

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 New Testament Christology: A Big Bang?¹

Near the end of the concluding chapter of James Dunn's ground-breaking study of New Testament christology, he makes a summary reference to "...the tensions and pressures within the earliest Christian assessment of the Christ-event which forced Christian thinking towards a modification of Jewish monotheism that would give adequate place to Christ..."² The whole of his book constitutes Dunn's account of those "tensions and pressures" to which he refers, and it has since proved to be both persuasive and seminal for scholars studying the development of christology in the New Testament. It provides a comprehensive treatment of categories within Jewish thought, such as Wisdom, Logos, Son of God, Son of Man, Adam, Spirit, and Angel that both moulded and further stimulated an emerging theological dynamic that sprung first of all from experiences of Christ's resurrection. What it does *not* do, however, is to give an equally persuasive explanation of the other side of the equation implied in Dunn's statement above: what was it about Jewish monotheism in the first century that rendered it so susceptible to modification in the face of pressure from christology? At several places in his book, Dunn makes the point that Jewish monotheism needed no modification to allow christology to develop within its theological categories. Now, right at the end, he admits that a modification was happening. Where was the resistance from Jews both within and outside the Christian movement? Why is this not reflected within the New Testament, as we find in the case of Christian modifications to halachah?

Dunn has been aware of this underexamined problem both within this book and since, and his response seems to take three different forms. Firstly, his approach to the Jewish categories minimises the extent and significance of the changes: by explaining just how far christology could go without breaking new ground, he is saying in effect, "Well yes, Jewish

¹ I owe the characterization of the picture adopted by Martin Hengel and others as a "big bang theory", in parallel to the well-known cosmological theory, to John Macquarrie, *Jesus Christ in Modern Thought* (London: SCM Press, 1990) 49-50.

² James D. G. Dunn, *Christology in the Making: A New Testament Inquiry Into the Origins of the Doctrine of the Incarnation* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1980) 266.

monotheism did get modified, but not much.”³ A second implication of his position might be framed, “...and it all really happened rather late in the piece when the ties with Judaism were cut and those involved were mostly Gentiles.”⁴ We should note that the focus in Dunn’s book is on pre-existence and incarnation, rather than on all aspects of christology. If we switch our attention to the application of divine titles to Christ, for example, then we might possibly discover some early developments among Jewish Christians that are much more significant challenges to the shibboleths of Jewish monotheism. Further, Dunn has since emphasized the non-controversial (in fact) nature of christology in Paul’s writings and other early New Testament writings.⁵ The initial tensions between Jewish Christians and their compatriots were focused on other issues than monotheism, namely the Temple, the Covenant and the Israel of God.⁶

In a later article, Dunn sets out his position in contrast to Martin Hengel’s landmark statement regarding the development of christology by the first generation of Christians,

...and one is tempted to say *that more happened in this period of less than two decades than in the whole of the next seven centuries, up to the time when the doctrine of the early church was completed.* Indeed one might even ask whether the formation of doctrine in the early church was essentially more than a consistent development and completion of what had already been unfolded in the primal event of the first two decades, but in the language and thought-forms of Greek, which was its necessary setting.⁷

Dunn develops Hengel’s statement further:

Congruent with Hengel’s thesis is the more recent restatement of the older view that the payment of divine honours to and worship of Jesus was an early feature of Christology which must have been sufficient of itself to cause a breach with monotheistic Judaism. Here again the argument is in effect that the decisive make-or-break issues were already being posed during the time of Paul’s ministry and writings. Indeed, it can hardly mean other than that Paul himself, the most important and controversial of the early principal figures in Christianity’s expansion and self-definition, played an active role in sharpening the issues which focused in Christology. On this reckoning, the split between Christianity and Judaism over Christology was all over bar the shouting by the time Paul disappeared from the scene, with only the “i”s to be dotted and the “t”s crossed for the full extent of the divisions to become clear to all.⁸

³ This is my formulation, of course, but it is based on one of the main thrusts of *Christology in the Making*, Dunn’s demonstration of the great diversity of pre-Christian Judaism, and the extent to which some of its developing strands were already expressing a far-from-simple monotheism. For instance, he speaks of ‘nascent Jewish binitarianism’ which the Fourth Gospel is ‘in danger of stretching into some form of ‘nascent ditheism’ (p.264).

⁴ See his summary section at the end of Ch.7, Dunn, *Christology in the Making*, 248-50.

⁵ James D.G. Dunn, “How Controversial Was Paul’s Christology?” *From Jesus to John: Essays on Jesus and New Testament Christology in Honour of Marinus de Jonge.*, Ed. Martinus C. De Boer, JSNT Supplement Series 84 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1993) 148-67.

⁶ A book-length exposition of his position, structured by the concept of “the four pillars of Second Temple Judaism”, is provided by James D.G. Dunn, *The Partings of the Ways: Between Christianity and Judaism and Their Significance for the Character of Christianity* (London: SCM Press, 1991).

⁷ Martin Hengel, *The Cross of the Son of God*, trans. John Bowden (London: SCM Press, 1978) 2.

⁸ Dunn, “How Controversial?” 149.

Against the position typified by Hengel, Dunn minimises the rate of christological development during the first century, especially among Jewish Christians. So when reading Paul, who was the earliest New Testament writer and also self-identified as a thoroughgoing Jew, Dunn has the task of explaining the christological features that would appear to be in conflict with Jewish monotheism. In the essay just cited, he tackles three general points of early Christian belief: that Jesus was the Messiah, that his death constituted an atonement, and the “divine significance” of Jesus. In each case Dunn argues that Paul’s language, beliefs and attitudes never put him outside the Jewish pale. Why should he bother? Why can he not countenance the thought that maybe Paul and other contemporary Jewish Christians might have been involved in christological thinking that would put them offside with other Jews? The answer is simple, and sound: in contrast to the conflicts surrounding the other three “pillars”, *there is no evidence in his letters that Paul was aware of any controversy arising from conflict between christology and monotheism. For him, and by implication his readers, they simply coexist, with no visible signs of tension discernible to modern exegetes.*

This is the fundamental datum around which all recent discussion of Paul’s christology has revolved, an axiom from which the discussion begins. No one asks for it to be explicitly established, because once it is made explicit it is so obviously true. Where the disputants divide is in explaining this hard fact. Dunn maintains that the significant christological developments had not yet happened in Paul’s day; Hengel and his allies say it was all over, *including the shouting*. And that is just where Dunn’s argument is at its strongest: in his colloquial paraphrase of Hengel’s position he is in fact too kind in saying “all over bar the shouting”, because in Paul’s time no one was shouting about christology at all: the texts from that time carry no Jewish voices, nor whispering echoes of voices, criticising Christians for modifying or transgressing their Jewish monotheism. If it all happened in the two decades before Paul began to write the letters we now possess, why are there no aftershocks discernible to even the most sensitive exegetical seismographs? On this basis alone, Dunn’s position is intrinsically more credible, but it still must be argued, instance by instance. To one such crucial text, discussed by Dunn in several places, we now turn all our attention.

1.2 1 Corinthians 8:6: A Text Out of Context?

A crucial test for Dunn’s position is provided by one verse: 1 Corinthians 8:6.

