

## **Paul Between Power, Force, and Domination**

### Introduction

The questions of power and authority are issues which are not only dealt with in Pauline interpretation but Paul himself explicitly addresses these issues in his letters. In some of these they even comprise the focal points of discussion such as in 2 Corinthians or Galatians. In other letters aspects of these are addressed, or the issues of authority and power occur in association with other issues (Rom 1:5; 15:15). The question of Paul's use of power and authority is closely intertwined with the issues of the power of the gospel, the power of Christ, and the power of God.<sup>1</sup> Since recent research has clearly demonstrated that religion and politics were not separated realms in antiquity, it is now evident that these issues not only had political overtones but were inherently political in as much as they were religious.<sup>2</sup> As Neil Elliott has emphasized 'The imperial context provides more than a conceptual background for Paul's theology' - the message of the cross per se is a 'challenge to the ritual and ceremony of the empire.'<sup>3</sup>

Though Paul's use of power and the power of God as manifested in Christ cannot be clearly separated, I will concentrate in this paper on the question of Paul's use of power and authority as an apostle who understands himself as called to proclaim the gospel among the gentiles. That Paul actually did exercise power and authority is hardly questioned in Pauline scholarship. But there is a broad range of perspectives on how this Pauline use of power should actually be evaluated. In traditional Pauline interpretation unquestioned authority is taken for granted for a founder of communities and a church leader. Also in approaches

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. Daniel Patte, *Paul's Faith and the Power of the Gospel: a Structural Introduction to the Pauline Letters*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press 1983. J.Christiaan Beker, *Paul, the Apostle: The Triumph of God in Life and Thought*. Edinburgh: T&T Clark. 1980.

<sup>2</sup> See e.g. Daniel Boyarin, *Dying for God: Martyrdom and the Making of Christianity and Judaism*. The Lancaster/Yarnton Lectures in Judaism and Other Religions for 1998. Stanford: Stanford University Press 1999. Neil Elliott, *Liberating Paul, The Justice of God and the Politics of the Apostle*, Sheffield Academic Press, 1995. Dieter Georgi, *Theocracy in Paul's Praxis and Theology*, ET Minneapolis: Fortress Press 1991.

<sup>3</sup> Neil Elliott, 'Paul and the Politics of Empire' in Richard A.Horsley (ed.), *Paul and Politics: Ekklēsia, Israel, Imperium, Interpretation*. Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International 2000, p. 39.

emphasizing the challenging political aspect of Paul's message of the cross such as in Elliott's, Horsley's, and Georgi's, Paul is perceived as exercising power and authority although not so much as an unquestioned leader but as somebody who is and takes part in a continuous dialogue.<sup>4</sup>

Some feminist theologians see Paul's use of power as an open or hidden re-inscription of hierarchical structures in the previously egalitarian discipleship of equals. Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza contends that despite the anti-imperial tendency of the message Paul proclaims there is a tension, even contradiction, in his claim of power over against the Christ-believing groups. Schüssler Fiorenza asserts that Paul, in his use of hierarchical language and in his exercise of power and authority, reintroduced hierarchical and authoritarian structures into the original discipleship of equals.<sup>5</sup> Others, e.g. Luise Schottroff, assert that Paul regarded himself as '...one...among many women and men who lived the gospel together and engaged in discussion and dispute about the correct interpretation of Torah in their situation.'<sup>6</sup>

The question I will deal with in this paper is whether this is an 'either-or' issue. Are hierarchical tendencies, rightly perceived to be present within Paul's discourse of power, inherently and necessarily expressions of domination and control and thus in opposition to a 'discipleship of equals'? Jacques Derrida's approach to questions of authority and power could prove illuminating since it draws attention to inequalities inherent even in relations of equals and even in the slight hierarchical tendency this creates.<sup>7</sup> I thus wish to analyse - 'with a little help from Derrida' - some aspects of Paul's use of authority and power, between power, force, and domination.

The terms 'power' and 'force' are used in many different ways in recent discussions, sometimes it seems also in contradictory ways.<sup>8</sup> I will refer to 'power', the more neutral term, as that by which people influence each other, or achieve a certain goal through their actions.<sup>9</sup> This does not necessarily imply domination of one person or group over another or others.

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<sup>4</sup> See my 'That We May Be Mutually Encouraged': *Feminism and the New Perspective in Pauline Studies*. London, New York: T&T Clark 2004, p.153f.

<sup>5</sup> As Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza states "The rhetoric of Pauline interpreters continues not only to identify themselves with Paul but also to see Paul as identical with 'his' communities, postulating that Paul was the powerful creator and unquestioned leader of the communities to whom he writes." 'Paul and the Politics of Interpretation', in Richard A. Horsley (ed.), *Paul and Politics: Ekklesia, Israel, Imperium, Interpretation*. Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International 2000, pp. 40-57, p.44.

<sup>6</sup> 'Holiness and Justice: Exegetical Comments on 1 Corinthians 11.17-34', in *JSNT* 79 (2000), pp. 51-60, p.53.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. *Negotiations: Interventions and Interviews 1971-2001*, ed. Elizabeth Rottenberg. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press 2002, p. 34.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. Derrida's use of the terms in *Negotiations*, p. 35, where he refers to 'force' and 'power' which to me seem close to the French terms 'force' and 'pouvoir' - 'force' being close to the German word 'Kraft'.

<sup>9</sup> This is similar to J.B. Thompson's definition of power as 'a capacity which enables or empowers some individuals to make decisions, pursue ends, or realise interests.' *Ideology and Modern Culture*. Cambridge: Polity Press 1990, p.151.

The term 'force' will be used here in the sense of forcing somebody to do something in exercising 'power over somebody' or in the sense of 'naked power' with implications of domination. Both terms are not limited to the personal realm but are understood as referring also to the communal and structural realm.

