Recent Research on Paul and Slavery

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Recent Research on Paul and Slavery

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Introduction

The last 500 years have witnessed a seismic shift in the world's attitude towards slavery. With the so called discovery of the 'new world' and the beginning of the colonial period (1492–1945), slavery became a vital aspect of the advancement of the various European empires that were competing for world dominance. In North America, the introduction of the first Africans as indentured servants at Jamestown, Virginia in 1619 marked the beginning of 400 years of African enslavement in the 'new world'. During the same time period, however, some who were actively participating in what came to be known as the 'Enlightenment' (1651–1794) began to question the practice of enslaving other human beings. Two particular events helped to obliterate the 'peculiar institution'. First is Wilberforce's persistent introduction of bills in parliament that eventually abolished the slave trade in the British Empire in 1833;[1] the second, Abraham Lincoln's 1863 unilateral Emancipation Proclamation in the midst of the American Civil War.

During this same period, the church experienced a degree of upheaval beginning with the actions of Luther, which spawned the Protestant Reformation (1517). Biblical scholars working in this time of new discovery and upheaval brought new methodologies and perspectives on how the Bible should influence society. Not surprisingly, slavery was one topic that enflamed the passions of those reaping the benefits of this revolution of knowledge. Since the early nineteenth century, much scholarly ink has been spilt over this subject. In the years immediately preceding the American Civil War, scholars used the Bible to support as well as to repudiate the practice of slavery. Although the Bible has much to say about slavery, often times the arguments were based on the writings of Paul the Apostle. Abolitionists and slavery advocates alike were able to garner support for their point of view through an appeal to Paul's letters. The result in the

1. Slavery in England was abolished in 1772, but the practice persisted in the colonies of the British Empire until 1833 when Britain abolished slavery and provided for the emancipation of enslaved people in the British West Indies, to take effect in August 1834. The Act declared that formerly enslaved people must serve a period of apprenticeship before receiving full emancipation. Originally this period was set at six years, but it was later reduced to four.

United States was not just a political split that caused a civil war; it caused entire denominations to divide from one another based on each other's opinion of slavery. In the wake of the Civil War and Reconstruction, New Testament scholars tried to reconcile a post-slavery society with a Biblical text that seemingly contradicted abolitionist sentiments. By the early twentieth century, the picture had changed to such a degree that E.J. Goodspeed would lament: 'Slavery is so disagreeable a subject that it has been almost obliterated from the English New Testament'.[2]

What follows below is an examination of how the debate over Paul and slavery has played out in New Testament scholarship.[3] It covers the last 200 years focusing particularly on how the debates have evolved over the last 35 years. In most cases, Patristic and Reformation evidence is not given consideration, unless, as in the case of 1 Corinthians 7.21, it provides a particular insight into how interpretation has developed. I have attempted to be comprehensive without being exhaustive. Rather than rehearse what every scholar has said about Paul and slavery, I have tried to represent the major shifts of the debate as the conversation took place over the decades of two centuries. I also do not attempt to arbitrate between all of the scholars and then suggest a new way forward. Rather, I am happy to allow the literature review to serve as a way of tracing the road NT scholarship has traveled. The book is broken into five chapters.

Chapter 1 is a wide ranging survey of NT scholarship on Paul and slavery over the last 200 years. One issue that NT scholars confronted was the problem of Pauline silence. The apostle never offered an unequivocal condemnation of slavery. Scholarship often interpreted this as tacit approval for the institution. Others concluded that Paul promoted a more philosophical approach that focused, in good Stoic fashion, on the inward freedom of the individual rather than the external, physical enslavement. Still others suggested that Paul's eschatology kept him from making suggestions about a social situation in a world that was soon to pass away. Some, in an apparent attempt to lessen the embarrassment brought about by a NT that supports slavery, mitigated ancient slavery in comparison to the more recent modern experience. The chapter organizes the review of scholarship into an artificial framework that divides the topic into four categories which serve as a functional aid for plotting the movement of NT scholarship over the last 200 years.

Chapter 2 is an examination of African American responses to Paul and slavery. I have included this chapter because there has not always

2. Goodspeed was reacting to the translation of slavery terminology with 'servant' instead of 'slave'. (Edgar Johnson Goodspeed, *The Meaning of Ephesians* [Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1933], p. 7 n. 4).

3. New Testament will be abbreviated NT from hereon out.

been a conscious recognition of the perspective that the descendants of former North American slaves can bring to a discussion of Paul and slavery. These are readings of Paul that have been conditioned by the experience of black Americans in a country that has long been dominated by whites, who initially enslaved Africans and then, following emancipation, actively promoted the disenfranchisement of former slaves and their descendants. The methodologies used and the conclusions reached by these scholars are not necessarily different than that of their white counterparts. But their intention for writing was different in that they wanted to address the tension that black Americans often felt in relation to the Apostle Paul. For those living in the African Diaspora as slaves and the descendants of slaves, Paul was and still is a particularly enigmatic figure in the Bible. The alleged apostle of freedom was more often viewed as a supporter of slavery because of his various injunctions that slaves should obey their masters and the apparent return of a runaway slave, Onesimus, to his master. The chapter traces the history of this tension and focuses on the significant contributions of three African American scholars.

Chapter 3 outlines how Paul's slavery metaphors have been interpreted over the years. In actuality, Paul has very little to say about slavery as an institution. With the exception of 1 Corinthians 7.21 and the book of Philemon, Paul never addresses the issue of slavery. The overwhelming majority of his references to slavery are metaphorical. The focus of this chapter is the scholarly debate over the source and meaning of Paul's slavery metaphors. One particular issue is the meaning of Paul's self-designation, 'slave of Christ', and whether that title should be understood against Paul's Greco-Roman or Jewish background.

Chapter 4 covers the numerous attempts to fill in and interpret Paul's incomplete words in 1 Corinthians 7.21. Did Paul intend for slaves to use 'slavery' or 'freedom'? For the first 1500 years, the majority believed that Paul was advising slaves not to take advantage of an offer of freedom. They were to remain slaves and serve God in the position to which they were called. Reformation era exegetes broke with the traditional interpretation and set off a long debate over how to complete Paul's elliptical phrase. The chapter traces the history of interpretation from Chrysostom to the modern period and focuses on more significant contributions that were offered in the last half of the twentieth century.

Chapter 5 traces the interpretive history of Paul's letter to Philemon. The traditional interpretation that held Onesimus to be a fugitive slave persisted through the nineteenth century. But that interpretation was challenged several times across the course of the twentieth century. The focus of the chapter is the way Paul handled the situation between Onesimus and Philemon and what that may tell us about the apostle's view on

slavery. The review of scholarship is broken into a four-part artificial framework. The first part reviews the traditional interpretation as it was generally viewed in the nineteenth century. The second outlines the challenges that it has endured across the twentieth century. The third surveys those whose questions and methodology are more concerned with legal aspects regarding Roman slave law and how it was that Onesimus came into contact with the imprisoned apostle. The fourth traces the work of those who interpret the letter in light of the social and rhetorical elements that might inform us about the situation in Philemon's household.

Finally, I provide an epilogue in which I highlight four areas in which NT scholarship already has and continues to change its understanding of ancient slavery and how a better understanding of ancient slavery helps us to interpret Paul. I look at what sources can tell us about slavery in antiquity, the conditions of slavery, the practice of self-sale and the notion of the upwardly mobile slave.

I have not offered specific chapters on Galatians 3.28 or the disputed letters of Paul. To be sure, I have not completely glossed over them; mention is made of them particularly in chapters one and two. But since with the majority of NT scholars, I deem Colossians, Ephesians and the Pastoral Epistles to be Deutero-Pauline, I have not focused on them as such. Moreover, the admonishments to slaves in these letters are part of the household codes and are better situated for treatment in a section that would cover all aspects of household imagery. Similarly, Paul's declaration of 'neither slave nor free' in the baptismal formula of Galatians 3.28 is not a statement as much about slavery as it is about Paul's theology of being 'in Christ', and consequently would be better treated as such. When these passages proved to be influential on particular scholars, however, I included them, recognizing that not every scholar over the last 200 years has subscribed to such a dissecting of the Pauline corpus.

This volume's intended purpose is to provide anyone interested in the topic of Paul and slavery a useful overview of the literature on the topic and an appreciation for the various twists and turns that have occurred throughout the years. I have written each chapter in such a way that one need not read the whole book in order to learn about a various aspect of scholarship in relation to Paul and slavery. The consequence of this approach is a small degree of repetition between chapters, but I think it is the best way to arrange the material so that it can be a user-friendly resource.

ABBREVIATIONS

AB	Anchor Bible
ABD	*Anchor Bible Dictionary*
ANRW	*Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt: Geschichte und Kultur Roms im Spiegel der neueren Forschung*
AGSU	Arbeiten zur Geschichte des Spätjudentums und Urchristentums
AThR	*Anglican Theological Review*
BECNT	Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament
Bib	*Biblica*
BNTC	Black's New Testament Commentaries
BR	*Biblical Research*
BZ	*Biblische Zeitschrift*
CBQ	*Catholic Biblical Quarterly*
CGTC	The Cambridge Greek Testament Commentary
CTJ	*Calvin Theological Journal*
CTQ	*Concordia Theological Quarterly*
CurBS	*Currents in Biblical Research*
EKKNT	Evangelisch-katholischer Kommentar zum Neuen Testament
EvT	*Evangelische Theologie*
FAS	*Forschung zur antiken Sklaverei*
FRLANT	Forschung zur Religion und Literatur des Alten und Neuen Testaments
HTR	*Harvard Theological Review*
HUT	Hermeneutische Untersuchungen zur Theologie
ICC	International Critical Commentary
Int	*Interpretation*
JAC	*Jahrbuch für Antike und Christentum*
JBL	*Journal of Biblical Literature*
JBR	*Journal of Bible and Religion*
JFSR	*Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion*
JR	*Journal of Religion*
JSNT	*Journal for the Study of the New Testament*
JSNTSup	Journal for the Study of the New Testament, Supplement Series
JSOTSup	Journal for the Study of the Old Testament, Supplement Series
JTS	*Journal of Theological Studies*
Mils	*Milltown Studies*
Neot	*Neotestametica*
NICNT	New International Commentary on the New Testament
NIGTC	New International Greek Testament Commentary
NovT	*Novum Testamentum*

NovTSup	Novum Testamentum Supplements
NTS	*New Testament Studies*
PG	Patrologia graeca
PL	Patrologia latina
PSB	*Princeton Seminary Bulletin*
R&T	*Religion and Theology*
RelStRev	*Religious Studies Reviews*
SBLDS	Society of Biblical Literature Dissertation Series
SBLSP	*Society of Biblical Literature Seminar Papers*
SBS	Stuttgarter Bibelstudien
SecCent	*Second Century*
SNTSMS	Society for New Testament Studies Monograph Series
SP	Sacra Pagina
TDNT	*Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*
TLZ	*Theologische Literaturzeitung*
TRev	*Theologische Revue*
TS	Texts and Studies
TynBul	*Tyndale Bulletin*
WBC	Word Biblical Commentary
WD	*Wort und Dienst*
WMANT	Wissenschaftliche Monographien zum Alten und Neuen Testament
WUNT	Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament
ZNW	*Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft*

Chapter 1

Paul and Slavery: 200 Years of Scholarship

Trying to summarize 200 years of the scholarly study of Paul and slavery into a digestible format is not an easy task. Many disparate voices have been raised during this time period. Some supported and some repudiated the practice of slavery in the modern period based on the writings of the Apostle Paul.[1] The approaches are as varied as the voices themselves. Consequently, the review of scholarship below has been organized into an artificial framework that divides the topic into four categories. Category One is a review of those who portrayed Paul as a social conservative and, therefore, a supporter of slavery. Category Two is a review of those who conclude that the apostle's opinion of slavery developed from a philosophical approach and was concerned more with inward freedom than external bondage. Category Three is a review of those who conclude that slavery in antiquity was more benign than its counterpart in the colonial period and therefore not requiring much attention from the apostle. Category Four is a review of those who interpret slavery as institutionalized violence and depend more on social rather than legal definitions of slavery. These are not precise categories, and they often overlap with one another. But they do serve as a functional aid for plotting out the movement of NT scholarship over the last 200 years.

One of the complications encountered when discussing Paul and his attitude towards slavery is the question of which Epistles should be used to inform our understanding. If, with the majority of NT scholars, we deem Colossians, Ephesians and the Pastoral Epistles to be Deutero-Pauline, we discover that Paul had every little to say about slavery as an institution. Apart from 1 Cor. 7.21-23, Gal. 3.28 (cf. 1 Cor. 12.13) and the Epistle to Philemon, all of Paul's slavery language is in the realm of metaphor. However, not every scholar over the last 200 years subscribed to such a dissecting of the Pauline corpus. Many of the scholarly opinions listed below considered all of the Epistles traditionally attributed to Paul to be authentic. Still others

1. Moreover, it is possible to detect the dissonance many scholars must have felt from living in a world that was abolishing slavery while studying a set of documents that seem to support the institution.

would only bracket out the Pastorals as pseudonymous while accepting Ephesians and Colossians as authentically Pauline. Consequently, no attempt has been made to distinguish between what is considered to be authentically Pauline and that which is not. Rather, each scholar's opinion is presented regardless of their conclusions of what constitutes authentic Pauline Literature.

The Socially Conservative Paul

Scholars in this category are those who generally conclude that Paul was a status quo supporter of slavery. This assertion is based on the fact that slavery was a pervasive facet of the Roman Empire and widely accepted. With estimates for the total number of slaves in the Empire anywhere from one-third or more of the total population; it would have seemed unthinkable for Paul, or anyone else for that matter, to consider the possibility of abolition.[2] For some, the lack of a condemnation of slavery in any of the Pauline Epistles is viewed as tacit approval of the institution. This argument based on Pauline silence was employed particularly in North America where the slavery question was foremost in the mind of many scholars.

In 1860 a compilation of papers was published under the title *Cotton is King and Pro-Slavery Arguments*.[3] The volume contains a number of essays that argue for the legal, economic, and political support of slavery in antebellum United States and was intended to answer pamphlets being circulated by numerous abolitionist groups. Of note is the inclusion of an essay by C.H. Hodge of Princeton University who was one of the stalwarts of American reformed theology.

In his article 'The Bible Argument on Slavery',[4] Hodge contends that Paul never addressed slavery to make a moral pronouncement, but only to outline the obligations that existed between slaves and masters.[5] The

2. An illustration of how pervasive slavery was may be seen in a proposal that was placed before the Roman Senate to require slaves to wear clothing that distinguished them from free persons. However, the proposal was defeated as dangerous out of fear that slaves would be able to count their number and realize their potential power (Seneca, *Clem.* 1.24.1).

3. E.N. Elliot (ed.), *Cotton is King* (Augusta, GA: Pritchard, Abbot & Lomis, 1860; reprinted in *The Basic Afro-American Reprint Library: Books on the History, Culture, and Social Environment of Afro-Americans* [New York: Johnson Reprint Corporation, 1968]).

4. C.H. Hodge, 'The Bible Argument on Slavery', in E.N. Elliot (ed.), *Cotton is King* (Augusta, GA: Pritchard, Abbot & Lomis, 1860; reprinted in *The Basic Afro-American Reprint Library: Books on the History, Culture, and Social Environment of Afro-Americans* [New York: Johnson Reprint Corporation, 1968]), pp. 840-77.

5. Hodge, 'The Bible Argument on Slavery', p. 848.

only critique of slavery that can be legitimately extrapolated from the NT is that which condemns the mistreatment of slaves.[6] According to Hodge, it is not the external relationship between slave and master that is important to Paul, but the idea of being free in Christ as found in 1 Cor. 7.21-23.[7]

That Hodge based his conclusion on the argument of Pauline silence is evidenced by the following:

> Again, the argument for the lawfulness of slaveholding, is not found on the mere injunction 'Slaves obey your masters' analogous to the command 'Let every soul be subject to the higher powers', but on the fact that the apostles did not condemn slavery; that they did not require emancipation, and that they recognized slaveholders as Christian brethren.[8]

Prior to making this statement, Hodge points out to his readers that the inclusion of slaveholding believers in the church is clear evidence that Paul did not condemn the practice. He even postulates that if slaveholders had been rejected from membership in the church, it would only have been the result of their mistreatment of slaves rather than their ownership of them.[9] Thus, in Hodge's estimate, it was not the institution of slavery that concerned Paul, but the abuse of it. If the apostle can be credited in any way with altering the institution, it is by encouraging Christians to practice a more benevolent form of slavery. Thus Hodge's condemning statement of abolitionist arguments towards the close of his essay:

> Slaveholding…in the New Testament is nowhere forbidden or denounced but on the contrary, acknowledged to be consistent with the Christian character and profession (that is, consistent with justice, mercy, holiness, love to God and love to man), to declare it to be a heinous crime is a direct impeachment of the word of God.[10]

It is interesting to note that nowhere in this essay or in 'The Fugitive Slave Law', another he contributed to this volume, does Hodge give consideration or make mention of the situation of Onesimus and Paul's Letter to Philemon.[11] Such a consideration might, at the very least, have caused him to acknowledge that Paul was hinting at the possibility of Onesimus's emancipation. Instead Hodge based his entire argument for slavery and

6. Hodge, 'The Bible Argument on Slavery', pp. 853-55.
7. Hodge, 'The Bible Argument on Slavery', p. 848.
8. Hodge, 'The Bible Argument on Slavery', p. 857.
9. Hodge, 'The Bible Argument on Slavery', p. 857.
10. Hodge, 'The Bible Argument on Slavery', p. 870.
11. This essay is in response to the US Supreme Court's 1857 Dred Scott decision. See C.H. Hodge, 'The Fugitive Slave Law', in E.N. Elliot (ed.), *Cotton is King* (Augusta, GA: Pritchard, Abbot & Lomis, 1860; reprinted in *The Basic Afro-American Reprint Library: Books on the History, Culture, and Social Environment of Afro-Americans* [New York: Johnson Reprint Corporation, 1968]), pp. 809-40.

Paul's opinion of the institution on the lack of a specific condemnation anywhere in the NT.

Another essay that appeared with Hodge's in the same 1860 volume was Thornton Stringfellow's 'Bible Argument or Slavery in Light of Divine Revelation'.[12] Similar to Hodge, Stringfellow concludes that Paul was a social conservative who supported slavery.[13] Through an examination of 1 Cor. 7.21-23, Stringfellow suggests that Christianity in no way gave slaves, either in antiquity or the nineteenth century, a title to freedom, and, consequently, slaves were called by God to be content with their divinely ordained position in society.[14] Stringfellow goes on to suggest that the statements in 1 Tim. 6.2 were directed at abolitionists in antiquity who believed that Christianity and slaveholding were incompatible. Paul was commanding Timothy to teach against such erroneous doctrines.[15] He even goes so far as to suggest that according to biblical example, slavery was a way of saving those who would have normally fallen to the sword. Thus, Africans were those who had been divinely saved from complete ruin.[16] Like Hodge, Stringfellow does not show any evidence of having considered the implications Paul's Letter to Philemon might have had on his final conclusions.

12. Thornton Stringfellow, 'Bible Argument or Slavery in Light of Divine Revelation', in E.N. Elliot (ed.), *Cotton is King* (Augusta, GA: Pritchard, Abbot & Lomis, 1860; reprinted in *The Basic Afro-American Reprint Library: Books on the History, Culture, and Social Environment of Afro-Americans* [New York: Johnson Reprint Corporation, 1968]), pp. 459-521.

13. For a modern assessment of the pro-slavery arguments like those of Hodge and Stringfellow and the problem of interpreting pro-slavery documents in an abolitionist world, see David Brion Davis, *The Problem of Slavery in the Age of Revolution, 1770–1823* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1975), pp. 523-56; Robert Mullin, 'The Biblical Critics and the Battle over Slavery', *Journal of Presbyterian History* 61 (1983), pp. 210-26; W.M. Swartley, *Slavery, Sabbath, War & Women: Case Issues in Biblical Interpretation* (Scottdale, PA: Herald Press, 1983), pp. 31-64; W.A. Meeks, 'The "Haustafeln" and American Slavery', in E.H. Lovering and J.L. Sumney (eds.), *Theology and Ethics in Paul and His Interpreters* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996), pp. 232-53; Allen C. Guelzo, 'Charles Hodge's Antislavery Moment', in J.W. Stewart and J.H. Moorhead (eds.), *Charles Hodge Revisited* (Eerdmans, 2002), pp. 299-325; J. Albert Harrill, 'The Use of the New Testament in the American Slave Controversy: A Case History in the Hermeneutical Tension between Biblical Criticism and Christian Moral Debate', in *Slaves in the New Testament* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 2006), pp. 165-92. For an overview of the slavery debate among Roman Catholics see Madeleine Hooke Rice, *American Catholic Opinions on the Slavery Controversy* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1944).

14. Stringfellow, 'Bible Argument', p. 482.

15. Stringfellow, 'Bible Argument', pp. 485-87.

16. Stringfellow, 'Bible Argument', p. 491.

Across the Atlantic in Great Britain, J.B. Lightfoot was also suggesting that Paul never intended to abolish slavery. In the introduction to his commentary on Philemon (1875), Lightfoot concedes that Christianity found itself in direct conflict with slavery, but he also suggests that:

> Slavery was inwoven into the texture of society; and to prohibit slavery was to tear society into shreds. Nothing less than a servile war with its certain horrors and its doubtful issues must have been the consequence.[17]

When commenting on the case of Onesimus, Lightfoot notes Paul's failure here and elsewhere in the NT to require emancipation, a fact that he describes as 'an apt illustration of the attitude of Christianity towards slavery in general'.[18] As with Hodge, Lightfoot concludes that according to 1 Cor. 7.21-23, Paul was more concerned with the inward enslavement of the individual (rather than the external) and concluded 'that the slave may cheerfully acquiesce in his lot, knowing that all earthly distinctions vanish in the light of his eternal truth'.[19]

Lightfoot's interpretation of Paul as a social conservative is based on two points. First, the argument of Pauline silence. Second, the threat that abolition would have caused to the Roman Empire. Paul, therefore, was happy to keep the status quo and did not press for manumission because it was ultimately not pertinent to the advancement of the gospel and would have threatened Rome with a slave rebellion. Lightfoot was not as forceful as Hodge and Stringfellow, however, in suggesting that the variety of slavery practiced in the early church was of a more benevolent type. It is clear as one reads Lightfoot that although he casts Paul as a social conservative, Lightfoot was not unaware of the problems associated with slavery and was certainly not a modern proponent of the institution. This is probably due in part to Lightfoot's well-known familiarity with Classical literature and Roman Jurisprudence.[20] The commingling of these with the NT allowed him to appreciate the wider ramifications of slavery for the individual.

In post-Civil War/Reconstruction America, NT scholarship was also beginning to realize that there was more to understanding slavery than just the statements made by Paul in his Letters. In many ways, M.R. Vincent was years ahead of himself in his attempt to understand the social aspects of slavery in antiquity. In his commentary on Philemon (1897),

17. J.B. Lightfoot, *St Paul's Epistles to the Colossians and Philemon* (Macmillan, 1875; repr., Peabody: Hendrickson, 1995), p. 323.
18. Lightfoot, *Epistles to the Colossians and Philemon*, p. 324.
19. Lightfoot, *Epistles to the Colossians and Philemon*, p. 324.
20. Lightfoot, *Epistles to the Colossians and Philemon*, pp. 320-22.

Vincent describes the moral effects of slavery as depriving a large population of 'manhood and self-respect'.[21] Moreover, he describes the institution as one which fostered within the slave characteristics of viciousness, cunning falsehood and treachery. Even if a slave did attain emancipation, it only changed the slave's political standing, not his or her character. Slaves carried into freedom all of the antecedents, habits, spirit and moral qualities of a slave.[22]

But the social effects of slavery touched the slaveholder as well. The absolute authority a master held over a slave without legal or moral restraints ultimately led to the corruption of the family unit.[23] Thus in Vincent's estimation, the institution was a social disease that permanently scarred all those with whom it came in contact. Unlike Stringfellow, Vincent does not point out any redeeming qualities inherent in slavery.

In spite of the bleak way Vincent describes slavery, he still gravitates towards describing Paul as a social conservative. He believes that Paul cannot be described as a supporter of slavery or as a condemner working towards its abolition.[24] Once again this is based on an argument of Pauline silence.

> If he had distinctly regarded the institution of slavery as wrong, *per se*, there is every reason for believing that he would have spoken out as plainly as he did concerning fornication; whereas there is not a word to that effect nor a hint of such in his Epistles. In this Epistle, and wherever he alludes to the subject, the institution of slavery is recognized and accepted as an established fact with which he does not quarrel, as a condition which has its own opportunities for Christian service and its own obligations which the Christian service profession enforces.[25]

In fairness to Vincent, it should be pointed out that his estimation of Paul as a social conservative was not uninformed support of the status quo. He considers the projecting of an abolitionist ideology onto Paul as anachronistic and 'more than questionable whether St Paul had grasped the postulate of the modern Christian consciousness that no man has a right to own another'.[26] In his final assessment of the apostle, Vincent suggests that 'Paul knew and appreciated the actual abuses and the evil possibilities of slavery: yet it is quite possible that he may not have looked beyond such an operation of the gospel principles as might rid the

21. Marvin R. Vincent, *Philippians and Philemon* (ICC; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1897), p. 163.
22. Vincent, *Philippians and Philemon*, p. 165.
23. Vincent, *Philippians and Philemon*, p. 164.
24. Vincent, *Philippians and Philemon*, p. 165.
25. Vincent, *Philippians and Philemon*, p. 165.
26. Vincent, *Philippians and Philemon*, p. 165.

institution of its abuses without destroying it'.[27] This, then, not only curtailed the abuses of the institution but also led to its destruction as Roman law became more and more influenced by Christian teachings.

As NT scholarship entered into the twentieth century, it was common to describe Paul as a social conservative who never condemned slavery, but did attempt to change the nature of the institution from within by injecting Christian principles. Consequently, Bible dictionaries, introductions to the NT, monographs and journal articles began to supply a steady stream of conservative Pauline ideology. In 1929, W.E. Raffety described Jesus (and by implication Paul) as a reformer 'whose gospel was dynamic rather than dynamitic' rather than an anarchist.[28] E.F. Scott (1932), arguing from the perspective of Pauline silence, suggested that any attempt by Paul to challenge the institution of slavery would have put Christianity in danger of subverting the established social order. Instead Paul placed slave and master on a new footing and did more than anyone else for the abolition of slavery.[29] This was also the opinion of M.E. Lyman (1962) who wrote that even though slavery was antithetical to the gospel 'Paul was not trying to abolish slavery but to sow the seeds of change'.[30] More recently, Justin Meggitt (1998) has argued that Paul did not require manumission because of the legal restrictions. But Paul's baptismal formula served a similar purpose by making the slave and master equal before God and thus functionally dissolving the institution within the community.[31]

In Germany scholarship followed a similar trajectory as that of the English speaking world.[32] F.C. Baur (1857) depicted Paul as a social conservative desirous of change, but limited by the world in which he lived.

27. Vincent, *Philippians and Philemon*, p. 167.

28. W.E. Raffety, 'Slavery', in *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia* (ed. James Orr; Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 1929), IV, p. 2817.

29. E.F. Scott, *The Literature of the New Testament* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1932), p. 177.

30. M.E. Lyman, 'Philemon', in *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible* (4 vols.; ed. G.A. Buttrick; Nashville, Abingdon Press, 1962), III, p. 784.

31. Justin J. Meggitt, *Paul, Poverty and Survival* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1998), pp. 181-82.

32. Some German scholars have criticized Paul and the early church for not being abolitionists and for their failing to apply the principles of the gospel equitably to the social injustices of their day. But these are in the minority. See: F. Overbeck, *Studien zur Geschichte der alten Kirche* (Schloss-Chemnitz: E. Schmeitzner, 1875), pp. 153-230; G. Kehnscherper, *Die Stellung der Bibel und der alten christlichen Kirche zur Sklaverei* (Halle: Max Niemeyer, 1957), pp. 79-96; Siegfried Schulz, *Gott is kein Sklavenhalter: Die Geschichte eniner verspäteten Revolution* (Zurich: Flamberg; Hamburg: Furche Verlag, 1972), pp. 167-93.

> And yet we cannot but judge that the abolition of slavery is a requirement of the moral consciousness which agrees with the spirit of Christianity. Thus although the apostle's views on marriage and on slavery were limited by the circumstances of the time he lived in, yet we see the universality of the Christian principle in the fact that in the whole history of mankind there has been no advance of moral development that was not essentially founded in Christianity, and was not brought about, without any revolutionary pressure, by its quietly working influence.[33]

This was also the view of W. Bousset (1929) who claimed that the time in which Paul lived was not right for addressing such a difficult question because any challenge to slavery could have inadvertently caused a new slave revolt and, at the same time, initiated the permanent destruction of Christianity.[34]

But not everyone in Germany accepted that Paul was a supporter of slavery or that it was socially impossible to challenge the institution. In his study of *Die Mystik des Apostels Paulus* (1930), Albert Schweitzer postulates that for Paul, it was not society or politics that made it impossible to challenge slavery. It was theology that restrained Paul.

> If Paul is exposed to the reproach that he did not in the Spirit of Christ oppose slavery, and consequently for centuries lent the weight of his authority to those who regard it as compatible with Christianity, the blame rests on the theory of the *status quo*. His mysticism did not permit him to hold a different view. For what need has one who is already a free man in Christ Jesus, and momentarily expects to enter in the Messianic glory, to be concerned about release from slavery for the few moments that he has still to spend in the natural world? Accordingly, Paul enjoins upon Onesimus, the escaped slave whom he had come to know during his imprisonment, that he should return to his master Philemon, and although as a believer he is now a freeman like his master, nevertheless to continue to serve him.[35]

K.H. Rengstorf (1935), in his study of Greek slavery terminology in the NT, also suggests a more subtle approach and claims: 'If slavery was not rejected from the Christian standpoint, every effort was made to bring it to an end'. He postulates that the rule of love among the members of the Christian community which caused all to stand on the same level before Christ, 'would finally lead to the abolition of slavery amongst Christians'.[36]

33. F.C. Baur, *The Church History of the First Three Centuries* (trans. Allan Menzies; London: Williams & Norgate, 1878), pp. 251-52.

34. W. Bousset, *Die Schriften des Neuen Testaments* (3 vols.; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1929), II, p. 101.

35. Albert Schweitzer, *The Mysticism of Paul the Apostle* (trans. William Montgomery; New York: Henry Holt & Co., 1931), p. 195.

36. Karl H. Rengstorf, 'δοῦλος', in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (10 vols.; trans. and ed. G.W. Bromiley; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964), II, p. 272.

Rudolf Bultmann (1951), on the other hand, dismisses the whole topic summarily by declaring that a slavery question never confronted the church and, since it was an accepted part of Paul's social world, it was not, therefore, the task of Christians to alter it nor an offence for Christian masters to own slaves.[37] Following in the footsteps of his mentor, Ernst Käsemann (1969) claims that Paul had little interest in using slavery as a way to create a new social order and went on to affirm the assumption among many NT scholars that 'Paul always acts as a representative of conservative attitudes'.[38]

A particularly insightful essay by Coleman-Norton titled 'The Apostle Paul and the Roman Law of Slavery' appeared at the halfway mark of the twentieth century (1951).[39] Like many NT scholars, he argues that Paul never denounced the system but introduced elements that would eventually destroy the system; i.e. by transforming the relationship between slave and master in the context of Christianity. After a discussion of Philemon and Onesimus, Coleman-Norton suggests five possible reasons why Paul never advocated the abolition of slavery or the enforced emancipation of slaves by Christian owners: (1) Nothing in Jewish, Roman or Christian tradition would have prompted Paul to begin a campaign against slavery; (2) Paul would have recognized that because slavery was such an integral part of Roman society any attempt to abolish it not only threatened the ruination of contemporary society but also Christianity as a revolutionary movement; (3) Paul's expectation of Christ's imminent Parousia would have caused him to see no need to alter the current social order and therefore encourage slaves to be content with their current state; (4) Paul preached the psychological principle that only inner liberty was important to the Christian life, being freed from external bondage was of little concern; (5) 'The omission of an attack against the social order of slavery, when Paul had an excellent opportunity to offer a protest in his Epistle to Philemon, makes the apostle's silence on this subject all the more significant'.[40]

Coleman-Norton's five points serve as an excellent summary of the approaches taken by many NT scholars at various stages in the twentieth century. The only one that had not yet been represented in our review is

37. Rudolf Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament* (2 vols.; trans. Kendrick Grobel; New York: Charles Scribner & Sons, 1955), II, pp. 230-31.

38. Ernst Käsemann, *New Testament Questions of Today* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1969), pp. 208-209.

39. Paul R. Coleman-Norton, 'The Apostle Paul and the Roman Law of Slavery', in P.R. Coleman-Norton (ed.), *Studies in Roman Economic and Social History in Honor of Allan Chester Johnson* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1951), pp. 155-77.

40. Coleman-Norton, 'The Apostle Paul and the Roman Law of Slavery', p. 172.

the eschatological argument in point number three. This explanation seems to have found favor with some scholars in the second half of the twentieth as evidenced in the works of J.L. Houlden,[41] R.E. Brown[42] and B.D. Ehrman.[43] Such an explanation presents Paul more as a pragmatist willing tolerate some things in light of the short amount of time left in history rather than an uncaring social conservative.

In the closing decades of the twentieth century, cracks began to appear in the commonly accepted view that 'Paul always acts as a representative of conservative attitudes'.[44] As the social sciences began to extend into the study of history, many scholarly assessments of life in antiquity were reevaluated. The study of slavery in the NT was no exception. Two authors who helped to initiate the reevaluation of slavery in antiquity were not NT scholars. One is sociologist Orlando Patterson and the other Roman Historian Keith Bradley. While an analysis of these two authors will take place later in this essay, both offered new insights about slavery in antiquity that have been rippling across NT scholarship since the early 1980s.

A particularly incisive article written by J.M.G. Barclay is 'Paul, Philemon and the Dilemma of Christian Slave-Ownership' (1991), which represents one of the first modern attempts to understand the social implications of slavery for Paul and the early Church. [45] While Barclay cannot be properly described as one who promotes a socially conservative Paul, he also does not portray Paul as an abolitionist. Indeed, the opening paragraphs of Barclay's article make it clear just how diverse NT opinion is on the topic.

One important point considered by Barclay is that Paul's ministry through house churches depended upon large households that were more than likely managed by slaves. He speculates that it must have seemed inconceivable that wealthy patrons in the churches could retain their social status and release all of their slaves. If Paul was to encourage all Christian slaveholders to manumit their slaves, he would have been undermining the very structure which helped to promote and support his fledgling

41. J.L. Houlden, *Ethics and the New Testament* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1975), pp. 21, 26.

42. R.E. Brown, *An Introduction to the New Testament* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1997), pp. 506, 509.

43. B.D. Ehrman, *The New Testament: A Historical Introduction to the Early Christian Writings* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), p. 347.

44. Compare Käsemann's conclusion (*New Testament of Questions*, pp. 208-209) with Robert Jewett's claim that 'Paul was in fact a revolutionary who struggled for the freedom of early church members in profound and successful ways' (*Paul Apostle to America* [Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1994], p. 60).

45. J.M.G. Barclay, 'Paul, Philemon and the Dilemma of Christian Slave-Ownership', *NTS* 37 (1991), pp. 161-86.

religious movement. Thus, Barclay contends, Paul probably could not envision how the abolition of slavery could possibly work and, at best, could only provide ambiguous advice.[46]

In the context of Philemon, Barclay concludes, based on the Letter's ambiguity, that Paul deliberately created an open ended letter partly because he wanted to allow Philemon the opportunity to make his own choices, but also because the apostle did not know what to recommend.[47] In practical terms, a believing slave in the house of a Christian leader created a variety of conundrums that were not easily resolved. By way of illustration, Barclay offers some possible scenarios where the slave/master relationship might come into conflict with their relationship as Christian brothers. (1) If Onesimus was freed because he was converted, would not other slaves be sure that they too were 'converted'?[48] (2) What recourse would a master have if a Christian slave refused to obey an order? Could a slave dare correct his master as a Christian brother as prescribed in Galatians 6:1?[49] (3) How would slaves participate in the Lord's Supper; would they eat the fellowship meal with the master or wait until they had finished their duties of serving the table first?[50]

In light of all of the dilemmas that would have confronted a Christian slaveholder, Barclay concludes that 'the social realities of slavery would make it well nigh impossible to apply Paul's own understanding of 'brotherhood' to the relationship between master and slave'.[51] Instead Barclay suggests that there existed in Paul a tension when grappling with the question of Christian brotherhood and slavery.[52] While it is certainly anachronistic to impose modern abolitionist ideals on Paul, Barclay does wonder why Paul never encourages Christian slaveholders to at least release Christian slaves according to the guidelines of Christian brotherhood as prescribed in Gal. 3.28. Unable to discover a readily available answer, Barclay suggests that along with the practical realities of slavery, Paul's expectation of an imminent Parousia probably rendered the whole project moot since the institution of slavery, along with the rest of the world, was about to disappear.[53] While Barclay's article created more questions than answers, it did represent a new attempt by NT scholarship to look beyond Paul's statements about slavery and to question how the

46. Barclay, 'The Dilemma of Christian Slave-Ownership', pp. 176, 184.
47. Barclay, 'The Dilemma of Christian Slave-Ownership', p. 175.
48. Barclay, 'The Dilemma of Christian Slave-Ownership', p. 176.
49. Barclay, 'The Dilemma of Christian Slave-Ownership', p. 178.
50. Barclay, 'The Dilemma of Christian Slave-Ownership', p. 179.
51. Barclay, 'The Dilemma of Christian Slave-Ownership', p. 180.
52. Barclay, 'The Dilemma of Christian Slave-Ownership', p. 183.
53. Barclay, 'The Dilemma of Christian Slave-Ownership', p. 184.

ideals of Christian brotherhood could be practically applied in a first-century setting.

In her 1995 essay, 'Work and Slavery in the New Testament', Margaret Davies reemphasized the interpretation of Paul as a social conservative. Far from reforming the institution of slavery or sowing the seeds of change, as had been argued by some scholars, Davies concludes that Paul and the NT actually reinforced slavery.[54] In regard to the Letter to Philemon, for instance, Davies argues that 'as it stands, the Letter endorses the social institution of slavery and accepts the slave-owner's absolute power over his slave'.[55] Onesimus is nothing more than a voiceless tool whose own wishes are not even considered within the context of the Letter.[56] In consideration of Barclay's claim that Paul depended upon wealthy households managed by slaves and therefore could not counsel emancipation, Davies comments:

> Barclay's suggestion that local churches needed to meet in the houses of rich Christians and that, since such houses could not function (sic) without slaves, no objections could be voiced about Christian ownership of slaves, is merely cynical. Even the most effete aristocrat, incapable of manual labor, could hire paid servants, and, had Christians stood out against slave-owning, they would not have met in the houses of slave-owners, but somewhere elsewhere, even in the open if necessary. And would there have been no rich people who would have been prepared to free their slaves when they became Christians?[57]

Davies challenges two other arguments that were often used to explain why Paul seems to have accepted, at least on a practical level, the continuing practice of slavery by Christians. In response to those who argue that challenging slavery would have created a dangerous social revolution,[58] Davies counters that 'Christian slave-owners were in such a minority in the Greco-Roman world that their freeing of their own slaves would have required no major social revolution, as freeing all slaves would have done'.[59] The second argument that she dismisses is Paul's belief in the imminent Parousia which she claims 'hardly justifies the lack of interest'

54. Margaret Davies, 'Work and Slavery in the New Testament', in John W. Rogerson, Margaret Davies and M. Daniel Carroll R. (eds.), *The Bible in Ethics: The Second Sheffield Colloquium* (JSOTSup, 207; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995), pp. 313-47.

55. Davies, 'Work and Slavery in the New Testament', p. 342.

56. Davies, 'Work and Slavery in the New Testament', p. 341.

57. Davies, 'Work and Slavery in the New Testament', p. 343 n. 70.

58. See above, for example, Lightfoot, Bousset and Coleman-Norton.

59. Davies, 'Work and Slavery in the New Testament', p. 346.

in the freeing of slaves by Christians.[60] In the case of 1 Cor. 12.13 and Gal. 3.28, Davies concluded that while these 'visionary statements' bore fruit in relationships between Jews and Gentiles, male and female, such was not the case with slaves. Pauline silence on the subject seems to overlook the possibility of actually altering the slave/master relationship and the Letter to Philemon suggests the contrary.[61]

Davies's portrayal of a socially conservative Paul seems to be an attempt to strip away any of the excuses used by NT scholars to insulate the apostle from accusations of being a supporter of slavery. Although her overall conclusions were not as generous to the apostle as that of Barclay, Davies does demonstrate the slow movement of NT scholarship towards considering slavery not from Paul's point of view, but from that of the enslaved. While Paul's comments might at times sound liberal and humane to those living in the modern age, would a slave living in a first-century Christian household have reached the same conclusion?[62]

One facet of the literature review thus far has been that Pauline silence on slavery indicated a tacit approval for the institution. Rarely has that assumption be challenged or reevaluated. In her 2000 essay, 'Paul on Bondage and Freedom in Imperial Roman Society',[63] Sheila Briggs presented an alternative interpretation of the Pauline silence. Rather than conclude that Paul's silence equaled approval of slavery, Briggs suggests that in actuality, Paul had engaged in a discourse of evasion as a way to deal with the social realties of slavery.[64] The avenue into Briggs's argument is 1 Cor. 6.16-17 where Christians are reminded not to engage in sexual intercourse with prostitutes. What Paul fails to mention, however, is that often prostitutes were slaves working for their master. They had no choice but to be prostituted. As Briggs points out, there is no Pauline or NT passage that addresses the sexual vulnerability of slaves. 'This discourse of evasion', claims Briggs, 'is a primarily early Christian response to the social reality of slavery'.[65]

The natural reading of Briggs's argument into other Pauline texts is that Paul did not endorse slavery but circumvented the discussion purposely as

60. Davies, 'Work and Slavery in the New Testament', p. 342.

61. Davies, 'Work and Slavery in the New Testament', p. 342.

62. The comments made by Peter Garnsey reinforce Davies claims: 'Paul like everyone else accepted legal slavery. The social attitudes he betrays in addressing slaves and their masters are conventional and conservative' (*Ideas of Slavery from Aristotle to Augustine* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996], p. 176).

63. Sheila Briggs, 'Paul on Bondage and Freedom in Imperial Roman Society', in Richard A. Horsley (ed.), *Paul and Politics: Ekklesia, Israel, Imperium, Interpretation: Studies in Honor of Krister Stendhal* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 2000), pp. 109-23.

64. Briggs, 'Paul on Bondage and Freedom', p. 111.

65. Briggs, 'Paul on Bondage and Freedom', p. 117.

a way of avoiding a rather messy topic. This is similar to Barclay's conclusion that the social realities of slavery left the typically opinionated apostle unsure what to recommend. Rather than risk being caught in an irresolvable debate, Paul simply ignored the subject as much as was possible.

