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CHURCH AND GENTILE CULTS AT CORINTH

MARK HARDING

Paul finds himself needing to address a number of issues in 1 Corinthians in which the Gentile cultic heritage of many of the readers intrudes. The two most significant of these issues are the eating of meat offered to idols and believers' participation in temple banquets. Scholars have argued that Paul uses terminology of believers which echoes and perhaps imitates the cults and, consequently, that Paul saw believers engaged in a Christian cult. However, from an analysis of Paul's discussion of the matters in question in the letter, it is argued that the redemptive achievement of Christ in history, and the response of believers to that work as proclaimed in the gospel, repudiates cult as the model for that response.

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INTRODUCTION

KARL Donfried's recent article "The Cults of Thessalonica and the Thessalonian Correspondence"¹ investigates the first century A.D. cultic context which surrounded the church in Thessalonica. His study suggests to this writer the possibility of extending the inquiry both to the cultic background presupposed by Paul in his correspondence with the Corinthians, and suggested by commentators in their exegesis of the first letter in particular. This essay, therefore, attempts to investigate (1) the nature of the cultic milieu in which the Corinthians lived as reflected in the correspondence, and (2) the extent to which commentators have been correct in their interpretation of certain passages from that cultic perspective.

FOOD OFFERED TO IDOLS

Paul finds it necessary to address a pastoral problem which has arisen with regard to the propriety of believers eating food offered to

idols. This was meat which had been slaughtered in ritual sacrifice to the gods before their images, and among that sold in the market.²

This meat is termed *ἱερό-* or *θεόθυτον* ("food offered to a god") by the Gentiles. Paul follows the Jewish practice in 1 Corinthians 8 when he employs the pejorative term *εἰδωλόθυτον* ("food offered to an idol").³ It is the meat left over from the sacrifice, i.e., after the god has received his/her share via the altar fire. In sacrifices to the dead and to the chthonian gods (the gods of the underworld), the victim was wholly immolated.⁴ But in the sacrifices to the Olympian gods, the bulk of the meat was consumed by the sacrificer and his family and friends in a meal at the shrine. The Greeks accounted for this sacrificial practice in myth.⁵

Returning to 1 Corinthians, the *ἱερόθυτον* was that which had come onto the market after the festivals when the numbers of victims were large.⁶ That not all meat on sale was necessarily sacrificial is a

²See H. J. Cadbury, "The Macellum of Corinth," *JBL* 53 (1934) 134-41.

³For a discussion of the Greek terminology see H. S. Songer, "Problems Arising from the Worship of Idols: 1 Corinthians 8:1-11:1," *RevExp* 80 (1983) 363-75 (364-65); see also *TDNT* 2 (1964) 377-79.

⁴See J. E. Harrison, *Prolegomena to the Study of Greek Religion* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1922) 16; Homer, *Iliad* 23:161-225 (the funeral pyre for Patroclus), Apollonius of Rhodes, *The Voyage of the Argo* 3:1026-36.

⁵Hesiod (*Theogony* 540f.) relates how Prometheus—the great champion of mankind—slaughtered a great ox and set two packages before Zeus; one containing the meat wrapped in the stomach of the beast, the other containing the bones but wrapped in "shining fat." Asking Zeus to choose which package he would like, the god (succumbing to the attractive presentation) chose the latter—the bones, the useless portion. "Because of this," concludes Hesiod, "the tribes of men upon earth burn white bones to the deathless gods upon fragrant altars" (*Theogony* 557). Cf. Homer, *Odyssey* 3.429-64, *Iliad* 1.457-74 where thigh bones are laid on the altar covered in fat with raw flesh laid on top. The usual ritual by which animals were sacrificed involved a procession to the altar undertaken by sacrificer, his company, and the victim (cf. *Odyssey* 3.456, *Iliad* 1.460). Once there the sacrificer offered prayers, invocations, wishes and vows. The victim, having been slaughtered, was dismembered. The inner organs were roasted on the altar fire. The sacrificer and his company tasted these thus sharing the meal with the god. Then the inedible remains, the bones, were burnt along with fat cut from the thigh of the victim. Small amounts of other food were also burned on the altar with wine added as a libation (cf. Phil 2:17, 2 Tim 4:6). The meat was then prepared for consumption by the worshipers at the sanctuary. In reality, then, the god received very little indeed. See W. Burkert, *Greek Religion* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1985) 56-59. Burkert bases his reconstruction on passages such as Homer, *Odyssey* 3.43-50 and *Iliad* 2.421-31.

⁶J. Murphy-O'Connor, *St. Paul's Corinth*, *Good News Studies* 6 (Wilmington: Glazier, 1983) 161. Writing of the annual "Little Panathenaic" festival in Athens—the "great" Panathenaic was celebrated every 4 years—Burkert says that the city officials received their share of the meat of 100 sheep and cows slaughtered at the great altar of Athena on the Acropolis. The remaining meat was then "distributed to the whole

reasonable assumption. Cadbury informs us that at Pompeii, at least, not all meat sold in that macellum was sacrificial meat.⁷

Should a believer eat such meat? Both the Jews and any believers they influenced would have insisted that such meat was tainted by idolatry. Moreover, it had not been killed in the prescribed way laid down in the Torah (see Lev 17:10–13). No tithe had been paid on it. Such meat should neither be bought nor eaten. Therefore the Jew was forbidden to eat.⁸ Pressure could have come also from within the congregation from those believers who were Gentiles and who now sought to avoid all contact with the cults. They had once participated in the cultic round. They once had eaten sacrificial meat as a matter of course. Such custom had now produced a built-in reaction to sacred objects; a reaction which they were not strong enough in faith to eradicate.⁹ Paul refers to these believers whose conscience is troubled as the “weak.”

The weak among the believers were apparently countered by those in the church who were of the opinion that since there was one God only there were no gods at all standing behind the idols of temple and shrine. If the statue—the cult image—was popularly regarded as the “residence” of the god,¹⁰ then, since there was only one God, food offered to the gods resident in the images was food offered to non-entities. The ritual was meaningless. The meat could not be tainted. These many divinities—so-called gods and lords (1 Cor 8:5)—simply did not exist. For the “strong” Corinthians, food offered to idols could be eaten without scruple.¹¹

population in the market place,” *Greek Religion* 232 (cf. 440 n. 34). See also G. Theissen, *The Social Setting of Early Christianity* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1982) 127–28.

⁷See Cadbury, 141, and G. D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987) 481 n. 21.

⁸See Exod 34:14–16, 4 Macc 1:2; G. D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 481 n. 25, C. K. Barrett, “Things Sacrificed to Idols,” *NTS* 11 (1965) 138–53 (146), and W. F. Orr & J. A. Walther, *1 Corinthians*, AB (New York: Doubleday, 1976) 228–29.

⁹See W. F. Orr & J. A. Walther, *1 Corinthians*, 254. Perhaps, as Barrett suggests, Rom 14:2 introduces us to a Jewish believer unable to obtain meat slaughtered in the correct Jewish manner and free of idolatrous association, “Things Sacrificed to Idols,” 140. On the question of the conscience of the weak, see P. W. Gooch, “The conscience in 1 Corinthians 8 and 10,” *NTS* 33 (1987) 244–54. Gooch argues persuasively that Paul’s use of *συνείδησις* in these chapters refers to the self-perception of the believer, not his moral conscience. The weak do not have a robust sense of their Christian identity (250).

¹⁰C. K. Barrett, *1 Corinthians* (London: A. & C. Black, 1968) 191.

