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The Representation of God in First Corinthians 8-10: Understanding Paul in the Context of Wisdom, Philo, and Josephus

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LOYOLA UNIVERSITY CHICAGO

THE REPRESENTATION OF GOD IN FIRST CORINTHIANS 8-10:
UNDERSTANDING PAUL IN THE CONTEXT OF
WISDOM, PHILO, AND JOSEPHUS

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO
THE FACULTY OF THE GRADUATE SCHOOL
IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

PROGRAM IN THEOLOGY

BY

TRENT A ROGERS

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For Rebekah

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CHAPTER 1
SURVEY OF THE INTERPRETATIONS OF PAUL'S COHERENCE OR
INCOHERENCE IN 1 CORINTHIANS 8-10

Introduction

First Corinthians 8:1-11:1 seems to be a relatively independent unit in the letter with a singular topic and introduced by *περὶ δὲ*, but a close reading of these chapters reveals that Paul comes to seemingly different conclusions in chapters 8 and 10 concerning what are permissible associations with idol food. The predominant interpretation argues that in chapter 8, Paul agrees with some of the Corinthians concerning the non-reality of pagan idol-gods (8:4), the singular existence of God (8:6), and the indifference of idol food for one's salvation (8:7-8). In principle, Paul agrees that because the pagan gods do not exist, the food associated with them is not corrupted by association. The believer need not concern himself with how the food would harm himself or offend God; it is only on account of another believer that one should consider abstaining from the otherwise morally neutral activity of eating food sacrificed to idols. Then, Paul offers himself as an example of not participating in a morally neutral activity (i.e. receiving financial support) out of a concern for other believers (8:13-9:27).

Paul's argument, however, becomes more negative in chapter 10 as he warns the Corinthians about the dangers of idolatry by retelling, among other allusions, the effects of the Golden Calf incident (10:1-13). The section of 1 Cor 10:14-22 seems to be in

contradiction with the permissiveness Paul theoretically agreed to in 1 Cor 8:4-9. In 10:14-22, Paul commands the Corinthians to flee actual idolatry (ειδωλολατρία; contra 8:1 where the subject is ειδωλόθυτα, food sacrificed to idols) on account of the incompatibility of the Lord's Table and the feasts of idol-gods. The issue is still food associated with idol-gods, but Paul has reframed the argument in terms of actual idolatry. The problem of contact with food associated with idols is that the idol-gods do have a demonic reality. Contact with idol food implies contact with demons. Then in a seeming softening of his hardline stance (10:14-22) and a return to his more permissive stance in chapter 8, Paul concedes that food (even food associated with idols) is morally neutral and one should avoid it only on account of another's conscience because God is the source of all food (10:23-30).

Paul's conclusions seemed so contradictory that early critical scholarship challenged the unity of 1 Corinthians by using these chapters as their starting point. Even some scholars who argue for the unity of these chapters admit that initially they appear inconsistent. For example, Joop Smit comments, "At first sight Paul's discourse on the idol offerings in 1 Cor 8:1-11:1 looks rather incoherent and confronts even the experts with insurmountable problems."¹ The arguments range from the idea that Paul is treating markedly different issues, employing sophisticated rhetoric, or quoting the Corinthians. Most of these explanations are not so simplistic as to assert that only one argument accounts for the observed incoherence of these chapters; rather, most of the proposals explain the coherence on the basis of multiple factors.

¹ Joop Smit, *"About the Idol Offerings": Rhetoric, Social Contexts and Theology of Paul's Discourse in First Corinthians 8:1-11:1* (Leuven: Peeters, 2000), 149.

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

Partition Theories

The (seeming) inconsistency between Paul's conclusions in 1 Cor 8 and 1 Cor 10 is taken seriously by scholars especially after Johannes Weiß. Advocates of partition theories argue that the differences between these chapters is so severe that they must originate from different correspondences. They have found the contradictions in different sections of 1 Corinthians to be more than just apparent contradictions, and have reasoned on this basis that the text as we have it is really a composite of several independent treatments of similar topics. While the particular partition theories differ considerably, they all share the view that 1 Cor 8-10 contains irreconcilable propositions. John C. Hurd notes, "Theories for the partition of 1 Corinthians are primarily based on the separation of 10.1-22(23) from its context. In this section, Paul's arguments against eating idol meat appear

somewhat different from the arguments used by him in 8.1-13 and 10.23-11.1.”²

Johannes Weiß expounds the earliest and most influential of these theories, and Khio-Khng Yeo formulates the most recent and comprehensive example of this approach.

Johannes Weiß

Johannes Weiß takes seriously the (seeming) contradictions in Paul’s positions and posits different sources to explain the difficulty.³ For Weiß, the irreconcilable difference is between the indifferent tones in chapter 8 and 10:23-11:1 and the hardline stance of 10:1-22. He summarizes Paul’s inconsistent responses:

The answer is not easy, as two apparent lines of judgment seem to be underlying: 1) In 10.1-22 Paul takes a rigorous stance as he brings up the warning example of the wilderness generation, which was seduced by the daughters of Moab into πορνεία and idolatry. He judged their behavior (10.7-8) as inclining towards real εἰδωλολατρία...2) Chapter 8 and 10:23-11:1, especially 10:29-30, sound altogether different. Here he seems to treat the whole question from the point of *adiaphoron*.⁴

These differences fit into his larger scheme of dividing 1 Corinthians according to the tone with which Paul makes his arguments. He argues that 1 Cor 8-10 is derived from the intermixing of two independent letters, one written from Ephesus and one from

² John Coolidge Hurd, Jr. *The Origin of 1 Corinthians* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1983), 131.

³ Johannes Weiß, *Der erste Korintherbrief* (Kritisch-exegetischer Kommentar über das Neue Testament 5; Göttingen : Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1910). His understanding of the incoherence of the argument is contained in 210-13.

⁴ Weiß, *Korintherbrief*, 212, “Die Antwort ist nicht leicht, da zwei verschiedene Reihen von Urteilen vorzuliegen scheinen: 1) In 10:1-22 nimmt P. einen rigorosen Standpunkt ein; indem er das warnende Beispiel der Wüstengeneration vor Augen stellt, die von den Töchtern Moabs zur πορνεία und zum Götzendienst verführt wurden, beurteilt er (10:7-8) ihr Verhalten als Hinneigung zu wirklicher εἰδωλολατρία...2) Ganz anders klingt Kap. 8 und 10:23-11:1, besonders 10:29-30. hier er scheint die ganze Frage unter dem Gesichtspunkt des *Adiaphoron*.”

Macedonia, with the addition of redactional comments. In 1 Cor 8-10, he divides the three traditions as follows:

- 1) 8:1-13; 9:19-23; 10:23-11:1 are part of the original letter of 1 Corinthians written by Paul. Paul's stance in these chapters is less restrictive than the added material.
- 2) 10:1-22 is an addition to 1 Corinthians that has been abstracted from a previous letter of Paul. Paul's positions in this section are unnuanced.
- 3) 9:1-18 does not fit either context; therefore, it is very likely that it is a later interpolation.

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

The benefits of this proposal are several. Paul would not be reduced to a writer who did not communicate his thoughts clearly to the audience. The three different positions are each coherent in themselves, even if they are in contradiction with adjacent positions originating from different sources. 1 Corinthians 10:1-22 is singled out as a section that does not seem to argue on the same bases. The strong reliance on the history of Israel and reading Christ back into the narrative is not typically the basis for an argument in 1 Cor. Nevertheless, the strongest argument against Weiß' partition theory is

that no extant manuscripts question the unity of these chapters.⁵ Moreover, the various partition theories in the wake of Weiß do not agree concerning how the text should be divided or on the origins of the pieces.⁶ This evidence alone, however, might not be sufficient to dismiss partition theories.⁷ In Weiß' proposal we must question if it offers much in the way of explaining the confusion in these chapters for two reasons. First, Weiß understands the previous position (10:1-22) and the material original to 1 Cor (8:1-13; 9:19-23; 10:23-11:1) to be irreconcilable, but they are both from the pen of Paul, so Paul is still charged with inconsistency. Of course, it is possible that this difference represents a development in Paul's view on the subject or he may be addressing different issues. Second, by ascribing the incoherence to a redactor, Weiß just pushes the problem back until a later stage in the text's development. We are left with either an incompetent redactor who could not see the incoherence of the argument or mistaken modern readers who do not understand the coherence of the redactor's argument.⁸ In either case, we lack

⁵ See the critiques of Weiß in Peter D. Gooch, *Dangerous Food: 1 Corinthians 8-10 in Its Context* (Studies in Christianity and Judaism 5. Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1993), 136-9; Alex T. Cheung, *Idol Food in Corinth: Jewish Background and Pauline Legacy* (JSNTSupp 176; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999), 82-5; and the critique of partitions theories in Hurd, *Origins*, 131-42; Helmut Merklein, "Die Einheitlichkeit des ersten Korintherbriefes," *ZNW* 75 (1984): 155-83.

⁶ Merklein ("Die Einheitlichkeit") compares the theories by Weiss, Héring, Schmithals, Dinkler, Schenck, Suhl, Schenke and Fischer, and Senft. Their proposed reconstructions of the text range from arguing that there were two original letters to 1 Cor being comprised of nine original letters.

⁷ For example, source criticism has long held traction in the Gospel of John despite little manuscript evidence for it. Moreover, the source critics have not reached agreement about either the division of the text or the origins of the sources. A similar source critical question arises in 1 Cor 14. Some scholars question the authenticity of 1 Cor 14:34-36 on the basis that it contradicts previous material in 1 Cor despite there being no manuscript evidence that it is an addition. For example, see Joseph Fitzmyer, S.J. *First Corinthians* (AB 32; New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), 528-38. Moreover, scholars who employ rhetorical criticism to parse Paul's argument have reached no more of a consensus concerning Paul's quotation of the Corinthians, but this fact alone does not invalidate the methodology.

⁸ One could argue that the contradiction is due to the emendations of a scribe who was uncomfortable with what he read in the text, but that is not the argument Weiß is making.

an explanation for the existence of these ‘irreconcilable contradictions’ in the text of 1 Cor.

Khiok-Khng Yeo

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

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

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 80. Other scholars have noted that Yeo overstates these disjunctions as the rhetoric can flow smoothly. See for example, John Fotopoulos, *Food Offered to Idols in Roman Corinth: A Social-Rhetorical Reconsideration of 1 Corinthians 8:1-11:1* (WUNT 2.151; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2003), 28; Duane F. Watson, review of Yeo, *Rhetorical Interaction*, *RBL* (2000). Although it is beyond the scope of this study, Fotopoulos and Watson also offer pointed critiques of Yeo’s obscure definition of the strong as upper-class, intellectual, ethnically Latin, urbanites, proto-gnostic, and immersed in Hellenistic Jewish theology.

¹¹ Yeo, *Rhetorical Interaction*, 80.

which he labels A, B, C, D, E, and F.¹² Relevant for the analysis of chs. 8-10 are Letters B, C, and E.

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

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

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

He summarizes the rhetorical differences between Letters B and C:

In Letter B, the style is authoritative, making use of traditional, Hellenistic Jewish, and scriptural material, with hardly any dialogue with the audience. In Letter C, however, the dialogical rhetoric is obviously visible in both chapter 8 and the end of chapter 10. Paul uses creedal and scriptural material, but he also interacts substantively with the audience's material.¹³

Yeo argues that these letters address different times, audiences, and situations.¹⁴ The issue in 1 Cor 10:1-22 is that of actual idolatry, from which Paul commands them to flee. The issue in 8:1-13, 9:19-23, 10:23-11:1 is not actual idolatry, so Paul tries to create a community dialogue in order for the strong and weak to interact over the issue of idol-food.

Yeo is to be commended for recognizing the difficulties in the text and not minimizing them. However, on the one hand he overemphasizes the differences in Paul's arguments, and on the other hand he makes the burden of consistency too high. The "abrupt transitions" that he detects can be explained plausibly by rhetorical studies, and he seems to dismiss the significant rhetorical argument for coherence advanced by

¹² For a summary of the content, see *Ibid.*, 81-82.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 210.

¹⁴ He identifies the knowledgeable addressed in Letter C as "proto-Gnostics who are steeped in Hellenistic-Jewish theology, especially that of Philo and the Wisdom literature" (155).

Margaret Mitchell in *Rhetoric of Reconciliation*.¹⁵ He recognizes the distinction in tone among these passages, but it does not follow from this that a different tone necessitates a different letter.

Despite the complexity of some of these partition theories, the application of their methodology may be too simplistic. Instead of wrestling with the complexities of the argument and the situation at Corinth, they avoid the issues by subdividing the text into different letters.¹⁶ This approach tends to exaggerate the differences between sections in order to highlight supposed inconsistencies. The result is that the demand for “consistency” is probably too high and too modern.¹⁷ Additionally, the divisions are based on the somewhat arbitrary and subjective basis of content without corresponding syntactical or text critical evidence.¹⁸ The arbitrariness of their methodology is shown in the lack of agreement among the source critics as to where the texts should be divided and the number of sources present.¹⁹ Inconsistency among source critics does not in itself

¹⁵ Margaret M. Mitchell, *Paul and the Rhetoric of Reconciliation: An Exegetical Investigation of the Language and Composition of 1 Corinthians*, (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1991).

¹⁶ Martinus C. De Boer (“The Composition of 1 Corinthians,” *NTS* 40 [1994]:229-45) does not argue for a partition theory, but he makes a similar argument. De Boer argues that Paul penned his original letter, and in response to subsequent reports, he resumed his writing with different tones. Especially important for De Boer is the difference in tone between chs. 1-4 and ch. 5.

¹⁷ As noted previously, some ancient author or redactor thought that this argument flowed well enough. Moreover, the Church Fathers do not detect inconsistency in Paul’s argument.

¹⁸ It is not that arguments based on content are themselves arbitrary because it is precisely the incongruence of the content that alerts the reader to the possibility of different sources. The difficulty of arguments made on the basis of content is both in locating a contradiction and evaluating the degree of that contradiction. For example, several things that source critics would label as contradictions might be explained plausibly as coherent statements by rhetorical analysts. Moreover, one must establish if the contradiction rises to the level of competing programs or ideologies or if it is considerably less. Rarely do source critics of 1 Corinthians provide methodological controls for these arguments.

¹⁹ For example, the major partition theorists do not agree about even the number of sources: Weiß (2 revised to be 3), Schmithals (3), Yeo (6), Jewett (5). Walter Schmithals, “Die Korintherbriefe als Briefsammlung,” *ZNW* 64 (1973): 263-88. Robert Jewett, “The Redaction of 1 Corinthians and the

invalidate the endeavor, but it makes current proposals less convincing as even those who agree about the presence of sources cannot agree about the application of this methodology. Perhaps one of the strongest arguments against partition theories is that the text critical evidence does not support subdivision into multiple letters. If convincing arguments for coherence can be made, they should be preferred to complex theories of composition. Anthony Thiselton states, “such partition theories are needed *only if exegesis fails to reveal a genuine coherence* within the epistle.”²⁰ For these reasons it is preferable to accept an argument for the coherence of these chapters if it can be made.

Importance of Location

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

Trajectory of the Pauline School,” *JAARSup* 46 (1978): 398-444. Raymond F. Collins, *First Corinthians* (SP 7; Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1999), 13, also notes that source criticism loses some credibility because the interpreters have made alterations to their own theories: “The fact that Weiss and Schmithals, two of the major proponents of the partition theory, changed their mind as to precisely how 1 Corinthians is to be divided up into component parts militate against the validity of the opinion that Paul’s extant ‘first letter to the Corinthians’ is a composite work.”

²⁰ Anthony C. Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (NIGTC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 39.

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

Wendell Lee Willis

Wendell Willis' revised dissertation, *Idol Meat in Corinth: The Pauline Argument in 1 Corinthians 8 and 10*, was a major impetus in turning subsequent discussion of 1 Corinthians 8-10 to the topic of location and the implications of dining.²¹ Willis describes at least three situations in which Corinthians might encounter idol-food, a term which he thinks refers primarily to meat: food at formal worship of a pagan deity, meals of fraternal organizations at the temples, and private meals at one of the dining halls connected to the temple.²² He suggests that Corinthian Christians probably did not consume idol-meat in order to show their superior knowledge; rather, they likely consumed idol-meat in order to maintain their normal social life. He argues against a sacramentalist interpretation of pagan meals, which he defines as the idea that "in the cult meal the worshippers consumed their deity who was contained (really or symbolically) in the sacrificial meat."²³ Willis draws five conclusions from his study of papyrological evidence:²⁴

- (1) There is insufficient evidence for the sacramental interpretation of cult meals.
- (2) There is a good deal of evidence for a social interpretation.

²¹ Wendell Lee Willis, *Idol Meat in Corinth: The Pauline Argument in 1 Corinthians 8 and 10* (SBLDS 68; Eugene, Oreg.: Wipf & Stock, 1985).

²² *Ibid.*, 265-6.

²³ *Ibid.*, 18.

²⁴ See his summary, *Ibid.*, 63-4.

(3) These meals were normal practices.

(4) “Because the pagan cult meals were not sacramental (a means of acquiring the deity and/or its special powers and traits) nor communal (an occasion of intimate relationship between the worshipper and the god), it is unlikely that Paul in 1 Cor 10:14-21 is trying to warn the Corinthians against the dangers of pagan sacraments.”²⁵

(5) This meat also would be available in the market and homes.

If the meals have a social function, Willis must explain the use of *κοινωνία* language in 1 Cor 10, which he asserts means a covenant relationship, not between deity and worshipper, but between pagan idolaters and Christians.²⁶ While Paul’s tone is harsh in 10:1-22 where he forbids the idolatrous activity of participating in meals at pagan temples, 8:1-13, 10:23-26, and 10:27-11:1 are instances that are not occasions of worship. In the latter contexts, Christians must be aware of the effects of their actions on other believers. Willis explains the coherence of 1 Cor 8-10:

It has already been seen that chapter 8 takes its shape because there Paul takes up and refutes the Corinthians’ views. But here in 10:1-13 Paul argues for his own reasons. The difference in style, and even emphasis, can be explained on that basis. Here Paul documents the danger of apostasy in Scripture and will proceed in 10:14-22 to warn from contemporary examples. Both are arguments of his own choosing.²⁷

For Willis, meals in dining halls of pagan temples are not necessarily religious. He argues “that in chapter 8 the situation is a meal held in a temple restaurant but not as an occasion of worship.”²⁸ In 1 Cor 8, the believer must consider the weaker brother’s conscience.

²⁵ Ibid., 63.

²⁶ On this point especially, see the critique by Cheung, *Idol Food*, 309-11.

²⁷ Willis, *Idol Meat*, 163. Willis seems to hint that the rhetorical design of Paul’s argument has some bearing on the coherence. He acknowledges that Paul quotes and refutes some positions of the Corinthians.

²⁸ Ibid., 259. He further defines the meal in ch. 8 as “non-cultic meals held in temple precincts” (260).

But in 1 Cor 10:1-22 Paul introduces the topic of meals that are cultic by intent—meals that he forbids outright. The remainder of 1 Cor 10, similar to 1 Cor 8, addresses situations which may be permissible but in which the believer must consider other believers.

Willis' proposal has been very influential but also strongly criticized. The weakest, and also most crucial, element of Willis' thesis is that meals at pagan temples could be almost exclusively social with little to no cultic significance. This non-religious "temple restaurant" view dichotomizes the social and religious in a way that would probably be foreign to an ancient mind. John Fotopoulos has demonstrated persuasively the social and religious implications of meals within the temple precincts and in the home.²⁹ Another issue with Willis' interpretation is his generally reductionistic understanding of Paul's Jewish heritage.³⁰ While he attempts to show the nuances of different dining situations in Greco-Roman sources, his understanding of the Jewish heritage contributing to Paul's thought is simplistic—Jews rejected cultic associations. This assumption cannot be sustained without qualification, especially as evidenced in Hellenistic Jewish authors. For example, Artapanus describes the Jewish hero Moses as building pagan temples and establishing pagan gods. Lastly, because Willis wants to

²⁹ Fotopoulos, *Food Offered*, 158-76. Ben Witherington III ("Not So Idle Thoughts about EIDOLOTHUTON," *TynBul* 44 [1993]: 245) comments, "Accordingly, I must reject W. Willis' interpretation that some of the meals in the temple precincts were basically secular in character. Even when a club (*collegium*) or society, or trade guild held a meal in the temple precincts this would have been preceded by a specific sacrificial event of worship as described above. So far as I can tell from the classical sources, while temple staff might turn extra meat over to a shop owner in the *macellum*, after which it could be sold and eaten at home, there is no evidence of temples simply keeping quantities of meat ready to hand in the precincts for basically secular banquets."

³⁰ See for example, Willis, *Idol Meat*, 222.

show that the pagan meal is not sacramental in nature, he must force the Christian eucharistic meal into this non-sacramental mold. While he argues that *κοινωνία* refers to the covenantal relationship among human participants, Paul equates the *κοινωνία* of the eucharistic meal as humans participating in the meal with the deity (1 Cor 10:16). I will argue, in line with the vast majority of scholars, that the *κοινωνία* of the eucharist describes a relationship between worshipper and deity and cannot be reduced to a social relationship among worshippers.

Gordon D. Fee

Gordon Fee covers the issue of idol-food in two articles and his commentary on 1 Corinthians.³¹ He proposes that the 1 Corinthians 8, 9, and 10 are a coherent set of chapters addressing two dining situations: meals of pagan worship and meals in a person's home. While many scholars argue that the incoherence is between 8:7-13 and 10:14-22, Fee argues that the problem is between 8:7-13 and 10:23-11:1. Some scholars before Fee had argued that *εἰδωλόθυτα* in 8:1-13 corresponded to the marketplace food in 10:23ff, but Fee argues that 1 Cor 8 "is dealing primarily with the eating of sacrificial food at the temple itself in the presence of the idol-demon."³² "This means, further, that the prohibition in 10,14-22, rather than a digression, is in fact the main point, to which the whole argument of 8,1-10,13 has been leading. The question of marketplace food is then taken up after the fact as another issue altogether—although it has close ties to Paul's defense in 9,19-23—and to this issue Paul gives a considerably different

³¹ Gordon D. Fee, "II Corinthians VI.14-VII.1 and Food Offered to Idols," *NTS* 23 (1977): 140-61; "Εἰδωλόθυτα Once Again: An Interpretation of 1 Corinthians 8-10." *Biblica* 61 (1980): 172-97; *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987).

³² Fee, "Εἰδωλόθυτα," 178.

answer.”³³ In his assessment εἰδωλόθυτα does not refer to marketplace food but to the “eating of sacrificial food at the cultic meals in the pagan temples.”³⁴ And eating at cultic meals is the overarching problem that Paul is addressing in 1 Cor 8-10. Fee attempts to lay out first the problem at Corinth and second Paul’s response.

Following Hurd, Fee thinks that there were no divisions among the Corinthians on this issue, and the position for which the Corinthians were arguing was one that had already been prohibited by Paul. They seem to be arguing for the right to eat feasts at the pagan temples. They make four points to support their requests. First, their γνῶσις of monotheism implies the non-existence of pagan deities. Second, their γνῶσις of food implies that it is a matter of indifference before God. Third, they have an enthusiastic understanding of the sacraments that implies their inability to lose their salvation. Fourth, they resort to questioning Paul’s apostolic authority. The real issue that Paul addresses in 1 Cor 8:1-10:22 is the Corinthians’ desire to attend temple meals.

Paul first takes issue with the basis of Christian ethics; it is to be based on love not γνῶσις. Then in 8:7-13 he qualifies their use of γνῶσις: “Food as a matter of indifference is about *what* one eats; it is not true about *where*—first of all because of what it can do to a brother.”³⁵ Chapter 9, then, is both a defense of his apostleship and an example of the proper use of freedom.³⁶ In 1 Cor 10:1-13, Paul attacks the Corinthians’

³³ Ibid., 178-9.

³⁴ Fee, *First Epistle*, 359.

³⁵ Fee, “Εἰδωλόθυτα,” 191.

³⁶ The assessment of ch. 9 as an apostolic defense is criticized by, among others, Fotopoulos, *Food Offered*, 18-20.

false sense of security they derive from their participation in sacramental worship because he views them to be in real danger of falling away. Paul appeals to the history of Israel to warn the Corinthians of the sin of idolatry and to demonstrate that even those who drew assurance from “spiritual sacraments” fell under judgment. The biggest “leap” that Fee makes is in his assessment of 1 Cor 10:14-22: “Having warned Corinth of the same possibility [of coming under God’s judgment], he concludes the argument, ‘*therefore, flee ειδωλολατρία*’. And ειδωλολατρία of course means eating at the temples.”³⁷ The bases of Paul’s prohibition are his understanding of the meal as participating with a deity and his understanding of idolatry as the realm of the demonic.³⁸ Only having concluded his treatment of questions by the Corinthians, does Paul then address a related but different topic: namely, food in the marketplace. Fee reads 10:31-33 as paralleling 9:20-23 and argues that Paul must have been known to eat marketplace food that had been sacrificed to idols. Some Corinthians had judged Paul on account of his practice (10:29), but he appeals to them to follow his example.

Fee’s proposal that 1 Cor 8:1-10:22 treats the single issue of attending cultic meals at pagan temples would seem to exacerbate the problem of coherence. Fee cannot

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 193.

³⁸ Fee’s assessment of Paul’s contexts is somewhat limited. He cites only Old Testament texts to demonstrate Paul’s view of idolatry (e.g., Fee, “Ειδωλόθυτα,” 193, n.32). The reason for Paul’s prohibition is “his understanding, based on the OT, of idolatry as the locus of the demonic” (Fee, “Ειδωλόθυτα,” 193-4). While Fee is dealing with the limited space of an article, he dismisses altogether the history of interpretation between the Old Testament text and Paul’s comments on it. The same oversight is repeated in his commentary (*First Epistle*, 462-75). Especially with the concept of idolatry as a realm of demonic influence, the contributions of Hellenistic Jewish authors should not be overlooked. This oversight is somewhat surprising since he admits that “ειδωλόθυτα” originates from Hellenistic Judaism (e.g., *First Epistle*, 357 n.1). Paul, while sometimes a novel interpreter of the LXX, needs to be placed within the traditions of biblical interpretation in which he participated. Some will also take issue with his sources of Pauline thought. He relies heavily on Colossians and Ephesians—two epistles whose relevance for 1 Cor have come into question in more recent scholarship—to assess what was Paul’s view of the demonic realm.

appeal to different dining situations to explain the differences in Paul's tone in 1 Cor 8 where the argument is made on the basis of another believer's conscience and 1 Cor 10 where the argument is made on the basis of committing actual idolatry. Fee's solution is somewhat surprising. He argues that Paul never begins with an imperatival prohibition; rather, he begins with the indicative: "An imperative which precedes the indicative (obedience in order to be justified) is anathema to Paul; but so also is an indicative with *no* imperative."³⁹ There are some things that are altogether incompatible with new life in Christ, but Paul does not begin with outright prohibition. Paul begins by treating the attitude that exalts knowledge and then treats their idolatrous actions.

It [idolatry] is incompatible with life in Christ as it is experienced at His table. But their abuse of ἐξουσία in this matter, based on false γνώσις and issuing in failure to love, is the far greater urgency. Both their attitude and their action are incompatible with the Gospel; but their action has resulted from their attitude, and it is this matter to which Paul first addresses himself⁴⁰

This pattern is in line with Paul's pattern of correcting issues at a deeper level.

Fee's proposal, while valuable, has a number of shortcomings. His assumption that εἰδωλολατρία means eating at the temples does not adequately deal with the complexities of the issue. If, as Fee argues, 1 Cor 8 and 10:1-22 address the same situation of eating at the temple before the idol-demon, how does Paul get from the acquiescent tone in 1 Cor 8 to equating the same action with idolatry in 1 Cor 10. The explanation that Paul begins with attitude and finishes with actions is inadequate because, although this pattern can be observed in other texts, never do the sections appear with

³⁹ Fee, "Εἰδωλόθουτα," 196.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 197.

such different tones.⁴¹ Moreover, a methodological flaw in Fee's work is not incorporating adequately the findings of rhetorical criticism. In light of Margaret Mitchell's subsequent work, *Paul and the Rhetoric of Reconciliation*, Fee's thesis on the function of 1 Cor 9 needs revision. Moreover, Fee does not give adequate attention to the different manners in which Paul argues in the sections of 1 Cor 8-10; this oversight is especially apparent with regard to his silence on the different representations of God while he gives much attention to defining other terms.

Ben Witherington III

Ben Witherington III, in two articles and a commentary, explains the situations at Corinth in a similar manner to Fee, but Witherington buttresses his argument with lexical and rhetorical evidence.⁴² Witherington thinks that "some of the Corinthians who claim

⁴¹ Fee, "Εἰδωλόθυτα," 197, offers 1 Cor 12-14 as an examples of this pattern. These chapters provide the closest parallel to 1 Cor 8-10 with 1 Cor 9 and 1 Cor 13 being slight digressions. I agree with Fee that the indicative is stronger in 1 Cor 12 and the imperative is stronger in 1 Cor 14, but the tone of the passages is quite similar. First Corinthians 12 culminates with an imperative (morphologically it could also be an indicative) to pursue greater gifts which parallels the end of 1 Cor 14 to be eager to prophesy (14:39). While 1 Cor 14 is more imperatival, there is nowhere near the harshness expressed in 1 Cor 10; nowhere in 1 Cor 14 does Paul warn them of losing their salvation or provoking God to jealousy. While I agree that Paul typically treats an issue from the indicative and then moves to the imperative, it cannot be sustained that Paul's tone typically differs so strongly between the sections.

⁴² Both authors are also concerned not to make Paul's prohibition into a law as this would counter Paul's approach. Fee, "Εἰδωλόθυτα," 195-7, argues that Paul deals first with the indicative of God's activity and then with the imperative of human obedience: "Eating at the idols' table finally will be forbidden outright: φεύγετε ἀπὸ τῆς εἰδωλολατρίας (10,14). It is incompatible with life in Christ as it is experienced at His table. But their abuse of ἐξουσία in this matter, based on false γνώσις and issuing in failure to love, is the far greater urgency. Both their attitude and their action are incompatible with the Gospel; but their action had resulted from their attitude, and it is this matter to which Paul first addresses himself" (197). Ben Witherington III, "Why Not Idol Meat? Is It What You Eat or Where You Eat?" *Bible Review* 10 (1994): 38-55; "Not So Idle Thoughts," 248-50, makes the argument that because εἰδωλόθυτα refers only to food eaten in the temple, Paul and James (as recorded in Acts 15) are much closer to each other. Both James and Paul do not impose dietary restrictions on Gentile Christians (i.e. laws); rather, they are concerned with the location of their dining. They prohibit dining at pagan temples where the meal involved εἰδωλολατρία and πορνεία. In Witherington's view, 1 Cor might represent Paul's attempt to apply the prohibition of the Jerusalem Council to Corinth. For the position that Paul's treatment in 1 Cor has nothing to do with the Jerusalem Council, see Manson, "Corinthian Correspondence," 200-201; David E. Garland, *1 Corinthians* (BECNT; Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003), 353-7. Fitzmyer (*First Corinthians*, 332-5)

to have ‘knowledge’ are rejecting Paul’s earlier prohibition of going to pagan temples” which they defend through their theology of the non-reality of pagan deities and the moral indifference of food.⁴³ While Fee had argued that this group represented all the Corinthians, Witherington locates this group as socially enlightened males.

Witherington’s assessment of Paul is that he is concerned with the location of eating, with its attendant activities, more than the food itself. He does not maintain his Jewish sensibilities concerning food, and in Witherington’s view has departed a great deal from his Jewish tradition.⁴⁴ Witherington’s major contribution is to demonstrate that “A study of all the NT references to εἰδωλόθυτον reveals that this term in the early period was distinguishable from ἱερόθυτον (sacred food), and that it meant meat sacrificed to and eaten in the presence of an idol, or in the temple precincts.”⁴⁵ Like Fee, Witherington thinks that Paul is addressing the same issue in 1 Cor 8 and 1 Cor 10, and he appeals to the ABA rhetorical structure, with 1 Cor 9 being a partial although related digression.⁴⁶

Paul follows his standard procedure of first dealing with the error’s theological root, the point at which it touches the heart of the gospel, and then dealing with the fruit of bad theology. The root of the problem is that the members of the *gnōsis* group, while having some of the right Pauline ideas, have drawn the wrong

claims that there is no evidence that Paul knew of the decisions by the Council. Hurd, *Origins*, 240-64, also argues that the Apostolic Decree stands behind the issues at Corinth.

⁴³ Ben Witherington III, *Conflict and Community in Corinth: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary on 1 and 2 Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 186.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 199, “Paul does not dispute that the Corinthians have the right to eat such food, so far as the food is concerned. Chs. 8-10 make clear how far from Judaism Paul had moved on the matter of food. He no longer believed that food commended one to God or offended God. He had come to the view that food was morally and religiously neutral.”

⁴⁵ Witherington “Not So Idle Thoughts,” 237.

⁴⁶ Witherington, *Conflict and Community*, 191. For Witherington, the issue is still eating food in a pagan temple: “In v. 14 Paul gives the directive that all of chs. 8-10 has been arguing for: Flee idolatry.”

social consequences, perhaps in an attempt to justify their continued participation in society.⁴⁷

This explanation is again very similar to Fee's, but Witherington additionally argues that Paul is enacting the Apostolic Decree with these prohibitions.

Witherington might be correct to see Paul's rhetorical approach as a theological introduction to the topic and then an effort to deal with the actual behavior. In all of this discussion, Witherington does not account for the difference in tone between the two chapters or the identification of the activity in 1 Cor 10 as literal idolatry. His lexical contribution of distinguishing between εἰδωλόθυτον (a Jewish-Christian polemical term referring to meat eaten in the idol temple) and ἱερόθυτον (the proper term for food that has come from the temple, but is not eaten there) has been criticized rightfully for being too forced. Alex Cheung especially criticizes Witherington for insufficiently exploring the Jewish and early Christian evidence.⁴⁸ Witherington does point us in the right direction as his socio-rhetorical argument employs rhetorical forms, lexical data, and historical data. Witherington, however, does not pay careful enough attention to how Paul makes his argument, especially with respect to his refutation of Corinthian positions, varied representations of God and their origins, and the differences in Paul's tone. He highlights the need to explore how idol-food is defined, but he does not give corresponding weight to the manner in which idolatry is defined.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 196. Witherington's explanation of dealing with the theology and then action is very similar to Fee's explanation of dealing first with the indicative and then the imperative.

⁴⁸ See especially the critique by Cheung, *Idol Food in Corinth*, 319-22.

Rhetorical Approaches

Most explanations of Paul's argument in 1 Cor 8-10 recognize that the complexities are attributable to the sophisticated way that Paul makes his argument. The interpreters in this section, while relying on the historical evidence for varying locations, argue for the coherence of these chapters primarily by analyzing Paul's arguments with the help of Greco-Roman rhetoric.⁴⁹ The apparent contradictions that the modern reader recognizes in the text would have been understood by ancient readers to be a rhetorical device of the author. Margaret Mitchell's argument is based on her understanding of the larger deliberative argument of the epistle. Peter Tomson thinks that 1 Cor 8 represents a rhetorical *inclusio* in which Paul presents a number of antitheses. Joop Smit, John Fotopoulos, and Richard Phua attempt to identify the positions of the Corinthians so they can show how Paul refutes them.

Chiasm

Margaret M. Mitchell

Margaret Mitchell's *Paul and the Rhetoric of Reconciliation: An Exegetical Investigation of the Language and Composition of 1 Corinthians* is one of the most influential books on 1 Cor, and probably the best defense of the compositional unity of the book.⁵⁰ She argues, "1 Corinthians is a single letter of unitary composition which

⁴⁹ Roy E. Ciampa and Brian S. Rosner, *The First Letter to the Corinthians* (PNTC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), reject the categories of Greco-Roman rhetoric as a context for understanding Paul: "Our contention is that rather than reading 1 Corinthians with Greco-Roman rhetorical categories in mind, it is better to take the Old Testament and Jewish frames of reference as the primary lens that clarifies our understanding of both the form and contents of the letter" (20).

⁵⁰ Mitchell, *Paul and the Rhetoric of Reconciliation*. Collins (*First Corinthians*) takes a similar approach to the unity of these chapters. Because the knowledgeable and the weak have communal solidarity in sharing the eucharist meal, it is imperative that the knowledgeable, through their blasé attitude

contains a deliberative argument persuading the Christian community at Corinth to become reunified.⁵¹ Mitchell reads every pericope of 1 Corinthians as supporting Paul's appeal, or *prothesis*, in 1:10 to pursue unity and put aside factionalism. The Epistolary Body can be divided into four sections that prove the *prothesis*: 1:18-4:21 censure of factionalism, 5:1-11:1 integrity of Corinthian community against outside defilement, 11:2-14:40 manifestations of Corinthian factionalism when coming together, 15:1-57 resurrection and the final goal. She further subdivides 1 Cor 5-10 into Paul's treatment of the issues of πορνεία (5:1-7:40) and ειδωλολατρία (8:1—11:1). There are a number of factors that argue for the unity of these subsections: corresponding exhortations (6:18; 10:14), Paul's repeated appeal to his own example, and the interlinking themes of idolatry and sexual immorality. In light of her overriding thesis, it is not altogether surprising that she argues that Paul's primary concern in 1 Cor 8-10 is for the unity of the Corinthian Christian community in the face of challenges from outside the community:

The variability and awkwardness of terminology in this section demonstrates that the issue upon which Paul is to give advice is at heart a definitional one: who is an idolater? But Paul's own larger consideration is how the Christian community can retain its internal unity when faced with pressures from the outside culture which pull the community apart.⁵²

toward idols, not lead the weak into actual idolatry. They must flee idolatry as a community. "Paul's use of the A-B-A' chiastic pattern of exposition is one in which the A' element is generally more pointed than the A element. This is the case with regard to the relationship between chs. 8 and 10. Chapter 8 argues more generally, ch. 10 more specifically. It is unnecessary to consider 8:1-13; 10:23-33 as relating to one situation, eating food that had previously been offered to idols, and 10:14-22 as relating to another kind of situation, actual participation in idolatrous worship, since 10:14-22 gets to the heart of the issue by warning the Christians of Corinth to avoid idolatry" (376). Collins, drawing heavily on Mitchell's work, makes his argument by appealing both to rhetorical structure and the different dining situations.

⁵¹ Mitchell, *Rhetoric*, 1.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 237.

She appeals to Paul's ABA pattern in which he attempts both to permit the eating of idol food and to prohibit idolatry. Paul's argument in 1 Cor 8 is that food offers no advantage, so the Christian must seek the community advantage, a *topos* common in political deliberative rhetoric.⁵³ Chapter 9 is an exemplary argument wherein Paul properly uses his freedom for the common good.⁵⁴ A corresponding negative example is given in 10:1-13 as Paul reminds them that God will bring destruction to the community for disloyalty. In 10:14-22, Paul addresses some of the specific practices that should be grounds for unity but actually divide them. Again she thinks this section is concerned with the definition of idolatry: "In this case his concern is still with defining what constitutes εἰδωλολατρία for this Christian community, which means simultaneously defining what are the boundaries of this social body."⁵⁵ 1 Cor 10:23-11:1 makes a final appeal to common advantage in opposition to factionalism in which Paul is unwavering on idolatry, but he concedes on the acceptability of idol meat. If Paul's approach is judged to be ineffective or obscure, "this is because Paul's overriding concern here is not merely idol meats in themselves, but the impact of conflicts over idol meats on the concord of the church community."⁵⁶

Mitchell is to be commended for her application of Greco-Roman rhetorical models to the text of 1 Cor to make an overarching argument for the unity of the epistle. While her thesis that Paul primarily addresses factionalism works well for 1 Cor 1-4, it is

⁵³ Ibid., 242.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 243-50.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 255.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 238.

not as fitting for the rest of the epistle.⁵⁷ Certainly issues of community divisions underlie 1 Cor 8-10, but a more fundamental concern is that idolatry is a sin against God that is incompatible with the believer's participation with Christ. Her analysis of the Jewish content of Paul's argument is also lacking. She focuses more on the form of the argument rather than the content and contexts from which the content is drawn. Lastly, the works of Smit and Fotopoulos will demonstrate the need to reevaluate the rhetorical structure of ch. 8 and the identification of Corinthian quotations and Pauline refutation.

Inclusio

Peter J. Tomson

Peter Tomson's primary goal in *Paul and the Jewish Law: Halakha in the Letters of the Apostle to the Gentiles* is to examine *halakha* in Paul's writings, and he uses 1 Corinthians, especially chs. 8-10, as a window into Paul's relationship with the Law.⁵⁸ He rejects the idea, espoused by Barrett, among others, that Paul is at his most un-Jewish when he deals with idol food at Corinth, and he argues that Paul was unwavering on his prohibition of known idol-food.⁵⁹ "Discussion was about gentile food of unspecified

⁵⁷ See the critiques of Mitchell by Stanley E. Porter, "Understanding Pauline Studies: An Assessment of Recent Research: Part One," *Themelios* 22 (1996): 14-25; Jeffrey T. Reed, "Using Ancient Rhetorical Categories to Interpret Paul's Letters: A Question of Genre," in *Rhetoric and the New Testament: Essays from the 1992 Heidelberg Conference* (eds. Stanley E. Porter and Thomas H. Olbricht; JSNTSup 90; Sheffield: Continuum, 1993), 307-8; Eckhard J. Schnabel, *Der erste Brief des Paulus an die Korinther* (Historisch Theologische Auslegung; Wuppertal: Brockhaus, 2006), 46; Fitzmyer, *First Corinthians*, 55; Ciampa and Rosner, *First Letter*, 20-21. Some scholars are unconvinced of the value of applying ancient rhetoric to the flow of whole letters: Philip H. Kern, *Rhetoric and Galatians: Assessing an Approach to Paul's Epistle* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998) and R. Dean Anderson Jr., *Ancient Rhetorical Theory and Paul* (rev. ed.; Leuven: Peeters, 1999).

⁵⁸ Peter J. Tomson. *Paul and the Jewish Law: Halakha in the Letters of the Apostle to the Gentiles* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1990).

⁵⁹ For example, see C. K. Barrett, "Things Sacrificed to Idols," in C. K. Barrett, *Essays on Paul* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1982): 40-59.

nature.”⁶⁰ Tomson thinks that Paul had previously taught on the matter of idol food and responds to their questions by employing the following structure:

(1) 8:1-13, on idol food offerings and ‘the weak’; Paul introduces the problem of idol food and argues that the reality of idolatry is in the consciousness of the delicate brother.

(2) 9:1-27, on the principles of Paul’s apostolic behavior; Paul’s life is an example of self-denial for others.

(3) 10:1-22, on the prohibition of idolatry; Paul gives theological arguments that are sufficient to prohibit idol food.

(4) 10:23-11:1, on the consumption of pagan food bought at the market place or offered in private homes; Paul addresses the practical considerations.⁶¹

He argues “The *inclusio* created by units (1) and (4), with prominent key words *συνείδησις* and *ειδωλόθυτα* gives the section its coherence, leaving units (2) and (3) as a digression.”⁶² Tomson appeals to the rhetorical flow of these chapters with the alternation between examples and the situation at Corinth to argue that Paul makes a sophisticated and coherent rhetorical argument. Paul’s overall tone toward idol food is negative. Because the Corinthians questioned Paul’s earlier judgments on the issue, Paul has recourse to the concept of another believer’s *συνείδησις*. In 1 Cor 8, Paul argues that the problem of idolatry is not contained in objects; rather, it is in human beings: “The problem is with the delicate consciousness of the gentile neophyte, who is still under the influence of idolatry. In the awareness of the ‘knowing’, the ‘delicate’ represent the reality of idolatry in man.”⁶³ In 10:1-22, Tomson acknowledges that Paul combines two

⁶⁰ Tomson, *Paul and the Jewish Law*, 219.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 190.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 190-1. This assessment is quite a bit different than many commentators who understand section (3) to contain Paul’s main point in the exhortation to flee idolatry.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 198.

worldviews: in one worldview, the idol is nothing while in another it represents a demon. Even in this combination of traditions, Paul is still writing entirely as a Jew: “It follows that Paul, in using arguments from both cultural traditions, strikingly reflects the various trends in late Second Temple Judaism.”⁶⁴ While Paul does combine these traditions, he comes to only one conclusion concerning idol food: idol food should not be eaten.

Tomson explains the coherence of these chapters by appealing to rhetorical and halakhic features.⁶⁵ Chapters 8-10 are unified around a chiasmic structure wherein the primary issue of idol-food is treated in the first and last elements.⁶⁶ Chapter 8 introduces the subject and places idolatry in the consciousness of the delicate brother while affirming the non-reality of idol-gods. Tomson argues that Paul never questions if idol-food is permissible, and he prohibits it outright in 10:1-22. Following this position, the final section gives advice concerning food of ambiguous origins. Tomson understands this to be a halakhic argument that is well aligned with Jewish prohibitions on gentile idol-food.

Tomson’s explanation has a great deal of merit. He recognizes the different traditions that feed into Paul’s interpretation and he appeals to the broader rhetorical structure to explain the unity of these chapters. Despite these strengths, Tomson’s greatest flaw is his attempt to read Paul almost exclusively as parallel to, or in the stream of, Tannaic Judaism. The comparative literature adduced by Tomson is of value, but his

⁶⁴ Ibid., 202.

⁶⁵ See the brief outline in Tomson, *Paul and the Jewish Law*, 208.

⁶⁶ Tomson’s chiasmic structure is different from Mitchell, Witherington, and Collins who propose an ABA pattern; whereas, Tomson proposes an ABBA pattern.

approach is far too exclusive of other contributing streams of thought. Cheung and Phua have questioned if the appeal to Tannaic literature is geographically and chronologically appropriate.⁶⁷ Moreover, it seems that Tomson gives little credit to the way in which Paul's belief in Christ has shaped his view of acceptable interaction with idol food. His over-reliance on Tannaic paradigms also affects the ways in which he sees God represented. He primarily discusses the tradition in 1 Cor 8 (non-reality of idols) in contrast to the position of 1 Cor 10 (demons behind idols), but he overlooks the representations of God in other sections. Tomson does not account well for the location of Paul as an educated Jew travelling the Mediterranean or that of the Corinthian Christians as primarily gentiles by birth. This study suggests that more fitting comparisons to the positions in 1 Cor 8-10 can be found in Hellenistic Jewish and Greco-Roman positions.

Partitio

Joop Smit

Joop Smit's book, *"About the Idol Offerings": Rhetoric, Social Contexts and Theology of Paul's Discourse in First Corinthians 8:1-11:1*, is a collection of essays, some of which have been published previously.⁶⁸ Smit justifies the application of ancient rhetoric to an examination of Paul's letters on the basis that he likely dictated them and expected them to be read aloud.⁶⁹ He argues that the coherence of a passage must be

⁶⁷ Cheung, *Idol Food*, 307; Richard Liong-Seng Phua, *Idolatry and Authority: A Study of 1 Cor 8:1-11:1 in Light of the Jewish Diaspora* (JSNTSupp 299; New York: T & T Clark, 2005), 25.

⁶⁸ Smit, *"About the Idol Offerings"*.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 42, "He dictates this letter and in doing so undoubtedly has in mind that, before long, it will be publically read in the assembly of believers."

made on three levels: syntactic, pragmatic, and semantic. Few question the syntactic coherence, so Smit focuses the bulk of his explanation on the pragmatic structure. Here he appeals to classical rhetorical models concerning the *dispositio* of a speech. He argues that “1 Cor. 8:1-6 functions as a *partitio*, a division in headlines of the entire following discourse.”⁷⁰ In this section, Paul does not advance a positive argument; rather he offers two antitheses that foreshadow his ultimate conclusion of the rejection of idol offerings: the antithesis between knowledge and love and the antithesis between many so-called gods and the true God.⁷¹ According to Smit, Paul does not quote the Corinthians in this section; rather the section contains only the *propositiones* of Paul. The *argumentatio* comes in 1 Cor 8:7-9:27 in which Paul discusses the social aspects of associations with idolatry. The second section of *argumentatio* occurs in 1 Cor 10:1-22. Here Paul discusses the theological aspects of participation in idol food and argues that it constitutes idolatry, which he supports by appealing to the examples of Israel and the Lord’s Supper. 1 Cor 10:23-30, the *anticipatio*, preempts probable objections, and 1 Cor 10:31-11:1 function as the *peroratio* that summarizes the discourse. Smit concludes “In so many words he forbids them to take part in public sacrificial meals, this being undesirable in social respect as well as unpermitted in theological respect.”⁷²

Smit’s proposal is helpful in explaining how an opening rhetorical feature can give coherence and structure to the larger argument. He provides a positive explanation,

⁷⁰ Smit, “*About Idol Offerings*”, 150.

⁷¹ In this *partition* structure, 8:1-3 is explicated in 8:7-9:27 (the social element) and 8:4-6 is explicated in 10:1-22 (the theological aspect).

⁷² Smit, “*About Idol Offerings*”, 153.

supported by classical rhetoric for how Paul's argument is made on multiple levels. Nevertheless, Smit's proposal has significant shortcomings. Against most scholars, he recognizes no quotations of the Corinthians in 1 Cor 8. According to Smit, Paul presents antitheses, but these are his own products. This study will demonstrate that there are valid reasons for regarding some of the clauses in 1 Cor 8 as quotations of the Corinthians, and Paul's argument is not coherent without attributing some material to the Corinthians. Fotopoulos has described Smit's two levels, social and theological, as "artificial and overly rigid."⁷³ It is true that these levels are probably more separable to the modern mind than they would have been to the Corinthians. Even if the two levels of response are accepted, it still does not explain the difference in tone and definition of deity between the chapters.⁷⁴ Fotopoulos criticizes Smit for two further problems.⁷⁵ First, Fotopoulos will extend the *partitio* from 8:1-6 to 8:1-9. Second, Fotopoulos will demonstrate that describing the weak party as a hypothetical rhetorical device destroys the force of Paul's argument by removing actual divisions from the community.

John Fotopoulos

John Fotopoulos' revised dissertation, *Food Offered to Idols in Roman Corinth*, takes a social-rhetorical approach to "argue that the primary focus of Paul's instructions is idol-food eaten in pagan temples in and around Corinth; a behavior that Paul

⁷³ Fotopoulos, *Food Offered*, 37.

⁷⁴ For example, just because Paul makes a social argument in 1 Cor 8:7-9:27, it does not follow that his tone is necessarily less severe as he is severe on a social issue in ch. 5.

⁷⁵ See his assessment in Fotopoulos, *Food Offered*, 35-7; "Arguments Concerning Food," 611-2 n. 1.

consistently rejects.”⁷⁶ He argues that diners at pagan temples seem to have believed that the gods participated in the meals with them, and Paul thus denounces this association as idolatrous. Moreover, Paul rejected these dining occasions because of the sexual encounters at these meals that Paul considered to be immoral behavior for Christians. In his social-rhetorical study, Fotopoulos attempts to paint a broader picture of what it meant to eat idol-food. In addition to the impressive analysis of archeological evidence, he also appeals to literary, papyrological, epigraphic, votary, and numismatic evidence. Thus, Fotopoulos expands and refines the arguments for the importance of both location and rhetoric.

The unique contribution by Fotopoulos is his detailed survey of cults and temples in and around Corinth. He describes the location and cult practices of Asklepios, Demeter and Kore, Isis and Serapis, and others. While he argues against the relevance of Demeter and Kore’s sanctuary, he thinks that the Asklepieion, with its dining facilities, fits Paul’s description of the dining and is an “extremely plausible context for 1 Cor 8:1-10:22.”⁷⁷ Contra Gooch, he argues that there is no evidence that any of the food served in the Asklepieion was non-sacrificial.⁷⁸ Fotopoulos’ chapter 6, which discusses the setting and

⁷⁶ Fotopoulos, *Food Offered to Idols*, 39. See also John Fotopoulos, “The Rhetorical Situation, Arrangement, and Argumentation of 1 Corinthians 8:1-13: Insights into Paul’s Instructions on Idol-Food in Greco-Roman Context,” *GOTR* 47 (2002):165-98; “Arguments Concerning Food Offered to Idols: Corinthian Quotations and Pauline Refutations in a Rhetorical *Partitio* (1 Corinthians 8:1-9),” *CBQ* 67 (2005): 611-631; “The Misidentification of Lerna Fountain at Corinth: Implications for Interpretations of the Corinthian Idol-Food Issue (1 Cor 8:1-11:1),” in *New Testament and Early Christian Literature in the Greco-Roman Context: Studies in Honor of David E. Aune* (ed. John Fotopoulos; NovTSup 122; Leiden: Brill, 2006), 37-50.

⁷⁷ Fotopoulos, *Food Offered*, 70.

⁷⁸ Gooch, *Dangerous Food*. Gooch’s assessment rests on the misidentification of the Lerna fountain. See Fotopoulos, “Misidentification of the Lerna Fountain,” 37-50.

activities of dining situations, is extremely helpful for understanding the situations to which Paul might be responding. Fotopoulos suggests that opportunities to dine at the Asklepieion could arise in the context of a thanksgiving meal (when a friend or relative was healed) or for private use (birthdays, wedding, funerals, or at the invitation of a patron).⁷⁹ In addition to these meals at temples, sacrificial food would be very common in the dining situation of a private home. Even the home setting would have libations to the gods, and “the food could have been sacrificed at home or at a temple by the host before being served at home.”⁸⁰ He concludes that “The avoidance of sacrificial food altogether would be extremely difficult.”⁸¹ Paul’s two issues with the meals seem to be the prevalent sexual immorality and the partnership with the idol-gods. He argues, “Κοινωνία at Greco-Roman formal meals fostered a relationship between the host, fellow diners and the deities invoked at the meal.”⁸²

⁷⁹ In my assessment, Fotopoulos has been unfairly reviewed on the issue of dining situations by P. Coutsoumpos, review of John Fotopoulos, *Food Offered*, *CBQ* 67 (2005): 339-40. For example, Coutsoumpos criticizes, “Occasionally, F. seems to oversimplify matters a bit, or perhaps to present them with a too-narrow understanding of the significance of the cultural background he emphasizes. For instance, to say that sacrificial food at formal meals held at the Asklepieion could hardly be avoided (p. 176) is an oversimplification, because it is well known that not all church members were able to attend such places and participate in such formal meals” (340). This seems to be a misreading of what Fotopoulos argues. Fotopoulos describes what likely occurred at meals in temples, and he notes “Certainly sacrificial food at formal meals held at the Asklepieion could hardly be avoided” (176). He is simply stating that if one attended a meal at the Asklepieion, the person would have encountered idol-food. He is not arguing that everyone would have dined at the Asklepieion and therefore would have encountered idol food.

⁸⁰ Fotopoulos, *Food Offered*, 177.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 177. His assessment of the possible motivations for Corinthian Christians attending such meals is helpful: “With the desire for increased social status, the necessity of social relations in Corinth, the love of rhetoric and ample wine to facilitate conversation and cheer, the attraction to attend meals hosted by pagan associates would indeed be strong” (178).

⁸² *Ibid.*, 176.

Having established the probable social-historical settings in which Corinthian Christians might encounter idol-food, Fotopoulos turns his analysis to Paul's argument in 1 Cor 8-10. He argues that the Apostolic Decree has nothing to do with the situation at Corinth and that there were actual parties of the Strong and Weak at Corinth. He thinks that some Corinthian quotations must be embedded in the text to make sense of the argument; the following he argues are quotations of the Corinthians' positions: 8:1b-c, 8:4b-c, 8:5a, 8:6, 8:8, 10:23a, 10:23c.⁸³ He thinks it is likely that Paul previously addressed the topic of idol-food, but the Corinthian Christians reverted to their normative Gentile practice of consuming idol-food.⁸⁴ Following Mitchell, he interprets 1 Cor 8-10 in line with the larger deliberative argument of the epistle that urges unity. He agrees with Joop Smit that 1 Cor 8 is a rhetorical *partitio*, but Fotopoulos argues that the *partitio* includes 1 Cor 8:1-9 instead of Smit's 8:1-6. In 1 Cor 8:1-9, Paul quotes and refutes the Strong's propositions. Fotopoulos sees the most significant seeming-inconsistency between the prohibition of eating food in pagan temples and tables (1 Cor 8:9-13; 10:14-22) and the permission of eating food in pagan homes (1 Cor 10:27-30). He assigns the inconsistency to Paul's quotation of the Corinthians and his correction. "Cult meal participation is clearly ruled out by Paul in 1 Cor 10:1-22. Paul's conclusion for eating in pagan temple (1 Cor 8:1-10:22) is complete prohibition: "For Paul, there is a common *κοινωνία* with pagan gods (who are actually demons) in cultic meals which is analogous

⁸³ See Ibid., 191-3. The identification of Corinthian quotations does make a contribution to the coherence of these chapters. For example, Fotopoulos has an explanation for the seemingly discrepant view of idol-gods: "The so-called gods and lords who, according to the Strong, do not have real existence (cf. 8:4-6), do, according to Paul, exist as demons (10:20)" (249).

⁸⁴ Ibid., 219.

to the *κοινωνία* with Christ in the Lord's Supper (10:14-22). Participation in cultic meals is *κοινωνία* with demons constituting idolatry which is prohibited."⁸⁵ Paul, however, accommodates the Strong's insistence on freedom in 10:25-11:1 and permits dining at formal house meals provided that they abstained from sexual immorality and the origins of the food were not explicitly stated to be from idol sacrifices.

There is much to be commended in Fotopoulos' study. His analysis of the archeological evidence solves some of the major questions surrounding the plausible contexts of idol-food at Corinth. He has demonstrated that the most plausible cult temple for dining was the Asklepieion; moreover, he has proven that the all food served at the Asklepieion would have been dedicated to the idol-gods. In contrast to Phua, he has taken seriously the Greco-Roman background of the Corinthian Christians and has demonstrated the likelihood of them reverting to normative Greco-Roman associations with idol-gods. I am largely in agreement with Fotopoulos' assessment of the rhetorical *partitio* and his identification of Corinthian quotations. My criticism of Fotopoulos is threefold. First, despite Fotopoulos' impressive grasp of the archeological evidence, he does not demonstrate a corresponding familiarity with textual sources, especially those of Hellenistic Jewish authors. It is shocking that neither Philo nor Josephus' arguments against idolatry fit into his analysis at all, not even in a single citation. In passing over Hellenistic Jewish authors, Fotopoulos has overlooked perhaps the most significant context of his "social-rhetorical" analysis, the comparable rhetorical denunciations of idolatry in other Hellenistic Jewish authors. Second, Fotopoulos recognizes that the issue

⁸⁵ Fotopoulos, *Food Offered*, 187.

centers on theological knowledge. The Strong justify their actions on the basis of their knowledge of the uniqueness of God and the corresponding non-existence of idols. Paul counters this theological knowledge with the correction that the idol-gods really have existence as demons. Fotopoulos recognizes the central role of theology, but he never deals with the different ways that the groups define God. Moreover, he does not seem to notice how Paul subtly shifts his own representations of God in order to fit his argument. Third, his explanation fails to deal with the issue of the severity of Paul's tone in 1 Cor 10 compared with his argument on the basis of *συνείδησις* in 1 Cor 8. In 1 Cor 8 Paul does not prohibit eating at the pagan temples on the basis of committing actual idolatry while in 1 Cor 10 his tone is more severe and consumption of idol food is understood to be idolatrous, incompatible with the eucharist, and participation with demons. My assessment is that Fotopoulos' argument for a rhetorical *partitio* is largely correct, but it offers an incomplete explanation that fails to deal with the issue of what is considered idolatrous and how God is represented.

Richard Liong-Seng Phua

Richard Liong-Seng Phua's dissertation written under the supervision of John Barclay, *Idolatry and Authority: A Study of 1 Corinthians 8.1-11.1 in Light of the Jewish Diaspora*, merits special attention because, like my approach, he argues for the need to reexamine the manner in which Paul defines idolatry in light of Diaspora Judaism.⁸⁶ As his title suggests, Phua attempts to locate the different positions at Corinth within the various Diaspora Jewish views on what it means to commit idolatry. He states,

⁸⁶ Phua, *Idolatry and Authority*.

The purpose of my book is to examine the issue of idolatry and authority in 1 Corinthians 8-10 by looking at the Jewish Diaspora communities and establishing parallels to the behavior of the parties in these chapters. And in the process, I hope to show that the parties are all ‘Jewish’ in varying ways but differ in their practices.⁸⁷

His main task is to reevaluate how the parties have been identified and offer new insights informed by the context of Diaspora Judaism. He argues, against those such as Smit, Hurd, and Gooch who think the “weak” are hypothetical, that there are three parties involved in this argument, all of which have different theological and ethical conclusions. Drawing on the work of Halbertal and Margalit, Phua demonstrates the multi-faceted approach to idolatry in Diaspora Judaism.⁸⁸ What one Diaspora Jewish author defined as idolatrous another author would permit. This assessment of Diaspora Jewish positions on idolatry enables him to counter the widespread assumption that only gentiles would be open to idolatrous associations.

Phua does not label his approach as a rhetorical *partitio*, nor does he appeal to rhetorical models to explain what Paul is doing. Nevertheless, Phua’s argument—that Paul quotes the strong and then refutes their positions—is a very similar argument to Smit and Fotopoulos even though Phua’s work lacks the rhetorical underpinnings. Phua attempts to reconstruct the argument of the strong by extracting Paul’s quotations of them. The apparent discrepancies of a surface level reading of the text can be attributed to Paul and the Corinthian strong operating from different definitions of what constitutes idolatry—each of these three positions (the strong, the weak, and Paul) can be found in

⁸⁷ Ibid., 27.

⁸⁸ Moshe Halbertal and Avishai Margalit, *Idolatry* (trans. Naomi Goldblum; Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992).

other Diaspora Jewish authors. From their strict monotheism, the belief in the non-reality of idol-gods, and their freedom in Christ, the “strong” adopt the practice of eating idol meat in the temple because they view it as harmless.⁸⁹ Prior to their conversion, the “weak” also participated in pagan cultic feasts, but after their conversion they took a more stringent stance and rejected any association with idol-meat. While Paul is informed by Diaspora Jewish rejections of idolatry, his reasons for abhorring idolatry are different. He rejects the strong’s assertion that the idols are nothing, but he does not condemn their behavior simply on the grounds of the Law. He has two concerns concerning the behavior of the strong. First, he thinks the idolatrous behavior of the strong will cause the weak to fall into actual idolatry. Second, he thinks the idolatrous behavior of the strong will cause them to incur the judgment of God. In 1 Cor 9 especially, Paul claims that he, as the founder of the church at Corinth, has the right to define what is idolatrous.

Phua is to be commended for his assessment of Diaspora Jewish positions concerning idolatry, and he offers a multifaceted approach to idolatry that allows the diverse positions to speak. This is a very welcome correction to most discussions of Diaspora Judaism that condense the position of Jews into a simple maxim: “Jews reject idolatry.” By offering a more varied definition of what constitutes idolatry for Jews, he helpfully questions the assumption that positions on idolatry can be easily divided along ethnic lines. While Phua surveys much of Hellenistic Judaism on the topic of idolatry, my approach will be to analyze individual arguments in greater detail to make comparisons to Paul. For example, Phua draws on a number of Philo’s treatises to extract Philo’s

⁸⁹ Phua assumes the location of the food consumption.

conception of idolatry, but I will focus on how Philo makes an extended argument—on both ethical and theological grounds—against the practice of idolatry in *De decalogo*. My contribution to the interpretation differs in scope from Phua's. He is concerned primarily to provide a plausible identification of the parties involved in 1 Cor 8-10. The analysis of the argument itself is only a means to achieve this identification. My work, however attempts to analyze Paul's argument especially in light of his Hellenistic Jewish contexts; both his argument and its contexts are important. It is not so much Phua's assessment of Diaspora Jewish positions with which I take issue; rather, the problems arise when he attempts to apply these positions to the situation at Corinth. First, the most controversial of his claims is that all three parties are Jewish. This assertion stands in contrast to the vast majority of Pauline scholars who argue on both historical and literary grounds that the Corinthian Christians were gentiles. Phua demonstrates that the various Corinthian positions on idolatry and arguments concerning acceptable interaction can be found in Diaspora Jewish positions. From this possibility, Phua leaps to probability, and the rest of his work is given to showing how this explanation is plausible and in his assessment probable.⁹⁰ In line with almost every Pauline scholar, I will demonstrate that the most likely reconstruction of the situation at Corinth is that the Corinthian Christians were primarily gentiles and where they seem to have Jewish thought-processes these are likely

⁹⁰ Scott E. McClelland, review of Phua, *Idolatry and Authority*, *RBL* (2008), helpfully critiques Phua, "A concern for this reviewer is twofold here. While ably showing the existence of a breadth of "party" identifications among scholars, Phua does not show the 'depth' (the ongoing consensus) that has built up over the years to incline toward a Gentile identification of these contestants. From there he makes a bit of a leap toward a determined effort to show that both parties were Jewish. There is a sense of 'could be' moving toward a 'should be' here. The rest of the book becomes a single-minded pursuit toward a Jewish identification for both parties. This makes the work one of advocacy for a position, not a balanced study of all available options."

attributable to Paul's teaching when he founded the church. Second, perhaps out of his overarching desire to demonstrate the Jewish context of this argument, he neglects discussion of the Greco-Roman context. Even if one accepts Phua's unlikely argument for an exclusively Jewish discussion, one still must reckon with the gentile context of worship at Corinth. What exactly was the action with which Paul takes issue? It should not just be assumed that this is, in every case, eating idol-meat in the temples. Third, his work suffers from an insufficient, possibly even non-existent, methodology for identifying the quotations of the "strong." As I will demonstrate in subsequent chapters, this methodological insufficiency causes him to mislabel some of the positions in 1 Cor. He does not interact with comparative rhetorical models from ancient authors and he overlooks the works of modern scholars who examine Paul's argument on the basis of rhetoric. He would be especially aided by interaction with Smit and Fotopoulos who present a stronger methodology for identifying quotations and demonstrating Pauline refutation.⁹¹ Fourth, Phua does not take seriously the difference in tone between chapters 8 and 10. He argues that Paul is treating the same situation (eating idol meat in the temple) with the same conclusion (do not participate!) in both chapters. In 1 Cor 8 he treats it from the stance of communal love, and in 1 Cor 10 he treats it from a warning of falling into actual idolatry. Again this does not account for the inconsistency of tone noted by the vast majority of scholars. How can Paul acquiesce to the strong's position of idol-food being unharmful for the strong person in 1 Cor 8 to the argument in 1 Cor 10

⁹¹ Publication dates might have made it difficult for Phua to interact with Fotopoulos' *Food Offered*, but three of Smit's articles were available a decade before the publication of Phua's *Idolatry and Authority*.

that it would bring the strong under God's judgment? Phua argues Paul is just treating the issue from different angles, but this approach too easily passes over the differences of the chapters. Fifth, my primary complaint with his presentation of Diaspora Jewish positions is that he does not show how one author could simultaneously hold to different definitions of idolatry and different representations of God. Paul's argumentation rests on his ability to hold in balance different Diaspora Jewish arguments concerning what is idolatrous. Sixth, another issue with his generally helpful assessment of Diaspora Jewish definitions of idolatry is that he gives little attention to the manner in which God is represented and its role in defining the severity of idolatry.

The Contribution of this Study

My review of past research has highlighted several areas that require reconsideration. Much attention has rightly been focused on the possible locations for interacting with idol-food. These analyses have adduced a combination of lexical, literary, archeological, and papyrological evidence. To my mind, they have adequately explained the various options for interacting with idol food in Roman Corinth. These previous studies contribute greatly to an understanding of the social situation in Roman Corinth, what many call a socio-rhetorical study. But these studies have failed to describe the way that Paul makes his argument, especially the manner in which he represents God and the conclusions that can be drawn from it. The argument of this project is that the evaluation of Paul's coherence in 1 Cor 8-10 can be helped by examining the different ways in which God is represented. In 1 Cor 8, the manner of God's representation is dictated by the shared confession to which at least some of the Corinthians appeal. The Corinthians

likely received this theological proposition from Paul, so it is not surprising that he affirms it here. Nevertheless, he qualifies the ethical conclusions that can be drawn from this theological proposition. Paul employs a different representation of God with an attendant shift in the definition of idolatry as he appeals to the history of Israel and the eucharist. Finally, Paul addresses the issue of marketplace food with yet another representation of God. It will be argued that Paul selects Jewish traditions (of representing God and defining idolatry) in order to bolster his prohibition on idol food and permission of marketplace food. While the traditions are primarily located in Hellenistic Judaism, they are filtered through Paul's christological lens. Paul's understanding of idolatry is affected by his belief in Christ's immanent presence in the community with the implication that associations with other objects of worship are prohibited.

CHAPTER 2

IDOLATRY: CONVERSATIONS AND PATTERNS

Introduction

Chapter 1 surveyed the different explanations for the coherence of Paul's argument in 1 Corinthians 8 and 10, and it noted the problem that scholars are attempting to explain. The apparent problem with Paul's logic is that he first argues that the non-reality of idols (8:4) implies that eating idol-food is not an intrinsically improper action (8:13). Then in 1 Cor 10, Paul warns the Corinthians against committing idolatry (10:7, 14) because eating idol-food implies association with demons (10:20) and arouses the jealousy of the Lord (10:22); thus, Paul may imply that eating idol food is an intrinsically improper action. At the heart of the dispute between Paul and the Corinthians is what it means to commit idolatry, and they seem to come to different conclusions concerning what are permissible and what are idolatrous associations that a Christian may have with pagan cult-images and cults.¹ While it is clear that Paul and the Corinthians are negotiating the definition of idolatry, modern scholars have tended to focus the bulk of their explanations for the coherence on other issues (e.g., sources, location, and rhetoric). Perhaps because texts like Isaiah 40-44 are so often taken to be representative of all Jewish thought, many assume that all Jews, including Paul, would deny the existence of other deities and avoid

¹ I recognize that the term "Christian" is viewed as problematic by some. For the purposes of this study, it is a helpful description of those who believe in Jesus as the Messiah in contrast to those like Wisdom, Philo, and Josephus.

any association with these non-gods. It is thus assumed that Paul would prohibit outright any association between the Christian and an idol-god, but the concept of idolatry in Paul's Jewish background was more fluid and nuanced than a simple unqualified rejection of associating with idols. The diversity of understandings concerning idolatry in Hellenistic Jewish thought and the general assumptions by modern readers of its uniformity point to the need to reevaluate our rigid definitions of idolatry and their implications for how we read these authors' arguments.²

This chapter will be an initial exploration of the varied spectrum of understandings of idolatry held by Jewish authors and begin to propose some methods for analyzing their approaches. Although scholars continue to debate the relationship of Paul to Judaism after his vision of the risen Lord, everyone agrees that Paul was raised a Hellenistic Jew. No one seriously questions the probability that he was a Jew, reared and educated in Tarsus, and probably also received some formal instruction in Judaism at Jerusalem. Thus, Paul's primary theological understandings are drawn from his Jewish heritage, but this Jewish heritage is broad, varied, Hellenistic, and understood through Paul's christological lens.³ When Paul makes arguments concerning idolatry, he is

² In addition to the typical monolithic understanding of idolatry in scholarship, exclusive monotheism is often assumed to be the unquestioned norm of post-exilic Jewish belief. Michael Mach ("Concepts of Jewish Monotheism During the Hellenistic Period," in *The Jewish Roots of Christological Monotheism: Papers from the St. Andrews Conference on the Historical Origins of the Worship of Jesus* [ed. Carey C. Newman, James R. Davila, Gladys S. Lewis; Leiden: Brill, 1999], 21-42), however, demonstrates the breadth of Jewish understanding of God's oneness. For example, it will be shown below that *Joseph and Asenath* adamantly opposes association with pagan deities that the author thinks to be non-living and unreal, but the text does not project an exclusive monotheism in which God exists in an unpopulated heavenly realm. Rather, Asenath interacts with a heavenly visitor who has some capacity to affect the physical realm.

³ I will use "Hellenistic Judaism" as a term descriptive of Jewish thought practiced within the larger Greco-Roman culture. I do not intend to contrast Hellenistic Judaism to Palestinian Judaism; rather, "Hellenistic Judaism" is descriptive of all Judaisms under Greco-Roman rule. When a distinction between

drawing upon and inserting himself into discussions that were already occurring in Hellenistic Jewish communities. Thus, Hellenistic Jewish authors will provide helpful comparisons and contexts to Paul's arguments concerning idols.

