

DEATH DISMANTLED:
READING CHRISTOLOGICAL AND SOTERIOLOGICAL LANGUAGE
IN 1 CORINTHIANS 15 IN LIGHT OF ROMAN IMPERIAL IDEOLOGY

by

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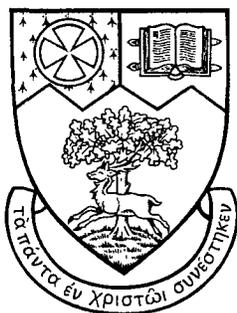
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ABSTRACT

Death Dismantled: Reading Christological and Soteriological
Language in 1 Corinthians 15 In Light of Roman Imperial Ideology

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This dissertation investigates the theopolitical background of the imagery Paul employs in 1 Corinthians 15, particularly in his proclamation of the story of Christ's parousia and the defeat of Death. It suggests that the apostle appropriated many of the images that comprise this story from the ideology of the Roman Empire, and that the manner in which he co-opted them illustrates his critical response to that ideology. In 1 Corinthians 15, Paul redeploys significant imperial titles (e.g., κύριος), actions (βασιλεύειν), and events (παρουσία, νίκη) to frame the gospel narrative that connects Christ's resurrection, arrival and rule (15:20–28) to his final subjugation of death (50–58). Re-read in light of the images' meanings as prescribed by Rome and as re-appropriated by Paul, these passages reveal a clash of rival soteriological narratives: Paul's "master story," his gospel of salvation won through the resurrection of his crucified lord, contests the salvific claims of the imperial discourse, the "story of

mastery” as dictated by Rome. The Pauline soteriology that emerges from this engagement can enrich postmodern understandings of what it means to be “saved.”

The study opens with an assessment of the contemporary (mis)use of Pauline christological and soteriological terms, which seem obscure or arcane when unmoored from their original, sociopolitical milieux. This first chapter proposes that if these obscure images are understood as initially embedded in the context of Roman theopolitics, then their meanings should be reappraised in that setting and again as Paul redeploys them. This entails a repositioning of the study of the images, first with respect to the narrational-soteriological relationships they imply (chapter two), then to previous assessments of the texts where Paul reassembles them (three). Chapter four develops a socio-rhetorical model of the hermeneutical obstacles to reading 1 Corinthians through first-century Corinthian eyes and ears, and then addresses the central theopolitical imagery in Rome’s story. Chapter five’s exegesis finds that the anticipated dismantling of every power, including Death, foregrounds the empire as Death’s proximate ally. This and other findings resolve into an exegetically founded Pauline soteriology (chapter six) that calls postmodern theopolitical allegiances into question.

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ABBREVIATIONS

ACNT	Augsburg Commentaries on the New Testament
ANTC	Abingdon New Testament Commentaries
ASP	American Studies in Papyrology
BLG	Biblical Languages: Greek
BNTC	Black's New Testament Commentaries
BTB	<i>Biblical Theology Bulletin</i>
BZNW	Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft
CBC	Cambridge Bible Commentary
ConBOT	Coniectanea biblica: Old Testament Series
ESV	English Standard Version
ET	English text
FS	Festschrift
HCSB	Holman Christian Standard Bible
JSNTSup	<i>Journal for the Study of the New Testament Supplement Series</i>
KJV	King James Version
LCL	Loeb Classical Library
LNTS	Library of New Testament Studies
LXX	Septuagint
<i>Message</i>	<i>The Message: The Bible in Contemporary Language</i> (paraphrase)
MNTC	Moffatt New Testament Commentary
ms	manuscript
MNTS	McMaster New Testament Studies
NASB	New American Standard Bible
NCV	New Century Version
NICNT	New International Commentary on the New Testament
NIGTC	New International Greek Testament Commentary
NIV	New International Version
NKJV	New King James Version
NLT	New Living Translation
NovTSup	<i>Novum Testamentum</i> Supplements
NTS	<i>New Testament Studies</i>
NRSV	New Revised Standard Version
Repr.	reprint/reprinted
RSV	Revised Standard Version
SBLDS	Society of Biblical Literature Dissertation Series
SBLSymS	Society of Biblical Literature Symposium Series
SNTSMS	Society for New Testament Studies Monograph Series
TDNT	<i>Theological Dictionary of the New Testament</i>
TNIV	Today's New International Version
UBS	United Bible Societies
Vg	Vulgate
Voice	<i>The Voice New Testament</i> (paraphrase)

I

Prologue: The Problem of De-contextualized Soteriological Language in Contemporary Church and Society

Introduction

How does the claim to trust in Jesus Christ as saviour shape the story of one's life in the church and surrounding culture?¹ One need not agree completely with Marcus Borg when he recommends replacing “personal lord and saviour”—a favourite expression of faith in the North American evangelical tradition—with *political* lord and saviour, though Borg rightly argues that a failure or refusal to see the political aspect of Jesus' crucifixion is tantamount to a betrayal of his Passion.² It is perhaps overly facile to analyze this question as a dichotomy between a sociopolitical focus and a theological one,³ as though overstressing one necessarily leads to neglecting the other. There should be a way to call attention back to the sociopolitical significance of salvation without de-prioritizing the relationship that forms between God (acting in and through Christ) and his people, whether imaged as individuals or as a collective whole.

¹ The evocative promise of seeing individual lives, including one's own, as *stories* is a fundamental premise of the present work, as is the conceptualization of the Bible as a diverse and polyvalent metanarrative; it will also be argued that certain discourses within Scripture function as narratives in interactive tension with the “story” of Roman imperial discourse. For a concise description of the “lure and power” of biblical and personal stories in postmodern culture, see Rabey, *In Search*, 110–15, especially his quotation of Brian McLaren, who argues that a story “doesn't teach by induction or deduction. It teaches by abduction. It abducts your attention and won't let you go until you have done some thinking for yourself” (111–12). But when the teaching is effected by an *imperial* narrative, one could speculate that the outcome may be more of a *colonization* than a temporary “abduction.”

² Borg, *Jesus*, 291–92; earlier, Borg cleverly explains that it was Jesus' passion (for God's kingdom, for justice, for Israel) that led to his Passion (shorthand for his suffering and crucifixion; 273–74).

³ As Borg sometimes does, e.g., in the underlying assumptions of his book: he stresses the socio-cultural world of the New Testament era as its “social canopy” without any noticeable attention to that canopy's relationship to, or integration with, the *sacred* canopy (as seminally construed by Berger in *Sacred Canopy*). See Borg, *Jesus*, 78.

But how should this salvific equation between the personal/theological and the sociopolitical be negotiated? As the idiom “personal saviour” indicates, the subject is a touchy one: it concerns how Christians understand their own salvation, or, in effect, what it means to be saved. Important as this concern is today,⁴ it is all the more imperative to redirect the question to Scripture, the better to understand the biblical roots of the underlying problem.⁵ If one takes the New Testament writers at their word, then the significance of the salvation offered to them and their communities in and through Jesus is at once personal, theological, and sociopolitical. As N. T. Wright describes this duality in the early Corinthian church, the “confession of ‘one God, one Lord’ marked the community out sociologically as well as theologically.”⁶ For example, a growing scholarly consensus indicates that Paul was a skilled negotiator in political settings, not just theological ones,⁷ and that the shape of these first-century settings was determined to a great extent by the Roman Empire. If one chooses to confront Paul with the question of how *he* conceived of his lord and saviour and the salvation he offered, then one must join him in confronting and engaging Roman theology and politics—or *theopolitics*,⁸ a term that reflects the smudged boundaries crossed when one asks questions that involve both

⁴ See the essays in Stackhouse’s anthology, *What Does It Mean*, particularly Bacote, “What Is *This Life For*,” 95–113; Nordling, “Being Saved,” 115–36; and Wilson, “Clarifying Vision,” 185–94.

⁵ This may be the reason why the first essay in Stackhouse’s *What Does It Mean* is Watts, “New Exodus,” 15–41.

⁶ N. T. Wright, *Climax*, 132.

⁷ See for instance Horsley, ed., *Paul and Politics*; or Carr and Conway’s focus (*Introduction*, 247) on Paul’s identity as a diasporic Jew in a first-century world whose “many instances of imperial domination across the Mediterranean made the existence of a ‘pure’ cultural identity virtually impossible,” and the way in which his hybridity influenced his thought. For example, to force gentile believers to become Jewish “would be to return to the idea of God being the local God of Jews only. For Paul, this way of thinking diminishes God” by retreating to a theological and Roman provincialism (262).

⁸ In employing this term, one can follow the lead of writers such as Lind, who uses “theological-political” and “theopolitical” to refer to elements such as rebellion and covenantal law in *Sound of Sheer Silence*, 89 and 101; and, in New Testament scholarship, Gorman, *Apostle*, throughout.

sociology and soteriology.⁹ A better understanding our own salvation would be affected by our discernment of the manner and degree by which Paul understood the story of salvation through Christ in interaction, or competition, with the story Rome offered—the claim to have saved the world through the victorious rule of Caesar.¹⁰

Ideally, then, the questions one asks of Paul would be soteriological in content,¹¹ sensitively critical in character, and theopolitical in context, with regard to the imperial loci of Paul’s writing and contemporary readings of his gospel. The irony is that this gospel, a message that grapples with the imperial contexts in which (or from which) God saves, is only just beginning to be proclaimed in North American evangelical churches; even mainline denominations, traditionally more engaged with their cultural and sociopolitical surroundings, are only starting to work out the ramifications of contemporary imperial contexts upon teaching, preaching, and hermeneutics.¹² This is not

⁹ This is not to recommend speaking confessionally of Jesus as “theopolitical saviour”; while accurate, the phrasing is unwieldy, devoid of personal appeal, and likely too provocative to be productive—i.e., using *theopolitical* in confessional contexts would seem to purposely antagonize conservative constituents who still struggle to admit the mutual influence of religion and politics in North American Christian traditions. On this score, see Jewett and Lawrence, *Captain America*, throughout; for an autobiographical engagement with the same issues, see Kuo, *Tempting Faith*.

¹⁰ For an illustration of the argument that “the empire has brought peace to a war-torn world” as one of Rome’s “fundamental claims,” see Carr and Conway (*Introduction*, 316) in dialogue with the imperial propaganda of the Priene Calendar Inscription (9 BCE). This inscription will be mentioned again later as the present work develops the concept of a Roman imperial “story of mastery” that influences the “master story” of Paul’s gospel.

¹¹ This soteriological emphasis complements and corresponds with projects that focus principally on the imperial context of Paul’s Christology, such as “Resisting and Reframing Lord: Christology and the Roman Empire,” Rieger’s first chapter in his *Christ and Empire*, 23–67.

¹² The United Church of Canada (UCC) appears to be the only North American denomination to have made “engagement and animation on empire” a principal focus for reflection, teaching curriculum, and reassessment of praxis, as shown in “Living Faithfully in the Midst of Empire (the Empire Report)”, a document featuring Douglas John Hall and other voices, available at www.united-church.ca/economic/globalization/report, accessed April 15, 2010. The UCC’s three-year (2006–2009) commitment to this initiative resulted in the narrative-centred resource guide *Challenging Empire: Justice Seeking in Your Faith Community*; “Empire and Racial Power” as the theme of the May 2008 issue of *Mandate* magazine; *Challenging Empire: A Call to Community*, a DVD of televised interviews including empire-critical biblical scholar Ched Myer; and a follow-up report by an Empire Task Group. Other denominations have placed welcome emphasis on the impact of empire on theology and ethics, as in “Liturgy and Empire: Faith in Exile and Political Theology,” a themed issue of *Letter & Spirit*, a Catholic

to imply that the contemporary church deliberately de-contextualizes Paul—though a “disembodied, decontextualized” soteriology can be a tacit form of evangelical accommodation to modernism,¹³ and perhaps to postmodernism, too.¹⁴ The problem is not such an active unmooring of Paul’s language from its original platforms, but the cumulative effects of dynamic shifts in culture and language over the course of the church’s theological history. Simply put, a contextual reading of Paul must account for the linguistic, locational, and temporal barriers that impede cross-cultural communication and de-contextualize Paul’s story; a hermeneutical model for visualizing these cross-contextual obstacles will be offered later in the dissertation.

Paul’s soteriological terminology seems de-contextualized in contemporary North American church and society because language is embedded in the context of its engendering culture. Paul clearly thought his conceptual vocabulary would be understood and appreciated in Corinth and the other major cities and regions to which he wrote, even as the thoughts behind his vocabulary developed and matured over time: his re-interpretations of prophetic/apocalyptic texts and Christian creedal traditions, for example, attest to the fracturing effects¹⁵ that the word of the cross had on his own thought and on that of his church communities. But the exact words chosen by Paul (together with his amanuenses) refracted the meanings assigned to them in Roman imperial soteriology, meanings that have been further altered and attenuated by

journal of biblical theology, but the journal does not attempt to be as thoroughgoing as the UCC’s programming.

¹³ Wilson, “Clarifying Vision,” 189.

¹⁴ But compare Borg, who highlights the rediscovery of biblical and theological contexts as an attribute of the postmodern-friendly Emergent Church movement, in *Jesus*, 300–2.

¹⁵ For this “fracture” paradigm, see Harrisville, *Fracture*, throughout. The “gravitational” hermeneutic proposed in chapter four of the present study suggests that *deflection* or *refraction* may be preferable to *fracture* as an index of change in individual and collective constructions (and reconstructions) of theological meaning and praxis, especially with regard to significant sociopolitical systems (e.g., the Roman Empire) and events (such as the resurrection of Christ).

subsequent biblical interpretation, translation, and cultural integration. According to Garry Wills, discerning “what Paul meant” requires a process of removal: “to scrub away linguistic accretions on Paul’s text is as necessary as to cleanse away the buildup of foreign matter on old paintings.”¹⁶ But to reflect upon what Paul meant, contemporary interpreters also need to account for the hermeneutical distances, boundaries, and obstacles involved in reading and/or hearing his gospel, not just the cultural and linguistic “accretions” of previous interpretation.

Paul, though collectively characterized in modern scholarship as the apostle of many titles,¹⁷ was a preacher and writer who addressed specific problems among the gatherings of Christians for whom he felt responsible, adapting elements of his theopolitical, cultural environment in the process.¹⁸ In Corinth, for instance, his letters were read aloud when received,¹⁹ with another layer of meaning provided by the reader, who would also have been well-versed in the Hellenistic Jewish and Roman imperial milieux—if not as thoroughly as Paul himself was! Each reading was a unique event, and each circle of reader and auditors²⁰ would have possessed varying levels of skill in

¹⁶ Wills, *What Paul Meant*, 177.

¹⁷ Including but not limited to Gorman, *Apostle of the Crucified Lord*; Goodwin, *Paul, Apostle of the Living God*; R. N. Longenecker, *Paul, Apostle of Liberty*; Bruce, *Apostle of the Heart Set Free*; and Schreiner, *Paul, Apostle of God’s Glory in Christ*. It is not the intention of the present work to add “Paul, Apostle of Theopolitics” to this list.

¹⁸ Karen Elliott Lowe deserves credit for the discussion and some of the phrasing of this paragraph and the next.

¹⁹ The principal, critical method that will be applied to 1 Corinthians 15 below will be a form of socio-rhetorical criticism, but literary criticism’s concern for “audience response” will receive an occasional hearing, as the latter helps to gauge the degree to which Paul’s adaptations of both biblical and Roman imperial material would have been successfully conveyed. For public delivery and reception as components of epistolary composition, see Stirewalt, *Paul the Letter Writer*, 6, 11–18, and especially 13–14 on the epistles’ adaptability for added oral messages and readings in other congregations; also Polhill, *Paul and His Letters*, 121–22, on the “encyclical” nature of Paul’s letters and their reading in a largely oral culture; Stirewalt and Polhill both refer to Colossians (4:7–9, p. 13, and 4:16, p. 121, respectively) for hints of Pauline epistolary reading practices among the early churches. On the “orality” of New Testament texts, see Shiner, *Proclaiming the Gospel*, and Horsley, Draper, and Foley, eds., *Performing the Gospel*.

²⁰ For a treatment of audience members as spectators and auditors, avidly engaged in performances and capable of momentarily blending their perceptions of actor and character, see McConachie, *Engaging*

cultural literacy, but in every reading and hearing, all would have shared to some extent the struggle of shaping a tradition indebted to both Jewish and Roman media, yet coextensive with neither: the “peace” with which Paul greeted his communities (cf. 1 Cor 1:3) had little to do with the Pax Romana that the Caesars established and defended through victorious war.

With every change that fledgling Christianity and its texts went through— canonization, creedal codification, local and imperial persecution, imperial sanction, and so on—the way in which Paul’s vocabulary was heard changed as well. Today’s North American readers encounter Paul in churches caught between modernism and postmodernism, and in cultures founded on curious admixtures of Christian principles and oppressive practices. The creeping awareness of its own imperial,²¹ “hyper-power” status unnerves the post-9/11 United States in its fight to end the “global war on terror” it once waged so eagerly; its drive to dismantle and triumph over terrorist networks carries theological and hermeneutical repercussions that have only begun to be assessed. Next door to the empire, Canada defines itself in ambivalent interdependence, as it once did (and often still does) with regard to Great Britain. Seated in churches and homes so distant from the theopolitical locations of Paul and his congregants, how are readers in these theopolitical settings to interpret the soteriological expressions that form a Pauline power language? What kind of credence can they give to terms like “lord,” “authority,” “ruler,” “power,” or “saviour”? How do they expect the Spirit of the living God to

Audiences, 48, 68, 193. While less dramatized than the Gospels, Paul’s letters would have required (and still do require!) performative skill to be read aloud well, so in a sense such readings were, and continue to be, auditions.

²¹ On characterizing the United States in comparison with prior hegemonies, see Laxer, *Perils of Empire*. A 2003 comment from Edward Said is similarly revealing: “What America refuses to see clearly, it can hardly hope to remedy,” cited in Khalidi, *Resurrecting Empire*, 152.

nourish them with these words? How should they understand and participate in Paul's gospel, his story of salvation?

A response to these questions begins with unpacking the constraints that govern the communication of that story, the ways in which theopolitical language is embedded within the changing cultural and hermeneutical contexts noted above. *Theopolitical expression is inherently and interfluentially fixed to the culture(s) in which it emerges*, growing and changing in connection with culture. As William Dyrness expresses the point, language is *contextually embedded in its engendering culture*. Concerning the communication of the Christian message, he remarks that this cultural embedment constrains the expression of the gospel, but these constraints issue from human finitude; that is, the limits are universal, not specific to any one culture.²² They can even be healthy and helpful, delimiting the range and meaning of communication. To speak in terms of revelation afforded by the gospel, these constraints circumscribe the revelatory domains in which the Spirit exercises lordship (2 Cor 3:18), providing safe anchorage for finite creatures to hear and understand the Spirit's leading. Todd Billings exhorts readers to celebrate the Spirit's work in *indigenizing* God's word in various contexts and cultures, though the same Spirit also enables the critique of cultural idols that resist the transformative word²³—and, surely, the critique of imperial idols that so resist the word or co-opt its content.²⁴

²² Dyrness, *How Does America*, 19–21, 25.

²³ Billings, *Word of God*, xvi, 107n3, and 109–22, and focusing specially on indigenized *reception* of God's word, 117–22. When performed faithfully, this Spirit-enabled cultural critique must surely also be celebrated, regardless of its perceived success.

²⁴ Following initially the example of Hays, who asserts "that Paul's pastoral strategy for reshaping the consciousness of his pagan converts was to narrate them into Israel's story through the metaphorical appropriation of Scripture" (*Conversion*, xi), it will be argued below that Paul is inviting his readers to participate in the gospel's soteriological story. But this invitation has another function in addition to Hays' "conversion of the imagination," namely *counter-colonization*, competing with the empire's colonizing,

There exists, then, a basic cultural contingency in the communication of Paul's theopolitical gospel, whether the attempt to be heard and understood originates from God or between human beings. The contingency is sociocultural in nature, but it can also take historical, religious, political, military, technological, economic, and artistic forms, as well as many combinations of these and other facets of culture. One's own observations and interpretations of another time and place are bound to be thoroughly contingent upon the presuppositions one forms within one's own contexts. For example, twenty-first-century North Americans will hear and explain the word "church" differently than the first-century Paul would have done with ἐκκλησία—a word evocative of a still earlier age's custom of free citizens assembling, an ideal that Paul and perhaps other Christians employed as a nostalgic, counter-imperial anachronism.²⁵ To put the challenge of addressing theopolitical and historical contingency succinctly, the past is a foreign empire: they rule things differently there.²⁶

Can twenty-first-century North American interpreters escape their preconceptions, to hear more accurately what Paul and other ancient writers would say to them? Systematic theologian Anders Nygren argued that domination by the presuppositions of

pacifying ideology. It may be helpful to consider Roman colonization and this proposed counter-colonization as processes akin to that of the indigenization noted immediately above. That is, Rome reinforced the imperial-ideological story of its god-given right to rule (via images such as kingship, victory, and peace, and actions such as the destruction of enemy strongholds and the establishment of its own colonies in their place) in the minds and everyday lives of its people; Paul proclaimed his Lord as one whose reign, through his Spirit, had already actually begun to provide unity and peace among the gatherings of his people, the very qualities that Rome could not fully deliver. Participation in such a project of counter-colonization would also be a crucial question to consider for those who read Paul in later imperial contexts.

²⁵ Wiley, "Paul and Early Christianity," 58. Wiley argues further that the deployment of the term determines that the church (unlike the empire) is not to use conquest as its method of expansion. The current connotations of *church* push Wills to replace the term with "gathering" (in *What Paul Meant*, 180–81 and applied throughout).

²⁶ Deliberately misquoting L. P. Hartley's opening line, "The past is a foreign country: they do things differently there," from *The Go-Between*, 3; cited by Borg, *Jesus*, 78, and with a slight variation by editor Roma Gill in Shakespeare's *Coriolanus*, 161.

the present age can frustrate the faithful picturing of past ages and their worldviews, but escaping one's own presuppositions and totally immersing oneself in the past would not be a viable solution even if it were possible: one would risk subjection to the presuppositions of the very age one seeks to understand, losing any historical perspective in the process. In short, one would cease to be a historian.²⁷ One would be unable to grasp the historical (and theopolitical) contingency of contemporary theology with the perspective one has now, appreciating, for example, how the cross as the most concrete form of God's suffering is contingent upon first-century Mediterranean history in general and Roman imperial history specifically.²⁸ One can read Paul's words in the same language in which his Corinthian congregants heard them, but if one were really able to hear *exactly as they did* that "the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God" (1 Cor 1:18; cf. 2 Cor 2:15), one might not understand how much Paul's soteriology was shaped by the context of the empire, because *one would never have known any other context* for comparison.

A contextual reading of Paul's story, then, must account for cultural, linguistic, and theopolitical contingencies that shape the experience of readers, and locational and temporal distances that impede their cross-cultural communication with the Pauline text. The fallout from this cross-contextual problem is that many Pauline words and images

²⁷ Nygren (*Meaning and Method*, 354) shared advocacy for *motivforschung* (theological "motif research") with Gustaf Aulén, whose thematic work on the atonement-as-victory will re-emerge in chapter six, below. Nygren's criticism of Bultmann and others seeking to demythologize the New Testament message (305–7) sounds surprisingly apt amid attempts to rediscover cultural contexts of the past: demythologization's error, he says, begins with the commendable attempt to re-contextualize meanings rather than rejecting them out of hand, but fails because of the introduction of foreign criteria, inapplicable constructions, and arbitrary rubrics—a warning that surely applies when comparing theopolitical languages.

²⁸ As Ferré suggests in *Christ and the Christian*, 170–71.

seem obscure, archaic, or oppressive,²⁹ and therefore inappropriate when employed in contemporary settings. Borrowing momentarily from the language of semiotics, one could say that the words are signifiers, or signs, that have lost contact with the concepts they once signified; the signifiers have been gradually emptied of much of their significance, so discerning and coming to terms with their meanings becomes ever more challenging for today's readers and auditors of Paul.³⁰

The issue is not that Paul's terms are no longer employed, but that the jobs they are asked to do have changed, in some cases dramatically so. In the case of εὐαγγέλιον, "gospel," the "good news" initially entailed "imperial announcements, such as the birth of a new royal child, an imperial military victory, or the ascension of a king."³¹ So the word's function was hardly generic when Paul recruited it to convey a different kind of news, the inbreaking news story of God working salvation for his people through Jesus Christ.³² Providing this etymology of a propitious announcement does not solve the problem of translation, nor would the repeated rendering of the noun and verb forms,

²⁹ On the tradition of the oppressive use of biblical language, including what she calls *kyriarchal* language and power dynamics (derived from κύριος, denoting elite-male, *Herr-schaft* structures of sociopolitical domination, a category designed to enable critical feminist exegesis), see Schüssler Fiorenza, *But She Said*, 6–8.

³⁰ McConachie (*Engaging Audiences*, 193) credits theatre audiences with playing a more "complex and interesting" role vis-à-vis signifiers than that adopted by semioticians, who are likely to discard signifiers once they have ascertained the signifieds. Lectors and auditors of Paul have the option of discarding seemingly empty or archaic signifiers, but it will be argued below (though not in semiotic terms) that it requires a more faithful integrity and creativity to refill or redeem them.

³¹ Wiley, "Paul and Early Christianity," 59; Gorman (*Apostle*, 108–9, adapting material from his own *Cruciformity*) complements this by pointing out that εὐαγγέλιον could mean the "good news of God's salvation" in Jewish contexts, not just the announcement of the emperor's beneficence or the "good news of military victory or of the emperor's birth/reign" that characterized the Greco-Roman definition.

³² This phrasing will be fleshed out later, but see Keesmaat's summary that "the invasive action of God in Jesus Christ introduced a new element into the story, an unexpected twist in the plot, which meant that Paul's dialogue with Scripture involved a transformation and reappropriation of the tradition for the communities which had come into being in Jesus Christ," in Keesmaat, *Paul and his Story*, 233, and, more broadly, Gorman, *Apostle*, 106–14.

with results like “the gospel I gospelled to you” in 1 Cor 15:1.³³ But when one pauses enough to recall the etymological source of the “good news,” one faces incongruities between Paul’s deployment of the term and its contemporary uses. The North American gospel has been domesticated in some instances, sometimes as a series of propositional bullet points³⁴ to be taught and defended in reactionary tones, or as a bill of goods to be branded and marketed.³⁵ Even creative theological adaptations of the canonical Gospels’ opening format, “(the Gospel) according to...,” still struggle to build accessible bridges across the gap between the narrativial εὐαγγέλιον and propositional statements.³⁶

This hermeneutical incongruity is jarring—or at least it should be!—and sometimes painfully so, when it involves images or titles used to describe members of the Trinity. Titles such as “Lord” and “King” are increasingly rare in current North American idiom; they do not sit well in a democratic ethos.³⁷ For some readers, they remain emblematic of a legacy of violence and oppression surrounding the church, to such a degree that they continue as loci of categorical controversy in contemporary theology and

³³ Wills, *What Paul Meant*, 181–82. “Revelation,” the alternative translation Wills suggests, is no less problematic than “gospel,” save for its more natural verb form; nor does revelation imply the news of a narrative in the same way that “gospel” does. Christopher Wright’s *Salvation Belongs* could be read as a counter-argument, as it takes Rev 7:9–10 as its control text, but Wright (96–98) carefully unpacks salvation as a story, “constituted within the all-encompassing biblical metanarrative” of which the gospel must be a primary focus.

³⁴ To which Miller objects in *Searching*, especially chapter ten, “The Gospel of Jesus: It Never Was a Formula,” 151–64. The gospel is more about relationships and the story they inhabit: biblically, one is “hard-pressed to find theological ideas divorced from their relational context,” 157.

³⁵ See Christopher Wright’s reflective question in *Salvation Belongs*, 55: how can something that belongs to God be packaged in “popular forms of mission and evangelism” as a product to be marketed? Also appropriate here is McLaren and Campolo’s discussion of salvation and the gospel in *Adventures in Missing the Point*, 18–30, including a careful critique of the church’s preoccupations with “getting saved” and accepting Christ as “personal Savior,” 19.

³⁶ For example, choices made by contributors to the deliberately accessible “Gospel According to...” book series show a marked divergence in their treatments of Christian themes in various popular media, variously emphasizing religious elements within successive movies as episodes in the larger story of the Walt Disney Company in Pinsky, *Gospel According to Disney*, or the emergence of faith, hope, and charity in a more tightly woven saga such as *The Lord of the Rings* in Wood, *Gospel According to Tolkien*. “The Gospel” is thus told as much “according to” the author as it is by the subject.

³⁷ As Bartholomew and Goheen remark in *Drama of Scripture*, 131, as those who live “as we do in modern Western democracies, the whole notion of kingdom is alien to our everyday experience.”

hermeneutics. Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza bases her critique of *kyriarchal* or *kyriocentric* power structures around the New Testament term for “lord,” κύριος, and she has lately reminded her readers that the title and its connotations derive in part from the workings of empire.³⁸ Other feminist theologians have incorporated “the obedient loyalty and honor due to feudal lords” that provided Anselm’s value framework, along with Abelard’s prayerful juxtaposition of God as redeemer and avenger, “merciful Father” and “stern Lord,” into their profile of the church’s theological history, concluding at one point that the church gradually took “a violent Lord into her bed,” spawning “devotional pieties of fear” for her “seductive abuser.”³⁹

At least three options present themselves as potential solutions to this problem of unanchored, and in some cases unwelcome, soteriological language. The first and easiest avenue is to continue to ignore the problem. This choice might mean risking further alienating oneself from Pauline texts and contexts. Like the condition of cognitive dissonance, a psychological conflict caused by inconsistency between an individual’s beliefs and actions, a kind of “contextual dissonance” might emerge here, perhaps presenting as a growing rift between the church and the academy, and resulting in

³⁸ The evolution of Schüssler Fiorenza’s kyriarchal/kyriocentric category is helpful to observe here, where to her earlier definitions (e.g. *But She Said*, 6–8, cited above) she adds “emperor” to reinvokethe imperial meaning of κύριος for her imperial-contextual work in *Power of the Word*, 6n21, 14. When κύριος is applied to God, the political implicitly becomes theopolitical.

³⁹ Brock and Parker, *Saving Paradise*, 267, 296, 305–6; they borrow their citation of Abelard (296n50) from Carroll, *Constantine’s Sword*, 294. On one level, these and other such claims are easily dismissed as pretensions; readers who are truly oppressed would welcome the gospel’s revaluation of language in the service of liberation. But the concerns of Schüssler Fiorenza, Brock and Parker also impel cooperation with the Spirit in the very revaluations the gospel brings. Moltmann’s political hermeneutics (*Crucified God*, citing 316–17 below) are illustrative here, especially if *hermeneutics themselves* are understood to be among the first of the “liberating actions” he anticipates:

The freedom of faith therefore urges men on towards liberating actions, because it makes them painfully aware of suffering in situations of exploitation, oppression, alienation and captivity. The situation of the crucified God makes it clear that human situations where there is no freedom are vicious circles which must be broken through because they can be broken through in him.

increasingly schizophrenic interpretations of Scripture. The anxiety brought on by contextual dissonance is not always immediately evident; its symptoms are so diverse and so easily masked by cultural embedment that readers might initially miss the warning signs in their own hermeneutical life and in that of their churches. Embedment can be a positive thing: word processors can embed fonts in order to preserve “fidelity” when sharing documents; a journalist embedded in a military unit can offer his or her audience the experience of its maneuvers, or at least an attendant verisimilitude. But if readers refuse or fail to account for the cultural embedment of their religious expression and experience, they are left with only the verisimilitude, the *appearance* of truth. They would be distancing themselves from a deeper understanding of that which God is trying to communicate to them.

A second option would be to reject arcane terms and their content, finding substitute images. The goal here is usually to address the issue of cultural relevance, either in locating or inventing new equivalents to awaken the reading imagination, or in retooling familiar words to uncover what Paul “really meant” to say.⁴⁰ Two recent versions of Scripture exercise this option, to varying extents. The goal of Eugene Peterson’s biblical paraphrase, *The Message: The Bible in Contemporary Language*, was to “translate as close to the American idiom” as possible.⁴¹ One effect of this hermeneutical policy, in terms of arcane or objectionable soteriological vocabulary, was the replacement of most instances of the term “lord.” By way of comparison, the NIV,

⁴⁰ As Wills does in an appendix in *What Paul Meant*, 177–92, replacing the “customary translation” with a “more adequate rendering” in order to overcome what he sees as a sacral oversaturation of Paul’s vocabulary. Thus “church” becomes “gathering,” “gospel” and “preach” morph into “revelation” and “bring the revelation,” “faith” gives way to “trust,” “justification” to “vindication,” “converted” to “summoned,” “salvation” to “rescue,” “Christ” to “Messiah,” “apostle” to “emissary,” etc. On a similar note, see Brock and Parker’s translation of *basileia* as “realm” (rather than the conventional “kingdom”) in *Saving Paradise*, 31.

⁴¹ Bearden, “Eugene Peterson,” accessed March 17, 2010 at www.bible-researcher.com/themessage.html.

NKJV, and NASB all contain some 600 or more *verses* in the New Testament alone in which the word “lord” appears at least once; *The Message* has just 27 New Testament *instances* of the term in total,⁴² and many of these are references to the Tetragrammaton. Peterson often replaces “lord” with the word “master”;⁴³ while more commonplace in the daily experience of contemporary readers, “master” somehow lacks the authority of κύριος, and it has also been targeted as a word to be resisted by contemporary critics, along with titular images such as “lord,” “ruler,” “king,” and “father.”⁴⁴

Another Bible translation retains κύριος but opts to rework Χριστός, Jesus’ “title-turned-name.”⁴⁵ The Ecclesia Bible Society indicates that in *The Voice New Testament*, certain words “borrowed from another language or words that are not common outside of the theological community (such as ‘baptism,’ ‘repentance,’ and ‘salvation’) are translated into more common terminology” here.⁴⁶ Trading “baptism” for “ritual immersion,” or “salvation” for “deliverance,” is less controversial than the decision to recast the word “Christ,” noting only in a footnote early in Matthew that “‘Christ’ and ‘Messiah’ are translated as ‘Liberator’ or the ‘Liberating King.’”⁴⁷ This self-described “Scripture project to rediscover the story of the Bible”⁴⁸ implies that the title/name “Christ” is archaic. The essential question, beyond those of the influence of Emergent and liberation theologies⁴⁹ or the theological adequacy of “Liberating King” as

⁴² Source: www.biblegateway.com, accessed March 17, 2010.

⁴³ “Master” appears at least once in approximately 350 verses in the *Message* New Testament.

⁴⁴ Billings (*Word of God*, 98–102) profiles two approaches to the biblical imageries of power and fatherhood, comparing and contrasting the work of Sallie McFague (who advocates abandoning those biblical metaphors that threaten to dehumanize) with that of Marianne Meye Thompson.

⁴⁵ The title-turned-name phrasing is that of Fee, *Pauline Christology*, 34, 37, 101, 108, 291, 341.

⁴⁶ *Voice*, vii, and specific to the meanings of “baptism” to various denominations and “secular” readers, xi.

⁴⁷ *Voice*, 3n, at Matt 1:18.

⁴⁸ *Voice*, i, and ix.

⁴⁹ For exemplary Emergent uses of liberation language, see Sweet, et al., *Church in Emerging Culture*, 85 (“the sacraments liberate us from the addiction to novelty that is the postmodern counterpart to modernity’s

a rendering of Χριστός, may be the cost of the replacement of “Lord” and “Christ” to the very biblical narrative this translational project planned to revitalize. The treatment of an early Christian confessional script,⁵⁰ the Christ-hymn of Phil 2:6–11, provides an example of the problem: in *The Message*, its climax reads “will bow in worship before this Jesus Christ, and call out in praise that he is the Master of all”; in *The Voice*, “Jesus, the Liberating King, is Lord.”⁵¹ Neither rendition commands the authoritative simplicity of κύριος Ἰησοῦς Χριστὸς or commends itself to liturgical use. Seeking new dynamic equivalents for difficult New Testament terminology is a worthwhile endeavour, but some of its recent outcomes are less than satisfactory with regard to the titular components of Paul’s soteriological vocabulary and the scriptural narrative(s) they represent.

The remaining alternative, and the most viable one, is that of re-evaluating, revalidating, and even re-valorizing the meanings of Paul’s problematic imagery by reconsidering it in its original cultural and biblical contexts. This option is the most challenging, for it entails a study of Pauline power terminology before it was Pauline, when a significant share of Paul’s words belonged to other theopolitical vocabularies. To add another necessary complication, it should be stipulated at this point that a theopolitical vocabulary can draw from more than one spoken or written language, as Rome did with Greek and Latin; but to validate this stipulation, one can briefly exegete a

quest for information”), 211–12 (engaging with liberation theology), and 226 (“a pilgrim is fixed on a destination in hope because he or she has already experienced liberation and has embraced the word of the liberator”).

⁵⁰ The Christ-hymn of Philippians 2, which will be considered in the epilogue of this study as an ancillary text with relation to the theopolitical Pauline soteriology articulated here, is also a prominent example of early Christian devotional material and an arguably vital portion of the gospel’s “narrative substructure.” See R. N. Longenecker, *New Wine*, 28–31.

⁵¹ *Voice*, 336 (Phil 2:11). Adding the title “king” also alters the cumulative significance of the other titles here, as well as in other instances of this combination, such as Acts 2:36.

piece of first-century BCE, Roman rhetoric that employs images Paul knew in the first century CE, but in comparable Latin phraseology. Consider the following excerpt from Cicero (106–43 BCE):

It is impossible for the Roman people to be slaves; that people whom the immortal gods have ordained should rule [*imperare*] over all nations. Matters are now come to a crisis.... Either you must conquer [*vincatis*], O Romans, which indeed you will do if you continue to act with such piety [*pietate*] and such unanimity, or you must do anything rather than become slaves. Other nations can endure slavery, Liberty is the inalienable possession of the Roman people.⁵²

It is tempting to jump immediately to comparing this excerpt with Christian texts, noting Cicero's impassioned refusal to take on the nature of a slave, precisely the kind of thinking that Paul argued against in Phil 2:6–11. But to make that leap immediately is to miss the language that underpins this claim to divinely sanctioned conquest. First, the Romans are not just to rule but to “rule over,” to “command,” in keeping with the related *imperiosus* (domineering, or imperious), *imperator* (commander; by Paul's time, the emperor), and *imperium* (power and/or authority to command).⁵³ Though Cicero's Rome is technically still a republic, this is a “hard” empire in the making, characterized by a militaristic grip (though not always an occupying force) over its subject peoples, and conquering those that tried to resist its rule. Second, the basis Cicero evinces for this predestined conquest is Roman *pietas*, the loyalty or allegiance expected in ties of family, citizenship, and worship.⁵⁴ This virtue of piety sustained freedom and a history of conquest, having saved Rome from subjugation even at times when the state had been

⁵² Cicero, *Philippic* 6.18–19; as cited (without added brackets) in the Perseus classical database, accessed at <http://old.perseus.tufts.edu/cgi-bin/ptext?doc=Perseus:text:1999.02.0021:speech=6:section=18> on Dec 1, 2009. The text dates from the mid-40s BCE.

⁵³ Wheelock, *Wheelock's Latin*, 246, 252, 478.

⁵⁴ See Elliott's portrayals of Roman imperial piety and its Pauline reworking in *Arrogance of Nations*, 121–41.

unable to strike at its enemies: during the Punic Wars, for instance, even a decision delayed by Hannibal could be understood as leading to “the salvation of Rome and its empire,” thanks to Rome’s gods and Roman piety shown them.⁵⁵ Paul, too, would incorporate sovereign rule and familial allegiance into his soteriological story, but he would rearrange the concepts and the relationships the empire drew between them, showing that salvation came through a different God and the resurrected Son who reigned over the world, despite appearances to the contrary, as his regent.

This is not to say that Paul’s soteriological vocabulary was once the inalienable possession of Rome; the subject nations, Palestine among them, used the same languages Rome did. The Greek of the Septuagint shows that its translators were wrestling, theologically and linguistically, with the rephrasing of God’s pledges of salvation for Israel. The question of how (and from what enemy) God would save his people had changed in the Hellenistic world, and language was part of that change. The solutions of the LXX opened the Scriptures to diasporic audiences, but they also left the LXX well-placed for adaptation. The rendition of κληθήσονται (“they will be called”) in Hosea 1:10 was a powerful promise for a Mediterranean culture of religious and ethnic pluralism, a pivotal part of a pledge from a κύριος who guarantees with his own name the safety of his people (Hos 1:7). But Paul readily co-opted this salvific assurance. He offered both Jews and Gentiles a calling to be transformed, from what Mark Goodwin calls a “deathlike situation” of barrenness and “non-peoplehood” to a new, secure status of adopted relationship, renewed covenant, and resurrection.⁵⁶ In this and other instances,

⁵⁵ Bagnall, drawing upon (but not precisely citing) the historian Livy, in Bagnall, *Punic Wars*, 194.

⁵⁶ See Goodwin’s engaging discussion of Paul’s use of Hosea in the conversion theology of Romans 9 in *Paul, Apostle of the Living God*, 150–58, with 154–55, and (quoted here) 157; Goodwin mislabels Hos 1:10 LXX as 2:1 (155) and Gen 21:12 LXX, which Paul quotes earlier at Rom 9:7, as 21:21 LXX.

translating an image such as “lord” from Hebrew to Greek could bring both great gains (e.g., the senses of authority held by the θεοὶ πολλοὶ καὶ κύριοι πολλοί of the Greco-Roman world) and “irreducible” losses (the disassociation from the monotheistic tradition and the name יהוה, YHWH).⁵⁷

So Rome’s rivals and provinces knew how to employ Greek; not for nothing has Koine, the Attic/Ionic amalgam, become “koine” in English, a decapitalized (if underemployed) synonym for a lingua franca. No matter: Rome knew how to capitalize on its adopted tongue, having recolonized the Hellenistic world and its languages.⁵⁸ Rome’s Greek and Latin theopolitical lexicon has become a focus of intensive research in post-9/11 studies of the New Testament and historical theology,⁵⁹ though the news is only gradually filtering into more accessible literature intended for the church.⁶⁰ With word-images like *pistis* (or *fides*, allegiance reciprocated faithfully between Rome and its citizens, closely tied to *pietas*), *sōtēria* (the “salvation” or security won through military triumphs), and *dikaioynē* (justice, or vindication),⁶¹ Rome sent a clear message: it is the empire that has saved the world, and therefore it is the empire that has the right to prescribe what faithfulness, salvation, and justice look like.

⁵⁷ Billings, *Word of God*, 114–15, to which the allusion to the “many gods and many lords” of 1 Cor 8:5 has been added.

⁵⁸ Well-worn though it may be, the introduction to Machen’s *New Testament Greek*, 1–6, still adequately describes the conquering Roman interaction with Greek, with the empire becoming conquered, in a cultural sense, by the changing language it adopts.

⁵⁹ See the overlapping vocabulary reviews in Wiley, “Paul and Early Christianity,” 58–59; Rieger, *Christ and Empire*, 31–32, with special attention to the ambivalence that would have been apparent in Paul’s use of “coded” language; and Gorman, treating the recycled Roman vocabulary as components of an explicitly *theopolitical gospel*, in *Apostle*, 108–9. Gorman has rightly drawn the author’s attention to the fact that he first employed the “theopolitical” descriptor in pre-9/11 scholarship, as in *Cruciformity*, 349 and 352.

⁶⁰ Claiborne and Haw review many of the same terms as more scholarly works do, explaining that in the Roman imperial context, religion and politics were “to a great extent, the same thing,” in *Jesus for President*, 66–70. Their summaries of what Rome’s theopolitical terms meant to Jesus and Paul are a bit simplistic: they reduce “saviour,” which to Rome was a healer, preserver, or (military) peacemaker figure, to “a title for Jesus,” and “lord” or “supreme ruler” to “a much more international acclamation” for Jesus than Messiah or Christ (69).

⁶¹ These brief definitions are adapted from Gorman, *Apostle*, 108–9.

It is not that the political side of these terms requires heavier attention. Rather, the focus here will be an area that remains underdeveloped in discussions of imperial theopolitics: retrieving the soteriological significance of Paul's co-option of Roman theopolitical images, as well as that of the manner in which he co-opted them. As the meanings of re-deployed Roman theopolitical terms can vary significantly between and within New Testament corpora, it is best to locate this reclamation project in a specific passage, one in which many of the problematic terms appear together in close proximity. Further, the passage should have a context from which the imperial background of the embedded terms can be clearly demonstrated, even if this influence has not been heavily emphasized in previous research.

First Corinthians 15 offers one such a locus of imperial imagery, where Paul deploys soteriological language that can be re-examined and quite possibly re-valORIZED via a contextual re-reading of the text. Traditionally, this chapter has not been studied for its imperial images, but the Roman and Pauline theopolitical values of the language embedded there, if successfully demonstrated, will also establish a platform from which to remap the narrative of the chapter, particularly surrounding Christ's resurrection and return to rule (15:20–28) and the proclamation of his final victory over death (50–58). For this chapter, though part of a rhetorical discourse, is also a narrative: in an unusual move for Paul, the terms he uses in this chapter shape and expand upon a carefully framed segment of late-breaking news he has to share, part of the story of the gospel.⁶²

⁶² One precedent for pursuing the role of titular images in shaping narrative christological identity comes from Rowe's recent book, *Early Narrative Christology*, especially 17–26. For another elucidation of the gospel-as-narrative, see Goldingay (*Israel's Gospel* [= *Old Testament Theology* 1:], 29–31), who pairs the core story of the gospel in the New Testament (John 3:16, though only implicitly is this a "gospel") with that of the Old (Isa 52:7–10, which in the LXX Goldingay credits with coining εὐαγγελίζομαι for Christian use) to infer a "biblical gospel" or "macronarrative," encompassing even "nonnarrative" parts such as the Pauline epistles.

First Corinthians 15:20–28, 50–58 constitute one pair of passages meeting the criteria above: Paul reassembles established imperial terms (e.g., κύριος, βασιλεία, βασιλεύειν, παρουσία, and νίκη) and deploys them alongside of other vocabulary that can be shown to have theopolitical connotations here (e.g., καταργεῖν, to render powerless), as he constructs a narrative connecting Christ’s death, resurrection, arrival, and victory.

The Structure of the Argument

To recap, the following dissertation describes a *contemporary problem* (the postmodern use of Pauline christological and soteriological terms, unmoored from their original, sociological milieu), a *route toward recovery* (repositioning the study of these terms, first with respect to the narrational relationships they imply, then to previous assessments of a biblical text where they congregate), a *theopolitical retrieval* (re-evaluating the meanings of the terms in their original context), an *exegetical response* (re-reading the text), and a *theological resolution* (the beginnings of an exegetically founded Pauline soteriology, as one facet of a theopolitically informed biblical theology).

The initial problem has been outlined in the prologue: christological and soteriological language, de-contextualized. Certain Pauline images concerning Jesus (such as “lord,” “saviour,” “king,” and “kingdom”) seem archaic, even oppressive, when employed in contemporary North American church and culture. Ignoring the issue, or choosing new substitute images, led only to blind alleys. Instead, the alternate route proposed was that of re-evaluating and re-valorizing the obscure terms, seeking their meanings embedded in Roman theopolitical contexts, then turning to a text where Paul reassembled them. First Corinthians 15 was selected as a surprisingly imperial locus of

powerful titles (e.g., κύριος), actions (βασιλεύειν), and events (παρουσία, νίκη), redeployed by Paul to frame the gospel narrative that connects Christ's resurrection, arrival and rule (15:20–28) to the proclamation of his final subjugation of death (50–58).

Chapter two, the first part of “The State of Paul’s Soteriological Language,” moves from the problem toward a suggested route to recovery. It recommends exchanging de-contextualized christological terminology for a socio-rhetorical perspective that promotes the narrational character of Paul’s soteriological discourse. Rome unwittingly contributed to Paul’s vocabulary, but that vocabulary’s force is gauged through its soteriological impact. That is, the benefit Paul’s Corinthian congregation received from participating in Christ’s victory over death is a question with a relational story behind it, revealed not just in Paul’s words but in the ways in which the apostle reordered the relationships between these words. Past treatments have proven titles christologically significant, but titular Christology’s value has been disputed; the totalizing effect of that approach, while mitigable, seems particularly inapt for engaging the claims of empire. Recent studies of Jesus’ soteriological “job descriptions”—even those that acknowledge imperial influences on Christology—fail to account for the soteriological deployment of christological terms in theopolitical discourses, but they do encourage the viewing of selected terms as indicators of a narrational orientation (whether in Rome’s “gospel,” or Paul’s). When one asks how Paul distinguished between Christ’s βασιλεία and that of Caesar, or whether Christ’s dismantling of rival powers was to be done on earth as it was in heaven, one’s answers will affect the correlations one reads between lord and subjects, or the saviour and those he saves; the questions themselves reveal a transition from ontological Christology to a narrational soteriology.

The third chapter, which comprises the second half of “The State of Paul’s Soteriological Language,” engages recent interpretations of 1 Corinthians 15 with respect to theopolitical concerns. For convenience, selected interpreters are grouped into provisional categories with distinguishing emphases (apocalyptic, rhetorical, socio-rhetorical, and specifically imperial), though these foci are not mutually exclusive: analyzing rhetorical structure requires attention to the chapter’s apocalyptic timbre, for instance, while Ben Witherington’s socio-rhetorical focus on Rome’s imperial eschatology converges with imperial-critical voices like that of Richard Horsley. This review is not intended to show a historical progression in interpretation, but an array of readings, with each set of renditions hinting in variegated ways at the theopolitical content still waiting to be explored.

What governs the decoding of the theopolitical dimensions of Roman imperial language when doing New Testament theology? To picture faithfully the rules and implications of a past era, present-day readers must acknowledge and be willing to revise the presuppositions of their own. To that end, the fourth chapter begins by reviewing promising visual models that mediate access from today’s North American world to that of the biblical text, hybridizing a distinctive hermeneutic from a combination of biblical-theological and socio-rhetorical stock, nuancing the manner in which today’s readers participate in the soteriological story Paul writes for Corinth. That participation begins with unpacking each theopolitical term *before* Paul re-encodes it, rediscovering the power Rome ascribed to image-rich words like “lord” (κύριος), the “king” or “emperor” and his “kingdom” or “empire” (βασιλεύς, βασιλεία), his official “presence” or “arrival” (παρουσία), the familial and fictive relationships between “father” and “son” (πατήρ,

υἱός) that legitimated his reigning (βασιλεύειν) over the Roman body-politic (σῶμα), and the “glory” (δόξα) and “victory” (νίκη) that he won in war. Supplementing this vocabulary are related images, such as “saviour” (σωτήρ), that Paul would redefine in 1 Corinthians 15 and other related texts. Rome commemorated her victories by asking citizens and subjects to participate in them, through celebratory parades of triumph;⁶³ the exegesis that follows this chapter discloses how thanksgiving for God’s victory (1 Cor 15:57) diverged from the Roman ideal, and how critically Paul engaged his imperial context.

Chapter five re-reads 1 Corinthians 15:20–28, 50–58 in its imperial, prophetic-apocalyptic, Corinthian contexts, making exegetical use of findings from earlier chapters. Reassigned by Paul, each term becomes a cipher imbued with new meaning for a soteriological story that contrasts with Rome’s own. Particularly prominent for an emerging soteriology is the concluding note of triumph over Death, the last enemy to be dismantled (v. 26) and the target of Paul’s proleptic taunting (55). At that point, an extended foray into the personification of Death will demonstrate how Paul’s prophetic-apocalyptic orientation toward the biblical-soteriological story was inextricably related to his theopolitical critique of the empire as a death-bringing entity. Paul is indeed calling the members of the Corinthian church body toward what Richard Hays terms “an imaginative projection of their lives into the framework of the Pentateuchal narrative” and more broadly the “larger narrative of God’s dealing with Israel”⁶⁴—but it will be

⁶³ Lopez, *Apostle to the Conquered*, 114.

⁶⁴ Hays, *Conversion*, 5 and 10; he rightly insists that Paul’s gospel was (and is) “comprehensible only in relation” to that metanarrative (5).

argued that prophetic responses to empire, principally from Isaiah,⁶⁵ informed Paul's expectations for his audience's participation in this metanarrative and in the Roman imperial theopolitics that continued to influence the shape of his gospel.

The sixth and final chapter presents implications for reading Paul's theopolitical soteriology today. First, this soteriology should be tested against ancillary Pauline texts, reappraised in terms of their theopolitical impact on Paul's original and contemporary audiences, in light of the new findings above. Two such ancillaries will be highlighted in Philippians; in each case, recurrent themes of conflict and victory echo forward from Paul's time, inviting conversation with a more recent interpreter. Phil 2:6–13 positions Christ in submission to a scandalous death on a Roman cross, with his subsequent exaltation as global κύριος given as the reason why believers should work out their salvation (σωτηρίᾳ) with fear and trembling. Gustaf Aulén's seminal advocacy of the Christus Victor atonement motif informs the phrasing of the argument, though dialogue with Aulén and his contemporary critics is deliberately confined with respect to this passage and others under discussion. Phil 3:20–21 finds Paul binding heavenly citizenship to his expectation of the coming saviour (σωτήρ) whose subjecting power transforms and glorifies his followers, a hope laden with theopolitical allegiance. Here, René Girard's theory of mimetic violence helps to unpack the political ramifications of the victory language that Paul shares with Rome, inasmuch as the apostle has Christ's sovereignty or imperium supplanting other claims to power. Girard helps to draw out the ambivalence in Paul's engagement with imperial violence (whether rhetorical or military) and his confrontation with death.

⁶⁵ Hays, *Conversion*, 4, 25–26, argues that Isaiah was preeminent among the Scriptures in determining Paul's missional understanding and defence of himself and his gospel.

Insofar as they develop findings from the preceding exegesis of 1 Corinthians 15, these ancillary texts and the biblical-theological project that emerges from them prompt questions for reading Paul today, overlapping with the questions posed earlier to Paul's theopolitical environment. How should contemporary North American readers hear Paul's vocabulary in their current contexts? What does Christ's σωτηρία mean today? From whom or what are believers "saved"? Inceptive responses to these and related questions will be presented as *theopolitical reading scenarios*, instances in which biblical and imperial theopolitics can be shown to overlap in ways that test the mettle of postmodern believers, calling them to nuance their participation in Christ's soteriological story and the stories told by their imperially influenced cultures. An appendix presents one final ancillary text in the form of a sermon that seeks to apply some of the dissertation's findings in a contemporary church context. It suggests that Romans 6:1–9 unites believers with Christ in his death and resurrection, events that have rendered sin (and death) powerless, incapable of mastering (κυριεύει) subjects as it once did—but death's reality must still be lived with, as it were, so the church is called to find life-bringing responses as a witness to a culture too often preoccupied with death.

From an initial dissatisfaction with the de-contextualization of Christological and soteriological language, to a resolution and reinvestment in the discursive and cultural arenas where churches and empires co-opt one other's vocabularies, this dissertation foregrounds a concern for the needs of contemporary believers who are struggling, or perhaps only beginning to struggle, within these arenas. The exegetical and biblical-theological shapes of this responsive enterprise are foundational, not incidental, to the response; but in application, the focus remains contemporary, not for the sake of the often

over-prioritized goal of being “relevant,” but to help in bridging the gap between the academy’s theopolitical resources and the theopolitical needs that North American churches are gradually coming to recognize. What is posited here is that the church appears to need help in negotiating interconnected theopolitical issues in which death and empire play significant roles. Accordingly, the epilogue suggests ways in which Paul’s theopolitical soteriology applies to issues ranging from the problem of addressing contemporary uses of theopolitical rhetoric and imagery, to the challenges of identifying with victims and contesting structural violence, to the recovery of a lost narrative of confessional allegiance to Jesus Christ as Lord.

Paul proclaimed the gospel of a Lord whose rule would overcome all opposition, from Rome to Death itself, but that rule began to be established through submission to death. The apostle hoped that the call to identify with the victor who had been a victim would unsettle cities pervaded by patronage and “upward mobility.” The kingdoms and lords have changed, but postmodern North American society, like ancient Rome, tells a captivating story, asking its participants to identify with victories won on corporate and national scales. Paul’s soteriology in 1 Corinthians 15 suggests a different model of salvation, a different embodiment of vicarious victory: Christ, not Nike. This is the soteriological story to be explored here.

II

The State of Paul's Soteriological Language, Part One: From De-contextualized Titular Christology to a Narrative Soteriological Discourse

Introduction: What Effect Does Paul Intend His Theopolitical Language to Have?

Many undergraduates in the Department of Religion and Classics at the University of Rochester initially found William Scott Green's classroom to be an intimidating place in which to learn. Some of them referred to Dean Green as the department's own version of Darth Vader, as he could make a student's throat tighten from across the room, not by using the Force, but by asking one simple question: "So what?" The student's self-confidence would crumble instantly. The air in the room would grow palpably thinner. The brilliance of the student's last point evaporated—and all because of two words. Of course, this student and others soon learned that Green's question was designed to help them to reflect on the significance of what they were learning (not that this made it any easier to respond!). It was insufficient to know an answer; they also needed to know how and why the answer mattered.

So what? How does this story apply here? The reason for employing this story is to illustrate the *significance* of the theopolitical terminology in the story Paul tells. That is, it is not enough to note that the apostle's gospel story is theopolitical in character, or that he redeploys imperial terminology as he unpacks it; one also needs to ask what effect he intends this terminology to have. Why does Paul use imperial vocabulary in 1 Corinthians 15? How does it contribute to the Christology and soteriology of his argument? Three provisional responses can be posited. First, Paul evidently found that

imperial language could reveal something essential about the relationships of allegiance among Jesus Christ the κύριος, Paul himself, and his Corinthian congregation. Second, the focus of this revelation had to do with the manner in which Christ's victory over Death and other powers would benefit those who remained loyal to him. Third, Paul expected that his borrowed terms would be familiar to an audience experienced with the ways in which empires past and present intruded upon the story of the God and people of Israel. That is, whether the audience members were thoroughly aware of the pivotal impact of the exile upon Israel's history and faith,¹ or only marginally familiar with the cumulative effects of repeated imperial colonization upon the Mediterranean world, Paul thought them capable of recognizing and responding to the theopolitical connotations of the vocabulary he adapted from inner-biblical and imperial narratives.

But even these opening questions and responses have a story behind them. Why the concern with narratives, especially in relation to Pauline soteriological and christological concepts? Tracing the role of narrative in Paul is hardly a novel approach; previous studies have profiled modern *narrative-theological readings* of Paul's epistles as well as *Paul's own responsive development* of Scripture's narrative threads.² The reading suggested here is certainly a narrative-theological one, and it too probes Paul's promotion of the biblical-theological story, following those who have studied Paul's relationship to the tradition of inner-biblical reinterpretation and reappropriation.³ Fruitful

¹ Brueggemann ("Biblical Theology," 101–3) underscores the priority of the exile by including it opposite the concept of *covenant* in the three dialectical pairings he suggests (*covenant* and *exile*; *hymn* and *lament*; and *presence* and *theodicy*) as appropriate rubrics for postmodern exploration of Israel's story. Cited previously in Lowe, "This Was Not an Ordinary Death," 225, where it was observed that the exilic pole of the first dialectical pair was contingent upon imperial activity.

² See for instance B. W. Longenecker, "Narrative Approach to Paul," 88–111; Witherington, *Paul's Narrative*; and more recently, the essays in B. W. Longenecker, ed., *Narrative Dynamics in Paul*.

³ As Keesmaat does in light of Paul's Hellenistic Jewish hermeneutical context, in *Paul and his Story*, 31–34.

as this location of Paul's narrational hermeneutic in relation to Hellenistic Judaism can be, another avenue presents itself as one that may prove productive in conjunction with it: to seek out the Roman imperial framework of Paul's interpretative narration. In other words, how did Paul relate his biblical-theological narrative of salvation to the story that Rome dictated, and how does he appear to have intended that his audience should relate to each of these competing narratives? The question remains vital for today's interpreters of Paul, who are caught up in the narratives of the postmodern West and its various empires. A later chapter will suggest a socio-rhetorical model for mapping the challenges posed by empires past and present to Pauline hermeneutics; the present discussion of intersecting soteriological narratives lays the groundwork for the model as well as for the subsequent exploration of Rome's vocabulary and the exegesis that follows it.

Whether ancient or postmodern, recounted as a deliberate discipline or practised unconsciously and uncritically, biblical theology must perforce include sociopolitical context in the course of its story. Historically, Israel had not practised or articulated its relation to God in a "sociopolitical vacuum," but in geopolitically competitive contact with other nations.⁴ The prophets had referred to regional superpowers as God's disciplinary instruments, instruments which were disciplined in turn for pursuing their divine mandate with excessive violence.⁵ If Israel's story was to continue, the instrumental position of Rome's vaunted supremacy needed to be determined, whether in continuity or discontinuity with the disciplinary roles of empires past. The articles of the

⁴ Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 492, with a similar phrasing on 525.

⁵ On this score, Goldingay notes Jer 50:13–15, Ezekiel 32, Nahum 1, Hab 2:15–16, and (notable here as a Pauline source in 1 Corinthians 15) Isaiah 25. See *Old Testament Theology* 2:759, 764, 772, 778–80, and more broadly, sections 8.5–8.6 in the same text. Also see Brueggemann's sixteenth chapter, "The Nations as Yahweh's Partner," in *Old Testament Theology*, 492–527.

gospel Paul “received” were narrative statements,⁶ partly contingent upon Rome’s unwitting role in God’s redemptive story; the ways Paul chose to pass those articles on to his congregations were likewise conditioned by Roman theopolitical images, borrowed from the empire’s story. But within Paul’s story, these images collided and overlapped with elements from the inner-biblical narrative that were conditioned by the memorable roles of previous empires, which exerted forces of their own upon Paul’s worldview. There were multiple imperial contingencies at work in Paul’s theopolitical gospel story.

To access that story, and to understand its interaction with the inner-biblical narrative that preceded it and the Roman imperial narrative that informed it, requires the accomplishment of several tasks. First, it would be wise to review previous scholarship on the narrational shape and function of Paul’s theopolitical soteriology, as it was at the soteriological level—the question of how and from what the story’s participants and adherents were “saved”—that Paul’s story broke with the inner-biblical narrative of his Scriptures and the theological imperative of imperial Rome. This is the concern of the present chapter. In the next, previous accounts of 1 Corinthians 15 will be collated with reference to the theopolitical language Paul deploys there. These things are merely the beginning of birth pangs; they are prerequisites for a narrative-theological, biblical-contextual reading—or, put simply, a socio-rhetorical reading—of Paul from a postmodern perspective. The project will reach full term in chapter four with the socio-rhetorical mapping of the hermeneutical obstacles to reading 1 Corinthians through first-century Corinthian eyes and ears as a prelude to interpreting it for postmodern ones, before parsing the theopolitical vocabulary as it appeared in Rome’s story and finally in Paul’s gospel.

⁶ Gorman analyzes the gospel’s narrative affirmations in 1 Cor 15:3–8 in *Apostle*, 101–2.

In anticipation of a deeper treatment in that fourth chapter, the present one will preview a few components (or “story capsules”) of this ideological vocabulary, with κύριος preeminent among those previewed. Like the other components, κύριος and other terms represent encapsulations of a pervasively imperial metanarrative, and thus they were readily adaptable as components of the narrative that Paul wanted to convey, a story of the dismantling of Death through Christ’s resurrection and royal accession. But they will also receive some early attention here because they illustrate the narrative function and character of soteriology within Paul’s theopolitical Christology.

The Narrative Function of Paul’s Terms:

Responding to Recent Christological Views

What narrational roles and functions do Paul’s theopolitical images fulfill? Some of the most weighted terms he borrows in 1 Corinthians 15 to describe Christ and his reign are titles (or images closely related to titles), such as κύριος, βασιλεύς, and βασιλεία. Titles have been acknowledged as christologically significant, but the value of titular Christology has been disputed; while its totalizing effect can be mitigated, as will be seen momentarily, the “tyranny” of a titular approach seems particularly inapt for a discussion that engages the dominating claims of an empire. A better option would be to view the terminology in question as pointing to a narrative orientation, initially as a part of Rome’s propaganda, but adapted by Paul to serve his gospel story instead. Recent studies of Jesus’ soteriological “job descriptions,” even those that account for imperial and colonial influences on Christology,⁷ still fail to assess the *soteriological*

⁷ See for instance Adams, *Coherence of Christology*, and Reiger, *Christ and Empire*; the latter is not concerned as Adams is with soteriological “job descriptions” *per se*, but criterial approaches logically

redeployment of christological terms in a theopolitical discourse. How did Paul distinguish between Christ's βασιλεία and that of Caesar? Was the apocalyptic promise of Christ's dismantling of rival powers to be done on earth as it was in heaven? The forthcoming answers to these questions concern the correlation of the lord and his subjects, of the saviour and those he saves; the phrasing of the questions themselves reveals the relationships between the (often) ontological concerns of Christology and a narratival understanding of soteriology.

1) Titular Christology

Titles are significant descriptors in, and for, Christology. The discipline takes its very name from the most frequent New Testament designation for Jesus, namely Χριστός, not κύριος/*dominus* or υἱός/*filius*. The discipline itself is a scholarly convention: those who practise it collectively theorize and cultivate a unified field of Christology, rather than producing multiply divided tracts of “kyriology,” “filiology,” and so on. True, it can be useful to isolate temporarily from the New Testament corpora a particular thread, brand, or pattern, based around the use of another christological title, such as a “Son of Man Christology.”⁸ But the priority for Pauline Christology, and for

undergird many studies of Christology, whether undertaken from systematic or biblical theology: it is difficult to discuss *the matter of who Jesus is* without also engaging *the manner in which he fulfilled and/or fulfills said role*. To cite an example drawn from 1 Corinthians, Gunton (*Yesterday*, 73) finds that Paul in 1 Cor 8:6 “ascribes to Jesus an equality of status with the Father alongside a difference of function.” Gunton’s point is valid, but the present argument would suggest a *narratival* context in which Paul developed such an emphasis on the divine activity of the Son vis-à-vis that of the Father.

⁸ Perrin (*A Modern Pilgrimage*, 55–56 and throughout the surrounding chapter, 41–56) significantly includes “Christ” as one of several alternatives (the others being those using “Son of God,” “Son of David,” and “Lord”) to the pattern of the “Son of Man” that he traces, which he claims holds a more “secure place in earliest Christianity.” An earlier point of Perrin’s, noting the influence of factors in the life of the early church upon Christology (45–47), should be kept in mind as we consider imperial contexts.

biblical Christology in general, rightly remains on the anointed office⁹ and person of Christ, even though this means encountering a problem that Gordon Fee has already noted: distinguishing between the person of Christ (Christology) and the work Christ did as saviour (soteriology) was not something that Paul tended to do.¹⁰ Fee compensates by admitting this ambiguity into his work with Paul's use of titles, especially the "former title-turned-name," Christ, and the "name-turned-title," Lord.¹¹ That is, what God-in-Christ does informs who God-in-Christ is, and vice versa. Jesus' titles and names are important because they reflect the complex combination of roles that he plays in Paul's theology.¹²

But the value of titular Christology has been disputed as arbitrary, even tyrannical, or, when mishandled, as minimizing the importance of differentiation between closely related but distinct titles (such as the Jewish/Hebrew "Messiah" and the Greek "Christ").¹³ This arbitrary-tyrannical claim is the province of Leander Keck, whose arguments concentrate on the isolation and abstraction of titles.¹⁴ Kavin Rowe is right to

⁹ For the imperial aspect of the anointed office, especially in the kingship-centred psalms and noting the employment of εὐαγγελίζοντες in proclaiming royal accessions, see von Rad, *Old Testament Theology*, 1:318–24.

¹⁰ Fee, *Pauline Christology*, 1–2.

¹¹ Title-turned-name: Fee, *Pauline Christology*, 34, 37, 101, 108, 291, 341, 536 (in relation to the "basic narrative" [= redemptive history] of historical Judaism), and 558. Name-turned-title: 558–59, 562, 585. Fee says that Paul consistently interprets "Lord," which was already a confessional title for Jesus, as shorthand for YHWH/*Adonai*, so that Jesus is ascribed the divine name as his title; for instance, he argues that the construction of Philippians 2 is such that Jesus should be understood as having been given "*the name-above-every-name Name*" as a title (397, italics his). The titles are of course interfluent: Χριστός, "even when it is a simple identifying referent, always harks back to the historical reality that the earthly Jesus lived and died as the Jewish Messiah, whom God raised from the dead to be Lord of all," 528.

¹² As when Fee comments (*Pauline Christology*, 107) on "the role that Christ as messianic king and Son of God plays in Paul's understanding of present and future eschatology" in 1 Corinthians 15.

¹³ As Fee (*Pauline Christology*, 535–36, 536n11), amid comments on the oxymoronic nature of a "crucified Messiah" in Gal 3:13, accuses Werner Kramer of doing. Also see 544–46 on the developmental similarities between *Christ* and *Son of God* as messianic titles in Paul's epistles.

¹⁴ Rowe (*Early Narrative Christology*, 23–24 and especially n84) offers a concise analysis of Keck's principal objections to titular approaches to Christology (especially in Keck's "Toward the Renewal," 370, and "Christology of the New Testament," 196–97), namely that such approaches overinvest meaning in individual words, miscarrying in instances where no titles or a plurality of titles appear, and short-changing

insist that the totalizing effects of an exclusively titular Christology can be alleviated by allowing titles to remain as integrated components of the narratives that make them intelligible; contemporary interpreters should be permitted and encouraged to concentrate on the same emphases that the biblical authors did.¹⁵ But the “tyranny” of an exclusively titular approach seems ill suited to engaging the dominating claims of empire, particularly when one is attempting to meet the needs of contemporary readers who may have been blinded to the totalizing connotations of the titles and hermeneutics of their native imperial settings. This totalizing effect can be glimpsed in the political-rhetorical strategy of redeploying significant titles from a nation’s heritage in order to legitimate its present rule, as when Rome’s emperors adopted the familial cognomen *Caesar* as a fictively hereditary title, or when Abraham Lincoln’s name and legacy are rhetorically deployed in contemporary American culture.¹⁶ By appealing to the memory of decisive figures and moments from a nation’s proud past, these exemplary titles grant instant legitimacy and minimize potential dissent—but in isolation, out of context, they are only ciphers, and a study that constrained itself to such titles alone could only hint at the

the christological and hermeneutical significance of Old Testament themes and of the Incarnation itself. As Rowe responds in several different phrasings, a narrative treatment of a given title largely circumvents these problems so long as it does not try to locate the entirety of the narrative’s Christology in that specific title.

¹⁵ Rowe, *Early Narrative Christology*, 24, 24n85–87. Specific to the Isaianic context from which it will be shown later that Paul drew to fuel his critique of imperial Rome, Hays (*Conversion*, 48) is similarly concerned by the misalignment of contemporary and ancient hermeneutical interests. Postmodern interpreters must constantly remind themselves, he argues, “that Paul might have alluded to Isaiah for purposes other than those that have propelled much modern scholarly investigation”—a word of caution for any New Testament discipline, not least imperial-critical studies.

¹⁶ On the deliberate deployment of Lincoln’s name in the title of a lobbying organization, see Kuo, *Tempting Faith*, 45–46; the name has also been used elsewhere for automotive brands and in military and institutional nomenclature. A disillusioned Kuo later recounts the similar treatment of God’s name as a rhetorical device, part of an “evangelical shorthand” used by lobbyists and speechwriters to convey the trappings of Christianity (59–61, 265). Skilfully used, such national and/or religious title-names can further an empire’s colonizing ideology, invoking the name as a cipher for a historical moment in which the empire was somehow “saved” (e.g., the ending of their respective nations’ civil wars by Augustus Caesar and Lincoln, the emancipation of slaves enacted by the latter, or the role of divine providence in either series of events), *without* necessarily including the full story or any liberating ramifications it may have.

national-soteriological narratives to which they belong. In a similar respect, it would be preferable to seek out part of Paul's Christology in a series of titles and supporting images, interrelated and situated within the sociologically informed, narrative context of his soteriologically significant story.

2) From Titular Christology to a Narrative Soteriology

If traditional approaches to titular Christology seem too hegemonic, there is another direction in which the probing of these images can still be effective. Rather than isolating the images as solely propositional or rhetorical statements, one can begin to recover and restore their meaning by remembering their placement and function in the narrational or confessional¹⁷ settings to which they belong. Biblical soteriology, inasmuch as it requires a narrated correlation between a saviour and those who are saved, is a theological discipline with a confessional narrative at its heart; one could even say that it is a discipline that *consists* principally of narrative. The biblical metanarrative is of course richly polyvalent, presenting such a multitude of soteriological story motifs that some have asked whether it can be accurately or ethically labelled a metanarrative at all.¹⁸ At issue here is not so much Scripture's canonical cohesion as its narrational coherence, the integration of its diverse representations of salvation and the way in which it comes about.

¹⁷ On avowals to YHWH as brief confessional formulae, from initial "content with a minimum of historical subject-matter" to encapsulated "confessional summaries of the saving history" YHWH brought about, see von Rad (*Old Testament Theology*, 1:121–28); he terms a summary such as Deut 26:5–9 as a *credo*, not an invocational or petitionary prayer but "out and out a confession of faith," 122.

¹⁸ See Brueggemann, *Old Testament Theology*, 558–59, who admits that his concerns about the hegemonic nature of biblical-metanarrational claims are offset by the texts' critical stance toward "the regnant metanarratives of our society"; he settles "for the judgment that the Old Testament is not a metanarrative but offers the materials out of which a metanarrative is to be construed."

One way of thinking about these soteriological narratives is to picture their christological titles *as conceptual, narrational roles to be filled*, as “job descriptions.” For example, Marilyn McCord Adams images Christ as the defeater of horrors—evils of such magnitude that they overwhelm their victims and often their perpetrators as well. The way in which she construes the narratives of the canonical Gospels implies a question in which her christological and soteriological perspectives merge: “What does Christology look like, if rescuing the world from horrendous evils is the Savior’s principal job?”¹⁹ As seen from this christological-soteriological perspective, God’s decision to intervene in history, to rescue human beings from otherwise irreparable brokenness, makes the Incarnation conditionally necessary: Christ’s co-participation in and defeat of horrors is how the “soteriological plot resolves.”²⁰ Adams’ defence of this model is philosophically vigorous, but the soteriological story itself is relatively simple, and not unlike other models of the atonement. “If all of these jobs are to be done by a single agent,” she acknowledges at the outset, “coherence demands that the various job requirements be compatible with one another.”²¹ She sees in the biblical witness “competing conceptualities and plot lines” regarding the soteriological characterization of the Incarnation, all of which are cruciform: in the eyes of the New Testament writers and first readers, Jesus’ actual career becomes the definitive standard for what the Messiah, the Son of Man, the Suffering Servant, the Davidic king, the Lamb of God, and the exalted, sovereign lord should look like.²² In each of the atonement images nascent in the New Testament, Jesus embodies a role in a salvific story—but what has yet to be fully

¹⁹ Adams, *Coherence of Christology*, ix.

²⁰ Adams, *Coherence of Christology*, 189.

²¹ Adams, *Coherence of Christology*, 17.

²² Adams, *Coherence of Christology*, 15–16.

appreciated is the role the Roman Empire plays in the background of many of these stories, and the degree to which the empire's own narrative intrudes upon the metanarrative and theological whole.