αλλ ημιν εις θεος ο πατηρ εξ ου τα παντα και ημεις εις αυτον, και εις κυριος Ιησους Χριστος δι ου τα παντα και ημεις δι αυτοθ.

But for us, there is one God, the Father, from whom (is) everything, and we (are) unto him; and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom (is) everything and we (are) through him.

On the surface, this succinct credal statement seems to affirm a christology of the very highest order: in the course of an argument in which he rejects several inadequate monotheistic slogans, Paul gives his approval to this formulation in which “one Lord Jesus Christ” stands alongside “one God, the Father” without any apparent sense of incongruity. The very manner of its presentation implies that Dunn is right: here too, Paul’s christology is uncontroversial, or else its use in his argument would require further supporting arguments. And that constitutes the mystery that this present thesis sets out to solve. How can we read this verse in such a way that its uncontroversial nature is apparent?

1.2.1 Dunn’s Reading of 1 Corinthians 8:6

Dealing with the problem of Paul’s apparent ascription of a cosmic role in creation to Jesus here and in *Colossians 1:15-20*,⁹ Dunn acknowledges the serious challenge these two texts offer to his general theory.

The relevant range of material [the evidence of these two texts] first comes to notice because it seems to lift early christology on to a wholly new plane - where *pre-existence and a role in creation are clearly attributed to Christ*. Such an attribution surely lifts the christology concerned well beyond any thought of a vindicated or glorified man; the lines of *deity* are being clearly sketched into this christology.¹⁰

Dunn begins his solution by quoting several Jewish texts (*Prov.3:19, Wisdom.7:26, 8:4-6 and 8:22-30, 2 Enoch 30:8, and Sirach 24:9*) in which very similar language is used not of Christ but of Wisdom.

Any Jew familiar with such passages would at once recognize what Paul was doing in 1 Cor.8.6 and Col.1.15ff. when they heard Paul’s letter being read to them. Paul was describing Jesus in the language of divine Wisdom. *He was in effect identifying Jesus with the figure of divine Wisdom*. That point is clear enough. The crucial issue, however, is what such language used of Jesus would have meant to such a hearer - or indeed to Paul himself... This crucial question can be answered *only if we are first clear what such language would have meant for the typical Jew of Paul’s time quite apart from its application to Jesus*.¹¹

Dunn considers three possibilities for such an interpretation of the Wisdom figure: the straightforward polytheistic one that would understand Wisdom to be another god; a “hypostatization of divine attributes”;¹² and a personification of divine activity, “a way of speaking about *God* in his wisdom and in the wisdom of his action.”¹³ Only the third of these is credible within the Judaism of Paul’s time, in Dunn’s view, and he gives three reasons in

⁹ Unlike Dunn, I do not accept that the letter to Colossae was written by Paul. Following a well-established critical consensus, I shall refer to seven extant epistles as undisputed: Romans, 1 and 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Philippians, 1 Thessalonians, and Philemon.

¹⁰ Dunn, *Partings*, 195, his italics.

¹¹ Dunn, *Partings*, 197, his italics.

¹² Dunn, *Partings*, 197.

¹³ Dunn, *Partings*, 198.

support of this conclusion. Firstly, it is wholly in line with established Hebrew poetry and imagery. Secondly, it takes account of the fact that such language is applied in the Jewish literature not only to Wisdom but also to other figures including the Word of God, the Spirit of God, the Glory of God and the Name of God. And, crucially, there is “the constant stress in the same writers on the activity of God where it is quite clear that God himself is the acting agent and ‘wisdom’ just a way of expressing how he acts....*Such is the language of a Jewish monotheism so confident of its major premise that it can speak vigorously of God’s wisdom without any thought of attributing a separate divine status to this wisdom or of compromising that monotheism.*”¹⁴

Applying this finding to Paul’s application of the same language to the figure of Christ, Dunn draws the conclusion that here too a metaphorical reading must prevail, “that *this is the language of poetry and hymn, not of finished theological logic.* To interpret it in what we today might regard as its most straightforward sense is probably a sure recipe for *mis-interpretation.*”¹⁵ Jewish readers of Paul’s time would have understood his figurative mode of speaking intuitively.

The great probability is that Jewish readers would have been no more perturbed by Wisdom language used of Jesus than they were by the vigorous poetic imagery used for ‘righteousness’, ‘repentance’, etc. They had used the same vivid metaphor of divine Wisdom to express the full significance for them of the Torah. They would understand that the first Christians were doing the same in the case of Jesus. Hellenistic Jews anxious to explain or commend their faith and way of life to sympathetic Gentiles would be saying in effect: If you wish to have access to the wisdom which lies behind the world, the creative rationale immanent within the cosmos, the wisdom by which God seeks to bring humankind to the highest good, you will find it in the law. So they would recognize that the first Christians were doing the same: if you want to see the fullest and clearest expression of God’s wisdom, you will see it in Jesus Christ. This, in fact, is precisely what Paul says in his first reference on this whole theme - 1 Cor.1: 24,30. To Corinthians who were seeking wisdom in words and in terms of knowledge of the divine, Paul says, ‘You will find the true measure of divine Wisdom in the cross of Christ’ (1 Cor,1:20-25).¹⁶

Neat as this solution may seem at first, it does give rise to several further questions:-

1. In 1 Corinthians, Paul is writing to a predominantly Gentile rather than Jewish audience.¹⁷ Can we be sure they would have been as familiar with the Jewish Wisdom figure as Dunn requires?
2. To make a connection between divine wisdom and the crucified Christ, as Paul does earlier in 1 Corinthians, is one thing. It is quite a different conceptual process to connect

¹⁴ Dunn, *Partings*, 199, his italics.

¹⁵ Dunn, *Partings*, 200, his italics.

¹⁶ Dunn, *Partings*, 200.

¹⁷ Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1987) 3-4; Ben III Witherington, *Conflict and Community in Corinth: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary on 1 and 2 Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1995) 24-28.

Christ with a metaphorical “Wisdom” that is in itself a personification of God’s creation of the Cosmos. Is Dunn’s interpretation in itself a mixed metaphor?

3. As Dunn himself acknowledges, there is a significant difference between identifying the figure of a personified Wisdom, expressing God’s creative action, with the Torah which thereby becomes personified, and identifying that personified quality with an actual person. “To refer the personification of divine Wisdom to the Torah was one thing. But to refer it to a man of living memory was a significant step beyond.”¹⁸ Not only in living memory either: was personified Wisdom ever identified with a human being such as Moses or Enoch?¹⁹

4. Finally, we need to seek evidence that this is what Paul was actually doing in the context of 1 Cor.8. It is all very well for Dunn to speak of Paul “using Wisdom language of Jesus” and asserting that such use would seem unexceptional to his contemporary fellow-Jews, but he does not go on to say *what* Paul was actually using it to say, in the course of his argument. Are there any precedents in the Jewish literature for using the figure of Wisdom, in the course of a similar discussion to the one here in 1 Cor.8, to settle practical issues arising from conflicting forms of monotheistic belief, especially in regard to setting boundaries around cultic practices regarded as idolatrous?²⁰ And would Paul’s fellow Jews have found his use of this motif helpful as they heard his discussion of this issue? Dunn does not go on to give us such an exegesis of this text: he is concentrating on establishing the *possibility* of such a usage; that is of speaking of Christ or anyone else in such metaphorical terms without implying personal pre-existence and personal agency in the creation of the cosmos. But the exegesis is necessary if Dunn’s explanation of the text is to stand. It is not my intention to produce such an interpretation in support of Dunn’s reading, but rather to argue for a quite different reading of the text in its context. Nevertheless, I acknowledge that Dunn has established a first-century Jewish figurative space in which such language *could* be read, and can accept the corollary that figurative readings should always be sought before concluding that similar texts imply personal pre-existence and a pre-cosmic role.