The last contribution to be reviewed in Category One is that of Richard A. Horsley. His 'Paul and Slavery' was published with other essays under the title *Slavery in Text and Interpretation* in *Semeia* 83/84.[66] The stated goal of Horsley's essay is to challenge the portrayal of Paul as a social conservative.[67] The biggest hindrance in understanding Paul, according to Horsley, is that NT scholarship has focused predominantly on a theological study of Paul (i.e. crucifixion and resurrection) which places Paul's theological statements in a spiritual realm rather than a concrete social realm. As a result, texts are read in isolation from their literary and historical contexts.[68] The typical interpretation of Gal. 3.28 is an example of this type of reading. Horsley argues that if the passage is read concretely rather than spiritually, then 'it can be read to mean that the principle forms of social domination that prevailed in Roman imperial society were supposedly transcended in the new alternative society'[69] being promoted by the apostle. If the scholarly consensus is that Paul was adamant that there was no longer a distinction between 'Jew and Greek' in the church, Horsley argues, then why not also between slave and free? Why is Gal. 3.28 sometimes read concretely, creating new social realties by dissolving the walls between some social groups and other times read spiritually, leaving the walls between other social groups? If one insists on reading Paul this way, the inevitable outcome is a Paul who lends himself to the pro-slavery argument.[70]

When Horsley examines Philemon, he suggests that the traditional interpretation of Onesimus as a fugitive slave is not viable in light of the challenges that have been leveled against this interpretation by the contributions of Knox, Winter and Callahan,[71] all of whom eliminate Onesimus's status as a fugitive. Without offering his own opinion or arbitrating

66. R.A. Horsley, 'Paul and Slavery: A Critical Alternative to Recent Readings', in Allen Dwight Callahan, Richard A. Horsley and Abraham Smith (eds.), *Slavery in Text and Interpretation* (Semeia, 83/84; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1998), pp. 153-200. Although the publication year is listed as 1998, the volume was not released until late 2000–early 2001. A special session of the Paul and Politics group discussed the volume at the 2000 SBL meeting in Nashville, but at that time the book had not yet been released.

67. Horsley, 'Paul and Slavery', pp. 153-55.

68. Horsley, 'Paul and Slavery', pp. 160-63, 183.

69. Horsley, 'Paul and Slavery', p. 177.

70. Horsley, 'Paul and Slavery', p. 178.

71. These will be reviewed in Chapter 5 when the history of scholarly interpretation of the Epistle to Philemon is considered.

between the traditional and non-traditional interpretations, Horsley seems to follow Callahan's interpretation and declares that: 'The Letter to Philemon, far from providing evidence that Paul acquiesced in or even advocated slavery, turns out to be irrelevant to the issue of slavery'.[72] Thus, Horsley effectively dismisses the only piece of Pauline Literature that is concerned solely with the issue of slavery by declaring it to be immaterial to the overall argument.

In consideration of Paul's admonition to slaves in 1 Cor. 7.21-23, Horsley says:

> Apparent ambiguities in the text of 1 Cor. 7.21b provided an opportunity for advocates and defenders of power and privilege to develop the traditional 'conservative' interpretation of Paul as defender of differential power-relations.[73]

The central issue with this passage is, of course, Paul's brachylogy. Should the slave make use of freedom or slavery?[74] Many interpreters in the past had chosen 'use slavery' as the appropriate completion of Paul's thought. The result, then, is that Paul was said to be suggesting that slaves *not* avail themselves of manumission when offered. Instead they should remain slaves and focus on serving God rather than worrying about their external condition. The problem for Horsley, once again, is a theological reading of the text. He argues that in spite of Paul's statements about circumcision/uncircumcision, married/unmarried and his encouragement not to change one's social standing in these matters, slaves were a special case that cannot be paralleled with these other social issues.[75] The literary context of 7.21b does not support the traditional interpretation that slaves *not* take advantage of freedom, because although he does offer general principles in these other matters, 'Paul's address to slaves and others in 7.21-23 breaks the pattern and offers an exception to the general principle'.[76] Instead, Horsley contends, the historical context requires that the 'use freedom' interpretation is the only historically intelligible reading in the context of the Roman Empire.

As a side issue to the Corinthian passage, Horsley also challenges the scholarly argument that the expectation of an imminent Parousia would have caused Paul to act in a socially conservative manner. Because of Paul's statement in 1 Cor. 7.29 about time being short, Horsley argues

72. Horsley, 'Paul and Slavery', p. 182.
73. Horsley, 'Paul and Slavery', p. 182.
74. The history of interpretation in relation to this passage will be examined more fully in Chapter 4.
75. Horsley, 'Paul and Slavery', p. 186.
76. Horsley, 'Paul and Slavery', p. 184.

that NT scholarship has incorrectly read a statement about virgins back into his previous comments about slavery. But even in the case of the Parousia slaves are an exception to the general principle as demonstrated by Paul's own exception clause in 7.21b. 'Considering the structure of the overall argument of 1 Corinthians 7, therefore, the point about the time having grown short does not apply directly to the situation of slaves. If we were to speculate how it might apply indirectly to the situation of slaves, we would have to consider that slaves would be an exceptional case considering the shortness of the time, just as they were to the general rule about remaining in one's condition'.[77] Moreover, much of Paul's writings focus on concrete political-economic-social issues. Paul was trying, Horsley argues, to build a new society that was being organized prior to the Parousia. 'He was convinced that he had been commissioned to organize communities as beachheads of the alternative society that would come fully into existence at the Parousia of Christ'.[78] Why would Paul single out slavery as the one aspect of the new society that had to wait until the Parousia instead of in the run up to it?

Although Horsley goes to some lengths to rescue Paul from those who would label him a 'social conservative' he also concedes that 'it would be very surprising if the assemblies Paul helped organize had quickly implemented and embodied the arguments Paul laid out in his Letters'.[79] In fact, Horsley seems to have anticipated possible questions of his reading of the above texts.

> It may be disappointing to modern interpreters that Paul did not speak in direct opposition to institutionalized slavery, or at least its dehumanizing effects. But he was caught up in a commission and engaged in a program far more radical than opposition to particular abusive aspects of an otherwise acceptable system.

Horsley then provides two specific reasons for the seeming failure of Paul's arguments to influence. (1) The current social structure was too dominant and well promoted throughout the empire. Consequently, it would have been very difficult for a new, small movement to oppose the system. (2) There was a major lack of network to promote Paul's ideals. In other words, Paul's anti-slavery rhetoric did not have a similar type of support as the pro-slavery rhetoric. Social patterns that could have helped implement Paul's behavioral ideals simply did not exist.[80] As evidence for his argument, Horsley points to the Deutero-Pauline Epistles which

77. Horsley, 'Paul and Slavery', p. 187.
78. Horsley, 'Paul and Slavery', p. 190.
79. Horsley, 'Paul and Slavery', p. 190.
80. Horsley, 'Paul and Slavery', p. 191.

revert to the old order.[81] Thus, in Horsley's estimation, Paul was an idealist whose ideas never were implemented.[82]

The above survey demonstrates that over the last 200 years a significant segment of NT scholars have determined that Paul was a social conservative in matters pertaining to slavery. Initially the 'evidence' for this conservatism was based on the lack of any specific condemnation of the institution in any of the Pauline Letters (authentic and disputed). In the second half of the twentieth century, however, the argument from Pauline silence began to give way to a more nuanced consideration of the problem which concluded that Paul's expectation of an imminent Parousia caused him to take a more pragmatic approach. Whatever the reasons, NT scholars, with perhaps the exception of Horsley, has not been able to explain away the problem of Pauline silence. The lack of any condemnation from the apostle's pen is almost deafening.

The Philosophical Paul

Scholars listed in this category are those who conclude Paul took a more philosophical approach to the topic of slavery. This is often predicated on Paul's instructions to slaves concerning calling and manumission in 1 Cor. 7.20-24. Because Paul mixes aspects of institutional and metaphorical slavery in this passage, some scholars have noted the Stocized appearance of Paul's argument. Paul seems to be more concerned with the internal slavery of the soul rather than the external bondage of the physical body. There is some overlap in this section with scholars in Category One who reached similar conclusions about Paul's attitude towards slavery. But there is a sufficient amount of material and argumentation to warrant its own category.

Adolf von Harnack (1904), like many of his contemporaries, argued that the early church never addressed a slave question or considered initiating a program of abolition. He suggests that the only possible way to

81. A similar conclusion was drawn by Neil Elliot about scholars promoting a socially conservative Paul in their interpretation of Philemon: 'These characterizations resound with a Pauline voice that has been trained into harmony with the pseudo-Pauline writings. Real advances in understanding Philemon fail to impede the glacial pressure of assumptions about Paul's "social conservatism". The pseudo-Paulines have effectively set the limits of exegetical possibility' (*Liberating Paul: The Justice of God and the Politics of the Apostle Paul* [Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1994], p. 49).

82. In the end, it is hard to see how, if at all, Horsley was able to reform Paul into an abolitionist. Many of his arguments depend on either dismissing evidence or making significant alterations in traditional interpretations. His venture might have been more successful had he been able to demonstrate that Paul's ideals had some lasting influence on the early Church rather than admitting that they just never caught on.

understand 1 Cor. 7.20-24 was that slaves *not* avail themselves of possible offers of manumission lest 'any alteration of their status would divert their minds to things of the earth'.[83] Converted slaves were regarded as brothers and sisters from the standpoint of religion, but, in good Stoic fashion, their position in the world was a matter of indifference.[84] Consequently, slaves were *not* to regard themselves as equals with their masters, a point Harnack claims is further developed in 1 Tim. 6.1 which suggests 'Christianity must have been in many cases "misunderstood" by Christian slaves'.[85] Thus, slaves were expected to dichotomize themselves by being inwardly free and equal with the free members of the Christian congregation, but at the same time fulfilling all the external legal and social obligations that their status required of them.

Ernst Troeltsch in his influential *The Social Teachings of the Christian Church* (1911) was one of many scholars across the twentieth century who incorporated Harnack's philosophical understanding of Paul and slavery into his own. Troeltsch wrote:

> …the slave is exhorted to love and obey his master, since he serves God and not man. To this extent, at least inwardly, the nature of the slave relationship was neutralized by the claims of the ideal. Outwardly, however, slavery was merely part of the general law of property and of the order of the State, which Christianity accepted and did not try to alter.[86]

Wayne G. Rollins is another. In his *Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible* article on Slavery (1976), Rollins wrote: 'The attitude of the church towards slaves echoes in large part the growing egalitarianism voiced by the Stoics and gradually reflected in Roman legislation'.[87]

The most comprehensive study to date of possible Stoic influences on Paul's view of slavery is by Will Deming (1995).[88] In this published version of his PhD dissertation, Deming comments about 1 Cor. 7.17-24: 'As it stands, with 7.17-24 Paul has fashioned a highly Stoicized version of his teaching on God's transforming grace, both in form and in content'.[89] The

83. Adolf von. Harnack, *The Mission and Expansion of Christianity in the First Three Centuries* (trans. James Moffatt; New York: Harper, 1962), p. 167 n. 4.

84. Harnack, *Expansion of Christianity*, p. 168.

85. Harnack, *Expansion of Christianity*, p. 170 n. 2.

86. Ernst Troeltsch, *The Social Teachings of the Early Church* (trans. Olive Wyon; New York: Harper, 1960), p. 132. See also Johannes Weiss, *Der Korintherbrief* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1910), p. 187.

87. Wayne G. Rollins, 'Slavery in the NT', in Keith Crim (ed.), *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible, Supplementary Volume* (Nashville; Abingdon Press, 1976), p. 831.

88. Will Deming, *Paul on Marriage and Celibacy: The Hellenistic Background of 1 Corinthians* (SNTSMS, 83; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

89. Deming, *Paul on Marriage and Celibacy*, p. 159.

whole section of 7.17-24 resembles a diatribe pattern commonly used by philosophers in antiquity.[90] Thus, when Paul introduces the notion of the freeman in 7.22 it is to create the Stoic paradox of freedom. In Stoic discourse, the wise and good man was free even though he may have been a slave. The bad man, on the other hand, was forever a slave even if he was a king.[91] Deming surmises that Paul may have chosen this form of diatribe because he considered it an apropos way to distinguish for the Corinthian congregation the difference between slavery of the body and the 'true' slavery of the mind.[92] Deming's argument does present some compelling evidence for considering Paul's advice to slaves in the context of Stoic argumentation and it was based on Deming's ideas that Horsley later suggested that slaves were the exception to the general principles laid out by Paul in 1 Corinthians 7.[93]

One notable contribution, even if often overlooked, is that of Kenneth C. Russell (1968) who portrayed Paul's understanding of slavery from a philosophical point of view, but also theologized it more than any of his predecessors. Russell claims that Paul did not consider slavery to be intrinsically evil and was not a social reformer. He was a practical man faced with practical problems.[94] For the early Christians, it was not a matter of one being pro-slavery or anti-slavery, but rather a question of how a slave could live a good Christian life. According to Russell, Paul's comments in 1 Cor. 7.20-24 mean that 'a slave can only be a good Christian by being a good slave'.[95] Even in the case of the household codes, the purpose was theological rather than sociological and intended to help slaves to become good Christians.[96]

> The slave is bound to obedience and cheerful service because only in this way can he fulfill his Christian obligation to witness to the teaching of Christ. His slavery is the vehicle God has given him to express his interior *ebedhood*.[97]

90. Will Deming, 'A Diatribe Pattern in 1 Cor. 7.21-22: A New Perspective on Paul's Directions to Slaves', *NovT* 37 (1995), p. 133.
91. Deming, 'A Diatribe Pattern in 1 Cor. 7.21-22', pp. 153, 164.
92. Deming, 'A Diatribe Pattern in 1 Cor. 7.21-22', p. 165.
93. Horsley, 'Paul and Slavery', p. 184. See the review of Horsley above.
94. Kenneth C. Russell, *Slavery as Reality and Metaphor in Pauline Letters* (Rome: Catholic Book Agency, 1968), p. 46.
95. Russell, *Slavery as Reality and Metaphor*, p. 46.
96. Russell, *Slavery as Reality and Metaphor*, p. 53.
97. Russell, *Slavery as Reality and Metaphor*, p. 73.

Hence slavery, in good Stoic fashion, is not a hindrance to the individual but a way to display internal obedience in an external manner.[98]

The advantage of the philosophical approach is that it allows interpreters to portray Paul as something other than a social conservative who is interested in promoting freedom of the soul over that of the body. However, not everyone has been convinced that this reading of Paul would have been seen as a positive one by the slaves at whom it was directed.

Between 1975 and 1988, G.E.M. de Ste Croix began to examine early Christian attitudes towards slavery. In response to those who tried to portray Paul and the early church as subversive revolutionaries, Ste Croix wrote: 'It is often said that Christianity introduced an entirely new and better attitude towards slavery. Nothing could be more false'.[99] Ste Croix acknowledges that 1 Cor. 7.20-24 reflected the Stoic paradox of freedom and that Pauline Christianity accepted this view *in toto*. But he also insists that the entire doctrine was more adaptable to the mindset of the slaveholders than the enslaved.[100] 'Whatever the theologian may think of Christianity's claim to set free the soul of the slave', Ste Croix argues, 'it cannot deny that it helped to rivet the shackles rather more firmly on his feet'.[101] While Pauline statements about equality in Gal. 3.28 may seem to deny that any difference existed between slave and free, this equality only existed in a spiritual sense in the eyes of God and was not, he insisted, a call for social equality.[102] How much more comfort, Ste Croix questions, would a Christian slave receive from hearing Paul's words in 1 Cor. 7.20-24 than a pagan slave who heard the Stoic argument? The theology and the philosophy both produced the same effect. The institution of slavery was reinforced through the promise of an elusive inward freedom. In the end it was the slaveholder who benefited most from the teaching, because it resulted in a slave more inclined to obey the master.[103]

98. See also Rengstorf, *TDNT* , II, p. 273; Colman-Norton, 'The Apostle Paul and the Roman Law of Slavery', p. 161; Briggs, 'Paul on Bondage and Freedom', p. 113; Craig Keener, 'Slaves Obey Your Masters: Ephesians 6.5', *The A.M.E. Zion Quarterly Review* 107 (1995), pp. 32-54.

99. G.E.M. de Ste Croix, 'Early Christian Attitudes towards Property and Slavery', in Derek Baker (ed.), *Church Society and Politics* (Oxford: B. Blackwell, 1975), p. 19.

100. G.E.M. de Ste Croix, *Slavery and Other Forms of Unfree Labour* (London: Routledge, 1988), p. 29.

101. Ste Croix, 'Early Christian Attitudes towards Property and Slavery', p. 20.

102. Ste Croix, *Slavery and Other Forms of Unfree Labour*, p. 30.

103. Norlding, however, contests Ste Croix's findings and suggests that Paul's commands had the opposite effect on slaves (John G. Nordling, 'Christ Leavens Culture: St Paul on Slavery', *Concordia Journal* 24 [1998], pp. 50-51).

The Benign Institution: Legal Definitions of Slavery

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, NT scholars' opinions about Paul and his attitude towards slavery began to be more informed by a consideration of the legal and philosophical background of slavery in late antiquity. In his commentary on Philemon, Lightfoot (1875) sketches a picture of first-century slavery based on the statements made by ancient philosophers, satirists, Roman historians, legal texts and inscriptions.[104] In many ways, J.B. Lightfoot began a new fashion in commenting, which is, setting the Letter in historical context.[105] This approach was also employed by M.R. Vincent (1897) who not only looked at the primary sources but was also informed by nineteenth-century historians like Henri Wallon (1847)[106] and W. A. Becker (1888).[107]

Probably one of the most influential contributions to appear at the beginning of the twentieth century was Adolf Deissmann's *Light from the Ancient East* (1908).[108] In his study of the NT against the background of ancient inscriptions and papyrus documents, Deissmann provided the layman and scholar alike the opportunity to compare the NT side-by-side with the normally inaccessible legal and cultural material of the ancient world. In his examination of Paul and slavery, Deissmann believes that Paul had been strongly influenced by legal ideas.[109] One particular example used by Deissmann to illustrate this claim is the Delphi manumission inscriptions. He observes that the slaves listed in the inscriptions were fictitiously purchased by a divinity and thus made the slaves of the god. Deissmann concludes that this ritual of 'sacral manumission' was the

104. Lightfoot, *Epistles to the Colossians and Philemon*, pp. 310-14.

105. This was one of the main differences between J.B. Lightfoot and F.C. Baur. The latter was more ideologically driven; the former made everything depend on careful exegesis of words and contexts as illuminated by what was known of the ancient world and ancient writings. For an assessment of Lightfoot and his scholarly contributions see the essays by C.K. Barrett, J.D.G. Dunn and Martin Hengel in J.D.G. Dunn (ed), *The Lightfoot Centenary Lectures: To Commemorate the Life and Work of Bishop J.B. Lightfoot (1828–89)* (Durham: Durham University Journal, 1989).

106. Henri Wallon, *Historie de l' esclavage dans l'antiquité* (3 vols.; Paris: Hachette, 2nd edn, 1879). Wallon was a French abolitionist and recognized authority on slavery. See Chapter 4 below.

107. Wilhelm Adolf Becker, *Gallus; or Roman Scenes of the Time of Augustus: with Notes and Excurses Illustrative of the Manners and Customs of the Romans* (London: Longmans, Green, 1888), pp. 199-225.

108. Adolf Gustav Deissmann, *Light from the Ancient East: The New Testament Illustrated by Recently Discovered Texts of the Graeco-Roman World* (trans. L.R.M. Strachan; London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1927).

109. Deissmann, *Light from the Ancient East*, p. 319.

background for Paul's statements when he declared that humans had formerly been slaves of sin, the law, and death, but were freed by Christ and, consequently, his slaves.[110] Similarly, when considering Paul's theology of redemption, Deissmann uses manumission documents from among the Oxyrhynchus papyri that also illustrated sacral manumission.[111]

Although Deissmann cannot be credited with fostering a new understanding of slavery in the context of legal ideas, he is representative of many who began to interpret Pauline statements about slavery in the context of Greek, Roman and Jewish law. Such an approach was used by numerous scholars in the twentieth century including W.S. Muntz (1913),[112] Coleman-Norton (1951),[113] J.D.M. Derrett (1970)[114] and Francis Lyall (1984).[115]

For much of the twentieth century, those who wrote about NT slavery did so according to what might be described as a 'legal definition' of slavery. That is, scholarly knowledge of how individuals and the institution functioned was based on an understanding of slavery drawn either from legal texts or from the aristocratic opinions preserved by Greco-Roman historians, philosophers and satirists. At the same time, there was a tendency to describe slavery in antiquity as a benign institution that was not as intrinsically evil in its ancient form as it was in the more recent modern period. This attitude can be detected from time to time among biblical scholars.[116] For instance, Harnack (1910) argues, without offering evidence, that slaves shared the rights of church members to the fullest extent and were as highly esteemed as freemen. Correspondingly, female slaves were respected and not taken advantage of in any way.[117] Harnack's arguments were later repeated by E.J. Goodspeed (1943).[118] Ernst Troeltsch (1911) went so far as to claim that slave labor in antiquity was being humanized in the natural course of events by the merging of slavery into colonate or serfdom.[119]

110. Deissmann, *Light from the Ancient East*, pp. 322-23.

111. Deissmann, *Light from the Ancient East*, pp. 327-28.

112. W.S. Muntz, *Rome, St Paul and the Early Church: The Influence of Roman Law on St Paul's Teaching and Phraseology and on the Development of the Church* (London: John Murray, 1913), pp. 48-50.

113. Coleman-Norton, 'The Apostle Paul and the Roman Law of Slavery'.

114. J.D.M. Derrett, *Law in the New Testament* (London: Longman & Todd, 1970), pp. 398-401.

115. Francis Lyall, *Slaves, Citizens, Sons: Legal Metaphors in the Epistles* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984).

116. This was not the portrayal offered by Lightfoot and Vincent, however.

117. Harnack, *Expansion of Christianity*, pp. 168-69.

118. E.J. Goodspeed, 'Paul and Slavery', *JBR* 11 (1943), pp. 169-70.

119. Troeltsch, *The Social Teachings of the Early Church*, p. 132.

This tendency to mitigate the overall violent nature of slavery was a result of what Horsley has identified as an uncritical approach by many classics scholars in the twentieth century. Because slavery was considered an embarrassment, many classics scholars either downplayed or tried to explain it away, which resulted in a portrayal of ancient slavery as a benign institution.[120] For instance, R.H. Barrow (1928) wrote 'that often slavery was a compulsory apprenticeship in a business or craft or art',[121] and that it could be profitable for some,[122] while paving the way to future success for others.[123] By such descriptions Barrow mitigates the overall violent nature of slavery, thus portraying it as a mechanism used for the social integration of foreigners that produced more productive Roman citizens.

> But whatever the skill required, it is clear that the slave received some training which would enable him to support himself when freed, and often gave opportunities for a fuller life than he could otherwise have enjoyed… In short, slavery must often have meant the exchange of semi-barbarism for Roman civilization, a vague enough gift but none the less real. The full opportunities for civilized life could only be used in freedom, no doubt, but slavery was an apprenticeship.[124]

Concerning the institution as a vehicle of social integration, Barrow said:

> Regarded in this light slavery is a compulsory initiation into a higher culture; the compulsion is admitted, but the initiation also is indisputable; from slavery only the best elements emerge, but they make their own unique contribution to civilization.[125]

Although he concedes that a slave was always 'just a slave' Barrow suggests it was possible to exaggerate the gulf separating the slave from the rest of society; there was not actually much of a gulf between slave and freed because this would have divided families.[126] He also contends that

120. Richard A. Horsley, 'The Slave Systems of Classical Antiquity and their Reluctant Recognition by Modern Scholars', in Allen Dwight Callahan, Richard A. Horsley and Abraham Smith (eds.), *Slavery in Text and Interpretation* (Semeia, 83/84; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1998), pp. 19-20; Mary Ann Beavis, 'Ancient Slavery as an Interpretive Context for the New Testament Servant Parables with Special Reference to the Unjust Steward (Luke 16.1-8)', *JBL* 111 (1992), pp. 37-54; Keith R. Bradley, *Slaves and Masters in the Roman Empire: A Study in Social Control* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), p. 19.

121. R.H. Barrow, *Slavery in the Roman Empire* (New York: Dial Press, 1928), p. 60.

122. Barrow, *Slavery in the Roman Empire*, p. 63.

123. Barrow, *Slavery in the Roman Empire*, pp. 171-72.

124. Barrow, *Slavery in the Roman Empire*, p. 63.

125. Barrow, *Slavery in the Roman Empire*, p. 197.

126. Barrow, *Slavery in the Roman Empire*, p. 170.

life after slavery was probably much harder than slavery itself and that former slaves who did prosper outside of the system could thank the system of slavery for their success.[127]

W.L. Westermann (1955), in consideration of the amelioration of slavery in the Roman Empire, posits that there was a distinct shift in the attitude towards the general condition of slaves in the first two centuries.[128] This gradual change in social conscious can be traced through a series of Imperial edicts that sought to improve the social and legal status of slaves. The result of such legal and social moves was, Westermann claims, that 'in practical affairs as well as in the increased kindness of attitude towards slaves as exhibited in social speculation regarding them, the lines of class cleavage between free and slave tended to disappear'. [129]

Others like John Crook (1967) followed Westermann in the claim that conditions of slavery in the Roman Empire gradually improved because the lot of the slave 'was subjected to a long, slow, tentative process of amelioration by legislation on humanitarian grounds'.[130] He further suggests that slaves might be better off than the poor free:

> In spite of the Roman law's insistence on sharply distinguishing between slave and free, the evidence suggests that in social, cultural and economic terms there was something much more like a 'continuum' of statuses, quite apart from labour conditions in which the free worker might be worse off than the slave.[131]

Crook also commented on the role of imperial slaves, which he considers to be the most socially mobile figure of Roman society, 'a projection of the spectrum of statuses upwards as well as downwards'.[132]

The efforts of some classics scholars to diminish the overall violent nature of ancient slavery influenced many a NT scholar's view of Paul and slavery. Thus, Derek Tidball (1984), adopting R.H. Barrow's portrait of ancient slavery, claims:

> In the first place, the institution of slavery was such an integral part of the social fabric in Paul's day that it would have been difficult for Paul or others to conceive of social organization without it…By the time of Paul it was not a severe and cruel institution… More and more humanitarian legislation had been introduced in the first century AD…From the slave's point of

127. Barrow, *Slavery in the Roman Empire*, p. 171.

128. W.L. Westermann, *The Slaves Systems of Greek and Roman Antiquity* (Philadelphia: The American Philosophical Society, 1955), p. 113.

129. Westermann, *Slaves Systems*, p. 114.

130. John Crook, *Law and Life of Rome* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1967), p. 56.

131. Crook, *Law and Life of Rome*, p. 58.

132. Crook, *Law and Life of Rome*, p. 64.

> view then, the Roman social system could be seen as working in his best interests. There was no widespread discontent about slavery. So, to the early church the question of the abolition of slavery was probably insignificant.[133]

It was S.S. Bartchy and the publication of his dissertation *ΜΑΛΛΟΝ ΧΡΗΣΑΙ: First-Century Slavery and 1 Corinthians 7.21* (1973), however, that helped to ensconce this portrayal of slavery for a generation of NT scholarship.[134] Bartchy provided the first comprehensive examination of Greco-Roman slavery in relation to the NT. Focusing on the elliptical phrase at the end of 1 Cor. 7.21b, he demonstrates how NT scholars usually completed Paul's thought by inserting either 'use slavery' or 'use freedom' depending upon their particular theological, historical or philological approach. He also observes that NT scholars do not 'seem to have been concerned to establish the actual social and legal situation of slaves in Corinth in the middle of the first century'.[135] The challenge confronting Bartchy, and those who had preceded him, was the 'lack of any serious, full-scale history of slavery in the Greco-Roman world'.[136]

Bartchy's portrayal of Greco-Roman slavery is based on an analysis of Greek, Roman and Jewish legal texts. Supplementing these is a variety of philosophical, historical and satirical literature. Much of his understanding of this literature is framed by the works of Barrow, Vogt, Crook and other classics scholars. The result, consequently, is a depiction of slavery which is decidedly benign. While acknowledging that slavery was far from the ideal situation,[137] Bartchy concludes that the first century 'was a time in which living conditions for those in slavery was improving; legal action and public opinion supported better treatment of slaves'.[138] Slaves were said to have the advantage of 'job security' over poor free persons[139] and could expect to be freed by age 30.[140] Life as a slave was attractive enough that many persons willingly sold themselves into slavery with the intention of climbing socially and gaining personal and social security.[141] Bartchy asserts that the treatment of slaves living under Jewish law was so good that Jews anxious to sell themselves were unable to find

133. Derek Tidball, *The Social Context of the New Testament: A Sociological Analysis* (Grand Rapids: Academie Books, 1984), pp. 114-15.

134. S.S. Bartchy, *ΜΑΛΛΟΝ ΧΡΗΣΑΙ: First-Century Slavery and 1 Corinthians 7.21* (SBLDS, 11; Missoula, MT: Society of Biblical Literature, 1973).

135. Bartchy, *ΜΑΛΛΟΝ ΧΡΗΣΑΙ*, p. 24.

136. Bartchy, *ΜΑΛΛΟΝ ΧΡΗΣΑΙ*, p. 30.

137. Bartchy, *ΜΑΛΛΟΝ ΧΡΗΣΑΙ*, p. 46.

138. Bartchy, *ΜΑΛΛΟΝ ΧΡΗΣΑΙ*, p. 71.

139. Bartchy, *ΜΑΛΛΟΝ ΧΡΗΣΑΙ*, p. 75.

140. Bartchy, *ΜΑΛΛΟΝ ΧΡΗΣΑΙ*, p. 85.

141. Bartchy, *ΜΑΛΛΟΝ ΧΡΗΣΑΙ*, p. 116.

Jewish purchasers.[142] The lack of any serious slave revolt in the first century was presented as evidence that slaves had become relatively content with their role in society.[143]

The far-reaching influence of Bartchy's representation of ancient slavery cannot be overstated. One merely need open a variety of commentaries and other NT works written in the 1970s and 1980s which deal with some aspect of slavery to discover the degree to which his influence extended. This is in spite of the fact that some, like C.K. Barrett, have questioned not only the positive social setting for slavery which Bartchy had sketched, but also his solution to the elliptical phrase in 1 Cor. 7.21b (1975).[144] Bartchy's positive view of slavery was given further prominence in his 1992 contributions on slavery and the Epistle to Philemon in the *Anchor Bible Dictionary*.[145]

A second work that also received much attention was that of Francis Lyall, *Sons, Slaves and Citizens* (1984). His volume is an expansion of publications from the 1970s and 1980s in which he sought to correlate various legal metaphors in the NT with extant Roman laws.[146] Lyall assumes that if an echo of Roman law can be detected in a text, then the text should be interpreted in light of that law and its implications. Using the Roman legal system as a hermeneutical grid, he examines a variety of topics including slavery, citizenship, adoption, inheritance, and trade, as they were regulated in Imperial Rome. Lyall surmises that because slavery was widespread in the first century, Paul must have drawn upon such images in his Letters. In the case of Paul's statements in Rom. 6.16-22, Lyall concludes that the background must be the Roman practice of individuals selling themselves into slavery.[147]

Lyall's study is problematic due to the way in which he approaches not only the NT, but also Roman, Greek and Jewish legal texts. His methodology consists of observing a Pauline statement or allusion to slavery and

142. Bartchy, *ΜΑΛΛΟΝ ΧΡΗΣΑΙ*, p. 52.

143. Bartchy, *ΜΑΛΛΟΝ ΧΡΗΣΑΙ*, pp. 85-87. Keith R. Bradley criticizes the suggestion that a lack of slave rebellions in Rome can be equated with contentment with the system (*Slavery and Rebellion in the Roman World: 140 B.C.–70 B.C.* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1989), p. 41.

144. C.K. Barrett, review of *ΜΑΛΛΟΝ ΧΡΗΣΑΙ: First-Century Slavery and 1 Corinthians 7.21* (SBLDS, 11; Missoula, MT: Society of Biblical Literature, 1973), by S. Scott Bartchy, in *JTS* 26 (1975), pp. 173-74.

145. S.S. Bartchy, 'Slavery (Greco-Roman)', in David Noel Freedman (ed.), *The Anchor Bible Dictionary* (6 vols.; Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1992), VI, pp. 65-73.

146. Lyall, *Slaves, Citizens, Sons*, p. 23. See also his 'Roman Law in the Writings of Paul: The Slave and the Freedman', *NTS* 17 (1970), pp. 73-79; 'Legal Metaphors in the Epistles', *TynBul* 32 (1981), pp. 79-95.

147. Lyall, *Slaves, Citizens, Sons*, p. 35.

then deciding which law may have been in Paul's mind on the basis of which law strengthened the imagery. Moreover, Lyall seems to be unaware of the difficulties involved with dating Jewish traditions in rabbinic literature.[148] He also seems to have been unaware of Bartchy's work. Similar criticisms were made in a review by D.E. Aune (1987).[149] Others, however, praised Lyall's contribution as a highly informative example of an interdisciplinary work (Hock, 1986).[150] Similar to Bartchy, many NT scholars accepted Lyall's treatment of Paul and slavery. Once again, a perusal through numerous NT commentaries will demonstrate the lasting influence of Lyall's work.

The Violent Institution: Social Definitions of Slavery

During the time in which Bartchy and Lyall were framing many NT scholars' perspective on slavery in the Greco-Roman world, two other important contributions were made that would also have lasting significance. Neither of these contributions came from a NT scholar. Rather, one was from a sociologist, and the other from a Roman historian.

In 1982, Orlando Patterson published his landmark work *Slavery and Social Death*.[151] Patterson was guarded about using legal texts as the basis for defining slavery, because he concluded that the Roman laws of slavery amounted to a 'legal fiction'. Rather than understanding property as a relationship, the Romans transformed the legal understanding to one of the power of an owner over a thing. Previously an ambiguity had existed between the definition of slaves as property and as inanimate objects. The consequence of this new legal paradigm, however, was that slaves, as human beings, were now classified as 'things' which placed a tremendous amount of control into the hands of the owner.[152]

For Patterson, slavery was far from a positive experience. It was a matter of the master's power over that of the enslaved.[153] Slavery was created and maintained by violence and in many ways was nothing more than a

148. Lyall, *Slaves, Citizens, Sons*, p. 9.

149. D.E. Aune, review of *Slaves, Citizens, Sons: Legal Metaphors in the Epistles* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984), by Francis Lyall, in *CBQ* 49 (1987), pp. 672-73. See also Dale B. Martin, review of *Slaves, Citizens, Sons: Legal Metaphors in the Epistles* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984), by Francis Lyall, in *PSB* 8 (1987), pp. 83-86.

150. R.F. Hock, review of *Slaves, Citizens, Sons: Legal Metaphors in the Epistles* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984), by Francis Lyall, in *Int* 40 (1986), pp. 214-16.

151. Orlando Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death: A Comparative Study* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1982).

152. Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death*, pp. 30-31.

153. Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death*, p. 26.

substitute for a violent death.[154] Slavery was a sentence of execution 'suspended only as long as the slave acquiesced in his powerlessness'.[155] Patterson demonstrates that slaves and former slaves were persons without honor who had been robbed of their former identity through a process he termed natal alienation.[156]

> Slaves differed from other human beings in that they were not allowed freely to integrate the experience of their ancestors into their lives, to inform their understanding of social reality with the inherited meanings of their natural forbearers, or to anchor the living present in any conscious community of memory.[157]

Slaves were estranged from their family and ethnic background to such a degree that they had effectively undergone a death experience on the social level.

In the context of the NT, Patterson considers the death of Christ as a symbolic example of slavery and freedom. In the power-dominated world of antiquity, the choice to be enslaved often meant another chance at life, while freedom could quickly lead to death. Patterson argues that for Christians, Christ had made the choice for them by dying and then becoming their new master.

> The slave, it will be recalled, was someone who by choosing physical life had given up his freedom. Although he could, of course, have kept his freedom and died, man lacked the courage to make this choice. Jesus, 'his savior', by his death made this choice for him.[158]

Consequently, Christians were able to live a life of 'freedom' while escaping the consequences of death which had already been nullified by Christ's death for them.

The second influential work was Keith R. Bradley's *Slaves and Masters in the Roman Empire* (1984).[159] Although unaware of Patterson's sociological work, Bradley reached very similar conclusions.[160] Acknowledging that only recently had scholarship viewed slavery as something unpalatable,[161]

154. Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death*, p. 3.
155. Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death*, pp. 3, 5.
156. Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death*, p. 306.
157. Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death*, p. 5.
158. Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death*, p. 71.
159. Keith R. Bradley, *Slaves and Masters in the Roman Empire: A Study in Social Control* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1984).
160. In the preface to the 2nd edition Bradley notes that his original manuscript went to the publisher in early 1982, at about the time that Patterson's work was being published.
161. Bradley, *Slaves and Masters*, p. 19.

he observes that by definition slavery is the securing and monopolizing of an involuntary work force by those who monopolize economic power.[162] As an institution, slavery required controls that would guarantee the stability and perpetuation of a system which the entire Roman Empire depended upon economically.[163] These controls were presented to slaves as rewards and incentives and used as a way to encourage a feeling of connectedness with society in spite of the reality of the slave's situation.[164] Two particular incentives were the semblance of family life and the promise of eventual freedom.[165]

Bradley challenges the commonly held notions that slavery could be a vehicle for upward mobility[166] and that the lack of a slave revolt in the first century, as argued by Bartchy, is evidence of slave contentment with the status quo.[167] He argues that the system and controls were such that slaves were hemmed in and that very few acted on any of their aspirations for escape and freedom.

Bradley also observes that, although Christianity presented itself as a religion of equality, it continued to perpetuate the inequalities evident in the slavery system. Commandments for slaves to obey masters and treat them deferentially would have only reinforced the current societal controls. The NT, by nature, is a set of documents produced for or by the aristocracy. Bradley notes that such commandments reveal how engrained these controls had become in society, not just among the ruling class but also among those being ruled.[168] Bradley put his views succinctly in a later article in which he says:

> There is little room for debate any longer about the inhuman character of chattel slavery in classical antiquity, whether in Rome or the classical Greek world. To the modern sensibility slavery represents the polar opposite of everything laudable in Greco-Roman civilization, an abomination for which no apology is possible and which no redeeming features can be found… [E]ven the rise of Christianity, which in propagating notions of a fundamental human equality in the world theoretically set itself in confrontation with slavery and potentially opened the way for reform, brought no substantive change. The impact of the new cult was insignificant and early Christians found in their religious beliefs no impulse to abolish slavery.[169]

162. Bradley, *Slaves and Masters*, p. 18.
163. Bradley, *Slaves and Masters*, p. 30.
164. Bradley, *Slaves and Masters*, pp. 24, 35, 39.
165. Bradley, *Slaves and Masters*, pp. 51, 59, 83.
166. Bradley, *Slaves and Masters*, p. 82.
167. Bradley, *Slaves and Masters*, p. 43.
168. Bradley, *Slaves and Masters*, p. 38.
169. Keith R. Bradley, 'The Problem of Slavery in Classical Culture', *Classical Philology* 92 (1997), pp. 274-75.

While there were other studies that appeared during this time, the works of Bartchy, Lyle, Patterson and Bradley were the most influential over a ten-year period. Bartchy was the most prominent in NT circles, and Patterson was increasingly challenging the status quo in classical studies. It would be more than ten years before Patterson's work began to influence NT scholars and, as will be seen below, eclipse Bartchy.

Probably one of the more well-known works examining Paul and slavery towards the end of the twentieth century is D.B. Martin's *Slavery as Salvation* (1990).[170] Martin sought to discover why early Christianity accepted the phrase 'slave of Christ' as a positive designation. Although aware of the contribution by Bradley, Martin does not appear to have been influenced by Patterson. This is not to suggest that he was unacquainted with Patterson, but Patterson does not appear in Martin's bibliography and Bradley is referenced only once in a note where Martin voices disagreement with Bradley's portrayal of slavery.[171]

Seemingly conscious of the pitfalls of working within Roman legal texts, Martin uses a sociological rather than a legal approach. This task is accomplished by using a variety of Greco-Roman literature and other non-literary sources such as funerary inscriptions instead of legal codes. He hoped this approach would allow him to recover perceptions of slavery at the level of the slaves rather than the aristocracy.[172] Martin acknowledges that there have been some who have tried to portray slavery as a 'rather benevolent institution'.[173] In spite of his protest to the contrary, however, Martin perpetuates this portrayal by describing the positive aspects of slavery as 'opportunities' for slaves living within the system.

Martin argues that slavery and slave language meant different things to different people,[174] that the entire system was rather ambiguous, and that it did not matter as much that one was a slave as it did whose slave one was.[175] Of particular interest to Martin are managerial slaves who sometimes had the opportunity to move up the social ladder while remaining slaves.[176] This advancement in society resulted from the unique position of the managerial slave and the high status of the owner. Martin posits that the opportunity managerial slaves had for upward mobility would have been an inspiration of hope for the lower classes. Consequently,

170. Dale B. Martin, *Slavery as Salvation: The Metaphor of Slavery in Pauline Christianity* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990).
171. Martin, *Slavery as Salvation*, p. 181 n. 1.
172. Martin, *Slavery as Salvation*, pp. xx, 2.
173. Martin, *Slavery as Salvation*, p. 1.
174. Martin, *Slavery as Salvation*, p. xx.
175. Martin, *Slavery as Salvation*, p. 35.
176. Martin, *Slavery as Salvation*, pp. 15-22.

while those of higher status held slavery in low esteem, those of lower status would have regarded it in a positive light.[177]

Martin suggests that the phrase 'slave of Christ', in early Christianity, was a leadership title that denoted the authority of the leader as a slave representative of Christ.[178] Using the managerial slave pattern, Martin explains Paul's self-designation of slavery in 1 Corinthians 9.[179] Martin also suggests that parallels exist between Paul and Greco-Roman politicians who gained their authority by appealing to the masses. He argues that by using political speech, Paul was able to assert his authority in Corinth by deriving it not from the higher-class members, but from those of the lower class.[180] Paul's declaration that he was a slave would have shocked and offended the higher-class members of the church because he admitted that he was occupying the low position of a slave. On the other hand, this strategy would have appealed to the lower-class members who regarded him as a managerial slave of Christ. By casting himself this way, Paul presented himself to the higher-class members as a challenging example of how they should relate to others. To the lower class, he embodied upward mobility and salvation through slavery to Christ.[181]

In many ways Martin represents the last of those NT scholars who gravitated towards a more benign presentation of slavery. Much of Martin's understanding of slavery is framed by classics scholars such as Barrow instead of Patterson and Bradley.[182] As will be seen below, it is Martin's argument that slavery was a vehicle for upward mobility that came under criticism the most.

Martin did not challenge Bartchy's work and the most significant challenge offered by a NT scholar to Bartchy's depiction of slavery in the first century and his interpretation of 1 Cor. 7.21, appeared in 1995. J.A. Harrill's dissertation, *The Manumission of Slaves in Early Christianity*, represented fresh thinking on a host of issues related to Paul and slavery.[183] Harrill rejects the framework for understanding slavery constructed by Bartchy[184] and is acutely aware of the problems that constructing a legal definition of slavery presents.[185] Instead his approach is informed by a combination of Roman legal codes, classical literature and the works of

177. Martin, *Slavery as Salvation*, pp. 47-49.
178. Martin, *Slavery as Salvation*, pp. 51-55.
179. Martin, *Slavery as Salvation*, p. 65-67.
180. Martin, *Slavery as Salvation*, p. 87.
181. Martin, *Slavery as Salvation*, p. 134.
182. Horsley, 'The Slave Systems of Classical Antiquity', p. 22.
183. J.A. Harrill, *The Manumission of Slaves in Early Christianity* (HUT, 32; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1995).
184. Harrill, *The Manumission of Slaves*, pp. 94-99.
185. Harrill, *The Manumission of Slaves*, p. 17.

Finley, Patterson and Bradley.[186] For Harrill, slavery in the ancient world was not a positive experience. One would rather die than be enslaved.[187]

One objective of Harrill's work, even if unstated, is to deconstruct Bartchy's framework for understanding slavery. He identifies numerous methodological problems underpinning Bartchy's approach[188] and concludes that Bartchy did not understand how to use legal codes as a source for social conditions. Moreover, he accuses Bartchy of uncritically accepting the ancient slaveholder's ideology by suggesting that the lack of slave rebellions in the first century was an indicator of the contentment of slaves within the system.[189] In a more recent contribution on the topic (2005), Harrill suggests that rather than providing liberation for slaves, the NT actually reinforces the established social hierarchy by the way it describes the relationship between slave and master.[190] The NT perpetuates Greco-Roman stereotypes of slaves that communicate a message about the position of Christians in the hierarchal Roman society.