In biblical Christology, and perhaps even more noticeably in soteriology, names, titles and related images do more than merely denote conceptual roles; they *point to or signify a narrative orientation, acting as metaphors and ciphers* for larger complexes of meaning.²³ Adams hints briefly at the cultic, legal, and apocalyptic categories into which many of the New Testament's atonement models fit, and from which historical Christology and soteriology have often drawn as sources for their models and names.²⁴ In the biblical tradition, names were often given in order to commemorate a significant story or event;²⁵ taking or giving a name was an act of dedication, an act of adopting a part in an inner-biblical story.²⁶ The Tetragrammaton YHWH, itself a *chiffre* that God reportedly chose (Exod 3:14, 34:6) to mark his identity and saving/sending agency, accumulated

²³ One can argue that a given cipher, while limited in evocative capacity, is capable of carrying more narrative freight than does Rowe, who insists "that κύριος is, for Luke at least, dramatically more than something like a christological cipher" (*Early Narrative Christology*, 24n85). When tracing a story within an epistolary (and thus not necessarily or primarily narrative) text, one might assert that christological ciphers can actually be assigned an *increased* dramatic/narrative significance, *as long as they remain situated in context* there.

²⁴ See again Adams, *Coherence of Christology*, 15–16; and in greater depth, Boersma, *Violence*; Beilby and Eddy, eds., *The Nature of the Atonement*; and Rieger, *Christ and Empire*. A concise dialogue on Christus Victor as one of these principal historical atonement metaphors will follow in a later chapter, in relation to Philippians 2; the current discussion is intended to draw primarily upon a biblical soteriology rather than on historical ones, insofar as such a distinction can be made.

²⁵ Knowles, *Tell Me*, 29–80. Also see Goldingay, *Old Testament Theology* 1:334–40, on the revelation of and in the name YHWH and its etymology and function: "When God goes on to promise to bring the people out of their miserable state in Egypt into the promised land, that is not really an extra revelation, but a spelling out of the first revelation in the concrete terms required by a particular situation" of imperial captivity (337).

²⁶ Carr and Conway (*Introduction*, 46) discuss a similarly adoptive act in relation to the biblical narrative's *events*, rather than its names, titles, and images. In synchronic parallel with contemporary Americans who claim the Puritan Thanksgiving holiday as their own, Israel collectively commemorated the exodus as a story that "celebrated the god, Yahweh, who had liberated 'them' from Egypt, and it expressed their confidence that this exodus God would also fight on their behalf against their contemporary 'pharaohs,' the local city-states." This story was redacted "by much later Israelites rereading the story of exodus in relation to ever new 'pharaohs': the 'pharaoh' of Solomon and his kingdom, the 'pharaoh' of Assyrian and Babylonian superpowers, etc."

surrogates (e.g., “The LORD”; *Adonai*) which were intended as glosses on the name יהוה/YHWH, “purely functional ‘shorthand’ meant to honor the name, not to replace or improve on it.”²⁷ The nouns used to complement or substitute for YHWH are metaphors, in which “the noun as metaphor always stands in a tenuous and proximate relation to the One to whom it bears witness.”²⁸

Contingent upon YHWH’s character and redemptive storyline—and, in some cases, the role of empires that invaded this storyline—human names were understood as encoded references to the story of what God had done (or hopefully would do) in the life of the named individual and the lives of those who named him or her.²⁹ One seldom-noted pair of examples is laden with theopolitical significance: in 2 Kgs 23:34 (// 2 Chr 36:4), Pharaoh Neco installed a new client king in Judah, changing his name in the process from Eliakim (“God raises [up]”) to Jehoiakim (“The LORD raises up”). In 2 Kgs 24:17, it was Nebuchadnezzar who reportedly installed and rechristened Mattaniah (“Gift of the LORD”) as Zedekiah (“The LORD is [my] righteousness”).³⁰ In these instances it falls to imperial overlords to remind Judah’s leaders of who they were, specifying which patron-god the client king serves in the first case (YHWH, not the more generic *El*), and redefining the king’s relationship to his LORD in the second. The ambivalence is present, though easy to miss: these names celebrate and participate in the history of God’s saving activity, but they are given not by God or by parents, but at the darkest “cliffhanger” moment of that story, by the leaders of Israel’s most enduring enemies.

²⁷ Seitz, *Word without End*, 257.

²⁸ Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 230, and 230–33, concerning the function of nouns as metaphors for an elusive, divine Subject: “the claim of the noun is always held loosely,” 232. See Seitz (*Word without End*, 251–62) for discussion of the foundational problem, namely “*whether we are entitled to call God anything at all*” (252, italics his).

²⁹ Knowles, in an earlier (2008) manuscript of *Tell Me*, 74.

³⁰ Name meanings as supplied in the 2008 ms of Knowles, *Tell Me*, 78–81.

Christological and soteriological titles also *convey narrative elements*. They identify roles that God has played or will play, pointing to a plot, a storyline, whether the plot is a short and simple one, or a summary of all of God’s attempts in history to redeem his people. “The Biblical ‘doctrine’ of God is primarily a recital of what he has done together with the inferences drawn from it,” according to G. Ernest Wright, where “‘doctrine’ in this sense has its own special and peculiar character...which necessitates the use of narration to depict what is involved.”³¹ Jesus’ own christological question to his disciples—“Who do you say that I am?”—implies a soteriological counterpart: What do you say that I do?³² Peter’s response, whether the simple ὁ χριστός of Mark 8:29 or the more elaborate ὁ χριστὸς ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ θεοῦ τοῦ ζῶντος of Matt 16:16, indicates that what he has observed *Jesus doing* informs his confession of who this *Christ is*. As Christopher Seitz phrases a more Trinitarian instance of the narrative content of confessional titles, “‘Father, Son, and Holy Spirit’ emerges from a particular story. Our use of this language preserves that particular story and the God who brought it and us into being, making us his people and allowing us to be faithful witnesses who call upon his name.”³³

These and other confessional examples also indicate that soteriological titles and images can begin to *evoke narratives* in non-narrative settings. If they suggest and signify narrative orientations and convey narrative elements, then even when transplanted from their original contexts, titular images should (ideally) still recall the stories from which

³¹ G. E. Wright, *God Who Acts*, 106.

³² Mark 8:29 // Matt 16:16 // Luke 9:20; also see Jesus’ response to John the Baptist’s followers at Matt 11:2–6 (or Luke 7:18–23, with Isa 61:1–2 and Luke 4:18–19 as backstory), in which it is Jesus’ agency in enacting the climax of God’s redemptive story that confirms his messianic identity. Manning cites Schillebeeckx’s point about Jesus’ question, namely that all readers must answer the “Who do you say...?” for themselves. See Schillebeeckx, *Jesus*, 171–72, quoted in Manning, *Stranger to Self-Hatred*, 23–24.

³³ Seitz, *Word without End*, 262.

they originate. Even when the original narrative has been obscured, the terms that once belonged to it still encapsulate parts of a larger story; when recombined, the latent narrative content can be educed once more. If one designates such titles and other images as *story capsules*, a point from James Barr comes into play. Barr foregrounds biblical story itself as a motif, one that should not be confused with, or substituted for, theology; but it can *form* the “raw material” for theology to develop, it can *contain* important theological elements, and it can *imply* theological ramifications.³⁴ Not all Scripture takes the form of narrative, Barr concedes, but the broader category of story still applies as a framework enriched by the addition of “non-narrative parts.”³⁵ Even in these settings, the images can summon and recollect for those who hear and read them the storied roles they have elsewhere played.

The challenge for the inner-biblical dynamic described thus far, in which names and titles are understood to refer narratively to the saving activity of God, is that the dynamic is never exclusively inner-biblical. The story and its capsules are not narrated in theopolitical isolation, nor would they have been read (nor should they be read today) in that way. The biblical narrative’s principals and stock characters could reprise their roles on more than one stage in the story, but the writers and auditors also drew in elements from other metanarratives and *their* images. When the reappropriated images and their narratives were theopolitical in character, so too were their evocative capacities and their effects when transplanted into a biblical-theological enterprise or a component of the inner-biblical narrative, as when the language of the Assyrian Empire’s treaties with its

³⁴ Barr, *Concept of Biblical Theology*, 354 (italics his). Barr earlier accentuates myth, legend, and revelatory “divine speech” as features of biblical story, operating alongside of strictly historical elements (346).

³⁵ Barr, *Concept of Biblical Theology*, 356.

vassal states shaped the exclusive pledge of love and allegiance to God as the LORD in Deut 6:4–6,³⁶ or when Paul drew both that confession and Rome’s imperial vocabulary into his gospel. In extending such confessions of loyalty to God to include the resurrected Jesus as κύριος, Paul was engaging in *counter-colonization*, offering a liturgical alternative to the ideology with which Rome settled and asserted its ownership of colonies such as Corinth. It was precisely in the worship and the name of this Lord Jesus (and no other) that Paul reappropriated the tradition of imperial contexts against which the inner-biblical narrative operated. By evoking the confessional memory of YHWH’s lordship, articulated over against any and all rival claims to that title, and by redirecting the recitation of this confessional worship toward the risen Lord Jesus Christ, Paul countered the claim that Caesar was lord.

This reappropriation of the narrational-evocative capacity of theopolitical images is pivotal to the life and propagation of Paul’s theopolitical gospel, to the spoken and written proclamation and reception of the crucified and resurrected Christ, as articulated in creative congruence with Israel’s scriptures and in responsive tension with Paul’s imperial environment. The capacity is pivotal not because the gospel is a “non-narrative” part of the biblical framework like those to which Barr alludes, but because the message evokes, resolves, and clarifies many of the constituent parts of the whole that preceded it. Does this presume a gospel that is itself as narrative in character as it is theopolitical? Some have asserted that the gospel has a metanarrational reach that embraces all of Scripture: John Goldingay, for example, pairs the core story of the gospel in the New

³⁶ As noted in Carr and Conway, *Introduction*, 128. Also see Bartholomew and Goheen, *Drama of Scripture*, 66–68, who note that Israel’s missional vocation was given in contexts of covenant that resembled but also contrasted with vassal treaties of the Hittite empire, as the Torah originated with God’s *deliverance*, not his *conquest*, of the people.

Testament (John 3:16) with that of the Old (Isa 52:7–10, to the LXX of which Goldingay credits the prototypical Christian coining of εὐαγγελί(ζ)ομαί) to infer a “biblical gospel” or “macronarrative,” encompassing—in an echo of Barr—even “nonnarrative” parts such as the Pauline epistles.³⁷ Francis Watson takes a different tack, maintaining that “the gospel according to Paul just isn’t a story,” and that “what Paul does *not* do is to incorporate his gospel into a linear story of creation and Israel as the end and goal of that story.”³⁸

But there *is* a narrative structure to the gospel, in at least as recognizable a sense as that of a broader “narrative substructure” in the Pauline corpus.³⁹ Paul does not often pause to unpack what he means by the gospel, though 1 Corinthians 15 does represent an exception:⁴⁰ here the reader sees not only Paul’s fullest outlining of the historical context of Jesus’ life and eyewitness testimonies to his risen appearances, but also a synopsis of his death and resurrection and a sequential layout of his impending arrival, his accession, the resurrection of those of his followers who have died, and his final defeat of Death. The basics of Christ’s death and resurrection can certainly be reduced to a singularity, as a shorthand form of the gospel message (1 Cor 2:2, “For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified,” where even the resurrection is only implied), a point that occasions debate between *punctiliar* and *linear* views of the

³⁷ Goldingay (*Old Testament Theology* 1:29–31) readily acknowledges that only *implicitly* is John 3:16 a “gospel.”

³⁸ Watson, “Is There a Story,” 232 and 234 (italics his), contra such arguments as Keesmaat, *Paul and his Story*. Over against the metanarrative views of the contributors to whom he responds, Watson (232n2) speaks of narratives in the plural, as he holds that Paul employed narratives with little attention to pan-biblical context.

³⁹ See the discussion in Watson, “Is There a Story,” 232 and throughout, and Horrell, “Paul’s Narratives,” 162–71, in response to Richard Hays’ seminal work on narrative substructure and John M. G. Barclay’s essay that precedes Horrell’s own.

⁴⁰ As Mitchell (“Rhetorical Shorthand,” 74) has it, the chapter constitutes “an example of the opposite literary tendency from shorthand: an expansion of the gospel narrative to respond to new questions.”

Christ-event.⁴¹ But one can still contend that the gospel according to Paul had what one might call a *partial* or *complementary* narrative structure, a stark outline that was not intended to be told independently of the preceding scriptural (meta)narrative(s). His gospel functioned as an overlay, which when overspread on Israel's scriptures would do just what an overlay does: it would add newly revealed details or instructions, augmenting (not overwriting!) the information below it, and reinforcing and equalizing the impression of the whole. Paul's gospel was not an independent story, but "story" remains the most agreeable term for speaking of the gospel's complementarily narrational form, especially in comparison and competition with other "stories" in first-century Mediterranean culture.

To return to the evocative story capsules comprising parts of Paul's evocative gospel: terms nearby the central images can *support* the narrative orientation observed above. They *expand* the story, conveying additional narrative elements, and further *substantiate relationships*: certainly those between titular images, but also those among characters and between the author and those who speak for him or her (narrator, characters, and the narratee whom the author invites into the story), and the reader, hearer, or interpreter, as the case may be. When Paul writes to the Philippian congregation(s) concerning the impending arrival of Jesus Christ as a saviour from heaven (Phil 3:20–21), images such as citizenship (πολίτευμα), control (ὑποτάξει), and "glorious body" (σώματι τῆς δόξης) provide the rhetorical, narrational, soteriological context for the titles of "saviour" (σωτήρ) and "lord" (κύριον). Taken together, the

⁴¹ That is, between those who hold that Paul viewed Christ's life, death and resurrection as a singular, coherent, saving action of God, and those who argue that he placed it as the climactic event (or series of events) in the biblical (meta)narrative(s). See Watson, "Is There a Story," 232n2, 239, and Horrell, "Paul's Narratives," 162–66, in dialogue with Barclay, Hays, J. Louis Martyn, and Rudolf Bultmann.

images begin to clarify the correlation between the saviour and the saved, the lord and his subjects. They hint at the backstory behind Paul's eager expectation. They fill out Paul's invitation to step further into the story he relates and participates in.

In continuity with the *evocative* and *invitational* capacities of Paul's story is a *performative* dimension: how does the apostle expect his audience's response to play out in community? What will a narrational-participatory response look and sound like? These questions, like the explorations of the narrational evocation and conveyance of meaning that preceded them, are indebted to the continuing maturation of postliberal theology and its promising integration into biblical studies: the legacy of Karl Barth, John Howard Yoder, George Lindbeck, Hans Frei, and Stanley Hauerwas continues to unfold in a growing appreciation for the *coinherence* of theology, ethics, and ecclesiology with relation to "the world-constituting story of God's self-giving revelation in Jesus Christ."⁴² For example, four chapters before Paul exhorts the Corinthians to render thanks to their victory-giving, salvation-bringing God (τῷ δὲ θεῷ χάρις τῷ διδόντι, 15:57), he tells them one way in which that thanksgiving should function in their congregation: in their *remembrance* of their Lord's new covenant (11:23–26) is a spoken *recital* of his death and a *reminder* of his resurrection as proof of his power over death. And in the shared recital of that death and resurrection was the basis of their communal identity and activity.

⁴² As described by Harink in *Paul among the Postliberals*, 14, mapping out the ways in which these and other theologians have influenced his own growth as well as that of Pauline studies; he singles out Yoder as having done postliberal (and "postconservative") theology before the term was coined (15). One of the most promising aspects of Harink's study is the way in which it incorporates the recent contributions of (theo)political studies of Paul's Roman imperial environment as one of several important perspectives, complementing such interests as "New Perspective" work on Paul's "Judaistic context," Paul as apocalyptic theologian, and Hays' redefinition of the faith(fulness) of Christ (15–18).

Coherently, then, the constellation of theopolitical images in Paul's story *evokes* narrational meaning, *invites* participation, and *informs* the ecclesial praxis born of that participation. What is the reader/hearer/interpreter to do with this appeal? Responses will hinge on what the ancient or contemporary audience knows (or cares!) about the images and concepts Paul evokes, as well as their knowledge and comprehension of the source(s) of the images. Ancient auditors knew lordship, allegiance, salvation, power, and control in much the same way that Paul did, though he turned these and other terms that legitimated Roman rule on their collective ear. But contemporary North American audiences are more likely to know allegiance as something to be pledged to a flag;⁴³ as helpful a term as "discipleship" is, it connotes little of the authority over life and death held by the ultimate lords of the first-century Mediterranean.⁴⁴ Similar comments could be made in comparing Roman and early Christian understandings of salvation with today's abstract conceptualizations of what it means to "save" (particularly in an age of electronic banking and writing, as in the case of word-processed documents like this one) and "get saved."

The evoking/inviting capacity of theopolitical story capsules is closely related to the evocative and invitational power of the story in which they appear, whether at the level of specific stories or the whole of Scripture. Phrasing the gospel as a story that invites participation is not new—as A. Katherine Hankey's 1866 hymn puts it, "I love to tell the story, for those who know it best / Seem hungering and thirsting to hear it from

⁴³ See for instance the various wordings of the pledge to the "Christian Flag" (all of which echo the cadence of the American Pledge of Allegiance) listed at http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Christian_Flag, accessed June 6, 2010.

⁴⁴ Here two pledges drawn from the modern fantasy genre may serve as alternative, voluntary oaths of allegiance and service, for the sake of comparison. Ursula Le Guin has a character swear, "To my Lord I give the hours of my life and the use of my death" (*Rocannon's World*, 74); Tolkien's Aragorn pledges his sword to the Ringbearer's service with the words "... if by life or death I can save you, I will" (*Fellowship*, 224; the 2001 film used "protect" instead of "save").

the rest”—though postmodernity has dictated changes in the way the old, old story is retold and the invitation given, often in terms that prioritize highly relational, narrational hermeneutics.⁴⁵ Such hermeneutics actually clarify the twofold pledge of allegiance that Paul’s gospel implicitly asks the reader to make: a confessional and theopolitical pledge, to the authority of the Χριστός and κύριος whose story the text helps to sustain; and an imaginative and moral commitment to its literary world, to the story and biblical text themselves and to the presidency of the author therein. When Paul recalls earlier in 1 Corinthians (4:15) that “in Christ Jesus I became your father through the gospel,” he captures both of these pledges, both kinds of relationship. Neither his relationship to the Corinthian disciples nor theirs to Christ makes sense apart from the other. This pair of commitments will resurface in the exegesis of 1 Corinthians 15, as it will be shown that Paul’s phrasing of Christ’s parousia invites the audience’s participation in the story by confirming the confessional-theopolitical and narrational ways in which they belong to Christ, rather than subscribing to the imperial story of their surrounding culture.

This leads to one final claim about the narrative function of names and titles and their supporting casts of images: they substantiate not only interpersonal relationships, but articulations of economic and immanent Trinitarian relationships as well. This is especially evident in contexts that present daunting challenges to the confessional-theopolitical and narrational commitments foregrounded above. As Dorothee Soelle reflects, the horrors of the World Wars sowed mistrust, on the part of some, of God as father, ruler, and sustainer; the pre-war “innocent trust” those titles required no longer

⁴⁵ See the whole of Bartholomew and Goheen, *Drama of Scripture*; or the emphasis on salvation-as-story, woven through the history of God’s covenant-making with his people, in Christopher Wright, *Salvation Belongs*, 97–116 and especially 96–98 (with Paul as one who “lived in that biblical-narrative world. When he thought of salvation, he thought of the Old Testament story”); or the theme of canonical books as love letters from God to the reader in Crabb, *66 Love Letters*.

seemed possible. There was still considerable appeal in “the power of powerless love” shown by the self-giving, suffering Christ, but the oppressive impression of God’s paternalistic titles troubled many postwar theologians, including Soelle herself. “Now that God is, for me, no longer imprisoned in images of ruler, king, and father,” she writes, “I want to reconcile my faith in Christ with my new understanding of God the creator.”⁴⁶ In 1 Corinthians 15, the relationship between God and Christ is primarily that of father and son, but Paul’s anticipatory narrative includes a regime change in 15:24—“when He hands over the kingdom to the God and Father”—that runs counter to the natural (imperial) order of succession, complicating ancient and contemporary interpretative expectations of sonship and fatherhood. It would be anachronistic to attribute to Paul the postwar angst over paternalistic imagery, but what contemporary interpreters learn from Paul’s soteriological deployment of christological imagery should cause them to question what they believe about the immanent and economic relationships within the Trinity, even in passages such as 1 Corinthians 15 where the role of the Spirit remains largely implicit.

3) Moving between Christology and Soteriology

The preceding discussion anticipates a shift from Christology to soteriology, not to the exclusion of the former, but simply a narrowing of focus to concentrate hermeneutical attention on the latter. As was noted earlier, following Fee, to separate Christology and soteriology is not faithful to Paul’s thought; it is unnatural to dissociate

⁴⁶ Soelle, *To Work and to Love*, 5. Also see 24–25, where she finds the dominating structure of Christian orthodoxy captured in *dominus/κύριος*: the image of God as “the coercive, feudal ruler . . . who rules over his subjects lends itself to sustaining worldly forms of oppression and exploitation” which Soelle attempts to remedy by advocating a “nonimperialistic” understanding of God as creator and liberator.

one from the other in the Pauline corpus.⁴⁷ Yet it can be productive, for more than one reason, to pinpoint soteriological questions within the story Paul tells.⁴⁸ To over-generalize momentarily, a soteriological focus allows one to put aside concerns with Christology's ontological issues, in favour of God's *actions* and *relationships* that populate the story. To ask Paul about the story of his Χριστός and κύριος is also to ask about the relationships that connect the Christ to the God who has anointed him, the Lord to his people, and the Son to his Father.⁴⁹ Then too, homing in on soteriology addresses a point that Rome knew well, for the empire also claimed to have saved the world. The rivalry between these two soteriologies is not always apparent in the New Testament, but Paul exposes it here in 1 Corinthians 15 for those with eyes to see.

The (Neglected) Soteriological Deployment of Imperial Terms in Paul's Christology

Paul and the terms he redeployed in 1 Corinthians 15 were known to the authorities. The Roman Empire used these terms in scripting its own ideological narrative, its own soteriological discourse. The contention here is that Paul's deployment contrasts deliberately with the empire's story, both at the level of individual word-images or "story capsules" and also at that of the story, or script, as a whole. There is a dual

⁴⁷ But see Fee's references to "soteriological texts" in *Pauline Christology*, 538, e.g.; one can assume he means only that such texts are *primarily* soteriological in orientation, rather than exclusively so.

⁴⁸ Witherington (*Paul's Narrative*, 2n1) parts company with Hays regarding the distinction "between narrative, which has to do with a story in a text, and story, which is also a narrating of events but in oral form"; he opts for "the term Story with a capital S to refer to the whole of the drama Paul reflects on, both in and beyond the text of Scripture." But how is the Story being told orally? Witherington risks confusion here, as his point that Paul's Story depended on inter-testamental oral traditions (2) does not address the use of oral "Story" with regard to Paul. Even if this Story represents more than just the appropriating of Old Testament narratives and nonnarrative portions (2–3), if these are "interrelated stories comprising one larger drama" (the story of a "world gone wrong"; that of Israel's role in that world; of Christ, arising out of God's redemptive role in those stories; and of Christians in a world beginning to be made right again), how can Witherington differentiate between oral story/Story and written narrative?

⁴⁹ Taking a cue here from Rowe, *Early Narrative Christology*, 21: "To put the simple question 'who is the κύριος?' to the Gospel of Luke," writes Rowe in a statement indebted to Keck, "is to elicit a complex answer, one which involves both Jesus and God and not one without the other."

appeal to treating these rival soteriologies as *scripts*. First, it illuminates the manner in which the “script” of Paul’s gospel interacts with the inner-biblical, narrational script that precedes and informs his gospel, as well as the discernible themes, such as prophetic scripts, that exert a particularly strong influence upon its message. Second and more germane to the present study, the competing narratives were not just stories of what God had done in Christ or what the Roman gods had done through the Caesars, but cultural *discourses*, intended not only as articles of faith but as values to be lived out faithfully. That is, there were *performative* dimensions to the two narratives referred to respectively here as Paul’s *master story* and Rome’s *story of mastery*.⁵⁰ These labels are themselves rhetorical constructs that risk domesticating their respective discourses: the Roman Empire’s soteriological story consisted of more than just the hard-won control of its domain, while for Paul, the lord of his gospel had just as decisive a claim on lordship as the Caesars did. Paul’s story as it appeared in his letters was not openly subversive, but the holistic script entailed a normative ethic at odds with that of the empire, an ethic that called readers to a faithful response to a high-fidelity God.

What was the character of the script Paul co-produced and directed? First, it was *confessional, foundational, and functional*: *confessional* in the sense of discrete

⁵⁰ The term “master story” is borrowed and adapted from Gorman, but setting it over against the Roman imperial “story of mastery” is deliberate, as it is posited here that the clash between the stories is rooted in their mutually exclusive salvation claims. Bartholomew and Goheen make closely related observations concerning such narrational-salvific competition between the biblical and other stories at work in the postmodern world: “there is more than one basic story competing in our culture for acceptance and use in making sense of our lives today” (*Drama of Scripture*, 19); “the dominant story of modern culture is rooted in idolatry: an ultimate confidence in humanity to achieve its own salvation” (197). The rivalry of master stories also has postcolonial applications, as voiced by Kwok Pui-lan. Kwok (*Discovering*, 72–73) applies Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak’s construct of “master discourse”—the discursive portrayal of a colonized people’s identity, re-inscribing their marginalized otherness—to the Gospels, concerning the manner in which Matthew and Mark re-inscribe the Syrophenician woman’s low social status. Kwok’s concern would perhaps be better directed at the history of the story’s reception, as the New Testament documents were hardly the “master discourses” of the time and sociopolitical situation in which they were written. This study will also occasionally use the term “master’s story” to suggest that the story and its participants *belong* to the master, i.e., Christ himself.

expressions of theological conviction, *foundational* to the lives of those who heard and affirmed the story by making the decision to participate in it, and *functional* in forwarding unmistakably soteriological portrayals of God's redemptive activity in Christ.⁵¹ Second and less readily apparent, it was a *prophetic* script, in that its inner-biblical quotations and allusions functioned as resolutions that unfolded in the (dis)course of Paul's letters, but also as coded critiques of the abuse of power.⁵² The prophetic-script "performance" of Paul and his congregants is not as transparent as such public acts as the Triumphal Entry and the Temple expulsion,⁵³ but those who had ears to hear would have picked up on Paul's reframing of the prophetic tradition's critique of the scripts of empire.⁵⁴ In anticipating the full realization of Christ's accession, Paul is offering not an

⁵¹ Like son, like father: R. N. Longenecker (*New Wine*, 30–32) has the New Testament's early confessional materials reflecting a "narrative substructure or story in which Jesus Christ is the main character," the portions of which were intended by the writers to remind their auditors "of the basic story about Christ, which they not only knew but also made the foundation of their lives"; while Longenecker does not explicitly call the story's portions *soteriological* here, that is plainly part of what he means to highlight as the "functional" aspect, along with "*the act* of confessing [ὁμολογέω; italics his] Jesus and one's relation to him."

⁵² Horsley and Silberman, *The Message and the Kingdom*, 70–73: biblical prophecies, both those that support the royal-messianic and the "anti-kingly ideal," later functioned as "scripts," representing their respective traditions. To enact one of those scripts was to present an ideology in visual symbolism, an ideology that could serve to critique the ruling order. For example, given Herod's "fondness for public spectacles," Jesus' Triumphal Entry would have appeared "an intentional and skillful political parody... bitterly mocking the messianic pretensions of the Herodian family." With his donkey and peasant clothing scripted by Zechariah, "Jesus was parodying the kind of procession that would have been familiar to the people of Jerusalem."

⁵³ See Horsley and Silberman, *The Message and the Kingdom*, 76–78, on the imperial/theopolitical context of Jesus' "dramatic prophetic performance" in the Temple; also see the commentary in *Voice*, 84, at Mark 11:17: "Jesus was confronted with a scene that shocked him. So He made a scene Himself. But He wasn't merely acting out; He had a message and, like the prophets of old, this message was better seen than heard."

⁵⁴ Contemporary imperial scripts are not the main focus here, but those theologians who continue to muster the biblical witness in response to abuses of power can be seen as maintaining this same tradition of prophetic critique, as when Soelle (*To Work and to Love*, 106–8) speaks of the violence against nature and the marginalized that appears to be "written into the industrial script" of the nations of the global west and north. For a more interpersonal application of "scripted" behaviour, see Manning, who in *A Stranger to Self-Hatred* suggests healing through meal-sharing, deliverance through the telling of stories and parables, liberation through prayer, and a reclamation of integrity and Christocentric self-acceptance as biblical routes out of the "script" of hating both self and others.

imperial concept of salvation, but a salvation that acknowledges and responds to the empire of his day.

The challenge presented to postmodern readers is that of recognizing such responses in Paul. They must be willing to make and keep a difficult commitment: to learn to discern the imperial forces that affected the imagery of the inner-biblical narrative and the story of Jesus that Paul inherited, the theopolitical terms he used to develop these stories, and the ways in which such forces continue to shape the stories of the readers' own lives. For Paul's gospel contains a multiplicity of interwoven narratives, competing for the reader's attention. This discursive rivalry complicates their narration and the participation and allegiance they invite. First, there is the inner-biblical, theological narrative of God working to save his people from enemies, be they oppressive empires, the threat of death, or the people's own patterns of sin; second, the gospel narrative Paul reports that he received and taught, that of the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus; third, the theopolitical imperative of Rome's empire; and fourth, the narrative(s) of postmodern North America, the world contemporary readers must negotiate. That world is where the collision of the second and third of these soteriological narratives—Paul's "master story" and Rome's "story of mastery"—must play out every day, in conceptual battles that challenge the readers' previous allegiances.

But the collision between these theopolitical soteriologies began in the first-century world that Rome believed it owned. It began when Paul adapted Rome's soteriological terms to serve his master's story, a strategic redeployment left largely untreated by previous christological and soteriological studies. The discursive rivalry between Rome's story of mastery and Paul's master story is not immediately evident

now, nor was it so when Paul first began the telling. Even if Paul's faith "was destined to overthrow the pagan tyranny of Rome and bring about a new society," the empire of his day still "stood at the very center of the civilized world."⁵⁵ Paul's counter-colonization, his alternative society of people living in faithful allegiance to Jesus as Lord, had to begin with an inner-biblically, prophetically funded challenge to the empire's soteriological narrative. That is why Paul, describing the "victory" won by the crucified and resurrected Jesus in 1 Corinthians 15, deploys images often used to illustrate Roman imperial rule, such as κύριος ("lord"), βασιλεία ("kingdom" or "empire"), παρουσία ("presence," or "arrival"), and νίκη ("victory"). Engaging significant elements of the Roman theopolitical context suggests new dimensions for communicating Pauline soteriology, transforming contemporary understandings of salvation (σωτηρία), discipleship, and allegiance to Christ as κύριος and σωτήρ. The next chapter marshals additional resources for this engagement by reviewing previous scholarship concerning the theopolitical images that shape 1 Corinthians 15.

⁵⁵ Quoting from the narrator's diachronically privileged introduction to Stanley Kubrick's *Spartacus* (1960).

III

The State of Paul's Soteriological Language, Part Two:

Recent Interpretations of 1 Corinthians 15

Introduction

Before pressing further into the question of how Paul adapts Roman imperial theopolitics to illustrate God's saving activity through Christ in 1 Corinthians 15, it would be advisable to survey briefly some of the previous scholarship on the passage itself, especially with respect to theopolitical terminology. The preeminent concern of this chapter is to foreground the relevance of sociopolitical (and particularly imperial) context, with special reference to the analysis of the theopolitical terms Paul employs and the socio-rhetorical scenarios in which he deploys them. But at least two self-directed caveats are in order here.

First, one must recognize that a "socio-rhetorical scenario" or situation is a scholarly construct, or, more accurately, a scholarly attempt to reconstruct a given situation. One cannot know for certain what Paul and Sosthenes were thinking at any given moment during the crafting of the letter we know as 1 Corinthians. Neither can one gauge with precision the effect that their compositional choices had upon the Corinthians, nor in what ways the Corinthians' choices affected *them*. Choosing to explore Paul's soteriological redeployment of imperial imagery through the lens of socio-rhetorical criticism represents only a best educated guess about the relationship between the social setting and soteriology of one fractious sector of early Christianity.

Second, one cannot expect every commentary to make as much of imperial Rome's influence on Paul and his respondents as will be the case here. For all its theopolitical power and influence, Rome was by no means the only influence on Paul's thought. 1 Corinthians 15 exhibits the apocalyptic character of the apostle's faith and worldview, so the salient aspects of Jewish apocalyptic are worth noting with reference to the ways in which Paul unfolded them. As one is deliberately engaging in dialogue with a chapter where Paul puts on a clinic of rhetorical skill, one also needs to identify salient features of first-century Greco-Roman rhetoric as Paul employed them. In selecting the contextually educated method of reconstruction that is socio-rhetorical criticism, one should also endeavour to learn more about the likely connections between the literary world that Paul and the Corinthians *created through their correspondence* and the sociocultural world in which they *lived*. That world was pervasively Roman (but not exclusively so, notwithstanding Roman propaganda's claims to the contrary!), so one should also be sure not to neglect studies that are socio-rhetorical in method but imperial in their concentration.

So it is necessary, even desirable, to review in this chapter commentaries from multiple exegetical emphases. Because Paul in 1 Corinthians 15 borrowed and adapted elements from apocalyptic, from rhetorical argumentation, from his broader sociocultural world, and from the Roman theopolitical ideology around which that world orbited, a study of that chapter should assess the work of previous critics who have concentrated on one or more of these influences.

This chapter does not seek to tear down the solid foundations laid by other students of Scripture; rather, it presents an opportunity to follow Paul's advice, building

jointly and responsively in the common task of nurturing and edifying fellow believers (1 Cor 3:5–11), remembering that “no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ.”¹ This chapter of commentarial review is a discussion, a cooperative venture, in which newcomers may discover that they are only honing the edges of earlier interpretations from the modern critical period. If one echoes or refines a question another interpreter has asked, then one participates in the co-negotiating and co-interrogating of Scripture, hopefully allowing Scripture access to interrogate and negotiate oneself in turn.² Put topically, this study need not focus upon the integrity, unity, epistolography, or authorship of 1 Corinthians, in part because other capable scholars have written (and will continue to write) excellent studies on these and other issues. All that is required at this juncture is to discuss the thematic and discursive influences that shaped Paul’s world and his argument, with the two previously selected portions of 1 Corinthians 15 (15:20–28 and 50–58) taking centre stage.

This freedom of exegetical and critical movement offers the liberty to address questions that may seem at first to have little bearing on imperial contexts. One example comes from Paul’s own negotiation of Scripture in these passages: if he quotes or alludes to texts drawn from the inner-biblical narrative (as highlighted in the last chapter) that speak powerfully about God reigning as sovereign, whether directly or indirectly through a messianic regent, then that citation’s assertion of sovereignty may well have implications for discussing and confronting empire(s). Another example comes in the

¹ 1 Cor 5:11, TNIV. Unless otherwise indicated, biblical quotations below are also from the TNIV.

² It is understood that *interrogate* and *negotiate* are ambivalent, potentially dangerous words, carrying violent and occasionally imperial connotations as they do in today’s politically charged world. But the choice of words is deliberate, intended to encourage the deep searching of biblical texts and their theopolitical ramifications, accompanied by a readiness on the part of readers to allow the texts’ own questions to search them as well.

form of Paul's choice of words that inform his use of Roman theopolitical vocabulary. If *καταργεῖν* ("to dismantle," or "to render inoperative") is the word Paul uses to talk about what happens to rulers inimical to God's imperium, and if even *some* of those powers are human and imperial in nature, then the vocabulary with which Paul describes their fate becomes sociopolitically, theopolitically relevant. Other examples will emerge amid the engagement with the commentators below.

For convenience, the interpreters are grouped into five provisional categories to underscore their particular exegetical emphases. The first grouping is generally *initiator*, comprised of deeply thoughtful examples of exegesis, as supplied by Fee and Thiselton, who will serve here as preparatory guides to the interpretative threads that inform the rest of the discussion. The other four categories, as introduced above, are *apocalyptic* (represented by de Boer, Brown, and Holleman), *rhetorical* (Pogoloff, Saw, Eriksson, Heil, and Ackerman), *socio-rhetorical* (Barrett and Conzelmann), and expressly *imperial* (Witherington and Horsley). Again, these foci are not mutually exclusive: analyses of rhetorical structure require attention to the apocalyptic timbre of Paul's subject matter in 1 Corinthians 15, while Ben Witherington's consciously socio-rhetorical focus on Rome's imperial eschatology actually places him closer to an empire-critical voice like Richard Horsley. Though the commentators in each group are presented in chronological order of publication, this categorical review is intended to show neither an exhaustive listing nor a historical progression in interpretation so much as an array of readings, with each set of renditions hinting in variegated ways at the theopolitical content that still remains uncharted.

Initiatory Orientations: Fee and Thiselton

Gordon Fee's extensive work in 1 Corinthians shows the significant depth and ongoing refinement of his theology. This refinement process offers Fee's readers multiple interpretative options for consideration, particularly with regard to the epistle's theopolitical elements. As will be the case with many of the interpreters reviewed below, what follows is a synthesis of Fee's views, focusing in his case on such aspects as the identity and fate of the "rulers" who appear in 1 Corinthians 2 and 15, the series of theopolitical and eschatological events that unfold in the latter chapter, and Paul's Christology and soteriology in 1 Corinthians vis-à-vis the roles of God as Father and Christ as Son and Lord.

As he treats the competing forms of wisdom in Corinth in his 1987 commentary, Fee avers that Paul "does *not* refer to what is fascinating the Corinthians: wisdom that belongs strictly to this age and its rulers, who are already 'coming to nothing.'"³ Fee understands *rulers* to "include those responsible for the crucifixion," but the term also extends to "those to whom the Corinthians would especially give deference,"⁴ whether because of their purportedly superior knowledge or their social status within Corinth's system of local, provincial and imperial patronage. If Good Friday and Easter jointly signalled these rulers' failure, their final undoing comes with the parousia (1 Cor 15:23). Fee divides the meaning of this event into a "political sphere" and a religious one,

³ Fee, *First Epistle*, 101 (at 1 Cor 2:6, italics his), referring to the "eschatological" verb, καταργεῖν (103). Fee reconstructs a positive definition for what Paul has in mind by wisdom here: with "*a crucified Messiah as its assumed content*, Paul's present concern is to explain the *nature* of this wisdom, which made it impossible for those in pursuit of merely human wisdom to recognize it as such" (102, italics his). That the failure of the (imperial?) rulers was one of *perception*—that is, that they not only crucified the Lord of Glory, but that they failed to recognize his manifestation as a saving act of God—should perhaps give pause to postmodern readers who may be blind to the effects of empire upon their own hermeneutics. This point will be revisited during the analysis of Brown, below, and again at the outset of chapter four.

⁴ Fee (*First Epistle*, 104) notes that the resurrection itself signals the "failure" of those responsible for Christ's death.

meaning respectively “the arrival of a ruler” and “the epiphany of a deity,” of which Fee prefers the latter here.⁵ He also underscores the importance of the δεῖν at the beginning of 15:25, as it points to the necessity of Christ’s reign—and, by extension, the defeat of death.⁶

Faced with a task more synthetic than commentarial in “Toward a Theology of 1 Corinthians” (1993), Fee pits Paul’s focus on the familial language of “father” and “son” against Greco-Roman polytheism (e.g., “one God, the Father,” over against the “many gods” of 1 Corinthians 8) and foregrounds soteriology as the letter’s primary theological interest (i.e., more so than Christology). He argues that from 2:8 onward, the title “lord” denotes the inheritor of the glory that rightfully belongs to him and his people.⁷

Anthropologically, human fallenness takes on an apocalyptic and cosmological shape, given Paul’s eschatological framework. Developing his interpretation of καταργεῖν, Fee puzzlingly portrays death as being both destroyed *and* “rendered helpless” by the resurrection.⁸

Pauline Christology: An Exegetical-Theological Study (2007) allows Fee to reconstruct Paul’s teaching on the person and atoning work of Christ, first seeking the Christology that emerges from each Pauline epistle, then working topically, synthesizing his findings. He investigates 1 Cor 15:23–28 as one of several loci “reflecting the role

⁵ Fee, *First Epistle*, 753; one could counter-argue that there is too little distinction in the language of religious and political parousias to justify such a division, which would have seemed unnatural in the first century.

⁶ Fee, *First Epistle*, 757.

⁷ Fee, “Toward a Theology,” 44.

⁸ Fee, “Toward a Theology,” 57–58. Responding to Fee in a separate essay, Charles Cousar encourages Fee to sharpen his depictions of Paul’s theological and ideological challengers, offering his own interpretation of 1 Corinthians’ theological statements through the lens of Paul’s refutation, or the statements’ “critique of the ideology that opposes Paul” (Cousar, “The Theological Task,” 93). Cousar also seems dissatisfied with Fee’s portrait of the everyday reality of death in Paul’s world; even if Paul rhetorically exaggerates his experiences of persecution, the lives of believers were still at risk (15:30–34) in Christ’s struggle to destroy rulers (102).

that Christ as messianic king and Son of God plays in Paul’s understanding of present and future eschatology.”⁹ The necessity and the inevitability of the resurrection of believers are “predicated by the Adam/Christ contrast” that leads into this passage; “Adam’s sin let something loose in the world—death—that is contrary to God and his nature,” an enemy whose undoing began with Christ’s resurrection and will end with that of believers.¹⁰ Within the context of the “larger event” of Christ’s parousia, Fee again combines possible translations of *καταργεῖν*, as Christ “abolishes all the ‘powers’ that stand against him” and “destroys all the ‘powers.’”¹¹ Translational choices are of course secondary to Fee’s christological points: Paul’s free interchange of *father* and *son* in terms of ruling over the βασιλεία; that such familial language suggests a “functional subordination” concerning Christ’s messianic role, but a subordination that nevertheless allows the cosmos to find “its meaning once more in the final glory of the *one* God”; and that “when the currently reigning messianic Son has, by life, destroyed the final enemy, death, that marks the end of the Son’s messianic functions. So he in turn returns to his prior ‘role’ as eternal Son.”¹²

Fee is always a thought-provoking dialogue partner, especially when he has sufficient space to meditate upon Pauline Christology’s underlying concerns—the divine roles and prerogatives Paul ascribes to Christ throughout 1 Corinthians, for example, or the role that Paul writes for him throughout his letters that incorporates him into each of the central features in the “basic narrative” of Israel’s history.¹³ Fee’s attention to literary

⁹ Fee, *Pauline Christology*, 107.

¹⁰ Fee, *Pauline Christology*, 108–9. Adam’s sin is only implied by Paul at this point, though 1 Cor 15:56 and the later intertext of Rom 5:12–21 certainly strengthen the implication.

¹¹ Fee, *Pauline Christology*, 111–12.

¹² Fee, *Pauline Christology*, 110–14, 545 (italics mine).

¹³ Fee, *Pauline Christology*, 134–42, 536–43.

and theological contexts is thorough and careful, although one might part company with him concerning the need to abstract “soteriological texts” from Paul’s letters, especially from the portions thereof that concern Israel’s narrative;¹⁴ the very acts of compiling the texts and categorizing them as “soteriological” arguably removes them from Paul’s overarching soteriological story. And Fee only rarely devotes space to theopolitical contexts in Paul’s gospel story, Rome’s ideology, or the inner-biblical narrative, even at points therein where empires played (and continued to play, in Rome’s case) significant roles in the soteriological story. This leaves a significant theopolitical gap in Fee’s responses to the questions of *who Christ is* and *from what enemy or danger he saves those who follow him*.¹⁵

Anthony Thiselton’s extensive dealings with biblical hermeneutics are clearly displayed in his commentary, perhaps the most exhaustively detailed ever written on 1 Corinthians in English. He devotes little attention to Paul’s appropriation of Rome’s dominant narrative, but his facility with the theopolitical images that populate that narrative proves helpful in further resolving the shape of the narrative itself. That is, Thiselton’s treatment of specific images, such as the kingdom and rulers that will concern this study again in chapters four and five, sharpens certain points—the conceptualization of enemy rulers as super-structural entities, for example, or the way in which the resurrection of the body entails a giving of life that ends the decadence of Death’s reign—that will become pivotal in re-reading Paul’s discourse on the resurrection and accession of Christ as a critical engagement with the theological imperative of Rome.

¹⁴ See Fee’s appendix of “soteriological texts” in *Pauline Christology*, 495–99; or, treated less extensively, in the narrational context of the Exodus, 538.

¹⁵ Fee’s note comparing the appellation of Caesar and Christ as saviour (*Pauline Christology*, 402n114) is a welcome exception.

Thiselton begins his introduction with a section on Paul's Corinth: its salient geographic and archaeological features, its religious pluralism, and its socio-economic situation of intensely competitive status-seeking and contempt for those without social standing, comprising a picture that Thiselton calls an "embarrassingly close model of a postmodern context for the gospel in our own times, even given the huge historical differences and distances in so many other respects."¹⁶ Corinth's commercial importance made it a strategic place to plant a church, a fact that initially seems at odds with Paul's often counterintuitive tactics. For instance, the apostle eschewed the professional status of a rhetorician (a position which might have forced him into marketing the gospel as an intellectual product) in favour of menial artisanship.¹⁷ To develop Thiselton's point, this constituted a provocative choice to move *down* the social status-seeking ladder: every time Paul reminded his correspondents of his rhetorically powerful career choice, those tempted by the prospect of upward mobility were forced to consider his secession from the norms of imperial society and the gospel story that explained it.

As for theopolitical terms, including those Paul adapted from Rome: the "rulers of this world order," whom Paul introduces in 2:6 as "doomed to come to nothing," Thiselton interprets as incorporating sociopolitical structures that transcend "the sum of their parts" without necessarily involving forces external to the structures themselves.¹⁸ His multilayered view on the matter of rulers, powers and the like, then, falls deliberately in the hermeneutical tradition of Walter Wink, allowing him to conclude that "[s]tructural

¹⁶ Thiselton, *First Epistle*, 16–17.

¹⁷ Thiselton, *First Epistle*, 20–21, citing 1 Cor 1:18 (though 2:2 would seem a better fit for this point).

¹⁸ Thiselton, *First Epistle*, 224 and 231–32, 234, with the present tense employed in 2:6 to indicate that the powers' reduction has already begun. His equation of "doomed to be brought to nothing" and "*rendering inoperative*, i.e., annihilate" makes his subsequent reading of 15:24–26 (1222, 1231, italics his) sound uneven. "World order" is Thiselton's "nearest modern equivalent" for the *structure* implied in the Jewish apocalyptic use of *aeon* (232).

and corporate evil is addressed by the cross.”¹⁹ The “gospel”—a term also employed by the empire to circumscribe the “good news” of the Pax Romana—is in Thiselton’s analysis “more than the message of the resurrection, but not less. It denotes *the message of salvation*.”²⁰ He translates βασιλεία in 15:24 as “rule,” in an unexplained overlap with his rendering of ἀρχήν later in the same verse.²¹ Thiselton agrees with Witherington’s suspicions that Paul refers to the fatherhood of God as a reaction to Rome’s propagandistic portrayals of Caesar as *pater patriae*, but he rightly insists that this explanation does not exhaust the meaning of the reference; Paul is targeting *every* power here, not just the imperial ones.²²

In the course of Paul’s subsequent study of the resurrection *body*, Thiselton emphasizes the body’s incorruptibility as the divinely empowered *reversal* of its decay, the *publicly evident flourishing* of its life, and Christ’s (and the Spirit’s) activity within this process as “not merely *living* but *life-giving*.”²³ His attention to sociopolitical setting is at times inconsistent: he notes the use of the trumpet (15:51) as an apocalyptic instrument and for marshalling an army for battle, but sees no such context for Paul’s later use of the victory motif.²⁴ In his hermeneutic for reading the powers inimical to Christ’s rule, Thiselton is admirably comprehensive; so is his construction of his

¹⁹ Thiselton, *First Epistle*, 239, cf. 245–46 and 1231: the risen Christ’s exaltation includes a responsibility to “‘see through’ the consequences of his saving, atoning, and victorious work for the crumbling away not only of individual sin and guilt, but of the hugely serious structural and corporate evil which holds the alienated world under its sway as a consequence of its turning away from God.” On the comprehensive inclusion of “*every structural power*” as a Pauline expansion of apocalyptic thought in 15:24, see 1232.

²⁰ Thiselton, *First Epistle*, 1184 (italics his).

²¹ Thiselton, *First Epistle*, 1222; Conzelmann argues likewise for βασιλεία as *kingship* or *sovereignty* (see below).

²² Thiselton, *First Epistle*, citing Witherington, *Conflict and Community*, 304–5. Cf. Thiselton’s (*First Epistle*, 1235) citation of Héring (*First Epistle*, 168), who phrases the last enemy’s opposition to God as “the empire of death.”

²³ Thiselton, *First Epistle*, 1272, 1274–75, 1276–81, 1283, and 1296 (with the accurate but cacophonous descriptor, “psychosocial” flourishing).

²⁴ Thiselton, *First Epistle*, 1296, 1303–4.

commentary as a whole. The only theopolitically relevant feature that detracts from Thiselton's comprehensive scope is the common problem noted at the inception of the present study: he overlooks details pertaining to the socio-rhetorical applications of Paul's vocabulary, the relationships between the terms, and the soteriological significance of their initial imperial deployment and their redeployment by Paul.

Apocalyptic Perspectives: de Boer, Brown, and Holleman

Martinus de Boer's *The Defeat of Death* has garnered a seminal reputation among studies of 1 Corinthians 15, especially among those that major in Paul's apocalyptic thought. De Boer's thesis is that Paul's understanding of death and his apocalyptic eschatology are mutually informative.²⁵ That de Boer argues for a *christological determination* behind the apostle's apocalyptic eschatology makes his study all the more important to our own.²⁶ For de Boer, death is one component of a "cluster of motifs or expressions" developed in Jewish apocalyptic; death's personification in 1 Corinthians 15 "provides *prima facie* support for the hypothesis that death is for Paul a cosmological/apocalyptic power."²⁷ Death is the root issue throughout the chapter, a strong influence in the development of Paul's eschatology, Christology,

²⁵ De Boer (*Defeat of Death*, 7) admits here that "apocalyptic eschatology" is a modern scholarly construct, used only for analytic and comparative convenience. The same applies to other New Testament concepts; Holleman (*Resurrection and Parousia*, 98) even takes this line pertaining to the parousia.

²⁶ De Boer, *Defeat of Death*, 19. De Boer's work is indebted to, and a development of, earlier work by Ernst Käsemann and J. Christiaan Beker, with regard to the problem of death as an enemy defeated at the cross yet still powerfully active in the world. A new response to this problem, vis-à-vis the already-not-yet tension between resurrection and parousia in which "history has become an ellipse with two foci," will begin to unfold in the next chapter, in an attempt to account for the part that sociopolitical structures play in reading Paul's eschatology and soteriology.

²⁷ De Boer, *Defeat of Death*, 35 and 132, characterizing death as "an enemy alongside the principalities and powers" and "a cosmic monarch alongside sin" in 1 Cor 15:24–26 and Romans 5, respectively. Also see de Boer's summary of his findings on the portrayals of death in Jewish apocalyptic eschatology in *Defeat of Death*, 83–91.

and anthropology there.²⁸ But as such, it also informs the theopolitics of the apostle's narrational soteriology in a way that de Boer does not fully anticipate, as will be shown later in chapter five.

In what way is death's role so integral to 1 Corinthians 15, and is there a theopolitical aspect to that role? De Boer would likely affirm the second half of that question, insofar as the theology of Jewish (and Christian) apocalyptic is often deeply invested in and troubled by the sociopolitical climate in which the apocalyptic author lives and writes—as two of de Boer's principal Jewish apocalyptic sources, 4 Ezra and 2 Baruch, will attest.²⁹ As for the first half of the question, bearing the second half in mind with regard to Paul's theopolitical language: it is the “powers of this age” that have engineered the death of Paul's lord, and that stand to lose the most at the risen lord's parousia.³⁰ The role of the rulers, authorities, and powers here in 1 Corinthians 15 begins with the context of death's introduction in the creed at 15:3–5, even when the powers are not expressly named there. Attendance and placement at the parousia is decided by the order of resurrection ἐκ νεκρῶν, while Christ's “reign” (15:24) is characterized first by the *destruction* and/or *subordination* of hostile powers—not, it should be noted, their express *death*—and second by a temporal limitation, dependent on the subjecting of death itself and the transfer of sovereignty from Son to Father.³¹

²⁸ De Boer, *Defeat of Death*, 105, 113.

²⁹ De Boer, *Defeat of Death*, 74–78, 80–83. For more on 4 Ezra and 2 Baruch as apocalyptic works shaped by Rome's imperial presence, see Esler, “Rome in Apocalyptic.”

³⁰ De Boer, *Defeat of Death*, 106. Among the verses he cites in support is 2:2: if Paul is to proclaim “Jesus Christ and him crucified,” then death must be pivotal—but not final!—to Christ's identity, as in ἐκ νεκρῶν at 15:12, 20.

³¹ De Boer, *Defeat of Death*, 115–16. See 116–18 for de Boer's compelling argument for Paul's scriptural allusions in 15:24–28 as an echo of a christological creed or hymn with which the Corinthians would have been familiar.

Against de Boer's point that "Christ is to destroy, i.e., to render eschatologically and thus permanently powerless, the inimical cosmological powers of this age,"³² it can be argued that *subjecting* and *rendering powerless* do not require the extreme of *destruction/annihilation*, in part because of the emphasis that de Boer himself earlier placed on the powers' subordination.³³ It is difficult to subordinate that which is already destroyed! But by and large, de Boer's synthesis of Paul's apocalyptic eschatology and soteriology is hard to criticize; only with a more thoroughgoing investigation into the *expressly* imperial theopolitical dimension of Paul's apocalyptic theology with respect to death could de Boer have improved his insights.³⁴ One can still endorse, without major reservations, de Boer's conclusion that the gospel has "unmasked the fact that behind the universal human reality of physical dying there is an inimical, cosmological power at work, a power of 'this age' that as such is doomed for destruction."³⁵ Indeed, one can carry the image of unmasking further, in that Paul's prophetically rooted polemic against Death identifies the manifestation of this cosmological power strongly with the might of Rome, an alliance in need of unmasking. The remaining question of just how this unmasking is performed will be explored more extensively in our own exegesis.

Alexandra Brown reads Paul's soteriology in light of its intensified apocalyptic images. She focuses on portions of 1 Corinthians where Paul attempts to draw his audience members not only toward the cross, but away from their enslavement to the

³² De Boer, *Defeat of Death*, 121.

³³ De Boer, *Defeat of Death*, 115–18, cited above, and 122: "The notion of the placement of the enemies under the feet of Christ (v. 25) is also suggestive of military subjugation."

³⁴ As when de Boer brilliantly spotlights 15:25 as a *soteriological* application of Paul's argument, to the "effect that Christ's reign will *not* end *until* all the enemies are put under Christ's feet and that means until *death* is destroyed. Of divine necessity (δεῖ) he must *continue* to reign (βασιλεύειν, present infinitive) until that one is taken care of" (*Defeat of Death*, 123, italics his), but does not delve further into the theopolitical ramifications of Christ "saving" his resurrected people from death by reigning as an earthly king would do.

³⁵ De Boer, *Defeat of Death*, 138.

values of their surrounding culture: in a newly Christian apocalyptic perspective, “cosmic rulers struggle for sovereignty over, and are manifested in, human life. At Corinth, they seek sovereignty over the mind; with ‘wisdom’ on their front line of battle, they capture human perception and hold it hostage.”³⁶ This perspective from Brown rekindles a question sparked by the exegesis of Fee and Thiselton above, involving the nature of the powers’ manifestation. In terms of theopolitical and military ideology, the clearest manifestation of the powers was in the myth of the Pax Romana, the peace sustained by violent acts such as the crucifixion of potential insurrectionists like Jesus of Nazareth, whom Paul claims is the true κύριος. Intellectually, the powers are defined by their opposition to Paul’s interpretation of Christ’s cross. Their failure to perceive God’s wisdom in that event may be part of what triggers Paul’s evident distaste for rhetoric, which he might well see as a coercive exercise of power, characteristic of faulty “wisdom.”³⁷

Paul, Brown argues, “announces the doom” of these rulers of his age (τῶν ἀρχόντων τοῦ αἰῶνος, whom Brown, like Thiselton, helpfully expands beyond “*merely* human powers who oppose God’s plan”) by using the word καταργεῖν, a term with variable active and passive meanings, which Brown translates as “‘to pass away’ or ‘to abolish/to break the power of.’”³⁸ The Corinthians must recognize the “act” of the crucifixion (and resurrection!) itself, as the “rulers” surely did (1 Cor 15:1–3), but their

³⁶ Brown, *Cross and Human Transformation*, 116.

³⁷ Michael Knowles deserves credit for much of the phrasing of this point of contact between the political and intellectual manifestations of the powers.

³⁸ Brown, *Cross and Human Transformation*, 116 and n27, arguing (*contra* many translations, cf. the ESV, HCSB, NASB, NCV, NKJV, NLT, NRSV, and TNIV) against the “passive” meaning here. To clarify Brown’s confusing choice of words, she intends the “active meaning” but the *passive voice*, such that the “rulers are not just passing away, they are *being abolished*, and their power is destined to *be broken*” (116n27, italics mine). She cites, among others, Hays (*Echoes*, 134), who has καταργεῖν as “‘to nullify, to abrogate, to invalidate, or to render ineffectual.’”

captivation by “knowledge” puts them at risk of ignoring the meaning of the act and thus sharing in the disenfranchising of the rulers by the power of God.³⁹

So in Brown’s view, *καταργεῖν* carries and reveals the apocalyptic tone of its contexts.⁴⁰ The eschatological context is not generically apocalyptic, but Paul does employ the “essential theological perspective of that genre...characterized by expectation of a future reign of God,” which is already invading the present, a phenomenon validated in part by the revelatory experiences of Paul and others.⁴¹ These experiences extend to demonstrative, prophetic speech-acts, performative reminders of the substance and power of the gospel Paul has preached (1 Cor 15:1),⁴² acts that sustained his apostolic role when he was absent from the company of his followers (5:3–4; 2 Cor 10:11; Phil 2:12; cf. Col 2:5). Whether in an apocalyptic or a broader prophetic tone, Paul models the reception of and response to God’s saving gift of grace (*χάρις*, as in 1 Cor 15:10, 57) in his life and preaching.⁴³ And he “writes of the parousia as the time when *all* will be subjected, not to the world or to any ideology of the world, but to God.”⁴⁴

Joost Holleman devotes the majority of his book to one very specific problem, that of theological and phraseological coincidence between the eschatological

³⁹ Brown, *Cross and Human Transformation*, 119: “Paul is sharply ironic: the Corinthians’ ‘knowledge’ is no better than the rulers’ ignorance.”

⁴⁰ Brown (*Cross and Human Transformation*, 92 and n58) adds “to nullify” to her other definitions of the term, citing Fee (*First Epistle*, 83) in support of the eschatological contexts of its use.

⁴¹ Brown, *Cross and Human Transformation*, 13 and n1, citing 1 Cor 15:20–27 among other passages in the letter.

⁴² Brown (*Cross and Human Transformation*, 19), asserting that the self-referential reminder of 15:1 qualifies as a speech-act, cleverly labels Paul a “speech-act’ivist.” Also see Thiselton’s endorsement and further development of Brown’s point in *First Epistle*, 43–52.

⁴³ On Paul’s frequent use of *χάρις* and his application of it to his calling (15:10) and reciprocal response to God (15:57), see Brown, *Cross and Human Transformation*, 131n61, and Joubert, “ΧΑΡΙΣ in Paul,” 193–94. For ways in which specifically Greco-Roman cultural meanings of *grace* furnished the interpretative framework or “décor” of Paul’s use of the term, supplying some of the “basic soteriological building blocks” of Paul’s theology, see Joubert, 187, 194–200.

⁴⁴ Brown, *Cross and Human Transformation*, 169, citing 1 Cor 15:28. On Paul’s letters themselves as a form of (apostolic) parousia, encouraging a performative response, see Joubert, “ΧΑΡΙΣ in Paul,” 207–8.

resurrection and the parousia itself. First Corinthians 15 makes it clear that the two events are eschatologically linked, but the manner of their connection is what Holleman seeks to question through “traditio-historical” research.⁴⁵ Holleman asserts that soon after the first Easter, the early church’s teaching on the parousia and the resurrection of believers began to fuse, with Paul being the first to link them explicitly; the parousia is the “younger” tradition of the two, but viewed traditio-historically, the eschatological resurrection is “appended” to it.⁴⁶ The apostle’s fifteenth chapter also shows that some, if not all, of the Corinthian factions did not expect a physical, eschatological resurrection of the dead⁴⁷—or at least that their expectation diverged significantly from Paul’s own—though Holleman does not address the question of whether this was due to a primarily Jewish or Greco-Roman influence. What he does analyze, with considerable depth of insight, is the way in which Paul’s language here reveals the relationship between the resurrection, the parousia, and the believers themselves.

In 1 Cor 15:20–28, Holleman makes much of Adam and Christ as representative figures.⁴⁸ Paul’s “in Adam” language is exclusive to this passage: in his analogy, participation in death comes via unity with Adam,⁴⁹ but being “in Christ” signals a different type of participation, one that means identifying with Christ’s death and thus also with his life, in a foretaste of Paul’s argument in Romans 5–6. Romans 5 and 1

⁴⁵ Holleman begins by laying out the history of this research in *Resurrection and Parousia*, 4–31.

⁴⁶ Holleman, *Resurrection and Parousia*, 31, 76, and 123–24.

⁴⁷ Holleman, *Resurrection and Parousia*, 40–41.

⁴⁸ An emphasis that comes across more comprehensively when viewing Holleman’s table of contents as a whole. If one were to posit comparably representative figures from the Pauline churches’ Greco-Roman cultural surroundings, Aeneas and Caesar both suggest themselves, if not in the same sense of belonging (i.e., *in Adam*, *in/of Christ*) that Paul intends in 15:20–23; Aeneas, as father of the Roman race, is paradigmatically closer to Abraham, with Caesar’s sphere of control striking a similarly patriarchal chord. See Elliott’s discussion throughout *Arrogance of Nations*.

⁴⁹ Holleman, *Resurrection and Parousia*, 55–56, 56n6. That this language has no immediately obvious parallel also means that the corresponding “in Christ” reference is neglected in discussion of that phrase (15–16).

Corinthians 15 are not, strictly speaking, about original sin, but about two types of spiritual heredity⁵⁰—a fine but necessary distinction, as the first is characterized primarily not by patriarchal sin but by a patrimony of death, while the second is a joint inheritance of new life (cf. Gal 3:26’s “sons through faith in Christ Jesus” with an echo in Eph 1:5, the “spirit of sonship” in Gal 4:5–6 and Rom 8:15, and Rom 8:23’s anticipated adoption and redemption). The intertext of Rom 8:23 introduces the promise of adoption with the “firstfruits of the Spirit”; here the Messiah himself is the firstfruits, the ἀπαρχή, offered at the *end* of the harvest, to consecrate the part and by extension the whole.⁵¹

But co-resurrection was a new idea within Israel’s traditional expectations for God’s eschatological agent.⁵² The ideal of messianic kingship was more familiar ground, which may sustain the growth of Paul’s argument here. His kingship is not exercised “fully until the end of time” in an apocalyptic scenario of cosmic conflict,⁵³ but there is still a sense in which Christ is already “installed” as the lord of the κόσμος since God has raised him from the dead (Rom 10:9); that moment began the “elimination or destruction” (with καταργέω as “render powerless,” a term Holleman says that Paul favoured for speaking of “annihilation”) of the powers and the old eon that are coming to an end.⁵⁴ Given the debated use of the pronoun *he* in the narration of 15:25–27, however,

⁵⁰ Holleman, *Resurrection and Parousia*, 180–81.

⁵¹ Holleman, *Resurrection and Parousia*, 50–51.

⁵² Holleman, *Resurrection and Parousia*, 103–14, 185.

⁵³ Holleman, *Resurrection and Parousia*, 134n5. On the timing of Christ’s accession, see 12, 42–44: 1 Cor 15:23 “clearly shows that Paul meant a chronological order,” though *sequential* order might be a preferable phrasing, given that the order cannot be strictly “chronological” when time itself has ended.

⁵⁴ Holleman, *Resurrection and Parousia*, 61, 65, 65n1; also see Holleman’s remarks on “enthronization” as a focus of eschatological/apocalyptic thought (8).

who is it that subjects every rule(r), authority, and power? Holleman suggests that as God's regent, Christ the king is the personal means by which God exercises authority.⁵⁵

What of the epilogue to this story of accession to power, in 15:50–58? The unravelling of the mystery reveals something about the character of God, of Christ, of Paul's apocalyptic outlook, and of the resurrected people. This God is a god who re-creates the dead (15:51–52); the rule of his son and regent is characterized not just by the subjection of enemies in the earlier portion of the chapter, but by resurrection and the proclamation thereof.⁵⁶ Eschatologically, resurrection is “embedded” in the apocalyptic framework of the events Paul describes, while the scenario continues to find its rhetorical shape through Paul's need to refute opposing arguments.⁵⁷ Paul contrasts Corinth's evidently dualistic anthropology with an apocalyptic counterpart in 15:47–49, in the economy of which resurrected bodies have a higher priority than the resurrection itself.⁵⁸ As Holleman points out, it is only a small (but quite literally vital!) move from an inaugurated eschatology to seeing Jesus' resurrection as the start of the eschatological resurrection; as Christians reflect Christ, the value of the resurrected *person* supersedes that of the *concept* of the resurrection event.⁵⁹ Already united with Christ through his death and new life, resurrected believers are here glorified, transformed (cf. Rom 8:17,

⁵⁵ Holleman, *Resurrection and Parousia*, 58–60; for an extended translation that attempts to clarify matters by substituting assumed antecedents for the pronouns, see Fee, *Pauline Christology*, 113. When analyzing the complex relationship between God the Father and God the Son in this passage, it may help to remember a point made by Grant (*Paul in the Roman World*, 71–72). Philo, Paul's contemporary, established an interpretation of the Shema as stressing *two* divine powers, such that the “one God” YHWH was both θεός, the creator, and κύριος, the ruler—an insight Grant credits to Dillon, *The Middle Platonists*, 162, citing Philo, *Abraham* 121. Thus there was a contemporary parallel, if not a precedent, for early Christians who found two distinct identities of God in the Shema, as when Paul parses out “God our Father” and “the Lord Jesus Christ” in 2 Cor 1:2–3. For additional Philonic influences on Paul's argument, see de Boer, *Defeat of Death*, 99–102.

⁵⁶ Holleman, *Resurrection and Parousia*, 97, 145.

⁵⁷ Holleman, *Resurrection and Parousia*, 46, 46n4.

⁵⁸ Holleman, *Resurrection and Parousia*, 38, 38n2 (citing de Boer, *Defeat of Death*, 55–56, 65, and 132–238), and 145n1.

⁵⁹ Holleman, *Resurrection and Parousia*, 161.

Phil 3:21), and reunited with him in a way that surpasses even the metaphor of baptism.⁶⁰ Their response to the vicarious victory they are granted (1 Cor 15:57) must be thoroughly participatory (15:58).⁶¹

Rhetorical Perspectives: Pogoloff, Saw, Eriksson, Heil, and Ackerman

Stephen Pogoloff's comments on Paul's rhetoric are seldom specific to 1 Corinthians 15, but several are nevertheless worth repeating and developing here, the better to understand how Paul paces and contextualizes his master story. For all of Paul's efforts to avoid the coercion and faulty "wisdom" of rhetoric as practiced by his Greco-Roman culture, he remained a skilled rhetorician, and any attempt to grapple with the theopolitics of his story must also account for the method of argumentation (as Pogoloff and others set out to do) with which the apostle conveyed his critique of the church and its participation in the allure of imperial society.

Modern understandings of rhetoric, argues Pogoloff, are "truncated"; even if the text still possesses a continuing rhetorical function for readers today, such a function is different than that of its original situation.⁶² But the latter is still accessible, at least partially, so long as one remembers that the "rhetorical" Paul is not the same as the "historical" one.⁶³ The Corinthian community did not have unrestricted access to Paul, either, but the barriers for them were local, largely geographical ones. The whole point of

⁶⁰ Holleman, *Resurrection and Parousia*, 168, 171, 190.

⁶¹ That Holleman (*Resurrection and Parousia*, 194) pays comparatively little attention to the prophetic, apocalyptic, or imperial background of the victory itself may simply reflect an effort to remain consistent with his valuation of persons over concepts: as the assessment of the resurrected outvalued the resurrection in the abstract, so too might the value of those who have been granted a victory outweigh the charitably granted victory itself.

⁶² Pogoloff (*Logos and Sophia*, 11, 95) acknowledges that the value of rhetoric had already begun to decline under the Roman Empire, "as opportunities for free political speech were curtailed" (175).

⁶³ Pogoloff, *Logos and Sophia*, 80.

the rhetorical Paul was to make up for the physical absence of the apostle himself, of his preaching and teaching in person. Reading letters aloud in the assembly “helped erase the distinction” between oral and written dialogue,⁶⁴ though the practice could not dissolve the distinction completely. But that may be precisely why Paul chose such *performative words* as *present* and *absent*, to make his rhetorical presence known from a distance.

The manner in which Paul connects his presence and that of Christ to the Corinthians’ salvation throughout his correspondence with them illuminates his understanding of the significance of Christ’s parousia as an eschatological event. Pogoloff offers 2 Cor 10:10 as an important locus of Paul’s language of presence (“For some say, ‘His letters are weighty and forceful, but in person he is unimpressive and his speaking amounts to nothing.’ Such people should realize that what we are in our letters when we are absent, we will be in our actions when we are present”),⁶⁵ but the same argument could be made for Phil 2:12’s rejoinder to readers to work out their σωτηρίαν with fear and trembling, “not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence.” It would also apply, inasmuch as Paul would describe himself as Christ’s ambassador (2 Cor 5:20), to *Christ’s* own presence with and in the community, not least in the anticipation of mutual belonging and allegiance at his parousia (1 Cor 15:23).⁶⁶ So Paul’s pneumatology, with the Spirit as the means by which God in Christ was *already* present with the believers in the apostle’s presence (2:4–5) and absence, is an important factor in Paul’s rhetoric, his ministry, and the ambassadorial facet of his theopolitics, even if it remains largely in the background in 1 Corinthians 15 and this study. For a fractious,

⁶⁴ Pogoloff, *Logos and Sophia*, 51.

⁶⁵ Pogoloff, *Logos and Sophia*, 83; Pogoloff’s reference is expanded here to include 10:10–11.

⁶⁶ Holleman (*Resurrection and Parousia*, 98–99) holds that the parousia, as an isolated event, is a modern scholarly convention; he points to both imperial and generic uses of the term in ancient usage.

highly partisan community of believers, hearing a trusted teacher identify his own presence so evocatively with their God and immanent-and-expected lord, through the Holy Spirit, should have been a powerful rhetorical incentive.

But as Pogoloff observes, anticipating and celebrating the parousia of a crucified and resurrected lord was a counter-incentive, as the idea was rudely incomprehensible to Corinthian society. For Paul to “champion” the foolishness of the cross was to draw Corinth into a world where the “champion” is crucified, where what persuades are words about a subject unfit for polite conversation!⁶⁷ And drawing Corinthian readers into this world meant drawing them *out* of the world characterized by the Greco-Roman reverence for knowledge/wisdom and the status-envy and rivalry of Roman patronage.⁶⁸ Paul’s rhetorical insistence on knowing “nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified” (2:2), his likening of unclear or untranslated glossolalia to the language of barbarians outside the empire (14:11), his self-references as an “idiot” as a means of resisting the tendency toward competition among sophists—all of these are tactics designed to explode the pretensions of Corinthian society.⁶⁹ The same tactics might have a similar effect if they were taken seriously by our own status-conscious society, whether in the upwardly mobile meritocracy of free-market capitalism or the relentless need for novelty and attention in the social networking platforms of Facebook and Twitter, but

⁶⁷ Pogoloff, *Logos and Sophia*, 119–20.

⁶⁸ Pogoloff (*Logos and Sophia*, 121–26) cites ancient sources on the Roman understanding of wisdom (Strabo 8.6.23c, and Plutarch, *Life of Caesar* 47.8, the latter specific to Corinth) and maps multiple levels of intra- and inter-civic rivalry. Inter-civic and inter-provincial competition was a particular concern for the Corinthians, corporately and individually, as the citizens of the re-founded colony could not trade upon the historic reputation of the pre-Roman city; money did not buy good ancestry (124; cf. εὐγενεῖς in 1 Cor 1:26).

⁶⁹ The self-referential point is Pogoloff’s (*Logos and Sophia*, 150; cf. 228, over against the “full” status of the hubristic, as in 1 Cor 4:8). On the letter as a presentation of Paul’s “political and religious views in opposition to Corinthian leaders” and thus a partial window on the composition of the church, the city, and the need for political (not just religious) concord there, see Grant, *Paul in the Roman World*, 23–24, and more extensively 23–44.

even this is slightly beside the point. Pogoloff's signal contribution to the present discussion is the foregrounding of a Pauline juxtaposition: the immanent and imminent presence of the crucified and resurrected lord, over against the Greco-Roman hunger for wisdom and status.

Insawn Saw's *Paul's Rhetoric in 1 Corinthians 15: An Analysis Using the Theories of Classical Rhetoric* is a rigorous examination of Paul's argument, using a rhetorical-critical methodology with a strong comparative basis in the work of classical rhetoricians. The goal of Saw's technically proficient study is to show that Paul wanted to go beyond merely teaching correct doctrine on the resurrection, to the point where his deliberative rhetoric would enable him "to persuade the audience, the Corinthians, to continue in their work of the Lord."⁷⁰ With due respect for Saw's development of a historically and classically based rhetorical criticism, as well as the strength of any scholarly counter-arguments on Pauline rhetoric, it is the application of Saw's methodology to Paul that deserves attention here, especially for the manner in which it unpacks Paul's method of incorporating theopolitically relevant images into his argument.

Saw reserves most of his comments for the structure, arrangement, and intended effect of Paul's chapter-long discourse as a whole, rather than his choices of individual words, but his analysis of the rhetorical whole does have a bearing on our study of the socio-rhetorical parts. He notices Paul's use of *pathos* in and around our passages to reproach and provoke the Corinthian audience toward anger—anger that is sometimes directed back at the apostle as interlocutor (15:12, 35–36), and later directed toward death

⁷⁰ Saw, *Paul's Rhetoric*, 5; Saw later points to 15:58 as indicative of a deliberative rhetoric at work (189), as its "future-directed" cast meets with Aristotle's correlation of timeframes and rhetoric types (*Rhetoric* 1.3.4.1358b).

as a defeated enemy (15:55–56).⁷¹ Saw sees 15:50–57 as a *peroratio*, which “amplifies and recapitulates Paul’s arguments, and excites the emotions of the audience... So in peroration rings the victorious sound for the defeat of death.”⁷² That section gives way to a concluding exhortation, “on the assumption that the audience/reader will respond favorably” to his appeal.⁷³

Saw also unearths important stylistic figures that help contemporary interpreters to see how the letter was *read*, not just how it was written. Paul uses the technique of *antistrophe* (ἀντιστροφή, or *conversio*), the repetition of “a closing word or words at the end of several (usually successive) clauses, sentences, or verses,” which lends additional force to the repeated ideas.⁷⁴ One particular instance of antistrophe requires scrutiny here because it reinforces Paul’s interconnection of two scriptural passages that inform the apostle’s telling of the end of the master story. The phrase ὑπὸ τοὺς πόδας αὐτοῦ, repeated between 15:25 and 27, allows Paul’s echo of Psalm 110 to sound again during his quotation of Psalm 8. The repetition is at once an aid to the speaker, the auditor, the exegete, and the memorizer: the phrase comes easily to the presenter’s lips, sounds forcefully familiar and important to the hearer’s ears, cements the connection between the scriptural references in the exegete’s eyes, and comes easily to the student’s mind—a cadence helpful in efforts to commit Paul’s words to memory in Greek as well as English, the better to hear and know them as the Corinthians did.

