

The Reluctant Biblical Historian: A Rhetorical Rationale

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One of the hallmarks of Frederik Wisse's academic work was his use of examples from the natural sciences to illuminate his arguments. Recent developments in genetics may prove illustrative for this present analysis of the methodological problems Biblical scholars still encounter when using rhetorical criticism to make historical conclusions about Paul's congregations.

How many and which genes are contained in the human genetic structure? Answering that question became, in the last years of the twentieth century and the first years of our own, a huge scientific enterprise. Until very late in the quest to identify the entire genome, the most common estimates of our complexity—in genetic terms, at least—put the number at somewhere between 120,000 and 150,000 genes. According to Stephen Jay Gould, in his 2003 book *The Hedgehog, the Fox and the Magister's Pox: Bridging the Gap Between Science and the Humanities*, one company even advertised the specific answer: 142,634. The quest was both scientific and commercial, as those drug companies and biotechnical firms not already funding research were seen as the potential customers for information and ultimately, perhaps, patents on each of those 142,634 genes.

Imagine the surprise, then, when at a press conference on February 12, 2001 scientists announced that they had completed mapping the genome and that there are, in fact, only about 30,000 genes in the human body (Gould 228). This means that human beings, genetically speaking, are only half again as complex as the fruit fly, and only one third more complex than a nematode, or "worm" of 19,000 genes, *C. elegans*, whose main feature seems to be its almost complete lack of features.

Behind the error of the hugely inflated numbers seems to be a fairly simple methodological fault, which was then exacerbated by a commercial interest. Gould explains for the non-scientist: "Genes don't make proteins directly. Rather, they replicate themselves, and they

serve as templates for the formation of distinctive RNAs, which then, through a complex chain of events, eventually assemble the vast array of proteins needed to construct a complex human body (228).”

In short, the scientists had the number more or less right, but the components wrong. Humans are composed of “about” 120,000 to 150,000 different protein combinations. But most scientists had wrongly assumed, or at least worked on the basis of, a kind of “one-to-one-to-one” causality between the gene (DNA), the RNA, and the protein. It was this assumption of a “linear chain of causation” (Gould 229) which proved erroneous.

At the same time, the faulty methodology was supported by a very active commercial interest. If (as most scientists likely doubted if pressed), a one-to-one correspondence between gene and protein could be found, then many of the diseases and genetic faults which trouble us might be narrowed to a problem with a specific gene, and most importantly, those companies lining up to patent specific “fix” genes would be in position to profit from them as the copyright holders of a “magic bullet” for, say, cancer or MS, Parkinson’s or Alzheimer’s.

This situation—the combination of a reductionist methodology that is acknowledged as such but still widely used, together with a very contemporary and commercial interest—should not strike Biblical scholars as something that bedevils only the scientific guild. A similar dilemma faces the NT scholar seeking to add to our historical knowledge of the world of Jesus and Paul. In a field where more and more scholars are competing for limited positions and publishing opportunities and searching for new contributions to our knowledge of a text which has already been dissected for almost two millennia, new data for NT communities is difficult, almost impossible, to come by solely from the texts themselves. Similarly, even while acknowledging the bias and therefore unreliability of the historical descriptions found in the NT, the pressure of having to have “something to say” creates for contemporary Biblical scholars a situation in which our working method is too often a form of reductionism similar to that which occurred within the human genome research community.

Thus the thesis of the present investigation: keeping in mind the rhetorical nature of Paul’s writing is a pressing reason to give the biblical critic pause in his or her historical task. A full appreciation for the role of rhetoric in the writing of Paul makes it increasingly difficult to support the legitimacy of repeating social, economic or political

conclusions about Paul's congregations when these have been taken primarily from his letters. Much like the scientists faced with only 30,000 genes, there may be fewer verifiable historical conclusions to be drawn from Paul's writings than our working hypotheses tend to allow.

Why is this? Firstly, it is because the overarching preoccupation of rhetorical writing, including that found in Paul's letters, is not the past, but the future. Second, it is because the structure of a rhetorical argument (whether refutation, or confirmation, diatribe, encomium or some other form) demands at times a level of exaggeration or affective description that speaks against our contemporary use of the same passages as proof for historical investigation. What Barclay called in the case of Galatians the difficulty of "mirror-reading a polemical letter" applies equally well as an argument for caution in the case of Paul's rhetorical writing overall.

