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Paul's corinthian polemics: an inversion of the
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**The Message of the Cross as “Body Language”
In Paul’s Corinthian Polemics:
An Inversion of the Greco-Roman Social Ethos**

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Submitted for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy
Department of Theology and Religion
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2007



SHI Wen Hua

- 2 APR 2008

ABSTRACT

The Corinthian correspondence reveals that the apostle Paul was deeply engaged in polemics with his opponents and critics in Corinth, who questioned his *modus operandi* and challenged his apostolic authority. Paul's response, which was both ironical and paradoxical, was based on his own understanding of the cross of Christ, in which *divine power* was demonstrated through apparent *human weakness*. This thesis attempts to show that Paul's response, which involved many kinds of "body language", was nothing less than a drastic inversion of the social ethos of his time. Unlike his Corinthian critics who apparently followed the current Greco-Roman ethos, Paul was operating on a world view which was diametrically opposed to it. This thesis consists of three Parts. Part I is on crucifixion in antiquity, which was a most powerful "body language", compared with the ancient idea of "noble death" in both Greco-Roman and Maccabean traditions, according to which the crucifixion of Jesus could only be a most vivid and terrifying symbol of extreme human suffering, weakness, degradation and shame. Part II is devoted to the study of Greco-Roman rhetoric, with special emphasis on the orator's delivery as "body language". Paul's intention to invert the current social ethos was again clear when he deliberately chose "to proclaim the gospel...not with eloquent wisdom" (1 Cor. 1.17), and that he came to Corinth "in weakness and in fear and in much trembling" (2.3). Part III is a study of the *peristasis* catalogue (or the list of tribulations), especially its positive use by philosophers and moral teachers in the Greco-Roman tradition, to demonstrate manly virtues such as courage and endurance. However, this was only one side of the coin. "The other side of the coin" showed that the *peristasis* catalogue, especially through the "body language" it contained, could also signify shame, humiliation, and human degradation rather than manly virtues. The thesis takes the view that it was this negative side that Paul had in mind when he provided lists of his own suffering. In the end, the crucifixion of Christ, Paul's unconventional manner of proclamation and his view on *peristasis*, all combined to turn the current Greco-Roman social ethos up-side-down. And "body language" has provided the vital link between the three: crucifixion, rhetoric and *peristasis*.

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I declare that this thesis embodies the results of my own work, that it has been composed by me and that it does not include work that has been presented for a degree in this or any other university. All quotations and the work and opinions of others have been acknowledged in the main text or footnotes.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

As is the case with any successful work, the present thesis represents not only years of dedication, but also the support and friendship of many. Although numerous people could be acknowledged, I would like to highlight those who have played the most significant roles in helping me bring this work to completion.

As a Chinese student I feel particularly privileged to be a postgraduate student at the Department of Theology and Religion, University of Durham, which is so well-known for its outstanding New Testament scholarship. I am most grateful to my doctoral supervisor, Professor John Barclay, for his invaluable guidance in the last four years. He has been a constant source of support and inspiration. I would certainly not have arrived at this point in my professional career without his expertise. Professor Barclay is not only the consummate English gentleman, but also a scholarly example, a man of graciousness and patience. When it comes to supervising international students, this latter point is especially demonstrated in his careful commentary not only on my ideas, but also on my English style and grammar. It is with good reason that Professor Barclay has earned a reputation as an outstanding supervisor, especially of international students.

The present study had its beginnings during my M.A. degree under the supervision of Professor James Dunn. My interest in Pauline studies truly started under his direction and I will always be indebted to him for this. Originally, the topic of my M.A. dissertation was the present thesis; however, Professor Dunn recognised that it would more appropriately be a subject for a doctoral thesis. In addition to Professor Dunn, it was at this time that I also received the encouragement and support of Dr. Carol Harrison, Dr. Stephen Barton, Dr. Steven Croft, and Dr. Chloe Starr. Without them my studies in Durham would not have been as pleasant as they have been. The friendly environment of both staff and students at the Department of Theology and Religion has made my years of study here most enjoyable.

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Above all else, I would like to give glory to God for His faithfulness. May this research contribute to a better understanding of His word to us.

Durham, Summer 2007

SHI Wen Hua

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ABBREVIATIONS

AB	Anchor Bible
ABD	<i>Anchor Bible Dictionary</i> . Edited by D. N. Freedman. 6 vols. New York, 1992
ABR	<i>Australian Biblical Review</i>
ANRW	<i>Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt: Geschichte und Kultur Roms im Spiegel der neueren Forschung</i> . Edited by Hildegard Temporini and Wolfgang Haase. Berlin, 1972-
ANTC	Abingdon New Testament Commentaries
BCE	Before the Common Era
BDAG	Bauer, W., F. W. Danker, W. F. Arndt, and F. W. Gingrich. <i>Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature</i> . 3d ed., Chicago, 2000
BDB	Brown, Francis, S. R. Driver and C. A. Briggs. <i>A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament</i> . Oxford, 1907
BECNT	Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament
BICS	<i>Bulletin of the Institute of Classical Studies</i>
BJRL	<i>Bulletin of the John Rylands University Library of Manchester</i>
BNTC	Black's New Testament Commentaries
CAAS	<i>Connecticut Academy of Arts and Sciences</i>
CBQ	<i>Catholic Biblical Quarterly</i>
CDP	Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy
CUP	Cambridge University Press
DPL	<i>Dictionary of Paul and His Letters</i> . Edited by G. F. Hawthorne and R. P. Martin. Downers Grove, 1993
EC	Epworth Commentaries
EKKNT	Evangelisch-katholischer Kommentar zum Neuen Testament
Herm	<i>Hermeneia</i>
HTR	<i>Harvard Theological Review</i>
IBC	Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching

ICC	International Critical Commentary
IEJ	<i>Israel Exploration Journal</i>
Int	<i>Interpretation</i>
JBL	<i>Journal of Biblical Literature</i>
JCE	<i>Journal of Christian Education</i>
JECS	<i>Journal of Early Christian Studies</i>
JETS	<i>Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society</i>
JR	<i>Journal of Religion</i>
JRH	<i>Journal of Religious History</i>
JRS	<i>Journal of Roman Studies</i>
JSNT	<i>Journal for the Study of the New Testament</i>
JSNTSup	Journal for the Study of the New Testament Supplement Series
JSOT	<i>Journal for the Study of the Old Testament</i>
JSP	<i>Journal for the Study of the Pseudepigrapha</i>
KEK	Kritisch-exegetischer Kommentar über das Neue Testament (Meyer-Kommentar)
LCL	Loeb Classical Library
LSJ	Liddell, Henry George, Robert Scott, and H. Stuart Jones. <i>A Greek-English Lexicon</i> . 9th ed. with revised supplement. Oxford, 1996
LXX	Septuagint
2 Macc.	<i>2 Maccabees</i>
4 Macc.	<i>4 Maccabees</i>
m.	Mishnah
MNTC	Moffatt New Testament Commentary
NICNT	New International Commentary on the New Testament
NIGTC	New International Greek Testament Commentary
NIV	New International Version
NovT	<i>Novum Testamentum</i>
NRSV	New Revised Standard Version
NT	New Testament
NTS	<i>New Testament Studies</i>

NTT	New Testament Theology
OEED	<i>Oxford Encyclopedic English Dictionary</i>
OT	Old Testament
OTP	<i>Old Testament Pseudepigrapha</i> . Edited by J. H. Charlesworth. 2 vols. New York. 1983, 1985
OUP	Oxford University Press
OWC	Oxford World's Classics
PBSR	<i>Papers of the British School at Rome</i>
QJS	<i>Quarterly Journal of Speech</i>
RSV	Revised Standard Version
SacPag	Sacra Pagina Series
SBL	Society of Biblical Literature
SBLDS	Society of Biblical Literature Dissertation Series
SBLSP	<i>Society of Biblical Literature Seminar Papers</i>
SBLSS	Society of Biblical Literature Semeia Studies
SE	<i>Studia Evangelica</i>
TAPA	<i>Transactions of the American Philological Association</i>
TDNT	<i>Theological Dictionary of the New Testament</i> . Edited by Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich. Translated by G.W. Bromiley. 10 vols. Grand Rapids, 1964-76)
TynBul	<i>Tyndale Bulletin</i>
UBS	United Bible Societies
WBC	Word Biblical Commentary
ZNW	<i>Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft und die Kunde der älteren Kirche</i>

Abbreviations of Nonbiblical Texts Referred to in Main Text and Footnotes

Aristotle	
<i>Eth. nic.</i>	<i>Ethica nicomachea</i>

<i>Rhet.</i>	<i>Rhetorica</i>
<i>Poet.</i>	<i>Poetica</i>
<i>Pol.</i>	<i>Politica</i>

Artemidorus

<i>Oneir.</i>	<i>Oneirocritica</i>

Augustine

<i>Civ.</i>	<i>De civitate Dei</i>

Callistratus

<i>Dig.</i>	<i>Digesta</i>

Cassius Dio Cocceianus

<i>Hist. rom.</i>	<i>Historia romana</i>

Cicero

<i>Att.</i>	<i>Ad Atticum</i>
<i>Br.</i>	<i>Brutus</i>
<i>Cl.</i>	<i>Pro Cluentio</i>
<i>Deiot.</i>	<i>Pro Rege Deiotaro</i>
<i>Fin.</i>	<i>De Finibus</i>
<i>Inv.</i>	<i>De inventione rhetorica</i>
<i>Leg.</i>	<i>De legibus</i>
<i>Mil.</i>	<i>Pro Milone</i>
<i>Nat. d.</i>	<i>De natura deorum</i>
<i>Off.</i>	<i>De officiis</i>
<i>Opt.</i>	<i>De Optimo Genere Oratorum</i>
<i>Or.</i>	<i>De Oratore</i>
<i>Orat.</i>	<i>Orator</i>

<i>Part.</i>	<i>De Partitione Oratoria</i>
<i>Phil.</i>	<i>Philippicae</i>
<i>Pis.</i>	<i>In Pisonem</i>
<i>Rab. Perd.</i>	<i>Pro Rabirio Perduellionis</i>
<i>Rep.</i>	<i>De republica</i>
<i>Tusc.</i>	<i>Tusculanae disputationes</i>
<i>Verr.</i>	<i>In Verrem</i>

Clement of Alexandria

<i>Paed.</i>	<i>Paedagogus</i>

Curtius Rufus, Quintus

<i>Hist. Alex.</i>	<i>Historia Alexandri Magni</i>

Demetrius

<i>Elo.</i>	<i>De Elocutione</i>

Dio Chrysostom

<i>Or.</i>	<i>Orationes</i>

Diodorus, Siculus

<i>Bibl. Hist.</i>	<i>Bibliotheca Historica</i>

Diogenes Laertius

<i>Vit. Phil.</i>	<i>Vitae Philosophorum</i>

Dionysius of Halicarnassus

<i>Ant. rom.</i>	<i>Antiquitates romanae</i>

Ennius, Quintus

<i>Ann.</i>	<i>Annales</i>

Epictetus

Diss.

Dissertationes

Eusebius

Hist. Eccl.

Historia ecclesiastica

Gaius

Inst.

Institutiones

Gellius, Aulus

Noct. Att.

Noctes Atticae

Gorgias

Hel.

Helen

Homer

Il.

Iliad

Odyss.

Odyssey

Horace

Sat.

Satirae

Ignatius, Bishop of Antioch

Ep.

Epistolae

Isocrates

Antid.

Antidosis

Or.

Orationes

Panegyrr.

Panegyricus

John Chrysostom

Hom.

Homiliae

Josephus

Ant. *Antiquitates judaicae*

B.J. *Bellum judaicum*

Justin Epitomator

Dig. *Digest*

Justin Martyr

Apol. *Apologia*

Dial. Tryph. *Dialogus cum Tryphone*

Juvenal

Sat. *Satirae*

Lucian

Cat. *Cataplus*

Dem. *Demonax*

Dial. d. *Dialogi deorum*

Dial. Mer. *Dialogi Meretricii*

Fug. *Fugitivi*

Gall. *Gallus*

Iudic. voc. *Iudicium vocalium*

Jup. Trag. *Juppiter Tragoedus*

Peregr. *De morte Peregrini*

Prom. *Prometheus*

Sat. *Saturnalia*

Marcus Aurelius

Med. *Meditationes*

Minucius Felix

Oct. *Octavius*

Origen

Cels. *Contra Celsum*

Petronius

Satyr. *Satyricon*

Philo

Cher. *De Cherubim*

Flacc. *In Flaccum*

Leg. All. *Legum allegoriae*

Post. *De posteritate Caini*

Quod Omn. *Quod Omnis Probus*

Somn. *De somniis*

Spec. *De specialibus legibus*

Virt. *De virtutibus*

Philodemus

De Rhet. *De Rhetorica*

Philostratus

Vit. Apoll. *Vita Apollonii Tyanae*

Plato

Apol. *Apologia*

Cr. *Crito*

Euthyd. *Euthydemus*

Euthyph. *Euthyphro*

Gorg. *Gorgias*

<i>Leg.</i>	<i>De Legibus</i>
<i>Men.</i>	<i>Meno</i>
<i>Phaed.</i>	<i>Phaedo</i>
<i>Phaedr.</i>	<i>Phaedrus</i>
<i>Protag.</i>	<i>Protagogas</i>
<i>Rep.</i>	<i>De republica</i>
<i>Resp.</i>	<i>Respublica</i>
<i>Soph.</i>	<i>De Sophista</i>

Plautus

<i>As.</i>	<i>Asinaria</i>
<i>Aul.</i>	<i>Aulularia</i>
<i>Bacch.</i>	<i>Bacchides</i>
<i>Cap.</i>	<i>Capitivi</i>
<i>Cas.</i>	<i>Casina</i>
<i>Cur.</i>	<i>Curculio</i>
<i>Ep.</i>	<i>Epidicus</i>
<i>Mil.</i>	<i>Miles gloriosus</i>
<i>Most.</i>	<i>Mostellaria</i>
<i>Per.</i>	<i>Persa</i>
<i>St.</i>	<i>Stichus</i>

Pliny the Elder

<i>Nat.</i>	<i>Naturalis hisroria</i>

Pliny the Younger

<i>Ep.</i>	<i>Epistulae</i>

Plutarch

<i>Caes.</i>	<i>Caesar</i>
<i>Cat. Min.</i>	<i>Cato Minor</i>

<i>Mor.</i>	<i>Moralia</i>
<i>Per.</i>	<i>Pericles</i>
<i>Vit.</i>	<i>Vitae illustrium virorum</i>
Ps. – Quintilian	
<i>Decl.</i>	<i>Declamationes</i>
Quintilian	
<i>Inst. orat.</i>	<i>De Institutio Oratoria</i>
<i>Rhet. ad Her.</i>	<i>Rhetorica ad Herennium</i>
Seneca	
<i>Apoc.</i>	<i>Apocolocyntosis</i>
<i>Beat.</i>	<i>De vita beata</i>
<i>Ben.</i>	<i>De Beneficiis</i>
<i>Clem.</i>	<i>De Clementia</i>
<i>Cons.</i>	<i>De consolatione ad Marciam</i>
<i>Ep.</i>	<i>Epistulae Morales</i>
<i>Ira</i>	<i>De Ira</i>
<i>Prov.</i>	<i>De Providentia</i>
Suetonius	
<i>Aug.</i>	<i>Augustus</i>
<i>Cal.</i>	<i>Caligula</i>
<i>Claud.</i>	<i>Claudius</i>
<i>Gal.</i>	<i>Galba</i>
<i>Jul.</i>	<i>Julius</i>
<i>Ner.</i>	<i>Nero</i>

Tacitus

Ann.

Annals

Hist.

Historiae

Terence

Eun.

Eunuch

Tertullian

Apol.

Apologeticus

Pat.

De Patientia

Virgil

Aen.

Aeneid

Xenophon

Ages.

Agesilaus

Cyr.

Cyropaedia

Eph.

Ephesiaca

bMem.

Memorabilia

Oec.

Oeconomicus

Introduction

This thesis is concerned with “body language”. *The Oxford Encyclopedic English Dictionary* defines “body language” as “the process of communicating through conscious or unconscious gestures and poses.”¹ However, the term “body language” is used more broadly and at times more loosely in this thesis than what the Oxford Dictionary has defined here. “Body language” in crucifixion was conveyed not only through “gestures and poses”, but also in powerful and effective symbols. For instance, the body of the crucified victim was clearly symbolic of the worst of human suffering and pain, humiliation and degradation. Similarly, the physical pain that Paul endured through “floggings”, “lashes” and beatings (2 Cor. 11.23-25) also conveyed lively and moving “body language”. The same was also true with reference to Paul’s “bodily presence” which was regarded as “weak” by his critics (10.10). It goes without saying that the most obvious “body language” was communicated through the various “gestures and poses” in the delivery of the orator in Greco-Roman rhetoric. Moreover, a powerful and impressive self-presentation of the orator, as of any agent, also carried with it signs and traits of masculinity which was vital to a man’s status in Greco-Roman society.

Moreover, “The Message of the Cross” in this thesis refers not only to the *content* of Paul’s gospel, but also the *manner* of his proclamation, or delivery, as well as his whole *apostolic life*. This was because, as far as Paul was concerned, the message he carried could hardly be separated from the manner of his presentation and his whole *modus operandi* as an apostle of Christ. Paul had not only “decided to know nothing among you [the Corinthians] except Jesus Christ, and him crucified” (1 Cor. 2.2), a decision

¹ Judith Pearsall, *The Oxford Encyclopedic English Dictionary* (New York: OUP, 1995), 158.



which governed the content of his gospel, his proclamation “not with plausible words of wisdom” (2.4), and his whole life, including his personal tribulations, were characterized by “weakness” (2 Cor. 11.30). This thesis will try to show that it was in the body language of the above three aspects, namely, the message of the cross, its presentation, and Paul’s own personal life, that the inversion of the current Greco-Roman social ethos became particularly obvious in Paul’s Corinthian polemics.²

This thesis has identified three specific areas concerning “body language”, in the broader sense of the term, in Paul’s Corinthian polemics, with special reference to their respective historico-social contexts and their relevant texts in the Corinthian correspondence. These three specific areas which constitute the three parts of the thesis are: (1) Crucifixion and noble death in antiquity. (2) Greco-Roman rhetoric, with special emphasis on its delivery. (3) *Peristasis* catalogues, perceived both positively and negatively. “Body language” is the vital link between the three of them. This thesis will try to demonstrate that on the basis of historico-social studies of the three areas, not only was Paul conscious of his intention, there was also an obvious consistency in his inversion of the current social ethos in all these three areas. Consequently, this thesis will try to deal with the following key questions, as well as minor questions related to them. Why did Paul decide “to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and him crucified” (1 Cor. 2.2)? Why did Paul decide not to proclaim “the mystery of God” in “lofty words or wisdom” when he came to Corinth (2.1)? Why did he come to Corinth “in weakness and in fear and in much trembling” (2.3)? After providing the whole list of personal tribulations (*peristaseis*) in 2 Cor. 11.23-29, why should Paul conclude by

² Of course, the word “body” or “body language” also appeared in other contexts in the Corinthian correspondence, for example, with reference to the Christian’s body as “a temple of the Holy Spirit” (1 Cor. 6.19); the Corinthian congregation as “one body” (10.17), which was Christ’s body (12.12, 27) in the contexts of the Lord’s Supper as well as in Paul’s teaching on spiritual gifts (12.12-31). But in all these and similar cases “body” or “body language” were used symbolically or as signs or metaphors in the contexts of Paul’s teaching, and not as inversion of current social ethos.

saying that “if I must boast, I will boast of the things that show my weakness” (11.30), instead of strength, like his Greco-Roman counterparts did?

1. Corinthian studies: a general situation and the approach of this thesis

The study of Paul’s Corinthian letters is among the most fascinating and yet at the same time the most complex in New Testament studies. In as early as the 1830s Ferdinand Baur had already held that the early church was largely divided into two camps led respectively by Paul and Cephas. This position dominated many decades in the study of early Christianity.³ Although Baur’s view has been much criticized or abandoned by many, its influence and support are still quite considerable even today.⁴ In the early twentieth century, a new movement known as the *Religionsgeschichtliche Schule* (“the History of Religion School”) was initiated by scholars who put the study of both Jewish and Christian religions in a much broader context and in close connection, even on par with other religious traditions, thereby challenging the unique status which the Judeo-Christian religion used to enjoy for centuries. In addition, the word “Gnosticism” was also characteristically used to interpret Corinthian Christianity or theology by scholars such as Walther Schmithals⁵ and Ulrich Wilckens.⁶ Being critical of Gnosticism as the appropriate background of Corinthian study, Richard Horsley advocated the perspective of “Hellenistic Judaism” to interpret Corinthian theology.⁷ Under Baur’s influence, Margaret MacDonald thinks that Corinthian study tended to be Paul-centred between the 1950s and the 1960s, focusing merely or predominantly on Paul’s thought rather

³ F. C. Baur, *Paul, The Apostle of Jesus Christ, His Life and Work, His Epistles and His Doctrine* (Edinburgh/London: Williams & Norgate, 1875), 1.267-320.

⁴ Margaret Y. MacDonald, ‘The Shifting Centre: Ideology and the Interpretation of 1 Corinthians’, in Edward Adams and David G. Horrell (eds.), *Christianity at Corinth: The Quest for the Pauline church* (Westminster John Knox Press: Louisville, 2004), 273-94, at 277. James D. G. Dunn, ‘Reconstructions of Corinthian Christianity and the Interpretation of 1 Corinthians’, in *Christianity*, 295-310. M. Goulder, ‘Sophia in 1 Corinthians’, *NTS* 37 (1991), 516-34.

⁵ W. Schmithals, *Gnosticism in Corinth* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1971).

⁶ U. Wilckens, ‘Sophia’, *TDNT* 7.519-22.

⁷ R. A. Horsley, ‘Gnosis in Corinth: I Corinthians 8.1-6’, *NTS* 27 (1981), 32-52.

than on “a full understanding of the Corinthian community as a whole.”⁸ Pauline scholarship between the 1960s and the 1970s could be regarded as “Christianity-centred” since “the *ekklesia* of first century Corinth” was quite commonly perceived as being representative of “Christianity”.⁹ This was followed by the “historico-sociological movement”, which has gradually shifted to become “society-centred”, i.e., using the Greco-Roman social context to interpret the Corinthian correspondence.¹⁰ This shift will have serious implications for the approach of this thesis, with its focus on the message of the cross in relation to the prevailing social ethos. Feminist study is next, with Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza’s book *In Memory of Her: A Feminist Theological Reconstruction of Christian Origins*, published in 1983, as a representative. This has aroused considerable interest in interpreting the role or status of women in the Corinthian church.¹¹

More recent has been the new interest in Greco-Roman rhetoric with special reference to the Corinthian context.¹² This thesis readily recognizes the importance and value of both the historico-sociological approach and the more recent rhetorical studies.

⁸ MacDonald, ‘The Shifting Centre’, 280. Cf. C. K. Barrett, ‘Christianity at Corinth’, *BJRL* 46 (1964), 269-97. K. Stendahl, *Paul among Jews and Gentiles* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1976). Nils Alstrup Dahl, ‘Paul and the Church at Corinth’, in *Christianity*, 85-95.

⁹ MacDonald, ‘The Shifting Centre’, 285. Schmithals, *Gnosticism*. Horsley, ‘Gnosis’, 32-52.

¹⁰ G. Theissen, *The Social Setting of Pauline Christianity* (Philadelphia: T. & T. Clark, 1982). Stephen C. Barton, ‘Paul and the Cross: A Sociological Approach’, *Theology* 85 (1982), 13-19. W. A. Meeks, *The First Urban Christians: The Social World of the Apostle Paul* (New Haven: Yale University, 1983). B. Holmberg, *Sociology and the New Testament* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1990). J. K. Chow, *Patronage and Power: A Study of Social Networks in Corinth* (JSNTS 75; Sheffield: JSOT, 1992). D. B. Martin, *The Corinthian Body* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995). David G. Horrell, *The Social Ethos of the Corinthian Correspondence* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1996).

¹¹ Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her: A Feminist Theological Reconstruction of Christian Origins* (New York: Crossroad, 1983). A. C. Wire, *Corinthian Women Prophets: A Reconstruction through Paul’s Rhetoric* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1990). E. S. Fiorenza (ed.), *Searching the Scriptures. Vol 2: A Feminist Commentary* (London: SCM, 1995). A.-J. Levine, *A Feminist Companion to Paul* (London and New York: T & T Clark, 2004). J. Økland, *Women in Their Place: Paul and the Corinthian Discourse of Gender and Sanctuary Space* (London: T & T Clark, 2004).

¹² George A. Kennedy, *Classical Rhetoric and Its Christian and Secular Tradition from Ancient to Modern Times* (London: Croom Helm, 1980); L. L. Welborn, ‘On the Discourse in Corinth: 1 Corinthians 1-4 and Ancient Politics’, *JBL* 106 (1987), 85-111; S. M. Pogoloff, *Logos and Sophia: The Rhetorical Situation of 1 Corinthians* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1992); D. Litfin, *St Paul’s Theology of Proclamation: 1 Cor 1-4 and Greco-Roman Rhetoric* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994).

Andrew Clarke believes that the Pauline corpus alone does not provide sufficient evidence to reconstruct the situation as it existed in Corinth. Multi-disciplinary approaches and perspectives are thus necessary.¹³ Current Corinthian studies have been well summed up by Edward Adams and David Horrell:

Thus the task of reconstructing earliest Christianity at Corinth will continue in diverse ways. While some branches of New Testament scholarship may eschew historical reconstruction...others will continue to make use of the wide range of ancient evidence in order to reconstruct a setting in ancient Corinth with which to better understand Paul and the Corinthians....One general area in which there does seem to be a convergence of opinion, unsurprising, perhaps, given the general collapse of the illusion that scholarship can ever be simply objective and disinterested, is in recognizing the need for critical and theoretical reflection, on the ways to use and interpret ancient evidence (Meggitt), on the ways to employ social-scientific resources (Holmberg), and on the interests and ideologies that shape scholarship (MacDonald).¹⁴

In the early twentieth century, the German NT scholar Adolf Deissmann came up with a view which later came to be known as the “Old Consensus”. It held that the NT authors belonged to the lower classes of their society on the basis of their use of the vulgar *koinē*, except Paul, whose social status was rather ambiguous.¹⁵ This was thought to be the case also of the Pauline congregations, including the Corinthian church. A very different view was put forward by Edwin Judge who believed that “Christianity was a movement sponsored by local patrons to their social dependents.”¹⁶ Gerd Theissen and Wayne Meeks who endorse Judge’s finding, a position now dubbed as the “New Consensus”, have also asserted that the Pauline communities comprised a cross-section of society, including some from the higher strata. Based on 1 Cor. 1.26, they insist on the existence of affluent groups within the Corinthian communities.¹⁷ John Chow also thinks that patronage played a vital role in the Corinthian church, so that the few

¹³ A. D. Clarke, *Secular and Christian Leadership in Corinth: A Socio-Historical and Exegetical Study of 1 Corinthians 1-6* (Leiden: Brill, 1993), 6.

¹⁴ Adams, *Christianity*, 42-3.

¹⁵ Adolf Deissmann, *Paul: A Study in Social and Religious History* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1926), 29-51. See J. J. Meggitt, *Paul, Poverty and Survival* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1998).

¹⁶ E. A. Judge, ‘The Early Christians as a Scholastic Community’, *JRH* 1 (1960-61), 4-15, 125-37, at 8.

¹⁷ Theissen, *The Social Setting*, 72-92; Meeks, *The First Urban Christians*, 54-73.

powerful patrons who possessed outstanding social status and wealth not only associated themselves with other powerful people in the colony but were also dominant figures who “through lawsuits, marriage or social fellowship with the powerful leaders in the colony, constantly sought to gain more, including possessions, power and honour.”¹⁸

Theissen’s work provides very useful insights into the social situation of the Corinthian church, especially its class membership and the nature of its conflicts. John Schütz, the editor and translator of Theissen’s essays, thinks that Theissen’s work is not only marked by “bold hypothesis”, it is also “balanced with exegetical insight and patience for detail”.¹⁹ Clarke criticizes the imbalance in Pauline study between theological perspective and social approach: “either they are too narrowly constructed on the theological ideals of the Pauline material; or they are too strongly dictated by modern social theory without taking sufficient cognizance of the socio-historical context.”²⁰ This thesis will try to keep a necessary balance between social study and exegetical insight. On this particular point, Judge’s critique of Holmberg’s work, *Paul and Power*, is worth noting:

It couples with New Testament studies a strong admixture of modern sociology, as though social theories can be safely transposed across the centuries without verification. The basic question remains unasked: What are the social facts of life characteristic of the world to which the New Testament belongs? Until the painstaking field work is better done, the importation of social models that have been defined in terms of other cultures is methodologically no improvement on the “idealistic fallacy” [of the theologians]. We may fairly call it the “sociological fallacy”.²¹

¹⁸ Chow, *Patronage*, 166.

¹⁹ John H. Schütz (trans.), *The Social Setting*, introduction.

²⁰ Clarke, *Leadership*, 129.

²¹ Judge, ‘The Social Identity of the First Christians, A Question of Method in Religious History’, *JRH* 11 (1980), 201-17, at 210. Moreover, John Barclay has also pointed out: “Sociological study of Paul’s churches should investigate not just social status but also social interaction and should cease generalizing about ‘Pauline Christians.’” Abstract of “Thessalonica and Corinth: Social Contrast in Pauline Christianity”, *JSNT* 47 (1992), 49-74. The crucial question seems obvious: How to make good use of the studies and findings of the various disciplines critically.

This thesis affirms that the Corinthian church situation in Paul's day was in a state of very serious crisis, both in matters of faith and conduct. And one of the most serious crises was clearly that of church "quarrels" (1 Cor. 1.11), or "jealousy and strife" (3.3). Otherwise, Paul would not have singled it out at the very beginning of 1 Corinthians. The matter became the more serious and complex when Paul himself was personally caught in the controversy. There was evidently a very organized and formidable force in Corinth that was working against Paul so that a great deal of the content in the two letters was interspersed with heated polemics between the apostle and his critics. This thesis attempts to show that Paul's polemics were conducted intentionally and consistently from the perspective of the cross, which turned out to be a drastic inversion of the current Greco-Roman social ethos.

Clifford Geertz defines a people's ethos as "the tone, character, and quality of their life, its moral and aesthetic style and mood – and their world view....In religious belief and practice a group's ethos is rendered intellectually reasonable by being shown to present a way of life ideally adapted to the actual state of affairs the world-view describes, while the world-view is rendered emotionally convincing by being presented as an image of an actual state of affairs peculiarly well arranged to accommodate such a way of life."²²

Bruce Malina endorses Geertz's finding and suggests that social ethos is "a system of symbols which acts to establish powerful, pervasive, and long-lasting moods and motivations in people, formulating conceptions of value-objects, and clothing these conceptions with such an aura of factuality that the moods and motivations are

²² Clifford Geertz, 'Religion as a Culture System', in Michael Banton (ed.), *Anthropological Approaches to the Study of Religion* (London: Tavistock Publications, 1966), 1-46, at 3.

perceived to be uniquely realistic.”²³ Malina’s concept of social ethos helps in understanding the Corinthian context and some of the basic problems of the Corinthian church. This thesis will try to read the Corinthian correspondence in the right social context to see if the Corinthian crises were actually linked to the Greco-Roman social ethos with which the Corinthians had been brought up, especially in regard to the society’s perception about honour, status, prestige, and power, and with its emphasis on human “wisdom” and “eloquence” which found their concrete expression in Greco-Roman rhetoric. Why was “the message of the cross” such “foolishness to Gentiles” and “a stumbling block to Jews” (1.23)? Was the Corinthians’ preoccupation with “wisdom” and “eloquence” largely responsible for their apparent failure to understand “the message of the cross” and its implications for their life and witness?

Horrell believes that the Corinthian correspondence “not only offers rich material for a study of the social ethos of early Christian teaching, but also – and this is important in the light of Giddens’ work – enables a focus on a specific community and on change over time”.²⁴

Stephen Chester thinks that at least in terms of social setting, the study of the Corinthian correspondence can be more precise than other Pauline documents: “that the Corinthian correspondence was sent by Paul to the church at Corinth during the sixth decade of the first century enables us to situate the Corinthian understanding of conversion more precisely within the wider context of the Graeco-Roman culture than would otherwise

²³ Bruce J. Malina, *The New Testament World: Insights from Cultural Anthropology* (Louisville: Westminster/ John Knox Press, 1993), 23. See also Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays* (London: Fontana, 1993).

²⁴ Horrell, *The Social Ethos*, 4.

be possible, especially given the rich archaeological record available for first-century Corinth and its environs” (1.4.1).²⁵

It is with this recognition of the importance of the social setting of Corinth that this thesis will allocate more than half of its contents to historico-social studies of context, resulting in a consistent pattern in all the three parts of the thesis. That is, every part will begin with historico-social background studies before the exegesis of the relevant Corinthian texts.

2. Crucifixion and the message of the cross in historico-social perspective

The social perspective of this thesis is indebted to the findings and insights of some modern scholars in Corinthian studies.²⁶ However, this thesis will try to keep a balance between historico-social studies and exegesis of the relevant Corinthian texts which takes the findings and insights of historico-social studies as its context.

In the historico-social study of crucifixion in antiquity, this thesis wishes to acknowledge in particular Martin Hengel's work which serves as a very useful lead to this thesis' own search of primary sources on the subject. The common practice of crucifixion as a form of capital punishment in the ancient world has caused Hengel to state that “it is crucifixion that distinguishes the new message from mythologies of all other peoples” and that “the death of Jesus by crucifixion was one of the main

²⁵ S. J. Chester, *Conversion at Corinth: Perspectives on Conversion in Paul's Theology and the Corinthian Church* (London: T & T Clark, 2003), 32.

²⁶ K. M. Coleman, 'Fatal Charades: Roman Executions Staged as Mythological Enactments', *JRS* 80 (1990), 44-73. Raymond Pickett, *The Cross in Corinth: The Social Significance of the Death of Jesus* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997). Michael Gorman, *Cruciformity: Paul's Narrative Spirituality of the Cross* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2001). Alexandra R. Brown, *The Cross and Human Transformation: Paul's Apocalyptic Word in 1 Corinthians* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995). T. B. Savage, *Power Through Weakness: A Historical and Exegetical Examination of Paul's Understanding of the Christian Ministry in 2 Corinthians* (Cambridge: CUP, 1996).

objections against his being the son of God”.²⁷ Hengel summarizes it very perceptively: “the reason why in his letters he [Paul] talks about the cross above all in a polemical context is that he deliberately wants to provoke his opponents, who are attempting to water down the offence caused by the cross. Thus in a way the ‘word of the cross’ is the spearhead of his message.”²⁸ In some ancient writings the word “madness” (μανία), was also used by Justin Martyr²⁹ and some pagan authors, to describe the Christian message about the cross, besides the word “folly” (μωρία).³⁰ While indebted to Hengel’s useful lead on the subject this thesis will depend largely on primary sources on crucifixion in antiquity and will focus on its main features, especially its “body language”.

Kathy Coleman tries to link ancient writings on crucifixion with some modern scholars’ views on execution and punishment in the Roman world. Coleman agrees with Harding and Ireland that “the history of punishment is not seen as a chronological development from ‘primitive’ to ‘civilized’ but rather as a constantly adjusting balance of techniques of social control determined by the physical resources, moral basis, and belief system of any given society”.³¹ This thesis endorses Coleman’s point that “penalties of degradation”, which sometimes entailed a public spectacle of punishment, were a “pervasive penal practice” in the ancient world.³² Moreover, the execution of crucifixion as a “public spectacle of punishment” also made its “body language” particularly powerful and effective.

Consequently, this thesis will try to show that a human person could not have suffered any greater pain, agony and humiliation than being publicly put on the cross, and quite

²⁷ M. Hengel, *Crucifixion in the Ancient World and the Folly of the Message of the Cross* (Philadelphia PA: Fortress Press, 1977), 1.

²⁸ Hengel, *Crucifixion*, 89.

²⁹ Justin, *Apol.* 1.13.4.

³⁰ Pliny, *Ep.* 10.96.4-8; Horace, *Sat.* 2.3.79; Tacitus, *Ann.* 15.44.3.

³¹ Coleman, ‘Fatal Charades’, 45.

³² Coleman, ‘Fatal Charades’, 45.

often in complete nakedness. The public nature of Roman execution seemed to have been designed to alienate the victim from his entire social context, so that the spectators, regardless of class, were united in a feeling of moral superiority as they ridiculed him, as was also the case with Jesus. To achieve such a desired goal in Roman society, “the mockery of a condemned person was sometimes performed spontaneously by parties other than the legal adjudicators. The best-known example from our period is the soldiers’ mockery of Jesus...the humiliation of the offender seems to be an integral part of the punishment, and it is obvious that this feature is going to bulk large in the context of executions performed in the course of spectacular enactments in the arena.”³³ Paul’s “message of the cross” and its “foolishness” will be viewed from this perspective. The inquiry on the subject will also try to find out if, and to what extent, the execution of crucifixion was inseparable from the very rigid social class distinction in Roman society. Coleman endorses Peter Garnsey’s finding and holds that “a crucial factor in the Roman penal system was the evolution of differentiated penalties for offenders of different status: *humiliores* and *honestiores*. This is a phenomenon that is characteristic of societies with a strongly differentiated class- or caste-system, and it follows that, when the upper classes are equated with true humanity, the lower classes are sub-human and therefore legitimately liable to cruel treatment.”³⁴ It was also for this reason that the Roman citizens were particularly horrified by any attempt to have any of their members crucified.

As the main concern of this thesis is with “body language”, efforts will be made to show that what happened at the scene of crucifixion were not just events and actions but also a demonstration of the power and impact of body language which was vividly and graphically conveyed through the suffering victim with serious social implications.

³³ Coleman, ‘Fatal Charades’, 47.

³⁴ Coleman, ‘Fatal Charades’, 55. See P. Garnsey, *Social Status and Legal Privilege in the Roman Empire* (Oxford: OUP, 1970).

Raymond Pickett's sociological analysis of the Corinthian situation in Greco-Roman context is generally accurate, and he has largely succeeded in putting the Greco-Roman and Christian socio-ethical values in very clear and strong contrast.³⁵ This helps to explain the mystery of the cross of Christ in paradoxical and dialectical terms. Pickett's use of the cross as "symbol" is very skilful. The cross is indeed a very powerful symbol. However, it must be borne in mind that for Paul it was the historical event and reality of the cross of Christ that gave true meaning to the "symbol".

Michael Gorman who has coined the term "cruciformity" in his book holds that "conformity to the crucified Christ" is "central to Paul's theology and ethics".³⁶ Gorman's primary concern is the "experience" of the Christian: "the purpose of Paul's letters generally...is not to teach theology but to mould behaviour, to affirm or - more often - to alter patterns of living, patterns of experience. The purpose of his letters, in other words, is pastoral or spiritual before it is theological....It is appropriate, therefore, to consider Paul first and foremost as a pastoral or spiritual writer, rather than as a theologian (or ethicist)."³⁷ This thesis is inclined to think that Paul himself would most probably object to such one-sided thinking, since Christian life and practice could hardly be artificially separated from sound teaching or theology. The New Testament clearly shows that wrong Christian behaviour or practice was often the direct or indirect result of wrong teaching or theology.

Timothy Savage has rightly noted that at the very core of Paul's position in 2 Corinthians lies an important paradox, "a paradox which finds expression in a number

³⁵ Pickett, *The Cross*.

³⁶ Gorman, *Cruciformity*, 4.

³⁷ Gorman, *Cruciformity*, 4.

of different antitheses and which drives to the very heart of what it means to Paul to be a minister of Christ".³⁸

3. The "rediscovery" of Greco-Roman rhetoric, self-presentation and masculinity

Although "wisdom" was a very important issue in both Greco-Roman and Jewish traditions, it is beyond the scope of this thesis. And while the "wisdom" issue clearly occupied a very prominent place in the Corinthian polemics, as was the case in 1 Corinthians 1-2, discussion on the issue in this thesis will be confined to the context of Paul's "message of the cross". This is because, in the final analysis, Paul's interest was clearly not in the usual wisdom *speculation* as such, but rather in the *demonstration* of divine wisdom in and through the cross of Christ. Moreover, it will also be shown that much in line with Paul's inversion strategy, human wisdom and divine wisdom were put in the sharpest possible contrast in the Corinthian polemics.

The following words in the Corinthian correspondence convey a very simple but crucial point, i.e., the relevance and importance of rhetoric in the Corinthian polemics: 1 Cor. 1.17; 1.20; 2.1-4; 2 Cor. 10.10.

For about two or three decades now Greco-Roman rhetoric has been generally recognized as an essential key to the understanding of the intriguing issues in the Corinthian letters, especially in 1 Corinthians 1-4. This has been clearly shown in the works of some modern scholars.³⁹

³⁸ Savage, *Power*, introduction.

³⁹ See above n. 11.

Stephen Pogoloff attempts a fresh reading of 1 Cor. 1-4 and stresses the importance of the “rediscovery of and renewed appreciation for ancient rhetoric”.⁴⁰ The rediscovery now clearly shows that rhetoric affected virtually all Greco-Roman culture and many aspects of society.

In Duane Litfin’s view, the reason why the Corinthians were not impressed by Paul’s public speaking was because “he came far short of the polish and sophistication in word choice, in diction, in voice, physical charm and self-possession that was indispensable to impress and move a Greco-Roman crowd.”⁴¹ Bruce Winter points out that Paul’s letters to Corinth contain evidence on the first-century sophistic movement. Winter suggests that the apostle’s language was essentially “anti-sophistic.”⁴²

Studies on Greco-Roman rhetoric in this study will seek to demonstrate that the art of rhetorical training and practice was a very essential part of ancient Greco-Roman education for males. Detailed instructions about rhetoric, especially its delivery which involved the whole human body (literally from ‘head to toe’), were repeatedly given in the following writings: Aristotle (*De arte Rhetorica*), Cicero (*De Oratore*), Quintilian (*Institutio Oratoria*), and a work by an unknown author believed a contemporary of Cicero (*Rhetorica ad Herennium*).

Closely connected with the subject of rhetoric was clearly the concern for masculinity in the Greco-Roman society. Here the contributions of scholars such as Maud Gleason, Jennifer Larson, and Jennifer Glancy are duly acknowledged in this thesis.⁴³ It will try

⁴⁰ Pogoloff, *Logos*, 3.

⁴¹ Litfin, *Proclamation*, 162.

⁴² B. W. Winter, *Philo and Paul among the Sophists* (Cambridge: CUP, 1997), 148.

⁴³ M. W. Gleason, *Making Men: Sophists and Self-Presentation in Ancient Rome* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995). Jennifer Larson, ‘Paul’s Masculinity’, *JBL* 123/1 (2004), 85-97. J. A. Glancy, ‘Boasting of Beatings (2 Cor. 11:23-25)’, *JBL* 123/1 (2004), 99-135.

to find out if Paul's physical unattractiveness, including the possibility of a physical disability or handicap, was the main reason for the Corinthians' low esteem of him and prejudices against him. Had the Greco-Roman concept of masculinity any direct bearing on a man's authority in society, including the apostolic authority of Paul? How crucial was this in the Corinthian controversy?

Gleason's book, *Making Men*, aims "to refocus our attention on the social dynamics of rhetoric as an instrument of self-presentation, and in the process refine our appreciation of the functional aesthetics of a profoundly traditional performance genre."⁴⁴

Rhetorical training in the Greco-Roman society was a necessary process through which the upper-class men were "made". In the end, education (παιδεία), for both Greek and Roman gentlemen, had become a most valuable form of capital investment. Greco-Roman rhetoric was an ongoing life-long process and discipline in a society which was much preoccupied with male socialization and in which gender identity, social status, and men's self-esteem were all interconnected.

Larson points out that "for all the attention to the historical setting...one aspect of the opponents' invective has been neglected: how the criticisms of Paul engaged cultural expectations about manliness and its relationship to authority" (cf. 2 Cor. 10-13).⁴⁵ This thesis agrees with Larson that Paul and his opponents were obviously functioning within a context of Greco-Roman social values and expectations. And the ultimate clash between two diametrically opposed sets of values and expectations became inevitable.

With regard to the perceptions of gender in the Greco-Roman society, Larson elaborates:

Personal dignity, bodily integrity, and specific details of one's appearance were all factors in individual self-assessment and in men's evaluation of one another's

⁴⁴ Gleason, *Making Men*, xx.

⁴⁵ Larson, 'Masculinity', 85-6.

masculinity. Elite men of the day were constantly concerned with the maintenance of their masculinity, because it both displayed and justified their positions of power. Unlike noble birth, which was immutable, masculinity was a matter of perception. While elites always represented their masculinity to outsiders as innate, among insiders it was implicitly recognized that masculinity was a performance requiring constant practice and vigilance.⁴⁶

It goes without saying that “body language” was conveyed in such a constant “performance”.

In 2 Cor. 10.10, Paul’s opponents openly challenged his skills as a public speaker. “Proper tone of voice, posture, gestures, dress, personal adornment, and other less concrete qualities”, says Larson, were “routinely cited by professionals as requirements for success. We have good reason to believe that Corinthians of the first century, even those with a lesser education, would have been experienced with regard to the evaluation of speakers.”⁴⁷ If that were indeed the case, criticisms against Paul and deep dissatisfaction with him might not be confined to a few leaders but shared among a much larger group.

Larson’s findings reveal a lot about the speaker’s self-presentation. Since the performance of a speaker was also *gender* performance, a man’s deficiency in self-presentation could easily create an opening for his rivals to ridicule him as “effeminate” (*mollior*). Paul’s “bodily presence” was described as “weak”. It remains to be seen if, and to what extent, the Greco-Roman perception of self-presentation had to do with the opponents’ criticism against Paul. John Harrill asserts that “attacks against one’s outward appearance and speaking ability, as in 2 Cor. 10.10, must be interpreted in light of these cultural beliefs about deportment as a system of signs that reveal both one’s

⁴⁶ Larson, ‘Masculinity’, 86.

⁴⁷ Larson, ‘Masculinity’, 87.

self-control and one's fitness to rule others."⁴⁸ The seriousness of 2 Cor. 10.10 together with its profound implications should be perceived in this particular context. In this connection, an important question deserves further investigation: Was Paul deficient in masculine virtues or did he willingly allow them to be abrogated? According to the Greco-Roman concept of masculinity, a real *man* did not cede power or control to another, as slaves and women did. And as masculinity was closely tied to the concepts of personal freedom and power over others, only the "fool" would abrogate them. Was Paul a "fool"? And if so, in what sense?

4. *Peristasis* Studies

Paul in his *apologia* referred to his tribulations for the sake of Christ, and most notably, in 1 Cor. 4. 8-13 and 2 Cor. 11.23-33. This thesis will attempt to show that those references would become the more meaningful in the context of the use of *peristasis* catalogues among the Greco-Roman sages and philosophers. Hence the study of *peristasis* catalogues in Greco-Roman tradition, with special reference to Stoicism.

Generally speaking, *περίστασις*, especially in the Stoic tradition, was perceived positively as occasions for the sages or philosophers to demonstrate their human virtues such as courage, endurance and manliness. This positive attitude towards *περίστασις* in the Greco-Roman tradition has also been confirmed by modern scholars such as John Fitzgerald. Fitzgerald believes his study of classical literature has shown that the Greco-Roman sage generally welcomed *περίστασεις*. Fitzgerald infers from here that it was

⁴⁸ J. Albert Harrill, 'Invective against Paul (2 Cor. 10.10), the Physiognomics of the Ancient Slave Body, and the Greco-Roman Rhetoric of Manhood', in Adela Yarbro Collins and Margaret M. Mitchell (eds.), *Antiquity and Humanity: Essays on Ancient Religion and Philosophy Presented to Hans Dieter Betz on His 70th Birthday* (Tübingen: Mohr-Siebeck, 2001), 189-213, at 204.

mainly for this reason that Paul in 2 Corinthians so often referred to the theme of his suffering and hardship.⁴⁹

However, this thesis holds that Fitzgerald's view represents only one side of the coin. The other side of the coin, which held just the opposite view, was also current in Greco-Roman society, as the research of Glancy has shown. This thesis has considered it reasonable to assume that it was the negative or derogative use of the *peristasis* catalogues that was the main concern of Paul who was trying to witness, paradoxically, to the divine power that was manifested in and through his own weakness.

Glancy asserts that according to the social ethos of Paul's time, the apostle's testimony concerning his own "weakness" and the abusing of his body was undoubtedly perceived by his opponents as mark of servile submission and insignia of humiliation which were unworthy of a *man* of any social standing, dignity and honour. This thesis accepts Glancy's important point that "it is the Christians...that revolutionize these values wholly by their total inversion."⁵⁰

The conflict between Paul and his critics in matters of social ethos and values deserves serious study, with special reference to the physical body of man in Roman society. Glancy endorses Harrill's finding that "social status was somatically expressed", and since Paul's bodily appearance was "weak" (1 Cor. 2.3; 2 Cor. 10.10; 11.30), his critics naturally questioned his manhood and right to authority.⁵¹

⁴⁹ J. T. Fitzgerald, *Cracks in an Earthen Vessel: An Examination of the Catalogues of Hardships in the Corinthian Correspondence* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1988), 44.

⁵⁰ Glancy, 'Boasting', 126.

⁵¹ Glancy, 'Boasting', 127-8.

Laurence Welborn holds that “Paul was governed by a social constraint in his discourse of the cross and in his account of the sufferings of the apostles of Christ”. And like his contemporaries Horace and Seneca, “Paul employs the language and imagery of the mime, when he speaks about these socially shameful subjects.”⁵² Welborn asserts that “Paul’s exposition of the folly of the message of the cross is best understood in the context of an intellectual tradition which, for want of a better term, we have designated the ‘comic-philosophic tradition.’”⁵³ The term suggests that “a common cultural perspective connects Socrates, satire, and the mime”. The “wise fool,” according to this tradition, was the hero Aesop of the folk-tale. For the intellectuals, however, Socrates was the model of the wise man whose wisdom was hidden in apparent foolishness. Welborn believes that “Paul participates fully in this tradition in his discourse about the folly of the word of the cross”. The major points of Paul’s argument in 1 Cor.1-4, such as the divine reversal of wisdom and foolishness, “find their closest analogies in the tradition that valorizes Socrates, Aesop, and the mimic fool”.⁵⁴

This thesis duly acknowledges Welborn’s contribution and insight, but suspects that the parallels he draws might have been somewhat over-stretched. There seems to be a significant difference between the “fool” in the Greco-Roman comic-philosophic tradition and the apostle Paul. For instance, while the “fool” of the mime was an enacted figure on a stage, although he could be reflective of people in real life, he remained, nonetheless, fictitious. On the other hand, Paul as a “fool” of Christ was completely *personal* and *existential* in real life, and was absolutely inseparable from his whole *modus operandi* as an apostle of Christ.

⁵² Welborn, *Paul, the Fool of Christ: A Study of 1 Corinthians 1-4 in the Comic-Philosophic Tradition* (London: T & T International, 2005), 3

⁵³ Welborn, *Fool*, 12.

⁵⁴ Welborn, *Fool*, 12-3.

This thesis tends to think that Paul's tribulations might not only be confined to the wounds and scars inflicted by others on his body, they might also be partly due to his manual labour as a *tentmaker*. Ronald Hock's finding shows that Paul's manual labour was very much the trade of a slave or person of very low social status.⁵⁵ As such, Paul's choice of manual labour, and decision to remain in this lowly esteemed trade, even as an "apostle" of Christ, could also be regarded as an inversion of the current social ethos. In other words, Paul's tentmaking labour was also socially a big σκάνδαλον in a most status-conscious society. The social prejudice and stigma that his manual labour brought would add further suffering to Paul besides the daily chores and physical pains that the manual labour itself brought. Yet, the apostle was not ashamed to stay in such a dishonourable profession for the sake of Christ and the Gospel. On the whole the study on περίστασις indicates that Paul's physical suffering had caused another σκάνδαλον in terms of the Greco-Roman social ethos in which human virtues, masculinity, and social status were greatly cherished.

5. Aim, limits and structure of the thesis

The basic hypothesis of this thesis is that the body is an important feature in ancient understanding of crucifixion and noble death, in Greco-Roman rhetoric, especially its preoccupation with delivery and masculinity, and in the Greco-Roman concept of *peristasis* (a catalogue of suffering). The historico-social studies of these three areas will provide the necessary contexts for the exegesis of the relevant passages in Paul's Corinthian polemics. This thesis will try to show that there was a deliberate attempt on the part of Paul to invert the current social ethos in his dealings with these three areas. The choice of these three areas also immediately sets a limit to the scope of this thesis,

⁵⁵ R. F. Hock, *The Social Context of Paul's Ministry: Tentmaking and Apostleship* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1980), 31-5.

not only in its historico-social studies, but also in its reference to the Corinthian passages. Consequently the exegesis will mainly be confined to 1 Cor. 1.18-31; 4.8-13; and 2 Cor. 2.1-5; 10.10; 11.23-33. While the choice of these passages may initially seem arbitrary, it will be shown that they are most directly related to the three historico-social areas under consideration.

The thesis will also attempt to keep a balance between the historico-social and the exegetical-theological in its overall approach. Consequently, all the three parts of the thesis consistently begin with historico-social studies. Part I: Crucifixion in Antiquity; Noble Death in Greco-Roman and Maccabean Traditions. Part II: Rhetoric, Delivery and Masculinity. Part III: *Peristasis* as Virtue with Special Reference to Stoicism, and *Peristasis* as Humiliation and Human Degradation. These historico-social studies are respectively followed by exegesis on the relevant Corinthian texts in all the three parts of the thesis.

Part I will begin with the historico-social studies on “Crucifixion in Antiquity” based on primary texts from Plato, Plutarch, Cicero, Seneca, Josephus and Philo. They will try to show why Paul’s “message of the cross” (ὁ λόγος ὁ τοῦ σταυροῦ) was such an obvious “folly” (μωρία) and great offence (σκάνδαλον) to the Greco-Roman world. This will be followed by studies on the idea of “noble death” in both Greco-Roman and Maccabean traditions. These contextual studies are expected to provide the necessary background for exegesis of 1 Cor. 1.18-31.

Part II will focus primarily on “Rhetoric, Delivery and Masculinity” in the Greco-Roman tradition. This exercise is necessary because much of the Corinthian polemics had to do with human eloquence and self-presentation in society. With this background

as its historico-social context, the exegesis of 1 Cor. 2.1-5 and 2 Cor. 10.10 will try to explain why Paul had deliberately chosen not to use “lofty words or wisdom” in Corinth, and why his “bodily presence” was so adversely perceived by his Corinthian critics.

Part III will first be devoted to the study of περίστας, with special reference to Stoicism, in its positive use. This will be followed by a close look at the other side of the coin, which highlights humiliation and human degradation, in close relation to Paul’s personal tribulations mentioned in the Corinthian correspondence. These background studies are expected to shed considerable light on the exegesis of 1 Cor. 4.8-13 and 2 Cor. 11.23-33.

It is the hypothesis of this thesis that all three areas are connected in their concern with the “body”, and together they will try to show that Paul’s polemics were nothing less than a drastic inversion of key elements in the current social ethos. The word “inversion” in the title as well as in its frequent use in the body of the thesis is admittedly strong and overt. It is used advisedly to indicate not only Paul’s intention, but also the intensity of the Corinthian polemics. As the thesis has been built on this important assumption, all its three parts will try to justify the appropriateness of its use in its presentation and argument.

PART I: CRUCIFIXION IN ANTIQUITY AND NOBLE DEATH

Chapter One: Crucifixion in Antiquity

1.1 Introduction

The apostle Paul's "message of the cross" as well as his approach to the Corinthian crisis demand a sufficiently clear understanding of the practice of crucifixion in antiquity and prevalent perception associated with it. This thesis has thus given the whole of chapter one to the study of crucifixion in antiquity. It is reasonable to assume that Paul was knowledgeable about the practice of crucifixion in antiquity and current public perception about it when he acknowledged that "the message of the cross" (ὁ λόγος ὁ τοῦ σταυροῦ) was "foolishness" (μωρία) to those who rejected it (1.18).

Division in the Corinthian church was evidently a most serious crisis that threatened the unity and fellowship of the church. Judging from Paul's description of the situation (1.10-17) as well as his immediate response (1.18-31), it is sufficiently clear that the Corinthian division, in the final analysis, was largely due to a vital failure to understand "the message of the cross", which was most essential to both the faith and conduct of the Corinthians. Why was "the message of the cross" such "foolishness" to those who rejected it? And why was its theology so difficult even for the Corinthian Christians to grasp, although it had been a few years now since the message was first brought to them by Paul? (assuming that Paul arrived in Corinth around AD 49/50 and 1 Corinthians was written around 54/55). The main problem apparently lay with people's perception about the cross in the Greco-Roman world. This chapter attempts to address these as well as other related issues in close relation to the social ethos of the Greco-Roman

society. This thesis is not only interested in crucifixion as a form of capital punishment, but also in the very powerful and graphic “body language” it conveyed as well as its serious social implications.

This chapter is greatly indebted to Hengel’s excellent studies on *Crucifixion* which referred to some of the most important primary sources on the subject in ancient Greco-Roman writings. If Hengel has modestly regarded his work as “no more than ‘historical preliminaries’ for a presentation of the *theologia crucis* in Paul,”⁵⁶ the inquiry in this chapter would mainly be an attempt to provide a necessary historico-social background to help explain why Paul’s “message of the cross” was such “foolishness” to those who rejected it.

This chapter will begin with a general survey of crucifixion in antiquity, based mainly on ancient writings on the subject, thanks to the very helpful lead of Hengel. This will then be followed by a study on crucifixion and Roman law enforcement; the victims of crucifixion; the social symbolism of crucifixion; with emphasis on the “body language” conveyed by this capital punishment.

1.2 Crucifixion in antiquity: A general survey

The work of Hengel on the origins and parallels of Roman crucifixion in ancient writings is widely acknowledged as the most significant research on the subject.⁵⁷

Hengel’s survey indicates that from the time of Plautus (c. 3rd century BC onwards),

⁵⁶ Hengel, *Crucifixion*, xii.

⁵⁷ Another significant work on the subject is that of Heinz-Wolfgang Kuhn, ‘Die Kreuzesstrafe während der frühen Kaiserzeit. Ihre Wirklichkeit und Wertung in der Umwelt des Urchristentums’, in Hildegard Temporini and Wolfgang Haase (eds.), *Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt: Geschichte und Kultur Roms im Spiegel der neueren Forschung* (Berlin: Walter De Gruyter, 1982), vol. 25.648-793. The work of Kuhn and Hengel discuss, for the most part, the same ancient source literature.

crux is already used as a “vulgar taunt” among people of the lower classes, including slaves and prostitutes. Indeed, he argues that *crux* is a horrid word that would not have sounded any better in the ears of slaves or foreigners (*peregrinus*) than to a member of the Roman nobility.⁵⁸

There seems to be a general consensus among scholars that the practice of crucifixion was first started by the Persians. This is largely due to the witness of the Greek historian Herodotus (484?-425? BC): For instance, Herodotus recorded that after conquering Babylon for the second time, the Persian king Darius “crucified (ἀνεσκολόπισε) about three thousand men [Babylonians] who were chief among them.”⁵⁹ Similarly, Darius wanted to impale (ἀνασκολοπιεῖσθαι) Egyptians “for being less skilful than a Greek.”⁶⁰ Herodotus also mentioned that Oroetes killed Polyerates of Samos and then crucified him (ἀνεσταύρωσε).⁶¹

Hengel’s impressive ancient sources show that quite a variety of “barbarian peoples” such as the Assyrians, Indians, the Scythians, the Taurians, and the Celts used crucifixion as a mode of execution. Even more significant was the practice of this horrific form of execution by the Carthaginians, especially for high treason, from whom the Romans might have learnt and perfected this form of death.⁶²

In Roman practice, crucifixion was used almost exclusively for non-Romans. However, Greek and Roman historians generally tended to stress the *barbarian* nature of crucifixion and play down their own practice of this mode of execution. The crucifixions by Mithridates, Rome’s arch-enemy, of the two kings of Thrace, were

⁵⁸ Hengel, *Crucifixion*, 9-10, esp. ref. Plautus, *Aul.* 522; *Bacch.* 584; Terence, *Eun.* 383.

⁵⁹ Herodotus 3.159.

⁶⁰ Herodotus 3.132.

⁶¹ Herodotus 3.125.

⁶² Among the cases cited are the crucifixion of the Median king Pharnus by the Assyrian king Ninus; the crucifixion of Cyrus by the Scythians. Hengel, *Crucifixion*, 22-3.

given as “deterrent examples” in the Hellenistic period.⁶³ Plato, the Greek philosopher, was already familiar with the practice of crucifixion, and from his *Gorgias* it was clear that crucifixion was often preceded by various kinds of torture.⁶⁴ As far as the Greeks were concerned, the many crucifixions executed by Alexander the Great were well known. A horrific example would be the siege of Tyre in which two thousand able-bodied survivors were crucified by Alexander.⁶⁵

Following the death of Alexander, Perdiccas came into power and he “tortured and impaled/crucified (ἀνεσταύρωσε)” the king [Ariarathes] and all his relatives in 322 BC.⁶⁶ The same practice was continued in the Hellenistic monarchies, although reports about it are few. Josephus wrote about crucifixions in Judaea in 167 BC when Antiochus IV persecuted the Jews.⁶⁷

Hengel argues that there would have been no less awareness, fear and dread of crucifixion in the east of the Empire than the west. This would have been especially true among lower classes. It is then reasonable that by the time of Paul, crucifixion would have been the *summum supplicium* throughout the entire Empire. This historical reality is of utmost important because when Paul proclaimed the “message of the cross” or “Christ crucified” (e.g., 1 Cor. 1.23; 2.2; Gal. 3.1) in various parts of the Empire, many hearers would know that this “Christ”, whom his followers regarded as “the Son of God” or even the very “God” himself, had been put on trial before Pontius Pilate like a criminal or rebel and found “guilty” (or at least presumed to be so), was eventually crucified. That this crucified Jesus of Nazareth could truly be the “Messiah” sent to earth, “the Son of God”, “Lord” of all, as well as coming “Judge” at the world’s end,

⁶³ Hengel, *Crucifixion*, 23-4.

⁶⁴ Plato, *Gorg.* 473BC.

⁶⁵ Curtius Rufus, *Hist. Alex.* 4.4.17.

⁶⁶ Diodorus, *Siculus* 18.16.3.

⁶⁷ Josephus, *Ant.* 12.256.

would most certainly have been thought lunacy and foolishness to any educated person.⁶⁸

In keeping with the view of Hengel, it seems best to keep the Gentile “μωρία” of the cross (1 Cor. 1.23) in the foreground and to deal separately with the subject within Jewish traditions.⁶⁹ This study attends to the former more than the latter. However, due to Paul’s reference to “Christ crucified” being “a stumbling block to the Jews” (1.23), a short discussion on crucifixion and “curse” related to “noble death” in Jewish literature will be offered in a later section (§2.4).

Many of the seats of Roman power, such as Syrian Antioch, Pisidian Antioch, Lystra, Iconium, Thessalonica, Philippi, Troas, Corinth and Ephesus were also centres of Paul’s missionary activity. It would be reasonable to assume that the Roman governors and officials in those places would have followed the Roman practice and used crucifixion as a major capital punishment. Not only would Paul be familiar with it, crucifixion as a horrible execution would also be a matter of common knowledge to most, if not all the people. Despite its extreme cruelty, the ancient world as a whole did not seem to have the intention to abolish it.

Even if crucifixion were regarded as something evil by the more “enlightened” or “civilized” like the Greco-Roman philosophers Cicero and Seneca, it remained a “necessary evil”. Cicero simply described crucifixion as *summum supplicium* (“the most cruel penalty”) and *istam pestem* (“that plague”), without any suggestion for its abolishment.⁷⁰ Philo described it as “punishment at the uttermost” (τὰς ἀνωτάτω

⁶⁸ Cf. Hengel, *Crucifixion*, 83.

⁶⁹ Hengel, *Crucifixion*, 84.

⁷⁰ Cicero, *Verr.* 5.168, 162.

τιμωρίας)⁷¹ while Josephus portrayed it as “the most pitiable of deaths” (θανάτων τὸν οἰκτιστόν).⁷² Seneca called the cross “the accursed tree” (*infelix lignum*)⁷³ and regarded the pain of crucifixion as a “climax” (*et novissime acutam crucem*).⁷⁴

The extent of suffering in crucifixion had prompted Seneca to ask some most disturbing questions in *Epistulae Morales* (101.14ff):

But what sort of life is a lingering death? Can anyone be found who would prefer wasting away in pain, dying limb by limb, or letting out his life drop by drop, rather than expiring once for all? Can any man be found willing to be fastened to the accursed tree [*infelix lignum* (or *arbor*) is the cross], long sickly, already deformed, swelling with ugly tumors on chest and shoulders, and draw the breath of life amid long-drawn-out agony? I think he would have many excuses for dying even before mounting the cross!

Seneca suggested that Maecenas should perhaps consider suicide as the last way to freedom from the unbearable suffering of crucifixion.

Despite the diversity of their backgrounds and contexts, most ancient writers seemed to have dealt with or at least mentioned some of the following significant points regarding crucifixion in antiquity.

(1) The variety of people crucified: criminals, rebels, slaves, Jews (including Jesus), Christians, and sometimes even nobles and Roman citizens. This last category was understandably most shocking and unacceptable to the Roman public.

(2) The utmost cruelty and maximum pain (physical and mental) that crucifixion inflicted on the victims. There were various forms of execution, from the usual cross-

⁷¹ Philo, *Flacc.* 126.

⁷² Josephus, *B.J.* 7.202.

⁷³ Philo, *Post.* 24-26.

⁷⁴ Seneca, *Ep.* 101.14.

shape to a tree or simply a piece of wood or beam. A variety of tortures, such as burning and flogging, were quite commonly applied to the crucified victims.

(3) The public display of crucifixion, sometimes even turning it into a dramatic spectacle for entertainment and amusement to the full satisfaction of the most sadistic desire of the spectators. It was also in this context that the total alienation of the victims from the rest of human society would understandably be most deeply felt.

(4) Perhaps in no other way was the total helplessness and powerlessness of a *human* person (if the victim was still worthy of such description!?) more graphically shown than the very sight of crucifixion itself.

(5) The public dishonouring of the human body (often in total nakedness and full exposure); the depriving of a decent burial and even the possibility of the corpse or body remains being turned into food for beasts and birds.⁷⁵

These points will be explored further.

1.3 Crucifixion and Roman law enforcement

Before investigating crucifixion as a capital punishment for people of different classes in the Roman society, it is necessary to have a general view about the vital link between punishment and social status, as well as Roman law enforcement and the *Pax Romana*.

Roman theories of punishment were characterized by a respect for status based on conventional socio-political relationships in society. This was more clearly reflected in

⁷⁵ Some primary textual evidences for these points will be cited in section (§1.3-1.4).

the actions and attitudes of judicial officials than in legal theory.⁷⁶ Garnsey elaborates: “[when] investigating the treatment given to defendants of different status in the various courts, it was found that low-status defendants were brought before the Senate or Emperor more often for punishment than for trial, and that if they were subjected to a relatively full examination and found guilty, they received harsher penalties than high-status defendants on the same charges.”⁷⁷

Summum supplicium was the most serious penalty for offenders of low status. This covered several aggravated forms of the death penalty, including exposure to wild beasts (*bestiis dari*), crucifixion (*crux*), and being burned alive (*vivus uri, or crematio*).⁷⁸ Roman citizens, on the other hand, were rarely punished by crucifixion according to the social convention of the time, although there were some exceptional cases. Such class consciousness and social distinction were very significant, especially with reference to the crucifixion of Jesus and Paul’s “message of the cross”.

The Romans’ concern for social peace and order had almost become pathological.⁷⁹ As such, even very enlightened philosophers agreed that it was necessary to punish criminals severely to maintain the Roman law and the *Pax Romana*. It was also generally agreed that for the law against criminals to be effectively carried out, physical punishment to the utmost was necessary, although the idealistic philosopher Plato also believed in the *corrective* purpose of punishment.⁸⁰ The execution was usually preceded by various kinds of torture, e.g., burning of the criminal’s eyes and flogging. Some tortures were even inflicted on members of the criminal’s family.⁸¹

⁷⁶ Garnsey, *Social Status*, 1-2.

⁷⁷ Garnsey, *Social Status*, 99-100.

⁷⁸ Garnsey, *Social Status*, 104.

⁷⁹ C. A. Barton, *The Sorrows of the Ancient Romans* (Princeton, N. J.: Princeton University Press, 1993), 180.

⁸⁰ Plato, *Gorg.* 525B. Coleman, ‘Fatal Charades’, 47.

⁸¹ Plato, *Gorg.* 473 C.

The Stoic philosopher Seneca cited three main concerns in Roman criminal law: correction, deterrence, and the restoration of security. He believed that the best corrective is *severitas* (severity), but it must not be over-used.⁸² This was also largely Gellius' position.⁸³

Moreover, there was also the element of retribution which made the primitive demands: "an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth". Retribution reasserted the status of the person who had been wronged, and ensured that due respect was paid to him (Gellius, *Noct. Att.* 7.14.3).⁸⁴

Philo's work also shows clearly how crucifixion was thought to be most fitting for the worst criminals.⁸⁵ Plutarch simply referred to crucifixion as a form of execution for the criminal with the important qualification that the victim "must carry his own cross".⁸⁶ The crucifixion of robbers by the young Caesar in Pergamum about 75 BC was recorded by Plutarch.⁸⁷

Suetonius reported that Caesar had the pirates' throats cut before crucifixion, but with the emphasis on the emperor's "merciful" nature rather than on the cruelty of the execution itself.⁸⁸ Generally speaking, Coleman is right when he says that "the humanitarian notion that execution should be carried out with dignity, speed, and discretion is a modern idea".⁸⁹

⁸² Seneca, *Clem.* 1.22.2.

⁸³ Gellius (*Noct. Att.* 7.14.2) mentioned three aspects of punishments: correction (

Deterrence was given jurisprudential recognition by Callistratus in *Dig.* 48. 19. 28. 15: “the practice approved by most authorities has been to hang notorious brigands on a gallows in the place which they used to haunt, so that by the spectacle others may be deterred from the same crimes.”⁹⁰ But as Coleman has rightly pointed out “to be an effective deterrent, a penalty should arouse horror and aversion; no doubt audiences in the amphitheatre experienced these sensations, but so effective was the gulf created between spectacle and spectators that the dominant reaction among the audience was pleasure rather than revulsion.”⁹¹ More will be said on this in relation to crucifixion being an occasion for public entertainment (see §1.5.2).

Despite its extreme cruelty and inhumanity, crucifixion was quite generally thought to have contributed significantly to the maintenance of peace and order of the Roman society against the threat of the worst criminals. Its employment was thus largely thought to be justified in the vast Empire where the *Pax Romana* must be maintained at all cost. The governor of Syria, Quadratus, for example, crucified some during a troublesome disturbance in the procuratorship of Cumanus.⁹² Felix did the same with many brigands in order to restore order. Josephus also recorded a considerable number of people who were regarded as “robbers/brigands” being crucified by Felix in Judaea.⁹³

Broadly speaking, throughout the first century peoples in the Empire generally enjoyed the *Pax Romana* in which the law was largely effective and the administration basically well functioned.⁹⁴ As such, a general hard line was taken against those criminals and robbers who threatened socio-political security and human lives and the use of crucifixion against them tended to gain general approval and acceptance. As such,

⁹⁰ Coleman, ‘Fatal Charades’, 50.

⁹¹ Coleman, ‘Fatal Charades’, 50.

⁹² Josephus, *Ant.* 20.129.

⁹³ Josephus, *B.J.* 2.253. Cf. 7.202.

⁹⁴ Suetonius, *Aug.* 98.2.

contempt for those who suffered it was thus something to be accepted. Not only was this most horrible form of execution able to produce its desired deterrent effect, but the victim who had suffered in the hands of the criminal/robber could also draw some satisfaction from the sight of it.

As Justin Epitomator quite clearly states: *ut et conspectu deterreantur alii ab isdem facinoribus et solacio sit cognatis et adfinibus interemptorum eodem loco poena reddita, in quo latrones homicidia fecissent* (that the sight may deter others from such crimes and be a comfort to the relatives and neighbours of those whom they have killed, the penalty is to be exacted in the same place where the robbers did their murders).⁹⁵

It was in this particular context that Quintilian hailed the crucifixion of criminals as good work: *quotiens noxios crucifigimus celeberrimae eliguntur viae, ubi plurimi intueri, plurimi commoveri hoc metu possint. omnis enim poena non tam ad (vin)dictam pertinet, quam ad exemplum* (whenever we crucify criminals, the most heavily used routes are chosen where the greatest number of people can watch and be influenced by this threat; for every penalty is aimed not so much at the offence as at its exemplary value).⁹⁶

1.4 Victims of crucifixion

1.4.1 Crucifixion of slaves

Although slavery was practised in most ancient cultures, ancient Greece and Rome were two societies in world history which seem to have been based on slavery. Independently,

⁹⁵ Justin Epitomator, *Dig.* 48.19.28.15.

⁹⁶ Ps.-Quintilian, *Decl.* 274. 13.

the Greeks and Romans had apparently transformed slavery into an institutionalized system of large-scale employment of slave labour in both the countryside and the cities.⁹⁷ The system of slavery was fully developed and stabilized as a socio-legal institution by the 2nd century BC.

In Roman society the law common to all peoples (*ius gentium*) was perceived to be different from the law of nature (*ius naturale*). Slavery was regarded as an institution of the *ius gentium*, something essentially contrary to the law of nature and the basic principle of human equality. Slaves were also held to be *pro nullo* at law⁹⁸ and were thus legally without rights or duties. In other words, under Roman law, slaves could own nothing.⁹⁹ Crucifixion was the standing form of execution for slaves.¹⁰⁰

In their writings, Cicero, Valerius Maximus, Tacitus, Livy and Plautus clearly mentioned crucifixion as “slaves’ punishment” (*servile supplicium*).¹⁰¹ Moreover, Callistratus wrote that slaves were traditionally punished more severely than free men.¹⁰²

Slaves lived constantly under the threat of the *servile supplicium* which in the system of slavery of the time often meant crucifixion. The term had become like a synonym of crucifixion itself. The following dialogue between a Roman matron and her husband is most revealing:

“Crucify that slave!” says the wife. “But what crime worthy of death has he committed?” asked the husband; “where are the witnesses? Who informed against him? Give him a hearing at least; no delay can be too long when a man’s life is at

⁹⁷ M. I. Finley, *Ancient Slavery and Modern Ideology* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1980), 67.

⁹⁸ W. W. Buckland, *The Roman Law of Slavery* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1970), 1, 10.

⁹⁹ Gaius, *Inst.* 2.96. For a concise discussion of the legal aspects of *peculium*, see A. Watson, *Roman Slave Law* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1987), 95-6.

¹⁰⁰ Garnsey, *Social Status*, 127.

¹⁰¹ Cicero, *Verr.* 5.169; Valerius Maximus 2.7.12; Tacitus, *Hist.* 4.11; Livy 29.18.14; Plautus, *Mil.* 539-40; *Most.* 1133, 359-64; *Per.* 855-6.

