

APOLLOS' FUNCTION IN 1 CORINTHIANS 1-4

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ABSTRACT. The dissensions in the Corinthian church bring up the question of the mention of Apollos' name in Paul's argument against the partisan spirit. Over time, there have been different proposals as to the role that Apollos had in the dissensions as well as his function in the argument of 1 Corinthians 1-4. Some say that Paul and Apollos were rivals and thus Paul formulates his argument against dissensions as a subtle attack on Apollos and his party. Others say that Apollos' role in the dissensions is a more indirect one, give his *modus operandi*. Apollos is seen as a preacher characterized by rhetorical skill (cf. Acts 18:24-28), who has made a great impression on the Corinthian congregation especially on those of a certain high social status, who have used Apollos against the less skillful Paul in order to advance their honor. Thus, in this view, Apollos is seen as having an unintentional and indirect role in the dissensions, being played by some in the congregation. Others, however, see Apollos as having no role in the dissensions, the mention of his name by Paul being only as a way of example and with direct application to others. This view is based on a certain interpretation of *meteschēmatiza* in 1 Corinthians 4:6. An analysis of these views and their supporting arguments leads us to believe that the fault for the dissensions falls not on Apollos, but on the Corinthians. Paul and Apollos share a close collaboration in the mission work; it is the Corinthians who have pitched one against the other.

KEYWORDS: dissensions, Corinthians, Paul, Apollos, *modus operandi*, *meteschēmatiza*, rivals

Introduction

The first major issue that Paul addresses in his first letter to the Corinthians is that of the dissensions. Our interest in this article is in probing the question of whether Apollos had any function in the occurring of the disputes among the Corinthians. This question is relevant in light of at least two facts.

First, Apollos' name is mentioned six times out of eleven in 1 Corinthians 1-4. He is mentioned elsewhere only in 1 Corinthians 16:12 and Acts 18:24-28, Titus 3:13 giving no independent information and 1 *Clem* 47:3-4 being wholly dependent on 1 Corinthians. Thus, information on Apollos

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always occurs in conjunction with the church in Corinth, and one inevitably wonders what Apollos' role was in the dissensions in the Corinthian *ecclesia*, if any, and what was the relationship between Paul and Apollos, given the fact that Paul critiques the distinction that the Corinthians made between their teachers.

Second, wisdom is a preeminent concept in the first four chapters of 1 Corinthians and seems to be the basic cause of the lack of unity in the Corinthian church. More specifically, the slogans in 1 Corinthians 1:12 seems to reveal that some in the Corinthian *ecclesia* preferred Apollos over Paul, a preference that reflected their worldly perception of wisdom. Conceivably, some preferred Apollos, not only because they believed that he embodied the qualities of wisdom they so highly esteemed, but also because by association with him, they themselves would be considered wise. This information, at least, raises the question of whether Paul opposed Apollos or whether Apollos had any (in)direct role in the dissensions. Did the two central figures in the Corinthian church have different *modus operandi* that led to being esteemed differently by separate sections of the Corinthian church?

These and similar questions constitute the focus of this article. In the end, we will seek to determine Apollos' function in 1 Corinthians 1-4 and evaluate whether he had any role in the dissensions in the Corinthian church. In what follows, we will examine three different views in regard to this topic and in order to help us determine with relative certainty Apollos' function in 1 Corinthians 1-4.

Paul and Apollos Are Rivals

According to several recent authors, it is believed that the dissensions in the Corinthian church were caused by Apollos, so that when Paul calls for unity he does it by constructing his argument in 1 Corinthians 1-4 as a polemic against Apollos and his followers. Niels Hyldahl has been a strong advocate of this view in recent years (Hyldahl 1991: 19-32; 1993: 68-82). He contends that 'Apollos was the person causing the troubles in Corinth which Paul had to face at the time of writing 1 Corinthians', though he is quick to state that 'there was no question of a party founded in Corinth by Apollos' (Hyldahl 1991: 21). He seeks to support his view with the following precarious arguments. First, following Dahl's programmatic article, he fully agrees that Paul is contending with a single opposition front: against the non- or anti-Pauline parties, or more specifically against the pro-Apollos party (see Dahl 1967: 313-335). Therefore, in his view 1 Corinthians 1-4 is clearly an *apologia* in which Paul seeks to recover his authority lost as a result of Apollos' subsequent work in the Corinthian congregation. Second, he wrongly identifies the problems in the Christian *ecclesia* as being of a theological and doctrinal nature, more specifically a Philonic type of wisdom (Hyldahl 1991:

24-26). Third, he incorrectly reads the situation of 2 Corinthians into 1 Corinthians, thus identifying the 'super-apostles' of 2 Corinthians 10-13 with Apollos and his followers of 1 Corinthians, especially since Apollos' name is not mentioned at all in 2 Corinthians (Hyldahl 1997: 212).