To illustrate the differences in response and manner of argumentation among Hellenistic Jews, this chapter will briefly describe the approaches taken by two Alexandrian Jewish texts: Artapanus *Fragment 3* and *Joseph and Asenath*. Having noted the complex responses to idolatry, I will then suggest some ways of moving the discussion forward. I will suggest that examining the premises of an author's argument provides a valuable lens from which to understand the argument as a whole. Specifically, looking at the manner in which an author represents God helps to understand the way that the author thinks about idolatry and its consequences. Then, I will note the various representations of God that Paul employs in 1 Cor 8-10 and the consequences that these variations have for his argument. I will conclude by suggesting that a profitable examination of Paul's argument concerning idolatry is to compare his argumentation with other arguments made by Hellenistic Jews concerning idolatry.

The Complexity of Idolatry Illustrated

It would seem plausible that texts written by Jews living in the same cultural location would hold similar views concerning what constituted idolatry and what were the acceptable associations with idols. These Jewish authors, however, come to sometimes

Palestinian Judaism and Judaism of other locations is fitting, I will use the terms "Palestinian Judaism" and "Diaspora Judaism." Using "Hellenistic Judaism" broadly avoids questions concerning if Josephus is properly situated in Diaspora or Palestinian Judaism. Moreover, by using "Hellenistic" broadly to describe Greco-Roman culture, I avoid an artificial bifurcation of culture under Greek rule and under Roman rule, a distinction that is not easily made in either Corinth or Alexandria. See the treatment of the term "Hellenistic Judaism" by Shaye J. D. Cohen, *From the Maccabees to the Mishnah* (LEC; Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1987), 35-7.

very different conclusions to these basic questions of belief and practice. Analyzing the approaches to idols taken by *Joseph and Asenath* and Artapanus *Fragment 3* will illustrate how Jewish responses to and interactions with pagan religiosity were both complex and varied. Despite the similarities of these texts arising in the same general cultural environment and being in the stream of Jewish panegyric writings, they come remarkably different conclusions concerning the ways in which the pious should interact with idols.

Joseph and Asenath

The novelistic expansion of the biblical narrative, *Joseph and Asenath*, describes the conversion of Asenath, her marriage to Joseph, and her integration in the Jewish community.⁴ The text was most likely written in Alexandria between 100 B.C.E. and 100 C.E.⁵ In many ways, *Joseph and Asenath*'s approach to idolatry represents what many readers assume to be the universal Jewish position as the author goes to great lengths to explain Asenath's complete rejection of her idolatrous past. Because Joseph's narrative

⁴ The textual history of *Joseph and Asenath* is disputed. In agreement with the growing scholarly consensus, I favor the longer recension edited by Burchard ("Joseph and Asenath" in *OTP*; "Ein vorläufiger griechischer Text von Joseph und Asenath," *DBAT* 14 [1979]: 2-53). For a defense of the shorter recension, see Ross S. Kraemer, *When Asenath met Joseph: A Late Antique Tale of the Biblical Patriarch and His Egyptian Wife, Reconsidered* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 50-88; Angela Standhartinger, *Das Frauenbild im Judentum der hellenistischen Zeit: Ein Beitrag anhand von 'Joseph & Asenath'* (Leiden: Brill, 1995), 50-51, 219-55. It should also be noted that I favor the growing consensus of Jewish authorship, especially because the issue of exogamy was much more a Jewish than early Christian problem; see John J Collins, "Joseph and Asenath, Jewish or Christian?" *JSP* 14 (2005): 97-112.

⁵ Because *Joseph and Asenath* uses the story of Joseph in Egypt to treat the issues of idolatry and endogamy, the Egyptian provenance is almost certain. Moreover, the author chooses Asenath as the female convert instead of another character such as Ruth. See Christoph Burchard, *Untersuchungen zu Joseph und Asenath* (Tübingen: Siebeck, 1965), 140-2. There is also a focus on Egyptian gods. John Barclay (*Jews in the Mediterranean Diaspora: From Alexander to Trajan (323 BCE-117CE)*) [Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1996], 204, 447) and John Collins (*Between Athens and Jerusalem: Jewish Identity in the Hellenistic Diaspora* [2d. ed. Biblical Resource Series; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000], 105-6) give the broad time frame of composition from 100 B.C.E. to 100 C.E.

antedates the Mosaic Law, the author does not explain Joseph's actions in light of the Law; rather, piety is defined by distinguishing Jewish from Egyptian practice, especially in terms of worship and diet.⁶

While *Joseph and Asenath* draws on themes from the whole Book of Genesis, it primarily elaborates on one verse: "And Pharaoh called Ioseph's name Psonthompanech, and he gave him Asenneth daughter of Petephres, priest of Heliopolis, as a wife for him" (Gen 41:45 NETS; cf. Gen 41:50; 46:20). The book contains two distinct sections. Chapters 1-21 focus on Asenath's conversion, and chapters 22-29 focus on the jealousy and conspiracy of Pharaoh's son against Asenath. The author describes Asenath as a beautiful virgin who arrogantly rejects every suitor, including Pharaoh's son. Instead of marriage, she chooses to surround herself with her idols in an ornate multi-chambered complex in her father's house. Asenath furiously refuses Pentephres' plan for her to marry Joseph, but at Joseph's physical appearance and presence, Asenath falls in love. Then it is Asenath who is scorned as Joseph refuses her kiss of greeting because piety prohibits him from touching lips that bless idols and eat idol food. Instead Joseph prays for her conversion. Following Joseph's prayer, Asenath is confused and broken. She repents of her idolatry by destroying all her idols, fasting for a week, and praying to be accepted by God. An angel appears to her on the eighth day and declares her to be

⁶ For *Joseph and Asenath*, piety seems to involve 4 aspects: keeping away from idols, endogamy, not repaying evil for evil, and observing the Jewish diet. Collins (*Between Athens and Jerusalem*, 243) comments, "It is not clear that observance of the Jewish Law is required. In practice, the Law is reducible to monotheism, rejection of idolatry, chastity before marriage, and avoidance of social or sexual intimacy with 'aliens'—that is, people who worship other gods ... In short, true religion is equated with worship of the living God and avoidance of idols."

accepted by God. She undergoes a mystical conversion experience and is transformed into a beautiful bride for Joseph, whom she marries as Pharaoh officiates the wedding.

In the second section, the narrative resumes eight years later when Pharaoh's son again becomes infatuated with Asenath. His attempts to persuade Simeon and Levi to conspire against Joseph are unsuccessful, but Dan, Gad, Naphtali, and Asher agree to betray Joseph. They ambush Asenath's caravan, and Pharaoh's son with fifty horsemen pursue Asenath and Benjamin. Benjamin kills each of them with a single stone apiece, and the sons of Leah overcome the rest of the troops. In a second effort, Dan, Gad, Naphtali, and Asher attempt to ambush Asenath, but she prays and their swords are turned to ash. She forgives them for their conspiracy. Pharaoh and his son die, and Joseph rules over Egypt for 48 years, after which he restores the throne to another of Pharaoh's sons.

It is primarily in the first section (chs. 1-21) that the author deals with the issue of idolatry, and this section has a more antagonistic tone with the author despising and mocking the pagan gods.⁷ In the first section, the author seems to be attempting to answer

⁷ Scholars dispute the stance that *Joseph and Asenath* takes toward Greco-Roman culture. John Barclay and John Collins are representative of the divergent views. While Collins notes that Pharaoh and Pentephres are treated by the author with some esteem, Barclay thinks them to be incidental to the story (*Jews in the Mediterranean Diaspora*, 210). Collins (*Between Athens and Jerusalem*, 108, 230-32) also notes that Pharaoh's son schemes not just against Jews but also against Pharaoh. Collins emphasizes the rejoicing of Pentephres and Pharaoh at the marriage of Joseph and Asenath and concludes, "In view of this happy conclusion, it makes little sense to speak of 'cultural antagonism' in *Joseph and Asenath* ... The only consistent antagonism in *Joseph and Asenath* is directed toward idolatry" (*Between Athens and Jerusalem*, 238). Barclay's take on the text is quite different: "The encounter of Joseph and Asenath, and the issue of the kiss, bring to the surface the sense of cultural antagonism which is the predominant tone of this document. When one considers the numerous frictionless ways in which this marriage could have been portrayed, the humiliating experience which Asenath is made to undergo indicates just how strongly the author wishes to communicate this message" (*Jews in the Mediterranean Diaspora*, 211). The different interpretations of the book by Barclay and Collins probably stem from the sections that they emphasize. Barclay emphasizes the first section (chs. 1-21) with Asenath's repudiation of idols and humiliating conversion; whereas, Collins emphasizes the second section (chs. 22-29) in which the pious Jews are

the question “How could Joseph, a model of Jewish piety, marry a foreigner, the daughter of an idolatrous priest?” In answering this question, the book seems to have two major purposes: to increase the standing of Gentile converts and to encourage Jews to take pride in their cultural heritage.⁸

In general, *Joseph and Asenath*'s depiction of idols is in line with the prophetic caricatures that make a complete identification between the idol and the idol-god itself and therefore describe the gods as inactive and dead.⁹ Asenath's chamber is filled with countless idols of the Egyptians, and the author repeatedly criticizes the idols for both

attacked by both Pharaoh's son and impious Jews. For a nuanced view similar to Collins', see Erich S. Gruen, *Heritage and Hellenism: The Reinvention of Jewish Tradition* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 95-99.

⁸ Barclay thinks that *Joseph and Asenath* is likely about the conditions for proselytism, and not a missionary text because so much biblical knowledge is presupposed (*Jews in the Mediterranean Diaspora*, 215; cf. Randall D. Chestnutt, "The Social Setting and Purpose of Joseph and Asenath," *JSP* 2 [1988]: 21-48.). Collins similarly thinks it is written to encourage Jews and also to encourage proselytes (*Between Athens and Jerusalem*, 238). In contrast, George W. E. Nickelsburg, "Stories of Biblical and Early Post-Biblical Times" in *Jewish Writings of the Second Temple Period: Apocrypha, Pseudepigrapha, Qumran Sectarian Writings, Philo, Josephus* [ed. Michael E. Stone; CRINT 2.2; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984], 65-71) thinks there is a strong possibility that the work was directed toward Gentiles. He thinks the book's syncretism, especially the Greek form of writing and telling from Asenath's point of view, indicates an intended Gentile audience; thus, *Joseph and Asenath* becomes instruction for proselytes: "The author has recounted a proselyte's progress from the viewpoint of the proselyte ... Its kerygmatic content is simple. Eternal life and immortality are to be found in God of Israel alone, whose worship excludes idolatry" (70). Joseph C. O'Neill ("What is *Joseph and Asenath* All About?" *Henoah* 16 [1994]: 189-98) takes an approach radically opposed to those who think the text is about proselytism or a missionary effort. He argues that Asenath is Jewish on account of extra-biblical stories of her being descended from Dinah, Pentephres' description of her relation to Joseph, Joseph's prayer for her, the description of her as an orphan returning to God, the symbolism of her meal to the Passover meal, and her name City of Refuge meaning New Jerusalem. O'Neill concludes, "I have been arguing that Joseph and Asenath is about apostate Israel that is won back to God the Father by Joseph who stands for the Messiah, the Son of God, who is bridegroom to Israel, his bride, and who bestows the Holy Spirit on her" (197).

⁹ There is one section that seems to acknowledge that there is a reality behind the idols. Asenath appeals to God for aid because "the wild old lion persecutes me, because he is (the) father of the gods of the Egyptians, and his children are the gods of the idol maniacs. And I have come to hate them because they are the lion's children, and have thrown all of them from me and destroyed them" (*Jos. Asen.* 12:9 [Burchard, *OTP*]). The lion represents a power that oppresses God's people, and some later texts describe the persecuting lion as the devil (e.g., 1 Pet 5:8). Even though Asenath has destroyed the physical representations of the gods, there is a devilish reality behind the idols that continues to oppose her. This dissociation of the idol and the god is restricted to this section of the text.

their number and inactivity. Asenath describes the idols, “Behold now, all the gods whom I once used to worship in ignorance: I have now recognized that they were dumb and dead idols and I have caused them to be trampled underfoot by men, and the thieves snatched those that were of silver and gold.”¹⁰ The idol-gods are proven to be non-real because there are no repercussions for destroying them. Their inactivity is contrasted to the activity of God as Creator. The author assumes that by describing the non-reality of the idol-gods that he has made a convincing case for abandoning their worship.

According to *Joseph and Asenath*, idolatry is an external act of worshipping idol-gods, but it is also an issue of the worshipper’s heart. The effects of idolatry are visible both in the internal misery of the idolater’s heart and the idolater’s outward appearance that pales in comparison to the pious (e.g., *Jos. Asen.* 6:1-8; 7:4; 14:9; 18:7-11; 20:7). While she is still idolatrous, Asenath’s attitude is arrogant and unkind (2:1; cf. 8:8-9). The author also understands idolaters to be in a defiled state because of their improper worship (11:16-17; 12:5). Asenath’s conversion involves new life (15:3-6) that is manifested physically in a beautiful appearance (18:7-11).

At the heart of this narrative is also the acceptable association that a pious Jew can have with a non-Jewish idolater. Initially, Asenath refuses to meet Joseph, but the sight of Joseph changes her heart. The story takes an ironic turn when it is Joseph who refuses to dine with the Egyptians (7:1-2) and refuses to be in Asenath’s presence (7:3-4). This refusal to associate with idol-worshippers leads to an explanation by Joseph and a prayer for Asenath’s conversion:

¹⁰ (*Jos. Asen.* 13:11 [Burchard, *OTP*]); cf. 8:5.

It is not fitting for a man who worships God, who will bless with his mouth the living God and eat blessed bread of life and drink a blessed cup of immortality and anoint himself with blessed ointment of incorruptibility to kiss a strange woman who will bless with her mouth dead and dumb idols and eat from the table of strangulation and drink from their libation a cup of insidiousness and anoint herself with the oil of destruction.¹¹

What Joseph describes is a complete break with those who participate in the worship of idols. Because there is a fundamental incompatibility between the “blessed cup of immortality” and the “cup of insidiousness,” there is a fundamental incompatibility between the pious and the idol-worshiper. The author uses Joseph’s actions to explain that the pious Jew carefully separates himself from the impious pagan. Joseph can work for an idolater (Pharaoh) and enter the house of an idolater (Pentephres), but he refuses to dine with either of them. In order for Joseph to be able to have fellowship with and marry Asenath, she must be “reborn” in a process of conversion. This conversion involves both a rejection of the idols and an acknowledgment of the true Creator God. She fasts and mourns in sackcloth and ashes. She breaks all her idols to pieces and throws them out the window. Her complete break with her idolatrous past is evidenced by her refusal even to let her own dogs eat the sacrificial food. Rather she gives the food to other dogs.

Central to Asenath’s acceptance by God is a mysterious visit by a heavenly messenger who declares to her, “Behold, from today, you will be renewed and formed anew and made alive again, and you will eat the blessed bread of life, and drink the blessed cup of immortality, and anoint yourself with the blessed ointment of incorruptibility.”¹² Asenath then undergoes a mysterious process of renewal that

¹¹ *Jos. Asen.* 8:5-6 (Burchard, *OTP*); cf. 7:5-6.

¹² *Ibid.*, 15:5.

demonstrates her acceptance by God. Only then is she able to approach Joseph. Her complete conversion and new life is evidenced by the fact that Joseph does not recognize her. She describes herself, “I am your maidservant Asenath, and all the idols I have thrown away from me and they were destroyed. And a man came from heaven today, and gave me bread of life and I ate, and a cup of blessing and I drank.”¹³ There is no continuity with her idolatrous past, not even her physical appearance.

The author of *Joseph and Asenath* takes a hardline stance against idols and idolaters. For the author, the idol-gods are dead, incapable of acting and speaking, and thus they can be destroyed without consequence. Joseph is a model of piety because he carefully avoids close contact, especially dining, with idolaters. In order to pursue piety, Asenath must completely reject her idolatrous practices and receive new life from God. Only then is it acceptable for Joseph to associate with her, dine with her, and marry her. On the one hand Joseph is fully integrated into the pagan political environment, but on the other hand, he remains entirely separate as a faithful Jew; thus, he provides a model of the possibility of cultural and religious preservation while living among pagans. In this way, *Joseph and Asenath* represents a common theme in Hellenistic Jewish documents—neither complete rejection nor complete acceptance of Hellenistic culture.

Artapanus

Whereas the position of *Joseph and Asenath* towards idols was one of strong dissociation, Artapanus—written in the same cultural environment—permits a much

¹³ Ibid., 19:5.

greater degree of interaction with idols.¹⁴ While *Joseph and Asenath* elaborates on a biblical narrative in order to explain a seeming incongruity (Joseph is pious even though he marries a non-Jew), Artapanus elaborates on and significantly expands the biblical narratives in order to describe more fully the contributions to Egyptian culture made by Jewish heroes, Abraham, Joseph, and Moses. Of the three extant fragments from Artapanus, *Fragment 3*, which describes the activity of Moses, is by far the longest.

In *Fragment 1*, Artapanus explains that the Jews are named after Abraham. In contrast to other Hellenistic Jewish authors who praise Abraham as a model of rejecting pagan astral worship in order to worship God (e.g., Philo, *Abr.* 69-77; *Jub.* 12:60), Artapanus says that Abraham taught astrology to the Egyptians. *Fragment 2* reworks portions of Genesis to explain how Joseph benefitted the Egyptians. In contrast to the biblical narrative that describes Joseph being sold into slavery (Gen 37:12-36), Artapanus describes Joseph as the one who arranges to be transferred to Egypt. Artapanus passes over the narrative of Joseph in prison (Gen 39:1-41:36) and describes Joseph's activity as the administrator of Egypt. His major contributions were dividing the land by establishing boundaries, discovering measurements, and irrigating the land. Not only does Joseph allot land to the priests, he also establishes two Egyptian temples. In *Fragment 3*, Artapanus describes that Moses was the teacher of Orpheus, inventor of boats and tools, and a philosopher. Like Joseph, he is responsible for establishing districts in Egypt. Although Moses supported Cenephres, the king, Cenephres became jealous and

¹⁴ The fragments of Artapanus were preserved by Alexander Polyhistor and subsequently by Eusebius in his *Praeparatio evangelica*. Because he discusses the activity of three Jewish heroes in Egypt, the Egyptian provenance is unquestioned. His work can be dated 250-100 B.C.E. (Barclay, *Jews in the Mediterranean Diaspora*, 127, 446)

attempted to dispose of Moses by sending him on an impossible mission against the Ethiopians, but Moses was victorious by using his military brilliance. Moses overcomes a second conspiracy by Cenephres when Moses kills a would-be assassin through his superior physical ability. Moses persuades Raguel not to invade Egypt, but then Moses is commanded by God to free the Jews from Egypt. The king imprisons Moses, but the prison is miraculously opened. When the king mocks Moses' God, he falls down as dead but is revived by Moses. Moses performs the plagues in order to convince the king to free the Jews. After the release of the Jews, the king regrets allowing the Jews to leave, and he pursues them only to be destroyed in the sea.

The fragments of Artapanus display both syncretism with Egyptian culture and a particular interest in praising Jewish heroes. On the one hand Artapanus describes each of these heroes establishing pagan forms of worship. But on the other hand, these Jewish heroes never engage in pagan worship, and they are distinct from the Egyptians on account of their creative brilliance. Many of the great things for which Egypt was renown are attributable to these brilliant Jews. The most shocking example of syncretism in the text is the description of the good things Moses gave to the Egyptians:

As a grown man he *bestowed many useful benefits* on mankind, for he invented boats and devices for stone construction and the Egyptian arms and the implements for drawing water and for warfare, and philosophy. Further he divided the state into 36 nomes and appointed for each of the nomes the god to be worshipped, and for the priests the sacred letters, and that they should be cats and dogs and ibises. He also allotted a choice area to the priests.¹⁵

¹⁵ Artapanus 27.4 (Collins, *OTP*). Artapanus seems to have a positive view of Egypt. He is even willing to attribute the annual flooding of the Nile River, an event on which Egyptian agriculture was dependent, to Moses (27:28).

Artapanus is unique among the Jewish apologists in that his syncretism goes so far as to suggest that Moses was responsible for Egyptian idol worship and theriolatry. Artapanus interprets Moses' establishment of these areas to be a beneficial way of maintaining social structure.¹⁶ Even more, Moses makes the ibis a sacred animal.¹⁷ Artapanus writes to boost Jewish pride in the achievements of their ancestors, and he has no problem glorifying Moses' role by attributing to him the establishment of Egyptian worship.

Despite these tales in which Moses is described as founding Egyptian idol worship and theriolatry, Artapanus still wants to make theological and social distinctions. He demonstrates that the God of the Jews is most powerful, and God cares specifically for the Jews. Pharaoh mocks God's activity, but when Moses whispers God's name in Pharaoh's ear, Pharaoh falls down speechless (3.27.24). God is active in speaking to Moses and bringing plagues on the Egyptians; whereas, Artapanus never indicates that the Egyptian gods have any real vitality or ability to act. Artapanus carefully distinguishes between Jews and Egyptians in that God's consistent care is for the Jews and he delivers them from their Egyptian oppressors.

Conclusions

Even though they both come from Alexandrian Judaism, Artapanus and *Joseph and Asenath* represent very different responses to pagan religion and social interaction.

¹⁶ Barclay argues that there could be an apologetic tone to this section that combats the critiques of Manetho, "Where Manetho described Moses as instigating the invasion of Egypt, terrorizing the land, persecuting the priests and destroying the animal cults (Josephus, *C Ap* 1.237-50), Artapanus paints a figure who strengthens the ruling regime, donates land to the priests and founds animal cults, becoming universally loved in the process (27.4-6)."

¹⁷ This act is strongly contrasted by Wisdom and *De decalogo* that both criticize sharply the idea of venerating animals as the lowest form of false worship.

Both texts describe the actions of historical examples of piety in order to explain the present situation of their communities. The past is described in order to make sense of the present, and these authors deal especially with how to define acceptable associations with idols and idolaters. Both texts acknowledge some form of unavoidable contact with people who worship idols, but *Joseph and Asenath* emphasizes the great lengths that Joseph takes in order to maintain distinction from his idolatrous neighbors. Joseph will not even eat with idolatrous people, but Moses, as recorded by Artapanus, feels free to establish Egyptian gods in order to promote social order. From a theological point of view, the texts share a great deal although *Joseph and Asenath* is far more antagonistic in its description of Egyptian gods. Both texts agree that God has a special relationship with the Jewish people, and God is active in speaking to and delivering his people. Neither text gives any indication that the Egyptian gods are real or have the ability to act. *Joseph and Asenath* repeatedly ridicules the deadness of the gods; whereas, Artapanus' approach is to treat them as inconsequential (they can be invented and established for social convenience) in contrast to God who kills those who mock God and overthrows the oppressors of God's people. While *Joseph and Asenath* and Artapanus share a literary location and theology, they come to remarkably different conclusions concerning the acceptable interactions that a pious person can have with idols.

Through the lens of the text that the author projects, we get a glimpse into the world behind the text. Both authors of these texts are attempting to instruct their audiences about proper and improper associations with idols and idolaters by retelling stories in the Jewish tradition. Both authors seem to think that the idol-gods are non-

existent and that there is only one true God who intervenes on behalf of faithful Jews. Despite this shared theology, the authors differ in the implications that this theology has for daily life in Alexandria. Artapanus seems to reason that the non-reality of the gods makes them a non-threat to the Jew, and a faithful Jew is free to interact with them, even to the point of establishing their worship. On the other end of the spectrum, *Joseph and Asenath* instructs its audience that the faithful Jew and convert to Judaism must break off nearly all associations with idolaters. The circumstances of living under a larger culture might force the audience to have some associations (e.g. Joseph works for Pharaoh and enters the house of Pentephres), but the faithful Jew takes seriously this contact and attempts to avoid close association and dining with non-Jews. The different approaches by these authors have a great impact on the practice of the Alexandrian Jewish community(ies). For example, if a Jewish metalworker read Artapanus, he might be undisturbed by attending a guild meal at a pagan temple (or even crafting a cult-image), but if this same metalworker read *Joseph and Asenath*, the meal would be prohibited outright (Joseph refuses to dine with non-Jews, and Asenath refuses to let even her dogs eat the food associated with idol gods). Especially when it comes to Jewish attitudes toward non-Jewish gods, there is a great deal of debate among Jews as to what are proper and improper associations. Neither *Joseph and Asenath*'s outright denunciation of idolatry nor Artapanus' nuanced acceptance are representative of all Hellenistic Judaism. Rather, they are positions that the authors have taken in an ongoing discussion among Jews living in a Hellenistic environment. Most Hellenistic Jews promote a position somewhere in between these two.

The Complexity of Idolatry Described

The brief analysis of the different approaches to idolatry taken by *Joseph and Asenath* and Artapanus illustrates that the issue of idolatry is complex and irreducible simply to theological differences. The complexity and importance of the issue is the reason that Jewish authors write extensively on this topic. There was a diverse group of terms used to describe interactions with gods through an image.¹⁸ And some have argued that the fluidity and ambiguity of these terms was one of the primary reasons for disagreements concerning acceptable associations.¹⁹ While it is necessary to analyze the use of the terms themselves, this analysis must be conducted in the broader analysis of an author's argument. Because these are shifting terms, the value of lexical studies apart from close analysis of their context is very limited. In some cases the authors are attempting to define terms, but most often the definition of terms is taken for granted. *Joseph and Asenath*, for example, makes no attempt to define the terms used to describe Asenath's images; rather, the terms are assumed, and the text focuses on describing the permissible associations with the images.

Another interpretive challenge for the modern reader is conceptualizing the first century *Sitz im Leben*. Often when the modern reader thinks about idolatry, the first concept is abstract and metaphorical—idolatry is excessive devotion to or passion about

¹⁸ For a discussion of the terms, see Derek Newton, *Deity and Diet: The Dilemma of Sacrificial Food at Corinth (JSNTSup 169)*. Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1987), 115-34. The terms εἰδωλολατρία and εἰδωλον, as descriptions of physical representations of a deity, are not common in pre-Christian Greek literature. Newton (*Deity and Diet*, 131) comments, "Only very rarely was *eidolon* used in pre-Christian Greek literature to indicate a representation of the divine. Above all, the term conveyed unreality."

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 134.

something or someone. For the first century reader, however, the first concept of idolatry was the concrete reality of worshipping a deity by using an image of the deity.²⁰ Early Christian and Jewish authors can use the concept of idolatry metaphorically (e.g., Eph 5:5; Col 5:5), but the primary referent is to the concrete reality. For the first century audience, idol-worship was an assumed aspect of Greco-Roman culture. Discussions—represented by the different positions taken by these texts—concerning the non-existence of idol-gods were theological, but these discussions had implications that affected their daily lives. Because the issue of idolatry had broad implications for how Jews and early Christians interacted in the larger Greco-Roman culture, the discussion below will highlight some of the sociological, practical, and theological issues involved in discussions of idolatry.

Sociological Issues

The whole fabric of Greco-Roman culture was interwoven with idol-worship, and Jewish and Christian authors were attempting to explain how the pious could navigate the culture and remain faithful to God. Paul's correspondence indicates the pervasiveness of idolatry in Roman Corinth because he must address the issues of idolatry at the pagan temple, in the home, at the meat market, and possibly at social dining halls. While Hellenistic Jewish and Christian communities agreed that idolatry was to be rejected, they still had to define what it meant to be idolatrous and map the ethical parameters of living with and among idols. Christopher Rowland describes Paul's task in 1 Cor 8-10, "In these chapters, Paul maps out for his readers and hearers a dialectical space in which

²⁰ Εἰδωλολατρία was a later term, but it refers to the long-standing tradition of worshipping a deity through an image of the deity.

two poles (namely fleeing idolatry and living in a world riddled with idols) are located.”²¹

The specific issues at Corinth will be explained in the exegesis of 1 Corinthians 8-10, but I will here make an initial exploration into the social issues involved when Jews and Christians interacted with idols and idolaters. Taking Philo as representative of some of the struggles of Jews interacting in the Hellenistic world, we begin to get a picture of challenges of social interaction.²²

The fact that Philo wrestles with questions of idolatry in several texts shows that it is both an important and challenging issue for the Jewish community in Alexandria.²³ Philo’s Jewish heroes are interpreted at some points in terms of the faithfulness of their response to idolatrous activity. For example, Abraham is the model of abandoning polytheism in order to worship the true God (Philo, *Somn.* 1; 160-2; *Virt.* 219).²⁴ Moses is

²¹ Christopher Rowland, “Living with Idols: An Exercise in Biblical Theology,” in *Idolatry: False Worship in the Bible, Early Judaism and Christianity* (ed. Stephen C. Barton; T & T Clark: London, 2007), 166.

²² Philo is the most helpful due to the expansiveness of his discussions of idolatry. Josephus’ encounter with Greco-Roman polytheism as he lived under Flavian patronage would also be a valuable study, but Josephus tends to subdue both the discussion of social incongruity between Jews and Romans and the criticism of Roman gods. This tendency in comparison to Philo is evidenced by the manner in which they treat the figure of Phinehas. Philo praises him as a model of piety; whereas, Josephus, writing under Roman patronage, is careful not to include God’s reward for a person who takes the law into his own hands and murders a lawbreaker. Louis H. Feldman (“The Portrayal of Phinehas by Philo, Pseudo-Philo, and Josephus” *JQR* 92 [2002]: 315-45) summarizes Philo’s take on Phinehas: “In Philo’s version of the incident with Zimri, far from being critical of Phinehas because he did not work through the judicial system, Philo praises him as zealous with the zeal for God. Phinehas may be a murderer in the eyes of the multitude, but Philo extols him in superlative terms, equating him to a philosopher.” (342). In contrast, Josephus wants to dissociate this Jewish hero from accusations that he is an impetuous zealot (a term that his Roman patrons would not appreciate in light of the Jewish War with Rome), “But Phinehas is still a priest, and so Josephus tones down the zealot-like aspects of his actions, as he does in his portrait of Elijah, with whom Phinehas is identified, by having him act less impetuously and less independently.” (Feldman, “The Portrayal of Phinehas,” 344).

²³ Philo is not unique in this emphasis as almost every Jewish text from Alexandria wrestles with the issue of idolatry (and associations with idolaters) in some form.

²⁴ See, David T. Runia, “Worshipping the Visible Gods: Conflict and Accommodation in Hellenism, Hellenistic Judaism and Early Christianity” in *Empsychoi Logoi—Religious Innovations in*

the ideal legislator who prohibits false worship (*Decal.* 50-80; *Mos.* 2.159-73; 2.270-4). And Phinehas becomes the model of virtue by purging the community from idolatrous contamination (*Mos.* 1.301-4; *Spec.* 1.56-7).²⁵ That Philo specifically confronts Greco-Roman idolatry and Egyptian theriolatry indicates that these were relevant issues for his Alexandrian community and issues that often caused tension in the community. Philo, as a wealthy, educated, and politically-involved Jew, also struggled with idolatry in the forms of wealth (*Leg.* 1.25) and striving for glory (*Leg.* 1.28). Karl-Gustav Sandelin describes the challenges that Philo of Alexandria faced as he attempted to live in the Greco-Roman Egypt while remaining a faithful Jew:

An Alexandrian Jew also witnessed pagan religious rites if he was present at sportive contests or performances at the theatre, occasions not unfamiliar to Philo (*Agr.* 110-123, *Ebr.* 177, *Prob.* 26, 141; *Prov.* 2, 5). Also attendance at club meetings and banquets, mentioned by Philo in *Ebr.* 20-23 and *Leg.* 3, 155-59, may have confronted Jews with pagan rituals (cf. *Flacc.* 4, 136).²⁶

Sandelin mentions a number of issues in Philo's context that raised questions about idolatry: wealth, attendance at sporting events and the theater, club meetings, gymnasium education, Greek citizenship, political office, and family relationships with non-Jews.²⁷ The only things we can say about Philo are those that are indicated by his writings, but the fact that he repeatedly confronts idolatry in its numerous forms indicates that Philo viewed idolatry as a real threat to his own devotion and the religious devotion of the

Antiquity. Studies in Honour of Pieter Willem van der Horst (ed. A. D. Houtman, A. D. Jong, and M. Misset-van de Weg; Ancient Judaism and Early Christianity 73; Leiden: Brill, 2008), 47-61.

²⁵ See also Philo, *Leg.* 3.242; *Post.* 182-185; *Conf.* 57, *Mut.* 108; *Virt.* 41.

²⁶ Karl-Gustav Sandelin, "The Danger of Idolatry According to Philo of Alexandria," *Temenos* 27 (1991): 125.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 123-31.

Alexandrian Jewish community. The threat of idolatry for the Alexandrian Jewish community was unavoidable because they existed as a minority sub-culture within the larger Greco-Roman society.

Issues of Community Practice and Boundaries

Many modern discussions of inter-religious disputes focus on detecting different theological positions espoused by each conflicting group. Religious conflict, however, is too complex and multi-faceted to be reduced exclusively to theology.²⁸ It is insufficient to describe Jewish worship only in terms of its monotheistic belief because there were non-Jewish monotheistic groups. Moreover, this would reduce Jewish worship to a set of beliefs. John Barclay highlights this problem:

To define Jewish religious distinction simply as adherence to ‘monotheism’ seems inadequate on a number of grounds. The term ‘monotheism’ places the emphasis on a concept—the belief that there is one, and only one, being rightly called ‘God’—and obscures the significance of *cultic practice* in defining acceptable or unacceptable religion ... Jewish distinction thus has to be defined more precisely, and in negative terms, as the rejection of alien, pluralist and iconic cult.²⁹

Barclay correctly argues that while theology is important, Jewish worship must also be defined by both practice and its contrast to Greco-Roman religion. As a minority sub-culture, Hellenistic Jews were forced to tolerate some association with idols.³⁰ But

²⁸ For example, the predominant critique of Jerusalem Judaism by the Qumran group did not concern their theology; rather, the Qumran group viewed Jerusalem Judaism to be apostate because of their practice, especially their calendar and rules of purity.

²⁹ Barclay, *Jews in the Mediterranean Diaspora*, 429-30; cf. Mark Bonington, “Fleeing Idolatry: Social Embodiment of Anti-Idolatry in the First Century” in *Idolatry: False Worship*, 107-119.

³⁰ For example, Helen K. Bond (“Standards, Shields, and Coins: Jewish Reactions to Aspects of the Roman Cult in the Time of Pilate” in *Idolatry*, 88-106) notes that Palestinian Jews lived with Roman images of deity in many aspects of their daily lives. She suggests that Jews were generally tolerant of pagan imagery as evidenced by pagan coins and temples, but they rejected pagan imagery in the context of worship. Bond also argues that Jews were “resigned pragmatists” and thought “that it was only worth objecting to pagan images when there was a reasonable chance of winning the case” (105). See also Louis

Hellenistic Jews also labored to draw clear boundary lines for acceptable practice and association. The boundary lines are essential to community identity and practice because boundary lines create the space for community identity. That is, one way of defining who is “in” a community is to define who is “out” of a community.

While discussions about idolatry for the modern reader are primarily theological, for first century authors and audiences they were first of all practical. Questions about idolatry were questions of what a person could and could not do. Definite community boundaries preserve sub-groups from assimilating entirely into the larger culture.³¹ Two of the most prominent practices that distinguished Jews from their Greco-Roman neighbors were circumcision and rejection of the gods. While circumcision was clearly defined (one either was or was not circumcised), rejection of gods and idols existed on a spectrum of practice, ranging from complete separation to participation in cultic meals while acknowledging the gods’ non-existence. There was much variation in defining what constituted idolatry and apostasy because these terms are labels given to those “outside” a community by those who are still “inside” a community. Thus, the label of

H. Feldman (*Judaism and Hellenism Reconsidered* [Supplements to the Journal for the Study of Judaism 107; Leiden: Brill, 2006], esp. 1-36) who notes that despite the prohibition of idolatry, pagan images and paintings abound in the archeological record. Feldman explains that some rabbis were tolerant of images because they did not think they represented a real threat. One rabbi even argued that he could remain faithful to Judaism and attend the bathhouse with an image of Aphrodite. His justification was that Aphrodite was merely an ornament of the bathhouse, and the bathhouse was not an ornament for Aphrodite.

³¹ John M. G. Barclay (“Who Was Considered Apostate in the Jewish Diaspora?” in *Tolerance and Intolerance in Early Judaism and Christianity* [ed. Graham N. Stanton and Guy G. Stroumsa; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998], 80) comments, “Tolerance has its limits in any community which wishes to preserve its identity. Boundaries which create distinctions between ‘insiders’ and ‘outsiders’ have to be established and maintained in a community is to survive, especially a minority community in a pluralist environment.”

being “idolatrous” or committing “apostasy” was a matter of perspective, not objective fact.³²

In order to bolster their definitions of community boundaries and idolatry, Jewish authors drew on the events of the past. Frequently Jewish authors retell events from Jewish history, not simply for the sake of memory, but in order to clarify the present. For example, the story of Asenath’s conversion in *Joseph and Asenath* is an explanation of how first century Jews could associate with Greeks and still remain within the bounds of being considered faithful to Judaism. The authors of these texts are attempting to define acceptable actions as they address real problems in their communities.

The stories of Artapanus and *Joseph and Asenath* have illustrated that communities drew different lines concerning acceptable and unacceptable associations. Jews almost unanimously agreed that they should not worship pagan gods, but there was vagueness in how this was to be applied in practice. Peder Borgen further complicates the issue by noting, “In everyday life, the negative attitude of refusal [of associating with idols in a particular way] led to the question of ‘how far’, meaning ‘where is the boundary line to be drawn?’”³³ These questions indicate the tension of attempting to

³² See, Barclay, “Who Was Considered Apostate,” 80-81.

³³ Peder Borgen, “‘Yes,’ ‘No,’ ‘How Far?’: The Participation of Jews and Christians in Pagan Cults,” in *Paul in His Hellenistic Context* (ed. Troels Engberg-Pedersen; Fortress: Minneapolis, 1995), 40. Barclay (*Jews in the Mediterranean Diaspora*, 90) notes the complexity of drawing boundary lines of acceptable action. With respect to the religious Hellenization of Jews, “At one end of the spectrum would be frequent and personal participation in sacrifice to non-Jewish Gods, but lesser levels of involvement include: observing other people sacrifice, non-sacrificial prayer, invocation of Greek Deities in magical or legal formulae, using Greek divine names in poetry, handling coins whose inscriptions bore divine titles, incorporating Greek divine names in Jewish nomenclature.” Barclay’s brief list includes activities that would likely be avoidable (e.g., using Greek divine names in poetry), but other activities are almost unavoidable in the Hellenistic context (e.g., handling coins whose inscriptions bore divine titles). Cf. Cohen, *From the Maccabees to the Mishnah*, 45.

avoid idolatry while at the same time attempting to flourish in a Greco-Roman culture that necessitated some contact with idols.³⁴ The danger, however, was that in attempting to flourish, the Jew could over-assimilate into Hellenistic culture to the degree that his own community would consider him to be apostate.³⁵ Arguments concerning idolatry, while they were made on theological premises, were arguments about practice. They defined the limits of acceptable practice and the limits of community; and thereby, they were definitions of what it meant to be a practicing member of a community.

Theological Issues

The preceding discussion has shown that the issue of idolatry is complex and cannot be reduced simply to theological differences among groups, but idolatry should not be examined to the exclusion of theology. Idolatry is an issue of what one believes about God, gods, and other things claimed by some to have divine status.³⁶ Other issues—such as where to draw the boundaries of acceptable practice—are implications of a community's theology.

³⁴ When this principle is applied the Corinthian situation, it is not difficult to understand why the Corinthians would desire to know how much association with pagan dining they could enjoy. Fotopoulos notes the entertainment, social, and economic benefits of attending these meals, “With the desire for increased social status, the necessity of social relations in Corinth, the love of rhetoric, and ample wine to facilitate conversation and cheer, the attraction to attend meals hosted by pagan associates would indeed be strong” (*Food Offered to Idols*, 178).

³⁵ On the topic of apostasy, see Barclay, “Who Was Considered Apostate in the Jewish Diaspora?”

³⁶ Newton (*Deity and Diet*, 116) for example, argues that the conflict between Paul and the Corinthians stems from a difficulty of defining God, and especially what is not God: “I contend therefore that the conflict underlying 1 Corinthians 8-10 arose because of different answers to the three questions: ‘What is an idol?’, ‘What is “idol food”?’ and ultimately ‘What constitutes “idolatrous worship”?’”

The Connection Between The Definitions of God and Non-God

One approach to understanding what is non-god is to clarify the nature of God; that is, the category of non-god or idol is dependent on the how the category of God is defined. Stuart Weeks surveys the trends and developments of the concepts of God and idolatry in the Hebrew Bible and concludes that Jewish authors progressively make God unique by redefining the category of God:

At the risk of over-simplifying, one might say that Yahweh becomes the only god, because the definition of ‘god’ is altered to fit only Yahweh; other deities, insofar as they are to be considered at all, qualify as only *šēdîm*, ‘demons’, the term used for some of them already in Deut. 32.17 and Ps. 106.37.³⁷

Whether or not one accepts Week’s description of the progressive definition of deity in the Hebrew Bible as accurate, he does helpfully point to a manner of understanding idolatry and God. An author’s understanding of what is non-god depends on what the author believes to be God, so that when an author labels something as non-god, he is necessarily comparing the non-god to his (often implicit) definition of God.

A Philosophical Approach to Defining God and Non-God

Moshe Halbertal and Avishai Margalit, in *Idolatry*, bring some clarity to the relationship between the manner in which an author represents God and the manner in which the author understands idolatry.³⁸ In attempting to clarify the agreement and disagreement among Jewish authors concerning idolatry, Halbertal and Margalit provide a valuable interpretive model for how to understand the variation in the argumentation.

³⁷ Stuart Weeks, “Man-Made Gods? Idolatry in the Old Testament,” in *Idolatry*, 20-21.

³⁸ Moshe Halbertal and Avishai Margalit, *Idolatry* (trans. Naomi Goldblum; Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992).

They examine the issue of idolatry from the standpoint of how the author represents God: “Different concepts of God create, when reversed, different concepts of idolatry.”³⁹ They look at several models of God and idolatry, of which the most relevant for our analysis of Jewish and early Christian texts are the representations of God in anthropomorphic terms and the subsequent rejection of these anthropomorphic terms.

In traditions that represent God in anthropomorphic terms (e.g., husband, father, king), idolatry is understood to be a sin committed in an interpersonal relationship; idolatry is adultery, disobedience, and disloyalty. They summarize the biblical understanding of idolatry,

According to the anthropomorphic concept of God, which is characteristic of biblical faith, idolatry is a sin within a system of interpersonal relationships, a sin analogous to those people commit with respect to other people, such as betrayal and disloyalty.⁴⁰

In these metaphors, God is understood to be a personal God with a special relationship to a chosen people. He is a jealous and avenging God, and the danger of idolatry is arousing his jealous anger.

In traditions that represent God philosophically, the goal is to purify conceptions of God from anthropomorphism, and idolatry is understood to be error or ignorance. To understand the concept of idolatry as error, Halbertal and Margalit draw on the work of Maimonides (a 12th century Jewish philosopher) who internalized the concept of idolatry. They argue that the concept of idolatry is internalized both socially and mentally. The

³⁹ Ibid., 1.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 1. What is “characteristic of biblical faith” is dependent on what one labels as the Bible. This anthropomorphic representation of God is especially true if one defines the Bible as the Hebrew Bible, as do Halbertal and Margalit. If, however, one includes a document like the Wisdom of Solomon, the manner in which “biblical faith” presents God becomes more nuanced.

social internalization of idolatry refers to the transfer of idolatry from a sin committed by other nations to a sin of which Israel is primarily guilty. “This social internalization within the community is made possible by the mental internalization whose essence is the shift from external worship to internal belief.”⁴¹ Using Maimonides as the model of philosophical Judaism, they note, “According to Maimonides the great error is anthropomorphism, which is manifested in two ways: perceiving God as a body and attributing to God emotions and a psychic life.”⁴² The philosophical system of Maimonides is not of great relevance for understanding Paul’s thought world, but the understandings of idolatry as error and God as very different than humans has precedence in Jewish thought especially from authors such as Philo and Wisdom.

Halbertal and Margalit helpfully point to a way forward in how to analyze understandings of idolatry. They describe the variation in defining idolatry in the Jewish tradition and they show the relationship between an author’s understanding of God and the understanding of idolatry. The nature of their work as a philosophical overview with an extensive scope, however, proves to be too reductionistic. Authors are confined into particular systems of thought; whereas, many authors employ multiple representations of God. Philo, for example, is adamantly opposed to anthropomorphic representations of God, but he maintains the biblical imagery of God as Father and King. Paul can talk about God’s oneness, but later he can describe other divine beings opposed to God. Halbertal and Margalit also do not adequately account for the significant concept of God

⁴¹ Ibid., 109.

⁴² Ibid., 109.

as Creator, which does not fit neatly into any one of their categories. While their study provides a valuable analytical model, they create too perfect disjunctions among the various representations of God.

A Model Adapted for Diaspora Jewish Texts

Richard Liong-Seng Phua, in *Idolatry and Authority*, attempts to clarify Halbertal and Margalit's model and apply it to Diaspora Jewish and Pauline texts. Phua summarizes his reading of Halbertal and Margalit: "The above analysis enables us to see idolatry in two broad categories, namely, *the worship of other gods or alien cult*, and *misrepresenting, or dishonoring God (Yahweh)*. These two can take place simultaneously or independently."⁴³ Phua subdivides the first category (worshipping other gods) into (1) unfaithfulness in the metaphor of the marriage relationship, and (2) disregarding ancestral customs. Phua subdivides the second category (misrepresenting/dishonoring God) into (1) the wrong kind of worship either in action or intention, (2) confusing God with nature or other gods/demons, and (3) failure to recognize the uniqueness of God. Phua then uses these classifications of idolatry as a critical tool for evaluating different views of idolatry at Corinth.

A few of the methodological problems with Phua's approach were noted in Chapter 1 and will not be repeated here. An additional fault of Phua's work is the somewhat rigid way in which he fits authors into models of representation. The greatest weakness in the application of this categorization is that Phua fails to analyze these authors at the level of their arguments. He picks representations of God from a corpus of

⁴³ Phua, *Idolatry and Authority*, 33.

an author in order to establish patterns, but he fails to analyze closely how these representations of God are woven into an argument. In this classification, Phua has lost sight of the real achievement of Halbertal and Margalit—noticing the interplay between an author's understanding of God and an author's understanding of idolatry.

Conclusions

What this section has noted is the broad ramifications that discussions concerning idolatry had for the Jewish and early-Christian audiences. While the question of what is considered to be idolatrous is not exclusively a theological issue, it also cannot be answered to the exclusion of theology. Theological decisions about permissible and impermissible associations and actions were eminently practical for these audiences. They were decisions about how Jewish and early-Christian subgroups could participate in a larger culture that was interwoven with idols. Thus, these authors are attempting to establish or reinforce boundaries for their communities. And the viability and continuance of the communities were dependent both upon inter-communal conformity of belief and practice and the distinction of the community's belief and practice from the culture around them. What is remarkable is that authors from very similar theological traditions represent God in different (perhaps incompatible?) ways in order to define idolatry and thus the boundaries of their communities. These complex configurations of what are permissible and impermissible actions are often made by appealing to different strands of representing God in the Jewish Scriptures.

The Complexity of Paul's Representations of God and Understandings of Idolatry in

1 Corinthians 8-10

Having noted that questions concerning idolatry were inseparable from social, practical, and theological discussions, we can turn to the complexity of the situation at Corinth.

Scholars typically note the apparent discrepancies in the ethical conclusions in 1 Cor 8-10 and still attempt to explain the coherence of the conclusions. This study will look at the issue of coherence from the other end of the argument; this study will examine the presuppositions of the arguments instead of the conclusions. Specifically, I am interested in examining the ways in which Paul represents God and the implications that these representations have for Paul's arguments and conclusions. This perspective—that is, analyzing the argumentative presuppositions and process—has been largely overlooked by scholars, but it opens a window into understanding the ethical conclusions at which Paul arrives. Perhaps the diversity of Paul's conclusions is intentional as he incorporates the breadth of Jewish understandings of who God is and what idolatry is in order to craft coherent arguments that are persuasive to the Corinthian audience.

Paul begins chapter 8 with the affirmation that God alone is God and any other so-called deities have no real existence. After an appeal to Paul's own example in chapter 9, he appeals to the example of the Israelites in the wilderness. In the example from Israel, God is described anthropomorphically as kingly liberator who is displeased (10:5) with his subjects and punishes their rebellion (10:8). Paul describes this deity as Christ whom the Corinthians should not test (10:9), and they should remember his faithfulness despite their temptation to faithlessness (10:12-13). In 1 Cor 10:14-22, Christ is a

personal being with whom the Corinthians participate when they take the “cup of the Lord.” The Corinthians are in danger of provoking Christ to jealousy by their participation with the “cup of demons.” First Corinthians 10:23-30 relies on the representation of God as the sole Creator. God alone is Creator with the implications that there are no other deities and any good (including food) comes ultimately from him. This overview of Paul’s argument notes the variety of ways in which God is represented and idolatry is understood. These initial observations indicate that Paul is drawing on a variety of images from Judaism and inserting himself into larger conversations.

Paul in Context: A Participant in Larger Discussions

This project locates Paul as an author who is interacting with larger conversations occurring in Hellenistic Judaism. Its methodology is to compare Paul to similar arguments—not narrative texts such as Artapanus’ *Fragments* or *Joseph and Asenath*—made by Hellenistic Jews, concerning idolatry in order to understand how Paul is crafting his argument in relationship with his tradition. Therefore, it is necessary to show that Paul is aware of and participating in these larger conversations.

Paul’s Interaction with Jewish Discussions Described

That Paul was influenced by both Judaism and Hellenism is evident in something as basic as citing the Jewish Scriptures in Greek. It is incorrect, however, to think of Paul’s interactions with the Corinthians as a conflict between two definable and entirely separable systems of thought, with Paul representing Judaism and the Corinthians representing Hellenism. Jason von Ehrenkrook explains the problem of assuming Judaism and Hellenism to be two definable and non-interacting systems of thought:

Hellenism was not a clearly defined, tangible, monolithic culture that Judaism could either *accept* or *reject*, as if Judaism were a “cultural vacuum” that could potentially be filled; rather, there were many Hellenisms, so to speak, numerous and variegated *regional* expression of hybrid cultures. Similarly, the notion of Judaism as a bounded ideological movement obscures “the ongoing messy negotiations that constitute culture.”⁴⁴

Paul, like other Hellenistic Jewish authors, was attempting to define the boundaries of acceptable interactions that a Christian (or Jew) could have with Hellenism without becoming assimilated into Hellenism to the point of overly-compromising religious distinctives.⁴⁵

That Paul quotes the Jewish Scriptures also indicates that he is positioning himself as an interpreter of and contributor to larger arguments. Karl-Gustav Sandelin’s comment concerning the relationship of Paul and Philo undoubtedly is representative of the relationship between Paul and the larger Hellenistic Jewish traditions: “In his way of handling what he sees as idolatry Paul no doubt is a heir of the same Jewish tradition which Philo represents.”⁴⁶ Hellenistic Judaism—coming both from the Diaspora and

⁴⁴ Jason von Ehrenkrook, *Sculpting Idolatry in Flavian Rome: (An)Iconic Rhetoric in the Writings of Flavius Josephus* (SBLEJL 33; Atlanta, Society of Biblical Literature, 2011), 37-38.

⁴⁵ As was mentioned earlier, the point at which one has overly-compromised the distinctives and become apostate is subjective label. Moreover, an individual labeled as an “apostate” by a community might not consider himself to be an apostate.

⁴⁶ Karl-Gustav Sandelin, “Philo and Paul on Alien Religion: A Comparison,” in *Lux Humana, Lux Aeterna: Essays on Biblical and Related Themes in Honour of Lars Aejmelaes* (ed. Antti Mustakallio; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2005), 242; cf. Sandelin, *Attraction and Danger of Alien Religion: Studies in Early Judaism and Christianity* (WUNT 290; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2012), 199. Niels Hyldahl (“Paul and Hellenistic Judaism in Corinth,” in *The New Testament and Hellenistic Judaism* [ed. Peder Borgen and Søren Giversen; Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1997], 204-16) probably overstates the comparisons between the Corinthian Christians and Hellenistic Judaism, especially in the form of Philo of Alexandria. “These features are admittedly few, and they do not allow the exegete to determine, with any reasonable certainty, the details of the philosophy of Apollos. However, they do make it clear enough that his philosophy was most likely akin to the philosophy of Philo of Alexandria . . . With Apollos a genuine piece of Hellenistic philosophy made its way from Alexandria (cf. Acts 18:24) to Corinth and entered successfully the scene of Paul’s Christian community there” (214...215). Hyldahl thinks that Apollos’ influence—and by implication the direct influence of thinkers like Philo—is especially prominent in the

Palestine—is a fitting comparison to Paul because it represents a group of diverse interpretations of Jewish theology and practice both in opposition to and in acceptance of aspects of Greco-Roman culture. Both Pauline Christianity and Hellenistic Judaism bear the stamp of Hellenism(s) while they also resist complete conformity.

Paul's Interaction with Jewish Discussions Illustrated

While it is certainly true that Paul is a pivotal and at times novel thinker, he does not address the problem of idolatry apart from the preconceptions of his Jewish tradition. Paul is thinking as a Jew through the lens of his experience of the risen Christ. Paul explicitly quotes his Jewish background, an act in itself that indicates he is taking a certain position within the stream of Jewish interpretations concerning idolatry, even if he may wish to create a slightly new position in light of his experience of the risen Lord. Because Paul is crafting an argument as a participant in larger conversations occurring in Hellenistic Judaism, it is valuable to compare and contrast his argument in 1 Cor 8-10 to other contemporaneous Hellenistic Jewish arguments. In subsequent chapters—3, 4, and 5—I will examine the works of The Book of Wisdom, Philo's *De decalogo*, and Josephus' *Contra Apionem*. Using these authors' polemics against idolatry as representative examples, we can then examine the places where Paul intersects with their arguments, deviates from them, or selectively appropriates them. Because the ultimate goal of this project is to gain a better understanding of Paul's argument in the context of his Jewish tradition, I do not describe at length narrative texts in which idolatry is

references to γνῶσις in 1 Corinthians 8. While I certainly agree with Hyldal that comparison to other Hellenistic Jewish authors helps in understanding Paul's thought, it is better to place Paul as a participant in larger conversations occurring in Hellenistic Judaism than to make him a respondent to a particular example of Hellenistic Judaism in the form of Philo of Alexandria.

discussed (E.g., Maccabean Literature, *Joseph and Asenath*, and *Liber antiquitatum biblicarum*). Texts such as these will be referred to in the analysis of 1 Cor 8-10 in terms of their theological and ethical content, but they are not as useful for understanding how Paul's rhetoric works.

In order to demonstrate Paul's interaction with these larger conversations occurring in Hellenistic Judaism, I will briefly describe the commonly recognized interaction between the Wisdom of Solomon and Rom 1:18-32. The majority of scholars note the strong similarities between the arguments of Rom 1:18-31 and Wis 13-15.⁴⁷ They do not agree, however, concerning the type of relationship between these texts. Scholars have proposed relationships between the two texts ranging from direct literary dependence to dependence on a shared tradition.⁴⁸ The nature of this relationship is complicated by the debate concerning the date of Wisdom. My intent is not to prove or

⁴⁷ This point has become so accepted in scholarship that offering an exhaustive list of references would prove unhelpful. Only the most significant, recent studies are referenced. Alexander J. Lucas, "Romans 1:18–2:11 and the Substructure of Psalm 106(105): Evocations of the Calf?" Ph.D. diss., Loyola University Chicago, 2012; Jonathan A. Linebaugh, "God, Grace, and Righteousness: *Wisdom of Solomon* and Paul's Letter to the Romans in Conversation" (Ph.D. diss. University of Durham, 2011); Douglas A. Campbell, *The Deliverance of God: An Apocalyptic Rereading of Justification in Paul* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), esp. 360-62; Joseph R. Dodson, *The 'Powers' of Personification: Rhetorical Purpose in the Book of Wisdom and the Letter to the Romans* (BZNW 161; Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2008). For the lexical similarities, see Timo Laato, *Paul and Judaism: An Anthropological Approach* (trans. T. McElwain; South Florida Studies in the History of Judaism 115; Atlanta: Scholar's Press, 1995), 94-5; Campbell, *Deliverance of God*, 361-2. For influence of the Wisdom of Solomon on 1 Corinthians, see Von Rodrigo J. Morales, "The Spirit, the Righteous Sufferer, and the Mysteries of God: Echoes of Wisdom in 1 Corinthians?" *BZ* 54 (2010): 54-72; Matthias Konradt, "Die korinthische Weisheit und das Wort vom Kreuz: Erwägungen zur korinthischen Problemkonstellation und paulinischen Intention in 1 Kor 1-4," *ZNW* 94 (2003): 181-214. Morales argues that Paul is directly dependent on Wisdom especially in formulating his pneumatology.

⁴⁸ Lucas, "Romans 1:18–2:11 and the Substructure of Psalm 106(105)," 15-20. See also Beverly Roberts Gaventa, "The Rhetoric of Death in the Wisdom of Solomon and the Letters of Paul," *The Listening Heart* (1987): 127-45.

disprove a particular relationship between Paul and Wisdom. It is sufficient for my argument that Wisdom and Paul are shown to be participating in the same conversations.

A thorough comparison between Wisdom and Romans would take this study off course, but it is necessary to recognize that Wisdom and Paul are both interjecting themselves into pre-existing conversations in order to offer instruction for their particular communities. What is clear in Rom 1:18-32 is that Paul is relying on and adapting an argument from his Jewish tradition. Thomas H. Tobin summarizes Paul's technique:

In presenting this description, Paul quite clearly used standard Hellenistic Jewish apologetic motifs against *Gentile* religiosity and conduct, and his Roman Christian audience naturally would have understood it in this way, at least at first. ... Because his description basically followed the pattern of traditional Hellenistic Jewish apologetic against Gentile religion and morality, his Roman Christian audience would have easily understood it and agreed with it. In this sense, Rom 1:18-32 is not so much an argument as an exposition of viewpoints he and the Roman Christians shared. On the surface at least, there was nothing controversial about it.⁴⁹

Tobin goes on to explain that although Paul largely repeats this traditional argument, he modifies it for his own context and argument. Most notably, Paul omits the word "Gentiles" as a specifying term in his description of the people against whom God's wrath is directed. Moreover, Paul emphasizes that God's wrath is directed against *all unrighteousness*. The implication of these two modifications (the omission of "Gentiles" and inclusion of "all") is that God's wrath is directed also against unrighteous Jews.

⁴⁹ Thomas H. Tobin, S.J. *Paul's Rhetoric in Its Contexts: The Argument of Romans* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 2004), 109-10. Tobin (*Paul's Rhetoric*, 109 n. 10, 11, 12.) expertly references Hellenistic Jewish arguments that are similar to Romans. Campbell (*Deliverance of God*, 362) emphasizes Paul's disagreement with the theological program of Wisdom.

Perhaps the best illustration of the relationship between the texts occurs in the way that Paul and Wisdom make their argument against pagan religiosity.⁵⁰ The similarities in the overall structure of the arguments indicate at least a shared conversation—if not dependence or a shared source. Both texts attack pagan religiosity on the grounds that natural theology makes pagans culpable for not worshipping God, but the appeal to natural theology is not unique to Romans and Wisdom (cf. Philo, *Decal.* 58-63). The sequence of the arguments’ progression of natural theology, sexual immorality, equating idolatry to sexual immorality, and a vice list does appear to be unique to these texts.⁵¹ A brief look at these themes will demonstrate the similarities between Romans and Wisdom that suggest a connection of some kind. While the differences between the texts are numerous, this analysis focuses on their similarities.

Wisdom begins its critique of pagan religiosity with a natural theology that asserts the culpability of humanity for not understanding God’s nature by examining the natural world (Wis 13:1-9). Romans’ point is slightly different—humans recognized God but rejected God—but it too begins its critique by appealing to natural theology (Rom 1:18-21). Both texts mention the foolishness of idolatry (Wis 13:10-14:2; Rom 1:22), and then describe how false belief caused humans to engage in sexual immorality (Wis 14:12, 24; Rom 1:24-27). Then a vice list follows (Wis 14:25-26; Rom 1:28-30). From here, the texts proceed in different directions. Wisdom continues with the second half of its

⁵⁰ For critiques similar to Wisdom’s, see *Let. Arist.* 128-71; *Sib. Or.* 3:8-45; *T. Naph.* 3.3-5; Philo, *Decal* 52-81; *Spec.* 1.13-31; Josephus, *C. Ap.* 2.236-54. The structure is shared only by Wisdom and Romans.

⁵¹ On this point, I am indebted to Campbell, *Deliverance of God*, 360; cf. Brendan Byrne, S. J. “*Romans*” (SP 6; Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 1996), 64-5.

chiastic structure, and Romans turns its attention to condemnation of all humans, especially those who judge others. While an argument can be made for literary dependence, I am only suggesting that the similarities in argument structure suggest that Paul is aware of this conversation. Moreover, Paul inserts himself into the debate and puts it to his own ends. Brendan Byrne comments on Paul's relationship especially to Wisdom, "These parallels show that in 1:18-32 Paul argues out of a defined tradition in Hellenistic Judaism. Within the framework of the intra-Jewish dialogue that he is conducting at this point and for his own rhetorical purposes, he is beguiling the implied reader with a conventional polemic against the Gentile world and its idolatry."⁵² Whether or not this "defined tradition in Hellenistic Judaism" is the Wisdom of Solomon, a group of texts, the teaching of a school, etc., is not significant. The significance of Roman's argument compared to Wisdom's argument is that their similarities are too strong to suggest that they are not at least branches of the same tree.

Paul's Novelty in his Interactions with Jewish Discussions

The danger in reading Paul alongside or in the context of other authors is that one could interpret Paul simply as a reservoir of preexisting streams of interpretation. While the present study is built upon the assertion that Paul is a participant in larger conversations, Paul is certainly a novel thinker who moves the discussion in new directions in light of both his christological lens and the Corinthian situations. What

⁵² Byrne, *Romans*, 65; cf. Alec J. Lucas, "Reorienting the Structural Paradigm and Social Significance of Romans 1:18-32" *JBL* 131 (2012): 121-41; "Unearthing an Intra-Jewish Interpretive Debate? Romans 1:18-2:4; Wisdom of Solomon 11-19; and Psalms 105(104)-107(106)," *Annali di Storia dell'Essegesi* 27 (2010): 69-91; "Distinct Portraits and the Parallel Development of the Knowledge of God in Romans 1:18-32 and Wisdom of Solomon," in *Christian Body, Christian Self: Concepts of Early Christian Personhood* (ed. Clare K. Rothschild and Trevor W. Thompson; WUNT 284; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2011), 61-82.

makes Paul different is the centrality of Christ, the claims made about Christ, and the effects that these claims have on the manner in which he understands idolatry. Paul views the issue of idol-food through a christological lens by which he understands the divine Lord to be present among the Corinthian Christians. Standard Jewish assertions of God's oneness are modified to include the unique role of the "one Lord, Jesus Christ" (1 Cor 8:6), and the ethical implications of a Christian's associations with idols must be examined in light of Christ's death on another's behalf (1 Cor 8:11). Causing another believer to stumble by means of one's associations with idols is equivalent to offending Christ himself (1 Cor 8:12). Paul understands Christ to have an active presence when the believers celebrate the eucharist (11:29-32), and this presence has implications for how a Christian should relate both to the divine Lord and a fellow Christian. Christians should be careful lest their associations with idolatry provoke the Lord to jealousy (1 Cor 10:22) because there is a fundamental incompatibility between participating in the Lord's Table and the feasts of idols (1 Cor 10:21). The shared meal and ritual of the Lord's Table also implies obligations in this inter-communal relationship (1 Cor 10:16-18). The active presence of Christ in establishing inter-communal bonds, judging improper action, and being jealous of idols governs the way in which Paul understands idolatry. This christological lens preserves God's transcendent unassailability, and it also preserves the divine Lord's immanent presence.

Another aspect of Paul's argument that is different from those in *Wisdom*, *De decalogo*, and *Contra Apionem* is that Paul addresses a very specific situation and in doing so quotes the positions taken by his audience. First Corinthians describes an

ongoing conversation in which Paul attempts to clarify his position against the Corinthian objections to his previous instruction. In addition to the unique situation of the ongoing argument, Paul also addresses an audience with a background in Gentile religiosity. The importance of the audience's background cannot be overstated because it affects the primary categories with which the audience interprets Paul's comments. For example, prior to their recognition of Jesus as the messiah, the categories by which the Corinthian Christians probably understood the divine were in terms of a competitive pluralism of deities occupying the divine realm. Their beliefs in the Jewish God and Jesus as Lord were not simply theological shifts; these beliefs carried many implications for the conduct of daily life. The prevalence of cults in Roman Corinth meant that Corinthian Christians would have to reevaluate their professional, social, and familial interactions. Paul's arguments—like those by Wisdom, Philo, and Josephus—were not theological questions distanced from daily practice. Rather, questions about idolatry were imminently practical; they were questions about one could and could not do.

Summary and Conclusions

This chapter began by noting the complexity of defining what it means to be idolatrous. At the heart of the issue are community boundaries and self-definition of faithful participation in the community at the exclusion of thoughts and acts considered to be idolatrous. As Jews, and later Christians, participated in the larger Greco-Roman world, they were forced to define what acts were permissible and what acts constituted apostasy. *Joseph and Asenath* and Artapanus illustrate the remarkably different approaches of two, roughly contemporaneous Alexandrian Jews. They represent nearly opposite ends of the

spectrum as Artapanus describes Moses as fully integrated into Egyptian life to the point that he can establish Egyptian cults for social expediency and still remain within the bounds of what the author considers to be faithful Judaism. In contrast, *Joseph and Asenath* describes Joseph's faithfulness to God in terms of separating himself from dining and associating with Egyptians. He navigates the larger Egyptian culture by taking care to remain distinctly Jewish.

These authors, like other Jewish and Christian authors who discuss idolatry, were not engaging in theological conversations removed from everyday practice; rather, they were answering for their communities the questions of acceptable participation of a Jew or Christian in a larger Gentile context. Because idols and cult association were woven into the fabric of Greco-Roman culture, discussions about idolatry for the first century audiences involved social issues of how to participate in this culture and the boundaries of a particular community. Driving these social and community distinctions are the theological convictions of Jews and Christians. Drawing on the work of Halbertal & Margalit and Richard Phua, I suggested that a way forward in understanding authors' arguments about idolatry is to examine the manner in which they represent God.

By briefly looking at Paul's argument in 1 Cor 8-10, it was noted that his (seemingly) inconsistent ethical conclusions correspond to different theological representations of who God is. My contribution to understanding the argument of 1 Corinthians 8-10 will be to analyze the issue of idolatry from the standpoint of Paul's representation of God in order to examine the impact that this stance has on his argument. This approach will compare the way that Paul argues to other Hellenistic Jews in order to

clarify the position that Paul takes concerning the acceptable interactions with Greco-Roman cults, gods, and cult-images. Paul is a participant in these broader conversations by his appropriation of previous arguments and his novel shaping of the tradition in light of his experience of the risen Lord.

CHAPTER 3

WISDOM'S POLEMIC AGAINST FALSE RELIGION

Introduction

The previous chapters have demonstrated both the complexity of how Jewish authors understood idolatry and that this complexity has been largely overlooked in the analysis of 1 Cor 8-10. When Paul argues that Christian associations with idols are either permissible or prohibited, he is participating in larger discussions of how Hellenistic Jews understood idolatry and represented the nature of God. Other Jews living in the Hellenistic world were similarly attempting to convince their communities concerning the acceptable boundaries for their communities. In order to understand Paul better, he must be read within the context of these larger arguments. Understanding the ways in which Paul's argument is similar to and different from other Hellenistic Jewish arguments significantly helps to explain Paul's argument. It was proposed that analyzing the manner in which Hellenistic Jewish authors represent God, especially in extended polemics, is a valuable lens for understanding their critiques of pagan worship, idol-gods, and idols.

One of the most well-known, Hellenistic Jewish critiques of idolatry comes from the Wisdom of Solomon.¹ Little is known about the author or the author's context. Due to the differences among sections of the book, some scholars think that Wisdom was

¹ This assessment and citations of the Greek text are taken from Joseph Ziegler, *Sapientia Salomonis* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1980). Translations, unless otherwise noted, are the author's. When Wisdom interacts with the Jewish Scriptures, the author is using the Greek version, the Septuagint.

composed over time by a school. Most argue for Alexandrian provenance on the basis of Wisdom's critique of (Egyptian) theriolatry, the exodus theme, and Wisdom's affinities to Philo of Alexandria.² The most probable time period of composition is in the early to mid-first century CE, but a date from 100 BCE to 40 C.E. is possible.³ Wisdom's euhemeristic explanation of idolatry in terms of a desire to worship a distant ruler (14:16-20) is most probably explained by early emperor worship. Moreover, the author seems to

² For arguments for Alexandrian provenance, see Marie-Françoise Baslez, "The Author of Wisdom and the Cultured Environment of Alexandria," in *The Book of Wisdom in Modern Research: Studies on Tradition, Redaction, and Theology* (ed. Angelo Passaro and Giuseppe Bellia; New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2005), 31-52; Addison G. Wright, "Wisdom," in *NJBC*, 510-11; John J. Collins, *Between Athens and Jerusalem: Jewish Identity in the Hellenistic Diaspora* (2d. ed. Biblical Resource Series; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 195; John M. G. Barclay, *Jews in the Mediterranean Diaspora: From Alexander to Trajan (323 BCE-117CE)* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1996), 451-2; Michael Kolarcik, "The Book of Wisdom: Introduction, Commentary, and Reflections," in *NIB* (ed. Leander E Keck; vol. 5; Nashville: Abingdon, 1997), 438-9; contra Dieter Georgi, *Weisheit Salomos* (JSHRZ 3.4; Güterloh: Mohn, 1980), 396. For a discussion of the Alexandrian setting as a context of the idol-polemic, see Manfred Görg, "Die Religionskritik in Weish 13,1f: Beobachtungen zur Entstehung der Sapientia-Salomonis im späthellinistischen Alexandria," in *Lehrerin der Gerechtigkeit: Studien zum Buch der Weisheit* (ed. Helmut Engel, S.J.; EThS 19; Leipzig: Benno, 1991), 13-25. Wisdom shares a number of features with Philo's *Decal*. They structure their idol polemics similarly and tend to avoid overt references to Jewish history while being written from a position of strong devotion to the promotion of Judaism. Both are law oriented in their piety, but they promote the law of nature that is accessible to all humans. See Collins, *From Athens*, 200; David Winston, *The Wisdom of Solomon: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (AB 43; New York: Doubleday, 1979), 59-63; Chrysostome Larcher, *Études sur le Livre de la Sagesse* (EBib; Paris: J. Gabalda, 1969) 151-78; Maurice Gilbert, S.J., *La critique des dieux dans le Livre de la Sagesse (Sg 13-15)* (AnBib 53; Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1973), 258-263; "Sagesse de Salomon (ou Livre de la Sagesse)," in *DBSup* (vol. 11, 1996), 97.

³ See Barclay, *Jews in the Mediterranean Diaspora*, 451. James C. VanderKam (*An Introduction to Early Judaism* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001], 124-5) thinks that it was written in the early first century of the Common Era. Chrysostome Larcher (*Le Livre de la Sagesse ou la Sagesse de Salomon* [3 vols.; EBib; Paris: J. Gabalda, 1983-5], 141-61) assesses the date to be late first century B.C.E. Winston (*Wisdom*, 20-25) argues for a date during the reign of Caligula (37-41 CE); cf. Leo G. Perdue, "Rhetoric and the Art of Persuasion in the Wisdom of Solomon," in *Christianity and Hellenistic Judaism: Social and Literary Contexts for the New Testament* (eds. Stanley E. Porter and Andrew W. Pitts; Texts and Editions for New Testament Study 10; Leiden: Brill, 2013), 358-60. Samuel Cheon (*The Exodus Story in the Wisdom of Solomon: A Study in Biblical Interpretation* [JSPSup 23; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997], esp. 151) agrees with Winston's assessment of the date. Through a social-scientific study of the text, he concludes that the text has several functions in the wake of Alexandrian riots in 38 C.E.: (1) identifying the audience as the righteous innocents (2) identifying the audience's enemies as the persecutors under God's judgment (3) identifying present history positively thus giving the audience hope (4) counteracting the anti-Semitic prejudice of the Gentiles.

be responding to a desperate situation in his community in which the hope of immortality and the eschatological judgment of the wicked become especially significant. This desperate situation is most likely a description of the pogroms in the wake of Flaccus' pronouncements. These factors make the most likely date sometime around 40 C.E.