¹⁰² Callistratus, *Dig.* 48.19.28.16.

stake!" "What, you numskull? You call a slave a man, do you? He has done no wrong, you say? Be it so; but this is my will and my command: let my will be the voucher for the deed." (*"Pone crucem servo."* "*meruit quo crimine servus supplicium? quis testis adest? quis detulit? audi; nulla umquam de morte hominis cunctatio longa est."* "*o demens, ita servus homo est? nil fecerit, esto: hoc volo, sic iubeo, sit pro ratione voluntas."*)¹⁰³

The Roman matron's command – "crucify that slave" (*pone crucem servo!*) may cause one to recall the shout of the chief priests and the police during the trial of Jesus before Pontius Pilate: "Crucify him! Crucify him!" (σταύρωσον σταύρωσον, John 19.6). Being a well informed Roman citizen and a seasoned traveller, Paul should have no difficulty identifying the crucified Christ with a crucified slave, as he had apparently done in the "Philippian hymn" (Phil. 2.5-11), whether the hymn was of Pauline origin or not.

A negative attitude towards slaves was reflected even in the mind of enlightened philosophers. Cicero defended King Deiotarus who was accused by his runaway slave of misconduct. In Cicero's opinion: "according to the practice of our ancestors, it is illegal to seek evidence from a slave against his master". Cicero was so angry with what he believed to be a false accusation of the runaway slave that he thought even the cruel penalty of crucifixion was not adequate as a torture for him. "Can the cross inflict adequate torture upon this runaway?" Cicero asked.¹⁰⁴

In very vivid terms, Cicero also described the crucifixion of slaves who were suspected of conspiracy:

Those men, after being convicted of the crime of conspiracy, handed over to execution, and bound to the stake...how effectively he frightened them into keeping quiet! He has ordered arrests to be made-that must have terrified them all; he has summoned their masters to their trial-what can alarm slaves more than that? ...What is the next step? The lash, the fire, and that final stage in the punishment of the guilty and the intimidation of the rest, the torments of crucifixion (...*Quid deinde sequitur? Verbera atque ignes et illa extrema ad supplicium damnatorum, metum ceterorum, cruciatus et crux*).¹⁰⁵

¹⁰³ Juvenal, *Sat.* 6.219.

¹⁰⁴ Cicero, *Deiot.* 26.

¹⁰⁵ Cicero, *Verr.* 5.11-2, 14.

According to Welborn, “the most vivid references to crucifixion in ancient literature are found in the comedies of Plautus, in which the lives of slaves are portrayed with unparalleled sympathy. It is here that one encounters a phenomenon that is essential to an understanding of Paul’s dictum on the ‘folly’ of ‘the word of the cross:’ references to crucifixion in Plautus’ comedies almost always take the form of jokes!”¹⁰⁶ Plautus’ writings are full of such “gallows humour”.¹⁰⁷ Even more frequent are places where slaves used the word *crux* in vulgar taunts, calling one another “cross-meat” and “cross-bird”,¹⁰⁸ or bidding one another to “go be hanged!”¹⁰⁹

Welborn has also found that the report of the crucifixion of a slave was sometimes “sandwiched between a mimic dance and a gymnastic spectacle.”¹¹⁰ The theme of crucifixion with comic features could also be found in novels and romances.¹¹¹ Gallows humour also appeared in satirists’ books.¹¹² The connection between crucifixion and comedy also occurred in political writing.¹¹³

For a Roman in the ancient world, speech was a most crucial element in the assertion of a man’s power and authority as well as status in society. It was a most tangible way of demonstrating his masculinity. A slave who had already been deprived of all civil and human rights for life, was sometimes not given the opportunity even to voice his grievances during the time of his crucifixion. Cicero, while not objecting to the crucifixion itself, nonetheless objected strongly to the cutting of a slave’s tongue.¹¹⁴

¹⁰⁶ Welborn, *Fool*, 134.

¹⁰⁷ Plautus, *Mil.* 372-3, 539-40, 610-4; *Per.* 855-6; *St.* 625-6; *Ep.* 359-64.

¹⁰⁸ Plautus, *Aul.* 522; *Bacch.* 584; *Cas.* 416; *Most.* 359-64; Terence, *Eun.* 383; Petronius, *Satyr.* 126.9; 58.2.

¹⁰⁹ Plautus, *As.* 940; *Bacch.* 902; *Most.* 1133; *Cas.* 93, 641, 977; *Cur.* 611.

¹¹⁰ Petronius, *Satyr.* 53.3. Welborn, *Fool*, 137-8.

¹¹¹ Petronius, *Satyr.* 111-3. Xenophon, *Eph.* 4.2 (see B. P. Reardon, *Collected Ancient Greek Novels* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), 155-7).

¹¹² E.g., Horace, *Sat.* 1.3.76-7, 82-3; Petronius, *Satyr.* 52; Juvenal, *Sat.* 6.219-23.

¹¹³ Philo, *Flacc.* 72-85.

¹¹⁴ Cicero, *Cl.* 187.

The crucifixion of slaves was particularly significant to Paul's "message of the cross" because Jesus Christ himself "took on the form of a slave" (μορφὴν δούλου λαβών, Phil. 2.7) when he was crucified, and Paul proudly used "slave of Christ" (δοῦλος Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ, Rom. 1.1) as his own self-designation.

1.4.2 Crucifixion of Jews

In the Roman tradition those who were guilty of betraying their own people to foreign enemies must be subjected to the utmost dishonour and shame and this might basically explain the crucifixion of eight hundred Pharisees by Alexander Jannaeus, which was recorded by Josephus.¹¹⁵ King Herod seemed to have refrained from using crucifixion as a form of execution and Josephus had no record of any crucifixion from Herod's time. The excessive use of crucifixion by the Romans in Judea had really put the Jews off, so that from the time of direct Roman rule it became a kind of taboo as a mode of Jewish capital punishment. Such attitude change is also reflected in rabbinic interpretation of Deuteronomy 21.23. Hengel explains:

Varus had already had two thousand prisoners crucified around Jerusalem, and AD 70, the year of terror, brought a sorry climax in this respect too. Nevertheless, the cross never became the symbol of Jewish suffering; the influence of Deuteronomy 21.23 made this impossible. So a crucified messiah could not be accepted either. It was here that the preaching of the earliest Christians caused particular offence in the mother country itself. It also explains why the theme of the crucified faithful plays no part in Jewish legends about martyrs. The cross had become too much a sign of the passion of Jesus and his followers – though in the Talmudic literature we have a whole series of references to the crucifixion of Jews during the later empire.¹¹⁶

Josephus remains our key witness as far as the crucifixion of the Jews is concerned.

Josephus, who served as Jewish advisor to Titus when Jerusalem was under siege, had

¹¹⁵ Josephus, *B.J.* 1.97ff; *Ant.* 13.380-3.

¹¹⁶ Hengel, *Crucifixion*, 85.

witnessed many scenes of crucifixion. To him crucifixion was “the most wretched of deaths” (θανάτων τὸν οἰκτιστόν).¹¹⁷

The terms cross and crucifixion occur in Josephus’ works, *Jewish Antiquities* and *The Jewish War*, quite frequently and in different places. They are used by Josephus in some very remarkable ways, for instance, in Josephus’ interpretation of Ezra, in relation to those who disobeyed or transgressed commands.¹¹⁸ In the Roman Empire, those Jews who obeyed the Jewish law and worshipped their only God, sometimes offended the Romans and were crucified. Similarly, those worked against the Romans as rebels, robbers or brigands. The numbers were considerable.¹¹⁹

According to Josephus the Jews were so horrified by crucifixion that when their Roman besiegers threatened to crucify a Jewish prisoner, the garrison eventually surrendered in exchange for safe conduct.¹²⁰ Josephus also referred to the flogging and crucifixion of Jews who were Roman knights (ἄνδρας ἱππικοῦ τάγματος) in Jerusalem by the Roman procurator Gessius Florus just before the outbreak of the Jewish War in AD 66.¹²¹ The crucifixion of those Roman knights was obviously very disturbing and shocking to the status-conscious Romans. Josephus’ account of the tragic ending of the Jewish fugitives during the siege of Jerusalem was among the most moving and disturbing:

When caught, they were driven to resist, and after a conflict it seemed too late to sue for mercy. They were accordingly scourged and subjected to torture of every description, before being killed, and then crucified opposite the walls (μαστιγούμενοι δὴ καὶ προβασανιζόμενοι τοῦ θανάτου πᾶσαν αἰκίαν ἀνεσταυροῦντο τοῦ τείχους ἀντικρὺ). Titus indeed commiserated their fate, five hundred or sometimes more being captured daily; on the other hand, he recognized the risk of dismissing prisoners of war, and that the custody of such numbers would amount to the imprisonment of their custodians; but his main reason for not stopping the crucifixions was the hope that the spectacle might

¹¹⁷ Josephus, *B.J.* 7.203.

¹¹⁸ Josephus, *Ant.* 11.17; 11.103; 11.208; 6.374.

¹¹⁹ Josephus, *B.J.* 2.306. *Ant.* 12.256; 17.295; 20.102, 129.

¹²⁰ Josephus, *B.J.* 7.202ff.

¹²¹ Josephus, *B.J.* 2.308.

perhaps induce the Jews to surrender, for fear that continued resistance would involve them in a similar fate. The soldiers out of rage and hatred amused themselves by nailing their prisoners in different postures; (προσήλουν...ἄλλον ἄλλῳ σχήματι πρὸς χλεύην), and so great was their number, that space could not be found for the crosses and nor crosses for the bodies (χώρα τ' ἐνέλειπε τοῖς σταυροῖς καὶ σταυροὶ τοῖς σώμασιν).¹²²

1.4.3 Crucifixion of Roman citizens

Garnsey has contributed significantly to the understanding of Roman citizenship and the privileges attached to it. The emphasis is on the inequalities associated with legal procedures in both civil and criminal spheres. The period with which Garnsey is primarily concerned stretches from the middle of the first century BC to the early third century AD. Garnsey believes that despite drastic socio-political changes which marked this period, the structure and ethos of Roman society remained basically unaltered.¹²³

Despite all the privileges and legal protection that they generally enjoyed, there were still cases of Romans who were executed on the cross. This was understandably most shocking to members of the privileged class. A good example would be Cicero's accusation of Verres, former governor of Sicily, for inflicting the cruel and disgusting penalty of crucifixion on a Roman citizen, Gavius, without adequate investigation and proof to show that Gavius was indeed a spy. Cicero found Verres' crucifixion of Gavius particularly unacceptable as he was being dragged off to be crucified in spite of his repeated claim that he was a Roman citizen. Cicero thus challenged Verres:

Out of your own mouth I accuse you: the man claimed to be a Roman citizen. If you, Verres, had been made prisoner in Persia or the remotest part of India, and were being dragged off to execution, what cry would you be uttering, save that you were a Roman citizen? This...mention of his citizenship had not even so much effect upon you as to produce a little hesitation, or to delay, even for a

¹²² Josephus, *B.J.* 5.449-51.

¹²³ Garnsey, *Social Status*, 2.

little, the infliction of that cruel and disgusting penalty (*crudelissimum taeterrimumque supplicium*).¹²⁴

For Cicero, it was the greatest misfortune for a Roman citizen to be flung down, stripped naked and tied up in the open market-place, and finally crucified.¹²⁵ Cicero was absolutely horrified and angry: "... he [Gavius] hung there, suffering the worst extreme of the tortures inflicted upon slaves (*servitutis extreme summoque supplicio affixum*). To bind a Roman citizen is a crime, to flog him is an abomination, to slay him is almost an act of murder: to crucify him is - What? There is no fitting word that can possibly describe so horrible a deed."¹²⁶

Another case about the crucifixion of Romans is found in Cicero's defence of Rabirius, a Roman noble and a senator who was threatened with the death penalty of crucifixion. The trial of Rabirius was instituted by Caesar in 63 BC. The prosecution was made by the tribune T. Labienus, a committed supporter of Caesar.¹²⁷ Cicero's words against Labienus were strong and powerful rhetorically:

"Veil his head, hang him to the tree of shame." Such phrases, I say, have long since disappeared from our state, overwhelmed not only by the shadows of antiquity but by the light of Liberty....Even if we are threatened with death, we may die free men. But the executioner, the veiling of the head, and the very word "cross" should be far removed not only from the person of a Roman citizen but from his thoughts, his eyes and his ears [*Mors denique si proponitur, in libertate moriamur, carnifex vero et obductio capitis et nomen ipsum crucis absit non modo a corpore civium Romanorum sed etiam a cogitatione, oculis, auribus.*].¹²⁸

Cicero's indignant expression clearly showed how abhorrent crucifixion was for him and his fellow Romans.

¹²⁴ Cicero, *Verr.* 5.165-8. Cicero's reference to Persia and India is interesting, as crucifixion is also known to be used in these places.

¹²⁵ Cicero, *Verr.* 5.158, 161; cf. 4. 24, 26; 1. 9, 13.

¹²⁶ Cicero, *Verr.* 5.169-70.

¹²⁷ Hengel, *Crucifixion*, 41-5.

¹²⁸ Cicero, *Rab. Perd.* 9-17.

If the crucifixion of a Roman, however noble but still *human*, was so unacceptable, it will certainly not be too difficult to imagine what the reaction would be when it came to the crucifixion of the One who was proclaimed as the very “Son of God” and “Saviour of the world”. Similarly, it should not be too hard to know how the unbelieving Roman society would regard Paul, when he publicly declared that he had decided to know nothing “except Jesus Christ, and him crucified” (1 Cor. 2.2). That must surely be the inversion of the conventional social ethos to the highest degree as far as Greco-Roman society was concerned. Again, the great “foolishness” (μωρία) and “madness” (μανία) of Paul’s “message of the cross” must be viewed from this perspective.

Like Cicero, Josephus, Suetonius and Livy also found the crucifixion of Romans shocking.¹²⁹ Suetonius also accused the cruel governor Galba of crucifying a Roman citizen without sympathy: “when the man invoked the law and declared that he was a Roman citizen, Galba, pretending to lighten his punishment by some consolation and honour, ordered that a cross much higher than the rest and painted white be set up, and the man transferred to it.”¹³⁰

1.4.4 Crucifixion of Christians

Records of the crucifixions of Christians, apart from a couple of those found in the writings of Roman historians like Tacitus and Suetonius, were not a matter of general public interest, although controversies, ridicule and Christian apologetics continued to centre around the crucifixion of Christ: How could a crucified Jew be the “Messiah”, the “Son of God” and even “God” himself?

¹²⁹ Josephus, *B.J.* 2.308. Suetonius, *Cal.* 27.3-4; 12.2; *Gal.* 9.1. Livy, 30.43.13; 29.9.10; 29.18.14.

¹³⁰ Suetonius, *Gal.* 9.2. Cf. *Claud.* 25.3.

From the viewpoint of New Testament studies, Josephus' reference to the crucifixion of Jesus under Pontius Pilate is particularly significant, although scholars have doubts and problems about the authenticity of Josephus' designation of Jesus as "the Messiah".¹³¹ Garnsey comments: "a political charge was at least aired in the trial of Christ (see e.g., John 18.33; 19.12, 19); later, the cross was frequently used for the punishment of Christians, at least from the time of Nero."¹³²

Not only was a "political charge...aired in the trial of Christ" as Garnsey has rightly suggested, the very title that was put on the cross of Jesus – "Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews" (Ἰησοῦς ὁ Ναζωραῖος ὁ βασιλεὺς τῶν Ἰουδαίων, John 19.19) – would quite certainly be read by the ignorant and uncritical as a kind of formal *verdict* against the crucified Jesus, especially when it was written in three languages: Hebrew, Greek and Latin. The political implication of Jesus' title or verdict was in fact very consistent with the origin and historical development of the practice of crucifixion, beginning from the Persians and Carthaginians down to the time of the Romans, when crucifixion had been a major *political* punishment. Those who were not politically minded would at least tend to assume that the crucifixion of Jesus, just like other criminals or rebels, was the necessary and just punishment for his "crime", whatever it might be in precise terms.

In Roman society as well as others in ancient times, the guilt of the crucified was quite readily assumed. The "stigma" that was attached to Jesus' crucifixion must therefore be understood in this historico-social context, especially at the time of Jesus when peoples in the empire did generally enjoy the *Pax Romana* and when Roman law was by and large quite effectively administered. In order to maintain the *Pax Romana*, the

¹³¹ Josephus, *Ant.* 18.64.

¹³² Garnsey, *Social Status*, 127.

crucifixion of Jesus and his followers was regarded as legitimate punishment.¹³³

Such an environment naturally made the defaming, both publicly and privately, of the crucified victim like Jesus much easier and more credible, not only socio-ethically, but also religiously, since the claims of Jesus had all these implications. And in the Jewish context, the burden of the stigma that was attached to the crucifixion of Jesus would be heavier if the “curse” in Deuteronomy 21.23 was believed to be related to crucifixion (see §2.4).

The persecution of Christians in Roman society in the first century was quite similar to that of the Jews. Condemned Christians were sometimes burnt with fire, thrown to the beasts or crucified.¹³⁴ However, in the history of the early church, it was often not the crucifixion of Christians that really concerned non-Christian society, but the “crucified Christ” himself and the Christian “message of the cross” which openly claimed that the crucified Jesus was in fact the Messiah, the Son of God, even the very God Himself.

Justin Martyr wrote that the Christian belief in Christ crucified was so offensive to the opponents that they regarded it not just as “folly” but also as “madness” (μανία).¹³⁵ Hengel comments, “the Greek word μωρία which he [Paul, 1 Cor. 1.18] uses here does not denote either a purely intellectual defect nor a lack of transcendental wisdom. Something more is involved”.¹³⁶ Hengel thinks that Justin Martyr actually “puts us on the right track” when he uses the word μανία (madness) to describe the strong reaction

¹³³ Suetonius, *Ner.* 16.2; Tacitus, *Ann.* 15.44.

¹³⁴ Tacitus, *Ann.* 15.44.4; Suetonius, *Ner.* 16.2; Seneca, *Beat.* 59. 3; Cassius 63.13.2; Justin, *Dial. Tryph.* 110. 4; Tertullian, *Apol.* 12.3.

¹³⁵ Justin, *Apol.* 1.13.4.

¹³⁶ Hengel, *Crucifixion*, 1.

of the ancient world to the Christian message about the crucified Christ, the Son of God.¹³⁷

Tacitus bluntly called the Christian belief *exitiabilis superstitio* (“pernicious superstition”) and described crucifixion as an extreme penalty. Tacitus’ basic historical data are right: *Auctor nominis eius Christus Tiberio imperitante per procuratorem Pontium Pilatum supplicio adfectus erat.* (Christus, the founder of the name, had undergone the death penalty in the reign of Tiberius, by sentence of the procurator Pontius Pilate).¹³⁸

Tacitus also accused Jesus of having instigated the “evil” or “disease” (*malum*) which soon found its way even to the imperial capital Rome.¹³⁹

Lucian ridiculed the Christians as “poor wretched devils” (κακοδαίμονες), who deny “the Greek gods and worship that crucified sophist himself (ἀνεσκολοπισμένον ἐκείνον σοφιστήν)” and live under his laws.¹⁴⁰ Lucian interpreted the letter T as an “evil instrument” as it was shaped in the form of a *tau* on which tyrants crucified men.¹⁴¹

According to Origen, Celsus contemptuously linked the crucifixion of Jesus to his humble upbringing as a carpenter and ridiculed the Christian ideas of “the tree of life” and the “resurrection of the flesh through the wood [of the cross]”: “What drunken old woman, telling a story to lull a small child to sleep, would not be ashamed of muttering

¹³⁷ Hengel, *Crucifixion*, 1.

¹³⁸ Tacitus, *Ann.* 15.44.3.

¹³⁹ Tacitus, *Ann.* 15.44.3. Hengel thinks that Tacitus’ precise account of Christ and his followers could have probably come from the trials of Christians which he himself conducted while serving as the governor of Asia (3).

¹⁴⁰ Lucian, *Peregr.* 13.

¹⁴¹ Lucian, *Iudic. Voc.* 12.

such preposterous things?”¹⁴²

The deep-seeded prejudice of Pliny, Caecilius, Suetonius, Tacitus and others had caused them to use such phrases as “new sect of a form of *amentia*”,¹⁴³ “senseless and crazy superstition (*vana et demens superstitio*)”, “sick delusions (*figmenta male sanae opinionis*)”,¹⁴⁴ “new and pernicious superstition (*superstiti nova et malefica*)”¹⁴⁵, to describe the Christian belief. The theme of “crucified” god is rare in ancient writings. Hengel explains: “the extraordinary paucity of the theme of crucifixion in the mythical tradition, even in the Hellenistic and Roman period, shows the deep aversion from this cruellest of all penalties in the literary world.”¹⁴⁶

The prejudices and charges against the crucifixion of Christians were so persistent and overwhelming that even the Christian Octavius found his apologetics quite ineffective. Hengel’s explanation is very clear: “Octavius cannot deny the shamefulness of the cross and therefore he is deliberately silent about the death of Jesus....He avoids the real problem, namely, that the Son of God died a criminal’s death on the tree of shame. This was not appropriate for a form of argument which was concerned to prove that the one God of the Christians was identical with the God of the philosophers.” Hengel rightly perceives something even more serious in Octavius’ evasion, because the Christian dilemma “all too easily led educated Christians into docetism.”¹⁴⁷

¹⁴² Origen, *Cels.* 6.34.

¹⁴³ Pliny the Younger, *Ep.* 10.96.4-8.

¹⁴⁴ Minucius Felix, *Oct.* 11.9; 9.2.

¹⁴⁵ Suetonius, *Ner.* 16.3. Cf. Tacitus, *Ann.* 15.44.3.

¹⁴⁶ Hengel, *Crucifixion*, 14.

¹⁴⁷ Hengel, *Crucifixion*, 4. Hengel elaborates on this important point much further in his section on “Docetism as a way of removing the ‘folly’ of the cross” (15-21).

1.5 The social symbolism of crucifixion

This sub-section is primarily concerned with certain social features which are found in the practice of crucifixion. They must be examined in vital relation to the social ethos of the Greco-Roman world. When Paul publicly acknowledged in 1 Cor. 1.18 that “the message of the cross is foolishness” to those who rejected it, he obviously had the current Greco-Roman social ethos in mind. The crucifixion of Jesus, like most other crucifixions, was a *public* event as well as a *social* occasion, and what people perceived in their mind in the context of their conventional social ethos was just as significant as what they actually saw with their eyes. This was where the social symbolism of crucifixion, including that of Jesus, became relevant and important. The following are some of the main features of the social symbolism of crucifixion.

1.5.1 The presumed guiltiness of the crucified victim

The presumed guiltiness of the crucified victim was not only the opinion of the condemning party, but perhaps more significantly, also that of the (often ignorant and innocent) public. As such, the presumed guiltiness of the crucified victim could be said to be largely responsible for the public prejudice against the crucified victim.

As has been noted earlier, the execution of this most severe and cruel capital punishment was considered a most effective and just way of getting rid of the presumed social menace. For the undiscerning general public, the crucifixion of Jesus would most probably be perceived in such a context also. Jesus clearly died as a kind of “rebel” in the eyes of those who did not have the whole and true picture about it, although according to the witness of the gospels Pilate had found no guilt or crime in Jesus.

Tacitus, Suetonius, Celsus, and Pliny seemed to have no real knowledge of them. Whatever the case might be, the “title” that was given to Jesus on the cross – “Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews” – would most probably be taken by the ignorant and innocent as the “crime” of the crucified Christ as well as a kind of official “verdict” on him, although the “title” was quite clearly written by Pilate as a mockery. And those who were in the know as well as the perceptive spectators would probably be able to read Jesus’ “title” on the cross as a possible mockery and insult to Jesus personally as well as to the Jews nationally. The response of the Jewish chief priests to the title clearly indicated that they would have nothing to do with a *crucified* “King of the Jews”. Instead, they suggested that the appropriate title or verdict should be: “this man said, I am King of the Jews” (John 19.21). Pilate’s response was: “what I have written I have written” (ὃ γέγραφα, γέγραφα, 19.22). This is perhaps one of the greatest paradoxes or ironies in human history, because what was intended by Pilate as an insult or mockery turned out to be a statement of truth, at least from the Christian point of view. For “Jesus of Nazareth” was indeed “the King of the Jews”, and more than just “the King of the Jews”. The Christian confession is that the crucified “Jesus of Nazareth” is “the King of kings”. Yet, on that day when “Jesus of Nazareth” was hanging on the cross, the “title” of the crucified victim or the “verdict” on him would most probably imply some kind of “treason” or “crime” in the Roman context of the time as far as the general public was concerned. As Paul himself had stated: “none of the rulers of this age understood this; for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory” (1 Cor. 2.8).

Augustine mentioned an oracle of Apollo which was meant as a reply to a question from a husband who intended to prevent his wife from being a Christian. The negative

answer of the oracle is most indicative of the Roman prejudice against the crucifixion of Christ:

Let her continue as she pleases, persisting in her vain delusions, and lamenting in song as a god one who died for delusions, who was condemned by judges whose verdict was just, and executed publicly by the worst iron-bound death (*Pergat quo modo uult inanibus fallaciis perseuerans et lamentari fallaciis mortuum Deum cantans, quem iudicibus recta sentientibus perditum pessima in speciosis ferro vincta mors interfecit*).¹⁴⁸

The oracle was most consistent with the view of Pliny, Tacitus and Caecilius about the crucified “God”: A “dead God” was the greatest contradiction in itself.¹⁴⁹

1.5.2 The public nature of crucifixion

The whole “drama” of crucifixion in the Greco-Roman world was often not confined to the very act of nailing or binding of the victim to the cross or wooden beam. What went before, such as insult, mockery, and all sorts of verbal and physical abuses, was just as “entertaining” and exciting as the final act itself. And as crucifixion was often deliberately executed in prominent public places, its desired goal, whether it was for deterrent purposes or for public entertainment, or both, could quite easily be achieved. Not only was Christ publicly “displayed” on the cross, the messengers of “the message of the cross” were similarly put on “stage” for full public viewing (cf. 1 Cor. 4.9).

Garnsey’s study indicates that “in non-legal literary sources *supplicium* has three basic meanings, torture, death, and punishment generally. The suggestion has been made that it is the first meaning [torture], that is preserved in the legal term *summum supplicium*.”¹⁵⁰ For the general public who were on the scene of crucifixion, the torture that was inflicted upon the victim could either arouse natural human sympathy or

¹⁴⁸ Augustine, *Civ.* 19.23.

¹⁴⁹ Hengel, *Crucifixion*, 19.

¹⁵⁰ Garnsey, *Social Status*, 122.

provide an occasion for entertainment, and as the crucified victim was usually presumed to be guilty, the latter was often more apparent.

Crucifixion as an extreme form of execution was regarded as abhorrent and disgusting by ancient people, precisely because of the various kinds of torture that were employed, usually prior to the final act of crucifixion (stripping, flogging, hanging etc.), and the considerable length of time that elapsed before death.¹⁵¹

Hengel's survey shows that not only in the ancient world generally, even in the Roman Empire where some kinds of "norm" would be expected, the form of execution could vary considerably.¹⁵² As such, crucifixion became a punishment in which "the caprice and sadism of the executioners were given full rein...there were too many different possibilities for the executioner."¹⁵³ Philo, Plutarch, Seneca, and Lucian all made references to the various forms of execution in their writings.¹⁵⁴ Flogging before crucifixion was a particularly customary Roman practice.¹⁵⁵

Inhumanity and cruelty beyond description were blatantly shown not only in the suffering of the victim, but also disgustingly demonstrated in the "satisfaction" that the spectators derived from it. Coleman elaborates:

A lingering death that lasts hours if not days, did not offer the same spectacular appeal as the other "aggravated" death penalties that were commonly imposed: burning and beasts. But the actual moment of death may be relatively insignificant in relation to the satisfaction spectators derived from witnessing preliminaries that culminated in the hoisting of the body onto the cross. It is also possible that a combined penalty was envisaged such as that suffered by the martyr Blandina, who was hung on a post as bait for the animals in a posture that is explicitly likened to crucifixion (Musurillo 5.1.41). Similarly the martyrdom

¹⁵¹ Plutarch, *Per.* 28.3.

¹⁵² Examples cited by Hengel are: "a flogging beforehand, and the victim often carried the beam to the place of execution, where he was nailed to it with outstretched arms, raised up and seated on a small wooden peg" (25).

¹⁵³ Hengel, *Crucifixion*, 25.

¹⁵⁴ Philo, *Post.* 61; *Somn.* 2.213; Plutarch, *Mor.* 449D; Seneca, *Cons.* 20.3; cf. *Ira* 2.2; *Beat.* 19.3; Lucian, *Prom.* 1.2; *Dial.* 5 (1).1.

¹⁵⁵ *Dig.* 48. 19.8.3; Cassius, 2.11.6.

of Pionius, who was nailed...and burnt, combined crucifixion and *crematio* (Musurillo 10).¹⁵⁶

Sometimes it was animals and not the human persons for whom the spectators showed sympathy. As far as the audience was concerned, the very sight of violence in action was quite enough to bring great fascination. Plato once described an innocent man who suffered the extreme form of execution: “the man will have to endure the lash, the rack, chains, the branding-iron in his eyes, and finally, after every extremity of suffering, he will be crucified/impaled (τελευτῶν πάντα κακὰ παθὼν ἀνασχινδυλευθήσεται).”¹⁵⁷

Joel Marcus suggests that “irony was exactly their intentions: this strangely ‘exalting’ mode of execution [i.e., the raising of the crucified victim] was designed to mimic, parody, and puncture the pretensions of insubordinate transgressors by displaying a deliberately horrible mirror of their self-elevation....Crucifixion was intended to unmask, in a deliberately grotesque manner, the pretension and arrogance of those who had exalted themselves beyond their station; the authorities were bent on demonstrating through the graphic tableau of the cross what such self-promotion meant and whither it led. Crucifixion, then, is a prime illustration of Michel Foucault’s thesis that the process of execution is a ‘penal liturgy’ designed to reveal the essence of the crime.”¹⁵⁸ The motive of deterrence behind the public display of crucifixion was obvious when the cross was erected in a prominent place for the full view of the public.¹⁵⁹

The writings of Philo,¹⁶⁰ Cicero,¹⁶¹ Seneca,¹⁶² Plutarch,¹⁶³ Suetonius,¹⁶⁴ and Artemidorus¹⁶⁵ all emphasized the public nature of crucifixion. The public place of

¹⁵⁶ Coleman, ‘Fatal Charades’, 56.

¹⁵⁷ Plato, *Rep.* 361E-362A.

¹⁵⁸ Joel Marcus, ‘Crucifixion as Parodic Exaltation’, *JBL* 125 (2006), 73-87, at 78-9.

¹⁵⁹ Quintilian, *Decl.* 274.

¹⁶⁰ Philo, *Spec.* 3.160.

¹⁶¹ Cicero, *Verr.* 5.158.

¹⁶² Seneca, *Ep.* 14.5.

execution, including the Roman amphitheatre, naturally provided a conducive environment for public entertainment and amusement. Considerable numbers of the early Christian martyrs were thrown into the arena of beasts for Roman entertainment.¹⁶⁶

Josephus noted that Gaius watched with satisfaction when a play was presented by the dancer Cinyras in which the hero and his daughter were crucified (σταυροῦται).¹⁶⁷ Philo gave a most detestable account of the Roman prefect Flaccus' crucifixion of Jews in Alexandria, which was mixed with popular entertainment:

But Flaccus gave no orders to take down those who had died on the cross. Instead he ordered the crucifixion of the living (ζῶντας δ' ἀνασκοποῦναι προσέτατεν)...And he did this after maltreating them with the lash in the middle of the theatre and torturing them with fire and the sword. The show had been arranged in parts. The first spectacle lasting from dawn till the third or fourth hour consisted of Jews being scourged, hung up, bound to the wheel, brutally mauled and haled for their death march through the middle of the orchestra. After this splendid exhibition came dancers and mimes and flute players and all the other amusements of theatrical competitions.¹⁶⁸

The entertaining and amusing effect of crucifixion needs no further elaboration. Hengel is surely perceptive when he says quite bluntly that "crucifixion satisfied the primitive lust for revenge and the sadistic cruelty of individual rulers and of the masses".¹⁶⁹

Besides physical pain, the mental and spiritual anguish that crucifixion brought to the victim was equally great, perhaps even greater than the physical aspect. The total loss of all humanity and dignity; the great shame and utter humiliation associated with the execution; the public exposure of the human body and the denial of burial left behind virtually nothing that could be regarded as "manhood" or masculinity.

¹⁶³ Plutarch, *Per.* 28.3.

¹⁶⁴ Suetonius, *Gal.* 9.2. *Claud.* 25.3.

¹⁶⁵ Artemidorus, *Oneir.* 2.53.

¹⁶⁶ Tacitus, *Ann.* 15.44.4.

¹⁶⁷ Josephus, *Ant.* 19.94. Cf. Suetonius, *Cal.* 57.4.

¹⁶⁸ Philo, *Flacc.* 84ff.

¹⁶⁹ Hengel, *Crucifixion*, 87.

No human situation or gesture could perhaps demonstrate the hopelessness and powerlessness of a human person more than the scene of crucifixion. Some victims were even forced to witness the execution of their own wives and children but were unable to do anything except to watch helplessly and powerlessly.

1.5.3 Crucifixion as “body language”

Gleason has found Josephus’ references to the human body and “body language” particularly fascinating in terms of semiotics and in the context of crucifixion which was executed publicly. Gleason elaborates:

What I am fishing for in these murky waters is some understanding of the semiotic context – of the ways the human body functions as a signifier in that time and place....But I speak of gestures, including acts of violence, as language....Even if “body language” is only a metaphor, the metaphor helps our investigation because languages are systems of communication that admit of degrees of familiarity....The relish with which Josephus narrates both ways of using the body as *tours de force* of self-presentation makes it clear that he did not consider body language a “natural” concomitant of strong emotion, but a system of conventional signs whose deployment was subject to conscious control.¹⁷⁰

Gleason goes on to consider how bodies could be manipulated. An excellent example is found in the Hasmonean king, Alexander Jannaeus’ spectacular use of bodies in pain. When his authority was challenged during a rebellion, Alexander crucified eight hundred Pharisees in the middle of the city of Jerusalem.¹⁷¹ Before crucifying, Alexander forced them to “watch the execution of their wives and children, while he reclined publicly amongst his concubines to watch the spectacle-within-a-spectacle.”¹⁷² Subsequently, the very sight of the king became an effective spectacle itself and

¹⁷⁰ Gleason, ‘Mutilated Messengers: ‘Body Language in Josephus’, in S. Goldhill (ed.), *Being Greek under Rome: Cultural Identity, the Second Sophistic and the Development of Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 50-85, at 50-1.

¹⁷¹ Josephus, *B.J.* 1.97-8.

¹⁷² Gleason, ‘Mutilated Messengers’, 78.

produced an intense emotional reaction in the audience: the next night eight thousand more rebels who got the message were absolutely horrified and fled the country.

Gleason has attached great significance to the control of the bodies of the enemies and the "body language" it sought to convey in a battle such as the siege of Jerusalem: "In the high-stakes hermeneutics of the siege, a crucial task in the struggle for power was not just to control the movements of bodies, but to control their meanings...we find the combatants trying to use human bodies as symbolic tokens in a crude *lingua franca*....These considerations are, I think, sufficient to explain the presence of mutilated messengers in Josephus' narrative."¹⁷³

The body of the crucified victim was fully exposed, and often in nakedness. It most vividly served as a very powerful "body language" by which human indignity, dishonour, degradation, weakness, helplessness and powerlessness were given the fullest possible expression. Quite naturally also, a crucified person was usually deprived of the honour of a decent burial. Instead, the human corpse or bodily remains were meant for the consumption of beasts and vultures. All these must be put in the context of the social ethos of the time concerning human dignity, especially masculinity, power and honour. The crucified victim became the very embodiment or epitome of shame, indignity, "foolishness" and "madness".

Since "body language" was meaningless in the Roman world apart from the real physical human body, understanding the Roman view of body in relation to manhood, especially masculinity, power and authority, social honour and status, becomes most essential. Substantial works have already been done by some modern scholars in this

¹⁷³ Gleason, 'Mutilated messengers', 83-4.

important area.

Barton has rightly observed that “honour was, for the Romans, synonymous with ‘being’. It was not, as it is for us, some minor and dispensable aspect of life”. It would therefore be a most unbearable thing should that honour be lost.¹⁷⁴ David deSilva thinks that the term “honour” has several synonymic meanings. It is therefore necessary for us to begin with a basic inventory of places in which the vocabulary of honour and dishonour are used when we investigate the honour discourse within a text. This would include words for “reputation” or “opinion”, “honour”, “dishonour”, “reproach”, “outrage” “worthy”, “noble”, “praise”, “scorn”, and the like. This list could be expanded by considering synonyms and by looking for other forms (e.g., verbs, adjectives, etc.) built on the same roots as the words above.¹⁷⁵

Malina holds that in the Mediterranean world, “from a symbolic point of view, honour stands for a person’s rightful place in society, a person’s social standing. This honour position is marked off by boundaries consisting of power, gender status, and location on the social ladder.”¹⁷⁶ From a functionalist point of view, “honour is the value of a person in his or her own eyes plus the value of that person in the eyes of his or her social group. Honour is a claim to worth along with the social acknowledgment of worth.”¹⁷⁷ Moreover, “physical affronts are always symbolic affronts that require a response. Failure to respond means dishonour, disgrace.”¹⁷⁸

¹⁷⁴ Barton, *The Sorrows*, 186.

¹⁷⁵ David A. deSilva, *The Hope of Glory: Honor Discourse and New Testament Interpretation* (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1999), 9.

¹⁷⁶ Malina, *The New Testament World*, 54.

¹⁷⁷ Malina, *The New Testament World*, 54, 32.

¹⁷⁸ Malina, *The New Testament World*, 55.

According to Malina's understanding, the crucified Christ obviously failed to mark off those "social boundaries". This was simply because as a crucified victim there was, humanly speaking, absolutely no way for Jesus to display his "power" and exhibit his manly "gender status". Nor was Jesus able to choose his "location" when he was helplessly nailed to the cross. Therefore, Paul's "message of the cross" was offensive not only to the Roman authorities but also to the whole populace, according to the general social ethos of the time.¹⁷⁹ It is not hard to imagine what sort of response Paul would get when he told the Corinthians that he had decided to know nothing among them "except Jesus Christ and him crucified". Perhaps no inversion of social ethos could be more radical than that.

For a crucified victim hanging there in absolute helplessness and powerlessness and shamefully in the full view of the public, it would be a blatantly cruel mockery to talk about "honour", "worth" and the host of other social "values" and moral "virtues"! Because his "*body language*" clearly testified that he had none of it! Moreover, if, as Malina has suggested, "physical affronts are always symbolic affronts that require a response" and "failure to respond means dishonour, and disgrace", a crucified victim in his absolute helplessness and powerlessness on the cross could only accept all the dishonour and disgrace as his predestined fate. There was absolutely no way for him ever to "respond" in his condemned state.

One could perhaps relate this to the scene of Christ's crucifixion again. It was quite clearly in recognition of Jesus' utter helplessness and powerlessness that some of the passers-by reviled him, shaking their heads and saying, "Aha, you who were going to destroy the temple and build it in three days! Save yourself! Come down from the cross!"

¹⁷⁹ Hengel, *Crucifixion*, 5.

Similarly the chief priests....He saved others; Himself He cannot save..." (Mark 15.29-31). Christ's own seemingly desperate cry - "*Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?*" (15.34) – no doubt could only further confirm his absolute helplessness and powerlessness as far as the spectators were concerned. And yet, here lies the real "foolishness" and "madness" of the whole thing, because Paul told the Corinthians in no uncertain terms that "the message of the cross" is (ἐστίν) "the power of God" (δύναμις θεοῦ, 1 Cor. 1.18) and that the apostle himself had decided to know nothing among them "except Christ and him crucified" (εἰ μὴ Ἰησοῦν Χριστὸν καὶ τοῦτον ἐσταυρωμένον, 2.2).

For ancient peoples in general, and for the Greeks and Romans in particular, there was perhaps nothing more shameful and humiliating than the public display of the crucified person, including the exposure of the body (often in complete nakedness). deSilva argues that the physical body must be taken into serious consideration in the matter of honour:

A more complex system of symbolizing the honour of a person is to be located in the treatment of the physical body, for there existed an intimate relation between honour and the physical person....Corporal punishment, such as flagellation or crucifixion, is an act of degradation imposed upon a body, a token of the lack of esteem in which criminals who are so punished, are held. Such observations should lead us, then, to pay careful attention to details touching the physical person and the treatment of that person by others as indications of honour exchanges.¹⁸⁰

This observation of deSilva is important in understanding the scandalous nature of crucifixion as well as the physical abuse which the victim suffered.

M. L. Satlow's research has shown that "Jewish sources from antiquity construct male nakedness in a more or less consistent manner. Male nakedness is an offence to the

¹⁸⁰ deSilva, *The Hope of Glory*, 14.

sacred. Similarly, the divine - and his representatives here on earth, whether they are kings, priests, or rabbis - does not reveal himself to social subordinates.”¹⁸¹

Gleason thinks that “although we cannot be sure that the Roman generally understood that Jews were specially sensitive about nudity in the presence of social inferiors, the verb αἰκίζεσθαι, commonly used for scourging, well conveys the injury to status that such punishment involved.”¹⁸² John’s Gospel witnessed not only the dividing of Jesus’ clothes by the soldiers at the time of crucifixion, but also the robbing of his tunic (19.23, 24). This could well imply further exposure of Jesus’ body and the dishonouring of it.

Burial was equally important for a normal person in ancient culture. The burial of the dead person was indicative of his social rank, honour and public identity. In his *De Legibus*, Plato discussed funerary legislation: (1) Funeral rites were required for the dead to be performed in respect of the gods. (2) Burial should be carried out on the third day. (3) Burial should be held outside of the city and with moderate mourning. (4) Mourning and lamentation should be appropriate and controllable.¹⁸³

According to Donna Kurtz’s study, the burial of the Greeks was concerned with tomb architecture and memorials as well as rites. Some possessions of the dead were destroyed or buried with them. Greeks regarded death as a slow transition to another form of life.¹⁸⁴ Kurtz notes that “by the Classical period Greek burials seem to have developed as far as they possibly could to satisfying the living, within a sequence of

¹⁸¹ M. L. Satlow, ‘Jewish Constructions of Nakedness in Late Antiquity’, *JBL* 116/3 (1997), 429-54, at 453.

¹⁸² Gleason, ‘Mutilated messengers’, 81.

¹⁸³ Plato, *Leg.* 958D-960B.

¹⁸⁴ Donna C. Kurtz and John Boardman, *Greek Burial Customs* (London and Southampton: Thames and Hudson, 1971), 329-32.

rites which preserved traditional practice, yet which gave scope to expression of human grief, admiration, even hope.”¹⁸⁵

Cicero described funerary regulation at great length.¹⁸⁶ Cicero had basically preserved Plato’s view on burial custom. (1) Rites for the dead are in honour of gods. (2) The corpse should be buried before daybreak. (3) Burial or cremation should be held outside of the city apart from famous persons and emperors.¹⁸⁷ (4) Limitation of the funeral expense like monuments and mourning. (5) Offerings are in honour of the dead. (6) Laws for the protection of graves (2.10-26). In the Roman period, burial tended to be luxurious, extravagant in monuments or columns, and the enormous size of tombs.

Jocelyn Toynbee’s observation is also significant: “all Roman funerary practice was influenced by two basic notions – first, that death brought pollution and demanded from the survivors acts of purification and expiation; secondly, that to leave a corpse unburied had unpleasant repercussions on the fate of the departed soul.”¹⁸⁸

According to Jewish burial custom, burial of the dead took place immediately after death and by sunset on the day of death. The corpse was washed and wrapped tightly by linen cloths around the body (*m. Semahot* 12.10) and placed in a coffin. Byron McCane’s dissertation has shown that “early Christians and Jews in Roman Palestine shared common rituals, theologies, and cultural values of death and burial.”¹⁸⁹

¹⁸⁵ Kurtz, *Greek*, 332-3.

¹⁸⁶ Cicero, *Leg.* 2.22.56; cf. Xenophon, *Cyr.* 8.7.25.

¹⁸⁷ According to Cicero, both cremation and inhumation were practised in the fifth century BC (*Leg.* 2.23.58).

¹⁸⁸ Jocelyn M. C. Toynbee, *Death and Burial in the Roman World* (London and Southampton: Thames and Hudson, 1971), 43.

¹⁸⁹ Byron R. McCane, *Jews, Christians, and Burial in Roman Palestine* (Ann Arbor: UMI Dissertation Services, 2005), 236.

A crucified victim was usually deprived of the above burial customs and rituals. As such he was virtually cut off from his society and became an outcast in his death, because of crucifixion.

Josephus, with his bi-cultural background thus considered the throwing out of the bodies in nakedness and without burial a most violent and humiliating act, especially for aristocratic Jews: "Bodies that had lately worn the sacred garment, that had presided over cosmic ceremonies and received prostrations from every corner of the globe, were seen naked, thrown out as carrion for dogs and wild beasts (ἐρριμμένοι γυμνοὶ βορὰ κυνῶν καὶ θηρίων ἐβλέποντο)." ¹⁹⁰

Moreover, as Gleason has insightfully observed, in a culture where autonomy and social control were articulated in body language, "the Greco-Roman aristocrats were expected to display a body free from the scars of mutilating punishment or manual work, and for aristocratic Jews, the stakes were even higher. Since aristocratic physical perfection encoded not only the social history of the body, but also its fitness for divine service, physically imperfect men could not assume priestly duties." ¹⁹¹

1.6 Conclusion

The main concern of this chapter is crucifixion in antiquity with reference to some of its main features. In order to show historico-socially some of the most horrible and disturbing aspects of human degradation and humiliation in crucifixion, considerable examples have been cited from primary ancient sources as well as secondary modern scholarly views. Special weight has been given to the crucifixion of people of lower

¹⁹⁰ Josephus, *B.J.* 4.324-25 (cf. 7.200).

¹⁹¹ Gleason, 'Mutilated messengers', 84.

strata of society, including slaves and Jews, because this most detestable form of capital punishment was commonly applied to them, including Jesus. The kinds of degradation and humiliation that the crucified victims endured were self-evident in some of the cases cited.

The public nature of crucifixion and the kind of “body language” conveyed by the crucified victims and the entire scene of the execution, including those most inhuman treatments the victims often received, both before and during the final act itself, made this form of capital punishment the most horrific and cruellest manner of human death. The cross thus became not only a most powerful visual symbol, but also a very impressive and moving “body language”. Those cases of crucifixion and the commentaries on them are not made in a vacuum, but in the concrete and harsh reality of the social ethos before as well as during Paul’s time.

Hengel warns against attempts, both ancient and modern, “to blur the sharp contours of Paul’s remarks about the cross of Christ...in symbolic-allegorical or cosmic terms”.¹⁹² This is because, for Paul and his fellow Christians of the time, the cross of Christ “was not a didactic, symbolic or speculative element but a very specific and highly offensive matter”, which brought a great burden to the life and witness of the early Christians. Hengel thus thinks that it was for this very reason that the relatively young Christian church in Corinth sought “to escape from the crucified Christ into the enthusiastic life of the spirit, the enjoyment of heavenly revelations and an assurance of salvation connected with mysteries and sacraments.”¹⁹³ But for the Christians themselves as well as for their opponents and critics, there was actually no way for the “spiritual” Corinthians to escape and still remain true to the historical reality of the crucifixion of

¹⁹² Hengel, *Crucifixion*, 17-8.

¹⁹³ Hengel, *Crucifixion*, 18.

Christ at the same time. Paul's open acknowledgement in 1 Cor. 1.18, that "the message of the cross is foolishness to the perishing", as well as the entire passage 1.18-31, must accordingly be understood and perceived in the overall context of crucifixion in antiquity as well as in close connection with the conventional social ethos of the apostle's time.

Chapter Two: Noble Death in Greco-Roman and Jewish Traditions

2.1 Introduction

The study of crucifixion in antiquity in the previous chapter has shown that one of the main reasons for people's perception of Paul's "message of the cross" as "foolishness" was because of the *manner* of Christ's execution, namely, crucifixion. There might, however, be other important factors that had also contributed to people's prejudice against the Pauline message. Recent studies have indicated that by the time of Paul there was a concept that was rather prevalent among Greeks, Romans and Jews, namely, "noble death". In the Greco-Roman world, the most classic example of "noble death" is generally assumed to be the famous death of Socrates, the philosopher *par excellence*; and for the Jews, the death of the Maccabean "martyrs". This chapter is devoted to the study of "noble death" in both Greco-Roman and Jewish traditions. It will try to show in what way or ways the subject is relevant to the death of Jesus, especially to Paul's "message of the cross". It will begin with a study of noble death in the Greco-Roman tradition, with special reference to the death of Socrates, to be followed by a study of noble death in Jewish tradition with special reference to the Maccabean martyrs. In addition, there will also be a brief review of some recent studies on noble death.

2.2 Noble death in the Greco-Roman Tradition

2.2.1 Socrates, the philosopher *par excellence*

Like Jesus and a few other great religious teachers and philosophers, Socrates (470-399 BC) wrote nothing. His life and thought are largely derived from the writings of Plato. There has been a general consensus that Socrates was "a man of great intellectual

brilliance, moral integrity, personal magnetism, and physical self-command.”¹⁹⁴ It is also now generally agreed that all the dialogues of Plato were written after Socrates’ death. Aristophanes’ *Clouds*, which first appeared in 423 BC, may be the only evidence from Socrates’ own lifetime.¹⁹⁵ Plato’s portrayal of Socrates in his *dialogues* remains largely consistent. But they should not be read as a technical “biography” of the great philosopher. Plato wrote as an apologist in order to present Socrates as “the ideal embodiment of philosophy, unjustly traduced by confusion with bogus practitioners (Sophists) and unjustly condemned for his dedication to the philosophic life.”¹⁹⁶

Much of Socrates’ time and energy was preoccupied with wisdom, truth and right conduct, although he only regarded himself as a fellow seeker of truth and a lover of wisdom (φιλόσοφος), but not a wise man (σοφός). Socrates’ critical and inquisitive mind made him a role model for the serious and thoughtful seekers after truth, but at the same time, it also rendered him exceedingly unpopular with the complacent, powerful and self-conceited, including the σοφοί of Athens. In the spring of 399 BC Socrates was formally prosecuted by the court and condemned to death. Meletus was the main accuser of Socrates in Plato’s *Apology*. Two main charges were brought against him. 1. Impiety (ἀσέβεια) towards the gods of the city. Instead of recognising the gods of the state, he was alleged to have introduced new deities to the city. 2. Corrupting the mind of young Athenians, thereby threatening the stability of society and challenging basic traditional assumptions. In the words of *Apology* 24B: “Socrates is guilty of corrupting the minds of the young, and of believing in deities of his own invention instead of the gods recognized by the State.” Socrates subsequently died by drinking a cup of poison

¹⁹⁴ Richard Kraut, ‘Socrates’, in Robert Audi (ed.), *The Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 749-50, at 749.

¹⁹⁵ C. C. W. Taylor, ‘Socrates’, in Honderich Ted (ed.), *The Oxford Companion to Philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 836-37, at 836.

¹⁹⁶ Taylor, ‘Socrates’, 836.

and his “noble death” turned him into a kind of “martyr”, so that his influence became even more lasting and widespread than when he was alive.

Socrates was also the hero of Xenophon. Although his *Memorabilia* was “as much a work of art as any Platonic dialogue”, his view on Socrates was quite different from that of Plato. In Plato’s idealism Socrates was a great martyr, and for Xenophon, the great sage was pre-eminently a moral teacher.¹⁹⁷ But for both Xenophon and Plato, the death of Socrates was undoubtedly “noble”.

On the noble death of Socrates, Xenophon praises his glory and dignity, writing: “how could any one have died more nobly than [Socrates]?” Furthermore, Xenophon finds Socrates’ method of death honourable, happy and most acceptable to the gods (*Mem.* 4.8.3. Cf. 4.8.2, 11; 1.2.18, 62).

The accounts of Socrates’ trial and its aftermath were recorded in three of Plato’s works. The *Apology* was primarily concerned with Socrates’ defence at his trial. *Crito* provided Socrates’ reasons for not taking the opportunity to escape from prison and head into exile. The day before Socrates’ trial was the first day of the annual Mission to Delos which had taken so long that Socrates was kept in prison for a month. There was an opportunity for Socrates to escape and leave the country. Though Socrates’ friends tried hard to persuade him to escape, he refused and expressed his strong conviction in response to Crito when Crito begged him to do so: “The really important thing is not to live, but to live well....And that to live well means the same thing as to live honourably or rightly.”¹⁹⁸ *Phaedo* was a most fascinating and moving story of the great

¹⁹⁷ A. D. Lindsay, *Socrates Discourses by Plato and Xenophon* (London: J. M. Dent & Sons, Ltd., 1918), ix-xi.

¹⁹⁸ Plato, *Cr.* 48A-B.

philosopher's final hours. It contained Socrates' basic philosophy of life, attitude towards death, and belief in the immortality of the soul.

2.2.1.1 Socrates' apology and sense of mission

In response to a charge of impiety towards the gods of the city, Socrates claimed that he had consistently been a faithful servant to his god as well as a dedicated and caring citizen of Athens. In an inspirational speech he says that he has done nothing but seeks to persuade all citizens to make their primary concern not their body but their soul.¹⁹⁹ In conclusion Socrates states he is ready "to die a hundred deaths," which gained him great admiration from the Stoic philosopher Seneca, who strongly believed in a true philosopher's consistency of word and deed (*Ep.* 24.15). Indeed, for Epictetus death was the best opportunity for a true philosopher to set an example leading others to this way of life (3.20.13).

These words of Socrates expressed the philosopher's strong sense of mission: "does it seem natural that I should have neglected my own affairs and endured the humiliation of allowing my family to be neglected for all these years...going like a father or an elder brother to see each one of you privately, and urging you to set your thoughts on goodness?"²⁰⁰ Socrates was convinced that his trial was absolutely unfair: "I am willing to die ten times over if this account is true...Other heroes of the old days [also] met their death through an unfair trial."²⁰¹

¹⁹⁹ Plato, *Phaed.* 30A.

²⁰⁰ Plato, *Phaed.* 30B-31A.

²⁰¹ Plato, *Phaed.* 42A.

2.2.1.2 Noble death

In the Greco-Roman tradition, the condemned Socrates in Plato's *Phaedo* was clearly perceived as one who welcomed a "noble death" (64A). Socrates' alleged "death wish" was undoubtedly governed by his overall view on the human body as a prison of the soul and his belief in the immortality of the soul in relation to the quest for truth (66B; cf. 64E). Paul Gooch has described Socrates' attitude towards the physical body as "somatic indifference".²⁰² Socrates was thought to be such a master over his own body through self-control, reason and somatic indifference that the hemlock poison was not able to have its normal torturous effect on him.²⁰³ Socrates' legendary composure has not only contributed much to the allegedly "noble" character of his death, it is sometimes used to compare his death favourably with that of Jesus.

Of course, one should not forget that Plato's *Phaedo* was designed as a kind of "eyewitness" account as Gooch has rightly noted: "Plato structures the account to evoke admiration from the start. *Phaedo* takes the role of eyewitness, and reports his own unusual experience: he felt no sorrow because Socrates met his death so fearlessly and nobly (58E). The dialogue closes with the famous lines about the end of our friend, the best and wisest and most just man of his time. And it is not only the more than a dozen of Socrates' companions present who are moved by these final moments: remember the jailer, who can contain neither his praise nor his tears as he calls Socrates the noblest and best and gentlest of men."²⁰⁴

²⁰² Paul W. Gooch, *Reflections on Jesus and Socrates: Word and Silence* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1996), 194-5.

²⁰³ Gooch, *Reflections*, 196-7.

²⁰⁴ Gooch, *Reflections*, 246.

Phaedo's account did not seem to have been seriously questioned in the Greco-Roman world. Epictetus greatly admired Socrates' resolute decision to prefer a noble death to living on dishonourably: "he saves himself by dying, not by flight" (4.1.165). Epictetus' admiration of Socrates as a paradigm was sufficiently well stated in Epictetus 4.1.159-69 where Socrates' honour, obedience, reverence and courage were particularly highlighted.

Gooch is right: "Plato makes certain that we know at the beginning of the dialogue that for Socrates philosophy itself is a kind of dying. His entire way of life has been preparation for this final day....If philosophy seeks the wisdom and truth that is to be found in soul, not body, then the final separation of soul from body may be welcomed as the fitting culmination of the philosophical quest."²⁰⁵

In the discussion about Socrates' "death wish" and "noble death" one simple but relatively significant factor is often overlooked, that is, his advanced age when confronted with the prospect of death.²⁰⁶ As Gooch has rightly pointed out, "Plato does not remark on Socrates' age in the *Phaedo*, but because Socrates himself refers to his being advanced in years and near natural death in his Defense (*Apology* 38C), the knowledge that Socrates has enjoyed a long and fulfilled life plays a silent part in our estimation of his death. Moreover, the *Phaedo* presents this as a painless end: the agonies of hemlock poisoning do not cloud Socrates' presence of mind or distance him from his dying."²⁰⁷ In view of what Gooch has just said, one may be permitted to ask this question: Had Socrates been much younger, say about the age of Jesus, would he have responded very differently in those final moments of his life journey? And if so, would his death be regarded as less "noble"?

²⁰⁵ Gooch, *Reflections*, 247.

²⁰⁶ See Xenophon, *Mem.* 4.8.1.

²⁰⁷ Gooch, *Reflections*, 247.

2.2.1.3 Divine sign

Both Plato's *Euthyphro* and Xenophon's *Memorabilia* mentioned Socrates' belief in some kind of divine "sign" or "voice" for guidance and thus aroused his critics' suspicion of the soundness of his mind and teaching. Socrates also talked about a "dream" in *Phaedo* 61B: "In the course of my life I have often had the same dream, appearing in different forms at different times, but always saying the same thing: 'Socrates, practise and cultivate the arts'....I meant that the dream...was urging me on to do what I was doing already, that is, practising the arts; because philosophy is the greatest of the arts, and I was practising it...."

Plato qualified Socrates' "death wish" with reference to the divine "necessity": "then perhaps from this point of view it is not unreasonable to say that a man must not kill himself until god sends some necessity upon him (πρὶν ἂν ἀνάγκην τινὰ θεὸς ἐπιπέμῃ), such as has now come upon me" (*Phaed.* 62C).

Cicero clearly believed that when a divine sign was given, one should welcome death obediently and joyfully as Socrates and Cato had done:

Cato departed from life with a feeling of joy in having found a reason for death; for the God who is master within us forbids our departure without permission. When, however, God himself has given a valid reason, as he did in the past to Socrates and in our day to Cato and to many others, then with certainty your true wise man will joyfully go forth from the darkness here into the light beyond...he will go forth at the summons and release of God. For the whole life of the philosopher, as the same wise man says, is a preparation for death.²⁰⁸

Cato was believed to have committed suicide after reading *Phaedo*.²⁰⁹ Lucilius was similarly set free from the fear of death.²¹⁰ Seneca linked Cato's courage in the face of death to his desire for true freedom (*Prov.* 2.9-10). Plutarch obviously thought that the

²⁰⁸ Cicero, *Tusc.* 1.74; 1.118. Cf. *Fin.* 3.60; *Rep.* 6.15-16; *Off.* 1.112.

²⁰⁹ Seneca, *Ep.* 24.6-7.

²¹⁰ Seneca, *Ep.* 24.12-21.

death of Cato was inspired by the example of Socrates.²¹¹ Epictetus firmly believed that one should accept death willingly when a “signal to retreat” was given by God, as Socrates had done (1.29.29).

2.2.1.4 The body as bondage of the soul and death as its liberation

Socrates consistently held that the body was the soul’s prison: “is not what we call death a freeing and separation of soul from body? Certainly, said Socrates. Such was the desire of a true philosopher: And the desire to free the soul is found chiefly, or rather only, in the true philosopher; in fact the philosopher’s occupation consists precisely in the freeing and separation of soul from body. Isn’t that so?”²¹²

Socrates advocated that there was one way in which “a man can be free from all anxiety about the fate of his soul; if in life he has abandoned bodily pleasures and adornments...with self-control, and goodness, and courage, and liberality, and truth – has fitted himself to await his journey to the next world.”²¹³

It is clear that philosophically or religiously, the Socratic attitude toward death was evidently based on the Greek belief in the immortality of the soul as well as its ability to find true wisdom “in the other world.”²¹⁴

Seneca thought that one could accept death with determination, presumably even through suicide, as long as “the way to freedom” from slavery was opened. His thinking was thus very much in line with that of Socrates, in regarding death as the path to true

²¹¹ Plutarch, *Cat. Min.* 67-8.

²¹² Plato, *Phaed.* 67C-D; cf. 66E.

²¹³ Plato, *Phaed.* 115A.

²¹⁴ Plato, *Phaed.* 67E -68B. Cf. 82C.

freedom, although Socrates was apparently not so ready to commit suicide as Seneca did (*Prov.* 6.7; *Ira* 1.112).

For Epictetus death was a sort of “harbour” or “refuge”: “And this is the harbour of all men, even death, and this their refuge. That is why none of the things that befall us in our life is difficult. Whenever you wish, you walk out of the house and are no longer bothered by the smoke” (4.10.27; 3.24.96-102).

2.2.1.5 Fearless and noble before death

In classical Greco-Roman tradition perhaps no true courage could have been better typified than the serenity with which Socrates faced death. Socrates was consistently and emphatically portrayed as being fearless before death. In Plato’s *Phaedo* 58E, Phaedo said, “since he seemed to me to be happy, both in his bearing [manner] and in his words, he was meeting death so fearlessly and nobly (ἀδεῶς καὶ γενναίως).”

In *Phaedo* 64A, Socrates said that a true philosopher should welcome death: “a man who has really devoted his life to philosophy should be cheerful in the face of death, and confident of finding the greatest blessing in the next world when his life is finished.” Socrates also likened himself to a soldier who took the order absolutely.²¹⁵

In an attempt to comfort his followers, Socrates said, “but you also, judges, must regard death hopefully and must bear in mind this one truth, that no evil can come to a good man either in life or after death, and God does not neglect him. So, too, this which has come to me has not come by chance (αὐτομάτου), but I see plainly that it was better for

²¹⁵ Plato, *Apol.* 28D-29A.

me to die now and be freed from troubles. That is the reason why the sign (σημείον) never interfered with me, and I am not at all angry with those who condemned me or with my accusers" (*Apol.* 41D).

Once the philosopher was convinced of the divine will he "cheerfully and quietly" accepted his fate, and offered a final prayer: "he took it [the cup], and very gently (μάλα ἥλαως)...without trembling or changing colour or expressions (οὐδὲν τρέσας οὐδε διαφθείρας οὔτε τοῦ χρώματος οὔτε τοῦ προσώπου) but looking up at the man with wide open eyes, as was his custom, said: 'what do you say about pouring a libation to some deity from this cup? May I, or not?' 'Socrates,' said he, 'we prepare only as much as we think is enough.' 'I understand,' said Socrates; 'but I may and must pray to the gods that my departure hence be a fortunate one; so I offer this prayer, and may it be granted'. With these words, he raised the cup to his lips and very cheerfully and quietly drained it (μάλα εὐχερῶς καὶ εὐκόλως ἐξέπιεν), quite calmly and with no sign of distaste, he drained the cup in one breath."²¹⁶

2.2.1.6 Final verdict

This was how Phaedo concluded his story about the death of Socrates, with the emphasis on his courage, wisdom and uprightness: "Such was the end, Echecrates, of our friend, who was, as we may say, of all those of his time whom we have known, the best (ἀρίστου, "noblest or bravest") and wisest (ἄλλως φρονιμωτάτου) and most righteous man (δικαιοτάτου)" (*Phaed.* 118).

²¹⁶ Plato, *Phaed.* 117B-C.

2.2.1.7 More on “noble death” in the Socratic tradition

Other ancient sources besides the writings of Plato clearly show the abiding and widespread influence of Socrates’ alleged “noble death”. Aristotle, following this Socratic tradition, also highly regarded the sacrifice of philosophers for friends or for other worthy causes as “noble death”:

But it is also true that the virtuous man’s conduct is often guided by the interests of his friends and of his country, and that he will if necessary lay down his life in their behalf. For he will surrender wealth and power and all the goods that men struggle to win, if he can secure nobility for himself; since he would prefer an hour of rapture to a long period of mild enjoyment, a year of noble life to many years of ordinary existence, one great and glorious exploit to many small successes.²¹⁷

This view was also shared by Diogenes Laertius: “tell us that the wise man will for reasonable course make his own exit from life, on his country’s behalf or for the sake of his friends, or if he suffers intolerable pain, mutilation, or incurable disease” (7.130; Philostratus, *Vit. Apoll.*). Epictetus had very high regard for Diogenes (4.1.152-55). Seneca listed a number of exemplars who died for others (*Prov.* 3.4). The metaphor of “sacrifice” was sometimes used to describe the death of noble persons, such as that of Socrates and Demonax, the latter being an enactment of the former.²¹⁸

Historically, Socrates’ “noble death” also became an inspiration and consolation for several illustrious Romans who ended their own lives after they had fallen into disgrace. Such was the opinion of the Roman historian Tacitus with reference to the suicides of Seneca and Thrasea Paetus.²¹⁹ Barton’s comments on honour as it relates to death are particularly insightful. She writes that Roman *virtus*, which is related to the aggressive and self-aggrandizing nature of a warrior, was controlled and balanced by a self-

²¹⁷ Aristotle, *Eth. nic.* 1169a.

²¹⁸ Tacitus, *Ann.* 15.62-4. Lucian, *Dem.* 1.11.

²¹⁹ Jan Willem van Henten and Friedrich Avemarie, *Martyrdom and Noble death: Selected texts from Graeco-Roman, Jewish and Christian Antiquity* (London: Routledge, 2002), 3-14.

sacrificial aspect. More to the point, there was honour in death not as a wasting of life, but rather an act of shaping life, or as Barton expresses it: "to will death was not to deny life but to carve its contour."²²⁰

Jan Henten makes a significant comparison between Greeks' and Romans' respective attitude toward death. While the "death wish" of the Greeks was often governed by their negative view on the human body as a kind of "prison" and their belief in the immortality of the soul, the Romans had their own views about noble death. They regarded it as a kind of self-sacrifice such as by those who were on military duty or as a dedication to the deities, with the hope that the act would ultimately bring about victory. A certain idea of "atonement" or "substitution" seems to be associated with this kind of self-sacrifice.²²¹

Latin sources referred to a special form of self-sacrifice as duty, called *devotio* such as the "dedication" by military persons of themselves, the enemy's army, or both, to the gods of the underworld or other deities. This ceremonial death was apparently regarded as the ultimate means to bring about victory.²²² Henten has found that the ancient Greeks had placed several kinds of "glorious death" in one category of *biaiothanasia* ("violent death") which included death on the battlefield, execution, as well as different forms of self-sacrifice and suicide. Descriptions of these deaths were found in different genres and literary forms, including elegies, tragedies, apologies, funeral orations, histories, biographical narratives (*teleute, exitus illustrium virorum*), diatribes, letters and so-called "acts" of pagan martyrs.²²³ Readiness to accept violent death rather than to compromise one's conviction and the profound desire to sacrifice for others were all

²²⁰ Barton, *Roman Honour*, 41-3.

²²¹ Cf. Epictetus 1.9.16, 22-6; 2.1.17; 4.10.27; Dio Cassius 59.8.3; 63.13.10-5. Henten, *Martyrdom*, 19-21.

²²² Cf. Livy 8.9.4-9; 8.10.11-4.; 8.6.13. Henten, *Martyrdom*, 19.

²²³ Henten, *Martyrdom*, 5.

stressed in pagan as well as in Jewish²²⁴ and Christian writings.²²⁵ However, Henten's study also reveals that unlike Christian and Jewish martyrs, willingness to sacrifice their life for religious motives was rare among pagans.

In view of the abiding and widespread influence of the Socratic tradition on "noble death" in the Greco-Roman society, it is significant to refer to the fourth century church father John Chrysostom's contention that the Christian martyrs were far superior to Socrates. Firstly, Chrysostom claimed to be able to list "ten thousand" Christian martyrs for every Socrates. Secondly, Chrysostom argued that Socrates had no choice but to accept death, whereas the Christian martyrs went to their deaths *willingly*.²²⁶ Thirdly, unlike Jesus and many of his followers, Socrates was of old age when he was confronted with death: "For not against their will did the martyrs endure, but of their will, and being free not to suffer....This you see is no great wonder: that he [Socrates] whom I was mentioning drank hemlock; it being no longer in his power not to drink, and also when he had arrived at a very great age....But show me someone enduring torments for godliness' sake, as I show you ten thousand everywhere in the world. Who, while his nails were being torn out, nobly endured? Who, while his joints were being wrenched asunder? Who, while his body was being cut in pieces, member by member? Who, while his bones were being forced out by levers? Who, while being placed on frying-pans without relief? ...Show me these instances. For [Socrates] to die by hemlock is like falling asleep, even more pleasant than sleep".²²⁷ If the death of Socrates were regarded as "noble", the martyrdom of many Christians would certainly be more so, in the opinion of Chrysostom.

²²⁴ 2 Macc. 6-7; Josephus, *B.J.* 7.323-88; *Ant.* 12.256, 21-2.

²²⁵ 1 Clement 5-6; Ignatius, *Letter to the Romans* 1-7.

²²⁶ Arthur J. Droge and James D. Tabor, *A Noble Death: Suicide and Martyrdom Among Christians and Jews in Antiquity* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1992), 139.

²²⁷ John Chrysostom, *Homilies on 1 Corinthians* 4.7.

2.2.1.8 A summary

It is obviously hard to be really fair and objective when comparing and contrasting two great figures from two very different traditions. However, the association between Socrates and Jesus, no matter from what perspective it is perceived, is clearly a historical reality which no one can easily bypass. In the opinion of Gooch, at least in the history of the Christian church, Socrates' association with Jesus has in fact elevated the reputation of the Greek philosopher *par excellence* to a kind of "sainthood," especially his attitude to death. Indeed, when one considers Socrates in relation to martyrdom, his death is seen to bring him closer to Jesus.²²⁸

Whatever the case might be, now that a relatively detailed account has been given about Socrates' "noble death" and the Socratic tradition, it is possible to see if there is any significant point of contact between Socrates and Jesus with special reference to Paul's "message of the cross."

Generally speaking, it may be fair to suggest that while Paul might be familiar with "noble death" in the Greco-Roman tradition, such an idea was evidently alien to the apostle's understanding of the death of Jesus on the cross. If there were any *nobility* in the death of Jesus, it could only be perceived from the divine perspective and not from any human point of view. The previous historical survey on crucifixion in antiquity has shown sufficiently clearly that the crucifixion of Jesus belonged to the most *ignoble* death of the time. It was *ignoble* in the eyes of the Romans, because they did not think that he was dying for the gods, for the nation or for any other noble cause. What was even worse was the sheer fact he was crucified with the sanction of the highest Roman

²²⁸ Gooch, *Reflections*, 276-7.

official in Palestine. And his death was not without struggle, e.g., the prayer in the garden for the possible removal of the “cup” of suffering before his arrest, and the outcry on the cross for being alienated from his God (compared with the legendary “calmness” of Socrates in the face of death). Of course, for the Jews the death of Jesus was well deserved for a “blasphemer”. It is therefore not surprising that in 1 Corinthians 1-2 Paul not only showed no interest in the Greco-Roman notion of “noble death”, but had actually put forward ideas which were diametrically opposed to the commonly accepted social ethos of the time. After raising the thorny issue of church divisions in 1.10-12, Paul went straight into the message of the cross: “Was Paul crucified for you?” (1.13). The force of Paul’s rhetoric was clear and simple: Only the one who was “crucified for you”, namely Jesus Christ, deserved the Corinthians’ total allegiance. As such, Paul first rebuked those (one should perhaps say *especially* those) who gave him their loyalty, because having received Paul’s message of the cross and being his “supporters” they should have known better.

For Paul, the crucifixion of Jesus was no mere historical reality, important as it was, but the very substance of his proclamation and the only purpose of his mission (1.17) and existence. The “eloquent wisdom” of man was incompatible with the “power” of God, which was demonstrated on the cross of Christ (1.17). Paul was fully aware that the message of the cross was “foolishness” to those who rejected it, but salvation to the believing (1.18). The wisdom of God in and through the proclamation of the cross had thus turned the social ethos of this world upside down (1.18-21). Paul knew that Jews demanded signs and Greeks desired wisdom (1.22). And yet he had committed himself to the proclamation of “Christ crucified”, which was “a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles” (1.23). His commitment was thus a direct and deliberate challenge to both Jews and Greeks of his time, because for them, the absolute horror of

crucifixion as a form of execution and all the sufferings (both physical and mental), shame, inhumanity and indignity that were associated with it were notorious. There was thus nothing “noble” about Jesus’ death, as Socrates’ death was commonly regarded to be. As such, only a “fool”, according to the social ethos of the time, would have committed himself to the proclamation of Jesus of Nazareth who was crucified, having been prosecuted by the highest Jewish council and put on trial by the most senior Roman official in Palestine. Yet, Paul was no fool. His commitment was based on the conviction that the crucified Christ had demonstrated clearly that “God’s foolishness is wiser than human wisdom, and God’s weakness is stronger than human strength” (1.25).

What has been said is sufficient to indicate that if one were looking for some significant points of contact between Socrates and Jesus with special reference to Paul’s message of the cross in the opening chapters of 1 Corinthians, the result could be rather disappointing. But *paradoxically*, the absence of any significant point of contact between the two cases is itself most revealing, because it serves to demonstrate quite clearly that the Greek philosopher Socrates and what he symbolizes and embodies do not quite fit into the picture of Paul’s crucified Christ in the final analysis. This is so despite the fact that Socrates has been a commonly respected and admired figure throughout the history of the church, especially for his commitment to the search for truth and for his courage in the face of great adversity, including death itself. But the mission and death of Jesus Christ have to be understood, perceived and interpreted in an entirely different way, especially in the way that Paul had shown in the opening chapters of 1 Corinthians. The uniqueness of the cross of Jesus lies precisely in its incomprehensible nature, humanly speaking. Otherwise, it would not be such “a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles.”

2.3 Noble death in 2 and 4 *Maccabees*: A Jewish tradition

The origin and title of 2 *Maccabees* are quite clearly explained by Jonathan Goldstein. Clement of Alexandria and Origen are believed to be the earliest of the Church Fathers to mention the books by name. They were called *Ta Makkabaika*, "Maccabaeon Histories". The earliest use of the term "Maccabees" for the heroes was found in Tertullian's *Adversus Iudaeos* 4, of about AD 195. After that, the title "Books of Maccabees" began to be commonly used by the Church Fathers.²²⁹

The form of 2 *Maccabees* appears rather strange. It begins with two letters. The first (II 1.1-10a) may be called Epistle 1, and Epistle 2 consists of 1.10b-2.18. 2.19 begins with a history in which (2.19-32) the writer refers to an 'abridgment' of the work of one "Jason of Cyrene" who wrote about "Judas Maccabaeus and his brothers, the purification of the 'greatest' of temples and the dedication of the altar, the wars against Antiochus IV Epiphanes and Antiochus V Eupator, and the miraculous divine interventions and glorious victories which then occurred."²³⁰ Goldstein accepts those claims of the abridger (2.19-23). The abridger evidently paid much greater attention to the sufferings of the martyrs (II 6.10-7.42) than other matters.²³¹ The themes of his history are also pretty obvious: the covenantal relationship between God and His chosen people, the sanctity of the Jerusalem temple, the Hasmonaean dynasty and their pious opponents, the martyrdom of the Jews, and the belief in resurrection.²³²

Although Jason and the abridger appear to have followed the most popular stylistic and narrative patterns of Greek historians, Goldstein thinks that "despite all these Greek

²²⁹ Jonathan A. Goldstein, *II Maccabees* (Garden: Doubleday & Company, 1983), 3-4.

²³⁰ Goldstein, *II Maccabees*, 4.