Several recent scholars continue to maintain that Paul and Apollos are rivals and that Paul writes 1 Corinthians 1-4 as a polemic against Apollos and his party, but they present their case from a different angle. For instance, they work with the general agreement that there is a development of situation between the writing of 1 and 2 Corinthians, both letters responding to somewhat different exigencies. They also dissociate themselves from those who believe that Apollos introduced a Philonic type of wisdom in the Corinthian congregation, and are inclined to accept the rhetorical background for the concept of *sofia* in 1 Corinthians 1-4. Notable among them are Donald Ker and Joop Smit, though Smit argues that *sofia logou* refers to 'logical wisdom' rather than 'rhetorical skill'.

The very title of Ker's article—'Apollos and Paul: Colleagues or Rivals'—already suggest the direction in which he is taking his argument. His analysis of 1 Cor 3:5-4:5, 4:6, 16:12, and Acts 18:24-28 leads him to conclude that the different styles of Paul and Apollos of doing ministry has placed the two into a 'strained relationship', so much so that Paul perceives Apollos as a rival in ministry. Thus, the emphasis of Ker's article is that Paul is antagonistic to Apollos in a *subtle* way, since 'In a volatile situation open criticism of another can backfire' (Ker 2000: 84). More specifically, the great following that Apollos won from among the Corinthians as well as his relationship with Aquila and Priscilla 'force Paul to present his case in a more irenic fashion than he otherwise would' (Ker 2000: 85). Nevertheless, in his cautious exercise of language, Paul's main goal, according to Ker, is to undermine Apollos, 'the overall effect [being that of] cast[ing] Apollos into shadows' (Ker 2000: 96).

Smit follows Ker in his argument that Paul addresses himself almost exclusively to the pro-Apollos group, so that Smit's thesis is to prove that what gives coherence to 1 Corinthians 1-4 is Paul's covert way of antagonizing Apollos and his followers. Smit believes that 'the missing link connecting the two themes' [wisdom and dissensions in 1 Corinthians 1-4] is Apollos and his party so that the four slogans in 1 Corinthians 1:12 'make known in covert terms that the adherents of Apollos are his principal target' (Smit 2002: 244). He seeks to substantiate this claim by contending that Paul intentionally uses the participle *apollymenoi* in 1 Corinthians 1:18, 19 as an allusion to the adherents of Apollos, based on the lexical argument that the verb and the proper noun share the same root and are often associated (Smit 2002: 243-44). That this may be the case also in 1 Corinthians 1-4, however, is a different issue. In order to prove this, one must at least show that Paul uses

the rhetorical technique of ‘covert allusion’ throughout these chapters, something that we will show cannot be defended from a study of the verb *meteschēmatisa* in 1 Corinthians 4:6. Both Ker and Smit would also have to prove that Paul is on defense in these chapters, something that has not been very convincing, as we will show shortly.

The claim that there is a ‘strained relationship’ between the two has been addressed many years before Ker and Smit advanced it. In his monograph on Apollos, Robert Wynne is careful to point to the fact that if Apollos was the cause of dissensions in the Corinthian congregation, it was more because ‘the minds of a good many of these converts were of such imperfect grasp that they could not many of them fully appreciate Apollos without depreciating Paul’, and not so much because there was some kind of rivalry between the two or that ‘there was a jealousy or a suspicious dislike between the two’ (Wynne 1912: 46, 68 respectively). The problem was thus with the Corinthians and not with Apollos (Litfin 1994: 227). In spite of the fact that Apollos is not to be blamed, the issue of Apollos’ role in the dissensions and Paul’s focus on him in 1 Corinthians 1-4 still raises the question of whether there was a distinction between them in their *modus operandi*, a distinction that could have *unintentionally* led to dissensions.