In 1998, *Slavery in Text and Interpretation* was published as *Semeia* 83/84.[191] A compilation of ten essays, the volume represents a *tour de force* intended to challenge the way NT scholarship examines the topic of Paul and slavery. The stated aim of the editors is to bring Patterson's work to the forefront of NT scholarship, as many NT scholars had not paid attention to Patterson's work.[192] Many of the contributors not only challenge the prevailing approach to Paul and slavery but also draw attention to the numerous problems involved with portraying slavery as a benign institution. Particularly incisive are the comments by R.A. Horsley who, influenced by Patterson's work, reacts to the frameworks constructed by Bartchy and later by Martin.[193] In response to the hypothesis of upward mobility, Horsley argues:

> It seems generally doubtful that the low status free population felt much solidarity with slaves, the very persons in the social order that defined

186. Harrill, *The Manumission of Slaves*, pp. 14-17.

187. Harrill, *The Manumission of Slaves*, p. 1.

188. Harrill, *The Manumission of Slaves*, pp. 94-102.

189. Harrill, *The Manumission of Slaves*, p. 97.

190. J.A. Harrill, *Slaves in the New Testament: Literary, Social, and Moral Dimensions* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2005).

191. Allen Dwight Callahan, Richard A. Horsley and Abraham Smith (eds.), *Slavery in Text and Interpretation* (Semeia, 83/84; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1998). Although the publication year is listed as 1998, the volume was not actually released until late 2000, early 2001. A special session of the Paul and Politics group discussed the volume at the 2000 SBL meeting in Nashville, but, at that time, the book had not yet been released.

192. Callahan, Horsley and Smith, 'Slavery in Text and Interpretation', p. 8.

193. Horsley, 'The Slave Systems of Classical Antiquity', pp. 19-66; and 'Paul and Slavery', pp. 153-200.

> them as at least freeborn. The very concept of upward mobility, of course, derives from an individualistic sociological worldview that accepts and presupposes the dominant social system (without fundamental critique let alone challenge) and then focuses on how individuals may be upwardly or downwardly mobile within it.[194]

The volume is complimented by two responses, one of which is from Patterson who examines Paul more closely than he has previously.

One of the most recent contributions to the topic is that of J.A. Glancy, *Slavery in Early Christianity* (2001).[195] Glancy provides a window into an aspect of slavery not often appreciated by NT scholarship. Although she includes legal codes in her analysis, she is also aware of the way in which the disparate ancient sources for slavery can distort a modern analysis of the original situation and is careful, therefore, not to reduce slavery to a set of legal definitions and regulations.[196] Instead, her approach examines the rhetoric of ancient slavery which considered slaves not as human beings, or even mere chattels, but as the 'surrogate bodies' of their master.[197] A slave's role in society designated them as the substitutes for free persons who labored, conducted business, and even received punishment on behalf of their master. Slavery denied the enslaved the right to be in command of their own bodies and made them vulnerable to physical control, coercion, and a variety of abuses. In particular, Glancy focuses on the sexual vulnerability of slaves in relation to their master. Slaves' bodies were unconditionally available to the master for the purposes of sexual gratification and providing enslaved offspring for the future. Obtaining sexual gratification by means of a slave was considered a legitimate use of one's property.

In the context of Christianity, Glancy argues that rather than overturning the Greco-Roman rhetoric of slavery, Christianity accepted and reinforced this rhetoric by making obedience to the master an article of religion as demonstrated by the household codes in the Pastoral Epistles. Consequently, the slave's body remained vulnerable to the master regardless of their mutual association within the church.[198] Instead of challenging

194. Horsley, 'Paul and Slavery', pp. 175-76.

195. Jennifer A. Glancy, *Slavery in Early Christianity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002).

196. Glancy, *Slavery in Early Christianity,* p. 4.

197. Glancy, *Slavery in Early Christianity*, p. 11.

198. Glancy notes elsewhere that Paul's lack of addressing the problem of sexual abuse of slaves by masters would have hindered their equal participation in the congregation and have made it difficult for the slaves of masters who were not Christians to fulfill Paul's strict sexual codes ('Obstacles to Slaves' Participation in the Corinthian Church', *JBL* 117 [1998], pp. 481-501).

societal opinions about slavery, Christianity sanctified the slaveholding morality beyond the standard claims of the Greco-Roman ethos.[199] Being a good Christian slave meant obeying the master and fostering his honor.

Closing Comments

As NT scholarship enters into a new millennium it is clear that there has been a perceptible shift in the way that Paul and slavery has been interpreted. Paul's silence on the subject led many to conclude that this was his tacit approval of the institution. Some concluded that Paul promoted a more philosophical approach that focused, in good Stoic fashion, on inward freedom of the individual rather than the external, physical enslavement. Still others suggested that Paul's eschatology kept him from making too many suggestions about a social situation that was soon to change. Whatever position NT scholars take it is still difficult to explain away the problem of Pauline silence. Once again, the lack of any clear condemnation from the apostle's pen is almost deafening.

Perhaps the most promising explanation of Paul and slavery is that which observes how pervasive slavery was in Roman society and how difficult it would have been to institute change. As seen above, scholars have suggested that challenging the institution would have threatened a revolution that would also have destroyed Christianity. Others have claimed that Christianity was too insignificant to cause such a major social upheaval. Whatever the case, it is clear that many NT scholars have come to appreciate the social and economic cornerstone that slavery represented in antiquity and that Paul, as Barclay suggested, simply might not have known what to advise.

One thing that has helped to drive the discussion has been the presence of slavery in the modern era. In nineteenth-century Europe and America, the slave trade prompted many to examine statements about slavery in the NT. Those who insisted on keeping slaves used Paul to support their practice. But so did the abolitionists who condemned it. Even after emancipation, scholarship still grappled for quite some time with the problem as demonstrated above. Some attempted to mitigate ancient slavery in comparison to the more recent modern experience in order to sponge away the embarrassment of the NT's support for this peculiar institution. But that portrayal of slavery has been challenged and declared to be a view of slavery that represents, for the most part, the slaveholders rather than the enslaved. Slavery, in whatever forms it may take and time period

199. Glancy, *Slavery in Early Christianity,* p. 147.

it might dwell, is not a positive experience for the enslaved. It is this legacy of the north Atlantic slave trade that has not only lurked under much of NT exegesis over the last two hundred years, but was the impetus for a whole new approach by those who were the heirs of this dark period of social injustice. As will be seen in Chapter 2, African Americans have pioneered an approach that seeks to make sense of Paul's statements about slavery and their own heritage as the descendants of former slaves.

Chapter 2

African-American Reponses to Paul and Slavery

Contributions made by African-American scholars on Paul and slavery are sometimes overlooked. To be sure, it is not that these contributions have been wholly ignored, but there has not always been a conscious recognition of the perspective the descendants of former North American slaves can bring to the discussion of Paul and slavery. What follows below is a survey of African-American scholarship that has given voice to a non-Eurocentric interpretation of Paul. These are readings of Paul that have been conditioned by the experience of black Americans in a country that has long been dominated by whites, who initially enslaved Africans and then, following emancipation, actively promoted the disenfranchisement of former slaves and their descendants. The experience of slavery, segregation, and the civil rights movement provided the opportunity for—one might even say forced—African Americans to read the Bible in a dissimilar way from that of their white counterparts.[1]

It must be acknowledged at the outset that to examine the contributions of African-American scholars in a separate chapter is problematic. On the one hand, it threatens to perpetuate the systemic neglect of these scholars by not including them in a broad overview of scholarship. To conduct such an exclusive review could be wrongly seen as a suggestion that the contributions herein are only an aberration of so-called 'mainstream' scholarship. On the other hand, a separate treatment of such contributions allows the distinctive voice of African-American scholars to be heard apart from the sometimes cacophonic literature reviews one finds in PhD dissertations and NT commentaries. In some cases the methodologies used and conclusions reached by these scholars is not different from their white counterparts. But the purpose of their work is often motivated by what they view

1. John Saillant, 'Origins of African American Biblical Hermeneutics in the Eighteenth-Century Black Opposition to the Slave Trade and Slavery', in V.L. Wimbush (ed.), *African Americans and the Bible: Sacred Texts and Social Textures* (New York: Continuum, 2000), p. 236. For an overview of African-American approaches to the New Testament see Larry L. Enis, 'Biblical Interpretation among African-American New Testament Scholars', *CurBS* 4.1 (2005), pp. 57-82.

as a heritage of racist exegesis which requires them to respond for the sake of their own community. It is with the objective of ascertaining clearly the contribution of black Americans on Paul and slavery which has led to such a presentation.

African Americans and Paul: A History of Tension

For those living in the African Diaspora as slaves and the descendants of slaves, Paul was and still is a particularly enigmatic figure in the Bible. The so-called apostle of freedom[2] was sometimes seen as a supporter of slavery because of his various injunctions that slaves should obey their masters and the apparent return of a runaway slave, Onesimus, to his master.[3] Suspicion of Paul was particularly evident in the antebellum south where slave masters used the apostle's writings to manipulate slaves into submission. A particularly incisive example of the tension that existed between the apostle and enslaved blacks has been handed down by theologian and mystic Howard Thurman. In his *Jesus and the Disinherited*, Thurman tells of when he would read from the Bible to his grandmother, the only portion of the Apostle Paul's Letters she would listen to was 1 Corinthians 13, and even that on only rare occasions. The problem, as described by Thurman, was that his grandmother was exposed to Paul when she was a slave:

> 'During the days of slavery', she said, 'the master's minister would occasionally hold services for the slaves. Old man McGhee was so mean that he would not let a Negro minister preach to his slaves. Always the white minister used as his text something from Paul. At least three or four times a year he used as a text: 'Slaves, be obedient to them that are your masters… as unto Christ'. Then he would go on to show how it was God's will that we were slaves and how, if we were good and happy slaves, God would bless us. I promised my Maker that if I ever learned to read and if freedom ever came, I would not read that part of the Bible.'

The reaction by Thurman's grandmother illustrates clearly the conundrum faced by enslaved blacks. How can one hear the apostle's message of freedom when white ministers suggest that the message does not extend in its fullness to slaves? Why should slaves get only half a gospel? The

2. Richard N. Longenecker, *Paul, Apostle of Liberty* (New York: Harper and Row, 1964); F.F. Bruce, *Paul, Apostle of the Heart Set Free* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977).

3. C. Michelle Venable-Ridley, 'Paul and the African American Community', in Emilie M. Townes (ed.), *Embracing the Spirit: Womanist Perspectives on Hope, Salvation and Transformation* (New York: Orbis Books, 1997), pp. 218-22; Brian K. Blount, *Then the Whisper Put on Flesh: New Testament Ethics in an African American Context* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2001), pp. 119-57.

response by Thurman's grandmother and others was to reject much of what Paul had to say.

Another poignant example of the sharp responses Paul sometimes received from blacks was recounted by Charles Colcock Jones in 1845. Jones was a Methodist minister who had written a Catechism to be used as part of plantation missions sent out from the Methodist church. In one section of the Catechism, Jones instructs slaves to obey their masters and to be subject to them, serving them faithfully even behind their backs as before their faces, for God is present and sees even if their masters do not.

Jones was taken aback, however, by the reaction he received from a group of enslaved blacks to whom he preached on the authority of Paul.

> I was preaching to a large congregation on the Epistle to Philemon: and when I insisted upon fidelity and obedience as Christian virtues in servants and upon the authority of Paul, condemned the practice of running away, one half of my audience deliberately rose up and walked off with themselves, and those that remained looked anything but satisfied, either with the preacher or his doctrine. After dismission, there was no small stir among them; some solemnly declared 'that there was no such an Epistle in the Bible'; others, that they did not care if they ever heard me preach again.[4]

The disagreeable way in which enslaved blacks responded to Paul did not end with the emancipation proclamation, reconstruction, or the civil rights movement. In 1968, Albert Cleage, in his book *The Black Messiah*, suggests that Paul is not to be trusted by African-American Christians. Cleage charges that while Jesus taught a gospel of liberation, 'the Apostle Paul who never knew Jesus modified his teachings to conform to the pagan philosophies of the white Gentiles'.[5] Moreover, for Cleage, it is Paul to whom the white oppressors of the black race turn in order to find support.[6] As a result, Cleage and others like James Cone[7] jettisoned Paul as a spokesperson for Christianity.

While there has been a history of tension between Paul and some black Americans, not everyone has responded by rejecting Paul. Many have tried to reconcile their position as Christians descended from slaves with the seemingly pro-slavery statements made by Christianity's greatest apostle.[8]

4. As quoted in Clarice Martin, 'Somebody Done Hoodo'd the Hoodoo Man', in Allen Dwight Callahan, Richard A. Horsley and Abraham Smith (eds.), *Slavery in Text and Interpretation* (Semeia, 83/84; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1998), p. 219.

5. Albert Cleage, *The Black Messiah* (New York: Sheed & Ward, 1968), p. 4.

6. Cleage, *The Black Messiah*, pp. 37, 44, 89-93.

7. James H. Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation* (Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1970).

8. Blount comments: 'I doubt the slaves who walked out on the Philemon sermon would have been impressed with the latter-day scholarly attempts to rehabilitate Paul's counsel to unconditional subservience. In fact, it is just this kind of Pauline

But this has been a slow and, for the most part, more recent process. One reason for this is that there has been a lack of African-American academic contributions either available to or considered by NT scholarship. This is illustrated in a study by Randall C. Bailey who notes that in 1995 there were only 26 African Americans in the United States who held doctoral degrees in biblical studies (12 in Hebrew Bible and 14 in New Testament). By 1999, the number of African American biblical scholars had increased to forty-five (twenty-one in Hebrew Bible and twenty-four in New Testament).[9] As of 2007, there are forty in the area of New Testament alone.[10] Thus while the profile of African-American scholarship in biblical studies is on the rise, it is still significantly overshadowed by a guild that is populated predominantly by white males.

One characteristic of African-American approaches to Paul and slavery is the almost universal rejection of the disputed Epistles as authentically Pauline. This in itself is not significant. Many NT scholars consider a number of 'Paul's' Epistles pseudonymously written. But among African-American scholars, Ephesians, Colossians and the Pastorals are often singled out because they include household codes that enjoin slaves to obey their masters. Slaveholders in the south often used these writings to control their slaves. As a result, the apostle Paul emerged from the era of American slavery with a tainted identity.[11] While there may be a variety of other reasons why these Epistles are considered *not* to be authentically Pauline, the presupposition among many African-American scholars seems to be that Paul was not a supporter of slavery and the presence of potentially 'pro-slavery' sentiments in these Epistles is an indicator of their pseudonymous nature.

Allen D. Callahan has commented on the tension between African-American scholarship and Paul, but would disagree that there has been a wide rejection of the deutero-Pauline Letters. He notes:

> It is not remarkable that African Americans found Paul an ambiguous witness to the Gospel proclamation. It is remarkable that very few African

(creation) theologically enabled ethics that made the slaves and the freedmen and women who looked back on their lives as slaves hesitant about reading, and studying Paul as a biblical and apostolic authority (*Then the Whisper*, p. 153).

9. Randall C. Bailey, 'Academic Biblical Interpretation among African Americans in the United States', in V.L. Wimbush (ed.), *African Americans and the Bible: Sacred Texts and Social Textures* (New York: Continuum, 2000), p. 696. For a list of these scholars see p. 707.

10. See the list which expands Bailey's original 1995 list in Brian K. Blount (ed.), *True to Our Native Land: An African American New Testament Commentary* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2007), pp. 559-60.

11. Venable-Ridley, 'Paul and the African American Community', p. 221.

> American intellectuals have openly rejected the apostolic witness as hopelessly anti-emancipatory. Quite the contrary: rejection of Paul, the Paul of the so-called deutero-Pauline Epistles and Pastoral Epistles, the Paul who exhorts slaves to be obedient to their masters and recommends oppressive governments as God-ordained, has been rare among African Americans. Some have found in Paul a compelling voice of freedom that articulates their own *cri de coeur*.[12]

Callahan may be correct in his overall assessment of African-American interpretations in general. But what follows will demonstrate that modern interpretations of Paul have, for the most part, rejected the disputed Pauline Epistles and focused almost primarily on the apostle's statements in 1 Cor. 7.17-24; Gal. 3.28; and, to a lesser extent, Philemon.

African American Interpretations of Paul and Slavery

While African-American academic interpretations of Paul and slavery are more recent, they are not completely absent in history. One of the earliest comes from Lemuel Haynes who was born in 1753, the child of a white mother and a black father. After serving a period of indentured servitude, he received training for the ministry, including Latin and Greek, from two Connecticut clergymen and was ordained in 1780. Interestingly, Haynes spent nearly 30 years as the pastor of white congregations in eighteenth-century New England.[13]

Of the numerous sermons and treatises written by Haynes that have been preserved, one entitled *Liberty Further Extended* (c. 1776) is of particular interest. Although Haynes was not known as a commentator on race relations, he was an opponent of slavery, as the document makes clear.[14] In the undated manuscript, Haynes provides political, theological and moral arguments against the institution of slavery. One of the theological arguments is (to the best of my knowledge) the earliest extant exegesis of 1 Cor. 7.17-24 by an African American.

> But you will say that Slave-keeping was practiced Even under the Gospel for we find *paul*, and the other apostles Exhorting *Servants to be obedient to their masters*. to which I reply, that it mite be they were Speaking to Servants in *minority* in General; But Doubtless it was practiced in the Days of the

12. A.D. Callahan, 'Brother Saul: An Ambivalent Witness to Freedom', in Allen Dwight Callahan, Richard A. Horsley and Abraham Smith (eds.), *Slavery in Text and Interpretation* (Semeia, 83/84; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1998), p. 235.

13. Helen MacLam, 'Introduction' in *Black Preacher to White America: The Collected Writings of Lemuel Haynes, 1774–1833* (New York: Carlson Publishing, 1990), pp. xix-xxiii.

14. MacLam, 'Introduction', p. xxv.

> Apostles from what *St. paul* says, *1. Corin 7 21. Art thou called, being a servant? care not for it; but if thou mayest Be made free, use it rather*. So that the Apostle seems to recommend freedom if attainable, q.d. 'if it is thy unhappy Lot to be a slave, yet if thou art Spiritually free Let the former appear so minute a thing when compared with the Latter that it is comparatively unworthy of notice; yet Since freedom is so Excelent a Jewel, which none have a right to Extirpate, and if there is any hope attaining it, use all Lawful measures for the purpose'. So that however Extant or preval[e]nit it mite Be in that or this age; yet it does not in the Least reverse the unchangeable Laws of God, or of nature;[15]

It is not clear whether Haynes's exegesis is a product of his theological training, his own investigations into 1 Cor. 7.17-24 or both.[16] Whatever the case, it is clear that Haynes has articulated one of the main interpretations supported by NT scholars even up until the present. By acknowledging the fact that slavery existed in antiquity while focusing on the importance of being 'spiritually free', Haynes promoted a Stoic interpretation of slavery and anticipated NT scholars who would later portray Paul in a philosophical manner.[17] Haynes's conclusion that only legal means should be used to gain freedom and his seeming unwillingness to challenge the fact of slavery in antiquity or his own contemporary setting may be a result of his own privileged existence in revolutionary New England (that is, in comparison to enslaved blacks). But the importance of Haynes's contribution cannot be overstated. He represents an early (perhaps the earliest) attempt by an African American to engage the enigmatic apostle of freedom, Paul, and interpret his statements on slavery while living in the midst of a slaveholding society. Unfortunately, Haynes also represents a single voice that was heard among the many that were forcibly silenced by a slaveholding society.

Another voice that spoke out against slavery while maintaining a commitment to the writings of Paul belonged to Fredrick Douglass, the nineteenth-century black abolitionist and former slave. Douglass rejected many of the arguments put forward by pro-slavery exegetes and did not

15. Lemuel Haynes, 'Liberty Further Extended', in *Black Preacher to White America: The Collected Writings of Lemuel Haynes, 1774–1833* (New York: Carlson Publishing, 1990), pp. 25-26.

16. One wonders how much access, if any, Haynes had to commentaries on the Corinthian passage. It is quite possible that his own knowledge of Greek enabled him to present an interpretation of one of the most difficult passages in the NT that would anticipate the opinions of NT scholars for years to come.

17. This would also be the conclusion of another African-American scholar. Vincent L. Wimbush opted for the philosophical interpretation in his *Paul the Worldly Ascetic: Response to the World and Self-Understanding according to 1 Corinthians 7* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1987), p. 81.

consider the Bible or Paul a promoter of slavery. Moreover, he refused to reject either the Bible or Paul, as demonstrated in the following speech.

> The constitution is pro-slavery, because men have interpreted it to be pro-slavery, and practice upon it as if it were pro-slavery. The very same thing, sir, might be said of the Bible itself; for in the United States men have interpreted the Bible against liberty. They have declared that Paul's Epistle to Philemon is a full proof for the enactment of that hell-black Fugitive Slave Bill which has desolated my people for the last ten years in that country. They have declared that the Bible sanctions slavery. What do we do in such a case? What do you do when you are told by the slaveholders of America that the Bible sanctions slavery? Do you go and throw your Bible into the fire'? Do you sing out, 'No Union with the Bible!'? Do you declare that a thing is bad because it has been misused, abused, and made bad use of? Do you throw it away on that account? No! you press it to your bosom all the more closely; you read it all the more diligently; and prove from its pages that it is on the side of liberty—and not on the side of slavery.[18]

Somehow Douglass was able to reconcile the tragedy that he and his race was experiencing without rejecting Paul and the wider witness of the Bible. And he looked forward to the day when 'Doctors of Divinity shall find a better use for the Bible than in using it to prop up slavery, and a better employment for their time and talents than in finding analogies between Paul's Epistle to Philemon and the slave-catching bill of Millard Fillmore'.[19]

In the beginning of this chapter we were introduced to Howard Thurman's grandmother who, due to her experience as a slave, had come to reject much of Paul's writings. That experience was one of the factors that ultimately led Thurman to write *Jesus and the Disinherited* (1949).[20] Thurman professed to live among a generation of African Americans who found very little that was meaningful or intelligent about Jesus Christ in the teachings of the church. For many, Christianity was nothing more than a way to keep blacks compliant with the wishes of whites. Rather than being concerned with the problems of contemporary life, they were taught to forgive and look forward to heaven.[21] Because of his experience with his grandmother, Thurman recognized that the Apostle Paul was often held suspect by blacks as one source of their oppression and sometimes even as an antithesis of the things taught by Jesus. The problem,

18. As quoted in Harrill, *Slaves in the New Testament*, pp. 177-78.
19. As quoted in Harrill, *Slaves in the New Testament*, p. 177.
20. Howard Thurman, *Jesus and the Disinherited* (New York: Abingdon–Cokesbury, 1949).
21. Thurman, *Jesus and the Disinherited*, p. 29.

according to Thurman, is that Paul is often not understood properly in his historical context.

Thurman explains Paul as a Jew living in the Roman Empire. But unlike Jesus and the other apostles, Paul was a Roman citizen. This distinction, though subtle, is important to understanding the apostle. Many Jews in the first century would have felt marginalized as a minority living in the Roman Empire. But Paul's position was very unusual because he was a minority with majority privileges, which required the perpetuation of the Imperial system. His citizenship was part of the state and depended on the state. This would in turn, Thurman argues, have influenced Paul's philosophy of history and the state. Thus, 'one is not surprised, then, to hear him tell slaves to obey their masters like Christ, and say all government is ordained of God'.[22] However, Thurman also suggests that 'it would be grossly misleading and inaccurate to say that there are not to be found in the Pauline Letters utterances of a deeply different quality—utterances which reveal how his conception transcended all barriers for race and class and condition'.[23] Thus, for Thurman, it is not so much that Paul had an ambivalent attitude towards slavery, but that only against his background as a Roman citizen can Paul's teachings on slavery be understood.

Almost 30 years later, in 1976, Latta Thomas published *Biblical Faith and the Black American*.[24] The main goal of the book was to present a challenge against 'racist interpretations' of the Bible that had been used to support slavery and segregation. Thomas wanted the Bible to be a source of liberation for black Americans as it was for their ancestors. But he disagrees with some, like Albert Cleage, who dismissed Paul as a distorter of the gospel and accused the apostle of favoring slavery or at least doing little to uproot it.[25] Like Thurman, Thomas wants Paul to be relevant for black Americans. As a result, Thomas promotes an exegetical approach among African Americans that counters the 'racist eisegesis' that invariably led to the supposed biblical support of slavery and segregation.[26] Particularly vulnerable to racist eisegesis is the Apostle Paul. 'Of all the persons of the early church days, Paul appears to be the most vulnerable to eisegesis and misinterpretation. All the fervent eisegeter has to do to misrepresent Paul's writings and thought is to ignore the historical context.'[27]

22. Thurman, *Jesus and the Disinherited*, p. 32.
23. Thurman, *Jesus and the Disinherited*, p. 33.
24. Latta Thomas, *Biblical Faith and the Black American* (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 1976).
25. Thomas, *Biblical Faith and the Black American*, p. 110.
26. Thomas, *Biblical Faith and the Black American*, pp. 24-25.
27. Thomas, *Biblical Faith and the Black American*, p. 26.

In his discussion of slavery, Thomas argues that Paul was not a supporter of slavery, but one who offered practical, rather than theological, advice for dealing with the institution due to the imminent Parousia.

> … Paul felt assured that the time span between the resurrection and the consummation was a very short one. Therefore much of the practical advice which he wrote to churches was of temporary value and designed just to tide the Christians over the few days left. Much of the fatherly instruction he offered on what under normal circumstances would have been routine matters like marriage, divorce, and the work ethic sound strange under the 'interim ethic'. In fact Paul came within a hair's breadth of discounting the need for slave uprisings (1 Corinthians 7.20-21) because he felt the Parousia would make them unnecessary.[28]

Thomas's reading of 1 Cor. 7.20-21 as a warning against slave revolts is curious and probably unwarranted. Like Haynes, he accepts the fact of slavery in antiquity and that Paul's statements could perpetuate slavery, at least until the Parousia. Unlike Haynes, however, he does not accept the Stoic approach with its dichotomistic categories of inner slavery versus external slavery.[29] Thomas's reading of 1 Corinthians 7 suggests that, with the exception of slavery, all general plans can be suspended:

> [Paul] found the achievement of human freedom important enough to be made an exception to the interim ethic… Circumcision, marriage, divorce, funerals, and business deals can all be 'put off'. But it is not so with freedom activities. Paul almost included it in the list of concerns to be suspended. Yet he catches himself: 'Well never mind; but if you do have a chance to become a freeman, use it' (TEV).[30]

Thomas goes on to claim that, unlike other things in the literary context of 1 Corinthians 7, slavery is the one item that Paul refused to include in a list of things to be tolerated even for the briefest of time.[31]

In the case of Philemon, Thomas suggests that, unlike the arguments presented by Cleage and others, the Epistle illustrates the apostle's awareness of the plight of a slave rather than any callous advocacy of slavery. The fact that Paul neither had Onesimus locked up nor sent back to 'take his medicine', but instead sent him back to be received as a brother is proof that Paul was not insensitive to slavery nor had he misrepresented the gospel.[32] On the contrary, if anything, the Epistle demonstrates to

28. Thomas, *Biblical Faith and the Black American*, p. 27.
29. Thomas, *Biblical Faith and the Black American*, p. 41.
30. Thomas, *Biblical Faith and the Black American*, p. 38.
31. Thomas, *Biblical Faith and the Black American*, p. 39.
32. Thomas, *Biblical Faith and the Black American*, p. 112.

Thomas that 'in spite of Paul's conviction of an early return of Christ, [it] reveals a man who saw the irreconcilable friction between the gospel and human slavery'.[33]

Thomas takes the same position when interpreting the NT household codes. In the case of Ephesians, Thomas questions Pauline authorship as he also seems to do for the Pastorals.[34] But in spite of this, he does not reject the Epistles as valueless for black Christian faith. When looking at the injunction for slaves to obey their masters in Eph. 6.5-9, Thomas concedes that it is accepting of existing slavery. But what is more significant for Thomas is that not only is the slave addressed but also the master. This, then, implies that 'God cares no more for the slave owner than he does for the slave'.[35] In the case of Colossians, Thomas accepts Pauline authorship and concedes that 3.22–4.1 matches almost word for word the Ephesians household codes. 'But in reading Col. 3.22–4.1 under exegesis, one feels Paul's sense of pressure of his conviction of the Second Coming.'[36] What exactly led Thomas to this conclusion, apart from a personal conviction that Colossians is authentically Pauline, he does not say.

Like Haynes, Thomas represents one of the first attempts by an African American to reconcile Paul's message of freedom with his statements on slavery. Thomas's efforts were aimed at helping African Americans understand Paul within his historical context rather than dismissing the apostle out of hand. Thomas adopted the eschatological position taken by other NT scholars which stated that Paul's expectation of an imminent Parousia prevented him from categorically challenging the institution of slavery. But Paul's imminent eschatology did not make him a promoter of slavery.

The 1980s mark the beginning of numerous contributions made by African-American scholars. In 1984, *Paul's Message of Freedom: What Does It Mean to the Black Church* was published by Amos Jones.[37] Like Latta Thomas, Jones's intent was to demonstrate the ways Paul could be relevant to black Americans. Jones acknowledges that, in many ways, Paul had been the problem rather than the solution for blacks.[38] But for Jones the real problem is not Paul or his Epistles. The problem was the way Paul has been misinterpreted and misused.

33. Thomas, *Biblical Faith and the Black American*, p. 41.
34. Thomas, *Biblical Faith and the Black American*, pp. 37, 39-40.
35. Thomas, *Biblical Faith and the Black American*, p. 37.
36. Thomas, *Biblical Faith and the Black American*, p. 38.
37. Amos Jones, *Paul's Message of Freedom: What Does It Mean to the Black Church?* (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 1984).
38. Jones, *Paul's Message of Freedom*, pp. 17, 30.

> What black theologians, black people, women and others have failed to realize, it seems, is that we are dealing with a Paul who has been misrepresented, corrupted, perverted and misused by the white church in pre-civil war America and, to a large degree, by the white church of today.[39]

Instead of portraying Paul as an advocate of or even one acquiescing in, slavery, Jones views the apostle as a militant opponent of slavery, and an aggressive advocate of freedom.[40] He further suggests that NT scholars who view Paul as a social conservative are racists.[41]

Jones adheres to a narrow Pauline corpus accepting Romans, 1 and 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Philippians, 1 Thessalonians and Philemon as authentic.[42] The main reason for this decision seems to be the presence of what he describes as 'quasi-proslavery statements' in the deutero-Pauline writings.[43] Moreover, it is with these Epistles that the large-scale misrepresentation of Paul began. The authors of the deutero-Pauline and Pastoral Epistles, Jones argues, tried to systematize Paul's theology, but misunderstood him as did also the author of 1 Pet. 2.18. This misinterpretation was then promulgated by the church fathers. Even the Protestant reformers failed clearly to understand Paul. The failure of Calvin and others to separate out Paul's genuine Letters from those attributed to him caused the pro-slavery position of the deutero-Pauline Epistles, the Pastoral Epistles and the Catholic Epistles to become mixed with Paul's genuine Letters despite the fact that Paul's position would be diametrically opposed to the subsequent positions.[44]

The exegetical focus of Jones's work is 1 Cor. 7.17-24. He suggests that the center of the passage is v. 20, but that it has often been misinterpreted because some have missed the emphasis point in the verse. The usual conclusion is that Paul's statement 'in this let him remain' was a command to not seek a change of social position. But Jones argues that the phrase 'the calling in which he was called' is where the emphasis should be placed. This takes into account the change in religious and social status that comes as a result of the call and does not assume the continuation of one's former social status though he or she has received the call. 'Therefore—contrary to those who, whether deliberately or inadvertently so, translate this verse to mean that slaves were to remain in their social condition of servitude even after they received the call—Paul seems to be instructing slaves to

39. Jones, *Paul's Message of Freedom*, p. 31.
40. Jones, *Paul's Message of Freedom*, p. 32.
41. Jones, *Paul's Message of Freedom*, pp. 37, 38, 55.
42. Jones, *Paul's Message of Freedom*, p. 26.
43. Jones, *Paul's Message of Freedom*, p. 31.
44. Jones, *Paul's Message of Freedom*, p. 36.

recognize the spiritual and social metamorphosis that comes about as a result of their call'.[45] He goes on to propose that the 'call' was not to an office or social status but to a specific state of existence. And since the most prominent term Paul uses to describe a slave's existence after the call is the church that is precisely where slaves are to remain, *in the church*.[46]

> For the slaves there was no longer to be intercourse between the *ekklesia* into which they had been called and the world from which they had been called; more precisely, the slaves' membership in the *ekklesia* guaranteed their freedom from their erstwhile state of servitude and therefore delivered them from the requirement of returning to their master and slavery.[47]

Consequently, Paul should not be viewed as one who exhorts slaves to remain enslaved once they have become members of the church, but rather as 'the leader of an underground movement within an oppressive society, viz., the church within the Roman society and the Corinthian world'.[48]

On the basis of on this interpretation of the passage, Jones proposes that the problem at Corinth was a fear that the former slave owners would enter the church and take back their slaves. Thus, the reason for Paul's statements in 7.20-23 is to answer an inquiry sent to him by these former slaves.[49] Paul's response to them is two-fold. First, they are to remain in the church as they were called. Second, when he says to them in 7.23 'you were bought with a price; do not become the slaves of men', he is commanding them to actively resist forceful attempts at re-enslavement.[50]

Jones uses this interpretation for the situation between Onesimus and Philemon. Because the apostle clearly states that the slave Onesimus had been converted by Paul, Onesimus had also become a member of the church and was no longer eligible to be a slave. Jones concludes: 'as a result of his call, Onesimus is a brother of Philemon, both physically and spiritually. As one who has been called in the Lord, Onesimus no longer belongs to Philemon but belongs entirely to the Lord as his freedman.'[51]

While Jones's contribution provides a different perspective on a famously difficult passage, it has not received wide acceptance even among African-American scholars. Cain Hope Felder, for instance, considers Jones's

45. Jones, *Paul's Message of Freedom*, p. 42.
46. Jones, *Paul's Message of Freedom*, p. 43.
47. Jones, *Paul's Message of Freedom*, p. 47.
48. Jones, *Paul's Message of Freedom*, p. 48.
49. Jones, *Paul's Message of Freedom*, pp. 60-61.
50. Jones, *Paul's Message of Freedom*, pp. 62, 64.
51. Jones, *Paul's Message of Freedom*, p. 59.

attempt to contemporize Paul 'excessive'.[52] One problem with Jones's overall treatment of the Corinthian passage and Paul in general seems to be his transformation of Paul into a first-century abolitionist. Claiming that Paul was the leader of an underground movement that house slaves in the church seems to be anachronistically forcing a nineteenth-century concept of the Underground Railroad onto Roman society. Moreover, it seems extreme to label as racists those scholars who conclude that Paul was not anti-slavery. As Haynes and Thomas demonstrated, one does not have to portray Paul as an abolitionist to understand his message of freedom in the context of a slaveholding society.

Cain Hope Felder has presented a somewhat more moderate view of Paul in comparison to that of Jones. In *Troubling the Biblical Waters* (1989), he examines the problems of freedom and class consciousness in Galatians and how Paul's responses to these problems in Galatia can be appropriated for the Black church.[53] Acknowledging that the concept of freedom in the Bible is more complicated than is often admitted, Felder focuses on Paul's statement in Gal. 5.1, 'For freedom Christ has set us free; stand fast therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery'. He is critical of those scholars who read Paul's statements here as only spiritual, lacking any type of sociopolitical reality. Noting that Jesus promoted a ministry of freedom that was non-discriminatory, Felder concludes that this was also the case in Paul's ministry. Consequently, freedom for Paul meant a lack of discrimination.[54]

In his commentary on Philemon (1999), Felder suggests that although Paul was anti-slavery, he 'was astute enough to recognize that the role of a pronounced abolitionist would not only have been foolhardy for himself, despite his Roman citizenship, but it would have also been disastrous to the nascent Christian missionary movement'.[55] While freedom is an important topic in Paul's Letters, it is 1 Cor. 7.21 which Felder says explains Paul's sending Onesimus back.[56] It underscores the personhood of the slave and provides a fresh socioeconomic perspective on the master–slave relationship. Thus, 'when Paul made his plea to Philemon to receive Onesimus [now converted] back no longer as a slave but more than a slave, a beloved brother, it should be forcefully clear that Paul wanted

52. Cain Hope Felder, *Troubling Biblical Waters: Race, Class and Family* (New York: Orbis Books, 1989), p. 108.

53. Felder, *Troubling Biblical Waters*, p. 103.

54. Felder, *Troubling Biblical Waters*, p. 106.

55. Cain Hope Felder, 'Philemon', in *The New Interpreter's Bible* 11 (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1998), p. 887.

56. Felder makes similar statements in the footnotes of *The Original African Heritage Study Bible* (Nashville: J.C. Winston, 1993), pp. 1659, 1736.

Philemon to honor their new tie as Christians *above and beyond* any legal demands. Their relationship was to be conditioned by love, not law, now they were linked by faith not fealty.'[57]

In 1990, *Stony the Road We Trod* was published under the editorship of Cain Hope Felder.[58] This is a landmark work in African-American scholarship, which helped to set the tone for the next decade.[59] The book, the result of a series of meetings of black biblical scholars and theologians between 1986 and 1989, marked the first time a group of African-American scholars collaborated on a major contribution to biblical studies.

One of the many important and insightful essays contained in the volume is Lloyd Lewis's *An African-American Appraisal of the Philemon–Paul–Onesimus Triangle*.[60] Lewis begins his essay by admitting that, for African Americans, Paul has been 'more bane than blessing' and uses the Epistle to Philemon as an example of the conflict that exists between a text and the method of interpretation. As with Thomas and Jones, Lewis adheres to a narrow Pauline corpus. He singles out Colossians in particular and the 'supposed link' between that Epistle and Philemon due to the similar lists of persons contained in both Letters (Col. 4.7-18; Phlm 2, 23). Because he considers Colossians to be pseudonymous, he contends that the linking of the Epistle with Philemon reduces the significance of Philemon and 'thus Philemon becomes an exegetical stepchild, made all the more odious to many black exegetes by its ambiguous position on slavery'.[61] Lewis suggests that a better way forward is to use Galatians as the interpretive key to Philemon.

Lewis begins his interpretation by noting the significant amount of familial language Paul uses, not only in Philemon, but in all his Letters. Using blood kinship ties that create common ancestors is one way of bringing social order to a group.[62] In Gal. 3.1–4.7, Paul uses family language to define the community and to indicate the ideals that each should exhibit. Thus, Paul creates a pseudo-household or family in the form of the church, and all those in the church would have come to understand what it meant to be called 'brother' in the household of the church. Paul's

57. Felder, 'Philemon', p. 901.

58. Cain Hope Felder (ed.), *Stony the Road We Trod: African-American Biblical Scholarship* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991).

59. See M.G. Cartwright's review of *Stony the Road We Trod: African-American Biblical Scholarship* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991), by Cain Hope Felder (ed.), in *Modern Theology* 9 (1993), pp. 100-102.

60. Lloyd Lewis, 'An African-American Appraisal of the Philemon–Paul–Onesimus Triangle', in Cain Hope Felder (ed.), *Stony the Road We Trod: African-American Biblical Scholarship* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991), pp. 232-46.

61. Lewis, 'An African-American Appraisal', p. 233.

62. Lewis, 'An African-American Appraisal', p. 235.

decision to refer to Onesimus as a brother (v. 16) would have been a strategic way of suggesting the kind of relationship he wanted Philemon to have with his formerly unconverted slave. Prior to conversion, Onesimus would not have been a member of the church or family. But when Onesimus did enter the pseudo-house of the church, he collided with Philemon his master.[63] Both were now brothers in the church and, according to the familial langue of the church and Gal. 3.28, could no longer be slave and master. All three, Paul, Onesimus and Philemon, were brothers in the same pseudo-household. This is the implication of Onesimus's conversion.

At the end of his essay Lewis returns to the problem Paul poses for black exegetes. He suggests that if Philemon is read according to the familial language then the results are more satisfying.

> Here, I think, is a chance for black exegetes to claim Philemon as their own and as an indication of good news and of a new arrangement for blacks… He invites the black church into new, nonstatic social configurations.[64]

As academic contributions to biblical studies by African-American scholars began to increase, black female scholars also raised their voices. These scholars provided a perspective quite different from the feminist interpretations offered by their white female colleagues and, in some cases, their male counterparts. In a 1989 essay entitled *Can an Enslaved God Liberate?*, Sheila Briggs examined the hymn in Phil. 2.6-11 and asked how it would have been received by a person who was a Christian but enslaved.

Briggs advances a hermeneutic of liberation. She wonders how a slave sitting in the church would hear Paul's words in Phil. 2.6-11 differently from free persons and how it would have affected the relationship between these two groups. Did they both endow it with the same meaning?[65] Briggs argues that even though the hymn is not a commentary on the institution of slavery, it would still be heard within the context of a slave's social reality.[66] Briggs concludes that since Christ is being held up as the ideal slave, the hymn would have strengthened the institution rather than diminish it.

> The belief that all persons are slaves in the metaphysical sense, and that likewise Christ in becoming human took on the slavery of the human condition, does not produce the effect of social leveling. That all persons are slaves by virtue of their humanity does not preclude that some persons

63. Lewis, 'An African-American Appraisal', p. 245.
64. Lewis, 'An African-American Appraisal', p. 246.
65. Sheila Briggs, 'Can an Enslaved God Liberate? Hermeneutical Reflections on Philippians 2.6-11', in Katie Geneva and Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza (eds.), *Interpretations for Liberation (*Semeia, 47; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 1989).
66. Briggs, 'Can an Enslaved God Liberate?', p. 143.

> are slaves by virtue of their social status. Indeed, the supposed metaphysical reality of universal slavery reinforces the social reality of a peculiar institution of slavery by encouraging endurances of the human condition rather than transformation of it through one's own efforts.[67]

Briggs further hypothesizes that the bondage metaphor in the hymn was part of a social construction of reality which advanced a message to the enslaved that their opposition to the institution of slavery was as hopeless as resisting their own humanity.[68] Moreover, Christ's voluntary enslavement stands in sharp contrast to those who were enslaved involuntarily. How, Briggs asks, could a slave identify with Christ as the ideal slave when Christ never truly took on the moral inferiority of a slave?[69] Briggs faults the hymn, consequently, because it excludes the elements of the reality of the slave existence which could have been used to challenge the institution of slavery. Slaves reading the text would have been struck by the fact that its focus is not entirely on the metaphorical ideal slave but on the *kuriocentric* theme of Christ becoming a slave to God. But the hymn does not provide an equivalent sense of the moral inferiority felt by real slaves. Thus although the hymn ostensibly could be held up as offering liberation to those who were oppressed, it was a liberation that the text never really gave to them.[70]

African-American Scholarship at the Close of the Twentieth Century

While the above represents significant contributions to the debate over Paul and slavery, there are three African-American scholars who have figured prominently in the discussion through the 1990s and into the new millennium. Clarice J. Martin, Dwight Allen Callahan and Brad Ronnell Braxton have each provided important contributions from African American perspective and will be the focus of our discussion below.

Clarice J. Martin

In 1990, Clarice Martin's article 'Womanist Interpretations of the New Testament' offered an evaluation of translation and interpretive strategies from a Womanist point of view.[71] Although her article was not directly concerned with Paul and slavery, it did have some bearing on how slavery

67. Briggs, 'Can an Enslaved God Liberate?', p. 146.
68. Briggs, 'Can an Enslaved God Liberate?', p. 146.
69. Briggs, 'Can an Enslaved God Liberate?', p. 147.
70. Briggs, 'Can an Enslaved God Liberate?', p. 151.
71. Clarice J. Martin, 'Womanist Interpretations of the New Testament', *JFSR* 6 (1990), pp. 41-61.

language in the NT should be translated and interpreted in the context of the African-American community.