1.2.2 The Missing Discourse Function of 1 Corinthians 8:6

This verse is often read as a dead end in Paul’s argument, a statement of Christian knowledge closing off a preliminary section that serves to dismiss knowledge as the basis on which to determine the issue at hand. This is typified by Allo, four decades ago, who classified the two parts of Ch.8 as “a) 1-6: ce que dit la science; b) 7-13, ce que dit la

¹⁸ Dunn, *Partings*, 200-01.

¹⁹ Dunn certainly found none in his extensive study of the Wisdom motif. Dunn, *Christology in the Making*, 168-76.

²⁰ I shall argue later that such boundary-setting is what is happening here, but not involving the Wisdom motif.

charité.”²¹ Such a reading gains some grammatical support from the adversive Ἀλλ with which 1 Cor.8:7 begins.

Likewise, Gordon Fee pays no further attention to v.6 in his lengthy interpretation of the remainder of Chs.8 -10: in his reading, from v.7 Paul has turned back to the pre-eminence of love over knowledge propounded in v.1b - 3, which he says enunciates the principle “that love, not knowledge, builds up, and therefore that love is what knowledge is all about.”²² Verses 4 - 6 are accorded a bridging function inasmuch as they establish “that though all may believe at the theoretical level that an idol is no god, not all share this ‘knowledge’ at the experiential, emotional level.”²³ That is, v.4 links and explains the apparent contradiction between v.1 and v.7. Verse six plays no positive role in the wider argument, merely explaining why Paul and his readers believe the monotheistic sentiments expressed in v.4 to be true rather than the polytheism of v.5.²⁴ So pervasive is this scholarly consensus about the irrelevance of v.6 to the wider argument of Chs.8-10 that Margaret Mitchell, in her recent analysis of the rhetorical structure of the epistle, sees wider significance for v.6 only in its phrase τὰ πάντα: Christ being Lord of all is the basis for the unity which, she argues, is Paul’s prime concern throughout the letter. Her only comment on the rhetorical function of the verse is, “He agrees with the fundamental principles of *both sides*, to which he adds a proper reminder of their unity in the common baptismal acclamation of one God and one Lord in 8:6”.²⁵

Mitchell’s comment illustrates an important corollary of this common reading of v.6. It implies that the formulation used is most probably traditional, or at least well established in Paul’s thinking, as in the minds of his readers. Why would Paul introduce it in his argument at all, if he intends to make no further use of it beyond this point, unless it is already well established as a credal formula which neither he nor his readers find contentious? It can thus function as a resting-point, a suitable summation of matters under discussion which can now

²¹ E.-B. Allo, *Première Épitre Aux Corinthiens*, 2nd ed., Études Bibliques (Paris: J.Gabalda et Cie., 1956) 202.

²² Fee, *First Corinthians*, 378.

²³ Fee, *First Corinthians*, 379.

²⁴ Fee, *First Corinthians*, 378-79. This is essentially the position taken by most other commentators. See Christophe Senft, *La Première Épitre de Saint Paul Aux Corinthiens*, Commentaire Du Nouveau Testament, Deuxième Série (Paris: Dechaux & Niestlé, 1979) 108-14; William F. Orr and James Arthur Walther, *1 Corinthians: A New Translation*, The Anchor Bible 32 (New York: Doubleday & Company, 1976) 230-35; Hans Conzelmann, *1 Corinthians: A Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians*, trans. Leitch James W., Hermeneia (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1975) 144-46; C.K. Barrett, *A Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 2nd ed. (London: A.&C. Black, 1971) 188-97; Allo, *1 Corinthiens*, 196-204; Hans Lietzmann, *An Die Korinther I.II*, Handbuch Zum Neuen Testament (Tübingen: J.C.B.Mohr (Paul Siebeck), 1949) 37-38; Archibald Robertson and Alfred Plummer, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the First Epistle of St Paul to the Corinthians*, The International Critical Commentary (Edinburgh: T.& T.Clark, 1911) 166-69; Frederick Louis Godet, *Commentary on First Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 1977) 416-21;

²⁵ Emphasis original. The “both sides” here refers to those who ate idol-foods and those who opposed them. Margaret M. Mitchell, *Paul and the Rhetoric of Reconciliation: An Exegetical Investigation of the Language and Composition of 1 Corinthians* (Louisville: John Knox Press, 1991) 241.

be agreed upon and put aside. Support for its traditional origin is provided by the opening phrase, ἀλλ̄ η̄μ̄ιν̄ : This is something true for “us”, for both Paul and his readers, and therefore presumably something already known. How would it be known, then? At this point, Form Criticism is often brought into play, highlighting the structural features of the verse so that it begins to collect labels such as “hymnic fragment”²⁶, “baptismal acclamation”,²⁷ and “confessional/credal”²⁸, suggesting that a tradition-history expedition might be in order, seeking to dig up evidence upon which to base a pre-history of the verse’s genesis within the primitive church. An older generation of exegetes, before the advent of Form Criticism and Tradition Criticism, had less difficulty in accepting that the apostle simply composed the verse, expressing the common theology of the earliest church in an uncontroversial manner: for them, there was no need to look for any application of this verse in Paul’s wider argument, because there was nothing exceptional about it.²⁹

Richard Hays offers an interesting departure from this approach, arguing that the verse is a traditional formula but used by Paul as the foundation for his ongoing argument.

Why, then, does Paul quote this confessional statement? First of all, he is establishing firm common ground with his readers, who will enthusiastically share in the monotheistic affirmation of verses 5-6. At the same time, however, by bringing this formula into play, he has subtly broadened the theological basis on which the discussion of idol meat must occur. Christian thought about this problem must start neither from an abstract doctrine of monotheism nor from a theoretical statement of the “gods” that do not really exist; rather Christian thought begins from a confession that binds us specifically to the one God of Israel and declares our personal union with and allegiance to this one God. We exist “for him” and not for our own purposes. To the extent that this confession of the one God echoes the *Shema*, we should also hear the echo of that text’s call to “love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might” (Deut.6:5). (Indeed, the reference in 1 Cor.8:3 to *loving* God - which seems to fit awkwardly into the context - suggests that Paul already had the *Shema* in mind a few sentences earlier.) All of this has a direct bearing on the question of idol meat: this one God of Israel is a “jealous God” who is well known to have no tolerance for idolatry. At this point in the argument, however, Paul is content to let that suggestion reverberate in the background; he will bring it directly into the foreground in chapter 10.³⁰

The links Hays identifies so succinctly between v.6 and Paul’s wider argument about food offered to idols seem inherently plausible, and I shall examine these in some detail in a later chapter. They are just the sort of thing we should expect to come from an exegete who has laid great stress on the importance of noticing the “echoes” of Jewish scripture in Paul’s writings and in other New Testament texts. However, he sidesteps the issue of explaining how

²⁶ Mitchell, *Rhetoric of Reconciliation*, 126.