⁷¹ Saw (*Paul’s Rhetoric*, 215) also finds provocations here toward fear (of the potential loss of salvation, at 15:2, 13–19; compare Eriksson, below) as well as pity (vv. 19, 30–32) and shame (vv. 34, 36).

⁷² Saw, *Paul’s Rhetoric*, 238.

⁷³ Saw, *Paul’s Rhetoric*, 238; in terms of rhetorical propriety (πρέπον), Paul’s role as “the spiritual father of the audience” makes it appropriate for him to repeat information (e.g., the narrative outline of the gospel), interrogate, and persuade, with the last action coming through clearly here in 15:58 (246–47).

⁷⁴ Saw, *Paul’s Rhetoric*, 251 and 251n151, citing examples in 1 Cor 15 of vv. 3–4 (with the repetition of κατὰ τὰς γραφάς), 25–27 (ὑπὸ τοὺς πόδας αὐτοῦ), 44 (ψυχικόν and πνευματικόν), 51–52 (ἀλλαγησόμεθα), 53–54 (ἀθανάσιαν), and 54–55 (νίκος).

By the time he turns to Paul's use of *apostrophe* (ἀποστροφή, or *exclamatio*), a rhetorical move in which “the speaker breaks off a discourse to address some person or personified thing either present or absent,” as Paul does when he taunts Death in 15:54–57, Saw has certainly made his point: Paul wants his auditors to respond to the threat of Death as he himself does, whether in specific instances (as with shared indignation, here in 15:54–57) or in the everyday decisions that produce an abundant life of working for the lord whose call Paul has embraced.⁷⁵ The antistrophic and apostrophic functions of the text are intriguing, although Saw's readers must combine his analysis with other studies in order to see the full ramifications of his interpretation of Paul.

Anders Eriksson, like Saw and other rhetorical-critical commentators, classifies 1 Corinthians as “primarily deliberative in nature,” with a cumulative appeal to the audience that plays upon the emotions of fear and hope.⁷⁶ But a point to keep in mind for a later stage of exegesis is that there may be reasons for these emotions beyond those that Eriksson considers, including the (often) imperial nature of the threat imposed by Death and its importance in the narrative for which Paul contends.

One fear-inducing form Paul's deliberative rhetoric takes that Eriksson does highlight in 1 Corinthians 15 is the repetition of the phrase “in vain” (κενός, connoting *emptiness* or *fruitlessness*), suggesting that believing and acting apart from Paul's teaching on the resurrection would be disadvantageous for his audience. When the

⁷⁵ Saw, *Paul's Rhetoric*, 261–62. Saw's analysis of Paul's use of personification within the apostrophic figure follows a few pages later (269–70). But for all of the rhetorical-critical insights he shares with his own readers, Saw's conclusions offer no significant changes to the findings of previous rhetorical studies. On Paul's deliberative provocation of his audience's indignation, compare Eriksson's brief accentuation of *indignatio*—hatred toward the accused party—as the accuser/prosecutor's goal in judicial (forensic) rhetoric, in Eriksson, “Fear,” 116.

⁷⁶ Eriksson (“Fear,” 117, appealing in n9 to Mitchell, *Paul and the Rhetoric*, 20–64, regarding deliberative rhetoric) asserts that Paul has by this point in the letter established his *ēthos*—his credibility, essentially—as the Corinthian church's founding apostle and authoritative prophet, as the grounds from which to make his emotional appeal here.

apostle repeats the phrase once more with feeling in the *peroratio* of 15:58, it underlines the risk to the Corinthians' salvation that Paul has implied over the course of the chapter.⁷⁷ Paul strikes the more hopeful note of the deliberative-rhetorical chord in 16:22 with the transliterated Aramaic prayer *μωρόνα θά* ("Come, Lord"); in conjunction with the parallel petition of the imperative *ἔρχου Κύριε Ἰησοῦ* ("Come, Lord Jesus") in Rev 22:20, this is a formulaic prayer for the parousia,⁷⁸ which in the case of 1 Cor 16:22 points back to 15:23.

Although it is only a short essay and thus not exhaustive, two critical points need to be raised in response to Eriksson's work. First, he seems to miss the sociopolitical impact of Paul's appeal to the Corinthians to imitate his example. One can agree with Eriksson that the goal of Paul's use of *pathos* here is to see that his "personal example becomes a model for the Corinthians to follow; his resurrection faith deserves to be imitated by them."⁷⁹ But in Corinth's deeply ingrained network of patronal relationships, the example of the absent apostle and his absentee lord would have been only one option among many for imitation in terms of social mobility, and not a particularly attractive one. Second, the excitement of the apocalyptic setting of 15:23–28, 51–57 should be highlighted as a further example of Paul's deliberative *pathos*⁸⁰—not that the apostle is being disingenuous in its use, but that he must know and want to communicate how exhilarated he is by the coming of his lord, the defeat of death and other inimical powers, and the prospect of seeing his resurrection hopes fulfilled.

⁷⁷ Eriksson, "Fear," 119.

⁷⁸ Eriksson, "Fear," 121–22. Though it cannot be explored here, the inherent risk of using the imperative to speak to one's lord should be noted.

⁷⁹ Eriksson, "Fear," 119.

⁸⁰ See for instance Witherington, *Conflict and Community*, 311, on the emotional appeal of 15:58 as a follow-up to "the equally emotive rhetorical questioning of death personified in v. 55."

John Paul Heil's recent work on 1 Corinthians merits respect in this study, in part because it represents a mirror image of the study's main interests: Heil tackles questions with regard to Paul's use of Scripture that anticipate our own discussion of the socio-rhetorical role the apostle gives to Roman theopolitical language. Some of the contextual correspondences are admittedly superficial. Heil sorts "explicit references" to the Old Testament—of which he counts six in 1 Corinthians 15⁸¹—from less easily discernible allusions and echoes; the present study also classifies certain elements of Paul's rhetorical arsenal as components acquired from other sources, but the references with which it works are less explicit, comprised of constellated terms borrowed from Rome's theopolitical vocabulary that become loanwords in Paul's.

Heil's attention is fixed on the scriptural references' rhetorical significance, rather than the theopolitical, but many of his points have theopolitical applications worth highlighting here. He accentuates the authoritative position of the Davidic king in Ps 109:1 LXX and 1 Cor 15:25, repeating a remark from Holleman concerning the close identification of the ruler with God himself.⁸² Paul's expansion from "your enemies" to "all enemies" is a simple observation but an important one,⁸³ as this consolidation of

⁸¹ Heil, *Rhetorical Role*, 13. Just what constitutes an "explicit" scriptural reference is a matter of interpretation; Heil counts Paul's reference to Ps 110 (109:1 LXX) in 1 Cor 15:25, for example, as so recognizable as not to require a more formal introduction from the apostle (206; also see Barrett, *First Epistle*, 358; and, earlier, Dodd, *According to the Scriptures*, 120–22). Addressing past controversy over 1 Cor 15:27a as a citation of Ps 8:7 LXX, Heil insists that the "essential elements" of the psalm are present (209), prompting questions about the constitution and determination of these essential elements: could they be compared with the "stable" elements of a narrative (as referred to in B. W. Longenecker, "Sharing in Their Spiritual Blessings," 73 and throughout, over against the piecemeal adaptation of a given story's "ideological nuggets")? What would be the role of citation in biblical story?

⁸² Heil, *Rhetorical Role*, 207, citing among other sources Holleman, *Resurrection and Parousia*, 60, concerning the ambiguity of the king's implied passivity in benefiting from (yet serving as the instrument of) God's defeat of his enemies. One wonders whether the psalm's affirmation of God's kingmaking role over enemies who interfered with his order would have caught the conscience of the king himself, cautioning him not to become imperial in his ambitions; what happens when the king himself becomes an enemy of God's order?

⁸³ Heil, *Rhetorical Role*, 208.

enmity will draw more support from our later study of the imperial vocabulary Paul redeploys. Heil renders καταργεῖται in 15:26 as “destroyed,” an instance of a divine passive verb.⁸⁴ Here he stresses Paul’s scenario of rival powers: God has “authorized and empowered” Christ to rule, in such a way that the personified death’s extension of power comes undone.⁸⁵ So the last of all enemies to be destroyed is not so much the phenomenon of death itself as the manifestation of the “power of death.”⁸⁶

At the end of 1 Corinthians 15, Paul and Heil continue to treat death as a personified “cosmic power,” consistent with Jewish apocalyptic.⁸⁷ Rendering humans “corruptible” was death’s claim to victory,⁸⁸ but what was once subject to death is now to be clothed and enveloped by God.⁸⁹ Concerning τότε γενήσεται ὁ λόγος ὁ γεγραμμένος, the lead-in to Paul’s paired quotations from Isa 25:8 and Hos 13:14, Heil cites Thiselton in discerning that “γενήσεται bears some such sense as ‘shall become operative’ or ‘shall come into force.’”⁹⁰ Neither interpreter makes the additional intuitive connection: when the combined prophecy becomes *operative*, death becomes *inoperative*! But Heil rightly emphasizes the changes Paul effects upon his source material, sharpening the taunt in 15:54–55 by repeating death as the addressee (rather than its “synonym” of Sheol/Hades) and stressing the taunt’s pronouns (e.g., “where is *your* victory”).⁹¹ Heil also plays up the instance of one apocalyptic power (death) using

⁸⁴ Heil, *Rhetorical Role*, 210.

⁸⁵ In the pivotal verse of a chiasmic structure that stretches from 15:24–28, in Heil, *Rhetorical Role*, 215.

⁸⁶ Heil, *Rhetorical Role*, 218.

⁸⁷ Heil, *Rhetorical Role*, 251–52, 252n14.

⁸⁸ Heil, *Rhetorical Role*, 254–55.

⁸⁹ 15:53–54a (anticipated by ὁ θεὸς τὰ πάντα ἐν πᾶσιν in 15:28?), in Heil, *Rhetorical Role*, 256–57 and 257n31.

⁹⁰ Thiselton, *First Epistle*, 1298, working in part from an interpretation belonging to Chrysostom; cited in Heil, *Rhetorical Role of Scripture*, 248n5.

⁹¹ Heil, *Rhetorical Role*, 250–51; cf. Horsley, *1 Corinthians*, 214.

another (sin) as its instrument or agent.⁹² The promise of future victory by the Lord for his followers demands the faithful response of working for him in 15:58, though Heil spares no attention for the theopolitical connotation of the title κυρίῳ in this power-rich setting.⁹³

David Ackerman's *Lo, I Tell You a Mystery* poses an intriguing outline for 1 Corinthians, in which the believers' past (chapters 1–4) and future (15) should shape the way they are to live in the present (5–14, and presumably 16). This temporally outlined dynamic permits him to draw out a paraenetic challenge Paul faces, with regard to the present study: the dominant ideology of the Corinthians' theopolitical environment opposed Paul's attempts to "resocialize" them into the pattern of the crucified and resurrected Christ. But Ackerman's study also recapitulates an assumption made frequently by the rhetorically oriented analyses already reviewed, namely that Paul depends upon the force of his own rhetoric to persuade his audience. As Paul expressly disavows such a dependency (1 Cor 2:1–13) by distancing himself, as was noted briefly above, from rhetorical coercion as part of the Greco-Roman paradigm, we will revisit the opposing assumption before turning our attention toward more socio-rhetorically focused studies below.

Ackerman scrutinizes Paul's use of rhetoric and paraenesis, though less technically (by design) than others such as Saw. At times this less technical approach leaves questions unanswered, as when Ackerman admits that even when Aristotelian

⁹² Heil, *Rhetorical Role*, 257–58.

⁹³ Heil, *Rhetorical Role*, 258–59. Heil's equation of "the Lord's work" (τῷ ἔργῳ τοῦ κυρίου) with *evangelizing* labour in 15:58 might be questioned: surely there are alternative ways of working for the Lord that cannot be reduced to evangelism! He refers to 1 Cor 3:8, 13–15, and 9:1 in support, which he reinforces at 259n37 with a point on work-as-evangelization from Collins, *First Corinthians*, 583. But Collins means considerably more by "evangelization" ("building up the community") than most contemporary uses of the term as a synonym for proselytizing.

rhetorical elements are borne in mind, one cannot know exactly how 1 Corinthians was “verbalized” when read aloud;⁹⁴ would the presence of what one might call “performance-enhancing” literary devices like *antistrophe* not offer significant clues in this regard? But Ackerman rightly observes that Paul’s argument is rife with irony and paradox, exhibiting highly developed rhetorical skill even in his reworking of materials that he may well have modified from other sources, such as 1 Cor 15:3–5: in this four-part creed, the apostle balances three historic aorist verbs with one perfect passive, “was raised.”⁹⁵ Ackerman cites Pogoloff’s connection between Paul’s use of rhetoric and his ambivalence toward status, and later combines a list of opposing attributes to show what he refers to as Paul’s “map of weakness.”⁹⁶ Paul’s prosody, while pivotal to Ackerman’s case, is a means to an end, namely the discussion of the apostle’s cross-centred theology and ideology. These themes will be discussed first in general, then with specific reference to Ackerman’s treatment of 1 Corinthians 15.

The crux of Paul’s hortatory problem is that of conflicting ideologies: the Corinthians too often fail to live distinctively within their environment and its encroaching influences.⁹⁷ Drawing supporting resources from Greco-Roman religious literature, Ackerman posits that as a city and as a part of the Roman οἰκουμένη, Corinth was fixated on death—a reconstructed setting from which YHWH emerges in contrast, as the *living* God.⁹⁸ The inescapable fact of death thus sets up a contested scene of

⁹⁴ Ackerman, *Lo, I Tell You*, 8.

⁹⁵ Ackerman, *Lo, I Tell You*, 38–40, 87.

⁹⁶ Ackerman, *Lo, I Tell You*, 63, 72.

⁹⁷ Ackerman, *Lo, I Tell You*, 24–29; see further the “hostile pagan environment,” 101, though this is insufficiently proven, with no attention to sociopolitical parallels between the conquest of death and Rome’s pacifying rule.

⁹⁸ Ackerman (*Lo, I Tell You*, 81–84) does not explain why he uses only literary sources to support his view of the social setting, or how the Greco-Roman literary imaging of death is significant; for instance, to select a question appropriate to the themes of 1 Corinthians 15, in what way is achieving Elysium an “escape”?

ideological control for Paul and his relation to his followers. As early in Paul's writing career as Gal 2:19, says Ackerman, death symbolized "the cessation of relationship. Paul saw himself moving from the sphere where sin is in control to the sphere of where Christ is in control."⁹⁹ Whether in Galatians, later in Romans, or here in 1 Corinthians, undergoing that cessation was part of identifying with the crucified Christ, an identification with which the church in Corinth evidently struggled. Ackerman adapts Brown's motif of *dislocation* to capture the worldview-disrupting effect of the cross, elsewhere citing Robert Hamerton-Kelly in alluding to the cross as a metonym for the gospel.¹⁰⁰ In the atonement effected by Christ, sin "became powerless."¹⁰¹ Freed from the mastery of sin and death, the believers whom Paul attempts to "resocialize" should live as though already fully transformed, in conformity with the ethic of the age to come, an age marked paradigmatically by love (1 Cor 13:10–12), an age when Christ "will conquer everything once and for all."¹⁰²

In Ackerman's interpretation of 1 Corinthians 15, the encounter with death amid clashing ideologies becomes focused on the resurrection, with the *reality* of death opposed by the resurrection's *power*: the resurrection of Christ (and the expectancy of the resurrection of οἱ τοῦ Χριστοῦ, 15:23) proves that "nothing, not even death" is

⁹⁹ Ackerman, *Lo, I Tell You*, 23.

¹⁰⁰ Ackerman, *Lo, I Tell You*, 40, 47 (citing Hamerton-Kelly, *Sacred Violence*, 65) and 51. In parallel with Brown's *dislocation*, see Harrisville, *Fracture*, and Smyth, *Trauma*.

¹⁰¹ Ackerman, *Lo, I Tell You*, 98, leading to a militarily titled but curiously apolitical section, "The Changing of the Guard" (100–1). But why the need to separate καταργέω's resulting powerlessness into an already-not-yet tension? Compare Harrisville (*I Corinthians*, 267), whose language is somewhat clearer, though he insists on a reading of καταργέω as *destruction* and limits the rule-authority-power complex to the demonic forces that traditionally oppose the messiah in Jewish apocalyptic: these "are already being crushed," while death is "as good as dead," rather than completely conquered as a *fait accompli*.

¹⁰² Ackerman, *Lo, I Tell You*, 144, citing 1 Cor 15:24–28. While the repetition of καταργέω does link this passage to 13:10–12, it is difficult to place them in the same context without explication as Ackerman does.

unconquered by him.¹⁰³ In the *refutatio* of 15:12–19, Paul destabilizes counter-arguments by showing that without the resurrection, death and sin remain victorious—i.e., Christ’s death had no efficacy in the lives of believers.¹⁰⁴ The analogy that follows between Adam and Christ identifies Adam with death, paraenetically encouraging a movement away from Adam’s sphere and toward Christ’s.¹⁰⁵ Contrasted typologically as a separate *existence* from that of Adam, belonging to Christ fits within a series of “moments” hinted at in this chapter, with full maturity achieved at the last, when death is finally defeated.¹⁰⁶ For Ackerman, the vocabulary the apostle employs in this chapter, such as the transformation of the $\sigma\omega\mu\alpha$ in the central theme of vv. 35–58, or the use of $\delta\acute{\omicron}\xi\alpha$ as a significant apocalyptic term,¹⁰⁷ is secondary to the main thrust of Paul’s argument, drawing believers from the deadly legacy of Adam’s paradigm—a life barely distinguishable from the surrounding culture—toward allegiance to Christ.

To question the end and degree to which Paul employs rhetoric is not to undermine Ackerman’s study and those that preceded it, only to nuance a frequently neglected or underdeveloped point: Paul does not use rhetoric for rhetoric’s sake, or for the sake of conforming to the epistolary conventions of his time. Of course he wants to persuade—but he knows that the crux of his master story, the apparent foolishness of

¹⁰³ Ackerman, *Lo, I Tell You*, 79, 91; again, Ackerman’s comments reveal the difficulty of speaking about death as an already-conquered enemy in the present tense. He is right, however, to connect 1 Cor 15 and Rom 6 on the thematic basis of resurrection as *new life* (76).

¹⁰⁴ Ackerman, *Lo, I Tell You*, 88.

¹⁰⁵ Ackerman, *Lo, I Tell You*, 52 (where, once more, Ackerman’s phrasing—“has been” swallowed up—muddies the timing of the victory Paul expects) and 89, cf. 23.

¹⁰⁶ Ackerman, *Lo, I Tell You*, 99–102. It seems that these “moments” expand the story of the “Christ-event,” usually understood to mean Jesus’ human career, crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension, to include his return as well. Ackerman’s (and Paul’s!) emphasis on the moment when Christ “delivers the conquered kingdom” idealizes that delivery, of course: as Rome well knew, kingdoms were not always completely subjected when they changed hands!

¹⁰⁷ Ackerman, *Lo, I Tell You*, 93–94. On the link between $\delta\acute{\omicron}\xi\alpha$ and the language of immortality here and in the apocalyptic genre, see Harrisville, *I Corinthians*, 281, who cites 1 Enoch 62:15–16’s “garments of glory” and of “life.”

redefining a crucified man as the resurrected Son of God with a lordship that outranks that of Caesar, would be read as a flawed premise by correspondents familiar with classical standards of argumentation. If imperial rulers, around the imitation of whom the entire system of patronage orbited, were among those who failed to recognize the one to whom all allegiance was due, then only the true God's transformative power could hope to shift the audience's loyalties completely away from them and toward Christ. Thus Paul's later description of the experience of proclaiming his message, such as the account offered in 2 Corinthians 2, would prioritize the "human impossibility" of the task, its cost, and the "counterintuitive, counter-cultural nature of the message and the bitter-sweet, death-and-life challenge that it conveys"; the persuasive folly of this correspondence testifies to God's power in a way that upstages the power of Rome.¹⁰⁸

Socio-Rhetorical Perspectives: Barrett and Conzelmann

C. K. Barrett is attentive to socio-rhetorical concerns, though his commentary precedes the sub-disciplinary label.¹⁰⁹ His introduction is rich with interconnections between Corinth's sociopolitical climate—including contrasts between classical perceptions of the wealthy old city and the re-founded Roman colony—and the rhetorical structure and effectiveness of 1 Corinthians.¹¹⁰ Theologically, one can take issue with Barrett for the blanket statement that there was "no evident Christological error at

¹⁰⁸ Quoting from Knowles, *We Preach Not Ourselves*, 111; Knowles is also responsible for prompting part of this argument and suggesting the wording of the final sentence.

¹⁰⁹ The classification of Barrett's work as socio-rhetorical here follows a bibliography by Vernon Robbins (<http://www.religion.emory.edu/faculty/robbins/SRI/defs/bib.cfm>, accessed July 15, 2010).

¹¹⁰ Barrett, *First Epistle*, 1–17, particularly citations of Homer ("wealthy Corinth": *Iliad* 2.570, 13.664) and Pausanias (*Description of Greece* 2.3.7), 1–2, and the analysis of 1 Corinthians as an unsuccessful document, as Paul's relationship to the Christians there continued to deteriorate as Paul's rivalry with leaders who "lacked the inward authorization, and the conformity with the passion of Christ, that marked Paul's apostolic work" (5–6, citing 2 Corinthians 12, and prefiguring Gorman's practice of "cruciformity").

Corinth to compel Paul to develop positive Christological views”: he admits that the Corinthians evidently erred in their understanding of the resurrection (and parousia), but if the crucifixion, resurrection and parousia are the pivot of the gospel by which the Corinthian believers are saved (1 Cor 15:2–4), then a flawed theology of the resurrection also entails a flawed soteriology and Christology.¹¹¹ Barrett’s concession that the formula *according to the Scriptures* “invites interpretation in Old Testament categories” might shed further light on the place of apocalyptic in Paul’s soteriological argument, though he does not mention the genre or its conventions here.¹¹²

Barrett’s translation of 15:23–28 allows him to highlight specific social and theological-traditional contexts that will resurface later in our exegesis. For instance, the choice of *rank* (τάγμα), rather than the more conventional *order*, specifies the primarily (but not exclusively) military derivation of the term as “a body of troops,” while preserving an ambiguity that words like “group, division, or detachment” would dispel.¹¹³ Every Ruler, Authority, and Power (all deliberately capitalized, with “Ruler” favoured over the more common and abstract rendering, “rule,” matching Barrett’s translation of the closely related ἄρχων in 2:6, 8) will be “brought to nought,” a clunky but accurate treatment of καταργήση.¹¹⁴ Like τάγμα, these nouns are deliberately ambiguous and fluid, with meanings that overlap. Barrett thinks they refer collectively to evil powers (as

¹¹¹ In response to Barrett, *First Epistle*, 17–18. Barrett also incorrectly labels the three gospel-summarizing clauses in 15:3–4 as a parataxis (338); the repeated conjunction καί shows the construction to be hypotactic, although parataxis might still be etymologically accurate (i.e., battlefield arrangement), given the strategic buildup of Paul’s argument. This point will receive further treatment during our exegesis.

¹¹² Barrett (*First Epistle*, 338) names sacrifice, punishment/atonement, and the suffering of the remnant as examples. He does posit that Paul may have edited an extant apocalyptic fragment (15:23–28) to conceptualize the resurrection “in apocalyptic terms,” 353.

¹¹³ Barrett, *First Epistle*, 354–55; cf. Horsley, *1 Corinthians*, 205.

¹¹⁴ Barrett, *First Epistle*, 357, with καταργήση, like ἀρχήν/ἄρχων, treated in keeping with Barrett’s translation at 2:6. He also points out here that the subject of καταργήση must be the same as that of παραδιδῶ, namely Christ.

opposed to “angelic powers, who simply lose their function” in the age to come—but would that not also be within the range of καταργήσις’s meaning?).¹¹⁵ When Barrett considers the final power to be so subjected, he makes a supremely helpful point:

Paul uses the word to mean not so much “to annihilate” as “to rob of efficacy”; it is accordingly arguable that even after this point death continues to exist, no longer as an effective enemy (to God) but as an instrument in his hand, which could be used, for example, against those whom God saw fit to punish.¹¹⁶

Where many interpreters have understood καταργήσις to require a final destruction, Barrett looks for another meaning consistent with the word’s etymology (κατά + ἀργός, in which the base is a contraction of ἀ + ἔργον). Deprived of its power, its ability to work, Death’s enmity becomes irrelevant; its potential function as an instrument is what matters. This is not to say that Death is redeemed, or even that it necessarily serves a redemptive purpose,¹¹⁷ only that it fills a role in God’s economy, in a manner not unlike the Old Testament treatment of foreign empires and rulers (cf. Isa 7:18—8:10; 10:5—15; 44:28—45:13; Jer 21:1—10; 27:1—11; and Hab 1:5—11).¹¹⁸ Insofar as the Pauline portrayal of Death reflects an inner-biblical tradition of imperial entities who are understood to have pursued too aggressively the instrumental roles assigned to them by God and so deserve discipline, Paul can use that portrayal to speak openly on the role of Death in God’s soteriological story, while commenting more obliquely on the fate (and the instrumental role, as in Romans 13) of another foreign empire that holds the proximate power of Death. To play off the dual meaning of τέλος as both *end* and *goal*

¹¹⁵ Quoting and questioning Barrett, *First Epistle*, 357–58.

¹¹⁶ Barrett, *First Epistle*, 358.

¹¹⁷ But see Breytenbach, “The ‘For Us’ Phrases,” 179–81, on sharing in Christ’s death as a prerequisite to redemption. Symbolically, for instance, baptism “does not do away with sins; it abolishes the cause of sin, the sinners themselves.”

¹¹⁸ For a treatment of the Isaianic and Jeremianic texts, see Eidevall, *Prophecy and Propaganda*, especially 179–83.

in Paul's phrase εἶτα τὸ τέλος (1 Cor 15:24), Death comes to an end, but only the end that God has planned for it.

To argue that God deals with Death as a foreign aggressor (i.e., instead of foregrounding a reading in which death and other powers simply “pass away”) is to ascribe a more militant role to Christ as the regent of the Father's reign. The soteriology Barrett brings out of 1 Corinthians 15 fits that interpretation: “The Son has been entrusted with a mission on behalf of his Father,” overthrowing those powers that challenge and threaten to usurp his Father's sovereignty, with Death understood as “the last adversary to hold out” against the government that the Son will later return to the Father.¹¹⁹ Barrett's commentary on the chapter's apocalyptic ending stays consistent with this compelling reading, as Christ's parousia heralds a universal *transformation* or *change* even for those who do not “sleep” (15:51), a change that signals the final stage in the overthrow of death, as this would leave the last enemy without subjects to rule.¹²⁰ Barrett also reminds his readers that the “sting” of death remains powerful because its insurgency grew out of a divine mandate.¹²¹ But the victory God grants believers over death is “so certain that Paul can speak of it in the present tense,” and so consequential that the Corinthians should respond with steadfastness (15:57–58, instead of their characteristically shifting

¹¹⁹ Barrett (*First Epistle*, 360) speculates that Paul may have adapted a proto-Gnostic myth here, which in his view is “not closely related to the primitive Christian scheme of preaching” Paul quotes in 15:3–5.

¹²⁰ Barrett, *First Epistle*, 380 (acknowledging the return to apocalyptic content, and referring to the local introduction of the Pauline “sleep” metaphor in 15:6) and 382, using the end of mortality to mark Death's final defeat. See Thiselton, *First Epistle*, 1220: “the logical ‘grammar’” of sleep “carries with it the expectation of *awaking to a new dawn and a new day*,” i.e., resurrection (italics his).

¹²¹ Barrett, *First Epistle*, 383: Death “still has a sting, a sting which has behind it a force that is the more potent because it is an agent of God himself... [Sin] makes clear that death is not merely a natural phenomenon, but a punishment, an evil that need not exist, and would not exist if man were not in rebellion against his Creator.”

loyalties), knowing that work undertaken in their Lord's name "can no more perish than he."¹²²

Hans Conzelmann's Hermeneia volume on 1 Corinthians can also be taken as an application of socio-rhetorical criticism, one rich in technical detail, never far removed from theological, literary, or sociopolitical questions. He writes at the outset that theology for Paul is primarily about "the event of salvation that is doctrinally formulated in the creed and actualized in the gospel; that is to say, it expounds the self-understanding of the faith which has its object in the work of salvation."¹²³ This profound concern with soteriology as the intermediate step between theology and the gospel helps to shape the rest of the commentary.¹²⁴ The sociological setting is similarly instrumental, as when Conzelmann joins Paul in targeting the "governing powers" (ἄρχοντες) for having crucified the "Lord of glory" in 2:8. As one of only two close conjunctions of κύριος and the cross, this verse "is obvious polemic against the Corinthians' exaltation Christology."¹²⁵

As for the ἄρχοντες themselves and the age they rule, both are "coming to nothing" (τῶν καταργουμένων at 2:6, καταργήση and καταργεῖται at 15:24, 26), in a translation that stresses their transience.¹²⁶ Conzelmann asserts that these governing powers are spiritual, not human: "Against the political interpretation it may be asked:

¹²² Barrett, *First Epistle*, 384–85.

¹²³ Conzelmann, *1 Corinthians*, 9; by contrast with Romans, Conzelmann posits 1 Corinthians as "applied theology."

¹²⁴ Conzelmann, *1 Corinthians*, 9, just before the previously quoted statement: "Talk of God and his nature and ways is consistently transformed into statements on his saving act, which took place 'in Christ' and actualizes itself in the gospel, the 'word of the cross'" (most likely alluding to 1 Cor 1:18, in which the Corinthian social context's obsession with wisdom is deeply embedded, as observed earlier).

¹²⁵ Conzelmann, *1 Corinthians*, 63; the other such reference is Gal 6:14 (63n68).

¹²⁶ Conzelmann, *1 Corinthians*, 56 and n2–3 (where he argues wistfully for "aeon" or "world-age" instead of age; so too Thiselton, *First Epistle*, 232), and 61n46.

What should earthly powers have to do with supernatural wisdom?”¹²⁷ That exclusively spiritual assertion becomes more problematic when Paul introduces the threefold complex of rule(r)s, authorities, and powers in 15:24, especially in an apocalyptic context that supports strong theopolitical ties between heavenly and earthly rulers. But before he arrives there, Conzelmann considers the parousia as a notably *absent* component of the creed in 15:3–5: with a different *Sitz im Leben* (to Conzelmann’s mind) from that of the creed, it “relates to the work of salvation that has taken place, and is defined by it.”¹²⁸ One may follow Conzelmann insofar as the cross and resurrection inform the parousia, but there is no reason to divorce it contextually from the creed when there is sufficient early evidence to connect the multiple key points in the gospel narrative together, contextually and confessionally.¹²⁹

Prefacing the parousia is the resurrection of Christ as ἀπορχή, showing that his raising is *constitutive* for those that follow.¹³⁰ Paul’s argument for these resurrections to come takes the form of the “Apocalyptic Order” of events in 15:23–28, even though the cross defines the period of the βασιλεία and so reshapes apocalyptic conventions

¹²⁷ Conzelmann, *1 Corinthians*, 61n47, engaging in brief discussion of the ἄρχοντες τῶν ἔθνων in [1] Baruch 3:16; the wording of Daniel 10:13 LXX is also apropos.

¹²⁸ Conzelmann, *1 Corinthians*, 257 and n80.

¹²⁹ The parousia is at least as integral to the early Christian faith as is Jesus’ *life*, the absence of which causes Funk to call Phil 2:6–11 a “creed with an empty center” in *Honest to Jesus*, 43; also see Yoder Neufeld’s musings on how history might have been peaceably different had the church placed more creedal and ethical value on the life and sacrificial ministry of Jesus rather than just the points of death and resurrection, throughout *Recovering Jesus*. It is worth noting that Conzelmann respects the connection between parousia and creed in 1 Cor 15:20, stressing Paul’s repetition and exposition of the ἐγγύερται from 15:4.

¹³⁰ Conzelmann (*1 Corinthians*, 267–68) adds that Paul also uses the word corporately, “to describe the first converts of a community (or a country) who are held in special esteem (16:15; Rom 16:5).” On Christ’s resurrection as constitutive of those that will follow, see further Moffatt, *First Epistle*, 244: Christ did not die and rise as an individual, inasmuch as his death and resurrection carried with them those of all Christians.

regarding the kingly messiah's rule.¹³¹ Conzelmann translates βασιλεία as kingship or sovereignty, delegated to Christ for an interval with a “definite end, the annihilation of the hostile powers,” whose subjection has already begun.¹³² The parousial chain of events ends with the taunting of death, whose personification Conzelmann finds “vacillating,” but the commentator does add that κέντρον, normally rendered as death's “sting,” could also denote a goad, an instrument of discipline or torture, or a symbol “of tyranny and force.”¹³³ Death's connection to sin (15:56) is what makes the overthrow of death an event relevant to the lives of the believers in Corinth, as the disarming of sin is a powerful recapitulation of their salvation and a cause for thanksgiving (15:58).¹³⁴

Imperial Perspectives: Witherington and Horsley

Ben Witherington III classifies his commentary as socio-rhetorical; indeed, he and Vernon Robbins are among the founding fathers of the critical sub-discipline. Here his work is categorized provisionally as an imperial commentary because Witherington rightly discerns the strong (if subtle) presence of imperial language in 1 Corinthians 15—that is, within a comprehensively socio-rhetorical study, his commentary on this penultimate chapter is more precisely imperial in its conceptual concerns. The present

¹³¹ Conzelmann, *1 Corinthians*, 269–70. Conzelmann's description of the βασιλεία as “Christologically speaking the time of the subjection of the powers” might be more accurately attributed to soteriology, as readers learn as much about the enemy powers and how they are saved from them as they do about the one subjecting them.

¹³² Conzelmann, *1 Corinthians*, 271, 271n80, and 273, equating the *subjecting* of 15:25, 27 with complete annihilation (273n94: “What is important is only the conveyance and *execution* of the work of salvation,” italics mine). The point of returning sovereignty to God is “not the temporal limitation of the sovereignty of Christ,” but to underscore that his regency was guaranteed by the Father himself (272).

¹³³ In support, Conzelmann (*1 Corinthians*, 292–93 and n41) quotes a Sophoclean fragment involving an unstable ruler “with the goad of mischief in his hands.”

¹³⁴ Developing further an initial point made by Conzelmann, *1 Corinthians*, 293.

study shares his concentration on Roman imperial eschatology,¹³⁵ but we will argue here and again in our exegesis of the chapter that eschatology is only part of the imperial-ideological story, and that Paul's underlying quarrel with Rome has more to do with soteriology, with questions over the *authority* and *ability* to save.

Witherington neglects very little of imperial importance in this passage, though there are a few keywords—"kingdom," "rule," "authority," and "power," for example—about which he chooses to say relatively little. To concentrate on what the author does emphasize, however, he ranks the (military) organization implied by Paul's deployment of the term *τάγμα*, with believers following Christ in successive resurrections, as the only "ordering," the "only sort of social order that ought to be truly important to Christians, not society's ranking systems."¹³⁶ (The assessment is still true when read differently: the Pauline *τάγμα* would indeed not have seemed important to Corinth's ranking systems—with the civic and provincial elite at their head.) The expectation of the parousia informs Paul's argument against Roman ideology, in that concern for allegiance to Christ should supersede his congregants' upwardly mobile ambitions. About the socio-rhetorical setting of the parousia itself, Witherington insists that "Paul's words did not amount to a program of revolution against the empire, since he stresses that it is only the returning Christ who will accomplish this reversal and transformation." To make such a statement is to forget that writing and reading eagerly about the parousia were themselves inherently subversive activities, as Witherington himself recalls a few lines later: if one

¹³⁵ Witherington, *Conflict and Community*, 295–98; his excursus on imperial eschatology is indebted (especially at 295n22 and 297n30) to Lanci's paper from the 1992 annual meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature, "Roman Eschatology in First-Century Corinth." Lanci returns to the Corinthian theopolitical context with his monograph, *A New Temple*.

¹³⁶ Witherington (*Conflict and Community*, 298) later uses *τάγμα* in the sense of the sequence of parousial events (304).

“lives in the light of such future eschatology [rather than the “present imperial” eschatological norm], all loyalties to any sort of human realized eschatology have become pointless,...relativized by the eschatological first coming and promised return of Christ.”¹³⁷

Witherington well understands that part of the theopolitical clash of cultures is due to the changes in social behaviour that would have resulted from adhering to Paul’s Christian eschatology, as opposed to continuing to participate in the public venues, rituals, and economic networks (e.g., sponsorship of competitions or philanthropic building projects dedicated to Caesar or Rome, or the purchase of meat sacrificed to other gods from the Corinthian *agora*, as in 1 Corinthians 8).¹³⁸ He also acknowledges that Rome’s appeal was not limited to the socioeconomic practices it encouraged, nor even to its “realized” eschatology, but that its imperial cult was devoted to the rule of the central figure who had brought the end of martial history, the Pax Romana, to fruition, namely Augustus (and by extension his predecessor, successors, and family). The very reason Paul phrased Christ’s arrival as a parousia in 15:23, had him subjugating a kingdom in 15:24, and referred to him as *Saviour* in Philippians 3 was to refute the Julio-Claudian propaganda stating that it was *Caesar* who had appeared, *Caesar* who pacified the world,

¹³⁷ Witherington (*Conflict and Community*, 298) subsequently parcels out political and religious definitions of parousia, in much the same way as Fee and Conzelmann do, concluding his comment by echoing Fee almost exactly: “Those who go out to meet the king when the trumpet sounds return to the city together once they have met outside the gates. *Parousia* was also used of the epiphany of a deity, as here” (304n53, italics his). Conzelmann admits that the “language of the court and that of the sanctuary are contiguous in the age of the Hellenistic ruler cult,” but still wants to separate the word’s usages with a political-religious dichotomy in *1 Corinthians*, 270 and n70.

¹³⁸ Witherington, *Conflict and Community*, 295 and 298. Grant (*Paul in the Roman World*, 71) claims 1 Corinthians 8 is a “less political” statement than other stances taken by Paul’s contemporaries, but he appears to overlook the potential economic and sociopolitical fallout should Christians have boycotted the meat market, as well as the diplomatic skill Paul shows here in negotiating a path that allows for personal freedom and corporate accountability while avoiding both a revolution and the local and/or imperial reprisals that would have followed.

and therefore *Caesar* who was saviour.¹³⁹ One pertinent objection is that Witherington's focus is always on eschatology, when these claims are actually more significant soteriologically than eschatologically, whether in ethical, devotional, liturgical or sociopolitical applications.¹⁴⁰ The distinction is a fine one, nonetheless. Inasmuch as Roman imperial (and Christian) eschatology and soteriology so thoroughly inform one another in the first century, it can be argued that they are obverse and reverse of the same denarius; even so, Witherington impoverishes his commentary slightly by neglecting the immediate soteriological facet of Paul's argument here.¹⁴¹

Richard Horsley's commentary on 1 Corinthians certainly promotes a socio-rhetorical concern for linking Paul's rhetorical choices with sociopolitical factors located in and around the Corinthian Christian community, but his predominant interest is expressly imperial. From the overarching competition between Paul's gospel and its "diametrical opposite"—"the imperial 'gospel' of Caesar as the savior who had brought peace and security to the world"—to the pervasive systems of patron-client relationships and imperial-cultic practices that sustained Rome's rule and Romanized its provinces, Horsley is intensively focused on Paul's responses to the empire as a dehumanizing

¹³⁹ Witherington, *Conflict and Community*, 297–98, citing Wengst (*Pax Romana*, beginning at 78). Also see Witherington's assertion that the emphasis on God's fatherhood that begins locally at 1 Cor 15:24 is another reaction to Roman eschatology, specifically to the depiction of the emperor as "father of the fatherland," 304–5. On the Augustan pacification, see Seneca, who in *Epistle* 91.2 opines that crises such as the burning of Lyons (Lugdunum) are unexpected "when peace prevails throughout the world" (*cum toto orbe terrarum diffusa securitas sit*). Richard Gummere (in Seneca's *Epistulae morales II*, LCL, 430na) dates the observation tentatively to the summer of 64 CE, since "'peace all over the world' would not be a true statement until January of 62"—but even then the statement remained a highly propagandistic one!

¹⁴⁰ A dual focus on soteriology and eschatology in this chapter receives a vote of confidence from Holleman, *Resurrection and Parousia*, 1 and 21, quoted in Thiselton, *First Epistle*, 1282: the framework of the Adam/Christ typology that launches the passages under scrutiny here is *representative, soteriological, and apocalyptic* in nature.

¹⁴¹ Further muddying the eschatological/soteriological question are comments such as Conzelmann's (*1 Corinthians*, 57), who labels σωζόμενοι ("saved") and ἀπολλύμενοι ("lost") as "eschatological" conceptual terms, and jumps to the conclusion that ἀπαρχή is also "eschatological" (267–68) simply because Paul uses it to describe the Spirit at Rom 8:23.

influence.¹⁴² He draws a stark contrast between the wealthy elite of the re-founded imperial colony, a centre for shipping and manufacture, and the displaced residents, who were assembled from the ranks of the empire’s manumitted slaves and urban poor; many of these colonists would have been those driven out of their former farms and homes, or expatriates (or immediate descendants of expatriates) of nations subjected by Rome.¹⁴³ Dispossessed even before they were relocated, then, no wonder the Corinthians hungered for status and security.¹⁴⁴

The imperial foundation of this liminal dislocation provides a key location—though not the only one—for Horsley’s perspective on the passages we are considering in 1 Corinthians 15. Even the pastoral imaging of Christ as the “firstfruits” of the resurrection to come (15:20) is read as a counter-imperial vindication, one that signals the beginning of “the termination of the imperial order” and its use of crucifixion as a punishment to discourage rebellion against the Pax Romana.¹⁴⁵ Paul’s “political-apocalyptic” worldview determines that the *rulers* of 15:24 are “doomed to perish”; as Horsley interprets Paul’s earlier reference to the ignorance of these characters in 2:6–8, the “imperial rulers have been undone precisely by their own repressive terrorizing [e.g., crucifixion] of subject peoples.”¹⁴⁶ The claim that $\pi\acute{\alpha}\sigma\alpha\nu \acute{\alpha}\rho\chi\eta\eta\nu$ in 15:24 includes

¹⁴² Horsley, *1 Corinthians*, 14, cf. 23, 27, and particularly 37, contextualizing the need for communal solidarity among the Christian Corinthian communities in the face of the idolatrous and dehumanizing values of the empire.

¹⁴³ Horsley, *1 Corinthians*, 23–24, citing such classical sources as Strabo (*Geogr.* 8.6.20–23), Cicero (unspecified, but probably *Republic* 2.7–8), Crinagoras (*Greek Anthology* 9.284), and Pindar (*Eulogies* 122); cf. the same and additional sources, such as Polybius (38.19–22, 39.2) and Appian (on the colonists of Carthage—which he occasionally paired with Corinth—as those in want of employment and land, in *Punic Wars* 136, or *Roman History* 8.20.136), in Grant, *Paul in the Roman World*, 13–20.

¹⁴⁴ Horsley, *1 Corinthians*, 31: “The recently founded city full of uprooted people yet striving for the appearance of culture had an atmosphere of spiritual emptiness, of a hunger for status and security.”

¹⁴⁵ Horsley, *1 Corinthians*, 37.

¹⁴⁶ Horsley, *1 Corinthians*, 59 (where the “political-apocalyptic” label could be seen as a refinement of “theopolitical”) and 197, where Paul’s “apocalyptic orientation” is the “controlling framework” of his argument.

imperial figures (such as the provincial governor, whose administrative centre was Corinth)¹⁴⁷ is unobjectionable, but to limit Paul's references to the "rulers" to imperial figures seems an unnecessary exegetical move on Horsley's part. Horsley presents 15:21–22 (literally, "For since through man death," highlighting the paucity of verbs and modifiers) as a "schematic" restatement of 15:20, perhaps anticipating his own argument (*contra* Conzelmann) that τῶν ἀρχόντων means a division whose battlefield maneuvers can be schematized, rather than an apocalyptic timetable.¹⁴⁸ In Paul's scheme, the defeat and taunting of death are to take place on "the final day of international deliverance," emphasizing the global reach and (counter-)imperial tradition of that deliverance.¹⁴⁹

Horsley's study is primarily concerned with the empire, but not exclusively so: he also sees broader Greco-Roman cultural considerations at play in 1 Corinthians. Paul's largely deliberative rhetoric was intended to be read aloud in the assembly of believers, though the letter was also deeply personal (and interpersonal).¹⁵⁰ Horsley acknowledges the scriptural/prophetic content of the missive, too. Psalm 110 equips Paul with a "scriptural warrant as a bridge to the destruction of death," with Psalm 8 providing further scriptural support;¹⁵¹ Paul's use of "the last trumpet" is identified as a commonplace in Israel's prophetic and apocalyptic literature for signalling "decisive or final events," though the signal was certainly used in Roman military settings as well, as

¹⁴⁷ Horsley, *1 Corinthians*, 25.

¹⁴⁸ Horsley, *1 Corinthians*, 204–5.

¹⁴⁹ Horsley, *1 Corinthians*, 214. Horsley does not appear to draw out in this commentary the ideological ramifications for and against empires contained in Israel's prophetic tradition, but many instances of the "in that day" formula suggest opportunities for further study, e.g., Isa 7:18–20, 10:27, 11:10–11, 19:16–24, 25:8–10, 26:1, 27:1–3, 27:13; Jer 30:7–8; Ezek 20:6, 30:9; Hos 2:18, 10:15; Amos 9:11–12; Mic 2:4, 4:6–7, 7:12; Zech 2:11, 12:3–11, 14:9.

¹⁵⁰ Horsley, *1 Corinthians*, 22–23.

¹⁵¹ Horsley, *1 Corinthians*, 206.

in calling troops to arms.¹⁵² But a frequent note in Horsley's comments is this: Paul counted on the resonance of political imagery such as *parousia* and "kingdom" in directing attention toward the need for fully embodied life as a faithful response, with his urging toward steadfastness (15:58) clearest, perhaps, in contrast to Corinth's "steadfastly faithful" relationship to Rome.¹⁵³ Even if the note seems overlaid at times, its echoes remain strong and convincing. It might have been still more so had Horsley dedicated more space to the *theopolitical* and *soteriological implications* of the clash he perceives between diametrically opposed gospels and saviours. It is those implications that we will attempt to unfold in the next two chapters, first with regard to the ways in which Rome understood its own vocabulary, then in the context of our exegesis of 1 Cor 15:20–28 and 50–58.

¹⁵² E.g., Caesar, *Gallic War* 2.20; cf. 1 Cor 14:8 in this regard. Isa 27:13, cited almost immediately above, is a serviceable example of the prophetic/apocalyptic employment of trumpet imagery, but see Grant, *Paul in the Roman World*, 6, on the reasons for Paul's decreasing use of apocalyptic imagery after writing 1 Thessalonians: "It is not clear that Paul retained all these ideas as he got older and farther into the Gentile world, though the trumpet soon came back in 1 Corinthians 15:52."

¹⁵³ Horsley, *1 Corinthians*, 220 and 23.

IV

Theopolitical Dimensions of Roman Imperial Language

Introduction

In this chapter, we begin to unpack that which was introduced in the prologue: a *socio-rhetorical paradigm that advances a contextual reading of biblical theology*. Such a paradigm offers a way of interpreting biblical theology through first-century Corinthian eyes and ears as a prerequisite to interpreting it for postmodern eyes and ears:¹ it clarifies theopolitical contexts, illuminating otherwise obscure or invisible aspects of Paul's soteriological narrative, as a prelude to application. But these obscure aspects of Pauline soteriology are difficult to discern precisely because of how inaccessible their contextual origins are. Put simply, we cannot see the original context as easily as we might think. In order to address Paul's theopolitical language as it appears in 1 Corinthians 15, we need to discover what his terminology meant to Rome, before (and after) Paul borrowed and adapted it. But before we can tackle either task, we must ask how best to visualize the initial problem of "seeing" into the first-century world, and the Roman imperial and Pauline narrative worlds that operated within it, from the vantage point of twenty-first-century North America.

¹ This phrasing is deliberately suggestive of Paul's active role (and to varying degrees, the roles of his ancient and postmodern audiences) in participating in the biblical story, especially over against rival discourses.

Hermeneutical Models, Empire, and Socio-Rhetorically Enabled Biblical Theology

As an undergraduate, I learned InterVarsity Christian Fellowship’s classic steps of biblical exegesis: observation, interpretation, and application of the text. The model is a good one, widely used, and simple to learn, remember, and teach. Many biblical commentaries work from a similar model, at least implicitly, with the NIV Application Commentary Series’ three exegetical tiers—Original Meaning, Bridging Contexts, and Contemporary Significance—forming one of the more deliberately phrased examples.² But the underlying assumption in this straightforward process is that readers can see clearly from their own historical and cultural contexts to the “world of the text” and the “world behind the text.” The process supposes that there are no major obstacles obstructing the readers’ view: Paul’s real and textual worlds can be readily understood if one’s telescope is sufficiently powerful. To switch to a metaphor of travel, one can meander into the text, retrieve its original meaning, and cross the interpretative bridge back to the contemporary world, resolving potential applications on the return trip.

There is no need to discredit the simplicity of that approach, but it is important to acknowledge that there *are* barriers impeding contemporary readers’ exegetical progress, deep gaps that are formidable to bridge. Even if one were to add a context-savvy precursor to the InterVarsity model—producing a four-step process of contextualization, observation, interpretation, application—it would still be beneficial to map the barriers to contextual retrieval, along with any unseen forces that might inhibit observation and interpretation. To search out the forces that govern a postmodern reading of ancient, arguably imperial texts, this chapter will begin by surveying some diagrams and descriptions that map the difficulties of seeing “into” a text and its real-world

² See for example the “Series Introduction” in Blomberg, *1 Corinthians*, 7–10.

surroundings, while also demonstrating the derived strength of a new hermeneutical model of choice, a hybrid of socio-rhetorical and biblical-theological models. The accent on specifically *narrative* models is intended to complement and interact with the narrative orientation of Paul's vocabulary in 1 Corinthians 15, elucidated in the second chapter.

The Chatman/Moore Narrative-Critical Model

Seymour Chatman's *narrative-critical model* has significantly influenced many New Testament literary critics, especially those who work with canonical Gospel texts, so much so that many students encounter Chatman only indirectly, through his interpreters.³ Stephen Moore presents Chatman's model without major adaptations, highlighting both the relationships and the movement of information between the personae who participate in a given narrative (Figure 1).

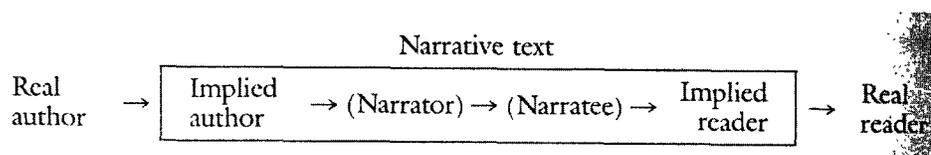


Figure 1: The Chatman/Moore model of narrative communication⁴

The Chatman/Moore model foregrounds the disclosure of narrative information through the medium of a text, from the *real* (historical) *author* to the *real reader* of the text, whether that reader is a contemporary of the author or a later interpreter. Information travels “instrumentally through the personae within the box,” beginning with the real

³ Moore, *Literary Criticism and the Gospels*, 46.

⁴ Moore, *Literary Criticism and the Gospels*, 46, adapted from Chatman, *Story and Discourse*, 151. Camery-Hoggatt employs similar models with regard to authorial intention, the “authorial reader,” and the narration of one story within another, in *Reading*, 75, 206. He adds an ellipse around the diagram to represent the “shared literary repertoire” of author and reader (84), anticipating the discussion of narrative boundaries that we will enter below.

author's counterpart within the text, the "presiding intelligence" of the *implied author*.⁵ The *narrator* gives voice to the story itself, sometimes as one of its characters, while the *narratee* is the one to whom the narrator speaks. The *implied reader* is presupposed by the text, not so much as a reflection of the real reader as a reconstruction of the ideal audience that the author would have wished to address. Each person in the process, whether real or imaginatively reconstituted, becomes a filter through which the story's information passes. Certain limits are imposed by this original version of the narrative communication model: the text is almost a closed book, as it were, a closed *world*, through which information can move in only one direction, from author to (passive) reader.⁶ The story's information is also the only thing that moves, in that the participants in the informational exchange are static with relation to one other.

Culpepper's Modified Narrative-Critical Model

Alan Culpepper's modifications to Chatman's model retain the earlier model's personae, while introducing other routes of informational exchange and a more detailed picture of the "world of the text," including senses of time that frame the story's narration. What passes between narrator and narratee, and implied author and reader, is now shown on more than one level, bracketed by the real author and reader. All of this takes the shape, not insignificantly, of an eye (Figure 2).

⁵ Moore (*Literary Criticism and the Gospels*, 46) offers Luke 1:1-4 as an instance of an implied author at work, where the "generation of this textual second self is a profoundly rhetorical act." To the extent that epistles can be said to involve elements from narrative communication models, Paul's creation of an implied author would be a similarly rhetorical activity.

⁶ The expression "closed book" is intended to play off the transparency implied in the idiom of reading a person or object like "an open book."

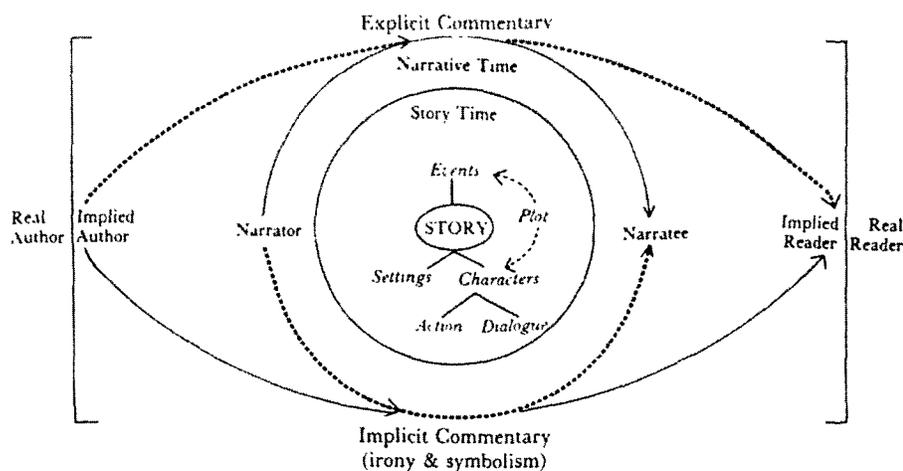


Figure 2: Culpepper's narrative-critical transmission model⁷

Regarding the transmission of narrative information, Culpepper says, “the choice of a communicational model is dictated both by its currency in contemporary literary criticism and its suitability for understanding afresh what the gospel is and how it achieves its effects.”⁸ Accordingly, Culpepper's work in *John's Gospel* trades upon the dynamic between that which the implied author and narrator make explicit, and what they choose to say parenthetically, with irony and metaphor. Where Chatman's diagram boxed the text as a confined space for communication, Culpepper's “eye-agram” opens up that space, treating the textual world as a bracketed exchange between author and reader.⁹ Information still circulates between the two, but more allowances are made for multiple levels of commentary (explicit, implicit), and the reader can interact more freely with the permeable lines of communication that form the boundaries of the narrated world. Culpepper's model assumes that the narratee and implied/real readers are participants in the narration, helping to construct the world that they are reading about.

⁷ Culpepper, *Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel*, 6; initially derived from Chatman, *Story and Discourse*, 267.

⁸ Culpepper, *Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel*, 6.

⁹ But see Moore's critical interaction with potential “blind spots” in the “eye-agram,” in “How Jesus' Risen Body.”

Lucie-Smith's Narrative-Moral Models

Alexander Lucie-Smith offers a different take on narratival models, but with readily visualized concepts similar to those employed above. Searching for models on which to base his narrative moral theology, Lucie-Smith presents three types of model for inspection (Figure 3).¹⁰

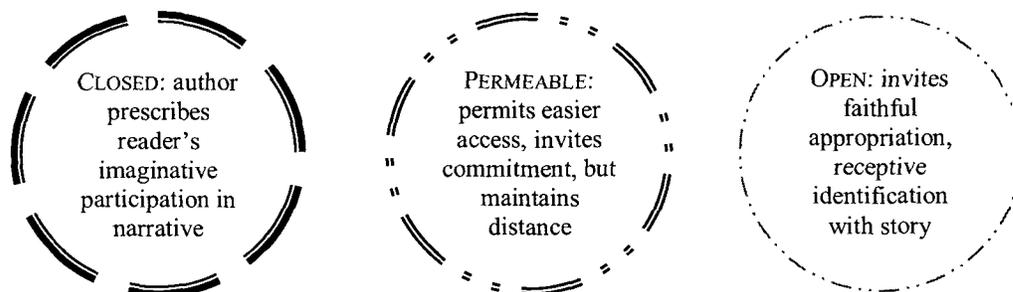


Figure 3: Lucie-Smith's narrative-moral communication models

The first type has a *closed* structure, with limits and access points established by authorial “presidency”: the story’s author presides in the story-world through such literary devices as plot, setting, and characterization, inviting imaginative appropriation but limiting the reader’s participation.¹¹ The second narrative type’s boundaries are *permeable*, allowing an array of possibilities and freedoms within the story-world while preserving dialectics of proximity and distance, familiarity and otherness; the story itself operates as a distancing device. Entry into this second kind of narrative is imaginatively easier, but it requires at least a temporary commitment to the story’s moral views. The third type is *open* to the reader and to other narratives, characterized by the revelations and *pathos* of biblical narratives: the canonical Gospels and many of the stories they contain are open-ended, inviting faithful appropriation and continuation. Where the first type asks for a

¹⁰ Lucie-Smith (*Narrative Theology*, 165–97) himself does not offer diagrams of his threefold model, which is presented here with decreasingly substantial boundaries to represent the closed, permeable, and open models in his written description. The summary that follows is adapted from Lowe, review of *Narrative Theology*, 497–99.

¹¹ Lucie-Smith, *Narrative Theology*, 168.

leap of the imagination and the second a moral commitment, the third anticipates the possibility of a receptive identification with the story and its characters.

Lucie-Smith's model is comparable to the preceding narrative-critical models in emphasizing permeable boundaries around the world of the text. His closed-permeable-open progression, which seems natural enough, is not without problems; literary and socio-rhetorical critics would be among the first to point out that *all* narrational boundaries are permeable to some extent, facing the interpreter with both access points and barriers to comprehension. But Lucie-Smith's typology is still helpful in drawing out such narrational elements as authorial presidency and interpretative allegiance, especially as these elements relate to biblical theology and socio-rhetorical criticism. One of biblical theology's confessional concerns is for the voice of each author and narrator within the biblical metanarrative, hinting at the presence of a Narrator who presides over the whole. Socio-rhetorical criticism's questions intersect with this concern, insofar as they probe questions of power: which voices are represented in the text, which ones are marginalized or excluded, and which hold the ultimate power to narrate, or script, the story being told.

Robbins' Socio-Rhetorical Model

Vernon Robbins' model facilitates his own socio-rhetorical approach to textual communication. It presupposes that rhetoric is itself a mode of analysis that guides the interdisciplinary interpretation of biblical texts; it provides "a socially and culturally oriented approach to texts, forming a bridge between the disciplines of social-scientific and literary criticism."¹² A close parallel to Robbins' socio-cultural overture to rhetoric comes from Ben Witherington III, who highlights socio-rhetorical criticism's capacity to

¹² Robbins, "Social-Scientific Criticism," 277.

connect the images of a given scriptural text with the social forms of its society, while establishing a precedent for applying socio-rhetorical methods to the Corinthian correspondence.¹³ Robbins' model is favoured here because its pictorial representation (Figure 4) shows how socio-rhetorical criticism incorporates and synthesizes some of the insights of the hermeneutical models already reviewed.

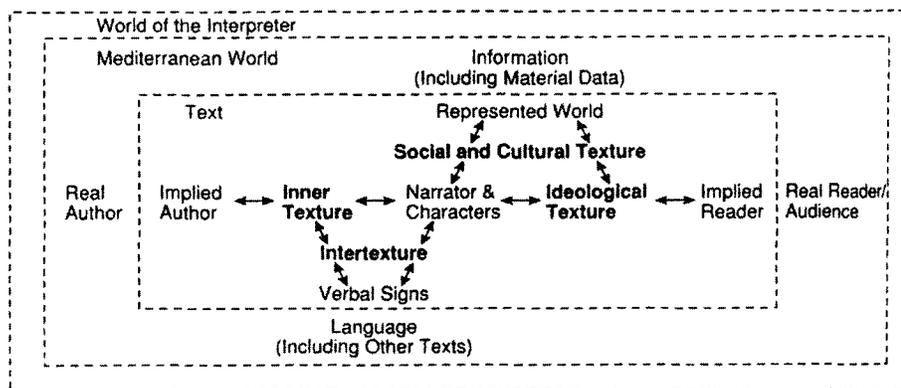


Figure 4: Robbins' socio-rhetorical model of textual communication¹⁴

Nuancing the scenario of author-to-reader communication, Robbins embeds the *represented world* of the biblical text within the *Mediterranean world* of the historical author, which is in turn enclosed by the *world of the interpreter*. Some of the details of the earlier models are elided here: within the text, for example, the narratee appears to have been fused with the implied reader. The broken lines between worlds represent human-made and temporal boundaries to communication; as in Lucie-Smith's typology, the boundaries are permeable, with narrational information exchanged through the gaps.¹⁵

To his already complex model Robbins adds the further complications of two imaginary lines running through the diagram: a horizontal, "rhetorical" axis, representing

¹³ Witherington, *Conflict and Community in Corinth*; the comment on bridging the gap between social and textual forms appears in the Preface, xi.

¹⁴ Reproduced from Robbins, "Social-Scientific Criticism," 278.

¹⁵ Robbins, "Social-Scientific Criticism," 279.

the now-familiar communication from the authorial personae to those of the reader, and a vertical, “mimetic” axis, intended to describe the way in which textual actors and elements imitate persons and things from the real (historical) world.¹⁶ Robbins’ point is to illustrate the action, or “dynamic movement from the author to the reader and from the reader to the author,” and the multiple textures (or textural “arenas,” bold-faced in the diagram) involved in the rhetorical communication that occurs in and around the text.¹⁷

The strengths of Robbins’ model also point to its weaknesses. Visualizing the concentric embeddings of worlds-within-worlds can be useful for recalling the cultural embedment of language, but why is the imagined first-century Mediterranean world necessarily inside the interpreter’s world? What determines that these worlds are truly *concentric*, that they share a centre? The text and the narrative within it understandably occupy the diagram’s centre; they are the physical object being read, the subject of interpretation, and the product of the surrounding culture. But there is no guarantee that the interpreter’s contextual world will encompass the narrational and historical worlds as neatly as it does in Robbins’ diagram. Framing the interpreter’s world with a boundary acknowledges that contemporary readers have what one might call *interfluent relationships* with the texts they read and the world outside their libraries. If, as Robbins says, part of the socio-rhetorical task is to design activities to assist interpreters in entering the inner texture of the textual world and its phenomena,¹⁸ then perhaps another part should be to devise corresponding exercises for making sense of the interpreter’s own “outside” world in relation to the world of the text. Yet the positioning of the

¹⁶ Robbins (“Social-Scientific Criticism,” 280) is less than clear on the orientation of these axes; the mimetic would seem to run not vertically but *inwardly* and *outwardly*, implying some possible three-dimensional improvements for the model.

¹⁷ Robbins, “Social-Scientific Criticism,” 280.

¹⁸ Robbins, “Social-Scientific Criticism,” 279.

interpreter's world and its boundaries displays a presumptively modernist objectivity; in postmodern perspective, the alignment may not be so simple.

Schüssler Fiorenza's Kyriarchal Model

As the present goal is to account for the hermeneutical challenges that affect a postmodern reading of ancient texts such as 1 Corinthians and the theopolitical narratives that influenced it, it would be productive to include a model that names and addresses the presence of empires as such hermeneutical challenges, not so much to "fix" the problems of socio-rhetorical hermeneutics in Robbins' model, but to admit that the influence of social structures can be so pervasive as to be felt in hermeneutics. If reading a narrative entails a textually mediated negotiation of meanings between author and reader—or, in the language of the communicational maps above, an invitation toward participation in that task and in the story-world that frames it—then empires and other powerful social structures will play key roles in such negotiations, whether in the interpreter's world, the historical world, the textually represented story-world, or any combination thereof. Indeed, in some cases an empire may be or one of the principals within the mediated world(s), or even the storyteller. When they play such important roles, empires have the socio-rhetorical power to prescribe (or, when desired, to proscribe) the contexts for the meanings they intend, and they often have the military, commercial, or theopolitical might to enforce their meanings, or to weigh in on other narratives into which they intrude. They have the power to exercise authorial presidency, to control the permeability of their narrational boundaries, and to coerce (rather than invite) participation.

It is the specific manifestation of this intrusiveness as societal and literary violence that sparks Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza’s model. She incisively targets a “kyriarchal” ethos that she finds inherent to imperial structures, structures that perpetuate acts of violence common to the worlds of ancient texts and contemporary interpreters.¹⁹ She contends that violence can take the form of oppressive language,²⁰ a reminder that should give one pause when considering Rome’s language, Paul’s, and one’s own. To allow postmodern readers to recognize the constraints that govern their reading, Schüssler Fiorenza hints at an elegantly simple model for mapping the synchronic and political tensions that concern empire-critical studies of Scripture. She does not diagram it explicitly, but posits the New Testament’s first-century Rome and modern forms of empire as a pair of focal contexts, potentially reproducing and re-inscribing imperial power and violence in every scriptural interpretation (Figure 5).²¹

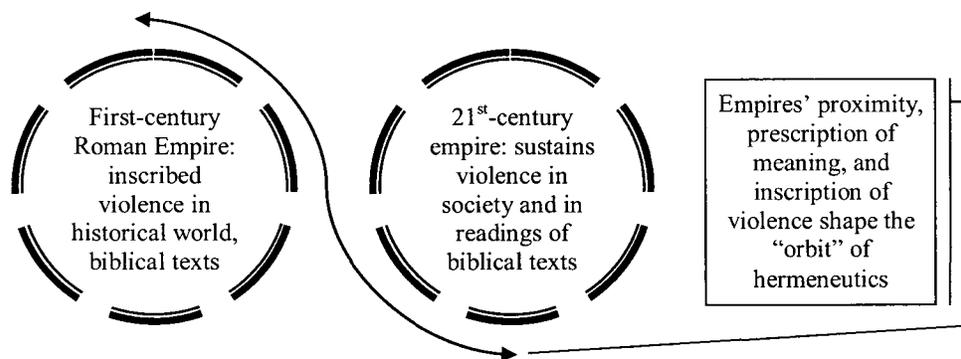


Figure 5: Schüssler Fiorenza’s “kyriarchal” model

To extrapolate, it is as though readers who enter the New Testament today are caught in the “orbit” of contemporary empire, even as they begin to feel the “pull” of the

¹⁹ Schüssler Fiorenza, *Power of the Word*, 49–68; her near-equation of feminist and imperial criticism is at times oversimplified.

²⁰ Schüssler Fiorenza, *Power of the Word*, 56.

²¹ Schüssler Fiorenza, *Power of the Word*, 9, 56, 164; the present summary and the elaboration that follows are adapted from Lowe, review of *Power of the Word*, 101. As was the case with the diagram of Lucie-Smith’s model above, this diagram has been constructed based on Schüssler Fiorenza’s written description.

Roman one from the historical and biblically represented worlds: their readings are bound to these violent foci, so the readings and the theology drawn from them must be examined accordingly. Thinking about biblical theology in an imperial context may mean conceding that even hermeneutics can reinscribe rhetorical (if not physical) violence.

The model delineated from Schüssler Fiorenza has an animate movement to it, like Robbins' socio-rhetorical framework, but it introduces a new dynamic, one that shows the forces *exerted on the reader*. The preceding models concentrated on the flow of information, what Robbins calls the rhetorical axis, and to a lesser extent, the correspondence between real-world actors and textual personae, the vertical (inward/outward) mimetic axis. If borrowing from Schüssler Fiorenza consisted merely of the acknowledgment of violence as a common denominator behind empires as the social contexts of biblical interpretation, the result could be added to Robbins' diagram as a third plotted line that might run parallel to either the rhetorical axis or the mimetic, depending on how the influence and reproduction of violence are imaged.

But this model also addresses the problem of relative positioning observed in Robbins' socio-rhetorical scheme. The interpreter is not free to be an objective observer of the historical world, the text, or its narrative. The interpreter's world is neither neatly nor symmetrically arranged around the textual world or the historical one that produced it. Reading Scripture in the social context of empire is not a simple matter of being at the receiving end of a biblical author's transmission; even if readers can admit that their own social location and era is also imperial in character, it is not the same as the imperial situation of Paul. The "obscure or invisible aspects of Paul's soteriology" that are to be recovered here, along with the Roman theopolitical vocabulary behind them, are difficult

enough to observe, given the historical distance from the twenty-first century world to Paul's first-century Mediterranean. But unless one concedes that postmodern exegesis is constrained by (theo)political norms and structures, then one's findings will not preclude application; they will preclude it.

The Gravitational Model Proposed

What is called for is a new hermeneutical model to visualize the way in which readers can observe and interpret the ancient Roman world, from the standpoint of a postmodern and pervasively North American one. The model proposed simplifies and combines Robbins' approach with Schüssler Fiorenza's, modifying his socio-rhetorical emphases with a concern, shared with her, for the influence of empire on biblical theology. That is, this "gravitational" model clarifies the alignment of the contextual "worlds" involved in imperial exegesis, allowing interpreters to map the dynamics at work in and between their own sociopolitical worlds and those of the authors and texts they interpret. The respective worlds are imagined as spheres that exert force upon a grid representing the continuities and discontinuities of historical context (Figure 6).

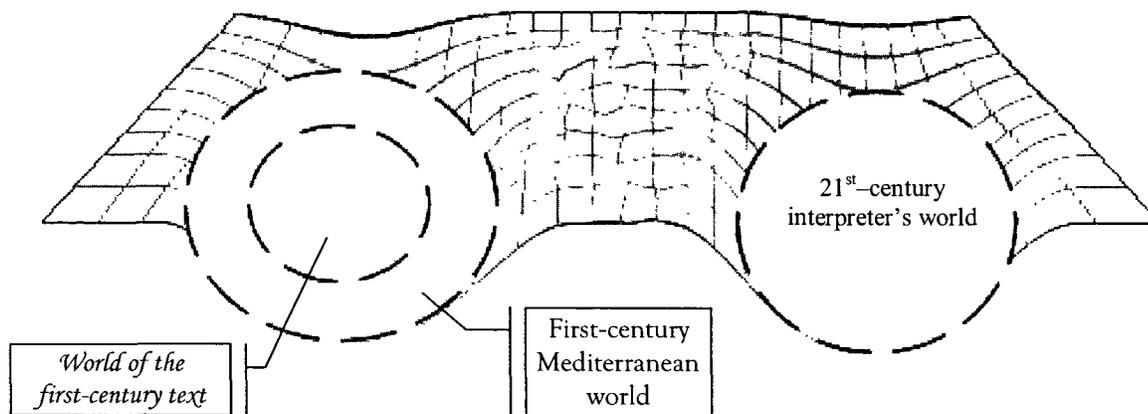


Figure 6: The proposed gravitational model of textual communication

The gravitational model respects the exchange of information, especially narrational information, between authorial and *lectorial* personae,²² which can be visualized as a correspondence taking place within and between the historical and textual spheres above, in much the same way as the process takes place in the narrative-critical and socio-rhetorical models already reviewed. But this model carefully disintegrates the neatly concentric arrangement of the world of the interpreter around the historical and textual worlds being studied.²³ As the callouts indicate, the textual world is still enclosed within the historical world from which it originates, but that historical world and the contemporary interpreter stand worlds apart. The model imagines the historical worlds in question (which can be as specific as first-century Achaia and twenty-first-century Ontario) as traveling far-flung orbits, separated by many cultural boundaries and great historical distances, but still exerting a degree of “pull” on each other and their immediate surroundings. Viewed sociopolitically and theopolitically, each world has its own centre of gravity, the theopolitical and cultural mores that govern its inhabitants and their interpretations of other eras, whether the sociopolitical rules and their exegetical ramifications are acknowledged or not.

This model functions as a multi-dimensional admission of the obstacles that impede historical-contextual hermeneutics. Its structure presents the continuity of historical context as a flat grid, on which sociopolitical structures and systems can be plotted. It stipulates that a sphere on the grid represents a society at a given moment in its

²² *Lectorial* is a neologism, pertaining to the reader (lector) and the activity of reading, as a counterpart to *authorial*.

²³ Admittedly, as was the case with Robbins’ socio-rhetorical model, this gravitational model cannot fully escape the conventions of modernism, in that the graphic presupposes an external observer who has an impartial and/or privileged view of the “worlds” and the grid of historical context; the view from within one of the gravity wells would not provide a useful illustration.

development—in this illustration, the Roman-dominated, Mediterranean world in the mid-first-century past on the left, and the early twenty-first-century, globalizing world of principally American influence on the right. The relative scale and size of the grid and the plotted societies are arbitrary and beside the point.²⁴ Rather, this model prioritizes the effects of sociopolitical systems on the (admittedly idealized) grid of history, bending and distorting the grid and frustrating interpreters who seek perspective on the theopolitics of a past era.

Some obstacles to observation are local; others are not. As Earth's atmosphere and the proximity of the sun can limit or refract what one can see of other planets and stars, the (permeable) boundaries of one historical or hermeneutical world can deflect or obstruct the view of another. In some instances, one world can eclipse another completely, hiding it from view. The theopolitics of the interpreter's world can distress the "fabric" of historical context, not only adding to the wrinkles left by previous regimes, but skewing the perspective of the would-be interpreter and the appearance of what he or she sees, pulling him or her down the curvature of that world's existing "gravity well," toward further epistemological or hermeneutical entrenchment. If a given context were governed by an empire uncertain of its own status (in which case the

²⁴ So are the societal shapes, though the spheres retain this illustration's indebtedness to the physical modelling of "gravity wells," distortions in the fabric of space and time caused by stars, black holes, and other massive objects. Gore (*Earth in the Balance*, 48–50) has previously adapted the same scientific premise to describe the way in which a "large historical event" (or a series of related smaller events) can shape collective political consciousness. It is posited here that the intrusion of empires and other massive social structures could shape the "landscape" in a manner similar to the impact of particular events. A diagram Camery-Hoggatt suggests (*Reading*, 144–45, modified on 174, 206) is instructively comparable, featuring "blasts," or explosion-marks, that represent "crucial events that the reader will know, but the characters inside the story would not know," events that altered the hermeneutical landscape by posing new questions about God's saving activity in the world. But such a map for discerning the respective "literary repertoires" of the *Sitz-im-Leben Jesu* and the *Sitz-im-Leben der Kirche* would need to be read in more than one direction: in the situation of Paul's letters to Corinth, for example, there are bound to be many things that Paul and the Corinthians would have known, but about which we as postmodern readers remain ignorant.

characterization of its world as “imperial” would be debatable), the boundaries of its domain and the degree of entrenchment might be harder to measure, but the gravitational model retains some utility even then. A reluctant or unstable empire could be represented by a gravitational depression in the grid without a visible, corresponding sphere, like a black hole, invisible to the naked eye but hyper-gravitational in the effects of the force it exerts on its spatial and temporal environment.

How might this model affect an attempt to retrieve the imperial context of Paul’s theopolitical vocabulary? There are many historical and cultural boundaries involved, of which North American cultural, ecclesiastical, and nationalist uses of New Testament vocabulary are only a few of the most proximate. Another is Paul’s own use of Roman imperial terminology, writ large enough in church history that it all but eclipses the meaning of those same terms as Rome knew them. Had the empire been aware of the way that Paul redeployed these terms in his master story,²⁵ it would have considered that story unsettling, a prospective threat to its own governing ideology. Even if the idea of a plurality of cultural narratives is more palatable to the postmodern mindset than it would have been to Rome, it is certainly possible that retrieving theopolitical contexts from one age will prove similarly unsettling to the wisdom and rulers of this age, in overturning or enriching what we thought we knew.

