

TRENT A. ROGERS

God and the Idols

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Mohr Siebeck

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427



Trent A. Rogers

God and the Idols

Representations of God
in 1 Corinthians 8–10

Mohr Siebeck

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For Rebekah

Preface

This volume is a slightly revised version my dissertation that was accepted in partial requirement for a PhD in New Testament and Early Christianity at Loyola University Chicago. My dissertation committee, Drs. Edmondo Lupieri, and Robert A. Di Vito, and my director, Thomas H. Tobin, SJ, were patient, supportive, and insightful throughout the process. Conversations with Dr. Tobin have been instrumental in steering me from error and pointing me toward more profitable avenues of research. I have benefitted greatly from his model of focusing on the primary text. Throughout my time at Loyola, Drs. Tobin and Lupieri have encouraged me to publish articles and have offered careful feedback on my work. My love for Pauline Studies was greatly enhanced by the classes I took at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School taught by Dr. D. A. Carson. Dr. Carson approaches the text with scholarly expertise, devotional zeal, and a pastor's heart. Following him, I am in a long line of the best of Christian imitation (1 Cor 11:1).

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May 2016

Trent A. Rogers

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List of Abbreviations

<i>ABD</i>	<i>Anchor Bible Dictionary</i>
AGJU	Arbeiten zur Geschichte des antiken Judentums und des Urchristentums
AnBib	Analecta biblica
<i>ANRW</i>	<i>Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt: Geschichte und Kultur Roms im Spiegel der neueren Forschung</i>
<i>ASE</i>	<i>Annali di Storia dell'Esegesi</i>
BBB	Bonner biblische Beiträge
<i>BBR</i>	<i>Bulletin for Biblical Research</i>
BECNT	Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament
BHT	Beiträge zur historischen Theologie
<i>Bib</i>	<i>Biblica</i>
BJS	Brown Judaic Studies
<i>BRev</i>	<i>Bible Review</i>
BWA(N)T	Beiträge zur Wissenschaft vom Alten (und Neuen) Testament
<i>BZ</i>	<i>Biblische Zeitschrift</i>
BZNW	Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft
<i>CBQ</i>	<i>Catholic Biblical Quarterly</i>
CBET	Contributions to Biblical Exegesis and Theology
ConBNT	Coniectanea neotestamentica or Coniectanea biblica: New Testament Series
CRINT	Compendia Rerum Judaicarum ad Novum Testamentum
<i>DBAT</i>	<i>Dielheimer Blätter zum Alten Testament und seiner Rezeption in der Alten Kirche</i>
<i>DBSup</i>	<i>Dictionnaire de la Bible: Supplément</i>
<i>EBib</i>	<i>Etudes bibliques</i>
EKKNT	Evangelisch-katholischer Kommentar zum Neuen Testament
ETS	Erfurter theologische Studien
FRLANT	Forschungen zur Religion und Literatur des Alten und Neuen Testaments
GNS	Good News Studies

