"Be imitators of me": Paul's modus operandi in forming the Corinthians

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“BE IMITATORS OF ME”
PAUL’S *MODUS OPERANDI* IN FORMING THE CORINTHIANS

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the S.T.L. Degree
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## Contents

**Introduction**...........................................................................................................................................3

**Chapter 1: Historical Background of the First Letter to the Corinthians**.................................7

1. Corinth and its Culture in the First Century CE..................................................................................8

2. Paul’s Visit to Corinth.........................................................................................................................14

3. Adaptation to the Culture of Corinth in First Corinthians...............................................................21
   3.1 Idolatry...........................................................................................................................................22
   3.2 Sexual behavior............................................................................................................................23
   3.3 Isthmian Games...........................................................................................................................24
   3.4 Corinthian Bronze and Mirrors..................................................................................................25

4. Conclusion.........................................................................................................................................26

**Chapter 2: Founding of the Community**.................................................................28

1. Paul’s Network – Personal Relationships with the Corinthians....................................................29

2. Paul’s Tent-Making as Preaching through Work............................................................................36

3. Preaching Christ Crucified in the Process of Building the Community...........................................39

4. The New Christian Community.......................................................................................................42
   4.1 Formation through Prayer Gatherings.......................................................................................45
   4.2 Formation through the Lord’s Supper.........................................................................................49

5. Conclusion.........................................................................................................................................53

**Chapter 3: Formation from a Distance**.....................................................................................55

1. Divisions in the Newly-Founded Church and Paul’s Rhetorical Response..........................56

2. Difficulties Addressed in First Corinthians.....................................................................................65
   2.1 The Sexual Matters..................................................................................................................65
   2.2 Lawsuits....................................................................................................................................68
   2.3 Idolatry.......................................................................................................................................70
   2.4 Use of Charismata....................................................................................................................73

3. The Ideal Follower of Christ According to Paul............................................................................75

**Conclusion**.........................................................................................................................................85

**Bibliography**.....................................................................................................................................88
Introduction

When Neil Armstrong accomplished his moon-walking mission in 1969, just a few years after the Second Vatican Council, it probably did not even come to people’s minds that we could actually walk on Mars. The world has changed since then, and what was unthinkable back in the 1960s now begs to be realized. The astronauts of 2016 are preparing to set foot on Mars, while the Church, apparently, prepares to make some adjustments – especially in evangelization. Pope Francis, in the Introduction to his Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, writes: “I wish to encourage the Christian faithful to embark upon a new chapter of evangelization marked by this joy [of the gospel], while pointing out new paths for the Church’s journey in years to come.”

What would be so new, then, and what could change in the mission of the Church today? The answer, I want to argue in this thesis, comes from Scriptures, since we want to be “like the head of a household who brings from his storeroom both the new and the old” (Matt 13:51).

What strikes us the most when we enter New York, Paris, or Warsaw today is the overwhelming feeling of complexity. The situation gets a little bit more complicated when we find ourselves in a city in a foreign country – with an unknown people, a strange culture, and being far away from our comfort zone. This is the environment for an evangelizer who decides to bring the gospel to strangers, and that was the situation for Paul when he reached Corinth sometime in the early 50s CE. At that time, Corinth, as a major Greek metropolis of the Roman Empire, was very well known for its luxury, its ability to entertain, and the somewhat immoral habits of its citizens. Were Corinthians ready to accept the gospel, especially the one Paul was focused on – the gospel of Christ crucified? Strangely enough, the Jewish tent-maker was able to plant the church of God in this very complex environment. What would he do today if he were to
bring the gospel to New Yorkers, or Parisians, or Varsovians? Two millennia after Paul we find ourselves bunkered in our electronic world, shopping online, playing computer games rather than living real life. Would Paul use the same methods in preaching and reaching the people? We certainly do not know for sure, but I want to argue in this S.T.L. thesis that Paul’s *modus operandi* in first-century Corinth is not outdated and can thus be used today. I hope the thesis helps and inspires priests, church group leaders, and all sorts of evangelizers in their apostolic work and in their striving to bring Christ to others.

Before we begin the thesis, I want to give an explanation of what I understand as Paul’s *modus operandi*. Having a particular message to be delivered (the one about Jesus Christ, who was “Son of God,” was crucified and buried, but was raised from the dead, who appeared to witnesses), Paul came to a specific city in the Mediterranean world. I believe that he was educated and intelligent enough to know that some kind of adapted way of proclaiming Christ had to be used in order to succeed. Therefore, a Christian formation according to Paul – his *modus operandi* – is his way of proceeding in building the church of God, including how he acted in order to reach the people of Corinth, then how he founded the community of the faithful, and finally how he formed them so that they could become God’s holy people. I will argue that Paul gave a simple strategy for evangelizers working in complex environments, namely, in his process of building Christian community he operated from complexity to simplicity – he used simple methods, setting himself as an example that was leading ultimately to Christ: “be imitators of me, as I am of Christ” (1 Cor 11:1).

*Methodology and Synopsis of Intended Work*

This work is a biblical thesis and hence examines the Scriptures as its source and its main inspiration. Each chapter involves exegesis of key passages which will bring us material for
reflection on Paul’s way of proceeding at every step of forming the Corinthians. The three

Chapter One of my thesis will investigate the historical background of the First Letter to
the Corinthians. I will begin by offering an overview of first-century CE Corinth. I will also
show how, by numerous references to Corinthian day-to-day existence (theater, music, marriage,
religious practices, sexual behavior, meat-shopping, etc.), we can depict from the letter the
author’s drawing near to those who were listening to him, and making his message
understandable and easy to accept. Inculturation, I will propose, was his missionary strategy and,
as such, the very first step of Paul’s \textit{modus operandi}. From there I will move on to investigate
the two New Testament accounts of Paul’s initial visit to Corinth. The entire first chapter, in my
view, will help to depict the mindset of an evangelizer immersing himself into a strange culture
and building the foundation for creating a Christian community.

Chapter Two will investigate how Paul founded the Corinthian community. This chapter
will be largely exegetical. First, I will consider his work as a preacher, going from one place to
another, especially where people would normally gather (markets, agoras, baths, etc.). But I will
also show how meeting many people passing by the busy trade route of Corinth and networking
with both disadvantaged citizens (such as the slaves, the women, the poor, etc.) and those of the
upper class (the people of education, wealth, connections, etc.), Paul became an apostle of Christ
in a new, unprecedented way. Next I will draw a picture of the community he eventually
founded, with a bit of structure and some rules. Lastly, I will consider Paul’s formation of the
community while he was still present to them.

The third chapter will demonstrate that Paul’s \textit{modus operandi} included writing letters. I
will look into the community’s self-development through trial and failure. Next, I will examine
how Paul found out about the Corinthians’ problems once he had left the city, and how he responded. Then I will explore some of the difficulties addressed in First Corinthians and describe Paul’s modus operandi in giving instructions through that letter. The most important part of this chapter will be its final section, which I will devote to Paul himself, as he presents himself as a role model for every Christian to follow.

At the end of the thesis I will offer a conclusion by explaining how today’s church leaders can learn much from the way Paul evangelized – being present with people, becoming one of them, and bringing Christ to their homes.
Chapter 1

Historical Background of the First Letter to the Corinthians

For those of us raised as Christians, the message of Christianity and its stories are part and parcel of who we are. Even the larger culture has assimilated much from Christianity; think of the crèche that appears in city squares at Christmas time. But Christianity and its message have gone through a long voyage to the present. Things were not so easy or apparent when the apostle Paul proclaimed the gospel. For the first-century CE world of the Mediterranean basin, the gospel as Paul proclaimed it was a surprising message, threatening the values and beliefs of the people he met. In other words, Paul’s specific message “that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures; that he was buried; that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the scriptures,”¹ and that he appeared to witnesses, including Paul (1 Cor 15:3-8), had to be delivered to specific people, living in a specific environment. In asking ourselves how it was even possible that an itinerant Jew could be so successful in founding a vibrant community in Greco-Roman Corinth, we need first to have an overview of the city itself and to create a profile of the people who lived there. Historical and archeological data will be very helpful in this.

This opening chapter, therefore, contains three sections. The first draws a historical picture of first-century Corinth. The second examines the two New Testament accounts of Paul’s initial visit to Corinth as depicted in 1 Cor 2:1-5 and in Acts 18:1-18. From there we will move on to look briefly at specific aspects of the city noted by Paul and used in his first (canonical) letter to the believers there. This information will help us depict the mindset of an evangelizer

¹ All Scripture quotations are from the NABRE.
immersing himself into a Greco-Roman urban environment and building the foundation for creating a Christian community.

1. Corinth and its Culture in the First Century CE

Depicted both in positive and in negative light, Corinth was very well known in the first-century CE Roman Empire. Horace famously commented, “Not for every man is the voyage to Corinth,” meaning that for most people the expense of the city was too high, and/or that its looseness in morality was simply unbearable for some. Strabo and Pausanias, two Greek historians and geographers, give us a great deal of information about what the city looked like and how it worked. Strabo (born 64 BCE), after passing by in 44 BCE, describes Corinth as “drawing a lot of people” because of its highly strategic locale and all the entertainment it provided. Pausanias, in his Description of Greece, depicts the city’s momentum in marketing, in religious piety toward Greco-Roman gods, and in its ability to entertain the people, a reference to the Isthmian Games hosted regularly since the year 50 CE. Undoubtedly, the most frequent word both used to describe the city was “wealthy.” But before it was like this, the city went through difficult times, and so we can say it had developed in three historical stages.

The first stage is that of ancient Corinth, covering the Greek part of its history. The earliest archeological findings date back to the Neolithic Period, but it was not before the eighth century BCE that it became one of the most important cities of Greece. Mostly for that reason, it played a central role in the uniting of the Greek city-states, which soon turned into the Greek Empire. However, because it never developed into a military power, during the revolt of the Achaean League against Rome (to stop Roman expansion in Greece), Corinth was severely

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3 Murphy-O’Connor, St. Paul’s Corinth, 12.
defeated and completely razed in 146 BCE. The second stage, between that destruction and 44 BCE, reveals some evidence of rebuilding and resettling. But more important for us and for Paul is the third stage, starting from 44 BCE, when the re-foundation of Corinth by Julius Caesar took place and the Roman Era of Corinth begun. The city regained its economic and political prominence and, by the time of Paul’s visit, had become the capital of Achaia, a Roman province under a proconsul.⁴

First-century Corinth quickly became one of the most prominent cities in the Greco-Roman world. When we talk about Roman Corinth, we need to bring to our mind the great cities of today – icons of prosperity and centers of culture, economy, and tourism (e.g., New York, Shanghai, Tokyo, and Paris, just to name a few).⁵ Its success was based mainly on its strategic location on the western side of the Isthmus separating the mainland of Greece from the Peloponnese (the Isthmus at its narrowest point is only 3.5 miles wide, making the Peloponnese almost an island). Therefore, all the land trade, as well as all human traffic going from upper to lower Greece, had to go through Corinth – including Paul. Coming from Athens (Acts 18:1), he likely made his way to Corinth by land, though it could be easily reached by sea. Having two economically important ports – Lechaion on the Corinthian Gulf and Cenchreae on the Saronic Gulf – the city monopolized trade from the Adriatic and the Aegean Seas. Much of the shipping trade between Rome and the eastern parts of the Empire passed through Corinth. Shipping would often come through there because the journey around the Peloponnese was very dangerous.⁶ The city’s geographic location thus played a large role in Corinth’s becoming one of the most famous

⁵ Murphy-O’Connor, St. Paul’s Corinth, 66.
cities of the Roman Empire. Its economic success was so stunning that Athens, at the time of Paul, started to decline in competition with Corinth.\(^7\)

When Paul reached Corinth in the middle of the first century CE, he must have been impressed by its size and grandeur. It is worth mentioning at this point that Roman Corinth was seriously “upgraded” by restoring and enlarging old temples, adding new shops and many public buildings, as well as creating an amphitheater for as many as 14,000 spectators. We need to add to the picture beautifully designed city gates, stylistic arches, Roman bathhouses, fountains, and basilicas. Apparently, the public marketplace (Agora) was bigger than any in Rome.\(^8\) It may well have been one of the most beautiful and modern cities Paul had seen. Today’s archeological remains of Corinth reveal extraordinary engineering. As Jerome Murphy-O’Connor reports, “it was built to a design of one of Rome’s best city planners,” starting with the fact that the choice for the location of the new city was determined by nature, on an elevated plain.\(^9\) What is more, during the so-called Pax Romana, it was not necessary to reinforce cities with enormous walls; if that was so, Corinth must have been exposed and visible from afar.\(^10\)

The city’s major roadway, the Cardo Maximus, fifty feet in width, ran north-south through the marketplace. So too did the two roads going to the two Corinthian ports – Lechaion and Cenchreae (both approximately 5 miles away from the Agora). All the other streets were also pleasantly wide, crossed at right angles, and gave easy access to the new, rectangularly designed area. The Agora’s portico in Corinth was the longest in ancient Greece, some 541 feet (with 71 Doric columns and 34 Corinthian ones).\(^11\) In addition, the city was in possession of the most desirable recreational area. Even though we do not know the exact location of the Olympion, one

\(^8\) Willis, “Corinth,” 279.
has to imagine an impressive hippodrome on the coastal plain, where the biannual Isthmian Games took place. We will return to the Isthmian Games again, but it is worth noting that they, too, were one of the reasons for the enormous economic boom of the city in the first century CE. Finally, the city was an interesting place in terms of sculpture. Almost every street, the city gates, the temples, and the public buildings were enriched with carefully and artfully crafted monuments or ornaments. Even today many public buildings in our own cities are ornamented with columns in the Corinthian order.

On many corners of the city was found a temple dedicated to one of the gods of the Pantheon or to the Emperor. The situation was not very different from Athens, where Luke portrays Paul as becoming indignant because of the sight of the city full of idols. His “I see that in every respect you are very religious” (Acts 17:22) sounds a bit provocative. In any event, with the re-establishment of the city many of the old cults and religions again flourished and were joined by new ones, coming from different areas of the Empire, such as Judaism and the Egyptian cult of Serapis. Probably the most popular cult was the worship of the city’s patron, Aphrodite, whose enormous temple with baths was situated in Acrocorinth (Corinth’s upper city). Since a great deal of its commercial life depended on the sea, it was appropriate to have temples dedicated to Aphrodite, the patroness of sailors, and, of equal fame, Poseidon, the ruler of the sea. His temple was closer to the place where the approximate location of the Olympion was. Also, Paul must have seen various miraculous fountains and yet another temple, that of Asclepius, the “god of healings.” Excavations of the area reveal a great number of clay copies of human body parts, left there as indicators of what had been healed by Asclepius or what was desired to be healed.

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The Corinth rebuilt in 44 BCE was a Roman colony. That is to say, in addition to Greek natives, the city was populated with Roman colonists. In order to colonize the city, Roman authorities sent (or left there after battles in this area) “veterans” of the Roman army to Corinth. According to Robert M. Grant, other colonists were ex-slaves and the poor of the city of Rome, people looking for employment or for land, as well as troublemakers.\(^{13}\) These data help reconstruct the social spectrum Paul encountered in Corinth: people working hard for the beauty of the city and for the pleasures of life, but also loose when it came to moral integrity, at least according to Jewish standards. Epictetus, a teacher of philosophy in Rome, on his arrival to Corinth notices a problem of some citizens, which is the fact that they do not practice the virtues fitting for Roman citizenship, but instead shave their bodies and try to look pretty.\(^{14}\) Edwin D. Freed notes that the danger of Christians going back to the immorality of their past was greater than in other cities to which Paul wrote. Moral problems in Corinth seemed more acute and might cause more anxiety than in other churches.\(^{15}\)

Along with regaining its political and economic significance, Corinth also attracted people from all over the Empire, forming an extraordinary ethnic mixture. The economically dynamic multi-ethnic and multi-religious ambiance enticed people from Asia Minor, Egypt, Syria, or Palestine to come to Corinth. Among those coming were Jews (some because of the decree of the Emperor Claudius in 49 CE that expelled Jews from Rome). They might have had their own synagogue where, as related in Acts, Paul would come every Sabbath to enter into discussions (Acts 18:4). Although archeological excavations of Corinth have unearthed a Jewish

\(^{13}\) Grant, *Paul in the Roman World*, 15.


inscription (probably from the door lintel of the synagogue) and ornaments with *menorah* from the fourth century CE, we know from Philo that Jews were in Corinth in the first century.\textsuperscript{16}

Although farming around the area of Corinth was limited in scope (due to accessibility), the soil was so good and so rich that Corinth became an Achaean “super-giant” in agriculture.\textsuperscript{17} It could possibly explain why Paul described the reality of growing faith among Corinthians via the metaphor of farming (“I planted, Apollos watered, but God caused the growth” [3:6]). However, it is probably better to think about Corinth’s abundance in crops and in other food supplies as coming from all the trading, both by sea and by land. The city produced highly prized bronze works and artfully polished mirrors, and was home to much light industry. Local artisans made highly valued pottery and lamps that were famous and desired around the Mediterranean Sea. First-century Corinth also stood out as the largest center of ceramic painting in the exotic-oriental style. When Paul arrived at Corinth, it was an important exporter of all sorts of textile goods, such as carpets, clothing, and tents.\textsuperscript{18} The latter datum is extremely important for Paul because he could easily find work there (cf. Acts 18:3).

