

PAUL'S *APOLOGIA* IN 1 CORINTHIANS 1-4 AND THE CONCEPT OF *PATERFAMILIAS*

CORIN MIHĂILĂ*

Emanuel University

ABSTRACT. In Paul's argument against dissensions, Paul is said to have tried to regain his authority before the Corinthians. The first rhetorical unit is thus seen as an apologia. In his argument, he seemingly uses the concept of *paterfamilias* known to have evoked power and control. However, such a proposal neglects the fact that Paul's argument is against exactly such type of discourse in which one seeks to elevate one teacher against another. Rather, in the use of the concept of *paterfamilias* we should see Paul redefining the concept and filling it with affection.

KEYWORDS: *apologia*, Corinthians, Apollos, Paul, *paterfamilias*

Introduction

The first issue that Paul tackles in his first letter to the Corinthians is that of the dissensions among the members of the church. According to recent studies, the dissensions seem to have been caused by the Corinthians' preferences for certain teachers as expressed in the slogans of 1 Corinthians 1:12. These preferences were formed by their evaluation of teachers according to their rhetorical skills and were fueled by their desire for enhancing their status that allegiance to these teachers would have provided.

In Paul's attempt to address this issue of dissensions and to put an end to them, Paul calls the Corinthians to conform their thinking to the values of God seen in the cross. The cross is counter-cultural and, therefore, the Corinthian Christians should perceive their teachers and their Christian assembly in light of the cross and not as a continuation of the social networks that they are used to in the larger society and where they vie for status and honor by way of extending their patronage over public speakers. The Corinthians need an adjustment or even a radical change in their thinking by renouncing the values of the world and by adopting God's values, exempli-

* CORIN MIHĂILĂ (PhD 2006, Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary) teaches New Testament Exegesis and Hermeneutics at Emanuel University of Oradea. Email: corin.mihaila@emanuel.ro.

fied in Paul's preaching. In his preaching, according to 1 Corinthians 2:1-5, Paul has taken a calculated anti-sophistic stance in order to conform his *modus operandi* to God's *modus operandi*, which goes clearly and intentionally against the expectations of the world when it comes to public speakers (see 1 Corinthians 1:18-31).

Paul's way of addressing the issue of dissensions raises the question of whether Paul, by appeal to his theology of the cross, is seeking to reestablish his authority (i.e., ethos) in the Corinthian community. Is Paul seeking to regain the following of the Corinthians presumably in light of the fact that his authority has suffered as a result of the coming on the scene of the more rhetorical Apollos, an Apollos that presumably played into the Corinthians hunger for status better than Paul? We know that in 2 Corinthians 10-13 Paul had to defend himself against the 'super-apostles', but can we say that in 1 Corinthians 1-4 his apostleship is also under attack, especially from those who were claiming allegiance to Apollos? Is 1 Corinthians 1-4 Paul's *apologia*? Is Paul's answer to the dissensions a calculated strategy to reposition himself in authority over the Corinthian church, as some have claimed? In order to give an answer to such a claim, we must analyze the father figure imagery used in these chapters in conjunction with Paul's calls for imitation.

Paul's *Apologia*

First Corinthians 1-4 has been regarded as an *apologia* for Paul's ministry since N. A. Dahl's programmatic article 'Paul and the Church at Corinth according to 1 Corinthians 1:10-4:21' (1967: esp. 317, 321 and 329), though he modified his view in a later edition of his article, stating that 'the characterization of 1 Corinthians 1:10-4:21 as an apologetic section is one-sided and may be misleading' (Dahl 1977: 61, n. 50). Though some have rightly accepted his modified view in believing that the unit only contains 'apologetic elements' (e.g., Winter 2002: 181-82) and therefore the situation of 2 Corinthians (esp. chaps. 10-13) differs from that of 1 Corinthians (Betz 1986: 44), there is still a good number of scholars who follow his initial view.

The most thorough analysis of 1 Corinthians 1-4 as an attempt by Paul to re-establish his authority is in our view that of Charles A. Wanamaker (2003: 115-37). The stated thesis of his article is to 'move Castelli's work forward by looking at the ways in which Paul's rhetoric in 1 Corinthians 1:10-4:21 functions ideologically to reassert his power in the Corinthian Christian community' (Wanamaker 2003: 116; see Castelli 1991). This emphasis on power, Wanamaker contends, can be seen in each of the four sections of the first rhetorical unit. A synopsis of his argument will be presented here.