The historical connection of rhetorical documents is not so much their past as the situations they create, or their future. The fact that rhetorical critical scholars are rarely able to agree on how to classify a Pauline letter does not change this basic observation, for the point is not the classification of specific examples of Pauline rhetoric, but rhetoric's overall intent. No matter what the genre: deliberative, judicial or ceremonial (epideictic), rhetoric seeks to create a future where a certain action is assured, be it praise, blame, political action, a guilty verdict or accolades. And while the popular modern equation of "rhetorical" with "lying" does not describe the ancient art, the Graeco-Romans were hardly above framing the evidence to suit their purpose. Quite the opposite: they left behind a rich legacy of specific rules for exactly how to frame evidence most effectively. Rhetorical writing is partisan writing.

Rhetoric by its very nature as persuasion is preoccupied, almost obsessed, with history. However, that history to which rhetorical writing connects is the potential result of its persuasive strategies, or to put it another way, the future created by its arguments, much more than the past reflected in the circumstances of its writing. Thus the active disinterest of rhetorical writing in its origins works against its use by modern interpreters to recreate the specific historical circumstances which beget it. And yet, it is precisely that recreation of the historical circumstances of writing which is the goal of many contemporary exegetes who take up the tools of rhetorical criticism. Ever since Lloyd Bitzer coined the term "rhetorical situation" in a 1968 article (1),

biblical and rhetorical scholars such as Schussler Fiorenza (387), Kennedy (1984, 34) and Stamps (1993, 1) have equated the phrase “rhetorical situation” with “historical situation” or *Sitz im Leben*. Many scholars have attempted in their studies of the New Testament to work backward more or less directly from an analysis of the rhetoric to the situation or “exigencies” which prompted such writing. Others have preferred a text-centred strategy that seeks to understand only how the rhetorical writing achieves its aim of persuasion within the text itself. We need more well-defined criteria and a wider appreciation of argumentation theory in which to understand and to evaluate the increasing number (Watson 1995, 226-42) of rhetorical-critical studies of the NT. Despite providing many, especially methodological, contributions to the field, historical studies using rhetorical criticism simply have not provided the clear window to the past for which many had hoped (Roetzel 1999, 80).

Partly, this failure arises from a confusing and ongoing methodological disagreement on the part of scholars as to how to define both rhetorical writing and modern rhetorical criticism: does rhetoric consist of any persuasive writing or is it confined to stylistic forms recognizable from either the speeches of ancient orators or the rhetorical handbooks (in part the “classical rhetoric” versus “new rhetoric” debate)? How much did rhetorical training and rhetorical composition affect written documents in Paul’s day? Was Paul a trained rhetorical speaker, or more likely, a writer with innate rhetorical ability who had imbibed and could imitate public discourse? How is rhetoric related to letter-writing? To *paraenesis*? (For a recent summary of these and other questions, see Kern 1998, ch. 1–2).

Despite the importance of these questions, a larger share of the blame for the failure of rhetorical-critical analysis to unearth new or more accurate history in Paul’s letters lies in the overall nature of historical evidence in the New Testament. Historical accuracy, of course, was not paramount to the purposes of any New Testament author (witness the descriptions of Paul contained in Acts). Although the ancients did not lack an appreciation for accurate description, *kerygma* and *paraenesis* are manifestly different from what the rhetoricians called *ekphrasis*, or description. In their own way, each of the Gospels, the Apocalypse of John, the general letters and the letters of Paul all reflect the primary purpose which eventually distinguished them within the community as “scripture”, a purpose clearly identified by

the author of John: “these things are written that you may come to believe . . . and that through believing, you may have life.” A lack of concern for historical accuracy in texts of the New Testament has bedevilled all the modern criticisms applied to them, each of which has proven in turn unequal to the extravagant claims of historical efficacy first laid on it.

Does this mean that Paul’s writing is empty of historical evidence? Clearly not. In fact Paul’s theology as expressed in his letters takes the shape it does precisely because he is reacting to reports of very specific circumstances in the various churches to which he wrote, giving those letters the quality that Beker (1996, 33) calls their “contingent character.” The historical specificity of Paul’s letters, which are characterized by their directly stated, specific, often very lively and contextual pastoral concern, is perhaps the most important criterion for distinguishing true Pauline authorship from pseudonymous Pauline letters. Paul’s uncontested letters give evidence of a very complex historical context, although the line of causality from congregational situation or event to Paul’s writing may not be so direct as is sometimes presumed.