¹¹Theissen, *Social Setting*, 121–43 (see especially 123–25) argues unpersuasively that the terms “strong” and “weak” are further related to the social status of the Corinthians. The “strong” are the socially privileged few (see 1 Cor 1:26–27) among the Corinthian believers. For them attendance at cult banquets was an integral and unavoidable aspect of their civic responsibility. The weak, on the other hand, were to

Paul sides with the strong to the extent that he argues that there is indeed one God and one Lord (1 Cor 8:6). Because the whole world belongs to the Lord, Paul argues in 1 Cor 10:26, meat both before and after the ritual still belongs to God. Robertson and Plummer helpfully paraphrase, "Meat does not cease to be God's creature and possession because it has been offered in sacrifice: What is his will not pollute any one."¹² Meat *per se* is a thing indifferent. "Eat whatever is sold in the market," Paul counsels in 1 Cor 10:25.¹³ In the context of chapter 8 where the issue is dealt with first, he insists, nevertheless, that the conscience of the "weak" brother must be guarded. "What if your weak brother should come upon you eating food offered to idols in an idol's temple?" he asks in 8:10. "Won't he be encouraged to eat food offered to idols and so sin against his conscience?" "Your freedom to eat," Paul continues, addressing the strong, "then becomes a sin against Christ" (v 12). Here we are moving from the issue of meat to that of the context in which sacrificial meat might be eaten.

TEMPLE BANQUETS

In 8:10 Paul asks the question of the strong, "If anyone sees you a man of knowledge, at table in an idol's temple, might he not be encouraged, if his conscience is weak, to eat food offered to idols?" One could encounter this food offered to idols in three ways—on sale in the market; at private banquets in a home where the meat served may have been purchased from the market and had been offered to

be found at the lower end of the social scale. As former Jews, they could only have eaten such meat with a bad conscience, or as Gentiles who had little opportunity to eat meat in the course of everyday life, the chance to eat meat in a cultic setting presented a "genuine temptation" (127). For a response to Theissen's arguments see W. A. Meeks, *The First Urban Christians* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983) 69–70.

¹²A. T. Robertson and A. Plummer, *1 Corinthians*, ICC (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1911) 22.

¹³For a helpful discussion of Paul's attitude toward the problem of *ἱερόθυτον* see C. K. Barrett, "Things Sacrificed to Idols," 138–53. Barrett believes that Paul is at odds with the "Apostolic Decree" (see Acts 15:20) in not forbidding all consumption of *ἱερόθυτον* regardless of the context in which it was eaten, writing, "In permitting the eating of *εἰδωλόθυστα*, Paul allows what elsewhere in the New Testament was strictly forbidden" (149). Cf. J. C. Brunt, "Rejected, Ignored or Misunderstood? The Fate of Paul's Approach to the Problem of Food Offered to Idols in Early Christianity," *NTS* 31 (1985) 113–24. However, Barrett appears to moderate this view in his more recent but much briefer comments on this question in "The Apostolic Decree of Acts 15.29," *ABR XXXV* (1987) 50–59 (50–52). Here he suggests that the Decree in forbidding the eating of *εἰδωλόθυστα* (see Acts 15:29) is in fact to be interpreted in the light of James' earlier reference to τὰ ἀλισγήματα τῶν εἰδώλων in v 20. Of these defilings, eating sacrificial meat, Barrett concludes, "pins this down to a special (and perhaps the most insidious) contact with pagan religion" (52). He seems to be referring here to eating such food at a temple.

idols before sale; and, at a banquet in a temple precinct. Paul has the third of these contexts in mind in 8:10. In chapter 8 he passes no judgment on the strong believer for eating at the temple *per se*. He does, however, hold him accountable for causing a weak brother to violate his conscience (v 12).

In discussion of Greek sacrificial practice (n. 5) it was noted how the sacrificial occasion was also the occasion for a meal—the diners dining on the sacrificial victim. The sacrificer and his company, by eating of the sacrifice, participated with the god. It was a meal shared.¹⁴ All the meat had to be consumed. Temples provided banqueting rooms for the purpose of the meal. The Asclepeum in Corinth had three such rooms which, writes Murphy-O'Connor, could accommodate 11 people each. Small tables were provided and cooking appears to have been done in each of them. Roebuck notes the existence in the center of each room of a block for a brazier.¹⁵ They could be hired out for private functions (in much the same way as one can hire a room today at a reception house or club). Murphy-O'Connor suggests that while some functions held in these rooms were purely social, others were held as “gestures of gratitude to the god for such happy events as a cure, a birth, a coming of age, or a marriage.”¹⁶ The Asclepeum was not the only establishment of this kind in Corinth. Greg Horsley points out that 40 banqueting rooms have been excavated in the Demeter-Kore precinct at the foot of Acrocorinth, a precinct which dates from before the sack of Corinth by the Romans in 146 B.C.¹⁷

Papyri have been recovered in which diners are invited to the god's *table* in his temple.¹⁸ Horsley cites three such papyri:

1. Nikephorus asks you to dine at a banquet of the Lord Sarapis in the Birth-House on the 23rd, from the 9th hour.
2. Herais asks you to dine in the dining room of the Sarapeum at a banquet of the Lord Sarapis tomorrow, namely the 11th, from the 9th hour.
3. The god calls you to a banquet being held in Thoereum tomorrow from the 9th hour.

¹⁴Homer, *Odyssey* 3:429–64, Aelius Aristides, *Orations* 45:27. See also n. 23.

¹⁵C. Roebuck, *Corinth*, Vol. XIV, *The Asclepeum and Lerna* (Princeton: The American School of Classical Studies at Athens, 1951) 52.

¹⁶M. Murphy-O'Connor, *St. Paul's Corinth*, 164.

¹⁷G. H. R. Horsley, *New Documents Illustrating Early Christianity*, Vol. I (North Ryde, NSW: Ancient History Documentary Research Centre, Macquarie University, 1981) 7. Horsley cites the research of N. Bookidis and J. E. Fisher, “Sanctuary of Demeter and Kore on Acrocorinth,” *Hesperia* 43 (1974) 267–307 (267).

¹⁸Horsley, *New Documents*, 1.5–9. See also *P. Oxy* 110 (A.D. ii).

The god was both host and guest at the banquet, concludes H. C. Youtie.¹⁹ Horsley writes, "The papyrus invitations . . . documents in quite a striking manner the situation which would have been known as normal and everyday by the recipients of Paul's letters at Corinth, and no doubt elsewhere."²⁰ There is, moreover, evidence of a cult of Sarapis from the third or second century B.C., though the remains of the Sarapea on Acrocorinth mentioned by Pausanias in the mid-second century A.D. have not yet been found.²¹

Returning to 1 Cor 8:10, we can assume that there were some believers at Corinth who considered that not only was food offered to idols to be eaten without scruple, but that accepting invitations to cult banquets was, likewise, an indifferent matter. The matter of attendance is shelved until 1 Corinthians 10 and raised indirectly in 2 Cor 6:14-7:1.²²

In 1 Corinthians 10 Paul exhorts believers to be on guard in their relationships with one another, to persevere in the life of a believer, to remember what happened to the generation which came out of Egypt at the time of the Exodus. "Remember what happened to those who worshipped idols," Paul urges his readers in v 7. They were overthrown. Their bodies were strewn about the desert. Having warned of the peril of thinking that one is strong and beyond temptation, he cries, "Flee the worship of idols" (v 14). In what context are believers in Corinth likely to be found engaged in this activity? By participation in cult banquets. In such banquets one was brought into partnership with the god whose banquet it was and over which he presided. Yet, Paul argues, eating the bread and drinking the cup of the Lord Jesus constitutes partnership with him. Loyalty to Christ excludes all other loyalties. The many so-called gods and lords have no further claim on the allegiance of the believer.