Wanamaker, following Castelli, starts by contending that 1:17 'already places Paul in a privileged position of authority since he claims primary role in mediating the message of Christ crucified to the Corinthians' (Wanamaker 2003: 124). It is through this claim to the unique role as 'creator' of the community that Paul ideologically legitimates his authoritative position.

The first section his argument (1 Corinthians 1:18-2:16) allegedly continues the argument by implying a 'narrative of origin', that is, the origin of the Corinthians' faith through the preaching of the gospel; not any version of the gospel, but Paul's version (Wanamaker 2003: 126). In this sense, it is believed that Paul uses the cross in the first building block (1 Corinthians 1:18-25) as a rhetorical tool for the purpose of establishing his *ethos* (Williams 1998: 677, 683, 687, and 692). The discourse of the cross functions as a foil against which Paul presents his authoritative position in the Corinthian assembly. Thus, it is argued that Paul seeks to elevate himself over Apollos by use of disguised speech (Smit 2000: 243-44). In the second building block (1 Corinthians 1:26-31), it is contended that Paul 'allies himself with the socially disadvantaged in Corinth in an attempt to win their loyalty', since they are the majority in the Corinthian community (Carter 1997: 61). In the third building block (1 Corinthians 2:1-5), Wanamaker argues that Paul seeks to legitimate his *modus operandi* against the 'value system of the socially superior members of the community who almost certainly would have identified with and even approved of rhetorical sophistication...' (Wanamaker 2003: 128).

Wanamaker continues to make his argument by an analysis of the second section (1 Corinthians 2:6-3:4) of the first rhetorical unit with a view to Paul's intent to reassert his authority. In the two building blocks of this section (1 Cor 2:6-16 and 3:1-4) it is argued that Paul distinguishes himself from the Corinthians by characterizing himself as 'perfect' and the Corinthians as 'babies' (Wanamaker 2003: 128-29, n. 62). Wanamaker contends: 'When 2:6-16 is read against the context provided by 3:1-4 it becomes clear that Paul has created a legitimating rationalization to explain his own position of dominance over the Corinthians...' (Wanamaker 2003: 129). In other words, the metaphors of 'mature' and 'babies' are regarded as functioning ideologically as a means by which Paul places himself in an authoritative position.

The third section of the argument (1 Corinthians 3:5-4:5) likewise can be read as intended to covertly elevate Paul above the Corinthians, but more importantly, above the other teachers, especially Apollos. It is true that in the first building block (1 Corinthians 3:5-17) Paul uses three analogies (i.e., land, building, temple) in order to prove the illegitimacy of human evaluation of teachers, but Wanamaker and others go even farther to argue that in using metaphors to present himself and the other teachers, Paul, in a subtle

way, allows for differentiations between himself and Apollos, placing Apollos and the other teachers (including the Corinthians) in a subordinate position (Joubert 1995: 217; Williams 1998: 691). He does this, allegedly, by pointing to at least three facts: he fulfilled the pioneering function in the originating of the Christian community as the one who planted and as the master builder; there will be distinctions in rewards; and those who destroy the temple founded by him will be destroyed (Wanamaker 2003: 131-33). In what is rightly regarded as a summary of Paul's argument (1 Corinthians 3:18-25) in the first rhetorical unit, Wanamaker again sees another step in Paul's argument for his authority. He states that 'by accepting this unity, the community effectively subscribes to Paul's authoritative position as the architect of the community's unity, and therefore, the re-unification of the community re-inscribes Paul's own position of dominance within it' (Wanamaker 2003: 134). The third building block (1 Corinthians 4:1-5), supposedly, enforces Paul's authoritative position by pointing to the fact that he is outside the range of the Corinthians' competence to evaluate; he is above criticism.

The final section (1 Corinthians 4:6-21) is regarded as the clearest statement of Paul's alleged intent to reassert his authority. Eva Maria Lassen has pointed to the fact that the irony characterizing the first building block of this section (1 Corinthians 4:6-13) emphasizes the inferior status and degrading treatment experienced by the father (i.e., Paul) while his children (i.e., the Corinthians) enjoyed the very best (Lassen 1991: 135-36). The distinction in status between Paul and the Corinthians is presented however in categories that associate Paul with those whom God chose (1 Corinthians 1:27-28) and the Corinthians with those of high status (1 Corinthians 1:26), pointing seemingly to Paul's superior position. If this is not clear enough, then, it is argued, Paul will overtly seek to establish his authoritative position by appeal to the father-figure imagery and the concept of imitation (see Joubert 1995: 213-23 and Castelli 1991: 100-3, 107-11 respectively). Wanamaker contends that by an appeal to a narrative of origin in which Paul is the 'begetter' of the community, he places himself in 'a unique position of unrivalled authority within the community in relation to other leaders whom he describes as mere *paidagōgoi*', seemingly a subordinate role (Wanamaker 2003: 135).

