

Love Child: The use of 1 Corinthians 13 beyond its original context and intent.

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Abstract

In this article, I use the metaphor of the family to explore the potential of 1 Corinthians 13 to transcend its original purpose and context and participate as the living Word of God across different contexts and for different purposes. I argue that a text is born through the integration of a textual-Father (the implied author's purpose), and a contextual-Mother (the implied context). While many post-modern scholars argue that a text should be viewed as an orphan without any roots to the author or original context, I show that love in 1 Corinthians 13 has its own unique character which enables it to transcend its original context and purpose without losing its identity as the offspring of a particular textual-Father and a particular contextual-Mother. I argue that love is characterised by the way it operates within the eschatological tension between the already and the not yet within the church and also in the realm of epistemology.

Introduction

Paul's reflection on love in 1 Cor. 13 has captured people's hearts and minds throughout the ages. It has been preached on and referred to within a variety of contexts for many different purposes. This naturally raises the question about the legitimacy of the way the text is employed. How far can we move from the original purpose of the author within the original context of the Corinthians church, before we can be accused of "abusing" the text? It would be fair to say that scholars are still trying to reach an exegetical consensus regarding the original purpose of the chapter. Hays¹ sees the section as "...straightforwardly ethical. By describing the qualities of love, Paul is seeking to promote the character formation of the members of the Corinthian community." Horrel² sees it as a reaction against the "false values and perceptions of the Corinthians." Grosheide³ links its purpose to liturgy and church order by describing it as "a necessary link in the argument which has as its purpose to assign to the glossolalia its rightful place." Thiselton⁴ agrees with Grosheide and quotes with approval

¹ *First Corinthians* (Louisville, KE: John Knox, 1999), 223.

² *The Social Ethos of the Corinthian Correspondence: Interests and Ideology from 1 Corinthians to 1 Clement* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1996), 183.

³ *Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians* (Grand Rapids, MI: WM. B. Eerdmans, 1976), 303.

⁴ *The First Epistle to the Corinthians: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (Grand Rapids: MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2000), 1027.

Spicq⁵ who places chapter 13 "among the themes which concern worship - from idol foods (Chs. 8-10), dress in worship (11:2,16) and the Eucharist (11: 17-34) to the use of charisms during worship (12:1-14:40)." Against this Walker⁶ argues:

While the subjects of chaps. 12 and 14 are "spiritual gifts" and their role in public worship, in chap. 13. Paul says nothing at all about public worship or, indeed, about the community as such; rather, chap.13 is an encomium on love, and, with its predominance of first person singular verbs, it focuses on the individual, not the community.

Conzelman also wishes to divorce 1 Cor. 13 from chapters 12 and 14, seeing the links with 12:31 and 14:1 as "ragged".⁷ According to him the chapter's style and contents reflect Wisdom literature. These inherent differences have led some scholars to conclude that the original purpose of the text is unimportant for its potential use in other contexts.

In this article, I will argue that texts have a life of their own and by their very nature are free to act by generating new meanings within different contexts and for different purposes. This can however only happen, I will argue, if the integrity of the text is maintained. I will utilise the metaphor of a family to show that the text-child reveals its unique character and identity (contents) which transcends both its textual Father (authorial intent)⁸ and textual Mother (immediate context). The family "genes" determine the characteristics of the text which, in turn, determine the number of other contexts within which, and purposes for which, the text may be used. The textual family thus co-determines the range of possible meanings which may be derived from any individual text. Forcing any text to generate meanings that go against its character and family ethos, I will argue, is to violate the uniqueness and integrity of the text. I will use an analysis of 1 Corinthians 13 to demonstrate and advance the epistemological presuppositions of my argument.

Living texts

Texts can be seen and treated as language coagulated into an object, (*parole parlée*) in contrast to the stream of life discourse (*parole parlant*) which forms, informs and transforms life-worlds. Yet, texts also have the ability to transcend their particular socio-historical context and influence the reader's life-world. Such texts often have a transformational ideological agenda, directed towards the on-going formation of new-, as well as the radical transformation of existing-, life-worlds.⁹ Ideological texts represent the unique way in which an author's particular subjective understanding of reality is

⁵ *Agape in the New Testament, Volume 2: Agape in the Epistles of St. Paul, the Acts of the Apostles and the Epistles of St. James, St. Peter, and St. Jude* (Eugene, Or.: Wipf & Stock Pub, 2006), 139.

⁶ "Is First Corinthians 13 a Non-Pauline Interpolation?" *Cathol. Biblic. Q.* 60, no. 3 (1998): 484.

⁷ *1 Corinthians* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1975), 218,221.

⁸ I acknowledge the elusiveness of authorial intent. In the article, I propose an intertextual Father (or implied author) who is only indirectly available through the text-child. Authorial intention is however recognised in the article as the intention to affect or change the context in some way. This "creates" the text and the text bears the fruit of this intention.