But has not Paul agreed earlier that food offered to idols is an indifferent item—that eating it is neither here nor there? In the development of the argument he asserts that what Gentile unbelievers sacrifice to their so-called gods is in fact sacrificed to demons (10:20). Participation in the sacrifice and participation in the meal which follows means participating with demons. It means having fellowship with evil supernatural personalities. One partakes and is a sharer of the table of demons.²³ This is not a matter of indifference. It is to

¹⁹H. C. Youtie, "The Kline of Sarapis," *HTR* 41 (1948) 9-29 (13-14).

²⁰Horsley, *New Documents*, 1.9.

²¹See D. E. Smith, "The Egyptian Cults at Corinth," *HTR* 70.3/4 (1977) 201-31 (217-18), and Pausanias, *Description of Greece*, 2:4:6.

²²For discussion of this passage (2 Cor 6:14-7:1) see G. D. Fee's article, "11 Corinthians and Food Offered to Idols," *NTS* 23 (1977) 140-61 and particularly 145.

²³W. F. Orr & J. A. Walther, *1 Corinthians*, 255, "This partnership is set up when the food is eaten at a meal where the dedication to the idol is identified," and C. K.

invite the same catastrophe which befell the idolaters of the exodus generation. He makes the same point in 2 Cor 6:14-7:1.²⁴

In 1 Cor 10:25 Paul returns to the issue of meat sold in the market. Although such meat may have been ritually slaughtered and offered—not to gods but to demons—the meat can be eaten. As meat, it belongs to God. It is not tainted. It will not harm. However it is the context in which meat offered to idols is eaten that is crucial. Eating in a cult banquet constituted the eater a sharer in the table of a demon.²⁵ But eating in a private house may be a different matter altogether (10:27). Paul is thinking “of social occasions which can acquire a cultic tendency, but do not have to do so.”²⁶ If the believer is informed, however, that the meat he is eating is “sacrificial meat”—*ἱερόθυτον*, the polite term is the term used (not “meat offered to an idol”—*εἰδωλόθυτον*)—then it is right not to eat it. This is enjoined on the believer, not because of the meat but because of the conscience of the informant (see 1 Cor 8:10-13; 10:28-29). We assume that he is a weak believer who has had his suspicions concerning the status of the meat confirmed by enquiry. The informant has given the purely social meal the character of a cult banquet. If it were in fact the case that this meal was a cult banquet it would have been obvious to the strong believer that the meat had come from the sacrificial ritual.²⁷

To what extent is the Lord's Supper the believer's cult banquet? Though this point will be taken up again in the section on the Mystery Cults, we can say at this juncture with Barrett that Paul “allows a limited degree of analogy between the pagan feasts . . . and the Christian feast.”²⁸ R. P. Martin cites and dismisses the theory that Paul was “a Hellenist who foisted on the church a sacramental

Barrett, *1 Corinthians*, 237, eating at an idol's table brought one into intimate relationship with evil spiritual powers. For the partnership and companionship of the worshippers with the divinity to whom the sacrifice has been made, see Plato, *Symposium*, 188 B-C. Cf. Plato, *Laws*, 653, and Philo, *Special Laws*, 1:221, as well as Homer (see also n. 14).

²⁴However, see G. Theissen, *Social Setting*, 122, 139. He argues that passive participation as a guest at a cult banquet is not specifically outlawed by Paul in 1 Cor 8:7-13. This is a concession to the socially advantaged among the believers. What is excluded in 10:14-22, however, is the reciprocal hosting of such banquets by the strong. That would amount to “idol worship” (139). Theissen's argument is, I feel, unpersuasive.

²⁵This is C. K. Barrett's point in “Things Sacrificed to Idols” where he summarizes, “Hence (conscientious scruples permitting) the Christian may freely use *εἰδωλόθυστα* and eat with unbelieving friends, To take part in idolatrous ritual is another matter . . .” (149).

²⁶H. Conzelmann, *1 Corinthians*, 177. Cf. C. K. Barrett, “Things Sacrificed to Idols,” 147.

²⁷C. K. Barrett, *1 Corinthians*, 243.

²⁸C. K. Barrett, *1 Corinthians*, 21.

doctrine which was modelled on the Greek Mystery practice of a meal in honour of a cult deity."²⁹ The analogy of which Barrett speaks consists in the fact that like the cult meal, the Supper (δεῖπνον) establishes communion/partnership (κοινωνία) with the Lord Christ, though, of course, with one who is rightly Lord and God.

Moreover, Paul speaks of the table (τράπεζα) of the Lord and the table (τράπεζα) of demons. Though *table* was an accepted designation for the sacrificial altar,³⁰ there is no sense in which the Supper of the Lord is a sacrificial meal. In contrast, the cult banquet was precisely that. The food had been offered to the god (ιερόθυτον, θεόθυτον). The believers' Supper on the other hand *celebrates* a sacrifice—or more exactly—a death (see 1 Cor 5:6–8). It is eaten in memory of Jesus' death and in gratitude for its benefits. Paul never uses the word sacrifice (θυσία) to refer to the supper. It is not eaten in a shrine or a temple before an image, but in a meeting, an ἐκκλησία. It is not eaten by worshipers participating in a cult, but by believers meeting together in one another's homes. That Christian writers came to use sacrificial terminology to refer to the Supper, thus departing from the New Testament understanding, is evident from the middle of the 2nd century A.D.³¹

THE BODY IMAGERY

It is quite possible that the body imagery surfaces for the first time in Paul's output in 1 Cor 10:17, 11:29 and more extensively in 12:12–26, and in Rom 12:3–8 as well. What is the origin of this imagery?

E. Best offers an extensive and persuasive treatment of the interpretation and possible origin of the imagery as encountered in the earlier Pauline letters. He concludes that the concept of Christ as

²⁹R. P. Martin, *Worship in the Early Church* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975) 121. However, compare H. Lietzmann, *Mass and Lord's Supper* (Leiden: Brill, 1979) 205–6. Lietzmann presses the sacrificial imagery too far in arguing that the Pauline Supper is to be regarded not only as an analogue to Hellenistic meals held as memorials to great men and cult founders, but also is to be thought of as a "sacrificial meal, in the elements of which divine power dwells" (205). He continues, "The symbolic words of Jesus now describe a spiritual reality: the faithful partake of the body of the Lord and become thereby *one* body with him and with one another: the *corpus mysticum* of the church comes into being. The simple table-fellowship of primitive times is now a mystical κοινωνία" (206).

³⁰See, e.g., LSJ and inscriptions and papyri cited, Mal 1:12 (LXX), Diodorus Siculus, *Histories*, 5:46:7.

