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PAUL'S EXPLANATION OF CHRIST-MOVEMENT IDENTITY IN 2 CORINTHIANS 6:14-7:1: A SOCIAL IDENTITY APPROACH

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Abstract

This article deploys a social identity approach to argue that Paul wrote 2 Cor 6:14-7:1 as an integral part of 2 Corinthians to elucidate Christ-movement identity at a key point in an integrated letter. First, I will critique arguments that the passage is an intrusion based on its alleged awkward positioning between 6:13 and 7:2, proposing instead that it is carefully sited within the larger unit of 6:11-7:4. Secondly, I will critically analyse arguments that its non-Pauline character is suggested by the language used. Thirdly, I will explain the presence of 6:14-7:1 in 2 Corinthians as a means whereby, at a critical point in his argument, Paul made a positive statement concerning Christ-movement identity for his Corinthian *pistoi*, that is, the ingroup of Christ-followers who accepted his version of the gospel, as opposed to *apistoi*. The latter category embraced both idol-worshipping non-Judeans and his Judean opponents in Corinth who advocated a rival identity based on a different gospel linked to the Mosaic law. In relation to Paul's extended re-application of Israelite scripture in 6:16-18, I will argue for its decontextualized, indeed "oracular" character in a context where Paul aimed to communicate with actual addressees, most of whom were illiterate non-Judeans.

Key words: Paul, social identity, integrity of 2 Corinthians, opponents, use of Old Testament, oracular use of scripture

Introduction

The last three decades have witnessed an efflorescence of interest in questions of identity in the Pauline correspondence and early Christianity generally (e.g. Esler 1998, 2003; Mason 2007; Harland 2009; Mason and Esler 2017; and Hockney and Horrell 2018). Much of that interest has focused on the application of the area of social psychology known as social identity theory that stems from the research of Henri Tajfel and John Turner in the 1970s and 1980s (Tucker and Baker 2014; Tucker and Kuecker 2020; Brown 2020: 228). Second Corinthians has also been interpreted from a social identity perspective (Barentsen 2011; Lim 2017, 2020; Esler 2021). My own work with 2 Corinthians goes back to 2009 when, inspired by an article by John Turner (2005), I began thinking about the letter in terms of the social identity approach to leadership. That research will culminate in my

contribution to the T & T Clark Social identity Commentaries on the New Testament Series, *2 Corinthians: A Social Identity Commentary* in 2021. (The first in this series, Robert Brawley's *Luke: A Social Identity Commentary*, appeared in 2020.) The current article is a more detailed treatment of 2 Cor 6:14-7:1 than was possible within the bounds of that commentary.[1]

There are few passages in 2 Corinthians more intriguing and debated than 6:14-7:1. The very title of this article is something of a provocation, since many scholars do not believe that Paul was responsible for placing 2 Cor 6:14-7:1 in its present location. Indeed many consider that its language (including several *hapax legomena*) and, indeed, its thought are alien to him, and that it is, therefore, an intrusion in the letter (Kümmel 1975: 287 lists representatives of this view). This view runs parallel to what is still probably the majority opinion that 2 Corinthians is not as Paul wrote it but represents a composite of fragments of other letters by some unknown redactor. Such doubts over the unity of the letter began with J. S. Semler, who, in a treatise in Latin published in 1776, first divided the letter into its alleged constituent parts. These were: (1) 1-8, plus 13:11-13 and Romans 16; (2) 9 and (3) 10-13:10 (Thrall 1994: 3-4). Semler managed to send the majority of New Testament scholars (in my view) galloping off in the wrong direction, *ad terram metuendam in qua adhuc multi permanent*. As a result, today some commentators urge the existence of two such constituent letters, others three, others four or five, or six, with Walter Schmithals proposing that nine letters were utilised in the composition of 2 Corinthians. Margaret Thrall has succinctly summarised the various options (1994: 47-49). Many commentators (discussed by Harris 2005: 15-25) regard 2 Cor 6:14-7:1 as a later interpolation in the letter, possibly not even written by Paul.

Although I began my research on 2 Corinthians with no fixed view concerning its integrity, I developed a conviction that we do possess the letter as Paul wrote it grew as I worked through the text. That view is based primarily on the close relationships and the pervasive inter-connectivity between the argument in the three broad sections (Chapters 1-7, 8-9 and 10-13) when viewed from a social identity point of view, together with the flimsiness of the arguments for seams and other textual phenomena alleged to show an aggregation of letter-fragments (see Esler 2021). In the argument that follows, the interpretation of 2 Cor 6:14-7:1—within the larger context of 6:11-7:4—as a Pauline exposition of Christ-movement identity and the case for its integral role in the letter will prove to be mutually reinforcing.

In the overall framework of my arguing for 2 Corinthians as an exercise in Pauline leadership, the preliminary observation to be made is that this passage is replete with identity language of the sort that responds to analysis using social identity theory. There are two major dimensions to this. First of all there is the basic differentiation between ingroup and outgroup. The outgroup are stigmatised as *apistoi* ("unbelievers") in vv. 14 and 15 and also as *akathartos* ("impure") in v.16. I will return to their identity below. All this represents a classic case of the negative stereotypification of the outgroup. Secondly, there is a positive presentation of the ingroup: they are *pistoi*

("faithful ones," with *pistos* appearing in the singular in v. 15) who are associated with righteousness, light and Christ. They are, indeed, "the temple of the living God," among whom God lives and moves, he being their God and they being his people. This represents a very high appraisal of the worth of ingroup belonging and identity, in relation to the three dimensions described by Henri Tajfel (1978: 28-29): our sense of belonging to the group ("cognitive"); how we feel about belonging to the group ("emotional"); and how we rate belonging to our group compared with belonging to others ("evaluative"). The ingroup must maintain their boundary with the outgroup, by coming out of them and touching nothing unclean. Then God will welcome them; he will be their father and they will be his sons and daughters. All these benefits that have been promised to them demand continued cleanness from defilement and holiness. In short, this is a very powerful and very positive statement of the identity of the ingroup in relation to the *apistoi*. At the heart of this identity lies an intimate relation with God as a welcoming and hospitable father.

Is 2 Corinthians 6:14-7:1 an Intrusion in the Letter?

An appropriate place to begin our detailed assessment is with the context of the passage in the letter. According to Kümmel, it is an "incontestable fact that this section fits poorly into its context" and it "has no thematic link with its context" (1975: 288, 291). Close inspection of the letter, however, suggests otherwise. Looking first at the matter at a fairly general level, we note that in 2:13 Paul concludes a brief account of his recent journeys with a statement of his arrival in Macedonia and does not return to that narrative until 7:5, with details of his arrival there. Accordingly, 2:14-7:4 represent a chunk of non-narrative discourse. Fortunately, scholars are more willing these days to recognise that this combination of narrative plus inserted discourse is an aspect of Paul's original conception for the letter and not a sign of letter-fragments subsequently, and clumsily, brought together by him or someone else. For present purposes we must note that our target passage ends only three verses, 7:2-4, short of the conclusion of this long discourse. If one reads 7:2-4 as summative of important themes in the entirety of 2:14-7:1 (as I will suggest below that we do), then 6:14-7:1, together with 7:2-4, thus forms the substantive climax of this long section (2:14-7:4). Although hitherto the issue of the identity of the Christ-followers of Corinth has been the subject of close attention by Paul, it now moves to center stage before Paul resumes his narrative (7:5-15) and addresses his big two remaining issues, the collection (Chapters 8-9) and his opponents in Corinth (Chapters 10-13). The passage 6:14-7:1 thus constitutes the climax of his discussion of Christ-movement identity, carefully situated towards the end of the first broad section of the letter (1:1-7:16).