The assessment of Wisdom's purpose and tone has a great impact on how the book is interpreted. Especially when it comes to the idol polemic, it is necessary to discern whether Wisdom is antagonistic toward Greco-Roman culture and thus attacks it or Wisdom thinks Judaism and Hellenism to be fundamentally compatible and thus criticizes only certain aspects of Greco-Roman culture. The different outlooks can be represented by the approaches taken by John Barclay and John Collins. John Barclay, in *Jews in the Mediterranean Diaspora*, analyzes documents from the Jewish Diaspora and labels them according to their convergence or antagonism with Greco-Roman culture. While he admits that Wisdom is a challenging document to assess, he interprets "*Wisdom* as an educated and deeply Hellenized exercise in cultural aggression."⁴ Barclay does admit that the central section of the book has a more positive outlook concerning the compatibility of Jewish and Greco-Roman cultures, but he argues, "The potential of a more integrated cultural vision suggested by the 'Book of Wisdom' (6.12-9.18) is never

⁴ Barclay, *Jews in the Mediterranean Diaspora*, 184. Barclay's analysis relies most heavily on chs. 11-19 in which God's people are contrasted with those who are foolish and ungodly. The last section of the book (chs. 11-19) parallels the opening of the book (1:1-6:11) with the emphasis on opposition and enemies. The transitional chapter 10 describes wisdom's role in rescuing God's people from enemies. The retelling of the exodus story portrays God's people as persecuted by their enemies and delivered by God. Thus the book begins and ends with the portrayal of God's people being under the attack of enemies. Winston (*Wisdom*, 63-4) generally agrees with Barclay that Wisdom is antagonistic to Greek culture. He thinks it is written to other Jews in order to encourage pride in the Jewish life.

fulfilled.”⁵ Barclay concludes that Wisdom’s antagonistic critique provides hope and encouragement to Jews that their enemies will be punished and they will be vindicated.

Collins responds to Barclay’s assessment and claims that “Despite the polemical cast of chapters 11-19, the dominant tone of the Wisdom of Solomon is one of convergence with Greek culture, typified by the portrayal of wisdom in Greek philosophical terms in the middle section of the book.”⁶ He notes that Wisdom’s critique of popular Greco-Roman religion parallels the critiques that philosophical Greeks, especially Stoic and Cynic philosophers, were already making. While he admits that the tone of chs. 13-15 is polemical, the polemic is not directed against the Alexandrian Greek audience; rather, it is a polemic that Wisdom attempts to make with Alexandrian Greeks against the Egyptians:

It is clear, then, that the critique of idolatry in Wis. Sol. does not represent an unqualified opposition to the Gentile world. Rather, the author was attempting to make common cause with enlightened Greeks who would share his contempt for popular superstition, and especially the crass forms of idolatry practiced in Egypt.⁷

⁵ Barclay, *Jews in the Mediterranean Diaspora*, 190. Alec J. Lucas (“Distinct Portraits and Parallel Development of the Knowledge of God in Romans 1:18-32 and Wisdom of Solomon 13-15,” in *Christian Body, Christian Self: Concepts of Early Personhood* [ed. Claire K. Rothschild and Trevor W. Thompson; WUNT 284; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2011], 61-82) argues that even this section that is typically interpreted as more universalistic may have an implicit particularism when read in light of the idol polemic that follows: “...Wis 13-15 depicts the knowledge of God as something not even nature worshippers achieved, much less idolaters and theriolaters. This difference, in turn, I argued, provides a neglected window into the tension between universalism and particularism in Wisdom, one that reveals implicit particularism in the epistemological anthropology of Wis 7-9, chapters typically regarded as belonging to the most universal portion of the book” (82).

⁶ Collins, *From Athens*, 202.

⁷ John J. Collins, *Jewish Wisdom in the Hellenistic Age* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1997), 212-3. See his critique of Barclay’s assessment of the idol polemic, Collins, “Natural Theology and Biblical Tradition: The Case of Hellenistic Judaism,” *CBQ* 60 (1998): 8-10.

Collins also compares Wisdom's approach to Philo's and notes the strong similarities. Even Barclay admits that Philo is an example of cultural convergence, so Collins thinks it is inconsistent for him to conclude that Wisdom's very similar argument is an example of cultural aggression. According to Collins, Wisdom and Philo both believe that Jewish Scriptures and Greek philosophy are compatible, and the critique of Greco-Roman religion must be read in light of Philo and Wisdom appealing to philosophy to demonstrate its agreement with the Jewish Scriptures.⁸ Further, Israel serves as the paradigm for righteousness, but Israel is not an exclusive paradigm as righteousness can be deduced partly from proper philosophical reflection on nature.⁹

In their assessments, Collins appeals more to the material in Wisdom 1-10 and Barclay relies more on Wisdom 11-19. These emphases are understandable because both Collins and Barclay admit that chs. 11-19, the section in which the idol polemic is contained, are more antagonistic. This antagonism, however, is not necessarily directed to all Greco-Roman culture. Collins has interpreted the idol polemic as making use of critiques already established by Greco-Roman authors. Their disagreement concerning

⁸ The learnedness of the author in Wisdom is undeniable, but Barclay (*Jews in the Mediterranean Diaspora*, 184) assesses the author's use of his learning differently: "the author of *Wisdom* employs his considerable learning not to integrate his Judaism with his environment but to construct all the more sophisticated an attack upon it!"

⁹ Collins appeals in part to Wisdom's practice of not offering the specific names of the characters in Israel's history. Barclay (*Jews in the Mediterranean Diaspora*, 190) responds, "The anonymity of the characters is not designed to establish a broad typology capable of including the righteous of all nations. It is a stylistic and rhetorical device, in the Alexandrian tradition of literary allusion; the biblically informed audience will know well enough to whom 'God's people' refers." In addition to Barclay's critique, there may be an aspect of "insider knowledge" that forms a bond between the author and audience against those on the outside who would not be able to recognize all the allusions.

the purpose of Wisdom is based, in part, on their analyses of the function of the idol polemic. Collins interprets the idol polemic as an argument made with educated Jews and Greeks against popular Egyptian religion. Barclay interprets the idol polemic as an argument made with educated Jews against popular Greek and Egyptian religion.

The assessment of Wisdom's genre also affects the way in which the sections are understood. The most convincing argument is that Wisdom is written in the form of *logos protreptikos*, a genre that Winston defines as "a highly charged plea designed to persuade a large audience to succumb to the charms of the philosophical life"¹⁰ Even though Wisdom does not employ many imperatives directly aimed at the audience, Wisdom is still attempting to make a persuasive argument for a particular course of action. Part of pursuing wisdom is forsaking the foolish and false worship practices that characterize the enemies of God's people. The author retells Jewish history in terms of God's provision for God's people and God's judgment on their enemies, and the author wants the audience to identify themselves as God's people as they pursue wisdom and forsake folly. Thus, the most likely audience is Jewish. The anonymous references to Jewish historical figures bolster the "insider appeal" because the work is intelligible to those who are familiar with Jewish history. Although the intended audience was Jewish, the author's interactions with Greco-Roman philosophy probably would have precluded widespread

¹⁰ Winston, *Wisdom*, 18-20; cf. Friedrich Focke, *Die Entstehung der Weisheit Salomos: ein Beitrag zur Geschichte des jüdischen hellenismus* (FRLANT 5.22; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1913), 85; James M. Reese, *Hellenistic Influence on the Book of Wisdom and Its Contents* (AnBib 41; Rome: Biblical Institute, 1970), 117-21; Wright, "Wisdom," 511; Perdue, "Rhetoric," 241-71.

reception by most Jews; thus, the author likely writes to educated, Hellenistic Jews who understood themselves to be Jewish but also conversant with the Greco-Roman world.

The analysis below will argue that Wisdom's idol polemic, in line with other Jewish idol polemics, makes a persuasive—although perhaps not fair—critique of pagan religion in order to dissuade Jews from engaging in idolatry and give them pride in their ancestral beliefs.¹¹ While Collins does make some helpful points concerning the argument of Wisdom, a better explanation is that Wisdom, especially in the idol polemic, adopts some Greco-Roman arguments and rhetorical devices, not to demonstrate convergence with Greco-Roman culture, but in order to make a sophisticated critique of Greco-Roman religion, Egyptian worship, and even Greco-Roman philosophy. The purpose of retelling the exodus is so that the author can make sense of the present circumstances of the Alexandrian Jewish community in the face of opposition. The author creates an argument that pits “us” against “them” and “our God” against “their gods.”

The Structure and the Argument

While there is some debate concerning the structure of Wisdom, I will subdivide the book into three sections with two additional excursus:

- 1) Wisdom's gift of immortality (1:1-6:21)
- 2) Wisdom's nature and Solomon's pursuit of wisdom (6:22-11:1)

¹¹ Winston (*Wisdom*, 63) similarly describes the purpose, “The author is primarily addressing his fellow Jews in an effort to encourage them to take pride in their traditional faith. He seeks to convince them that *their* way of life, rooted in the worship of the One true God, is of an incomparably higher order than that of their pagan neighbors, whose idolatrous polytheism has sunk them into the mire of immorality. Moreover, he attempts to justify their present suffering through the promise of immortality as a reward for their steadfast perseverance in the pursuit of righteousness.”

3) Wisdom's role in the Exodus (11:2-19:22)
 Excursus 1: God's mercy (11:15-12:22)
 Excursus 2: Idolatry (13:1-15:19)¹²

In the first section (Wis 1:1-6:21), the author describes the oppression of the righteous and their ultimate vindication by God. The author begins this section with an exhortation for rulers to seek the Lord (1:1-2) and concludes with an exhortation for rulers to honor wisdom (6:21). God's justice will be realized fully in the future when the righteous will be rewarded with immortality and the wicked will be punished. Even though the righteous might appear to suffer harm—such as the barren (3:13-4:6) and those who die young (4:7-15)—God will reward them with life: “But the souls of the righteous are in the hands of God, and torment will not touch them in any way” (Wis 3:1).¹³ In contrast, God will punish the ungodly—those who have despised wisdom—for mistreating the righteous and rebelling against God (3:10-11). There is a tension between the author's particularism and universalism. On the one hand God is found by those who do not test God (1:2), wisdom is kind (1:6), and wisdom “hastens to make itself known to those who desire” (6:13).¹⁴ God and wisdom are accessible to all. But on the other hand, God's

¹² See for example, Winston, *Wisdom*, 4; Lester L. Grabbe, *Wisdom of Solomon* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997), 13-17. For an argument for a two-part structure, see Addison G. Wright, S.S., “The Structure of Wisdom 11-19,” *CBQ* 27 (1965): 28-34; “The Structure of the Book of Wisdom,” *Biblica* 48 (1967): 165-84. For the history of the debate concerning the structure, see Maurice Gilbert, “The Literary Structure of the Book of Wisdom: A Study of Various Views,” in *The Book of Wisdom in Modern Research: Studies on Tradition, Redaction, and Theology* (ed. Angelo Passaro and Giuseppe Bellia; Deuterocanonical and Cognate Literature Yearbook 2005; New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2005), 19-31.

¹³ Kolarcik (“Book of Wisdom,” 444) notes the chiasmic structure of this opening section which centers on Wis 3:1-4:20. He further notes the structure of this central section wherein the author uses the parallel diptych system to heighten the contrast between the righteous and the wicked.

¹⁴ Φιλάνθρωπον (1:6; cf. 7:23; 12:19), along with its noun-form φιλιανθρωπία, is a term with a rich history in Stoic and Middle Platonic philosophy. See David Winston, “Philo's Ethical Theory,” *ANRW*

“grace and mercy are with his elect” (4:15). The author appeals to two unnamed Jews (Enoch and Elijah) as examples of the righteous. While the author describes the universal accessibility of wisdom, the section pits the elect righteous (who are exemplified by Jewish heroes) against the oppressive wicked. The author comforts the righteous by assuring them that they ultimately will be rewarded and their enemies will be punished. The author intends to comfort his oppressed Jewish audience by describing God’s eschatological vindication.

The second section (Wis 6:22-11:1) is an extended praise of wisdom and her role in the lives of the righteous. The tone is different as the perspective shifts from third person in the first section to the first person in the second section. Although he is not named, Solomon is the implied speaker who embodies the righteous who seek wisdom

2.2.1, 372-416; Peder Borgen, *Philo of Alexandria: An Exegete for His Time* (NovTSup 86; Leiden: Brill, 1997), 243-260. Greek authors can use φιλανθρωπία to describe the benevolence of the gods (e.g., Aristophanes, *Pax*, 392-93; Plato, *Symp.*, 189C; Plutarch, *Mor.*, 758) and of the king (Plato, *Leg.*, 713D; *Symp.* 189D) to their subjects. While φιλανθρωπία does have a universalistic tone in Greco-Roman philosophical writings, there are not necessarily universalistic implications with its use by Jewish authors. Philo, for example, thinks that the virtue of humanity is particularized most perfectly in the Mosaic Law. Even in the special laws that are most distinctly Jewish, humanity is enacted. The greatest virtue and goal of the law is piety, but one’s relationship with other humans should be characterized by humanity (e.g., Philo, *Decal.* 164; *Spec.* 1.128, 221, 295, 324; 2.39, 63, 79, 110; 4.97; cf. *C. Ap.* 2.145-6). Philo’s particularistic understanding of φιλανθρωπία expressed in the Mosaic Law is clearest in *Virtues* 51-174. Collins (*Between Athens and Jerusalem*, 202) explains this tension in Wisdom, “Wisdom is characterized as *philanthrōpon* (1:6; 7:23), a Stoic term with broad universalist implications. On the other hand, we are told that God hated ‘those who lived long ago in your holy land’ because of their abominable practices (12:3-4), and the author has nothing good to say about the Canaanites and Egyptians. The author wanted to affirm simultaneously a universalist doctrine of divine *philanthrōpia* and the biblical notion of the election of Israel. The two ideas are not easily compatible.” While the concept of φιλανθρωπία in the Greco-Roman world was generally put to universalizing ends, its adoption by Jewish authors is not unqualified. Rather, when an author such as Philo or Wisdom appropriates this term, it is shaped by their particularistic understanding of God’s relationship with a particular people. Borgen (*Philo: An Exegete*, 258) comments, “In a Jewish understanding the application of the concept of *philanthropia* to the particular people of God was central. The universalistic aspect then was understood to mean that this Jewish people of God with its laws and worship was the center of mankind.”

and serve as a counterpart to the wicked. The relationship of Solomon as a counterpart to the wicked can be seen in their reflections on mortality. In the first part of the book, the wicked reason that their mortality renders wise living unprofitable (2:1-24); in contrast, the reality of mortality makes Solomon desire wisdom even more (7:1-22). Solomon describes at length the nature of wisdom (7:22-8:1) with an emphasis on wisdom's agency in creation and establishing the cosmic order. Two repeated themes are that wisdom is a gift from God (e.g., 8:21; 9:6, 17), and wisdom draws the righteous into a relationship with God: "generation by generation she (i.e. wisdom) enters into holy souls makes them friends of God, and prophets" (Wis 7:27; cf. 7:14). Solomon concludes his prayer for wisdom with a thematic statement that will be explained in the rest of the book: "And thus the paths of those on earth were set right and the humans were taught what pleases you, and by wisdom they were saved" (Wis 9:18). Having stated that wisdom saves the righteous, the author then demonstrates how wisdom rescued significant figures in Jewish history.¹⁵ The climax of this demonstration is the description of how wisdom rescued a holy people, understood to be the Israelites, from their oppressors, the Egyptians (Wis 10:15-21). This climax draws together the central themes of the first two sections and paves the way for the third section that describes God's provision for the Israelites in the wilderness.

The final section (11:2-19:22) explains that God delivers God's people from their oppressors in the exodus, which is an extension of the theme introduced in Wis 10:15-

¹⁵ Wisdom may be understood to be an agent of God, but the author describes personified wisdom as the one who rescues the righteous.

11:1.¹⁶ There are several shifts in the argument from the previous sections. Whereas the first two sections are understood by some to represent convergence and openness to Hellenistic culture,¹⁷ the final section is much more particularistic (the righteous are identified as a specific nation) and antagonistic (the wicked oppressors of God’s people are punished as the righteous are saved). Corresponding to this definition of the righteous as a particular nation, the identities of the righteous and wicked in the final section are corporate; the righteous in the first two sections were individuals: the person who suffers injustice and Solomon. Another shift is that the third section focuses on God’s activity and wisdom moves to the background. Wisdom has done her job of making a people friends of God, and now the author focuses on God’s wise care. Kolarcik explains the connection between the final section and the previous two: “The events of the exodus, ranging from the plagues of Egypt to God’s providence for the Israelites in the desert, are presented as signs of God’s wisdom and commitment to justice.” In this section, God becomes the example of providential wisdom as God cares for God’s people and judges their enemies. Thus, God’s judgment of the wicked—described as an eschatological hope in the first section—demonstrates the wisdom and justice of God’s providential rule. The Israelites and the Egyptians embody the righteous sufferer and the wicked oppressor of the first section, and the recounting of God’s past judgment substantiates the

¹⁶ There is some debate concerning whether the third section, often described as a *midrash*, begins at 10:1 or in ch. 11. Due the shifts in the argument beginning with ch. 11, it is best to begin the third section in ch. 11. See Wright, “Structure of Wisdom,” 28-30; Gilbert, “Structure of the Book,” 26-30.

¹⁷ E.g., Collins, *Between Athens and Jerusalem*, 201-2.

eschatological hope. The activity of judgment in the final section is primarily through secondary means; the cosmos acts with God in order to punish the Egyptians by means of their sins but this activity is still understood to be God's doing (11:13): "the cosmos is the defender of the righteous...For creation, serving you its maker, exerts itself to punish the unrighteous" (Wis 16:17...24).

The structure of this section (11:2-19:22) is important for understanding the function of the polemic against pagan worship (13:1-15:17). This section explains how the elements of the cosmos save God's people (Israelites) and punish their enemies (Egyptians): "For through the things by which their enemies were punished, they were benefitted in their lack" (Wis 11:5; cf. 11:16; 12:23, 27). The author employs seven antitheses to demonstrate how the cosmos saves God's people and opposes their enemies:

- 1st Antithesis (11:6-14): Water from Rock vs. Nile turned to Blood
- 2nd Antithesis (11:15-16:15): Provision of Quail vs. Plague of Animals
 - Excursus 1 (11:17-12:22): Divine Power and Mercy
 - Excursus 2 (13:1-15:19): On False Worship
- 3rd Antithesis (16:5-15): Healing of the Serpent Bites vs. Fatal Bites by Insects
- 4th Antithesis (16:16-29): Manna vs. Storms
- 5th Antithesis (17:1-18:4): Pillar of Fire vs. Plague of Darkness
- 6th Antithesis (18:5-25): Deliverance vs. Death of the Firstborn
- 7th Antithesis (19:1-12): Red Sea as Deliverance vs. Drowning¹⁸

While the first and second sections described the activity of wisdom as a secondary means of God's activity, this section describes the cosmos as a secondary means of God's activity. The conclusion is significant because it indicates how Wis 11-19 is to be

¹⁸ This structure of six or seven antitheses is well-recognized although there is some variation in the precise division of the antitheses. E.g., James M. Reese, "Plan and Structure in the Book of Wisdom," *CBQ* 27 (1965): 398-99; Wright, "The Structure of Wisdom," 30; Winston, *Wisdom of Solomon*, 10-12; Kolarcik, "Book of Wisdom," 446; Gilbert, "The Literary Structure," 30.

understood. The author justifies the destruction of the enemies because they were unrighteous and were warned (19:13-17); thus, God's justice is upheld. The author also indicates that the cosmos operated in a new way to punish the ungodly (19:18-21), and punishing of the wicked by means of the cosmos is to be understood as God's providential care for God's people: "For in every way, you exalted and glorified your people and you did not neglect to help them in every time and place" (Wis 19:22).

Despite the disagreements concerning where to divide the larger units of the text, scholars agree that Wisdom 13-15 is a digression from the flow of the main argument. Gilbert explains how the idol polemic fits into the larger argument,

The second digression (13-15) also seems to answer a tacit question: Why does God use animals to punish the Egyptians? The author explains that of the three main types of religion practiced by the pagans of his day, worship of the world and its elements (13:1-9), worship of idols (13:10-15:13) and worship of living animals (14:14-19); this last, secular in Egypt, is the worst and most blameworthy deviation. So God uses what the Egyptians adore in order to punish them. Once he has demonstrated this, the author returns to the exodus and describes what happened to both parties and compares their lot.¹⁹

The first excursus (11:15-12:22) explains God's mercy as a preface to explaining how he punished the Egyptians while delivering his people. God's punishment is perfectly just as he punishes them by means of the objects with which they sin (11:15-16). This theme is reasserted in the material intervening the first and second excursus (12:23-7). The idol polemic is to be understood in light of the theme of God's just punishment. Wisdom expands the critique of false forms of worship to include Greco-Roman as well as

¹⁹ Maurice Gilbert, "Wisdom Literature" trans. K. Smith in *Jewish Writings of the Second Temple Period: Apocrypha, Pseudepigrapha, Qumran Sectarian Writings, Philo, Josephus* (ed. Michael E. Stone; CRINT 2; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984), 304.

Egyptian practices. Directly following the idol polemic, the author explains two things relevant for his explanation of the exodus: God punishes the enemies of God's people by means of their objects of worship and blesses God's people with great provisions (16:1-4). In this three-part critique, Wisdom makes an argument of progressive levels of wickedness. While the author criticizes Greco-Roman forms of worship, the author more severely criticizes the practices that are uniquely Egyptian: nature worshippers are vain (μάταιοι, 13:1), idolaters are wretched (ταλαίπωροι, 13:10), and Egyptian theriolaters are most foolish (ἀφρονέστατοι, 15:14). Scholars have constructed various outlines of chs. 13-15. Addison Wright's outline helps to see the structure and progression of Wisdom's argument:

- (1) Nature Worship (13:1-9)
- (2) Idolatry (13:10-15:17)
 - a. Introduction (13:10)
 - b. The carpenter and wooden images (13:11-14:2)
 - c. Apostrophe (14:3-6) and transition (14:7-11)
 - d. The origin and evils of idolatry (14:12-31)
 - c'. Apostrophe (15:1-3) and transition (15:4-6)
 - b'. The potter and clay images (15:7-13)
 - a' Conclusion (15:14-17)²⁰

The one emendation that I will make to Wright's outline is to extend the excursus on idolatry through 15:19. I have included 15:18, 19 with the preceding section because they continue the condemnation of Egyptian worship begun in 15:14, and the syntactical marker διὰ τοῦτο in 16:1 indicates a transition that applies the preceding material to a

²⁰ Wright, "Wisdom," 519-20; "Structure of the Book of Wisdom," 180-81; "Numerical Patterns in the Book of Wisdom," *CBQ* 29 (1967): 528-9. Cf. the nearly identical outline, Grabbe, *Wisdom*, 23. This division of idolatry into three groups—nature worshippers, idolaters, and animal worshippers—can be observed in other Hellenistic Jewish texts, especially Philo, *Decal.* 52-81. See Larcher, *Études*, 144-5, 162-66; *Le Livre*, 747-8.

new topic.²¹ Wisdom 15:18, 19 serve as a transitional passage that resumes the second comparison (11:15-16:15) between the cursing of the plagues with the blessing of the qual. While Wisdom's mocking critiques of idol craftsmen are modeled after the critiques in the Psalms and Prophetic Books, Wisdom introduces new material relevant to the author's situation (e.g. nature worship, animal worship, and explanation of idolatry's origins as honor for a distant ruler), and Wisdom structures the argument in a more symmetrical manner.

The significance of these structures—both of the book as a whole and Wisdom 13-15—has great significance for how the polemic against false worship is interpreted. The author is not simply relating arguments to his audience; the author is choosing to make those arguments in a particular form that he thinks reinforces his overall argument. It is important to interpret Wisdom 13-15 within the context of Wisdom 11-19 that contrasts God's provision for God's people with God's punishment for their enemies, a punishment that God accomplishes primarily through the secondary means of the cosmos. The enemies of God's people are punished by means of their sins. The retelling of God's past judgment on enemies substantiates the eschatological hope (described in the first section) that God will deliver the author's community from their oppressors.

Wisdom 13:1-9

Wisdom begins the critique of false forms of worship by condemning those who worship nature instead of perceiving the God who gives nature its beauty. Wisdom is not

²¹ Wright ("Wisdom," 519) argues that the entire polemic is formed around the *inclusio* of 13:10 and 15:17 with the assertion that idols are dead things.

making an argument for the existence of God. God's existence is assumed, and Wisdom is attempting to disprove pagan conceptions of God and thereby to prove the validity of Jewish understandings of God. Although Wisdom's designation of these worshippers as μάταιοι may be a deliberate attempt to link them to the idol craftsmen in Isaiah (Wis 13:1; Isa 44:9), the author of Wisdom takes the critique in a different direction than the prophetic critiques of the Jewish Scriptures as he makes a philosophical argument. Many have noted that this section is a critique of Stoic materialism that had failed to make a distinction between God and creation.²² Wisdom responds by asserting that God is the immaterial Existing One, ὁ ὄν.²³ Platonists used this term in reference to the transcendent intelligible principle in contrast to Stoicism's immanent deity. For the author of Wisdom, Platonism's transcendent God combats Stoicism's failure to distinguish God from nature. But Platonism too is imperfect because it would leave the author with an unknowable God. Wisdom, however, asserts that the Existing One is none other than the Jewish God (cf. Exod 3:14), who is both the Creator and personal God revealed in the Jewish Scriptures.²⁴ Thus, Wisdom corrects the conception of God by one philosophical school

²² Gilbert, *La critique*, 14-20; VanderKam, *Introduction*, 127; Winston, *Wisdom*, 255; Larcher, *Le Livre*, 752-4. Collins ("Natural Theology," 7) comments, "Stoics and Platonists were in agreement that the order of nature required the existence of a divine mind. They disagreed as to whether the divinity was immanent or transcendent." In line with the scriptural tradition and contemporary Jewish writers such as Philo, Wisdom presents a God who is transcendent.

²³ The term is dependent on Exod 3:14. Winston, *Wisdom*, 249, notes that Philo uses ὁ ὄν and τὸ ὄν; whereas, Wisdom only uses ὁ ὄν.

²⁴ See Gilbert, *La Critique*, 43; Reese, *Hellenistic Influence*, 53-4; cf. Grabbe, *Wisdom*, 36-7. For the author of Wisdom, the ὁ ὄν of Platonism is really the ὁ ὄν of Exod 3:14. In Jewish history, this description of God is his self-revelation to his chosen people, so he is to some degree knowable in a personal sense. The concept of God as Creator of the physical world also is a correction of the Platonic

(Stoicism) by means of another philosophical school (Platonism), but the author ultimately rejects both conceptions as insufficient.

The significance of alluding to Exodus 3:14 in the context of Wisdom 11-19 should not be underestimated as it ties together several themes in these chapters.²⁵ Wisdom 11-19 is concerned with the actions of God in providing for God's people and judging their enemies.²⁶ In Exodus 3, God promises to act for the deliverance of his people from their oppressors (Exod 3:7-10, 16-17, 20-22). God's self-revelation is to a particular people with whom God has a personal relationship. Thus Wisdom critiques the (Stoic and Platonic) conceptions of God, and Wisdom asserts that The Existing One is knowable by means of self-revelation to a particular people. The author preemptively limits the degree to which one can understand God by analogy to the natural world because God's revelation and care are directed to a particular people. It is precisely in God's historical acts of deliverance—the narrative background for Wisdom 10-19—that God is known. While Wisdom acknowledges a certain level of universal accessibility to the knowledge of God, the truest knowledge of God comes through God's self-revelation to a particular people.

conception of God. Reese (*Hellenistic Influence*, 53 n.93) demonstrates that for Plato, God creates the ideas but not the physical world; see, *Rep.* 497c, *Soph.* 266; *Tim.* 30a-c.

²⁵ It is characteristic for the author of Wisdom to assume that the audience will understand his allusions to the Septuagint. In light of the significance of Exodus 3, it is not unreasonable to argue that the author expects his audience to interpret his brief allusion to Exod 3:14 in the context of Exodus 3.

²⁶ In Wisdom 11-19, the cosmos acts to oppose the oppressors of God's people, and this is understood to be God working through secondary means to punish the oppressors. Similarly, God promises in Exodus 3 to punish the Egyptians, but this punishment will be carried out in part through the agency of Moses (Exod 3:12, 16-22).

In order to describe the creative role of God, the author of Wisdom describes God as τεχνίτης (Wis 13:2). This designation is significant because it is a Greek, not biblical, description of God.²⁷ While the author just criticized Greek understandings of ὁ ὄν, now the author employs terms drawn from Greek philosophy in order to explain the distinction between the Creator and the created world. The identification of the ὁ ὄν as τεχνίτης is a remarkable qualification of Platonic understandings of God. In Wis 13:1, the author explains that The Existing One (ὁ ὄν), whom Platonists argued was unknowable, is knowable in God's self-revelation especially through Moses (cf. Exod 3:13-17). Then the author further redefines The Existing One (ὁ ὄν)—whom the Platonists thought to be separated from the material world—to be the Architect (τεχνίτης) of the material world.²⁸ Thus, Wisdom labors to present a God that is both the universal Creator and concerned with a particular people, both the immaterial Existing One and the Creator of the material world, both known analogously through nature and known personally through revelation.

The problem with nature worshippers is that they rely only on the sense of sight and fail to understand a deeper reality (13:7). Reese summarizes the argument, “The Sage is saying that philosophers who thought that they had found ‘him who is’ were mistaken because they were not willing to recognize the nature of God as transcendent ‘craftsman,’

²⁷ E.g. Epictetus 1.6.7; Anaxagoras, Fragment 46a. See the treatment in Reese, *Hellenistic Influence*, 54.

²⁸ See Reese, *Hellenistic Influence*, 53-4; Gilbert, *La critique*, 43.

unique Creator of all.”²⁹ Wisdom agrees with the nature worshippers that nature is beautiful, but Wisdom asserts that nature is not the ultimate reality.

Wisdom’s critique is one of incomplete inference. From the beauty of nature they should arrive at correspondingly (ἀναλόγως, 13:5) greater God.³⁰ Wisdom has the same view as Philo that nature, when properly studied through philosophy, should lead one to recognize the infinitely greater goodness and beauty of God. Winston notes, “The author appears to be saying for the beauty and power of the universe we could both readily deduce the existence of the Designer and First Cause of all things, and equally come to realize how vastly superior he is to all that he has created.”³¹ This method of argumentation departs from the scriptural pattern of idol polemics. While Deutero-Isaiah appealed to God as Creator to prove that he was the *only* God, Wisdom argues from creation to demonstrate that people should arrive at the knowledge of the one God, whom the author argues is the God who is made known in the Jewish Scriptures.³² Wisdom’s critique of these worshippers is less severe because he thinks they were simply mistaken in their genuine quest for God. They are ignorant (13:1), foolish (13:1), unable (13:1),

²⁹ Reese, *Hellenistic Influence*, 54.

³⁰ For the concept of analogy in Plato, see Gilbert, *La Critique*, 25-30; Larcher, *Le Livre*, 763-7; Hampus Lyttkens, *The Analogy Between God and the World: An Investigation of its Background and Interpretation of its Use by Thomas of Aquino* (Uppsala: Almqvist and Wiksells, 1952), 18-28.

³¹ Winston, *Wisdom*, 251.

³² Reese (*Hellenistic Influence*, 56-62) claims that this argument is an example of Hellenistic influence on the Jewish author. Grabbe, *Wisdom*, 36, similarly states, “The type of argumentation in 13:5 is Hellenistic, not biblical. It includes the common Hellenistic form of reasoning from analogy, and it argues that the beauty of creation requires some overseer and source of beauty behind it.”

astray (13:6), failing (13:9), but Wisdom does not criticize their motives even though their methods resulted in failure.³³

Wisdom 13:10-14:2

While Wisdom 13:1-9 made a philosophical critique of those who worship nature, Wis 13:10-14:2 is more in line with scriptural polemics that offer a caricature of the manufacture of idols. Wisdom's mocking caricature of idol-making in Wis 13:10-14:2 parallels other Hellenistic Jewish sources and is dependent on idol polemics by the Prophets, especially Deutero-Isaiah.³⁴ The author does not make a genuine attempt to represent image worship in terms that would be recognizable to those participating in image worship.³⁵ Rather, Wisdom, like the prophetic critiques, begins with the

³³ Wisdom and Philo might be drawing on a similar traditional critique of nature worship. They both associated the *πλαν*-stem—that can refer both to “error” and the “celestial bodies”—with nature worship (Wisdom 13:6; Philo, *Decal.* 52). For the parallels of Wisdom and Philo's arguments in Greek philosophy, see Collins, *Jewish Wisdom in the Hellenistic Age*, 196-209. Valentin Nikiprowetsky (*De Decalogo: Introduction, Traduction et Notes*, [Les Ouvres de Philon D'Alexandrie 23; Paris: Cerf, 1965], 75 n.7) thinks the similarities between Philo and Wisdom's idol polemics indicate that this scheme was common in Alexandrian Judaism.

³⁴ Cf. Philo, *Decal.* 70-76; Ep Jer 8-73; *Sib. Or.* 8.375-399. In the Prophets, see Psalm 115:3-8; Isa 44:9-20; Jer 10:1-16. For an extended comparison between Isa 44 and Wis 13, see Gilbert, *La Critique*, 64-75. That Wis 13:1-9 does not depend directly on a form of argumentation found in the Prophets should not be surprising because Wisdom is treating a problem in first-century Alexandria that was not an issue for Deutero-Isaiah or Jeremiah.

³⁵ Winston (*Wisdom*, 262) comments, “It should be noted that the Egyptian view of their idols was considerably more sophisticated than it would appear from our author's polemical description. A ritual ‘opening of the mouth’ was performed on the statues while they were still in the sculptor's workshop (the ‘gold house’), as a result of which the work of human hands was thought to come alive. The deity was thought to be in the heavens, and only to take up a temporary residence in his image after the necessary rite had been performed”; cf. Grabbe, *Wisdom*, 58-9. A brief comparison between Plato and Wisdom's use of *ἄψυχος* demonstrates how Wisdom misrepresents pagan image-worship. Wisdom argues that the idolater petitions the lifeless image itself: “Concerning his possessions, marriage, and children, he is not ashamed to call on a lifeless thing (τῷ ἄψυχῷ)” (Wis 13:17). The fact that the idol is *ἄψυχος* is taken by Wisdom to mean that there is no reality apart from the idol itself. Plato, however, talks about those who acknowledge the lifelessness of the idol but maintains a reality apart from the idol: “The ancient laws of all people concerning the gods are twofold. Some of the gods whom we honor we see clearly, but some (of the gods

assumption that the gods behind the idols do not exist. From the presupposition of the idol-god's nonexistence, Wisdom argues that Greeks worship the statue itself.³⁶ Based on this assumption, the entire section is a mocking elaboration of the opening thesis: "(they) designate as gods the works of human hands" (Wis 13:10).³⁷ The author first mentions idols made of gold and silver, and then he shows the progressively less valuable materials used, stone and wood and finally clay. This progressive devolution of the quality of materials parallels the author's view that idolatry itself is a progressive degradation from good. Verses 11-16 are a narrative of idol-making followed by Wis 13:17-14:2 that present six ironies of the craftsman's devotion.

In Wisdom 13:11-16, the woodcutter uses the choice pieces of a tree to create a useful vessel, and with the leftover scraps he both prepares food and finally constructs an idol.³⁸ The non-reality of the idol-god is evidenced by the fact that the other scraps are readily consumed by fire—they have no existence beyond their material composition. Moreover, the craftsman fashions a god from a piece that is unsuitable for anything

whom we honor) we set up statues (ἀγάλματα) as images (εἰκόνας), and when we worship these things even though they are lifeless (ἀψύχους) we think the living (ἔμψυχοι) gods have good-will and grace on account of these" (Plato, *Laws*, 931a, author's translation). The author of Wisdom thinks that by proving that the image is lifeless, he has proven that there is no reality behind the idol. According to Plato, the view held by many Greeks was that the image was separable from the divine reality.

³⁶ Gerhard von Rad (*Wisdom in Israel* [trans: James D. Martin; New York: Abingdon, 1972], 181) argues that the accusation that pagans worship statues "stands or falls on the assumption of the complete identity of deity and image."

³⁷ Gilbert (*La Critique*, 53-5) highlights the structural significance of 13:10 that is arranged in a chiasm to emphasize that the idols are made by humans. He also notes the alternation between plural and singular words. a: ἔργα χειρῶν ἀνθρώπων; b: χρυσὸν καὶ ἄργυρον; c: τέχνης ἐμμελέτημα; c': ἀπεικάσματα ζώων; b: λίθον ἄχρηστον; a: χειρὸς ἔργον ἀρχαίας.

³⁸ Cf. Horace, *Sat.* 1.8.1; *Apoc. Abr.* 5; Winston, *Wisdom*, 260-61.

else.³⁹ The process of constructing an idol is not portrayed as a pious undertaking; rather, it is the activity of leisure and idleness (13:13). The author gives several pieces of evidence to cause the audience to question the reality of the idol-god. There is nothing especially godlike about its form; it looks like either a human or an animal. The strongest piece of evidence against the reality of the idol-god is that the idol does not display any ability to act: “he [the idol craftsman] knows that it is unable to help itself, for it is an image and it needs to be helped” (Wis 13:16).⁴⁰ The idol is not that of an agent that helps; rather, the only thing it can do is receive help. This is a theme to which Wisdom will return, and it is especially significant when read in light of Wisdom 11-19 that describes how God repeatedly helps God’s people.

Wisdom then mocks the idea that an idol-craftsman would entreat as a god the thing that he had just formed from wood. Wisdom presents six mocking ironies in which he contrasts the help desired by the idol-craftsman and the ability of the idol to help:

Request of the craftsman :: characteristic of the idol

i) assistance with life :: lifeless (17)

ii) health :: weak (18a)

iii) life :: dead (18b)

iv) aid :: inexperienced (18c)

v) prosperous journey :: unmoving (18d)

vi) success with hands :: no strength (19)

³⁹ The idol craftsman uses stones that are not suitable for building (Wis 13:10) or wood that is not suitable for making a vessel (13:13). εἰδὼς ὅτι ἀδυνατεῖ ἑαυτῷ βοηθῆσαι, καὶ γὰρ ἐστὶν εἰκὼν καὶ χρεῖαν ἔχει βοηθείας.³⁹

⁴⁰ Lit. “he knows that it is unable to help itself, for it is an image and has need for help.”

The author highlights the foolishness of idolatry by describing how the idolater entrusts things of greatest value to an idol that lacks inherent value. All of the characteristics for idols in this section are negative and focus on the non-life of the idol: dead (νεκρός, 10, 18); useless (ἄχρηστος 10, οὐθὲν εὐχρηστον, 13), helpless (ἀδυνατεῖ ἑαυτῷ βοηθῆσαι, 16), lifeless (ἄψυχος, 17), weak (ἀσθενής, 17), inexperienced (ἄπειρος, 18), unable to walk (19, τὸ μηδὲ βάσει χρῆσθαι δυνάμενον), inactive (ἀδρανής, 19). Following these ironies, Wisdom offers a final, more developed irony that has a slightly different form. It is not certain if the idol-craftsman is still the subject or if it is the idol-worshipper in general. The idolater asks to be provided with a safe voyage from an idol, constructed by a simple woodcutter in his leisure, while the idolater rides on a ship that was planned wisely by a skilled shipwright.⁴¹ The idolater's folly is obvious: the idol which he petitions is less capable of saving him than the ship itself.

Wisdom 14:3-11

After the extended mockery of idol-craftsmen, Wisdom addresses God. The apostrophe is addressed to God as Father, but it is not clear how personal this Father-figure is. On the one hand, the description of God as the providential Father describes God's universal control of the world.⁴² *Anyone* who sets sail could put his trust in God's providential care. But on the other hand, God's providential care is particularized in his

⁴¹ Wright ("Wisdom," 519) describes the superiority of the ship, "The ship has two advantages over the idol: it was made out of decent motives (not in idleness; cf. 13:13) and under the guidance of Wisdom."

⁴² Winston, *Wisdom*, 266, comments, "It should be noted that as in Philo and Josephus, the term 'Father' is employed by our author in a universal context." C. Kolarcikm "Wisdom," 553.

actions on behalf a particular person, Noah (Wis 14:6-7). Thus, Wisdom continues to affirm God's universal accessibility and God's particular relationship with a chosen people. Aside from this initial designation, there is no further title for God in the apostrophe.

The verb (δια)κυβερνάω and the noun κυβερνήτης are Stoic terms that describe the governance of the universe.⁴³ Just as the author redefined philosophical terminology in 13:1 in terms of the God who acts in Jewish history, so the terminology concerning God's providence is redefined in terms of God's saving activity in the history of Israel. Gilbert comments, "The author takes the opportunity to use Greek theses on Providence, but he removed the aspects that were irreconcilable with his faith and based his assertions on several significant events in the history of salvation: the passage of the Red Sea in the exodus and Noah's Ark."⁴⁴ The author focuses on God as the source of wisdom, the one who saves, and the one who is active in history. Just as the idol polemics in the Jewish Scriptures assert the characteristics of God that most contrast the caricature of idols, Wisdom first describes the idols' inactivity and inability to save (13:16-14:1) and then describes God as the Savior (14:4). The primary contrast between God and the idols is that God has demonstrated his ability to save humans: "showing that you can save from

⁴³ See Gilbert, *La Critique*, 102-4; Winston, *Wisdom*, 214, 265. Winston states, "The verb *kybernaō* was employed by the Stoics to describe the guiding power of the Logos" (214). Reese (*Hellenistic Influence*, 10-11) notes that πρόνοια in addition to διακυβερνάω was a technical Stoic word to describe God's providence

⁴⁴ Author's translation of Gilbert, *La Critique*, 125: "L'auteur en profite pour reprendre les thèses grecques sur la Providence, mais il leur enlève les aspects inconciliables avec sa foi et fonde ses affirmations sur quelques hauts faits de l'histoire du Salut: le passage de la Mer Rouge de l'Exode et l'arche de Noé."

anything” (Wis 14:4). In this apostrophe, Wisdom draws on the theme of chapters 11-19: God delivers his people using the means of the cosmos. Here it is the sea—in the narratives of both Noah and Moses—by which God executes providential deliverance.

In the transitional section (Wis 14:7-11), Wisdom declares that God hates both idols and the idol-craftsman.⁴⁵ There is a contrast between wood used righteously, as in Noah’s obedience in building the ark, and wood used unrighteously, as in the crafting of an idol (Wis 14:7-8).⁴⁶ There is a goodness to wood because it is a part of God’s creation, but it is misused by humans. One use trusts in God’s providential care, and the other use ensnares human souls in error. The critique again is that something that was made, and is thus not eternal, is called a god (14:8). The argument is similar to Wisdom’s critique of nature worship with the underlying premise that nothing created is worthy of worship, but the folly of idolatry is more severe because even the creator of the idol is a created being. Recalling the theme of eschatological judgment in the first section, Wisdom declares that God will punish both the idol and the idol-craftsman (Wis 14:10-11). Wisdom continues both to retell events of God’s deliverance from the past and to promise future judgment in order to assure the audience that the Jewish manner of life is best.

⁴⁵ For the chiasmic structure of 14:8-10, see Gilbert, *La Critique*, 100-102.

⁴⁶ Wisdom has a similar view of humanity. Humans were created by God and are thus part of God’s good creation. Through a life of righteous living they can inherit immortality, but a life of unjust living brings death. God’s creation is good, but God judges the use of the creation whether it be wood (used rightly for benefit to humanity or wrongly for the substance of idols) or humans (living righteously or living unrighteously).

Wisdom 14:12-31

Wisdom 14:12-31 forms the center of the chiasmic structure in 13:1-15:19.⁴⁷ The author begins by asserting that the theological error of idolatry results in moral depravity: “The idea of idols was the source of sexual immorality (πορνείας), and their invention was the ruin of life” (Wis 14:12). There is a strong connection between sexual immorality and idolatry in the Jewish Scriptures, and sexual immorality is often singled out as an especially terrible sin, one that is characteristic of the pagans.⁴⁸ But it would still be strange for Wisdom to single out this particular sin here and then group sexual perversions, with no special designation, among other sins in Wis 14:22-31. Moreover, the more common sequence of causation in Jewish literature is that sexual immorality, especially exogamy, leads one to false worship.⁴⁹ While Wis 14:12 could be stating that

⁴⁷ There is some debate concerning whether Wis 14:11 belongs in this section or the preceding section. Because Wis 14:12 begins a new idea (idolatry is not from the beginning and it leads to moral depravity), it is best to place Wis 14:11 in the preceding section as a summary statement of that section.

⁴⁸ See, Stephen C. Barton, “Food Rules, Sex Rules, and the Prohibition of Idolatry: What's the Connection?” in *Idolatry: False Worship in the Bible, Early Judaism, and Christianity* (London: T&T Clark), 141-162.

⁴⁹ For example, the *Testament of Reuben* also notes the close connection between fornication and idolatry, and in line with most Jewish sources, the *Testament of Reuben* argues that fornication leads to idolatry: “So then, my children, observe all the things that I commanded you, and do not sin, for the sin of promiscuity is the pitfall of life, separating man from God and leading toward idolatry, because it is the deceiver of the mind and the perceptions, and leads youths down to hell before their time” (*Test. Reub.* 4:6-7 [Kee, *OTP*]; cf. Exod 34:15-16). Similarly, Phinehas’ zeal is celebrated because the Israelites’ lust led them to false worship: “And Israel stayed in Sattim, and the people were profaned by whoring (ἐκπορνεύσαι) after the daughters of Moab. And they invited them to the sacrifices of their idols and the people ate of the sacrifices and did obeisance to their idols” (Num 25:1-2 NETS). Pseudo-Philo’s retelling of the Balaam narrative reinforces the sequence of sexual immorality leading to false worship: “And then Balaam said to him ‘Come let us plan what you should do to them. Pick out the beautiful women who are among us and in Midian, and station them naked and adorned with gold and precious stones before them. And when they see them and lie with them, they will sin against their LORD and fall into your hands; for otherwise you cannot fight against them’” (Ps-Philo 18:13-14 [Harrington, *OTP*]). The scriptural story of Solomon is also a graphic picture of exogamy leading to idolatry (e.g., 1 Kgs 11:1-10). In the New

crafting idols leads to that particularly heinous sin of sexual immorality (a point that would be strengthened by 14:27), it is more likely that Wisdom is drawing on the common Jewish metaphor for idolatry in terms of sexual immorality. More specifically in the prophetic literature, God is the husband to an adulterous people.⁵⁰ Like he does in chapter 10, the author expects the audience to understand the subtle scriptural allusion to make sense of the argument. Wisdom has appropriated a scriptural metaphor used to describe Israel's sin of false worship, and Wisdom has applied that concept to all humanity. Kolarcik correctly argues, "The author is adapting the uniquely Israelite understanding of fidelity to the One God for its application to all humanity in the explanation of the origin of idol worship."⁵¹ This universal application of this metaphor to all humanity strengthens the particularistic assertion in Wis 15:4-6 that the Jews are not deceived by the painters. Interpreted in light of this prophetic metaphor wherein idolatry is spiritual adultery, Wisdom 14:12 argues that idolatry entailed the betrayal of God. This act of betrayal evokes the personal wrath of God described in Wis 14:14.

Testament, the most common association between idolatry and sexual immorality is for them to be in a list of actions characteristic of non-believers and to be avoided by believers (e.g., Acts 15:20, 29; 21:25; Rom 2:22; Col 3:5; 1 Pet 4:3; Rev 2:20; 9:20-21). There are two passages in Revelation, however, that may suggest that idolatry causes a devolution into sexual immorality. Revelation's retelling of the Balaam incident is similar to Pseudo-Philo's: "But I have a few things against you: you have some there who hold to the teaching of Balaam, who instructed Balak to place a stumbling block before the Israelites so that they ate food sacrificed to idols and committed sexual immorality" (Rev 2:14; cf. Rev 2:20; author's translation of *NA*²⁷).

⁵⁰ For example the πορν-stem, in addition to the general concept of adultery, is used by these Prophetic texts to describe false worship: Isa 57:1-10; Jer 2:1-37; 3:6-8; Ezek 16:15-43; Hos 1:1-2:23; 4:11-19.

⁵¹ Kolarcik, "Wisdom," 557.

Later in this section, the author elaborates on the moral effects of idolatry, but he first explains the origins and end of idols.⁵² Despite God's good creation of the world, evil exists. And just as God did not create death (Wis 1:13) God did not create idols. The unrighteousness of humanity brought about death, and idols are the result of human vanity. The author assumes that truth preceded error which implies that monotheism preceded polytheistic idol worship. The argument for a god's validity is made on the grounds not only of its origins (idols were created by humans vs. God who is The Existing One) but also its endurance (God will continue to exist after God destroys the idols).⁵³ While Wisdom 11-19 primarily describes God's punishment of the wicked by means of their sins, the theme of eschatological judgment is recalled (3:10-13) and now it is applied to the creations of the ungodly (14:9-10, 13-14). Despite the current flourishing of the ungodly and their ungodliness (i.e. idols), the author assures that God will one day judge them.

Having established that idols were not from the beginning, the author must explain how they came to exist, since they clearly were not the creation of God. The mockery of the idol-craftsman did not explain how humanity got to the point of

⁵² Wisdom 14:13-14 is arranged in a chiasmic ABA'B' pattern:

A: statement of idols' beginning: "neither did they exist from the beginning" (14:13a).

B: statement of idols' end: "nor will they exist forever" (14:13b).

A': means of idols' beginning: "by the vanity of humans they entered the world" (14:14a).

B': means of idols' end: "and therefore a sudden end is devised for them" (14:14b).

See, Gilbert, *La Critique*, 127-8.

⁵³ Perhaps the most vivid picture of this in Jewish texts is the story of Dagon's destruction and God's endurance (1 Sam 5:1-5).

worshipping idols, and now the author will attempt an explanation.⁵⁴ The author provides two euhemeristic explanations for the origins of idolatry: a father honoring his deceased child and people honoring a distant ruler. Wisdom explains how a father initiates honor rituals that progress into idolatry:

For a father, troubled with untimely grief and having made an image of his child so quickly taken away, now honored as a god what was formerly a dead person, and he handed down to his dependents mysteries and initiation rites. Then the ungodly custom, being strengthened in time, was kept as law. (Wis14:16-17)

The background for Wisdom's euhemeristic explanation lies in the Greco-Roman practice of erecting statues of deceased loved ones.⁵⁵ And while it is improbable that a father would worship the image of his son, it is plausible enough for Wisdom's argument that generations later might worship the image as a god. The euhemeristic explanation of idolatry originating from the desire to worship a monarch is more plausible, especially in the Egyptian context where the line between ruler and divine was blurred. Roman emperor worship also provides a possible backdrop for the concept of honoring a distant ruler. The people begin with a desire simply to honor the ruler, but the artisan deceives the people by forming the ruler's image into a more beautiful form. The result of the artisan's deception is that "The masses, enticed by the beauty of the workmanship, now regard as an object of worship the one who recently was honored as a human" (Wis 14:20).

⁵⁴ Euhemerism derives its name from Euhemerus (ca. 300 B.C.E.) who argued that Uranus, Zeus, and Cronus were great human kings who were subsequently venerated as divine. Cf. *Sib. Or.* 3.110-115.

⁵⁵ See Winston, *Wisdom*, 276-8; Gilbert, *La critique*, 140-57.

After the author has explained how people arrive at the folly of idol worship, he lists a catalogue of sins that result from their theological error. The author attributes all of these sins to the single cause of idolatry: “For the worship of unspeakable idols is the beginning, cause, and end of every evil” (Wis 14:27). Several of these practices, such as the references to mystery cults, condemn distinctly Greco-Roman practices.⁵⁶ It is common for Jewish authors to caricature pagans as sexually immoral while asserting that Jews maintain sexual purity and marital fidelity. By castigating pagan practice and praising Jewish practice, the vice list allows the author to reinforce the observable distinctions between his Jewish audience and their pagan neighbors. It is not just that the pagans worship falsely; their false worship results in moral depravity. And the description of their immorality makes the connection between these idolaters and the wicked oppressors in the first section of Wisdom (E.g, Wis 2:6-20; 3:1-13; 4:3-6). That the idolaters are identifiable with the wicked reinforces the connection in Wisdom 11-19 between the wicked and the oppressors, who are the Egyptian idolaters.⁵⁷ Wisdom continues to threaten eschatological judgment on these people (Wis 14:30-31).

This section is attributed special significance by the author’s placement of it in the center of the chiasm. There are a number of explanations that the author makes in this section, but its contribution to the overall argument of Wisdom 11-19 is probably the reason that it is central to the chiasm. Wisdom 11-19 emphasizes God’s provision for

⁵⁶ For the Hellenistic context of these vices, see Reese, *Hellenistic Influence*, 20-21; Winston, *Wisdom*, 279-80. Gilbert (*La critique*, 164-9) is more helpful for the Jewish and Christian parallels.

⁵⁷ See Kolarcik, “Wisdom,” 559.

God's people and God's punishment of their enemies, and this central section of the chiasm highlights the distinction between God's people and everyone else. It explains how all the other nations forsook God and devolved into idolatry. The difference in theology between God's people and their enemies results in radically different ethical practices because idolatry is the cause of every evil. Finally, Wisdom emphasizes the distinction between God's people and the eschatological judgment of these idolaters (14:13-14, 30-31). This distinction between God's people and their enemies is heightened by the transitional passages before and after this section that emphasize God's displeasure with and eschatological judgment on the idolaters (14:8-11) and God's special relationship to those who are not idolaters (15:1-6).

Wisdom 15:1-6

These verses comprise the second apostrophe to God. The most notable shift in this section is the use of first person pronouns beginning with the address as "our God" (Wis 15:1). The author identifies himself and his audience as the God's people, for whom God cares personally.⁵⁸ Wisdom 11-19 describes the provision of God for God's people in the wilderness, and the identification of the audience with the people of God is strengthened by the allusion to God's self-revelation in the wilderness (cf. Exod 34:6). The characteristics of God that these verses highlight differ from many idol polemics because this apostrophe does not reassert specific characteristics of God that contrast with

⁵⁸ The personal relationship between the author's audience and God alludes to the personal covenantal relationship that God has with Israel, and thereby the author strengthens the identification of the audience as the people of God. Cf. Ezek 11:20; 34:30-31.

the absence of those characteristics in idols (e.g., God's salvific providence in Wis 14:3 in contrast to the inability of idols to act in Wis 13:16-19).⁵⁹ In 15:1, Wisdom describes God as kind (*χρηστός*), true (*ἀληθής*), patient (*μακρόθυμος*), and merciful in managing all things (*ἐλέει διοικῶν τὰ πάντα*). These attributes are not contrasted with the idols; rather, they allude to the presentation of God's character in the aftermath of the Golden Calf episode: compassionate (*οἰκτίμων*), merciful (*ἐλεήμων*), patient (*μακρόθυμος*), exceedingly merciful (*πολυέλεος*), and truthful (*ἀληθινός*) (cf. Exod 34:6).⁶⁰ The allusion to Exodus 34 has strong particularizing implications. God's self-revelation in Exodus 34 is directed toward Moses and the Israelites for whom God declares his steadfast love. Exodus 34 emphasizes the knowledge of God that the Israelites have on account of God's Law (34:1, 4, 11-28), self-description (34:6-7), and saving actions on their behalf (34:10-16). And each of these ways of knowing the true God is directed toward a particular people with whom God has made a covenant. Exodus 34 is entirely antagonistic toward non-Israelites as they are commanded to observe extreme separation from the native inhabitants of the land.

Wisdom 15:2 seems somewhat out of place because the subject shifts from God to first person plural pronouns. The change in subject is probably due to Wisdom 15:2

⁵⁹ Kolarcik ("Wisdom," 561) sees the primary contrast being between God's relationship with his people and the idolaters' relationship with their idols: "The bond between the righteous and God is highlighted and intensified by the contrast to the relationship between idolaters and their lifeless idols (vv. 4-6). The God of the righteous is full of power and mercy (v. 1); the many gods of the idolatrous are powerless (13:17-19)."

⁶⁰ Wisdom's reliance on Exodus 34 in this section is well-recognized; see Larcher, *La Livre*, 847-8; Winston, *Wisdom*, 281.

alluding to Exodus 34:9 in which Moses asks God to take away Israel's sins and be with his people.⁶¹ Alec Lucas explains the function of Wisdom 15:2ff in the context of Exodus 34:

The confident declaration in Wis 15:2 that “we will not sin” and the subsequent denial of complicity in contemporary idolatry suggests that the author of Wisdom regarded Moses' prayer as having been answered. Israel's “stiff-necked” nature, her “sin” and “lawlessness,” had been removed.⁶²

Following the pronouncement of God's judgment on idolaters (14:30-31), Wisdom asserts that God is also merciful (15:1) and that God's people are not to be grouped with the pagan idolaters (15:2-6). Wisdom states both that God's people are not deceived by idols (15:2, 4-6) and that God would forgive them if they were deceived (15:1-2).

In contrast to the close relationship that God has with God's people, the idolaters offer devotion to an object that cannot reciprocate. The idolaters “desire the non-breathing form of a dead image” (Wis 15:5). Wisdom returns to the theme of the wicked being punished by the things they desire, and claims that those who set their hope on these foolish things are worthy of that vain hope (15:6)

Wisdom 15:7-13

Wisdom's mockery of the potter parallels the critiques Wisdom leveled against the woodcutter, but the author is more severe in his critique of the potter because the potter has evil motives (15:12). The non-reality of these idols is shown by both their

⁶¹ Gilbert, *La Critique*, 181-2; Winston, *Wisdom*, 281; Lucas, “Distinct Portraits,” 70.

⁶² Lucas, “Distinct Portraits,” 70; cf. Kolarcik, “Wisdom,” 562-3. Judith 8:18 confidently makes this same boast: For never in our generation, nor in these present days, has there been any tribe or family or people or town of ours that worships gods made with hands, as was done in days gone by” (NRSV).

substance and their maker. Like the woodcutter, the potter begins with one substance that he forms for different uses. The potter makes vessels for clean use and vessels for unclean use from the same lump of clay. He forms vessels for common use, and then, “In ill-will, he forms a non-god from the same clay, he who shortly before came from the earth and shortly after will return to the earth from which he was taken, when the loan of his life is demanded back” (Wis 15:8). The idol is crafted from a common substance and by a common agent, an agent so incapable of imparting life that even his own life is on loan from another. Even the potter himself was recently formed from the clay. He has a borrowed soul and attempts to create life even though he has no life in himself.⁶³ The result of his effort is that the idols are twice removed from divinity.

While Wisdom has hinted that idols were created as a delusion, in this section, the author describes the intentionality on the part of the craftsman to deceive the worshippers. Because he does not know the true God, the potter pursues money by any means, and he crafts idols for profit. Wisdom places greater blame on the craftsman than the masses because the craftsman knows that the idols are not gods. The craftsman’s motives and pursuit of material pleasures (Wis 15:10-13) recall the attitude of the wicked (Wis 2:6-20). While Wisdom has predicted the eschatological judgment of idolaters, the punishment described in Wis 15:10-11 is according to the theme of Wisdom 11-19: “one is punished by means of the very things by which one sins” (Wis 11:16). The potter seeks

⁶³ There are references to humans have a borrowed life in Greek (Plato, *Tim.* 42E), Roman (Lucretius 3.971), Jewish (Philo, *Abr.* 257; *Her.* 104; *Spec.* 1.295; Josephus, *B.J.* 3.374), and early Christian texts (Luke 12:20).

after material gain at the cost of knowing God, and the result is internal misery. The irony is that the pater's hope is placed in clay and as a result "His heart is ashes. His hope is more worthless than earth. And his life is of less value than clay" (Wis 15:10).

Wisdom 15:14-19

At this point, Wisdom explicitly identifies the false worshippers as the oppressors of God's people, an identification at which Wisdom has been hinting. Although the author never uses the proper name (Wis 16:4; cf. 11:5; 12:20; 16:8; 18:1), "the enemies of God's people" (Wis 15:14) are the Egyptians, who are especially noted for theriolatry (Wis 15:18-16:4). Additionally, Kolarcik comments "Other designations for the Egyptians link the oppressors of Israel to the wicked in the first part of the book ('wicked,' 12:10-11; 'ungodly,' 16:16; 'unjust,' 12:23; 'foolish,' 15:14; 19:3)."⁶⁴ Thus, both the wicked in the first section and the oppressors of God's people in the third section are ways of describing the Egyptians. In the chiastic structure of Wisdom 13-15, Egyptian theriolatry is paralleled to philosophical nature worship. Nature worshippers are described as "vain" (μάταιοι, 13:1) compared the theriolaters as "most foolish" (ἀφρονέστατοι, 15:14). The structure heightens the folly of the theriolaters because they worship the worst kind of animals in contrast to philosophical nature worshippers who at least deified the beautiful and useful aspects of creation.

This final section summarizes some of Wisdom's critiques of idols, and directs the critiques specifically at the Egyptians. Wisdom alleges that these Egyptian oppressors

⁶⁴ Kolarcik, "Wisdom," 569.

are foolish and miserable, but the cause of this misery is not what the reader might expect. Reading the exodus narrative, Wisdom's readers might expect the Egyptians to be miserable as a result of God's direct actions against them in the plagues and drowning in the Red Sea. Wisdom, however, states that they are miserable because of their incorrect theology. The oppressors of God's people are foolish and miserable "for all the idols of nations they accounted gods" (15:15). Wisdom again alleges that non-Jews make a complete identification between the idol and the god. The non-reality of the divinity behind the idols is evidenced in the fact of their inactivity and their origins in human craftsmanship.⁶⁵ These critiques seem to be modeled after Psalm 113:11-15 (LXX; 115:4-7).⁶⁶ They are merely material and have no life with which to activate their body parts. Wisdom explains their non-reality in the fact of humans' inability to give life. Humans are even better than their idols because humans are at least made by God who has the ability to impart life and the soul: "For a human made them, and one who borrowed his spirit formed them; for no human is able to form a god like himself. But being mortal, he makes a dead thing with his lawless hands, for he is better than the things he worships because he had life but those things never did" (Wis 15:16-17 NRSV).

⁶⁵ Larcher, *Le Livre*, 879-80, argues that the author criticizes both Greek and Egyptian gods at this point for their anthropomorphic character.

⁶⁶ While the two texts show some variation, both Ps 113 (115) and Wis 15 contain the following descriptions: idols of the nations (113:12; 15:15); made by humans (113:12; 15:16); eyes incapable of sight (113:13; 15:15); ears incapable of hearing (113:14; 15:15); noses incapable of smelling (113:14; 15:15); hands incapable of feeling (113:15; 15:15); feet incapable of walking (113:15; 15:15). Wisdom has omitted the elements of mouths (113:13) and throats (113:15) and switched the order of ears and noses. Additionally, Wisdom makes the concept of human construction an explanation for their inability rather than a characteristic of the idols. The dependence of Wis 15:15-16 on Ps 113 is strengthened by the shared theme of the exodus from Egypt. Psalm 113 begins "At Israel's exodus from Egypt, of Iakob's house from a barbarian people, Judea became his holy precinct, Israel his seat of authority" (113:1-2 NETS).

In Wis 15:18, 19, the author criticizes a specifically Egyptian practice, theriolatry. Wisdom's preceding critique of idols in terms of their inactivity and human origins would not disqualify animals from being suitable objects of worship, but in Wis 13:1-9, the author made the distinction between God and everything God created. For the author, only God is worthy of worship. While the nature worshippers at least deified magnificent things, the Egyptians deify animals; moreover, they deify the worst kinds of animals.⁶⁷ The theme of theriolatry, specifically being punished by the animals that one worships, caused the initial excursus (12:27), and now the author returns to the same theme: "Therefore, they were punished rightfully through similar creatures and were tormented through hordes of beasts" (16:1). Having completed the excursus on idolatry, the author resumes his explanation of how God delivered God's people while punishing their enemies by the same means.

Analysis of the Argument

The textual analysis above has noted some ways in which the author crafts his polemic against false forms of worship. While the author is making an argument for the Jewish understanding of God, he accomplishes this by drawing on and correcting Greco-Roman arguments. For the author, the most significant source of theological knowledge is the Jewish Scriptures, but his interpretation of the Scriptures is shaped by his understanding of Greek philosophy and his own situation in Alexandria. The author does not engage in a

⁶⁷ It seems to be a common Hellenistic Jewish criticism that Egyptians worship the worst kinds of animals (cf. Philo, *Decal.* 78; *Cont.* 8; Josephus, *C. Ap.* 2.6). Wisdom's reference to the Egyptian theriolaters as most foolish (ἄφρονέστατοι) and the animals they worship as foolish (ἄνοια) might be a deliberate attempt to connect the condemnation of idolatry in Ps 113 to the theme of Egyptian theriolatry: "May those who make them [idols] become like them, and all who trust in them" (Ps 113:16 NETS).

systematic rebuttal of Greco-Roman theologies; rather, he exploits internal differences, makes moral arguments, satirizes, relies on deductions, and alludes to Scripture.

Exploiting Differences in Greco-Roman Religion

Wisdom's idol polemic is different from the polemics in Psalms and Prophets, texts on which Wisdom draws, because Wisdom expands the polemic by incorporating philosophical critiques of Greco-Roman forms of worship. Because Greco-Roman religiosity was not a single unified system of beliefs, intramural critiques existed among different groups of Greeks and Romans. Some of these intramural critiques were socially stratified critiques made by the educated against the masses, and some critiques were among philosophical schools. In both cases, the author of Wisdom is able to assume a countering position that already existed within Greco-Roman thought although the author carefully modifies it in light of his Jewish tradition. This technique is demonstrated most clearly in the critique of nature worshippers and the critique of Egyptian theriolatry.

As the argument was described above, the author of Wisdom aligns himself with the Middle Platonic idea of a transcendent God against Stoicism's immanent God (e.g., 13:1, 7-9). But even though Wisdom can borrow an argument from one philosophical school, Wisdom does not endorse this philosophy altogether. Wisdom accepts Platonism's transcendent God, but Wisdom identifies the unknown Existing One of Platonism as the God of the Jews, who reveals himself at Sinai. Moreover, this transcendent Existing One is understood to be the craftsman who forms the material world. Thus the author corrects Stoicism by means of Middle Platonism and then corrects Middle Platonism by means of Judaism. The author similarly exploits the existing divides

in pagan religiosity when he criticizes the foolishness of Egyptian theriolatry. The author doubtlessly expects no resistance from his Jewish audience in the condemnation of this Egyptian practice. Instead countering theriolatry by means of a logical rebuttal, the author is able to insert himself into a divide among pagans, align himself with Greek criticisms of Egyptians, and dismiss theriolatry with little effort.

That the author employs existing arguments does not imply that the author lacks creativity or insight; rather, the use of existing critiques enables the author to make a stronger argument. If (as I have argued above) the author writes primarily to an educated, Hellenistic Jewish audience, his appeals to Greco-Roman philosophy and upper-class criticisms would function to bolster the audience's pride in their Jewish faith that was conversant with but superior to the best Greco-Roman thought. In order to appeal to an audience that probably had some familiarity with Greco-Roman philosophy (perhaps through a gymnasium education), the author demonstrates both his own facility with philosophy and Judaism's superiority over Greco-Roman philosophical understandings of God. This technique allows the author to buttress his argument with the best of Greco-Roman philosophy in order to demonstrate that wisdom—even in the incomplete form understood by Greco-Roman philosophers—points to the Jewish manner of worship, although it does so insufficiently. The author bolsters the audience's pride in Judaism by demonstrating that the best Greco-Roman philosophy points to Jewish belief and practice. And the author attempts to persuade the audience to pursue Jewish belief and practice by demonstrating the incompleteness of Greco-Roman philosophy and the moral

consequences of its practice. The author references Greco-Roman beliefs in order to make a more sophisticated rebuttal and to demonstrate the superiority of Judaism.

Moral Arguments

Although the author does not dwell on his view of Jewish morality, the underlying assumption is that the Jewish way of life is characterized by moral integrity, and this morality flows from their proper understanding of God. The contrast to Jewish morality is pagan immorality that flows from their improper understanding of God (esp. Wis 14:12-14, 21-22). Many of Wisdom's examples of pagan immorality are standard Jewish accusations against pagans (e.g., murder, adultery, debauchery, and homosexuality), and the author likely thinks he will receive no objection from the audience. Some of his examples of pagan immorality, however, are more specific to Greco-Roman cultic practices (e.g., secret mysteries, frenzied revels).⁶⁸ Wisdom has incorporated stock Jewish critiques of pagans and supported them with some specific examples of pagan excess in order to persuade the audience of the dangerous moral result of false worship. The author paints an obviously slanted picture of pagan immorality and altogether omits any example of pagan morality. The author and his audience were part of the same minority group that struggled to maintain their community boundaries within the broader Greco-Roman world. Establishing a set of moral values characteristic of the minority group is an effective boundary marker only if they are not characteristic of the larger

⁶⁸ The accusations of murder (14:23, 24, 25) and sexual immorality (14:12, 24, 26) are especially pronounced. The accusation of homosexuality is debatable. Wisdom 14:26 lists several results of idolatry among which is *γενέσεως ἐναλλαγῆς*. While Winston (*Wisdom*, 280) notes that we would expect *γένους ἐναλλαγῆς* instead of *γενέσεως*, the best translation is probably "interchange of sexes." Cf. *Test. Nephtali* 3:4; Rom 1:26.

culture. The author argues that Judaism is distinctly superior both in its theology and morality, an assertion which his audience likely received wholeheartedly.

Satire

Wisdom's critiques are most persuasive when the author elaborates on long-standing Jewish caricatures of pagan worship. The author mocks pagans as worshipping precious metals, stone, wood, and clay. This satirical critique is undergirded by an assumption that the author assumes the audience will share: pagans believe that their gods *are* the idols, not that they are represented by the idols. By never stating this premise, the author avoids inviting the readers to question the logic of the argument, and the reader is easily caught up in the humorous caricature of the opponents. This disingenuous representation of pagan worship allows the author to describe the idol-gods repeatedly as "dead" and "manmade." These satirical flurries also permit the author to pass over more difficult questions, such as the question of the seeming superior power of the pagan gods in light of the dominance of Greco-Roman culture over Jewish culture. These selective and well-crafted satires demonstrate the ridiculousness of the pagan worship as the author has represented it.

Obvious Deductions

In the idol polemic, the author rarely offers detailed logical arguments. The reader must fill in the logical steps to arrive at Wisdom's conclusions. For example, the polemic closes with an explanation of why idols are dead. Wisdom argues that humans receive their spirits from God and are not capable of creating inspired life. They are necessarily better than any of their creations because they have a spirit that their creations lack (Wis

15:16-17). The vagueness of this argument has the benefit that the author's premises are hard to challenge because the audience must infer them. The statements about idols being dead and humans being better than idols are conclusions of arguments that the author states without detailing the logic.⁶⁹ The reader is shamed into compliance with the author because the author compares those who do not follow his logic to infants (15:14). Similarly, Wisdom describes those who worship nature as incapable in their reasoning (13:1-2). Anyone who would disagree with the author is readily dismissed as being foolish and without thought.

Use of Scripture (Pss 113 [115], 134 [135]; Is 44; Jer 10)

This section is limited to discussing briefly the manner in which Wisdom employs the Scriptures to argue against idolatry. Wisdom makes use of the Scriptures in several ways: direct reference, allusion, and type of argumentation. Wisdom directly references Exodus 3 and 34 (Wis 13:1; 15:1), and in both occurrences Wisdom is attempting clarify who God is. Implicit in this manner of argumentation is that the Jewish Scriptures, not philosophy or human reason, is accepted as the authoritative guide to belief. Wisdom also alludes to the history of Israel in order to demonstrate God's character through a description of God's interactions with humanity. The primary theme of Wisdom 11-19 is that God acts, through the secondary means of the cosmos, to deliver God's people and

⁶⁹ The whole argument is built upon a reassertion of who God is. God is True Existence and has the ability to create inspirited life; humans are the creations of God; therefore, humans are inspirited. From this theology, the author can make claims about the natures of humans and idols. Humans, as creations, cannot create inspirited life; idols are the creations of humans; therefore, idols do not have life. From the conclusions of these arguments, the author can compare idols and humans. Death is better than life; humans are alive, and idols are dead; therefore, humans are better than idols.

punish their enemies. In order to demonstrate this point within the idol polemic, Wisdom alludes to the stories of Moses (Wis 14:3) and Noah (Wis 14:6). The author resumes this explanation, following the excursus on idolatry, by explaining the irony of Egyptian theriolatry—the Egyptians are punished by the animals that they worship in contrast to the Israelites whom God feeds by means of animals (16:1-3). Wisdom also borrows the form of critique from the scriptural text. The reworking of idol polemics is evident in Wisdom 13:10-16 and 15:7-9 which seem to be an elaboration of themes in Ps 113:11-15, Isa 44:9-20 and Jer 10:1-16. Wisdom heightens and extends the satire by giving more detail to the process of crafting the idols.