³¹See, e.g., Didache, 14:3; Justin, *Dialogue with Trypho*, 41:3; Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, 4:17:5. See further, J. B. Lightfoot, *The Christian Ministry* (London: Macmillan, 1901) 124–35, and E. Ferguson, "Spiritual Sacrifice in Early Christianity and its Environment," ANRW II.23.2 (1980) 1159–89, especially 1166–89.

corporate personality explains the distinctive Pauline use of the imagery as applied to believers in their relationship to Christ.³²

Recently a fresh suggestion as to the origin of the body imagery has been advanced by A. E. Hill (and supported enthusiastically by G. G. Garnier and J. Murphy-O'Connor).³³ He observes that archaeological excavation has brought to light a number of terra-cotta representations of parts of the body placed in the Temple of Asclepius, the god of healing, as votive offerings. They were expressions of gratitude for the healing of that particular bodily member. Hill believes it quite likely that Paul, wandering about Corinth, inspected the Asclepeum (cf. Acts 17:16, 23), and observed these myriad dismembered parts of the body. Hill concludes that this emphasis on dismembered parts in the Asclepeum may lie behind Paul's exhortation to the believer not to tolerate dismemberment within their congregational life. Murphy-O'Connor similarly believes Paul was influenced by these votive images. The church, he urges, ought not to be like the "dead, divided, unloving and unloved" bodily members in the Asclepeum.³⁴ From this, he concludes, "it would have been an easy step to the contrasting image of the whole body in which the distinctive identity of each of the members is rooted in a shared life."³⁵ Hill's suggestion appears attractive particularly in light of the fact that Paul only refers to individual parts of the body in I Corinthians among his letters (see I Cor 12:12-26). Furthermore, the Corinthians were familiar with the cult of Asclepius. There had been Asclepeia in the city since the late fifth century B.C.³⁶

However the difficulty with this reconstruction of the origin of the body imagery in I Corinthians lies in the fact that the terra-cotta votives which have sparked this interest date from *before* the Roman

³²See E. Best's chapter, "The Body of Christ: The Earlier Epistles," in his *One Body in Christ* (London: SPCK, 1955) 83-114. See also B. Daines, "Paul's Use of the Analogy of the Body of Christ with Special Reference to I Corinthians 12," *EQ* 50 (1978) 71-78. G. D. Fee rather dismisses Best's discussion and conclusions. "The very commonness of the imagery," he asserts, "makes much of that discussion irrelevant," *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 602 n. 11. There is no doubting this "commonness." See, e.g. Aristotle, *Politics*, IV:iii:11; Xenophon, *Memorabilia*, 2:3:18-19; Livy, 2:32:9-12; Seneca, *Letters*, 95:52-53.

³³A. E. Hill, "The Temple of Asclepius: An Alternative Source for Paul's Body Theology?," *JBL* 99 (1980) 437-39. See also G. G. Garnier, "The Temple of Asklepius at Corinth and Paul's Teaching," *Buried History* 18 (1982) 52-58; J. Murphy-O'Connor, *St. Paul's Corinth*, 165-67, and "The Corinth That St. Paul Saw," *BibArch* 47 (1984) 147-59 (156). G. D. Fee is unconvinced, see *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 602 n. 11.

³⁴J. Murphy-O'Connor, *St. Paul's Corinth*, 167.

³⁵J. Murphy-O'Connor, *St. Paul's Corinth*, 167.

³⁶C. Roebuck, *Corinth*, XIV.154; A. E. Hill, "The Temple of Asclepius," 438.

sack of Corinth in 146 B.C.³⁷ The excavation reports clearly date these to the fourth century B.C.³⁸ They were found as fill, deposited before later Hellenistic and Roman building programs. Unless there was a continuation of the practice of placing such votives in the Asclepeum after the Roman re-founding of the city—and we have no evidence that this is the case—then we must conclude that Paul's imagery did not have its origin here.

THE ATHLETIC IMAGERY OF 9:24-27

The NT letter writers occasionally refer to the life of the believer by the image of the athletic contest (see 2 Tim 2:5, 4:8, cf. Heb 12:1, Jas 1:12, 1 Pet 5:4). Paul sees himself as the athlete in 1 Cor 9:24-27. He does not run aimlessly, he assures his readers. His commitment to gospel preaching and submission to the will of God is earnest. His one aim in persevering is to obtain the prize. For him it is a heavenly prize—as Phil 3:14 indicates—"I press on toward the goal for the prize (τὸ βραβεῖον) of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus." The athlete submits himself to pain and suffering—to the regimen of training and self-control (9:25). And the athlete, remarks Paul, receive a perishable wreath (φθαρτὸς στέφανος); we, on the other hand, an imperishable (ἄφθαρτος) one.

All Greeks would have been familiar with this imagery. The Corinthians were host to one of the four panhellenic (athletic) festivals—the Isthmian Games held approximately seven miles distant at the sanctuary of Poseidon at Isthmia. These had been inaugurated as early as the early sixth century B.C. They were dedicated to the god Poseidon. The games were not only for athletes. Drama, poetry and music also had their place. Like all such occasions, the Isthmian Games were decidedly cultic in nature. Oscar Broneer believes that,

³⁷I owe this insight to Mr. John Court, a post-graduate student at Macquarie University, whose study of the excavation reports of C. Roebuck first led him to doubt Hill's thesis. Mr. Court, whose observations are not in print, informs me that in his comprehensive study of the extant votives from Asclep around the Mediterranean, he is not aware of any to be dated later than the end of the first century B.C. He adds (*per litt.*) that this is not to say that Paul had not seen votives to Asclepius in travels. Venerable stone votives were still to be seen in the Asclep at Athens and Epidaurus in the first century A.D.

³⁸See C. Roebuck, *Corinth*, XIV.111-38 including Plates 29-56. After dating the material found in the deposits in which the votives have been found, Roebuck concludes his discussion with the observation, "The evidence of the coins, of the lamps, and of the pottery indicates that the accumulation of votives represented in the deposits began in the last quarter of the fifth century and ended in the last quarter of the fourth century B.C., when the precinct and Lerna were rebuilt," 137. The latest datable object found in the deposits is a Theban coin of 315-288 B.C.

since Paul stayed in Corinth for a period of 18 months (Acts 18:11) during Gallio's proconsulship, he would have been present in the spring of A.D. 51 when these biennial games were held.

Murphy-O'Connor speculates that Paul may have attended the games despite their cultic orientation.³⁹ Though Palestinian Jews had a long tradition of hostility to Gentile festivals,⁴⁰ Jews of the Dispersion may have lacked their scruples.⁴¹ Since Paul's trade was that of tent-maker and the visitors and spectators were housed in tents, Paul's attendance, Murphy-O'Connor concludes, would have been likely.

As we have noted above, Paul observes that the runners receive a "perishable crown." It is of some interest that from early times (c. 473 B.C.) the victors at the Isthmian games received a wreath of withered celery, not the fresh celery wreaths granted victors at the Nemean games (held approximately 12 miles southwest of Corinth), thus highlighting more acutely the contrast between the perishable and imperishable crowns which are the goals and prizes of athletes and believers respectively.⁴²

SACRAL MANUMISSION

In a justly famous section of his work *Light from the Ancient East*,⁴³ A. Deissmann enthusiastically argues that at the basis of Paul's assertion: "You are not your own; you were bought with a price" (1 Cor 6:19-20), and, "You were bought with a price; do not become slaves of men" (7:23), lies the practice of sacral manumission, the custom of releasing a slave in the context of the cult. Deissmann cites inscriptions from Delphi and elsewhere in Greece (though not from Corinth) in which the god "buys" a slave from his master, "for freedom."⁴⁴ It is clear that the slave has already paid the price of his/her freedom, having deposited the money in the temple treasury from which the master receives his price. The feigned transaction completed, the slave is now free from his former master. "At the utmost," adds Deissmann, "a few pious regulations to his old master

³⁹J. Murphy-O'Connor, *St. Paul's Corinth*, 17.

⁴⁰See 1 Macc 1:14; 2 Macc 4:9, 12-13. See also E. Schürer, *A History of the Jewish People in the Age of Jesus Christ*, rev. ed., Vol. 2 (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1979) 54-55.

⁴¹E.g. Miletus Theatre Inscription. For text and discussion, see A. Deissmann, *Light from the Ancient East* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1978 repr.) 451-52, and G. H. R. Horsley, *New Documents Illustrating Early Christianity* (Vol 3; North Ryde, NSW: Ancient History Documentary Research Centre, Macquarie University, 1983) 54.

⁴²O. Broneer, 'Paul and the Pagan Cults at Isthmia', *HTR* 44 (1971) 169-87 (186).