²⁷ eg. Mitchell, *Rhetoric of Reconciliation*, 241, having it both ways!

²⁸ Richard B. Hays, *First Corinthians*, Interpretation: A Biblical Commentary for Teaching and Preaching (Louisville: John Knox Press, 1997) 139; Orr and Walther, *1 Corinthians*, 231; Conzelmann, *1 Corinthians*, 144; Senft, *1 Corinthiens*, 111.

²⁹ cf. Robertson and Plummer, *First Corinthians*, 167-68; Godet, *First Corinthians*, 416-19.

³⁰ Hays, *First Corinthians*, 140.

Paul might justify such an explicit modification of the Shema, by throwing our problem back into the prior theological development of the early church. He avers that,

Paul's present interest is not to reflect about christological problems or to explain the relation of Jesus Christ to God the Father. Still, we must observe in passing that the early Christian confession cited in verse 6 takes the extraordinarily bold step of identifying "the Lord Jesus" with "the Lord" acclaimed in the *Shema*, while still insisting that "for us there is one God." Paul and other early Christians have reshaped Israel's faith in such a way that Jesus is now acclaimed as Lord within the framework of monotheism. It is a great pity that Paul's surviving letters nowhere take up this paradox as a topic for extended discussion.³¹

A pity indeed, although we might make two points in response. Firstly, it could well be argued that Paul does in fact reveal a key to his general thinking on this point in *Philippians* 2: 9-10, where the gift of the divine name to Jesus in his exaltation is seen as a means of glorifying the Father: not an extended discussion, certainly, but at least a good clue as to why Paul may have not considered such use of "the Lord" to be paradoxical at all. But it is more germane to our present purpose to focus on Hays' exegesis of the verse before us and to note that while affirming its significance for Paul's subsequent argument he uses the established label of "early Christian confession" to avoid considering the possibility that an exploration of that significance-in-context might uncover the very sort of discussion he would like to have had from Paul, albeit an implicit one.

Hays' exegesis of this verse is in line with an emerging readiness among a few recent commentators to read Paul's discussion of theological issues in vv.1 - 6 as laying a positive foundation for the ensuing discussion of Christian *praxis* in 8:7 - 11.1. Once that door is opened, we are squarely faced with the further possibility that verse 6 is Paul's own formulation, even composed specifically for this epistle. The significance of that possibility is not necessarily grasped by those who acknowledge it. After a brief summary of scholarly discussion of its possible origins in Hellenistic Jewish Christianity, and concluding that these "can neither be proved nor disproved",³² Fee jumps without any substantive argument to the conclusion, "Most likely it is a Pauline construct, created *ad hoc* in the present argument, but making use of language that he has in common with his Hellenistic Jewish origins. In any case, it so thoroughly fits the present argument that the question of background or origin is ultimately irrelevant."³³ Witherington allows that "Verse 6 is probably a Pauline adaptation of the Shema, one that reflects a reading of it through a sapiential lens."³⁴ An earlier commentator, Senft, raises the question of Pauline authorship in a footnote, citing three exegetes against it and one in favour, and by implication accepts the majority vote or else concludes that the matter is of no further importance, despite noting the dissenting voice of

³¹ Richard B. Hays, *Echoes of Scripture in the Letters of Paul* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1989) 140.

³² Fee, *First Corinthians*, 374.

³³ Fee, *First Corinthians*, 374.

³⁴ Witherington, *Conflict and Community*, 198.

Feuillet in this fashion: “selon A. Feuillet...la formule est si parfaitement adaptée à la situation corinthienne, qu’elle ne peut être que de Paul.”³⁵ None of these commentators seem interested in exploring the consequences of Paul’s suggested authorship of the formula.

1.3 Intertextuality and the Shema’

A vigorous recent argument for Pauline authorship of verse 6, by one who is fully aware of the radical consequences of this position, is provided by N.T. Wright in Chapter 6 of his study of Pauline theology, *The Climax of the Covenant*.³⁶

His position can be condensed into these key points:-

1. 1 Cor.8:6 is an implicit modification of the Shema, one of Israel’s most privileged texts, whose function within Jewish faith and piety is to encapsulate the centre of Torah observance and Israel’s covenant obligations.
2. Paul is the author of this modification, which he has produced in the course of composing this epistle to Corinth and to fulfil his purposes in this specific situation. The modified formula plays an essential part in his resolution of the issue at hand, concerning idolatry and the issue of food offered to idols.
3. Paul’s purpose in constructing this modified monotheistic formula is to arrive at a distinctively Christian theological formulation that will not only encapsulate a christological redefinition of monotheistic faith in God but in doing so will implicitly give a christologically determined answer to the question, “Who are the people of God?”. It is this question that lies at the heart of the boundary-marking problems raised by Christian *praxis* concerning food offered to idols. “He is going back to the foundations, and laying the claim that the people formed by *this* formula of belief form a new family with a new family code of behaviour.”³⁷
4. Although brought into being in response to the situation in Corinth, the modified formula is intended to remain as a permanent statement, both expressing and demarcating the separate being of the Christian faith community now emerging as a social entity distinguished from the old social divide between Jew and Greek, Israel and the nations. Within the new context of this faith community, the language and concepts of Israel’s scriptures are given new content. Christology thus both affirms received concepts and statements (notably, Wisdom, Messiah, and the Oneness of God) and transforms them into new theology, by the inescapable pressure of its own inner dynamic. This transformation is major rather than incremental: Wright refers to “the enormity of the theological move implied in v.6” and “the unprecedented bifurcation

³⁵ Senft, *I Corinthiens*, 111 n.17.

³⁶ N. T. Wright, *The Climax of the Covenant: Christ and the Law in Pauline Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992) 120-36.

³⁷ Wright, *Climax of the Covenant*, 130. In my fourth chapter I shall argue strongly that 1 Cor.8:6 does indeed have strong family associations, but not on the basis that Wright offers here: not as a modification of monotheism.

within monotheism that he (Paul) believes must be expressed.”³⁸ Paul’s specific intent in composing v.6 as a new formulation of “christological monotheism” is to draw a line of demarcation between the Christian community and other Jewish monotheists. He is constructing a new creed in order to force a separation between those who stand within the Christian community and make this confession and all those who do not, both pagans and monotheists.

