

University of Oxford  
MTh in Applied Theology

**‘ “All things are lawful”, but not all things build up.’**

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*An account of Christian freedom for today's church, with  
special reference to 1 Corinthians 8.1 – 11.1.*

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## I – A 21<sup>st</sup> Century Controversy

### §1 Introduction

For several years, homosexuality has been a matter of controversy within the Anglican Communion. More recently (as we shall see in §2), matters have been brought to a head by the actions of the Episcopal Church (USA) (ECUSA)—now The Episcopal Church (TEC)—and the Anglican Church of Canada (ACC). This controversy is an example of the *use* and *understanding* of Christian freedom within today's church. We would like to place alongside it a biblically and theologically informed account of Christian freedom, to shed light on the difficulties of—and responses to—that controversy.

In *Resurrection and Moral Order* O'Donovan states that scripture must be read, 'not only for moral bricks, but for the indications of order in which the bricks fit together.'<sup>1</sup> To that end, we will allow 1 Corinthians 8.1 – 11.1 (with the help of some other passages) to shape and help define our account of Christian freedom. Although the issue of idol-food is largely irrelevant to Western Christianity, in 1 Corinthians Paul also deals with questions of identity and praxis, including the practise of Christian freedom. These questions are also raised by the contemporary controversy over homosexuality.

As we will focus on the deeper questions in 1 Corinthians, so also will we focus on the deeper questions in the controversy: this essay is *not* about the ethics of homosexuality, but is rather an account of Christian freedom. We will find that, for Paul, building the community is more important than exercising freedom or rights, however 'lawful' they may be, and that Christian praxis is not about 'freedom' or 'rights', but Christ-like (that is, cruciform) self-giving.

### §2 The Anglican Communion and Homosexuality

The key issues in the Anglican controversy over homosexuality are: (1) the ordination of practising homosexuals to the episcopate (or, in fact, at all); (2) the authorisation of liturgical rites celebrating or blessing same-sex unions; (3) the intervention of other provinces in North America, leading to various legal actions. We will now give an account of the recent history of these issues.

At the 1998 Lambeth Conference, Resolution I.10 (called 'Human Sexuality') stated the Communion's position on homosexuality. It rejected homosexual practice as 'incompatible with Scripture', but stressed the importance of pastoral care for homosexuals. Crucially the resolution stated,

[This conference] cannot advise the legitimising or blessing of same sex unions nor ordaining those involved in same gender unions.<sup>2</sup>

This part of the resolution in particular formed the foundation of the various responses to the North American provinces by the wider Anglican Communion.

<sup>1</sup> O'Donovan, *Resurrection*, 200.

<sup>2</sup> 1998: Resolution I.10.e.

The current difficulties began in May 2003, when bishop Michael Ingham of New Westminster diocese (ACC) issued a 'Rite for the Celebration of Gay and Lesbian Covenants', after a request by the diocesan synod the previous year. Two weeks after that, on 7 June 2003, Gene Robinson was elected as bishop of New Hampshire (ECUSA/TEC). His election was confirmed by the 74<sup>th</sup> General Convention, which also passed resolution C051, allowing dioceses the freedom to explore same-sex union liturgies:

Resolved ... 5. That we recognize that local faith communities are operating within the bounds of our common life as they explore and experience liturgies celebrating and blessing same-sex unions.<sup>3</sup>

In response to these events the Archbishop of Canterbury—Rowan Williams—called an emergency meeting of the Primates at Lambeth Palace on 15-16 October 2003. They reaffirmed Resolution I.10 and asked ECUSA/TEC not go through with the consecration of Gene Robinson, writing, 'This will tear the fabric of our Communion at its deepest level.'<sup>4</sup> They also said that 'similar considerations' applied in the case of the diocese of New Westminster. However, despite this plea, Gene Robinson was consecrated on 2 November 2003. And in 2004 the ACC General Synod asked the Canadian 'Primate's Theological Commission' to compile a report on 'the Blessing of Same Sex Unions'.

In October 2004, the Windsor Report, commissioned by the emergency Primates' meeting in October 2003, was published. ECUSA/TEC's actions contrary to Resolution I.10 were sharply criticised, and the 'hurt and offence' caused across the Communion by its actions was highlighted:

[ECUSA/TEC] has caused deep offence to many faithful Anglican Christians both in its own church and in other parts of the Communion...<sup>5</sup>

Along with the criticism, the Windsor Report acknowledged the 'imperatives of communion', which include 'repentance, forgiveness and reconciliation'. So, it recommended that ECUSA/TEC be invited,

to express its regret that the proper constraints of the bonds of affection were breached in the events surrounding the election and consecration of a bishop for the See of New Hampshire, and for the consequences which followed...

... to effect a moratorium on the election and consent to the consecration of any candidate to the episcopate who is living in a same gender union...<sup>6</sup>

In February 2005, the Primates met in Dromantine. The Communiqué they issued was largely a response to the Windsor Report. They stated that Resolution I.10 'has been seriously undermined by the recent developments in North America,'<sup>7</sup> and made two requests. First, that ECUSA/TEC and ACC,

voluntarily withdraw their members from the Anglican Consultative Council [also ACC!] for the period leading up to the next Lambeth conference.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>3</sup> 2003: Resolution C051.