<i>GOTR</i>	<i>Greek Orthodox Theological Review</i>
<i>Greg</i>	<i>Gregorianum</i>
<i>Hen</i>	<i>Henoch</i>
<i>HTKNT</i>	<i>Herders theologischer Kommentar zum Neuen Testament</i>
<i>HTR</i>	<i>Harvard Theological Review</i>
<i>JBL</i>	<i>Journal of Biblical Literature</i>
<i>JQR</i>	<i>Jewish Quarterly Review</i>
<i>JSHRZ</i>	<i>Jüdische Schriften aus hellenistisch-römischer Zeit</i>
<i>JSJ</i>	<i>Journal for the Study of Judaism in the Persian, Hellenistic, and Roman Periods</i>
<i>JSNT</i>	<i>Journal for the Study of the New Testament</i>
<i>JSNTSup</i>	<i>Journal for the Study of the New Testament: Supplement Series</i>
<i>JSOTSup</i>	<i>Journal for the Study of the Old Testament: Supplement Series</i>
<i>JSP</i>	<i>Journal for the Study of the Pseudepigrapha</i>
<i>JSPSup</i>	<i>Journal for the Study of the Pseudepigrapha Supplement Series</i>
<i>JTS</i>	<i>Journal of Theological Studies</i>
<i>KEK</i>	<i>Kritisch-exegetischer Kommentar über das Neue Testament (Meyer-Kommentar)</i>
<i>LEC</i>	<i>Library of Early Christianity</i>
<i>LSJ</i>	<i>Liddell, Scott, Jones, A Greek-English Lexicon</i>
<i>NIBD</i>	<i>New Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible</i>
<i>NICNT</i>	<i>New International Commentary on the New Testament</i>
<i>NIGTC</i>	<i>The New International Greek Testament Commentary</i>
<i>NJBC</i>	<i>The New Jerome Biblical Commentary</i>
<i>NovT</i>	<i>Novum Testamentum</i>
<i>NovTSup</i>	<i>Novum Testamentum Supplements</i>
<i>NTS</i>	<i>New Testament Studies</i>
<i>OTK</i>	<i>Ökumenischer Taschenbuch-Kommentar</i>
<i>OTP</i>	<i>Old Testament Pseudepigrapha</i>
<i>PNTC</i>	<i>Pillar New Testament Commentaries</i>
<i>PVTG</i>	<i>Pseudepigrapha Veteris Testamenti Graece</i>
<i>RB</i>	<i>Revue Biblique</i>
<i>RBL</i>	<i>Review of Biblical Literature</i>
<i>SBFLA</i>	<i>Studii biblici Franciscani liber annus</i>
<i>SBLDS</i>	<i>Society of Biblical Literature Dissertation Series</i>
<i>SBLEJL</i>	<i>Society of Biblical Literature Early Judaism and Its Literature Studies in Christianity and Judaism</i>
<i>SBLSP</i>	<i>Society of Biblical Literature Seminar Papers</i>
<i>ScEs</i>	<i>Science et esprit</i>
<i>SP</i>	<i>Sacra Pagina</i>

<i>SPhilo</i>	<i>Studia Philonica</i>
SVTP	Studia in Veteris Testamenti pseudepigraphica
<i>Tem</i>	<i>Temenos</i>
<i>Them</i>	<i>Themelios</i>
<i>TJ</i>	<i>Trinity Journal</i>
TSAJ	Texte und Studien zum antiken Judentum
<i>TynBul</i>	<i>Tyndale Bulletin</i>
WUNT	Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament
ZNW	Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft und die Kunde der älteren Kirche

Chapter 1

Survey of the Interpretations of Paul's Coherence or Incoherence in 1 Corinthians 8–10

Although 1 Cor 8:1–11:1 is a relatively independent unit in the letter with a unifying topic, a close reading of these chapters reveals several interpretive challenges. The first challenge manifests itself in seemingly contradictory statements while the second deals with incoherencies in tone. The problem of contradictory statements is primarily an issue within 1 Cor 8, while the problem of incoherence in tone is primarily an issue with the relationship between 1 Cor 8 and 1 Cor 10.

Contradiction is exemplified in the comparison of 1 Cor 8:1 (“we all have knowledge”) and 8:7 (“this knowledge is not held by everyone”). Although some scholars have seen these contradictory statements as evidence of multiple sources combined somewhat haphazardly, most scholars think that Paul first quotes the Corinthians and then refutes their positions. The problem of incoherence of tone is more challenging as Paul comes to seemingly different conclusions in chapters 8 and 10 concerning permissible and illicit associations with idol food. The predominant interpretation argues that in chapter 8 Paul agrees with some of the Corinthians concerning the non-reality of pagan idol-gods (8:4), the singular existence of God (8:6), and the indifference of idol food for one’s salvation (8:7–8). In principle, Paul agrees that because the pagan gods do not exist, the food associated with them is not corrupted by association. The believer need not concern himself with how the food would harm himself or offend God; it is only on account of another believer that one should consider abstaining from the otherwise morally neutral activity of eating food sacrificed to idols. Then, Paul offers himself as an example of not participating in a morally neutral activity (i.e. receiving financial support) out of a concern for other believers (8:13–9:27).