⁹ David Janzen, *The Social Meanings of Sacrifice in the Hebrew Bible: A Study of Four Writings* (Walter de Gruyter, 2004), 58, identifies ideology and world-view as synonymous. Brett "Biblical Studies and Theology: Negotiating the Intersections," *Biblic. Interpret.* 6, no. 2 (1998): 132. defines ideology as "...a wider complex of contested symbols, values and practices which shape and legitimate the socio-economic interest of a particular social group." His definition of ideology is closely aligned to that of Marx. In this article, I understand *culture* as the widest shared social construction of reality; *world-view* as a more specific interpretation of reality within a shared cultural context (i.e., a Christian worldview versus a secular worldview); and ideology as an even narrower expression of a world-view amongst a smaller constituent who are actively seeking to promote their interpretation of reality as the one that should be shared by all.

expressed in opposition to other interpretations of reality with the view of persuading others to share this interpretation.¹⁰ Ideological texts are thus deliberately intentional.

Theological texts are inherently ideological as they also want to persuade the readers to share a particular understanding of reality. The intention of the Biblical texts is to convince believers to inhabit an alternative symbolic world against the dominant worldview and cultural interpretation of reality.¹¹ The Biblical textual canon, furthermore, operates with the status as the *viva vox Dei* in the light of the church's confession that these scriptures have been inspired by the Holy Spirit.¹² The Biblical texts continue to be reflected upon and to be preached in the faith-based expectation that through them God will continue to speak to his church.

Any event of reading or hearing is inevitably interpretative and creative, but for Scripture to be read or heard as Scripture implies a distinctive instance of this dynamic. For Scripture to be read or heard as Scripture indicates the expectation that this event will be divinely creative, interpreting the readers and hearers every bit as much as the readers and hearers interpret the text. Scripture comes to us in the context of the Church's liturgy, not as a dead letter on an aging page but as the vehicle for a living word, as the means of divine address.¹³

In traditional exegesis, however, Biblical texts are often objectified as *parole parlee* and distanced from the contemporary context in which they are expected, by faith, to function.

Because Biblical texts continue to participate in the on-going cultural debate, both within and outside the church, they are able to transcend their immediate context and original purpose. The question remains as to the extent that this can take place before the text is subsumed within the new context to serve an alternative purpose from its original intention. The interaction between the objective exegetical understanding of the text in its original context and the power of the Biblical text to operate as a speech-act of the living God, remains a theological hermeneutical conundrum. I will propose that the use of the metaphor of a family may provide an appropriate hermeneutical key that will anchor the text to its original purpose and context without eliminating the subjective dimension of the text as a relevant human/ divine speech act.¹⁴

The text as family

I am, of course not the first to use the concept of "family" to consider the relationship between the author, the text and the context. Other users, however, though influential, also seem to use the

¹⁰ Harry Morton Johnson, *Sociology: A Systematic Introduction* (Allied Publishers, 1960), 587, links ideology to shared ideas within a particular group.

¹¹ Malina, "The Social Sciences and Biblical Interpretation Reflections on Tradition and Practice," *Interpretation* 36, no. 3 (1982): 229–42, proposes three models to understand socio-cultural reality. The first is the structural-functional model. In this model, society is viewed as a static system where the different elements of the system all cooperate and contribute to the maintenance of the system. The second model, propounded by Stuart Hall, depicts culture as a dynamic and continuously changing product of the battle for cultural dominance amongst competing ideologies within society. Texts may be co-opted as ideological instruments within this struggle. The more relevant and compelling a text is deemed to be in support of a particular ideology, the higher the status which it is accorded. The third model is the symbolic model where society creates and maintains a foundational interpretation of reality by linking symbolic meanings to valued objects and actions.

¹² The inspiration of the Spirit, however, does not exclude human authors, who are often named as part of the text, or the historically shaped contexts which are addressed through the texts.

¹³ Anderson, H in Paul H. Ballard and Stephen R. Holmes, *The Bible in Pastoral Practice: Readings in the Place and Function of Scripture in the Church* (Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2006), 218.

¹⁴ While I am speaking of the text in human terms metaphorical use is different from personification. Metaphors are marked by difference and similarity between the two objects. I understand the text as remaining text but it is here thought of in terms of the human family.

concept more narrowly, primarily focusing on the absence of the author to the text. Plato¹⁵ was the first to use the metaphor of the family to illuminate the relationship between the text and authorial intent. He did this by describing the text as a child, in need of protection by its author father:

And every word, when once it is written, is bandied about, alike among those who understand and those who have no interest in it, and it knows not to whom to speak or not to speak; when ill-treated or unjustly reviled it always needs its father to help it; for it has no power to protect or help itself.