<sup>4</sup> 2003: *Statement*.

<sup>5</sup> 2004: *Windsor*, §127.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid*, §134.

<sup>7</sup> 2005: *Communiqué*, §6.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid*, §14.

This request was affirmed by the 13<sup>th</sup> meeting of that Council, in June that year. Second, in line with the Windsor Report, the Primates requested a 'moratorium' on public rites of blessing of same sex unions, and on the consecration 'of any bishop living in a sexual relationship outside Christian marriage.'<sup>9</sup>

2006 saw the 75<sup>th</sup> General Convention of ECUSA/TEC, at which they voted to change their name to The Episcopal Church. They also passed some resolutions in response to the Windsor Report, which were widely regarded as failing to comply with it. In Resolution A160 they expressed 'regret' as requested by Windsor, but changed the wording (e.g. 'breached' became 'strained') and omitted key phrases (e.g. 'the proper constraints').<sup>10</sup> Resolution B033, dealing with the consecration of bishops, did not have any binding legal force. And the Convention failed to make any statement at all about liturgical rites. A week later Rowan Williams wrote to the Primates,

The recent resolutions of the General Convention have not produced a complete response to the challenges of the Windsor Report...<sup>11</sup>

Attention now turned to the 2007 meeting of the Primates in Dar es Salaam. Picking up on the 75<sup>th</sup> General Convention's 'lack of clarity', they highlighted the apparent 'inconsistency' between 'the position of the General Convention and local pastoral provision.'<sup>12</sup> One key problem was that the presiding bishop herself, Katharine Jefferts Schori, had authorised same-sex liturgies in her own diocese, on the basis of the 74<sup>th</sup> General Convention's Resolution C051.

The Primates sought to address these issues directly, offering some specific suggestions for a way forward, in a move designed to,

contribute to healing and reconciliation within The Episcopal Church and more broadly... such is the imperative laid on us to seek reconciliation in the church of Christ.<sup>13</sup>

We will return to ECUSA/TEC's response to the Tanzania Communiqué in §13.

The North American provinces have understood their identity primarily in terms of autonomy and independence, rather than as part of the wider community of the Anglican Communion (we will look at this further in §13). Consequently their praxis has been affected: they have shown more concern for their own autonomy and rights as individual provinces, than for the effect of their actions upon the wider Communion. To use the language of our title, they haven't broken any *laws*—the Communion has no legal authority in the provinces—but their actions have certainly not *built up* the Communion.

We will now study 1 Corinthians 8.1 – 11.1 to discern the 'indications of order' we wrote about in §1. We will find that they centre upon our identity as a community, and on Christological praxis.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid, §18.

<sup>10</sup> 2006: General, (2)A.

<sup>11</sup> 2006: 'Challenge'.

<sup>12</sup> 2007: *Communiqué*, §21.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid, §§28, 35.

## II – 1 Corinthians 8.1 – 11.1

### §3 'Weak' and 'Strong' (8.1-13)

Although the existence of two groups in Corinth is sometimes questioned, we agree with Horrell, who says, 'much of Paul's exhortation would be rather pointless' if he had invented them for didactic reasons.<sup>14</sup> Therefore we ask the next question: why 'weak' and 'strong'?

Theissen argues that the two groups were differentiated socially. The 'weak' were poor, with a diet of mainly barley flour. Their only access to meat was at major public festivals and religious feasts.<sup>15</sup> Further, the temples functioned as 'restaurants' and 'butchers' as well as centres of worship.<sup>16</sup> (The question about market food (10.25) shows however that there *were* other sources of meat as well.<sup>17</sup>) By contrast, the 'strong' were unwilling to give up their (regular?) temple meals for social and professional reasons.<sup>18</sup>

Unlike in Romans 14.1 – 15.6, where the issue is strong or weak *faith*, here Paul talks of 'suneidhsiß', perhaps because it was used in the Corinthians' letter to him.<sup>19</sup> The word is often translated 'conscience', but perhaps a better translation is 'self-awareness', meaning reflection on past actions, as opposed to a guide for future actions.<sup>20</sup> The weak were insecure in their identity as Christians, in their knowledge of God as the *only* God, and so after eating idol-food they were 'defiled' (8.7), as they thought the food they had eaten was defiled by being sacrificed to idols. The strong had no such trouble:

The slogan [panta ekestin (10.23)] claims that the σοφοß is free to do whatever he chooses because he possesses the knowledge (8.1) that sets him above the petty taboos of social convention; he possesses eḵousia – philosophically informed inner freedom.<sup>21</sup>

The strong believed that exercising their knowledge (gnwsiß) would build up their freedom (eḵousia), and that doing so would encourage the weak to be built up in it as well.<sup>22</sup> But it did not, hence Paul's remark, 'knowledge puffs up, but love builds up' (8.1). The strong, 'puffed up' by their knowledge, were encouraging the weak to act against (and therefore 'defile') their 'conscience' (8.7). The Corinthian 'strong' placed a greater emphasis on the exercise of their eḵousia, than on the effect of their behaviour on the wider community. This had serious consequences in the lives (and 'consciences') of the 'weak' believers.

<sup>14</sup> Horrell, *Theological*, 84-85.

<sup>15</sup> Theissen, *Social*, 125-136.

