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The Portrait of a Pastoral Theologian according to 1 Corinthians

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Introduction

The Corinthian epistles provide us with the most complete and many-sided picture of how Paul believed his theological convictions should be expressed in the life of a church.¹ There we have the divergence between what happened in Corinth and what Paul thought ought to have happened.² Paul's practice of applied theology in 1 Corinthians makes it one of great attraction to many. In the words of Conzelmann, "Theology is here translated into an illumination of the existence of the church and of the individual Christian in it."³

In the following pages an attempt is made to look at the teachings of Paul in 1 Corinthians with special emphasis on the role of a pastoral theologian. This inevitably calls for a new approach, different from the traditional ones in which Paul is looked upon as *the* great theologian of all time and his teachings treated under the themes provided by systematic theology. In this paper we emulate Paul's own method of treatment that he followed in writing his first epistle to the Corinthians. The paper has four sections. Firstly, the personal relationship of a pastoral theologian. Here we look at the importance of right relationship of a pastoral theologian towards the church/community to which s/he is called to minister. Secondly, the place of moral and ethical issues in the life of a pastoral theologian. A theologian's approach to personal and social life is the focus here. In the third section, the emphasis is on the place of doctrinal beliefs in the life of a pastoral theologian. The relationship between right beliefs and right practice gets attention here. Finally, an attempt is made to draw some implications towards developing a pastoral theology with particular reference to the Indian situation.

I. The Personal Relationship of a Pastoral Theologian

Through the history of the Christian churches, we have examples of effective, gifted church leaders losing their efficiency and positions of leadership because of their failure to build up a proper rapport with the people to whom they minister. Sad to say that even today such instances are not rare. Therefore, it becomes all the more important on our part to look at Paul, the great founder of the Christian church, other than Jesus Christ himself, to see for ourselves how he was able to fare with the communities which he has established and to whom he has ministered. Our focus here shall, however, be limited to 1 Corinthians. Paul's personal affinity to the Corinthian community may be perceived from three spheres of his relationship with them : his

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own life-style at Corinth, his use of metaphors in relation to the Corinthian believers, as well as his attitude towards the community.

A. Paul's Life-Style at Corinth

The way one organizes her/his life is an indication of the values one attaches to life in relation to others amongst whom s/he lives. This is more so, if one chooses to live differently from those amongst whom s/he makes her/his abode. Paul, who lived among the Corinthians for a period not less than 18 months, did not share the life-style of the Corinthian Christians. His way of living amongst them may be noticed from his life-style, which include : his personal example, his personal commitment, and his personal concerns.

Firstly, Paul's life as a role model for the Corinthians is evident from his summons to the Corinthian Christians to "imitate me" (1 Cor. 11:1). This is generally expected of a son who is called to imitate his father. Elsewhere also, Paul asks his hearers to imitate (Gal. 4:12; Phil. 3:17). However, this is not identical with to "follow", but it is used of the pupil's relationship with her/his teacher.⁴ An apostle's life is a clear reflection of the crucified Christ. Besides, Paul lived with the Corinthians long enough for them to closely watch his way of life in the midst of them. The pattern of life he lived is such that it is provided as an example worthy of imitation. If only the Corinthians were the humble servants, as Paul himself was, their problems would disappear.⁵

Secondly, Paul's life in Corinth was characterized by his deep commitment to the wellbeing of the Corinthian Christians. More than anything, it is evident in his long stay at Corinth, among a very difficult community. Then, there is his own desire to visit them again in person. In 1 Cor. 4:19, Paul speaks of his intention to do so quickly. But he goes on to explain why he has to delay his coming to Corinth (1 Cor. 16:5-9). These two passages need not be taken as contradictory. It may be, as Barrett suggests, due to the long period of time taken to complete the letter and the change of plan that may have occurred during the period. Chapter 16 is a timetable, whereas chapter 4 was written heatedly (cf. also 2 Cor. 1:15, 16, 23).⁶ What is important to note here is Paul's earnest desire to visit the Corinthians despite those who thought he would never appear again in Corinth.

In the third place, Paul has had a deep personal concern towards the Corinthian believers. The number of letters that he wrote them is an indication of the same. It is claimed that Paul has written at least four letters to the Corinthian church. The first letter is 1 Cor. 5:9, the theme of which was "have no company with fornicators." It is also called the lost letter. The second letter is the present 1 Corinthians. A third letter is the "severe letter" or "letter in tears" (2 Cor. 2:3-4) where Paul speaks about his painful visit. The fourth and final letter, the present 2 Corinthians, is also called the letter of "reconciliation." The writing of four letters is an evidence of Paul's relationship to them, though not so much friendly as the Philippians, it shows one of concern to a problematic community.