But there are some remaining questions that should precede a close encounter with the images of the first-century Roman imperial story and the world the empire claimed to own. What does it mean to fuse Robbins’ and Schüssler Fiorenza’s models, if,

²⁵ As noted earlier, this term takes its cue from Gorman, most recently in his chapter on Phil 2:6–11 as the outline of Paul’s “master story” of participation in the death and resurrection of Christ, in Gorman, *Inhabiting*, 9–39. A sharper contrast will be drawn shortly between this Pauline master story and Rome’s story of mastery.

as was claimed earlier, “socio-rhetorical criticism advances a contextual reading of biblical theology”? Upon what aspects of the models under review does this combination further improve? Beyond its concern with the “gravity” of empire, how is this model revolutionary?

The gravitational model develops the structure of the relationships already established among authors, readers, and texts, emphasizing, with regard to these relationships:

- *Boundaries and their permeability.* As with Lucie-Smith’s typology of closed, permeable, and open narratives, and the cultural and temporal barriers of Robbins’ socio-rhetorical model, the gravitational model permits access to historical and textual worlds, while admitting, first, that some of the barriers are local to the observer, and second, that the interpreter’s perspective may be skewed by sociopolitical forces, whether local or manifesting at a significant distance.

- *Dynamic movement, whether rhetorical, mimetic, or systemic.*²⁶ Action is not limited to the plot of the narrative discourse or the rhetorical communication from authorial to lectorial personae; there is also Robbins’ mimetic movement to consider, as agents, institutions, and other elements inside the text reflect and imitate their historical counterparts. But the attractional force of nearby worlds must be taken into account, too. For instance, if Rome’s discursive world loomed large in Paul’s imagination, its powerful ideology would have strengthened the mimetic “pull” on his vocabulary. Only a still greater force could have kept Paul’s redeployment of Rome’s language from sounding

²⁶ Mimesis will be reviewed in the last chapter, as informed by the mimetic theory of René Girard; *systemic* pertains to the world-systems and their competing forces at work in the model, as well as circumscribing the expanse over which these forces can be felt.

just like Rome. Accordingly, in an admitted limitation of the model, each discursive world also *repels* alternative attempts to prescribe new meanings for its images.

- *A plurality of “gravitational centres.”* The sphere of Rome’s influence on the first-century Mediterranean world, including the way in which that very world was defined, should not be underestimated. Luke 2:1, so often rehearsed as the beginning of the Christmas story, contains a term that does not translate easily into English: variously rendered as “Roman Empire” (in the NLT and *Voice*), “Roman world” (NIV), “world” (NRSV, NKJV), “inhabited earth” (NASB), or “Empire” (*Message*, and in the HCSB without capitalization), the actual term is οἰκουμένη, meaning the inhabited, civilized world, the Hellenized world, *Rome’s* world, indeed therefore the world *as known and as defined* by Rome. But Rome’s sanction is not the only force exerted on the apostle. “Paul’s temporal point of view shapes his narrative theology or ideological point of view,” but crucifixion and resurrection, or death and life, furnish that theology’s structure.²⁷ Paul’s perspective was indebted to the diasporic Jewish cultural milieu as it was to the Roman, but it was the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus Christ that fractured and reformed his relationship to both of these matrices. The gravitational model reminds us that Paul’s rhetorical path traveled through several theopolitical and ideological domains at once—as do our own hermeneutical paths.

- *The presidency of the author, and his or her relationship to forces external to his text.* When we open 1 Corinthians, to the extent that we can align ourselves with the Corinthian readers, we encounter Paul as an author, one who decides—along with Sosthenes, his amanuensis—the degree to which his readers can participate in his story.

²⁷ Resseguie, *Narrative Criticism*, 186, where Paul’s narrative theology/ideology is composed of additional “antitheses and paradoxes”: then/now, old and new creation, flesh/spirit, already/not yet, etc., an insight Resseguie credits in turn to Thompson, *Introducing Biblical Literature*, 285.

The gravitational model maintains the distinctions and correspondence the previous models would have shown between Paul the author and the Paul that the contemporary interpreter meets in the epistle, along with the differentiation between the interpreter, the Corinthian congregation, and what we might call the “ideal congregants” inside the letter, those who will choose to follow the discipleship path that Paul maps out. The model also affords that the author is not alone in feeling the effects of imperial ideology; his readers are caught in that orbit, too. The Corinthians and the Paul within the epistle correspond with the empire in different ways, and some of these responses are mimetic in character. The textual world of 1 and 2 Corinthians represents a socio-rhetorical contest of authorial presidencies, between competing claims about the true identity and nature of the κύριος, the nature and scope of his βασιλεία, and the legitimacy of rival offers of σωτηρία.

- *The colonizing of Corinth in Paul’s story.* In a sense, Paul is asking in 1 Corinthians 15 for all three commitments from Lucie-Smith’s typology: a leap of the imagination, moral allegiance, and receptive identification with his story (the gospel) and its characters (the witnesses, himself, Christ). The implied, ideal readers with whom Paul would like to populate his narrative world are the congregants who will reunite the factions that have divided their church, the congregants who will “stand firm,” always giving themselves “fully to the work of the Lord” (15:58). The gravitational model accounts for the way in which Paul’s claim on the Corinthians through Christ competes with the allegiance Rome demanded as founder of their colony; there is more than one gravitational force at work, demanding loyalty and imitation, and the combined forces are among the factors threatening to tear the Corinthian church asunder.

• *The position and responsibility of contemporary readers.* Rome's ideology is not the only one demanding theopolitical allegiance. The gravitational model imagines the claims on the twenty-first-century reader as additional impediments to hermeneutical comprehension, showing the contemporary North American world's boundaries and gravitational "field" as permeable but undeniably present. Reading is not just a matter of penetrating (with the violation such a word potentially connotes) the world of and behind the text, but of breaking away from the familiarity of one's own respective story and real worlds, as Paul and his co-authors asked his followers to secede from their world of imperial norms. The extent of narrational participation is vital here: one cannot completely identify with first-century Corinthian eyes and ears, and even if one could, one might find oneself blind to the same limitations they experienced. Socio-rhetorically enabled biblical theology examines first-century context as a prerequisite to interpretation and application; it encourages postmodern readers to enter the historical world and the author's story, but they are not emigrating permanently. Even if Paul as presiding author allowed readers to "immigrate" into his epistolary narrative, the potential for re-inscribed violence remains strong in the theopolitical language that he adopted.

• *The role of language and the retrieval of its context.* The gravitational model attempts to track the language that Paul borrowed from Rome. In order to understand exegetically how Paul's theopolitical terminology shaped the narrative of 1 Corinthians 15, more needs to be determined about the role it played in Roman discourse. Selecting authors who wrote before, during, and after the time of Paul's letters carries the risk of synchronic reading, the danger of assuming that what was true of the use of language in another author's time was also true in Paul's. The οἰκουμένη of Appian (ca. 95–165 CE),

the Alexandrian who chronicled Rome's martial history during the reigns of Trajan and Hadrian, or that of the biographer and historian Plutarch (ca. 46–120 CE),²⁸ was a different world than the Julio-Claudian Empire; yet because Appian and Plutarch were making a conscious effort to recapture the story of earlier Roman periods, their vocabularies are still a valuable component of Rome's overarching theopolitical, ideological, and historical discourse. Hearing Paul's language from authors who contributed (even retrospectively) to Rome's discourse will help us to understand how and why Paul adopted and adapted Rome's words, which in turn will indicate how he interacted with Rome's discursive story.

• *The significance of discursive boundaries and centres.* One difficulty in conceptualizing the gravitational model's "discursive worlds" or "spheres of influence" is that the visual representation emphasizes boundaries at the expense of centres—or so it appears. This apparent emphasis can be helpful when investigating what occurs at the boundaries, whether that involves the transmission of narrational information, the presidency of the author in determining what to communicate and how the audience is to participate, or the role(s) dictated for those left outside the story and/or the world in which it is told.²⁹ But without their respective centres, narrational boundaries make little sense, and the discursive worlds would be empty of persuasive power. More to the point, narrational boundaries themselves are rarely clear (and metanarrational boundaries perhaps even less so); their appearances in the gravitational hermeneutic and the other models

²⁸ For instance, note Plutarch's imperial ambivalence regarding the οἰκουμένη and the variable sphere of Rome's control in *Life of Caesar* 23.2: in attempting to occupy Britain, Caesar "carried the Roman supremacy beyond the confines of the inhabited world" (προήγαγεν ἔξω τῆς οἰκουμένης τὴν Ῥωμαίων ἡγεμονίαν).

²⁹ Again, the οἰκουμένη is illustrative, as the empire maintained the physical borders of its "civilized" world, as well as the labels for the outsider—the barbarian, or the *peregrinus*, for instance—who did not fit into the story of its mastery of that world.

above are mere visual aids, representations of more complex phenomena. In the realities of reading and living, postmodern readers are pulled in at least two directions simultaneously; the forces originate with the gravitational centres in question, not the boundaries, but it can be challenging to negotiate borders that one cannot clearly discern.

- *The performative impact of evocative language.* The force that each of these stories exerted upon their historical context did not stop with the events at their respective cores; a deeper impact registered in the lives of those who subscribed (or subscribe today) to them. Rome's story of mastery carried expectations and responsibilities for its adherents. If Caesar was lord, king, patron and father—however much each ruler might have publicly refused the titles³⁰—then he required public responses of loyalty from his people as subjects, clients, and family members. If he secured victory, then he and his own divine patron(s) needed to be thanked accordingly. Loyalty and liturgy are at least as performative in Paul's master story. The utterance of evocative language is what fosters communal identity and praxis. For instance, Paul proclaims that the observation of the Lord's Supper is a tradition that he received from the Lord himself. When ancient and postmodern celebrants read his words, they stand "not only in textual continuity with his letter, but... in living continuity with his tradition."³¹ In their respective uses of each theopolitical image below, the discursive rivalry between Paul's master story and Rome's story of mastery tested the fidelity and the lived-out loyalties of the Corinthian audience.

- *An analogy between the gravitational model as an expression of contemporary hermeneutical challenges and the situation of Paul's initial audiences.* Implicit among

³⁰ The ambivalence shown by Rome's rulers toward these titles will be demonstrated below, but such cases of apparent modesty are more likely instances of the use of the rhetorical device of *apophasis*, the introduction or acceptance of an idea via denial or negation.

³¹ Crossan and Reed, *In Search of Paul*, 295.

the previous points has been the assumption that an inexact but nonetheless promising analogy can be drawn between the gravitational hermeneutic as a model for the present-day act of reading—i.e., a hermeneutical activity outside the textual and/or discursive world(s) in question—and the dynamics of the world(s) reflected therein. Readers today are pulled in one direction by (post)modern assumptions but need to become aware of, and perhaps in some respects to yield to, the semantic gravitation of the theopolitical language of an earlier era. In 1 Corinthians, Paul's readers were also pulled in multiple directions by competing attractions, principally identified by their rival claims concerning lordship and salvation. At the core of the empire's story was its boast of having mastered its world, with Caesar as victorious father figure and guarantor of the Pax Romana. By contrast, Paul's narrative revolved around the impact of a single life and death, a seemingly insignificant event on the fabric of history; but if the life in question was that of the Lord Jesus, the giver of life (1 Cor 15:45), and if his resurrection has defeated Death, then the repercussions of that one life have a mass greater than that of the empire that put him to death. As we turn to face the images that supported the Roman Empire's story, we may begin to feel a measure of resonance from the powerful claims made in this narrational world as well as those made by Paul, and a measure of empathy for those who had to negotiate the forces of the attractional competition between the two.

Transition: Exploring the Components of Rome's Story of Mastery

Accordingly, the balance of this chapter is divided into ten short units, each of which addresses a particular component of Rome's imperial language; some feature brief links to contemporary concepts, intended to make their topics more accessible. Taken

separately, each of these ten units could generate an expansive word-study, detailing what each of the underlying theopolitical concepts meant to Rome, then to Paul. But when treated cumulatively, they emerge as interconnected modules of a Roman metanarrative, a story dictated by exponents of an empire that was aggressively conscious of its own power and boundaries. The geopolitical boundaries will remain largely in the background below. It is the theopolitical combination of divine and human authority that rhetorically frames and sanctions the “world” of Rome’s rule, drives its governing story, determines its ideological impact upon its spatial and temporal environment, and therefore concerns us here. With the exception of a few previews, the units that follow confine themselves to probing the conceptual story modules—lordship, kingship, salvation, paternal kinship, rule, authority, power, glory, victory, and so on—of the Roman imperial story of mastery, with the placement and function of the vocabulary in Paul’s master story best saved for a later stage of exegesis.

Theopolitical Terminology in Rome’s Imperial Discourse

1) Lord, lord over (κύριος / κυριεύειν)

When unpacking a story that governs an empire, a central theme such as lordship, or mastery, offers a natural place to begin, especially when one makes a priority of narrational presidency. However, articulating the Roman imperial domain of κύριος presents a difficulty for contemporary North America, a context where lordship is almost obsolete, at least in name. Apart from compound nouns like *landlord* (and, in Canada, as a former dominion of Britain, the vestigial ties to institutions such as the House of Lords), the term *lord* appears infrequently outside of ecclesiastical settings. The major

exception appears in the realm of fantasy: Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings*, Lucas' *Star Wars* and Rowling's *Harry Potter* series all share the epithet "Dark Lord" with respect to their arch-villains, reinforcing the theme in the North American imagination of a lord as an oppressive, enemy figure.³² *Lord* is even rarer as a verb: its idiomatic construction, "lord it over," is so arcane that it is often replaced with surrogates derived from the Latin *dominus* (master), such as "domineer" or "dominate."

According to Plutarch, lordship was an integral part of the Hellenized Mediterranean ethos long before Rome rose to power. An oracle allegedly confirmed that the young Alexander would be lord (κύριος) of all people, ruling over an empire (ἀρχῆς); even the diviner's mispronunciation became storied, when he greeted Alexander with παιδῖος (which could be interpreted as implying that he was the son of Zeus, Δίος) instead of παιδίον (*my son*, intended as a familiar form of address).³³ Upon his dissolution of the Persian Empire, Alexander is proclaimed king of Asia, rewards his friends with wealth and provinces (ἡγεμονίας), and declares to the Greeks that all their tyrannies are abolished (καταλυθῆναι).³⁴ When Alexander masters (κυριεύσας) Susa, a city with its own lengthy imperial history, Plutarch pauses to tell his reader that the Persians allegedly kept water from the Nile and the Danube on hand as proof of their

³² For Tolkien, see Carpenter, ed., *Letters of J. R. R. Tolkien*, 146, 151: in an undated letter, Tolkien asserts that "domination" is the main concern of the "Enemy" in all its forms in his fiction, including the "Dark Lord" Sauron—even if this desire is at times motivated by the apparent good of industrious benefaction. For George Lucas, see Brackett and Kasdan, *The Empire Strikes Back*, 1 ("the evil lord") and 62 ("the Dark Lord"), though neither title occurs in the vocative. For J. K. Rowling, see for instance *Chamber of Secrets*, 17, 43.

³³ Plutarch, *Life of Alexander* 27–28; the oracle's mistake illustrates the (mis)use of Greek as a *lingua franca*, while the chapters as a unit are a study in Mediterranean concepts of divine kingship and fatherhood. Alexander's filial relationship to Philip and Zeus is ambiguous here, particularly regarding the use of κυρίου and πατρός.

³⁴ Plutarch, *Life of Alexander* 34.1.

empire's scope and sovereignty (τὸ μέγεθος τῆς ἀρχῆς καὶ τὸ κυριεύειν ἀπάντων).³⁵ Evidently, even before Rome appears on stage in the story that leads to its dominance of the Hellenized world, lordship is already understood as a relational, relative concept: the greater the enemy, the greater the mastery involved in defeating and overruling them.

Given this background, it should not be surprising that the claim of lordship was taken as a serious threat when Rome shifted from republic to empire. Appian has Cassius describe Caesar as κύριον, a sovereign and an autocrat who had usurped the Senate's authority and disrupted the balance of powers (ἡγεμονίαν).³⁶ Sometimes other words appear to have been chosen to convey the same sense of domination, as when Cicero fears that Antony would not be declared an enemy of the state until "he becomes our master" (ἡμῶν γένηται δυνατώτερος).³⁷ Reflecting on consular rule, Gaius Terentilius thinks the term *consul* only slightly less detestable than *king*: in reality, he observes, Rome has two masters instead of one, possessing an "unregulated and unlimited power" (*immoderata, infinita potestate*).³⁸

By the time Domitian ruled, the emperor was increasingly being called *dominus*, rather than *princeps* (first citizen, or magistrate) or other titles.³⁹ But when Paul was writing, late in the Julio-Claudian dynasty, κύριε was as yet a respectful form of personal address, only gradually beginning to find employment with reference to Roman

³⁵ Plutarch, *Life of Alexander* 36: "the greatness of their empire and the universality of their sway."

³⁶ Appian, *Civil Wars* 4.12.91–92. Especially intriguing is the implied flexibility and reciprocity of power in the statement, "You, of the people, when you go to the wars, obey your generals as masters in everything, but in time of peace you resume your mastery over us."

³⁷ Appian, *Civil Wars* 3.8.53; other terms related to δυνατέω ("I exert power," which Paul applies to Christ's powerful presence among the believers in Corinth, 2 Cor 13:3) will be dealt with below.

³⁸ Livy, *Ab Urbe condita libri*, 3.9.4; cf. 3.34.8; *potestas* will also play a role in the later discussion of Rome's power language. Unless otherwise noted, quotations of Livy in English are taken from the LCL.

³⁹ Starr, *The Roman Empire*, 56.

emperors.⁴⁰ Augustus “was horrified and insulted when called ‘My Lord’” and reprimanded those who dared use the address, including his children and grandchildren,⁴¹ a detail that seems minor until one recalls that his sons included a future emperor: even (or perhaps especially!) the adopted Tiberius would not have been allowed to call his father κύριε or *domine*. Tiberius followed Augustus’ example, retreating from the same title that Caligula and Domitian would later embrace.⁴² As *dominus* conveyed the master-slave relationship during the republican era,⁴³ the term played a role in stratifying Rome’s social structure; could it have been an uncomfortably clear reminder of the emperor’s relationship to his people and the Senate, as the Julio-Claudians consolidated their power?⁴⁴ The early church proclaimed Jesus as “the *Kurios* liturgically honoured...to whom it owes salvation and life.”⁴⁵ Considering the imperial context behind words like κύριος and *dominus* may require the contemporary church to reevaluate the way in which it pays honour to its saving Lord. The same may well prove true concerning divine and human kingship.

2) King, empire, reign (βασιλεύς / βασιλεία / βασιλεύειν)

Kingship was a problem for Rome’s leaders. There were kings in their history and founding mythology: Romulus was hailed as a god and the son of a god, and as king and

⁴⁰ Bartholomew and Goheen (*Drama of Scripture*, 173) note that the multiplicity of Roman “lords” connoted *limitations* on their respective spheres of authority, such as that of the paterfamilias or the centurion, in comparison with Caesar’s comprehensive/ultimate lordship.

⁴¹ Suetonius, *Augustus* 53, as translated by Graves, *The Twelve Caesars*, 78.

⁴² So translator J. C. Rolfe notes at Suetonius, *Augustus* 53 (p. 206 and note *a*, in *Suetonius* 1, LCL), pointing the reader to *Tiberius* 27, where the emperor turns down the title (and, in 26, the titles *imperator* and “father of his country,” as well as the civic crown given for saving Rome’s citizens). From Trajan’s rule onward, says Rolfe, *dominus* conventionally meant *lord*, or “Sire.”

⁴³ Rolfe, on Suetonius, *Augustus* 53 (p. 206*na*).

⁴⁴ The same question might be put to Augustus for forbidding anyone to address him as δεσπότης (Dio, *Roman History* 55.12.2), another customary slave-to-master address.

⁴⁵ Schnackenburg, *God’s Rule and Kingdom*, 300, 302, citing Rom 10:9, 1 Cor 12:3, and Phil 2:11 in support.

father of Rome, entreated upon his ascension forever to protect his children. Livy (59 BCE–17 CE) has Proculus Julius attest that the ascended ruler appeared to him, ordering, “Declare to the Romans the will of Heaven that my Rome shall be capital of the world.”⁴⁶ Just as was apparent in the case of lordship, the (Mediterranean) world-wide scope of Alexander’s conquests made him a paradigmatic king in Greco-Roman eyes; Plutarch notes the “kingliness” (βασιλικόν) of Pompey’s nature, even as he admits that Pompey’s resemblance to statues of *King* Alexander was rhetorically exaggerated.⁴⁷ At age 33, Caesar despairs when contrasting himself with the Macedonian conqueror, as the latter was already reigning as king (ἐβασίλευεν) of the known world by the time he had reached the same age.⁴⁸ But Rome was not ruled by a king, at least not in name. Kings were for barbarian nations,⁴⁹ and client and buffer states; Rome answered to a nominally democratic senate, and ultimately—in the New Testament era, when her clearly imperial status was still relatively new—to the Caesars.

The language of kingship was and is the heart of the problem. Hugh Mason’s claim that βασιλεύς “never in the central period entered the official language of Rome” is overstated: the term appears frequently in texts that relate Rome’s official history, and where it does not appear it can be conspicuous by its absence.⁵⁰ The honorifics *imperator*

⁴⁶ Livy, *Ab Urbe* 1.16.3–7.

⁴⁷ Plutarch, *Life of Pompey* 2.1.

⁴⁸ Plutarch, *Life of Caesar* 11.3–6.

⁴⁹ See for example Plutarch, *Life of Caesar* 56.7–8: Rome was angered by Caesar’s celebration of a triumph over Pompey’s sons in Spain; this was not seen as a victory “over foreign commanders or barbarian kings” (ἄλλοφύλους ἡγεμόνας οὐδὲ βαρβάρους βασιλεῖς), but the annihilation of the offspring of a great Roman leader.

⁵⁰ Mason, *Greek Terms*, 120; though the use of βασιλεύς increased under Hadrian and the Severi, it never completely replaced αὐτοκράτωρ (120–21). But Appian uses βασιλεύς to denote the emperor from the Augustan era forward, describing Tiberian Rome as a monarchy (τὴν μόναρχον ἐξουσίαν; see *Roman History* 6.16.102, 10.5.29). Mason likely oversimplifies out of a desire to avoid the synchronic entanglements that consultations with later imperial historians introduce, but to ignore the ways in which Roman authors read and wrote (and read meaning into) their political history is to risk overlooking the methods with which Paul and other Christian interpreters may have done the same.

and αὐτοκράτωρ appear much more frequently in Roman discourse than βασιλεύς does, yet the meaning of αὐτοκράτωρ (ruling alone, exclusively, monarchically) also applied to *dictator*.⁵¹ All three of these terms could refer to the emperor, but none offered convenient derivatives, so words derived from βασιλεύς were often substituted.⁵² Problems with the translation and application of these royal titles have persisted in English: the RSV, NRSV, NIV, NASB, KJV and NKJV all render βασιλέων as “kings” to be prayed for in 1 Tim 2:2, perhaps inadvertently advancing the interests of monarchs while obscuring the letter’s intended reference to the emperor and perhaps the empire at large.⁵³

In a sense, it was Rome’s avoidance of explicitly royal titles that set the empire apart from its constituents and rivals. Greater Armenia stands out in Appian’s survey of the empire’s domain precisely because it is *not* subject to Roman tribute, appointing its own kings.⁵⁴ The Alexandrian goes on to regale his readers with Rome’s historic expulsion of regal rulers, before marking Caesar’s seizure of power as the beginning of monarchical rule: Roman leaders are currently called *imperators*, he agrees, even if they are all “very kings in fact” (δὲ ἔργω τὰ πάντα βασιλεῖς).⁵⁵ Roman leaders are

⁵¹ Mason, *Greek Terms*, 117–18; the Latin *dictator* was in some instances transliterated as δικτάτωρ. See Dio, *Roman History* 52.41.4, for a classical differentiation of the general military and imperial uses of αὐτοκράτωρ.

⁵² Mason, *Greek Terms*, 119–20. The derivative problem can be demonstrated by inventing comparable examples in English, e.g. “emperoring,” or by pointing out that usually only in their *secondary* definitions do *dictate* and *dictation* connote a *dictator* in the sense of a commanding authority.

⁵³ D’Angelo, “Imperial Interests,” 5: “This translation had special benefits for those who prayed some version of ‘God save the King,’ or, in the U.S. ‘the state.’ While it is not impossible that the writer wished to include some of the client-kings in this command, it is virtually certain that the letter’s concern was with the Roman rulers usually called ‘emperors’ in English.” D’Angelo cites Dibelius and Conzelmann, *The Pastoral Epistles*, 36, in support of her point. For more detail on and instances of the Roman political dimensions of kingship, see Carter, *Matthew and Empire*, 160–62.

⁵⁴ Appian, *Roman History*, Preface §2.

⁵⁵ Appian, *Roman History*, Preface §6, with a closely parallel comment in Dio, *Roman History* 53.17.2. Appian follows his reference to Caesar’s securing (ἀσφαλῆ) of sovereignty with a mention of the Augustan imperial motto, “peace and security” (*pax et securitas*, or εἰρήνη καὶ ἀσφάλεια), which Paul quotes in 1

kingmakers, the ones who *give* kings to their subject nations, the ones who decide who should βασιλεύειν there.⁵⁶ Even if Sulla officially disavowed only the specific *title* of king during his Mithridatic triumph;⁵⁷ if Caesar refused the same title only because it was historically inauspicious and politically divisive;⁵⁸ or if Octavian's adopted cognomen, *Augustus*, evinced monarchical power,⁵⁹ still Rome avoided applying the explicitly royal title to her leaders whenever possible.

Roman discourse pertaining to the state's emergence as an empire, then—in a period that corresponds with and surrounds the composition of the New Testament—betrays a fundamental distrust of kings. Kingship claims were pivotal to the motivation of Caesar's murderers: they charged that he was a king and a tyrant, not a leader (ἡγεμῶν).⁶⁰ Josephus described emperors twice with βασιλείᾳ and referred to Vespasian's βασιλεία, but again, these are *derivatives* of βασιλεύς, incrementally deflecting the force that the title itself had when applied to the Roman emperor.⁶¹ Kingdom terminology had its place, as long as the kingdoms in Rome's orbit could be represented in nondisruptive relation to Rome as the centre of power, something the Egyptians understood when they feared, in Caesar's account of the Alexandrian Wars,

Thess 5:3. For the development of the discussion on Paul's use of this slogan, see Lowe, "'This Was Not an Ordinary Death,'" 217–19.

⁵⁶ Appian, *Roman History*, Preface §7 and 11.8.47.

⁵⁷ Appian, *Civil Wars* 1.11.100–101: in the context of his autocratic actions, the disavowal was seen as either “the official denial of royalty” or “the official avowal of tyranny.” Compare 1.11.98, with Sulla as unelected “king, or tyrant” (βασιλεὺς ὧν ἡ τύραννος), “holding power by force and violence.”

⁵⁸ Appian, *Civil Wars* 2.16.107–8, 110; Caesar even rejects the appellation “king of the nations that were subject to the Romans.”

⁵⁹ LCL translator Horace White remarks in a footnote to Appian's introduction (§5) to the *Civil Wars* that *august* or *Augustus* could be paraphrased “as His Majesty” in English; see White, in Appian, *Roman History* 3 LCL (*Civil Wars* 1–3.26), 13n1.

⁶⁰ Appian, *Civil Wars* 2.17.119, 3.2.18. For uses of ἡγεμῶν in the New Testament, see Matt 2:6, 27:2. Suetonius (*Julius Caesar* 79) recounts Caesar's apparent resistance to the royal title, and the Sibylline prophecy that only a king could conquer the enemy Parthians, who were themselves governed by a “king of kings,” a title previously applied to the Persian leader; see Rolfe's note at Suetonius, *Gaius Caligula* 5 (p. 410a, *Suetonius* 1).

⁶¹ For the Josephus references, see *Jewish War* 1.5, 4.546, and 5.409, cited in Mason, *Greek Terms*, 120.

that their “kingdom would become a Roman province” (*futurem ex regno provinciam*).⁶² There was plenty of room in Rome’s story for kings and kingdoms, so long as their power was not a threat to Rome’s. To keep the telling of its story of mastery consistent, the empire’s authority needed to be absolute, as did its claims about the salvation that its leaders brought to their people.

3) Saviour, salvation (σωτήρ / σωτηρία)

Like *lord* and *king*, the terms *saviour* and *salvation* sound almost foreign to the twenty-first-century world outside of the church. Other than Linus van Pelt’s earnest recitation of Luke 2:8–14 in the KJV (“unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord”) during the annual broadcasts of *A Charlie Brown Christmas*, the term *saviour* goes almost unheard.⁶³ When it does appear, it is often relegated to the purview of superheroes, and with a surprising degree of ambivalence. Traditionally, the hero’s job is to “save the day,” along with the lives of damsels in distress, innocent bystanders, and often entire cities; the strength, speed, and bravery s/he shows in performing these saving acts are the key attributes that contribute to the “super” honorific. Even revisions of classic superhero narratives, such as the television drama *Smallville*’s teen-oriented version of Superman, retread their predecessors’ themes of saving individual and collective lives.⁶⁴ Other popular uses of saviour/salvation language

⁶² Caesar, *Alexandrian War* 3; he does exactly that at Zama, redefining Numidia as Africa Nova, in *African War* 97, and he does much the same in Gaul, in Suetonius, *Julius Caesar* 25, in Graves, *Twelve Caesars*, 23.

⁶³ On the comparison of Roman imperial and Christian messianic birth narratives, as well as the jadedness of today’s readers when reading the latter and the need to reconceptualize the imperial titles deployed therein, see Crossan, *God and Empire*, 104–8.

⁶⁴ As expressed in the show’s theme song, “Save Me,” performed by the band Remy Zero. Bryan Singer’s film *Superman Returns* (Warner Bros., 2006) also traded in (and on) salvation language, with Lois Lane’s claim, “The world doesn’t need a savior,” countered by Superman: “every day I hear people crying for

have been palpably darker. Televised trailers for *Max Payne*, a 2008 film based on a video game about vigilante justice, declared that “a wicked world dying for salvation prays for a savior.” Other recent American films and television programs, including *Hancock*, *Watchmen*, and *V*, have expressed similar ambivalence concerning their superhero characters and their respective status as saviour figures.

The parallel between American superheroes and Roman imperials is closer than it might seem, especially where it concerns the relationship of a “saviour” figure to a given city or state. Even those readers who have deliberately avoided initiation into the world of comic books can likely identify Superman with Metropolis, Batman with Gotham City, and Captain America with the United States. This suggests that saviours are *protectors*, an image that would have been easily recognized in the first-century Near East. In other instances, Roman saviours were *patrons*, whether to specific cities—paradigmatically, closer to Bruce Wayne, wealthy benefactor, than to Batman as crime-fighter—or to other bodies, such as Roman citizens or enemy captives. As Appian tells it, the temporarily triumphant Samnite leader Gaius Pontius hoped to have acted in a manner worthy of a victor (νεκικηκότος) and a φιλανθρώπος, a “humane man” or philanthropist.⁶⁵ Some have argued for a Greco-Roman saviour typology, with divine-human offspring, deified for legendary works of benefaction (*euergesia*) on the one hand, and great kings and other leaders as living manifestations (*epiphaneia*) of gods on the other.⁶⁶

one.” Similarly deliberate were the film’s recapitulations of Greek mythological and Christian theological motifs, such as Atlas shouldering the sphere of the heavens, or a father sending his only son to Earth as a messianic figure.

⁶⁵ Appian, *Roman History* 3.4.4.

⁶⁶ Cartlidge and Dungan, *Documents for the Study of the Gospels*, 17–18, distilling an argument made by Talbert, *What Is a Gospel*, 53–89.

But to draw rigid distinctions between apotheosized heroes and epiphanic rulers, or between protectors and patrons, is to ignore the fluidity that existed among these images. Our priority here is to observe, and to begin to reflect upon, the deep theopolitical investment in the manufacture of saviour figures and the salvation they offered. As one edict put it, Augustus was one who, having been sent

to us and to our descendants as a saviour (*soter*) [sic], has put an end to war and has set all things in order...having become visible (*phaneis*), Caesar has fulfilled the hopes of all earlier times...not only in surpassing all the benefactors (*euergetai*) who preceded him but also in leaving to his successors no hope of surpassing him; and whereas, finally, that the birthday of the God has been for the whole world the beginning of the gospel (*euangelion*) concerning him...let his birthday mark the beginning of the new year.⁶⁷

Earlier and later cases manifest a similar salvific lexicon. When Demetrius, nephew of Antiochus IV Epiphanes, escaped from Rome and reclaimed the Seleucid throne in Syria, he was given the title σωτήρ by the Babylonians for killing their satrap and restoring their government (ἡγεμονία); he recompensed his former captors for his escape, but Rome continued to dictate who the surrounding region's rulers would be.⁶⁸ In

⁶⁷ Grant, *Ancient Roman Religion*, 174; as quoted in Cartlidge and Dungan, *Documents for the Study of the Gospels*, 13–14. This Priene calendrical inscription from the Asian League has become a featured player in the stock company of Roman imperial primary sources, appearing in Sherck, *Rome and the Greek East*, 124–25; Horsley, *Jesus and Empire*, 9–10, 23–24; Champion, *Roman Imperialism*, 266; Stanton, *Jesus and Gospel*, 31; Oakes, *Philippians*, 139–40; and (quoting Horsley) Claiborne and Haw, *Jesus for President*, 70. The Greek source usually cited is Dittenberger, *OGIS* 2:48–60, §458. Crossan cites Asian provincial governor Paulus (or Paullus) Fabius Maximus' proclamation that led to the edict in *God and Empire*, 147–49, with the imperial gospel, more accurately documented as the plural εὐαγγέλια, among the terms highlighted in the edict itself; Horsley and Claiborne appear to conjoin Paulus' suggestion and the edict for convenience.

Among reconstructive translations of the inscription, the salient points here are the recurrent patronal and soteriological terms (e.g. Paulus was sent for the province's benefactive σωτηρία by the right hand of the divine saviour Augustus, thus melding divine, imperial, and provincial sponsorship in order to legitimize the last) and the inclusion of fortune and σωτηρία, taken either as an allocation (so Crossan, “with good fortune and safety,” and Sherck, “with good luck and for [our] salvation”) or an invocation (Champion: “may Good Fortune and Safety attend!”). Also see the sources credited by Evans, “Mark's Incipit,” 1–3 and especially 2n6. For a comparable example of Augustus' acclamation as Son of God, Caesar, saviour, benefactor, and ἀυτοκράτωρ over land and sea, see the signage on a statue from the Lycian town of Myra, as quoted in Grant, *Ancient Roman Religion*, 175.

⁶⁸ Appian, *Roman History* 11.8.47; as noted earlier, the term for exercising local rule here is βασιλεύειν.

a telling combination of biblically familiar terms, Appian describes Cicero as his country's saviour (σωτήρ), who, after receiving the thanks of the Roman assembly (χάριτες, ἐκκλησίαν), was hailed at Cato's suggestion as the father of his country (πατέρα τῆς πατρίδος), setting a precedent for the ascription of the same title to later emperors, who already ruled essentially as kings (βασιλεῦσιν), but with the *father* title added as a final testimonial (μαρτυρία) to their service.⁶⁹ Before Caligula is crowned, the public's outspoken concern for Germanicus—Caligula's father, who was also Tiberius' nephew, and Claudius' brother—suggests a salvific status by equating his welfare with that of the city and the country: *Salva Roma, salva patria, salvus est Germanicus*.⁷⁰ Caligula was later decreed to share a status as saviour of human life with rather august company, including Julius Caesar, Ares, and Aphrodite.⁷¹ Like other titles, *saviour* was applied to multiple emperors, including Titus and Vespasian.⁷²

Exceptionally helpful in understanding the image of the protective saviour is the presentation of the oak wreath, “traditionally awarded for saving a Roman's life in battle” and often worn in the recipient's subsequent statuary portraits—especially in Caesar's case, “as a token that he ‘saved the State’.”⁷³ Appian explains that Caesar was crowned

⁶⁹ Appian, *Civil Wars* 2.1.7.

⁷⁰ Suetonius, *Gaius Caligula* 6.

⁷¹ Cartlidge and Dungan, *Documents for the Study of the Gospels*, 14, quoting Murray, *Five Stages of Greek Religion*, 150 (also cited in Grant, *Ancient Roman Religion*, 175). Cartlidge and Dungan theorize that this resolution was approved by the city council of Ephesus circa 48 CE, when Paul may well have been there.

⁷² Jeffers, *The Greco-Roman World*, 101–3. With respect to emperor-worship in general, Jeffers comments that any given individual's “favorite god”—perhaps as close as the ancient world came to accepting a “personal saviour”?—would have been seen as compatible with other gods and with the imperial cult. Shrewdly, Jeffers observes that politicians in the U.S. are quick to associate themselves with the staples of “civil religion” there, among them *the flag, the church, and apple pie*.

⁷³ Suetonius notes that Caesar received the oak wreath from Marcus Thermus, when he saved a fellow soldier while serving as the Asian provincial governor's aide-de-camp. See Suetonius, *Julius Caesar* 2, as translated by Graves, *The Twelve Caesars*, 13, with the quoted statuary description on p. 11. Rolfe (at Suetonius, *Julius Caesar* 2, p. 4na) labels the oak crown “the Victoria Cross of antiquity,” though this

with oak as the country's saviour (ὡς σωτήρι τῆς πατρίδος), as this was the ensign by which "those whose lives had been saved" (οἱ περισωθέντες) had traditionally rewarded their guarantors.⁷⁴ The same civic crown was conferred on Augustus "*honoris causa*, as the saviour of all the citizens";⁷⁵ though Augustus' triumphant closure to the civil wars surely merited the crown, historical observers may still note the irony of awarding that specific honour as an unearned degree!

Receiving that crown was one of many salvation-rich episodes from Augustus' life. One such moment hints that saviours could be envisioned without resorting to the language of the σωτήρ family. Preparing for battle at sea, Octavian pours a libation to various powers, including Ἀσφαλείῳ Ποσειδῶνι or "Saviour Neptune", in hopes of counting them as allies against his father's enemies.⁷⁶ Other relevant tributes came in poetic form: Sextus Aurelius Propertius has even Jupiter remain respectfully silent as Apollo admires Augustus as the "savior of the world," while the emperor's own adoptive, deified father, Julius Caesar, looks down to proclaim that "I am a god; this victory [at Actium, 31 BCE] is proof that you are of my blood."⁷⁷ Apollo's cult grew during Augustus' reign "because he declared Apollo to be his patron," sometimes with the qualifier *Actius* to commemorate Apollo's presidency over Augustus' victory at

cross—while certainly an imperial award—is given expressly for conspicuous valour, not necessarily for saving lives.

⁷⁴ Appian (*Civil Wars* 2.16.106) also records the ascription of Caesar's πατήρ πατρίδος title here. Co-opting an account from Plutarch, Shakespeare deploys Rome's tradition of the oak crown to highlight fluctuating relations of honour and hatred: even before returning from Corioles to Rome "brow-bound with the oak," having "lurch'd all swords of the garland," Coriolanus accuses the fickle citizens of calling "Him vile that was your garland," i.e., their saviour/hero. See Shakespeare, *Coriolanus*, 1.i.176, 1.iii.14–15, 2.i.122–23, and 2.ii.97–101. The play can be read as a dramatic example of Roman political contextual retrieval on Shakespeare's part.

⁷⁵ Rolfe, *Suetonius* 1, 332ne.

⁷⁶ Appian, *Civil Wars* 5.11.98; in more literal English, "Neptune the Securer."

⁷⁷ Quoting Propertius, *Elegies* 4.6, Crossan (*God and Empire*, 10) argues that the "cosmic salvation" Propertius posits is significant because Octavian had executed Caesarion, Caesar and Cleopatra's son, who was a *divi filius* by birth, rather than adoption. See Crossan's description (8–10) of Actium as signaling the end of Octavian's last rivals.

Actium.⁷⁸ But Augustus transformed Apollo from a god of victory to a god of peace, “adapted to the patriotic and propagandistic purposes” of Rome, an adaptation reflecting a fusion of the protector and patronal figures.⁷⁹ The gods could serve as patrons of individual towns and whole empires: Jupiter was the “highest patron” for Pompeii, but he was also associated with Juno and Minerva as “joint protectors” of the Roman state.⁸⁰

The wealth of Roman saviour images does not mean that those figures called saviours were automatically imperial. Michael Grant treats the goddess Isis and her cult as emblematic of the many “divine saviours, independent of official, patriotic religion.”⁸¹ Corinth initially knew Aphrodite in similar fashion, as a patron goddess of the city, with the area’s principal temple dedicated to her on the hill known as the Acrocorinth.⁸² But the newer temple to Venus in Corinth proper was built for the divine mother of the Julio-Claudian line, in keeping with the trend of “newer, more vigorous Gods who possessed the newest and most elaborate temples in the downtown areas.”⁸³ Corinth’s new identity required an imperial deity as a patron, reflecting the sponsorship of the colony that began with Caesar, who re-founded and repopulated the city by settling veterans and exporting some of Rome’s urban poor;⁸⁴ it was the militant aspect of the goddess of love who

⁷⁸ Grant, *Cities of Vesuvius*, 49 and 143n3. Also, Dio has Augustus dedicating a temple to Ἀπόλλωνι τῷ Ἀκτίῳ (Apollo of Actium) in *Roman History* 51.1.2.

⁷⁹ Quoting Grant, *Cities of Vesuvius*, 49.

⁸⁰ Grant, *Cities of Vesuvius*, 51–52.

⁸¹ Grant, *Cities of Vesuvius*, 54–55; yet even here, Domitian figures as a prominent devotee of Isis, since her priests had saved his life, finding favour with the Flavians and ironically saving one who was a likely candidate for a salvific status.

⁸² Jeffers, *The Greco-Roman World*, 263.

⁸³ Cartlidge and Dungan, *Documents for the Study of the Gospels*, 13. The authors preface their unusual capitalization of “Gods” as an attempt to level the playing field between Greco-Roman divinities and the Judeo-Christian one throughout their compilation.

⁸⁴ Jeffers, *The Greco-Roman World*, 116, with comparisons between Corinthian and Philippian colonial composition; also see his comments on the emperor as the Empire’s highest “single” patron, 143. Plutarch features Corinth along with Carthage in *Life of Caesar* 57.6–8 as the foremost of newly planted/restored colonies, as these two had been simultaneously captured (146 BCE) and rebuilt (the former as the *Colonia Laus Iulia Corinthiensis*, 44 BCE), appeasing veteran soldiers.

“saved” by bringing victory to Caesar, her fictive descendant through her Trojan son Aeneas.

The creation and redefinitions of imperial saviour figures lead one to the workings of the salvation they offered. Several instances show that Rome understood salvation as “safety,” often in a military or political sense, in much the same way as one would speak today of “amnesty,” “asylum,” or “security.” The overlap in political meanings should not be surprising, since the deployment of *securitas* (ἀσφάλεια) played an important part in Caesar’s accession and Augustan “peace and security” propaganda during the discussion of kingship, and reappeared a moment ago in the title of Neptune’s salvific aspect, Ἀσφαλείῳ Ποσειδῶνι. That is, for imperial Rome, one who saves was one who *makes secure* or *offers security or amnesty*, sometimes self-referentially.⁸⁵ To cite a prime example from the Mithridatic Wars, Archelaus urged his troops to work hard to secure their own salvation (σωτηρίας) in battle.⁸⁶ In 42 BCE, the orator Hortensia decried a triumviral plan to offset civil war expenses by taxing Rome’s richest women, insisting that they would give generously if the empire (ἀρχῆς), the country (πατρίδος), or the populace’s safety (σωτηρίαν) were threatened by Gauls or Parthians, or if the commonwealth (πολιτείαν) were truly being restored.⁸⁷

The diplomatic facet of σωτηρία is just as revealing. Negotiating with Phameas, Scipio the Younger counsels his Carthaginian adversary to secure his own safety

⁸⁵ Nor was such an offer unassailably constant or altruistic: Tiberius offers and then withdraws ἀμνηστίαν for followers of Sejanus in Dio, *Roman History* 58.16.6. This can be contrasted with Cornelius Scipio’s execution of the leaders of a mutiny, while proclaiming pardon to the rest of the mutineers (τοῖς ἄλλοις ἀμνηστίαν ἐκήρυξε δίδοναι, in Appian, *Roman History* 6.7.36).

⁸⁶ Appian, *Roman History* 11.5.37; lateral examples can be found in the practice of praying for soldiers’ σωτηρίας (Dio, *Roman History* 56.14.4), in the Roman people becoming nervous about their own ἀσφαλείας (58.7.4), or in Caesar, *Alexandrian War* 16, in which it seems unfair that “the salvation [*salute*] of all should be decided by the rival exertions of so few” in battle.

⁸⁷ Appian, *Civil Wars* 4.5.33.

(σωτηρίας) since he cannot guarantee that of Carthage. Phameas' rejoinder binds his own σωτηρία to Carthage's fate under Rome's antagonism, which makes Scipio's reply all the more striking: he pledges his enemy "safety and pardon" (σωτηρίαν καὶ συγγνώμην) along with Roman favour, a promise founded solely on any confidence Phameas may have in Scipio's integrity.⁸⁸ During Rome's years of civil strife, Quaestor Granius Petro is among the captives taken from a ship by Metellus Scipio.⁸⁹ Scipio takes the rest of his capture as spoils of victory, but he offers Granius his life; Granius instead kills himself, responding "that it was the custom with Caesar's soldiers not to receive but to offer mercy" (ὁ δὲ εἰπὼν ὅτι τοῖς Καίσαρος στρατιώταις οὐ λαμβάνειν, ἀλλὰ διδόναι σωτηρίαν ἔθος ἐστίν), where "mercy" is more literally "salvation."⁹⁰ In another example, as Caesar later tells his friends, the most pleasurable part of a military victory was "to save [τὸ σώζειν] the lives of fellow citizens who had fought against him"—even if the recipients chose not to accept the salvation offered.⁹¹

This sampling shows Rome's saviour/salvation language to have been tightly earthbound, and rarely far away from the threat of violence.⁹² Rome had high expectations for its saviours, but these expectations were for an earthly salvation, for a hero who would save "the day" (to return to the comparison with modern category of

⁸⁸ Appian, *Roman History* 8.16.107. "Pardon," συγγνώμην, may be more familiar to today's readers of Paul when translated as "concession" (1 Cor 7:6). The Scipio in question here is Publius Cornelius Scipio Aemilianus Africanus Numantinus, earlier judged *worthy of his adoption* and called "the salvation of the Romans" (περισῶσαί Ρωμαίους, 8.14.99–101), the adopted grandson of Scipio Africanus (the Elder), who defeated Hannibal.

⁸⁹ Plutarch, *Life of Caesar* 16.4. The Scipio in this instance is the consul Quintus Caecilius Metellus Pius Cornelianus Scipio Nasica, great-grandson of Scipio the Elder.

⁹⁰ Plutarch, *Life of Caesar* 16.4.

⁹¹ Plutarch, *Life of Caesar* 48.4.

⁹² Thus Gorman's comment in *Inhabiting*, 139n47: while the counter-imperial character of the early Christian gospel has recently become a "commonplace" in biblical interpretation, its broader counter-violent stance has been neglected. This is important, he rightly says, when "imperial salvation is almost always attained and maintained by violence or the threat of violence."

superhero with which this section began), the city, or the state, whether through martial exploits or generous philanthropy. That emphasis on earthbound salvation may cause one to rethink the way one addresses Jesus as saviour in today's churches, for part of the vocabulary of salvation is based on Paul's choice of words, which he in turn sampled from Rome. For instance, when English-speaking Christians sing, "My Jesus, my Saviour, Lord, there is none like you,"⁹³ the lyrics are more than just words that fit a certain rhythm; they are culturally embedded titles, possessing an evocative, cumulative force that needs to be recognized, along with the equally forceful Christian tradition of excluding and even negating other figures as potential saviours.⁹⁴ When one eulogizes a Christian friend (e.g., "Bob was looking forward to going home to be with the Saviour"), one may want to pause to remember that Paul sometimes thought of this reunion the other way around: that his saviour and his lord would be coming to rescue him and his fellow believers (Phil 3:20, ἐξ οὗ καὶ σωτηρῆρα ἀπεκδεχόμεθα κύριον Ἰησοῦν Χριστόν).

To the extent that they reflect on the meaning and significance of salvation language as employed both inside and outside of their churches today, postmodern Christians may have to reconsider how and from what they are saved in light of the corresponding examples drawn from the theopolitical discourse of Paul's imperial Roman context. "Saviour" and "salvation" are perhaps the most sensitive of the images addressed in this study, because they highlight the exclusionary nature of the traditional and

⁹³ Darlene Zschech, "Shout to the Lord," first released on the album *People Just Like Us* (Hillsongs, 1994).

⁹⁴ Cartlidge and Dungan, *Documents for the Study of the Gospels*, 16, referring back to their epigraphical quotation (13) of 1 Cor 8:5–6 during their discussion of exclusion of other saviours and gods as a pivotal component to the uniqueness of Christian claims; and 21–22, where they note that the worship of Jesus effects a "powerful negation" in affirming Christ as saviour, rather than Caesar or other alternatives, thus setting this gospel at odds with all others. The negation is perhaps more powerful than these authors acknowledge, negating the very existence of the gods themselves (so the appropriative echo of the Shema in 1 Cor 8:4: οὐδεὶς θεὸς εἰ μὴ εἶς. On this score, see N. T. Wright's emphasis on "christological monotheism" in *Climax*, 120–36, and, in conversation with Wright, Morales' "Liturgical Conversion," 114–17).

contemporary expression of Christological monotheism. In confessional and liturgical idiom, Jesus is “my saviour,” *the* (only) saviour, the one who saves believers from sin, from death, from hell. Such exclusionary usage naturally repulses alternative prescriptions of meaning for its images,⁹⁵ even prescriptions that antedate the current norms. But it is illuminating to realize that imperial Rome faced a comparable discursive challenge, in reverse: in identifying his saviour as *the* Lord, Paul relativized all competing salvific claims. The Greco-Roman plurality of saviour-figures, with Caesar as the ultimate guarantor of mercy or salvation, had no authority from which to save. This question of contested legitimacy will also be worth remembering as the present study turns toward Rome’s imagery of kinship with respect to imperial succession.

4) Father and son (πατήρ, υἱός); sonship and adoption

Like kingship, the language of *kinship* was a familiar subject in the Roman world, as well as in the Hellenized world that the empire inherited. Once more one can begin with Alexander, who apparently preferred to receive from his father a realm full of struggles, wars, and rivalry (ἀγῶνας, πολέμους, φιλοτιμίας) rather than a kingdom of peace and luxury.⁹⁶ To revisit points glanced over during the sections on lordship and kingship, Alexander’s fame brought him the felicitous problem of dual parentage, at once a son (biologically) of Philip and (mythologically) of Zeus; little wonder, then, that Plutarch has him acknowledging the comprehensive scope of divine kingship and

⁹⁵ Admittedly defying the gravitational model as articulated earlier. It could be argued that the effects of multiple “gravitational fields” could keep a given theopolitical image stationary relative to the two discursive worlds in question, but it is probably best to concede that the model as a metaphor cannot account for all contingencies of imperially influenced narrational communication.

⁹⁶ Plutarch, *Life of Alexander* 5.3.

paternity.⁹⁷ These examples evince themes that prove recurrent in Rome’s discourse, in which patrilineal relationships, both adoptive and fictive, shaped the holding and transference of imperial power. To read these themes with the same weight that Roman-schooled readers would have assigned to them, one must recall that familial loyalty, *pietas*, applied to political relationships as well as household ones, especially the relationships between the Senate “fathers” and the populace. Shakespeare can help one remember that ideally, the leaders or “helms o’ th’ state” were to care for the citizens of Rome as fathers would for their children.⁹⁸

Sonship could determine allegiance in Rome’s world. Mithridates Pergamenus was “the son of a wealthy citizen of Pergamum who had been adopted by Mithridates the Great, from whom he took his name.”⁹⁹ During the Alexandrian War, this Pergamene Mithridates took the city of Pelusium and marched to support Caesar at Alexandria, “peacefully subduing, meanwhile, and winning over to friendship with Caesar, by that authority [*auctoritate*] which normally belongs to the victor, all those districts along his line of march.”¹⁰⁰ But the account fails to amplify the victor’s familial background: the Pergamene’s adopted father, Mithridates VI (“the Great”) of Pontus, had been a principal opponent for the previous generation of Roman generals, an aggressor whose death justified part of Pompey’s third triumph in 61 BCE. Anyone from the Pontic βασιλεία—such as Paul’s coworker Aquila, in Acts 18:1—would have known that legacy of triumph

⁹⁷ See n33 and n47 above, and the circular logic of empire in Plutarch, *Life of Alexander* 27.6–11: all people are under the kingship of God (βασιλεύονται ὑπο θεοῦ), namely Zeus, “since in every case that which gets the mastery and rules is divine” (τὸ γὰρ ἄρχον ἐν ἐκάστῳ καὶ κρατοῦν θεῖόν ἐστιν); God is the common father of all, but is understood to be particularly close to his noblest children.

⁹⁸ Menenius, in *Coriolanus* 1.i.69–71, as the lines appear in Gill’s Oxford School edition, 3.

⁹⁹ A. G. Way, translator, in *Caesar’s Alexandrian, African and Spanish Wars* (*Caesar* 3, LCL), 50n1; Way notes but does not name an alternative account, alleging that Pergamenus was Mithridates’ natural son.

¹⁰⁰ Caesar, *Alexandrian War* 26; also see Appian, *Roman History* 11.17.121, who has Caesar bestowing Pharnaces’ kingdom to Mithridates of Pergamum in gratitude for his help in Egypt.

and defeat, but the defeated ruler's adopted son must have felt it more keenly.¹⁰¹ How startling, then, to find Mithridates Pergamenus leading an acquisitive march, a provincial triumph, for Rome! But the story grows stranger: Mithridates of Iberia, the rebel king whom consular historian Cassius Dio reports as having been betrayed to Rome by his brother, actually appears to have been Mithridates of Pergamum!¹⁰² Mithridates the Great's adopted son had the diplomatic aptitude (and the audacity, given the risks) to shift his familial/political loyalties not once, but twice. Allegiances born of adoption were significant in the world Rome ruled, then, if not always permanent.

As an empire emerged from the shards of a republic, adoption and father/son language became an intensely political key to Rome's imperial accession, licensing patrimonial rule. Truly hereditary succession was not technically possible, as the emperor's powers reverted legally to the people upon his death, but legitimizing the transition of power through family ties served as a powerful legal fiction, so much so that a blood or fictive relationship to one's predecessor was soon required for formal succession.¹⁰³ These connections were important to whole family lines, not just individual leaders: Suetonius (ca. 69–130 CE) reports that Caesar's extended family could "claim both the sanctity of kings, who reign supreme among mortals, and the reverence due to gods, who hold even kings in their power."¹⁰⁴ Even if the Julio-Claudians' divine

¹⁰¹ In some triumphal parades the lives of the sons themselves were threatened, as when the consul Cornelius tortured a son of his enemy Britomaris and led him in triumph, according to Appian, *Roman History* 3.6.1.

¹⁰² That is, the Mithridates whom Dio erroneously locates in Iberia was actually Mithridates of Bosphorus, earlier known as Mithridates of Pergamum. See Dio, *Roman History* 40.28.7, and LCL translator Earnest Cary's corresponding note in *Dio's Roman History* 7 (Books 56–60), 441n1.

¹⁰³ This and other psychological and ideological requirements (e.g. charisma, courage, and not least the support of the army) gained importance as the security of succession and accession began to destabilize after the reign of Tiberius: so Starr, *The Roman Empire*, 13, 39, 41.

¹⁰⁴ Suetonius, *Julius Caesar* 6, in Graves, *Twelve Caesars*, 15.

heritage was understood to be a gloss, its interpretation of history and paternity still carried public authority.

This ancestral power would have been felt among Rome's client kings and kingdoms, too. When Nicomedes Philopator succeeds his father as Bithynian king, Rome confirms the authority of the appointment.¹⁰⁵ Pontus provides another example: it is described as a "paternal kingdom" (τὴν πατρῴσσαν ἀρχὴν), the exclusive (μόνην) possession of Mithridates, but after the Mithridatic Wars Pontus becomes part of Rome's family of provinces.¹⁰⁶ Later, with suspect magnanimity, Augustus cedes back to the Senate Rome's non-belligerent provinces, including the joint province of Bithynia and the previously contested Pontus.¹⁰⁷ Participation and position in the empire were rarely a matter in which the provinces had any choice, whether under the jurisdiction of the "Fathers" of the Senate or the emperor's paternally conceptualized leadership.

A basic tenet of the imperial claims of sovereignty over Rome's people and her subject nations was the emperor's status as father, not just of his successor, but of the empire as a unified whole. The title that configured this fictive, collective kinship was that of *pater patriae*, or πατέρα τῆς πατρίδος: father of the country (or "fatherland"). One may observe how the title is deployed repeatedly with reference to the Julio-Claudian period, first as an epithet for Julius Caesar,¹⁰⁸ then for Augustus. In 2 BCE, the

¹⁰⁵ Appian, *Roman History* 12.1.7.

¹⁰⁶ Appian, *Roman History* 12.8.58.

¹⁰⁷ Dio, *Roman History* 53.12.2–4.

¹⁰⁸ Appian, *Civil Wars* 2.16.106; also noted by Suetonius in *Julius Caesar* 76 (in Graves, *Twelve Caesars*, 40), where Caesar's use of the prefix *imperator* and the suffix "father of his country" is remembered as hubris, though the latter epithet nonetheless became the epitaph on Caesar's column in the Forum (*Julius Caesar* 85).

Senate votes to erect in the Forum a statue of Augustus, the new *pater patriae*.¹⁰⁹

According to custom, Octavian had taken the name of his new father only *after* he was received by Caesar’s followers as his son; he adopts the “Caesar” cognomen first, then “Augustus” as a title.¹¹⁰ Adopting these names conveys upon the ruler a strong family relationship and an auspicious splendour, but “father,” a title that instantly imbues Octavian with ἐξουσίαν (authority) and honour, also entails an accountability to love his subjects, who are to revere him in return.¹¹¹ As Augustus reasons, how could he be a good ruler (καλῶς ἄρχοιμι) over his subjects if he allowed them to diminish in numbers? How could he rightfully be called “father” (πῶς δ’ ἂν ἔτι πατὴρ ὑμῶν ὀρθῶς ὀνομαζοίμην) if they refused to procreate? This status, while eventually formalized by decree, drew its sustenance not only from public adulation but public *compliance* as well: the title would be for flattery and honour alone¹¹² if it were not substantiated through filial obedience to the emperor as patronal father.

Subsequent Julio-Claudian reigns were replete with similar themes. The young Tiberius initially accepted an offer of adoption from Marcus Gallius, a senator, but dropped the surname when Gallius opposed Augustus.¹¹³ Tiberius later vetoed his mother Livia’s “Parent of the Country” (*parentem patriae*) title, demurring when offered the

¹⁰⁹ Starr, *The Roman Empire*, 26; Augustus tearfully accepted the honorific from the Senate “Fathers” after he had already declined it (Suetonius, *Augustus* 58; as would Nero, because of his own youth, *Nero* 8). For a declination of even the *imperator* title, see *Claudius* 12.

¹¹⁰ Appian, *Civil Wars* 3.2.11 and 14, where Octavian also invokes (ἀνεκάλει) Caesar as father rather than friend; the adoption is later ratified by the people of Rome, granting Octavian the rights thereof (3.13.94). On the assumption of *Caesar* and *Augustus* as title-names, see Suetonius, *Augustus* 7, in Graves, *Twelve Caesars*, 49.

¹¹¹ Dio, *Roman History* 53.18.2–3. Also see Virgil (*Aeneid* 6.789–94, cited incompletely in Champion, *Roman Imperialism*, 266), who hails Augustus as “son of the deified” and restorer of Rome’s golden age, while avoiding the redundancy of restating Augustus’ own theopolitically advantageous title by having Anchises call him *divi genus* (rather than *divi filius*) during his *ex eventu* prophecy.

¹¹² Dio, *Roman History* 40.10.10 (formalizing the title) and 41.9.2–3 (honour, not flattery, as the title’s basis).

¹¹³ Suetonius, *Tiberius* 6, in Graves, *Twelve Caesars*, 103.

pater title himself, on the grounds that he might sully the honorific.¹¹⁴ More recent readers with dysfunctional or blended family backgrounds may find some humour in Tiberius' complex family relationships: he was the stepson (via his mother Livia's remarriage), son-in-law (through his marriage to Julia), and finally the adopted son of Augustus, and his adoption came with obligations. Upon being adopted by Augustus and adopting his own nephew Germanicus, Tiberius ceased to operate as head of the Claudian family, surrendering the privileges of that position and legally unable to give or receive gifts or emancipate slaves.¹¹⁵ Such a move could have a trickle-down effect, as Claudius assumed the cognomen "Germanicus" upon his brother's adoption into the Julian house.¹¹⁶ Where Caligula assumed "Father of the Armies" and "Greatest and Best of Caesars" (*optimus maximus Caesar*) among other epithets, even flirting with an evocative assumption of the title of βασιλεύς,¹¹⁷ Claudius initially refused the "father" title, as Caligula's murder had him worried about his own ἀσφάλειαν as newly installed emperor.¹¹⁸ Later, Nero would keep troops in Britain, as a withdrawal would diminish the glory of Claudius, his adopted father; later still, Vespasian would refuse the "father" title until late in his reign.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁴ Suetonius, *Tiberius* 50 and 67, in Graves, *Twelve Caesars*, 125, 131. Dio (*Roman History* 57.12) has Livia's proposed title as μητέρα τῆς πατρίδος. For Tiberius' frequent refusal to use his rightful titles in official capacities, see Dio, *Roman History* 57.2.1, 57.8, and 58.12.8, as well as Suetonius, *Tiberius* 26, in Graves, 115.

¹¹⁵ Suetonius, *Tiberius* 15, in Graves, *Twelve Caesars*, 109.

¹¹⁶ Suetonius, *Claudius* 2.

¹¹⁷ Suetonius, *Gaius Caligula* 22; Caligula quotes Homer's *Iliad* 2.204, Εἷς κοίρανος ἔστω, εἷς βασιλεύς. On the "Father of the Armies," it may prove helpful to correlate Appian's picture of Zeus as "God of Armies" (στρατίῳ Διὶ πατρίῳ, *Roman History* 12.9.66), perhaps along with the militant tone of the problematic biblical name, Κυρίῳ τῷ Θεῷ σαβαώθ (e.g., as at 1 Sam 1:3 LXX).

¹¹⁸ Dio, *Roman History* 60.3.2, 4.

¹¹⁹ Suetonius, *Nero* 18, *Vespasian* 12.

Today, relationships between fathers and sons are often highly ambivalent; in many cases the ties are severed completely.¹²⁰ This emotionally charged context makes it difficult to speak the language of fatherhood, sonship, and adoption as Rome did, or to hear that language as Paul and his congregations would have. This is not to say that the conceptual language of the Roman πατρίδος, the fatherland, was Paul's mother tongue. His preaching on divine adoption was heavily invested in the biblical tradition, and Christ's status as the Son of God was clearly a priority for Paul, as will be evident in re-reading 1 Corinthians 15.¹²¹ One of the exegetical tests to be faced at that point will be to hold divine sonship and fatherhood in dynamic tension between Paul's biblical and Roman imperial contexts. Before taking on that task, however, other concepts in Rome's theopolitical narrative must be considered, such as the emperor's patronal relationship to his people as a body politic.

5) Body (σῶμα)

Instead of offering a digest of multiple appearances of the term σῶμα in Roman imperial discourse, it may be constructive to pause at this point and consider just one vital set of instances of σῶμα as a theopolitical metaphor, in relation to some of the other images reviewed here. One highly accessible route from sonship to σῶμα is to attend the funeral ceremonies for Augustus Caesar in 14 CE. As the deceased emperor's adopted son, stepson, son-in-law and successor, it fell to Tiberius to eulogize Πατήρ Augustus.

¹²⁰ See especially the first three chapters in Miller and MacMurray, *To Own a Dragon*.

¹²¹ Apropos here are Goodwin's comments in *Paul, Apostle of the Living God*, 150–58: in Rom 9:24–26, Paul appropriates Hosea 2:1, 25 (LXX) to demonstrate that the living God adopts converts in a way that creates life by reversing a “deathlike situation” of barrenness and non-being, echoing God's own original creative acts. Goodwin applies similar logic to instances of the “living God” epithet in 2 Cor 3:3, 6:16. Even in these largely Jewish contexts, however, the Roman imperial influence can still be felt, supplying the (idolatrous, dead, nonexistent) gods in opposition to whom the living God's identity continued to be shaped in the New Testament, and perhaps colouring Paul's talk of divine adoption here.

Rather than seeking to become the “sole lord of all,” Tiberius reportedly recalled, “Like a good physician who takes in hand a disease-ridden body [σῶμα] and heals it, he first restored to health and then gave back to you [the Roman people] the whole body politic.”¹²² This comment’s immediate context also incorporates Augustus’ kindness (φιλανθρωπία) shown in mediating factional divides, his generosity (εὐεργεσία, connoting benefaction) in appeasing the army, and the indisputable status of exclusive lordship (μόνος ἀναμφιλόγως κύριος ἀπάντων) Tiberius claims his predecessor eschewed.

Nor was this the first occasion in which Augustus and the Roman collective were knit together. As he began his rule, Augustus was advised by Maecenas not to shy away from surgery and cauterization, meaning capital punishment, if such treatments would help the patient.¹²³ But Augustus’ wife Livia later counseled him to opt for these techniques only as a last resort. She proposed that the preservation (σωτηρία) of the governed was the reason why the ruler’s office was established; her diagnostic goal was to save (σώζειν) as many as possible, not to put them to death.¹²⁴

Taking action to save the collective Roman patient in this way images Augustus as a healer, a saving figure in the mode of a fellow son of Apollo, Asclepius. The god and founder of medicine learned his art from his father, and his medical kit included two vials he had received from Athena, containing blood drawn from the Gorgon Medusa: one to

¹²² Dio, *Roman History* 56.39, as translated in Santosuosso, *Storming the Heavens*, 109; the brackets on “the Roman people” are his. Dio’s previous uses of a similar bodily metaphor, cited here momentarily, are not noted in Santosuosso.

¹²³ Presumably the body politic. Dio, *Roman History* 52.26.8.

¹²⁴ Dio, *Roman History* 55.17–18, 55.20.2.

raise the dead, the other to destroy.¹²⁵ Like Asclepius, the emperor held the power of life and death over his people, the “body” on which he operated. Amputation was a possibility even for Rome’s senators, with motives that could be simultaneously Asclepian and imperial; Augustus put Turullius to death in Cos to atone to both Caesar and Asclepius, from whose sacred grove the senator had harvested wood for building warships.¹²⁶

6) Rule, ruler (ἀρχή, ἄρχων)

This unit and the next focus jointly on *rule, authority, and power*, terms difficult to isolate from one another in any language. “Rule” is treated first, not as the first of the three to appear in 1 Corinthians 15, but primarily because the term is accompanied by an office, “ruler,” more closely than the other two. Multiple occurrences of ἀρχή and ἄρχων have already surfaced with respect to empires, kingdoms, and rulers in the course of other studying other terms along the way, but we have yet to take the measure of the rule/ruler terminology itself. When employed to describe a person, ἀρχ- terms frequently meant the equivalent of a magistrate, transferred metonymically from the office to the official who held it; occasionally this applied to provincial, consular, or tribunal rule, where ἄρχων(ν) found its most consummate sense of “independent authority” as a

¹²⁵ Graves (*The Greek Myths* 1:168–71) hypothesizes that oracular politics were the Asclepius myth’s subtext, involving the Apollonian suppression of a pre-Hellenistic medical cult. Even among Greco-Roman saviour-figures, then, there is evidence for a degree of theopolitical competition that preceded Paul’s appropriation of the image.

¹²⁶ Dio, *Roman History* 51.8.3, employing the Roman variation on the better-known Greek form of Asclepius’ name. In his editorial introduction to Graves (*The Greek Myths* 1:13), Kenneth McLeish attributes the high degree of “cultural continuity” between Greek and Roman myth to Rome’s centuries of bilingual and “bi-cultural” education.

descriptor for provincial governors, or a given city's *princeps* (first magistrate).¹²⁷ Even at the local or provincial levels, Roman-appointed magistrates held considerable power, emblemized by the fasces, a bundle of rods surrounding an axe, which represented the power to inflict corporal and capital punishment within one's magisterial domain.¹²⁸

The use of ἀρχή signified the domain ruled, either in the geographical sense or that of a sphere of political or military influence. Mason finds ἡ Ῥωμαίων ἀρχή a “common expression” as the equivalent of the *imperium Romanum*, though he says that ἡγεμονία (whence the English word “hegemony”) is “more usual” for this application as well as in place of ἀρχή in the non-technical sense of military command.¹²⁹ Even if ἡγεμονία was more common, the use of ἀρχήν was anything but arcane. It could indicate the Persian Empire, Macedonian dominion, or the expanding influence that the Romans enjoyed as they consolidated their power throughout the οἰκουμένην, the inhabited world that the Macedonians formerly controlled—proof positive, for Rome, that it had the power to prescribe the extent of its own world.¹³⁰ Sometimes ἀρχή meant a

¹²⁷ Mason (*Greek Terms*, 110–11, 112–13) cites in support the post-Pauline example of ὁ ἄρχων τοῦ αἰῶνος τούτου (the *prince* of this world, or age) in Ignatius, *Rom.* 7.1. Also see the comparable Pauline combination of ἄρχων and ἐξουσία to describe Satan's power: τὸν ἄρχοντα τῆς ἐξουσίας τοῦ ἄερος (Eph 2:2).

¹²⁸ So crucial was this “Roman symbol of strength in unity” (Gill, in notes to *Coriolanus*, 47, suggesting stage direction at 2.ii.36) that individuals' fasces were broken when they were dismissed from office (Dio, *Roman History* 59.20.3).

¹²⁹ Mason, *Greek Terms*, 110–11, 113. References to support Mason's point might include Plutarch, *Life of Pompey* 33.6 (the Parthian empire); 53.7, 56.1 (Roman empire/dominion/supremacy); and *Life of Alexander* 34.1 (where ἡγεμονία = provinces, awarded to friends by the victorious Alexander; compare the galled Octavian, appeased with the Gallic ἡγεμονίαν in Appian, *Civil Wars* 3.10.73). But at *Life of Alexander* 48.4–5, Alexander is alleged not to deserve the title/name of ruler (τῆς ἀρχῆς ὄνομα, rather than ἡγεμόνος).

¹³⁰ Plutarch, *Life of Alexander* 17, 34.1, 69.2–5 (Persian); 27.5–7 and *Life of Pompey* 34.5 (Macedonian); *Life of Pompey* 38.2–3 (Roman); the extent of Pompey's military ambition is delimited by the “Outer Sea,” the Atlantic, the Red Sea, and the Mediterranean (which was often tellingly called the *Mare Internum*). Also see Appian's repeated deployment of ἀρχ- terms in his Preface (“and all are under Roman rule,” καὶ πάντων ἄρχουσι Ῥωμαίοι) and with respect to the Carthaginians' imperial power (ἀρχῆς), their ambition to rule (ἄρχειν) over vanquished Rome, and the reassertion of Roman power (ἀρχή) in his *Roman History* 6.15.98, 8.7.42.

command with tenure, as when one of Caesar’s centurions famously signalled that his sword would extend his commander’s χρόνον τῆς ἀρχῆς, or at Caesar’s reelection to the office (ἀρχῆς) of δικτάτωρ—though his enjoyment of long-sought power and dominion (ἀρχὴν καὶ δυναστείαν) turned out to be short-lived.¹³¹ The line between ἀρχή and ἡγεμονία was indistinct in their empire-wide applications: the former’s sense of “empire” is virtually synonymous with the latter’s connotation of “power.”¹³² Employed separately or bundled together, the terms might best be integrated in today’s terms as “jurisdiction,” covering both the *range* and the *exercise* of rule.

7) Authority (ἐξουσία) and power (δύναμις)

The meanings and applications Rome prescribed to its theopolitical terms have shown a significant fluidity up to this point. It has been evident in the near-equivalence of “lord” and “king” as monarchical titles, the interchangeable deployment of *imperator* and αὐτοκράτωρ on the battlefield and in the imperial court, the transliteration of one of the military monarchy’s highest honours (*dictator*/δικτάτωρ), and the proclamation of leaders as both “father” and “saviour” of their country. In this section, that fluidity will surge, making the distinctions between the analogous ἀρχή and ἡγεμονία above seem cut-and-dried by comparison. The problem extends from Greek to Latin, but it can be seen in English, too: the contemporary usage of “authority,” “power,” and synonyms such as “sovereignty” and “autonomy” is almost interchangeable in many different

¹³¹ Plutarch, *Life of Caesar* 29.5–6, 51.1, 69.1. Assuming a late-first-century composition date, the centurion’s threat would have brought to mind Vespasian’s violent rise to power in 69 CE—which Ronald Mellor pinpoints as Rome’s first unambiguously military accession, in Episode 4, “Years of Eruption,” in the PBS program *Empires: The Roman Empire in the First Century* (Goldfarb and Koval Productions, 2001).

¹³² Appian, *Civil Wars* 1.1.5 (cf. 1.1.6, where the human hunger for power is φιλαρχίαν) and 1.3.20.

relational senses and contexts, whether commercial, governmental, religious, or interpersonal.

The problem of fluid meanings and translation is not new. Earlier, *auctoritas*—the Latin noun usually rendered as “authority,” but which also suggests “ownership,” “responsibility,” “influence,” or perhaps a “sanctioning power”—appeared during the analysis of sonship and adoption. At this juncture, it pays to listen closely as Dio (160–230 CE) tries to explain the word after transliterating it. The intended purpose of the Roman senators’ ἀυκτώριτας, he says, is to reveal (φανερόν) their will: for “such is the general force of this word; to translate it into Greek by a term that will always be applicable is impossible” (τοιούτων γὰρ τι ἡ δύναμις τοῦ ὀνόματος τούτου δηλοῖ ἑλληνίσαι γὰρ αὐτὸ καθάπαξ ἀδύνατόν ἐστι).¹³³ When one observes that even Dio’s explanation requires a near-cognate like δύναμις (“force,” or “power”), one can see how quickly definitions of authority and power interlock. When a citizen in *Coriolanus* complains, “What authority surfeits on would relieve us,” the primary motive for the remark is a parallel in food shortages between ancient Rome and Jacobean England, but through the complaint, Shakespeare draws attention to the many ways in which authority and power will unfold in the sequence of the play.¹³⁴ Though the presentation may be less dramatic, a similar unfolding will play out here vis-à-vis ἐξουσία, δύναμις, and their Latin cognates.

Roman discourse employs ἐξουσία in many of the same contexts as it does the Latin *imperium* (“empire,” or “imperial control”) and *potestas* (“power,” “rule,” or “force”). Ἐξουσία, which alone among a host of other imperial labels “comes closest to

¹³³ Dio, *Roman History* 55.3.4–5.

