

## CHAPTER 11

### CONCLUSIONS

This study has been a systematic investigation into the meaning of one verse written by the apostle Paul, 1 Corinthians 8:6. The importance of that particular verse for the early history of christology made such a lengthy investigation appropriate. Because a major aspect of the verse's historical significance has been widely held to arise from its seeming misrelation to its present textual context, I have sought to provide a rigorous investigation of the complex relation between the verse and its textual and social contexts. That rigour was structured by my explicit adoption of E.D.Hirsch's four criteria for validity in interpretation, and the credibility of my results must stand or fall to some extent with those criteria. Within the presuppositions of that methodological framework, I can now claim to have arrived at some very definite and worthwhile conclusions. In order to state these with assurance, I should firstly recapitulate the preliminary results upon which they are founded. These were arrived at in three broad phases of the investigation.

#### 11.1 Recapitulation: the Structure of my Argument

The first phase, contained in Chapters 2 to 6, examined the *textual context* in a systematic manner, in order to determine the matters of fact required by Hirsch's third and fourth criteria: *generic appropriateness* and *coherence*. For maximum interpretive rigour, it was important to determine what demands the textual context makes on the verse quite separately from seeking to show whether or not the verse meets those demands.<sup>1</sup> While this procedure meant that 1 Cor.8:6 was virtually ignored for the first half of the study, this is justified by the consideration that a fresh interpretation of verse-in-context requires a fresh look at the context as well as the verse, and so a thorough re-examination of the textual context was undertaken, not as a mere "ground-clearing" exercise but in order to open up the possibility (or even necessity) of a new definition of that contextual relation. I trust that this has led me into a coherent set of conclusions, built upon one another sequentially.

In chapter 2, I noted that at the widest level, the letter is structured by conventions of the ancient epistolary genre. An examination of the way in which Paul adapted those conventions indicated that the letter as a whole is argumentative in nature, because the apostle is addressing an audience that is in some respects resistant to his leadership. Chapter 3 built

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<sup>1</sup> This, after all, is the normal order in which we process any fragment of normal discourse: the preceding discourse shapes our expectations of what the fragment should be saying, providing parameters within which we interpret the fragment, and subsequent discourse then confirms or modifies that interpretation.

upon that result. Consideration of argumentative discourse in the Greco-Roman world, drawing on recent studies in this field, led me to conclude that although we cannot look to ancient rhetorical theory to define formal structures in Paul's letters, nevertheless the rhetorical genres shape his argumentative discourse significantly, alongside argumentative genres drawn from other cultural contexts. Two such other genres are of particular importance: the citing of Jewish scriptures as adapted by the early Christian movement, and the established proclamation of Christ by Paul and other authoritative bearers of the gospel. I concluded that although all three of these sources provide important *topoi* within the discourse on εἰδωλόθυτα, the essentially Jewish, scriptural motivation of his stance on this issue led him to attempt to provide argumentation in its support that would have more natural appeal to gentile Christians. That is, he attempts throughout to engage his audience as participants in a *deliberative* mode of discourse, even though he does switch from that genre into a judicial self-defence for much of ch.9, and into a weighty scriptural argument through most of 10:1-22. Nevertheless, Paul ends the discourse as he began it, in deliberative mode, with the argumentative *topos* on which he relies most being the example of the crucified Christ, which he appeals to as the ultimate justification both for his stance over the explicit issue on hand and also in defending his personal practice over the related issue of financial support.

Having completed that analysis of the discourse structure and literary genre of the εἰδωλόθυτα discourse as a whole, I analysed the immediate textual context of 1 Cor.8:6, the first six verses of the discourse. I argued that its rhetorical structure is indeed that which would be required for it to introduce a deliberative discourse, engaging the audience as participants in a deliberative debate while indicating Paul's own stance on the issue, his υποθέσις. The most probable discourse function of verse 6 was then identified as the expression of Paul's θέσις, the underlying grounds on which he will argue for his υποθέσις, in the subsequent discourse. At this point of my investigation I claim to have established the specific requirements of genre and discourse function that 1 Corinthians 8:6 must meet if it is to be regarded as forming an integral part of its textual context, in accordance with Hirsh's third and fourth interpretive criteria.