The manner in which he has integrated 6:14-7:1 into its immediate context provides further support for its careful positioning within Paul's wider communicative intention in the letter. As Paul works towards our target passage he progresses from speaking largely about the substance of his message to the way he has conducted his ministry and the values that he embodies in doing so. Second Corinthians 6:3-10 concern the hardships of his ministry (*diakonia*). This is an important concept in 2 Corinthians (with

diakonia occurring twelve times, *diakonos* ['minister'] four times and *diakonein* ['to minister'] three times). Also significant are the qualities he deploys to undertake his *diakonia*. The hardships, in vv. 4-5, one of several such catalogues in the Corinthian correspondence (Fitzgerald 1988), are largely peculiar to anyone like himself who is a far-roving preacher of the Gospel. But the behavioural qualities he exhibits in coping with them in vv. 6-7 are different, for they should characterize the life of any Christ-follower. Omitting "knowledge," "Holy Spirit" and the "power of God" since they do not expressly designate nor are limited to behaviour, they are as follows:

> *purity (*hagnotês*);

> *forbearance (*makrothumia*);

> *kindness (*chrêstotês*);

> *genuine love (*agape anupokritos*);

> *truthful speech; and

> *the weapons of righteousness (*ta hopla tês dikaiosunês*) for the
> right hand and the left.

As Wayne Meeks has observed, even when Paul is asserting particular qualities in himself as part of his defensive mode, he also presents them as qualities that the community he is addressing should imitate (1993: 160). From a social identity perspective, purity, forbearance, kindness, genuine love and truthful speech are descriptors of group identity related to behaviour. Paul is really offering himself as prototype of these descriptors that the Corinthian Christ-followers need to embody to be members of the group. Paul is raising the issue of normative behaviour that is characteristic of the Christ-movement and exemplifying it in certain specific categories beginning with *hagnotês*.

The appearance of purity (*hagnotês*) at the start of the list is highly significant, given the cluster of the language of purity and impurity at the heart of our target passage (6:14-7:1). Included in it is an injunction not to touch anything (or anyone) unclean (6:17), and it ends with a further direction: "Let us cleanse (*katharisômen*; 7:1) ourselves from every defilement (*molusmos*) of body and spirit, perfecting holiness (*hagiosunê*) in the fear of God (7:1)." The negative injunctions here would very adequately indicate behavioural characteristics antithetical to purity, even if the word ἁγνότης did not find a close synonym *hagiosunê* in the final clause. Thus Paul paves the way for a central feature of his exposition of Christ-movement identity to the Corinthians by mentioning purity as the first of the identity-descriptors he aims for in his own behaviour. The other prominent point of this list is at its end, with Paul's appeal to righteousness; this is very possibly meant to be summative of the previous items. Yet even if it is not, it has a generalising quality that they do not. It is not accidental, therefore, that Paul mentions righteousness in 6:14 as the first positive quality in this description of Christ-movement identity.

Some commentators have accurately noticed that the echoes of 6:11-13 in 7:2-4 only make sense on the assumption that Paul always intended

these two passages to frame 2 Cor. 6.14-7.1, since otherwise the repetitions would be otiose. As Lambrecht observes, "7:2-4 is not only the continuation, but also the resumption of 6:11-13. This seems to indicate that there was always an interruption after 6:13" (1999: 122). On the other hand, without the location of 6:14-7:1 between 6:11-13 and 7:2-4 these latter two passages would be repetitious in a manner unlike Paul. This view is confirmed by Paul's use of the expression "I said before" (προείρηκα γὰρ) in 7:3, where the previous statement was that they were in his heart, a reference back to "our heart is wide" in 6:11, since it would be extremely odd to use προείρηκα of something mentioned only three verses earlier (on the assumption that 6:14-7:1 was a later intrusion).

Even more compelling evidence for the integration of 6:14-7:1 in the letter exists in the circumstance that Paul has crafted 6:11-13 and 7:2-4 as the necessary frame for this passage using the rhetorical technique of chiasm. The first phrase in 6:11, "Our mouth is open to you, Corinthians," conveys the frankness and confidence with which Paul speaks to the Corinthians. This is essentially equivalent to what he said earlier in the letter, when he claimed, in the course of contrasting himself to Moses, that he employed *parrêsia*, "frankness of speech" (3:12). In one of the many signs of the chiastic arrangement across 6:11-7:4, this theme is repeated in 7:4: "Great is my frankness towards you" (*pollê moi parrêsia pros humas*). Within this outer frame of frankness of speech is another, concerning being "open hearted" (the meaning of which is considered below). Paul initially claims that "my heart is wide" (*hê kardia hêmôn peplatuntai*; 6:11), but he says to (the Corinthians) "you are restricted by your own inner parts" (*stenochôreisthe de en tois splanchnois humôn*; 6:12), so that he urges them also to "be widened" (*platunthête*; 6:13), that is, in their hearts. The chiastic pattern re-appears with his exhortation to them in 7:2: "make room for us (sc. in your hearts; *chôrêsate hêmas*)" and his assertion that they are in his heart (7:3). Thus we have the following chiastic arrangement around 6:14-7:1:

     A1   My mouth is open (6:11)
       B1   My heart is open (6:11)
         C1   Do not be narrow, open your hearts (6:12-13)

               6:14-7:1

         C2   Make room for us (in your hearts) (7:2)
       B2   You are in our hearts (7:3)
     A2   Frankness of speech (7:4)

It is perhaps the misguided determination of many commentators to treat 2 Corinthians as a collection of letter fragments, with 6:14-7:1 regarded as a later intrusion and possibly not even written by Paul, that has led to a failure to recognise the rather blatant chiastic arrangement embedded in 6:11-13 and 7:2-4 and hence to interpret 6:14-7:1 as an integral part of Paul's communicative intention.

Yet another factor has deflected commentators from grasping the authenticity of 6:14-7:1. This is the difficulty of matching the meaning of this section with the two framing passages on account of the currently majority

view on the meaning of "opening one's heart." Most commentators consider the expression "our heart is wide" (*hê kardia hêmôn peplatuntai*) in 6:11 concerns the demonstration of affection (e.g. Thrall 1994: 469; Matera 2003: 161; Guthrie 2015: 344). Such an interpretation, however, sits uneasily with the injunctive character of 6:14-7:1, except perhaps in the very awkward sense that Paul might be saying "be affectionate towards me by doing what I say." Yet without evidence that the understanding of "open one's heart" as "show affection" had some mooring in Paul's world there is a very real risk that such an interpretation is anachronistic and sentimental. Even in contemporary English usage "to open your heart" to someone means, not to show him or her affection, but to pour out to that person one's problems and secrets.

The ancient evidence indicates a very different meaning for opening one's heart. The notion is not particularly common in our ancient sources, but there are two revealing instances in the Septuagint with which Paul would certainly have been familiar. The first instance is in Deut 11:16: "Take a care for yourself, lest your heart is widened (*mê platunthê hê kardia sou*) and you transgress and serve other gods and worship them"). The similarity of the expression *platunthê hê kardia sou* here with Paul's *hê kardia hêmôn peplatuntai* in 6:11 strongly suggests a similarity, if not identity, of meaning. In Deut 11:16 the expression, preceded by *mê*, has a negative connotation, but not of the sort suggested by Furnish (1984: 360), who opines that the wide heart represents "conceit" or by Thrall, who proposes "pride" (1994: 469). Rather it means that their hearts are open but to the wrong gods. Accordingly, it refers not to the expression of emotion but to receptivity (here, of the wrong type), which is then followed by action. The same meaning, but here in a positive context, is found in Ps 118 (119):32: "I ran the road of your commandments, when you opened my heart" (*hodon entolôn sou edramon hotan eplatunas tên kardian mou*). Once again we have the same expression that Paul deploys in 6:11. The expression means that God has made the Psalmist receptive to him and hence obedient to his law. Here again, therefore, a widened heart is a sign of receptivity, understanding and responsive action, not just "understanding," as Furnish suggests (1984: 360).