Paul’s argument, however, takes a negative turn in chapter 10 where he warns the Corinthians about the dangers of idolatry by retelling, among other allusions, the effects of the Golden Calf incident (10:1–13). The section of 1 Cor 10:14–22 seems to be in contradiction with the permissiveness Paul theoretically agreed to in 1 Cor 8:4–9. In 1 Cor 10:14–22, Paul commands the Corinthians to flee actual idolatry (εἰδωλολατρία; contra 8:1 where the subject is εἰδωλόθυτα, food sacrificed to idols) on account of the incompatibility of the Lord’s Table and the feasts of idol-gods. The issue is still food associ-

ated with idol-gods, but Paul has reframed the argument in terms of actual idolatry rather than potentially causing another believer to stumble. The problem of contact with food associated with idols is that the idol-gods do have a demonic reality. Contact with food associated with idols implies contact with demons. Then, in a seeming softening of his hardline stance (10:14–22) and a return to his more permissive position in chapter 8, Paul concedes that food (even food associated with idols) is morally neutral and should be avoided only on account of another’s conscience because God is the source of all food (10:23–30).

Paul’s conclusions seemed so contradictory that early critical scholarship challenged the unity of First Corinthians by using these chapters as their starting point. Even some scholars who argue for the unity of these chapters admit that initially they appear inconsistent. The arguments range from the idea that Paul is treating markedly different issues to the notion that he is employing sophisticated rhetoric or even quoting the Corinthians. Most of these explanations are not so simplistic as to assert that only one explanation accounts for the apparent incoherence of these chapters; rather, most of the proposals explain the coherence on the basis of multiple factors.

This chapter will briefly describe and evaluate representative authors who hold to the following three positions: Paul’s text is not unified; unity exists if one accounts for the different situations or locations; and unity is shown by analyzing Paul’s sophisticated rhetorical structures. While several authors combine the second and third positions, their arguments are grouped according to their primary contribution toward an explanation for the coherence of 1 Cor 8–10. These positions are not treated chronologically because they do not demonstrate a linear development. Further, the following review of scholarship is a representative sample of different approaches to the coherence of Paul’s argument. Because it is only representative, many positions are described by either the first or the most thorough treatment of that position.

A. Partition Theories

The (seeming) inconsistency between Paul’s conclusions in 1 Cor 8 and 1 Cor 10 is taken seriously by scholars especially after Johannes Weiß. Advocates of partition theories argue that the differences between these chapters are so severe that they must originate from different correspondences. They have found the contradictions in different sections of First Corinthians to be more than just *apparent* contradictions, and have reasoned on this basis that the text as we have it is really a composite of several independent treatments of similar topics. While the particular partition theories differ considerably, they all share the view that 1 Cor 8–10 contains irreconcilable propositions. Johannes Weiß expounds the earliest and most influential of these theories, and

Khiok-Khng Yeo formulates the most recent and comprehensive example of this approach.

I. Johannes Weiß

Johannes Weiß posits different sources to explain the contradictions in Paul's argument.¹ For Weiß, the irreconcilable difference is between the agreeable tone in 1 Cor 8 and 10:23–11:1 and the hardline stance of 10:1–22. He summarizes Paul's inconsistent responses:

The answer is not easy, as two apparent lines of judgment seem to be underlying: 1) In 10:1–22 Paul takes a rigorous stance as he brings up the warning example of the wilderness generation, which was seduced by the daughters of Moab into πορνεία and idolatry. He judged their behavior (10:7–8) as inclining towards real ειδωλολατρία...2) Chapter 8 and 10:23–11:1, especially 10:29–30, sound altogether different. Here he seems to treat the whole question from the point of *adiaphoron*.²

These differences fit into his larger scheme of dividing First Corinthians according to the tone with which Paul makes his arguments. He argues that 1 Cor 8–10 is derived from the intermixing of two independent letters, one written from Ephesus and one from Macedonia, with the addition of redactional comments. In 1 Cor 8–10, he divides the three traditions as follows:

(1) 8:1–13; 9:19–23; 10:23–11:1 are part of the original letter of 1 Corinthians written by Paul. Paul's stance in these chapters is less restrictive than the added material.