The appointment of Apollos as leader to shoulder the responsibilities, when Paul was leaving the city, was another indication of Paul's concern for the Corinthians. Though later this became a problem as reported in *The Acts of Paul and Theca*, probably owing to his oratory abilities, which made many loyal to him, even when others remained with Paul who continued to have close touch with the Church. The sending of Timothy is yet another example of Paul's concern for them (1 Cor. 4:17). However, in comparing with 1 Cor. 16: 10-11 where Paul says "if Timothy comes", as though he hasn't been sent yet, there is a difficulty. Barrett's solution to

the problem is that Timothy was already sent via a different route with other visits to make.⁷ Being Paul's convert, Timothy was perfectly fitted for the job.(cf. also 2 Cor. 12:18). Paul, like any other apostle, had the right to support from those amongst whom he ministered. Yet, he refused to receive help from the Corinthians lest he burden them (1 Cor. 9:3-14; 2 Cor. 12:13-15a). This was another clear indication of Paul's special concern towards them. He appeals to the Corinthians to have the same concern and generosity on their part, towards those in need (1 Cor. 16:1-3; 2 Cor. 9:1-15), as Christian life is to be characterized by the motif of love (1 Cor. 13).

B. Paul's Use of Metaphors in Relation to the Corinthians

Among the frequently used images in the Pauline correspondence are those of the father and son, brother, as well as the body metaphor. They, to a large extent, communicate the special relationship that Paul shared with the Corinthian believers and in turn what he expected from them, in their relationship with one another.

The impression that we get on a causal reading of 1 Corinthians is that the bond between Paul and the Corinthians is strong, although some irregularities have arisen.⁸ The term used for describing their relationship is, first of all, that of the father. Conzelmann stresses that the term is not a mere metaphor but real "spiritual" fatherhood.⁹ Father-son relationship is unique and corresponds to the relationship between the convert and the preacher. It was Paul's missionary work among them that made the Corinthians Christians. This he did, not in his own right, but in Christ Jesus and through the gospel. He uses the term "father" for a special reason, that he could call them to imitate him.¹⁰ "My dear children" (*tekna*) in 1 Cor. 4:14 emphasizes the parental relationship between himself and the Corinthians. Thus the stress on guardianship becomes the basis for the admonition. It is the father who admonishes, and it is a positive and creative correction done in love (Rom. 15:14; Col. 1:28).¹¹

"Brother" is the second image that Paul uses to express his special relationship with the Corinthians. It is a customary term/designation used by Christians for each other.¹² Barrett states that "brother" represents the correct relationship between Christians who in Christ Jesus are all sons of the same Father and that the ordinary distinctions of sex, class and race ceased to exist among them. It stands for warmth of feeling.¹³ Address someone "brethren", is a sign that criticism is spoken from pastoral love. Often it is used when something unpleasant has to be said (cf. 7:29; 10:1; 14:20).¹⁴ Paul's address to them as "brethren" also may mean that he speaks to the readers with an authority of Jesus Christ in order to build up the community (2 Cor. 10:8; 13:10). However, Paul makes an "appeal" to them, rather than burdening with commands as often seen today. For Christian ethical method is to appeal for a life worthy of the gospel than having to obey commands. The "appeal" is for the unity that is made in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ.¹⁵

A third metaphor that Paul used to express his relationship to the Corinthians is the term "body". By referring to the Church as the body of Christ, he understood the inalienable relationship that existed among the Corinthian believers as members belonging to one another. As a member belonging to the body, Paul shared the same relationship with the Corinthians as they did to one another. In the context of the Corinthian endeavour to project the individual superiority of the members, the body metaphor lays stress on their corporate identity. It emphasizes the human solidarity of belonging together. The "body" concept, says Robinson, "forms the keystone of Paul's theology."¹⁶ He related with the Corinthians as one among them—

that is, of the same household of faith. Notwithstanding their differences in perceptions and standing, as members who shared in the one faith, they have a common identity. Parents and children and brothers and sisters, everyone belongs to the same family and each is subject to the eventualities within the family. Similarly, those who belong to the body cannot but be subject to the experiences of the different parts of the body.¹⁷

C. Paul's Attitude towards the Corinthian Community

Paul's attitude to the Corinthian Christians is twofold : one of appreciation of the positive qualities and the other of admonition where corrections were due. On the one hand, in his appreciation of the Corinthians, Paul gives thanks to God for them and recognizes the gifts bestowed among them. But on the other hand, he also admonishes the people for their immaturity and division that hampers the Christian witness.

Paul has always been willing to give credit where it was due. His appreciation includes a thanksgiving for the divine activity and recognition of the contribution of others. The thanksgiving in 1 Cor. 1:4-9 reflects the Christian standing of Paul's readers. Although thanksgiving was part of the formula of ancient letter writing, according to P. T. O'Brien :

Paul's opening thanksgiving periods, particularly the thanksgivings and petitions contained within them, give evidence of the apostle's deep pastoral and apostolic concern for the readers, sometimes for an individual (Philm. 3-6), but on most occasions for congregations (cf. Phil. 3:1-11 and even 1 Cor. 1:4-9).¹⁸

The apostle's prayers of thanksgiving are directed toward God (1 Cor. 1:4; 1 Thess. 1:2; 2:13), even when it is something to be realized in the future, e.g. parousia (1 Cor. 1:8, Phil. 1:6). It is offered for the faithfulness of God who acted in the past.¹⁹ In 1 Cor. 1:4-9, the stress is on the gracious activity in Christ. The Corinthians were given God's grace, were enriched, and testimony to Christ had been confirmed in the midst of them. They had been called into fellowship with God's Son who is utterly reliable.²⁰