I am aware that an analysis of Paul and the question of power cannot be limited to the specific use of words referring explicitly to power (e.g. *du, nami j* and *evxousi, a*).<sup>10</sup> I cannot elaborate on this detail in a paper of this length but will concentrate on aspects where Paul more or less explicitly addresses issues which involve power and authority.

I will deal with these aspects in four sections:

- 1 The Presence of Power in Social Relations
- 2 Paul and the Communal Aspect of Power
- 3 Paul's Differentiated Use of Power
- 4 The Dynamics of Power and the Openness of Hierarchies in Paul

## 1 The Presence of Power in Social Relations

Paul's letters are traces of social relations. Through these letters Paul addresses people he is related to. This relationship was either established at an earlier visit of the apostle or, as with Romans, it arises from a common interest between Paul and a particular group. Yet the letters not only witness to a relationship between Paul and a group of people but also to Paul and some people who are so closely related to him that they are named as joint-senders of the letter, and to specific relationships amongst the people addressed in the letters. Thus the letters are traces of a network of relationships geographically spread over a wide area in the Roman empire. The letters themselves are a means which help to maintain and establish this network in that they are the means of communication between people who are separated through geographical distance. Many issues addressed in these letters themselves deal with social interactions and problems within this network of relationships. Questions raised by the group in 1 Corinthians or by Paul in Romans 14-15 deal with that ethos of social relations which accords properly with 'being in Christ'. The fact that there are questions mentioned in

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<sup>10</sup> Cf. Sandra Hack Polaski's detailed analysis of the discourse of grace as a discourse of power in her *Paul and the Discourse of Power*. Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press 1999, pp. 104-123.

these letters, apparently raised by Christ-believing groups, indicates that these letters are part of continuous conversation, that they are conversations in a particular situation.<sup>11</sup> The letters give us some insight into complex relational structures involving many actors relating to each other in various ways on a variety of different and diverging levels in constantly changing situations.

It is almost a sociological commonplace that wherever people relate to each other the question of power is involved. Social relations are power relations. This is not only so when one or several actors claim to exercise power and authority in a specific situation or for a specific purpose, but also generally where people interact with each other and try to live together. This is even more so when people want to achieve something for a specific purpose. There is no human agency and interaction without the involvement of power.<sup>12</sup> Power, understood as present in any human interaction, is thus not limited to situations of conflict where opposing interests clash with each other or to situations where an individual or a group tries to ensure the outcome of an action against the interests of others. This perception of power recognizes the fact that people who relate to each other influence each other, that there is always something 'happening between them'.

Power thus should not be confused with domination or force in the sense of enforcing something, or of trying to achieve one's own goals against the will of others even to the extent of using violence. These aspects may be involved in certain specific power relations but they are not inherent to power as such. As Foucault emphasizes, violence does not 'constitute the principle or the basic nature of power.....In itself the exercise of power is not violence...'<sup>13</sup> To perceive social relations as power relations implies that all actors in the relationship are active agents influencing the processes and interactions in the relationship. Power thus is a factor even in the most democratic egalitarian group of equals. This is neither negative nor positive but needs to be accounted for where human beings relate to each other. To negate it

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<sup>11</sup> Cf. the subtitle of Calvin J. Roetzel's *The Letters of Paul: Conversations in Context*. 4th edition. Louisville, Ky: Westminster/John Knox Press 1998. Also Runnar M. Thorsteinsson, *Paul's Interlocutor in Romans 2: Function and Identity in the Context of Ancient Epistolography*. Stockholm: Almqvist&Wiksell International 2003.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. Anthony Giddens, who understands power as 'the *transformative capacity* of human action' in his *New Rules of Sociological Method: A Positive Critique of Interpretative Sociologies*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press 2<sup>nd</sup> edition 1993, p.145.

<sup>13</sup> 'The Subject and Power' in Hubert L. Dreyfus and Paul Rabinow, *Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press 1982, p. 220.

or to propose the ideal of power-free social relations is either naïve or deliberately misleading.<sup>14</sup>

According to this perception of power it would be either naïve or misleading to expect a power-free zone in the social relations reflected upon in the Pauline letters. It would be a surprise not to find aspects of power expressed in these letters. This is even more so since they are reflections of a movement which emerged from visions of one crucified whose resurrection was perceived as the beginning of the ‘changing of the world’. This process of the ‘changing of the world’ was not a theoretical ideology which was intellectually held as true but it implied concrete changes in social relations and life in anticipation of this ‘change’. It implied real not merely intellectual changes. Such a process necessarily involves power as no changes can be achieved without the exercise of some sort of power.

The political aspects of these changes should be kept in mind as well. As Neil Elliott and others have emphasized, to believe that through a Jew who was crucified by the Roman imperial forces the ‘change of the world’ had been initiated cannot but have been heard with political overtones. It was anti-imperial and implied that these groups who gathered in Christ perceived themselves as called to live according to an ethos which differed radically from the ideology of the Roman empire. Those groups especially who were called as Gentiles had to learn to live a life-style which differed radically from their previous life as pagans.

The aspects of power which are inherent in such radical social changes in a context which is dominated by quite a different ethos are openly and controversially discussed in Paul’s letters. Conflicts, claims of authority and power and disagreement and negotiations are not hidden but addressed openly in these letters (e.g. Gal and 1 and 2 Cor; but it is difficult to get the full picture of the situations mentioned as we have only one side of the conversation). Although the power issue is not always addressed in the explicit use of the words *du, nami j* and *evxousi, a*, this does not, in my view, indicate that Paul in his use of language had a hidden agenda which he tried to impose on his ‘partners in conversation’. But it is beyond any doubt that he did exercise power in his relationships with Christ-believing groups and that he saw nothing wrong with it. He perceived himself as called by God to a specific mission which implied a specific interpretation of the Christ event as a turning point in salvation history. His

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<sup>14</sup> Cf. Michel Foucault who particularly in his later work emphasized the presence of power in social relations and who challenges the idea that an ideal social formation should imply the liberation from power. See e.g. his *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings, 1972-1977*. Colin Gordon ed. New York: Pantheon 1980.

mission had to do with the ‘association of Gentiles’ as satellite communities with Israel. He was in an open (not hidden<sup>15</sup>) discussion, or to use a Derridaean term, in negotiation with other apostles, co-workers and his communities about the practical implications of this being ‘in Christ’.