The second major phase of my investigation is found in Chapters 7 and 8, where I seek to fulfill Hirsch's second criterion of *correspondence*: that the reading must account for each linguistic component of the text under examination. I began with a detailed syntactic analysis of the verse, showing that, in its present form at least, it was quite unsuitable to stand on its own, while its syntactic links with its immediate pre-text were essential to its own internal semantics. Following those links led me to conclude that the fundamental assertion expressed by the paired main clauses in verse 6 does not predicate the *existence or non-existence* of the many gods nor of the one God, but rather affirms the Christian community's commitment to *calling* only one being "God" and only Jesus Christ "Lord." A structural analysis of the four supplementary clauses then showed that these depict fundamental

relational aspects of Christian faith: that all benefits come to Christians from God through Christ, and that being a recipient of these benefits entails an appropriate God-wardness that is likewise determined through Christ. While the two main clauses might be thought as of making the most fundamental assertions of the complex sentence, the subordinate clauses in combination actually constitute the Focus of the sentence in which the most significant new information is presented to the audience, qualifying the more Given assertions in the main clauses. An examination of the pre-text concluded that such a general schema linking Benefits and Obligations was already semantically activated before this point in the epistle.

In the third phase of my study, Chapters 9 and 10, that general semantic schema was then filled out by recourse to the social context in which this debate was taking place, in order to meet Hirsh's first criterion of *legitimacy*: that any reading must be permissible within the public norms of the *langue* in which the text was composed. I argued that this Benefits-and-Obligations schema would most naturally be interpreted in terms of two fundamental social constructs, *patronage* and *family*, and that those connotations were filled out by their association with the everyday use of two key terms in the verse, *πατήρ* and *κύριος*. I argued that by invoking these fundamental social constructs, and the shared values associated with them, within the expression of his *θέσις*, Paul was able to conduct large parts of his subsequent argument within the constraints imposed by the native sensibilities of his predominantly gentile audience.

## 11.2 Summary: What is 1 Cor.8:6 Saying?

As this study has progressed to this point, I have built a layered picture of the multiple functional and semantic links between this key verse and its textual context. I have argued that far from being an ill-fitting insertion into the text drawn from some other context, it can be interpreted in a manner completely fulfilling Hirsh's criteria. All linguistic features of the verse have been explained in terms of its textual and social context. The interpretation I have reached, in which all the key terms of the verse are related directly to basic Greco-Roman social constructs, might be held to be reductionist, inasmuch as Paul and other New Testament writers can be seen to have used some of those terms in different ways elsewhere.<sup>2</sup> Against any such charge, I maintain that the key terms must be interpreted by means of semantic elements drawn from Greco-Roman society, not only because the relation between the verse and its pre-textual context has prepared us to do just that, but even more *because it*

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<sup>2</sup> I have already argued when discussing his use of one key term, *κύριος*, that such an objection runs the risk of embracing an exegetical fallacy based on a misunderstanding of the linguistic phenomenon of *polysemy*. When a word can be used to mean different things in different contexts, as most words can, then those meanings are true alternatives, rather than fragments that can be accumulated to make some bigger, more inclusive meaning attached to individual words. As I have already noted, we should always be mindful of Barr's insistence that meaning resides in sentences rather than isolated words.

*is that very social context which is addressed in this discourse.* Given that the most probable discourse function of the verse has been shown to be that it should provide an expression of Paul's fundamental grounds on which he will argue his case for how the church should handle the problem presented by its encounter with εἰδωλόθυτα in Corinth, then it is only to be expected that his use of language should be dominated by semantic associations drawn from that very social context.

When seemingly explicit theological terms such as "Father" and "Lord" are read in terms of the patronage and family associations evoked by other features of the verse, 1 Cor.8:6 is shown to have plenty to say about Paul's approach to the problem on hand, and to do so persuasively. I shall attempt one further demonstration of this, in the form of a paraphrase expressing some of the explicit and implicit messages conveyed by this verse, in conjunction with the preceding two verses.