Jacques Derrida¹⁶ extended Plato's idea by referring to the text as an "orphan", whose father is thus unable to come to its aid. Roland Barthes¹⁷ in the same vein, understands the very act of writing as killing the author.

As soon as a fact is narrated no longer with a view to acting directly on reality but intransitively, that is to say, finally outside of any function other than that of the very practice of the symbol itself, this disconnection occurs, the voice loses its origin, the author enters into his own death, writing begins.

I wish to argue that a text is the off-spring of a union between the author as its textual "Father" and the immediate context as its textual "Mother".¹⁸ The text gains life within-, and is born through-, its immediate context. A text-child thus carries the genes of both its textual "Father" (potentially challenging or transcending the immediate context) and its textual "Mother" (contextual relevance, stability, one meaning). A text which does not adequately reflect its textual "Mother" will be contextually ignored and die of neglect in the present. Similarly, a text without the necessary DNA from its textual "Father" that enables it to transcend its immediate context and develop its own unique character (contents) by which it may maintain itself within other contexts will also die of irrelevance in the future. The unique character of the text-child to both reflect and transcend its textual parents allows it to grow in stature and to maintain itself with integrity within different contexts.

Key fallacies in interpretation

Payne¹⁹ identifies two key fallacies when interpreting texts. The first of these, what he calls, the *intentional fallacy* "makes complete identification of a text's meaning with the author's intention."

Payne²⁰ argues that authorial intent is a complex concept which operates on many levels, both conscious and sub-conscious, and that a multiplicity of such intentions may overlap within one written work which makes the identification of a singular purpose within a given context impossible. This idea may tempt us to interpret the "family" metaphor in such a way that the author's act of writing is seen as releasing multiple meanings that all carry the potential to fertilise different Mothers or contexts, thus creating many different "children". And yet, the fact remains that the text remains the unique text-

¹⁵ "Plato, Phaedrus, Section 275e." *Perseus Digital Library*, translation 1925, 275d & 275e, <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.01.0174%3Atext%3DPhaedrus%3Asection%3D275e>.

¹⁶ *Margins of Philosophy* (Chicago, Illinois: University of Chicago Press, 1982), 316.

¹⁷ *Image, Music, Text* (Waukegan, Illinois: Fontana Press, 1979), 142.

¹⁸ The "gender" of the text as Mother is used to reflect the female receptivity to change and being able to nurture, bear and support a (in this case) text-child. The author's input, as "father" has the potential to affect, challenge or change a particular context.

¹⁹ "The Fallacy of Equating Meaning with the Human Author's Intention," *Jets* 20, no. 3 (1977): 244.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 245.

child of one particular author father and one particular contextual mother. This results in what Payne²¹ calls, the *affective fallacy*, substituting the original setting for the setting of the interpreter's own world resulting in *eisegesis* rather than *exegesis*. As Payne notes in regards to parables: "When parables are used as springboards for contemporary reflection, divorced from their setting in Jesus' life, they lose their peculiar power and authority as parables of *Jesus*."²²

The authenticity of a text is thus intrinsically linked to its textual parents. This does not mean that we need to know, or are even, necessarily, able to "know" the parents of the text apart from the text itself. The textual parents form part of the essence of the child and can only be discerned within and through the child. They, and only they, created the life of the text-child. While the text-child, is more than the product of the textual parents' individual-, or combined identities the text-child remains the product of this particular union.

Finding the textual parents

In speaking of "textual, parents" I have designated an interest in the implied author and context rather than the "real" author and "real" context. I do not, thereby, mean to exclude the historical author and the historical context from exegetical consideration. Scholars are, however, often forced into hypothetical constructions of the external author and context without tangible historical data.²³

Prinsloo²⁴ warns that reconstructing such an external *Sitz im Leben* for the text may be employed to facilitate understanding but should not steer the exegesis in a particular direction. Internal indications about the contextual issues which the author intentionally addresses in the text, however, provide objective material from which to construct a view of the implied author's intention within an implied context. By internal indications I refer both to the explicit contents of the text and the implicit structural clues that may be gained from the text, both immediately and within the larger canon within which it operates. To return to our family metaphor, the Biblical text of 1 Corinthians 13 not only has textual parents but also has an extended canonical family including brothers and sisters, uncles and aunts, cousins and nephews, grandparents who all have an influence on how the text may continue to 'live' in different contexts.²⁵

For our purposes, it is thus important to see the way Paul, as the implied author, integrates the section on love within the broader textual context of 1 Corinthians. Love is clearly not a separate section that can be read in isolation from the rest of the argument. The immediate textual context shows that "love" forms the central core of a bigger exposition on the gifts of the Spirit in chapters 12 and 14. By looking at the formal repetition of words or phrases we can see the way in which the last verse in chapter 12 corresponds with the first verse in chapter 14.

²¹ Ibid., 250.

²² Ibid., 251.