It is therefore this confession that marks out the people of God against their neighbours, both Jewish and pagan, much as in the tripartite division of 10.32. The confession of ‘one God, one Lord’ marked the community out sociologically as well as theologically.³⁹

Wright’s reading of this key verse is clearly stated and its ramifications made clear. The first two points seem to provide a sound basis for further discussion, as has been implied by my summary of other commentators, and I shall do so later at some length. The third and fourth points, however, are very much open to dispute. They combine to constitute the dividing line between his position and that of Dunn, and thereby focus us on the crucial issues in our present investigation. As an initial response to Wright, we can pose several critical questions indicating the vulnerability of his position to further debate:-

1. If Paul intends v.6 to constitute a new boundary marker, why does he introduce it with so little fuss? Where are the signs of controversy? Where is his defence against those who will find it objectionable? This is Dunn’s fundamental question regarding this text, and the strength of his position concerning New Testament christology in general: it was not conspicuously controversial.
2. Wright’s exposition of Paul’s thought is heavily theological, in the sense of providing an abstract, even philosophical, analysis of the significance of both the Jewish and christological versions of monotheism, and then postulating the latter as an explanation of the logic of Paul’s argument in Chapters 8 to 10 of this epistle. What he does not do is to provide a correspondingly detailed analysis of the subsequent text to demonstrate the outworking of that inferred logic. He depicts Paul as he were operating as a philosopher in this chapter.⁴⁰ Can

³⁸ Wright, *Climax of the Covenant*, 130.

³⁹ Wright, *Climax of the Covenant*, 132.

⁴⁰ Consider this sampling of Wright’s language as he explains what Paul is doing in 1 Cor.8: “Jewish monotheism at this period was not a matter of theoretical belief, of speculative investigation of the being of God for its own sake. It was the fighting doctrine which engaged in battle on two fronts: against dualism, the rejection of the goodness of the created order, and against paganism, the deification of the created order or parts of it, or of forces within it. The second of these (paganism) seems to have been more important in the period we are considering Monotheism was therefore exactly the doctrine to which one would appeal in going back to first principles when faced with the question as to how a group that asserted its continuity with the people of God (cf. 1 Corinthians 10:1, etc.) might behave when faced with living in a pagan society. Equally, it is clear that Paul, like many Jews of his period, was just as alert to the dangers of lapsing into a metaphysical or ontological dualism This two-pronged battle, I suggest, helps to explain the delicate nature of Paul’s argument throughout 1 Corinthians 8. He is determined to maintain the balance of genuine creational monotheism, warding off the dangers (as he would see it) of dualism on the one hand and of paganism on the other.” Wright, *Climax of the Covenant*, 125-26. While such abstractions are the tools of philosophical analysis,

this be confirmed empirically, from the wider passage?

3. In this letter in general, and concerning the issue of idol-food in particular, does Paul really want to encourage a further separation of the Christian community from its Jewish and Greek social environment? Wright takes 10:32, with its tripartite phrasing, *Ἰουδαίους...καὶ Ἕλλησιν καὶ τῇ ἐκκλησίᾳ τοῦ θεοῦ*, in support, holding that Paul is already thinking of the Christian community of faith as constituting a social entity in distinction from Jews and Greeks, a new nation in effect. That idea has recently been subjected to heavy criticism from scholars who emphasize Paul's ongoing self-identification as a Jew and point out the need for rigorous scrutiny of one's own presuppositions before reading Paul in such terms, especially if one is European, Protestant and Gentile.⁴¹ At the very least, we must now say that the hermeneutical onus is very much on Wright to prove his case at this point. We might also argue that if he had cited 10:32 in full, as *ἀπρόσκοποι καὶ Ἰουδαίους γίνεσθε καὶ Ἕλλησιν καὶ τῇ ἐκκλησίᾳ τοῦ θεοῦ*, then he might have taken more notice of Paul's irenic intention at that point, to create social harmony rather than emphasizing communal distinctiveness.

1.4 Text in Context: An Exegetical Challenge

My introductory discussion so far has enabled me to set out issues of historical christology surrounding 1 Corinthians 8:6 as presented by the opposing positions of James Dunn and N.T. Wright: the former reading it in the light of his general thesis that the development of christology reflected in the New Testament was gradual and mostly uncontroversial, and the latter maintaining a version of Hengel's thesis that it all happened decisively and early. Wright in fact has characterised Paul's composition of this verse as "one of the greatest pioneering moments in the entire history of christology."⁴²

The fact that such contrasting views of this verse's theological significance can be held by two contemporary scholars who in other respects can be seen as very similar should lead us to suppose that their differences in view are rooted in the problematic nature of the verse itself. I propose to establish, in the course of this thesis, that it does indeed contain a number of significant ambiguities on several different levels, which are largely unexamined in the scholarly literature, and to engage in a detailed, principled contextual exegesis of this one verse in order to attempt to resolve these inherent problems.

The value of such an enterprise rests firstly in the verse's significance for historical theology: was it indeed a great pioneering moment in the development of christology, and if so what exactly was its distinctive contribution? But just as interesting is the exegetical

it is not so clear to me that they are an accurate description of the apostle's struggle for the gospel.

⁴¹ See the discussion in Daniel Boyarin, *A Radical Jew: Paul and the Politics of Identity*, *Contraversions: Critical Studies in Jewish Literature, Culture and Society* (Berkeley: U of California P, 1994), passim.

⁴² Wright, *Climax of the Covenant*, 136.

challenge inherent in the attempt to resolve the verse's inherent ambiguities. There is a lengthy tradition of scholarly interpretation of this verse and its textual context. If I am to argue that this tradition has failed to produce an adequate reading, I must also account for the plausibility of previous readings: how have so many learned predecessors got it wrong? Why have so many scholars been content to accept established readings? Coming at this from another angle, we might say that in order to establish a radically new interpretation of any text, one must argue for a fresh reading not only of the text in itself, but also of its context. If, as I suspect, previous readers have misunderstood the text, and remained unaware that they are doing so, then they must also to some extent have misread the context. I shall now consider one such eminent scholar as a case in point.

1.4.1 Thüsing's Approach

Wilhelm Thüsing's *Per Christum in Deum* is an important study of Pauline christology by a German scholar which has continued to exercise an influence in European commentaries.⁴³ Its value for my present study lies chiefly in the way in which its approach illustrates some key exegetical issues facing us as we seek to relate the verse to its context. He opens his discussion with the observation that the verse says more about God and Christ than is needed in the context, inasmuch as the end of v.4 ("...and that there is no other God apart from one") has already shown the nothingness of the gods and with it the meaningless of food offered to idols. "V.7 would join on to v.4 very smoothly"⁴⁴ he remarks, without supporting argument, presumably relying on the consensus of exegetical scholarship concerning Chapters 8-10 with which he is familiar. The verse's function is to support v.4 as a "familiar key sentence",⁴⁵ and v.5 acts only as a means of introducing it into the argument. On this basis he adopts the hypothesis that Paul has not "constructed this formula *ad hoc*",⁴⁶ but rather "found it somewhere else and introduced it here."⁴⁷ That somewhere else is then asserted to be most probably "a frequently used element of Paul's own preaching and instruction"⁴⁸ rather than a communal creed or a verse of a hymn. Support for that option is provided in the course of a discussion of parallel passages. The final crucial move in Thüsing's exegetical logic is his argument that the meaning of this verse can best be clarified by consideration of parallel passages in which Paul's use of the same terminology is semantically defined by the context, with special reference to Romans 11:36. We can summarize the essential logic of his exegesis

⁴³ Wilhelm Thüsing, *Per Christum in Deum*, 3rd ed., Neutestamentliche Abhandlungen (Münster: Aschendorff, 1986), 225-33 in particular.

