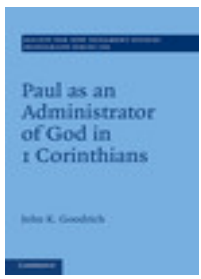

Paul as an Administrator of God in 1 Corinthians

The Graeco-Roman Context of 1 Corinthians

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1

APOSTOLIC AUTHORITY IN 1 CORINTHIANS

> If to others I am not an apostle, at least I am to you.
>
> 1 Cor 9.2

Paul's first epistle to the Corinthians[1] provides a unique and fascinating insight into the social realities and ethical pitfalls that enveloped one of the apostle's earliest and most cherished faith communities. Throughout its sixteen chapters, Paul's letter repeatedly attests to the conflicts that erupted within the church at Corinth and the volatility of the community's boundaries with the unbelieving world. The church's discord – apparent in political factions (1.10–4.21), civil litigation (6.1–8), libertarianism (6.12; 8.1–11.1), gender disputes (11.3–16; 14.33–6), segregated dining (11.17–34), and charismatic bias (12.4–31) – is indicative of the competitive and dissenting spirit that permeated the city's congregations. Furthermore, the high degree of *fragmentation* that plagued the community seems to have been fuelled intensely by its widespread *integration* with non-Christian society; indeed, there was almost no sense of separation between the church and the unbelieving world from which it was called.[2] An assembly obviously fraught with internal conflict, preoccupied with non-Christian ethics, and consumed with popular forms of education and leadership, the church in Corinth struggled perhaps

[1] The canonical 1 Corinthians was not Paul's initial correspondence with the Corinthian church (cf. 1 Cor 5.9–11), but this form of reference will be utilised throughout for the sake of convenience.

[2] As Barclay (1992: 57–8) has astutely observed, 'One of the most significant, but least noticed, features of Corinthian church life is the absence of conflict in the relationship between Christians and "outsiders". In contrast to the Thessalonian church, the believers in Corinth appear neither to feel hostility towards, nor to experience hostility from, non-Christians… Clearly, whatever individual exceptions there may be, Paul does not regard social alienation as the characteristic state of the Corinthian church.' Cf. de Vos (1999); Robertson (2001: 53–113). For the influence of non-Christian ethics on the Corinthian believers, see Clarke (1993); Winter (2000: x). For Paul's portrayal of the Corinthian church as an ideologically distinct community, see Horsley (2005); Adams (2000: 147–9).

more than any other of the apostle's early faith communities to grasp and embody the new 'symbolic order' of Pauline Christianity.[3]

While the nature of the Corinthians' shortcomings distinguished them from Paul's other churches, it is the manner in which Paul utilised the gospel to remedy these complications that distinguishes 1 Corinthians from the rest of the Pauline corpus. First Corinthians reveals in a way unlike any other Pauline epistle the apostle's theology *in practice*, that is, the applicability of the gospel to real people and ordinary problems.[4] According to Gordon Fee, it is this ability of Paul to bring the good news to bear in the marketplace, to facilitate the message as it works its way out in the exigencies of everyday life, that demonstrates the 'truth[fulness] of his gospel', and finds unique expression in 1 Corinthians.[5]

Paul's apostolic authority

Among the many ways that Paul applies his theology to the lives of the believers in Corinth, few are as prevalent and important in 1 Corinthians as the elucidation of apostolic power and authority.[6] As James Dunn maintains, 'The opportunity to compare Paul's theology and his practice, or, better, his theology in practice, is nowhere so promising as in the case of apostolic authority', and '[o]n the day-to-day reality of Paul's apostolic authority, the most instructive text is undoubtedly 1 Corinthians'.[7] The basis of Dunn's two assertions seems clear: the conceptualisation of apostles and apostleship was a matter of great concern between the Corinthian believers themselves, as well as between the church and its founder, and so much so that it was the first topic Paul sought to resolve in the letter (1.10–4.21), one he would soon revisit (9.1–27), and one that would eventually occupy further reflection in later correspondence (2 Corinthians). Clarifying who, or what, Paul and the other apostles were and how they were to be perceived was therefore a matter of real

[3] Horrell (1996: 53–9); cf. Tucker (2010).

[4] Barrett (1968: 26); Conzelmann (1975: 9); R. F. Collins (1999: 29); Furnish (1999: 122–3).

[5] Fee (1987: 16).

[6] Scott (2001: 3) defines *social power* as 'the socially significant affecting of one agent by another in the face of possible resistance'. In this investigation various forms of power will be identified. One such form is *authority*, which we understand to be an expression of what Scott refers to as *persuasive influence*, which involves 'processes of legitimation and signification that can be organised into complex structures of command and expertise' (17). It is by virtue of his position in the ecclesiastical structure that Paul issues the commands and possesses the apostolic rights which will occupy our attention in this study.

[7] Dunn (1998: 571–2).

urgency in Paul's rhetorical strategy as he undertook to direct the church toward ecclesial unity and Christian maturity. At the same time, because the letter is not as polemical as Galatians or 2 Corinthians, it provides an exceptional window into the power dynamics of an apostle playing a relatively unscripted role.

Inasmuch as apostolic authority remains a pertinent topic of study in Pauline theology in general and in 1 Corinthians in particular, the enquiry remains complicated in modern NT research by the multiplicity of scholarly approaches being employed. Not only do these different points of entry leave many interpreters with competing perspectives about the nature of Paul's authority and apostolic practice, but, as the following survey seeks to demonstrate, they too often fail to consider important hermeneutical factors relevant to interpreting Paul's discourses, including their socio-historical and rhetorical contexts.

Authority constructed

Numerous studies in 1 Corinthians have sought to illuminate the nature of apostleship and the authority Paul possessed by examining the theological implications of the many illustrative ways the apostle *constructs*, or *describes*, the apostolate. Countless studies, for instance, have investigated Paul's use of the title ἀπόστολος (1 Cor 1.1, 17; 4.9; 9.1–2, 5; 12.28–9; 15.7, 9), aiming to expose the nature of apostleship by deciphering the origin of the title. While a few interpreters have suggested that the Pauline concept originated in Christianity or Gnosticism,[8] a growing consensus of scholars – following the initial proposal of J. B. Lightfoot and its later development by Karl Rengstorf – suggest that Paul's particular brand of apostleship had its origin in Judaism and was in some way related to the office of the שליח ('delegate').[9] Going in a similar direction, Karl Sandnes has examined Paul's identification with the Hebrew prophets (2.6–16; 9.15–18), suggesting that Paul understood and portrayed his apostolic role as an extension of the OT prophetic tradition.[10] John N. Collins, on the other hand, has focused on Paul's use of the term διάκονος (3.5), arguing quite controversially that Paul's metaphor depicts the apostle as an embassy from God to the church, rather than as a servile position as the term is conventionally understood

[8] For the apostolate as a Christian invention, see, e.g., Munck (1950); Ehrhardt (1953: 15–20). For its origin in Gnosticism, see Schmithals (1969: 98–110).