²³¹ Goldstein, *II Maccabees*, 5-6.

²³² Goldstein, *II Maccabees*, 12.

elements, the abridged history is profoundly Jewish.”²³³ The Maccabean narratives and their basic theology seem to support Goldstein’s claim.

Based on the first letter (2 *Macc.* 1.9) Henten thinks that the date of 2 *Maccabees* is about 124 BC and the author was likely to be a member of the Hasideans.²³⁴ Moreover, 4 *Maccabees*, especially in its historical contexts of martyrdom, is believed to have been largely derived from 2 *Maccabees* and came into being around 100 BC.²³⁵

In Goldstein’s view, 2 *Maccabees* 7 constitutes “the earliest surviving examples of elaborate stories of monotheists suffering martyrdom and are the direct source for the patterns that thereafter prevailed in Jewish and Christian literature”. He thinks that “Heb. 11.35-36 surely alludes to II 6.18-7.42...thereafter in Jewish (see IV 6.28-29) and especially in Christian tradition is the idea of the redemptive power of martyrdom”.²³⁶

2 *Maccabees* has three stories of “noble death”: the ninety-year old scribe Eleazar, the anonymous mother, and her seven sons (6.18-31; 7). The nobility of such death was set in the context of the covenant.²³⁷ David Seeley is clearly right in thinking that the martyrdom of the elderly martyr Eleazar was a particularly important source of encouragement and strength for his fellow Jews (6.31).²³⁸

In the Maccabean writings the martyrs were regarded as Jewish philosophers whose thoughts and virtues provided a guideline for the Jewish way of life. Henten elaborates: “therefore, the Jewish philosophy...measures up to Greek philosophy in every aspect.

²³³ Goldstein, *II Maccabees*, 20-1.

²³⁴ Henten, *The Maccabean Martyrs as Saviours of the Jewish People: A Study of 2 and 4 Maccabees* (Leid: Brill, 1997), 296.

²³⁵ Henten, *Martyrs*, 82.

²³⁶ Goldstein, *II Maccabees*, 282-3.

²³⁷ Henten, *Martyrdom*, 46.

²³⁸ David Seeley, *The Noble Death: Graeco-Roman Martyrology and Paul's Concept of Salvation* (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1990), 89.

And because of its divine origin it surpasses Greek philosophy....That explains why they refuse in front of the king to renounce the εὐσέβεια and the philosophical way of life which stems from it.”²³⁹

The idea of bodily resurrection of the Jewish martyrs was obviously the most significant element among other notions in the Maccabean belief in divine vindication. Moreover, Antiochus IV’s conversion to Jewish religion just before his death was clearly regarded as a powerful witness to God’s sovereignty over earthly powers and authorities.²⁴⁰

In H. Anderson’s view, the writer of *4 Maccabees*, while familiar with Greek thought, especially Stoic ideas, was not really concerned to promote them among his Jewish readers as such, but rather to use them in the service of his own people, making the great virtues of the Greek self-control, courage, justice, and temperance, subordinate to the Jewish Law.²⁴¹ This is also basically the view of deSilva.²⁴² Here is an example: “Reason, I suggest, is knowledge of things divine and human, and of their causes. And this wisdom, I assume, is the culture we acquire from the Law, through which we learn the things of God reverently and the things of men to our worldly advantage. The forms of wisdom consist of prudence, justice, courage, and temperance” (1.16-19; cf. 1.6; 5.7-13, 17-25; 13.19; 14.2).

John Barclay seeks to interpret the thesis of *4 Maccabees* in relation to Jewish identity and tradition. He thinks that the author had placed the Maccabean martyrdoms “within

²³⁹ Henten, *Martyrs*, 294.

²⁴⁰ 2 *Macc.* 9.8-17. Henten, *Martyrs*, 303.

²⁴¹ H. Anderson (trans.), ‘4 Maccabees’, in James H. Charlesworth (ed.), *OTP* (New York: Doubleday & Company, 1985), vol. 2.531-64, at 537-8.

²⁴² deSilva, *4 Maccabees* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998), 51.

the framework of the thesis that ‘religious reason is master over the passions’” right from the start (1.1-3.18).²⁴³

The author of *4 Maccabees* was obviously familiar with the relation between reason and passions, which was a main issue in contemporary philosophy, especially in Stoicism. But to the author, it was Jewish philosophy which was superior (5.22, 35- 7.7, 9, 21) and all philosophies must be at the service of Jewish interests. Barclay suggests that the author’s use of the first person plural “we” in relation to wisdom (σοφία), education (παιδεία) and (Jewish) law (νόμος) is indicative of the author’s strong sense of solidarity with his Jewish community. This also implies that ultimately the author was only interested in the Jewish form of “wisdom” or “philosophy”.²⁴⁴

While *4 Maccabees* appears to share the Stoic belief that religion is an ingredient of “reason”, the repeated occurrences of the words “godly reason” (εὐσεβὴς λογισμός) (1.1; 5.38; 7.16 etc.) and “godliness” (εὐσέβεια) suggest that “reason” was to be understood in a Jewish religious context, especially in relation to the examples of great Jewish figures in history. They all “conquered” passions with their godliness (7.21-22).²⁴⁵

If a simple question were raised, “how did Socrates take it when he was confronted with death?” The answer could well be, the Greek philosopher was “taking it like a man”. This is in fact the title of a significant paper written jointly by Stephen Moore and Janice Anderson based on their study of *4 Maccabees*.

Moore and Anderson (hereafter only Moore for convenience) focus on the issue of masculinity in their Maccabean studies. Moore has noticed that while the definitive

²⁴³ Barclay, *Jews in the Mediterranean Diaspora* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1996), 369.

²⁴⁴ Barclay, *Jews*, 371.

²⁴⁵ Barclay, *Jews*, 372-3.

masculine trait usually includes both control of others and self-control in most of the Greek and Latin writings, *4 Maccabees* regards self-control as the supreme index of masculinity compared with the control of others.²⁴⁶ The “masculinity” of old Eleazar, the widowed mother and her seven young sons (or boys) was powerfully demonstrated in their self-control when confronted with death (14.11; cf. 15.23, 28-30; 16.14, 2).

Moore singles out four cardinal virtues (φρόνησις “prudence”, σωφροσύνη “temperance”, δικαιοσύνη “justice”, and ἀνδρεία “courage”) in the Greco-Roman society which were thought to have been articulated by Plato, especially in *Phaedo* 69C. These four virtues were subsequently cherished also by Aristotle, the Stoics as well as Philo. The author of *4 Maccabees* is believed to have taken over these virtues and applied them to the Mosaic Law. The Maccabean author demonstrated that Eleazar, the mother and her seven sons all died with great courage, ἀνδρεία, which was considered essentially a masculine virtue.²⁴⁷

True maturity was thought to be mental and not physical. When the sixth son was faced with death, he proudly said to Antiochus, “I am younger in age than my brothers, but just as mature mentally” (11.14; cf. 5.31). Similarly in 5.23, Eleazar challenged Antiochus: “you mock at our philosophy as though our living under it were contrary to reason. On the one hand, it teaches us temperance so that we are in control of all our pleasures and desires; and it gives us a thorough training in courage [ἀνδρεία, “manliness”] so that we willingly endure all hardship.” The Jewish Maccabean martyrs were models of masculine virtue not only for the Jews but also for the Gentiles (2 *Macc.* 7.12; 4 *Macc.* 17.16-24).

²⁴⁶ Moore and Janice Capel Anderson, ‘Taking It like a man’, *JBL* 117 (1998), 249-73, at 250.

²⁴⁷ Moore, ‘Taking It’, 252-3.

Ironically, Antiochus, the powerful ruler who appeared to have absolute control over his captives became a slave of his own passions (8.2). He was defeated for not being able to force his captives to eat defiling food. In violent rage he lost control of himself (10.17). For the author of *4 Maccabees*, true masculinity is clearly something *internal*. For him the real battle was therefore between the martyrs and themselves. In popular Hellenistic moral philosophy a clear distinction was made between the man who was “stronger than himself” (κρείττων ἑαυτοῦ), i.e., one who was able to control his passions and appetites, and the man who was “weaker than himself” (ἥττων ἑαυτοῦ), the person who became a slave to his own passions and appetites.²⁴⁸ Plato thus said in his *De pēpublica*: “For he who is master of himself would also be subject to himself, and he who is subject to himself would be master.”²⁴⁹ And in his *Laws*, Plato clearly stated that: “being defeated by oneself is the most shameful and at the same time the worst of all defeats”.²⁵⁰ Moore believes the reason for this is that it is equivalent to defeat at the hands of women or slaves.²⁵¹

In *4 Maccabees*, ironically, the King Antiochus who possessed absolute power over others turned out to be powerless and unmanly when confronted with an elderly man, a widowed mother and her seven boys. It was clearly a public shame for the king since manhood was essentially a matter of public perception in the ancient Mediterranean world. By a marked contrast, the tortured old martyr Eleazar’s manly behaviour was greatly admired and he was described as a person “adorned with the beauty of his piety...the great soul and the noble man” (6.2, 5). Seeley’s understanding and definition of “noble death” is largely based on the death of Eleazar, in which he finds four important elements: (1) obedience to the divine Law; (2) a military context, which

²⁴⁸ Moore, ‘Taking It’, 257-8; 261.

²⁴⁹ Plato, *Rep.* 4.430E-431A.

²⁵⁰ Plato, *Leg.* 1.626D-E.

²⁵¹ Moore, ‘Taking It’, 262.

involved a war against Antiochus and the Hellenizers; (3) the overcoming of physical vulnerability; and (4) sacrificial metaphors since the deaths of the martyrs in 4 *Maccabees* are considered “vicarious.” Moreover, judged by the way that stories are told in 4 *Maccabees* there is hardly any doubt that its author regarded the martyrs as examples mimetically to be followed (cf. 7.8-9; 14.9; 9.30; 11.24-25).²⁵²

Moore notes that “in the ancient Mediterranean world, μαλακός (‘soft’; Latin *mollis*) was the adjective supremely used to differentiate women, girls, boys, youths, effeminate males, catamites, and eunuchs from ‘true men’”.²⁵³ In the highly dramatized encounter between Antiochus and his Jewish captors, the latter clearly emerged as the winners. Even the widowed mother became a true “man” - she took it like a man! The Maccabean author had particularly great admiration for the suffering mother (17.1; 14.12; 15.15) and concluded with this remark: “how numerous, then, and how great were the torments that the mother suffered while her sons were tortured on the wheel and with the searing irons” (15.22).²⁵⁴ The Maccabean author’s great admiration became the more remarkable since he himself shared the popular view that the female was “the weak-spirited, weak-souled, and weaker sex”. But as Moore has rightly observed, “it is precisely this ‘innate’ disability that the mother is depicted as heroically overcoming, thereby proving herself worthy of one of the more curious compliments that a Hellenistic male author could bestow upon a female character.”²⁵⁵ In this particular context, Kerstin Aspegren’s comment is very insightful: “if a woman achieved something good or distinguished herself in ethical, religious or intellectual matters, she was not praised as being a woman of good qualities but as a woman who

²⁵² Seeley, *The Noble Death*, 147.

²⁵³ Moore, ‘Taking It’, 263.

²⁵⁴ Moore, ‘Taking It’, 265.

²⁵⁵ Moore, ‘Taking It’, 266.

had become manly. Unable to measure up to men in the arena of virtue, the best woman could hope for was to be declared an honorary man.”²⁵⁶

Although not a great deal of what Moore has said about masculinity in the Greco-Roman world and the Maccabean stories is particularly new, he has nonetheless made a few points which are insightful and instructive.

(1) As Moore has stated repeatedly in the article as well as in his conclusion, mastery is synonymous with masculinity in most of Greek and Latin texts that survive from antiquity. He is right in putting the emphasis on the inner self-control of a person as being far superior to the outward domination of others. This point has been well made with special reference to *4 Maccabees* in which the inner self-control of the Jewish captors – Eleazer, the mother and her seven boys – enabled them to emerge as “manly” winners in their confrontation with the pagan ruler. Antiochus became a loser in the end and thus suffered from great shame and humiliation according to the social ethos of the Greco-Roman society. Honour belonged to his Jewish sufferers. To use Moore’s expression, Antiochus had been “feminised”.

(2) Moore’s paradoxical way of presenting his case is attractive. For example, in the Maccabean story, it was the “weak” who had defeated the “strong”, “the conquered” who had shamed “the conqueror” and self-mastery had displaced the political mastery of others. Such significant paradoxes are also present in Paul’s “message of the cross” (1 Cor. 1.18-31). However, it is important to point out that while the author of *4 Maccabees* had constructed a Jewish version of masculinity, it was still largely based on the Hellenistic social ethos and values of the world of Antiochus, the pagan tyrant.

²⁵⁶ Kerstin Aspegren, *The Male Woman: A Feminine Ideal in the Early Church* (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wilksell, 1990), 11.

Moore has thus noted a very significant problem in the Maccabean author's continuity with the Hellenistic tradition with regards to masculinity: "victory is achieved in 4 Maccabees only by accepting and reaffirming the dominant hierarchical continuum along which ruler and ruled, master and slave, male and female were positioned."²⁵⁷

While Moore is pleased to see "the elite, hegemonic concept of masculinity" being modified by 4 *Maccabees* by elevating self-mastery or self-control over mastery of social inferiors, the old Greco-Roman ethos remained basically unchallenged. Even in 4 *Maccabees* itself it was still taken for granted that women were "predestined" to be subservient to men. In the end it was still masculinity or manliness that was being glorified. The Jewish martyrs' victory over their pagan oppressor was only one side of the story. The other side of the story was the simple fact that these martyrs were "implicated in a contest of manhood that is itself inherently oppressive."²⁵⁸ The point is very well made.

In 4 *Maccabees* the author had made a remarkable contrast between honour and shame. As deSilva has rightly commented: "the author does not consider for a moment that the tortures and physical outrages to martyrs' bodies affect their honour in any way. While such treatment is thought to include the destruction of a person's honour and place in society, for the martyrs it is a sign of honour."²⁵⁹ On this very significant point 4 *Maccabees* differs markedly from Greco-Roman perception and apparently comes closer to the crucifixion of Jesus in which Jesus suffered great bodily "dishonour" and "shame". Paul, in his imitation of Christ, was evidently not ashamed of the "dishonouring" of his body and spoke very openly about it. 1 Cor. 4.9-13 and 2 Cor.

²⁵⁷ Moore, 'Taking It', 272.

²⁵⁸ Moore, 'Taking It', 273.

²⁵⁹ deSilva, 'The Noble Contest: Honour, Shame, and the Rhetorical Strategy of 4 Maccabees', *JSP* 13 (1995), 31-57, at 54.

11.22-32 are good examples. Paul knew full well that while those sufferings he referred to in 1 and 2 Corinthians would be causes for shame according to Greco-Roman social ethos, a point which has been made sufficiently clear in the study of crucifixion with reference to "body language", it was an honour for the sake of the "message of the cross". Paul undoubtedly derived his inspiration and strength from the crucifixion of Jesus (1 Cor. 2.2).

Unlike the Maccabean author who readily accepted the Greco-Roman ethos about masculinity, honour and shame, strength and weakness, Paul had deliberately disassociated himself from such ethos in his message of the cross, including the manner of his appearance and speech. Paul had evidently opted for a clear-cut discontinuity with the social ethos of the time as far as his life and witness were concerned. Ultimately, it was not man's glory that Paul sought but God's, and his commitment was to true godliness and not manliness. In terms of the present thesis this last point is most relevant and significant.

"Noble death" in the Maccabean tradition, very much like the Greco-Roman tradition, was also largely a human perception. Therefore, in comparison to the death of the Maccabean martyrs, for instance, to the death of Eleazar, the death of Jesus was also far from being "noble".

There is, however, one common element in Paul's theology of the cross and the Maccabean martyrdom that makes a comparison between the two cases meaningful, i.e., the great *paradox* that is present in both cases. Quite similar to the Pauline case in which the power of God was believed to have been revealed in the "weakness" of Jesus' crucifixion, the paradoxical nature of the Maccabean martyrdom is also evident when

the old and the weak (Eleazar), the female (the widowed mother) and her seven young boys ultimately triumphed over the seemingly strong and powerful.

Finally, there is the crucial *identity* issue which was a main concern, not only in the Maccabean martyrdom, but also in the death of Jesus as well as in Paul's response to the Corinthian crisis. It is here that Barclay's effort to place the theology and spirit of 4 *Maccabees* at the centre of Judaism, especially in relation to the vital issue of Jewish *identity*, becomes particular relevant and helpful. In Barclay's opinion, the greatest contributor to the maintenance of the fundamental bond of the ethnicity and identity of the Jews in diaspora has been *ta patria*, the customs passed down from one generation to the next. But unfortunately, it was this very strength which often caused the resentment of other ethnic communities who considered the Jews to be "unassimilable". However, what has been perceived as offensive by the non-Jews is the very distinctive feature, namely the Jewish tradition, which provides the impetus for their survival in diaspora for two more millennia, under the most extreme and devastating circumstances. The problems and challenges they face today are even greater.²⁶⁰

The Maccabean martyrs were clearly regarded as heroes and role models for the Jews, especially in the context of Jewish *identity*. Henten has thus suggested that both 2 and 4 *Maccabees* attempted to "deal with issues of self-definition and Jewish identity in both the religious-cultural and the political spheres".²⁶¹ The martyrs' refusal to submit to the pagan ruler and their subsequent "noble deaths" were obviously taken as powerful marks of their Jewish *identity*.²⁶²

²⁶⁰ Barclay, *Jews*, 444.

²⁶¹ Henten, *Martyrs*, 6.

²⁶² Henten, *Martyrs*, 7, 11.

The *identity* issue is important, because the Corinthian problem was also essentially an *identity crisis* and Paul clearly took the matter of Christian *identity* very seriously right from the start of his Corinthian letter when he solemnly reminded the Corinthian Christians that they were “sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints” (ἡγιασμένοις ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ, κλητοῖς ἁγίοις, 1 Cor.1.2), and that they had already been “called into the fellowship of his [God’s] Son, Jesus Christ our Lord” (1.9). That was the Corinthian Christians’ true *identity*. As such, it was sheer foolishness for them to think that they “belong to Paul”, “Apollos” or “Cephas” (1.12). And such mentality which had clearly led to the very serious conflicts and divisions in the Corinthian church, was a very clear indication that the trouble-making Corinthians were still very much enslaved by the social ethos of the time. It was clearly an *identity* issue. Had they taken their Christian identity seriously and had understood all its profound implications from the perspective of the cross, they would not have behaved in the way they did. And they most certainly would not have challenged Paul’s *modus operandi*.

2.4 Crucifixion and the “curse”

It is almost impossible to discuss the matter of “noble death”, especially the Jewish σκάνδαλον (1.23), without considering the very important idea of “curse” in close connection with the cross or “tree”.

Paul’s reference to the Old Testament scriptures twice in 1 Cor. 15.3, 4 – “according to the scriptures” (κατὰ τὰς γραφὰς) – was very significant. It could serve apologetically as a direct response to the Jewish σκάνδαλον (particularly in view of Deut. 21.23) as well as the Greco-Romans’ characterization of the “message of the cross” as “foolishness”. Unfortunately, Paul did not point to any particular passage or passages of the scriptures

he could have in mind when he wrote 15.3, 4. However, one is naturally tempted to recall Isaiah 53, where the death (vv.7-8), burial (v.9) and vindication (resurrection?) (vv.10-12) of the “suffering servant” were all mentioned or at least implied.

What Paul failed to do in 1 Cor. 15.3, 4, i.e. pinpointing particular verses of the “scriptures”, he did in Galatians 3.13, with special reference to the Deut. 21.23 concerning “the curse of the law.” Just like 1 Cor. 15.3, 4, Gal. 3.13 also belonged to the very core of Paul’s gospel or “the message of the cross”, although its expression was different from the Corinthian passage. In terms of the present thesis, especially on the crucial issues of crucifixion and “noble death”, Gal. 3.13 is obviously very important, because the verse is about the *manner* of Jesus’ death in relation to Deut. 21.23. As has already been mentioned, the Greeks and Romans’ characterization of “the message of the cross” as “foolishness” was basically due to the *manner* of Jesus’ death, i.e., crucifixion. And as far as the unbelieving Jews were concerned, besides the problem of crucifixion, which for the Greeks and Romans were largely a matter of social ethos, there was also the *religious* problem surrounding the death of Jesus. This problem had basically to do with the Jews’ messianic expectation (a topic which is obviously far beyond the scope of the present thesis to deal with) and the Jewish understanding of the “curse” in Deut. 21.23.

In Galatians 3.13 Paul refers to Christ’s sacrificial death in close connection with “the curse of the law” of Deut. 21.23 which had been set in parallel with *Pesher Nahum* (4Q169) 3-4 i lines 7-8 and *11QTemple* 64 lines 6-13 by Yigael Yadin.²⁶³ John Allegro

²⁶³ Y. Yadin, ‘Pesher Nahum (4Q pNahum) Reconsidered’, *IEJ* 21 (1971), 1-12. Cf. Joseph A. Fitzmyer, ‘Crucifixion in Palestine, Qumran, and the New Testament’, in *To Advance the Gospel: New Testament Studies* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1981), 125-46. J. M. Baumgarten, ‘Does TLH in the Temple Scroll Refer to Crucifixion?’ *JBL* 91 (1972), 472-81. Max Wilcox, “‘Upon the Tree’-Deut 21:22-23 in the New Testament’, *JBL* 96 (1977), 85-99.

first published this fragmentary *pesher* in 1956²⁶⁴ and then in 1971 Yadin published his own revision. This portion of the *pesher* interprets Nah. 2.12-14, where the fall and plundering of Nineveh (612 BC) are the main concern. The author(s) of the Qumran *pesher*, according to Fitzmyer, reapplies Nahum's words to the situation in Judea in the early 1st century in order "to present its own interpretation of what God has done to certain elements in that people."²⁶⁵

It has been generally agreed that *Pesher Nahum* refers to a historical event according to which Demetrius III the Seleucid ruler (95-78 BC) was invited by the enemies (the Pharisees) of Alexander Jannaeus (the Sadducee high priest, 103-76 BC) to assist them in Jerusalem. When the expansionist and war-like Alexander Jannaeus eventually regained Jerusalem, he punished the Pharisees by publicly crucifying them in Jerusalem.²⁶⁶ An account of this cruelty of Alexander in the treatment of his opponents is offered by Josephus.²⁶⁷

There are different identifications of the *pesher*'s "Lion of wrath," although he is most often thought to be Alexander. Yadin begins his argument for this association with two observations: (1) Here, the "Lion of wrath" is God's instrument (cf. Hosea 5.13-15), and (2) "Wrath" in the Bible is most often associated with God's anger.²⁶⁸ Therefore, the "Lion of wrath" within the *pesher* was regarded as God's judgement against the דורשי החלקות ('seekers of smooth things'). Fitzmyer has identified the phrase "seekers of smooth things" as the Pharisees, the opponents of the "Lion of Wrath" (=Alexander Jannaeus).²⁶⁹

²⁶⁴ J. M. Allegro, 'Further Light on the History of the Qumran Sect', *JBL* 75 (1956), 89-95.

²⁶⁵ Fitzmyer, 'Crucifixion', 130.

²⁶⁶ Fitzmyer, 'Crucifixion', 131.

²⁶⁷ Josephus, *Ant.* 13.379-80; cf. *B.J.* 1.93-8.

²⁶⁸ Yadin, 'Pesher Nahum', 3.

²⁶⁹ Fitzmyer, 'Crucifixion', 131-2. Cf. Yadin, 'Pesher Nahum', 12.

Yadin suggests that *11QTemple* 64 lines 6-13 is closely related to *Pesher Nahum*, the Temple Scroll makes clearer the ambiguous crimes of Deut. 21.22-23, these are: (1) political treason such as conspiring to handover one's own people, and (2) attempting to escape the death penalty by fleeing. Yadin argues that these specific crimes are likely references to the historical events concerning Demetrius III and Alexander.²⁷⁰ The דורשי החלקות would have passed on information to Demetrius III, which led to this disaster in Jerusalem.²⁷¹ The awful events are described by Josephus: in the wake of the crucifixions, the 8,000 rebels learn that Alexander forced the families of the crucified to watch the execution, all the while looking on as he consorted with his concubines – this story led the opponents to flee in horror.²⁷²

As we have seen, the Seleucid backed Pharisees who passed information on to the enemy, thus considered treasons, were crucified.²⁷³ The purpose of hanging was not merely to inflict the greatest pain and suffering on the victim, but also to serve as a public deterrence. However, *11QTemple* 64 line 12, which rewrites Deut. 21.22-23, instructs that execution must be followed by burying the hung corpse before sundown.²⁷⁴ The instruction is seen to be in line with the Torah in such cases.

Yadin seeks to restore lines 7-8 of *Pesher Nahum* as follows: “its interpretation concerns the Lion of wrath [who...sentence of] death דורשי החלקות (and) who hangs men alive [on the tree as this is the law] in Israel as of old since the hanged one is called alive on the tree.”²⁷⁵ Yadin explains that the group behind the *pesher*, strict observers of the Bible, could have based their interpretation on the customs of ancient Israel with reference to Deut. 21. Yadin points to Josh. 8.23-29 where the king of Ai is seen to be

²⁷⁰ Yadin, ‘*Pesher Nahum*’, 8-9.

²⁷¹ Josephus, *Ant.* 13.376-83.

²⁷² Josephus, *B.J.* 1.97-8.

²⁷³ Yadin, ‘*Pesher Nahum*’, 9.

²⁷⁴ Fitzmyer, ‘Crucifixion’, 134.

²⁷⁵ Yadin, ‘*Pesher Nahum*’, 12.

hanged alive, but his corpse is treated according to the regulations of Deut. 21.23.²⁷⁶

Fitzmyer, who accepts the plausibility of Yadin's restoration, suggests that there is one common idea among various restorations: that the group behind the *peshet* expresses horror at such crucifixion.²⁷⁷

If Yadin is right in seeing a connection between *Peshet Nahum* and *11QTemple*, and that "to hang" in both cases refers to crucifixion, the implication is that Romans were not the only ones in Palestine to use this mode of execution.²⁷⁸

The evidence from Qumran, for this study, is especially significant because it makes a clear contribution to language associated with crucifixion. Within early Jewish literature there is a paucity of references using such language as "to hang *alive* on the tree" (ותליה אחרו על עץ 21.22), especially in connection to Deuteronomy (כי לחלוי חי על העץ).

The study of the Qumran texts in relation to Deut. 21.22-23 has very significant implications for the crucifixion of Jesus, especially in connection with Gal. 3.13, a passage highly relevant for the discussion about "noble death," or, in the case of Jesus, "ignoble death." The case is well put by Fitzmyer, who begins his explanation with a statement that the *opinio communis* is that *Peshet Nahum* refers to Alexander crucifying his enemies. Thus, these lines of the *peshet* are a "missing link" in pre-Christian Palestinian writings that there were Jews who considered "hanging" (תלוי), in reference to Deut. 21.22-23, as a way to describe crucifixion. Before this evidence, "hanging on a

²⁷⁶ Yadin, 'Peshet Nahum', 10-1.

²⁷⁷ Fitzmyer, 'Crucifixion', 132.

²⁷⁸ Fitzmyer, 'Crucifixion', 135. One might add that Jews in this period would likely not have accepted crucifixion as an acceptable way to deal with their enemies – whether from a "legal" or "religious" perspective. The argument of Yadin points to an understanding of causes for crucifixion in Deut. 21 and a Mosaic injunction for dealing with a corpse after crucifixion. One would suspect that the "Lion of Wrath" as Alexander would only have been endorsed by the Qumranites in so far as he was an instrument of judgement against the wicked treasors. However, with this said, the author(s) of the *peshet* would have believed Alexander *also* to be an enemy of Israel.

tree” was often explained in relationship to the crime of *perduellio* (high-treason), which was punished within the Roman Empire by the penalty of crucifixion. However, even before the *pesher*, it was never doubted that crucifixion was practised in Roman Palestine, whether by the Romans or Alexander in Hasmonean times. However, the application of Deut. 21.22-23 to crucifixion has been puzzling, and nearly universally taken for granted in commentaries. The significance of the *Nahum Pesher* is that it provides the extra-biblical documentation to show how Deuteronomy 21.23 was likely interpreted by Jews at this time: to be hung on a tree is understood as crucifixion.²⁷⁹

In Gal. 3 and 4 Paul used the story of Abraham in Genesis to argue for his doctrine of justification by faith. Gal. 3.13 was part of the first of four midrashic developments of the Abraham story in Genesis. The first midrashic development was found in Gal. 3.6-15. Starting from Gen. 15.6 Paul in Gal. 3.6-15 concluded that the true children of Abraham were those, like the Christians, who had put their faith in God. By contrast, however, “all who rely on the works of the law are under a curse; for it is written, ‘cursed is everyone who does not observe and obey all the things written in the book of the law’ (3.10), which was clearly a reference to Deut. 27.26.

Although Paul in Gal. 3.6-15 did not refer to the crucifixion of Jesus explicitly, crucifixion or the cross was quite clearly implied in 3.13 when Paul boldly declared that “Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us” with a specific reference to Deut. 21.23: “cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree”. It is important to note that Paul in his reference to Deut. 21.23 in Gal. 3.13 omits “by God” and adds “on a tree,” which is not found in the MT, but in the LXX, because without the “tree” it would be difficult to link Deut. 21.23 to the hanging of Jesus on the “cross”. Exegetically, it has been difficult to take the “tree” in Deut. 21.23 and apply it to the

²⁷⁹ Fitzmyer, ‘Crucifixion’, 136-7.

“cross” of Jesus. The Qumran texts seem to have quite clearly indicated that there was in fact a pre-Christian understanding of crucifixion as a “hanging on a tree” and this is especially true of 4QpNah. This significant finding provides a most important “missing link” for the understanding of Paul’s argumentation, especially in Gal. 3. Paul, in an “analogous” way, had also related Deut. 27.26 to Deut. 21.22-23 to expound his vicarious and soteriological theology. To apply the “hanging” in Deut. 21.23 to Jesus is evidently a Christian *theologoumenon*, which is understandably not to be expected in a Qumran text.²⁸⁰

In the studies of Fitzmyer, Yadin and others, the Qumran texts in relation to Gen. 22, Deut. 21 and Gal. 3 also have other implications. For the present study on “noble death”, especially with reference to the crucifixion of Jesus, it is sufficient to know that a vital link between the “tree” in Deut. 21.23 (LXX) and the “cross” in Gal. 3.13 could be established even in pre-Christian time on the strength of the Qumran texts. As far as Paul was concerned, it was sufficient to argue that what was a “curse” in the law had now turned out to be God’s means of salvation for all, whether such death of Jesus was regarded as “noble” or not. Even if it should be regarded as “ignoble” by the unbelieving world, whether Jewish or Greco-Roman, Paul would argue, as he did in 1 Corinthians 1.18-31, that God in his true σοφία had in fact used the “ignoble” to shame the “noble”. In view of Paul’s consistent uses of paradoxes in the Corinthian correspondence, one could perhaps quite safely infer that the crucifixion of Jesus was for Paul an “ignoble” death according to conventional social ethos of which he must be assumed to be very knowledgeable. Otherwise his “message of the cross” would not have been such a blatant inversion of the current social ethos.

²⁸⁰ Fitzmyer, ‘Crucifixion’, 138.

2.5 Conclusion

On the matter of “noble death”, it may be relevant and helpful to make a cross-reference to Romans 5.6-8 in which Paul made a very significant but rare remark about the death of Christ. The deaths of Socrates and that of the Maccabean martyrs were indeed “noble”, because they died not only for themselves, but also for others (presumably including the “righteous” and the “good” also), for nation as well as for God. The same was basically true with Christ, except as Paul has significantly highlighted, and a point which seemed to be missing in the “noble death” of both Greco-Roman and Jewish traditions, the death of Jesus was for “sinners”, people who were *not worth* dying for. Such an act of Christ is naturally subject to various value judgements, even diametrically opposed value judgements. For the cynical and the unbelieving, to die for “sinners” (people not worth dying for), was surely a most foolish act. On the contrary, for the believing (people who are conscious of their own sinfulness) it was a most selfless and *noble* act – for one *even* to die for the unworthy and ignoble sinners.

The study of crucifixion in antiquity has shown that the crucifixion of Jesus was a most *ignoble* death as far as the unbelieving world was concerned. This would contrast most strongly with the concept of “noble death” according to the social ethos of the time. The classic example of noble death in the Greco-Roman tradition would most probably be the death of Socrates, the philosopher *par excellence*. For the Jews, the classic example would most likely be the martyrdom of the Maccabees.

Could any meaningful comparison be drawn between Socrates and Christ as well as between Christ and the Maccabees on the issue of death? The answer may be both “yes” and “no”. Yes, because like Socrates who died for his “mission” (which included the

quest for truth, true wisdom and philosophy as well as for the people of Athens) and the Maccabees (who died for faith and conviction, as well as for nation and God), Jesus Christ also died for his “mission”: for humanity and for God. But a definite “no” to comparison, as far as the *manner* of Christ’s death was concerned, because the *manner* of Christ’s death was most *ignoble*, for reasons which are self-evident from the study of crucifixion in antiquity. To put it very simply, the crucifixion of Jesus was the most *ignoble* death in the eyes of the Greco-Roman world, and a terrible “curse” according to the Holy Scripture (Deut. 21.23) of the Jews. But *paradoxically*, it is this “no” side of the comparison, especially between Socrates and Christ, that is most significant, revealing and challenging from the Christian perspective, because it brings out sharply the uniqueness of Christ crucified, making the message of the cross such utter μωρία and σκάνδαλον to the world, turning its ethos totally upside down. Moreover, according to the main categories of the crucified victims which have been identified earlier, namely, the crucifixion of rebels, low class people, slaves, Jews, Christians and Romans, Jesus could be said to have died the death of *all* the categories, except the Romans who were distinguished from all the rest. This point is profoundly significant in relation to the “foolishness” of “the message of the cross”. As has already been pointed out earlier, Christ clearly died as a kind of “rebel” in the eyes of those who did not have the true picture about it, although according to the witness of gospel writings Pilate had found no crime in Christ.

Value judgements aside, the point that is really significant and important here was that the *manner* of Christ death was markedly different from his Greco-Roman and Jewish counterparts. In the end one could only conclude that it was the *manner* of Jesus’ death (i.e., *crucifixion*) that was *ignoble* and consequently made “the message of the cross” a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles” (1 Cor.1.23). Had Christ died in another way *instead of crucifixion*, would it make a significant difference to the ancient

world's attitude towards him and to the message about him? Probably yes, because, at least in the Corinthian context, it was clearly the "cross" (σταυρός) that made the message about it "foolishness" (μωρία). This shows yet again that the cross was really *the issue* in Paul's response to the Corinthian crisis as well as to the world's characterization of "the message of the cross" as "foolishness". As this thesis attempts to show, it is *the cross* that has turned the world upside down by the inversion of its social ethos.

This thesis has no problem subscribing to the views of Seeley, Droge and Henten that noble death/voluntary death/martyrdom enjoyed general acceptance in all the traditions they have studied, although there were some exceptions. However, it is very important to point out that in none of the cases cited by these scholars was there an execution by *crucifixion*. If there were, such death would hardly be regarded as "noble" in the ancient world, due to its deep-seated prejudice against crucifixion as a capital punishment for the worst criminals, including slaves. In the end, only the believing Christians would consider the death of their Lord "noble", paradoxically.

Chapter Three: Exegesis of 1 Corinthians 1.18-31

3.1 Introduction

The study of crucifixion in antiquity has provided the necessary background to explain why Paul's "message of the cross" was perceived contemptuously as "foolish" by those who rejected it, and was therefore such a radical inversion of the social ethos of Greco-Roman society. Crucifixion in antiquity naturally led to the death of the crucified victim. But this was no ordinary death. According to the study of "noble death" in both Greco-Roman and Jewish traditions, together with a short excursus to the subject of "curse" in Deuteronomic and Galatian contexts, the death of Jesus was blatantly *ignoble*. The *body language* and *social symbolism* that crucifixion conveyed were just as significant as its *physical* or *literal* aspect, especially in the case of Christ's crucifixion. "Especially", because of the alleged or perceived "crime" Christ had committed, as well as the extraordinary claims of his immediate followers about him. Crucifixion as the most abhorrent form of capital punishment was symbolic of practically all the "negatives", when judged by the social ethos of Paul's time, such as shame and humiliation, human degradation and indignity. And for the crucified victim himself, this most detestable form of execution was vividly and powerfully symbolic of human helplessness and powerlessness. In the end the very sight of crucifixion, both for those who were at the scene and for those who were not, but who could exercise their imagination, became the very embodiment of the most effective and powerful "body language".

Moreover, when placed in the religious context of the Jews of the time, there was also the additional and crucial element of divine "curse" in crucifixion. As Paul was brought up and moved extensively in the multi-cultural environment of the Roman Empire,

including Greco-Roman and Jewish cultures, one could quite reasonably assume that most of what has been dealt with in the above studies of crucifixion in antiquity and “noble death,” would be within the purview of his knowledge. This point is crucial in the exegesis of those Corinthian passages which touch on the important subject of Christ’s crucifixion and Paul’s “message of the cross”. Those passages include the present section, 1 Cor. 1.18-31. The exegesis will be done in the following sequence: “The dethronement of human ‘wisdom’ by ‘foolishness’ and ‘foolishness’ as divine power (1.18-25)”; “Absolutely no grounds for boasting by both human and divine standards, and Christ the wisdom, righteousness, sanctification and redemption (1.26-31)”.

3.2 The dethronement of human “wisdom” by “foolishness”, and “foolishness” as divine power (1. 18-25)

The problem of divisions in the Corinthian church was not only a personal challenge to Paul’s leadership and authority, it also revealed, in the final analysis, the Corinthians’ failure to understand that it was Christ alone who was crucified for them and thus rightly deserved their absolute allegiance. Closely linked to the problem of church divisions was clearly the issue of “wisdom”. In Paul’s judgement, church divisions in Corinth were a clear indication that those who were involved in them had actually adopted the *modus operandi* of the world, especially in their understanding of “wisdom” and “power”. The subject of wisdom had a long history in both Jewish and Greco-Roman traditions, and Paul who had moved quite deeply and extensively in these two cultures could be assumed to be familiar with the subject. But he obviously had no intention to deal with the speculative aspects of those traditions in the Corinthian letters. In the Corinthian context, the word σοφία seemed to be referring to two different and

yet closely related entities.²⁸¹ (1) It could be referring to certain exalted (religio-philosophical) knowledge that was often thought to be only in the possession of a privileged group of people, and which brought them special status both socially and spiritually in society. (2) It could more tangibly mean special skills, usually rhetorically trained and acquired, which enabled a person to publicly express himself with great eloquence, power and persuasion, and by means of which the possessor of such skills earned social esteem and popularity. Paul attempted to deal with these two aspects of σοφία in his response to the Corinthian crisis, including the troubling issue of church divisions (σχίσματα). In response to the exalted “wisdom”, which was often socio-philosophically conceived, Paul presented a marked contrast between the perceived wisdom of the Corinthians and that of God’s. It was Paul’s conviction that the divine wisdom was clearly revealed and powerfully demonstrated in the crucified Christ (1 Cor. 1.17-2.9). The Corinthians’ perceived wisdom was also very much in line with the second aspect of σοφία which heavily depended upon human eloquence. This aspect of σοφία was acquired technically through rhetorical training in the Greco-Roman world, including the indispensable aspect of one’s physical appearance and delivery (hence, the importance of “body language”). Wisdom, power, rhetoric, eloquence were all fundamental elements and basic values of the most cherished social ethos of the Corinthians.

A relatively careful reading of 1.10-17, which provides the immediate background for the exegesis of 1.18-31, indicates quite clearly that church divisions (1.10) in Corinth were a major issue that greatly troubled Paul.²⁸² Some of the factors that might have caused the Corinthian σχίσματα could be explained *socially*, such as the Corinthians’

²⁸¹ Barrett, ‘Cephas and Corinth’, 28-39 (See §4.2).

²⁸² Barton, ‘1 Corinthians’, in James D.G. Dunn and John W. Rogerson (eds.), *Eerdmans Commentary on the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 2003), 1314-52.



preoccupation with σοφία, social status and power. However, the crux of the matter was also essentially *theological*, especially in relation to the crucifixion of Jesus. This crucial point was evidently reflected in the most vital question which Paul posed to the divided church in 1.13, as soon as the matter of σχίσματα was raised (“Was Paul *crucified* for you?”) as well as in the very strong statement he made in 1.17. Paul’s solution was therefore both *social* and *theological*. Those social values of the Corinthians included wisdom, eloquence, power, honour, and other status symbols. They were passionately cherished and jealously guarded by members of the society. Consequently, immediately after making his strong statement in 1 Cor. 1.18a, “the message of the cross is foolishness” to those who rejected it, Paul went straight into direct confrontation with the crucial issues of human wisdom and power in 1.18b-25 in very polemical and paradoxical terms. In the end, the whole passage goes far beyond mere discussion on the subjects of wisdom and power, and becomes a direct encounter between two diametrically opposed world views. As such, Paul’s deliberate attempt to challenge the basic social ethos of the Corinthians must also be regarded as both *risky* and *courageous* at the same time. It was *risky* because when calling into question the fundamental social values of the Corinthians, especially with “the message of the cross”, which was already acknowledged even by Paul himself to be “foolishness”, his strategy clearly ran the risk of backfiring. But Paul was fully prepared to take the risk and openly declared that he had already “decided to know nothing...except Jesus Christ, and him crucified” (2.2). The task of Paul was extremely *courageous*, because it was a direct confrontation with the firmly established social ethos of the time. As such, what Paul did was tantamount to a drastic *inversion* of the social ethos, not just of the Corinthians, but also of Greco-Roman society. The full force and implications of Paul’s response must be viewed from this perspective. It is therefore important to bear in mind again that while Paul’s main argument was ultimately *theological*, the cause of the Corinthian

crisis was also deeply rooted *socially*. As such, it is absolutely necessary to set the Corinthian *text* in the overall *context* of the Greco-Roman society. This is what the present thesis has attempted to do in its previous section on crucifixion in antiquity and noble death in Greco-Roman as well as in Jewish traditions. Moreover, since Paul's intention was to *invert* the social ethos of those who were involved in the divisions, his *rhetorical* approach was understandably and appropriately *paradoxical*.

1.18 Ὁ λόγος γὰρ ὁ τοῦ σταυροῦ τοῖς μὲν ἀπολλυμένοις μωρία ἐστίν, τοῖς δὲ σωζομένοις ἡμῖν δύναμις θεοῦ ἐστίν. (“For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God”)

The Greek γὰρ (“for”) in 1.18 was obviously meant to connect 1.18-31 with 1.17. In 1.17, Paul emphasized that his mission was primarily the preaching of the gospel. He did it “not with eloquent wisdom (οὐκ ἐν σοφίᾳ λόγου), so that the cross of Christ might not be emptied of its power (ἵνα μὴ κενωθῇ ὁ σταυρὸς τοῦ Χριστοῦ)” (1.17b). With this statement in 1.17b Paul was already setting a sharp contrast between his manner of proclamation and the style of his Corinthian critics who cherished “eloquent wisdom”, according to the social ethos of the time. This important point will be dealt with more extensively with special reference to rhetorics in the Greco-Roman tradition in the second part of this thesis.

Ὁ λόγος ὁ τοῦ σταυροῦ (“the message of the cross”) here clearly referred to Paul's gospel message and the emphasis was deliberately on “the cross”, which was the crux of the matter in Paul's response to the Corinthian crisis in 1. 18-31. And it was precisely this crux that was contemptuously regarded as “foolishness” (μωρία) by those who rejected it.

In most of the Wisdom writings, for instance, in Proverbs and Psalms, the word ἄφρων is used almost exclusively for the fool.²⁸³ In Philo's writings the concept of folly referred to all worldly wisdom.²⁸⁴

Welborn argues that the term μωρία cognates "stupidity" rather than "absurdity" in Paul's time and its social stigma was not generally associated with the English word "folly". The term μωρία "designated the attitude and behaviour of a particular social type: the lower class moron. The 'foolishness' of this social type consisted in a weakness or deficiency of intellect, often coupled with a physical grotesqueness. Because the concept of the laughable in the Greek-Roman world was grounded in contemplation of the base and defective, those who possessed these characteristics were deemed to be 'foolish.'"²⁸⁵ As such, what Paul actually meant to say was that the message of the cross was regarded by the cultured elite of his day as "a coarse and vulgar joke".²⁸⁶

Welborn's point also raises the question concerning the origin of the word "foolishness" (μωρία) in the Corinthian correspondence. Was it first used by those who rejected "the message of the cross", or was it first employed by the messenger Paul himself who knew right from the start that both the content of his message and the manner of his proclamation would arouse such a negative response in the unbelievers? Welborn thinks that μωρία was probably applied to Paul by certain members of the Corinthian church to describe the impression they had about the apostle and his gospel. The term could also be a judgement of Paul's critics upon his preaching.²⁸⁷ Welborn's suggestion sounds

²⁸³ The fools are those who lack true knowledge of God, and thus fail to acknowledge God as God. Bertram, *TDNT* 4. 833.

²⁸⁴ Philo, *Cher.* 116; *Leg. All.* 2.70.

²⁸⁵ Welborn, *Fool*, 1-2.

²⁸⁶ Welborn, *Fool*, 2.

²⁸⁷ Welborn, *Fool*, 102-3.

reasonable, because Paul's allegedly unimpressive physical appearance and manner of speech could have easily caused his critics to apply the term *μωρία* to him personally as well as to his "message of the cross". Moreover, in 1.18 where the statement occurred, Paul was very specific that "the message of the cross" was "foolishness" (*μωρία*) to those who were "perishing". This naturally leads to a more likely possibility, namely, the very knowledgeable and alert Paul himself was most probably the first, or among the first, to have perceived that his "message of the cross" would be regarded contemptuously as "foolishness" by those who rejected it. This possibility should be taken more seriously in the context of the current social ethos and it is clearly supported by this thesis's study on crucifixion and noble death in antiquity. If, for instance, the death of Socrates was commonly regarded as *noble*, it would be sheer foolishness or stupidity to claim that the one who died the most *ignoble* death on the cross could in any way be the "Saviour" of the world and the "Son of God".

In close connection with the issue of *μωρία*, the characterization of the cross of Christ as "madness" (*μανία*) by the opponents of the Christian message, beginning from the first century, as chapter one has already noted, could also be taken into consideration. This was because, for the contemptuous opponents to the Christian message throughout the centuries, what was considered *μωρία* could also be *μανία* at the same time.

"The message of the cross" was central to Pauline theology in the Corinthian correspondence, and also in varying degrees in other Pauline writings. Crucifixion language was distinctively Pauline, and unlike other references to the death of Jesus, it was exclusively used by Paul in polemical situations.²⁸⁸ Used even more sparingly was Paul's description of the gospel as "foolishness". It is only found in one epistle (i.e., 1

²⁸⁸ Rom. 6.6; 1 Cor. 1.17, 18; 2.2; 2 Cor. 13.4; Gal. 2.19; 3.1, 13; 5.11; 6.12, 14; Phil. 2.8; 3.16. C. B. Cousar, *A Theology of the Cross: The Death of Jesus in the Pauline Letters* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1990), 23.

Cor 1.18-25, 27; 2.14; 3.18-19; 4.10). But it has played a crucial role in the history of Christian thought, as Welborn has rightly pointed out.²⁸⁹

Historical research has shown that the term “folly” was nowhere connected with the cross in pre-Christian literature, Greek or Latin. In the ancient world the cross was described as “terrible”, “infamous”, “barren”, “criminal”, and an “evil instrument”, and crucifixion was regarded as “cruel and disgusting”, “shameful”, “the supreme penalty”, “the most wretched of deaths”. But nowhere is the cross associated with “foolishness” in Greek and Latin. Paul’s expression about the message of the cross in 1 Corinthians was therefore unique, not only in Pauline writings, but also in the entire New Testament.²⁹⁰ Nor is the term μωρία found in the OT. In this connection Welborn’s point is particularly valid and helpful: “of particular important...is the emergence within Paul’s vocabulary of the language of the “cross” (σταυρός). As Cicero and Varro attest, it was this cruel and disgusting term which the cultural elite of the Roman world least wanted to hear. The cross was an ominous lacuna at the center of public discourse.”²⁹¹ As such, Paul, the “fool” for Christ’s sake, must have been thought to have turned the world upside down by describing his gospel most provocatively as “the message of the cross”: Paul chose such a single phrase knowing fully well that this expression would surely be regarded by those who were perishing as utter “foolishness”. On this Welborn aptly remarks: “it is not difficult to imagine how vulgar and shocking this language [about the cross] must have sounded to the Corinthian elite.”²⁹² Studies of other NT documents, including Paul’s earlier writings, such as 1 Thessalonians, indicate that the “cross” language does not actually occur in pre-Pauline kerygmatic formulae. But the

²⁸⁹ Welborn, *Fool*, 15.

²⁹⁰ Welborn, *Fool*, 21-3.

²⁹¹ Welborn, *Fool*, 251.

²⁹² Welborn, *Fool*, 252.

case is very different when it comes to the Corinthian correspondence (e.g., 1.13, 17, 18, 23; 2.2, 8).²⁹³

For Paul, the decision to use the language of the cross was never casual or incidental. It was probably after much serious thought that Paul had finally *decided* (ἐκρίνα) to know nothing among the Corinthians “except Jesus and him crucified” (1 Cor. 2.2). In view of what has already been said about crucifixion and noble death in antiquity, there must obviously be a certain *rationale* behind Paul’s deliberate choice of the cross in his response to the Corinthian crisis. One might even be tempted to conjecture that Paul could have intended to use the cross as a kind of “shock” tactic in order to turn the social ethos of the Corinthians upside down.²⁹⁴ Some of the main problems in the Corinthian church, such as church divisions, the Corinthians’ preoccupation with power and social status, as well as their low estimation of Paul, were clear indications that they were still very much enslaved by the old traditional social ethos.

For Paul the messenger, “the message of the cross” was never neutral. It demanded a crucial response from the hearer. They could either reject it to their own destruction, or receive it for their own salvation. This was clearly the intent and force of Paul’s statement in 1.18. People’s response to “the message of the cross” would subsequently divide them into two entirely different categories: those who were “perishing” and those who were “being saved”. Moreover, the rejection and reception of the message also represented two diametrically opposed world views; one “of the world” (1.20), and the other, “of God” (1.21).

²⁹³ Welborn, *Fool*, 252.

²⁹⁴ Horrell, *The Social Ethos*, 132.

In Paul's view, people's positive response to the message was actually not entirely an arbitrary human perception, because it was "spiritually discerned" (πνευματικῶς ἀνακρίνεται, 2.14).

The Greek σταυροῦ in the phrase ὁ λόγος γὰρ ὁ τοῦ σταυροῦ is genitive. It was probably intended to denote the theme of Paul's gospel message, namely, the core of Paul's message was the cross itself. Hence Charles Barrett comments: "the gospel is simply a placarding (cf. Gal. 3.1) of Christ crucified; its effects are twofold: it is foolishness to those who are on the way to destruction, but to us who are on the way to salvation it is God's power (cf. 2 Cor. 2.15f.)."²⁹⁵ The phrase - "the message of the cross" - as a description of the gospel message is first found in Paul's writing. The term "the word" or "the message" (ὁ λόγος) seems to refer to the form or manner of Paul's preaching while "the cross" in the genitive (τοῦ σταυροῦ) means the core content of the "message" proclaimed. In the words of Anthony Thiselton, "the cross is Paul's definition of the gospel."²⁹⁶ Or as Hans Conzelmann puts it "the word of the cross" is, as is shown by 2.1f, an exhaustive statement of the content of the gospel."²⁹⁷ Litfin has rightly suggested that Paul wanted to keep the "word" (or "message") and the "cross" together: "the repeated article in the construction serves to prevent the focus from shifting away from form to content and balances the stress between the two."²⁹⁸ This point is extremely important because, as will be shown later in this thesis, the criticism of Paul's critics against him had to do with *both* the core *content* of his message and the *manner* of his proclamation. Paul was apparently very conscious of this in his response. Thus, for example in 1.17, the phrase "not with eloquent wisdom" quite obviously

²⁹⁵ Barrett, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (London: Adam & Charles Black, 1968), 19.

²⁹⁶ A. C. Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 2000), 154.

²⁹⁷ H. Conzelmann, *1 Corinthians: A Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians* (Hermeneia; Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1975), 41.

²⁹⁸ Litfin, *Proclamation*, 194.

referred to the *manner* of Paul's proclamation, and "the cross of Christ" essentially meant the core *content* of the gospel. While some distinction between the two may be valid, it is, however, neither necessary nor helpful to press the issue too hard, since in the case of Paul, the *content* of the gospel and the *manner* of its proclamation could not be artificially separated. The message of the cross, when rightly understood, was a radical inversion of the social ethos of the Corinthians. Its paradoxical nature is particularly obvious as Horrell has rightly perceived: "the symbolic order of the gospel, as Paul sees it, centred upon the cross of Christ, inverts the values of the dominant social order. Anyone who wants to count themselves 'in' must cease to regard themselves as strong and wise 'in this age' and become weak and foolish in order to discover the power of God."²⁹⁹

The words "perishing" and "being saved" also seemed to be intended to cause those this-worldly Corinthians to think of the eschatological dimension of "the message of the cross", a dimension that was in danger of being forgotten in the Corinthians' many preoccupations and problems. Conzelmann is right in suggesting that the two contrasting present participles – "perishing" and "being saved" – are "eschatologically defined".³⁰⁰ This is in fact very understandable since the crucifixion of Christ itself was an *eschatological* event. In fact, Paul's sense of the *eschaton* could be felt even in his opening words of greetings: "...as you wait for the *revealing* (ἀποκάλυψιν) of our Lord Jesus Christ....He will also strengthen you to *the end* (τέλους) so that you may be blameless *on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ*" (1.7, 8).

Besides the strong contrast between those "who are perishing" and those "who are being saved", the verbal form of the expression "who are being saved" is also worth noting. The Greek verb σωζομένοις is a present participle, and it might well be intended by Paul

²⁹⁹ Horrell, *The Social Ethos*, 137.

³⁰⁰ Conzelmann, *1 Corinthians*, 41.

as a reminder to the Corinthians that the Christian salvation was still a *process* and *not yet* a full reality, humanly speaking. While *eschatologically* it is correct to regard the Christians as having been saved *already*, it is equally true to think that it is still *not yet existentially*. Here lies the tension in the Christian's experience. This point might have special meaning in the Corinthian context because certain members of the church quite obviously thought that they had *already* reached full maturity or had arrived at the *final* point (4.8-10). Paul lamented in 4.8, with a touch of sarcasm:

Paul divided people into two categories according to their response to "the message of cross", i.e., the lost and the saved. Richard Hays is clearly right in thinking that Paul's sharp division was made from "the apocalyptic perspective".³⁰¹ For Paul, the "cross" not only made this new division, it had also inaugurated the "new age", so that the "foolishness" of the cross belongs to the "old age" mentality of those who are perishing.³⁰² Moreover, the expression "who are being saved" also clearly indicated the crucial issue of Christian *identity*. As has already been noted earlier, church divisions in Corinth which greatly troubled Paul (1. 10-17) were also a very serious *identity* crisis. Otherwise, they would not have pledged their allegiance respectively to *human* personalities such as Paul, Apollos, and Cephas. As *Christians*, and such was their true *identity*, Christ alone deserved their total allegiance. On this point Pogoloff has a useful comment: "the contrast in 1.18 between those who are perishing (ἀπολλυμένοι) and those who are being saved (σωζόμενοι) not only moves the discourse from cultural to community identity, it also locates that identity within the larger narrative of God's salvific activity."³⁰³

Paul's use of antithesis and paradox in the Corinthian correspondence is impressive and

³⁰¹ R. B. Hays, *First Corinthians* (Louisville KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1997), 28.

³⁰² G. D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (Grand Rapids MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1987), 69.

³⁰³ Pogoloff, *Logos*, 158.

striking, and the passage under consideration, i.e., 1. 18-31, is just a good start.³⁰⁴ One could even suggest that it required a person with considerable rhetorical skills to do that. At the very beginning of the passage Paul had already set up an important antithesis between the “foolishness” of the message of the cross and “the power of God”. It is important to note that in this striking antithesis Paul was not saying that the “cross” itself is “foolishness”, for this was not the real issue according to the study on crucifixion in antiquity. The real issue was the *perception* about that form of capital punishment and all the body language, social implications, prejudices and symbols that were associated with it. It was “the message of the cross”, which necessarily centred round the *crucified* Christ, that constituted “foolishness” as far as the unbelievers were concerned.

Greco-Roman society attached great importance to word, speech or message (λόγος). In such social context no logos was actually “neutral” or value-free. In a society which was status-conscious, logos could often determine a person’s worth or otherwise in society. As such, “the message [logos] of the cross” could only belong to the lowest and most despised of the Greco-Roman society, such as slaves and criminals, according to the study of crucifixion and noble death in antiquity. It must therefore be a most astonishing and horrendous thing for Paul to openly claim that such logos was “the power of God” (δύναμις θεοῦ)! But such was his very paradoxical way of presenting his case.

Once Paul’s antithesis and paradox were skilfully presented, he seemed to have the desired freedom to use terms and expressions in his own special way, and yet without contradicting himself. Thus, human “wisdom” suddenly became “foolishness”, and divine “foolishness” became “wisdom”. In the end there was virtually no substantial

³⁰⁴ See Mitchell, *Reconciliation*, 211-2.

difference between God's "wisdom" or "power" and God's "weakness", as far as Paul was concerned, as he tried to demonstrate in the verses that followed. On this particular point Pickett's observation is insightful: "the paradox is that the 'weakness of God' (1.25) and the 'power of God' (1.18) are synonymous in that they are both defined in terms of the cross....The upshot of this line of reasoning is that the social values denoted by the folly-wisdom and weakness-strength antitheses have been superseded by an alternative set of values which are centred in the cross."³⁰⁵ Thiselton's point is also helpful: "antithesis constitutes the key to Paul's argument...the wisdom-folly contrast played an important role in the Graeco-Roman world and almost certainly represented theological slogans or catchwords."³⁰⁶

Paul's antithetical and paradoxical way of speaking was clearly aimed at turning the social ethos of the time upside down. This drastic exercise was necessary because the troublesome Corinthians were still very much enslaved by current social ethos. On Paul's deliberate inversion of the Corinthians' social ethos, Martyn comments: "...the gospel is God's advent! And for that reason, those who are being redeemed discover that in the event of the gospel God invades their wills; rearranging the very *fundamenta* of their existence. As event, the gospel is inseparable from God because God himself comes on the scene in that proclamation in the fullness of his power."³⁰⁷ Once the social ethos of the Corinthians was turned upside down, "the message of the cross" would no longer be the subject of any human evaluation and judgement.

1.19 γέγραπται γάρ· ἀπολῶ τὴν σοφίαν τῶν σοφῶν καὶ τὴν σύνεσιν τῶν συνετῶν ἀθετήσω. ("For it is written, 'I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and the discernment of the discerning I will thwart.'")

³⁰⁵ Pickett, *The Cross*, 71.

³⁰⁶ Thiselton, *The First Epistle*, 154, n. 24.

³⁰⁷ Martyn, *Theological Issues in the Letters of Paul* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1997), 219.

Paul continued to dethrone worldly wisdom in its totality with a quotation from Isa. 29.14 in 1.19. With this quotation his purview here had gone far beyond the boundary of Corinth and spoke quite universally about divine judgement on the “wisdom” of this world. But Paul obviously did not want to get himself entangled in the endless discussion and debate about the whole “wisdom” issue here. Despite his rejection of worldly wisdom, Paul did qualify his point a little later saying that “among the mature, we do speak wisdom, though it is not a wisdom of this age....But...God’s wisdom” (2.6, 7). This point is very important because, as Wolfgang Schrage has rightly pointed out, “the critical destruction of worldly wisdom ...does not mean irrationality – no *credo quia absurdum* (‘I believe it because it is absurd’). Rather it means that the cross is actually the defining sign of all wisdom and the horizon of all faith-implied understanding and all theology.”³⁰⁸

In view of the crucial connection between 1.18 and 1.19, it is very important to take the Greek γάρ (“for”) in 1.19 seriously. Paul had already stated in 1.18 that the preaching of “the message of the cross” had resulted in the vital division of people into two distinct categories: “those who are perishing” and those “who are being saved”. At first glance, this division in 1.18 merely appears like a statement of fact, resulting from two diametrically opposed responses to the “message of the cross”. However, as Cousar has rightly observed, “the statement of v. 18 is cast in an entirely new light by the quotation of Isa. 29:14 in v.19 and the allusions in v. 20”.³⁰⁹ That is to say, the word γάρ in 1.19 clearly suggested that the division mentioned in the previous verse did not just happen as an empirical fact, it must also be traced back to the sovereign God ultimately. In the words of Cousar, “it is a part of the divine strategy to expose the wisdom of this age

³⁰⁸ „Die kritische Destruktion der Weltweisheit bedeutet also keine Irrationalität, kein *credo quia absurdum*. Wohl aber bedeutet es, dass das Kreuz tatsächlich Vorzeichen aller Weisheit und Horizont allen im Glauben implizierten Verstehens und aller Theologie ist.“ Wolfgang Schrage, *Der Erste Brief an die Korinther* (Zürich: Benziger Verlag, 1991), 192.

³⁰⁹ Cousar, *Theology*, 29.

(1.19).”³¹⁰

1.19 was a direct quotation from Isa. 29.14 (LXX: ἀπολῶ τὴν σοφίαν τῶν σοφῶν καὶ τὴν σύνεσιν τῶν συνετῶν κρύψω, “I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and will hide the understanding of the prudent”), except the verb κρύψω (“I will hide”, “conceal”, “keep secret”) is replaced by ἀθετήσω (“I will set aside”, “bring to nought”, “nullify”, “confound”). Barrett thinks that Paul’s variation may be due to Ps. 32.10 (LXX: κύριος διασκεδάσει βουλὰς ἐθνῶν ἀθετεῖ δὲ λογισμοὺς λαῶν καὶ ἀθετεῖ βουλὰς ἀρχόντων, “The Lord frustrates the counsels of the nations; he brings to nought also the reasonings of the peoples, and brings to nought the counsels of princes.”), in order to make the quotation more suitable to his argument.³¹¹ This is because ἀθετήσω is a much stronger verb than κρύψω and has the same force as ἀπολῶ “I will destroy”.

1.19 not only enforced Paul’s point in v.18, but also served as a stern warning to those who considered themselves “wise” and who regarded the message of the cross as μωρία.³¹² Thiselton acknowledges the suitability of the parallel which Paul drew between the Isaianic context and his own: “against the background of Isaiah 29 the contrast suggests a parallel between the vulnerability and fragility of time spent devising strategies for self-presentation or self-enhancement as against seeking alignment of the self with the divine purpose.”³¹³ In the Isaianic context, Isa. 29.14, from which Paul quoted, belongs to Yahweh’s judgement oracle against Judah whose national leaders had put their trust in their own human wisdom and devices by entering into a crucial treaty with Egypt rather than believing in Yahweh through the words of His prophet. What was involved here was clearly a “wisdom” issue, i.e. human wisdom

³¹⁰ Cousar, *Theology*, 29.

³¹¹ Barrett, *The First Epistle*, 52.

³¹² Fee, *The First Epistle*, 69-70.

³¹³ Thiselton, *The First Epistle*, 162.

against that of Yahweh's as the original text clearly stated: "so I will do amazing things with this people, shocking and amazing. The wisdom of their wise shall perish, and the discernment of the discerning shall be hidden" (Isa. 29.14, NRSV). The emphasis of Yahweh's stern pronouncement was clearly on the destruction of the wisdom of the wise. Similarly, in the Corinthian case, the crucial matter was also that of "wisdom", so that as long as human "wisdom" prevailed, "the message of the cross" would be regarded as "foolishness" and consequently rejected by the "wise". Such "wisdom", as was the case in Isa. 29.14, must be destroyed since "the world did not know God through [its own] wisdom". The appropriateness of Paul's reference to Isa. 29.14 is therefore quite apparent.

It is also significant to note that Judah's reliance on her own human wisdom was inseparably linked to the nation's lack of true worship and credible spirituality. Human "wisdom" could be said to be the very root cause. Isa. 29.13 openly declared: "The Lord said: Because these people drew near with their mouths and honour me with their lips, while their hearts are far from me, and their worship of me is a human commandment learned by rote". The historical contexts of Isaiah and Corinth were admittedly different. However, similar to the Isaianic case, the "wisdom" problem in Corinth was also closely related to the important matters of worship and spirituality. Church divisions, the disorderliness in the administration of the Lord's supper (ch.11) and the abuse and misuse of spiritual gifts (*χαρίσματα*, in chs. 12-14) were clear examples. The words "mouths" and "lips" in Isa. 29.13 could remind one of human speech and eloquence, through which human "wisdom" found its impressive expression. It was precisely in the area of speech or eloquence that the Corinthians had serious trouble, amongst other problems. But ironically, it was also particularly in "speech and knowledge of every kind" (*ἐν παντὶ λόγῳ καὶ πάσῃ γνώσει*) that the Corinthians had been most "enriched"

as Paul himself readily acknowledged at the beginning of his letter (1.5). It is therefore natural and understandable that Paul should deal most firmly with the “wisdom” and “speech” problems. Finally, in both the Isaianic and Corinthian cases, the judgement was clear: The overthrowing of human “wisdom” and the vindication of God’s wisdom; and in the Corinthian case, in and through Christ crucified. Paul in 1.19 had only quoted the second half of Isa. 29.14. But the first half of the verse was also meaningful when applied to the Corinthian situation, especially in relation to “the message of the cross”. This was what the Lord said in Isa. 29.14a: **אֲחֵדֶם-הֵיכָה הַפְּלֵא וְהַפְּלֵא** “so I will again do *amazing* things with this people, shocking and amazing.”³¹⁴ As the study on crucifixion in antiquity has shown, it was a most “shocking” form of execution. But the utterly “amazing” thing was that God in His wisdom had now used this most “shocking” form of execution as His means of human salvation. While it was undoubtedly “shocking” to “those who are perishing”, regarding it as “foolishness”, it was most “amazing” to those “who are being saved”.

1.20 ποῦ σοφός; ποῦ γραμματεὺς; ποῦ συζητητὴς τοῦ αἰῶνος τούτου; οὐχὶ ἐμώρπεν ὁ θεὸς τὴν σοφίαν τοῦ κόσμου; (**“Where is the one who is wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world?”**)

The purview of Paul’s concern became even clearer in the next few verses (1.20-25) where he referred, in very broad and general terms, to the “wise” and “the scribe” as well as “the debater of this age” and “the wisdom of the world” (τὴν σοφίαν τοῦ κόσμου, 1.20). Similarly, the terms “Greeks” and “Jews” (1.22-24) must also be put in the

³¹⁴ LXX Isaiah 29.14: διὰ τοῦτο ἰδοὺ ἐγὼ προσθήσω τοῦ μεταθεῖναι τὸν λαὸν τοῦτον καὶ μεταθήσω αὐτοὺς καὶ ἀπολώ τὴν σοφίαν τῶν σοφῶν καὶ τὴν σύνεσιν τῶν συνετῶν κρύψω (“Therefore behold, I will once again deal marvelously with this people, wondrously marvelous. And the wisdom of their wise men shall perish, and the discernment of their discerning men shall be concealed.”).

broadest contexts. Here Martyn is right in recognizing the fact that “there are two opposing worlds in Paul’s apocalyptic, that is the Old Age and the new creation,” and that “Paul sees that the coming of Christ is the invasion of Christ. And as invasion, that event has unleashed a cosmic conflict, indeed *the* cosmic conflict.”³¹⁵

It is important to note that Paul’s emphasis was on God’s wisdom which was revealed and powerfully demonstrated in and through Christ crucified as well as on the salvation of those who believed. There was no suggestion in Paul’s argument that the Christian believers or those “who are being saved” have now been *made wise* or *appeared wise* in human terms by virtue of their salvation. In fact, the believers would continue to be looked upon as being “foolish” (1.27) by the unbelieving world as long as “the message of the cross” continued to be regarded as “foolishness” by it.

The rhetorical questions in 1.20 clearly suggested that Paul was going to elaborate on his argument against human wisdom from the perspective of the cross. Paul’s questions - “where is the one who is wise? Where is the scribe?” - may have some OT Scriptures behind it, i.e., Isa. 19.12 (LXX: ποῦ εἰσιν νῦν οἱ σοφοί σου; “where are now your wise men?”); 33.18 (ποῦ εἰσιν οἱ γραμματικοί; “where are the scribes?”). The use of the interrogative was a form of argument which could be found also in extra-Old Testament literature.³¹⁶

Paul’s reference to “the wise” (σοφός), “the debater” (συζητητής) and “the scribe” (γραμματεὺς) in 1.20 was clearly polemical.³¹⁷

³¹⁵ Martyn, *Theological Issues*, 281-2.

³¹⁶ Conzelmann, *1 Corinthians*, 43.

³¹⁷ See Archibald Robertson and Alfred Plummer, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary: First Epistle of St Paul to the Corinthians* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1967), 19-20. Conzelmann, *1 Corinthians*, 43. Thiselton, *The First Epistle*, 164.

The phrases τοῦ αἰῶνος τούτου (“of this age”) and τοῦ κόσμου τούτου (“of the world”) occurred in Paul’s writings rather often: “age” (αἰών) (31 x), “world” (κόσμος) (47 x). Sometimes these terms were used by Paul synonymously. Similarly, Paul also employed expressions like “wisdom of the world”, “wisdom of this age” and “wisdom of this world” quite freely (1 Cor. 1.20; 2.6; 3.19).³¹⁸

Barclay rightly suggests that “‘this world’ and ‘the present age’ are spoken of in consistently derogatory terms throughout the letter, for they, together with their rulers, are doomed to imminent destruction (1.18-2.8; 3.18-20; 7.31).”³¹⁹ Adams suggests that “Paul skilfully turns the conventional ideological associations of κόσμος to his advantage. By linking κόσμος with ὁ αἰὼν οὗτος, the old age deposed in the apocalyptic judgement of the cross, Paul sets the dominant social system conventionally associated with, and legitimized by, κόσμος in *antithesis* to God’s new order.”³²⁰ For Paul, the new “age” or “world” had *already* arrived with the crucifixion of Christ and his subsequent resurrection, although the end was still *not yet*. This point was already made in 1.8 where Paul referred to “the day of our Lord Jesus Christ” (ἐν τῇ ἡμέρᾳ τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ [Χριστοῦ]) and later in chapter 15 with regard to the believers’ future resurrection. Sasse is apparently correct in suggesting that while the OT and Jewish idea had been taken over by the NT, there was very significant new development because of the Christ event (cf. Heb. 1.10ff; 13.8; Rev. 1.17). In other words, through the crucifixion and resurrection of Christ, eternity was *already* a present reality.³²¹ Thiselton has a good point when he prefers the translation “of this world order” (τοῦ αἰῶνος τούτου): “Apocalyptic contrasts express in temporal terms realities which in effect amount to a difference between two world orders....Hence what appears as ‘folly’

³¹⁸ Sasse, *TDNT* 1.203.

³¹⁹ Barclay, ‘Thessalonica and Corinth’, 59.

³²⁰ Adams, *Constructing the World: A Study in Paul’s Cosmological Language* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 2000), 113.

³²¹ Sasse, *TDNT* 1.202.

or 'weakness' as it is judged within the values and frame of the old world order...at once appears as 'wisdom' and divine 'power'. The three status-related terms sage, expert, and debater receive a different evaluation within a different world order."³²²

From what has been considered so far, it is not difficult to understand why Paul had to make a sharp contrast between this age and the age to come in relation to the wisdom and power issues, because two entirely different world views were involved here.

Paul's follow-up question in 1.20b might actually be regarded as a kind of rhetorical answer to the first three in 1.20a. That is to say, God *had indeed* "made foolish" (ἐμώρηνεν) the wisdom of the world, including the "wisdom" of the σοφός, γραμματεὺς and συζητητής through "Christ crucified" (1.23). The point of *divine initiative* (or pre-emptive act) must be clearly noted here. That is, God *already had*, in and through Christ crucified, taken the initiative to make foolish the wisdom of the world. Well *before* the message of the cross was proclaimed by Paul, and at the very crucifixion of Christ, God had *already* "made foolish the wisdom of the world". This point may help to determine if the idea of "foolishness" was *first* ascribed to the message of the cross by those who had rejected it (Welborn's position) or something which had *already* been *anticipated* by Paul who was keenly aware of the world's attitude towards the cross and crucifixion. This thesis is inclined to take the latter position. In fact, given Paul's pre-conversion Jewish as well as Greco-Roman backgrounds, it is reasonable to assume that Paul (or Saul then) would most probably have shared the prejudice of *both* Jews and Romans concerning the cross in general and the crucified Christ in particular. The suggestion that Paul had already anticipated the rejection of "the message of the cross" is thoroughly consistent with the study of crucifixion in antiquity and the concept of "noble death" in the Greco-Roman tradition as well as the social ethos of Paul's time.

³²² Thiselton, *The First Epistle*, 165.

With regards to ἐμώρπαιεν, Conzelmann is right in thinking that “Paul does not say, ‘God shows that the world is foolish,’ but ‘God makes its wisdom foolish.’”³²³ Man’s entire “world” had now been turned completely upside down, because of this most drastic inversion of his whole social ethos. Hays is therefore perceptive when he says that “the cross becomes the starting point for an epistemological revolution. Thus, Paul provides the categories necessary for a fresh critical evaluation of divisions in the church and, more fundamentally, of our understanding of wisdom, power, and wealth. For anyone who grasps the paradoxical logic of this text, the world can never look the same again”.³²⁴

Rhetorical eloquence was a most highly sought after and respected skill in Paul’s time. Eloquent orators then might be compared to the “stars” and “superstars” of the world of entertainment or the world of sports now. It must therefore be most shocking to hear Paul saying that God in Christ had now “made foolish” all of this. “Where are they now?” Paul asked rhetorically but most solemnly (cf. Isa. 19.12).

1.21 ἐπειδὴ γὰρ ἐν τῇ σοφίᾳ τοῦ θεοῦ οὐκ ἔγνω ὁ κόσμος διὰ τῆς σοφίας τὸν θεόν, εὐδόκησεν ὁ θεὸς διὰ τῆς μωρίας τοῦ κηρύγματος σῶσαι τοὺς πιστεύοντας·
(“For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, God decided, through the foolishness of our proclamation, to save those who believe.”)

The opening statement in 1.21a clearly implied that true knowledge about God did not belong to the will or autonomy of the world. Cousar is right in thinking that 1.21 “is

³²³ Conzelmann, *1 Corinthians*, 43.

