

Cultural underlays to the conflict in Corinth revisited

ABSTRACT

The theory of FC Baur in 1831, that Judaizers have been partly responsible for the conflicts in 1 Corinthians, has since been widely rejected. Currently it is viewed that the Jews in the congregation of Corinth were either an insignificant minority, or totally absent from the congregation. The current consensus, if there is any, inclines toward an interpretation of the conflicts as being of a purely social nature. The aim of this article is to evaluate some of the current approaches to the Corinthian conflict. Cultural underlays to the conflicts, not only from tensions between Romans and Greeks, but especially from a possible Jewish section in the congregation are investigated. In this article an overview of the Wirkungsgeschichte will be given, as well as the core section which points to Jewish presence in this congregation. Furthermore the Jewish, Greek and Roman cultures are briefly described, and in conclusion relevant sections in the Corinthian letters are examined from an intercultural perspective.

1. CULTURE AS A FRAMEWORK FOR INTERPRETING DIVISIONS WITHIN CORINTH

Regarding the main cultural groups that were resident in Corinth, there is little difference of opinion amongst New Testament scholars. Most scholars¹ agree that the city of Corinth was inhabited mainly by Romans (after the city has been rebuilt by Caesar in 44 BC), local Greeks, and, with Corinth being a cosmopolitan city, groups from other countries (Murphy-O'Connor 1992:1136, Thiselton 2000:3). One distinct group in Corinth was the Diaspora Jews, who had their own synagogue, and retained a degree of separation from other groups due to their adherence to Judaism.

The composition of the congregation in Corinth, as well as the divisions within the congregation, has been much debated. Baur and the Tübingen-school initially viewed the partisanships mentioned in 1 Corinthians 1:12 to be of a cultural nature. He followed the principles of Hegel and assessed the divisions in terms of the thesis that the Christian Jews supported Peter and Christ versus the antithesis that the Gentile Christians supported Paul and Apollos. According to Baur, the Roman Catholic Church eventually brought about the synthesis that unified the two groups.² For more than a century scholars have accepted and expanded Baur's theory.

In his commentary on 1 Corinthians Meyer (1877:2-4) views the two main groups in Corinth to be the Jewish Christians and the Gentile Christians (although admitting that the Gentile Christians were in the majority) as opposing groups in Corinth. This line of thought is also visible later in the work of Dods (1901:33-34), as well as Robertson and Plummer (1929:12)³,

1 Cf. Murphy-O'Connor (1992:1136), Thiselton (2000:3).

2 Cf. Grosheide (1965) on this issue. He does however mention that there still remained some adherents to Baur's point of view (Grosheide 1965:33-37).

3 In their commentary on 1 Corinthians 1:12 Robertson and Plummer (1929:12) comment on

who both point out two main groups, being the followers of Paul and Apollos as Hellenistic, versus the followers of Cephas and Christ as Judaisers.

This view has largely been dismissed by scholars due to the fact that four groups are mentioned, and that it is only in Galatians 2:11-14 that Peter and Paul are shown to have serious differences. According to Grosheide (1965:37) the leaders did not try to attract followers for themselves, but the congregants themselves favoured one leader above another. Despite the objections of Grosheide, the relevance of Galatians 2:11-14 should not just be ignored. Although there is no textual evidence as support, it must be asked whether Peter, or for that matter James and the delegation from Jerusalem could have visited the congregation in Corinth at some stage (which could have promoted adherence to food laws).

This movement away from interpreting the schisms in the Corinthian congregation as a cultural one, was noticed by Allen (1956:26-35). Allen accepts the rendering of Acts, that Paul always started out his preaching activity in the synagogue, but he concludes that Paul's preaching in the synagogue was unsuccessful, since only some godfearers accepted Christ. The response of the Jews in Corinth to Paul's ministry (according to Allen) was altogether negative.

This argument is taken a step further by Sanders (1991:19-21) who argues that Paul probably did not preach in the synagogues at all. The main reason for this radical statement is the lack of reference to preaching in synagogues and opposition from the Jews in Paul's letters. He reasons that Paul used the agora and his workplace to promote the gospel. If this line of argumentation is followed, the question still remains: "Who are the weak that oppose the eating of idol meat?"

