First Corinthians

George T. Montague, SM

Baker Academic
a division of Baker Publishing Group
Grand Rapids, Michigan

Published by Baker Academic
a division of Baker Publishing Group
P.O. Box 6287, Grand Rapids, MI 49516-6287
www.bakeracademic.com

Printed in the United States of America

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data
Montague, George T.
First Corinthians / George T. Montague.
p. cm. — (Catholic commentary on sacred Scripture)
Includes bibliographical references and index.
ISBN 978-0-8010-3632-3 (pbk.)
1. Bible. N.T. Corinthians, 1st—Commentaries. I. Title
BS2675.53.M66 2011
227′32077—dc23 2011023836

Imprimatur: Most Rev. Gustavo García-Siller, MSpS, Archbishop of San Antonio
Nihil obstat: Rev. John A. Leies, SM, STD, *Censor deputatus*

In keeping with biblical principles of creation stewardship, Baker Publishing Group advocates the responsible use of our natural resources. As a member of the Green Press Initiative, our company uses recycled paper when possible. The text paper of this book is composed in part of post-consumer waste.

green press INITIATIVE

11 12 13 14 15 16 17 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Contents

Illustrations

Editors' Preface

> The Church has always venerated the divine Scriptures just as she venerates the body of the Lord. . . . All the preaching of the Church should be nourished and governed by Sacred Scripture. For in the sacred books, the Father who is in heaven meets His children with great love and speaks with them; and the power and goodness in the word of God is so great that it stands as the support and energy of the Church, the strength of faith for her sons and daughters, the food of the soul, a pure and perennial fountain of spiritual life.
>
> Second Vatican Council, *Dei Verbum* 21

> Were not our hearts burning while he spoke to us on the way and opened the scriptures to us?
>
> Luke 24:32

The Catholic Commentary on Sacred Scripture aims to serve the ministry of the Word of God in the life and mission of the Church. Since Vatican Council II, there has been an increasing hunger among Catholics to study Scripture in depth and in a way that reveals its relationship to liturgy, evangelization, catechesis, theology, and personal and communal life. This series responds to that desire by providing accessible yet substantive commentary on each book of the New Testament, drawn from the best of contemporary biblical scholarship as well as the rich treasury of the Church's tradition. These volumes seek to offer scholarship illumined by faith, in the conviction that the ultimate aim of biblical interpretation is to discover what God has revealed and is still speaking through the sacred text. Central to our approach are the principles taught by Vatican II: first, the use of historical and literary methods to discern what the

biblical authors intended to express; second, prayerful theological reflection to understand the sacred text "in accord with the same Spirit by whom it was written"—that is, in light of the content and unity of the whole Scripture, the living tradition of the Church, and the analogy of faith (*Dei Verbum* 12).

The Catholic Commentary on Sacred Scripture is written for those engaged in or training for pastoral ministry and others interested in studying Scripture to understand their faith more deeply, to nourish their spiritual life, or to share the good news with others. With this in mind, the authors focus on the meaning of the text for faith and life rather than on the technical questions that occupy scholars, and they explain the Bible in ordinary language that does not require translation for preaching and catechesis. Although this series is written from the perspective of Catholic faith, its authors draw on the interpretation of Protestant and Orthodox scholars and hope these volumes will serve Christians of other traditions as well.

A variety of features are designed to make the commentary as useful as possible. Each volume includes the biblical text of the New American Bible (NAB), the translation approved for liturgical use in the United States. In order to serve readers who use other translations, the most important differences between the NAB and other widely used translations (RSV, NRSV, JB, NJB, and NIV) are noted and explained. Each unit of the biblical text is followed by a list of references to relevant Scripture passages, Catechism sections, and uses in the Roman Lectionary. The exegesis that follows aims to explain in a clear and engaging way the meaning of the text in its original historical context as well as its perennial meaning for Christians. Reflection and Application sections help readers apply Scripture to Christian life today by responding to questions that the text raises, offering spiritual interpretations drawn from Christian tradition or providing suggestions for the use of the biblical text in catechesis, preaching, or other forms of pastoral ministry.

Interspersed throughout the commentary are Biblical Background sidebars that present historical, literary, or theological information, and Living Tradition sidebars that offer pertinent material from the postbiblical Christian tradition, including quotations from Church documents and from the writings of saints and Church Fathers. The Biblical Background sidebars are indicated by a photo of urns that were excavated in Jerusalem, signifying the importance of historical study in understanding the sacred text. The Living Tradition sidebars are indicated by an image of Eadwine, a twelfth-century monk and scribe, signifying the growth in the Church's understanding that comes by the grace of the Holy Spirit as believers study and ponder the word of God in their hearts (see *Dei Verbum* 8).