³²⁴ Hays, *First Corinthians*, 27.

unequivocal about the incapacity of human wisdom”.³²⁵ True knowledge of God, or about God, was a matter of divine initiative and it could only be given to the world as His gift. Paul’s statement made it clear that it was “in the wisdom of God” (ἐν τῇ σοφίᾳ τοῦ θεοῦ) that such should be the case. David Garland makes a significant point that six citations of the Holy Scripture appear in 1.18-3.23 (1.19, 31; 2.9, 16; 3.19, 20). All these citations made the same important point that the world simply could not comprehend God’s way through its own wisdom.³²⁶ What has been said so far about the inadequacy or failure of human wisdom was also thoroughly consistent with what Paul said about divine revelation and the Spirit in 2.6-16. But the end of person’s road was the beginning of God’s way. The last statement of 1.21 brought truly good news through divine wisdom, because “God decided, through the foolishness of our proclamation, to save those who believe”. There was something very paradoxical and ironical here, i.e., “the wisdom of God” was revealed “through the foolishness” (διὰ τῆς μωρίας) of the Christian proclamation. The overall context of the Corinthian correspondence indicated that “foolishness” referred to both the *content* (message) and its *proclamation* (“not with eloquent wisdom”, 1.17). Litfin is thus right: “the crucial term κηρύγμα in 1.21 again preserves Paul’s dual emphasis upon form and content and, in this sense, stands synonymous with ‘the word of the cross’ of 1.18. As in that first reference to μωρία, it is here not simply the cross that is foolish; the foolishness consists of the proclamation of the cross”³²⁷ This point was very important, because the world had not only regarded Paul’s “message of the cross” as μωρία, the very *manner* or *form* of Paul’s presentation was also unimpressive and unacceptable, according to current rhetorical theory and practice. Paul was evidently very conscious of this and the need to respond to it, which was why he emphasized repeatedly that he was sent “to proclaim

³²⁵ Cousar, *Theology*, 29.

³²⁶ David E. Garland, *1 Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003), 59.

³²⁷ Litfin, *Proclamation*, 198.

the gospel...not with eloquent wisdom” (1.17) and that his “speech and...proclamation were not with plausible words of wisdom” (2.4).

What has been said has clearly shown that Paul’s concern was far more than just a comparison or contrast between human and divine wisdoms, but the entire encounter of two *world orders*. This point is most crucial to the present thesis which seeks to show that Paul’s “message of the cross” was nothing less than the inversion of the social ethos of his time.

1.22 ἐπειδὴ καὶ Ἰουδαῖοι σημεῖα αἰτοῦσιν καὶ Ἕλληνες σοφίαν ζητοῦσιν, (“For Jews demand signs and Greeks desire wisdom,”) 23 ἡμεῖς δὲ κηρύσσομεν Χριστὸν ἐσταυρωμένον, Ἰουδαίοις μὲν σκάνδαλον, ἔθνεσιν δὲ μωρίαν, (“but we proclaim Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles,”)

1.22 further explained why the message of the cross was regarded as “foolishness” by the world of the unbelieving Jews and Greeks. The Jews’ request for *signs* (σημεῖα) could be found in Mark 8.11 (and parallels). In the present context, the Jewish demand was clearly perceived by Paul negatively, i.e., as a clear sign of scepticism and unbelief with reference to “the message of the cross”. Similarly, the Greeks’ desire for “wisdom” was also put in a negative way, with the implication that “the message of the cross” was “foolishness” to them. Again, in this particular context, “wisdom” was no longer just a matter of the Greeks’ speculation, but their entire social ethos.

The first δέ in 1.23 should clearly be translated as a strong “but”, in order to make the contrast between the world’s way of thinking and that of God’s. However, it is more than just a striking contrast. The force of the statement – “*but* we proclaim Christ

crucified” – clearly suggested that it was Paul’s most uncompromising *determination* to want to *continue* with the proclamation of the message about “Christ crucified” *despite* its rejection by the world. The *present* tense of κηρύσσομεν also has this strong sense.

Conzelmann suggests that “the classifying of mankind from the standpoint of salvation history as Jews and Greeks is a Jewish equivalent for the Greek classification ‘Greeks and barbarians.’”³²⁸ Conzelmann’s suggestion is apparently right, although it must be borne in mind that in the context of the present passage Paul’s division of humankind into those “who are perishing” and those “who are being saved” (v.18) was infinitely more important. Paul’s overall concern for the salvation and calling of “both Jews and Greeks” (v.24) also far outweighed their respective interests: the Jews in signs and the Greeks in wisdom. On this particular point Krister Stendahl is clearly right when he suggests that the pre-Christian Paul used to divide humankind into two parts, Jews and Gentiles, but the Christian Paul began to use the word “all” in his writings to include both parts. The mission of Paul should be seen in this context.³²⁹

The qualifying statement in 1.23 served to reinforce the idea that the world’s rejection of the Christian message was no surprise to Paul from the very beginning and such rejection would continue to be a matter of fact as long as the world judged it through its own “wisdom”.

The word σκάνδαλον is only found in the LXX, the NT and Christian writings, while σκανδάληθρον, meaning “trap”, has the Hebrew equivalent מכשול in Qumran.³³⁰ In Pauline writings the words σκάνδαλον and σκανδαλίω appear not only in 1 Corinthians

³²⁸ Conzelmann, *1 Corinthians*, 47.

³²⁹ Stendahl, *Paul*, 1-6.

³³⁰ See 1 QS 2.12, 17; 1 QH 4.15; 8.35 (chains of stumbling); 9.21, 27; 10.17; 16.15, 22. Conzelmann, *1 Corinthians*, 47, n.79.

(1.23; 8.13) but also in Romans (9.33; 11.9; 14.13; cf. Gal. 5.11). Stählin detects a NT “reconstruction” of σκάνδαλον: “in the sphere of this possibility of opposing effects inherent in Christ and His Gospel the word σκάνδαλον becomes a term...in which the main OT meanings – ‘occasion of guilt’ and ‘cause of destruction’ – are fused into a total unity in the NT reconstruction – for in the NT unbelief is the basic sin.”³³¹ Stählin’s point serves to highlight the gravity of Paul’s use of the term σκάνδαλον in the present Corinthian context, because the proclamation of “Christ crucified” had not only caused the unbelieving Jews to “fall”, the rejection of “the message of the cross” actually led to eternal damnation. This was clearly the force of the word “perishing” in 1.18.

As has already been discussed in §2.4 about crucifixion and the “curse”, a vital link between the “tree” in Deut. 21.23 (LXX) and the “cross” in Gal. 3.13 could be established even in pre-Christian times on the strength of the Qumran texts. This would also help to explain why the cross of Christ was such a σκάνδαλον for the unbelieving Jews.

1.24 αὐτοῖς δὲ τοῖς κλητοῖς, Ἰουδαίοις τε καὶ Ἑλλήσιν, Χριστὸν θεοῦ δύναμιν καὶ θεοῦ σοφίαν· (“**but to those who are the called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.**”)

The δὲ in the opening statement of 1.24 must be understood as a very forceful “but”, just as the case in 1.23, and thus serves very effectively to provide the strongest contrast between two diametrically opposed perceptions. In the context of the Corinthian polemics the word “called” (κλητοῖς) here could well serve as a clear reminder to the

³³¹ Stählin, *TDNT* 7.352-3.

self-conceited Corinthians that not only was their present Christian *identity* a divine gift (cf. 1.2), the vital knowledge that “Christ [was] the power of God and the wisdom of God” was also of divine origin, revealed in and through “Christ crucified”. The word “called” here as well as in 1.2 was clearly *inclusive* language when clearly understood, would serve to remind the divided Corinthian congregation of the divinely given oneness and fellowship in “Christ crucified”. Moreover, as a “called” community in Christ, the Corinthian church should truly be liberated from the enslavement of the conventional social ethos, including the very rigid classification of social classes.

It is important to note that here Paul was not simply saying that the cross of Christ revealed the wisdom of God, but that Christ *was* “the wisdom of God” (θεοῦ σοφίαν, 1.24b). Similarly, Christ crucified demonstrated not only the power of God, but was *himself* “the power of God” (θεοῦ δύναμιν, 1.24b).

1.25 ὅτι τὸ μωρὸν τοῦ θεοῦ σοφώτερον τῶν ἀνθρώπων ἐστὶν καὶ τὸ ἀσθενὲς τοῦ θεοῦ ἰσχυρότερον τῶν ἀνθρώπων. (“For God’s foolishness is wiser than human wisdom, and God’s weakness is stronger than human strength.”)

The opening word ὅτι, which could simply be rendered “for”, initiates Paul’s concluding statement for the whole of 1.18-25. This section (1.18-25) is clearly not an isolated paragraph, because it has 1.13-17 as its background and 1.26-31 as its immediate follow-up.

“Wisdom” and “foolishness” had already been strongly contrasted throughout much of 1.18-24. In Paul’s brilliant reasoning and subtle argument throughout the passage, the focus on the cross remained very sharp. Paul’s concluding statement in 1.25 basically

reasserted the points which he had so profoundly made earlier. As such, what is new in 1.25 was not so much its content as Paul's slightly different way of expression. Instead of bringing human and divine wisdom yet again in sharp *contrast*, Paul now made a *comparison* between the two. But the force of the earlier contrast between (human) foolishness and (divine) wisdom, and between (human) weakness and (divine) strength was still being retained. Paul's talk about "God's foolishness" and "God's weakness" appeared like a kind of concession at first glance. If so, it could only be for the sake of argument in Paul's rhetoric. In other words, it was not that Paul himself really thought that there was any "foolishness" or "weakness" on the part of God, for that would be absolutely impossible for Paul. Paul's very subtle argument was really this: *even granted* that "foolishness" could be ascribed to God or His act, "God's [so-called] foolishness was [still] *wiser* than human [so-called] wisdom". The same was true about "God's weakness". If that was the case, both "human wisdom" and "human strength" appear even more *worthless*. Here lies the force of Paul's rhetorical argument.

Weiss appears to be right in thinking that the definite article τὸ before μωρόν (foolishness) and ἀσθενέες (weakness) respectively served to highlight "the very definite (hence the article) single act of God...namely, the death of Christ on the cross, which is held by men to be a sign of foolishness and weakness."³³²

With reference to the manifestation of divine power in the "weakness", Savage comments perceptively: "As a minister of the gospel of the crucified Christ, and as one called to serve in an age dominated by a self-exalting outlook, the apostle Paul has little option but to respond to his worldly critics: 'when I am weak, then I am strong'".³³³ Very much in line with what has already been noted earlier in this thesis, Savage

³³² Johannes Weiss, *Der Erste Korintherbrief* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1910), 34.

³³³ Savage, *Power*, 189-90.

concludes that “the Corinthian church was embroiled in a conflict between two opposing viewpoints: the worldly outlook of the Corinthians and Paul’s own Christ-centred perspective, the so-called ‘wisdom of this age’ and the ‘wisdom of God’....It was precisely this conflict which seems to have evoked Paul’s paradoxical teaching of power through weakness.”³³⁴

Having set the worldly wisdom in sharp contrast with the divine, Paul now returned to his direct address to the Christians in Corinth, drawing their attention specifically to their own *humble* background and God’s gracious and amazing way in His calling (κλήσις) of them (1.26-31).

3.3 Absolutely no grounds for boasting by both human and divine standards, and Christ the wisdom, righteousness, sanctification and redemption (1.26-31)

1.26 Βλέπετε γὰρ τὴν κλήσιν ὑμῶν, ἀδελφοί, ὅτι οὐ πολλοὶ σοφοὶ κατὰ σάρκα, οὐ πολλοὶ δυνατοί, οὐ πολλοὶ εὐγενεῖς (“**Consider your own call, brothers and sisters: not many of you were wise by human standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth.**”)

This verse has already become a key reference for NT scholars concerning the social origins of early Christianity. “No other single verse of the entire New Testament was more influential in shaping popular opinion and exegetical judgement alike on the social origins of early Christianity than 1 Corinthians 1.26”, says Wuellner.³³⁵ And for Meggitt,

³³⁴ Savage, *Power*, 188.

³³⁵ W. H. Wuellner, ‘The Sociological Implications of 1 Corinthians 1:26-28 Reconsidered’, in E. A. Livingstone (ed.), *Studia Evangelica IV* (Berlin: Akademie, 1973), 666-72, at 666.

it is striking that both the Old and New consensuses have found here “a keystone for their respective reconstructions of Christian origins.”³³⁶

In the second century Celsus alleged that Christianity was a movement of low classes, including Jesus himself, who was only able to win his disciples among members of low strata such as “tax-collectors and sailors” and those “who had not even been to a primary school.”³³⁷ Deissmann holds that early Christianity, including the Pauline congregation, came from the lower strata of society.³³⁸ In contrast to Deissmann’s view, Judge argues that “Christianity was a movement sponsored by local patrons to their social dependents”.³³⁹ He then proceeds to suggest that Paul could have been identified as a “sophist” as he also had some intimate patronal relations.³⁴⁰ Chow thinks that “patronage was one of the important ways through which relationships in first-century Corinth were structured.”³⁴¹ Chow’s assertion that “Paul sided with the socially weak” in the Corinthian church is not only consistent with the general impression that the correspondence gives, it is also much in line with Paul’s strategy to dethrone the “powerful” and “wise” in the city.³⁴²

While it might be true that Paul tended to be on the side of the poor in dealing with certain Corinthian problems such as the food issue in 1 Cor. 8-10 and the Lord’s Table in 11, his *pastoral* concern was undoubtedly that of church unity.³⁴³

³³⁶ Meggitt, *Poverty*, 102. See Theissen, ‘Review Essay: Justin J. Meggitt, *Paul, Poverty and Survival*’, *JSNT* 84 (2001), 51-64.

³³⁷ Origen, *Cels.* 1.62.

³³⁸ Deissmann, *Paul*, 29-51.

³³⁹ Judge, ‘The Early Christians’, 8.

³⁴⁰ Judge, ‘Cultural Conformity and Innovation in Paul: Some Clues from Contemporary Documents’, *TynBul* 35 (1984), 3-24, at 23.

³⁴¹ Chow, *Patronage*, 188.

³⁴² Chow, *Patronage*, 188.

³⁴³ Mitchell, *Reconciliation*, 237-43. Horrell, *Solidarity and Difference: A Contemporary Reading of Paul’s Ethics* (London: T. & T. Clark International, 2005), 166-203; 99-132.

Some of the terms employed by Paul in 1.26-29 were significant: the wise, the powerful, and those of noble birth. Paul combined the three terms together and tried to remind the self-conceited Corinthians that actually “not many” of them deserved such social stratification. Theissen finds parallels to the Pauline social terms here in Philo’s writing:³⁴⁴ “Are not private citizens continually becoming officials, and officials private citizens, rich men becoming poor men and poor men men of ample means, nobodies becoming celebrated, obscure people becoming distinguished, weak men (ἀσθενεῖς) strong (ἰσχυροί), insignificant men powerful (δυνατοί), foolish men wise men of understanding (συνετοί), witless men sound reasoners?”³⁴⁵

Socially it was obvious that church divisions in Corinth were essentially due to a struggle for power and social status, very much along the line of the conventional social ethos. As such, it was only natural and necessary that Paul should deal with them thoroughly in the form of a drastic inversion of current social ethos.

The fact that Paul said there were few people who belonged to the upper class meant that there were at least some, while the majority of the Corinthian community remained poor and low. And ironically, precisely there were “not many” in the church, the elite became the more important and influential and could thus more fully exploit their social position. Clarke believes that “there were in the congregation some from the ruling class of society.”³⁴⁶ Winter concludes that 1.26 referred to “the ruling class of Corinth from which orators and sophists came.”³⁴⁷ Barclay puts forward the view that Paul referred to “the minority of Christians with relatively high social status.”³⁴⁸ Without sufficient solid data it is perhaps not wise or helpful to give a rigid description of the social composition

³⁴⁴ Theissen, *The Social Setting*, 72.

³⁴⁵ Philo, *Somn.* 1.155.

³⁴⁶ Clarke, *Leadership*, 45. See Meeks, *The First Urban Christians*, 63.

³⁴⁷ Winter, *Philo*, 191.

³⁴⁸ Barclay, ‘Thessalonica and Corinth’, 57.

of the Corinthian church, except to simply accept Paul's description that "not many" of the Corinthian Christians were of the elite class, implying that the rest belonged to the ordinary and lower strata of society. It is not necessary for this thesis to enter into the almost endless debate between the "Old" position, represented, for example, by Deissmann and Meggitt who argues that Pauline Christians should be located amongst the poor, the non-elite of the Roman Empire; and the "New Consensus", spearheaded by Theissen and Meeks, which asserts that the Pauline communities comprised a cross-section of society, including some from the higher strata.³⁴⁹

Whatever the case might be, the intention of Paul's statement in 1.26 was clear, namely, to confront the Corinthians with the harsh social reality, so that they might not be too self-conceited and boastful. Here the Pauline strategy and rhetoric were impressive. He seemed to be saying to them: "Since you Corinthians are so concerned with power and social status, let us examine it by your own worldly standard. In the end even you yourselves will have to acknowledge the naked fact [however reluctantly!] that in reality "not many of you...." The Corinthians' craving for power and social status were obviously among the causes for church divisions.

Those terms used by Paul - "wise" (σοφός), "powerful" (δυνατοί), and "noble birth" (εὐγενεῖς) were all attractive catchwords of the time, things which people deeply desired to possess. They were basic to the traditional social ethos. When Isocrates was asked about a person's path to "glory", he simply answered, "What was his birth and education?"³⁵⁰ Aristotle regarded wealth, honour, strength, and noble birth as some essential elements of happiness or Fortune.³⁵¹ Jerome Neyrey's study shows that "Greeks, Romans, and Judeans all considered honour and shame to be pivotal values in

³⁴⁹ See Introduction, n. 14-16.

³⁵⁰ Isocrates, *Antid.* 308.

³⁵¹ Aristotle, *Rhet.* 1360b 3-5; *Eth. nic.* 1102a.

their cultures....From Homer to Herodotus and from Pindar to Paul...men lived and died in quest of honour, reputation, fame, approval, and respect.”³⁵²

The Romans had divided society into two big categories: *honestiores* and *humiliores* (higher and lower status).³⁵³ Honour belonged only to the former, *honestiores*. If, as Barton has observed, honour was synonymous to “being”,³⁵⁴ Paul’s questioning of the Corinthians’ presumed “honour” (i.e., being “wise”, “powerful”, and “of noble birth”) was tantamount to challenging their very “being”, to borrow the expression of Barton. This is in fact not an overstatement, since Paul was actually dealing with the “being” of the Corinthians, when he reminded them of their “call” (κλησις)³⁵⁵ in 1. 26 and God’s choice of them in 1. 27 (“God chose...”). It was clearly this divine call and election that ultimately gave the Corinthians new “being”, although they seemed to have been forgetful about this, due to their enslavement by the current social ethos. Moreover, it goes without saying that it was their new Christian “being” that gave the unworthy Corinthians their true *identity*. In the end, Paul’s initial questioning of their true social status was designed to paradoxically lead to the re-affirmation of their true *being* and *identity*.

1.27 ἀλλὰ τὰ μωρὰ τοῦ κόσμου ἐξελέξατο ὁ θεός, ἵνα καταισχύνῃ τοὺς σοφοὺς, καὶ τὰ ἄσθενῆ τοῦ κόσμου ἐξελέξατο ὁ θεός, ἵνα καταισχύνῃ τὰ ἰσχυρά, (**“But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong;”**) 28 καὶ τὰ ἀγενῆ τοῦ κόσμου καὶ τὰ ἐξουθενημένα ἐξελέξατο ὁ

³⁵² Jerome H. Neyrey “‘Despising the Shame of the Cross’: Honor and Shame in the Johannine Passion Narrative’, in D. G. Horrell (ed.), *Social-Scientific Approaches to New Testament Interpretation* (Edinburgh, T. & T. Clark, 1999), 151-76, at 155.

³⁵³ Garnsey, *Social Status*, 221.

³⁵⁴ Barton, *The Sorrows*, 186.

³⁵⁵ Chester, *Conversion*, 77-112.

θεός, τὰ μὴ ὄντα, ἵνα τὰ ὄντα καταργήσῃ, (“God chose what is low and despised in the world, things that are not, to reduce to nothing things that are,”)

In typically Pauline fashion, Paul talked about God’s overturning of the current social order in very paradoxical terms in 1.27 and 28. The opening ἀλλά (“but”) in 1.27 already anticipated something of the reversal: “*But* God chose what is foolish...weak...low and despised in the world....” Horsley is right in thinking that “this idea of God’s overturning the established order is deeply rooted in Jewish biblical traditions, such as the great songs of God’s victory over the powerful and wealthy rulers on behalf of lowly Israel (e.g., Exodus 15; Judges 5; Sam. 2:1-10; cf. Luke 1:46-55)”.³⁵⁶ What is even more important, from the perspective of the present thesis, is the fact that Paul’s inversion of the social ethos of his time, with “the message of the cross”, was basically consistent with this theology of the divine overturning.

Horsley suggests that Paul’s use of the terms “wise, powerful, and noble birth” has yet another level on top of its social aspects and implications. This is the “spiritualized” level, which was rather common among Hellenistic and Roman philosophers. The Stoics, for example, thought that only the truly “wise” might be regarded as really rich, powerful and qualified to be a “king”. Horsley’s study indicates that Hellenistic Jews had adopted this “philosophical spiritualization” of the old Greco-Roman ideals and applied it to their own devotion either to Yahweh or to the personified *Sophia*. The same was also true for Philo. Horsley cites the Wisdom of Solomon in which the heavenly *Sophia* is said to be conferring a “kingdom” on “pious souls” (6.20, 21; 10.14), as well as “riches” (7.8, 11, 13-14; 8.5, 18; 10.11) and “noble birth” (8.3).³⁵⁷ Horsley’s study on this issue is relevant to the Corinthian context, because, besides the

³⁵⁶ Horsley, *1 Corinthians*, 51.

³⁵⁷ Horsley, *1 Corinthians*, 52.

Corinthians' craving and fighting for *social* wisdom, power and wealth, there were also serious attempts to use (or misuse) their *spiritual gifts* (1 Cor. 1.4, 5; 12-14) to further consolidate their *social status*. As such, what Paul said, with a touch of sarcasm, in 4.8-10 actually had both *social* and *spiritual* meanings and implications, because the Corinthians were apparently fascinated by the "spiritual" level of their attainment. The Corinthians' claim to spiritual maturity or superiority was also clearly reflected in certain aspects of their views and behaviour. For example, at least some members were indifferent to sexual immorality (ch. 5) while some others seemed to have gone to the other extreme of despising legitimate sexual and married life (ch. 7). There was also the lack of care and concern on the part of the (spiritually) "strong" and "mature" for those who were "weak" in their view and practice about food offered to idols (ch. 8). Paul's powerful and skilful rhetoric in the whole section of 1.18-31 had thus thoroughly turned *both* the social and "spiritual" worlds of the boastful Corinthians upside down.

1.29 ὅπως μὴ καυχῆσθαι πᾶσα σὰρξ ἐνώπιον τοῦ θεοῦ. ("so that no one might boast in the presence of God.")

Boasting was another feature in Greco-Roman society, which was closely associated with power, wealth and status. Aristotle discussed it in *Rhetoric* (1360b-1362a; 1366a-b). Besides the first virtue of *prudence*, Cicero considered the following external attributes as praiseworthy: "public office, money, connexions by marriage, high birth, friends, country, power" (*Inv.* 2.59.177). Quintilian included wealth, power, and influence as key subjects for praise (3.7.14). Philo took note of "silver, gold, honour, office, beautiful body" (*Virt.* 187-226).

Here in 1.29 Paul clearly and solemnly reminded the self-conceited of the divine overtuning of social order “so that no one might boast in the presence of God.” The Greek ἵνα in 1.27 and 28 and ὅπως in 1.29 clearly suggested that what God had done was not only purposeful, it had also left absolutely no ground for any human boasting. “Boasting” was clearly a major Corinthian problem in church divisions. Such boasting seemed to be based on two factors. (1) Association with some particular charismatic leader or “hero”, and hence *right* relationship, which was very crucial to one’s standing in Greco-Roman society. (2) Their own personal “gifts” (χαρίσματα) and accomplishment, whether real or imagined.

For those who were spiritually perceptive and sensitive, to be ἐνώπιον τοῦ θεοῦ (“in the presence of God”) was a most awesome (even awful) and humbling thing. As such, only the badly misguided or self-conceited would dare to think about boasting, “in the presence of God”.

Horrell comments: “the symbolic order of the Pauline gospel expressed here stands in sharp contrast to the dominant symbolic order of Roman society. In the latter the poor are despised, and one’s value is determined by education, wealth and breeding. The cross, on the other hand, turns the world upside down and demonstrates God’s rejection of the world’s hierarchy....They experience a total transformation of their evaluation.”³⁵⁸

1.30 ἐξ αὐτοῦ δὲ ὑμεῖς ἐστε ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ, ὃς ἐγενήθη σοφία ἡμῖν ἀπὸ θεοῦ, δικαιοσύνη τε καὶ ἁγιασμός καὶ ἀπολύτρωσις, (“**He is the source of your life in Jesus Christ, who became for us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification**”)

³⁵⁸ Cf. 1.27-29. Horrell, *The Social Ethos*, 134.

and redemption,") 31 ἵνα καθὼς γέγραπται· ὁ καυχώμενος ἐν κυρίῳ καυχάσθω. (" in order that, as it is written, "Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord.")

God had not only shown Himself to be truly wise in His salvation through Christ crucified, especially in saving those who were humble and lowly; "He is [also] the source of your life in Jesus Christ" (1.30). In the statement that immediately followed, Paul was no longer talking about "wisdom" in abstraction, but in very concrete terms. Christ Jesus was here regarded almost like *personified* wisdom when Paul said that Christ Jesus ἐγενήθη σοφία ἡμῖν ἀπὸ θεοῦ ("became for us wisdom from God"). On this Barrett rightly comments: "thus Christ crucified himself becomes the personal figure of Wisdom, God's agent in creation (cf. 8.6), but especially God's means of restoring men to himself."³⁵⁹

But that was not all. For the Christians, Christ Jesus also became their δικαιοσύνη τε καὶ ἁγιασμὸς καὶ ἀπολύτρωσις ("righteousness and sanctification and redemption"). Since the main theme of the whole passage of 1.18-31 is "the message of the cross", the key theological term δικαιοσύνη ("righteousness") must be perceived in the whole context of Christ's sacrificial act on the cross; the act which made it possible for the Corinthian believers to stand before God as forgiven sinners. This point was very important for both Paul and the trouble-making Corinthians, because whatever problems Paul might have with them, he did not seem to have questioned their Christian *calling* and *identity*. Instead, Paul reminded them right from the beginning that they were "called to be saints" (κλητοῖς ἁγίοις, 1.2) and were "being saved" (1.18).

³⁵⁹ Barrett, *The First Epistle*, 60.

The word ἁγιασμός (“sanctification”) was also in the mind of Paul at the very beginning. The Corinthians, despite their many blemishes in their Christian faith and practice, were still regarded by Paul in 1.2 as having been ἡγιασμένοις ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ (“sanctified in Christ Jesus”). It was possible that Paul’s employment of this very important term here in 1.30 might be intended to remind the Corinthians of their very privileged status in Christ as well as to encourage them to lead a life that was fitting for those who had been set apart by God and for God. The third term ἀπολύτρωσις (“redemption”) with its rich imagery borrowed from the ancient slave trade, could quite easily cause one to remember the classic case of God’s liberation of Israel from the Egyptian bondage which had become the prototype of divine salvation in and through Christ crucified. The “words of institution” of the Lord’s Supper in 11.23-26 were clearly a solemn reminder of this.

Slightly earlier in 1.29 Paul left absolutely no ground for any human boasting. Here in 1.31 which is a concluding statement for the whole section of 1.18-31, he gave just a little room for the possibility of boasting. But such boasting could only be done ἐν κυρίῳ (“in the Lord”). 1.31 which is an adaptation of Jeremiah 9.23-24, fitted into the whole context of 1.18-31 very well, because Jeremiah 9.23 referred to the boasting of “the wise, the mighty, and the wealthy”: “thus says the Lord: do not let the wise boast in their wisdom, do not let the mighty boast in their might, do not let the wealthy boast in their wealth”. The verse could thus be appropriately applied to the boastful Corinthians in both social and spiritual terms. But Jeremiah actually said more than that in 9.24: “but let those who boast boast in this, that they understand and know me, that I am the LORD; I act with steadfast love, justice, and righteousness in the earth, for in these things I delight, says the LORD.” This verse from Jeremiah helps to provide a clearer context, not only for the original prophetic words, but also for Paul’s statement in 1.31.

In other words, for Jeremiah as well as for Paul, the only grounds for boasting could only be the LORD Himself and His work, and nothing else. Hays therefore thinks that 1.31 “emphatically precludes any possibility of gloating in human wisdom. It is God who is the source of salvation, God who deserves all the glory. There is no room for human self-assertion.”³⁶⁰

3.4 Conclusion

Paul was evidently dealing with some of the most crucial and complex issues in 1.18-31 in response to the perceived “foolishness” of “the message of the cross”. These issues included the most sought-after wisdom, power, and status in the Greco-Roman society. Methodologically Paul very skilfully employed the antithetical and paradoxical ways of speaking. He did it by first dethroning the “wisdom of the wise” by the perceived “foolishness” of “the message of the cross” and put in its place the power and wisdom of God, which had been revealed and demonstrated in and through “Christ crucified”. However, both the power and wisdom of God were not conceived by Paul in abstraction, because they were effectual for those who were “being saved”. Moreover, both the overturning of worldly wisdom and the salvation of those who had been called, were in God’s absolute sovereignty. It was God who had “made foolish the wisdom of the world” (1.20), and it was also him who had “decided” to save those who believed (1.21). As such, the dissolution of human wisdom was not an end in itself, but just the beginning of God’s saving grace.

The main problem with the self-conceited Corinthians was clearly that of boastfulness which was most probably the main contributing factor to their divisions. But Paul’s

³⁶⁰ Hays, *First Corinthians*, 33-4.

antithetical and paradoxical approach left them absolutely no grounds for any human boasting, because even by the worldly standard, or by their much cherished social ethos, “not many” of them were actually “wise”, “powerful”, and of “noble birth” (1.26). But here lies the great divine paradox: God chose what was “foolish” to shame the “wise”, the “weak” to shame the “strong”; and things that “were not”, to reduce to nothing things that “were” (1.27, 28). In the end, what was presented here by Paul in 1.18-31 was a revolution of immense proportions, and perhaps no inversion of the current social ethos could be more radical than that.

Having dethroned the wisdom of the world and reaffirmed God’s wisdom and power in His calling of those who were “being saved”, Paul concluded his response by reminding the Corinthians that Christ alone had now become “for” them, “wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification and redemption”, and perhaps everything. The Corinthians must now fully understand their *calling* and *identity* on this basis alone. And, if anyone dared to boast, let him or her “boast in (or of) the Lord”, but only on this basis.

PART II: RHETORIC, DELIVERY, BODY LANGUAGE AND MASCULINITY IN GRECO-ROMAN SOCIAL ETHOS

Chapter Four: Rhetoric, Delivery, Body Language and Masculinity

4.1 Introduction

Part I has sought to put Paul's "message of the cross" in the historico-social context of the Greco-Roman world. The study of crucifixion in antiquity and the concept of "noble death" in both Greco-Roman and Jewish traditions have shown why Paul's message was "foolishness" to the unbelieving Gentiles and "a stumbling block" to the Jews, and why Paul's message was such a drastic inversion of the social ethos of his time. The exegesis of 1 Cor. 1.18-31 has also been done in this context. The first chapter of Part II is to assess the place of rhetoric, especially delivery, which was a well established "body language" in Greco-Roman society. The main concern here is with rhetoric, with special reference to Paul's decision "to know nothing" among the Corinthians "except Jesus Christ, and him crucified" (2.2), and why his "speech and...proclamation" were "not with plausible words of wisdom" (2.3) when he came to Corinth. The study of Greco-Roman rhetoric would also help to answer the question why Paul's "bodily presence" and "speech", were perceived by his Corinthian critics to be "weak" and "contemptible" respectively (2 Cor. 10.10). This chapter will begin with the rediscovery of the importance of rhetoric in New Testament scholarship, especially in Corinthian studies. Reference will first be made to some modern scholars who have made significant contributions to the rediscovery. The main bulk of this chapter will be a study of some of the original texts of Greco-Roman writers on the theory and practice of ancient rhetoric, especially on delivery as "body language". This will be followed by an

exegesis of 1 Cor. 2.1-5 and 2 Cor. 10.10, passages which make best sense when they are put in the social context of rhetoric in the Greco-Roman world.

4.2 Importance of rhetoric rediscovered: A review of some scholarly views

For more than two decades now Greco-Roman rhetoric has been generally recognized as an essential key to the understanding of certain intriguing issues in the Corinthian correspondence, as the works of Barrett, Litfin, and others have shown.³⁶¹

Church "schism" in 1 Corinthians 1-4 has been an intriguing problem. Baur held that the early church was largely divided into two big camps led respectively by Paul and Cephas.³⁶² Weiss and Barrett also take Peter's influence on the Corinthian church seriously. Barrett sees clear allusions to this in his re-examination of passages such as 1 Cor. 1.12; 3.22; 9.5; 15.5.³⁶³ Since Paul was the founder of the Corinthian Church it is naturally far easier to assume the existence of a "Pauline" party. Based on the repeated occurrences of the name of Apollos, especially in relation to Paul (1.12; 3.4-6, 22; 4.6) together with the interesting description of Apollos in Acts (18.24-28), scholars have reasonably assumed that there was also a formidable "Apollos party" which seriously challenged the leadership of Paul. But scholars seem to search in vain for the "Christ party". In critical response to Baur, Johannes Munck only acknowledges the presence of certain "cliques" in the church.³⁶⁴ In view of the seriousness of the schism in the Corinthian Church, Munck's view might be an understatement. One tends to agree with James Dunn's view that "Munck probably went too far in his reaction to Baur. It seems hard to doubt that Paul was confronted by some sharp criticism if not outright

³⁶¹ Barrett, 'Cephas and Corinth', in *Essays on Paul* (London: SPCK, 1982), 28-39. See Introduction, n. 11.

³⁶² Baur, *Paul*, 1.269-81.

³⁶³ Barrett, 'Cephas', 28-39.

³⁶⁴ J. Munck, 'The Church without Factions: Studies in 1 Corinthians 1-4', in *Paul and the Salvation of Mankind* (London: SCM Press, 1959), 135-67.

opposition from within the church in Corinth. We need only think of the sharpness of his response in passages like 1.17; 3.1-3; 4.18-21; 8.1-3 and 11.16".³⁶⁵ A couple of verses are particularly worth mentioning here. 1 Cor. 4.3: "with me it is a very small thing that I should be judged by you". 9.3: "This is my defence to those who would examine me". These brief references are quite sufficient to show that very serious schism did exist in the Corinthian Church and that Paul evidently felt it warranted an equally serious response. Church schism was in fact the first problem he mentioned in 1 Corinthians (1.10-17), among the host of other problems.

In the last century, discussion on wisdom in 1 Cor. 1-4 has "fluctuated among three major hypotheses: attempts to explain the language and themes (particularly of chs. 1-4) in terms either of Gnosticism, or Hellenistic Judaism, or of rhetoric."³⁶⁶ This is obviously too vast an area for this thesis to enter into, except to take on the subject in relation to rhetoric which had a very direct bearing on the Corinthian controversy.

The word σοφία occurs sixteen times in 1 Cor. 1-3 alone, and once each in 1 Cor. 12.8 and 2 Cor. 1.12 respectively. The adjective σοφός follows a similar pattern and appears ten times in 1 Cor. 1-3, once in 6.5 without any technical meaning, and nowhere else in the two Corinthian letters. Unlike Wilckens who denies the existence of disharmony in the various uses of σοφία in 1 Cor. 1-3, Barrett is evidently right in asserting that "if there is no disharmony there is at least a good deal of polyphony".³⁶⁷ Barrett also rejects Wilckens' argument that Paul could not have been opposing a rhetorical expression because he knew nothing of the rhetorical styles of the formal philosophies. Again, as will be shown later in the study of rhetoric in the Greco-Roman tradition based primarily on ancient texts, Barrett is reasonable in thinking that Wilckens' assumption

³⁶⁵ Dunn, *1 Corinthians* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995), 32.

³⁶⁶ Dunn, *1 Corinthians*, 34.

³⁶⁷ Barrett, 'Christianity', 7.

simply ignores the historical fact that rhetoric was very much part of the life and life-style in Paul's time.³⁶⁸ Barrett also has the backing of the research results of scholars like Litfin, Welborn, Pogoloff, and Mitchell on the subject.

This thesis believes Paul had good reason to be familiar with traditional Greco-Roman rhetoric, and the exegesis of 1 Cor. 1.18-31 quite clearly indicates that Paul was rather accomplished in his rhetorical skill, judging from his response to the controversial issues of "wisdom" and "power" in very impressive antithetical and paradoxical style.

Barrett has divided the meaning of σοφία into the good and bad categories, but warns against drawing the lines too sharply. He holds that there is a group of passages where σοφία denotes "a kind of eloquence, a technique for persuading the hearer" and it is "harmless" in itself. It only becomes "vicious" when it comes to rely on "human device and artifice, and not on the divine power resident in Christ crucified and transferred by the Spirit to the preaching which has Christ crucified as its theme".³⁶⁹ This kind of σοφία belongs to the "bad" category and Paul refused to adopt it when he first preached to the Corinthians (see especially 1 Cor. 1.17; 2.1). For Paul, to do so would be tantamount to providing a "substitute" for "Christ crucified", which was the real worry of Paul.³⁷⁰ For the apostle, "Christ crucified" alone, was "the power of God and the wisdom of God" (1.23, 24).

Part 1 of Litfin's book is on the rhetorical background of 1 Cor. 1-4. He is convinced of the pervasive and powerful place of rhetoric in first century Greco-Roman society, and believes that for the majority of the population it was a kind of "commodity", with a

³⁶⁸ Barrett, 'Christianity', 7.

³⁶⁹ Barrett, 'Christianity', 8.

³⁷⁰ Paul used expressions such as "the wisdom of the world" (1.20), "the wisdom of men" (2.5), "wisdom of this age or of the rulers of this age" (2.6), "human wisdom" (2.13) and "the wisdom of this world" (3.19) to describe the human "substitute" for "Christ crucified".

small number being the “producers” and the rest, consumers.³⁷¹ For Litfin, the impact of this pervasive Greco-Roman rhetorical tradition on Paul and the Corinthians was unquestionable. He elaborates: “the Corinthians of the early Christian era...loved and rewarded *logos* and *sophia*...[and] had not the slightest compunction about standing in judgement over the speakers who came before them”.³⁷²

Litfin’s view on rhetoric, whether in ancient Greco-Roman tradition or with special reference to the Corinthian context, is generally sound. There may, however, be some problem with his assessment of Paul’s *modus operandi*. It is true that in the Corinthian context Paul was committed to proclaiming the crucified Christ which Litfin regards as the “fixed and unchanged” message, a “constant”.³⁷³ Litfin is also quite right in pointing out that Greco-Roman rhetoric was often used to achieve the orator’s desired self-seeking goal through the process of “adaptation”, and thereby in danger of compromising integrity and basic principles. However, even Litfin agrees that “for the majority of ancient rhetors this [self-seeking goal] was not the sole consideration.”³⁷⁴ That being the case, there seems to be no compelling reason to think that Paul, who has been assumed by Litfin to be familiar with Greco-Roman rhetoric, had not also used the art skilfully (but not craftily) in order to achieve his noble goal. Judging from his well-reasoned argument and its eloquence in his response to the “wisdom” issue in 1 Cor. 1-4, it is hard to believe that Paul had not in fact made skilful use of the Greco-Roman rhetoric of his day.

Welborn begins by pointing out that scholars before World War II tended to overlook or deliberately by-pass the “political” aspect of the Corinthian factions and interpreted

³⁷¹ Litfin, *Proclamation*, 132.

³⁷² Litfin, *Proclamation*, 146.

³⁷³ Litfin, *Proclamation*, 248.

³⁷⁴ Litfin, *Proclamation*, 246.

them largely in terms of “Hellenistic mystery religions and syncretistic gnosis”.³⁷⁵ This thesis is inclined to think that Welborn is right in his observation here. Welborn finds it impossible not to have the impression that Paul described the situation in the [Corinthian] church “in terms like those used to characterize conflicts within city-states by Greco-Roman historians”.³⁷⁶ For example, Paul spoke first of σχίσματα in 1 Cor. 1.10. Besides σχίσμα, Welborn also refers to other similarly important terms such as ἔρις (1.11); ζήλος (3.3); μερίς (1.13) etc. and their uses in the ancient Greco-Roman world. He cites numerous classical examples and draws parallels between the ancient Greco-Roman world and the Corinthian situation. He is convinced about politics and rhetoric being the key to unlock the “wisdom” mystery in 1 Cor. 1-4, and is prepared to say dogmatically: “It is no longer necessary to argue against the position that the conflict which evoked 1 Corinthians 1-4 was essentially theological in character. The attempt to identify the parties with the views and practices condemned elsewhere in the epistle, as if the parties represented different positions in a dogmatic controversy, has collapsed under its own weight”.³⁷⁷ This thesis takes the view that while it is unwise to treat the Corinthian conflict only or essentially in terms of “dogmatic controversy”, one is not so sure, as Welborn has so strongly held, that the issues in 1 Corinthians 1-4 were just *political* and *rhetorical*. This is because in the Corinthian context, what are political and rhetorical to Welborn could hardly be entirely separated from the *theological*. For instance, was not the most serious and disturbing issue of church divisions (σχίσματα) also the result of a very grave theological failure to recognize that the church was the one undivided “body” (σῶμα) of Christ? Even granted that those politically minded Corinthians were not aware of the serious theological implications of their divisions and conflict, Paul himself certainly was keenly aware of them. This is clearly reflected in the questions he posed before them: “has Christ been divided? Was Paul crucified for you?

³⁷⁵ Welborn, ‘Corinth’, 86.

³⁷⁶ Welborn, ‘Corinth’, 86.

³⁷⁷ Welborn, ‘Corinth’, 88.

Or were you baptized in the name of Paul?" (1 Cor. 1.13) As such, would it not be better to suggest that in the Corinthian situation politics, rhetoric and theology were closely related and intermixed?

Welborn is so eager to draw close, even exact parallels, between ancient city-states and the Corinthian situation on the issues of socio-political conflict as well as on socio-economic inequality and class divisions³⁷⁸ that he is prepared to make an unqualified statement that "Paul's goal in 1 Corinthians 1-4 is not the refutation of heresy but what Plutarch describes as the object of the art of politics - the prevention of *stasis*".³⁷⁹ I readily agree with Welborn that "the prevention of *stasis*" was Paul's "goal". But how did Paul try to achieve that "goal"? By simply resorting to "lofty words of wisdom" (2.1) as the sophists and others were doing? There is no denying that Paul probably did skilfully use some such rhetorical "methods" in his response to the wisdom issue. But as a responsible pastor and *theologian* it is hard to imagine that he would not be equally concerned with *theological substance* as a real answer to the Corinthian problem. Perhaps this is a matter of definition and perception. Without being dogmatic about it one tends to think that what the Corinthians did according to 1 Cor. 1-4 was most unacceptable, i.e., their unduly strong attachment to particular leaders as their "heroes"; setting up one particular "leader" against others so as to tear the church apart, as if Christ himself could be divided; glorifying human wisdom out of proportion etc. Had Paul not considered the thinking and practice of the Corinthians "wrong" and thus *theological* in the ultimate sense, he probably would not have responded to the issue with the "wisdom of God" and "Christ crucified" which are clearly *theological* motifs.

³⁷⁸ Welborn, 'Corinth', 93-101

³⁷⁹ Welborn, 'Corinth', 89-90.

To put it simply, Paul probably had skilfully employed the rhetorical *method* (“form”) to convey his *theology* (the real “substance”). I am glad that Welborn finally recognizes Paul’s *theological* interpretation in his conclusion:

It is Paul’s intention in 1 Corinthians 1-4 not merely to put an end to dissension but to transform the Corinthians’ understanding of the conflict. The strife of the factions is no petty quarrel, no *Cliquenstreit*, but a mirror of the cosmic conflict between the rulers of the age and the power of God. *The theological interpretation that the apostle gives to the struggle is obviously designed to turn the Corinthian Christians away from politics* (italics not original). The fate of the community does not rest upon precepts of statecraft, but upon the word of the cross. Thus, its members need not look to political leaders, but can await redemption from God.³⁸⁰

Such being the case, as Welborn himself has so clearly put it in his conclusion, a reasonable and balanced position is to take the Corinthian controversy as sociological (or, in Welborn’s own words, in terms of politics and rhetoric) as well as theological.

Pogoloff has attempted a fresh reading of 1 Cor. 1-4 based on “three currents” in present NT scholarship.³⁸¹ These three currents are interrelated and they represent “a major shift in interpretative stance”. The first and foremost current is a “rediscovery of and renewed appreciation for ancient rhetoric” which no longer regards “rhetoric” narrowly in terms of “style” and hence “mere rhetoric”. The rediscovery now clearly shows that rhetoric affected virtually all Greco-Roman culture and practically every level of society, including early Christianity. The second current is found in the “renewed interest in social factors”, such as social status which had to be constantly maintained through fierce competition and boasting etc. Pogoloff believes this would allow “a fresh look at 1 Corinthians”. The third current is in the “change in hermeneutical theory”. Unlike the old, the new “rhetorical criticism” enables the interpreter to use the texts as both literary and historical. And the point of “intersection” between the two is the rhetorical. On the whole Pogoloff’s understanding of rhetoric in the socio-political context of ancient

³⁸⁰ Welborn, ‘Corinth’, 109.

³⁸¹ Pogoloff, *Logos*, 1-3.

Greco-Roman world is quite similar to Welborn's. Pogoloff's emphasis is on the social and cultural factors which "enflesh Paul's language".³⁸² Again, like those who are keen to promote rhetoric in NT studies, Pogoloff also has the tendency to downplay the importance of doctrinal and theological concerns in 1 Cor. 1-4. He readily assumes that in 1 Corinthians "Paul is addressing an exigence of the ethical dimensions of division, not doctrinal divergence".³⁸³ One is uncomfortable with Pogoloff's rather artificial separation between the "ethical" and the "doctrinal". In fact, Pogoloff himself has also clearly observed that "Paul is responding not to division itself, but to the "values" which lie behind them".³⁸⁴ But what are "the values which lie behind"? Whatever they might be, they must somehow be relevant to Christian *doctrines*. Moreover, as Pogoloff himself has rightly observed, "to persuade the Corinthians to change their values and behavior, Paul appeals to the narrative of community origins. In this narrative, Paul founded the community by preaching to them about the crucified Christ".³⁸⁵ By "community origins" and "crucified Christ" Pogoloff obviously has in mind the Christian "calling" in 1 Cor. 1.26-30 and the gospel message of Paul which had Christ's crucifixion at its very centre in 1.23; 2.2. In case the position of this thesis has given the unintended impression of being unfair to Pogoloff whose insights regarding rhetoric it actually appreciates, let part of his conclusion be quoted approvingly here:

Paul insists that modeling the church on such attitudes and behaviors of the outside world betrays the heart of the gospel. Christians...should not divide themselves from one another, because Christ suffered and died and rose again equally for all. The persuasiveness of Paul's message is not to be attributed to the status of rhetorical skill (even if he has it), but to the authority he derives from his master. This authority he not only speaks but acts in suffering, a humble attitude he enjoins the Corinthians to imitate.³⁸⁶

³⁸² Pogoloff, *Logos*, 3.

³⁸³ Pogoloff, *Logos*, 104.

³⁸⁴ Pogoloff, *Logos*, 119.

³⁸⁵ Pogoloff, *Logos*, 119.

³⁸⁶ Pogoloff, *Logos*, 14.

For Mitchell “1 Corinthians is a unified deliberative letter which throughout urges unity on the divided Corinthian church.”³⁸⁷ Through exegetical investigation of the language and composition of the text, Mitchell concludes that Paul’s political terms and *topoi* in 1 Corinthians were commonplace in Greco-Roman political texts concerning concord and factionalism. Her focus is thus on the “political” nature of 1 Corinthians.³⁸⁸ In Mitchell’s view, however, Paul’s rhetoric of reconciliation in 1 Corinthians was a failure on at least two grounds. First of all, it seems rather clear from 2 Corinthians that “Paul’s rhetorical strategy of appealing to himself as the respected example to be imitated was not well received at Corinth, but was instead negatively interpreted as Paul’s ‘self-recommendation.’” Secondly, as a deliberative argument for concord, Paul’s 1 Corinthians was an inherently risky undertaking. Instead of reuniting the Corinthian factions, Paul seems, by his argument in this letter, to have ‘incurred the enmity of both.’”³⁸⁹ But Mitchell has also pointed out at the same time that despite its “inaugural failure”, 1 Corinthians remained a very important and popular document for appeals for church unity and reconciliation.³⁹⁰

Winter’s study on the sophistic movements in the early Roman Empire in Alexandria and Corinth has convinced him that “the Pauline letters to Corinth...contain information which is not found elsewhere on the first-century sophistic movement.”³⁹¹ Winter thinks that those Corinthians who were united in their support for Apollos were hoping that the rhetorically skilful orator would help establish their social prestige in this Roman city (1 Cor. 16.12), and that “their choice of the ‘speaking’ Apollos over the ‘writing’ Paul reflects a long-standing preference that goes back to the days of Isocrates.”³⁹² Winter

³⁸⁷ Mitchell, *Reconciliation*, 296.

³⁸⁸ Mitchell, *Reconciliation*, 300.

³⁸⁹ Mitchell, *Reconciliation*, 303.

³⁹⁰ Mitchell, *Reconciliation*, 303-4.

³⁹¹ Winter, *Philo*, 232.

³⁹² Winter, *Philo*, 241.

has thus made a significant observation that the Corinthian correspondence “reflects the spirit of the age of the early Roman Empire, for the public orator was clearly in the ascendancy.”³⁹³

The above review of some of the scholarly views has shown that while there has been a consensus among modern scholars concerning the importance of the re-discovery of Greco-Roman rhetoric for Corinthian studies, it is also clear that this important re-discovery has also led scholars to various directions and conclusions. While this thesis duly recognizes these scholars’ respective contributions to the understanding of Greco-Roman rhetoric, one particularly important aspect, namely, its delivery, or “body language”, does not seem to have been taken seriously enough by these scholars. This thesis will try to show that delivery, which was conveyed by powerful “body language” in Greco-Roman rhetoric, was crucial in the opponents’ criticism of Paul as well as in the apostle’s *apologia*.

4.3 Rhetoric in Greco-Roman Culture

4.3.1 Rhetoric as oral culture in Greco-Roman society: An overview

In *Gorgias*, Plato defined rhetoric as “the artificer of persuasion” (πειθοῦς δημιουργός).³⁹⁴ Tamsyn Barton suggests that “the appreciation of the magical power of rhetoric appears as a theme at least as early as the fifth century BC. It is a leitmotif in Platonic discussions of rhetoric, where rhetoricians are often confuted as conjurers.”³⁹⁵ Aristotle defined rhetoric as “the faculty of discovering the possible means of

³⁹³ Winter, *Philo*, 241.

³⁹⁴ Plato, *Gorg.* 453a.

³⁹⁵ Tamsyn S. Barton, ‘Physionomics: *Voir, Savoir, Pouvoir*’, in *Power and Knowledge: Astrology, Physiognomics, and Medicine under the Roman Empire* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1994), 95-131, at 97. *Gorgias*, *Hel.* 10. Plato, *Euthyd.* 288B-C; *Protag.* 315A.

persuasion.”³⁹⁶ Isocrates described Πειθώ as goddess by whom an orator could share her power (δύναμις) through eloquence.³⁹⁷ Quintilian regarded rhetoric as “the science of speaking well (*bene dicendi scientia*)”.³⁹⁸ Rhetoric involved both theory and practice. Some prefer to use the term “oratory” with reference to the actual speech and “rhetoric” to indicate the theory or technique of speaking.³⁹⁹

The main feature of Greek rhetoric was obviously *oral* expression with particular concern for clarity, vigour, and beauty by the standard of the classical Greek mind. Ancient Greek society relied heavily on *oral* expression. Although literacy was already extensive in Athens in the fifth and fourth centuries BC, reading and writing were still quite difficult, regardless of the materials used, whether stone, bronze, clay, wood, wax, or papyrus. Oral expression thus remained most primary and common. Whether reading to a small group or just simply to himself alone a Greek man was quite accustomed to reading *aloud*.⁴⁰⁰ It is quite well known that the Homeric poems and a great deal of ancient Greek drama first existed *orally* before they were committed to formal writing. Speech, or oral delivery, did not lose its special significance even when the original oral literature became written. Oratory was also used a great deal in ancient philosophy both in the teaching of logical method and for the exposition of ideas and doctrines as well as for engagement in dialogues.⁴⁰¹ Even letters often sounded very much like speeches, as was the case with certain New Testament documents. In Colossians 4.16, for example, special instruction was given for the letter to be read in the church of the Laodiceans, and similarly, for the Laodicean letter to be read in Colossae. Besides letters and other written works, Greek oratory had a very broad coverage to include philosophical

³⁹⁶ Aristotle, *Rhet.* 1355b 2.

³⁹⁷ Isocrates, *Antid.* 323

³⁹⁸ Quintilian 2.15.34.

³⁹⁹ Kennedy, *The Art of Persuasion in Greece* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1963), 9.

⁴⁰⁰ Kennedy, *Persuasion*, 3-4.

⁴⁰¹ Kennedy, *Persuasion*, 4-6.

writings, sermons, political pamphlets, educational treatises, funeral encomiums, as well as other intellectual exercises. In Greek oratory the *form*, especially its *oral delivery*, was just as important as its *substance*, and often more so.⁴⁰² This will become evident in the study of classical texts later in this chapter.

Due to the very prominent role of oratory in ancient literary activities, it is not surprising that literary criticism was essentially rhetorical in reality. Oratory often became the centre of attention; even the structure, approach, standards, and terminology of literary criticism were largely borrowed from the rhetorical schools.⁴⁰³ All these and other relevant factors naturally contributed to the development of Greco-Roman oratory as well as its firmly established place in the whole intellectual life and civilization of the Greco-Roman world in antiquity.

As the eloquence and power of oratory would be quite meaningless without the hearer or audience, Greco-Roman rhetoric could also be said to be very *audience-centered*. From very ancient time the Greeks had been intuitively drawn to human eloquence. They revelled in it and were most delighted in being swept away by it. They had so much expectation from the eloquence of the speakers that they could suddenly become hostile toward the speakers who failed to satisfy them.⁴⁰⁴ In the words of Litfin, they seemed to want to be “lifted up and carried out of themselves by the sheer power of eloquent words.”⁴⁰⁵

Plato was anxious that persuasion could be accomplished διὰ ῥώμην λόγου (“by the

⁴⁰² Kennedy, *Persuasion*, 6-7.

⁴⁰³ Kennedy, *Persuasion*, 7-8.

⁴⁰⁴ Cf. Plato, *Protag.* 319B-323A; Xenophon, *Mem.* 3.6.1.

⁴⁰⁵ Litfin, *Proclamation*, 35.

power of words”).⁴⁰⁶ On another occasion, Plato used the term δύναμις to describe the λόγου δύναμις (“function of speech”).⁴⁰⁷ In Aristotle’s rhetoric, the term ρώμη was replaced by δύναμις, which was often translated as “faculty,” “capacity”,⁴⁰⁸ but the essential meaning of “power” was never lost. Quintilian used the Latin term *vis* which was the equivalent of the Greek δύναμις to describe rhetoric as the power of persuasion.⁴⁰⁹

According to conventional theory and practice Greek rhetoric consisted of five major parts, namely, invention, arrangement, style, memory and delivery. (1) Invention (εὑρεσις, *inventio*) was mainly concerned with the subject matter and its relevant questions in preparation for the appropriate arguments to be used in proof or refutation. (2) Arrangement (τάξις, *dispositio*) involved the careful and formal organization of a speech into parts. (3) Style (λέξις, *elocutio*) was based on the so-called “four virtues”, i.e., correctness, clarity, ornamentation, and propriety. (4) Memory (μνήμη, *memoria*) was concerned with “mnemonic devices”. (5) Delivery (ὑπόκρισις, *actio*) dealt with the rules for the control of the voice and other bodily gestures of the orator.⁴¹⁰

Historically, rhetoric seemed to have arisen largely to serve democracy, for example, in Sicily and Greece, and especially at Athens, and its main concern was largely with civil questions. Of the three basic elements in speech which had been identified by Aristotle (*Rhetoric* 1358a 38) – speech, speaker, and audience – the first was often compromised due to its preoccupation with the last two. This point is particularly significant for this thesis, because, as will be seen later in chapter 5, Paul’s primary concern was clearly with the *content* of the speech itself, namely, “the message of the cross”, and not with

⁴⁰⁶ Plato, *Phaedr.* 267A.

⁴⁰⁷ Plato, *Phaedr.* 271D.

⁴⁰⁸ Aristotle, *Rhet.* 1356a 2; 1362b 14.

⁴⁰⁹ Quintilian 2.15.3-4.

⁴¹⁰ Kennedy, *Persuasion*, 10-2.

“lofty words or wisdom” (1 Cor. 2.1) or “plausible words of wisdom” (2. 4). Moreover, as a “speaker” or “orator”, Paul confessed openly that he did not come to Corinth with the strength and self-confidence which were expected of his Greco-Roman counterpart, but “in weakness and in fear and in much trembling” (2.3). The meaning and implications of Paul’s self-confession (or strategy) can only be appreciated in the context of Greco-Roman rhetoric.

Rhetoric underwent its greatest development in the Hellenistic period. The first complete handbook is the *Rhetorica ad Herennium*, an anonymous first-century BC treatise once attributed to Cicero largely because Cicero’s early *De inventione rhetorica* paralleled part of it. Traditional theory is found in Cicero’s later works *De Oratore* and *Orator*, as well as *Partitiones Oratoriae*. The same is also true in the writings of Dionysius of Halicarnassus and the elder Seneca. But the most complete expression is found in Quintilian’s *Institutio Oratoria*.⁴¹¹

4.3.2 Rhetoric as core education (παιδεία)

After learning how to read and write, together with some arithmetic, musical and gymnastic training, a Greek boy at the age of about fourteen would be sent to the school of the rhetorician for formal theoretical instruction in public speaking. This was most likely to be continued for the rest of his life. The sophists also adopted instruction in public speaking as an important part of their education.⁴¹²

There has been controversy over the role of sophists in the development of Greco-Roman rhetoric, a topic that deserves a brief comment here. The sophists were often

⁴¹¹ Kennedy, *Persuasion*, 13.

⁴¹² Kennedy, *Persuasion*, 7.

portrayed as professional educators but not philosophers, who educated young men for high fees. Plato thus despised the sophists who "profess to be teachers of virtue and advertise themselves as the common teachers of the Greeks, and are ready to instruct anyone who chooses in return for fees charged on a fixed scale."⁴¹³ Plato distinguished himself from the sophists, because for him, the true philosophers only sought truth and knowledge. Plato's rival was Isocrates, the well known sophist who put great emphasis on the *social value* of persuasive rhetorical presentation. Kennedy appreciates Isocrates' contribution to rhetoric: "Sophistry had a bad name with many critics....But sophistry, like rhetoric itself, is not necessarily depraved, decadent, or in poor taste. It is that natural aspect of rhetoric which emphasizes the role of the speaker and the process of learning to speak or to write primarily by imitation of models....Sophistry is also one place within the rhetorical system where allowance is made for genius and inspiration, something which technical handbooks cannot create."⁴¹⁴ Donald Clark points out that "from the beginning there were three characteristic and divergent views on rhetoric. There was the moral philosophical view of Plato, who condemned rhetoric because it seemed to him to deal with appearances, opinion, and pleasure whereas it ought to deal with reality, truth, and the good life. There was the philosophical scientific view of Aristotle, who tried to see the thing as in itself it really was, who endeavoured to devise a theory of rhetoric without moral praise or blame for it. There was, finally, the practical educational view of the rhetoricians from Isocrates to Cicero to Quintilian, who praised rhetoric, practised it, and taught it as an essential attribute of the free citizen in a civilized society."⁴¹⁵

⁴¹³ Plato, *Men.* 91B. Cf. *Euthyd.* 271C-272B; *Rep.* 495E-96A.

⁴¹⁴ Kennedy, *Classical Rhetoric*, 39-40.

⁴¹⁵ Donald L. Clark, *Rhetoric in Greco-Roman Education* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1957), 24-5.

Plato's Academy came under considerable influence of Greek rhetoric and was responsible for Aristotle's decision to teach rhetoric. During this period of time rhetoric was regarded as the most certain way to fame and success. For centuries the orator was a powerful and attractive icon. In a society of very diverse ideas and competing philosophies, rhetoric was perhaps the only learned discipline which provided a common basis for education.⁴¹⁶

In view of the crucial role that rhetoric occupied in both education and the intellectual life of Greco-Roman society, it was only natural that most of the philosophical schools had rhetorical training in their core curriculum (Quintilian 3.1.15 and 12.2.23 ff). Philosophical interest in the great art of rhetoric might have also been prompted by the practical needs to attract disciples.⁴¹⁷ The immediate successors of Aristotle, Theophrastus and to a lesser extent Demetrius, had made some significant advances in rhetorical theory and practice.⁴¹⁸

Pogoloff argues convincingly that "through rhetorical education and the general use of speech, the culture itself became rhetorical."⁴¹⁹ Similarly, Henri Marrou thinks that rhetorical παιδεία should be placed at the very centre of any genuine picture of Hellenistic civilization.⁴²⁰ Such views are consistent with what Isocrates (436-338 BC) had stated in the fourth century BC concerning the great importance of rhetorical education in his own time. It is worth quoting him at some length here:

Beautiful and artistic speech...is the work of an intelligent mind. [Athens] knew that whether men have been liberally educated from their earliest years . . . is made manifest most of all by their speech, and that this has proved itself to be the surest sign of culture [παιδεύσις] in every one of us, and that those that are

⁴¹⁶ Kennedy, *Persuasion*, 271.

⁴¹⁷ Kennedy, *Persuasion*, 272.

⁴¹⁸ Kennedy, *Persuasion*, 272-3.

⁴¹⁹ Pogoloff, *Logos*, 48.

⁴²⁰ H. I. Marrou, *A History of Education in Antiquity*, trans. George Lamb (New York: Sheed & Ward, 1956), 49.

skilled in speech are not only men of power in their own cities but are also held in honour in other states. And so far has our city distanced the rest of mankind in thought and in speech that her pupils have become the teachers of the rest of the world; and she has brought it about that the name "Hellenes" [Ἑλλήνων] suggests no longer a race but an intelligence, and that the title "Hellenes" is applied rather to those who share our culture [παιδεύσεως] than to those who share a common blood.⁴²¹

Litfin is right in noting that Isocrates' use of the term "Hellenes" no longer signified merely an ethnic group or a race but could in a broader sense, denote a διάνοια, a way of thinking "which venerated wisdom and eloquence as man's highest achievement, a way of thinking shared by men of intelligence wherever Greek culture had spread."⁴²² Clark concludes that "in the Greco-Roman schools education was almost exclusively education in rhetoric, which the ancients considered an adequate preparation for the life of free men."⁴²³ Marrou points out that "throughout the Hellenistic and Roman period, the normal form taken by Greek culture at its highest level was that of eloquence."⁴²⁴ Again, like the rest in Greco-Roman society, the Corinthians' preoccupation with rhetoric and those social values closely associated with it should also be perceived from this educational background and historico-social perspective.

4.3.3 The preoccupation with delivery ("body language") in Greco-Roman rhetoric

Delivery in Greek was ὑποκρίσις, which originally meant "the playing of a part". The word derived from ὑποκρίνεσθαι, a verb which was used very early to describe an actor's response to the chorus in Greek tragedy. The word for "responding" or "acting" soon came to mean "delivering a speech." Similarly, the word for actor, ὑποκριτής, was

⁴²¹ Isocrates, *Panegy.* 48-50.

⁴²² Litfin, *Proclamation*, 74.

⁴²³ Clark, *Rhet.* 65.

⁴²⁴ Marrou, 'Education and Rhetoric', in M. I. Finley (ed.), *The Legacy of Greece* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1981), 185-201, at 195.

mainly used to denote the task of the speaker.⁴²⁵ According to Philodemus, “much of delivery is the natural and unconscious bodily expression of the emotions. Delivery depends, too, on natural endowment, beauty of voice, grace of body, self-possession [self-confidence], qualities the lack of which caused Isocrates to refrain from public appearances. But Demosthenes said that delivery was the first thing in oratory, and the second and the third, and actors say that it is everything in their art.”⁴²⁶ In his *Demosthenes*, Plutarch mentioned Demosthenes who was challenged by the tragic actor Andronicus because Andronicus thought that Demosthenes’ words were excellent but his delivery was deficient.⁴²⁷ Philodemus noted that “although Demosthenes was in the first rank of rhetors, still he is criticized by Aeschines for his shrill voice, and again for loudness, and by Demetrius of Phalerum for being too theatrical, and not simple and noble in his delivery.”⁴²⁸ In the Greco-Roman tradition all the theories and practices of rhetoric were finally put to the test in *delivery*, so that delivery became almost synonymous with rhetoric itself.

Rhetoric in Latin literature was largely based on its Greek predecessor. The Romans began to appreciate the importance of the great art of persuasion around the late third century BC when their city became a powerful state in the Mediterranean.⁴²⁹ Before that the status of a Roman citizen in society was largely depended upon family prestige and wealth as well as personal authority and power.

The basic word for speech in Latin was *oratio*, which Cicero (*Off.* 1.132) subdivided into *contentio* (debate), and *sermo* (conversation). The original function of a Roman

⁴²⁵ Ray Nadeau, ‘Delivery in Ancient Times: Homer to Quintilian’, *QJS* 50 (1964), 53-60, at 53.

⁴²⁶ Philodemus, *De Rhetorica*, trans. H. M. Hubbell, ‘The Rhetorica of Philodemus’, *CAAS* 23 (1920), 243-382, at 301.

⁴²⁷ Plutarch, *Mor.* 845B. Cf. *Lives, Demosthenes* 7. This comment sounds very similar to Paul’s opponents’ opinion about the apostle (2 Cor. 10.10).

⁴²⁸ Hubbell, ‘Philodemus’, 301.

⁴²⁹ Kennedy, *Rhetoric*, 4.

orator was basically that of a performer in official religious or political functions, primarily as a senator or lawyer, but in the last two centuries of the republic the word had acquired new meanings. Rhetoric in Latin was basically derived from the Greek term *rhetorice*, or the more Latinized *rhetorica* (Quintilian 2.14), and the word *eloquentia*⁴³⁰ was sometime used to refer to *ars dicendi*, “art of speaking”.⁴³¹

Actio, *agere*, and *actor* in Latin meant acting, to act, and actor respectively. All three also meant the delivery of a speech, to speak, and speaker. The Romans also used *pronuntiatio* frequently for delivery, and *pronuntiare* for the verb form and, less frequently, *pronuntiator* as the noun. These words, too, had their theatrical background, especially with reference to reciting and declaiming. Thus for most people in antiquity, public and social activities such as the delivering of a speech, the presenting of a declamation, and the reciting of poetry as well as the playing of a part on stage in drama etc., all had a lot in common.⁴³²

Full details on delivery, involving the use of whole human body, were repeatedly given in the following writings: Theophrastus; *Rhetorica ad Herennium*; Cicero’s *De Oratore*; and Quintilian’s *Institutio Oratoria*. This study will begin with Aristotle because, although he didn’t discuss delivery in details, he did lay the foundation for all subsequent discussion of rhetoric.

4.3.3.1 Aristotle (384-322 BC)

Aristotle was one of the Greek pioneers who made delivery one of the basic elements of the art of rhetoric (*Rhet.* 1403b 1-5). He held that proofs (πίστεις) were effected by

⁴³⁰ Ramsey MacMullen, *Enemies of the Roman Order* (Cambridge; Harvard, 1966), 15.

⁴³¹ Kennedy, *Rhetoric*, 7.

⁴³² Nadeau, ‘Delivery’, 53.

three means which formed the core of rhetoric: character (ἥθος), emotion (πάθος), and logical reasoning (λόγος).⁴³³ In addition to the above three means of persuasion, there were also other qualities which were expected of the good orator in order to effectively convince his audience: good sense (φρόνησις, way of thinking, intelligence), virtue (ἀρετή), and goodwill (εὐνοία, enthusiasm).⁴³⁴

According to Aristotle, “emotions are all those affections which cause men to change their opinion in regard to their judgements, and are accompanied by pleasure and pain; such are anger, pity, fear, and all similar emotions and their contraries.”⁴³⁵ This was how Aristotle described the “object” of rhetoric: “But since the object of rhetoric is judgement - for judgements are pronounced in deliberative rhetoric and judicial proceedings are a judgement - it is not only necessary to consider how to make the speech itself demonstrative and convincing [ἀποδεικτικὸς καὶ πιστός], but also that the speaker should show himself to be of a certain character and should know how to put the judge into a certain frame of mind.”⁴³⁶

Generally, Aristotle, like Socrates before him, had quite consistently accepted eloquence based on knowledge. While recognizing the special need for emotions especially in the peroration (1419b 10ff), depth of knowledge was more important in successful speaking (1354a14 ff and 1354b 21ff). This naturally leads to the next point which is logical reasoning. Aristotle consistently insisted that the logical side of rhetorical theory and practice were crucial, and that there were two kinds of logical proof: “(1) deductive- the enthymeme; (2) inductive- the example.”⁴³⁷ Rhetorical speech should also be concerned with “purity” which was the foundation of style. Purity

⁴³³ Aristotle, *Rhet.* 1356a 7; *Eth. nic.* 1094a-b.

⁴³⁴ Aristotle, *Rhet.* 1378a 5-7.

⁴³⁵ Aristotle, *Rhet.* 1378a 8.

⁴³⁶ Aristotle, *Rhet.* 1378a 2-3.

⁴³⁷ Freese, xxxii.

consisted of five rules: (1) The usage of the correct Greek language. (2) Impressiveness or loftiness of style. (3) Propriety in the echo from audience, the character of the speaker, the nature of the subject. (4) Avoiding of rhythmic prose. (5) The use of graphic language to paint things before the eyes of the audience.⁴³⁸

As logical reasoning was ultimately a matter for the listener or audience to judge, Aristotle was well aware of the significant role of the audience as judge, since “the object of Rhetoric is judgement.”⁴³⁹ However, Aristotle disapproved of using rhetoric wrongly just for the sake of securing good judgement from the audience: “For it is wrong to warp...feelings, to rouse...anger, jealousy, or compassion, which would be like making the rule crooked which one intended to use.”⁴⁴⁰

Greco-Roman audiences clearly understood their role as judge and took such a role most seriously. They enjoyed not only the power of oratory, but also their own power as listeners, especially in their judgement or evaluation of the speaker. This point about the audience being a “judge” was most relevant to the Corinthian context, because, not only did Paul’s Corinthian critics know their role well, they had also apparently played such a role in relation to Paul. This point will be dealt with in the exegesis of the relevant Corinthian passages.

4.3.3.2 Theophrastus (c. 370-c. 285 BC)

Theophrastus, a pupil of Aristotle, once lectured to as many as two thousand students at once and gave particular attention to the technique of speaking,⁴⁴¹ especially body

⁴³⁸ Aristotle, *Rhet.* 1404a 4.

⁴³⁹ Aristotle, *Rhet.* 1378a 2.

⁴⁴⁰ Aristotle, *Rhet.* 1354a 5. Cf. 1355a 12.

⁴⁴¹ Diogenes Laertius 5.37.

gestures (Athenaeus 1.21AB).⁴⁴² It is therefore not surprising that Theophrastus' influence on rhetoric was greatest in the areas of style and delivery. There were "four virtues" in delivery according to Theophrastus:⁴⁴³ purity (ἑλληνισμός, *purus et Latinus*),⁴⁴⁴ clarity (τὸ σαφές, *dilucide planeque*),⁴⁴⁵ propriety (τὸ πρέπον, *decorum*),⁴⁴⁶ and ornamentation (κατασκευής, *ornatus*).⁴⁴⁷

Theophrastus wrote a whole work *on delivery* entitled Περὶ ὑποκρίσεως (Diogenes Laertius 5.48). Harry Caplan thinks that "Theophrastus was probably the first to make delivery the fourth *officium oratoris* [formal duty of the orator]. This was a subject which Aristotle himself did not quite fully develop"⁴⁴⁸ (see *Rhet.* 1403b 1).

4.3.3.3 *Rhetorica ad Herennium*

In *Rhetorica ad Herennium*, the unknown author added memory and *delivery* to the three parts of the traditional theory of rhetoric, making it five altogether: invention, arrangement, style, memory, and delivery. For the writer, "Delivery is the graceful regulation of voice, countenance, and gesture" (*Rhet. ad Her.* 1.2.3). The writer also looked at the human voice in close relation to the orator's physical movement and gestures, i.e., "body language" (3.11.19). Voice quality (3.11.20-14.25) was divided into three aspects: volume, stability, and flexibility (3.11.20). Vocal flexibility was further divided into three tones: (1) The conversational tone. (2) The debating tone. (3) The tone of amplification.⁴⁴⁹ In order to maintain manly dignity in speaking, the speaker

⁴⁴² Kennedy, *Persuasion*, 273.

⁴⁴³ Theophrastus' four virtues in delivery had also been taken up in *De Oratore* (3.37ff).

⁴⁴⁴ Cicero, *Or.* 3.40.

⁴⁴⁵ Cicero, *Or.* 49.

⁴⁴⁶ Demetrius, *Elo.* 114; Aristotle, *Rhet.* 1048a 10ff; 1413b 3ff; Cicero, *Or.* 3.210-2.

⁴⁴⁷ Diogenes Laertius 7.59; Dionysius of Halicarnassus, *Isocr.* 3; Quintilian 10.1.27; Demetrius, *Elo.* 41; Cicero, *Or.* 3.184 ff; *Orat.* 228.

⁴⁴⁸ [Cicero], *Rhetorica ad Herennium*, eds. G. P. Goold, et al., trans. Harry Caplan, 190-1.

⁴⁴⁹ *Rhet. ad Her.* 3.13.23-24.

particularly warned against a sharp voice which is regarded as *feminine* (3.12.22). The writer was also aware of the intimate connection between body movement and voice (3.15.26-27). Again, the importance of “body language” is obvious.

4.3.3.4 Cicero (106-43 BC)

Cicero was easily one of the best known figures in rhetoric during the Roman Republic. He managed to combine the theory and practice of Demosthenes and Aristotle. Cicero listed five parts of rhetoric - invention, arrangement, expression, memory, and delivery, - and made special connection between voice and body movement: “Delivery is the control of voice and body in a manner suitable to the dignity of the subject matter and the style.”⁴⁵⁰ Cicero explained: “Why should I go on to describe the speaker’s delivery? That needs to be controlled by bodily carriage, gesture, play of features and changing intonation of voice; and how important that is wholly by itself.”⁴⁵¹

Cicero repeatedly asserted that “delivery is the dominant factor in oratory; without delivery the best speaker could not be of any account at all, and a moderate speaker with a trained delivery can often outdo the best of them.”⁴⁵² Cicero continued: “Nothing else so penetrates the mind, shapes, moulds, turns it, and causes the orator to seem such a man as he wills to seem [as delivery does].”⁴⁵³ Cicero held that the audience’s judgement very much depended on the effective speaker himself.⁴⁵⁴ For Cicero, the ultimate goal of the speaker was to persuade and to win his audience. Cicero regarded the speaker’s ability to sway his hearer’s emotions as “the orator’s chief source of

⁴⁵⁰ Cicero, *Inv.* 1.7.9.

⁴⁵¹ Cicero, *Or.* 1.18.

⁴⁵² Cicero, *Or.* 3.56.213.

⁴⁵³ Cicero, *Br.* 37.142.

⁴⁵⁴ Cicero, *Or.* 1.123-5. *Br.* 184-8.

power (*plurimum pollere*).⁴⁵⁵ Cicero divided the persuasive art of speaking into three functions: the proof of the truth, the winning of hearers' favour, and the stirring of their emotions.⁴⁵⁶

Like several other great philosophers and orators, Cicero also recognized the endowment of "nature" in oratory besides good theory and practice: "Therefore let art follow the leadership of nature in pleasing the ear. Certainly the natural excellence of voice to be desired is not in our power, but the use and management of the voice is in our power."⁴⁵⁷ In the end, nature and human training complement each other: "We must, of course, look to Nature for both gifts. But distinctness may be improved by practice; the musical qualities, by imitating those who speak with smooth and articulate enunciation."⁴⁵⁸ What Cicero said was certainly true. However, in actual practice, it was the humanly created "art" in *delivery* that seemed to have precedence over the endowment of "nature".