A solution to this problem was raised by Ziesler (1990). He argues that Paul's opponents may have been Judaising Christians who were not Jews at all. According to him, it is quite possible that his opponents were Gentile⁴ Christians who had begun to explore their adopted heritage and found there greater emphasis on keeping the Torah which they now proposed to import into the church. They probably distorted it, and made it what it had not been in Judaism: a pre-requisite for salvation (Ziesler 1990:106).

By rendering Acts as an unreliable historical source, as well as suggesting the absence of Christians of Jewish origin from the Early Christian congregations, some scholars attempted to solve some of the chronological anomalies between the book of Acts and the Pauline epistles. This, however, created a new paradigm⁵ with its own set of problems: Could the divisions in the congregation of Corinth be explained without taking into consideration the cultural diversity in the congregation? Would this imply that there were only two divisions, between the rich and the poor, or the important and the unimportant? Would these remaining categories, for instance, suffice in qualifying 'the weak' and 'the strong' in 1 Corinthians 8-10?

2. PROBLEMATIC PORTIONS WITHIN THE WIRKUNGSGESCHICHTE

2.1 'The weak' and 'the strong' in 1 Corinthians 8-10

It has already been shown that most of the major works on Paul focus on theological and rhetorical

the four groups as follow: "We may distinguish them respectively as St Paul and his Gospel, Hellenistic intellectualism (Apollos), conciliatory conservatism, or the gospel of the circumcision (Kephass), and 'Zealots for the Law', hostile to the Apostleship of St Paul.

4 The author's own italics.

5 Propose here that this interpretation of the divisions and conflict in the Corinthian letters evidences a paradigm shift, according to the theory posed by Kuhn (1970).

aspects, rather than on socio-historical data.⁶ This is also true of the interpretation of this passage, especially because it touches the issue of the law. Recently, however, a few noteworthy works on the concrete, historical issues present in this section have been published.

Although continuing with the thesis presented by Theissen (1983:148), Martin (1990) focuses on the weak as the target of Paul's main missionary activity in 1 Corinthians 9:19-23. He surprisingly ignores the Jews, those under the law, and those without the law, to proceed to Paul's accommodation of 'the weak'. Martin (1990:119) sees 'the weak' as the socially 'low' or underprivileged, whilst the strong would be the minority with a "high" status in social and economic ranks.

Although confirming again the lack of unity in scholarship about Paul's approach on this issue, Cheung's answer on the question of the identity of 'the weak', is noteworthy. Not only does he (1999:124-125) refute the idea that 'the weak' are just a rhetorical ploy invented by Paul himself, but he also finds an explanation that 'the weak' may be Jewish Christians unacceptable in the light of 1 Corinthians 8:7. This verse refers to 'the weak' as believers that were "until now accustomed to the idol", and therefore, according to Cheung (1999:124), excludes Jewish Christians. He also comes to the conclusion that 'the weak' does not refer to social status, but to cognition. In his words: "The 'weak' are those who are intellectually and/or morally immature" (Cheung 1999:125).

Given the central nature of these chapters in the book, and the great possibility that differences regarding eating habits could spark conflict, it is strange that Cheung (1999:124) would regard 'the weak' and 'the strong' not as parties within the congregation, but only as weak individuals whose salvation is in jeopardy. It is also probable that this conflict have at least some contribution from Jewish origin, in the light of the recurrent reference to the Jews and those under the law in 1 Corinthians 9:19-23, all the references to Israel's history in 1 Corinthians 10, and even the inclusion of the Jews in the command 1 Corinthians 10:32, i.e. not to cause anyone to stumble.

2.2 The Hebrews in 2 Corinthians 11:22

The reference to Hebrews in the Corinthian congregation has often been overlooked in the construction of the composition of the congregation.⁷ With reference to the theme of this article, it is very important to look at the interpretations of the identity of Paul's critics in this verse.⁸ These Christians could have been Jews from Palestine, or they could have been Judaizers. It is also proposed that it could be a delegation from the Jerusalem Apostolate, similar to the one in Galatians 2:11-14. The other alternatives posed are Gnostic Jewish Christians, or Hellenistic Jewish missionaries.⁹

In the light of the inconclusive nature of this debate (Savage 1996:10), the evidence from 2 Corinthians 2:11-22 compels us to review the composition and conflict of the congregation according to 1 Corinthians (especially with regard to Jewish factions).