As in all the other cities of the Empire, with the passing of time, the Romans influenced more and more the Corinthian infrastructure, economy, and politics. While in the Corinth Paul entered people spoke Greek (especially in trading), the official language was Latin, though one could also encounter languages of other ethnic minorities of the city. In terms of population, the city rapidly grew until it reached approximately 100,000 inhabitants by the time of Paul’s visit.\textsuperscript{19} Arriving in Corinth from Athens, where he had no or limited success in his mission, Paul was confronted with a multidimensional challenge named “Roman Corinth.”

\textsuperscript{16} Willis, “Corinth,” 281.  
\textsuperscript{17} Donald Engels, *Roman Corinth: an Alternative Model for the Classical City* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), 123.  
\textsuperscript{18} Rosik, *Pierwszy List do Koryntian*, 34-35.  
2. Paul’s Visit to Corinth

It is not easy to reconstruct Paul’s visit to Corinth, for two particular reasons. First, he himself does not supply us with enough historical data to do so. Second, we have to be careful with the historicity of the portrait in Acts of the first encounter between Paul and the Corinthians. Since Luke has his own theological interests the data from Acts must be used with caution. However, when we juxtpose Paul’s letters and Acts, it is possible, in my opinion, to sketch a scenario that is highly probable, especially using those points where Acts and Paul’s own account converge. For instance, we can deduce that Paul separated from Timothy and Silas and entered Corinth alone after a short visit to Athens en route (Acts 17:14-15; 18:1 and 1 Thess 3:1-2); he initially supported himself in Corinth by earning his living (Acts 18:3 and 1 Cor 9:15-18); one of his early converts in Corinth was Crispus (Acts 18:8 and 1 Cor 1:14); and after Paul left Corinth, Apollos came to Corinth (Acts 18:24 and 1 Cor 1:12). In addition, there is the link with Priscilla and Aquila (Acts 18:2 and Rom 16:3), along with reference to a certain Sosthenes (Acts 18:17 and 1 Cor 1:1). According to some scholars (Goulder, Collins), it is also very likely that the hearing before Gallio is historically credible, once we see how well informed Luke seemed to be.20

With these points in mind, let us try to recreate the circumstances of Paul’s first visit to Corinth. In 1 Cor 2:1-5 Paul writes:

“When I came to you, brothers, proclaiming the mystery of God, I did not come with sublimity of words or of wisdom. For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ, and him crucified. I came to you in weakness and fear and much trembling, and my message and my proclamation were not with persuasive (words of) wisdom, but with a demonstration of spirit and power, so that your faith might rest not on human wisdom but on the power of God.”

We can logically conclude that Paul visited Corinth during its Roman period. This was on his so-called second missionary journey which covered a time span between the years 49 and 52 CE. According to Acts he went through Philippi, Thessalonica, Athens, Corinth, and Ephesus, before going to Jerusalem in approximately 52 CE. Immediately preceding the visit to Corinth was a short stay in Athens, which Acts depicts as unsuccessful. Preaching on the resurrection of the body, he scandalized some of his listeners, and so in consequence he had to leave the Athenian Agora defeated. Luke describes bluntly: “some began to scoff, but others said, ‘We should like to hear you on this some other time’” (Acts 17:32). This episode did not stop Paul from continuing his mission. From Athens, Paul set out to proclaim the gospel in “wealthy” Corinth, the ancient rival only 53 miles away.21

Luke opens his own description of Paul’s visit to Corinth by saying: “After this he left Athens and went to Corinth. There he met a Jew named Aquila, a native of Pontus, who had recently come from Italy with his wife Priscilla because Claudius had ordered all the Jews to leave Rome” (Acts 18:1-2). He dates Paul’s arrival, therefore, by referring to the Edict of Claudius, who was Emperor from 41-54 CE. The ban against the Jews by Claudius was well recognized by historians. The reason for the ban is depicted by the second century historian Suetonius, who says: “Claudius expelled from Rome the Jews constantly making disturbances at the instigation of Chrestus.”22 This Chrestus was probably Christ about whom the expelled Jews, or Judeo-Christians, were disputing and causing trouble for the authorities of Rome. What is troubling for scholars, however, is the date of the turmoil and of the edict itself. There are two documents in competition for the dating. The first is a text from Orosius, the only one who gives us an explicit date, and the second is a text from Dio Cassius.

22 Murphy-O’Connor, St. Paul’s Corinth, 152.
Orosius’s fourth-century CE account allocates the expulsion of the Jews to the ninth year of Claudius’s rule. Since he was proclaimed as Emperor in January 41 CE, his ninth year would start in January 49 CE (and end up in January 50 CE). This is the reason why most scholars date the decree to 49 CE, and thus Paul’s initial visit in Corinth was likely from 49 CE to 51 CE. However, some suggest that Dio Cassius’ mention of a “restriction” of Jewish meetings in 41 CE must also have referred to the Edict of Claudius. As Jerome Murphy-O’Connor underlines, it might be true that some Jews were expelled from Rome at this time, just as the Romans banished Jews on other occasions. However, it is highly improbable that a newly appointed Emperor would start with a set of bans and expulsions. Actually, it was just the opposite. Claudius’s attitude toward Jews was extremely positive, as we can infer from his restoring to them all the privileges that his predecessor Caligula (37-41 CE) had abrogated. According to Craig S. Keener, Claudius was an intellectual, but was easily manipulated by his wives and the nobles of the city. He was viewed as weak and less tyrannical, which leads to a conclusion that his edict of expulsion of the Jews likely had a later date. Thus, in order to set the closest date for Paul’s arrival, we have to look into other data, too.

From First Corinthians, we may investigate a possible allusion to the Isthmian Games held in April/May 49 and 51 CE, of which Paul could not be unaware. Athletic metaphors, as noticed by Murphy-O’Connor, employed in 1 Cor 9:24-27, could indicate Paul’s appearance in the city during the great opening of the Olympon in Corinth.

In Luke’s narrative, we encounter—as mentioned above—the account of a judicial trial before a Roman proconsul of Achaia, Gallio: “But when Gallio was proconsul of Achaia, the Jews rose up together against Paul and brought him to the tribunal, saying, ‘This man is inducing

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23 Murphy-O’Connor, St. Paul’s Corinth, 157.
24 Keener, Acts, 2698.
people to worship God contrary to the law’’ (Acts 18:12-13). The existence of the tribunal in
Corinth is archeologically well attested. A Corinthian bema (or speaker’s platform) stood right in
the center of the Agora, and archeologists date it to 44 CE. In this place the magistrates sat to
listen to those appointed for a trial, who were standing on the square stone podium in front of the
bema. Murphy-O’Connor notes that two flights of stairs led up to the bema, and shops
surrounded the area.26

Raymond F. Collins mentions epigraphic inscriptions from Delphi, which indicate that
Gallio was proconsul from 50-51 or 51-52 CE.27 Gallio likely left Corinth by the end of 51 CE
because he developed home-sickness, and this might suggest Paul’s arrival sometime between
51-52 CE. However, even with all these texts, we cannot state with precision the date of Paul’s
visit. For this reason, I choose to follow the traditional dating which places the “eighteen
months” which Luke talks about between early 50 and 51 when Paul left for Ephesus.28

According to Acts Paul set out on a missionary journey (Acts 15:40-41), during which he
founded churches in places such as Philippi, Thessalonica, and Corinth. It is good to recall at this
point the information we have already collected about the metropolis he was walking into. It was
a city of great economic and political significance; it had very vital connections with Rome and
was greatly romanized; the city, however, retained several Greek elements, such as usage of the
language; it had a beneficial geographical location, easily accessible from Athens; it also
attracted peoples and beliefs from all over the Empire; and it had a prominent Jewish
community.29

26 Murphy-O’Connor, St. Paul’s Corinth, 28.
27 Collins, First Corinthians, 23.
28 Murphy-O’Connor, St. Paul’s Corinth, 159.
29 Keener, Acts, 2684.
When Paul reached Corinth, he started to look around for an audience, and the first thing to come to his mind was probably a synagogue. Also, Luke’s report suggests that the first people met by the apostle were fellow Jews, “After this he left Athens and went to Corinth. There he met a Jew named Aquila” (Acts 18:1). Connecting with the Jewish community in Corinth is likely for many reasons: it was the best place for finding food, housing, various social connections, and, most importantly, a job. It is thus probable that Paul there went at first, making connections and preparations for preaching his gospel.

Keener suggests that Corinth contained the most numerous Jewish population in all of Greece. Apparently, it was known for religious tolerance that allowed Jews to practice freely the prescriptions of the Torah. Jews from as far away as Egypt knew about descendants of Abraham in Corinth and in other wealthy regions of Greece. So, likely, did Paul. He knew beforehand that he was going to meet his fellow Jews in Corinth, and so we may deduce that he would also deliver his message among them, which at the beginning seemed to appear successful. Some significant converts stand as proof of his effective initial attempt to plant the church in Corinth: Stephanas (1 Cor 1:16), Titus Justus (Acts 18:7), and Crispus whom Acts call a ruler of the synagogue (1 Cor 1:14); moreover, the wealthy Gaius, who became a crucial figure for the Corinthian community (1 Cor 1:14). In the next chapter we will take a closer look at these converts.

Many scholars today are hesitant to speak about first century CE synagogue buildings. Whether there was a synagogue built for religious purposes in Corinth or not, we may try to reconstruct the initial meeting with Jews there. Not many Jews held Roman citizenship, since most of them, coming from outside, formed an immigrant, almost autonomous community. Seen as no different from non-Roman or non-Greek religions, Jews were probably treated as the other

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30 Keener, Acts, 2694.
immigrant communities.\footnote{Keener, Acts, 2737.} Although they did not fit into a guild system with their patron deities, Jews organized themselves quite well in making characteristic local “mini-environments” with decent economic power. One example, notes Keener, is the provision of kosher meat for the local butcher shops at the Agora, which were controlled by civic authorities.\footnote{Keener, Acts, 2737-2738.} It is likely that Paul with his artisan skills was well received by the Corinthian Jewish community.

Luke reports in Acts: “Every Sabbath, he entered into discussions in the synagogue, attempting to convince both Jews and Greeks” (18:4). The Greek inscription found by archeologists in Corinth, noting the local “Synagogue of the Hebrews,” is dated between 100 BCE and 200 CE. Now, even though the style of the letters in the inscription suggests that it comes from a time after Paul, a synagogue might have been built over a previous one. The archeological finding situates the synagogue in a prosperous part of the city, which gives us a little better idea about the beginnings of Paul’s mission in Corinth. Paul might have been accommodated in a shop in the Jewish enclave or near to it. A city center was an excellent base for the purpose of his mission, which Luke describes as trying to convince both Jews and Greeks.\footnote{Keener, Acts, 2738.} From here it would have been easy for him to work throughout the week and to enter into discussions in the synagogue on every Sabbath. Synagogue buildings, as well as Jewish gatherings called “synagogues,” were not merely places of prayer. For example, the Theodotos synagogue inscription found in Jerusalem (dated between late first century BCE and some time before 70 CE), gives us a unique insight into what the function of early synagogues was. The inscription says that it was built for the reading of the Torah and for the teaching of commandments. Additionally, having guest rooms it served as an inn for Jews from outside the
city. It was probably that educational function of the synagogue (attested by Philo and Josephus Flavius), which Paul utilized for his preaching about Jesus.\(^\text{34}\)

Being a Jew (indeed a Pharisee; Phil 3:5), Paul knew exactly the customs of the diaspora. By the time he visited Corinth, synagogue worship was already structured into a liturgical celebration.\(^\text{35}\) In addition, Wayne A. Meeks writes that “in the cities where Paul founded congregations the Jews had probably already advanced to the stage of possessing buildings used exclusively for the community functions.”\(^\text{36}\) Most probably, coming on Shabbat to the synagogue, he would pray with all the attendants the introductory prayers of “Sh’ma Israel” and “the Eighteen Blessings,” and listen to a reading from the Pentateuch and perhaps a reading from the Prophets or Writings. A time of interpretation followed.\(^\text{37}\) We might suppose that Paul employed the latter to try to convince both Jews and gentiles alike. It is probable that some of “the Greeks,” about whom Paul talks frequently in his letters (Gal 3:28; Col 3:15; 1 Cor 1:22), were gentiles who attended the Jewish gatherings in the hope of finding something spiritual or “wise” there. Indeed, the Corinthian synagogue was most likely a Greek-speaking one, since Greek was the most popular language among Roman Jews.\(^\text{38}\)

According to Luke Paul spent one and a half years teaching the word of God to the people of Corinth (Acts 18:11). His initial visit resulted in consolidation of those who listened to his gospel into a newly formed entity, the church. The eighteen months of evangelizing Corinth was a powerful spark that enflamed some Jews and gentiles of the isthmian metropolis. Step by

\(^{37}\) Rosik, Pierwszy List do Koryntian, 33.
\(^{38}\) Keener, Acts, 2739.
step they became Christ believers. We have to be aware that in First Corinthians Paul greets only the Corinthian church along with a group of those “who call on the name of our Lord Jesus” (1 Cor 1:2), but in the second letter he sends greetings to the church “with all the saints in the whole of Achaia” (2 Cor 1:1). Despite many difficulties on the way, the Corinthian community was yeast that leavened the surrounding province. Around September of the year 51 CE, Paul left for Ephesus with an encouraging nucleus of “the church of God that is in Corinth” (1 Cor 1:2).

3. Adaptation to the Culture of Corinth in First Corinthians

Logically, the first task for Paul after he reached Corinth was to adapt himself to the given circumstances. Being a Jew, we might think, he would rather stay within the familiar ambiance of diaspora Judaism; however, passages from First Corinthians indicate Paul’s substantial knowledge of how the city functioned and how the people lived. Through the letter itself we can say something substantial about the life and ethos of the city. For instance, we find allusions to the social and moral situation of Corinth [such as sexual practices of some of the citizens and the members of the community with them (7:5)]. From Paul we find out about its social mix (1 Cor 1:26), as well as allusions to the busyness of markets and easy access to trading goods (10:25); to farming and construction activities (3:9); to the Isthmian Games (9:24-27) and the theater (4:9); to justice affairs in the city court called bema (6:1; 6:7); and to the numerous cults celebrated in the city (8:5). In other words, by looking into windows opened by First Corinthians, we can glimpse how Paul lived his life in close contact with the Corinthians and evangelized in the particular context of Corinth. Following are the examples of that kind of teaching from the experience of daily-life.

3.1 Idolatry

In 1 Cor 8:5 Paul writes: “Indeed, even though there are so-called gods in heaven and on earth (there are, to be sure, many “gods” and many “lords”); and in 12:2: “You know how, when you were pagans, you were constantly attracted and led away to mute idols.” It was inevitable for anybody living in the Roman Era to encounter various religious idols. Luke describes Paul’s experience of facing that reality in Acts: “You Athenians, I see that in every respect you are very religious. For as I walked around looking carefully at your shrines, I even discovered an altar inscribed, ‘To an Unknown God’” (17:22-23). However, his encounter with idols and foreign cults was not an easy part of the picture of Corinth. On his arrival he must have reminded himself of all the prescriptions of the Torah concerning idolatry, such as “You shall not make for yourself an idol or a likeness of anything in the heavens above or on the earth below or in the waters beneath the earth” (Exod 20:4). His monotheistic convictions from Judaism remained, even after his encounter with the risen Jesus as Lord: there is no other God but the Father, and one Lord, the Christ (8:6). In bringing Christ to Corinthian gentiles, Paul had to compete with an enormous number of gods and idols, one of which was the Emperor himself. As we said before, every corner of the city contained either a temple, or a shrine, or a miraculous fountain. Pausanias stated that near the Agora were many temples and monuments of the Greek gods, such as those of Artemis, Dionysus, Tyche, Poseidon, Apollonius, and three monuments of Zeus. On the way leading from the city to the port Lechaion stood statues of Hermes, Poseidon, Leucateia, and Palaimon.40

The prevalence of pagan cults made for a great challenge. The way Corinth worked in the mid-first century CE was deeply rooted in the citizens. With countless temples the sacrificial system must have been flourishing, and it was impossible for the little group of Christ-believers

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40 Rosik, Pierwszy List do Koryntian, 33.
to avoid meats sacrificed to idols, cultic feasts (probably the best place for business meetings, etc.), or civic festivals in honor of Greek gods or goddesses (reality mentioned by Paul in ch. 8). Therefore, instead of denying this reality Paul uses the theme of the sacrificial meals and worshiping of idols as an adapted way of teaching about participation in the Eucharist, “You cannot partake of the table of the Lord and of the table of demons” (10:21). In order to keep the community Christ-centered, Paul had to bring forward illustrations of banquets of daemons with which believers cannot be participants (10:20). As we can see, Paul uses images from the daily life of the Corinthians so that his listeners can understand the realities of faith on the basis of their own practice.