²³ The on-going debate as to the sources of the Old Testament is a case in point. After many years of canonising JPD & E in various ways, a new consensus is gradually developing which only wishes to distinguish between P and non-P.

²⁴ *Die Metodiek van Eksegese* (Pretoria, South Africa: Universiteit van Pretoria, 1995), 19.

²⁵ While postulating different 'sources' in the development of the Old Testament text Gerhard von Rad, *Genesis: A Commentary* (Westminster John Knox Press, 1973), 42, nevertheless laid the groundwork for a broader intra-textual canonical understanding of the implied author and context. According to von Rad the different accounts of creation in Genesis 1 and 2 complement each other, so that Genesis 2 may not be read without reference to Genesis 1 and vice versa. Ultimately, von Rad, declares, the Old Testament should be read as being received from Jesus Christ himself.

- (a) But *eagerly desire the greatest gifts*
- (b) and now I will show you the **most excellent way**
- (c) 1 Corinthians 13: Exposition of love
- (b) Follow **the way of love**
- (a) and *eagerly desire spiritual gifts*

The repetition of the same words or phrases, here, forms a chiasmic pattern (abba). The inside section of the chiasm bcb (most excellent way/ love/ way of love) clearly forms a deliberate bridge to and from the section on "love" in chapter 13. This same structure is used in Romans 9-11 where chapter 10 acts as Christological crux of the implied author's argument regarding the place of the Jews within the on-going salvation-historical work of God in and through the church. This supposes a very strong, rather than a "ragged" link such which Conzelmann²⁶ suggested to exist between chapter 13 and chapters 12 and 14.²⁷ Chapter 13 clearly operates within the context of worship which plays out against the context of disunity and sinful behaviour within the implied church in Corinth.

Finding the textual DNA

The concept of person points to the unique characteristics of the text that forms the basis of its ability to transcend its original purpose and context and operate meaningfully in other contexts. Paul's focus on love in 1 Corinthians 13 has its own unique DNA (contents) which reflects key characteristics of its "textual-Mother" and "textual-Father" and identifies it as a unique product of their union. This family relationship limits the scope of the how 1 Corinthians 13 can operate independently but does not eliminate it.

The text of 1 Corinthians 13 has a form which is an open to description and objective analysis. Without this the text ceases to exist as a text. Similarly, without transcendent contents which gives it its own voice in a range of different contexts 1 Corinthians 13 would have died in obscurity and irrelevance.

The body

A grammatical analysis of 1 Corinthians 13 shows three repetition of third class conditional sentences in which the *protasis* sets up a hypothetical situation.²⁸ The hypothetical situations are all marked by the term "but", indicating an absence of love. This, in each case, leads to a negative conclusion, or *apodosis*. Grammatical repetitions also occur in verses 4-8a. Love is first described positively, "love is"; then negatively, "love is not"; then again positively, by means of the term "always" (with which we

²⁶ 1 Corinthians, 218.

²⁷ According to Meeks, *The Writings of St. Paul* (Norton, 1972), 41, the repetitions in 14:1a and 12:31a points to a device of an editor who is making an insertion in the text. One can also argue that the mere fact that chapter 13 exists as chapter 13 between chapters 12 and 14 within the broader text of 1 Corinthians as a letter means that it cannot be separated from them without destroying both the letter as a whole (because it is only this letter if it contains these particular chapters) and the individual chapter (because without the whole letter this particular part no longer exists as a particular part of the letter).

²⁸ Clayton Croy, *Prima Scriptura: An Introduction to New Testament Interpretation* (Baker Academic, 2011), 24. Croy argues that the first hypothetical situation is currently known by Paul, the second is marked to such an extent by hyperbole that it becomes completely theoretical and the third situation is possible but not being experienced at the moment. "Thus the conditional clauses seem to combine scenarios that are quite capable of fulfillment with scenarios that are largely hypothetical." *Ibid.*, 225.

may also include the term "never" in 8a).²⁹ The third group of grammatical repetitions (verse 8b ff.) all start with the phrase "where there is " which is then followed by a negative statement ("will cease"; "will be stilled"; "will pass away").

Another type of grammatical pattern is evident in verses 11-13. Here time plays an important role. Paul, as the implied author, first uses "when" plus the past tense, to set up a contrast with "now" plus the present tense, which is again contrasted by "then" plus the future tense.