This is what Paul means by the expression in 6:11. He attends very closely to what the Corinthians are saying to him (that is, he takes their views into his heart), weighs them up very positively and then responds to them with action. In 6:12-13 he asks the Corinthians to reciprocate his approach. They must not be constricted in their inward parts but should open themselves (that is, open their hearts) to him. This means they should be take in what he says and respond to it positively, with such a response embodied in behaviour. Thus, the final statement in 6.13: "You also be widened [in your hearts]" (*platunthête kai humeis*), preceded by "I speak as if to children" to emphasize their need to act on his word, is followed immediately and naturally by the imperatival forms in 6:14-7:1. Similarly, his first words after this passage: "Make room for us [in your hearts]" (*chôrêsate hêmas*; BDAG 1094) in 7:2, correspond directly and, as noted above, chiastically, to *platunthête kai humeis* in 6:13. Thus Paul returns to this theme of the open heart for emphasis (within the finely crafted chiastic structure of 7:2-4) but also to add a justification for what he has asked them to believe and to do in 6:14-7:1, namely, that he has not wronged, corrupted or exploited anyone, implying

allegations along these lines being made against him, presumably by the opponents he attacks in Chapters 10-13.

From this analysis, the conclusion follows that 2 Cor 6:14-7:1 is not a later intrusion into some notional passage that originally consisted of 6:11-14 and 7:2-4. Rather Paul has constructed 6:11-7:4 as a unified passage in the letter in which the central teaching of 6:14-7:1 is very carefully situated within a chiastic scheme emphasising the Corinthians need to attend very carefully to what he says and to respond positively to his explanation of Christ-movement identity and to the behavioural norms that flow from that identity. Prior to investigating his explanation of that identity, it is necessary critically to assess the arguments for the alleged non-Pauline origin of 6:14-7:1 on the basis of its vocabulary and thought.

Do the Vocabulary and Thought of 6:14-7:1 Exclude Its Pauline Origin?

(a) *Hapax Legomena*?

The remainder of the case for the passage being an interpolation, and one perhaps not even written by Paul, rests on the number of New Testament *hapax legomena* it contains and the presence of concepts that are alleged to be non-Pauline, even perhaps to indicate an origin in Qumran. I will consider these two issues in turn.

The *hapax legomena* are these: *heterozugein, metochê, sumphônêsis, Beliar, sugkatathêsis*, and *molusmos* (all falling in 6:14-16). Also *pantrokratôr* (6:18) only appears in the New Testament here and in Revelation (1:8; 4:8; 11:17; 15:3; 16:7, 14; 19:6, 15; and 21:22). It has been argued that it is uncharacteristic of Paul to have six *hapax legomena* (leaving aside παντοκράτωρ) in such a short section. Three considerations, however, make the presence of these words as intended by Paul for this section of the letter readily explicable. Firstly, as Fee has argued (1971: 144-147), Paul tends to introduce *hapax legomena* when he is engaging in a sudden burst of rhetoric (e. g. at 1 Cor 4:7-13, where there are six New Testament *hapaxes* and two other words found only in Paul, and at 2 Cor 6:3-10, with four New Testament *hapaxes*). As already noted, the passage comprising 6:11-7:4 is rhetorically constructed around an elaborate chiasm and these words occur at the beginning of the most rhetorically wrought section thereof (6:14-7.1). Secondly, part of Paul's rhetorical intention involved his decrying on no less than five occasions forms of association or connection between aspects of the Christ-movement and aspects of outgroups (6:14-16). This meant his coming up with five Greek words meaning "association" or "connection" in a general sense. Having thought of the more obvious cases of *koinônia* and *meris*, it is not surprising that he had to reach for more unusual words in relation to the remaining three: *metochê, sumphônêsis*, and *sugkatathêsis*. In other words, the needs of the immediate context explain his use of *hapax legomena*. Thirdly, Paul elsewhere uses other forms of the words here, which makes their appearance far less surprising, or they appear in the Septuagint or other Judean literature. Although *heterozugein*, appearing here in the present participle, *heterozugountes*, meaning "being misyoked," occurs nowhere else in the New Testament, its substantival antonym, *suzugos*, is employed by Paul in Phil 4:3 in the sense of "true comrade" (literally "yoke-fellow;" BDAG

954). The substantival form *heterosuzugos* appears in Lev 19:19, in the context of a commandment against interbreeding different types of cattle. *Metechô*, the verbal form of *metochê* and meaning "to share," appears in 1 Cor 9:10, 12; 10:17, 21 and 30. The form *sumphônos*, meaning "being in agreement," occurs in 1 Cor 7:5 and *sumphônein* is quite common elsewhere in the New Testament meaning "to be in or to have come to an agreement" (Matt 18:9; 20:2, 13; Luke 5:36; Acts 5:9; 15:15). The word *Beliar* is frequently found as a name for the devil in Judean extra-biblical literature, including the *Ascension of Isaiah* (*passim*), *Jubilees* (1:20), and the *Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs* (*Reuben* 4 and 6; *Levi* 3, 19; *Daniel* 5), so that by Paul's time Beliar was regarded as a Satanic spirit (Charles 1900: lvii). The verbal form of *sugkatathêsis* appears in the Septuagint in Exod 23:1, 32 (and in Luke 23:51) meaning "to agree with". Paul employs the verbal form of *molusmos*, namely, *molunein*, in 1 Cor 8:7 (in connection with idol worship) and the word also appears to designate pollution in 1 Esdras 8:83, Jer 23:15 and 2 Macc 5:2. This analysis suggests that the concentration of *hapax legomena* in this section of the letter is not an argument against Pauline authorship.

(b) Non-Pauline Thought?

Many critics entertain the idea that "the dualism and spirit of exclusivism exhibited in the passage are foreign to Paul" (Fee 1971: 110-114). Some make this argument generally, by comparison with his other writings (so Thrall 1994: 30-32), while some suggest, more specifically, that the passage had a Qumran origin (Fitzmyer 1961; Gnilka 1968). I will consider the general arguments first and then that concerning Qumran.

In 2 Cor 7:1 Paul requests that they all cleanse themselves from every defilement, something he nowhere else says it is the power and responsibility of Christ-followers to do (Furnish 1984: 376). Yet this idea is driven by and follows from the notion that they are "God's temple" in 6:16 (Newton 1985: 110-114). It has also been objected that the notion of cleansing from defilement "of flesh (*sarx*) and spirit (*pneuma*)" in 7:1 is contrary to Pauline theology elsewhere, for example, because the *sarx* is the seat of sin and should be mortified not purified (Schmiedel 1892: 253). But there is a non-theological use of *sarx* in this very letter, at 7:5. In 1 Cor 6:16 and 15:39, moreover, *sarx* is used as a synonym for *soma* ("body") which, to an extent, softens the differentiation between these two words). Furthermore, it has been argued that the divine *pneuma* received by Christ-followers is not capable of purification (Windisch 1970: 218). In response, one notes that there is a non-theological use of *pneuma* in this very letter, at 2:13. The notable employment of *pneuma* with *anesis* ("relief") in 2 Cor 2:13 and *sarx* with *pneuma* in 2 Cor 7:5 provides support for Gordon Fee's idea that *sarx* in this sense means "outwardly" and *pneuma* "inwardly" (1971: 161). Also urged as counting against Pauline authorship is that the plea for Christ-followers to separate themselves from the pagan world seems contrary to 2 Cor 5:9-11 (Gnilka 1968: 57). The answer to this is that this injunction is not to be taken literally (Lambrecht 1999: 123). Rather, Paul is insisting on moral purity and proper behaviour. These are identity descriptors that help constitute the group boundary. Like all group boundaries, there are some areas of prescription and some of proscription. In other words, it means to end the wrong sort of