¹³⁴ Shakespeare, *Coriolanus* 1.i.13; and see Gill’s introductory comments, v–vi.

being a precise and technical term” approximating *imperium*, remains an “acceptable” translation of *potestas*, as well as connoting the authority that a given ruler holds.¹³⁵

Imperium is the “most frequent” meaning of ἐξουσία: Dio has various forms of it granted to Caesar and Augustus, while other authors describe the reigning emperor’s *imperium* by combining ἐξουσία with αὐτοκρατής, μόναρχος, or αὐτοκράτωρ.¹³⁶ To compare two authors’ descriptions of the same ruler’s authority, Suetonius records that Tiberius took the imperial *power* immediately, even as he seemed to shrink from the imperial *title*, telling friends “what a monster the empire was” (*quanta belua esset imperium*);¹³⁷ but Appian simply summarizes the Tiberian era as part of the time “of the empire”—τὴν μόναρχον ἐξουσίαν.¹³⁸

The orientation and magnitude of ἐξουσία, δύναμις, *imperium* and *auctoritas* could vary widely. In some instances, local or provincial autonomy was meant, as when Rome appointed Syrian proconsuls with the ἐξουσίαν to levy troops and engage in warfare.¹³⁹ Caesar’s civil war commentary marks the fear of Pompey’s name and authority (*imperium*), but it also preserves the sense of *imperium* as imperial power(s), particularly that of the Roman people, or of a supreme command (*summa imperii*) or

¹³⁵ According to Mason, *Greek Terms*, 134.

¹³⁶ Mason, *Greek Terms*, 133, citing Dio, *Roman History* 55.10.18 and 13.5 (the ἐξουσία of Caesar and Augustus, respectively) Philo, *Leg.* 4.26, 8.54 (ἐξουσία with αὐτοκρατής), Appian, *Illyrian Wars* 30.88 (= *Roman History* 10.5.30, LCL: ἐξουσία with μόναρχος), and Herodian, *Hist.* 1.3.1 (ἐξουσία with αὐτοκράτωρ).

¹³⁷ Suetonius, *Tiberius* 24, in Graves, *Twelve Caesars*, 113. Hypocritical though Tiberius’ protest may be, it reveals a startling parallel to the theme of Rome’s beastly character in Revelation 13, this time originating with a writer from the empire’s core (rather than its margins), one or two generations after Revelation was written. Close at hand, note the theopolitical use of ἐξουσία and δύναμις in Rev 13:2 (τὴν δύναμιν αὐτοῦ καὶ τὸν θρόνον αὐτοῦ καὶ ἐξουσίαν μεγάλην, where the final term is rendered *potestatem magnam* in the Vulgate), and again in 13:4–5, 7, 12.

¹³⁸ Appian, *Roman History* 10.5.30. Here, as in any other instance of translation, it is important to remember that a seminal English rendering will affect subsequent interpretations. In many cases concerning an interchangeable series of terms, the choice of an English equivalent is governed by the need for variety and smooth reading, not just word-for-word accuracy. τὴν μόναρχον ἐξουσίαν says a good deal more than “empire,” but other options—“monarchical authority,” perhaps—can be both repetitive and unwieldy.

¹³⁹ Appian, *Roman History* 11.8.50–51.

“chief authority” (*maximae auctoritatis*).¹⁴⁰ Along with δυναστεία, δύναμις could approach the meaning of *imperium*, though it was etymologically closer to *potestas*.¹⁴¹ So the power held by pirates was δύναμις, the greatness of Mithridates was in his empire (ἄρχης) and power (δυνάμεως), and certain powers (δυνάμεις) traditionally came with political offices (ἀρχαίως).¹⁴²

These examples show the relativity of power, its relational nature, and its variable meanings in Roman political contexts. Frustratingly fluid in their definitions and applications, the terms employed by Rome’s authors remained diverse, demonstrating the comprehensive reach of empire. Conjectural though it would be at this stage, it might be tempting to simplify Paul’s equation of multiple powers in 1 Cor 15:24: when Christ dismantles πᾶσαν ἀρχὴν καὶ πᾶσαν ἐξουσίαν καὶ δύναμιν, why should the translator not select one or two of the closest equivalents in the target language?¹⁴³ Since ἀρχήν, ἐξουσίαν and δύναμιν all share a deeply theopolitical meaning, one might easily say that Christ dismantles every imperial power. After all, the only other frequent Greek term for empire excluded from this triumvirate is ἡγεμονία!¹⁴⁴ But the diversity of Rome’s theopolitical terminology is precisely what Paul respected in his own theopolitical language; his choice of words had to cover at least a representative sampling of the

¹⁴⁰ Caesar, *Civil Wars* 1.61 (the authority of Pompey); 3.11 (the power of the Roman people); 1.4, 3.18 (as supreme command/control; also see 1.85); and 3.109 (*maximae auctoritatis*).

¹⁴¹ Mason, *Greek Terms*, 134. Appian’s *Civil Wars* 2.36, the example Mason cites here in brief, rewards further consideration, as it anticipates (in Appian’s retrospect) a permanent change in the “form of government” and notes the Roman people’s call for Caesar and Pompey to disarm and abdicate their commands.

¹⁴² Pirate δύναμις: Plutarch, *Life of Pompey* 25.1. For Mithridates, see Appian, *Roman History* 12.15.102. For the political-official form of δυνάμεις, see Dio, *Roman History* 52.20.3.

¹⁴³ The fluidity between ἐξουσία and *potestas* returns in Jerome’s rendering, *omnem principatum et potestatem et virtutem* (1 Cor 15:24, Vulgate).

¹⁴⁴ Apart from technical use for specific civic and military postings, Mason (*Greek Terms*, 151) broadens the use of hegemony to describe the *Imperium Romanum* and government in general: “The Greek writers chose to employ an imprecise term; if we can establish from external information precisely what they meant, it is incorrect to translate or understand that specific precise reference, for if so, the intention of the purposely imprecise wording is lost.”

dominant terms of power of his day. The translator who hopes to preserve Paul's meaning lacks the authorization to collapse Paul's three terms together as "empire," or any other blanket term that appears to justify a given theological or political end.

8) **Glory (δόξα)**

Gaining glory was a priority for individual warriors, whole armies, and entire peoples in story of mastery over which Rome presided. "So great is the glory won by the Roman people in their wars," comments Livy in the preface to his *Ab Urbe condita libri*, that "when they declare that Mars himself was their first parent and father of the man who founded their city, all the nations of the world might well allow the claim as readily as they accept Rome's imperial dominion."¹⁴⁵ This observation further cements the connection between some of the key terms and relational concepts under review here: the primacy of (adoptive) divine parentage in Rome's worldview, its claim of *imperium* over the nations of the Hellenized world, and victorious warfare as the means of sustaining the empire and proving the divine heritage. But it also introduces and prioritizes *gloria* or δόξα as a distinctively Roman attribute.

Rooted in the Augustan moral revival,¹⁴⁶ Livy's history was a deliberate effort in the recovery of racial memory, evoking the glory of the past for the good of Rome's future. His analysis of the present is telling: "wealth has made us greedy, and self-indulgence has brought us, through every form of sensual excess, to be, if I may so put it,

¹⁴⁵ From de Sélincourt's translation of Livy's *Early History of Rome*, 30. The LCL rendition has "the nations of the earth may well submit," further emphasizing Rome's geopolitical advantage.

¹⁴⁶ Ogilvie, "Introduction," in de Sélincourt's translation of Livy, 6.

in love with death both individual and collective.”¹⁴⁷ If Rome had been fated to become the greatest empire ever known, then glory came with the territory. (Notably, however, Livy allows that the divine realm is greater still.)¹⁴⁸ He speaks of victorious generals’ accumulated glory, described in varying degrees that may sound to North American ears like collegiate honours, such as *magna gloria* (great glory), or returning to Rome *cum maxima gloria*.¹⁴⁹ Glory could be graciously declined and ironically regained, too: with the state “half orphaned” (*re publica ex parte orba*) by the loss of a consul, another refuses a triumph (more precisely “laurel,” *lauream*) but gains *gloria* by refusing and then crediting his victory to the leaders who fell in battle.¹⁵⁰

Glory was an attribute that was won by one, yet subsequently ascribed by others, especially by those in positions of authority. Glory was implicit in the voting of the title *imperator* (or αὐτοκράτωρ) and other military honorifics, like *magnus* (“the great”): Plutarch speculates that *magnus* may have been accredited to Pompey by his army, but the historian insists the epithet received its “authority” and “weight” (κράτος, δύναμις) from Sulla.¹⁵¹ Glorious titles could be charitably declined, too, as when Pompey is said to have refused the honour of the title αὐτοκράτωρ while the camp of his opponent Domitius still stood.¹⁵² If war brought glory, peace could diminish it,¹⁵³ so the drive to

¹⁴⁷ de Sélincourt’s rendering (Livy, *Early History of Rome*, 30) is admittedly poetic; death is not explicitly mentioned here. The LCL has Rome driving toward self-ruin and “universal destruction” (*perdendique omnia*).

¹⁴⁸ Livy, *Ab Urbe* 1.4.1.

¹⁴⁹ Livy, *Ab Urbe* 1.31.8 and 2.25.6, respectively; compare Appian’s description in *Civil Wars* 2.1.9 of Pompey acquiring μέγα δόξης καὶ δυνάμεως because of his Μιθριδατείων ἔργων of war.

¹⁵⁰ Livy, *Ab Urbe* 2.47.10–11.

¹⁵¹ Plutarch, *Life of Pompey* 13.5; the LCL rendition of “authority and weight” stretches slightly the domain of the Greek terms. When Dio uses αὐτοκράτωρ (e.g., *Roman History* 54.33.5), his phrasing indicates the term’s duality as a title and an imperial name: τὸ γὰρ ὄνομα τὸ τοῦ αὐτοκράτορος.

¹⁵² Plutarch, *Life of Pompey* 12.3, though Pompey and Sulla previously saluted *each other* as αὐτοκράτωρ (8.2). Contrast this with Dio’s remarks on Caligula as the victory-less αὐτοκράτωρ, despite the emperor’s self-conception as having been crowned by Victory in a dream, in *Roman History* 59.22.2, 26.5.

increase personal and familial glory went hand in hand with more warfare. Pompey later dreams of decorating a temple of Venus Victrix or Ἀφροδίτης νικηφόρου (literally “victory-bringer”) with the spoils of war, alluding specifically to the glory and splendour (δόξα καὶ λαμπρότης) that the goddess and her human offspring would receive through this act.¹⁵⁴ And in parallel with Livy’s initial comment, glory could also be imputed to the Roman people as a whole, though the same was true of infamy (δόξης ...κακῆς) brought on by defeat or disgrace.¹⁵⁵ The greater the fame of the enemy, such as that of the Macedonians under Antiochus, the greater the glory in victory.¹⁵⁶

9) Presence / Arrival (παρουσία)

The arrival of a glorified leader was an event to be anticipated and celebrated. An ossified trace of this event endures in the liturgical and calendrical traditions of the church, confined to seasonal use. But this *advent* was not a holiday season in the Greco-Roman world, not in the contemporary sense; it was not yet synonymous with the merrymaking of Christmas, with the commemoration of Christ’s First Advent overlaid with a renewal of hope for his return, his Second Coming. When the angel said the first noel to certain poor shepherds, *adventus* (the substantival form of the verb *adveniō*) heralded an arrival, an approach, as of a dignitary. These visits were not always welcome. When Caesar landed in Africa, many provincials doubted his arrival, suspecting he was

¹⁵³ Plutarch, *Life of Pompey* 23.4: ἄδοξίαν. In contrast, Augustus was apparently not tempted “to increase the boundaries of the empire or enhance his military glory,” making “barbarian” leaders swear to keep peace treaties (ironically, in the Temple of Avenging Mars). See Suetonius, *Augustus* 21, in Graves, *Twelve Caesars*, 59.

¹⁵⁴ Plutarch, *Life of Pompey* 68.2.

¹⁵⁵ Appian (*Civil Wars* 2.10.70) writes of τὴν δόξαν being won in combat for the entire Roman ἡγεμονίας, and of the δόξης ...κακῆς incurred by the ignominious fate of Lucullus (*Roman History* 6.9.51–52).

¹⁵⁶ Appian, *Roman History* 11.7.37–38: the “renown” (δόξης) of the Macedonians’ vast empire (ἀρχὴν μεγίστην) are among the subjects of ridicule by the Roman conquerors.

operating by proxy; they doubted, that is, until the dictator personally certified the event by dispatch.¹⁵⁷ The advent was the time for the (re)establishment of justice and order—regardless of whether the visitor’s administration of justice matched the version for which the locals were hoping.¹⁵⁸

The closest Greek equivalent for *adventus*, παρουσία, arrived at a related meaning by another route.¹⁵⁹ Conventional use of παρουσία included the emperor’s presence in court or before the senators, but the predominant meaning lay in his official approach and a “fixed set of social behaviors” required in responsive participation, with announcements and trumpet blasts to bring the city’s population out to welcome and acclaim their visitor.¹⁶⁰ Even when not named as such, parousial procedure was still suggested for Augustus’ homecomings to Rome, as vestal virgins, senators, and men with their wives and children were to go out to greet the emperor.¹⁶¹ To anticipate the way in which Paul’s use of the imperial court’s parousial vocabulary might sound against the

¹⁵⁷ Caesar, *African War* 26; Jerome would later employ the same form for παρουσία in 1 Cor 15:23 (Vulgate).

¹⁵⁸ This bringing of justice is almost completely absent from contemporary applications of “advent,” though a 1986 revision to the hymn “O Come, O Come, Emmanuel” begins to restore it. Where the line *Solare nos adveniens* had earlier been translated as “come and cheer / Our spirits by Thine advent here,” Laurence Hill Stookey suggests “by thy justice here” (*The United Methodist Hymnal*, #211). This less literal rendering de-prioritizes the sense of advent as an arrival, but it does promote a restoration of justice, revisiting a theopolitical issue on which Paul reflected in his letters, especially in Romans: he trusts in the justice God’s arrival brings, not the justice the empire promises.

¹⁵⁹ The construction of παρουσία (παρά, beside, + οὐσία, substance/being = *presence with* those visited) was not lost on the historic church’s theological exponents. On the status of the “dead in Christ” and the hope of being “with the Lord,” Ambrose writes that the end of life “is not the death of our being but of evil, for being continues, but it is evil that perishes... the same being will rise again, now more honorably for having paid the tax of death.” Ambrose, *On Belief in the Resurrection* 2.47–48, *NPNF* 2 10:181, quoted in Gorday, ed., *Colossians, 1–2 Thessalonians*, 88. Ambrose also speaks of the *adventus salvatoris*, evoking an emperor’s advent, in the “salutology” of his *Homilies on Luke* 10.39 (Luke 21:27), cited in Studer, *Trinity and Incarnation*, 129–30. To avoid an excursus here on ancient Trinitarian terminology, see Studer, *Trinity and Incarnation*, 109–10, 141–45.

¹⁶⁰ Malina and Pilch, *Social-Science Commentary*, 49–50. Comparing this “ceremonial rite” of empire with Christ’s παρουσία as Paul describes it in 1 Thess 4:16–17, the authors add that the term “means coming, arrival, or presence (it never means ‘return’).” Dio offers an instance of παρουσία as official court presence in *Roman History* 59.3.7.

¹⁶¹ Dio, *Roman History* 51.19.2; this privilege was subsequently refused by Augustus, 51.20.4.

background of this image, one can guess that the redeployment of these terms would have entailed substantial risk for author and recipients alike.¹⁶² The παρουσία of a dictator unsanctioned by Rome would have promoted an alternative form of justice and a potential threat to the world that the empire had fought so hard to win and pacify.

10) Victory, victor (νίκη, νίκος, νικῶν)

The problem of translating theopolitical contexts changes slightly at this point.

The preceding word-studies have been geared toward retrieving lost images and revisiting concepts that twenty-first-century North America considers obsolete; but victory and its Greek counterpart, *nikē*, are still instantly recognizable, even if the Greco-Roman vestiges behind them go unnoticed. Militarily, victory is announced with a “Mission Accomplished!” banner by the commander-in-chief of the world’s most powerful military, from the deck of an aircraft carrier.¹⁶³ Commercially, one can identify at a glance the logo of one of the world’s most prevalent brand names, a multinational company that markets not just sportswear, but an image: the Nike “swoosh.”¹⁶⁴

Theologically, postmodern Christians may have some idea what it means to affirm Christ as “the brave hero going off to battle against the forces of evil, and triumphing—and yet a hero bearing no weapon but love, that strange victorious lamb,” whether this paradigm

¹⁶² Donfried, “The Cults of Thessalonica,” 21–48. During a broader discussion on Pauline engagement with Thessalonica’s imperial and civic cults (31–46), Donfried identifies παρουσία, ἀπάντησις, and κύριος as “heavily loaded political terms” (34) drawn from royal theology, noting the scholarly support for articulating the first term as a visit from Caesar or other royalty. Donfried rightly concludes that Paul’s attack on Roman theology and its *Pax et Securitas* program was unlikely “to lead the citizens to give Paul a warm or extended welcome” (43), though he misses the irony of this cold reception in contrast to the welcome expected at an imperial παρουσία.

¹⁶³ See Rutherford’s commentary on Bush’s May 2003 landing on the USS *Abraham Lincoln* as a “staged triumph,” a scripted moment of political theatre evoking “memories of victorious generals and emperors parading through the streets of ancient Rome,” in *Weapons of Mass Persuasion*, 179–82.

¹⁶⁴ Naomi Klein’s first assessment of Nike is that of a leader in a global marketing trend: “What these companies produced primarily were not things...but *images* of their brands,” in Klein, *No Logo*, 4 (italics hers).

of the conquering hero unnerves them or not.¹⁶⁵ Victory vocabulary presents us with one of our toughest challenges in this chapter: we need to look backstage, to push aside the overly familiar staging and branding in order to find the context behind the historical scenes.

The “swoosh” logo is only Nike’s modern manifestation; for the first-century world, Nike (or Victoria) was a goddess, the divine personification of victory, present in temples dedicated to her in Mediterranean cities, or through statues and other images placed in the temples of the principal deities of the Greco-Roman pantheon. Her images augured military outcomes and presided over momentous occasions in the lives of great generals: on the day when Caesar defeated Pompey, it was reported that Nike’s image, placed in front of a statue of Minerva in the Peloponnesian region of Elis, turned itself toward Minerva’s temple threshold. Corresponding events were recorded at temples dedicated to Nike elsewhere in the empire, including the Aegean city of Tralles, where a statue was also dedicated to Caesar.¹⁶⁶ When Augustus died, his funeral procession was to pass through Rome’s Triumphal Gate, preceded by the image of Nike/Victoria borrowed from the house of the Senate.¹⁶⁷ Nike’s image was handled every day in Corinth, where coins were minted with Rome’s blessing from the year of the imperial re-founding of the *colonia*: Nike/Victoria occupied the reverse of coins whose obverse stamps commemorated the laureate Tiberius, a numismatic place often held by Aphrodite

¹⁶⁵ Placher, “The Cross of Jesus Christ,” 162.

¹⁶⁶ Caesar, *Civil Wars* 3.105; similar omens can be found in Plutarch, *Life of Caesar* 47, and Dio, *Roman History* 56.24.4.

¹⁶⁷ Suetonius, *Augustus* 100, in Graves, *Twelve Caesars*, 95.

or Poseidon as the colony's protectors.¹⁶⁸ Victory's iconography was known throughout Rome's world, with a cultural currency specific to Achaia.

To the extent that the ancient Mediterranean can be said to have shared a worldview, victories defined the identity of the leaders who experienced them. Put in terms of the gravitational hermeneutic above, victories consolidated the authorial control wielded by political and military leaders, confirming their authority to rule and prescribe meaning within their discursive world. This defining process could also function retroactively. Plutarch had seers declaring the newborn Alexander ever victorious, as his birth reportedly coincided with momentous victories in both war and sport; the adult Alexander would send captured shields to Athens as emblems of the victories he shared with the Greeks, and would be celebrated, in a politically intriguing turn of phrase, as having “conquered the right to rule and mastery” (ἄρχειν καὶ κρατεῖν νενίκηκεν).¹⁶⁹ By the same author's reckoning, even before Pompey dreamed of decorating a temple to the glory of Venus Victrix, he was already writing to faraway kings, generals and cities in the “tone of a victor” (ὡς νενικηκῶς).¹⁷⁰ Caesar, known for the nobility of his own “work of victory” (τῆς νίκης ἔργω), voices an opposing verdict on Pompey after a frustrating battle against him: victory would have “been with the enemy, if they had had a victor in command” (Σήμερον ἂν ἡ νίκη παρὰ τοῖς πολεμίοις ἦν, εἰ τὸν νικῶντα εἶκον).¹⁷¹ And particularly revealing in light of the role of hegemonic terms in the language of

¹⁶⁸ See Burnett et al., *Roman Provincial Coinage I, Part I: Introduction and Catalogue*, 249–57, with accompanying photos in *Part II: Indexes and Plates*, especially #1119, 1145–48 (with Victory atop a globe, perhaps the κόσμος or οἰκουμένη), 1185, 1189 (depicting the *genius* of the *colonia*), 1192, 1197–99, 1223, 1225, and 1334–35.

¹⁶⁹ Plutarch, *Life of Alexander* 3.5ff, 16.15–19, 52.3–5; cf. 40.3, where “the end and object of conquest [κρατεῖν] is to avoid doing the same thing as the conquered.”

¹⁷⁰ Plutarch, *Life of Pompey* 66.1, and 68.2, cited earlier.

¹⁷¹ Plutarch, *Life of Caesar* 18.4, cf. 15; 39.5–8.

authority is Appian's recognition of Cato as the "author" of a victory (ὡς ἡγεμόνι τῆς νίκης).¹⁷²

Definition through victory could be so thorough as to require the renaming of victors and pivotal locations. Seleucus acquired the surname Νικάτωρ for his success in war; Augustus founded Nicopolis to "perpetuate the glory of his victory at Actium."¹⁷³ In other cases, events became auspicious when viewed in hindsight, like the auguring moments involving Nike's image. A fish leapt and fell at Augustus' feet before he was victorious in naval battle at Sicily; and in addition to founding Nicopolis, the emperor commemorated Actium with a statue of the peasant Eutychus and his ass Nicon (i.e., good fortune and victory), whom Augustus fortuitously met just before the battle.¹⁷⁴

Victory was something to be won, but in another sense it was *given* to the victor as an indication of divine favour with attendant privileges. Appian describes Cornelius Scipio as crediting his former victories to divine favour, not military strength, and therefore as looking for signs of victory (οἱ σύμβολα νίκης) from the gods as omens for his later battles.¹⁷⁵ In Egypt, Caesar's war commentary admits that the gods and their blessings played a role in all the chance encounters of war, but exceptionally so at times when military strategy fails.¹⁷⁶ To close the civil wars, Cicero prompted a fifty-day thanksgiving for Augustus' victory at Actium.¹⁷⁷ Laurel trees and the emperor's oak wreath were kept on continual display as signs that Augustus was "always" both victor

¹⁷² Appian, *Roman History* 6.8.40; cf. the use of ἀρχηγόν in Heb 2:10 (τῆς σωτηρίας), 12:2 (τῆς πίστεως).

¹⁷³ Appian, *Roman History* 11.9.57; Suetonius, *Augustus* 18, in Graves, *Twelve Caesars*, 55.

¹⁷⁴ Suetonius, *Augustus* 96, in Graves, *Twelve Caesars*, 93.

¹⁷⁵ Appian, *Roman History* 6.5.26; see Appian's later comment (7.8.53) on a Roman victory at Metaurus as divinely given, specifically as compensation for an earlier loss, and, still later, his labeling of laurel, δάφνη, itself as a σύμβολον νίκης (*Civil Wars* 5.5.46).

¹⁷⁶ Caesar, *Alexandrian War* 75.

¹⁷⁷ Appian, *Civil Wars* 3.10.74; Octavian's victory days (ἡμέρας ἐνίκαι) become national holidays (5.13.130).

and saviour,¹⁷⁸ perhaps following the precedent of earlier laureates, who could send correspondence to Rome, wreathed, according to custom (ἔθος), in the laurels of a victor.¹⁷⁹

The most memorable of the victor's privileges raises the issue of presenting military victories to the Roman public. For winning an especially decisive battle, a commander could be voted the honour of a θρίαμβος, or *triumphus*, a ceremonial victory parade through Rome's streets to the temple to Jupiter on its Capitoline Hill. By Paul's time, this parade had become almost exclusively the reserve of the emperors. Augustus enjoyed a triple-triumph for his victories in Dalmatia, Actium, and Alexandria, a celebration that reportedly followed the shutting of the gates of Janus Quirinius' temple,¹⁸⁰ signifying that Rome was now at peace. He subsequently called on those who won triumphs to spend their prize money in civic philanthropy.¹⁸¹ Sometimes triumphal honour was relative: Tiberius' Illyrian triumph seems to have been awarded in part because of Publius Quinctilius Varus' infamous defeat in Germany, which would have forged a German-Pannonian alliance if not for the conquest of Illyricum.¹⁸²

Staging was paramount in these ceremonies. Augustus changed the sequence of his own parade: "The custom was for the magistrates to issue from the city to meet the victorious general, and then to turn and march ahead of him. Octavius, by putting them

¹⁷⁸ Dio, *Roman History* 53.16.4, in close similarity with Appian, *Civil Wars* 5.11.97.

¹⁷⁹ Appian, *Roman History* 12.11.77; Pompey had magnified his victories in his own letters (Appian, *Civil Wars* 2.10.63, where "victors" is actually κρατοῖεν); no wonder Appian counts his rivalry with Caesar as a φιλονικία (not a φιλοτιμία, with which Plutarch characterized Philip's Macedonia) that nearly destroyed Rome (2.15.102).

¹⁸⁰ Suetonius, *Augustus* 22, in Graves, *Twelve Caesars*, 59. Compare the hailing of Nero as *imperator* and his closing of the doors of the temple of Janus in *Nero* 13.

¹⁸¹ Suetonius, *Augustus* 30, in Graves, *Twelve Caesars*, 63.

¹⁸² Suetonius, *Tiberius* 17, in Graves, *Twelve Caesars*, 109.

behind him, symbolized his position as chief citizen of the state.”¹⁸³ Caligula’s triumph was filled out with ἀξιόθριάμβευτον (triumph-worthy) “Germans”—Gauls, in fact, who had to dye their hair, learn the language of the defeated tribe, and adopt appropriate names to keep up the pretense.¹⁸⁴ Claudius allowed provincial governors and exiles to come to Rome to see his triumph; he placed the naval crown alongside his civic crown (the oak crown given to saviours) at his palace “as a sign that he had crossed and, as it were, subdued the Ocean” itself (*traiecti et quasi domiti Oceani insigne*).¹⁸⁵

Nikē was an integral component of first-century Mediterranean culture and of the Roman theopolitics that administrated it. Victory’s symbolism was so powerful that it was adopted and adapted by the first-century Christian church, a brave theological move that risked depicting the atonement exclusively “in terms of first-century history, a historicized or earthly Christos Victor”; the risk comes in the potential for misunderstanding, for “limiting the scope of Christ’s victory to earth or to human history.”¹⁸⁶ But to anticipate that legacy is to risk getting ahead of ourselves, re-emerging too soon from Paul’s theopolitical context. The next chapter will include a deeper consideration of the way in which Paul appropriated the image of victory into the procession of his soteriological story, of the manner in which he considered Christ’s victory won and shared with Christ’s followers.

This chapter began by suggesting a hermeneutical model, constructed in the course of critical dialogue with other such models, that employs gravitational forces as a

¹⁸³ Dio, *Roman History* 51.21.9, and quoting Cary’s note there in *Dio’s Roman History* 6 (Books 51–55), 63n1.

¹⁸⁴ Suetonius, *Gaius Caligula* 47.

¹⁸⁵ Suetonius, *Claudius* 17.

¹⁸⁶ Weaver, *The Nonviolent Atonement*, 22; that risk of misunderstanding is exactly why Weaver calls his atonement view “narrative Christos Victor,” in order to emphasize the significance of Christ’s death and resurrection as cosmic, transcending history.

visual metaphor in an attempt to account for the socio-rhetorical and/or semantic “pull” that massive social structures such as empires exert upon historical context(s) and the postmodern reading of biblical and other ancient texts. The ten studies that followed illustrated some of the richly variegated and interconnected images with which imperial Rome dictated its story, announcing to the Mediterranean world it dominated that it had a divinely given authority to control the far-reaching domain that it had won and “saved.” These images and terms, which initially seem conventionally theological to postmodern eyes, legitimated the empire’s rule, its power, and its presiding, paternal lordship over its peoples and its own story: they encapsulate, or emblemize, all for which Rome stood, including its ability to colonize the known world and the imagination. But it was precisely these images, where Rome’s authority seemed strongest, that Paul chose to contest and re-appropriate, redirecting their theopolitically persuasive gravity to substantiate his own soteriological narrative of a different lord. The re-reading of portions of 1 Corinthians 15 that follows will begin to show how the apostle accomplished this.

V

Exegesis: Re-reading 1 Corinthians 15:20–28, 50–58

Introduction

The re-evaluation of Paul’s vocabulary in the preceding chapter now points the apostle’s contemporary readers back to two closely related passages, densely populated with theopolitical words and images, in 1 Corinthians 15. This re-reading refines the aggregate findings from chapters II–IV through biblical-theological exegesis, analyzing the paired passages of 15:20–28 and 50–58 in the biblical, imperial, eschatological contexts from which the texts and the gospel cannot be extracted in good faith.¹ Particularly prominent for the soteriology that begins to emerge here is the concluding note of triumph over Death, the last enemy to be dismantled and the principal target of Paul’s taunting. That prophetic, proleptic polemic is a good deal more political than it first appears—and it is critical to the “master story” of Paul’s gospel.

This master story determines the shape of the exegesis that follows. This is exegesis in the form of thematic commentary, insofar as its pace is guided by Paul’s own narrational rhetoric. But the express emphasis on the relationship of that master story to its imperial context frees the writer and readers alike from the need to follow Paul down every avenue, commenting on every aspect of the text. Among the many contact points between Paul’s theology in First Corinthians and the theology of the first-century Roman Empire, certain threads that create one particular, theopolitical picture of Paul’s

¹ Concerning the “truth” about Christ which Scripture reveals out of specific literary-situational, pastoral and experiential contexts, Stevenson and Wright (*Preaching the Atonement*, 105, referring to God’s justice in Romans) cleverly and rightly insist that contemporary interpreters “fail to do it justice if we abstract it either from that experience, or from the argument in which its expression originally had force.” This is no less true of the present texts: it is not our province to remove them from their Corinthian setting.

soteriology can be shown to be interwoven, without pulling them out of the surrounding fabric of the epistle.

If points of translation seem belaboured below, it is because translation offers a consistent opportunity to unpack the words Paul redeploys and the ways in which their meanings fit together in the Roman and Pauline worldviews. These words are the imperial backdrops and props that Paul repositions and repaints in order to set his own scene; they condition the way in which contemporary audiences see and access Paul's story.² Some of those shared vocabulary words can be easily understood, with English equivalents standing at the ready. Others take more dedicated work to interpret, and perhaps some slightly different translations, the better to recapture the meanings they carried for Rome and for Paul.³ In interpreting theopolitically rich images, exegesis can have as much conceptual work to do with the domain of the target language as with the original.⁴ Stephen Fowl posits that translation "is not the first conceptual or interpretive task of the commentator. Rather, translation presumes the interpretive work that formally follows it."⁵ In this case, the interpretive work may indeed follow the translation, but both have been preceded by chapters on narrational soteriology, on prior studies of the

² The vocabulary is part of the texts, of course, but it is as though the words themselves form parts of the permeable membranes through which we enter the text. The historical refraction of theopolitical meanings since the terms were coined can further obstruct, or in some instances improve, our view of and participation in the textual world. But perspective is of course highly subjective. As Horrell and Adams ("The Scholarly Quest," 13) observe, the window into historical Christianity is "hardly transparent; the picture that emerges owes much to the particular perspective of the scholar who engages in the construction of that picture."

³ The people of God have risen to the challenge of this type of reclamation project before, in other imperial contexts, long before Rome was on the scene. In Neh 8:8, 12, the teachers of the post-exilic community "read from the Book of the Law of God, making it clear and giving the meaning so that the people understood what was being read" and responded with joy.

⁴ Breytenbach ("The 'For Us' Phrases," 171) validates such a view even when crossing semantic boundaries between conceptual vocabularies that lie within the same language: as he puts it, the cross of Christ and its significance were the "target domain," mapped in terms of the various source-domain imagery available to the New Testament authors.

⁵ Fowl, *Philippians*, 6.

text, and on the Roman imperial context of Paul's terms, so there is little to presume, but much left to explore.

Socio-Rhetorical Context: Reading 1 Corinthians in Roman Corinth

The present study's second chapter began to posit that Paul's master story and Rome's story of mastery were not merely accounts of what God had done in Christ or what the Roman gods had done through Caesar, but competing narrational discourses, embedded in their culture and performative in their implications. Having toured the principal images of Rome's unitive discourse in the previous chapter, we now enter both a city and an epistle in which Paul's coopted images had to compete with the imperial originals for attention. To understand the socio-rhetorical environment in which this competition occurred, we should focus our own attention briefly on Paul's audience in Corinth, the physical reminders of Rome's presence they encountered in living there, and the responsive effect that the apostle might have hoped to produce in his auditors by the time they had finished the first fourteen chapters of 1 Corinthians.

If we assume that Paul's readers approximated a cross-section of resettled Corinth's colonial population, then among them were freedmen, urban labourers, tradespersons, and perhaps even veterans⁶—many of whom were provincials who had earned their Roman citizenship in military service. Soldiers and civilians alike (or their immediate forebears) had been relocated from Rome to Corinth in what amounted to imperial crowd control,⁷ the strategic placement of a colony of "Romans" as the

⁶ Thiselton, *First Epistle*, 3.

⁷ Lanci (*A New Temple*, 26, 30) contrasts the situating of Corinth's "refugees" with the settlement of Philippi with veterans, which he characterizes as an exercise in imperial security; one could speculate that

commercial and provincial capital of Achaia. The fact that Paul's Corinthian correspondence was in Greek attests to bilingual speech and writing in Corinth,⁸ but the city was even more thoroughly cosmopolitan, with colonials and travelers varying in socioeconomic status and literacy.

Literate in the written word or not, residents would likely have been aware of two important colonial facts. First and specific to Corinth, the city owed its existence to an imperial act of colonization, as the city occupied the space once held by a Greek city that Rome had destroyed; the empire had stated its mastery in the phases of destruction and re-establishment alike. Second, Roman citizenship involved considerable ambivalence for colonials. On the one hand, classical historian Togo Salmon cites Dio's record of injunctions from Augustus, who recommended against the freeing of large numbers of slaves and significantly increasing the number of citizens, in order to maintain a distinction between Romans and subject nations.⁹ On the other, Salmon argues that citizenship was (theoretically) "within the reach of all," especially as a provincial city-state became more Roman and less "peregrine," or foreign.¹⁰ Within Rome's story of bringing peace through its mastery of the known world, this dialectic between *peregrinitas* and *Romanitas* might well have been part of the Corinthian outlook. Excepting the veteran families, the colonials would have found a strong attractational force in the idea of becoming members of a body politic, belonging to someone other than the distant Caesar, without such dialectics.

the Corinthian veterans played a similar role, though Rome's "security" needs there probably had more to do with establishing a Roman *cultural* base.

⁸ Lanci, *A New Temple*, 28.

⁹ Dio Cassius, 56.33.3, cited in Salmon, *Nemesis*, 35n23.

¹⁰ Salmon, *Nemesis*, 36.

That said, it would have been difficult for anyone in Corinth to forget their founding fathers. The western side of the re-founded city's forum was comprised of imperial temples, dedicated respectively to Venus as imperial mother of the Julio-Claudians, Apollo as Augustus' patron god, and Octavia and/or the imperial cult in general.¹¹ Imperial family birthdays and other holidays were celebrated publicly in the forum with meals featuring meat sacrificed before the family's statues (erected by wealthy Corinthian donors, in keeping with patronal practice) and their temples, as well as those of other gods represented there.¹² The forum and the celebrations that took place there exhibited a particularly high concentration of imperial themes in "the mass media of the ancient world," i.e., statues, coins, and events that spoke volumes about Rome's justice, peace, and salvation; these themes, as N. T. Wright says, were woven together in a "new grand narrative of empire," such that "[f]rom Spain to Syria, everybody knew about Rome, what it stood for, what it did, and who was in charge of it."¹³ Where postmodern audiences have to strain to hear the "echoes of Caesar" in the letters of Paul,¹⁴ the residents of Corinth would have been reminded every day of how much their urban space and public life was consecrated to the empire.

Against this background, certain themes in 1 Corinthians would have stood out clearly as the colonial audience heard or read them. For example, Paul begins

¹¹ Crossan and Reed, *In Search of Paul*, 298–99.

¹² Crossan and Reed, *In Search of Paul*, 300–1, noting the location "under the watchful eyes" of the family members, present in the form of their statues; also see Lanci, *A New Temple*, 99–104, on the connection between temples and the empire's civil theology.

¹³ Wright, *Paul*, 63, 64. Wright alludes to Virgil, Horace, and Livy as tellers of this narrative, but he too struggles to locate one definitive locus that proclaims all of the themes of what is here referred to as Rome's story of mastery. In close parallel are Crossan and Reed (*In Search of Paul*, 288), who admit that relatively few in the empire would have heard or been able to read Virgil, Horace, or Ovid, so image-bearing media, "from the smallest coin to the largest forum," would have been all the more significant as "Roman imperial theology worked well as a magnificent advertisement for what many people wanted to believe."

¹⁴ N. T. Wright, *Paul*, 61, adapting for empire-critical use Hays' allusion-testing criteria in *Echoes*.

proclaiming Christ as Lord from the opening of the letter: Christ's lordship and the confession of his name extend everywhere (1:2); he and his Father extend grace and peace to the colonials through Paul (1:3); his apocalyptic arrival is expected eagerly, and he is the mediator of the colonials' speech, knowledge, and spiritual gifts (1:4–7); the calling into fellowship with him as Son and Lord is an expression of his Father's own faithfulness (1:9). This Jesus holds a title that belongs to Caesar, and his presence as Lord is similarly pervasive, but already Paul is drawing out ways in which this sovereign's relationship with his subjects differs markedly from that of the emperor. Paul goes on to identify him as the crucified Lord (2:8), the coming one who judges, calls, and assigns responsibilities to his servants (3:5, 4:4–5, 7:17), in whose name and powerful presence believers gather (5:4) just as they were first justified (6:11), and who is united and one with his people in spirit (6:17).

The applications of Christ's lordship emerge in public, in the community of faith and in the members' interaction with their Roman colonial culture. Three such applications are especially noteworthy here. First, the memorials of Caesar's lordship in Corinth provoke from Paul a reminder of Christ's lordship: above the so-called gods and lords of the forum's sacrificial space is one God, the Father, and one life-giving Lord, Jesus Christ (8:4–6). Second, by the same token, the Eucharist is to be the Christian community's own consecrated memorial of their Lord: it is his death that they proclaim until he comes (11:26). Their celebration of the meal was to be a communal recitation of their relationship to their Lord, of their communion with him and with one another, and it implies a renunciation of the primacy of other patronal relationships that existed outside

the community.¹⁵ As Paul saw it, their failure to maintain equality and hospitality was what made the Eucharistic event uncharacteristic of Christ, like any other Roman meal, and therefore not the Lord's Supper (11:20). Third, confession of Jesus as Lord was a communal, performative act: the Holy Spirit enabled the confessional statement itself (12:3, presumably spoken before/with others as fellow witnesses) and empowered the manifestation (φανέρωσις, another potent image that often belonged to Roman rulers) of outwardly observable gifts within the Christian body (12:7).¹⁶

Lordship is thus illustrative of this performative dimension of the apostle's discourse: in the above ways and others, Paul calls his readers to recommit themselves fully, communally, and publicly to their Lord. To use the image of the gravitational hermeneutic from our fourth chapter, Paul aims to draw his audience away from the orbit of Rome's story of mastery, and he will marshal the empire's own captivating narrational images as well as the resources of the inner-biblical narrative to that end. The task is urgent and sensitive. If image-rich language evokes narrative and informs praxis, then the Corinthians' salvation is staked on the question of whether they will subscribe to Rome's

¹⁵ In her summary and development of earlier work by Antoinette Clark Wire, Kittredge ("Corinthian Women," 107–9) raises valid concerns about the degree to which Paul himself had renounced the patronage system with regard to the subordination of women in the church's emerging social structure. Specific to 1 Corinthians 15, Kittredge finds 15:23–28 to be a locus of a "language of political relationships," with 15:28 as the "culminating image of subordination in which the son must occupy an intermediary position between the Father and all things," encouraging the intermediary roles upon which patronage thrived, and legitimizing the subordination of women to their husbands (105, 107). Her fundamental question, "whether Paul is simply opposing the patronage system or is fundamentally shaped by it" (107–8), should probably be answered with an ambivalent affirmative on both counts. Indeed, Neyrey (*Render to God*, 145–46, more comprehensively 144–90) names *patronage as the primary model of social interaction* through which Paul explains God's relationship to himself and the Corinthians.

¹⁶ If Paul highlights the gift of prophetic speech in 1 Corinthians 12–14, counting it as a recognizable phenomenon of the Spirit's activity, intelligible and distinct from glossolalia (so Schnelle, *Theology*, 170, 338), he has his reasons. His own role as a prophet is an important concern in the background of 1 Corinthians 15: as he proclaims the Lord's resurrection and parousia as the foundation of his readers' confessional lives, he evinces a predictive facet of prophetic speech concerning the parousia as a future event, but his prophetic priority is on calling God's people to renewed commitment to their Lord (and, it might be argued, away from the influence of a potentially idolatrous empire). Cf. Neyrey, *Render to God*, 147, on Paul's claim on the prophetic role as one of special gifting or benefaction (and thus of elevated rhetorical and ecclesial status) from his Patron.

story or Paul's. Paul needs them to see that the Roman imperials, like previous empires, hold the power of Death "as their ultimate weapon,"¹⁷ but that this weapon is dismantled by Christ's resurrection.

Literary Context: Reading 1 Corinthians 15 in 1 Corinthians

Paul's broader project of speaking to the Corinthians in their social and ideological context also leads to a reminder concerning *literary* contextualization as he begins a new phase of his argument in 1 Corinthians 15. Having addressed a series of very practical concerns in congregational and public life (among them the formation of the community around a liturgical confession of Christ's lordship, with its implication of the re-ordering of patronal allegiances), Paul now explains the Lord's resurrection as "The Basis" for the practical and (counter-ideological) liturgical concerns that came before.¹⁸ There has been considerable debate about the epistolary backstory that led Paul to write this chapter, with much of the discussion centering on his use of $\gamma\upsilon\omega\rho\acute{\iota}\zeta\omega\ \delta\grave{\epsilon}$ rather than $\pi\epsilon\rho\grave{\iota}\ \delta\grave{\epsilon}$.¹⁹ As Anthony Thiselton summarizes and responds to several

¹⁷ A thesis closely related to (but developed independently of) that of N. T. Wright, *Paul*, 70: if "earthly rulers have death as their ultimate weapon, the defeat of death in the resurrection is the overthrow of the ultimate enemy which stands behind all tyranny. That, I think, is part of the point of 1 Corinthians 15:20–28 and Colossians 2:14–15." Wright is right to underscore the importance of Isa 40–55 as containing "a massive and mocking denunciation of pagan religion and the imperial power it sustains" (66), but his proposal for 1 Cor 15:20–28 would be well served by an application to Isa 22–29 (as will be shown below), on which Paul has already drawn in 1 Cor 1:19, and again to support his point on prophetic speech in 14:21, with an intertextual undercurrent of empire-as-divine-instrument.

¹⁸ As Fee, *First Epistle*, 717, entitles this section. Also see his discussion, e.g. p. 716, "Furthermore, all of this is integrally tied to the matters of behavior that have preceded. It is of more than merely passing interest that both major sections of this argument conclude with exhortation to proper behavior"; cf. 713.

¹⁹ Hurd's synthesis (in *Origin*, 91–92, 195–200) determines that the Corinthians may have stated an *objection* rather than a question, perhaps still affirming in some sense Christ's resurrection but rejecting that of Christians as Paul might have previously proclaimed the latter; but Hurd stresses the importance of chapter 15 as part of a *conversation* between Paul and the Corinthians, regardless of the source of Paul's information. More recently, Stirewalt (*Paul the Letter Writer*, 68, 72) quite rightly discerns a process of *itemization* at work in the letter but gives the impression of associating 1 Corinthians 15 too strongly with "items introduced by *peri de*" as Paul's responses concerning written communication in 1 Corinthians 12–14, 16. Polhill (*Paul and His Letters*, 249) disagrees, noting that the lack of a *peri de* formula in 15:1

previous streams of argument regarding Paul's use of $\gamma\upsilon\omega\rho\acute{\iota}\zeta\omega$ and the options for its translation, he settles on "I want to restore to your full knowledge" as a means of acknowledging both the recurrent theme of ignorance-versus-knowledge in the chapter (and, it can be argued, the letter as a whole) and the comparable use of $\gamma\upsilon\omega\rho\acute{\iota}\zeta\omega$ in 12:3.²⁰ But what makes this precedent in 12:3 so convincing is the performative function served there by the confession of Jesus as Lord, noted earlier. Believers are saved by this Lord's gospel, but that salvation must be affirmed in their words and their lives.

Soteriological Context: The Master Story as *Narratio*

Chapter 15 is a defence of the resurrection and the parousia, but Paul contextualizes these events as part of the gospel. In an adaptation of Michael Gorman's work, the gospel was described earlier as Paul's "master story," a narrative overlay that augmented the information beneath it, incorporating that information into an updated story of God's relationship to his people in such a way as to reinforce and stabilize the impression of the whole. But that overlay, like the layers of the Old Testament beneath, was also responsive to (and contingent upon) the norms and mores of the culture in which it was mapped. In Paul's correspondence with the church in Corinth, the "essence of the gospel" is the lordship of Jesus Christ, who holds Paul's allegiance: the apostle gives his loyalty "neither to pagan god nor emperor ('lord' was commonly applied to both) nor even to the Jewish God (who is also called 'Lord') except insofar as he is known through

indicates that the issue of the resurrection came to Paul by means other than the Corinthians' letter. In agreement with the previously footnoted point on resurrection theology as the basis for congregational and liturgical instruction, he adds that "the real import of the resurrection hope is what we are doing *now*" (250, italics his).

²⁰ Thiselton, *First Epistle*, 1182–83.

Jesus Christ.”²¹ Caesar’s lordship is made manifest through his (benef)actions, bringing peace to his world, as announced in his own gospel. YHWH’s lordship can be exegeted from his saving acts, beginning with bringing Israel out of Egypt.²² Christ’s lordship begins with the story of his resurrection, another act performed by YHWH, but that lordship becomes the definitive manner in which YHWH’s own lordship is known, with the resurrection taking centre stage away from the story of deliverance from Egypt.

Characterizing the gospel in terms of saving acts and responsive allegiance has profound implications for the role of the church and the conceptualization of salvation. Those implications re-emerge implicitly in the course of discussion below, but I follow Paul (and others) in opening with them as he begins his resurrection discourse, before scanning ahead to 15:20–28. Paul’s reminder to the Corinthians of the gospel he had preached there is a call to renewed allegiance: they must be loyal to this εὐαγγέλιον, this good news, *because it is saving them*:

Now, brothers and sisters, *I want to remind you of the gospel I preached to you, which you received and on which you have taken your stand. By this gospel you are saved, if you hold firmly to the word I preached to you. Otherwise, you have believed in vain.*²³

This preface establishes what Paul intends the chapter to do, moving from the broad (if succinctly summarized) contours of the gospel that he had preached verbally for the benefit of the church he founded, to the exegesis of its details with regard to death and the resurrection. The concerns raised in correspondence with the Corinthian church are so serious as to prompt Paul to perform a recovery operation—in current idiom, the gospel

²¹ Best, *Second Corinthians*, 39, on 2 Cor 4:4–5.

²² Creation of course comes chronologically first, but it is “secondary or complementary” to the Exodus in Israel’s faith, and generally only “in later passages [of the Old Testament] is creation integrated into the series of God’s saving acts” (Barth, *God with Us*, 10).

²³ 1 Cor 15:1–2, TNIV, italics added. Gorman has recommended in personal correspondence that the translation shared by the TNIV and NASB, “you are saved,” could perhaps be better read as “you are *being* saved” with respect to the present tense of σώζεσθε.

story has “crashed” in Corinth, and Paul is returning it to an earlier “system restore point.” The church needs a reminder about the gospel’s character and a clarification of its function. The upshot is that the church (then and now) does not have a franchise on the gospel; the gospel is what created the need for the church.²⁴ And the Corinthians’ σωτηρία, their salvation, could not consist of self-preservation.²⁵ Others in their colony ultimately counted on Caesar for their salvation, but for Paul’s followers, the outside source of their salvation was to be the master story of Christ. From the outset, then, this chapter on the resurrection is theopolitically charged.²⁶ The resurrection meant that the gospel had not failed, that the story continued and was worthy of the Corinthians’ allegiance.

This is the context as Paul takes up the story, offering a recap of its previous events to refresh his adherents’ collective memory and imagination. Ben Witherington holds that the early creed that begins in 15:3 forms the *narratio*, the statement of the presenter’s case, for the argument-in-miniature that is 1 Corinthians 15.²⁷ That is, *the master story of the gospel itself*, in the form of the creed, *is* the narrative outline from which Paul will build his case:

²⁴ Ladd (*Theology of the New Testament*, 109–17) makes a related comparison relating the church and God’s kingdom. Robin Ellis is gratefully acknowledged for bringing this perspective to the author’s attention through his adaptation of Ladd in a recent sermon on 1 Cor 15:1–11.

²⁵ Billings, in *Word of God*, 87–88, critiques a contemporary manifestation of this issue: “For all the talk of Christ and the Spirit, both evangelical and mainline tendencies have a Deistic conception of the Christian life, in which our monarch, God, tells us what he wants, and we go about the implementation of it.” Speech about the Spirit from such a perspective, Billings warns, tends to be a gloss for a process of self-salvation.

²⁶ Grant, *Paul in the Roman World*, 43: “At first glance, the fifteenth chapter seems remote from political concerns, but since it deals with the final destiny of the Corinthians as of other Christians, it plainly has a climactic place in the letter.” Even this comment does not resolve the apparent apolitical stance, unless we also remember that “personal” eschatology, the “final destiny” question that Grant mentions, entailed a *political* choice between saviours. First-century Rome had no First Amendment, no constitutional distinction between religion and politics.

²⁷ Witherington, *Conflict and Community*, 292.

For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures (15:3–4).

Paul will echo some of the features in the creed later in the chapter, as with the chiasmic repetition of εἶτα...ἔπειτα, ἔπειτα...εἶτα that sequences the events in 15:5–7²⁸ and the ἔπειτα...εἶτα he uses to the same end in 15:23–24. His use of the creed also recalls for the audience the vital significance that Jesus' death has for the church community as a colony-in-miniature.²⁹ Going forward, that benefit will propel the church community into the midst of the unfolding events of the gospel narrative.

First Corinthians 15:20–28

15:20–21: ²⁰But now Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. ²¹For since by a human came death, by a human also came the resurrection of the dead.

Scanning ahead from Paul's narratio to his exegesis of the master story, one finds him acknowledging the introduction of death and its effects, but pointing to what God has already done to begin counteracting these effects. This foreshadows the dismantling of the personified Death: historically and rhetorically, Christ's resurrection limits death's sphere of activity.

Death is pivotal to this entire chapter. In some instances it seems a grim but necessary prerequisite to resurrection; in others, a personified *power* or *theopolitical*

²⁸ Witherington, *Conflict and Community*, 300.

²⁹ Breytenbach ("The 'For Us' Phrases," 173) argues that the Greek tradition of "dying for" an ideal, e.g. the πόλις, does not apply to 15:3b ("Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures") because dying for "our sins" demands a different solution. This is not necessarily so: the alternative commonwealth Paul has in mind in Phil 3:20, for instance, suggests a soteriology more closely derived from that Greek tradition than Breytenbach will admit.

agency with alleged ties to other such powers. Having intimated earlier that Christ's death is a crucial component of the gospel he had preached in person to the Corinthians (15:3–4), Paul now needs to talk about the place that death and resurrection have in God's economy, relative to each other. Both came through a man, Paul admits, but his argument is about the *effects* of death, not so much its *origin*.³⁰ That is, Paul is not asserting what might be called "original death," as a parallel to a doctrine of original sin, but assessing death's fallout pattern and God's countermeasures. Nor is the analogy Paul draws as strict as those dreaded by American high schoolers taking the SAT (e.g., "tenet : theologian :: hypothesis : biologist"),³¹ but the scholastic aptitude and analogical reasoning skills he requires of his students are just as high. So while the sparse sentence structure of 15:21 does not literally read, "human : death :: human : resurrection," its verbless structure approaches that effect, simplifying a complex equation; thus Eugene Peterson's fitting addition to the verse in *The Message*, "There is a nice symmetry in this." The resurrection of Christ as the "firstfruits" (ἀπαρχή) constitutes the first act (ἀπό + ἀρχή) of the drama to come.

15:22–23: ²²For as in Adam all die, so too in Christ all will be made alive.

²³But each in his own rank: Christ, the firstfruits; afterward, those who belong to Christ, at his Arrival.

The spread of human-borne death and human-borne resurrection now becomes a personal and typological dichotomy. But the point of that contrast is to preview the future in store for those who are ἐν τῷ Χριστῷ. Paul's readers experience for the first time in

³⁰ So Garland, *1 Corinthians*, 706.

³¹ From www.freesat1prep.com/sat/verbal/analogies/analogy_questions.htm, accessed August 20, 2010.

this chapter the socio-rhetorical force of redeployed imperial vocabulary, as they hear of their own future deployment as those considered οἱ τοῦ Χριστοῦ in their Lord's royal Arrival.

With Paul's letters organized for contemporary readers in order of decreasing length, they may first encounter Adam in Romans, where his very existence is the provenance of death's reign (Rom 5:14). But the Corinthians had no way of reading their letter through the lens of the later epistle; in terms of audience-response criticism, this is their first encounter in the letter, if not ever, with Paul's image of Adam. Later in the chapter, Paul will elaborate on the image, apparently coining the characterization of Christ as the "last Adam" (ὁ ἔσχατος Ἀδάμ, 1 Cor 15:45, 47), "a description which points unambiguously to the eschatological character of the apostle's thought."³² But upon the first hearing, the naming of "Adam" is only a further specification of the vector death has followed, a natural but typically lethal extension of its agency.

What does Paul intend by "in Adam"? Stanley Porter observes that the sense in which ἐν τῷ Ἀδάμ...ἐν τῷ Χριστῷ is understood here affects the verse's theological outcome: the materialist sense of the preposition suggests "the realist view of original sin, in which humans in some way physically pre-existed in Adam." Porter rightly thinks the *spherical* sense of the preposition to be more probable, such that "one is in the sphere of Christ's control," an explanation "which appears to make better sense of Paul's language."³³ Of course, analyzing Paul's grammar exhausts neither the theopolitical

³² Kreitzer, "Adam and Christ," 9–10.

³³ Porter, *Idioms*, 159. The sense of the prepositional phrase and the theology of the reader are of course mutually informative: a predetermined inclination toward the tradition of original sin would both govern and be reinforced by the reading of the text. The same applies to those who subscribe to a reading in which "humans belong to particular realms, the one controlled by Adam and his actions and the one controlled by Christ and his." Continuing to read the phrase in the spherical sense, one can readily agree that Adam's

implications nor the theological vitality of his words. Fowl points out that “in Christ” could be thought of as a political sphere in potential rivalry and conflict with that of a congregation’s home city, such as Philippi (or Corinth, in this case).³⁴

The principal identifier for those who dwell “in Christ”—at the anticipated juncture, the only way of telling them apart from those who are ἐν τῷ Ἀδαμ, with whom they are explicitly contrasted—is that all (πάντες) of those ἐν τῷ Χριστῷ “will be made alive,” resurrected.³⁵ Paul analyzes allegiance in terms of whether the dead stay dead, and vice versa: death has none of its accustomed permanence for those who are loyal to Christ.³⁶ The future passive, “will be made alive,” strengthens that loyalty by recalling the passive-active tension at play in Christ’s own resurrection. Christ the Son was raised from the dead by God the Father, but it was in being (passively) raised that Christ inaugurated a new and deathless mode of humanity, that he (actively) accepted the

choices established that realm, but Paul’s language here and in Romans 5–6 suggest that it is not Adam but sin and death that control it.

³⁴ Fowl, *Philippians*, 19. Jervis (*At the Heart*, 97–113, quoting 98 and 100) has made a compelling argument about the theology of the phrase: she argues that “in Christ” and “with Christ” (the latter occurring outside of the confines of the present study) denote different contexts of suffering within Christian life. The first category “refers to our experience of suffering as people who believe in Jesus Christ,” wherein the “life we receive ‘in Christ’ unites us to Christ’s death—a death that was not just a death to sin but also a death resulting in life.” The second category, “with Christ,” denotes suffering experienced sacrificially and voluntarily “as a *result* of our being believers—what we might call believer-specific suffering.” Jervis readily admits that the categorical distinction is heuristic and provisional, foreign to Paul’s “dense, organic, and unsystematic thought” (97n58, 98) but her underlying point remains crucial: the phrase “in Christ” does more than simply (!) locate Paul’s ancient and postmodern adherents in the sphere of Christ’s control. That is likely its primary purpose here, but the phrase also characterizes that sphere as one of affliction. The benefit Paul announces next for those belonging to Christ comes at great personal, subjective cost, not just the “objective” cost to Christ himself. Those ἐν τῷ Χριστῷ will be resurrected, but Paul makes no promises that the route to resurrection will not be one characterized by affliction after the pattern of Christ.

³⁵ Perhaps a comment from Miles (*Christ*, 224) over-anticipates Paul’s argument at the end of the chapter: this “victory that the Lord wins over Satan by rising from the dead is only a victory in principle... Yet the Lord’s people win through the Lord’s resurrection a foretaste of victory now and the assurance of total victory later.” As he elaborates, the people also win “crucially, an explanation of why total victory cannot be immediate. They must be persecuted as the Lord has been persecuted before they too can triumph as he has triumphed.” But if Jesus’ triumph includes the crucifixion, we must take literally the phrase “baptized into his death” (Rom 6:3).

³⁶ Cassidy (*Christians and Roman Rule*, 64) makes a similar point, minus the emphasis on resurrection: “Paul’s allegiance to Jesus is the arbiter of his loyalty to every other entity.”

title of “Lord” with which he was invested, and the catalogue of activities Paul ascribed to him earlier in the letter—judging, calling, justifying, uniting, and assigning responsibilities to his servants (3:5, 4:4–5, 6:11, 6:17, and 7:17, all cited above)—shows how active he continues to be in their midst. A related tension of life and death is hidden in the two communal rites of allegiance in which Paul expects all of those who self-identify as “in Christ” to participate: in baptism and in communion, it is their Lord’s death and new life that those loyal to him are asked to re-enact and to share in the present.

Once resurrected, this Lord’s followers will join him, arrayed in an order, as for battle: τάγμα in 15:23 connotes not a chronological sequence of events but a military unit and its positioning, its deployment.³⁷ In the bilingual Greco-Roman first century, τάγμα was used as the “standard literary term for *legio*,” legion, though the loan-word λεγιών did see occasional use.³⁸ Τάγμα could mean a regiment, or “the order or rank assigned to individuals,” and it does double duty in these senses here.³⁹ In differentiating between the already resurrected Christ and οἱ τοῦ Χριστοῦ, those awaiting resurrection, τάγμα also demarcates a temporal order between past and future certainties, and denotes Christ’s military precedence in priority and rank, without diminishing the vital participation of those who belong to him.

The brilliance of Paul’s rhetorical use of τάγμα is in the way in which his phraseology mirrors his subject matter. The movement from 15:23a, ἕκαστος δὲ ἐν τῷ

³⁷ Delling, “τάσσω, τάγμα, κτλ,” *TDNT* 8:27–48 (especially 31–32), with Christ understood as possessing the non-military “rank” of ἀπαρχή: “The resurrection of his people takes place simultaneously with the *parousia* of Christ as participation in His rule.” See 32 for correspondence of τάγμα’s phrase with 1 QS 6:8.

³⁸ Mason, *Greek Terms*, 163.

³⁹ See Garland (*1 Corinthians*, 708), who cites 2 Sam 23:13 LXX, Ign. *Rom.* 5.1, Josephus’ *Jewish War* 1.9.1 §183, and 1 Clem 37:3, 41:1 as supportive primary sources. Moffatt’s rendering (*First Epistle*, 246) is “division.”

ἰδίῳ τάγματι, to 15:23b, ἀπαρχὴ Χριστός, is *paratactic*: the clauses are arranged together without a conjunction, with only a colon (· or :) to show how the clauses are connected. Παράταξις originally suggested the arrangement of troops in battle order; indeed, the best known classical example, Caesar’s “*veni, vidi, vici*,” was contextually military, an assessment of the speed with which he defeated the Pontic ruler Pharnaces II.⁴⁰ The connection from 15:23b to 15:23c, ἔπειτα οἱ τοῦ Χριστοῦ ἐν τῇ παρουσίᾳ αὐτοῦ, is a conjunctive instance of *hypotaxis*: the ἔπειτα shows that the latter clause is subject to the former. In other words, Paul moves in this sentence from proper deployment to orderly subjection, anticipating the subjection language still to come and reinforcing the relationship between Christ and those who are considered οἱ τοῦ Χριστοῦ. In this military parade, Christ’s own belong to him militarily, grammatically, and theopolitically.

In naming the παρουσία as the context in which the ranks of the resurrected receive their marching orders, Paul is subverting a term at the heart of Roman imperial ideology, of which the Corinthian audience would have been well aware.⁴¹ As observed in the last chapter, παρουσία evoked the presence of the emperor or another high imperial official, especially in the *mise-en-scène* of the official’s prestigious arrival at a colonial city such as Corinth. It is for this reason that the word is translated as Arrival,⁴² deliberately and prominently capitalized, for this was a significant event, rich in its themes of mutual ownership. For the colony, the dignitary’s approach represented a

⁴⁰ Plutarch, *Life of Julius Caesar* 50.3; Suetonius, *Julius Caesar* 37.

⁴¹ Garland, *I Corinthians*, 708–9, and 708n6 concerning the minting of a Corinthian coin commemorating Nero’s advent there in 66 CE; Garland uses advent and parousia interchangeably in this instance.

⁴² In parallel with Moffatt, *First Epistle*, 246, “royal coming or arrival,” with the latter term alone and uncapitalized in Moffatt’s translation. Also see Collins, *Power of Images*, 26, who describes the parousia in I Thessalonians as “the great parade.”

chance to cement a favourable relationship: we welcome and honour you, Rome's emissary, as our divine guest (or, simply put: Hail, Caesar!). From Rome's perspective, a dignitarian παρουσία was an opportunity to remind the colony in question of its proper relationship to the imperial centre: you belong to us, and you are to think of this visitor as our magisterial representative. The empire and emperor owned the colony, as well as the parousial event itself; "presence" could belong to anyone, but the Arrival was copyrighted by Rome.⁴³

By co-opting the term from the empire, Paul is making an earth-shattering statement, rewriting the imperial owner's manual. He binds the participants (οἱ τοῦ Χριστοῦ) and the event (τῇ παρουσίᾳ αὐτοῦ) firmly to Christ, not Caesar. The events coordinated around this Arrival do have an eschatological timbre, but Paul is concerned with "the 'logical' more than the temporal sequence of things."⁴⁴ The things that matter at this stage concern the participants— that they are resurrected, that they belong to and literally follow Christ, and that the Corinthians who are loyal to Christ can count themselves among their ranks—and Christ (not the imperial emissary), who is the parousial dignitary to be honoured, the God Who Arrives.

Paul's picture of the Arrival is at times clouded by contemporary translations of 15:23. The TNIV's rendering of "then, when he comes, those who belong to him" and the NLT's "when he comes back" deliver the essence of the words, but they minimize the import of the coming as an *event*: where other translations and paraphrases (NASB,

⁴³ The assumption here is that an event can be owned as an image can; on this count, *The Voice's* rendition of Matt 22:20 is helpful, as it has Jesus asking concerning a denarius, "Of whom is this a portrait, and *who owns this inscription?*" (italics added). In today's world, one thinks of the ubiquitous warnings in sports telecasts, in which the rebroadcast and even the *description* of the game's events are proscribed if made without authorized consent.

⁴⁴ Fee, *Pauline Christology*, 108.

HCSB, NKJV, NRSV, ESV, *Message* and *Voice*) maintain the parousia as a gerund (“at his coming”), the TNIV and NLT nearly remove the occasion from Paul’s eschatological calendar. They cut short the Arrival. They place more boundaries between the twenty-first century, American-imperial reader and the first-century, imperial event that Paul is co-opting—boundaries that were already rather permeable, thanks to the military-political theatrics that continue to characterize armed invasions.

Following Paul further into the parousial sequence, then, reveals that it is not just the sphere of in-Christ to which readers are bound, but to the event of his Arrival; the readers owe literary allegiance to Paul and devotional allegiance to the Lord whose coming παρουσία drives the apostle’s narrative.

15:24: ²⁴Then comes the end, when he hands over the dominion to *the* God and Father, when he has dismantled every rule and every authority and power.

Paul passed a dangerous sentence here. If the text of First Corinthians had fallen into the wrong hands, what would a Roman official have made of this proposed end to every form of power and governmental control? Would he have seen Paul’s conjunction of καταργήση with βασιλεία, ἐξουσία, ἀρχή, and δύναμις as a threat to Roman supremacy? Fortunately for him, this hypothetical official did not have a surfeit of English translational options to think through. But like Paul’s intended audience in Corinth, he might have contemplated the likely meanings of the individual words as they appear in this constellation. Contemporary readers cannot read with ancient audiences’ eyes, but they can use their own to reconsider the options that have already been

suggested before they settle the question of the degree of Paul's theopolitical subversion in this setting.

The scheduled events in this verse are initiated by the Arrival. “Then” (εἶτα) indicates not a strict *timetable* but a *sequence* of temporal, yet eternally significant, events.⁴⁵ These events are understood to be replete with authority and judgment; at his parousia, Christ “will bring to light what is hidden.”⁴⁶ Τὸ τέλος is not necessarily The End in an ultimate sense, although the parousial regime-change is characteristic of apocalyptic hopes for vindication against oppressive rulers. Furnish finds the entire section that begins here, 15:24–28, to be “generally representative” of Paul’s views, although he suspects that Paul imported its apocalyptic contents from another source.⁴⁷ Source-critical speculation is less important here than the priority of understanding to what end Paul purposed the prophetic-apocalyptic themes he evokes. The immediate end or goal of εἶτα τὸ τέλος is to introduce the pair of clauses that follow, detailing what happens at the τέλος itself, with each clause beginning in parallel, with ὅταν. With each *when* Paul is effectively playing “remember when,” but looking forward, asking his audience to *imagine* or *anticipate* when and how they will apprehend their salvation and their saviour as he brings these things about.

The first of these two “imagine when” clauses, **when he hands over the sovereignty to the God and Father**, raises the first of a host of exegetical questions. Why “sovereignty”? “Kingdom,” while customary, is no longer a satisfactory translation because of the baggage it carries in its train: the word is heavily patriarchal; it refers

⁴⁵ Holleman (*Resurrection and Parousia*, 12, 42–44, 52) thinks 15:23 “clearly shows that Paul meant a chronological order,” but the unresolved question of whether Paul intends to imply an end of *time* makes words like *sequential* preferable to “chronological.”

⁴⁶ Best, *Second Corinthians*, 48, referring back to 1 Cor 4:5.

⁴⁷ Furnish, “Theology in 1 Corinthians,” 77.

principally to a geographical domain, rather than extending to include command over that domain; and among its remaining modern applications are ecclesiastical provincialisms, unpleasant historical connotations, and relics decreasingly relevant to North American theopolitics.⁴⁸ These *impedimenta* prevent “kingdom” from conveying to contemporary readers the magisterial force of βασιλεία. But that customary translation does remind one that βασιλεία carries a heavy weight of structural patriarchy and *monarchical* domination. Faithful translation of the word and the concept allows no whitewashing of these qualities. Still, to capture βασιλεία’s territoriality and the political exercise of that power requires a versatile translation (optimally, one with a related noun for the ruler, and a verb for the exercise of power, close at hand). One might consider words like “dominion,” “monarchy,” “hegemony,” or “imperium,”⁴⁹ options that would bind readers

⁴⁸ For Hill (*In God’s Time*, 142 and n17), the flaws in conceptualizing of God’s reign as a “kingdom”—over-emphasis of a geographical location, and reinforcement of the stereotype of God as male, to the exclusion of female and gender-neutral metaphors—are serious enough to commend “dominion” as his preferred translation. Carter (*Matthew and Empire*, 177 and n8) has also remarked on this, noting that some scholars (citing Letty Russell and Ada María Isasi-Díaz) “have sought alternative expressions that shift the image from the imperial world to that of households and relationships. One option is ‘kin-dom,’” a term Carter finds helpful in highlighting non-imperialistic alternative relationships but neglectful of the scope of the rule of God (or of other rulers, elsewhere in the New Testament and LXX).

In some ecclesiastical contexts, the English *kingdom* has been used so frequently by a given denomination as to become suggestive of that group to the exclusion of others; loanwords from other contemporary languages do not necessarily provide better alternatives. In electronic correspondence with the author (February 24, 2006), staff member Ed Miller recalled the process of renaming a training conference for InterVarsity chapters in New York and New Jersey, in search of a new name that would evoke God’s kingdom: “We thought about naming it ‘Kingdom Camp’ but that sounded too much like a Jehovah’s Witnesses [sic] program! Someone asked what the German word was for Kingdom and it was ‘Reich.’ We didn’t think that would be good either for obvious reasons! Then someone mentioned the Greek word, *Basileia*.” The name has proven successfully evocative in that context, then, but in exegesis it is preferable not to add new loanwords from the original language, as no actual translation is thus accomplished.

⁴⁹ “Dominion” and “sovereignty” admittedly carry some theological baggage of their own: the former is perhaps too evocative of dominion theology, but the latter, while traditionally the province of discussions of human free will and divine foreknowledge, will serve well enough, as those conversations are not unrelated to the question of God’s sovereignty vis-à-vis other nations. “Hegemony” is eschewed because it suggests (especially in post-colonialism; see Ashcroft et al., *Post-Colonial Studies*, 116) a form of cultural control couched in terms of social order and stability as defined by those in power, rather than an *empire* ruled by political and military force, which is a more accurate description of the conflicted realm of Rome and the picture Paul paints in 1 Corinthians 15. *Imperium* is unwieldy and inconsistent with what Paul

uncomfortably close to the intense political power plays of Paul's day and the subversive character of proclaiming a rival to Rome's imperium. But the best option may be "sovereignty," a word that holds a "cash value" comparable to the other possibilities as well as a contemporary currency in geopolitics, without the disadvantageous baggage accumulated by "kingdom" and "monarchy."⁵⁰

So Christ, the arriving Lord, is to deliver **the sovereignty to the God and Father**. There is something very counter-imperial about this part of the parousial sequence. Father-son succession was common among kings in Rome's world, and as was noted in chapter four, a fictive patrilineal relationship smoothed the transfer of power from one emperor to the next, even for men who were already blood relatives. In this setting, the attribute of *pietas* was shown as one *paterfamilias* succeeded another in the administration of an empire-wide household. Sometimes this due diligence demanded violence: later authors "celebrated Octavian's revenge on the murderers of Julius Caesar, his adoptive father, as an act of pietas to the glorified Caesar."⁵¹ So if this is succession, it is happening in reverse, from son to father. What seems more likely is the image of a victorious general, formally turning a pacified region (or returning a re-pacified province) back to the emperor's authority, helping to bring order to the "household" of his imperial

probably had in mind, given how rarely the empire actually portrayed itself as a βασιλεία at this early stage.

⁵⁰ The verb βασιλεύειν will be rendered "to reign as sovereign" at 15:25, below.

⁵¹ Jeffers, *The Greco-Roman World*, 92; so also Potter, "Roman Religion," 150, expanding this act of pietas to include the whole of Octavian's involvement in the civil wars. Citing Tacitus (*Annals* 1.10), Potter elaborates that the virtue of *pietas* has an almost "physical quality: it can compel action, or it can be worn like a piece of clothing." Such a view might cause us to reconsider a text such as Gal 3:26–28, in which unity with Christ in baptism amounts to being "clothed with Christ" (cf. Rom 13:14) and *adopted* by God; this unity dissolves otherwise divisive barriers of ethnicity and social status, outstripping the premise of Caesar's οἰκουμένη and the degree of *pietas* due him.

“father,”⁵² who was officially managing the economy on behalf of Rome’s people and the Senate.

For Christian auditors in Corinth, capital of senatorial Achaia, this would have been a powerful image to meditate upon in relation to the fledgling church’s proto-Trinitarian economy. It is not Caesar who receives the imperium back, but God, *the* God. The italicized definite article is intended as an optional addition, clarifying the place of Paul’s God as the (only) God and Father. *Only* is only implied, not stated outright; Paul’s point is not to exclude the possibility of other deities, but to relativize or invalidate them in the presence of the principal God, the one whose master story Paul helps to write. Referring to (the) God and Father is only incidentally doctrinal. Paul does not set out to demonstrate the triumph of monotheism, or even henotheism, over polytheism.⁵³ His statement simply makes all other claims of divine paternity (read: Zeus/Jupiter, and the Caesars) ultimately irrelevant. Among the options of pluralism, the singular God is the only one that matters.

Paul has not called God “Father” since 1 Cor 8:6; other than the appearance of οἱ πατέρες (“fathers,” meaning “ancestors,” although the same word could refer to senators as Rome’s “fathers”) at 10:1, the Corinthian audience has not heard the term πατήρ at all

⁵² The empire’s provincial management was rarely easy. The expense of creating and maintaining a new province had to be weighed against its potential troublemaking capacity. In chapter four, we joined Dio (*Roman History* 53.12.2–4) in suspecting Augustus’ magnanimity as he ceded to the senate Rome’s non-belligerent provinces. Concerning the Corinthians’ experience in this matter, Achaia province was senatorial when Paul visited there; Egypt, by contrast, was too wealthy and strategic in value to let Octavian risk senatorial control. See Jeffers, *The Greco-Roman World*, 120, 260, 274.

⁵³ Diverging somewhat from Fee, “Toward a Theology,” 37–58, who emphasizes Paul’s father/son focus *contra* polytheism (“many gods...”) at 8:6. In agreement with Morales’ (“Liturgical Conversion,” 116) development of N. T. Wright’s work, Paul is best understood here as prioritizing praxis over doctrine: the fundamental problem, to which Paul’s redefinition of the Shema was the answer, was one of “competing liturgies.” That is, the allegiance owed and given to God, *rather than Caesar*, as Father should be reflected in the daily lives of the believing community. So too Wright, *Climax*, 130: Paul is “laying the claim that the people defined by *this* formula of belief form a new family with a new code of family behaviour” (italics his).

since then. If one assumes Paul's letter was heard all in one "sitting," and/or that it was heard multiple times, the echo of 8:4–6 would have been clear. The "one God, the Father," rather than Caesar as *pater patriae* or any of Corinth's other options for worship,⁵⁴ is the only one who is to receive the sovereignty back from the "one Lord, Jesus Christ." Christ's resurrection confirmed his identity as the agent and lord regent of YHWH; reciprocally, Christ's restitution of power confirms the identity of the God on whose behalf he acts.⁵⁵ In the dramaturgy of Paul's biblical heritage, contradistinctive to polytheistic frameworks, God is "like an actor who has been called on to replace an entire cast. The virtuosity of his performance is both compelling and disturbing, and the memory of it deeply marks even the many parts of the Old Testament from which he is absent."⁵⁶ Now, as Paul looks forward, he sees that virtuosity expand, as God the Son delivers the world to God the Father.