Martin proposes that when slavery language is clearly used, or an allusion to slavery is made, it should be translated as 'slave' rather than the more euphemistic term 'servant'. The reason for such an approach is that the use of 'servant' rather than 'slave' minimizes the full psychological effects of the institution of slavery. A non-euphemistic understanding is preferred over a more conciliatory approach because it is the only way to grasp the power of the biblical traditions that allude to slaves.[72]

As part of her Womanist interpretive strategy, Martin seeks to amplify the voices of all those who have been marginalized by sexist, racist or classist interpretations. As a case study she examines Onesimus and the interpretation of the events surrounding the composition of Paul's Letter to Philemon. She notes that the traditional interpretation offered by Lightfoot, Caird and others often assumes that there is some type of culpability on the part of Onesimus. Martin maintains that this interpretation is based on Onesimus's status as a slave and assumes that 'slaves are inherently bankrupt'.[73] This is a faulty interpretation that assumes Philemon, as a Christian slave-master, would have treated Onesimus in a manner consistent with Christian teachings (i.e., love, charity, kindness). But, Martin reminds her readers, this was not the case in the American South and therefore not necessarily the case in the first century. This is the problem with euphemistic translations and interpretations. They create assumptions that 'risk masking socioeconomic or political verities that are of fundamental significance in assessing historical and symbolic meaning'.[74] Thus, a translation of Onesimus as a 'servant' rather than a 'slave' risks overlooking his real status as an oppressed individual and also has the potential of assuming that he is of questionable character simply by virtue of his social status.

The remainder of Martin's article focuses on how slavery language in the NT, and particularly in Paul's writings, was received by enslaved Africans in North America. Martin advances a hermeneutic of suspicion that critiques not only the biblical writers but also the way that the texts were used to support the domination of blacks by whites. She concludes with a question as to how valuable the Pauline and non-Pauline writings that contain slavery texts can be to African Americans. In the case of the household codes, can they be redeemed or should they be aborted?[75]

72. Martin, 'Womanist Interpretation', pp. 49-51.
73. Martin, 'Womanist Interpretation', pp. 54-55.
74. Martin, 'Womanist Interpretation', p. 55.
75. Martin, 'Womanist Interpretation', p. 60.

One year later, Martin provided some answers to her questions with a contribution entitled 'The Haustafeln (Household Codes) in African American Biblical Interpretation: Freed Slaves and Subordinate Women' in the *Stony the Road We Trod* volume (1991). In this essay Martin maintains that the household codes have had a more far-reaching impact on the lives of African Americans than any other NT passage.[76] Her goal is to determine how these can be of help to modern African Americans. As with other NT scholars, and particularly African-American scholars, Martin considers all Epistles which contain a household code, including 1 Peter, to be pseudonymous.[77]

After a short review of modern interpretations of how household codes may have functioned in early Christianity, Martin takes the conclusions of Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza as her point of departure.[78] Schüssler Fiorenza suggested that the original message of the Jesus movement was decidedly non-patriarchal and non-hierarchal. Instead it was dominated by an ethos designated as a discipleship of equals.[79] Thus, structures of domination were destroyed, allowing women and slaves to be social equals within the context of the church.[80] This new vision of equality attracted many women and slaves to Christianity. But it also created numerous social tensions because it threatened the prevailing structures of the Greco-Roman world.[81]

> By the latter decades of the first century, then, the 'disruptions' of the patriarchal household—which was occasioned, in part, by an increased population of women and slaves in the Christian missionary movement—prompted a clamping down on women and slaves to restore 'peace' in the community. The *Haustafeln* in Colossians, Ephesians and 1 Peter—all written after C.E. 70—reflect an attempt to restrict the enthusiasm of women and slaves and thus restore order to the patriarchal household. Patriarchally appropriate behavior was enjoined to persuade imperial authorities that Christian communities were not a threat to the state (1 Peter 2.11–3.12). The *Haustafeln* were also used to reinforce the hierarchical, patriarchal ordering of the husband–wife, father–child, and master–slave relationship and to justify them christologically.[82]

76. Clarice J. Martin, 'The Haustafeln (Household Codes) in African-American Biblical Interpretation: Freed Slaves and Subordinate Women', in Cain Hope Felder (ed.), *Stony the Road We Trod: African-American Biblical Scholarship* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991), p. 206.

77. Martin, 'The Haustafeln', p. 207.

78. Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her: A Feminist Theological Reconstruction of Christian Origins* (New York: Crossroad, 1988).

79. Schüssler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her*, pp. 140-54.

80. Schüssler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her*, p. 148.

81. Schüssler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her*, p. 251.

82. Martin, 'The Haustafeln', p. 213.

Martin points out that in spite of these injunctions to slaves, African Americans have repeatedly reinterpreted the codes in light of their religious and social history. While slave masters used the codes to encourage blacks to be submissive to whites, the results were not always satisfactory. Martin goes on to wonder why this same type of reinterpretation has not been used in the African-American community in conjunction with women. Rather than liberate women, the community is guilty of reinforcing the patriarchal structures that they themselves shunted as it pertained to slavery.[83]

Martin restated her view of the problematic deutero-Pauline Epistles in 1998 in her contribution to the volume *Slavery in Text and Interpretation*.[84] The focus of this essay is how Paul's Letters were received and interpreted among slaves in the South. She notes that in antebellum America, 'Pauline texts were used in service of a larger "metalanguage" of domination endorsing the enslavement of black peoples in America'.[85] The long history of European and American ethnocentrism meant that Paul was read as a tool of domination rather than liberation.[86] As an example of the problems that are created by the combination of deutero-Pauline Epistles and ethnocentrism, Martin offers an essay by Charles Hodge, 'The Bible Argument on Slavery', in which the theologian argues for the rightness of slavery.[87] She faults Hodge who, in spite of living in the age when historical biblical criticism was on the rise, failed to acknowledge that many of the passages used to support the racist slave ideology were *not* Pauline. In response to Hodge and others who claimed that slavery was not a sin and used Paul to illustrate their point, Martin replies:

> The fact is, defenders of human bondage were 'hermeneutical contortionists', striving to make the round blocks of selected, and historically conditioned first-century biblical traditions fit into the square holes of seventeenth, eighteenth and nineteenth century discourses of 'domination' and 'subjectivity' designed to reinforce a construction of reality that rendered some 'natural' lords, leaders and masters, and others the ruled, the dominated, and the enslaved.[88]

83. Martin, 'The Haustafeln', pp. 225, 228-31. This question was raised earlier by Jacquelyn Grant, 'Black Theology and the Black Woman', in Gayraud Wilmore and James Cone (eds.), *Black Theology: A Documentary History* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1979), p. 421.

84. Martin, '"Somebody", Done Hoodo'd the Hoodoo Man', in Allen Dwight Callahan, Richard A. Horsley and Abraham Smith (eds.), *Slavery in Text and Interpretation* (Semeia, 83/84; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1998), pp. 203–33.

85. Martin, 'Somebody', p. 207.

86. Martin, 'Somebody', pp. 207-10.

87. Hodge, 'The Bible Argument on Slavery', pp. 840-77.

88. Martin, 'Somebody', p. 215.

In the case of Paul's Letter to Philemon, she notes that there is a high degree of ambiguity. But that does not stop many Eurocentric NT scholars from interpreting the Letter in light of the household codes which in turn reinforces the hermeneutic of domination. Many African-American scholars, on the other hand, interpret the Epistle in light of Paul's statements in 1 Cor. 7.21-23 and Gal. 3.26-29. Accordingly, Onesimus would have been received as a 'brother in truth', which Martin suggests would mean manumission.[89] She notes that the Letter is too ambiguous to determine with any certainty whether Onesimus was a fugitive slave and that there are a number of reasons he may have been with the apostle.[90] Consequently, the traditional interpretation is too unduly influenced by the deutero-Pauline Letters.

The above three essays illustrate Martin's hermeneutical strategy for dealing with the historical tension between African Americans and the apostle Paul. First, as noted above, there seems to be an underlying presupposition that any literature containing a household code is pseudonymously written. Indeed, not only are these Epistles viewed as non-Pauline (or non-Petrine), they are seen as later aberrations of the original gospel message preached by Jesus and Paul. Second, since these Epistles are contained in the canon, while they may not be rejected out of hand or considered to be of little value, they *must* be reinterpreted in order to 'correct' the aberrations that have been inculcated into generations of readers. Third, as with Jones, Thomas and Lewis, the interpretive keys to Philemon are 1 Cor. 7.21-23 and Gal. 3.26-29. These two passages supersede anything that is found in the disputed Pauline Epistles. In short, Martin's overall assessment of Paul and slavery seems to be that the apostle was not a supporter of slavery and any suggestion in the NT that he was pro-slavery was the result of later generations who either misunderstood Paul or deliberately changed his teachings in order to control women and slaves in the church and to reduce the social tensions that were being created in Greco-Roman society by the egalitarian teachings of the church.

Allen Dwight Callahan

A.D. Callahan has been another important contributor to the ongoing discussion of Paul and slavery. His first contribution was a short note on

89. Martin, 'Somebody', p. 217.

90. See also Clarice J. Martin, 'The Rhetorical Function of Commercial Language in Paul's Letter to Philemon (Verse 18)', in D.F. Watson (ed.), *Persuasive Artistry: Studies in New Testament Rhetoric in Honor of George Kennedy* (JSNTSup, 50; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1991), pp. 321-37.

1 Cor. 7.21 published in 1989.[91] Similar to Jones, Callahan suggests that the interpretive key to understanding this problematic passage is how one understands Paul's notion of what it means to be 'called' here. He argues that the idea of being 'called' is not the post-Reformation concept of 'vocation'. Nor is it a reference to one's social or religious position in the world. Rather, it is an indication that one is a member of the church who has been called out of society.[92]

In this context of calling, Callahan then examines Paul's statement in 7.22 which states that a slave who has been called is 'a freedman in the Lord'. Because a freedman was still legally obligated to the patron who freed him, Callahan suggests that the gist of 7.22 is that the slave who has been called is now owned by God and obligated to God. Thus, those who were slaves and have been 'called' by God have experienced a change of status in the context of the church. 'Though called as slaves, Paul understands the addressee to be an actual freedman.'[93]

By way of explaining the passage, Callahan suggests that what lies behind it is the practice of ecclesial manumission. Such a practice would have transferred a slave to freedom and thus a change of status. This change of status transpired, Callahan contends, when the Corinthian church would use collective funds to purchase the freedom of slaves who had become members of the church. To illustrate his point he offers *1 Clement* 55.2 which describes such a practice and Ignatius's *Letter to Polycarp* 4.3 which speaks out against it.

> This explains Paul's financial language in v. 23a, which I would read as a rhetorical question akin to v. 21 and on the pattern of the rhetorical questions in v. 18. 'You were bought with a price, weren't you? Do not be slaves to human beings.' Paul forbids those *apeleutheroi* who were *douloi* before calling (i.e., previous to *klesis*) to relapse into considering them as still in some way a slave, no doubt an important interdiction in a society which never allowed the freedman to forget his origins.

As noted above, Callahan's hypothesis is similar to that of Jones in his understanding of calling and interpretation of 7.23 forbidding freedmen to return to a former state of slavery. However, Callahan does not indicate that he is familiar with or influenced by Jones. He seems to have reached a similar conclusion independently. While his interpretation does offer a possible historical insight into the practice of ecclesial manumission in Early Christianity, there are some difficulties. J.A. Harrill has pointed out

91. Allen Dwight Callahan, 'A Note on 1 Corinthians 7.21', *The Journal of the Interdenominational Theological Center* 17 (1989–90), pp. 110-14.
92. Callahan, 'A Note on 1 Corinthians 7.21', pp. 111-12.
93. Callahan, 'A Note on 1 Corinthians 7.21', p. 112.

that it is problematic for Callahan to project a second-century document back on to the social situation of 1 Corinthians. It is not clear that the practice referred to by Clement and Ignatius is the same as those in 1 Cor. 7.21-23. Even more problematical is the notion of a community chest, which Harrill demonstrates did not exist in the nascent congregation at the time of Paul's writing the Epistle (cf. 16.2).[94] In general, Callahan's argument has not received much response.[95]

In 2000, Callahan reengaged 1 Cor. 7.21-23 in 'Paul, *Ekklesia* and Emancipation in Corinth' (2000).[96] In this essay he observes that Black Theology and Latin American Liberation Theology have often used the theme of Israel's exodus as a paradigm for freedom in oppressive societies. But the exodus theme has become difficult to apply in the current American situation where it is difficult for blacks to see America as the Promised Land.[97] As a replacement for the exodus motif, he proposes a paradigm of emancipation that extends beyond the exodus.

Callahan states that 'Paul's *ekklesia* in 1 Corinthians was an emancipatory project'.[98] As in 1989, he maintains that the Corinthian congregations were practicing ecclesial manumission. Although this was not a liberationist practice in the technical sense of the phrase, because former slaves were still obligated to their masters, it was an emancipatory practice in that it created a space for freedom within the limits of the Roman slave system.[99] It was a project of emancipation that was community based and was a form of politics in which Paul challenged Roman hegemony through those who were traditionally powerless.[100]

While Callahan's article does provide a valuable critique of liberation theology with some implications for 1 Corinthians 7, it fails to extend that critique to American society and to offer any suggestions as to how such an emancipation project can be of use in the current social and political context. Antoinette Clark Wire has expressed reservations about Callahan's reading of this passage because, as she contends, 'when manumission is offered as a concession, where available, in an argument for people to remain in the station they held when called, it simply tightens the

94. Harrill, *The Manumission of Slaves*, p. 107.

95. For instance, Anthony Thiselton does not consider Callahan's article in his commentary (*The First Epistle to the Corinthians* [NIGTC, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000]).

96. Allen Dwight Callahan, 'Paul, *Ekklesia* and Emancipation in Corinth', in R.A. Horsley (ed.), *Paul and Politics: Essays in Honor of Krister Stendahl* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press, 2000), pp. 216-23.

97. Callahan, 'Emancipation in Corinth', p. 219.

98. Callahan, 'Emancipation in Corinth', p. 216.

99. Callahan, 'Emancipation in Corinth', p. 221.

100. Callahan, 'Emancipation in Corinth', p. 223.

restrictions on those without this opportunity'.[101] And C.J. Roetzel, in response to Callahan, has noted that in light of Paul's eschatological tone in 1 Corinthians 7 commanding believers to remain in the state they were called (7.24) because the time is short (7.31), Paul seems to suggest to the believers in Corinth to hold tight, deliverance is at hand. 'Moreover, if the purchase of freedom for brothers and sisters in Christ was so important, why was Paul not more explicit about it?'[102]

While Callahan has contributed to NT scholarship in a number of areas, it is his work on Paul's Epistle to Philemon for which he is best known. In 1993, he published 'Paul's Epistle to Philemon: Toward an Alternative *Argumentum*', which presented the main arguments from his doctoral dissertation.[103] Callahan argues that the fugitive slave hypothesis has some inherent problems, the most obvious being that the Epistle does not explicitly say that Onesimus was a runaway slave.[104]

Callahan's proposition is that Onesimus was not a runaway or, for that matter, even a slave. While he concedes that the term 'slave' (δοῦλος) is present, he finds the lack of the term 'master' (δεσπότης) and the fact that the names of Philemon and Onesimus are not conjoined in any possessive construction in the Letter damaging to the traditional theory.[105] Instead, he places the burden of establishing Onesimus as a slave on Paul's request in v. 16a that Onesimus be welcomed back by Philemon 'no longer as a slave but more than a slave'. Callahan, however, does not view this as sufficient evidence that Onesimus was a slave because the key term in the phrase, he argues, is the comparative particle 'as' (ὡς) which indicates a virtual rather than an actual state of affairs. Noting that the comparative also appears in v. 17a in reference to Paul, Callahan proposes that Philemon was to accept Onesimus's presence as if he were accepting the apostle himself. Thus, according to Callahan, Onesimus should not be characterized as a returning fugitive, but as a minister coming to Philemon's house church to minister in proxy for the imprisoned apostle.[106]

101. Antoinette Clark Wire, 'Response: Paul and Those outside Power', in R.A. Horsley (ed.), *Paul and Politics: Essays in Honor of Krister Stendahl.* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press, 2000), p. 225.

102. Calvin J. Roetzel, 'Response: How Anti-Imperial Was the Collection and How Emancipatory Was Paul's Project?', in R.A. Horsley (ed.), *Paul and Politics: Essays in Honor of Krister Stendahl* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press, 2000), p. 229.

103. Allen Dwight Callahan, 'Paul's Epistle to Philemon: Toward an Alternative *Argumentum*', *HTR* 86 (1993), pp. 357-76. See also his 'Brother Love', *Harvard Divinity Bulletin* 22 (1993), pp. 11-16.

104. Callahan, 'Paul's Epistle to Philemon', p. 358.

105. Callahan, 'Paul's Epistle to Philemon', p. 362.

106. Callahan, 'Paul's Epistle to Philemon', p. 376.

Callahan goes even further in his hypothesis by suggesting that the terms 'beloved brother' and the phrase 'both in the flesh and in the Lord' are more significant to Philemon and Onesimus because the words link them as not only as Christian brothers, but as kinsmen. The problem being addressed in Philemon, then, is not whether Onesimus was a real slave or even Philemon's brother, but that he was not Philemon's 'beloved brother'. Paul was writing a Letter to defuse a family quarrel that could possibly jeopardize the apostolic ministry provided through Onesimus. Callahan underpins his hypothesis with three arguments.

First, he notes that in antebellum North America the traditional interpretation of Philemon was not always accepted. And he is not the first to suggest that Onesimus and Philemon were actual brothers. He offers as an example John Gregg Fee, an abolitionist clergyman, who had suggested that Onesimus and Philemon were brothers in the true sense of the word:

> There is evidence in the Epistle that Onesimus was a natural brother to Philemon—a younger brother, bound to the elder. This was very common in that age. Paul calls him 'a beloved brother, especially to me, but how much more unto thee, both IN THE FLESH and in the Lord'…To Paul, Onesimus was a brother, especially or peculiarly beloved to the Lord—as a Christian—in a spiritual sense. To Philemon he was not only a brother specially beloved in the Lord, but also a brother specially beloved in the flesh. (And Paul knew from a previous acquaintance, this attachment and blood relationship.)[107]

Callahan also considers the incident quoted above involving the preaching of Charles Colcock Jones from Philemon to slaves and the rejection of that message by the slaves as evidence that 'the prevailing interpretation of Philemon is far from self-evident and beyond dispute in American biblical criticism and that the religion of proslavery apologists and not-so-cultured despisers, who on reasoned grounds called the traditional proslavery hermeneutic into question'.[108]

The second argument underpinning his argument is the lack of internal evidence to substantiate the traditional interpretation that Onesimus was a fugitive slave. In an attempt to discover the source of the fugitive slave hypothesis, Callahan traces it back to John Chrysostom. Because Paul's Letter to Philemon was often considered to be unimpressive and lacking in any particular doctrinal significance, many early commentators thought it to be of little if any value. Chrysostom, however, not only insisted on the importance of the Letter but also provided an innovative interpretation. Since slavery was an important issue during his time, and the

107. As quoted in Callahan, 'Paul's Epistle to Philemon', p. 364. See John Gregg Fee, *An Anti-Slavery Manual* (repr.; New York: Arno Press, 1969 [1848]), p. 112.

108. Callahan, 'Paul's Epistle to Philemon', p. 365.

position of some Christians was too radical for him, Chrysostom used the Epistle to dispel the disestablishmentarian reputation of the Christianity of his day with respect to slaves. 'Apparently a Christian anti-slavery wing was wresting slaves away from their masters.'[109] After examining Chrysostom's statements on Philemon, Callahan concludes: 'it is clear that the historical reconstruction of the life situation of Philemon as Paul's appeal on behalf of a fugitive slave can be traced back to the imaginative and ingenious hypothesis of John Chrysostom… Neither the initial hypothesis nor its later developments, however, are rooted in any historical evidence. Nor is there any indication that anyone before Chrysostom had read the Letter as he did.'[110] This, Callahan contends, warrants the proposition of an alternative hypothesis.

The third argument Callahan makes in favor of his alternative hypothesis is based on Orlando Patterson's depiction of slavery as a form of social death.[111] Noting that natal alienation was the lot of every slave, he contends that this has a bearing on this situation between Onesimus and Philemon. Paul is not summoning the figure of a literal slave but the antitype of the blood relative. Slavery was the antithesis to fraternity.

> When Paul exhorted Philemon to receive Onesimus no longer as a slave, he was therefore commanding the former to desist in treating the latter as though he were beyond the pale of fraternal entitlements to love, honor and respect… Paul insisted on this point because Onesimus is Philemon's own brother, both by blood (ἐν σαρκί) and by faith (ἐν κυρίῳ). In this short, diplomatic Epistle Paul attempted deftly to heal a rift not between errant slave and irate master, but between estranged Christian brothers.[112]

Callahan's alternative hypothesis has attracted much attention but few adherents.[113] Margaret Mitchell was the first to respond by accusing Callahan of not accurately representing Chrysostom.[114] 'The evidence Callahan adduces in support of his contention that Chrysostom's interpretation

109. Callahan, 'Paul's Epistle to Philemon', p. 367.

110. Callahan, 'Paul's Epistle to Philemon', p. 368.

111. Orlando Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death: A Comparative Study* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1982).

112. Callahan, 'Paul's Epistle to Philemon', p. 371. Callahan restated these arguments in a commentary, *Embassy of Onesimus: The Letter of Paul to Philemon* (Valley Forge, PA: Trinity, 1997). While the material in the commentary is substantially the same as his earlier article, there are some additions including two excursuses.

113. J.A. Fitzmyer, *The Letter to Philemon* (AB, 34c; Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 2000), pp. 19-20; J.A.D. Weima, review of *Embassy of Onesimus: The Letter of Paul to Philemon* (Valley Forge, PA: Trinity, 1997), by Allen Dwight Callahan, in *CTJ* 33 (1998), pp. 238-39.

114. Margaret M. Mitchell, 'John Chrysostom on Philemon: A Second Look', *HTR* 88 (1995), pp. 135-48.

was novel and tentative, therefore, is untenable for it is based upon a misreading of a single passage'.[115] J.A. Harrill echoed concerns similar to Mitchell's in noting that his use of patristic sources is questionable. Harrill also expressed doubts about Callahan's philology of ὡς as indicating a virtual rather than an actual state of affairs.[116] J.G. Nordling's critique goes to the heart of Callahan's interpretation by pointing out that 'brother' (ἀδελφός) is just as indeterminate a word in the Pauline corpus as 'slave' (δοῦλος). In fact, 'brother' occurs so frequently in the NT, Nordling argues, that the more expected understanding of the term would be fellow Christian rather than natural brother.[117]

Callahan was a contributing editor to the *Semeia* 83/84 volume *Slavery in Text and Interpretation* (1998).[118] In his essay 'Brother Saul: An Ambivalent Witness to Freedom', he presents an outline of the reception history of Paul's Letters among African Americans. Although he argues that, in spite of the history of tension, most African-American scholars do not reject Paul or even the disputed Epistles, he acknowledges that most are partial to the Paul of Acts rather than the Paul of the Epistles.[119] This is demonstrated through the spirituals and even in Martin Luther King's 'Letter to America' which betrays a preference for the Paul of Acts.[120] Callahan demonstrates that, in spite of the discomfort that many African Americans may feel about Paul, and, in particular, his statements on slavery, there has been, for the most part, a determination to engage the apostle.

Overall, Callahan's contributions to the discussion of Paul and slavery represent an attempt to understand the apostle within the historical framework of both the first century and the modern African-American context. His rereading of Paul is generally a reaction against how Paul has been misunderstood and misrepresented in the past. Unlike many of his colleagues, he does not jettison those Letters whose Pauline authenticity is questionable. His approach seems to be more concerned with presenting a canonical Paul that is acceptable and useful to the African-American community. It is clear from his work that he has taken seriously the task of engaging the so-called apostle of freedom in the context of the traditional tension that many black Americans feel in relation to Paul.

115. Mitchell, 'John Chrysostom on Philemon', p. 140.

116. J.A. Harrill, review of *Embassy of Onesimus: The Letter of Paul to Philemon* (Valley Forge, PA: Trinity, 1997), by Allen Dwight Callahan, in *CBQ* 60 (1998), p. 758.

117. John G. Nordling, review of *Embassy of Onesimus: The Letter of Paul to Philemon* (Valley Forge, PA: Trinity, 1997), by Allen Dwight Callahan, in *CTQ* 64 (2000), p. 251.

118. See in particular: 'Brother Saul: An Ambivalent Witness to Freedom', pp. 235-50.

119. Callahan, 'Brother Saul', p. 244.

120. Callahan, 'Brother Saul', p. 245.

Brad Ronnell Braxton

The debate among NT scholars surrounding Paul's statements about slavery in 1 Cor. 7.21-23 is ongoing. The importance of this passage has not been lost on African-American scholars as evidenced above by the contributions of Haynes and Jones, each of whom gave a different interpretation a little over 200 years apart. But B.R. Braxton's *The Tyranny of Resolution: 1 Corinthians 7.17-24* (2000)[121] represents the most sustained examination from an African-American perspective.

Unlike many of his predecessors, Braxton's approach is delineated by his intentional avoidance of solving many of the exegetical ambiguities resident in this passage. He argues that those who have examined it previously claimed to resolve the ambiguities but actually created a form of exegetical tyranny by making the text subservient to preconceived notions. Instead he contends that the passage is intentionally ambiguous.[122] In an exegetical overview of the passage, Braxton attempts to show that the conclusions of previous studies have unnecessarily resolved many of the inherent ambiguities. These ambiguities, according to Braxton, are not only linguistic but also social and cultural. He rejects the suggestion that Paul was promoting a status quo approach to individual social positions as a result of the divine call. Paul was not, according to Braxton, condemning the notion of change in social status but was condemning change of status as a pre-condition of the call. Paul rejected social change as a requirement to be 'in Christ'. Examining 1 Corinthians 7 as a whole, he challenges the conclusion that Paul's comments on slavery and circumcision are merely illustrations intended to support his advice to the Corinthians. Instead Braxton views them as an important aspect of Paul's treatise on the meaning of 'calling'. The ambiguities in the passage, Braxton suggests, may be a result of Paul's own attempt to workout the social and cultural implications of what it means to be 'in Christ'. The social tensions between a slave and master would easily have spilled over into the church, especially if it was meeting in the master's home.[123] Paul's advice to slaves is not to allow their social situation to adversely affect their experience in the church. Paul does allow for the possibility of social change for a slave, but he is not clear about his position on manumission. The elliptical phrase μᾶλλον χρῆσαι in v. 21 is, according to Braxton, purposely ambiguous because Paul does not want to recommend anything specific concerning slavery and manumission in the context of the church. Braxton concludes

121. Brad Ronnell Braxton, *The Tyranny of Resolution: 1 Corinthians 7.17-24* (SBLDS, 18; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2000).

122. Braxton, *The Tyranny of Resolution*, p. 1.

123. Braxton, *The Tyranny of Resolution*, p. 223.

that it is impossible to discover from the passage exactly what Paul thought on this matter. Ambiguity was how Paul chose to deal with the problem.[124]

Having made a case for the passage's inherent ambiguities, Braxton shifts away from exegesis and historical comparisons to an examination of how ideology influences interpretation. He demonstrates how nineteenth-century abolitionist and pro-slavery advocates used (or did not use) this passage to support their position. Braxton provides extensive quotes that show how advocates of the various positions understood the passage. He concludes that ideological presuppositions of the interpreters influenced their exegesis of the passage.[125] Braxton's response is to suggest an approach that considers the social and historical aspects of the text but does not assume that all ambiguities can be solved. He argues that some of the presuppositions of modern interpreters have led to the belief that ambiguities can be rectified through a more rigorous application of the historical-critical method. Instead, he suggests that acceptance of ambiguity as an original feature opens up new ways to view the passage and the apostle Paul.

A second contribution by Braxton is *No Longer Slaves: Galatians and African American Experience* (2002).[126] The purpose of this volume is to promote a reader response/liberation hermeneutic reading of Galatians among African Americans. In many ways, it is a commentary on Galatians that focuses on issues of race and social justice in the context of black America. The African-American heritage of slavery, Braxton says, provides an insight for this type of hermeneutic.[127]

Of particular interest are Braxton's comments on the baptismal formula in Gal. 3.28. He contends that many scholars have wrongly assumed that Paul's statements about the disintegration of ethnic, social and gender roles is only an eschatological ideal. The crisis over ethnicity in the Galatian church would not have served Paul's purpose. 'With the defection of his converts looming on the horizon it is unlikely that Paul would resort to speculations about the eschatological harmony that Christ would establish. Paul's concern in Gal. 3 is for *present* harmony.'[128]

The second misconception that Braxton responds to is the idea that 3.28 implies or entails the absence of social distinctions.

124. Braxton, *The Tyranny of Resolution*, p. 228.

125. Braxton, *The Tyranny of Resolution*, pp. 263, 270.

126. Brad Ronnell Braxton, *No Longer Slaves: Galatians and African American Experience* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2002).

127. Braxton, *No Longer Slaves*, p. 16.

128. Braxton, *No Longer Slaves*, p. 93.

> Proponents of this view contend that unity in the Church is achieved through abolishing social distinctions and replacing them with amalgamated Christian identity. If Paul's declaration in 3.28 was meant to depict the abolishing of social distinctions he would have effectively undercut the force of his whole argument. Paul's entire evangelistic campaign was designed to bring the Gentiles into the Church as Gentiles. In other words, Paul preached a law-free gospel among Gentiles in order to insure ethnic diversity in the Church.[129]

Such an interpretation of Paul, Braxton suggests, helps to inform an approach to more equitable race relations in the United States and the Christian church. Rather than obliterate ethnic diversity, Galatians encourages the maintenance of such cultural distinctions.

Closing Comments

It is apparent that the tension that has long existed between the Apostle Paul and African Americans has yet to dissipate completely. The apostle of freedom has been tainted by the experiences of slavery and racism in North America. Added to this is the more than five hundred years of Eurocentric biblical interpretation. Whether or not the blame for this can be laid at the apostle's feet is moot. The fact is that the appeals to Pauline Epistles as an authority for the enslavement, segregation, and active disenfranchisement of an entire race has made it difficult for those who have been dominated by a hegemonic majority to see past such abuses. Paul has been and still remains an enigma for many black Americans.

The problem, however, has not been one that African Americans, scholars and laypersons alike, have avoided. Granted, some like Thurman's grandmother and Albert Cleage chose to reject Paul as a biblical personage who was either of no value to the black community or, worse yet, a complete fraud in regard to the original gospel message of Jesus. But, like many other NT scholars, African Americans have sought to try and reconcile Paul's words with the teachings of Jesus and Paul's gospel of freedom with his problematic statements about slavery. Haynes took the more philosophical approach to understanding Paul but still suggested that freedom was possible so long as it was obtained by legal means. Thurman attempted to understand Paul within the latter's position as a Roman citizen as a way to explain his apparently proslavery remarks. Thomas took into consideration the eschatological tone of Paul's Letters and concluded that instructions about slaves represented a practical, rather than theological, solution. Jones read Paul as a first-century abolitionist who was actively undermining the institution of slavery, a conclusion that is

129. Braxton, *No Longer Slaves*, p. 94.

contrary to Thurman's portrayal of Paul as a good Roman citizen. Callahan is not as radical as Jones, but his suggestion that Paul encourages ecclesial manumission is still closer to abolitionism than some would accept. Others like Martin deem the deutero-Pauline and the Pastoral Epistles to be the source for proslavery sentiments and an aberration of the original gospel message preached by Jesus and Paul. The true authors of these pseudonymous Letters were promoters of the status quo power structures in the Greco-Roman world and did not represent the original social vision of Christianity.

While African-American scholarship has been actively and increasingly engaging the problem of Paul and slavery, there does not yet exist anything that resembles a consensus, nor may there ever be. An extremely important contribution that the ongoing dialogue has produced, however, is a reading of Paul from underneath. African-American and Womanist perspectives on Paul have helped bring out an appreciation of Paul's Letters at the point of reception. Traditionally, Eurocentric interpretations have focused on the Letters at their point of delivery and have asked questions about what Paul's intended meaning might have been. But with the development of ideological criticism, African-American scholars have begun to ask how Paul's readers, particularly slaves, would have understood the admonitions to slaves. As Sheila Briggs has pointed out, it would have been difficult for enslaved persons to identify with Paul's metaphor of slavery since most of them, unlike Christ in Phil. 2.6-11, did not enslave themselves voluntarily and had no chance of ever gaining freedom in a true sense of the word. The advantage of such a reading not only sheds light on a portion of Paul's audience that is usually neglected, but it also helps to challenge interpretive presuppositions. As Martin has pointed out, the assumption that there is some type of culpability on the part of Onesimus is based on Onesimus's status as a slave and assumes that slaves are inherently bankrupt. But a reading of Paul from the perspective of the oppressed person creates a whole new set of questions and interpretations.

One thing that the above contributions clearly demonstrate is that for African Americans there can be no separation between Paul and slavery and the legacy of slavery and racism in North America. There was no conceptual difference between the experiences of a first-century slave and a nineteenth-century slave. Both were persons who were enslaved and dominated. Therefore, it is inevitable that African-American scholars are going to try and make sense of their experiences and that of their ancestors by reading the NT in a way that is distinctly different from the dominant white American population. Thus, the contributions of Martin, Callahan and Braxton are important in their attempt to understand Paul in two

contexts, in the context of the first-century Roman Empire and the context of the nineteenth-century pre- and post-civil war America. The fact that the first-century words of Paul were used to control the bodies and destinies of nineteenth-century blacks means that both periods of slavery have become inextricably intertwined.

The situation might be summed up in this way: Eurocentric scholarship has had two hundred years during which it controlled the interpretation of Paul and slavery. African-American scholarship, on the other hand, has only recently begun to tackle the problem in earnest. The tension that black Americans have felt in relation to Paul has a long history. But the gains in understanding that tension and addressing its source and its remedy have been made more rapidly.

Chapter 3

Paul and the Metaphor of Slavery

When commenting on Paul's self-identification as a slave of Christ in Rom. 1.1, Origen grappled with the question why the apostle would describe himself as a slave when later in the Epistle he claims that all those who are in Christ have not received a sprit of slavery but of adoption as sons. Origen's solution to this riddle was that Paul understood marriage as a form of slavery and that his self-identification in Rom. 1.1 is evidence that Paul had a wife when he was called to be an apostle.[1] While Origen's attempt to unravel Paul's slavery metaphors would certainly not be accepted in scholarly circles today, it serve as an example of one of the earliest attempts to understand the meaning of the metaphor and its use in the NT. The metaphors prove to be difficult because the language has a complex relationship with the institution of slavery. Terms that are used to address situations between slaves and masters are also used to explain aspects of early Christian theology. The Pauline Epistles employ the slavery terminology more often in the construction of theology than in actual address of the institution of slavery. As noted above, a survey of the undisputed Epistles reveals that 1 Cor. 7.21-23 and the Letter to Philemon are the only instances in which Paul clearly addresses an aspect of institutional slavery.[2] Of particular interest to NT scholars has been Paul's self-identification as a slave of Christ. This phrase appears three times as a title for Paul, twice within an opening greeting (Rom. 1.1; Phil. 1.1) and once as part of a personal defense (Gal. 1.10).[3]

1. Origen, *Comm. in Rom.* 1 (*PG* 14.461).

2. This assumes the traditional interpretation of Philemon, which regards Onesimus as slave. It does not take into account the 'baptismal formulas' that mention slaves but are not actually addressing the institution as such (1 Cor. 12.13; Gal. 3.28).

3. The phrase also appears in 1 Cor. 7.22; Eph. 6.6; Col. 4.12. A variation, δοῦλος θεοῦ, is found in Tit. 1.1. The term σύνδουλος in Colossians 1.7 and 4.7 may also be interpreted with the same meaning as δοῦλος Χριστοῦ. In addition to these can be added the verb δουλοω ('serve as a slave'), which on five occasions has Christ as its object, suggesting that those who fulfill this service are slaves of Christ: Rom. 12.11; 14.18; 16.18; Eph. 6.7; and Phil. 2.22 in the context of 2.21. The same verb along with its cognate δουλεύω also serves the same function with God as its object in 1 Thess 1.9 and Rom. 6.22.

What follows is a two-part survey of the various investigations into Paul's use of slavery metaphors, with a specific focus on his self-designation as a slave of Christ. The first part provides an overview of NT scholarship from the late nineteenth century till the 1980s. The second part focuses on five monographs and an article that appeared at the dawn of the new millennium.

Slave of Christ: The Source of Paul's Metaphor

Interpretation of the 'slave of Christ' designation has commonly pursued two possibilities: (1) the phrase, an honorific title found in the LXX, was borrowed by Paul from stories about the patriarchs, Moses, David and the prophets; (2) the phrase was a symbolic adoption taken from Greco-Roman slavery and illustrates that Paul is in a similar relationship with Christ.

M.R. Vincent advocated the first alternative at the close of the nineteenth century (1897) and suggested that for Paul the phrase carried thoughts of 'cheerful and willing service; dependence upon Christ; of ownership by Christ and identification with Christ in his assuming the form of a bond servant'. He contends that Paul had 'quietly…slipped himself into the place of the Prophets and leaders of the Old Covenant' and substituted the name of Christ for Jehovah.[4] Vincent did not explain the phrase in relation to a Greco-Roman context but instead restricted himself to a Jewish background. Similar to Vincent are the conclusions of other NT commentators across the twentieth century including C.K. Barrett,[5] C.E.B. Cranfield,[6] E. Käsemann[7] and L. Morris.[8] J.D.G. Dunn also recognizes the background as Jewish, but does not consider the title so much honorific as indicative of dedication. He concludes that to be a slave of Christ does not necessarily imply that Paul has placed himself in line with the great figures of Israel. Rather, the phrase expresses Paul's belonging to and dependence upon Christ in the same exclusive and unconditional way that ancient Israel had done in relation to God.[9]

4. Vincent, *Philippians and Philemon*, p. 3.
5. C.K. Barrett, *The Epistle to the Romans* (BNTC; London: A. & C. Black, 2nd edn, 1962), pp. 15-16.
6. C.E.B Cranfield, *Romans* (ICC; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1975), p. 50: 'For the Greek in the classical tradition it was well-nigh impossible to use a word of the *doulos* group without some feeling of abhorrence'.
7. Ernst Käsemann, *Commentary on Romans* (trans. G.W. Bromiley; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980), p. 5.
8. Leon Morris, *The Epistle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), p. 37.
9. J.D.G. Dunn, *Romans* (WBC, 38a; Dallas: Word Books, 1988), pp. 8-9.

Other scholars, however, have favored the Greco-Roman background. P.T. O'Brien, for instance, concludes that the phrase has no LXX (i.e. Jewish) background and that it was used to emphasize that Paul was at the 'master's disposal'.[10] G.F. Hawthorne acknowledges the possibility of a LXX background but concludes that if one must choose between two formative environments, the Greco-Roman is the more plausible choice.[11] Gordon Fee also opts for a Greco-Roman background based on considerations of what the original reader would have understood. However, he also recognizes that an honorific motif from the LXX lies somewhere in the background. Fee suggests that a double connotation may be possible.[12]

From these few examples it is evident that the phrase 'slave of Christ' has been of interest to exegetes for some time as have many other aspects of Paul's metaphorical usage of slavery terms. But rarely is there a consensus on how to understand the metaphor. The chief difficulty has been determining against what background the metaphor of slavery should be should interpreted and understood. The contrast between the Jewish and Greco-Roman backgrounds can easily lead toward two opposite conclusions. What follows is a chronological review of how opinions in scholarship have shifted between these two possible backgrounds and how scholarship has attempted to understand what Paul meant when he called himself a slave of Christ.

As noted in Chapter 1, Adolf Deissmann (1908) linked NT slavery metaphors to the Delphic manumission inscriptions. The slaves listed in the inscriptions were purchased by a divinity (usually Apollo) who made them slaves of the god. The fact that the slave was not really bound to the god, but was in fact free, led Deissmann to the conclusion that the sale was fictitious. Nevertheless, the former slave was considered to be a slave of the god. Deissmann suggests that this ritual of sacral manumission was the background for Paul's statements when he declared that people had formerly been slaves of sin, the law, men and death, but now were made free by Christ and, consequently, his slaves.[13] Similarly, when considering Paul's theology of redemption, Deissmann uses manumission documents from among the Oxyrhynchus papyri that also illustrated sacral manumission.[14] The act of being redeemed or purchased by Christ led Deissmann to claim that in 1 Cor. 6.20 and 7.23 Paul was 'using the very formula of

10. Peter T. O'Brien, *The Epistle to the Philippians* (NIGTC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans 1991), p. 45.

11. Gerald F. Hawthorne, *Philippians* (WBC, 43; Waco: Word Books, 1983), p. 5.

12. Gordon Fee, *Paul's Letter to the Philippians* (NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans 1995), p. 63.

13. Deissmann, *Light from the Ancient East*, pp. 322-23.

14. Deissmann, *Light from the Ancient East*, pp. 327-28.

the records'. And of Gal. 5.13, Deissmann noted that 'in these words of St Paul we have literally the other formula of the records'.[15]

In addition to suggesting a possible source for Paul's metaphor, Deissmann also posited how it may have been heard and understood by those more familiar with the language of the Imperial household. 'Though not designed originally as a formula of contrast to the cult of Caesar, it certainly aroused sensations of contrast when heard beside the frequent title of "Slave of the Emperor":—there were Imperial slaves all over the world.'[16] Thus while the metaphor may have had its origins in the practice of sacral manumission, Deissmann believes it also would have been heard as a challenge to the prevailing Imperial ideology.

Deissmann's thesis received wide acceptance for quite some time and is still picked up by some scholars who are not familiar with the literature relating to slavery in the NT.[17] But its focus on inscriptions and Greco-Roman backgrounds was not completely satisfactory to some and other alternatives were subsequently offered.

In 1928, M.D.R. Willink asked whether the phrase 'slave of Jesus Christ' was a title of humility or honor. He concluded that it could not be a title of humility since such a title would be found more often in the NT. Instead, he suggests that it was an honorific title and that the background for Paul's self-identification could be located in the *Ebed-Yahweh* theme associated with the history of Israel.[18] In general, Israel was identified as God's slaves. During times of humiliation and distress, God provided Israel with special protection, which in turn made them God's slaves. More frequently, however, the phrase was 'restricted to a few outstanding men occupying pivotal positions at turning points in history'.[19] The greatest of all these 'men of action' was the slave in Isaiah 40–55 whose future actions would be epoch making. Willink suggests that this setting in the Hebrew Bible formed a part of the background of Paul's title.

> If, then, St Paul and his fellows in confessing Jesus as Lord gave Him the position of Yahweh, in calling themselves 'slaves of Jesus Christ' they claimed a place in the succession of 'slaves of the Lord' with Moses, David and the prophets, as men whom God was using at a turning point in His purpose for the world. It was a claim to be used sparingly.

15. Deissmann, *Light from the Ancient East*, p. 324.
16. Deissmann, *Light from the Ancient East*, p. 376.
17. See, for instance, David J. Williams, *Paul's Metaphors: Their Context and Character* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1999), pp. 121-23.
18. M.D.R. Willink, 'Paul, a Slave of Jesus Christ', *Theology* 16 (1928), pp. 46-47.
19. Willink, 'Paul, a Slave of Jesus Christ', p. 47.

But this honorific background was only a part. Willink argues that familiarity with the administrative duties of Imperial slaves in ancient Rome may also have influenced Paul. Paul's readers may have associated his self-designation as a slave with the type of administration commonly undertaken by Imperial slaves. This in turn would have led them to understand Paul as an administrator on God's behalf. Thus, when Paul identifies himself as a slave of Christ he is 'laying claim to a special place not only in the history of God's dealings with the world, but in the administration of His Church'.[20]

Willink's hypothesis appealed to both the Jewish and the Greco-Roman backgrounds and influenced other scholars who later chose to explain the expression on such a basis. Unfortunately, the brevity of Willink's contribution (less than two pages) makes it difficult to evaluate properly, and it has received meager attention across the years. In general, he examines broad parallel images without offering any specific comparisons. Most of his effort is focused on the Jewish background, but his restriction of the phrase to a few 'men of action' seems to overlook the possibility that the motif was more widespread. Moreover, his identification of the Isaian slave of God as the 'greatest example' implies that the motif reached a climax in the Isaian literature and thus diminishes the need to explore the wider Jewish context. Even so, he is representative of an approach later adopted by a number of scholars.