⁴³*Light from the Ancient East*, 318-30.

⁴⁴See also C. K. Barrett, *Documents Illustrating the New Testament* (London: SPCK, 1956) 52-53.

are imposed on him."⁴⁵ The deed of manumission is left in the care of the god. The slave is a completely free man.

With reference to 1 Cor 6:20 ("You were bought with a price"), the price of freedom, says Deissmann, is not that paid by the slave but that paid on his behalf by Christ in his death. But one senses that Deissmann has not fully perceived the implications of the manumission texts and the 1 Corinthians passages. Though for Deissmann, the slave was only fictitiously sold to the divinity, the price paid to which Paul refers results in slavery to Christ. Believers have been bought by Christ in the same way that God bought/ransomed his people from Egypt, delivering them from one bondage into bondage to himself (Exod 6:6-7, 19:5; 1 Pet 2:9). Such bond-service is perfect freedom.

The point being made by Paul in 1 Cor 7:22-23 ("For he who was called in the Lord as a slave is a freedman of the Lord," and "Likewise he who was free when called is a slave of Christ . . .")⁴⁶ is more helpfully explained by Francis Lyall from the standpoint of Roman custom. This custom is particularly appropriate since New Corinth was a Roman foundation.⁴⁷ He sees v 22 as reflecting the distinctive Roman attitude of the mutual obligations of freedman and former master. The master, now the patron of the former slave, cared for him should he be needy, sick, or homeless. He could not testify against his former slave. The freedman owed certain reciprocal duties to his patron. Lyall writes,

The free Christian is to consider himself the slave of Christ, subject to the full control and care of his Master. The Christian slave is to consider himself Christ's freedman, a full human being, yet not detached from his patron. Christ has freed him and will perform the duties of a patron towards him, summed up in caring for him. The freedman owes reciprocal duties to Christ to the fullest extent.⁴⁸

Sacral manumission does not illuminate these passages in 1 Corinthians.⁴⁹ The insights gained from a study of Roman customs appear far more persuasive.

⁴⁵ *Light from the Ancient East*, 322. On the precise nature of the sale to the god, see also S. Scott Bartchy, *First-Century Slavery and 1 Corinthians 7:21* (SBL Dissertation Series 11; Missoula: Scholars Press, 1973) 121-25. Bartchy argues persuasively that sacral manumission took the form of an "entrustment sale," the slave depositing the money with the priests (the god's representatives) as the one who as a non-person at law needed a trusted intermediary in the commercial transaction.

⁴⁶ Paraphrase of 1 Cor 7:21-22 in C. K. Barrett, *1 Corinthians*, 152.

⁴⁷ F. Lyall, *Slaves, Citizens, Sons: Legal Metaphors in the Epistles* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984) 27-46.

⁴⁸ F. Lyall, *Slaves, Citizens, Sons*, 44.

⁴⁹ See however Gal 5:1, "For freedom Christ has set us free." Cf. C. K. Barrett, *1 Corinthians*, 171; Epictetus, *Discourses*, 1:19:9; 4:7:16-18.

DELIVERING TO SATAN (1 COR 5:5)

In chapter 5 Paul confronts the serious immorality of a believer living with his father's wife. Paul counsels, "Let him who has done this be removed from among you" (v 2), adding, in v 5, "You are to deliver this man to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus" (RSV).

Many commentators see in vv 2 and 5 allusions to excommunication. This was practiced by the ancient Israelites (see Deut 17:7, 19:19, 21:21, 22:24, 24:7)⁵⁰ and by the Jews of the NT era (e.g., John 9:35, 16:2). Robertson and Plummer, commenting on the phrase παραδοῦναι . . . τῷ Σατανᾷ ("to deliver . . . to Satan," v 5), write, "This means solemn expulsion from the Church and relegation of the culprit to the region outside the commonwealth and covenant where Satan holds sway."⁵¹ Suffering and ultimately death, inflicted by Satan, would result, which suffering, however, would have a remedial effect.⁵²

Hans Conzelmann, however, highlights the reflection of Paul's injunction in magical incantations. He observes, "(This) shocking idea is to be understood in the first instance within the context of contemporary history: the view of the curse and ban as entertained by the whole ancient and Jewish world."⁵³ A similar phrase to that which occurs in 5:5 is to be found in a third century A.D. magical papyrus—an incantation for the driving out of a demon—in which the following occurs, "I give you over to black chaos in utter destruction."⁵⁴ Deissmann illustrates the verse by citing another magical papyrus which has the words, "Daemon of the dead . . . I deliver unto thee such a man, in order that . . ." (text breaks off).⁵⁵ Not surprisingly,

⁵⁰See P. Zaas, "'Cast Out the Evil Man from your Midst' (1 Cor 5:13b)," *JBL* 103 (1984) 259–61.

⁵¹A. T. Robertson & A. Plummer, *I Corinthians*, 99.

⁵²See A. T. Robertson & A. Plummer, *I Corinthians*, 99–100 and C. K. Barrett, *I Corinthians*, 126. This interpretation is supported by the RSV in its rendering of the Greek τὸ πνεῦμα. Adela Yarbro Collins in her article, "The Function of 'Excommunication' in Paul," *HTR* 73 (1980) 251–63, has challenged this by arguing that (1) the injunction must be interpreted "communally and eschatologically" (259), (2) the destruction of the flesh is a reference to the eternal destruction of the transgressor on the Day of the Lord, and (3) Paul was not concerned here about the man's possible repentance. The "spirit" (τὸ πνεῦμα) which must be saved is not the spirit of the man, but the Spirit in the church which must be "untainted by the contagion of impurities in the day of the Lord, by the ejection of the incestuous fornicator" (260).

⁵³H. Conzelmann, *I Corinthians*, 97.

⁵⁴*P. Par 574*. Text in G. Milligan, *Selections from the Greek Papyri* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1910) 112–14. Lines 1247–48 read, παραδίδωμι σε εἰς τὸ μέλαν χάος ἐν ταῖς ἀπωλείαις.

⁵⁵*London Magical Papyrus*, 46.334–35, fourth century A.D. Text in A. Deissmann, *Light from the Ancient East*, 302 n. 5; νεκυδαίμων, . . . παραδίδωμί σοι τὸν δεῖνα, ὅπως . . .

Deissmann concludes his discussion of 1 Cor 5:5 with the words, "the Apostle advises the Corinthian church to perform a solemn act of execration."⁵⁶

But as C. K. Barrett and G. D. Fee properly point out that there is a considerable difference between the Pauline injunction and the magical incantation.⁵⁷ In the former the transgressor is not handed over to Satan's complete control. The expectation is that he will be reclaimed if the discipline of excommunication is administered. In the latter, however, the powers of darkness are given complete control over the one into whose power he has been consigned.

THE MYSTERY CULTS

There existed in Corinth, as in many Greek πόλεις, so-called mystery cults. These cults, both native and imported from Egypt and Asia, existed alongside the officially sponsored state-cults. At Athens the state actually organized the famous Eleusinian mysteries. Speculation concerning the origin of the mysteries focuses on the possible survival of prehistoric agrarian cultic expressions.⁵⁸ In Greece, the mysteries were seen as the particular gift of Demeter the corn-goddess. They were open to men and women alike, to slave and free. Initiation often took the form of lustration.