Two aspects need to be taken into account here. (1) Derrida has emphasized that to be part of a conversation or, as he calls it, in negotiation about an issue implies that one argues from a certain position, holds a certain conviction. This does not mean one’s own position is static and never changeable, but that without positions negotiations are impossible. Paul has meanings and positions in the questions addressed from which he argues and over which he agrees or disagrees with his ‘partners in negotiation’ in lively debates. (2) It has to be kept in mind that Paul’s as well the others’ power in these relationships was a power ‘without an army’. The means by which any of the members of this social network (including Paul) could exercise power were very limited and certainly not backed by a threat of violence. There was no legal or political or ecclesial system at their command and thus also at Paul’s disposal to enforce agreement to one’s own position or authority. There was only negotiation and persuasion by which they could exercise power and thus influence each other. As long as this was so the process of negotiation about issues in debate in the early Christ-believing groups remained open. That they were not always in agreement about the questions addressed does not mean that they were not and did not understand themselves as being in a relationship with each other. The conflict at Antioch did not prevent Paul from bringing the collection to Jerusalem. The disagreement with the Corinthians did not hinder Paul from writing to them and even visiting them again. The traces of conflict, negotiations, agreements, and solidarity, and the power involved, are reports of living relationships which necessarily involve all these. An indication of this unbroken network is Paul’s frequent use of words containing the prefix *sun*.

## 2 Paul and the Communal Aspect of Power

Power is not something that exists in and by itself. Foucault formulated that power is not a thing, it cannot be grasped as an object apart from social relationships; and Derrida states that

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<sup>15</sup> As Polaski contends ‘Paul’s use of the language of ‘grace’ here is, therefore, a signal that something else is going on: a claim about authority, a discourse of power that is the more effective for being hidden.’ *Paul and the Discourse of Power*, p. 109.

it is 'not a substance, it is not something that is stabilizable, which would fall under phenomena' ..... it is always inscribed in a space ...'<sup>16</sup> Power is not some essence somebody has/possesses over another person. Thus power and authority are never individual but only exist in a communal setting. This not only but particularly applies to power without any legal or military force backing it. The work of Weber about charismatic authority and its discussion by Holmberg are the 'classics' in this field which need not be dealt with here in detail.<sup>17</sup> Weber's description of the inter-connectedness of the charismatic leader and community is still a useful tool for understanding some aspects of power relations- even though Holmberg rightly demonstrated that a clear distinction between charismatic origins of a movement and its institutionalization is impossible. I even doubt that such stages existed since they sound like the deterioration of an early ideal stage towards a less original and thus more static stage. (cf. from Früh-zu Spätjudentum or from early Jesus-movement to Frühkatholizismus). But that no charismatic leader can exercise any power over a community without the community granting a leader this authority and power over them certainly still is quite an adequate description. However, the communal aspect of power and authority between Christ-believing communities and Paul seems to me to be more complex than this.

Although Paul viewed himself as personally called by God to proclaim the gospel (Rom 1,1) he did not set up an independent personal mission to the gentiles run just by himself as the only single and exclusive authority. It can hardly be envisaged that such an individualistic action would have been successful. Moreover, the message itself is communal through and through as it is about the community of God with his world, and thus the community of people at the beginning of the arrival of 'the world to come' in the Christ event. Even irrespective of the scenario recounted in Acts, it is significant to note that although Paul emphasizes that he has been called as an apostle not by men but by Jesus Christ himself (Gal 1:1) he never appears as the single and independent leader who exercises personal power and authority from an isolated position above everybody else. In his letters Paul shows himself as part of a network of people and communities. Though he sees himself as attributed with special power and authority as an apostle, that is, with a special mission he sees himself and his task as part of a network, the whole messianic movement of early Christ believers.

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<sup>16</sup> *Negotiations*, p. 35. Note that Derrida uses the term force here. The way he uses it seems to me to be very close to the use of the term power in the sense of the German word Kraft. I therefore keep to the term power and apply what Derrida says with regard to force to the term power.

<sup>17</sup> Bengt Holmberg, *Paul and Power: The Structure of Authority in the Primitive Church as Reflected in the Pauline Epistles*. Lund: Gleerup 1978. Max Weber, *Economy and Society: An Outline of Interpretive Sociology*. 3 vols.; ed. Günther Roth and Claus Wittich. New York: Bedminster Press 1968.

This is expressed e.g. in the communal openings of his letters. These letters, with the exception of Galatians, are not individual letters by Paul but they are communal letters not only in that they address communities but also in that they are sent by small groups of people. Paul always mentions at least one co-worker who is addressing the community together with him. The list of greetings at the end of the letters are indications of this communal aspect of Paul's work as well. The sometimes long lists demonstrate the manifold network of relations which Paul was part of and was working in, and are indications of the divergent levels and ways in which Paul was relating to others. I will come to these aspects of Paul's use of power in the next section of this paper.