Representations of God

There are some considerable differences between the representation of God in Wisdom's polemic against false worship and the polemics in the Prophets. These differences are largely attributable to the different audiences and locations of the authors. Most notably, the author of Wisdom interprets the scriptural views of God through his philosophical understanding. The author neither attacks polytheism nor emphasizes God's oneness. Instead, the author presents a God who is both the universal Creator, perceivable by observing nature, and covenantal Father, known by God's self-revelation in the Law. Thus Wisdom presents God in both universal and particular terms, but the universal terms (e.g., Creator and The Existing One) and redefined by the author's interpretation of the Jewish Scriptures.

Creator

A consistent aspect of the Jewish definition of God is that God is Creator, so it is not surprising that Wisdom's representation of God assumes God's role as Creator.⁷⁰ Just as some knowledge about wisdom can be obtained apart from direct revelation, some knowledge about God is obtainable apart from special revelation. Thus, even pagans can infer some things about God by observing nature. Wisdom, like Philo, expects some humans to apply reason and philosophy to the natural world in order to infer something about the analogous nature of God.⁷¹ From the beauty of nature, humans should be able to understand that the Creator is infinitely more beautiful.

God's identity as Creator provides the essential distinction between worshipping God and worshipping anything else. The category of God is defined so that anything not the Creator is disqualified from being God. God is the self-existent Creator in contrast to nature that is contingent on God. Only God is The Existing One. Moreover, God is Creator in distinction from idols that are the creations of humans. Wisdom does describe God as Creator with the anthropomorphic representation of a Craftsman (13:1), but this image is intended to describe the distinction between God and everything else.⁷²

⁷⁰ The affirmation of God as Creator does not necessarily mean that God does not use secondary means to create. Wisdom can be described as an agent that God uses in order to create (Wis 7:22, 25-26; 8:1; esp. 9:2; cf. 1:14). Moreover, God's role as the Creator explains why the cosmos punishes the oppressors of God's people in Wis 11-19.

⁷¹ See Collins, "Natural Theology and Biblical Tradition: The Case of Hellenistic Judaism," 1-15.

⁷² The term τεχνίτης is used both in reference to God as the Craftsman of the World (13:1) and humans as the craftsmen of idols (14:18). Wisdom probably intends to contrast the creative abilities of the idol-maker to God's magnificent works in creation. The idea of God as Craftsman may also have been a way for Wisdom to draw on Greco-Roman philosophy. See Reese, *Hellenistic Influence*, 54; Winston,

The Existing One

In the polemic against false worship, the author's first description of God is drawn from Greek philosophy. God is The Existing One, ὁ ὄν. The author uses this description to make a distinction between the self-existence of The Existing One and the contingent existence of everything else.⁷³ As I have commented, Wisdom is employing a Middle Platonic term in order to critique a Stoic idea, but ultimately the author wants to argue that the meaning of God as ὁ ὄν is understood properly by the Jewish Scriptures. The author appeals to the description of God as ὁ ὄν in the Septuagint's translation of Exodus 3 in order to describe The Existing One as a God who is personally connected to a particular people. God is the self-existing Creator, but the context of Exodus 3 qualifies this God to be the Jewish God who enters into special relationship with a particular people.

Father

The tendency of Wisdom to present God in both universalistic and particularistic terms is especially evident in the description of God as Father. Wisdom borrows the anthropomorphic imagery of God as Father from the Jewish Scriptures but not without modification.⁷⁴ In Wis 14:2, the author describes the actions of wisdom, being manifested

Wisdom, 249-50. The author also describes wisdom as a craftsman of the world (7:21) and of a ship (8:6), but a different word is used (τεχνίτης).

⁷³ This is an essential distinction that the author uses to contrast God's creation to the creations of idol craftsmen. Idol craftsmen are incapable of imparting life because they are not self-existing; they have a borrowed spirit (e.g., Wis 15:8).

⁷⁴ The imagery of God as Father in the Jewish Scriptures is complex and can make reference to God as Creator and God as the Redeemer (or Maker of his people) in the exodus. Isaiah 45, directly

through the skillfulness of the shipwright in the act of crafting a vessel. There is nothing to suggest that this shipwright is Jewish, and wisdom seems to be universally accessible. While wisdom built the ship, the author argues that God directs it: “But your providence, Father, steers it” (Wis 14:3). As wisdom is accessible to the (pagan or Jewish alike) shipwright, it seems that God’s paternal providence is exercised in an equally universal manner. Kolarcik comments, “Philo and Josephus employ the metaphor of father for God in a universal manner, as does the author of Wisdom.”⁷⁵ Wisdom’s description of God as Father, however, is more nuanced than Kolarcik indicates. Although the author parallels the actions of God to the non-particularistic agency of wisdom, the author addresses God personally. Moreover the examples of God’s providence are in terms of God’s provision for Moses (Wis 14:3) and Noah (Wis 14:6). The particularistic nuances of God as providential Father agree with the manner in which God is depicted in Wis 11-19, a section in which God’s providence is exercised by the cosmos punishing the enemies of God’s people. Moreover, the author can group himself with the righteous who call on God as their Father (Wis 2:16).

following the idol polemic on which Wisdom draws, exemplifies this complexity. On the one hand, there are strong references to God’s special care for his people (45:3, 4, 11, 15, 17), even when it manifests itself by raising up Cyrus to punish God’s people (45:1, 13). On the other hand, there are references to God’s universal work as Creator (45:5-8, 12, 18). Among these particularistic and universalistic conceptions of God, is the description of God as Father: “It is like the one who says to his father, ‘What will you beget?’ and to his mother, ‘With what are you in labor?’ Because thus says the Lord God, the Holy One of Israel, the one who has made the things that are coming: Ask me about my sons and about my daughters, and command me concerning the works of my hands.” (Isa 45:10-12 NETS). God is the Potter of all things but especially of God’s people Israel. His Fatherhood has a special focus on Israel, but he is also the Creator (and in that sense Maker and Father) of all things (cf. Exod 4:22; Deut 32:6, 18; Isa 1:2; 64:7; Jer 38:9 [31:9]; Hos 11:1; Mal 2:10). God’s Fatherhood most often refers to his care for Israel, and even when God is Father in terms of creating everything, Israel is still the focus as God’s unique son.

⁷⁵ Kolarcik, “Wisdom,” 553.

When multiple gods are introduced to compete with the Jewish God for authority, Wisdom, in line with the scriptural tradition, appeals to the activity of the deities in history to demonstrate their reality or non-reality. Wisdom accomplishes this by making subtle references to God's activity within the idol polemic and by framing the idol polemic within the exodus story. Wisdom's references to God's salvation of Noah and the Israelites in the Red Sea passage are situated in the apostrophe to God wherein the author reasserts the character of God in contrast to idols. Whereas the idols are unable to save a well-designed ship on a common voyage, God saved a "plank" through a catastrophic flood. The activity of God in history frames the discussion of idols because the surrounding chapters describe how he accomplished the exodus from Egypt.⁷⁶

Related to the idea of God as personal Father is the theme of God's special care for God's people.⁷⁷ In some instances, the Fatherhood of God is implied by the designation "your people" because God's people are described as God's children (e.g., Wis 9:7; 12:19; 18:13). God's people are also identified more specifically as the righteous (Wis 2:13, 18; 5:5; 18:7), not idolaters (Wis 15:14-15), and God's people in every case are understood to be Israel (Wis 9:7, 12; 12:19; 16:2, 3, 5, 20; 18:3, 13; 19:2,

⁷⁶ A critical reader might notice that Wisdom's examples of God's activity come from distant history, and more recently it does not seem that God has delivered Israel from her enemies. Wisdom does not address this issue, but Wisdom's description of God's involvement in the world does not stop with his activity in Israel's history because Wisdom envisions a more fundamental and universal activity for God, creation. Not only is this a standard Jewish method of argumentation, it also allows the author to argue from a philosophical standpoint because deduction of God's being from nature is accessible to all humans.

⁷⁷ God's care for God's people is not to be understood at the exclusion of God's care for all people (e.g. Wis 12:13, 20-21). When the oppressors of God's people repeatedly and unrepentantly sin, God judges their actions against God's people.

5, 22). Within the idol polemic, God's special relationship with God's people is alluded to in 15:1 which calls God "our God" and alludes to the renewal of the covenant in Exodus 34. The conclusion of Wisdom is important for understanding God's relationship with humanity: "For in every way, you exalted and glorified your people and you did not neglect to help them in every time and place" (Wis 19:22). Thus, Wisdom describes God as the transcendent Creator and also the one who cares especially for his people.

Eschatological Judge

On the one hand, the unrighteous are presently punished by means of their own sins and by the cosmos, and on the other hand, the author holds out the threat (which is the hope of the author and audience) that God will one day punish the wicked oppressors, who are idolaters. In the idol polemic, the author states that God will punish idols and idol-craftsmen: "For equally hated by God are the ungodly person and his ungodliness, and the thing made will be punished with the one doing it" (Wis 14:9-10; cf. 14:11, 14, 30-31). In the first section, God's eschatological judgment embodied the righteous' hope of justice (e.g., Wis 3:10; 4:16-5:14).⁷⁸ The function of God's eschatological judgment in the idol polemic is to dissuade the audience from engaging in idolatry by promising that idolatry incurs the wrath of God.

⁷⁸ Wisdom preempts any questioning of God's justice because Wisdom asserts that God gave people a chance to repent (Wis 11:9-14; 12:3-18, 20-21; 19:1-5, 13).

Understandings of False Worship

Collins states that for Wisdom, “The basic sin is idolatry, which is denounced repeatedly throughout the book.”⁷⁹ While Wisdom does argue that the fundamental sin is abandoning God in false worship, false worship is not reducible to idolatry. Even within the idol polemic of Wisdom 13-15, the author describes the differences in the manner and motives of different types of false worship. The nature worshipper is guilty of error and ignorance (13:1), but this person has made a genuine attempt to seek God (13:6). The idolater is miserable (13:10) and deceived by idols (14:11, 21; 15:4), and their sin is one of both cognitive error and action. Wisdom accredits no goodwill to the idol craftsmen (14:8-10); rather, they are portrayed as intentionally deceiving the masses (15:9). “This person [idol craftsmen] knows more than all others that he sins” (Wis 15:13). Thus, Wisdom hints at an understanding of false worship as a willful act by some (idol craftsmen and some idolaters) and an unintentional act by others (nature worshippers and some idolaters).

Various actions are included under Wisdom’s condemnation of false worship. At its core, false worship is a combination of cognitive error about who God is and incorrect action (both in devotion to things that are not God and in not devoting oneself to the worship of God). Nature worshippers have an incorrect understanding of God. While they do not necessarily express that in improper action, they do not worship properly by practicing Jewish forms of worship. The author defines the false worship of idolaters as

⁷⁹ Collins, *From Athens*, 199.

errant thought expressed in improper action: idolaters “thought wrongly about God by devoting themselves to idols” (14:30). Pagans err not only in worshipping falsely but also in thinking falsely about God and gods.

A common explanation of false worship in the Jewish Scriptures is that it is the forsaking of ancestral customs. This understanding of false worship, however, is absent from *Wisdom*, which signals a difference in the way that *Wisdom* presents false worship. When a scriptural author warns his audience not to forsake ancestral custom, he understands idolatry to be a sin into which Israel can fall. Similarly, in some prophetic texts (e.g. Jeremiah), idolatry is described as a characteristic of Israel. In other prophetic texts (e.g. Deutero-Isaiah), idolatry is a sin that characterizes pagans. The author of *Wisdom* draws stark contrasts between God’s people and their oppressors, and idolatry is uniquely a characteristic of their oppressors. *Wisdom* acknowledges that there might be a chance that Jews could stray into false worship, but even then God would forgive them (Wis 15:1-3). The general presentation of false worship in *Wisdom* is that it is a sin of which the pagans are guilty.

Thinking Wrongly About God

Wisdom presents false worship as incorrect thinking about God. This is evident both in explicit texts (e.g., Wis 13:2, 10; 15:15) and the mockery with which *Wisdom* treats the process of making idols—it is a foolish endeavor. Associated with incorrect thinking about God are misplaced trust (14:29), misdirected prayer (13:17-14:1), frenzied cultic activity (14:22-23, 28-29), and improper worship (14:18, 20, 27). For the author of *Wisdom*, improper worship does not necessarily have to express itself in pagan ritual.

Nature worshippers do not seem to participate in any particular cultic acts; nevertheless, the author considers them to worship falsely because they think wrongly about God. The author describes their thinking as ignorant of God (13:1), failure of perception (13:1, 4-5), and error about the knowledge of God (14:22). These descriptions of pagan ignorance contrast with the God's people who think rightly about God and are not deceived by pagans (15:2-4). The allusions in Wis 15:1-2 to the covenant and Mosaic Law imply that proper Jewish understanding of God comes from God's self-revelation in the Law. While pagans should be capable of inferring something about God by observing nature (Wis 13:1-5), the author thinks that the truest knowledge of God is available to Jews in the form of the Mosaic Law.

Worship of Idols

Idolatry was both the most prevalent and most obvious example of false worship in the author's context. Cult temples and idols were visible daily to the Alexandrian Jewish community. The worship of a deity through idols was also the most common and characteristic form of non-Jewish worship in the Greco-Roman world. Moreover, the rejection of images in worship, while not exclusively a Jewish concept, was especially noted by pagans as a characteristic of Jewish worship. In contrast to philosophical nature worship, idolatry had been discussed by Jews for centuries and was prohibited in the Law.

Idols are defined in contrast to God who is Creator. From God's role as Creator, Wisdom asserts God's salvific providence, pre-existence of the physical world, and ability to act in history. Corresponding to each of these traits of God, the idols are

demonstrated to be non-gods. The fundamental difference between God and everything else is that he is the Existing One who creates everything else. God is Creator, but idols are created. Unlike nature and humans that are created directly by God, idols are twice removed from God. Even the description of an object as being made with human hands may have become a term to describe idols.⁸⁰ The non-reality of idol-gods is shown by the fact that they are created by those who cannot impart the spirit to them. Thus, idols are dead. Addison Wright attributes significance to the definition of idols as dead because he argues that the entire polemic is formed around the *inclusio* of 13:10 and 15:17 with the assertion that idols are dead things.⁸¹ God's salvific providence is contrasted to both the idols' inability to save and the special care that the idolater must take in order to ensure the safety of his idol. God's pre-existence stands in stark contrast to the euhemeristic explanations of the origins of idolatry. God's activity in the history of Israel is contrasted with the inability of idols even to perform actions on their own behalf: they cannot exercise even the most basic sensory abilities.

The most succinct expression of the author's criticism of idols occurs in his first description of idols and idolaters: "Wretched, with their hopes set on dead things, are those who designate as gods the works of human hands. These things are skillfully crafted gold and silver, representations of animals, or useless stone, the work of an

⁸⁰ See Ernest G. Clarke, *The Wisdom of Solomon* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973), 93-4; Gilbert, *La Critique*, 81-3.

⁸¹ Wright, "Wisdom," 519. Wolfgang M. W. Roth ("For Life, He Appeals to Death (Wis 13:18): A Study of Old Testament Idol Parodies," *CBQ* 37 [1975]: 21-47, esp. 45-7) argues that the primary contrast in Jewish idol parodies is between the dead idols and life-giving God.

ancient hand” (Wis 13:10). The author critiques the idols in terms of their activity, makers, material, and form. The most biting parts of Wisdom’s polemic against idols are the satirical comments about the “deadness” of idols that are like a corpse in that they have body parts but they are unable to use them (Wis 13:16-19; 14:29). As discussed above, the author thinks idols to be unworthy of worship because they are the creation by humans who do not have the ability to create inspired life. Idols are made from precious and common materials, but nothing merely material is worthy of worship. Moreover, the form into which craftsmen shape this material is unbecoming deity; they are shaped into the form of animals and other humans.

Worship of Animals

The inclusion of theriolatry in the author’s critique of false worship allows the author to resume the main argument of Wisdom 11-19 and draw on the situation of his own community. This especially Egyptian practice is important for the author’s own context and to demonstrate how God had delivered God’s people from the hand of the Egyptian gods in the past. The importance of discussing theriolatry for the flow of the argument is that it resumes the author’s theme of how God uses the cosmos to provide for God’s people and punish their enemies (Wis 11:5; 16:17, 24; 19:6). In Wis 16:1, the author reminds his audience that people are punished by the things by which they sin, a theme that also appears directly before the excursus on false worship (Wis 12:27; cf. 11:16). Moreover, the author reinforces the distinction between God’s people, for whom God provides, and the enemies of God’s people, whom God punishes. The

Egyptian oppressors were punished by means of animals, but instead (ἀντί) of punishment by animals, God's people received the animals as food (Wis 16:1-4).

Effects of False Worship

The effects of idolatry are realized both externally and internally. Internally, the idolater is miserable with useless hope, but the idolater is also threatened with divine judgment. The consequences of idolatry are realized internally, and the author argues that idolaters are punished by the things that they worship. They are punished because they have hoped in false things, and as a result, their hopes are futile (Wis 15:6). Idolatry has further internal consequences in that idolatry results in immoral actions, actions that the author thinks result in misery (Wis 14:22-29). The idolaters are frenzied, disordered, and confused. The author makes an implicit argument that the Jewish mode of living, even in its strictness, produces a happier existence than pagan excesses.

In addition to the internal torment of the idolater's soul, Wisdom also assures the audience of God's future judgment on the idolaters, a judgment that is seen historically in God's punishment of the Egyptians in the exodus. Wisdom 11-19 describes how God punishes the oppressors of God's people, who are identifiable as idolaters, through the secondary means of the cosmos.⁸² In the polemic against false worship, Wisdom mentions that God will punish idolaters, even if their present punishment is to lead a miserable life. Wisdom 14:8-10 states that both idols and idolaters are hated and cursed by God, and then the author promises that they will be punished: "and the thing made

⁸² The identification of idolaters as the wicked oppressors is strengthened by the description of them as wretched (ταλαιπώρος; Wis 3:11; 13:10; cf. 15:14) with vain hope (Wis 3:11; 13:10).

will be punished with the one doing it. Therefore divine judgment (ἐπισκοπή) will come upon the idols of the nations..." (14:10-11a; cf. 14:30-31). While the main point of the excursus on false worship is not to promise God's eschatological punishment on the idolaters, the author uses eschatological punishment as another assurance that the Jewish way of life and worship is proper. Even though the author's community presently suffers at the hands of wicked idolaters, God will punish the wicked idolaters and reward the righteous Jew.

Conclusions

In Wisdom 13-15, the exhortation to avoid false worship and pursue piety through the Mosaic Law is largely implied by describing the foolishness of pagan expressions of worship. The author describes the internal misery of idolaters, mocks the foolish manner in which they craft gods, and promises God's future punishment on their actions. On the other hand, the author reaffirms the close relationship between God and God's people; they are not deceived by false forms of worship, but even if they were, God would forgive them. The text seems to be written to Jews, and the author assumes that this people no longer commits idolatry (15:2). The author attempts to show the benefits of the proper conception and worship of God in contrast to the disastrous results of all forms of pagan worship. The author thinks the contrast between Jewish Law-observance and pagan cultic worship sufficiently proves the superiority of Jewish belief and practice.

Wisdom's critique of idolatry is very much in line with scriptural idol polemics in their mocking caricatures of the process of making a god. Because they deny any reality of the deity behind the idol, they both begin with the complete identification of the god

and the idol. Wisdom also speaks of false worship in terms of error and departure from the proper worship of God. While wisdom shares these features with the Jewish Scriptures, Wisdom mostly removes idolatry from the context of interpersonal relationship because idolatry is something that characterizes the pagans.

While Wisdom is dependent upon and in agreement with rejections of idolatry in the Jewish Scriptures, Wisdom expands the discussion of false worship to include issues relevant to the Alexandrian context, nature worship and theriolatry. In the discussion of nature worship, the author demonstrates that he is conversant in Greek philosophy by rejecting and qualifying different Greek philosophical positions. Wisdom also introduces euhemeristic explanations for the origins of idolatry that caricature common Greco-Roman practices. Following the explanation of the invention of idolatry, Wisdom explains that the introduction of idolatry also introduced every evil into the world (14:27). The counterpart to the evil effects of idolatry is Jewish piety in the observance of the Law. Wisdom 13-15, read in the context of the Book as a whole, argues that idolatry is a foolish pagan invention with disastrous effects including the sure punishment of God.

CHAPTER 4

PHILO'S POLEMIC AGAINST FALSE RELIGION

Introduction

Philo of Alexandria was a highly educated Jew who lived from about 20 B.C.E. to 50 C.E. In addition to his literary output, he also represented the Alexandrian Jews politically in the delegation to Gaius Caligula (38 C.E.) in response to the disturbances in Alexandria. Within this societal upheaval, Philo remained deeply committed to the Jewish community, Jewish way of life, and Jewish Scriptures. Philo was an extremely well-educated and Hellenized Jew who interpreted the LXX in light of his philosophical education. On the one hand Philo was staunchly committed to Jewish belief and practice (e.g., he thought apostates should be executed), and on the other hand, Philo was remarkably convergent with Hellenistic culture (e.g., he received a gymnasium education and wrote in Greek). Philo's writings display the dual commitments in Philo's own life between being a pious Jew and being conversant with Hellenistic culture, and they bear the stamps both of his Jewish commitment and Hellenistic education.

His writings are generally divided into the *Allegorical Treatises* and the treatises concerning the *Exposition of the Law*. Because idolatry was a significant boundary marker that differentiated Jew from Gentile, Philo mentions idolatry in many of his treatises, and the most extended critique of Gentile idolatry comes in *De decalogo*. *De decalogo* belongs to the *Exposition of the Law* in which Philo offers a commentary and

explanation of the LXX.¹ There is general agreement among scholars that the *Exposition* is less technical than the *Allegorical Treatises* and thus more accessible to a broader audience. Erwin R. Goodenough is an early representative of those who think Philo's *Exposition* is directed to a Gentile audience: "The Exposition is thus more intelligible throughout when, in contrast with the writings designed for Jews, it is recognized to have been written for gentiles."² Elsewhere I have argued that Philo's retelling of the narrative events around Sinai and his presentation of the Law in *De decalogo* is an attempt to make accessible the Law and history of a particular people to a broader Greco-Roman audience.³ This universalizing tendency in *De decalogo* is less evident when he pointedly critiques the theology and practice of all non-Jewish religion because Philo is arguing that Jewish practice embodies piety in contrast to the impiety of pagan practice. Proper belief and practice are exemplified by a *particular people*. But even when he critiques

*In order to make the references to Philo more accessible to the reader, I have employed the translations by F. H. Colson in the Loeb Classical Library.

¹ Many accept the sequence of the *Exposition* to be *Opif.*, *Abr.*, (*On Isaac*), (*On Jacob*), *Decal.*, *Spec.*, *Virt.*, *Praem.* See for example Peder Borgen, *Philo of Alexandria: An Exegete for His Time* (NovTSup 86; Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1997), 77. There is debate concerning the insertion of *Mos.* as the last of the biographies. In *Praem.* 1-3, Philo himself indicates this scheme of Moses' work: creation of the world, history, and Law.

² Erwin R. Goodenough, "Philo's Exposition of the Law and his De Vita Mosis," *HThR* 26 (1933): 124; cf. Emil Schürer, *The Literature of the Jewish People in the Time of Jesus* (ed. Nahum Glatzer; trans. Peter Christie and Sophia Taylor; New York: Schocken, 1972), 338. See also, Emil Schürer, *The History of the Jewish People in the Age of Jesus Christ (175 B.C. – A.D. 135)* (trans. rev. ed. Geza Vermes, Fergus Millar, and Martin Goodman; Edinburgh: Clark, 1973), 3.840-1; Frederick H. Colson, *De Decalogo* PLCL, xiv; Valentin Nikiprowetzky, *De Decalogo* (Les Oeuvres de Philon D'Alexandrie 23; Paris: Cerf, 1965), 29-32; Peder Borgen, "Philo of Alexandria: Reviewing and Rewriting Biblical Material," *SPhilo* 9 (1997): 47-53.

³ Trent A. Rogers, "Philo's Universalization of Sinai in *Decal.* 32-49," *SPhilo* 24 (2012): 89-109.

pagan religiosity, there are hints of his more universal scope because he does so in a way that he thinks will appeal to the philosophically inclined Gentile.

Having concluded that the treatises comprising the *Exposition*, and *De decalogo* in particular, are more accessible and universalizing, we must still assess Philo's purpose in this genre of writing. Ellen Birnbaum argues that we should not limit Philo to a single purpose: "Philo may have several aims in mind here: to reclaim the alienated Jews, educate less knowledgeable ones, assuage non-Jews who may be hostile, and appeal to those who might be interested."⁴ These purposes are consistent with the universalizing tendency observable in Philo's writing even though Philo's universalism is grounded in particularism.⁵ Jutta Leonhardt-Balzer defines universalism and particularism in Second Temple Judaism: "Universalism in the context of Judaism is the idea that the Jewish traditions—in whichever form—are relevant for the whole world. The opposite term is particularism, which in the same context would mean the view that they refer to the Jewish nation only." Philo believes Judaism to be the purest philosophy, and in this sense, it should be the universally practiced philosophy. Thus, the particular Law of the Jewish God is understood to be relevant and accessible to all people because it is the law of nature. Philo does not want to compromise his conviction that the Jewish Law and practice is superior to all others; rather, he intends to show the superiority of the Jewish

⁴ Ellen Birnbaum, *The Place of Judaism in Philo's Thought: Israel, Jews, and Proselytes* (BJS 290/SPhMS 2; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1996), 20.

⁵ Jutta Leonhardt-Balzer ("Jewish Worship and Universal Identity in Philo of Alexandria" in *Jewish Identity in the Greco-Roman World: Jüdische Identität in der griechisch-römischen Welt* [ed. Jörg Frey, Daniel R. Schwartz, and Stephanie Gripenotrog; AGJU 71; Leiden: E. J. Brill, 2007], 33. See also Birnbaum, *The Place of Judaism*, 1-6.

Law in that it is universally applicable.⁶ In this demonstration, he may hope to persuade sympathetic Gentiles of the respectability of the Jewish Law and perhaps persuade them to practice the Law. Moreover, and perhaps more importantly, this demonstration assures Jews of the intellectual superiority of Judaism and engenders pride in their ancestral religion, which provides the foundation for pious actions.⁷

The Structure and the Argument

The argument of *Decal.* should not be separated from its connection to other treatises in the *Exposition*. Philo assumes that the audience will be familiar with treatises concerning the patriarchs (*Decal.* 1), and he reads the Decalogue as heads, or summaries, of laws that are explained more extensively in *De specialibus legibus* (*Decal.* 50-2; cf. *Abr.* 1; *Spec.* 1.1; *Heres.* 167-73). The *Exposition* is Philo's explanation of the Jewish Law, and *De decalogo* deals specifically with the 10 commandments and the circumstances of their dictation. Philo's treatise is well structured:

- Introduction (1)
- I. Four Questions about the Circumstances of Giving the Law (2-49)
- II. Exposition of the Ten Commandments (50-153):
 - A. Explanation of the Division into Two Sets of Commandments (50-51)
 - B. The First Set of Commandments (52-120)
 - C. The Second Set of Commandments (121-53)
- III. Rough Synopsis of *Spec.* 2-4.131
- IV. Explanation for the Absence of Penalties in the Decalogue (176-78)

⁶ Peder Borgen ("Philo of Alexandria," in *ABD* 5.341) comments on this universalizing impulse in Philo: "Philo's extreme form of particularism risked ending up in a universalism where Jewish distinctiveness was in danger of being lost." It should also be noted that Philo's universalism can be read as an extreme particularism in which other nations abandon their practices and observe the Jewish Law because it is the legal code that accords perfectly with the law of nature and reason. Cf. *Mos.* 2.17-20, 43-4.

⁷ While Philo's implied audience and purpose are probably outside his Jewish community, apologetic works often are read by those inside the community of the author. Jews would be comforted by Philo's defense of Jewish philosophical superiority and might find in *De decalogo* an apologetic model.

The Introduction locates *De decalogo* among Philo's other treatises, and the four questions preempt some of the concerns that an audience, unfamiliar with the specifics of the Law, might ask. In the *Exposition*, *De decalogo* follows both the description of God's creation of the world and the lives of Jewish patriarchs. The narratives about the patriarchs are especially important for Philo's explanation of the Decalogue because the patriarchs are examples of how to live in accordance with the law of nature. Philo understands the Decalogue to be the perfect, written manifestation of the law of nature, and thus the patriarchs are prototypes of the Decalogue. The universalizing implication of this identification of the Decalogue with the law of nature is that Mosaic Law is applicable to non-Jews.⁸ Philo clarifies the connection between the patriarchs and the written Law in his opening: "Having related in the preceding treatises the lives of those whom Moses judged to be men of wisdom, who are set before us in the Sacred Books as founders of our nation and in themselves unwritten laws, I shall now proceed in due course to give full descriptions of the written laws."⁹ For Philo, the lives of the patriarchs, who precede the giving of the Law, demonstrate that the Law extends beyond nationalistic practice because it can be practiced in accord with nature and wisdom. Peder Borgen argues, "On the concrete and nationalistic level the lives of the Patriarchs were the lives of 'the founders of our nation,' i.e. of the Jewish nation. On the general level of

⁸ J. H. A. Hart, "Philo of Alexandria," *JQR* 17 (1904): 82, makes the connection between Philo and the Stoic natural Law: "So, then, the life according to Nature which the Stoic philosopher preached was after all no more than the life of the law-abiding Jew."

⁹ Philo, *Decal.* 1 (PLCL, Colson). Although the audience knows who the "men of wisdom" are, the discrete Jewish designations never appear in *Decal.*: Abraham, Isaac, Jacob/Israel, and Joseph. Aaron also receives no mention and the priests are only mentioned twice (*Decal.* 71, 159).

law and philosophy they were archetypes and in themselves unwritten laws.”¹⁰ Although it is important that the Jewish people have wise ancestors, the significance of the patriarchs is that their wise manner of living agrees with the wisdom of the Mosaic Law.¹¹ Moreover, the Law of Moses accords with natural law because the Law is received from God who is Creator.¹² Special revelation to specific men (i.e. the Jewish patriarchs) excludes non-Jews, but Philo’s presentation of the Law as the same as the law of nature opens the possible practice of the Law to all people who live in accord with reason and nature.¹³ Hindy Najman summarizes, “In Philo’s view, the patriarchs exemplify the possibility of leading a virtuous life even if one does not have access to the written Law of Moses (*Abr.* 16).”¹⁴ Appeal to the congruence between the Mosaic Law and the natural law removes some of the exclusive Jewishness of the Law because it can be lived partially through wisdom.

¹⁰ Borgen, *Philo*, 71.

¹¹ See John W. Martens, *One God, One Law: Philo of Alexandria on the Mosaic and Greco-Roman Law* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 2003), 86-90, who correctly notes that more than just being in accordance with the Law of nature, these wise men become unwritten laws that are determined by the law of nature.

¹² See Francesca Calabi, *The Language and the Law of God: Interpretation and Politics in Philo of Alexandria* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1998), 37-8.

¹³ On the natural law being the law of reason, see Philo, *Opif.* 172; *Prob.* 47-9; Hindy Najman, “The Law of nature and the Authority of the Mosaic Law,” *SPhilo* 11 (1999): 62-3. While another Second Temple Jewish work, Jubilees (E.g., *Jub.* 6:17; 15:1; 16:28), indicates that the patriarchs had access to the Mosaic Law in the form of heavenly tablets and thus kept the Law through direct revelation, Philo intends to show that the Mosaic Law has broader accessibility and applicability. See Peder Borgen, “Philo of Alexandria,” in *Jewish Writing of the Second Temple Period: Apocrypha, Pseudepigrapha, Qumran Sectarian Writings, Philo, and Josephus* (ed. Michael E. Stone; CRINT sec. 2, vol. 2; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984), 238, n.23; Najman, “Law of nature,” 61-2.

¹⁴ Hindy Najman, “A Written Copy of the Law of nature: An Unthinkable Paradox,” *SPhilo* 15 (2003): 60.

Philo then answers four questions that a reader might have concerning the law: (1) Why was the Law given in the desert? (2) Why was the number of laws ten? (3) What is the nature of the voice? (4) Why was the singular “you” used? These are not technical questions that an educated Jew might ask; rather, they are questions that arise from a person who was familiar with Judaism but not formally instructed in the Law.¹⁵ The answer to each of these questions reinforces the truthfulness and piety of the Mosaic Law.

In *De decalogo* 44-49, Philo describes the manner in which the Law was given. Philo highlights the cosmic elements of the giving of the Law to show its divine delivery and reception. Philo spends the most time in his Sinai account describing the anomalous voice that he takes to be God speaking to the souls of rational humans (again, not exclusively Jews). In this retelling of the Law’s dictation, Philo mutes and downplays especially Jewish elements while at the same time highlighting cosmic elements. Philo’s emphasis on the universal aspects of the giving of the Law coincides with his description of the Law as relevant, applicable, and perhaps even accessible to pagans. “He presents the Law as proved true by nature and philosophy and shown to be unique by its divine and miraculous origins, but to universalize the Law Philo must hurdle the particularizing

¹⁵ Maren R. Niehoff (*Jewish Exegesis and Homeric Scholarship in Alexandria* [New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011], 184) notes that *De decalogo* fits the more accessible tone of the *Exposition* with its general introductory questions. The overall tone suggests “Philo’s audience in the *Exposition* indeed seems to be more interested in the overall values and customs of Judaism rather than in intricate questions” (174-5). These observations lead Niehoff to conclude that a non-Jewish audience for the *Exposition* is more likely.

aspects of the Sinai narrative and transform Sinai into a truly universalizing event.”¹⁶

Philo is so intent on presenting the exceptionalness of the Jewish Law that he presents it in a way that is universally applicable.

In *Decal.* 50, Philo begins to describe the Law itself. He already made the distinction between the Decalogue (the heads or summaries of the laws that were given directly by God) and the special laws (the ones that elaborate on the Decalogue and were given through Moses) (*Decal.* 19-20). Now Philo divides the Decalogue into two tables with the first set, comprised of commands relating primarily to God, and the second set comprised of commands relating to humans’ obligations to other humans. His explanation is that piety is the basis for morality. (*Decal.* 121).¹⁷ These five begin with

¹⁶ Rogers, “Philo’s Universalization,” 109. Hindy Najman (*Seconding Sinai: The Development of Mosaic Discourse in Second Temple Judaism* [JSJSup 77; Leiden: Brill, 2003], 105) similarly notes, “Only through the unique Sinai event does it become possible for the written Law of a particular nation to serve as the perfect copy of the unwritten law of nature.”

¹⁷ Philo can show the similarity of Greek laws and the Jewish Law while maintaining the superiority of the Jewish Law by explaining how the Jewish Law is the best promotion of the polis. While the first table more specifically relates to the Jewish God, the second table can be interpreted in congruence with Greek laws for the promotion of society and humanity. See especially, Rogers, “Universalization of Sinai,” 93, from which much of the following note is adapted. The first tablet accords with the law of nature and proper philosophy, and the second tablet prevents the destruction of the polis. (6) Adultery is the greatest crime against the polis because it is founded in pleasure [*Decal.* 121], corrupts another’s soul [§§123-4], destroys three families [§§125-7], and it leaves the children despised by both families [§§130-1]. (7) Murder is an offense against another person with a soul and robs the temple of God [§§132-4]. (8) The thief is an enemy of the polis (πόλεως ἐχθρός), and if the thief were strong enough, he would destroy the whole polis as his desire is only checked by his weakness [§§135-7]. (9) False witness destroys the legal system of the polis [§§138-41]. (10) All interstate wars spring from desire which is one of the four Stoic passions [§§142-53]. Thus, the Laws are cast in terms of philosophy and the polis, not in terms of covenant faithfulness and ethnic identity. Jutta Leonhardt, *Jewish Worship in Philo of Alexandria* (TSAJ 84; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2001), 286-92, compares Philo’s works to Plato’s *Laws* and argues “Philo describes the Torah as a Jewish constitution in the Hellenistic sense. This brings him close to the Greek descriptions of constitutions, and especially Plato’s *Nomoi*, in which the philosopher attempts to design the ideal constitution by comparing the best aspects of a number of Greek states” (286). Moreover, Philo appeals to his audience through language appropriate to the contemporary Greco-Roman context. On the desert as a place of cleansing (*Decal.* 12-13), Maren Niehoff, *Philo on Jewish Identity and Culture* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2001), 256, notes, “By thus associating Mosaic Law with health Philo has inscribed it into Nature and suggested its objective value.” Niehoff explains that this way of presenting the Mosaic Law in terms health reflects a contemporary trend in Greco-Roman culture in which ethics was

God's governance of the world and conclude with reverence for parents who mimic God's creative activity (*Decal.* 51). The First Commandment (*Decal.* 52-65, 155) rejects nature worship and polytheism on account of God being utterly distinct from nature and being uniquely One. The Second Commandment (*Decal.* 66-81, 156) demonstrates the absurdity of worshipping both inanimate objects and irrational animals. The Third Commandment (*Decal.* 82-95, 157) explains that perjury is calling on God to witness a lie, which implies that the perjurer does not believe that God exists. The Fourth Commandment (*Decal.* 92-105, 158-64) grounds the Sabbath rest in the activity of God in creation and explains the Sabbath as a day on which the entire Jewish nation studies philosophy and pursues virtue. The Fifth Commandment (*Decal.* 106-120, 165-7) describes how parents mimic God's creative actions and commands children to repay kindness to their parents. Philo interprets the Sixth Commandment (*Decal.* 122-31, 168-9) as the worst offense against a fellow human because it has pleasure as its source, corrupts another's soul, destroys families and even states, and is cruel toward children. The Seventh Commandment (*Decal.* 132-4, 170) prohibits murder as sacrilegious because it is an offense against one who possesses a soul and is near to God. The Eighth Commandment (*Decal.* 145-7, 171) forbids stealing because it leads to the usurpation of states if the thieves gain sufficient power. The Ninth Commandment (*Decal.* 138-41, 172) forbids false testimony because it corrupts truth, conceals facts, and corrupts the legal system. Philo interprets the Tenth Commandment (*Decal.* 142-53, 173-4) in Stoic terms

understood as treatment and a cure. In *Spec.* Philo explains how the Law is the best remedy both for mental and physical ailment. For example, indigestion is cured through the prohibition on gluttony (*Spec.* 4.100). For an explanation of the special Laws as Greek virtues, see Naomi G. Cohen, "The Greek Virtues and the Mosaic Laws in Philo: An Elucidation of *De Specialibus Legibus* IV 133-135," *SPhilo* 5 (1993): 9-23.

as a prohibition on desire. Covetousness is founded in desire, the deadliest of the four passions, and can be checked only by philosophical reasoning.

Having completed his treatment of the Decalogue, Philo summarizes the laws and explains how the Decalogue relates to the special laws, and thus also how *De decalogo* relates to *De specialibus legibus*. The Ten Commandments are summaries or heads on which the special laws elaborate. For example, the Fourth Commandment involves numerous areas in the special laws: purification rituals, feasts, year of rest for the land, and the year of Jubilee (*Decal.* 158-64). The Ten Commandments are summaries of the laws, and they are also distinct in that there are no punishments prescribed for disobedience. Philo explains the absence of penalties on the grounds that God is the source of good, and God leaves punishment to a subordinate, justice.

With this overview of Philo's presentation of the Law, we now turn to a more detailed analysis of Philo's polemic against false religion contained in his explanation of Commandments One and Two. While Wisdom's polemic against false religion was a very carefully constructed chiasm, *De decalogo* 52-81 derives its structure primarily by explaining the Ten Commandments successively. *De decalogo* treats nature worship, idolatry, and theriolatry in the same sequence that Wisdom did, but the reasoning for the sequence is different. Even though Wisdom 13-15 was an excursus, the author still attempted to tie it into the flow of the argument in Wisdom as a whole, and in Wisdom 11-19 the main point is to demonstrate that God provides for God's people while punishing their enemies. Philo does not make the explanation of the Commandments to be an example of a larger argument. Rather, Philo is working progressively through the

text in the LXX. As he explains each commandment, he catalogues the list of pagan errors combated by the Commandment.

Decal. 52-65: Nature Worship

While the larger structure of *De decalogo* is clear, the substructure within each of the Commandments is sometimes elusive. The First Commandment establishes that God is the supreme, unique King, and everything else is categorically inferior to God. When Philo examines how pagans abuse this proper understanding of God, he dwells primarily on pagans who worship the natural world (*Decal. 52-64*). Philo lists errors while also interjecting a proper understanding of who God is.¹⁸ While the structure and progression of Philo's argument is not as clear or precise as Wisdom's, it is nevertheless discernible.

1) Manifestations of Error: Deifying the Material World (*Decal. 52-8*)

A Deification of the four elements (*Decal. 53*)

B Deification of the sun, moon, planets, and fixed stars (*Decal. 53*)

C Deification of heavens (*Decal. 53*)

D Deification of whole cosmos and misunderstanding God's providence (*Decal. 53*)

A' Pantheon as the four elements (*Decal. 54*)¹⁹

B' Pantheon as the sun, moon, planets, and fixed stars (*Decal. 54-5*)²⁰

C' "Pantheon" as the heavens (*Decal. 56-7*)²¹

D' Moses instructs not to deify the cosmos and about God's providence (*Decal. 58*)²²

¹⁸ Philo introduces the different manifestations of theological error with a particle (or combination of particles) and the nominative, masculine, plural article. The particle indicates transition to another error, and the article is used substantively to indicate a group of people.

¹⁹ Philo identifies the deities in the following way: earth (Kore, Demeter, or Pluto), sea (Poseidon and subordinates), air (Hera), and fire (Hephaestus).

²⁰ Philo identifies the deities in the following way: sun (Apollo) moon (Artemis) planets (Aphrodite and Hermes) stars (names by the mythmakers).

²¹ Philo identifies the sons of Zeus, the Dioscuri, as the heavens.

²² While D' is not perfectly parallel because it does not involve the Greek pantheon, it belongs in the chiasmic structure because it contains a reference to the cosmos and God's providence.

- 2) Further Manifestations of error (*Decal.* 59-63)
 - Thinking material things to be the primal God (*Decal.* 59-61)
 - Giving no honor to God (*Decal.* 62)
 - Blaspheming God (*Decal.* 63)
- 3) Exhortation not to worship the material world but to honor the Creator (*Decal.* 64-5)²³

It seems that Philo wants to address a specific set of errors, so he groups them systematically in the first section and then lists a number of other errors in the second section. The structure of the first section indicates that Philo's primary argument is to combat the deification of the cosmos—an error he probably identifies as Stoicism. In subsection D, Philo uses several descriptions of God's providential activity and none of them is an especially Jewish description of God. But in D', Philo clarifies that the providential God is to be identified as the Jewish God. The fundamental distinction is that the pious (Jew) "should not suppose any of the parts of the universe to be the omnipotent God."²⁴ Section 3 is a summary exhortation that reinforces the distinction between God and everything else that exists. Philo emphasizes God's uniqueness as the providential Creator by reaffirming it at key structural points of the argument.

Philo does not cite the LXX. Rather, he assumes that his audience has familiarity and he begins the explanation with the problem: "A great delusion (*πλάνοϋς*) has taken hold of the larger part of mankind..."²⁵ Philo is commenting on Exodus 20:1 in the LXX:

²³ *De decalogo* 64-5 comprises a third section that is distinguishable from first two as it is a summary exhortation that addresses the errors in both of the first two sections.

²⁴ Philo, *Decal.* 58 (Colson, PLCL).

²⁵ Philo, *Decal.* 52 (Colson, PLCL). The first part of *Decal.* 52 belongs to the general introduction of the Commandments. It explains how each of the two tables is to be categorized. The first table relates primarily to piety and the second table to virtue: "The transcendent source of all that exists is God as piety is the source of the virtues, and it is very necessary that these two should be first discussed." (Philo, *Decal.* 52 [Colson, PLCL])

“You shall not have other gods besides me” (Exod 20:3, author’s translation)²⁶ The first commandment should create in humans a proper conception of who God is, but human beings have gone astray in their understanding by worshipping nature as if it were God. There may be a play on words as Philo describes nature worship as a delusion (πλάνος), and they worship among other things “the other planets and the non-wandering stars” (τοὺς ἄλλους πλανήτας καὶ ἀπλανεῖς ἀστέρας; *Decal.* 52). The repetition of the πλαν- stem, while appropriately describing the celestial bodies as those that appear to move and those that appear fixed, may also be used to heighten the irony. The play on words is more explicit in *De specialibus legibus* where Philo rejects the worship of celestial bodies by explaining Deut 4:19:

“Do not when thou seest the sun and the moon and the stars and all the ordered host of heaven go astray (πλανηθεῖς) and worship them.” Well indeed and aptly does he call the acceptance of the heavenly bodies as gods a going astray (πλάνον) or wandering. For those who see the sun ... have wandered infinitely far (ἐπλανήθησαν πλάνον) in supposing that they alone are gods. But if they had been at pains to walk in that road where there is no straying (ἀπλανοῦς), they would at one have perceived that just as sense is the servitor of mind, so too all the beings perceived by sense are the ministers of Him who is perceived by the mind.²⁷

Philo reads the LXX closely and highlights aspects that strengthen the irony of the pagans’ folly. Pagans go astray theologically by following celestial bodies that do not go astray. Philo is not bothered by the fact that Deut 4:15-20 seems to elaborate primarily on the Second Commandment while he applies it to the First.

²⁶ Philo omits the particularizing elements of describing God in terms of God’s activity with Israel, especially Exod 20:2.

²⁷ Philo, *Spec.* 1.15-17 (Colson, PLCL).

Philo describes four different manifestations of the error of not distinguishing properly God from the material world: those who deify the four elements; those who deify the celestial bodies, those who deify the heavens, and those who deify the cosmos. Philo objects to the deification of these beings because it undermines the worship that is due to God alone. Philo describes God with especially Greek terms that emphasize both that God is Creator and that God continues to control the world providentially. Each of the manifestations of error can be described as worship of the Greek pantheon. Those who worship the four elements give them the names of the gods of the Greek pantheon: Kore or Demeter or Pluto (earth), Poseidon (sea), Hera (air), and Hephaestus (fire).²⁸ Similarly, the celestial bodies have counterparts in the pantheon, and the heavens refer to the sons of Zeus, the Dioscuri. Moses, however, commands the pious to distinguish between God and everything else: “he should not suppose any of the parts of the universe to be the omnipotent God.”²⁹ For Philo, the fundamental ontological distinction is between God and everything else, and he expresses this idea through the metaphor of God as Father. The Father is distinct from all His children, everything that is created. God

²⁸ Cf. Philo, *Spec.* 1.12-20; *Contempl.* 3. In making this argument Philo seems to acknowledge that pagan worship of the gods of the pantheon can be dissociated from idols. He seems to acknowledge that a pagan could worship at a temple of Poseidon before his cult image and believe that the reality of the god’s power was in his governance of the sea, not in his physical presence in the cult image. This recognition of a reality beyond the physical cult image is not a thought that Philo repeats when he wants to criticize the non-reality of idols on the basis of their merely physical existence.

²⁹ Philo, *Decal.* 58 (Colson, PLCL); Nikiprowetzky, *De Decalogo*, 70 n.1, provides the following references where Philo makes a similar point: *Ebr.* 43; *Spec.* 1.13; *Conf.* 170-6; *Fug.* 212; *Mos.* 1.113, 2.37; *Somn.* 1.15; *Flacc.* 123; *QG* 3.34. In *Spec.* 1.20, Philo emphasizes that God has priority over nature in terms of time and causation: “And if anyone renders the worship due to the Eternal, the Creator, to a created being and one later in time, he must stand recorded as infatuated and guilty of impiety in the highest degree.” (Colson, PLCL). See also Philo, *Mig.* 179.

can be distinguished from nature in terms of both time and God's activity. God existed before nature and he continues to guide it providentially.

The next classification of nature worshippers are those who think nature to be the primal God, and Philo criticizes them for relying exclusively on their physical senses.³⁰ They rely on inferior means (physical senses) and thus they come to inferior conclusions (deifying those things that are perceived physically). In contrast, the Law speaks to the superior faculty (the mind) and thus it describes the Supreme Being (cf. *Spec.* 1.16-20).

Similar to Wisdom 13:1-9, this critique is probably aimed at the Stoics.³¹ Collins comments on *Decal.* 52-54, "Here, Philo is taking issue with Stoicism, but he could find support for his position in the Platonic tradition, which affirmed the role of the Demiurge and the priority of the soul."³² Again Philo responds to this error by reasserting a proper conception of God. Also paralleling Wisdom, Philo describes God as the Truly Existent One (ὁ ὄν ὄντως; 59), which contrasts God's self-existence with the contingent existence of everything else God created. God is both eternal (in contrast to the nature that came into being) and the providential Charioteer who steers all creation safely (in contrast to nature that is acted upon). Philo compares nature worshippers to those who honor a

³⁰ Cf. *Spec.* 17-20. Philo juxtaposes two conceptions of God in *Decal.* 59. The pagans regard nature as the primal God, who is the Existent one that they do not know. In making this comparison, Philo abuts the term *πρῶτος θεός* to *ὁ ὄν ὄντως*, a term which Philo interprets in light of his Jewish tradition and Middle Platonism. Nikiprowetzky, *De Decalogo*, 71 n.3, comments on whom Philo addresses in *Decal.* 59, "According to Philo, this formula refers to the Chaldeans and the Stoics (cf. *Migr.* 179; *Virt.* 212), or the Epicureans (cf. *Somm.* II, 283)" (author's translation).

³¹ Cf. Alan Mendelson, *Philo's Jewish Identity* (BJS 161 ; Atlanta: Scholar's Press, 1988), 35; Karl-Gustav Sandelin, "The Danger of Idolatry According to Philo of Alexandria," *Temenos* 27 (1991): 132-33.

³² John J. Collins, "Natural Theology and Biblical Tradition: The Case of Hellenistic Judaism," *CBQ* 60 (1998): 7-8.

King's servants instead of the King. The result is not that the servants are honored; rather, the result is that the King is dishonored (61).

While the similarly structured and argued critique by the Book of Wisdom presented the nature worshippers with generally good motives, Philo criticizes them more severely. These people honor everything except the God who really deserves the honor, and they do so intentionally (*Decal.* 62-3). Some of these people attempt both to blaspheme God and harm the pious (i.e. Jews).³³

Philo concludes his critique of nature worshippers exhorting the audience to reject false conceptions of God and pursue correct thinking in the Law:

Let us then reject all such imposture and refrain from worshipping those who by nature are our brothers, even though they have been given a substance purer and more immortal than ours, for created things, in so far as they are created, are our brothers, since they have all one Father, the Maker of the universe.³⁴

Philo again reasserts God's character; God is eternal and he is the cause of everything.

Philo continues the metaphor of God's Fatherhood, which distinguishes God from everything else that is dependent on God. All created things, even if they appear more splendid than humans, are in the class of beings that are contingent; thus, all created

³³ Philo inserts an apologetic for Jews "who hold that silence is best for the time being to avoid giving provocation" (*Decal.* 63 [Colson, PLCL]). This probably references Jewish actions in the Alexandrian riots, and Philo is attempting to defend Jewish practice and theology by demonstrating that pagan misperception of God leads to murderous actions against humans.

³⁴ Philo, *Decal.* 64 (Colson, PLCL). In *Contempl.* 7, Philo makes a similar argument concerning idols. Their substance disqualifies them from being an object meriting worship. The "brothers" of the idols are crafted into various shapes to be used in daily activities. The fact that the same substance of which the god is crafted is also used to make common tools demonstrates that there is nothing special about the substance. Philo argues that for something to be truly worthy of worship it needs to be unique and incomparable.

things are the brothers of humans. Philo concludes this section by exhorting the audience to take seriously the first commandment by forsaking these ideas and honoring God.³⁵

Decal. 66-76: Idolatry

Philo then proceeds to explain the second commandment, which he again does not quote:

You shall not make for yourself an idol or the likeness of anything whatever things are in heaven above, whatever things are in the earth below, or whatever things are in the waters under the earth. You shall not worship them or serve them, for I am the Lord your God, a jealous God who repays the sins of fathers upon children to the third and fourth generation to those who hate me and shows mercy to thousands, for those who love me and keep my ordinances.³⁶

In his explanation of the second commandment, Philo structures it in two main sections dealing with idolatry and theriolatry:

- 1) Introduction to Idolatry: Idolaters are guiltier than nature worshippers (66).
 - A) Idolaters are blind (67-69).
 - B) Idol craftsmen are more worthy of honor than idols (70-72).
 - C) Idolaters are foolish (72-75).
 Exhortation: One with a soul should not worship something without a soul (76a).
- 2) Introduction to Theriolatry: Egyptians are guiltier than other nations (76b)
 - A) Egyptians deify domesticated animals (76c-77).
 - B) Egyptians deify savage wild animals (78-79).
 - C) Egyptians are miserable and are mocked by outsiders (80).
 Conclusion: The goal of the Second Commandment is knowledge of God (81).

There is not a clear progression of the argument. Rather, Philo seems to combine several critiques of idolatry that culminate in his conclusion. Philo explains the second

³⁵ Philo's comment concerning polytheism seems somewhat misplaced: "let the idea that gods are many never even reach the ears of the men whose rule of life is to seek for truth in purity and guilelessness" (Philo, *Decal.* 65 [Colson, PLCL]). Syntactically this phrase goes with the section concerning nature worship, but polytheism has not been the major criticism of nature worshippers.

³⁶ Exodus 20:4-6, author's translation of the LXX. Philo does quote the commandment in *Spec.* I.22. In *Spec.* I.25, Philo quotes from Leviticus 19:4.

commandment primarily as a prohibition of making physical idols.³⁷ He begins his critique with a theme that recurs in his treatments of idols: artists deceive the masses by making beautiful idols (66). Philo has a general mistrust of artists who use precious materials in order to trick people into assigning divinity to an image. In *De specialibus legibus*, Philo elaborates on the manner in which the artisans deceive the masses. Similar to the nature worshippers whose reliance on physical senses made them unable to perceive God, the idol craftsmen make use of the limitations of physical senses to deceive the masses. In *De specialibus legibus*, Philo describes how the myth-makers and the craftsmen cooperate:

And to promote the seductiveness they have fitted the falsehood into melody, metre and rhythm, thinking to cajole their audience thereby. Further, too, they have brought in sculpture and painting to co-operate in the deception, in order that with the colours and shapes and artistic qualities wrought by their fine workmanship they may enthrall the spectators and so beguile the two leading senses, sight and hearing—sight through lifeless shapes of beauty, hearing through the charm of poetry and music—and thus make the soul unsteady and unsettled and seize it for their prey.³⁸

³⁷ W. Barnes Tatum (“The LXX Version of the Second Commandment (Ex. 20, 3-6 = Deut. 5,7-10): A Polemic Against Idols, Images,” *JSJ* 17.2 [1986], 189) clarifies Philo’s interpretation of the Second Commandment: “Philo’s understanding of the Second Commandment, therefore, approximates that of the LXX although he does not use the vocabulary of the LXX. He interprets the Second Commandment in a polemically anti-idolic and not in an anti-iconic manner.” Previously, Barnes explained how Josephus (*Ant.* 3.91) and Philo (*Decal.* 51) redefined the scope of the Second Commandment from its form in the LXX, which is similar to that in the MT: “They consider as the First Commandment: the prohibition against having ‘other gods’ beside God. They view the Second Commandment as consisting of the second and third prohibitions: the one against making ‘a sculpted image’ (MT) or ‘an idol’ (LXX), and the other against worshipping ‘them’” (188). Thus, Philo is following the LXX when he interprets the Second Commandment as a prohibition of idolatry and not just iconic representations.

³⁸ Philo, *Spec.* I.28-9 (Colson, PLCL).

Philo repeatedly criticizes the motives of craftsmen as they intentionally deceive the masses for their own profit. They deceive people by using desirable materials, cast in beautiful form, and established by elaborate rituals (*Spec.* I.21).³⁹

Philo, like the prophetic critiques of the LXX, begins with the assumption that the gods behind the idols are non-existent. From the presupposition of the idol-god's nonexistence, Philo argues that Greeks worship the statue itself. Philo does not make a genuine attempt to represent pagan image worship on its own terms; rather, as an outside observer of their rituals, he makes a one-to-one equivalence between the idol and the god.⁴⁰ Philo repeatedly claims that the craftsmen make the gods themselves. Philo explains his understanding of idols as merely material in *De specialibus legibus* when he talks about greed as an idol:

It is these that he calls "idols," like to shadows and phantoms, with nothing firm or strong to which they can cling. They are borne along like a restless wind, subject to every kind of change and alteration ... And indeed when they are present, the apparition is like idols or images seen through mirrors, deceiving and bewitching the sense and seeming to subsist when they have no abiding substance.⁴¹

³⁹ Philo links the Second Commandment to greed because the idol craftsmen use gold and silver to make their images. The idolaters associate gold with blessing and happiness. The result is that they pay homage to anyone that possesses gold. Philo then critiques the Roman patronage system that is built on greed: "All the needy who are possessed by that grievous malady, the desire for money, though they have no wealth of their own on which they bestow worship as its due, pay awe-struck homage to that of their neighbors, and come at early dawn to the houses of those who have abundance of it as though they were the grandest temples, there to make their prayers and beg from blessing from the masters as though they were gods" (*Spec.* I.24 [Colson, PLCL]). Philo might just be arguing that idolaters associate wealth with blessing because their idols—which they also associate with blessing—are made from gold. But his argument might also be that the idolaters associate the golden idols with blessing, and since there is no reality behind the idol, they learn to associate gold with blessing

⁴⁰ Cf. *Spec.* I.21: "There are some who put gold and silver in the hands of sculptors as though they were competent to fashion gods" (Colson, PLCL). Philo does not discuss, for example, how the Ark of the Covenant could be constructed by human hands, but it does not locate God as being physical or unmoving.

⁴¹ Philo, *Spec.* I.26 (Colson, PLCL).

Philo is attempting to explain how greed can be understood as an idol. His explanation is that greed is a non-reality that moves around like the wind. Similarly, idols are non-realities because they are reducible to their merely material composition. Philo argues that they are phantoms and shadows because there is nothing beyond the material substance of which the idols are made. In reality, most Greeks probably viewed images as representations of or the local presence of the deity. This satirical critique is undergirded by a caricature of pagan religion that the author assumes the audience (both sympathizers and especially Jews) will share: pagans believe that their gods *are* the idols, not that they are represented by the idols. Philo states his premise: “they think to be gods the images and paintings made by their own craftsmanship” (τὰ δ’ ὑπ’ δημιουργηθέντα πλάσματα καὶ ζωγραφήματα θεοῦς ἐνόμισαν, 70; cf. 7, 156; *Spec.* I.21). This disingenuous representation of pagan worship allows Philo to describe the idol-gods repeatedly as “dead” and “manmade.” These satirical flurries also permit the author to pass over more difficult questions, such as the question of the seemingly superior power of the pagan gods in light of the dominance of Greco-Roman culture over Jewish culture. These selective and well-crafted satires demonstrate the ridiculousness of the pagan worship as Philo has portrayed it.

Decal. 67-69

Philo criticizes both idolaters and idol craftsmen in this section. The error of the idol craftsmen is greater than that of nature worshippers. Philo seems to think that worshipping God’s creation is closer to true piety than worshipping material parts of creation (stone, silver, gold, and wood) that have been refashioned by humans. While

Wisdom 14:12-31 demonstrates the terrible effects of idolatry by describing the external immoral actions that result from idolatry, Philo appeals to the internal misery of the individual's soul. By deceiving the masses, the artists have harmed the souls of people: "For these idolaters cut away the most excellent support of the soul, the rightful conception of the Ever-living God."⁴² Idolaters then wander through life directionless, like unstable boats. Idolaters are more miserable even than those who suffer from physical blindness because idolaters have deliberately destroyed the "eye of the soul."⁴³ God's judgment awaits them, and they are presently reduced to being more foolish than infants.⁴⁴ Philo states that even an infant can understand that a craftsman is greater than the craft he produces because the craftsman precedes it and is the cause of the craft (69). The craftsman has priority of time and honor over his craft.⁴⁵

Decal. 70-75

Philo continues this theme of comparing the idol to the idol craftsman, and he argues that both the craftsman and the craftsman's tools—things which no pagan would

⁴² Philo, *Decal.* 67 (Colson, PLCL); cf. *Spec.* 1.36, 313. Philo likely agrees with Wisdom that idolatry results in the immoral actions characteristic of the pagans. He certainly believes that proper worship of God brings about righteous living: piety leads to virtuous living (*Decal.* 52)

⁴³ Philo describes both idolaters and nature worshippers as intentionally misrepresenting God. He uses the same term to describe them: ἐκών (63, 68); cf. *Contempl.* 10.

⁴⁴ Philo says that idolaters will encounter κόλασις (69). LSJ, "κόλασις," lists the concrete definition as "checking the growth of trees" which can then refer to more general "correction" or "chastisement." While this word, along with its cognate verb (κολάζω), is not the most common word used in the LXX to reference God's punishment, in early Christian (e.g., Matt 25:46; 2 Pet 2:9; 1 John 4:18) and first centuries C.E. and B.C.E. Jewish literature (e.g., 2 Macc 4:38), it specifically references God's punishment of human activity. Philo's use of this term elsewhere (e.g., *Spec.* 1.55; 2.196; *Fug.* 65; *Flacc.* 96) seems to indicate that κόλασις refers to God's divine judgment. Contextual support for this interpretation can be found in the adverb δικαίως, a term commonly associated with the fairness of God's judgment.

⁴⁵ Cf. *Spec.* 1.20.

think of worshipping—are more worthy of worship than the idol. The logic of Philo’s argument becomes apparent in *Decal.* 76. The idol craftsman, being given a soul by God, is superior to an idol that lacks a soul. The irony of this inversion of honor is that the craftsmen age and become poverty-stricken; whereas, the idols become more adorned with expensive ornaments. The most ridiculous act is that some idol craftsmen worship their own creations as gods: “for it is known that some of the image-makers pray and sacrifice to their own works though it would be far better to worship each of their hands.”⁴⁶ Like the Wisdom of Solomon, Philo is drawing on the satire of idol makers made by the Prophets. Even the craftsman’s tools—which are presumably also creations of the craftsman—are superior to his product. The implicit argument is that the tools at least have some benefit in that they are useful for shaping materials, but the idols offer no benefit at all to humans. The argument that the craftsman’s hands and tools are more worthy of worship only works if one accepts the complete equivalence of the god with the idol. Thus, the idol craftsman creates his god.

The comparison of the idol craftsman to his idol reaches its most satirical point when Philo asks if the craftsman would desire to be like his god. One’s goal should be to become similar to his god, and the coherence of one’s religious beliefs is evidenced in one’s desire to be like his god. For idolaters this would constitute a downgrade as they would become blind, deaf, non-aspirating, non-smelling, non-tasting, mute, and inactive. They would become like their gods that sit in temples and enjoy the sacrifices but are incapable of doing anything. Philo predicts that pagans would wholeheartedly reject this

⁴⁶ Philo, *Decal.* 72, author’s translation.

idea. And the pagans' response to Philo's proposal is "the strongest proof of the wide extent of impiety shown by men who acknowledge gods of such nature that they would abominate the idea of resembling them."⁴⁷ Philo begins with the premise that worshippers should want to be like the god that they worship. In a *reductio ad absurdum*, he demonstrates the foolishness of pagan worship by explaining the results of this premise in their religious system.

Philo again makes a complete equivalence between the idol and the god. Implicit in his argument is that the anthropomorphism of the idol demonstrates its non-reality. The idolater prays to the god as if it can do something more than a human, but the idol is a less capable replica of a human because it is in human form but cannot act. There is no reality beyond the physical location of the idol. Even though it possesses hands like a human, it has been created by one who is unable to impart life. The logic runs: pagan gods are manmade; humans do not have the ability to create life; therefore, the pagan gods are lifeless.

Decal. 76

The comparison between the idol craftsman and idol reaches its conclusion with Philo's exhortation: "Let no one, then, who has a soul worship a soulless thing."⁴⁸ Only God, as True Existence, has the ability to impart a soul to something else. Humans, as the direct creations of God, have received a soul. But idols, as the creations of humans, lack a

⁴⁷ Philo, *Decal. 75* (Colson, PLCL); cf. Ps 115:5-8; Isa 44:9-20.

⁴⁸ Philo, *Decal. 76* (Colson, PLCL). In the beginning of the treatise (*Decal. 7-8*), Philo contrasts idols and the true God. The primary difference is that idols are all "soulless/lifeless" (ἀψύχοι) in contrast to "the true, really existent God" (τὸ ὄντα ὄντως ἀληθῆ θεόν).

soul. The critique of idols and thus pagan gods is that they are the creations of human hands.

Decal. 76-80: Theriolatry

Egyptians are as guilty as the Greeks in terms of their idolatrous behavior, but the Egyptians also engage in theriolatry.⁴⁹ Philo thinks that the Egyptians are unique in their reverence for animals. The Egyptians worship bulls, oxen, rams, and goats, and like the Greek mythmakers, they invent tales for each of the animals. While these animals at least offer some value to humans, the Egyptians take their aberrant worship further and worship animals that are not only useless but actually harmful.⁵⁰ They choose the two fiercest creatures on land and water, the lion and the crocodile (*Decal. 70*). The Egyptians also worship a host of other animals, most of which are unclean according to the Mosaic Law.

Philo does not attempt to prove why animal worship is improper. For him, the category of “irrational animals” (ζῷα ἄλογα) is one that is not worthy of worship. While idols were criticized for being the products of human craftsmen, animals at least are the direct creations of God. Nevertheless, animals lack souls. He expects that his audience will readily condemn this Egyptian practice (80). Philo, thus, concludes his polemic of aberrant worship with the example that will be most persuasive to his audience of Greek-speaking Alexandrians. He anticipates that the audience will side with his ridicule of the Egyptians. This ridicule serves two purposes for Philo. First, it distinguishes Jews from

⁴⁹ For Philo’s further critiques of Egyptian theriolatry, see *Spec.* 1.79, 2.146; *Mos.* 1.23; *Contempl.* 8-9; *Legat.* 139, 163.

⁵⁰ Cf. Philo, *Contempl.* 7-8.

the common Egyptians, a distinction that had profound implications for the legal standing of Jews in Alexandria. Philo calls attention to a well-recognized difference between the Jews and Egyptians. This difference highlights the difference between Jews and Egyptians and similarity between aniconic Jewish and philosophical Greek reverence for God. Second, it allows Philo a way to exploit distinctions in the varied pagan religious systems. Even the first two groups in Philo's polemic, nature worshippers and idolaters, would ridicule the Egyptians.

Decal. 81: Conclusion to Aberrant Worship

Philo's comments in *Decal.* 81 probably serve primarily as a summary of the second commandment, but they draw on arguments from both the first two commandments. Moses' intent was to lead humans to worship the God who is. Moses' goal in directing people to worship God is not to benefit God because God is sufficient in himself; rather, instructing people to worship God benefits humans. Whereas idolatry removed the best support of the soul (τὸ κάλλιστον ἔρεισμα τῆς ψυχῆς, 67), rightful worship of God is the best end (τὸ ἄριστον τέλος, 81). Whereas idolatry resulted in misery, rightful worship of God results in being showered with blessings by God. Philo also returns to his thesis that one should arrive at the correct conception of God—which is recorded perfectly in the Mosaic Law—through proper reflection on nature.⁵¹ One should follow nature (ἔπομαι τῇ φύσει).

⁵¹ Philo makes explicit in *Spec.* 1.32-50 that philosophically contemplating nature should lead one to perceive and seek after God. Moses is the example of the philosopher who was taught about God by nature (*Spec.* 1.41, 49-50): "That means I bid you come and contemplate the universe and its contents, a spectacle apprehended not by the eye of the body but by the unsleeping eyes of the mind" (Philo, *Spec.* 1.49 [Colson, PLCL]). Colson (PLCL vol. VII, 127 n. b) interprets this statement to mean "the contemplation must be philosophical, 'looking through nature to nature's God.'" Philo regards Platonic philosophy as most closely attaining this contemplation of God (*Spec.* 1.47-8). The idea that one can

Philo concludes his treatment of aberrant worship by using a technique common to Jewish idol polemics; he reasserts the character of God. Philo's conclusion asserts that God is the Really Existent One (ὁ ὄντως ὄν), and this phrase summarizes some of the critiques of each improper form of worship. Whereas nature worshippers (i.e. Stoics) failed to distinguish between God and nature, Philo employs the Middle Platonic vocabulary to present a God who is transcendent over nature. Whereas idol-gods were the creations of humans and lacked a soul, God is self-existent. Whereas the animals worshipped by Egyptians caused only harm for humans, God is the source of good gifts in the world.

Analysis of the Argument

Philo's manner of argumentation can be distinguished from Wisdom's at the outset because of differences in genre. While Wisdom uses Jewish Scripture to illustrate the activity of wisdom, Philo's whole approach is to explain the Jewish Scriptures. The idol polemic is an attempt to explain the superiority of the Mosaic Law by demonstrating the absurdity of false forms of worship. The argumentative implication for this approach is that Philo does not typically employ Scripture to prove his point; rather, he begins with Scripture, makes an explanation, and supports his explanation by other means such as Jewish practice, philosophy, and logical argumentation. For example, Philo begins *De specialibus legibus* with an explanation of the practice of circumcision. He demonstrates

deduce God from nature accords with Philo's overall treatment of the Law in *Decal.* He intends to show that the natural law is identical to the Mosaic Law. See Rogers, "Philo's Universalization," 91-5; Nikiprowetzky, *De Decalogo*, 133; cf. Martens, *One God*, 127; Hart, "Philo," 82; Najman, "Written Copy," 59. André Myre, S. J., "La Loi et Le Pentateuque," *ScEs* 25 (1973): 209-225, esp. 219-220, does not equate the two laws. While he argues for a strong connection between the two laws, he accords the Mosaic Law with a lesser status than the natural law.

the validity of the practice by normalizing it as a practice of many cultures (*Spec.* 1.2-3). Philo also appeals to contemporary medicine: prevention of disease (*Spec.* 1.4), promotion of cleanliness (*Spec.* 1.5), and the fertility (*Spec.* 1.7). Moreover, he observes that circumcision promotes the high moral value and piety that characterizes Jewish men (*Spec.* 1.6). To these explanations, Philo adds two allegorical proofs: the removal of pleasure (*Spec.* 1.8-9) and deceit (*Spec.* 1.10). Philo's explanation of circumcision represents his method of explaining the Law because he begins with Scripture and makes his explanation by drawing on things like the experience of other nations, Jewish practice, medicine, and philosophy.

Exploiting Cracks in Greco-Roman Religion

Like other Jewish authors, Philo does not attempt a frontal attack against all non-Jewish worship. Rather, Philo inserts himself into debates already occurring among different streams of thought in Greco-Roman religion. He is least condemning of Greco-Roman philosophy that errs by deifying nature. He probably wants the audience to view him as philosophically astute, and he probably writes to persuade an upper-class, educated audience that would recognize and accept his arguments. When he critiques nature worshippers (Stoics), he takes the stance of another philosophical system (Middle Platonism). Thus he borrows existing arguments for God's transcendence, but he modifies them in light of his Jewish faith. For example, he borrows Platonism's idea of True Existence (τὸ ὄντως ὄν), but he nuances Platonism's unknowable God to be the Jewish God who is known through the Mosaic Law and law of nature. He continues his self-identification as a philosopher into his critique of idol worship. Greco-Roman

philosophical critiques of anthropomorphic idol worship already existed. Philo borrows this line of critique, and he modifies it by incorporating mocking satire, a common theme in the idol polemics in his Jewish tradition.⁵² But when Philo comes to the discussion of Egyptian worship, he expects his audience to agree wholeheartedly with his criticism. He notes that any outsider would rightly look scornfully on the Egyptian practices (80).

