

THEOLOGICAL AND ETHICAL RESPONSES TO RELIGIOUS PLURALISM—1 CORINTHIANS 8–10¹

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Gentile conversion to Christianity in the first century meant a theological revolution—turning from the worship of ‘dumb idols’, 1 Cor. 12:2. It did not however extract converts from life in cities where religious pluralism was woven into the very fabric of every daily life. For example, meat was bought after being sacrificed to idols, ablutions were carried out in public baths in the presence of deities, and festivals and great occasions were celebrated in the city under religious patronage. As part of daily living Paul recognized that his converts needed ‘to have dealings with. . . idolaters’ (συναναμίγυσθαι. . . εἰδωλόφταις), 1 Cor. 5:9–10. What were the appropriate Christian responses to the complexity of daily life which was presided over by Corinth’s deities?

To answer this question it is proposed I. to describe the religious pluralism of Roman Corinth which took for granted the legitimacy of all its ‘many gods and many lords’, II. to examine its impact on Jews living in the midst of such pluralism to ascertain how adherents of the monotheistic religion from which Christianity sprang coped with the problems it posed, and to note Rabbinic advice on how to live in the midst of it as pious Jews, III. to assess the different reactions to religious pluralism by Corinthian Christians, IV. to outline Paul’s solutions to the related pastoral problems, and V. to evaluate that church’s theological and ethical responses to its world of religious pluralism.

¹This discussion is based on part of my 1990 Annual Tyndale Fellowship New Testament Lecture and is dedicated to my colleagues and former students at Trinity Theological College, Singapore for whom turning from idols to the true and living God was as costly a decision as it was for the first century Gentile converts of Corinth. I wish to acknowledge the kindnesses extended by Dr. C.K. Williams II and Dr. N. Bookidis of the Corinthian Excavations of the American School of Classical Studies on two visits to the site.

I. Descriptions of religious pluralism in Corinth²

The character of religious pluralism in this large Roman colony of approximately one hundred thousand inhabitants is found in three ancient Corinthian sources. The first is the archaeological evidence which enables us to grasp something of the number of temples and shrines in Corinth. A full account of them is to be found in Pausanias, a traveller to Corinth and other cities of Greece c. AD 170. His extensive literary work is not dissimilar to the modern day 'Blue Guide' to Greece except that the former's primary concern was with the plethora of Corinth's gods and goddesses.³ 1 Corinthians also discusses the problem especially in chapters 8–10.

i. Corinthian Temple Sites

The archaeological site reveals something of the religious pluralism of that city. Simply standing at the east end of the forum with the Acropolis on the left a visitor can see the ruins of the temple of Demeter and Persephone on the slopes,⁴ four temples with uncertain dedication in one or two cases across the West end of the forum, between them in the distance the large

²For the most recent discussion see D. Engels, 'Religion' *Roman Corinth: An Alternative Model for the Classical City* (Chicago and London, University of Chicago Press 1990) ch. 5. J. Wiseman's 'Corinth as a Religious Center under the Principate, I. Paganism before Constantine', announced for *ANRW* II, 18.3 (1990) has been deferred to 18.6 and was therefore not available to the author.

³Archaeological evidence has not been found for all the deities mentioned by Pausanias. This does not reflect on his credibility because only a very small portion of the estimated 640 hectares of Corinth has been excavated in the past one hundred years. For the list of shrines described by Pausanias not found to date in Corinth see M. Sakellarios and N. Faraklas, *Corinthia-Cleonea* (Athens, Center of Ekistics, 1971) 143–46. For the list of Greek cults sites which survived the desolation see R. Lisle, *The Cults of Corinth* (Ph. D. Johns Hopkins University 1955) 168, although it is considered wrong to assume that they were used during that period, C.K. Williams, *Pre-Roman Cults in the Area of the Ancient Forum* (Ph D University of Pennsylvania, 1978) 19–20, D. Engels, *op. cit.*, 93–95 'Romanized' *contra* J. Kent, *Corinth: The Inscriptions 1926–1952* (American School of Classical Studies at Athens, Princeton 1966) VIII. III, 20 n. 10.

⁴N. Bookidis and R.S. Stroud, *Demeter and Persephone in Ancient Corinth*, American Excavations in Old Corinth, Corinth Notes No. 2 (Princeton, 1987) 11–12 on the revival of the cult with the construction of new buildings in the second half of the first century AD.

temple of Octavia, and to the right that of Hera Acraia and the ancient temple of Apollos.⁵

ii. Pausanias on Corinth

This archaeological evidence is supplemented by a very lengthy discussion on Corinth in the *The Description of Greece* by Pausanias. He describes how the ancient visitor approaching Corinth through one of its two ports, Lechaëum, would have been immediately confronted by Achaia's religious pluralism. Pausanias records a sanctuary and a bronze image of Poseidon, and a temple and a stone statue of Aphrodite. On the mole was erected another bronze image of Poseidon and at the other end sanctuaries of Asclepius and Isis, ii, 3. Coming to this capital of Achaia through Craneum, the rich suburb at the foot of the Acrocorinth, the visitor saw another temple to Aphrodite 'of Melaenis'.

Corinth's pluralism was seen in the heart of the city, for most of the sanctuaries were in the forum. In the middle was a bronze statue of Athena, and steps from it led to the temple of Octavia, the sister of Augustus.⁶ There also stood Artemis 'surnamed Ephesian', and the wooden images of Dionysius covered with gold with faces ornamented with red paint. Nearby was the temple of Τύχη with a standing image of Parian marble and beside it a sanctuary for all the gods, θεοῖς πᾶσιν ἐστὶν ἱερόν, ii, 6. Monotheism was far from the thinking of the general populace of Corinth and they saw no contradiction between a temple 'housing all the gods' and those sanctuaries to other deities close by.