It is also significant to note that the communities Paul writes to and over which he exercises power and authority have in no way been forced into the relationship with Paul. The issue at stake also is not primarily an individual relationship with Paul. These communities responded to his preaching of the gospel, they were founded by Paul (except the one in Rome which he addresses with specific caution) which means that they consented voluntarily to become part of the network of the Christ believing groups. Thus although Paul certainly was regarded as having authority, and sometimes exercised authority over them, he could never have achieved anything without their consent. He was apostle for them in as much and only as long as they regarded him as such.<sup>18</sup> He had by no means any established or institutionalized position over them and certainly could not be a leader for them without them consenting to his leadership. There was as yet no normative concept of what an apostle actually was and what it implied in status. Thus, neither Paul nor his communities could refer to a specific status when they referred to apostolic authority. Although there is something special in being an apostle Paul nevertheless is like anyone else in Christ. He as well as the communities are called by God through the Spirit. The Spirit was not exclusively given to Paul but they all shared in spiritual gifts and each one had his/her own specific charisma (1 Cor 12:4-11) Paul's authority as an apostle was his charismatic gift, not as a means to a personal end but for the edification and empowerment of the community. The apostolic charisma had no precedence over any other gift which served the same purpose. The other members were similarly gifted with their charismata. The authority and exercise of power in Paul is thus seen as functional- serving a specific purpose which is communal not individual.

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<sup>18</sup> See e.g. John H. Schütz, *Paul and the Anatomy of Apostolic Authority*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1975, p. 8; 204.

### 3 Paul's Differentiated Use of Power

Paul in his letters not only exercises power and authority but he does so in a clearly hierarchical way.<sup>19</sup> The mere fact that he writes letters to his communities demonstrates that he perceives himself as somebody who has something to say, has a right to do so, and presumes that his activity is effective.<sup>20</sup> His way of arguing demonstrates that according to his perception to be an apostle is something special. His claim to apostleship is a claim to authority at the same time. This is not so much of a surprise if we take into account aspects of Derrida's approach to the questions of power and authority. Derrida thinks that there are no entirely non-hierarchical structures in social relations. He states that 'The erasure of a certain coded hierarchy always gives rise to a more subtle, more symbolic hierarchy, the code of which still remains in formation.'<sup>21</sup>

To acknowledge hierarchical aspects in Paul's use of power and authority does not say anything about how he actually exercised these. As we have seen above, power and authority should not automatically be equated with force and domination. In the light of Derrida's statements about power and hierarchy, the question of force and domination also requires thorough consideration with regard to hierarchical relationships. It also has to be taken into account that not all of Paul's personal and communal interactions and relationships are shaped by the same pattern. Paul does not relate to everybody and always in the same way. The pattern of his relationships depends on the situation he is addressing as well as whom he is addressing. The issue would require a differentiated analysis throughout his letters, which is beyond the scope of this paper. I can only mention some aspects which in my view would be significant to be taken into account and which could lead to further insights.

As mentioned above, Paul is part of a broad and divergent network of people and communities. This implies that he is relating to a variety of people who on different levels and with different functions are part of this network as well. They interact with each other on a variety of issues and occasions, a fact which in itself indicates that the ways they interact might differ as well. Thus the aspect of power involved in these relationships must be looked at in a differentiated way. Being aware that more could be mentioned I will concentrate on

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<sup>19</sup> See Michael J. Gorman, *Cruciformity: Paul's Narrative Spirituality of the Cross*. Grand Rapids, Mich: Eerdmans 2001, p. 294. Dale B. Martin, *The Corinthian Body*. New Haven: Yale University Press 1995, p. 59f.

<sup>20</sup> Schütz *Paul and the Anatomy of Apostolic Authority*, p. 9.

<sup>21</sup> Derrida, *Negotiations*, p. 21.

three groups of people Paul is in contact with, that is 1) other apostles, 2) his co-workers, 3) the communities he had founded.

### Paul and Other Apostles

Paul's description of the arrangement with 'Jerusalem' in Gal 1-2 gives us an insight into the relationship between apostles. Paul reports that he travelled there without anybody commanding him to do so, that is, he emphasizes that there is no authority above him in the Christ-believing movement to command him, at least no one he would recognize. We further learn that there must have been issues that gave rise at least to some irritation if not conflict which had to be sorted. We also learn that the apostles knew about each other and the issues at stake, that is, there was some sort of communication between them; they were in a relationship with each other and regarded themselves as part of the same network. They also regarded it as important to meet personally to clarify what was a matter of debate. The way they met and the agreement they came to gives no indication that any of the apostles involved was in any way superior-or subordinated to the other. They negotiated on the basis of equality and met as equals, discussed as equals, and recognized each other's function as different but equal. They recognized that there were different mission fields which required different people to work in and to proclaim the same gospel differently to those who were and remained different in Christ, that is to Jews and Gentiles. They met as members of the Christ-believing groups on an equal level, with the same authority, that is, there was no status hierarchy amongst these apostles. This is not to say that there was no power involved in these negotiations, possibly even with some hierarchical inclinations. To negotiate they each must have had their own positions from which to negotiate. There must have been a flow of power between them, by which they influenced each other. The outcome of these negotiations, as Paul reports it, was the mutual recognition of each others' mission and authority on a basis of equality (Gal 2:9).<sup>22</sup>

There are occasions where Paul mentions other apostles which also indicate that he regarded them as equal. E.g. he neither sends nor appeals nor commands Apollos but he urges him to visit the Corinthians ( 1 Cor 16:12), and Apollos apparently felt free to act as he thought it was appropriate. Paul does not deny Apollos' authority as God's apostle and servant but he rather depicts their egalitarian relationship as exemplary for the Corinthians '...so that you

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<sup>22</sup> Cf. Polaski, *Discourse*, p. 89. pace Bengt Holmberg, *Paul and Power*, pp. 15-56.