The recognition of others begins with a realization of one's own self. Paul does not make any tall claims for himself. Although he was the first evangelist to have preached in Corinth (1 Cor. 3:6), he does not consider himself to be superior to others who followed him. In fact, he equates the work of Apollos with that of his own. He considers s/he who plants and s/he who waters is one, that is, the aim, result and the motivating power of her/his work are identical. Paul and Apollos have worked in Corinth as allies, not as rivals.²¹ Creation and nurturing of faith is the work neither of preacher nor of hearer, but of God. God accepts their labour, but they have no independent importance. In 1 Cor. 3:9, Paul refers to himself and Apollos as fellow-workers or colleagues, as God's paid agents.

There were those, who becoming aware of the need, undertook the service of the saints (cf. 2 Cor. 8:17). Such were Stephanas and family. They were neither appointed by Paul or by the Church, but were appointed by God in service and humility. It is now for the Church to recognize this ministry as Paul has himself recognized it. It is in this recognition of one's willingness to serve and of her/his spiritual equipment that the origins of the Christian ministry lie. The natural leadership should be recognized (cf. 1 Cor. 12:28) in a practical form by subordination to the leaders. Paul also recognized the services and Christian fellowship of Fortunatus and Achaicus. Besides, he mentions several other Christian workers who join him in extending their greetings to the Corinthian Church (1 Cor. 16:15-20).²²

The appreciation of the Christian contribution of the Corinthians did not deter Paul from admonishing them when he found it was necessary. The divisions within the church, owing allegiance to various leaders ministered among them (1 Cor. 1:10-17), was something that Paul could not tolerate. Such party spirit was against the very nature of the gospel that proclaimed peace and unity. In 1 Cor. 3:1 Paul says that he could not talk to them as spiritual, meaning mature, but only as fleshly, meaning immature. Spirituals are the ones whose existence is determined by the Spirit of God. The fleshly are the ones whose existence is governed by their own internal considerations. Claims and counter claims of the possession of superior spiritual gifts served to widen the cause of division. They claim to have “spiritual” gifts, said Paul, yet they lack love. Their existence is determined by their own desires. In 1 Cor. 4:8-13, with the use of a set of ironies, he cleverly takes the Corinthians to task for their pretension of being wise and knowledgeable whereas in actuality they were not.

II. Ethical Issues in the Life of a Pastoral Theologian

Having looked at the excellent personal relationship Paul sought to establish with the Corinthians, let us now look at the pastoral issues to which he directs his attention. Issues relating to proper Christian conduct played an important role in Paul’s perception of Christian life. In certain cases the Corinthians themselves sought Paul’s advise regarding matters pertaining to proper Christian behaviour. The issues addressed by Paul include that of correcting disorders within the community and answering questions raised by the Corinthians themselves. It is in the interaction between the practice of Christian faith in a given context and the role of faith in addressing a practical issue that Paul’s ethics and theology take shape. In dealing with issues that are relevant for all time, Paul’s theology assumes a practical significance. Some of the key issues responsible for disquiet among the Corinthian believers and towards which Paul directs his attention include : wisdom in relation to party spirit, the question of sexual laxity, church and world relations, and order in Christian worship.

A. Wisdom in Relation to Party Spirit.

Paul begins his letter addressing the issue that relates to the exercise of “wisdom” (1 Cor. 1:10-4:21). Probably through a group of merchants going from Corinth to Ephesus, Paul received news regarding the disorders at Corinth. 1 Cor. 1:11 specifically makes mention of Chloe’s group as against those of the others. Paul perceives that a lack of understanding of the wisdom of God as the major reason for the division among the Corinthians. He informs them that the wisdom of God is in direct contrast with human wisdom. It appears foolishness to those who are being lost but for the ones being saved, it is the power of God (1 Cor. 1:18). Being seekers of wisdom (Greek philosophy has originated at Greece), Paul found it hard to deal with the Corinthians who went to Athens in seeking wisdom. But at the same time he knew that it was through God’s wisdom that the poor Corinthian Christians were saved.

Instead of offering a superficial solution, Paul goes much deeper in analyzing the root cause of division among the Corinthians. He sees baptism as a major cause of the division. The person by whom one was baptized assumed significance (1 Cor. 1:10-17) over against the act of baptism itself, which was an indication of a changed life (cf. Gal. 2:9; 6:15). The preaching of the word does not make such a division. For Paul did not preach with human wisdom, but with the wisdom of God that was once hidden, but now demonstrated in the power of the Spirit. He considers worldly wisdom as foolish since it was responsible for creating the party spirit. It attributed to the Greeks alone the virtues of the wise. The Sophia cult thus served as

the cause behind the division. Paul therefore proceeds to show that the way of the world and the way of God are different.