The flesh

If we turn our attention to that which marks the individuality of the text such as the way individual words and phrases are used within the passage, a more complex description becomes possible. Pericope A (verses 1-3) lists several things. Pericope C (verses 8-13) has a similar list. When we compare the two lists we find semantic repetitions and structural correspondence:

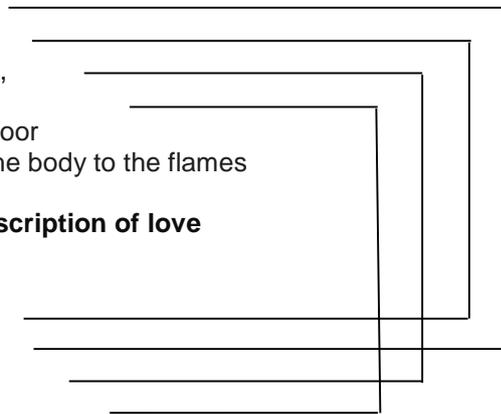
Pericope A

- (a) tongues
- (b) prophecies
- (c) knowledge (1),
- (d) faith
- (e) giving to the poor
- (f) surrendering the body to the flames

Pericope B – description of love

Pericope C

- (b) prophecies
- (a) tongues
- (c) knowledge (1)
- (d) faith
- (g) hope
- (h) love



There is an obvious chiasm (abba) between tongues/prophecies and prophecies/tongues while knowledge and faith are parallelisms (cdcd). "Giving to the poor" (e) and "surrendering the body to the flame" (f)³⁰ in pericope A are not directly balanced by either "hope" (g) or "love" (h) in pericope C. This gives the structure a climatic ending. Pericope C does not function simply to round off an argument developed earlier, but adds new information right at the end. The personal element ("I") is used in pericope A and pericope C but absent in pericope B. Pericope B, which describes the essential

²⁹ All fifteen verbs in this section are in the Indicative mood and Present tense indicating aphoristic or timeless truths.

³⁰ Collins, *First Corinthians* (Liturgical Press, 1999), 476, points to the textual problems with this particular expression. "On intrinsic grounds "boasting" appears to have the greater claim to authenticity. "To boast" (*kauchaomai*) is a common Pauline term, occurring some thirty-five times in the letters. ... On the other hand, the fact that there are three or four grammatical versions of "burning" weakens the case for this reading. It could further be argued that although sacrificial self-immolation was not a common Christian practice, pious scribes, for whom martyrdom was virtuous, may have found boasting on the part of a saint reprehensible and substituted an act of virtue for something they considered to be wrong. Nonetheless, the various "burning" readings are explicable (see C. C. Caragounis, "Crux"). These readings, taken in the totality of their manuscript evidence, provide strong external evidence for "burning" and constitute a claim for its originality. "To hand over" is a verb of incomplete predication. For it to make sense it must be complemented by another clause or phrase. "So that I bum" appears to be such a complementary clause...On balance "burning" appears to be the preferable reading. In 13:3 Paul's argument comes to its climax.

characteristics of love, is sandwiched between A and C which both deals with the way love is worked out in the praxis.

The character

The unique transcendent dimension of 1 Corinthians 13, by which it is able to transcend its authorial father and contextual mother, is embedded in the way it may be characterised as an eschatological text. While the hypothetical scenarios in pericope A point to a set of general conclusions about love and pericope B develops the concept of love again using general, if not timeless, categories, pericope C places the concept of love in an eschatological setting.³¹ Hays points out:

The logic of Paul's argument is impeccable within the eschatologically determined symbolic world of his gospel. The Corinthians, however seem to have lost hold of the future temporal orientation of Paul's preaching. They have moved into a frame of reference that thinks only in spatial categories of "above" and "below." They believe that their spiritual gifts give them immediate access to the divine world. And they are not thinking at all about the future event of God's judgment and transformation of the world (cf. 15:20-28). This direct encounter with God, Paul insists, belongs to the eschatological "not yet" of salvation.³²

The eschatological focus is clearly revealed by the way the concept of "knowledge" is used and modified in chapter 13. In pericope A "knowledge" is something which a person can possess without love, but which affects him or her negatively ("I am nothing"). In pericope C knowledge is described as something that will pass away, but also as something that is "partial". Knowledge is set up in a temporal eschatological framework with a tension between the present and the future ("I now know in part, then it will be complete"). This final eschatological knowledge does not affect the subject negatively, in fact just the opposite! The full and complete knowledge which the writer looks forward to, is "the same as God's knowledge of me". God's knowledge of "me" is not something that affects God negatively. It is perfect knowledge; it rests on God's perfect love towards the object. Knowledge, thus, functions here, in pericope C, as a relational term, it leads the person to know God face to face (v.12). Thiselton³³ says it well: "Here 'know' in its verbal form recalls the dimension of intimate personal encounter that we find in the Hebrew uses of the word to denote sexual union." To know God perfectly at the eschatological end, will mean to love Him perfectly. Knowledge will go over into love.