*"Some of you argue that we should develop a common policy on what others of us call 'idol-foods' on the basis of our knowledge of such theological principles as those expressed in the sayings, "There is no idol in the world" and "There is no God except one". Such an approach would in effect deny that there is a real problem to be addressed other in the minds of those whose scruples are based on deficient theological understanding. Foods offered to non-existent beings cannot possibly do us any harm, you maintain.*

*But this approach ignores the most salient fact of our everyday experience: that we live in a society in which a multitude of heavenly or earthly beings is named and venerated as either a "god" or "lord", whatever we might think of the realities behind such language. It is the clash of loyalties arising from our social interaction with pagan cultic activities that constitutes the practical problem for us as Christians. The most troublesome loyalty clash of all concerns how we should relate to the cult of Caesar, in which the emperor is acclaimed as both "a god" and "supreme lord", and regarded as the supreme mediator between the divine and human realms, on the grounds that he is the ultimate patron whose "family" of loyal retainers controls the empire. If we are seen to distance ourselves from the cults around us, we will very likely come to be regarded as socially deviant and subversive to the empire itself.*

*Faced with these difficulties, I intend to argue for a policy that does not compromise the distinctive loyalties inherent in our Christian faith. Unlike those around us, we name only one as God, and acknowledge as our family only those who name him Father. As he alone is the source of all benefits we receive, our fundamental obligations are to him alone, and no other patronal relations can be allowed to supercede our loyalty to him, which is also expressed in our family loyalties to one another. These must take precedence over all other social obligations. Furthermore, it cannot be said that Caesar functions as the supreme mediator of God's beneficent relation with us: that role belongs to Jesus Christ. It is Christ alone we acknowledge as "lord", the one master through whom God has given us everything we need, and consequently it is through him that we are obliged to respond to God with gratitude and loyalty. It is to the example of Jesus, whose authority over us we acknowledge*

*in calling him “lord”, that I will appeal to above all other considerations as I proceed with my discourse on the problem of what we must do about foods that have been offered to idols.”*

### **11.3 What are the Christological Implications?**

This study has been an exercise in exegesis: my goal has been to identify the “best reading” of 1 Cor.8:6, the reading that gives the most satisfactory explanation of the contribution this verse has to make to the discourse in which it is found. Nevertheless, an important part of my justification for spending so much effort on this task was the significant place accorded to this one verse by scholars engaged in the task of reconstructing the history of christological development within the first century of the Christian movement. So we might well ask what implications my study might have for that enterprise.

I am reluctant to attempt such an evaluation, preferring to leave it to those with expertise in that field of historical reconstruction. If I succeed in persuading others that the text I have examined was indeed written to communicate the meanings I have identified, then an assessment of what this implies for christological development must be undertaken by those with a different set of competencies than I have: it requires an historian’s ability to build a coherent picture from disparate texts and authors. My role is simply to affirm that the text is saying something in particular, and that other readings of its original message are highly unlikely.<sup>3</sup>

Nevertheless, it is appropriate for me to briefly express my sense of some tentative implications. It does not seem possible that this verse asserts Christ’s agency in the creation of the universe. Cosmology on that scale is simply not within the text’s horizon, even though it raises the issue of various beings *ἐν κόσμῳ* being called “gods” and “lords”. The focus of the discourse is not on the origin of the world, but on the status of foods sacrificed to such beings within it. This in turn is dominated by the relational questions at the heart of cultic practice: What benefits do we currently obtain from the gods and their intermediaries, and what obligations do we accrue by receiving such benefits? As I have demonstrated, the focus of 1 Cor.8:6 is entirely on the Christian answer to those questions: our obligations to God are those mediated to us through Jesus Christ, for all our benefits come through him. Whether

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<sup>3</sup> Arguing that a text is framed to assert one thing normally implies that it is not asserting something else. If the above paraphrase of 1 Cor.8:6 within its paragraph expresses the very heart of what Paul intends to communicate to his audience in Corinth, then it follows that there may be many other ideas he *might* have used similar words to express, in this or other contexts, which are simply not on the text’s horizon in the present instance. By offering this interpretation, and by arguing that it has the status of the “best reading” in Hirsch’s terms, I am also implying that no other interpretation has equal validity. To the extent that my case is convincing, it necessarily rules out a number of other readings that must be seen as competing rather than complementary. If I am wrong, this will be demonstrated by an argument examining both verse and context more thoroughly than I have managed to do, arriving at a reading that is more comprehensive in its explanation of the facts and more finely balanced in its judgement. It will not, however, involve conceding that competing interpretations must be given a place alongside one another regardless of their mutual incompatibilities.

such a focus on present benefits to the Christian community mediated through Christ can possibly be extrapolated into a broader cosmological role including ideas of his pre-existence and participation in God's original creation of the world is beyond the scope of this study. I am quite clear that it is also beyond the horizon of the text.