association with both types of *apistoi*: firstly, the idol-worshippers (which would certainly include not frequenting pagan temples [Barnett 1997: 341]) and, secondly, Paul's opponents, in relation to whom it would mean not paying no attention to their false message (see below). Next, there is an apparent contradiction between *akathartou mê haptesthe* ("touch nothing unclean") of 6:17 and the perspective of 1 Cor 10:23-33 (Schmiedel 1892: 253). Yet only impure food and drink is excluded by the 1 Corinthians passage; other types of impurity remain. Finally, some have observed that Paul nowhere else suggests that fulfilment of divine promises depends on obedience to God (Furnish 1984: 376). Yet Paul is not saying that here. The promise at 6:16 does not require the prior obedience of the Corinthians (Thrall 1994: 30). These are some of the main issues that have been raised by those claiming a non-Pauline provenance to 2 Cor 6:14-7:1. As we have seen, none of them is convincing.

One particular approach to arguing that 2 Cor 6:14-7:1 is non-Pauline is the proposal by Fitzmyer and Gnilka that the passage had a Qumran origin, although possibly with later "Christian" editing. Fitzmyer (1971: 273) identified the following features that suggested contacts with Qumran:

> (a) the triple dualism of uprightness and iniquity, light and darkness, Christ and Beliar (together with the underlying notion of "lot"); (b) the opposition to idols; (c) the concept of the temple of God; (d) the separation from impurity; (e) the concatenation of Old Testament texts.

Gnilka (1968: 63) focused on similar issues suggesting links to Qumran: "(1) the community as God's temple; (2) separation from a godless environment; and (3) dualism." Seifrid (2014: 288-289) offers a nuanced discussion of the question of Paul's possible (but not probable) link to Qumran writings and concludes: "It is unlikely, but not impossible, that Paul draws directly on the Qumran writings. If he does to, he certainly alters their thought."

The problem with views advocating a Qumran origin for this material is that they do not attend sufficiently to what Paul has to say elsewhere about the non-Judean world, couched in strongly dualistic language, within which context 2 Cor 6:14-7:1 can be readily accommodated. One cannot simply find Qumran wherever one sees dualistic thinking in the work of a first century Judean: dualism may just be a natural way of viewing the world in the light of a particular social situation. I have previously made this point in relation to a comparison of John's Gospel and the Community Rule at Qumran (1994: 90-91):

> Dualism at the level of ideology and symbolism is plausibly to be explained as an inevitable reflection of the fact that the fundamental social reality for both groups was a marked division between themselves and the outside world. In such a context, dualism comes naturally.

Social identity theory provides useful resources for understanding such dualism, in that it demonstrates not only that an ingroup defines itself against an outgroup (or outgroups) with which it exists in a competitive environment to generate identity for the members, but that it tends to stereotype members of

the outgroup as being similar to one another in various negative ways (the "outgroup homogeneity effect"), even if outgroup homogeneity is not a universal phenomenon in intergroup relations (Simon 1992). The language of purity, moreover, here including the reference to the Corinthians being "the temple of God", is largely a means to establish boundaries between pure and impure that can be readily deployed in the context of inter-group tension as a way of denigrating the outgroup. As we will see below, the Old Testament texts that Paul cites serve precisely this purpose of ingroup/outgroup differentiation.

Having refuted the various main objections that have been advanced for Paul not having been responsible for the placing of 6:14-7:1 in its current position in 2 Corinthians or, indeed, his not having written this passage at all, I will now offer a positive case for its inclusion in the letter in terms of Paul's reinforcement of Christ-movement identity in Corinth.

Paul's Exposition of Christ-Movement Identity in 2 Cor 6:14-7:1

Paul begins this section with an imperative: "Do not become misyoked (*Mê ginesthe hetertozugountes*) with unbelievers (*apistois*)." As noted above, *heterozugos* appears in Lev 19:19 in a commandment against interbreeding different types of cattle. Yet even, as is highly likely (see below), the Corinthians did not discern Lev 19:19 behind Paul's statement, they would surely have taken the message from the vivid image conveyed—of avoiding a situation where two animals of a different kind were forced into close proximity and action by a wooden yoke over their necks. The image is highly apt to evoke a sharply differentiated ingroup and outgroup and that is how Paul's develops it, with the outgroup here designated as *apistoi*. In 1 Corinthians *apistos*, which appears eleven times (1 Cor 6:6; 7:12, 13, 14 (bis), 15; 10:27; 14:22 (bis), 23, 24), means someone who is not a member of the Christ-movement and probably an idol-worshipper (since there is no sign it also refers to Judeans and an idol-worshipper does seem in view in 1 Cor 10:27). In 2 Corinthians the position is different. Although idol-worshippers must be included among the *apistoi*, the word also extends to another group, Paul's opponents. The only use of *apistoi* in the letter before its appearance at 6:14 is in 4:3-4:

> And even if our Gospel is veiled, it is only veiled to those who are perishing, to whom the god of this age has blinded the minds of the unbelievers (*apistoi*), to prevent them from seeing the light of the gospel of the Glory of Christ who is the image of God.

My analysis of this verse in *2 Corinthians: A Social Identity Commentary* led to the conclusion that *apistoi* in 4:4 "must mean any *anthrôpoi*, Judeans or non-Judeans, who do not accept his Gospel; this category, therefore, embraces (idolatrous) Greeks, Judeans and Judean Christ-followers who do not accept his Gospel" (Esler 2021). In reaching this conclusion, his opponents are certainly to be included. After all, the god of this age (probably Satan) has blinded the minds of these unbelievers (4:4) and in 11:14-15 he will describe his opponents as the servants of Satan. In addition, they are preaching "another Jesus," "a different Spirit" and "a different Gospel" (11:4). It is, in fact,

virtually impossible to exclude Paul's opponents from the *apistoi* ι of 4.4. Thus, Paul envisages two groups: on the one hand, those who are blinded by the god of this age; and, on the other hand, those who see the light of the glory of Christ. The latter are the members of Paul's Christ-movement groups; the former are all the rest of humanity (including Paul's opponents). The usage of 4:4 (and 11:14-15), not that of 1 Corinthians (where the numerous instances of *apistos* refer only to idolatrous non-Christ-followers), thus provides the essential context for understanding *apistoi* in 6:14 and *apistos* in 6:15. The similarities between the two passages even extend to the repetition in 6:15 of the contrast between Christ and the god of this age, now under the guise of Beliar. A very similar understanding of *apistoi* has been reached by J. A. Adewuya, who considers the term "should be understood inclusively, that is, not only in its usual technical sense as a reference to unbelievers outside the Christian community but also to immoral and unfaithful ones within the community whose lifestyle is nothing better than the outsiders" (2001: 103). Volcker Rabens has also run a strong argument for the *apistoi* in 2 Corinthians 6 encompassing both idolatrous pagans and Paul's opponents (2014). Webb, on the other hand, far less persuasively interprets the evidence to explain the *apistoi* as "non-Christians outside the church community" (1993: 199).