Nearby was a fountain containing Poseidon with a dolphin under his feet spouting water. In the same area was a bronze Apollos, and a statue of Aphrodite made by Hermogenes of Cythrus. There were also two bronze statues of Hermes, one

⁵In addition, epigraphic evidence has been unearthed of the cult of *Providentia Augusti et Salus Publica* established during the reign of Tiberius on the occasion of the discovery of the Sejanus conspiracy and other imperial cults, *Victoria Britannica*, see A. Bagdikian, *The Civic Officials of Roman Corinth*, (MA University of Vermont, 1953) 19-20 on the cultic officials and the inscriptions to Tiberius Claudius Dinippus who was the priest of the *Victoria Britannica*, West nos. 86-90, 110, 111, Kent nos. 158-163.

⁶For recent discussion see M. Wallbank, 'Pausanias, Octavia, Temple E', *Annual of the British School at Athens* 84 (1989) 361-394.

of them being housed in a temple. Two of the three images of Zeus which stood in the open were named by Pausanias, one of 'the Lower World' and the other 'Most High' ὑψιστος, ii, 8.⁷

Whether the traveller left the forum for Lechaëum or Sicyon he was confronted by more statues and temples. Above the gateway to Lechaëum were two gilded chariots, one carrying Phaëtheon, the son of Helios, the other transporting Helios himself. A little further on was a bronze stature of Heracles, iii, 1-2. Near the fountain of Peirene was erected an image and a sacred enclosure of Apollos. On the road to that port was a bronze image of a seated Hermes, iii, 3-4.

Leaving the forum for the closest city, Sicyon, a visitor would have immediately seen a temple and a bronze image of Apollos, iii, 6. Situated near the theatre was a wooden image of Athena Chalinitis which had marble face, hands and feet and nearby a naked wooden stature of Heracles. Above the theatre was located a sanctuary of Zeus Capitolinus, iv, 1, 5. On the same road was a burnt out Corinthian temple either of Apollos or Olympian Zeus, vii, 9— a reminder of the sacking of Corinth in 146 BC.

Near the gymnasium stood the temples of Zeus and Asclepius, the image of the former was rendered in bronze and the latter, together with that of a statue of Health, was made of white marble, iv, 5. Pausanias tells his readers of the many baths, the most famous of which was close by Poseidon. At its entrance were two statures, one of Poseidon and the other of Artemis hunting, iii, 5. Of the many wells in the city, one was dug beside another image of Artemis, iii, 5.⁸

Climbing the Acrocorinth which today is often associated only with Aphrodite,⁹ the visitor was again confronted by a plethora of gods and goddesses. According to legend, the Acrocorinth had been originally assigned to Helios

⁷Cf. the altar at Sycion to Zeus Meilichius Μελιχίος='gracious', ix, 6.

⁸Strabo, 8.6.21 'there is a good supply of wells throughout the city'.

⁹For a discussion see C.K. Williams, *Pre-Roman Cults in the Area of the Ancient Forum* 169ff., and 'Corinth and the Cult of Aphrodite' in ed. M.A. Del Chiaco *Corinthiaca: Studies in Honor of Darrell A. Amynt* (Columbia, University of Missouri Press 1986) 12-24, D. Engels, *op. cit.*, 97-99. For the archaeological evidence see M.E. Carr *Soles Aphrodite at Corinth: A Study of the Sculptural Types* (PhD Yale University, 1976) on 80 fragments belonging to the Roman period.

but was subsequently 'handed over' to Aphrodite. Yet as one ascended the mountain one saw the two precincts of Isis, Pelagarina and the Egyptian Isis, two to Serapis, one of which was called 'in Canopus'. Corinth's pluralism encompassed not only the gods of Greece and Rome but Egyptian ones as well.¹⁰ There was an altar to Helios, and a sanctuary to Necessity, Ἀνάγκη, and Force into which it was 'not customary to enter', according to Pausanias, iv, 6–7. Above it was a temple of the Mother of the gods, Μητρὸς θεῶν νόος, and a throne. There were the temples of the Fates and Demeter and the Maid, and one to Hera Bunaea where the images were not visible. On the summit was a temple of Aphrodite containing another image of Aphrodite this time armed, with Helios and Eros, iv, 6–v, 1.¹¹ What was to be made of the Mother of the gods?¹²

In this prestigious Roman colony Aphrodite had a new role which severed her from the disreputable aspects of her Greek past. She was adopted as the goddess from whom Julius Caesar claimed descent.¹³ While Corinth could no longer be called 'the city of Aphrodite' she had secured an important political place in the capital of Roman Achaia.

The discussion by Pausanias of the pluralism of Corinth's divinities makes no value judgements, for he, like so many ancients, simply assumed its legitimacy.¹⁴

¹⁰D.E. Smith 'The Egyptian Cults at Corinth' *HTR* 70 (1977) 201–31 and D. Engels, *op. cit.*, 102–107.

¹¹Strabo, 8.6.21 speaks of 'a small temple of Aphrodite' on the Acrocorinth.

¹²See J. Ferguson, 'The Great Mother' *The Religions of the Roman Empire* (London, Thames and Hudson, 1970) ch. 1.