(2) 10:1–22 is an addition to 1 Cor that has been abstracted from a previous letter of Paul. Paul's positions in this section are unnuanced.

(3) 9:1–18 does not fit either context; therefore, it is very likely that it is a later interpolation.

Paul's stance in 1 Cor 10:1–22 appears much more forceful than the more nuanced views in 1 Cor 8 and 10:23–11:1. Weiß thinks that in 1 Cor 10:1–22 Paul agrees with the Weak, in line with his Jewish heritage, and prohibits any association with idols because it constitutes an association with demons. In 1 Cor 8 and 10:23–11:1, however, Paul shows no concern for the possibility of contact with demons and appears to permit some consumption of idol-food. Weiß reasons that these differences belie an assumption of authorial unity, so he concludes that the hypothesis of multiple letters is necessary for logical consistency.

The benefits of this proposal are several. Paul would not be reduced to a writer who did not communicate his thoughts clearly to the audience. The

¹ Johannes Weiß, *Der erste Korintherbrief* (KEK 5; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1910). His understanding of the incoherence of the argument is contained in 210–13.

² *Ibid.*, 212.

three different positions are each coherent in themselves, even if they are in contradiction with adjacent positions originating from different sources. First Corinthians 10:1–22 is singled out as a section that does not seem to argue on the same bases. The strong reliance on the history of Israel and reading Christ back into the narrative is not typically the basis for an argument in First Corinthians. Nevertheless, the strongest argument against Weiß' partition theory is that no extant manuscripts question the unity of these chapters.³ Moreover, the various partition theories in the wake of Weiß do not agree concerning how the text should be divided or on the origins of the pieces.⁴ This evidence alone, however, might not be sufficient to dismiss partition theories.⁵ We must question whether Weiß' proposal for partition offers much in the way of explaining these two chapters for two reasons. First, Weiß understands the previous position (10:1–22) and the material original to First Corinthians (8:1–13; 9:19–23; 10:23–11:1) to be irreconcilable, but they are both from the pen of Paul, so Paul is still charged with inconsistency. Of course, it is possible that this difference represents a development in Paul's view on the subject or he may be addressing different issues. Second, by ascribing the incoherence to a redactor, Weiß just pushes the problem back to a later stage in the text's development. We are left with either an incompetent redactor who could not see the incoherence of his own argument or confused modern readers who do not understand the coherence of the redactor's argument.⁶ In ei-

³ See the critiques of Weiß in Peter D. Gooch, *Dangerous Food: 1 Corinthians 8–10 in Its Context* (Studies in Christianity and Judaism 5. Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1993), 136–9; Alex T. Cheung, *Idol Food in Corinth: Jewish Background and Pauline Legacy* (JSNTSup 176; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999), 82–5; and the critique of partitions theories in John Coolidge Hurd, Jr. *The Origin of 1 Corinthians* (Macon, Ga.: Mercer University Press, 1983), 131–42; Helmut Merklein, “Die Einheitlichkeit des ersten Korintherbriefes,” *ZNW* 75 (1984): 155–83.

⁴ Merklein (“Die Einheitlichkeit”) compares the theories by Weiss, Héring, Schmithals, Dinkler, Schenck, Suhl, Schenke and Fischer, and Senft. Their proposed reconstructions of the text range from arguing that there were two original letters to 1 Cor being comprised of nine original letters.

⁵ For example, source criticism has long held traction in the Gospel of John despite little manuscript evidence for it. Moreover, the source critics have not reached an agreement about either the division of the text or the origins of the sources. A similar source critical question arises in 1 Cor 14. Some scholars question the authenticity of 1 Cor 14:34–36 on the basis that it contradicts previous material in 1 Cor despite there being no manuscript evidence that it is an addition. For example, see Joseph Fitzmyer, S.J. *First Corinthians* (AB 32; New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), 528–38. Moreover, scholars who employ rhetorical criticism to parse Paul's argument have reached no more of a consensus concerning Paul's quotation of the Corinthians, but this fact alone does not invalidate the methodology.

⁶ One could argue that the contradiction is due to the emendations of a scribe who was uncomfortable with what he read in the text, but that is not the argument Weiß is making.

ther case, we lack an explanation for the existence of these ‘irreconcilable contradictions’ in the text of First Corinthians.