<sup>16</sup> Blue, *Food*, 309 and Still, *Aims*, 335-336.

<sup>17</sup> Dunn, *Theology*, 703.

<sup>18</sup> Theissen, *Social*, 125-136.

<sup>19</sup> Dunn, *Theology*, 703.

<sup>20</sup> Thiselton, *Corinthians*, 640-644; *Shorter*, 130-131.

<sup>21</sup> Hays, *Conversion*, 399.

<sup>22</sup> Fee, *Corinthians*, 366, 369; Thiselton, *Shorter*, 133.

#### §4 Paul's Personal Example (9.1-23)

It is sometimes suggested that chapter 9 is part of another letter, seemingly a digression from the topic of idol-food in chapters 8 and 10. However its place in Paul's argument is key.<sup>23</sup> He is not simply defending his status as an apostle, but trying to establish the validity of his 'rights', or 'liberties', so he can demonstrate that he voluntarily foregoes them for the sake of others.<sup>24</sup> In doing so he is seeking to correct the strong's understanding of *ejkousia*; chapter 9 explains 8.13.<sup>25</sup>

His 'rights' or 'liberties' (*ejkousian*) as an apostle to receive food and shelter and pay, and to have a wife, are unequivocal. Not only are they justified by human affairs and the Torah, Jesus himself said that, 'those who proclaim the gospel should get their living by the gospel' (9.14).<sup>26</sup>

And yet he freely chooses to give up those liberties to further the gospel, that he 'might save' others (9.22-23); Paul's goal is not the exercise of his liberties, but the salvation of others, which may require him to restrict those liberties.<sup>27</sup> His ministry is exercised according to the pattern of Christ's life, and so it takes on a *cruciform* shape, as he voluntarily renounces his own rights/liberties.<sup>28</sup> His point is that, following Christ, Christian freedom is demonstrated *more* in freely giving up liberties, than in exercising them.

#### §5 Danger of Disqualification (9.24 – 10.13)

These verses should be read as part of Paul's qualification of the Corinthians' slogan, 'all things are lawful' (6.12, 10.23). Starting with the Exodus and the wandering in the wilderness, Paul shows the Corinthians they are part of the larger story of God's people.<sup>29</sup> They are not an historically isolated group: he locates their identity firmly and squarely in its wider historical and scriptural context.<sup>30</sup> In doing so, he argues that Israel was a 'type' (10.6, *tupoi*, often translated 'warning') for the church.<sup>31</sup>

Because of their arrogance and misplaced trust in their 'sacraments' (the cloud, 10.2; manna (?) and the rock, 10.3-4), the people of Israel acted unwisely, committing idolatry, sexual immorality and a variety of other sins, for which thousands of them were destroyed. Paul's point is that *our* sacraments—baptism and eucharist (10.2-4)—provide 'no guarantee' either;<sup>32</sup> we also are not 'bullet-proof'.<sup>33</sup> Hence the key verse: 'so if you think you are standing, watch out that you do not fall' (10.12). As the Israelites had not reached the promised land, and many of them were struck down for evil behaviour and so never did reach it, so we

<sup>23</sup> Horrell, *Theological*, 84.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid, 92; Thiselton, *Shorter*, 136.

<sup>25</sup> Horsley, *Consciousness*, 580.

<sup>26</sup> Horrell, *Theological*, 93.

<sup>27</sup> Fee, *Corinthians*, 426, 433.

<sup>28</sup> Thiselton, *Shorter*, 137-143.

<sup>29</sup> Wright, *Resurrection*, 294.

<sup>30</sup> Thiselton, *Shorter*, 149-153.

<sup>31</sup> Hays, *Conversion*, 398-400.

<sup>32</sup> Horrell, *Theological*, 96.

<sup>33</sup> Songer, *Problems*, 369.

have not yet reached the kingdom of God, and there is a danger we also may be 'struck down' before we arrive. Be warned, Paul says: all things are *not* lawful.

9.24-27 serve as an introduction to this; the emphasis again is on self-denial and self-control, rather than self-gratification.<sup>34</sup> The Israelites gave into temptation, and sinned; Paul is diligent in heeding their warning, punishing and enslaving his own body so he isn't 'disqualified' by giving into fleshly desires, and he urges the Corinthians to do the same.

### **§6 Covenant Loyalty and Solidarity (10.14-22)**

At the Passover, by reciting the story and sharing the meal, Jews actively involve themselves in that foundational event in their people's history. More than that, they *identify* themselves with that event, and with all the people who have done so ever since.<sup>35</sup> Thiselton writes of the Christian eucharist, the first of which was celebrated during a Passover meal:

The giving and receiving of the bread and the cup constitute *covenant pledges of loyalty and solidarity*: God pledges himself to his people; God's people pledge themselves to their God.<sup>36</sup>

In these verses Paul is reminding the Corinthians that the correct 'knowledge' (8.2) is not about the existence of idols, but about 'loyalty and solidarity', with God and each other: as the Passover for Jews, so the eucharist for Christians. They are marks of *identity*, 'covenant pledges'.

