Why then, did Paul focus on the cross when he wrote to the Corinthians? Why does he begin writing in such startling language about God? In the light of our explorations into the influences upon the Corinthian church, it should be possible to answer these questions with greater clarity and precision.

These themes have of course been examined before. Neil Richardson for example, has explored the theological significance of Paul's language in 1 Corinthians 1 and 2. His careful examination of Old Testament parallels has shown that in ascribing weakness and foolishness to God, Paul has arrived at "not only new language about God, but also a new understanding of God". He concludes: "Most important of all, the God who seems to be nowhere is in fact the ultimate reality which is the great subverter of the status quo."

Although Richardson's conclusion is apt, it is hard to see precisely how it emerges from his own reading of the immediate problems of the church in Corinth. His suggestion is that the Christ-party so stressed the importance of Christ that they "marginalised belief in God"; in response, Paul emphasised the word Θεός, to correct their defective eschatology. In fact, for Richardson, eschatology is the underlying issue at stake between Paul and his critics in Corinth. We have noted above some difficulties with using realised eschatology as a key to understanding the theology of the church in Corinth. If anybody's eschatology is realised here, it is Paul's, who claims that God has revealed his secret wisdom to him (2:9–10). Richardson's reconstruction faces other problems as well. 8:6 clearly states a *common* belief in the "one God the Father" between Paul and the Corinthians, and shows no hint of a 'marginalised' belief in God as such. Richardson's version reads too much into the frequency in the early section of the letter of the word Θεός, which is surely explained more by the rival claims to know the mind of God, than any 'Christomonism' on the part of the Christ-party. Moreover, if the problem were an insufficient Christology, why would Paul's answer emphasise the cross in particular, rather than the person of Christ in general? Again, in focusing on the Christ-party as the source of the trouble, Richardson underestimates the degree of internal dispute between different groups in the church, which from 1:10–12 appears to be the immediate cause of Paul's concern. Paul seems to focus on the cross not in order to correct the Corinthians' defective eschatology, but to oppose their internal power struggles, and the ideological justification which underlay the boastful behaviour which sparked it all off.

To choose a further example, R.S. Barbour arrives at a similar conclusion about Paul's language:

'Christ crucified' is 'wisdom of God', not by a simple identification in the processes of polemic, nor yet by the identification of Christ with an already-known pre-existent figure of wisdom, but in the process of asserting that the very heart of God's purpose is the cross of Christ; not just Christ but Christ crucified.

Barbour thinks that the discussion in 1 Corinthians concerns "the secrets of the last days, on the model found in Jewish apocalyptic and at Qumran". As we have seen, there are difficulties with the theory of a Jewish background for Corinthian theology, and there is little clear evidence that the Corinthian Christians claimed to be living in, or knew the secrets of, the last days. They simply did not put the issue in this form. Like Richardson, Barbour's conclusion is valid, but rests on uncertain foundations. Both in fact suggest that the main problem is theological, and that between these Corinthians and Paul there is primarily a clash of ideologies. However, the issues Paul confronts more directly are matters of conduct. He uses the cross to correct Corinthian behaviour rather than theology, although naturally there are some (perhaps unacknowledged) beliefs and pre-suppositions

underlying that behaviour. The task is therefore to understand how the cross does act in this critical manner to counter these patterns of relationship emerging in the church.

In what follows, a reading of the events leading up to the writing of 1 Corinthians is described, which shows more appropriately how the cross, understood as a revelation of God, addresses that very conduct, and the social and philosophical context in which it developed. Paul's startling ascription of weakness and foolishness to God is in fact a specific counter to power plays being enacted in the Corinthian church.