[9] Lightfoot (1865: 92–101); Rengstorf (1964: 407–45). More recently, Agnew (1986); Frey (2004: 180).

[10] Sandnes (1991: 77–130).

to mean.[11] Stephan Joubert and Trevor Burke have independently targeted Paul's father metaphor (4.14–21), while Beverly Gaventa has concentrated on Paul's maternal language (3.1–2).[12] Finally, Zeba Crook, utilising the relational framework of patronage, portrays Paul as a client and beneficiary who out of loyalty labours to 'convert' other clients to his patron God (9.1, 16–17; 15.8–10).[13]

While normally being socio-historically and exegetically focused, most studies investigating Paul's metaphorical representations of apostleship, however, neither seek nor are able to address what are arguably the most fundamental theological matters concerning apostolic authority: its basis, scope, purpose, and limits. However, this lacuna has in large part been filled by John Schütz, who was one of the first to address Paul's authority utilising modern theory. Combining detailed exegesis with sociology, Schütz demonstrated that Paul's conceptualisation of *apostolic* authority significantly varied from Max Weber's model of *charismatic* authority, since the apostle's authority did not rest on the legitimation of others.[14] Instead, after examining a number of Pauline texts (including 1 Corinthians 1–4 and 15), Schütz reasoned that Paul's authority transcended the legitimating power of the community and rested on two 'figures of interpretation': (i) the *gospel*, itself 'a power or force in human affairs, the field or sphere in which those called by it now stand and through which they move to a future already adumbrated and in some sense present in the gospel'; and (ii) the *apostle* himself, whose power derives not from an institution – 'Paul does not regard apostolic authorization as a sometime thing, as a limited endowment of representative authority' – rather, as the apostle embodies the gospel in his life and ministry, his authority becomes 'inseparable from the whole of the person authorized'.[15] 'Hence, both the gospel and the apostle are manifestations of a single power and *are* "authority" in that sense.'[16] Deeply learned and nearly comprehensive in scope, Schütz's work remains a leading theological analysis of Paul's authority-concept.

Even Schütz's investigation, however, was not able to address every significant facet of Pauline apostolic power and authority, as he himself ignored how Paul's authority was actually exercised. That is to say, while Schütz's treatment provides an intriguing study on Paul's ideology of

[11] J. N. Collins (1990: 195–7). See in response Clarke (1999: 233–43); Hentschel (2007: 91–8).
[12] Joubert (1995); Burke (2003); Gaventa (2007: 41–50). Cf. Gerber (2005).
[13] Crook (2004: 155–69). [14] Schütz (1975: 268–9).
[15] Schütz (1975: 284). [16] Schütz (1975: 284).

authority, it remains one-dimensional insofar as it fails to analyse how Paul asserted his authority over his Christian communities.

Authority asserted

While the studies mentioned above have examined how Paul *constructed* apostolic authority, a number of other studies have sought to expose and evaluate how Paul *asserted* authority. Looking beyond Paul's apostolic representations, these investigations often utilise modern theory to detect, compare, and assess the use of power and authority in Paul's letters. Bengt Holmberg, whose analysis of the 'structures of authority' in the early church is now quite famous for helping to usher in an age of sociological exploration of the NT, is another who has left a massive imprint on the landscape of Pauline authority studies. Whereas Schütz examined Paul's authority as an ideological abstraction, Holmberg pursued the matter as a sociological reality, utilising 'concrete social facts' to establish what 'actually happened between Paul and his churches'.[17] Relying therefore on both Acts and the Pauline letters to supply his historical data, Holmberg compared Paul's power to the Weberian authority models and concluded that the primitive church operated under the influence of a complex structure of ecclesial power based mainly on charismatic authority, and contained mixed degrees of institutionalisation. Moreover, while Holmberg contended that Paul's Gentile mission was largely dependent on, though not subordinate to, the Jerusalem church,[18] he argued that Paul possessed a large measure of regional authority, having been superordinate to his missionary co-workers and having had the necessary leverage over the local churches he founded to admonish them and to expect from them financial support in return for preaching.[19] In fact, according to Holmberg, it was Paul's *over*-involvement in those churches that disrupted their development of local political structures (cf. 1 Corinthians 12 and 14).[20]

Although Holmberg's analysis yielded rich results, his methodology has been criticised by scholars reluctant to impose anachronistic and unsubstantiated models onto ancient texts.[21] There is, to be sure, much to be gained by using modern theory in the study of biblical literature. Theories, frameworks, and models can at the very least function as useful

[17] Holmberg (1980: 203), who charges Schütz and his methodological predecessors with committing 'the fallacy of idealism'.
[18] Holmberg (1980: 55–6). [19] Holmberg (1980: 70–93).
[20] Holmberg (1980: 116). [21] Judge (1980: 210); Clarke (1993: 3–6).

heuristic tools 'for the purpose of developing new approaches to and opening up new questions about early Christianity'.[22] Still, the criticisms directed against Holmberg's analysis have served to remind interpreters of the need to verify interpretive claims and methodologies with sufficient historical data. As Holmberg himself remarks,

> [A] detailed knowledge of the historical setting of the early Christians is indispensable for any historical reconstruction of their real life. Historiography cannot operate without historical data that can serve as evidence, nor can it neglect any available historical data, just because they cannot be easily fitted into one's own outlook or 'model'. Socio-historical fieldwork is what hypotheses, models, and theories work on and are constructed from. This means also that models or theories cannot substitute for evidence, by filling in gaps in the data, as it were.[23]

Future efforts to elucidate and appraise Paul's apostolic authority must therefore situate Paul's letters in their historical context and validate the use of modern theory and expectations with sufficient textual evidence.

This warning is particularly germane to critics who are expressly suspicious of the apostle's exercise of authority and have sought to expose its suppressive nature without reconstructing the context in which it was employed. Graham Shaw, for instance, while conceding that Paul's letters advocate liberation and reconciliation, aggressively argues that those tenets are wholly incompatible with the oppressive ethos of Paul's political practice.[24] Paul's assertion of authority is, according to Shaw, 'complex but unrelenting', as he manipulated churches to rely on him, all the while concealing his dependence on them and alienating those believers who failed to ally.[25] Furthermore, Paul's abusive exercise of power is to be credited to the apostle's mistaken sense of authorisation: 'the brittle, arbitrary and divisive nature of Paul's leadership', Shaw remarks, 'is intimately connected with self-delusion about the resurrection, and a mistaken value attributed to charismatic phenomena'.[26] Targeting several Pauline letters, in addition to Mark's Gospel, Shaw has particularly harsh words for Paul's rhetoric in 1 Corinthians:

[22] Horrell (2000: 93). Cf. Esler (2000); Horrell (2009).

[23] Holmberg (2004: 269–70). Cf. Holmberg (1990).

[24] Shaw (1983: 181–4). Despite his criticisms of Paul's assertion of authority, Shaw attempts to exonerate Paul's intentions by conceding that the apostle was 'learning to exercise freedom and love' (184).

[25] Shaw (1983: 181). [26] Shaw (1983: 182).