3.2 Sexual Behavior

In 1 Cor 5:1 Paul writes: “It is widely reported that there is immorality among you, and immorality of a kind not found even among pagans—a man living with his father’s wife.” In 6:16, he asks: “do you not know that anyone who joins himself to a prostitute becomes one body with her?” And in 6:18, he exhorts: “Avoid immorality. Every other sin a person commits is outside the body, but the immoral person sins against his own body.” For a celibate evangelizer it must have been much of a concern to form people’s consciousness regarding sexuality in such a place. Paul passionately beseeches the Corinthians to conduct themselves as being called to take care of the things of the Lord, and he does that by showing how their current life should stand in opposition to the surrounding culture: “Shall I then take Christ’s members and make them the members of a prostitute? Of course not!” (6:15). He raises their consciousness about the place in which they live and which he knew about from his own living there. By writing bluntly about specific sexual behaviors (as well as by exhorting on the local sexual customs) Paul shows how familiar he was with the social life of the Corinthians.
Since the foundation of the city, apart from its “trade and wealth,” Corinth had the reputation of a “port city.” It was probably no worse, or better, than any other port city in the world when it comes to its ways of entertaining of sailors. However, Gordon D. Fee notes that the post-44 BCE Corinth inherited most of its former traditions, including its immoral fame.41 Called by Strabo “the city of love,” Corinth lured many looking for sexual excitement. Partly because of these factors, Greeks used the word korinthiazesthai, meaning “to act like a Corinthian,” as a synonym for “to fornicate.”42

As we can see, a newborn community and Paul were immersed in the world of incredible wealth and sexual tolerance to almost everything, which could affect not only singles but also married couples. Paul knew this. Back then, living in their midst, he was very close the people of Corinth, and now, understanding their situation, he stands for them in their struggle.

3.3 Isthmian Games

In 9:24 Paul writes: “Do you not know that the runners in the stadium all run in the race, but only one wins the prize? Run so as to win.” In order to encourage the community and to describe clearly the realities of spiritual dynamics, he uses images from the daily life of Corinth. He does it here, in First Corinthians, for the first time, but the images coming from the world of sport will show up again in other letters (e.g., “I continue my pursuit [Gr. dioko, also as “run”] toward the goal, the prize of God’s upward calling, in Christ Jesus” [Phil 3:14]).

Murphy-O’Connor argues that the Isthmian Games, held biannually on the northern side of Isthmia, were the second biggest after the Olympics. There were several disciplines performed at the games, such as running races, four-horse chariot races, wrestling contests, etc.43 A huge

42 Rosik, Pierwszy List do Koryntian, 31.
43 Murphy-O’Connor, St. Paul’s Corinth, 14-15.
stadium, the excitement of the performances, and the related activities of the Isthmian Games (such as all the marketing, business, and family meetings) could be compared to the American football industry in the United States today.

Built by the best city planners, the stadium simply pumped up the significance and the economic level of the region. One could not only be delighted by a huge amount of sports entertainment, but it was also an excellent occasion to do business and make new contacts. Despite Murphy-O’Connor’s suggestion, we simply do not know whether it was Paul’s way to meet new people, as well as to create a network of contacts and dependencies in Corinth.\footnote{Murphy-O’Connor, \textit{St. Paul’s Corinth}, 14.} However, drawing upon events from the Isthmian Games leads to conclusion that it was an important part of Corinthian life, and Paul knew it.

3.4 Corinthian Bronze and Mirrors

In 13:1 Paul begins his famous hymn thus: “If I speak in human and angelic tongues but do not have love, I am a resounding gong or a clashing cymbal.” It is very probable that at least one of the instruments he refers to here was made of Corinthian bronze. For over a hundred years throughout the Roman Empire, Corinthian bronze was a passion for many, and a collector’s item for the rich. It was different from any other bronze because of its proportionally mixed metals (gold and silver) with a normal bronze, which made it uniquely beautiful. At some point it was as highly valued as gold, precious stones, and land. Vessels, ornaments, statues, and figurines made with Corinthian bronze became an obsession to the extent that, as Pliny the Elder reports, their owners carried them about with them.\footnote{Murphy-O’Connor, \textit{St. Paul’s Corinth}, 208-213.} At the time of Paul, to refer to “a clashing cymbal” might allude to “the one of Corinthian Bronze.” In addition, when we read in 1 Cor 13:12: “At present we see indistinctly, as in a mirror, but then face to face,” it is possible that he is referring...
to the highly valued mirrors ornamented with the Corinthian bronze. All this suggests that Paul knew the culture of Corinth thoroughly, and he used it for vivid examples and as a mean of persuasion.

4. Conclusion

Being commissioned to proclaim Christ, Paul found himself in the first-century Roman metropolis, which Cicero called “the light of all Greece.”46 By no means was it a mistake on Paul’s account to choose the capital of Achaia as one of his apostolic fields. Founding a Christian community in such a diverse and morally indifferent society must have been quite a challenge. However, as an economic “giant,” as well as a cultural and religious melting pot, Corinth happened to be fertile ground in which Paul planted and God gave incredible growth (1 Cor 3:6). Under reconstruction since 44 BCE (and probably at the time of Paul’s visit), the city became for Paul a construction zone for the church of God, for which the apostle to the gentiles laid a foundation (3:10).

The historical dimension of Paul’s visit to Corinth gives us a broader picture of his entire mission and his character. This chapter has suggested the mindset of an evangelizer immersing himself into a challenging environment and building the foundation for creating a Christian community. By numerous references to Corinthian day-to-day existence (theater, music, marriage, religious practices, sexual behavior, meat shopping, etc.), Paul reveals to us the very first step of his modus operandi, namely adaptation. The variety of different aspects of life treated in First Corinthians, as well as its rather lengthy content, supports this claim. His drawing near to those who were listening to him and simply living the everyday life of Corinthians made his message understandable and easy to accept. Within eighteen months he made himself, as he

46 Murphy-O’Connor, St. Paul’s Corinth, 44.
himself reports in the letter, “a slave to all so as to win over as many as possible” (1 Cor 9:19), and he “became all things to all, to save at least some” (9:22). However, he did all this for no other reason than the gospel. The evangelizer of Corinth came in through other people’s door, as it were, in order to go out through his own door. In other words, being one of “them,” he made the message he brought to Corinth much easier to accept.

In the following chapter we will look closer at how Paul founded the Corinthian church and at the process of growth of the new community from its very birth.
Chapter 2
Founding of the Community

According to Acts, Paul spent eighteen months in Corinth before he set out for Ephesus (18:11). That was enough time to get familiar with the people who were open to his gospel proclamation, but not necessarily enough time to establish a fully operating community. As he later commented, what he did in those months was to lay down the foundation of the church of God in Corinth. But what about its growth? Did Paul think of building the community in stages? Did he have a plan for how to get things in shape? We might assume that much of his eighteen-month stay in Corinth was according to a plan of some kind. That would be helpful, especially for the image that Paul uses in First Corinthians 3:10-17 of an architect who builds the church of God. But not only for this image. Paul also saw the process of creating the Corinthian community as planting and tending a field of crops (3:6-9) and as building a new family (4:14-15). And he had a special role to play in the process. As the builder, the farmer, and the father, Paul succeeds in what was his apostolic mission in Corinth – to establish and form the church of God.

This chapter, which is largely exegetical, elaborates on Paul’s founding the community and its initial growth while he was still present. I will show how Paul created a network of personal relationships with the people of Corinth, mainly through practicing his tent-making skills at the busy trade route of the city, and how he became an apostle of Christ in a new, original way. I will also consider his work as a preacher, going from one place to another, especially where people would normally gather. Then I will draw a picture of the community he
founded, a community with some structure and rules. Lastly, I will reflect on Paul’s formation of the community while he was still present with them.

1. Paul’s Network – Personal Relationships with the Corinthians

Since he had a great skill of self-adaptation and inculturation, as we saw in the first chapter, Paul, at some point, started to create a network of personal relationships with the Corinthians. Indeed, he made several friends, as we see in the many names honored by his mentioning them in his letters (1 Cor and Rom). Thanks to First Corinthians, Romans, and Acts, we are given specific names of Paul’s network, and we learn more about the Corinthian community and the way he founded it than about any other Pauline community. Murphy-O’Connor notes that we can list sixteen specific individuals from the different lists, discounting the overlaps.47 Thus, at the beginning of First Corinthians, Paul mentions Sosthenes (1:1) and those whom he baptized personally at Corinth, Crispus and Gaius (1:14), and Stephanas (1:16, who is also mentioned in 16:17). At the end of the same letter, Paul also underlines the role of Fortunatus and Achaicus as deliverers of a letter (16:17), and mentions the most important couple involved in his apostolic work in Corinth, Aquila and Prisca (16:19). In addition, in Romans, which was written from Corinth, Paul sends greetings from certain members of the Corinthian church: Lucius, Jason and Sosipater, Tertius, Gaius (already listed in First Corinthians), the city treasurer Erastus, and Quartus (16:21-23). I would also add Phoebe, whom Paul mentions in Romans 16:1-2 as a benefactor and a deacon of the church in Cenchreae (one of the ports of Corinth), and Chloe, of whom we do not know much, but Paul decides to mention her in 1 Cor 1:11. Then, looking at Acts 18, we find – in addition to some already listed in Paul’s letters (Prisca and Aquila in v. 2; Crispus in v. 8; and Sosthenes) – a character named Titus

47 Murphy-O’Connor, St. Paul’s Corinth, 182.
Justus (v. 7). As Keener notes, the list of names comprising Paul’s network in Corinth includes influential citizens, mostly of Roman citizenship and persons of means.\textsuperscript{48} Thus, when Paul wrote, “Consider your own calling, brothers. Not many of you were wise by human standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth” (1:26), we must conclude that the aforementioned characters were exceptions. There is no space to elaborate on every name. For the sake of this chapter, especially when it comes to the specific relations established by Paul in order to build the community, we will focus on his relations with Aquila and Prisca, Crispus, and Gaius.

We already saw in the first chapter that Paul’s initial ministry at Corinth might have been started in the vicinity of the local synagogue. It is possible also that there he met one of the most famous couples in the New Testament, Aquila and Prisca. Paul underlines their important status by mentioning them in First Corinthians: “Aquila and Prisca together with the church at their house send you many greetings in the Lord” (16:19); moreover, in Romans he does not forget to greet them (they had returned to Rome some years following Paul’s Corinthian mission) as the first ones on the list: “Greet Prisca and Aquila, my co-workers in Christ Jesus, who risked their necks for my life, to whom not only I am grateful but also all the churches of the gentiles” (16:3-4). What do we know about the couple that seemed so influential in founding the Corinthian church (Acts 18:2)? They both had Roman names that were not commonly used among slaves, and so we can deduce that Aquila and Prisca were freeborn Jews living in the diaspora of Corinth. When it comes to Aquila, however, some scholars argue that he might have had a slave background and earned his freedom at some point. Prisca may have been a Latin noblewoman (Collins recalls Jewett’s argument on that matter\textsuperscript{49}); her nobility is inferred from the fact that her


\textsuperscript{49} Collins, First Corinthians, 611.
name appears repeatedly before that of Aquila. As a noblewoman she fits into the category of the *matrona* in the Roman world.  

Although Luke reports that Aquila was a Jew from Pontus (a city on the Black Sea), he and Prisca likely had already been baptized when Paul meets them in Corinth. According to Keener, Luke might have omitted this information in order to emphasize Paul’s role in founding the Corinthian church. Whether that is so or not, if Claudius’s edict of expulsion from Rome in 49 CE (cf. Acts 18:2) included those who believed in *Chrestus* and created turmoil among Jews, Aquila and Prisca might have been among them. Their Roman citizenship is doubtful, for it would have been unlikely to expel Roman citizens.

As already underlined in the first chapter, Jewish travelers and those with Jewish connections would know where to go in order to find a diaspora community or to find members of their own trade. Coming to Corinth around 49 CE (after Claudius’s edict was issued), Aquila and Prisca established their own business of tentmaking near their fellow Jews, and thus were able to provide Paul with a place where he could work upon his arrival at Corinth. Apart from Prisca’s suggested nobility, they both must have been fairly well-to-do if they were able to secure Paul’s lodging and a means of livelihood for eighteen months. This, in my opinion, is somewhat intriguing, because being a person of means does not necessarily imply one’s willingness to share. Luke mentions the shared profession as the reason for the connection: “He went to visit them and, because he practiced the same trade, stayed with them and worked, for they were tentmakers by trade” (Acts 18:2-3). However, trade ties must not have been the only ones that bound Aquila, Prisca, and Paul.

Looking for hospitality, it well might have been that Paul had his mission in mind (“All this I do for the sake of the gospel, so that I too may have share in it” [9:23]). When he met Aquila and Prisca, he needed a place to stay, but also wanted to share what he himself received, namely, his faith in Christ (1 Cor 2:1). Apart from establishing a professional relationship with his co-traders, it was probably inevitable, by the fact that Paul lived in their house, that they developed deeper levels of relationship and friendship. Indeed, Keener notes that, however great an honor it was to entertain a visiting scholar or a renowned preacher, typical hospitality did not extend beyond a week’s stay. The eighteen-month stay in a familial environment of his patrons’ households (such as Aquila and Prisca’s; Gaius’s [Rom 16:23]; Titus Justus’s? [Acts 18:7]) might lead us to think that Paul established close familial relations with some of the members of the community. If that was so, he would be much better understood when he wrote: “I am writing you this not to shame you, but to admonish you as my beloved children. Even if you should have countless guides to Christ, yet you do not have many fathers, for I became your father in Christ Jesus through the gospel” (4:14-15). Paul uses here a metaphor he thinks is going to be useful and compelling in his preaching to all the Corinthians. Familial vocabulary, according to Trevor J. Burke, was a shared world of meaning, so that when Paul used it in his both letters (see also 2 Cor 6:13) it was very much “alive” for his listeners. It is hard to imagine that it was merely a rhetorical thrust on the part of Paul. Paul’s network in Corinth became “a family network,” and so he could give them what he first received from Christ as their spiritual father: “I fed you with milk” (1 Cor 3:2). Burke quotes Plutarch, Cicero, and Hierocles, to the

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52 Keener, Acts, 2721.
effect that a father was a persona so highly valued as to be compared to gods, and to rank third after them and one’s country.\textsuperscript{54}

Furthermore, it is worth noticing that the familial language Paul uses with the Corinthians is full of affection and the naturalness of paternal love. Seneca, for instance, wrote in one of his essays titled \textit{On Mercy}: “no affection binds us more than the love of children.”\textsuperscript{55} However stricter paternal love may be than the love of a mother for her children (“Shall I come to you with a rod?” [4:21]), it is no less real. Apparently, it was very real for Paul, who treated the Corinthians as his beloved children. Having a family-like relation with them, he was their parent and teacher who often thought about his “offspring” as part of himself (“Are you not my work in the Lord?” [9:1]).\textsuperscript{56} Finally, it is worth noticing that it is in First Corinthians that Paul speaks about “love” more than anywhere else in his letters. Although the famous chapter 13 specifically concerns how one should use his or her charismata (“a more excellent way”) rather than about Paul’s relation to the members of the community, still his description of agape there is significant: “Love is patient, love is kind. It is not jealous, [love] is not pompous, it is not inflated” (v. 4). In addition, at the end of the letter, Paul as the father of the community does not leave his children without a sign of his deepest affection: “My love to all of you in Christ Jesus” (16:24).

Both the language Paul uses in addressing the Corinthians and the spectrum of issues he takes up in First Corinthians (marital and sexual matters, blunt remarks on divisions, issues of power) lead us to conclude that there was a deep, familial relation between the apostle and at least some of the members of the Corinthian church. Presumably, some were closer than others, such as Aquila and Prisca, to the extent that their friendship generated further collaboration in

\textsuperscript{54} Burke, “Paul’s role as ‘Father,’” 101.  
\textsuperscript{55} Burke, “Paul’s role as ‘Father,’” 103.  
\textsuperscript{56} Burke, “Paul’s role as ‘Father,’” 103.
Paul’s mission. Luke reports that the couple accompanied him on his journey to Ephesus where their house served as “the house church” for the community. According to Collins, when Aquila and Prisca left Paul for Rome, a Christian community in the capital of the Empire once again gathered at their home (Rom 16:5).\footnote{Collins, First Corinthians, 608-609.} Paul’s initial connections point to people of great influence for the life of the church, people who made possible his apostolic mission of building up the church.\footnote{Meeks, First Urban Christians, 30-31.} Thanks to his networking with some prominent people of the city, he could fend for those who were not wise by human standards, nor powerful, nor of noble birth (1:26), and make them one body. However, Aquila and Prisca were not the only prominent people in Paul’s network.\footnote{Collins, First Corinthians, 609.}

The next important figures mentioned by Paul are Crispus and Gaius. In First Corinthians he writes: “I give thanks [to God] that I baptized none of you except Crispus and Gaius, so that no one can say you were baptized in my name” (1:14-15). The first name belongs to another of the Corinthians on whose support Paul could probably count. Many scholars link this Crispus with the one mentioned in Acts 18. Luke reports that Crispus was the archisynagogos – an official of the synagogue (Acts 18:8). Becoming a Christ-believer, as Paul notes in 1 Cor 1:14, Crispus was baptized with his entire household. His influence as the one who was responsible for the service in the synagogue and the maintenance of synagogue building may have led others to believe in Christ.\footnote{Collins, First Corinthians, 83.}

The function of the archisynagogos suggests that Crispus was well-to-do, and thus an influential figure in the diaspora community. That, along with what was written about Aquila and Prisca, leads to the conclusion that Paul’s modus operandi included recruiting powerful people.
Networking with such Corinthians made a great difference to Paul’s ministry. We know from Acts that the first converts, following Crispus’s example, were the members of his household, though there is no mention of their names or numbers. However, it was strategic on Paul’s part to target people of means for two reasons. First, they exercised influence over others—it was probably better to follow someone who had a certain status in the society to say: “If Crispus with his whole household believed, there must be something in what Paul is saying.” Second, it was much more convenient for the logistical organization of the church. As Collins writes, Christians probably met in smaller groups, but occasionally they needed a house that was big enough to accommodate a whole church. Moreover, this would have had a salutary impact on poor members. If from the beginning, Paul taught the Corinthians that they are all parts of one body and “the parts of the body that seem to be weaker are all the more necessary” (12:22), and accordingly, “if [one] part suffers, all the parts suffer with it” (12:26), then networking with the more prominent Corinthians as the more powerful parts of the body inspired them not only to be mindful of the poor, but also to assist them with what they needed.