Maps and a Glossary are located in the back of each volume for easy reference. The glossary explains key terms from the biblical text as well as theological or exegetical terms, which are marked in the commentary with a cross (†). A list of Suggested Resources, an Index of Pastoral Topics, and an Index of Sidebars are included to enhance the usefulness of these volumes. Further resources, including questions for reflection or discussion, can be found at the series website, www.CatholicScriptureCommentary.com.

It is our desire and prayer that these volumes be of service so that more and more "the word of the Lord may speed forward and be glorified" (2 Thess 3:1) in the Church and throughout the world.

Peter S. Williamson
Mary Healy
Kevin Perrotta

Note to Readers

The New American Bible differs slightly from most English translations in its verse numbering of the Psalms and certain other parts of the Old Testament. For instance, Ps 51:4 in the NAB is Ps 51:2 in other translations; Mal 3:19 in the NAB is Mal 4:1 in other translations. Readers who use different translations are advised to keep this in mind when looking up Old Testament cross-references given in the commentary.

Abbreviations

†	indicates that the definition of a term appears in the Glossary
§	indicates section number in a church document
ABD	*Anchor Bible Dictionary*, edited by D. N. Freedman, 6 vols. (New York: Doubleday, 1992)
ACCS 7	Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture: New Testament 7, *1–2 Corinthians*, edited by Gerald Bray (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1999)
BECNT	Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament
Catechism	*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2nd ed. (New York: Doubleday, 2003)
CCSL	Corpus Christianorum: Series Latina (Turnhout: Brepols, 1953–)
CCSS	Catholic Commentary on Sacred Scripture (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008–)
ET	English translation
FC	Fathers of the Church: A New Translation (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1947–)
JB	Jerusalem Bible
JTS	*Journal of Theological Studies*
KJV	King James Version
Lectionary	*The Lectionary for Mass* (1998/2002 USA ed., Washington, DC: Confraternity of Christian Doctrine)
LXX	Septuagint (see Glossary)
NAB	New American Bible (Revised Edition, 2011)
NIV	New International Version
NJB	New Jerusalem Bible
NRSV	New Revised Standard Version
PG	Patrologia graeca, edited by J.-P. Migne, 162 vols. (Paris, 1857–86)
PL	Patrologia latina, edited by J.-P. Migne, 217 vols. (Paris, 1844–64)
RSV	Revised Standard Version
SC	Sources chrétiennes (Paris: Cerf, 1943–)

Books of the Old Testament

Gen	Genesis	Josh	Joshua	1 Kings	1 Kings
Exod	Exodus	Judg	Judges	2 Kings	2 Kings
Lev	Leviticus	Ruth	Ruth	1 Chron	1 Chronicles
Num	Numbers	1 Sam	1 Samuel	2 Chron	2 Chronicles
Deut	Deuteronomy	2 Sam	2 Samuel	Ezra	Ezra

Neh	Nehemiah	Wis	Wisdom	Obad	Obadiah
Tob	Tobit	Sir	Sirach	Jon	Jonah
Jdt	Judith	Isa	Isaiah	Mic	Micah
Esther	Esther	Jer	Jeremiah	Nah	Nahum
1 Macc	1 Maccabees	Lam	Lamentations	Hab	Habakkuk
2 Macc	2 Maccabees	Bar	Baruch	Zeph	Zephaniah
Job	Job	Ezek	Ezekiel	Hag	Haggai
Ps	Psalms	Dan	Daniel	Zech	Zechariah
Prov	Proverbs	Hosea	Hosea	Mal	Malachi
Eccles	Ecclesiastes	Joel	Joel		
Song	Song of Songs	Amos	Amos		

Books of the New Testament

Matt	Matthew	1 Tim	1 Timothy
Mark	Mark	2 Tim	2 Timothy
Luke	Luke	Titus	Titus
John	John	Philem	Philemon
Acts	Acts of the Apostles	Heb	Hebrews
Rom	Romans	James	James
1 Cor	1 Corinthians	1 Pet	1 Peter
2 Cor	2 Corinthians	2 Pet	2 Peter
Gal	Galatians	1 John	1 John
Eph	Ephesians	2 John	2 John
Phil	Philippians	3 John	3 John
Col	Colossians	Jude	Jude
1 Thess	1 Thessalonians	Rev	Revelation
2 Thess	2 Thessalonians		