When Christians share 'the cup of demons', these covenant pledges are breached,<sup>37</sup> as they were when Israel worshipped idols—10.20, directly quoting Deuteronomy 32.17, and so referring to *Israel*, not pagans.<sup>38</sup> Having pledged ourselves to God, we provoke his jealousy (10.22) if we pledge ourselves to idols as well; we cannot share in two *koinwnia*.<sup>39</sup>

The key to this is 10.14: 'flee from the worship of idols.' Christians are free to eat idol-food, but not to *worship* those idols, to share their *koinwnia* as well as Christ's; temple meals in the context of worship are impossible for Christians,<sup>40</sup> for they involve an act of commitment to powers hostile to Christ (that is, demons, 10.20-21).<sup>41</sup>

<sup>34</sup> Sumney, *Place*, 330.

<sup>35</sup> Thiselton, *Shorter*, 156-158.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid*, 158.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid*, 159-161.

<sup>38</sup> Hays, *Conversion*, 400.

<sup>39</sup> Horrell, *Theological*, 100.

<sup>40</sup> Horrell, *Solidarity*, 176; *Theological*, 101.

<sup>41</sup> Songer, *Problems*, 372.

### §7 The Imitation of Christ (10.23 – 11.1)

Paul here re-emphasises the genuine freedom that Christians have; his qualifications of 'all things are lawful' do not compromise Christian freedom, but show its proper use.<sup>42</sup> Our genuine liberty means there is no need to worry about eating idol-food 'by mistake', either through purchasing meat in the marketplace, or eating in a private home (10.25-27). In this sense, 'all things' are 'lawful'. As 10.14-22 showed, it is the context, 'idol-worship', or damage to another believer's 'conscience', which is prohibited by Paul, rather than the food itself.<sup>40</sup> While we do have genuine freedom, in exercising it we have to be careful that we don't fall into idolatry (even of freedom itself), and that we don't cause damage to others, or to ourselves. In this sense, 'all things' are *not* 'lawful'. Freedom should be exercised to build others up, rather than in a way that causes their destruction (or our own). This may mean renouncing genuine liberties for others' advantage: 'do not seek your own advantage, but that of others' (10.24).

In Part II we have been looking for the 'indications of order' we wrote about in §1. First is *community*. In 1 Corinthians we find Paul addressing a community divided between 'weak' and 'strong'. He recognises their differences (§3), and tries to give them a wider understanding of their identity, as a community in continuity with the people of Israel (§5), which together shares the *koinwnia* of Christ, his bread and his cup (§6). Despite their differences, they are one body, and should treat each other accordingly.

Second is *inaugurated eschatology*: neither group understood themselves eschatologically. The strong thought they already had it all, the weak didn't know they had anything (§§3, 5). So Paul tries to teach them to understand their identity in terms of a dialectic between what is 'already' and what is 'not yet'. For example, we have already been given freedom (important for the weak), but it is not yet fully realised (important for the strong).

Third is *the imitation of Christ*. Paul teaches and demonstrates a Christ-like (that is, cruciform) attitude of self-giving, and self-denial (§4). The genuine freedom we have *in Christ* must be exercised *in Christ*, to build others up, even if that means renouncing genuine liberties (§7). Paul places the cross at the centre: the way of the *Christian* is the way of *Christ*, the self-sacrificing way of the cross. For Paul, the controlling principle of Christian praxis is this: 'be imitators of me, as I am of Christ' (11.1).

<sup>42</sup> Thiselton, *Shorter*, 165-166.

### III – Theological Principles and Christological Praxis

#### §8 Theology and Ethics

There is a fourth ‘indication of order’ we have not mentioned yet: *Christological monotheism*. In 1 Corinthians 8.6 Paul places Jesus at the heart of the Jewish monotheistic confession of faith.<sup>43</sup> He redefines who God is *Christologically*. That redefinition is the theological foundation of the three ‘indications of order’ mentioned in the last section, for as Wright says, it is ‘bound to affect the way the belief work[s] itself out in practice.’<sup>44</sup> Our thesis is that our identity as the community *in Christ*, the one Lord, as children of the Father, the one God, defines our right praxis *in Christ*: Christian freedom can only be understood alongside Christian identity.

To reflect this, and our ‘indications of order’, our account of freedom will be shaped around 8.6: *from, for and through the one God and Lord*. First, we will look at the theological principle of freedom, given in the order of creation, and restored by Christ: *from the Father*. Second, we will look at the theological principle of eschatological identity: *for the Father*. Third, we will look at the expression of both freedom and identity in Christological praxis: *through the Son*. ‘Community’ will be a recurring theme throughout the account.

It is not only we who recognise the importance of community. In their critique of the liberal concept of ‘individual autonomy’—which concept has its roots in the slave trade, and the freedom of cities to define their own laws<sup>45</sup>—‘communitarians’ place a strong emphasis on community. Although he doesn’t accept the label, Hauerwas is an influential ‘communitarian’. He argues that virtue and moral character can *only* be learned within communities, which teach the traditions that form their identity, rather than from ‘universal’ first principles. Community truths can only be learned from within communities, so the truth about Jesus can only be discerned ‘from within a life of discipleship in the community of the church.’<sup>46</sup>

‘Community learning’ sharply contrasts with the contemporary liberal understanding of ‘freedom’ as ‘individual autonomy’, especially the ‘liberty to choose rather than be compelled to adopt a particular vision of the good life.’<sup>47</sup> (Which understanding can be seen in the actions of the North American provinces of the Anglican Communion.) Whilst we may want to question the (sectarian?) leanings of communitarianism, its (overly?) strong critique of liberalism, or its (over-simplified?) dissociation of church and world, communitarianism confirms for us the importance of *community*.