Ridicule

Philo is most persuasive when he mocks other forms of worship. He does make logical arguments that explain why idolatry is foolish. For example, he argues that humans have a soul, but they worship objects that are soulless. But his more powerful arguments are those that rely on satire. The longest of these satirical flurries occurs in *Decal.* 74-5 in which Philo mocks the idols as having qualities that no human would reasonably want to possess. Their physical reality is nothing more than the material of which they are made, and they are incapable of performing even basic functions like sight. Similarly, he mocks the Egyptian manner of choosing which animals should be honored as gods. He caricatures them as finding the most harmful of animals to be their gods (78). Philo is not attempting to offer a genuine representation of these forms of worship. He offers a caricature (e.g., Greek idols are gods; Egyptians searched for the least worthy animal) from which he can ridicule them persuasively.

⁵² While Jewish authors typically deny the reality of idol-gods and thus prohibit their worship, the Greco-Roman authors who criticized idolatry, frequently concluded with civic custom and expedience necessitated their ongoing worship. E.g. Dio Chrysostom, *Dei cog.* 48-60; Cicero, *Nat. d.* II.70, 71; Varro in Augustine, *Civ.* IV.27, 31; VI.10.

Obvious Deductions

Philo is prone to making deductions, the logic of which is difficult to refute. The problem is that he begins with premises that are not really representative of the positions he is combating. Two examples relying on the same premise demonstrate this technique. Philo begins by making a complete identification between the pagan god and the cult statue. He can then observe that the cult statues do not move or act, so he mocks pagan gods as inactive. Moreover, because he thinks that the pagan god is identical to the image, he can conclude that pagans make their gods. Everyone agrees that the craftsman is greater than the product of his craft, so it is foolish for pagans to worship their non-gods. The deductions that Philo makes in each of these arguments are sound, but they are based on premises that do not accurately represent pagan positions.⁵³

Contrasts

A technique that Philo uses throughout *De decalogo* to demonstrate the superiority of the Mosaic Law is to contrast it with pagan forms of law and religion. In his polemic against false worship, Philo draws contrasts between God and other objects of worship and between piety and false worship. The mocking descriptions of pagan objects of worship have been described above, but it is important to note that the condemnation of a particular object of worship is frequently followed by a reassertion of the value of God's nature. While Wisdom groups the reassertions of God's nature into apostrophes, Philo cannot help himself and frequently interjects the proper understanding

⁵³ This feature of Philo's argument reinforces that assessment of his audience to be primarily upper-class, educated Jews and also Gentile sympathizers. It is doubtful that anyone would read Philo's exposition if they did not already have an interest in the Jewish Scriptures, and it is even more doubtful that his exposition would move someone from being antagonistic to the Jewish faith to being a supporter.

of God directly following a description of error. A corresponding set of contrasts occurs with Philo's description of Jewish Law observance and pagan religion. The Mosaic Law is "profitable for life" (50), the "genuine philosophy" (58), provides support for the soul (67), and is "right instruction" (80). In contrast, other religious devotion can be described as a "great delusion" (52), "incapacity for instruction or indifference to learning" (59), and "excess of impiety" (62).

Representations of God

Philo thinks that the representation of God in the Jewish Scripture is consistent with the best philosophical understandings of deity. When one reads the Jewish Scriptures at face value, however, there are certain depictions of God that describe God in anthropomorphic terms (e.g., Father, King, and Husband), and these anthropomorphic descriptions appear to be inconsistent with philosophical conceptions of God. Philo does not set out to correct "errors" in the Scriptures. Philo likely does not think that errors exist in Moses' writing and especially not in the Decalogue because it was given directly by God. Rather, the anthropomorphic language has a function in explaining God even if the language needs to be interpreted properly as describing a deeper non-anthropomorphic reality. Philo asserts God's role as Creator and continues to employ anthropomorphic images drawn from the Jewish Scriptures, such as King, Ruler, and Father. But he transforms these images, so that they are no longer descriptions of interpersonal relationships; rather, they refer to God's sovereign rule as the Creator and Sustainer of all things.

Philo's concept of God is remarkably complex and detailed. While the primary goal of this section is to describe the manner in which God is represented in *De decalogo*,

broadening the scope to some other texts in the *Exposition*—especially *De opificio mundi* and *De specialibus legibus*—will clarify Philo’s argument in *De decalogo*. Perhaps the clearest explanation of Philo’s conception of God comes in the conclusion to *De opificio mundi* in which he explains God’s nature and role as Creator:

The one first learning these things—not by his hearing but rather by his understanding—and impressing on his soul amazing and worthwhile thoughts that God is and exists, the Truly Existing One is One, He made the cosmos and has made it one just as it was said that He made it like Himself according to its oneness, and He always exercises providence over His creation, will lead a blessed and happy life because he is shaped by thoughts of piety and holiness.⁵⁴

Philo’s concept of God is rooted in Jewish monotheism. Similar to what he argues in *Spec.* I.33-35 (cf. Wis 13:1-5), here Philo argues that God’s existence and the oneness of God can be perceived analogically by looking at nature. Just as the cosmos is singular, God is singular. The singular God is the Truly Existent One, which term is significant for both Platonism and his Jewish tradition. Moreover, God is Creator and continues to guide the world providentially. For Philo, God is unique, and nothing is comparable to God, so that only God belongs to the category of God.⁵⁵

In *De opificio mundi* 172, Philo makes a fine and important distinction between the essence and existence of God with the phrase ἔστι καὶ ὑπάρχει θεός.⁵⁶ Philo uses two

⁵⁴ Philo, *Opif.* 172, author’s translation. The references to God are translated with masculine pronouns as it is closer to Philo’s thought than feminine pronouns. While I have primarily used Colson’s translations to make the texts more accessible to the reader, I have translated this section because it is at the end of a treatise (and thus easily referenced by the reader) and to highlight specific ideas of Philo’s conception of God.

⁵⁵ See Philo, *Sacr.* 92; cf. *L.A.B.* 2.86. See also Peter Frick, “Monotheism and Philosophy: Notes on the Concept of God in Philo and Paul (Romans 1:18-21)” in *Christian Origins and Hellenistic Judaism: Social and Literary Contexts for the New Testament* (eds. Stanley E. Porter and Andrew Pitts; Leiden: Brill, 2012), 240-1.

⁵⁶ On this point, I am indebted to Frick, “Monotheism and Philosophy”, 241-4.

verbs to describe God's existence, and their significance is more recognizable in their substantive forms: οὐσία and ὑπαρξις. Philo elaborates on this distinction in his explanation of the Second Commandment in *De specialibus legibus*. Philo admits of the difficulty of thinking about God and states that two questions must be answered: "One (question) is whether the Deity exists (ἔστι) ... the other is what the Deity is in essence (κατὰ τὴν οὐσίαν)."⁵⁷ Thus Philo makes a fundamental distinction between the existence and essence of God. In order to answer the first question that concerns God's essence, Philo argues analogically from nature that one should be able to perceive the Craftsman from the craft (*Spec.* I.33-35). In answer to the question about God's essence, Philo admits that knowing God's essence is beyond human capacity, even beyond Moses' ability (*Spec.* I.40-41). Humans only have the capacity to perceive the powers of God (*Spec.* I. 45-50) because the essence of the transcendent God is only knowable by the purest mind (*Spec.* I.46). Peter Frick summarizes,

In sum, in Philo we thus have a concept of God that has at its core a God who is utterly unique and transcendent, inaccessible to the human mind and cognition. Philosophically, Philo mediates this notion of utter transcendence via his doctrine of the logos and powers. Theologically, he mediates his view of absolute transcendence by recourse to anthropomorphic designations, the *via negativa*, and occasionally even positive descriptions.⁵⁸

When this understanding of Philo's representation of God is applied to *De decalogo*, the anthropomorphic images make better sense. In contrast to God, Philo insists that the anthropomorphic form and activity (as described in myths) of the gods demonstrates that

⁵⁷ Philo, *Spec.* I.32 (Colson, PLCL); cf. Philo, *Somm.* 1.230-231.

⁵⁸ Frick, "The Concept of God," 243; See also Frick, *Divine Providence in Philo of Alexandria* (TSAJ 77; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1999), 38-42.

they are not divine beings. And he is careful not to mold God into an anthropomorphic form that would similarly demonstrate that God is not divine. Rather, the anthropomorphic descriptions of God are a way for Philo to explain the transcendent God by means of human understanding, even if it must be recognized that they are imperfect descriptions of God.

Creator

For Philo, the concept of God as Creator is foundational to the refutation of other forms of worship. The tendency to reassert God's role as the Creator in contrast to contingent idols is a long-standing pattern in Jewish literature. Philo also applies God's role as Creator to the issue of nature worship. Philo interprets several anthropomorphic descriptions of God to be descriptions of God's creative activity. For example, Philo interprets the First Commandment primarily as a condemnation of nature worship and the necessity of distinguishing between Creator and creation. The primary representation of God in the First Commandment is God's role as Creator, and when Philo introduces this commandment, he explains God's uniqueness as the Creator through the image of God as King. Philo explains that the Decalogue is divided into two tables, and the first commandment deals with matters "concerning the monarchy, by which the world is ruled."⁵⁹ And worshipping creation instead of the Creator parallels the folly of one "who rendered to the subordinate satraps the honours due to the Great King."⁶⁰ In addition to the image of God as King, Philo employs another anthropomorphic image from the

⁵⁹ Philo, *Decal.* 51 (author's translation): *περὶ μοναρχίας, ἣ μοναρχεῖται ὁ κόσμος.*

⁶⁰ Philo, *Decal.* 61 (Colson, PLCL).

Jewish Scriptures to explain God's role as Creator. Philo explains the coherence of the first table: "The one set of enactments begins with God the Father and Maker of all, and ends with parents who copy His nature by begetting particular persons."⁶¹ God is Father in the sense that he generates the world as the sole Creator. Thus, Philo explains God's distinct role as Creator with the images of his kingly governance and paternal generation. Moreover, Philo's introduction to the First Commandment condemns the deification of nature and those people who have forgotten that God is the Begetter of creation and the Ruler of the great world-city (53). Philo's primary representation of God in the First Commandment is God as Creator, and Philo interprets several anthropomorphic images drawn from the Jewish Scriptures as descriptions of God's role as Creator. Philo retains the images from the Scriptures, but he reinterprets them.

For Philo, the fundamental ontological distinction is between God as Creator and everything that God created, and the images of King and Father communicate well the definitive boundaries between categories of being. A father is clearly distinct from his children, and the king is clearly distinct from his subjects. The ontological distinction between God and nature is reinforced by the facts that God precedes creation and is the cause of creation. While creation came into existence, God has always been (*Decal.* 58; cf. *Spec.* 1.14; *Opif.* 171; *Contempl.* 4). In contrast to everything else that is contingent, God is "the Uncreated, the Eternal, the Cause of all."⁶² Underlying the assertion of God's

⁶¹ Philo, *Decal.* 51 (Colson, PLCL).

⁶² Philo, *Decal.* 64 (Colson, PLCL).

superiority to creation is the idea—made explicit in Philo’s critique of idols (*Decal.* 69)—that the craftsman is superior to his product.

Father

The analysis above highlighted the importance of God’s role as Creator and noted that Philo employs images drawn from the Jewish Scriptures in order to express God’s creative role. Now we will examine an important scriptural image for God, God as Father, to see how Philo’s philosophical interpretation of the Jewish Scriptures removes this image from the interpersonal context. While the Scriptures do not frequently describe God as Father, when it does use paternal language of God it is in the context of an interpersonal relationship with God’s children, often identified as Israel. Sometimes God’s Fatherhood is implied by his relationship to Israel who is his son (e.g., Exod 4:22; Deut 1:31; 8:5; 14:1).⁶³ For example, God’s Fatherhood in the Song of Moses (Deut 32:6) is a way to explain God’s personal care for his people. Philo employs this scriptural description of God, but he transforms it to align with contemporary philosophical conceptions of deity. Philo refers to God as ὁ πατὴρ τῶν ὅλων (*Decal.* 32; cf. 107, ὁ θεός ὁ γεννητὴς τῶν ὅλων; *Ebr.* 108-110), a term drawn from Middle Platonism. Father is also a way for Philo to describe God as Creator. He is the source of existence, and everything that exists is his progeny. He is the “Father, Maker of the universe” (*Decal.* 64; cf. 51, 105). For Philo, the distinction between God and everything else consists in God’s self-

⁶³ Philo also implies God’s Fatherhood in *Decal.* 7-9. Philo’s point is that God, as Creator, is the source of all existence, and pagans ascribe the cause of their existences to other “pseudo-fathers.” In *Heres.* 169, Philo interprets the Second Commandment to be a prohibition of worship for objects which are not the causes of anything. In this context, God’s nature can be defined as the cause of existence; cf. *Spec.* 1.13, 23.

existence in contrast to the contingent existence of everything else. God's Fatherhood is not confined to Israel as in the Jewish Scriptures; rather, Philo describes God as Father of the world (134). Philo can combine the scriptural anthropomorphic images in a redefined way that emphasizes God's cosmic role. Philo argues that improper worship is that which forgets the "the highest and most august, the Begetter, the Ruler of the great World-city, the Commander-in-Chief of the invincible host, the Pilot who ever steers all things in safety."⁶⁴ False worship is not a sin committed exclusively by Israel who forgets God's special paternal care for his children; false worship is also a sin committed by all humans who fail to recognize God's cosmic paternity as the Father of everything.

King

One of the representations of God in the scriptural description of the giving of the Law is that of a King. God is the King to whom Israel has obligations of loyalty and service. Philo actually makes the reference to God as King more explicit whereas it is often underlying in the Jewish Scriptures. But while Philo maintains the imagery, he also transforms it, so that God's role of King has more to do with his sovereignty as Creator than his interpersonal relationship with Israel. Perhaps the clearest example of this occurs in Philo's summary of the First Commandment. The LXX frames the Decalogue in terms of God's political deliverance of an enslaved people from an oppressor: "I am the Lord you God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery. You shall not have other gods besides me" (Exod 20:1-2 NETS). Philo acknowledges that the LXX represents God as King, and he maintains this imagery, but he reframes the

⁶⁴ Philo, *Decal.* 53 (Colson, PLCL).

imagery, so that God's kingship is his sovereign control of the world: "the monarchy, by which the world is ruled" (*Decal.* 52; cf. 155).⁶⁵

Philo also transforms the promises associated with keeping the law. Covenant loyalty, understood by the LXX as faithfulness to the Great King, entailed benefits for a particular people:

You yourselves have seen what I have done to the Egyptians, and I took you up as though on eagles' wings, and I brought you to myself. And now if by paying attention you listen to my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be for me a people special above all nations. For all the earth is mine. (Exod 19:4-5 NETS)

Philo explains the blessings with some redefinition that universalizes the concept of Kingship:

But it befits the Great King that the general safety of the universe should be ascribed to Him, that He should be the guardian of peace and supply richly and abundantly the good things of peace, all of them to all persons in every place and at every time."⁶⁶

God's Kingship is understood to be his sovereign rule of everything, not his alliance with a particular people. Philo preserves the image of God as King, but this language too is transformed so as to be grounded in God's sovereign rule as Creator and for the benefit of all people.⁶⁷

True Existence

While Wisdom began its polemic against nature worship by asserting that God is $\acute{\omicron} \acute{\omega}\nu$ (Wis 13:1), Philo begins his polemic against idols (*Decal.* 59) and concludes the

⁶⁵ Philo, *Decal.* 51 (Colson, PLCL).

⁶⁶ Philo, *Decal.* 178 (Colson, PLCL).

⁶⁷ Cf., *Decal.* 41 where God's Kingship is also understood in terms of the Greco-Roman idea of a Benefactor. Additionally, Philo can use images not borrowed from the LXX such as craftsman and charioteer to describe God's sovereignty.

section (*Decal.* 81) by asserting that God is ὁ ὄντως ὢν.⁶⁸ Sandmel comments on Philo's vocabulary for God, "Philo's usual term for God as the transcendent, unknowable deity, is the Platonic term *To On*, 'that which exists'; at times he uses another Platonic phrase, *To ontōs On*, 'that which *existingly* (that is, 'truly') exists.'"⁶⁹ Like Wisdom, Philo employs this Middle Platonic term for God, but he does not do so without qualification. Philo believes that the unknowable Being of Platonism is the personal God who is revealed in the Law. An important implication of God's identity as ὁ ὄντως ὢν is that God has the ability to create life with a soul. The critical distinction between humans and the idols they worship is their origin. God created humans, and humans have a soul, but humans do not have existence in themselves as God does, so they are unable to create life with a soul (76).

Understandings of False Worship

Corresponding to Philo's redefinition of God, he redefines what it means to worship improperly. Because he has redefined the anthropomorphic language associated with the representation of God in the LXX (esp. King and Husband), definitions of false worship

⁶⁸ Cf. *Decal.* 8: ὁ ὢν ὄντως ἀληθῆς θεός

⁶⁹ Samuel Sandmel, *Philo of Alexandria: An Introduction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979), 91. Peder Borgen, "Philo of Alexandria" in *Jewish Writings of the Second Temple Period: Apocrypha, Pseudepigrapha, Qumran Sectarian Writings, Philo, Josephus* (CRINT 2; ed. Michael E. Stone; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984), 273, notes "At times Philo maintains that God is unknowable, transcending virtue and the good and beautiful. He is that which exists' (τὸ ὄν), or 'he who exists' (ὁ ὢν). But, although God himself is unknowable, his activities, which are called his powers (*dynameis*) can be known. Central powers are: God's activity in creating the world, represented by the name 'God' (*Theos*), and his continued activity in governing the world, indicated by the name 'Lord' (*Kyrios*)." While Borgen is generally correct in his description of Philo's theology, it must be emphasized that Philo believes that Platonism's unknowable God is the personal God who can be known through Moses' instruction in the Law. Dillon (*Middle Platonists*, 155) correctly describes Philo's Platonic conception of God, "Philo follows a system in which the supreme principle is the One, though for him it is also, of course, the personal God of Judaism. He calls it frequently the One, the Monad, or the Really Existent (*to ontōs on*), for example at *Deus* 11 and *Heres* 187." Cf. Barclay, *Jews in the Mediterranean Diaspora*, 165.

dependent on these representations must also be adjusted (esp. disloyalty and adultery).

Philo still has a great concern to prohibit idolatrous activity, but he redefines the language of what is idolatrous. One thing that stands out in Philo's denunciation of false worship in *De decalogo* is that he does not repeat all scriptural definitions of idolatry. For example, denunciations of idolatry in the Jewish Scriptures often are made along the lines of forsaking ancestral customs, but this concept of false worship is absent in *De decalogo*.⁷⁰

We can speculate that the absence of this definition of idolatry corresponds to Philo's insistence that the law of nature is the law of Moses, so that the proper practice of this law is accessible to non-Jews and not bound by the ancestral customs of a particular people or group. The following categorizations are Philo's primary descriptions of what it means to worship falsely.

Honoring the Creature Rather Than the Creator

Although Philo can distinguish among the different manifestations of false worship (worship of nature, cult images, and animals), his critique of all of them is that they make a category mistake in what they worship. They all honor as God things that are not God, and worship things unworthy of worship. Philo believes these categories of being to be obvious because everyone should recognize that the craftsman is greater and more worthy of honor than the thing he produces (*Decal.* 69). The product is passively acted upon; whereas, the craftsman is the active cause. Sandelin comments,

Philo's understanding of idolatry as deification of created things, i.e. things which do not form ultimate causes, illuminates his interpretation of the commandment forbidding images (Ex. 20, 4. 23). The second commandment, says Philo, forbids

⁷⁰ This critique of idolatry is exemplified by Jeremiah's satirical questioning in Jeremiah 2.

us to ‘to make gods of things which are not the cause of existence (τὰ μὴ ἄττα)’ (Her. 169).⁷¹

Philo argues that giving undue honor to nature does not really honor nature; it only dishonors God (*Decal.* 61).⁷² Again drawing on the metaphor of God as Father, Philo makes a distinction between God and all creation that is God’s progeny; thus, nature is viewed as the sibling of humanity, and it is absurd for people to worship their siblings (*Decal.* 64, 70). Philo treats Egyptian theriolatry as something that is obviously absurd. Their folly is demonstrated not just in that they worship the class of things not worthy of worship (everything created), but they worship even the lowest things of that class.⁷³

Polytheism

Whereas the Wisdom of Solomon only critiques the particular expressions of false worship (e.g., the construction of manmade gods), Philo, similar to the argument Josephus will make, briefly critiques the idea of polytheism. After Philo has discussed the error of worshipping nature, he summarizes the First Command:

Let us, then, engrave deep in our hearts this as the first and most sacred of commandments to acknowledge and honour one God Who is above all, and let the

⁷¹ Sandelin, “The Danger of Idolatry,” 115; cf. Karl-Gustav Sandelin, “Philo and Paul on Alien Religion: A Comparison” in *Lux Humana, Lux Aeterna: Essays on Biblical and Related Themes in Honour of Lars Aejmelaesus* (Ed. Antti Mustakallio; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 2005), 218. Although Sandelin cites *Her.* 169, this same argument can be found in *Decal.* 59, 64.

⁷² In *Decal.* 61, Philo compares nature worshippers to those who honor the satraps above the king. He makes a similar comparison in *Spec.* 1.14 where he says that nature worshippers are like those who attribute the agency of directing the chariot to the horses and ignore the charioteer.

⁷³ In *Contempl.* 8-9, Philo describes how the Egyptians worship the most ferocious and harmful wild animals. Then Philo comments on how the class of irrational animals is less worthy of worship than even the human beings who are at least nearer to God.

idea that gods are many never reach the ears of the man whose rule of life is to seek for truth in purity and guilelessness.⁷⁴

Not only is it an error to deify that which is created, it is an error to think that multiple things can be described as deity because there is only one being in the category of Creator.⁷⁵ Philo does not develop this idea any further. He is content to define God as the singular Creator, Father, and Cause. The preface to *De specialibus legibus* offers some insight into how Philo regards the relationship between polytheism and the first commandment: “On the special laws which fall under the two heads of the Ten Commandments, one of which is directed against the acknowledgment of other sovereign gods save the One, and the other against giving honours to the works of men’ hands.”⁷⁶ In both *De decalogo* and *De specialibus legibus*, Philo argues that the First Commandment prohibits polytheism because polytheism, like nature worship, is the deification of the created (cf. *Migr.* 179; *Her.* 169; *Virt.* 212).⁷⁷ Philo believes that false worship is not original, and he attributes the origins of polytheism to ignorance. Although false worship

⁷⁴ Philo, *Decal.* 65 (Colson, PLCL). Another broad categorization of false worship is the charge of atheism. Greco-Roman authors sometimes accused the Jews of being atheists because they did not accept the Greco-Roman gods. Philo reverses this charge and accuses the non-Jews of being atheists because they swear falsely by their gods. Swearing falsely in God’s name means that the Greeks are guilty of either atheism or impiety. If they are convinced that God hears everything, then it is impious to swear falsely by God. Or they might be ignorant of God’s providence: “If [you swear] in ignorance, you are an atheist, and atheism is the source of all iniquities...” (Philo, *Decal.* 91 [Colson, PLCL]). Philo has reversed the accusation against Jews and demonstrated how Greeks, not Jews, are atheists (cf. *Opif.* 170).

⁷⁵ Cf. Philo, *Opif.* 171.

⁷⁶ Philo, *Spec.* preface (Colson, PLCL); cf. *Spec.* 1.331-2, 344.

⁷⁷ On this point, see Sandelin, “Philo and Paul on Alien Religion,” 218-222.

is not original, humanity has devolved into an ignorance of God that Moses must correct (*Decal.* 8; *Spec.* 1.14-5; *Ebr.* 45).⁷⁸

Worship of Images

Philo attacks the most prevalent and visible form of aberrant worship when he criticizes any worship that involves a physical image.⁷⁹ He interprets the second commandment primarily to be a prohibition of worshipping idols. Philo, like the prophetic critiques of the Jewish Scriptures, begins with the premise that the gods behind the idols do not exist. From his monotheistic viewpoint, it is not possible for idol gods to have any real existence; rather, they are phantoms. Even the idols are interpreted by Philo to be phantoms because they have no existence beyond their material substance (cf. *Spec.* 1.26-7). Because their idol-god does not exist, pagan worship involving images must be directed at the physical image itself. Thus, Philo satirizes that even pagans believe that their gods *are* the idols, not that they are represented by the idols.⁸⁰

Because the idol-gods do not exist and craftsmen know that they do not exist, the craftsmen use every deception at their disposal to convince people that the idol-gods are

⁷⁸ Sandelin, "Philo and Paul on Alien Religion," 220-21, notes that Paul can also describe moral failure leading to the idea of polytheism.

⁷⁹ Philo, like most Jews, did not condemn literary representations of God that described God's image. But he, again like most Jews, was unwilling to admit the legitimacy of any physical representation of God.

⁸⁰ There is at least one place where Philo admits that the Greco-Roman view of idol worship is more complex than he typically satirizes. In *Leg.* 290, Philo admits that the image is separate from the deity: "The temple, my Lord Gaius, has never from the first admitted any figure wrought by men's hands, because it is the sanctuary of the true God. For the works of painters and modellers are representations of gods perceived by sense but to paint or mould the likeness of the invisible was held by our ancestors to be against their religion." Because *Legatio ad Gaium* is an apologetic work, Philo is probably trying to present Greco-Roman worship in the best way. His main goal is not to polemicize about Greco-Roman worship but rather to extol the virtues of Jews.

real. Sculptors and painters (*Decal.* 7-8, 66, 70, esp. *Spec.* 1.29), craftsmen (*Decal.* 71), and mythmakers (*Decal.* 55; *Post.* 165) conspire to deceive the masses into false belief about the idol's reality. Philo believes that both mythmakers and those who craft the physical representations are guilty of deception. In *De gigantibus*, Philo defends Moses as one who always speaks truthfully, and to demonstrate Moses' truthfulness he explains Moses' intolerance for deceitful images:

...And therefore also he has banished from his own commonwealth painting and sculpture, with all their high repute and charm of artistry, because their crafts belie the nature of truth and work deception and illusions through the eyes to souls that are ready to be seduced..⁸¹

In *Decal.* and *Spec.*, Philo also criticizes poets because, like the artisans, they deceive the masses through the senses.

For Philo, the gods are not real, but the craftsmen and mythmakers intentionally deceive the masses. The result is that “they think to be gods the images and paintings made by their own craftsmanship” (τὰ δ’ ὑπ’ δημιουργηθέντα πλάσματα καὶ ζωγραφήματα θεοὺς ἐνόμισαν, *Decal.* 70). This representation of pagan worship allows Philo to describe the idol-gods repeatedly as “dead” and “manmade.” These satirical flurries also permit Philo to pass over more difficult questions, such as the question of the seeming superiority of Greco-Roman gods in light of the dominance of Greco-Roman culture over Jewish culture or the question of how the Jewish God can have a physical location with the Ark of the Covenant and not be identified with it. These selective and well-crafted satires demonstrate the ridiculousness of the pagan worship as Philo has

⁸¹ Philo, *Gig.* 59 (Colson and Whitaker, PLCL).

represented it. Because he believes that the gods can be equated with their idols, Philo criticizes the gods primarily with descriptions of them as manmade and lifeless.

Having made the assertion that idols are equivalent to pagan gods, Philo explains how the gods are manmade. The designation of pagan gods as “manmade” is so engrained in Philo’s thought that it has almost become title for them. The logic runs: pagans gods are only their material image; their material images are made by humans; therefore, pagan gods are manmade. Philo’s emphasis on God as “Uncreated and Eternal” (*Decal.* 60; cf. 67) might be an effort to contrast the created and dependent idols. Following his argument that idols are manmade, Philo can describe them as lifeless. Supporting the description of idols as lifeless are both a logical argument and the observation that they do not act as living beings. The implied logical argument runs: pagan gods are manmade; humans do not have the ability to create life; therefore, the pagan gods are lifeless. Philo offers a very pointed critique of idols in which he compares the nature of idol-gods to the nature of the true God. Philo’s first description of idols is that they are “idols of stone and wood and suchlike images, all of them lifeless things.”⁸² He then proceeds to define God in terms of True Existence. In doing so, Philo makes a contrast between the Truly Existent One and those images that are without life. Philo’s most satirical argument is a *reductio ad absurdum* based on the equivalence of the god and the statue. Philo thinks that the goal of religion is to become like one’s god. This goal, however, is not desirable if one’s god is lifeless and inactive. Philo mocks,

Pray you therefore that you may be made like your images and thus enjoy supreme happiness with eyes that see not, ears that hear not, nostrils which neither

⁸² Philo, *Decal.* 7 (Colson, PLCL); cf. *Her.* 12; *Congr.* 48.

breathe nor smell, mouths that never taste nor speak, hands that neither give nor take nor do anything at all, feet that walk not, and no activity in any parts of your bodies.⁸³

Philo expects no objection to his argument. If the idols are the gods and are made by humans, then they have no life because humans are incapable of creating life. Philo concludes his polemic against images with an exhortation, “Let no one, then, who has a soul worship a soulless thing, for it is utterly preposterous that the works of human nature should turn aside to do service to what human hands have wrought.”⁸⁴

Error

Philo is quite in line with the Jewish Scriptures when he defines false worship in terms of worshipping things that are created and worshipping images of gods. Philo, however, expands what constitutes false worship from being primarily an external act to being an improper understanding. For example, Exodus 20 describes the first two commands in terms of exclusivity of devotion (οὐκ ἔσονταί; Exod 20:3) and external acts of worship (οὐ ποιήσεις σεαυτῷ εἰδωλον; Exod 20:4). The Scriptures, in this example, are not primarily concerned with improper thoughts about God. Sandelin comments on Philo’s approach, “The basic reason for creating images of gods is a blindness of the intellect (διάνοια). The ‘man of no discernment’ believes material things to be the causes of all things instead of the Existent (τὸ ὄν) whom he is unable to see.”⁸⁵ For Philo, idolatry is not exclusively an outward act of worship; rather, it can be understood as an

⁸³ Philo, *Decal.* 74 (Colson, PLCL); cf. *Spec.* 2.256; Ps. 115:5-8.

⁸⁴ Philo, *Decal.* 76 (Colson, PLCL).

⁸⁵ Karl-Gustav Sandelin, “Philo’s Ambivalence Towards Statues,” *SPhilo* 13 (2001): 128.

inward misdirection of the soul. False worship is not exclusively false action because thinking falsely about God is also false worship. False worship as incorrect thought falls into two primary categories: ignorance and delusion.

Ignorance

In *Decal.* 7-9, Philo hints at an argument that he makes more clearly in other treatises: idolaters are ignorant of the Source of Existence. The chain of events leading to idolatry begins in the prideful heart that despises proper reverence for divine things; this results in ignorance of the divine and the invention of idol-gods. Idolaters are ignorant of God, and “Such persons are happily compared in the sacred Scriptures to the children of a harlot; for as they in their ignorance of their one natural father ascribe their paternity to all their mother’s lovers...”⁸⁶ Philo mocks the idolaters as not perceiving things that even infants perceive. Even infants recognize that the craftsman is greater than his craft. Idolaters, however, deify those things that are twice removed from deity. They are the creations of created humans (69-70). The irony is that the human craftsmen who are created directly by God grow old, become impoverished, and die, while their creations gain greater honor and adornment (71). Moreover, the folly of idolatry is demonstrated in that an ensouled person worships a soulless thing (76).

Delusion

Nature worship can be described as a delusion or wandering from the truth (*Decal.* 52, 66). David Runia argues that the verb *πλανάω*, which the LXX uses to

⁸⁶ Philo, *Decal.* 8 (Colson, PLCL); cf. *Spec.* 1.331-332; *Ebr.* 108-110; *Conf.* 144. See Sandelin, “The Danger of Idolatry,” 113-4.

translate $\pi\tau\eta$, may show the influence of Middle Platonism on the text of the LXX.⁸⁷

Regardless of the intent of the LXX, Philo is happy to adopt this terminology in order to make a Middle Platonic critique of Stoic materialism that failed to distinguish nature from the transcendent God. “When he says at *De Decalogo* 52 that ‘no small delusion has taken hold of the majority of humankind in deifying the elements’, the word *planos* naturally recalls the ‘going astray’ in the biblical text.”⁸⁸ The link to a Middle Platonic interpretation is made more evident in *Spec.* 1.13-20 in which Deut 4:19 is explicitly quoted (*Spec.* 1.15). Runia notes that Philo does not avoid the description “gods”; people go astray when they think that these sense-perceptible celestial bodies alone are gods (*Spec.* 16). “What we must do is ‘give honour to the One who is not only God of gods both intelligible and sense-perceptible, but also Creator of all things’ (20).”⁸⁹

Internalization of Idolatry

While Philo does want to promote the community practice of the Law in Alexandria, he also moves the Law from the context of a nation practicing the Law to the Law being directed at an individual soul. He notes that the Decalogue is directed to

⁸⁷ David T. Runia, “Worshipping the Visible Gods: Conflict and Accommodation in Hellenism, Hellenistic Judaism and Early Christianity” in *Empsychoi Logoi—Religious Innovations in Antiquity. Studies in Honour of Pieter Willem van der Horst* (ed. A. Houtman, A. D. Jong and M. Misset-van de Weg; Ancient Judaism and Early Christianity 73; Leiden: Brill, 2008), 49-53. He states, “The details [of translating the LXX] are subtle, but do suggest in my view that the context of Hellenistic cosmic religion was present in the translators’ mind. We might even take them as a further indication of an acquaintance with the philosophical terminology of Platonism...” (52). The prohibitions in Deuteronomy that were originally directed against Babylonian astral worship are interpreted by the translators of the LXX in terms of Hellenistic cosmic religion. See, Sandelin, “The Danger of Idolatry,” 132-3; e.g., Deut. 4:19.

⁸⁸ Runia, “Worshipping the Visible Gods,” 54.

⁸⁹ Runia, “Worshipping the Visible Gods,” 55. For this point, Runia thinks that Philo has Deut 10:17 in mind. See also Mach, “Concepts of Jewish Monotheism,” 42.

individuals whose obedience is equal in worth to the obedience of an entire nation (36-38). It is consistent with the Jewish Scriptures to argue that the Law is a means of life, but his explanation of the function of the Law is also made in terms of the individual's soul: "Both [tablets of the Law] are excellent and profitable for life; both open out broad highroads leading at the end to a single goal, roads along which a soul which ever desires the best can travel without stumbling."⁹⁰ For the individual who wants to pursue truth and piety, the Law provides instruction for that individual's soul.⁹¹ Philo's internalization of the Law—made in part by noticing the anomaly of a singular "you" in the Decalogue—has the implication of making the benefits and consequences of obedience to be realized in the soul of an individual; moreover, the specific sins also can be interpreted as internal sins against the soul.⁹² Sandelin comments on the result of internalizing idolatry, "Philo does not only speak of deifying things outside man. He also mentions deifying things connected with man himself, i.e. his senses, his mind and his body (*Leg.* 1.344, *Ebr.* 95)." The passions themselves become idolatrous.⁹³

⁹⁰ Philo, *Decal.* 50 (Colson, PLCL).

⁹¹ See especially *Decal.* 58.

⁹² Philo's understanding of circumcision demonstrates how he internalizes religious practices. He begins his discussion of the special laws with an explanation of circumcision in *De specialibus legibus* because the practice is the cause of much ridicule (*Spec.* 1.2). He normalizes the practice by citing its practice in other cultures (1.2-3), and then he offers four explanations for its legitimacy. First, it prevents terrible diseases. Second, it promotes bodily cleanliness. Third, it connects the body and heart. Fourth, it promotes fertility. But Philo also wants to interpret circumcision symbolically as the removal of pleasures and purifying the soul from conceit (*Spec.* 1.9). Philo treats both circumcision and piety (proper thoughts about and worship of God) as physical religious observations whose deeper reality resides in the internal reality of the soul.

⁹³ Sandelin, "Danger of Idolatry," 115; cf. *Post.* 158-66; *Ebr.* 65-76.

Corresponding to his internalization of the Law, Philo also internalizes the sin of idolatry.⁹⁴ Philo's argument throughout the *Exposition of the Law* is that the piety prescribed in the Mosaic Law can be arrived at even by non-Jews by examining nature and philosophy. This consistent assertion implies that gentiles are inexcusable for their false worship even though they did not receive the explicit prohibition of idolatry in the Mosaic Law. The question then might be "From where does idolatry come, and what causes its origin if it is not from the beginning and not from God?" Philo's response is consistent with the internalization of idolatry through the *Exposition*: idolatry originates in the prideful hearts of humans. Philo begins *De decalogo* by answering the question of why Moses would choose to legislate away from the cities. His answer is fourfold: pride is rampant in cities, purification is necessary before receiving the laws, rules for civic life are necessary before civic life, and God's miraculous provisions in the wilderness demonstrate that the laws are also a miraculous provision (*Decal.* 2-20). Under the topic of pride, Philo explains that pride gives rise to idolatry. The prideful heart does not give proper reverence to things superior to the human being with the result that "Pride also brings divine things into utter contempt, even though they are supposed to receive the highest honors."⁹⁵ The proud human has no concern for truth and he degenerates into the error of idolatry. There is a subtle difference here between the very similar critiques of

⁹⁴ Philo takes this internalization of idolatry further in *Spec.* 1.22-28 where he describes excessive desire for wealth and fame as idolatrous. Thus, idolatry is not simply external physical worship of a cult image; it can be the disposition of one's heart that moves the person away from God. Philo thinks Moses intends this interpretation by mentioning that gods can be made of silver and gold (Exod 20:23; Lev 19:4). Philo interprets Leviticus 19:4 as "teaching them in a figure that it is not fitting to assign divine honours to wealth" (Philo, *Spec.* 1.25 [Colson, PLCL]).

⁹⁵ Philo, *Decal.* 6 (Colson, PLCL).

idolatry by Philo and the Book of Wisdom. While Wisdom offers an euhemeristic explanation of idolatry by which humans slowly descend into foolish misconception, Philo places the origin of idolatry in the prideful heart. Wisdom makes the argument on the larger scale of a people-group (especially Greeks and Egyptians) foolishly wandering into idolatry to the point where it is an accepted part of their culture. At least in *Decal.* 6-9, Philo seems to locate the origins of idolatry in an individual's prideful heart. Yehoshua Amir comments that Philo's critique of pagan pride and ostentation in worship also brings him in line with other critiques of pagan religiosity, especially by Cynics.⁹⁶

As the origins of idolatry are in an individual's prideful heart, so the effects of idolatry are in the harming of an individual's soul. Philo describes how people have filled the world with contrived images for worship. The effect of idolatry is NOT primarily an affront against God; rather, it harms the idolater's soul:

These idolaters cut away the most excellent support of the soul, the rightful conception of the Ever-living God. Like boats without ballast they are forever tossed and carried about hither and thither, never able to come to harbor or to rest securely in the roadstead of truth, blind to the one thing worthy of contemplation, which alone demands keen-sighted vision.⁹⁷

By failing to look with the eye of the soul, these people have an incorrect understanding of who God is (68). The result is that they live a miserable life.

Corresponding to the internalization of idolatry is the internalization of piety. Because God is sufficient in himself, it is improper to say that worship of God is for God's benefit. Rather, proper worship has as its goal the benefit of humanity:

⁹⁶ Yehoshua Amir, "The Decalogue According to Philo," in *Ten Commandments in History and Tradition* (ed. Ben-Zion Segal; Jerusalem: Magness, 1990), 131-2.

⁹⁷ Philo, *Decal.* 67 (Colson, PLCL).

He [Moses] gave no place in His sacred code of laws to all such setting up of other gods, and called upon men to honor Him that truly is, not because He needed that honour should be paid to Him, for He that is all-sufficient to Himself needs nothing else, but because He wishes to lead the human race, wandering in pathless wilds, to the road from which none can stray, so that following nature they might win the best of goals, knowledge of him that truly is, Who is the primal and most perfect good, from Whom as from a fountain is showered the water of each particular good upon the world and them that dwell therein.⁹⁸

Several important points emerge in Philo's understanding of worship. (1) God is sufficient (2) therefore, worship is not for him. (3) God teaches humans piety for their own good by means of (4) nature and (5) revelation. This argument fits into Philo's larger argument in the *Exposition* that intends to show the plausibility and value of the Jewish religion to a broader Greco-Roman audience. Humans can observe the evidences of God in nature and in the Jewish Law, and these are established by God for the good of humans.

The internalization of piety and idolatry does not mean that Philo denies the validity of Jewish religious activity. In fact, Philo views his internalization of piety as offering a surer defense of Jewish practice (cf. *Decal.* 97-8 concerning the Sabbath and the manner in which allegorical interpretation coexists with the literal). And outward religious apostasy is still to be punished with death (e.g., *Spec.* 1.54-5; 1.315-6). One of the consequences of internalizing idolatry is that it makes idolatry a sin for which Jews, including Philo, must examine their hearts.

Conclusions

Philo begins with an understanding of God that is dependent on his Jewish tradition as interpreted through Greco-Roman philosophy. Most importantly for Philo's conception of

⁹⁸ Philo, *Decal.* 81 (Colson, PLCL); cf. Philo, *Decal.* 41.

God are the ideas that God is One, True-Existence, and unlike humans. Philo consistently reinterprets anthropomorphic language concerning God. He does retain the imagery of God as Father and King from the Jewish Scriptures, but he redefines both of these roles to refer to God's sovereign rule and creative ability, not God's unique relationship with a particular people. Corresponding to this reinterpretation of God, Philo comes to new conclusions concerning what is false worship. He removes idolatry, as well as piety, from an interpersonal relationship and describes it as error that harms a person's soul.

In the broader *Exposition's* presentation of idolatry, Abraham serves as the paradigm for pagan enlightenment and Phinehas serves as the paradigm for Jewish religious zeal. The narrative of Abraham assures Philo that proper philosophical contemplation can lead a righteous soul from misguided astral worship to true piety.⁹⁹ Abraham demonstrates that the broader Greco-Roman audience to which the *Exposition* is directed should through proper philosophical reflection discern the correctness of the Jewish religion. Phinehas demonstrates that even though pagan idol-gods are non-existent, Jews must still vigorously, and at times violently, defend their ancestral customs when other Jews violate them.¹⁰⁰ In *De decalogo*, Philo ridicules the foolish practices of false worship among non-Jews, but he does not prescribe any action that should be taken against them. Their punishment is to lead miserable lives and await the judgment of God.

⁹⁹ Philo, *Praem.* 27, 58; *Somm.* 1.160-61; *Virt.* 212-3; Sandelin, "The Danger of Idolatry," 110-11.

¹⁰⁰ See *Spec.* 1.56; 1.316; Sandelin, "The Danger of Idolatry," 112, 122-3.

CHAPTER 5

JOSEPHUS' POLEMIC AGAINST FALSE RELIGION

Introduction

The works of Flavius Josephus are well-recognized as vital sources of information concerning the interactions of Jews with their Greek and Roman neighbors. His own life, detailed in his somewhat self-serving autobiography, describes how he navigated the challenges of living as a “faithful Jew” under Roman rule.¹ After the Jewish Revolt (66-70 C.E.), an event in which he played a role on both sides, he moved to Rome and began writing under the patronage of the Flavian emperors. His writings evidence cultural awareness, political experience, learnedness, and a steadfast commitment to the Jewish people. Josephus produced two major historical records, *Bellum judaicum* and *Antiquitates judaicae*, and two shorter works, *Vita* and *Contra Apionem*. Josephus was a voluminous writer, and *Contra Apionem* stands as the last and shortest of his works. While all of his works show an underlying Jewish apologetic, apology is the primary intent in *Contra Apionem*, and it is an important source for understanding how Jews could reject Greco-Roman religion and still view themselves as good citizens under Roman rule.

¹ Josephus' own life is a picture of the complexity of defining what it means to be a “faithful Jew.” While Josephus' attempts to portray himself as both faithful to the Jewish ancestral religion and a patriot, many other Jews would consider him to be unfaithful both religiously and politically. See Steve Mason, *Life of Josephus: Translation and Commentary* (Vol. 9 of *Flavius Josephus: Translation and Commentary*; ed. Steve Mason; Leiden: Brill, 2001).

Josephus wrote over the course of several years, and it is somewhat difficult to date *Contra Apionem* precisely, but a date shortly after 94 C.E. is most likely.² Although Josephus uses sources drawn from different types of writing, he integrates them into a generally coherent argument. Various proposals have been given as to the genre of the treatise, and it is probably best to assess the genre to be that of *apologia*.³ Barclay provides a helpful definition of this genre: “It seems best to define ‘apologetic’ as defense that is a) directly formulated against explicit accusations (legal charges and non-legal slurs), and b) directed toward observers (rather than ‘insiders’), at least at the level of rhetoric (the actual or intended audience is another matter).”⁴ While Barclay’s definition of *apologia* is helpful, it should also be noted that Josephus’ *apologia* makes both negative (refutation of slanders) and a positive (extolling the excellences of the slandered position) arguments. In *C. Ap.* 2.145-286, Josephus sets aside the refutation of specific slanders and attempts to offer a positive presentation of the Law that will persuade the reader concerning the benefits of the Jewish practice of the Law. He states his purpose in this section:

For I did not choose to write an encomium of ourselves, but I consider this to be the most just form of defense against the many false accusations against us—a defense from the laws, in accordance with which we continue to live.⁵

² See John M. G. Barclay, *Against Apion: Translation and Commentary* (Vol. 10 of *Flavius Josephus: Translation and Commentary*; ed. Steve Mason; Leiden: Brill, 2007), XXVI-XXVIII.

³ Christine Gerber, *Ein Bild des Judentums für Nichtjuden von Flavius Josephus: Untersuchungen zu seiner Schrift Contra Apionem* (AGJU 40; Leiden, Brill, 1997), 78-88; Barclay, *Apion*, XXX-XXXVI.

⁴ Barclay, *Apion*, XXXV.

⁵ Josephus, *C. Ap.* 2.147 (Barclay, *Apion*, 250-251).

Despite the encomiastic nature of 2.145-286, Josephus puts this material to an apologetic use. He notes the deviation from the general thrust of the work, and he explains how it fits into the overall structure of the work.

Having established the genre, it is still necessary to determine the purpose and intended audience of this work. The implied audience of an *apologia* (at the level of the rhetoric) is someone or some group that is outside the exchange of accusations and defenses. The implied audience is an observer whom the author wants to persuade to take the author's side over against his critics. Thus, Josephus claims to direct his work toward Gentiles, not Jews, because Jews should not need to be persuaded to accept Josephus' positions.⁶ The implied Gentile audience is more specifically a Roman audience. Josephus generally criticizes Greeks and Egyptians harshly, but he remains silent

⁶ Contra Martin Goodman ("Josephus' Treatise *Against Apion*" in *Apologetics in the Roman Empire: Pagans, Jews, and Christians* [ed. Mark Edwards, Martin Goodman, and Simon Price; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999], 50-51) who accepts that the declared audience is identical with the intended audience, so that *Contra Apionem* is both written for and received by a Gentile audience. Gerber (*Ein Bild des Judentums*, 90-91) argues that the intended audience was Greeks and Romans but acknowledges that it was likely received mostly by Jews: "It is obvious that the intended readers of Josephus are primarily non-Jews—Greeks and Romans—with the respect for Greek thought and Roman power. But, as is claimed, are Jews also envisioned as addressees? It is clear that Josephus does not apply directly to Jewish readers. Although apologies, in fact, were reliably handed down by the adherents of the apologists, but not by the targeted opponents, and it is easy to imagine that Jews read Apion to gain self-assurance in their Judaism and to find arguments against the hostile environment" ("So ist offensichtlich, daß die *intendierten Leser des Josephus zuallererst Nichtjuden sind, Griechen oder Römer*, mit Achtung vor griechischer Denktradition und römischer Macht. Sind aber, wie behauptet, auch Juden und Juedinnen als Adressaten anvisiert? Es ist deutlich ist, dass sich Josephus nicht direkt an juedische Leser wendet. Zwar wurden Apologien de facto sicher von den Anhaengern der Verteidigten ueberliefert, nicht aber von den angesprochenen Gegnern, und es ist gut vorstellbar, daß Juden und Juedinnen Ap lesen, um Selbstvergewisserung in ihrem Judentum zu gewinnen und Argumentationshilfe gegeneuber einer feindlich eingestellten Umwelt zu finden."). It is, however, unlikely that Greeks were the intended audience because they are criticized sharply.

concerning the Romans.⁷ Josephus also assumes that his audience is sympathetic to the Jewish cause, well-educated, and familiar with his previous works.

Although the implied audience (the group to whom the work is directed at the level of rhetoric, not necessarily the actual audience) of *Contra Apionem* consists of educated upper-class Romans, this group is probably not the intended audience (the group to whom Josephus actually writes). Greeks and Egyptians, bearing the brunt of Josephus' criticisms, could not be expected to receive this treatise favorably. They would likely be frustrated by the disingenuous representation of their beliefs and practices. Moreover, Josephus' critiques of Greek gods are easily applied to the Roman gods, so it is also unlikely that Josephus' work would be viewed favorably by a *popular* Roman audience. Eric Gruen also questions the probability of an *educated upper-class* Roman audience being the actual recipients (even if they are the implied audience): "How many Romans would take an interest in Josephus' sniping at obscure Greek and Egyptian writers, quarreling about Jewish antiquity, and claiming the superiority of Judaism over Hellenic institutions?"⁸ While upper-class Romans may not have taken great interest in Josephus' subject matter, they also would not have taken great offense at his criticisms either of Greek and Egyptian writers or popular Greek (and by implication, popular Roman) religion. Thus, that upper-class Romans are the implied audience makes the most

⁷ Barclay, *Apion*, 362-9; see also, XVI-LI. Although Josephus does not criticize Roman belief or practice explicitly, I will show below that most of his criticisms of Greek religion are easily applicable to Roman religion. Thus, his explicit deference to the Romans veils his underlying attack on all of Greco-Roman religion.

⁸ Eric S. Gruen, "Greek and Jews: Mutual Misperceptions in *Josephus' Contra Apionem*" in *Ancient Judaism in its Hellenistic Context* (ed. Carol Bakhos; Boston: Brill, 2005), 49.

sense of the rhetoric. The audience for whom Josephus writes (intended audience) and the audience most likely to have read his work (actual audience) doubtlessly would have been an educated, upper-class Jewish audience (one that spoke Greek and was conversant in philosophy), and it is most likely that Josephus intends his work to be read by this educated, upper-class Jewish audience.

If we are correct in distinguishing the implied audience (upper-class Romans) from the intended audience (upper-class Jews), we still must examine the purpose of this apologetic work. The assessment of the audience is interconnected with the assessment of the purpose. Coinciding with the different proposals of the audience, there are several proposals for the primary purpose of *Contra Apionem*: to defend Judaism from criticisms in the larger Greco-Roman environment and reestablish relations with Rome,⁹ gain proselytes or converts,¹⁰ defend Judaism and impress the audience,¹¹ or a combination of purposes.¹² I am unconvinced that *Contra Apionem*'s intended audience is Roman, so I

⁹ Goodman, "Josephus' Treatise," 55-8; Per Bilde, "*Contra Apionem* 1.28-56: Josephus' View of His Own Work in the Context of the Jewish Canon" in *Josephus' Contra Apionem: Studies in its Character and Context with a Latin Concordance to the Portion Missing in Greek* (ed. Louis H. Feldman and John R. Levison; Leiden: Brill, 1996), 94-114.

¹⁰ Per Bilde, *Flavius Josephus between Jerusalem and Rome: His Life, his Works, and their Importance* (JSPSup 2; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1988), 117-8, 120-21; Steve Mason, "The *Contra Apionem* in Social and Literary Context: An Invitation to Judean Philosophy" in *Josephus' Contra Apionem*, 187-288, esp. 188, 208, 222. Mason summarizes his view of *Contra Apionem* as a form of *logos protreptikos*: "Josephus' *Contra Apionem*, [was] written for gentiles in Rome at the end of the first century. This document, I shall argue, is best understood as an invitation to already interested gentile readers to embrace Judean philosophy" (188); cf. Mason, *Josephus and the New Testament* (2d ed.; Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 2003), 136-8.

¹¹ John M. G. Barclay, "Josephus v. Apion: Analysis of an Argument" in *Understanding Josephus: Seven Perspectives* (ed. Steve Mason, JSPSup 32; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998), 194-200.

¹² Aryeh Kasher, "Polemic and Apologetic Methods of Writing in *Contra Apionem*" in *Josephus' Contra Apionem*, 143-86, esp. 185.

find it unlikely that it intends to reestablish relations with Rome or gain proselytes. Christine Gerber proposes a more general purpose of *Contra Apionem*: “to convince [the audience] of the falsity of the slander by the goodness, as well as the superiority of Judaism.”¹³ While the implied audience consists of upper-class Romans, apologetic works often find their greatest readership (the actual audience) within the author’s own tradition. Even though an *apologia* is formally directed outward (the implied audience), Collins explains the psychological benefit of an apology for those inside the tradition: “Even if the apologetic had little impact on outsiders, it still reduced the dissonance for the Jews since it showed how their tradition could be made compatible with the surrounding culture.”¹⁴ As it was read by Jews, this thorough defense could have encouraged Jews about the respectability (indeed superiority) of their beliefs and ways of life; moreover, it might have been intended as a model of how to defend Judaism against Gentile criticisms.¹⁵

The Structure and the Argument

The outline of Josephus’ argument is important for interpreting his discussion of Greek religion because it occurs, not in the refutation of specific slanders, but in the context of

¹³ Gerber, *Ein Bild*, 93: “...zu überzeugen von der Falschheit der Verleumdungen wie der Güte, ja Überlegenheit des Judentums.”

¹⁴ Collins, *From Athens to Jerusalem*, 16; cf. Kasher (“Polemic and Apologetic Methods,” 144) who summarizes the function of polemical works, “Polemics are intended, on the one hand, to strengthen those who hold similar opinions—i.e. to reinforce the convinced while convincing the sympathetic, the dubious and hesitant. On the other hand, they are also intended to change the opinions of the distant and opposed (or at least to cast doubt in their minds), and to arouse interest among the indifferent and the uninvolved, with a view to eventually convincing them as well.”

¹⁵ Cf. Kasher, “Polemic and Apologetic Methods,” 155-6.

an apologetic explanation of the Law. Barclay provides the following structure of the two-volume work:

- 1.1-5: Introduction
- 1.6-218: Part One: The Antiquity of the Judeans
- 1.219-2:286 Part Two: Refutation of Slanders
 - 1.219-26: Introduction
 - 1.227-87: Manetho
 - 1.288-303: Chaeremon
 - 1.304-20: Lysimachus
 - 2.1-144: Apion
 - 2.145-286: Apollonius Molon and others
 - 2.287-96: Conclusion¹⁶

The section that is most significant for presenting Josephus' rebuke of aberrant forms of worship is the refutation of Apollonius Molon and others (2.145-286). The tone of this section can be distinguished from preceding sections because here Josephus focuses more on offering a positive portrayal of Judaism than refutation of criticisms, and at some points this section becomes an *encomium* of the Law and Moses. The structure of this section is more difficult to delineate than previous sections that proceeded more systematically. Barclay provides a more detailed outline:

- 2.145-286: Apollonius Molon and others
 - 2.145-150: Introduction
 - 2.151-89 Moses and the structure of the constitution
 - 2.190-218: Summary of key laws
 - 2.219-35 Judean endurance for the law
 - 2.236-86: Judean religious difference and its rationale¹⁷

¹⁶ Barclay, *Apion*, XXI. Barclay provides more detailed outlines for each of the sections, and I have only reproduced the most relevant subject headings. See the slightly different and more detailed outline in John R. Levison and J. Ross Wagner, "The Character and Context of Josephus' *Contra Apionem*," in *Josephus' Contra Apionem*, 2-5. Bilde, *Flavius Josephus*, 118, offers a simple structure that accounts for both the different tone beginning in 2.145 and Bilde's argument that *C. Ap.* has a missionary intent: (1) 1.1-5: Introduction (2) 1.6-2.144: Polemics and Apologetics (3) 2.145-286: Agitation or Missionary Activity (4) 2.287-296: Conclusion. While the simplicity and clarity of this outline is attractive, the sections are much more lopsided than Barclay's, and I am unconvinced by the missionary intent. For a structure similar to Barclay's with variations on some section delineations, see Gerber, *Ein Bild*, 67-71.

The subsection in which Josephus criticizes pagan religion (2.236-54) occurs in the explanation of Jewish religious difference (2.236-286).

Before turning to the specific arguments made in *C. Ap.* 2.236-54, we will examine the structure of Josephus' argument in *C. Ap.* 2.236-86. While Josephus does not explicitly state his main point at the beginning of *C. Ap.* 2.236-86, he primarily defends the Jews against the accusation that they are intolerant and anti-social: not only do Jews prohibit non-Jews from Jewish worship, they also refuse to worship non-Jewish gods. At *C. Ap.* 2.236, Josephus transitions to a new point. While *C. Ap.* 2.145-235 focused on the excellences of the Jewish Law and rarely named critics, *C. Ap.* 2.236 begins with the theme of accusations by people like Lysimachus and Apollonius Molon. Apollonius Molon, as the primary example of one who accuses Jews of being anti-social, will recur in this section (2.255, 258, 262, 270). Apollonius Molon and Lysimachus both criticized the Jews for being anti-social and even misanthropic (1.309; 2.148), and this shared criticism seems to be the reason that Apollonius and Lysimachus are mentioned together at the beginning of 2.236-86. The central criticism for which Josephus offers an apology in this section is stated in 2.258: "Without taking any of this into account, Molon Apollonius accused us of not admitting those who are in the grip of their own opinions about God, and of not wishing to share fellowship with those who choose to live according to a different way of life."¹⁸ Josephus introduces this accusation (2.236-8) and

¹⁷ See Barclay, *Apion*, XXI.

¹⁸ Josephus, *C. Ap.* 2.258 (Barclay, *Apion*, 315-16). While Josephus defends the Jewish practice of not admitting foreign worship into Jewish practice, this defense is probably a redefinition of the real issue. The offense by the Jews had much less to do with their refusal to admit foreign worship into their own and

then makes his defense against this accusation in three steps. First, he demonstrates the foolishness of Greco-Roman conceptions of deity (2.239-254). If the Greco-Roman understandings about deity are so mistaken, why would Jews even think to admit these conceptions into their worship? The criticism is restated in *C. Ap.* 2.255-58. Second, Josephus explains that other noteworthy nations similarly prohibit foreign religious ideas and people into their polity: Lacedaemonians (2.259-61), Athenians (2.262-8), Scythians (2.269), and Persians (2.270). Third, Josephus affirms Jewish loyalty to their Law as a noble virtue and the only sensible course of action (2.271-84). The Jewish Law is so excellent that other nations emulate it. Why then should Jews emulate foreign customs when foreigners acknowledge the excellence of Jewish Law and practice?

Thus, the polemic against false religion (2.236-54) must be understood as a function of three greater arguments: the treatise as a whole, *C. Ap.* 2.145-286, and *C. Ap.* 2.236-86. In *C. Ap.* 2.236-86, the polemic against false religion justifies the Jews' tenacious guarding of their religious customs by showing the absurdity of other religious beliefs. This section (2.236-86) fits into *C. Ap.* 2.145-86 by demonstrating the virtue of the Jews in their practice of the Law: the Law so exceeds other legal constitutions (especially in its conception of God) that it would be foolish for the Jews to abandon it. In

much more to do with their refusal to recognize pagan deities. The refusal to recognize pagan deities gives rise to the accusations that Jews are atheists (because they deny the existence of gods), insurrectionists (because they refuse to worship patron deities and thereby upset social order), and anti-social (because they do not participate in civil activities associated with religious rites and segregate themselves by sectarian worship). Barclay explains Josephus' redefinition: "Few could complain Judeans kept their own religious traditions, but it could cause deep offense if they disparaged others' customs. Refusal to participate in the religious rites that defined social solidarity could cause friction (e.g. in Alexandria; 2.65), raising suspicions that they did not support the local city or the larger Roman empire (cf. 2.73). If that is the force of the accusation, Josephus turns the issue of Judean *non-participation* in others' rites into that of *non-admittance* of others into their own. He thus makes a purportedly 'anti-social' and 'irreligious' policy look like quite proper defense of the truth" (Barclay, *Apion*, 315 n.1041).

the argument of *Contra Apionem* as a whole, the polemic against false religion is one defense in refuting the accusation that Jews are intolerant minsanthropes and atheists. The way to refute these accusations is to show the excellence of the Jewish Law and the virtue of Jews who practice it.

While the bulk of this analysis will focus on the particular argument Josephus makes in *C. Ap.* 2.236-54, it is profitable first to point out the sequence of some arguments that Josephus makes elsewhere in *C. Ap.* 145-286 concerning pagan gods and idolatry. This section (*C. Ap.* 2.145-286) is devoted to a defense of the Law, which Josephus, like Philo, thinks promotes both piety and humanity (2.145-6). While Greeks attribute their laws to various gods such as Zeus and Apollo, Moses is led by God to provide a faithful conception of God (2.162-3). Josephus intends to prove the correctness of Moses' understanding of God by examining individual laws and demonstrating that the wisest of the Greeks have imitated Moses' conception of God (2.168-71). Due to the overlap with Philo's exposition of the first commandment in *De decalogo*, *C. Ap.* 180-98 merits a closer examination. Some think it may even be possible that Josephus depends on Philo's descriptions of the Law in *De decalogo* and *De specialibus legibus*.¹⁹ Consistent with Middle Platonic conceptions of Deity, Josephus describes God as known by his works (2.190-2).²⁰ While Josephus does not explicitly deny that God has an image,

¹⁹ Barclay, *Apion*, 359-61.

²⁰ Cf. Plato, *Tim.* 41-42. Barclay, *Apion*, 277 n. 756, comments, "Drawing on the Platonic tradition, Philo would speak of God's invisibility and immateriality (e.g., *Spec.* 1.20); Josephus uses less precise terms, but makes it clear that it is both impossible and improper to represent God visually (cf. 2.252)." For an alternative reading based on a textual variant, see Jason von Ehrenkrook, *Sculpting Idolatry in Flavian Rome: (An)Iconic Rhetoric in the Writings of Flavius Josephus* (SBLEJL 33; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2011), 72-8.

he interprets the first commandment to be a rejection of making or imagining the image of God (2.191).²¹ The LXX can refer to creation as the work of God's hands, but Josephus carefully denies any anthropomorphic representation of God: "These [i.e. all creation] God made without hands, without effort, without needing any assistants, but when he willed beautiful things, they at once beautifully came to be."²² God is worshipped both in cultic acts and in daily living. In daily life, Jews worship God by practicing virtue (2.192). For cultic worship they have one temple for the one God (2.193). Underlying this statement is a subtle critique of pagan polytheism because pagans have many gods and even erect multiple temples for the same god.

C. Ap. 2.236-8

After describing the greatness of the Jewish Law and the courageous practice of the Law by Jews, Josephus claims that these facts have no effect on the Jews' accusers: "The Lysimachuses and Molons, and other writers of that sort—fake sophists, who dupe the young—insult us as the most despicable human beings."²³ Josephus does not elaborate concerning why Jews are labeled as the vilest or most despicable humans. In this introduction, Josephus does not state the specific accusation leveled against the Jews, but the immediate and broader context clarifies that the accusation centers on Jewish intolerance of pagan religions. As noted above, Apollonius Molon and Lysimachus both

²¹ For Josephus' understanding of idolatry and images, see Ehrenkrook, *Sculpting Idolatry*.

²² Josephus, *C. Ap.* 2.192 (Barclay, *Apion*, 305-6).

²³ Josephus, *C. Ap.* 2.236 (Barclay, *Apion*, 315-16). Before Josephus refutes the accusation, he inserts a brief ethos-argument against his accusers. The accusation that a philosopher corrupted the youth was a common way of describing the subversiveness and destructiveness of their teaching (e.g., Xenophon, *Mem.* 1.1; Isocrates, *Antid.*, 15.96; Cicero, *Clu.* 63; Plato, *Apol.* 23d-25d; *Crito* 15; Josephus, *C. Ap.*, 2.145, 2.264;).

criticized the Jews for being anti-social and even misanthropic (1.309; 2.148). Josephus cites Apollonius Molon especially as a representative of the accusation that Jews do not tolerate other religious beliefs or modes of life (2.258). It seems that their “vileness” is primarily related to their social practice of preserving Jewish distinctions. Barclay explains,

Josephus keeps the charge at this point extremely general. It is only after an extended depiction of valueless opinions about the divine (240-54) that he will specify the issue of religious intolerance (2.258). In that context it will seem entirely reasonable for Judeans to be inhospitable to others’ opinions about ‘God.’²⁴

Thus, Josephus builds his apology before he states the specific accusation. The accusation will appear absurd in light of Josephus’ preceding explanation. Why would Jews admit such foolish ideas about God into their worship? Their intolerance is justified, and in fact laudable. The polemic against pagan religion must be understood in the immediate apology for Jewish intolerance of pagan religion and the broader apology for the superiority of Jewish belief and practice.

Josephus alleges that the critics of the Jews hurl accusations—that in this context are primarily the accusations of Jewish intolerance of pagan religion—at them without reason. He states that he would prefer not to discuss the aberrant worship practices in which other nations have engaged, but these critics have forced his hand in the matter (2.237; cf. 2.150). Both Jewish practice and Law prevent them from criticizing other nation’s gods, and their philanthropy is demonstrated in their peaceable living with

²⁴ Barclay, *Apion*, 306 n.955. Barclay uses the term “Judeans” while I will use “Jews.” There is no ideal term in English because “Judean” emphasizes their geographical location but downplays religion; whereas, “Jew” emphasizes religion but downplays geographical location.

others: “It is our traditional custom to observe our own laws and to refrain from criticism of those aliens.”²⁵ Moreover, the piety of the Jews generally prevents them from criticizing pagan religiosity: “Our legislator has expressly forbidden us to deride or blaspheme the gods recognized by others, out of respect for the very word ‘God.’”²⁶ Josephus seems to be drawing on an existing interpretation of Exodus 22:28 (22:27 LXX). The LXX translates אלהים as a plural: θεοὺς οὐ κακολογήσεις (Exod 22:27 LXX, You shall not revile the gods). Josephus reads the LXX carefully and interprets this as a prohibition of criticizing things reported to be divine out of respect for the concept of divinity. Nevertheless Josephus’ opponents have forced him into the situation in which he must comment on pagan deities.

The effects of this introductory apology are to present the Jews favorably, offer an apology for Jewish actions, and turn the tables on his opponents. Josephus intends to demonstrate that the Jews are both philanthropic and pious, and these themes shape the way he represents Jewish interactions with respect to pagan deities. Jews are typically tolerant of other people on account of Jews’ respect for God. Behind the text of *Contra Apionem* is a long history of social unrest due to Jewish insistence on purity of worship. In the audience’s not too distant memory are thoughts of the Jewish War with Rome, the pogroms in Alexandria, and their rejection of emperor worship. Josephus’ subtle counter to this history of unrest is to claim that Jews really desire to live peaceably with their neighbors. Mirroring the attitude of the Jews, Josephus intends to present himself as

²⁵ Ibid., 2.237.

²⁶ Ibid., 2.237; cf. Philo, *Mos.* 2.205; *Spec.* 1.53.

desiring not to criticize. He is not the attacker; rather, his opponents have attacked the Jews and forced him to make a defense, a part of which is to demonstrate the faults of his accusers.

C. Ap. 2.239-41

Throughout *Contra Apionem*, Josephus has attempted to present himself as a philosopher, and thus he can offer a sophisticated philosophical critique of more base forms of Greek and Egyptian thought. This approach also allows him to align himself with positions that already exist in the broader Greco-Roman world, so he is not forced to make entirely new arguments about Greek religion. Josephus' attempt to align himself with philosophers is most obvious in his critique of Greek polytheism. He questions, "For who of those among the Greeks admired for their wisdom has not censured the most famous poets and the most trusted legislators for originally sowing such opinions about the Gods among the masses...?"²⁷ Josephus claims that he is not the first to notice the absurdity of pagan worship; the wisest pagans have already criticized these institutions and practices.²⁸ There is an underlying view that the common people are neither capable of nor possibly even culpable for deciding to engage in polytheistic practices. They are led by others. In the case of false worship, the blameworthy leaders are the poets and legislators.²⁹ Notice also that Josephus is critiquing primarily Greek mythology, and he

²⁷ Josephus, *C. Ap. 2.239* (Barclay, *Apion*, 306); cf. 2.242, 247, 255, 281.

²⁸ See Barclay, *Apion*, 307 n. 964. There was a long-standing tradition in Greek culture of critiquing myths about the gods. E.g., Plato, *Resp.* 376-392; Cicero, *Nat. d.* 1.39-41.

²⁹ Cf. *C. Ap. 2.153*. In *De decalogo*, Philo heavily criticizes the poets, myth makers, and artists, but his critique of the legislators is not as explicit. Instead, when Philo speaks of legislators he typically does so in encomiastic terms of Moses. In *Decal.* 176, Philo does compare Moses to other lawgivers, but the

allows Roman mythology to remain relatively unscathed. This deference to the Romans is due doubtlessly to his implied audience and his patrons who were both Roman.

Josephus' criticism of the Greek gods is on the basis of their plurality, likeness to animal behavior, and anthropomorphic nature. Greek religion offers no objective criteria for determining the number of gods. The result is that "they represent them to be as numerous as they choose."³⁰ Josephus blames the idea of the plurality of the gods on the desires of the poets. This might be a subtle critique of pagan acceptance of foreign gods into their worship and Jewish resistance to that trend. The Greco-Roman frustration with Jewish worship was not that they worshiped God; rather, Jews—like Christians later—were considered atheists because they *only* worshipped one God. Josephus makes his critique with the presupposition that anything in the category of God pre-exists humanity. The idea of creating one's gods was a ridiculous concept for a Jew whose view of God is rooted in God's role as the sole Creator.

Pagans are not even respectful of their gods in the way that they describe them. Rather, they make myths about the existence of the gods, and the myths are patterned after the behaviors that they observe in the animal world. They describe their gods "like the species of animals" (ὡσπερ τῶν ζώων τὰ γένη [C. Ap. 240]). Then Josephus addresses the anthropomorphic nature of the gods, especially Zeus. The ungodlike character of the

comparison is not meant to demonstrate how the other lawgivers have led the people astray; rather, the comparison is to demonstrate the greatness of Moses. The theme that leaders are the ones primarily responsible for the idolatry practiced by the masses is a theme that runs throughout Pseudo-Philo's *Liber Antiquitatum Biblicarum*. On this point, see Frederick T. Murphy, "Retelling the Bible: Idolatry in Pseudo-Philo," *JBL* 107 (1988): 275-87.

³⁰ Josephus, *C. Ap.* 2.240 (Thackeray, LCL). Elsewhere Josephus argues that even philosophical Greeks borrowed Moses' monotheistic understanding of God's nature (2.168).

gods is demonstrated not only in their myths that are patterned after humans but also that their myths are patterned after the most reprehensible human behavior. For example, Zeus is a tyrant and a terrible Father against whom his own children rebel.

C. Ap. 2.242-49

Josephus reiterates that he aligns himself with the critique that pagan philosophers already make concerning the Greek gods (2.242) although he does not cite or name any of these philosophers at this point.³¹ Josephus again critiques the anthropomorphic descriptions of the gods in terms of their appearances (bearded, beardless), occupations (blacksmith, weaver, warrior, musician, archer), and interactions (wars and alliances among themselves) (2.242-3). The underlying critique is that the myths about pagan gods are crafted in the likeness of human activity, and thus they must not be divine.

Josephus offers a more extended critique of the gods' sexual immorality. It was common for Jews to criticize the sexual immorality of non-Jews, and Josephus alleges that these sexually immoral tendencies are mirrored by their gods. The fact that the gods are subject to their passions undermines any claims that they might make to being deities. Even their wills are subject to the passions, things outside themselves that exercise control over them. Moreover, the greatest of the gods, Zeus, has limited control of events, and even he is subject to a force greater than himself, Fate (2.245). The pagan deities not only have a hierarchy of control among themselves, they also are controlled by forces

³¹ The division between *C. Ap. 2.242-49* is made in order to discuss the text in more manageable units.

beyond their control. In contrast, Josephus' God is not subject to or in competition with any other deity, and the Jewish God is the sole director of the course of history.³²

Josephus attacks Zeus far more than any of the other gods, and he offers specific myths that describe Zeus' sexually immoral activity (2.245-6). Josephus probably criticizes Zeus especially because Jews might have had some attraction to the idea of the supreme deity.³³ It might be that Josephus thinks that most Jews would be unlikely to abandon Jewish monotheism for the ridiculous myths of polytheism, but they might be tempted to make an equivalence between the Jewish God and the pagan god Zeus. Josephus does not offer a systematic rebuttal; rather, he assumes his audience will share a basic understanding of what constitutes sexual immorality and that this activity of the gods shows their falsity: "what person of good sense would not be provoked by these [i.e. descriptions of the gods' sexual immorality] both to castigate those who concocted these stories and to condemn those who accepted them for their utter stupidity?"³⁴ When one compares the chastity and self-control (that Josephus claims is) practiced by Jews (2.199-

³² Josephus' criticism of anthropomorphisms in the pagan deities, like Philo's criticism, overlooks some of the anthropomorphic representations of God in the Jewish Scriptures.