B. Sexual Relations

Sexual laxity amongst the believing community was another serious problem with which Paul was concerned in his letter to the Corinthian church. He deals with the case as one of utmost importance. A man was living in continued sexual relationship with his stepmother (1 Cor. 5:1-13). The Corinthians were least bothered about it even though such a sin was not found even among the Gentiles. Sexual laxity carried over from the past life and the permissiveness within the society is rebuked heavily by Paul. He demands that the offender be excommunicated from the church. Excommunication was practiced both in Judaism and the Essene community. Conzelmann claims, based on M. Goguel,²³ that the punishment involved some ceremonies other than a mere exclusion from the church, and it afforded an opportunity for the repentance of the offender. Barrett is of the view that the excommunicated man is to be handed over to Satan for suffering and probably death, so that having met Satan's claim he may be saved.²⁴ The concern for the purity of the Church as a whole weighed uppermost in the award of punishment. Commenting on it, Pathrapankal observes, "Paul knew how bad examples could spoil the whole structure he was gradually building up, especially in Corinth."²⁵

Paul next mentions prostitution and the associated evils under the broad issue of sexual laxity (1 Cor. 6:12-20). After having started with a particular instance of moral concern in chapter 5, he now picks up a proposition from the Corinthian source which said, "All things are permitted me." His purpose is to deal with Corinthian libertinism at a deeper level.²⁶ In 1 Cor. 6:13 Paul wrote that the body is not to be used for sexual immorality but to serve the Lord. Since through baptism and Eucharist Christians are joined to the body of Christ, it is improper that the same parts be joined with the prostitute. His advise is to shun sexual immorality (1 Cor. 6:18).

C. Church-World Relations

Christians' relationship with the world is illustrated in a particular case, namely, the proceedings between Christians before worldly courts (1 Cor. 6:1-11). Paul uses the occasion to remind the believers of the apocalyptic idea of the role of the "saints" in the last judgement and the same is represented in terms of the present. The Church is called upon to practice its eschatological sovereignty in the world in an indirect way. Church is constrained to develop worldly organizational forms. The question, then is, being the Church and in the light of her eschatology, whether the Church will then become part of the world or whether it will be a compromise on the part of a religious society. Paul however, maintains the eschatological character. For him eschatology is a critique of the present than a negation of it. One needn't avoid it for a Christian world programme.²⁷ Dealing the issue, Paul concludes that the Christians should be able to settle their own disputes in their own courts (1 Cor. 6:1-6), and that they should not have disputes at all (1 Cor. 6:7f.). He advises suffering wrong rather than going to a court against a fellow Christian. Paul does not call Christians to a complete withdrawal from the world, rather even while being in the world, they ought to be governed by different value systems than that of the world.

D. Order in Christian Worship

The section beginning with 1 Cor. 11:2 until 14:40 deals with topics relating to Corinthians' manner of worship. The subdivision of 1 Cor. 11:17-34 has probably been occasioned by the

oral information and inserted by Paul in answering questions regarding worship. Apart from this, there are two other topics that he treats in this section : the veiling of women and spiritual gifts. Based on Craig, Hurd is of the opinion that 1 Cor. 14:33b-36 (the conduct of women in church) is more closely related to 1 Cor. 11:2-16 (the veiling of women in the church), than to 1 Cor. 12:1a-14: 33a, 37-40 (the problem of glossolalia in the Church).²⁸

Many scholars do not believe that the passage dealing with the veiling of women (1 Cor. 11:2-16) is occasioned by a question from the Corinthians.²⁹ Instead Paul was urging his own point of view against the opposite opinion held by the Corinthians. Paul urged women to be veiled during the worship of the Church against the opposite view held by them. Moffatt says that the women did not feel obliged to veil since men and women in worship bareheaded according to Greek writers.³⁰ Paul however begins his critical observation with a positive note of praise.

The Jewish cultural milieu from which Paul hailed had no recognition of women before men. This, together with his efforts for order and discipline in a young community, Paul took some practical steps to control the liberal tendencies of women.³¹ Paul himself knew the weakness of his argument, but his intention was to control them in the worship. It cannot be used in discriminating against women.³²

In 1 Cor. 11:17-34, Paul takes up the issue regarding disorder in the celebration of the Lord's Supper. What we observe here as characteristics of Paul is the appeal to the Lord's authority in 1 Cor. 11:23-26. The purpose of this section is "... the correction of abuses in the observance of the Lord's Supper, rather than the answering of some uncertainty on the part of the Corinthians concerning the manner of celebrating the Eucharist."³³ Paul calls attention to the deviation in their behaviour from the proper celebration of the Eucharist, probably based on oral information. He stresses that their gathering thus damages the community than building them up. Even before the Supper is celebrated the congregation possess unity because of their being baptized into the body of Christ and by holding a common faith, and from the Christian worship and ethical practice. In the Lord's Supper, their unity is strengthened and renewed.³⁴

On the contrary, the division in the Corinthian church became manifest in their gathering for Eucharistic celebration. Agape meal that was celebrated in the context of the Lord's Supper was meant to be a horizontal sharing of the vertical experience of the Lord Jesus Christ. Agape was to be conditioned by higher thinking than by feeling. But this is where the schism was evident owing primarily to the problems of the cultured and the uncultured. Paul's exhortation was to wait for one another and to make it an occasion of joy and celebration of unity where in they re-enact the death of Christ even as they wait eagerly for the parousia.