J. A. Robinson helpfully defines the term "mystery" (μυστήριον) as signifying "a religious rite which it is profanity to reveal."⁵⁹ The

⁵⁶ *Light from the Ancient East*, 303. Cf. 1 Cor 16:22; εἴ τις οὐ φιλεῖ τὸν κύριον, ἢ τὸ ἀνάθεμα ("If anyone has no love for the Lord, let him be accursed"), Gal 1:8, 9 and 1 Tim 1:20. M. Smith goes too far when he argues that Paul (like Jesus) was a magician and that congregational meetings at Corinth were "largely group seances of which the most important elements were the invocation of spirits, the utterances they inspired, and the changes they produced in the personalities of the possessed." See his "Pauline Worship as seen by Pagans," *HTR* 73 (1980) 241-49 (246).

⁵⁷ C. K. Barrett, *1 Corinthians*, 126; G. D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 208-13. On the question of what is signified by the term "destruction of the flesh," Fee concludes that Paul is using "destruction" metaphorically, arguing that Paul's anthropology which does not envisage the separation of flesh and spirit (211), and the following purpose clause contain the key to exegesis, "It is especially difficult to see how an expected death can be understood as remedial . . . (210).

⁵⁸ See W. Burkert, *Greek Religion*, 276-78 for discussion. See also R. Bultmann, *Primitive Christianity* (Edinburgh: Fontana Library, 1956) 185-92; S. Freyne, *The World of the New Testament*, New Testament Message #2 (Wilmington: Michael Glazier, 1980) 35-41, and C. K. Barrett, *Documents*, 91.

⁵⁹ J. A. Robinson, *St. Paul's Epistle to the Ephesians*, 2nd ed. (London: Macmillan, 1909) 234. See too Herodotus, *Histories*, 2:171; and Plutarch, *On Exile*, 607C. Cf. G. E. Mylonas, *Eleusis and the Eleusinian Mysteries* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1961) 7. S. Angus's treatment in *The Mystery Religions and Christianity* (London: John Murray, 1924) 45-75 remains a valuable and detailed attempt to define the various elements of the mystery cults. D. H. Wiens, "'Mystery' Concepts in Primitive

word comes to mean something secret requiring divine revelation to be made known. This meaning is in line with the common meaning of the word "mystery" in English. Only the initiated had access to the rite(s). In the context of the mystery the initiate had experiences in which great terrors were provoked and dispelled by the rites. "For the 'mystes'" [the initiate], writes Burkert, "death loses its terror."⁶⁰ Robert Banks observes that the mysteries "catered for the psychological needs of the people . . . chiefly through various dramatic rituals in which adherents participated and vivid mystical experiences to which they aspired."⁶¹ Such experiences were termed redemptive or salvific.⁶² By participating in the cult drama, the worshiper felt himself re-born. It is suggested that he received from the god, who himself had been brought back from the dead, assurance of well-being (σωτηρία) now and in the future, even to the extent of a guarantee of immortality.⁶³ Apuleius, the second century A.D. Roman writer, describes in the last book of the *Metamorphoses* a procession of initiates of the Isis Mystery witnessed by his hero Lucius at the Corinthian port of Cenchreae. Lucius reveals that at his own initiation soon after,

Christianity and its Environment," ANRW II.23.2 (1980) 1248-84 is a helpful recent summary of the present state of the debate concerning the possible interface of the Graeco-Roman background and the New Testament.

⁶⁰W. Burkert, *Greek Religion*, 277.

⁶¹R. Banks, *Paul's Idea of Community* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publ. Co., 1980) 20.

⁶²"Salvation" (σωτηρία) is apprehended by the initiate. See also R. Bultmann, *Primitive Christianity*, 188; R. Reitzenstein, *Hellenistic Mystery Religions: Their Basic Ideas and Significance*, Pittsburgh Theological Monograph Series (Pittsburgh: Pickwick Press, 1978, reprint) 11; S. Angus, *The Mystery Religions*, 137-38.

⁶³See, e.g., R. Reitzenstein, *Hellenistic Mystery Religions*, 27; E. Lohse, *The New Testament Environment* (London: SCM, 1976) 232-43 (233), and A. J. M. Wedderburn's discussion in "The Soteriology of the Mysteries and Pauline Baptismal Theology," *NovT* XXIX (1987) 53-72. Wedderburn argues that there is no evidence for the initiates' dying and rising with the god, rather it was a case of their hopes of immortality being raised by their participation in the ritual, 56. On the other hand, the Christian has died with Christ (see Rom 6:5, 2 Cor 5:14). Donfried in "The Cults of Thessalonica," 348-49, citing an observation of Ramsey MacMullen (in *Paganism in the Roman Empire* [New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981] 55), disputes the view that the Mysteries offered worshippers any sure hope of immortality. However, see also the response of W. A. Meeks to MacMullen in *The First Urban Christians*, 241-42 n. 44. Striving for a secure eternal well-being is reflected in the mid-4th century writer Firmicus Maternus (*The Error of the Pagan Religions* 22:1) who reports the following assurance whispered to the initiates in an unspecified mystery cult, θαρρεῖτε μύσται τοῦ θεοῦ σεσφωμένου· ἔσται γὰρ ἡμῖν ἐκ πόνων σωτηρία. Wedderburn argues that the future "we will have (ἔσται) salvation" seems to contrast with the more assured perfect tense of "of the god has been saved" (σεσφωμένου), "The Soteriology of the Mysteries," 60.

I approached the very gates of death and set one foot on Proserpine's threshold, yet was permitted to return, rapt through all the elements. At midnight I saw the sun shining as if it were noon; I entered the presence of the gods of the underworld and the gods of the upperworld, stood near and worshipped them.⁶⁴

Lucius does not reveal the mystery, i.e., the details of the rite. Yet he narrates something of what happened, giving some enigmatic indication, without profaning the mystery. As a result of his initiation, he is a man re-born.

Now in 1 Cor 2:1 Paul says to his readers, "I did not come proclaiming to you the mystery (though see the textual variant, *μαρτύριον*) of God in lofty words or wisdom." In 2:7 he writes, "We impart a secret and hidden wisdom of God," or literally, "We speak the wisdom of God in a mystery." In 4:1 he writes, "This is how one should regard us, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God" (see also 13:2, 14:2, 15:51). Paul's use of this term *μυστήριον* is by no means rare (Eph 1:9, 10; 3:3-6; Col 1:26, 27; 2:2).

Accordingly some scholars have presumed that Paul was the purveyor of a mystery cult—a Christian one. According to J. Reumann, Windisch saw Paul as the arch-mystagogue, the arch-hierophant—the guide of the initiated, the leader in the rites.⁶⁵ Reitzenstein was also prepared to assess Paul in this fashion.⁶⁶

But it is clear in 1 Corinthians, and elsewhere in Paul, that he is using the word *μυστήριον* in a radically different way compared to the way it was used in the ancient world in the cultic context. If Paul has a mystery—a secret—he imparts it, speaking it and disclosing it to all in public. The "mystery" is available in the public arena. It is the once hidden divine plan for the redemption of the world through Christ, a plan which is now made known and declared in the historical facts of the life and death of Jesus, and now disclosed to the world—to Jew and Gentile—in the preaching of the gospel. It is these events which baptism and Lord's Supper commemorate. In them Jesus' redemptive achievement wrought on the behalf of believers was re-presented to the congregation. When one became a believer at

⁶⁴*Metamorphoses* 11:23 (Loeb edition).

⁶⁵See J. Reumann, "'Stewards of God'—Pre-Christian Religious Application of *OIKONOMOS* in Greek," *JBL* 77 (1958) 339-49 (340).

⁶⁶See *Hellenistic Mystery Religions*, 327 and 533-43. Reitzenstein (327) believes that Paul's teaching concerning dying and rising with Christ (see Rom 6:1-14, 2 Cor 5:14) has direct links with the Mysteries in which the worshiper dies and rises with the god in the cult drama. This view has no basis according to A. J. M. Wedderburn (see his "The Soteriology of the Mysteries," 53-57, and the detailed analysis of paucity of the evidence from the various Mysteries in 57-71). Reitzenstein himself provides no classical evidence.