Thus, it is in the use of the concept of *paterfamilias* that one most clearly perceives Paul's intention to exert authority over the Corinthians and present his authoritative position in the church above all the other teachers. This concept is believed to gather under its umbrella all that Paul has communicated in the first rhetorical unit: his appeal to the narrative of origins (1 Corinthians 1:18-2:5); his distinction between the mature and the children (1 Corinthians 2:6-3:4); his denying the Corinthians the right to judge

the founder of the community (1 Corinthians 3:5-4:5); and his injunction to imitation (1 Corinthians 4:6-21). All these are believed to be inherent in the first century concept of *paterfamilias* and therefore a study of this concept, both in 1 Corinthians and in Paul's culture, is necessary in order to adequately evaluate the supposition that Paul seeks to reestablish his authority in 1 Corinthians 1-4.

Before we look at this important concept used by Paul in this final section, which offers the solution to the dissensions—imitation of Paul—it is important to see whether in fact Paul does aim at reasserting his authority all throughout the first rhetorical unit. It is not necessary to go into great details in order to prove Wanamaker's argument invalid. There are clear evidences in these chapters of Paul's self-deprecation for the purpose of revealing the importance of God/Christ in the community's formation. His self-effacing cannot be regarded as a covert and subtle way of self-assertion, but should rather be taken at face value, namely as a sincere desire of Paul to point away from himself (and the other teachers) to God.

For instance, in the first stage of his argument (1 Corinthians 1:18-2:5), Paul clearly points to the triune God's central role in creating the Corinthian community: the message that saves is the message about the crucified Christ (1 Corinthians 1:17-25); several times God is the subject of verbs that speak of his initiative in the salvation of the Corinthians (1 Corinthians 1:26-31); and faith unto salvation is the result of the work of the Spirit (1 Corinthians 2:1-5). In all this work of salvation, Paul is the mere herald of the message (Dodd 1999: 53).

Though in the next section (esp. 1 Corinthians 3:1-4) he speaks of himself as 'mature' and the Corinthians as 'babies', his intention is not to elevate himself above the Corinthians, but rather to point to the Corinthians' spiritual condition as a dangerous one. Since in 2:6-16 Paul presents only two possible spiritual categories—believers and unbelievers based on their perception of the gospel—the Corinthians being fleshly find themselves in a dangerous condition spiritually—spiritual yet acting as unbelievers, as those who have not been enlightened by God. Thus, a central theme in 2:6-16 at least is that God occupies the central role in salvation, in that he is the one who enlightens men to salvation. The message of salvation is communicated by teachers such as Paul, but it is received only by revelation. Peter Lampe, thus, is on target when he states that '2:6-16 points out that 'we preach *God's* wisdom, which *God* predestined' (2:7); '*God* revealed' (2:10)... and so forth. The word 'God' occurs ten times in 2:6-16. Here we encounter the argument's point, and the polemic against the Corinthians. Facing the veneration of apostles, Paul calls out 'God, God,' not 'Paul,' not 'Apollon,' not 'Cephas' (Lampe 1990: 127). By distinguishing between the 'perfect' and the 'babies', Paul is then seeking to make the Corinthians understand that

their divisive spirit and preferences for teachers based on their eloquence of speech proves their worldly thinking, and is man-focused rather than God-focused.

That this is so is most clearly seen in the next section (1 Corinthians 3:5-4:5). In this section, not only does Paul use metaphors to describe himself and the other teachers that are normally associated with low-status people, but he also points to God's central role: *God* is the one who gives the teachers to the church; *God* is the only one who can create the church; *Christ* is the only foundation; *God* is the only one who will judge them; and all belong to *Christ/God*. Even when Paul speaks of himself as the one laying the foundation, he does not exalt himself since he performs his work 'according to the grace of God given to me'. Moreover, the metaphors he uses to describe himself and the other teachers are not to be thought as 'a covert jab at anyone else', for that would lead to a collapse of Paul's argument for unity, since he would be engaging in a practice he rejects (Lampe 1990: 56). Rather, his self-deprecation should be regarded as sincere, intended to point to God's significant role contrasted to his (and others') menial role.