In his article, 'Zur Bedeutung von *doulos* bei Paulus', Gerhard Sass (1941) also contends for a Jewish background to Paul's 'slave of Christ' title by concluding that it was derived from the LXX.[21] Examining the usage of δοῦλος in the LXX, Sass determined that the term underwent an etymological shift through which it became distinguished from the notion of slavery as a restrictive bondage. This separation from the institution itself made room for the development of a meaning that was theological in nature and denoted an idea of instrumentality rather than servitude. In this new sphere of meaning, people were said to be chosen 'instruments' in God's dealings in history. Sass posits that Paul adapted this motif from the LXX, and, once God was replaced with Christ, Paul became the 'instrument' of Christ. Thus, when Paul identified himself as a slave of Christ, it was not in the sphere of unconditional subjection and servitude; rather, the designation should be understood as an honorific title given to only a few individuals entrusted by God with a special task.[22]

20. Willink, 'Paul, a Slave of Jesus Christ', p. 47.
21. Gerhard Sass, 'Zur Bedeutung von *doulos* bei Paulus', *ZNW* 40 (1941), pp. 24-32.
22. Sass, 'Zur Bedeutung von *doulos* bei Paulus', pp. 31-32.

Sass's contribution is valuable because it demonstrates that language of enslavement did not necessarily indicate servitude.[23] Problematic, nonetheless, is the limited scope of his approach. By focusing on only particular individuals in the LXX (i.e., Moses, the prophets, Cyrus), Sass overlooks the possibility that a more widespread motif was at work. His argument that 'slave of God' was an honorific title suggests that these individuals are being located in an elevated position rather than being considered as humble 'instruments' chosen by God. Moreover, the proposal that Paul replaced 'God' with 'Christ' seemed to imply that Christ, and Christ's 'instruments' at work in the church, were the apex of a developing tradition that used Jewish notions of slavery merely as a catalyst.

In 1948, W.L. Westermann reaffirmed and expanded upon Deissmann's thesis.[24] Although Westermann commends Deissmann for suggesting that the formula of the Delphic manumission inscriptions might have informed Paul's slavery metaphors, he considers it to have been too narrowly applied. Rather than view the process as a fictitious sale, Westermann argues that 'it was clearly an entitlement sale'.[25]

Westermann supports his assertion by examining more closely the Delphi inscriptions and the manumission formulas contained therein. He observes that there were two types of formulas. The first formula, which makes up three quarters of the more than one thousand inscriptions, grants the slave outright freedom with no restrictions or any residual obligations to the former master. The remaining inscriptions were those in which the slave agreed to continue to work under contract for his former owner. This form of continued indentured servitude was known as *paramone*. The role of the god in all of these proceedings, Westermann seems to suggest, is more as an arbiter between slave and master rather than owner of the slave.

> Whether the Delphic grants of freedom by trust sale to the god were without restrictions or were accompanied by continuing services (*paramone*) of the freedman, made not the slightest difference in one essential feature. In both types the sale to the god was often declared to be 'for freedom'. The work agreement, the indenture for service of the freedman, became a part of the price of liberty paid by him as a former slave… The fact is that the slave who was transferred to the god Apollo by dedication or by trust sale was free by virtue of the entrustment. This is implicit both in the documents

23. Sass was followed by W.H. Ollrog, *Paulus und seine Mitarbeiter* (WMANT, 50; Neukirchen–Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1979), pp. 75-76, 184 n. 108.

24. W.L. Westermann, 'The Freedman and the Slaves of God', *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 92 (1948), pp. 56-64.

25. Westermann, 'The Freedman and the Slaves of God', p. 55. Westermann also provided a brief critique of Sass's contribution in which he claims that while the thesis may work in the Semitic languages, it does not carry over into the Greek (p. 56).

> without indenture and in those with it; but it is not only suggested. It is definitely stated.[26]

It is this context of *paramone* that Westermann suggests was the source of Paul's slavery metaphors. Assuming that Paul was familiar with the concept of *paramone*, it would seem that his understanding of an individual being freed from sin only then to be enslaved by Christ would have been informed by such a practice.[27] Thus conversion and obligation to Christ was a form of *paramone*. As an example of this in Paul, Westermann offers 1 Cor. 7.22-24.

> Here are all of the main features of the *paramone* of the Delphic inscriptions. The general service contract is the arrangement of the new convert with the Lord. Free or slave he has engaged himself to do slave or servant duties. He had been bought with a price. Hundreds of times in the Delphic inscriptions the price is given. In both cases the technical Greek word *timé* is the same. To Paul the price was Christ's sacrifice. Whether free or slave the man thus bought was spiritually free, but bought by his agreement with the Lord.[28]

Westermann brought more clarity to the Delphic inscriptions as a possible background to Paul's metaphor. But his challenge of Deissmann's understanding of a 'fictitious sale' does not seem to have added much to the debate. Nevertheless, his contribution demonstrates the enduring nature of Deissmann's hypothesis forty years after it was first suggested.

The prominence of Deissmann's hypothesis was challenged in 1957 by Franz Bömer in his *Untersuchungen über die Religion der Sklaven in Griechenland und Rom*.[29] Bömer demonstrates that mistaken interpretations and harmonization of the Delphic inscriptions on the part of Deissmann, in addition to the presence of incompatible terminology between the inscriptions and Paul, render the parallels overstated.[30] For instance, Deissmann's starting point for comparing the inscriptions with Paul was the claim that Christians had been 'bought (ἀγοράζεσθαι) for a price (τιμή)'. But as Bömer points out, ἀγοράζειν does not appear in the sacral manumission formulas. Moreover, the term used by the inscriptions, πρίασθαι, does not occur in the NT. As a result of these criticisms by Bömer, comparisons of sacral manumission practices to NT slavery images have, for the most part,

26. Westermann, 'The Freedman and the Slaves of God', p. 58.
27. Westermann, 'The Freedman and the Slaves of God', p. 60.
28. Westermann, 'The Freedman and the Slaves of God', p. 61.
29. Franz Bömer, *Untersuchungen über die Religion der Sklaven in Griechenland und Rom* (4 vols.; Wiesbaden: F. Steiner, 1958–63).
30. Bömer remarked: 'Delphi ist mit weitem Abstand der Ort, der für die sakrale Freilassung die grösste Bedeutung besitzt' (II, p. 76 n. 271). See also Bartchy, *ΜΑΛΛΟΝ ΧΡΗΣΑΙ*, pp. 121-25.

been abandoned.[31] Bömer, on the other hand, suggests that a more probable source might be found in a Near Eastern background rather than Greco-Roman.

Similar to Bömer, Edwin Yamauchi (1966) suggests a background for the Pauline metaphors that was wider than the Hebrew Bible and located in the broader usage of slavery language in the Ancient Near East.[32] Examining various texts and inscriptions, he demonstrates that the self-identifying title 'slave of god' was commonly used among several people groups (predominantly Semitic). Often coloring the phrase's meaning was a particular type of institutional slavery. The ancients, however, did not regard this notion of slavery as repulsive, but as a common way of identifying with the god(s) they worshipped. Similar to Willink and Sass, Yamauchi concludes that the title was often used to describe figures of exceptional status. In the case of Paul and the NT, the 'slave of Christ' title is said to have drawn upon this common ANE heritage of identifying oneself as the slave of a god(s) and was further shaped by the institution of Greco-Roman slavery current in the first century. Slave of Christ, Yamauchi concludes, was an honorific title designating the humility and subjection of a slave to a sovereign.[33]

In 1968, Kenneth C. Russell published his PhD thesis, *Slavery as Reality and Metaphor in Pauline Letters*, in which he offered the first comprehensive examination of slavery metaphors in the Bible. Russell determined that the notions of slavery to God and to Christ could be traced back to a tradition that developed within the framework of Israelite history and slavery institutions.[34] He concludes that the slavery to God motif was influenced by the tradition of Israel's bondage in Egypt. The idea that God had become a special protector of Israel and that the Israelites in turn were God's slaves reflected ancient royal court language in which subjects of the king were often called slaves. This royal ideology, in the context of the language and motif of slavery, was transferred to the people of

31. S.R. Llewelyn, 'The Slave of God (Rom. 6.22) and Sacral Manumission', in S.R. Llewelyn (ed.), *New Documents Illustrating Early Christianity* (Sydney, Australia: The Ancient History Document Research Centre [Macquarie University], 1992), VI, pp. 70-81.

32. Edwin Yamauchi, 'Slaves of God', *Bulletin of the Evangelical Theology Society* (1966), pp. 31-49.

33. Yamauchi, 'Slaves of God', p. 48.

34. Kenneth C. Russell, *Slavery as Reality and Metaphor in Pauline Letters* (PhD diss., Pontifical University, Rome, 1968). Unfortunately Russell only published the second half of his dissertation, which consists of his examination of the NT but not the Hebrew Bible and other Jewish literature. Special thanks are offered to the Pontifical University Library, which allowed me to examine the unpublished section of Russell's thesis while my wife and I were in Rome celebrating our tenth wedding anniversary.

Israel as a whole as well as to select individuals. The theme reached its zenith within the *Ebed-Yahweh* of Isaiah who, though humiliated and defeated, persevered in doing God's will and was subsequently raised to glory.[35] Russell went on to provide a cursory examination of the Apocrypha, Pseudepigrapha, Dead Sea Scrolls, and Rabbinic literature. In each of these bodies of literature he finds little that differed from the Hebrew Bible and concludes that the Isaian servant tradition, instead of being recast in new ways, remained 'vigorous and alive'.[36]

Russell contends that Paul transferred the servant theme, including the notions of suffering and humiliation, to Christ, himself, and others.[37] On this basis Russell concludes that Paul and others were understood to be sharing in the humiliation and suffering of Christ, who was regarded as the ultimate example and fulfillment of Isaian servanthood. Combined with this Jewish tradition were the real images of institutional slavery that would have influenced the way slavery language in the NT was understood. The title of 'slave', Russell argues, never became purely honorific but worked in tandem with its secular antitype as a description of 'a fundamental condition of complete dedication to the divine will'.[38]

Russell represented a significant attempt to gain a wider understanding of the slave of God motif. His examination of numerous Jewish sources placed him in a position to sketch a picture of a developing tradition. Yet, even with such a broad approach Russell was too narrowly focused. Initially he avoided this narrowness by examining slavery in a variety of aspects and not just those individuals who were identified by God as 'my slaves'. But his choice to regard the Isaian servant as the height of the motif's expression and as the governing framework for all subsequent slavery metaphors suggests otherwise. The reader is left suspecting that Russell started with a presupposition that Christ was the final development of the suffering servant tradition and then worked backwards. His assertion that this is how Paul arrived at his understanding of slavery to Christ only seems to confirm that suspicion.[39]

Although many scholars were beginning to focus on a Near Eastern background as a source for Paul's metaphors, there were many who continued to gravitate towards the Greco-Roman institution as a possible source. Francis Lyall (1984)[40] is representative of many who concluded that Paul had neither sacral manumission nor the Hebrew Bible in mind when

35. Russell, *Slavery as Reality and Metaphor*, pp. 42-43 (unpublished section).
36. Russell, *Slavery as Reality and Metaphor*, pp. 52-55.
37. Russell, *Slavery as Reality and Metaphor*, pp. 19, 28, 34.
38. Russell, *Slavery as Reality and Metaphor*, p. 88.
39. Russell, *Slavery as Reality and Metaphor*, p. 28.
40. See the review of Lyall in Chapter 1.

he penned his metaphors. Unlike Sass, Bömer, Russell and Yamauchi, Lyall considers the background of Paul's slavery language in Romans to be the Greco-Roman institution from which Paul borrowed the imagery of the Roman legal system to illustrate his theological explanations. Since Paul's Epistle to the Romans was probably written in Corinth (a major slave market) and addressed to the capital of the Empire (the heart of Roman law), Lyall surmises that Paul would have naturally drawn his imagery from the cosmopolitan life around him.[41] Those who have followed a similar interpretive approach include C.K. Barrett (1962),[42] J.A. Fitzmyer (1993),[43] Peter Garnsey (1997),[44] W.A. Meeks (1983),[45] L.L. Morris (1988),[46] J.G. Nordling,[47] and W.G. Rollins (1978).[48] This position is somewhat tentatively adopted by J.D.G. Dunn who points out, however, that Paul's slavery metaphors are at times 'strained' and that the 'real life parallel is not entirely applicable' to the Greco-Roman setting (1988).[49]

Others have not been so convinced. In a discussion of the slavery metaphors in Romans 6, Ernst Käsemann (1980) tersely writes: 'There is nothing here to suggest the ancient custom of redeeming slaves'.[50] Bruce N. Kaye (1976) also questions the degree to which slave practices had influenced Paul and suggested that his usage of slavery terms was part of an interpretive trend in the Christian tradition that went back to Jesus and, ultimately, Israelite traditions.[51] Thus, while many have willingly accepted that Paul's metaphors were the product of his Greco-Roman environment, others have sought a background in Paul's Jewish heritage.

41. Lyall, *Slaves, Sons, Citizens*, pp. 23, 34, 36, 173. In particular, Lyall views the discussion of slavery in Rom. 6.16 as an allusion to the Greco-Roman practice of self-sale. Lyall concedes, however, that he cannot prove conclusively that Paul was using Roman law in all of his metaphors (p. 178).

42. Although Barrett only commits to the background as 'probably' and does not elaborate further (*Romans*, p. 131).

43. Fitzmyer, *Romans*, p. 449.

44. Peter Garnsey, 'Sons, Slaves—and Christians', in Beryl Rawson and Paul Weaver (eds.), *The Roman Family in Italy: Status, Sentiment, Space* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), pp. 101-21.

45. Wayne A. Meeks, *The First Urban Christians*: *The Social World of the Apostle Paul* (Yale University Press, 1983), pp. 20-23.

46. Morris, *Romans*, p. 261.

47. Nordling, 'Christ Leavens Culture', pp. 49-51.

48. Wayne G. Rollins, 'Greco-Roman Slave Terminology and Pauline Metaphors for Salvation', *SBLSP* 26 (1987), pp. 100-10.

49. Dunn also follows Meeks (*Romans*, pp. 341, 345, 347, 354).

50. Käsemann, *Romans*, p. 179.

51. Bruce N. Kaye, *The Thought Structure of Romans with Special Reference to Chapter 6* (Austin: Schola Press, 1979), pp. 129-32.

Recent Studies on Paul's Slavery Metaphors

While the above survey represents important contributions to the debate over Paul's slavery metaphors, the decades surrounding the beginning of the new millennium witnessed a number of substantial contributions. The remainder of this chapter will focus on the works by these scholars.

Dale B. Martin (1990)

One of the more influential works on Paul's slavery metaphors at the end of the twentieth century was Dale B. Martin's *Slavery as Salvation* (1990).[52] Martin's approach is significantly different from those of his predecessors. Rather than attempting to discover the origin of Paul's slavery metaphors he focuses on how the metaphor would have been understood by a reader/listener of Paul's Letters in a first-century context. Why did early Christianity accept the phrase 'slave of Christ' as a positive designation? What could be positively extrapolated from an institution that was brutally administered and robbed the individual of freedom?

In his study, Martin concludes that slavery and slave language meant different things to different people, that the entire system was rather ambiguous, and that it did not matter as much that one was a slave, but whose slave one was. If one was merely a slave in a mine or agricultural setting, then slavery was certainly *not* a positive experience. But slaves owned by an influential master were sometimes able to wield their own influence and power that they held by virtue of their position as a slave. Of particular interest were managerial slaves who controlled large households or businesses for their masters. These managerial slaves sometimes had the opportunity to move up the social ladder while still remaining slaves. This advancement in society was based upon the unique position of the managerial slave and the high status of the owner. Their path to success depended upon their participation in slavery. Martin suggests that the opportunity managerial slaves had for upward mobility might have served as an inspiration of hope for the lower classes. Consequently, while those of higher status would have held slavery in low esteem, lower-status society would have regarded it in a positive light.

Martin suggests that the dichotomy between how managerial slaves were perceived with that of other types of slaves provided an opportunity for some slaves to be upwardly mobile within society. Some of these upwardly mobile slaves were former imperial slaves who not only gained their freedom but were able to amass an enormous amount of wealth and

52. Dale. B. Martin, *Slavery as Salvation: The Metaphor of Slavery in Pauline Christianity* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990).

power. Others, like Epictetus, were not imperial slaves, but went on to become widely respected teachers and philosophers.[53] The combination of education and skills learned during slavery and the prospect of Roman citizenship at manumission meant that slavery was a conduit for upward mobility in the Roman Empire. 'For a select few, therefore, slavery could bring access to financial resources, citizenship, education, and the patronage of higher status persons.'[54]

One feature of Martin's methodology is his acknowledgment that all laws relating to slavery, and much of the literature that discusses slaves, were written from an aristocratic point of view. This literature reflected the opinions of slaveholders not the slaves. In order to understand how early Christians could have found a positive aspect of slavery, Martin portrays Greco-Roman slavery from a socio-historical perspective that focuses specifically on opinions of slavery that might be attributed to lower-class citizens. One way this is accomplished is by examining funerary inscriptions that detail how a slave may have felt about his master and his role as a slave.[55] Another avenue for determining the attitudes of slaves was through statements contained in Artemidorus's dream handbook, *Oneirocritica*, which Martin claims 'is a valuable source of attitudes of the lower strata of Greco-Roman society'.[56] While this book offers interpretations of slaves' dreams, Martin notes that there is a division within the handbook between ordinary slaves and managerial slaves. Through examination of some of the interpretations that Artemidorus gives to dreams experienced by slaves, Martin concludes:

> Artemidorus's handbook is more a source for social concept than for social 'reality'. In other words, it tells less about actual slave activity than about how persons within the society conceptualized slave life. But the handbook demonstrates that people in Greco-Roman society recognized the ambiguity of slave status and thought of slaves as occupying two different levels in society. People acknowledged the special social position of managerial slaves and their power and influence relative to society as a whole.[57]

Martin also uses literature which represented popular culture to help ascertain the way slaves were perceived. Romance novels and satirical literature contain portrayals of slaves that Martin suggests reveal how slaves were viewed in antiquity. One of the themes in this literature is the

53. Martin, *Slavery as Salvation*, p. 31.
54. Martin, *Slavery as Salvation*, p. 32.
55. Martin, *Slavery as Salvation*, p. 18.
56. Martin, *Slavery as Salvation*, p. 20.
57. Martin, *Slavery as Salvation*, p. 22.

slave who rose from lowly origins to an enviable position in society. Particularly illustrative of this theme is the freedman Trimalchio in Petronius's *Satyricon*. In this novel, the character of Trimalchio claims to have used slavery to obtain his master's wealth and to rise to be a well-connected freedman. Another character in the novel claims to have sold himself into slavery in order to become a Roman citizen. While Martin acknowledges these as fictitious accounts, they represent, he claims, the myth of upward mobility that would have inspired the lower classes.

Having established this framework of slavery and upward mobility, Martin concludes that in early Christian usage 'slave of Christ' was a leadership title that denoted the authority of the leader as a slave representative of Christ. Using the managerial slave pattern, Martin explains Paul's self-designation of slavery in 1 Corinthians 9. As Christ's managerial slave, Paul was able to bridge the disunity gap that, according to Martin, existed between the higher- and lower-class members in the church at Corinth. Martin suggests that parallels exist between Paul and Greco-Roman politicians who gained their authority by appealing to the masses. He argues that by using political speech, Paul was able to assert his authority in Corinth by deriving it not from the higher-class members, but from those of the lower class. Paul's declaration that he was a slave would have shocked and, perhaps, offended the higher-class members of the church because he admitted that he was occupying the low position of a slave. On the other hand, this strategy would have appealed to the lower-class members who regarded him as a managerial slave of Christ. By casting himself this way, Paul presented himself to the higher-class members as a challenging example of how they should relate to others. To the lower class, he embodied upward mobility and salvation through slavery to Christ.

Martin's study has been influential in some quarters of NT studies.[58] But there has also been a significant amount of criticism leveled at the framework which Martin established for understanding Paul and slavery. One aspect complicating Martin's thesis was his attempt to portray slavery as an institution that provided an opportunity for upward mobility. As Keith Bradley points out, the idea of slaves having a 'class consciousness' of their own never developed in antiquity and rather than admire the master's 'slave representative', all slaves, regardless of their position, would have been competing for the support and favor of the master.[59] Bradley further notes that while some slaves were of higher rank and influence, this did not exempt them from the same type of abuse and maltreatment

58. For a restatement of Martin's thesis, see Glenn S. Holland, 'Paul's Root Metaphors: Slavery', *Proceedings: Eastern Great Lakes and Midwest Biblical Societies* 12 (1992), pp. 185-94.

59. Bradley, *Slavery and Society at Rome*, pp. 72-73.

other slaves received.[60] J.A Harrill comments that 'Martin's sharp separation of upper-class values and perceptions from those of the lower class looks at times artificial and exaggerated'.[61] Similarly, Richard A. Horsley doubts that the notion of upward mobility among slaves would have appealed to the unenslaved lower class Paul was addressing.

> It seems generally doubtful that the low status free population felt much solidarity with slaves, the very persons in the social order that defined them as at least freeborn. The very concept of upward mobility, of course, derives from an individualistic sociological worldview that accepts and presupposes the dominant social system (without fundamental critique let alone challenge) and then focuses on how individuals may be upwardly or downwardly mobile within it.[62]

Martin has also been criticized for the way he uses funerary and other inscriptions. S.R. Llewelyn notes that much of the existing inscriptional evidence for slavery is (1) biased by the fact that only those who had become successful ex-slaves would record epigrams; (2) the public nature of the inscriptions precludes an opportunity to criticize the system; and (3) many of the inscriptions were approved by the master and written from his perspective as a way to cultivate his own image rather than that of a slave, former or otherwise.[63]

These critical responses to Martin's claim about social patterns have made it difficult for many NT scholars to accept his suggestion that slaves regarded managerial status as a means to upward mobility.[64] Also perplexing is the lack of any examples of someone who voluntarily entered slavery for the express purpose of upward mobility.[65] If slavery provided a way to circumvent social structure, as Martin claims, then at least one example of this being practiced voluntarily would lend support to his claim.

60. Bradley, *Slavery and Society at Rome*, p. 152.

61. J.A. Harrill, review of *Slavery as Salvation: The Metaphor of Slavery in Pauline Christianity* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990), by Dale B. Martin, in *JR* 72 (1992), pp. 426-27.

62. Horsley, 'Paul and Slavery', pp. 175-76.

63. S.R. Llewelyn, 'The Sale of a Slave-Girl: The New Testament's Attitude to Slavery', in S.R. Llewelyn (ed.), *New Documents Illustrating Early Christianity* (Sydney, Australia: The Ancient History Document Research Centre [Macquarie University], 1992), VI, pp. 51-52.

64. Harrill is also unconvinced of the social structure that Martin attempts to suppose and the idea of slavery providing honor or upward mobility. He cites the work of Orlando Patterson (*Slavery as Social Death*, 1982) who argues the complete opposite to Martin (Harrill, review of *Slavery as Salvation*, pp. 426-27).

65. Martin does provide some examples of self-enslavement, but none of these demonstrates self-enslavement as a means to upward mobility (pp. 39-42; 194-95).

I.A H. Combes (1998)

In some ways, the work of I.A.H. Combes, *The Metaphor of Slavery in the Writings of the Early Church*, represented a challenge to the methodology and conclusions reached by Martin.[66] Combes suggests that a wider range of issues needs to be examined in order to determine how slavery language came to occupy an important part of early Christian theology. To achieve this she examines slavery language as it developed both in an historical and theological context beginning with the LXX and finishing with patristic literature. Combes argues that religious metaphors are problematic because they require interpretation and the space between delivery and reception provides an infinite number of opportunities for misunderstanding. Principles of faith handed down across time and culture risk ceasing to bear the same relevance when applied in a new cultural context.[67] In light of this, Combes suggests that interpretation requires a study of how the language developed in the past and of the way in which certain factors contributed to this development.[68] Christian descriptions of humanity's relationship with God are theological and have less to do with secular and political authority than with the direction of Christian theology.[69] The metaphor of slavery, according to Combes, pivots on the Christian 'Kerygma' and not on secular authority.[70]

Of particular interest for Combes is the way slavery metaphors operate as a description of one's relationship with God. According to Combes, Judaism seems to have been unique in its self-perception of being in a literal slave relationship with God. Those who worshiped God were, in the Hebrew mind, God's slaves, and those who worshiped other gods and idols were likewise slaves of these. 'The Hellenic tradition on the other hand shows no sign of such a communal, literal slavery.'[71] In societies contiguous to ancient Judaism, slavery to a deity was individualistic and normally associated with some type of service to a temple. A corporate concept of slavery in Judaism, based as it was upon a division between human and divine slavery, prevented aspects of institutional slavery from interfering with the religious.[72] By retaining this distinction between human and divine slavery, it was possible for early Christians also to

66. I.A.H. Combes, *The Metaphor of Slavery in the Writings of the Early Church: From the New Testament to the Beginning of the Fifth Century* (JSNTSup, 156; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998).

67. Combes, *The Metaphor of Slavery*, p. 11.

68. Combes, *The Metaphor of Slavery*, p. 12.

69. Combes, *The Metaphor of Slavery*, p. 14.

70. Combes, *The Metaphor of Slavery*, p. 15.

71. Combes, *The Metaphor of Slavery*, p. 44.

72. Combes, *The Metaphor of Slavery*, p. 48.

describe themselves in a slave relationship with God without excluding those who may have been slaves in a literal sense. It was also possible to avoid any contradiction between theological and secular perceptions of slavery. Theological concepts represented by institutional terms like salvation/freedom and conversion/enslavement to God presented little problem once the division of human and divine slavery was retained.[73]

In examination of Paul, Combes rejects many of the previous interpretations. She is unsatisfied with a background derived from the LXX. She notes that the actual phrase 'slave of God' is rarely used and that the more common phrase is 'my slaves' which serves as an honorific title of distinction for select individuals. She argues that to trace Paul's expression 'slave of Christ' to the 'slave of God' theme in the LXX is to neglect the fact that nowhere does Paul actually call himself a 'slave of God'. 'It is an inaccurate reflection of [Paul's] theology to think that he could simply have substituted Χριστοῦ for Θεοῦ. One certainly cannot find any Old Testament antecedents for the metaphor within his work.'[74] She is similarly unsatisfied with the approaches of Martin and others who seek to place the metaphor in a Greco-Roman slavery context. Unconvinced by Martin's arguments for upward mobility, she observes generally that many attempts to interpret Paul in a legal context of slavery ultimately do not yield any convincing parallels.[75]

Combes's approach is based on the observation that Paul's slavery imagery has a strong correlation with the theme of death (e.g. Rom. 6.6-7). Adopting Orlando Patterson's hypothesis that slavery is the equivalent of social death, Combes argues that when entering into slavery, people die to their former life and are given a new one by their master. In the case of Paul, individuals who identify with Christ in baptism die to their old master (sin) and receive a new life as slaves of Christ. This, according to Combes, signifies that believers are 'dead to the world and its priorities and are participants in the humiliation and crucifixion of Christ'.[76]

Combes's work helped to bring an important and needed corrective to Martin's framework for understanding Paul's slavery metaphors. At the same time, however, Combes was criticized for her understanding of how metaphors develop. Glancy takes issue with Combes's claim that the metaphor developed over time and separately from the institution of slavery. Rather than see the metaphor evolving, Glancy would 'argue rather that a church that existed in the midst of a slave-owning society

73. Combes, *The Metaphor of Slavery*, p. 69.
74. Combes, *The Metaphor of Slavery*, p. 79.
75. Combes, *The Metaphor of Slavery*, pp. 79-87.
76. Combes, *The Metaphor of Slavery*, pp. 87-89.

continued to generate metaphors based on the experience of daily life'.[77] Glancy would contend that the metaphor was controlled by the 'deep embeddedness of religious language in cultural realties' rather than claiming that the metaphor developed separately from the institution.

J.A. Harrill is also critical of Combes and what he perceives to be the usage of an outdated model of Christian origins. He laments the frequent use of phrases like 'NT theology', 'the early church', 'patristic doctrine' and the avoidance of most non-canonical literature, all of which suggests to the uninformed reader that Christianity was a monolithic entity.

Murray J. Harris (1999)

Murray Harris's *Slave of Christ*: *A New Testament Metaphor for Total Devotion to Christ*[78] is located somewhere between popular and scholarly since its intended audience is both the academy and the church. Harris's stated purpose for the book is to revive interest in a neglected theme in NT theology.[79]

Harris's approach to the topic is historical and exegetical. He exhibits an awareness of many of the issues that surrounds the 'slave of Christ' phrase and attempts to provide a treatment of each. Following a brief discussion of the various aspects of metaphor and the appearance of such elements in the NT, Harris begins to explore the ancient world of slavery.[80] Presupposing an OT background for the metaphor, he investigates NT slavery against a Jewish background and also the Greek and Roman systems.[81] He places this sociological and historical examination as a background to understanding the NT view of slavery. Utilizing what could be called a broad canonical approach, Harris examines most of the occurrences of slave themes in the material of the gospels and the Epistles. He concludes that although the NT tolerated slavery, it did not endorse it. He believes that early Christianity operated within its social context and worked to promote change from within the church, not from within the society.[82] Based on these conclusions, Harris exegetes the various metaphorical slave themes present in the NT. He examines the concept of slavery as it interacts with freedom, lordship, ownership and privilege. He

77. Jennifer Glancy, review of *The Metaphor of Slavery in the Writings of the Early Church: From the New Testament to the Beginning of the Fifth Century* (JSNTSup, 156; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998), by I.A.H. Combes, in *JBL* 120 (2001), p. 393.

78. Murray J. Harris, *Slave of Christ: A New Testament Metaphor for Total Devotion to Christ* (Leicester: Apollos, 1999).

79. Harris, *Slave of Christ*, p. 20.

80. Harris, *Slave of Christ*, pp. 19-21.

81. Harris, *Slave of Christ*, pp. 25-47.

82. Harris, *Slave of Christ*, pp. 61-65.

states that while slavery may have held negative connotations for those who filled the social role of a slave, early Christians held 'slave of Christ' to be a positive title.

Michael J. Brown (2001)

Michael Brown's 'Paul's Use of Δοῦλος Χριστοῦ Ἰησοῦ in Romans 1.1' had the benefit of considering the metaphor in light of the work done by Martin and Combes.[83] The focus of Brown's work is not on Paul's slavery metaphors in general, but specifically on Rom. 1.1, which he believes is lacking sufficient treatment in either Martin or Combes.[84] Brown argues that Paul's identification in Rom. 1.1 is a technical term that would have had a specific meaning for those members of the *familia Caesaris* (those who received patronage as former slaves of the Emperor) and who would have been members of the Roman congregation.

Brown argues that the key to understanding Paul's slavery metaphor in Romans is predicated on understanding the relationship between the Roman and Philippian correspondences. Focusing on the greetings listed in Phil. 4.22, Brown notes that Philippi's status as a Roman colony and the high population of Roman citizens in the area suggests that there was a substantive connection between the *familia Caesaris* and the Philippian congregation. Thus, when Paul identified himself as a 'slave of Christ', this would have resonated with the Roman citizens in the congregation who were slaves of the Emperor based on their status in the *familia Caesaris*.[85] Brown believes the same argument can be utilized when analyzing Romans since a large number of the persons greeted in Romans 16 are potentially former slaves.

Brown uses a combination of social and legal understanding of slavery to support his hypothesis. Following Martin, he cautiously accepts the hypothesis that for a select few, like the *familia Caesaris*, slavery could be a means of upward mobility.[86] But he also acknowledges Orlando Patterson's critique that slaves were without social standing and considered to be socially dead.[87] However, this was not necessarily the case among Imperial slaves who were members of the *familia Caesaris*. These were individuals, Brown argues, whose connection to the Imperial household allowed them to wield power and to advance in society even over the established aristocracy. 'Members of the *Familia* were some of the most

83. Michael J. Brown, 'Paul's Use of Δοῦλος Χριστοῦ Ἰησοῦ in Romans 1.1', *JBL* 12 (2001), pp. 723-37.
84. Brown, 'Δοῦλος Χριστοῦ Ἰησοῦ in Romans 1.1', p. 728.
85. Brown, 'Δοῦλος Χριστοῦ Ἰησοῦ in Romans 1.1', p. 725.
86. Brown, 'Δοῦλος Χριστοῦ Ἰησοῦ in Romans 1.1', pp. 726, 731.
87. Brown, 'Δοῦλος Χριστοῦ Ἰησοῦ in Romans 1.1', p. 728.

powerful persons in the empire without a doubt, but this power was a double-edged sword because the higher an imperial slave climbed the more he was held in contempt by aristocrats.'[88] Christianity, Brown suggested, offered a way of dealing with this problem.

> A slave served at the pleasure of his master which is a precarious situation to occupy. Thus, the rationale behind Paul's use of δοῦλος Χριστοῦ Ἰησοῦ is to connect his understanding of ministry to their status as imperial slaves in a manner that allows this particular congregation to grasp its nuance and insights. In identifying himself with the Roman congregation on the basis of legal status, Paul is able to create an inroad with this congregation. He identifies his status as analogous to theirs. Furthermore, he implies that the benefits of Christian slavery are in his mind analogous to the benefits of Imperial slavery.[89]

John Byron (2003)

My contribution appeared in a published version of my PhD thesis entitled *Slavery Metaphors in Early Judaism and Pauline Christianity*.[90] In this volume I use a history of traditions approach and attempt to understand not only the origins of Paul's slave of Christ metaphor, but also how it was that Jews understood themselves as slaves of God. The rationale for this approach is based on the conclusion that Paul was operating within an established Jewish tradition and that the slave of Christ metaphor is best understood within that tradition rather than through the Greco-Roman institution of slavery. Prior to examining Paul, I attempt to recover the Jewish slave of God tradition so as not to be guilty of reading already established Pauline categories back into early Judaism. Thus, my research is divided into two parts.

In Part One, I trace the Jewish slave of God tradition in the LXX. I observe the source of this tradition to be the story of the Exodus event. The people of Israel were released from slavery in Egypt so that they could become enslaved to God. The slave–master relationship between Israel and God was based on the twin axioms of covenant fidelity and the practice of monolatry. These axioms required that, as God's slaves, Israel could serve and obey God only. The title 'slave of God' occupied an emblematic status. The phrase was not merely a metaphorical image that compared Israel's relationship with God through the institutional language of slavery. The title, I argue, was a distinctive way of associating the Israelites with God and represented their national history in conjunction with God.

88. Brown, 'Δοῦλος Χριστοῦ Ἰησοῦ in Romans 1.1', p. 732.
89. Brown, 'Δοῦλος Χριστοῦ Ἰησοῦ in Romans 1.1', p. 734.
90. John Byron, *Slavery Metaphors in Early Judaism and Pauline Christianity: A Traditio-Historical and Exegetical Examination* (WUNT, 162; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2003).

To declare oneself a slave of God was to identify with the story of the Exodus, the stipulations of the covenant and the subsequent events that influenced the development of the tradition.[91]

In other Jewish literature I notice that there is an ongoing attempt to reconcile the Jewish identification of slaves of God with slavery that was forced upon them by foreign oppressors. The response to this form of slavery was a pattern of Humiliation–Obedience–Exaltation. When Jews remained faithful to God, but were forced to serve someone other than God (Humiliation), their response was to remain obedient to God (Obedience) and wait for God to rescue them from the oppressive situation (Exaltation). Paradigmatic of this pattern was the figure of Joseph. Joseph's slavery and imprisonment in Egypt, his faithfulness to God and subsequent elevation to the throne of Egypt mark him out as the paradigmatic slave of God.

In Part 2, I propose that Paul's use of slavery language is better understood in the context of the wider Jewish slave of God traditions. This does not mean that Paul never had Greco-Roman practices in mind. But it does signify that Paul's notion of slavery to God and Christ can be regarded as a natural development from his Jewish heritage. Paul did sometimes allude to Greco-Roman practices by way of an illustration (Rom. 6.16; 14.4; 1 Cor. 7.22; and perhaps Gal. 4.1–7). However, his preliminary framework was, I believe, the Jewish slave of God tradition.

For Paul, Christ was the paradigmatic slave of God. In the Philippian hymn, Christ exemplifies the pattern of Humiliation–Obedience–Exaltation, which was how the slave of God was often characterized in early Judaism. Central to the hymn's portrayal of Christ is his obedience. This obedience identified him as a slave of God and was the reason God exalted him from his humble situation. This exaltation provided Christ with the title of 'Lord' over all of creation. In response to Christ's new title and authority, creation became obligated to obey Christ. Similar to the ideology of the Israelite monarchy, Christ is God's representative on earth and directs those under his authority towards obedience of God. Those who obey Christ are his slaves as well as the slaves of God.

Paul interprets the Christ event through the language and imagery of the Exodus. Israel was released from slavery in Egypt to become the slaves of God. According to Paul, humanity was released from slavery to sin in order to become the slaves of God. The implications of Christ's death and resurrection are portrayed as a transferring event. Those who identify with Christ through faith and baptism are transferred from slavery under one master (sin) to slavery under another master (God). The objective of the

91. Byron, *Slavery Metaphors*, p. 59.

Christ event was not freedom but slavery. Slavery is axiomatic to human experience. Prior to the Christ event humanity was involuntarily enslaved to sin, though still held responsible. As a result of the Christ event, those who identify with Christ have the opportunity to choose whom they will obey and to whom they will be enslaved. The ultimate intention of the Christ event is not slavery to Christ, however. Christ never stands as an alternative to slavery to sin or 'other gods'. Only God is represented as an alternative to slavery. The Christ event and enslavement to Christ are avenues through which the believer becomes an obedient slave of God.

In light of this informative framework, I suggest that the title 'slave of Christ' in Paul is also emblematic. The title recalls the transforming results of the Christ event, defines the believer as a member of the Christian community and focuses attention on the object of the believer's obedience, which is the exalted Christ. However, Paul's claim to be Christ's slave was not a usurpation of the normal position of God in the title. For Paul, 'slave of Christ' is a religious claim about his relationship with God in the context of the Christ event. When Paul used the expression to refer to himself or others, he was declaring his association with the figure of Christ, his release from sin through the Christ event, his enslavement to God and his obedience to God through the imitation of the paradigmatic slave of God, Christ.

J.A. Harrill has been critical of my work in three specific areas. First, he suggests that I have misunderstood Dale Martin by concluding that Martin was looking for the origin of Paul's metaphor rather than the way the metaphor was heard by Roman urbanites in the first century. A second area, and more substantive than the first, is my 'unexamined presupposition that metaphors operate only on the level of the history of ideas disconnected from and untainted by culture'. This is a problem, Harrill charges, that is endemic in the biblical theology movement to which he relegates my book. The final problem Harrill has is with what he describes as my 'totalizing interpretive framework that sets up an artificial cultural dichotomy between "Judaism" and "Hellenism" as code words masquerading as historical entities. The aim of such scholarship, as Wayne A. Meeks writes, is to urge the distinctiveness of Christianity against its 'pagan' environment, a distinctiveness that it allegedly shared with ancient Israel.'[92] Others have echoed Harrill's criticism by stating that:

> Throughout the study Byron assumes a rather stark contrast between Paul's 'Greco-Roman environment' and his 'Jewish heritage', contending that the latter is relevant to our understanding of Paul. Although this is a

92. J.A Harrill, review of *Slavery Metaphors in Early Judaism and Pauline Christianity: A Traditio-Historical and Exegetical Examination* (WUNT, 162; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2003), by John Byron, in *Shofar* 23 (2005), pp. 185-87.

> careful study, the assumption that 'Greco-Roman' and 'Jewish' are two distinct and identifiable environments, will, no doubt, be problematic for many modern interpreters of Paul.[93]

While it is possible that at times I overstated the distinctiveness of Paul's Jewish heritage over the Greco-Roman environment, I stand by my claim that Paul's slavery metaphors, as a religious idea, find their source in the history of the Jewish people and their self-identification as the slaves of God. Granted, Jews lived and thrived in the Roman Empire, but there are also numerous examples of their marginalization based on their religious beliefs. While others may not have heard Paul's metaphors the same way he did, it seems clear that he had rich tradition of slavery metaphors to draw upon that were predominantly Jewish in nature. I do allow at times that Paul uses Greco-Roman imagery, but in general, his usage seems to more accurately reflect his religious background not his Roman environment.

Sam Tsang (2005)

Sam Tsang has offered yet another perspective on Pauline slave metaphors by investigating how Paul used them to persuade his readers. In his published PhD thesis *From Slaves to Sons: A New Rhetoric Analysis on Paul's Slave Metaphors in his Letter to the Galatians*,[94] Tsang argues for an interpretation that gives serious consideration to Paul's symbolic universe. Like Brown, Tsang notes that while Martin and Combes have made valuable contributions to the discussion of Paul's slavery metaphors, little work has been done on how Paul used these metaphors in Galatians.[95]

Tsang presupposes that Paul has images of the Roman institution of slavery as the background for the metaphor. His approach is to reconstruct the social-historical institution of Greco-Roman slavery and to relate it to issues raised in Galatians.[96] Combined with this approach is a rhetorical analysis developed by Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca. This type of rhetorical analysis considers how a fusion occurs between a theme and a *phoros* (the picture an author paints to convey an idea). This fusion of theme and *phoros* can be used in an argument by creating an analogy that

93. Milton Moreland, review of *Slavery Metaphors in Early Judaism and Pauline Christianity: A Traditio-Historical and Exegetical Examination* (WUNT, 162; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2003), by John Byron, in *RelStRev* 31 (2005), p. 93.

94. Sam Tsang, *From Slaves to Sons: A New Rhetoric Analysis on Paul's Slave Metaphors in his Letter to the Galatians* (New York: Peter Lang, 2005).

95. Tsang does not seem to have been aware of my contribution on the subject in which I devoted an entire chapter to slavery metaphors in Galatians. This is perhaps due to an overlap in the publication process between our two volumes.

96. Tsang, *From Slaves to Sons*, p. 3.

is able to persuade the reader.[97] Based on this methodology, Tsang looks at slavery metaphors in Galatians from three perspectives and contends that understanding Paul's slavery metaphors in Galatians helps to determine how Paul understood himself, his strategy for attacking his opponents and his strategy for teaching his readers.

The first perspective is the way Paul used his slavery metaphors as an apologetic, which also provides an opportunity to determine how Paul viewed himself. Tsang examines Gal. 1.10 and suggests that the literary context portrays Paul as one standing in the long line of the prophets of Israel.[98] The cultural context of the metaphor is the patron–client relationship that requires one to fulfill particular services to the master.[99] The overall meaning is that 'Paul's ministry, or his words, were under direct control of Christ. His mission was to become a prophet of Christ's new age.'[100] 'The Rhetorical function of the identification metaphor is to demonstrate Paul's identity with his master, Jesus, as well as drawing attention to his divinely ordained mission in the subsequent passage (Gal. 1.11-16)'.[101]

The second perspective is the way Paul used the metaphor polemically. Here too Tsang uses a process that takes into consideration the literary and cultural context of the metaphor and makes a suggestion as to what the metaphor meant and how it functioned polemically. In the case of Gal. 2.4, the metaphor is connected to the problem of Jerusalem agents interfering with the church at Antioch. The cultural context is the practice of re-enslavement of former slaves by kidnappers. The meaning, or *phoros*, is that the Jerusalem agitators are illegally entering the congregation to re-enslave those who have been set free which, when fused with the theme points to the Jerusalem agents polemically as those who stand in opposition to Paul's theological position.[102] Tsang uses a similar process to examine Gal. 4.30. He concludes that, as in 2.4, Paul uses the metaphor as part of a polemic that labels the agitators as slaves and thus asserts that association with them would endanger those in the Galatian congregation.[103]

The third and final perspective is the didactic use of slavery metaphors in Gal. 3.23-26 and 4.1-10. Following the same process as the first two, Tsang suggests that the metaphor of the pedagogue allows Paul to teach about the positive aspects of the law even though he has to combat those

97. Tsang, *From Slaves to Sons*, p. 15.
98. Tsang, *From Slaves to Sons*, p. 68.
99. Tsang, *From Slaves to Sons*, p. 70.
100. Tsang, *From Slaves to Sons*, p. 72.
101. Tsang, *From Slaves to Sons*, p. 74.
102. Tsang, *From Slaves to Sons*, p. 87.
103. Tsang, *From Slaves to Sons*, p. 103.

who would promote the so-called negative aspects of the law.[104] In the context of 4.1-10, the metaphor of the pedagogue is expanded in such a way that Paul is able to accomplish two purposes. On the one hand, he can demonstrate the negative aspects of the law. On the other hand, he is able to discredit the teachings of his opponents.[105]

Tsang's study is valuable for examining how the metaphor functioned as part of Paul's rhetorical approach to the Galatian controversy. However, his so-called reconstruction of the social-historical institution of Greco-Roman slavery in relation to issues in Galatia is problematic. While Tsang may be correct in his analysis, there are many more perspectives that have been offered by NT scholarship, and Tsang's failure to deal with them evenhandedly means that there may be other ways to understand Paul's metaphors. But that in no way diminishes the importance of the study. Time will tell if Tsang has helped to push NT scholarship in a new direction.