The Five Antitheses of 2 Corinthians 6:14b-16

In 6:14b-16 Paul develops the contrast between the ingroup and outgroup, the *apistoi* , by formulating five antitheses phrased as rhetorical questions that assume a negative answer: "Can X have anything to do with Y?" The first antithesis (v. 14b) refutes the possibility of righteousness (*dikaiosunê*) having any partnership (*metochê*) with lawlessness (*anomia*). Righteousness has already appeared three times in the letter. In 3:9 Paul uses the word in the fundamental contrast between the ministry of condemnation (associated with the law of Moses) and the ministry of righteousness (associated with the Gospel). In 5:21 it occurs in the expression "the righteousness of God" where it is a way of describing the identity of the redeemed community. Both of these instances, therefore, are exalted ways of referring to the identity of Paul's Christ-movement communities. In 6:7 Paul has in mind a similar meaning when he speaks of "the weapons of righteousness" that he brandishes in his ministry. This latter instance is highly significant; as noted above, it is mentioned in a prominent place in the list of qualities brings to his ministry and now, in 6:14, it has pride of place in the identity he is exposing to the Corinthians. In social identity terms, Paul is presenting himself as prototypical of this identity-descriptor and it is something that the Corinthians must interiorize within their own identity to be loyal members of the Christ-movement. After two more positive uses of the word (9:9, 10), Paul will subsequently speak of his opponents, servants of Satan, as disguising themselves as "servants (*diakonoi*) of righteousness" (11:5). We conclude from this that righteousness is a key identity-descriptor for Paul's version of the Christ-movement in Corinth at the time he is writing this letter, more so than in 1 Corinthians (where it occurs only once, in 1:30, predicated of Christ Jesus), probably because he must now counter opponents who have arrived claiming it as a product of their own ministry. Righteousness is a reactive idea

in Paul's letters, which he deploys when facing Judean opposition to this mission (Esler 1998: 153-159). It does not mean simply "ethical righteousness" (Barnett 1997: 346), even though normative behaviour forms part of the complex of meaning involved, since it "presupposes a moral life in accord with God's will"(Matera 2003: 163). Righteousness becomes a field of contestation that Paul cannot vacate but must rather enter in order to confront the opposition directly. The antonym of righteousness is *anomia*, literally "lawlessness," or "iniquity," a word Paul will later use twice in Romans. In Rom 4:7 the word appears in the plural in a quotation from Psalm 32:1. More interesting is Rom 6:19, since there Paul addressees his audience as having moved from lawlessness (*anomia*) to righteousness (*dikaiosunê*), precisely the distinction he is making in 2 Cor 6:14b. In 1 Cor. 9:21 Paul employs the nominal/adjectival form *anomos* to make a rather different point—to refer to non-Judeans who lacked the law of Moses.

The second antithesis (v. 14c), "What fellowship (*koinônia*) does light have with darkness?" differs in character from the first. The word *koinônia* is quite common in Paul's letters (Rom 15:26; 1 Cor 1:9; 10:16 (bis); Gal 2:9; Phil 1:5; 2:1; 3:10; Phlm 6, and also in 2 Cor 8:4; 9:13 and 13:13). Although the first antithesis offered substantive information concerning ingroup and outgroup capable of observation in the course of human behaviour, the second employs metaphors of light and darkness solely in order to approbate the ingroup and derogate the outgroup, yet without providing any details of either. Paul posited the same contrast between light and darkness earlier in the letter, in 4:3-6, so it is not surprising to find it here (Barnett 1997: 347). The same contrast, which is really a rather obvious one when engaged in outgroup derogation, also crops up elsewhere in Paul's letters. A particularly close example linked to ingroup/outgroup identities, and, in a letter predating 2 Corinthians, is found in 1 Thess 5:4-5:

> But you are not in darkness, brethren, for that day to surprise you like a thief. For you are all sons of light and sons of the day; we are not of the night nor of darkness.

Other examples are found in Rom 2:19; 13:12; and 1 Cor 4:5. To reiterate a point made above, there is no reason to suppose a Qumran provenance for this contrast between light and darkness; anyone interested in differentiating ingroup from outgroup in this culture would find this a natural, indeed banal, means to do so.

The third antithesis, in v. 15a, asks "What concord (*sumfônêsis*) does Christ have with Beliar?" The word Beliar often appears as a name for the devil in Judean extra-biblical literature, including the *Ascension of Isaiah* (*passim*), *Jubilees* (1:20) and the *Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs* (*Reuben* 4 and 6; *Levi* 3, 19; *Daniel* 5). In v. 15a it is likely that Beliar is another name, along with Satan (2 Cor 2:11; 11:14; 12:7), for "the god of this world" mentioned in 2 Cor 4:4. This antithesis thus develops the contrast between "the god of this world" and Christ from earlier in the letter (4:4). While the Christ-followers must be represented by "Christ" in this antithesis, it is also probable that Paul's opponents fell under the banner of Beliar, since in 2 Cor 11:14-15 he describes them as ministers (*diakonoi*) of Satan who disguise themselves as ministers (*diakonoi*) of righteousness.

The fourth antithesis (v. 15a), "What part (*meris*) does a believer (*pistos*) have with an unbeliever (*apistos*)?" does little more than identify the two groups concerned with reference to the designations that most precisely encapsulate their respective characters, their rival group identities. *Apistos* has the same meaning as in the previous verse and in 2 Cor 4:4, namely, anyone who does not subscribe to the Gospel of Christ as Paul preached it. Paul now makes explicit what was previously implied, *pistos* as the inevitable antonym of *apistos*— "believer" as opposed to "unbeliever."

The fifth antithesis (v. 16a), "What agreement (*sugkatathesis*) has the temple of God (*naos Theou*) with idols?," has an explanatory statement (v. 16b) that needs to be read alongside it, "For we are the temple of the living God …," which also points forward to what follows. The contrast here is not so finely balanced compared with the previous antitheses, since it does not contrast "the temple of God" with "the temples of idols." So two changes are introduced. The first is that the temple of God is personalised and now means "us." Paul had previously mentioned this idea in 1 Corinthians, so we know the Corinthians were already familiar with it:

> Do you not know that you are God's temple (*naos Theou*) and that God's Spirit dwells in you? If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy him. For God's temple is holy, and that temple you are (1 Cor 3:16-17).

So it can hardly be suggested that this is a non-Pauline idea. In addition, we should note that implied in this statement and those of 2 Cor 6:16a-b is the replacement, at least in a metaphorical sense (and Paul will later acknowledge its continuing actual existence in Rom 9:1-5), of the temple in Jerusalem as the temple of God with the Christ-group. A key feature of Judean ethnic identity (the centrality of the cult in the Jerusalem temple) is therefore transformed in the new identity of the Christ-movement. The second change introduced in the fifth antithesis is that the entity posed as the opposite of God's temple consists of idols themselves, not a temple containing them.

Yet the point is clear in spite of these two alterations to the pattern. Paul is excluding any association between (his) Christ-followers and idols, but without specifying what that prohibition might encompass. Presumably Paul must mean both idolatry itself, acts of worship offered to lifeless statues, and practices associated with such worship, such as temple prostitution. In an earlier letter Paul had described his converts as those who "turned to God from idols, to serve a living and true God" (1 Thess 1:9).

Paul's Oracular Use of Israelite Scripture

After the statement "We are the temple of the living God," Paul begins a catena of scriptural statements (it is, as we will see, inaccurate to call them "quotations") that is unique in 2 Corinthians. Although he prefixes them with the statement "Just as God said" (*kathôs eipen ho Theos*), he provides a source for none of them. Making sense of this collection of biblical material necessitates taking a position in the current discussion in the field between researchers, inspired by Richard Hays' 1989 book *Echoes of Scripture in the*

Letters of Paul, who consider that the context of scriptural echoes and quotations is important in interpretation, and those, especially represented in the writings of Christopher Stanley, who dispute this view.