<sup>43</sup> Wright, *Covenant*, 129.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid*, 133.

<sup>45</sup> Dunn, *Liberty*, 7-10.

<sup>46</sup> Fergusson, *Community*, 51-68, quotation 68.

<sup>47</sup> Horrell, *Solidarity*, 50.

## §9 Freedom: 'one God, the Father, *from whom...*'

Our first theological principle is that humans do not exist in a vacuum, or in a moral world of our own making. O'Donovan writes, 'the Spirit forms and brings to expression *the appropriate pattern of free response to objective reality*.'<sup>48</sup> That 'objective reality' was created by God, and our participation in that 'order of creation', including the limits it places upon us, is what characterises our freedom. Just so,

freedom is "potency" rather than "possibility". Nothing could be more misleading than the popular philosophy that freedom is constituted by the absence of limits.<sup>49</sup>

Freedom is about the person herself ('potency'), rather than her circumstances ('possibility'); it is ordered to its continuing 'potency', not to increasing its 'possibilities' (freedom to commit suicide is not freedom, for in doing so it annihilates itself). Freedom is freedom only as it operates within created order: 'for God has given [man] his freedom at the same time as he has given him a world in which to be free.'<sup>50</sup>

Although humans are created free, we act in bondage due to our sinfulness; our sin causes us to 'pursue unreality'.<sup>49</sup> Thus *Christian* freedom is necessarily founded not only on creation but also on *redemption*. Man's perception of the created order is confused by sin, and so without the resurrection of Jesus from the dead—vindicating creation and our created life, revealing and restoring created order—true morality, as participation *in that order*, is simply not possible.<sup>51</sup> In Paul's language, the Father offers us freedom from bondage to the law, from 'the powers', flesh and desire, and death, through the death and resurrection of Christ.<sup>52</sup> Christians have been given genuine freedom from these things, first in the created order, and second through the redemptive death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, following our enslavement to sin and 'unreality'.

In 1 Corinthians 9 we read about Paul's genuine freedom and rights. He is no longer 'under the law' (9.20)—that is, Torah—but, he says, 'I am not free from God's law but am under Christ's law' (9.21). Here we see what O'Donovan means when he says that freedom is not constituted 'by the absence of limits.'<sup>53</sup> Rather, 'limit is the very material with which freedom works.'<sup>54</sup> The command of God which frees us does not immediately fall silent, but puts before us the way of right use of that freedom: the way of Christ,<sup>55</sup> which may mean (as it did for Paul) enslavement to our neighbours in love. When Christ frees us, he does so not from the world-order itself, but from our false *perception* of that order, our *misunderstanding* of it, so that we can participate in it fully, as we were created. Christian freedom is given, in creation and redemption, not so we can stand over against the created order, but so we, the community of Christ, can take our place *within* it, and freely perform our task in the world faithfully and obediently.<sup>56</sup>

<sup>48</sup> O'Donovan, *Resurrection*, 25.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid*, 107.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid*, 120.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid*, 13, 19, 54-56, 148 etc.

<sup>52</sup> Chamblin, *Freedom*, 313-314; Dunn, *Liberty*, 55-75..

<sup>53</sup> O'Donovan, *Resurrection*, 120.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid*, 108.

<sup>55</sup> O'Donovan, *Desire*, 256.

<sup>56</sup> O'Donovan, *Resurrection*, 81, 120.

### §10 Identity: 'one God, the Father... *for whom...*'

Our second principle is now, and also not yet; having shown the basis of Christian freedom to be in both creation and redemption, we now look to understand it eschatologically. (We are taking εἰς in 8.6 to mean 'towards': we have come from, and are moving towards, the Father.) It is sometimes argued that the Corinthians had an 'over-realised eschatology', however recent evidence is 'overwhelming' in showing that their claim to possess all things was actually 'a distinguishing mark of Stoic and Cynic thought.'<sup>57</sup> Hays argues that the Corinthians understood their Christian identity (and therefore their Christian freedom) in those terms, which left eschatology out of consideration:

Paul is seeking to redefine their identity – which has been shaped by non-eschatological ideas indigenous to their culture – within an apocalyptic narrative that locates present existence in the interval between cross and *parousia*.<sup>58</sup>

When Paul tells the Corinthians to strive for the 'imperishable prize' (9.24-25, see also Philippians 3.14 and 2 Timothy 4.8 etc.), he is attempting to teach the Corinthians to think eschatologically, to realise that what they have now is only in part, but what is to come will be in full. In 13.12 he makes this explicit using the language of γινωσιβ:

For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then we will see face to face. Now I know (ginwskw) only in part; then I will know fully (epignwsomai), even as I have been fully known.