Apollos’ Unintentional Role in the Dissensions

If most scholars disagree with the suggestion that there might have been a rivalry between Paul and Apollos, some still contend that 1 Corinthians 1-4 is an *apologia* and that Paul addresses the pro-Apollos group that formed against the will of Apollos. Kuck raises the issue in a form of a question: ‘If we can rule out personal opposition as the reason for Paul’s discussion of Apollos, then does Paul single out Apollos because he unintentionally spawned a faction which is the main or only opposition to Paul in Corinth?’ (Kuck 1992: 163). He is right to observe that ‘this is a harder question to answer with confidence’ (Kuck 1992: 163), but there have been quite a few who have had no difficulty in connecting Apollos with the dissensions, though in a more indirect way. In other words, although Apollos is not to be held directly responsible for the dissensions, it is argued that his distinct *modus operandi* led unintentionally to the dissensions among the Corinthians given their penchant for worldly wisdom. Paul Barnett, for instance, expresses well the position of these scholars: ‘It is not as though Apollos has set out to undermine or compete with Paul. Rather the problem lies with some of the Corinthians who have elevated Apollos above Paul while prompted to move off in unhelpful directions in the prizing of *sophia*-rhetoric and perhaps of the *pneumatika*’ (Barnett 2003: 319).

The argument of Apollos’ unintentional role in the dissensions is presented at least along two lines. First, Apollos is identified as more rhetorical-

ly eloquent than Paul. In light of this, it is argued that 'Paul's reminder that he preached 'Christ crucified' but not in the 'wisdom of speech' is most likely a corrective of the Corinthians' appreciation of Apollos' recent ministry among them' (Barnett 2003: 316). Thus, as de Vos argues, 'the opposition to Paul in 1 Corinthians 1-4 appears to be based on his refusal to preach in a rhetorical/sophistic style. Given the obsession with rhetorical skill, eloquence and sophism at Corinth, it is likely that for many Christians it was an embarrassment to have Paul seen as their teacher' (de Vos 1999: 219). By contrast, at least in the minds of some Corinthians, Apollos fitted better the image of a sophist than Paul, 'which had the potential to affect severely the group's status' (de Vos 1999: 220). Litfin concludes: 'Hence, it is not only plausible but in fact likely that an unwitting contrast between the eloquence of Apollos and Paul would have triggered the sort of divisions we discover in rhetorically attuned Corinth' (Litfin 1994: 253).

Not only did the Corinthians appreciate the more eloquent Apollos, but second, it is also believed that those who most likely appreciated Apollos' eloquence in speech and despised Paul's deliberate anti-sophistic stance are the elite. They are the ones who regarded rhetoric as a status indicator so that when Paul, who was compared to a rhetor, took his anti-sophistic stance, he was perceived as one who lived below his expected status and was thus a basis for shame for the elite in the congregation (Martin 1990: 77-82). Pickett is representative of this position when he states:

It is likely that Paul was discredited for his weakness and shame. Conversely, Apollos was credited with possessing honor and power, the operative values of the privileged elite in the community. Apollos, in contrast to Paul, measured up to the ideal of a cultivated person current in Greco-Roman society... The identification of Paul's opponents as members of a social elite further clarifies how Apollos whose rhetorical eloquence qualified him as a cultivated person in Greco-Roman society, served as a yardstick of Christian leadership for them. With the social values of honor and power as their criteria this dominant minority determined that Apollos more aptly exemplified an ideal of apostleship which was constructed on these values (Pickett 1997: 53, 54 respectively).

The assumption that the dissensions were the unintentional result of a more eloquent Apollos who fared better with the hunger for honor and status of the elite in the Corinthian congregation has the benefit of reconstructing the rhetorical situation behind 1 Corinthians 1-4 keeping in mind both the social and rhetorical backgrounds of the dissensions and of wisdom. For instance, it fits well with the fact that the major theme of this first rhetorical unit is that of dissensions caused by a worldly evaluation of teachers based on wisdom-criteria. The Corinthians seem to have evaluated their teachers according to the values of the world and what the world perceived as wis-

dom. It also has the benefit of taking into consideration the background of wisdom as sophistic rhetoric particularly related to speech (see Winter 2002) as well as the social dimensions of the dissensions (see Theissen 1982). In other words, the Corinthians had a high esteem of rhetoric as a status marker and were thus confusing the Christian ecclesia with other social networks to which they belonged.