¹³For her imperial role see D. Engels, *op. cit.*, 98–99. For Aphrodite as the mythical mother of Caesar and the cult of Venus Genetrix see also S. Weinstock, *Divus Julius* (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1971) 15–18. While the connection between Aphrodite and the sexual of ancient Corinth is well attested, see J.B. Salmon 'Corinth in the Greek World' *Wealthy Corinth: A History of the City to 338 BC* (Oxford, Clarendon Press 1984) ch. XXVII esp. pp. 398–401, Roman Corinth's loose living cannot be attributed to Aphrodite's patronage, see H.J. Mason, 'Lucius at Corinth' *Phoenix* 25 (1971) 160–65 for the evidence of immorality drawn not only from 1 Cor. but primarily from the second century sources.

¹⁴The list of Corinthian divinities provided by Pausanias was not untypical for cities of the East, for similar gods and goddesses appear in many others places in his account, see especially his evidence on the other Roman colony in Achaia, Patraea, Ch. VII. For a survey of the gods and goddesses in Ephesus similar to those found in Corinth and Patraea see R.E. Oster, 'Ephesus as a

iii. 1 Corinthians' Many Gods and Many Lords

1 Corinthians briefly refers to the religious pluralism of Corinth with a discussion of its 'many gods and many lords' (θεοὶ πολλοὶ καὶ κύριοι πολλοί), 8:5. Can we discern a distinction between the use of these terms which might throw further light on the Christians' perceptions of Corinth's pluralism? Other extant evidence shows that κύριοι is the title given not to heroes but to gods and goddesses whose statues are to be found in Corinth i.e. Isis and Serapis, Apollo, Artemis, Athene and Hermes, Asklepios and Dionysis.¹⁵ It is unlikely that the reference was to the ruling emperor as a deity, for Nero early in his reign refused divine honours.¹⁶ Departed emperors in 'popular' terminology were referred to as 'gods' for whom it is believed that there were cults in Corinth.¹⁷ The two terms here are synonymous.¹⁸ Reference is

Religious Center under the Principate, I. Paganism before Constantine', *ANRW* II, 18.3 (1990) 1661-1728.

¹⁵A. Deissmann, *Light from the Ancient East* (ET Baker, 1978) 352 *contra* G.D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (Grand Rapids, Eerdmans 1987) 373 who wrongly argues that the term was normally given to deities of the mystery cults and that gods refers to traditional deities. Pausanias does not use the term κύριος in his *corpus* to refer to a god but has another category *viz.* a hero, ἥρωες whose worship was mentioned elsewhere by him in Sicyon, a city close to Corinth, where there are heroes' shrines II. 8.1, 9.4, 9.6, and heroes 10.1, 11.7. See R.E. Oster, *op. cit.*, 1681-86 for a discussion of Ephesian heroes. The terms ἥρωες and ἥρῶν, 'shrine of the hero' are not used by Pausanias in two of the Roman colonies of Achaia, although they are used elsewhere by him of other cities in the province. P.A. Rainbow, *Monotheism and Christology in 1 Corinthians* 8.4-6, (Oxford D. Phil, 1987) 291 states that the Corinthians worshipped heroes although he provides no supporting evidence. For a discussion of the term κύριος see W. Bousset, *Kurios Christos* (ET New York, Abingdon Press, 1970) 138-147, A. Deissmann, *op. cit.*, 338-78.

¹⁶On the refusal of divine honours by Nero see R.K. Sherk, *The Roman Empire: Augustus to Hadrian*, Translated Documents of Greece and Rome, Vol. 6 (CUP, 1988) No. 64 (c. AD 55). While a proclamation of the emperor Nero refers to Claudius as a god, θεός, who has departed to his ancestors, no title of divinity is accorded Nero, *P.Oxy.* 1021 (AD 54). It is therefore right to see the use of κύριος in legal documents relating to the reigning emperor in Paul's day as a title of honour and not divinity, e.g. *P.Merton* 1 (AD 58). Cf. G. D. Fee, *op. cit.*, 373 n. 16 citing A. Feuillet, 'La profession de foi monotheiste de 1 Cor. viii, 4-6', *Studi Biblici franciscani Liber Annus* 13, 7-32 as support for the view that Paul has in mind deified Hellenistic kings and Roman emperors.

¹⁷See the inscription in Kent, No. 50 '[Sacred] to the deified Julius Caesar'. S. Weinstock, *Divus Julius* (Oxford,arendon Press, 1971) 405 draws attention to both a local *flamen Divi Iulii* at Corinth which 'implies a cult in a temple or at least an altar', and the coin struck with the head of Julius Caesar and a

also made by Paul to pagan sacrifices, cups and tables used in temples, and to meat sold in the market after being offered to idols, 8:1,4. 10:19,21.

II. The Impact of Religious Pluralism on the Jews¹⁹

In the early centuries Diaspora Jews as well as Christians lived in societies where religious pluralism flourished. How did the former who were also committed to monotheism cope with the problems it raised? The rabbinic sources discussed 'Abodah Zarah i.e. 'strange worship'—the very title suggesting that this was how paganism was perceived by pious Jews.²⁰ Although the sources record some of arguments mounted by philosophers to the anti-pluralistic stance of the Jews, they are primarily a comment on how the latter struggled to cope with the impact of the pagan environment on their daily lives. This brief survey will cover the phenomenological, philosophical and apologetic responses to religious pluralism.

Firstly, there was the need to explain observations which made Jews about the efficacy of other gods. The statement 'We both know in our hearts that there is no reality in an idol' would be expected as a succinct expression of the OT's view, but the matter was somewhat more complex for them than that.²¹ The completion of this citation by that pious Jew indicates something of the dilemma felt when they observed—'nevertheless we see men enter [the shrine] crippled and come out cured'—a reference to healings in the temples of Asklepios

hexastyle temple with a statue which might be his, although Weinstock, 299 concedes that it could be 'real or projected'.