6 See Cheung (1999:17).

7 Cf. 1 Cor 11:22: "Are they Hebrews? So am I. Are they Israelites? So am I. Are they Abraham's descendants? So am I".

8 Even though viewed from a rhetorical perspective, Duling (2008:837) clearly points out the role of 'ethnicity' in this verse.

9 Both Savage (1996:3-12) and Martin (1986:373-375) give a lengthy discussion on the identity of these "Hebrews".

2.3 The existence of cultural conflict in Corinth

From the preceding sections it is clear that very few scholars still accept the presence of socio-cultural factors in the conflict in Corinth. There is, however, still appreciation for the role of culture in Corinth. In his treatise on the relevance of the Corinthian letters for the Chewa Culture, Banda (2004:94) lists eight issues in 1 Corinthians which have definite socio-cultural connotations, namely: wisdom and power (1:10-4:21), illicit sexuality (5:1-13), marriage and divorce (7:1-40), idol food (8:1-10:33), head covering (11:2-16), drunkenness at the Lord's Supper (11:27-34), ecstasy (14:1-40) and the resurrection of the body (15:1-58).

In an exploratory article Winter (2003:139-155) undertakes an analysis of the size of each issue in the letter to the Corinthians. He motivates this study with the reason that past studies of 1 Corinthians have largely proceeded on an *a priori* assumption that each of the issues addressed forms a discreet unit. With his analysis Winter aims at exposing underlying problems and cumulative arguments.

Winter concludes that the leadership conflict between Paul and Apollos, the Lord's Supper, and the litigation of members in the congregation are the conflict issues which are foremost in terms of the attention Paul yields to these in his letters. To his view Roman society was never successful in defining acceptable limits of behaviour to its followers, and this loose structure was also evident in the way the Corinthians viewed authority (Winter 2003:142-143, 153).

The issue of compromise to a certain culture is also investigated by Winter (2003:143-148). In this investigation it becomes clear that Paul's warnings against Christian compromise to the sexual illicitness of the Greco-Roman culture comprise of a large cluster within the Corinthian letter.

In his study Winter has proven that there are cultural underlays to the Letters to Corinth, and that the outcome yields more promising results than the traditional way of interpreting, explicated above (point 1). This enterprise of Winter also clearly creates room for a new method of studying the Corinthian letters, i.e. by examining underlying themes in the letter, rather than viewing each section as a separate and closed entity.

3. RELEVANT CULTURES IN FIRST-CENTURY CORINTH

Due to the cosmopolitan nature of Corinth, it is difficult to identify all the cultural groups within the boundaries of the city. The city is described by Myers (1987:235) as the "hub of intercourse between Romans, Greeks, Jews, Syrians and Egyptians". As proposed above in the Introduction, my study is limited to the relations between the three main cultures in Corinth: the Jewish, Greek and Roman culture.

3.1 The Jews as a cultural group within the Diaspora

In exploring the unique culture of the Jews, it is important to appreciate that they were indeed a "travelling culture"¹⁰ if there ever was one. Not only have they been taken into exile on more than one occasion,¹¹ but they have also been in frequent contact with the languages and the customs of the Mediterranean world (Rajak 2001:4).

10 The nature of culture as "travelling", and therefore ever-changing and dynamic is explored by Nye (2000:447-477).

11 The ten northern tribes were exiled to Assyria in 732 BC, and the tribes of Judah and Benjamin to Babylonia in 587 BC.

Many Jews moved to different locations ‘voluntarily’, looking for new trade centres and better business opportunities. The Jewish community in Alexandria was an example of such an immigration (Myers 1987:286). In the case of the Jewish community in Corinth, it is significant that Jews like Aquila and Priscilla experienced “double exile”, in the sense that they had to leave from Rome (their first abode abroad) when the Jewish faith was declared a *religio illicita* by Claudius.

Researching Diaspora Judaism highlights the changes that the “travelling nature” of a culture brings about. The absence of the temple, being a minority within the larger Greco-Roman society, and being exposed to different religions all had an effect upon Jewish culture in Corinth. These changes did not only have negative consequences. It also contributed to the synagogue and the Greek language being the stepping stones for Paul in proclaiming the message of the true Messiah.