A full treatment of delivery was given in Cicero's *De Oratore* (3.56.213-58.217), in which he said: "Nature has assigned to every emotion its own particular facial expression, tone of voice and gesture [*Omnis enim motus animi suum quemdam a natura habet vultum et sonum et gestum*]" (3.57.216; cf. Philodemus 1.196.8). As Robert Sonkowsky has rightly pointed out, "nature and training in the art of delivery together produce and establish a *genus vocis* for each emotion (3.215 f)."⁴⁵⁹

⁴⁵⁵ Cicero, *Br.* 79.276; 80.279.

⁴⁵⁶ Cicero, *Or.* 2.115. Cf. *Opt.* 4.

⁴⁵⁷ Cicero, *Orat.* 17.58.

⁴⁵⁸ Cicero, *Off.* 1.37.133.

⁴⁵⁹ Robert P. Sonkowsky, 'An Aspect of Delivery in Ancient Rhetoric Theory', *Transactions American Philological Association*, XC (1959), 257-74, at 270.

For Cicero, eloquence essentially “consists of language and thought.”⁴⁶⁰ Eloquence was inseparable from wisdom: “Eloquence is nothing else but wisdom delivering copious utterance.”⁴⁶¹ As such, a truly eloquent orator was also a sound thinker: “For no one can be a good speaker who is not a sound thinker. Thus whoever devotes himself to true eloquence, devotes himself to sound thinking [*prudenter intellegit*].”⁴⁶² Yet in the end, it was still the art of *delivery* that was really crucial and decisive: “There is no thought which can bring credit to an orator unless it is fitly and perfectly expressed.”⁴⁶³ There was also the vital element of “grace” in good delivery: “For it is not enough to discern what is to be said unless you have the ability to say it fluently and with some charm; nor even is this enough unless what is said is recommended by some grace of voice, facial expression, and action [*nisi id quod dicitur fit voce voltu motuque conditius*].”⁴⁶⁴

Although gracious or powerful delivery was itself an “art”, there was no such thing as “art for art’s sake” in Greco-Roman rhetoric. This was because, as Cicero himself had pointed out, eloquence held out the greatest rewards in Roman society, leading to glory, honour, reputation, status, and applause: “From eloquence those who have acquired it obtain glory and honour and high esteem.”⁴⁶⁵ Eloquence “brings with it a large measure of popularity, glory and power [*gratiae, gloriae, praesidi plurimum*].”⁴⁶⁶ And “through this he won not only the highest reputation for talent, but also great applause [*summam ingeni non laudem modo sed etiam admirationem est consecutus*].”⁴⁶⁷

⁴⁶⁰ Cicero, *Or.* 3.5.19.

⁴⁶¹ Cicero, *Part.* 79.

⁴⁶² Cicero, *Br.* 6.23.

⁴⁶³ Cicero, *Orat.* 67.227.

⁴⁶⁴ Cicero, *Br.* 29.110.

⁴⁶⁵ Cicero, *Inv.* 1.5. *Br.* 49.182.

⁴⁶⁶ Cicero, *Orat.* 41.141.

⁴⁶⁷ Cicero, *Br.* 43.159. Cf. *Or.* 3.14.53.

Cicero called *actio* a “sort of language,”⁴⁶⁸ and “a kind of eloquence of the body” (Quintilian 11.3.1). This point is of great significance, because oratory is essentially understood as “body language”. But for “body language” to be effective, body movement must obviously be in full harmony with the orator’s mind and words. For Cicero “the body talks”: “For by action the body talks [*Est enim actio quasi sermo corporis*], so it is all the more necessary to make it agree with the thought” (*Or.* 3.59.223). On the expression of the orator’s eyes, which was deemed to be very crucial in delivery, Cicero said, “For as the face is the image of the soul, so are the eyes its interpreters.”⁴⁶⁹

Cicero had earlier mentioned that it was “a fine voice and great dignity of bearing” that made the speaker’s delivery “impressive”. In Cicero’s Roman society, it goes without saying that “a fine voice and great dignity of bearing” could only come from man. This was where the crucial matter of manliness or *masculinity* became most relevant and important in Roman rhetoric. A good speaker will take great pains to manage his voice and all other body gestures well so that nothing *effeminate* would appear, but *manly* features only: “The superior orator will therefore vary and modulate his voice....He will also use gestures in such a way as to avoid excess....There should be no effeminate bending of the neck....He will control himself by the pose of his whole frame, and the vigorous and manly attitude of the body [*virili laterum flexione*].”⁴⁷⁰

4.3.3.5 Quintilian (c. AD 35-100)

If the early Roman Empire could be regarded as “one of the most eloquent periods in human history”, Quintilian’s writing would most probably be the best resource about

⁴⁶⁸ Cicero, *Or.* 3.59.222. See *Orat.* 55.

⁴⁶⁹ Cicero, *Orat.* 17.60.

⁴⁷⁰ Cicero, *Orat.* 18.59-60.

oratory of the time.⁴⁷¹ Quintilian's *Institutio Oratoria* consisted of twelve books in which he had skilfully adapted some of the features of Aristotle's *Rhetorica* and of Cicero's *De Oratore* and *Orator*.⁴⁷² Like his predecessors, Quintilian adopted the five parts of rhetoric: "...invention, arrangement, expression, memory, and delivery or action (the two latter terms being used synonymously)" (3.3.1).

For Quintilian rhetoric was not only the matter of speaking well, it should also include other virtues and character of the orator since no man can speak well unless he is good man (2.15.34), or a *vir bonus* (11.3.10). Only good and virtuous men could possess oratory.⁴⁷³ Quintilian's emphasis on the importance of the moral character of the orator distinguished him from some of his predecessors.

Quintilian had a grand view of the whole man in his philosophy of education. For him, the accomplished orator was "the greatest human type". With that noble goal in mind Quintilian readily assumed the role of a serious educator, especially in the training of great orators. Such thinking could be said to be very much in line with the ethos of his time which had begun "to see human beings as individuals rather than as cogs in society."⁴⁷⁴

Since oratory is essentially "body language", there had naturally been a kind of rhetorical theory of the *body* in Greco-Roman tradition. There was, for instance, already a well known Roman idiom. "The body of the orator must be the body of the good man. This body is good to the extent that it betrays itself to be a mere vessel, given its virtue and value by the soul of the good man of which it is the bearer. Bodily excellence cites

⁴⁷¹ Kennedy, *Rhetoric*, 428.

⁴⁷² Kennedy, *Rhetoric*, 496-7.

⁴⁷³ Quintilian 2.17.43. Cf. 12.1.9

⁴⁷⁴ Kennedy, *Rhetoric*, 498.

and performs the authority of the good man.”⁴⁷⁵ It was thus clear that Quintilian did not want just to train a skilful “actor”, but a *man* who was also *morally good*. The body of the orator would be good only when it revealed “the goodness of the orator himself.”⁴⁷⁶ Moreover, the orator must also be a man who could truly be called *wise*, and not only perfect in moral character (Quintilian 1. pr. 18-19).⁴⁷⁷ For Quintilian, the “perfection” of oratory could only be achieved when the orator of noble personal character had acquired the essential skills of the art and delivered them accordingly (11.1.10).

Although Quintilian agreed with Aristotle in theory that “delivery is a matter of nature rather than of art,”⁴⁷⁸ he qualified it by saying that “nothing comes to perfection unless nature is assisted by art.”⁴⁷⁹ Quintilian thus elaborated on the importance of voice and other training and practice at considerable length (11.3.19, 22).

Like all other educators of oratory Quintilian also took for granted that this art was the monopoly and prerogative of *man*. *Masculinity* must therefore be maintained and displayed at all costs and at all times. The dull, coarse, hard, and stiff voice of a man was just as bad as an *effeminate* voice which was thin, empty, grating, feeble, and soft.⁴⁸⁰ As such, when Quintilian talked about body gesture, he was certainly referring to a man’s body gesture in rhetorical training; such body gesture was literally from head to toe because “gesture conveys meaning without the help of words” (11.3.66-67). Due to the crucial role that body gesture played in the “body language” in delivery, it is essential to note the respective roles that members of a man’s body played, with special reference to Quintilian’s instruction.

⁴⁷⁵ Erik Gunderson, *Staging Masculinity: The Rhetoric of Performance in the Roman World* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2000), 61.

⁴⁷⁶ Gunderson, *Masculinity*, 61.

⁴⁷⁷ Gunderson, *Masculinity*, 87-8.

⁴⁷⁸ Quintilian, *Institutio Oratoria*, vol. V, trans. Donald A. Russell, intro., 5.

⁴⁷⁹ Quintilian 11.3.11. See Cicero, *Or.* 3.42; *Br.* 137.

⁴⁸⁰ Quintilian 11.3.30-32.

The Head

Quintilian's instruction on body gesture began with the head: "It is the head which occupies the chief place in Delivery (as it does in the body itself).... (1) For seemliness, it must first be upright and natural.... (2) The head conveys meaning in many different ways. Apart from the movements of assent, denial, and agreement, there are others, well-known and universally used, which express modesty, doubt, surprise, and indignation" (11.3.69-71).

From the head Quintilian moved to the face as the head's dominant feature, and from there downward to the neck and then the shoulders, the arms and the hands in very orderly manner (11.3.72-84).⁴⁸¹

The Face and the Eyes

"The face is sovereign", according to Quintilian, because "it is this that makes us humble, threatening, flattering, sad, cheerful, proud, or submissive; men hang on this; men fix their gaze on this; this is watched even before we start to speak; this makes us love some people and hate others; this makes us understand many things; this often replaces words altogether" (11.3.72).

And of the face itself, the most important and obvious feature is the eyes: "The mind shines through especially in...the eyelids and the cheeks. Much also is done by the eyebrows" (11.3.75-78).⁴⁸² Whatever one does with the various parts of the body, all *feminine* mannerisms must be avoided, warned Quintilian.⁴⁸³

⁴⁸¹ Gunderson, *Masculinity*, 76.

⁴⁸² Quintilian 11.3.76 (eyes), 78-79 (eyebrows), 69 (head), 83 (shoulders), 126 (feet), 128-29 (swaying), 165. Cf. Seneca, *Ep.* 52.12.

⁴⁸³ Adrian Caesar, *Taking it Like a Man: Suffering, Sexuality and the War Poets: Brooke, Sassoon, Owen, Graves* (Manchester; Manchester University Press, 1993), 63.

Neck and Shoulders

“The nape of the neck must be straight, not stiff or bent back...Rarely is it becoming to shrug or hunch the shoulders, because this shortens the neck and produces a gesture of humiliation and servility [*gestum quendam humilem atque servilem*], suggesting hypocrisy, because people use it when they are pretending to flatter, admire, or fear” (11.3.83). This clearly revealed the social status-consciousness of Quintilian, a very proud Roman.

Hands

“As for the hands, without which the delivery would be crippled and enfeebled, it is almost impossible to say how many movements they possess, for these almost match the entire stock of words. Other parts of the body assist the speaker: the hands, I might almost say, speak for themselves” (11.3.85-87).

It is important to note that Quintilian linked the use of the hands as an important body gesture to that of “deauthorization and silencing” of one’s rival, including “political” rivals in society.⁴⁸⁴

Feet

“Stamping the foot can be opportune on occasion, as Cicero says, at the beginning or end of a passage of aggressive argument, but if it is done often it shows the speaker to be a fool, and ceases to attract the judge’s attention.”⁴⁸⁵

⁴⁸⁴ Gunderson, *Masculinity*, 83.

⁴⁸⁵ Quintilian 11.3.128. See Cicero, *Or.* 3.220.

Gestures which mimic action

For Quintilian, gestures which mimic action must be avoided: "An orator has to be very different from a dancer; he must adapt his gesture to his sense more than to his words - which indeed was the practice of the more serious actors too. I would readily let him move his hand towards himself when he speaks about himself, or towards a person whom he wishes to point out, and a few things like that....This caution applies not only to the hands, but to the whole range of gesture and voice."⁴⁸⁶

Inappropriate gestures were taboo

"Take care not to thrust the chest or stomach forward. This arches the back, and all bending backwards is unsightly. The side must be in tune with the gesture, for the movement of the whole body is important, so much so that Cicero says that more is done by this than by the hands themselves" (11.3.122; See Cicero, *Orat.* 18.59).

Harmonious coordination

In the mobilization of the various body parts in delivery great emphasis is put on good co-ordination and harmony, just like an orchestra: "Not only is the body carefully articulated in its parts, it is also coordinated and organized such that its elements will be orchestrated into a harmonized whole" (11.3.122; 11.3.70).

Dress

"As for dress, there is no special form for the orator, but his is noticed more. As with all men of standing, it should be distinguished and masculine" (11.3.137). Dress should avoid being *effeminate*: "Of course, wrapping your left hand in your toga and tying it

⁴⁸⁶ Quintilian 11.3.88-90.

round you is almost insane, and throwing back the fold from its bottom onto the right shoulder is foppish and effeminate" (11.3.146).

Jane Gardner's comment on "dress" is particularly significant: "There is clearly a dress code. Behaviour and appearance are important and there is an image of 'masculinity' to be guarded, that is, of psychological masculinity. It is not enough merely to be biologically male, one must give out the appropriate signals and play the expected gender role....For a man deliberately to imitate the behaviour of the opposite sex was not merely unbecoming, it was self-degradation."⁴⁸⁷

Roman lawyers' "definitions of what comprise legacies of 'men's clothing' and 'women's clothing' refer to social assumptions about appropriate 'masculine' behaviour."⁴⁸⁸ What Paulus says about the matter is also helpful: "When a legacy is left of men's clothing, only those are included which are appropriate for a man's use without shaming his masculinity (*salvo pudore virilitatis*)."⁴⁸⁹

The orator and the actor

It is also important to note that Quintilian wanted to make a clear distinction between a "comic actor" and a true "orator": "I do not want my pupil to be a comic actor, but an orator (*non enim comoedum esse, sed oratorem volo*)."⁴⁹⁰ Quintilian also set the two terms *actio* and *imitatio* against each another and insisted that the orator's performance was not just an imitation of a "thing", i.e., the orator's delivery must be seen as a performance of an "essence" or of a "character". Only in this way could the orator be a

⁴⁸⁷ Jane F. Gardner, 'Sexing a Roman: imperfect men in Roman law', in Lin Foxhall and John Salmon (eds.), *When Men Were Men: Masculinity, Power, and Identity in Classical Antiquity* (London: Routledge, 1998), 136-52, at 147.

⁴⁸⁸ Gardner, 'Sexing a Roman', 136.

⁴⁸⁹ Paulus, *Sent.* 3.6.80. Cf. *Dig.* 34.2.23.2.

⁴⁹⁰ Quintilian 11.3.182.

true “actor” of *himself* (11.3.5). And only this *self*, in Quintilian’s view, was the *vir bonus et gravis*, the good and serious man. This point was important for Quintilian, because a true orator could only be an “actor” or “imitator” for himself and not for others.

In his conclusion, Quintilian cited the good example of Cicero, and hailed Marcus Antonius as an orator *par excellence* in the art of delivery in gesture, voice, and words which agreed with the course of his thoughts.⁴⁹¹

Sonkowsky concludes that “in the Aristotelian tradition, which includes the Theophrastan and the Ciceronian, the techniques of delivery are not merely something that is added in a superficial way after the process of literary composition has been completed, but something that is vitally involved in the very labours of composition anticipating the public presentation.”⁴⁹²

Sonkowsky’s point is very important because of the intimate relation between “literary composition” and “public presentation” which were involved in the one and the same process in ancient rhetoric. In the case of Paul, however, the distinction between “literary composition” and “public presentation” was not always clear, nor was it the apostle’s particular concern. This was because for Paul the two could hardly be separated. Thus, when Paul mentioned the “message (λόγος) of the cross” he most probably had in mind the “content” of his message [“literary composition”] and its proclamation [“public presentation”]. However, 2 Cor. 10.10 seemed to suggest that his critics were making a distinction between Paul’s “literary composition”, i.e., his “letters”, which they considered “weighty and strong”, and his “bodily presence”, and

⁴⁹¹ Quintilian 11.3.184. See Cicero. *Br.* 37.141.

⁴⁹² Sonkowsky, ‘Delivery’, 273.

“speech” which they regarded as “weak” and “contemptible” respectively. The critics’ distinction between “literary composition” and “public presentation” as well as their negative judgement on the latter are quite understandable in the case of Paul in the context of Greco-Roman rhetoric. In its later development, as the previous survey has indicated, Greco-Roman rhetoric had taken the public presentation, i.e., delivery, more seriously than literary composition, because it was the “body language” which proved to be far more powerful and attractive than mere written words, or mere speech without body gestures.

4.4 Recent studies on “masculinity”, with special reference to Gleason

The previous section on Greco-Roman rhetoric has not only shown the important place it occupied in Greco-Roman society and civilization, it has also demonstrated that rhetoric in the ancient Greco-Roman world was exclusively a *manly* game. This is most evident in its great emphasis on delivery which was essentially men’s “body language”. This point was very important in the Corinthian controversy in which Paul’s “masculinity” was apparently called into question.

Sufficient attention has been given to the place of masculinity in the ancient Greco-Roman world in modern New Testament studies, so that the study on Greco-Roman rhetoric would appear rather incomplete without taking the subject of masculinity seriously. Considerable work has already been done by some modern scholars in the last couple of decades on the subject. A very good and up-to-date survey of masculinity study in modern New Testament research could be found in Moore’s article.⁴⁹³

⁴⁹³ Moore, “O Man, Who Art Thou...?": Masculinity Studies And New Testament Studies, in Stephen Moore and Janice Capel Anderson (eds.), *New Testament Masculinities* (SBLSS 45; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2003), 1-22.

Gleason's findings are particularly helpful for understanding the ethos of rhetoric, especially the crucial issue of *masculinity* in Greco-Roman society.⁴⁹⁴ Gleason's focus is most relevant to the Corinthian problem particularly because Paul's opponents were obviously very critical of his weak self-presentation, and by implication, the crucial absence of manliness, which was expected of a good orator. This point is bound to shed light on the exegesis of 1 Cor. 2. 1-5 and 2 Cor. 10.10.

Gleason thinks that twentieth century readers' experience of ancient rhetoric is "entirely an armchair affair". As such, they often fail to appreciate some of the basic aspects of the training and discipline which were essential to serious rhetorical training and education (παιδεία). These were the necessary processes through which men, especially upper-class "men", were "made". Gleason is right in asserting that παιδεία, for both Greek and Roman gentlemen, as this thesis' earlier historical survey has shown, was a form of "symbolic capital": "Its development required time, money, effort, and social position...eloquence was the essential precondition of its display".⁴⁹⁵

Gleason has clearly noted that through παιδεία in public speaking and constant competition with their peers, a Roman was able to display his "cultural capital" which "distinguished authentic members of the elite from other members of society....The star performers...attracted large audiences [in]...bruising competition for status dominance. By this kind of dramatization, enhanced by all the charms of symbolic violence, the gap between the educated and the uneducated came to seem in no way arbitrary, but the result of a nearly biological superiority."⁴⁹⁶

⁴⁹⁴ Gleason, *Making Men*, xx.

⁴⁹⁵ Gleason, *Making Men*, xx-xxi.

⁴⁹⁶ Gleason, *Making Men*, xxi.

Gleason also seeks to demonstrate that in the second century there was “a heightened level of conscious awareness about deportment training”, during which rhetoric was very much perceived as the very embodiment of manhood. However, the whole exercise was not static, but an ongoing dynamic process of “male socialization” in which “gender identity” and “public identity” were amongst the most essential parts of an interconnected whole. “Self-presentation” largely determined a man’s standing in society.⁴⁹⁷ Viewed from this perspective Paul’s apparent lack of good “self-presentation” and impressive “public identity” (1 Cor. 2.1-5; 2 Cor. 10.10), could only make him an easy target of his critics’ contempt.

The lives and careers of two popular second-century rhetoricians, Favorinus and Polemo, provided Gleason with fascinating materials and insights into the ways ancient Romans perceived and constructed masculinity during a time when men, especially those of the upper class, were much preoccupied with concerns about “manly” deportment. In Gleason’s view, Favorinus and Polemo represented “opposing paradigms of masculinity”.

The relatively late materials of Gleason (second century) appear like a point of weakness at first glance. However, under closer scrutiny, it actually turns out to be a matter of strength as far as Corinthian studies are concerned, because those second century materials could well serve as historical continuity to the development of Greco-Roman rhetoric from the time of Aristotle to Quintilian. Moreover, since Greco-Roman rhetoric had been well established and firmly planted in the whole social ethos of the Greco-Roman world for at least three centuries, and most of its theories and practices

⁴⁹⁷ Gleason, *Making Men*, xxvi.

remained relatively constant, the second century materials used by Gleason can reasonably be assumed to be largely relevant to Paul's time.

Gleason's original and persuasive findings are far more than just rhetorical studies of second-century Roman society. They also involve the Sophistic movement of the time and reveal a lot about the function and meaning of an elite culture in the ancient Roman society. She is right in pointing out that it was the *Pax Romana* that had provided the aristocrats the environment to challenge each other's "masculinity", while they remained absolutely sure of their "collective dominance".⁴⁹⁸

The Sophistic movement was primarily a Greek movement in the fifth century BC. Soon after the time of Christ a new movement appeared and was given the name "Second Sophistic" by the sophist Philostratus, who wrote about its history up to around AD 200.⁴⁹⁹ Its popularity brought some sophists a great deal of wealth and turned them into fashionable preachers who inculcated belief in traditional religious and moral values in the most refined and elegant form. Aelius Aristides and Herodes Atticus must be counted among the most famous sophists of the second-century sophists.⁵⁰⁰ Glen Bowersock describes the sophists in the second movement as established "public speakers who offered a predominantly rhetorical form of higher education, with distinct emphasis on its more ostentatious forms."⁵⁰¹

The history of classical antiquity was almost exclusively a history of *men*. Women were excluded from "the structure of power perpetrated by dominant masculine ideologies,"

⁴⁹⁸ Gleason, *Making Men*, 162.

⁴⁹⁹ Kennedy, *Classical Rhetoric*, 37.

⁵⁰⁰ Kennedy, *Classical Rhetoric*, 38.

⁵⁰¹ G. W. Bowersock, *The Second Sophistic: A Cultural Phenomenon in the Roman Empire* (London: Routledge, 1993), 1.

as Lin Foxhall has rightly noted.⁵⁰² Foxhall thinks that "Roman men were identified as men by being born with male bodies, carrying male genitals, and despite any subsequent social and physical events, his maleness (and with it his hierarchal position) usually remained intact."⁵⁰³ On this Dominic Montserrat elaborates: "in antiquity, the male body provided an important symbolic gauge of discourses about power, identity and social position....The male body was a surface upon which power relations were mapped, and which could be exploited as a forum for the display of these dynamics. According to ancient physiology, the unmarked, unspecified and unqualified human body was male, providing the yardstick by which other kinds of bodies were measured and defined. A man's physical characteristics were explained in terms of his innate male claim to physical superiority."⁵⁰⁴ It is sufficiently clear from Montserrat's observation that in antiquity the physical body of man was always perceived in close connection with social ethos and values, especially power and status. As such, the symbolic nature of man's body in social terms was just as important, if not more so, as its physical aspects.

The legal implications of the male identity were just as important as its social aspects, as Gardner has clearly stated: "In Rome, the determination of masculinity was especially important because of the peculiar authority given in Roman law to the male in his gender role as *paterfamilias*; he could exercise *potestas* over other free persons within the *familia* of which he was head, and, unlike women, he had no restrictions on his legal capacity to engage in transactions with other heads of household."⁵⁰⁵

⁵⁰² Foxhall, *When*, 1.

⁵⁰³ Foxhall, *When*, 5.

⁵⁰⁴ Dominic Montserrat, 'Experiencing the male body in Roman Egypt', in *When*, 153-64, at 153.

⁵⁰⁵ Gardner, 'Sexing a Roman', 136.

Barton makes a subtle but significant distinction between a "male" and a "man" in Roman culture: "A male was not necessarily a man. One was ontologically a male but existentially a man. Born a male (*mas*) or a human (*homo*), one made oneself a man (*vir*). A *vir* was not a natural being."⁵⁰⁶ As such, a "man" was not a kind of "given". A true "man" had to be *made*. The making of man and the maintenance of manhood or masculinity help to explain the fierce competition that was part and parcel of Greco-Roman society. Gleason is particularly mindful of "the terror of defeat and public humiliation" in such fierce competition.⁵⁰⁷ It was a matter of survival, and usually only the "fittest" could survive. This may also partly account for the existence of "divisions" and "quarrels" (1 Cor. 1.10, 11) and their seriousness in the Corinthian church. In this context, the Corinthian conflict was essentially the result of fierce competition between the *men* Paul, Peter, and Apollos (even Christ). While these leaders themselves might not personally approve of such unwarranted competition, as Paul himself had clearly done (1 Cor. 1.13-17), their respective parties obviously thought otherwise. As such, these enthusiastic party supporters were just behaving as the ordinary Corinthians did, according to the social ethos and practice of the time. It was clearly that kind of social ethos and practice which Paul was trying to invert. And given the historico-social context of the time, what Paul did was clearly a most risky thing.

The establishment of masculinity and its maintenance were such demanding exercises in the ancient Greco-Roman society that David Gilmore has appropriately chosen terms such as "hardiness", "self-discipline", "manhood cult", "manhood ideologies", even "death" to describe the situation.⁵⁰⁸ He elaborates: "manhood ideologies force men to shape up on penalty of being robbed of their identity, a threat apparently worse than

⁵⁰⁶ Barton, *Roman Honour*, 38.

⁵⁰⁷ Gleason, *Making Men*, xx.

⁵⁰⁸ David D. Gilmore, *Manhood in the Making: Cultural Concepts of Masculinity* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990), 220.

death...manhood directly correlates with man-role stress....A special moral system ('real manhood') is required to ensure a voluntary acceptance of appropriate behaviour in men."⁵⁰⁹

Greco-Roman society was so committed to the forming as well as the maintaining of true masculinity that the "'real' men are expected to tame nature in order to recreate and bolster the basic kinship units of their society; that is, to reinvent and perpetuate the social order by will, to create something of value from nothing. Manhood is a kind of male procreation; its heroic quality lies in its self-direction and discipline, its absolute self-reliance - in a word, its agential autonomy."⁵¹⁰ This thesis is inclined to think if this was largely the case, then Paul's challenge to the current perception of masculinity, whether in relation to his self-presentation, manner of speech or his own perception of "weakness", was a very drastic inversion of the basic social ethos.

That rhetoric, with its strong emphasis on masculinity, was an exclusive game of *men* was also very evident in the fact that it had rigidly and consistently divided humanity into two camps, characterized respectively by masculinity and femininity, or, to use Gleason's description, between "the legitimate and the illegitimate".⁵¹¹ In such a social context and according to such rigid social and gender division, it might be appropriate and significant to ask if Paul would be perceived by his critics as belonging to femininity and the "illegitimate". If Paul's social standing, according to the current perception about masculinity, was indeed "illegitimate", how could he possibly lead and exercise his apostolic authority in competition with the "super-apostles"? Questions like these are relevant because Paul operated in "a face-to-face society" where "one's

⁵⁰⁹ Gilmore, *Manhood*, 221.

⁵¹⁰ Gilmore, *Manhood*, 223.

⁵¹¹ See Gunderson, *Masculinity*, 9.

adequacy as a man was always under suspicion and one's performance was constantly being judged."⁵¹²

What has been said so far about masculinity obviously has a great deal to do with "body language" which is the main concern of this thesis. For the Greeks and Romans, masculinity, just like crucifixion in antiquity, had become a system of signs or symbols by which powerful and effective "body language" was conveyed in social interactions. It was the sort of "body language" that a male child began to learn at birth together with his proper physical development [Soranus, *Gyn.*2.32 (101)].⁵¹³

Masculinity had become such a paramount concern and preoccupation in Greco-Roman rhetoric that the two were practically synonymous or identical at times. In this particular context Gleason has an insightful comment: "In a value system that prized rhetorical skill as the quintessential human excellence, and in a society so structured that this perfection could be achieved only by adult males, arbiters of rhetoric were also arbiters of masculine deportment."⁵¹⁴ Moreover, an accomplished presenter of winsome masculine deportment was also regarded as a "good man". For Gunderson, such value judgement was closely linked to the development of rhetoric: "the authority of oratory as a practice of good men motivates the development of rhetorical theory."⁵¹⁵

Gleason has found the well-known or infamous professional quarrels between the sophists, Favorinus and Polemo, fascinating. The feud also involved their pupils who were naturally expected to take sides. Gleason rightly thinks that the case should be seen as "an integral part of male socialization." She elaborates: "After all, one reason

⁵¹² Gleason, *Making Men*, xxii.

⁵¹³ Gleason, *Making Men*, 70.

⁵¹⁴ Gleason, *Making Men*, 104.

⁵¹⁵ Gunderson, *Masculinity*, 9.

that these rivalries became so intense was that they came to represent competing paradigms of masculinity, as well as competing claims to power and status. Philosophers, as well as sophists, were interested parties in the struggle...to claim high ground.”⁵¹⁶ This kind of situation was obviously relevant to the Corinthian schism. This is because, to use Gleason’s expression, the Corinthian schism was also essentially a kind of “male socialization”, and the various parties in the names of Paul, Apollos, and Cephas (even “Christ”) were clearly “interested parties in the struggle”, representing “competing paradigms of masculinity, as well as competing claims to power and status”. Paul was clearly expressing his deep disappointment with those competing Corinthians because these believers had apparently forgotten their Christian *identity*, or had placed their *social* identity over and above that of their *divine* calling. You had been “called to be saints” (κλητοῖς ἁγίοις, 1 Cor. 1.2), Paul solemnly reminded them. But you were “behaving according to human inclinations” (3.3). “Are you not merely human?” asked Paul in 3.4.

Under fiercely competitive conditions in the Greco-Roman society, “to preserve one’s integrity as a man is to be like the athlete.”⁵¹⁷ Moreover, the competitors must also try desperately to maintain “a truly masculine profile” where “an appropriate level of masculine tension in gaze, walk, and gesture must be cultivated by continuous exertion”, and yet doing it in such a way that the whole act must never be allowed “to appear put on” [like an actor].⁵¹⁸ Again, it was most probably in this kind of society and under similar circumstances that Paul had to move about. It remains to be seen if the bearer of the “message of the cross” felt compelled to conform to such social convention.

In Greco-Roman society gender differences were often made according to movement of

⁵¹⁶ Gleason, *Making Men*, 73.

⁵¹⁷ Gleason, *Making Men*, 73.

⁵¹⁸ Gleason, *Making Men*, 80.

the human body, because it served effectively as a kind of “language” - body language. Similarly different social classes were also distinguished more or less in that way through the minutiae of “body language”, besides “the external language of dress”. As the psychologists put it, “nonverbal behavior encodes power well.”⁵¹⁹ This would probably be the kind of background of Paul’s critics when they judged his “bodily presence” to be “weak”.

The great popularity and charm of self-presentation must not be perceived narrowly in terms of formal competition between social or political rivals. As Gleason has noted, “great sophists and declaimers...were only the tip of the iceberg”, because all aristocrats were expected to be impressive public speakers, in all sorts of occasions and functions, both public and private, including ‘learned discussions at the baths’”.⁵²⁰ While rhetorical practice was an exclusive game of *men*, not all men were *equal*. It was a very *elitist* game, reserved predominately or exclusively for the aristocrats. Yet over the centuries, as Greco-Roman rhetoric had permeated practically the entire Greco-Roman culture, even the non-elitist also had significant roles to play, as the indispensable audience, observers, even as (self-appointed) “judges”. In this sense, it would be reasonable to suggest that Paul’s critics or judges would probably be much larger than a few leaders. The magnitude of the Corinthian conflict and crisis should perhaps be perceived from this perspective also.

Great risk, however, was involved in self-presentation by which true masculinity was established, maintained and constantly renewed in Greco-Roman society, because in the cruel and often unpredictable arena of relentless competition, the participant could only end up either in honour or shame. It was the inescapable duty of a Greco-Roman *man* to

⁵¹⁹ Gleason, *Making Men*, xxvi.

⁵²⁰ Gleason, *Making Men*, xx-xxi.

be constantly on the guard for the defence of personal as well as family honour.⁵²¹ This important point was probably relevant to Paul's conflict with his critics. While Paul as the "slave" or "fool" of Christ crucified was not at all concerned with the defence of his own "personal" as well as "family honour", according to the current social ethos and convention, he evidently thought it necessary to defend the honour and integrity of his own *apostolic* identity and integrity (e.g., 1 Cor. 4.1-13; 2 Cor. 10-13). Again, it remains to be seen if and in what way was Paul's manner of defending his apostolic identity and integrity constituted an inversion of the current social ethos.

Respectable competition, in which true manliness was at stake, could only take place between or among people who were equal or almost equal in honour and status. Hence, a challenge presented to an inferior or somebody without social honour could only bring shame and humiliation to the challenger.⁵²² In this very cruel game, one should also be mindful of the very significant role of the audience who often acted as the "arbiter of a suspenseful process."⁵²³ The winner of such a competitive exchange was naturally thought to have defended his honour, while the loser would have to put up with enormous shame and the damage to his status in the community.⁵²⁴ Paul seemed to be reminding the competing parties in Corinth of their foolishness and mindlessness, because in a fight some would eventually emerge as winners and others losers. Why should that be, since they were all "winners" in Christ already? (1 Cor. 3.21-23).

The lack of true masculinity was also expressed contemptuously as the appearance of "effeminate signs". In Clement's words, "a noble man should bear no sign of effeminacy upon his face or any other portion of his body. Nor should the disgrace of

⁵²¹ Halyor Moxnes, 'Honour and Shame', in Richard L. Rohrbaugh (ed.), *The Social Science and New Testament Interpretation* (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, 1996), 19-49, at 20.

⁵²² Moxnes, 'Honour', 20.

⁵²³ Gleason, *Making Men*, xxiii.

⁵²⁴ Moxnes, 'Honour', 21.

unmanliness ever be found in his movements or his posture.”⁵²⁵ “The orderly man (*ho kosmios*) reveals his self-restraint through his deportment: he is deep-voiced and slow-stepping, and his eyes, neither fixed nor rapidly blinking, hold a certain indefinably courageous gleam.”⁵²⁶ As such, “the slightest sign of softness or slackening will undo the whole effect [of a man].”⁵²⁷ Did Paul’s Corinthian critics judge him in this way when they concluded that his “bodily presence” was “weak”?

On the subject of effeminate appearance and behaviour Caesar draws attention to two Greek words. The word *androgynos*, which he renders as “effeminate”, was used to describe the appearance of someone who was “between man and woman.” The word *cinaedus*, on the other hand, referred to sexual deviance, especially to males who preferred to play a “feminine” (receptive) role in intercourse with other men. Both terms were used quite indiscriminately of men of “effeminate appearance and behaviour.”⁵²⁸

Without denying the gift of Nature, masculine identity was not just a static “given”, because, for the elite of Greco-Roman society, a masculine identity was an “achieved state”. It was the result of years of hard work. The feud between the two rival rhetoricians, Polemo and Favorinus, clearly showed the tension between “hyper-masculine” and “effeminate deportment” and the crucial role of self-presentation.⁵²⁹ Gleason is thus right in asserting that “manliness was not a birthright. It was something that had to be won.” “The defining lines of competitive space” had to be redrawn repeatedly in order to exclude those far less privileged in society. And in this merciless world of fierce rivalry and competition, absolutely no other form of competitive masculine activity was more “electrifying” to both the competitors and spectators than

⁵²⁵ Clement of Alexandria, *Paed.* 3.11.73-74.

⁵²⁶ Adamantius 2.49.1.413-14F. Gleason, *Making Men*, 61.

⁵²⁷ Gleason, *Making Men*, 62.

⁵²⁸ Caesar, *Taking it*, 64.

⁵²⁹ Gleason, *Making Men*, 159.

the kind of “body language” called “rhetoric” and its delivery.⁵³⁰

Since the art of rhetorical skill, or the “body language”, had long been publicly and socially acknowledged as a “definitive test of masculine excellence”, it is quite understandable that issues pertaining to rhetorical delivery often became “gender issues”, as gender was itself “a primary source of the metaphorical language with which power relationships are articulated, in our own time as in antiquity”.⁵³¹ As such, the winning or the losing party in a competition between equal rivals often depended upon one’s ability to expose the opponent’s alleged effeminate style, mannerism or features, which betrayed true masculinity.⁵³²

4.5 Conclusion

This part of the thesis begins with the rediscovery of the importance of Greco-Roman rhetoric for New Testament studies, especially for the understanding of the Corinthian context and text. Special reference has been made to a number of scholars who have made significant contribution to the rediscovery of rhetoric. Their positions on the subject have shown beyond reasonable doubt that a relatively clear understanding of Greco-Roman rhetoric is essential to any serious study of the Corinthian controversy. Reference to the views of these scholars is immediately followed by an extensive survey of the historical development of Greco-Roman rhetoric from Aristotle to Quintilian, and its crucial role in ancient society, based on primary sources. This is done with special emphasis on *delivery* as a firmly established as well as a most powerful and effective “body language” in Greco-Roman society. Special reference is made to the study of Gleason as well as the works of other scholars on the important subject of masculinity

⁵³⁰ Gleason, *Making Men*, 159.

⁵³¹ Gleason, *Making Men*, 160.

⁵³² Gleason, *Making Men*, 160.

in close relation to the theory and practice of Greco-Roman rhetoric and its dominant role in the social ethos of the time.

As Corinth was one of the most important centres at the time of Paul, both commercially and socially, as well as in other aspects in the Roman Empire, this thesis takes the view that what has been said about rhetoric in Greco-Roman tradition would largely be true in Corinth. This naturally included the society's preoccupation with masculinity which was closely related to the theory and practice of rhetoric. Not only was the Corinthian opponents' criticism of the apostle Paul a clear reflection of the social ethos of the time, the apostle's response was also indicative of his knowledge about the issue, otherwise his polemics in passages such as 1 Cor. 2. 1-5 and 2 Cor. 10.10 would be quite unintelligible to the readers. As far as this thesis is concerned, this is just another example to show how important and necessary it is for the Corinthian text to be put in its proper historico-social context.

It is hoped that this chapter's study on Greco-Roman rhetoric, especially its preoccupation with delivery, "body language" and masculinity, has now paved the right way for a proper exegesis of 1 Cor. 2.1-5 and 2 Cor.10.10.

Chapter Five: Exegesis of 1 Corinthians 2.1-5 and 2 Corinthians 10.10

5.1 Introduction

The main concern of Part II is rhetoric, in close connection with Paul's determination not to proclaim his gospel with "plausible words of wisdom" (1 Cor. 2.4). Paul's self-presentation, as well as his manner of "speech" (λόγος) and "proclamation" (κήρυγμα, 2.4), i.e., his "delivery", seemed to have led to his critics' very damaging verdict that "his bodily presence is weak, and his speech contemptible" (2 Cor. 10.10). In the previous chapter due recognition was first given to the rediscovery of the importance of rhetorical studies in New Testament scholarship, especially in relation to the Corinthian context. The main bulk of chapter four was devoted to the study of some of the original texts of Greco-Roman writers, from Aristotle to Quintilian, on the theory and practice of ancient rhetoric, especially on delivery as "body language". This was immediately followed by a special reference to Gleason's study on masculinity, which was a dominant issue in the social ethos of Paul's time. It is hoped that this study on Greco-Roman rhetoric, especially its preoccupation with delivery, "body language" and masculinity, has now paved the way for a proper exegesis of 1 Cor. 2.1-5 and 2 Cor.10.10.

In 1 Cor. 1.18-31, Paul took a big risk to confront the current social ethos with "the message of the cross." He made a sharp contrast between divine wisdom and human wisdom. The latter was largely displayed by rhetorical eloquence in its delivery, a practice cherished most dearly by the Greeks and Romans, including the Corinthians. It was Paul's absolutely uncompromising conviction that the divine wisdom had already been revealed and powerfully demonstrated in the crucified Christ. Paul's polemic in

1.18-31 seemed to be largely directed against the unbelieving Jews and Gentiles (1.22) who were “perishing” (1.18). But in 2.1-5 and 2 Cor. 10.10 Paul apparently had his Christian critics in mind. Their criticism of Paul and disappointment with him seemed to be less with his “message of the cross” and more with his manner of delivery as well as his personal appearance, judging from the important statements such as 10.10 and 11.6, although for Paul his message could hardly be separated from his delivery. This last point is particularly important, because in dealing with the Corinthian crisis, including the apparently more practical aspect of it, such as presentation, or “delivery” (“body language”), Paul’s overriding concern was the “message of the cross” (1 Cor. 1.18; 2.2). For Paul, the *content* of the message should determine its presentation, and not the other way round. However, the criticism of Paul’s Corinthian critics as well as the apostle’s response could only be properly understood and appreciated in the context of Greco-Roman rhetoric, especially in its delivery as “body language” as well as society’s concept of masculinity.

Paul’s deliberate refusal to use “lofty words” or “plausible words of wisdom” in his proclamation became the more significant given the fact such rhetoric skill could well be at his disposal. Winter is prepared to go so far as to suggest that both Philo and Paul were indebted to Greek rhetoric and had in fact used their rhetorical training to overthrow the rhetorical devices of the sophists.⁵³³ However, as Winter has also rightly pointed out, “when it came to the public presentation of Paul’s message, he not only rejected ‘the grand style’ of rhetoric, but also the persuasive techniques which invigorated Greek rhetoric (1 Cor. 2.1-5). The comments of his opponents in 2 Corinthians 10.10 have established how others saw his ‘bodily presence’ and his ‘inadequate’ λόγους. Paul’s account in 2 Corinthians 10.10 and 11.6, presents a

⁵³³ Winter, *Philo*, 237-43.

composite picture. That he could have used 'the grand style' when speaking publicly is not problematical: that he chose not to when preaching is explicable for the theological reasons he gives (I Cor. 2.5)."⁵³⁴ Winter's reference to Paul's "theological reasons" is particularly relevant to this thesis which tries to argue that Paul's attempt to invert the Greco-Roman social ethos of his time was essentially out of "theological reasons".

In 2.1-5, apart from 2.2 which referred to the core content of Paul's message of the cross, the remaining four verses were mainly concerned with the apostle's manner of proclamation. One should not simply infer from Paul's statement in 2.1 that he had totally renounced rhetoric for the sake of the gospel message. That the well educated apostle to both the Jews and the Gentiles was familiar with Greco-Roman rhetoric seems to be beyond reasonable doubt. As Pogoloff has rightly said, "through rhetorical education and the general use of speech, the [Greco-Roman] culture itself became rhetorical."⁵³⁵ Litfin believes "by the first century this rhetorical tradition lay at the core of over half a millennium of Greek cultural history."⁵³⁶ As such, it might well be possible for Paul to have employed certain rhetorical skills for the sake of his own *apologia* without adopting the *modus operandi* of the sophists or his critics, and without compromising his own Christian integrity. In fact, Paul's letters were not only "weighty and strong" as his critics seemed to have acknowledged (2 Cor. 10.10), they also sounded very "rhetorical", even "eloquent", at times. 1 Cor. 1.18-31 may be cited as a good example.

What is the precise nature of 2.1-5? Is it just a "simple testimony"⁵³⁷ or "an autobiographical account"?⁵³⁸ It is obviously far more than that. Timothy Lim is clearly

⁵³⁴ Winter, *Philo*, 239.

⁵³⁵ Pogoloff, *Logos*, 48.

⁵³⁶ Litfin, *Proclamation*, 189.

⁵³⁷ Barrett, *The First Epistle*, 61.

right to regard it as “the personal manifestation of the apostle’s *theologia crucis* in preaching.”⁵³⁹ But Lim is also quick to recognize that the *theological* and the *sociological* were not mutually exclusive in the case of Paul: “It is difficult, however, not to recognize that a sociological interpretation, not to the exclusion of but complementing the theological exegesis, is also needed, for Paul in this passage employs terminology which traditionally belongs to rhetoric and appears to be distinguishing himself from the other preachers who were circulating in the Corinthians church.”⁵⁴⁰ Lim further argues that “it is unlikely that 1 Cor. 2.1-5 is a rhetorical strategy, whether as a tacit admission of the effectiveness of rhetoric...or as an attempt to disarm his audience (e.g. Dio, *Or.* 12.15; 42.2f), for the use of a device wrought by human wisdom at this point in the letter would unravel the thematic development of 1.17-25 and 1.26-31, and would contradict his theology of the cross.”⁵⁴¹ But as Winter has noted, Paul’s “renunciation of all technical rhetorical devices in his gospel presentation...with a theology of a crucified Messiah” would put him “in a powerless position in relation to the status structure of Corinth.”⁵⁴² Paul was obviously well prepared to accept such a “powerless position”, because he knew full well that *paradoxically* it was precisely in such a vulnerable position that the power of Christ crucified was manifested in his own weakness. No wonder Michael Bullmore concludes that 2.1-5 not only contains “both the content and the manner of Paul’s preaching”, it is also a critique of current rhetorical expectation as well as its firmly established standard by which a speaker was judged.⁵⁴³

⁵³⁸ Weiss, *Der Erste Korintherbrief*, 44, 47.

⁵³⁹ T. H. Lim, ‘Not in Persuasive Words of Wisdom, but in Demonstration of the Spirit and Power’, *NovT* 29/2 (1987), 137-49, at 145.

⁵⁴⁰ Lim, ‘Wisdom’, 145.

⁵⁴¹ Lim, ‘Wisdom’, 148, n. 29.

⁵⁴² Winter, *Philo*, 147-8.

⁵⁴³ Michael A. Bullmore, *St. Paul’s Theology of Rhetorical Style: An Examination of 1 Corinthians 2.1-5 in the Light of First Century Greco-Roman Rhetorical Culture* (San Francisco: International Scholars Publication, 1995), 221.

Winter makes a similar point when he suggests that while in 2.1-5 Paul “depends heavily on rhetorical language and allusions” (e.g., ὑπεροχή, πίστις, δύναμις, ἀπόδειξις), his approach has been shaped by his gospel message as well as his rejection of the social conventions associated with public speaking in Corinth. Winter thus believes that the apostle’s language was essentially “anti-sophistic.”⁵⁴⁴

5.2 Exegesis of 1 Cor. 2.1-5

2.1 Κἀγὼ ἐλθὼν πρὸς ὑμᾶς, ἀδελφοί, ἦλθον οὐ καθ’ ὑπεροχὴν λόγου ἢ σοφίας καταγγέλλων ὑμῖν τὸ μυστήριον τοῦ θεοῦ. (“When I came to you, brothers and sisters, I did not come proclaiming the mystery of God to you in lofty words or wisdom.”)

The Greek term κἀγὼ (“and I,” or “as for I,” “but I”), at the very beginning of 1 Cor. 2.1 clearly denotes emphasis. Barrett translates it as “it was in line with this principle.”⁵⁴⁵ Winter thinks that Paul is here making a clear contrast between the sophists and himself.⁵⁴⁶ Whatever the case may be, what Paul was stating here in 2.1 was consistent with what he had said earlier in 1.17, i.e., that his proclamation was not with “eloquent wisdom” (ἐν σοφίᾳ λόγου). This point was of utmost importance for Paul’s *apologia*, because its persuasiveness depended largely on the *consistency*, not only of his message of the cross but also his *manner* of proclamation (“delivery”), i.e., the whole of his *modus operandi*. As such, the word ἐλθὼν (“came”) in 2.1 could also be rendered “first came” – “when I *first* came to you”. In other words, Paul seemed to be saying, “From the day when I *first* came to

⁵⁴⁴ Winter, *Philo*, 147-8.

⁵⁴⁵ Barrett, *The First Epistle*, 62.

⁵⁴⁶ Winter, *Philo*, 155.

you *until now* my *modus operandi* has been consistently the same.” The same word *καὶ* γὰρ which reappears in 2.3 seems to have the same force.

The word *ὑπεροχή* (“lofty”) was a common term in the language of Greco-Roman rhetoric. It was cited by Aristotle to describe the “superiority” men often felt based on *γένος*, *δύναμις*, and *ἀρετή*.⁵⁴⁷ Aristotle also referred to the sense of superiority the eloquent orator had over against the incompetent speaker.⁵⁴⁸ For the present exegesis, the most relevant point in Aristotle’s comment is obviously his reference to “oratory”. However, Aristotle also clearly indicated that the word *ὑπεροχή* in this particular context was not confined simply to its rhetorical connotation. It also had a great deal to do with superior social status according to the social ethos of Paul’s time. On the Greco-Roman society’s preoccupation with competition and rivalry for social status Pogoloff comments: “this was already implicit in 1.17, since, as we have seen, *σοφία λόγου* would normally be taken as status-related, especially in the context of rivalries and the opposition to the cross. The nature of this opposition is brought out in 1.18-25, as Paul develops the paradoxical topic of the saving power of the “foolish” and “powerless” (low-status) *λόγος τοῦ σταυροῦ* versus the boasted power (high status) of *σοφία λόγου*.”⁵⁴⁹ It was precisely in response to the Corinthians’ preoccupation with social status that Paul had solemnly reminded the Corinthians of their humble origin in 1.26-28. That being the case, Paul’s important decision not to use *ὑπεροχὴν λόγου ἢ σοφίας* (“lofty words or wisdom”) was not only a very significant departure from current social convention in rhetorical context, it was actually tantamount to renouncing his own social status. The drastic nature of the apostle’s inversion of Greco-Roman social ethos must also be perceived from this perspective.

⁵⁴⁷ Winter, *Philo*, 155.

⁵⁴⁸ Aristotle, *Rhet.* 1379a 7.

⁵⁴⁹ Pogoloff, *Logos*, 132.

This significant term ὑπεροχή was employed by Diodorus to describe men's competition for social status through eloquence.⁵⁵⁰ Raymond Collins renders this phrase ὑπεροχὴν λόγου ἢ σοφίας as "advantage of rhetoric or wisdom" which is a reprise of the cleverness-of-speech motif of 1.17 (οὐκ ἐν σοφίᾳ λόγου). "'Advantage,' literally 'heights,' is hapax in Paul. Used metaphorically it suggests not only the loftiness of one's words but even more the advantage that accrues to one who has the advantage of high ground in a battle. Paul denies that when proclaiming the gospel to the Corinthians he used his oratorical skills to gain a competitive edge."⁵⁵¹

In the opening chapters of 1 Corinthians Paul had consistently used the word λόγος in close connection with σοφία. This was because, for Paul, it was not just any kind of λόγος which he arbitrarily rejected, but λόγος based on σοφία. Since σοφία was already a well defined technical term in Greco-Roman understanding at the time of Paul, one could quite readily assume that the Corinthians would be quite well acquainted with it and the connotations closely associated with it. Not only were they familiar with it, they also greatly cherished and valued it.⁵⁵²

With reference to the present participle active καταγγέλλων in 2.1 Litfin thinks that "Paul's view of a preacher contrasted sharply with that of the Greco-Roman orator."⁵⁵³ While the Greco-Roman orators fully exploited their rhetorical skills to achieve their self-seeking goal, Paul as a faithful preacher of Christ crucified refused to follow that kind of style. To resort to human wisdom, especially "eloquence" and human "dynamic" through rhetoric, would be unworthy of a faithful preacher of the cross: "The *modus operandi* Paul adopted to avoid usurping the power of the cross is summed up in

⁵⁵⁰ Diodorus Siculus, 34/35.5.5

⁵⁵¹ R. F. Collins, *First Corinthians*, (Collegeville, Minn: Glazier/Liturgical Press, 1999), 118.

⁵⁵² Savage, *Power*, 74-5.

⁵⁵³ Litfin, *Proclamation*, 247.

the term *proclamation* – the simple, straightforward ‘placarding’ of the cross.’⁵⁵⁴ While the orators relied on human means Paul depended on the working power of the Spirit to produce the desired result which was πίστις (faith). But Litfin has also rightly pointed out that the contrast here is “not between reason and irrationality”. It is rather between “two different ways of bringing listeners to see the truth of the Gospel”.⁵⁵⁵

There has been some textual discussion on two phrases in the Greek manuscripts: μυστήριον τοῦ θεοῦ and μαρτύριον τοῦ θεοῦ.⁵⁵⁶ Metzger suggests that μαρτύριον could be a recollection of 1.6 whereas mystery here “prepares for its usage in ver. 7.”⁵⁵⁷ Collins thinks that μυστήριον (“mystery”, cf. 2.7) makes better sense in the Corinthian context with special reference to the eschatological significance of Paul’s message of the cross which has been clearly expressed in 1.18.⁵⁵⁸

The use of the expression μυστήριον τοῦ θεοῦ (“the mystery of God”) evidently suggested that Paul’s determination not to resort to “lofty words or wisdom” was based on far more than just *rhetorical* considerations. For Paul, it was also a profoundly *theological* issue. As a bearer of the message of the cross Paul was absolutely convinced that he had been commissioned not to “deliver” an eloquent human speech, but to proclaim “the mystery of God”. In Paul’s case, it was the *content* of the message that ultimately determined the *manner* of the speech. This clearly distinguished Paul from the Greco-Roman orator of the time for whom the *manner* of “delivery” was just as important as, and perhaps more so than, the *content* of the speech itself.

⁵⁵⁴ Litfin, *Proclamation*, 247.

⁵⁵⁵ Litfin, *Proclamation*, 248.

⁵⁵⁶ While μαρτύριον (“witness”) is supported by $\aleph^c$, B, D, G, P, Ψ , 33, 81, syr^h, Vulgate, and readings in Origen, Chrysostom and Jerome, μυστήριον (“mystery”) has early backing in the Beatty Papyrus, the Codex Sinaiticus, and a number of Latin fathers.

⁵⁵⁷ Bruce M. Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament: A Companion Volume to the United Bible Societies’ Greek New Testament* (2nd ed.; London; New York: United Bible Societies, 1994), 480.

⁵⁵⁸ Collins, *First Corinthians*, 118, 115-6.

As has already been made sufficiently clear in the exegesis of 1.18-31, Paul was not rejecting human wisdom just conceptually or intellectually. He was trying to demolish a well established *system* which had become an alternative to God's way of salvation or in real danger of becoming so.

As a *system* it was only natural that σοφία should have been fully integrated, together with λόγος, into the whole social ethos of a city like Corinth. On this Pogoloff elaborates: "when σοφία and λόγος are combined in ancient usage, they frequently imply far more than just technical skill at language. *Rather*, they imply a whole world of social status related to speech. In the Greco-Roman milieu of Corinth, one who was described as speaking ἐν σοφίᾳ λόγου would have been understood to be an educated, cultured individual who could speak to a group about a subject in a manner which persuaded them by evidence and argument presented in a suitable style....Such speech communicated not just the subject matter, but also explicitly or implicitly communicated the character and authority (*ethos*) of the speaker."⁵⁵⁹

2.2 οὐ γὰρ ἔκρινά τι εἰδέναι ἐν ὑμῖν εἰ μὴ Ἰησοῦν Χριστὸν καὶ τοῦτον ἐσταυρωμένον. ("For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and him crucified.")

As has already been noted earlier, the *modus operandi* adopted by Paul in the proclamation of the gospel was ultimately based on *theological* considerations. 2.2 is another good example. Here the Greek γάρ ("for") indicates not only a causal relation between verses 1 and 2, whereby verse 2 explains the first verse, it also provides a *theological* reason why Paul did not come to Corinth proclaiming his message of the

⁵⁵⁹ Pogoloff, *Logos*, 54.

cross in “lofty words or wisdom”. Ἰησοῦν Χριστὸν καὶ τοῦτον ἐσταυρωμένον (“Jesus Christ, and him crucified”) was a profoundly *theological* statement about Paul’s core message. The verb ἔκρινα (“decided”) denoted a serious determination and firm commitment on the part of the messenger of the gospel. It was a crucial decision which was clearly and firmly resolved in Paul’s mind *before* he came (ἐλθὼν) to Corinth. The short phrase “to know nothing” (οὐ τι εἰδέναι) was clearly used with great emphasis and had the crucified Christ as Paul’s only focus.

As has already been shown in chapter one in its study on the origin and practice of crucifixion in the ancient world, together with the exegesis of 1.18-31, Christ crucified had every reason to be regarded as “stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles” (1.23). Now that Paul had purposely adopted a *modus operandi* in the proclamation of this message of “stumbling block” and “foolishness”, the unbelieving Jews and Gentiles would not only find his *message* itself totally unacceptable, but also the *manner* of his proclamation had now become contemptible.

The word ἐσταυρωμένον (“crucified”) which had already been used by Paul in 1.23 in the form of perfect passive participle in the Greek, reappears here in 2.2. In both cases the Greek perfect tense was clearly meant to describe an action or event that occurred in the past and its effect continued into the present. Thus, when Paul placed the focus on “Christ crucified” as the core message of his gospel he was in effect suggesting that the cross had not been cancelled out by all the events that subsequently followed, including Christ’s resurrection, so that Christ crucified became the very key to unlock the “mystery of God” (2.1).

Joseph Lightfoot takes the phrase “to know nothing” to simply mean “I did not trouble myself about the knowledge of anything else.”⁵⁶⁰ It was clearly intended to emphasize Paul’s single-mindedness concerning the gospel message as well as his firm commitment to its proclamation. Schrage’s German rendering is simply “*nichts anderes hat Paulus wissen wollen*” (nothing else has Paul wanted to know).⁵⁶¹ Fee rightly qualifies it by adding that “to know nothing” does not mean that Paul rejected all other knowledge; rather, Paul had a single-minded focus on Christ crucified.⁵⁶²

Gorman translates 2.2 as: “I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ - that is, Jesus Christ *crucified*.” Gorman prefers this translation because of its clear focus and emphasis on the crucifixion of Jesus. He thinks that “in context” the words “to know” mean something like “to experience and to announce in word and deed” which is very “comprehensive.” Gorman agrees with Hans Küng that Paul succeeded more than anyone when he expresses the ultimate distinguishing feature of Christianity: the “cross-centred focus.”⁵⁶³ Gorman is right in holding that “it is not indeed as risen, exalted, living, divine, but as crucified, that this Jesus Christ is distinguished unmistakably from the many risen, exalted, living gods and deified founders of religion, from the Caesars, geniuses, and heroes of world history.”⁵⁶⁴

2.3 *κἀγὼ ἐν ἀσθενείᾳ καὶ ἐν φόβῳ καὶ ἐν τρόμῳ πολλῷ ἐγενόμην πρὸς ὑμᾶς,*

(“And I came to you in weakness and in fear and in much trembling.”)

The absence of certain details in this verse has puzzled scholars and general readers

⁵⁶⁰ J. B. Lightfoot, *Notes on the Epistles of St Paul from Unpublished Commentaries* (London: Macmillan, 1895), 171.

⁵⁶¹ Schrage, *Der Erste Brief*, 1.227.

⁵⁶² Fee, *The First epistle*, 92.

⁵⁶³ Gorman, *Cruciformity*, 1.

⁵⁶⁴ Gorman, *Cruciformity*, 2.

alike. The following views help to illustrate the complexity of the issue and they indicate that the verse allows for various possible interpretations. Savage has raised a number of questions regarding this puzzling verse: "Why was Paul afraid? Did he think his failure in Athens would be repeated in Corinth? Was he sensing a personal inadequacy for the ministry? Was he intimidated by large crowds? Was he anticipating persecution?"⁵⁶⁵ Savage's questions could be easily multiplied. Savage has readily assumed that Paul's mission in Athens was a "failure". This thesis wishes to question such an assumption. Savage's assumption is obviously based on Acts 17. But the same passage also clearly states that "some of them [the Athenians] joined him and became believers, including Dionysius the Areopagite and a woman named Damaris, and others with them" (17.34). The conversion of "the Areopagite" alone was certainly not a small matter. In fact, even if no conversion actually took place, Paul's opportunity to address such a distinguished gathering at the Areopagus and to debate with the Epicurean and Stoic philosophers was already very remarkable.

Collins suggests that "Paul's self-depreciation is part of his rhetorical appeal. Ancient rhetors such as Isocrates and Dio Chrysostom often voiced a kind of mock humility so as to win the good will of their audience. Nonetheless, Paul's description of his weakness may reflect his real situation as well as his rhetorical strategy (cf. 2 Cor. 11.16-29)."⁵⁶⁶ It is hard to know if Paul's statement was really part of his "rhetorical appeal" or "strategy".

Thiselton thinks that the expression ἐν φόβῳ καὶ ἐν τρόμῳ could best be understood with special reference to Paul's "sense of responsibility before God to fulfill God's

⁵⁶⁵ Savage, *Power*, 72.

⁵⁶⁶ Collins, *First Corinthians*, 116.

call".⁵⁶⁷ Thiselton's suggestion here is helpful, because as far as Paul was concerned, it was indeed an awful responsibility in proclaiming "the message of the cross" which the preacher himself already knew would ultimately determine the hearers' eternal destiny, either salvation or damnation (1 Cor. 1.18). Paul's responsibility became heavier since he himself already knew that his message of the cross would be offensive to his audience who would only welcome and appreciate things that were powerful and glorious according to the current social ethos.⁵⁶⁸

Welborn suggests that Paul might have portrayed himself as a well known figure in the mime, or the befuddled orator: "Paul evokes the well-known figure of the befuddled orator in the account of his appearance and proclamation at Corinth in 2.1-5, a description which must have struck Hellenistic eyes and ears as a virtual caricature."⁵⁶⁹

Welborn's suggestion seems to have the support of some classical examples. Cicero was portrayed as a comic figure: "you always come to the court trembling, as if you were going to fight as a gladiator, and after uttering a few words in a meek and half-dead voice, you take your leave."⁵⁷⁰ The speech of the emperor Claudius was thought to be "confused mumbling" and "unintelligible".⁵⁷¹ Zeus was portrayed as a foolish orator: "I am confused in the head and trembling and my tongue seems to be tied."⁵⁷² Welborn elaborates: "like Seneca's Claudius, Paul is weak and impotent. Like Lucian's Zeus, Paul is frightened and confused. Like Herodas' 'stammerer' Battaros, Paul trembles before his audience."⁵⁷³

⁵⁶⁷ Thiselton, *The First Epistle*, 213.

⁵⁶⁸ Schrage, *Der Erste Brief*, 229.

⁵⁶⁹ Welborn, *Fool*, 98.

⁵⁷⁰ Cassius 46.7.

⁵⁷¹ Seneca, *Apoc.* 5.2; 6.1-2.

⁵⁷² Lucian, *Jup. Trag.* 14.

⁵⁷³ Welborn, *Fool*, 98.

Socrates had been described by Callicles as a “fool”, whose speech was more befitting to a slave (δουλοπρεπές), and appeared ridiculous (καταγέλαστον) and unmanly (ἄνανδρον) in front of his audience.⁵⁷⁴ Welborn thinks that “Paul follows a Socratic precedent in making himself and his manner of speaking the object of parody.”⁵⁷⁵

While Quintilian emphasized that an orator must have strength and confidence, he also agreed that “there is also a certain tacit approval to be won by proclaiming that we are weak, unprepared, and no match for the talents of the opposing party” (4.1.8).

Welborn’s finding deserves serious consideration. However, just like some of the views that have been cited, it is equally difficult to be certain if such was indeed the case with Paul. For one thing, even granted that Paul was knowledgeable about the tradition cited by Welborn, it was quite another thing to suggest that the apostle had in fact followed such a tradition which was based on a very different world view from Paul’s own.

Having stated the core gospel message most concisely but powerfully in 2.2, Paul in 2.3 revealed openly to his Corinthian readers how he first came to Corinth in terms of manner and feeling: “in weakness and in fear and in much trembling”. The statement became the more meaningful and revealing in comparison and contrast with what Paul had said earlier in 2.1 which was also about his first “coming” to the Corinthians. “Lofty words or wisdom” in 2.1 and “weakness...fear and...trembling” in 2.3 now form a very interesting contrast. Paul’s Corinthian letters are full of such contrasts or comparisons. In the two Corinthian letters here is the first time where Paul talked about his own “weakness” (ἀσθένεια), although he had already referred to God’s or Jesus’ “weakness” earlier in 1.25. The matter of “weakness” is raised again in 4.9-13, 2 Cor.

⁵⁷⁴ Plato, *Gorg.* 485 B-C.

⁵⁷⁵ Welborn, *Fool*, 98,

⁵⁷⁵ Welborn, *Fool*, 98-9.

6.4-10 and 12.7-10 with considerable illustrations and elaborations. Yet, none of these texts seems to indicate clearly and precisely the nature of the Paul's "weakness". As such, one is tempted to suggest that this weakness could be physical, and/or mental, and/or spiritual. Based on 1 Cor. 4.10 – "We are fools for the sake of Christ, but you are wise in Christ. We are weak, but you are strong" – which was obviously put in a rather sarcastic way in order to provoke his Corinthian critics to think clearly and reflect humbly, one may be allowed to suggest that it was in a similar way that "weakness" was used in 2.3 by Paul. In other words, in comparison to the so-called "strong" in Corinth, Paul, a δοῦλος of Christ, was quite prepared to consider himself as being "weak" for the sake of Christ. For the sake of Christ, Paul was prepared not just to be considered "weak" or a "fool" (4.10), but even to share Christ's sufferings "by becoming like him in his death" (Phil. 3.10). Of course, one should not rule out the possibility that "weakness" in 2.3 might just as well be physical in nature, the kind of "weakness" that he mentioned, for instance, in 2 Cor. 12.9, although no one can be certain about the precise nature of such "weakness". And since Paul had earlier in 1.23-25 described "Christ crucified" as "God's weakness" paradoxically, it might well be that the so-called "weakness" in 2.3 was used by Paul in a similar way. While human "weakness" was often perceived negatively and despised particularly in Greco-Roman society, especially in its understanding of masculinity as well as in rhetorical theory and practice, it was something that Paul very much wanted to "boast" about, especially when there was a divine promise attached to it (2 Cor. 12.8-10). In this connection David Black has an insightful comment on 2 Cor. 11.29: "It is this sympathetic statement in 11.29 - τίς ἀσθενεῖ καὶ οὐκ ἀσθενῶ; – that closes the preceding catalogue of persecutions and sufferings (11.22-28) and prepares the reader for Paul's assertion that it is only in the things which reveal his weakness does he dare to glory (11.30)."⁵⁷⁶

⁵⁷⁶ David Alan Black, *Paul, Apostle of Weakness: Astheneia and its Cognates in the Pauline Literature* (New York: Peter Lang, 1984), 144.

The Greek words φόβος (“fear”) and τρόμος (“trembling”) are perhaps just as intriguing as ἀσθενεία (“weakness”). Were the words “fear” and “trembling” used by Paul with reference to God or to man, or to both? The text itself is not clear. It is perhaps meaningful with reference to *both* the divine and the human.

Firstly, with reference to the divine, the Greek words φόβος and τρόμος are quite often used in combination in the LXX,⁵⁷⁷ especially with reference to the human encounter with the divine with fear and trembling, with the emphasis on the majesty and holiness of the Lord.⁵⁷⁸ For example, Moses and the Israelites sang this song to the triumphant LORD who revealed his power to the Egyptians: “Terror and dread (φόβος καὶ τρόμος) will fall upon them. By the power of your arm they will be as still as a stone- until your people pass by, O LORD, until the people you bought pass by” (Exodus 15.16).

Another good example is Isaiah 19.16 in which both φόβος and τρόμος appear in the LXX: “On that day the Egyptians will be like women, and tremble with fear [ἐν φόβῳ καὶ ἐν τρόμῳ] before the hand that the Lord of hosts raises against them.” Although it is difficult to know if Paul had this verse of Isaiah in mind when he referred to φόβος and τρόμος here in 1 Cor. 2.3. The word “women” would have gender connotations in the Corinthian context, especially with reference to the current concept of masculinity. For the Corinthians φόβος and τρόμος could only be the behaviour and disposition of women, children, and slaves! But as a specially commissioned messenger of the gospel of salvation it was very natural and understandable that the apostle Paul should have a deep sense of “fear” and “trembling” because of the absolutely solemn and awful nature of the task. This was particularly true of Paul who was most conscious of his divine

⁵⁷⁷ Ex. 15.16; Judith 2.28; 15.2; Ps. 54 (55).5; Is. 19.16; Da. LXX. 4.16; 4 Macc. 4.10. Edwin Hatch and Henry A. Redpath, *A Concordance to the Septuagint and the Other Greek Versions of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1998), 1435-6, 1374.

⁵⁷⁸ Savage thinks that the phrase φόβος καὶ τρόμος used by Paul could be referring to his own daily experience with the awe-inspiring majesty of God (*Power*, 73).

calling as he identified himself at the very beginning of the two Corinthian letters: “Paul, called to be an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God” (1 Cor. 1.1).

Secondly, Paul’s possible reference to the human was inseparable from the first. While the origin of the gospel as well as Paul’s call to proclaim it had come from God, the gospel itself was meant for *humans* to hear and hopefully to receive. As has already been noted earlier, the receiving or the rejecting of the message of the cross would ultimately determine human destiny for eternity. The eternal damnation of those who rejected the gospel must have caused a tremendous sense of “fear and trembling” on the part of the bearer of the gospel message. As such, it would be reasonable to assume that it was with a deep sense of burden and responsibility that Paul first came Corinth. Moreover, both the *content* of the gospel, especially with Christ crucified as its core message, and Paul’s *manner* of “delivery” or *body language*, also gave ample cause for Paul to be fearful and tremble for reasons which were just too obvious for both Paul himself and for the Corinthians.

Generally speaking, in Greco-Roman society only a fool or an insane man would publicly reveal or confess his own “weakness” (ἀσθενεία), especially when confronted with formidable opposition and challenges, as was clearly Paul’s unenviable position at the time. A *man* who did that would not even be worthy of a respectable challenger according to the most refined and sophisticated game of Greco-Roman rhetoric, as the previous study on rhetoric has already witnessed. It was also absolutely unacceptable to the Greco-Roman perception of masculinity. A respectable *man* was supposed to be strong, or at least pretend to be so. To publicly acknowledge one’s “weakness” in the context of masculinity was tantamount to admitting unconditional defeat even before the contest actually started. In fact, in such a situation it was even meaningless to have a

contest, since under normal circumstances a contest was supposed to be a contest between *equals*. Thus, when one party publicly acknowledged his own weakness, the sense of “equality” was immediately lost and the contest aborted. It is very important to appreciate Paul’s admission or acknowledgement of personal “weakness” in 2.3 in this particular context, because what has been said about Greco-Roman rhetoric in this thesis was common knowledge, even common sense, as far as the Corinthians were concerned. As such, it became the more startling and incredible that Paul should have made such an acknowledgement publicly in the Corinthian context. Common sense would obviously suggest that it was a most crucial time for the deeply troubled apostle to be assertive with regard to his status and authority in order to effectively deal with the great Corinthian crisis and controversy. Again, what Paul did was none other than a conscious and drastic inversion of the social ethos of the time.

However, it could not be ruled out that ἀσθενεία (“weakness”) in 2.3 might well be physical in nature, since the word means illness. Paul explicitly mentioned his bodily illness (δι’ ἀσθένειαν τῆς σαρκός, Gal. 4.13) for which he had been burdened when he first preached the gospel in Galatia.⁵⁷⁹ Also, Paul’s reference to the “thorn in the flesh” (σκόλοψ τῇ σαρκί) appears like some kind of bodily ailment (2 Cor. 12.7).⁵⁸⁰ It could also be referring to Paul’s physical disability.⁵⁸¹ Hock thinks that Paul’s “weakness” could be closely related to his manual labour as a tent-maker who was perceived by others as slavish and the lack of social standing in a most status-conscious Corinthian society.⁵⁸² Lim regards Paul’s refusal of support as “a sign of his weakness (10-13)”.⁵⁸³

⁵⁷⁹ H. D. Betz, *Galatians: A Commentary on Paul's Letter to the Churches in Galatia* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1979), 224-6.

⁵⁸⁰ V. P. Furnish, *II Corinthians* (New York: Doubleday, 1984), 548.

⁵⁸¹ Forbes, ‘Comparison’, 14.

⁵⁸² Hock, *The Social Context*, 67.

⁵⁸³ Lim, ‘Wisdom’, 142.

2.4 καὶ ὁ λόγος μου καὶ τὸ κήρυγμά μου οὐκ ἐν πειθοῖ[ς] σοφίας [λόγοις] ἀλλ' ἐν ἀποδείξει πνεύματος καὶ δυνάμεως, (“My speech and my proclamation were not with plausible words of wisdom, but with a demonstration of the Spirit and of power,”)
 5 ἵνα ἡ πίστις ὑμῶν μὴ ᾗ ἐν σοφίᾳ ἀνθρώπων ἀλλ' ἐν δυνάμει θεοῦ. (“so that your faith might rest not on human wisdom but on the power of God.”)

Paul’s refusal to use “words of [human] wisdom” (σοφία λόγου, 1.17) or “lofty words or wisdom” (ὑπεροχὴν λόγου ἢ σοφίας, 2.1) or “plausible words of wisdom” (πειθοῖ[ς] σοφίας [λόγοις], 2.4) is given a very clear reason here in 2.4, 5.⁵⁸⁴

This exegesis is more inclined to think that for Paul, not to proclaim his message of the cross “with plausible words of wisdom” was more a deliberate choice than the actual lack of ability to be a good public orator. It is hard to believe that one who could write and argue so eloquently and skilfully and spoke powerfully for the gospel, as Paul himself had apparently demonstrated, was not somehow capable of impressing the public with his eloquence, unless he was really suffering from some mysterious physical impediment. The word “decided” (ἐκρίνα, from κρίνειν) in 2.2 is an active verb and it clearly suggests deliberate and rational thinking and action. As such, the following verse 2.3 might not necessarily be a literal statement. For it could well be Paul’s rhetorical device intended to provoke. Or it could well indicate Paul’s awful sense of responsibility and burden as the messenger of the gospel, the response to which forever determined a person’s destiny. If it were indeed Paul’s deliberate choice not to proclaim

⁵⁸⁴ The phrase πειθοῖ[ς] σοφίας [λόγοις] has quite a few variant readings. In some texts the phrase appears before ἀνθρωπίνης while others have this adjective after σοφίας (K^c, A, C, P, Ψ, 81, syr^h al). Metzger regards this as “obviously secondary” as it “has the appearance of an explanatory gloss inserted by copyists (at different places) in order to identify more exactly the nuance attaching to σοφίας”. Metzger explains that “in order to represent the diversity of evidence, a majority of the Committee decided to print πειθοῖ[ς], and, on the strength of P⁴⁶ G 35^a which lack λόγοις, to enclose this latter word within square brackets” (Metzger, *Commentary*, 481).

the “mystery of God” in “lofty words or wisdom” (2.2), it would also be thoroughly consistent with his overriding intention to invert the social ethos of his time.