II. Khiok-Khng Yeo

Khiok-Khng Yeo attempts “to analyze Paul’s rhetorical interaction with the Corinthians over the issues of participating in the cultic meal (1 Cor 10:1–22) and eating idol food (1 Cor 8:1–13, 10:23–11:1), and subsequently, to suggest potential implications for a cross-cultural hermeneutic.”⁷ Yeo, like Weiß, thinks that literary and textual evidence necessitates partitioning First Corinthians into multiple original letters. He adduces four primary pieces of evidence. First, Paul mentions the presence of other correspondence. Second, “The abrupt transitions between 1 Cor 6:12 and 13, and between 10:22 and 23 suggest fragments of different letters joined together.”⁸ Third, there is a difference between the knowledge of and reactions to the divisions in 1:10–14 and 11:18–19. Fourth, “there appears to be a discrepancy between the absolute prohibition of Paul in 1 Cor 10:1–22 and the seemingly compromising attitude in 1 Cor 8 and 10:23–31 concerning idol worship.”⁹ Yeo divides the Corinthian correspondence into a series of six letters which he labels A, B, C, D, E, and F.¹⁰ Relevant for the analysis of 1 Cor 8–10 are Letters B, C, and E.

Letter B: 9:24–10:22 (authoritative style).

Letter C: 8:1–13, 9:19–23, 10:23–11:1 (dialogical rhetoric).

Letter E: 1 Cor 9:1–18 (judicial defense).

He summarizes the rhetorical differences between Letters B and C:

In Letter B, the style is authoritative, making use of traditional, Hellenistic Jewish, and scriptural material, with hardly any dialogue with the audience. In Letter C, however, the dialogical rhetoric is obviously visible in both chapter 8 and the end of chapter 10. Paul

⁷ Khiok-Khng Yeo, *Rhetorical Interaction in 1 Corinthians 8 and 10: A Formal Analysis with Preliminary Suggestions for a Chinese, Cross-Cultural Hermeneutic* (Biblical Interpretation Series 9; Leiden: Brill, 1995), 1. I have not included Walter Schmithals or Robert Jewett, who was Yeo’s *Doktorvater*, in this survey because many of their arguments are adopted and expanded by Yeo.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 80. Other scholars have noted that Yeo overstates these disjunctions as the rhetoric can flow smoothly. See for example, John Fotopoulos, *Food Offered to Idols in Roman Corinth: A Social-Rhetorical Reconsideration of 1 Corinthians 8:1–11:1* (WUNT 2.151; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2003), 28; Duane F. Watson, review of Yeo, *Rhetorical Interaction*, *RBL* (2000). Although it is beyond the scope of this study, Fotopoulos and Watson also offer pointed critiques of Yeo’s obscure definition of the Strong as upper-class, intellectual, ethnically Latin, urbanites, proto-gnostic, and immersed in Hellenistic Jewish theology.

⁹ Yeo, *Rhetorical Interaction*, 80.

¹⁰ For a summary of the content, see *Ibid.*, 81–82.

uses creedal and scriptural material, but he also interacts substantively with the audience's material.¹¹

Yeo argues that these letters address different times, audiences, and situations.¹² The issue in 1 Cor 10:1–22 is that of actual idolatry, from which Paul commands them to flee. The issue in 8:1–13, 9:19–23, 10:23–11:1 is not actual idolatry, so Paul tries to create a community dialogue in order for the Strong and Weak to interact over the issue of idol-food.

Yeo is to be commended for recognizing the difficulties in the text and not minimizing them. Nevertheless, on the one hand he overemphasizes the differences in Paul's arguments and, on the other hand he makes the burden of consistency too high. The "abrupt transitions" that he detects can be explained plausibly by rhetorical studies. Yeo seems to dismiss the significant rhetorical argument for coherence advanced by Margaret Mitchell in *Rhetoric of Reconciliation*.¹³ He recognizes the distinction in tone among these passages, but it does not follow from this that a different tone necessitates a different letter.