Apart from these strengths, it seems that this view is heavily dependent on a rhetorical rendition of the description of Apollos in Acts 18:24-28 as *anēr logios*, *dynatos en tais graphais* and one *epideiknys dia tōn graphon* and the belief that 1 Corinthians 1-4 is an *apologia* (or at least 2:1-5). Therefore, we may comment briefly on both these elements.

Regarding the first element, *epideiknumi*, according to several lexicons, is used in Acts 18:28 in a figurative sense meaning 'to prove, to demonstrate, or to show that something is true' (BDAG 370), in our case by appeal to Scripture (*dia tōn graphon*). It is used usually in judicial rhetoric possibly as in Acts 25:7 where the verb is used in a legal context ('charges which they could not prove').

The adjective *dynatos* can have the rhetorical meaning of 'powerful eloquence' especially in a context dealing with public speech, as is the case with Acts 18 describing Apollos' preaching (Pogoloff 1992: 182-183). Nevertheless, that he was *dynatos en tais graphais* does not single Apollos out necessarily (especially in contrast to Paul), since preaching in the early church (cf. Acts) implied extensive knowledge of the Old Testament which served for proving the messianic character of Jesus (Litfin 1994: 242). The rhetorical connotations of these two terms thus allow the *possibility* of Apollos being described as a speaker that used the means of rhetorical persuasion known in his day.

What seems to move the argument from the description of Apollos as merely allowing the possibility of rhetorical connotations to actually demonstrating it is the phrase *anēr logios*. According to Winter, for instance, 'the collocation [i.e., *anēr logios*] is clearly connected with rhetoric' (Winter 2002: 178) which would seem to indicate, he maintains, that 'Luke intends the reader to understand that Apollos is trained in rhetoric and makes use of it during his ministry in Corinth' (Winter 2002: 178, n. 171). It is indeed true that the description *anēr logios* usually means 'learned man' (cf. Plutarch, *Thes.* 3.2.7; Strabo, *Geogr.* 14.1.42.21), though it could also mean 'eloquent man' in a rhetorical context (cf. Plutarch, *Cic.* 49.5). Therefore, Dunn argues, 'It is an easy step of the historical imagination to identify those rebuked consistently throughout 1:17-3:23 for their false evaluation of wisdom and clever speech with Apollos or with an Apollos faction' (Dunn 1995: 30) and that is what Winter and others do. They infer from the rhetorical connotations of the terms used to describe Apollos' preaching ministry in

Corinth that his distinct *modus operandi* that relied heavily on persuasion by means of sophistic rhetoric was the cause of dissensions among the Corinthian Christians. Especially the elite may have been attracted to Apollos' eloquent preaching, since this reflected their own status. However, one could equally reasonable argue that even though such terms have rhetorical connotations, this would not imply that Apollos used the sophistic rhetoric against which Paul argues in 1 Corinthians 1-4 (Litfin 1994: 242). That this later option is more viable is supported by the fact that Apollos' preaching is done in a Jewish, not a Hellenistic context. Therefore, Munck may be right that '[n]othing can be quoted about Apollos to make it likely that he was striving for wisdom in the way that—as Paul thought—the Greeks strove for worldly wisdom' (Munck 1959: 144). Moreover, 1 Corinthians 3:5-4:5 describes the two missionaries—Paul and Apollos, in congenial terms though performing different functions in the church.

Regarding the second element, a quick perusal of the first four chapter of 1 Corinthians will show what Paul's purpose truly is: not of reasserting his authority, but of bringing about unity by means of the cross discourse. Brian Dodd rightly states: 'Throughout this opening section Paul depreciates himself for Christological emphasis, accepts the unity of the missionary workers in their gospel work, and stresses the cruciform nature of life in Christ, laying a foundation for his solution to the church problems' (Dodd 1999: 33). Paul's intentions are thus conciliatory, not authoritarian. Throughout 1 Corinthians 1-4, the emphasis is on the positive—unity—rather than the negative—polemic. Dodd is right that '[t]here is no direct evidence that Paul also responds to a challenge to his authority in 1 Corinthians' (Dodd 1999: 33).