Introduction to 1 Corinthians

Imagine that in a dream one night you find yourself in a parish where there are several drunks at Sunday Mass; where some members are claiming that there is no resurrection of the dead and that Jesus is not really present in the Eucharist; the parishioners are divided into cliques and factions; the president of the Altar Society is not talking to the head catechist; there is public unchallenged adultery and many marriages are in disarray; a group is dabbling in New Age spirituality; the liberals, the charismatics, and the traditionalists are all trumpeting their version of the church; and Masses are abbreviated for the sake of Sunday football—one of the many signs the parish has compromised heavily with the surrounding secular culture.

A nightmare? Not exactly. You were just experiencing a modern version of the community in Corinth. For this very reason, though, we have a lot to learn from these Corinthians, our enthusiastic but immature ancestors in the faith. The issues Paul faced with them are ones that, in one form or another, the church still struggles with today. Though Paul may not have thought so, we can be grateful that the Corinthians had so many problems because from the Apostle's treatment of them, we can glean wisdom in dealing with ours.

The Author

Readers who know of Paul's life will recall his dramatic conversion from being a strict Pharisee and persecutor of the Christians in Palestine to being apostle of the Gentiles; his struggle to get the authorities in Jerusalem to accept the noncircumcision of Gentiles; his mission to Asia Minor and then to Macedonia and Achaia (today's Greece); and his founding of churches at the

price of beatings, imprisonment, and shipwreck. They know also of his martyrdom in Rome under Nero. This is the Paul who planted the Christian faith in Corinth around AD 50 and later wrote this letter from Ephesus, addressing his recent converts.

That Paul is the author of this letter has never been in debate. There is some doubt whether 1 Cor 14:33b–36, forbidding women to speak in the assembly, is from a later hand, since it appears to conflict with what Paul says elsewhere about the active role of women in the community's worship (11:5, 13). If it is a later insertion, it was done quite early, since it appears in all the Greek manuscripts, though some have it at the end of the chapter. In any case, even with its difficulties, these verses were accepted into the canon of the inspired Scriptures, with their relevance to the Church today left to experts to propose and the Church to decide. Though called First Corinthians, this letter is not actually the first one Paul wrote, since he refers to an earlier letter in 5:9, which has been either lost or incorporated into what we know as 2 Corinthians.

Corinth: A Cauldron of Cultures

What kind of environment did Paul find when he first came to Corinth? Located at the end of a neck of land attaching the Peloponnese peninsula to mainland Greece and having a port facing east (Cenchreae) and another with access to the west (Lechaion), Corinth was geographically predestined to be a corridor of commerce and a potpourri of cultures (see map, p. 309).[1] Ships could be hauled across the isthmus on chariots on the four-mile paved railroad-like *diolkos*, whose grooves can still be seen on a surviving strip. This saved mariners sailing from Athens to the Adriatic 185 sea miles, and to Naples or Rome 95 sea miles.[2] It also spared them sailing around Cape Maleae, proverbially treacherous for seafaring. Ships with cargo too heavy for the diolkos would unload at one port and either haul the empty boat over the diolkos or load the cargo into a different boat at the other port. For various reasons, much cargo passed through Corinth itself. Being able to excise duty on the shipping, and celebrated for its shipbuilding and its production of bronze, ceramics, and textiles, Corinth was a wealthy city. It was also one of the ancient world's largest. Its six-mile encircling wall locked into the Acrocorinth, a rocky hill rising to a height of 1,887 feet like an impregnable fortress.

1. For a thorough introduction to Corinth from a historical and archaeological point of view, see Jerome Murphy-O'Connor, *St. Paul's Corinth* (Wilmington, DE: Michael Glazier, 2002).

2. Francis Ambrière, *Greece* (Paris: Hachette, 1964), 391.

Fig. 1. The Acrocorinth seen from the Temple of Octavia, a veiw Paul would have had in Corinth.