More than many, perhaps most, of the books of the NT, Paul’s letters may be seen as historical documents. Beker, in discussing the canonization of the Pauline corpus, notes just this point:

The particularity of Paul’s gospel was felt to be a problem at the time of the canonization of the Pauline letters toward the end of the second century A.D. Because the “apostolic” witness of the canon claimed a universal address, the framers of the canon decreed that the letters of Paul, just like the Catholic Epistles, had been addressed to all Christian churches. After all, canonicity meant catholicity. For how could the “apostolic” witness be applicable to the catholic church if Paul had only written to some specific churches about specific problems? (Beker 1996, 32)

Clearly there was some kind of debate over the *eschaton* in Thessalonica and some kind of congregational disunity in Corinth. But venturing into the specific details that may lie behind such general observations quickly leads to guesswork and disagreement. What Wisse, in his discussion of theories of textual interpolation, has called “the prohibitive weight of the burden of proof (1990, 172)” applies equally well as a criticism of the many attempts to reconstruct

precise congregational settings from Paul's writings. To use an analogy: we have an answer but we do not have independent access to the questions that occasioned it. Those "questions," or the situations that gave rise to Paul's letters, are only available to us as they are embedded in his responses. And Paul's answers are complex rhetorical documents that often go far beyond the question. Even his description of the situation must be considered, in historical terms at least, suspect, since the purpose of his unique, epistolary *ekphrasis* is to set the scene in such a way as to be the more persuasive about it (so: *Progymnasmata of Nicolaus the Sophist*. Kennedy 2003, 167). As Robbins notes: "One of the purposes of argumentative discourse is to 'create a particular kind of culture', and defining a situation in a particular way is an important technique in moving the discursive practices in a situation toward one's goals" (1996b, 188).

Rhetorical texts not only come out of an historical context but of course they also help create a new one. Wisse notes that:

Particularly for those canonical and other early Christian writings which soon found wide acceptance and use, it is important to distinguish between the historical situation they reflect and the historical situation they created. . . . Religious books are generally not written to state what is but what the author thinks should be. The historian who ignores this runs the danger of creating parties or religious communities which never existed or which did not yet exist. . . . (1986, 179–80).

Whatever else one might be able to say about Paul, he self-consciously styled himself in his letters as a church founder, and presented his work as helping God create of people and communities something radically new and different. Immediately upon opening I Corinthians, for example, in the usual spot where the addressee is listed, Paul identifies his readers, not for their Corinthian context, status, or connections (as would be expected in a more typical Graeco-Roman letter) but rather as "those who are sanctified, set aside, consecrated in Jesus Christ, in order to be called saints." Historical description is simply not the main point for Paul.

This genre-based barrier to finding history in a rhetorical document remains determinative in contemporary studies of Paul. An absence of hard evidence combined with a resourceful, motivated and increasingly large guild of Biblical scholars has at times resulted

in theories that have, through repetition, taken on the patina of fact, if only so that they can then be built upon by others.

One, but hardly the only, example may be found in Bart Ehrman's 2004 edition of *The New Testament: A Historical Introduction to the Early Christian Writings*, a general work marketed as an undergraduate text for introductory classes in New Testament or Biblical Literature.

In his discussion of the Corinthian letters (chapter 20), Ehrman describes the problems of the church in Corinth: "At their periodic community meals, some had been gorging themselves and getting drunk while others had been arriving late to find nothing to eat. Some of the men in the congregation had been frequenting prostitutes and didn't see why this should be a problem; one of them was sleeping with his stepmother (317)." We find this description familiar because it is: the author essentially encapsulates Paul's own words. And certainly, there are very specific problems that Paul is trying to address in First Corinthians. It would be hard to imagine a literary-critical and a-historical reason why Paul would write: "It is actually [as in "generally" or "widely"] reported that there is sexual immorality among you, and of a kind that is not found even among pagans; for a man is living with his father's wife." Likewise, when Paul uses an apocalyptic rationale to ridicule the Corinthian believers suing each other in court (1 Cor 6:1-6), the modern reader can assume with a good deal of certainty that a similar court case must have at least been reported to the apostle.

Having noted the historical details in 1 Corinthians, many scholars, including Ehrman, then fail to make a qualitative distinction between these incidents and the comments Paul makes about other issues, such as the crucial question of the existence of competing groups in the Corinthian church. Thus Ehrman writes: "The church was divided against itself, with different factions claiming different leaders, each of whom, from Paul's perspective, was seeking to usurp the claims of others...and claiming to represent the true faith as expounded by one or another famous authority (Paul, Cephas, Apollos, and Christ himself; 1:12)" (321-22).