Closing Comments

If the above review demonstrates anything it is that NT scholars have yet to reach a consensus on this topic. While the last one hundred years has witnessed numerous contributions on the topic, there is still much work to be done. Some will want to concentrate on the origins of Paul's metaphor while others are satisfied to discover how it may have been heard by a first-century audience. Some would view Paul as operating within an established tradition that can be traced through Jewish literature. Others would see the metaphor as a result of Paul living in an empire whose population and economy were heavily indebted to slaves. Still others would see it as a little of both.

Chapter 1 detailed how some NT scholars have constructed an overly positive view of ancient slavery. At the same time, a corrective has been brought to bear on that interpretation. While the overly positive view of ancient slavery has yielded to a model which understands slavery as a brutal institution, this too is susceptible to over-simplification. As appalling as slavery is in any society, the fact remains that in the context of the first century Paul's slavery metaphors did take on some positive aspects. This is not to suggest, of course, that Paul was a supporter of slavery. But he and other NT authors were able to find something that was of 'redeeming' value for their theology. There is a bit of a conundrum here. An academic reconstruction is always going to be just that, a construction,

104. Tsang, *From Slaves to Sons*, p. 116.
105. Tsang, *From Slaves to Sons*, p. 130.

and, therefore, an abstraction. Reality, especially in dealing with something like slavery, is always complex, and can be extremely messy. Academics tend to like to classify things and put them in order. Because of different foci, NT scholars who look at the text of Paul and slavery metaphors emphasize a more positive view. Those who look at the 'reality' of slavery are going to view it very differently. Some type of synthesis is needed.

Chapter 4

FREEDOM FROM ANXIETY: PAUL'S ADVICE TO SLAVES IN 1 CORINTHIANS 7.21

1 Corinthians 7.21 has the distinction of being the only passage in which Paul directly addresses slaves.[1] As demonstrated in the previous chapter, the majority of Paul's slavery language is confined to the realm of metaphor. And the Letter to Philemon, although written on behalf of a slave, does not actually speak to the slave. It is possible that one could interpret the baptismal formula in Gal. 3.28 as speaking to slaves, but not to the same degree that we find in 1 Cor. 7.21.[2]

The passage holds another distinction. It is one of the more difficult passages to translate and interpret. It appears that Paul left his thoughts incomplete. In 7.21 he says, 'Were you a slave when called? Do not worry about it. But if you are able to become free μᾶλλον χρῆσαι [rather use (it)]'. Translators and interpreters have asked the same question: use what? The direct object of χρῆσαι is ambiguous and requires translators to make a choice. Did Paul mean that those who had become Christians while slaves should use their *slavery*, that is, refuse the chance to become free? Did he mean that slaves should use their *freedom*? Or did he mean he wanted slaves to continue to use their *calling* by God? 'Slavery', 'freedom' and 'calling' are each an important part of Paul's discussion in 1 Cor. 7.17-24, and a case can be made for each term to fill in Paul's brachylogy.[3]

The rest of the verse would only require a brief comment had Paul finished his thought. But instead a number of words and phrases in the verse have been vigorously debated across the centuries. These include:

1. This is assuming, with most NT scholars, that Paul is not the author of those Letters that contain household codes where slaves are addressed.

2. It is interesting to note that even though Paul speaks directly to the situation of the slave in 7.21, he immediately transitions to metaphor in 7.22-23 as a way to interpret the lot of the slave.

3. Brachylogy is the omission, for the sake of brevity, of an element which is not necessary for the grammatical structure but for the thought (F. Blass and A. Debrunner, *A Greek Grammar of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* [trans. and rev. R.W. Funk; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961], pp. 255-56 §483).

(1) χρῆσαι: is the verb to be translated as 'make use of' or does the aorist imperative suggest a stronger meaning of 'to take' or 'to grasp', which could imply a new opportunity? (2) μᾶλλον: is the adverb an elative comparison and thus translated as 'by all means', 'certainly', or is it a contrasting comparative to be translated as 'rather' or 'instead'? If the latter is the correct translation, is the contrast with 'able to become free' with 'do not worry about being a slave', with the general principle of 'remaining in one's calling' or with the possibility of becoming a freedman? (3) εἰ καί: should these two words be read together and translated as 'although' or 'even though', which suggests that the condition represented is immaterial even if fulfilled? Or should they be read separately so that εἰ would communicate the indicative reality and be translated as 'if indeed' and the καί would be an emphatic particle adding stress to the possibility of becoming free? (4) ἀλλά: should the adversative particle be understood as standing in contrast to 'don't worry about being a slave', or is it intended to signal a limitation of the general principle of 'remaining in one's calling'? (5) ἀλλ' εἰ καί: How is this combination to be understood in view of the varied possibilities for each word? (6) δύνασαι ἐλεύθερος: does this phrase refer to an action initiated by the slave or an action by the owner over which the slave has no control? (7) γάρ: does this conjunction in 7.22 express the reason why one should remain a slave or does it introduce support for seeking freedom should the opportunity arise?[4] In addition to the syntax and grammar, there is also the literary context, the social and cultural setting and Pauline theology—all of which should be taken into consideration as well. And although numerous scholars have worked on the problems embedded in the verse, a consensus has yet to be found. This is most evident in the way that modern English translations have rendered Paul's elliptical sentence so that his advice reads as a command for slaves to either 'remain in slavery'[5] or 'take freedom'.[6]

4. For an overview of the difficult grammar and syntax of this verse, see, Bartchy, *ΜΑΛΛΟΝ ΧΡΗΣΑΙ*, pp. 8-9; Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (NICNT: Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), pp. 306-22; Harrill, *The Manumission of Slaves*, pp. 74-75; J.D. Gordon, *Sister or Wife? 1 Corinthians 7 and Cultural Anthropology* (JSNTSup, 149; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997), pp. 162-63; Thiselton, *First Epistle to the Corinthians*, pp. 546-62.

5. *Remain in Slavery*: Wast thou called being a bondservant? Care not for it: nay, even if thou canst become free, use it rather (*American Standard Edition*, 1885); If you were a slave when you were called, never mind. Even if you can gain your freedom, make the most of your present condition instead (E.J. Goodspeed, *New Testament: An American Translation*, 1923); Were you a slave when you were called? Do not be concerned but, even if you can gain your freedom, make the most of it (*New American Bible*, rev. edn, 1986); Were you a slave when called? Do not be concerned about it.

Commentators before the Modern Period

The earliest known attempt by an exegete to untangle the meaning of the verse is found in the works of John Chrysostom (c. 354–407 CE).[7] In a Homily on 1 Corinthians, he writes:

> As circumcision profits not: and uncircumcision does no harm; so neither does slavery, nor yet liberty. And that he might point out this with surpassing clearness, he says, 'But even if you can become free, use it rather', that is, rather remain as a slave. Now upon what possible ground does he tell the person who might be set free to remain a slave? He means to point out that slavery is no harm but rather an advantage. Now we are not ignorant that some say, the words, 'use it rather', are spoken with regard to liberty: interpreting it, 'if you can become free, become free'. But the expression would be very contrary to Paul's manner if he intended this. For he would not, when consoling the slave and signifying that he was in no respect injured, have told him to get free. Since perhaps someone might say, 'What then, if I am not able? I am an injured and degraded person'. This then is not what he says: but as I said, meaning to point out that a man gets nothing by being made free, he says, 'Though you have it in your power to be made free, remain rather in slavery'.[8]

Chrysostom's comments indicate that he was participating in an ongoing debate about the meaning of μᾶλλον χρῆσαι. He does not specify to whom he was responding, but the overwhelming majority of commentators before the modern period followed Chrysostom's conclusion that Paul wanted the enslaved to 'use slavery'.[9] For instance, Severin, the bishop of Gabala (died c. 408 CE), said staying in slavery demonstrated that there

Even if you can gain your freedom, make use of your present condition more than ever (*New Revised Standard Version*, 1989).

6. *Take Freedom*: Were you a slave when called? Never mind. But if you can gain your freedom, avail yourself of the opportunity (*Revised Standard Version*, 1946); You were a slave when called? Never mind. Of course if you do find it possible to get free, you had better avail yourself of the opportunity (James Moffatt Version, 1954); Were you a slave when you were called? Don't let it trouble you—although if you can gain your freedom, do so (*New International Version*, 1984) .Were you called while a slave? Do not worry about it; but if you are able also to become free, rather do that (*New American Standard Version*, 1995 update).

7. Origen commented on the verse, but not in an attempt to solve the problem of interpreting μᾶλλον χρῆσαι.

8. John Chrysostom, *Homily* 19, PG 61: 155-64; cf. *Homily on the Epistle to Philemon, Argument* (*PG* 62.773); Harrill, *The Manumission of Slaves*, p. 78; Judith L. Kovacs, *1 Corinthians Interpreted by Early Christians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), p. 118.

9. For an overview of the passage's history of interpretation, see the chart in Bartchy, *ΜΑΛΛΟΝ ΧΡΗΣΑΙ*, pp. 6-7.

was no disadvantage to a Christian remaining a slave.[10] Pelagius (c. 350–c. 425 CE) finished Paul's elliptical phrase with the words 'use slavery' (*magis utere servitio*).[11] Cyril of Alexandria (d. 444 CE) told slaves to remain in slavery because bearing this yoke would bring a future reward, especially if the yoke was carried with a good attitude.[12] Hervaeus of Bourgdieu (whose commentary was circulated under the name of Anselm of Canterbury) told slaves to remain in slavery because it produced humility, patience and future rewards.[13] This was also the opinion of Peter Lombard (d. 1146) and Thomas Aquinas.[14] This brief summary demonstrates that among patristic and medieval commentators, Paul's words were commonly understood as an injunction to reject an offer of freedom in favor of staying in slavery on the basis that their humility would earn them a future reward.

Opinions began to shift, however, when Reformation exegetes broke from the traditional interpretation of the verse and opted for the 'use freedom' interpretation. In his commentary on 1 Corinthians, John Calvin wrote:

> *But if even you can become free*. In my view the word 'even' carries no more emphasis than is evident here: 'If, instead of being a slave, you could become even free, it would be more suitable for you'. But it is doubtful whether he is still speaking to slaves, or is now turning to address those who are free. In the latter case 'become' (γενέσθαι) would simply have been used for the verb 'to be' here. Either meaning fits in quite well. And both come to the same thing. Paul means to show not only that freedom is good, but also that it gives more opportunity than slavery. If he is speaking to slaves his meaning will be: 'When I tell you to be free from anxiety, I do not debar you from even enjoying liberty, if it comes your way'. If he is speaking to those who are free, it will be by way of concession, in words something like these: 'My advice to slaves is to be cheerful, even if being free is better and more desirable, should a person have the choice between them'.[15]

10. John Anthony Cramer, *Catenae graecorum patrum in Novum Testamentum* (8 vols.; 1841, repr., Hildesheim: Georg Olms, 1967), V, p. 141; Bartchy, *ΜΑΛΛΟΝ ΧΡΗΣΑΙ*, p. 14 n. 30; Harrill, *The Manumission of Slaves*, p. 78.

11. *Pelagi expositio in I Corinthios* 7.21 (Alexander Souter [ed.], *Pelagius's Expositions of Thirteen Epistles of Paul*. Part 2. *Text and Apparatus Criticus* [TS, 9.2; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1929], 165.14); Harrill, *The Manumission of Slaves*, p. 79.

12. Cyril, *Com. in Joanis evangelium* 10 (PG 74. 878); Bartchy, *ΜΑΛΛΟΝ ΧΡΗΣΑΙ*, p. 14 n. 30; Harrill, *The Manumission of Slaves*, p. 78.

13. Hervaeus of Bourgdieu, *Com. in epist. Pauli: in epist. ad Cor. 7* (PL 81.880-83); Bartchy, *ΜΑΛΛΟΝ ΧΡΗΣΑΙ*, p. 14 n. 30; Harrill, *The Manumission of Slaves*, p. 79.

14. Bartchy, *ΜΑΛΛΟΝ ΧΡΗΣΑΙ*, p. 14 n. 30; Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, p. 556.

15. John Calvin, *The First Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Corinthians* (trans. John W. Fraser; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1960), pp. 153-54.

Martin Luther also opted for 'use freedom', but in light of his opposition to the peasant revolts, he also made it clear that freedom should be gained with the master's consent and not taken by force.[16]

> 'But', St Paul says, 'If you can gain your freedom, avail yourself of the opportunity'. This does not mean that you should rob your master of your person and run away without his knowledge and consent, but it means you are not to interpret the words of St Paul, when he says that everyone should remain in the estate in which he was called, to mean that you must remain a serf, even though you could gain your freedom with the knowledge and consent of your master. St Paul wants only to instruct your conscience, so that you know that before God both estates are free, whether you are a bondsman/woman or a freedman/woman. He does not want to hold you back from gaining your freedom, if you can do so with the consent of your master.[17]

The Reformation marks an important shift in the way that exegetes interpreted this verse. The dynamics of the argument shifted and set in motion a 500-year debate about how to understand Paul's advice to slaves in 1 Cor. 7.21. Luther's writings would have particular influence on German scholarship.[18] At the same time that the effects from the Reformation were rippling across Europe, Africans were being forcibly enslaved and taken to the New World. Both of these events helped to set the stage for a debate about slavery and Paul's words, a debate that had ramifications for much of Western civilization.

Nineteenth-Century Scholarship

The nineteenth century witnessed the beginning of the end of slavery. Between 1798 and 1808, approximately 200,000 Africans were imported into the United States and sold as slaves. During this same decade, several Northern states began the gradual abolition of slavery while Great Britain took the bold step of abolishing the slave trade (1807). In 1819, the United States followed Great Britain and equated slave trading with piracy, a crime punishable by death. By April of 1865, the United States had fought a bloody civil war and the Thirteenth Amendment forced the emancipation of four million slaves. During the same time period abolitionist ideology took hold in Europe and America. Abolitionists and slaveholders

16. Thiselton, *First Epistle to the Corinthians*, p. 555.

17. Martin Luther, *Luther's Works, Commentaries on 1 Corinthians 7, 1 Corinthians 15, Lectures on 1Timothy*, XXVIII (trans. Edward Sittler; St Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1973), pp. 42-43.

18. Harrill, *The Manumission of Slaves*, p. 80.

alike rallied for their cause, wrote pamphlets, gave speeches and sometimes killed one another. As we saw in the previous chapters, the Bible, and, more specifically, Paul's Letters were often employed by both sides to support their cause.[19]

One place in which the intersection of abolitionism and biblical scholarship met was in the work of French historian Henri Wallon. In 1847, he published a three-volume work entitled *Histoire de l'esclavage dans l'antiquité* with a 164-page introduction in which he criticizes slavery, particularly in the French colonies, as an unchristian institution that corrupts both the slave and the master and therefore society as a whole.[20] As part of his moral-spiritual approach to the problem of slavery, Wallon uses 1 Cor. 7.21 to support his contention that Christianity was, at its root, anti-slavery.[21]

Following in the wake of Wallon was Paul Allard who wrote *Les esclaves chrétiens* in 1876, which subsequently went through another five editions.[22] Citing Wallon, Allard interprets 1 Cor. 7.21 as 'use freedom'.[23] Allard's work popularized what M.I. Finley has called the 'dogma that the early church was opposed to slavery'.[24]

Among New Testament scholars, opinions mirrored the proslavery and abolitionist tensions of the century. Henry Alford (1874) followed the traditional interpretation of 'use slavery' as it was rendered by Chrysostom and others. He concludes that completing this phrase with 'slavery' was necessary, on the basis of 'the usage of the particles εἰ καί by which the καί "also" or "even", does not belong to the εἰ, as in καὶ εἰ, but it is spread over the whole context of the concessive clause. It is also required by the context; for the burden of the whole passage is, "Let each man remain in

19. Davis notes: 'It is important to add that the early antislavery movement coincided in time with serious Biblical criticism on historical as well as philosophical grounds. But this scholarship in the early nineteenth century, largely confined to Germany, had delayed impact in both England and America' (*The Problem of Slavery in the Age of Revolution*, p. 527).

20. Moses I. Finley, *Ancient Slavery and Modern Ideology* (New York: Viking Press, 1980), pp. 12-13. Harrill, *The Manumission of Slaves*, p. 80.

21. Henri Wallon, *Histoire de l'esclavage*, p. xxxviii; David Brion Davis, *The Problem of Slavery in Western Culture* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1966), pp. 17-19; Harrill, *The Manumission of Slaves*, p. 80.

22. Finley, *Ancient Slavery*, p. 15.

23. Paul Allard, *Les esclaves chrétiens depuis les premiers temps de l'église jusqu'à la fin de la domination romaine en occident* (Paris: Victor Lecoffre, 6th edn, 1914), pp. 168-69 n. 5. Harrill, *The Manumission of Slaves*, p. 80.

24. Finley, *Ancient Slavery*, p. 15.

the state which he was called".' Alford adds support to his argument with an appeal to the Syriac which also fills in the ellipsis with 'chose slavery'.[25]

T.C. Edwards (1885) followed a similar trajectory by suggesting that although it is possible for the combination of εἰ καί to have two meanings, in both cases the meaning in 1 Cor. 7.21 is still 'remain in slavery'. If Paul had intended the resultant clause not to be contrasted with the conditional clause but to be consistent with it ('If you can become free use freedom'), he would have omitted the καί as is the case in vv. 9 and 15. 'The Apostle's words imply', Edwards argued, 'that the Christian slave is more likely than the free man to realize vividly his freedom in the Lord, and, therefore, that of the two conditions, his is the preferable.'[26]

Shortly after the publication of Edwards's commentary, however, F.L. Godet (1886) reached the exact opposite conclusion. Godet suggests that the combination of εἰ καί introduces a 'new fact' in which Paul is breaking with the general principle of 'remaining in one's place' and provides the slave the opportunity to become free if such a situation should arise. With the presence of a 'new fact' Godet concludes that the natural reading of μᾶλλον χρῆσαι is to complete the phrase with 'freedom'.[27]

J.B. Lightfoot (1895) notes the preference among patristic interpreters for 'use slavery' which he considers to be the expected conclusion 'for while slavery was an existing institution, there would be a temptation to explain the passage as recommending the *status quo*'.[28] Lightfoot rejects the traditional interpretation, however, and opts instead for 'use freedom'. He acknowledges the ambiguity of εἰ καί, but, like Godet, argues that it is more natural to supply τῇ ἐλευθερίᾳ out of the ἐλεύθερος to the phrase μᾶλλον χρῆσαι from the immediate sentence than τῇ δουλείᾳ out of the δοῦλος of a more distant clause. He also suggests that χρῆσαι in the sense of 'to avail oneself of an opportunity offered' was an idiom which also occurred in 9.12, 15. 'But the main argument', Lightfoot asserted, 'is the extreme improbability that St Paul would have taken any other view. From the nature of the case, the free man was in a much more advantageous position for doing God's work than a slave who was fettered at every turn.'[29]

25. Henry Alford, *The Greek New Testament* (6 vols.; Boston and New York: Lee & Shepherd, 1874), II, p. 527.

26. Thomas Charles Edwards, *First Epistle to the Corinthians* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1885), p. 185.

27. F.L. Godet, *First Epistle to the Corinthians* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1886; repr., Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1957), 358-59.

28. J.B. Lightfoot, *Notes on the Epistles of St Paul* (London: Macmillan, 1895; repr., Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, Publishers, 1995), p. 229.

29. Lightfoot, *Notes on the Epistles of St Paul* p. 230.

Twentieth-Century Scholarship (1900–1972)

In spite of living in a post-slavery world, scholarship in the twentieth century did not come any closer to a consensus on how to interpret this verse. If anything, the record suggests that opinions became more fractured. In 1904, Adolf von Harnack, in a footnote in his *Mission und Ausbreitung des Christentums*, declares that 'the only possible sense of 1 Cor. 7.20f…is that the apostle counsels slaves not even to avail themselves of the chance of freedom'.[30] Johannes Weiss (1910) reaches the same conclusion on the basis of the context of the overall passage,[31] and William Ramsay (1913) believes that Paul's restriction against a slave seeking emancipation was an expansion of Jesus' teaching about seeking first the Kingdom of God.[32] Robertson and Plummer (1911), on the other hand, adopt a position similar to that of Godet and Lightfoot and conclude that the verse was a 'parenthetic mitigation given in passing' in which Paul's advice to the slave could be summarized as: 'Slavery is not intolerable for a Christian, but an opportunity for emancipation need not be refused'.[33]

It should be mentioned that while much of the discussion about this verse took place among Protestants, there was also some reaction from Catholic scholars. Some Catholics were wary of the abolitionist cause and considered it to be 'the fanaticism of the Reformation Saints'.[34] It was in response to those who considered the 'take freedom' interpretation to be a 'post-reformation error' that Alphons Steinmann published his *Paulus und die Sklaven zu Korinth: 1 Kor. 7, 21 aufs neue untersucht* (1911). Based on Paul's Jewish background, his understanding of the character of God and his conscience as a pastoral counselor, Steinmann concludes that Paul

30. Adolf von Harnack, *The Mission and Expansion of Christianity in the First Three Centuries* (trans. J. Moffatt; New York: Harper, 1962), p. 167 n. 4.

31. Johannes Weiss, *Der Erste Korinther Brief* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1910), pp. 187-88; *Earliest Christianity, A History of the Period A.D. 30–150* (trans. Frederick C. Grant; Gloucester, MA: Peter Smith, 1970), II, pp. 588-89 esp. n. 75; repr. of *The History of Primitive Christianity by Johannes Weiss, Completed after the Author's Death by Rudolph Knopf, Translated by Four Friends and Edited by Frederick C. Grant* [trans. F.C. Grant, A.H. Forster, P.S. Kramer, and S.E. Johnson; New York: Wilson-Erikson, 1937]; trans. of *Das Urchristentum. Nach dem Tode des Verfassers herausgegeben und am Schlusse ergänzt von Rudolph Knopf* [Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1917]).

32. William M. Ramsay, *The Teaching of Paul in Terms of the Present Day* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1913), pp. 249-50.

33. Archibald Robertson and Alfred Plummer, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (ICC; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1911), p. 148.

34. This label appeared in an editorial written in *U.S. Catholic Intelligencer*, Oct. 1, 1841, quoted in Madeleine Hooke Rice, *American Catholic Opinion in the Slavery Controversy* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1944), p. 77.

would not have advised slaves to reject the opportunity for manumission.[35] In what was in many ways a reaction to Steinmann, Francis Xavier Kiefl, a Roman Catholic scholar and dean of Regensburg Cathedral, wrote *Die Theorien des modernen Sozialismus über den Ursprung des Christentums: Zugleich ein Kommentar zu 1 Kor 7, 21* (1915).[36] Kiefel argues that Paul was ordering slaves to keep their place in slavery and not overturn the established social order. The exchange between these two continued throughout the decade with each of them drawing extensively on the history of interpretation but without adding any substantial arguments.[37]

In an article published in 1924, C. H. Dodd offered a brief contribution to the question from the standpoint of philology.[38] Dodd compares Paul's use of χρῆσαι in 1 Cor. 7.21 with a similar usage in a recently published papyrus:

> Καὶ πολλάκις ἐξ[ἦν γράψαι σοι περὶ τοῦ κεφαλαίου τούτου] καὶ προσδοκον (*leg.* προσδοκῶν) καθ᾽ ἑκάστην καταλαμβά[νειν ἐκεῖσε] τούτου ἕνεκεν οὐκ ἐχρησάμην ἄλλην γράψαι ἄλλοις γράμμα[σι]ν : *ib.* 12-13 καὶ πρὸς τὸ γνῶναι τὸν ἐμὸν δεσπότην ἐχρησάμην παρακαλῶν διὰ τούτον (*leg.* τούτων) μου τῶν γραμμάτων (P. Oxy. XVI 1865, 4ff.).
>
> I had many opportunities of writing to you concerning this matter, and expecting each day to come thither, for that reason *did not avail myself* of them to write another Letter over again… That my master may know this *I took the opportunity* of exhorting you by this my writing.

Dodd argues that the fragment 'favours the rendering of the Pauline passage – "If you actually have before you the possibility of becoming free, avail yourself of it by preference". In effect the object of χρῆσαι is supplied from the sense of δύνασαι exactly as in the papyrus it is supplied from the sense of ἐξῆν.'[39] Unfortunately, a single example, dated to the sixth or

35. Alphons Steinmann, *Paulus und die Sklaven zu Korinth: 1 Kor. 7, 21 aufs neue untersucht* (Braunsberg: Verlag Hans Grimme, 1911). One year earlier Steinmann had published a pamphlet entitled *Sklavenlos und alte Kirche: Eine historisch-exegetische Studie über die soziale Frage im Urchristentum* (Apologetische Tagesfragen, 8; Gladbach: Volksvereins Verlag, 4th edn, 1922]), in which he devoted seven pages to the topic of Paul and slaves at Corinth. Bartchy, *ΜΑΛΛΟΝ ΧΡΗΣΑΙ*, p. 2; Harrill, *The Manumission of Slaves*, p. 83.

36. Francis Xavier Kiefl, *Die Theorien des modernen Sozialismus über den Ursprung des Christentums: Zugleich ein Kommentar zu 1 Kor 7, 21*(Munich: J. Kösel, 1915).

37. Alphons Steinmann, 'Zur Geschichte der Auslegung von 1 Kor 7,21', *TRev* 15–16 (1917), pp. 340-48; Kiefl, 'Erklärung', *TRev* 15–16 (1917), p. 469; Steinmann, 'Antwort', *TRev* 15–16 (1917), pp. 469-70; Bartchy, *ΜΑΛΛΟΝ ΧΡΗΣΑΙ*, pp. 2-3; Harrill, *The Manumission of Slaves*, pp. 84-85.

38. C.H. Dodd, 'Notes from Papyri', *JTS* 26 (1924–25), pp. 77-78.

39. Dodd, 'Notes', pp. 77-78.

seventh century, detracts, as Dodd concedes, from the value of the comparison. Margaret Thrall would later consider it unconvincing since

> in the papyrus there is only one possible object which the rest of the sentence provides for χρῆσαι, but in the Pauline example the difficulty consists precisely in the fact that two different, and conflicting, objects are possible. Dodd favors δύνασαι, but it could equally well be maintained that the object is to be supplied from the sense of the preceding δοῦλος ἐκλήθης, which gives an entirely opposite meaning.[40]

The brevity of the article combined with the problems of dating perhaps led to the neglect of Dodd's contribution. But Dodd's suggestion marks the first time that syntactical parallels were used to illumine lexical relationships with the aim of interpreting 1 Cor. 7.21.[41] As we will see below, the same approach would be taken up in more detail by J.A. Harrill 70 years later.

For almost fifty years there was little in the way of new arguments added to support either side of the debate. As others have noted, it is ironic that in the same volume of Gerhard Kittel's *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, Karl Heinrich Rengstorf, in his article on δοῦλος chose to add τῇ ἐλευθερίᾳ while Heinrich Schlier, writing on ἐλεύθερος, opted to add τῇ δουλείᾳ.[42]

There was a subtle shift in opinions, however. While some scholars opted for the 'use freedom' interpretation,[43] there was an increasing preponderance to favor the 'use slavery' interpretation.[44] This is apparent when we read such statements like: 'the apostle's answer is remarkably

40. Margaret E. Thrall, *Greek Particles in the New Testament: Linguistic and Exegetical Studies* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1962), pp. 78-79.

41. Harrill, *The Manumission of Slaves*, p. 83.

42. Thrall, *Greek Particles*, p. 79; Bartchy, *First-Century Slavery*, p. 5 n. 11; Harrill, pp. 93-94; K.H. Rengstorf, 'δοῦλος', *TDNT* (1964), II, p. 272; H. Schlier, 'ἐλεύθερος', *TDNT* (1964), II, p. 501.

43. Coleman-Norton, 'The Apostle Paul and the Roman Law of Slavery', p. 162; W.D. Davies, *Paul and Rabbinic Judaism* (London: SPCK, 1958), p. 71; Leon Morris, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1958), p. 114; Thrall, *Greek Particles*, p. 81; Darrell Doughty, 'Heiligkeit und Freiheit: Eine exegetische Untersuchung der Anwendung des paulinischen Freiheitsgedankens in I Kor 7' (PhD diss., Göttingen, 1965).

44. Schweitzer, *The Mysticism of Paul the Apostle*, p. 194; Samuel Belkin, 'The Problem of Paul's Background', *JBL* 52 (1935), pp. 55-60; J.N. Sevenster, *Paul and Seneca* (NovTSup, 4; Leiden: Brill, 1961), p. 189; C.K. Barrett, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (London: A. & C. Black, 1971), pp. 170-71; James E. Crouch, *The Origin and Intention of the Colossian Haustafeln* (FRLANT, 109; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1972), pp. 122-26; Siegfried Schulz, *Gott is kein Sklavenhalter: Die Geschichte einer verspäteten Revolution* (Zurich: Flamberg; Hamburg: Furche Verlag, 1972), p. 170.

conservative'[45] since 'he can recommend a slave not to take advantage of possible release, let alone strive for it'[46] and views civil freedom as 'merely a civil affair', whereas 'in the church it is of no value'.[47] There were some contributions, to be sure, that added a more nuanced approach to their interpretation of the verse, but many still opted for 'use slavery'.[48]

In 1959, E. Neuhäusler wrote an article on theological aspects of 1 Corinthians 7 with a particular focus on v. 20.[49] He suggests that the 'use slavery' interpretation of 1 Cor. 7.21 is correct and that Paul was not saying that slaves *should* use slavery but that they *could* use slavery.[50] While this represents a possible new understanding of Paul's words, Neuhäusler offers no support that Paul's statement was non-obligatory.[51]

Heinz Bellen represents an important shift in the history of this verse's interpretation.[52] Bellen was not a NT scholar or theologian, but a Roman historian. As such, his interest in 1 Cor. 7.21 was the result of a larger project devoted to studying ancient slavery. His approach to the problem was to consider the verse in the context of all of ch. 7 and the social setting of Roman slavery. Bellen notes that throughout the chapter, Paul encourages a form of asceticism. Paul provides the reader with two possible courses of action, both of which he accepts as valid, but one of which is the preferred. In the case of 7.21, Bellen concludes that Paul's statement to slaves follows the same line of thinking and, therefore, slaves should remain in slavery. Just as the better choice for Christians is not to become married, so too a slave should chose not to become free.[53] The significance

45. Günther Bornkamm, *Paul* (trans. D.M.G. Stalker; New York: Harper & Row, 1971), p. 209.

46. Käsemann, *New Testament Questions of Today*, p. 215.

47. Hans Conzelmann, *1 Corinthians: A Commentary* (trans. J.W. Leitch; Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1975), p. 127.

48. One exception is F.W. Grosheide who anticipated Bartchy's thesis by twenty years when he suggested that the phrase be completed with neither 'freedom' nor 'slavery'. 'We must keep in mind that in this verse the vocation stands in the center. This prompts us to supply the words "your vocation" after *use*. The phrase would thus mean: if you can be free, make a better use of your vocation' (*The First Epistle to the Corinthians* [NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1953], p. 170).

49. E. Neuhäusler, 'Ruf Gottes und Stand des Christen: Bemerkungen zu 1 Kor. 7', *BZ* 3 (1959), pp. 43-60.

50. Neuhäusler, 'Ruf Gottes', p. 51.

51. See comments in Bartchy, *ΜΑΛΛΟΝ ΧΡΗΣΑΙ*, p. 19; Harrill, *The Manumission of Slaves*, pp. 86-87.

52. Heinz Bellen, 'Μᾶλλον χρῆσαι (1 Cor. 7, 21): Verzicht auf Freilassung als asketische Leistung?', *JAC* 6 (1963), pp. 177-80; See also his *Studien zur Sklavenflucht im römischen Kaiserreich* (FAS, 4; Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner, 1971), pp. 147-54.

53. Bellen, 'Μᾶλλον χρῆσαι', p. 179.

of Bellen's contribution is its avoidance of a myopic approach that interpreted the passage only through a theological lens. There was as yet no attempt to interpret the verse that gave serious consideration to the social setting of slavery, and Bellen's worked help to lay the groundwork for future investigations.[54]

Following Bellen was Henneke Gülzow (1969).[55] Gülzow placed the discussion of NT slavery into three periods. The first period includes the Epistles to the Romans, Corinthians and Philemon, which were written under an expectation of an imminent Parousia. The second period includes Colossians and Ephesians when expectation of the Parousia was beginning to wane and there was a need to stabilize Christian households. The third period includes 1 Timothy when persecution of the Church was increasing and Christian slaves needed to obey their unbelieving masters with the hope of converting them.

Gülzow describes the first period as a time when most Christian slaves were owned by Christian masters, and the harsh realities of slavery were masked. In examination of 1 Cor. 7.21, Gülzow notes that a slave who became free would still retain some level of obligation to his former master.[56] Consequently, the situation of a freedman could be more unpleasant than that of a slave since the slave would have lost the 'benefits' of slavery but retained some of the responsibilities. In context of the expectation of the imminent Parousia, the possible negative effects that freedom could have on a slave, and because the majority opinion of scholars favored the 'use slavery' interpretation,[57] Gülzow concludes that the most natural reading was 'remain in slavery'.[58]

S. Scott Bartchy (1973)

With the 1973 publication of his dissertation, *ΜΑΛΛΟΝ ΧΡΗΣΑΙ: First-Century Slavery and 1 Corinthians 7.21*, S. Scott Bartchy provided what was at the time the most comprehensive examination of the elliptical phrase at the end of 1 Cor. 7.21.

Bartchy outlines the conflicting conclusions of his predecessors and notes that interpretation of the verse usually depends on the methodology used. Those who examines 7.21 from a grammatical point of view typically opt for the 'take freedom' interpretation. Those who stress the

54. Harrill, *The Manumission of Slaves*, p. 87.

55. Henneke Gülzow, *Christentum und Sklaverei in den ersten drei Jahrhunderten* (Bonn: Rudolf Habelt, 1969).

56. Gülzow, *Christentum und Sklaverei*, pp. 177-81.

57. Gülzow was following Weiss, *Der Erste Korinther Brief*, p. 188.

58. Gülzow, *Christentum und Sklaverei*, p. 179; Bartchy, *ΜΑΛΛΟΝ ΧΡΗΣΑΙ*, pp. 17-18; Harrill, *The Manumission of Slaves*, pp. 90-91.

overall context of ch. 7 prefer the 'use slavery' interpretation. In fact, those interested primarily in theological issues seem to favor the 'use slavery' interpretation because it portrays a supposed attitude of humility that sounds more religious.[59] On the other hand, those whose method is solely historical or philological often neglected the literary context and broader issues of Pauline theology.[60] Bartchy considers both methods to be incomplete. His approach includes a consideration of (1) slavery in the first century CE; (2) the important themes and overall context of 1 Corinthians; (3) the structure and argument in ch. 7 with a particular focus on vv. 17-24; and (4) exegesis of 7.21.

One challenge confronting interpreters was what Bartchy describes as the 'lack of any serious, full-scale history of slavery in the Greco-Roman world'.[61] Moreover, NT scholars did not seem to be concerned with establishing the social and legal situation of slaves in Corinth. 'The term δοῦλος seems to have gained its content from "general knowledge" rather than from historical investigation.'[62] In response to this dearth of information, Bartchy provided an examination of slavery in the first century CE that made up almost one-half of the book and represented the first such investigation by a NT scholar.

Bartchy's portrayal of Greco-Roman slavery is based on an analysis of Greek, Roman and Jewish legal texts. Supplementing these is a variety of philosophical, historical and satirical literature. While acknowledging that slavery was far from the ideal situation,[63] he concludes that the first century 'was a time in which living conditions for those in slavery was improving; legal action and public opinion supported better treatment of slaves'.[64] Slaves were said to have the advantage of 'job security' over poor free persons[65] and could expect to be freed by age 30.[66] Life as a slave was attractive enough that many persons willingly sold themselves into slavery with the intention of climbing socially and gaining personal and social security.[67] Bartchy asserts that the treatment of slaves living under Jewish law was so good that Jews anxious to sell themselves were unable to find Jewish purchasers.[68] The lack of any serious slave revolts in the first

59. Bartchy, *ΜΑΛΛΟΝ ΧΡΗΣΑΙ*, pp. 23-24.
60. Bartchy, *ΜΑΛΛΟΝ ΧΡΗΣΑΙ*, p. 25.
61. Bartchy, *ΜΑΛΛΟΝ ΧΡΗΣΑΙ*, p. 30.
62. Bartchy, *ΜΑΛΛΟΝ ΧΡΗΣΑΙ*, p. 25.
63. Bartchy, *ΜΑΛΛΟΝ ΧΡΗΣΑΙ*, p. 46.
64. Bartchy, *ΜΑΛΛΟΝ ΧΡΗΣΑΙ*, p. 71.
65. Bartchy, *ΜΑΛΛΟΝ ΧΡΗΣΑΙ*, p. 75.
66. Bartchy, *ΜΑΛΛΟΝ ΧΡΗΣΑΙ*, p. 85.
67. Bartchy, *ΜΑΛΛΟΝ ΧΡΗΣΑΙ*, p. 116.
68. Bartchy, *ΜΑΛΛΟΝ ΧΡΗΣΑΙ*, p. 52.

century suggests that slaves had become relatively content with their role in society.[69]

Bartchy's investigation led him to the conclusion that slaves had no choice of whether to be slave or free. Manumission was a decision left to the master who need not consult the slave. Thus any interpretations of 1 Cor. 7.21 that suggests the slave should reject the opportunity for freedom and remain enslaved are questionable.[70] It would have been impossible, Bartchy argues, for slaves to obey Paul's supposed command by rejecting freedom and using slavery as an opportunity for the gospel. Consequently, the 'use slavery' interpretation is not suitable from a legal and social context. Furthermore, because slaves had no choice regarding to their future, choosing to 'use freedom' is not an option either.[71]

Paul, according to Bartchy, was responding to the situation in the Corinthian church with his 'theology of calling'.[72] Some Corinthian church members had allowed their self-perception of 'exaltation with Christ' to distort their view of religious and social status. Bartchy suggests that the literary context of 7.21 is a side comment in a larger discussion of how the new life in Christ affected Corinthian self-understanding. Paul was not, therefore, addressing any particular problems of slaves in Corinth but was providing an example of how neither social nor religious statuses are influenced by the new life in Christ. Persons who were married, circumcised, or enslaved when 'called' to Christ should not seek to change their social or religious status based upon their conversion. They are to be more concerned with keeping the commandments of God.

It is in this context that Bartchy examined the μᾶλλον χρῆσαι phrase. He notes the prominence of the verb χράομαι in the works of Josephus where it is often used with the phrase τοῖς νόμοις. The combination of these two phrases was part of an exhortation to keep the laws of God or some particular aspect of Jewish lifestyle.[73] Taking this into account, Bartchy suggests that in the context of Paul's 'theology of calling', μᾶλλον χρῆσαι should be understood as an exhortation to newly freed slaves to continue keeping the commands of God as befits their calling in Christ. Thus, 7.21 should be interpreted neither as an exhortation for slaves to 'seize an opportunity for freedom' nor to 'remain in slavery', but instead to 'remain faithful to the call of God' on their life and the stipulations that surround it.[74] Bartchy's suggested translation of 1 Cor. 7.21 is: 'Were you

69. Bartchy, *ΜΑΛΛΟΝ ΧΡΗΣΑΙ*, pp. 85-87.
70. Bartchy, *ΜΑΛΛΟΝ ΧΡΗΣΑΙ*, p. 106.
71. Bartchy, *ΜΑΛΛΟΝ ΧΡΗΣΑΙ*, pp. 110-14.
72. Bartchy, *ΜΑΛΛΟΝ ΧΡΗΣΑΙ*, pp. 132-36.
73. Bartchy, *ΜΑΛΛΟΝ ΧΡΗΣΑΙ*, pp. 155-57.
74. Bartchy, *ΜΑΛΛΟΝ ΧΡΗΣΑΙ*, p. 159.

a slave when you were called? Don't worry about it. But if, indeed, your owner should manumit you, by all means (now as a freedman) live according to God's call'.[75]

New Testament Scholarship after Bartchy (1974–1995)

As noted in Chapter 1, Bartchy's contribution made a lasting impression on NT scholarship. Of particular influence was his portrayal of first-century slavery as it provided an accessible outline of the topic that was framed to meet the needs of NT scholars. Once again, a survey of numerous commentaries, Bible dictionaries and articles will demonstrate the degree to which NT scholarship came to depend on Bartchy for an understanding of slavery. Less convincing, however, was his suggestion of how to complete Paul's elliptical phrase.

In a review of the book, C.K. Barrett (1975) expresse skepticism of Bartchy's suggestion for completing 7.21 and was particularly critical of Bartchy's failure to translate the word δυνάσαι:

> This omission obtrudes itself repeatedly in the book; it is briefly discussed on pp. 176f., but is certainly not justified. And the point is vital. In some cases, but not all, it is (or so at least Paul thinks) within the power of the Corinthian slave to secure his manumission. Shall he do so or not? This is the question, and the answer will be either Yes or No. I think it is No; there are better men who think it is Yes. But even after reading this learned book I find it hard to accept that it is not one or the other.[76]

Dieter Lührmann (1975) is also unconvinced by Bartchy and, following Heinz Bellen, argues that: 'Vom Kontext her ist nun auch selbstverständlich τῇ δουλείᾳ zu denken: „auch wenn du ein Freier werden kannst, bleibe um so lieber Sklave'. Nur diese Ergänzung ist sinnvoll angesichts der durchgehaltenen Mahnung, in dem zu bleiben, was man ist.'[77]

Peter Trummer (1975) found some aspects of Bartchy's argument convincing and even complementary to his own hypothesis, but he did not adopt Bartchy's suggestion for completing Paul's words.[78] Trummer believes that the most natural interpretation of 1 Cor. 7.21 is 'take

75. Bartchy, *ΜΑΛΛΟΝ ΧΡΗΣΑΙ*, p. 159.

76. C.K. Barrett, review of *ΜΑΛΛΟΝ ΧΡΗΣΑΙ: First-Century Slavery and 1 Corinthians 7.21* (SBLDS, 11; Missoula, MT: Society of Biblical Literature, 1973), by S. Scott Bartchy, in *JTS* 26 (1975), p. 174.

77. Dieter Lührmann, 'Wo man nicht mehr Sklave oder Freier ist: Überlegungen zur Struktur frühchristlicher Gemeinden', *WD* 13 (1975), p. 62.