THE GENESIS OF AN ARGUMENT

The ethical and doctrinal values of the 'Apollos group', influenced by Epicurean-style values and thinking, were markedly different from those who entered the church under Paul's ministry and teaching. If this were the case, it would not be surprising if the wealthy high-status leaders of the congregation who still looked to Paul as their spiritual father, on seeing this group behaving in the ways described above, began to protest and even to try to discipline these maverick new Christians. 5:9 indicates that Paul had written before, quite probably in response to an earlier complaint of some Corinthians that others within the church were behaving in an immoral fashion. The Corinthian request for advice referred to in 5:9 may well have come from the Paul-loyalists who objected to the worldly behaviour of this newly converted group. This advice had been mistakenly interpreted (by the Paul group?) as advocating withdrawal from contacts with outsiders altogether (5:10), vindicating their opposition to these new Christians' over-friendly relations with pagan (perhaps Epicurean?) neighbours. This advice therefore simply gave rise to further dispute over what Paul really meant. The dialogue then degenerated into an argument over names, those still loyal to Paul claiming his authority, admirers of Apollos pitting his merits over against that of the founder of the church. In this atmosphere, it would also not have been surprising if some of the small number of Jewish Christians in the congregation started to claim partiality to Peter as well.

Subsequent to this, however, two factors in particular seem to have led to invidious comparisons between Paul and Apollos. One was Paul's lack of rhetorical skill, compared to Apollos' proficiency in this area. As suggested above, the most likely cause of the trouble was that Paul was considered by some in the congregation to be a bad speaker, or as Paul himself later put it, ἰδιώτης τῳ λόγῳ (2 Cor. 11:6). This would naturally have become a bone of contention and an additional cause for contempt for a group who had specifically been attracted to the Christian church because of Apollos' rhetorical *skill*. Once their behaviour had been criticised in the name of Paul, the founder of the congregation, a natural response would be along the lines of: "Why should we take any notice of Paul, when he is so obviously inferior in σοφία λόγου to Apollos?"

The other bone of contention was Paul's decision to work at a trade rather than to exercise his right to financial support from the church, referred to in ch. 9. Ronald Hock suggested that the issue here was Paul's means of support. In order to distinguish himself from fraudulent Cynic teachers, and in contrast to the various options open to any travelling sophist, Paul chose not to exercise his right to enter a household, accept a patron and receive due financial support. Instead he chose to ply a common trade, making tents. Paul became a 'weak' figure in the social structure of Corinth in order to preserve his own freedom (9:1), and to enable him to offer the gospel 'free of charge' (9:18). Peter Marshall argued instead that it was not so much Paul's work, but his social obligations that were the key issue. Marshall points out that Paul was happy to take financial support from the Philippians (Phil 4:14–20), so that it cannot be, as Hock claims, that Paul refused to claim support on principle. In fact, Marshall suggests, it was this very acceptance of support from Philippi that had caused the problem in Corinth. Paul refused offers of help from Corinth because he felt that to do so

would put him under obligation to the group who had extended the offer, a politically sensitive point given the divisions in the community. Like Hock, Marshall agrees that Paul put himself in a socially disadvantaged position. Yet, in contrast to Hock, he argues that Paul does so not on principle lest the gospel should not be freely offered, but rather in order to shame the 'hybrists', those he criticizes for proud boastful behaviour, those in whose pocket he would have been, had he accepted their patronage. A third perspective comes from Dale Martin, who examines Paul's use of the metaphor of slavery, and highlights its often unnoticed complexity. To high-status people it implied voluntary condescension, but to lower-status people it implied the privilege of being a slave of Christ. Martin argues that Paul refused to accept support from the Corinthians, not to avoid offending the rich but to avoid offending the poor, with whom Paul would have had little contact if he had taken up residence in the home of a rich Corinthian patrician.

Paul's statement of his reasons comes in 9:22–3. Verse 23 suggests that he did not refuse payment and take up a trade out of a settled principle that he should preach the gospel free of charge: Marshall's point that Paul was happy to accept financial support elsewhere is entirely valid. Nor did he do it to avoid putting himself in the pocket of the wrong people in Corinth. The explicit reason given in the text is διὰ τὸ εὐαγγέλιον (9:23), and ἵνα τοὺς πλείονας κερδήσω (9:19). Paul chose to work with his hands to make the gospel available to the class of people he would meet while plying a trade, rather than the limited circle he would reach if attached to a household as resident teacher on the sophistic model. When he claims that his reward for doing this is that he "may make the gospel free of charge" he means not restricting it to those who can pay to hear it. Hock's study showed how the obvious models for Paul's activity would have included charging fees and becoming the resident teacher at the home of a rich patron. This would have restricted the gospel's appeal to the "rich, powerful and well-born" (1:26), and taken it out of the hearing of poorer, lower-status people, something Paul was not prepared to do.