As has been noted earlier, the so-called “weakness” in 2.3 was perceived only from a human perspective, with regard to both the *content* of the message of the cross and Paul’s manner of its *delivery*, including his allegedly unimpressive physical appearance. This seemed to be one of the major reasons for Paul’s “fear” and “trembling”, i.e., for fear that the message of salvation might be rejected and thus resulted in the eternal damnation of the hearers (1.18). In other words, for those who were “perishing” (1.18), both the *content* of Paul’s message of the cross and his *manner* of proclamation (delivery or body language) were the main reasons for their rejection. Hence the logic of the apostle’s clear statement in 2.4 about “speech and proclamation” (ὁ λόγος καὶ τὸ κήρυγμα). In substance what was said in the remaining part of 2.4-5 was already stated in 1.17-31, except for the reference to “the Spirit” (πνεύματος) at the end of 2.4. The “Spirit” is given a much fuller treatment in 3.10-15. When this passage is read in connection with 1.20-31, “power” (δύναμις) is almost synonymous with the “Spirit” (πνεῦμα), a sort of hendiadys, as Collins has rightly noted: “‘Spirit and power’ is classical Pauline hendiadys (1 Thess. 1.5; cf. Acts 1.8) in which the exegetical ‘and power’ identifies ‘the spirit’ as the powerful Spirit of God.”⁵⁸⁵

The polemical nature of the word δύναμις (“power”) in 2.4-5 is very obvious in this particular context. Δύναμις was a key word in both Greco-Roman rhetoric, especially in the body language of delivery, and masculinity. Δύναμις was also the very thing which the Corinthians, especially Paul’s critics, most cherished and claimed to possess. Moreover, the power or authority of Paul was also seriously being challenged in

⁵⁸⁵ Collins, *First Corinthians*, 120.

Corinth. However, Paul's primary concern here and elsewhere was not so much with his own personal power or authority, but God's (1.17-18, 24-25; 2.4-5).

Closely connected with the concept of δύναμις was another equally important word in Greco-Roman tradition, i.e., ἀπόδειξις ("demonstration"). Plato used the term ἀπόδειξις as a means of proof of an argument.⁵⁸⁶ Aristotle was similarly concerned with proofs (πίστεις): "proof is a sort of demonstration (ἀπόδειξις) since we are most strongly convinced when we suppose anything to have been demonstrated (ἀποδεδειχθαι)."⁵⁸⁷ Epictetus employed ἀπόδειξις in a similar sense⁵⁸⁸ while Plutarch regarded ἀπόδειξις as a means of finding truth: "philosophy is concerned with truth, and the illumination of truth is demonstration (ἀπόδειξις)."⁵⁸⁹

Lim has observed quite insightfully that "by employing it with πνεύματος and δυνάμεως, Paul uses ἀπόδειξις in a way which is different from and counter to the rhetorical meaning of the term. He asserts that his word and his preaching are based upon a demonstration, not of the rhetorical kind, but of the Spirit and of power. This demonstration does not consist of arguments from generally accepted truths, but upon the divine conviction of the Spirit and power (cf. 1 Cor. 4.20)."⁵⁹⁰ However, Lim is quick to qualify that Paul's determination not to follow the current rhetorical practice did not mean a total rejection of the art. Paul simply did not want his proclamation to depend on "plausible words of wisdom", but on "the Spirit and power".⁵⁹¹

⁵⁸⁶ Plato, *Soph.* 265D; *Phaed.* 77C.

⁵⁸⁷ Aristotle, *Rhet.* 1355a 11.

⁵⁸⁸ Epictetus 2.25. Cf. Diogenes Laertius 7.45.

⁵⁸⁹ Plutarch, *Mor.* 387A.

⁵⁹⁰ Lim, 'Wisdom', 147.

⁵⁹¹ Lim, 'Wisdom', 148.

In the final analysis, church schisms in Corinth were essentially a “power” struggle. The rise to social prominence and glory depended very much on the acquisition of power as well as its maintenance and increase in Greco-Roman society. Without real “power,” rhetoric and its body language were virtually meaningless. The phrase “a demonstration (ἀπόδειξις) of the Spirit and power” says much about the problem in Corinth as well as Paul’s controversy with his critics. Human “eloquent wisdom” (1.17) and “lofty words or wisdom” were nothing, unless it could be *demonstrated* in real power. Judging from the overall tone of the Corinthian correspondence, one gets the impression that Paul did not seem to really believe that his Corinthian critics actually had as much δύναμις as they claimed to have or imagined to have. Paul’s view was clearly reflected, for example, in 4.18-20 where the “power” issue was raised in a highly polemical manner. One is tempted to think that there was actually no need for the apostle to find out *if* “these arrogant people” really had “power” or not. The very tone of Paul seemed to indicate that he did not really believe that they had! Interestingly enough, the Greek word which has been rendered “talk” in the NRSV is λόγος. Ironically, it was λόγος (“speech”) that Paul had identified as a particular “gift” (χάρισμα) which the Corinthians had, at the beginning of the first Corinthian letter (1.7). But equally ironical was the sad fact that this particular χάρισμα had caused enormous trouble in Corinth. No wonder Paul had to deal with it head-on and in the most severe manner.

Again, here in 2.5, just as in 1.17-31, “human wisdom” (σοφία ἀνθρώπων) is set in stark contrast with “the power of God” (δυνάμει θεοῦ). Paul finally explained why he did not make his proclamation about Christ crucified “with plausible words of wisdom, but with a demonstration of the Spirit and of power” when he first came to the Corinthians: “so that your faith might rest not on human wisdom but on the power of God.”

5.3 Exegesis of 2 Cor. 10.10

2 Cor. 10.10 ὅτι αἱ ἐπιστολαὶ μέν, φησὶν, βαρεῖαι καὶ ἰσχυραί, ἡ δὲ παρουσία τοῦ σώματος ἀσθενὴς καὶ ὁ λόγος ἔξουθενημένος. (“**For they say, ‘His letters are weighty and strong, but his bodily presence is weak, and his speech of no account.’**”)

Introduction

2 Cor. 10.10 is put here in close connection with 1 Cor. 2.1-5 mainly because these two Corinthian passages were dealing with virtually the same issue, namely Paul’s self-presentation, delivery, or body language and λόγος (“speech” or word). Yet, the context of the present “2 Corinthians” could not be assumed to be exactly the same as “1 Corinthians” in terms of time and circumstances.

Paul’s relationship with the Corinthian church was a very complicated and complex one and only two “Corinthian letters” are available. According to 1 Cor. 5.9 Paul had apparently written another letter which dealt with, among other issues, sexual immorality. Between the present two “letters” there seems to be a certain time gap of which Paul’s modern reader has very little knowledge. In 2 Cor. 2.1 Paul referred to “another painful visit”. This seemed to imply that after the writing of the present “1 Corinthians” Paul had actually made one “painful visit” to Corinth, very much in line with what he promised in 1 Cor. 4.19: “But I will come to you soon, if the Lord wills, and I will find out not the talk of these arrogant people but their power”. Paul’s promise here in 4.19 clearly suggested that one of the main purposes of his intended visit was to deal with the “arrogant people” in the church and his tone was clearly severe. As such, if Paul’s promised visit did take place it would be quite consistent with the “painful visit” mentioned by Paul in 2 Cor. 2.1.

In his first visit Paul stayed in Corinth for a year and a half (Acts 18.11). When a certain time gap between the present "1 Corinthians" and "2 Corinthians" is taken into consideration, it would be quite reasonable to assume that quite a few years had passed between Paul's first visit to Corinth and the time when 2 Corinthians 10.10 was written. Ernest Best doubts if the present "2 Corinthians" was a single letter and suggests that "it may consist of portions of several letters of Paul which someone at Corinth put together after his death in order to preserve them." Best elaborates:

There is a very clear break both in thought and in mood at the end of chapter 9, and a very strong case can be made for regarding the whole of chapters 10-13 as coming from another letter. Many scholars identify this with the intermediate or painful letter. More probably chapters 10-13 come from a letter written after chapters 1-9. If so, they depict another stage in which relations between Paul and the Corinthians again became worse after the improvement indicated in 7.5-16. This deterioration was caused by preachers who came into Corinth from other Corinthian communities with ideas about Jesus and the gospel which were very different from those of Paul.⁵⁹²

I am happy to accept the suggestion that chapters 10-13 of the present "2 Corinthians" probably formed a unit of its own originally. However, it is not quite prepared to go so far as to endorse Best's view that "2 Corinthians" may "consist of portions of several letters of Paul which someone at Corinth put together after his death in order to preserve them."⁵⁹³

There are considerable autobiographical notes in 2 Corinthians. This was also to be expected as this letter, especially chapters 10-13, was mainly devoted to Paul's defence of his own *modus operandi* as an apostle against the false or "super-apostles" (11.5). It is particularly significant that it was in special reference to the "super-apostles" that Paul clearly stated that while he might be "untrained in speech", he was however, not untrained "in knowledge". The polemical context of 10-13 seemed to suggest that the

⁵⁹² Ernest Best, *Second Corinthians* (Atlanta: John Knox, 1987), 2.

⁵⁹³ See Barclay, '2 Corinthians', in James D.G. Dunn and John W. Rogerson (eds.), *Eerdmans Commentary on the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 2003), 1353-73; Thrall, *Commentary*, 1.3-49; Furnish, *II Corinthians*, 29-54.

perception of Paul being “untrained in speech” was the negative opinion of his opponents. This was most probably the origin of the critical statement in 10.10 regarding Paul’s “bodily presence” and “speech”.

Was Paul really “untrained in speech” as he had apparently admitted, and as some scholars are inclined to think?⁵⁹⁴ It is hard to know what the case really was just on the basis of a single statement in 11.5 which was evidently made in a polemical context. As has already been suggested earlier in this thesis, as a man of culture of his time it is difficult to think that Paul would have really been “untrained in speech”. What Paul was trying to say was perhaps the fact that he was *technically* or *professionally* “untrained” in the way that the orators of his time were. Or, even if Paul had been technically or professionally trained as the seasoned orators had, Paul had already decided not to practise it for reason which he had already given, for instance, in 1 Cor. 2.4, 5. This would be thoroughly consistent with his overall intention to invert the current social ethos. Again, as the statement was made in a polemical context, Paul has probably made it by way of concession for argument’s sake.

Fortunately, the understanding of 2 Cor. 10.10 is not wholly dependent on those circumstances and factors behind 2 Corinthians, and of which not much reliable information is available. What has been said so far simply indicate the complex nature of Paul’s relationship with the Corinthians, and that a great deal had actually transpired since Paul wrote the present “1 Corinthians”. This point, although simple, may help to appreciate the complexity of this one single verse in 10.10. The previous study would confirm that the meaning of the text could be made far more intelligible with Greco-Roman rhetoric and body language as its immediate context.

⁵⁹⁴ Savage, *Power*, 70.

That 2 Cor. 10.10 is an authentic quotation of Paul from his Corinthian critics seems to be beyond reasonable doubt. The word ἐπιστολαί (“letters”) here would probably include at least the present “1 Corinthians” as well as the one mentioned in 1 Cor. 5.9, and possibly also the “painful letter” implied in 2 Cor. 2.1. Winter thinks that 2 Cor. 10.10 “reflects a continuing debate among the sophists over written versus extempore oratory, an argument begun in the fourth century BC. An excellent example of this debate is found in the exchanges between Alcidas and Isocrates.”⁵⁹⁵ It is difficult to determine if this Corinthian verse was a true reflection of the classical tradition cited by Winter. What is relatively certain is the fact that Paul’s critics obviously thought that there was an obvious discrepancy between his “letters” which they considered “weighty and strong” and his “bodily presence” which they regarded as “weak”, and his “speech” which they found to be “contemptible”.

Βαρεῖαι and ἰσχυραὶ (“weighty and strong”) most probably refer to *both* the *content* and the *tone* of Paul’s letters. The Corinthians could well be making a statement of simple fact here. It would be very reasonable to expect the letter mentioned in 1 Cor. 5.9 to be “weighty and strong” since Paul was dealing with the very grave matter of sexual immorality, in which he instructed that the sexually immoral person should be driven out of the congregation (5.13), which was tantamount to “excommunication”. Although not the whole of “1 Corinthians” could be considered “weighty and strong”, most of it, whether on matters of doctrine or conduct, was clearly worthy of that kind of description.

Moreover, the context as well as the tone of this quotation from Paul’s critics in 2 Cor. 10.10 seems to suggest that the words βαρεῖαι and ἰσχυραὶ were probably used in a

⁵⁹⁵ Winter, *Philo*, 205.

positive sense as an acknowledgement. That being the case, what the critics said next – “but his bodily presence is weak, and his speech contemptible” – becomes the more intriguing, especially when the two diametrically opposed opinions were put in stark contrast. The Greek expression μέν and δέ quite clearly suggests a contrast. What Paul’s critics had said was thus grave and serious, because the remark had virtually accused Paul of inconsistency or discrepancy between written words and his actual “speech” and personal conduct, i.e., the apostle did not actually “deliver” what he promised or threatened to do, as he had promised or threatened in 1 Cor. 4.19. In other words, Paul’s critics subsequently found out that Paul was actually not as “weighty and strong” as he earlier claimed or “pretended” to be. He was thus a bluff! Ironically, as far as Paul’s Corinthian critics were concerned, it was they themselves who had found out that the same apostle who had promised and threatened (1 Cor. 4.19) turned out to be just a bad “talker”, and not really a *man* of real “power” (δύναμις) and true substance! Such an impression or opinion about Paul became very serious and damaging when put in the proper context of Greco-Roman rhetoric and body language which expected a *man* to “deliver” what he had promised and that there should be no inconsistency or discrepancy between his written words and his oral delivery and “bodily presence”. A good orator was ultimately judged by his overall “self-presentation” which should be a great “performance” in itself. The Corinthians would not only be familiar with the rules of such a game but had apparently subscribed to it themselves. Consequently, Paul was judged by the same firmly established rules.

Much has been said in scholarly circles about the “bodily presence” (ἡ παρουσία τοῦ σώματος) of Paul which was judged by his Corinthian critics to be “weak” (ἀσθενής) based on Paul’s quotation 2 Cor. 10.10. Some think that Paul was probably hampered

by “ill health” which made his bodily presence “unimpressive”.⁵⁹⁶ But was it really the case? No one can be quite certain about it. Victor Furnish says that “weak stands in direct contrast to strong, so that the criticism would seem to be that the apostle cuts a sorry figure in person.”⁵⁹⁷ But in what sense was Paul a “sorry figure”? Hans Betz links 1 Cor. 2.3 with 2 Cor. 10.10, and points out that weakness here refers to Paul’s unattractive appearance rather than inner feelings in light of the Socratic-Cynic tradition in which a public speaker’s appearance was just as important and powerful as his speech.⁵⁹⁸ Again, Paul’s allegedly “unattractive appearance” remains largely a matter of speculation and conjecture for lack of solid biblical and historical evidence.

While modern scholars’ “interpretations” of Paul’s “bodily presence” remain largely speculative, the Corinthians’ expectation of a good orator to have impressive “bodily presence” was undoubtedly part of the social ethos of the time. Epictetus highlighted the importance of the physical appearance of a true Cynic: “Such a man needs also a certain kind of body....That was the way of Diogenes, for he used to go about with a radiant complexion, and would attract the attention of the common people by the very appearance of his body” (3.32.86-89). Arignotus, “a man of superhuman wisdom”, described his unattractive teacher Pancrates as “a holy man, clean shaven, in white linen, always deep in thought, speaking imperfect Greek, tall, flat-nosed, with protruding lips and thinnish legs” (Lucian, *The Lover of Lies*, 34). Betz compares Paul’s weakness to Lucian’s Pancrates whose speech and appearance were unfitted for public oratory.⁵⁹⁹ Again, there is no way to tell if Betz’s comparison is really appropriate. Lucian made a sharp contrast between educated noble men with “dignified appearance”

⁵⁹⁶ Thiselton, *The First Epistle*, 261.

⁵⁹⁷ Furnish, *II Corinthians*, 468.

⁵⁹⁸ Betz, *Der Apostel Paulus und die sokratische Tradition: Eine exegetische Untersuchung zu seiner „Apologie“ 2 Korinther 10-13* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1972), 44-57.

⁵⁹⁹ Betz, *Paulus*, 53-4.

(σχῆμα εὐπρεπές) and men with “servile appearance” (σχῆμα δουλοπρεπές).⁶⁰⁰ Given their Greco-Roman background, it would be quite reasonable to assume that Paul’s Corinthian critics would be rather familiar with these or similar comparisons, although there is no clear suggestion in the Corinthian correspondence that the Corinthian critics had in fact made any comparison between Paul and any of the classical figures.

Larson is right in pointing out that “unlike noble birth, which was immutable, masculinity was a matter of perception.”⁶⁰¹ That Paul’s “bodily presence is weak, and his speech contemptible” was largely a matter of perception. Larson’s findings also confirm that the performance of a speaker was also *gender* performance, a man’s deficiency in self-presentation could easily create an opening for his rivals to ridicule him as “effeminate” (*mollior*).⁶⁰² Barton’s study also shows that “the art of spotting an effeminate man was not foreign to the authors of tragedy, Old Comedy, Greek and Roman oratory and poetry, and even graffiti. Many of the signs were matters of physique or physical movement....A key association of the effeminate man, the κιναιδός (*kinaidos*), or *mollis* (soft man), was that of sexual passivity.”⁶⁰³ Larson’s observation is apparently right: “ancient orators were thought to dominate and master their audiences, so one who lacked a forceful self-representation could be described as ‘weak’. Another possibility, not mutually exclusive of the first, is that the reference is to actual physical disability, puniness, or weakness.”⁶⁰⁴ This thesis is inclined to think that Paul’s “weak” bodily presence in 2 Cor. 10.10 referred more to his self-presentation as a whole in the context of current rhetoric and body language, rather than to the actual physical “weakness” of the apostle, such as physical handicap or defect, of which the reader has little or no knowledge. In the present context, the Corinthian critics’

⁶⁰⁰ Lucian, *The Dream*, 13.

⁶⁰¹ Larson, ‘Masculinity’, 86.

⁶⁰² Larson, ‘Masculinity’, 88.

⁶⁰³ Barton, ‘Physionomics’, 116.

⁶⁰⁴ Larson, ‘Masculinity’, 88.

impression and opinion about Paul were perhaps more important than his actual physical body. As the study on Greco-Roman society has already indicated, the audience's impression and opinion about the orator was part and parcel of the game in rhetoric. And body language was often far more effective and powerful than mere substance of verbal expression in determining the audience's impression and opinion about the orator.

As has already been noted in a number of places earlier in this thesis, the controversy between Paul and his opponents had much to do with "speech" (λόγος). Paul's speech was openly censured by his opponents as contemptible. But did the term λόγος here refer to style or to content? Larson is right in thinking that "in view of the way in which the sources on rhetoric and physiognomy consistently viewed both physical appearance and the sound of the voice as dual requirements for success as a public speaker, it seems that the opponents were probably referring to a lack of impressive (i.e., masculine) deportment in the way Paul both looked (bodily presence) and sounded (speech). Speech played a crucial role in the performance of gender."⁶⁰⁵

An important question apparently deserves further investigation: Was Paul actually deficient in masculine virtues or did he willingly allow those "virtues" to be abrogated for the sake of the gospel, so as to allow the power of God to truly manifest itself in and through his own human weakness, so that the faith of the Corinthians might rest "not on human wisdom but on the power of God" (1 Cor. 2.5)? According to the Greco-Roman concept of masculinity, a real *man* did not cede power or control to another, as slaves and women did. If Paul had indeed done so, it would be quite conceivable in view of his

⁶⁰⁵ Larson, 'Masculinity', 89.

willingness to be a δοῦλος of Christ,⁶⁰⁶ and it would be a choice which was thoroughly consistent with his overall intention to invert the current social ethos with his gospel which had shaped and formed his own *modus operandi*.

Whether it was by choice or by actual deficiency, Paul's allegedly "weak" physical appearance and "contemptible" speech would have disqualified him from being a respectable member of the elite by the long and firmly established standard of Greco-Roman rhetoric and the concept of masculinity. By the same standard Paul consequently became an embarrassing figure as far as his Corinthian critics were concerned.⁶⁰⁷

Despite the many conjectures, speculations and intelligent guesses, no one can actually be certain as to *how* "unimpressive" Paul's "physical presence" really was and in what precise manner was his speech "contemptible". A most graphic description of Paul's physical appearance is found in the *Acts of Paul and Thekla* 3, in which Paul was portrayed as "a man small in size, bald-headed, bandy-legged...with eyebrows meeting, rather hook-nosed."⁶⁰⁸ This portrait was clearly most "unimpressive". However, one must obviously be aware of the apocryphal nature of the source.⁶⁰⁹ But Savage has inferred from sources such as this that "perhaps his humble physical presence is affecting his speech."⁶¹⁰

In view of the uncertainty surrounding the meaning of Paul's "weak" bodily presence, the following points may be worth considering:

⁶⁰⁶ Larson, 'Masculinity', 91.

⁶⁰⁷ Litfin, *Proclamation*, 161.

⁶⁰⁸ J. K. Elliott, *The Apocryphal New Testament: A Collection of Apocryphal Christian Literature in an English Translation* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1993), 364. See Malina and Jerome H. Neyrey, *Portraits of Paul: An Archaeology of Ancient Personality* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1996). Robert M. Grant, 'The Description of Paul in the Acts of Paul and Thecla', *Vigiliae Christianae* (1982), 36.1-4. Abraham J. Malherbe, 'A Physical Description of Paul', *Harvard Theological Review* (1986), 79.170-75.

⁶⁰⁹ The document was written in the late 2nd century. Malina, *Portraits of Paul*, 127.

⁶¹⁰ Savage, *Power*, 71.

Firstly, the “bodily presence” of Paul could well be as unimpressive as it was described according to sources such as the *Acts of Paul and Thekla* 3. In that case, there would be every reason for Paul to be despised according to the social ethos of the time, especially in the context of Greco-Roman rhetoric and society’s perception of masculinity. In rhetoric, the speaker was expected to be handsome, self-confident, assertive, strong and imposing which enabled him to command respect and attention, and ultimately approval and praise. When it came to the actual “delivery” of the speech which depended a lot on “self-presentation”, an attractive and balanced body would then allow the orator to use all the body parts, quite literally “from head to toe”, fully and skilfully to enhance the whole presentation. It was here that the power and charm of *body language* became more evident. But if the poor apostle’s physical presence was really as it was being portrayed in sources such as the apocryphal *Acts*, he certainly had very little to “present”. If he were given a chance to “deliver” a formal speech, Paul’s “self-presentation” would make him look more like a pathetic clown who was only fit for public entertainment rather than a serious and respectable orator, according to the standard of Greco-Roman rhetoric. Moreover, even if Paul’s allegedly unimpressive physical presence was something that he was born with, or due to certain bodily defects from which he suffered subsequently, he could not possibly expect or solicit public understanding and sympathy for that either, according to the Greco-Roman perception of masculinity. The failure to closely monitor the physical development of a male person from birth or to rectify any bodily defect would simply not be accepted by society.

Secondly, the allegedly “weak” bodily presence of Paul need not necessarily imply that he was actually suffering from certain clearly noticeable bodily defect or defects. The previous study has shown that according to the stringent rules of Greco-Roman rhetoric

and the rigid perception of masculinity, even the “self-presentation” and “delivery” of a perfectly *normal* person would be considered “weak” unless all the body parts were deliberately put in full and effective use like an orchestra. Paul, who had firmly decided “to know nothing” among the Corinthians “except Jesus Christ, and him crucified” (1 Cor. 2.2), and was equally determined to proclaim the gospel “not with eloquent wisdom” (1.17; cf. 2.4), was most unlikely to adhere to the strict rules and conventions of Greco-Roman rhetoric or uncritically share the current perception on masculinity. For to do so would be tantamount to emptying the cross of Christ of its power (1.17) and would make the faith of Corinthians rest on “human wisdom” rather than on “the power of God” (2.5).

Just like the “weak” bodily presence of Paul, his allegedly “contemptible” speech would also become more intelligible and meaningful when put in the context of Greco-Roman rhetoric and masculinity. The Greek word for “speech” in this verse is λόγος. This is rather problematic, as Kennedy has rightly noted: “the Greek word for speech is λόγος, an ambiguous and sometimes mystical concept which may refer concretely to a word, words, or an entire oration, or may be used abstractly to indicate the meaning behind a word or expression or the power of thought and organization or the rational principle of the universe or the will of God. On the human level it involves man’s thought and his function in society, and it further includes artistic creativity and the power of personality.”⁶¹¹

Judging from the frequent appearance of the term λόγος in various contexts in the Corinthian letters and the whole complexity of the Corinthian problems which had a great deal to do with “speech”, “eloquence”, “wisdom” etc., it was quite unlikely that

⁶¹¹ Kennedy, *Persuasion*, 8.

the word λόγος in 2 Cor. 10.10 would only mean an ordinary “word” or “words”. As Paul in the Corinthian letters were equally concerned with both the *content* of the message of the cross and the *manner* of its proclamation, or “delivery”, it would be quite reasonable to assume that the word λόγος here might also have to do with *both* the *content* and the *manner* of its “delivery” which involved the whole of “self-presentation” in rhetorical terms. The above statement of Kennedy about “artistic creativity and the power of personality” is therefore relevant and important.

If λόγος were to be regarded as the *content* of Paul’s gospel, in what sense was the *content* of Paul’s gospel so negatively regarded as “contemptible”? Assuming that these Corinthian critics were Christians, otherwise they would have nothing to do with Paul in the context of the Corinthian church, it was very unlikely that they would regard the *core* gospel message itself as “contemptible”, otherwise, why should they embrace the Christian faith in the first place? As such, it would be quite reasonable to suggest that if the content of Paul’s gospel was in any way “contemptible” to the Corinthian critics, it would probably not be the core message of the gospel as such, but its lack of sophistication, by the standard they had accepted from the Greco-Roman social ethos. If the core message of Paul’s gospel was as simple and unsophisticated as the apostle put it, e.g., in 1 Cor. 2.2, simply just “Jesus Christ, and him crucified”, or as in 1 Cor. 15.3-5, simply about Christ’s death, burial and resurrection, the sophisticated and philosophically minded could have found it rather “contemptible”. What has been said here is admittedly rather speculative, because it might well not be the case when the critics used the word “contemptible” (ἐξουθενημένος) to describe the content of Paul’s “speech” (λόγος). It was perhaps far more likely that the “contemptible” “speech” (ὁ λόγος ἐξουθενημένος) was referring to Paul’s *manner* of presentation, or *body language*. This would make much better sense in view of what the critics had said about Paul’s

“weak” ‘bodily presence’ (ἡ παρουσία τοῦ σώματος ἀσθενής). It would also appear far more logical when put in the context of Greco-Roman rhetoric and masculinity.

In view of what has been said earlier, there is no need to elaborate on the meaning of “speech” in terms of delivery and self-presentation. One crucial and puzzling question, however, has yet to be answered: Why had it taken so long for the Corinthian critics to realize, or for the criticism to be echoed by Paul, that while Paul’s letters were “weighty and strong”, his bodily presence was “weak” and his speech “contemptible”? It had been quite a few years now since Paul first brought the gospel to them in Corinth. Had these sharp, observant, intelligent and critical Corinthians not clearly noticed Paul’s weaknesses, especially his unimpressive “bodily presence” and his contemptible “speech” even *then* in the course of one year and six months (Acts 18.11)? A possible explanation may be put in the following way. It could well be that at their initial encounter with Paul, they were so impressed and fascinated by the absolutely new and challenging gospel which Paul brought that even some of the apparent weaknesses of Paul were somehow overlooked or became secondary. Moreover, there was also another possible factor about which one could be more certain, i.e., the simple fact that no letter seems to have been written in the course of Paul’s first visit. As such, there was just no occasion *then* for the critical Corinthians to compare the apostle’s letters with his “bodily presence” and his “speech”. But a lot had transpired since then. At least two letters had been written before the present “2 Corinthians”, and the church situation had now turned from bad to worse, including church schisms which involved Paul himself and others personally. The Corinthians, especially Paul’s critics, naturally did not like some of the threatening words of the apostle. In what was apparently Paul’s *first* letter to them (1 Cor. 5.9) he had already demanded “excommunication” for the “sexually immoral persons”: “Drive out the wicked person from among you” (5.13). In 4.18-21,

those who felt threatened and hurt by Paul's severe warning were clearly far more numerous. For some of the Corinthians, these words of Paul not only sounded threatening, they could well be misconstrued as being arrogant as well.

Judging from some of the contents of the present "1 Corinthians", the letter was clearly "weighty and strong", although this remark of Paul's critics could be taken either as a compliment or as a clear indication of their displeasure with it, especially when some of its contents was directed against them. Although the letter mentioned by Paul in 1 Cor. 5.9 cannot be traced, one could quite reasonably assume that it would be "weighty and strong" as well, since it was dealing with such a serious matter as sexual immorality. With at least two of Paul's "letters" at their disposal and presumably also having seen the apostle at least twice *now*, the Corinthian critics were in a good position to make a comparison or sharp contrast between his letters which they considered "weighty and strong" and his "bodily presence" which they now described as "weak" and his speech as "contemptible". Very much unlike Paul's first visit when they might have looked at all aspects of Paul, including his bodily presence and speech in some innocent and unbiased ways, they might *now* have changed their initial attitude and impression about Paul due to the drastically changed situation. Such a big change in the Corinthians' attitude towards Paul could well be due, at least in part, to the powerful presence and influence of the "super-apostles". Otherwise Paul would not have used such strong words to compare himself with them (2 Cor. 11.16-23). If Paul in his first visit were regarded by all as a "friend", those who were supporters of the "super-apostles" or other leaders would have to treat him very differently, if not in fact as their "enemy" *now*. Moreover, in view of what Paul had promised or threatened in 1 Cor. 4.18 and 19 his critics would now naturally watch very closely to see if he could *deliver* what he had promised and threatened to do. As has already been noted earlier, Paul's critics

apparently did not like those threatening words in 4.18-19 from the time when they first received them. Through critical, even hyper-critical eyes, they would understandably assess and examine Paul from a very different perspective now; and through their scrutiny, they now discovered a very disturbing inconsistency or discrepancy in Paul between what he had written and how he actually appeared and spoke. Hence the remark recorded in 2 Cor. 10.10. In other words, Paul did not live up to their high expectation of him. And this was a very damaging thing in the context of both Greco-Roman rhetoric and current perception about masculinity. When a *man* was charged with inconsistency or discrepancy, it was also tantamount to saying that he was a fraud or bluff. That inconsistency was an important issue for Paul in his dealings with the Corinthians was clearly reflected in passages such as 1.17-20, where Paul insisted that he was thoroughly consistent and had never been “vacillating” (1.17).

Harrill makes good use of literary sources to show that “slave physiognomics” was commonly used in Roman time to maintain “a somatic hierarchy between the slave and the free.”⁶¹² According to Josephus, Celadus was once sent by the Emperor Augustus, to find out if a certain young man was the prince Alexander. Celadus unveiled the plot simply by the young man’s servile appearance: “Celadus had no sooner set eyes on him than he detected the points of difference in the face, and noting that his whole person had a coarser and servile appearance (δουλοφανές), penetrated the whole plot” (*B. J.* 2.106-7).

Philo believed that a slave possessed a “naturally slavish body” (*Quod Omn.* 40). Apollonius tried to prove that a certain Arcadian boy was a free person simply because he did not look “slave-like in appearance” but possessed “all the good-looks”

⁶¹² Harrill, ‘Invective’, 200.

(Philostratus, *Vit. Apoll.* 8.12) Livy regarded all Syrians as being “far better fitted to be slaves, on account of their servile dispositions (*servilia ingenia*), than to be a race of warriors” (35.49.8). Harrill refers to a number of Greco-Roman writers who made “a physiognomic connection between somatic inferiority - a weak, ugly bodily presence - and the condition of natural slavery.”⁶¹³

In the political arena somatic invective was frequently used among the Greco-Roman elite against their rivals. However, as Harrill has significantly pointed out, such abusive rhetoric was very seldom used against slaves. Instead, it was directed at freeborn men, especially political opponents who were regarded as being slavish. As such, physiognomic distinctions between the slave and the freeman had very little to do with the actual description of slaves but had far more to do with the rhetoric of manhood in Greco-Roman society. According to Harrill’s finding, “the servile/free-looking dichotomy served as a mask for disputes about manhood in Greco-Roman thinking across the board, from oratory and history to moral philosophy, comedy, and satire.”⁶¹⁴ In this connection, Cicero’s somatic invective directed at Piso is well known: “Do you begin to see, monster, do you begin to realize how men loathe your impudence? No one complains that some Syrian or other, some member of a crew of newly-made slaves, has become Consul. We were not deceived by your slavish complexion [*color servilis*], your hairy cheeks, and your discoloured teeth; it was your eyes, eyebrows, forehead, in a word, your whole countenance, which is a kind of silent speech of the mind, which pushed your fellow-men into delusion” (*Pis.* 1).

Harrill’s finding has important implications for the study of the Corinthian controversy, especially in relation to 2 Cor. 10.10, because in New Testament scholarship this

⁶¹³ Harrill, ‘Invective’, 201.

⁶¹⁴ Harrill, ‘Invective’, 201.

particular Corinthian verse has been too commonly cited as “evidence for Paul’s actual physical appearance”, which could be misleading in the context of Greco-Roman rhetoric. This was because the problem that the Corinthian critics had with Paul might have very little to do with the apostle’s “actual physical appearance”, but with his perceived deception and inconsistency, very much in the tradition of the caricatured Piso. Harrill thus thinks that it is appropriate to draw an analogy between Cicero’s invective against Piso and the criticism of the Corinthians against Paul. In both cases, there was the perceived inconsistency between what was once mistakenly believed to be stern and authoritative (or to use the expression of 2 Cor. 10.10, “weighty and strong”) and the actual physical presence (“weak” in 10.10). In both cases, the consequence was grave, because the perceived inconsistency would eventually rob the person under attack of all the credentials and attributes of a respectable free citizen. In other words, just like Piso in the eyes of Cicero, the poor apostle Paul had now virtually become a sort of “natural slave.” Exegetical studies on some of the relevant Corinthian texts, such as 1 Cor. 2.1-5 and 2 Cor. 10.10, could now become far more intelligible and meaningful in light of Harrill’s finding on Greco-Roman rhetoric, especially with reference to physiognomics and manhood.

In Greco-Roman invective, “to accuse a person of a weak bodily presence and deficient speech is to call that person a slavish man unfit for public office or otherwise to dominate others.”⁶¹⁵ An important moral issue was involved here. Philip Hughes therefore believes that in 2 Cor. 10.10 the critics’ accusation “was rather of a moral character, and therefore much more damaging to the authority he [Paul] claimed than the ridicule of any merely physical disabilities.”⁶¹⁶ Glancy suggests that “the adjective ἀσθενής refers ultimately to low social status, a lack of honour, or simply a weak claim

⁶¹⁵ Harrill, ‘Invective’, 204.

⁶¹⁶ Philip Edgcumbe Hughes, *Paul’s Second Epistle to the Corinthians: The English Text with Introduction, Exposition and Notes* (Edinburgh: Marshall, Morgan & Scott, 1962), 362.

to apostolic authority.”⁶¹⁷ The seriousness of 2 Cor. 10.10 together with its profound implications must therefore take these points into consideration.

Despite their diversity, the many handbooks and other relevant literature on Greco-Roman rhetoric clearly spoke with one voice on the fragility of manhood: “weak demeanour is slavish and leads to a loss of manhood.”⁶¹⁸ A great deal of examples were given to constantly warn against the flatterer and his weak bodily presence.⁶¹⁹ Aristotle warned that “flatterers are always servile” (*Eth. nic.* 1125a). Seneca despised the flatterer for his servile obsequiousness (*obsequium servile*).⁶²⁰ Dio Chrysostom regarded the flatterer as one “who lacked a free man’s spirit (ἀνελεύθερος) and was of a servile nature (δουλοπρεπής)” (*Or.* 15.29). Even a free man could be a slave “insignificant in appearance, servile (δουλοπρεπής), unsleeping, never smiling, ever quarrelling and fighting with someone, very much like a panderer, who in garb as well as in character is shameless and niggardly, dressed in a coloured mantle, the finery of one of his harlots ” (*Or.* 15.29). According to Epictetus, shameful actions could turn a free man into a slave (4.1.8-18). Harrill elaborates:

All these examples demonstrate that flattery and inconstancy were physiognomic signs of the slavish man whose ignoble gestures and weak bodily presence served as a rhetorical *topos* for the antitype of manhood in Greco-Roman moral philosophy. Such moral preaching assumes rhetoric of manhood similar to that in the moral *exempla* of historical literature and in the invective of judicial oratory aimed at typecasting an enemy as physiognomically servile.⁶²¹

Again, the implications of this observation for the Corinthian controversy are obvious. One is inclined to agree with Harrill that instead of taking 2 Cor. 10.10 just as evidence for Paul’s *actual physical presence*, as New Testament scholars often do, the expression of the verse could also be interpreted as slave physiognomics at the same time.

⁶¹⁷ Glancy, ‘Boasting’, 128.

⁶¹⁸ Harrill, ‘Invective’, 205.

⁶¹⁹ Curtius Rufus, *Hist. Alex.* 8.4.30; Tacitus, *Ann.* 1.7; 5.61; 12.4; *Hist.* 1.36.

⁶²⁰ Seneca, *Ben.* 6.30.5.

⁶²¹ Harrill, ‘Invective’, 204.

There is obviously a great deal of truth in what Harrill has said, although he might have put his point across too strongly, with reference to Paul's controversy with his critics. This is because, despite the critics' admittedly strong invective against him, Paul was evidently still committed to explore all ways and means to try to resolve the issue in a *Christian* manner. They were good reasons to assume that Paul was, after all, very conscious of the fact he was here dealing with critics who had already embraced his "message of the cross". They were quite certainly not those who were "perishing" (1 Cor. 1.18). Quite to the contrary, there were also reasonably good grounds to suggest that as far as Paul was concerned, these critics would probably be among the "saints" whom he mentioned in the opening verses of the two Corinthian letters: ἡγιασμένοις in 1 Cor. 1.2 and ἁγίοις in 2 Cor. 1.1.

5.4 Conclusion

Part II is devoted to "Rhetoric, Delivery, Body Language and Masculinity" in the context of the Greco-Roman social ethos. This has paved the way for the exegesis of 1 Cor. 2.1-5 which dealt with Paul's manner of proclamation, or "delivery" in rhetorical terms; and 2 Cor. 10.10 in which Paul referred to the Corinthians' invective against him. Understanding of the Corinthian critics' invective against Paul has been considerably enhanced by Larson's and Harrill's studies on Greco-Roman physiognomics and manhood. On the whole it is reasonable to suggest that Part II of this thesis once again shows the importance of putting the Corinthian texts in proper historico-social contexts, just as in Part 1.

In the course of exegesis of 1 Cor. 2.1-5 and 2 Cor. 10.10 some very crucial issues have been discussed and important questions raised. Inasmuch as this thesis has tried to deal

with those issues and questions fairly and squarely, some of the points made, and answers attempted, including those that have been provided by respectable scholars, remain rather tentative, for instance, the precise nature of Paul's "weakness...fear...trembling" when he first came to Corinth (1 Cor. 2.3). And in what precise way was Paul's "bodily presence...weak" and his "speech contemptible" (2 Cor. 10.10)? What has become reasonably certain, as far as this thesis is concerned, was Paul's intention to invert the current social ethos with his *modus operandi* as an apostle of Christ. And without Greco-Roman rhetoric, especially its body language, as its background, even this relative certainty could not have been arrived at. Part II of this thesis has thus shown once again the great importance of putting biblical texts in their proper historico-social contexts, and how vital it is to keep a necessary balance between the sociological and the theological.

Part III will mainly be a study of Paul's apostolic life in terms of personal tribulations, with special reference to the concept of suffering in the Greco-Roman tradition as its historico-social background and in close connection with Paul's autobiographical notes on the subject in 1 Cor. 4.8-13 and 2 Cor. 11.23-33.

Part III: Hardship (*peristasis*) in Greco-Roman social ethos and Pauline understanding

Part III is concerned primarily with Paul's perception as well as his personal experience of suffering and hardship, especially its physical aspects which, again, were conveyed largely in *body language*. It will try to show that the lists of hardship in Paul's autobiographical notes could only become meaningful and revealing in the Greco-Roman context. Part III is also consistent with the previous two parts of the thesis where the exegesis of the relevant Corinthian passages was preceded by a study of the Greco-Roman background regarding crucifixion and rhetoric respectively.

Chapter Six: Hardship as "virtue" in classical writings, with special reference to Stoicism

6.1 Stoicism: A general introduction

Zeno of Citium (334-262 BC) is commonly regarded as the founder of Stoicism. This Greek school of philosophy derived its popular name from the *στοὰ ποικίλη* or "painted porch" in Athens, the well-known location of their teaching. Zeno's thought was further developed by Cleanthes and Chrysippus. The trio could be regarded as the early representatives of Stoicism.⁶²² With the exception of Cleanthes' short "Hymn to Zeus", virtually no work of the early Stoics has survived intact. The leading figures of the next period of Stoicism were Panaetius (c. 185-c. 110 BC) and Posidonius (135-51 BC), who

⁶²² R. W. Sharples, 'Stoicism', in Honderich Ted (ed.), *The Oxford Companion to Philosophy* (Oxford: OUP, 1995), 852-3, at 852. See A. A. Long, 'Stoicism', *Hellenistic Philosophy: Stoics, Epicureans, Sceptics* (London: Duckworth, 1986), 107-209.

operated and developed the school largely at Rhodes. Their influence on Cicero's philosophical treatises (mid-first century BC) was very considerable. The following phase of Stoicism, sometimes known as *Roman Stoicism*,⁶²³ left behind some of the most important Stoic writings. This Roman phase of Stoicism was represented especially by Seneca the Younger (c. 2 BC-AD 65), Epictetus (c. AD 55-135), and the Roman emperor, Marcus Aurelius (AD 121-80).⁶²⁴ The primary concern of these Stoics and their followers was on practical and personal ethics. The influence of these men and their school lived on, so that the word "stoical" has become a common expression to indicate acceptance of misfortune without complaint.⁶²⁵ Many leading Roman political figures were Stoics.

Generally speaking Stoicism was characterized by a philosophy of nature, an empiricist epistemology and an absolutist conception of moral duty. Writings of the founder Zeno were all lost; but his influence persisted. The Stoic idea of the divine reason (λόγος) was central to their understanding of the universe as a highly unified entity, including the harmony of the universe (permeated with the λόγος) and man (endowed with the "seed of logos", λόγος σπερματικός). Personal happiness and the well being of human society were perceived in highly and consistently moral terms, with great emphasis on human moral obligation. And man would not be able to fulfill his moral obligation and obtain true happiness and virtue unless *reason* became the true master of his life, thought and action.⁶²⁶

⁶²³ See E. Vernon Arnold, *Roman Stoicism: Being Lectures on the History of the Stoic Philosophy with Special Reference to Its Development within the Roman Empire* (Cambridge: CUP, 1911).

⁶²⁴ David N. Sedley, 'Stoicism', in Robert Audi (ed.), *The Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy* (Cambridge: CUP, 1995), 768-9.

⁶²⁵ Sharples, 'Stoicism', 852.

⁶²⁶ Philip P. Hallie, 'Stoicism', Edwards Paul, *et al.*, (eds.), *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (London: Collier Macmillan Publishers, 1967), vol. 8.19-22, at 21-22. Sedley, 'Stoicism', 769. Long, 'Stoicism', 147-50.

Important to the Stoic philosophy was the belief in God and his providential work over the whole of the orderly universe in which man occupied a very prominent place.⁶²⁷ Man's reason enabled him to recognise the supreme plan of God and to submit himself willingly to it. This would also allow him to transcend his own personal interest and natural desire, so that even his own suffering was believed to be serving a wider purpose pre-determined by the divine will.⁶²⁸

The belief that the world was completely ruled by Providence not only had strong appeal to the ruling class, but also was a source of great comfort to those who had to deal with all sorts of misfortunes and odds in life. For this as well as other reasons Stoicism remained a great fountain of moral strength and social force in ancient Greco-Roman society.⁶²⁹

6.2 The Stoic view on virtue, good and evil

The subject of virtue had a prominent place in ancient Greco-Roman philosophy and ethics. In the Platonic view, virtue was essentially an inner state which governed and guided a person's moral behaviour and action.⁶³⁰

According to Stoic ethics, a person's inner state was not an autonomous and independent entity. It must be in harmony with the orderliness of nature (φύσις). As such, a morally responsible person must always try to act "according to nature" (κατὰ φύσιν). It was only in this way that a person secured a life of ἀπάθεια, or εὐθυμία, namely, spiritual peace and well being as well as εὐδαιμονία, the happiness for his soul

⁶²⁷ Long, *Epictetus: A Stoic and Socratic Guide to Life* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2002), 143.

⁶²⁸ F. H. Sandbach, *The Stoics* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1975), 35.

⁶²⁹ Sandbach, *The Stoics*, 16.

⁶³⁰ Michael Slote, 'Virtues', in *The Oxford Companion*, 900-1, at 900.

(δαίμων).⁶³¹ In such a happy and blessed state, a person could be said to be in perfect harmony with nature and became almost God-like.⁶³² This was a true Stoic's "ultimate concern". The Stoics' belief in the attainment of such a happy and blessed state was based on their understanding of the λόγος as the soul of the universe as well as man's potential to participate and share in the λόγος due to the λόγος σπερματικός that had been implanted in each person. Such was the philosophical context in which the Stoic view on virtue, good, and evil is to be understood.

In Stoicism, "virtue" might sometimes appear highly philosophical and abstract. However, this important word could also be understood in more concrete terms, so that the Stoics could more tangibly talk about certain cardinal virtues such as intelligence, which was the ability to distinguish the good from the evil; bravery, to know what was to fear and what was not; justice, to render to a person what he really deserved. Of these and other important virtues, the most important one for the Stoics was undoubtedly self-control, which was the inner mental state of a person that governed all his thinking and action in life.⁶³³

For the Stoics, virtue was inseparable from wisdom, so that a "virtuous" man was also a "wise" man, or, only the wise could be virtuous. Although the Stoics had their own particular view on good and evil, it would be too simplistic to think that things in life were just either good or evil for the Stoics. This was because, besides things "good" and "evil", there were also things which were considered "indifferent" (ἀδιάφορα) to the virtuous and wise man. However, the virtuous Stoics also acknowledged that certain things they considered indifferent could also be "advantages" (though not necessarily to be *needed or essential*). Health, wealth, and honour, for example, were among these

⁶³¹ Diogenes Laertius 7.88.

⁶³² Hallie, 'Stoicism', 8.21.

⁶³³ Hallie, 'Stoicism', 8.22. Long, 'Stoicism', 199-200.

“advantages”. Their opposites were “disadvantages” to be avoided by the wise (but not at all costs) as well as those things which were totally “indifferent” (ἀδιάφορα) to the wise.⁶³⁴ From what has been said it should now become sufficiently clear that for the Stoics “advantages” were not in themselves “good”, and “disadvantages” necessarily “bad”. “Advantages” and “disadvantages” were thus outside the Stoic concept of “good” and “bad” in *moral* terms.

In his *De Officiis*, Cicero mentioned four cardinal ethical virtues which were concerned “either (1) with the full perception and intelligent development of the true; or (2) with the conservation of organized society, with rendering to every man his due, and with the faithful discharge of obligations assumed; or (3) with the greatness and strength of a noble and invincible spirit; or (4) with the orderliness and moderation of everything that is said and done, wherein consist temperance and self-control” (1.5.15). Cicero’s emphasis on temperance and self-control was consistent with the general teaching of Stoicism.

The Stoics believed that the road to virtue was a well-trained reason which enabled a person to think and act correctly. In the Platonic tradition there were basically four cardinal virtues: justice, temperance (self-control), bravery and wisdom. But Zeno tried to re-define these four cardinal virtues in terms of wisdom; so that justice was primarily concerned with distribution, temperance with acquisition, and bravery with endurance. All these virtues could be obtained only through wisdom. And wisdom was inseparable from knowledge which enabled a person to make a distinction between what should and should not be done and between what was good or evil or neither (i.e., things that were just indifferent [ἀδιάφορα]).⁶³⁵ This point about knowledge was of great importance to

⁶³⁴ Hallie, ‘Stoicism’, 8.22. Long, ‘Stoicism’, 189-99.

⁶³⁵ Sandbach, *The Stoics*, 42.

the Stoics, because, a person could do what was right only if he always *knew* what was right. The word virtue (ἀρετή) in ordinary usage had a wider and more general sense, which could be rendered “excellence” and the like, but in Stoicism it was often taken absolutely to mean *moral* excellence or perfection which could be obtained only by those who were truly virtuous. And only those who were truly virtuous could be regarded as truly good (ἀγαθόν) and happy. In this sense, virtue, goodness and happiness virtually became synonymous in Stoic ethics. Moreover, due to its particular emphasis and focus on the *moral* aspect of virtue, *moral* excellence and *human* excellence became identical in the end, and should thus be the ultimate goal of one’s life. Following this simple logic, what was considered “evil” or “bad” in the Stoic concept was confined only to what was *morally* imperfect. In this context, misfortune, suffering, sickness and even death itself, matters which were normally regarded as “evil”, belonged only to the *morally indifferent* and were not “evil” *per se* in the Stoic sense.⁶³⁶ However, the Stoics were also quick to acknowledge that among things morally indifferent some “have precedence” (προηγμένα) over others. Thus for example, good fortune, health, wealth, and beauty, would generally be *preferred* rather than misfortune, sickness, poverty, and ugliness, by a normal and sensible person if there was a choice.⁶³⁷ For the Stoics, such preference was just *natural*. Generally speaking, for Zeno and his followers, the “preferred” things could never lead to true happiness (εὐδαιμονία). Throughout the history of Stoicism this remained a key point in its philosophy. A man’s virtue never depended on his ability and success in obtaining anything in the external world. It only depended on his having the right mental attitude towards those “indifferent” things. The Stoics’ confidence in one’s self-reliance were not only of immense importance to the Stoics themselves, but also a source of great

⁶³⁶ Sandbach, *The Stoics*, 28. See Tad Brennan, *The Stoic Life: Emotions, Duties, and Fate* (Oxford: OUP, 2005), 119-34.

⁶³⁷ Sandbach, *The Stoics*, 31.

inspiration, comfort and strength to those who had to face the harsh realities of life, including severe suffering and death itself.⁶³⁸

In Stoicism emotions were often interpreted in intellectual terms. Emotions such as distress, fear and the like only reflected a false judgement about what was evil, and should thus be ignored. Such mental attitude sometimes gives people the impression that the Stoics were a class of people with very little or no human feelings.

From what has been said so far, it is sufficiently clear that for the Stoics there were actually two very different categories of so-called “good” and “evil” things; one *morally* vital and the other *morally* indifferent. The values that were attached to the two categories respectively were very different. The vast difference between the two must always be maintained, and it required great wisdom to do that. The Stoics were most particular about the vital distinction between the two, so much so that different vocabularies and expressions were actually employed for the matter. Thus, things that were regarded as morally good were “to be won” (αἰρετόν), and the morally evil “to be fled from” (φεύκτον). Indifferent matters were either “to be taken” (λήπτον) or “picked” (ἐκλέκτεον) or “not to be taken” (ἀλήπτον). The morally good were described as “beneficial” (ὠφέλιμον) or “useful” (χρήσιμον), and the evil “harmful” (βλαβερόν). Indifferent things could either be “serviceable” (εὐχρηστα) or “unserviceable” (δύσχρηστα).⁶³⁹ These were some of the “serviceable” (εὐχρηστα) things according to Seneca in *Ep.* 82.11: “I classify as ‘indifferent,’ - that is, neither good or evil, - sickness, pain, poverty, exile, death.”

Cicero in *Tusculan Disputations* 5.10.29-30 linked happiness with goodness:

⁶³⁸ Sandbach, *The Stoics*, 29.

⁶³⁹ Sandbach, *The Stoics*, 30.

Let us see who are to be described as happy: for my part I think it is those who are compassed about with good without any association of evil, and no other sense underlies the word happy, when we use it, except the fullness of combined good and complete separation of evil...for there will come as it were a throng of evils, if we regard them as evils, poverty, obscurity, insignificance, loneliness, loss of property, severe physical pain, ruined health, infirmity, blindness, fall of one's country, exile and, to crown all, slavery - in all these distressing conditions - and more still can happen - the wise man can be involved; for chance occasions them, and chance can assail the wise man; but if these are "evils," who can show that the wise man will be always happy, seeing that he can be involved in all of them at one and the same time? ...And if the noble distinction of this title of "wise," most worthy of Pythagoras, Socrates and Plato, so delights them, let them constrain the soul to despise the things which dazzle them, strength, health, beauty, riches, distinctions, wealth, and count as nothing the things that are their opposites: then will they be able in clearest accents to claim that they are terrified neither by the assault of fortune nor the opinion of the mob nor by pain or poverty, and that they regard all things as resting with themselves, nor is there anything beyond their control which they reckon as good.

Some comments could be made on the above statement of Cicero: (1) The expressions, "if we regard them as evils", and "if these are evils" clearly suggest that nothing was actually evil, only *thinking* made it so. (2) The belief in "chance" which was thought to be beyond human control. In Stoic vocabularies, chance, fate, divine will etc., were often synonymous.⁶⁴⁰

In the end it was the mental attitude which separated the "wise man" from others, according to Cicero in *Fin.*3.13.42: "Again, can anything be more certain than that on the theory of the school that counts pain as an evil, the Wise Man cannot be happy when he is being tortured on the rack? Whereas the system that considers pain no evil clearly proves that the Wise Man retains his happiness amidst the worst torments. The mere fact that men endure the same pain more easily when they voluntarily undergo it for the sake of their country than when they suffer it for some lesser cause, shows that the intensity of the pain depends on the state of mind of the sufferer, not on the pain's own intrinsic nature." For Cicero, it was "the state of mind of the sufferer, not the pain's own

⁶⁴⁰ Cf. Epictetus (4.1.128-31; 4.4.6-7; 4.5.27-37) highlights when it is "up to us" (ἐφ' ἡμῖν). Long, *Epictetus*, 27-31; 211; 218-22.

intrinsic nature,” that was decisive. A similar attitude is found in Seneca in *Const.* 10.4: “The wise man does receive some wounds, but those that he receives he binds up, arrests, and heals; these lesser things he does not even feel, nor does he employ against them his accustomed virtue of bearing hardship, but he either fails to notice them, or counts them worthy of a smile.”

For Seneca, things good or evil were not just matters of mental attitude and human perception, it was also God’s way of thinking: “It is God’s purpose, and the wise man’s as well, to show that those things which the ordinary man desires and those which he dreads are really neither good nor evils. It will appear, however, that there are goods, if these are bestowed only on good men, and that there are evils, if these are inflicted only on the evil” (*Prov.* 5.1-2). The Stoic idea that God’s purpose could be in harmony with human thinking was consistent with their fundamental belief in the unity of the divine λόγος and the λόγος σπερματικός in man.

Seneca, in *Ep.* 82.17, in profoundly Stoic spirit and composure, stressed that man’s voluntary decision to confront hardship was a great virtue: “...nothing glorious can result from unwillingness and cowardice; virtue does nothing under compulsion (*Non est autem gloriosum, quod ab invito et tergiversante fit; nihil facit virtus, quia necesse est.*)” (cf. 66.16). For Seneca, a virtuous man “welcomes (*amplexatur*) that which all other men regard with fear”.⁶⁴¹ The virtuous man was fearless when confronted with hardship: “He reckons all these things as the bugbears of man’s existence. Paint him a picture of slavery, lashes, chains, want, mutilation by disease or by torture, or anything else you may care to mention; he will count all such things as terrors caused by the derangement of the mind” (*Ep.* 85.27).

⁶⁴¹ Seneca, *Ep.* 71.28; cf. 30.9; *Ira* 1.5.2.

In *Ep.* 71.26-27 Seneca made it clear it was not hardship itself that was evil but the breakdown of the human mind, and it was only in the rational part of man where “supreme good” could be found:

What element of evil is there in torture and in the other things which we call hardships? It seems to me that there is this evil, - that the mind sags, and bends, and collapses. But none of these things can happen to the sage; he stands erect under any load....I do not withdraw the wise man from the category of man, nor do I deny to him the sense of pain as though he were a rock that has no feelings at all. I remember that he is made up of two parts: the one part is irrational - it is this that may be bitten, burned, or hurt; the other part is rational - it is this which holds resolutely to opinions, is courageous, and unconquerable. In the latter is situated man's Supreme Good.

Seneca held that “the wise man is a skilled hand at taming evils. Pain, want, disgrace, imprisonment, exile - these are universally to be feared; but when they encounter the wise man, they are tamed” (*Ep.* 85.41).

According to Epictetus the virtuous man was one “who though sick is happy, though in danger is happy, though dying is happy, though condemned to exile is happy, though in disrepute is happy” and “suffers no harm, even though he is soundly flogged, or imprisoned, or beheaded” (2.19.24; cf. 4.1.126). “How, then, does it come about that he suffers no harm, even though he is soundly flogged, or imprisoned, or beheaded?” asked Epictetus. The answer was: The virtuous man bore it in “a noble spirit” (4.1.127). Epictetus had great confidence in the human mind's freedom to choose between good and evil (1.25.1-4; cf. 2.4-7; 2.5.1, 7-8).

The Stoics were keenly aware of the fact that while a morally right attitude and action were within man's power to decide and do according to his nature-endowed reason, there were often the unforeseen circumstances which could prevent him from realizing his noble goal. However, this was not their primary concern, because as long as the attitude and action were *morally right*, the mature Stoics could commit the end-result to

God, fate or chance with the peace of mind and a clear conscience (συνείδησις). Varying degrees of belief in fate or determinism seemed to be quite common among Stoics. In the end, what brought happiness to a man was not necessarily success in terms of the actual realization of the desired goal, but the *morally good* intention, attitude and action. While accepting certain factors which could be beyond human control, the Stoics were generally very strong and consistent in their conviction that self-reliance, informed by knowledge and guided by wisdom and reason, was the road to happiness.

6.3 Hardship as God's gift

The idea that human hardships had their divine origin seemed to be very ancient. It could be found, for example, in Homer's *Iliad* 24.527-51 and *Odyssey* 4.236-37, 1.32-33. In the mythology of Homer, both good and evil came from God. However, in order to justify God's goodness and the divine purpose behind "evil", Plato in *De republica* 617E boldly affirmed that "God is blameless (θεὸς ἀνάλτιος)." He repeated this in *Rep.* 380A: "...we must either forbid them to say that these woes are the work of God, or they must devise some such interpretation as we now require, and must declare that what God did was righteous and good, and they were benefited by their chastisement." It was this conviction that provided the wise with the fortitude to endure suffering and misfortune as Plato put it in *Rep.* 387E: "'Least of all then to him is it a terrible thing to lose son or brother or his wealth or anything of the sort.' 'Least of all.' 'Then he makes the least lament and bears it most moderately when any such misfortune overtakes him.'" Plato's point was clear. (1) The God/gods could not be held responsible for evil. (2) Even if hardship or any evil should befall man, it could only be for his benefit.

While the Stoics put great emphasis on self-reliance and were fully confident about human potential and ability to do the best in life, they also believed that all human lives were predetermined by some providence, whether the gods or fate, or both. Yet, the

human persons were ultimately responsible for things good or bad. To them, providential determinism and human moral responsibility were fully compatible.

Seneca's *De Providentia*, written around AD 41-42, was a kind of theodicy, in response to Lucilius' question: if Providence was indeed in control, how did one account for the disturbing fact that many evils often seemed to come upon good people. In his reply, Seneca asserted that the world of nature was orderly and well planned so that one could only assume that whatever happened to men was providential. But the strong and virtuous must not be shaken by what were commonly regarded as "evils", such as misfortune, sickness, and even death itself. All these should be matters of indifference to them. In real life God often put those whom he loved and trusted to severe test and struggle and God was usually not disappointed. Following this simple logic, the weak and the timid were not worthy of God's trial. As such, the mature and the highly motivated should really welcome sufferings and calamities as God-sent opportunities for their own good. God "does not make a spoiled pet of a good man; he tests him, hardens him, and fits him for his own service (*Bonum virum in deliciis non habet, experitur, indurat, sibi illum parat*)", Seneca asserted in *Prov.*1.6. He elaborated on this:

God, I say, is showing favour to those whom he desired to achieve the highest possible virtue whenever he gives them the means of doing a courageous and brave deed, and to this end they must encounter some difficulty in life....Do not, I beg of you, shrink in fear from those things which the immortal gods apply like spurs, as it were, to our souls. Disaster is Virtue's opportunity (*calamitas virtutis occasio est*)....In like manner God hardens, reviews, and disciplines those whom he approves, whom he loves (*Hos itaque deus quos probat, quos amat, indurat, recognoscit, exercet*) (*Prov.* 4.5-7).

For Seneca the trial of the virtuous and his ultimate victory was also part of God's grand and mysterious design to question common conceptions concerning the nature of

“good” and “evil”, conceptions which failed to distinguish the *morally* good and evil from the “indifferent” things (*Prov.* 5.2).

Seneca believed that even the gods were sometimes moved by the virtuous man’s struggle with God-sent calamity: “Do you wonder if that God, who most dearly loves the good (*deus ille bonorum amantissimus*), who wishes them to become supremely good and virtuous, allots to them a fortune that will make them struggle? For my part, I do not wonder if sometimes the gods are moved by the desire to behold great men wrestle with some calamity” (*Prov.* 2.6-7).

The pedagogical value and discipline in man’s struggle was readily assumed by Seneca: “And so, in the case of good men the gods follow the same rule that teachers follow with their pupils; they require most effort from those of whom they have the surest hopes” (*Prov.* 4.11).

The man in struggle must take great comfort from the fact that “God has deemed us worthy instruments of his purpose to discover how much human nature can endure (*Digni visi sumus deo in quibus experiretur quantum humana natura posset pati*)” (*Prov.* 4.8. See *Ep.* 11.8-10; 52.2.7-8). But for Seneca, such great comfort was not enough to sustain man in his life-long struggle. Besides being a man of fortitude and courage, he must also commit himself to God or Fate, with the strong conviction that his struggle was part of the grand design of the universe determined by a sovereign will.

This philosophy had been well stated, for example, by Seneca in *Prov.* 5.6-8:

I am under no compulsion, I suffer nothing against my will, and I am not God’s slave but his follower....Therefore everything should be endured with fortitude...let us be cheerful and brave in the face of everything, reflecting that it is nothing of our own that perishes. What, then, is the part of a good man? To offer himself to Fate. It is a great consolation that it is together with the universe we are swept along; whatever it is that has ordained us so to live, so to die, by the same necessity it binds also the gods.

Seneca's last statement that not only men, but also the gods, were bound by "the same necessity" was not only a great consolation to those who were caught in hardship, it also served to reiterate the Stoics' fundamental belief in the unity between the virtuous man and the divine *logos*, or God himself.

Sometimes Seneca even went further with the seemingly incredible suggestion that the one who endured the most severe hardship with the strongest fortitude might even "outstrip God", because God is "exempt from enduring evil, while you are superior to it" (*Prov.* 6.6).

The Stoics' focus on reason and the mind together with their attitude to things "indifferent" often gave people the impression that they had totally disregarded the harsh reality of physical pain and were void of human feelings and emotions. Such an impression, however, was not altogether correct. Seneca, for instance, took the reality and experience of physical pain quite seriously. In Seneca's *Ep.* 14.4-5 a most vivid and graphic description of bodily pain and the extreme endurance of the sufferer were given: "Picture to yourself under this head the prison, the cross, the rack, the hook, and the stake which they drive straight through a man until it protrudes from his throat. Think of human limbs torn apart by chariots driven in opposite directions, of the terrible shirt smeared and interwoven with inflammable materials, and of all the other contrivances devised by cruelty, in addition to those which I have mentioned!"

The Stoics' emphasis on the mastery and strength of the human reason was sometimes accompanied by a humble acknowledgement of divine assistance in man's struggle, such as Seneca put it in *Ep.* 41.2: "Indeed, no man can be good without the help of God. Can one rise superior to fortune unless God helps him to rise?" And in *Ep.* 41.4: "If you

see a man who is unterrified in the midst of dangers, untouched by desires, happy in adversity, peaceful amid the storm, who looks down upon men from a higher plane, and views the gods on a footing of equality, will not a feeling of reverence for him steal over you? Will you not say: 'This quality is too great and too lofty to be regarded as resembling this petty body in which it dwells? A divine power has descended upon that man.'"

The following statement in Seneca, *Ep.* 73.16 would certainly be a great encouragement to those caught in trial: "The gods are not disdainful or envious; they open to you; they lend a hand as you climb. Do you marvel that man goes to the gods? God comes to men; nay, he comes nearer, he comes into men. No mind that has not God, is good."⁶⁴² In this particular context, the word "reason" in the following statement in *Ep.* 74.21 could well be taken as a kind of synonym for God: "Love reason! The love of reason will arm you against the greatest hardships (*Ama rationem! Huius te amor contra durissima armabit*)."

Sometimes Epictetus conceived of God as someone who was "within" man himself, so that he became a kind of "God-bearer". Such a thought naturally placed great responsibility on man:

Do you not know that you are nourishing God, exercising God? You are bearing God about with you, you poor wretch, and know it not! Do you suppose I am speaking of external God, made of silver or gold? It is within yourself that you bear Him, and do not perceive that you are defiling Him with impure thoughts and filthy actions. Yet in the presence of even an image of God you would not dare to do anything of the things you are now doing. But when God Himself is present within you, seeing and hearing everything, are you not ashamed to be thinking and doing such things as these, O insensible of your own nature, and object of God's wrath! (2.8.12-14)

⁶⁴² See also Seneca, *Ep.* 31.11; 41.1; 120.14; Epictetus 2.8.9-14.

Basically following his great predecessors, Marcus Aurelius Antoninus held firm to the belief that everything in the world was the design of the divine Reason or God, which or whom man must gladly accept and co-operate with. To do so was also to follow the dictate of Nature. "Why should I live in a world where there are no gods and no Providence?" asked Marcus Aurelius in *Meditations* 2.11.

In certain contexts, "reason" and "god" were almost synonymous for Marcus Aurelius. As such, one should always "keep the god within us safe from violation or harm, stronger than pleasures and pains, doing nothing without purpose or by mistake or in pretence, having no need that anyone else should do something or not do something and accepting what happens and what is assigned to us coming from the same source as that from which it has itself come" (*Med.* 2. 17).

Like Seneca, Marcus Aurelius was equally convinced that a man's hardship was God's assignment, as he put it simply but clearly in 3.11: "...and what virtue it calls for from me, such as gentleness, manly courage (*ἀνδρείας*), truth, fidelity, guiltlessness, independence, and the rest. In each case therefore must thou say: this has come from God." Once a man accepted what had been predetermined by "destiny", his duty was to be obedient to God without complaint: "...there is left as the characteristic of the good man to delight in and to welcome what befalls and what is being spun for him by destiny...but to maintain it to the end in a gracious serenity, in orderly obedience to God, uttering no word that is not true and doing no deed that is not just."⁶⁴³ As a faithful "follower of God", a Stoic should totally disregard others' opinion about him and be free from all cares and concerns, and just set his mind on the course that God had assigned for him: "What others may say or think about him or do against him he does

⁶⁴³ Marcus Aurelius, *Med.* 3.16. Cf. 2.17; 3.7; 5.27.

not even let enter his mind, being well satisfied with these two things - justice in all present acts and contentment with his present lot. And he gives up all engrossing cares and ambitions, and has no other wish than to achieve the straight course through the Law and, by achieving it, to be a follower of God" (*Med.* 10.11).

6.4 Suicide

The constant recurrence of the topic of suicide among the Roman Stoics, and Seneca's glorification of it as "the path to freedom", has prompted people to remark that Seneca was "in love with death."⁶⁴⁴ Whatever the case might be, it was Seneca's view that "the best thing which eternal law ever ordained was that it allowed to us one entrance into life, but many exits....This is the one reason why we cannot complain of life: it keeps no one against his will" (*Ep.* 70.14).

For all his apparent glorification of death and his praise of the freedom it brought, it was Seneca's view that everything in life, including death itself, had its appointed time. As such, there was no need to either hasten its arrival or to try to turn away from it: "It is folly to die through fear of dying. The executioner is upon you; wait for him. Why anticipate him? Why assume the management of a cruel task that belongs to another? Do you grudge your executioner his privilege, or do you merely relieve him of his task?" (*Ep.* 70.8)

For the Stoics, "appropriate action" (καθῆκον) was an important factor regarding suicide. Reason must ultimately decide what course of action was appropriate or inappropriate in a particular set of circumstances. However, to act appropriately was not

⁶⁴⁴ Sandbach, *The Stoics*, 50.

necessarily good, and to act inappropriately necessarily bad, in the strictly *moral* sense.

In this case suicide was not a strictly *moral* issue.

Naturally it was quite impossible for the Stoics to talk about human suffering and hardship without having to deal with the issue of death ultimately, whether it was “natural” death or otherwise. Here the “noble” death of Socrates, the philosopher *par excellence*, was undoubtedly the *locus classicus* for people to imitate. Plato, Cicero, Seneca, and Epictetus all regarded Socrates’ death as a response to “divine sign” (see §2.2.1.3). When a “divine sign” was given, the issue of death, including suicide, was beyond mere human judgement to decide whether an action was “appropriate” or not. This was because when a “divine sign” was believed to have been given to a person, some kind of moral “ought” or imperative became a major factor in that person’s ultimate decision. In this case, the Stoics, like Socrates, would think that a person could only be “obedient” to the “divine sign”, whether to willingly surrender to some outside agent, or to commit suicide.

Socrates consistently held that the body was the soul’s prison and there was one way in which a man could be free from all anxiety about the fate of his soul.⁶⁴⁵ Philosophically or religiously, the Socratic attitude toward death was evidently prompted by the Greek belief in the immortality of the soul as well as its ability to find true wisdom “in the other world.”⁶⁴⁶

Seneca thought that once the nature of death was properly understood, a man could actually “scorn death” because not even death was able to strike his soul and “the way out” [suicide] was always open to him with the divine assurance that “of all things that I

⁶⁴⁵ Plato, *Phaed.* 65C, 66E, 67C-D, 115A.

⁶⁴⁶ Plato, *Phaed.* 67E-68B. Cf. 82C.

have deemed necessary for you, I have made nothing easier than dying.”⁶⁴⁷ Seneca even went so far as to suggest that “to despise our bodies is sure freedom” in *Ep.* 65.22-23: “For my body is the only part of me which can suffer injury. In this dwelling, which is exposed to peril, my soul lives free. Never shall this flesh drive me to feel fear, or to assume any pretence that is unworthy of a good man. Never shall I lie in order to honour this petty body. When it seems proper, I shall sever my connection with it. At present, while we are bound together, our alliance shall nevertheless not be one of equality; the soul shall bring all quarrels before its own tribunal. To despise our bodies is sure freedom.”

For Seneca, however, there was nothing honourable about death *per se*: “Death is honourable when related to that which is honourable; by this I mean virtue and a soul that despises the worst hardships (*id est virtus et animus extrema contemnens*)” (*Ep.* 82.14).

Epictetus subscribed to Socrates’ view that the body was an encumbrance. Yet this in itself was not a sufficient reason for a person to take suicide as an option (1.9.10-11). It would be equally wrong to commit suicide in order to escape from one’s adverse circumstances. The right way to treat one’s body was simply to regard it as completely unimportant (1.9.17).⁶⁴⁸

Epictetus was sometimes fond of using a phrase like “the door stands open” to indicate that suicide always remained an option for people (1.25.18). However, one should always be certain about God’s call before suicide was committed: “If thou sendest me to a place where men have no means of living in accordance with nature, I shall depart this

⁶⁴⁷ Seneca, *Prov.* 6.6-7; *Ira* 1.112.

⁶⁴⁸ Long, *Epictetus*, 159.

life, not in disobedience to thee, but as though thou wert sounding for me the recall.”⁶⁴⁹

Also, no one should take his own life unless he was certain that he had completed his God-given assignment on earth: “Men, wait upon God. When he shall give the signal and set you free from this service, then shall you depart to him; but for the present endure to abide in this place, where he has stationed you” (1.9.16).

6.5 Courage and manliness

Quite a lot has already been said about the Stoic attitude toward hardship and suffering. However, in order to make a clearer and stronger comparison and contrast between the Stoic and the Pauline perceptions of the matter, it would be necessary to highlight the Stoic view on courage and manliness here.

Despite the distinctiveness of Stoicism as a philosophical school, its leaders and followers continued to be inspired by Plato and Xenophon’s Socrates, especially in the area of moral virtues, such as fortitude and self-control over mental, physical, and emotional stress.⁶⁵⁰ The Stoics were also mindful of Socrates’ famous saying: “No harm can come to the good man in life or in death, and his circumstances are not ignored by the gods” (Plato, *Apol.* 41D).

Cicero expressed his deep conviction in a very Stoic manner that the courage and discipline of the human soul would enable a man to endure all the odds in life and eventually make life worth living: “The soul that is altogether courageous and great is marked above all by two characteristics: one of these is indifference to outward circumstances....The second characteristic is that, when the soul is disciplined in the

⁶⁴⁹ Epictetus 3.24.101-02; cf. 1.24.20.

⁶⁵⁰ Long, *Epictetus*, 68.

way above mentioned, one should do deeds not only great and in the highest degree useful, but extremely arduous and laborious and fraught with danger both to life and to many things that make life worth living" (*Off.* 1.20.66). He praised the Stoic understanding of courage, especially courage that was prompted by its response to danger and for the cause of justice: "The Stoics, therefore, correctly define courage as 'that virtue which champions the cause of right.' Accordingly, no one has attained to true glory who has gained a reputation for courage by treachery and cunning; for nothing that lacks justice can be morally right" (*Off.* 1.19.62).

Cicero in *Tusc.* 2.18.43 elaborated on the definition of virtue with special emphasis on *manliness*:

It is universally agreed then, not merely by the learned but by the unlearned as well, that it is characteristic of men who are brave, high-spirited, enduring, and superior to human vicissitudes to suffer pain with patience....And yet, perhaps, though all right-minded states are called virtue, the term is not appropriate to all virtues, but all have got the name from the single virtue which was found to outshine the rest, for it is from the word for "man" that the word virtue is derived (*appellata est enim ex viro virtus*); but man's peculiar virtue is fortitude (*virī autem propria maxime est fortitudo*), of which there are two main functions, namely scorn of death and scorn of pain. These then we must exercise if we wish to prove possessors of virtue, or rather, since the word for "virtue" is borrowed from the word for "man," if we wish to be men (*Utendum est igitur his, si virtutis compotes vel potius si viri volumus esse, quoniam a viris virtus nomen est mutuata*).

Manly bravery and endurance occupied very prominent places in the social ethos of the Romans, because these were highly regarded as the very qualities which enabled them to conquer places and build their empire. In this particular context, the one word they had in mind would most probably be *virtus* (a word cognate with *vir*, "man" as seen above). *Virtus* was therefore a particularly *manly* quality in the face of extreme suffering, and pain was a litmus test of *masculinity*. It is therefore quite natural that great Roman thinkers such as Cicero and Seneca repeatedly used the adjective *womanly* (*muliebriter*) as the pejorative term to characterize a man's failure to endure pain.

Using the analogy of the athletes in fierce competition, Seneca in *Ep.* 78.17 made special reference to virtue and manliness: "What blows do athletes receive on their faces and all over their bodies. Nevertheless, through their desire for fame they endure every torture, and they undergo these things not only because they are fighting but in order to be able to fight. Their very training means torture. So let us also win the way to victory in all our struggles, for the reward is not a garland or a palm or a trumpeter who calls for silence at the proclamation of our names, but rather virtue, steadfastness of soul, and a peace that is won for all time, if fortune has once been utterly vanquished in any combat. You say, 'I feel severe pain.' What then; are you relieved from feeling it, if you endure it like a woman (*si illum muliebriter tuleris*)?"