⁴⁴ Thüsing, *Per Christum in Deum*, 225, my translation (as are the following quotations from the same place).

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

thus:-

1. Verse 6, along with v.5, is supplementary rather than essential to Paul's argument regarding idol-food.
2. It functions as a supportive formula, already known to and respected by the audience.
3. Therefore its meaning for Paul is not reducible to its significance in the present context.
4. The semantic fields of its key phrases are best indicated by an examination of other contexts (other arguments and other letters) in which Paul uses them unambiguously.
5. Such an examination will in fact allow us to conclude that this verse is one among several expressions of a theological viewpoint that is consistent and distinctively Pauline, however it may have been related to traditional community formulae.

The logic of an alternative possibility can now be outlined by contrast:-

1. Verses 5 and 6 form an essential part of Paul's argument regarding idol-food, which cannot rest on v.4 alone. (The chief possibilities are that they constitute an essential refinement of v.4 or that they stand in opposition to it)
2. Whether or not this verse was previously known to either Paul or his audience as a formula, and whatever its authorship, its meaning *in this context* is equivalent to its use and significance within his present argument.
3. Therefore that meaning must be isolated by an examination of that context in this letter.
4. If such an examination yields a sufficient explanation of all the semantic features in the verse, recourse to explanations of key terms or phrases derived from other texts by the same or different authors is at best only confirmation and at worse misleading. That is, other texts may indicate semantic possibilities, but they cannot do so exhaustively, inasmuch as the present text may well have something fresh to say; and recourse to usage in another text may suggest a meaning that may be uncritically transferred to the present one, blinding us to the distinctive qualities of language or thought in the text before us.
5. My subsequent exegesis of this context will in fact argue for just such a sufficient explanation of the verse's function and meaning.

The initial difference between these two alternative approaches is provided by the first premise in each case, and it is that difference I shall address as my first exegetical task. Nevertheless, I should also acknowledge that the logic in each of the alternatives outlined above is to some extent circular. That is, it is not possible to determine which of the alternative first premises is best without also developing a sense of how we will handle the consequent issues: we will be more inclined to read Paul's argument about idol-meat as an outcome of v.6 if we have a strong sense of that verse's semantic links with other parts of the letter (my position), and less inclined to do so if it carries strong resonances for us of what we perceive to be Paul's language use and theological convictions expressed in other places

(Thüsing's approach in what is, after all, a book dealing with Paul's theology in general rather than with the exegesis of this epistle).⁴⁹

My chosen approach depends largely on a set of related methodological presuppositions: that the significance of a passage must always be sought first of all in its own immediate textual context; that the context will provide sufficient evidence to indicate such significance or to verify meanings suggested by parallel texts; and that we should presume, until the evidence of the text itself proves otherwise, that every component part of a text has a "good fit" to its context rather than carrying a "greater meaning" unconnected with the text's own semantic world.

At this point I also need to own a further crucial presupposition which separates me not from Thüsing, but from those post-modern literary critics who dismiss or minimise the possibility of distinguishing between alternate "readings" of a text, given that they all necessarily reflect the subjectivity of the readers.

1.4.2 Valid and Invalid Interpretations

In the body of this dissertation I seek to argue that a new interpretation of 1 Corinthians 8:6 is both possible and necessary, and to establish that this new reading is a more probable interpretation of Paul's intended meaning than has been put forward to date. Such a programme clearly implies a definite hermeneutical stance, which I am happy to own. I find myself in fundamental agreement with E.D. Hirsch in his criticism of a "hermeneutical skepticism" widespread among literary critics of his day:

The theoretical aim of a genuine discipline, scientific or humanistic, is the attainment of truth, and its practical aim is agreement that truth has probably been achieved. Thus the practical goal of every genuine discipline is consensus - the winning of firmly grounded agreement that one set of conclusions is more probable than others - and this is precisely the goal of valid interpretation. It must not be dismissed as a futile goal simply because the subject matter of interpretation is often ambiguous and its conclusions uncertain. Certainty is not the same thing as validity, and knowledge of ambiguity is not necessarily ambiguous knowledge.⁵⁰

Hirsch's position, and my own, is that interpreters of a text must distinguish between the text's *meaning* and its *significance*; and that while the latter term points us to a plethora of possible connections between the text and various communities of readers, the readings favoured by those various audiences belong to them, not the text.⁵¹ The *text's* meaning

⁴⁹ I do not want to place either Dunn or Wright in this continuum of exegetical method. Their difference is in their reading of Paul's theology, and I have suggested that their broad views, while founded on their exegesis of a wide range of texts, must also be corroborated in the course of detailed exegesis of particular passages, including 1 Cor. 8:6 in which I have taken a special interest. Thüsing does offer a close examination of this text, but uses a methodology which I think is flawed, as I have explained here.

⁵⁰ E.D. Hirsch, Jr, *Validity in Interpretation* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1967) vii-ix.

⁵¹ I must, of course, acknowledge that this distinction between meaning and significance is hotly disputed in current critical theory, and that the debate involved is one of the defining issues of *postmodernism*. A passage by Paul Ricoeur seems to encapsulate the position that Hirsch opposes. "According to another fallacious view, the

belongs not to any audience, but to its author alone - it is what the author intended the text to say to its intended audience, that and no more. The prime task of interpretation is to find that intended meaning (or meanings, but only if it can be shown that the text is intentionally polyvalent).

Interpretation can never achieve certainty, only probability relative to alternative interpretations.

Since the meaning represented by a text is that of another, the interpreter can never be certain that his reading is correct but if he remembers that his job is to construe the author's meaning, he will attempt to exclude his own predispositions and to impose those of the author. However, no one can establish another's meaning with certainty. The interpreter's goal is simply this - to show that a given reading is more probable than others. In hermeneutics, verification is a process of establishing relative probabilities.⁵²

Hirsch offers four criteria by which we may adjudicate between competing interpretations.⁵³ These, of course, merely make explicit what exegetes commonly do when arguing for the plausibility of their textual readings.

1. The criterion of *legitimacy*: the reading must be permissible within the public norms of the *langue* in which the text was composed.
2. The criterion of *correspondence*: the reading must account for each linguistic component of the text.
3. The criterion of *generic appropriateness*: if the text follows the conventions of a specific genre, it is inappropriate to construe the kind of meaning found only in another genre.