This is the case also with the last section of the first rhetorical unit (1 Corinthians 4:6-21). Like nowhere else before, Paul goes to great length to portray himself and the other teachers as the most despised people—'the scum of the earth, the refuse of the world'. But in such conditions, they actually live out a cruciform life. It is this quality that Paul calls on the Corinthians to imitate (Pickett 1997: 59). When they learn to renounce all desires for fame and fortune—the 'benefits' that come with high status—they then will find the solution to their dissensions. Thus, Paul is not calling them to follow him *per se*, but to follow Christ (Garland 2004: 147; Thiselton 2000: 371-73).

This short survey of the first four chapters, then, shows what Paul's purpose truly is: not of reasserting his authority, but of elevating God's role in Christ. 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: 40). This is particularly seen in the fact that Paul is critical not only of his opponents but of his own adherents as well. Moreover, 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) (Wire 1990: 46). Not the least, 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. Thus, Paul does not seek to secure a following, but ultimately to bring about unity (Welborn 1987: 320-46; Mitchell 1992: 199-200, 207-10). This, in fact, was one of the responsibilities of a *paterfamilias*: the creation and maintenance of unity and peace within the household (Burke 2003: 107).

The Concept of *Paterfamilias*

Studies into the concept of *paterfamilias* have tended to overemphasize the aspect of authority and power (*patria potestas*) to the exclusion of any affections involved in a familial relationship. But even though it is generally recognized that the *paterfamilias*, especially in the Roman society, was vested with authority, power, and control (cf. Lassen 1991: 129-33), more recent scholarship has rightly construed a more balanced/moderate understanding of the concept, noting that in practice the *paterfamilias* rarely exercised his authority to its fullest extent (Clarke 2000: 88-90). Moreover, Andrew Clarke has rightly pointed out that the *potestas* was exercised in different ways over the father's offspring and his slaves (Clarke 2000: 90-95). Thus, in practice, the relationship between parents and children was characterized more than just by exercise of *potestas*; there was also mutual bond of *pietas* (respect) between the members of a family. In light of this, the question remains as to whether 'the authority which was customarily invested within the head of the household [was] also dominant in the Christian congregation which met in his house' (Clarke 2000: 162).

Trevor Burke has recently done a thorough study of the metaphor of family. He lays the foundation of his methodology by rightly contending that,

If metaphors are to be a useful means of communication 'the *person using the figure* and the *person... hearing the words* [must] give the words the same content'. Thus, if Paul's usage of familial nomenclature is far removed from what was commonly associated with family members in antiquity, the correlation would be weak and the impact lessened and our findings rendered less useful (Burke 2003: 98, citing Lyall 1984: 20).

Burke then continues with pointing to a number of aspects of the parent-child relationship in antiquity, by reference to ancient texts. He identifies such elements as hierarchy (e.g., Aristotle, *Pol.* 1.3.2), authority (e.g., Aristotle, *Pol.* 1.13.6-7), imitation (e.g., Isocrates *Or.* 1.4.11), affection (e.g., Plutarch, *Frat. Amor.* 5.480C), and education (e.g., Plutarch, *De Lib.* 5.3E), as characterizing the parent-child relationship. Applying his findings to 1 Corinthians 4:14-21, Burke contends that in order to bring about unity, 'Paul

assumes a role similar to that of a *paterfamilias* in the ancient world who was responsible for exercising authority as well as maintaining order, peace, and concord within his own family. In brief, Paul here is about that business of household management' (Burke 2003: 107). He sees in the use of the metaphor by Paul in 1 Corinthians 4:15 all the above mentioned elements. Thus, Paul intends to establish his superordinate position in the Corinthian community and his authority over the church by calling his children to obey him through imitation, as a way of educating them.

Despite these similarities between the conventional understanding of a father-child relationship and Paul's use of the metaphor, Burke is careful to point to some important distinctions. First, he argues that, 'even though the apostle expected his Corinthian progeny to conform to his pattern, this ought not to be construed as a strategy of coercion or manipulation or authoritarianism on Paul's part. On the contrary... Paul later sounds an important Christocentric note to inform his readers that to imitate him is merely to imitate Christ (11:1) whom he serves' (Burke 2003: 110). Second, 'Paul's paternal role *vis-à-vis* his spiritual offspring is highly complex and variegated and should not be reduced to a *single* expression of his hierarchical stance channeled through his call to imitate him' (Burke 2003: 110, n. 43). Thirdly, 'we should not assume an (over-simplistic) one-to-one correspondence between the social reality of a father in antiquity and Paul's metaphorical use of this term' (Burke 2003: 112). Fourth, 'whilst his position as 'father' was a hierarchical one, there is a dialectic between this and the undoubted affection he also felt for his spiritual offspring' (Burke 2003: 113). Thus, while Paul employs a metaphor that carries with it certain conventional and accepted perceptions, he does not mechanically employ it, but redefines it to fit his agenda as he presents the Christian community as a unique assembly.