Hays distinguishes between the "implied readers" and the real first-century CE readers of Paul's letters (1989: 29). While not devoting much attention to that latter, he does at one point comment on them in a footnote as follows: "The implied readers of these letters appear to be primarily Gentile Christians with an extensive knowledge of the LXX and an urgent interest in its interpretation." Yet this leaves hanging the question of Paul's actual original readers, which Hays addresses as follows:

> Whether the actual original readers of the letters fit this description is a question that must be distinguished carefully from the literary question about the implied reader as an intratextual phenomenon. Some such characterization of Paul's actual readers, however, is not implausible (1989: 201, fn. 92).

Stanley, with considerable justification, finds this view unconvincing:

> This virtual equation of the implied audience with the actual audience of Paul's letters allows Hays to sidestep the thorny question of whether Paul's first-century audiences would have been capable of recognizing and following his many allusive references to the Jewish Scriptures, together with the related question of whether this is what Paul expected (2008: 132).

Stanley suggests that in taking this approach Hays underestimates the demands that this view of Paul's writing imposes on an actual first-century audience for number of reasons (2008: 132; 2004). It is historically implausible that Paul's audiences would have possessed the degree of biblical literacy needed. Most of them must have been illiterate and could not have read Israelite scriptures themselves. Also, the sort of analysis Hays proposes is hard to imagine without some way of identifying particular biblical passages akin to our system of chapter and verse for which there is no evidence in the New Testament.

Paul's converts, admittedly, must have known he was a Judean and that Judeans possessed a substantial body of writing about their relationship with their God. It is clear that Paul must have ensured that his audience was familiar with certain parts of this narrative, such as, as Stanley suggests, the story of Adam's fall, the Abraham narrative and certain key episodes in the Exodus narrative. The latter is mentioned in 2 Corinthians 3. But this material seems to have been fairly limited. Paul probably explained Israelite tradition to his converts orally. It is highly unlikely, given the very negative attitude to reading of the law of Moses in Chapter 3 (see Esler 2021), that this was a feature of his congregations. Why would Paul have allowed, let alone encouraged, such reading among an audience whom he was instructing to regard the law of Moses as a ministry of death and condemnation (2 Cor 3:7, 9).

More fundamentally, when we view the letter (realistically) as a communication to actual (and not implied) "readers" (in fact, "listeners"), as far

as the scriptural quotations in the passage are concerned, how would Paul's audience have been in any way helped by knowing their original context, including, as we will soon see, Israel's return from exile or what God promised to Solomon? He neither indicates that the material is a composite of quotations nor discloses the source of any of them. Yet if he wanted his audience to be able to contextualise these biblical quotations, it would have been extremely helpful to do so. He does not even mention that he is citing a written text or texts. He is instead inviting his audience to listen to the voice of God. This means that discussing Paul's use of quotation in this passage as an exercise in intertextuality, in line with Hays' approach, would run counter to Paul's argumentative aim and procedure that were solely directed, in line with the rhetorical practices of his day, to winning around to his viewpoint an audience of actual human beings. As practiced by creative interpreters such as Richard Hays (1989) or William Webb (1993), imagining how a well-informed implied reader operating intertextually might have understood Paul's use of scripture can result in the crafting of elegant literary-critical and theological outputs. My interest, on the other hand, lies in discerning what practical messages (Esler 2005: 88-93) Paul was attempting to communicate to actual people in a particular historical context.

As Stanley astutely proposed in 2004, a socially realistic way to envisage the character of Paul's use of Israelite scripture is with reference to the Greco-Roman practice of seeking oracles from the gods, either orally (as at Delphi) or in written form (by a random, and thus necessarily decontextualized, selection of a passage from a sacred book [van der Horst 1998]). Oracles were "short enigmatic sayings that offered the recipients guidance concerning the will of the deity or spells to be recited to secure divine protection" (2004: 58). Oracular and divinatory practices were engaged in by certain "religious experts" in the Greco-Roman world whose rise in influence during the first century CE has been charted by Wendt (2016). This research provides a significant context against which to assess Paul's use of Israelite scripture. Jennifer Eyls (2019), in fact, has now carefully situated Paul within ancient practices of divination, one of them being the use of literary texts (Israelite scripture in particular) to access useful information from the Judean God:

> For his textual prophecies, Paul selects, reorders, repackages, and edits numerous passages from a Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible. This practice of allegorizing and repurposing culturally foundational texts toward prophetic ends reflects the allegorical and oracular uses of Homer that we see as early as the sixth century BCE (2019: end of Chapter 3).

Paul's Oracular Use of Scripture to Explain Christ-Movement Identity in 2 Corinthians 6:16-7:1

Paul refers to the "biblical" statements he quotes as "promises" (*epangeliai*; 7:1) and he certainly intends his audience to believe that they were promises made in the past but to them: "Having these promises (*epangelias*), beloved ones (*agapêtoi*), therefore, let us …." But achieving that rhetorical effect would have become much more complicated, if not impossible, if his Corinthian

Christ-followers had known anything about the original contexts of the various statements. The more they knew of the original scriptural settings, the less application they would have had to them. Moreover, the various modifications Paul made to these quotations had the effect (and probably also the purpose) of disguising their source. In short, Paul realised that if his audience were aware of the original context of the quotations, that realisation would have induced them to believe they did not apply to them. All Paul needs is for his audience to accept that God uttered the words he cites. To that extent his usage is oracular, as just described. The meaning communicated to the Corinthians by virtue of these quotations came from their divine source, their *ipsissima verba* and the way in which Paul interprets them. We can now consider the biblical quotations in the light of these conclusions.

The first of them is in 6:16:

Just as God said, "I will live and walk (*emperipatêsô*) among them, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people."

For an audience unfamiliar with Israelite scripture, the alleged scriptural quotation in v. 16 concerns the identity of the Christ-movement. On all three aspects of social identity—the cognitive, emotional and evaluative—the "quotation" asserts that the members of the Christ-movement are deeply privileged: it is they who are God's people. This statement rather leaves the Judeans out in the cold, in that it poses a challenge to the notion of Israel's election that is, at the very least, heavily qualified if not jettisoned. (If it is jettisoned here, Romans 9-11 shows that Paul could not, in the end, deny to Israel election or the fulfilment of God's promises and considered that Israel and the Christ-movement would co-exist until the End.) Not only that, but God dwells and walks among them, which also renders problematic the status of the temple in Jerusalem which, like Greco-Roman temples, was regarded by those who frequented it as the locus for God on earth. For Paul's Christ-followers are now God's temple. The non-ethnic dimension of Christ-movement identity is very visible in this material. This indicates how effective an oracular approach to Israelite scripture can be.

If, however, one attempts to construe what is said with reference to the possible scriptural contexts for the material, problems soon arise. Thus William Webb, as part of his well argued thesis that 2 Cor 6:14-7:1 is to be understood in the context of the new covenant and the second Exodus, suggests that Paul may have had in mind Lev 26:11-12 (LXX). This reads: "And I will pitch my tent amongst you, and my soul will not abhor you, and I will walk [*emperipatêsô*] among you. And I will be your God, and you will be my people." He also suggests Ezek 37:27 as another possibility (LXX: "And my tent shall be among them, and I will be to them God and they will be to me my people"), or else that Paul had in mind both passages (Webb 1993: 33-4).He adds that the (striking) word *emperipatêsô* (which does not appear in Ezek 37:27) "has been inserted from Lev: 26:11 (perhaps from memory)" (1993: 37). He further reasons that this (alleged) quotation from Ezek 37:27 is to be read closely with the promise of an everlasting covenant in Ezek 37:26 (1993: 38).