> This letter, which contains the most famous of all Paul's writings, the lyrical passage on love in ch. 13, is in other respects an exercise of magisterial authority. Its keynote is struck in the second verse – the Lordship of Christ. In the name of that Lord Paul demands unity and obedience. He is to be seen subduing critics, subjecting the faithful to his unsolicited censure, and giving firm rulings to their most intimate queries. It is a style that the officials of the Vatican can rightly claim as their own. It is perhaps a sign of Paul's confidence in the exercise of his authority that only a few verses of the letter are devoted to prayer. He briefly thanks God for the spiritual achievement of the Corinthians … and declares his confidence that God will maintain their loyalty – sentiments which both confirm the Corinthians in their position of obedience and rule out of court the possibility of their defection. Here he needs neither to flatter nor cajole, and so he proceeds to command.[27]

Although Shaw's concerns are refreshingly candid, his rhetoric is habitually overstated and his analysis fails to place any of Paul's discourses in their historical context. As Dunn remarks with reference to Shaw's criticisms on 1 Corinthians, 'A fairer reading … would be much more sensitive to the rhetorical character of the letter and to the social factors at play in Corinth, particularly when we cannot hear the other sides of the debates and do not know how much the issues were caught up in the social tensions of Corinth, not least between patrons and their clients.'[28]

Elizabeth Castelli's treatment of Paul's call to imitation (μιμήσις), while offering another stimulating appraisal of the apostle's 'strategy of power', ultimately suffers from a similar kind of contextual neglect.[29] Critical of past interpreters who 'either have ignored the implicit articulation of power present in the advocacy of mimetic relations or have rendered the power relationship unproblematic and self-evident',[30] Castelli has sought, on the basis of the theory of Michel Foucault, to expose the power buried in Paul's rhetoric by showing how the perpetuation of sameness was used to repress deviance and proliferate a single Christian ideology – Paul's own – with the ultimate consequence of monopolising truth and determining who would and would not be saved. Castelli's thesis has particular relevance for 1 Corinthians, where Paul's call to become his imitators surfaces twice in significant sections of the letter.

[27] Shaw (1983: 62). [28] Dunn (1998: 575–6).
[29] Castelli (1991: 15). [30] Castelli (1991: 33).

'Imitation of Paul in both contexts (4:16 and 11:1)', Castelli states, 'has to do fundamentally with the social arrangement of the Corinthian community (unity and identity) and always refers back to the singular authoritative model of Paul.'[31] But Castelli's insistence on Paul's manipulation of the Corinthians fails to account for how his call to imitation originally functioned in the letter, that is, as a pattern of suffering and of *sacrificing* one's authority, rather than *exploiting* it (cf. 4.9–13; 9.19). Castelli attempts to circumvent the matter of authorial intention by dismissing its accessibility to modern exegetes.[32] However, as Margaret Mitchell has noted, such neglect is at odds with Castelli's own rhetoric as well as the postmodern theory on which her thesis rests.[33] Moreover, once the socio-rhetorical context of 1 Corinthians is given fuller attention, it is plain that the Corinthians, not Paul, were those fixated on power.[34]

Sandra Polaski, who is also informed by Foucauldian methods of detecting power, analyses Paul's autobiographical discourses in order to move behind what Paul *states* about his power to identify what Paul *implies* about it. Even though she has no wish to apply a 'hostile reading' to the text, nor 'to vilify Paul's power claims from the outset', nor 'to dismiss them as deceitfully self-serving', Polaski openly employs a hermeneutic of suspicion whereby she attempts to detect in Paul 'evidence of power relations which the surface meaning of the text may mask'.[35] This leads her to investigate Philemon, Galatians, and Paul's references to the divine grace given to him (e.g. 1 Cor 3.10) in order to demonstrate how the apostle possessed a sense of revelatory authority which he used to persuade his audiences to obey. While he always afforded his audiences the opportunity to refuse, to do so would have been an affront to him and, just as Castelli observed, would have resulted in placement outside the ideological community.[36]

Whereas Shaw, Castelli, and Polaski have raised serious questions about the motives and effects of Paul's apostolic authority, other

[31] Castelli (1991: 114–15). See also Wanamaker (2003), who is indebted to Castelli's approach and further emphasises Paul's use of ideology to assert power.

[32] It is significant that Scott (2001: 2) notes how a 'power relation cannot … be identified unless there is some reference to the intentions and interests of the actors involved and, especially, to those of the principal'.

[33] M. M. Mitchell (1992).

[34] Cf. Clarke (1998: 342–7); Copan (2007: 181–218).

[35] Polaski (1999: 21).

[36] Polaski (1999: 71): 'Paul moves from relationship-language that is already accepted by his readers … to another set of terms, commercial, familial, and even corporeal in nature, which, taken together, describe a universe in which Paul is very close to God in authority.'

interpreters have suggested that the power relations operating between Paul and his communities were far more complex than some modern critics realise. Ernest Best, for instance, while recognising that Paul possessed authority derived from the gospel, argued that Paul only made claim to his apostleship and apostolic authority when addressing his relationship with other church leaders.[37] In so doing, Best attempted to mitigate the charge of Paul's abuse of specifically *apostolic* authority, insisting that Paul exercised authority over his churches only on the basis of his status as their *founder* ('father').[38] But Best's distinction between Paul's roles as apostle and church founder seems artificial; despite Best's attempts to do so, there does not appear to be any reason to separate Paul's apostolic and missional roles. Moreover, determining which role Paul occupies when he exercises authority over his converts seems to require evidence beyond what his letters provide.

Kathy Ehrensperger, followed by Adrian Long and Rick Talbott, has also given Paul's exercise of authority a sympathetic reading, attempting to explain how Paul used his authority constructively, that is, not to suppress his churches, but to empower them toward Christian maturity. While she grants that Paul and others in the early Christian movement exercised power *over* their communities and operated within an asymmetrical hierarchy, Ehrensperger places Paul's rhetoric into conversation with contemporary feminist theories of power in order to explain that Paul's authority, far from being domineering, had a transformative objective which sought to enable early believers to reach a status of maturity on a par with their leaders.[39] As Ehrensperger herself remarks, 'Paul emphasizes again and again that the aim of his teaching is to *empower* those within his communities to *support each other*. He acts as a parent-teacher using power-over them to empower them and thus render himself, and the power-over exercised in this role, obsolete.'[40]

[37] Best (1986: 8–12, 22).

[38] Best (1986: 22): 'There is no doubt Paul claimed to be an apostle, and that of the type of Peter. There is no doubt that he exercised authority. There must be doubt that these two ideas are necessarily related.'

[39] Ehrensperger (2007: 179).