What the Corinthians have been given in Christ—which includes knowledge and freedom—is only a deposit, a foretaste of what is to come. Paul does indeed *already* have knowledge, but it is *not yet* in full. He does indeed *already* have freedom, but it is *not yet* in full. We are not free to do anything we choose and escape punishment ('all things' are *not* εἰς ἑσθιν) because we are still in danger of choosing sin, like idolatry and sexual immorality (10.1-22), like causing brothers and sisters to be 'defiled' (8.7), or worse, 'destroyed' (8.11). We will only be given εἰς ἰουσια (that is, authority, freedom etc.) in full when we have been given γινωσιβ in full where there is no danger of us choosing sin/unreality, when we can stand and not fall (10.12).

The dialectic between 'already' and 'not yet' is not limited simply to what we have been given in Christ, but extends to our very identity. As we saw in §5, Paul sought to relate the Corinthians' situation to that of the Israelites wandering in the wilderness. They were God's people, they already had his promises, but they had not yet reached the promised land. In a similar way, Paul warns the Corinthians, they already have their identity together in Christ, and all that comes through that, but his kingdom has not yet been realised fully; so all that comes with that new identity has not yet been realised fully either, and will only be so at the last: 'the process of metamorphosis into the image of God in Christ is a life-long one.'<sup>59</sup>

This dialectic is vital to what Paul is teaching the Corinthians, to his warning about disqualification, and to his exhortation to voluntary discipline (and even obedience, 10.15). In such a precarious state, a model for behaviour is necessary, and Paul provides one: himself, but only as he imitates another.

<sup>57</sup> Hays, *Conversion*, 407-409, quotation 408-409.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid*, 409.

<sup>59</sup> Dunn, *Liberty*, 66.

## §11 Identity and Freedom: ‘..one Lord, Jesus Christ, *through whom...*’

We have seen how genuine freedom is given in creation and redemption, but given as a foretaste of what is to come, not given in full. The exercise of what has been given must be according to the pattern of the one through whom it is given: Christ. The pattern of his life is the pattern of love.

Paul introduces our third and final theme in the first verse: ‘knowledge puffs up, but love builds up.’ Paul’s understanding of love is at the foundation of both his theology and his ethics: (1) because it is through the love God showed us in Christ that we are freed from sin and death, and raised to new life; (2) because Paul believes that Christ-like love should be the central feature of the Christian life.<sup>60</sup> In Romans 13 he writes,

love each other... the night is far gone; the day is at hand. So then let us cast off the works of darkness and put on the armour of light. Let us walk properly as in the daytime... put on the Lord Jesus...<sup>61</sup>

It is *through* Jesus’ love that we are able to live in the day; it is *through* Jesus’ example of love that Paul defines how we must ‘walk properly as in the daytime’.

For O’Donovan love is the ‘single ordering-principle’ of morality (it is that which gives ‘moral bricks’ their order). Love does not simply give virtues (e.g. the classical ‘cardinal’ virtues: temperance, fortitude, prudence, justice) their distinctive character, but reveals what they are about: *what* they are ordered to, not simply *how* they are ordered.<sup>62</sup> The ‘double aspect’ of the moral life (the form of which is love) finds its expression in the ‘Greatest Commandment’, in which we can see that towards which Jesus ordered his love: God and neighbour. This ordering is not in terms of a priority of choice (God first, others second, yourself last), as if there are ‘rival claims’ to our love. Nor is the ordering ‘manipulation’, as if we should love our neighbour as a means to the end of loving God.<sup>63</sup> Rather,

[the ordering of love] is the free conformity of our agency to the order of things which is given in reality... In the ordering of love it is truthfulness that is at stake.<sup>64</sup>

Augustine said that if we learn to love God and neighbour, all other loves (e.g. of creation and self) will simply fall into place.<sup>65</sup> We add, it is in love alone that our freedom finds its truest expression, that it is only in loving that we are truly free: ‘love brings liberty to its fullest expression.’<sup>66</sup> Freedom ‘serves’ love; only in doing so is it truly freedom, and it is still ‘freedom because both it and love have the same goal of fellowship.’<sup>67</sup> And so we ask what implications loving God and neighbour has for Christian freedom, if it is in love that freedom is truly freedom.

If we pledge ourselves to love God as Christ did we must worship him alone, and no other, or our love is

<sup>60</sup> 1 Corinthians 13.1-3.

<sup>61</sup> Romans 13.8-14 (ESV).

<sup>62</sup> O’Donovan, *Resurrection*, 201-203, 226.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid*, 232-235.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid*, 236.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid*, 239.

<sup>66</sup> Chamblin, *Freedom*, 315.

<sup>67</sup> Calvin, *Institutes*, 137; Kromminga, *Christian*, 158, 162-163.

false. As Paul wrote to the Corinthians, ‘you cannot partake of the table of the Lord and the table of demons’ (10.21b). Idolatry—or, unfaithfulness to God—is absolutely forbidden by Paul. As we have seen, the example of Israel in 10.1-13 shows how dangerous it is to arouse God’s jealousy in this way. Once again we see that not *all* things are lawful; there are certain things which are non-negotiable; for the church, as for Israel before it, covenant faithfulness to God is one of these.