This consequent loss of social status was quite probably a major cause of disparagement of Paul among this status-seeking group. Paul was conscious as he wrote to the Corinthians of his 'weakness' in their eyes (2:1–5; 4:9–13; 9:22). It was at one and the same time their accusation against him, and his own deliberate boast. This atmosphere of disdain towards Paul would have then extended into a critique of his views on the resurrection and various ethical matters. Theology influenced by Epicurean-style ideas fostered not only a distancing from the poor in the congregation, but from the founder of the church as well.

PAUL'S KNOWLEDGE OF THE CORINTHIAN DISPUTES

While this situation was developing in his absence, Paul received two separate pieces of information. First, an oral report came from "Chloe's people" (1:11), a message which concentrated not so much upon ethical irregularities as on divisions. Chloe's people used to be thought of as followers of Demeter, but this view has little to commend it, and they should rather be seen as members of Chloe's household, either freedmen, or more probably slaves. This report on the Corinthian church came most likely from the perspective of the poorer members of the congregation. Not surprisingly then, Chloe's people saw division only among the richer members, some claiming the name of Paul, some that of Apollos, and they duly reported this to Paul. From their perspective, the major problem at Corinth was this personality-based rivalry. It would appear that Chloe's people did not see themselves as part of this rivalry. This confirms the assumption that it was primarily the rich who were involved, on one side those converted by and still loyal to Paul, and on the other, those drawn into the church by Apollos' ministry.

Secondly, Paul received a letter (7:1), presumably delivered to him by Stephanas, Fortunatus and Achaicus (16:17). Stephanas it seems, despite being one of Paul's converts, had managed to stay clear of the argument. He had perhaps acted as a mediator between the two main sides, delivering a letter informing Paul of the issues which had given rise to this rivalry (including asking for clarification on the question of what Paul had meant by his earlier advice not to associate with immoral men—5:9ff). Fortunatus and Achaicus may have been rich householders like Stephanas, yet more likely were Stephanas' slaves, perhaps senior members of his household travelling with him. Coming from Stephanas, this written information emerged not from the perspective of the *poorer* members (as in the oral report from Chloe's people), but with full awareness of the issues which divided those at the higher end of the social scale in the church, namely the ethical and doctrinal problems Paul addresses in chapters 5–15.

Basically, the poorer Christians see the problem as a squabble among the richer members over leaders, Paul's supporters see the problem as the behaviour of the 'Apollos group', and the Apollos group see the problem as their opponents' misguided adherence to Paul's authority. As Paul saw it, the worldly Epicurean-style 'wisdom' manifest in this group within the church which had begun to associate itself with the name of Apollos manifested itself as arrogance (καυχάομαι) and independence, both towards socially and charismatically inferior members of the congregation and subsequently and increasingly towards himself. This arrogance is based on the claim to *wealth, eloquence and knowledge*. Their attitude towards the others in the church, is expressed in 12:21: "I have no need of you". With regard to Paul, their boast is to be wise, filled, rich, kings, χωρὶς ημῶν (4:8). Others in the congregation, still 40 loyal to Paul and his teaching, have been drawn into comparable attitudes of competition (ἔριδες) out of an initial unsuccessful attempt to correct these others, and in turn a small number of others have begun to express partiality to Peter.

Paul therefore had to tackle two problems, competition and boasting, both of which revolve around the use of *power*. The Apollos group's boasting was an assertion of superiority based on their knowledge, over the poor of the congregation, over those loyal to Paul and even over Paul himself. The resulting divisions of 1:10ff indicate a struggle for control of the congregation between those loyal to Paul and this 'Apollos group'. Paul's polemic in 1 Corinthians therefore needed to operate on two levels. In the foreground he addresses some major sections of the church which have become embroiled in a struggle for power. In the background he has to address this group whose social and theological arrogance has sparked the whole thing off. On both levels he confronted illegitimate struggles for power within the congregation, and had to develop a theology which counters such power-plays, whether on behalf of the 'Apollos group' or of his own supporters.