¹⁸The context shows that they conveniently established an anthesis for the one God and one Lord, P.A. Rainbow, *op. cit.*, 161. See the inscription in Deissmann, 352 'to the lords, the greatest gods' τοῖς κυρίοις θεοῖς μεγίστοις.

¹⁹The study cannot be restricted to Corinth or Roman Greece, because of the slender evidence, see the short work by B.D. Mazur, *Studies on Jewry in Greece* (Athens, Printing Office Hestia, 1935).

²⁰A profile of religious pluralism can be constructed from the rabbinic sources e.g. S. Lieberman, 'Heathen Idolatrous Rites in Rabbinic Literature' *Hellenism in Jewish Palestine: Studies in the Literary Transmission Beliefs and Manners of Palestine in the 1 Century BCE–IV Century CE*, (New York, Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1950) 128–38.

²¹bT, AZ 55a.

or Serapis. That incident had to be explained by the rabbi to the ordinary Jew.²²

That was not the only challenge of pluralism to Jewish monotheism. The argument of a philosopher with the leading rabbi, R. Gamaliel II recorded in a late first century or very early second century AD polemic against idolatry shows that the monotheism of the latter did not go unchallenged. In the light of the statement concerning the jealousy of God over the worshipping of idols, Exodus 20:5, the philosopher asks

But is there any power in the idol that it should arouse jealousy? A hero is jealous of another hero, a wise man is jealous of another wise man, a rich man is jealous of another rich man, but has the idol any power that one should be jealous of it?²³

While Gamaliel believes that the idol has no power, he responds with an argument that God is jealous because the honour rightly due to him by mankind is given to an idol.²⁴ But the philosopher presses his point further. 'Some idols are worthwhile' and explains that when a fire raged in a temple, the idol escaped. 'Was it not that the idol could take care of itself.' The rabbi noted that the philosopher worshipped not only one object, 'but also the sun, the moon, the stars and the constellations, the mountains and the hills, the springs and the glens and even human beings'.²⁵

The pluralistic religious world also challenged what it perceived to be Jewish inconsistencies given the latter's exclusivist stance against pluralism. In doing so they reveal the argument used by the rabbis viz. that statues of gods and goddesses could rightly be considered ornaments and not gods. Proclus, the son of a philosopher said to R. Gamaliel III in Acco when he was bathing in the bath of Aphrodite 'It is written in

²² bT, AZ 55a. cf. Sanh 63b.

²³ Mek, *Bahodesh*, vi (Exodus 20.3-6). For a discussion of the sophisticated allusion in Gamaliel's response see L. Wallach, 'A Palestinian Polemic against Idolatry: A Study of Rabbinic Literary Forms' in ed. H.A. Fischel, *Essays in Greco-Roman and Related Talmudic Literature* (New York, KTAV, 1977) 116-7. For the dating see, H.L. Strack and G. Stemberger, *Einleitung in Talmud und Midrasch* (München, C.H. Beck'sche 1982) 76. Cf. M, AZ 4.7 where the rabbis including Gamaliel II were challenged in Rome as to why God did not destroy idols.

²⁴ The idol is equated with a dog which was an insult, see T, AZ 6.4.

²⁵ Mek, *Bahodesh*, vi.

your Torah “and there shall cleave nought of the devoted thing to your hand”. Why are you bathing in the bath of Aphrodite?’²⁶ The Rabbi’s justification was twofold. He argued that he did not come into ‘her domain’ but ‘she has come into mine’ *i.e.* the bath existed before the image of Aphrodite was set up in it, and the bath itself had been constructed for general use. Because the stature was set up next to the urinal he defended his actions on the grounds that while the scripture passage cited by Proclus proscribes ‘what is treated as a deity’, ‘what is not treated as a deity is permitted’ and the latter applied in this case.²⁷ This subjective argument which meant that the difference rested in the mind of the beholder was proscribed elsewhere—‘That which he [the Gentile] treats as a god is prohibited. And that which he does not treat as a god is permitted’.²⁸

When Jews were seen pouring water over themselves in the Bath of Aphrodite one rabbi asked ‘Is this not forbidden?’ However the other rabbi replied ‘that the waters are public property and could not be forbidden by virtue of its being a pagan sanctum’.²⁹ It was considered that the bath houses dedicated to a deity could be used by Jews. Others argued that it was acceptable provided no payment was given—‘If an idol has a bath-house or garden, we may use either so long as it is not to the advantage of idolatry’ *i.e.* there is no payment or recognition of any kind given to the idol.³⁰

Even Jewish manufacturing of idols could be justified by some who argued that nothing was wrong provided a Jewish

²⁶W.A.L. Elmslie, *The Mishna on Idolatry Aboda Zasa* (CUP 1911) 109 noted that it still survives as a sacred fish pond.

²⁷bT, AZ 44b. A. Wasserstein, ‘Rabban Gamaliel and Proclus the Philosopher (Mishnah, Aboda Zara 3.4)’ (Hebr.) *Zion* 45 (1980) 257–67.

²⁸T, AZ 5.6.

²⁹pT, *Schebi* VIII end, 38b–c cited Lieberman, *op. cit.* 133 for the argument concerning the translation.