[40] Ehrensperger (2007: 136, original emphasis). See also Adrian Long (2009: 56–147): '[W]hen contextualized within both the Corinthians' situation and especially within his self-presentation in the Corinthian correspondence, it would seem safer to find in Paul's claim to be the community's father a statement of power which is gospel-defined; which aims not at self-aggrandizement but at the edification of the community through service and love' (130). Moreover, Talbott (2010: 93–161) shows that Paul holds in tension the notions of 'kyriarchy' (structural power and superiority) and 'kyridoularchy' (exercising power on behalf of social subordinates so as to empower them), implementing a kyridoularchal vision in his churches while addressing with kyriarchical rhetoric those who failed

Ehrensperger's approach involves analysing and re-evaluating many of the same metaphors and motifs examined by her predecessors, such as Paul's grace language, apostleship terminology, parental metaphors, and imitation motif. But although her exegesis is socio-historically grounded and her thesis about the empowering role of the apostolate deserves serious consideration, the assumption that the apostles sought eventually to eliminate the ecclesial hierarchy seems unwarranted. At what point was apostolic authority rendered obsolete, and was this goal actually achievable, or merely hypothetical? Ehrensperger simply goes beyond the evidence when she utilises her framework to impose this ecclesiastical goal.

Authority contested

In addition to considering the social context of power, one of the most significant complications with analysing Paul's power and authority in Corinth is that there existed within and without the community various contestants for power and various understandings of it. Reconstructing the competing power relations operative in the church is therefore an essential hermeneutical step in the interpretive process. Although there is certainly no consensus in modern scholarship about the precise social circumstances facing the community at the time 1 Corinthians was written, what is known (or hitherto found to be historically plausible) must be taken into serious consideration, especially when assessing Paul's power claims and assertions. As Dunn explains, 'Difficult though it is, the reconstruction of social context is necessary for any full understanding of the letter': 'as different reconstructions are proffered, or as different facets of the complex historical context of 1 Corinthians are illuminated, so different emphases and facets of the letter itself will be thrown into prominence (and others into shadow)'.[41]

Dunn's warning is particularly applicable in our case. Most would agree, for instance, that one of the major ethical failings of the Corinthian community was its preoccupation with personal power, exercised through honour, boasting, and patronage, and perhaps most apparent in the church's political, legal, and dietary disputes.[42] As L. L. Welborn

to align with his vision. But empowering others did not render one's power obsolete. As Talbott explains, 'Kyridoularchy did not necessarily require one to forfeit his or her status or economic means simply to identify with lower-status members. The object was not repudiating one's power but ascribing honor to others' (100).

[41] Dunn (2004: 296, 309).

[42] See, e.g., Chow (1992: 113–66); Clarke (1993: 59–107).

has rightly and memorably remarked, 'It is a power struggle, not a theological controversy, which motivates the writing of 1 Corinthians 1–4.'[43] Intensifying these local feuds still further were the disproportionate power and patronage ascribed to individual leaders, including not only apostolic figures such as Paul, Apollos, and Cephas, but perhaps also local dissenters, such as the Corinthian prophetesses and popular orators.[44] Finally, it is important also to recall the role occupied by God/Christ in Paul's apostolic undertaking, particularly as the one who exercised power over him and would judge his ministry at its completion.[45] These kinds of power relations must be factored into any discussion of Paul's portrayal and assertion of apostolic authority, as they are foundational to the reconstruction of the occasion of the letter and indispensible for identifying its rhetorical, perhaps even apologetic, objectives.

Summary

As this survey has shown, Pauline interpreters have employed a variety of methods and approaches in seeking to elucidate Paul's apostolic authority. But many who have investigated the concept have restricted their analyses either to the construction *or* assertion of his authority. For Paul, however, theology is inseparable from practice, so it is important that both aspects be examined together when possible. It has also been shown that many studies neglect certain hermeneutical factors that must be accounted for when addressing apostolic power and authority. Scholars utilising modern theories of analysis are especially prone to identify power claims without adequately demonstrating that such forms and expressions of power are substantiated by historical data. Beyond this, many of these studies ignore that there were in Corinth various contestants for power whose own power assertions disrupted the community and set the tone for Paul's subsequent response. Because Paul's power relations are so complex, it is important that his exercise of authority not be treated, as Andrew Clarke warns, 'in simplified terms, essentially dealing exclusively with Paul's mechanisms of asserting power'.[46] Rather, Clarke recommends, 'Paul's power rhetoric and his power dealings need to be explored within their wider context, including the ways in which Paul defined the limits of his power, the ways in which he

[43] Welborn (1987b: 89). [44] Cf. Wire (1990); Winter (2002).

[45] As Schütz (1975: 285) remarks: 'The final judgment is the final and unmistakable manifestation of power.'

[46] Clarke (2008: 106; cf. 108–9).

undermined the power that was inherent in his own position, [and] how he responded to the power plays of others.'[47] What is therefore needed is an investigation that considers both Paul's construction *and* assertion of authority, one that is sensitive to the letter's socio-historical and rhetorical contexts.

Paul as an administrator of God: a neglected metaphor

One image that too often goes overlooked, yet can be utilised to address the concerns raised by Clarke, is Paul's portrayal of apostles as administrators (οἰκονόμοι) of God.[48] Paul's metaphor appears in two important passages in 1 Corinthians (4.1–5; 9.16–23), and in both pericopae Paul indicates that his apostleship was being scrutinised by his own converts. Paul therefore employs the metaphor in both texts to correct fundamental misunderstandings about his apostolic role, rights, and responsibilities. In fact, the strategic placement of this metaphor indicates that Paul believed it cogently communicated some of his chief apostolic attributes; indeed, the directive in 1 Cor 4.1 (οὕτως ἡμᾶς λογιζέσθω ἄνθρωπος) suggests that Paul considered this metaphor to be a more reliable illustration of the apostolate for his current readership than the other images he employed in 1 Corinthians 3–4. Furthermore, Paul's reinstatement of the same metaphor in 9.17 demonstrates his continued confidence in the image's ability to convey his role to this particular church. Beyond this, Paul's metaphor affords the reader a promising way to analyse Paul's construction *and* assertion of authority in 1 Corinthians, for both 1 Cor 4.1–5 and 9.16–23 offer representations of apostleship and the authority inherent in that position, as well as show how the apostle exercised (or even refused to exercise) his authority in an effort to resolve specific problems in the church. Paul's use of this metaphor therefore provides a multi-faceted portrait of apostleship and emphasises aspects of his authority that many previous scholarly investigations have overlooked.

[47] Clarke (2008: 106).

[48] The terms οἰκονόμος and οἰκονομία are used metaphorically for apostleship in four passages in the Pauline epistles. Although Paul uses οἰκονόμος in Rom 16.23 for the civic magistracy held by Erastus and in Gal 4.2 as a metaphor for the pre-Christian function of the Mosaic Law, the only undisputed Pauline letter where the metaphor is used to represent apostleship is 1 Corinthians, where it appears in 4.1–2 (οἰκονόμος (2x)) and 9.17 (οἰκονομία). In the disputed letters, the abstract noun οἰκονομία appears metaphorically for Paul's apostolic commission in Eph 3.2 and Col 1.25. Οἰκονόμος is also used in Titus 1.7 as a metaphor for an ἐπίσκοπος and οἰκονομία refers in Eph 1.10, 3.9, and 1 Tim 1.4 to the divine plan/administration of God. The metaphor is implied in the Pauline *Haustafeln* (Eph 6.9; Col 4.1); cf. Harrill (2006: 85–117).