The situation looks rather similar with another individual of the Corinthian community with whom Paul associated, Gaius. His role, as well as Aquila and Prisca’s, and Crispus’s, appears significant for the creation of the church. Gaius’s encounter with Paul and his gospel must have meant a great deal if at some point it led Gaius to be baptized, possibly along with his entire household; however, Paul is silent on that matter. Paired with Crispus in 1 Cor 1:14, Gaius was one of Paul’s supporters in his mission at Corinth. Collins writes that his Roman name suggests his imperial citizenship, and thus his gentile origin. In the Letter to the Romans we find a piece of useful data about the relationship between Paul and Gaius and about his status:

“Gaius, who is host to me and to the whole church, greets you” (16:23). His house must have been large enough to accommodate a few dozen people, indeed the entire church of Corinth, which proves Gaius’s influence and his rather wealthy standing. The map of Paul’s network in Corinth, in my opinion, shows his strategic thinking. But not only that. From the composition of the community we can deduce that Paul had an inclusive mindset, that is to say, he was caring for the salvation of both Jews and gentiles; and he wanted to have in the church those who were powerful, but also the “have-nots” of Corinth (“God chose the lowly and despised of the world, those who count for nothing, to reduce to nothing those who are something” [1:28]; and: “Therefore, my brothers, when you come together to eat, wait for one another” [11:33]). But the question remains – how did Paul approach his future brothers and sisters in Christ?

2. Paul’s Tent-Making as Preaching through Work

From the way Paul argues about his rights as an apostle, we can learn a great deal about his approach to human work and about his style of evangelization. In First Corinthians he writes, “The Lord ordered that those who preach the gospel should live by the gospel. I have not used any of these rights, however” (9:14-15). The statement of the apostle underlines the fact that, whenever he preached the gospel, he would never charge people for his service so he might say later on, “when I preach, I offer the gospel free of charge” (9:18). Despite his right to live by preaching the gospel (we should think of generous donors making fruitful collections for him), he chose not to use it. It was Paul’s deliberate choice, for he did not want to boast in anything but the Lord. The choice was to make his person and his preaching all the more convincing.

However, as the evidence from Second Corinthians shows, some people in the community found Paul’s *modus operandi* about laboring unacceptable (2 Cor 11:7).
That Paul worked for a living is supported elsewhere. Starting from First Thessalonians he affirms, “You recall, brothers, our toil and drudgery. Working night and day in order not to burden any of you, we proclaimed to you the gospel of God” (2:9). Here Paul does not specify the nature of his work; however, from Luke we find out that his trade was craftsmanship in leatherworking, which allowed him to produce tents, for instance. In Corinth he shared his trade with his dear patrons – Aquila and Prisca, as we read in Acts: “He went to visit them and, because he practiced the same trade, stayed with them and worked, for they were tentmakers by trade” (18:2-3; see also Rom 16:3-5).

At time of the Roman Empire, it was not surprising to see rabbis exercising their trade, as opposed to philosophers, who normally would do no physical work but rather made their living from fees charged in the schools they taught, or from donations from their patrons, or simply from begging. However, because Paul thought of these possibilities as diminishing his credibility, he chose to work with his hands. He may have found much work in Corinth, since the skills of a tentmaker were widely needed. Relying on knowledge from that area and epoch, we can actually get a sense of what Paul did. As a tentmaker he likely provided temporary coverings of various sizes: he supplied his clients with thin tent-like structures used at the beach; hucksters oftentimes used canvas for their booths during festivals; sometimes, even in cities, families used tents on big occasions, if the house could not contain the numbers. Moreover, during the Isthmian Games in Corinth, which were celebrated twice a year, the crowds pitched tents for lodging and dining purposes.

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63 Collins, First Corinthians, 337.
64 Murphy-O’Connor, St. Paul’s Corinth, 192.
65 Murphy-O’Connor, St. Paul’s Corinth, 193.
Paul was a hard worker. As Murphy-O’Connor notes, “he lists manual work as one of the unfair hardships of his life” (1 Cor 4:12; 2 Cor 6:5). Together with his statement in First Thessalonians that he was “working night and day,” we are left with an image of a man who spent most of his time in his workshop (1 Thess 2:9). Plying a trade gave him some financial independence, but above all it was a superb occasion for meeting many people who passed by the busy trade route of Corinth and for networking with many people—both disadvantaged (such as the slaves, the women, the poor, etc.) and those of the upper class (the people of intellect, wealth, connections, etc.). Again, following Murphy-O’Connor’s suggestion, the choice of the tent-making trade was, on Paul’s part, effective for his mission, since it met three important criteria: mobility (from one city to another), universality (products were needed by many), and silence. The silence of the work gave him a much better environment in which to start a conversation with his clients, which eventually might turn into an exchange about things that normally matter to people (such as virtues, religion, etc.). Keener points out that Mediterranean society was very chatty: people went for long talks, whether in the streets, or taverns, or shops—especially those nearest the agora. Also, Ronald F. Hock argues that the workshops of shoemakers and leatherworkers were recognized as conventional settings for intellectual discussions. It is easy to imagine Paul leading his customers through different aspects of daily life to questions of faith and, ultimately, to the point where there was a place for preaching about the Messiah. It seems logical, especially with regard to evangelization of those gentiles whom Paul would not have encountered in the synagogue. Using his own trade and a quiet workshop, Paul became an apostle of Christ in a new, unprecedented way, through his own work.

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66 Murphy-O’Connor, St. Paul’s Corinth, 193.
67 Murphy-O’Connor, St. Paul’s Corinth, 192.
68 Keener, Acts, 2721.
3. Preaching Christ Crucified in the Process of Building the Community

Paul’s *modus operandi* was to go and bring the gospel where it had not been preached. If that is the case, then every time he found himself in a new city, he had to go through the process of assimilation, meeting new people, and preaching to them about Jesus. Likewise in Corinth—if he had planting the church of God in his mind—Paul had to present his agenda, the gospel, and to persuade his listeners of the wisdom of the new way. Luke suggests that Paul preached from the beginning, which took place at least once a week on the Sabbath in the synagogue (Acts 18:4). We also might want to keep in mind what we have already said about preaching throughout the week while working as a tentmaker. After the arrival of his co-missioners Silas and Timothy in Corinth, Paul was able to occupy himself more with preaching the word of God (Acts 18:5). In this section we ask, what was the role of Paul’s preaching in founding the community and what would he preach about? Why would Paul’s words be convincing so as to win for the community of faith people like Crispus and Gaius, Sosthenes, Erastus, and as well as many others, the rich and the poor alike?

It may well be that Paul moved from one place to another to preach, especially where people would normally gather (e.g., markets and baths), especially if he wanted to meet social and religious groups other than the Jews. If we take Luke’s account about ministry in Athens into consideration that “he debated daily in the public square with whoever happened to be there” (Acts 17:17), this might be the case also in Corinth. Also, his preaching at the Corinthian synagogue on Sabbath days seems to follow a typical path, his *modus operandi* when coming to a new city. According to Richard I. Pervo, we can easily derive this from Acts (see 14:1; 17:1-
but also when we look at Paul’s letters, we see hints of this somewhat unsuccessful practice (see 2 Cor 11:24). The word Luke employs to describe Paul’s activity in the Corinthian synagogue is *dialegomai*, which can be translated as “reasoning.” Frederick W. Danker explains that we have to take this word to mean presenting a reasoned position in public. Putting these points together, we gain a better understanding of Paul’s *modus operandi*. First, it involved preaching; second, it was conducted in a reasoned way; and third, it was done in public. How big was the synagogue in Corinth? Keener notes that the first-century synagogue at Gamla could accommodate around three hundred people. In a city of the size and diversity (including Jews) of Corinth, we can assume that Paul had many potential listeners on the Sabbath. The “reasoning” he used would be to show to the Jews, as Luke says, “that the Messiah was Jesus” (Acts 18:4). This was likely woven into Paul’s interpretation of the Law and the Prophets. He argued, for instance, that Jesus of Nazareth “died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures; that he was buried; that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the scriptures,” and that he showed himself to the witness, including Paul himself (1 Cor 15:3-8).

“Christ crucified” was the core of Paul’s preaching, indeed of his whole ministry, as we learn from one of his most striking confessions: “When I came to you, brothers, proclaiming the mystery of God, I did not come with sublimity of words or of wisdom. For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ, and him crucified” (1 Cor 2:1-2). Deducing from 1 Cor 1-4, there were a few ways of presenting the gospel at that time. Nevertheless, Paul insisted on his way of preaching, notes Paul Barnett, because the core of the *kerygma* (for Paul it

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was the crucified Lord) could be easily diminished by the style of others.\textsuperscript{74} Hans Conzelmann notes that the apostle preached this way not only to testify to God’s power and love revealed in a strange way, namely, through the crucifixion of Jesus, but also to give historical roots to faith in Jesus.\textsuperscript{75} Regarding the latter point, Paul’s gospel was not merely another of the religious ideas of the Greco-Roman world, but having a historical background in Judea made it more grounded and alive for the Corinthians (e. g., 1 Cor 11:23-26). I suggest that Paul’s gospel of the crucified Lord resonated much among those Corinthians who later on formed the body of the community, especially the poor, the vulnerable, and the disadvantaged members of the Corinthian church, who found themselves close to the suffering Christ who gave himself up in order to give life to the believers. Some Corinthians wanted to receive that gift.

However, Paul’s initial preaching did not consist only of Jesus’ salvific death. For his listeners, whether in the synagogue or in the quiet of his workshop, one of the most attractive points, and certainly a controversial one, was Christ’s resurrection and its reference to the lives of the believers (cf. 1 Cor 15: “But if Christ is preached as raised from the dead, how can some among you say there is no resurrection of the dead?” [v. 12]; and: “if Christ has not been raised, then empty [too] is our preaching; empty, too, your faith” [v. 14]). Furthermore, based on what he said in related passages elsewhere we see how, as a support for his arguments, Paul offers an eschatological perspective to his listeners, as in ch. 13: “At present we see indistinctly, as in a mirror, but then face to face. At present I know partially; then I shall know fully, as I am fully known” (v. 12). This, I suppose, might indicate possible ways of preaching about the deeper meaning of faith in Christ and its eschatological angle when he first met the Corinthians.

\textsuperscript{74} Barnett, “Paul, Apologist,” 317.
According to Grant, Paul likely preached much against idolatry and the Greek gods in Corinth, especially to gentiles.\textsuperscript{76} We find some traces of this in First Corinthians, where Paul writes: “You know how, when you were pagans, you were constantly attracted and led away to mute idols” (12:2), which together with an account from First Thessalonians (“you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God” [1:9]), makes us think about Paul’s speech at the Areopagus in Athens (Acts 17:22-31). His careful attention to idolatry (1 Cor 8; 10:14-22) leads us to conclude that the subject was by no means new to the members of the community. Most probably, Paul encountered the problem of idolatrous behavior of the Corinthians from the very beginning of his stay in the city. Preaching against idolatry, however, Paul needed to give to his listeners a solid alternative. This was done, as we already saw, by preaching the crucified and resurrected Christ. For some people, this message was enough to believe and to form a new entity in Corinth – the Christian church.

4. The New Christian Community

We do not know exactly when, within the eighteen months Paul spent in Corinth, the community was born. When was the first meeting? In which house and when was the first celebration of the “Lord’s Supper” (1 Cor 11:20)? Nevertheless, we can ascertain that, after some initial time of Paul’s ministering (through work and preaching), a group of people whom he encountered was ready to meet and organize themselves in the community. It was a unique group, gifted in many ways with spiritual endowment. The evidence in First Corinthians mostly supports what we encounter in Acts in terms of the content of the community, that is, the Corinthian church consisted of members mostly of gentile origin. In order to understand that, we might want to go to Second Corinthians, where we find traces of Jews distancing from the

\textsuperscript{76} Grant, \textit{Paul in the Roman World}, 8-9.
message of Christ when Paul speaks about “the veil” over Jewish hearts (2 Cor 3:15). The veil, meaning a certain reading of the Law, led the hearers of Paul to suspicion about the gospel and to look for a proof (“For Jews demand signs” [1 Cor 1:22]). Therefore, among the members of the church in Corinth, (6:11; 8:7; 12:2), only a few were Jews.

The size of the community at Corinth is beyond our ability to reach with precision, though scholars have tried to estimate the number. Following Murphy-O’Connor on the matter, at the bottom of the scale we are limited by the number of names combined from Paul’s and Luke’s accounts, and so sixteen members seems to be the minimum. If the sixteen had spouses, that would give us a minimum of thirty members. On the other hand, the top of the scale is limited by the fact that the house church could accommodate only a certain number of people. Given that the households of Crispus and Stephanas were baptized with them, we may think of a base number for the community at Corinth to be forty to fifty members.

Paul’s correspondence gives us the best knowledge for reconstructing the social strata of the early Christian community. However, the socio-economic composition of the Corinthian church is among the most debated topics among scholars. Panayotis Coutsoumpos points out that many scholars have tried to polarize the social strata of the community in ways that make it seem either poor or disproportionately rich. A. Deissmann is often cited in support of the former position (he makes his argument quite directly by stating that early Christianity was a movement within the lower classes), whereas E. A. Judge represents the latter (saying that the Christian

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78 Rosik, Pierszy List do Koryntian, 41-42.  
79 Murphy-O’Connor, St. Paul’s Corinth, 182.  
movement was dominated by the well-to-do citizens of the big cities).\textsuperscript{81} By a careful reading of First Corinthians, however, we might come to a different impression.

As we have seen, Paul describes the social makeup of the community as follows: “Not many of you were wise by human standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth” (1 Cor 1:26). It seems necessary, therefore, to distinguish between statements about individual members and about the community as a whole. Gerd Theissen nicely summarizes the entire problem by saying: “The majority of the members, who come from the lower classes, stand in contrast to a few influential members who come from the upper classes. This internal stratification is not accidental but the result of structural causes.”\textsuperscript{82} In other words, although not many converts come from the higher socio-economic levels, the Corinthian church included such citizens as the city treasurer of Corinth and Gaius. The latter’s wealth and house were sufficient to provide hospitality for the whole community, including a major group within it – the poor. Paul’s own description of the community asserts that both Deissmann’s and Judge’s judgments bear some support – Paul formed the initial group of the Corinthian church by connecting people from the upper classes with the poor.

Paul’s message of the crucified and the risen Lord made an impact on many individuals from different social contexts, and so it is legitimate to say that the Corinthian community was a multicultural and socio-economic mix. In the initial group there were Jews (Acts 18:2; 18:8) and gentiles alike. One could find there some wealthy members (Aquila, Prisca, Crispus, Stephanas), but also poor ones, and probably also slaves (given that the households of the wealthy were baptized with them, we may suppose some slaves among them). We are to be impressed, on the one hand, with how Paul managed to bring all these people from different backgrounds together

\textsuperscript{81} Coutoumpos, Community, 33-34.
and form one community. On the other hand, the mixture must have created many tensions and, in consequence, problems Paul had to address in First Corinthians (divisions [1 Cor 1:10], power issues [3:18], neglecting the poor [11:33]). It is worth investigating how the apostle organized the life of the church so that, from the material he had, it was sufficient to create a vibrant community in Corinth.

4.1 Formation through Prayer Gatherings

Luke reports that Paul shared his mission in Corinth with Silas and Timothy (Acts 18:5). These three, having previous experience in establishing churches (1 Thess 1:6-7; 2:3; 2:11-12), likely organized the first and subsequent prayer-gatherings of the Corinthian community, (Rom 16:21; 1 Thess 3:2). From Paul’s instructions about liturgical assemblies in First Corinthians, it can be inferred that the community was accustomed to come together as “the whole church” (14:23). Collins notes that whenever Christians gathered as an entire community, they would undergo two kinds of events – the celebration of the Lord’s Supper (11:17-34) and a symposium, which took place after the Lord’s Supper. The symposium refers to traditional gatherings of the Hellenistic world undertaken on different occasions for celebrations, or for the gatherings of an association. However, the Christian symposium had many differences from any other of that time, such as its social and cultural diversity, as well as prayer via speaking in tongues and prophecy.  