If we are to love others as Christ did, that means ‘pleasing’ others rather than ourselves, to build them up:

We who are strong ought to put up with the failings of the weak, and not to please ourselves. Each of us must please our neighbour for the good purpose of building up the neighbour. For Christ did not please himself...<sup>68</sup>

These acts of service mean not grasping for power, or equality with God, but humbling ourselves, according to the pattern of Christ’s love for us.<sup>69</sup> It means giving up even what is rightfully ours, for the sake of another, to build them up. In our passage we have seen how Paul gives up what is rightfully his, in imitation of Christ. For example, in 8.13 (and in 10.28), he won’t eat so as not to cause another to stumble. In 9.19, he freely enslaves himself to all, so he might win them for the gospel. This refraining is not the loss but the *expression* of Paul’s freedom. Liberty is given as much for abstaining, as it is for using.<sup>70</sup> It is given, not as an end in itself, but for the purpose of building up the community; so when Paul freely restricts, or doesn’t make use of his liberties for that purpose, he is truly free:<sup>71</sup>

Not for a moment does he ask the strong to renounce their liberty... but he does challenge them to practise it in a certain way... They are free both to exercise and to restrict their freedom, for they are enslaved to Christ and not to the liberty he granted them.<sup>72</sup>

Paul was all too well aware that freedom could easily serve as a cloak for selfish and self-seeking ends, that liberty could quickly degenerate into licence. The only effective controlling factor, he implies, is love—love defined simply as the concern to serve one another.<sup>73</sup>

‘Freedom’ can be a cover for idolatry, or even its object. The only true way to avoid being enslaved to something is to give it up. By being enslaved to Christ, by loving and serving one another, which involves voluntarily and freely giving up our own freedom and rights, we avoid idolising freedom, or even ourselves. And so we are freed to worship God alone. This is perhaps Paul’s main point in 1 Corinthians 8.1 – 11.1: Christians are genuinely and truly free, but it does not stop there. Through Christ they are free to be truly human (that is, like Christ), part of and within the created order and the community of the people of God; they are free to serve God; they are free, like Christ, to take up their role within the created order, and act (freely!) in faithful obedience to the Father; they are free to serve one another in and through the love of Christ. Perhaps Luther sums it up best:

<sup>68</sup> Romans 15.1-3a.

<sup>69</sup> Philippians 2.5-11.

<sup>70</sup> Calvin, *Institutes*, 842.

<sup>71</sup> Fee, *Corinthians*, 369.

<sup>72</sup> Chamblin, *Freedom*, 315.

<sup>73</sup> Dunn, *Theology*, 659.

A Christian is a perfectly free lord of all, subject to none. A Christian is a perfectly dutiful servant of all, subject to all. These two these seem to contradict each other. If, however, they should be found to fit together they would serve our purpose beautifully.<sup>74</sup>

## §12 Principle and Praxis

Our thesis has been that our identity as the community in Christ, the one Lord, as children of the Father, the one God, defines our right praxis. In the last section we saw how identity and praxis meet in love: the ‘recognition of the cross at the heart of the creator must lead to an answering love.’<sup>75</sup> Just as Paul redefines monotheism Christologically, so also he redefines love—and community praxis—Christologically. As he shows by his example of himself, it is the cross that redefines love and stands at the centre of—and unites—theology and ethics, principle and praxis; ‘Christian identity and Christian lifestyle’ are inseparable.<sup>76</sup>

In *The Conversion of the Imagination* Hays writes,

[Paul believed that] the transforming action of God prophesied by Isaiah *has now taken place* in the crucifixion of Jesus.<sup>77</sup>

The cross stands at the juxtaposition of two ages; we live in its shadow and power: after the fulfilment of the (Old Testament) scriptures, but before the consummation of the kingdom. That is why Paul is trying to teach the Corinthians ‘to perceive reality within the framework of a dialectical “already/not yet” eschatology.’<sup>78</sup> Only within that framework can Christian identity and freedom be understood: the power of what has ‘already’ happened (the cross) directed towards what has ‘not yet’ happened (the *parousia*),<sup>58</sup> the power of the down-payment, the foretaste of what is still to come in full, practised within—and for the building up of—the community.

The form of Christian life—and therefore Christian freedom—is love, but a very specific love. As Hays points out, ‘love’ by itself is not helpful as a ‘focal image’ for Christian ethics (nor, for us, Christian freedom); apart from the cross it has no real meaning. Paul does not pluck his understanding of love out of the ether, but bases it on the concrete reality of the cross: ‘the content of the word “love” is given fully and exclusively in the death of Jesus on the cross.’<sup>79</sup> The cross shows us that love is not about ‘inclusiveness’, but ‘repentance, discipline, sacrifice, and transformation.’<sup>79</sup> It is *this* love that the Windsor Report calls, ‘the proper constraints of the bonds of affection.’<sup>80</sup> For Paul, this love is what Christian life (and therefore Christian freedom) is about, it is where that life comes from, and what it is directed to.

<sup>74</sup> Luther, *Freedom*, 277.

<sup>75</sup> Wright, *Covenant*, 133.

<sup>76</sup> Thiselton, *Corinthians*, 458.

<sup>77</sup> Hays, *Conversion*, 404.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid*, 403.

<sup>79</sup> Hays, *Moral*, 200-203, quotation 202.

<sup>80</sup> 2004: *Windsor*, §134.