Corinth had a reputation of being one of the most sensual cities of the ancient world.[3] The temple of the Greek goddess Aphrodite stood atop the Acrocorinth, and prostitutes had their reserved seats in the theater. The term "Corinthian girl" meant prostitute, and *korinthiazesthai* ("to Corinthianize, live like a Corinthian") meant to fornicate or promote the trade. If Aelius Aristides' remark is true, "[Corinth] chains all men with pleasure and all men are equally inflamed by it . . . so that it is clearly the city of Aphrodite."[4] Still, it was an expensive venture to go there, as reflected by the proverb "Not every man has the means to go to Corinth," a saying known in Rome and applied by Strabo to the cost of fornication. The Isthmian games, held every two years, flourished nearby, and Paul may have arrived in time to witness them, or at least the crowds that flocked to the events. They would supply Paul with a wealth of athletic images, such as that of the imperishable crown awaiting Christians compared to the wreath of celery that the victors in the games received (1 Cor 9:25–27).

The culture of Corinth was such that it considered human lives—or at least certain human lives—expendable. Aside from abortion and the abandonment

3. According to the ancient geographer Strabo (*Geography* 8.6.20), in classical times a thousand "sacred prostitutes" practiced in Corinth. No other Greek cities had "sacred prostitutes," so it is unlikely that Corinth did, and scholars today even doubt whether prostitution was any more common there than in other large Greek cities. But there must have been some foundation for its renown as a center for fornication and sexual immorality.

4. *Orations* 46.25; quoted by Murphy-O'Connor, *St. Paul's Corinth*, 116.

Fig. 2. This lintel, inscribed "Synagogue of the Hebrews," marked the entrance to the synagogue that was the successor of the one in which Paul preached in Corinth.

of babies (dropped off in a temple or left exposed), which was common in Roman times, of all the Greek cities in Paul's day, Corinth was virtually alone in its enthusiastic adoption of the homicidal games of the Roman amphitheater. This may have been due to the Roman influence in its history. Originally a native Greek city, it was devastated by the Roman general Lucius Mummius in 146 BC, then was rebuilt in 44 BC by Julius Caesar, who established it as a colony of freed slaves. When Paul arrived between AD 49 and 51, he found a population of Romans, Greeks, and Near Easterners of every provenance, including a number of Jews—all attracted by the commercial advantages of the city. The city was composed of a small number of wealthy merchants, a large number of poor workmen, and a great number of slaves—an additional sign of the wealth of the city.

It was a city of gods and goddesses. Besides the Jewish synagogue, of which a later lintel has been discovered reading "Synagogue of the Hebrews," there were temples to Apollo, Asclepius, Athena, Demeter, Dionysus, Kore, Palaimon, Zeus, Cybele, Isis, Serapis, Melkart, Sisyphus, and Aphrodite. The cults of Jupiter Capitolinus and of Artemis, the Great Mother, flourished, as did certain of the mystery religions, that of Isis surely, and probably that of Dionysus.

Such was the Corinth that Paul entered in the middle of the first century AD. Fresh from disappointment at the failure of his approach to the "wise" of

Achaia

BIBLICAL BACKGROUND

After years of conflict the Romans destroyed Corinth in 146 BC, but Julius Caesar rebuilt it in 44 BC as a Roman colony of freedmen, and in 27 BC Corinth was made the capital of the Roman province of Achaia, which included roughly the southern half of what is Greece today. It is indicative of its wealth that Corinth, not Athens, was the capital of Achaia.

Athens, who scoffed at Paul's preaching of the resurrection (Acts 17:16–34), Paul began proclaiming that the wisdom and power of God were to be found in the cross (1 Cor 1:23–24).[5] Despite initial difficulties, leading to his break from the synagogue, his ministry of a year and a half there flourished, so that in 2 Cor 1:1 he could greet not only the Christians in Corinth but also "all the holy ones throughout Achaia."[6] From here he wrote his First Letter to the Thessalonians and possibly the second.[7]

The Writing of 1 Corinthians

Paul certainly wrote this letter from Ephesus (1 Cor 16:8). According to Acts, at the end of his initial year-and-a-half ministry in Corinth, Paul sailed for Ephesus, where he stayed only a brief time before moving on to Caesarea, Jerusalem, and then via Antioch to his third missionary journey through Asia Minor (Acts 18:11, 22–23). When in the course of this third journey he arrived again at Ephesus, Apollos, an eloquent preacher from Alexandria who had ministered in Ephesus, had already been sent by that community to Corinth. There Apollos "gave great assistance" to the faithful (Acts 18:24–28), watering where Paul had planted (1 Cor 3:6). During this time, AD 53–54, two events prompted Paul to write our 1 Corinthians. First, a report arrived from "Chloe's people" (1 Cor 1:11) that the community was splitting into factions, each claiming allegiance to

5. I do not mean to imply here or elsewhere that Paul did not also preach the resurrection when he began in Corinth. He had obviously done so in Thessalonica (1 Thess 1:10), and 1 Corinthians will conclude with a long discussion about the resurrection. It was simply a matter of which dimension of the †paschal mystery, in his judgment, needed to be stressed at the beginning with the Corinthians, as he does at the beginning of the letter.