3.2 The Greek culture

Due to the total demolition of Corinth by Lucius Mummius (146 BC) and the replenishing thereof by Julius Caesar (44 BC),¹² Roman culture (including Latin as language) was probably dominant over Greek culture in Corinth in the First Century. Nevertheless, surveying the Greek culture and the influence of Greek culture (and Hellenism as an extension thereof) in Corinth seems inevitable. The Greek culture as a highly influential and influenced culture is usually described with the concepts of Hellenisation and syncretism.¹³

Alongside all the aspects of language, education, drama, sport and religious feasts, Greek philosophy had an undeniable influence after the death of Alexander the Great.¹⁴ The surrounding cultures, however, also had their influence upon Hellenism. Although the Greek deities were easily “transportable” to countries outside the Mediterranean, the opposite was also true. One such an example was the influence of the mystery cults upon Greek culture.

Corinth in the First Century was a perfect setting for the assimilation and/or acculturation of cultures. Not only its position between two important harbours, and on the crossroads through the Isthmus, but also the diverse cultural backgrounds of the Freedmen which were accommodated in the city, provided a perfect setting for a large scale assimilation and acculturation.

3.3 Roman culture

Scholars often refer to the Greco-Roman culture¹⁵ to evade the pitfalls that Nye (see 3.1 above)

12 The city was initially populated again with Roman Freedmen who demanded land (Strabo, *Geography* 8.6.23).

13 Hellenisation was seen (i.a.) in vast use of the Greek language in the Mediterranean world and beyond, the fact that Greek curricula were taught in schools unto the outskirts of the country, and that Greek theatres, temples and Gymnasiums were erected everywhere. The Olympic and Isthmian Games, as well as the various religious feasts that were held on a regular basis, soon gained wide popularity (Yamauchi 2000:386-387).

14 The words of Rajak (2001:538-539) summarises this diverse influence on the Jewish context very well: “The Greek/Hebrew opposition could take surprising forms: beauty versus truth, or else beauty and truth versus indifference to the physical; harmony with nature versus disharmony; art and science versus morality; pleasure versus guilt; cheerfulness versus solemnity; optimism versus pessimism; man versus god; an immanent versus a transcendent god; universality versus exclusivity; adaptability versus tenacity; flexibility versus rigidity; reason versus dogma; patriotism versus political helplessness; liberty versus authority; even liberalism versus socialism”.

15 Cf. the titles of the different publications, e.g. by Jeffers (*The Greco Roman World*), Garrison (*The*

warns against, i.e. viewing culture as a separate and fixed identity. There are, however, ample evidence that Roman culture was very prominent in Corinth. The existence of the imperial cult at Corinth can be deduced from the location of the temple for Octavia, the sister of August, in the city. This temple probably was the site for the imperial cult. In addition to this temple a statue of Julius Caesar was found, which only confirms the hypothesis (Winter 1994:94-95). Furthermore, there is literary evidence that Corinth was the home of the provincial imperial cult for the member cities of the Achaean league.

Considering furthermore the discontinuity in the history of Corinth (a Greek city previously demolished by the Romans)¹⁶, and the replenishing of the city with Roman Freedmen by Julius Caesar, a separate exploration of Roman culture may indeed be fruitful in understanding cultural conflict in Corinth.

3.4 Summary

Although the mountains of information on the cultural history of the Jews, Greeks, Romans, and other First Century cultures may be frustrating, it poses a challenge to review the essence and the changing of cultures through the lenses of cultural conflict and interaction.

From the description of the three cultures that met one another in Corinth, it was clear that the Greek and Roman cultures have more in common, and that they were more accommodating towards one another than the Jewish culture and faith. Differences within the Greek and Roman cultures, however, are not to be underestimated. Although often grouped together in cultural studies, the history of Corinth contained the remains of a bitter war between the Greek and Roman superpowers.

A society in Corinth without tensions between Greeks and Romans was therefore almost unimaginable. The Corinthian Christian was probably caught up in a triangular network between the legalistic exclusivity of the Diaspora Jew, the search for wisdom and intellectual excellence by the Greek freedman, and the natural inclination to assert power and initiative by the Romans, which was imbedded in their patron-client system. To my view these tensions are clearly visible when looking at the textual evidence in the Letters to Corinth.

4. ANALYSIS OF THE CULTURAL UNDERLAYS IN DIFFERENT CONFLICTS IN THE TEXT OF THE CORINTHIAN LETTERS

The approach of Elliott (1986:1-33) is taken as a structuring and limiting principle for studying the relevant portions in 1 Corinthians.¹⁷ The different references are assessed in terms of their relevance towards (1) pivotal values, (2) accentuated beliefs and symbolisation, (3) norms and sanctions, as well as (4) socialisation and personality structure.