³³ See Barclay, *Jews in the Mediterranean Diaspora*, 432-3. The best-known association of Zeus with the God of the Jews occurs in the *Letter of Aristeas*. The Greek description of Jewish worship is as follows: "These people [i.e. Jews] worship God the overseer and creator of all, whom all men worship including ourselves, O King, except that we have a different name. Their name for him is Zeus and Jove. The primitive men, consistently with this, demonstrated that the one by whom all live and are created is the master and Lord of all." (*Let. Aris.* 16 [Shutt, *OTP*]; cf. Aristobulus Fragment 4). Collins thinks that even though this statement is attributed to a Greek, it still represents the theology of *Let. Aris.* as a whole. He does, however, caution that this is not a complete identification, "Pseudo-Aristeas was not suggesting the complete equivalence of Greek and Jewish religion by any means, only that Greeks, too, had a place for the worship of a supreme god" (Collins, *From Athens*, 192). While *The Letter of Aristeas* does not necessarily demonstrate a desire on the part of the Jews to worship the non-Jewish god, Zeus, it does show a method of seeking common ground by identifying at least in part Zeus with God.

³⁴ Josephus, *C. Ap.* 2.247 (Barclay, *Apion*, 310). Here Josephus condemns the commoners along with the leaders.

203) to the actions of the pagan gods, it is an unavoidable conclusion that even common Jews practice a greater degree of morality and self-control than pagan deities.³⁵ What's more is that even goddesses—in a culture that placed more sexual restrictions on women—were guilty of sexually immoral and impassioned behavior.

Josephus, then, offers a few final criticisms in no particular order. He comments that they deified passions, and even more than this, they have deified the worst passions. They have also institutionalized these ridiculous myths by making sacrifices to the more esteemed gods a matter of civic importance. Lastly Josephus criticizes the idea that there are good and bad gods. The Greeks believe that the bad gods are to be avoided, but the idea of needing to avoid a deity is altogether preposterous for Josephus. The Jewish understanding of God is that God is the source of good (2.166), and it is also not possible to avoid God.

Josephus continues his approach of refuting arguments from the past, that he implicitly claims to be representative, in order to show the absurdity of his opponents' positions. When he refutes accusations against the Jews in Book 1, he critiques the arguments made by distant and obscure Greek and Egyptian historians while largely avoiding contemporary critiques. Similarly, when he attacks Greco-Roman religion, he critiques the most outrageous of the Greek myths while largely avoiding contemporary Roman writings about the gods. In both his refutation of slanders and critique of pagan

³⁵ The Jews are so concerned about sexual morality that they would execute any Jew who acted like the pagan gods: "What are our marriage laws? The Law recognizes no sexual connexions, except the natural union of man and wife, and that only for the production of children... The husband must have union with his wife alone; it is impious to assault the wife of another. For any guilty of this crime the penalty of death is inexorable, whether he violates a virgin betrothed to another or seduces a married woman" (Josephus, *C. Ap.* 2.199...201 [Thackeray, LCL]).

deities, Josephus attacks positions that are distant from his audience. If we are correct that Josephus' implied audience included Romans, it is no accident that he attacks Greek myths while avoiding Roman myths. Barclay calls this approach controlled antagonism

... [When Josephus borrows the Greek historical practices of criticizing other Greek historians] in his attack on Greek mythology, Josephus knows that he is following in the steps of Greek intellectuals (especially Plato, *C. Ap.* 2.238-39, 242, 256-7), and when one compares what other Jews have said about idolatry (e.g. *Wisdom of Solomon*) Josephus' comments on images appear relatively mild. It is also noticeable that the examples Josephus chooses are generally from the old 'classical' Greece rather than from contemporary life. While Josephus thus undercuts the cultural claims of his Hellenized contemporaries, he leaves undefined the targets of his attack in the present day."³⁶

He does not provide a logical refutation of the deities; rather, the ridiculousness of their actions is assumed to be evident, and this absurdity is assumed to prove that they are not really gods. On the one hand, Josephus does not attack Roman beliefs and practices, but he does criticize Greek religiosity with arguments that could just as easily apply to popular Roman religiosity. Upper-class, philosophically-inclined Romans would probably agree with Josephus' criticism of the Greek (and implicitly Roman) gods; thus, commonality of belief might have as much to do with class as it does with ethnicity.

C. Ap. 2.250-54

It must be recalled that *C. Ap.* 2.145-296 forms an extended defense of the Jews on account of the perfection of their Law. The condemnation of the lawgivers in *C. Ap.* 2.239 and 2.250 forms an *inclusio* around Josephus' main critique of aberrant worship. The relevance of false worship to Josephus' larger defense is that legal systems, other than the Jewish Law, remove piety and the proper understanding of God from their laws.

³⁶ Barclay, *Jews in the Mediterranean Diaspora*, 364.

Josephus, like Philo, thinks that laws regulating human interactions are based on and flow from one's understanding of God (*C. Ap.* 2.169-71, 181, 188-9). Josephus traces the source of the problem and its effects, and he answers the question of what causes false worship: "Now what is the reason for such inconsistency and error concerning the deity? I suppose it is because their legislators did not originally recognize the true nature of God, nor, when they had distinguished whatever accurate knowledge they were able to grasp, relate to this the rest of the structure of the constitution..."³⁷ Legislators, with the obvious exception of Moses, begin with an improper understanding of God that corrupts the rest of their laws.

Because the lawmakers failed in their task of legislating piety, the poets, orators, and artists were afforded an opportunity to deceive the masses. Josephus' view is that Moses is the earliest legislator, and he is copied by others. These Greek legislators, however, failed to copy the best part of the Mosaic Law, those parts that relate to piety. That the Greek gods are later introductions betrays their true reality as human inventions. The Jews practice the original, correct form of legislation from which the Greeks deviate. The poets whimsically assimilate even foreign gods into the myths.³⁸

Similar to his predecessor Philo, Josephus argues that the fluctuations in the physical appearances of the gods also shows their non-reality. Some artists use the finest material to make cult statues, but even these materials need constant upkeep. Josephus

³⁷ Josephus, *C. Ap.* 2.250 (Barclay, *Apion*, 311-12).

³⁸ This point foreshadows Josephus' next argument which is an apology for Jewish rejection of foreign gods. Barclay (*Apion*, 312 n.1019) comments, "The reference to admitting *foreign* gods, which is hardly relevant to 2.240-49, is introduced here to prepare the way for the central theme of 2.255-69 (e.g., 2.257, 259, 267), the refusal of Judeans to accommodate foreign conceptions of the divine."

does not explicitly identify the god with the cult image as Philo and Wisdom had done, but he does criticize Greeks for forming the figure (μορφή) of a god from their own imaginations (2.252). Moreover, as the popularity of a god increases or decreases so does the splendor of his temple.³⁹ The alternative to this false worship is for humans to “preserve unchangeable their conception of God and the honor they pay him.”⁴⁰ Although Josephus does not offer a thorough reassertion of God’s character at this point, he maintains that the solution to false worship is a proper conception of God. This assertion also segues into the next section in which Josephus will defend the Jews against the claims that they are antisocial and atheists because they do not accept the Greek gods. Barclay explains how these sections fit together: “If Judeans have their own conception of God (which is true and proper, 2.255) why should they admit people with opinions such as those described in 2.240-49? If their unwillingness to associate with others signals a refusal to change, what Apollonius considers a fault is in fact the Judeans’ greatest virtue.”⁴¹

Analysis of the Argument

It is well-recognized that *Contra Apionem* is the most structured and rhetorically sophisticated of Josephus’ works.⁴² It is his final work, and in it he attempts to

³⁹ The fact that a god’s temple is neglected is taken by Josephus to be proof that the god is unreal. Josephus does not address the logical problem of how to explain the destruction of the Jerusalem Temple either by the Babylonians or the Romans.

⁴⁰ Josephus, *C. Ap.* 2.254 (Barclay, *Apion*, 313).

⁴¹ Barclay, *Apion*, 313 n. 1027.

⁴² For reference to some of Josephus’ argumentative structures, see Harold W. Attridge, “Josephus and His Works” in *Jewish Writings of the Second Temple Period: Apocrypha, Pseudepigrapha, Qumran*

demonstrate the respectability of the Jews in comparison with other cultures, especially the Greeks and Egyptians. For the most part, he exempts the Romans (at least explicitly) from his most scathing critiques.⁴³ Barclay argues that the idol polemic in particular demonstrates Josephus' attitude toward the Romans,

Most revealing is the fact that the critique of 'Greek' religion and mythology is not widened (as it could have been) to include the Romans: to say that 'the Greeks and some others think it good to make statues' (*C Ap* 2.74) looks like a studied attempt to *avoid* including the Romans in his critique of religious images.⁴⁴

Although Barclay correctly notes that Josephus avoids critiquing Roman religious belief and practice, this explicit avoidance does not mean that Josephus altogether exempts Roman religion from critique. As I have mentioned above, the things that Josephus critiques about Greek gods (e.g., plurality, humanlike activities, and immoral actions) are also true of the Roman gods. Thus, *Contra Apionem* can be read as an explicit deference to the Romans, but it is also a veiled critique of popular Roman religion. Josephus does,

Sectarian Writings, Philo, Josephus (ed. Michael E. Stone; CRINT II.2; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984), 228-30.

⁴³ On Josephus' deference to the Romans and modeling of Judaism to be in agreement with the Romans, Barclay ("Judaism in Roman Dress: Josephus' Tactics in the *Contra Apionem*" in *Internationales Josephus-Kolloquium Aarhus 1999* [ed. Jürgen U. Kalms; Münsteraner Judaistische Studien 6; Münster: LIT, 2000], 232) comments, "I think a strong case can be made that Josephus' depiction of Judaism in C [i.e. *Contra Apionem*] has a specifically Roman character and is designed to represent Jews in terms both comprehensible and attractive to his Greek-reading Roman (or Romanised) audience. The Jews of Josephus' C are, if you will, *Judaei togati*." Barclay does not interpret Josephus' Romanized portrayal of Judaism as an exclusively political move; rather, this representation likely mirrors Josephus' own acculturation and reconceptualization of what Judaism meant under Roman rule. Barclay concludes, "While claiming to belong to an unchanging tradition—in fact, precisely in making that claim—Josephus has, perhaps, internalized the Roman culture he had come to appreciate, and has found in it an appropriate vehicle with which to express his Judaism" (245).

⁴⁴ Barclay, *Jews in the Mediterranean Diaspora*, 366. See also Barclay, "The Politics of Contempt: Judeans and Egyptians in Josephus's *Against Apion*," in *Negotiating Diaspora: Jewish Strategies in the Roman Empire* (ed. John M. G. Barclay; Library of Second Temple Studies 45; New York: T & T Clark, 2004), 109-127, where he argues that Josephus was appointed by the Romans to be a spokesman for the Jews, but he was forced to argue in terms that would compliment his Roman patrons.

however, argue that Greek philosophers recognized the error of popular Greek religion, and thus he exempts philosophically-inclined Romans from criticism. Josephus' makes his arguments by attacking the accusers' character, exploiting the variation already existent in Greek religion, using satire, and condemning the arbitrariness of Greek religion.

Character Attacks

Some of the liveliest rhetorical flurries in *Contra Apionem* are the places where Josephus attacks the character of his accusers (e.g., 2.2-7). This argumentative tendency is less prevalent in *C. Ap.* 2.236-54, but Josephus does introduce the section by attacking the character of Lysimachus, Molon, and others like them. They are fraudulent in the wisdom that they espouse, and they deceive the youth who are easily swayed by their inventions (2.236). This tactic lessens the force of the accusations by explaining the source of the accusations as unreliable and even deceptive. These foolish teachers are contrasted with the intellectuals who reject such notions of deity (2.242).

Exploiting the Cracks in Greek Religiosity

Josephus' position in the larger Greco-Roman world was tenuous on all sides. While he very clearly identified himself as a Jew, his actions in the war with Rome brought his standing in the Jewish community into suspicion. And while he comfortably enjoyed the patronage of the Flavians, he did not adopt their religious beliefs or practices. On the surface, it would seem that Jewish aniconic monotheism was entirely in contradiction to Greco-Roman iconic polytheism, but this view underestimates the plurality of options in both systems of belief. Even if there were more inclusive views in

Judaism, Josephus' own position was not one of them. Greco-Roman religious belief, moreover, was not a unitary system with standardized sacred texts. Great variation in belief and practice existed within Greco-Roman religious expression. Perhaps because Josephus' own religious beliefs did not have sufficient cultural traction, he attempts to critique Greek religiosity from within the system by identifying himself as a philosopher. Barclay comments on this tactic, "He insinuates himself into the debates among Greeks and Romans, wedging open the gaps that lay between one system of religion and the other, and linking the Judean tradition to its 'philosophical' mode."⁴⁵ Josephus does not begin his critique of myths by advancing an argument of his own invention; rather, he claims to be arguing in line with Greek philosophers (2.239). He pauses briefly to restate that leading thinkers reject these myths (2.242).

Satirical reductia ad absurdum

Josephus chooses myths that are both well-known and easily critiqued. It is perhaps impossible to determine to what degree these myths—primarily in this case by Homer and Hesiod—represented the beliefs of common Greek worshippers. The fact that Stoics felt the need to interpret Homer allegorically probably indicates that the myths were accepted at face value by at least some Greeks. Josephus' tactic is to demonstrate that the logical results of these myths are entirely untenable. The actions of the gods in the myths demonstrate that they are not gods. An unchallenged premise of Josephus'

⁴⁵ Barclay, *Apion*, 307 n.963; cf. Barclay, "Judean Historiography in Rome: Josephus and History in *Contra Apionem* Book 1" in *Josephus and Jewish History in Flavian Rome and Beyond* (ed. Joseph Sievers and Gaia Lembi; Boston: Brill, 2005), 29-43. Barclay explains a possible rhetorical motivation for this approach: "His [Josephus'] own tradition did not perhaps carry sufficient political power for his challenge to be effective" (43). See also Barclay "Snarling Sweetly," 73-87.

argumentation is that he begins with the Jewish God as the definition of deity. Evidence that the Greek gods are not gods comes from them being controlled by their passions, being many, bound by Fate, and similar to humans.

Greek Arbitrariness in Defining the Divine

Josephus criticizes the myths of the pagans because they have no standards by which to evaluate them other than their own whims. Without any objective standards, “They represent them to be as numerous as they choose...”⁴⁶ Moreover, the laziness of the lawgivers resulted in an ever increasing number of gods:

[The lawgivers] allowed the poets to introduce whatever Gods they wished, suffering all kinds of things, and the orators to give citizenship, by decree, to any useful foreign God. Painters, also, and sculptors enjoyed considerable license in this matter among the Greeks, each himself devising a particular form, one molding it from clay, the other painting;⁴⁷

Corresponding to the whimsical introduction of new deities is the falling out of favor experienced by some of the cults. The fleeting nature of the worship of certain gods demonstrates that they were not worthy of worship in the first place. Underlying Josephus’ argument is an implicit apology for the Jewish refusal to admit foreign gods into worship. The difference between the Jews and Greeks is that the Jews have defined standards of what is worthy of worship; whereas, the Greeks worship whatever deities suit them for a time and then they discard them when they are no longer in vogue.

⁴⁶ Josephus, *C. Ap.* 2.240 (Thackeray, LCL). There is, however, some reasoning behind the choice of the gods. For example, someone must be responsible for Spring and Fall; thus, Demeter is a logical necessity. Part of the difficulty with defining the divine in Greek thought is the multitude of sources from which to choose. Josephus argues that having one sacred text testifies to the correctness of Jewish theology (*C. Ap.* 1.37-41; 2.179-81).

⁴⁷ Josephus, *C. Ap.* 2.252-2 (Barclay, *Apion*, 312-13).

Representations of God

Josephus is somewhat unique among Jewish idol polemicists in that he does not interweave the reassertion of God's character into his polemic against false religion. While Wisdom and Philo seem to model their idol polemics in part after Isaiah 44 with the mockery of making idols and the reassertion of God as Creator, these themes are not present in *C. Ap.* 2.236-54. This difference in argumentation is largely due to the fact that *Contra Apionem* is an apologetic work, and the polemic against Greek religion is part of Josephus' apology for Jewish non-admittance of Greek gods into their worship. Josephus explains that the Jews are justified in not worshipping the Greek gods primarily by explaining the foolishness of the gods, not by extolling the character of the true God. Because Josephus does not explicitly describe God's nature in *C. Ap.* 2.236-54, we are forced to discuss what is implicit in this section and what we can glean from the larger argument of *C. Ap.* 2.145-286. Because Josephus critiques the Greek gods in terms of how they deviate from his understanding of God, we can get a glimpse of Josephus' understanding of God by looking at what God is not. If the God of the Jews is to be the perfect contrast to the flawed Greek gods, God must have at least the following qualities: singularity, lack of passion, being free of anthropomorphism, and being providential.

Singular

In contrast to the pagan gods who are many, a number that is growing with the whimsical desires of the poets, the Jewish God is One (*C. Ap.* 2.240). The ridiculousness of the interactions among the gods is probably an attempt to undermine the idea of polytheism itself. Philo interpreted the First Commandment to forbid polytheism

explicitly, and Josephus similarly asserts the unique oneness of God by means of the First Commandment. He especially emphasizes that God is the self-sufficient Creator (*C. Ap.* 2.190-2). Jewish practice also coincides with Jewish theology: Ἐἷς ναὸς ἐνὸς θεοῦ (There is one temple for the One God. *C. Ap.* 2.193). Moses' whole representation of God is tied to his singularity: "he represented him as single and uncreated and immutable through all eternity, more beautiful than any mortal form, known to us by his power, but as to what he is like in essence, unknown."⁴⁸ Moses' Law is superior because he begins with the proper understanding of who God is, and fundamental for Jewish theology is the oneness of God.

Impassible

Josephus' most extended critique of the Greek gods is that they are enslaved to their passions and as a result they engage in moral depravity. In order for God to transcend the immorality of the Greek gods, God's activity must be self-controlled. Josephus does not explain God's character positively perhaps because he believes the nature of God to be incomprehensible (*C. Ap.* 2.167). The idea of God having desires, especially desires comparable to human desires, is unbecoming of deity. By avoiding the scriptural descriptions of God's emotions, Josephus presents a less personal God that fits well with his attempt to present Judaism as a philosophy.

Not Like Humans

The description of the Greek gods in terms of having emotions, struggling with each other, and working at specific trades makes the gods very much like humans.

⁴⁸ Josephus, *C. Ap.* 2.167 (Barclay, *Apion*, 263-4).

Josephus judges anthropomorphic descriptions of the divine to be incorrect and irreverent. That the Greek gods can be compared to the most immoral humans shows their non-reality. Correspondingly, the incomparability of God to human terms evidences his distinction from humanity.

Providential

Finally, for Josephus an essential aspect of the definition of God is that God be self-existent and not controlled by any external forces. Even the greatest of the Greek gods cannot escape the control of Fate. In contrast, Josephus believes in a God who is both transcendent and sovereign:

...God encompasses all things, perfect and blessed, self-sufficient and sufficing for all, that he is the beginning, middle, and end of all things; he is evident through his works and acts of grace, and more apparent than anything else, but in form and greatness beyond our description.⁴⁹

Josephus' God is not controlled by any forces beyond God. God is self-sufficient and in control of all things in contrast to the Greek gods who are bound by external forces.

Understandings of False Worship

Josephus differs somewhat from Philo and Wisdom who attacked the idea of crafting physical statues as gods. Unlike Wisdom and Philo, Josephus does not focus his critique on physical images; rather, Josephus mocks the myths of the gods. Elsewhere in *Contra Apionem*, Josephus strictly forbids representing God's form in any statue, but that is not his focus here.⁵⁰ The very human behavior of the gods shows that they are not gods at all.

⁴⁹ Josephus, *C. Ap.* 2.190 (Barclay, *Apion*, 276-7); cf. *C. Ap.* 2.165-6, 179-81, 185, 245.

⁵⁰ See, *C. Ap.* 2.12, 74-5, 191. John M. G. Barclay ("Snarling Sweetly: Josephus on Images and Idolatry," in *Idolatry: False Worship in the Bible, Early Judaism and Christianity* [ed. Stephen C. Barton; New York: T & T Clark, 2007], 81-83) describes the problem of representing God with a physical image.

Josephus' definition of false worship seems to be worship of many gods and worship of gods with non-divine qualities.

For Josephus, the idea of a plurality of divine beings itself creates an insurmountable problem. Plurality of divine beings implies competition and ranking among the gods. The result is that there are greater and lesser gods, and there are beneficial and harmful gods. Moreover, even the greatest gods are subject to forces that are external to them, such as Fate and their own passions.

Additionally, false worship is any worship of beings that possess qualities not becoming of divine beings. These qualities include both likenesses to animal species and anthropomorphisms. Perhaps the qualities that make the gods most unworthy of worship are those moral qualities that would be reprehensible if they were to be found in human beings. The way that Zeus seduces women, treats them after he impregnates them, and acts according to his passions demonstrates that his activity would not be desirable in any human being, much less a god.

Conclusions

The ethical conclusions that Josephus intends to make are a function of how *C. Ap.*

2.236-54 fits within both *C. Ap.* 2.145-286 and the work as a whole. The section, *C. Ap.*

2.236-54, is a negative aside directed against Greek religion in a section that is primarily

a positive presentation of Jewish Law and life. The negative aside functions to contrast

In contrast to Philo and Wisdom's explanation of Greco-Roman religious belief, many Greeks likely distinguished the cult image from the god. The question becomes why an image cannot represent a greater reality (e.g., as a flag represents a country). Barclay lays out Josephus argument: "A. *Images are meant to be similar to the reality they represent.* B. Images are lifeless and therefore inferior to what they represent. C. *But the inferior cannot be adequately similar to the superior.* D. *What is not wholly adequate in religion is wholly inadequate, indeed impious.* E. Therefore: image-representation of God was rightly banned by Moses" (81).

Greek belief—especially in terms of its absurd piety and the inhumanity of the gods—with both the piety and humanity that characterize Jewish life. Josephus attempts to align himself with Greek philosophers who recognize the ungodlike nature and activity of the gods. The effect of Josephus' argument on the Jewish audience, who is the audience most likely to have read *Contra Apionem*, is to bolster the confidence that Jews should have in their Law and to comfort them concerning the compatibility of Judaism with the best expressions of Greco-Roman culture. It is obvious that Josephus wants to dissuade his upper-class Jewish audience from believing in the Greek pantheon, but he does not deal much with the practice of Greek religion. Belief in the pantheon was probably not a strong temptation to an educated Jewish audience although he does focus his critique on Zeus more harshly probably because the supreme God represented some temptation for the Jews.

Josephus does not make a precise logical argument for the non-reality of the Greek gods. Further, he does not make a persuasive argument for the correctness of worshipping the God of the Jews. In fact, it is unlikely that Josephus' arguments would move someone from a firmly held position into agreement with Jewish practice. But this is not his purpose in this section. His primary purpose is to describe the absurdity of Greek religion as part of an apology for Jews not worshipping Greek gods. He intends to defend Jewish worship as honorable, and in so doing he promotes it as the wisest form of worship. In *C. Ap.* 2.236-54, Josephus castigates the ungodlike qualities of Greek gods, and by comparison, he shows the greater respectability of Jewish worship. Like Wisdom and Philo's arguments, Josephus makes a broad appeal to reject Greek forms of worship

and pursue Jewish practice. He does not, in this work deal with the specifics of what that worship looks like. The most one could glean from this presentation is that the Greek gods are unworthy of worship and indeed are not really gods.

CHAPTER 6

PAUL'S POLEMIC AGAINST FALSE RELIGION

Introduction¹

The preceding three chapters analyzed arguments made by Hellenistic Jews about false religion. This detailed analysis has established an understanding of the manner in which educated, upper-class Jews refuted popular and philosophical Greco-Roman religious

*All quotations of the New Testament, unless otherwise noted, are the author's translation of NA²⁷: B. Aland, K. Aland, J. Karavidopoulos, C. M. Martini, and B. M. Metzger (eds), *Novum Testamentum Graece* (27th ed. Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1993).

¹ One of the great challenges of analyzing the argument of 1 Cor 8-10 is to present a fresh and original analysis of the text while remaining conversant with the abundant secondary literature. My approach in this project as a whole and also in this chapter is to focus on the primary sources while noting the contributions of other scholars primarily in the footnotes. The works that are most influential on my analysis are listed below. In some cases, those cited are the most significant scholarly work on a topic, while in other cases I have chosen them because of their fresh approach.

Commentaries: Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987); Wolfgang Schrage, *Der erste Brief an die Korinther* (EKK 7 vol. 2; Zürich: Benziger, 1995); Raymond F. Collins, *First Corinthians* (SP 7; Colledgeville: Liturgical Press, 1999); Joseph Fitzmyer, S.J. *First Corinthians* (AB 32; New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008); Roy E. Ciampa and Brian S. Rosner, *The First Letter to the Corinthians* (PNTC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010).

Monographs: Margaret M. Mitchell, *Paul and the Rhetoric of Reconciliation: An Exegetical Investigation of the Language and Composition of 1 Corinthians* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1991); N. T. Wright, *The Climax of the Covenant: Christ and the Law in Pauline Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991), esp. 120-136; Joop Smit, "About the Idol Offerings": *Rhetoric, Social Contexts and Theology of Paul's Discourse in First Corinthians 8:1-11:1* (Leuven: Peeters, 2000); John Fotopoulos, *Food Offered to Idols in Roman Corinth: A Social-Rhetorical Reconsideration of 1 Corinthians 8:1-11:1* (WUNT 2.151; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2003); Richard Liong-Seng Phua, *Idolatry and Authority: A Study of 1 Cor 8:1-11:1 in Light of the Jewish Diaspora* (JSNTSup 299; New York: T & T Clark, 2005).

Articles: Gordon D. Fee, "II Corinthians VI.14-VII.1 and Food Offered to Idols," *NTS* 23 (1977): 140-61; "Εἰδωλόθυστα Once Again: An Interpretation of 1 Corinthians 8-10," *Biblica* 61 (1980): 172-97; Ben Witherington III, "Not So Idle Thoughts about EIDOLOTHUTON," *TynBul* 44 (1993): 248-50; "Why Not Idol Meat? Is It What You Eat or Where You Eat?" *Bible Review* 10 (1994): 38-55; Peder Borgen, "'Yes,' 'No,' 'How Far?': The Participation of Jews and Christians in Pagan Cults," in *Paul in His Hellenistic Context* (ed. Troels Engberg-Pedersen; Fortress: Minneapolis, 1995); John Fotopoulos, "Arguments Concerning Food Offered to Idols: Corinthian Quotations and Pauline Refutations in a Rhetorical *Partitio* (1 Corinthians 8:1-9)," *CBQ* 67 (2005): 611-63; Karl-Gustav Sandelin, "Philo and Paul on Alien Religion: A Comparison" in *Lux Humana, Lux Aeterna: Essays on Biblical and Related Themes in Honour of Lars Aejmelaeus* (Ed. Antti Mustakallio; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 2005), 211-46.

beliefs and practices. For these authors, and also for Paul, discussions concerning idolatry and pagan gods were discussions that were eminently practical and profoundly shaped the activities of their communities. Interactions with the religious practices and beliefs of the pagan culture were unavoidable, and Jews debated the acceptable degrees of interaction that one could have and still remain faithful to God. When a particular author (or community) designated something as idolatrous, he forbade the practice and also defined the faithful within the community as those who did not engage in that particular action. While discussions concerning interactions with other religions were practical, the arguments were made on theological grounds and involved a particular view of the deity. The manner in which an author represented God affected the manner in which idolatry was understood and the dangers associated with interactions with pagan gods.

In turning to Paul's argument in 1 Cor 8-10, we must be aware of both how Paul is a participant in these larger Hellenistic Jewish conversations about idolatry and how he turns the discussion in new directions. Christopher Rowland notes the similarity of the theological and practical questions faced by early Christians and Jews: "While an uncompromising rejection of idolatry was required, living with and around idols (the prepositions are important) reflected the centuries-old experience of the Jews."² Rowland's statement, however, requires some explanation. Certainly, most first-century Jews were monotheistic, but to say that "an uncompromising rejection of idolatry was

² Christopher Rowland, "Living with Idols: An Exercise in Biblical Theology," in *Idolatry: False Worship in the Bible, Early Judaism and Christianity* (ed. Stephen C. Barton; T & T Clark: London, 2007), 164.

required” does not mean that Jews unanimously agreed on what was idolatrous. Chapter 2 illustrated the remarkable breadth of how Jews defined idolatry, and that definition depended significantly on how the author represented God. In addressing the complex situation at Corinth, Paul draws on various Jewish streams of interpretation concerning the representation of God and definition of non-gods. Some of these streams Paul views as complementary even while he interprets them all in light of his radical belief in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Like the author of *Wisdom*, Philo, and Josephus, Paul was a Hellenistic Jew, and his arguments show his indebtedness to his Jewish heritage. The comparison of these authors’ arguments shows not only Paul’s connection with Hellenistic Jewish streams of interpretation, but even more so the comparison highlights how Paul shapes these traditions in radically new directions. A few differences in Paul’s writing should be noted. First Corinthians is different in terms of his form. Paul writes a letter of admonition in order to give apostolic instruction in response to specific questions from the audience. First Corinthians is also different in terms of the relationship between author and audience. Paul founded the Christian community at Corinth, so that the Corinthians beliefs are shaped substantially by Paul’s own instruction.³ First Corinthians is most notably different from other Hellenistic Jewish texts in the way that Paul argues, particularly in regard to his understanding of the Lord Jesus Christ. In contrast to *Wisdom*, *De decalogo*, and *Contra Apionem*, the argument in 1 Cor 8-10 is a

³ I recognize that the term “Christian” is viewed as problematic by some. For the purposes of this study, it is a helpful description of those who believe in Jesus as the Messiah in contrast to those like *Wisdom*, Philo, and Josephus (cf. 1 Cor 1:2).

christological argument. Paul's belief in the Lord Jesus Christ as the Savior and Judge of the Christian community created an imminent view of the deity in a way unattested in Hellenistic Jewish authors.

Because Paul's instructions are directed at a particular people in a specific setting, understanding some basic things about the Corinthians' location sheds light on the challenges they faced. By the time that Paul writes in the mid-fifties, Greek Corinth was only a memory.⁴ Gaius Julius Caesar repopulated the city with freedmen, military veterans, and urban tradesmen. The city was now governed by Roman law, used Latin as its official language (even if Greek was most commonly spoken), adopted Roman customs, and practiced Roman religion. But the steady flow of traffic into this port city also meant that new customs and religions came too, and intermixing was inevitable. Corinth's position as distributor of both goods and ideas may have provided strategic motivation for Paul to found the Christian community at Corinth.

The composition of the Christian community at Corinth seems to be primarily Gentile converts to faith in Christ.⁵ What is perhaps more surprising is the breadth of socio-economic statuses implied in Paul's Letters to Corinth. There are believers wealthy

⁴ See Pausanias, *Descr. Graec.* 2.1.2; 2.3.7. Corinth's strategic location on the isthmus allowed it to control important harbors on the eastern (Cenchreae) and western (Lechaeum) coasts of Greece. Thus, Corinth became a significant trade city. Moreover, Corinth possessed fertile plains and a thriving pottery industry. Following its defeat in the Achaean War (146 B.C.E.), Corinth remained destitute for about a century. The major turning point came in 44 B.C.E. when Julius Caesar decreed that Corinth was to be refounded as a Roman colony with Roman laws. For an abbreviated history of Corinth, see Collins, *First Corinthians*, 21-4; Thiselton, *First Epistle*, 1-22; Jerome Murphy-O'Connor, O. P., *St. Paul's Corinth: Texts and Archaeology* (3rd ed. Rev. and Exp.; Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical, 2002); Wayne A. Meeks, *The First Urban Christians: The Social World of the Apostle Paul* (2nd ed.; New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003).

⁵ Contra Phua, *Idolatry and Authority*.

enough to host leisurely meals in their homes while other believers arrive later at these meals probably because they are either slaves or day-laborers. The disparities in socio-economic statuses among the Corinthians probably had repercussions for how they understood their interactions in the church with issues such as rankings of gifts, authority of an apostle, the role of wisdom, unity, and (especially important for our study) acceptable interactions with pagan society. After Paul left Corinth, divisions arose in the church, and the authority of his apostleship seems to have been questioned. The Corinthians, at least some of them, have written to Paul to request his advice on divisive issues while others sent oral reports.

The Structure and the Argument

Form of First Corinthians

Determining the form of Paul's writing affects how one understands the content and arguments contained in it. It is common to call this text "The First Epistle to the Corinthians" but Fitzmyer points out that First Corinthians should not be understood as an epistle (a highly artistic form of writing) but rather as an occasional letter and substitute for Paul's personal presence: "A letter is something non-literary, a means of communication between persons who are separated from each other."⁶ This classification is correct so long as one recognizes, as Fitzmyer does, that there are sections (esp. chapters 13 and 15) that transcend the immediate problems in the community. Moreover, classifying a letter as "non-literary" does not mean that the author does not make

⁶ Fitzmyer, *First Corinthians*, 54; see Collins, *First Corinthians*, 1-4, 6-14.

sophisticated arguments.⁷ Paul addresses the problems in the community, but he is constantly placing those problems in the grander picture of the death of Christ, nearness of the Parousia, and resurrection. This letter, then, is the personal address of Paul to a community that he founded, in response to reports and the community's own questions, in order to give his apostolic instruction. But what kind of letter is it? The answer to this question is tied to both the structure and purpose.

While scholars debate the specific purpose for Paul's letter to the Corinthians, at least they (those who hold to the unity of the letter) can agree that First Corinthians is an occasional letter.⁸ Paul offers his instruction in a particular manner, so that his purpose is connected to both the argumentative content and the form in which it is delivered. In dealing with the form and purpose of First Corinthians, Margaret Mitchell's work has been the most influential. She assesses the form of the letter to be deliberative rhetoric, intended to persuade the audience to pursue unity (1 Cor 1:10).⁹ As I will discuss below, I

⁷ Even though First Corinthians is a letter, it was probably read to the Corinthians, and thus it was received as a form of speaking to the Corinthians. In this speech, Paul can employ rhetorical models to communicate his instruction. See Collins, *First Corinthians*, 17-20.

⁸ The following features of the letter help us understand the occasion of writing: 1) Reports from Chloe's people (1:10-12); 2) Writings from the Corinthian Christians (7:1); 3) Reports from Stephanus, Fortunatus, and Achaicus (16:15-17); 4) Desire of the Corinthians for Apollos to visit (16:12); 5) Delay of Paul's visit (4:21). See Fitzmyer, *First Corinthians*, 51-2.

⁹ Mitchell, *Paul and the Rhetoric of Reconciliation*; cf. Hans Dieter Betz and Margaret M. Mitchell, "Corinthians, First Epistle to the" in *ABD*, 1.1139-48. A number of scholars accept Mitchell's general argument of deliberative rhetoric. For example, Collins (*First Corinthians*, 20) agrees that First Corinthians is a form of deliberative rhetoric with 1 Cor 1:10 as the thesis; and thus he assesses the purpose: "It is addressed to the Christians at Corinth, urging them in the name of the Lord Jesus to have no divisions among them. Rather they ought to be in agreement with one another." Fitzmyer follows some of the structural points, but he criticizes the rigidity of forcing the whole letter into the mold of deliberative rhetoric. See below for his critique.

am unconvinced that the letter as a whole is a single exercise in deliberative rhetoric. Others argue that First Corinthians is a letter of admonition intended to instill proper action in the audience (1 Cor 4:14).¹⁰ The category of letter of admonition is to be favored because it is broad enough to include the various topics addressed but also narrow enough to describe the work as instructions to act in particular ways.

Occasion and Purpose of First Corinthians

Ciampa and Rosner consider themselves to be part of the “rough consensus [that] has begun to emerge in which scholars agree that the problems Paul addresses in 1 Corinthians reflect the infiltration of Corinthian social values into the church.”¹¹ This “consensus” has merit when one considers that actions such as sexual immorality, idolatry, striving for position, and the glorification of wisdom were viewed by Jews and early Christians as characteristic actions of pagans. In short Paul is urging the Corinthians to live in light of their new calling in Christ and not in light of their past. This mirrors Paul’s instructions to Gentile churches elsewhere. Especially relevant for our focus on chapters 8-10, is Paul’s description of the Thessalonians’ faith in Christ: “you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, and to wait for his Son (coming) from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, Jesus who rescues us from the coming wrath” (1 Thess 1:9, 10). Paul goes on to describe how he instructed them to live in light of this

¹⁰ E.g., Fitzmyer, *First Corinthians*, 55-6.

¹¹ Ciampa and Rosner, *First Letter*, 4, see also 21. They quote several others who argue similarly. See also Richard B. Hays, *First Corinthians* (Louisville: John Knox, 1997), 71; esp. Bruce W. Winter, *After Paul Left Corinth: The Influence of Secular Ethics and Social Change* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), 27-8; Wolfgang Schrage, *Der erste Brief*, 1:42; Thiselton, *First Epistle*, xviii; David E. Garland, *1 Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003), 13.

calling: "... encouraging, comforting, imploring you to walk worthily of the God who calls you into his kingdom and glory" (1 Thess 2:12; cf. 1 Cor 12:2). This manner of walking involves ongoing conformity to the calling of Christ and rejection of pagan practices. In a similar way, he instructs the Christians in Rome, "Do not be conformed to this world [i.e. the pagan practices that are contrary to God], but be transformed by renewing the mind..." (Rom 12:2). Paul thinks that something radically new has happened when these Gentiles believed in Jesus as the Christ ("If someone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come." 2 Cor 6:17), and now he is instructing them about how they should live in light of this new radical life. The reintegration of pagan values into the lives of these converts to Christ manifests itself in a number of ways in the practice of Corinthian Christians: fascination with wisdom, social climbing, sexual immorality, legal disputes, marriage practices, idolatry, disorder, and prideful vaunting of one's abilities.

Structure of First Corinthians

Even though scholars almost universally recognize certain thematic divisions within First Corinthians, there is still debate concerning how the letter fits together as a whole. One of the peculiar characteristics of First Corinthians is its episodic character.¹²

¹² The letter is so episodic that some commentaries assess the structure to be a list of thematic sections. For example, Collins has labeled thematically similar sections as Rhetorical Demonstrations although the thematic unity of his Second Rhetorical Demonstration (5:1-7:40) is difficult to discern. One of the disadvantages of these thematic outlines is that they do not help in seeing the overall unity of the letter or the way that the component sections are connected. Similarly, Schrage (*Der Erste Brief*, 1.90-1) divides the letter thematically: 1,10-4, 21 Parteien; 5,1-6,20 Konkrete Mißstände; 7,1-40 Ehe und Ehelosigkeit; 8,1-11,1 Götzenopferfleisch; 11,2-34 Gemeindeversammlung; 12,1-14,40 Charismen; 15,1-58 Auferstehung; 16, 1-18 Kollekte und persönliche Mitteilungen.

In comparison to Paul's other works, First Corinthians discusses a variety of practical topics that do not seem to be tightly intertwined around one central theme.¹³ Paul seems to be treating a number of different issues. While many assessments of the structure of First Corinthians err on being too disconnected, Ciampa and Rosner provide a novel proposal. I include it not because it has gained widespread scholarly acceptance, but rather because it is a thoughtful attempt to connect chapters 8-10 closely to chapters 11-14 without forcing the whole letter into a single rhetorical mold.¹⁴ Moreover, they provide a fresh perspective on the main theme of the epistle being the purity of the church instead of its unity (e.g., esp. Mitchell). In line with their reading of Paul in light of the Old Testament background, they argue that Paul opposes two practices that (both Jews and Christians thought) were especially characteristic of pagans: sexual immorality and

¹³ This assessment of First Corinthian's structure contradicts the proposal of Mitchell's *Paul and the Rhetoric of Reconciliation*. She argues that First Corinthians is written in the form of deliberative rhetoric and each pericope advances Paul's *prothesis* stated in 1 Cor 1:10 to put aside factionalism and pursue unity. Thus, every topic that Paul addresses—even though they range from incestuous relationships to head coverings in worship to the nature of the resurrection body—serves the overarching function of exhorting the Corinthian Christians to pursue unity. In the Second Section of Proof (1 Cor 5:1-11:1), Mitchell sees two main topics: Πορνεία and Group Solidarity (5:1-7:40) and Idol Meats, Freedom and Group Unity (8:1-11:1). My assessment of Mitchell's proposal is that she makes an appropriate explanation of chapters 1-4, but forcing chapters 5-16 into the same mold reduces the complexity of the arguments. Fitzmyer (*First Corinthians*, 55; cf. Ciampa and Rosner, *First Letter*, 20) aptly evaluates Mitchell's proposal that the whole letter makes the appeal for unity (in *Rhetoric of Reconciliation* and her *ABD* article co-authored with Hans Dieter Betz: "Corinthians, First Epistle to the"): "That is indeed the burden of chaps. 1-4, but it is an oversimplification of the argument of 'the entire letter,' and sections in the *probatio*, with their multiple and diverse topics, scarcely function as a proof of the alleged *narratio*. In an effort to show the rhetoric of the letter, a procrustean bed has been made."

¹⁴ See my review of their work, Trent A. Rogers, review of Roy E. Ciampa and Brian S. Rosner, *The First Letter to the Corinthians*, *TJ* 34 (2013): 107-8. Following Mitchell, most scholars employ models of Greco-Roman rhetoric to make sense of how Paul's larger argument is structured, but Ciampa and Rosner (*First Letter*, 20) do not follow this approach: "Our contention is that rather than reading 1 Corinthians with Greco-Roman rhetorical categories in mind, it is better to take the Old Testament and Jewish frames of reference as the primary lens that clarifies our understanding of both the form and contents of the letter."

idolatry (with greed being a third vice). Ciampa and Rosner’s structure reflects their interpretation centering on sexual immorality and idolatry:¹⁵

- I. Letter Opening (1:1-9)
- II. True and False Wisdom and Corinthian Factionalism (1:10-4:17)
 - A. Factions in the Community (1:10-17)
 - B. Negative Treatment: “No More Boasting about Human Leaders” (1:18-2:5)
 - C. Positive Treatment: “Let Those Who Boast Boast in the Lord” (2:6-3:4)
 - D. Application to the Church, Ministers, and Ministry (3:5-4:17)
- III. “Flee Sexual Immorality” and “Glorify God with your bodies” (4:18-7:40)
 - A. Negative Treatment: “Flee Sexual Immorality” (and Greed) (4:18-6:20)
 - B. Positive Treatment: “Glorify God with Your Bodies” (7:1-40)
- IV. “Flee Idolatry” and “Glorify God in Your Worship” (8:1-14:40)
 - A. Negative Treatment: “Flee Idolatry” (Food Offered to Idols) (8:1-11:1)
 - B. Positive Treatment: “Glorify God” in Your Worship (11:2-14:40)
- V. The Resurrection and Consummation (15:1-58)
- VI. Letter Closing (16:1-24)

In summary, Paul treats four main elements: wisdom (chs. 1-4), sexuality (chs. 5-7), idolatry (chs. 8-14), and resurrection (ch. 15).¹⁶ Ciampa and Rosner should be commended for thinking closely about how the theme of “the infiltration of pagan practices into the church” affects the structure of the epistle, and their proposal helps to show the connectedness of themes. But they have attempted to force the letter into too rigid of a structure. This is most obvious in their assessment of chapter 6 within the broader theme of sexuality. The connection between the sections “Flee Idolatry” and

¹⁵ Ibid., 24.

¹⁶ They also list four major themes that drive Paul’s instruction in the letter: the lordship of Christ, worldwide worship, the eschatological temple, and the glory of God (Ciampa and Rosner, *First Letter*, 33). It should also be noted that “Toward the end of each negative section (4:18-6:20 and 8:1-11:1) Paul provides both negative and positive imperatives using the same language relating to the broader theme” (Ibid., 23).

“Glorify God in Your Worship” is intriguing, but there is little indication in the text that they are tightly connected; moreover, 1 Cor 11:2-14:40 could hardly be characterized as a thoroughly positive treatment of worship.

Simply listing the themes does little to show the connectedness, and approaches to connect the themes at the level of the letter (e.g., Mitchell) or themes (e.g., Ciampa and Rosner) are too forced. I will not propose a novel structure, but I do want to account for both the unity of the letter and its episodic character. It is best to read First Corinthians as an occasional letter, in fact a letter of admonition, with issues being addressed on account of either direct questions from the Corinthians or reports about the community that concerned Paul. Paul uses models of Greco-Roman rhetoric, but he does so primarily at the level of the argument concerning each topic, not at the level of the whole letter.¹⁷

Perhaps the best that we can propose is a simple broad structure connecting the issues:

Paul first discusses the oral reports he has received and then addresses written reports.

Attempts to discern a stronger overarching structure have proven too forced. In Chapter

1, Paul indicates that he is addressing oral reports which seem to carry through chapter 6:

¹⁷ In contrast, Mitchell argues that the topics are carefully selected to demonstrate the overarching appeal: “The present historical rhetorical study, which dovetails with some such analyses, is meant to provide further substantiation for the comprehensive structure of the whole letter by examining it as a deliberative letter. However, unlike previous analyses, this study argues that 1 Corinthians is not merely a list of loosely connected topics which one might conceivably grant to have been part of the same original letter, but indeed constitutes a thoroughgoing argument for church unity centered on the *πρόθεσις* in 1:10” (*Rhetoric of Reconciliation*, 187-8). For the validity of applying rhetoric to the level of individual arguments, see Quintilian, *Inst. Or.* 4.1.73-75. Although I disagree with Fotopoulos in the acceptance of Mitchell’s thesis for the whole epistle, he is still correct in seeing 8:1-11:1 as a distinct rhetorical unit (Fotopoulos, *Food Offered to Idols*, 197-9). Fitzmyer again offers a fitting critique: “That Paul makes use at time of rhetoric in his argumentation no one will deny (see Smit ‘Epideictic Rhetoric’). That this letter as a whole, however, follows a deliberate rhetorical pattern is highly questionable” (Fitzmyer, *First Corinthians*, 55. Citation of Joop F. M. Smit, “Epideictic rhetoric in Paul’s First Letter to the Corinthians 1-4,” *Biblica* 84 [2003]: 184-201).

“For it was reported to me about you, my brothers, by those from Chloe that...” (1 Cor 1:11; cf. 5:1). And then he addresses written questions beginning in chapter 7: “Now concerning the matters about which you wrote...” (1 Cor 7:1). I will use the following structure:

Introduction: 1:1-9
 Reports about the community: 1:10-6:20
 Wisdom and Divisions: 1:10-4:21
 Incest: 5:1-13
 Lawsuits: 6:1-11
 Prostitution: 6:12-20
 Written Questions: 7:1-14:40
 Marital Sexuality: 7:1-16
 [Eschatological Excursus: 7:17-24 remaining is same state]
 Virgins: 7:25-28
 [Eschatological Excursus: 7:29-35 living in in light of the eschaton]
 Virgins and Widows: 7:36-40
 Idol food 8:1-11:1
 Public Worship 11:2-14:40
 11:2-16 Head Coverings
 11:17-34 Lord’s Supper
 12:1-31 Spiritual Gifts
 [Eschatological Excursus: 12:31-13:13 Love]
 14:1-40 Gifts in Worship
 Resurrection 15:1-58
 Closing 16:1-24

This structure accounts for the episodic character as the topics are treated because they appeared in either an oral report or written question. It also provides a general overarching structure based on two broad sections of oral reports and written reports. It is probable that the questions concerning food sacrificed to idols were questions about which the Corinthians wrote to Paul.

Structure of Chapters 8-10

When we turn to the section of chapters 8-10, almost everyone recognizes that there is general thematic unity in dealing with food associated with idols, but there is a great deal of debate concerning the internal structure (or lack of structure) of this unit. The main issue that runs throughout chapters 8-10 is the discussion about the acceptability or non-acceptability of eating food that is associated with idols. If one accepts that there are actual groups of Corinthians disputing this issue as I do, then there is a disagreement between the groups for which Paul offers his instruction. Several times (1 Cor 8:7, 9, 10, 11, 12; cf. 9:22) Paul refers to those who do not participate in the eating food sacrificed to idols as weak (ἀσθενεῖς), and he uses the substantive form, “the Weak.”¹⁸ While he never explicitly labels the opponents of “the Weak,” “the Strong” is the best term primarily because it is the logical corollary to “the Weak” group. Moreover, there may be hints at the idea of a Strong group in Paul’s wording in 10:22 (cf. 10:13).¹⁹

¹⁸ There are some who think that the Weak group is a hypothetical group created by Paul for the sake of argument. They typically argue that the Corinthians as a whole desired to participate in feasts with food dedicated to idol-gods. But most scholars recognize this as a real group, even if they would not self-identify themselves as Weak. I will argue that there is both a Weak and Strong group. For the sake of clarity I will capitalize both Strong and Weak.

¹⁹ While I recognize that Paul never uses the term “Strong” in 1 Corinthians 8-10, I will employ the term throughout this chapter. There is a group in Corinth that is arguing for the consumption of food sacrificed to idols. It is the group that asserts “we all have knowledge.” Because they make their argument on the basis of their *gnosis* some have labeled them as gnostics. This term, however, is to be avoided because it can be confused with the labels some scholars have used for the Nag Hammadi texts. Paul argues that the Strong are in danger of provoking Christ to jealousy, and then he asks rhetorically if the Strong are stronger than Christ. If this Strong group is identifiable as one of the factious groups in chapters 1-4, Paul may be playing on words in his satirical statement in 4:10: ἡμεῖς ἀσθενεῖς, ὑμεῖς δὲ ἰσχυροί (we [the apostles] are weak, but you are strong). But in 1 Cor 4 Paul is likely talking about the whole church. Whether or not these groups, the Weak and Strong, would self-identify by such titles is another issue altogether. If anything, “Weak” might be a pejorative title for those whom the Strong felt to be uneducated. Anders Eriksson (*Traditions as Rhetorical Proof: Pauline Argumentation in 1 Corinthians* [ConBNT: New Testament Series 29; Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1998], 143-4; cf. Stanley Stowers, “Paul on the

It seems that the Strong argue from their monotheistic theology that idols are non-entities, and thus food associated with idols is not dangerous. Paul addresses this issue by interacting with their arguments.

The presence of contradictory statements in 1 Cor 8:1-9 implies one of three things: an incoherent argument, a later composition from multiple arguments, or a series of quotations with refutations. For example, 1 Cor 8:1 states “we all have knowledge” and then v.7 states “but this knowledge is not held by everyone.” Apparent contradictions like this lead scholars to argue that Paul both quotes and refutes certain positions of the Corinthians in 1 Cor 8:1-9. John Fotopoulos draws on ancient rhetoric and labels this structure of quotation and refutation as a *partitio*.²⁰

Use and Abuse of Reason,” in *Greeks, Romans, and Christians: Essays in Honor of Abraham J. Malherbe* (eds., David L. Balch, Everett Fergusson, and Wayne A Meeks; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1990), 276-84) relies on therapeutic models of Hellenistic philosophy and argues that ‘weak’ can also mean ‘sick’ where the remedy is philosophical instruction. Thus, the issue of food sacrificed to idols may have arisen from the instructive “proselytizing” efforts of the Strong: “A likely scenario is that some of the Corinthians, proud of their true beliefs about the divine and the power of those beliefs to desacralize the world, attempted to cure the moral illness of the weak by drilling into them the true belief of the sole existence of the One God” (Eriksson, *Traditions*, 144). Even if the Strong had designated a group as weak, it is unlikely that they would label themselves as such. Gerd Theissen (“The Strong and Weak in Corinth: A Sociological Analysis of a Theological Quarrel,” in *The Social Setting of Pauline Christianity* [Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1982], 121-43) argues that the Strong and Weak are divided by socio-economic status. The Strong, being more affluent, were accustomed to fine dining at the temple; whereas the poorer Weak rarely consumed meat. Although Theissen’s assessment of first-century meat consumption has been disproven, socio-economic factors likely affect the situation, as they almost certainly do in 11:17-34 (see Justin J. Meggitt, “Meat Consumption and Social Conflict in Corinth,” *JTS* 45 (1994): 137-41). As we have seen with upper-class Jews—exemplified in the gymnasium education of authors like Philo, Josephus, and the Wisdom of Solomon—social pressures combined with philosophical approaches to God could lead to different conclusions concerning the acceptable interactions with pagan deities.

²⁰ Fotopoulos also argues that the structure of the *partitio* establishes the structure for the whole argument in 1 Cor 8-10: “His *partitio* also attempts to establish the general order for his ensuing argumentation, as a *partitio* can do. This ensuing argumentation consists of a *narratio* (statement of facts) in 8:10a and the *probatio* (proofs), which are laid out in 8:10b-11:1, roughly corresponding to the order of the Corinthian Strong quotations and Pauline refutations from 8:1-9” (Fotopoulos, “Arguments Concerning Food Offered to Idols,” 617-8). For Fotopoulos, the following sections correspond to one another:

8:1-3

8:10-9:27

I read First Corinthians 8-10 as a self-contained argument against eating food sacrificed to idols in the idol's temple. While it does involve improper worship (Ciampa and Rosner) and has a serious impact on communal unity (Mitchell), Paul is addressing the issue because it had become a problem of central importance for the Corinthians' faithfulness to Christ. I agree with Fotopoulos that "Paul's instructions in 8:1-11:1 [are] to be interpreted as a coherent, sustained prohibition of intentional consumption of food offered to idols."²¹ My reconstruction of the argument accepts that 8:1-9 is a *partitio* and then Paul makes his argument against eating εἰδωλόθυστα²² in two stages: communal love

8:4-7	10:14-22
8:8a	10:1-13
8:8b-9	10:23-11:1

1 Cor 8:1-19 does introduce many of the topics that Paul will discuss in chapters 8-10, but I am less convinced of its role of providing the structure for the whole argument. The looseness of this structuring element is shown even in the fact that the sections in 10:14-22 and 10:1-13 are inverted from their reference in the *partitio*

²¹ Ibid., 611; cf. Smit, "1 Cor 8, 1-6"; "The Rhetorical Disposition of First Corinthians." Another proposal for the dining situation and the coherence of Paul's response is offered by Bruce Fisk: "Some activities and meals within a pagan temple are morally objectionable for Christians while others are not. 1 Cor 8:10 describes permissible meal attendance, while 10:19-22 clearly portrays what is off limits" ("Eating Meat Offered to Idols: Corinthians Behavior and Pauline Response in 1 Corinthians 8-10 [A Response to Gordon Fee]," *TJ* 10 [1989]: 62). He defends this interpretation by making three points: (1) pagan temples had diverse functions, including non-cultic functions Fisk can label as "harmless fun and social convention"; (2) Paul only condemns idolatry, not idol meat; and (3) partnership with idolaters entails idolatry. Fisk sees the unity in the following way: "We have sought to show that both halves of chap. 10 have strong ties to chap. 8. 10:1-22 shares the temple setting of 8:10 while 10:23-11:1 follows chap. 8 in defending the moral neutrality of idol meat. Chap. 8 is the common denominator" (68). In the following analysis I will explain what I think is a more fitting explanation of the situation, but a comment on the supposed neutrality of food associated with an idol temple is warranted here. While Paul does not explicitly forbid the eating of food sacrificed to idols in this passage, that is one of the earliest Christian commands for Gentile believers (Acts 15:20, 29; 21:25). That does not prove that this is the case in 1 Corinthians, but does make it more likely that Paul sees a problem with the consumption of food *known* to be sacrificed to idols.

²² Paul uses both the singular and plural forms of εἰδωλόθυστον with no discernible difference in meaning. I will use the plural throughout this chapter: εἰδωλόθυστα.

and theological fidelity.²³ First, Paul argues on the basis of love for other believers in chapters 8 and 9. Paul introduces the issue, refutes some of the Strong's positions, and argues that the Strong's pseudo-right is of less importance than love for other believers. Chapter 9 is an argument from the greater to the lesser: if Paul is willing to sacrifice legitimate rights out of love for other believers, all the more the Strong should be willing to sacrifice their pseudo-right out of love for other believers. Second, Paul argues on the basis of faithfulness to Christ. Chapter 10 demonstrates the danger of the Strong's actions as an affront to Christ, and warns of impending judgment. Then Paul discusses other situations in which the believer would encounter food associated with idols.

In summary, Paul uniformly prohibits Christians from eating in the presence of an idol-god. On account of Christ's work as Savior, Christians have obligations of love to other believers and of faithfulness to Christ. What has largely been overlooked is the way that these arguments are made on the basis on one's understanding of God and idols and the varied representations of God to which Paul could appeal to make his point. It is to this analysis that we now turn. It cannot be overemphasized that Paul's argument (both in its focus on communal love and its focus on theological fidelity) is grounded in the work of Christ as Savior. As I have done in previous chapters, I will first offer a thorough analysis of the text, and then I will attempt to synthesize some of the strands of

²³ Alex T. Cheung (*Idol Food in Corinth: Jewish Background and Pauline Legacy* [JSNTSup 176; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999], 162; cf. Schrage, *Der Erste Brief*, 1.66-8) also thinks Paul makes a two-part argument, "There is no inconsistency between 1 Corinthians 8 and 1 Cor 10:1-22. On the contrary, the two passages represent two stages of Paul's argument: not only will eating idol food cause the weak to stumble, but it will also make the Corinthians partners with demons...Paul's position in a nutshell is this: to eat idol food knowingly is to participate in idolatry; therefore, for the sake of the weak and for the sake of yourselves, avoid any food if, and only if, you know that it is idol food."

argumentation. I will divide the text and its analysis into thematic and syntactical units even while recognizing that these units comprise a unified whole: (a) 8:1-9, (b) 8:10-13, (c) 9:1-27, (d) 10:1-13, (e) 10:14-22, (f) 10:23-30, (g) 10:31-11:1.

1 Cor 8:1-9

The interpretation of 1 Cor 8:1-9 is complicated by several factors, among them the most challenging are the identification of quotations and understanding the theological underpinnings of the argument. I will argue that the Strong (an actual group of the Corinthian Christians), appealing to the oneness and uniqueness of God, reject the existence of idol-gods and thereby conclude that neither eating nor abstaining from εἰδωλόθυστα has any bearing on their salvation. Paul refutes both their theological premise (by arguing that there is a reality behind the idol-gods which he will later identify as demons) as well as their ethical conclusion (by demonstrating that eating has caused the Weak to stumble and the Strong to be unfaithful to Christ). While it is difficult to discern precisely what the argument of the Strong is, their argument is plausibly reconstructed as follows:

We all have knowledge that God is One and therefore idol-gods are not real. For us there is one God the Father, from whom all things exist and we exist for him. And there is one Lord Jesus Christ, through whom all things exist and we exist through him. Food is a matter of indifference that does not cause God to judge us, so we are neither worse nor better off if we eat or do not eat.

In the following exegesis I will explain why I think certain phrases are best understood in Paul's argument as quotations of the Strong.

vv. 1-3

At the beginning of 1 Cor 8, Paul begins a new section of the letter with the topic indicator, *περὶ δέ*: “Now concerning food sacrificed to idols.”²⁴ While *εἰδωλόθυτα* literally means “things sacrificed (or perhaps ceremonially dedicated) to an idol” the context and the fact that Paul includes the term *βρῶσις* in 8:4, indicates that the problem centers on the consumption of food sacrificed to idols. Gordon Fee and Ben Witherington, especially, have advanced the argument that *εἰδωλόθυτα* refers to food sacrificed in the temple and then eaten in the temple precincts.²⁵ They are probably correct in this assessment both because every occurrence of *εἰδωλόθυτα* definitely or plausibly refers to food eaten in the temple precincts and because when the context is clearly different (e.g., 1 Cor 10:25-30) another word is used, *ιερόθυτον*.

Witherington points out that the term *εἰδωλόθυτα* is a Christian polemical word.²⁶

As we have seen with the Jewish idol polemics, *εἶδωλον* (which forms the root of

²⁴ Fotopoulos (in summary, *Food Offered*, 208) argues that the things offered included more than just meat although 1 Cor 8:13 is concerned especially with idol meat. I am persuaded by his analysis, and thus I translate *εἰδωλόθυτον* (and also the plural, *εἰδωλόθυτα*) as “food offered to idols.” See also, Joël Delobel, “Coherence and Relevance of 1 Cor 8-10” in *The Corinthian Correspondence* (ed. R. Bieringer; Leuven: University Press, 1996), 182-3. While Gordon Fee (*Εἰδωλόθυτα*, 180-3; *First Corinthians*, 358-9) argued that *εἰδωλόθυτα* referred specifically to meat eaten in the idol’s temple, Bruce Fisk (“Eating Meat Offered to Idols,” 55-8) argues that this focuses the term too narrowly. In my assessment, Fisk’s thesis is incorrect. For an explanation of the derogatory connotations of *εἰδωλόθυτα* for Jewish writers, see Fitzmyer, *First Corinthians*, 337-8.

²⁵ Gordon D. Fee, “II Corinthians VI.14-VII.1 and Food Offered to Idols,” *NTS* 23 (1977): 140-61; “Εἰδωλόθυτα Once Again: An Interpretation of 1 Corinthians 8-10,” *Biblica* 61 (1980): 172-97, esp 179-87. See references for Witherington below.

²⁶ Witherington also has argued that *εἰδωλόθυτα* refers to meat sacrificed and eaten in the pagan temple precincts in contrast to *ιερόθυτον* that is sacrificed in the temple and then eaten in the home. See, Ben Witherington III, *Conflict and Community in Corinth: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary on 1 and 2 Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 188-9; “Why Not Idol Meat?” 38-55; “Not So Idle Thoughts about EIDOLOTHUTON,” 248-50. The summary of his interpretation is as follows: “It is commonly

εἰδωλόθυτα) is a pejorative term that Jews and early Christians used to describe pagan cult statues, so εἰδωλόθυτα is not a pagan self-description. The examination of *Joseph and Asenath* in chapter 2 showed that pagan food was closely associated with idols and could serve as a boundary marker between faithful Jews and everyone else, including pagans and (those deemed to be) unfaithful Jews. While authors like Philo and Josephus never directly address food sacrificed to idols, they both defend Jewish dietary restrictions. And while Jews could allegorize the dietary laws, there is no evidence that Jews dismissed the literal observance of these laws. The combination of their defense of food laws and condemnation of idolatry makes it very likely that Philo and Josephus would denounce the eating of εἰδωλόθυτα as behavior unfaithful to God.²⁷ Philo and

assumed that εἰδωλόθυτον is a polemical term created by early Jews to refer to meat sacrificed to a pagan god. An exhaustive search of the data in the TLG and in the papyri casts doubts on this hypothesis. All of the references to εἰδωλόθυτον in the sources are found in Christian texts, with two exceptions; and both of these exceptions may have been influenced by Christian redaction. In any case, it appears that neither of these texts antedates the Corinthian correspondence. Thus, this term may have originated in early Jewish Christianity. A study of all the NT references to εἰδωλόθυτον reveals that this term in the early period was distinguishable from ἱερόθυτον (sacred food), and that it meant meat sacrificed to and eaten in the presence of an idol, or in the temple precincts. Numerous reference to εἰδωλόθυτον in the Greek Fathers show that Chrysostom and others understood this to be the meaning of the term in Acts 15 and in other contexts. Several possible implications of the above are: (1) the Decree in Acts 15 is about Gentiles refraining from meals and immorality in pagan temples, not about them keeping a modicum of Jewish, or Noachic food laws; (2) 1 Cor. 8-10 reflects Paul's acceptance and implementation of the Decree; (3) Galatians was written before the Decree and reflects the struggle that led to the Decree; (4) Paul and James were in basic agreement in regard to what Gentiles needed to do to maintain table fellowship with Jewish Christians—avoid pagan feasts and immorality. Neither imposed circumcision or food laws on Gentiles. The latter was the position of the Judaizing faction in the Jerusalem Church who were more conservative than James, Peter, or Paul. As C. Hill's recent 'Hellenists and Hebrews' shows, F.C. Baur's view of early Christianity is no longer adequate" ("Not So Idle Thoughts," 237). Cf. Paul Douglas Gardner (*The Gifts of God and the Authentication of the Christian: An Exegetical Study of 1 Corinthians 8-11:1* [Lanham, Md.: University Press of America, 1994], 15) who thinks that the term originated with the Apostolic Council.

²⁷ See Cheung, *Idol Food*, 39-81. He summarizes his examination of Jewish texts: "In the minds of most Jews, idol food was so inextricably bound up with idolatry that they were instinctively repulsed by it. Idol food simply epitomized idol worship. It was no accident that the Jewish attitude toward idol food reflected in these sources was more stringent than attitudes concerning other matters which involved at least passive contact with idolatry" (77).

Josephus represent streams of Jewish interpretation with which Paul would interact as he gives instructions to the Corinthian Christians.

It is unclear whether Paul introduces the Strong's quotation with the phrase "we know that" or if this is part of the quotation by the Strong. This formulaic introduction coupled with the content that he will counter makes it likely that this is a quotation of the Strong, but this has little bearing on the interpretation.²⁸ Thus the Strong defend their actions by arguing that everyone has knowledge. The knowledge to which they are referring is both the theological proposition (idols are not real because God is one) and the ethical conclusion (associations with idols are harmless): "We know that idols do not exist, and therefore any interaction with them is harmless." The argument on the basis of shared knowledge is immediately countered by Paul in a three-part refutation: (1) "knowledge puffs up but love builds up" (2) "if someone thinks he knows something, he does not yet know as he ought to know" (3) "if someone loves God, this one is known by

²⁸ Many previous scholars read this as a quotation (e.g., Wendell Lee Willis, *Idol Meat in Corinth: The Pauline Argument in 1 Corinthians 8 and 10* [SBLDS 68; Eugene, Ore.: Wipf & Stock, 1985], 68; Gardner, *Gifts*, 22; Fotopoulos, *Food Offered to Idols*, 209). In contrast, Derek Newton (*Deity and Diet: The Dilemma of Sacrificial Food at Corinth [JSNTSup 169]*. Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1987], 289) and Smit ("1 Cor 8,1-6") argue that 1 Cor 8:1-6 contains no quotations by the Corinthians, but rather is Paul's position. The central dispute, according to Newton, is that Paul and the Corinthians have different understandings of εἰδωλον. Smit ("1 Cor 8,1-6," 583) argues that Paul agrees with the Corinthians that they both have knowledge, and that this approach is a prudent acknowledgement of the Corinthians as equal partners in the discussion. But this interpretation would appear to put 1 Cor 8:1 in contradiction with 8:7. Smit's explanation is that in 8:1 "Paul addresses the Corinthians who have knowledge. Besides them, or among them, he now distinguishes a group of believers who have not yet reached this level of knowledge" ("The Rhetorical Disposition," 479). Smit's explanation does not account for the bold claim in 8:1 that it is "all" who have this knowledge. From 1 Cor 8:7, it is clear that Paul recognizes not "all" have this knowledge. While I am unpersuaded by proposals such as Smit and Newton's, arguing that Paul quotes the Corinthians still leaves us with the question of whether or not the Corinthians would recognize these quotations. Ciampa and Rosner (*First Letter*, 374) question if this is a quotation of the Strong or Paul, and conclude "The answer would be obvious to the Corinthians but is perhaps unattainable today, and the difference does not greatly affect our exegesis once we understand the ways in which Paul both agrees and disagrees with those to whom he is responding."

him.”²⁹ Paul’s focus on love probably looks forward to his quotation of Deut 6:4 in 1 Cor 8:6. Paul uses the same verb for love: ἀγαπάω. The *Shema* in Deut 6:4 (LXX) is followed by the command to love God in 6:5: καὶ ἀγαπήσεις κύριον τὸν θεόν σου. Paul’s point is likely that any appeal to the knowledge about God must be understood in light of the command to love God. This sets the context of 1 Cor 8-10 to be about God’s people commanded to love both God and God’s people.³⁰ Those who know and love God are distinct from everyone else, not only in their actions, but also because they are known by God.

vv. 4-5

Similar to the introduction of the topic in 1 Cor 8:1, the restatement of that topic begins with Περὶ . . . οἶδαμεν ὅτι: “we know that an idol is nothing in the world and that there is no God except One.” As in 8:1, this again is probably a statement by the Strong. The Strong’s argument involves a positive (there is no God except One) and negative assertion (an idol is nothing). At first glance, the logic of the argument is not entirely clear. How does the assertion that “an idol is nothing” relate to (or is proved by) the assertion that God is one? It would seem that God’s oneness directly relates to the plurality of the gods but not necessarily the “nothingness” of the idol. The argument is based on the close association between the idol and the god. Eriksson summarizes the Strong’s argument:

²⁹ The movement of the Christian from worshipping non-gods to worshipping God is described by Paul as knowing and being known by God (Gal 4:8-9).

³⁰ See Ciampa and Rosner, *First Letter*, 378-9.

Major premise	There is only One God, 8:4c
Minor premise	The pagan gods are not real gods, 8:4b
Conclusion	Therefore, eating idol sacrifices is allowed. ³¹

Eriksson's summary of the argument is correct, but note that the "Minor premise" is inferred because 1 Cor 8:4b claims that idols, not pagan gods, are not real or "nothing." The Strong's argument is based in part on Paul's theological instruction, but they have quite clearly come to different conclusions concerning the acceptability of certain actions. Before we analyze the Strong's conclusion and Paul's response, we need to understand how they are making their argument and the streams of interpretation that feed into it.

Foundational to most Hellenistic Jewish and Christian thinking about God was the belief that God is one, but this theological proposition resulted in numerous positions concerning pagan gods, non-gods, or idols.³² What does it mean for an idol to be "nothing"? In one sense, Jews and Christians criticized idols because they are "something." At the very least (and in fact, at the very most) pagan idols are material objects. But there is only one true God, so these gods must be nothing. Christopher Wright explains how the Jewish view of the existence or non-existence of the gods is made on the basis of a point of reference:

³¹ Eriksson, *Traditions*, 154; Cf. Fee, "Εἰδωλόθυσια," 181; Witherington (*Conflict and Community*, 186) summarizes similarly, "Only God is God and food is morally neutral. Therefore, eating in temples dedicated to so-called gods is harmless."

³² Phua is correct that God's oneness was a basic Jewish confession, and it was significant for Hellenistic Jewish authors. He cites the following (*Idolatry and Authority*, 131 n. 33): "Ant. 3.91; Spec. Leg. 1.30; Op. Mund. 170-2; Conf. Ling. 170-71 and Leg. All. 3.48, 126." P. M. Casey ("Monotheism, Worship and Christological Development in the Pauline Churches," in *The Jewish Roots of Christological Monotheism: Papers from the St. Andrews Conference on the Historical Origins of the Worship of Jesus* [ed. Carey C. Newman, James R. Davila, and Gladys S. Lewis; Leiden: Brill, 1999], 221-2) notes that the Strong are using a strand of interpretation within Jewish monotheism to justify their actions.

So, coming back to the question, are the gods something or nothing? If asked in relation to YHWH, the answer has to be nothing. Nothing whatsoever compares with YHWH, or stands in the same category as he does ... But if the question is asked in relation to those who worship the other gods—whether the nations who claim them as their own national deities or even in relation to the temptation that Israel faced to “go after” them—then the answer can certainly be something. The gods of the nations, with their names, statues, myths and cults, clearly do have an existence in the life, culture and history of those who treat them as their gods ... They are nothing in relation to YHWH; they are something in relation to their worshippers.³³

Jews and Christians recognized both that pagans worshipped non-real gods and that these gods really existed in the minds and cultic worship of the pagans.