may learn through us the meaning of the saying ‘Nothing beyond what is written’, so that none of you will be puffed up in favour of one against another.’ (1 Cor 4:6). The fact that Peter and Apollos may have visited Corinth does not seem to have been perceived as problematic or threatening his own authority as an apostle, but he even encourages their ministry (1 Cor 3:5-9; 21-23; 16:12).<sup>23</sup> He further mentions Andronikus and Junia as apostles who are well appreciated and were Christ-believers before Paul, a fact he recognizes respectfully (Rom 16:7). But he does react and tries to establish his own specific authority when he thinks other apostles actually do trespass the limits of their respective function and authority in claiming specific authority that Paul attributes only to the ‘founding father’ of a community. In relation to the Corinthians he claims this position exclusively for himself (1 Cor 4:14-15; 2 Cor 10:14). He defends this role and tries to re-establish it vehemently in 2 Cor 10-13 as it seems badly threatened by some apostles who went beyond their geographical limits according to Paul’s perception of apostolic authority (2 Cor 10:15; also Rom 15:20b). But even in this conflict, Paul does not claim authority over other apostles but only defends, no doubt powerfully, his own position over against them in relation to his Corinthian converts.

#### Paul and his Co-Workers

The position of Paul over against his co-workers seems to have been slightly different. There apparently was a circle of a significant number of people around the apostle who worked together with him in his apostolic work, and some of these even travelled with him.<sup>24</sup> Paul is the centre of this circle who organizes and decides the activities of the whole group. He is the one who ‘sends’, ‘leaves’, and ‘commends’ his co-workers to his communities (1 Thess 3:2; 1 Cor 4:17; 16:10-11a; 2 Cor 7:13-15; 8:18). Their task is to ‘strengthen and encourage’ them (1 Thess 3:2), they do ‘the work of the Lord’ as Paul himself (1 Cor 16:10), they remind them of the gospel Paul has proclaimed amongst them (1 Cor 4:17), they serve as links to the communities, they are thus part of the network of communication between Paul and his communities, and they represent Paul when he cannot visit the communities himself (1 Cor 4:17f). As such they should be welcomed with respect and honour, they should not be despised (1 Cor 16:10), but given due recognition (1 Cor 16:18).

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<sup>23</sup> See Robert Banks, *Paul’s Idea of Community*. 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, Peabody, MA: Hendrickson 1994, p. 173.

<sup>24</sup> See Wolf-Henning Ollrog, *Paulus und seine Mitarbeiter: Untersuchungen zu Theorie und Praxis der paulinischen Mission*. Neukirchen: Neukirchener Verlag 1979.

Though these references indicate that there is a hierarchical tendency in the relationship of Paul and his co-workers, and that Paul clearly is the one who exercises authority and uses 'power' over against them, there is no indication that Paul tried to dominate them or forced them into something they would not themselves consent to. The hierarchical tendency and the exercise of power in their relationship does not intrinsically imply that Paul was dominating them. Although they were Paul's co-workers and the hierarchy in their relationship was not to be reversed, I also cannot find traces of 'benevolent patriarchalism' in the few texts that refer to the network of Paul and his co-workers. These rather reflect a participatory relationship, Paul regarding them genuinely as co-workers, not lower in status than himself, and no less able to fulfil the task they were sent to perform than Paul himself. They appear as self-conscious mature colleagues. Paul apparently did not just order what they had to do, but discussed things with them and they could agree or not (2 Cor 8:16), Titus decides himself to leave for a journey to Corinth. I also am not convinced that in Phil 2:22 Paul perceives Timothy as being in a son-father relationship to himself, serving him like a son serves his father. Timothy together with Paul served the gospel – the analogy then is the son(s), both Timothy and Paul served the father (gospel). Though this reading does not annul the hierarchy in the relationship between Paul and Timothy, Paul here clearly emphasizes their equality rather than his own superior position as a father. Moreover, the fact that Paul does send all his letters except Galatians not only in his own but also in the name of at least one co-worker, and that the greetings at the end of most letters are sent not only by the apostle himself but by co-workers as well demonstrate similarly only a slight hierarchy between Paul and his co-workers.

Within the network of his co-workers Paul actually did hold a position of authority. Nevertheless, the hierarchy in this relationship is not one that reflects domination and mere subordination of the co-workers to Paul. They regarded themselves and were regarded by Paul as servants of the gospel of God, serving together with him the same purpose, the content of which also is reflected in the relationship of those who perceive themselves to be called as co-workers to a specific task in the service of the gospel.

### Paul and His Communities

Whereas the relationship between Paul and other apostles and of Paul and his co-workers and the implications of power therein can only be derived indirectly from his letters, the

relationship between Paul and his communities (and the community in Rome) is more or less openly reflected in his letters as all except one are addressed directly to such communities.

The way he writes to them demonstrates that he thought of himself as having authority over them and that he was in a position to give them guidance through his letters when he could not be personally present. The fact that the letters apparently were received (and later transmitted) indicate that others, though not all, in his congregations shared this perception, but the letters' contents at various points indicate also that his authority was questioned.

Paul writes from the position of the subject-who-knows and he invites the members of his congregations to follow his example and advice. He does not command although he could do so, but prefers to appeal (Philemon; Rom 12:1f), he is their father, nourishes them like a mother (1 Cor 3:2), he is the planter, and the layer of the foundation (1 Cor 3:5-15), he asks them to imitate him (1 Thess 1:6; Phil 3:17; 1 Cor 4:16) and tells them to 'keep on doing the things that you have learnt and received and heard and seen in me' (Phil 3:17; 4:9). He writes to them on behalf of issues on which they previously had asked for his advice, giving them guidance (1 Cor 7; 12; ), warns them from boasting (Rom 11:20), he commends his co-workers to them, asks them to subordinate to the house of Stephanas (1 Cor 16:15f). These are all clear indications of hierarchically structured relationships. Paul does claim authority and exercises power with the means at his disposal. He does so not on the basis of some personal advantage or status privilege, nor on the basis of institutional power or a fixed hierarchical structure, or of any force to back him, but because of his temporal primacy as the one through whom they had first learnt of the gospel (2 Cor 10:14). (He does not claim any authority in communities he had not founded - except Romans, where is claimed as apostle to the gentiles). He moreover defines his authority as an apostle by his conformity to the gospel he is proclaiming and his capacity to embody it.<sup>25</sup>