Emphasizing his role as “the father” of the community, Barnett argues that Paul saw himself as a teacher (“be imitators of me” [11:1-2]). It is not difficult to imagine that Paul himself was at the beginning a leader and a teacher of the proper use of charismata. As a man of the Spirit and a powerful minister of God (2:3-5), and having Silas and Timothy on his side, Paul

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83 Collins, First Corinthians, 508.
brought to the Corinthians new ways of connecting with God. As given by the Holy Spirit, the *charismata* required interpretation and explanation. Paul’s discussion on the use of spiritual gifts leads to the conclusion that most of them, including speaking in tongues, he well knew by his own practice (14:18). Practicing charismatic prayer and its fruitfulness might have suggested to him that all in the community should speak in tongues and use their spiritual gifts (14:5) because it builds up the church (14:4).

When we think about the possible structure of the Corinthian church, and thus also the prayer assemblies, we might consider some type of hierarchical structure. We understand from Paul’s quotation of the Corinthian discussions: “I belong to Paul,” “I belong to Apollos,” “I belong to Cephas,” “I belong to Christ,” that the notion of leader was very important to the Corinthians. According to Burke, the hierarchical structures of Corinth themselves suggest Paul’s role as the *pater-familias* of the community. Synagogues had their leaders to whom Jews would turn on many occasions; Greco-Roman households were organized around the *pater-familias*; many institutions and the so-called *collegia* (groups of philosophers, political parties, voluntary associations, sects, etc., were seen by Romans as *collegia*) had leaders as *personae* with certain amounts of authority. Meeks notes that these associations depended on the beneficence of wealthier patrons. It may be that Paul used the same pattern to form the Christian community. Another possible type of organization would be that of the synagogue gathering, especially concerning the part of the *symposium* where there was time for reading Scripture, preaching, and employing spiritual gifts (1 Cor 14:26; 1 Thess ).

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85 Keener, 1-2 Corinthians, 9.
86 Burke, “Paul’s role as ‘Father,’” 107.
88 Meeks, First Urban Christians, 78.
planned to establish a new type of “synagogue,” based on the belief that the awaited Messiah was Jesus, crucified and raised from the dead. However, this sort of understanding of Pauline communities remains problematic. Scholars such as Richard Ascough underline that, although Paul’s Christianity had much to do with the Judaism of the first century, using synagogues as an analogy might be misleading. Living far away from Palestine, the apostle planted the church in a Roman city with a Greco-Roman culture. That is why the organization of the community along the lines of a voluntary association (Roman collegium) seems much more convincing.

Paul, when considering the gathering of the church, thinks about “order” and “upbuilding” (1 Cor 11:34; 14:5; 14:12; 14:33; 14:40). Many issues he writes about, concerning the use of charismata, the relation to the poor, the behavior of women, etc., suggest that the Christian symposium was a crowded and socially diverse event (men and women, slaves and free, rich and poor, believers and passersby). Closely related to the Lord’s Supper, the symposium was the time and space where the members could use their spiritual gifts to build up one another. Paul writes: “When you assemble, one has a psalm, another an instruction, a revelation, a tongue, or an interpretation. Everything should be done for building up” (14:26). We might imagine that this part of the assembly started with the leader’s words of encouragement, maybe a little reading of Scripture with an interpretation in the light of the Christ event, or an instruction on how to live as Christians. In First Thessalonians Paul underlines the significance of instructions and exhortations on the way of living: “we treated you as a father treats his children, exhorting and encouraging you and insisting that you conduct yourselves as

91 Ascough, What are They Saying, 93.
worthy of God” (1 Thess 2:11-12; see also 1 Cor 14:6). It is possible that such instructions were uttered during the symposium (14:26).

The father of the Corinthian church formed both the spirit and the mind of its members, and he wanted them to build up one another (1 Cor 14:14-17). For him, the charismata were to form one’s spirit, while the instructions were to build up mind. After the instructions, some singing of Psalms might have followed, which seems a good way of involving the entire congregation (“one has a psalm” [1 Cor 14:26]; “I will sing praise with the spirit, but I will also sing praise with the mind” [14:15]). During the symposium, the charismatic community in Corinth underwent powerful manifestations of the Holy Spirit. Inspired tongues and prophesies occurred, which must have been life-changing experiences, especially for newcomers and passersby (14:24-25). However, Paul’s elaborate instruction on speaking in tongues, prophecies, and women’s talking and hairdressing all suggest that the symposium sometimes might have turned into “a disordered cacophony of sounds,” as Collins calls it.92 Because God, in Paul’s conviction, is a God of order, the formation of the symposium seemed crucial (14:33). Therefore, Paul formed both the life of the individuals and of the community as whole so that Christ’s body might be manifested in its proper shape (“Now you are Christ’s body, and individually parts of it” [12:27]).

Finally, as a strategic builder who lays the foundation of the church, one must keep in mind all the other “layers of the church” and the coming years of usage. Barnett argues that Paul’s modus operandi was to form leaders of the church who would stay and finish the building of Christ’s body.93 He writes: “It appears that Paul ‘fulfilled the gospel’ by proclaiming its message and gathering a congregation, delivering to it the ‘key traditions’ that embodied ‘the

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92 Collins, First Corinthians, 512.
faith,’ establishing patterns of worship, ordering the leadership of the new church.” These Paul’s activities at the birth of a new community could be summed up as “foundation laying.” At least a few names in Corinth can be associated with Paul’s idea of forming leaders: Aquila and Prisca, who were his “co-workers in Christ Jesus,” and to whom all the churches of the gentiles were grateful (Rom 16:3-4); Phoebe, who was “a minister of the church at Cenchreae” (Rom 16:1); Stephanas, who devoted himself to the service of the church (1 Cor 16:15); and Gaius, who offered his house for the use of the community (Rom 16:23). Having his imminent departure in mind, Paul prepared the church of Corinth to be on its own by forming its leaders. In addition to that, his already developed custom of writing letters (from Corinth itself Paul writes a few of them) assured that those who took over the leadership would keep in touch, especially in case of troubles.

4.2 Formation through the Lord’s Supper

Before setting out on a journey to Ephesus, Paul likely appointed leaders for the church (here I follow Barnett95), who would make sure that during the Lord’s Supper there was always time for the breaking of the bread and sharing of the wine. We can think of Paul’s instructions on the Lord’s Supper as one of the most heartfelt parts of the formation of the Corinthian church (“For I received from the Lord what I also handed on to you, that the Lord Jesus, on the night he was handed over, took bread…” [11:23]). For the purpose of this chapter, we will look into two realities of the “Eucharistic” celebration in Corinth – the formation of the house churches and the organization of the Lord’s Supper.

It is widely acknowledged that Christians gathered in private houses. It was long before Christianity was officially recognized as a religion, and so gathering in public places for them

was impossible. According to Collins, 1 Cor 14:23 suggests that Christians met in smaller groups (probably for prayer gatherings smaller in scale, in smaller houses), and met as a whole church occasionally in a house big enough to accommodate all the smaller communities of the city. As we saw before, that is why it was so important for the church to have wealthy and powerful citizens among its members. That created a space to encounter in one place many people from different social levels and a specific ambiance to call each other *adelphoi*, “brothers and sisters” (1 Cor 1:10; 1:26; 2:1, etc.). For Paul, the household (*oikos* or *oikia*) as both a place and a spiritual reality was of a great importance. Here Paul preached, participated in the Lord’s Supper, and probably baptized (1:16). For many scholars (Collins, Murphy-O’Connor, James C. Walter), the household was the basic structural unit of the Corinthian church, where the church came together to celebrate the Eucharist, to preach and explain the gospel, and to evangelize those who came to the meal though not yet Christians. As a meeting place, writes Meeks, the house provided some privacy, a certain degree of intimacy, and stability of place.

Many have tried to reconstruct a typical house used for the gathering of the Christian community. Archeological excavations at Corinth reveal four houses of the Roman period, which, as we can imagine, creates many opinions on the possible *locus* of the Corinthian church. Daniel N. Schowalter describes three of these scholarly opinions, each supported by different scholars. First, the choice of Murphy-O’Connor is that the community gathered in such a house as the *Anaploga* villa, the Roman villa found in the year 1960. Murphy-O’Connor writes that the

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96 Collins, *First Corinthians*, 506.
97 Collins, *First Corinthians*, 74.
98 Meeks, *First Urban Christians*, 76.
Anaploga villa might have been similar to the one Gaius owned. Its conditions impose limiting the symposia to the public places of the oikos, such as the entrance area, the courtyard (atrium), the dining room (triclinium), and the latrine. These areas combined would limit the number of possible attendants to a couple of dozen people, whereas the maximum number for the atrium was 50. The atrium, therefore, was the most probable area to host the prayer gathering after the meal, whereas the triclinium was the place of the Lord’s Supper with probable extension to the atrium. The shortage of space, suggests Murphy-O’Collins, might have forced the host to divide the guests into two groups – the more honorable members of the church invited into the triclinium (which held up to 15 people), and the rest who stayed outside. According to the custom, those in the dining room reclined (8:10), whereas those in the courtyard were forced to sit. It well may be that these facts were among the reasons for divisions and for Paul’s account on the liturgy in Corinth (11:17-34). Given the arrangement of such households, might Paul have failed to anticipate the problems that emerged when giving his foundational teaching about the Lord’s Supper?

Another position is that of David G. Horrell, who suggests that the buildings in Corinth found near the theater fit much better the possible hosting of the ekklesia. Having two or even three floors, Horrell argues, these structures would have been much more affordable and thus more likely to accommodate the non-elite. The upper floors are proposed as being used for domestic space, and thus a probable locus for the gathering community. A third opinion comes from John D. Crossan and Jonathan Reed, who propose yet another structure for the house churches in Corinth. In short, for them the architectural form of a two-story villa with shops and workshops on the street level and luxurious apartments above (such as found in Herculaneum

100 Collins, First Corinthians, 182.
101 Collins, First Corinthians, 183-184.
and Pompeii) provided an area in which people from different social strata could have found themselves more comfortable and, as such, would be an ideal place for the Corinthian church to gather.\textsuperscript{103} However, all three opinions remain at best only probabilities.

Moving on now to the conduct of the Christian meal, most scholars today (such as Collins, Coutsoumpos, Walters, Ascough) agree that, originating in the Jewish \textit{Pesach}, the Lord’s Supper followed the shape of the Greco-Roman celebration of meals. All this is derived from the social customs and problems of the Corinthian assembly described by Paul in chapters 2 and 5 of First Corinthians. Coutsoumpos argues that the problems of divisions and factions at the Lord’s Supper mirror similar problems to the Greco-Roman \textit{eranos}.\textsuperscript{104} This type of meal included situations where the prosperous Corinthians, after bathing, arrived at the meal first, while the poorer classes came later. Differences in food, in the location of eating, and in the time one had to eat appeared and created certain tensions (see 1 Cor 11:33-34). However, the social side of the \textit{eranos} was of great importance, and “friendship” terminology is common in the language of social ethics in Greek literature.\textsuperscript{105}

With all the evident similarities, however, the Christian \textit{eranos} meal exhibits significant differences. First, whereas in the Greco-Roman \textit{eranos}, it was highly unlikely to associate and mix social levels in one place, the intention for the Lord’s Supper was to welcome that kind of mixture. As one body of Christ, Paul wanted the more vulnerable parts to be taken care of by the more honorable ones (1 Cor 12:22-25). Unfortunately, 1 Cor 12-14 reveals that the Corinthians themselves did not appreciate this teaching. Second, whereas the Greco-Roman \textit{eranos} was oftentimes intended for gaining political votes, and thus was ruled by human business, the Lord’s Supper was to build up the church by prayer and by receiving the body and blood of Christ.

\textsuperscript{103} Schowalter, “Seeking Shelter,” 336-337.
\textsuperscript{104} Coutsoumpos, \textit{Community}, 4.
\textsuperscript{105} Coutsoumpos, \textit{Community}, 18.
Finally, the Greco-Roman *eranos* was hosted by the *pater-familias* of the house where the meal took place, but Paul wanted Jesus to be the center of the Lord’s Supper as the head of the body of the church (12:12). As has been shown, it is likely that the way Paul shaped the church’s meetings was based on combination of the Hellenistic *eranos* meal and the *symposium* (11:21). For the Corinthians this would make the Lord’s Supper culturally understandable and easier to follow.

5. Conclusion

Paul’s mission at Corinth was to proclaim the crucified and risen Christ (1 Cor 15:3-4) and to plant a church in the midst of a large metropolis (3:7). The apostle pictures himself, therefore, by referring to certain images. First, he understood his actions as if he was a spiritual “constructor” of the community, laying its foundation by preaching the gospel of Christ crucified (3:10-11). Second, he was a kind of “a farmer” who, in spite of not causing growth, did plant the church in Corinth (3:6). Third, using vocabulary of kinship, Paul calls himself “the father in Christ” of the beloved children, that is, the members of the community (4:14-15). In Corinth, he raises a new family in Christ, in which everybody calls each other *adelphoi* – “brothers and sisters,” and all are the parts of one body of Christ (12:13). Paul’s preaching the gospel and his organizational skills laid a strong enough foundation not only to sustain the church after his departure, but also to expand it by planting other communities “throughout Achaia” (2 Cor 1:1).

In this chapter we looked at Paul’s *modus operandi* in founding the Corinthian community. His initial preaching of Christ among different social levels of the society won some

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107 Coutsoumpos, *Community*, 23.
influential citizens for his mission (1:26). People such as Aquila and Prisca, Crispus and Gaius, and others formed a network of connections. These characters likely opened their houses to host the whole community when it gathered together for the celebration of the Lord’s Supper or for the Christian symposium (Rom 16:23). Moreover, many of the more influential members of the church might have served as leaders of the ekklesia, especially after Paul’s departure (16:1; 16:3). When it comes to the ways of evangelization of Corinth, worth noticing is Paul’s using his profession as tentmaker in proclamation of the gospel, which made him an apostle of Christ in an original way.

We also have learned that for Paul the unity among members was crucial in building up the church (1 Cor 1:10; 12:27). In such a diverse group, both culturally and socially, there was always a great danger of divisions among the members of the community, and Paul knew that. He wanted to resolve the problem of division basically by two means. First, he gave to the church a structure of the “house churches.” The church of Paul likely followed the structure of a Greco-Roman household (11:33). The second unifying element was the way the church’s meetings were shaped according to the Hellenistic eranos meal and the symposium (11:21). The father of the Corinthian community wanted liturgical gatherings to be formative, too. He strived for Christ to be the center of the gathering (11:23); he wanted the gatherings to be prayerful events (14:23); and finally, as one body of Christ, Paul wanted everybody to take care of each other, especially of the more vulnerable members of the community (12:23).

In the next chapter we will examine how Paul formed the Corinthian church after his departure from the city, namely, by writing letters. A large part of the third chapter will be devoted to Paul himself, as he presented himself as a role model for the Corinthians to follow.
Chapter 3
Formation from a Distance

Though the Corinthian church was vibrant and very dear to Paul, it was also the one that caused him the most trouble. Once he left Corinth for Ephesus in 51 CE, the time had arrived for the church to stand its own, albeit we can assume that at Paul’s farewell both the Corinthians and the father of the community promised to keep in touch – through letters and occasional visits. And so it was. After some time and without his being far away from Corinth, the apostle received a not very positive report about the church there (1 Cor 1:11). Paul’s response is immediate and takes the form of letters, among which was First Corinthians. All the issues addressed in the letter boil down to one problem, namely divisions. Division is behind the problems reported about the Lord’s Supper, the controversy over eating meat offered to deities, the legal suits between members of the community, and the reactions to Paul’s self-support in Corinth. But even from afar Paul does not cease to build up the Corinthian church, as evident in his use of the word oikodomeo, to “build up” (8:10; 14:4; 17).

In this third and final chapter we will see that Paul’s modus operandi included writing letters. We will look into the community’s self-development through trial-and-error after Paul’s departure, and see how Paul responded to this. In order to learn Paul’s pastoral strategy in giving instructions, in the second section we will explore some of the difficulties addressed in First Corinthians. The most important part of this chapter, however, will be its final section, which I will devote to Paul himself, as he presents himself as a role model for the Corinthians – and also for us who read Paul’s letter today.
1. Divisions in the Newly-Founded Church and Paul’s Rhetorical Response

One of the indicators of a good parent is the ability to let his children go away from home and mature by living on their own. Because of Paul’s affection toward the community in Corinth, the experience of leaving must have been difficult for him, but as a good father he looked forward to the next step the church had to take – maturity. It can be inferred from Paul’s words that the Corinthians’ formation includes various stages. Such lines as “Brothers, I could not talk to you as spiritual people, but as fleshly people, as infants in Christ” (3:1), and “I fed you milk, not solid food, because you were unable to take it” (3:2) suggest the existence of an infancy stage in formation of the community, in which one of the constitutive elements is learning through trial and error. That stage also includes corrections from a parent. Let us now look at how the trial and error stage of the community went and how Paul responded.