Yet a consideration of the entirety of the passage in question from Ezekiel—37:24-28—quickly throws up insurmountable obstacles to Webb's

position. The passage concerns the future re-establishment of Israel, under King David, on their land and observing God's laws, with God's dwelling-place, that is, his temple, among them. Visible here are all the most common (diagnostic, not essential) indicators of ethnic identity (Hutchinson and Smith 1996: 6-7): a common proper name (Israel); a myth of common ancestry; a shared history; a common culture (including laws); an ancestral homeland with its central cultic site; and a sense of communal solidarity. The final verse, "Then the nations (*ta ethnê*) will know that I the Lord sanctify Israel, when my sanctuary is in the midst of them for evermore" (Ezek 37.28), makes clear that this a promise made to ethnic Israel and to no one else. Indeed, the other ethnic groups serve as mere witnesses to God's sanctification of Israel, which they do not share. How could it possibly have been in Paul's interest as a leader seeking to communicate with his largely or totally non-Judean audience to draw their attention to a vision of future salvation from which they were necessarily excluded? The more they knew about the context of Ezek. 37.27 the less they would have regarded it as applying to them.

This view finds confirmation in how Paul actually treats the biblical material. In v. 16 the first, and thus very prominent, three words of the alleged quotation are *enoikêsô en autois*, "I will dwell among them." But this expression does not occur in the Septuagint! (The expression "and I will dwell in their midst" appears in the MT of Exod 25:8, but the Septuagint has at that point *ophthêsomai en humin,* 'I will appear among you.') Webb suggests it is closer to *hê kataskênôsis mou* ("my dwelling place") of Ezek 37:27 than to Lev 26:11 (1993: 35), but this misses the point here: Paul has produced an expression that refers to the presence of God without any mention of a temple even though that was central to the vision of the future in Ezek 37:24-28. Having just in v. 16b re-interpreted the temple (which for Judeans meant the imposing edifice in the ethnic capital Jerusalem devoted to God's cult) as Paul and his Christ-followers, he continues this theme by fabricating a Septuagintal statement in which God promises his continued presence "among them" without any reference to a physical temple (which is no longer necessary as "they" have now taken its place as the locus of God's presence). It is possible that phraseology from the two Septuagintal passages was in Paul's head when he wrote this section of the letter, but he has done nothing to draw the attention of his audience to those passages. His use of them is decontextualized and oracular, serving to explain and to exalt Christ-movement identity.

The next verse highlights the intergroup dimension of Paul's message:

Therefore go out (*exelthate*) from their midst
and separate yourselves (*aphorisate*), says the Lord,
and do not touch (*mê haptesthe*) anything/anyone unclean (*akathartou*);
then I will welcome (*eisdexomai*) you.

An ancient audience listen to this passage until the clause 'says the Lord' might have assumed it was a continuation of the previous statement; now they learn it was not. Paul is communicating in strong terms that the God-chosen ingroup—the temple of the living God no less—exists amongst an outgroup from whom they must separate themselves. Paul treats being

among them as carrying the risk of touching something or someone unclean (*akatharton/akathartos*); coming out from among them is necessary to avoid incurring such uncleanness. Commentators on this passage usually discover Paul's inspiration in Isa 52:11 (LXX):

> Depart (*apostête*), depart (*apostête*)! Go out from there (*exelthate ekeithen*)! Do not touch anything unclean (*akathartou mê haptesthe*); go out from her midst (*exelthate ek mesou autês*). Separate yourselves (*aphorisate*), you who carry the vessels of the Lord (e.g. Webb 1993: 40-43; Starling 2011: 67-69).

In Isaiah this passage is an exhortation to the Israelites to leave Babylon (as they once left Egypt) taking the Temple vessels with them, similar to the prophet's direction in Isa 48:20, where Babylon is named (Goldingay 2001: 299). Once again, however, although Paul may have remembered the verse from Isaiah, it is hardly likely that his addressees would have been able to identify it, or that he would have wanted them to. The changes he introduces are quite noticeable. The main one is the alteration of "from out of her (that is, Bablyon's) midst" (cities being regarded as feminine) to "from out of their (*autôn*) midst," with the plural pronoun clearly linking the statement to the *apistoi* in v. 14. In addition, this sentiment now appears ahead of the invocation to touch nothing/no one unclean since Paul is giving priority to the intergroup dimension. He generalises the Isaianic passage, effectively erasing signs of its exilic provenance, because he is interested in using biblical language with a portentous note to it rather than wanting to evoke a picture of Israel leaving Babylon that would only have confused his addressees.

Another aspect of this process is his eliminating mention of those "who carry the vessels of the Lord" which had relevance for Isaiah's Israelite audience, but none for Paul's Corinthian Christ-followers. The implausibility of Webb's case that Paul is seeking consciously to evoke the Exile theme is nowhere clearer than when he suggests in reference to the omission of the vessels: "Though omitted, these contextual elements serve as important hermeneutical clues when understanding how the passage fits conceptually within 6.14-7.1," *inter alia*, because the mention of those who carry the vessels of the Lord "continues the temple theme in 2 Cor. 6.16b and in the first quotation (6.16d.)" (1993: 41). How Paul's deliberate omission of an element that might evoke the temple can continue the temple theme (rather than actively suppressing it) requires a stronger argument than this.

In this context, what did Paul intend by the expression "do not touch anything/anyone unclean (*akathartou*)"? The only other instance of *akathartos* in Paul is in 1 Cor 7:14 where it is used of children of a Christ-follower and a pagan. In the Septuagint the word is employed of things, persons and conditions. The logic of the discussion requires that whatever is not to be touched is to be found among, and presumably characterises, the *apistoi apistoi* of v. 14 (and the *apistos* of v. 15). Since, for the reasons set out above, *apistoi* has a broad meaning, namely, those who are not Christ-believers aligned with Paul's Gospel, touching anything unclean must also have a wide scope. It cannot be restricted to the pagan neighbours of the Corinthian Christ-followers and the idolatrous practices in their temples as many

commentators suppose (Witherington 1995: 406; Barnett 1997: 353; Lambrecht 1999: 118; and Matera 2003: 166), although those neighbours do form part of the number of the *apistoi*. Further assistance in its interpretation comes from 7:1: "Since we have these promises, beloved friends, let us cleanse ourselves from every defilement (*molusmos*) of the body (*sarx*) or spirit (*pneuma*, making our holiness complete by the fear of God." This suggests an ambit for what is unclean that embraces both the physical (things that can be touched) and spiritual. Harris is right to observe that "unclean" here, as in *molusmos*, is non-specific, being akin to 1 Thess 5:22, "Shun every form of evil," but wrong to limit it to "Gentile uncleanness of any type" (2005: 508). For it must refer to the uncleanness of anyone who is not characterised by righteousness but by lawlessness as mentioned in v. 14, and all who are under the sway of Beliar as in v. 15. These two categories certainly cover the behaviour of Paul's opponents in Corinth, since later in the letter, in 11.14-15, he will describe them as the servants of Satan who disguise themselves as servants of righteousness. By necessary implication, however, it must also include activities connected with pagan idol-worship.

The last statement in v. 17, with God still speaking (v. 16) is "And I will welcome (*eisdexomai*) you." Commentators have sought to identify the specific biblical source for this statement, with Webb noting six possibilities (1993: 44-45). But this quest (to find a specific instance of *eisdexomai* that has humas ["you" plural] as its object) is a fruitless one. The notion of God welcoming his people is very common in the Old Testament, either with "them" or "you." Here the second person plural is demanded by the context and there is no basis to attribute it to a particular scriptural text. Paul has simply chosen a very general statement often used of God in Israelite scripture to continue the theme of the close relationship between God and his people. Any attempt to understand the expression with respect to a particular Old Testament passage, such as Webb's opting for Ezek 20:34, clearly because it has a return from Exile setting (1993: 46-47), is far-fetched and doomed to failure.