hermeneutical task would be governed by the original audience's understanding of the text. As Gadamer has firmly demonstrated, this is a complete mistake: the Letters of Saint Paul are no less addressed to me than to the Romans, the Galatians, the Corinthians, etc. Only dialogue has a 'you', whose identification proceeds from the dialogue itself. If the meaning of a text is open to anyone who can read, then it is the omni-temporality of meaning which opens it to unknown readers; and the historicity of reading is the counterpart of this specific omni-temporality. From the moment that the text escapes from its author and from his situation, it also escapes from its original audience. Hence it can procure new readers for itself." (Paul Ricoeur, *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences*, John B. Thompson [Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1981] 192). Ricoeur allows us to take no prisoners, and I must reject his position without qualification. It is one thing to allow that Paul's audience in Corinth might possibly have misunderstood his letter to them, but it is quite another to assert that it is *no more addressed to them than to anyone else*. The letter is, in fact, an integral part of an ongoing dialogue between Paul and the Corinthian audience to whom he specifically addresses it (1 Cor.1:2), and our role is akin to that of eavesdroppers unknown to the participants. *To investigate what Paul's text might have signified to him and to them is an enterprise quite distinct from reporting what it signifies to me now*, although the former may well influence and be influenced by the latter. To affirm or deny this distinction is an article of methodological faith, rather than a matter open to "demonstration" by Gadamer or anyone else. I have chosen to side with Hirsch, and will proceed on that basis. I am not yet convinced that Gadamer can be enlisted in wholehearted support of Ricoeur's position above. Ricoeur gives no references for Gadamer's purported demonstration, but see Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 2nd ed. (New York: Crossroad, 1975) 235-305 in general, and pp.299-301 in particular for a distinction between historical and hermeneutical interpretation. For a sympathetic presentation of the value of post-modern approaches within biblical criticism, see Edgar V. McKnight, *Post-Modern Use of the Bible: The Emergence of Reader-Oriented Criticism* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1988); and for a short, trenchant criticism, D.A. Carson, *Exegetical Fallacies*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1996) 125-28.

⁵² Hirsch, *Validity*, 235-36.

⁵³ Hirsch, *Validity*, 236.

4. The criterion of plausibility or *coherence*: the reading “makes most sense” as a contribution to its particular discourse context. This is of particular importance when a text is regarded as “problematic” because the first three criteria allow for more than one interpretation.

These four criteria provide the most general guidelines for my present study, which is focused on establishing the most probable interpretation of a problematic text; and which must also show that previously established readings of the text are more problematic than other readers have supposed. What makes a text problematic, in general? Obviously, indeterminacy in any of these four factors would give it that status to some extent, but Hirsch attaches special importance to the issue of coherence as the most common reason for problematic texts. This relates mostly to the problem of recovering implicit rather than explicit meanings:

It is often said that implications must be determined by referring to the context of the utterance, which, for ordinary statements like “I have a headache,” means the concrete situation in which the utterance occurs. In the case of written texts, however, context generally means verbal context: the explicit meanings which surround the problematical passage. But these explicit meanings alone do not exhaust what we mean by context when we educe implications. The surrounding explicit meanings provide us with a sense of the whole meaning, and it is from this sense of the whole that we decide what the problematical passage implies. We do not ask simply, “Does this implication belong with these other explicit meanings?” but rather, “Does this implication belong with these other meanings *within a particular sort of total meaning?*”.... The ground for educing implications is a sense of the whole meaning, and this is an indispensable aspect of what we mean by context.⁵⁴

The “total meaning”, in Hirsch’s sense, in the case of our present text is something we must derive from our reading of the epistle as a whole, and that task is well established as an essential aspect of all competent exegesis. However, we should recognize that the “written texts” in Hirsch’s pervue are *literary* artifacts which have been written to stand largely on their own, creating their own textual worlds of meaning; rather than being primarily *occasional* and thus written as a means of communication between specific people in order to facilitate specific relationships and address specific situations, as is the case with Paul’s letters. This difference is a matter of degree rather than of absolute kind, but it does mean that “the concrete situation in which the utterance occurs” is just as essential a part of the context we must establish as is the “total meaning” of the text. It is for this reason that exegesis of Paul’s epistles must always attempt to establish, or at least to hypothesize, a situational context that identifies what is going on between the writer and his addressees. These two aspects of context, which we may refer to as the situational and textual, are of equal importance in determining implications. Unfortunately, after 2000 years our access to the situational context is quite problematic, relying heavily on reconstructions drawn from evidence provided by the text itself, with some help from other contemporary texts. For this

⁵⁴ Hirsch, *Validity*, 220.

reason it is likely to remain more hypothetical than the textual context. It may be that our most reliable criterion for evaluating competing hypotheses about the situational context involves evaluating the contributions they each make to a reading of the “total meaning” of the text.

Another way of expressing this whole endeavour is to use the concept of “horizon”, which Hirsch derives from Husserl. It refers to “a system of typical expectations and probabilities”,⁵⁵ generally unconscious, that are derived from our sense of the text as a whole.

“Horizon” is thus an essential aspect of what we usually call context. It is an inexplicit sense of the whole, derived from the explicit meanings present to consciousness.... The explicit meanings are components in a total meaning which is bounded by a horizon. Of the manifold typical continuations within this horizon the author is not and cannot be explicitly conscious, nor would it be a particularly significant task to determine just which components of this meaning the author *was* thinking of. But it is of the utmost importance to determine the horizon which defines the author’s intentions as a whole, for it is only with reference to this horizon, or sense of the whole, that the interpreter may distinguish those implications which are typical and proper components of the meaning and those which are not.⁵⁶

Hirsch then goes on to make the point that a major part of the horizon presented to the readers is constituted by their awareness of any established genres as well as the material created by the author. That is to say, there is a close relationship between the third and fourth criteria, and it is not possible to determine coherence without considering genre. It would seem, therefore, that *genre* provides a very useful issue with which to begin our interpretation of 1 Corinthians 8:6 and its relations with its surrounding text. That is, I will begin by asking whether there is any clearly identifiable generic structure governing that surrounding text which would help us to define the horizon of meaning within which the verse should be interpreted.⁵⁷ If no such generic structure can be found, we would then need to rely wholly upon the surrounding text to indicate the horizons of meaning which Paul himself has established for the guidance of his intended audience.

1.5 The Search for Genre

“Genre” is actually a term drawn from the discipline of literary criticism, and is a shortened form of “literary genre”. David Aune, in his monograph exploring the relationship between the New Testament and its contemporary literary environment, describes the importance of genre studies for the discipline of New Testament scholarship:

Literary genres and forms are not simply neutral containers used as convenient ways to package various types of written communication. They are social conventions that provide

⁵⁵ Hirsch, *Validity*, 221.

⁵⁶ Hirsch, *Validity*, 221 – 222.

⁵⁷ As I will show early in my next chapter, in following Hirsch I am already adopting a use of “genre” that is consistent with general literary criticism but at odds with some recent New Testament scholarship, where it is used to characterise whole texts only rather than to identify modes of discourse within a text.

contextual meaning for the smaller units of language and text they enclose. The original significance that a literary text had for both author and reader is tied to the genre of that text, so that the meaning of the part is dependent upon the meaning of the whole. A *literary genre* may be defined as a group of texts that exhibit a coherent and recurring configuration of literary features involving form (including structure and style), content, and function. *Literary forms*, on the other hand, while exhibiting similar recurring literary features, are primarily constituent elements of the genres that frame them.⁵⁸