The second ὅταν clause, **when he has dismantled every rule and every authority and power**, has its own attendant problems. Καταργήση is often translated as "destroyed" here—as in the TNIV's "destroyed all dominion, authority and power"—and Paul's apocalyptic tone seems at first blush to support that view. But καταργεῖν "really falls short" of "to destroy," suggesting instead a power broken or made ineffective.⁵⁷ Classically, καταργεῖν is "to render powerless," "to nullify" or "abolish," or "to leave

⁵⁴ Grant, *Paul in the Roman World*, 64–65, citing the geographer Pausanias' accounting of Corinth's gods, idols, and temples, including statues of Kthonios and Hypsistos (2.8), sanctuaries or temples of Augustus, Octavia, and Jupiter Capitolinus (3.1, 4.5), with rare but noticeable signs of foreign imports such as Isis and Sarapis.

⁵⁵ See further Wink, *Naming*, 51n34, where part of Paul's "playing" with Pss 8:6 and 110:1 is to develop the relationship between the two "Lords" spoken of in 110:1.

⁵⁶ Miles, *Christ*, 213–14.

⁵⁷ So Stott observes in *Cross of Christ*, 240–41.

unemployed,” as when Euripides employs the term with reference to the working hand made idle.⁵⁸ That sense is not so far from what Paul intends.

“Dismantled” is a deliberately chosen rendering for καταργήση, preferable to nearby options like Wink’s translational choice, “neutralized,”⁵⁹ because “dismantled” implies *divestiture*, *demotion*, even *disassembly*, but *not* outright destruction. That is, following the Old French verb *desmanteler*, to dismantle is to strip of an article that was once invested in the subject, depriving the subject of a power that was once legitimately given and responsibly used. In this sense, it evokes a backstory that “neutralize” does not. When used to refer to an object, “to dismantle” nicely fills in English the role καταργεῖν plays in Paul’s Greek: it connotes a removal of apparatus or defence, a disarmament, a *powering down*. Καταργεῖν is not a militaristic word in the empire’s vocabulary or in that of Paul, but as was argued earlier, this is the word Paul uses to talk about what happens to rulers inimical to God’s sovereignty. If even *some* of those powers are human and imperial in nature, then the words that describe their fate become theopolitically relevant. “Dismantle” is not inherently martial either, but the term does see frequent contemporary deployment in the theatre of political and military conflict, most often in plans to “disrupt, dismantle, and destroy” enemy forces and plots.⁶⁰ So καταργήση in

⁵⁸ Euripides, *Phoenician Women* 753.

⁵⁹ Wink, *Naming*, 51, also allows for *depotentiating*, which is unwieldy but correctly captures the sense of disempowerment or disarmament; compare Moffatt’s choice, “dethroned,” in *First Epistle*, 27, at 2:6.

⁶⁰ See for example comments by White House spokesman Robert Gibbs on the military goal in Afghanistan to “disrupt, dismantle, and ultimately destroy al-Qaeda and its extremist allies,” quoted in Koring, “Commander Calls for New War Strategy,” A10. The interchangeable phrasing of “disrupt, dismantle, and destroy” and “disrupt, dismantle, and defeat” has also drawn attention, as noted in Bailey, “Catchphrase Watch,” and in satirical punditry such as *The Daily Show with Jon Stewart*. Opposite the meaning of dismantlement as divestiture is the sense of national self-investiture and entitlement to which empires can be prone, as noted by Hall (*Cross in Our Context*, 227): he suggests that comparative questions about the similarities between Rome and imperial America should be repeated concerning “any people, however admirable in other respects, who assume the mantle of Empire.”

15:24 and καταργεῖται in 15:26 are rendered there as dismantled, rather than with the alternatives that have proliferated in English biblical versions and commentaries.⁶¹

Those scheduled for dismantling are πᾶσαν ἀρχὴν καὶ πᾶσαν ἐξουσίαν καὶ δύναμιν. Who are these figures? Having reviewed in chapter three the debate between exegetes who argue for an interpretation exclusive to spiritual powers (e.g., Conzelmann) and those like Horsley, who see in this passage and 2:6–8 only the arrogance and ignorance of imperial rulers, “undone precisely by their own repressive terrorizing of subject peoples,”⁶² the same positions need not be rehearsed again. It is worth remarking, however, that the prophetic/apocalyptic setting is likely an underlying factor in the debate,⁶³ as the tension between this-worldly and otherworldly elements in the apocalyptic scenario begs to be resolved in one direction or the other.

⁶¹ The versional and exegetical alternatives for translating this specific use of καταργεῖν shake down into four trajectories, though a few interpreters argue for more than one of these. **(1) Destroy:** so the NKJV (“puts an end to”/“destroyed”), NRSV, TNIV, ESV, NLT, CEV, and NCV; Heil (*Rhetorical Role*, 210), as a divine passive verb; Fee, who prefers “rendered helpless” when the verb is passive (“Toward a Theology,” 57–58); de Boer (“to destroy, i.e., to render eschatologically and thus permanently powerless,” while emphasizing subordination as “suggestive of military subjugation,” in *Defeat of Death*, 121–22); Harrisville (“already being crushed,” *1 Corinthians*, 267); and Horsley (“undone,” “doomed to perish,”” in *1 Corinthians*, 59, 197). **(2) Abolish:** so the NASB, HCSB, Calvin (*First Epistle*, 324; his Latin has *aboleverit* in 15:24, diverging from the Vulgate’s *evacuaverit*—but he follows the Vg. with *destruetur* in 15:26, adding that God’s glory will be seen in the “destruction” of all the disobedient, 328), Fee (*Pauline Christology*, 111–12), Garland (“‘dethrone,’ ‘abolish,’ or ‘overthrow,’ rather than ‘destroy,’” in *1 Corinthians*, 710–11), and Brown (“‘pass away’ or ‘to abolish/to break the power of,’” in *Cross and Human Transformation*, 116 and n27). **(3) Nullify/render powerless:** so Hays (*Echoes*, 134: “to nullify, to abrogate, to invalidate, or to render ineffectual”), Holleman (*Resurrection and Parousia*, 61, 65: “render powerless,”” or, curiously, “annihilate”), Ackerman (*Lo, I Tell You*, 98), and possibly Moffatt (*First Epistle*, 246: “put down”) and Stott (*Cross of Christ*, 241: “their power has been broken. They have not been abolished, but they have been overthrown”). **(4) Being brought to nought/coming to nothing:** so Barrett (*First Epistle*, 357), Conzelmann (*1 Corinthians*, 56n2–3, 61n46), and Thiselton (*First Epistle*, 224, 231–32, 234, oddly equating “doomed to be brought to nothing” with “rendering inoperative, i.e., annihilate,” italics his).

⁶² Horsley, *1 Corinthians*, 59; Conzelmann, *1 Corinthians*, 61n47, cited previously: “Against the political interpretation it may be asked: What should earthly powers have to do with supernatural wisdom?”

⁶³ As when Horsley, *1 Corinthians*, 197, argues that Paul’s “apocalyptic orientation” is the “controlling framework” of the apostle’s argument: if the imperial context of 1 Corinthians is Horsley’s first concern, then he has his own controlling framework that will naturally colour his view of Paul’s worldview and its denizens.

The theopolitical contexts explored earlier offer no such resolution as to the identity of the agencies or the timing of their dismantlement. Examining the way that the empire employed ἀρχήν, ἐξουσίαν, and δύναμιν showed that the three terms were almost interchangeable in their implied definitions and discursive applications. Along with ἡγεμονία⁶⁴ and (less frequently) βασιλεία,⁶⁵ this triumvirate proclaimed the empire's commanding *jurisdiction* and expansive *reach*.⁶⁶ Together, these terms were the modes and settings in which Rome told its story of mastery. The answer to the question intimated by Paul's doubled use of ὅταν, the *when* at which he expects this dismantling and regime-change to occur, is tied to the irreducibility of the agencies being dismantled: the apocalyptic tension of this-worldly and otherworldly elements (noted above) plays havoc with any attempt to pinpoint its timing.⁶⁷ But to describe this as *both* a historical

⁶⁴ Again, Mason (*Greek Terms*, 151), on the fluidity of ἡγεμονία relative to the other terms: "The Greek writers chose to employ an imprecise term; if we can establish from external information precisely what they meant, it is incorrect to translate or understand that specific precise reference, for if so, the intention of the purposely imprecise wording is lost."

⁶⁵ As βασιλεία often referred to domains that buffered or fell within the Roman ἀρχή, one could argue that the rule of the latter circumscribed that of the former—though this would undermine the habitual rendering in imperial-critical research of βασιλεία τοῦ θεοῦ as the "Empire of God," such that this empire would stand in automatic opposition to the Roman one. That assumption is based largely on Josephus' references to the emperor as βασιλεύς (*Jewish War* 3.351; 4.596; 5.563; specific to Titus, 5.58), one such reference in Appian (*Civil Wars* 2.86, for Hadrian), and later New Testament texts (1 Tim 2:2; 1 Pet 2:13, 17; Rev 17:12), all as cited in Carter, *Matthew and Empire*, 161n49, and idem, *John and Empire*, 192. These all date from a later era than 1 Corinthians, when βασιλεύς was used less guardedly with reference to Caesar, although an earlier, Latin counterexample can be found in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* 15:858–60: "Jupiter controls the heights of heaven and the kingdom of the triformed universe (*arces temperat aetherias et mundi regna triformis*); But the earth is under Augustus's sway. Each is both sire and ruler" [8 CE; ET as cited in Carr and Conway, *Introduction*, 299]. What Paul may be doing in maintaining "kingdom" language here is *reversing the state status quo, showing that it is in fact God's sovereignty that supersedes and deconstructs every empire and hegemony*.

⁶⁶ Authority (ἐξουσίαν) was a key theopolitical question for Rome (and thus for Paul and other evangelists) to settle. As Griffith-Jones asks, what "were the limits to the emperor's authority? It was naïve, perhaps, but quite consistent to link power over nations with power over nature" (*Four Witnesses*, 65). Griffith-Jones cites here as exemplary Philo's description of the Augusteum, Augustus' Alexandrian temple, as a "saving hope" for sailors at sea.

⁶⁷ That is, theopolitical agencies cannot be reduced to the temporal/historical, this-worldly plane or the eschatological, other-worldly; to assign a precise when to the end in view here would be to over- or underestimate the connectivity between the two. The biblical treatment of Rome's imperial cult illustrates this theopolitical connectivity. Meadors (*Idolatry*, 162) notes that while the New Testament authors vary in the specifics of their responses to the cult, the responses grow more vitriolic when the cult is understood as

process *and* an eschatological moment is *not* a permanent deferral. What can be said for certain is that Christ will reign, and that the primary characteristic of the unfolding of his reign is the dismantling of others. When a theopolitical power that works in ways inimical to the reign of God is brought to account or deprived of its power to hurt, there the reign of Christ can be said to have taken another step toward consummation.

In proclaiming his master story of the gospel, Paul respects the diversity of Rome's theopolitical terminology, but the threefold complex of rule(r)s, authorities, and powers is only a means to an end: in the end, Christ will dismantle *every* power, imperial and/or cosmic.⁶⁸ The three terms cannot be lumped together in translation or theological exegesis; their multiplicity, their fluidity, and the resulting this-worldly/otherworldly tension are precisely Paul's point in including three of them at once. Nor do imperial applications exhaust their meaning; Paul himself has used each one on more than one previous occasion in the letter, often in conversations having more to do with polity than politics.⁶⁹

idolatrous, "diametrically opposed to God's will. It was no less a form of idolatry than that which had precipitated the downfall and exile of Israel." On the one hand, the cult is understood to be a transitory, human creation—as empires themselves are (so Laxer, *Perils of Empire*, 2). On the other, the cult represents a superhuman agency, running amok in the complex matrix of two worlds at once, and there is no guarantee that its dismantlement in the otherworldly plane will translate precisely to this one. Imaging such imperial phenomena as massive objects in the "rubber sheet" representation of the gravitational hermeneutic in the previous chapter was primarily intended to depict their impact on the temporal plane, but a similar effect could be imagined for the otherworldly.

⁶⁸ Calvin (*First Epistle*, 324) weighs in: the powers are "the legitimate powers, which have been ordained by God," adding that this stage of abolition will entail the end of the world's polity, magistracy, and law. As for the different words Paul uses, "*Rule and authority and power* mean much the same thing in this verse; but these three words are in conjunction with each other in order to make the meaning plainer" (italics original to the English translation).

⁶⁹ Which is not to say that the question of polity is not politically charged! Paul's previous uses of "rule" in 1 Corinthians are limited to rulers in 2:6, 8, and 15:24, but the appearances of "authority" (7:4, 37; 11:10) and "power" (1:18, 24; 2:4–5; 4:19–20; 5:4; 6:14) usually have more to do with inter-gender and intra-church relationships, as well as the power of God. As Ellis ("When You Come Together... [1 Cor 14:26–40]," Wentworth Baptist Church, Hamilton, Ontario, July 4, 2010) observes, it is rare for Paul to lay out *rules* as he does in 1 Corinthians 14, but his priority there is to help avoid the abuse of *power* (implied) while keeping order (stated outright in τῶν, 14:40).

With these words, then, Paul is not necessarily speaking to the Corinthians on “their own terms,” but certainly in terms that they would have recognized from their lives in their church and under the empire. The entities and structures he scheduled for dismantling would have been understood to include the empire, as the empire was one of the most prominent *theopolitical agencies* of its era.⁷⁰ This is not to say that Paul thought of Rome as “the evil empire,” imaging it as Revelation would later do under the thin guise of Babylon, or as Ronald Reagan famously imaged the Soviet Union. It means only that life under the empire was an everyday fact in Corinth, an experiential reality, as familiar, and as certain, as death and taxes (and responsible for considerable amounts of both). When Peter Stevenson and Stephen Wright argue that Christ’s “divine victory may be something to celebrate, but it may also create the feeling that this battle takes place far away from everyday human experience,”⁷¹ they underestimate the proximate effect Rome had upon daily life among the early churches. The empire was not Paul’s only rhetorical target, but it was never far away from his target audience.

⁷⁰ “Theopolitical agencies” should be taken to encapsulate the sociopolitical structures that Wink and Thiselton describe as transcending “the sum of their parts” without necessarily involving external forces (see Thiselton, *First Epistle*, 224, 231–32, and [quoted] 234; and Wink, *Naming*, 10–12, 50–55, and *idem*, *Engaging*, 83n43). One can of course follow Wink in the use of “the Powers” as a catch-all category: as the New Testament’s “power” terms are, in his words, “to a degree interchangeable, one or a pair or a series can be made to represent them all” (*Naming*, 10, italics his). *Theopolitical agencies* is suggested here—though *theopolitical structures* or *entities* would also be fitting—simply as an alternative, heuristic label, incorporating the agencies’ trans-human, aggregate qualities and acknowledging their apocalyptic setting. See Thiselton, *First Epistle*, 1232, on Paul’s expansion of apocalyptic thought to include “every structural power” in 15:24 (italics his).

⁷¹ Stevenson and Wright, *Preaching the Atonement*, 141.

15:25–26: ²⁵For He must reign as sovereign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. ²⁶The last enemy to be dismantled is Death.

Paul begins to reveal the scriptural warrant for Christ's reign and for the dismantling of Death, the circumscription of its power over human life, which began at Christ's resurrection and continues in the resurrection of his followers. The theopolitical reach of his reign is so comprehensive that even an enemy as formidable as Death must be subjected to his sovereignty; so too must any agency that holds the power of death.

“When Christianity put the trappings of royal courts into its structure it made itself foreign to the mind and spirit of Jesus. Jesus knew He was king, but that was not what He wanted the people to see in Him.”⁷² Joseph Girzone’s comment foregrounds a tension in the gospel narrative(s) that Paul received and developed: Jesus was a king who spoke often about his Father’s sovereignty and rarely his own, a messiah who was rendered powerless and destroyed by powerful theopolitical agencies. His resurrection was his vindication—“By his *δυνάμει* God raised the Lord from the dead, and he will raise us also” (1 Cor 6:14)—but this still left Paul with the plenipotentiary problem of having to conceptualize Christ as the Lord of God’s *βασιλεία* in a way that Christ himself had not described in much detail.

Paul’s answer was to turn to his Scriptures. Establishing the forward-looking backstory of Christ’s reign was a demanding interpretative task.⁷³ While Paul’s exegesis in the Corinthian correspondence is not a how-to guide, it does illustrate the early

⁷² Girzone, *Portrait of Jesus*, 141.

⁷³ Harrisville, *Fracture*, 98, notes the reversal of the reader’s interpretative expectations: the cross-event *causes* biblical re-interpretation, rather than *requiring* it *ex post facto*.

church's hermeneutical struggle with the traumatizing, fracturing effect of the cross,⁷⁴ and some of its most viable solutions in reconciling this scandal with the monarchical reign of God. One solution was to adapt more than one text at a time, as Paul does here, beginning with Ps 110:1. To borrow a term from the film industry, Paul is *compositing*, combining content from multiple biblical "shots" to achieve a desired effect: an image of *Christ's reign over the sovereignty of God, as seen through the treatment of enemies of that sovereignty*. It is necessary (δεῖ) that Christ be sovereign until all his enemies, including the antecedent rule(r)s, authorities, and powers, are subjugated. That is all the Corinthians are told "on paper," but if (and it *is* an "if") they see in Paul's words an afterimage of Ps 110:1, then they know something more.

Psalm 110:1 (109:1 LXX) is *not* easily recognizable, notwithstanding Heil's assertion to the contrary: as with Ps 8:6 (8:7 LXX) in 15:27a, some of the "essential elements" survive Paul's rendition of poetry into prose, but only τοὺς ἐχθρούς emerges exactly as it appeared in the psalm.⁷⁵ Of course, even if they understandably fail to "get" the reference, the Corinthians may well recognize the *theme*. Functioning as a sort of thematic synecdoche, Ps 110:1 recalls the rest of that psalm for those who are familiar with it as Paul is—in particular 110:5, on the LORD's shattering/crushing (LXX: συνέθλασεν, *has shattered*) of kings in the day of his wrath—while evoking the psalmic theme of enemy-subjugation for those less biblically literate. Of the seven other New

⁷⁴ See the various reflections in Heyman, *Power of Sacrifice*, 122; Smyth, *Trauma*, throughout; and Harrisville, *Fracture*, viii–ix, on the discontinuity between the New Testament and its religious environments, a discontinuity caused by the cross. Harrisville's resulting rubric of "fracture" reveals the "warping" of the Jewish apocalyptic framework to address the finality of a historic event in the crucifixion (80–81).

⁷⁵ *Contra* Heil, who (as noted two chapters ago) counts Paul's reference to Psalm 110 as so recognizable as not to require a more formal introduction (*Rhetorical Role*, 206). Heil is right to insist (209) that essential elements of Ps 8:7 LXX can be heard in 1 Cor 15:27a, but that case is weaker here in terms of audience-response criticism.

Testament quotations or allusions to Ps 110:1 (Matt 22:44, Mark 12:36, 14:62, Luke 20:42–43, Acts 2:34–35, and Heb 1:13, 10:13), six deal exclusively with the Davidic apprehension of the messiah’s relationship to YHWH; the last, Heb 10:13, is the only instance other than 1 Cor 15:25 in which the subjugation of enemies is the point of the allusion. Here, the Christology of the (unstated) first half of Ps 110:1, the reciprocity between God and his regent, is *defined* by the subjugating of τοὺς ἐχθρούς, for their presence seems to require the regent to reign (βασιλεύειν) as he is to do.⁷⁶ Paul invests further in Israel’s scriptural tradition to show that the enemies’ opposition requires that they be dismantled, which is the reason why this new phase of Christ’s sovereignty must happen.⁷⁷

Paul identifies the ultimate of the powerful enemies slated for dismantling as Death. Describing Death as the ἔσχατος ἐχθρός is principally a matter of order, but it also suggests ultimacy in the sense of the *latest* and *greatest*, the *archenemy* of maleficent power,⁷⁸ whose further characterization will be addressed later. Death was the final enemy that the Son of God faced in his life, and it defeated him. But as Witherington puts it, “Resurrection loosens death’s grip on human life.”⁷⁹ Death delimits life and is (after Easter) the precursor to resurrection: it is a reality of human existence, and it gives

⁷⁶ Garland (*1 Corinthians*, 711) follows and briefly quotes Barrett (*First Epistle*, 358) in translating the present infinitive βασιλεύειν as “‘to continue to reign.’ Christ reigns from the time of his resurrection until he subjugates every enemy at the end.” It is understood that Christ’s reign was already in force before his parousia, but that the Arrival initiates a new phase of his relationship to his realm, his people, and his enemies; see Horsley, “First Letter,” 289, who concludes that “[t]he very purpose of Christ’s *kingdom* or reign...was to destroy” the rulers and powers.

⁷⁷ To assert a divine sovereignty shaped by enmity begs the question of theodicy. As Borg (*Jesus*, 101–2) writes of the biblical ideal of kingship, “Injustice was the product of having lords other than the God of Israel.” Christ’s royal Arrival and the initiation of his official reign (βασιλεύειν) as sovereign (βασιλεύς) spells the end of theopolitical agencies, resolving decisively the ambivalence of having Israel’s human kings as intermediaries.

⁷⁸ In a theopolitically fortunate outgrowth of Greek-to-Latin translation, the Vg. renders ἔσχατος as *novissima*, meaning *last*, *most recent*, or *utmost*, but also referring substantively to *those in the rear*, i.e., the freshest troops in battle.

⁷⁹ Witherington, *Conflict and Community*, 305.

resurrection its initial meaning. But Christ's resurrection also redefines and circumscribes Death, as it is no longer the "final chapter" in life. Accordingly, Paul's current chapter is not *about* Death, but *resurrection from* it. In Paul's rhetorical rendering, the resurrection of Christ means that the dismantling of Death has already begun, to be completed at the parousia, as Thomas Finger points out for Paul's contemporary audiences:

If Jesus has already conquered the powers of evil and if he will surely return to consummate all of God's plans, then no situation of evil, tragedy, or despair can be as threatening as it looks. *It must pass away.* If the final evil, death, has already been conquered and if the power of the resurrection now lives within us (cf. Eph. 1:19–21), then nothing, not even death, can defeat the life and love which now flow through us.⁸⁰

The lyrics to a song by Matt Maher drive Finger's hopefulness home for contemporary audiences, proclaiming that *Christ's resurrection constitutes an invitation to be co-resurrected with him*: "Christ is risen from the dead / Trampling over death by death / Come awake, come awake / Come and rise up from the grave." When he explains that God "used death to destroy death... He literally tricked death into destroying itself. Jesus used the process of death to completely eradicate it," Maher implicitly adapts the post-apostolic theology of Gregory of Nyssa concerning the deception of the devil.⁸¹ This thought should not be a surprising liturgical development, given that Death fills the role of archenemy here that Christian theology and the popular imagination have traditionally reserved for Satan. The immediate temptation is to import the soteriology of a καταργεῖν intertext from Hebrews 2: "by his death he [Christ] might *break the power* of him who

⁸⁰ Finger, *Christian Theology* 1:102 (italics mine); cf. Rom 8:35, 37–39, at the suggestion of Michael Knowles.

⁸¹ Matt Maher and Mia Fieldes, "Christ Is Risen," from *Alive Again* (Essential/BMG, 2009), with comments as they appear at <http://www.mattmahermusic.com/music.php>, accessed August 8, 2010. Maher, who intriguingly chooses to sing the text of Hosea 13:14 rather than 1 Cor 15:55 ("hell," rather than Paul's reduplicated "Death"), indicates in the online liner notes that he deliberately borrows the phrasing of Christ as risen from the dead, "trampling over death by death, and redeeming us from the grave," from a Ukrainian Easter liturgy. For a concise summary of patristic alterations to the role of Satan in the Christus Victor atonement motif, see Weaver, *Nonviolent Atonement*, 15.

holds the power of death—that is, the devil—and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death” (2:14b–15, italics added).⁸² But Paul does not speculate here about the hierarchy of Satan and Death. His soteriology is more in line with Heb 2:15 than the verse that precedes it, capturing the fear and subjection for which Death as archenemy is directly responsible—qualities that he will develop as the story unfolds.

Paul has not forgotten the empire in the course of this exegesis. Later, he will write to the church in Rome that “the one in authority is God’s servant for your good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for rulers do not bear the sword for no reason. They are God’s servants, agents of wrath to bring punishment on the wrongdoer” (Rom 13:4). Rome wields the proximate power of death, but that is the very route by which Christ exemplifies its defeat, for he has arisen from Roman crucifixion.⁸³ Back here in First Corinthians, Paul begins to lay the groundwork for that later argument by gradually revealing the empire’s *proximity* to death, its fate of co-subjection with death, and the biblical warrant for that subjection. If Death, increasingly personified in this chapter, is treated as a defeated enemy that has overstepped its ordained role, then any theopolitical power allied with Death will find itself subject to a similar role and fate.

⁸² Heyman, *Power of Sacrifice*, 102, notes that Hebrews (unlike 1 Corinthians and other New Testament texts) makes priorities of atonement ritual and liminal space rather than the motif of victory over opponents.

⁸³ The phrasing of this point should be credited to Michael Knowles.

15:27–28: ²⁷For he “has put everything in subjection under his feet.” But when it says, “everything in subjection,” it is evident that he who put all things in subjection to him is the only exception. ²⁸When all things are subjected to him, then the Son himself also will be subjected to the one who subjected all things to him, so that God may be all in all.

As Paul further unpacks the scriptural warrant for the dismantling of every enemy, he defines more exclusively the πατήρ-υιός relationship that he earlier hinted at when he referred to God as Father: conceiving of Christ as the Son is a christological move that relates closely to the scope of the sovereign realm in question. Biblically, it confirms the relationship and reach of divine regency; imperially, it questions the divine right claimed by the son of Rome’s gods.

The quotation of Ps 8:6 is slightly clearer than the psalmic allusion that preceded it, but the “everything” placed under the feet of the ruler is less clearly political: the original context exults in the God-given authority of humans as regents over (and stewards of) creation, rather than the command of a God-given king over his enemies.⁸⁴ Coupled with Psalm 110, however, 8:6 magnifies the authority of the steward-regents, with their stewardship-rule encompassing the earth, just as the magnificence of YHWH’s own name does (8:1, 9). By quoting this psalm, Paul increases the scope of rule while politicizing and singularizing the regency. The roles involved in the subjection are complicated,⁸⁵ but even if the Father is the one doing the subjecting, the scriptural

⁸⁴ To which 8:2 (“Through the praise of children and infants you have established a stronghold against your enemies, to silence the foe and the avenger”) is the notable exception. Also see N. T. Wright, *Paul*, 28, who argues persuasively that Paul’s use of these texts supports “a statement of new creation through the Messiah,” with Psalm 8 “itself an evocation of Genesis 1”; Christ’s resurrection, Wright argues later (104), affirms both God’s power over Death and the goodness of creation.

⁸⁵ See Fee’s revision of 15:24–28, with assumed antecedents substituted for the pronouns in the passage in order to clarify that it is the Father who subjects all things to/under the Son, in *Pauline Christology*, 113.

background intimates that the role of divine regent is vitally important here: being the beneficiary and conduit of God's subjecting activity is itself a divine function attributed to Jesus as the Jewish-messianic Son of God.⁸⁶

But this subjection goes beyond what even a composite scriptural background can supply. One can concur with Wink that Paul is "spinning off from *hypotassō* ('to subject,' used 6 times in only 3 verses) a commentary on the lordship of Christ,"⁸⁷ effectively a brief midrash on Psalms 8 and 110, but the subjugation of enemies is a (sadly) polyvalent ambition, one in which the Roman world was well schooled.⁸⁸ One of the theopolitical advantages to each successive Caesar's claim to be the *divi filius* was that the status made the subjugation of rival nations part of the natural order of things. That is, the Son of Rome's gods did not lose wars, but accepted tribute from provincial subalterns whom he and his divine forebears had defeated⁸⁹—a practice only too familiar to the Jewish tradition of the messianic warrior-king. That tradition had met with bitter failure in the exile, but lived on in apocalyptic hope, which is precisely the hope that Paul reworks here. Enriching his story with psalmic images, Paul subjects his audience to the subordination-subjection wordplay in order to capture their attention, reminding them that, despite appearances, only one Son of the one God could conquer Death.

⁸⁶ On the observation of uniquely divine functions and the divine "Son" title attributed to Jesus in 1 Cor 15, see Moo, "Christology of the Early Pauline Letters," 187. Also see Delling, "τάσσω," *TDNT* 8:43, on the reciprocity of God granting supreme power that would in turn be rendered back to God.

⁸⁷ Wink, *Naming*, 51; the "spinning off" could be seen as a midrash on the paired texts of Pss 8:6 and 110:1. Wink also notes here that "Whatever happens to the Powers in v. 24, they cannot be 'destroyed,' because they are presupposed again in 1 Cor. 15:27–28. However we decide to translate v. 26, then, v. 24 should indicate the *subjection* of the Powers, not their annihilation." The use of ὑποτάσσω in 15:24–27 also indicates that it functions as a complement to βασιλεύω.

⁸⁸ See the use of ὑποτάσσω and related terms, looking back on the early imperial era, in Plutarch, *Pompey* 64; Polybius, 3.36.7; the hopes of defeating and subjugating the German ἔθνη in Herodian, *Hist.* 7.2.9; ὑποτάξονται, *they will submit*, in Herodian 2.2.8. Cf. Polybius, *Histories*, 3.13.8, 3.36.7, and 18.15.4.

⁸⁹ Heyman, *Power of Sacrifice*, 78, notes that the *sacrificial* language of the imperial cult *personified* Rome in the person of the emperor, made him *ritually present* throughout the empire, and allowed *conquered lands to return thanks* for his political benefaction. Also see 80–81, on the reinforcement of Octavian's *filius* status by Virgil, et al.

As the subject of Paul's previous sentence, Death is subjected to Christ and deprived of its subjects. On the one hand, the Corinthians are still subject to Death: they may not live to see their Lord's Arrival. On the other hand, Death's dismantling has already begun, and its hold on Christian lives has been abbreviated. By extension, the same applies to the empire. To the extent that it acts in concert with Death, it too stands in judgment; rhetorically, it too has "already" been deprived of its subjects, even if the historical reality has "not yet" come about. In Romans 13, Paul will require that "everyone be subject to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God" (13:1). But the unstated corollary of this argument in Paul's future is actually clearer here in 1 Corinthians 15: Christ, as God's regent, has the right to dismantle every authority that exceeds its mandate. So the Corinthians are—and yet are not— subjects of Rome and Death. By arguing that God in Christ dismantles other subjugating powers and gives new life to his subjects, Paul is exposing a powerful alliance between enemies. He is decolonizing Death.

Deus omnia in omnibus: the goal of all this subjection is for God to be "all in all." What does Paul mean by ὁ θεὸς [τὰ] πάντα ἐν πᾶσιν? Unlike the spherical sense of ἐν used earlier at 15:22, this ἐν provides an example of the preposition's extended locative sense, as does the phrase ἀλλὰ [τὰ] πάντα καὶ ἐν πᾶσιν Χριστός ("but Christ [is] all [races] and in all [races]") in Col 3:11.⁹⁰ The implication in the Colossian ascription connotes a *participation* among nationalities, ethnicities and social strata that is ecumenical and then some: by effacing the boundaries between Jews and Greeks, barbarians, slaves, and freedmen, the Pauline author includes outsiders and undesirables

⁹⁰ Adapted from a comparison suggested by Porter, *Idioms*, 156–57 (brackets in original).

who could play no part in Rome's οἰκουμένη but were welcome as inhabitants under Christ's rule, as Christ had a part in them.⁹¹ That note of co-participation is less evident here in 1 Cor 15:28, but the extent of God's sovereignty is cosmic, without apparent limit.

Continuing to listen and read from the canonical mezzanine above the Corinthian audience for another moment, we can hear this "all" echoed in another Pauline instance where "all" are explicitly made subject to Christ, as with the earlier comprehensive wording here in 15:24–25 (πάντων, twice, in relation to three nouns, and πάντας) and 27–28 (πάντα, six times, and πᾶσιν). In Phil 3:21b, writing in Roman imprisonment near the end of his life, Paul speaks of the Lord Jesus Christ as a saviour who will transform the bodies of his rescued ones "by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control" (ὑποτάξαι αὐτῷ τὰ πάντα). When John Paul Heil reads that verse within his intricately chiasmic structuring of Philippians, he suspects that τὰ πάντα would have reminded Paul's colonial audience of the πᾶν and the πᾶσα (*every* knee, and *every* tongue) that were to bow and confess, back in Phil 2:10–11.⁹² Paul was echoing himself, reminding his audience of the scope of Christ's rule. But inasmuch as the exact phrase αὐτῷ τὰ πάντα is repeated four times among the six instances of πάντα in a similar context of divine subjection in 1 Cor 15:27–28, Paul was echoing more than just his earlier content from within Philippians, picking up where he had left off with the Corinthians.

⁹¹ Slightly later than Colossians, Josephus expresses a similar breadth of subjection in *Jewish War* 2.361: δουλεύειν οἷς ὑποτέτακται τὰ πάντα, as noted by Delling, "τάσσω," *TDNT* 8:41n10.

⁹² Heil, *Philippians*, 139. For a previous application of Heil's audience-response method, asking what the Pauline audience would have remembered of what they had heard earlier in the same epistolary reading, see 61–64.

Interregnum: 15:29–49

It may seem presumptuous to touch so briefly on 15:29–49 on the way to a second complex of imperial themes and vocabulary at 15:50–58, as though this interval holds nothing of related christological, soteriological, or sociopolitical interest. Quite the contrary: Paul develops his portrayal of Christ as a second, life-giving Adam; finds glory and power in death and weakness, in ways that would have been read as anathematic to cultural identity in the empire; and portrays himself as one who frequently faces Death.

In this “interregnum” between passages more heavily constellated with theopolitical concepts, Paul continues to engage with the matter of life and death, and again, the empire is not far away. In 15:20–22, the apostle portrayed Christ and his sphere of influence as counterparts to Adam and his sphere, which was characterized by death. Now, in 44–49, that portrayal of Christ evolves into a second (or *last*) Adam, during a midrash on Gen 2:7. As the “life-giving πνεῦμα,” Christ is more than the counterpart to Adam; he is imaged as *the eschatological counterpart to the role that God played at creation*.⁹³ This portrayal has profound repercussions for those who consider themselves made in God’s image (cf. 1 Cor 11:7), as they must now consider themselves to be in the process of being conformed to that of the Christ who was crucified by the empire and resurrected by the God who gives (new) life. This cruciform image-bearing is corporate, and not yet complete; φορέσομεν, *we shall bear*, appears in the future indicative. But it is first God’s image, then God-in-Christ’s image, that is to be borne by the believers. The image of the son of Rome’s gods, seen and touched every day on the empire’s coinage (cf. Matt 22:19–22), is not to be their model.

⁹³ Fee, *Pauline Christology*, 116–19.

Not coincidentally, this interval also contains the only mentions of δόξα, *glory*, in this chapter of the letter, one of the theopolitical terms that received special attention in chapter four. In 15:40–41, 43, Paul uses glory at first in a descriptive sense, referring to the luminescence of heavenly bodies versus earthly ones, and the differences between sun, moon, and respective stars. This is parabolic of the manner in which the dead are raised: sown (σπείρεται) in dying as perishable, dishonourable, and weak, the resurrection somehow leaves them imperishable, glorified, and empowered. The Corinthians’ transformation began when they committed themselves to Christ by confessing him, sharing in his story, and becoming recognizable as those who are in Christ (15:22) and belong to him (15:23). Where the surrounding culture prizes so highly the glory and power of the imperial present, it can be difficult to settle for being “merely” ἐν τῷ Χριστῷ, with the hope of being ἐν δόξῃ and ἐν δυνάμει deferred.

Is the glorification and empowerment of the members of the resurrected body really so theopolitically significant?⁹⁴ Paul has already associated glory with the death of Christ in such a way as to evoke the glory and power of royal/military accessions in the biblical tradition. When he says in 2:8 that ignorant rulers “crucified the Lord of glory,” this image of Christ owes a clear debt to the enthronement text of Psalm 24: the “king of glory” (ὁ βασιλεὺς τῆς δόξης) who emerges there is also identified as the Lord of Hosts (or *Powers*: Κύριος τῶν δυνάμεων, Ps 23:10 LXX).⁹⁵ This is the Lord who has been crucified on a Roman cross. Roman imperial power and glory may not be foremost

⁹⁴ Or, alternatively, that their resurrection itself is so characterized.

⁹⁵ Fee (*Pauline Christology*, 136) notes Ps 24 as an intertext but does not comment on the import of τῶν δυνάμεων. He does articulate thoughtfully the theology of 1 Cor 2:8: Christ’s glory “was not diminished by the shame of the cross. And, of course, inherent in such language is that the crucified One is also the presently reigning Lord of glory. So their crucifying the Lord of glory was a win-win matter as far as the eternal God is concerned.”

in Paul's thought here, but neither are they absent from the scenario of resurrection and transformation that the apostle continues to reveal to his audience.⁹⁶ Item one: the "Lord of glory" is understood to have gained (or, in light of his pre-existence, *reclaimed*) that title in the course of undergoing crucifixion. Item two: in the empire, glory could be gained in death, and even attributed posthumously—but certainly not for the ignominious death of a slave, a rebel, or a criminal. So by rights, in the combined matrix of Roman and Jewish backgrounds, this event should have left him criminalized, accursed (cf. Deut 21:23, Gal 3:13), and, obviously, dead. But the glory of Paul's "Lord" outshines that of Rome, even though *the route to Christ's glory as Lord begins paradoxically with a cruciform death*. As a corollary, *those who hope to bear and share that Lord's image can expect to follow the same paradoxical path to glory, through death*.

This is what Paul has in mind when he *portrays himself as one who dies or faces Death* "every day,"⁹⁷ allegedly fighting "wild beasts in Ephesus" with the hope of the resurrection spurring his efforts. Whether or not this constitutes exaggeration for rhetorical effect, the clear intention of 15:30–34 is to show the lives of believers to be at risk in Christ's struggle to destroy rulers.⁹⁸ "Because Paul once died with Christ, he dies daily with him...It is not that he is continually in danger because of his missionary work," but that the way that Jesus lived and the way of living Paul understood as normative was

⁹⁶ Schnackenburg (*God's Rule*, 287) argues that the Synoptics' use of δόξα made the term synonymous for the early church with God's reign, while Paul's δόξα is "heavenly radiance and eschatological transformation, a grace in which the Christian faithful can partake only in the future world," citing 1 Cor 15:43 among other passages in support of his point. It is certainly YHWH's heaven and eschatological transfiguration that Paul means here, but he would not have been ignorant of the fact that Rome also laid claim to glory and power in royal/military fashion.

⁹⁷ The personification of Death is not required here, as Paul does not name the power, saying more literally that "I die daily" (καθ' ἡμέραν ἀποθνήσκω), but neither is capitalizing "Death" as an entity out of place, given Paul's animation/personification of it in 15:26, 55.

⁹⁸ Cousar, "The Theological Task," 102.

and is “a kind of dying which goes on all through life.”⁹⁹ In a subsequent letter to the Corinthians, Paul will communicate his experience with death as though he is a captive in Christ’s triumphal parade, casting himself again into the role of weakness, humiliation, and approaching death—something he would have the strength to do only because his triumphing captor had traveled that route of humiliation first.¹⁰⁰

First Corinthians 15:50–58

15:50–52: ⁵⁰Now I declare this to you, brothers and sisters, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the sovereignty of God; nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable. ⁵¹Behold, I am telling you a mystery: we will not all sleep, but we will all be changed—⁵²in an instant, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For that trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed.

Paul’s imagery here builds upon a supporting argument about death and new life that he began back at 15:35. Only God knows exactly what form the resurrected body will take, since he is the one who provides it.¹⁰¹ Paradoxically, the imperishable body that Paul anticipates will be the product of an instantaneous transfiguration, heralded by imagery at once apocalyptic and imperial. But in a recapitulation of the relationship

⁹⁹ Best, *Second Corinthians*, 42.

¹⁰⁰ Knowles, *We Preach Not Ourselves*, 81: “Only by virtue of having been soundly ‘defeated’ by God— included in a humiliation like that of Jesus—is Paul subsequently included in the *Triumphus* of this resurrected ‘Lord.’ Thus... the humiliation that he suffers is an affirmation rather than a denial of divine favour, a necessary prelude to glory rather than its negation.” Beard (*Roman Triumph*, 4) argues that the triumphal ceremony’s literary tradition “which glorified military victory and the values underpinning that victory also provided a context within which those values could be discussed and challenged,” a trend in which Paul is participating laterally, as will be argued in the next chapter.

¹⁰¹ Collins, *Power of Images*, 146–47, commenting upon the imagery of the death of the body-as-seed.

between Father, Son, and those who belong to the Son, the new body is an inheritance, and it participates in God's sovereignty, not Rome's.

Paul does not use the word “body,” σῶμα, now as he did in 15:35, 37–38, 42, 44, but he manages to talk *about* the resurrection body in its absence, and in language that speaks of transformation in a manner much more corporate than contemporary North American ears are accustomed to hearing.¹⁰² Paul is less interested in whether or not all the individuals within the Corinthian Christian collective have what evangelicals would call a relationship with Christ as “personal saviour,” and more so in telling the *members* of the Corinthian Christian *body* about how their *bodies*, plural and collective, will be “delivered from the tyranny” of sin and death,¹⁰³ transformed *by* and *in* Christ.¹⁰⁴ Of course the actual, physical, individual bodies of the faithful will be glorified—but as diverse members, united together.

For Paul's σῶμα is a body politic,¹⁰⁵ assembled by God and belonging to Christ (as Paul argued earlier at 6:15, 12:12–27, and especially 12:24), not Caesar. Between the reception of Paul's letter and the parousia, the members were to keep their bodies pure in terms of sexual ethics (6:13b–20),¹⁰⁶ but in this and other areas of life their bodies were also arguably instrumental in testifying to a way of life alternative to that expected by the

¹⁰² Restoring the corporate sense of *body* is one reason why Schüssler Fiorenza (*Power of the Word*, 106) speculatively translates σῶμα as “corporation” in the contemporary, multinational sense. Laudable for its creativity, such a move risks the same re-inscribing of globalizing violence that worries her elsewhere in her book.

¹⁰³ Furnish, “Theology in 1 Corinthians,” 78, 80–81.

¹⁰⁴ This represents an often subtle but consistent vein running through the Pauline corpus. Fowl (*Philippians*, 38–39) connects in-Christ status to body-membership: “‘In Christ’ must stand for a body of convictions about Christ (or a narrative account of the person and work of Christ as in [Phil] 2:5–11)... It would have been Paul's membership in this body which landed him in jail.”

¹⁰⁵ Grant, *Paul in the Roman World*, 40–41.

¹⁰⁶ In the course of their beneficial sketch of first-century Corinth, Horrell and Adams (“The Scholarly Quest,” 2–8) lament the lingering, homiletical portrayal of Corinth as a city of vice (8); even if the old city's temple to Aphrodite on the Acrocorinth did feature temple prostitutes, there is little evidence to connect that legacy to the re-founded colony.

empire.¹⁰⁷ God’s sovereignty afforded believers adoption into a new family under God as *paterfamilias*, and membership in a body under Christ’s headship,¹⁰⁸ although the full extent of this adoption and membership would not be realized until the parousia. That deferral and partially understood anticipation were central to apprehending the μυστήριον—the “known ‘mystery’”—that Paul is unravelling for his readers.¹⁰⁹ But as the lives of individual members could testify against the empire’s ethics, so too the incorporation of Christ’s body and the anticipation of its glory resisted Rome’s norms. It was formed under Rome’s rule, but not under its auspices or with the formality of other *collegia*. Its parts owed their gifts and their oneness to the Spirit (1 Cor 12:4, 13), not to Caesar’s order. They were to maintain their unity, diversity, and concern for one another (12:19–25),¹¹⁰ looking forward to a time when they would be entirely free of Caesar’s ministrations.

With ἐν ἁτόμῳ ἐν ῥιπῇ ὀφθαλμοῦ, Paul announces that the transformation he anticipates is both instantaneous and momentous. His phrasing evokes the uncertainty

¹⁰⁷ Heyman’s comments (*Power of Sacrifice*, 168–69) are generally topical to post-Pauline periods of diametrical opposition between Roman imperial and Christian discourses, but they are useful for comparison with Paul’s era and his rhetoric: during more intense persecution, believers’ bodies and lives could be considered counter-imperial weapons, destabilizing Rome’s dominant ideology in the very acts of their torture and execution. This may be a stage Paul foresees with his encouragement toward unity with Christ in a *criminal’s* death (192); to conquer death as Jesus did was a “rhetorically invincible” exercise (217–18), preceded incrementally by “dying daily.”

¹⁰⁸ Schnelle (in *Theology*, 553, 567–68) unpacks well the development of Pauline thought from the concept of the church as Christ’s body in 1 Corinthians to a “politico-ecclesiological theology of unity” in Ephesians and Colossians; the characterization there of Christ as the body’s head can be read as a counterproposal to the imperial organism, further relativizing Rome’s political ideology of its own headship over the body politic.

¹⁰⁹ The lovely phrasing of the “known ‘mystery’” is that of Grant, *Paul in the Roman World*, 70. Also helpful is Brown (*Cross and Human Transformation*, 99n70), who reminds her own readers that Paul sometimes uses μυστήριον to talk about the gospel itself, citing 1 Cor 2:1 (cf. 2 Cor 4:3–4), but elsewhere to convey content related but different from the gospel (citing 1 Cor 13:2, 14:2, and the present instance of 15:51, which is located closer to the core gospel message than Brown thinks it is).

¹¹⁰ Horsley (*1 Corinthians*, 171, citing Livy, *Ab Urbe* 2.32, among other texts) cites the body-to-city-state analogy as a common ancient rhetorical trope, most famously employed by Menenius Agrippa in the fifth century BCE. “But no other ancient writer uses the analogy as Paul does here,” Horsley argues, to stress both “diversity and interdependence.” The irony is that Paul’s exhortation for unity was predicated on the Christian body politic’s secession, or at least its distinction, from the Roman one.

and rapidity of change in a world in which whole cities could fall prey to disaster with little warning. Lucius Annaeus Seneca (“the Younger,” 1 BCE–65 CE), recalling in the early 60s CE a fire that reportedly consumed Lyon (Lugdunum), reflected that “an hour, an instant of time, suffices for the overthrow of empires!” (*hora momentumque temporis evertendis imperiis sufficit*). Does Seneca, who would soon be implicated in a plot against Nero and ordered to commit suicide, mean this statement to include Rome? “We are unequal at birth, but are equal in death,” the orator continues in the same epistle. “What I say about cities I say also about their inhabitants: Ardea was captured as well as Rome [by the Celts, in 390 BCE].”¹¹¹ For the emperor’s tutor and advisor, these were dangerous times.

These senses of immediacy and catastrophic change are not inappropriate to the story that Paul tells, or the one that he lived. In Best’s words, as “there is a process of dying, so there is a process in which the risen power of Christ manifests itself in Paul’s life”; for Paul, “what is mortal is swallowed up by life, eternal life.”¹¹² But this stage of that larger transformational process is instantaneous, and framed in apocalyptic stock images. “Moment” (ἀτόμω) suggests “an indivisible moment of time,” using “an adjective meaning ‘uncut.’”¹¹³ By appealing to three of the five human senses (the sound of the trumpet, and momentarily, the sight and touch of clothing), “Paul imaginatively suggests that the entire human being will be transformed at the parousia.”¹¹⁴ Paul’s God

¹¹¹ Seneca, *Epistle* 91.6 and 16. Ardea was the first capital of Latium, the proto-Roman state, captured by the Samnites; it may be no accident on Seneca’s part that his phrasing, *Ardea capta*, matches the legend with which Rome declared its conquests in its coinage (e.g., Octavian’s AEGVPTO CAPTA coins, showing a crocodile to commemorate his victory over Mark Antony and Cleopatra, as cited in Kreitzer, *Striking New Images*, 35).

¹¹² Best, *Second Corinthians*, 42 and 47, citing intertexts of Rom 6:4 and Gal 2:20.

¹¹³ Collins, *Power of Images*, 148 and 148n113.

¹¹⁴ Collins, *Power of Images*, 148. It is not uncommon to read the use of the trumpet in the Old Testament in light of its parousial use in the New, as when the trumpet blast in Exod 19:16 resounds as “a sign of the

does what Rome's emperors and gods cannot: he *re-creates* the living and the dead.¹¹⁵ In so doing, God gives the new body—that of the individual, and the collective body politic—as an *inheritance*, recalling Paul's earlier argument against Rome's *divi filius* theology. Full membership in God's sovereignty has its privileges in the manner of adoption, but is incompatible with bodies of flesh and blood, bodies that still bear only Adam's image. Incorruptible life is a gift that only this God can give,¹¹⁶ and his gift gives the lie to Rome's claim to have an imperishable imperium.

15:53–54: ⁵³For this perishable must put on the imperishable, and this mortal must put on immortality. ⁵⁴But when this perishable will have put on the imperishable, and this mortal will have put on immortality, then the saying that is written will come into effect: “Death is swallowed up in victory.”

Paul turns again to Scripture, reworking apocalyptic themes to drive home his point concerning what the resurrection has done to Death. But the victory of the immortal God and his imperishable sovereignty also counters the empire's exclusive claim on victory and immortality.

With the dismantling of Death, the end of its hostile agency, comes the end of mortality for God's people. Death “will not be finally defeated until the Lord revokes, for everyone, the curse of mortality that he spoke against his human creatures after their

advent of the Lord in power, as at the second coming of Christ” (Barth, *God with Us*, 122, citing Matt 24:31; 1 Thess 4:15, 17; 1 Cor 15:52; and Revelation 8–11). The trumpet was already noted as a military signal (as in Caesar's *Gallic Wars*, 2.20) in chapter three, and as an accompaniment to the parousia as a royal, imperial, and/or apocalyptic event in chapter four.

¹¹⁵ Holleman, *Resurrection and Parousia*, 97.

¹¹⁶ See Wieland, *Significance of Salvation*, 125–26, relating 15:50–54 to Romans 1–2, 5:21 and 2 Tim 1:10.

disobedience.”¹¹⁷ The instrument of that curse has taken on a life and a will of its own, and will not be easily subdued, but the “must” (δεῖ, as with Christ’s reign as sovereign at 15:25) leaves no doubt of the eventual outcome: the victims of Death’s abuse will be redressed.

Death’s fate of being “swallowed up” is a recycling of poetic justice, drawing from Isaiah’s polemical point of view against “a Canaanite mythological motif in which death ‘swallows’ everything,”¹¹⁸ but from the Greco-Roman perspective, too. As before, Seneca offers a parallel suitable for comparison with Paul’s statement, κατεπόθη ὁ θάνατος εἰς νῆκος, in 15:54b: “How many towns in Syria, how many in Macedonia, have been swallowed up!” (*Quot oppida in Syria, quot in Macedonia devorata sunt?*)¹¹⁹ The metaphorical swallowing of Death means its “forcible disarming”; speculation about *how* the victory is won (or how the victory is given)¹²⁰ is tertiary to the primary *accomplishment*, the biblically supported *fact* of the victory itself, and the secondary *implications* of that victory which Paul begins to unpack later. The apostle refuses to specify whether Death has any choice in surrendering, though Death’s passivity—*being swallowed* εἰς νῆκος—leaves that option open, in keeping with Hellenistic and Septuagintal uses of νικάομαι as a passive verb.¹²¹ Death’s defeat is a classically

¹¹⁷ Miles, *Christ*, 225, on 15:54a. Despite its emphasis on mortality, this comment treats Satan principally and Death only by extension, as per our earlier observations about the temptation to introduce Satan even into those biblical-theological scenes from which he is absent.

¹¹⁸ Roberts, “Isaiah,” 1045–46.

¹¹⁹ Seneca, *Epistle* 91.10, in *Epistulae morales* 2:436–39 (LCL). This shortly precedes a similar citation by Grant (*Paul in the Roman World*, 15n13) regarding earthquakes that had devastated provincial cities: “Do you not see how, in Achaia, the foundations of the most famous cities have already crumbled [*consumpta*, as in *worn away*, or *swallowed up*] to nothing, so that no trace is left to show that they ever even existed?”

¹²⁰ Delling, “τάσσω,” *TDNT* 8:41–42, 42n11.

¹²¹ Delling, “τάσσω,” *TDNT* 8:27–28, 40, 41 and 41n7, n9. Νικάομαι is “statistically” a Hellenistic term and a *hierarchical* one, connoting submissive relationships to powerful superiors, though “the subordination expressed may be either compulsory or voluntary.” Delling does not discuss the *degree* to which such submission can legitimately be described as voluntary. In Paul’s view, Jesus underwent a

apocalyptic reversal. It had seemingly triumphed over the Son of God, but recasting Jesus as victor rather than victim¹²² requires that the apparent victor be re-branded too.

Vital to this victory are the immortal and imperishable attributes that Paul extends from God and his sovereignty to his transfigured people, for the victory will only be realized when that which is perishable and mortal has been re-clothed.¹²³ Nothing that dies can inherit or participate in this consummation of God's sovereignty. In characterizing God and his domain with words such as ἀφθαρσία and ἄθανασία, Paul is capitalizing on a series of Greek cognates that were adapted by Hellenistic Judaism.¹²⁴ God's sovereignty is to be identified with incorruptibility, with deathlessness—and with *life*, not just with the absence of death as a phenomenon or an agent. But the subtext, as in the verses immediately previous, is a critique of any other sovereign claims on eternity, including Augustan Rome's "golden age," which "constituted, at least in terms of the public transcript, the present structure of the empire as experienced now in everyday life."¹²⁵ That is, Augustus' victory having won for Rome this golden age, it was in Rome's best interests to propagandize the present state *as* the eternal state, encouraging and propagating an image of the empire as an immortal entity. Paul's characterization of God's contagiously immortal life and incorruptible sovereignty challenged that state of things at its core.

voluntary subordination in submitting to crucifixion and death; for Death and other hostile theopolitical agencies, submission will evidently be less deliberate.

¹²² Heyman (*Power of Sacrifice*, ix) explains insightfully that recasting the victim as the victor is essential to Christian martyrology as a literary genre of sacrificially themed rhetoric, stemming from the death and resurrection of Christ.

¹²³ Wieland, *Significance of Salvation*, 125.

¹²⁴ Wieland, *Significance of Salvation*, 125.

¹²⁵ Carter has already performed with expertise a similar but more extensive treatment on the Johannine equivalent, in the eighth chapter of *John and Empire*, "Eternal Rome and Eternal Life" (204–34, quoting here from 205).

15:55–56: ⁵⁵“O Death, where is your victory? O Death, where is your sting?”

⁵⁶The sting of Death is sin, and the power of sin is the law...

Addressing Death directly as a personified and conquered antagonist is relatively new territory in Paul’s world, quite apart from speaking to Hades as a god whose name was interchangeable with his realm—though Hos 13:14 LXX, which Paul adapts here, does render Sheol as ᾗδης. In 1 Cor 15:26, Paul introduced death as an enemy, counted among the ranks of the rule(r)s, authorities, and powers being dismantled.¹²⁶ Now he fleshes out that image, implying that Death possesses great power, only to take that power rhetorically away from it. The role that death plays as a power in Paul’s soteriological drama is complex and new, but with familiar backdrops.¹²⁷ Seeking to know this Death as Paul portrays him will require explorations of Paul’s use of personification here, then his appeal to Greco-Roman cultural and Jewish prophetic/apocalyptic conventions, and finally the allegory in the resulting taunt. The sophisticated way in which Paul wields Scripture supports a case against the imperial sanctioning of death as a resurfacing theme in the apostle’s soteriological hermeneutic.

The Personification of Death. In personifying Death, attributing to this already universal phenomenon an agency and an agenda, a human-like will and abilities to carry out that will, Paul admits that God and God’s people have a powerful opponent, one that

¹²⁶ Prior to 15:26, 54–55, Paul has referred to death *per se* only twice in the entire letter: at 3:22, where death is among the people and things that Paul lists—including himself!—as belonging to the Corinthians, as they belong to Christ, and Christ to God; and 11:26, where it is the Lord’s death (τὸν θάνατον τοῦ κυρίου) that brings participants life in the new covenant and in/through his body (11:24–25) and is to be commemorated in communion until he comes (ἄρχι οὐ ἔλθῃ), i.e., at his parousial Arrival.

¹²⁷ For example, Jewish monotheism viewed plagues and other sources of destruction as agents of death, insisting all the while that these forces were ultimately “controlled by God; death has no power over them”; so Collins, *Power of Images*, 149 and n117, citing Exodus 9–10 and Hab 3:5. From the perspective of imperial culture, numismatic images provided a “heritage” of settings and motifs for the New Testament’s christological thought (see Kreitzer, *Striking New Images*, 98), including elevation of divine victors over defeated enemies.

seemed to have defeated Christ, derailing the master story. But the resurrection shows that God has power over Death, as well as Rome, the theopolitical agency in league with Death at the crucifixion.¹²⁸ Paul's personification of the last enemy is not as thoroughgoing here as it is in Romans 5–8, where Death is attributed with many actions: entering the world through sin, coming to all people, reigning, and performing as the agency or arena for sin's reign (Rom 5:12, 14, 17, 21). Some of Death's agent functions there are positive: when it is *Christ's* death, it becomes the medium for reconciliation with God (though the reconciled are *saved* through his *life*, 5:10) and the avenue for unity with Christ in baptism (6:3–4). It is precisely in Christ's death that Death loses its ability to master (or *lord over*, κυριεύει, 6:9) him, though it remains the outcome and the wages of sin (6:16, 21, 23), reaping the fruit produced by those controlled by sin. It is still brought on by commandments that were intended to be life-bringing (7:5, 10), and it characterizes Paul's wretched body and the minds of those controlled by sin and hostile toward God (7:24, 8:6–8). It is still an enemy Paul faces, which would evidently separate him “from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus” if it could (8:36–38).¹²⁹

Back in 1 Corinthians 15, the only details of agency that Paul provides about Death are that Jesus faced it “for our sins according to the Scriptures,” that it came through a human being just as the resurrection comes, that sin is its power to “sting,” and that its role as the last enemy to be dismantled (or neutralized) will end with defeat, when

¹²⁸ The question in the affiliation of Death and Rome is who is controlling whom. Although it would seem that Rome is the agent and instrument of Death as demonstrated at the crucifixion, it will be maintained here that the relationship is more complex than that, with mutual influence and occasional identification between the two.

¹²⁹ An expansion of Collins, *Power of Images*, 259, who calls attention only to actions that point to personification. Paul still prioritizes death's *agency* even when its activities are not fully personified, mirroring the actions of Old Testament nations and the manner in which they were characterized, and at times directly addressed, as (corporate) entities (cf. Isa 19:1–15, 20:5–6, Nahum 3, Obad 2–18, and the echoing of Isa 21:9 and Jer 51:47–49 in Rev 14:8).

it will be swallowed up in victory. Death is mentioned so seldom in First Corinthians that its arrival via Adam in 15:21 (par. Rom 5:12) marks the first time it has appeared in the epistle as the sole subject of a sentence. But its malevolent presence is powerful here in this chapter, even when its agency is less fully realized than in Romans.¹³⁰ In any case, this much is clear according to the way in which Paul “animates” the story: the role that death rehearses, resurrection reverses.

Greco-Roman, Prophetic and Apocalyptic Sources and Conventions for Death's Enmity. Death was an all-too-familiar phenomenon in the first-century Mediterranean world. As noted above by Seneca, death was the great leveller of rich and poor. Escaping death's clutches was the stuff of myth, and even in that mythic world, only a handful of heroes—Odysseus, Theseus, Orpheus, Psyche, and Rome's progenitor, Aeneas—had journeyed to the domain of Hades/Pluto and returned. Nevertheless, the hope of gaining power over death was a theme that echoed in the Hellenistic cultural lexicon of Paul's time, as Seneca's writings attest. As he wrote in the letter quoted above, less than a decade after Paul wrote First Corinthians: “We are in the power of nothing when once we have death in our own power!” (*Non sumus in ullius potestate, cum mors in nostra potestate sit.*)¹³¹ Earlier in the *Epistles*, he also says of Metellus Scipio (last seen in the present study offering mercy to Granius Petro, the captured quaestor) that in taking his own life when he himself later faced capture, Scipio “conquered death.”¹³² To an extent,

¹³⁰ Collins (*Power of Images*, 259) makes an insightful distinction between *personification* and *animation*, as when Paul “personifies death in 15:26” and “animates death in 15:55–56a, comparing it to a lethal insect.” Rich as Collins' phrasing is, death still does not appear to be fully personified in 15:26, only imaged as an enemy. But even a reduced personification would still be consistent with the Roman tendency to downplay, compared to the Greeks, the gods' human qualities. On this count, see Jeffers, *The Greco-Roman World*, 94.

¹³¹ Seneca, *Epistle* 91.21.

¹³² Seneca, *Epistle* 24:10, quoted in Heyman, *Power of Sacrifice*, 182.

then, Paul's taunt reflected the *realization* of a hope known to the Greco-Roman cultural lexicon of his era.

Paul also gives his mockery of personified Death a biblical warrant, adding to the already complex interrelationship between his two texts. But his "quotation" is problematic, in that it diverges from both of its sources in Isaiah and Hosea. The citation formula that introduces the paired texts as a singular "saying that is written" (ὁ λόγος ὁ γεγραμμένος, the having-been-written word) has the effect of treating Hos 13:14 not as a freestanding quotation but "as an extension of Isa. 25.8."¹³³ The LXX of Hos 13:14 actually appears to have the *opposite* of the meaning Paul gives it, making it an unconvincing proof-text, so unlikely as a source that Paul's access to a revised version of the LXX has been posited.¹³⁴ Some of Paul's changes may be stylistic, achieving a measure of elegance in repetition (Death/Death, where the LXX has Death/Hades).¹³⁵ But in making his editorial changes, Paul has essentially modified a negative statement about death into a positive one.¹³⁶ As Steve Moyise observes, rationales concerning Paul's interpretative moves should not disguise how radical these moves would have seemed to some of his Jewish contemporaries!¹³⁷ Why does Paul go to such great lengths to reshape Hosea's thought?

Part of the answer comes in the nature of this precise pairing of texts and textual backgrounds. C. H. Dodd classified Hosea, Isaiah, and Jeremiah as "less deeply colored

¹³³ Moyise, "The Minor Prophets," 97, 111.

¹³⁴ Moyise, "The Minor Prophets," 111–112; versional variances are not the main point here, but see 111 in the same essay for a chart that breaks down the differences between the Tanakh, the LXX, and Paul's rendering.

¹³⁵ Moyise, "The Minor Prophets," 111. Also see Heil, *Rhetorical Role*, 250–51, and Horsley, *I Corinthians*, 214, both cited earlier on this taunt-sharpening point.

¹³⁶ Moyise, "The Minor Prophets," 112–13.

¹³⁷ Moyise, "The Minor Prophets," 113.

by apocalyptic imagery” than Zechariah and other New Testament sources.¹³⁸ Suggesting such a clean divide between prophetic hues and apocalyptic tones may look heuristically tidy, but the genres are so thoroughly interrelated that it seems an overly facile move, if not a fallacious one. Nevertheless, a related idea from Dodd is worth reconsidering. Dodd suggested Hosea 13 as a possible background for the Synoptic Gospels’ apocalyptic discourse. If that hypothesis holds for other writers in the apostolic period, then in 1 Cor 15:54–55 Paul “was not employing a casual literary reminiscence, but referring to a passage already recognized as a classical description of God’s deliverance of His people out of utter destruction.”¹³⁹

Nor would the redactive work required to pair Hos 13:14 with Isaiah’s conquest-of-death theme have been as arbitrary as it initially appears. Rather, Paul’s interpretation expands the breadth of Isaiah’s vision, making it more Gentile-inclusive.¹⁴⁰ As Harrisville explains it, Hosea 13 was originally a dialogue between YHWH and Hosea concerning the northern kingdom’s guilt. Conventionally, the passage is understood to end with YHWH’s “refusal to redeem,” but if YHWH’s words are interpreted as a promise rather than a threat, then they express the power of God “to penetrate where most believed he could not go (cf. Amos 9:2).” Thus Hosea recontextualizes the thought of his contemporary, Isaiah, to express divine sovereignty over Death and Death’s place, rather

¹³⁸ Dodd, *According to the Scriptures*, 74.

¹³⁹ Dodd, *According to the Scriptures*, 76. Dodd uses this and his subsequent hypothesis that Hos 5:8–6:3 LXX lies behind Paul’s insistence that Christ “was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures” to argue for Hosea’s subsurface influence in early Christian soteriological thought (78–79). More recently, Seitz has argued for a much broader and more variegated role for the Minor Prophets in relation to Paul’s thought and its canonical organization. His “conviction is that the book of the Twelve is a ‘goodly fellowship of the Prophets,’ akin to the apostolic fellowship represented by the Pauline Letter Collection within the canonical New Testament, and likely influencing both its formation and form” (Seitz, *Goodly Fellowship*, 12).

¹⁴⁰ Moyise, “The Minor Prophets,” 112–13; so too as a consistent theme in Goodwin, *Apostle of the Living God*.

than merely repeating the hope for a cessation of war; and Paul in turn recontextualizes Hosea, giving the prophet's vision a cosmic scope.¹⁴¹

The extent to which Isaiah 25:8 and Hosea 13:14 dovetail around the treatment of Death becomes even more apparent if one considers the soteriologies communicated by their respective contexts. Hosea 13 is a piercing indictment of Israel's neglect of covenant. The wilderness shaped the people's exclusive relationship with YHWH, rehearsed in 13:4–6 (“But I have been the LORD your God ever since you came out of Egypt. You shall acknowledge no God but me, no Saviour except me,” 13:4). So YHWH's lethal reprisal against their forgetfulness comes appropriately from the wilderness, in the form of an attack by animals; even Israel's rulers are powerless to save them from this fate (13:9–11). The power of Death/Sheol is a means to God's ends. There is no mention here of the (military/political?) medium through which Death would come, though neglecting the covenant went hand in hand with attempting (adulterous) alliances with more powerful, national rivals (e.g., Egypt and Assyria, in 7:11). Whether it comes via wild animals (like those Paul fought in Ephesus, perhaps?), or by the hand of an empire from Israel's past or Paul's present, God still has mastery over Death.

Isaiah 25's soteriology vis-à-vis Death is similarly challenging. Like Hosea 13, the immediate setting recalls God's saving role in the past (“a refuge for the poor, a refuge for the needy in their distress,” 25:4), but it also scans forward in a rhetorically effective, apocalyptic retrospective: “In that day they will say, ‘Surely this is our God; we

¹⁴¹ Harrisville, *I Corinthians*, 282. Neither Moyise's argument nor Harrisville's seems airtight: Hosea's polemic against death can certainly be seen as an expansion of Isaiah's thought, but YHWH's inclusion of Gentiles is ambivalent in both the Isaiah and Hosea passages. The satisfaction Isaiah expresses over the rubble of the city of “foreigners” (25:2, 5, TNIV; other versions have “aliens,” “strangers,” or even “barbarians,” though the LXX's τῶν ἄσεβῶν connotes *the godless* or *unfaithful*) contrasts with the imaging of God as a refuge for (all?) poor peoples in need. Hosea matches God's polemic against personified Death with another particularly violent one against Samaria (13:16).

trusted in him, and he saved us. This is the LORD, we trusted in him; let us rejoice and be glad in his salvation” (25:9). This salvation is not universal, as Moab, like Samaria in Hosea 13:16, finds out (25:10–12),¹⁴² in a threat that undermines Isaiah’s own promise that God will “wipe away the tears from all faces” (25:8). The swallowing up of Death in 25:8 is an extension and clarification of God’s promised removal of alienation/death in 25:7. Again, the vehicle by which Death arrives on the scene goes unmentioned, but as in Hosea’s case, those that bring death in this portion of Isaiah are usually Israel’s principal rival/enemies, the Egyptian and Assyrian armies.

The portrayal of empires as deadly entities—and by extension, the rivalry between any salvation they offered and the ongoing story of YHWH’s power to save—reflects a *recurrent rhetorical convention* in the prophets.¹⁴³ When Habakkuk lamented the bloodshed and perversion of justice that had come to characterize his land, “God’s answer shocked the prophet”: God would use the savage Babylonians to address the very violence the prophet complained about, reorienting him (and the reader) from obduracy to patience (Hab 2:1–4) as God dealt with those who had abused power and thrived on injustice.¹⁴⁴ The deracinated Daniel grows in influence in the court of imperial Babylon, but only because YHWH intervenes in key instances where imperial “justice” would have led to the prophet’s death. Local to the present Isaianic context is YHWH’s critique of the

¹⁴² On the personification of Moab in Isa 25:10b–12 “as a man about to drown in a cesspool,” compounded by the “grotesque metaphor” of being “trodden down, like straw,” see Eidevall, *Prophecy and Propaganda*, 160.

¹⁴³ And, to an extent, in other portions of the Old Testament. Egypt’s identity as a land of slavery, a creature of chaos and death, formed the dark underbelly of Israel’s confession of YHWH as their liberator: on the parallel roles of Egypt/Rahab and Assyria in Ps 87:4, for example, Brueggemann says that the “reference is historical but by using the mythic name [Rahab], Egypt (and Pharaoh) are reckoned to be a force for chaos in the world,” and later, “Egypt as a political-military reality clearly takes on important symbolic, metaphorical power well beyond anything that can be established historically” (Brueggemann, *Reverberations*, 28 [cf. Isa 30:7], 59).

¹⁴⁴ Barth, *God with Us*, 329–30.

way in which his people's leaders had formed a *covenant with death*; the phrase “presumably refers to a treaty with Egypt (30.1–2; cf. 22:13),”¹⁴⁵ but allegorically equates Egypt with Sheol/Hades. Breaching the covenant with YHWH was rhetorically equivalent to forming a covenant with death, with Sheol, which from the prophetic perspective was to be avoided at all costs. “God’s judgment would come as a scourge and Israel would be beaten down by it,” writes Ronald Vallet of Isa 28:15–18, “but the good news was that the covenant with death would not stand.”¹⁴⁶

Allegory: Victory over Death as Victory over Empire? Put succinctly, an underexplored reason that Paul amplifies the personification of Death during his appropriation of scriptural resources here is that the warrant of Scripture tacitly opposes the imperial sanctioning of death.¹⁴⁷ His use of Isaiah in particular whispers a highly nuanced critique of Rome as a death-dealing power, in the tradition of prophetic imperial criticism.¹⁴⁸ Paul quotes an empire-rich portion of Isaiah, chapters 22–29, four times in this letter, with three of these citations occurring in 1 Corinthians 14–15. Modern scholarship tends to read Isaiah as a tripartite macrostructure, with the parts, the various

¹⁴⁵ Roberts, “Isaiah,” 1050, at Isa 28:15 (italics his). At 30:1–5 (1053), he adds the context: “Isaiah condemns Judah’s negotiations with Egypt (703–701 B.C.E.) as rebellion against God and the resulting defensive alliance against Assyria as ultimately useless.”

¹⁴⁶ Vallet, *Steward Living in Covenant*, 211–12. Vallet earlier uses Joseph’s role in Gen 47:13–21—brokering his people’s slavery/tenancy during the famine—as an ambivalent paradigm for addressing contemporary questions of slavery (e.g., addictions, compulsions, and political and economic injustice): “We become slaves when we serve the modern-day equivalent of the household of Pharaoh, forgetting that we are called to be members of the household of God. To serve in the household of Pharaoh is to live a living death. That’s what slavery is” (107).

¹⁴⁷ This assertion can be read in close parallel with that of N. T. Wright, *Paul*, 65–66, who argues from a catalogue of prophetic texts (overlapping with and complemented by the listing offered in our previous paragraph) for a “strong theology of creation, fall, and providence” (66) at the heart of a Jewish biblical and intertestamental “critique of pagan empire” (66–69), which in turn influenced Paul’s counter-imperial and creation theologies.

¹⁴⁸ See Eidevall, *Prophecy and Propaganda*, 175–76, on the re-applicability of oracles from one specific national enemy to a later target, and Yamazaki-Ransom, *The Roman Empire*, 32–39, on the varied chorus of prophetic characterizations of Persia and Cyrus, Egypt, and Assyria. For an argument on the tradition of prophetic protest with regard to the role of “the powers” as opponents in the canonical Gospels, see Horsley, *Jesus and the Powers*, 43–61.

literary Isaiahs, in turn comprised of an assembly of oracles: those oriented toward Israel in Isaiah 1–12, existing in an “antithetical” relationship of lexical correspondence with the block of oracles against the nations in Isa 13–23,¹⁴⁹ and with yet more divergence evident in the “Little Apocalypse” of 24–27. But Paul would not have conceived of Isaiah piecemeal. Luke confirms twice in Luke-Acts that his narrator (and his readers, judging by the matter-of-fact presentation) thought of Isaiah as a single scroll (βιβλίον, at Luke 4:17),¹⁵⁰ referred to by “place” or section (τόπον, at Luke 4:17; ἡ περιοχὴ τῆς γραφῆς, at Acts 8:32), yes, but not disparate units. For a pastoral exegete such as Paul to draw multiple times in the same portion of his own writing from the same περιοχὴ of a prophetic book is not surprising. But Paul’s re-contextualization effectively masks the counter-imperial inflection of Isaiah’s imagery, for those who are unfamiliar with the source material. When mapped in the order in which the cited passages originally appeared, Paul’s Isaianic references in 1 Corinthians 1, 14–15 look like this (see Table 1 on the next page):

¹⁴⁹ Landy, “Three Sides of a Coin,” 14. But see Eidevall, *Prophecy and Propaganda*, 24–25, on Isaiah 7–48 as a unit of “discourse on empires,” with 5:26–30 functioning as that discourse’s prologue.

¹⁵⁰ This instance is anarthrous, so it could as easily be “a book of the prophet Isaiah” as “the book.”

Passage Cited	Thematic Context in Isaiah	Context as Cited in 1 Corinthians
22:13: But see, there is joy and revelry, slaughtering of cattle and killing of sheep, eating of meat and drinking of wine! “Let us eat and drink,” you say, “for tomorrow we die!”	Oracle of Jerusalem’s imminent destruction: God rages against the uselessness of Judean leaders’ “cynical fatalism” when facing a renewed threat, the news of Assyria’s victory over Babylon (703–701 BCE) ¹⁵¹	15:32: Rhetorical use of fatalism to demonstrate uselessness of life without faith in resurrection (cf. 15:12–19); follows immediately after outline of parousia and the dismantling of Death; recalls that Paul often faces the possibility of his own death
25:[7–]8: ...he will destroy the shroud that enfolds all peoples, the sheet that covers all nations; he will swallow up death forever. The Sovereign LORD will wipe away the tears from all faces; he will remove his people’s disgrace from all the earth.	Follows a psalm (25:1–5) to God as deliverer and as judge of oppressors; plots a reversal of the Canaanite mythic motif of Death as an all-consuming entity; promises the swallowing up of Death and the removal of alienation ¹⁵²	15:54: Continued unfolding of prophetic and apocalyptic imagery regarding the parousial resurrection; up to this point death has been discussed in terms of mortality, but 15:54–56 revives 15:24–26’s portrayal of Death as an oppressive enemy whom God will judge and from whom God will deliver his people
28:11–12: Very well then, with foreign lips and strange tongues God will speak to this people, to whom he said, “This is the resting place, let the weary rest”; and, “This is the place of repose”—but they would not listen.	Oracle against Ephraim and Judah: God will use Assyria as an instrument, an interpreter, to speak to recalcitrance and fatalism in Judah; immediately precedes a warning against a planned alliance with Egypt as a “covenant with death” and the “realm of the dead” (28:15–18)	14:21: Glossolalia as ministry and a sign to unbelievers; prophetic speech can be a sign too, if it calls witnesses to judgment and repentance (14:24); intelligibility of instruction within church community prioritized (15:19); citation used as a call to maturity and humility (given the humbling intention of the Isaianic context?)
29:14: Therefore once more I will astound these people with wonder upon wonder; the wisdom of the wise will perish, the intelligence of the intelligent will vanish.	Indictment of pretense in worship (29:13); ironic critique of (political) shrewdness, using metaphor of sight/blindness; hints at the use of an enemy to teach humility to the “wise”	1:19: Salvific power and apparent foolishness of the word of the cross, used by God as a means to frustrate conventional wisdom; crucified Christ seems scandalous to Jews and foolish to the nations

Table 1: Paul’s Re-contextualization of Citations from Isaiah

Like a “book cipher” in cryptography, in which Isaiah is the “key” text or codebook, any imperial authorities who somehow become part of Paul’s audience are unlikely to understand Paul’s encoded meaning (or even to know that there *is* a code at

¹⁵¹ Roberts, “Isaiah,” 1041–42. Roberts also uses 22:12–14 to point forward to 28:14–15.