The historical veracity of the man living with his stepmother (or at least, the veracity of the report of it) should not blind us to the possibly argumentative function of Paul's words concerning the

so-called factions (*schismata*) of the Corinthian church. An appreciation of the rhetorical aim in naming the conflicting parties may help us better discern where past history becomes argument over what future the Corinthians are asked to choose.

Of crucial importance is the persuasive task Paul has set himself in 1 Corinthians 1:10, his *propositio* or thesis statement for the entire letter (so Mitchell 1992, 184; Witherington 1995, 94–97; Wuellner 1986, 460, among others). Here Paul pleads that “all of you be in agreement and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be united in the same mind and in one purpose.” The term Paul uses for “being united” is *katartizo*, “to put in order or restore” (AGB). That the word was used in its noun form as a medical term for the setting of bones or repairing of dislocated joints is instructive (AGB; so also Mitchell 74) in light of Paul’s use of body metaphors throughout his writing. The use of this term in the passive (“that you may be mended, knit together, or reset”) in rhetorical terms shows the influence of a deliberative rhetorical strategy, a strategy that Paul’s next words will attempt to put into action.

In his argument for unity in Corinth, Paul broadly follows the refutation or *anaskeue* form, as outlined in the handbooks (Kennedy 2003, 101). The following schema will illustrate how well Paul’s description of the situation in Corinth fits this model. In a refutation, the speaker is to

1. Blame the teller of the story or state the faulty situation (1 Cor 1:11) “there are quarrels among you”
2. Give a summary of the false claim (1:12) “What I mean is that each of you says: ‘I belong to Paul,’ or ‘I belong to Apollos,’ or ‘I belong to Cephas,’ or ‘I belong to Christ.’”
3. Attack it as being:
 - *obscure* (1:13c) “were you baptized in the name of Paul?”
 - *incredible* (1:13a) “Was Paul crucified for you?”
 - *impossible* (1:13b) “Has Christ been divided?”
 - *illogical* (ibid)
 - *unfitting* (3:4) “For when one says ‘I belong to Paul,’ and another ‘I belong to Apollos,’ are you not merely human?”
 - *unprofitable*. (3:17) “If anyone destroys God’s temple, God will destroy that person.”

The *progymnastic* exercises were just that—exercises—and so it is hard to imagine that Paul would follow the form of a refutation without any deviation whatsoever (much of chapter two, in my opinion, forms an enlargement of the argument, partly by means of an ironical *encomium* on the origins and destiny of the Corinthian Christians). But from the above it appears evident that Paul is engaged in the first few chapters of 1 Corinthians in a form of classical refutation not too different from what the handbooks taught. This observation should then warn us against taking Paul's summary of the situation for its historical description without considering first its purpose in the rhetorical structure of his argument.

Any working hypothesis that takes Paul's listing of names in 1:12 at face value suffers from a number of objections (see: Fee 1987, 55 ff; Witherington 1995, 95 ff; and especially Munck 1959, 135–67). Firstly, the terms or names which Paul lists are not all of equal value. "Paul," "Apollos," and "Cephas" had varying degrees of recognition among the Gentile converts, although notably, it was probably only Paul and Apollos who had any direct dealings with the congregation. Peter's name is only mentioned in three other places in 1 Corinthians (3:22, 9:5 and 15:5) and none of these instances except perhaps 9:5 can be used to indicate any direct contact with the Corinthians. In 9:5 Paul presumes that his readers will be familiar with Peter's marital situation, yet such an assumption does not necessarily indicate direct contact, since 3:22 and 15:5 indicate that Peter's name is well-known to the Corinthian Christians as it was imbedded in the original *kerygma* Paul would have proclaimed. Without any other corroborating evidence that Peter had been active in the congregation, it is hard to sustain an argument that there was a Petrine party, much less what its theology might have been.

From the letter it is abundantly clear, on the other hand, that Apollos had visited Corinth and had been involved in some way with the congregation there. Paul mentions Apollos the most often: in 1 Cor 3:4–9, 3:22, and 4:6. By acting as a kind of summation of the argument to that point, Paul's words in 4:6, "I have applied all this to Apollos and myself for your benefit . . ." would seem to indicate that the real object of his concern might have been a congregational allegiance split in two (Witherington 1995, 83–87). Here again, however, it is impossible to separate fact from rhetorical device, since the correlation of Apollos with those Corinthian Christians who over-

valued sophistry or *sophia* helps further Paul's argument that they are all to imitate him as their sole "father" in Christ (4:15), whose surprising weakness in personal presence (here *ethos* is at work) mirrors the weakness of Christ from which has come "a demonstration of the Spirit and of power (2:4)."