It seems that some of the Corinthians were inclined to mistake their Christian assembly for other social networks to which they belonged, such as the household, and import their values into the structuring of their new Christian network. In this respect, Paul seeks to affirm the fact that the Christian community has a unique identity, with a different set of values than those of the surrounding culture, with a particular structure, and therefore with redefined relationships among its members (Meeks 1986: 139).

If Paul seeks to redefine the system, then could it be that 'Paul's argument suffers an internal breakdown here because when he picks up the father image [evoking authority exclusively], he deflates the call to freedom and new possibilities that had not been an option for the poor, women, and slaves?' (Williams 2000: 821) Demetrius Williams aptly responds:

Paul appears to aim at a redefinition of the father image. This means that his image as father is not based upon displays of power and authority. Unlike the Roman *paterfamilias* who would use his position to impose and support hierarchical social order, Paul as the Corinthians' 'father' makes a gentle appeal to them to imitate him (4:16). His model is based upon the cruciform pattern of the cross of Christ—the power of God for the establishment of the eschatological community (Williams 2000: 821).

Andrew Clarke is particularly helpful in bringing out the similarities but also differences between the Christian assembly and the conventional household. First, he rightly observes that 'Paul certainly refers to himself as the father of the Corinthian community, but he also draws attention to other significant householders in that community who were leading figures' (Clarke 2000: 163, 217). The same is true concerning 1 Corinthians 4:15: here 'he neither excludes the possibility of other 'fathers' nor insists on being exclusively the one 'father' of the *whole* church' (Clarke 2000: 219). Second, Paul offers other teachers as an appropriate model for emulation. Timothy, for instance, is presented by Paul 'as a means of reminding the Corinthians of what is appropriate behavior' (Clarke 2000: 221). Third, 'in contradiction to those models of leadership which were prevalent in Greco-Roman society, Paul's legitimation comes not from his own qualities which might have commanded respect, but rather he defers to Christ alone' (Clarke 2000: 221). Fourth, Paul does not describe himself in relation to the Corinthians exclusively in terms of parent/child relationship, which may evoke the idea of a superior/inferior relation, but also as a brother, that is, as an equal sibling (Clarke 2000: 223).

We may conclude, then, that the concept of *paterfamilias* carried with it various denotations, of which both authority and affection are part. When Paul uses the metaphor, however, he redefines it in light of the unique relationships that characterize the Christian community. And even if in the Roman mind, the concept evoked authority, in the case of Paul, it was modified by love (Clarke 2000: 222).

Conclusion

Dissensions was a major problem in the Corinthian church, the cause being both an evaluation of the teachers according to their rhetorical prowess and a view of the Christian church in light of social values learned in the larger society. Paul responds to this issue, by pointing to the cross as God's means of turning downside up the values of the world while at the same time as God's means of forming a completely new *ecclesia*. For Paul, the values inherent in the theology of the cross formed the basis of his *modus operandi* as a preacher, namely a rejection of rhetorical persuasion.

Some have argued that Paul's stance towards rhetoric seen in his self-deprecation attitude as well as in his role as a father for the Corinthians evokes authority, power, and control. But we have seen that such an argument is incompatible with the theological/Christological emphasis that is evident in the first rhetorical unit. Rather, being consistent with his use of other terminology and with his position towards cultural values, Paul redefines the concept of *paterfamilias*, emphasizing affection towards the Corinthians in all his dealings with them.

The focus of Paul's argument in 1 Corinthians 1-4 is not the reestablishing of his authority, but the calling of the Corinthians to unity around the same values represented by the cross, values that are counter-cultural and values that he exemplified in his preaching style. Paul calls the church back to Christ and not back to himself and he does it not by resorting to an attitude of authority but to appeals based on a loving relationship.

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[This article is part of chapter 3 of Corin Mihaila (2009) *The Paul-Apollos Relationship and Paul's Stance toward Greco-Roman Rhetoric. An Exegetical and Socio-historical Study of 1 Corinthians 1-4* (LNTS 402). London: T&T Clark International, pp. 276-293. Used by permission from the publisher]