¹⁵² Again, Roberts, “Isaiah,” 1045–46.

work) unless they also have access to the codebook of Isaiah.¹⁵³ Because the coded message is thematic and symbolic rather than specific and concrete, a Roman official hearing or reading First Corinthians with an eye out for subversive content—giving new meaning to a “hermeneutic of suspicion”!—would have to have access to *and familiarity with* Isaiah’s imperial-critical motifs, an unlikely scenario. Rhetorically speaking, Paul may well be stealing a march on the empire.

How deliberate is this identification of the Roman Empire with Death? The preceding section referred to Isaiah’s equation of Egypt with Sheol/Hades: not only is this polemic proximate and therefore relevant to Paul’s cited text of Isa 25:8, but it is also an instance of figurative enemy-imaging in such a way as to be re-applicable to other, later foes.¹⁵⁴ Taking on the prophetic/apostolic mantle and tailoring it to his own specifications as he does in First Corinthians, Paul is consciously developing the enemy-imaging tactics of his prophetic predecessors, allowing their earlier critiques of deadly imperial entities to reverberate in his own polemic. Not many of the Corinthians would have been likely to follow all of Paul’s highly allusive, figurative treatment of Death.¹⁵⁵

¹⁵³ The tendency of book ciphers to rely on having the same *edition* of the key text could provoke questions here about Paul’s various citations of the LXX, Tanakh, and revised versions of each.

¹⁵⁴ As previously noted, see Eidevall on the re-applicability of oracles against other nations in *Prophecy and Propaganda*, 175–76, though no treatment of this text or its imagery appears there. There is a peculiar similarity in this regard to the names of the writing prophets themselves: the prophetic books gave ancient authors access to the prophets themselves, conveying the authority, “the message and personality of those figures,” though in the process “they erased those figures through reinventing them in social memory” (Landy, “Three Sides of a Coin,” 6, 8, 8n19, summarizing and responding to an earlier argument by Ehud Ben Zvi). The imaging and effacing processes evidently applied to both the prophets and the interchangeable enemies whom they treated.

¹⁵⁵ One should take seriously Stanley’s (*Arguing with Scripture*, 42) questions about the accessibility of Paul’s arguments and the biblical texts from which he drew them, e.g., the expense and resultant difficulty of obtaining copies of texts (was Isaiah what Paul happened to have with him when he wrote 1 Corinthians?). Stanley’s typology of *informed*, *competent*, and *minimal* hearer/readers (67–69, and 79–83 as applied to 1 Cor 1:19) allows educated guesses concerning Paul’s expectations (e.g., that some audience members’ knowledge would include “key stories and important christological passages, yes; precise literary contexts for specific quotations, no,” 78), but does not fully account for the *sharing* of knowledge across these types with regard to *general* rather than precise literary contexts in larger portions of Scripture, such as Isa 22–29. His point that diverse levels of understanding produce a varying rhetorical effectiveness (113)

Some might have been familiar with the Isaianic περιοχή in question, others just able to recognize the contours of Isaiah's imperial critique, and still others only aware of the general theme of victory over Death (whether from an Old Testament context, a Greco-Roman one, or both). To the extent that they were able to follow and willing to commit to Paul's argument, they could respond creatively, reading death-bringing, theopolitical entities into and alongside of Death, and reflecting upon the ways in which the gospel of their crucified and resurrected Lord had saved (and continued to save) them from Death and death-bringing powers.

In the final analysis, is Paul handling Death as a cipher for Rome, placing a death's-head mask upon (or revealing it beneath) the face of the empire? If so, the treatment is careful, a far cry from the historical-allegorical, one-to-one correspondence between Rome and Babylon in Revelation (14:8, 16:19, and 17–18, with 14:8 and 18:2 echoing Isa 21:9).¹⁵⁶ When one is learning to write from the margins, symbols of empire are to be used guardedly. But even if a strict correspondence is lacking between the spiritually abstract (Death) and the materially concrete (Rome), Paul's technique is still highly figurative. Indeed, it can still be considered allegorical, in the sense in which postcolonial studies tend to use the term. In that critical context, allegory is understood as “a ‘symbolic narrative’ in which the major features of the movement of the narrative are all held to refer symbolically to some action or situation.” Allegories can be crafted to serve the interests of the colonizers, but they are prone to appropriation by the colonized,

is exactly what the present argument dictates in terms of comprehending Paul's development of prophetic anti-Death and imperial-critical themes; one can only speculate how much the informed and competent readers would have helped the minimal ones to understand.

¹⁵⁶ For the Babylon/Rome comparison in Revelation (particularly in terms of imperial arrogance and vice) and other examples of Jewish apocalyptic from the Roman imperial era, see Howard-Brook and Gwyther, *Unveiling Empire*, 77–81, 162–84, and Royalty, *Streets of Heaven*, 187–210.

playing a new role in counter-discourses against the colonizers' ideological/narrative dominance. And once an allegory is appropriated, it "disrupts notions of orthodox history...and imperial representation in general."¹⁵⁷ In Paul's world, in which multiple "symbolic narratives" are in play at once, appropriating the empire's keywords and images was powerfully disruptive, yet shrewdly tactical; but Paul supplemented this gambit with images borrowed from Jewish prophetic and apocalyptic traditions to let the audience infer a connection between Death and empire.

The present contention, then, is that Paul's use of allegory is twofold. In appropriating Rome's theopolitical vocabulary, Paul is retelling the empire's story of mastery¹⁵⁸ as Christ's master story, recasting the imperial allegory's major features.¹⁵⁹ But Paul is also grounding this retelling in his Scriptures, marshalling supportive images drawn from a theopolitically subversive and symbolically rich portion of Isaiah, along with a parallel image adapted from Hosea. In keeping with his prophetic antecedents' treatment of empires, Paul announces the beginning of the end for Death and its allies (i.e., Rome) as instruments that have become oppressors of God's people and thus enemies, in Death's case the ultimate enemy, of God.

In taunting the last enemy, Paul changes Death's δίκη (Hos 13:14 LXX) to its νίκη, its **victory**. The first of the incidentally rhyming terms can mean a penalty or

¹⁵⁷ Ashcroft et al., *Post-Colonial Studies*, 9.

¹⁵⁸ Supporting the suggested label for the empire's narrative, *story of mastery*, are the remarks of Bell and Golden, *Jesus Wants to Save*, 130, who describe Rome as "masterful" in the repeated retelling of its own story. Within that narrative, occupation of territory meant securing peace through victory; outside of the narrative, "for those in the lands being conquered...it wasn't peace. It was destruction. Death. The end of life as they knew it."

¹⁵⁹ The conversation that emerges between Bassler ("Paul's Theology: Whence and Whither?," 3–17) and Kraftchick ("Seeking a More Fluid Model," 18–34), admits the difficulty of seeking a central Pauline story, as it is never fully articulated, while allowing for a view of Paul's narrative work as a *responsive activity*. That perspective facilitates the relationships suggested here between Pauline soteriology and its Roman imperial and Hellenistic Jewish counterparts.

sentence of judgment, a punishment to be meted out (cf. the “death sentence” of 2 Cor 1:9, τὸ ἀπόκριμα τοῦ θανάτου); it can also extend to vengeance. Personified, the goddess Δίκη could exhibit either justice or vengeance, or both, as the sailors understand her to be doing in pursuing Paul in Acts 28:4. Had Paul left δίκη in the appropriated text, the face of theodicy in the Christian philosophical tradition might have matured somewhat differently: if the power ascribed to Justice—or the power to avenge justly—belongs not to Death but to God, then the resurrection might have been understood less as a victory and more as the erasure of death’s “sentence.”

But even though such questions of theodicy arise throughout the chapter, Paul emphasizes that what Death has lost is its *victory*. Israel understood that YHWH was a bringer or guarantor of victory (2 Sam 23:10–12, 2 Kgs 5:1, 1 Chr 11:14, 29:11, Ps 98:1, Prov 21:31, and notably *against* Israel in Jer 51:14), but that ascription should not obscure the Roman theopolitical context of victory in Paul’s world. Like Δίκη, Νίκη could be personified, and her sanctioning presence was a vital component of Rome’s arsenal. *À propos* Paul’s redeployment of the term, there was a contemporaneous imperial link between victory and death: during Nero’s reign, the city of Nysa minted a coin bearing the emperor’s likeness on the obverse, and Pluto, pictured with a sceptre and a representation of Nike, on the reverse.¹⁶⁰ Imaging God as robbing Death of his victory meant rewriting the imperial script that dictated the ownership of victory. In Paul’s

¹⁶⁰ Burnett et al., *Roman Provincial Coinage* 1:443 (§2670); see 1:442 for a précis on Nysa, relevant here for its mention of the territory’s temple to Pluto and the city’s proximity to the supposed location of Persephone’s abduction. Nysa was less than 70 km from Ephesus and approximately 100 km from Priene, with its inscription from the provincial assembly of Asia Minor—which is to say that the imperial gospel and the victory it proclaimed (and perhaps even the connection between that victory and death, assuming that the minting of the Plutonic victory coin was not a random combination of images with no history of prior association) had architectural and numismatic loci relatively close to Paul’s compositional headquarters for 1 and 2 Corinthians. Later numismatic evidence from Macedonia has Nike imaged as standing atop the globe of the world, holding a wreath and trophy (2:71, §301–2) or with the oak wreath on the reverse (2:73, §326).

rewrite, Death is not the province of the empire, only its chief export, relativized by Christ's resurrection and the pledge of more to follow. This is how Death is defeated. This crucified and resurrected provincial is what the *definitive* God and Lord looks like.¹⁶¹

What of Death's **sting**? In keeping with Raymond Collins' earlier observation, the ability to sting is well within the range of Death's animated, personified agency. Κέντρον connotes an insect's sting, a goad or other disciplinary instrument, or even, recalling a Sophoclean fragment quoted by Conzelmann, an imperial tool "of tyranny and force."¹⁶² Worse, Death and its sting operate on an ancient mandate. To retrace Barrett's earlier steps: the deadliness of Death's sting is powered by "a force that is the more potent because it is an agent of God himself"; that is, it had a divine commission.¹⁶³ No wonder it requires an act of God to dismantle Death!

But if **the sting of Death is sin, and the power of sin is the law**, does this mean that sin operates freely, as though with God's permission? To that counter-argument, the Paul of Romans would likely answer μὴ γένοιτο, but the Paul who wrote First Corinthians had not yet penned Rom 7:7–13, with its more nuanced relationship between sin and the law. There, the audience members would be given to understand that "in order that sin might be recognized as sin, it used what is good [i.e., the law] to bring about my death" (7:13). Here, they hear only that Death and sin are coefficient, and that sin is

¹⁶¹ Cf. Barth, *Epistle to the Philippians*, 67: "God the *Lord* is the God who calls his own, gathers, illumines, justifies, purifies and prepares them for his kingdom. This name now belongs (that is the power of his resurrection) to the abased and humbled One" (italics his).

¹⁶² Conzelmann (*1 Corinthians*, 292–93 and n41, noted in chapter three) quotes a Sophoclean fragment involving an unstable ruler "with the goad of mischief in his hands."

¹⁶³ Barrett, *First Epistle*, 383, also cited two chapters ago: Death "still has a sting, a sting which has behind it a force that is the more potent because it is an agent of God himself."

shaped and empowered by the law—a simpler explanation of Death’s sting and the need to remove it, but a more disturbing one.

Specific to the role of the law as powering Death’s sting, one could posit one more level of counter-imperial coding, although it would have risked confusion on the part of Paul’s audience,¹⁶⁴ as it would have required a dual understanding of “the law.” By promoting Christ’s administration of his βασιλεία (presumably by means of the Torah)¹⁶⁵ and with the objective of dismantling rivals such as Death, Paul implicitly contrasts—and rhetorically deconstructs—the rule of Caesar, who administrates his ἀρχή/imperium via Roman law, enforced by the threat of individual death and even mass destruction, if need be. To impose his will, Caesar requires Death; Christ is dismantling it. From such a perspective, Christ’s resurrection signals the beginning of the end for Roman *rule, per se*, because that rule is identified with (and impotent without) the power of Death, depending upon that power for its very survival. But this argument is admittedly tentative; it is more probable that Paul has the Torah principally in mind

¹⁶⁴ Stanley (*Arguing with Scripture*, 81) makes a parallel comment about the potential for rhetorical confusion in Paul’s letters, as in 1 Cor 1:19, where his use of Isaiah might well have confused audiences both familiar with and ignorant of the Isaianic context.

¹⁶⁵ This is where directly drawn correspondences between Christ and Caesar, or between βασιλεία and ἀρχή/imperium, can become confusing, and where the primary association of “law” with Roman law places one at risk of under-estimating influentially Paul’s Jewish context. In the sense in which Paul talks about the law in Romans, it is usually the Torah and its implications that he has in mind, as the association with Death and sin would seem to dictate here. Keeping in mind an interpretation of 1 Corinthians 15 like that of Calvin (*First Epistle*, 324, cited earlier), who argued that the abolition of “legitimate powers, which have been ordained by God” will mean the end of the world’s structures of polity, magistracy, and law, one would need to argue here that it is especially *imperial* law, and certainly not the Torah itself, that is to be abrogated. But see Schnelle (*Theology*, 139, 143) for an assertion concerning treatments of the law in Jesus traditions: Jesus neither abolishes the Torah nor rejects its nature as a gift to God’s people, but his focus on entering God’s βασιλεία does constitute a relativizing or “decentering” of the law.

here,¹⁶⁶ perhaps with the potential end of the Roman reckoning of justice echoing in the background.

Finally, looking at the sting of Death eschatologically (for Death is the *last* enemy to be dismantled), Douglas John Hall equates the stinging feature with Death's debilitating *anxiety*, with the *preoccupation* and *fear* that Death unleashes. In an illustration of Pauline already/not-yet tension, grace through faith has countered Death's "sting," leaving the final resolution of Death's existence up to the God who creates, gives, and re-creates life. Death as "the fate of all the living," the last enemy, "being God's creature and in some strange way God's servant, can only be negated by God; from our side, its negation is *not yet*: it must be undergone."¹⁶⁷ Hall's reading, like the present one, is allegorical: he understands the sting of animated/personified Death as a figurative guise for a very real phenomenon that accompanies Death.¹⁶⁸ Nor is his interpretation incompatible with the Death-as-cipher-for-empire reading recommended here. The irresistible momentum of Christ's sovereignty began with Paul's use of δεῖ, "he *must* reign," in 15:25;¹⁶⁹ in that δεῖ, the project of dismantling *every* enemy, whether ontological or theopolitical, was officially begun. Like seafaring destroyers that have outlived their usefulness, Death and all those who sail in its fleet will be decommissioned.

¹⁶⁶ As N. T. Wright (*Climax*, 210) argues in a point that is parenthetical to, but supportive of, his main thesis on Paul's consistently "underlying subject matter: the story of God and Israel, reaching its high point in Jesus and the Spirit, the climax of the covenant."

¹⁶⁷ Hall, *Cross in Our Context*, 214 (italics his).

¹⁶⁸ In a way, the animation or personification of Death *is itself* the symbolic narrative that Hall unpacks, in that he seeks a real-world correspondence for features such as Death's sting, quite apart from Death's theological connection to sin as Paul defines it.

¹⁶⁹ Remembering de Boer's comment on the importance of the connection between δεῖ and the *continuation* or *continuity* of that reign shown in the present infinitive βασιλεύειν, in *Defeat of Death*, 123, cited earlier.

15:57–58: ⁵⁷...but thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. ⁵⁸Therefore, my beloved brothers and sisters, be steadfast, immovable, always excelling in the Lord’s work, knowing that your work in the Lord is not without purpose.

As he concludes his discourse on the God who resurrects and the Lord Jesus Christ who dismantles Death, Paul confirms their identities through the thanksgiving he describes as due to them, not to the empire’s gods and victors. The thanksgiving is to be reflected in the Corinthians’ lives and work, but this is only possible because they participate in the work done by their Lord.

Giving thanks is a Pauline hallmark, often overlapping with benediction, blessing, and doxology as responses to God for his saving activity.¹⁷⁰ Paul frequently asks his congregants to thank God for what God has done in their lives, following his own example by offering concise declarations that represent both praise and thanks, as he does now with the expression “thanks be to God.”¹⁷¹ In this case the thanksgiving-as-response is reciprocally appropriate, as Paul offers it (by commending its offering) to the God whom he characterizes by generosity: while it helps the flow of the sentence in English to insert a comma after “God,” the participle that denotes God’s giving activity is linked to the rest of the clause by appearing in the dative, so that the effect of τῷ δὲ θεῷ χάρις τῷ διδόντι is “thanksgiving to God-who-gives!”

Rhetorically, the reminder that what this giving God supplies is **the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ** helps the Corinthians to recall the soteriological thrust of the chapter. But it also distinguishes the identity of the victory-bringing God in the

¹⁷⁰ O’Brien, “Benediction,” 69: “Paul mentions the subject of thanksgiving in his letters more often, line for line, than any other Hellenistic author, pagan or Christian.”

¹⁷¹ O’Brien, “Benediction,” 70–71.

context of imperial Corinth: this is not Venus Victrix, Ἀφροδίτης νικηφόρου the victory-bringer, with her prominent downtown temple, but Ὑἠωῃ who gives victory through *our* lord, Jesus Christ, not Caesar. Contrary to the Priene inscription from Asia Minor’s provincial assembly, which decreed of Augustus that it was difficult “to return for his many great benefactions [εὐεργετήμασιν] thanks in equal measure [ἴσον εὐχαριστεῖν],”¹⁷² it is not Caesar to whom the thanksgiving is due.

Rhetorical staging is important for this victory, too, especially if Death is read as a cipher for (or ally of) the empire. In a chapter on the resurrection, Paul has mentioned the crucifixion only once, but the empty tomb cannot eclipse it: at the cross, the crucifixion looked like a defeat, not a victory. The resurrection signalled the beginning of God’s triumph over Death, but does that exhaust the substance of victory? Was anything won in the crucifixion itself? Jack Miles suggests that the cross was an answer to the haunting question of theodicy that arose out of the Exile, a response to the doubt and despair of God’s apparent desertion of Israel and a reshaping of militaristic national hopes.

When Assyria took Israel and Babylonia destroyed Jerusalem, God referred to them as the weapons that he was brandishing against his chosen people. Since then, Israel’s “prisoners of hope” [Zech 9:12] have never abandoned the dream of a day to come when Israel would once again be the weapon that the Lord would brandish against her oppressor as he had done at the Exodus from Egypt.¹⁷³

Of course, the hope and the doubt both ran even deeper than that, to the core of the Lord’s identity before his people. If other nations had defeated Israel and Judah, was the God of Israel and Judah still the Lord he had claimed to be? “How indeed can the Lord

¹⁷² The translation is Sherk’s (*Rome and the Greek East*, 124); Dittenberger notes the εὐχαριστεῖν as having been reconstructed (*OGIS* §458).

¹⁷³ Miles, *Christ*, 210.

fail? *The Lord needs a way to fail*—without ceasing altogether to be the Lord.”¹⁷⁴ But the way God chose moved from victories won by God’s disciplinary instruments (imperial agents who were understood to be *messianic*, insofar as they were set apart by YHWH for a specific purpose, as in Isa 45:1 and Hab 3:13) to taking on his people’s defeat and mockery on himself in Christ by enduring yet another loss, exhibiting “weakness” (cf. 1 Cor 1:24–30). As Miles words it, Jesus’ road to the cross entailed “winning for God the right to fail at war,” and in the process revising the meaning of kingship and lordship.¹⁷⁵

How did Paul expect the Corinthians to live in light of this revelation, in gratitude to the lord and king whose latest apparent defeat was to be understood as a victory *for them*,¹⁷⁶ an enduring victory over Death, sin, and every theopolitical enemy? In chapter four, we learned that fifty days of thanksgiving were held as national holidays in honour of Augustus and his victory at Actium, with laurels and his oak wreath on display as symbolic reminders of his continual status as both victor and saviour.¹⁷⁷ These “victory days” (ἡμέρας ἐνίκας) were holidays because of the changes effected in the empire and its citizens, from war to peace (at least officially). But in national memory, the victory also marked a change in the *leader*, when Octavian became Augustus or Σεβαστός, with both his Latin and Greek titles redefining what a revered and reverent leader looked like. Paul’s thanksgiving resonated primarily along with benedictions and doxologies, as expressions of soteriological praise in the Jewish biblical tradition.¹⁷⁸ But there was also a Roman resonance to the victory God had won in and through Christ, dismantling enemies

¹⁷⁴ Miles, *Christ*, 240 (italics his).

¹⁷⁵ Miles, *Christ*, 243. It is not necessary to follow Miles in asserting from John 18:36–37 that Jesus had an “otherworldly definition” of kingship; Jesus’ statements there do not dissociate God as far from the overthrow of Rome as Miles thinks they do.

¹⁷⁶ Furnish, “Theology in 1 Corinthians,” 83: the victory is soteriological in that it is *given to believers*.

¹⁷⁷ As noted earlier. See Appian, *Civil Wars* 3.10.74, 5.11.97, 5.13.130; and Dio, *Roman History* 53.16.4.

¹⁷⁸ As in Pss 9, 26:7, 42:4, 50:14, 50:23, 69:30, 95:2, 100:4, 107:22, 118:1, 138:1, 147:7; Isa 12:1, 51:3; Jer 17:26, 30:19; Jonah 2:9; and specific to thanksgiving for salvation from death, Pss 30 and 116.

and bringing peace to those loyal to him, and reshaping what it meant for him to be called “Lord.” In the resurrection, God made this Jesus “both Lord and Messiah” (Acts 2:36).

How were the Corinthians to glorify Jesus in the sense of hailing him as victor, if not in such a literal and nationalistic sense of voting thanksgivings to him? How are we to do so, reading from a distance, over the Corinthians’ collective shoulders? One act of thanks empties out into another, as Paul suggests a principle for pouring out thanksgiving in everyday lives: knowing that they are loved (presumably by their lord,¹⁷⁹ as well as their apostolic correspondent!), believers should be **steadfast, always excelling in the Lord’s work**. In our fourth chapter, this verse supplied an example of Paul’s attempt to colonize Corinth with (implied) readers, readers ready to have their imaginations fired up, ready to identify receptively with Christ, Paul, and the witnesses to the resurrection, and ready to recommit their allegiance to Christ, Paul, and the story the apostle relates. In context at the end of the chapter, the gospel narrative of the resurrection and the dismantling of enemies draws those readers and auditors in, involving them personally and corporately. Within the social setting of the repopulated imperial colony, Paul hopes that his appeal will remind his audience of who founded their “colony,” and to which lord their allegiance is due. He has called Christ κύριος only once in this chapter, at 15:31; now he does so three times in two verses. Having spoken of the transformation to come, Paul tries to transform a less-than-ideal reading community into an ideal one.

What is **the work of the Lord** in which the congregants are to excel? Again, it is only because contemporary readers know which lord Paul is speaking about that the

¹⁷⁹ The assertion of Christ’s love for the Corinthians is based not least on 1 Corinthians 13, where the paradigmatic characterization of love stands in conflict with the perception of Venus as both love-goddess and divine queen mother of the empire. Ackerman (*Lo, I Tell You*, 144) is correct that believers are to live in conformity with the age-to-come that is marked by love (13:10–12), but it is less certain that it can best be argued from *that* passage (and, presumably, its use of καταργεῖν) that Christ “will conquer everything.”

“work” becomes distinct from the “works” of other lords of Paul’s world. Asia Minor’s Priene inscription acknowledged Augustus’ “many great benefactions,” philanthropic works that the emperor sponsored for the public welfare and for the building up of his own reputation as Rome’s highest patron. The public television program *History Project* suggests that Augustus and other emperors undertook major building tasks—e.g., the Pantheon, roads, aqueducts, Trajan’s Forum, Caracalla’s baths—with their “eternal reputations” in mind.¹⁸⁰ Working for Jesus as Lord with *his* eternal reputation (and ours) in mind need not be limited to evangelism as it has been traditionally understood in North America. It need not rule out philanthropic patronage, though it would necessarily be a form of patronage that preserves the dignity of clients and allows clients to reciprocate in educating their patrons, helping them to transform their own lives, not just those of the clients. The “work” could be as simple, as far-reaching, and as subversively counter-cultural as revising the way in which believers view and spend money, considering “every bill and coin as if it already carried the stamp of His [God’s] kingdom,” rather than that of Rome or the U.S. treasury.¹⁸¹ But unlike the work(s) of Caesar and other benefactors, this work is not static; it is ongoing. It is a work that belongs to the Lord (as

¹⁸⁰ *History Project: Seven Wonders of Ancient Rome* (Atlantis/Discovery Channel, 2004). Such reputations of civic and imperial benefactors were literally built into their public works, as in two inscriptions (cited by Winter, *Seek the Welfare*, 28) in which the people as beneficiaries pledge “to praise (ἐπαινέσαι)...and to crown (στεφανῶσαι)” or to “praise and honour (ἐπαινέι τε καὶ τιμᾶ)” the benefactors in perpetuity.

¹⁸¹ McKinley, *Beautiful Mess*, 140, and throughout his chapter on the “Stamp of Empire” (133–45), which re-imagines American currency as bearing the image of God as love, rather than the portraits of founding fathers, speculating what life might be like if believers lived every day “knowing whose beautiful likeness is stamped on our money and how to spend it well in His Empire” (134). Some of McKinley’s other chapters illustrate the preceding point on the need for reciprocity between Christian patrons and clients, as Paul was essentially arguing for in Corinthian contexts of thanksgiving in 2 Cor 8:12–14, 9:12–15.

the genitive τῷ ἔργῳ τοῦ κυρίου indicates)¹⁸² and so cannot continue in excellence without his mutual participation.

How are believers to verify that which Paul insists they know, **that your work in the Lord is not without purpose?** Κενός means *in vain, empty, fruitless*, or perhaps, in this context of what one might call ergonomic discipleship, *useless* or *without purpose*.¹⁸³ The word could have been very effective following Paul's use of καταργέω: the parousia would leave Death and other powers unemployed (ἄ + ἔργον), but the Corinthian auditors, by contrast, were to characterize themselves by industriousness. If they pour out their lives in thanksgiving, what assurance do they have that this will not leave them empty? Chapter three described the fine distinction between eschatology and soteriology, in that the doctrines were opposite sides of the same coin, difficult to understand in isolation: Roman imperial eschatology and soteriology were thoroughly interrelated in the first century, as were the eschatologies and soteriologies of Hellenistic Judaism and early Christianity that developed in their shadows.¹⁸⁴ The dovetailed questions of *when* and *how* salvation would (or had) come were priorities in the theopolitical context of all three of these religious worldviews, and for individuals as well as corporate entities. As Finger puts it, eschatology “engenders profound hope which transforms personal existence in any context; yet this hope is aroused by and directed

¹⁸² Again, thanks are due to Michael Knowles for this point; while the Roman facet of the thanksgiving Paul encourages requires proper reception of the benefaction, the *response* is *imitative* and *participatory*.

¹⁸³ As noted in chapter three, following Eriksson, “Fear,” 119: repeating κενός in the *peroratio* drives home Paul's fear-inducing, deliberative rhetoric, underscoring the risk to the Corinthians' salvation that he has already implied.

¹⁸⁴ As the manifestations of imperial power would have varied from province to province, so the diversity of first-century Judaism and Christianity, or perhaps “Judaisms” and “Christianities,” also requires respect. See Zetterholm's proposal on Acts 6:8–9 as reflective of a host of different streams of Jewish thought and praxis, some of which may have been more open toward Gentile involvement and the new teaching of Jewish-sectarian Christianity than others were, in *Formation of Christianity in Antioch*, 91–94, or Ehrman, *Lost Christianities*.

toward God’s kerygmatic, cosmic [i.e., soteriological] acts which transcend and transform all contexts.”¹⁸⁵ Knowing and serving a crucified and resurrected Lord and anticipating the transformation that would attend his Arrival were activities that Paul expected to transform the lives of his congregants in the present.

A Rhetorical Possibility: The Failure of the Gospel

Stevenson and Wright ask a pointed question regarding Paul’s later statement in Rom 1:16: Why would anyone think Paul should be ashamed of the gospel—especially, one might add, when he had just confessed his eagerness to preach in Rome, the empire’s heart, in 1:15? The authors posit that it might have appeared to the Romans as though “the gospel was the last resort of a God whose plan thus far had failed.”¹⁸⁶ That letter and audience are slightly later than those of First Corinthians, but the question of *failure* is an appropriate one with which to summarize the preceding exegesis, as that possible cause-and-effect frames much of Paul’s argument in this chapter. To improvise upon the popular failure-tracking internet meme, Paul is arguing against the possibility of “gospel fail.” If there was no resurrection, then:

Allegiance to Christ, hope in him, and faithful acts performed for him are all useless. Had the gospel narrative ended without Easter, failing to pledge the resurrection of the dead, then “not even Christ has been raised”; the master story is over, and there is nothing compelling about it. Preaching, faith/allegiance, and evangelism/euergetism are all useless, without purpose [κενός]. Paul and his co-teachers “are then found to be false

¹⁸⁵ Finger, *Christian Theology* 1:117.

¹⁸⁶ Stevenson and Wright, *Preaching the Atonement*, 106. Also relevant to this question in Romans is Paul’s later assertion regarding the salvation on Jewish/Judean and Gentile Christians: “It is not as though God’s word had failed [ἐκπέπτωκεν]” (Rom 9:6).

witnesses about God”; believers “are still in” their sins; those who have already died are “lost”; those who still hope in Christ are pitiable above all others; and Paul (if an apostle at all, having witnessed no risen Jesus!) faces death with “no more than human hopes” (15:13–19, 31–32, 58). By extension, baptism is only unity with Christ in death, with no celebration of new life; the Eucharist is only a memorial, with no living Lord to whom to commit allegiance and gratitude. Paul is certain that none of this is the case, but rhetorically, he has to admit the contingent “what ifs,” the eventualities for faith and discipleship if the gospel had failed. And there are further theopolitical consequences to the gospel’s hypothetical failure that Paul does not fully articulate.

The acts of Rome are mightier than the acts of God. Without Christ’s resurrection, there is no parousial rescue for God’s people. The empire seems better qualified than Israel’s God to boast of its saving power (cf. the claims of Assyria’s representative in 2 Chr 32:13–15). Rome continues to hem in all other kingdoms and claims on power, circumscribing and dictating terms to them, rather than having the terms of its rule dictated to it; Palestine remains a rebellious province, but not the birthplace of a βασιλεύς whose rule undermines everything Rome believes and practises. Rome still holds an exclusive claim on the glory of the parousial event of the Arrival and the sole rights to Nike. Any βασιλεία that Israel’s God claims to have is defined and delimited by existing theopolitical agencies whose power is still very much in effect. Caesar is still the undisputed βασιλεύς and κύριος, the sovereign and lord, of the inhabited world.¹⁸⁷ But the theopolitical fallout has yet to run its course.

¹⁸⁷ Yamazaki-Ransom, *The Roman Empire*, 73 argues that Luke’s use of “all the world,” οἰκουμένη, may reflect the evangelist’s sarcasm toward imperial-rhetorical arrogance.

God's people are still subjected and enslaved. No new mystery (15:51) has been revealed. The people of God in Corinth are still born into oppressive slavery under sin and death and patronal dependence upon the empire.¹⁸⁸ With failure and exile still ruling their experience, the people of the God who brought his people out of Egypt are dominated by other powers and authorities;¹⁸⁹ God the Creator apparently has no *auctoritas*, and no power over life or death. The empire is master of the life and death of the body politic. God's justice is insignificant; Rome's justice is not. The life and execution of a revolutionary rabbi who claimed to be the Messiah of God are not worth following, writing about, or imitating.¹⁹⁰

But now—to adopt, momentarily, Paul's own rhetorical voice—Christ *has* been raised from the dead, and the last enemy has been dismantled.

But now victory belongs to God, not Rome.

But now work in the Lord is not useless.

But now Rome's imperium is limited.

But now God's sovereignty is not.

But now the story is not over.

¹⁸⁸ Bell and Golden (*Jesus Wants to Save*, 57) offer a personal application of biblical allegories on Exodus: the “real reason for oppression is human slavery to violence, sin, and death. There’s an Egypt that we’re all born into.”

¹⁸⁹ No supersessionism is intended here, and no disrespect meant for Jewish experience apart from Christ, beyond what Paul himself says in his letters. Exemplary here is B. W. Longenecker, “Sharing in Their Spiritual Blessings,” 68–69, noting that in Paul the stories of ethnic Israel and of Christ are intricately interconnected, but not wholly fused. In what may be an unintentional pun, Longenecker states that the “issue” of ethnic Jewish descent in Galatians “was whether gentile Christians needed to include themselves within Israel’s ongoing story,” and if so, how.

¹⁹⁰ Paul’s casting of Christ as a figure to be imitated is an important key to understanding the soteriology of 1–2 Corinthians, given that the entire colonial culture was oriented toward the propagation and maintenance of patronal relationships within the city and with the strength of Rome. Paul called them in the opposite direction: “suffering, when understood as identification with Christ the victim, is the solution to rivalry” (Hamerton-Kelly, “A Girardian Interpretation,” 77). The ties between René Girard’s mimetic violence, Gustaf Aulén’s Christus Victor atonement motif, and the present context of soteriology in the context of empire will be unpacked further in the next chapter.

VI

Reading and Contextualizing Paul's Theopolitical Soteriology Today

Introduction: Ancillaries, Interpreters, and Theopolitical Reading Scenarios

The theopolitical reinterpretation of Pauline soteriology drawn from 1 Corinthians 15 should be corroborated in ancillary texts and appraised for its likely impact on Paul's original and contemporary audiences. The ancillaries proposed here and in the appendix suggest themselves on the basis of conceptual congruence with the passages in 1 Corinthians 15. The object of these closing exercises is not to hunt for or isolate soteriological proof-texts that happen to feature some of the same vocabulary that Paul deployed in 1 Corinthians, but to follow the theopolitical threads in Paul's patterns of thought into an unfolding¹ series of intertexts. The appendix suggests another such text, though the tone of its presentation is intended to favour ecclesiastical settings rather than the academic setting in which the following two studies in Philippians are situated:

- In Philippians 2:6–13, Paul positions Christ Jesus in submission to a scandalous death on a Roman cross, with his subsequent exaltation as global κύριος given as the reason why believers should work out their σωτηρία with fear and trembling.
- In Philippians 3:20—4:1, Paul binds heavenly citizenship to his expectation of the coming σωτήρ whose subjecting power transforms and glorifies his followers, a hope laden with theopolitical allegiance.

¹ The language of “unfolding” here follows a parenthetical suggestion by Kim, *Christ and Caesar*, 197: “while 1 Cor 15:24–28 may be seen as unfolded in Revelation, Rom 15:17–25 may be seen as unfolded in the second half of Acts.”

These are more than test cases, developing the findings from the suggested re-reading of 1 Corinthians 15. They also prompt questions for reading Paul today. In terms of biblical theology, these auxiliaries could be assembled together to form the cohesive beginnings of an inner-biblical, theopolitical soteriology.²

The dissertational applications are somewhat narrower than that, consisting of embryonic responses to some of the same questions posed to Paul's theopolitics in the last chapter. How should contemporary readers apply Paul's theopolitical soteriology to their current contexts? What does Christ's σωτηρία mean today? In view of how Paul's invitation to participate in the master story of the gospel helped his audience to negotiate the reality of death and the empire's story of mastery in Corinth, and in light of how he extended a similar invitation to his audience in Philippi, asking them to identify with and renew their allegiance to a crucified saviour, how can his postmodern audience in North America be said to be "saved"? To help postmodern readers to explore more possibilities for their own involvement concerning Paul's soteriological narrative and the pressing theopolitical questions it poses, two authors will be recruited to help interpret the two passages from Philippians.

The first recruit is Gustaf Aulén. The manner in which Phil 2:6–13 presents Jesus Christ as κύριος is not expressly labelled as a victory in the style exhibited in 1 Cor 15:57, but in Philippians the exaltation is again cause for exultation, inasmuch as Christ's deliberate obedience and faithfulness unto death has effected his own universal lordship and the σωτηρία of his followers. The theme of victory evokes the Christus Victor

² The integrity of such an inner-biblical soteriology guards against any temptation to abstract the ancillary texts from their biblical contexts, as the interwoven, canonical (and socio-rhetorical) settings of the texts is precisely what allows them to be understood as intertexts in the first place. Along the same lines, one could argue that in the very act of locating intertexts lies a biblical theology writ small.

atonement motif, and Aulén's seminal advocacy of that image will naturally inform the interpretative phrasing of this argument, for it is difficult to discuss the contextual significance of Christ's victory without Aulén's articulation of Christ's resurrection as a triumph over death, sin, Satan, and other enemy forces.³ The motif of *Christus Victor* has traditionally been assigned to the purview of systematic rather than biblical theology, but here it can be a useful hermeneutical device with which to study triumphal imagery in the Roman imperial and Pauline soteriologies.

As the second of the recruits, René Girard brings to the table a theory of *mimetic violence* that applies to the political ramifications of the victory imagery that Paul shares with Rome. Christ's sovereignty, even if conceptualized as nonviolent in nature, still subdues and supplants other claims to power. In Phil 3:20–21, for instance, the coming σωτήρ exercises a power that transforms and glorifies those who hope for rescue, but it is also a subjecting power that brings everything under his control. Paul used his own master story to contest Rome's story of mastery,⁴ targeting and co-opting the imperial narrative's soteriological claims, and the victory given by Paul's God reflects the exclusionary nature of the image *and* its re-appropriation: God's victory is shared with Christ's followers, but it is mutually exclusive with the victory claimed by Rome's gods and emperors. Girard helps to draw out any remaining ambivalence felt by postmodern

³ See for example Weaver, *The Nonviolent Atonement*, 72–74, 210–19, and Rieger, *Christ and Empire*, 237–67. Rieger's questions (248–49) are especially relevant: where is struggle, suffering, loss, or death in Christ's victory? What happens *after* Christ is resurrected and enthroned?

⁴ It is an ongoing assumption of this study that what it has referred to as the "story of mastery," a coherent and unitive discourse of the Empire's exclusive claim to power, can be discerned within Rome's imperial literature—even if there was no single, cohesive corpus to anchor the story. Potter ("Roman Religion," 139) notes a related difficulty in comparing Roman polytheism with Jewish and Christian theology: "There was no central body of texts that could link together all aspects of polytheism throughout the Roman world. Scholars who were interested could assemble lists of cults for individual cities and speculate upon the relationships between the gods on these lists...But there is no reason to think that the results of their endeavours had an impact" on Roman religious life.

readers toward Paul's engagement with (and mimicry of) the imagery of empire. Girard's discussion of mimetic violence and death⁵ calls into question the redeployment of that imagery, further unpacking Paul's discursive imitation and contestation of the empire's soteriological story.

Although a Girardian approach to 1 Corinthians has proven effective before,⁶ the present study's re-reading of Philippians 3 is no more a "Girardian reading" than the treatment of Philippians 2 is "Aulénian," or more "Elisabethan" than the analysis of the imagery of lordship that a text such as Romans 14:9 could produce with help from Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza.⁷ Rather, mimetic theory reveals Paul's *initial* mimicry of empire: Paul's narrative flirts with a conventionally violent, Roman imperial concept of victory, but it ultimately vindicates and encourages loyalty to a *victim* of imperial justice. Girard's take on rhetorical and structural violence facilitates the understanding of the interrelated contingency of the arena of Rome's rule and Paul's portrayal of a saviour who underwent and defeated death on behalf of his "citizens."

These selected ancillaries and dialogue partners provide the structure for the first half of this final chapter. When an instructor plans a syllabus for a potential course, the choice of a textbook says much about his or her agenda in teaching, for the manner in which the text conveys the subject matter will affect the course outcome—assuming, of

⁵ On conformity with Jesus' death, see Girard, *I See Satan Fall*, 27; on Satan's role in Jesus' death, 32–46, 182–84.

⁶ For the application of Girard to 1–2 Corinthians, see Hamerton-Kelly, "A Girardian Interpretation," 65–81.

⁷ That is, Schüssler Fiorenza's emphasis on "kyriarchal" sociopolitical and literary structures might be helpful in probing Paul's statement that Christ was crucified and resurrected "so that he might reign as lord over both the dead and the living," ἵνα καὶ νεκρῶν καὶ ζώντων κυριεύσῃ). The "Elisabethan" descriptor appears to have been coined by the contributors to a review panel on Schüssler Fiorenza's *Power of the Word* during the annual meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature, in Boston, Massachusetts, on November 24, 2008, as a less unwieldy option than "Fiorenzan" or such like, punning on the Elizabethan era of British history.

course, that the students read the book!—as surely as the in-class presentation will. In a similar way, the choice of texts to be addressed here signals an ongoing search for additional locations in which Paul engaged the theopolitics of Rome’s story of mastery with those of Christ’s master story, even as the choice of conversation partners broadcasts an ongoing concern for critical engagement with the idioms, imagery, and ideology of theopolitics ancient and contemporary.

For the present, that concern suggests that readers grow more alert in their interpretation of whatever theopolitical scenarios they encounter—an alertness that authors such as Aulén and Girard can foster, insofar as their contributions help to unpack the ramifications of Paul’s soteriology. To practise reading with eyes watchful in this regard, the second half of this epilogue presents a series of *contemporary theopolitical reading scenarios*, situations that call upon the skills that Paul shows in negotiating the enmity of Death and the captivating discourse of empire. Early in our fourth chapter, we acknowledged the wisdom with which Vernon Robbins characterized part of the interpretative task of socio-rhetorical criticism: he suggested that activities be designed to assist readers in entering the inner texture and workings of ancient textual worlds.⁸ To complement that recommendation, it was proposed that the task should perhaps also include the devising of corresponding exercises for considering the interpreter’s own “outside” world in relation to the textual world(s) at hand. The contemporary theopolitical scenarios offer opportunities to begin to do just that. If Paul’s theopolitical language evokes narrative(s) and draws us into the orbit of his master story, and if we are to proclaim this story as good news to our culture, then should we not be critically concerned with the potency of other narratives that compete with the gospel for attention,

⁸ Robbins, “Social-Scientific Criticism,” 279.

particularly in instances at which these narratives trade upon images that Paul adapted from the empire? Following these scenarios, the appendix turns our theopolitical-interpretative exegetical skills back toward Scripture once again, suggesting an example of what the kerygmatic proclamation of Paul's theopolitical soteriology might look like when preached in a postmodern, North American church setting.

Ancillary Texts

Philippians 2:5–13: Christus Victor?

Philippians, and in particular the hymn to Christ in the letter's second chapter, have been interpreted in imperial context before, and expertly so.⁹ The current objective is to explore the imperial context of the relationship between the proclamation of the crucified Christ, his resurrection from death as the reason for his triumphant exaltation as global κύριος, and the manner in which that triumph leads into the outworking of the Philippian believers' σωτηρία. The Christus Victor atonement motif, as articulated by Gustaf Aulén and his interpreters, will provide some help in evaluating the triumph of God in Christ as Paul portrays it. While Christus Victor does not accurately describe the theopolitical soteriology mapped here, Aulén is not included as a "straw man," but rather as one of the proponents of a view that sounds so similar to this project that the contribution of the latter must be carefully differentiated from that of the former.¹⁰

⁹ Most thoroughly in Oakes, *Philippians*, especially 129–74; developed further in idem, "God's Sovereignty," 126–41; and N. T. Wright, "Paul's Gospel," 160–83. Also see the summary and dialogue with Oakes, Wright, and other sources in Lowe, "'This Was Not an Ordinary Death,'" 207–11.

¹⁰ But with regard to the traditional matrix of three atonement theories—Christus Victor, satisfaction, and moral influence, summarized most succinctly by Green ("Kaleidoscopic View," 169), who renders the first as "Christ the Conqueror"—the motive emphases of the present soteriology suggest that it should be understood in close relationship to the Christus Victor "family" of theories.

Imprisonment and death pervade Philippians. Paul’s “chains” (1:7, 13–14, 17) make the possibility of his permanent “absence” from the body of believers—his death—a very real threat, even though the joyful personal outcome of being with Christ (1:23) awaits.¹¹ But it is Christ’s death on a Roman cross that anchors the hymn and the entire epistle.¹² The crucifixion keeps the second half of the hymn from sounding too much like the ascension, or the apotheosis,¹³ of an emperor: what emperor’s accession to the height of theopolitical power began with a criminal’s death? As I have argued elsewhere, to be obedient to death on a cross was to be acquiescent to the empire’s power over life and death¹⁴—and while the emperor technically answered to Rome’s gods, Senate, and populace (and the military, who would have been the first to confer *imperium* upon those Caesars who had proved victorious on the battlefield),¹⁵ in actuality Caesar was at the *top* of that power structure, not crushed underneath it, and obedient to no one.

When Paul anticipates that Jesus Christ will be hailed as “lord,” then, he is not physically dismantling Caesar’s rule, but he is doing so rhetorically, fighting with words, as it were. God, the *only* God, is the one who confers the title upon Jesus, in an echo of Isaiah 45.¹⁶ And he confers that title *because* (διὸ καὶ) Jesus made himself obedient to

¹¹ For Heil (*Philippians*, 17), presence and absence are central themes of the pivot between 1:27b and 27c in the chiasmic unit of 1:19–30; in Heil’s audience-response reading (61–64), Paul’s hearers would have remembered what they heard earlier in the letter, so later mentions of *absence* would recall to their minds the potential for Paul’s absence because of his death in 1:20 (73). In a similar vein, Oakes (*Philippians*, 147) wonders whether the vocabulary evocative of the emperor and his apotheosis would have been more evident on subsequent hearings of the text than it was at first.

¹² Heil, *Philippians*, 18, 90–91: death, occurring in the genitive (θανάτου, 2:8a–8b) anchors the chiasm of 2:1–16.

¹³ There are probably echoes of both enthronement and apotheosis here; but Oakes (*Philippians*, 133) critiques an earlier argument by Dieter Georgi, saying that Georgi “needs to choose between apotheosis and enthronement.”

¹⁴ Lowe, “‘This Was Not an Ordinary Death,’” 210.

¹⁵ Oakes, *Philippians*, 144, citing Béranger, *Recherches*, 52. On the emperor’s connection to the Roman gods, see Oakes, *Philippians*, 156.

¹⁶ Oakes (*Philippians*, 168–69) observes that in the exilic context of Isaiah 45, submission to “the only” God means that “Babylon’s gods and Babylon’s emperor are shown to be powerless.” This echo raises

death on a cross, *in order that* (ἵνα) every knee should bow and every tongue confess his name, for the renown, the δόξα, of God. So the confession “that Jesus Christ is Lord” would have been understood to have a strong counter-imperial thrust, closely related to its *doxological* and *exorcistic* capacities as a confirmation of authority and orthodoxy. That is, the expression ascribes praise, or “glory,” to Christ (implicitly negating the glory of the emperor and empire), and serves as an oath or vow that expels demonic powers and repulses imperial ones.¹⁷

Placing such a critical confession at the heart of his message was a vital step in what was earlier referred to as Paul’s strategy of *counter-colonization*: his “ideal audience” here would be comprised of those willing to move from *reading* that Jesus is Lord, to *confessing* this is so, with all the renunciation of ultimate loyalty to the empire and its story that this move implies.¹⁸ There is room in Paul’s developing thought for the paying of taxes, revenue, fear/respect, and even honour (τὸν φόρον, τὸ τέλος, τὸν φόβον, and τὴν τιμὴν, Rom 13:7) to the emperor and empire—but *not for confessional worship, nor for the ascription of ultimate lordship*. Jesus’ ascension and the confession

questions, similar to those raised in the last chapter, about how much and how thoroughly and deliberately Paul was appropriating Isaiah, as well as how much of the appropriation was recognized and by what proportion of his audience. But as Oakes (170) continues, “If the Philippians knew the Isaianic context, as they might if this kind of eschatology was part of Paul’s general teaching, then they would know that the imperial figure there is also a saviour.”

¹⁷ On the exorcistic function, especially in combination with the counter-imperial, see Swartley, *Covenant of Peace*, 225–26. For Paul’s expectation that pneumatic inspiration will confirm orthodox belief, see Neyrey, *Paul in Other Words*, 172: “truly inspired speech is confession of Jesus’ abiding authority: ‘Jesus is Lord!’” (Cf. 1 Cor 12:1–3.)

¹⁸ But see the nuances suggested by Schnelle (*Theology*, 225 and n72, at odds with “some streams of Anglo-American ‘anti-imperial’ Pauline interpretation” as exhibited in works by Horsley, Crossan, and N. T. Wright), who argues that even with his redefinition of the empire’s central images, the apostle had “no intentional political stance in the modern sense”; and Kim, *Christ and Caesar*, who insists that “in Philippians there is neither an anti-imperial polemic nor any intent to subvert the Roman Empire” (30), and that Paul’s proclamation of the gospel contained none of the “specific critique” of Rome and the imperial cult that Revelation’s author preaches more clearly (34–36). In keeping with the prophetically-based critique of empire(s) espoused in Wright’s *Paul* and the present study, it could be argued against Kim that the imagery of Philippians 2–3, Romans 13, and 1 Corinthians 15 was as subversive as Paul dared write, for fear of politically revolutionary responses and/or imperial reprisals.

of that fact relativize every other claim to power. As Scott Daniels notes, calling Christ “Lord” demands a willingness to take up one’s cross, a “willingness to witness that the systems of dominance and violence are false,” renouncing the escalation of nationalist rivalries.¹⁹ In the case of *contemporary* geopolitical claims, where the rivalry is so intense and unceasing that Mars seems to have been rhetorically elevated to a “messianic” status of his own,²⁰ these are challenging words to hear.²¹ Acknowledging God’s triumph in Jesus remains tantamount to disavowing any other exclusive authority or power, as well as any prior claim it may have on the loyalties of the reader/confessor. As Michael Gorman expresses it, the act of confessing Christ places one “under the lordship of this Jesus, to make a deliberate move from the sphere of any other lord (whether pagan idol, Roman emperor, or anything else) into the sphere of this crucified Lord... To make the confession ‘Jesus is Lord’ is also implicitly to make the confession ‘And I am the servant of this exalted crucified Lord.’”²²

The language of Gustaf Aulén’s soteriological motif, *Christus Victor*, offers a limited measure of interpretative assistance at this juncture. In Paul’s letters, Aulén sees a “great complex of demonic forces,” with sin and death, “almost personified,” as leading figures in that complex. “To be set free from sin through Christ,” remarks Aulén, citing

¹⁹ Daniels (“Passing the Peace,” 129–36, quoting from 135) is actually in dialogue with Girard here, who will be addressed shortly.

²⁰ Hadley, “Ascension of Mars,” 189.

²¹ The most troubling element for both ancient and contemporary readers in empires that make exclusive claims to power may be the question of *how willingly* every tongue will confess. If this is construed proleptically as an actual, future-historical event, will God *force* a recalcitrant empire to bow? Must he *teach* its knees to bend? That would prove an especially hard pill to swallow for those nations accustomed to thinking of themselves as God’s agents, but God has proven reluctantly willing at earlier periods to use rival empires as disciplinary instruments—as in the prophetic warning (from the context of which Paul borrowed) that his speech could come “with foreign lips and strange tongues” (Isa 28:11–12) if his people refused to listen.

²² Gorman, *Cruciformity*, 144.

Rom 5:18 and 6:11, “is to be delivered also from death’s dominion.”²³ Sin and Death are among those Christ defeats and triumphs over on the cross and in the resurrection, but the dualism of this motif is attenuated somewhat when Death (and the Devil, largely behind the scenes in Paul’s version of the drama²⁴) is revealed as an “executant,” cast in its role for God’s redemptive purposes.²⁵ But Aulén tends to stress these cosmic and ontological powers, neglecting the roles that *sociopolitical* power plays in the biblical drama. In order to address the authority exercised in turn by Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, Persia, and Rome, the voices of Scripture seek to cast these empires and other powers as executants, too.²⁶ Here in Philippians, for instance, Paul claims that, despite appearances, his imperial imprisonment in Rome (and if necessary, his death there) is only a means to an end, that God and his gospel are actually sovereign over even Rome’s authority.²⁷

²³ These portrayals are of course helpful to Aulén’s framing of the drama of crucifixion and resurrection (*Christus Victor*, 67), in which Christ “fights against and triumphs over the evil powers of the world, the ‘tyrants’ under which mankind is in bondage and suffering, and in Him God reconciles the world to Himself” (4); both references are cited previously in Lowe, “Atonement and Empire,” 38.

²⁴ Satan is certainly present in 1–2 Corinthians, as in 1 Cor 5:5 and 2 Cor 4:4, texts that appear to support Aulén’s “executant” function. The devil does not, however, have the centre-stage role that Death takes in the soteriology of 1 Corinthians 15. But on Satan’s role “in a disquieting parallel with God,” coordinating a “system” of evil powers comprised of Sin, Death, and other powers, see Bouyer, “Two Economies,” 241–45, with 245 quoted here.

²⁵ Aulén, *Christus Victor*, 55–56. Aulén also faults Anselm’s legacy for emphasizing only sin and guilt as enemies, while his own “classic” view encompasses death, sin, the law, the devil, and the curse as representative of a “series” of powers (149); cited previously in Lowe, “Atonement and Empire,” 39, 39n14. Stott (*Cross of Christ*, 228–30) critiques Aulén for misrepresenting Anselm’s view as an atonement “from below” and for drawing so sharp a contrast between satisfaction theory and *Christus Victor* that they appear mutually exclusive. This does not keep Stott from presenting a systematic, six-fold application of the theme of conquest/victory to the whole structure of Scripture (231–39), followed by a section of participatory emphasis on “Entering into Christ’s Victory” (239–46). For an appreciation of the reclaiming of temporal dualism by Aulén and Boyd, see Boersma, *Violence*, 199–200.

²⁶ As I have argued in “Atonement and Empire,” 40–41. That article tried to phrase this argument in service to a version of *Christus Victor* reframed in imperial context, then tentatively referred to as *Christus Coronatum* to focus attention on Christ’s enthronement as the culmination of his victory. Constructively critical reactions to that attempt, along with Reiger’s chapter on Aulén’s own neo-colonial context (*Christ and Empire*, 237–67), convinced me to rework this feature in slight contradistinction to *Christus Victor*.

²⁷ As addressed in greater detail throughout Oakes, “God’s Sovereignty.” As Carter has done, Oakes uses “sovereign” or “sovereignty” freely where terms such as “authority,” “power,” “jurisdiction,” “king” and “kingship,” and “lord” and “lordship” might otherwise be used. This usage is unobjectionable, but for clarity’s sake one might try here to nudge *sovereignty* toward the domain of βασιλεία, at slight variance with Carter, as argued earlier in chapter five.

The need to account for that biblical portrayal of theopolitical powers has been a vital component of critical modifications to Christus Victor.²⁸ It is even more so here. Gregory Boyd, Denny Weaver, Thomas Finger, and Joel Green all promote the sociopolitical and narrational contexts of biblical atonement motifs, Christus Victor among them.²⁹ But the Pauline theopolitical soteriology drawn from 1 Corinthians 15 provokes questions that are not limited to the sociopolitical contingency of the biblical narrative's drama of salvation, nor to the theopolitical roles played there by the world powers of the day, but also extend to the manner in which components of those powers' own soteriological narratives were redeployed by Paul (and, by further extension, other biblical authors). By showing that Death would be dismantled after every rule, authority, and power had shared that fate—or, in Philippians 2, that part of the humiliation of Jesus' death came courtesy of Rome, and that every knee, including Death's and Rome's, would bow to Jesus as Lord—our theopolitical soteriology demonstrates that the empire was closely identified, or allied, with Death.³⁰ Rome exercised Death's proximate power in transgressing the limitations of its divine mandate, as previous empires had done. This

²⁸ See Boyd's inclusive definition of the "powers" ("Christus Victor View," 38), which incorporates "the demonic force of destruction behind fallen social structures," in keeping with his insistence (46) that *only* Christus Victor respects the apocalyptic context (implicitly including the earthly-heavenly, theopolitical duality of said powers) of Jesus' life and the "kingdom revolution" he initiated. Or see Green's riposte ("Christus Victor View," 61–62), in which he praises Boyd's attention to an atonement model clearly resident in Scripture's texts and its salvation drama, accounting without abstraction for the historical realities of Jesus' death on Roman cross, but asks whether Boyd is overcompensating for Walter Wink's sociopolitically sensitive reading of the New Testament powers.

²⁹ Boyd's concern with the narrational facet, and what this dissertation calls the theopolitical, has just been noted and is pervasive in his work. Weaver maintains that the cosmic confrontation between Jesus and the devil (and/or the powers) must be set "*in history* between the Roman Empire and Jesus and his church" ("Narrative *Christus Victor*," 17 [italics his], 16–26). Finger ("Response to J. Denny Weaver," 38–39) balances Weaver's concern for historical-narrational context, which he labels the *conflictive* dimension of Christus Victor, with its *transformative* (or "involving transcendent powers") facet (cf. Finger, "*Christus Victor*," 103). Green ("Kaleidoscopic View," 163; affirmed by Boyd, "Christus Victor Response," 186) avers that the death of Jesus and its saving significance cannot be understood apart from the sociopolitical and religious forces that he opposed.

³⁰ In support of "every knee" as a deliberately vague reference to the empire, see Beck, *Anti-Roman Cryptograms*, 67, and more broadly 51–92, with respect to a posited alliance in Paul's thought between overzealous advocates of "Roman Civic Religion" and Satan and other evil forces.

simultaneous foregrounding³¹ of Death and (by extension) any death-dealing, theopolitical agent as inimical to the life of God's people is essential to the re-reading of 1 Corinthians 15 and Philippians 1–3. It has serious implications for the discussion of issues such as theodicy,³² the ethics of warfare, and ecclesiology that cannot be fully unpacked here, though some of them will continue to unfold in the theopolitical reading scenarios below.

One more question from the discussion of *Christus Victor* remains to be put to the present theopolitical soteriology, with its concern for the competition between Rome's story of mastery and Paul's master story. As Thomas Schreiner puts it, anticipating the imagery of dismantlement employed in the present work, "how did Christ's death dismantle the principalities and powers?"³³ In 1 Corinthians 15, this question of efficacy would involve the manner in which believers participate in God's victory through Christ;

³¹ Where Weaver ("Narrative *Christus Victor*," 3–4, 17) sees himself as "restoring the devil" whom Anselm "deleted" from the atonement equation, the current proposal simply *foregrounds* Death and its connection to the Roman Empire as the dominant social and theopolitical structure of its day. Death's role as a defeated enemy has long been acknowledged as part of the climax of Paul's argument in 1 Corinthians 15, but the importance of Death's characterization as the ultimate or *archenemy*, at centre stage in Paul's thought there, needs to be better understood. This foregrounding has at least as much Pauline textual warrant as exists for Weaver's "restore the devil" gambit, and it also takes seriously Aulén's point regarding the Pauline emphasis on a "complex" of enemies, rather than on Satan as such. On problems with the demythologizing of *Christus Victor*, and on death as a terror that Jesus has already been through and thus disarmed, see Finger, "*Christus Victor*," 104–5.

³² The theodicy-oriented implications remain similar to those already debated by proponents of *Christus Victor*. One could responsibly side with Finger ("Response to J. Denny Weaver," 38–40), who admits attributing indirect violence to God (*contra* Weaver) but not direct violence (*contra* Boersma). For example, Finger acknowledges Scripture's dual attribution of judgment, e.g. to the justice of God and the death-dealing of Babylon; this is a pattern that God continues to choose, allowing for (but not complicit in) tragedies resulting "from choices for death." He also explains ("*Christus Victor*," 98) that in the motif, inasmuch as sinners subject themselves to other lords, declaring "allegiance to powers that are under death's dominion," God is just in initially handing them over to death.

³³ Schreiner, "Penal Substitution," 52; so too Green ("Kaleidoscopic Response," 65), who observes that Boyd's view does encourage the transformation of Christians but does not address how they are made holy. Weaver (*Nonviolent Atonement*, 212, 221) anticipates that question by emphasizing that Christians are not themselves saving agents, but participants in salvation who "join in" God's reign, as opposed to continuing complicity with evil powers. A similar view will be espoused here, but when Weaver insists (22) that his "narrative *Christus Victor*" avoids the limitations of first-century, earthly victory, one may respectfully disagree: mutual investment with Paul in the empire's wealth of "earthly" victory images is precisely the avenue that twenty-first-century readers should pursue, allowing for limitations on the part of the first-century image and the contemporary reader who encounters it.

in the language of Philippians 2, it engages Christ's death, his enthronement, and the salvation the Philippians were to work out.

To respond to this question in terms of the imperial contexts the stories shared, one could channel the imagery of *Christus Victor* back toward the empire's literary and performative discourse, before returning once again to the Pauline. How were the empire's victories celebrated so as to invite the participation of the populace? Returning thanks to the gods responsible for the victory was one such important, ceremonial task, one in which the state had a vested interest.³⁴ Even more symbolically powerful was the triumphal parade, a ritual that tied together thanksgiving, propaganda, and military and divine glory. The link in Phil 2:9–11 between Christ's ascension and acclamation was certainly a familiar triumphal motif not long after Paul's time, as an image of the ascendant Titus attests;³⁵ as with other images the apostle co-opted, it was Paul's identification of the deified figure as a crucified provincial that would have galled a Roman audience.

In the imperial custom, cheering crowds consumed the triumph's multisensory spectacle, which ended at the Capitoline hill, often with the ritual execution of the prominent captives who had been paraded before the victor's chariot. A triumph, or even a surrender or execution *evocative* of a triumph, could consolidate a ruler's power, humiliate and/or eliminate his opponents, and ingratiate him with his subjects.³⁶ The

³⁴ Potter, "Roman Religion," 177: Following a victory, "the Roman state would offer sacrifices to thank the gods for assuring the victory and would dedicate some of the spoils taken from the enemy in the temple of the god or god's [sic] concerned (the result was that the temple of the gods often had substantial sums of money to lend to the state in times of emergency)."

³⁵ Beard (*Roman Triumph*, 233–38) notes an image of the emperor in the vaulted ceiling of the Arch of Titus, depicted as being flown heavenward on an eagle's back, as a very concrete "structural connection" (238) between the triumph-as-ceremony and the victor as a figure *en route* to becoming divine.

³⁶ See Beard, *Roman Triumph*, 128–32, 324, on the execution of prisoners, the exceptions to this practice (one of which is recorded by Appian, *Roman History* 12.17.116–17, on the stay of execution for many of

triumph is an important focus here because it was a highly symbolic, *narrative* locus, perhaps even the *principal* locus, by which the *triumphator* legitimated his victory or rule: he entered the imperial city's boundaries, usually with the permission of the Senate and/or the assembled people,³⁷ and in so doing he invited those bodies to participate in the story of his accession to power. In effect, this is the principal way in which they participated in the salvation he had brought to them. The victory itself had already been won in a distant theatre of war, but it was imported into Rome, re-enacted as part of the imperial liturgy of pacification, inviting identification with the victor and his story.³⁸

How does Paul contend with this celebration of victory as a narrative motif? He appropriates the motif but retells the story, hinting that his master story is the true story, and the empire's story of mastery the counterfeit.³⁹ The apostle of the master story redeploys the motif of triumph, but upside-down. He explicitly uses the verb θριαμβεύειν to phrase his ministry as an experience of being paraded as a captive in Christ's triumph

the prisoners at Pompey's triumph, notably including the sons of Mithridates and Tigranes), and the later growth of the triumph into a literary trope, used to describe an *adventus*, or the executions of political rivals such as rebellious client-kings. On the politics of timing a triumph appropriately, see Plutarch, *Life of Pompey* 14. When away from Rome, triumphal conventions could apply to the custom in which νικῶντες added the baggage of defeated enemies to their own train (from at least as early as Alexander's time, in Plutarch, *Life of Alexander* 32.4), or the surrender of an enemy (as in Plutarch's account, in *Life of Caesar* 27.1, of the capitulation of Vergentorix [Vercingetorix] to Caesar, stripping off his own armour and seating himself at Caesar's feet: αὐτὸς δὲ καθίσας ὑπὸ πόδας τοῦ Καίσαρος... ἄρχι οὐ παρεδόθη φρουρησόμενος ἐπὶ τὸν θρίαμβον).

³⁷ Beard, *Roman Triumph*, 205: senatorial permission was the safest route by which "to parade respect for the legal rules which policed the very boundaries that a triumphal celebration would break"; traditionally, the assembly of the people could also arbitrate in this manner, but even those triumphs held *without* such permission were remembered as self-legitimizing *faits accomplis*.

³⁸ Once more, Michael Knowles deserves credit for suggesting nuances to a previous form of this argument.

³⁹ This capitalizes on a point by N. T. Wright ("Paul's Gospel," 182–83) repeated by others (Witherington, *Thessalonians*, 140–41): "This counter-empire can never be merely critical, never merely subversive. It claims to be the reality of which Caesar's empire is the parody. It claims to be modeling the genuine humanness, not least the justice and peace, and the unity across traditional racial and cultural barriers, of which Caesar's empire boasted." Even while agreeing with Wright, there is a bigger picture to the "reality" of which he speaks, in that the stories that give the empire and the counter-empire their respective *meanings* are in discursive competition, as to which is the true story, the one that offers its participants a more effective salvation.

in 2 Cor 2:14–17,⁴⁰ and to image the way in which “the rulers and the authorities” (τὰς ἀρχὰς καὶ τὰς ἐξουσίας, echoing part of the command structure in 1 Cor 15:24) are exposed and defeated through Christ in Col 2:14–15.⁴¹ Imperial victors were expected to seek the permission of Rome’s people and senators before entering the boundaries of the city; operating on the authority of a different lord, Paul breaches the boundaries of the empire’s discursive world by re-appropriating one of its most celebrated theopolitical images.

As the empire came to use the triumph as a literary trope to describe events that evoked that ritual, so the Pauline corpus also provides some triumphal colouration even in loci where θριαμβεύειν is absent: the ascent of Christ as the gift-giving king in Eph 4:7–10;⁴² the investiture of Christ with the title of “Lord” here in Phil 2:5–13 (but through humility and crucifixion, through self-divestiture,⁴³ not military victory); and the victory over Death and theopolitical powers in 1 Corinthians 15, a victory given to the faithful by God the Father through the Lord Jesus Christ.⁴⁴ In Christ, Death had been undergone and defeated, and in the story that Paul asked his co-workers to share, that

⁴⁰ As eloquently argued in Knowles, *We Preach Not Ourselves*, 75–111. The thanksgiving Paul offers to God to introduce this thought (τῷ δὲ θεῷ χάρις, 2:14) recalls 1 Cor 15:57’s τῷ δὲ θεῷ χάρις τῷ διδόντι but makes the thanksgiving more affecting, as in 2:14 Paul casts himself as the victim of the *triumphator*, not his beneficiary.

⁴¹ See Webber’s intriguing claim that Christus Victor is the atonement motif “that will be most readily heard in the postmodern world,” in *Ancient-Future Faith*, 43; as quoted in Stevenson and Wright, *Preaching the Atonement*, 137. Also see those authors’ homiletical development of Webber’s point as part of their chapter, “The Decisive Victory: Colossians 2.8–15” (*Preaching the Atonement*, 137–56).

⁴² As argued earlier in Lowe, “This Was Not an Ordinary Death,” 202–7.

⁴³ In terms of understanding Christ’s humility as a victory coming out of apparent defeat, the kenosis of the Philippian Christ-hymn can perhaps be compared to the self-divesting surrender of Vercingetorix, footnoted above.

⁴⁴ Understanding the conclusion of 1 Corinthians 15 as a triumphal event could find some further (if admittedly tenuous) support in the social background of Paul’s co-workers. Luke remembers that Aquila was a native of Pontus (Acts 18:2). Recalling from chapter four the ambivalence and shifting allegiances among the Pontic royal family with relation to Rome, Roman warfare, and Roman triumphs, one wonders whether Aquila’s provincial origin lent some additional richness to the intertextual themes of sonship and victory in Paul’s thought here.

enemy was no longer driving the triumphator's chariot, but was now being paraded ahead of it, disarmed and en route to Christ's investiture and Death's own final dismantling. By confessing allegiance to their master and his story, his followers joined his celebration. This was how they began to work out their salvation, how they were (and continue to be) saved, and no enemy—not Death, the Devil, or the empire—could legitimately steal the triumph out of that celebration (cf. Rom 8:38–39).

Phil 2:5–13, then, like the instances in which Paul expressly appropriated triumphal imagery from the Roman imperial liturgy, functions as a parodic inversion of Rome's celebration of victory and deification of victors: Christ becomes victorious by submitting to the combined power of Death and Rome, which are disarmed and proven powerless by his resurrection, in a foretaste of their ultimate dismantling. Paul's re-appropriation of this and other images effectively breaches the sacral boundaries of the empire's theopolitically discursive world. This offence intensifies when the invitation to participate is extended to peoples on the outside and underside of imperial society, such as barbarians and slaves, promising them a share in the imminent glory of the life-giving, arriving Christ: "When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory."⁴⁵

***Philippians 3:20—4:1: Salvation, Citizenship, Imperial Leadership,
and Mimesis***

A later text in Philippians reveals another of Paul's engagements with Roman theopolitical contexts, and thus another vantage point from which to examine the

⁴⁵ Col 3:4, 11, quoting 3:4. This emphasis on inclusive participation, again deflecting and surpassing the claims of the Roman *οἰκουμένη*, was discussed during the exegesis of 1 Cor 15:27–28 in chapter five.

question of how Roman citizens and Christians, respectively, could expect to be saved. Having urged his correspondents to πολιτεύεσθε, to “live as citizens,” in a manner worthy of the gospel,⁴⁶ Paul now connects that command to a hope of rescue by a σωτήρ whose power transforms and glorifies his citizens. The *context* in which he appears and the *role* that he plays both dictate that this arriving figure is the emperor⁴⁷—but instead, Paul identifies him as the Lord Jesus Christ. This would have been a startling move. Discursively, the story of the empire’s rule was not about the peaceful dispensation of benefits and justice, but the delivery of a “crisis-ridden state” to the one man capable of mitigating its disasters.⁴⁸ Once more, Paul is supplanting the empire’s soteriological narrative, but to what end? How will the rule of this lord unfold differently from that of his rival, Caesar?

As Aulén’s atonement motif of Christus Victor proved heuristically useful with the previous text, so the interpretation of this text and a few relevant facets of imperial context will be mediated in part by another contemporary theologian: René Girard and his theory of mimetic rivalry and violence. Girard’s principle (*la rivalité mimétique*) states that the desire to imitate other human beings, or to possess what they possess, bleeds into rivalry. This mimesis grows like a contagion⁴⁹ until it threatens social

⁴⁶ At 1:27; the verb’s political significance is often glossed over by such renderings as “live your life” or “conduct yourselves.”

⁴⁷ Oakes, *Philippians*, 138–40: the context and role shape the interpretation of the σωτήρ in 3:20 as “an eagerly awaited figure who comes, from the state to which his people belong (ἐξ οὗ καὶ...), to another state where they are living, in order to rescue them”; the figure “must be” a state military leader, which in turn must be the emperor. Oakes’ interpretation benefits from the exclusivity of Roman ideology, which can be hermeneutically helpful. That is, although Rome made allowances for other saviour-figures within their οἰκουμένη, none would have had the authority to act in the way that this one does without the empire’s blessing.

⁴⁸ Oakes, *Philippians*, 143 and n53, citing Béranger, *Recherches sur l’aspect idéologique*, 194–97.

⁴⁹ Translator James Williams offers *contagion* or *violent contagion* as the best approximation of Girard’s term, *mimétisme*, in Girard, *I See Satan Fall*, 17n2; he also helpfully suggests the English *snowballing* for the runaway nature of conflict implied in the phrase *emballement mimétique* (21n1).

relationships and the stability of the social fabric itself, leading to the mechanism of the scapegoat (*le bouc émissaire*), the unconscious and often corporate decision to exile or kill one representative of the society so that order may be restored to the whole, often with the offshoot that the victim is later divinized. While this process can be cyclical, Girard has argued repeatedly that the Bible, and the Gospels in particular, are unique among the many stories in which the cycle takes place: only in the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus does God interrupt the cycle and expose it for what it is by vindicating Jesus and reversing the sentence of death.⁵⁰ In the Gospels' description of Satan's rule as a kingdom divided against itself, Girard finds an especially provocative instance of his principle at work, illustrating the way in which evil self-deconstructs.⁵¹

Girard's work has been mined for its hermeneutical applications, with significant results.⁵² Like Aulén's work, it has also been modified and heavily critiqued on account of a tendency toward proof-texting; for an outmoded history-of-religions approach, shown in comparing older myths with the New Testament; and for a predilection for fitting evidence into a unified theory,⁵³ which can seem "imperialistic."⁵⁴ Yet mimetic theory is also credited as a cause of renewed interest in the atonement, with interdisciplinary appeal.⁵⁵ With reference to the Corinthian epistles, Robert Hamerton-Kelly has capably shown Girardian

⁵⁰ See Girard, *I See Satan Fall*, 19–31, 103–36.

⁵¹ Girard, *Bouc émissaire*, 259–76, especially 265–66 for the opposition he establishes between the operation of the reign of God on one hand and those of Satan and the world at large on the other, in a conflict that resembles that of the Christus Victor view. See Boersma, *Violence*, 146–47, for a précis of Christus Victor elements in Girard's soteriological thought, which Boersma otherwise classifies as a form of moral influence theory.

⁵² See for example Hamerton-Kelly, *Sacred Violence*; Swartley, ed., *Violence Renounced*; and Williams, *The Bible*.

⁵³ Heyman, *Power of Sacrifice*, 153–54. Boersma ("Response to T. Scott Daniels," 155) adds the further critique that Girard so emphasizes the *revelation* of the cyclical problem of mimesis that redemption is watered down to mere knowledge or awareness, a "quasi-Gnostic" argument with "no eye for participation in Christ."

⁵⁴ Hamerton-Kelly, "A Girardian Interpretation," 65.

⁵⁵ Eddy and Beilby, "The Atonement," 10.

theory to apply to themes such as sacrifice (1 Cor 10:14–22, with idolatry as the epitome of mimesis, harnessing the desire to command the power of the god to whom sacrifices are made), the call to imitate Paul as he imitates Christ (4:16, 11:1), and the factional division caused by the scandal of the cross and its rejection.⁵⁶

It is contended here that Girard's mimetic theory is useful to the extent that it illuminates a text *as well as the socio-rhetorical or discursive worlds that engendered or are represented in that text*. Well used, it should reveal more than previously unconnected or underappreciated facets of the biblical text itself, but also something of the rivalry between the text's discourse and any textual or social discourses it may oppose. The standout feature of Hamerton-Kelly's application of Girardian theory to the Corinthian context is that the call to imitate the crucified Christ means sharing in his status as victim, in that this calling counteracts the drive toward mimetic rivalry that characterizes the Roman system of patronage and its insurgency within the Corinthian church.⁵⁷ Paul's invitation is audacious because it entails *downward* mimesis, toward the imitation of a victim, the personal and corporate identification with a loser in the Roman social system, when the norm of imperial society was to imitate and seek the favour of the elite. In Philippians 3, Paul focuses not on ecclesiastical-patronal factionalism but the character of citizenship, modelled around the expected arrival of Christ as saviour (and, implicitly, as *princeps*). Mimetic theory clarifies the manner in which this focus responds to Rome's conceptualizations of its empire and colonies such as Philippi. Above, the motif of victory threaded through the ritual of triumph and Paul's upside-down evocation

⁵⁶ Hamerton-Kelly, "A Girardian Interpretation," 67–68, 71; "by rejecting the cross, the Corinthians had no means of transforming the [factional] violence; they were in a sacrificial crisis" of *suppressed* violence (68).