6. "By the time of Nero's accession [AD 54], Christianity had a permanent hold in Achaia, already boasting at least twenty churches" (J. A. Pattengale, "Achaia," *ABD* 1:53).

7. Scholars question whether 2 Thessalonians was authored by Paul or a later disciple.

Fig. 3. Paul's missionary journey to Corinth.

one or another minister. The report, or others like it, told of a number of other disorders as well, such as one might expect from persons freshly converted out of paganism. Second, in a prior letter (see 5:9) Paul had warned the faithful, among other things, to avoid "fornication," that is, falling back into pagan sexual practices. The community now responded with a series of doctrinal and moral questions in a letter carried to Paul most probably by Stephanas, Fortunatus, and Achaicus, leaders in the community (16:17).

Structure and Literary Features

Although Paul treats many topics in this letter, he has organized his material in a very clear manner, which makes it easy to follow his thought. Aside from the address at the beginning and the lengthy conclusion in chapter 16, the letter falls into four major parts, as follows:

I. Address (1:1–9)
II. Disorders in the Community (1:10–6:20)
  A. Divisions over Personalities (1:10–4:21)
  B. Moral Disorders (5:1–6:20)

III. Answers to the Corinthians' Questions (7:1–11:1)
  A. Marriage and Virginity (7:1–40)
  B. Offerings to Idols (8:1–11:1)
IV. Problems in the Community's Worship (11:2–14:40)
  A. Women's Attire (11:2–16)
  B. The Lord's Supper (11:17–34)
  C. Spiritual Gifts (12:1–14:40)
V. The Resurrection (15:1–58)
  A. The Resurrection of Christ (15:1–11)
  B. Resurrection as Transformation (15:12–58)
VI. Conclusion (16:1–24)

Writing as Script

Paul follows the conventions of letter writing in his day. But it is unlikely that he himself *wrote* any of his letters. His letters to the churches were oral both at their origin in dictation and at the point of delivery by a public reading. In many cases, as in Paul's discourse on the cross as power and wisdom (1 Cor 1:18–2:5), we can almost hear him preaching. And that is what he intends his listeners (not readers!) to hear as a single reader proclaims the message to the community to which the letter is addressed. It was ultimately not the written letter that represented Paul but the living voice of his representative. That is why even today Paul's Letters are suited for proclamation at the liturgy. The written word is just a script for proclamation.

Our literate culture has not prepared us to be good listeners. Why should we bother to pay close attention to an oral proclamation if we can read it in our missalette or our Bible? If we forget what the reading was about, we can easily read it later. Not so for the people in Paul's day. The only missalette they had was in their head. And that is where they recorded what they heard. Our literate culture has also taught us to lose our memories. A young technocrat next to me on a flight astounded me when he said: "I don't have to remember anything. Anything I want to know or remember is right here." He pointed to the latest cybertoy in his hand. This reliance on "where we can find it" outside ourselves makes moderns suspect that the words of Jesus in the Gospels were crafted by his followers much later, for who could remember all that he said? The suspicion is ill-founded. Our spiritual ancestors had recorders in their heads and could play them at will![8]

8. I lived in an oral culture in Nepal, and often I would give our cook a litany of items he should bring from the grocery. He never took notes, but he remembered everything. I would not dare go to the

Why is this important for us who will be reading the text of Paul? Instead of zipping through the text (this applies especially to those of us who took speed-reading lessons), we need to re-create the sound either by reading it aloud or at least imagining someone proclaiming Paul's preached letter to his addressees. And probably we need to make extra effort when listening to his word being proclaimed in the liturgy.

Literary Techniques

Whether we are listening or reading, it helps to be attentive to some of the literary techniques Paul uses. He uses *wordplays*, as when he plays on the difference between the "wisdom of word" (empty †rhetoric) and the "word of the cross," and on human wisdom and power versus God's foolishness and weakness, which is the true wisdom and power (1 Cor 1:17–25). Or the play on "all things are for me but not all things help me" (my rendering of the Greek wordplay in 6:12, which is not obvious in the NAB). Or between "using" and "using up" in 7:31. Or the double meaning of "followed them" in 10:4. Or the plays on the words "discerning" and "judging," both forms of the Greek *krinō*, in 11:31–33.