The normal interpretation of verse 11 (when I was a child..., but now that I am a man") is often interpreted as if Paul, as the implied author, sees himself as someone who has left his childishness behind and has now become fully mature. The "now" is however taken up again in verse 12 where, in the light of the expectation of the future, Paul, as the implied author, describes himself, not as a mature adult, but rather in terms of a child who only knows partially. The eschatological tension between the past (I was a child), the present (I am an adult), and the future (I will know and love perfectly), means that Paul's "adulthood" must not be interpreted as something which he has already achieved but, rather, something towards which he is moving. His adulthood is linked to knowledge

³¹ Craig, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, Interpreter's Bible (New York, NY: Doubleday, 1953), 1046, points out that most English translations render the Greek as if it used adjectives to describe the nature of love "timelessly," e.g., love is patient; love is kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant or rude (NRSV). But "the nature of love is expressed by Paul in a series of verbs, the active character of which may not be fully indicated by ... adjectives ..."

³² *First Corinthians*, 229.

³³ *First Corinthians: A Shorter Exegetical and Pastoral Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2011), 223.

which is linked to his expectation of knowing the Lord in a new way in the future.

1 Corinthians as the family home

The character of love as developed in 1 Corinthians 13 shows that it functions most naturally within a Christian liturgical setting by setting out how the gifts of the Spirit are to be utilised in the church as the body of Christ. Love meets others with their weaknesses and fallibility and directs and accompanies them towards the eschatological goal of knowing and loving God completely. The Holy Spirit as the precursor of the *age to come* makes His presence known through love. Through the gifts of the Spirit believers are enabled to focus away from themselves to the service of others. The gifts are, thus, always operations of love. Thiselton³⁴ notes:

First, love represents “the power of the new age breaking into the present,” the only vital force which has a future. Love is that quality which distinctively stamps the life of heaven, where regard and respect for the other dominates the character of life with God as the communion of saints and heavenly hosts. ...[Secondly] love (agape) denotes above all a stance or attitude which shows itself in acts of will as regard respect, and concern for the welfare of the other. It is therefore profoundly Christological, for the cross is the paradigm case of the act of will and stance which places welfare of others above the interests of the self. Here Moltmann and Jungel rightly relate this to the self-giving grace of the cruciform, Christomorphic God.

Christians live within the eschatological tension between two opposing realities. Believers have received the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of love. Because of this, members of the church can serve each other in love through the gifts of the Spirit. Despite this, as we see from the situation at Corinth, Christians also remain selfishly focussed on themselves. Believers still do not love God and others completely. Barth speaks of this as a “most profound dialectic.”³⁵ The way in which the “character” of love is developed presupposes a broken reality within the church. Love is called upon to act with patience, to resist being boastful or envious. It operates in a context where it needs to forgive wrongdoing, and curb anger. It does not operate within an idealistic utopian context, but a context in need of a final eschatological transformation. This transformation is not magically realised in the church. It works itself out through the church’s growth in her knowledge of God as the God of love. According to Thiselton³⁶ “Paul asserts that in this present life: we come to know bit by bit, piece by piece, part by part, or in piecemeal stages.” Hays concurs:

The contrast between “now” and “then” is critical to understanding verse 12. Only “then,” in the consummation of God’s kingdom, will we know fully-as God knows us already in the present. This last turn of phrase deftly sets the Corinthians who claim “knowledge” in their proper place. God alone is the one who really knows (cf. Gal. 4:9).³⁷

The love that 1 Corinthians 13 espouses is the pneumatic Christological love which creates a radically alternative world-view from that operating in the world outside of-, and apart from-, Christ. As Collins and Harrington note: “For Paul love is not so much a virtue as it is eschatological power, the gift of God poured out into the very depths of one’s being.”³⁸ This form of love is critical. It challenges the

³⁴ *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 1034.

³⁵ Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics the Doctrine of Reconciliation, Volume 4, Part 2: Jesus Christ, the Servant as Lord* (Continuum International Publishing Group, 2004), 839.

³⁶ *First Corinthians*, 230.

³⁷ Hays, *First Corinthians*, 230.

³⁸ Raymond F. Collins and Daniel J. Harrington, *First Corinthians* (Liturgical Press, 1999), 484.

wisdom of the world through the foolishness of the cross (1 Cor. 1:18-25) and calls the believers to emulate Christ's wisdom in the loving service of others (1 Cor 1:26-30). Augustine in his *Enchiridion* speaks of a "third state" of human existence in which the "mightier power of love strives against the power of the flesh."³⁹ The power of love is realised in the giving up of rights for the sake of the "weaker" believers whose conscience may be challenged by the freedom that other Christians claim in the name of Christ (1 Cor. 8). It calls for radical unity (1 Cor. 1:10-13; 3:1-15), and a new way of conducting worship (1 Cor. 11-14). It destroys envy, competitiveness and boastfulness (1 Cor. 4:6-7). The character of love which is revealed in the 1 Corinthians 13 text-child is shown to fit in well as an explanatory voice for the actions of other textual family members in 1 Corinthians.