³⁰*Ibid.* cf. M, AZ 4.3 in the case of a garden or bath house belonging to an idol it may be used ‘without expression of thanks, but if it did not do that which is required. If the property belongs jointly to the idol and to other owners, advantage may be taken of it whether with or without expression of thanks’. M, *Shemoth Rabba* 31.3 ‘It may be likened to a sanctuary of the Nymphs which provided water to the whole city, and everybody used to offer praise to the source which supplies it (*i.e.* Νυμφαῖν) [with water]’, T, AZ 6.5 and parallels on ‘A spring which flows out of a heathen sanctuary’.

craftsman did not bow down to them. It has been suggested that though this was indeed stretching the letter of the law and it should be seen as an endeavour 'to find a sanction *post factum*' for it 'clearly shows the reality with which the sages had to reckon, even if they did not approve.'³¹

While the Jews were forced to adapt to the religious pluralism of their day because it was woven into the fabric of daily life in a Gentile city, there were issues on which they felt they could not and would not cross the Rubicon. Firstly, there was the clear prohibition on eating blood and abstaining from food offered to idols.³² Secondly, there was the proscription against entering the idol temple—'he who pokes his head and the greater part of his body into a temple containing an idol is unclean'.³³ While there was participation in the Guilds of Alexandria by Jews, they did not join in the guild dinners in pagan temples.³⁴ Some Jews kept away from Gentile parties because of the 'the fear that the host will make a profession of faith before an idol'.³⁵ Thirdly, there was the ban on the sale of animals to Gentiles, and indeed a ban on the sale of items near the time of pagan religious festivals because

³¹E.E. Urbach, 'The Rabbinic Law of Idolatry in the Second and Third Century in the Light of Archaeological and Historical Facts' *IEQ* 9 (1959) 160-61. Cf. Tertullian, *De idololatria* ch. v against Christians making idols and ch. vii on the admission of idol makers as members of the church and even as ministers.

³²'Do not eat blood; abstain from food sacrificed to idols', αἷμα δὲ μὴ φαγεῖν, εἰδωλοθύτων ἀπέχεσθαι, *The Sentences of Pseudo-Phocylides*, ed. P.W. Van der Horst, (Leiden, E.J. Brill, 1978) l. 31 (Alexandria, 30 BC-AD 40) For his discussion that this line might have been a later interpolation, see p. 135. There is ample evidence elsewhere see E. P. Sanders, *Jewish Law from Jesus to the Mishnah*, (London, SCM 1990) 274-5. However he does suggest that although 'we cannot quantify. . . we may suppose that Jewish attitudes towards pagan meat varied' and that his own 'guess' is that eating meat with pagan friends 'has a home somewhere in Judaism'. Sanders is proposing 'that some Jews regarded the minor, formal idolatry involved in eating sacrificial meat as less serious than transgressing either of two prohibitions' i.e. eating pork etc and blood, pp. 281-82. He appears to be committed to an *apriori* view that Paul's solutions eg. 1 Cor. 10:27-29 must have a precedents in Jewish sources. There needs to be some evidence. Pagan sources record the strictness of Jews on this issue, see M. Whittaker, *Jews and Christians: Graeco-Roman Views* (CUP, 1984) 73-80.

³³T, A Z 6.3

³⁴M. Wischnitzer, 'Notes to a History of the Jewish Guilds', *HUAC*, xxiii. 2, (1938) 246-53.

³⁵E.E. Urbach, *op. cit.*, 242 citing T, AZ iv.6, bT, AZ 8a.

they could be used for idolatry.³⁶ He also avoided any appearance of veneration and therefore did not ever wish to be seen bowing down before an idol even if he were to drop money accidentally in front of it. There was the Rubicon for the pious Jew.³⁷

III. Corinthian Christians and Religious Pluralism

The Corinthian Christians, especially Gentiles, also had to learn to cope with the religious pluralism, facing the same complexities as those who were adherents to the roots from which Christianity sprang. As in the case of the Jews, there arose a diversity of opinion in the church as to what could and could not be done in particular circumstances, especially on the matter of food offered to idols in the temple, 1 Corinthians 8:7–10. The Christians like the Jews resorted to an authoritative teacher to adjudicate.

Were there arguments to which the Corinthians might appeal as the justification for their responses, as was the case in the Rabbinic sources? Some of the Christians could have justified their entering the temple in order to participate in the idol feasts arguing as Rabbis did on other issues. The *apologia* could be argued in much the same way the Jews did for bathing in the Aphrodite Baths. For the latter, the origin of the water for the town supply could not be traced to the activity of Aphrodite but to God ‘from whom all things derive’. What could be said of bathing water by Jews, could also be said by Christians concerning food. Was it not permissible to eat meat that had been offered to the idols and then sold in the meat market? Did not Jews affirm that ‘the earth is the Lord’s and the fulness thereof’ whenever they ate?³⁸ If that citation from Psalm 24:1 was the appropriate text—Paul does cite it later in

³⁶G.J. Blidstein, ‘The Sale of Animals to Gentiles in Talmudic Law’ *JQR* 61.3 (Jan. 1971) 188–98. CD xii ‘No man shall sell beasts or birds to the Gentiles lest they offer them in sacrifice.’

³⁷This brief and composite survey of extant sources gives some indication of how complex it was perceived to be a loyal Jew living in the midst of religious pluralism. It is acknowledged that some of the sources used are late or difficult to date and makes allowances for the issue of historicity which needs to be evaluated, see E.L. Strach and G. Stemberger, *op. cit.*, 56.

³⁸T, *Ber.* 4.1.

later in the discussion, 10:26—was it not a matter of indifference for the Christian what one ate, Mark 7:19 or even where one ate it?

It is suggested that the Corinthians had developed a theological justification for eating in the idol temple which is summarized in 1 Corinthians 8.4–6.³⁹

Concerning therefore the eating of things sacrificed to idols, we know that no idol is anything in the world, and that there is no God but one. For even though, γὰρ εἶπερ, there are so-called gods, λεγόμενοι θεοί, whether in heaven or on earth; as there, ὥσπερ, are many gods and many lords; but, ἀλλά for us there is one God, the Father, from whom all things derive, ἐξ οὗ τὰ πάντα, and for whom we live, καὶ ἡμεῖς εἰς αὐτὸν; and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things, δι' οὗ τὰ πάντα, and through him we live, καὶ ἡμεῖς δι' αὐτοῦ, 8:4–6.