In saying this, he turns the strong's understanding of *ejkousia* (etc.) on its head,<sup>81</sup> and shows the weak some of the fundamental truths of the Christian faith. For although he saves his strongest words for the strong, criticising their incorrect understanding of Christian principles and their dangerous praxis, he does also correct and encourage the weak, albeit more gently ('his long pastoral experience tells him that not all consciences become re-educated at the same pace'<sup>82</sup>); the weak do not have sufficient understanding of Christian principles to live a Christian life to the full. As Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians, and as we hope we have shown, without right principle right praxis is impossible.

<sup>81</sup> Fee, *Corinthians*, 252.

<sup>82</sup> Wright, *Resurrection*, 293.

## IV – Christian Freedom and Today's Church

### §13 Analysis of a Controversy

As we return to the controversy in today's church, we remind ourselves that we are not writing about homosexuality but freedom. We could have used other examples of the use of freedom (e.g. lay presidency in Sydney diocese) to similar effect; we are not here talking about whether these actions are 'lawful', but whether they 'build up'.

In 2003 the Primates explicitly asked ECUSA/TEC not to proceed with the consecration of Gene Robinson, making it clear that such an action would 'tear the fabric' of the Communion. Their request was ignored, and the consecration went ahead. The Windsor Report later criticised the failure of the bishops who consecrated Gene Robinson to listen to the concerns of the wider Communion.<sup>83</sup>

In March, ECUSA/TEC's house of bishops rejected the recommendations of the 2007 Communiqué, revealing the principles behind their actions throughout. One of their concerns was not to 'compromise' their 'autonomy as a church,' which they felt would happen if they acted on the recommendations of those outside their province. But what is perhaps most revealing, they do not want to 'violate' their

founding principles as The Episcopal Church following [their] own liberation from colonialism and the beginning of a life independent of the Church of England.<sup>84</sup>

This response shows that they understand their identity in terms of independence and autonomy, in being able to determine their own laws, and in pursuing their own 'vision of the good life.'<sup>85</sup> Their praxis is determined by the principle of 'rights', similarly to the Corinthian strong. Whereas Paul teaches the Corinthians to understand their identity in terms of the wider community (past, present and future), ECUSA/TEC apparently understands its participation in the Communion as that of an independent member voluntarily 'signing up' to something, rather than as an integral part of its own identity and life. This leads it to exercise its (legitimate) freedom without consideration for the rest of the Communion.

The Primates responded similarly to Paul, in line with the account of Christian freedom we have given, trying to tread the line between 'legalism' and 'licence', between autonomy and inter-dependence. (That tension is there because of the unrealised, eschatological nature of our identity.) Reading through the material one constant feature is the insistence on the 'autonomy' (their word) of each province, yet also the unity of the Communion as a whole. They speak of 'autonomy-in-communion' as,

the balanced exercise of the inter-dependence between the thirty-eight provinces and their legitimate provincial autonomy.<sup>86</sup>

As Paul in 1 Corinthians, the Primates recognise that each province has genuine freedom (even rights!), but

<sup>83</sup> 2004: *Windsor*, §129.

<sup>84</sup> 2007: *Bishops*.

<sup>85</sup> Horrell, *Solidarity*, 50.

<sup>86</sup> 2005: *Communiqué*, §8.

that sometimes we are called to give up that our liberties voluntarily, for the sake of the whole. The North American provinces have not done this, despite the various requests of the Primates. Their actions, lawful or not, have most certainly not built up the Communion as a whole, and on those grounds cannot be seen as a legitimate use of Christian freedom. Equally, the Primates' requests to ECUSA/TEC and ACC to limit their autonomous actions voluntarily are fair, given our account of Christian freedom.

## §14 Conclusion

There are two key principles in the account of Christian freedom we have given. First is the importance of community. Christians are united to each other as brothers and sisters in Christ, who died for each of them. That community is *not yet* perfect, so there are and will be problems and disagreements. Christian freedom is given to enable the members of that community to live together in harmony: its goal is fellowship, the building up of the community.<sup>87</sup>

Second, Christian freedom is exercised rightly in imitation of the self-sacrificing love of Christ. Freedom is not simply given to be used, but to be laid aside for the sake of others. In doing so we do not lose that freedom, but express it most fully. By using our freedom in loving service of others, we avoid idolising our own desires (and freedom itself), and so are free to love and worship God alone.

Christian identity is in Christ; we do not have absolute freedom to 'reinvent ourselves', or do whatever we like, whether or not we limit someone else's freedom, whatever J.S. Mill might say.<sup>88</sup> Freedom is not about whether we can do something in good conscience, but about 'free responsibility'.<sup>89</sup> Freedom is not *from* ourselves, but from God; freedom is not *for* ourselves, but for God and his people. Freedom is not *through* ourselves, but through the one Lord, Jesus Christ. Christian freedom is from, for and through the love of God in Christ. And so, we will allow O'Donovan to have the last word:

The life of love which we are given to live with God is a life that is from first to last oriented towards him as the original Love, from whom this love is given to us.<sup>90</sup>

<sup>87</sup> Calvin, *Institutes*, 842; Kromminga, *Christian*, 158, 162-163.

<sup>88</sup> Dunn, *Theology*, 661.

<sup>89</sup> Werpehowski in Webster, *Barth*, 229-230.

<sup>90</sup> O'Donovan, *Resurrection*, 248.

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