Another technique Paul uses is the †*diatribe*, a common rhetorical device in the ancient world in which one argues with an imaginary opponent, as Paul does in 15:36–37 and elsewhere in his letters. You will also encounter *lists of vices* (5:10–11; 6:9–10) and *virtues* (13:1–13; see also 2 Cor 6:6–7; Eph 6:14–17; Col 3:12–14); in Paul sometimes one list immediately follows another (Gal 5:19–23). Paul also cites *proverbs* or wisdom sayings, either his own or ones borrowed from the biblical or Gentile culture of his day: "A little yeast leavens all the dough" (5:6; Gal 5:9). "Bad company corrupts good morals" (1 Cor 15:33). And he knows the power of *metaphor*: "You are God's field, God's building" (3:9). "Your body is a temple of the holy Spirit" (6:19).

Paul delights in asking his listeners *rhetorical questions*: "Do you not know that you are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwells in you?" (3:16). "Do you not know that the holy ones will judge the world?" (6:2). "Do you not know that we will judge angels? Then why not everyday matters?" (6:3). "Can it be that there is not one among you wise enough to be able to settle a case between brothers?" (6:5). "Do you not know that the unjust will not inherit the kingdom of God?" (6:9). "Do you not know that your bodies are members

grocery without the list in my pocket. For a concrete example of how memory works in an oral culture, see Kenneth E. Bailey, "Informal Controlled Oral Tradition and the Synoptic Gospels," *Themelios* 20, no. 2 (1995): 4–11.

of Christ? Shall I then take Christ's members and make them the members of a prostitute?" (6:15; see also 6:16, 19; 7:16; 14:6–9, 16). The rhetorical question is both a compliment (the speaker presumes the hearer knows) and a challenge (but you seem to have forgotten).

Early in 1 Corinthians, Paul makes it clear that rhetoric for rhetoric's sake is foolishness, but he does not hesitate to use rhetoric to proclaim Christ, whose message deserves the best in beauty and power.

Theological Themes

From the reports and the questions he received, Paul sensed how serious the situation in Corinth was. Aside from the factions, many were appealing to their new "knowledge" that idols are nothing to justify continuing their pagan practice of sacrificial meals (see commentary on 1 Cor 8); an incestuous man was being welcomed publicly in the community; Christians were taking fellow Christians to pagan lawcourts; sexual immorality was being tolerated in the name of the freedom of the gospel; and a spirit of divisiveness was appearing even in the celebration of the Eucharist, where different groups were eating their meals apart, some even getting drunk while the poorer were left hungry. Even their prayer meetings, for all their enthusiasm, were becoming chaotic. Some of the questions posed by the community were less dramatic: what is the value of marriage, given the imminence of the Lord's return? Do our bodies really share in eternal life, and if so, how?

The community's many problems anticipate many of the throes the Church goes through today, and Paul's responses sowed the seeds of a rich theological development in such areas as the centrality of the cross and the resurrection; the role of the Holy Spirit in revealing the †mystery of Christ, in sanctifying the faithful, and in endowing them with †charisms; baptism and the Eucharist; the Church as the body of Christ and temple of the Holy Spirit; tradition; Christian liberty; marriage; virginity; and †conscience and moral responsibility. No other letter touches on so many different topics that have relevance to the Church today.

The problems dogging the community were not only internal. Also, the Corinthians' relation with Paul was rocky, especially when the Apostle was not around. From 2 Corinthians we can gather that among the members were some who questioned his authority, especially after they had experienced the later ministry of Apollos and Peter, and perhaps of others whom Paul dubs "superapostles." Part of the difficulty was a negligence in dealing with errant members,

and thus there was either inadequate authority in the community or opposition to existing authority. The Letters of Paul had great importance for establishing order and harmony in this rowdy community. Reconciliation eventually won out—a sign of hope that in our Church today it can happen as well.

1 Corinthians: Part of a Whole

In one sense the Bible is a library. There are seventy-three books in the Catholic canon, forty-six of the Old Testament and twenty-seven of the New. Just as in libraries today, some books belong to one literary type, some to another. The collection was compiled over hundreds of years and reflects different historical situations. Often the author or authors of one book did not personally know the author or authors of another. Nevertheless, Christians firmly believe that each book was inspired by the Holy Spirit. And that means that no one book can claim to be complete without the others, and thus each book is like an instrument in a great symphony orchestra. Paul's collection is like a set of instruments within the larger orchestra. Hence, we will look first at the place of 1 Corinthians among Paul's Letters, and then at where these fit in the whole of the canon.