4.1 References to Pivotal values

4.1.1 Jewish Monotheism

1 Corinthians 10:18-22

In this treatise on offering to idols, Paul is clearly referring to the diverse cultural

Greco-Roman context of Early Christian Literature) and Goodman (*Jews in a Greco-Roman world*).

16 Archaeological evidence does leave a question mark on the extent of the demolition of Corinth and the way that it is related by historians (Oster 1992:54-55).

17 For a more detailed application of this approach Wessels (2006:16-36) can be consulted. The object here is not to give a thorough theological discussion of the pericopes in question, but to focus on the socio-cultural 'texture' embedded in the text (Robbins 1996:2-5).

contexts of the congregation. Converted non-Jews cannot proceed with their idol offerings as normal. Paul uses the sacrificial rites of Israel as an example to show that sacrifice is an all inclusive action. Therefore participating in pagan sacrificial rites exposes oneself to the demons. In verse 21 Paul recalls the Ten Commandments. The other important reference to cultural interaction is the question in verse 22, “are we stronger than He?” That addressed the idealisation of “power” over their gods in the Roman culture, especially where the gods had limited spheres of influence.

4.1.2 Greek “Wisdom and miracles”

1 Corinthians 1:20-31

It is clear that the wise men, the philosophers, the Greeks and the Jews had different expectations from the apostles. The solution for Paul is not always accommodation and supplying them what they want, but especially in proclaiming the Crucified Christ as the power of God. This Christ did not only become a stumbling block to the Jews, but also foolishness to the Greeks.

1 Corinthians 12:7-13

The distinction between the central values in traditional beliefs is drawn very clearly. The Holy Spirit gives “wisdom (referring to the Sophists), miraculous power and prophecy (referring to aspects which were present in both Israel’s history and the mystery cults)”, and speaking in tongues (which was a phenomenon in the mystery cults also). Furthermore the shift from circumcision in Judaism in relation to baptism as the new symbol of unity (Buell & Hodge 2004:246), and the referral to Holy Communion are evident in this passage.

4.2 Accentuated beliefs and symbolisation

4.2.1 Jewish Circumcision

1 Corinthians 7:17-19

The command for everybody, whether circumcised or uncircumcised, to stay as they are, is a crux interpretum for those who argue for the absence of Jews from the congregation in Corinth, or their irrelevance in the existing conflicts. From verse 18 it is highly probable that Paul speaks here to Jews and Non-Jews (Murphy-O’Connor 1997:75). Paul refers to one of the most important symbols in Jewish culture, the circumcision, and degrades it to nothing.¹⁸

4.3 Norms and sanctions

4.3.1 The Law

1 Corinthians 9:19-23

It is clear that the Jewish law still played a major role in the Corinthian congregation. Even if people may reckon that this adherence refers mainly to godfearers, it makes little sense when his efforts to become a Jew to the Jews are mentioned here explicitly. It is strange that Paul as a “missionary to the Gentiles” would approach the issues of the Jews and their laws with so much circumspection. This can only be explained by his fervour to save at least some (verse 22).

4.3.2 The consumption of idol meat

1 Corinthians 8:7-13

It is clear from this passage that removing the “stumbling block” for the weaker brother

¹⁸ There is even a difference amongst scholars on whether a prominent historian like Josephus supported circumcision of proselytes or not (Mason 2003:75).

is more important than the “make-or-break” exercising of freedom. The exercising of freedom¹⁹ should not be a stumbling block to the weak. This passage, especially verse 8, contains one of the major arguments for the absence or total minority of Jews in the congregation of Corinth (see 2.1). The argument is that people “accustomed to the idols” could not possibly refer to Jews, but to heathens who applied radical restrictions in their fervour for Christ. Amidst the numerous solutions the possibility remains that the weak were influenced by a Jewish faction within the congregation. If we accept that “the weak” were not Jews, it does not explain the numerous references²⁰ to Jews and Jewish history in this cluster of 3 chapters (1 Cor 8-10) covering the issue of idol meat. I hold that Paul is indirectly attacking the “Hebrews”, and their followers referred to in 2 Cor 10:22.²¹

1 Corinthians 10:23-33

Paul is presenting accommodation concerning meat in an innovative way. He does not want the Christian to be bound by rules once more, and therefore everything is permissible. He stresses, however, that Christians should consider in which way their behaviour will be beneficial for their weaker brother. It is also clear that accommodation concerning meat is twofold. It is not only the weaker brother, bound still by Jewish laws, who are in question, but also the unbeliever inviting the Christian to eat with him.²² Again the issue of causing other people to stumble is mentioned. Paul explicitly tries to take away the impediments to everybody in every way, in order that many may be saved.