Despite the complexity of some of these partition theories, the application of their methodology may be too simplistic. Instead of wrestling with the complexities of the argument and the situation at Corinth, they avoid the issues by subdividing the text into different letters.¹⁴ This approach tends to exaggerate the differences between sections in order to highlight supposed inconsistencies. The result is that the demand for "consistency" is probably too high and too modern.¹⁵ Additionally, the divisions are based on the somewhat arbitrary and subjective basis of content without corresponding syntactical or text critical evidence.¹⁶ The arbitrariness of this methodology is

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 210.

¹² He identifies the knowledgeable addressed in Letter C as "proto-Gnostics who are steeped in Hellenistic-Jewish theology, especially that of Philo and the Wisdom literature" (155).

¹³ Margaret M. Mitchell, *Paul and the Rhetoric of Reconciliation: An Exegetical Investigation of the Language and Composition of 1 Corinthians* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1991).

¹⁴ Martinus C. De Boer ("The Composition of 1 Corinthians," *NTS* 40 [1994]: 229–45) does not argue for a partition theory, but he makes a similar argument. De Boer argues that Paul penned his original letter, and in response to subsequent reports, he resumed his writing with different tones. Especially important for De Boer is the difference in tone between 1 Cor 1–4 and 1 Cor 5.

¹⁵ As noted previously, some ancient author or redactor thought that this argument flowed well enough. Moreover, the Church Fathers do not detect inconsistency in Paul's argument.

¹⁶ It is not that arguments based on content are themselves arbitrary because it is precisely the incongruence of the content that alerts the reader to the possibility of different sources. The difficulties of arguments made on the basis of content are both in locating a contradiction and evaluating the degree of that contradiction. For example, several things

shown in the lack of agreement among source critics as to where the texts should be divided and the number of sources present.¹⁷ Inconsistency among source critics does not in itself invalidate the endeavor, but it makes current proposals less convincing as even those who agree about the presence of sources cannot agree about the application of this methodology. Perhaps one of the strongest arguments against partition theories is that the text critical evidence does not support subdivision into multiple letters. If convincing arguments for coherence can be made, they should be preferred to complex theories of composition. As Anthony Thiselton cautions, “Such partition theories are needed *only if exegesis fails to reveal a genuine coherence* within the epistle.”¹⁸ For these reasons it is preferable to accept an argument for the coherence of these chapters if it can be made.

B. Importance of Location

Paul explicitly indicates that he addresses more than one location in 1 Cor 8–10. In 1 Cor 8:10, Paul warns the Corinthians of the possible implications if they are seen dining ἐν εἰδωλείῳ (in the temple of an idol). Then he takes a more permissive stance toward food bought ἐν μακέλλῳ (in a meat market). Further, the situation described in 1 Cor 10:26 seems to be in the house of a non-believer. All interpreters recognize that different situations are in view, but they dispute both the specific situations and the cultic implications of each situation. For example, does dining ἐν εἰδωλείῳ necessarily imply cultic activity, or can the dining halls function like a non-cultic restaurant? Moreover, what setting does Paul envision in 10:1–22 where no location is specified? Willis, Fee, and Witherington, make contributions to understanding the

that source critics would label as contradictions might be explained plausibly as coherent statements by rhetorical analysts. Moreover, one must establish if the contradiction rises to the level of competing programs or ideologies or if it is considerably less. Rarely do source critics of First Corinthians provide methodological controls for these arguments.

¹⁷ For example, the major partition theorists do not agree about even the number of sources: Weiß (2 revised to be 3), Schmithals (3), Yeo (6), Jewett (5). Walter Schmithals, “Die Korintherbriefe als Briefsammlung,” ZNW 64 (1973): 263–88. Robert Jewett, “The Redaction of 1 Corinthians and the Trajectory of the Pauline School,” *JAARSup* 46 (1978): 398–444. Raymond F. Collins, *First Corinthians* (SP 7; Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1999), 13, also notes that source criticism loses some credibility because the interpreters have made alterations to their own theories: “The fact that Weiss and Schmithals, two of the major proponents of the partition theory, changed their mind as to precisely how 1 Corinthians is to be divided up into component parts militate against the validity of the opinion that Paul’s extant ‘first letter to the Corinthians’ is a composite work.”