Visiting the church today

Love in 1 Corinthians 13 has been shown to be its own person with its own character and voice. This enables it to leave its original liturgical ecclesiological home and also operate in other contexts. In doing so, however, it must maintain its own character as a child of a specific father and mother. Treating the text of 1 Corinthians 13 as an orphan text which can be adopted by a different family with different values for a radically different purpose, is an act of violence and abuse against it. This form of Christian love cannot, for instance, be co-opted to participate directly in the debate on homosexuality or marriage equality. When it speaks, it must be allowed the freedom to operate within the tension between broken reality and the new creation which will finally be realised at the return of Christ. This Love-child, as we have seen, exists as a transformational power that sets up signs of the expected new creation within the old broken reality.

Welcoming this transforming Christian love into the church today will affect the church in a variety of ways. There are many obvious links between the modern-day church and the Corinthian home. I will limit my focus in this section to three important, but not readily apparent issues. The first effect is the deconstructive dimension of love. Love strips the church of any idealistic or sentimental vision of the world. Secondly, the unique eschatological power of 1 Corinthians 13's love actively undermines the power structures by which we maintain this broken reality. Thirdly, it challenges and subverts the way we know and understand reality.

The love we encounter in 1 Corinthians 13 is often captured and forced to reflect an idealistic way of looking at the world, nowhere more so than at wedding ceremonies. It is most distorted when it is trivialised and turned into a sentimental ode to sexual romance. In as much as marriage exists within the tension between the already and the not yet, the text-child may indeed have something fresh to contribute to the understanding of what marriage means and requires. Doing so, however, calls for critical engagement with the underlying brokenness and sinfulness of the couple getting married; the need for redemptive love that goes beyond romance; and the knowledge that such love is only accessible by faith in Christ. When marriage turns into arguments and battles for supremacy, Christian love sets the warring couples on a different course: the course towards "weakness" for the sake of the other. Loving weakness is not a matter of powerlessness, but of restraint:

³⁹ Bishop of Hippo Saint Augustine, *The Enchiridion on Faith, Hope and Love* (Regnery Publishing, 1996), 137.

Love is often thought as powerless. The cross betrays weakness (1 Cor. 1:18-25). But love has a power of its own which is not to be measured in terms of ordinary strength or force. It enables martyrs to endure, women to abide overbearing husbands, and husbands nagging wives. The power of love is not, then, the wrong kind of restraint or force.⁴⁰

There is not only a danger that we may trivialise love by placing it in an ideal setting rather than the harsh reality of a broken world, but also the danger that we may misconstrue the unique power by which love operates to transform this broken reality. The transforming power of love in the Christian community stems from the fact that God manifests his character and presence in the church through it. Bernard Brady sees the description of love in 1 Cor. 13:4-7 as “personification” in that “love takes on characteristics of people.”⁴¹ I would argue that the opposite is true: love is not given human characteristics but divine ones.

Commenting on Barth’s understanding of God’s love as a restraint of his power rather than an absence of power, Anna Case Winters, accuses him of depicting the incarnation as a form of divine deception “in which God appears to be weak and vulnerable when in fact God was not.”⁴² Barth, however, argues that one can only speak of God’s power under the rubric that “God has the power to be Himself, and that only then, and in this way He is the power over all things.”⁴³ From this we can deduce that it is only in as much as God is and remains the God of love, that He is and remains all-powerful. God’s omnipotence is a necessary reflection of who He is:

The love with which He turns to us in this work, and in which He has made Himself our God, has not made Him in the least degree poorer or smaller. It has its power and its reality of love for us too in the fact that it continues to be free love, that God has bound and still binds Himself to us as the One who is able to thus bind Himself and whose self-binding is the grace and mercy and patience which helps us, because primarily He is not bound, because He is the Lord, because stooping down to us He does not cease to be the Lord, but actually stoops to us from on high where He is always the Lord.⁴⁴

This means that in God, weakness and vulnerability does not indicate the absence, or a lack, of power. They are, instead, qualities which determine a particular kind of power, namely God’s loving power. God’s restraint of his all-conquering, omnipotent power does not imply a curbing or limiting of his power but reflects the way in which God’s power is revealed as grace and mercy and patience, in other words, the way it is revealed as the power of love.

Love in 1 Cor. 13, similarly, exhibits both restraint and positive power: it “does not” do certain things while it “does” certain other things. It is constructive in what it does not do, as much as it is constructive in what it does because both dimension reflects its essence. Love “is” what it does, and does not, do. Christians can, however, do certain things which look like love without it ultimately qualifying as love. Christians may sacrifice themselves to the point of dying, they may minister to others, while still focused on, and serving themselves. 1 Corinthians 13’s love gains its power from “a free disposition to unseat the concern for self as the driving force of life and replace it with a practical

⁴⁰ Ernest Best, *Second Corinthians* (Westminster John Knox Press, 2012), 51.