Several arguments support this position. First, Paul is critical not only of his opponents but of his own adherents as well. Second, had his authority been questioned, no doubt that the Corinthians would not have asked for advice concerning the issues he responds to in 1 Corinthians (cf. 11:2) (see Wire 1990: 46). Third, Paul writes to the whole church and not only to a certain party; his problem is with the Corinthians' high esteem of sophistic rhetoric in general that has led to preferences rather than the depreciation of his authority in their eyes as a result of the ministry of Apollos. Fourth, it is hard to state, on the one hand, that Paul defends his preaching style with the word about the cross in 1 Corinthians 2:1-5 and then, on the other hand, to state that Apollos is not directly responsible for the fact that the Corinthians appreciated more Apollos' style as different from that of Paul. In other words, the moment one claims that Paul reasons theologically for his *modus operandi* it is impossible to argue that a different *modus operandi* based on rhetorical conventions (i.e., that of Apollos) is acceptable. If the cross requires the style of one's presentation to be in weakness, devoid of

rhetorical eloquence, as Paul's, it is impossible to see how the cross would allow for a style that is powerful, conforming to contemporary standards of an accomplished orator, allegedly as Apollos'.

In light of these arguments, we can quite firmly state that Paul does not seek to secure a following, but ultimately to bring about unity (Welborn 1987: 320-46). If that is the case, then it is very probable that Paul's and Apollos' styles of preaching were not that different. Consequently, the problem that Paul points to in 1 Corinthians 1-4 is the Corinthians' overvaluation of rhetorical style, rather than the distinction between himself and Apollos (Munck 1959: 143-49). We can thus agree with Pickett that, 'Paul nowhere implicates either of them [i.e., Apollos and Cephas] so there is no reason to assume that they were in any way responsible for the quarreling that occurred in their names' (Pickett 1997: 49).

Apollos' Neutral Role in the Dissensions

The question of why Paul would bring up Apollos' name in his discussion of dissensions that resulted from a worldly evaluation of teachers based on sophistic rhetoric has received yet another answer from Kuck, namely that 'Paul chose to speak about Apollos as one case in point, the most visible example of the absurdity of playing one Christian teacher against another' (Kuck 1992: 161). He continues:

Paul singles out Apollos as a case in point, an example of how two of the teachers whom the Corinthians are using as mascots to promote themselves and berate others do in fact not behave that way to each other. Perhaps Paul chose Apollos precisely because, having been with Paul in Ephesus and having been mentioned in the Corinthian letter to Paul, he is the example Paul can use with the most effectiveness (Kuck: 1992: 161).

The effectiveness of the use of Apollos' name in Paul's argument for unity can be seen from the fact that Paul chose to speak of collaboration with one who functioned more as an independent missionary. Barnett, for instance, is correct to observe that 'Apollos is a freer agent than Paul's more direct associates were' (Barnett 2003: 318), never being admitted into the inner circle of the apostle's intimates nor ever functioning as a messenger or agent of Paul. From the information provided by Luke in Acts 18, one can conclude that Apollos was not a convert of Paul nor 'had [he] ever been subject to Paul's tutelage' (Barnett 2003: 318). This independent spirit, 'untrammeled and unguided by any earthly superior authority' (Wynne 1912: 62) seems to be confirmed by what we read in 1 Corinthians 16:12. Thus, using the independent Apollos as an example of unity and collaboration would have had a greater rhetorical effect in teaching the Corinthians the lesson of unity. According to this view, then, Apollos had absolutely nothing

to do with the dissensions in Corinth; he functions only as an example. Those who caused the dissensions, it is believed, remain unnamed (see de Vos 1999: 220).

In order to evaluate such a view we will have to look at the meaning of the verb *meteschēmatisa* in 1 Corinthians 4:6, which in this view means 'to exemplify'. In other words, the verse would mean that Paul only used himself and Apollos as an example about those unnamed teachers who have caused the dissensions, substituting those names with theirs (Vos 1995: 154-72). That is, 'Paul was saying things about himself and Apollos which, though true, should really have been said about other people' (Hall 2003: 23). Robertson and Plummer argue for the same sense of the verb: 'The meaning will be 'I have transferred these warnings to myself and Apollos for the purpose of a covert allusion'... The *meteschēmatisa* therefore consists in putting forward the names of those not really responsible for the *stasis* instead of the names of others who were more to blame' (Robertson and Plummer 1914: 81).