¹⁸ Anthony C. Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (NIGTC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 39.

coherence of Paul's argument primarily by explaining the locations and their implications. Fee and more so Witherington also employ rhetorical analysis in their explanations.

I. Wendell Lee Willis

Wendell Willis' revised dissertation, *Idol Meat in Corinth: The Pauline Argument in 1 Corinthians 8 and 10*, was a major impetus in turning subsequent discussion of 1 Cor 8–10 to the topic of location and the implications of dining.¹⁹ Willis describes at least three situations in which Corinthians might encounter idol-food, a term which he thinks refers primarily to meat: food at formal worship of a pagan deity, meals of fraternal organizations at the temples, and private meals at one of the dining halls connected to the temple.²⁰ He suggests that Corinthian Christians probably did not consume idol-meat in order to show their superior knowledge; rather, they likely consumed idol-meat in order to maintain their normal social life. He argues against a sacramentalist interpretation of pagan meals, which he defines as the idea that “in the cult meal the worshippers consumed their deity who was contained (really or symbolically) in the sacrificial meat.”²¹ Willis draws five conclusions from his study of papyrological evidence:²²

- (1) There is insufficient evidence for the sacramental interpretation of cult meals.
- (2) There is a good deal of evidence for a social interpretation.
- (3) These meals were normal practices.
- (4) “Because the pagan cult meals were not sacramental (a means of acquiring the deity and/or its special powers and traits) nor communal (an occasion of intimate relationship between the worshipper and the god), it is unlikely that Paul in 1 Cor 10:14–21 is trying to warn the Corinthians against the dangers of pagan sacraments.”²³
- (5) This meat also would be available in the market and homes.

If the meals have a social function, Willis must explain the use of *κοινωνία* language in 1 Cor 10, which he asserts means a covenant relationship, not between deity and worshipper, but between pagan idolaters and Christians.²⁴

While Paul's tone is harsh in 1 Cor 10:1–22 where he forbids the idolatrous activity of participating in meals at pagan temples, 1 Cor 8:1–13, 10:23–26, and 10:27–11:1 are instances that are not occasions of worship. In

¹⁹ Wendell Lee Willis, *Idol Meat in Corinth: The Pauline Argument in 1 Corinthians 8 and 10* (SBLDS 68; Eugene, Ore.: Wipf & Stock, 1985).

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 265–6.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 18.

²² See his summary, *Ibid.*, 63–4.

²³ *Ibid.*, 63.

²⁴ On this point especially, see the critique by Cheung, *Idol Food in Corinth*, 309–11.

the latter contexts, Christians must be aware of the effects of their actions on other believers. Willis explains the coherence of 1 Cor 8–10:

It has already been seen that chapter 8 takes its shape because there Paul takes up and refutes the Corinthians' views. But here in 10:1–13 Paul argues for his own reasons. The difference in style, and even emphasis, can be explained on that basis. Here Paul documents the danger of apostasy in Scripture and will proceed in 10:14–22 to warn from contemporary examples. Both are arguments of his own choosing.²⁵

According to Willis, meals in dining halls of pagan temples are not necessarily religious. He argues “that in chapter 8 the situation is a meal held in a temple restaurant but not as an occasion of worship.”²⁶ In 1 Cor 8, the believer must consider the weaker brother's conscience. But in 1 Cor 10:1–22 Paul introduces the topic of meals that are cultic by intent – meals that he forbids outright. The remainder of 1 Cor 10, similar to 1 Cor 8, addresses situations which may be permissible but in which the believer must consider other believers.

Willis' proposal has been very influential but also strongly criticized. The weakest, and also most crucial, element of Willis' thesis is that meals at pagan temples could be almost exclusively social with little to no cultic significance. This non-religious “temple restaurant” view dichotomizes the social and religious in a way that would probably be foreign to an ancient mind. John Fotopoulos, as we will see, has demonstrated persuasively the social and religious implications of meals within the temple precincts and in the home.²⁷ Another issue with Willis' interpretation is his generally reductionistic understanding of Paul's Jewish heritage.²⁸ While he attempts to show the nuances of different dining situations in Greco-Roman sources, his understanding of the Jewish heritage contributing to Paul's thought is simplistic – Jews rejected cultic associations. As chapter 2 will describe in more detail, this assumption cannot be sustained without qualification, especially as evidenced in

²⁵ Willis, *Idol Meat in Corinth*, 163. Willis seems to hint that the rhetorical design of Paul's argument has some bearing on the coherence. He acknowledges that Paul quotes and refutes some positions of the Corinthians.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 259. He further defines the meal in 1 Cor 8 as one of the “non-cultic meals held in temple precincts” (260).