Finally, listing "Christ" as the last term in his group of "parties" should indicate that there is something going on in 1:12 besides description, since presumably a Corinthian Christian who claimed that he belonged to one of the other groups would hardly deny also belonging to Christ. Similarly, if the slogans are assumed to be titles for particular groups of Corinthian Christians who were baptized by one or another of the persons named, here again the Christ title makes little sense.

Another factor speaking against the literal historicity of these groups is their number. Four names and competing allegiances are given in 1:12. That a house-church of the type that Paul would have established in his brief missionary stay in Corinth would have the requisite number of people to be split into four distinct factions seems improbable.

Most importantly, however, the rhetorical function of the final slogan "I belong to Christ" tips the reader that there may be a reason other than historical description for the names appearing as they do. In the *Progymnasmata of Aphthonius*, in the section on "Refutation" (what Theon calls "Contradiction"), the author notes that "those engaged in refutation should first state the false claim of those who advance it, then add an exposition of the subject and use these headings: first, that it is unclear and incredible, in addition that it is impossible and illogical" (Kennedy 2003, 101).

Paul follows these general steps in his refutation of the Corinthian troubles. By including "I belong to Christ" among his slogans, he is engaging in an argument of *diasyrmus* or reduction to absurdity, as his next words immediately point out: "Has Christ been divided?" There was almost certainly no specific "Christ party" at Corinth. The second listing of the names at 3:22 but this time without the Christ party speaks against any such assumption. Moreover, 3:22 makes explicit the building force of Paul's argument in 1:12–13—that divisions of any sort fracture the unity of those who are "in Christ" and recalls the implied metaphor of "resetting joints" by which Paul began the entire section. Clearly, Christ cannot be divided, and it is

this rhetorical and theological point upon which Paul builds much of the following argument. It would be tempting here also to see echoes of the Eucharistic theology elaborated later in the same letter by Paul (1 Cor 11), where again the *topos* of unity is front and centre, and appeal to the unity of Christ is again used to argue for the unity of the community.

That there was some kind of congregational strife in Corinth is clear. Discerning specific quarrelling groups by name, much less allying these groups to the ascetic or libertine tendencies perhaps implied in the rest of the letter, involves, as Fee has put it, “a good deal of guesswork” (56). However this has hardly stopped a good many Biblical scholars, from F.C. Baur to A. Wire to L.L. Welborn, from attempting the task.

The example of 1 Corinthians 1:12 and the Petrine and Christ parties confirms the difficulty of reconstructing history from a rhetorical passage. Yet there has always been, and still exists, the desire to know New Testament texts better by placing them into historical context. An awareness of biblical criticism’s long history of importing its own philosophical and historical fashions or presuppositions into the texts (what Gould calls the “cognitive biases within and behind all creative work, including empirical studies” [2003, 138]), should limit what scholars have left to say. Upon the evidence of the texts alone there is scant historical detail that can be proposed, bear the burden of proof, and yet not represent the most innocuous of statements. Rather than a “house built upon the sand,” historical reconstruction of New Testament communities sometimes appears to be an increasingly high and sometimes top-heavy edifice of theory built upon a rather narrow and shallow foundation of empirical data. There was a Paul, there was a Corinthian church, between them existed some kind of problems to do with his status and their unity. No one can gain a Ph.D. nor win an academic reputation with such basic summations.

Increasingly, then, the biblical historian is seeking his or her history elsewhere. Once the text itself is understood to have such non-historical aims, a better way to enrich our understanding of the context of Paul’s early congregations seems to be in fields such as sociology or archaeology. Increasingly, Pauline scholars concerned with history are bypassing the text entirely, or deciding to come back to it to test inferences only after their substantive work is completed in other areas.

Philip Harland's *Associations, Synagogues and Congregations* illustrates the point well. His introduction begins almost immediately with Paul, and mentions Peter, John of Patmos and Ignatius, but these names are given only to show the applicability of the real work of the book. Harland's real starting point is not the earliest church, but its cultural and social cradle. As he writes: "paying close attention to archaeological evidence or artifacts from cities like Ephesus, Sardis, Smyrna and Pergamum may bring this world to life and provide a new, even revolutionary, angle of vision on the lives of both early Christian congregations and Jewish synagogues" (Harland 2003, 3). Harland's real concern is the hard data that can be found to understand the social and religious history of Roman Asia (265). He eschews the *ad hoc* way Biblical studies has traditionally treated archaeological evidence for an approach that begins, not with scripture, but with a systematic examination of that evidence, and then moves, in a limited way, back to the texts.