Unfortunately, there remains much debate in NT scholarship about Paul's *oikonomos* metaphor. The confusion is, on the surface, due to the fact that there have been an insufficient number of studies completed on the metaphor by biblical scholars. There exists, for instance, no book-length treatment to date exclusively devoted to explaining this image, whether in 1 Corinthians or anywhere else in Paul's letters. But this oversight by biblical scholars is perhaps only indicative of the general unfamiliarity with the concept among ancient historians; indeed, there remains a conspicuous lacuna even in ancient historical scholarship due to the lack of a definitive treatment of the term οἰκονόμος by classicists. Although some studies have been conducted on the use of οἰκονόμος, οἰκονομία, and related terminology, they are few, quite dated, generally inaccessible as unpublished doctoral theses, and have limited aims so that they do not bring much light to bear directly on Paul's metaphor.[49] In fact, as will be demonstrated in this study, appropriately interpreting Paul's *oikonomos* metaphor requires familiarity with socio-legal and economic aspects of the ancient world that are not immediately obvious in 1 Corinthians and that many NT exegetes have failed to consider heretofore.

There also remains confusion among scholars about the derivation of Paul's metaphor. Even though Paul's description of apostles as *oikonomoi* has long been recognised as a metaphor with a *source domain* originating somewhere in the administrative landscape of the ancient world,[50] the precise social context and connotations of the analogy remain disputed. Many interpreters are even reluctant to identify a specific area of derivation, since *oikonomoi* were ubiquitous in Graeco-Roman antiquity.[51] But failing to identify the metaphor's source domain accurately will bring, and indeed has already brought, added confusion to the exegetical task. Not only do these varying opinions about the metaphor attribute competing legal statuses to Paul's apostolic profile (which affects, for instance, the social perception of apostleship, as well as how one interprets the volitional aspect of his preaching in 1 Corinthians 9), but the failure to

[49] Landvogt (1908); Reumann (1957). Cf. Lehmeier (2006).

[50] Kövecses (2002: 4): 'The conceptual domain from which we draw metaphorical expressions to understand another conceptual domain is called source domain, while the conceptual domain that is understood this way is the target domain… The target domain is the domain that we try to understand through the use of the source domain.'

[51] Tooley (1966: 75–6) considered 1 Cor 4.1–2 to be 'the most pregnant use of the metaphor in the NT', yet failed even to propose a possible source domain, despite distinguishing between several social contexts in which *oikonomoi* were appointed. See also the indecision of Michel (1967: 150); Conzelmann (1975: 83); Horsley (1998a: 67, 129–30); Collins (1999: 168–9); Fitzmyer (2008: 212).

distinguish between source *domains* can easily lead to the indiscriminate use of source *materials*. It is therefore critical that Paul's metaphor be situated in the right administrative context in order to ensure that it is interpreted appropriately.

Survey of interpretations

The first sustained scholarly treatment of Paul's *oikonomos* metaphor attempted to locate the origin of the image in the religious matrix of the Graeco-Roman world. In the middle of the last century, John Reumann, following the *religionsgeschichtliche Schule*, pursued the expression οἰκονόμους μυστηρίων θεοῦ (1 Cor 4.1) by examining a number of Greek inscriptions depicting variously ranked *oikonomoi* in a range of religious capacities. Reumann then proposed that Paul probably adopted the title 'stewards of the mysteries of God' from this Graeco-Roman religious context, especially the mystery cults. Reumann remarked,

> [R]ather than any … theological explanation, it is the background in Greco-Roman life and use of the term with already existing religious connotations which provide the immediate and most obvious insight into Paul's designation of himself and others as 'stewards of God' and his mysteries; as in other instances, he is borrowing terminology current in the religious world of his day.[52]

Despite Reumann's impressive sample of texts featuring *oikonomoi* performing religious rites and responsibilities, the mystery cult hypothesis influenced very few interpreters. Not only does the reading fail to account for the monetary use of the metaphor apparent in 1 Cor 9.17, where Paul's apostolic wage (μισθός) is the issue in dispute, but nearly a decade later Reumann himself abandoned his own proposal in favour of a more ambiguous reading.[53] Moreover, in this later work Reumann

[52] Reumann (1958: 349). Cf. Windisch (1934: 221). Much of Reumann's work in Paul was directed against Oscar Cullmann's decontextualised rendering of *oikonomia* as *Heilsgeschichte*. Cullmann's (1951: 33) understanding of the term was largely influenced by its later-Pauline occurrences (Eph 1.10; 3.2, 9; Col 1.25). Cullmann then imported this later cosmic sense into Paul's self-designation as an '*oikonomos* of God's mysteries' (1 Cor 4.1) so that Paul's metaphor indicated the apostle was not just entrusted 'an administration of the divine teaching about salvation but also of the active realization of the redemptive history' (223). In support of Cullmann's reading is the fact that a number of patristic authors subsequently utilised *oikonomia* to refer to God's cosmic plan of redemption; cf. Richter (2005). Nevertheless, Reumann (1967) convincingly showed that the earlier-Pauline uses of *oikonomia*-terminology do not refer to God's redemptive plan.

[53] Reumann (1967: 161). Still, Reumann (1992: 14) maintained that the mystery cult interpretation would have resonated with many in Paul's world. But as Schrage (1991: 321)

intimated that the phrase 'stewards of the mysteries of God' may in fact have been a Semitism borrowed from Second Temple Judaism, a theory that continues to carry some currency in modern scholarship.

The Semitic hypothesis has, for instance, been advocated by Benjamin Gladd in his recent monograph on Paul's use of μυστήριον in 1 Corinthians. Although he concedes that 'Paul may have invented this stewardship metaphor without any reference to the OT, Second Temple Judaism, or Mystery Religions', Gladd observes certain resonances between 1 Cor 4.1–5 and Theodotion's Greek text of Daniel, which eventually lead him to suppose that Paul's *oikonomos* metaphor was a familiar image in Jewish apocalyptic.[54] But Gladd's proposal fails to convince, since, as he himself admits, the Greek phrase is found nowhere in Jewish literature or anywhere else in Graeco-Roman antiquity.[55] Raymond Brown and Markus Bockmuehl, on the other hand, suggest that a Hebrew parallel may exist from Qumran, both briefly noting the similarities between Paul's designation of apostles as οἰκονόμοι μυστηρίων (1 Cor 4.1) and the intriguing phrase נשי משמרת לרזיכה [א] ('the men who guard your mysteries', 1Q36 16.2).[56] The resemblance is certainly striking, but we should not minimise the differences between the actions and responsibilities implied by the Greek noun οἰκονόμος and the Hebrew verb שמר, especially because the former was directed to Gentile urbanites, the latter to sectarian Jews. While there may be some implied functional overlap between the two terms, they are not strictly equivalent: οἰκονόμος implies the accumulation, administration, and dispensing of resources; שמר generally indicates protection and safekeeping. Furthermore, the fragmentary nature of 1Q36 leaves us with virtually nothing by which to identify who the guardians were and how they were supposed to protect their mysteries, rendering the text basically useless to interpreters of Paul's metaphor.[57] Beyond this, a Jewish apocalyptic context, just as the

remarks, 'Obwohl ihnen nach Paulus μυστήρια θεοῦ anvertraut sind, ist zu bezweifeln, daß der Sprachgebrauch der Mysterienkulte von Einfluß war. Die Apostel sind keine Mystagogen.'