78. Peter Trummer, 'Die Chance der Freiheit: Zur Interpretation des μᾶλλον χρῆσαι in 1 Kor 7, 21', *Bib* 56 (1975), pp. 344-68. Trummer critiqued Bartchy in an addendum to his article (pp. 367-68).

freedom'.[79] He supports his conclusion through an appeal to the structure of the chapter in which Paul's comments on circumcision and slavery are part of an overall discussion of marriage. Trummer opposes Bellen's contention, however, that Paul promotes an ascetic lifestyle.[80] Freedom was not being denied to the slave, Trummer argues, but rather a new social context was being offered for the slave to live according to God's call.[81] Instead of viewing Paul as supporting conservative ideals, Trummer claims that the apostle had actually started a quiet revolution that not only led to a new relationship between masters and slaves but also had socio-legal consequences.[82]

Yet another study of the problem was published by Norbert Baumert in 1986 entitled *Ehelosigkeit und Ehe im Herren: Eine Neuinterpretation von 1 Kor 7*.[83] He restated his conclusions ten years later in *Woman and Man in Paul: Overcoming a Misunderstanding*.[84] Baumert notes that the principal stream of commentators from Chrysostom to the modern period view, Paul as advising the slave not to accept an offer of freedom.[85] Nevertheless, after a review of the numerous semantic and syntactic questions embedded in the verse, Baumert concludes that the best interpretation is one which understands Paul as telling the slave to accept freedom if such an offer is made.[86] Along with Trummer, he rejects Bartchy's proposed translation of 7.21, 'by all means [as a freedman] live according to [God's calling]', based on a study of the context and lexical evidence and, like Barrett, criticizes Bartchy for ignoring the force of δυνάσαι which gives the slave a clear opportunity to make a decision.[87] Consequently, and in contrast to Bartchy, Baumert argues that the offer of freedom did not have to be accepted. Baumert understood the force of 'rather' (μᾶλλον) to

79. Trummer, 'Die Chance der Freiheit', p. 357.

80. Trummer, 'Die Chance der Freiheit', p. 355.

81. 'Die paulinische These vom Verbleiben in der göttlichen Berufung darf also nicht als grundsätzliche Konservierung von Unterdrückungsstrukturen mißdeutet warden' ('Die Chance der Freiheit', p. 364).

82. '…eine stille Revolution der Gesinnung, welche nicht nur zu einem neuen Verhältnis von Herren und Sklaven, sondern auch zu sichtbaren sozialrechtlichen Konsequenzen führen konnte' ('Die Chance der Freiheit', p. 364).

83. Norbert Baumert, *Ehelosigkeit und Ehe im Herren: Eine Neuinterpretation von 1 Kor 7* (FB, 47; Würzburg: Echter Verlag, 2nd edn, 1986).

84. Norbert Baumert, *Woman and Man in Paul: Overcoming a Misunderstanding* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1996).

85. Baumert, *Woman and Man in Paul*, pp. 70-71.

86. Baumert, *Ehelosigkeit und Ehe im Herren*, pp. 114-51, esp. 120; *Woman and Man in Paul*, p. 71.

87. Baumert, *Ehelosigkeit und Ehe im Herren*, pp. 131-32 n. 266, 141 n. 278; Baumert, *Woman and Man in Paul*, p. 71.

indicate 'that one could also, with right, forego these opportunities, for example, if one was too old or lacked self-confidence, or if freedom would make excessive demands upon one'.[88] In support of his reading, Baumert points out that besides the Epistle to Philemon and Ignatius, *Letter to Polycarp* 4.3, and in spite of Chrysostom and the principal stream of scholarship, 'there is scarcely any indication in the tradition of anyone placing an obstacle to the freeing of a slave by invoking this text, or of slaves who declined such an offer being celebrated as heroes'.[89] Finally, he rejects the 'supposed deeper theological reasons' (e.g., religious humility) for the other interpretations and claimed that through his interpretation 'the rug is pulled out from under every rigidity [*sic*] and "every social conservatism".'[90]

In spite of the significant contributions made towards solving the problem of interpreting 7.21 in the two decades following Bartchy, consensus among scholars remained elusive. For instance, W.F. Orr and J.A. Walther (1976) opted for the 'use slavery' interpretation and conclude that 'the slave could *make use* of his status, undoubtedly for Christian witness'.[91] Gordon Fee (1986), on the other hand, opted for 'use freedom' and although he accepts Bartchy's contention that a slave could not reject manumission,[92] he finds Bartchy's interpretive solution unpersuasive and the appeal to Josephus as not lending confidence to his interpretation.[93] And thus it continued. Some scholars opted for 'use freedom'[94] while others opted for 'use slavery'.[95] There are three other studies, however, that deserve a detailed discussion.

88. Baumert, *Woman and Man in Paul*, p. 71.

89. Baumert, *Woman and Man in Paul*, p. 72.

90. Baumert, *Woman and Man in Paul*, pp. 73-74.

91. William F. Orr and James Arthur Walther, *1 Corinthians* (AB, 32; Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1976), pp. 215, 217.

92. Fee concluded that slaves did not have a choice and therefore were to make the best of their entrance in to freedom (*The First Epistle of the Corinthians*, p. 318).

93. Fee, *The First Epistle of the Corinthians*, pp. 316-17 n. 48.

94. G. Corcoran, 'Slavery in the NT, 2', *Mils* 6 (1980), pp. 69-72; Bruce Fanning, *Verbal Aspect in New Testament Greek* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990), pp. 367-68; S.R. Llewelyn, 'If you can gain your freedom: Manumission and 1 Cor. 7.21', in S.R. Llewelyn (ed.), *New Documents Illustrating Early Christianity* (Sydney, Australia: The Ancient History Document Research Centre [Macquarie University], 1992), p. 69; Brian S. Rosner, *Paul, Scripture and Ethics: A Study of 1 Corinthians 5–7* (AGJU, 22; Leiden: Brill, 1994), p. 174.

95. Franz Laub, *Die Begegnung des frühen Christentums mit der antiken Sklaverei* (SBS, 107; Stuttgart: Verlag Katholisches Bibelwerk, 1982), pp. 63-67; Dimitris J. Kyrtatas, *The Social Structure of the Early Christian Communities* (London: Verso, 1987), pp. 33, 63; Margaret M. Mitchell, *Paul and the Rhetoric of Reconciliation: An Exegetical Investigation of the Language and Composition of 1 Corinthians* (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox

The first is that of Allan Callahan (1989–90) who suggests that 1 Cor. 7.21 is best understood in the context of ecclesial manumission.[96] According to Callahan, Paul's statements in 7.21-23 were a response to church-funded manumission. Based on similar situations found in *1 Clement* 55.2 and Ignatius, *Ad Polycarpum* 4.3, Callahan argues that individuals in the church were selling themselves into slavery in order to gain money for a community chest that could then be used to buy back others who were enslaved. Paul's admonishment in 7.23, 'you were bought with a price, don't become slaves of men', was intended to stop people who had become freedmen from reselling themselves into slavery in order to donate towards the church's manumission fund. The elliptical statement in 7.21 was Paul's attempt at preventing believers in the church from thinking of themselves in some way as a slave.[97] While this represented a very different approach to the problem, it has won few adherents.[98]

A second study is a 1990 article by Gregory Dawes.[99] Dawes approaches the passage by considering it in light of the Greco-Latin rhetorical technique of *digressio* as outlined in Quintilian's handbook (IV 3.14).[100] When encountered, the *digressio* can appear to be a distraction from the main theme. But 'the difference', according to Dawes, is that 'what appears to be a 'wandering away' from the main theme is actually *ad utilitatem causae pertinens*. If the speaker deals with another topic, it is only to illustrate or further explain the matter being discussed'.[101]

Dawes demonstrates how Paul uses the technique in 1 Corinthians. When the apostle does use *digression*, he also uses a pair of illustrations, not just one. Dawes demonstrates this usage in 1 Cor. 3.5-15 where Paul uses the double imagery of a field (vv. 5-9) and of a building (vv. 10-15).

Press, 1991), pp. 121-25; A.A. Rupprecht, 'Slave, Slavery', in *Dictionary of Paul and his Letters* (ed. G.F. Hawthorne, R.P. Martin, and D.G. Reid; Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1993), p. 882. One exception to the rule, however, was Stanly Porter's adoption of Bartchy's translation (*Verbal Aspect in the Greek New Testament, with Reference to Tense and Mood* [New York: Peter Lang, 1993], pp. 357-58).

96. Allen Callahan, 'A Note on 1 Corinthians 7.21', *Journal of the Interdenominational Theological Center* 17 (1989–90), pp. 110-14.

97. Callahan, 'A Note on 1 Corinthians 7.21', p. 113.

98. For a more detailed discussion of Callahan's article, see Chapter 2 above. See also the critical comments made by Harrill, *The Manumission of Slaves*, p. 107.

99. Gregory Dawes, '"But if you can gain your freedom" (1 Corinthians 7.17-24)', *CBQ* 52 (1990), pp. 681-97.

100. Dawes notes that he is not the first to comment on the rhetorical aspects of 1 Corinthians. Johannes Weiss had already noticed this at the beginning of the twentieth century (*Erste Korintherbrief*, p. xliii). But Dawes does not think that sufficient attention has been given to 7.17-24 as an example ('But if you can gain your freedom', pp. 683-84).

101. Dawes, 'But if you can gain your freedom', pp. 683-84.

While both may appear to be making the same point, they have different purposes. The field imagery is directed at the community and intended to identify the role of the apostles (Paul and Apollos) while the building imagery is intended to serve as a warning to individuals (rather than the community) who may follow Paul's ministry in Corinth. The reason for the change in metaphors, Dawes argues, is because the field imagery was too limiting and did not communicate the kind of care required to build the Church. Thus, the change in imagery signaled a shift in emphasis and a new direction in Paul's argumentation.[102]

When examining 7.21 Dawes notes that many of those who adopt the 'use slavery' interpretation do so because of the immediate context. He argues, however, that an appreciation of Paul's argumentation style contradicts such an interpretation. After a review of the lexical and syntactical arguments for the 'use slavery' interpretation, Dawes concludes that the best translation of 7.21 is: 'But if indeed you can become free, by all means make use of [this opportunity to gain your freedom]'.[103]

Finally, Dawes addresses the function of the illustrations of circumcision and slavery together with Paul's discussion of marriage and celibacy. He notes that in the mind of Paul's readers, both images would have what Dawes calls a 'positive pole' and a 'negative pole'. Gentile Christians familiar with the OT would have noticed the importance of circumcision and would have also been familiar with questions about its importance for salvation. Slavery, even if not considered incompatible with salvation, would certainly be considered undesirable. Dawes suggests that Paul chose these illustrations because the Corinthians had a 'positive' and a 'negative pole' in regards to marriage and celibacy; celibacy was seen positively, marriage negatively. Paul's response to these views is not to promote one over the other, but to instead relativize them both.[104] In light of this, Dawes describes the function of Paul's illustrations.

> To counter this temptation with regard to marriage and celibacy the apostle first of all brings forward the case of circumcision, which illustrates perfectly the rule of vv. 17, 20, 24 (and 27), that each should remain in the state

102. Dawes, 'But if you can gain your freedom', p. 687.

103. Dawes, 'But if you can gain your freedom', pp. 690-92. Harrill seems to have misunderstood Dawes's argument when he notes that Dawes sides with Chrysostom and other patristic commentators who favored the 'use slavery' interpretation (*The Manumission of Slaves*, p. 105). Dawes also gave consideration to Bartchy's interpretation and, while agreeing that there were probably certain legal restrictions on the slaves' ability to accept or reject manumission, finds his suggestion unconvincing for many of the same reasons listed by Barrett and Fee (Dawes, 'But if you can gain your freedom', pp. 693-94).

104. Dawes, 'But if you can gain your freedom', p. 695.

> in which he was called. And yet because the matter was more complex than this, and because Paul could see that there was some advantage to celibacy, he brings forward another example, slavery. This second example illustrates both the ultimate indifference of one's state of life (v. 21a) *and* the possibility of having a preference where circumstances allow (v. 21b).[105]

Dawes's contribution offered significant, new insights to solving the interpretation of 1 Cor. 7.21. Rather than focus on syntax and lexical arguments alone, the consideration of rhetoric provided the supporters of the 'use freedom' interpretation with an important argument for understanding how the illustrations work in the context of ch. 7.

Will Deming's study (1995) also gave consideration to the implications of rhetoric when interpreting this passage.[106] Deming isolated a distinctive diatribe pattern in 1 Corinthians 7 that occurs in other Hellenistic authors.[107] The pattern consists of two, sometimes three, elements: (1) a statement of fact is given in the form of a rhetorical question, often in the direct address of the second-person plural; (2) the question is followed by an imperative which denies that the statement has any significance for the person's life; and (3) a statement is sometimes added to explain why the statement of fact should be treated with indifference. Examples of this pattern can be found in the works of Teles, Philo, Seneca and Epictetus.[108]

According to Deming, the pattern also occurs five times in 1 Cor. 7.18-19, 21-22, and 27. But the pattern is interrupted in 7.21b with a qualification. Paul was unable to complete his Jew/Greek, slave/free paradigm because, unlike circumcision, he could not argue both sides of slavery. The imperative would be nonsensical if Paul had said 'You were called as a freeman?—do not become a slave!' or 'You were called as a freeman?—do not let it concern you!'[109] Deming notes that normally in this diatribe pattern the imperative was meant not so much as a command but as a rebuff to do the opposite of what one was naturally inclined to do—'a rhetorical slap in the face'.[110] But Paul's statement in 7.21b alters the pattern. If he wanted to sound like a supporter of the status quo, he would not have needed to add the mitigating phrase in 7.21b. 'Indeed, such

105. Dawes, 'But if you can gain your freedom', p. 697.

106. Will Deming, 'A Diatribe Pattern in 1 Cor. 7.21-22: A New Perspective on Paul's Directions to Slaves', *NovT* 37 (1995), pp. 130-37.

107. Deming acknowledged that he is not the first to notice the diatribe pattern in Paul's argumentation, but no one had isolated the specific pattern he discovered ('A Diatribe Pattern in 1 Cor. 7.21-22', p. 130).

108. Deming, 'A Diatribe Pattern in 1 Cor. 7.21-22', pp. 131-32.

109. Deming, 'A Diatribe Pattern in 1 Cor. 7.21-22', p. 133.

110. Deming, 'A Diatribe Pattern in 1 Cor. 7.21-22', p. 135.

emphatic rhetoric would betray him as something of an activist, vehemently opposing the idea of manumission… Paul's choice of the imperative in 7.21a may itself indicate that he wishes to *mitigate*, not increase, the rhetorical impact of the verse'.[111] Consequently, Deming concludes that 1 Cor. 7.21 be understood as saying 'that while Christian slaves should regard their disenfranchised state as a matter of indifference, they should not, as a consequence, forego an opportunity to gain their freedom'.[112] Similar to Dawes, Deming's identification of the diatribe pattern provides more support for those who favored the 'use freedom' interpretation of the verse.

J. Albert Harrill (1995)

The most significant challenge to Bartchy's depiction of first-century slavery as well as his interpretation of 1 Cor. 7.21 appeared in 1995. J.A. Harrill's dissertation *The Manumission of Slaves in Early Christianity* represented fresh thinking on a host of issues related to Paul and slavery.

Harrill outlines a summary of ancient slavery using Orlando Patterson's 'social death' hermeneutic and the dependent labor hermeneutic of M.I. Finley in order to paint a picture of slavery in antiquity that was less than positive.[113] Moreover, he establishes that the manumission of slaves was a subject that needed to be addressed.[114] This is particularly the case in NT studies since a number of scholars assume that slaves did not have the legal right to refuse manumission. These scholars import this assumption into their interpretation of 1 Cor. 7.21 and conclude that it was impossible for a slave to refuse manumission if offered. Harrill demonstrates, however, that it was possible for slaves to refuse manumission and provided examples from antiquity when slaves were offered freedom, but turned down the opportunity.[115]

In an extended review, Harrill criticizes Bartchy's portrayal of slavery and challenges assertions made by Bartchy, namely that (1) the lack of a slave revolt proves slave 'contentment'; (2) numerous persons sold themselves into slavery in order to better their lives; and (3) slave-owners treated their slaves like children.[116] He also finds methodological problems with the way Bartchy used legal codes.

> Too often he speaks of 'Greek', 'Roman', and 'Jewish' law as if they composed monolithic institutions. He continually claims that 'in Greek law' this

111. Deming, 'A Diatribe Pattern in 1 Cor. 7.21-22', p. 135.
112. Deming, 'A Diatribe Pattern in 1 Cor. 7.21-22', p. 137.
113. Harrill, *The Manumission of Slaves*, pp. 1, 15-17, 67.
114. Harrill, *The Manumission of Slaves*, p. 53.
115. Harrill, *The Manumission of Slaves*, pp. 88-89.
116. Harrill, *The Manumission of Slaves*, pp. 96-97.

> happens, 'in Roman law' that happens, and 'in Jewish law' the following occurs, as if law codes reflect actual behavior or even themselves 'act'. As we saw in chapter 1, this method is at best inappropriate given the scattered and fragmentary nature of the primary sources and at worst highly misleading in its use of laws as positive indicators of social practice. Because of his juridical hermeneutic, Bartchy paints a picture of first-century slavery as it was legally defined, not as it was actually practiced. He mistakes legal history for all history.[117]

Finally, Harrill finds Bartchy's completion of Paul's brachylogy in 1 Cor. 7.21 unpersuasive. 'His elliptical translation, bending the clause back to supply 'calling' as the object of the verb, is doubtful'.[118]

Harrill's approach to solving the problem of 1 Cor. 7.21 picked up the task where C.H. Dodd left it in 1924, with a consideration of philology. Using the *Thesaurus linguae graecae* CD-ROM, Harrill collected seventeen examples from fourteen different authors with which he compared the syntax of μᾶλλον χρῆσαι in 1 Corinthians 7.21.[119] From his comparison Harrill concludes that the μᾶλλον χρῆσαι phrase was not being contrasted with a situation ('if indeed you can become free') but with a course of action ('do not worry about it').

> The adverb μᾶλλον is adversative not to its protasis ('if you can indeed become free'), but to the previous apodosis ('do not worry about it'). A different situation calls for a different course of action. If manumission *is* offered, then the slave *should* be concerned. Manumission places new responsibilities upon the Christian slave. In the first situation, being a slave, Paul directs one course of action and tells the slave *not* to be concerned and to 'use slavery instead' (of worrying about becoming free). In the second situation, becoming free through manumission, Paul directs a different course of action and orders the slave *to be concerned* and to 'use freedom instead' (of remaining a slave). The 'if' clause of 7.21 sets up the second situation. Paul directs the person in the second situation to a different course of action ('use your becoming free instead').[120]

Harrill summarizes his findings by suggesting that Paul included the exception for slaves due to the nature of the city of Corinth. Since it was a Roman colony, the norms of Roman manumission would apply to 1 Cor. 7.21. 'By permitting the manumission exception within his wider discussion of marriage, Paul makes room in his theology for the institutionalized exercise of manumission.'[121]

117. Harrill, *The Manumission of Slaves*, p. 99.
118. Harrill, *The Manumission of Slaves*, p. 101.
119. Harrill, *The Manumission of Slaves*, p. 109.
120. Harrill, *The Manumission of Slaves*, p. 118.
121. Harrill, *The Manumission of Slaves*, p. 127.

Overall, Harrill's solution to 1 Cor. 7.21 has been received favorably. Some have criticized his handling of primary sources[122] and his dismissive comments about individuals selling themselves into slavery.[123] Perhaps the strongest criticism comes from Keith Bradley who questions Harrill's evidence that slaves could reject manumission and characterizes his portrayal of ancient slavery as being 'heavily and closely derived from secondary sources'.[124] In the end, it is Harrill's argument from philology which is probably the strongest part of his contribution.[125]

1 Corinthians 7.21 at the Dawn of the Twenty-First Century

As the twentieth century eclipses into a new millennium, NT scholarship seems to have reached a consensus on 1 Cor. 7.21. As noted above, in the period between Dodd (1924) and Bartchy (1973), the weight of opinion seemed to be tipping in favor of the 'use slavery' interpretation. But since Harrill (1995), although his work has had a varying degree of influence, there does not seem to be anyone who opts for the 'use slavery' interpretation. While each scholar may suggest his or her own nuance to solving the problem, the preponderance of opinion has moved to favor 'use freedom'.[126] The reasons for this move may be attributed to a better understanding of ancient slavery, a greater appreciation for the role of rhetoric, and more powerful research tools. It is tempting to declare that a line has finally been drawn under the subject and conclude that the debate has come to an end. But as the above history has demonstrated, the interpretation of this passage has experienced many twists and turns, and the final lap in the race towards a solution may have yet to occur.

122. Justin Meggitt, review of *The Manumission of Slaves in Early Christianity* (HUT, 32; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1995), by J.A. Harrill, in *JTS* 47 (1996), p. 642.

123. Bruce Winter, 'St Paul as a Critic of Roman Slavery in 1 Corinthians 7.21-23', *Βέροια* (1997), pp. 345-46.

124. Keith Bradley, 'The Problem of Slavery in Classical Culture', p. 276.

125. Keith Bradley, 'The Problem of Slavery in Classical Culture', p. 276.

126. Ben Witherington III, *Conflict and Community in Corinth: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary on 1 and 2 Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), p. 184; Winter, 'St. Paul as a Critic of Roman Slavery', pp. 348-52; Raymond F. Collins, *First Corinthians* (SPS, 7; Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1999), pp. 285-86; Harris, *Slave of Christ*, pp. 59-61; Thiselton, *First Epistle to the Corinthians*, pp. 558-59; David E. Garland, *1 Corinthians* (BECNT; Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003), p. 314; Alistair Scot May, *The Body for the Lord: Sex and Identity in 1 Corinthians 5–7* (JSNTSup, 278; London: T. & T. Clark, 2004), pp. 237-38; Alan F. Johnson, *1 Corinthians* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2004), p. 122; Jesper Svartvik, 'How Noah, Jesus and Paul Became Captivating Biblical Figures: The Side Effect of the Canonization of Slavery Metaphors in Jewish and Christian Texts', *JGRChJ* 2 (2001–2005), pp. 212-14.

Closing Comments

In Chapter 1, we saw that many NT scholars interpreted Pauline silence as the apostle's tacit approval of the institution. Paul's apparent failure to complete his thoughts in 1 Cor. 7.21 only added to the frustration of interpreters seeking to know what the NT said about slavery. Still, for 1,500 years the prevailing interpretation of the verse added to the argument that slavery was not condemned by the NT. The Reformation seems to have been the first shift in a protracted debate.

The influence of the abolitionist cause should not be overlooked. As the notion of slavery became more and more contradictory to the growing perception of human rights and dignity, the ambiguous nature of the verse easily lent itself to the promotion of emancipation. But it is important not to oversimplify. As we saw, good scholars on both sides of the debate, whether abolitionists or not, were able to argue for their position. Slavery, for intentional purposes, eventually disappeared. Scholarship continued to debate Paul's words.

If there is an explanation for the current consensus of the 'use freedom' interpretation it may be credited to a better understanding of slavery in antiquity and the conventions of rhetoric. Although Bartchy's portrayal of ancient slavery and his suggestion for completing the elliptical phrase have been eclipsed by Harrill and others, his work remains important for the new directions that he helped to push the debate. And the rhetorical patterns identified by Dawes and Deming demonstrate that in spite of the brachylogy, Paul's argument is not as tangential and obscure as it may have first appeared. Still one has to wonder what the history of this verse may have looked like had Paul merely finished his thoughts and included the words 'freedom' or 'slavery'.

Chapter 5

PAUL, ONESIMUS AND THE LETTER TO PHILEMON

The Letter to Philemon is the shortest of all in the Pauline corpus. Consisting of only 335 words in the original Greek, it is almost postcard size in length. In comparison to some of Paul's other Letters, like Galatians, Romans and the Corinthian correspondence, Philemon hardly seems worth similar effort on the part of NT scholars. But a quick glance through the bibliography of J.A. Fitzmyer's commentary (2000) reveals that scholarly interest has been out of proportion in regard to this mini missive.[1] Not only is the Letter very short in length in comparison to the apostle's other works, it is also short on details, which opens the way for endless speculation.[2] If ever a Pauline Letter required a combination of detective skills and imagination, Philemon is that Letter. Details lost in the mix include: the location of Paul's imprisonment, the exact status of Onesimus in regard to his absence from Philemon's household, how Onesimus came to encounter the imprisoned apostle, the final outcome of the situation between Onesimus and his master Philemon, and whether or not Onesimus later became a second-century Bishop of Ephesus. All of these questions have led scholars to offer a variety of competing solutions.

What follows is an overview that describes the various twists and turns of the scholarly interest in Philemon over the last 150 years. The review is broken into a four-part artificial framework. The first part reviews the traditional interpretation as it was generally viewed in the nineteenth century. The second outlines the challenges that it has endured across the twentieth century. The third surveys those whose questions and methodology are

1. The greatest contribution Fitzmyer has made to Philemon studies is by far the bibliography. With its length of 35 pages it represents a full one-third of the commentary. Add to this the specific bibliographies at the end of each pericope and the result is a treasure trove of sources and information for Philemon and wider Pauline studies (*The Letter to Philemon* [AB, 34c; Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 2000]).

2. Such a tendency was noted by R.W. Wall: 'In my view, many commentators exaggerate the peril of Onesimus's situation and the prerogatives of Philemon's social status. On this mistaken basis, some offer ingenious and highly influential reconstructions of the circumstances that occasioned the writing of this letter' (*Colossians and Philemon* [IVPNTCS; Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1993], p. 183).

more concerned with legal aspects regarding Roman slave law and how it was that Onesimus came into contact with the imprisoned apostle. The fourth traces the work of those who interpret the Letter by enquiring what social and rhetorical elements might inform us about the situation in Philemon's household. As was seen in the broad overview in Chapter 1, there has been a move away from defining slavery as a legal institution and towards understanding it sociologically. As we will see below, Philemon has not been left unaffected by this shift.

Nineteenth-Century Scholarship

As with many topics that concern NT scholarship in the nineteenth century, it is the work of F.C. Baur that presents a convenient starting point. Baur concluded that the Epistle was not from the hand of the Apostle Paul but was instead a second-century Christian romance composed to explain how post-Pauline Christianity should deal with slavery. The main thrust of the Letter was the Pauline theme of reconciliation. The description of Onesimus's separation from Philemon in v. 15 represents what he calls

> …the teleological view of history [which] is the mother of historical fiction, and once the idea be regarded as the substance of what has taken place, it is no great step to regard what has happened as having happened only in representation and that it might serve as the outward form of the idea. Thus it cannot be called either an impossible or an improbable construction of this Epistle, if we regard it as a Christian romance serving to convey a genuine Christian idea.[3]

While modern scholars do not accept Baur's conclusion, it represents one way of getting around the various absent details in the Letter by emphasizing a theological rather than historical interpretation.

About the same time that Baur was promoting his hypercritical approach, some in the United States were interpreting the Letter in the context of the ongoing debate over slavery. One 'contribution' is that of G.D. Armstrong (1857) who was the pastor of the Presbyterian Church in Norfolk, Virginia. In his book *The Christian Doctrine of Slavery*, Armstrong argues that slavery was not condemned in the Bible. Of particular interest here is his exposition of Philemon. Armstrong used the Letter as 'proof of apostolic example' that fugitive slaves should be returned to their masters.[4]

3. F.C. Baur, *Paul the Apostle of Jesus Christ: His Life and Work, his Epistles and his Doctrine* (London: Williams & Norgate, 1875), p. 84.

4. George D. Armstrong, *The Christian Doctrine of Slavery* (Charles Scribner, 1857; repr.; New York: Negro Universities Press, 1969), pp. 33-49.

But not only did Armstrong interpret the Letter as the return of a fugitive slave, he went so far as to alter the translation to reflect this interpretation. Following the lead of other pro-slavery writers, Armstrong paraphrases vv. 15 and 16 to read: 'receive him not as a fugitive slave' instead of retaining the original 'no longer as a slave'.[5] The change is significant because it interpolates into the text a host of presuppositions about the Letter's occasion. While there were few if any who followed Armstrong's exposition, it serves as an important example of the role Philemon played in the American slavery debate.[6]

Challenges to the Traditional Interpretation

In spite of interpretations offered by some like Baur and Armstrong, the traditional interpretation of Philemon has remained in vogue since at least the time of John Chrysostom. In 1879, British scholar J.B. Lightfoot[7] articulated the traditional interpretation of the situation surrounding the Letter's composition as follows. Onesimus, a slave owned by Philemon, had run away, financing himself at his master's expense. Attempting to escape recapture, he fled to the crowded city of Rome to become lost among the people. While in Rome, Onesimus somehow came in contact with the Apostle Paul who was imprisoned there. How this meeting came to happen is not known for sure, but Lightfoot offers a few suggestions: (1) perhaps he met with Epaphras while in Rome, was recognized, and brought for an interview with the apostle; (2) perhaps he fell upon hard times and sought out Paul in hopes of receiving some sort of charity; or (3) perhaps he experienced pangs of conscience and presented himself to the apostle in order to receive comfort and advice.[8] While an exact scenario is not presented by Lightfoot, the conclusion, however, is that the

5. Armstrong, *The Christian Doctrine of Slavery*, p. 40.

6. One of the strongest ecclesial statements in favor of slavery was issued in 1835 by the South Carolina Lutheran Synod when it said, 'Whereas individuals and Societies of the North, calling themselves abolitionists, under the pretense of ameliorating the conditions of our servants, have created an excitement deeply affecting our interest, and calculated to sever bonds of attachment which exist between master and slave; and whereas this unjustifiable interference with our domestic institution is opposed to the Constitution of our common country, is subversive of our liberties as men and contrary to the precepts of our blessed Savior, who commanded servants to be obedient to their masters, and the example of the holy Apostle Paul, who restored to his lawful owner a runaway slave' (William Edward Eisenberg, *The Lutheran Church in Virginia 1717–1962* [Roanoke, VA: The Trustees of the Virginia Synod, Lutheran Church in America, 1967], p. 13).

7. Lightfoot, *Epistles to the Colossians and Philemon*, pp. 310-14.

8. Lightfoot, *Epistles to the Colossians and Philemon*, p. 312.

runaway was eventually converted by Paul and became a beloved brother to the imprisoned apostle. Having realized the need not only for repentance but also for restitution, Paul sent Onesimus back to Colossae, with Tychicus, carrying a letter asking Philemon to forgive the truant slave of his offense and to treat him no longer as a slave but as a brother.[9]

The first scholarly challenge to the traditional interpretation seems to have originated in a short article written by E.R. Goodenough (1929).[10] Goodenough interprets Philemon in light of Athenian slave law which allowed a slave to seek asylum at an altar, sanctuary or even a family hearth that had some type of association with religion. He briefly outlines how this law had influenced subsequent Ptolemaic and Roman law so that it 'probably was universally observed in Paul's day in the eastern part of the empire, since it later impressed itself upon Ulpian's legislation'.[11] Goodenough then postulates that Onesimus was caught pilfering from his master Philemon and escaped to Paul as a place of asylum and to request intercession from the apostle.

The only difficulty with such an interpretation is Paul's location. How was it possible, Goodenough questions, for a runaway slave to claim asylum in the cell of the imprisoned apostle? His solution is to consider Paul's self-identification as a 'prisoner of Christ Jesus' in v. 1 as metaphorical rather than literal. Support for this reading is based on Paul's plans to be able to visit Philemon soon (v. 22), an action that would not have been possible for one chained in prison. Since 'the plain implications of the Epistle itself are that Paul was free and somewhere in the neighborhood', Goodenough concludes that the phrase 'prisoner of Jesus Christ' is comparable to Paul's other favorite title 'slave of Christ'.[12]

Goodenough's interpretation has not received wide acceptance particularly because of his reluctance to consider Paul to be a literal prisoner.[13]

9. Vincent, *Philippians and Philemon*, pp. 165-69; Adolf Jülicher, *An Introduction to the New Testament* (New York: Putnam and Sons, 1904), p. 125; Ernst Lohmeyer, *Die Briefe an die Kolosser und an Philemon* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1930); C.F.D. Moule *The Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon* (CGTC; Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, 1957); Gülzow, *Christentum und Sklaverei*, p. 31; Eduard Lohse, *Colossians and Philemon* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1971); Peter Stuhlmacher, *Der Brief an Philemon* (EKKNT; Zurich: Benziger, 1975); Joachim Gnilka, *Der Philemonbrief* (Freiburg: Herder, 1982); P.T. O'Brien, *Colossians, Philemon* (WBC, 44; Waco: Word Books, 1982); F.F. Bruce, *Epistles to the Colossians, Philemon, and to the Ephesians* (NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984).

10. E.R. Goodenough, 'Paul and Onesimus', *HTR* 22 (1929), pp. 181-83.

11. Goodenough, 'Paul and Onesimus', p. 181.

12. Goodenough, 'Paul and Onesimus', p. 183.

13. Craig S. Wansink, *Chained in Christ: The Experience and Rhetoric of Paul's Imprisonments* (JSNTSup, 130; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996), p. 149.

However, F.F. Bruce (1984) modified Goodenough's hypothesis by suggesting that 'if the apostle was under house-arrest in his own lodgings, might not the place where he lived count as his 'hearth' within the meaning of the act—always supposing that the provision was valid in that city, and that Onesimus availed himself of it?'[14]

In spite of the hesitancy by many to accept Goodenough's hypothesis, it sufficiently helped to pique the interest of NT scholars. Many have since attempted to answer the numerous questions surrounding Philemon and to suggest a new solution that not only sheds light on the Letter but also helps to understand the larger question of Paul and slavery.

In 1935, John Knox published *Philemon among the Letters of Paul* in which he offered a reevaluation of every aspect of the Letter and the traditional interpretation. Driving the study is the question of why the short and seemingly insignificant Epistle was preserved by the early church.[15] Knox is unconvinced that the Epistle was in fact a cover letter for a fugitive slave, an interpretation that he labeled 'a tentative hypothesis'.[16] The single greatest difficulty with the traditional interpretation, according to Knox, is the lack of any explicit statement indicating such in the Letter. As evidence for his contention, he compares Philemon to Pliny's letter to Sabinianus in which Pliny intercedes on behalf of an errant freedman who had sought his intercession. This letter is comparable in length to Philemon and often referenced by NT scholars when discussing Philemon. Knox points out that, unlike Paul, Pliny is direct, saying exactly what one would expect to hear in such a situation. Furthermore, more than one-third of the letter is devoted to Pliny describing the freedman's penitence. Added to this are repeated requests for Sabinianus to be lenient and provide clemency. But when one then reads Philemon in light of Pliny, Knox points out that:

> Paul says not one word about any repentance on the part of the slave and there is no explicit appeal for forgiveness or pity on the part of the master. In other words, the terms we should expect such a letter to contain in abundance are simply not there at all. This fact alone should lead us to suspect a rather deeper purpose in the letter than the obvious one generally assigned.[17]

In light of his conclusions above, Knox provides an exposition of the Epistle in which he focuses attention on three statements in the letter that

14. Bruce, *Epistles to Colossians, Philemon, and to the Ephesians*, p. 197.

15. John Knox, *Philemon among the Letters of Paul: A New View of its Place and Importance* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1935; rev. edn, New York: Abingdon Press, 1959), p. 8.

16. Knox, *Philemon among the Letters of Paul*, p. 17.

17. Knox, *Philemon among the Letters of Paul*, p. 20.

he believes have been overshadowed by the fugitive slave stereotype and provide a clearer picture of the Letter's occasion.

In the request section of the Letter, Knox reevaluates the traditional interpretation of the phrase παρακαλῶ σε περί in v. 10. Usually the preposition περί is understood as Paul making a request 'on behalf of' Onesimus. But Knox argues that when περί was preceded by παρακαλῶ the object was usually the content of a request. After providing some examples to illustrate his point, Knox contends that what Paul was doing was not making a request on behalf of Onesimus but was asking *for* Onesimus. 'Paul, with all possible delicacy, is asserting a claim upon Onesimus based on Onesimus's status as Paul's child, a claim that would see the slave returned to Paul rather than Philemon'.[18]

The second statement Knox reevaluates is ὃν ἀνέπεμψά σοι in v. 12. The traditional translation/interpretation of ἀνέπεμψα is 'I send back'. But Knox argues that the more obvious rendering of the verb would be 'I send up', which would indicate the referring of a case from a lower to a higher court. Paul is requesting that Philemon relinquish Onesimus to him but does not want to do anything without the consent of the slave's master. So 'Paul is referring Onesimus's case to his legal owner for decision'.[19]

The third statement that is examined is ἵνα αἰώνιον αὐτὸν ἀπέχῃς in v. 15. How is Philemon to have Onesimus back? If the runaway hypothesis is upheld, then the natural reading is that Philemon will retain Onesimus as a slave. But, Knox contends, if the runaway hypothesis is not allowed to overshadow the interpretation, then it can be naturally understood as Philemon retaining Onesimus as a brother, not as a slave. Paul then was asking that Philemon admit Onesimus to the same partnership that already existed between the apostle and the slave's owner. This, according to Knox, is a transfer of ownership which Paul then underwrites in v. 19 with a promise to pay.

The result of Knox's exposition is the suggestion that the Letter is not about the return of an errant slave to his master, but a request from the apostle to Philemon. Paul wanted Philemon to release Onesimus so that he could participate with Paul in the activities of religious service.[20] Such an interpretation would have been radical enough in comparison to the traditional one promoted by Lightfoot and others. But Knox went on to offer even more solutions to the details that the Letter failed to provide.

Knox proposes that when Paul wrote the household codes in Col. 3.18–4.1, he did so with Onesimus's situation in mind. Thus, the reason for the

18. Knox, *Philemon among the Letters of Paul*, p. 24.
19. Knox, *Philemon among the Letters of Paul*, p. 25.
20. Knox, *Philemon among the Letters of Paul*, p. 31.

'disproportionately long treatment of master–slave relations'.[21] Combined with this is Paul's recommendation of Onesimus to the congregation as a dear and faithful brother (4.9) and Knox's suggestion that the Laodicean letter mentioned in 4.16 refers to the Letter to Philemon. All of this leads Knox to conclude that 'Philemon and Colossians are related to each other in the closest possible fashion. The occasion of Philemon, if not also the occasion of Colossians, at any rate accounts for much of its content and very probably for its particular church address'.[22]

Turning again to Philemon, Knox suggests that the commonly assumed identification of Philemon as the owner of Onesimus was also incorrect. Instead, the owner was actually Archippus, and, since Paul did not know this individual, he solicited the assistance of Philemon, overseer of the churches in the Lycus valley, to help bring about a satisfactory resolution to the situation. The traditional interpretation identified Philemon as the slave's owner because he was the first person listed in the greeting—as was the standard convention. But Knox argues that the occurrence of the personal pronoun (σοῦ) after Archippus's name signaled that it was Archippus who was owner of both Onesimus and the house in which a local Christian congregation gathered.[23] Based on this new identification of Onesimus's owner, and the recipient of the Letter, Knox argues that the statement in Col. 4.16-17 about the Laodicean letter and the command for Archippus to 'fulfill his ministry' was Paul's way of bringing pressure to bear on the situation through the local congregation on an individual he had never met. Philemon's only role was to oversee the proceedings and to ensure that Archippus fulfill his obligations to Onesimus as a new brother and, we assume, to release him to serve the Apostle Paul.[24] Knox went on to suggest that Archippus did in fact release Onesimus who not only returned to serve Paul but also became the second-century Bishop of Ephesus about whom Ignatius writes in his *Letter to the Ephesians*.[25]

In the closing chapter of his book, Knox returns to the question of why the Epistle was preserved by the early church. Following the suggestion of E.J. Goodspeed that the first collection of Pauline Letters occurred at Ephesus, Knox posits that as Bishop of Ephesus, Onesimus would have

21. Knox, *Philemon among the Letters of Paul*, p. 37.
22. Knox, *Philemon among the Letters of Paul*, p. 55.
23. Knox, *Philemon among the Letters of Paul*, p. 62.
24. Knox, *Philemon among the Letters of Paul*, p. 68.
25. Knox supports this claim by pointing out language in Ignatius's *Letter to the Ephesians* that supposedly parallels closely with that of Philemon (*Philemon among the Letters of Paul*, pp. 99, 103).

slipped the letter Paul had written about him into this collection, thus guaranteeing its preservation.[26]

Those familiar with NT scholarship surrounding Philemon are used to being told that Knox's reevaluation has won few adherents. H. Greeven (1954) said: 'Was Knox unmittelbar zum Verständnis des Philemon und des Kolosser beigetragen hat, scheint mir trotz aller Fülle der Phantasie'.[27] C.F.D. Moule (1957) found Knox's construction 'ingenious and interesting' but not completely convincing. He especially took issue with the theory that Archippus was the actual owner of Onesimus.[28] G.B. Caird (1976) commented that 'on critical examination this neat reconstruction falls apart', and F.F. Bruce (1984) said 'Knox's reconstruction has more of fancy than of fact about it'.[29] One of the more penetrating examinations was by E. Lohse (1971) who said:

> Knox establishes his case by arbitrarily harmonizing statements in Col. and Phlm… Knox's hypothesis collapses when one enforces the methodological rule of first trying to understand a writing in the light of its own statements before drawing on other documents for purposes of comparison.[30]

In spite of these critical comments, Knox's imaginative rendition of the events leading up to and including the writing of Philemon have occupied the minds of NT scholars for almost four generations. A quick perusal of any number of commentaries, introductions to the NT and many journal articles demonstrates the obligation many feel to deal with Knox's reconstruction. For instance, in an essay on ethics in Philemon, W.J. Richardson (1968) rejected most of Knox's hypothesis, but felt the need to interact with Knox at various points in his argument even though the article had very little to do with the historical interpretation of the Epistle.[31] Even as recently as 1992, J.W. Martens offered a fresh challenge to Knox's comparison of Ignatius's *Letter to the Ephesians* with Philemon though almost seventy years had passed and numerous rejections of the hypothesis had already piled up.[32]

26. Knox, *Philemon among the Letters of Paul*, p. 107.

27. H. Greeven, 'Prüfung der Thesen von J. Knox zum Philemonbrief', *TLZ* 79 (1954), cols. 373-78.

28. Moule, *The Epistle to the Colossians and to Philemon*, pp. 17-18.

29. Bruce, *Epistles to Colossians, Philemon, Ephesians*, p. 202.

30. Lohse, *Colossians and Philemon*, pp. 186-87.

31. W.J. Richardson, 'Principle and Context in the Ethics of the Epistle to Philemon', *Int* 22 (1968), pp. 301-16.

32. John W. Martens, 'Ignatius and John Knox Reconsidered', *SecCent* 9 (1992), pp. 73-86.

The fact is, however, Knox's reconstruction has cast a long shadow over Philemon studies, and rejection of his hypothesis has not been universal.[33] A.E. Barnett (1946) accepted Knox's reconstruction and said:

> To assume that Archippus was the master of Onesimus, that the Colossian church met in his home, that Philemon was minister to that church and Apphia his wife, that our letter was the letter to be read first at Laodicea and then sent on to Colossae and was thus the letter 'from' Laodicea so illuminates the meaning of the letter to the Colossians as well nigh to guarantee the correctness of the assumption.[34]

For others, Knox captured their imagination and inspired them to either reinforce or make adjustments to his interpretation. For instance, P.N. Harrison (1950) proposed a modified version of Knox's theory. Although he rejected Knox's claim that Archippus was actually Onesimus's owner and that Philemon is the lost Laodicean letter in Col. 4.16, he did accept that Paul was requesting that Onesimus be returned to him and that the former slave went on to become the Bishop of Ephesus.[35]

J.L. Houlden (1970) seems to accept much of Knox's hypothesis including the possibility that Philemon is the letter from Laodicea. In regard to the traditional interpretation of Onesimus Houlden says 'that he was a runaway slave and that this is why Paul is delicate and charming in this letter aimed at assuaging his master's wrath is a legend without foundation'. Houlden suggests that Onesimus had been 'lent out' to Paul. Houlden dismissed the possibility that Onesimus had seriously wronged Philemon by concluding about v. 18: 'we do not know at all what this refers to, but it sounds like one of those minor domestic transactions which lie somewhere between borrowing and stealing. All in all, the master seems to be a rather fiery character who needs careful handling but usually comes to heel when a firm line is taken.'[36]

Lamar Cope (1985) had the opportunity to personally encounter Knox in his oral doctoral examinations at Union Theological Seminary and was prompted by the experience to revisit Knox's hypothesis.[37] Cope concludes that according to grammatical rules of agreement, Knox is correct to

33. Knox's hypothesis was given added prominence with his introduction to 'Philemon' in vol. 11 of the *Interpreter's Commentary* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1955), pp. 555-60.