Whether or not these are bold and more or less naked power claims, as it is asserted in some strands of feminist interpretation, these are certainly indications that there is some sort of hierarchy in Paul's relation to his communities. Elizabeth Castelli perceives Paul's call to imitation in itself as problematic since she sees in it the promotion of the value of sameness and the erasure of difference. To imitate somebody, according to her perception, means to become the same as or copying the other person. There is no room for difference. This

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<sup>25</sup> Schütz, *Paul and the Anatomy of Apostolic Authority*, p. 107. Gorman, *Cruciformity*, pp.268-303.

supports the establishing of Paul's unique apostolic authority as it renders other and divergent interpretations of power and truth impossible.<sup>26</sup> Sandra Hack Polaski finds a 'hidden discourse of power' in Paul's use of the language of grace in that 'grace' at various points in his letters could as well be replaced by 'power'. Here she finds Paul's claim of authority 'wrapped up' in the language of 'grace'. As it is hidden it is all the more effective.<sup>27</sup> And though Paul acknowledges that grace is also given to the members of the communities he seeks to reserve for himself unique authority as interpreter of the divine gift, presuming a spiritual hierarchy with him at the top.<sup>28</sup> Polaski thus sees Paul as initiating a discourse which in its claims for sameness effectively disempowers and marginalizes those who are different.

Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza too, perceives Paul as the one who is to blame for the re-inscription of hierarchical tendencies into the original discipleship of equals. She holds that even in 'turning upside down' the language of imperial domination a discourse of hierarchical power is re-established. The mere fact that Paul apparently claims authority in certain passages of his letters, that he tries to establish his authority in relation to a community he had founded is perceived as a move away from an original ideal *ekklesia*.<sup>29</sup> The discourse of domination and subordination is seen as going back to Paul himself. He is the one who re-introduced his arguments as 'normative' over against his opponents. His exercise of power and authority in his communities is seen as 'not very different from the hegemonic power discourses of domination and empire'.<sup>30</sup>

Schüssler Fiorenza's and other feminist theologians' critique of Paul is based on a 'a reconceptualization of *ekklesia* as a pluriform congregation of fully responsible 'adult' voices who have equal standing', on a depiction of early Christian community as a radical democratic assembly (*ekklesia*) of differing theological voices and sociorhetorical practices'.<sup>31</sup> Following Derrida's approach, such a scenario of an original ideal 'discipleship of equals' has similarities with the construction of an ideal past. It reads similarly to the Weberian construction of charismatic origins of the new Christian movement which in the wake of the second generation deteriorated towards the hierarchical institutionalization of

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<sup>26</sup> Elizabeth A. Castelli, *Imitating Paul: A Discourse of Power*. Louisville, Ky: Westminster/John Knox Press 1991, pp. 119 and 134.

<sup>27</sup> Polaski, *Discourse*, pp. 109, 111.

<sup>28</sup> Polaski, *Discourse*, pp. 119, 123.

<sup>29</sup> Schüssler Fiorenza, 'Paul and the Politics of Interpretation', in Richard A. Horsley ed., *Paul and Politics*. Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International 2000, p. 50.

<sup>30</sup> Schüssler Fiorenza, 'Paul and the Politics of Interpretation', p. 50.

<sup>31</sup> Schüssler Fiorenza, 'Paul and the Politics of Interpretation', p. 55. Also Schüssler Fiorenza, *Rhetoric and Ethic: The Politics of Biblical Studies*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press 1999, pp.169-171.

*Frühkatholizismus*, Paul in this scenario being blamed for the initiation of the deterioration. Whether such a radical democratic assembly of equals ever was in existence at the origins of the early Christ-believing movement is, in my view, a matter of speculation. Thus Schüssler Fiorenza's critique of Paul seems to be based on a rather idealistic reconstruction of history.

This is not to deny that there are hierarchical aspects in Paul's language and in his claim of authority over against his communities, particularly in situations of conflict. It is also no surprise that he did use this language and that there was some sort of hierarchy between him and his communities. Several aspects need to be considered in relation to this issue.

Paul did not have at his disposal an Enlightenment understanding of equality and freedom as we do. To read Paul's letters and interpret his use of power as an encoded appeal in a modern Western individualistic sense privileges a modern Western bias. Paul had at his disposal a Scriptural language and thought world and the language of visions of a world radically different from 'this world'.<sup>32</sup> It would be anachronistic to expect him to perceive this 'other world', this 'politeuma in heaven' in a language which had no allusions to the language and thought world known to him. Elsa Tamez has noted a similar difficulty in Paul's androcentric language. Inclusive language was not an option for a first century man or woman as no other language was at their disposal than the dominant one.<sup>33</sup> The situation could be compared to the one feminists found themselves in when they searched for a formulation of women's identity from a feminist perspective.<sup>34</sup> To note this should not prevent us from critically analysing Paul's use of language and his exercise of power lest we copy it into the 21<sup>st</sup> century, but it should prevent us from anachronistically and unfairly judging the writings of a first century Jew.

It is apparent that Paul's use of power is differentiated and flexible/variable. He does not relate in the same way to the communities he founded as he does to other apostles or his co-workers. But even when he uses power in a clearly hierarchical way I do not think this is a straight-forward indication of an attempt on his part to force or dominate his co-workers or the communities he had founded in order to control them.

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<sup>32</sup> See my *That We May Be Mutually Encouraged*, pp. 142-154.