The Lord as owner of all the earth, and all the people on the earth is central to the issue here, which is a theme central to Jewish religion from the Torah. This Almighty God must be glorified through the eating and drinking habits of the Christians. A further important insight is that Christ did not only die for the sins of the world, but he came to serve mankind in order to save them. The church of Christ should follow this example.²³

1 Corinthians 11:17-22

This is another of the key areas where consent about the reason behind the conflict, has not yet been reached in scholarly circles. In the Corinthian congregation divisions did exist, and these divisions were brought to the surface at the Holy Supper. Paul remarks that these divisions within the church do have a certain function: to show which of them has God’s approval. In general Paul finds it unacceptable that certain people eat and drink all the food, whilst others don’t get anything. Although the major trend is to view this division in terms of an economic schism, there is also a background of the Roman elite or freedmen dining separately from the plebeians or slaves to accentuate their status.²⁴

19 “Freedom” is a laden concept within the Roman culture, especially in the case of Corinth which consisted mainly of freedmen.

20 Cf. 1 Cor 8:4; 1 Cor 8:9 (a reference to Lev 19:14 in the Torah); 1 Cor 9:8,9; 1 Cor 9:13; 1 Cor 9:20; 1 Cor 10:1-10; 1 Cor 10:18; 1 Cor 10:32.

21 See the discussion on the identity of the Hebrews in 2 Cor 10:22 in 2.3.4 above.

22 The interpretation of 1 Cor 10:27 as being an issue between Jews and Non-Jews is accepted by Botha&Van Rensburg (2002:53).

23 The role of a “christocentric koinonia-dynamic” in solving the problem of idol food is highlighted by De Wet (2006: 821-835).

24 Within the patron-client system it was typical to serve special food to special guests in the

4.3.4 Covering of the head during gatherings

1 Corinthians 11:3-16

The covering of the head can easily be interpreted as a gender issue (Keener 1993:475), but it has definite relevance for the present theme. As a rule all women appeared with veils on the street. But when it concerned prayer, Greek women, as well as the men, prayed bare-headed. On the other hand, Roman and Jewish men prayed with their heads covered (Blacklock 1973:593). On top of this, Roman men often covered their heads as a sign of status (Winter 2003:147). It must also not be overlooked that the problem with Hellenism in 2 Maccabees 4:10 was that the adherents of the Gymnasium were forced to wear a Greek hat. Paul's solution to this problem is to make the head covering a standard rule for woman, and make wearing the head covering thus more acceptable to society. On the other hand, he might be discouraging the wearing of the head covering for men, to prevent the spreading of the status conflict in the congregation.

4.4 Socialisation and personality structure

4.4.1 Relationship between Jews and Non-Jews

1 Corinthians 6:1-8

This pericope refers to two important factors in the cultural context of the believers in Corinth. Firstly, the court cases were held in the basilica. The practice of oratory skills and Roman law was part of everyday life in Corinth. It seems that even congregation members took one another to court. Paul hints in verse 4 that people of little account (maybe referring to slaves or non-citizens)²⁵ are better equipped to mediate in such cases than worldly judges. Paul reacts to this by using the principle of reciprocity in verse 8. It is not fitting for brothers to cheat and to wrong one another.

2 Corinthians 10:21b-29

This pericope has already been shown to be critical for the understanding of Jewish influences in the congregation in Corinth. The one problem with linking this passage to 1 Corinthians is the reference in 2 Corinthians 11:4 which indicates that they came to Corinth after Paul. The recurring of the leadership problem in 2 Corinthians makes it probable that these people came after Paul's initial stay in Corinth, but before Paul received the news about the congregation and the questions that led to the writing of 1 Corinthians.²⁶

Paul also argues here that the false leaders in Corinth do not have an idea what it really means to be a leader in God's church. Through his life he was prepared to be servant to the Jews and the non-Jews. Noteworthy in verse 28 and 29 is the fact that Paul's concern for all the churches is still burning in his heart, despite all that he endured.