²⁷ Fotopoulos, *Food Offered to Idols in Roman Corinth*, 158–76. Ben Witherington III (“Not So Idle Thoughts about EIDOLOTHUTON,” *TynBul* 44 [1993]: 245) comments, “Accordingly, I must reject W. Willis' interpretation that some of the meals in the temple precincts were basically secular in character. Even when a club (*collegium*) or society, or trade guild held a meal in the temple precincts this would have been preceded by a specific sacrificial event of worship as described above. So far as I can tell from the classical sources, while temple staff might turn extra meat over to a shop owner in the *macellum*, after which it could be sold and eaten at home, there is no evidence of temples simply keeping quantities of meat ready to hand in the precincts for basically secular banquets.”

²⁸ See for example, Willis, *Idol Meat in Corinth*, 222.

Hellenistic Jewish authors. For example, Artapanus describes the Jewish hero Moses as building pagan temples and establishing pagan gods. Lastly, because Willis wants to show that the pagan meal is not sacramental in nature, he must force the Christian Lord's Supper into this non-sacramental mold. While he argues that *κοινωνία* refers to the covenantal relationship among human participants, Paul equates the *κοινωνία* of the Lord's Supper as humans participating in the meal with the deity (1 Cor 10:16). I will argue, in line with the vast majority of scholars, that the *κοινωνία* of the Lord's Supper describes a relationship between worshipper and deity and cannot be reduced to a social relationship among worshippers.

II. Gordon D. Fee

Gordon Fee covers the issue of idol-food in two articles and in his commentary on 1 Cor.²⁹ He proposes that the 1 Cor 8, 9, and 10 are a coherent set of chapters addressing two dining situations: meals of pagan worship and meals in a person's home. While many scholars argue that the incoherence is between 1 Cor 8:7–13 and 10:14–22, Fee argues that the problem is between 1 Cor 8:7–13 and 10:23–11:1. Prior to Fee, some scholars had argued that *εἰδωλόθυτα* in 1 Cor 8:1–13 corresponded to the marketplace food in 10:23ff, but Fee argues that 1 Cor 8 “is dealing primarily with the eating of sacrificial food at the temple itself in the presence of the idol-demon.”³⁰ “This means, further, that the prohibition in 10,14–22, rather than a digression, is in fact the main point, to which the whole argument of 8,1–10,13 has been leading. The question of marketplace food is then taken up after the fact as another issue altogether – although it has close ties to Paul's defense in 9,19–23 – and to this issue Paul gives a considerably different answer.”³¹ In his assessment, *εἰδωλόθυτα* does not refer to marketplace food but to the “eating of sacrificial food at the cultic meals in the pagan temples.”³² And eating at cultic meals is the overarching problem that Paul is addressing in 1 Cor 8–10. Fee attempts to lay out first the problem at Corinth and second Paul's response.

Following Hurd, Fee thinks that there were no divisions among the Corinthians on this issue, and the position for which the Corinthians were arguing was one that had already been prohibited by Paul. They seem to be arguing for the right to eat feasts at the pagan temples. They make four points to support their requests. First, their *γνώσις* of monotheism implies the non-

²⁹ Gordon D. Fee, “II Corinthians VI.14–VII.1 and Food Offered to Idols,” *NTS* 23 (1977): 140–61; “*Εἰδωλόθυτα* Once Again: An Interpretation of 1 Corinthians 8–10,” *Biblica* 61 (1980): 172–97; *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987).

³⁰ Fee, “*Εἰδωλόθυτα* Once Again,” 178.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 178–9.

³² Fee, *First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 359.

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