Is the only defensible avenue of the NT historian, then, to turn to studies as a Graeco-Roman archaeologist? While acknowledging the evident value of such historical studies, there is another, perhaps more limited, historical angle available to the biblical scholar wishing still to begin with the letters themselves. Again, it is the nature of rhetorical writing that suggests a direction, together with an insight from the field of Pauline ethics.

It is suggestive to place the nature and goals of rhetorical writing alongside the long-recognized fact that Paul's ethics, like Biblical ethics in general, are built on an "indicative-imperative" schema. Typically, an ethical admonition is based on a future outcome; for example, "exercise so that you will not become overweight." Paul, on the other hand, "customarily rests his moral imperatives on the basis of God's prior action on behalf of believers in Christ" (Rosner 1995, 17). There are three verses in the undisputed letters where the formulation is succinct, 1 Corinthians 5:7, Galatians 5:1, and most clearly, Galatians 5:25: "Since we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit." Within the *paraenetic* context of his writing, Paul is saying that the believers' actions are to be guided, not by a perceived goal, but by what they have already received as an identity in Christ. That is, his followers are, in some way, to become what they already are. The indicative state comes first, much as does the vision held up before an audience that a Graeco-Roman rhetorician practicing deliberative

rhetoric wishes to move to a particular action. “There is no institution devised by man which the power of speech has not helped us to establish” (Isocrates, *Nicoles or the Cyprians*, 6-9). Or in Paul’s words, giving credit to the source of his self-proclaimed apostleship: “According to the grace of God given me, like a skilled master builder I laid a foundation” (1 Cor 3:10).

The ontological implications of Paul’s indicative-imperative schema have been discussed at length by Bultmann and his interpreters (see Parsons for a summary). From a rhetorical viewpoint it is suggestive that the peculiar ontology of Paul’s indicative fits well with the rhetorical aim of persuasion by describing things, not as they are, but as they should be. If we restrict ourselves to how it is argued for in 1 Corinthians, we see that the world Paul wished to move his readers toward—what for him is denoted by the term living “in Christ” and which has been called by later scholars the “indicative” state—was not an idealistic construct but rather presented as simple reality. It is this concept of a present but somehow unrealized state—what a hermeneutic scholar like Paul Ricoeur calls “the world of the work”—toward which the rhetorical document moves the reader/hearer that is shared by both rhetorical communication in general and Pauline ethics. Nowhere does Paul question the possibility that faith does not radically alter life; it has already done so. He only questions when evidence of this change is lacking or faulty (c.f. Gal 3:1-4). In the case of 1 Corinthians all that was required was that the Corinthian believers follow his example and take their place in the new way of living. And the most obvious signs that they had begun to do this would be their humility and their unity, both of which are desired outcomes clear from the rhetorical thrust of the letter.

In Paul’s argument these outcomes are not only desirable, but more importantly, real and present in the lives of his hearers. The old adage is that “if something has already been done then it is possible,” and Paul offers himself as proof of being created new. Paul’s *mimesis* statements in 1 Corinthians should be understood in this light. The idea that he is trying to reinstate his own authority is a retrojection of the themes of 2 Corinthians. Rather, his authority is expressed in 1 Corinthians as the first step toward encouraging the Corinthian believers toward imitation (Brant 1993, 290), leading to their full participation in the body of Christ and the resulting unity that would bring.

In seeking to infer historical data from the Pauline letters, including from 1 Corinthians, the biblical historian runs the risk of being caught in the confusion between what was and what in Paul's words was "in Christ." A less-explored and promising field of historical study is the type of work undertaken by Beker (*Heirs of Paul*) and others who are examining the historical results of Paul's rhetoric both within the canon and without. A rich body of material, evidence of how Paul's rhetoric created history, stretches from the Pastoral Epistles and the book of Acts, through Clement, and on past the New Testament into Paul's many appropriations in the church. In other words, it is not only possible to link text and community by how communities create texts, but also by how a text, even an idiosyncratic and personal text, has sometimes created community. When we only see texts as remnants of community, we are forgetting the role they may have had in shaping history, and we risk ignoring the fundamental nature of biblical texts, which is to pass on meanings they judge to be more important than historical ones.

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