1 Corinthians within Paul's Letters

For our purposes we will consider all the letters traditionally attributed to Paul (excluding Hebrews) as the "Pauline corpus," even though scholars debate whether some of the letters or parts of the letters were the work of his disciples. As we have noted above, in that collection 1 Corinthians makes a major contribution in theological themes. But for more information on the tension between Paul and the Corinthian community, we would turn to 2 Corinthians, which also tells us many details about Paul's apostolic sufferings (11:23–33) and his mystical experience (12:1–5) that we would not know otherwise. First Corinthians does not take up the question of the role of faith in justification, which is the major concern of Galatians and Romans. For Martin Luther, this was the most important theme of the whole Bible, and he believed that anything that gave a qualification to that doctrine, as James does in speaking about the importance of works, should not really be in the canon. But that was not and is not the Catholic view. Romans also has a long and beautiful chapter (8) on the Holy Spirit, which the Fathers of the Church considered the heart of the letter. We also find in Romans three chapters (9–11) on the question

of the role of the Jews in God's plan of salvation. First and Second Thessalonians are concerned primarily with the second coming of Christ, which has only a minor role in 1 Corinthians. Philippians is a cordial letter containing the famous hymn about Christ's not claiming divine privileges but emptying himself, taking on "the form of a slave," dying on the cross, and being raised to glory by the Father (Phil 2:5–11). A similar hymn in Col 1:15–20 portrays Christ's role in creation itself and in the new creation of the resurrection. Ephesians is a lengthy, hymnlike letter extolling the wonder of the Church in God's plan. The latter two letters, called †Captivity Epistles, build on Paul's teaching on the Church as the body of Christ, which we find in 1 Corinthians. Ephesians also fills out Paul's sketch on marriage in 1 Cor 7 by showing how it is a symbol of Christ's union with the Church. The other letters harmonize with or develop themes introduced in our letter. But there are passages both within 1 Corinthians and in Paul's other letters that are in tension with other Pauline passages, as we will see in 1 Cor 11:5, 13 and 14:34–35, about women speaking in the assembly. Hence the value of a commentary to explain how these differences can be reconciled.

First and Second Timothy and Titus, although possibly penned by a disciple of Paul in later circumstances, belong to the Pauline canon, for they apply his thought to pastoral situations via the form of address to individual shepherds appointed by Paul. They are important for showing how the ministry of Paul that we see in 1 Corinthians will be carried on after his death—what we call the apostolic succession, a key to what we declare in the creed: "I believe in one, holy, Catholic, and *apostolic* Church."

The Pauline Canon within the Wider Canon

Christians read Paul in the light of the whole biblical canon, from Genesis through Revelation. He is a major contributor, for only one New Testament author (Luke) writes at greater length. His is also the first writing we have about Jesus, since 1 Thessalonians probably predates the Gospel of Mark by more than fifteen years. Yet already at that time Paul has a deep theological understanding of the gospel message. For example, the triad of faith, hope, and love, which later tradition calls the theological virtues, are already firmly established in his consciousness. Yet his reflections are in the form of letters, not narratives about Jesus, as the Gospels are. So although Paul's Letters precede in time, the Gospels precede in honor, not only because they tell us what happened before Paul, but also because they tell the story of the Person who so fascinated Paul

and inspired his life and ministry. Rightly so, then, are they placed before the Pauline Letters in the canon.

The Greek Old Testament, the †Septuagint, was Paul's Bible, and we cannot understand the Apostle or his writing apart from it. He quotes from it frequently. Among other New Testament writings, as mentioned above, the Letter of James contextualizes Paul's teaching on justification by faith, insisting that faith must be expressed in works. There is an element of †apocalyptic end-time imagery in Paul (1 Thess 4:15–18) but not to the extent to which it is developed in the book of Revelation or in the Gospels (Matt 24:1–31; Mark 13:1–27; Luke 21:5–28). The Acts of the Apostles tells us of events in Paul's life that are not mentioned in his letters, although there is some overlap here and there.

1 Corinthians for Today

Since you will read this letter through the lens of your own life experience, you will probably see applications that others might not. Sometimes Paul's statements will confirm and console you; at other times they challenge you to think outside the box of your own experience. Such is the richness of God's Word. The discussion questions available online will stimulate your reflection and give you the delight of discovering treasures you never dreamed were there. In the commentary I frequently offer a "Reflection and Application" section as one way to draw out the significance of the passage for our lives today, but this is only to stimulate your own reflection on the passage.