The singular existence of God is shown to be true by comparison to the “nothingness” of idols: οὐδὲν εἰδωλον ἐν κόσμῳ (1 Cor 8:4). One Jewish interpretation of idolatry (See my discussion of *De decalogo* and the Wisdom of Solomon) argued that pagan idols are the pagan gods, and because the gods do not exist, the idols are nothing real. The idol, and thus the god, is merely the material of which it is composed (and is more useful for lighting a fire than it is for worshipping). Paul, Philo, and the author of Wisdom drew heavily on the Psalms and Prophets (especially texts like Isaiah 40-44; Jer 10; Psalms 77, 105, and 115) in order to criticize pagans as worshipping idols themselves. These texts equate the god and the idol. Some have criticized Jews and early Christians as approaching pagan idols with a naïve understanding because even pagans would recognize that idols were the work of human hands (and certain craftsman were even very well-respected). The Jewish and I think the Pauline understanding of gods and

³³ Christopher J. H. Wright, *The Mission of God: Unlocking the Bible's Grand Narrative* (Downers Grove, Ill.: IVP Academic, 2006), 139. See also Fitzmyer, *First Corinthians*, 342.

idols, however, was not based on naiveté, but rather was a criticism founded in the way that pagan's themselves understood their idols. Several Septuagintal texts make a clear distinction between the image and the god, which indicates that at least some Jews understood the distinction. Clearest is the statement attributed to Gideon's father, "And Joash said to the men who were standing against him [i.e. Gideon], 'Are you acting as judges on behalf of Baal? Or are you saving him? ... If he is god, he himself will judge him [i.e. Gideon] because he tore down his altar'" (Judges 6:31 LXX; see also 3 Kingdoms 18:27). The author indicates that there is a distinction between the god and the image/idol because the god should defend his image. Even the context of Isaiah 44 (which was foundational for Paul, Philo, and Wisdom) recognizes the distinction between the image and the god.³⁴ If Jews and Christians really do understand that the pagans do not equate their gods with the images of their gods, then why do they claim that the gods are not real because they are merely material? The Jewish, and thus Christian, critique rests on the belief that both the idols (see *De decalogo* and the Wisdom of Solomon) and the gods (see *Contra Apionem*) are the creations of the human imagination. Christopher Wright summarizes this critique well:

The Israelites, fully aware of what *idols* were supposed to signify among those who bowed down before them, nevertheless castigated them as "the work of

³⁴ The distinction between gods and their images is clearer in the Masoretic text of Isaiah 46:1 than it is in the Septuagint. The Septuagint reads: "Baal has fallen, and Dagon is broken; their carvings (τὰ γλυπτὰ αὐτῶν) have become for beasts and cattle (i.e. they must be carried by cattle because the gods are not able to carry their images). You carry them bound as a burden for the weary one..." (Isa 46:1 LXX). The Masoretic text reads, "Bel bows down and Nebo bends down; their idols have become for beasts and cattle; these things are carried as burdens on weary animals" (Isaiah 46:1 MT). In the Masoretic text, there is almost the sense that the gods are crouching down to steady their idols that are being carried by oxen. But the Septuagint describes the gods as fallen and broken.

human hands.” What then did this signify for the *gods* that the idols represented? The radical conclusion has to be that the psalmists and prophets make no distinction between the images and the gods they represented—*not because they did not know that such a distinction was there in the minds of pagan worshippers but because ultimately there was no such distinction in reality.*³⁵

Even though, for example, Asklepios was “so-called a god” by the pagans, the only real existence that Asklepios had was in the imagination of the pagan and the physical representation in the idol. Thus Philo, Wisdom, Paul, and the Strong can argue that the god is only the idol, the idol is nothing, and therefore the god is nothing. This is why a common form of criticizing pagan *gods* is to label them to be the “work of human hands.”³⁶

There is, however, a difference in the way Paul and the Strong understand the non-existence of idol-gods. As we have seen in preceding chapters (especially chapter 2 with the comparison between *Joseph and Asenath* and Artapanus *Fragment 3*), the agreement that gods do not exist can result in radically different theological and ethical interpretations of how to interact with idols. Subsequent correction and instruction by Paul will get to the heart of the matter concerning the implications of the non-existence of idols. The problem addressed in 1 Cor 8 is that the actions of the Strong have the

³⁵ Wright, *The Mission of God*, 151.

³⁶ See especially my discussions of Philo and Wisdom in chapters 3 and 4. This interpretation is especially important to understand a text like 4 Kingdoms 19:17-18 (2 Kings 19:17-18; cf. Ps 113:12 LXX [115:4]): “Truly, Lord, the kings of the Assyrians have desolated the nations and they gave their gods into the fire because they were not gods but the work of human hands (ἔργα χειρῶν ἀνθρώπων), wood and stone, and they destroyed them.” One way to describe idols (and thus pagan gods) is to combine the terms for “hands” with another root meaning “make” or “form” (e.g., χειροποίητος: Wis 14:8; χειροκμήτος: *Decal.* 66), but it is even more common to describe the process of making idols (e.g., Psalm 135:15-18; Isa 44:9-20; Jer 10:3-14; Hos 8:4-6; 13:2; Hab 2:18-19; Wis 13:10-19; 14:8-31; *Decal.* 66-76; *C. Ap.* 2.252-3).

potential to “destroy” the Weak (1 Cor 8:11). Paul will later argue that despite the non-existence of the idol, there is still a demonic reality behind it (1 Cor 10:20). The Strong admit that many people continue to recognize other deities, and thus the Strong state that “even if there are those called gods, either in heaven or on earth.” A parallel to the idea of pagan deities being “so-called gods” (οὐδὲν εἶδωλον ... εἴπερ εἰσὶν λεγόμενοι θεοὶ; 1 Cor 8:4...5) is found in Wisdom 15:15, where the idols of the nations are called gods (πάντα τὰ εἶδωλα τῶν ἐθνῶν ἐλογίσαντο θεούζ). According to Wisdom, associations with idols are to be avoided, even though Wisdom makes no mention of a demonic presence. The danger of idolatry in Wisdom (even without claiming their association with demons) is that God will punish both the idols and the idolater. With the corrective phrase “as there are many so-called gods and many lords,” Paul reinforces that there are indeed things claimed by worshippers to be gods (which he will later explain are connected to demons).³⁷ By labelling them as “so-called gods” he acknowledges both their non-deity (people only call them gods) and their existence in the world (which he will claim is related to demonic activity).

³⁷ Fitzmyer (*First Corinthians*, 341; cf. 342), for example, argues that Paul makes a concession for the sake of argument: “Although idols are nonentities, many people subjectively consider them to be really existent...” See the argument for “gods” and “lords” being synonymous by Bruce W. Winter, “Theological and Ethical Responses to Religious Pluralism—1 Corinthians 8-10,” *TynBul* 41(1990): 2147-5. Witherington (*Conflict and Community in Corinth*, 188-9) thinks that “gods” references traditional pagan deities and “lords” probably refers to those imported from the eastern part of the Empire such as Isis and Serapis. Some think that this is the position only of the Strong as they look at the surrounding pagan practices. See Fotopoulos, *Food Offered*, 212; Thiselton, *First Corinthians*, 632. Witherington summarizes this section well: “His view is that though the ‘gods’ are not gods, there are demons present, using pagan feasts in temples to prey upon unsuspecting people. In fact, the sacrifices are offered unwittingly to demons (10:20f.). Thus in a limited sense Paul allows that there are “many gods and lords” (8:5). Supernatural evil powers use pagan religion to lead people away from the true God. The idols themselves are dumb and nothing, but they are used by the powers of darkness to enslave human minds and hearts” (*Conflict and Community in Corinth*, 188).

v. 6

The origins of 1 Cor 8:6 are strongly debated. The formulaic elements and structure similar to the *Shema* seem to indicate that it is an early confessional formula.³⁸

While the *Shema* certainly provides a theological basis for this confession, the confession also contains more developed elements that likely rely on pre-existing Jewish interactions with Stoic and Platonic thought (analogous to the way that Philo was applying Stoic and Platonic philosophy to his conception of God).³⁹ The fact that verse 6 is conversant with Hellenistic Judaism at a sophisticated level makes it likely that Paul brought this

³⁸ Most scholars think 1 Cor 8:6 is a confessional formula (e.g., Schrage, *Der erste Brief*, 2.241; Fotopoulos, *Food Offered*, 213; Phua, *Idolatry and Authority*, 132). Some also think it is pre-Pauline, (e.g., Conzelmann, *First Corinthians*, 144; Fitzmyer, *First Corinthians*, 336). Some specify this pre-Pauline formula to be a baptismal formula (e.g., Rainer Kerst, “1 Kor 8,6: ein vorpaulinisches Taufbekenntnis?” *ZNW* 66 [1975]: 130-9; Jerome Murphy-O’Connor, “1 Cor., VIII, 6: Cosmology or Soteriology?” *RB* 85 [1978]: 254-9. James Dunn (*Christology in the Making: A New Testament Inquiry into the Origins of the Doctrine of the Incarnation* [2nd ed.; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989], 179-81) thinks there are pre-Pauline elements that Paul compiled and arranged specifically to address the situation at Corinth. Scholars have also proposed several backgrounds for the confessional formula: Stoicism (e.g., Conzelmann, *First Corinthians*, 144-5), Hellenistic Judaism (e.g., Richard A. Horsley, “The Background of the Confessional Formula in 1 Kor 8:6” *ZNW* 69 [1978]: 130-35; “Consciousness and Freedom,” 574-89; Helmut Merklein, *Der erste Brief an die Korinther: Kapitel 5,1-11,1* [ÖTK 7.2; Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 2000], 2.188), Gnosticism (Walter Schmithals, *Gnosticism in Corinth: an Investigation of the Letters to the Corinthians* [Nashville: Abingdon, 1971]). In more recent scholarship, the possibility of a Gnostic background is not taken as a serious possibility. This is due in a large part to the dating of First Corinthians compared to gnostic texts.

³⁹ The clearest explanation of Jewish interaction with Stoic and Platonic conceptions of God is Gregory Sterling “Prepositional Metaphysics in Jewish Wisdom Speculation and Early Christian Liturgical Texts.” *Studia Philonica* 9 (1997): 219-238. Sterling suspects that “Stoic and Platonic formulations of prepositional metaphysics found their way into Jewish synagogue liturgies in association with both attempts to present God in philosophical categories and in Wisdom speculations” (237). Sterling demonstrates how Greco-Roman authors were making arguments about the nature of God through the careful use of prepositions, and that Christians seem to have interacted with these arguments in order to describe the nature of God and Christ. With regard to 1 Cor 8:6, Sterling understands the cosmological description of God to be reliant on Stoic formulations while the soteriological description of Christ to be reliant on Platonic formulations: “Perhaps an early Christian—whether it was Paul or the author of a confession he was citing—used the Stoic formula for God and then balanced it with the Platonic formula for Christ” (236). I am not entirely convinced that Paul understood Christ in a way similar to Platonic understandings of the Logos, but Sterling does point to the careful formulation of Christian theology that relied on a Jewish tradition shaped by years of interactions with Greco-Roman thought.

confessional formula to Corinth, and it was part of his instruction. Whether or not it is a baptismal confession is hard to say. The Strong have likely appealed to this foundational, shared teaching to support their claims, especially those claims articulated in 1 Cor 8:4. The Strong seem to argue from the Oneness of God that idols are non-existent, and therefore associations with them are harmless.

The confessional formula begins: “But for us there is one God the Father, from whom all things exist and we exist for him” (1 Cor 8:6a). Central to Jewish and early Christian theology was the oneness, and thus singularity, of God (see my “Theological Synthesis” in chapters 3, 4, and 5). Divine oneness is the belief that makes the plurality of gods an absurd categorical mistake because only One Being is within the category of God. Wisdom, Philo, Josephus, and Paul share the belief in God’s oneness.⁴⁰

The One God is then described as Father, who is the Creator of all things.⁴¹ This representation of God describes both God’s relationship with the whole world (ἐξ οὗ τὰ πάντα) and God’s relationship with this particular people (ἡμεῖς εἰς αὐτόν). While the Scriptures can use Fatherhood language in reference to both of these relationships, Philo, especially, used the representation of God as Father to describe God’s creative role (in

⁴⁰ See especially, Wis 13:1; *Decal.* 58-9; *C. Ap.* 2.167; 2.239. In addition to the *Shema*, Isaiah 40-44 is an important text in the Septuagint on which these authors drew. In Isaiah, God’s oneness is demonstrated by him being the only Creator and the only Savior of Israel (e.g., Isa 43:10-11; 44:6).

⁴¹ In Pauline texts, the idea of God’s Fatherhood is not elaborated or explained. It appears most often in epistolary openings and describes the Father’s unique relationship to Christ (e.g., Rom 1:7; 1 Cor 1:3; 2 Cor 1:2, 3; Gal 1:1, 3, 4; Eph 1:2, 3; Phil 1:2; Col 1:2, 3; 1 Thess 1:3; 2 Thess 1:1, 2; 1 Tim 1:2; 2 Tim 1:2; Tit 1:4; Phlm 3).

contrast to inactive idols).⁴² Hellenistic Jewish authors, especially represented in Philo, repeat the anthropomorphic images for God, such as Father, but reappropriate them to speak of God's universal Fatherhood as the Creator who generated all things.⁴³ While the confession is 1 Cor 8:6a emphasizes creation in reference to God as Father, it is not as narrow as in Philo.

Also in contrast to these Jewish authors, Paul can talk of the active presence of Christ through whom Christians have come to new life and in whom they continue to live out that life: "And there is one Lord Jesus Christ, through whom all things exist and we exist through him" (1 Cor 8:6b). Paul does not think that the inclusion of Christ in this confession compromises his commitment to the oneness of God.⁴⁴ He can still confess and teach that "there is one God, the Father." Throughout First Corinthians, Paul speaks about God as if there is only one God, often using the noun with the definite article that admits of no other gods. All the occurrences of θεός in First Corinthians occur as ὁ θεός

⁴² For Philo and Wisdom's representation of God as Father, see chapters 3 and 4, especially Ch. 3 n. 74. When the Scriptures speak of God as the Father to a particular people, the context relates God's begetting of the people to his acts of salvation, most notably the exodus. In some texts, God is specifically described as Father of his people: Deut 32:6; Isa 63:16; 64:7 (64:8) Jer 3:4, 19; 38:9 (31:9) Mal 2:10. In other texts, God's Fatherhood is implied by the description of God's people as God's son: Exod 4:22-23; Isa 32:6; 44:1-2; 63:8; Hos 11:1. In addition to God's relationship as Father to the nation, 2 Sam 7:14 promises that God will be a forgiving Father to David and his descendants. In Paul's prohibition of idolatry in 2 Cor 6:14-7:1, he represents God as Father of God's people by alluding to 2 Sam 7:14. Paul modifies his allusion to include all believers in Christ as "sons and daughters" whereas 2 Sam 7:14 more narrowly addressed David and his descendants. Paul's argument frames God's Fatherhood in relationship with a particular people, but then Paul adds that the Father is the Lord Almighty, a description of God's power over all things.

⁴³ See ch. 4; cf. Ciampa and Rosner, *First Letter*, 383; Schrage, *Der Erste Brief*, 2.222-5.

⁴⁴ Philo, while remaining wholly committed to the oneness of God, can also admit that there are other divine beings that are not to be identified as God: the logos, powers of God, and angels.

with the exception of 1 Cor 8:4 and 8:6 where God's oneness is already emphasized in the context.⁴⁵ The radical impact of Paul's experience of Christ is evident especially in 1 Cor 8:6b. The most striking difference between Paul's and other Hellenistic Jewish authors' beliefs in the oneness of God is that Paul thinks the Lord Jesus Christ is a divine being who performs deeds that only God can do.⁴⁶ These two theological strands (the oneness of God and the divine attributes of Christ) converge in the confession that seems to be shared by Paul, the Strong, and the Weak.

⁴⁵ I interpret θεός in 1 Cor 8:4 to be a reference to another god, and thus it is not a reference to God: "there is no god except the One (God)" (οὐδεὶς θεὸς εἰ μὴ εἷς). This interpretation is supported by the scribal insertion of ἕτερος following θεός. In 1 Cor 8:6, the article is replaced by the adjective εἷς: "there is One God, the Father" (εἷς θεὸς ὁ πατήρ). Paul's overriding preference is to use θεός with the article. There are three places where in the confessional formula, dependent on the *Shema*, Paul simply writes εἷς θεός (1 Cor 8:6; Eph 4:6; 1 Tim 2:5; cf. the prayer with the debated article in 2 Thess 2:16). The other nominative construction that sometimes omits the article is θεός + (ἔστιν) + ὁ nominative noun (Rom 8:33; Phil 2:13; 1 Thess 2:5). The two other instances of the nominative θεός without the article are 2 Cor 5:19 and Gal 6:7. In other cases, most prominently the genitive, θεός appears with or without the article, and there is no apparent distinction between the two.

⁴⁶ In First Corinthians, the most common descriptions of Jesus are Christ and the Lord. "Jesus" is used, but it always occurs with another title except in the example of non-spiritual response in 1 Cor 12:3. At the outset in 1 Cor 1:1-4 Paul describes an close connection between Jesus and God with the dense sequence of names: Christ Jesus, God, God Christ Jesus, Lord Jesus Christ, God, Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus and God cooperated in the calling of Paul (1:1), forming the church in Corinth (1:2), and sending grace and peace to the Corinthians. There still appears to be some hierarchical relationship between God and Christ (e.g., 3:23; 11:3). The prominent Old Testament theme of the Day of the Lord has now been transferred to the near return of Christ (1:7-8; 4:5; cf. 16:22). When Paul appeals to an authority, he appeals to the Lord Jesus Christ, not to God (1:10), and Jesus (described as "Christ" or "Lord") is understood to be an active presence among the community (5:3-5; 10:16, 21; 11:27-32). And it is the Lord who sovereignly directs Paul's travels. Below are some of the descriptions of the Lord Jesus Christ in 1 Corinthians:

Christ: 1:1, 2, 3, 4, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 12, 13, 17, 23, 24, 30; 2:2, 16; 3:1, 11, 23; 4:1, 4, 5, 10, 15, 17; 5:7, 15; 7:22; 8:6, 11, 12; 9:12, 21; 10:4, 9, 16; 11:1, 3, 29; 12:12, 27; 15:3, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 22, 23, 27, 31, 57; 16:24.

Lord: 1:2, 3, 7, 8, 9, 10, 31; 2:8, 16, 19, 5:3, 4, 5; 6:2, 11, 13, 14, 17; 7:25, 32, 34, 35; 8:6; 9:1, 5; 10:21; 22, 26; 11:1, 20, 23, 27, 32; 12:3, 5; 15:31, 57, 58; 16:1, 7, 10, 15, 22, 23.

Son: 1:9; 15:28.

Wisdom of God: 1:24, 30

Power of God: 1:24.

Passover Lamb: 5:7.

Righteousness, holiness, redemption: 1:30.

In 1 Cor 8:11-12; 10:9, and 10:11-22, Paul will prohibit certain actions because they are affronts to Christ who saved them. In chapters 8-10, the role of Christ is primarily stressed as soteriological. Likewise, the confession in 1 Cor 8:6 emphasizes Christ's soteriological role (esp. the title Χριστὸς and the phrase ἡμεῖς δι' αὐτοῦ), but it also ascribes a creative role to Christ (δι' οὗ τὰ πάντα).⁴⁷ Paul connects the ideas of creation and redemption both in the connection between the Father (Creator) and Christ (Savior) and also in the two roles of Christ (in creation and redemption). God's role as the Creator was fundamental to Jewish thought and served especially in idol polemics to deny the existence of other gods because God is the unique Creator. In texts like Isaiah 40-44, the fact that God is the only Creator is used to argue that God is the only Savior in which Israel should trust. But Paul does not focus on defining the category of God and then describing how other so-called gods do not qualify. Rather, he focuses on uniquely divine actions and their impact that has already been realized in the community.

While Paul and the Corinthians could agree to the confession in 1 Cor 8:6, they came to markedly different conclusions concerning the practical entailments. The fact that this confession may well have originated with Paul and captures some of the most

⁴⁷ Jerome Murphy-O'Connor ("1 Cor., VIII, 6: Cosmology or Soteriology?," 253-67) argues for an exclusively soteriological role for Christ. Similarly Dunn (*Christology in the Making*, 180) argues that Paul places emphasis on Christ's soteriological role, but his point is to connect the Corinthians' experience of spiritual salvation to their responsibility to God as Creator. In contrast, Gordon Fee (*Pauline Christology: An Exegetical-Theological Study* [Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 2007], 92) thinks that Paul views "Christ as the 'one Lord' through whom both creation and redemption were effected." So also Larry Hurtado (*Lord Jesus Christ: Devotion to Jesus in Earliest Christianity* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005], 123): "In another tantalizingly brief passage, 1 Corinthians 8:6, Jesus is explicitly identified as the one 'through whom (are) all things and we through him.' That is, Jesus here is linked with God, and the repetition of the prepositional phrases 'through' (*dia*) makes emphatic his role as agent in creation as well as redemption."

basic and shared theology of the community makes it a particularly persuasive basis for an argument. Although the Strong think that this basic confession validates their actions, Paul also will base his argument on the theology of this confession. By quoting the confession, the Strong appeal to the oneness of God and God's uniqueness in not being threatened by false gods, whereas Paul will emphasize the dynamic soteriological role of Christ (in chapter 8 with respect to other saved Corinthians and in chapter 10 with respect to provoking the Savior to jealousy). Paul will explain that (1) believers exist through Christ in a salvific relationship, (2) that salvific relationship places them in a community, and (3) there are certain demands on their actions on account of both (1) and (2).

It seems that Paul quotes this confession for two primary reasons. First, the confession forms the primary argumentative basis for the Strong, and Paul intends to refute their argument. Second and related to the first, Paul wants to show how this confession is to be understood properly and how they should live in light of it. Paul is trying to put Corinthian actions in a wider context; namely, Paul wants them to understand the importance of Jesus' lordship as a filter for their actions. In effect what Paul has done is to state that he too has this $\gamma\tilde{\nu}\tilde{\omega}\sigma\iota\varsigma$ and that he too affirms the central monotheistic confession. In turning to verse 7, he begins to refute the ethical conclusions that they have drawn from their claimed $\gamma\tilde{\nu}\tilde{\omega}\sigma\iota\varsigma$.

v. 7

Paul and the Strong agree concerning the truthfulness of the confessional material in 1 Cor 8:6. Despite the Strong's claim that everyone has the knowledge of God's Oneness and therefore the non-existence of other so-called gods, Paul rebuts (indicated

by the use of the adversative ἀλλά) that not everyone has this knowledge.⁴⁸ The Strong's actions have harmed the συνείδησις (probably best translated as moral conscience) of the Weak.⁴⁹ Their conscience is harmed both by committing an act that goes against their understanding of faithfulness to God and by committing a morally reprehensible act (1 Cor 8:10). Here Paul focuses on the first manner that the Strong have harmed the conscience of the Weak. Paul argues that (recently converted?) Weak's history of worshipping pagan gods and eating food sacrificed to the gods make them prone to misunderstanding the implications of the Strong's actions. In their conversion to belief in Christ, they probably envisioned a break with pagan worship, and now the Weak viewed participation in pagan worship as a violation of their faithfulness to Christ. The Weak's past association with idols meant that any association with idols at all (even if they acknowledged God alone as God) polluted their moral conscience.

Richard Phua correctly summarizes the Strong's position: "It appears that the 'strong' possess the knowledge that all things come from the one God, which obviously includes food, even idol-meat. And since idols are nothing and insignificant, and since

⁴⁸ David Horrell ("Theological Principle or Christological Praxis? Pauline Ethics in 1 Corinthians 8:1-11:1," *JSNT* 67 [1997], 89) appropriately summarizes what Paul means by "knowledge": "What he does perhaps mean is that not all possess this knowledge in a way that convinces them of the non-reality of idols and of the consequent acceptability of idol-food—in this sense they do not have the gnosis of the strong." It is not simply that they do not have the theological knowledge that God is one. It is that they do not draw the appropriate conclusions from that. See also David G. Horrell, "Idol-Food, Idolatry and Ethics in Paul" in *Idolatry: False Worship in the Bible, Early Judaism and Christianity* (ed. Stephen C. Barton; New York: T & T Clark, 2007), 120-140.

⁴⁹ For a detailed study of συνείδησις in Hellenistic Jewish literature, especially Philo, see Richard A. Horsley, "Consciousness and Freedom among the Corinthians: 1 Cor 8-10," *CBQ* 40 (1978): 574-89; cf. Jerome Murphy-O'Connor, "Freedom of the Ghetto (1 Corinthians 8:1-13; 10:23-11:1)" in *Keys to First Corinthians* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 127-8; Gregory W. Dawes "The Danger of Idolatry: First Corinthians 8:7-13," *CBQ* 58 [1996]: 98).

God is the one who has created all things, it is perfectly right for the ‘strong’ to eat idol meat.”⁵⁰ What is intriguing about the Strong’s position is that it bears strong similarity to Paul’s own position in 1 Cor 10:26. As we will see in the analysis of 1 Cor 10, the differences between these positions are that Paul refuses to participate in worship at the idol temple (because it could provoke the Lord to jealousy) and Paul is more concerned about the effect of his actions on other believers than his freedom. In chapter 8, Paul argues primarily along the grounds of communal love; whereas, in chapter 10, he will correct these actions of the Strong that he labels as acts of idolatry.

v. 8

First Corinthians 8:8 argues for the moral and theological neutrality of food: “food will not make us stand before God” (cf. 1 Cor 10:25-26).⁵¹ The questions are twofold: is this a quotation of the Strong and does Paul agree with it. Even if it is not a quotation by the Strong, it is certainly a position with which they would agree. The change from third person to first person probably indicates a shift of speaker in which Paul is quoting the Corinthians.⁵² Moreover, the content of 1 Cor 8:8 has some parallels

⁵⁰ Phua, *Idolatry and Authority*, 133.

⁵¹ Most commentators interpret *παρίστημι* to have a negative connotation that is to be avoided and thus interpret the phrase as standing before God in judgment. Another interpretation is to think of this in a cultic context as standing before the altar of God with the effect that food does not achieve a positive thing (ability to stand before God in cultic worship). See Charles H. Giblin, “Three Monotheistic Texts in Paul,” *CBQ* 37 (1975), 536-7. Whichever interpretation one takes, the point of the statement is that food has no bearing on it (regardless of the “it” representing a positive cultic standing or a negative summons to judgment). Jerome Murphy-O’Connor (“Food and Spiritual Gifts in 1 Corinthians 8:8,” *CBQ* 41 [1979]: 292-8) argues that 1 Cor 8:8 is a quotation of the Strong, and he prefers the minority text: “we are no better off if we do not eat, and no worse off if we do.” His position is to read the Corinthians as arguing for the absolute moral neutrality of food.

⁵² See Fitzmyer, *First Corinthians*, 345.

with what is most likely a quotation from the Corinthians in 1 Cor 6:13.⁵³ So it is most likely a quotation of the Strong. But does Paul agree with it?

If one takes the stance that Paul agrees with this assertion, the claim would be that because God alone is God, God is not in any way threatened by food that has been associated with non-gods. Thus, the danger of food associated with idols would not be that it is an affront to God; rather, one's interaction with this food has implications for how other believers understand these non-gods. The major problem with this interpretation is that in 1 Cor 10:1-22 Paul seems to argue that food can indeed have a bearing on one's standing before God. If one takes the stance that this is a position of the Strong with which Paul disagrees, then verse 9 becomes the beginning of Paul's refutation of the Strong's position in verse 8. Paul then continues to refute the Strong's position (i.e. that food has no bearing on one's standing before God) in chapter 10. The Strong assert that food is a matter of indifference before God and thus Christians are not better off for eating or abstaining as far as God is concerned. This position of the Strong seems to be consistent with their theological reasoning: God is unassailable and One and thus idols are non-existent and harmless (cf. 1 Cor 8:4). This position, however, does not seem consistent with Paul's theological reasoning: God is unassailable and One, but demons are behind idols and Christ is offended by Christians participating with demons. Fotopoulos summarizes,

⁵³ "Food is for the stomach and stomach is for food, and God will destroy both the one and the other" (1 Cor 6:13).

“The apostle vividly demonstrates from Israel’s history and from the meaning of pagan cultic meals that the consumption of sacrificial food connotes partnership with the pagan gods who are demons. Food then, in this case idol-food, does have great significance for someone’s relationship with God. Hence, from Paul’s perspective consuming idol-food is not an *adiaphoron*.”⁵⁴

Due to Paul’s argument in 1 Cor 10:1-22 in which the eating of this food is described as a matter of faithfulness to Christ, I agree with Fotopoulos that Paul thinks food has consequences for one’s standing before God.

There is also the question concerning whether 1 Cor 8:8b-c (“Neither are we worse off if we do not eat, nor are we better off if we do eat.”) is Paul’s correction of the Strong’s position or if it is a continuation of the Strong’s position. Fotopoulos thinks that the Strong were advocating for Christians to consume idol-food, and they would not agree that “neither are we worse off if we do not eat, nor are we better off if we do not eat.”⁵⁵ I disagree with Fotopoulos. The Strong want to assert the indifference of food as it affects their relationship with God, and therefore they think that they are permitted to eat, even if their motivation is social expediency. As far as it relates to their standing before God, the Strong are eager to claim that food has no effect. But the Strong are also interested in defending their own practice of eating this food, which was socially and economically expedient for them. Recall that feasts in temples were not exclusively, or perhaps even primarily, religious functions; rather, they were often parties comprised of

⁵⁴ Fotopoulos, *Food Offered*, 217.

⁵⁵ Fotopoulos, *Food Offered*, 217-8. Ciampa and Rosner (*First Letter*, 368, 389) interpret the verse: “We’ll be worse off if we do not eat and better if we do since we will offend our friends and neighbors (and hurt our chances of social advancement by building relationships with potential patrons) if we snub them by rejecting their invitations or their food.”

guilds, business associates, and families. The Strong were less concerned with advocating that other Christians should consume food sacrificed to idols. Their concern was to defend their own freedom.⁵⁶ In verse 9, Paul will respond that food is not an issue of indifference. Paul thinks that Christians would not be worse off for abstaining—they would actually be far better off.

v. 9

Paul rebuts the Strong with a warning that their actions have serious effects on other Christians. Their knowledge “puffed them up” so that they were not acting in love toward their fellow believers. There is a contrast between the actions of the Strong (that cause a brother to stumble; 8:9) and Paul’s actions (that are careful not to cause a brother to stumble; 9:12).⁵⁷ One question concerns the idea of the Strong’s ἐξουσία (right). Do they have a legitimate Christian “right” to eat food sacrificed to idols, or does Paul use this term as a concession to prove a point? Many scholars have argued that Paul agrees with the Strong’s legitimate claim to eat food sacrificed to idols.⁵⁸ Arguing that the Strong have a legitimate ἐξουσία to eat food sacrificed to idols, however, is at odds with Paul’s discussion of idolatry in 1 Cor 10:1-22 where he argues that this activity offends

⁵⁶ Note the repeated references to freedom, but the idea of moral compulsion does not appear. The Strong do not seem to care if the Weak participate in feasts so long as their “freedom” to do so is not hindered.

⁵⁷ Both Wisdom 14:11 and Psalm 105:36 (LXX) use the term σκάνδαλον in their polemics against idolatry. But in both these cases, it is the idol itself, not the actions of someone else, that become the stumbling block. In Wisdom, idols are a σκάνδαλον to pagans; whereas, in Psalm 105, idols are a σκάνδαλον to God’s people.

⁵⁸ E.g., Witherington, *Conflict and Community*, 199.

Christ. Moreover, ἐξουσία seems to be a word emphasized by the Corinthians when they sought to justify a particular action. Their emphasis on ἐξουσία explains why Paul spends chapter 9 explaining what it means to exercise Christian rights and what things are genuinely rights of the Christian. It is better to interpret this as Paul not thinking that they have a legitimate right to eat food sacrificed to idols. Paul does not validate that the Strong have a legitimate right; rather, he only recognizes (somewhat tongue-in-cheek) that they claim to have this right. He entertains this pseudo-right to show that even if food were a matter of Christian indifference, it would still cause a brother to sin and thus offend Christ.

1 Cor 8:10-13

Paul is concerned that the Weak would witness the Strong's nonchalant attitude toward εἰδωλόθυτα and be tempted to participate in idolatry in some way. The primary issue seems to be that the Strong are dining (or wanting to dine) in an idol's temple (ἐν εἰδωλείῳ κατακείμενον; 1 Cor 8:10).⁵⁹ The most likely temple in which to dine at Corinth was the Asklepieion.⁶⁰ Knowing that Asklepios did not really exist, the Strong reasoned that attending meals hosted by pagans at the temple of Asklepios should not be an issue. In 1 Cor 10 Paul will show how attending this meal in the idol's temple is a theological problem, but here he shows how it is a problem of not loving one's brother because the

⁵⁹ Fee (*First Corinthians*, 359) is a staunch proponent of the view, with which I agree, that the problem throughout 1 Corinthians 8-10 is the desire of the Strong to eat sacrificial food at cultic meals with a secondary issue being food sold in a marketplace.

⁶⁰ See Fotopoulos, *Food Offered*, 49-155.

brother will think that eating food sacrificed to idols is an acceptable practice. The action of the Weak brother eating food sacrificed to idols is understood by Paul to be destructive: “this ‘weak’ person—the brother for whom Christ died—is destroyed by your knowledge.” Paul reframes this affront to one’s brother as an affront to Christ himself: “you sin against Christ” (1 Cor 8:12). The force of Paul’s argument rests with the intimate association between Christ and the one who believes in Christ. When one believer acts in a way that harms another believer, the former has actually sinned against Christ.

Paul’s conclusion in 1 Cor 8:13 provides his reasoning for all of chapter 9. He concludes by stating that “if food makes my brother stumble, I will never again eat meat, so that I will not make my brother stumble.” Paul does not use the term εἰδωλόθυτα (food sacrificed to idols) that he has used throughout his argument. Rather, he uses the more general terms βρῶμα (food) and κρέας (meat). Paul’s point is to make an argument from the greater to the lesser. If Paul is willing to give up even common meat, how much more should the Strong be willing to give up meat that is associated with idols (and as Paul will argue in chapter 10, is associated with demons)? That is, if Paul is willing to give up something that is both a right and a good thing, how much more should the Strong be willing to give up something that is neither a right nor a good thing. In chapter 9, Paul will argue from his own example that as he gives up even a legitimate right for the sake of others, the Strong should be willing to give a pseudo-right for the sake of others.

1 Cor 9:1-27

The role of chapter 9 in the flow of chapters 8-10 has caused a great deal of debate with some arguing that it is misplaced in the reception of First Corinthians. The treatment here will be brief because this section does not contain representations of God or an understanding of false worship. Nevertheless, it does form an integral piece of Paul's argument, and its function must be ascertained. Many who argue for the coherence of chapters 8-10 also argue that chapter 9 is an apology. The opening verses indicate that Paul intends to defend his apostleship, even if that is not his primary purpose:

Am I not free? Am I not an apostle? Have I not seen Jesus our Lord? Are you not [the result of] my work in the Lord? Even if I am not an apostle to others, certainly I am for you. Indeed you are the seal of my apostleship in the Lord. This is my apology to those who would judge me (1 Cor 9:1-3).

The verses that follow indicate that some of the questioning came about because of Paul's refusal to accept material support. Paul asserts that it was his right to receive material support (9:3-14), but he has forgone this right for the greater good of preaching the gospel without being hindered (9:15-23). This has led some to explain chapter 9 as Paul arguing for the Corinthians to give up their legitimate right to eat idol food for a greater good.⁶¹ But this explanation would imply that Paul thinks food is indifferent and Christians have the right to interact with food sacrificed to idols, which Paul interprets as fellowship with demons. We have already seen that Paul does not believe εἰδωλόθυτα to be a matter of indifference.

⁶¹ For a concise summary of positions on chapter 9, see Cheung, *Idol Food in Corinth*, 137-43.

Even though the Corinthian Christians do not have a legitimate right to eat food sacrificed to idols, Paul launches into an explanation of what Christian rights really are, and he uses himself as an example of foregoing even legitimate rights for others' good. The contrast is between Paul and the Strong, and can be summarized: for the sake of others, Paul does not exercise his legitimate apostolic rights, and how much more then should the Strong be willing to sacrifice their pseudo-right. This approach allows Paul to get to the heart of the issue in that the Strong are pursuing what they think is best for themselves without concern for either the community or the Lord.

1 Cor 10:1-13

In chapter 10, Paul continues to argue that Corinthian Christians should not eat food sacrificed and served in pagan temples (i.e. εἰδωλόθυστα). While chapter 8 made this argument on the basis of love (ἀγάπη), Christian rights (ἐξουσία), and a desire not to harm another believer's conscience (συνείδησις), chapter 10 argues more forcefully that eating εἰδωλόθυστα constitutes actual idolatry (εἰδωλολατρία) with the potential for arousing the jealous wrath of the Lord. In addition to the issue of εἰδωλόθυστα (food sacrificed and eaten in the temple precincts), Paul addresses several other issues involving sacrificial food, including buying food at a market to dining in a pagan's home. Most scholars recognize 1 Cor 10:1-22 to be a rhetorical unit.⁶² Paul bases his argument

⁶² It should be noted that some scholars argue that 1 Cor 10:1-10 or 10:1-13 are a pre-Pauline text or a previous composition by Paul. See especially, Wayne A. Meeks, "And Rose Up To Play": Midrash and Paraenesis in 1 Corinthians 10.1-22," *JSNT* 16 (1982): 64-78. Karl-Gustav Sandelin ("Do Not Be Idolaters!" [1 Cor 10:7]) in *Texts and Contexts: Biblical Texts in Their Textual and Situational Contexts: Essays in Honor of Lars Hartman* [Oslo: Scandinavian University Press, 1995], 257-73) argues that in 1 Cor 10:1-13 Paul draws on a pre-existing Jewish text. He concludes, "The injunction not to be idolaters, together with the citation of Exod 32:6 in 1 Cor 10:7, is the most important Pauline addition to the pre-

on two main points: the history of Israel (10:1-13) and the community's experience of the Lord's Supper (10:14-22). The retelling of the history of Israel shows that enjoying God's blessings is not a sure sign that God is pleased with and will not judge a group of people.⁶³ The significance of the argument about the Lord's Supper is based on the comparison between the believer's participation with Christ in the Lord's Supper paralleling a worshipper's participation with demons in the pagan cultic meal. Both meals result in *κοινωνία* with an unseen spiritual being.⁶⁴ *Κοινωνία* with both Christ and demons is an unthinkable division of loyalty for Paul, and it compromises the belief in God's uniqueness and the exclusivity of Christ's death on their behalf.

Pauline text. Therefore it can be seen as containing the central idea of the passage" (271). See his reconstruction of the Jewish text (265). Ultimately, there is insufficient evidence for this being a pre-existing text. Moreover, the context of the argument against idolatry fits so well with the themes in 1 Corinthians 8-10. Gary D. Collier ("That We Might Not Crave Evil": The Structure and Argument of 1 Corinthians 10.1-13," *JSNT* 55 [1994]: 55-75), also admits that it is possible that this was an earlier composition.

⁶³ Some argued that the Corinthians derived their confidence from a mystical view of the sacraments as protecting them. This view has been countered by several scholars; e.g., Karl-Gustav Sandelin, "Does Paul Argue Against Sacramentalism and Over-Confidence in 1 Cor 10.1-14?" in *The New Testament in Hellenistic Judaism* (ed. Peder Borgen and Søren Giversen; Peabody, Mass: Hendrickson, 1995), 165-82; "Do Not Be Idolaters! (1 Cor 10:7)," 111-27; Fee, "Εἰδωλόθυστα Once Again," 180-81. Sandelin is probably correct in arguing that Paul's primary purpose is to urge the Corinthians to flee idolatry. Their actions are, however, rooted in a confidence of their standing before God verified by the blessings they have received which parallels the experience of the Israelites in the desert. Paul draws on the downfall of the Israelites to warn them that enjoying God's blessings does not mean that one is irrevocably in God's favor.

⁶⁴ Joop Smit ("Do Not Be Idolaters' Paul's Rhetoric in First Corinthians 10:1-22," *NovT* 39 [1997]: 52) explains the problem: "Participation in the Lord's Supper as communion (*κοινωνία*) with the blood and body of Christ is diametrically opposed to participation in sacrificial meals as communion (*κοινωνοί*) with demons (vv. 16-17, 18-20)."

vv. 1-5

Paul closed chapter 9 with an explanation of his intention in pursuing the imperishable crown. His main point was that he is an example of self-restraint for the greater good (of preaching the gospel). Now he will provide negative examples of those who did not worship God properly. He appeals to the example of the Israelites, specifically the Wilderness Generation. He mentions blessings from God that everyone in the Wilderness Generation shared: the cloud, passage through the sea, baptism into Moses, spiritual food, and spiritual drink. Despite these blessings that they enjoyed, God was displeased with most of them and punished them. One characteristic sin of the wilderness wanderings was that of idolatry, epitomized in the Golden Calf episode. Paul draws on the context of idols in chapter 8 and assumes that the audience will immediately connect the idea of the wilderness wanderings with the dangers of idols.⁶⁵ Paul's point can be summarized as God having great displeasure with those who engage in idolatry, even after they have experienced blessing from God.

Paul begins 1 Cor 10 by stating his desire for the Corinthians not to be ignorant: Οὐ θέλω γὰρ ὑμᾶς ἀγνοεῖν (1 Cor 10:1). The content that he wants them to know explicitly involves the blessings shared by all the Israelites, but this statement also

⁶⁵ Schrage (*Der Erste Brief*, 2.381-2) explains the connection to chapter 8 although he understands chapter 10 to be a focused on participation in pagan cult meeting whereas chapter 8 discussed the more general topic of eating food sacrificed to idols. "He appropriately connects their own example with the exhortation to self-discipline and the warning of the danger of becoming-ἀδόκιμος from the previous section. But at the same time Paul goes back again to 8:10, where the presence of Christians in the idol temples has already been mentioned in passing, but now, as the close connection with verses 14-22 teaches, that [discussion] involves participation in pagan cult-meetings and not just eating food sacrificed to idols in temple dining halls."

introduces the topic of committing idolatry. In *De decalogo* and *Wisdom*, false worship is described as ignorance, and it is especially characteristic of pagans (see the subsections entitled “Understandings of False Worship” in chapters 3 and 4). Both Philo and *Wisdom* introduce false worship by describing it as ignorance (Philo, *Decal.*, 8; *Wis* 13:1; cf. 1 *Cor* 10:1).⁶⁶ While Philo and *Wisdom* described idolatry resulting from the ignorance of pagans, Paul alleges that the Corinthian Christians might be guilty of idolatry on account of their ignorance.

Paul analogizes the situation of the Corinthian believers to the Wilderness Generation, and he lists the events of the Exodus with this in mind. In the first four verses, Paul describes the five privileges that were shared by all Israelites in the Wilderness generation: the guiding cloud, rescue in the Red Sea, Moses’ leadership, spiritual food, and spiritual water. Paul refers to the Wilderness Generation as “our fathers” (10:1) by which he identifies the Corinthian Gentile-turned-Christ-believers as sharing in the heritage of God’s people because the Gentile Christians are a part of God’s new people.⁶⁷ The “cloud” was a way to symbolize visually the active presence of God among the Israelites, and analogous to the way that God was active in the exodus

⁶⁶ Idolaters are ignorant of God, and “Such persons are happily compared in the sacred Scriptures to the children of a harlot; for as they in their ignorance of their one natural father ascribe their paternity to all their mother’s lovers...” (Philo, *Decal.* 8 [Colson, PLCL]); cf. *Spec.* 1.331-332; *Ebr.* 108-110; *Conf.* 144; *Wis* 15:11

⁶⁷ Fitzmyer (*First Corinthians*, 380) comments on this identification: “In mentioning them as ‘our’ ancestors, Paul speaks as one of Jewish birth, but he is including the predominantly Gentile Christian community of Roman Corinth in ‘our,’ because Christians are for him in a new sense ‘the Israel of God’ (Gal 6:16).”

deliverance, Christ is active among the Corinthian believers.⁶⁸ The phrase “They were all baptized into Moses...” has engendered a good deal of debate, but for our purposes, it is sufficient to state that Paul sees the deliverance of the Israelites through Moses’ leadership to be analogous to the baptismal experience of the Christian (cf. Rom 6:3; Gal 3:27).⁶⁹ It is based on the comparison of Moses to Christ, with both acting as agents of God’s deliverance. This comparison is not uncommon in early christological understandings, and the point is to demonstrate how Christ’s deliverance supersedes the deliverance in Moses.⁷⁰

Another source of great debate is the phrase “they were drinking from the spiritual rock that followed them and the rock was Christ” (1 Cor 10:4). The rock is spiritual because it represents God’s miraculous provision, and Judaism developed the idea of the rock following the Israelites.⁷¹ Some interpret this phrase as Paul literally believing that Christ was the rock while others understand Christ’s role for the Corinthians to be analogous to the role of the rock for the Israelites. Fitzmyer represents the literal interpretation: “Paul thinks that Christ was actually the accompanying rock, conceived of as the source of water that saved the Israelites in their desert wanderings.

⁶⁸ Ciampa and Rosner (*First Letter*, 446) think the references to the cloud and passing through the sea may allude to the Christian experience of baptism.

⁶⁹ See Fitzmyer, *First Corinthians*, 381; Schrage, *Der Erste Brief*, 2.389-93. See also 1 Pet 3:20-21 where baptism, as a salvific event involving water, is compared to the Flood, as a salvific event for Noah’s family.

⁷⁰ For example, this theme is prominent in Matthew’s christological understanding. See Trent A. Rogers, “The Great Commission as the Climax of Matthew’s Mountain Scenes,” *BBR* 22.3 (2012): 383-98.

⁷¹ See esp. *L.A.B.* 10.7. Fitzmyer (*First Corinthians*, 383) also references the targumic (*Tg. Onqelos* Num 21:16-20) and rabbinic (*Tos. Sukkah* 3.11) sources.

Paul thus applies to Christ an appellation often given to Yahweh as the helper or aide of Israel, called in Hebrew *šûr*, ‘Rock.’”⁷² The second interpretation views the rock’s provision of nourishment for the Israelites to be analogous to Christ’s provision for the Corinthians. The second interpretation has more trouble explaining why Paul describes this rock as “spiritual.” I slightly favor the literal interpretation, but either interpretation is in line with the main point that Paul wants to make. Even though all the Israelites received these blessings and provisions from God, “God was not pleased with the majority of them, for they were struck down in the wilderness” (1 Cor 10:5; cf. Num 14:16, 29-32). The point is to remind the Corinthians, who believed themselves to be spiritual on account of the blessings of God (cf. 1 Cor 1-4), that they are not beyond the judgment of God.

Paul’s argument is based in part upon the intimate care and provision of God for the Wilderness Generation. This care and provision is understood to be analogous to the care and provision that the Corinthian Christians experience from Christ. The phrase “the rock was Christ” (1 Cor 10:4) is of great importance for Paul’s representation of Christ. Whatever can be said about Paul’s hermeneutic of the Hebrew Scriptures, what he has done is to make Christ an active being in the community. From the identification of Christ with the rock, there are two important points for our study. First, this reinforces the connection between God and Christ including the thoughts of Christ’s divinity and preexistence (cf. 1 Cor 8:6). Second, this gives historical substance to Paul’s argument

⁷² Fitzmyer, *First Corinthians*, 383. This interpretation may also reference Wis 11:4 as a possible link to wisdom Christology.

that Christ is actively and personally engaged among his people, with the emphasis in v. 4 on provision and later the emphasis on judgment. Christ will be shown to be active in judgment both already among the Israelites (1 Cor 10:9) and now among the Corinthians (1 Cor 10:21-22), but this active role in judgment is founded upon Christ's active role in salvation. They cannot claim that Christ saves them without also affirming that Christ judges them.

vv. 6-10

The correlations between Israel and the Corinthians (both enjoyed specific blessings from God, engaged in idolatry, and received or could receive God's judgment) should serve as examples to warn the Corinthians from idolatrous behavior. The Israelites serve as examples of the judgment coming on those who desire evil. There are strong parallels between this section and Psalm 105 (LXX), which may even be a source on which Paul is drawing.⁷³ Verse 14 describes the sins of the Wilderness Generation as impure desires: "They desired desires (lit.) in the wilderness and put God to the test in the waterless land" (καὶ ἐπεθύμησαν ἐπιθυμίαν ἐν τῇ ἐρήμῳ καὶ ἐπείρασαν τὸν θεὸν ἐν ἀνύδρῳ). Both 1 Cor 10 and Psalm 105 describe the idolatry of the Wilderness Generation in terms of desire (10:6; 105:14) and testing God (10:9; 105:14), which might suggest that Paul is alluding to a developed tradition about idolatry in the Wilderness. Whatever the reference, Paul views the desire for evil as rebellion against God. Paul might not have a specific incident in mind. Rather, he is referring to the repeated

⁷³ Contra Collier, "That We Might Not Crave Evil," esp. 63-74, who argues that 1 Cor 10:1-13 is a midrash of Numbers 11.

inclination of the Israelites toward the worship of idols because Paul clarifies the phrase “that we not desire evil” with “do not be idolaters.”⁷⁴ Paul might also intend a parallel between the Israelites’ desire to eat the food they did in Egypt with the Gentile Christians’ desire to eat the food they did before their belief in Christ.⁷⁵ Paul might be suggesting that their desire for food sacrificed to idols is a desire to abandon the devotion to Christ and return to their former lifestyles in the same way that the Israelites desired to abandon God’s provision in the Wilderness in order to eat the food they had in Egypt.

Until chapter 10, Paul has been making the argument that Christians should not eat εἰδωλόθυτα primarily by appealing to their obligations to love one another. First Corinthians 10:1-5 sets the stage for warning them that God’s people are not beyond God’s judgment. But the argument now takes a drastically sharper tone when Paul situates the actions which the Strong view as harmless within the context of idolatry. Doubtlessly, this description would have been shocking and offensive to the Strong. Paul commands the Corinthians not to become idolaters (μηδὲ εἰδωλολάτραι γίνεσθε). The term “idolater” (εἰδωλολάτρης) is never a self-description. Rather, a person is labelled as an “idolater” by someone who judges his actions to have gone too far. In Jewish and early Christian texts, labelling actions as idolatrous constructs a boundary that both

⁷⁴ Fee, *First Corinthians*, 454.

⁷⁵ This interpretation accords well the overarching thesis of Ciampa and Rosner that the major problem Paul is combatting in First Corinthians is the re-infiltration of pagan values into the Corinthian church. Phua (*Idolatry and Authority*, 161) summarizes: “the ‘craving’ of the Israelites suggests their desire for their former way of life in Egypt. When Paul uses this example of Israel as a way to warn the ‘strong’, it is highly probable that he is suggesting that by freely eating idol-meat and thus committing idolatry, the ‘strong’ are expressing their desire for their former way of life.”

describes the acceptable actions within the community and delineates who is outside the community. The effect of this statement is that Paul is warning them that their actions could place them outside of the community of God's blessing and in the realm of God's judgment.

In order to illustrate the severity of the Strong's actions, Paul parallels the idolatrous actions of the Strong to examples of idolatry from Israel's past that all the Corinthians would agree are idolatrous. He appeals primarily to four narratives drawn from the Wilderness Generation: the Golden Calf (Exodus 32), intermarriage with the Midianites (Numbers 25), judgment by serpents (Numbers 21), and grumbling (Numbers 16).⁷⁶ Central to Paul's argument is that there is a direct comparison between the actions of the Israelites—which led to God's wrath—and the actions of the Corinthians.

First Corinthians 10:7 is a direct quotation of Exod 32:6. Paul compares the Corinthians' association with idols to the paradigmatic sin of the Wilderness Generation—the worship of the Golden Calf. In Exodus 32, the sin is not simply

⁷⁶ Paul's thought is also influenced by Psalm 77 (78) that describes the history of Israel in order to instruct God's people to be faithful to God and keep God's commandments (77:7). The psalm describes the cycle of Israel's unfaithfulness, God's wrath, and Israel's repentance. Their sin is a combination of forgetting God's works, disobeying God's commands, and engaging in idolatry. Israel's Wilderness years are summarized by the psalmist: "And they tested and embittered God the Most High. And his testimonies they did not observe and they turned away and were faithless as also their fathers; they were twisted into a crooked bow. They provoked him to anger with their hills, and with their carved images they moved him to jealousy. God heard and disdained, and he treated Israel with utter contempt" (Ps 77:56-59 NETS). Another significant psalm in Paul's thinking is Psalm 105 (106) which describes God's faithfulness despite Israel's idolatry. Psalm 105 elaborates on the specific sin of idolatry (coupled with sexual immorality) that characterizes the wilderness generation. The people repeatedly sin, and God repeatedly expresses wrath, but God's faithfulness to God's people prevails. Exodus 32 and Numbers 25 are historical accounts of the idolatry of the Wilderness Generation, and Psalms 77 and 105 are poetic retellings of that unfaithfulness. The most important themes for Paul's thought are the connection between idolatry and sexual immorality and the response of God to idolatry: God punishes even God's own people when they worship idols.

association with idols via food; rather, God's people have forsaken rightful worship and pursued idolatrous worship that also included sexual immorality (drawing on an interpretation of *παίζω* in Exod 32:7).⁷⁷ This passage is appropriate for the Corinthian setting because the Corinthian Christians, due to their "orthodox" theological understanding of God, were unlikely to be tempted to attend meals at pagan temples due to a genuine belief in the gods' reality and abilities; however, they probably were attracted to the activities surrounding the idol feasts, possibly including sexual activity that Paul would forbid. Paul's point is that the Corinthians' behavior is comparable to the idolatrous worship of the Wilderness Generation (even though the Corinthians' behavior is motivated by other factors) that aroused God's fierce wrath (Exod 32:12 uses an emphatic expression for Moses' request "to stop your fierce wrath" *παῦσαι τῆς ὀργῆς τοῦ θυμοῦ σου*).

Paul alludes to Num 25 in 1 Cor 10:8, and the point is to reinforce God's displeasure with any association with idols. Paul may have in his mind the Hellenistic

⁷⁷ See Fee, *First Corinthians*, 454-5; Thiselton, *First Corinthians*, 734-7; Schrage, *Der Erste Brief*, 2.398-9. While the majority of uses of *παίζω* refer more generally to the act of merrymaking or amusement, there is at least one attestation in the LXX with strong sexual overtones: *ἐγένετο δὲ πολυχρόνιος ἐκεῖ, παρακύψας δὲ Ἀβιμελεχ ὁ βασιλεὺς Γεραρων διὰ τῆς θυρίδος εἶδεν τὸν Ἰσαακ παίζοντα μετὰ Ρεβεκκας τῆς γυναικὸς αὐτοῦ* (When Isaac had been there a long time it happened that Abimelech, king of the Philistines was looking out the window and saw Isaac *enjoying* his wife Rebekah; Exod 26:8). The ensuing dialogue indicates that *παίζω* referred to sexual acts between a husband and wife. While the context of *παίζω* in Exod 32 does not explicitly refer to sexual activity, it is within the semantic range of the verb to interpret it in such a way. Fotopoulos explains how this interpretation of *παίζω* fits with Paul's critique of Greco-Roman practice: "In light of this study's survey of Greco-Roman meals in Chapter 6, it seems likely that Paul is explicitly exhorting against sexual immorality in the context of dining rather than offering a general exhortation against sexual immorality" (*Food Offered*, 231). Witherington (*Conflict and Community*, 221-2) argues that in addition to the idolatrous associations at the temple it was also a problem for Christians to be engaging in sexual immorality: "This common association in the larger culture would explain why sexual immorality and idol food are also *always* linked in the NT (cf. Acts 15:29; Rev. 2:14, 20). It is worth adding that the some rabbis interpreted 'play' in Exod 32:6 to be sexual play (cf. Babylonian Talmud *Soṭa* 6b)."

Jewish interpretation of this text. As recounted by Josephus (*Ant.* 4.126-30), Israel's sexual immorality with Midian was really an attempt to seduce Israel into idolatrous worship and thus to have them forfeit God's blessing.⁷⁸ The connection between idolatry and sexual immorality, a very common theme in Hellenistic Jewish idol polemics, in this case is causal—sexual immorality leads to idolatry.⁷⁹ Paul might be suggesting that the Corinthians desired to participate in the sexually immoral activities (which would also be prohibited by Paul) associated with idol worship, so that they are willing to associate in an unacceptable way with idols.⁸⁰

⁷⁸ The Book of Revelation makes a strikingly similar interpretation of Numbers 22-24, the chapters directly preceding the reference that Paul makes. "But I have a few things against you: you have some there who hold to the teaching of Balaam, who instructed Balak to place a stumbling block before the Israelites so that they ate food sacrificed to idols and committed sexual immorality" (Rev 2:14). This narrative seems to have been significant for both Jews and Christians. In Hellenistic Jewish interpretation, Phinehas becomes an archetype of zeal and fidelity to God because he turned the Israelites away from this idolatry and sexual immorality (Ps106:28-31; Sir.45:23-24; 1 Macc.2:27, 54; Philo, *Leg. All.* 3.86.242; *Post.* 54.183; *Conf.* 13.57; *Mut.* 18.108; Ps-Philo, *L.A.B.*, 24:4; 28:1-3; 46:1-47:10; 48:1-2; 50:3; 52:2; 53:6). See especially, Louis H. Feldman, "The Portrayal of Phinehas by Philo, Pseudo-Philo, and Josephus," *JQR* 92 (2002): 315-45.

⁷⁹ Contra Wis 14:12 where idolatry is the origin and cause of sexual immorality. Especially in the Apostolic Decree, the New Testament vice lists, and Revelation, there is a strong connection between sexual immorality and idolatry. Stephen C. Barton, ("Food Rules, Sex Rules, and the Prohibition of Idolatry: What's the Connection?" in *Idolatry: False Worship in the Bible, Early Judaism, and Christianity*, 141-162) gives an extended explanation for the connection. Barton comments, "Food and sex have to do with matters of utmost seriousness: *the generation and sustenance of life*. In other words, they have the potential to be creative, and therefore involve acts and imaginaries of human creativity. Conversely, they have the potential to be instruments of death and imaginaries of doom and judgment" (145). Because they involve life and death, they are moral issues; moreover, they are moral issues that involve both the private and public spheres and bring the private sphere into the public. Food and sex are visible and definable activities for which specific actions can be prohibited and permitted, and one's compliance with these commands is observable. Therefore, food and sex become significant boundary markers that allow a community to define itself in distinction from others while also creating group solidarity through common practice. They communicate who is inside the community and who is outside the community. In early Christianity, food rules become fewer, but the rules that do exist gain more significance because for Gentile converts, they involve a significant change from their previous practice.

⁸⁰ This interpretation is strengthened by the fact that in other contexts, the Corinthians engaged in sexual immorality (1 Cor 5:1-11; 6:9-20). Fee (*First Corinthians*, 454-5) gives four reasons supporting the idea that sexual immorality was associated with temple dining: (1) Numbers 25, alluded to here, links the

In his command not to put Christ to the test, Paul alludes probably to Num 21:4-7.⁸¹ In Numbers 21, the Israelites speak against God and Moses because they do not have the abundance of food that they had in Egypt. God's anger is aroused, and he sends serpents to punish the people. Paul interprets their questioning of God as putting Christ to the test.⁸² Analogously, the Strong are testing Christ by engaging in behavior that Paul considers to be idolatrous.

Paul alludes to either Num 14:1-38 or Num 16:41 in 1 Cor 10:10. Numbers 14 deals with the report of the ten spies, and Numbers 16 deals with the people's reaction to the killing of Korah. Because Paul states that their grumbling results in supernatural execution by the Destroyer, he is probably alluding to Numbers 16, with Korah's household being destroyed by the earth in Num 16:31-35 and the grumbling Israelites destroyed by the plague in Num 16:43-50. The narrative of Korah highlights the danger of attempting to circumvent the instruction of God's leaders (Moses and Paul) and shows how grumbling and questioning result in God's wrath. In these last two examples—putting Christ to the test and grumbling—there is a theme of the people desiring the life

two; (2) if one interprets *παίξεν* with sexual overtones, the two activities are linked in the quotation of Exod 32:6; (3) in 1 Cor 6:12-20, Paul links the word temple with sexual immorality; (4) every time idolatry is mentioned in the New Testament, it is associated with sexual immorality. Phua, however, interprets the association to be more general “The most satisfactory explanation of this Old Testament allusion is thus that Paul is telling the Corinthians not to be like the Israelites in their sexual immorality because sexual liaison with pagans can lead to idolatry, which was the case in Numbers 25” (*Idolatry and Authority*, 164).

⁸¹ For a discussion of the number 23,000, see Fitzmyer, *First Corinthians*, 386

⁸² It is somewhat peculiar that the Israelites' actions are interpreted to be a test of Christ. There is good textual support for “Lord” and “God,” but the reading “Christ” is best supported, and it is certainly the *lectio difficilior*. Moreover, 1 Cor 10:4 understands Christ to be active among the Israelites in the Wilderness, so Paul probably thinks Christ to be a participant in this narrative also.

they had in Egypt (Num 16:12-14; 21:5). These examples coupled with the interpretation of desiring evil in 10:6 as a desire for the provisions of Egypt, suggest that Paul interprets the Strong's behavior as a desire to have the "benefits" (including things such as social interaction, economic connections, entertainment, and sexual activity) of their former lives as pagan idol worshippers.

Again Paul's approach is to appeal to God's very active judging presence among the Wilderness Generation in order to demonstrate Christ's very active judging presence among the Corinthian Christians. The practical instruction, again, is based on a particular view of the deity. In this case, God and the Lord Jesus are understood to be judges and punishers of evil. This threat of judgment on idolatry forms a strong argument for the Corinthians to abandon the practices Paul is defining as idolatrous. These examples serve as a warning of divine judgment for the sins associated with idols, but the person of divine judgment is now Christ (or the Lord in some manuscripts).

vv. 11-13

In chapter 10, Paul has been making the argument that the Corinthians should learn a lesson from God's judgment on the idolatry of the Wilderness Generation, and now he restates the monitory role of these examples: "and these things happened to them as types, and they were written in order to warn us..." (1 Cor 10:11; cf. 10:6). Paul thinks that the Corinthians are living at the end of the ages, and this view adds urgency to the demands for holiness because the Day of the Lord is at hand. The main point of this argument comes in 1 Cor 10:12: "Therefore let the one who thinks he stands firm pay attention, lest he fall." Paul uses "therefore" (ὥστε) as an exhortatory inference that

provides the summative instruction of 1 Cor 10:1-11.⁸³ The warning is a direct attack on the Corinthian Strong who claim not to be sinning by their activity. Paul calls them to examine themselves. The very person who claims immunity from temptation (recall the over-confident trust of the Strong in their standing before God) is the person who is in danger of “falling.” Whereas in chapter 8 Paul warned the Strong that their actions could have the unintended consequence of harming the Weak, here Paul warns the Strong that their actions could have the unintended actions of harming themselves by causing themselves to fall. This indicates a shift in the argument from chapter 8 to 10: chapter 8 is given from the standpoint of concern for the standing of the Weak, and chapter 10 is concerned with the standing of the Strong. For Paul, the danger of idolatry is a danger for Strong and Weak alike. The Strong, taking confidence in their knowledge, would be shocked to be informed that they themselves were in real danger. Paul seems compelled to explain that they cannot blame their idolatry on God because God provides the way of escape.

Paul has now defined the issue of eating εἰδωλόθυτα to be an issue of εἰδωλολατρία. And he argues that the behavior of both the Strong and the Wilderness Generation involved idolatry (and sexual immorality). If the Strong think that their actions have no effect on their standing before God (cf. 1 Cor 8:8), they need only to look at the example of the Wilderness Generation. Just as God judged their idolatry, so too

⁸³ For this use of ὥστε see Trent Rogers, “The Functions of ὥστε in the New Testament” *Annali di Storia dell’Esegesi* 30/2 (2014) 323-28.

Christ will judge the Corinthians' idolatry.⁸⁴ The explanation for the warning is based on God's actions in the past, and the warning has weight insofar as Christ is viewed to be present and active among the Corinthians.

1 Cor 10:14-22

vv. 14-17

Paul's use of διόπερ beginning 1 Cor 10:14, marks the subsequent phrase as significant and of pronounced importance. While Paul previously warned them not to become idolaters, now he commands them to flee from idolatry (10:14).⁸⁵ This may well be the central exhortation of Paul's argument in 1 Cor 8-10.⁸⁶ Having given the exhortation to flee idolatry (10:14), Paul lays the foundation for prohibiting certain kinds of associations with idols (10:16-22). The foundation for the prohibition is the personal participation that believers have with both Christ and other believers in the celebration of the Lord's Supper.

⁸⁴ Dunn (*Christology in the Making*, 184) summarizes Paul's argument: "In other words, Paul says to his readers: if you compare yourselves to the Israelites you will see what peril you are in. They experienced the equivalent of what we have experienced: they went through what we call a baptism; they enjoy what we call 'spiritual food'—you only need to equate Moses with Christ (so 'baptized into Moses') and the rock with Christ to see how close the parallel is to your own situation—and yet look what happened to them (vv. 5, 9f.)."

⁸⁵ Fee ("Εἰδωλόθυτα Once Again," 193) explains the flow of Paul's thought: "In vv. 1-13 Paul has warned that Israel's εἰδωλολατρία and πορνεία caused their overthrow, despite their 'sacraments'. Having warned Corinth of the same possibility, he concludes the argument, 'therefore, flee εἰδωλολατρία'. And εἰδωλολατρία of course means eating at the temples."

⁸⁶ Willis, *Idol Meat*, 166-7; Fee, *First Corinthians*, 464; Witherington, *Conflict and Community*, 224; Cheung, *Idol Food*, 147; Fotopoulos, *Food Offered*, 233.

The interpretation of *κοινωνία* (participation) has generated considerable debate in secondary literature.⁸⁷ The primary question is if *κοινωνία* refers primarily to a vertical or horizontal relationship. Paul does not elaborate on the nature of the relationship. He thinks that the nature of the *κοινωνία* in the Lord's Supper is understood by the Corinthians, and it is an understanding on which he can base his argument in 1 Cor 10:16:

Is not the cup of blessing that we bless a participation in the blood of Christ? Is not the bread that we break a participation in the body of Christ?
 Τὸ ποτήριον τῆς εὐλογίας ὃ εὐλογοῦμεν, οὐχὶ κοινωνία ἐστὶν τοῦ αἵματος τοῦ Χριστοῦ; τὸν ἄρτον ὃν κλῶμεν, οὐχὶ κοινωνία τοῦ σώματος τοῦ Χριστοῦ ἐστίν;

Lexical studies have shown that both a vertical and horizontal interpretation are within the semantic range of *κοινωνία*, and the context indicates that both vertical⁸⁸ and horizontal⁸⁹ relationships are involved, with perhaps an emphasis on the vertical. As much as the Lord's Supper is a participation with Christ, it is also a participation with

⁸⁷ Ciampa and Rosner (*First Letter*, 473-5) provide a good summary.

⁸⁸ The vertical component of *κοινωνία* (participating in/with Christ) is implied by the very context of worship which is focused on a deity. Analogous to *εἰδωλολατρία* which is worship focused on an idol-god, the Lord's Supper is focused on the Lord. The primary issue in both the worship of idols and the celebration of the Lord's Supper is about how one relates to the deity. The Israelites' focus at the altar of sacrifice (1 Cor 10:18) was on the restoration and maintenance of a relationship with God. Likewise, pagans sacrifice to demons. The acts by Christians (in the Lord's Supper), Jews (at the altar of YHWH), and pagans (at the altar of gods) are analogous in the fact that they are all ways of relating to a deity. Moreover, the vertical element of *κοινωνία* is strengthened by the fact that the consequences of improper worship are realized in the offense to the deity (1 Cor 10:22).

⁸⁹ Even while the vertical dimension of *κοινωνία* might be the primary referent in the context of worship, ancient worship was communal. The proper and improper worship of the Wilderness Generation (1 Cor 10:1-11) and the celebration of the Lord's Supper (1 Cor 10:14-22) are the experiences of groups of people. The Lord's Supper was a communal meal, and it had implications for how the Corinthians related to one another (1 Cor 11:17-22). The unity of the plurality of Christians in the Lord's Supper is emphasized in 1 Cor 10:17. Worship in the ancient world was the action of a community, so *κοινωνία* with a deity implies some level of *κοινωνία* with others participating in the worship.

other believers. Believers together share in the one loaf. The importance of this line of argumentation is that Paul is basing his command to flee idolatry on both theological (κοινωνία ἐστὶν τοῦ αἵματος τοῦ Χριστοῦ) and ethical (πάντες ἐκ τοῦ ἐνὸς ἄρτου μετέχομεν) grounds. One of the things that makes the appeal to the Lord's Supper so fitting for Paul's argument is that the Lord's Supper, like idolatry, is a matter of relating to God (the thrust of chapter 10) and also a matter of relating to others (the thrust of chapter 8). In a way that other lines of argument cannot, the Lord's Supper emphasizes both the vertical and horizontal obligations of claiming Christ as Savior. The vertical and horizontal relationships of the Lord's Supper tie together Paul's lines of argumentation, primarily horizontal in chapter 8 and primarily vertical in 10:1-13.

vv. 18-22

Having appealed to the Corinthians' participation with Christ in the Lord's Supper as proof of the seriousness of dining relationships with deities, Paul further proves his point by appealing to associations that three groups of worshippers have: Israelites at the altar (10:18), pagans with demons (10:19-20), and Christians with the Lord (10:21). Just as Israelites participated with God at the altar (and received a portion of the meat),⁹⁰

⁹⁰ There is some debate concerning with whom the Israelites participated. It could be that they participate with God by taking part in the cultic celebrations. But this could also be a reference to the Israelites' participation with pagan deities in idolatrous celebrations like the Golden Calf incident. For the latter interpretation, see Fotopoulos, *Food Offered*, 235.

so pagans participate with their gods at the altar (and receive a portion of the meat that is εἰδωλόθυστα).⁹¹

Paul and the Strong agree that the idol-gods are not real, and from this theological understanding, the Strong argue that there is no danger in having κοινωνία with them. The Strong's theological understanding of what an idol is, causes them to dismiss them as harmless. The understanding of idols are merely material wood, stone, or metal is basically the view of the Prophets and Hellenistic Jewish authors such as Wisdom, Philo, and Josephus (see my discussion in chapters 2, 3, 4, and 5). Paul agrees with their belief that the idol-gods are not real, but he argues that there is another, demonic reality behind the worship of idol-gods. And worshipping before idol-gods is κοινωνία with demons. The view of demons behind idol worship is not incompatible with monotheistic beliefs, and it has a strong history in Jewish thought.⁹²

⁹¹ Karl-Gustav Sandelin, "Does Paul Warn the Corinthians Not to Eat Demons?" in *Attraction and Danger of Alien Religion* (WUNT 290; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2012), 123-32, argues persuasively that Paul does not have any idea of theophagy, either concerning the cup of demons or the Lord's Supper.

⁹² Richard Horsley ("Gnosis in Corinth: 1 Corinthians 8.1-6," *NTS* 27 [1980]: 38) notes that there are two primary streams of interpretations in Jewish texts concerning idols. "The one line, expressed prominently in Deutero-Isaiah, derided the heathen gods as nothings and their worship as foolishness, since the idol-gods are merely the lifeless products of human craftsmanship — in contrast to the one, true, living God, usually described in terms of his creative activity." He goes on to describe this as the approach taken especially by Wisdom and Philo in *De decalogo*. But there is another approach to idols in Judaism: "The other distinct traditional Jewish polemic against idol-gods appears prominently in apocalyptic literature such as Jubilees and 1 Enoch. This other tradition, although it agrees that idols are 'nothings' and lifeless human products, saw in idolatry the service or the influence of demons (Jub 11.4-6; 22.16-22; 1 Enoch 19; 99.6-10; Test. Naph. 3.3-4). Most interesting for the conflict between Paul and the Corinthian dissidents is the connection of this other polemical tradition with the motif of divine judgment. Biblical texts on which this tradition draw connect the critique of idolatry as the service of demons with a recitation of Israel's historical disobedience in, and punishment for, its sacrificing to idols (Deut 32.17-21; Ps 106 [105 LXX]. 28-40). Paul himself draws on this tradition in formulating his argument against the implications of the Corinthians' gnosis in 1 Cor 10.20-2 as well as in 10.1-13" ("Gnosis in Corinth," 39). While I think Horsley too neatly divides Jewish interpretations into two definable categories (they are more akin to a fluctuating spectrum of belief), he does alert us to the type of interpretation in Hellenistic Jewish literature

The danger of too close an association with idols is twofold. First, the Christian may unknowingly participate with demons. Second and more severe, the Christian might arouse the jealous wrath of the Lord. The Lord might be personally offended by Christians participating both with demons (by means of food sacrificed to idols) and with the Lord (by means of the Lord's Supper). It is Christ alone who is the Savior of the Corinthians, and Christ demands an exclusive relationship. Corinthians cannot have *κοινωνία* with Christ and other spiritual beings.