Such an argument for participation can be sustained from these doctrinal statements in verses 4–6. The term 'so-called' gods, οἱ θεοὶ λεγόμενοι, indicates that the attribution of deity in heaven and on earth made by the pagans of Corinth to the phenomenon was not true. The ascribing of divinity was popular but erroneous.⁴⁰ While they have 'no existence in the form their worshippers believe them to have',⁴¹ the phrase

³⁹A number of commentators believe that the citation from the Corinthian letter covers not only v. 4 but also 5–6. For the list see J.C. Hurd, *The Origin of 1 Corinthians*, (London, SPCK 1965) 68. It will be noticed that almost all assume the citation is to be found in v. 4 and just under half cited by Hurd believe it concludes at v. 6. For a full discussion in support of the citation in vv. 4–6 see W.L. Willis, *op. cit.*, 83–87, although he suggests 'as there are many gods and many lords' is a Pauline qualification, 86. Cf. G.D. Fee, *op. cit.* 371 n. 10. who rejects vv. 4–6 as a Corinthian citation on the tenuous arguments that γὰρ is 'a strictly Pauline feature, especially in this letter', the anacolouthon makes little sense and the credal statement in v. 5 is a Pauline interpretation.

⁴⁰Cf. the use of λεγόμενοι for 'so-called' kings, Epictetus 4.1.51 and synonymous 'so-called' statements in Dio Chrysostom, *Or.* 13.11, 77/78.34 where the term is inappropriate to those who use it. On the latter issue see J.L. Moles, 'The Career and conversion of Dio Chrysostom' *JHS* xcvi (1978) 91. Cf. the old English meaning of 'commonly' = 'popularly but erroneously' Cf. also *Hermetic Writings* 2.14 οὐτε γὰρ τῶν ἄλλων λεγομένων θεῶν οὐτε ἀνθρώπων οὐτε δαιμόνων τις δύναται καθ' ὅπουσονοῦν ἀγαθὸς εἶναι ἢ μόνος ὁ θεός, and Tertullian *De idolatria* ch xv 'The so-called gods are of course mere names, but we know that, when names are misused for superstitious ends. . .'. εἶπερ can be used to imply that it is contrary to the fact, LS which agrees with the meaning of 'so-called gods' and ὥσπερ 'just as indeed' indicates that there were in Corinth many gods and many lords, as Pausanias carefully records.

⁴¹G.D. Fee, *op. cit.*, 372–3.

and lords [which] was not necessarily incompatible with Jewish monotheism'.⁴² To see the phrase 'the so-called gods' as 'emphatic a qualification of the monotheism of [v. 4] as Paul could have made as a Christian' is to misunderstand the participial construction's meaning.⁴³ These were no gods. Why then should there be any compunction on the part of some Christians eating a meal before idols, *i.e.* 'so-called gods'?

If the Rabbis could use the argument that a statue was only an ornament and not an idol because you did not bow the knee to it, then Corinthian Christians who believed that an idol was nothing could have rationalized their attending a feast. As long as they did not bow the knee to it or acknowledge its presence in any way, it was simply a statue. On those grounds they felt free in their conscience to do so because of their knowledge concerning the non-existence of an idol.⁴⁴ They could thus justify and pursue such a course of action which seemed appropriate for them individually in the light of the fact that an idol was nothing, and therefore eating what was sacrificed to them was a matter of indifference. 'We all have [this] knowledge', 8:1. Was that knowledge not part of Paul's teaching on idolatry? The statements are echoed elsewhere in Paul's teaching.⁴⁵ They therefore confidently took their stand upon this knowledge and ate in the idol temple, 1 Corinthians 10:12. If this reconstruction is correct, then 'the certain' *i.e.* 'those who stand', had mounted a very powerful argument based on Pauline teaching. This perhaps explains why he needed to give such lengthy reply.

⁴²P.A. Rainbow, *op. cit.*, 132. The statement is explained later by Paul in the discussion, 1 Cor. 10:20 where the 'so-called' are identified as demons.

⁴³J.C. Hurd, *op. cit.*, 122.

⁴⁴It should be noted that the majority of statements made here by the Corinthians could also have been readily endorsed by the Jews living in a pluralistic society except the affirmation that Jesus is the one Lord through whom all things came and through whom we live, which was a unique Christian affirmation.

⁴⁵1 Thess. 1.9 θεῷ ζῶντι καὶ ἀληθινῷ was now served in contrast to idols, cf. 1 Cor. 12.2 'lead away to dumb idols', 1 Thess. 1.1 ἐν θεῷ πατρὶ καὶ κυρίῳ Ἰησοῦ Χριστῷ where God is invoked as Father and Jesus as Lord, Col. 1.16 τὰ πάντα δι' αὐτοῦ καὶ εἰς αὐτὸν ἐκτίσται which it is said of Jesus.