III. The Place of Doctrine in the Life of a Pastoral Theologian

In the preceding section we have seen the importance Paul attached to issues relating to social/ethical life. He considers it of utmost importance for the members of the body of Christ to sort out disorders in the life and witness of the Church. This involves both, the ones towards God and the ones affecting the relationship with one another within the community/society. He then moves on to matters regarding doctrines which the Corinthians themselves have raised. For Paul there was a close association between what one professed and how one lived. The questions that he clarifies with regard to one's faith relate to marriage and virginity, eating meat sacrificed to idols, the exercise of spiritual gifts, the resurrection of the dead, and Christian solidarity.

A. Marriage and Virginity

The first of the main series of responses by Paul to the Corinthian questions, concern the marriage (1 Cor. 7:1-24, 39-40) and the question of virginity (1 Cor. 7:25-38). 1 Cor. 7:8-9 is about the marriage of the unmarried, the widows and widowers. 1 Cor. 7:10-11 deals with the question of divorce with special reference to mixed marriages while 7:12-16 that of the Pauline privilege. The issue is summed up in a general discussion in 7:17-24. Though treated in two parts, Paul seemed to have considered marriage and virginity together as forming one unit.³⁵ Issues regarding marriage and sexuality probably arose from a context where asceticism was considered superior to that of married life.³⁶ In 1 Cor. 7:1-9, Paul deals with issues relating to : (i) sexual relationship within the bond of marriage, and (ii) marriage of the unmarried. Concerning the first, as Hurd has correctly observed, the Corinthians said, "It is best for a man not to touch a woman" and regarding the second, perhaps, "It is best that they remain as you are."³⁷

In 1 Cor. 7:25-38, Paul deals with the question concerning virgins. This, together with the earlier discussion on married life, relates to the issue of sexual morality. The consideration includes two categories. The first relates to the duty of a Christian father towards his daughter who is at the age of marriage. A second relates to spiritual marriages (1 Cor. 7:36-38) wherein virgins refer to women who have entered into spiritual marriages with men who have vowed themselves to celibacy. That is, men and women living together under a vow of virginity. A third position that stands between these two extremes is the suggestion that, Paul is speaking to a group of engaged couples at Corinth who were wondering whether to go ahead with their wedding plans.³⁸

In dealing with the Pauline understanding of marriage and virginity, Pathrapankal observes that a misunderstanding of the context of chapter 7 together with "certain inherited inhibitions from the past" is what made Paul out to be merely tolerating married life and establishing the superiority of virginity over marriage. He acknowledges that the real issue is a criticism of the ascetic tendencies of some 'over-converted' Christians in Corinth for whom marital relationships were unholy.³⁹ For Paul abstinence from sexual relationship for a certain period and an ascetic mode of life are both for the same purpose, that is, prayer. Neither is superior to the other. One is called to lead a normal way of life that includes marriage. But to remain unmarried is a special calling and for a definite purpose. Any preference to virginity should be motivated by the eschatological considerations of an imminent parousia. His challenge is to accept one's own situation, and not to be burdened by additional responsibilities.

B. Eating Idol-Meat

In chapters 8 and 10 of 1 Corinthians, Paul deals with the question of eating meat sacrificed to idols. This is the second issue that Paul takes up, among the many, raised by the Corinthians. This section however has raised several questions. The first and foremost relates to the integrity of the epistle itself since chapter 9 deals with a completely different issue, namely, the apostolic authority of Paul. Another question relates to the consistency of Paul with regard to his discussions on eating idol-meat as they appear in 1 Cor. 8 and 10 and in various other places where the subject appears.⁴⁰ The Corinthians considered themselves as the ones possessing knowledge (*gnosis*) and authority (*exousia*). Eating of idol-meat was a demonstration of their knowledge and newly found freedom. But Paul rejects this view. In 1 Cor. 8:8 and 8:1a-4, he not only quotes the Corinthian position but also adds to it a warning. While the strong are free

to eat anything in any circumstances, they cannot ignore the anxiety created among the weak.⁴¹ Freedom of “consciousness” is to be seen in relation to the “consciousness” of the weaker one who is less-informed compared to the well-informed who is “strong.”

Theologically speaking, idols do not exist, there is only one God. Buying meat offered to idols in the market place, therefore, is permissible. On the same premise social gatherings with people professing other faiths, even at religious places, were possible. But Paul looked at the question from a different angle which had to do with the place of the community even while respect is given to the individual. He makes a distinction between individuality and personality on the one hand, and community and collectivity on the other. Individuality is a gift and is the material dimension of personality. But personality should operate through community. People living together as individuals without concern for one another is a collectivity. Persons in community should behave in such a way that the community is not destroyed. In 1 Cor. 8:11 Paul says, individualism destroys the one for whom Christ has died. Knowledge puffs up into individualism whereas love builds up the community. A person should take into consideration the other. Community should take precedence over personality.