Corinth one did not enter the realm of myth; one was not initiated into some great secret in which there might have been some hope of immortality. Paul speaks confidently about the resurrection of believers in I Corinthians 15 as a consequence of the raising of Jesus from death. Moreover, all believers are in possession of the "secret." There are no grades or levels through which the "initiate" must progress,⁶⁷ though some at Corinth have displayed by their factionalism a childishness which, as yet, deprived them of maturity. C. K. Barrett observes, "All Christians are potentially perfect or mature in Christ (Col 1:28), though only some are actually what all ought to be."⁶⁸ There is no distinction between those initiated. The "deep things" (I Cor 2:10) of God are available to all in the gospel which focuses on the cross and on God's redemptive work wrought there.

GLOSSOLALIA

It has been argued that the phenomena of glossolalia and their interpretation evident among the Corinthian believers find their parallel in the Greek cults; namely, in ecstatic utterance excited by the cult frenzy associated with the mystery cult of Dionysus, and the Greek mantic tradition as represented by the nearby oracle at the shrine of Apollo at Delphi.⁶⁹ In a recent article, H. Wayne House seeks not only to demonstrate affinity between glossolalia and these cults but argues that Corinthian believers' excess in regard to "tongues" was a result of believers allowing their background in these cults to influence their theology and conduct in the congregation.⁷⁰

That the worship of Dionysus and Apollo—gods associated in myth—was well known in Corinth has been established by Oscar Broneer.⁷¹ It is conceivable that former devotees of these gods were among the converts in the Corinthian congregations. But what evidence is there that glossolalia was a feature of the cults in question?

⁶⁷See Apuleius, *Metamorphoses*, Book 11. Lucius passes from his uninitiated state to worshiper of Isis, to priest of Osiris, and finally to the higher priestly order of the Pastophores.

⁶⁸C. K. Barrett, *I Corinthians*, 69.

⁶⁹That the cults explain the Corinthian glossolalic excess is described by Christopher Forbes, "Early Christian Inspired Speech and Hellenistic Popular Religion," *NovT* XXVIII (1986) 257-70 as the "consensus" view. J. Behm, for example, writes that "Paul is aware of a similarity between Hellenism and Christianity in respect of these mystical and ecstatic phenomena," *TDNT* I (1964) 724. See also Forbes' appendix "Works on Early Christian Prophecy and Hellenistic Religion" in his article "Early Christian Inspired Speech and Hellenistic Popular Religion," 269-70.

⁷⁰H. Wayne House, "Tongues and the Mystery Religions of Corinth," *BibSac* 140 (April-June 1983).

⁷¹See O. Broneer, "Paul and the Pagan Cults at Isthmia," 182.

House assumes that in the ecstatic state the worshipers of Dionysus spoke in tongues and that the entranced μάντις who received oracles from the god at Delphi pronounced them likewise. At Delphi, according to House, a priest/prophet interpreted what she said to the enquirer by translating the oracle into Greek. House, citing the authority of an article in the 1911 edition of *Encyclopedia Britannica*, adds that even the phrase "to speak in tongues" (γλώσσαις λαλεῖν) frequently used in I Corinthians 14 was "borrowed from ordinary speech."⁷²

The evidence for cultic glossolalia—both in the Mystery cults and at the oracle at Delphi—is surprisingly flimsy given the strength of the consensus. While it is certainly true that the worshipers of Dionysus did conduct themselves in a frenzy—dancing wildly, tossing their heads, eating raw flesh—the extent of their glossolalia appears to have been the wild cry εὐοῖ⁷³ and their acclamation of Dionysus by names of Phrygian origin.⁷⁴ Their εὐοῖ is an ejaculation, an outburst, a "Yahoo!" There is no demonstrable affinity between the glossolalia encountered in the Corinthian congregations and the frenzied shouting of the bacchantes.

Christopher Forbes has decisively rebutted House's assumption that the mantic pronounced her oracles in "tongues."⁷⁵ By a careful investigation of the ancient sources he concludes that while the μάντις was entranced she neither raved nor babbled nor did she deliver her pronouncements in a foreign tongue.⁷⁶ What she communicated was in Greek. It required not interpretation by translation but rather was announced by the προφήτης speaking on her behalf.⁷⁷ What she said might be obscure—in archaic Greek. She might deliver her oracles in

⁷²House, "Tongues and the Mystery Religions of Corinth," 134–50 (139). For further discussion of the origin of the term γλώσσαις λαλεῖν, see R. A. Harrisville, "Speaking in Tongues: A Lexicographical Study," *CBQ* XXXVIII (1976) 35–48, and S. D. Currie, "Speaking in Tongues," *Int* 19 (July 1965) 274–94; R. H. Gundry, "'Ecstatic Utterance' (N.E.B.)?," *JTS* N.S. 17 (1966) 299–307.

⁷³For this exclamation, see Euripides, *The Bacchae*, 142; Aristophanes, *Lysistrata*, 1291–94; Demosthenes, *On the Crown*, 259–60; Diodorus Siculus, *Histories*, 4:3:3.

⁷⁴See Euripides, *The Bacchae*, 158–59.

⁷⁵See C. Forbes, "Early Christian Inspired Speech," especially 260–67.

⁷⁶See Plutarch's definition of divine inspiration as encountered at the Delphic oracle (at which he served as a priest) in *The Oracles at Delphi*, 397C. "The voice is not that of the god, nor the utterance of it, nor the metre, but all these are the woman's; he puts into her mind only the visions, and creates a light in her soul in regard to the future; for inspiration is precisely this" (Loeb tr.).

⁷⁷See C. Forbes, "Early Christian Inspired Speech," and "Prophecy and Inspired Speech" (unpublished Ph.D. thesis; Macquarie University: North Ryde, 1987) chapter 8, "Early Christian Prophecy and its Hellenistic Parallels: Definitions and Terminology," 229–61. In the latter, Forbes writes of the rôle of the προφήτης in the oracular process at Delphi: "Instead of being the interpreter or versifier of the Pythia's

riddles. But she did not speak in "tongues." Nevertheless Forbes discusses an instance (the only instance of which he is aware) where the mantic did reply to the enquirer in a foreign language. The incident is known to Herodotus (fifth century B.C.), Plutarch (first/second century A.D.), and Pausanias (second century A.D.).⁷⁸ Having consulted the oracle of Ptoan Apollo near Thebes, Mys, a Carian, received his reply in that language much to the surprise and amazement of accompanying Thebans who clearly expected the reply to be in Greek.

STEWARDS, SERVANTS, SUBORDINATES, AND SLAVES OF GOD AND CHRIST

Finally, I want to deal with the following terms: "subordinates of Christ" (1 Cor 4:1); "servants of Christ," (1 Cor 4:1; 2 Cor 11:23); "servants of God" (2 Cor 6:4); "stewards of the mysteries of God" (1 Cor 4:1); and "slaves of Christ" (1 Cor 7:22).