After the usual greetings and thanksgiving of the letter, Paul goes straight to the core of the problem: “it has been reported to me about you, my brothers, by Chloe’s people, that there are rivalries among you” (1:11). As stated in the previous chapter, Chloe is a figure about whom we know very little. Since she had servants of some kind, we can assume she was a wealthy person (as Richard B. Hays suggests, “Chloe’s people” could be members of her family, slaves, or freed persons from the household108). More important, however, is the report Chloe’s people presented to Paul in Ephesus. The verb edelothe indicates that the “report” was not merely hearsay or rumor, but most probably took the form of a letter.109 The report, obviously bad news, must have made an impression on Paul, who considered the Corinthians to be his own family. Responding to their conduct, he still calls them adephoi – brothers (1:11).

109 Collins, First Corinthians, 78.
When it comes to the content of the report, Paul, fortunately for us, quotes some of the slogans of the Corinthians which they tended to use among themselves. Some would say, “I belong to Paul,” others, “I belong to Apollos,” still others, “I belong to Cephas,” or “I belong to Christ” (1:12). Because we do not have a copy of that report, some scholars have gone further and tried to retrieve its lines through a “mirror-reading” of First Corinthians. Dale B. Martin notes, for example, that Paul quotes at least a few of the Corinthian sayings which they themselves used in the correspondence: “Everything is lawful for me” (6:12; 10:23); “food for the stomach and the stomach for food” (6:13); “all of us have knowledge” (8:1); “there is no idol in the world,” and “there is no God but one” (8:4). Although there might be more Corinthian slogans contained in First Corinthians, these few are sufficient to establish the possible reasons for the divisions (schismata) among the Corinthians.

According to Keener, there was a time in the history of scholarship when the reconstruction based on “mirror-reading” led to the suggestion of different “parties” in the Corinthian church. The differences behind them were thought to lie in things like Gnostic theology and/or Stoic and Cynic philosophy. Today, scholars seem to point to other possible reasons for factions in the community. Thus we find opinions that the divisions were based on informal “schools” of teachers and their style. Without any intention on the side of the teachers, these schools formed around Paul, Apollos, and Cephas as leaders (1:12). Some followers even claimed that they possessed a direct spiritual access to Christ without a human mediator. From the fact that Christ is juxtaposed with Apollos, Cephas, and Paul, Richard A. Horsley suggests

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111 Keener, 1-2 Corinthians, 8.
112 Hays, First Corinthians, 23.
that we may also infer that some Corinthians understood Christ more as a wisdom teacher than as the crucified Lord.\textsuperscript{113}

Other scholars argue that the factions were caused by the personal behavior of some of the members, namely, their “puffing up” over their spiritual endowment (“if I speak in angelic tongues but do not have love” and “if I have a gift of prophecy (…) but do not have love” [13:1-2]). Looking down on others who were not as gifted with the \textit{charismata}, the more gifted in Corinth might have caused unnecessary tensions at community gatherings that led to scandal breaking out in the church.\textsuperscript{114} Paul seems deeply moved by the way his beloved children at Corinth behaved during the church gatherings. After his departure from Corinth, the power dynamics at the community meals apparently changed and became politically charged. It might have been, as James C. Walters writes, that “the rivalries at Corinth were between households who competed for status by hosting teachers.”\textsuperscript{115} If that was the case, it was easy for the host of the meal to try to please the teacher and the powerful of the community by good food and wine, and to forget about the poor and the latecomers.

Among many opinions about the reasons for factions, however, the most reasonable position is Martin’s. In short, he tends to funnel all the tensions at Corinth into one major category, that is, the fight between the so-called “Strong” with those labeled as the “Weak.”\textsuperscript{116} According to Martin, the Strong were wealthier, more prominent members of the church (along with their associates) who seemed to “puff up” on many grounds and to boast of many things except the Lord himself. The Weak came from the lower-status group (along with those who felt for them) and needed much greater attention and care because of their status. The Strong, writes

\begin{thebibliography}{9}
\bibitem{114} Hays, \textit{First Corinthians}, 23.
\bibitem{115} Walters, “Paul and the Politics,” 358.
\bibitem{116} Martin, \textit{Corinthian Body}, 69.
\end{thebibliography}
Martin, emphasized radical freedom and claimed spiritual knowledge for themselves. The knowledge they claimed to possess seemed to have its roots in radical monotheism, which led them to be fearless of “gods” and demons. They showed no concern for rules of diet (such as what kind meat they should eat) and, by depreciating the body, they treated loosely matters of human sexuality (so as, in the case of some, to have no problem with enjoying the services of prostitutes). Also, being highly educated and having economic means, the Strong could sponsor “household philosophers” who, by living in the house of a patron, or at least by attending exclusive dinners, would raise the position of the household in the eyes of those to whom it might be of interest. The slogans of the Strong presuppose their knowledge of moral philosophy, and thus imply a rather high position in society.

One of the most vivid examples of tensions between the Strong and the Weak in the Corinthian church, argues Theissen, is given by Paul’s reference to the behavior during the Lord’s Supper. Right before citing Jesus’ words over the bread and cup, he writes: “When you meet in one place, then, it is not to eat the Lord’s supper, for in eating, each one goes ahead with his own supper, and one goes hungry while another gets drunk. Do you not have houses in which you can eat and drink? Or do you show contempt for the church of God and make those who have nothing feel ashamed?” (1 Cor 11:20-22). It is easy to read between the lines that the Strong had their own houses in which they could eat and drink, whereas the Weak did not have such resources. The “haves” of the church arrived early and became sated, even drunk, whereas the “have-nots,” because of their duties as slaves or day-laborers, came later and went hungry. As Theissen notes, this sort of conduct was typical at dinner parties around the Greco-Roman

117 Martin, Corinthian Body, 70.
118 Martin, Corinthian Body, 73.
119 Theissen, Social Setting, 96.
120 Martin, Corinthian Body, 73.
Guests took their places at the house and around the table according to status, and the quality of food and wine served to guests reflected guests’ status and proximity to the host. We have already seen in the previous chapter that this practice of discrimination was much expected at the Greco-Roman eranos. However, the Lord’s Supper was, for Paul, to be a different case. Though some of the conventions of the time might have been seen as normal (the benefactors of the church paid for most of the meal and hosted the community in their house, after all), it was unacceptable to Paul to blatantly express the division and, worse, to exacerbate the factions at the Lord’s Supper. The father of the Corinthians emphasizes throughout chapter 11 that the Christian meal should be a common meal, and he challenges the Strong to modify their “rights” of status in order to promote unity with the Weak.\footnote{Theissen, \textit{Social Setting}, 153-155.}

As we saw in Chapter 2, in Paul’s mind the community was supposed to be the place where the Spirit of God unites and reveals himself in the way he wishes (12:11). Martin speaks about the same reality in terms of “a body.” He emphasizes the way Paul looked at the church, trying to prevent the Corinthian “body” from pollution.\footnote{Martin, \textit{Corinthian Body}, 74.} Unfortunately, when the report of Chloe’s people arrived in Ephesus, the Corinthian body was already polluted and the spirit that was at work in the community was not of God but was rather a spirit of division. This spirit is described elsewhere in the New Testament as “the father of lies” (Jn 8:44) and “the accuser of our brothers” (Rev 12:10), and is depicted as a cause of disease (Mk 1:40-43). Jesus cleansed people of unclean \textit{pneumata} and cured them of various diseases that were viewed in the gospels as demonic activity.\footnote{Martin, \textit{Corinthian Body}, 163.} Paul, too, wanted the Corinthian body to be healthy, unpolluted, and properly formed. He knew what was at stake. In Paul’s mind the united and Spirit-filled

\footnote{Martin, \textit{Corinthian Body}, 164-165.}
community expressed the very presence of Christ in the world. As Murphy-O’Connor writes, “Believers were the means by which the Risen Lord acted in the world. They were his ears, eyes, and hands. What he had done when physically present, they now do in his name and with his power.” Therefore, when Paul calls the Corinthian church the body of Christ (1 Cor 12:27), he implies the physical presence of Jesus, here and now, in the community united in love and care for one another. Unfortunately, looking at the Corinthians, one of whom had improper relations with his stepmother (5:1), others of whom claimed that “Jesus is accursed” (12:3), revealed that the body of the church was seriously ill and needed immediate help. After first sending Timothy (4:17), Paul’s letter was to be the cure.

From Paul’s ministry we know that he dealt with churches’ problems in three different ways. First, he would go and revisit the city in person (16:5); second, if a personal visit was not possible, he would send one of his co-workers (16:10); and third, he would write a letter. According to 1 Cor 5:9, Paul’s correspondence with the Corinthians consisted of more than the two canonical letters that we have. Some commentators suggest three or four letters in total. Both First and Second Corinthians were written in Greek – the lingua franca of the eastern part of the Empire – which might reflect Paul’s intention to reach the widest spectrum of the community. The “medicine” for the Corinthian body had to be understandable and presented in the most digestible form. The presupposed “knowledge” of the Strong, however, made it difficult to deliver a medicine – it could not be any kind of a letter, but a rhetorically sophisticated one. And so it was. The structure of First Corinthians and its deliberative

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argumentation reveal a high level of rhetoric. As Margaret M. Mitchell points out, the letter employs four elements that characterize the sophisticated rhetoric of that time: a focus on the future as the subject of deliberation; a determined set of appeals or advantageous ends; proofs by example; and appropriate subject matter for deliberation (indeed, factions were a typical subject matter).\textsuperscript{129}

It turns out that Paul possessed a high degree of compositional and rhetorical skill, which could not be taken for granted. But should we be surprised? According to Luke, Paul was from Tarsus, the capital city of the Roman province of Cilicia (Acts 9:11). If that was the case, Paul’s early years were likely spent learning philosophical trends and rhetorical skills. According to Keener, this might explain his grasp of philosophical language, since Tarsus was a center of philosophy.\textsuperscript{130} Paul must have been a good student. As already stated, First Corinthians demonstrates the author’s ability to use many rhetorical tools, which made the medicine easier to take – at least in Paul’s mind. To appreciate a few rhetorical figures, we can start with what has been noticed by Mitchell. By considering the entire letter, she shows that Paul's call for unity is carried forward in four movements: 1. showing the Corinthians that their division is in opposition to the Christ-body and the theology of Christ crucified; 2. elaborating on particular problems in the community; 3. elaborating on community gatherings and spiritual gifts; and 4. arguing for the resurrection of Christ.\textsuperscript{131} This gives to Paul’s letter a structure and assurance to the audience of a sensible argumentation. The medicine, as we see, is first of all nicely packaged.

It is worth noticing that Paul by no means starts with complaints. On the contrary, at the very beginning of the letter, he does not hesitate to greet the Corinthians warmly and call them

\textsuperscript{130} Keener, \textit{1-2 Corinthians}, 5.
\textsuperscript{131} Mitchell, “Corinth,” 776-778.
hegiasmenois en Christo, “sanctified in Christ” (1:2), or as others translate, “consecrated in Christ” (NJB). In other words, Paul lays the foundation for the entire letter by calling the Corinthians “holy ones,” thereby indicating that he is going to form them through affirmation and that his exhortations will lead to an advantageous end. Later on we see this rhetoric at work, such as when the apostle implies that the community is already a temple of the Spirit (3:16), or when he says that every member of the community, as a part of the body of Christ, has the Holy Spirit within him (6:19). Moreover, as Meeks underlines, Paul’s formation through affirmation employs the language of belonging. This includes terms charged with emotion, those describing relations, and even the vocabulary of “family.” Little by little, repetitive use of such language led the members of the community to the conviction of belonging to the inner circle of the new family (4:14-15).

Nevertheless, as is the case in most families, the Corinthians experienced differentiation of roles and the subsequent rise of competitiveness, jealousy, and other dynamics that threaten group life. Paul knew all that, and managed to produce a medicine, his rhetorically sophisticated letter, under very challenging circumstances. He had to face the problem of enmity and division between the Strong and the Weak in a way that would bring about unity and health to the Corinthian body. Among many other rhetorical devices and means of argumentation, as we have seen already, Paul changes some commonly accepted cultural rules and dependencies among people. The rhetoric of power in First Corinthians is used by Paul to carefully reconstruct the normally expected hierarchy into what Rick F. Talbott calls kyridoularchy. He suggests that the structure of Paul’s community, seen as the body of Christ, “required power to be used to

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empower or honor those with less status.” Thus kyridoularchy honors and empowers vulnerable members, without neglecting the power of the nobles. That sort of system is also characterized by men and women enjoying elevated importance within the boundaries of the community, which is designed to result in a more harmonized and prosperous group. One of the best examples of such a reconstruction within the Corinthian community is the expected shape of the Lord’s Supper. Here Paul criticizes the Strong of the church for their eating and getting drunk before the Weak come to the Supper: “do you show contempt for the church of God and make those who have nothing feel ashamed?” (11:20-22). The apostle then gives a new way of proceeding with the Supper, which reveals a new order among the Corinthians in general: “Therefore, my brothers, when you come together to eat, wait for one another. If anyone is hungry, he should eat at home, so that your meetings may not result in judgment” (11:33-34).

In the Greco-Roman world the notions of “healthy body,” “purity,” and “harmony” would surely find fertile ground; these are what Mitchell calls “advantageous end[s]” in deliberative argumentation. Martin also notes that Paul uses the rhetoric of concord and harmony of the social body. A long rhetorical tradition of the ancient polis suggests that the city state, as a body, must get rid of any contamination or disease within its walls. During times of crisis, professional orators delivered speeches that became at some point a separate genre, and were intended to give hope and encouragement to an audience to strive for harmony. Martin argues that the structure of homonoia speeches and the rhetoric of the body politic in the Greco-Roman society lie behind the body of First Corinthians.

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Apart from whether the letter was accepted or not, the situation at Corinth after Paul’s departure was dealt with by a letter of high rhetorical value. We can appreciate First Corinthians as the most likely way of prescribing medicine for such a troubled community (if we think of a letter as a possible solution). The father of the community did not cease to form his beloved children even from a distance. Thinking about formation in stages (“I fed you milk, not solid food, because you were unable to take it” [3:2]), Paul continues to form the body of the Corinthian church as an instrument to bring Christ to the world. We will now move on to the particular issues and the concrete solutions suggested by Paul.

2. Difficulties Addressed in First Corinthians

According to Paul, the church as a whole needs constant formation. We can observe this conviction in his greeting in 1 Cor 1:2, where the teacher of the Corinthians reminds them that they are called to grow in holiness. However, the trial-and-error era of the church is described as nothing but bodily pollution and chaos. Knowing how fragile the newborn church is—which so easily became divided—Paul’s goal is to convince the members to take up the cross in daily life and return to the path of holiness. Through this elaborately constructed letter Paul patiently deals, one by one, with issues within the Corinthian church. In this section we will take a closer look at four difficulties addressed by Paul: sexual matters, lawsuits, the use of charismata, and idolatry.

2.1 Sexual Matters

The moral scandals at Corinth are seen by many to be the result of the alleged immorality of the general citizenry. Given that the Roman colonists inhabiting the city were mostly from the

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neglected spheres of Rome (such as veterans of the army, ex-slaves, the poor), can we assume that at least a few of them were found also among the members of the community? Whether it was so or not, according to Barnett, Corinth was no worse and no better than any other port city of the Roman Empire. It may have been the combination of characteristics—idolatry and general immorality, the strategic location of the city, and resulting multicultural exchange that led the Corinthians to confusion in their sexual habits. As Jack W. MacGorman notes, the introductory formula of 1 Cor 7:1 indicates that Paul responds to questions posed by the Corinthians themselves. In the entire letter we can articulate three different points of Paul’s formative discourse: some members were confused about the meat offered to idols and then sold at the market (ch. 8); there was confusion about sex and marriage (ch. 7); and some of the members asked questions about the charismata (ch. 12-14).

Paul thinks about the church in Corinth as one body—and not just any kind of body, but the body of Christ. Every member, as a part of the body, interacts with others and influences their lives, whether he intends to or not—“Do you not know that a little yeast leavens all the dough?” This symbiotic, organic relation between the members of the church leads to the conviction concerning the serious need for moral hygiene and the necessity of staying away from pollution. That is to say, if any part of the body is polluted, the entire body suffers. In this highly sophisticated homonoia letter, Paul’s statement about the case of incest may sound somewhat brutal, especially his suggestion to “deliver this man to Satan for the destruction of his flesh” (5:5). However, Paul knows the Corinthian body is sick and attacked by Satan, and thus needs an immediate reaction. Martin argues that because the healthy body of the community is at

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stake, the apostle plays the role of a doctor and tries to clean up the wounded body by excision.\textsuperscript{143} We assume that this logic also plays on the pride of those Strong of the community, who should be sorrowful (5:2) and not proud about their misunderstood freedom in sexual life (5:6). Fearing that through this man’s spirit, the whole \textit{pneuma} of the church could be contaminated, Paul brings back harmony and unity by creating clear boundaries for the community. Only a united and morally controlled church could be a sign of Christ in the world and a true witness for eventual converts.