⁵⁷ Hamerton-Kelly, "A Girardian Interpretation," 69.

of it; in what follows, the empire's imaging of itself and its ruler is exposed, beginning in the setting of the gladiatorial arena, in order to show how Paul imitated and adapted elements of that discourse⁵⁸ to shape the relationship of the "citizens of heaven" to their saviour.

Contingency and Mimesis: Theopolitical Realms and Rulers Shaped by Enemies. The Roman gladiatorial arena reveals much about the way in which Rome understood its place, and the role of its emperor, in holding authority over so many lives—and deaths—in the known world.⁵⁹ The arena offered a space for the empire to address and circumscribe the presence of its rivals and enemies. Officially, Rome and other ancient near eastern powers defined their domains by natural, physical boundaries: the Nile and Danube in Persia's case;⁶⁰ the Nile and Euphrates (Gen 15:18) or the Red Sea, the Mediterranean, Euphrates, and Negev (Exod 23:31, Josh 1:4, Ps 72:8, Zech 9:10) for biblical Israel; and the Atlantic "Outer Sea," the Red Sea, and the Mediterranean for Pompey's Rome.⁶¹ But Rome also understood its domain to be framed by threatening barbarians and unknown dangers. In a correlate to the function of imperial temples as

⁵⁸ Concerning discursive rivalry, Heyman (*Power of Sacrifice*, 162) has already offered a critical application of Girardian theory to the post-apostolic church, demonstrating that the conceptualization of Jesus as both the leader of God's kingdom/imperium *and* its sacrificial victim provided a rich basis for the development of Christian martyrological discourse; he selects Girard as a conversation partner, Heyman explains (97, 151–52), precisely because Girard argues that the New Testament does *not* represent Jesus in this way.

⁵⁹ Dodge ("Amusing the Masses," 248–49) observes that the gladiatorial games began as funerary tributes; yet Potter ("Entertainers," 330–31), argues idealistically that the games were neither sacrifices nor about death, but that their intended purpose was to model "courage in life" in the context of single combat. Potter painstakingly distinguishes gladiatorial contests from executions (e.g., by exposing condemned criminals to attack by wild animals, 331–32), but death remained a common denominator in many forms of amphitheatrical entertainment.

⁶⁰ Recalling Plutarch's accounting of Persian scope and sovereignty, cited earlier, in *Life of Alexander* XXXVI: "the greatness of their empire and the universality of their sway" (τὸ μέγεθος τῆς ἀρχῆς καὶ τὸ κυριεύειν ἅπαντων).

⁶¹ Plutarch, *Life of Pompey* XXXVIII.2–3 (in which the reason for Pompey's later military expeditions is to "connect the circuit" of earlier conquests). Israel was only a minor power in the ancient near east, but the ambitions of the Davidic dynasty pointed in an imperial direction, as in the nervous characterization of lands beyond the Euphrates as places of aggression, punishment, and exile (1 Kgs 14:15, Isa 7:20, 18:7).

reminders of Rome's sacral ownership of its cities, the gladiatorial arena illustrates this nervousness, symbolically reversing Rome's geopolitical scenario by ringing spectators around re-enactments of historic and mythic battles, ritually surrounding chaotic elements with imperial civilization:

Rome saw itself as an embattled island of civilisation surrounded by a savage world. The arena turned this world view inside out. Here the savage world was surrounded and contained by Rome. There at their feet they could see the brutality of the wild world beyond the frontiers. It was a living demonstration of the power of Rome and people who challenged that power were thrown into the savage space beyond the frontiers. On an arena day that savage space was down there on the sand. Criminals, including Christians who refused to acknowledge the emperor as divine, had to be shown to be powerless in the face of the savagery that only Rome could tame.⁶²

Matches between individual combatants were excitingly unpredictable, but ultimately Rome decided the outcome of the larger, deliberately staged contests: the empire provided the weapons and could take them away again, keeping memorable encounters with foes such as the Carthaginians and Britons couched safely in history.⁶³ The games promoted the Julio-Claudian empire's unity, but their mythological dramatization hammered home the emperor's authority over the lives and deaths of enemies of the state.⁶⁴ Geopolitically and symbolically, Rome mapped its ἀρχή⁶⁵ relative to its

⁶² As observed by presenter Terry Jones in *Gladiators: The Brutal Truth* (BBC/Time-Life, 2000). No further reference was credited there or in the transcript, but for support one could look to Hadley's re-articulation ("Ascension of Mars," 190) of Walter Wink's work, inasmuch as the self-serving goal of what Wink calls the *myth of redemptive violence* is "to establish order over a seemingly threatening chaos." In Girardian theory, the arena could easily be seen as a structural representation of the scapegoat mechanism. Also see Salmon's focus on order and the rule of law as principal attributes of the οἰκουμένη, in comparison with the lawlessness of the barbarian regions without, in *Nemesis*, 33.

⁶³ See for example the description of Claudius' re-enactment of the storming of a British town, with the emperor himself in the lead role, in Meijer, *The Gladiators*, 37, 178. The arena also marked the boundary between criminals and/or slaves, with their humiliation and deaths on display, and the law-abiding spectators, in Meijer, 148–49.

⁶⁴ Meijer, *The Gladiators*, 33, 152–54; Potter ("Entertainers," 332) extends that control to the entire world, demonstrated through the variety of animals employed in amphitheatrical executions.

⁶⁵ As noted in chapter four, Plutarch used ἀρχή to indicate the Persian Empire (*Life of Alexander* 17, 34.1, 69.2–5), Macedonian dominion (27.5–7; *Life of Pompey* 34.5), or the Roman consolidation of power

opponents, its rivals, in much the same manner as it understood lordship—that is, as a relational concept in which the power of the enemy determined the greatness of the mastery shown in defeating and overruling them.⁶⁶ This was the principal way in which the empire’s story of mastery made sense to its narrators.

One of the observations made in chapter five was that Paul presented Christ’s sovereignty as contingent, as though its scope and duration (up to the point at which he returns his regency to the Father) depended on the presence of enemies: “For He must reign as sovereign until he has put all his enemies under his feet” (1 Cor 15:25). That is, the continuing existence of enemies provides at least part of the purpose and dimensions of Christ’s triumph and reign. But the declaration positions Christ rhetorically in the same situation that Caesar occupied in Roman geopolitical ideology, as sovereign of an enemy-shaped realm—in the Philippian context, an imperial figure who comes to the rescue of his oppressed colony of that realm. This is a formidable disclosure. A proleptic implication that Paul may intend is that Christ’s sovereignty will ultimately displace all empires, including Caesar’s. The shape of Paul’s master story is still cruciform, but its ending resembles Rome’s story of mastery, which could only be told in terms of the conquest of enemies. Yes, the ultimate goal is God’s sovereignty as an absolute—“that God may be all in all”—but the unintended ramification is that this final state emerges from one that is delimited just like that of the empire. There is a mimetic character to the

throughout the Macedonian οἰκουμένη. Also see Appian’s repeated deployment of ἀρχ- terms in his Preface (e.g., “all are under Roman rule,” πάντων ἀρχουσι Ῥωμαίοι), with respect to Carthaginian imperial power (ἀρχῆς) and ambition to rule (ἀρχεῖν) over vanquished Rome, and Rome’s reassertion of power (ἀρχή) in *Roman History* 6.15.98, 8.7.42.

⁶⁶ As described in chapter four.

discursive competition between these narratives: the teleological end of Paul's story unfolds in imitation of Rome.⁶⁷

This problem of the conquest-dependent state also applies to Christ's own status as "Lord," as the *master* in Paul's master story. Paul's rhetorical use of Psalm 110 claims that "Christ is Lord *because he has defeated God's enemies*," in keeping with some of that text's other New Testament applications, but by no means all of them.⁶⁸ In other citations of the psalm, the narrational/rhetorical point of the citation is the Lord-to-Lord relationship it illustrates, not the subjection of enemies. Nor is this the New Testament's only premise from which to assert that Christ is Lord: for example, his lordship is also understood to originate in his resurrection, as in Acts 2:36.

But Paul's argument does seem to allow for the disquieting possibility that Christ's lordship is not absolute, that it is *as contingent as* Roman lordship is (i.e., in such a way as to be at risk⁶⁹), because it is partially *contingent upon* the Roman concept as a metaphor for the manner in which Christ rules. This metaphorical contingency was evidently not a problem for Paul and his Corinthian audience: it was enough to state that there was "one God, the Father...and one Lord Jesus Christ." Even if the sovereignty of Christ had yet to play out on the field of history, the God for whom Christ reigned as regent, YHWH the κύριος—despite the apparent superiority of the gods of rival nations—had an uncontestable status. For those who view Paul's historical and textual worlds from

⁶⁷ Neither Girard nor his interpreters appear to apply mimetic theory to whole narratives or the competition between them, although the approach is implied throughout Heyman's *Power of Sacrifice*. Mimesis is usually presented for study within the world of the text, but a socio-rhetorical view of mimesis requires consideration of rivalry on a larger scale.

⁶⁸ As reviewed earlier, Boyd's case that Psalm 110 is *always* employed to that end ("Christus Victor View," 31, italics his) is slightly overstated.

⁶⁹ Boyd (*Satan and the Problem*, 14–16, 145–77, 312n36) has explored the risk to God's sovereignty (i.e., his authority) in the process of Boyd's own conflict-driven "warfare worldview" in Scripture. He does not appear to address the concomitant risk to Christ's status as Lord specific to that motif of victory and potential defeat.

later theopolitical vantage points, however, this assurance may not be sufficient. To frame this issue of mimesis and contingency in terms suggested by Schüssler Fiorenza, the structure and character of Paul's master story is *kyriarchal*.⁷⁰ *In its title and its terms, Paul's master story is no less kyriarchal than is Rome's story of mastery.* It is the story of a κύριος, a "lord" or "master," who is elevated over all of his subjected and dismantled enemies.

But if the name of the master confessed at the centre of the master narrative is the crucified and resurrected Jesus, the one who made himself obedient even to death, rather than a Roman imperial lord and saviour, then *Paul's gospel is good news in a way that Rome's story of mastery never intends to be. It saves in a manner that the imperial gospel never presumed to save.* There is a soteriological surplus⁷¹ to the story: its terms remain part of the imperial "not yet", but the way in which the apostle rephrases them points toward the "already" of redemption.

Citizenship Owed to a Resurrected Saviour. It is that moment of final redemption that Paul eagerly anticipates. The saviour whose arrival he expects has done something for his "colonies" that no Caesar ever did in advance of a parousia: he has died for them.

⁷⁰ Schüssler Fiorenza normally applies the *kyriarchal* label to societal structures that oppress in terms of race, class, and/or gender, or to a societal ethos, but her conceptualization of an "ekklēsia of wo/men," an imagined space for the egalitarian (thus the inclusive "wo/men," in *Power of the Word*, 69–70) interpretation of Scripture, implies that narratives and their interpretations can be kyriarchal, too; the perceived need for such a space is itself dictated by the pervasiveness of these kyriarchal narrative/interpretative norms. Her goal for the space is realistic: *ekklēsia* "is not a reversal of kyriarchal domination and subordination but a space that is 'already' and 'not yet.'" Similar to the way in which Richard Horsley has often characterized the early church (especially in Corinth) as a community *alternative* to those of the empire rather than expressly *counter-imperial*, Schüssler Fiorenza describes the *ekklēsia* as "the alternative—not the counter or anti-space—to empire." Worthwhile as that proposal is, its deliberate alterity could easily give way to disengagement, allowing contemporary readers to bypass the hard work of reconciling themselves to troubling biblical concepts such as this imperially contingent lordship.

⁷¹ Throughout *Christ and Empire*, Rieger speaks of a "christological surplus" at work in imperially influenced articulations of the atonement throughout the church's global history. That surplus is surely at work here, but so too is a *soteriological surplus*: it is not only *who Jesus is* but *what he is understood to have done* that echoes beyond the imperial chamber.

In addressing the Philippian Christians as citizens of heaven, Paul calls them further into the story by calling their attention to the character and actions of their heavenly first citizen.

Chapter five included Cilliers Breytenbach’s remark on the Greek cultural tradition of “dying for” an ideal, such as the πόλις—that is, dying to preserve the integrity of one’s city or principality.⁷² Rome, for its part in this tradition, had moved from republic to empire under commanders such as Julius and Augustus who were willing to risk their lives in battle to prove the victorious character of the Roman commonwealth and its leaders; even subsequent emperors who had little battlefield experience were ascribed traditionally military titles to perpetuate this soteriological image.⁷³ But the alternative πολίτευμα that Paul proposes here in Philippians 3 is one comprised of citizens for whom Christ, the σωτήρ Paul expects from heaven, won a victory precisely in his death and resurrection. Christ is coming to the defence (or rescue) of the πόλις as a collective; but in a reversal of Greco-Roman soteriological expectations, he had been crucified for them, for the colonial collective of individual citizens.⁷⁴ This colonial identity was familiar to the whole Philippian colony, as “the inhabitants of Philippi were considered to be living on Roman soil, somewhat in the way

⁷² Breytenbach (“The ‘For Us’ Phrases,” 173, cited critically in chapter five with regard to 1 Cor 15:3b), insisted that the idea of Christ dying “for our sins,” as in 1 Cor 15:3, requires a different logic than that of a death for the sake of the πόλις.

⁷³ As noted in chapter four with reference to titles, such as *imperator*, that were often granted by the military.

⁷⁴ The balance between ancient and contemporary concepts of collective and individual identity is hard to maintain here. Collins (*Power of Images*, 54) points out that the antonym of πολιτεύω—which along with πολίτευμα is unique to Philippians in the Pauline corpus—is “*idiōteuō*, ‘to live as a private individual,’ devoid of social responsibility and neglecting to fulfill the laws of society.” Πολίτευμα’s primary connotation of statehood causes Collins (55) to ask whether this represents Paul’s attempt to render the βασιλεία of God in Hellenistic terms.

that modern embassies are considered to be extraterritorial”;⁷⁵ but this is as much a theological claim as it is a political one. Philippi lived its colonial life as a protectorate of the emperor and the Roman gods. The Philippian Christians were to live in contrast as a protectorate of the Lord Jesus Christ, living out (πολιτεύεσθε) for all their worth the responsibilities of being their Lord’s citizens. Much as in 1 Cor 15:50–54, they had a powerful incentive for following through: the transformation and glorification of their bodies at their Lord’s arrival.

How were the Philippians expected to live in this way? Paul’s point is not to offer a political treatise, but a normative model for what citizenship should look like. The call in 1:27 to live ἀξίως τοῦ εὐαγγελίου τοῦ Χριστοῦ, “worthily of the gospel of Christ,” offers the first clue, reminding the audience whose story it is that they are performing, as though the sovereignty of the gospel is the territory to which they belong. The Christ-hymn provides another clue, functioning “as their ‘city charter.’”⁷⁶ If, like Paul, they rethink their Christian experience as citizenship, they will remember that they joined the colony through baptism, symbolically undergoing death as Jesus did; and if they look to Jesus as their Lord and Saviour in a framework in which he takes the place of the emperor, then they can also consider Jesus their first citizen, their victorious *princeps*, who has already been through Death’s domain, who through his Spirit enables them to face the prospect of following him even there without fear.⁷⁷ As early as 1:19, the Philippians learn that their own prayers and the Holy Spirit’s comfort together “give Paul an ‘eager expectation and hope’ of the glorification of Christ through Paul’s death. The

⁷⁵ Collins, *Power of Images*, 54.

⁷⁶ Gorman, *Apostle*, 419.

⁷⁷ At this juncture, the theopolitical soteriology advocated here begins to become compatible with Abelardian moral influence theory, in that Christ as *princeps* and son of God is an exemplary figure whose character and saving activity are inspirationally normative for those who follow him.

apostle describes this outcome as his σωτηρία, ‘salvation.’”⁷⁸ This is where Girardian mimesis begins to break down, where the mimicry of Roman citizenship changes keys: whether Paul or the Philippian Christians live or die, there will be glory to share, but the glorification is by and for Christ.

If Christ as Paul’s glorified saviour, lord, and first citizen has undergone and defeated Death, then the implications for facing suffering and death are profound, especially vis-à-vis the admission of human brokenness. The rescuing saviour knew pain, weakness, and humiliation in the context of his life and ministry, but he met them again in force on the cross.⁷⁹ As the late Madeleine L’Engle puts the question, “How is it that human beings find it easy and even, alas, pleasurable to hurt another human being? Jesus came to live with us to show us how to be human, truly human; and for this love he was betrayed, mocked, feared.”⁸⁰ She is probably wise to overlook the grim reality displayed in Jesus’ confrontation with human antagonists, namely that betrayal, mockery, and fear of enemies are also deeply human attributes. But those who let themselves be conformed to Christ find ways to participate in his way of being human: showing compassion to the destitute, disabled, and powerless, hospitality to the stranger and the refugee, love to the enemy, justice to the oppressed, and humility and fearlessness to those who bring death. Part of what the saviour has always saved his people from is the need to imitate the elite, the need to be powerful.⁸¹

⁷⁸ Oakes, “God’s Sovereignty,” 131.

⁷⁹ Best, *Second Corinthians*, 40: “The glory of God, which we expect to see in the ascended and exalted Christ, cannot be separated from that same glory revealed in the cross... For Paul a correlative of the recognition of human weakness is always the opportunity it gives to God.”

⁸⁰ L’Engle, in a section of her *Glorious Impossible*, entitled “The Mocking of Christ” (no pp.).

⁸¹ Vanier, *Becoming Human*, 46: “There is a lack of synchronicity between our society and people with disabilities. A society that honours only the powerful, the clever, and the winners necessarily belittles the weak. It is as if to say: to be human is to be powerful.”

Contemporary Theopolitical Reading Scenarios

Each of the scenarios that follow is intended to illustrate possibilities for negotiating problems of death, empire, and allegiance faced by North American Christians today. The first two scenarios present closely related challenges, beginning with the deliberate evocation and propagation of death in military capacities, then addressing the (mis)use of Scripture to justify the imperial deployment of those capacities. Additional scenarios are then suggested in passing, from the rhetorical use of victory-language in marketing, to the tasks of recovering narrative threads and assessing the role of a narrativel, theopolitical soteriology in the church. Much as Paul called Christians in Corinth and Philippi first to reflect upon the cruciform narrative into which they had been drawn and saved (and continued to be saved) from Death and other theopolitical powers, and then to continue to work out the implications of their salvation in the theopolitically charged settings of their colonial environments, so our participation in the same story might cause us to consider the theopolitical ramifications of that narrative in our postmodern environment. Each scenario calls for the sensitively handled recognition of a challenge, reflection upon the problem(s) it presents, and an opportunity for redirection, reassessing what it means in each context to imitate one's Lord and Saviour in doing as he did, continuing to dismantle Death, to bring light and life through the gospel (2 Tim 1:10). As Paul's theopolitics dealt with Death *en route* to the resurrection, the ultimate goal here is to infuse with *life* a theopolitics that addresses the deadly serious topics of empire and death.⁸² This is negotiation, not negation; it is

⁸² It is of course possible to overstate, to make automatic or overly facile, the association of imperial economics and politics with death. The empires of recent history have shown themselves capable of doing great humanitarian good, such as in efforts to alleviate the AIDS epidemic in Africa, in some cases acting to alleviate the oppressive consequences of their own actions or those of other geopolitical powers. It

intended as an act of loving service to the living God, the God who has always been, unlike his rivals, characterized as alive and at work in his people and his world.⁸³

Scenario 1: Wearing the Mantle of the Reaper. In contemporary Afghanistan, the United States has increasingly relied upon unmanned, remote-operated drones to target and destroy insurgents. These “hunter-killer” drones include the MQ-9 Reaper, a craft whose distant whine provokes “a fear that’s worse than dying” in those on the ground, according to one Pakistani doctor. President Obama has remarked that these drones are part of “a more targeted approach—one that strengthens our partners and dismantles terrorist networks without deploying large American armies.”⁸⁴ The logic behind this “targeted” strategy echoes the objective of *dismantling* enemies—a goal, as was argued earlier, that lends a contemporary currency to the rendering of καταργέω as *dismantle*.⁸⁵ Its language is more reserved than the avowed intentions of George W. Bush’s “global war on terror”;⁸⁶ that is, only “terrorist networks” are so dismantled, not

should also be noted that empire-critical study does lend itself to synchronic generalizations about empire, i.e., reading about YHWH’s “economy of life rather than the [Egyptian] imperial economy of death” (Claiborne and Haw, *Jesus for President*, 57) as a commentary on the role of contemporary empire, or reading current imperial practices “back into” the ancient-historical and textual worlds. When performed carefully with regard to both ancient and contemporary contexts, however, analogies involving the biblical depictions of empires—e.g., Egypt as a culture built on slavery and death/afterlife, Assyria and Babylon as agents characterized by arrogance and aggression, and Rome as an occupying force that imposed order and “peace” through war—are not inappropriate.

⁸³ G. E. Wright, *God Who Acts*, 84, contrasting YHWH with the Canaanite god Baal’s seasonally-limited life and activity.

⁸⁴ Smith, “Deadly Robots,” A27, quoting a speech made by Obama at the United Nations on September 23, 2010. Koring, “Deskbound Warriors,” A29, elaborates on the Reaper as a bigger version of the Predator drone armed with a larger payload of Hellfire missiles, and on the psychological effects of the war experienced by the drones’ remote operators.

⁸⁵ See the discussion in chapter five, at 1 Cor 15:24.

⁸⁶ Bush’s avowed purpose for the war, to “rid the world of evil,” received critical scorn from the likes of Albright, who calls the president’s hubristic goal “an impossible job” for mortals (*The Mighty*, 159–60); Northcott, *An Angel Directs*, 99; Bellah, “New American Empire,” 21–22; Budde, “Selling America,” 81; Boers, “Pastors, Prophets,” 166; and Daniel, “Empire’s Sleepy Embrace,” 182. For an opposing view, see Frum and Perle, *An End to Evil*; this conversation receives more extensive attention in Lowe, “*Pax et Securitas*” (forthcoming). President Obama has distanced himself from that war as such, while supporting its offensives: “The ‘global war on terrorism’ is over and calling it that was a bad idea, President Barack Obama’s counterterrorism adviser said Thursday. The phrase, coined by former president George W.

the tactic of terrorism itself. But if one examines Obama's statement and the strategy to which it refers, one finds some untested and disturbing assumptions: implicitly, the strategy assumes that dismantling or destroying enemies is a positive way in which to strengthen allies, and that increasing the distance between victor and victim somehow reduces the dehumanizing trauma of warfare in the lives of soldiers.

Collateral to the haunting psychological damage inflicted in the lives of combatants and non-combatants alike is the theological cost incurred by this "targeted" strategy—not just that concomitant with visiting the trauma of death upon the victims, but the added price of assuming the mantle of Death (via the drone's title, "Reaper") while dismantling enemies with Hellfire missiles, courtesy of a U.S. Air Force that has recently operated with an advertising slogan of "Above All." At one level these are mere (!) names, but their use signals that drones are not the only items being deployed. At work here is a rhetorical exploitation of death and geopolitical sovereignty. The state that sponsors and boasts the capability of bringing such deadly force leaves itself open to critique for that practise, and that critique could be informed by the way in which Paul confronted Rome's dominant ideology with his own theopolitical gospel.

How might our orbit around the master story of Paul's gospel begin to shape such a critique? If we as Christians confess Christ and his story to be the centre of our moral, ethical, ecclesial, and sociopolitical lives, then we can offer an "orbital perspective" that differs from those of the other discourses that draw attention in our society. The first facet of this critique, then, could manifest as an increased *attentiveness to the content and presentation of the news* of domestic and international activities of various governments

Bush...enraged many of his critics who argued that it was impossible to wage war on a tactic (or a noun)." (Koring, "War on Terror," A1).

and agencies. The manner in which news and advertising media frame⁸⁷ information is important: what appears to be unequivocally “good news” for one people may prove upon closer inspection to be a tragedy for another. The second facet could be the *questioning of one’s own loyalties*: if entering heavenly citizenship through baptism frees Christians to serve the world in the gospel’s proclamation and celebration, securing people individually and corporately “from the power of death and from all the lesser powers and authorities which, in the name of death, purport to reign in this world,”⁸⁸ then that change would naturally inform a protest against the sponsorship and export of death.⁸⁹ The third facet could take the form of *pressing governments toward less violent alternatives* to warfare, such as the cleverly phrased practice of *just policing*, which has been commended as a middle ground for advocates of just-war theory and pacifism.⁹⁰ A fourth possible facet, *faithfully and actively seeking completely nonviolent responses*, might be suggested, though it would require a broader theological basis than 1 Corinthians 15 and Philippians 2–3.⁹¹ Governments may need to continue to see war as a necessary evil to protect their sovereign interests; followers of Jesus do not necessarily

⁸⁷ For a helpful comparison between the way in which news media “frame” or “reframe” news and the narrational framing of traumatic events within the New Testament gospel, ending with a call toward a compassionate, communal re-accounting of violent news, see Mitchell, “Seeing through the Drama.”

⁸⁸ Stringfellow, *Private and Public*, 31–32; cf. 67.

⁸⁹ A related protest could be lodged against sociopolitical and economic practises that perpetuate injustice (whether foreign or domestic) as well as practises that lead to both injustice and death, such as the inadequate monitoring of the mining of precious stones and metals in the Democratic Republic of Congo and other regions of Africa. This pairing of death and injustice is not to say that any death is automatically unjust, but to invite reflection and (where possible) change in policies that in some way promote death. A text such as Marshall’s *Beyond Retribution* epitomizes helpful reflection in this manner, with regard to moving from retributive to restorative justice.

⁹⁰ As in Schlabach, “Just Policing,” 3–22, along with the other essays in the same volume. As Schlabach (13) notes, pacifists who protested the post-9/11 “war on terrorism” were on unstable footing because in the course of lobbying “for less violent responses, they called for alternative, international, judicial responses to terrorism that would still require some military or police force to apprehend the criminals.”

⁹¹ There is some debate as to the degree to which a cruciform life entails nonretaliation and the limits that may be responsibly placed around hospitality, as noted by Boersma (*Violence*, 178 and nn82–83) concerning his disagreement with Gorman’s proposal in *Cruciformity*.

fall under such restrictions and are thus potentially free to encourage their neighbours, their churches, and even their governments to seek violence-free relationships. Such leadership could be expressed morally and/or financially: the current climate of post-hegemonic, global recession exhibits both an opportunity for increased accountability, administered through peer review and utilizing the fear of losing international investments.⁹²

How are this scenario and critique informed by the theopolitical soteriology nascent in these pages? Given the debt that this soteriology owes to the Christus Victor motif, the international orientation of the scenario and response may come as a surprise, as international jurisprudence, in relation to the atonement, often develops *pace* Hugo Grotius (1583–1645). In Grotian theory, there is “no particular institution entrusted with the task to punish sovereign rulers” who overstep their mandate of pursuing justice; while war is an option, alternatives such as sanctions or simple admonishment are preferred for upholding international justice, ideally with clemency.⁹³ Christ’s exemplary death and resurrection make possible an “enhanced moral standard,” above that of conventional law, for Christians working in the international arena.⁹⁴ But the issues of allegiance, hegemony, and the propagation of death in pursuit of victorious war anchor this reading scenario to the theopolitical soteriology suggested in the course of interpreting 1

⁹² See Carmichael, “The G20’s Modest Task,” B11: “A system that relies on moral suasion isn’t perfect. But it’s more than was in place before the financial crisis.”

⁹³ Stumpf, *Grotian Theology*, 227–28.

⁹⁴ Stumpf (*Grotian Theology*, 98–99) elaborates: “It is not simply the fear of punishment and the hope for rewards in eternity which induce man to adhere to God’s laws. It would not even be possible to adhere to God’s law if God had not opened the way to this by the atonement for the sins of mankind...Man is therefore in need of external help in order to be rescued from the vicious circle of perpetual sin.” Certainly there is common ground between this articulation of Grotian theology and the present theopolitical soteriology, evident in the context of rescue from the combined powers of sin and death as they manifest in oppressive geopolitical ambitions, and even extending to the deliberative rhetoric that pervades both Paul’s tone in 1 Corinthians 15 and the balance of hope and fear in Grotian theonomics.

Corinthians 15 and the ancillaries above. So does the fifth potential facet of the critique above: *considering one's own life expendable in the pursuit of justice*. Dying for the sake of others is the utmost application of finishing a life of steadfast, purposeful work for the Lord (1 Cor 15:58). As William Stringfellow puts it, the Christian's freedom to serve means that "he is engaged in the wholesale expenditure of his life...he is not threatened by the power of death either over his own life or over the rest of the world." So the most characteristic place to find him is serving (and potentially dying) among those known as his enemies.⁹⁵ This is what the reconstruction of the church's role in the face of imperial power could begin to look like: unmasking death-dealing practices at any cost, and dismantling them whenever possible.

Scenario 2: "To Deliver Their Soul from Death"? But what happens when the empire itself marshals the resources of the church for its own ends? When an empire rips images from Scripture to image itself and its enemies, it displaces the allegiances of those who have committed themselves to the biblical narrative and the Lord who inhabits and owns that narrative. That is, readers within the empire will have trouble telling the difference between gospels—between Paul's master story, their own state's story of mastery, and the ways in which each story invites their trust.⁹⁶ If the empire has found a route by which to colonize components of the biblical narrative, it can be more difficult for readers to discern God's presence there in the textual world, as well as in their own world and their own lives.

⁹⁵ Stringfellow, *Private and Public*, 42–43.

⁹⁶ Stringfellow's comments (*Private and Public*, 11) on the brief post-WWII religious revival that afforded "a benediction for ascendant American power and wealth in the midst of the world's poverty, impotence, and want" are the more convicting for their post-9/11 applicability. The problem Stringfellow does not directly anticipate is the imperial re-cooption of the conceptual trappings of the gospel itself: if many of an empire's leaders and constituents buy into its rhetorical use of scriptural images, then the empire does not need to reclaim the imperial use of the word *gospel*, for many of its people will believe the gospel of Christ and the story of their empire to be coextensive.

The reading scenario that best illustrates this imperial cooption of biblical imagery is a theopolitical, discursive self-portrayal that has emerged from the United States since September 11, 2001.⁹⁷ This discourse adds another story to a foundation of American “civil religion,” a narrative tradition that has historically been well versed in the manipulation of biblical and cultural symbols, from the portrayal of the Americas as the “New World” and the “Promised Land” to that of the Soviet Union as the “Evil Empire.”⁹⁸ After 9/11, however, the polemical tone of that civil religion intensified markedly. President Bush’s speeches reproduced powerful motifs from Scripture and hymnody. Bush sampled language from the prologue of John’s Gospel to cast America as a messiah in place of Jesus: “‘This ideal of America is the hope of all mankind... That hope still lights our way. And the light shines in the darkness. And the darkness will not overcome it. May God bless America.’”⁹⁹ He also spoke allusively of the U.S. as the Good Samaritan, affirmed that there was “‘power, wonder-working power, in the goodness and idealism and faith of the American people,” and claimed for his country in the present the role God promised to post-exilic Israel—to say “to the captives, ‘come out,’ and to those in darkness, ‘be free.’”¹⁰⁰ These statements image the United States as a messianic nation, an unambiguously “good” force for eradicating evil—all idolatrous

⁹⁷ The use of biblical imagery has been considerably more nuanced during the Obama Administration than it was under that of his predecessor, but there are sufficient commonalities to demonstrate a contemporary, cohesive, theopolitical discourse—a manner in which an empire speaks theologically about itself—very roughly paralleling the cohesive socio-rhetorical discourse of late-republican and early imperial Rome that has been suggested repeatedly in the present work. On Obama’s nuancing, see his “‘Call to Renewal’ Keynote Address,” June 28, 2006, accessed November 12, 2010, at <http://obamaspeeches.com/081-Call-to-Renewal-Keynote-Address-Obama-Speech.htm>, also cited in Lowe, “*Pax et Securitas*.”

⁹⁸ For synopses of biblical images used in American “millennial civil religion,” especially with regard to apocalypticism in the Cold War and post-9/11 eras, see Jewett and Lawrence, *Captain America*, 131–48, and throughout Dyrness, *How Does America*; again, as noted in Lowe, “*Pax et Securitas*.”

⁹⁹ Chapman, “Imperial Exegesis,” 91–92, quoting Bush’s words from September 11, 2002. Chapman points out that Bush places the American messianic victory in the *future*, displacing John’s setting of Jesus’ incarnation in *history*.

¹⁰⁰ The first two examples are as quoted in Chapman, “Imperial Exegesis,” 95–96; for a critique of the position of strength implied in Bush’s use of Isa 49:9, see Northcott, *An Angel Directs*, 7–9, 12.

and/or blasphemous claims, but couched as conscientious applications of Scripture for the shaping of national identity and responsibility.

Additional examples come not from remarks made *by* the president but from updates given *to* him regarding the Iraq War. In 2003, Defence Secretary Donald Rumsfeld began presenting to Bush intelligence briefs with cover sheets that featured scenes of military progress and liberation, captioned with biblical quotations that have been described as “militant” and “bellicose.”¹⁰¹ As with the rhetorical examples already offered in the current reading scenario, these images should not be taken as representative of American executive *policy*, but as indicative of a theopolitical vocabulary that clearly informs the worldview of some of the world’s most influential leaders. In the case of these images, Paul’s re-appropriation of Rome’s theopolitical imagery can help postmodern North American readers to recognize the effects of that process operating in reverse, when a contemporary superpower co-opts biblical images into its civic religious lexicon.

When the story of the images first broke, it drew attention to the pairings of photos and Scripture as proof of Rumsfeld’s manipulation of his president, and on their potential to offend Muslims in particular (implying a polarizing “holy war” in a primarily Islamic geopolitical region) and other non-evangelical viewers in general.¹⁰² The less obvious impact is in the rhetorical nature of the biblical captions themselves. Soldiers,

¹⁰¹ So labelled in an article by the Agence France Presse, dated May 18, 2009; last accessed at www.alternet.org/world/140077/ on November 13, 2010.

¹⁰² See Draper, “And He Shall Be Judged,” www.gq.com/news-politics/newsmakers/200905/donald-rumsfeld-administration-peers-detractors, accessed November 12, 2010. Draper admits that the cover sheets were not Rumsfeld’s idea but that of Major General Glen Shaffer, a ranking intelligence official who, as “a Christian, deemed the biblical passages more suitable” than other cover-sheet alternatives when the death toll of U.S. soldiers began to rise; but Draper insists that “the sheer cunning of pairing unsentimental intelligence with religious righteousness” was Rumsfeld’s “signature,” the more so because he could officially deny authorship of the cover sheets if asked.

holding their machine guns while praying, are subtitled with the words, “Here I am Lord, Send Me” (Isa 6:8) and 1 Chr 16:11 (“Seek the Lord and His strength”). Isa 26:2, “Open the gates that the righteous nation may enter, The nation that keeps faith,” functions as the legend for an image of U.S. tanks rolling through the Hands of Victory— Hussein’s own triumphal arch, its crossed swords cast from the weapons of soldiers killed in the Iran-Iraq War. Collaged photos showing the toppling of Saddam’s statue bear the descriptor of Ps 33:16–19: “The king is not saved by a mighty army...the eye of the LORD is on those who fear Him, On those who hope for his loving kindness, To deliver their soul from death.”¹⁰³

These pairings of biblical and photographic images offer a richly layered view of post-9/11 American civil religion, with various motifs and motives on display. Juxtaposed with the devotion shown by praying soldiers is the questionable ethic of harnessing prayer as a potent visual stimulus. The hubristic assumption of the role of the “righteous nation” is matched by the graphic symbolism of driving an army through the enemy’s own triumphal arch. The curious use of Psalm 33 depends in large part upon the sympathies of the reader, functioning either as a devoutly un-conflicted trust in *both* the LORD *and* one’s own army, or as a wry commentary on the manner in which the subjects are delivered from death. Above yet another collage of soldiers and tanks, Isa 5:28 reads, “Their arrows are sharp, all their bows are strung; their horses’ hoofs seem like flint, their

¹⁰³ Other examples include Ps 139:9–10 (“If I rise on the wings of the dawn...”) positioned over a fighter jet, poised to take off from an aircraft carrier; Eph 6:13 (“Therefore put on the full armor of God...”) above a tank; Prov 16:3 (“Commit to the Lord whatever you do...”) with a soldier armed at his post; Josh 1:9 (“...for the Lord your God will be with you wherever you go”) flanked by images of soldiers and military vehicles in action; 1 Pet 2:15 (“It is God’s will that by doing good you should silence the ignorant talk of foolish men”) over Saddam Hussein; and the “writing on the wall” passage from Dan 5, which describes Hussein’s palace, shown occupied by the U.S. military. Images available at www.gq.com/news-politics/newsmakers/donald-rumsfeld-pentagon-papers, accessed November 13, 2010. Quotations of Scripture are cited here in brief, but otherwise as they appear there.

chariot wheels are like a whirlwind”; again, the mystery is how deep the reader’s exegesis (of both the text and its deployment) is intended to go. Perhaps Isa 5:28 is only intended as a proof-text about the power of an army, an appropriated citation that derives its rhetorical potency from being a piece of holy writ. But in its original context, the army is that of unspecified nations,¹⁰⁴ summoned by God to serve as tools with which to discipline his people. They are characterized as fulfilling this role unknowingly, but eagerly, as invasion falls within their imperial goals; they are the “bad guys” in the story, made to serve a redemptive (but not necessarily “good”) purpose. It is a bizarre exegetical phenomenon to see a reluctant empire, then so bent on eradicating evil, identifying with empires that so eagerly brought death and destruction as (unwitting) disciplinary instruments of YHWH. But in the historical analysis of the unravelling of the liberation/occupation of Iraq, this association of the U.S. with an overzealous, death-bringing empire will require additional assessment, too.

What kinds of tentative questions might be prompted by these appropriations of Scripture? This question itself is bound to be divisive, as Bush was such an outspoken Christian that his faith became a controversially rhetorical tool: many U.S. Christians continue to trust his integrity and (by extension) the way in which he employed his faith and his Bible in the political sphere.¹⁰⁵ Of the many ways in which one could carefully address the sensitivity of this issue, then, the first question might be to *ask how one might recognize and call attention to abuses of Scripture and promote an atmosphere of*

¹⁰⁴ As cited in the previous chapter, see Eidevall, *Prophecy and Propaganda*, 24–25, on Isa 5:26–30 as a prologue—in which the identity of the invading nation(s) is left purposely vague—to the “discourse on empires” of Isa 7–48.

¹⁰⁵ See Singer, *President of Good and Evil*, 91–93, 98–99, 101–2, who admits the appeal of Bush’s rhetoric, while questioning the appropriateness of his personal religious creed as determining public policy: “It matters to us all because Bush’s faith...may make him more certain that he is right than he should be” (98).

accountability in which Scripture can be read in the public sphere, but *in which readings can also be criticized constructively*, without sowing unnecessary discord. The Word of the Lord who brought Israel out of Egypt should never be held captive to a particular geopolitical, ideological, and/or theological agenda; but when that irony does come to pass, taking Scripture back may prove to be a matter of digging deeper into the same sacred, renewable resources that seem to have been wrongfully exploited.

The imperially savvy mode in which (it has been argued above) Paul interpreted his Bible offers a further clue about how one might possibly proceed here. Isaiah is rich in empire-critical texts, and not just the ones that Paul himself mined. Speaking primarily to those who hoped to ally themselves with the power of Egypt to keep their homeland secure from other imperial threats, God reminded his people that “the Egyptians are mortals and not God; their horses are flesh and not spirit” (Isa 31:3). References like this can counterbalance the weight of imagery like the horses’ hoofs of flint in 5:28. They do not necessarily belittle or fully demythologize imperial rule, but when employed carefully, they have the potency to expose the power of empires for the limited thing that it is. A second, exemplary question would be to inquire as to *how one might best locate and tactfully employ biblical resources that deconstruct imperial abuses of power*, whether literary, military, socioeconomic, theopolitical, or any combination thereof. An empire’s power can indeed be captivating. It can liberate and occupy other nations, dictate the direction of global economies, and colonize the imagination; it occupies a category that seems superhuman. Like any audience, it may find permeable points in the biblical story through which to enter that textual world and colonize its images. But the victory it appropriates from that world has already been won: Jesus came, Jesus died (and

rose!), Jesus conquered. The empire's horses are flesh, not spirit. Its forces can bring death, and can certainly save lives when used in humanitarian capacities, but they cannot bring new life to the dead.

An additional, more personal question that may help to resist an empire's colonizing power is to ask *how we might recall our decisions to trust in Christ as subjective beginnings of our own respective stories of salvation from Death and death-dealing powers*. If the event of becoming a Christian is articulated as the moment (or series of moments) at which one "confronts and confesses" the presence and power of death in one's life and world, then this amounts to a crisis of exposure to death.¹⁰⁶ But it is there that one also begins to practice seeking God's presence: out of the crisis comes a pledge of allegiance, not to death's power or the power of any agency that brings death, but to the Lord who overcame death in the resurrection, "according to the Scriptures," in such a way that no other power can counterfeit.

The loving, allegiance-empowering presence of God in Christ as one who has already undergone and triumphed over death can be understood to be greater and more enduring "than any of death's threats."¹⁰⁷ The prior experience of death's anxiety (or sting¹⁰⁸) represents "the concrete and profound reign of death," trumped by "the personal and decisive exposure to the presence of God which subdues death and ends death's reign once and for all." As one matures in Christian discipleship over time, through encounters with Scripture and promptings of the Spirit, one may come to see more facets of Death's

¹⁰⁶ Borrowing here and throughout this paragraph from Stringfellow, *Private and Public*, 64–65.

¹⁰⁷ Again, quoting Stringfellow, *Private and Public*, 64–65; the focus on Jesus' death as an assurance that believers will not have to undergo death *alone*, as Jesus himself did, is that of Finger, "Christus Victor," 105.

¹⁰⁸ Remembering the point from chapter five on death's sting-as-anxiety, made by Hall, *Cross in Our Context*, 214.

reign exposed. For individuals and families, this may involve the struggle to recognize one's own unwitting complicity in imperial practises that extend that reign. This struggle could entail the re-examination of previous choices made as consumers, as small (and as vital) as learning the standards for ethical labour under which one's coffee and chocolate were produced, what one's government's role was in the process, and what small role one could play in helping to effect any necessary change. At the national level, the mighty army that sets out to deliver others from death may end up furthering injustice and death, and those who sponsor such death-dealing activities may find that repentance is an ongoing process, a daily recommitment to work for Christ's reign rather than that of Death.

Scenario 3: Just Do It? North Americans are accustomed to the blurring of distinctions between political, cultural, and corporate sectors of life. They are used to seeing their many choices as consumers—beginning with what they eat, drink, wear, drive, view, smell, hear, play, and communicate, extending to the formation of their very identities as diverse individuals—branded.¹⁰⁹ The subtle genius of branding in this context is that it becomes, in Naomi Klein's words, "more about ownership than representation."¹¹⁰ Ownership, in this fashion, can be stamped on more than just individual bodies and selves; collectives, from sports franchises to nations and their policies, can effectively be marketed and branded as well.¹¹¹ This branding can cross over

¹⁰⁹ See the disillusionment in Klein, *No Logo*, especially her fifth chapter ("Patriarchy Gets Funky: The Triumph of Identity Marketing"), 107–24; her fellow activists in "identity politics" turned out not to be "fighting the system, or even subverting it. When it came to the vast new industry of corporate branding, they were feeding it" (113).

¹¹⁰ Klein, *No Logo*, 124.

¹¹¹ The suggestion of a future in which the Bush-era security state gives way to the incorporated "US-Global" is one of the more effective touches in Roberts' dystopia, *Homeland*—especially because it accounts for such strategies as "selling" the need for preemptive war in Iraq to the American populace. Of course, national identity can in turn be appropriated for its evocative marketing power, as in the

into something very close to a religious sense, too: Klein is not exaggerating by much when she refers to Nike's flagship store in Manhattan as "a temple, where the swoosh [logo] is worshiped as both art and heroic symbol."¹¹²

Of the many possible questions and challenges that the current hermeneutical project might raise with regard to this issue, each appropriate to the sociopolitical contexts of Paul's various audiences in our own day, a few present themselves as particularly fitting for Eurocentric and/or "Americentric" settings. One such question with which one might respond is *whether the members of Christ's body recognize a brand when they see it*. Given the aggression and subtlety of contemporary marketing practices, what is at issue is not traditional, *lectorial* literacy, for when the saleable item is *the brand itself* as an image, a set of desirable attributes, or an activity (e.g., "W.W.J.D.?"), no words may be needed. Rather, this would seem to involve "emptorial" or *consumer* literacy—though refusing to be identified primarily as a "consumer" is also a choice to encourage—and developing the ability to see past the marketing mask, to learn whether what is being sold is truly good or merely a bill of goods.

In Nike's case, the corporate empire has appropriated a Greco-Roman name to announce such virtues as strength, honour, speed, and success, bypassing Paul's own appropriation of the Roman imperial ideal. But behind the logo of the "swoosh," the athletic virtues, and the company's appeal to oppressed groups as "ready-made market

advertisements that caption a cup of Tim Horton's coffee with the words, "True Patriot Love," or commercials proclaiming Cadillac cars to be the essence of "Life, liberty, and the pursuit."

¹¹² Klein (*No Logo*, 56) notes that the power of the "swoosh" as the emblem of athletic honour extends to its popularity as a tattoo, within the ranks of the company employees and buyers alike. This is what makes credible the thought experiment in "guerrilla capitalism" that is Max Berry's novel, *Jennifer Government*: his near-future premise has employees taking their company as a surname (e.g., "John Nike"), losing that name when fired, killing random owners of a new product to raise the product's "street cred," feeling comfortable only in "USA countries" where "American" is spoken and Coca-Cola and McDonalds are accessible, and using Nike's "just do it" slogan to strengthen their resolve when eliminating competitors. See Berry, *Jennifer Government*, 3, 5–6, 22, 24, 222.

niches” lies a history of dependence on sweatshop labour to assemble its product, a practice for which activist groups such as Educating for Justice have worked to hold Nike and other leading brands accountable.¹¹³ That is what dismantling a death- and injustice-dealing empire can be about. But the dismantling can also involve issuing a more basic statement of a theopolitically informed *caveat emptor*, perhaps assisting churches in recognizing, and cautioning them against, the rhetoric of *νίκη* in corporate and commercial discourse.¹¹⁴ Nike has taken drastic steps to rehabilitate its image, vastly improving the treatment of its labour force and partnering with nonprofit groups to maintain its corporate accountability,¹¹⁵ but the company’s own name continues to illustrate the dire need for increased recognition skills: part of the reason why the brand functions so well as commercial-imperial rhetoric is that so few realize the nature of the claim that they are “buying into” when they purchase and wear its products. If the church is a commonwealth of heaven and a body belonging exclusively to Christ, then neither Nike nor any other brand should ever have sole rights to its imagination.

Scenario 4: Story Fail. Another pressing soteriological exigency to which Paul’s master story could be applied is the church- and culture-wide perception of a loss of, and need for, narratives. It is suggested here that insofar as sociopolitical and economic

¹¹³ On the tailoring of Nike’s image to cater to minorities, see Klein, *No Logo*, 113; on Nike’s involvement with sweatshop labour, see 328, 350, 368. For the resources offered by Educating for Justice (EFJ), see www.educatingforjustice.org/stopnikesweatshops.htm, accessed November 15, 2010; a related site, http://educatingforjustice.org/?page_id=2, describes the group’s core perspective as “Christian liberationist” in character. EFJ’s “Swords into Plowshares” campaign (www.educatingforjustice.org/swords.htm) against the Iraq War, drawing deliberately as it does from Isa 2:4, would also qualify as an instance of the practice of *locating and tactfully employing biblical resources that deconstruct imperial abuses of power*, recommended earlier.

¹¹⁴ As McKinley, et al. (*Advent Conspiracy*, 19–30) are clearly trying to do: they term “the religion of consumerism” as the “fastest-growing religion in the world,” promising transcendence to, and demanding devotion from, its adherents. As consumerism’s annual zenith occupies and displaces Advent, its idolatry is particularly difficult to isolate from the true worship of God during that season (21–22), and there is a constant temptation to bow to the god of consumerism even after becoming aware of its idolatrous nature (26). Implied here is the idea that Christmas itself has been rebranded as a commercial event.

¹¹⁵ As noted in Khanna, *How to Run the World*, 129, 132, 176.

empires can be said to employ narratives, such narratives are all the more appealing and captivating when they fill a need that is not otherwise being met at the individual or corporate level, and that in Paul's theopolitical soteriology one finds an invitation to contest the appeal of contemporary imperial narratives, to renew one's confessional allegiance to Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour, and so to reclaim a role in a narrative that helps one to negotiate life in postmodern North America.

North Americans could be described as people in search of stories to which to belong. Postcolonial suspicion and postmodern ambivalence toward metanarratives, along with the excess of unconnected factoids and opinions available in the Information Age, produce a liminal sensation of becoming narratively unmoored.¹¹⁶ The sensation can plague institutions, such as a troubled presidential administration,¹¹⁷ or be felt by individuals as a story-less anomie. Such experiences of disorientation may still be on the rise. Tasked with creating a vocabulary for the coming decade's social trends (as he had done previously with *Generation X*), Douglas Coupland targeted both the increasing sense of "denarration"—the "process whereby one's life stops feeling like a story"—and the absence of good leadership "in a world without kings, only princes in whom our faith is shattered."¹¹⁸ True, Coupland did not expressly associate the two phenomena together, but if this growing "denarration" continues to afflict governments and other institutions

¹¹⁶ Walsh and Keesmaat, *Colossians Remixed*, 31–33, map a parallel, narrational-ethical liminality in the context of postmodernity, globalization, and *commodification* as imperially colonizing phenomena.

¹¹⁷ See for example Schmuhl, "Obama's So-Called Narrative Problem," critiquing pundits who fault the Obama Administration for losing the compelling narrative with which the President campaigned.

¹¹⁸ Coupland, "Douglas Coupland Presents," F7. Coupland's new vocabulary also includes "narrative drive," as a compensating ambition to a widespread inability to "ascribe a story" to individual lives. Self-definition, Coupland predicted darkly, "will continue to morph via new ways of socializing. The notion of your life needing to be a story will seem slightly corny and dated. Your life becomes however many friends you have online."

as well as their constituents, even the wisest leaders may find their theopolitical faith-building and storytelling efforts hampered.

This presents a void that soteriological narratives such as the ones presented in this study can begin to fill. Corporate narratives, prescribed variously by nations, companies, and other institutions can lend structure and purpose to those who participate in them. To its provinces in the first-century Mediterranean, Rome's story of mastery emphasized that the Caesars had brought the Pax Romana to a world torn apart by civil war. To the United States in the days following 9/11, a shared feeling of national mourning was supplemented with the resolution that in spite of attacks on major military and commercial centres, the country would remain "open for business."¹¹⁹ These corporate narratives are all the more persuasive in such historical moments of crisis. They can energize activity in positive ways, but their coercive capacity can be difficult to recognize or defend against.

As a "master story," Paul's gospel can also fall prey to the postcolonial and postmodern suspicions observed above, but it can also be of assistance in deconstructing the stories of mastery that first engendered those suspicions. In the metaphor of the gravitational hermeneutic, Paul's master story is itself a discursive world, formed around his personal encounter with the crucified and risen Lord; because it owes part of its discursive vocabulary to a critical engagement with the imagery of an empire, it can assist its postmodern readers in accounting for the massive "pull" that contemporary social structures exert upon them. The gospel invites them into a narrative that can help them to negotiate their culture's sometimes Kafkaesque disorientation toward anxiety and

¹¹⁹ See Walsh and Keesmaat, *Colossians Remixed*, 35–37, for a critique of this stance as an exercise in crisis-driven, military-industrial mythmaking.

death, while refusing to dwell *on* death or *in* it. Being baptized into this story means becoming a citizen of the gospel's sovereignty, free to follow the example of Christ, the saviour and *princeps*. Being adopted into the story provides the opportunity to become more like the Father and the Son, to inherit immortality, to be enabled better to abound in the Lord's work, to learn to share in his ministry of dismantling Death and social structures that prove inimical to the life of the Lord's people.

Scenario 5: Jesus Saves. This final offering is less a reading scenario than a theopolitical *worship* scenario, or more accurately a series of suggestions for the incorporation of the present Pauline theopolitical soteriology into the liturgical life and missional ministry of the North American church. Rather than blithely assuming that the findings of a dissertation can be transferred directly from the academy to the church, the intention here is simply to encourage reinvestment in the atonement motifs familiar to that setting.¹²⁰ But this reinvestment is funded in part by the present findings, in hopes that they will strengthen relationships already growing (slowly) between the church's inward and outward activity.

For example, one possible first step we might consider in this reinvestment would be to do anything possible to *foster the church's biblical-narrative, biblical-theological, and theopolitical literacy and loyalties*. This step could take many forms. Liturgical responses might include a more theopolitically reflective use of extant worship choruses that emphasize God's saving activity (e.g., "You Are Stronger," or "Mighty to Save"),

¹²⁰ While it is hoped that readers will find some merit in the soteriology proposed here, it should not be taken as the sole hermeneutic for reading the atonement in Scripture or for performing it in Christian praxis. The proposals to such ends in Beilby and Eddy's *Nature of the Atonement* are dialogically useful, but one would be surprised if any of their contributors, excepting perhaps Green ("Kaleidoscopic View," 157–85), had managed to convince his respondents of the pan-biblical explanatory power of his particular view.

the composition of new songs and readings (perhaps focusing upon ways in which Christ continues to dismantle Death and death-dealing powers),¹²¹ and the retrieval of neglected hymns that profess faith as a deeply participatory struggle of pilgrimage (implicitly after the pattern of Christ, as in Bunyan's hymn, "Who Would True Valour See") or the biblical-theological hope for the end of tyrannies spiritual and earthly.¹²² Educational responses could be as simple as applying the technique of "storying"—symbolizing biblical story capsules with pictures as aids for memory and teaching¹²³—and as radical as books like Shane Claiborne's *Jesus for President* and Rick McKinley's *Advent Conspiracy*¹²⁴ that challenge believers to identify more strongly with the gospel story in which they trust and to which they belong.

A second suggested step could involve a *continual cultivation of theopolitical and ethical offshoots of the gospel and their involvement in the church's ministry and service.*

The United Church of Canada has proven exemplary at this, beginning with its "Living Faithfully in the Midst of Empire" theme and developing resources for local, faithful

¹²¹ Conveying death-dismantling, justice-restoring, empire-critical themes well in song is no easy task. As wryly observed by Claiborne and Haw (*Jesus for President*, 58), it is "hard to come up with words that rhyme with 'debt cancellation.'"

¹²² Also known as "To Be a Pilgrim," Bunyan's lyric is taken from *Pilgrim's Progress*, written during his imprisonment. The opponents named therein are the lion, giant, hobgoblin and "foul fiend," but the song's provenance is a reminder of the need for civil disobedience when conscientiously opposing the theopolitical state. Alternatively, during Advent, one might reconsider the call for the "Rod of Jesse" to "free / Thine own from Satan's tyranny; / From depths of hell Thy people save, / And give them victory over the grave" as expressive of a hope for the end of other tyrannies in addition to that of Satan.

¹²³ E.g., the missional practice of "Chronological Bible Storying" for children, as illustrated at www.cbs4kids.org (when last accessed on November 17, 2010, the site appeared to be at least temporarily offline) and in Novelli, *Shaped by the Story*; or the teaching resource entitled "The Story" (www.thestory.com/about-the-story, accessed November 17, 2010), which centres upon "the unfolding progression of Bible characters and events arranged chronologically."

¹²⁴ Some writers associated with the Emergent Church have a predilection toward phrasing the atonement as salvation from the "mess" humans find themselves in (most clearly in McKinley, *Beautiful Mess*, but also in Claiborne, *Jesus for President*, 77–78 [on the competition between Archelaus, Antipas, and Philip for Herod's realm as a "royal mess"], 85n28, 141, 163, 188, 224). The mess(es) can be personal, but also corporate, cultural, and theopolitical. Given that the messes are portrayed as occurring at points where a personal or corporate narrative thread becomes lost, as if *the story itself* needs to be saved, the present theopolitical soteriology and its rescuing lord/saviour would seem to be highly compatible with that construal.

activism such as *Challenging Empire: Justice Seeking in Your Faith Community*.¹²⁵ Part of the challenge in that approach is the difficulty of translating and contextualizing its best features into other denominational settings. For churches with a congregational polity, a hierarchically mandated curriculum is not an example to imitate. For those that count themselves theologically more conservative or evangelical than the United Church, the adventure comes in articulating Paul's "master story" in such a way as to proclaim the narrative faithfully, without neglecting the master's mission to dismantle Death and injustice.

¹²⁵ See www.united-church.ca/economic/globalization/report (accessed November 17, 2010) and related pages.

APPENDIX

Preaching a Theopolitical, Pauline Soteriology

Writing on its implications for contemporary preaching, Warren Carter argues that empire-critical analysis of Scripture demonstrates “that our well-practiced separation of the religious and spiritual from the sociopolitical and somatic is not sustainable. Our New Testament texts lead us into the midst of sociopolitical and somatic life, not away from it.”¹ Helping the church to bridge that separation has been central to the logic of using the term *theopolitical* throughout this dissertation: to divorce the theological from the sociopolitical is to perpetuate a false dichotomy, whether the soteriological questions at hand originate with the Roman Empire, the Pauline epistles, contemporary North American manifestations of civil religion, or any other source.

The text upon which the following sermon is based was originally intended as an additional ancillary for the epilogue, but it ultimately engendered something else: it represents the author’s response to a gracious invitation to preach on the text(s) in question, an opportunity to gauge the viability of this dissertation’s Pauline theopolitical soteriology by preaching it and engaging with warm and thoughtful reactions from the author’s own church congregation. The tone of the sermon will be seen to vary from that of the final form of the foregoing chapters, coming across as slightly less formal, more colloquial, oriented toward audiences comprised of people with varying economic standings and educational experiences. Structurally, in much the same way as the

¹ Carter (“Proclaiming,” 158) explains a moment later that the biblical texts themselves “offer insight into the ways of empires and train readers to be discerning about ruling authorities and to assess them in relation to God’s life-giving and inclusive purposes,” to which might be added the emphasis from the epilogue on caution concerning contemporary empires’ use and abuse of biblical themes.

selection of ancillary texts and more recent theological interpreters propelled the first half of the last chapter, the choice of texts below governs the way in which the suggested theopolitical soteriology unfolds pastorally and kerygmatically.

The sermon is intended to evince the themes that surfaced throughout the foregoing chapters, confronting the combined weight of death and imperial imagery by re-evaluating what the living God has done in Christ to save his people. It argues that in Romans 6:1–9, Paul portrays believers as united with Christ in death and resurrection. At variance with 1 Corinthians 15, it is sin, rather than Death, that is the enemy that has been rendered powerless (καταργηθῆναι), and while death no longer exercises the mastery (κυριεύει) that it once did, its grip on the church’s imagination remains powerful. Death’s reality must still be lived with, as it were, and the church must be consistently called to missional ministries that bring life.

Called out of Death (Romans 6:1–11)²

I have chosen the title “Called out of Death” because it accurately summarizes the conceptual content of the passage we’re reading together today, and because I think the title also describes our experience and identity as Christians, both recently here at Wentworth and in our everyday contact with our culture.

We as Christians (especially if we’re evangelicals) talk a lot about *being* saved, about *getting* saved. But what are we saved *from*? Your hard drive and your email account save files and messages from getting lost, your bank account saves your money, firemen save people from fires, Spiderman and Superman save people from villains, but

² An edited form of a sermon first preached at Wentworth Baptist Church, August 15, 2010.

what are we as Christians saved from? [Working in cooperation with the congregation, a list emerged, consisting of death, sin, hell, fear, despair, wrath, and persecution].

Paul talks a great deal about the one who saves us: Jesus Christ. That's called Christology, doctrine about who Jesus is. He also talks a lot about *how* Jesus saves us: we call that *soteriology*, teaching about how we are saved. This passage in Romans is about both, but it's primarily about the soteriology part: *how* and *from what* we are saved. There are plenty of villains in the soteriology of Romans; in Romans 8, Paul personifies hardship, distress, persecution, famine, nakedness, and peril, along with death, as "malevolent actors on the stage of the drama of salvation," enemies who try in vain to separate believers from the love of Christ (Rom 8:35–39).³ But the enemies in this passage are sin and death. They first came onstage in chapter five, entering the world through Adam.

Often when we talk about Adam's influence, we use the term "original sin," but that isn't quite what Paul's saying in these chapters. We've inherited a spiritual legacy from Adam, yes, but this is more about the background of sin and death: the problem is not so much that we inherited Adam's sinfulness, but that Adam's choices allowed sin and death to enter the world, and since then humans have all been subject to them. We were their hostages. Paul has just closed his previous thoughts in Romans 5 by telling us the *good* news, saying that "where sin increased, grace increased all the more, so that, just as sin reigned in death, so also grace might reign through righteousness to bring eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord." Paul is setting up a power struggle here, between the twin powers of sin and death on the one hand, and God's grace, reigning through righteousness, on the other.

³ Collins, *Power of Images*, 259.

Think about that phrase, “reign through righteousness.” The word *reign* in Romans 5:21 is βασιλεύειν, meaning “to be king over,” to rule like a king.” It’s related to the word βασιλεύς, a “king,” a political ruler. The kind of control that sin once had in our lives is like the way a king has control over the people in his kingdom, and death is the main arena in which that control presents itself, or perhaps the principal agency through which sin acts.⁴ The good news—the gospel—is that God’s grace rules like a king in an opposing kingdom, an empire of righteousness, or of justice. That is, the rule of God’s grace grows when God sets things right, whether he chooses to act directly or through us. And we have a choice to make about which of these kingdoms we will serve.

¹ What shall we say, then? Paul asks in verse one. Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase? ² By no means! We are those who have died to sin; how can we live in it any longer? Here Paul anticipates and dismantles an argument that the Roman Christians he is writing to might have made, having read what he had written about the reign of sin, and that of grace. When it seems as if grace rules through righteousness and justice *in the same way* that sin rules in death, can’t we expect grace to grow whenever sin does, as though the conflict between the powers is escalating? Whenever I read Paul’s answer, I hear one of my New Testament professors, Richard Longenecker, who would always look at that phrase, “By no means,” and add, “or, in the King James, ‘*God forbid!*’” The words basically mean “no way!” They’re an emphatic NO. If we have “died to sin,” *we do not live in its domain of death anymore.*

⁴ Collins (*Power of Images*, 259) points to Romans as featuring Paul’s most frequent use of the device of personification; particularly relevant here is the rhetorical effect Collins attributes in Romans 5–7 to the figures of the law (which “enters in, wages war, and takes prisoners”), sin (which “dwells, seizes opportunities, deceives, and kills,” along with taking slaves and reigning, particularly through the agency of death. Grace, meanwhile, “exercises dominion through justification.”

Verses 3 and 4: ³ **Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death?** ⁴ **We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.** How are we baptized “into” someone, and “into” his death? Paul often uses the phrase “in Christ,” to mean a state of being, a way of life, that’s deeply rooted in Christlikeness, growing as Jesus’ disciple, resting in his care, belonging to him. In baptism, we symbolically enter into, or take on, that status of being in Christ. When you join a group on Facebook, that act is recorded publicly, as an update that all your friends can see. But unlike Facebook status updates, which expire or become obsolete after a few days, this status change of being “baptized into Christ Jesus” is meant to be permanent.

How are we baptized into Christ’s *death*? We often focus so much on baptism as a symbol that we don’t think about what the act actually claims to do: it identifies us as having died, taking part in the death of Jesus. One scholar writes that sharing in Christ’s death is a *prerequisite* to redemption. Baptism “does not do away with sins; it abolishes the cause of sin, the sinners themselves.”⁵ If we were hostages to sin and death, then to put it bluntly, *baptism effectively shoots the hostage*. In baptism, we are resurrected, yes, but first we die and are (ritually) buried. Once we are raised “through the glory of the Father,” we live a new life. We live in newness of life. Depending on what translation you’re reading, you may see something there about “walking” in that new life. Ancient Greek used the word “walk” much as we do, to talk about living the journey of life, not just literal walking. The point is that our new walk cannot involve commuting back and forth between the dominion of sin and that of grace.

⁵ Cilliers Breytenbach, “The ‘For Us’ Phrases,” 179–81.

Verses 5, 6, and 7: ⁵ **If we have been united with him in a death like his, we will certainly also be united with him in a resurrection like his.** ⁶ **For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body ruled by sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin—**⁷ **because anyone who has died has been set free from sin.** It isn't just any death that we die. It is Jesus' death. It is crucifixion. It is state-sponsored torture. Being baptized and united into Christ's death means being *co-crucified* with him in that death.⁶ The good news is that we are also resurrected; in baptism, we don't stay underwater, but the control sin had over us is dissolved there. This staging, this ritual enacting, of the death of the old self shows that our slavery to sin is not just psychological or spiritual, but *somatic*—that is, the slavery manifests itself primarily at the level of the σῶμα, our bodies,⁷ though it can certainly affect our minds, our hearts, and our spirits as well.

But what does Paul mean by this “body of sin”? Sometimes we speak of a body as in a body of written work. A scriptural paraphrase called *The Voice* translates this second part of verse 6 as, “Our entire written record of sin has been cancelled, and we no longer have to bow down to sin's power.” That's not a bad rendering. But with the references to crucifixion and baptism here, there's something very physical about Paul's use of the term “body.” Sin's rule, its control, still exists, but our bodies are dead to it, so its power no longer matters. The words that our Bibles use here, like “rendered powerless,” “abolished,” or “done away with,” are trying to capture the meaning of the word καταργέω, which literally means to “deprive of power,” like you might power down a

⁶ See Hamerton-Kelly, *Sacred Violence*, 70, emphasizing the mimetic quality of baptism: “[T]he rite of entry into the community is a rite of identification with the crucified. Co-crucifixion (Rom 6:6) is part of an exposition of baptismal theology in terms of which baptism is an identification with Christ's death,” burial, and resurrection.

⁷ Sabou, *Between Horror and Hope*, 133–37.

computer, or to “dismantle”—not just to take something apart, but to remove the emblems of its command, as though taking a king’s crown away from him. The word doesn’t necessarily mean to destroy. The power, the ability to work, of sin is cancelled, like death’s power is in 1 Cor 15:24–26.⁸ As we sang a few moments ago in Charles Wesley’s words, our great Redeemer “breaks the power of cancelled sin.” And if sin’s power to rule is cancelled, so is its ability to command us as slaves. We *were* its slaves, but now we serve and love and owe allegiance to a different lord.

Are you with me so far? Then let’s look at verses 8 through 11: **8 Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. 9 For we know that since Christ was raised from the dead, he cannot die again; death no longer has mastery over him. 10 The death he died, he died to sin once for all; but the life he lives, he lives to God. 11 In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus.** The cancelling of sin’s power means that its domain, death, no longer “has mastery” over Christ or those who have died and been raised with him. Some of your Bibles might say death “no longer rules over him.” Like the kingly rule back in 5:21, the word Paul uses here signifies the rule of a *lord*. It’s easy to forget how absolute a lord’s control is over his subjects when we don’t have many lords in North American society, but if you were under someone’s lordship in ancient or medieval society, you *belonged to that person until your death*. Death severed the relationship between the lord and his subject or slave. Christ, our resurrected Lord, cannot be under death’s lordship, and

⁸ As noted earlier, in 1 Corinthians 15, Death might continue to fill a role in God’s economy, comparable to the treatment received by certain foreign empires and rulers in the Old Testament (cf. Isa 7:18–8:10; 10:5–15; 44:28–45:13), but only as a tool that is empowered only to serve God’s purposes. Again, for a treatment of the Isaianic texts named above, see Eidevall, *Prophecy and Propaganda*, especially 179–83.

neither can we. We are saved from the domain, the control, of sin, and called out of the grave, into the reign of God's grace, into new life.

Now I would suggest at least two ways in which this calling to live "alive to God in Christ Jesus" works out in our lives, both inside and outside of the church. First, I submit to you that Wentworth has been working through this theme—being called out of death, through baptism, to new life—for several months now. Let me give you some examples, and maybe you can think of others:

- ✧ In January, Eric performed for us Matt Maher's song, "Christ is Risen," echoing the words from Hosea 13 and 1 Corinthians 15: "O death, where is your sting? O hell, where is your victory?" The repeated call in that song, "Come awake, come awake / Come and rise up from the grave," is an invitation to co-resurrection: the grave is no place in which to live!
- ✧ We celebrated a baptismal service, marking the beginning of four new lives in Christ and hearing their testimonials as to the newness of life in which they had already begun to walk.
- ✧ Cindy Westfall and Robin Ellis preached that same theme consistently, in anticipation of that service; Robin's preaching on 1 Corinthians 15 over the past three weeks echoed it yet again.

And we continue to wrestle with the same themes, going forward, as Tracy and her helpers in Vacation Bible School will be taking the campers on an imaginative trip to Egypt this week. Now Egypt is exotic, it's summery, but what does it have to do with this theme of wrestling against death? I reminded Tracy that in the Bible's chronology, Egypt was the first empire that shaped the experience of the people of God. As a doctoral

candidate whose specialty is biblical theology in the context of empire, I offered to bring in a counter-imperial angle to the teaching in VBS. Strangely, Tracy hasn't taken me up on it! But I do want to talk about Egypt for a moment, not to disparage the focus of VBS, but to point out something vital about the place Egypt had in the imagination of God's people. Matthew takes Hosea's words, "Out of Egypt I called my Son" (Hos 11:1, Matt 2:15), and applies them to Jesus during his childhood, staying safe from Herod. But historically, experientially, God made *himself known to Israel as the Lord their God who called them out of Egypt*. The words "out of Egypt" are so important that they show up over a hundred times between the beginning of Exodus and the end of the Old Testament:

- Starting with Ex 3:10: "I am sending you to Pharaoh to bring my people the Israelites *out of Egypt*,"
- and continuing to Ex 20:2 // Deut 5:6, both of which read, "I am the LORD your God, who brought you *out of Egypt*, out of the land of slavery,"
- to Hosea 13:4, "I have been the LORD your God ever since you came *out of Egypt*. You shall acknowledge no God but me, no Saviour except me,"
- before concluding with Haggai 2:5, "This is what I covenanted with you when you came *out of Egypt*. And my Spirit remains among you. Do not fear."

Why was it so important that Israel come out of Egypt? Not just because it was a land of slavery, or of idolatry, but because Egypt, in Israel's memory, was a culture, arguably an imperial culture, characterized by *death*. To some extent that was due to Egypt's own religious worldview, which was focused on the afterlife, on the Pharaohs as rulers who were understood to be divinized, made into gods, when they died. But it's also

because it was a place that still held an appeal in the minds of some in Israel. Listen to what Isaiah is forced to say in Isaiah 28, to those who tried to seek an alliance with Egypt against the invasion of another empire, the Assyrians:

¹⁵ You boast, “*We have entered into a covenant with death, with the realm of the dead we have made an agreement.* When an overwhelming scourge sweeps by, it cannot touch us, for we have made a lie our refuge and falsehood our hiding place.”

¹⁶ So this is what the Sovereign LORD says: “See, I lay a stone in Zion, a tested stone, a precious cornerstone for a sure foundation; the one who relies on it will never be stricken with panic.

¹⁷ I will make justice the measuring line and righteousness the plumb line; hail will sweep away your refuge, the lie, and water will overflow your hiding place.

¹⁸ *Your covenant with death will be annulled; your agreement with the realm of the dead will not stand.* When the overwhelming scourge sweeps by, you will be beaten down by it (Isa 28:15–18, italics added).

Egypt seems a rich and powerful ally, but it is an empire characterized by death, as the realm of the dead. Symbolically, it is a domain of death. I would suggest we remember that when we see the allure of the richness and extravagance of the culture around us, and the way that it is fascinated with, yet also trying to avoid, death: our movies and our television shows are riddled with violence, and rarely do we consider the long-term ramifications of exporting violence and death to other parts of the world, yet we avoid dealing with the *reality* of death whenever possible. No, I am not suggesting that we characterize Canada or the United States as places that serve the empire of sin and death; I am asking us to be cautious in how we walk with newness of life within our culture. I am asking us to remember what household we belong to—Pharaoh’s, or Christ’s. As Ronald Vallet writes, “The whole business of the household of Jesus Christ

is about what God has done and is doing to bring us out of slavery, out of sin, out of enmity with God.”⁹ It is God who brings us out of slavery, God who sets us free, and God who annuls the covenant with death that we once made.

But God in his grace allows us the chance to secure that annulment through the choices we make every day. Let me quickly mention one such choice we can make, which is also the second way I would suggest in which the theme of being called from the grave to new life works out. Again, you can probably think of other possibilities, but this is just one very practical outworking of engaging the Egypts around us, and refusing to be captivated by them. The example I would suggest is donating our blood. As Christians, we claim to follow the ultimate blood donor: the Son of God, who gave his life’s blood to bring us salvation. If we want to bring and help give newness of life, donating blood is a simple, powerful way of doing that. You may have noticed that I’m wearing two unusual lapel pins on my shirt: pins I have earned for donating blood regularly in the US and Canada. As often as I am allowed, every 56 days, I donate blood, not just as a help to those who need it, but as a reminder to myself and others that Christ’s church is in the sacrificial business of saving lives. I would love to see churches in North America become characterized by significantly higher blood donation rates than the surrounding culture, as a statement of witness to that culture: we recognize that through Jesus we have been saved from the rule of sin, brought out of (or through) death to new life, and we give some of our life away, some of the substance of our new selves away, as often as we can.

⁹ Vallet, *Steward Living in Covenant*, 108. He does not belabour the point, but Vallet insightfully connects the enslaved status of those caught in sin to their enmity with God in 5:8 (that is, those controlled by sin would be considered hostile to another lord). I am less sure of the interpretation of 8:22 that Vallet offers just beforehand, as he appears to make creation’s release from groaning dependent upon the point when God’s “people find their freedom,” rather than God’s work of adopting and redeeming our bodies and his creation.

The soteriology, the explanation of *how* and *from what* we are saved, in Romans 6:1–11 has us as believers united with Christ in our baptism, first in death, then in resurrection; the power of sin has been dismantled, and death no longer has the mastery that it once did, but its reality is still something that we have to figure out how to “live with.” Part of our allegiance to the ruling power of God’s grace is shown in how we deal with the sin and death of the dominion from which we have been saved.

So when we bow in prayer, we pledge our allegiance and our lives to our lord whose crucifixion and resurrection rescued us from the regime of sin and death. We follow him not just in service, but out of love, asking him to help us find creative, life-bringing ways in which to walk in newness of life. And when we close our service, we challenge each other to keep reflecting further upon the kinds of *theopolitical* words Paul used in today’s passage (words like “kingdom,” “power,” and “lordship”) to talk about baptism as marking the end of our slavery to sin and death. We read further in Romans 6, remembering that sin and death are powers that have been defeated, whom we no longer belong to! And we combine our talents and our resources to find other life-saving, life-bringing, life-affirming, life-giving measures—whether giving blood, cleaning up a city park, baking cookies for a neighbour, inviting a homeless person in for dinner, or helping young couples to figure out how to balance kingdom-building with family-building—with which to honour our Lord who has saved us.

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