In *Tusc.* 4.24.53 Cicero attempted a definition of bravery (*fortitudo* = ἀνδρεία): "Bravery is, he [Chrysippus] says, the knowledge of enduring vicissitudes or a disposition of soul in suffering and enduring, obedient to the supreme law of our being without fear (*Fortitudo est, inquit, scientia rerum perperendarum vel adfectio animi in patiundo ac perferendo summae legi parens sine timore.*)" "Supreme law" here could be referring to the law of nature or of God. However, it was perhaps more likely that Cicero had in mind the "reason" that was believed to be in man's inner being, as his next statement in *Tusc.* 2.20.47-48 seemed to indicate:

When then we are directed to be master of ourselves, the meaning of the direction is that reason should be a curb upon recklessness....It is man's duty to enable reason to have rule over that part of the soul which ought to obey. How is it to be done? You will say. Even as the master over the slave, or the general over the soldier, or the parent over the son. If the part of the soul, which I have described as yielding, conducts itself disgracefully, if it give way in womanish fashion to lamentation and weeping (*si se lamentis muliebriter lacrimisque dedet*), let it be fettered and tightly bound by the guardianship of friends and relations; for often we find men crushed by a sense of shame at being overcome without any reason. Such persons therefore we shall have almost to keep in chains and guard closely like slaves, whilst those who shall be found more steadfast, though not of the highest strength, we shall have to warn to be mindful of honour, like good soldiers recalled to duty.

For Cicero, no insult to a person's *manly* ego could be greater than being tauntingly described as "womanish", an adjective used by Cicero in the previous statement as well as in the following one in *Tusc.* 2.23.55: "But the principal precaution to be observed in the matter of pain is to do nothing in a despondent, cowardly, slothful, servile or womanish spirit (*ne quid abiecte, ne quid timide, ne quid ignave, ne quid serviliter muliebriterve faciamus*).” It is worth noting that for Cicero being *womanish* was closely parallel to being *slavish*.

For Cicero as well as the committed Stoics, true manliness and other closely related virtues or qualities were essentially mental and not physical. Their main concern was with inner strength and fortitude and not physical power. But the mind required a great deal of alertness and readiness. This meant strict discipline and constant exercise, without which courage, manliness etc., were just empty talk. To the Stoics, ultimately it was the human mind or reason which was in tune with the law of Nature or God or the divine *Logos* that made everything possible - courage, manliness, virtue, wisdom, goodness, beauty, and happiness: "Happiness depends on what is entirely a man's own doing, the operation of his mind: if he judges correctly and holds steadfastly to truth he will be a perfect being, whom misfortune may strike but will never harm. The wise man will be more rightly called a king....All things will rightly be called his, for he alone knows how to use them; rightly too will he be called beautiful, for the features of the mind are more beautiful than those of the body, rightly the only free man, since he obeys no master and is the servant of no greed, rightly invincible, for though his body may be bound, no fetters can be put on his mind....If it is true that none but the wise are good and all the good are blessed, is anything more to be studied than philosophy or anything more divine than virtue?" (*Fin.* 3.22.75-76)

6.6 The true Stoic most worthy of imitation and praise

In classical Greco-Roman thinking, the great value of the suffering and hardship endured by the virtuous was not confined to their own personal life. Equally important was the common belief that they could be inspiring exemplars for others. Great pedagogical value was thus attached to their examples (Seneca, *Prov.* 4.8, 11).

For Cicero, it was the man's display of virtue in situations of extreme danger and difficulty that deserved the greatest praise: "the greater the difficulty, the greater the glory" (*Sed quo difficilius, hoc praeclarius*) (*Off.* 1.19.64). Cicero believed that the glory that now belonged to the one who had made it was perceived largely in terms of bravery, nobility, and masculinity: "We must realize...that achievement is most glorious in the eyes of the world which is won with a spirit great, exalted, and to the vicissitudes of earthly life. And so, when we wish to hurl a taunt, the very first to rise to our lips is.... 'For ye, young men, show a womanish soul, yon maiden a man's;' and this: 'Thou son of Salmacis, win spoils that cost no sweat nor blood.' When, on the other hand, we wish to pay a compliment, we somehow or other praise in more eloquent strain the brave and noble work of some great soul" (*Off.* 1.18.61).

In Cicero's *De Oratore* 2.346-47, those who managed to overcome adversity and misfortune in most difficult situations with wisdom, bravery, and dignity should deserve "the most welcome praise":

But the most welcome praise is that bestowed on deeds that appear to have been performed by brave men (*viris fortibus*) without profit or reward; while those that also involve toil and personal danger (*cum labore ac periculo ipsorum*) supply very fertile topics for panegyric, because they admit of being narrated in a most eloquent style and of obtaining the readiest reception from the audience; for it is virtue that is profitable to others, and either toilsome or dangerous or at all events not profitable to its possessor, that is deemed to mark a man of outstanding merit (*praestantis viri*). Also it is customarily recognized as a great and admirable distinction to have borne adversity wisely, not to have been

crushed by misfortune, and not to have lost dignity (*dignitatem*) in a difficult situation.

Seneca expounded his idea of the “honourable and glorious” in a most eloquent manner in *Ep.* 82.10-12: “Mere death is, in fact, not glorious; but a brave death is glorious....I classify as ‘indifferent,’ – that is, neither good nor evil, - sickness, pain, poverty, exile, death. None of these things is intrinsically glorious; but nothing can be glorious apart from them. For it is not poverty that we praise, it is the man whom poverty cannot humble or bend. Nor is it exile that we praise, it is the man who withdraws into exile in the spirit in which he would have sent another into exile. It is not pain that we praise, it is the man whom pain has not coerced. One praises not death, but the man whose soul death takes away before it can confound it. All these things are in themselves neither honourable nor glorious; but any one of them that virtue has visited and touched is made honourable and glorious by virtue; they merely lie in between, and the decisive question is only whether wickedness or virtue has laid hold upon them.”

The idea of God sending a good example for the learner to imitate was also present in Epictetus 3.22.45-49: “And how it is possible for a man who has nothing, who is naked, without home or hearth, in squalor, without a slave, without a city, to live serenely? Behold, God has sent you the man who will show in practice that it is possible. ‘Look at me,’ he says, ‘I am without a home....Yet what do I lack? Am I not free from pain and fear, am I not free? ...Who, when he lays his eyes upon me, does feel that he is seeing his king and his master?’” In Epictetus’ ideal, a true philosopher became God-like in the end: “Of such character will I show myself to you - faithful, reverent, noble, unperturbed...one who dies like a god, who bears disease like a god. This is what I have; this is what I can do; but all else I neither have nor can do. I will show you the sinews of a philosopher (νεῦρα φιλοσόφου)” (2.8.27-29).

6.7 A Jewish counterpart: the Maccabean tradition

In the Jewish tradition, a most likely counterpart to Stoicism on the virtues of courage and endurance would probably be the moving example of the Maccabean martyrs in the face of extreme suffering. As such, it might be helpful to make a brief reference to it before examining the case of Paul on the matter. Brent Shaw thinks that it was the intention of the author of Fourth Maccabees to show that, by using the power of the human spirit and mind to control the body, one could be a “master of oneself” (αὐτοδέσποτος) under adverse circumstances.⁶⁵¹ This was most evident in the author’s recounting, in graphic details, of the extreme suffering the Maccabean martyrs went through. They were Eleazar, the seven young men and finally, their mother. The moral of the author was abundantly clear: the martyrs emerged victorious in their confrontation with the tyranny of their oppressor, because they powerfully showed that the tortured body, under the control of the spirit and mind, was able to endure and finally overcome all the horrible tortures inflicted upon it. The victims’ victory eventually earned them a noble reputation as worthy martyrs of the nation.

The author of Fourth Maccabees summed up the virtue of endurance of the Jewish martyrs in 17.11-16: “Truly divine was the contest in which they were engaged. On that day virtue was the umpire and the test to which they were put was a test of endurance. The prize for victory was incorruption in long-lasting life. The first to enter the contest was Eleazar, but the mother of the seven sons competed also, and the brothers as well took part. The tyrant was the adversary and the world and the life of men were the spectators. Piety won the victory and crowned her own contestants.”⁶⁵²

⁶⁵¹ Brent D. Shaw, ‘Body/Power/Identity: Passions of the Martyrs’, *J ECS* 4 (1996), 269-312, at 277.

⁶⁵² Anderson (trans.), ‘4 Maccabees’, 2.562-63.

Very much like the Stoics, and perhaps more so, the Maccabeans also took God's sovereignty and divine assistance seriously. However, also like the Stoics, except somewhat less explicit and pronounced, the focus of the Maccabeans in their περίστασις was on the *human* qualities or virtues which enabled them to overcome extreme adversity and emerge as victors. For the admiring public or readers, the attention was also largely on the *human* efforts and virtues of their sages or martyrs, so that in the end it was both "praise be to man on earth" and "glory be to God on high". Whatever the case may be, one suspects that for Paul's Corinthians, the interest could well be more in "praise be to man on earth" rather than in "glory be to God on high". This thesis will try to show that this would certainly not be Paul's way of thinking. It was always divine grace and glory that the apostle sought. Moreover, Paul was ever conscious of his own identity as the δοῦλος of Christ. As such, he sought none of his own glory.

The Greco-Roman as well as the Maccabean traditions on endurance also seem to have been reflected in the thinking of the early church fathers. In his letter, Ignatius, bishop of Antioch, had also associated martyrdom with the virtue of endurance.⁶⁵³ Similarly, Tertullian also believed that *patientia* or endurance was most important to the mind as well as the body, to the extent that it virtually became the lord and master of one's mind and body.⁶⁵⁴ When this happened, a person would be well prepared for all the adversities in life, including "whips, fire, the cross, wild beasts and . . . the sword".⁶⁵⁵ Consequently, the martyrs were regarded as "athletes of piety" (εὐσεβείας ἀθλητῶν) and it was their "valour, manliness and courage (ἀνδρείας)" which won them their battles.⁶⁵⁶

⁶⁵³ Ignatius, *Eph.* 3.1.

⁶⁵⁴ Shaw, 'Body', 298.

⁶⁵⁵ Tertullian, *Pat.* 13.8.

⁶⁵⁶ Eusebius, *Hist. Eccl.* 5.1.1. Shaw, 'Body', 307.

6.8 Conclusion

Special reference has been made to Stoicism in this part of the thesis as an essential background study in preparation for an inquiry into Paul's understanding of hardship based largely on 1 Cor. 4.8-13 and 2 Cor. 11.23-33. For the purposes of this thesis, it is obviously of little use as well as impossible to look at Stoicism in very broad and general terms. Attention has therefore been given only to several issues which are assumed to be characteristic of the Stoic school and relevant to the apostle's *peristasis* catalogue; issues such as the Stoic view on virtue, good, and evil, human hardship as a divine gift, severe suffering as a most welcome opportunity to demonstrate a man's great courage and endurance, which were regarded as the most obvious traits of masculinity. Last but not least was the Stoic attitude towards death and suicide. The pedagogical values which the Stoics' attached to the great examples set by the truly virtuous man were also clearly noted.

The study on virtue, good, and evil has quite clearly shown that for the Stoics these concepts were only important and meaningful *morally*, and judgement on them depended largely if not entirely on the human reason or mind. Things external, including hardship and physical pain, even death itself, were matters of "indifference" to Stoics. As such, these "indifferent" matters were not within the Stoics' *moral* concerns. Although the Stoics' attitude toward hardship was indicative of their *moral* character as well as being relevant to the issues of virtue and wisdom, hardship itself was *not* a moral issue. The Stoics were therefore thought to be members of a class who were able to transcend things, including hardship, pain, even death itself; things which were generally the deep concerns of other people. It remains to be seen where Paul really belonged. It goes without saying that the Stoics' belief in hardship as a God-sent

gift to the “worthy” as a test of their *moral* character naturally lightened their burden in the face of severe hardship. While suicide was not treated lightly by the Stoics, there was the general understanding that it was largely a matter of human judgement at the dictate of a man’s reason as well as being sensitive to the divine “call”. Although the Stoic view of courage was essentially consistent with the general Greco-Roman position on the matter, its *moral* overtone has to be especially noted. On the matter of masculinity, the Stoic emphasis was also clearly on man’s *moral* fortitude and *mental* stamina rather than on his outward features and physical strength. The great importance that the Stoics attached to pedagogical values of moral virtue obtained by the good and wise was essential to the core teaching of Stoicism. This concern became the more important when the virtuous was seriously regarded as a God-sent “witness”. It will be interesting to see if Paul’s view on the matter were in any way comparable to the Stoic’s.

It is particularly worth noting that, by introducing the unique idea of the “indifferent” (ἀδιάφορα) the Stoics had more or less re-defined “good” and “evil” both philosophically and morally. It remains to be seen if Paul had also subscribed to such ideas in his attitude towards hardship and suffering, or if the apostle looked at those issues quite differently. Whatever the case might be, the Stoic idea was clearly quite out of the ordinary, as far as the common people were concerned, people who could not and would not look at those harsh realities of life in such a detached or “indifferent” manner and remain “stoical” about them.

Generally speaking, the Stoic attitude toward hardship was basically *positive* for reasons which have been given in this study. This is, however, only one side of the coin. There is *the other side of the coin* which has yet to be looked at in this thesis. This other side will hopefully reveal the significant fact that there was also a tradition in the Greco-

Roman society which viewed hardship, especially its physical aspects, with contempt and suspicion, regarding it as personally and socially humiliating and degrading, and thus unworthy of true manliness. It was probably from this *negative* perspective that Paul's Corinthian critics had judged the apostle's hardship. Moreover, it was also probably from a similarly *negative* position that Paul had presented his περίστασις in order to witness to the power of God in his degradation and humiliation, in a typically *paradoxical* fashion. This will be the remaining task of this part of the thesis (Chapter 7) before embarking on an exegesis of 1 Cor. 4.8-13 and 2 Cor. 11.23-33 (Chapter 8).

Chapter Seven: Suffering and hardship as signs of shame and degradation: the other side of the coin

7.1 Introduction

The possible background of Paul with reference to *περίστασις* has been a matter of considerable interest to New Testament scholars, especially in relation to the Corinthian correspondence. Bultmann has attributed Paul's lists to the Stoic tradition while Schrage regards them as Jewish apocalyptic. These two positions are thought to be representative of "the two most widespread scholarly opinions on the provenance of the lists".⁶⁵⁷ However, R. Hodgson argues that Paul's diverse background was not confined to Stoic philosophy or Jewish apocalyptic only, and holds that "Paul's lists stem from a widespread literary convention of the first century which served a Hellenistic Jewish history writer like Josephus, the pharisaic Judaism of the Mishnah, and the incipient Gnosticism that appears full-blown in the Nag Hammadi library."⁶⁵⁸ One does not necessarily have to agree with Hodgson to simply note that the background of Paul could well be more complex than the respective views of Bultmann and Schrage. But Hodgson's world is obviously far too big for the present thesis to handle, which is why the previous chapter has only made a special reference to the Stoic tradition as a most important background study on the *peristasis* catalogues in relation to Paul's autobiographical notes concerning his own suffering and hardship.

This chapter will begin with a review of Fitzgerald's thesis, which not only confirms the positive use of the *peristasis* catalogues in the Greco-Roman tradition, but also asserts that Paul had in fact followed that tradition very closely. As both the Stoic tradition and

⁶⁵⁷ R. Hodgson, 'Paul the Apostle and First Century Tribulation Lists', *ZNW* 74 (1983), 59-80, at 60.

⁶⁵⁸ Hodgson, 'Paul', 69, 60.

Fitzgerald's thesis are only concerned with the positive use of the *peristasis* catalogues, it would be necessary to look at "the other side of the coin", which will try to show that the suffering and hardship in the *peristasis* catalogues could also be perceived *negatively* as signs of shame and degradation. The exegesis of Paul's biographical notes on the subject (Chapter Eight) will try to demonstrate that it was the *negative* aspect of the *peristasis* catalogues that Paul had in mind when he listed them out in his *apologia* as the apostle of Christ. Paul's approach would also be consistent with his seemingly bizarre decision "to know nothing...except Jesus Christ, and him crucified" (1 Cor. 2.2) and his deliberate refusal to use "eloquent wisdom" (1.17) or "plausible words of wisdom" (2.4) in his proclamation. In all these Paul's overall intention remained consistent and clear, namely, the inversion of the current social ethos.

7.2 A review of Fitzgerald's thesis

Fitzgerald believes his study of classical literature has shown that the Greco-Roman sage generally used the *peristasis* (περίστασις) catalogues positively to demonstrate the best of human virtues. The sage's ability to endure extreme hardships was so highly regarded in the Greco-Roman society that Epictetus actually viewed περίστασις as "the test of the philosopher" (2.19.24; 3.10.11) and of true masculinity.

The propagandistic and pedagogical purposes of the use of the *peristasis* catalogues in the classical tradition have also been clearly noted by Fitzgerald. What is even more important, as far as this thesis is concerned, is Fitzgerald's view that it was for the *same* reason that Paul had listed the *peristasis* catalogues in 2 Corinthians.⁶⁵⁹ Fitzgerald further conjectures that Paul in 2 Corinthians was thus frequently depicting himself in

⁶⁵⁹ Fitzgerald, *Cracks*, 44.

terms of the typically “ideal philosopher” of the Greco-Roman tradition and the *peristasis* catalogues were used by him as “an integral part of this *Selbstdarstellung*”. In the end, the *peristasis* catalogues served the same literary function for Paul. Paul’s purpose in the use of the *peristasis* catalogues was to show that he was not driven to despair in the face of suffering and severe hardship. Quite to the contrary, Fitzgerald holds that “the emphasis falls on Paul’s superiority to suffering and his triumph over it.”⁶⁶⁰

Fitzgerald has identified Paul’s “*Peristasenkataloge*” or “*peristasis catalogues*”, not only in the Corinthian correspondence in 1 Cor. 4.9-13; 2 Cor. 4.8-9; 6.4-10; 11.23-28; 12.10, but also in Rom. 8.35-39; Phil. 4.11-12; 2 Tim. 3.11. He believes that “this designation stems from the widespread recognition that Paul’s lists are similar to lists of ‘circumstances’ (*peristaseis*) found in numerous ancient documents.”⁶⁶¹ Fitzgerald also holds that “Bultmann, more than anyone else, is responsible for the application of the term *Peristasenkataloge* to Paul’s lists of difficulties and for the understanding of the catalogues that is current in many scholarly circles.”⁶⁶² Fitzgerald generally subscribes to Bultmann’s position and stresses the similarity in the use of the catalogues by the ideal sage and the apostle Paul.⁶⁶³

Fitzgerald has a useful survey of the term *περίστασις* beginning from the fifth century BCE. In its subsequent development the term essentially meant “a catalogue of circumstances,” for either “good” or “bad” or both. However, it was “adverse circumstance,” “difficulty,” or “hardship” that the term more commonly designated, as

⁶⁶⁰ Fitzgerald, *Cracks*, 204.

⁶⁶¹ Fitzgerald, *Cracks*, 1.

⁶⁶² Fitzgerald, *Cracks*, 7.

⁶⁶³ Fitzgerald, *Cracks*, 12-3.

was the case in Paul's use in the Corinthian correspondence.⁶⁶⁴ The following findings of Fitzgerald are particularly worth noting:

Peristasis catalogues frequently serve as rhetorical and literary foils for the depiction of various aspects of the wise man's existence and character...they serve to depict such characteristics as 1) the sage's serenity despite the direst calamities of life, 2) his virtue, especially his courage, 3) his endurance of the greatest and most demanding hardships, 4) his perseverance in doing noble deeds despite the dangers involved and his refusal, at any cost, to depart from what justice dictates, 5) his contempt for Fortune, 6) his victory over adversity, 7) his *askesis* and the role it plays in his victory, 8) his invincibility and invulnerability as a person, 9) his perfect rationality, 10) his demeanour and his response to his adversaries, 11) his consent to the hardships of his life and the volitional character of his suffering, and 12) his conformity to the will of God and the place of his suffering within the divine plan. In short, the catalogues depict and celebrate the greatness of his invincible virtue, the power and tranquillity of his philosophically informed mind.⁶⁶⁵

It remains to be seen if, and to what extent, Paul's use of the catalogues was similar to that of the ideal sage.

From the Greco-Roman tradition Fitzgerald has singled out *Phaedo* 67E -68B where the sangfroid attitude of Socrates' confrontation with death was commonly believed to be a great revelation about the true philosopher. This was also true of Aristotle's "virtuous man" who "endures repeated and severe misfortune with patience" (*Eth. nic.* 1.10.11) as well as Cicero's "no one can be just who fears death or pain or exile or poverty" (*Off.* 2.11.38). Epictetus held basically the same view in 2.19.24 and 4.1.127.⁶⁶⁶

Fitzgerald's study shows that the wise man's hardship was often attributed to two sources: Fortune and God. Whatever the case might be, *the will* of the wise man was decisive in his response to the adverse circumstances. For the ancient philosopher like Socrates, response to hardship involved not only the rational disposition of the person

⁶⁶⁴ Fitzgerald, *Cracks*, 203.

⁶⁶⁵ Fitzgerald, *Cracks*, 115.

⁶⁶⁶ Fitzgerald, *Cracks*, 60-5.

but also his voluntary attitude.⁶⁶⁷ The notion of the “death wish” of Socrates (Plato’s *Phaedo* 62C; 64A) had an abiding influence in the Greco-Roman tradition. Seneca stressed that the virtuous man “welcomes (*amplexatur*) that which all other men regard with fear” (*Ep.* 71.28). On Quintilian Fitzgerald comments: “his attitude toward Fortune and her hardships is thus one, not of fear, but of utter contempt. Fear is servile, but contempt is the attitude of a superior to an inferior (Quint. *Inst.* 12.8.14), and the sage’s disdain for Fortune is a sign that he feels himself superior to her and what she is able to inflict.”⁶⁶⁸

Fitzgerald notices a significant difference in the Greco-Roman tradition between “Fortune” and “God” in relation to adversity or hardship. While “Fortune” was often thought to be working against man and was thus the author of evil, sages and moralists tended to regard or welcome adversity as a “gift” from God. Fitzgerald elaborates: “a lofty conception of deity as well as a refusal to call hardships “evils” opened the way in Stoic circles for the treatment of hardship as a benefaction bestowed out of the divine’s love for humanity. In this tradition, which has a clear Platonic basis (*Resp.* 379C-380C), God is not the author of evil, but of adversity, and hardships are part of the divine’s designs for the sage.”⁶⁶⁹ As such, Seneca believed that the wise and virtuous should thankfully welcome it as a divine favour (*Prov.* 4.5.7-8).

God’s testing of the good and wise men through hardships was not only for their own sake, they were also expected to be good examples for others to follow (*Prov.* 4.8, 11). Moreover, the fact that good and wise men also experienced “evils” while evil men

⁶⁶⁷ Fitzgerald, *Cracks*, 70.

⁶⁶⁸ Fitzgerald, *Cracks*, 74.

⁶⁶⁹ Fitzgerald, *Cracks*, 76.

enjoyed “goods” and blessings also served as part of the divine plan to question the common notion about “good” and “evil” (*Prov.* 5.2).⁶⁷⁰

For both Seneca and Epictetus hardship should in no way be regarded as a sign of divine hostility towards a good man or as an indication of God’s negligence of him. Quite on the contrary, it should be understood as “God’s recognition of an individual’s worth [*Diss.* 1.29.47].”⁶⁷¹

Fitzgerald cites the works of Xenophon (*Agesilaus* 6.2), Pliny (*Naturalis historica* 7.28.102-04), and others to highlight the great value of hardship in classical tradition, especially in the demonstration and cultivation of ἀνδρεία: “The ideal philosopher or sage possesses all the virtues, and he uses them all in meeting adversity, whatever its source...it is especially ἀνδρεία that is manifested in the midst of hazards and hardships. *Andreia* means ‘courage,’ or, to be more precise, ‘manliness’....As the quintessential virtue, courage is deemed worthy of honour and gives rise to self-reliance, confident boldness, pride, and boasting.”⁶⁷²

Fitzgerald also makes a significant reference to Plato’s *De republica* (357A-362C), where the good and wise man was portrayed, not only as “the righteous sufferer”, but also as a “fool”, hence “the foolish righteous sufferer”. For Socrates, the so-called “foolish righteous sufferer” was actually “the just man” who was loved by the gods, and that “all things that come from the gods work together for the best for him that is dear to the gods” (612E-613A). Socrates firmly believed that in most cases the “just man” would end his life in honour (613C).⁶⁷³

⁶⁷⁰ Fitzgerald, *Cracks*, 79.

⁶⁷¹ Fitzgerald, *Cracks*, 81.

⁶⁷² Fitzgerald, *Cracks*, 87-8.

⁶⁷³ Fitzgerald, *Cracks*, 100-1.

Fitzgerald asserts that the pedagogical purpose of the *peristasis* catalogues in the Greco-Roman tradition and Paul's was also similar. Moreover, both the classical sage and Paul also attributed their respective hardships to God (1 Cor. 4.9; 2 Cor. 6.9). As such, they accepted their hardships willingly and joyfully.⁶⁷⁴

Fitzgerald's reading of Paul in 2 Cor. 4 is clear and sound: "It is in 2 Cor. 4, however, that Paul points to the appearance of divine power in his human frailty. As a consequence, the catalogue of his hardships serves both to show the power of God at work in him and to demonstrate at the same time his own weakness (cf. also 2 Cor. 11.30; 12.10). His serenity and endurance are thus the work of God, and, for this reason his boasting of his hardships in 2 Corinthians is 'boasting of the Lord' (1 Cor. 1.31)."⁶⁷⁵ Fitzgerald is also very perceptive in recognizing that it was precisely in Paul's understanding of the divine power and his own human weakness that the apostle stood "in radical contrast to those...who saw in their triumph the demonstration of their own power and thus boasted of their victory as their own achievement."⁶⁷⁶

Fitzgerald's very significant study has evidently confirmed much of what has been said about the *peristasis* catalogues in the Stoic tradition, which is the main focus of the previous chapter, although his study is not only confined to the Stoic tradition.

Fitzgerald's comparison of the Greco-Roman sages with Paul regarding the use and function of the *peristasis* catalogues are made on a very important assumption that not only was the apostle familiar with the Greco-Roman tradition, he was using it precisely in the manner of the sages. However, Fitzgerald also acknowledges that in his Corinthian correspondence Paul had also adapted the classical traditions "for his own

⁶⁷⁴ Fitzgerald, *Cracks*, 204.

⁶⁷⁵ Fitzgerald, *Cracks*, 206.

⁶⁷⁶ Fitzgerald, *Cracks*, 206.

purposes” and his use of them was “highly creative”. Moreover, Fitzgerald has also pointed out that Paul’s creative use had also been “informed by the OT traditions about the afflicted righteous man and suffering prophet, and it is transformed by his fixation on the cross of Christ.”⁶⁷⁷ As far as Paul’s theology and perspective were concerned, what Fitzgerald has said about the approach of Paul being “transformed by his fixation on the cross of Christ” is particularly important and relevant. Paul’s familiarity with the Greco-Roman tradition concerning the *peristasis* catalogues seems to be beyond reasonable doubt, given the apostle’s broad background and education. However, it remains to be seen if Paul had indeed used it in the ways that have been so readily assumed by Fitzgerald, given the simple fact that the Greco-Roman sages and the Christian Paul were operating on very different philosophies, and had very different goals in mind. For the sages, the “ultimate concern” seemed to be more for the demonstration of human virtues and manliness than the enabling grace of God or the gods. Chapter Eight will try to show that the main concern of Paul might well be very different.

There is little doubt that ancient sources do show sufficiently clearly that Greco-Roman philosophers and moral teachers often used the noble example of the “suffering sage” to admonish their followers in moral teaching and character training. It is also clear that Paul also recognized the moral and pedagogical values of his own experience in suffering and hardships, such as the case in 1 Cor. 4 (“be imitators of me,” 4.16). Again, were the Greco-Roman sages and Paul really that similar on this particular point? For one thing, in the Greco-Roman tradition, the sages were worthy of imitation largely because of the *manly* virtues they had demonstrated in the face of adversity. But the case of Paul, with its focus on divine grace and power, could well be significantly

⁶⁷⁷ Fitzgerald, *Cracks*, 207.

different. Moreover, the main reason why Paul considered himself worthy of imitation was because he was himself an imitator of Christ in the first place (11.1).

Fitzgerald thinks that “just as the sage’s suffering plays a role in the divine plan, so does Paul’s. The suffering of both is inseparable from the mission to which they have been called.”⁶⁷⁸ Again, is Fitzgerald drawing too close a parallel between the Greco-Roman sage and Paul here? The classical texts that have been referred to do indicate that the idea of divine plan was sometimes present or assumed in the suffering of the Greco-Roman sage, but the focus was almost inevitably on things *human*, or more precisely, on those virtues which were considered particularly *manly*. In the end, God, or the gods remained in the background rather than at the forefront. But was this the case with Paul? And while there is no denying that the Greco-Roman sage did have a sense of mission in enduring the odds in life, the mission goal was largely anthropocentric. Even when his anthropocentrism went beyond mere self-interest so as to include service and even sacrifice for people and for the nation, was its “ultimate concern” God’s glory? The exegesis of the relevant Corinthian texts will try to show that Paul’s ultimate mission goal was consistently theocentric or Christ-centred, although the apostle was also mindful of human interests and needs, so that he had to confess to the Corinthians that “I am under daily pressure because of my anxiety for all the churches” (2 Cor. 11.28).

Also somewhat misleading is Fitzgerald’s comparison of the Greco-Roman sage with Paul in relation to power: “For both Paul and the sage, what enables this victory over adversity is power [Phil. 4.13]. *Peristaseis* provide the occasion for displaying this power, and with this display comes the victory and the vaunting that goes with it.”⁶⁷⁹ This is misleading because while the Greco-Roman sages did sometimes attribute their

⁶⁷⁸ Fitzgerald, *Cracks*, 204.

⁶⁷⁹ Fitzgerald, *Cracks*, 205.

victory over adversity to divine power or assistance, the idea of *manly merit* or *worthiness* was either clearly present or implied in the context. Moreover, and generally speaking, divine assistance and power were thought to be only available to the “wise”, the “good” and the “noble” because they *deserved* it. It was thus *merited* favour. Again, such a perception was in stark contrast to Paul’s theology of the cross which only knew *unmerited* favour and grace. And in the case of Paul, as will be seen again in the next chapter on exegesis of the relevant Corinthian texts, even if divine power were present in Paul’s suffering and hardships, it was demonstrated in and through human *weakness* in a most *paradoxical* way. In the listing of a *peristasis* catalogue, ancient writers were not only concerned with the person’s reactions to hardships, but also the resulting status implications. If the reactions were characterized by endurance and courage, the result would clearly be *high status* for the one who endured. Conversely, if the person simply succumbed to hardship, the result would obviously be *low status* for him.⁶⁸⁰ But was social *status* also Paul’s great concern?

Fitzgerald also recognizes that in 2 Corinthians “the catalogue of his [Paul’s] hardships serves both to show the power of God at work in him and to demonstrate at the same time his own weakness (cf. also 2 Cor. 11.30; 12.10).”⁶⁸¹ If so, one should not be so sure to assert that Paul’s portrayal of himself in 2 Corinthians was really “in terms typically used to describe the ideal philosopher”, as Fitzgerald has so readily asserted.⁶⁸² Such an assertion seems to have made it difficult for Fitzgerald to consistently recognize some of the obvious differences between the Greco-Roman sage and Paul in the use of *peristasis* catalogues. In his eagerness to draw close comparisons or parallels between the two, the markedly different philosophies or theologies on which they

⁶⁸⁰ S. B. Andrews, ‘Too Weak Not To Lead: The Form and Function of 2 Cor 11.23b-33’, *NTS* 41 (1995), 263-76, at 276.

⁶⁸¹ Fitzgerald, *Cracks*, 206.

⁶⁸² Fitzgerald, *Cracks*, 206.

respectively operated became rather blurred in the end. This is so despite Fitzgerald's significant observation that Paul had not only "adopted" the classical model in his use of the *peristasis* catalogues, but also "adapted" it in his own "creative" way and for his own particular purposes.⁶⁸³

There is just one more point to be considered, i.e., generally it was not Paul's *modus operandi* to compare himself with others: "We do not dare to classify or compare ourselves with some of those who commend themselves. But when they measure themselves by one another, and compare themselves with one another, they do not show good sense" (2 Cor. 10.12). That being the case, it was really questionable if Paul had any intention to *compare* himself with the "suffering sages" of the Greco-Roman tradition when he presented the *peristasis* catalogues in 11.23b-29 and elsewhere.

As Fitzgerald's focus is almost exclusively on the positive side of the use of *peristasis* catalogues in the case of both the Greco-Roman sages and Paul, it is equally important, especially for the purposes of the present thesis, to look at *the other side of the coin*, i.e., to show that *peristasis* catalogues could also be perceived contemptuously, so that they were indicative of human degradation and indignity rather than honour and glory. This will be the concern of the next section of this chapter.

7.3 The other side of the coin: suffering and hardship as signs of shame and degradation

Sufficient examples have already been given from classical Greco-Roman texts in the

⁶⁸³ Paul's *peristasis* catalogues "represent the convergence of several traditions and reflect his own personal experiences of suffering and divine power. They take us to the centre of Paul's understanding of God and his own self-understanding, yet anchor him in the culture and conventions of his time" (Fitzgerald, 207).

previous chapter as well as in Fitzgerald's in-depth study cited in the present chapter to illustrate how the Greco-Roman sages had used *peristasis* catalogues to show the virtues and masculinity of those who managed to overcome great adversities and sufferings in life. While the divine design and assistance behind men's suffering were sometimes mentioned or implied in those classical texts, the emphasis was generally and consistently on the great ability and virtues of those men who succeeded. The impressive qualities or virtues that were displayed and the vivid "body language", often conveyed in very dramatic and moving manners, were unmistakably *masculine* in nature. The victors became great and abiding exemplars to others and the pedagogical values of their "success" stories were self-evident. However, all these represent only one side of the coin. The other side is not so gratifying.

Glancy questions Fitzgerald's suggestion that "Paul's endurance of tribulations testifies to his fortitude."⁶⁸⁴ For Glancy it is necessary to show the other side of the coin, which is equally relevant and important to the present thesis. In the "body language" of ancient Greco-Roman world the scars or bodily wounds could convey *both* positive and negative messages, depending on the context and situation. In terms of social status and public recognition, bodily scars were often visible marks and signs of the suffering sages, true philosophers and nobles, or of the courageous warriors who suffered serious wounds in the battlefield. But in the case of people who belonged to the lower strata of society, such as the runaway soldiers in battle or those who surrendered for fear of death, beaten slaves and criminals or defeated fighters etc., bodily scars, as "body language", could only speak of shame and humiliation. Such negative aspects of the body wounds, which connoted shame and humiliation, have already been partly dealt with in the study of crucifixion in antiquity (Chapter One). Socio-politically, body scars or wounds could well be powerful and vivid signs and symbols of a man's power,

⁶⁸⁴ Glancy, 'Boasting', 121.

honour, and glory. But the opposite was also true, because they might connote defeat, enslavement and submission, and ultimately became a person's στίγματα.

As powerful symbols and effective "body language", the scarred body was often used rhetorically in a man's self-presentation in the Greco-Roman society in which status and honour were of paramount concerns. Body wounds were also symbols of a man's virile self-control, courage, and superman-like endurance. A classic example of this is found in Plutarch's *Moralia* 331C where reference was made to King Philip who fought courageously in battle: "When the thigh of his father Philip had been pierced by a spear in battle with the Triballians, and Philip, although he escaped with his life, was vexed with his lameness, Alexander said, 'Be of good cheer, father, and go on your way rejoicing, that at each step you may recall your valour.'" "Are not these the words of a truly philosophic spirit which, because of its rapture for noble things, already revolts against mere physical encumbrances?" asked Plutarch rhetorically. And he continued,

How, then, think you, did he glory in his own wounds, remembering by each part of his body affected a nation overcome, a victory won, the capture of cities, the surrender of kings. He did not cover over nor hide his scars, but bore them with him openly as symbolic representations, graven on his body, of virtue and manly courage (ἀλλ' ὥσπερ εἰκόνας ἐγκεχαραγμένας ἀρετῆς καὶ ἀνδραγαθίας περιφέροντα).

It is hardly necessary to elaborate further on what Plutarch said concerning the power of the body language which a man of valour conveyed.

Quintilian said that the scars on man's body spoke for himself more powerfully than his declamation: "Thus when Antonius in the course of his defence of Manius Aquilius tore open his client's robe and revealed the honorable scars which he had acquired while facing his country's foes, he relied no longer on the power of his eloquence, but applied directly to the eyes of the Roman people."⁶⁸⁵ Quintilian was absolutely right in this

⁶⁸⁵ Quintilian 2.15.7.

case, because the body language with which the “honorable scars” conveyed was certainly far more powerful and effective than mere human words.

Josephus too, narrated Antipater’s self-defence against accusations of disloyalty before Julius Caesar by letting his body speak, as in *B.J.* 1.197: “At these words Antipater stripped off his clothes and exposed his numerous scars. His loyalty to Caesar needed, he said, no words from him; his body cried it aloud, were he to hold his peace.” Josephus was certainly very perceptive here. Once “his body cried it aloud,” not a single word from the defender would indeed be necessary. Cicero also attached great importance to the masculine character of a warrior’s body scars (*Tusc.* 2.18.43). Glancy comments, “what a warrior’s scars shout is a tabloid of masculinity. Scars testify that a man, scorning both pain and death, has risked both.”⁶⁸⁶

However, not all scars were necessarily marks of courage and honour. Thus, while scars in the *front*, for example, on the man’s face, chest, or throat were often read as marks of true courage in battle or any other combats, body scars on the *back* of a man were often regarded as visible signs of cowardice. As such, the very *location* of one’s body scars became an important issue. Servilius could thus boast of the glorious fact that all the “honourable scars” he received were “in front”, as in Livy 45.39.16: “I have on twenty-three occasions challenged and fought an enemy; I brought back the spoils of every man with whom I duelled; I possess a body adorned with honourable scars, every one of them received in front.” The drama continued: “He then stripped, it is said, and told in which war he had received each wound.” Significantly enough, Paul had also said in Gal. 6.17, “I carry the marks of Jesus branded on my body.” But was Paul making this reference to show his *manliness* according to the meaning and implications of the social ethos of his time? It was most unlikely, for Paul in this particular Galatian

⁶⁸⁶ Glancy, ‘Boasting’, 106.

context was only acknowledging the fact that as a faithful δοῦλος of Christ it was his destiny and privilege to share in Christ's suffering.

In the classical texts, the sages often spoke of the fact that their body had endured inflictions of all sorts. But not all physical inflictions suffered necessarily signified courage and endurance. Only the precise context or occasion could distinguish courage from cowardice. Glancy has studied closely the meaning and related connotations of "the whippable body" and discovers that "in Roman *habitus*, whipping was the archetypal mark of dishonor".⁶⁸⁷ As such, "being subject to beating, being vulnerable to the power of another man (or woman) to order whipping, was not a *rite de passage* associated with maturing to manhood but a state that diminished any claim to manliness."⁶⁸⁸ Flogging was commonly used as slave corporal punishment in Roman practice. Subjection to corporal punishment thus clearly signalled enslavement, humiliation, and debasement. As Richard Saller has rightly noted, "precisely because *uerbera* were fit for slaves and encouraged a servile mentality of grudging fear, such punishment was considered inappropriate and insulting for freeborn adult *filiifamilias*."⁶⁸⁹ Therefore, a "whippable body" was dishonourable and disgraceful, as Richard Alston has said: "beating, especially public beating, was a dramatic demonstration of the subjugation of the person to the power of another and an important symbol of the servility of the victim and his community."⁶⁹⁰ Dominic Montserrat thinks that "beating is almost an analogue to penetration, because it is invasive and therefore demeaning, and thus it also enforces the distinction between slave and free."⁶⁹¹ A slave, whose body was assaulted or injured, was "somatically...in a permanent and given state

⁶⁸⁷ Glancy, 'Boasting', 107.

⁶⁸⁸ Glancy, 'Boasting', 108.

⁶⁸⁹ Richard Saller, 'Corporal Punishment, Authority, Obedience', in Beryl Rawson (ed.), *Marriage, Divorce, and Children in Ancient Rome* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1991), 144-65, at 165.

⁶⁹⁰ Richard Alston, 'Arms and the Man: Soldiers, Masculinity and Power in Republican and Imperial Rome', in *When*, 205-23, at 208.

⁶⁹¹ Dominic Montserrat, 'Experiencing the male body in Roman Egypt', in *When*, 153-64, at 157.

of passivity and subjection.”⁶⁹² There were thus qualitative differences between free and slave bodies.

Based on the consistency in the use of whipping or flogging in Roman society, one could quite safely infer that it had established itself as an important distinguishing mark between a slave and a free man. It was actually a sad fact that some Roman slaves did often bear the humiliating and debasing marks on their backs due to past whippings. Jesus, the “suffering servant” *par excellence*, also endured such physical abuse in the final hours of his mission.

In Rome, it would be the greatest dishonour, shame, and humiliation for a free person to be subjected to whippings publicly. Cicero’s *In Verrem* 5.158-61 gave a very vivid and moving description of a Roman citizen Gavius’ suffering in the hands of Verres, highlighting the severe flogging which was inflicted on Gavius’ body, as a mark of gross injustice and humiliation for a Roman citizen.

Philo’s account of Flaccus’ campaign against the Jews of Alexandria relied heavily on a kind of body language which was closely associated with whipping or flogging and which was indicative of one’s social class and standing in the Roman society. According to his account, Flaccus ordered the members of the Jewish council to be rounded up and brought to a theatre as a spectacle, highlighting, in particular, the awful corporal torture through flogging: “Then as they stood with their enemies seated in front to signalize their disgrace he ordered them all to be stripped and lacerated with scourges which are commonly used for the degradation of the vilest malefactors, so that in consequence of the flogging some had to be carried out on stretchers and died at once, while others lay sick for a long time despairing of recovery” (*In Flaccum* 75). Horrified

⁶⁹² Montserrat, ‘Experiencing’, 157.

by the Roman's humiliating and undignified treatment of the Jewish leaders Philo made the following critical remarks:

For it is surely possible when inflicting degradation on others to find some little thing to sustain their dignity....Surely then it was the height of harshness that when commoners among the Alexandrian Jews, if they appeared to have done things worthy of stripes, were beaten with whips more suggestive of freemen and citizens, the magistrates, the Senate, whose very name implies age and honour, in this respect fared worse than their inferiors and were treated like Egyptians of the meanest rank and guilty of the greatest iniquities (*In Flaccum* 79-80).

Similarly, Josephus also voiced his protest in *B.J.* 2.308: "For Florus ventured that day to do what none had ever done before, namely, to scourge before his tribunal and nail to the cross men of equestrian rank, men who, if Jews by birth, were at least invested with that Roman dignity."

But very ironically, according to the Book of Acts, it was the members of the Jewish council who had unjustly flogged the innocent apostles: "and when they had called in the apostles, they had them flogged (δείραντες). Then they ordered them not to speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go." But as the apostles left the council, "they rejoiced that they were considered worthy to suffer dishonour (ἀτιμασθῆναι) for the sake of the name" (Acts 5.40-41). Thus, instead of complaining about injustice and being perturbed by any sense of humiliation, the Christian apostles counted it a privilege to have gone through such an experience of great "dishonour (ἀτιμασθῆναι)"! It was a blatant inversion of Roman (and in this case, also Jewish) social ethos.

Glancy's studies show that "to be penetrated, or even to be liable to corporal violation, was inconsistent with respectable masculinity; in order for a man to protect his reputation and his status, he had to (be able to) protect the boundaries of his body from breaches of any kind."⁶⁹³

⁶⁹³ Glancy, 'Boasting', 111.

The profound meaning of Paul's "body language" was not only confined to the wounds and scars borne by the body, it also had important implications for his manual labour: his tentmaking profession. In this particular connection, Hock's study is important, although in 1 Cor. 4.12 Paul only mentioned "the work of our own hands", and not explicitly "tentmaking" as such. Paul's tentmaking profession, mentioned in Acts 18.3, and implicitly by Paul in 1 Cor. 4.12, has often been taken *positively* as his ability (and pride) to support himself and thus making the gospel free to others. It is also sometimes taken as a kind of "sideline", without thinking that it was central to Paul's self-identity and life style as a δούλος of Christ. Hock has tried to show that Paul's manual labour was very much the trade of a *slave* or person of very low social status. His "hunger" and "thirst" mentioned in the Corinthian letters, might also be an indication that this trade did not always provide sufficiently for Paul. In other words, Paul's tentmaking *labour* was also socially a big σκάνδαλον in a status-conscious society.

Having tried to establish that Paul was a leatherworker, a maker of tents (as well as other leather goods), Hock then discusses the daily experiences of a first century artisan.⁶⁹⁴ Artisans worked for long hours in a dirty, noisy, and dangerous environment and were regularly stigmatized as slavish, poor, and uneducated with a modest income, that is, daily bread and not much more.⁶⁹⁵ Hock sums up Paul's condition: "Paul's trade in large measure determined his daily experiences and his social status. His life was very much that of the 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

⁶⁹⁴ Hock, *The Social Context*, 26-31.

⁶⁹⁵ Hock, *The Social Context*, 31-35.

others and by himself as slavish and humiliated; of suffering the artisans' lack of status and so being reviled and abused."⁶⁹⁶

Savage has also made some contribution to the discussion on the social implications of Paul's manual labour as a tentmaker. Savage questions some rather popular views that the Corinthian criticism of Paul was largely due to his refusal to accept help or pay for his ministry, and was thus very different from both Hellenist and Jewish teachers. Savage is quite right in thinking that such might not really be the main issue. The main problem was probably the social implications of manual labour such as tentmaking, and to a lesser degree, inconsistency on the part of Paul, since he himself also believed that a worker deserved his pay (1 Cor. 9.6-7, see also Jesus' teaching in Matthew 10.10; Luke 10.7).⁶⁹⁷

But was Paul not keenly aware that by maintaining the ground of his boasting he had to keep his manual labour going, and because of the social implications of that kind of servile work the price was very great? One would like to think that Paul himself was most probably aware of that. However, he seemed to be well prepared for such "weakness" through which, paradoxically, God's power might be manifested, just as it was through the cross of Christ. Yet, in order to do that Paul had to deal with the misunderstanding and criticism of his Corinthian critics who viewed the whole thing negatively according to the social ethos of the time. Again, it was a confrontation of two diametrically opposed social perceptions and this was what made Paul's theology of the cross such a drastic inversion of the Greco-Roman social ethos. Savage seems to be right in taking the view that "the key to understanding the Corinthians' criticisms of Paul for refusing their material support would be found, not in positing hypothetical

⁶⁹⁶ Hock, *The Social Context*, 67.

⁶⁹⁷ Savage, *Power*, 81.

groups of rival missionaries (who did not refuse support), but in seeking to discover the prevailing first-century attitudes to matters such as pay, money, wealth, poverty and employment.”⁶⁹⁸ Paul’s labour work was undoubtedly undignified and contemptible according to the current social ethos. Cicero explicitly despised manual labour by saying that “vulgar are the means of livelihood of all hired workmen whom we pay for mere manual labour, not for artistic skill; for in their case the very wage they receive is a pledge of their slavery” (*Off.* 1.150). Similarly Lucian: “a labourer toils with his body...a man who has naught but his hands (a man who lives by his hands).”⁶⁹⁹

Given the fact that in first century Roman society where material possession was one of the most important criteria to assess a person’s standing in society, the poverty of Paul would necessarily and understandably be an important matter for which a solution must somehow be found. Judging from Paul’s strategy and approach in the Corinthian correspondence, instead of changing or improving on his working and living conditions, Paul had apparently decided to deal with the issue both socially and theologically rather than evading it. *Socially*, Paul wanted the Corinthians to adopt a new *Christian* social ethos which was markedly different from the current one. *Theologically* he confronted them with the theology of the cross, which, when rightly understood, would virtually turn the old world of the Corinthians up-side-down. That was, humanly speaking, a most daunting task, especially in a great commercial centre such as Corinth where social status and all the values involved were the main concerns of its residents. As such, the conflict of diametrically opposed perceptions between Paul’s and his critics’ was inevitable. And judging from the contents of 2 Corinthians, the solution was not very promising yet.

⁶⁹⁸ Savage, *Power*, 84.

⁶⁹⁹ Lucian, *Somn.* 9. See also Seneca, *Ep.* 88.2; Juvenal 9.140.

7.4 Conclusion

This part of the thesis begins with references to some classical writings, both Greek and Roman, on περίστασις, which was commonly regarded as a true test of the sage's manliness, courage and endurance. According to this Greco-Roman tradition, those who overcame hardships were highly regarded as noble, praiseworthy and exemplary, and in marked contrast, those who failed would be viewed in terms of unmanliness and cowardice.

For lack of substantial evidence it would be difficult to be wholly certain if Paul was aware of the tradition. However, on the basis of the apostle's vast knowledge about things around him in the Greco-Roman as well as the Jewish worlds, one could perhaps quite safely assume that Paul was knowledgeable about such tradition. But did Paul use the *peristasis* catalogues in the way that they were commonly used by the Greco-Roman sages, as was the assumption of scholars like Fitzgerald? This part of the thesis has taken the view that Paul most probably did not use it according to the classical tradition, i.e., using it *positively* to demonstrate or prove his own *human* endurance and courage, so that glory and honour might be conferred upon him. For to do so would rob God of His glory and honour, and this would be the last thing that the δοῦλος of Christ wanted to do. As such, this thesis has considered it more reasonable to assume that it was the *negative* use of the *peristasis* catalogues that was the main concern of Paul, because only in this way was the apostle able to witness, *paradoxically*, to the divine power that was manifested in and through his own weakness. And only in this way was he able to "boast" of his own weakness, an idea which would certainly be considered totally absurd according to the thinking of the time. But for Paul, it was precisely this perceived absurdity that made his message of the cross and his own *modus operandi*

such a drastic inversion of the social ethos of the time. Exegesis on the relevant Corinthian passages, i.e., 1 Cor. 4.8-13 and 2 Cor. 11.23-33 will be the concluding chapter of the thesis. It will try to show that the *peristasis* catalogues in Paul's own biographical notes were used to serve his overall purposes in his Corinthian polemics, namely, to challenge certain perceptions of his critics which he considered incompatible with Christian thinking and to invert the current social ethos.

Chapter Eight: Suffering and hardship as demonstration of divine power in human weakness: Exegesis of 1 Cor. 4.8-13 and 2 Cor. 11.23-33

8.1 Introduction

Chapter Six shows that generally suffering and hardship were welcomed as means of proving a man's virtues and masculinity while Chapter Seven suggests that suffering and hardship, especially its physical aspects, also had very *negative* implications in the very status-conscious Greco-Roman society. It was probably from this *negative* perspective that Paul's Corinthian critics had judged the apostle. This thesis has taken the view that Paul had used *peristasis* catalogues to show how the divine power and grace were demonstrated in and through his own human weakness, in a paradoxical way. 1 Cor. 4.8-13 and 2 Cor. 11.23-33 are probably among the best examples of this. This exegesis of these passages will try to show that Paul's intention was consistent with his determination to invert the social ethos of his time.

8.2 Exegesis of 1 Cor. 4.8-13

Paul's opening statement in 1 Cor. 4.1 was clearly meant to correct the Corinthians' wrong perception about him and his fellow-workers who should only be regarded as "servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God" (ὑπηρέτας Χριστοῦ καὶ οἰκονόμους μυστηρίων θεοῦ). While the word "servants" generally suggests humble social status and connotes humility and unworthiness, according to the current social

ethos, the phrase “stewards of the mystery of God”, on the other hand, indicates great privilege and honour from the Christian point of view.⁷⁰⁰

Verse 4.7, expressed in the form of a mild rebuke, was quite unmistakably Paul’s direct response to the Corinthians’ state of mind. The key word here is διακρίνει (“different”, NRSV), which simply means “judges” or “distinguishes”. It is therefore a matter of perception which involved value judgement, and which was the very source of the Corinthian trouble (ἀνακρίνω, 2.14-15). Here Paul was most certainly referring to the Corinthians’ unwarranted high opinion of themselves as well as those whom they supported.

4.8 ἤδη κεκορεσμένοι ἐστέ, ἤδη ἐπλουτήσατε, χωρὶς ἡμῶν ἐβασιλεύσατε· καὶ ὄφελόν γε ἐβασιλεύσατε, ἵνα καὶ ἡμεῖς ὑμῖν συμβασιλεύσωμεν. (“Already you have all you want! Already you have become rich! Quite apart from us you have become kings! Indeed, I wish that you had become kings, so that we might be kings with you!”)

Verse 8 is expressed in the form of rebuke and sarcasm. The idea of fullness and richness as well as being “kings” could have come from Cynic and Stoic thinking. In Epictetus’ opinion the true Cynic could say, “Who, when he lays eyes upon me, does not feel that he is seeing his king and master (τίς με ἰδὼν οὐχὶ τὸν βασιλέα τὸν ἑαυτοῦ ὁρᾶν οἶεται καὶ δεσπότην);” Moreover, in Cynic thinking, the philosopher’s reign was a “sharing in the kingly rule of Zeus (ὡς μετέχων τῆς ἀρχῆς τοῦ Διός).”⁷⁰¹ According to the Stoic, wealth (πλοῦτος), kingship (βασιλεία), happiness (εὐδαιμόν), and freedom

⁷⁰⁰ Cf. Martin, *Slavery as Salvation: The Metaphor of Slavery in Pauline Christianity* (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 1990).

⁷⁰¹ Epictetus 3.22.49, 95.

(ἐλευθερία) could only belong to the wise man.⁷⁰² Weiss has suggested that the slogan in the Corinthian parties reflects Stoic influence.⁷⁰³ Very much in line with Weiss, Terence Paige also conjectures that certain terms and vocabularies in Paul's letter echoed Stoic thought, and 4.8 is a very good example.⁷⁰⁴ Paige concludes that "such an influence would not only explain the presence of Stoic-like terminology, but [also]...the development of...a highly individualistic, self-centred ethics...self-centred spirituality."⁷⁰⁵ Hays holds a similar view.⁷⁰⁶ However, just as in other cases, the origin of certain Pauline expressions and terms are really difficult to trace with certainty.

Paul's sarcastic and ironical statement was clearly indicative of his disapproval of the Corinthians' perception. The rebuke and sarcasm here became the more obvious as Paul had very humbly considered himself and his fellow-workers no more than just "servants of Christ" at the very beginning of the chapter. Hence, the contrast was between humble "servants" and highly exalted "kings".

Hodgson thinks that "having abandoned Paul's *theologia crucis* in favour of a *theologia gloriae* the dissidents are reminded of the actual conditions of Christian life between the ages by means of a list of Paul's tribulations. The function of this list is thus didactic rather than apologetic and autobiographical."⁷⁰⁷ This thesis, however, is inclined to think that Paul's περίστασις list was *both* didactic (1 Cor. 4.6-21) *and* apologetic and autobiographical (4.1-4; 9.1-2).

⁷⁰² Plutarch, *Mor.* 1060B, 1062E.

⁷⁰³ Weiss, *Der Erste Korintherbrief*, 158-9.

⁷⁰⁴ Terence Paige, 'Stoicism, ἐλευθερία and Community at Corinth', in J. Wilkins and Terence Paige (eds.), *Worship, Theology and Ministry in the Early Church : Essays in Honour of Ralph P. Martin* (Sheffield : JSOT, 1992), 180-93, at 184.

⁷⁰⁵ Paige, 'Stoicism', 192.

⁷⁰⁶ Hays, *First Corinthians*, 70.

⁷⁰⁷ Hodgson, 'Paul', 65.

Thiselton believes that 1 Corinthians 1-14 have shown “the evidence of both a realized eschatology and an enthusiastic theology of the Spirit.”⁷⁰⁸ Thiselton’s suggestion about the Corinthians’ “realized eschatology” could perhaps be counter-balanced by Barclay’s view. Barclay has problem with those who tend to interpret the Corinthian theology simply as an example of “realized eschatology” based on 4.8. For Barclay “it is important to be aware how Paul’s perspective on the Corinthian church tends to control our description of them. In Paul’s view the freedom, knowledge and spiritual ecstasy enjoyed by the Corinthians constituted a falsely claimed pre-emption of eschatological glory.” Barclay is right in thinking that “the Corinthians apparently see nothing pitiable about the present, because their non-apocalyptic perspective anticipates no radical disjunctions in the future. Their Spirit-filled lives are not an early experience of the future; they simply consider themselves to have reached the heights of human potential.”⁷⁰⁹ If Barclay is right, the word “already” (ἤδη) which occurs twice in 4.8 simply meant that the Corinthians had considered themselves “to have reached the heights of human potential”, to use Barclay’s expression. Whether it was Thiselton’s “realized eschatology” or Barclay’s “heights of human potential”, Paul had to sternly remind the Corinthians that the whole thing was *not yet*.⁷¹⁰ The sarcasm of Paul’s statement was obvious and strong: “and would that you did reign, so that we might share the rule with you!” The simple fact was, of course, that the Corinthians were “not yet” in a position to either reign or rule.

4.9 δοκῶ γάρ, ὁ θεὸς ἡμᾶς τοὺς ἀποστόλους ἐσχάτους ἀπέδειξεν ὡς ἐπιθανατίους, ὅτι θέατρον ἐγενήθημεν τῷ κόσμῳ καὶ ἀγγέλοις καὶ ἀνθρώποις. (“For I think that God

⁷⁰⁸ Thiselton, ‘Realized Eschatology at Corinth’, in *Christianity*, 107-18, at 118.

⁷⁰⁹ “But did the *Corinthians* see their experience as related to an eschatological time-frame like this? Did they consider that they had already entered the future, or did they simply not operate with Paul’s typical contrast between present and future?” asked Barclay (‘Thessalonica and Corinth’, 64).

⁷¹⁰ Barrett thinks that “the Corinthians are behaving as if the age to come were already consummated, as if the saints had already taken over the kingdom (Dan. 7.18); for them there is no ‘not yet’ to qualify the ‘already’ of realized eschatology” (*The First Epistle*, 109).

has exhibited us apostles as last of all, as though sentenced to death, because we have become a spectacle to the world, to angels and mortals.”)

In 4.1 Paul had described himself and his fellow-workers as “servants” and as “stewards”. He now applied the term “apostles” in 4.9 to himself as well as to others. Rengstorf is right in asserting that in the NT Paul was undoubtedly “the classical representative of the apostleship”. This was largely due to the very dramatic nature of his calling and the extraordinary range of his missionary and pastoral activities (15.10). The polemics and apologetics Paul was engaged in also contributed a lot to his deep sense of apostleship and calling.⁷¹¹ But apostleship was inseparable from authority which an apostle was expected to exercise. Dunn believes that “the opportunity to compare Paul’s theology and his practice is nowhere so promising as in the case of apostolic authority....He had demonstrated his apostolic commissioning by his success in founding churches. And to those churches at least he was an apostle....Paul, then, writes his letters to his churches precisely as their apostle”.⁷¹²

For Paul, the words “exhibited” and “sentenced to death” and “spectacle” could well be intended to remind his readers of Christ’s own crucifixion. And as an apostle of Christ crucified, Paul was also expected to walk in the steps of his Master. What Paul said here in 4.9 not only contrasted most strongly with 4.8, the irony was equally strong: while the Corinthians who owed Paul the gospel had considered themselves to be “kings”, Paul, the messenger of the gospel and his fellow apostles now appeared like men who had been “sentenced to death”. Yet, the humanly appalling condition of Paul should not

⁷¹¹ Rengstorf, *TDNT* 1.437.

⁷¹² Dunn, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1998), 571-2.

take anyone by surprise, as Karl Plank has rightly observed, “humiliation and affliction characterized his apostleship (4.9-13).”⁷¹³

Plank is right in thinking that despite his obvious sarcasm and apparent anger, which was immediately followed by a stark contrast between the Corinthians’ highly “exalted” state and the apostles’ pitiable condition, Paul’s purpose was “to reestablish his position of preeminence among them as their spiritual πατήρ (4.14-15), not to shame them.”⁷¹⁴

What follows from 4.8 were even stronger words of sarcasm with considerable elaboration in 4.9-13. Paul was here painting a very vivid and moving picture. His self-conceited Corinthian Christians probably thought that they were now occupying a most commanding position in an arena or a theatre like “kings”, just waiting for a great procession to gradually pass in front of them. The procession was heralded by some victorious generals who were just returning from a great conquest. Last in the procession were those captured soldiers who had already been “sentenced to death” (ἐπιθανατίους). It was probably in that kind of context that Paul spoke about becoming “a spectacle (θέατρον, “theatre”) to the world, to angels and to men”. Here Paul intentionally likened himself and his fellow-apostles to “men sentenced to death”. Such a vivid portrayal of himself and his fellow-apostles in great irony was clearly meant to provoke the self-conceited and haughty Corinthians.

Of course, what Paul had portrayed could also be a show in the theatre rather than a procession. There was also some effective and moving “body language” in Paul’s portrayal. Welborn suggests that the term θέατρον literally means “‘a place for seeing’, especially dramatic performances. It was a place used increasingly for public assemblies

⁷¹³ Karl A. Plank, *Paul and the Irony of Affliction* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1987), 16.

⁷¹⁴ Black, *Weakness*, 104.

in the early empire, corresponding to the growing significance of the theatre in public life. Then, θέατρον means 'what one sees at a theatre, a play.'" Welborn thinks that "it is in the latter senses that Paul uses the term here, and not in the general sense of 'spectacle'".⁷¹⁵ Welborn suggests that allusions to the mime are present throughout 1 Cor. 1-4.⁷¹⁶ Welborn's thesis rests on a very crucial hypothesis, i.e., that Paul was not only familiar with the "comic-philosophic tradition" but also had consciously adopted it precisely in the way that Socrates and Aesop had done, for his own purposes. That the well educated apostle would be familiar with theatrical work such as mime seemed to be beyond reasonable doubt. But to suggest that he had strategically adopted the role of the "wise fool" is quite a different matter. And there is simply no solid evidence to show that Paul had in fact followed the practice of Socrates and Aesop. When Socrates, Aesop and Paul were put on the stage in "theatrical" context, there would obviously be some points of similarity. However, one suspects that in real life, those apparent similarities might turn out to be far less convincing. That Paul had regarded himself to be a kind of a "fool", and that he was also being put on a kind of "stage" as a "spectacle" (4.9, 10) for the sake of the gospel, should not be confused with Welborn's thesis that Paul had in fact deliberately assumed the role of a mime, precisely in the Comic-Philosophic Tradition of the Greco-Roman world. Even granted that Paul had in fact assumed the role of the "fool" and adopted the "fool's speech" for his own particular purposes, Welborn might have unwittingly over stretched his parallels by identifying the apostle too closely with Socrates and Aesop. Perhaps, those New Testament scholars who "routinely dismiss the notion that Paul derived the role of the fool and the genre of the 'fool's speech' (2 Cor 11.1-12) from the Greek and Roman mime" might well have a valid point.⁷¹⁷

⁷¹⁵ Welborn, *Fool*, 51.

⁷¹⁶ Welborn, *Fool*, 50-4.

⁷¹⁷ Welborn, *Fool*, 3.

Thiselton thinks that “Paul introduces the metaphor of a great pageant, in which criminals, prisoners, or professional gladiators process to the gladiatorial ring, with the apostles bringing up the rear as those who must fight to the death....The main verb of the sentence is ἀπέδειξεν (aorist of ἀποδείκνυμι, put on display). It is used in the context of displaying theatrical entertainments or gladiatorial shows.”⁷¹⁸ Whether it was Welborn’s “mime”, or Thiselton’s “pageant”, Paul’s point remained sufficiently clear when he used the word “spectacle” in 4.9. What is really problematic and questionable, as far as this thesis is concerned, is the very close comparison which Fitzgerald has drawn between the Greco-Roman sage and Paul with regards to the use of περίστας. Fitzgerald’s comparison is inappropriate simply because the whole irony of Paul in this Corinthian passage was clearly not concerned with the exhibition of his own manly “virtues” at all, as was the case with the sage. However, Fitzgerald is perceptive about Paul’s skilful use of paradox in his ironical admonition, although Fitzgerald does not think that Paul had finally accomplished his purpose.⁷¹⁹

Thiselton notes that the word ἐπιθανάτιος is only used here in the NT, but it appears in the LXX for those thrown to the lions (Bel and the Dragon 31). Schrage thinks that the idea of “death” here may be suggestive of the sharing with Christ in his crucifixion.⁷²⁰ Paul’s reference to “the world, to angels and to men” (τῷ κόσμῳ καὶ ἀγγέλοις καὶ ἀνθρώποις) seemed to suggest some kind of “cosmic” significance of the apostolic ministry, including the suffering and possible martyrdom of the apostles.

4.10 ἡμεῖς μωροὶ διὰ Χριστόν, ὑμεῖς δὲ φρόνιμοι ἐν Χριστῷ· ἡμεῖς ἀσθενεῖς, ὑμεῖς δὲ ἰσχυροί· ὑμεῖς ἔνδοξοι, ἡμεῖς δὲ ἄτιμοι. (“We are fools for the sake of Christ, but

⁷¹⁸ Thiselton, *The First Epistle*, 359.

⁷¹⁹ Fitzgerald, *Cracks*, 148.

⁷²⁰ Schrage, as cited by Thiselton, *The First Epistle*, 360.

you are wise in Christ. We are weak, but you are strong. You are held in honour, but we are in disrepute.”)

The irony of Paul continues in 4.10 with three sets of sarcastic contrasts. The Pauline irony which was enshrined in the three catchwords μωρός (foolish), ἀσθενής (weak), and ἄτιμος (dishonor) was already present in 1.18ff. The word ἔνδοξος, which means “splendid”, “glorious” or “respected” is in sharp contrast to the term ἄτιμος, “despised”, “insignificant” or “dishonoured”. The word ἄτιμος (“we are in disrepute”) in 4.10 clearly had social status in mind in the Corinthian context, with special reference to those who were poor and weak and were thus treated with disrespect in the Greco-Roman society. In the context of the theatrical metaphor in the Greco-Roman tradition, the term ἄτιμος could also be used for public entertainers such as actors and gladiators who often had no ownership of themselves, and thus had no real social status.⁷²¹ Theissen suggests that the social composition of the Corinthian church was diverse and seemed to be dominated by those who came from the upper class; and 4.10 refers to the three categories of high ranking people first mentioned in 1.26 - the wise, the powerful, and the noble birth. Each term has a strong sociological significance, and “Paul contrasts his circumstances with those of the Corinthians in terms bearing indisputable sociological implication. For example, Paul works with his hands....He is ‘the refuse of the world, the offscouring of all things (1 Cor. 4.11-13).’”⁷²²

Of the three sets of contrast between the “fools” (μωροί) and the “wise” (φρόνιμοι); the “weak” (ἀσθενεῖς) and the “strong” (ἰσχυροί); and between those “held in honour” (ἔνδοξοι) and those “in disrepute” (ἄτιμοι), the word “fools” in the first set of contrasts deserves some special treatment here, in view of its connotations and implications

⁷²¹ Welborn, *Fool*, 60-1.

⁷²² Theissen, *The Social Setting*, 73, 71-2.

which were most probably familiar to both the Corinthians and Paul himself. Moreover, Paul's own self-designation as a "fool" for Christ's sake was thoroughly consistent with his earlier description of the "the message of the cross", namely, the Christian gospel as "folly" to those who refused to believe (1.18, 21, 23).

The comic-philosophic tradition was based on the social ethos of Greco-Roman world. Whereas in the case of Paul the concept of fool derived essentially from his understanding of the cross of Christ. As Welborn has rightly stated, "because of the event of the crucified Christ, Paul has come to believe that God has chosen the nothings and nobodies".⁷²³ As such, Paul's appropriation of the role of the "fool" for Christ's sake was "a matter of theology, of faith". Welborn thinks that Paul's adoption of the role of a fool was inspired, at least in part, by Christ's own crucifixion as well as the sufferings of his first disciples.⁷²⁴

Paul's language about his self-designation as the "fool" was not only ironical and rhetorical, it had also subtly demolished all wisdom that was humanly conceived, because if Paul's "foolishness" was indeed the way or the wisdom that God had chosen in his dealings with human existence and predicament, there would be absolutely no place for human "wisdom". As such, the sarcasm of Paul's following statement – "you are wise in Christ" – was immediately apparent.

In typically Pauline paradox, the strong contrast he set between the "weak" and the "strong" as well as between "honour" and "disrepute" was ultimately the contrast between two diametrically opposed world views. This is thoroughly consistent with Paul's inversion of the current social ethos.

⁷²³ Welborn, *Fool*, 250.

⁷²⁴ Welborn, *Fool*, 250.

As Moxnes has rightly noted, "the first Christian communities were part of a larger honour and shame culture in the Greco-Roman world of the first century. They shared many elements of this larger culture."⁷²⁵ The term honour (*dignitas*), which was based on power, life-style, and wealth, was the principal criterion of legal privilege in Roman legal practice.⁷²⁶

From the viewpoint of this thesis, what Neyrey says about "shame" is very meaningful: "Contempt, loss of face, defeat, and ridicule all describe shame, the loss of honour....Shame can be ascribed or achieved. A magistrate may ascribe shame by declaring one guilty and so worthy of public flogging (2 Cor. 11.23-25)....Yet shame may be achieved by one's folly or by cowardice and failure to respond to a challenge."⁷²⁷ In the case of Paul, shame could be said to be both "ascribed" and "achieved". His Corinthian critics had obviously poured contempt upon Paul whether his shame was ascribed or achieved, and the latter was perhaps more contemptible, because, to borrow the expression of Neyrey, Paul had refused "to participate in the honour-gaining games characteristic of males, and thus bring contempt on oneself."⁷²⁸

As the first two parts of this thesis have already shown, both crucifixion in antiquity and Greco-Roman rhetoric essentially involved "body language". The same is largely true with the *peristasis* catalogues in Paul's Corinthian correspondence. As such, the following statement in which Neyrey closely associates honour with man's body is particularly meaningful: "the bodily grammar for honour works also for shame. If the honourable parts of the body, the head and face, are struck, spat upon, slapped,

⁷²⁵ Moxnes, 'Honor', 36.

⁷²⁶ Neyrey, 'Shame', 156.

⁷²⁷ Neyrey, 'Shame', 158.

⁷²⁸ Neyrey, 'Shame', 158.

blindfolded, or otherwise maltreated, shame ensues....If one is publicly stripped naked, flogged, paraded before the crowds, and led through the streets, one is shamed.”⁷²⁹

In Corinth Paul’s honour was clearly more challenged than claimed. In fact the moment when Paul “decided to know nothing” among the Corinthians, “except Jesus Christ, and him crucified” (1 Cor. 2.2), and came to Corinth “in weakness and in fear and in much trembling” (2.3), he had virtually surrendered all his claim to “honour” as far as Greco-Roman society was concerned. Paul had consequently made himself most vulnerable in a most status-conscious society. And yet, paradoxically, it was precisely in his vulnerability that the messenger of the cross sought to demonstrate God’s power and wisdom in and through Christ who had earlier made himself vulnerable.

**4.11 ἄχρι τῆς ἄρτι ὥρας καὶ πεινῶμεν καὶ διψῶμεν καὶ γυμνιτεύομεν καὶ
κολαφιζόμεθα καὶ ἀστατοῦμεν (“To the present hour we are hungry and thirsty, we
are poorly clothed and beaten and homeless,”)**

In marked contrast to the Corinthians’ thinking that they were now enjoying the fullness and kingly reign promised by Christ, Paul suddenly responded with a most down-to-earth and grim statement, beginning from 4.11, to describe the apostles’ present *Sitz im Leben* (life situation). The phrase “to the present hour” (ἄχρι τῆς ἄρτι ὥρας] was quite certainly made with considerable emphasis. One could almost hear Paul saying, “my dear friends in Corinth, while you may think that you have *already* reached the fullness of your Christian experience, to the present hour, we are still *not yet!*” The pitiful physical condition to which Paul was here referring, may be regarded as largely true. To an ordinary person in the days of Paul, the apostle of the now highly exalted King and

⁷²⁹ Neyrey, ‘Shame’, 158.

Lord should be “hungry and thirsty” and be “poorly clothed” was absolutely far beyond any possible human imagination, let alone being “beaten and homeless”! Paul’s “body language” was unmistakable here. Under normal circumstances, the status of an ambassador would naturally be expected to correspond with the one who sent him. But this was clearly not the case with Paul and his fellow apostles in the eyes of others. Another σκάνδαλον!

According to Lucian, hunger was the common experience and complaint of artisans (*Sat.* 31). Paul’s condition in this verse (πεινῶμεν καὶ διψῶμεν) might well be literally true. According to Lucian, “labourers are barely able to supply them with just enough” (*Fug.* 12-13). He elaborated: “you see if you get a single sandal done before the sun rises you will be much ahead earning your daily bread....Take care, however, that you don’t dream you are rich and then starve when you wake up” (*Gall.* 1). In the *Cataplus*, the cobbler Micyllus still had to face hunger even though he laboured for many long hours (*Cat.* 20).

The verb γυμνιτεύω (γυμνότης, noun) in this verse said far more than just poor clothing, because it was also indicative of the low social status of the person who was “poorly clothed”. At the time of Paul, good clothing was expensive, and only the rich could afford it. In the words of Meggitt, “the importance given to clothing as a means of articulating socio-economic distinctions in antiquity also suggests that it necessitated significant financial outlay.”⁷³⁰ Juvenal witnessed that the poor were often being ridiculed for their dressing: “of all the woes of luckless poverty none is harder to endure than this, that it exposes men to ridicule” (*Sat.* 3.147-52).

⁷³⁰ Meggitt, *Poverty*, 61. See Gildas Hamel, *Poverty and Charity in Rome Palestine, First Three Centuries C. E.* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), 57-93.

The verb κολαφίζω could have a wide range of meanings, from violent beating to physical harms or injuries caused by hard manual labor such as Paul's tent-making work, and the latter would naturally imply the low social status of a slave-like artisan.⁷³¹

Not surprisingly, Welborn tries to put the word "buffeted" (κολαφιζόμεθα, "brutally treated" in NIV, and "beaten" in NRSV)⁷³² in the context of the mime: "It is not difficult to comprehend why the beating of the fool provided amusement: the explanation lies in the complex social function of this theatrical type. For the rich in the audience, the blows that rained down upon the fool's bald head were a sign of his helplessness and humiliation, and thus welcome reminders of the power of the rich to inflict punishment, and their invulnerability to such mistreatment."⁷³³ Again, it is difficult to be certain if Paul actually had the mime in mind in this as well as in other similar contexts.

In his research on Greco-Roman urban housing, Ramsey MacMullen has remarked that "no one has sought fame through the excavation of slums."⁷³⁴ The artisans normally lived and worked in small workshops (*tabernae*).⁷³⁵ Meggitt also tries to show that "nearly the entire *plebs urbana* lived in 'appalling slums'".⁷³⁶

4.12 καὶ κοπιῶμεν ἐργαζόμενοι ταῖς ἰδίαις χερσίν· λοιδορούμενοι εὐλογοῦμεν, διωκόμενοι ἀνεχόμεθα, ("and we grow weary from the work of our own hands. When reviled, we bless; when persecuted, we endure;") 13 δυσφημούμενοι

⁷³¹ Thiselton, *The First Epistle*, 362.

⁷³² See more on body "beatings" in the light of § 7.3.

⁷³³ Welborn, *Fool*, 70-1.

⁷³⁴ MacMullen, *Roman Social Relations 50 BC to AD 284* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1974), 93.

⁷³⁵ A. Wallace-Hadrill, *Houses and Society in Pompeii and Herculaneum* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), 139. A. Burford, *Craftsmen in Ancient Greek and Roman Society* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1972), 79.

⁷³⁶ Meggitt, *Poverty*, 66. Z. Yavetz, 'The Living Conditions of the Urban Plebs in Republican Rome', in R. Seager (ed.), *The Crisis of the Roman Republic* (Cambridge: W. Heffer & Sons, 1969), 162-79.