Here is why I find 1 Corinthians "a lamp for my feet, a light for my path" (Ps 119:105). The opening chapters tell me that my church, like that of the Corinthians, is a gathering of saints and sinners, people who are consecrated by the blood of Christ but desecrated by self-centered concerns that hinder the building of a loving, unified community: cliques and turf wars, personal preferences becoming demands, just like these folks in Corinth. I repent of my sins against the unity of the Church. If we would only keep our eyes on the cross, what a difference that would make (1 Cor 1). Maybe when we come to meetings we would fall on our knees and seek God's wisdom first before we promote our own agenda. For there is a spiritual wisdom available to those who are spiritually mature (chap. 2).

But no, we find fault with our priest or †minister, not looking beyond them to see Christ, who has chosen to come to us in the flesh of human, and sometimes all-too-human, instruments. That is part of the sacramental nature, the visible, flesh-and-blood nature, of the Church (chaps. 3–4). And

yes, there are scandals in the Church, sometimes even in the clergy. We have heroines like Mother Teresa of Calcutta but also Catholic politicians who don't defend the life of the unborn. Do I belong to this Church? Indeed I do, because the frontier between good and evil passes through my heart too. And if some say I'm a hypocrite, I'll say yes, but nowhere else could I become a saint, and I'm trying (chap. 5). I'm challenged to think of my body and the bodies of everyone I meet not as food for lust but as members of Christ's own body, each one a temple of the Holy Spirit. I try to do that with my students, especially those who in their dress mistake the classroom for a swimming pool (chap. 6).

As a priest I daily witness the disastrous effects of the sexual revolution and pornography on family life, and I long for the day when Paul's wisdom on family life might rule the day. I rejoice that more and more young men and women like myself (no longer young) are finding how life-receiving and life-giving is the gift of oneself in celibate consecration to the Lord (chap. 7). Our idols today are not those of Corinth but the worldly values, the "sensual lust, enticement for the eyes, and a pretentious life" (1 John 2:16) that invite me to compromise my commitment to Jesus and to insist on my rights even when doing so would hurt others. I hope one day to have Paul's thirst for the unity of the Church and the common good of all in the community, "not seeking my own benefit but that of the many, that they may be saved" (10:33; chaps. 8–10).

Like the Israelites in the desert and the Christians in Corinth, I take too much for granted the incredible gifts the Lord has given, especially my baptism, the Eucharist, and the gift of the Holy Spirit (10:1–5), and I repent of the times I have celebrated Mass distractedly or forgotten that the Eucharist means also embracing those who have hurt me and seeking reconciliation (chap. 11). And what about those spiritual gifts, the charisms? They call me out of my cocoon to praise God and to become a channel of his love to others. I praise God that I have received an outpouring of the Holy Spirit—but I leak and need constant renewal. Above all I need God's love to serve others with the gifts he has given me (chaps. 12–14). Finally, Paul's masterful treatment of the resurrection of Jesus as a guarantee of my own and that of my loved ones fills me with assurance and joy. It whets my appetite for the not-yet fulfillment and makes me want to live every day in the power of the Holy Spirit (chap. 15).

Such are some of the treasurers I find in 1 Corinthians. There are many more for you to find.

Living Tradition

This commentary is built on the assumption, made clear in Vatican II's *Dei Verbum* (*Constitution on Divine Revelation*), that Scripture is the consigning to writing of sacred tradition, which, while being unique and unrepeatable in the apostolic writings, continues into our day through the teachings of the Fathers and Doctors of the Church, the liturgy, the lives of the saints, and the Church's magisterium. With that in mind, I make frequent references to that "living tradition" both within the commentary and in sidebars. In a concise phrase *Dei Verbum* says, *Traditio proficit*, . . . *crescit perceptio*: "Tradition develops, . . . insight grows" (§8). I believe this commentary, like others in the Catholic Commentary on Sacred Scripture, is immensely enriched by our two thousand years of development and insight.[9]

9. The frequent quotations from St. John Chrysostom are taken from the *Saint Chrysostom: Homilies on the Epistles of Paul to the Corinthians*, vol. 12 of *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, First Series, ed. Philip Schaff (1889; repr., Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979), checked against the Greek and occasionally revised into more contemporary English style; http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/2201.htm.