The verb *meteschēmatisa* is used only three other times in the New Testament and all of them by the same author, Paul (2 Cor. 11:13, 14, 15; Phil. 3:21). In all occurrences the verb has its 'normal' meaning of 'to change the form of something into something else', whether the change is real or just a disguise (BDAG 641-42). The same meaning is present in the current usage in extrabiblical writing such as Diodorus Siculus (*Bib. Hist.* 1.81.6), Josephus (*A.J.* 7.257, 8.267), Plutarch (*Mor.* 426.E), an Philo (*Legat.* 80.7).

Thus, the verb always implies some kind of outward change and that it never has the meaning of 'to apply' or 'to exemplify'. This meaning of the verb can easily be corroborated with the message of the immediate context of 1 Corinthians 4:6. What Paul is saying is that in 1 Corinthians 4:6 he intends to change what has been said in order to apply to unnamed teachers—the 'natural' meaning of the verb, but at the same time Paul and Apollos are not excluded from the referent for that would go against the context. This is what Thiselton also believes as he combines different aspects of the meaning. He states:

I have allusively applied all this to myself and to Apollos' to convey precisely the balance between probability and openness latent in the Greek. Clearly the examples are *allusive* to those whom Paul does not mention by name; but it goes beyond the evidence to claim that Paul and Apollos themselves are necessarily only *ciphers of rhetorical fiction* whom Paul himself exempts from his own warnings. Indeed, his reference to his own self-knowledge or conscience (4:4) suggests the opposite. Mere *examples* undertranslates; *covert* rhetoric overtranslates; *allusive application* identifies the issue (Thiselton 2000: 351).

Paul Ellingworth and Howard Hatton may be very close to what is Paul actually saying in this verse when they paraphrase Paul: 'In all that I have said up to now it may seem that I have been talking only about Apollos and myself; but what I have said can be applied more widely, namely to you readers' (Ellingworth and Hatton 1995: 93).

Conclusion

We are now in a position to draw a conclusion regarding Apollos' function in 1 Corinthians 1-4 and seeming role in the dissensions. We know from 1 Corinthians 16:12 that the two missionaries worked independently, but not necessarily in competition with one another, since Paul seems to use warm terms in referring to Apollos. Therefore, 1 Corinthians 1-4 cannot be regarded as an attempt on the part of Paul to defend himself against the threat that Apollos is posing to him in the Corinthian church. A careful reading of Acts 18:24-28 and an examination of the terms used to describe Apollos can lead us to believe that Apollos was rhetorically skilled, but we have no clear grounds for arguing that Apollos' *modus operandi* differed from Paul's to such a degree that he used sophistic rhetoric which Paul opposed in 1 Corinthians 1-4 and which led to the dissensions in the Corinthian assembly, especially since Apollos is presented as being of much help to the Corinthians.

This positive regard of Apollos by Luke is confirmed by Paul's non-polemical argument in 1 Cor 3:5-4:5 as he mentions Apollos' name several times. A reading of the text at its face value forces us to believe that Paul describes Apollos in congenial rather than polemical terms, making thus the Corinthians responsible for the dissensions rather than Apollos.

That this is so was lastly corroborated by the study of the meaning of the verb *meteschēmatisa* in 1 Corinthians 4:6. What we were able to say with certainty concerning its meaning is that Paul used himself and Apollos in his argument in the previous section, not just as examples or as an indirect way of referring to others, but that Paul and Apollos were themselves in danger of being evaluated according to worldly standards of wisdom. Thus the dissensions in the Corinthian church were not limited to preferences for Paul or Apollos, but neither did they exclude them.

In light of this study, we may conclude that the fault for the dissensions in the Corinthian church was not Apollos nor his seemingly different *modus operandi* than Paul, but the Corinthians' evaluation of their teachers (including Paul and Apollos) according to worldly wisdom. Paul and Apollos were co-workers in common missionary projects that were the victims of the Corinthians' partisan spirit.

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