[54] Gladd (2008: 172). Gladd, who regards Daniel as a 'steward of mysteries', argues that the shared use of εὑρίσκω and πιστός in 1 Cor 4.2 and Dan 6.4 (Theo) substantiates the claim that Paul was alluding to the Danielic episode. But in the latter text, εὑρίσκω has no syntactical relationship with πιστός; God is not even the subject of the verb, as he is implied to be in 1 Cor 4.2.

[55] Gladd (2008: 171); cf. Bockmuehl (1990: 166 n. 42). The infrequent and insignificant use of οἰκονομία-terminology in the LXX has been noted by Reumann (1967: 151).

[56] Brown (1968: 45); Bockmuehl (1990: 166).

[57] Such is perhaps the reason why neither Brown nor Bockmuehl suggest how 1Q36 might illuminate the Pauline phrase, and why Gladd (2008: 270), who is aware of the text, draws no comparison between it and 1 Cor 4.1. Even Harvey (1980: 331), who refers to the

mystery religions hypothesis, fails to offer an explanation for Paul's clear monetary use of the metaphor in 1 Cor 9.17.

Another recent treatment has sought to show that Paul's metaphor was derived from the regal administrative contexts of the Hellenistic and Roman periods. Relying exclusively on papyrological evidence, Peter Arzt-Grabner and Ruth Kritzer argue that Paul's image has close structural correspondences with officials appointed within the public domain (*öffentlichen Bereichs*), especially certain high-ranking financial officers who served in imperial hierarchies.[58] Moreover, because official, Ptolemaic documentation uses the verb εὑρίσκω for the calling to account of a regal *oikonomos* (P.Rev. 49), it is suggested that Paul was probably even well acquainted with the terminological conventions of those political systems, since he employs the verb in a similar manner in 1 Cor 4.2.[59] This, however, seems to minimise the significant differences that existed between the Hellenistic regal *oikonomoi* and their Roman counterparts, since the Roman *oikonomoi* who served in the administration of Caesar were in fact imperial slaves who managed his household and economic interests. By ignoring their individual job descriptions and distinct social and legal statuses, these interpreters confuse the two categories, portraying both kinds of official as if they occupied a single office. A similar confusion is also apparent in the way Kritzer relates the relevant Pauline discourses. Although she indicates that Paul's metaphor in 1 Cor 4.1–2 implied free status, in her comments on 9.16–17 she suggests that Paul's preaching was involuntary and unpaid. She then likens his office to a public liturgy. But since liturgies were normally municipal offices, the comparison seems only to obscure the image further by introducing another political category.[60] It is not finally clear, then, whether Paul's metaphorical language was drawn from a regal, civic, or private context, or even whether 1 Cor 4.1–2 and 9.16–17 cohere in any sense.

It has also become common to propose that Paul adopted his *oikonomos* metaphor from the Hellenistic moral philosophers. Abraham Malherbe, followed by John Byron and Lincoln Galloway, suggests that Paul's use of the analogy in 1 Cor 9.17 should be read in light of the

Qumran expression as an 'almost exact equivalent' to the Pauline metaphor, cannot exclude the possibility that Paul's image was derived from another context.

[58] Arzt-Grabner, Papathomas, Kritzer, and Winter (2006: 163).

[59] Arzt-Grabner, Papathomas, Kritzer, and Winter (2006: 164): 'Paulus verwendet hier einen Vergleich aus dem Amtsbereich (ἐν τοῖς οἰκονόμοις), und wie die Belege zeigen, ist er mit der Terminologie einer "amtlichen Feststellung" gut vertraut, und zwar bis ins Detail.' But the use of εὑρίσκω was also used for the calling to account of other kinds of *oikonomoi* (cf. Luke 12.43).

[60] Arzt-Grabner, Papathomas, Kritzer, and Winter (2006: 354).

figurative use of the same image in Epictetus (*Diatr.* 3.22.3).[61] Epictetus' *oikonomos* metaphor has as its target domain the 'true Cynic', and likens the person who assumes the Cynic lifestyle without first being assigned to it by God to the person who appoints himself as the *oikonomos* of a well-ordered house and begins insolently giving orders: he will of course be disciplined by his κύριος. Although there are fascinating similarities between Epictetus' construal of the true Cynic and Paul's portrayal of Christian apostleship (cf. *Diatr.* 3.22.23; 1 Cor 1.17), those who rely exclusively on Epictetus' metaphor to make sense of Paul's analogy face one major problem: Epictetus' portrayal of the true Cynic as an *oikonomos* is itself a metaphor. Epictetus, just as Paul, drew from a particular source domain – namely, estate management – and then applied very specific attributes of the manager to the Cynic, several of which are different from those which Paul himself underscores. Conspicuously absent from Epictetus' metaphor, for example, is the subject of money. Yet remuneration is plainly a central concern in Paul's metaphor in 1 Cor 9.17. Therefore, unless it can be demonstrated that Paul and Epictetus used their metaphors identically – and they clearly did not – then it is imperative that the interpreter trace Paul's *oikonomos* metaphor back to its original, *literal* source domain before applying attributes to the apostle.

The most common approach to Paul's *oikonomos* metaphor, then, has been to interpret it against the backdrop of literal managerial slavery. Dale Martin's treatment of the metaphor has been particularly influential in this respect. Martin, who limits his focus to 1 Corinthians 9, argues that the expression οἰκονομίαν πεπίστευμαι (9.17) implied that Paul identified himself as Christ's enslaved, representative leader.[62] Although most biblical scholars once regarded ancient slavery only as a brutal and oppressive institution, Martin sought to demonstrate that slavery functioned for some in the Roman world as an opportunity for social advancement. Legally, slaves had no family, possessed no money, and were to be restricted to a low social stratum. Martin, however, through an extensive use of literary and non-literary evidence, argued that some slaves circumvented these restrictions, acquiring spouses, children, allowances (*peculia*), and even relatively prominent social standing, experiencing significant social mobility through association with high-power owners. Martin therefore

[61] Malherbe (1994: 249–51); Byron (2003: 249–53); Galloway (2004: 184–6). See also Ierodiakonou (2007: 65), who credits the terminological similarities between Epictetus and Paul to their shared use of 'the common conversational language of the day, which reflects a common way of thinking about things in this period'.