In order to make his argument persuasively, Paul defines idolatry as *κοινωνία* with demons and represents Christ as a jealous deity. The greatest danger of idolatry is that the Corinthians could arouse the jealous anger of Christ. The whole argument is founded on a view of Christ as presently active in the community. Christ is the active Savior of the community and participates with them in the Lord's Supper; as a result, Christ demands exclusive devotion. In the same way that the Corinthians know Christ to be active in these ways, Christ may also be aroused to jealousy.

1 Cor 10:23-30

Paul's argument against Christians eating *εἰδωλόθυστα* (i.e. food sacrificed and eaten at the temple) concluded in 10:22. Now he will address issues that are related to *εἰδωλόθυστα* in that they involve meat that has or could have its origins in the temple but

that (1) recognizes God as One, (2) believes idols to be nothing, but (3) rejects associations with idols because demons inhabit them. For more on these lines of interpretation, see Phua, *Idolatry and Authority*, 126-69.

is eaten in different contexts. While in chapter 8 Paul instructs the Strong not to exercise their pseudo-right, in 1 Cor 10:25-30 Paul permits certain exercises of Christian freedom.

vv. 23-24

The transition from the Lord's jealousy in 1 Cor 10:22 to the permissibility of actions in 1 Cor 10:23 is abrupt. After Paul has prohibited outright the consumption of εἰδωλόθουτα, Paul sets the stage to address two additional contexts in which Christians might encounter food sacrificed to idols. First Corinthians 10:23a and 10:23c are probably a quotations of the Corinthians that Paul seeks to qualify (cf. 1 Cor 6:12).⁹³

Πάντα ἔξεστιν ἀλλ' οὐ πάντα συμφέρει·
 "Everything is permissible" but not everything is beneficial.
 πάντα ἔξεστιν ἀλλ' οὐ πάντα οἰκοδομεῖ
 "Everything is permissible" but not everything builds up.

Paul makes two main points concerning the exercise of Christian freedom. First, to say that an action is permissible does not mean that it is recommended. Second, even actions that are permissible on theological grounds might be prohibited on the basis of their effects on the community. This correction of the Strong's assertion coincides with Paul's own example of limiting the exercise of his liberty for the common good. Chapter 9 was an explanation of how Paul did not "seek (only) his own good, but also the good of another" (1 Cor 10:24).

⁹³ There is strong textual support for the addition of μοι before πάντα in both 10:23a and 10:23c. If this pronoun is accepted as the original reading, it represents a qualification by Paul of the Corinthians' statement that "everything is permissible." The scope of their slogan would be limited by Paul's comment. The permissible scope is reduced from a general aphorism to an individual permission; thus, the focus is on ecclesiological upbuilding rather than on the exercise of Christian rights.

vv. 25-26

Again the transition is abrupt from the correction of the Corinthians' positions in 1 Cor 10:24 to the discussion of meat obtained in the meat market. Given Paul's hardline stance on εἰδωλόθυστα, one might anticipate that Paul would command great scrupulousness when shopping at a meat market, but Paul's position is quite permissive: "Eat everything sold in the marketplace without judging with regard to (your) conscience." (1 Cor 10:25). The justification of permitting the eating of food purchased in the meat market is that the Lord possesses everything, so nothing is inherently contaminated.

What commentators rarely point out is that Paul, in order to substantiate his argument, has chosen, from his Jewish background, another representation of the Lord—again the argument is made along theological lines. In 1 Cor 10:1-22, the prevailing representation of the Lord is that Christ is actively present among and jealous for the community of Corinthian Christians—the community is in very real danger of Christ's judgment (in the same way that God judged the Israelites). But the representation is different in 1 Cor 10:26: "For the earth and its fullness are the Lord's [probably a reference to Christ as the Lord]" (cf. Ps 23:1 LXX). In this representation, the Lord is the unthreatened Creator who possesses everything (cf. 1 Cor 8:6). It is not an affront to the Lord if Christians come into contact with meat sacrificed to idols because everything is God's. It is not that the representation of the Lord as unthreatened Creator is in contradiction with the representation of Christ as jealous. They both come from biblical

representations of God, but they are also distinct and make different points about God and the permissible associations with idols and food associated with idols.

vv. 27-30

Again the transition from the meat market to the meal at an unbeliever's house is abrupt, but it is another context in which a believer might encounter food sacrificed to idols. Along with the majority of commentators, I think it most probable that verses 27-29 refer to food bought in the *macellum* and then eaten at home.⁹⁴ In addition to the context indicating a different location from that of εἰδωλόθυτα, Paul uses a different noun to describe this food, ἱερόθυτον. Fitzmyer summarizes the context of this new situation,

Many Corinthian Christians would have had nonbelieving friends who might tender an invitation to dine in their houses, and such dining would not have been a participation in 'the table of demons' for such Christians (v. 21), because the setting of the meal is different, a private home, and not an idol's temple, as in 8:10.

One of the biggest questions is the identity of the informant. Who is the person who says "this is sacrificial food"? The options are as follows: pagan host, pagan guest, or the Weak Christian. While it is not central to our study, it is most likely that the informant is a Weak Christian.⁹⁵ The Weak Christian might attend the meal thinking that the meat will not have been sacrificed to a god, or the Weak Christian might be a slave or servant for the meal.

⁹⁴ Fotopoulos (*Food Offered*, 242) mentions the various contexts proposed by scholars: (a) food sacrificed in a temple and eaten in the temple precinct, (b) sacrificial food purchased in a *macellum* and eaten in the temple precinct, (c) food sacrificed at a temple and then taken home and eaten, (d) sacrificial food purchased from the *macellum* and eaten in home, (e) food sacrificed in a home and eaten in a home.

⁹⁵ For a defense of the informant as a Weak Christian, see Fitzmyer, *Frist Corinthians*, 400-402; Fotopoulos, *Food Offered*, 244-6.

Another question is for whose conscience should the Christian be concerned? Should the Christian house-guest be concerned with the conscience of the house owner (who is a pagan and has no scruples about food sacrificed to idols) or the conscience of a weaker Christian? It seems most likely that Paul is concerned that the house-guest not give the impression to the Weak Christian that idols are something to be tolerated (cf. 1 Cor 10:32). Again, Paul urges those with knowledge to have concern for other believers, and not exercise their “rights” apart from their obligations to love other believers.

1 Cor 10:31-11:1

Paul concludes chapters 8-10 with the overarching principle of doing everything for the glory of God. Some have noted that Paul is proposing a more fitting slogan than the Strong’s.

Strong’s Slogan: πάντα ἔξεστιν (everything is permissible)

Paul’s Slogan: πάντα εἰς δόξαν θεοῦ ποιεῖτε (do everything for the glory of God)

The filter for a Christian’s actions should not be simply whether it is permissible. The real question is if it brings glory to God. Following from this theological principle, Paul offers a second principle with reference to other humans: do not cause people (Jews, pagans, or Christians) to stumble. He reinforces the need to seek the communal good. They find the example of seeking the good of others in Christ and also in Paul.

Excursus: Idolatry in the Pauline Material

The perspective of this project is to read Paul as a participant in larger polemics concerning idolatry in early Christian and especially Hellenistic Jewish arguments. The following analysis will draw upon the analyses of Hellenistic Jewish arguments in the

preceding four chapters, but it is also important to read First Corinthians within the context of other Pauline material.⁹⁶ Paul uses the term εἶδωλον and its derivatives (e.g., εἰδωλόθυτα) to describe the images that were used in Greco-Roman worship. This term originated as a Hellenistic Jewish designation with antagonistic overtones. Phua notes correctly that “The term for the cultic objects in pagan Greek is ἄγαλμα, while human statues are normally called ἀνδριάς or εἰκών; although it can be used for images of the gods, shapes or apparitions, the cultic object is never called an εἶδωλον.”⁹⁷ While the concept of idolatry is mentioned in several Pauline vice lists (e.g., 1 Cor 5:10-11; 6:9-10 [if it is to be considered a vice list]; Gal 5:19-21; Eph 5:3-5; Col 3:5; cf. Rev 21:8; 22:18), little information can be gleaned from them other than that idolatry is a characteristic of pagans and believers in Christ are expected to have abandoned that practice. Paul’s Epistle to the Romans, Epistle to Galatians, and First Thessalonians are other texts in the Pauline corpus in which he develops the concept of idolatry.

⁹⁶ Even though the Pauline material references idolatry several times, there are other important texts in the New Testament that deal with idolatry. What is remarkable about the theme of idolatry in the New Testament is that it is absent from the Gospels. Karl-Gustav Sandelin (“The Jesus Tradition and Idolatry,” *NTS* 42 [1996]: 412-20), mentions a few Gospel texts in which there might be a reference to idolatry. The most important non-Pauline text is Revelation. The false teaching in Pergamum and Thyatira led the people to commit sexual immorality and to eat food sacrificed to idols (εἰδωλόθυτα; Rev 2:14, 20; cf. Rev 21:8; 22:15). In Revelation 9:20, the author connects idolatry with the sin of sexual immorality, and he offers a more extended explanation of idolatry: “And the rest of humanity who were not killed by these plagues neither repented of the works of their hands nor stopped worshipping demons and idols of gold, silver, bronze, stone, and wood—which cannot see, hear, or walk—And they did not repent of their murders, magic arts, sexual immorality, or thefts” (9:20-21). Like Paul, the author argues that even though idols are merely material, there is a demonic force behind them. The Christian is to remove himself from associations with these idols—including both the false teachings and food. See Rowland, “Living with Idols,” 163-76.

⁹⁷ Phua, *Idolatry and Authority*, 130.

In First Thessalonians, probably the earliest extant Christian document, Paul describes the conversion of Gentiles as an abandonment of idolatry in order to worship the true God: "...you turned to God from idols, in order to serve the living and true God and to wait for his Son from heaven, Jesus who rescues us from the coming wrath" (1 Thess 1:9-10). The part of this statement that relates to God and idols bears strong resemblance to Hellenistic Jewish descriptions of pagans converting to Judaism (e.g. Asenath and Abraham). Idols are dead and false in contrast to God who is "living and true." But Paul is also different in that living out this faith in God also means that the believer eagerly waits for the return of the Son, the one who rescues them from wrath. Paul contrasts the dead idols with the one true God and the saving Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. To serve God means that one has abandoned idols and waits for his Son. Similarly, in Galatians 4:8, a person's conversion to Christ involves abandoning and not returning to false gods: "But when you did not know God, you were enslaved to those things which by nature are not gods." What has changed their status of being enslaved is the redemption of the Son (Gal 4:4-7). These themes in Pauline texts help us to understand Paul's point in 1 Corinthians 12:2: "You know that when you were pagans,⁹⁸ you were deceived and led away to mute idols." In 1 Cor 12 and 1 Thess 1, Paul contrasts idols and the true God. In line with Jewish critiques, Paul describes idols as false, non-living, and inactive. In contrast to idols that cannot act or speak, God empowers his

⁹⁸ I have chosen to use the term "pagan" because it better communicates Paul's intent. He is not trying to describe their ethnicity; rather, ἔθνη communicates a belief system that was not exclusive to the one God and one Lord Jesus Christ.

people to speak and act (1 Cor 12:4-11). For Paul, belief in God means that a person has severed his devotion to false gods.

In Rom 1, Paul echoes a stream of interpretation in Hellenistic Judaism wherein idolatry is the root sin that leads to all pagan depravity (e.g., Wis 14:12; cf. Rev 2:14, 20).⁹⁹ Even though Romans as a whole is thoroughly christological, the Lord Jesus Christ does not appear in the idol polemic of Rom 1:18-32. God is represented to be the Creator, who is perceivable by his works (cf. Philo and Wisdom). Paul begins with the belief that God is perceivable through nature, but humans have rejected that knowledge about God: “Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools, and they exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal humans, birds, animals, and reptiles” (Rom 1:22-3). Another way of describing their aberrant worship is that “they exchanged the truth about God for a lie, and they worshipped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever, amen” (Rom 1:25). Paul’s belief in the singularity of God is clear, and there is a fundamental distinction between Creator God and all other things in creation. Pagans have thought wrongly about God—their error begins with an intellectual misstep—and their idolatrous thoughts have manifested themselves in idolatrous and immoral actions.

While most of the Pauline references to idolatry occur in vice lists that do not provide much detail about the vices, Paul does expound upon idolatry in a few texts.

⁹⁹ The idea that idolatry leads to every other sin is most prominent in the Wisdom of Solomon. Alec J. Lucas has thoroughly explained the connection and parallels between these texts: “Unearthing an Intra-Jewish Interpretive Debate? *Romans* 1,18-2,4; *Wisdom of Solomon* 11-19; and *Psalms* 105(104)-107(106),” *ASE* 27 (2010):69-91; “Reorienting the Structural Paradigm and Social Significance of *Romans* 1:18–32,” *JBL* 131 (2012): 121-41.

Idolatry is the worship of non-living, mute, and deceitful objects, and it characterizes non-believers, including Christians prior to their “turning” or conversion. Christians are those who have abandoned the deceitful folly of idols, turned to God, and await the return of the Son. Belief in and worship of the true God is incompatible with the worship of idols.

Analysis of the Argument

One of the major differences between Paul’s argument and those we have seen by other Hellenistic Jewish authors is that the audience (both implied and intended) of Paul’s work consists of those within his same theological camp. Whereas Philo and Wisdom especially exploited the cracks already existing in the varied explanations of the divine in Greco-Roman culture in order to disprove the reality of pagan religiosity, Paul works with the varied beliefs about God (drawing on both his Jewish background and his previous teaching about Christ) in order to bring cohesive theological understanding and practice from the Corinthians’ fragmented belief and practice. Many of the more polemical features of other Hellenistic Jewish arguments, such as satire and the mockery of idols’ inactivity, are not present in Paul’s argument. This difference is largely due to the fact that the Corinthian Strong probably were not tempted to believe in the reality of the idol-gods and thus Paul saw little need to disprove them.¹⁰⁰ Rather the Corinthian

¹⁰⁰ Contra Nikolaus Walter (“Christusglaube und heidnische Religiosität in paulinischen Gemeinden,” *NTS* 25 [1979]: 422-42, esp. 425-36) who thinks that one of the primary things that Paul is combating is the Corinthian practice, born out of their polytheistic background, to offer worship to multiple deities. Walter contends that the Corinthians had not realized that salvation in Christ also implied the exclusive demands of worshipping him alone. From our study, it seems that the Strong were thoroughly convinced of the idol-gods’ non-reality, so actual belief in idol-gods was not a temptation. It is, however,

Strong were tempted to engage in associations with idols on account of things such as social pressure, desire for entertainment, and economic prospering, and Paul writes to convince them that consumption of εἰδωλόθυτα constitutes idolatry and is unacceptable.

Maintenance of or Departure from Judaism

One of the perennial discussions in Pauline studies concerns Paul's Jewish identity, and there is considerable debate in 1 Cor 8-10 whether Paul essentially reinforces Jewish teaching concerning idolatry or if he shapes early Christian teaching in a direction radically different than Judaism. Jack Sanders, for example, interprets Paul as repeating the Jewish teaching on interaction with pagan culture: "In 1 Corinthians, Paul advised Christians that they should not be polytheists (idolaters) and that they must confine sex to marriage. He thus took a normal Jewish stance toward Graeco-Roman culture."¹⁰¹ As we have seen, there are positions within the streams of Jewish interpretation that would basically agree with Paul's prohibition of eating εἰδωλόθυτα, but the way that Paul reasons is shaped radically by his experience of Christ.

Paul reads his Jewish tradition through a christological lens in order to combat the Corinthians' interactions with pagan gods. Paul's teaching in 1 Cor 8:6 is an example of him appealing to the Jewish tradition in order to assert both the oneness of God and God's distinction from creation. But Paul also modifies this tradition through a

possible that the Weak were confused by the actions of the Strong which may have led to theological doubts.

¹⁰¹ Sanders, "Paul Between Jews and Gentiles," 83. Sanders argues that Paul was forging Christianity into a middle ground between Judaism (which forbade idolatry and sexual immorality) and Greco-Roman culture (which forbade circumcision). Paul is setting up boundary markers for this sect, and on the issue of idolatry, the boundary is clearly drawn in agreement with Judaism.

christological lens in order to assert that the one through whom creation is accomplished is also the one who accomplishes their salvation. Paul urges them to live in light of their new calling in Christ and abandon the ways of their pagan past, and the foundation for this new life is the death of Christ for them. Thus, although some of Paul's practical conclusions (excepting the permissive approach to food in 1 Cor 10:25-30) can be found in other Jewish authors, Paul's argument is significantly shaped by the role of Christ in the community.

Refutation and Qualification

In at least one way, Paul's argument is more akin to Josephus' than to the arguments by Philo or Wisdom in that Paul and Josephus are both refuting specific positions which they quote. In *Contra Apionem*, the quotations are more clearly identified; whereas, in First Corinthians, Paul's use of the *partitio* does not as clearly identify the quotations for the modern reader, and thus interpretation is more complex. One of the reasons that Paul does not indicate quotations as clearly as Josephus is because he is quoting positions with which the audience would be familiar and that they would readily recognize. The use of refutation is especially prominent in chapter 8. The Corinthian Strong's assertion in 8:1 (οἴδαμεν ὅτι πάντες γινώσκοντες ἔχομεν) is both qualified and then refuted. Paul immediately qualifies the value of knowledge by asserting the greater value of love (8:1). He returns to this slogan of the Strong in verse 7 where he directly refutes it: οὐκ ἐν πάνσιν ἡ γινώσκεις. A similar qualification occurs in 1 Cor 8:8, 9 and 10:23.

In 1 Cor 10, the refutation comes primarily in the form of extended explanation rather than brief statements. While Paul does not quote the content of their boast, it seems that the Corinthians interpreted the blessings of God to be indicative of his favor and impunity from judgment. Paul refutes this belief by explaining that the Israelites were blessed in many ways but still came under the judgment of God. Similarly, the Corinthian Strong seem to have believed that food eaten before idols was harmless; whereas, Paul claims that there is a very real danger of associating with demons and thus provoking the Lord to jealousy.

Moral Arguments

Wisdom, Philo, and Josephus employed moral arguments in their refutation of false religion, but their moral arguments took a different form than Paul's. They showed that the immoral practices of the pagans proved that their theological foundation was correspondingly flawed. In First Corinthians, Paul's moral arguments are made on the basis of love, over against the Corinthians' self-seeking, pride, claims of personal rights, and jealousy. Paul explains that their morality has to be redefined, not in terms of their pagan past, but rather in light of their experience of Christ. Specifically, this means that love (directed at others for whom Christ has died) trumps knowledge and any claim to individual rights. Paul puts forward a pseudo-right in order to demonstrate that even if it were a right, love would trump that right.

The Strong's claims to have knowledge in 1 Cor 8:1 are immediately qualified to be secondary to the higher call of love. The knowledge claimed by the Strong has led them to claim that they have the right to certain actions. But these rights have detrimental

effects (8:9) on the Weak. And thus, the Weak brother falls into sin because of the Strong's claimed knowledge (8:11). In chapter 9, Paul then puts himself forward as an example of one who sacrifices legitimate rights (in contrast with the Strong who are claiming illegitimate "rights") for the sake of love. The crux of the moral argument is that Christ's death on behalf of other Christians makes love for them more important than any right or knowledge that can be claimed. Paul concludes his instructions about proper interaction with idols with the demand for Christians to act like Christ in self-sacrificial love: "Be imitators of me, even as I am an imitator of Christ" (1 Cor 11:1; cf. 16:24). Paul will also develop the ethic of love at length in chapter 13.

Use of Scripture

Paul's theological framework is dependent on the definition of God described in the Jewish Scriptures. Paul's dependence on Jewish Scripture is most obvious in 1 Cor 8:6 and 10:1-13. He interacts with the Scriptures both at the level of direct quotation and allusion to narratives. First Corinthians 8:6 is very likely something that Paul previously taught the Corinthians, and it represented a core tenet of their theological framework. But Paul has freely modified this Jewish statement in order to account for Christ. It should not be overlooked that Paul has taken what was one of the most significant statements in the Scriptures for Jews and he has made it central to his instruction of who God and Christ are. Paul's beliefs, and thus also the Corinthians' beliefs through his instruction, are founded upon Jewish Scriptures.

Like Wisdom, Philo, and Josephus, Paul is interpreting the Scriptures in order to instruct contemporary people about how to live and believe. That is, they all look at the

Scriptures as relevant and providing normative instruction for their communities. But Paul's reading of the Scriptures is again filtered through his christological lens.¹⁰² Thrice Paul affirms that the purpose of the Torah (each reference is to the narrative and not legal portions) is to instruct the Corinthian Christians: "Does it not speak to us? Surely on account of us..." (1 Cor 10:10); "Now these things happened as examples for us, so that we not desire evil as they desired" (1 Cor 10:6); and "These things were happening to them as examples and were written to warn us, on whom the ends of the ages have come" (1 Cor 10:11). But what is remarkable is that these examples of blessing and judgment by God are taken to be analogous to how *Christ* acts among the Corinthians: "Let us not put Christ to the test, as some of them tested (him) and were killed by serpents" (1 Cor 10:9).

Appeal to Christian Practice and Experience

The appeal to the Corinthians' experience of Christ is probably the strongest argument of Paul in chapter 10, and it is also something at which Paul hints in chapter 8. The modification of the *Shema* in 1 Cor 8:6b to include the soteriological role of Christ is essentially an appeal to the salvific experience of Christ in the community. This is reinforced in verses 11 and 12. In verse 11, Paul reminds the Strong that the Weak have the same salvific experience of Christ, and that this shared experience should affect the

¹⁰² For example, in the quotation of Deut 25:4 in 1 Cor 9:9, Jewish Scriptures are taken to be relevant for the Christians in Corinth, but the Scripture may be interpreted to apply to an entirely different context. It applies to the rights of Christian missionaries. The Jewish Scriptures provide direct commands to be followed, and some of them are also applied in new ways to the context of the Christian community. Paul can even speak of a new law being the law of Christ (1 Cor 10:21). In 1 Cor 10:4, Christ is read into the Wilderness narrative.

way that believers relate to one another. Moreover, in verse 12, their shared experience of Christ also means that a sin against another believer is a sin against Christ.

Paul appeals to the Christian practice of participating with Christ in the Lord's Supper which Paul interprets to be analogous to and in conflict with eating in the presence of an idol (with a demon existing behind the idol). The persuasiveness of Paul's argument rests on their experience of Christ in the activities of the Christian community. In two other texts in this letter (5:1-13; 11:17-34), Paul appeals to their experience of the Lord in the Lord's Supper in order to persuade them to particular action. Both times, he reminds them both of their participation with Christ as a community and that Christ is actively judging the community. The idea is that when they "come together" to celebrate the Lord's Supper they should be united and holy in order to glorify Christ.¹⁰³ When they come together "the power of our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Cor 5:4) is present in their celebration. In 1 Cor 11:27-32 the warning of the Lord's powerful judging presence is even more severe:

Therefore, whoever eats the bread and drinks the cup of the Lord unworthily, will be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord...for whoever eats and drinks [unworthily], eats and drinks judgment on himself by not considering the body. For this reason, many among you are weak and ill and a number have died" (1 Cor 11:27...29, 30).

Paul assumes that the Corinthians have a real and dynamic experience of Christ in the Lord's Supper, and he leverages this experience to urge them to proper action.

¹⁰³ In 1 Cor 5:4, Paul uses *συνάγω* (a *hapax legomenon* in Paul) to describe the congregation coming together to celebrate the Lord's Supper. Paralleling this verb, he uses the more common synonym *συνέρχομαι* in chapter 11 (17, 18, 20, 33, 34) to describe the same coming together for the Lord's Supper and worship (cf. 1 Cor 14:23, 26).

In their practice of baptism and the Lord's Supper, they have experienced Christ. Both of these practices should have informed them of the exclusive nature of their relationship with Christ. The initiation into (baptism) and maintenance of (Lord's Supper) their relationship with Christ centered on the celebration of Christ, and both of these celebrations instruct the believers concerning the demanded exclusivity of the relationship. Paul thinks that there is an irreconcilable competition between devotion to Christ and association with idols (cf. 2 Cor 6:14).¹⁰⁴ The Christian who has experienced Christ in baptism and continues to experience Christ in the Lord's Supper must forsake associations with deceptive idols, which are really demons.

Representations of God

Both God and Lord

First Corinthians 8 and 10, and especially 1 Cor 8:6, is a truly remarkable development of Jewish theology. On the one hand, it bears strong resemblance to Jewish streams of theology in which heaven was populated by more than just God (e.g., the logos for Philo or wisdom for Wisdom of Solomon), and on the other hand, it is revolutionary in attributing divine salvific activity to the Lord Jesus Christ.¹⁰⁵ While many Jews described angelic figures with god-like attributes and in proximity to God, they almost unanimously maintained that these beings were not to be worshiped, and

¹⁰⁴ Although some consider this verse to be a later interpolation, the content certainly fits with Paul's approach to the exclusive relationship with Christ.

¹⁰⁵ Larry Hurtado ("First Century Jewish Monotheism," 3-4) is especially helpful for understanding trends of Jewish thought about God.

“This is what makes the early readiness of monotheistic Christians to participate in the public cultic veneration of Jesus the most striking evidence that Christian devotion quickly constituted a significant innovation in Jewish Exclusivist monotheism.”¹⁰⁶ Paul’s thought is so remarkably shaped by Christ that his theological instruction to the community puts God and the Lord in parallel relationship (1 Cor 8:6) and that God’s activity among the Israelites is analogous to Christ’s activity among the Corinthians (1 Cor 10:1-22)

Father/Creator

For Paul, just like for Philo and Wisdom, God’s Fatherhood is connected to God’s role as Creator. In 1 Cor 8:6, it is the one Father God who is responsible for Creation, but the idea is not developed (as in Philo, that God is Father in the sense that he begets and guides all creation). Perhaps more significant than God’s Fatherhood being connected to creation is the connection between God’s Fatherhood and the Christ. Both First and Second Corinthians open: *χάρις ὑμῖν καὶ εἰρήνη ἀπὸ θεοῦ πατρὸς ἡμῶν καὶ κυρίου Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ* (1 Cor 1:3; 2 Cor 1:2).¹⁰⁷ Grace and peace come from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. More intriguing is that every mention of God’s Fatherhood in the Corinthian correspondence, with the exception of the quotation in 2 Cor 6:8, is connected to the Lord.

¹⁰⁶ Hurtado, “First-Century Jewish Monotheism,” 9.

¹⁰⁷ Cf. Rom 1:7; 1 Cor 1:3; 2 Cor 1:2, 3; Gal 1:1, 3, 4; Eph 1:2, 3; Phil 1:2; Col 1:2, 3; 1 Thess 1:3; 2 Thess 1:1, 2; 1 Tim 1:2; 2 Tim 1:2; Tit 1:4; Phlm 3.

In comparison to other Hellenistic Jewish idol polemics, 1 Cor 8-10 places less emphasis on the importance of God as Creator. Moreover, the Lord Jesus Christ is also active in creation (1 Cor 8:6; 10:26). Paul shifts the emphasis from God's creative role to the salvific role of Christ. Drawing on the idol polemic in Isaiah 40-44, authors such as Philo and the author of Wisdom of Solomon explained the non-existence of idol-gods by appealing to God as the only Creator. Paul makes this same argument. In response to the reality of other gods being worshipped (1 Cor 8:4-5), Paul reminds the Christians that there is only One God who is the Creator (1 Cor 8:6a). That is, the category of Creator is only applicable to one being, the Father of our Lord. But the salvific role of the Lord Jesus Christ (1 Cor 8:6b) is the focus of Paul's subsequent argument. Central to the argument in 1 Cor 8:7-13 is the common salvation that believers have in Christ and the resulting love for one another that should flow from that.

Lord Jesus Christ

It is safe to say that nothing influenced Paul's theological framework more than his experience of the Lord Jesus Christ.¹⁰⁸ The most significant thing that Paul can say about the Lord Jesus Christ is that he is the agent of their salvation. As mentioned above, the explanation of the Lord in 1 Cor 8:6 is primarily soteriological. While the confession

¹⁰⁸ In the Corinthian correspondence, it is difficult to perceive if there is any difference that Paul conveys with different titles: Lord, Jesus, or Christ. They all reference the one person. Hurtado (*Lord Jesus Christ*, 117.) notes, "There are thus three main types of Pauline contexts in which Jesus is characteristically referred to as *Kyrios*: (1) In hortatory statements and passages Jesus is the Lord/Master whose teaching and example are authoritative for believers. (2) In references to eschatological expectations, Jesus is designated the Lord who will come again as agent of God. (3) In formulae and passages reflecting actions of the worship setting, *Kyrios* designates the unequalled status given to Jesus by God and is the characteristic title given to Jesus in the worship practices of early Christian circles."

in 1 Cor 8:6 does not make explicit the nature of the soteriological relationship, in 8:11 Paul makes the connection between the believer and Christ's death on the believer's behalf: ὁ ἀδελφὸς δι' ὃν Χριστὸς ἀπέθανεν. The Corinthian Christian community, in all its diversity and disfunctionality, exists because Christ has died for them.

The significance of Christ's activity does not end with his death on their behalf; rather, Paul understands Christ to have an ongoing presence and activity within the community. While chapter 8 mentions the salvific relationship between the believer and Christ, chapter 10 describes the present interaction between the believer and Christ. The Corinthians are warned in 1 Cor 10:9 not to test Christ. This draws on the narrative of the Wilderness Generation testing God's patience and forbearance by engaging in sinful behavior. Concerning the Lord's Supper, Hurtado comments,

Clearly the Lord's supper is here the Christian cult meal where the Lord Jesus plays a role that is explicitly likened to that of the deities of the pagan cults and, even more astonishingly, to the role of God! This is not merely a memorial feast for a dead hero. Jesus is perceived as the living and powerful *Kyrios* who owns the meal and presides at it, and with whom believers have fellowship as with a god.¹⁰⁹

The active role of Christ in the community of believers undergirds Paul's argument about the Lord's Supper in 1 Cor 10:14-22. The key word is κοινωνία. There is a close fellowship between the believer and the Lord in the celebration of the Lord's Supper. Because both Christ and demons are active in their respective meals, the believer cannot participate in both and remain faithful to Christ. The greatest danger for the believer is to arouse the jealous anger of the Lord (1 Cor 10:22). The idea of Christ's active presence in

¹⁰⁹ Hurtado, *Lord Jesus Christ*, 146.

judging and punishing abuses in the Lord's Supper is elaborated in 1 Cor 11:27-34.

While the theme of eschatological judge is present, the more highly emphasized role is the Lord as the really present judge in the community. The threat is not so much of a future judgment but rather that Christ might effect his judgment presently in the community (cf. 1 Cor 11:27-32).

This active and jealous presence of the Lord seems to contrast the description of the Lord in 1 Cor 10:26. Here the Lord (originally referring to Yahweh but now probably interpreted by Paul to be a reference to Christ) is the one who possesses the whole earth. The Lord's possession of all things is founded, as in other Jewish texts, on the fact that the Lord created all things. The representation of the Lord as Creator and Possessor of the earth is somewhat more distant than the representation of the Lord as the dynamically present Savior and Judge. And Paul uses this distinction to make different points. The active judging Lord warns the believer about unfaithfulness. And the unassailable Possessor of all things assures the believer of the Lord's control in a pluralistic environment.

Understandings of False Worship

The fundamental differences that led to disagreement at Corinth were centered—not so much on who God is but rather—on the understanding of what an idol is in relationship to God. All parties—Paul, the Strong, and the Weak—could agree that there was one Creator God and there was one Lord and Savior. Their agreement about the identity of God means that Paul does not define false worship as thinking wrongly about God like Wisdom and Philo or even like Paul elsewhere (e.g., Rom 1; cf. 1 Cor 10:1). But they

disagreed concerning the practical implications of these beliefs with respect to other gods. The Strong seemed to have had a very narrow category for what constituted false worship. Presumably, the Strong thought false worship involved *both* the action of being in an idol's presence *and* the personal belief in the reality of that idol. On the basis of God's oneness, they argued that being in the idol's presence alone would not constitute false worship. Coming out of a background (perhaps recently?) of worshipping idols, the Weak judged false worship to be *either* the action of being in the idol's presence *or* personal belief in the reality of that idol. Paul understands that there are spiritual forces that oppose God's reign, and these forces are focused especially on the worship of idols. False worship, for Paul, involves actions of devotion to something other than God, which constitute κοινωνία with demons. Idol gods are not real, but demons exist behind the worship of these false gods. Eating food in the presence of an idol is unfaithfulness to Christ depicted in the analogy of the fundamental incompatibility of the Lord's Supper and a meal before an idol in the presence of demons.

Conclusions

After the time when Paul brought the gospel to these Corinthians and they began "to call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Cor 1:2) the church began to have serious issues as they reverted to practices characteristic of their pagan lifestyle. One such practice was the Strong faction's desire to eat εἰδωλόθυστα (food sacrificed to an idol-god and eaten in the idol-god's temple), and Paul viewed this as unacceptable practice on account of a believer's obligations of love to other believers and of faithfulness to Christ. The approach of this analysis has been to look at how the representation of God functions in

Paul's argument, especially in comparison to other Hellenistic Jewish idol polemics. While this is an argument made about the acceptability or non-acceptability of particular practices, it is an argument made on theological grounds, and these theological underpinnings have been largely unexplored. As Paul crafts his argument and attempts to make different points concerning the permissible interactions with idols and idol-food, he represents God in different, although compatible, ways. In 1 Cor 8, Paul affirms the Strong's assertion that there is only one God, but Paul also begins to reframe their theological reasoning to focus on the dynamic soteriological role of the Lord Jesus Christ in the community. The fact that God is the sole Creator implies that he is the only God and is not threatened by so-called pagan gods, but the fact that Christ died for the Corinthian Christians means that they have obligations to other Christians. The significance of Christ's soteriological role is even more pronounced in 1 Cor 10 where Christ's active provision for and judgment of the Corinthians is analogous to God's interactions with the Wilderness Generation. This comparison demonstrates to the Strong that God's people can commit idolatry (contra Wisdom) and that God will judge even his own people. Moreover, the ongoing fellowship that the Corinthians have with Christ in the celebration of the Lord's Supper demands that they not have fellowship with idol gods or demons. But then Paul assures the Corinthians that the Lord is Lord of everything, and idol-gods and demons do not threaten the Lord; thus, they can eat anything so long as it is sufficiently detached from the idol-god. By appealing on the one hand to God's uniqueness as Creator and the other hand to the Lord's dynamic soteriological relationship with the Christians, Paul is able both to preserve the idea of the

transcendent unassailability of God and give weight to the demands of a really present Savior.

CHAPTER 7

SUMMARY, SYNTHESIS, AND SIGNIFICANCE

Introduction

Despite the prevalence of discussion concerning idolatry in Jewish texts—especially Hellenistic Jewish texts whose authors were living in a culture dominated by Greco-Roman religion—the theme of idolatry is not dealt with extensively in early Christian texts. In the New Testament, Paul’s instructions in 1 Cor 8-10 stands alone as the only extended instruction concerning idolatry. The proper interpretation of these chapters has generated a great deal of debate because the flow of Paul’s argument is not immediately discernible to the modern reader. In agreement with some other recent analyses, I have made the case that 1 Cor 8-10 forms a unified and persuasive argument prohibiting the consumption of εἰδωλόθυτα (food sacrificed and eaten within the temple precincts). The Strong at Corinth should abstain from eating εἰδωλόθυτα on account of love for those for whom Christ died and on account of exclusive faithfulness to and fellowship with Christ.

I have also suggested that a proper understanding of Paul’s argument must place him as a participant in larger conversations about idolatry occurring in Hellenistic Judaism. Much of this project was devoted to understanding how three particular Hellenistic Jewish texts (Wisdom, Philo’s *De decalogo*, and Josephus’ *Contra Apionem*) constructed their arguments about idols. Several things emerged from the analysis of these texts. Each of these authors made arguments about practice, and they made their

arguments on theological grounds. Their arguments involve a particular view of God that shapes how they view idols and interactions with idols. Understanding the strands of interpretation in the theological frameworks of Hellenistic Judaism allows us to understand more clearly Paul's argument as he participates in these larger conversations about idolatry. Moreover, comparing these texts to First Corinthians enables us to appreciate more fully how Paul's theological and practical thinking is shaped radically by his belief in the Lord Jesus Christ as Savior and Judge.

This concluding chapter is organized into three parts: (1) summary of preceding chapters; (2) synthesis of the representations of God and definitions of false worship in Paul, Wisdom, Philo, and Josephus; and (3) explanation of the significance of this project.

Summary of Preceding Chapters

Chapter 1

Chapter 1 noted the (apparent?) incoherence of Paul's argument in First Corinthians 8-10 and reviewed some of the previous explanations of its coherence or incoherence. The approaches were broadly divided into those scholars who viewed chapters 8-10 as irreconcilably incoherent and those who sought to explain how they were coherent. The first group is comprised of source critics who partition these chapters into sections from many letters. Scholars in the second group made arguments for coherence on the basis of different dining locations and rhetorical structures. I sided with those seeking to explain Paul's argument as a unified prohibition of eating food eaten in idols' temples, which Paul argues is idolatry. Paul uses the rhetorical *partitio* in order to

quote and refute positions of the Strong. I suggested that an overlooked feature of Paul's argument is the variation in the way that he represents God. While Paul gives instructions about particular practices (e.g., dining location, presence of idols, the conscience of others, etc.), he is making arguments on the basis of a particular view of the deity. This chapter showed that previous scholars have not examined closely the ways that Paul represents God and its implications on how idols are portrayed. Chapter 1 proposed that a helpful lens for understanding 1 Cor 8-10 would be to compare it with contemporary arguments made by Hellenistic Jews paying particular attention to the way that these authors represent God and its implications for their understanding of idols.

Chapter 2

While Chapter 1 showed that understanding how God is represented could provide a better understanding of what behavior is considered idolatrous, and thus prohibited, Chapter 2 demonstrated the complexity of the topic of idolatry in the Hellenistic Jewish world. Although scholars sometimes assume that Jews uniformly rejected any associations with idols, the reality is that all Hellenistic Jews interacted with idols to some degree. The discussions in Hellenistic communities were about the degree to which one could interact with idols and still be considered to be within the bounds of faithful Judaism. Hellenistic Jewish authors, just like Paul and the Corinthian Christians, were negotiating the boundaries of what it meant to be idolatrous, and thus inside or outside the community. *Artapanus Fragment 3* and *Joseph and Asenath* were examined in order to demonstrate the poles in Hellenistic Judaism concerning the acceptable interactions with idols. On the one hand, Asenath is the example of piety because she

severs entirely any contact with idols, and on the other hand Artapanus describes pious Moses, the hero of Judaism, as the one who founded certain Egyptian idol cults and theriolatry. Even though these authors arose from a similar provenance, interpreted the same Scriptures, and considered themselves to be monotheistic, they came to radically different conclusions concerning the acceptable interactions that one could have with pagan gods. Both authors, like Paul, retold the past in order to instruct their communities about how to live in the present. This analysis showed that there was a variety of positions concerning what constituted idolatry and that these authors were defining the boundaries of acceptable and prohibited practices.

The fact that the definition of idolatry was a matter of practice also meant that it involved a number of other issues. It determined the social interactions that the “pious” could have in the broader pagan culture. The definition of idolatry also defined the boundaries of the community. Those within the community do not practice behaviors that the community deemed to be idolatrous. But at the heart of these discussions were a series of theological issues as authors attempted to define what is God and non-god and also the danger or harmlessness of associating with non-gods. It was noted that one’s definition of God largely determines his/her category of non-god. Then I described some of the different ways that Paul represents God in 1 Cor 8-10. Paul was certainly not the first Hellenistic Jew to define idolatry and then prohibit it. Three other extended critiques of idolatry in Hellenistic Jewish texts provide a window into the way Hellenistic Jews were making arguments concerning pagan religion: the Wisdom of Solomon, Philo’s *De decalogo*, and Josephus’ *Contra Apionem*. With these texts serving as representatives of

arguments being made by Hellenistic Jews, we are in a position to examine where Paul reproduces, abandons, or modifies pre-existing traditions. At the outset we can note one thing that is unique about Paul's approach: the risen Christ shapes how he understands the nature of the community and the activity of the divine among the community.

Chapter 3

Chapter 3 analyzed the critique against pagan religion in the Wisdom of Solomon. Drawing on Greco-Roman philosophy and rhetoric, Wisdom makes a sophisticated critique of Greco-Roman religious belief and practice in order to dissuade Jews from engaging in idolatry and bolster their pride in their ancestral beliefs. Throughout Wisdom, the author emphasizes that God provides for his people and punishes their enemies. Chapters 11-19 (describing wisdom's role in the exodus) are cast in this polemical tone, and the critique of false religions in 13:1-15:19 is especially antagonistic.

Wisdom organizes false religion into three categories: nature worship, idolatry, and theriolatry. Nature worshipers receive the least harsh rebuke because they genuinely sought God. In the category of nature worshippers, Wisdom critiques Stoicism's failure to distinguish God from nature by appealing to Platonism's transcendent God, ὁ ὄν. But Platonism's transcendent, unknowable God makes Himself known in self-revelation to a particular people in the Jewish Scriptures (Exod 3:14). While nature worshippers are guilty of incomplete inference, idol-craftsmen intentionally deceive the masses, and will receive the eschatological judgment of God. In their leisure and with base materials, woodcutters and potters craft gods in the forms of humans and animals. Idols are the works of human hands, and are twice removed from the divine. Wisdom heightens the

Prophets' satire of idolatry, and makes two significant additions. Wisdom provides euhemeristic explanations for the origins of idolatry, emerging from the grief of a father or a desire to honor a distant ruler. And Wisdom asserts that the invention of idolatry is the source of all evil. Most foolish and miserable of all false worshippers are the Egyptians who engage in idolatry and also theriolatry. Even worse, the Egyptians worship the most hateful and useless kinds of animals.

Wisdom 13-15, read in the context of the Book as a whole, argues that idolatry is a foolish pagan invention with disastrous effects including the sure punishment of God. On the one hand, Wisdom argues that God is utterly distinct from Creation. It is this distinction that makes nature worship flawed (because it does not perceive the distinction) and idolatry foolish (because God is different than that material world). But on the other hand, God is actively involved in the created world, especially with his elect people. God cares for his people, and punishes their wicked enemies. Analogous to the way God punished the Egyptians in the exodus, God's eschatological judgment especially awaits idolaters and theriolaters who have thought wrongly about God, engaged in immoral action, and oppressed God's people.

Chapter 4

The subject of Chapter 4 is Philo's *De decalogo*, which fits into the broader corpus of Philo's Exposition of the Law. In the Exposition, and especially in *De decalogo*, Philo explains the Jewish Law in order to assure Jews (and probably Gentile sympathizers) of its intellectual superiority and thereby to provide a convincing argument for its practice. Wisdom is more carefully structured than *De decalogo*, but *De decalogo*

evidences a deeper understanding of philosophy and more complex thought. Philo interprets the Law as the perfect expression of the law of nature, and he explains that the best philosophy finds its truest expression in the Law. Philo interprets Commandments One and Two to prohibit Greco-Roman religious belief and practice. He has the same three categories for pagan aberrations (nature worshippers, idolaters, and theriolaters) as Wisdom, and he arranges them in this order because that is the order in which the Law treats them.

Philo interprets the First Commandment to be a prohibition of worshipping nature. Central to Philo's theological thought is the fundamental ontological distinction between God and everything else. God exists within Himself and everything else is contingent upon the Creator. Philo can draw on the images for God in the LXX (e.g., Father, King, and Ruler), but he reinterprets these to refer to God's creative role, not his interpersonal relationship with a particular people. For example, the worship of nature is honoring the subjects above the King. Those who worship nature rely only on their physical senses and deify the four elements, celestial bodies, the heavens, or the cosmos. But this is a category mistake of failing to recognize that the Craftsman is greater than his craft.

The Second Commandment prohibits both idolatry and theriolatry. While nature worshippers deify those things that are the brothers of humans (i.e. they are direct creations of God), idolaters err more greatly by deifying soulless things. Philo identifies the cult image with the god, and argues that pagan gods are manmade in contrast to God who is the Self-Existent Creator. Philo does not repeat the scriptural descriptions of

idolatry as adultery and disloyalty (these images would define God anthropomorphically as Husband or King) or forsaking of ancestral customs (this would imply that the Law is not discernible through philosophical reflection on nature); rather, idolatry is an error of and harm to the soul. This definition of idolatry as harm to the soul corresponds to Philo's presentation of the Law as the most wonderful support of the soul. The effect of being deceived by the craftsmen is that the idolater is miserable and leads a wretched life. Because piety can refer to thinking properly about God, impiety can be defined as thinking wrongly about God; thus, Philo expands the category of false worship from primarily external acts to include improper understandings of God (in contrast to the Scriptures on which he comments that define idolatry primarily as improper action). Philo dismisses theriolatry without making a logical argument against it; rather, he ridicules their foolishness and claims that everyone would agree with his assessment intuitively. The Egyptians pass over useful animals and worship the vilest of creatures, and visitors to Egypt even ridicule this folly.

Chapter 5

Chapter 5 analyzed the polemic against Greek religion in Josephus' *Contra Apionem*. Perhaps no other historical person better demonstrates the challenges of Hellenistic Jews living under Roman rule than Josephus, who was formerly a leader of the Jewish resistance to Rome but then writes under the patronage of the Flavian emperors. The work is an apology for Jewish belief and practice. Although the implied audience is upper-class Romans, Josephus writes first and foremost to educated upper-class Jews in order to encourage Jews about the respectability of Jewish belief and

practice and its superiority over other ways of life. *Contra Apionem* 2.236-286 explains Jewish religious difference from Greeks (especially as a defense of Jews being considered religiously intolerant and anti-social), and Josephus begins that explanation in *C. Ap.* 2.236-254 by leveling his critique of Greek gods. Josephus claims that he would prefer not to criticize other gods, but his opponents have forced him. Josephus' main point is that Jews would be foolish to abandon their superior way of life (extolled in *C. Ap.* 2.145-235) for the foolishness of Greek belief and practice (critiqued in *C. Ap.* 2.236-286).

Josephus wants to align the best of philosophy with Judaism, and therefore he begins his critique of popular Greek religion by stating that Greek philosophers have repeatedly criticized popular Greek religious belief and practice. Rather than Judaism being an obscure sect, Greek philosophy actually proves it to me the truest way of life. Josephus, like most Jewish polemics against pagan religion, argues that the physicality of the cult statues demonstrates their non-reality, but Josephus is unique in focusing the bulk of his criticism on the myths about the gods, drawn primarily from Homer and Hesiod. He does not mount a logical argument as to why the myths about the Greek gods prove that they are not gods; rather, he describes the most outlandish myths and assumes his audience will agree that these gods are not really gods.

The Greek gods are many, similar to humans, immoral, and subservient. The plurality of gods is unthinkable because that implies rankings and quarrels among the gods, and Josephus' Jewish definition of God will not admit more than a singular God. Most foolish is that the Greeks have fashioned their gods into the forms of humans by

assigning them specific characteristics to embody, territories to rule, trades at which to work, and skills to have. In a *reductio ad absurdum*, Josephus questions why people would worship gods so immoral that their behavior would be most reprehensible if performed by humans. Moreover, the Greek gods are subservient to things internally (e.g., their passions) and externally (e.g., Fate). Josephus' most extended critique is of the supreme god, Zeus, probably because Zeus could represent a temptation for Jews in a way that most gods would not. Most to be blamed for this folly are the legislators who did not reign in the poets and artisans. Greek legislators, generally praised in the ancient world for their wisdom, should have emulated Moses in making piety the foundation for humanity.

Chapter 6

In Chapter 6, this study turned to the examination of Paul's instructions to the Corinthian Christians in 1 Cor 8-10. The form of First Corinthians is quite different than the preceding three texts in that it is a letter written to a specific community that has an ongoing relationship with the author. Paul founded the Christian community at Corinth and continues to have a significant role in shaping their belief and practice. Paul writes this letter of admonition in order to persuade them to live in light of their new calling and life in Christ and not be conformed to their former pagan ways of living. While Paul draws on the Jewish Scriptures and Hellenistic Jewish interpretations of them, Paul's belief is shaped radically by his understanding of who Christ is and his active presence in the Corinthian Christian community. The letter has an episodic character as Paul gives instruction on a number of practical issues, first about oral reports and then about written

questions. In chapters 8-10, Paul gives instructions to the community concerning food associated with idols, with the majority of the instruction focusing on εἰδωλόθυτα (food sacrificed and eaten within the temple precincts). Paul consistently prohibits Christians from eating εἰδωλόθυτα by appealing first to their obligation to love one another and then to their obligations of exclusive faithfulness to Christ.

Paul employs a rhetorical device, the *partitio*, in order to quote the Corinthians and then refute their positions. While the original audience would have known well the lines of argumentation, the identification of the Strong's positions is not as clear to modern readers. It seems that a certain "Strong" faction in the community—probably motivated by their desires for social advancement and pleasure—has claimed that associations with idols are permissible because idol-gods do not exist. That is, their monotheism has provided justification for their permissive attitudes toward εἰδωλόθυτα. They base their actions on the confession that Paul delivered to them (1 Cor 8:6) which affirms One God the Creator and One Lord, the agent of both creation and salvation. In chapter 10, Paul will explain that the Strong do not have the "right" to eat this food, but in chapter 8 he entertains this pseudo-right in order to explain that Christian action is based on love for those for whom Christ died. The Weak in Corinth have witnessed the confident actions of the Strong and as a result the consciences of the Weak are harmed so that they are unsure of what faithfulness to Christ entails. He makes two arguments from the lesser to the greater to explain that the "right" to do something should be sacrificed because of what Christ has done. If Paul is willing to give up all meat for the sake of other Christians (1 Cor 8:13), the Strong should be willing to give up this specific meat.

And if Paul is willing to sacrifice his legitimate rights for the sake of other Christians (chapter 9), the Strong should be willing to sacrifice their pseudo-right.

In chapter 10, Paul's prohibition of εἰδωλόθυτα is made on the basis of exclusive devotion to Christ who saves and judges the Corinthian Christian community. He explains that the blessings enjoyed by Corinthians are analogous to the blessings enjoyed by the Wilderness Generation. Nevertheless, Paul says that their enjoyment of blessing from God did not mean that God was pleased with them because God judged and punished them. The idolatrous actions of the Wilderness Generation and God's judgment of them serve as examples and warnings for the Corinthians, so that they "not be idolaters as some of them were!" (1 Cor 10:7). Paul appeals primarily to four narratives drawn from the Wilderness Generation: the Golden Calf (Exodus 32), intermarriage with the Midianites (Numbers 25), judgment by serpents (Numbers 21), and grumbling in the wilderness (Numbers 16). These narratives warn the Corinthians that God does not tolerate idolatry among God's people, and then Paul commands, "Therefore, my beloved, flee idolatry!" (1 Cor 10:17). The most forceful argument that Paul makes is that the Christian celebration of the Lord's Supper constitutes a κοινωνία with Christ analogous to the pagans' κοινωνία with demons in their worship of idol-gods. Christians are obligated to exclusive faithfulness to Christ, as indicated by the singularity of one cup and one loaf in the Lord's Supper, and their eating of εἰδωλόθυτα compromises that devotion. Even more severe is that their eating of εἰδωλόθυτα arouses the jealousy of Christ which none of them could bear. While Paul is on the topic of food associated with idols, he discusses two other contexts in which a Christian might encounter this food: the

meat market and at a non-believer's house. In these cases, the Christian has the freedom to eat the food (so long as no one indicates that the food has been sacrificed) because all the earth is God's creation.

Synthesis of Arguments by Paul, Wisdom, Philo, and Josephus

One of the goals of this study has been to understand these authors on their own terms, but it is also helpful to synthesize some of the streams of interpretation in Hellenistic Judaism in order to compare these authors' arguments. The challenge for Jews and Christians in talking about idolatry is the balance between representing God as personally present and thus affected by human actions or removed and thus non-threatened by human actions. If God is represented as the unassailable Creator (and thus slightly distanced from the community), the consequences of idolatry are not that God will judge the offender; rather, the consequences of idolatry are internalized to be harming one's soul. Conversely, if God has a personal and active presence among the community, there is a danger of offending God and incurring God's wrath. These authors are wrestling with the balance of representing God in a way that protects God's uniqueness and also allows them to prohibit idolatrous actions. For these authors, theological arguments were eminently practical. They affected what were permissible and impermissible actions and thereby established the boundaries of the community. These four authors were all concerned to preserve monotheism while also making a persuasive argument about not engaging improperly with the religious beliefs of the Greco-Roman culture.

Representations of God

One of the central things that this study has shown is that arguments concerning the permissibility or prohibition of certain actions involve a certain view of the deity, and the specific manner in which God is represented shapes the argument. When these authors vary the way that God is represented, they are making deliberate choices with implications on their arguments. It is difficult to say if their theological understanding of God drives their conclusions about the acceptability of certain actions or if their practice drives certain theological emphases—likely it is a combination of both factors. This interplay between theology and practice makes understanding the representation of God a crucial aspect of understanding these authors' arguments and conclusions.

Most Jews would have understood God's role as Creator to be one of the primary representations of God (with God's representation as Redeemer/Deliverer in the exodus also being of central significance). It was a common mode of argumentation to discredit other gods by claiming that the Jewish God alone was Creator. Wisdom and Philo, interpreting the LXX through the lens of Platonic philosophy, make the ontological distinction between God and everything else on the grounds that God is the self-existent Creator and everything else is dependent creation—only the Creator is worthy of worship. Paul implicitly agrees with this distinction, but Paul also affirms the significance of Christ by attributing creative (and more importantly salvific) agency to him. The role of Christ in creation represents a remarkable shift in this stream of interpretation because Philo and Wisdom reinforce God's oneness by appealing to God's role as Creator. Stemming especially from the centrality of the *Shema* in Jewish religious life, the oneness

of God was an engrained tenet of Jewish belief. Josephus attacks the ridiculousness of the gods especially because of the theological problems of polytheism; in fact, it was the Jewish practice of monotheism in worship that necessitated Josephus' defense in the first place. The centrality of belief in God as the only Creator carries over into Pauline Christianity, so that no one in Corinth seems to be questioning this theological proposition.

While Greek and Roman gods share many qualities with humans, Hellenistic Jews insisted on speaking of God in non-anthropomorphic terms, which meant that they had to interpret carefully the (apparent?) anthropomorphisms in the Septuagint. The likeness of Greek gods to humans and even animals was a source of great ridicule by Josephus. Similarly Wisdom and Philo eschewed the notion that God was like humans. The challenge for these authors was how to interpret the Jewish Scriptures in a way that did not denigrate them but also in a way that could explain the anthropomorphic representations as descriptions of deeper realities. Philo bluntly states, "God is not like a human" (*Decal.* 32). This rejection of anthropomorphic descriptions of God is central to the manner in which he interprets the imagery of God in the Jewish Scriptures. Philo maintains the anthropomorphic images, but the representation of God as King describes his sovereign control (*Decal.* 51, 52, 61, 155) and God as Father describes his creative acts (*Decal.* 32, 51, 53, 64, 105,107). Similarly, Wisdom avoids anthropomorphic descriptions of God and prefers categories such as Creator and True Existence. Although Wisdom avoids anthropomorphic descriptions of God, it does not follow that Wisdom's God is impersonal. The idol polemic is situated within a section in which Wisdom

describes how God has acted on behalf of God's people, and the apostrophes in the idol polemic are directed to a personal God. Wisdom describes this universal Creator as "our God" who has special care for a particular people. While Wisdom can use the Father imagery to describe God's providential control of creation (e.g., 14:2-3), Wisdom can also use the Father imagery to describe God as the covenantal Father. In some instances, the Fatherhood of God is implied by the designation "your people" because God's people are described as God's children (e.g., Wis 9:7; 12:19; 18:13). God's people are also identified more specifically as the righteous (Wis 2:13, 18; 5:5; 18:7), not idolaters (Wis 15:14-15), and God's people in every case are understood to be Israel (Wis 9:7, 12; 12:19; 16:2, 3, 5, 20; 18:3, 13; 19:2, 5, 22). The demonstrations of God's providential control are in God's care for particular Jewish heroes: Moses (14:3) and Noah (14:5-7). The apostrophe to God in Wis 15:1-5 alludes to description of God in Exodus 34 when the covenant is renewed. God has entered into a covenantal relationship with a particular people, and God acts in history to care for them. Wisdom 10-19 (cf. 16:1-4) is a description of how God exercises sovereign control over the cosmos to care for God's people and punish their enemies. Philo is deeply committed to his Jewish community, but his approach in *De decalogo* is different from Wisdom because Philo meticulously removes particularizing elements from the Sinai narrative.¹ While Exodus 19 and 20 make the covenantal context of the giving of the Law explicit, Philo omits this element along with particularizing ethnic descriptions of the people to whom the Law was given.

¹ See Trent A. Rogers, "Philo's Universalization of Sinai in *Decal.* 32-49," *SPhilo* 24 (2012): 89-109.

Paul seems much less concerned to reinterpret the anthropomorphic descriptions of God; rather, Paul can attribute personal qualities to Christ in order to show the severity of the Corinthians' offense. Moreover, the language of God as Father from the LXX is applied to the relationship between God and Christ. Paul understands the divine Christ to have physical properties, not only in his death (1 Cor 8:11), but also as having continuing impact in the community (1 Cor 10:16-17).

While Philo and Josephus do not hold out the threat of God's direct judgment, Wisdom and Paul think that unfaithfulness to God has the potential to result in God's judgment. God cares deeply for God's people and will punish the oppressor's of God's people. In the first section of Wisdom, the author describes the hope of the righteous as God's eschatological judgment of the wicked (e.g., Wis 3:10; 4:16-5:14), and in the idol polemic, Wisdom promises that God hates and will punish both the idol and the idolater, who are identified as the enemies of God's people (Wis 14:9-14, 30-31). This description of God's direct judgment in vindication of God's people corresponds to the more personal description of God in Wisdom. The immanency of judgment is not as explicit in Wisdom, however, as it is in Paul's 1 Corinthians in which Christ's judgment manifests itself in the immediate punishment of offenders (e.g., 1 Cor 11:30). Wisdom describes how God punished the wicked in the past and holds out the hope of future judgment, but there is little thought of God's active presence among the community in the present. For Paul, there is a very real danger that the actions of the Corinthians could arouse the jealous wrath of the Lord that could be realized both presently and in the future (1 Cor 10:21-22).

Defining False Worship

Corresponding to an author's definition of God is his definition of what is false worship, and just as God is represented variously so also false worship is defined variously.² As mentioned above, Wisdom and Philo make a fundamental ontological distinction between God and everything else. God is the self-existent Creator, and everything else belongs to the category of "non-God." Drawing on the distinction between God's essence and everything else, Philo argues that worshipping or ascribing divinity to anything other than God is false worship. Philo's understanding of false worship is the deification of anything that is created (either by God or, worse, by humans). Nature and the celestial bodies are the "brothers" of humans, and it is absurd to worship as divine one's brother because the two are of the same nature (*Decal.* 64). Failure to distinguish between Creator and creation is tantamount to not distinguishing between the subject and the ruler (*Decal.* 61, 64). Even worse than worshipping nature is worshipping idols that lack souls. The human, by possessing a soul, is superior to the soulless idol, so it is nonsensical for the human to worship the idol (*Decal.* 76). Wisdom appeals to the ontological distinction between God (who is self-existent) and humans

² A common understanding of false worship in the Jewish Scriptures is to forsake the Jewish ancestral religion, but these authors do not make arguments along those lines. Perhaps, they abandon this traditional line of argumentation because their audiences (whether or not it is the implied or intended audience) include those outside the ancestral tradition. Because pagans should be able to understand God and right action analogically by observing nature, Wisdom and Philo criticize pagans for their inability to think rightly about God and worship properly. Philo and Josephus note that the best Greek philosophers have been able to understand something about who God is. Thus, these authors do not argue for the audience to reject the alien cult; rather, they attempt to demonstrate the foolishness of Greco-Roman religious expressions. Even though Paul appeals to the Jewish Scriptures and describes the Israelites as "our fathers" (1 Cor 10:1), he is writing to Gentiles who have believed in Jesus as the Christ. So the appeal not to forsake ancestral religion would make little sense.

(who are contingent upon God) in order to explain that idols lack souls (Wis 15:8, 16-17). Humans have borrowed souls and are unable to impart souls to their creations, the idols. Josephus' argument is slightly different because he discredits the gods as divine, not by criticizing their ontology, but rather by describing their behavior as unbecoming for God. The pagan gods are numerous (*C. Ap.* 2.239, 2.251), humanlike (*C. Ap.* 2.240, 2.242;), animal-like (*C. Ap.* 2.240), immoral (*C. Ap.* 2.241, 2.2446), and enslaved (*C. Ap.* 2.247). All of these qualities do not belong to the category of "God" and thus, they disprove the reality of the gods. The category mistake of worshipping something other than God is also what lies behind Philo and Wisdom's critiques of animal worship, a practice especially characteristic of their Alexandrian context. While no animal belongs to the category of "God," the Egyptians are even so foolish as to worship the worst of animals (e.g., Wis 15:18-19; Philo, *Decal.* 79-80).

Wisdom and Philo want to promote Judaism as the truest philosophy, and this emphasis has implications for how competing philosophies are treated. If Judaism is primarily a religion of personal and corporate devotion to God, then it makes sense to describe non-devotion as betrayal. But if Judaism is a philosophy, (even while recognizing that "philosophy" in the ancient world describes a way of life) then deviation from Jewish worship is a cognitive error expressed in improper practice. For Philo, the primary category of describing false worship is cognitive error; thus, he redefines idolatry from being an external act of worship to an internal error of the soul. More fundamental than the external acts of improper worship is the ignorance of idolaters about who God is (e.g., Philo, *Decal.* 8; cf. *Spec.* 1.331-332; *Ebr.* 108-110; *Conf.* 144). Philo also describes

nature worship as a delusion or wandering from the truth (*Decal.* 52, 66). For Wisdom, the nature worshipper is guilty of error and ignorance (13:1), but this person has made a genuine attempt to seek God (13:6). Wisdom's broad category for false worship is incorrect thinking about God. This is evident both in explicit texts (e.g., Wis 13:2, 10; 15:15) and the mockery with which Wisdom treats the process of making idols—it is a foolish endeavor. The idolaters will be punished (not just for their actions but also) because they have thought incorrectly about God (Wis 14:30; cf. 14:22). Having described the folly of Greek myths about the gods, Josephus labels these thoughts as “irregular and erroneous conceptions of the deity.”³ Josephus does not first and foremost critique Greek religious practice, but he focuses on their beliefs in the gods. These erroneous conceptions arise from the legislators' ignorance about God (*C. Ap.* 2.251).

The masses are simply deceived, but the artists, poets, and painters intentionally deceive of the masses. Wisdom, Philo, and Josephus are in line with the majority of Jewish thought about God in the rejection of physical representations of God's image (see esp. Josephus, *C. Ap.* 2.191). Thus, they reject the Greco-Roman images as impious and mock those who craft them and trust in them. Wisdom especially accredits ill-will to the artisans who intentionally deceive the masses, so that the error of idolatry seems to be intentional on the part of the craftsman and simply foolish on the part of most common worshippers (Wis 15:3). Philo argues that because the idol-gods do not exist and craftsmen know that they do not exist, the craftsmen use every deception at their disposal

³ Josephus, *C. Ap.* 2.250 (Thackeray, LCL).

to convince people that the idol-gods are real. Sculptors and painters (*Decal.* 7-8, 66, 70, esp. *Spec.* 1.29), craftsmen (*Decal.* 71), and mythmakers (*Decal.* 55; *Post.* 165) conspire to deceive the masses into false belief about the idol's reality. Josephus blames the legislators for not reigning in the painters and poets (*C. Ap.* 2.251-2). In contrast to Wisdom and Philo, Josephus does not accredit ill-will to the artisans. They simply introduce the gods that they choose.

In both *De decalogo* and *De specialibus legibus*, Philo argues that the First Commandment prohibits polytheism because polytheism, like nature worship, is the deification of the created (*Decal.* 65; *Spec.* preface; 1.331-2, 344; cf. *Migr.* 179; *Her.* 169; *Virt.* 212). For Philo, the First Commandment also instructs about God's oneness with the implication that polytheism is altogether flawed. Wisdom and Josephus would agree with Philo, but they do not make the distinction as neatly. Josephus begins with the idea that God is one and goes on to criticize the pagan multiplication of gods. He describes how the idea of polytheism is erroneous by describing the inconsistencies and nonsensical categories into which the gods are forced. The ridiculousness of a plurality of deities evidences itself as the various gods are confined to specific realms (*C. Ap.* 2.240), fight each other (*C. Ap.* 2.243), and abuse one another (*C. Ap.* 2.245). While Philo attacks the categorization itself (polytheism is flawed because there can be only one being in the category of God), Josephus attacks the specific example of polytheistic belief (Greek polytheism contains numerous errors.).

Philo wants to promote the communal practice of the Law in Alexandria, but to defend the Law as the best philosophy he describes the Law as being directed at an

individual's soul (*Decal.* 50, 58). By internalizing the Law, the benefits and consequences of obedience are realized in the soul of an individual. Corresponding to his internalization of the Law, Philo also internalizes the sin of idolatry. Philo's argument throughout the *Exposition of the Law* is that the piety prescribed in the Mosaic Law can be arrived at even by non-Jews by examining nature and philosophy. This consistent assertion implies that Gentiles are inexcusable for their false worship even though they did not receive the explicit prohibition of idolatry in the Mosaic Law. Even the origin of idolatry is not located external to humans (such as in the rebellion of angels); rather, idolatry originates in the pride of human hearts (*Decal.* 6) or in human desire to venerate another (Wis 14:12-21).

In regard to the definition of false worship, Paul is somewhat different than the other authors because he focuses on false worship as improper practice and association (*κοινωνία*). Paul clearly thinks that worship of pagan gods and idols constitutes false worship, and the Corinthians seem to agree. The Israelites engaged in false worship by representing God in the golden calf, and pagan sacrifices constitute false worship because they are really participating with demons. But do the Strong engage in false worship when they participate in meals in an idol's temple? Paul argues that this constitutes false worship because they participate with demons and this action is incompatible with their celebration of the Lord's Supper. Paul's category of false worship includes anything that is incompatible with a believer's undivided devotion to Christ. Paul is much less concerned with the activity of pagans—idolatry is a real danger for those inside the community (*contra* Wisdom).

Understandings of Idols

Both Wisdom and Philo direct the majority of their polemic against false religion at ridiculing the idolatrous practices of pagans. This emphasis is due to several factors, one of which is the visibility and pervasiveness of idolatry. One cannot also help but wonder if idol worship presents an easy target as it is easily misrepresenting and criticized as foolish. Additionally, rejection of images (and thus foreign gods in the form of images) was a well-known Jewish distinction from pagans that often resulted in Jews being ridiculed as atheists. Wisdom contains extended mockeries of idol craftsman—the woodcutter (Wis 13:11-14:2) and the potter (Wis 15:7-13)—critiques that are elaborations on the mockeries that Isaiah 44 makes of idol manufacturers. The description of the idol-makers' activities is nothing new, but Wisdom provides the philosophical underpinnings of these mockeries. Humans have borrowed souls, so they are not capable of imparting life. Wisdom criticizes the non-reality of pagan idols because they are crafted by one who does not have the ability to impart the spirit to them (Wis 13:10; 13:16-19; 14:29; 15:16-17). Only God, who is Self-Existent, has the ability to impart life. Like Deutero-Isaiah and Philo, Wisdom makes a complete identification between the idol and the god. As I have argued, this is not a naïve approach on the part of these Hellenistic Jewish authors. They knew that pagans understood cult images as physical representations of the god's presence. Because these Jews denied the existence of the god, they reasoned that the only thing that is real about the god is its material cult statue. Then the non-reality of the gods is evidenced in the fact that their idols do not move, speak, or act. Similarly, Philo reduces Greco-Roman cultic worship to the worship

of physical images. It is fairly easy to prove that cult images are not divine on account of their composition (their substance is used for common and cultic uses), activity (they have no capacity for action and are not the causes of anything), and existence (they are recent creations by humans) (*Decal.*66). The images are dead and dumb. One of Philo's recurring descriptions for pagan gods is that they are manmade because he believes them to have no existence beyond the physical image that was crafted. Philo even mocks idol worshippers because they would not want to become like their gods (Philo, *Decal.* 74; cf. *Spec.* 2.256; Ps. 115:5-8). Josephus is different in this regard because he does not identify the god entirely with the image. He focuses his critique on the activity attributed to the gods in Greek myths. He does mention the composition of images (*C. Ap.* 2.252) and that no material is sufficient to represent God (*C. Ap.* 2.191), but his critique is focused on the myths about the gods, not their physical representation.

A major difference between the immaterial God and the gods made of wood and stone is that the pagan gods, being identified with the perishable materials of their cult images, are not eternal; they are subsequent to the creation of the material world. Unlike God, idols were not from the beginning. How then did idols come to exist? Wisdom offers an euhemeristic explanation of the idols' existence in terms of a grieving father or an attempt to honor a distant monarch. Wisdom also makes the claim that idolatry is the source of all evil, and Wisdom describes pagan immorality in contrast to the righteousness of the Jews. Philo and Josephus do not give extended euhemeristic explanations for the origins of idolatry, and they place the blame for idolatry on artists. They argue that Moses legislated piety into the laws because he had a proper conception

of God. Those legislators who copied Moses did so inadequately because they removed proper theology from the laws. This oversight created space for artists and poets to degenerate into polytheistic myths.

Paul's understanding of idols is heavily indebted to streams of Jewish interpretations. On the one hand, he agrees with a stream of interpretation that identifies the god with the physical idol and thus reasons that the gods are dead and inactive (cf. the Prophets, Wisdom, Philo, and Josephus). This is the interpretation of the Strong with which Paul agrees (1 Cor 8:4; 10:19-21; cf. 1 Thess 1:9). But he also draws on a stream of interpretation in Judaism that thinks that demons are behind the worship of idol gods. Idols indeed are nothing, but demons are real and oppose the lordship of Christ among the Corinthians.

Significance of this Study

This study has sought to understand Paul's argument in 1 Cor 8-10 in light of its contexts, especially the contexts of Hellenistic Judaism, First Corinthians, and Greco-Roman rhetoric. I have argued that Paul uniformly prohibits Christians from eating food sacrificed to idols and eaten in an idol's temple. I am certainly not the first to make this argument; indeed, my proposal would be somewhat suspect if it was entirely novel. My contribution has been to show *how* Paul argues by employing various representations of God in order to make particular points about the essence of idols and the acceptable interactions with them. In choosing different representations of God to make different

points about idols, Paul is drawing on and shaping the streams of interpretation in Hellenistic Judaism as he reads them in light of Christ.

Although the primary goal of this study is to come to a better understanding of Paul's argument in 1 Cor 8-10, Paul's argument does not make sense apart from understanding it in the context of Hellenistic Jewish attempts to interact with the Greco-Roman world. One contribution of this study is to come to a better understanding of the polemics made by Wisdom, Philo, and Josephus. Only after these authors were analyzed thoroughly in their own right, was the attempt made to compare and contrast them. Each of these authors was making an argument about permissible or impermissible practice, but they made their arguments on theological grounds. The manner in which they represented God affected the way that they understood idols and the potential dangers of associating with idols. Even though these texts were written by Hellenistic Jews who were interpreting the Septuagint, they show variation in the way that they represent God and idols. The similarities of these polemics highlight their interconnectedness as streams of thought in larger Hellenistic Jewish interpretation while their differences highlight the complexity of the issue and the range of interpretations. This extended analysis of Hellenistic Jewish texts seems at first to be the long way of gaining an understanding of Paul, but there is a thickness to Hellenistic Judaism that necessitates careful analysis to understand it properly.

Only after these authors have been understood thoroughly and correctly do they provide a helpful context for understanding Paul's arguments. The majority of Paul's

argument draws on streams of interpretation already existing in Judaism. But the role of Christ radically shapes Paul's theological grid and takes the polemic against idolatry in new directions. Both in terms of its communal impact (ch. 8) and in terms of faithfulness to God (ch. 10), the controlling thought is the salvific role of Christ. Paul's novelty can be appreciated when it is read in the context of these Hellenistic Jewish polemics.

Comparing Paul to other Hellenistic Jewish authors—especially in the way in which they represent God in their idol polemics—provides a clearer understanding of the coherence of Paul's argument. Paul draws on the breadth of representations of God in order to make a persuasive argument prohibiting the Corinthians from eating εἰδωλόθυτα.

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