The case seems somewhat similar with those Corinthian believers who engaged the services of prostitutes (6:12-20). Paul argues here with some of the Strong who are supposed to have knowledge, namely that individual bodies of the members are the parts of Christ’s body (6:15), and that the body is not for immorality but for the Lord (6:13). He draws a line between members of the church and outsiders by contrasting these two groups: “neither fornicators nor idolaters nor adulterers nor boy prostitutes nor sodomites nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor robbers will inherit the kingdom of God. That is what some of you used to be; but now you have had yourselves washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God” (6:11). For Christians to employ prostitutes is seen as letting the immoral spirit of the surrounding cosmos pollute the Spirit of the church’s body. Paul uses here the Strong’s own words of picturing the reality of human daily existence: “Food for the stomach and the stomach for food” (6:13). The example works on several levels: as the pollution of the body can happen to the one who eats without knowledge about food, the human spirit can be also contaminated by sexual intercourse with a prostitute; also, it was to say that one should not become a slave to either food or sex.\textsuperscript{144} As we see, Paul

\textsuperscript{143} Martin, \textit{Corinthian Body}, 169.
\textsuperscript{144} Martin, \textit{Corinthian Body}, 176.
can be quite frank about boundary-transgressing actions of Christians for the sake of the greater good, which is the call to holiness and the ability of the Spirit-filled community to bring Christ’s presence to the world.

Also, when addressing confusions about sex and marriage in ch. 7, Paul teaches the Corinthians to look beyond their own interests. The pneumatic bond between the Christian and Christ, and thus among the Christians themselves, is the basis of all Christian conduct, including sex. Here Paul encourages married couples to fulfill their marital duties to protect themselves from being tempted to *porneia* outside of their marriage (7:5). As Martin notes, Christians no longer possess their own bodies, but filled with God’s Spirit, they are to take care for one another by staying away from occasions of pollution.¹⁴⁵ And boundary-breaking sexual intercourse with outsiders was definitely among such occasions.

### 2.2 Lawsuits

The cosmopolitan character of Corinth was manifested in various public institutions, such as the magistrate of the capital of Achaia, offices of the Isthmian olympion, and of course the *bema*, the city tribunal. The Corinthian *bema*, or speaker’s platform, was located in the center of the *Agora* where the magistrates sat.¹⁴⁶ Luke reports that Paul himself was troubled by the Corinthian Jews who “rose up together against Paul and brought him to the tribunal” (Acts 18:12). Fortunately for him, the proconsul Gallio was not interested in Jewish arguments concerning the Mosaic Law, and thus released the apostle. For Paul, however, lawsuits conducted by some of the members of the Corinthian community against each other were a multidimensional evil. Michael J. Gorman writes that, in Paul’s mind, these lawsuits were

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¹⁴⁵ Martin, *Corinthian Body*, 178.
against wisdom (1 Cor 6:2-6), denied cruciform love (6:2-8), and diminished the community’s sanctification (6:9-11).¹⁴⁷

Paul argues against the lawsuits in order to bring about a new order. The reality in which the Corinthians now find themselves is the reality which Christ called “the kingdom of God.” According to Gorman, the father of the Corinthian community draws upon the Jewish apocalyptic belief that God’s people will assist him on judgment day (6:2). Putting forth an argument *a maiore ad minus*, which describes an obvious conclusion from a claim about a stronger entity to one about a weaker entity, Paul asks: “If the world is to be judged by you, are you unqualified for the lowest law courts?” (6:2). Specifically, this is to shame the Strong of the community, who are portrayed also in this section of the letter as those who are supposed to have knowledge, and yet failed (6:5). As some scholars believe, it was the elite who were taking the Weak to the Corinthian bema to exercise their power in the church, but through this they were actually diminishing the spiritual endowment of the community. If we add the fact that in ancient times the Roman law system was biased toward the upper class (according to Martin, all the judges were from the highest classes; there was also need to hire an advocate¹⁴⁸), then it is clear how far away some members of the church were from Paul’s idea of the stronger parts of the community’s body taking care of the more vulnerable ones. Paul strongly opposes that inequality within the church and gives a concrete solution—settle cases among yourselves (6:5). This would lead, again, to changing the social hierarchy and conventional traditions of the nobles, who likely litigated against those of lower status. By telling the Strong they should not take the Weak to court, Paul sets a boundary between Christ’s body and the world. From now on

¹⁴⁸ Martin, *Corinthian Body*, 76.
everyone should behave more like those of the same rank, who were more likely to strive for settlement and not to go to the court.\textsuperscript{149}

Part of Paul’s “formation from a distance” involves both a deep sense of brotherhood among the Corinthians and good communication. Paul wanted to see in the Corinthian body both friendship and mutual concern, which ultimately lead to love and unity.\textsuperscript{150} Only then could the Spirit be fully at work and distribute his gifts as he wished (12:11). It is striking, actually, how much emphasis Paul puts on communal dignity as a Spirit-filled entity. Meeks underlines here that Paul’s affirmative formation implies a great gift granted to the church, which is the ability, through the guidance of God’s Spirit, to judge rightly all the controversies within the church.\textsuperscript{151} However, only by changing the dynamics of power within the \textit{ekklesia} could the community exercise its possession of the Spirit and grow in brotherhood.

\textbf{2.3 Idolatry}

According to Martin, the Corinthians had the same kind of thinking about the cosmos as the leading philosophical schools at that time.\textsuperscript{152} Basically, there were two main aspects of the human world—the spirit (\textit{pneuma}) and the body. \textit{Pneuma}, as the life-giving force, and thus a very important part of the cosmos and the human body, was not an entirely separate entity. The transition between the interior and the exterior of the body was fluid, and there was continuity between the human body and its surroundings (made from the same material). This immediate interaction resulted in everybody interacting, somewhat automatically, with each other.\textsuperscript{153} In addition, there was the value for the human body which, in Greco-Roman society as today in our culture, was a subject of great care. It was extremely important in society to have a nicely-shaped

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\item \textsuperscript{149} Martin, \textit{Corinthian Body}, 77.
\item \textsuperscript{150} Grant, \textit{Paul in the Roman World}, 41-42.
\item \textsuperscript{151} Meeks, \textit{First Urban Christians}, 124.
\item \textsuperscript{152} Martin, \textit{Corinthian Body}, 20-21.
\item \textsuperscript{153} Martin, \textit{Corinthian Body}, 21.
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body, because a beautiful body was a sign of aristocracy. Thus the proper care of the body—through exercise, massages, breath control, baths, etc.—seemed crucial in day-to-day life. No wonder that the fear of polluting the body, whether physically or spiritually, was very serious in Roman Corinth, so much so that people sometimes could become paranoid about it.¹⁵⁴

Through the prism of the Greco-Roman spirit-body worldview, we can understand better and appreciate Paul’s rhetoric about the Corinthians’ engaging in idolatry and the consumption of idol-meat. In First Corinthians we find a blunt warning not to participate in banquets and festivals where food is offered to idols, because in Paul’s view it is actually offered to demons: “I mean that what they sacrifice, [they sacrifice] to demons, not to God, and I do not want you to become participants with demons” (10:20). In other words, whoever participates both in meals offered to idols and in the Lord’s Supper mixes the cup of demons with the cup of the Lord, and causes pollution of the entire body (10:21). According to Grant, that would imply even further consequences for the individual and for the community, because “a little yeast leavens all the dough” (5:6).¹⁵⁵ He argues that Paul’s view of idolatry comes from his Jewish background, which can be noticed, for instance, in Romans where he claims that gentiles worshiping idols “exchanged the truth of God for a lie and revered and worshiped the creature rather than the creator, who is blessed forever” (Rom 1:23). Educated within Jewish circles, Paul also might have learned the idea from the book of Wisdom, where the author denounces idolatry as leading to such practices as ritual killing, adultery, debauchery, disorder in marriages, and sexual perversion (Wis 14:23-27). Letting the demonic spirit enter one’s life through one channel affects all its other important aspects. Paul knows that the members of the community are still weak and far from being grounded in faith. He describes them as “still of the flesh” to indicate

¹⁵⁴ Martin, Corinthian Body, 139.
¹⁵⁵ Grant, Paul in the Roman World, 66.
that in many instances the Corinthians need to be instructed about which behavior belongs to Christian conduct and which is totally against it (3:1-4). For Paul, idolatry, even though there are no other gods (8:5), belongs to the practices polluting the body of Christ. Maybe, however, Paul wants here to teach the Corinthians something far more important?

When it comes to the issues of eating idol-meat and idolatry in chapters 8 and 10, it seems that Paul argues along the same lines that we saw with instances of sexual matters and lawsuits – the tensions between the Strong and the Weak. The divided church suffers because of the boastful claims of the Strong about their superior knowledge. The apostle agrees with the fact that there are no other gods and with the truth that eating idol-meat means nothing to the sanctified Christian. However, in Paul’s mind, within the community one can find a serious differentiation in knowledge and different levels of spiritual life. Especially the newly baptized members of the community and those with a lower level of education were constantly at risk of defiling their conscience (8:7). Paul’s solution to this differentiation is simple: “as I gave up my prerogatives as an apostle for the sake of others, so you should also resign on the claim of the knowledge for the sake of the Weak” (9:23; 8:10-11). The latter, without proper knowledge, are endangered by the sight of the Strong eating idol-meat and, therefore, if they act against their conscience, the holiness of the whole community is in danger. Paul insists on the community’s call to grow in holiness, and teaches the individual members of the Corinthian body to take care of each other. The proper “knowledge” of anything in the community, therefore, is measured by one’s self-giving love and by the willingness to renounce one’s interests for the sake of others. Paul’s words speak for themselves: “No one should seek his own advantage, but that of his neighbor” (10:24); “if someone says to you, ‘This was offered in sacrifice,’ do not eat it on account of the one who called attention to it and on account of conscience; I mean not your own
conscience, but the other’s” (10:28-29); and “avoid giving offense, whether to Jews or Greeks or the church of God, just as I try to please everyone in every way, not seeking my own benefit but that of the many, that they may be saved” (10:32-33).

2.4 Use of Charismata

Paul’s exhortations to self-giving love among the members of the community include also church gatherings and the proper usage of charismata. From First Corinthians we conclude that the church enjoyed great spiritual endowment among its members. The newcomers, indeed, with the whole church, must have been amazed by the way the Spirit worked during the gatherings. However, with great power comes great responsibility. Apparently, here too the problem was based on the tensions between the Strong and the Weak.

The Strong manifested problematic behavior (their looking down on others; their “puffing up” and the improper use of power) in connection with their spiritual endowment and the true manifestations of God’s power working through them. Unfortunately, according to Meeks, the behavior that the members of the community recognized as directly manifesting the Spirit of God served as one of the means of gaining prestige and influence within the group.\(^\text{156}\)

Even the spiritual gifts could be manipulated and, instead of being signs of God’s presence, were made instruments of harm.\(^\text{157}\) Especially through “speaking in tongues,” one could attract the attention of the church within which that gift was highly prized. A person who could demonstrate “tongues” at the assembly also held some currency of social power. Paul is aware of that connection, and in his teaching about charismata pays special attention to the gift of “speaking in tongues” (for three chapters, chs. 12-14). He tries to kill two birds with one stone by putting “tongues” in the proper order among the rest of the charismata – he gives an instruction on the

\(^{156}\) Meeks, First Urban Christians, 119.
character of the gifts of the Spirit and tries to harmonize with the rest of the group those who “puff up” on the basis of speaking in tongues. Meeks writes, “He insists on the equality of all spiritual *charismata*, but he puts the Corinthians’ favorite, ‘tongues,’ at the bottom of his list (1 Cor 12:8-10, 28, 29).”¹⁵⁸ This seems crucial for the formation of the group. Therefore, Paul promotes those who prophesy (“Whoever speaks in a tongue builds himself up, but whoever prophesies builds up the church “ [14:4]), and helps to realize that in Christ’s body there should be no extraordinary mental state to prove one’s ability of being a leader.

The “formation from a distance” concerning *charismata* concentrates on what Paul calls proper order: “So, (my) brothers and sisters, strive eagerly to prophesy, and do not forbid speaking in tongues, but everything must be done properly and in order” (14:39-40). In my opinion, right order in Paul’s mind includes two aspects. First, he was trying to give a proper shape to the uncontrolled charismatic worship in Corinth, because only through properly ordered prayer could God truly manifest himself (“since he is not the God of disorder but of peace” [14:33]). According to Gorman, chaos during the church’s assembly did not measure up to God, Christ, and spirit of the gospel.¹⁵⁹ Using construction language, Paul tries to bring about the order and harmony necessary to build up the church and to shape a beautifully formed body of Christ (14:12, 26, 31, 40). In the body, all the parts have their respective roles and contribute what is needed for the building. However, according to Paul, the *charismata* of speech, such as songs of praise, teaching, revelation, speaking in tongues, and their interpretation (14:26), are decisive for the right order of the community. Vincent P. Branick underlines that in a healthy church gifts of speech stood for markers of good communication among the members.¹⁶⁰ It is clear that without

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¹⁵⁸ Meeks, *First Urban Christians*, 123.
specific guidelines church gatherings could turn into a cacophony of sounds, which did not do any good for the listeners.\textsuperscript{161} It is worth noticing that the apostle shows the Corinthians how the assemblies and the \textit{charismata} have in themselves an apostolic function. He knows that the church gatherings properly ordered and guided by the Spirit can be very powerful experiences for those who are not yet Christians (14:24-25).

Second, the heart of all the formative elaboration on spiritual gifts is what Paul says in ch. 13 about love (vv. 1-13). Here he presents something we can describe as fundamental to the proper use of the \textit{charismata}. According to Paul, love never fails as fundamental to all actions and, as such, it is expected from those who speak in tongues and from those who possess any other gift, whether the Strong or the Weak. Even if some of the members did not demonstrate various \textit{charismata}, and yet showed love, they would be affirmed. On the other hand, even the most spectacular gifts performed without love to others lose all their value and become empty signs (13:8). For Paul, love is like the concrete which cements all the bricks of the church of God, a glue that keeps the Corinthian body together. Self-giving love is the core of Paul’s “formation from a distance” – a more excellent way (12:31).

\textbf{3. The Ideal Follower of Christ According to Paul}

For those reading First Corinthians for the first time, it could be somewhat scandalous to see the author putting himself in front of the reader as a role model to follow. Paul’s “be imitators of me” triggers questions about the centrality of Christ in the Christian message. But was Paul himself a good example? As a founder of many churches, he was a key figure in bringing the gospel to the gentiles; indeed, he is still a key figure today for churches that read his letters as divine revelation. However, his \textit{persona}, as no other in the New Testament, is a

\textsuperscript{161} Collins, \textit{First Corinthians}, 512.
controversial one: as a rhetorical master he could polarize people\textsuperscript{162} and push toward radicalism\textsuperscript{163}; but on other occasions, he seemed not to be radical at all.\textsuperscript{164} Oftentimes, we see Paul bluntly reaching to the roots of the problem.\textsuperscript{165} In First Corinthians he is easily fired up, sometimes scandalized, passionate about his apostleship, and even offensive (14:34). From Paul’s perspective, he must have had a certain level of self-knowledge and a good awareness of the community in Corinth if he did not hesitate to invite the members to imitate his ways.

Several times we see Paul presenting himself as the best example to look up to when addressing different matters of the letter. It is part of Paul’s rhetoric. He does not limit usage of himself as a role model only to the two explicit instances where he calls the Corinthians to imitate him (4:16 and 11:1). According to Mitchell, Paul’s argument for unity among the members of the community stands for the leitmotif of the entire letter and, as such, is supported by the author’s constant reference to himself as the example of the non-divisive course of action.\textsuperscript{166} First, in discussion about divisions in the community based on personal preferences of the Corinthians, Paul presents himself as the model for anyone who proclaims the gospel (1:13-17). Paul’s use of himself as an example also appears in chapters 3-4, where he underlines his role in founding the Corinthian church and sets out his credentials for advising and for imitating him. Thus he is their founder and, along with Apollos, a co-worker for God (3:6); he is a “servant of Christ and steward of the mysteries of God” (4:1); he is an apostle (4:9) and their father (4:16). Paul’s behavior, therefore, is the model for imitation when it comes to the

\begin{quote}
\textsuperscript{162} 1 Cor 6:9-11 “Do not be deceived; neither fornicators nor idolaters nor adulterers nor boy prostitutes nor sodomites nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor robbers will inherit the kingdom of God. That is what some of you used to be.”
\textsuperscript{163} 1 Cor 5:13 “Purge evil person from your midst.”
\textsuperscript{164} 1 Cor 10:25 “Eat anything sold in the market, without raising questions on grounds of conscience.”
\textsuperscript{165} 1 Cor 5:1 “It is widely reported that there is immorality among you, and immorality of a kind not found even among pagans.”
\textsuperscript{166} Mitchell, \textit{Paul and the Rhetoric}, 54.
\end{quote}
particular issues of *porneia* (5:3 and 6:15); he appeals to his personal lifestyle as an example in the case of celibacy (7:7); also in learning self-giving love, Paul depicts himself as the one to follow (8:13; 9:23); and in 10:23-11:1 Paul presents himself as a model of proper Christian freedom in opposition to divisive members of the community who seek their own advantage. Moreover, the famous “Hymn of Love” in chapter 13 is “a more excellent way” that Paul wants to show the Corinthians, which he illustrates by presenting himself as a paradigm of the proper usage of spiritual gifts and a model to follow in regard to tongues (14:18 and 14:19). Finally, in 15:30-32 Paul points out his way of looking at the resurrection and wants the Corinthians to follow his example as one who has hope. As these self-references are spread all throughout the letter, we now want to ask what was Paul’s strategy and intention in forming the Corinthians from a distance by setting forth his own example or by his explicit calls to imitation.