παρακαλοῦμεν· ὡς περικαθάρματα τοῦ κόσμου ἐγενήθημεν, πάντων περίψημα ἕως ἄρτι.
(“when slandered, we speak kindly. We have become like the rubbish of the world,
the dregs of all things, to this very day.”)

Paul continued with his description of the apostles’ appalling living condition in 4.12-13. His confession about growing “weary” from the work of their own hands once again indicated the demand and burden of manual labour. It was not only the manual labour that was difficult for Paul and his fellow apostles to bear. The social stigma that it brought to the labourers was equally burdensome and humiliating, as Martin has rightly commented: “the dative χερσίν, with our hands (v.12), is instrumental, and calls attention to the status of manual labour, which was in general despised in Greek culture by those who secured an income in other ways.”⁷³⁷ The so-called “dignity of labour” was certainly an absolutely novel idea to people of Paul’s time.

The “we” here – “we labour, working with our own hands” – could either literally refer to Paul with some of his fellow-apostles and co-workers or only to Paul himself. If it were the former, one would most naturally think of Aquila, a fellow Jew whom Paul first met in Corinth and who was “of the same trade” as Paul (Acts 18.1-3). The fact that Paul was a kind of “tentmaker” would automatically bring him down to the very low social strata of the Greco-Roman society, for reasons which have been given earlier in chapter 7. Hock’s research on the social, economic, and physical conditions of Paul’s trade has led him to make a rather credible suggestion that Paul’s hunger, thirst, nakedness as well as other social stigma and abuse he bore were closely related to his manual labour as a tentmaker.⁷³⁸ If manual labour was a matter of Paul’s own choice, and the resultant weariness was in this sense self-inflicted, reviling and persecution

⁷³⁷ Martin, *Corinthian Body*, 79-86.

⁷³⁸ Hock, *The Social Context*, 35.

were certainly not. Paul's determination not to retaliate could be said to be part of his *imitatio Christi*. While this might be a good "virtue" from the Christian perspective, it was unmistakably a blatant sign of weakness and cowardice according to the Greco-Roman social ethos of the time.

Superficially words in 4.12, such as λοιδορούμενοι ("reviled") appear only like some kind of verbal abuse. Welborn's study, however, indicates that something far more serious could be implied here: "And again, predictably, verbal abuse devolves into physical violence - hitting, spitting, etc. - in these passages, as it does in 1 Cor. 4.12."⁷³⁹ If Welborn's reading is correct, Paul's reference to persecution immediately after reviling would make very logical sense.

Just as in 4.11 ("to the present hour"), the expression "we have become" (ἐγενήθημεν) and "are now" (or "until now", ἕως ἄρτι] in 4.13 provided a very apt and stark contrast to the self-elevated status of the Corinthians. Paul's final statement in 4.13 appears like a kind of continuation of the thought in 4.9, 10. Welborn thinks that it is "the climax of the account", because Paul was here echoing "the judgement of the world upon the clownish apostles." The two Greek words here, περικαθάρματα ("rubbish") and περίψημα ("dregs"), were "the worst terms of abuse in the Greek language."⁷⁴⁰ No wonder Hays thinks that Paul's statement should not be "underplayed" here, because "Paul is saying in the strongest possible terms that to be a follower of Christ is to share his destiny of being scorned and rejected by the world."⁷⁴¹ Judge, who has consistently insisted that Paul came from the high ranking sector of the Greco-Roman society with well-balanced "social qualifications", is clearly perceptive when he says that "this social distinction explains his constant sensitivity to the humiliations he suffered from time to

⁷³⁹ Welborn, *Fool*, 81.

⁷⁴⁰ Welborn, *Fool*, 79, 80.

⁷⁴¹ Hays, *First Corinthians*, 72.

time....1 Cor. 4.13 is certainly not the complaint of a person to whom social affronts were normal. On the contrary, they are felt as indignities he ought not to have been subjected to.”⁷⁴² But Meggitt, who has assigned Paul to the social grouping of the poor, argues that “in Roman law codes, there was almost an infinite variety of ways a person could suffer insult. It is unlikely that anyone, however, low in the social pecking order, would have been content to be treated as ‘the filth of the world’ (περικαθάρματα τοῦ κόσμου), ‘the off-scouring of all things’ (πάντων περίψημα) as Judge seems to imply. To follow Judge’s reasoning in this area is ultimately to deny the humanity of the poor in the first century.”⁷⁴³ While Meggitt’s criticism of Judge is rather understandable, especially from the perspective of modernity in which human dignity and rights are often taken for granted, one suspects of that Meggitt’s view is rather idealistic and sentimental when put in the proper context of the social ethos of Paul’s time. If Paul’s “social qualifications” were indeed as impressive as Judge has put it, the irony of Paul’s statement would become the more startling. This is because the great majority of the Corinthians were most probably among those who were “low and despised in the world” (1.28) socially. But these chosen ones of God had now thought that they had “become rich” and had “become kings” (4.8). On the other hand, a person with the right “social qualifications”, had *ironically*, become “like the rubbish of the world, the dregs of all things” (4.13). However, to Paul who was fully determined to invert the social ethos of his time, such irony never came as a surprise.

While reviling, persecution and slander directed against Paul and his fellow-apostles were ill-intended, the apostles’ response – “we bless”, “we endure” and “we speak kindly” - could only be derived from the Master who had gone through far more than

⁷⁴² Judge, *The Social Pattern*, 58.

⁷⁴³ Meggitt, *Poverty*, 90.

these apostles had so far experienced.⁷⁴⁴ And such “power” was again paradoxically demonstrated in the apparent “weakness” of the apostles.

Language, in both verbal and “body” forms, has already been shown to be vital in Paul’s dealing with the complicated and complex Corinthian situation. Paul’s language in 4.8-13 is just another good example. Plank has summed up this important point quite well: “Paul confronts the Corinthian situation armed with the weapons of irony. Through the careful use of ironic language he challenges the Corinthian system of value and asserts the force of his own fundamental convictions.”⁷⁴⁵ Although this passage of 4.8-13, just like others in the Corinthian correspondence, was put in the form of irony and sarcasm, Paul’s intention remained positive, because those words, however strong and disturbing, were ultimately meant to provoke and correct at the same time.

8.3 Exegesis of 2 Cor. 11.23-33

The polemical and apologetic nature of 2 Cor. 11.23-33 is clear right from the start of 11.1-6, in which Paul talked about his own “foolishness” (11.1); about the Corinthians being “led astray” by those who proclaimed “another Jesus” and “a different gospel” (11.3, 4). Further into the chapter Paul made reference to those who wanted “to be recognized as our equals” (11.12). Paul described those “boasters” as “false apostles, deceitful workers”, who were “the ministers” of “Satan” (11.13-15). Jerry Sumney has tried to link these “ministers” to the “Pneumatics” whose “powerful demeanour includes recounting successes and visionary experiences, as well as demanding pay and obedience.”⁷⁴⁶ Hanson thinks that “Paul’s opponents in Corinth were Jewish Christians

⁷⁴⁴ The paradox of weakness as source of power as in 1 Cor. 1.18-23.

⁷⁴⁵ Plank, *Affliction*, 33.

⁷⁴⁶ J. L. Sumney, *Identifying Paul’s opponents: The Question of Method in 2 Corinthians* (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1990), 189, 190.

influenced by Greek philosophy, pneumatics.”⁷⁴⁷ This thesis is more inclined to endorse Peter Marshall’s reading: “the rival apostles are probably rhetorically trained...and have attributed to themselves those virtues and deeds which belong to the traditional ways of measuring a person’s greatness. Together with their Corinthian associates who shared these values, they have expected an apostle to be a man of culture, basing this on those qualities which they have ascribed to themselves in an open and unashamed self-display. They have depicted Paul as a socially and intellectually unacceptable person who fails to meet the standards of apostleship which they best exhibit. His speech is unrestrained....His physical appearance is ridiculous and shameful as befits a fool.”⁷⁴⁸

Towards the middle of the chapter Paul first made it clear to the Corinthians that he was actually no “fool” (11.16). However, if the Corinthians really thought that he was a “fool” he would “boast a little” and speak “as a fool” (11.16, 17). The concluding statement in 11.18 was very important: “since many boast according to human standards (κατὰ σάρκα, more literally, “according to the flesh”), I will also boast”. This statement was important because, had Paul not been provoked by the Corinthians, he would not have spoken like a “fool” as he did in this chapter, especially the passage in 11.23-33, which is sometimes described as “the fool’s speech”, e.g., by Barrett,⁷⁴⁹ Sumney,⁷⁵⁰ and Murphy-O’Connor.⁷⁵¹ In other words, it was only for polemical and apologetic purposes that he had reluctantly chosen to speak “like a fool” in his conflict with the Corinthian “fools” (1.19).

⁷⁴⁷ A. T. Hanson, *The Paradox of the Cross in the Thought of St Paul* (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1987), 87-8.

⁷⁴⁸ P. Marshall, *Enmity in Corinth: Social Conventions in Paul’s Relations with the Corinthians* (Tübingen: Mohr-Siebeck, 1987), 339-40.

⁷⁴⁹ Barrett, *Second Epistle*, 288. See Ralph P. Martin, *2 Corinthians* (Waco: Word Books, 1986); Furnish, *II Corinthians*, 512-3; Plummer, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Second Epistle of St. Paul to the Corinthians* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1915), 311.

⁷⁵⁰ Sumney, *Opponents*, 153-5.

⁷⁵¹ Jerome Murphy-O’Connor, *The theology of the Second Letter to the Corinthians* (Cambridge: CUP, 1991), 107. See Murray J. Harris, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 789.

The sarcasm in 11.19 was obvious: “for you gladly put up with fools, being wise yourselves!” In other words, if the Corinthians were indeed so “wise” as they claimed or pretended to be, they would not have allowed those “fools” to “make slaves” of them, to “prey upon” them, and to “take advantage” of them (11.20). In sarcastic tone and with certain amount of anger Paul made a rather unusual remark: “to my shame, I must say, we were too weak for that!” (11.21). In other words, it was certainly very “foolish” of the “wise” Corinthians to have allowed those “fools” to have made slaves of them, to have preyed upon them and to have taken advantage of them. Had Paul wanted to do that he certainly would have greater advantage over those “fools”, since the Corinthians owed him the gospel. But Paul had to confess that he was “too weak for that!”

Savage has correctly perceived the negative response that would most probably come from Paul’s readers: “A list of personal afflictions so horrific that it would have elicited feelings of extreme contempt among his readers. By boasting of such humiliations the apostle would seem to be reveling in his disgrace.”⁷⁵² Ralph Martin rightly notes the basic differences between the Greco-Roman tradition and Paul’s use of the *peristaseis*-list: “this section is dominated by the use of the *peristaseis*-list, i.e., a list of trials, endured by moral philosophers and teachers....There are obvious differences as well; not least in that the popular moral philosopher suffered *peristaseis* as a totally human experience, where Paul saw a divine purpose running through all his life’s arduousness.”⁷⁵³ Martin’s observation is generally correct, although the moral philosopher sometimes also referred to divine assistance or presence in their struggle, as the earlier study on Stoic *περίστασις* has already shown.

⁷⁵² Savage, *Power*, 63.

⁷⁵³ Martin, *2 Corinthians*, 368.

11.23 διάκονοι Χριστοῦ εἰσιν; παραφρονῶν λαλῶ, ὑπὲρ ἐγώ· ἐν κόποις περισσοτέρως, ἐν φυλακαῖς περισσοτέρως, ἐν πληγαῖς ὑπερβαλλόντως, ἐν θανάτοις πολλάκις. (“Are they ministers of Christ? I am talking like a madman – I am a better one: with far greater labors, far more imprisonments, with countless floggings, and often near death.”) 24 Ὑπὸ Ἰουδαίων πεντάκις τεσσαράκοντα παρὰ μίαν ἔλαβον, (“Five times I have received from the Jews the forty lashes minus one.”)

Boasting was usually done in Paul’s time with public recognition in mind.⁷⁵⁴ But Paul was doing it here in a very special polemical context, because it would be the very last thing he wanted to do under normal circumstances.

That 11.23-33 is basically about “boasting” is sufficiently clear from the two verses that immediately preceded it (11.21, 22). Paul in 11.22 was clearly “boasting” about his Hebrew or Jewish identity, and the polemic here obviously indicated that at least some of his opponents, the other “ministers of Christ” (11.23) were of Jewish origin. Thrall suggests that the emphasis on Jewishness may indicate that “the Jewish Christian component [of the Corinthian Church] was larger than is usually supposed.”⁷⁵⁵

But the two expressions in the following verse (11.23) – “I am speaking as a fool” and “I am talking like a madman” – clearly indicated that it was really not the intention of Paul to want to boast. He was actually forced to do so, much against his own wish and Christian character, although boasting was part and parcel of the life and life style of the Greco-Roman society. In this connection Ben Witherington’s point is relevant: “in Corinth shaming and boasting or priding themselves was a public phenomenon of an

⁷⁵⁴ “Boasting was often seen as a demand for public recognition of honour. Words for ‘boast’ and ‘boasting’ (καύχημα, *kauchēma*; and terms with the καυχ-, *kauch-*, stem) are common in the NT (Rom 2:17, 23; 3:27; 4:2).” Moxnes, ‘Honor’, 24.

⁷⁵⁵ Thrall, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Second Epistle to the Corinthians* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2000), 2.730.

‘honour-shame’ culture. The Corinthian people lived within an honour-shame orientation, where public recognition was often more important than facts, and where the worst thing that could happen was for one’s reputation to be publicly tarnished.”⁷⁵⁶

Pogoloff comments that “the Corinthians are competing because they are, in typical Greco-Roman fashion, both proud of whatever social status they have, and envious of those with higher status.”⁷⁵⁷

Moreover, both in the general context of the Greco-Roman world and in the particular context of the Corinthian situation, “boasting” was not just a matter of personal attitude and behaviour, it was an essential feature in the whole of rhetorical training and practice, especially in public oratory where the orator was judged and praised for his eloquent speech. He was expected to be “boastful”. It was inherent in the social ethos.

The strong expression *καὶ γὰρ* (“and I”, or “I also”) which occurs six times in 11.16-22 alone, clearly indicates the frequency and intensity of Paul’s reluctant comparison with his rivals. In each case Paul was establishing his parity with his rivals. What Paul did here in 11.23 was just a natural continuation of what he had already started, however reluctantly. If the expression *καὶ γὰρ* was used to indicate the parity or equality between Paul and his rivals, the other expression, *ὕπερ ἐγώ* in 4.23a (“I am far more”, or “I am better”) was obviously meant to show his superiority over them. The above two expressions, *καὶ γὰρ* and *ὕπερ ἐγώ*, although relatively simple, were indicative of Paul’s rhetorical skill in the context of polemics and *apologia*.

Instead of providing an impressive list of achievements and credentials to show his “superiority” over his rivals, Paul came up with a *peristasis* catalogue, itemizing his

⁷⁵⁶ B. Witherington, *Conflict and Community in Corinth* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 8.

⁷⁵⁷ Pogoloff, *Logos*, 211.

sufferings, especially its *physical* aspects and the “body language” he sought to convey. What was surprising here was the simple fact that, unlike his Greco-Roman counterparts, it was not human virtues, such as courage, endurance and manliness that Paul tried to exhibit, but blatant human weakness, even cowardice (e.g., 11.32, 33). And while Paul’s presentation was understandably surprising to the Greeks and Romans, it was typically Paul’s paradoxical way of dealing with the Corinthian problem, which was consistently and consciously an inversion of the Greco-Roman social ethos. For Paul it was far more than just a matter of strategy. It was theologically motivated and prompted, especially by his understanding of the cross.⁷⁵⁸

11.23a reveals the real bone of contention between Paul and his Corinthian rivals. The word “ministers” (διδάκοντες) here appeared rather harmless, since by itself it did not really confer any particularly significant social status. However, in the context of the Corinthian controversy, the word was really a very problematic and serious issue. Unlike, for instance, 1 Cor. 4.8-13 and other places where Paul identified himself and his fellow-apostles with the first person plural “we” in his *apologia*, in this whole passage of 2 Cor. 11.23-33 he used the singular “I”, thereby making the issue far more *personal*. The *peristasis* catalogues he itemized should also be viewed in this context. The contention was essentially between *him* and his rivals.

The expression, “I am a better one”, in 11.23a was most extraordinary, even somewhat shocking, to those who had known Paul as a humble δοῦλος of Christ. Paul himself was apparently very conscious of it when he confessed that he was here “talking like a madman”. But in what precise way was Paul a “better” minister than the other “ministers of Christ” (11.23)? The answer was found in the following *peristasis*

⁷⁵⁸ “Appeal is made to evidence of his shame and dishonor. ‘What he has endured is the seal of his Apostleship’” (Plummer, *Commentary*, 322). See Harris, *The Second Epistle*, 797-8.

catalogues Paul provided. In other words, it was in personal tribulations and sufferings that Paul wanted to show that he was “better” than the rest, and *not* in any Greco-Roman, or Jewish (cf. the Maccabeans “martyrs”) virtues such as courage, endurance, or other noticeable *manliness*. This was another clear indication of Paul’s “madness”, according to the current social ethos which could only appreciate *peristaseis* as proofs of a person’s manly virtues. Paul’s intention to invert current social ethos needs no further explanation here.

In 11.23 Paul referred first of all to his “labours”. It was “with far greater labours” that Paul claimed to be superior to his rivals. Such an argument was hardly valid in the context of current Greco-Roman ethos, for at least three reasons. (1) If “greater labours” here was simply meant to indicate in very general terms that one was working “harder” than others in whatever work, such “greater labours” would not have any particular merit in itself, or earn any social status to the hard labourer. In fact in a society where most hard work were performed by people of the lower strata of society, including ordinary artisans and slaves, hard labours, instead of being the ground for boasting, were usually the very cause of social prejudice and contempt. The so-called “dignity of labour” or “sanctity of labour” could only be a bad joke to the hearers of Paul’s Greco-Roman society. (2) If by “greater labours” Paul had in mind all the hard work he had been doing for the sake of the gospel, appreciation could only be expected from his close associates and supporters, and certainly not his rivals who were understandably jealous of his “hard work” as well as its fruit. (3) If by “greater labours” Paul was referring specifically to his manual labours as a tentmaker, it could only cause society, including the Corinthian Christians who were brought up in the same ethos, to further despise him, for reasons which have been shown by scholars such as Glancy and Hock (see §7.3). But it was precisely in such an apparently poor or invalid argument that the

power and subtlety of Paul's irony and paradox became most obvious and provocative as an inversion of the current social ethos.

The phrase φυλακαῖς περισσοτέρως ("far more imprisonments") was just as problematic as Paul's earlier reference to κόποις περισσοτέρως ("far greater labours"). (1) "Imprisonments" as a general term could only negatively connote crimes and other illegal or anti-social activities in Paul's time, and would thus work against the apostle. (2) Just from Paul's own biographical notes as well as the witness of the Book of Acts alone, one could reasonably infer that the apostle's "imprisonments" were not only factual, but perhaps far more frequent than what has been recorded. But since they were apparently not the result of any noble and heroic acts, but closely or exclusively due to the preaching of "the message of the cross", such argument would draw sympathy neither from those who were "perishing" nor from Paul's jealous rivals. Forbes is thus right: "imprisonments and beatings...are hardly calculated to inspire confidence in the respectability of anyone's position."⁷⁵⁹ Similarly, Marshall thinks that hardships made Paul "a man of shame",⁷⁶⁰ according to the current social ethos.

Perhaps far more serious and with much greater implications was Paul's reference to the physical assaults that he painfully experienced, beginning from 11.23b and 11.24.⁷⁶¹ Paul's reference to "the forty lashes less one" is an interesting one, because "the thirty-nine lashes" was the official punishment of the synagogue. In Matt. 10.17 Jesus warned his disciples about the possibility of being delivered up to Jewish councils (συνέδρια) and being flogged "in their synagogues" (ἐν ταῖς συναγωγαῖς αὐτῶν). The

⁷⁵⁹ Forbes, 'Comparison', 19.

⁷⁶⁰ Marshall, *Enmity*, 361.

⁷⁶¹ Since Paul's own accounts as well as those in Acts cannot literally verify the precise locations or the exact number of times regarding the physical assaults mentioned by Paul in the above verses, their historicity seems to be beyond reasonable doubt. The fact that Paul was actually stoned "near death" was witnessed at least once in Acts 14.19, and this occurred in Lystra.

origin of such corporal punishment is found in Deut. 25.2-3. Under normal circumstances the number of lashes was determined by the nature of the offence, but in no case should it to exceed forty. This was to prevent the offender from having to suffer gross public humiliation.⁷⁶² The Deuteronomic origin of the practice found its later development in *m. Makkoth* 3.10 and it was attested, for instance, also in Josephus' *Antiquities* 4.238, 248. Synagogue flogging was administered for various offences, which were itemized in *m. Makkoth* 3.1-9.⁷⁶³

History is full of ironies. Paul, who was once a most notorious persecutor of the first Christians himself, was often responsible for the *floggings* of his victims (Acts 22.19). But the persecutor himself had now become the victimized. According to *m. Makkoth* 3.14 the possibility of a person's dying during or after the thirty-nine strokes was real; no wonder Josephus had described this frightening punishment as "most ignominious" (*αλoχίστη*) for a free man (*Ant.* 4.238).⁷⁶⁴ In view of such awful reality, it was indeed amazing that Paul managed to survive after "five times" enduring such floggings. Thrall highlights the fact that Paul as a Jew suffered heavily in the hands of his own Jewish people.⁷⁶⁵ This point is worth noting because of Paul's earlier pride in his own ethnic identity (11.22). The social stigma associated with such corporal punishment and the humiliating experience that Paul had to endure was not difficult to imagine, especially when he was a Roman citizen, a "free" man. This again was very different from the kind of "manliness" and other "virtues" which the Greco-Roman sages or philosophers were committed to exhibit in their use of the *peristasis* catalogues.

⁷⁶² Harris, *The Second Epistle*, 801

⁷⁶³ Barrett, *Second Epistle*, 296.

⁷⁶⁴ Harris, *The Second Epistle*, 802-3.

⁷⁶⁵ Thrall, *II Corinthians*, 736.

Glancy holds that “while some scholars treat Paul’s listing of hardships in 11.23b-33 as an ironic inversion of first-century values, others - seemingly a majority - argue that this same listing is consistent with the Greco-Roman rhetorical practice of acknowledging hardships, often as demonstrations of virile fortitude....Acknowledgment of the specific meanings of flogged bodies in a first-century *habitus* is essential for appreciation of Paul’s rhetorical strategy in the fool’s speech.”⁷⁶⁶ This thesis obviously sides with those scholars who treat “Paul’s listing of hardships in 11.23b-33 as an ironic inversion of first-century values”, for reasons which have already been given in chapter 7.

In their respective commentaries, Best and Martin understand Paul’s endurance of hardship as a sign of courage or manliness.⁷⁶⁷ Martyn argues that Paul’s suffering testified to the virtue of his fortitude and loyalty to Jesus.⁷⁶⁸ Glancy, however, contends that “in their emphasis on the manliness of confronting manifold physical challenges, contemporary scholars assimilate the strips scored in Paul’s flesh to cicatrized emblems of martial valor while...ignoring the power relations - of legal status, domination and submission, honour and shame - incarnated in flogged bodies by Roman *habitus*.”⁷⁶⁹ This last point of Glancy is very important. Just as she has criticized Fitzgerald for being one-sided in associating bodily suffering (including whipping or flogging) only as signs of honour or manliness, without recognizing its negative aspects, she has now done so to other scholars such as Best and Martin. Glancy’s view is very much in line with the position of this thesis which tries to show that it was the *negative* side, the dishonouring part, that Paul had in mind in 11.23-25 when he referred to “floggings” etc., because to highlight the honourable and glorious side of body whipping and flogging, according to the social ethos of the time, would have weakened his argument

⁷⁶⁶ Glancy, ‘Boasting’, 119.

⁷⁶⁷ Best, *Second Corinthians*, 114; Martin, *2 Corinthians*, 376.

⁷⁶⁸ Martyn, *Galatians*, 568, n.73.

⁷⁶⁹ Glancy, ‘Boasting’, 121.

in the Corinthian controversy. It would appear rather unlikely that in 11.23-25 Paul intended to defend his honour in the manner of the Greco-Roman sages and according to their social ethos. Thus, when Paul tried to compare himself with the “super-apostles” with the listing of his suffering and hardship, the real purpose was to show that he had suffered more than they did (if they had indeed suffered); suffering not just in physical terms, but also with humiliation and degradation in social terms. Paul’s statement in 11.23 should be understood in this context. And Paul’s concluding remark at the end of the listing also clearly suggested that Paul’s reference was to humiliation and weakness and not glory and strength: “Who is weak, and I am not weak?” (11.29).

Unlike Fitzgerald, who regards *peristasis* catalogues only as signs of virtues based on the views of Seneca and Epictetus, Glancy argues that “we cannot rely on Seneca (or, later, Epictetus) to reconstruct the *habitus* that shaped the Corinthian response to Paul’s whippable body.”⁷⁷⁰ Glancy’s point is apparently right because judging from the immediate context of 2 Cor. 11, or in the overall purview of the two Corinthian letters, Paul’s critics simply could not regard Paul’s “whippable” body as a sign of “virtue”; neither did Paul himself. For to regard the *peristasis* catalogues according to the social ethos of the Greco-Roman tradition would surely go against Paul’s express purpose to boast of his weakness and God’s enabling grace in and through his weakness. If Paul really had any intention, in the heat of his polemics against his critics, to show his superiority over them, it was certainly not in the matter of human endurance and courage. The fact that he was “let down in a basket through a window in the wall [of Damascus] and escaped from his [King Aretas’] hands” (11.32, 33) was a sure sign of cowardice according to the common Greco-Roman understanding of courage and masculinity. If Paul had any sense of “superiority” over his Corinthians critics or the

⁷⁷⁰ Glancy, ‘Boasting’, 124.

“super-apostles”, it would be in the area of suffering and hardship (11.23). That was really the main point of Paul’s argument and the listing of the περιστάσεις in chapter 11, and elsewhere. Yet, paradoxically again, what was considered “shame” according to Greco-Roman ethos turned out to be “honour” for Paul and he always counted it a great honour to suffer for Christ. Not only did Paul openly acknowledge that he carried “the marks of Jesus” branded on his body in Gal. 6.17, he went also further to confess that he was “always carrying in the body the death of Jesus” (2 Cor. 4.10). Such was the extent of Paul’s *imitatio Christi*.

It has now become sufficiently clear that according to the social ethos of Paul’s time, the apostle’s testimony concerning his own “weakness” and the abusing of his body were likely perceived by his opponents as marks of servile submission and insignia of humiliation which were unworthy of a *man* of any social standing, dignity and honour. For Paul’s critics, αἰσχρός (dishonourable, degraded, and ultimately, morally suspect), and ταπεινός, connoted shame, humiliation and degradation.⁷⁷¹ Shaw has rightly pointed out that “it is the Christian writings of the New Testament that revolutionize these values wholly by their total inversion. Paul boasts of his self-abasement and humility, and draws attention to the effort one must make to strive towards the final virtue that should be claimed by the Christian, that of being *tapeinos*. Indeed, he actually creates a new virtue – *tapeinophrosunê* (ταπεινοφροσύνη) - the voluntary abasement of the self and one’s body.”⁷⁷² Paul’s mindset was thoroughly consistent with his deep desire to be an imitator of Christ, especially Christ’s self-emptying (*kenosis* in Phil. 2.6-8).

⁷⁷¹ Larson thinks that “Paul’s open admission that he had been flogged by both Jewish and Roman authorities (2 Cor.11.23-25) was certainly the boasting of a ‘madman’ because of the shame and humiliation incurred by the recipients of such punishments” (94).

⁷⁷² Shaw, ‘Body’, 303-4.

This conflict of basic ethos between the Greco-Roman tradition and Paul's theology of the cross is central to this thesis which argues consistently that such theology was an inversion of the current social ethos. Glancy is making a valid point when she says that "because NT scholars have not acknowledged that relationships of power were embodied, they have not appreciated the centrality of Paul's body to the super-apostles' campaign against him".⁷⁷³ However, Glancy also argues that Paul's "boasting of beatings" was for strategic reasons, i.e., as marks of identification with the sufferings of the crucified Christ, although the Corinthians obviously failed to appreciate the "manly valour in Paul's storytelling body".⁷⁷⁴

Larson goes a little further to suggest that Paul was in fact using a dangerous strategy, i.e., by strongly identifying with Christ in his weakness, since weakness in a man connoted humiliation and degradation in that most power-conscious society. Paul was reproached by his opponents for reasons which could be divided into two main categories: First, his lack of physical appearance and skills as a public speaker, and the fact that he had thus failed miserably in terms of rhetorical performance. Second, his personal character, which had been clearly shown in his poor lifestyle, manual labor, and so on. However, "taking Christ as his model, Paul argues that weakness, humility, and suffering in the cause are badges of honour in God's eyes (2 Cor. 12.5-10)."⁷⁷⁵ There seems to be little doubt that Paul's conformity to Christ crucified ("cruciformity") was a most deliberate choice and a life-long commitment (1 Cor. 2.2; cf. Gal. 6.14). Again, the inversion of the social ethos of the Corinthians must be viewed from this perspective.

⁷⁷³ Glancy, 'Boasting', 127-8.

⁷⁷⁴ Glancy, 'Boasting', 135.

⁷⁷⁵ Larson, 'Masculinity', 95.

Paul referred to his “countless floggings” (2 Cor. 11.23) in connection with his self-confessed “weakness” (11.29, 30) and he was not ashamed of that, because such confession was thoroughly consistent with his strong commitment to *imitatio Christi*. In this connection what Paul said in 13.4 was extremely important: “for he [Christ] was crucified in weakness”. But that was not the end of the story, otherwise there would not have been any “good news” for Paul to proclaim. Thus, what followed immediately was equally important: “but [Christ now] lives by the power of God”, so that as one who had been fully identified with Christ, Paul was able to remind the Corinthians with confidence that although he and his fellow apostles were “weak in him [or with him]”, they could also “live with him [Christ] by the power of God.” It is important to note that part of Christ’s “weakness” in the eyes of the Greco-Roman world would almost undoubtedly be the floggings which Pilate inflicted on him (John 19.1; see Mark 15.15 and parallel in Matt. 27.26). One is tempted to think that when the apostles “rejoiced that they were considered worthy to suffer [the] dishonour [of floggings] for the sake of the name [of Jesus]” (Acts 5. 40, 41), they could well have had Christ’s own floggings in mind. As such, the profound sense of solidarity with the Christ who once suffered would be quite unmistakable.

11.25 τρις ἑρραβδίσθην, ἅπαξ ἐλιθάσθην, τρις ἐναυάγησα, νυχθήμερον ἐν τῷ βυθῷ πεποίηκα· (“Three times I was beaten with rods. Once I received stoning. Three times I was shipwrecked; for a night and a day I was adrift at sea;”)

In 11.25 the verb ἑρραβδίσθην (from ῥαβδίζω, Latin *virgis caedere*, “beating with rods”) was a Roman punishment.⁷⁷⁶ Martin elaborates on this: “the penalty of being beaten with rods has a technical side, referring to a punishment inflicted by the Roman

⁷⁷⁶ Harris, *The Second Epistle*, 803.

magistrates....Paul suffered this indignity three times, we are told; a fact which is sad evidence that Roman governors were not always meticulous in upholding the law (Livy 10.9), and a miscarriage Paul comments on as ...‘outrageously treated at Philippi’ (1 Thess. 2.2)....In Paul’s case the beating was administered as a public warning, or because he was treated as a social pest.”⁷⁷⁷ In the case of Paul, the actual legality of those cases of beatings from which he suffered was not as significant as the social implications and symbols that were attached to it. This is just the negative side of the *peritasis* catalogue. In the Greco-Roman society it would be the greatest dishonour, shame and humiliation for a free person to be subjected to whippings publicly (see §7.3).

The beating of Paul by the Roman authorities was tantamount to the denial of his Roman citizenship and the implications and consequences were evidently most serious, because one of the main differences between the condition of a slave and a free man in Roman society was the vulnerability of the former to repeated corporal punishment. Saller has noted that whipping or beating in Roman society “symbolically put a free man in the servile category and so degraded him.” Thus, “the act of being whipped affected a Roman’s status by detracting from his honour through public humiliation and association with the lowest human form in the Roman world, the slave.”⁷⁷⁸ There has been some debate about Paul’s social origins or status. A considerable number of NT scholars take the position that Paul enjoyed his privilege as a Roman citizen (Acts 16.37)⁷⁷⁹ before his Christian conversion. Judge suggests that Paul, who came from a distinguished Jewish circle, belonged to “the privileged group of Hellenistic families” and possessed “an unusually well balanced set of social qualifications.”⁷⁸⁰ Hengel suggests that Paul came from a “petty-bourgeois” middle class family and Nils Dahl

⁷⁷⁷ Martin, *2 Corinthians*, 377. Cf. Furnish, *II Corinthians*, 516.

⁷⁷⁸ Saller, ‘Punishment’, 154.

⁷⁷⁹ See Barrett, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Acts of the Apostles* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1998), 2.801-2; Dunn, *The Acts of the Apostles* (Peterborough: Epworth Press, 1996), 223; Bruce, *The Acts of the Apostles* (London: Tyndale Press, 1965), 340-1.

⁷⁸⁰ Judge, *The Social Pattern*, 57-8.

believes that Paul was born into a well-to-do family,⁷⁸¹ while Sanders thinks that Paul had a middle class upbringing.⁷⁸² Both W. M. Ramsay and Theissen believe that Paul belonged to the higher strata of society and possessed citizenship of both Tarsus and Rome and thus enjoyed “an unusual, privileged status”.⁷⁸³ Marshall also insists that Paul’s social status and education were equal to his rivals.⁷⁸⁴ Thrall concludes that “Paul’s own mention of the three Roman floggings he endured does not cast serious doubt on the claim in Acts that he was a Roman citizen. A mixture of various external circumstances and inward motives would be sufficient to account in each case for his silence concerning his possession of the citizenship.”⁷⁸⁵

As Paul was a Jew and most probably a Roman citizen as well, it would be quite reasonable to assume that he would be very knowledgeable about the “sanctity” of the human body, especially that of a *man*, in both Jewish and Roman traditions and in current social ethos. Moreover, now as a Christian, he had gone even further theologically to assert that the body of the believer was in fact “a temple of the Holy Spirit” (ναὸς τοῦ ἁγίου πνεύματος, 1 Cor. 6.19) by which to “glorify God” (6.20). In 4.11-13 Paul openly talked about his body being “hungry and thirsty, poorly clothed and beaten” as well as growing “weary” from the work of manual labour. In 2 Cor. 4.8-10 he talked about being “afflicted in every way...crushed...persecuted...struck down...always carrying in the body the death of Jesus”; and in 6.5-9, “beatings, imprisonments...dying...punished.” When compared with others, Paul felt very personally and deeply that he experienced “far greater labours, far more imprisonments,

⁷⁸¹ Hengel, *The Pre-Christian Paul* (London: SCM Press, 1991), 17. Dahl, *Studies in Paul: Theology for the Early Christian Mission* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1977), 35.

⁷⁸² E. P. Sanders, *Paul* (Oxford: OUP, 1991), 10.

⁷⁸³ W. M. Ramsay, *St. Paul the Traveller and the Roman Citizen* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1895), 30-1; Theissen, *The Social Setting*, 36

⁷⁸⁴ Marshall, *Enmity*, 400.

⁷⁸⁵ Thrall, *II Corinthians*, 2.742. However, Meggitt takes an opposite view that “just as the early Church Fathers recognised him [Paul] as a ‘common man’ (ἀγοραῖος), and his contemporaries saw him as one of poor (πτωχός) so we should also place him in this economic context” (*Poverty*, 96).

with countless floggings, and often near death" (11.23). He was not ashamed (although humanly speaking, as a *servant* of God as well as a Roman *man*, he should feel very ashamed) to confess his physical suffering openly (11.24, 25). The suffering apostle was clearly not speaking "in parables" but in rich, vivid and solid "*body language*" which could only be fully understood according to the social ethos of the Greco-Roman world.

This thesis has earlier referred to the story about Antipater who exposed his numerous scars in the body to prove his loyalty to Caesar (see §7.3).⁷⁸⁶ Martyn in *Galatians* draws a close comparison between Antipater and Paul: "as Antipater was said to bear on almost every part of his person the marks of wounds showing his loyalty to Caesar, so Paul points to his body as it testifies to his belonging to the crucified Jesus."⁷⁸⁷

Martyn's comparison between Antipater and Paul, while interesting and valid to a certain extent, requires some important qualification here. To begin with, it was the praise of the man (Caesar) and other possible motives that were the concerns of Josephus' story. But in the case of Paul, human praise and other ambitions had long been "crucified", and the loyalty he now pledged for Jesus was in obedience to the divine calling he received from his master, and his whole life was a most convincing testimony to this fact. As such, even in the heat of the Corinthian controversy, his loyalty to Jesus was never challenged by his rivals and critics.

However, Martyn is insightful when he says that "the painful wounds he has endured and continues to endure in his preaching are like those endured by Jesus, in the sense that Paul's own injuries are inflicted by the same powers that crucified Jesus (1 Cor. 2.8;

⁷⁸⁶ Josephus, *B.J.* 1.193, 197.

⁷⁸⁷ Martyn, *Galatians*, 568, n.73.

Gal. 4.19; cf. Borse). For this reason his scars are nothing other than the present epiphany of the crucifixion of Jesus (2 Cor. 4.7-10)."⁷⁸⁸ One could perhaps elaborate on this a little with the suggestion that it was in Paul's identification with Master, or in the context of *imitatio Christi*, that he said in Gal. 6.17 that he carried "the marks of Jesus branded on his body", and in 2 Cor. 4.10 that he was "always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be made visible in our bodies." Paul's paradoxical statement about "death" and "life" is particularly revealing and powerful here. Bruce notes: "the 'marks of Jesus' which he carried in his body are accepted by him as the marks of branding or tattooing which certified that a slave (especially a recaptured runaway slave) was the property of this or that owner."⁷⁸⁹ John Pobee points out that the scars Paul carried are "the sign of apostleship."⁷⁹⁰ Taking Gal. 6.11-17 as a whole, "the paradox of the cross is central to this passage, and so is the representation of Jesus' sufferings by his disciple."⁷⁹¹

In Phil. 3.10 Paul had in fact gone beyond the carrying of "the marks of Jesus", and talked about full identification with Christ: "I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the sharing of his sufferings by becoming like him in his death". Such was perhaps the uttermost limit of *imitatio Christi*. The statement that immediately follows suggests that such profound desire to want to be fully identified with the crucified Christ was also deeply inspired by the eschatological hope of resurrection: "if somehow I may attain the resurrection from the dead" (3.11). Here Paul had only put it in a rather unassuming way when he qualified his hope with the words "if somehow".

⁷⁸⁸ Martyn, *Galatians*, 569.

⁷⁸⁹ Bruce, *The Epistle of Paul to the Galatians: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (Exeter: The Paternoster Press, 1982), 275.

⁷⁹⁰ J. S. Pobee, *Persecution and Martyrdom in the Theology of St. Paul* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1985), 95.

⁷⁹¹ Hanson, *Paradox*, 86.

Although there is no New Testament record about Paul's having been "ship-wrecked" and being "a drift at sea" until the later part of his missionary journeys (Acts 27), there is no good reason to doubt the historicity of his reference, for there was nothing very glorious about such incidents, except to show that his sufferings were indeed enormous and very varied.

11.26 ὁδοιπορίαις πολλάκις, κινδύνοις ποταμῶν, κινδύνοις ληστῶν, κινδύνοις ἐκ γένους, κινδύνοις ἐξ ἔθνων, κινδύνοις ἐν πόλει, κινδύνοις ἐν ἔρημῳ, κινδύνοις ἐν θαλάσῃ, κινδύνοις ἐν ψευδαδέλφοις, (**"on frequent journeys, in danger from rivers, danger from bandits, danger from my own people, danger from Gentiles, danger in the city, danger in the wilderness, danger at sea, danger from false brothers and sisters;"**)

Eight types of "dangers" (κινδύνοις) are singled out in 11.26. Some were closely associated with Paul's constant travels, such as "danger from rivers...robbers...in the wilderness". All these were only to be expected in the ancient Roman Empire as far as travels were concerned, despite the *Pax Romana* which people did generally enjoy. Other dangers came from people who were hostile to Paul as a messenger of the gospel, whether Jews ("my own people") or "Gentiles". The danger from "false brothers and sisters" was mentioned separately from the dangers from both (presumably unbelieving) Jews and Gentiles. This was particularly significant because unlike the unbelieving Jews and Gentiles, those "false brothers and sisters" would most probably be people who claimed or pretended to be fellow Christians like Paul. As such, it would be reasonable to suggest that Paul could have entrusted himself to them or confided with them, a rather dangerous thing to do in a society which was generally hostile to the relatively new but much misunderstood Christian movement. If such was indeed the case, this

particular “danger” from “false brothers and sisters” would be harder than most other dangers for Paul to bear, because it involved a certain kind of betrayal against him. Paul must have felt it deeply and personally. It would also be reasonable to conjecture that such “false brothers and sisters” could also be present in the Corinthian congregation who were working against him just as his other rivals and critics did. As Harris has rightly observed, “‘dangers among false brothers’ stands alone at the end of Paul’s list, probably because he viewed it as the most hurtful and insidious peril of all. External dangers that threatened his own life were one thing; treacherous opposition that undermined his work was quite another thing. He could cope with life-threatening hazards from without more easily than with work-undermining perils from within.”⁷⁹²

**11.27 κόπω καὶ μόχθῳ, ἐν ἀγρυπνίαις πολλάκις, ἐν λιμῷ καὶ δίψει, ἐν νηστείαις
πολλάκις, ἐν ψύχει καὶ γυμνότητι· (“in toil and hardship, through many a sleepless
night, hungry and thirsty, often without food, cold and naked.”)**

Much of what Paul mentioned here already occurred in the *peristasis* catalogue such as 1 Cor. 4.11 and 12. Although the words “many a sleepless night...cold and naked” appear rather new here, they add no significant substance to what Paul was saying, as these were naturally to be expected in the harsh life style of the apostle.

Paul’s miserable life, including extreme material poverty at times, formed a stark contrast to the fullness and richness (4.8; cf. 11.21) of the self-conceited and boastful Corinthians, which would include material abundance. This was of course one side of the story. The other side was the simple fact that Paul’s material poverty was, at least in part, due to his refusal of support by the Corinthians, which had contributed

⁷⁹² Harris, *The Second Epistle*, 808.

significantly to their estranged relationship. Yet, the “fool” of Christ could always draw, paradoxically, great comfort and self-consolation from his *imitatio Christi*: “as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and yet possessing everything” (2 Cor. 6.10).

The problem between Paul and his critics in Corinth apparently had to do with Paul’s refusal of material support from the Corinthians, especially since Paul had obviously accepted support from other churches.⁷⁹³ It is obvious from the Corinthian correspondence that certain influential and powerful patrons in the church were already exerting a great deal of influence on members of the congregation. The sensible and perceptive Paul would not want to come under the influence of those patrons and felt indebted to them by accepting their favour. But Paul’s behaviour could well be perceived as “a violation of the convention of friendship or patronage”,⁷⁹⁴ as Chow has noted. Marshall focuses on the conflict between Paul and his Corinthian critics in light of Greco-Roman social conventions. Marshall suggests that the Greco-Roman conventions of friendship were based on the pattern of giving, receiving and returning. Failure to adhere to the obligation of friendship...could bring about enmity.⁷⁹⁵ Paul, who was probably familiar with such social conventions, was obviously prepared to take the risk, and thus paid the price for having to constantly face hunger and thirst, in order to be free from obligation and indebtedness to his “patrons”.

11.28 χωρὶς τῶν παρεκτὸς ἡ ἐπίστασις μοι ἡ καθ’ ἡμέραν, ἡ μέριμνα πασῶν τῶν ἐκκλησιῶν. (“And, besides other things, I am under daily pressure because of my anxiety for all the churches.”)

⁷⁹³ E.g., Phil. 4.15, 16; 2 Cor. 11.8.

⁷⁹⁴ Chow, *Patronage*, 188.

⁷⁹⁵ Marshall, *Enmity*, 1-21.

Those sufferings and dangers that Paul had so far mentioned in the *peritasis* catalogue in 11.23-27 largely involved the material and physical aspects of his life. But “the daily pressure” upon him resulting from his “anxiety for all the churches” (ἡ μέριμνα πασῶν τῶν ἐκκλησιῶν) mentioned in 11.28, could be said to be basically mental and spiritual. Such was the pastoral side of the servant of Christ which sometimes got hidden, especially in the midst of heated debate and controversy. The reference to “all the churches” in 11.28b was clearly meant to indicate the extent and magnitude of Paul’s pastoral anxiety and concern. Based on study of the term *παρεκτός* in 11.28, Harris suggests that “as we move from vv.23b-27 to vv.28-29 we are not merely progressing from external to internal hardships but from various intermittent physical hardships that lay in the past to a single constant spiritual burden of the present.”⁷⁹⁶ Best’s comment is also helpful: “Paul’s final point about his service to Christ relates to the inward wear and tear on his mind and soul, something even more difficult to bear than his physical sufferings. There were sleepless nights arising from his anxiety about one or another of his churches.”⁷⁹⁷

11.29 τίς ἀσθενεῖ καὶ οὐκ ἀσθενῶ; τίς σκανδαλίζεται καὶ οὐκ ἐγὼ πυροῦμαι; (“Who is weak, and I am not weak? Who is made to stumble, and I am not indignant?”)

From the immediate context of 11.23-33, it is difficult to know what precisely Paul was trying to say when he asked this question. The understanding of the verse may have to depend largely on the much larger context of the Corinthian correspondence. One thing seems to be pretty certain as far as the composition of the Corinthian congregation was concerned. In terms of social strata, only some were “rich” and “powerful” in marked contrast to the majority who were poor and weak (1 Cor. 1.26). It would also be

⁷⁹⁶ Harris, *The Second Epistle*, 811.

⁷⁹⁷ Best, *Second Corinthians*, 113.

reasonable to assume that the rich and the powerful were often the boastful and the self-conceited. As such, the poor and weak could quite easily become the prey of those who were in the upper strata of society, and the poor and weak were apparently being socially disregarded by those above them. Moreover, the social and moral behaviour of those in the upper strata seemed to have often caused the weak and the poor to stumble and fall. It was most probably for this main reason that the caring apostle, who obviously was not ashamed to identify himself with the weak and the poor, had become “indignant” whenever he saw the fall of the weak and the poor.

The rhetorical question “who is weak, and I am not weak?” in 11.29a might indicate that Paul was not unaware of human weakness and the weaker members of his flock in Corinth. It could also be intended as an encouragement to the weak with whom he fully identified. As one who was keenly aware of his own weakness in many ways, Paul was in the best position to protect the interest of the weak and to champion their cause. Furnish has put the scholars’ views on Paul’s problem into three broad categories: (1) ‘As some kind of personal anxiety or spiritual torment; (2) As some form of physical or mental illness; (3) Related to persecution which Paul often experienced.’⁷⁹⁸ Martin notes that the verb ἀσθενεῖν (“to be weak”) in 11.29 is a key word in the “Fool’s Speech” (11.21a, 30; 12.5, 9, 10). It could have a wide range of meanings: “bodily weakness or sickness...or the religious sense of a sensitive conscience (Rom. 14.1, 2; 15.1; 1 Cor. 8.11, 12), or a trait of inability to lead within the congregation (1 Cor. 8.9-11; 10.15, 31).”⁷⁹⁹ Barrett has rightly noticed the paradoxical nature of Paul’s statement in his comment on 11.29: “Paul declares that he is weak, and that it is in his weakness - his

⁷⁹⁸ Furnish, *II Corinthians*, 548-9. See §5.2.

⁷⁹⁹ Martin, *2 Corinthians*, 382.

humble and humiliated behaviour, his poverty, his unimpressive appearance - that the power of Christ is made known.”⁸⁰⁰

Forbes suggests that while “popular exegesis” tends to think that Paul’s self-confessed “weakness” was the apostle’s own awareness of his own “inadequacy for God”, in common Hellenistic usage as well as in Paul himself, the term ἀσθένεια carries “strong social connotations”: “‘weakness’ is the state of those without power or status.... ‘Weakness’ connotes humiliation in the eyes of others, rather than inadequacy in one’s own.”⁸⁰¹ Forbes’ observation is certainly helpful, although in the complexity of Paul’s thinking and experience, the word ἀσθένεια probably had a wider range of meanings for Paul than just the social aspect. Paul himself might perhaps think that his entire apostleship was characterized by “weakness”. Andrew is therefore quite right in describing Paul’s apostleship as “apostleship of weakness”.⁸⁰² Black also points out that for Paul “weakness is a sign of apostleship”: Christ himself was “‘crucified in weakness, but lives by the power of God’ (13.4). Far from contradicting the gospel, the sufferings, limitations, and weaknesses of the apostle are wholly consistent with it because the sufferings, limitations, and weaknesses of Jesus comprise the very core of the gospel’s message.”⁸⁰³ Black sums up his position on the matter: “the Pauline weakness motif is composed of three sub-themes: the anthropological, the Christological, and the ethical. There are the three inseparably related components of Paul’s gospel as well.”⁸⁰⁴

For Paul, unlike the worldly Corinthians who viewed human strength and weakness largely from the perspective of current social ethos, there was another dimension to

⁸⁰⁰ Barrett, *Second Epistle*, 302

⁸⁰¹ Forbes, ‘Comparison’, 19.

⁸⁰² Andrews, ‘Too Weak’, 263.

⁸⁰³ Black, *Weakness*, 139.

⁸⁰⁴ Black, *Weakness*, 228.

“weakness” from the perspective of Paul’s understanding of the cross, because “he [Christ] was crucified in weakness” (2 Cor. 13.4).

11.30 Εἰ καυχᾶσθαι δεῖ, τὰ τῆς ἀσθενείας μου καυχήσομαι. (“**If I must boast, I will boast of the things that show my weakness.**”)

If the power of God was indeed demonstrated in the weakness of Christ’s crucifixion, which was symbolic of human suffering in its extremity, it was thoroughly logical for Paul, who himself was now sharing the suffering of the crucified Christ, to say that “if I must boast, I will boast of the things that show my weakness” (11.30). With this bold and extremely paradoxical statement, which appeared like a kind of theological *manifesto*, Paul’s *apologia* could now be said to have reached its intended climax. Not only was what Paul said here a climax of his argument, some of the statements he made subsequently also showed that there was great consistency in what he had said here about his boasting in weakness.⁸⁰⁵

Paul’s boasting of weakness provided a marked contrast to the Greco-Roman sages in their respective use of *peristasis* catalogues. While the latter used it to exhibit their own human virtues, Paul applied it to his own situation, unashamedly highlighting only his own human weakness, so that in the end, if there were any “power” to talk about, it was entirely divine power which was manifested in human weakness. And while his Greco-Roman counterparts might sometimes attribute their success to divine assistance, it was often put in the background rather than up front. Moreover, in some cases, even when divine assistance was clearly or explicitly acknowledged, there was also the idea of *merited* favour, i.e., God, or the gods had only chosen the wise and virtuous for the exhibition. With reference to Paul’s catalogue of suffering in chapter 11, Anthony

⁸⁰⁵ E.g., 12.3, 5, 9-10.

Harvey is perceptive when he remarks that, had the catalogue come from a philosopher or a sage, such great ordeals successfully overcome would be a very powerful testimony to the strength of human endurance. But it was in the midst of a most heated polemics against his opponents and critics that Paul had referred to those ordeals from which he suffered physically and mentally. As one whose thinking had consistently been a drastic inversion of the current social ethos, Paul had again surprised his opponents and critics by using the catalogue to “boast” of his weakness, rather than his own strength.⁸⁰⁶ Similarly, it was also in a most polemical context that Paul in his concluding remark in Gal. 6.17 had referred to the carrying of “the marks of Jesus” that were “branded” on his body. Again, it was clearly not for human praise and admiration, as in the Greco-Roman tradition or in the Maccabean story, that Paul had used that kind of “body language” which was clearly vivid. Such body language had to be conveyed so that no one would “make trouble” for him (Gal. 6.17a). And at the back of Paul’s mind, just like in 2 Cor. 11 where his many ordeals were itemised, was the theology of the cross: “May I never boast of anything except the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world” (Gal. 6.14).

11.31 ὁ θεὸς καὶ πατὴρ τοῦ κυρίου Ἰησοῦ οἶδεν, ὁ ὢν εὐλογητὸς εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας, ὅτι οὐ ψεύδομαι. (**“The God and Father of the Lord Jesus (blessed be he forever!) knows that I do not lie.”**) **32** ἐν Δαμασκῷ ὁ ἐθνάρχης Ἀρέτα τοῦ βασιλέως ἐφρούρει τὴν πόλιν Δαμασκηνῶν πιάσαι με, (**“In Damascus, The governor under King Aretas guarded the city of Damascus in order to seize me,”**) **33** καὶ διὰ θυρίδος ἐν σαργάνῃ ἐχαλάσθην διὰ τοῦ τείχους καὶ ἐξέφυγον τὰς χεῖρας αὐτοῦ. (**“but I was let down in a basket through a window in the wall, and escaped from his hands.”**)

⁸⁰⁶ A. E. Harvey, *Renewal through Suffering: A Study of 2 Corinthians* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1996), 102.

Realizing the serious nature of what he had testified in 11.23-30, Paul thought it proper to appeal to God the Father as witness to the truth (11.31). And the following incident he recalled (11.32, 33) clearly showed that Paul was indeed not lying, for no liar would recall publicly such an embarrassing story. As Furnish has rightly pointed out “it is a story about Paul’s humiliation, not about his heroism.”⁸⁰⁷ There was clearly nothing heroic about such an escape, especially in comparison or contrast to the sages in the Socratic or Stoic tradition. This point also serves as a warning to any attempt to try to compare the Greco-Roman sages or philosophers with Paul, the “fool” and δοῦλος of Christ. For instance, the “weak” apostle could hardly fit into Cicero’s ideal of the brave and wise: “...when the Wise Man is suffering torments of pain, he will say ‘How pleasant this is! How little I mind’” (*Fin.* 5.27.80; cf. *Pis.* 42)! Nor was Paul keen to be an “Olympic victor”, which was Epictetus’ concern with regards to training and discipline (1.24.1-2).

Having said that, it is necessary and important, however, to bear in mind that Paul was actually in some ways “brave” as well as being very disciplined, even by Stoic standards, e.g., when confronted with a violent mob, with a king or Roman governors or senior officials, both Roman and Jewish, including his response to life-threatening sea storm and shipwreck and so on. Moreover, as one who was “always carrying in the body the death of Jesus” (2 Cor. 4.10) or “the marks of Jesus” (Gal. 6.17), Paul could well be said to be equally prepared as the Stoics for the expected as well as the most unexpected; yes, even death itself.

In stark contrast to Socrates’ dualism which regarded the physical body as essentially evil, and death as the liberation of the soul from the burdensome body, Paul took the

⁸⁰⁷ Furnish, *II Corinthians*, 542.

human body as a divine gift, even as a “temple of the holy spirit” (1 Cor. 6.19). As such, the suffering and mutilation of the body became the more painful for Paul both physically and spiritually. This point must be taken into serious consideration when discussing suffering and hardship in which the human body and “body language” were deeply involved. Although Paul managed to bear all those bodily pains by the enabling power and grace of his Lord, at no point did the suffering apostle indicate that those pains were not real nor were they easy to bear. Even if Paul’s physical endurance could be compared to those of his Greco-Roman counterparts, his real concern was obviously not “endurance” (ὑπομονή) as such, nor was it other “virtues”, but divine power and glory, revealed in his weakness. It was not some kind of “moral ideal”, however noble, that occupied the *troubled* mind of the apostle (troubled, because Paul never claimed to have the kind of “steel mind” which was expected of the Stoic like Seneca), but the kind of “daily pressure” and the “anxiety for all the churches” mentioned, for instance, in 2 Cor. 11.28.

8.4 Conclusion

In the ancient Greco-Roman world, a man had to be most assertive if he wanted to establish himself in a very competitive society. The case has been demonstrated in the study of Greco-Roman rhetoric, especially with reference to the crucial matter of self-presentation which involved both oral and bodily delivery (or “body language”). It must therefore be perceived as another inversion of the current social ethos when Paul deliberately and unashamedly stated that if he were to boast at all, it would be his weakness (2 Cor. 11.30). Paul’s confession was intended to mean that he was just an *ordinary man* of flesh and blood, and most certainly not the kind of *superman* that the Greco-Roman sages and wise philosophers were often thought to be, or claimed to be.

According to this line of thinking, his escape from the hands of King Aretas in Damascus would be regarded as a most embarrassing act of cowardice. No true “Socrates” would ever do that. As to the catalogue of hardship in 11.23-28, the wise and virtuous sages would only use it to establish themselves in the status-hungry Greco-Roman society, and no sane man would ever use it as a confession of one’s own weakness. As such, only the “fool” in the ancient mime would perhaps do that. But for the sake of Christ as well as for “the message of the cross” Paul had willingly become “the fool of Christ”. Again, no inversion of social ethos could be more drastic than this.

Moreover, as far as Paul was concerned, the confession of his own personal weakness was not only meant to be, paradoxically, a powerful testimony to divine grace in his own life, it was also an authentication of his apostleship which had been in serious dispute, due particularly to the strong challenge of the “super-apostles” (11.5). This point was made very clearly in the strong and unambiguous statement Paul made just prior to the listing of his many ordeals (11.23). It is also important to note at this point that, if not for the provocation and challenge of his opponents, Paul would most probably not have referred to his suffering and ordeals in such a manner. The expressions, “I am speaking as a fool” (11.21) and “I am talking like a madman” (11.23) clearly suggested the provocative and polemical nature of his catalogue of ordeals. Moreover, while the suffering of Christ was not explicitly mentioned in chapter 11, it is reasonable to assume that it would probably be in the mind of Paul whenever his own suffering was mentioned. Just as Christ’s sacrificial suffering was the authentic mark of his messiahship, Paul’s affliction could also be regarded as the sure sign of his apostleship. One suspects that Paul’s opponents, amongst them the “super-apostles”, most probably could not produce a more impressive list of afflictions than Paul’s. Paul’s statement, “...with far more imprisonment, with countless floggings...” (11.23), quite

clearly implied that such was most probably the case. Even if Paul's opponents were able to list something equally or more impressive, they would most probably be employing it in accordance to the Greco-Roman tradition. It is obviously tempting to suggest that Paul had in fact used his *peristasis* catalogues both here in 11.23-33 and in other places (cf. 1 Cor. 4.9-13; 2 Cor. 6.4-5), out of careful strategic consideration. Even if this were really the case, the perceptive apostle would have been keenly aware of the risk he was taking when he boasted of his weakness rather than strength, for reasons which have already been repeatedly mentioned in the thesis. And unless the Corinthians rightly perceived paradoxically that it was precisely in Paul's own human weakness that the divine power was really manifested and effective, there was no way that they would acknowledge and accept his apostolic authority, because it was absolutely impossible for mere humans to ever conceive that any leader could have real authority and exercise it in weakness. And judging from the overall background of the Corinthians who had yet to be set free from the social ethos of the time, the likelihood of them being able to understand and appreciate what Paul was saying did not seem to be very promising.

Conclusion

As has already been stated in the *Introduction*, the basic hypothesis of this thesis was that crucifixion and the idea of “noble death” in antiquity; Greco-Roman rhetoric, especially its preoccupation with delivery and masculinity; and the Greco-Roman concept of *περίστασις* were all powerful and effective means of employing “body language”. It can now be concluded that the historico-social studies of these three areas have provided the necessary contexts for the exegesis of the relevant passages in Paul’s Corinthian polemics. Together with the exegesis of the relevant Corinthian passages it is hoped that the thesis has managed to show that there was indeed a conscious attempt on the part of Paul to invert the current social ethos in his polemics, and that body language is one vital link between three dimensions of his theology and social practice.

Throughout the thesis there has been an attempt to maintain a balance between the historico-social and the exegetical-theological in its overall approach. It is hoped that this desired balance is now actually reflected in both the contents and proportions of the thesis. Connecting the three parts of the thesis is clearly the “body language” in the three areas of studies: “Body language” in crucifixion in antiquity and the ancient idea of “noble death”; “body language” in Greco-Roman rhetoric, especially in its delivery and in its close connection with self-presentation and the concept of masculinity; and “body language” in the use of *peristasis* catalogues, both positively and negatively.

Part I began with the historico-social studies on “Crucifixion in Antiquity” based on primary texts. In order to show historico-socially some of the most horrible and disturbing aspects of human degradation and humiliation in crucifixion, many examples have been cited from primary ancient sources as well as modern scholarly views.

Special weight has been given to the crucifixion of people of lower strata of society, including slaves and Jews, because this most detestable form of capital punishment was commonly applied to them, including Jesus. The kind of degradation and humiliation that the crucified victims endured were self-evident in some of the cases cited. The public nature of crucifixion and the kind of “body language” conveyed by the crucified victims and the entire scene of the execution made this form of capital punishment the most horrific and cruellest manner of human death. The cross thus became not only a most powerful visual symbol, but also a very impressive form of “body language”. Those cases of crucifixion and the commentaries on them are not made in a vacuum, but in the concrete and harsh reality of their historico-social contexts which had moulded and shaped the social ethos of Paul’s time. These historico-social studies on crucifixion in antiquity have tried to answer the question why Paul’s “message of the cross” was such an obvious “folly” and great offence to the Greco-Roman world. This is followed by studies on the idea of “noble death” in both Greco-Roman and Maccabean traditions. These contextual studies have provided the necessary background for the exegesis of 1 Cor. 1.18-31. And since this thesis has also assumed that Paul was knowledgeable about the practice of crucifixion in antiquity and current public perception about it, his open acknowledgement that “the message of the cross” was “foolishness” (1.18) and his decision “to know nothing...except Jesus Christ, and him crucified” (2.2) could reasonably be interpreted as a clear intention to invert the current social ethos.

The classic example of noble death in the Greco-Roman tradition, as has already been made sufficiently clear, would most likely be the death of Socrates, the philosopher *par excellence*. For the Jews, the classic example would most probably be the martyrdom of the Maccabees. In marked contrast, the crucifixion of Christ was the most *ignoble* death in the eyes of the Greco-Roman world, and a terrible “curse” according to the Holy

Scripture (Deuteronomy 21.23) of the Jews. But *paradoxically*, it is this negative side of the comparison, especially between Socrates and Christ, that is most significant, revealing and challenging from the Christian perspective, because it brings out sharply the uniqueness of Christ crucified, making Paul's message of the cross such utter μωρία and σκάνδαλον to the world, turning its ethos totally upside down. Moreover, according to the main categories of the crucified victims which have been identified earlier, namely, the crucifixion of rebels, low class people, slaves, Jews and Christians, Jesus could be said to have died the death of *all* the categories. This point is profoundly significant in relation to the "foolishness" of "the message of the cross".

Paul was evidently dealing with some of the most crucial and complex issues in 1.18-31 in response to the perceived "foolishness" of "the message of the cross". These issues included the most sought-after wisdom, power and status in Greco-Roman society. Methodologically Paul very skilfully employed the antithetical and paradoxical ways of speaking. He did it by first dethroning the "wisdom of the wise" with the perceived "foolishness" of "the message of the cross" and put in its place the power and wisdom of God, which had been revealed and demonstrated in and through the crucified Christ. However, both the power and wisdom of God were not conceived by the apostle in abstraction or in a vacuum, but in and through the crucified body of Christ, which was the medium of a very powerful "body language", and which demanded a response from those who heard it, either to accept it for their own salvation, or to reject it for their own damnation (1.18).

The main problem with the self-conceited Corinthians was clearly that of boastfulness, and that was most probably the main contributing factor to their divisions. But Paul's antithetical and paradoxical approach left them absolutely no grounds for any human

boasting, because even by worldly standards, or by their much cherished social ethos, “not many” of them were actually “wise”, “powerful” and of “noble birth” (1.26). But here lies the great divine paradox: God chose what was “foolish” to shame the “wise”, the “weak” to shame the “strong”; and things that “were not”, to reduce to nothing things that “were” (1.27, 28). In the end, what was presented here by Paul in 1.18-31 was a revolution of immense proportions, and perhaps no inversion of current social ethos could be more radical than that.

Having dethroned the wisdom of the world and reaffirmed God’s wisdom and power in His calling of those who were “being saved”, Paul concluded his polemics by simply but most significantly reminding the Corinthians that Christ alone had now become “for” them, “wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification and redemption”, and perhaps everything. The Corinthians must now fully understand their *calling* and *identity* on this basis alone. And, if anyone dared to boast, let him or her “boast in (or of) the Lord”, but only on this basis (1.31).

Part II focused primarily on “Rhetoric, Delivery and Masculinity” in Greco-Roman tradition and in close relation to it, the current concept of masculinity. This exercise was deemed necessary because much of the Corinthian polemics had to do with human eloquence and one’s self-presentation in society. And it was in rhetoric, especially in the orator’s delivery that “body language” was most obvious and powerful in displaying some of the most important traits of masculinity. With this background as its historico-social context, the exegesis of 1 Cor. 2.1-5 and 2 Cor. 10.10 has tried to explain why Paul had deliberately chosen not to use “lofty words or wisdom” in Corinth, and why his “bodily presence” was so adversely perceived by his Corinthian critics. Paul’s decision to refrain from following the current social convention in his proclamation of

the gospel and in his self-presentation was again a clear indication that he intended to invert the social ethos of the time concerning the practice of rhetoric.

This thesis has taken the view that what has been said about rhetoric in the Greco-Roman tradition would largely be true in Corinth. Not only was the Corinthian opponents' criticism of Paul a clear reflection of the social ethos of the time, the apostle's response was also indicative of his knowledge about the whole issue, otherwise his polemics in passages such as 1 Cor. 2. 1-5 and 2 Cor. 10.10 would be quite unintelligible to the readers. While Paul on the one hand had decided not to resort to current rhetorical practice in his proclamation of the gospel, his determination "to know nothing" among the Corinthians "except Jesus Christ, and him crucified" (1 Cor. 2.2) was in itself a most ironical and paradoxical manner of affirming the power and effect of "body language". Because, given the historico-social background of crucifixion and its implications in Paul's time, it was virtually impossible for the apostle's contemporaries not to think about the kind of "body language" that the crucifixion of Christ conveyed. Although in 1 Cor. 2.1-5 and 2 Cor. 10.10 Paul might seem to be less concerned with his "message of the cross" and more concerned with his manner of delivery as well as his personal appearance, it must be pointed out again that for Paul his message could hardly be separated from his delivery.

Part III has concentrated on the study of *περίστασις*, with special reference to Stoicism which used it positively. This is followed by a close look at the other side of the coin of *περίστασις*, highlighting humiliation and human degradation, in close relation to Paul's personal tribulations mentioned in the Corinthian correspondence. Similar to crucifixion, noble death, rhetoric and delivery, the kind of "body language" that Paul's personal tribulations conveyed was equally clear and was thus most relevant and important to the

thesis. It must be noted that a great deal of the pains and sufferings were actually inflicted on Paul's physical *body* according to his *peristasis* catalogues (1 Cor. 4.8-13; 2 Cor. 11.23-33).

Generally speaking, the Stoic attitude toward hardship was basically *positive* for reasons which have been given in the study. This was, however, only one side of the coin. There was also *the other side of the coin* which revealed the significant fact that there was also a tradition in Greco-Roman society which viewed hardship, especially its physical aspects, with contempt and suspicion, regarding it as personally and socially degrading, and thus unworthy of true manliness. It was probably from this *negative* perspective that Paul's Corinthian critics had judged the apostle's hardship. Moreover, it was also probably from a similarly *negative* position that Paul had presented his *περίστασεις* in order to witness to the power of God in his degradation and humiliation, in a typically *paradoxical* fashion.

This part of the thesis began with extensive reference to classical writers, both Greek and Roman on *peristasis* catalogues, which was commonly regarded as a true test of the sage's manliness, courage and endurance. For lack of substantial evidence it would be difficult to be certain if Paul was aware of the tradition. However, on the basis of the apostle's vast knowledge about things that were around him in the Greco-Roman as well as the Jewish worlds, one might assume that Paul was relatively knowledgeable about such tradition. This thesis has taken the view that Paul most probably did not use *peristasis* catalogues according to the classical tradition, i.e., using it *positively* to demonstrate or prove his own human endurance and courage, so that glory and honour might be conferred upon him. For to do so would rob God of His glory and honour, and this would be the last thing that the *δοῦλος* of Christ wanted to do. This thesis has thus

considered it reasonable to assume that it was the *negative* or derogative use of the *peristasis* catalogues that was the main concern of Paul, because only in this way was he able to witness, paradoxically, the divine power that was manifested in and through his own weakness. And only in this way was he able to “boast” of his own weakness, an idea which would certainly be considered totally absurd according to the thinking of the time. But for Paul, it was precisely this perceived absurdity that made his “message of the cross” such a drastic inversion of the social ethos of the time. Exegesis of 1 Cor. 4.8-13 and 2 Cor. 11.23-33 has shown that what has been said about *peristasis* catalogues is consistent with Paul’s own *modus operandi* as well as his intention to invert the current social ethos regarding manly “virtues” such as courage, endurance, power and strength.

In the ancient Greco-Roman world, a man had to be most assertive if he wanted to establish himself in a very competitive society. It must therefore be perceived as another inversion of current social ethos when Paul deliberately and unashamedly stated that if he were to boast at all, it would be in the area of his weakness (2 Cor. 11.30). As such, only the “fool” in the ancient mime would perhaps do that. But for the sake of Christ as well as for “the message of the cross” Paul had willingly and most gladly become “the fool” of Christ. Again, no inversion of social ethos could be more drastic than this.

Moreover, as far as Paul was concerned, the confession of his own personal weakness was not only meant to be, paradoxically, a powerful testimony to divine grace in his own life, it was also an authentication of his apostleship which had been in serious dispute, due particularly to the strong challenge of the “super-apostles” (2 Cor. 11.5) and the like. This point was made very clearly in the strong and unambiguous statement Paul had made just prior to the listing of his many ordeals (11.23). It is also important to

note at this point that, if not for the provocation and challenge of his opponents, Paul would most probably not have referred to his own suffering and ordeals in such a manner. The expressions, "I am speaking as a fool" (11.21) and "I am talking like a madman" (11.23) clearly suggested the provocative and polemical nature of his catalogue of ordeals.

This thesis has obviously not been written in a vacuum or in isolation from general Corinthian studies. Quite on the contrary, it has tried to make good use of some works which have already been done on the subject with a deep sense of gratitude and profound appreciation. A significant part of the thesis has thus been built on those valuable materials and resources that are deemed to be most relevant and useful to the thesis. As such, the thesis does not wish to claim much significant originality in relation to current studies on crucifixion and "noble death" in antiquity, Greco-Roman rhetoric and περίστασις. What may be considered original in the thesis is the candidate's own search for and study on some of the important primary sources in classical writings. This is particularly evident in the historico-social studies on crucifixion and the concept of "noble death" in antiquity, and the theory and practice of rhetoric in the Greco-Roman tradition, in close connection with the ancient concept of masculinity. The idea of "body language" is certainly not entirely new in New Testament or Pauline studies. What may be considered new or original in relative terms is the attempt of the thesis to identify them *consistently* in *all* the three parts of the thesis: in crucifixion and noble death; in rhetoric, especially in its emphasis on self-presentation and delivery; in περίστασις, with special reference to Paul's own bodily suffering and pain and the "body language" it conveyed socially and symbolically. It is hoped that a "case" for the thesis has been established.

The title of the present study emphasizes “inversion”. It is hoped that the appropriateness of the use of the term has now been largely justified in the presentation and argument of all three parts of the thesis. As the whole thesis has been built on the hypothesis that Paul had a clear intention to *invert* the current social ethos, in his response to the Corinthian crisis, not only the use of the admittedly strong term “inversion” has to justified, the value and originality of the thesis also largely hinges on the appropriateness of the use of the term “inversion”. In a way, the argument of the thesis on this important point is rather simple and straightforward. Unlike the Corinthians, including his Corinthian critics who followed the current Greco-Roman ethos, Paul was operating on a world view which was diametrically opposed to it. For instance, Paul was putting *divine* wisdom and *human* wisdom in a diametrically opposed position. The historico-social study on crucifixion in antiquity has shown almost without a shadow of doubt that the cross was symbolic of some of the most detestable and abhorrent things in Greco-Roman society. It was in this context that Paul was keenly aware that “the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing” (1 Cor. 1.18). And *yet*, despite the apostle’s full knowledge of it, he overtly declared that he had “decided to know nothing” among the Corinthians, “except Jesus Christ, and himself crucified” (2.2). Similarly, knowing fully well the great importance of rhetoric, especially in its emphasis on self-presentation, eloquence and wisdom, in the social ethos of Greco-Roman society, Paul again openly announced that his “speech” and “proclamation” were “not with plausible words of wisdom” (2.4). Moreover, while the sage in Greco-Roman society would refer to περίσταςις to show his *manly* virtues, Paul deliberately used them to *boast* of his own “weakness” (2 Cor. 11.30). The thesis has therefore tried to show consistently in all its three parts that there was a clear intention in Paul’s mind to *invert* the current social ethos of the time. Such intention seemed to be clear right from the start of the Corinthian correspondence,

where Paul tried to demolish the firmly established Greco-Roman social ethos concerning wisdom, eloquence, social status etc. (1 Cor. 1.18-31).

Like many other theses, this thesis has also left some questions unanswered, and certain issues clearly deserve further studies and inquiries. As a candidate from mainland China, the writer of this thesis would like to pursue some of these issues from a *Chinese* perspective, in close connection with all three parts of the thesis: crucifixion, rhetoric and masculinity, and περίστασις. It is hoped that this exercise could make a modest contribution to Pauline studies in inter-cultural or cross-cultural contexts.

(1) Crucifixion does not seem to have been practised, at least not in the form of a recognizable capital punishment, in Chinese antiquity. As such, the Chinese, both ancient and modern, would probably not have reacted to it exactly in the way that people in the Greco-Roman world did. However, the Chinese would quite certainly find certain elements in crucifixion offensive and detestable, for example, the extreme cruelty that was associated with it. As such, it would be equally extremely difficult for them to imagine that a kind and wise Deity could have used the crucifixion of Jesus, an innocent person, as a sacrificial victim for the atonement of human sin. The divine act becomes the harder for the Chinese to accept when animal sacrifices had been consistently practised in China from time immemorial, but not human sacrifice. Moreover, precisely because of its offensive nature, the Chinese would probably be able to appreciate the kind of “body language” that crucifixion conveyed. This particular issue could perhaps be done in the close relation to Paul’s theology of the cross and in a much larger context.

(2) Rhetoric was also most essential to ancient Chinese education, especially to the literati and scholar-officials. In a male dominated society governed by the state ideology Confucianism (from around the second century BCE in the Han Dynasty to the end of the Qing [T'sing] Dynasty in 1911), masculinity was also a primary concern in traditional Chinese social ethos.

(3) The positive attitude toward *peristasis* in traditional Chinese thought would be quite comparable to the Stoic position, as personal suffering or tribulation was considered a most essential training for a potential leader/sage/saint not only in the early stage of his education, but also to keep him strong, virtuous and vigilant in his future leadership and continued self-cultivation.

As the candidate already has plans to translate her thesis into the Chinese language, not only for the readers in mainland China, but also for those in the Chinese *diaspora* (hopefully even for those Koreans and Japanese who could read Chinese), the pursuit of the above matters would be a natural and challenging continuation of her future academic career.

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