Relating this conclusion back to the different pictures of the historical development of christology drawn by Martin Hengel and others such as James Dunn, I can only conclude that anyone wanting to cite this verse as evidence for a "big-bang" model of christological development is mistaken. 1 Cor.8:6 is not saying anything about the creation of the world, because it is actually focused on something else entirely: the relation between God and those who worship him through Christ, here and now.

#### 11.4 Coda: What about the Shema'?

In my introductory chapter we saw that several recent interpreters have identified an essential connection between 1 Cor.8:6 and Deuteronomy 6:4, the credal statement in prominent use in first century Judaism.<sup>4</sup>

We can compare their terminology and structures by laying them out side by side.

##### 1 Cor.8:6

αλλ ημῖν  
εις θεός  
ο πατήρ  
ἐξ ου τὰ πάντα  
καὶ ἡμεῖς εἰς αὐτόν,  
καὶ εἰς κύριος  
Ἰησοῦς Χριστός  
δι ου τὰ πάντα  
καὶ ἡμεῖς δι αὐτοῦ.

##### Deut 6:4

»Ἄκουε, Ἰσραηλ

κύριος

ο θεός ἡμῶν  
κύριος εἰς ἐστίν

καὶ ἀγαπήσεις κύριον τὸν θεόν σου ἐξ ὅλης τῆς  
καρδίας σου καὶ ἐξ ὅλης τῆς ψυχῆς σου καὶ ἐξ  
ὅλης τῆς δυνάμεώς σου.

Each formulation begins with an adjunct identifying the community of faith to which it applies: ημῖν and Ἰσραηλ respectively. Each then specifies a name by which the community's sole deity is known: ο πατήρ and κύριος, although neither of these is really a personal name, as in each case it is used because of the relational characteristics its use implies: The Christian community names the one God as "the Father" because it relates to

<sup>4</sup> Scholars recognizing this verse as a reference to the Shema include 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) 180; Hermann Probst, *Paulus und der Brief*, Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament, 2.Reihe 45 (Tübingen: J.C.B.Mohr (Paul Siebeck), 1991) 133; N. T. Wright, *The Climax of the Covenant: Christ and the Law in Pauline Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992) 120-36; Richard B. Hays, *First Corinthians*, Interpretation: A Biblical Commentary for Teaching and Preaching (Louisville: John Knox Press, 1997) 140; Raymond F. Collins, *First Corinthians*, Sacra Pagina 7 (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1999) 315; and Anthony C. Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, The New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2000) 636.

him, and addresses him in prayer, as “Our Father”; and Israel refers to the deity in Greek as Κύριος because this is the translation of יְהוָה, “lord” which is the closest they will ever come in the first century to using the divine personal name יהוה. Each text then affirms the relationship between the community and the deity: 1 Cor.8:6 by asserting the community’s God-wardness (καὶ ὑμεῖς εἰς αὐτόν), and Deut.6:4 by owning him as “our God” (ο θεός ἡμῶν). Each also contains, as the predicate of its main clause (or first main clause in the case of 1 Cor.8:6), an affirmation of the singularity of God, as a statement of faith distinguishing the community from its polytheistic environment. ( εστίν) εἰς θεός ) in 1 Cor.8:6, and (ο θεός ...) εἰς εστίν) in Deut.6:4. Each finishes with a reference to the obligations arising for the community from this relationship with its deity: καὶ ἡμεῖς εἰς αὐτόν ... δι’ αὐτοῦ in one case, and the much fuller καὶ ἀγαπήσεις κύριον τὸν θεὸν σου ἐξ ὠλης τῆς καρδίας σου καὶ ἐξ ὠλης τῆς ψυχῆς σου καὶ ἐξ ὠλης τῆς δυνάμεώς σου on the other.