Paul’s injunction is that in matters such as eating idol-meat, considering some food as clean and others as unclean, and some days as more important than others should not become a scandal and disturb the unity and peace in the Christian congregations. While some of the practices he mentions related to Jewish life, others arose from the Gentile customs, both leading to confusion. Paul, therefore, instructs against discriminating on the basis of knowledge. Knowledge should not be the criterion for action or inaction (1 Cor. 8:1) but concern for the weaker one (1 Cor. 8:9). Food should not be eaten if it leads the other to sin (1 Cor. 8:13). The strong should help the weak (Rom. 15:12).⁴²

C. Exercise of Spiritual Gifts

In chapters 12-14, Paul takes up another issue that was raised by the Corinthians. This relates to the question of exercising charisms. The exercise of spiritual gifts in the Corinthian context, more than any other passages in the New Testament, provides us with a richer insight into its community life, especially the busy life of divine worship.⁴³ Having learned first hand about the manner of worship in Corinth, during his first visit to the city, Paul has brought his knowledge up-to-date with the receipt of information by the questions that were raised, or even from the report received from Chloe’s party. He then proceeds to deal with the essential oneness of these varied gifts. The individual gifts are to be exercised with the ultimate aim of unity within the Church. Paul stressed the variety of the gifts of the Spirit. No part of the body can claim to be the true body; no single function of the body can be considered the only legitimate expression of the body’s life. He maintained that glossolalia is the least gift of all (ch. 12). The highest gift is love (ch. 13) and when it is present, suppresses the public practice of speaking in tongues (ch. 14).⁴⁴

Charism is a concrete demonstration of the presence of love, grace and fellowship. It is the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. Love is the controlling factor over all charism. When Paul was asked about the problem associated with the exercise of spiritual gifts, he went to its root (1 Cor. 12:6-11 and 28-30). Other places where discussions on charisms occur are Rom. 12:4-8 and Eph. 4:7-11. Charis and charisma are complementary and are given to the individual for the good of the community. When Paul was asked which is the greater charism, he responded saying what is important is to understand the role of the Spirit. The

Holy Spirit is more important than the gifts. Holy Spirit is the one who enables a Christian to lead a Christian life. He enables us to accept Jesus Christ as Lord. There are more charisms than prophecy and tongues. But they are to be exercised in love. Paul associates these gifts with other gifts, with prophecy and tongues mentioned at the end. When Corinthians wanted an abstract teaching of the charisms, Paul answered it in the context of its use in the Church. He insisted the need for control and order in the exercise of charism.

D. Resurrection of the Dead

Whether or not the question of resurrection of the dead was actually raised by the Corinthians, Paul felt there were some differences between him and the Corinthians on the question of resurrection. Therefore he felt constrained to take up the issue in his letter. There seemed to have been some who did not believe the resurrection of the dead. "How can some of you say there is no resurrection of the dead? (1 Cor. 15:21). But there were others who were baptized on behalf of the dead. Paul spoke about the resurrection of the dead in bodily form (1 Cor. 15:1-34) and the necessity and spiritual possibility of such a belief (1 Cor. 15:35-57).⁴⁵ The Corinthians had distinguished between the resurrection of Christ and the resurrection of Christians. While they had accepted the first, rejected the second.⁴⁶

The treatise on the resurrection of the dead is based on the traditional confession of faith, recognized both by Paul and the Corinthians without question (1 Cor. 15:3-5). Resurrection is based on faith in Christ and Christology is the very basis of resurrection.⁴⁷ Paul is not the originator of the tradition but the conveyor of it. Jesus who died on behalf of us was later recognized as the Lord and Christ. His death was according to the Scriptures—the divine plan of salvation history. He died on behalf of others and was buried—proof of death. But God raised him up on the third day according to the Scriptures and other people saw him. The event of resurrection is made real for us through the divine power combined with our faith.

E. Christian Solidarity

The issue of Christian unity is something that is to be practically experienced in one's willingness to share material possessions. The importance of sharing as a mark of solidarity appears at least in two places in the Corinthian context. While in one, it appears to be Paul's admonishment in the light of what he has heard (1 Cor. 11:18), in the other, it may have come as a response to the questions raised by the Corinthians (1 Cor. 16:1-2). In the former, the concern was the unwillingness on the part of the wealthy to share with the poor Christians in the common meal associated with the Lord's Supper. The insensitivity towards the needs of the poor and the deprived made a mockery of the very intention of the Lord's Supper.⁴⁸ The latter deals with the manner in which money was to be collected towards the support of the Jerusalem Christians who were affected by a severe famine (1 Cor. 16:1, 2) and the way in which it was to reach them (1 Cor. 16:3-9). Paul had collected money for the poor in Jerusalem from Macedonia and Achaia. The Corinthians were told about it and were in agreement. But their question now was how they should go about it. Paul suggests that they take a collection in their liturgical gathering. Concerning the delivery of the money, Paul wanted to have it done by their representatives. He deliberately minimized his association with the collection so as to allay any Corinthian fears that Paul has a special stake in it.⁴⁹

IV. The Contextual Bearings of a Pastoral Theologian

We have looked at the personal relationship Paul has had with the Church at Corinth and the way he had answered their questions regarding moral/social relationships and doctrinal beliefs.