Aune's definition of genre as a set of texts is acceptable only if we allow for the possibility of intersecting sets: in recent literary theory, it is generally recognised that a given text may belong to more than one genre.⁵⁹ This sets the terminology of biblical scholars, as represented by Aune, somewhat at odds with that current among literary theorists. I shall argue later in this chapter (2.3.3.1), when discussing the work of Margaret Mitchell, that this difference has some serious consequences, particularly if by using "forms" instead of "genres" in our description of subdivisions within a text we assume a fixed relation between structural (that is, *formal*) features and the generic cross-textual conventions they express. Genre seems most useful as a literary-critical concept when used to identify different *conventional modes of discourse* that an author expects an audience to recognize, whether or not there are any fixed forms of expression characteristic of each genre (some have them, others do not).⁶⁰ To confine its use, as Aune does, to whole texts, is to deprive ourselves of an established tool of literary analysis. For example, we shall see that many recent interpreters of Paul's letters have seen them as belonging to at least two genre-producing fields: ancient letter writing and ancient rhetoric, and that the former is often used as a shell around the latter. Yet we shall also see that formal features are more characteristic of the letter genre than of rhetorical genres, so if anything we might be tempted to reverse Aune's order and describe literary genres as primarily constituents of the literary forms that frame them. It would be better, however, to simply abandon any definition that involves making one a constituent of the other: as literary phenomena, forms and genres are different in kind, should be defined independently, and identified as such however they function in relation to each other in particular texts. Accordingly, I shall use literary *forms* to identify fixed combinations of

⁵⁸ David E. Aune, *The New Testament in Its Literary Environment*, Library of Early Christianity (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1987) 13. For other studies of genre by New Testament scholars, see the articles in *Semeia* 43; especially Mary Gerhart, "Generic Competence in Biblical Hermeneutics," *Semeia* 43 (1988): 29-44, and C.H. Talbert, "Once Again: Gospel Genre," *Semeia* 43 (1988): 53-73.

⁵⁹ See John Reichert, "More Than Kin and Less Than Kind: The Limits of Genre Theory," *Theories of Literary Genre*, Ed. Joseph P. Strelka, Yearbook of Comparative Criticism, VIII (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1978) 57-79, especially 60-66.

⁶⁰ It seems to me that we are struggling here with the legacy of form-criticism, which is grounded in an axiomatic correlation of formal structures and modes of discourse, with context of situation included as a further correlated element. The continuing dominance of this critical methodology in German biblical scholarship is reflected in such fine publications as Schrage's commentary on 1 Corinthians, and Hermann Probst, *Paulus und der Brief*, Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen Zum Neuen Testament, 2.Reihe 45 (Tübingen: J.C.B.Mohr (Paul Siebeck), 1991).

words or fixed structural features, and literary *genres* for distinct modes of discourse recognisable as such by the audience.

We should also note that genre is a concept with both synchronic and diachronic aspects: genres are subject to constant evolution.⁶¹ This means that in attempting to identify literary genres within Paul's writings we must be constantly aware of both the value and the dangers of carrying our experience of genres from one historical context into another. For instance, there may be significant differences as well as similarities in the genre "preaching" as found in modern Christian churches, in classical Greek philosophy, in first-century Judaism or popular hellenistic culture, and in Paul's mission. To determine the state of a genre as used by Paul and his audience in a particular context is essentially a matter of historical investigation, rather than of simply relying on the dogma of modern literary or discourse-linguistic theories.⁶² In this respect there are important similarities between genre study and linguistic investigation in their combination of synchronic and diachronic dimensions of the phenomena studied.

The body of my study which follows is structured in three parts. The first and longest part, consisting of Chapters 2 to 6, is an extensive investigation of the major literary genres active in 1 Corinthians in general and in the discourse on εἰδωλόθυτα in particular, while determining the argumentative structure of that discourse. My reason for delaying an examination of 1 Cor. 8:6 until after that lengthy examination of its context is that I am attempting to apply Hirsch's third and fourth interpretative criteria (*generic appropriateness* and *coherence*) with the utmost rigour. Only by determining the verse's likely genre and discourse context in advance can we maximize our chances of reading the verse in the light of its context rather than the converse.⁶³ The first conclusion I will draw from this process is that the discourse context of the verse is an extended argument of mixed but primarily deliberative genre in which the writer's discourse goal is to persuade his audience to adopt a set of values

⁶¹ Alistair Fowler's extensive study of genre theory includes this generalization: "Genre criticism has tended to split into two quite distinct and almost unrelated activities. One is abstract speculation about permanent genres. It excited many during the Renaissance and for a century after, but is now regarded as unreal - unless, of course, it is structuralist. The other activity is plodding chronicle history of individual genres that continually transform themselves without ever waiting long enough for generalization. One concentrates on fixity (if necessary, inventing it), the other on change (even if no general ideas emerge). In the abstract, the polarity is the irreducible one of synchronicity versus diachronicity. But good criticism will avoid or combine these opposites." Alastair Fowler, *Kinds of Literature: An Introduction to the Theory of Genres and Modes* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1982) 48.

⁶² Failure to observe this principle greatly diminishes the value of the analysis of 1 Corinthians offered by Ralph Bruce Terry, which relies uncritically on a theory of "text-types" [genres by another name] without establishing the applicability of its dogmas to the Pauline corpus. Ralph Bruce Terry, *A Discourse Analysis of First Corinthians*, Publications in Linguistics, 120 (Arlington: Summer Institute of Linguistics, 1995).

⁶³ Of course an "interpretive circle" is operative in any reading, so that in the course of my research my emerging sense of the inner structure of the verse threw light on its context. My attempt at interpretive rigour consists of separating these processes as far as possible as I now argue my case.

that are less “Greek” and more “Jewish” in nature. My second conclusion, at the end of Chapter 6, will be that the probable discourse function of the verse itself is that of a *θήσις*, expressing the underlying general theme the particular concrete case (*υποθεσις*) argued by the writer, which in this discourse is that his audience should minimize their contacts with pagan cultic activity. Having determined that probable function of the verse, I am ready to examine the content of the verse itself and to confirm that it can indeed function as a *θήσις* for the whole discourse.

The second part of my argument, presented in Chapters 7 and 8, focuses on the verse itself, 1 Cor.8:6, in accordance with Hirsch’s second criterion of *correspondence*. I explore in detail the grammatical structures that determine its semantics both intrinsically and in relation to its immediate context in the opening paragraph of the discourse. I will argue that the syntax of the verse ties it firmly into its present context, making it quite unlikely to have had a previous life in anything like its present form. From that syntactic and semantic structure I will also draw the conclusion that the assertive force of the verse lies not in the monotheistic affirmations of its twin main clauses, but rather in its four subordinate clauses, which combine to make a strong affirmation of the connection between benefits received by the audience from God through Christ and the obligations to God and Christ that follow from those benefits.

The third part of my argument, in Chapters 9 and 10, then looks to the social context of the discourse, the situation of the Corinthian believers within their wider Greco-Roman society, in order to show just how apposite such a *θήσις* statement is, both to the situation Paul faces and to his particular strategy for dealing with it in this discourse. I argue that the semantics of the benefits-and-obligations schema appealed to by Paul can best be understood in the light of the social structures of patronage and family basic to Greco-Roman society. By doing so, I seek to satisfy Hirsch’s first criterion, that of *legitimacy*.

In my concluding chapter I review the methodology of the study, summarizing the results obtained at each stage and arguing that the sequential nature of the process gives those results the status of a “best reading” displacing rather than complementing previous readings. I then briefly consider the implications for the theological and intertextual issues raised in this introduction.