These similarities are so strong that we must acknowledge that this is an unmistakable case of intertextual echoing: Paul has constructed his own formulation with the venerated scriptural text in mind. However, identifying such a link is not the same as deciding what function it fulfills in the present text, or if it has any *communicative* function at all.<sup>5</sup> Given that I have identified Paul’s rhetorical strategy in this discourse as one in which he has decided to use a *deliberative* mode of argument in which his predominant *topoi* will be those drawn from Greco-Roman rather Jewish culture, in order to shift his audience towards adopting a more Jewish, covenantal attitude to the matter on hand, I find it highly unlikely that he would expect them to recognize this allusion to a scriptural text that above all encapsulates the viewpoint they are resisting. Even if they were able to do so, would that be an effective strategy, or self-defeating, putting the cart before the horse? Paul’s scriptural formation is evident here, including the strong association between the monotheistic affirmation in Deut.6:4 and the commitment to community-building expressed in its immediate textual context. This does not mean we can identify this echo as an integral part of the communication, as a *topos* to which he could appeal. If his converts in Corinth had shared Paul’s scripturally-based convictions, the present discourse would have been unnecessary. I

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<sup>5</sup> Throughout this study I have operated on the axiom that the “best reading” of a text is that which comes closest to capturing what the author intended to communicate to his chosen audience: this is what Hirsch labels *the meaning* of the text. Other meanings may be identified as integral parts of the text’s wider *signification*. An important category of such significations are those we can identify as present for the author but not part of what is being said to the audience. We may place these on a “continuum of awareness”, ranging from a sub-conscious set of associated ideas and terminology forming the background material from which the writer selects his message and its expression, to what we might describe as “a note to myself” that the audience might or might not be able to recognize. It seems most likely to me that Paul’s echoing of the Shema here falls into this latter category: that in choosing to express his θῆσις in these terms, he is also reminding himself at the outset of this discourse just how far he must shift his audience’s attitudes to render them compatible with the covenantal values of his own scriptural heritage. We do not have to posit that this process was conscious in order to properly identify such significance-for-the-author. It seems to me that applying Hirsch’s distinction between meaning and significance would help clarify some of the controversy around intertextuality, and particularly to the identification of scriptural echoes, which should be classified either as integral to the message or merely significant for the author.

think that we should regard the Shema as something Paul was arguing *for* rather than *from* with this particular audience, and that its echo here functions as a note to himself, a reminder of what he must bring his audience to face by the end of the discourse.<sup>6</sup> What he was using these words to actually communicate to *them* at the outset of this argumentative discourse was something else, which constitutes the text's meaning.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> That is, he is defining Christian beliefs and use of language over against Greek paganism and a philosophical monotheism, not against Jewish monotheism. He echoes the Shema in order to bring his audience closer to it, and to the world of Jewish faith expressed by it, not in order to differentiate Christian faith from its scriptural and Jewish roots. This sets me apart from the position taken by Wright, *Climax of the Covenant*, 132-35.

<sup>7</sup> However, we might also ask whether in echoing the Shema as he has done, has Paul also modified any of its essential affirmations: particularly in his use of the expression, εἰς κύριος Ἰησοῦς Χριστός. I have already argued, against Wright's position, that any such modification has no place within the assertions he is presenting to his audience. But has it happened anyway, in his use of these terms? The Shema, in its Greek form, affirms that Κύριος is *one κύριος*; if both of these uses of the term are equivalent, a coded repetition of the divine name, then there is indeed a clash with Paul's assertion that the Christian community calls only one being Κύριος, and that this is Jesus Christ rather than the one they call Θεός. This would be tantamount to saying that they are applying the divine name to Jesus (which may well be what Phil.2:9 asserts, whether or not it can be seen here). If, on the other hand, the second κύριος in the Shema is equivalent to "one covenant lord", the two texts are much more compatible. I much prefer this second reading of the Greek form of Deut.6:4, as it makes for a much more straightforward predicate. Whether it is a better translation of the Hebrew original is another issue, beyond the scope of this study.