Paul has faced these questions from a specific background, and therefore, answered them the way he did in responding to that particular situation. Our context today is completely different from that of Paul. So also are the issues faced and questions raised. How, then do we relate the pastoral approach of Paul to a specific Corinthian situation in the early Christian era to our present day needs in the early part of the 21st century and to our specific Indian context? We may be able to draw certain broader principles in the light of Paul's own approach. To do so we need to clearly distinguish the Pauline context from that of our own.

A. The Original Context

Our point of departure should be the understanding that Paul was a product of his own time. He was a Jew and a Pharisee. Once he met the Lord on his way to Damascus, Paul did not lose his Jewish heritage. His thought patterns were very much moulded by his background. He was influenced by his own culture, for instance, in relating to women. There was no recognition of the equality of women with men. However, he did make a conscious effort to overcome his basic framework. This we see in instances such as, considering no distinction on the basis of sex, race, status, etc. (Gal. 3:28).⁵⁰ He became a missionary to the Gentiles, and did not insist circumcision on Gentile converts. His theology was a lived experience and a study of the various aspects of that experience. We need to study his prophetic and charismatic approach in theologizing in our context; Paul taught and challenged to live a dynamic Christian life.⁵¹ Paul's letter was addressed to a concrete situation, which prevailed in Corinth. One of the reasons why Paul wrote the way he did was to address the issues that were pertinent to the Corinthian church at the time of his writing. Today we are to apply the word and its meaning to our context with the help of the Holy Spirit.

B. The Present Indian Context

Our context in India today is vastly different from that of Paul. So are the varying contexts of the Indian churches, despite the possibility of some similar issues and problems being present in the modern Indian churches as was in the setting of Paul. We have to relate Paul to our context of oppression, poverty, religious plurality, and cultural diversity. Being the first theologian of the church, Paul is normative in some respects, yet he cannot be made absolute. While maintaining the "dynamism of his theology" and the challenge of his letters, our task involves discovering the essentials of his theology from the accidentals, and differentiating concepts of absolute values from the relative values.⁵² We need to engage ourselves in the breaking down of barriers of oppression, exploitation, caste discrimination, and subordination of women. Only this way can we make the message of Paul relevant to our situation.

In as much as the message comes with the authority of God himself, it is addressed to our situations as well. We note some of the specific areas in which the Pauline teachings may be applicable in the Indian setting. As people of God, we are called to dedicate ourselves to the larger purposes of God rather than narrow selfish motives. The gifts we are endowed with are to be used for the building up of his church here in India and not for personal aggrandisement. We are to be thankful for his grace bestowed upon us. This includes the beginning of Christianity in an early period in India, for the many missionaries and evangelists involved in the work of the apostolate, and the fellowship the Churches have in the Lord Jesus Christ. The call to ministry is to get involved in the work of facilitating the unity of the Church rather than creating divisions. Our allegiance ultimately should be to the Lord of the Church than to any traditions.

Christian ministers should be humble before the Lord and should not consider themselves at a pedestal high in comparison to ordinary members of the church. In our relationship to the world, other religions should not be considered demonic but be willing enough to enter into a dialogue with them and to learn from them. We have to take all forms of sin seriously and to preach and teach against them, but with the ultimate concern of love. A feeling of urgency should motivate us in our ministry and use sacraments as a means of grace. We should stand up against discriminations and consider others better than ourselves. In as much as the Spirit has bestowed each Christian with her/his own gift, we should not forbid the ministry of even the humblest Christian. In fact, it should be recognized that each member of the Church has a ministry and God has equipped her/him for that purpose with his gifts. The ministry is a shared ministry. Our life in the present, despite its ups and downs, should be lived with the hope of the future and a resurrected life.

Conclusion

The first epistle to the Corinthians portrays Paul as a theologian who developed his theology in the context of his pastoral ministry among the Corinthian believers. It's true that the church was far from perfect. The problems of the church made it difficult for any pastor to devote his energy for the church. In fact, the Corinthian church in many ways resembles some of our own churches today. Although one of the more gifted churches of all times, the Corinthian church faced social/moral, doctrinal and spiritual problems as we do today. In spite of such difficulties and problems, Paul maintained a very close relationship with the church. He considered the members of the church as his children and they reckoned him as their father. He devoted his time and energy to the building up of the church, yet rebuked them when they had erred. In dealing with the social, ethical and doctrinal problems faced by the church, Paul was concerned for the building up of the church, and therefore also the common good, than mere abstract theological reflections.⁵³ Thus, Paul leaves before us an emulative example to be followed in our own ministries. All the while commitment to Christ and the Gospel was such that he never compromised with the truth of the Gospel. He stands before us as a theologian with a pastoral concern and as a pastor with a theological mind. And he bids us, "Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ."