What could be said of 'the weak'? They did not 'have' that knowledge,⁴⁶ and 'until now being accustomed to idols eat the meat sacrificed to idols, and because their conscience is weak, it is defiled (τῇ συνηθείᾳ τοῦ εἰδώλου ὡς εἰδωλόθυτον ἐσθ(οουσιν)). They could not say with certainty that an idol was nothing, οὐδὲν εἰδωλον, 8:1. There were Jews who perceived that there may have been 'power' in them for healing.⁴⁷ The 'weak' took a similar view that the food eaten in an idol temple had not been simply offered to a statue and it was wrong even if other Christians did it, 8:7–9.⁴⁸

It is not possible to ascertain precisely why some Corinthian Christians wanted to eat food in the idol temple, for no clear indication is given from the text.⁴⁹

V Paul on religious pluralism in 1 Corinthians 8–10⁵⁰

His discussion is built around a number of cumulative arguments used to persuade both the confident and the weak as to how they should resolve this issues. The operative word is 'persuade' for there appear to be those who, on the basis of their theological affirmations, are firmly convinced that they have every right to participate in the idol feasts.

⁴⁶ Ἄλλ' οὐκ πᾶσιν ἡ γνώσις which in context is related to the issue of eating before idols in the temple, vv. 7a, 10 cf. v. 1.

⁴⁷ Cf. the epigraphic evidence of Corinth 'Secundus, a freedman of deified kings [i.e. an imperial freedman] Hygeia erected in honour of the Healing Saviour' [τήν] δ' Ὑγιήν, ἀπελευθεροῖς]! [δ]ν θείωμ βασιλέων [δθετ]ο Παιηθιεύ Σωτή[ρι]! Σεκοῦνδος, J.H. Kent, No. 64 (mid. 2nd century AD) probably refers to Asklepios rather than Apollo, M. Lang, *Cult and Cure in Ancient Corinth: A Guide to The Asklepieion*, (American School in Athens, 1977) 36. The stature of Hygeia stood in a sanctuary of Asklepieion at the north edge of the city, Pausanias ii, 4–5.

⁴⁸ Athena is visible in her statue. Together, these hymns express very neatly two poles of an epiphany, the sighting of a god in the form of his image and the sensing of a presence which only the pious can perceive.' R. Lane Fox, *Pagans and Christians* (London, Penguin, 1988) 115. The invitations could be issued in the name in a god or the host of the feast 'The god calls you to a banquet being held in the Thoeion tomorrow. . . ' P.Coll.Youtie 51, 'Nikephoros asks you to dine at a banquet of the lord Serapis in the Birth-house. . . ' P.Köhn 57.

⁴⁹ For the range of possibilities see W.L. Willis, *op. cit.*, 21ff.

⁵⁰ It is not proposed to undertake detailed exegesis but to deal with the broad argument. For the most recent exegetical treatment which takes account of the secondary literature see P.D. Gardner, *The Gifts of God and the Authentication of a Christian*, (Ph.D. Cambridge University, 1989).

Paul's overall concern is a fundamental one *viz.* that determining ethical responses on this issue should be done not only within a credal but also a relational framework, in the first instance with respect to the weak Christian, 8:7ff. They must not be determined solely on the grounds of any perceived effects or non-effects on the individual Christian himself. In 9:3–12 he cites his own conduct in Corinth of not exercising the right to support for the sake of facilitating, rather than hindering the progress of the gospel. His cross-cultural sensitivity for the sake of others in his apostolic ministry is an example of his previous argument, 9:20–22, 8:13. Even if Paul cannot cite a παράδοσις of his which covers idol food, he can provide a paradigm for them, including the exercise of self-discipline over his bodily appetites for the sake of his ministry.⁵¹ The judgement of God upon Israel because of its seeking after evil things, flirting with idolatry and resulting riotous behaviour, the committing of fornication, and the tempting of God and murmuring against his providential goodness furthers the argument. These stand as warnings to the Corinthians, 10:11 including those who feel that they are secure as well as others who believe that the temptations to compromise with idolatry are unbearable, presumably because of social pressure, 10:13. They all are therefore, δίοπερ, to flee idolatry.

Paul explicates what this injunction will mean as he speaks to 'wise' men. The implications of eating of idol meat in an idol temple are spelt out on the basis of eating as an act of fellowship *i.e.* participation. In one sense an idol is nothing but for Paul neither idols nor things sacrificed to them were insignificant, for to sacrifice to them was to sacrifice to demonic powers and not to God. A pious Jew was to comment 'We both know in our hearts that there is no reality in an idol;

⁵¹In 1 Cor. 11.2 he praises them because they remember him in all things presumably as a paradigm. For a discussion of Paul's anti-sophistic background including self-discipline see my *Philo and Paul among the Sophists: A Hellenistic Jewish and a Christian Reponse* (Ph.D. Macquarie University, 1988) 169–177. The defence here is not related to a Corinthian challenge to Paul's authority to make a ruling on this matter, G.D. Fee, *op. cit.*, 361–2, but to the criticism of his having worked. Paul has used this issue to explicate what it means to imitators of him, 4.16 and 11.1. See also my argument *ibid.*, 149–211.

nevertheless we see men enter [the shrine] crippled and come out cured' commented a Jew.⁵² How could that be explained? Paul's answer traced the origin of that power to the demonic world, a fact which had not featured in the theological framework from which some Corinthians had made their decision on this issue.⁵³ Christians could not engage in a common activity with those powers, 10:21: neither could they drink from the cup of demons nor eat from their table.⁵⁴ The Corinthian Christians must not provoke the Lord to jealousy, 10:22, for a relationship with two powers was impossible.

The relational concerns of Paul are also seen when he discusses the need for them to determine behaviour within the parameters of edification and the seeking of the good of others, 10:24. They could buy meat in the market which he endorses on the basis of Psalm 24.1—a text which Jews were encouraged to cite as they partook of food.⁵⁵ They must seek the good of their neighbour. Here Paul's injunctions contrast with that of the Rabbi who proscribed the presence of the pious at a Gentile gathering and Tertullian's later concerns about Christians eating with non-Christians (see p. 218). Paul's solution is based

⁵²bT, AZ 55a cf. Sanhedrin 63—a reference to healing either by Asklepios or Serapis.