Paul concludes these divine utterances with the following:

> I will be a father to you and you will be my sons and daughters (*kai esomai humin eis patera, kai humeis esesthe moi eis huious kai thugateras*), says the Lord Almighty.

Most scholars believe that Paul was drawing primarily on 2 Sam 7:14a for this statement (Webb 1993: 53). This comes from the passage when God has Nathan prophesy to David that it will not be his task to build the temple in Jerusalem but that of his son (Solomon) to do this (2 Sam 7:4-17). Nathan delivers God's message to David that his son "shall build a house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom for ever" (v.13), before adding, "I will be his father, and he shall be my son" (*egô esomai auto eis patera kai autos estai moi eis huion*). This statement certainly provides easily the closest parallel of the possible sources that have been identified, the others being Isa 43:6; 49:22; 60:4; Jer 38[31]:9; Hos 1:10 (Webb 1993: 52).

Webb tortures 2 Cor 6:18 into referring to the Exile by using two arguments. The first is Juel's idea that this is an example of the "democratization" of Messianic promises, so that the community now

becomes the recipient of the promises about the Messiah. Webb develops this idea by suggesting that this "democratization" "represents a re-reading of the Davidic covenant *in light of the community-oriented new covenant*" (Webb 1993: 54-55, citing Juel 1988: 108; italics original). But not only could Paul not possibly have assumed his audience would tumble upon so ingenious a connection, but the sharp antithesis he has drawn earlier in the letter, in Chapter 3 (see Esler 2021) between old and new covenants would be undone by this type of connection. Webb's second argument is that Paul's addition of "and daughters" has been added from Isa 43:6 (and cf. Isa 56:5; 60:4) and imports a return from Exile dimension (1993: 56-58). Yet in Isa 43:6 and 60:4 (and also in 49:22 that Webb overlooks) the phrase is not "sons and daughters," but rather sons, then daughters featuring in their own separate phrases ("… bring my sons from [the land] far away, and my daughters from the ends of the earth;" Isa 43:6 [LXX]). The only instance of "sons and daughters" in Isaiah is at 56:5, where they are described not as being brought home but as having their position subordinated to that of foreigners! In any event, however, it is hard to imagine that Paul could possibly have intended his audience to recognise this fragile connection.

In short, 2 Sam 7:14a is not an exilic passage and, even if Paul had the Exile in mind here, this was hardly a text he was likely to cite to alert his audience to that connection. For even without any exilic reference, the original context of the quotation in Nathan's prophecy to David had nothing whatever to say to his Corinthians. Instead, they would have been bewildered if this statement had induced in them thoughts of God's telling David that Solomon, not him, would build the temple. Paul may or not may not have remembered the source of the biblical expression. If he did, he has chosen this statement, once stripped of its original reference and with the rather major change involved in third person singular pronouns becoming second person plurals, because it had an appropriate message and scriptural resonance for his audience. This is another oracular use of scripture.

Paul winds up 6:14-7:1 with a bold assertion that the divine statements he has just quoted represent promises to him and his Corinthian addressees (and no doubt Christ-followers loyal to his Gospel elsewhere).

> Since we have these promises (*epangeliai*), beloved friends, let us cleanse ourselves from every defilement of the body and spirit, making complete our holiness (*hagiôsunê*) by the fear of God.

There are four divine promises in all: (a) that God will dwell and walk among them; (b) that He will be their God and they will be his people; (c) that He will welcome them (once they have separated themselves from every bodily and spiritual defilement); and (d) that He will be their father and they will be his sons and daughters. Only the material about separation in v. 17 is not in the nature of a promise, but is the trigger for one. It misconstrues Paul's communicative intention to suggest that "These promises summarize the restoration theology of the exilic period and substantiate Paul's earlier statement, 'we are the temple of the Living God'" (Matera 2003: 167). For although Paul may have been prompted by his own deep knowledge of Israelite scripture to lift from exilic passages material that he reworked to formulate the first three promises (but not the fourth), he did not intend that

Paul has used the language in an oracular way: it is enough that these are d ivine statements and promises. Their original context within the destiny of ethnic Israel was irrelevant and would only have mystified the Corinthians. He was intent on crafting a powerful statement of identity for the group, the *pistoi* as opposed to the *apistoi*, and to do that he has selected and modified scriptural material that hit the appropriate intellectual and emotional registers. To say that they were the temple of the living God was not to summarise restoration theology but to suggest to his readers an entirely different modality of God's being in the world than the temple in Jerusalem, one that involved a non-ethnic group identity. The ultimate goal to which Paul refers, the completion of their holiness (*hagiôsunê*) that will result from their having cleansed themselves, that is, having separated themselves from sinful outgroups, represents a description of exalted state they will achieve through that new identity.

2 Corinthians 7:2-4 as the Completion of 2 Cor 6:11-14

The last three verses in the passage, 7:2-4, represent the concluding aspects of the chiasm set out above (C2, B2, and A2) that match the opening aspects in 6:11-13 (A1, B1, and C1). He wants them to make room for him, meaning, be open and receptive to him do what he says. That is why he then lists a number of things that he has not done which, if he had, would have impeded their making room for him (7:2). He is not making a request that they show him affection (*contra* Thrall 1984: 480-481). That Paul says he is not seeking to condemn them (7:3) implies that such an inference might otherwise arise from what he has said. This means he has in mind their behaviour in potentially culpable ways, which further confirms he is not speaking of a mere lack of affection.

Yet 2 Cor 7:2-4 not only concludes the argument that began with 6:11 by rounding off the chiasm, but also restates central themes of the letter. Thus, key expressions in these verses, as Matera has noted (2003: 169), are found elsewhere in the letter: *adikein/adikia* (2:5-11; 7:2 and12:13); *phtheirein* (3:17; 7:2 and 11:3-4) and *pleonektein* (2:11; 7:2 and 12:17-18). This provides evidence for the interconnectedness of 2 Corinthians. Paul ends this section in 7:4 on an appropriately high note: he speaks to them frankly, he claims great honour in respect of them, he is filled with comfort (*paraklêsis)* because of them, thus showing they can cause him comfort as earlier in the letter he claimed he comforted them (1:5-6), and he is overwhelmed with joy on the midst of affliction. He has been prototypical in sharing comfort and it now emerges that the Corinthians have embedded this quality in themselves as expected in social identity theory. He is also prototypical in relation to joy, for just as he claims he can give them joy (1:15; 2:3), it is also the case that they are partners in joy (1:24). Comfort and joy emerge as central aspects in the identity of the Christ-movement, with Paul a prototype of both identity-descriptors.

Conclusion

This analysis indicates that 6:14-7:1 is by no means an interpolation inserted into 2 Corinthians by Paul or someone else. Rather it is not only tightly

stitched into its immediate context, of 6:11-7:4, but it is also closely integrated with the case he has been making since 1:1. Nor is the thought in the passage alien to Paul. Instead, in this passage Paul provides a climactic discussion of Christ-movement identity just prior to his return in 7:5 to the biographical details he had last touched upon in 2:13. Whereas Paul has been considering issues of identity for much of 1:1-6:13, in 6:14 he moves from a performance that has ranged from *piano* to *forte* to a *fortissmo crescendo al finale*. He does this by offering an explicit description of the identity of his Christ-followers in the most exalted terms using a catena of scriptural materials unparalleled in this letter and which richly embody Paul's oracular approach to Israelite scripture. When looked at in social identity terms, therefore, the position and character of 6:14-7:1, both of which have hitherto proved quite troublesome for commentators, prove readily explicable.

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