4.4.2 Citizenship

1 Corinthians 1:26-31

The referral to the majority of the congregation as not being "influential" or of "noble

triclinium, whilst inferior people were served in the *atrium* with food of lesser quality (Keener 1993:477).

25 Even though Mitchell (1993:562-586) approaches this pericope more from a socio-economic angle, focusing mainly on the difference in status of the parties in question, the Greek (and even more so the Jewish) members of the Christian community would surely have been disadvantaged against the Roman Christian within the Roman law.

26 Of course, there is also the matter of the lost correspondence of Paul to the Corinthian church, which makes any explanation regarding the origin of Paul's Jewish opponents just more speculative.

birth” is a confirmation that “Roman citizenship by birth” must have given higher status than just being part of the freedmen. On the other hand, this probably confirms the existence of Roman elite in the congregation. Paul also refers to Jesus who was not a Roman citizen, and who did not even have the privileges Paul himself enjoyed. The concept of “boasting” would fit perfectly into the Roman patron-client system, where persons were very status-conscious.

1 Corinthians 7:20-24

Paul allows for everybody to retain a place in life that the Lord assigned to that person and to which God has called him/her. Paul clearly addresses slaves and freedmen in verse 22.²⁷ For a Christian, being the “Lords” freedman, or Christ’s slave is more important than citizenship of Rome and freedom from slavery.

5. CONCLUSION

It is always difficult to speculate about the composition of a congregation that existed just about 2000 years ago, especially when one has to do this through the window of a text not written for that purpose.

From the historical background of Corinth it is almost incontestable that the congregation in Corinth had at least a fair number of Greeks and Romans in their midst. The four references to the Greeks in 1 Corinthians, as well as the presence of Sosthenes, and others with Latin names testify to this.

Although the presence and the prominence of Jews in the congregation have generally been contested in scholarship, it has been proven as most likely that the Jewish cultural background played a major role in Corinth.²⁸ Some might argue Jewish culture played a major role in Christianity as a whole, but there are specific markers in the discussed pericopes which point to the presence of Jewish Christians in Corinth, as well as their influence in the congregation.

Not only are the Jews as a group named 7 times, often in juxtaposition with the Greeks, but there are several references to issues important in Jewish culture, such as circumcision, meals, the Jewish law, which are also debated in their differences with other cultures in Corinth.²⁹ Although Paul refers in somewhat impersonal fashion to the people of Israel in 1 Corinthians 10:18, the direct approach taken in 2 Corinthians 11:22 is a clear indication that Jews contributed in some way or another to the problems between the different factions in Corinth.

Furthermore we find explicit references to Jewish members of the Corinthian congregation, for instance Aquila and Priscilla,³⁰ Crispus³¹, and possibly Sosthenes.³² Apollos

27 1 Cor 7:22: “For he who was a slave when he was called by the Lord is the Lord’s freedman; similarly, he who was a free man when he was called is Christ’s slave.”

28

Even in the recent reference to the current research on 1 Corinthians Thiselton (2006:320-252) makes no reference to the role that Jews or Judaism played in the conflicts in the congregation.

29

It must be taken into account that this study did not include all the references to Jewish culture in the Corinthian letters (for a comprehensive list, cf. Keener 1993), but only those in which the matter of cultural interaction were clearly present.

30 Cf. Rom 16:3, 1 Cor 16:19, 2 Tim 4:19.

31 Cf. Acts 18:8, 1 Cor 1:14.

32 The identity of the Sosthenes in 1 Cor 1:1 is linked by some to the Sosthenes appointed as ruler of the synagogue, although it was a very common name in the First Century (Thiselton 2000:69).

from Alexandria was also a Jew, well educated in the Scriptures (Ac 18:24).

Consequently I argue that the Jews did play a role in the conflict in Corinth, especially in the light of their background of separation. The tensions between the Greeks and the Romans in the congregation are constantly lingering. The Greeks might have lost the wars, but the battle for cultural supremacy, the battle between Hellenism and Romanitas was still very much part of everyday life.

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KEY WORDS

1&2 Corinthians
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TREFWOORDE

1 & 2 Korintiërs
Kultuur
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