[62] D. B. Martin (1990); cf. Lehmeier (2006: 219–65); R. H. Williams (2006: 76–83); Zeller (2010: 173).

contended that Paul's metaphorical depiction of himself as the οἰκονόμος of the divine κύριος would have elicited a positive impression from persons of a low social condition. While free persons within the church would have responded negatively to Paul's menial self-representation, slaves and others from humble origins would have regarded the metaphor as a designation of honour, power, and authority.[63]

But even as some interpreters agree that the phrase οἰκονομίαν πεπίστευμαι (9.17) indicates a claim to slavery and leadership, others contend that the title is legally ambiguous and cannot support the social implications advanced by Martin. Murray Harris, for example, states that Paul's designation in 1 Cor 9.17

> scarcely validates the inference that Paul views himself as a high-status managerial slave (*oikonomos*) in Christ's household, especially since Paul has already used that actual term *oikonomos* twice in the same letter in reference to stewards who are commissioned to expound 'the mysteries of God' (1 Cor. 4:1–2), 'managers' authorized to divulge God's hidden truths (= the gospel), a role that in fact makes Paul 'the scum of the earth' (1 Cor. 4:13).[64]

Harris also challenges the assumption that either Paul or the Corinthians would have associated managerial slavery with the positive social implications advanced by Martin. According to Harris, managerial slaves 'formed such a small minority that we may question whether that particular connotation of slavery would have ousted the dominant notion of slavery as humble subjection to a master in the minds of Paul's converts'.[65] Moreover, 'Any suggestion of Paul's personal concern about "status" … seems foreign to an evangelist-pastor who earlier in 1 Corinthians has depicted himself and the other apostles as doomed gladiators entering

[63] D. B. Martin (1990: 84):

> It is important to see … that up through [1 Cor] 9:18, according to one form of discourse, at least, Paul has made no move toward humility or self-lowering, even though he has defined himself as a slave of Christ. He has, however, redefined the categories for leadership and authority. Instead of thinking about leaders in the normal ways – as patrons, wealthy, kings, those who are free and do as they will – Paul moves the debate into the common discourses of early Christianity, which talks of its leaders as slaves of Christ. Again, this is not to make Christian leaders less powerful or authoritative but to insist that the discussion be carried on in the context of Christian discourse rather than in that of the upper class or of moral philosophers. Far from giving up his authority, Paul seeks in 9:1–18 to establish it beyond question.

[64] M. J. Harris (1999: 129). [65] M. J. Harris (1999: 129–30).

the arena of human scorn at the end of the procession (1 Cor. 4:9–10), and who aligned himself with menial slavery by pursuing the servile, manual trade of tent-making (Acts 18:3).'[66]

John Byron has also challenged Martin's treatment of the *oikonomos* metaphor. Byron conducted his study first by critically assessing Martin's historical analysis of *oikonomoi*, especially in the inscriptions, and eventually assembled a case for the legal ambiguity of the title.[67] Unlike Martin, Byron took into consideration Paul's metaphor in 1 Cor 4.1–2, where Paul also portrays the apostle as a ὑπηρέτης ('servant'). While Byron supposed that the title οἰκονόμος is legally ambiguous, he argued that ὑπηρέτης plainly indicates free status. This, along with an unconventional reading of 1 Cor 9.16–18, led Byron to conclude that Paul's *oikonomos* metaphor implies that the apostle was a free-will servant.

But Byron's analysis is not without its own complications. In his reassessment of the legal status of *oikonomoi*, Byron failed to distinguish between the very different kinds of administrator in antiquity that bore this title, comparing municipal *oikonomoi* of the likes of Erastus from Rom 16.23 with private *oikonomoi* of the likes of the Unjust Steward from Luke 16.1–8.[68] Such is a case of verbal *parallelomania* ('excerpt versus context'),[69] for Byron conflates the evidence, assuming that different kinds of *oikonomoi* in antiquity can at once serve as appropriate comparisons for Paul's use of the term in 1 Corinthians. Nevertheless, Byron (perhaps inadvertently) has brought into question Martin's assumption that managerial slavery serves as the most plausible source domain of Paul's metaphor.[70] It is therefore imperative that we revisit the ancient evidence in order to identify from which source domain Paul was borrowing and what apostolic attributes the metaphor implies.

Research aims, methods, and procedure

Given the confusion that continues to shroud the interpretation of Paul's *oikonomos* metaphor, it is appropriate that we examine it afresh in this

[66] M. J. Harris (1999: 130).
[67] Byron (2003: 241–53).
[68] Byron (2003: 243–4).
[69] Sandmel (1962: 7):

> It would seem to me to follow that, in dealing with similarities we can sometimes discover exact parallels, some with and some devoid of significance; seeming parallels which are so only imperfectly; and statements which can be called parallels *only by taking them out of context*. I must go on to allege that I encounter from time to time scholarly writings which go astray in this last regard. It is the question of *excerpt versus context* (emphasis added).

[70] Byron, for instance, has significantly influenced Galloway (2004: 184 n. 148).

study in order to clarify those socio-historical, exegetical, and theological matters in dispute. It is important at the outset therefore to raise the following research aims and questions: in antiquity, what were the main administrative contexts in which *oikonomoi* were appointed? What were the major social, legal, and structural differences between those administrators? To what kind of *oikonomos* was Paul comparing himself? What attributes was Paul applying to himself through the metaphor? Addressing these socio-historical and exegetical issues will comprise the bulk of the following study, since the answers to these questions will determine how the relevant Pauline texts are interpreted and how one understands Paul's theology of apostleship and apostolic authority.

In order to meet these aims, it is important that we pay close attention to certain methodological considerations. One of the main methodological contributions of this study will be the differentiation it makes between words and concepts in a way that certain previous studies have neglected. The first way this differentiation will be observed is by distinguishing between the various persons (concepts) designated as *oikonomoi*. By paying careful attention to these diverse source domains, this study seeks to use the relevant source materials responsibly, so as to avoid any parallelomanic pitfalls.

The second way that the word-concept distinction will be observed is by investigating each of those diverse roles (concepts), not only through the designation *oikonomos*, but, when possible, also through a variety of Greek synonyms and Latin correlatives. Along these lines, L. Michael White and John Fitzgerald have emphasised the importance, when drawing parallels, of examining 'semantic fields' rather than 'individual key words', warning that 'the data used in making comparisons must not be restricted to instances of verbal identity or similarity', since '[s]ome of the most striking parallels between Christian and non-Christian texts are primarily conceptual and involve little or no verbal agreement between the two'. 'In future studies', they therefore advise,

> it will be crucial to investigate such terms, not simply in isolation from one another but as part of the conceptual 'linkage group' to which they belong and with increased attention to the social worlds in which they are used. Similarly, attention will need to be given to combinations of Greek words as well as to equivalent terms and similar expressions in Latin and other languages.[71]

[71] L. M. White and Fitzgerald (2003: 31).