<sup>33</sup> Elsa Tamez in her commentary on Romans in Luise Schottroff /Wacker Marie-Theres (eds.), *Kompendium Feministische Bibelsauslegung*, Gütersloh: Christian Kaiser/Gütersloher Verlagshaus 1998, pp. 557-573, p. 558.

<sup>34</sup> See my *That We May Be Mutually Encouraged*, pp. 110-120.

#### 4 The Dynamics of Power and the Openness of Hierarchies in Paul

The letters Paul writes to his communities demonstrate that his authority as an apostle was accepted but not unquestioned. There were debates and discussions and conflicts arising in these early Christ-believing communities since not all was clear and self-evident once the foundation had been laid. (It would be surprising if this had been so!)

In these debates and discussions Paul perceives himself and is perceived by at least some of the members of his congregations as being in a special position over against them. He several times refers to the fact that he has a temporal and functional primacy over against them. That he had been in Christ before them seems to have made a difference for Paul as he explicitly mentions Andronikus and Junia as ‘... well known to the apostles, and they were in Christ before me.’ (Rom 16:7). His role as the one from whom they first had heard of and responded to the gospel of Christ Jesus also makes their relationship distinguished compared with the relationship among themselves as community members. He is the one who had laid the foundation, (1 Cor 3: 10), he is their father (1 Cor 4: 15). This implies also that on the other side they had to consent to their own foundation, that is, before Paul could become their ‘founding father’ and their acknowledged authority to guide them, they had to respond positively to his proclamation of the gospel, they had to decide to become members of Christ-believing groups. An act of voluntary consent, not of force or even violence, precedes any hierarchical relationship between Paul and his communities. It is more likely that the exercise of Roman power- in the sense of force and domination- would have prevented people from becoming part of a Jewish movement of followers of one crucified by Roman forces than that power exercised by Paul and his co-workers could have forced Christ-believing groups to agree to ‘their’ foundation.

Thus the basis of their and Paul’s relationship is not an act of force or domination but of mutual agreement. Even when Paul was present in his communities he did not have any other than rhetorical means and the example of his own life in Christ to show them what life in Christ actually implied. There was no institutional power, and no army behind him to make them do what he considered appropriate according to the gospel. Once he left a community the means to exercise power in the sense of domination and control were even fewer. He could only write to them, and send his co-workers to visit them, hoping that these would be welcomed. He had no control on how his letters were read and interpreted ! Even to send a

messenger with the letter, a person who was authorized to explain and interpret the content on his behalf was no guarantee that the addressees heard and understood what he had written exactly in the way he had meant it.<sup>35</sup> All of these aspects demonstrate that Paul did not have very strong means at hand had he actually wanted to control and dominate others !

The consent to become part of the Christ-believing movement was viewed as the result of the activity of the Spirit. Recognizing this, Paul emphasized that they were all equal in Christ, including himself. They were all ‘called’, they were gifted with charismata, they were all ‘sons and daughters of God’. And even when the apostolate is a charisma it does not have any superior quality over any other charisma which builds up and empowers (1 Cor 12:28f; 14:26).<sup>36</sup> Paul emphasizes that neither he nor any other apostle or co-worker in the gospel are ‘something’ but what counts is God as the one who gives growth (1 Cor 3:5-7). The communities do not stand in Paul or in any other apostle but only in the gospel.<sup>37</sup> This equality is unquestioned even when Paul writes a ‘bold reminder’ (Rom 15:15) or scolds the Galatians as ‘foolish Galatians’ (Gal 3:1). Nevertheless, due to his temporal and functional primacy as the founder of his communities, he perceives himself in a position of authority over against them.

A detailed analysis of Paul’s use of language in arguing his case in matters of debate in his congregations might reveal important insights in his exercise of authority and power. There is no room to elaborate on this here. But, as mentioned above, it is interesting to note that Paul sees himself in a position to command but mentions this only to emphasize that he prefers rather to appeal to Philemon. The frequent use of the verb *parakalein* has been noticed by other scholars.<sup>38</sup> It is an indication that Paul would like his communities to consent actively and consciously to his guidance rather than just to obey blindly.

When Paul asks them to imitate him it is not necessary to conclude that this meant they should copy him to become the same. Schütz has demonstrated that Paul’s demand of imitation and authority has to be seen in relation to the content of the gospel. The power of the gospel becomes evident not just in words which are proclaimed but in life. It thus also is manifest in the life of the apostle himself, he himself is an illustration of life in Christ. As Schütz states ‘The logos characteristic of Paul’s apostolic endeavour is marked by its power, by its

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<sup>35</sup> Cf SNTS 2002 paper of James Dunn on oral performance and tradition

<sup>36</sup> See also Schütz, *Paul and the Anatomy of Apostolic Authority*, p. 258.

<sup>37</sup> Cf. Schütz p. 249.

<sup>38</sup> E.g.C.J. Bjerkelund, *Form, Funktion und Sinn der parakalo-Sätze in den paulinischen Briefen*.Oslo 1967.

transition from logos to ergon (Rom 15:18; 2 Cor 10:11). Thus, when Paul asks the members of his communities to imitate him as he has imitated Christ this is not a request to copy him but demonstrates that what is required is not just intellectual or spiritual consent to the message of the gospel but to embody it in one's own life. To embody the gospel in life implies that it is embodied in diversity. This is acknowledged by Paul throughout his letters. He consistently emphasizes the right and appreciation of difference in his Christ-believing groups, (as in Rom 9-11 and 14-15, 1 Cor 7;8-10; 12). 1 Cor 12 is an explicit appreciation of difference as the charismata are of value for the community precisely because they are not all the same. Thus the appeal to imitate him is not a hidden attempt to keep control over them but guidance which has as its goal their own divergent embodiment of the gospel as mature followers of Christ.