NOTES

1. C. K. Barrett, *Essays on Paul* (Philadelphia : The Westminster Press, 1982), p. 1.
2. H. Conzelmann, *1 Corinthians*, Hermenia (Philadelphia : Fortress Press, 1975), p. 9.
3. *Ibid.*
4. *Ibid.*, p. 92.
5. C. K. Barrett, *A Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians* (London : Adam and Charles Black, 1968, 1971), p. 116.
6. *Ibid.*, p. 118.
7. *Ibid.*, pp. 116-17.
8. J. C. Hurd, Jr., *The Origins of 1 Corinthians* (London : SPCK, 1965), p. 108.
9. Conzelmann, *1 Corinthians*, p. 91.
10. C. K. Barrett, *Commentary on 1 Corinthians*, p. 115.
11. *Ibid.*
12. Conzelmann, *1 Corinthians*, p. 20.
13. Barrett, *1 Corinthians*, p. 31.

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14. W. B. Harris, *First Epistle of St. Paul to the Corinthians* (Madras : CLS, 1958), p. 37.
15. *Ibid.*
16. J. A. T. Robinson, *The Body : A Study in Pauline Theology*, Studies in Biblical Theology (London : SCM, 1952), p. 9.
17. It is this concept of corporateness of the body that Sallie McFague was led to develop as a fitting imagery for an ecologically relevant theology. See her *The Body of God : An Ecological Theology* (Minneapolis : Fortress Press, 1993).
18. P. T. O'Brien, "Thanksgiving within the Structure of Pauline Theology" in *Pauline Studies*, eds., D. A. Hagger and M. J. Harris (The Paternoster Press; Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1980), p. 56.
19. *Ibid.*, p. 62.
20. *Ibid.*, p. 56.
21. Barrett, *1 Corinthians*, p. 85.
22. *Ibid.*, pp. 393-95.
23. Conzelmann, *1 Corinthians*, p. 97.
24. Barrett, *1 Corinthians*, pp. 125-27.
25. J. Pathrapankal, *Critical and Creative* (Bangalore : Dharmaram Publications, 1986), p. 132.
26. Cf. C. K. Barrett, *Essays on Paul* (London : SPCK, 1982), p. 13.
27. Conzelmann, *1 Corinthians*, p. 104.
28. C. T. Craig, "The First Epistle to the Corinthians : Introduction and Exegesis," in *The Interpreter's Bible*, ed. by G. A. Buttrick et al. (12 vols.; New York : Abingdon Press, 1951-57), X, p. 124 cited by Hurd, *The Origin of 1 Corinthians*, p. 182.
29. See W. O. Walker, Jr., "1 Corinthians 11:2-16 and Paul's Views Regarding Women" *Journal of Biblical Literature* 94 (March 1975), 99. 94-140 where the author argues against the non-Pauline authorship of 11:1-16 and considers it as a later interpolation. But cf. Hurd, *The Origin of 1 Corinthians*, pp. 83-86 for an opposite view.
30. J. Moffatt, *The First Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians*, The Moffatt New Testament Commentary (London : Hodder and Stoughton Limited, 1938), p. 149.
31. Pathrapankal, *Critical and Creative*, p. 105.
32. A. C. Wire, *The Corinthian Women Prophets : A Reconstruction through Paul's Rhetoric* (Minneapolis : Fortress Press, 1995) pp. 130-31. See also Choi Woo-Hyuk, "Women Should Keep Silent?" ed. by AWRC, *Women of Courage : Asian Women Reading the Bible* (Seoul, Korea : AWRC, 1992), pp. 169f.
33. Hurd, *The Origin of 1 Corinthians*, p. 79.
34. D. E. H. Whiteley, *The Theology of St. Paul* (Oxford : Basil Blackwell, 1964), p. 181.
35. Hurd, *Origin of 1 Corinthians*, p. 154.
36. For a detailed treatment of the issue, see A. C. Wire, *The Corinthian Women Prophets*, pp. 82ff.
37. Hurd, *Origin of 1 Corinthians*, p. 167.
38. *Ibid.*, pp. 169-82.
39. Pathrapankal, *Critical and Creative*, p. 105.
40. Barrett "Things Sacrificed to Idols", in *Essays on Paul*, p. 40.
41. R. A. Horsley, "Consciousness and Freedom among the Corinthians; 1 Corinthians 8-10" *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 40 (Oct. 1978), pp. 574-89.
42. Pathrapankal, *Critical and Creative*, pp. 135-36.
43. Conzelmann, *1 Corinthians*, p. 204.
44. Herd, *Origin of 1 Corinthians*, pp. 190ff.
45. *Ibid.*, p. 199.
46. *Ibid.*, p. 200.

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47. Conzelmann, *1 Corinthians*, pp. 249-50.
48. W. F. Orr and J. A. Walther, *1 Corinthians*, The Anchor Bible, vol. 32 (Garden City, New York : Doubleday & Co., Inc., 1976), p. 270.
49. Hurd, *Origin of 1 Corinthians*, pp. 200-5.
50. An Soo-Kyung, "No Sexual Discrimination in Christ", ed. by AWRC, *Women of Courage : Asian Women Reading the Bible* (Seoul, Korea : AWRC, 1992), pp. 139-50.
51. Pathrapankal, *Critical and Creative*, pp. 108f.
52. *Ibid.*, pp. 108, 124, 136ff.
53. W. B. Harris, *1 Corinthians*, pp. 240-47.