⁴¹ Bernard V. Brady, *Christian Love* (Georgetown University Press, 2003), 69.

⁴² Anna Case-Winters, *God’s Power: Traditional Understandings and Contemporary Challenges* (Westminster John Knox Press, 1990), 112.

⁴³ Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics The Doctrine of God, Volume 2, Part 2: The Election of God; The Command of God* (Continuum International Publishing Group, 2004), II.1 565.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, II.1 527.

concern for others.”⁴⁵ It is only in as much as the Corinthian “Love-child” is given the power to challenge and disrupt the direction of the church’s life-force that the church will be transformed into truly being what it already is, the body of Christ (1 Cor. 12, 14).

The way the church engages with power, reflects the way it understands herself and her God. It becomes visible in, amongst other things, the power structures operating between husbands and wives, slaves and masters, church leaders and church members. While 1 Corinthians 13’s love operates primarily within the confines of the church, other passages in the Pauline corpus indicate that it will also leads the church to break through her own boundaries to serve those on the outside, who may even be persecuting her. The church’s restraint on using power to her own advantage, because of her commitment to benefit others, bears powerful testimony of the Lord she serves.

The analysis of 1 Corinthians 13 has shown that the concept of knowledge is an intrinsic part of the author’s deliberation on love and thus forms a natural extension to allow it to reach beyond its ecclesiological liturgical home. Linda Zagzebski⁴⁶ notes in the introduction of her book “On Philosophy” that “love is not usually discussed in a book on epistemology.” Martin Buber⁴⁷ famously distinguished between three epistemological ways of engaging with reality. Firstly, we can approach it as an I-It world by reducing reality to the objective world that can be manipulated by humans. Secondly, we can employ an epistemological I-Me approach in which the individual takes up centre stage within the I-It world. Thirdly, Buber suggested, we can utilise an I-Thou epistemology in which the Other (both God and other humans) finds a meaningful place in our interpretation of reality. It is this form of knowledge that marks the 1 Corinthians text-child. Knowledge and love coalesce as a particular form of engaging with and understanding reality.

In 1 Corinthians 13 there is talk of a growth of knowledge, the impossibility of knowing completely in the present, as well as the hope of complete knowledge in the future. At the same time the subjective knower is already completely known, in the sense of being loved, by God. The requirement to love is, and remains, an invitation to love in response to being loved by God. By understanding knowledge as a personal relational concept operating within a broken context in need of future fulfilment, the text of 1 Corinthians 13 can extend its reach beyond the liturgical and ecclesiological setting in which it is most at home. Without love all our other actions, even religious actions, count for nothing (1 Cor. 13:2). Knowledge as a way of acting in love towards others calls for the ability to listen, empathise, discern—to engage all our senses in learning so that we are able to serve the other better in love. An epistemology grounded in love, therefore, does not objectify the Other but recognises him/her as a unique subject that surpasses the possibility of ever knowing them in full. As love, knowledge, at its core, is critical of objectivity and neutrality as a way of distancing the knower from the known; it is biased towards the person and well-being of the other.

⁴⁵ Brendan Byrne, “The letter to the Philippians” in Brown, *The Jerome Biblical Commentary: The New Testament and Topical Articles* (Chapman, 1976), 794.

⁴⁶ *On Epistemology* Wadsworth Philosophical Topics Philosopher (Wadsworth) (Cengage Learning, 2009), 1.

⁴⁷ *Eclipse of God: Studies in the Relation between Religion and Philosophy* (Humanities Press International, 1988).

Conclusion

In this, article I have used the metaphor of a family to explicate the way in which a text may transcend its textual context and operate with integrity in new and alternative settings. I have shown that such a metaphorical approach does justice to the objective dimensions of the text without, thereby, flattening the text so that it loses its subjective voice. I have shown that texts that lack the ability to remain relevant in other contexts die. The Biblical text as the living word of God within the church claims continued relevance for believers. The metaphor of the text as part of a family was used to argue that the text-child cannot be treated as an orphan when importing it into a new context. To do so, would mean losing the uniqueness of this particular text, thus killing the text-child itself. I have argued that it is, instead, necessary to understand the character of the text-child with reference to its parents, its objective features and its way of thinking and responding within its context (its contents). I have, furthermore, shown that the eschatological tension between the already and the not yet within which Paul, as the implied author, has set this poem on love, provides the most useful bridge to the context of today. Love in Corinthians, I have indicated, lived within an abusive church-home and may still do so today. In examining 1 Corinthians 13' s love in the context of the church today, I focused on its deconstructive power against idealism, as well as its qualities as a power by which God himself is present in the church. In the third place, I examined the way in which this love informs the way we get to know and understand reality. Love is the way the Holy Spirit is present within the church as the body of Christ and also the way He accompanies the church towards the final day when at last she will know in full, and thus love completely, in the same way she is known and loved by her God, who is love.

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