Scholars such as Mitchell and Collins find Paul’s call to imitation to be a part of his rhetorical and formative strategy. In the Greco-Roman world “formation from a distance” had to be carefully planned and rhetorically structured if one wanted to be heard. As a Hellenistic letter of persuasion, First Corinthians employs numerous types of images to address different groups in the audience.¹⁶⁷ Read aloud during the gathering of the church, Paul’s letter had to be equipped with adequate arguments and persuasive rhetorical tools to engage both the Strong and the Weak of the church. As an excellent rhetor, Paul enriches his arguments with examples which, according to Mitchell, were the best proof for deliberative speakers.¹⁶⁸ A call to imitation was a common rhetorical technique, and speakers and authors oftentimes set forth gods and heroes as

they proceeded with arguments. Because people choose to do things that their heroes choose to
do, examples (either historical or invented ones) were commonly expected and widely used.\textsuperscript{169}

As part of a dialogue with the community, the appeal to follow a concrete example in
First Corinthians in Paul’s view was a remedy for all the problems the community faced.
Proposing persons of high moral quality was essential to the success of rhetorical speeches,
which is why the father of the community proposes someone they knew. Facing a serious crisis
of leadership, the Corinthians were given something they could relate to, something real for
them, something they could put into practice – in short, Paul’s example. Because some of the
Corinthians probably undermined Paul’s apostleship (e.g., in contrast with Peter), Paul’s drawing
an image of himself begins with defending his claim to be an apostle of Christ. This conviction
leads him, as we see on numerous occasions (1:14; 2:1; 3:5; 9:1), to present himself as a true
apostle, the father of the community, and the founder of the church in Corinth. In Paul’s eyes his
apostleship and his fatherhood of the community were the two pillars on which he laid his claim
to be imitated. He himself came to Corinth not in the light of human wisdom, but as a true
apostle – preaching Christ crucified and raised from the dead (2:1-2). In order to support his right
as an apostle, he oftentimes refers back to his vocation he received directly from the Lord (1:1),
as well as to some of the instructions revealed directly to him by Christ (11:23; 14:37). This life
as an apostle, therefore, becomes a pattern also for the Corinthians: “I have applied these things
to myself and Apollos for your benefit, brothers, so that you may learn from us not to go beyond
what is written” (4:6).

Some scholars (e.g., Collins and Burke) also underline Paul’s claim of his spiritual
fatherhood toward the Corinthian church. As already noted, Paul does not hesitate to use
affective language of kinship in his discourse with the Corinthians. When the apostle first tells
them what the reason for this letter is, he states, “I am writing you this not to shame you, but to admonish you as my beloved children” (4:14). Throughout the passage, notes Collins, Paul uses persuasive familial language “in order to bring his beloved children to their senses and teach them the ways they should follow.” The intensity with which the father of the community approaches the Corinthians is significant. Why would Paul be like this? Burke, in his article about Paul’s role as “father” to the Corinthians, writes that the *ekklesia* must have become for many the new family of God as a replacement for the natural family sometimes severed by conversion. Paul truly saw himself as the founder of that church (“I planted” [3:6]) and the father of the new Corinthian family (“Even if you should have countless guides to Christ, yet you do not have many fathers, for I became your father in Christ Jesus through the gospel” [4:15]). As the one and only father of the community, Paul wanted to be loved, respected, and imitated not for his own satisfaction, but for the good of his children.

Once the reason for writing to the Corinthians had been established, Paul, as the father of his beloved children, appealed with strength, “Therefore, I urge you, be imitators of me” (4:16). Such language can have a place in a “father-child” relationship, and it is legitimate for the father to say to his child, “Which do you prefer? Shall I come to you with a rod, or with love and a gentle spirit?” (4:21). According to Burke, imitating a moral exemplar, such as in a “teachers-pupils” relation, was stereotypical in ancient society. Even today fathers are expected to provide an appropriate model for their children to imitate, although at the time of Paul these expectations seem to have been much higher. In Jewish tradition imitation of the father was broadened to include the examples of the fathers of the nation (Moses, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, etc.). Paul’s claim to be the father of the Corinthian church, therefore, implies also his authority

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171 Burke, “Paul’s role as ‘Father,’” 95.
172 Burke, “Paul’s role as ‘Father,’” 102.
over the members and the expectation to be imitated as children imitate their father. It is worth
noticing that, in addressing the Corinthians with “father-children” language, Paul shifts to the use
of the first person singular (4:14-21), as if to say, “Only I am your father and I expect you to
obey me through imitation.” Again, this was not merely a strategy of coercion or
authoritarianism or manipulation. On the contrary, the advantageous end of imitating Paul was
ultimately imitating Christ himself (11:1).\footnote{Burke, “Paul’s role as ‘Father,’” 110.} Paul’s call to imitation, as he himself makes clear in
11:1, refers to Christ and accordingly to whatever Christ himself would have done and said.
Supported by vivid proof of God’s working grace in his own life, Paul, above all, wanted the
Corinthians to imitate Christ’s self-giving love.

Paul’s sending Timothy in 4:17 gives us an image of a father who teaches his children: “I
am sending you Timothy (…); he will remind you of my ways in Christ [Jesus], just as I teach
them everywhere in every church.” It is important to note at this point, following Benjamin A.
Edsall, that in Paul’s sight the process of learning the ways of Christ was fundamental not only
for the Corinthian community, but for every church he founded; but the teaching of those ways
to the community was also important for Paul himself.\footnote{Benjamin A. Edsall, \textit{Paul’s Witness to Formative Early Christian Instruction} (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2014), 13.} In antiquity fathers were expected to
teach their offspring, and the didactic role of parents was obvious. Aristotle, for instance,
emphasized that for children it was very important to attend to the exhortations of their fathers
\textit{(hoi patrikoi logoi).}\footnote{Burke, “Paul’s role as ‘Father,’” 104.} It was in the family that a child received instructions and learned how to
socialize; in the family children learned to choose virtues and to avoid vices. Also, Josephus
supports such family dynamics among Jews –teaching in the context of home was common for
them.\footnote{Burke, “Paul’s role as ‘Father,’” 104.} Furthermore, the instruction of children should start at the earliest possible moment,
since at that early stage of their lives they look for a role-model to imitate. People need a human model to follow. As we observe in First Corinthians, Paul’s “formation from a distance” employed the conventions of the father-child relation, especially the expectation to give an example and to teach. The father of the Corinthian church used cultural assumptions of the time with regard to how he and the members of the community should relate to one another.\(^{177}\)

As the father of the Corinthians, Paul wanted to be imitated in numerous instances. Especially when teaching on the matter of divisions in the church, he emphasizes his own example – true strength is not manifested by exercising power over the Weak, but rather, the power of God is manifested, as in his own life, in weakness (1:18-19). The paradox of the cross is something that Paul taught from the very beginning of his ministry in Corinth (2:1-2), and he expected his children to live out that paradox. As Martin notes, in order to remind the divided Corinthians of this teaching, Paul puts in front of his audience two opposing ways of thinking and being.\(^{178}\) One is the way of human wisdom with worldly values, such as prestige, power, and dominance. This, according to Paul, was embodied by the Strong. The other way, the one Paul wanted to be understood by the Corinthians, was the way of God’s wisdom shown by the crucified Lord. Accordingly, this type of way Paul exemplified by his own ministry (2:1-2; 9:12).

Apart from that, the father of the Corinthians wanted his children to imitate him in exhibiting key virtues. Greco-Roman ethics influenced structures of family relationships, professional relations between patron and client (starting with the emperor, who was seen as a patron of the empire, and ending with slaves), and hierarchical relations within larger groups like

\(^{177}\) Burke, “Paul’s role as ‘Father,’” 105.
\(^{178}\) Martin, *Corinthian Body*, 55.
Those who lived their lives according to high ethical standards were likely to be respected and followed. One of the virtues valued in Greco-Roman society, self-control, topped the list when it came to the perfect image of a leader, whether it be the emperor, a father, or a master. Paul tried to convince his readers that he himself embodied the virtue of self-control and thus was worthy to be imitated.

As we read in chapter 7, where Paul is asked about marriage and virginity, the example to be followed for the unmarried and the widows is precisely that of the apostle: “Now to the unmarried and to widows, I say: it is a good thing for them to remain as they are, as I do, but if they cannot exercise self-control they should marry, for it is better to marry than to be on fire” (vv. 8-9). Martin rightly notes that this construction portrays celibacy as a higher status and greater strength than having sex. Thus Paul’s argument for celibacy seems to be referring to the popular Roman virtue. On the other hand, we have to note here, following Grant, that virginity itself as well as marrying without raising offspring was seen as wrong in Greco-Roman society. Against all conventions, the father of the community teaches the Corinthians to “be as strong as I am,” meaning, self-controlled, other-centered, anxiety-free, and, most importantly, Christ-centered (“I should like you to be free of anxieties. An unmarried man is anxious about the things of the Lord” [v. 32]; “An unmarried woman or a virgin is anxious about the things of the Lord, so that she may be holy” [v. 34]; “I am telling you this for your own benefit, not to impose a restraint upon you, but for the sake of propriety and adherence to the Lord without distraction” [v. 35]).

One of Paul’s teachings, however, encountered notable resistance within the community, namely concerning money. Money issues, mentioned by Paul in many letters, were an important

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181 Grant, Paul in the Roman World, 107-108.
factor and “earned” a significant place in the process of “formation from a distance.” What would Paul like the Corinthians to imitate in such an instance? On the one hand, he pointed to his own practice: not looking for his own benefit, but preaching the gospel free of charge, although “the Lord ordered that those who preach the gospel should live by the gospel” (9:14). Paul’s refusal to take direct remuneration from the Corinthians infuriated some of them, because the Strong and the powerful of the church wanted Paul to be their exclusive guest and teacher (as was the custom at that time). Paul’s manual labor to support himself was offensive, at least to the upper class of the community. As Martin notes, most people of the higher classes avoided manual labor even if they had to go into debt.\(^{182}\) Paul teaches here something important for those who desiring to imitate Christ: never be a burden for others when proclaiming the gospel; do not be in people’s debt but rather let them be receivers of God’s saving power. Taking Paul’s own history, that was probably how he saw the divine reality. He himself was the example of God’s unconditional love shown to him on the road to Damascus (Gal 1:13-17).

On the other hand, Paul wanted the Corinthians to imitate their father in generosity, which they could manifest by financial support of the other churches. At the end of the letter, the apostle gives the members of the community an opportunity to be generous in response to God’s unconditional love revealed in Paul’s preaching the gospel. In Romans we learn that Paul sees the collection as an “exchange of gifts,” as a transaction of friendship in which both sides give to each other, not out of cold calculation, but out of one’s loving heart (Rom 15:28-29). Moreover, this type of offering is not just any type of offering. Paul calls the collection he proposes “the collection for the holy ones” (1 Cor 16:1), using the same expression for the members of the Jerusalem church that he used for the Corinthians. Paul thereby expands the thinking of the Corinthians to consider the larger body of Christ and render it proper care. The

\(^{182}\) Martin, Corinthian Body, 80.
father of the community spiritualizes the financial gift of the Corinthians, as well as all the other financial support from his communities. Martin suggests that in Paul’s view “financial gifts” stand for a sacrifice to God.¹⁸³ In other words, Paul turns the financial support into something spiritual – the Corinthians learn that their gift is actually a gift to God, and by offering it they increase their spiritual credit.

Finally, in all the discussion about Paul’s formative call to imitation, we have to acknowledge his intention for the Corinthians is, ultimately, to imitate Christ himself: “Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ” (11:1). Paul believes in First Corinthians that all the members of the church are “called to fellowship with Jesus Christ our Lord” (1:9). That was why in addressing factions he taught them to be like Jesus who was not divided (1:13). They were all baptized in the name of Christ who was also crucified for them (1:13), and so Paul wanted them, especially the Strong of the community, to follow Christ’s example in dealing with one another. Paul points simultaneously to Christ while offering to the Corinthians himself as a true and living example. The Corinthians are called to be like Paul, living images of the crucified Lord, embodying self-giving love as the greatest of all the virtues (13:13).

¹⁸³ Martin, Corinthian Body, 82.
Conclusion

Cicero called Corinth “the light of all Greece.” Indeed, the great metropolis of the Roman Empire imported innovations in popular culture (e.g., in sports, architecture, etc.), in education (schools of philosophy), and in business. But in Paul’s view, one of the largest and most important cities of Greece needed another kind of import, or better, another kind of “light.”

Pauline studies reveal that Paul’s *modus operandi* was to bring the light of Christ to cities by forming communities that would bear his presence. Even though most of the thirteen letters in the New Testament traditionally attributed to Paul were written to communities, it is First Corinthians more than any other that provides us with Paul’s *modus operandi*. The goal of this thesis has been to learn the pattern Paul used to build and form the Corinthian church, and to suggest the significance of the letter for contemporary Christian communities and for those involved in evangelization.

The first chapter of the thesis showed that Paul’s choice of Corinth for spreading the gospel in the region of Achaia was no mistake. As an economic “giant,” as well as a cultural and religious melting pot, Corinth was fertile ground in which Paul planted and God gave incredible growth (1 Cor 3:6). We depicted the mindset of an evangelizer immersing himself into a Greco-Roman urban environment and building the foundation for a Christian community. Paul’s numerous references to Corinthian day-to-day existence in First Corinthians (theater, music, marriage, religious practices, sexual behavior, meat shopping, etc.), reveal how the apostle drew near to those who were listening to him. Paul made himself “all things to all” (9:22); he became one of the Corinthians for the sake of the gospel. Inculturation was his missionary concept and, as such, the very first step of Paul’s *modus operandi*. 
The second step in Paul’s *modus operandi* was to find ways to bring together the people he met and to initiate a Christian community. Chapter two revealed that Paul was an apostle of Christ and a founder of churches in an original way, namely, by using his profession as a tentmaker in evangelization. Meeting many people passing by the busy trade route of Corinth and networking with both the Weak (such as slaves, women, poor, etc.) and the Strong (people of intellect, wealth, connections, etc.), Paul created, for the sake of the future church, a network of valuable connections. We discovered that his initial preaching of Christ won some influential citizens (such as Aquila and Prisca or Gaius) who later on likely opened their houses to host the Lord’s Supper or Christian *symposium*. Some of the more influential members of the church might have served as leaders of the *ekklesia*, especially after Paul’s departure (16:1; 16:3). We also learned that, for Paul, the unity among members was crucial for building up the church (1 Cor 1:10; 12:27), and in order to achieve that, he gave the church a structure of “house churches.” A second unifying element was the way Paul shaped the church’s meetings (the Lord’s Supper and the prayer gatherings), which were based on the Hellenistic *eranos* meal and the *symposium* (11:21). However, both unifying elements of the structure given to the Corinthian church can be brought to one component: Christ as the center of the gathering (11:23).

In the third chapter we discovered that the last stage of Paul’s *modus operandi* involved letting the community mature on its own. Unfortunately, for the Corinthians the trial-and-error time after Paul’s departure did not appear smooth in formation. Though the Corinthian church was a vibrant one and indeed very dear to Paul, it was also probably the most trouble-making. Hence the need for Paul’s outreach through letter writing. We can be grateful both to the community and to Paul, because First Corinthians constitutes Paul’s most practical and timeless
letter with regard to teaching about the Eucharist, marital issues, sexuality, leadership, relations within the community, relations with the world, and Christian praxis in general.

We discovered that even from afar Paul does not cease to build up the Corinthian church. For Paul formation is a constant process. In order to make their learning easier, the father of the Corinthians gives them, throughout the letter, a help for their daily-life struggles, especially in their life as a community. This thesis revealed that Paul’s *modus operandi* is to constantly point to Christ crucified and raised from the dead, and to call the Corinthians to imitate himself as a living proof that imitation of Christ is possible. The Corinthians knew Paul from the very beginning when he came to Corinth and started to work as a tentmaker. Albeit with human limits, his life was a true example of the ideal follower of Christ which he wanted the Corinthians to become on every level of existence. In other words, Paul’s *modus operandi*, from the very first step to the last one, was to bring Christ to the life of others and to form Christ-like disciples, just like himself: Christ-centered, self-giving, self-controlled, and anxiety-free. And in doing so, they could then be a model for others.

Although we are two millennia apart, Paul still teaches us a great deal about the ways God works when it comes to evangelization of those who do not know Christ, and about the formation of those who are already Christians. God gives growth where evangelizers and leaders of the church live close to the people and are not afraid of the surrounding culture. The ways of bringing Christ to others have to be adjusted properly in different times and places (just as Paul used tent-making, or *eranos*, or *symposia*). Most importantly, however, people will be inspired to follow Christ if they see true witnesses of his self-emptying love in those who evangelize. That is true in every time and place.
Bibliography