Awareness of both of these kinds of word-concept distinction will be of central importance in this investigation, since each has been overlooked in previous studies.[72]

The second main methodological contribution of this study involves the utilisation of ancient sources. There has been a growing concern among NT scholars in recent years regarding the kinds of extra-biblical material that should be employed to establish the interpretive context of early Christianity. Those working especially in the Pauline epistles have been challenged to be discriminant about their use of ancient sources due to the limited light certain kinds of evidence can bring to bear on the socio-cultural environment of Paul's churches, not least the Corinthian community. According to Justin Meggitt, for instance, there exists 'a fundamental problem that hampers all interpretations of the Corinthian epistles to a significant extent: *the problem of dependence on elite sources* (written and nonwritten)'.[73] Meggitt remarks,

> Although most scholars use a variety of sources in their analysis of the letters, and believe that their employment of them is increasingly sensitive and sophisticated, failure to recognise the *atypical* and *unrepresentative* nature of much of the material that is employed to reconstruct the context within which the letters are interpreted renders much of what is written about them of little value.[74]

Therefore, NT scholars, Meggitt maintains, must reconsider their 'evidential presuppositions' and 'undergo a significant change in perspective'.[75] Meggitt takes his recommendation further still: 'If New Testament scholars wish to make sense of the preoccupations and expectations of both Paul and the Corinthian community, we must seek out … those sources, both literary and nonliterary, that give voice to the world of the nonelite, that articulate what could be termed the *popular culture* of the

[72] If, for example, Byron had focused on the same concept, or role, that Martin had expressly targeted, that is, *private* estate managers, Byron would have eliminated from his investigation those free *oikonomoi* who served in *municipal* roles and then probably reached different conclusions. Alternatively, had Byron opened up his study to Greek and Latin correlatives for private estate managers (e.g. ἐπίτροπος, πραγματευτής, *vilicus*, *actor*, *dispensator*), he would have also realised that the slave status of private *oikonomoi* during the Roman period was far more uniform than he supposed, since the legal status of estate managers is generally clearer in the evidence bearing those other terms.

[73] Meggitt (2004: 242, original emphasis).

[74] Meggitt (2004: 242, original emphasis).

[75] Meggitt (2004: 242).

first century.'[76] Unfortunately, what precisely Meggitt means by 'popular culture', what concepts require such a scrutinising approach to the source materials, and which sources are then able to bring this world to light are less than clear. Nevertheless, his warning remains applicable for many working in Pauline studies generally and 1 Corinthians in particular. One cannot simply assume that most or even many of the numerous extant literary works from antiquity characterise the thoughts, attitudes, practices, and beliefs of the early believers just because they are contemporary, correspond geographically, and relate thematically with Paul's letters. As Meggitt states, 'If we wish to find more representative sources with which to construct our understanding of the context within which the Corinthian correspondence was written and read, and to interpret such sources appropriately, it is necessary to look beyond New Testament scholarship' and 'to benefit from those who have made the study of "popular culture" their central preoccupation'.[77]

Accordingly, much of the evidence to be assembled in this study will rely on the work of ancient social, economic, and legal historians, that is, the specialists in the periods, regions, and subjects central to this investigation. Moreover, the reconstructions will necessarily rely on an eclectic collection of evidence, including ancient literature, inscriptions, and papyri. Admittedly, when describing ancient forms of servile administration, every type of evidence has limitations. As J. Albert Harrill laments, 'In the end, we find that none of our sources fulfills our expectations; together, they allow a reconstruction of slavery that few historians specializing in modern periods would find satisfactory.'[78] But Harrill concedes that a diligent pursuit of reliable sources can result in a faithful reconstruction of ancient slavery. This requires that the highly informative *theoretical* sources (e.g. agricultural handbooks, novels, dreambooks, biblical literature, legal texts) be supplemented with *actual* portrayals of real-life slaves (e.g. inscriptions, papyri).[79] Harrill, in fact, provides as an example how the profile of Petronius' fictional and seemingly exaggerated former steward Trimalchio (*Satyr.* 26–78), an archetypal *nouveau riche*, is in certain ways validated by Seneca's real-life counterpart, Calvisius Sabinus (*Ep.* 27).[80] 'With care', Harrill thus concludes, 'imaginative literature can yield important historical insights.'[81]

[76] Meggitt (2004: 241–2, original emphasis).
[77] Meggitt (2004: 243).
[78] Harrill (1995: 29); cf. W. Fitzgerald (2000: 8).
[79] Harrill (1995: 28–9).
[80] For additional examples of wealthy former slaves, see Mouritsen (2011: 228–47).
[81] Harrill (1995: 29); cf. McCarthy (2000: 8).

Harrill's opinion is shared by Fergus Millar, whose analysis of Apuleius' second-century CE novel the *Metamorphoses* reveals the historical and contextual insights that can be obtained from certain kinds of ancient fiction. '[T]he invented world of fiction', Millar affirms, 'may yet represent – perhaps cannot help representing – important features of the real world.'[82] Similar kinds of general historical insight can also be gathered from certain gospel parables. 'At its simplest', explained C. H. Dodd, 'the parable is a metaphor or simile *drawn from nature or common life.*'[83] More suitable definitions of the parable genre have been offered in recent years,[84] but Dodd nonetheless discerns how several of Jesus' parables reflect conceivable scenarios and thus provide reasonably reliable data with which to produce sketches of actual people and the ancient world. Even Fabian Udoh, who believes the NT slave parables are 'literary constructs that transmit the *slaveholders*' fantasies, fears, ideals, values, and agenda' and therefore 'do not completely "reflect" the practice of slavery in the Roman Empire', ultimately maintains that the parabolic slave, 'if he is to be comprehensible', must have 'an underlying social reality'.[85] Thus, in this investigation a host of sources will be utilised to reconstruct the relevant forms of ancient administration, not least ancient fiction and biblical parables. These theoretical and occasionally elitist sources will be especially useful in this investigation, since even Paul's metaphor considers, to a certain extent, the expectations of his administrative superior (ζητεῖται ἐν τοῖς οἰκονόμοις, 1 Cor 4.2). By relying on the testimonies of various kinds of text, a range of voices will be heard, and the portraits which are assembled will be, it is hoped, all the more reliable.

Cognisant of these aims and methodological concerns, this study will proceed in two parts. First, in Chapters 2–4 the main three administrative contexts in which the title *oikonomos* was used (regal, municipal, private) will be examined separately in order to illumine the varying social, structural, legal, and remunerative characteristics associated with each domain. Analysis of these contexts will enable us to develop a general profile of the *oikonomoi* who served in them so that in Chapter 5 those profiles can be compared to Paul's own apostolic portrait constructed in 1 Cor 4.1–5 and 9.16–23. By comparing those profiles with the characteristics of Paul's image, a plausible source domain for the metaphor will become apparent. Secondly, after having identified the metaphor's source domain, in Chapters 6–7 those two passages where Paul applies

[82] Millar (1981: 75). [83] C. H. Dodd (1935: 16, emphasis added).
[84] See, e.g., Snodgrass (2008: 7–9). [85] Udoh (2009: 328).

the metaphor (4.1–5; 9.16–23) will be analysed in order to determine how an informed understanding of the metaphor influences and instructs the interpretation of those important Pauline texts. Finally, in Chapter 8 (the conclusion), and on the basis of our understanding of how Paul utilised the *oikonomos* metaphor in 1 Corinthians, the implications of this self-portrayal will be discussed and their significance for Paul's apostolic authority accounted for.