⁵³As we see the pagan's attitude of reverence for the idol through the eyes of the Jewish compiler of the polemic, the pagan is pictured as expressing the opinion that the idol is fraught with divine power. The power does not only manifest itself in the consciousness of the idolater. The idol's power distinguished as material from the power worshipped in the idol by the idolater is for that reason a vindication of the idolater's belief.' L. Wallach, *op. cit.*, 399-400. See also E.E. Urbach, 'The Rabbinic Law of Idolatry in the Second and Third Century in the Light of Archaeological and Historical Facts' *IEQ* 9 (1959) 154 n. 19 who contests the view of Liebermann that idols were not perceived by Jews as the work of demon powers who act through the images and statues.

⁵⁴For example, the Corinthian cup of Aphrodite see J.H. Kent, No. 3 τὰς Ἀφροδίτας ἐμί. For a reproduction see B. Jeffrey, *Local Scripts of Archaic Greece* (Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1990) p. 132 no. 35, plate 21 and discussion Corinth 15.1 p. 115, no. 1 and SEG XI 200, the original is in the Corinth Museum On the Asklepieion cups and cult tables see S.B. Aleshire, *The Athenian Asklepieion: The People, their Dedications and the Inventories* (Amsterdam, 1989) Inventory V. cult table and other silver plate for Asklepios (τὴν ἀνάθεσιν καὶ τὴν ποίησιν τῆς τραπέζης) l. 24, silver plate for the use of the priest l. 42, four cups dedicated by Athenian people ll. 95-6 and one drinking cup by the priest, and Inventory IV ll. 118-9 one cup and three drinking cups.

⁵⁵'The earth is the Lord's and the fulness thereof' Ps. 24:1 cited in the T, *Ber* 4.1.

on a disposition to respond to a private invitation to dinner and to eat without question the food provided. The only reason for abstention was a matter of scruple for the host or another guest who, in mistaken kindness drew the attention of the Christian to the fact that the food had been offered to idols, 10:28. It is clear that the abstention was for the sake of the other person's conscience and not the Christian's, 10:28–29. It is possible by grace to partake and what the Corinthians are to do must be for the glory of God *i.e.* giving no occasion for stumbling to either Jew or Greek or the churches of God. Paul did this, seeking to please all men in all things, seeking the welfare of others *ie*, their salvation, and not his own advantage, 10:30–33. He commands them to be imitators of him just as he has modelled his behaviour on Christ's, 11:1.

V. Inadequate perceptions and responses to religious pluralism

Ethical responses by those Christians living in the midst of religious pluralism involved more than knowledge derived from important statements about one God and one Lord. Account had to be taken of the OT's warning of judgement because of the nexus between idolatry and immorality. The effects of individual actions on others also had to be considered, for not to do so was to misunderstand both the nature of Christian ethics and the grace of God. The defence by the confident Corinthians of their response to the religious pluralism of their day epitomizes a fundamental, endemic weakness in their perception of the Christian life. Such a life was meant to be modelled on the Messiah's earthly ministry *i.e.* other-centredness and not self-centredness, cf. also 4:16–17, 11:1, 23–24. There could be no self-regarding actions based on any catch phrase of 'all things are lawful', 10:23.

Secondly, while 'secure' Corinthian Christians made no notional concessions to religious pluralism, there were those who did so because their theological construct did not take cognizance of the reality of the demonic world when they decided to eat food in the presence of idols in temples. That world, Paul argued, could not be dismissed for it was a reality.

Thirdly, there are still those who misunderstand about the issue under discussion the way Paul sought to resolve the

problem in 1 Corinthians 8–10. Most recently R. Gordon states categorically 'But it was only Christianity which refused sacrifice, which meant in practice advocating a meatless diet.'⁵⁶ Paul ruled otherwise.

In conclusion it should be noted that the issues raised in 1 Corinthians 8–10 are not merely of academic concern to NT scholars in the West. Churches in the East, like the Christian congregation in first century Corinth, live in societies where there are many gods. Some face the identical problem of food offered to idols, and among Asian churches, there is not always unanimity as to how to respond. All agree that eating food before idols at a religious festival or in a temple is incompatible with their Christian profession, cf. 1 Corinthians 10:14 ff. There are those who feel uneasy about Paul's solution which allows for such mixing, 1 Corinthians 10:25ff.⁵⁷ Others extend Paul's ruling to their own families where all food may be offered to idols. How these issues are decided indicate theological and ethical perceptions of the Christian life. Are not Paul's relational parameters an important guide?

There are now substantial issues for Western churches which some Christian churches in the East have faced for centuries *viz.* living in the midst of religious pluralism as the people of God. The latter's first hand experience cannot be ignored by the West as it now comes to grips with religious pluralism on its own shores. Nor can it dismiss the costly affirmations Corinthian Christians had to make as they lived in the midst of a pluralistic society. They affirmed that there was one God, the Father, and one Lord, Jesus Christ. But simply affirming that was not sufficient, for to be a Christians meant to live in such a way as to glorify God by modifying ethical conduct so as not to give any occasion for stumbling to the church of God, nor to create hindrances to Jews or Gentiles so they may be saved, 10:31–33.

⁵⁶'Religion in the Roman Empire' ed. M. Beard and John North in *Pagan Priests* (London, Duckworth, 1990) 251.

⁵⁷The issue seems to be of no greater significance than a Christian eating *kosher* meat or that which has been consecrated according to Islamic custom.