The Greek words for "servant," "steward," "subordinate" and "slave" (δῆκονος, οἰκονόμος, ὑπηρέτης and δοῦλος respectively) of themselves do not have cultic significance. The ὑπηρέτης is a subordinate of another. Ὑπηρέται are to be found in any subordinate rôle; in domestic service,⁷⁹ as minor public officials witnessing and copying documents,⁸⁰ or as executors of the orders of a court or monarch. The οἰκονόμος can denote a steward,⁸¹ or an administrator

ravings, he [the προφήτης] was merely an official spokesman, with little or no direct role in the oracular process itself" (234). In the former Forbes argues that elsewhere it appears that the προφήτης was the priest-supervisor of the oracular session, 264. See also D. E. Aune, *Prophecy in Early Christianity and the Ancient Mediterranean World* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983) 30-34. Plato makes abundantly clear that there was a difference between the inspired μάντις and the προφήτης. While the former receives oracles while in a "state of frenzy" (μανέντος) the latter imparts the oracle in his "rational mind" (ἔννοος), *Timaeus*, 71E-72A. Cf. *TDNT* 6 (1968) 781-96 both for a general discussion of the phenomenon of prophecy in the Graeco-Roman world, and 787-88 for an analysis of the difference in function in which the μάντις and the προφήτης were engaged. At Delphi, the terms προφήτης and μάντις could describe the same person but not the same function. In contrast to the Graeco-Roman environment where it was the μάντις who was inspired and not the προφήτης, Luke and Paul perceive that the Christian prophet is inspired. Forbes writes that Christian prophecy "is the reception and subsequent public declaration of (usually) verbal revelation. Such revelation is normally spontaneous (we have no examples of it happening in response to enquiries) and the subsequent declaration is normally immediate," "Prophecy and Inspired Speech" (276).

⁷⁸See Herodotus, *Histories*, 8:135; Plutarch, *On the Obsolescence of Oracles*, 412A; Pausanias, *Description of Greece*, 9:23:6; and discussion in C. Forbes, "Prophecy and Inspired Speech," 140-41.

⁷⁹See Herodotus, *Histories*, 3:63; and Plato, *The Statesman*, 289C.

⁸⁰See *P. Tebt* 850.54 (170 B.C.), and 866.57 (237 B.C.); *P. Oxy* 260.19, 20 (A.D. 59), and *P. Fay* 26.20 (A.D. 150).

⁸¹See LSJ and passages cited there.

in the public service or of a private estate.⁸² Paul's Letter to the Romans was, in all probability, written from Corinth.⁸³ In 16:23 we read of one Erastus (see also 2 Tim 4:20 and Acts 19:22 for an associate of Paul of the same name) who is an οἰκονόμος τῆς πόλεως who sends greetings to the Roman believers. There was an Erastus who, before the mid first century A.D., held the Roman municipal office of aedile (commissioner of public works) at Corinth. He laid a pavement at his own expense in return for the aedileship.⁸⁴ The διάκονος was a link-man; a courier, or a waiter. The δοῦλος was, of course, a slave.

These four terms are found in the context of the Gentile cults. We meet the "subordinate" (ὕπηρέτης) in such a sphere in Dio Chrysostom, Diodorus Siculus, and Dionysius of Halicarnassus.⁸⁵ The "steward" is also a term found in the cults as Reumann summarizes, "Private societies of a religious nature employ the title οἰκονόμος for their stewards, and in the Sarapis and Hermes Trismegistus cults clear examples appear.⁸⁶ The διάκονος Θεοῦ ("servant of God") is a waiter or server in the temple. The term is used of a college of δίακονοι presided over by a priest.⁸⁷ The cults also testify to "slaves" of the god—attendants engaged in the precinct in menial tasks.⁸⁸

⁸²See Aristotle, *Politics*, 1314b7; Luke 12:42; *P. Tebt* 402.1 (A.D. 172).

⁸³See C. E. B. Cranfield, *Romans*, Vol. I (ICC; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1975) 12-16.

⁸⁴See J. Murphy-O'Connor, *St. Paul's Corinth*, 37; H. J. Cadbury, "Erastus of Corinth," *JBL* L (1931) 42-58; and G. Theissen, *Social Setting*, 75-83. Theissen believes that it is more likely that the Erastus of Rom 16:23 was in fact a quaestor (treasurer) in Corinth in the year that Paul wrote Romans. The usual Greek term for the Roman office of aedile is ἀγορανόμος. While the word for quaestor is ταμίης, it is not attested for this period. Theissen argues that Erastus held the office of οἰκονόμος τῆς πόλεως prior to the more privileged office of aedile—an office held for one year only. "It would have been mere chance were Erastus aedile in precisely that year when Paul wrote to the Romans while in Corinth," 81. See further W. A. Meeks, *The First Urban Christians*, 58-59.

⁸⁵Dio Chrysostom, *Discourses* 36:33; Diodorus Siculus, *Histories*, 1:73:3; Dionysius of Halicarnassus, *Roman Antiquities*, 2:73:2.

⁸⁶J. Reumann, "Stewards of God," 349.

⁸⁷*CIG* II, 1800:1. On the question of the term διάκονος in general see J. Collins, "Diakonia as an Authoritative Capacity in Sacred Affairs and as the Model of Ministry," *Compass Theological Review* 18 (1984) 29-34.

⁸⁸See the papyri and inscriptions cited by MM. Strabo mentions ιερόδουλοι employed as prostitutes in temples in his *Geography*, 6:2:6 and 11:4:7. In 8:6:20, Strabo populates the pre-146 B.C. temple of Aphrodite in Corinth with 1,000 such ιερόδουλοι. See also *P. Tebt.* (6.25 (40-39 B.C.) and *P. Oxy.* 50 (100 A.D.) where there is reference to the practice of manumission by "hierodulismus," in which "the slave paid a sum of money and became by a legal fiction the nominal property of a temple but in reality free," E. P. Grenfell and A. S. Hunt, *The Oxyrhynchus Papyri*, Part I (London: Egypt

Although Paul uses these four titles and the cultic terminology: such as "servants of God"; "stewards of the mysteries of God"—there is no Christian cult in Corinth. The ὑπηρέται of Christ are preachers—Apollos and Paul. The δῆκονοι of God/Christ, likewise, are purveyors of the gospel in the same passage (1 Cor 4:1) and in 2 Cor 6:4 and 11:23. The "stewards of the mysteries" are, once again, preachers. The "slave" of Christ is the believer (1 Cor 7:22). The "slave" of Christ does not render a specific cultic obligation but expresses, in his life as a whole, the fact that having been bought with a price (6:20, 7:23) he is under obligation not to live an immoral life (6:18). He is to glorify God in his body (6:20).⁸⁹

CONCLUSION

At a number of points in the argument of 1 Corinthians Paul deals with issues in which the Gentile cultic heritage of the believers conflicts with the commitment of believers to Christ. Eating meat offered to idols and participating in temple banquets are the two most significant of these. Scholars have nominated other matters raised in the Letter which, in their opinion, are illuminated by reference to the cults. These are the origin of the "body" metaphor in chapter 12 in Paul's consideration of the disembodied body parts which might have been on view in the Asclepeum, the practice of sacral manumission, the exorcism by magical incantation of the offender in chapter 5, and the presence of glossolalia in the congregations as an import from the cults and Mysteries. We have concluded that the drawing of cultic analogies in these instances is precipitate. The athletic imagery in 9:24–27 is a possible case of Paul using local color to make his point. Finally, we have emphasized that though Paul may use terminology which, in the case of μυστήριον, echoes the cults, and in the case of the servant/steward of God/Christ designations, imitates them, one cannot assume that Paul saw the believers as engaged in a Christian cult as worshipers. The contrast between the worshiper in the cults—both state and Mystery—and the believer who, on the basis of the divine redemptive work in history, relates to God in the sphere of interpersonal relationships as preacher and believer is studied and deliberate.

Exploration Fund, 1898) 108. This is most improbable. See J. Murphy-O'Connor, *Corinth*, 55–57 for discussion.

⁸⁹For a discussion of the terminology of serving God, see M. Harding, "The Terminology of Respecting & Serving God in the New Testament Era" (unpublished M. A. thesis, Macquarie University: North Ryde, NSW, 1987).