34. A.E. Barnett, *The New Testament: Its Making and Meaning* (New York: Abingdon–Cokesbury Press, 1946), p. 89.

35. P.N. Harrison, 'Onesimus and Philemon', *AthR* 32 (1950), pp. 268-94.

36. J.L. Houlden, *Paul's Letters from Prison* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1970), pp. 225-26.

37. Lamar Cope, 'On Rethinking the Philemon–Colossians Connection', *BR* 30 (1985), pp. 45-50.

understand the personal pronoun in v. 1 as indicating that it was Archippus who was Onesimus's master, not Philemon.[38] Moreover, Cope argues, there is a complete lack of external evidence indicating that Philemon was the master of Onesimus. In the case of Archippus, however, the coincidence is too great. This leads Cope to conclude:

> I would say that the evidence for Archippus is all circumstantial, but that it is many times stronger than the presumptive guess upon which the argument for Philemon is based. That is, in my view, John Knox was far too gentle in the discussion with his critics. On the basis of the grammar, the external evidence and the inherent logic of the Letter to Philemon, it is clear that the best answer to the slave master's identity is Archippus, with Philemon a poor second.[39]

In Cope's opinion, the statements in Col. 4.17 are easier to comprehend if they are seen as an extension of the situation with Onesimus. Paul is merely using Philemon, an overseer, and the local congregation to bring pressure on Onesimus's master.

In Germany, W. Schenk (1987) offered a scenario that was clearly influenced by Knox, but with several expansions and modifications.[40] Similarly to Knox, Schenk notes that there is not one word in the Letter about a fugitive slave and thus questions the validity of this interpretation. He disagrees with Knox about Archippus and retains the traditional identification of Philemon as Onesimus's master. According to Schenk's reconstruction, Philemon, like the Apostle Paul, was a former persecutor of Christians who, upon being converted, opened his home to a Christian group in Pergamum.[41] Onesimus, Philemon's unconverted slave, was sent to Ephesus to convey news to the imprisoned Paul. While there, Onesimus was converted and then sent back with a request that Philemon release and return the slave to Paul. Thus, as with Knox, Schenk's hypothesis stresses that the Letter to Philemon is not about forgiving a fugitive slave, but about a request that Philemon accept Onesimus as a beloved brother and release him to participate with Paul in religious service.

It is Sara Winter's (1987) contribution that has attracted as much attention as that of John Knox. Winter reasserts Knox's contention that it was

38. A similar approach was taken by Ferdinand Hahn who suggested that Archippus had replaced Epaphras as the leader of the House Church ('Paulus und der Sklave Onesimus', *EvT* 37 [1977], pp. 179-85).

39. Cope, 'On Rethinking the Philemon–Colossians Connection', p. 47.

40. Wolfgang Schenk, 'Der Brief des Paulus and Philemon in der neueren Forschung (1945–1987)', *ANRW* 2.25.4 (1987), pp. 3439-95.

41. Surprisingly, Schenk locates the recipients of the letter in Pergamum on the basis of the correlation between v. 22 and 2 Cor. 1.8 and 2.12 ('Der Brief des Paulus and Philemon', pp. 3482-83).

Archippus who owned Onesimus and that Philemon and Apphia were church leaders and thus addressed first in the Letter since it was primarily a church matter.[42] Unconvinced of the fugitive slave hypothesis, she argues that the key to understanding the situation was in the thanksgiving section of the Epistle. Winter notes that the Pauline thanksgiving in the apostle's other Epistles consistently introduces important themes that are covered in the main body of the Letter. If the Epistle to Philemon had been about Onesimus and a problem with the slave's master, Winter argues, then this would have been alluded to in the thanksgiving section. Instead, Paul has devoted the thanksgiving section of the Letter to recounting the comfort and aid that the reader has been to the imprisoned apostle. Onesimus only needed to be mentioned briefly because the Letter's recipient knew that the slave had been with Paul. This situation is similar to Phil. 2.25-30 where Epaphroditus had been sent to Paul in prison and then returned with a letter of thanks. Onesimus had not run away from his master and mysteriously encountered an imprisoned Paul. He was sent there purposely by the Colossian church so that he could provide comfort and food parcels to the imprisoned apostle.[43] She considers ἐχωρίσθη in v. 15 as merely referring to Onesimus's time away from home and that any debts mentioned in vv. 18-19 as only possible debts.[44] Onesimus was not a fugitive but an emissary whom Paul now wanted to return so that he could continue in the ministry of the gospel. This is clearest, according to Winter, in v. 13.

> Although διακονῇ has often been translated 'serve' (with serve as a body servant understood by the translator), in Phlm 13, as elsewhere, this verb must refer to Christian ministry. Both in its usage in the Pauline corpus and in its general use in the NT period neither the verb nor either of the two noun forms (διακονία/διάκονος) had the meaning 'serve as a servant' (or slave). The verb διακονέω and the noun forms appear to have entered common use through Christian use, and apparently had primarily a literary use earlier.[45]

Winter's reconstruction helped to revive interest in the questions posed by Knox and offered some adjustments that helped to explain how it was that Onesimus was able to encounter the imprisoned apostle. C.S. Wansink (1996) adopts Winter's reconstruction in his study of Paul's imprisonments

42. Sara C. Winter, 'Paul's Letter to Philemon', *NTS* 33 (1987), pp. 1-15.

43. Winter, 'Paul's Letter to Philemon', p. 3.

44. Winter, 'Paul's Letter to Philemon', pp. 5-6. She also accepted Knox's reading of ἀνέπεμψα in v. 12 as 'sending up' rather than 'sending back' (pp. 7-8).

45. Winter, 'Paul's Letter to Philemon', p. 9.

and suggests Onesimus was ministering to the prisoner Paul as was commonly done in antiquity.[46] But similar to Knox was the continued rejection of these hypotheses.[47]

J.G. Nordling (1991) offered a response to Winter that reasserted the case for the traditional hypothesis.[48] He argues that the evidence from antiquity suggests that there was a grave problem involving fugitive slaves. Mirroring this problem was a set of laws that allowed the master to recoup his property and punish the slave. This, Nordling, argues would have prevented Paul from specifically mentioning Onesimus's status as a fugitive. The apostle would not have wanted to alert authorities to the situation should they read the Letter, and he did not want to further antagonize Philemon by mentioning what everyone knew to be the situation.

> Paul must have known that Philemon would be tempted to avenge himself upon Onesimus by the strict letter of the law, as was his right. Paul wrote the letter, therefore, to inform Philemon that the formerly useless Onesimus was now a fellow believer and, as such, deserving reinstatement and not punishment.[49]

Since the contributions of Winter and Wansink, there have not been any new attempts to revive Knox's hypothesis. However, as noted above, most critical commentaries and introductions at least mention Knox. And in spite of the rejection of Knox, NT scholarship has continued to look for answers to the questions Knox posed, and the traditional interpretation, while the most popular, is still being challenged.

Redefining Onesimus's Legal Status

This leads to a discussion of Peter Lampe and his influence on Philemon studies. In 1985, he published a short article in which he compared the definitions of *servus fugitivus* in Roman slave law with the situation of Onesimus.[50] Lampe demonstrates that three Roman Jurists were of the same opinion. The case of a *fugitivus* should not be based on the absence of the slave from the house but assessed on the nature of the slave's intention

46. Craig, S. Wansink, *Chained in Christ: The Experience and Rhetoric of Paul's Imprisonments* (JSNTSup, 130; Sheffield Academic Press, 1996).

47. One of the major drawbacks to the emissary hypothesis promoted by Winter and Wansink is the suggestion that an unconverted slave who has a reputation for being useless would be sent to minister to Paul (Barclay, 'Paul, Philemon and the Dilemma of Christian Slave Ownership', p. 164).

48. John. G. Nordling, 'Onesimus Fugitivus: A Defense of the Runaway Slave Hypothesis in Philemon', *JSNT* 41 (1991), pp. 97-119.

49. Nordling, 'Onesimus Fugitivus', p. 118.

50. Peter Lampe, 'Keine "Sklavenflucht" des Onesimus', *ZNW* 76 (1985), pp. 133-37.

when he or she left the master's house. In particular, Lampe focuses on the opinion of Proculos who said that a slave was not legally a *fugitivus* if, knowing that his master wished physically to chastise him, he left to seek a friend whom he persuaded to plead on his behalf.[51]

In the context of Paul's Letter to Philemon, Lampe suggests that such a legal solution may explain how it was that Onesimus came into contact with the imprisoned Apostle Paul. Lampe argues that rather than viewing Onesimus as a slave running away from his master, he could be viewed as purposely running to the Apostle Paul who was a friend of Philemon. The purpose of this 'fleeing' was not with the intention of escaping the bonds of servitude but to obtain the apostle's intercession. Lampe concludes by suggesting that Paul was not asking Philemon to forgo punishing the slave for the illegal act of absconding, but for some other unspecified injury alluded to in vv. 18-19.[52] Lampe's article caught the attention of many NT scholars who found his legal solution to the problems in Philemon more acceptable than those offered by Knox and others.

B.M. Rapske expanded upon Lampe's hypothesis in a 1991 article.[53] Rapske outlined the numerous hypotheses that had been previously offered to explain how it was that a runaway slave could have come into contact with the imprisoned apostle. The chief obstacle, of course, was to explain how or why a runaway slave would or could willingly go to a Roman prison to meet with a prisoner and how the imprisoned apostle could then send the fugitive back to his master carrying a letter without somehow running afoul of the legal authorities. Rapske concludes that Lampe's thesis is the most plausible explanation. In support of his conclusion Rapske offers the situation between Vedius Pollio and Augustus in which a slave who was about to be severely punished successfully appealed to Augustus to intercede on his behalf.[54] Another example is the situation between Pliny and Sabinianus so well known to Philemon scholars.[55] Rapske argues that although the word 'friend' did not appear in the Letter to Philemon, Paul would still have been an appropriate *amicus*

51. Lampe, 'Keine "Sklavenflucht"', p. 136.

52. Lampe, 'Keine "Sklavenflucht"', p. 137.

53. Brian M. Rapske, 'The Prisoner Paul in the Eyes of Onesimus', *NTS* 37 (1991), pp. 187-203.

54. In the case of Pollio's slave, Augustus was at Pollio's home as a dinner guest. The slave incurred Pollio's wrath for breaking a valuable piece of crystal and was ordered to be thrown into a pond of flesh-eating fish. The slave fell at the feet of Augustus and successfully won the emperor's intervention on his behalf (Suetonius, *Lives: Augustus*, 2.17).

55. Rapske, 'The Prisoner Paul in the Eyes of Onesimus', pp. 195-99.

domini. He suggests that the following might have been in Onesimus's mind when he set out to find Paul.

> Paul is, first of all, personally responsible for Philemon's radical change of religious commitment (Phlm 19). Second, he knows that Philemon's personal religious practices have changed—his master and Paul are personally associated (viz., συνεργοί: Phlm 2) in the work of proselytizing for the new faith. Philemon's personal religious labors continue even in the apostle's absence. Third, Phlm 22 implies that Paul's name is frequently on the lips of both his master and the church in his house. Perhaps more significantly, however, Paul's influence over his master would have been clearly evident to Onesimus from the fact that the whole household has been restructured so as to serve the new religion.[56]

Rapske concludes that Lampe's thesis removes any objections that Onesimus would not have known the location and circumstances of Paul. Onesimus would have been aware of Paul's situation and, although not yet a Christian himself, would have recognized Paul as someone who could most readily bring pressure to bear on Philemon and his household. Thus, Onesimus was not a runaway but one who sought the intercession from a very important friend of his master.

It was fourteen years before Lampe received a response. In 1999, Harrill challenged Lampe's methodology of using Roman jurists to interpret Philemon.[57] His criticism is on three levels: (1) the term *fugitivus* has multiple and conflicting definitions among the Roman jurists. Often the jurists disagreed among themselves and their opinions were often the result of 'hairsplitting'; (2) using legal texts as a source for social practice is questionable because legal codes can only provide inexact knowledge and 'build a highly misleading model of slavery'; (3) the rulings of the jurists were 'academic' and based upon hypothetical cases rather than the actual cases. Harrill cautions that 'the deliberations of the jurists were academic games having little to do with the practice of law'.[58]

Harrill's cautions are appropriate and bring a helpful corrective to the way legal texts are used by NT scholars.[59] But the long hiatus between

56. Rapske, 'The Prisoner Paul in the Eyes of Onesimus', pp. 201-202.

57. J.A. Harrill, 'Using the Roman Jurists to Interpret Philemon', *ZNW* 90 (1999), pp. 135-38.

58. Harrill, 'Using the Roman Jurists', p. 137.

59. In a more recent publication, Harrill has compared the letter to Philemon with journeyman apprentice contracts that are among the documentary papyri discovered at Oxyrhynchus. Noting several parallels in structure and language, Harrill suggests that Paul is requesting that Philemon allow Onesimus to serve Paul as an apprentice in the Gospel. While acknowledging that it still leaves many of the questions surrounding the letter unanswered, he tentatively suggests it as an alternative to the fugitive slave

Lampe and Harrill's short articles has meant that many have adopted Lampe's hypothesis in their commentaries on Philemon without having a more nuanced understanding of how Roman legal codes should be used. Bartchy's article on Slavery in the *Anchor Bible Dictionary* (1992) and the commentaries by Dunn (1996) and Fitzmyer (2000) are a few examples of how Lampe's thesis has influenced the thinking of many NT scholars.[60]

Socio-Rhetorical Interpretations of Philemon

As demonstrated in previous chapters, NT scholarship has witnessed a growing interest in and development of socio-rhetorical interpretive methods. This has been particularly revolutionary in the study of Paul and slavery because it has caused a move away from understanding the topic only from a legal standpoint. In the case of Philemon, socio-rhetorical studies of the Epistle have focused less on Onesimus and the questions surrounding his legal status and how it is he could encounter Paul in prison. Instead, some scholars have begun to investigate the Letter to determine how Paul brought pressure to bear on Philemon.

In 1978, F.F. Church was one of the first to compare the Epistle to Philemon with the structures and design of ancient rhetoric.[61] Accepting the traditional interpretation of Philemon, Church demonstrates that Paul framed his appeal to Philemon according to the structures of deliberative rhetoric with adaptations to fit his own particular needs.[62] The objective of using deliberative rhetoric when making an appeal was to establish honor while gaining an advantage.

Paul's task was to gingerly address Onesimus's situation by establishing Philemon's honor while at the same time convincing him to fulfill the request (i.e. forgive Onesimus). This was accomplished in three steps. First, Paul praised Philemon by mentioning reports of how the householder had 'refreshed the hearts of the saints' (vv. 5-7). Second, having confirmed Philemon as a person of honor, he then intertwined this with

hypothesis that is the foundation of the traditional interpretation of the letter (*Slaves in the New Testament*, pp. 14-16).

60. S.S. Bartchy, 'Philemon, Epistle to', in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary* (6 vols.; ed. David Noel Freedman; Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1992), V, pp. 305-10; J.D.G. Dunn, *The Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon* (NIGTC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), pp. 304-306; Fitzmyer, *The Letter to Philemon*, p. 20. This scenario appears to be adopted by Marianne Meye Thompson, *Colossians and Philemon* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), pp. 196-98.

61. F.F. Church, 'Rhetorical Structure and Design in Paul's Letter to Philemon', *HTR* 71 (1978), pp. 17-33.

62. Church, 'Rhetorical Structure and Design', pp. 20-21.

Onesimus by describing the slave with the same terms that describe Philemon's ministry to the saints (vv. 11-12). It is at this point that 'Paul is literally forcing a point of honor. While ostensibly avoiding even the appearance of constraint, his argument is designed to do just that, yet without robbing Philemon of the opportunity to act on his own in a truly honorable fashion.'[63] Third, there is a direct appeal by Paul to benefit from Philemon while once again intertwining the same terminology used to describe Philemon's ministry with Onesimus (v. 21). Combined with this is a closing statement expressing the apostle's confidence in Philemon's willingness to fulfill the request (v. 21).[64]

By way of comparison, Church demonstrates that although Pliny's letter to Sabinianus may be similar in circumstances to Philemon, the two letters are different in their respective rhetorical structures. Pliny's letter is an example of rhetorical *deprecatio* which is much more direct, mentions details of the circumstances leading to the appeal and, at its core, is a plea for mercy. Paul, on the other hand, was not appealing to Philemon to be merciful. Although the letter concerns a private matter between a slave and a master, it is also a public letter, and thus a plea for mercy has no place rhetorically. Consequently, unlike Pliny's letter, Philemon is more than just an intervention on one person's behalf. 'Onesimus may be the subject of Paul's plea, but its objects are love and brotherhood. Paul has seized the opportunity to instruct the entire community in the principle of practical Christian love.'[65]

Church was later followed by C.J. Martin (1991).[66] Martin focuses on the commercial language in v. 18. Traditionally, Paul's promise to repay Philemon is interpreted as evidence of Onesimus's thievery. But Martin argues that an understanding of Paul's use of the rhetorical device of anticipation suggests that Paul's promise to repay may only be for argument's sake and does not necessarily mean that an actual theft occurred or debt was owed.[67]

> Paul's stated readiness to share his economic resources shows the boundless character of his concern for Philemon. The commercial allusions function, then, as a quintessential illustration of the fact that Paul would utilize all resources at his disposal to prevent possible economic barriers, or any hindrances from forestalling the full granting of his request. Philemon is

63. Church, 'Rhetorical Structure and Design', p. 27.
64. Church, 'Rhetorical Structure and Design', pp. 30-31.
65. Church, 'Rhetorical Structure and Design', pp. 32-33.
66. Clarice J. Martin, 'Commercial Language in Philemon (v. 18)', in Duane F. Watson (ed.), *Persuasive Artistry: Studies in New Testament Rhetoric in Honor of George A. Kennedy* (JSNTSup, 50; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1991), pp. 321-37.
67. Martin, 'Commercial Language in Philemon', p. 334.

> not free to act in full obedience to Paul's request, for Paul's rhetorical offer of a 'promissory note', a kind of *cheirographon* (Col. 4.18), an autographed 'I.O.U.', has fully opened the door for Philemon's full cooperation.[68]

The combination of this rhetorical promissory note with a reminder to Philemon of his own debt to the apostle not only removes any possible barriers, but, Martin concludes, it also adds more weight to Paul's argument that Philemon should fulfill the apostle's request.

While the contributions of Church and Martin helped Philemon studies to consider new angles, it is the work of N.R. Petersen that seems to have helped launch an interest in socio-rhetorical studies of Philemon. In 1985, Petersen published *Rediscovering Paul: Philemon and the Sociology of Paul's Narrative thought World*.[69] A combination of literary criticism and sociology, Petersen's book marked the beginning of a new era for Philemon studies.

Although Petersen assumes the traditional interpretation of the Letter as a framework for his study, he is not interested in answering historical questions. Petersen argues that story is history and that the internal structures and dynamics of Paul's narrative world are what is more important than history.[70] Paul and the readers of his letters lived in a symbolic universe in which they agreed upon certain images and roles that defined who they were as well as their relationship with one another.[71] The focus of Petersen's study is to understand that symbolic universe and how Paul used it to accomplish his purposes in the Letter to Philemon.

The first step in Petersen's program is a literary analysis of the Letter. He outlines five theses about the sociology of letters that he believes are fundamental to understanding the story behind Philemon. (1) Every letter presupposes some form of previous relationship between the addresser and the addressee. Even if there is no prior relationship, a letter initiating a relationship must take the prior non-relationship as its premise. (2) Every letter, once it has been received, constitutes a new moment or event in the relationship between the addresser and the addressee. The letter becomes a past shared experience to which the correspondents can refer in the same way as they refer to past face-to-face encounters. (3) Every letter implies at least one future stage in the relationship beyond the reception of the letter—the addressee's response. (4) Addressers, addressees, and other persons referred to in letters are related to one another within a 'system of typifications, relevances, roles, positions, statuses'. (5) The rhetoric, the

68. Martin, 'Commercial Language in Philemon', p. 336.

69. N.R. Petersen, *Rediscovering Paul: Philemon and the Sociology of Paul's Narrative Thought World* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985).

70. Petersen, *Rediscovering Paul*, p. 15.

71. Petersen, *Rediscovering Paul*, p. 62.

style, and the tone of the letter correspond to the addresser's perception of his or her status in relation to the addressee.[72]

From the above presuppositions, Petersen suggests an outline for the story behind the Letter to Philemon. The most important aspect of this story, according to Petersen, is the idea of indebtedness. The fact that Paul considered Philemon to be indebted to him describes the relationship between them and allows the apostle to request a repayment of that debt. By doing this Paul has placed his relationship with Philemon on the table. Either Philemon fulfills the request and remains in a relationship of equality with him, or he rejects the request and places at risk his own status with Paul and the church because he has not treated Onesimus as a brother. Petersen concludes:

> This, I believe, is the underlying issue in Paul's letter as it stands. Paul's visit to Philemon involves not only Philemon's decision to be or not to be a brother, but also Paul's response—to say, 'You are a brother'. Or, 'You are not a brother'. Clearly, Paul wants Philemon and other readers to conclude that only one response is reasonable from Philemon—to be, and to remain, a brother by being a brother to Onesimus.[73]

The second step of Petersen's program examines the roles of social structure and social relations and how they relate to Philemon and the way he chooses to respond to Paul. With the advent of Onesimus's new status as a brother, there are a number of complications that occur as it relates to Philemon and his role both in society and the church. The first complication is that Onesimus's conversion places him in the position of playing two roles in relation to Philemon. In the social structure of the world, he is Philemon's slave, but in the church he is a brother. This in turn calls into question the social structure of the master–slave relationship. If the symbolic universe of the church emphasizes equality, how can Philemon still maintain his role as master?[74] Combined with this conundrum is the social pressure on Philemon. On the one hand, the worldly structure expects Philemon to punish Onesimus. On the other hand, there is the social pressure from the church to accept Onesimus as a brother. Added to this mixture of pressure and competing social roles is Paul's addressing of the letter to the entire church. Everyone in the church is aware of the problem and is waiting for the resolution. All of this, Petersen argues, is part and parcel of the symbolic universe that Paul, Philemon and the church share together.

72. Petersen, *Rediscovering Paul*, pp. 63-64.
73. Petersen, *Rediscovering Paul*, p. 78.
74. Petersen, *Rediscovering Paul*, p. 97.

> Beyond the problem of social relations that arises upon the arrival of Onesimus and Paul's letter, there is also a problem pertaining to the church's symbolic universe. This problem concerns the *idea* of equality, which is important because it is a fundamental feature of the symbolic universe Paul shares with his people… For this reason, Philemon's refusal to accept Onesimus as his brother would not only disrupt the social fabric of the community, but it would also threaten the whole rationale, the 'reality' of the international brotherhood. Philemon's options and actions are therefore significant because of what they mean as well as for their more immediate effects on social relations in his church.[75]

Overall, Petersen did not so much introduce a new solution to the questions surrounding Philemon as propose a new methodology for reading the letter. While his work raised questions, it also inspired others to work further.

While Church and Petersen emphasized the social pressure that was brought to bear on Philemon and his honor, others have looked at how Paul was able to do this without completely alienating the slave owner. Andrew Wilson (1991) analyzes Philemon from the standpoint of linguistic pragmatics as it is concerned with politeness.[76] Pragmatic and politeness theory attempts to understand the interaction that takes place in discourse. One important part of the construct in politeness theory is 'face', which recognizes that some utterance may potentially involve some cost to the speaker's or hearer's *face*. These are defined as Face Threatening Acts (FTAs) which may include requests and orders, criticism and potential loss of standing within the community. Wilson suggests that politeness theory could be valuable for reading Philemon. Since the letter is a public not a private correspondence, any potential FTAs would make Philemon's position vulnerable before the Christian community.[77]

Assuming the traditional interpretation of Philemon and using a model of politeness developed by Geoffrey Leech, Wilson examines the Letter. He notes that Paul has reduced the possibility of any FTAs against Philemon by minimizing himself. This is done by forgoing the usual title of 'apostle' in the salutation and adopting the identification of 'prisoner' which not only suggests that he is not wielding authority over Philemon, but also that he shares social solidarity with Onesimus. But at the same time, Paul uses numerous pronouns and familial language that connect him with Philemon. Thus, while Paul may minimize his position in relation to Philemon, he also creates a familial bond between all three of the

75. Petersen, *Rediscovering Paul*, p. 101.

76. Andrew Wilson, 'The Pragmatics of Politeness and Pauline Epistolography: A Case Study of the Letter to Philemon', *JSNT* 48 (1992), pp. 107-19.

77. Wilson, 'The Pragmatics of Politeness', pp. 108-109.

characters. Even the extended thanksgiving functions as a sustained form of politeness.[78]

Wilson notes how scholars often comment on the lack of any explicit request being made in the request section of the Letter. But he suggests that this, too, is part of Paul's strategy to reduce FTAs. By hedging and indirectness, the perceived cost to the hearer is reduced because nothing has been 'put on record'. Paul then complements this by a promise to pay any debts that may be owed. Such a move is yet another attempt to reduce FTAs.[79] Wilson suggests that Paul's forthright request for a room and expectation that Philemon would 'do even more than I ask' should not be seen as a threat, which would be an FTA, but rather as quiet confidence in a friend.[80]

At the end of the twentieth and the beginning of the twenty-first centuries, scholarship began to focus more on the situation of Onesimus, an unconverted slave, living in the home of a prominent Christian leader. N.H. Taylor (1996) wonders if some early Christian congregations willfully excluded slaves from the church.[81] He notes that Onesimus's unconverted status would have been an exception in the first century. Since the church was the primary means of socialization for its members, Taylor concludes that Onesimus's conversion was either incomplete or that he had somehow lapsed.[82] But with his conversion now completed under the oversight of Paul, he is sent back with a request to be reinstated in Philemon's home and thus complete the conversion and socialization process.[83]

K.O. Sandnes (1997) also looks at the role of households and conversion in conjunction with Philemon.[84] He observes that Paul held a concept of common identity in the church. Such a concept would also have practical consequences for the master and slave relationships which would put social pressure on Philemon. Sandnes argues that by declaring Onesimus to be a brother, Paul challenged the autonomy and sovereignty of the slave master in a Christian fellowship. By asking him to welcome Onesimus back, Paul is encouraging a symbolic unity that speaks of egalitarianism and challenges the socially acceptable structure of the household.[85] But

78. Wilson, 'The Pragmatics of Politeness', pp. 113-114.

79. Wilson, 'The Pragmatics of Politeness', p. 116.

80. Wilson, 'The Pragmatics of Politeness', p. 118.

81. Noah H. Taylor, 'Onesimus: A Case Study of Slave Conversion in Early Christianity', *R&T* 3 (1996), pp. 259-81.

82. Taylor, 'Onesimus: A Case Study of Slave Conversion', pp. 266-67.

83. Taylor, 'Onesimus: A Case Study of Slave Conversion', p. 274.

84. Karl Olav Sandnes, 'Equality within Patriarchal Structures', in Halvor Moxnes (ed.), *Constructing Early Christian Families: Family as Reality and Metaphor* (New York: Routledge Press, 1997), pp. 150-65.

85. Sandnes, 'Equality within Patriarchal Structures', pp. 159-60.

Sandnes also concedes that this new relationship may not work out in practical terms. So the easiest way for this equality to be put into practice is for Philemon to allow Onesimus to return and work with Paul.[86]

Frilingos (2000) examines how Paul uses family language as a way to appeal to the *domus* imagery.[87] By calling Philemon 'brother' Paul puts himself and the *paterfamilias* on equal ground. By calling Onesimus his 'child' he has created a rhetorical *domus* in which Philemon is replaced by Paul as the *paterfamilias* which in turn supersedes any claim that Philemon had over Onesimus. In effect, Paul has shamed Philemon in his own household. Thus, in Frilingos's opinion, Paul is less concerned about Onesimus's status than he is about his own.[88]

But not everyone has been convinced that Paul's household rhetoric would have brought about equality in the church. De Vos (2001) has recently noted that the Mediterranean world was a collectivist culture which determined self-identity by sociological, rather than psychological, terms.[89] The understanding of gender, kinship and class were all part of one's self-identity. Related to this is the patriarchal system in which males seek to dominate usually through the patron–client relationship. In the case of a slave, de Vos argues, this would be even more pronounced. He concludes that with the structures of the slavery system moving slaves to the status as freed, there would be no major shift in attitude or habit. Lingering legal obligations after manumission would not have changed the situation very much. As evidence for his point he offers Pliny's letter in which the freedman, although no longer a slave, was still obligated to the former master and could expect similar treatment as if he were still a slave. Vos concludes that in light of the social realities of the day, the best that Paul could hope for was a perceptual shift rather than a structural one.[90]

Closing Comments

It would be an understatement to say that the interest in Paul's Letter to Philemon is out of proportion to its size. But the fact is this short letter has captivated the minds of many scholars. The twentieth century witnessed a number of studies engage an Epistle that had attracted little attention since it was first written. As we saw in Chapter 1, the shift from legal to

86. Sandnes, 'Equality within Patriarchal Structures', p. 163.

87. Chris Frilingos, '"For My Child, Onesimus": Paul and the Domestic Power in Philemon', *JBL* 119 (2000), pp. 91-104.

88. Frilingos, '"For My Child, Onesimus"', p. 104.

89. Craig S. de Vos, 'Once a Slave, Always a Slave? Slavery, Manumission and Relational Patterns in Paul's Letter to Philemon', *JSNT* 82 (2001), pp. 89-105.

90. Vos, 'Once a Slave, Always a Slave?', p. 102.

social definitions of slavery has played an important role in the interpretation of the letter. Some scholars attempted to 'rescue' Paul from being a lawbreaker by redefining Onesimus's legal status. These attempts represent a commendable effort to place the letter in the context of Roman slave law. The drawback, of course, is that the lack of detail in the letter only leads to endless speculation. Although some of these attempts yield some very imaginative results, the constructions offered usually do not hold up to scrutiny.

The Letter's lack of detail has spawned at least two positive trends. First, the introduction of rhetorical criticism to Philemon studies has helped NT scholarship to refocus on what can be known about Paul, Onesimus and Philemon. Rather than trying to reconstruct a plausible background to the letter, rhetorical criticism helps us to understand the intended purpose of the letter. In its concise form, the letter contains many threads from the social world of early Christianity. Paul's skill demonstrates the interweaving of rhetoric and Christian values in a way that cannot easily be observed in letters written to a large community. By studying Paul's rhetoric in the letter to an individual, Philemon, we can better understand what Paul wanted to happen in the particular situation of the slave Onesimus, even if it cannot tell us what Paul thought about slavery in general.

The second positive trend, related to the first, is a better appreciation for the social setting of early Christianity. By focusing on the presence of a slave in a prominent Christian household, NT scholars have begun to rethink the construction of the ancient household. New studies have queried what limitations may have been placed on the conversion and inclusion of slaves in Christian households. In many ways, it would have been difficult for Paul and the early Christians to begin a wholesale movement towards abolition or even emancipations. The structure of the household seems to have rendered some aspects of Christianity more symbolic for slaves. The ambiguous nature of Paul's letter may reveal this reality of the ancient world.

As Philemon studies enter the twenty-first century the situation has come full circle. We know no more, and assume even less, about Onesimus and the circumstances that led Paul to write a letter on his behalf. Many suggestions have been put forward and subsequently rejected. But they have all contributed to a better understanding of the social world in which Christianity and slavery existed. It will be interesting to see what the next century holds for this mini missive.

Epilogue

The previous chapters demonstrated the various changes in the way NT scholars view slavery in antiquity and in the letters of Paul. Scholars no longer live in a world that promotes slavery and a better understanding of slavery in the ancient world has led to the reevaluation of a number of traditional interpretations. What follows is an overview of four areas in which NT scholarship has already changed, and continues to change, its understanding of ancient slavery and how these changes help us to understand Paul.

The Sources for Understanding Slavery

One area which has been a particular stumbling block for NT scholarship is the problem of what sources should be used to inform our understanding of slavery and how we should use them. The most obvious resource would be Roman legal texts regulating slavery. But using these is problematic for three reasons.

First, the primary source for Roman law is the *Digest of Justinian*, which was not published until 533 CE. The *Digest* is a compilation of legal excerpts from which all obsolete rulings had been excised and only those still relevant to 533 CE had been preserved.[1] While some laws in the *Digest* undoubtedly go back to the first century, many may also be missing. Though the relevance of the *Digest* for NT studies cannot be dismissed out of hand, it is not necessarily an accurate indicator of which laws were in vogue in the first century. It is quite possible that there were other laws that did not survive and could shed light on NT texts. Thus, while a picture of the legal situation of early Imperial Rome is very good, it is also inherently incomplete.

Second, the use of legal texts to define the nature and practice of slavery is methodologically questionable. The danger is that it results in monolithic claims about Roman slavery. Legal texts were not necessarily positive indicators of social practice. As Harrill has cautioned, 'legal codes, at best, provide only inexact knowledge about social practice and, at worst,

1. Bradley, *Slavery and Society at Rome*, p. 20.

can build a highly misleading model of slavery. Reading law codes as descriptive rather than prescriptive overlooks the course of juridical decisions in the practice of law.'[2] Slavery laws were established in response to situations that required some type of legal control. Whether or not they actually mirror social practices and attitudes is debatable.

Third, it is difficult to determine the extent to which Roman laws were fully implemented in Rome's provinces. Roman law applied only to Roman citizens while non-Romans typically retained their own local rules. Provincial governors applied Roman law as part of their official duties, but how effectively and thoroughly are questions difficult to decide.[3] Governors were under no compulsion to hear particular cases, and their authority was probably felt more in cities than in rural areas, where local practices are likely to have predominated. This being the case, it would be difficult for us to determine, for instance, which, if any, Roman laws applied to the case of Onesimus and Philemon.

Another source for understanding slavery is philosophical and literary works. These are often considered valuable resources that contain opinions and perceptions about slavery from the standpoint of popular culture in antiquity. But it is also true that all of this literature was written by and for those who were members of the aristocracy. Terence and Epictetus notwithstanding, we have very little information about slavery from those who experienced it. Consequently while this literature certainly provides us with information about slavery in antiquity, we must be cautious in the way we interpret and use it.

When reading moral philosophers it is possible to find numerous statements about slavery, some which even seem to seek to alleviate the plight of the enslaved. But we also have no evidence that these writings represented public opinion or that they affected the ways slaves were treated.[4] Even when masters are chastised by Seneca for brutally abusing slaves (*Epistle* 47), the focus of the condemnation is against masters who do not exhibit the self-control of a Stoic, not masters who mistreat slaves.[5]

Ancient novels are also replete with depictions of slavery. At times it seems that the authors of these works are encouraging a more mitigated

2. Harrill, *The Manumission of Slaves*, p. 14; 'Using the Roman Jurists to Interpret Philemon', p. 136.

3. Peter Garnsey and Richard Saller, *The Roman Empire: Economy, Society, and Culture* (Berkley and Los Angles: University of California Press, 1987), pp. 1-4; Harrill, 'Using the Roman Jurists to Interpret Philemon', p. 137.

4. Glancy, *Slavery in Early Christianity*, p. 7.

5. Harrill, *The Manumission of Slaves*, p. 25.

form of slavery. However, these novels can be divided into two categories: ideal novels and satirical.[6]

In the ideal novels we often have stories of slaves who are able to overcome their circumstances and become successful former slaves. However, many of the slaves in these novels have been enslaved under false pretences (e.g., a noble person becomes wrongfully enslaved). The point of the story is not to create slave heroes or make social commentary, but to describe how the slave regains his or her rightful position in society.[7] In many of these novels, slavery is represented as one of society's negative values and is contrasted with the positive value of freedom. The point of the novel is to reinforce the established social codes rather than challenge them.[8]

Even in satirical literature the same goal is present. In order for the literature to be entertaining, social codes had to be turned on their head. Thus, characters such as Petronius's freedman Trimalchio are a deliberate overstatement of stereotypes about slaves intended to show that a former slave is still no better than a slave.[9] Moreover, because all of this literature was written as fiction, how does one then determine what is historical fact and what is fiction?[10] Similarly with the legal texts, this literature must be cautiously used in such a way that the scholar is not taken in by the satire of the author, confusing ideology with history.

The Conditions of Slavery

If nothing else, the above review of NT scholars demonstrates the divergent opinions of how slaves were treated in antiquity. To be sure, S.S. Bartchy and others overstated the positive conditions in which slaves lived and worked. Orlando Patterson and Keith Bradley have demonstrated that, for most, slavery was not a positive experience. Slavery was a relationship of violent domination. It was the powerful exploiting the powerless. But it also needs to be emphasized that not every slave that lived in the Roman Empire was brutalized and worked to death. Slavery was diverse in practice and ideology from nation to nation. It was diverse even within the Roman Empire itself. Those who were enslaved in an

6. L.M. Wills, 'The Depiction of Slavery in Ancient Novels', in Allen Dwight Callahan, Richard A. Horsley and Abraham Smith (eds.), *Slavery in Text and Interpretation* (Semeia, 83/84; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1998), p. 118.

7. Glancy, *Slavery in Early Christianity*, pp. 7, 52; Wills, 'The Depiction of Slavery in Ancient Novels', p. 119.

8. Wills, 'The Depiction of Slavery in Ancient Novels', pp. 120, 129.

9. Wills, 'The Depiction of Slavery in Ancient Novels', p. 121.

10. Harrill, *The Manumission of Slaves*, p. 29.

urban setting experienced a better (or at least improved) quality of life than those who worked on large farms or in the mines. A slave's quality of life depended upon his function, relation to the master and the degree of responsibility carried by the slave. Bradley notes:

> Generalizations about the 'typical' material environment of the slave in the central period of Roman history must necessarily be cautious, therefore, yet the evidence described so far implies in the face of things a fairly bleak material regime for most Roman slaves. [But] there were always exceptions.[11]

In light of the above, NT scholars must be cautious to avoid either extreme when interpreting Paul's statements on slavery. A slave was a financial investment and it was to the master's advantage to take care of and provide for the slave. Barclay seems to have found the middle ground when he concludes that: 'during the first century slaves could expect a combination of protection, provision, abuse and exploitation'.[12] That there was a positive view of slavery on some level is most evident by the way in which Paul uses slavery language to describe his relationship with Christ (Rom. 1.1; Gal. 1.10; Phil. 1.1) and the relationship of believers with one another (Rom. 12.10-11; 14.8, 13; Gal. 5.13; 1 Cor. 9.23). Slavery could be a positive image for Paul. Consequently, not all forms of slavery were considered to be undesirable. But the vast majority of them probably were.

The Practice of Self-Sale

Most NT scholars are familiar with the thesis that individuals would sell themselves into slavery as a way to relieve themselves of debt, improve their quality of life or even as a means of social improvement.[13] This has also been sometimes suggested as the background for Paul's discussion of slavery to sin and God in Rom. 6.16-22 and his understanding of slavery to Christ.[14] However, how frequently this form of enslavement was practiced is not clear. References to self-sale in the Roman jurists indicate that individuals who sold themselves into slavery had not only given up their inalienable right to freedom, but also brought shame upon themselves and their family (*Digest* 28.3.6.5; 40.12.1). Apart from two references in the Jurists, references to self-sale are few and obscure.[15] Bradley gives little attention to the practice in his work and comments: 'It is

11. Bradley, *Slavery and Society at Rome*, p. 89.
12. Barclay, 'The Dilemmas of Christian Slave-Ownership', p. 167.
13. Bartchy, *ΜΑΛΛΟΝ ΧΡΗΣΑΙ*, p. 47; 'Slavery (Greco-Roman)', p. 70.
14. Barrett, *Romans*, p. 123; Lyall, *Slaves, Sons, Citizens*, p. 35; Meeks, *First Urban Christians*, pp. 20-23; Dunn, *Romans*, p. 341; Fitzmyer, *Romans*, p. 448.
15. Glancy, *Slavery in Early Christianity*, p. 82.

generally agreed that self-sale as a mode of enslavement was of negligible importance in the central period of Roman history'.[16]

The only clear allusion to the practice in Christian literature is found in *1 Clement* 55.2. The reference is enigmatic, however, and seems to be referring more to those who were willing to suffer for others rather than suggesting that the author was familiar with the practice of self-sale. Another allusion is found in Petronius's *Satyricon* where the freedman Trimalchio claims to have sold himself into slavery in order to improve his social standing. However, as noted above, satire was intended to distort common social values for the purpose of comedy while reinforcing those values at the same time.[17]

This limited evidence for the practice of self-sale should serve as a caution to NT scholars. Horsley considers this 'a good illustration of the limitation of uncritical use of Roman law as a historical source'.[18] Consequently, the questions surrounding the practice of self-sale in antiquity and its influence on Paul is yet another example of how we can unknowingly perpetuate the ideology of the slaveholders through our sources.

The Upwardly Mobile Slave

The belief that manumitted slaves were upwardly mobile individuals has been a common assumption among both classical and NT scholarship. In NT circles, Bartchy's work was probably the most influential. He was followed by Dale Martin who suggests that a few individuals in society benefited from this system. This is how Martin understands Paul in 1 Cor. 9.16-23. However, there have been some studies in the last thirty years that have questioned not only the social mobility of slaves and freed persons, but also the social mobility of the free poor.[19] When NT scholars focus on the social mobility that did occur among the very few who were members of *familia Caesaris*, they are analyzing an abnormal pattern, not one that would have been recognized by the slave population as an opportunity for social mobility. 'The experience of the vast majority of slaves cannot be mitigated by focusing on the unusual influence or atypical

16. Keith R. Bradley, 'Roman Slavery and Roman Law', *Réflexions historiques* 15 (1988), p. 482.

17. Glancy, *Slavery in Early Christianity*, p. 82

18. Horsley, 'The Slave Systems of Classical Antiquity', p. 36.

19. P.R.C. Weaver, 'Social Mobility in the Early Roman Empire: The Evidence of the Imperial Freedmen and Slaves', in M.I. Finley (ed.), *Studies in Ancient Society* (London: Routledge,1974), p. 136; 'Children of Freedmen (and Freedwomen)', in B. Rawson (ed.), *Marriage, Divorce, and Children in Ancient Rome* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991, 1996), p. 189.

mobility of a select few'.[20] Moreover, social mobility among slaves suggests the presence of class consciousness among slaves. Bradley points out, however, that the idea of slaves having a 'class consciousness' of their own never developed in antiquity and that rather than admire the master's 'slave representative', all slaves, regardless of their position, would have been competing for the support and favor of the master. While some slaves were of higher rank and influence, this did not exempt them from the same type of abuse and maltreatment other slaves received.[21]

Closing Comments

There is not yet, nor may there ever be, a consensus on how we should understand slavery in Paul's letters. While the overly positive view of ancient slavery has yielded to a model which understands slavery as a brutal institution, this too is susceptible to oversimplification. As appalling as the notion of slavery is in any society, the fact remains that, in the context of the NT, slavery did take on some positive aspects. This is not to suggest, of course, that Paul was a supporter of slavery. But he and other NT authors were able to find something that was of 'redeeming' value for their theology.

A positive result of this ongoing debate has been an enhanced appreciation of the sources used to understand slavery. Just as NT scholars have become more cautious about the use of rabbinic materials as a source for Jewish laws and customs in the first century, the application of legal texts and literature to describe slavery in antiquity have also been reconsidered. While there is much to be gained from these sources, we must be cautious that we do not inadvertently perpetuate the ideology of the ancient slave owners.

The last two centuries has held some dramatic changes for our understanding of Paul and slavery. As a variety of new methods for studying the NT are discovered and employed, our understanding will undergo still yet more changes.

20. Horsley, 'The Slave Systems of Classical Antiquity', p. 57.
21. Bradley, *Slavery and Society at Rome*, pp. 72-73; 152.

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