The frequent use of words like *u`pota, ssetai, u`pakou, ein,* and *douleu, ein/dou/loi* have been referred to as indications of the hierarchical structure of Paul's thinking and claims of authority.<sup>39</sup> The hierarchical structure is obvious but having said so does not mean that this is the end of the story. It is noteworthy that Paul never asks his communities to subordinate personally to him as an apostle nor to become his servants. They shall subordinate to each other, to God or to Christ, but never to an apostle. They shall perceive themselves as servants serving each other, serving the building up of the congregation, serving God or Christ. He describes his own and the status of his co-workers in similar ways. They are *dou/loi* of Christ (Rom 1:1; Phil 1:1) and *oikono, moi* of the congregation (1 Cor 3:5ff) and they serve as examples for some Corinthians to be imitated (not copied). Some members of the Corinthian community seem to re-introduce values of status and hierarchy of their Greco-Roman surrounding culture, that is, of boasting and wealth and high esteem according to this culture of force and domination.<sup>40</sup>

Some recent research also demonstrates that the message of the cross proclaimed in the context of first century Roman empire was inherently political and thus anti-imperial.<sup>41</sup> It was a challenge of the value system of the Greco-Roman imperial culture in that it turned this

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<sup>39</sup> As e.g. Cynthia Briggs Kittredge, *Community and Authority: The Rhetoric of Obedience in the Pauline Tradition*. Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International 1998, pp. 50-51 and pp.108-110. Cf. also Dale A.Martin who perceives Paul's use of the slavery metaphor rather than connoting humility established his authority as a leader. *Slavery as Salvation*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press 1990, pp. 114, 147.

<sup>40</sup> Martin, *The Corinthian Body*, pp. 65ff, also John K. Chow, *Patronage and Power: A Study of Social Networks in Corinth*. Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press 1992, pp. 113-166, Mark Reasoner, *The Strong and the Weak: Romans 14.1-15.13 in Context*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1999, pp. 45-63.

<sup>41</sup> Elliott, *Liberating Paul: The Justice of God and the Politics of the Apostle*. Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press 1995, p. 114f.

value system upside down.<sup>42</sup> Martin rightly notes that in 1 Corinthians Paul did not replace the hierarchical language of his time with an egalitarian language but that ‘ he appropriates terminology of status (wisdom, power) and claims it for the oppositional realm of apocalyptic discourse.’<sup>43</sup> The appeals to subordinate to and be servants of God and Christ, to know nothing but Christ crucified are, rather than being calls to let themselves be dominated, outspoken challenges of the claims of Roman imperial rule personalized in the Emperor.<sup>44</sup>

The proclamation of the beginning of the world to come in the event of a Jew who had been crucified by Roman force and resurrected by God’s power led to the paradoxical ethics of the power of the cross (1 Cor 1:18f.) which is the ‘power in weakness’ Paul refers to in 2 Cor 10-13:10.<sup>45</sup> It has to be seen in accordance with Scriptural promises proclaimed by the Jewish prophets, that ‘God would overturn the structures of power maintained at Paul’s time by Roman armies. The strong would be removed from their thrones and God would lift up the downtrodden.’<sup>46</sup>

To what extent and how this turning upside down of the Greco-Roman value system later contributed to a new establishment of dominating and oppressive power structure in Christianity would require further investigation. It seems apparent to me that in Paul’s case they served a purpose opposite to this. The turning upside down of traditional values and patterns which he implies with the message of the cross has a de-stabilizing effect on hierarchical structures as such. It is not, as has been noted, a replacement of hierarchical with egalitarian structures or language, but more realistically takes account of the existence of hierarchies in relationships. Hierarchies need not be inherently dominating or oppressive and they also need not be static and unchangeable. Derrida has emphasized that it is necessary to acknowledge that such hierarchies actually do exist in any discourse, either explicitly or implicitly, either open or hidden. This need not necessarily lead to a static hierarchical structure or the establishment of positions of absolute power. Hierarchies can also be flexible.<sup>47</sup> They can be ‘on the move’, dynamic, and functional, serving a specific purpose to build up relationships and communities. This is, in my view, what Paul actually does. He does

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<sup>42</sup> Georgi, ‘God Turned Upside Down’, in Horsley (ed.), *Paul and Empire*, pp. 148-157. Martin, *Corinthian Body*, p.59.

<sup>43</sup> Martin, *Corinthian Body*, p. 59f.

<sup>44</sup> Elliott, *Liberating*, p.139. Horsley, ‘Rhetoric and Empire-and 1 Corinthians’ in Horsley, *Paul and Politics*, pp. 90f. N.T. Wright, ‘Paul’s Gospel and Caesar’s Empire’, in Horsley ed., *Paul and Politics*, p. 179.

<sup>45</sup> Cf. Sze-kar Wan, *Power in Weakness: Conflict and Rhetoric in Paul’s Second Letter to the Corinthians*. Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International 2000. Also Mark Reasoner, *The Strong and the Weak; Romans 14:1-15:13 in Context*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1999 and Timothy B.Savage, *Power Through Weakness: Paul’s Understanding of the Christian Ministry in 2 Corinthians*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1996.

<sup>46</sup> Martin, *Corinthian Body*, p. 60.

<sup>47</sup> Cf. The system of corporate and shifting leadership of the Swiss federal government.

use power in a hierarchical way. But he does not do so in a dominating and oppressive way nor does he do so to establish a personal and fixed position of power. He does so to guide and build up those who like himself are called and gifted by the Spirit. He does so not to make his converts dependent on him but to support them in growing in Christ so that they themselves embody the gospel and in their diversity glorify God in their lives (Rom 15: 7-12).

Dr. Kathy Ehrensperger

Lecturer in New Testament Studies

Department of Theology and Religious Studies

University of Wales

LAMPETER SA48 7ED

United Kingdom

k.ehrensperger@lamp.ac.uk