PAUL'S RHETORICAL STRATEGY

The two-dimensional nature of the problem at Corinth presented Paul with a delicate and difficult task. There was confusion over his role in the church, some claiming too much for him, others claiming too little. He wanted to defend his own authority and standing, yet without seeming to take sides, thus endorsing the divisions in the church and alienating even further a significant section of the congregation. He needed to combat arrogance without appearing arrogant, to combat division without being divisive. Paul's argument therefore weaves together a critique of both quarrelling and boasting. The direction of his attack constantly oscillates between the two, at times clearly addressing one (such as in 1:10–16), at times addressing the other (for example in 4:8–13), and at times combining an attack on both stances, revealing the underlying connection between them. As Paul begins to address this complex situation, the cross is his central theological reference-point, so that 1:18–25 serves to introduce his counterpoint to their wisdom. In opposition to the Epicurean-

influenced wisdom prized by some Christians, which has in turn led to the quarrelling outlined in 1:10–12, and the desire for power which lies behind both, Paul puts forward the cross as the content of God's wisdom.

THE CROSS AS CRITIQUE OF CORINTHIAN QUARRELLING

Whether the 'Christ' slogan in 1:12 is a *reductio ad absurdum* of Corinthian quarrelling, or a phrase used by some within the Apollos group, Paul picks it up rhetorically to begin his response to the emerging cracks in the unity of the church. Paul's strategy is to redirect attention to their unity not in individual leaders, but in the Christ to whom they do in fact belong. Victor Furnish has argued persuasively that the motif of 'belonging to Christ' in 1 Corinthians functions as a key ethical grounding for paraenetic appeals. Paul responds to their claim to belong to different apostolic figures by reminding them of the one to whom they *really* belong. This impression is confirmed by an analysis of the following few verses.

The three rhetorical questions in 1:13 all expect a negative response. "Is Christ divided?" No, clearly not—Christ is One, and the basis for unity of *all* the church, regardless of which leader they prefer. "Was Paul crucified for you?" No—Christ was. Paul links Christ's crucifixion on their behalf to the fundamental unity of the congregation in Christ. For Paul, the unity of the church is grounded not just in Christ, but in Christ *crucified* for them. Christ's death for them places them in a relationship of belonging and interdependence to him and to each other. This is reinforced by reference to baptism, their point of entry into the community. "Were you baptised in the name of Paul?" Clearly not, rather in the name of Christ. For Paul, the baptised are baptised into Christ's death (Rom. 6:4), and this act remains the fundamental basis of unity (1 Cor. 12:13, Gal. 3:27f.). When Paul reminds them of their baptism into Christ, he refers them to the cross, the crucified Christ as the foundation stone of their unity as a congregation.

By their focus on the leader who performed their baptism, the Corinthians have forgotten their baptism into Christ's death. For Paul, the new community, founded on the death of Christ, makes all the old divisions and oppositions irrelevant. The cross is the decisive criterion of the church's unity and identity, and both are compromised by the behaviour of the Corinthian Christians, whether followers of Apollos or loyalists to Paul. This is of course why the dispute over who baptised whom would "empty the cross of its power" (1:17), because it denies the reality of the unity which the cross has achieved, and blurs the distinction between the church and the world.

Paul associates the cross and unity at two other points in the letter. One is at 8:11, where Paul apparently addresses those in the high-status 'Apollos group' who eat in pagan temples, without regard for the effect this might have on poorer, more conscientious members of the Christian community. Paul's appeal to consider the weaker Christian is based on the fact that the latter is "the brother for whom Christ died". Paul again appeals to the cross as the basis of their common life and mutual belonging. Again at 15:3 the apostle rehearses the pre-Pauline tradition which he handed on to them. The context here also is that of an appeal to a common belief. This is the content of the original κηρυγμα which stood as the foundation stone of the Corinthian church. It begins of course with the clause Χριστὸς απέθανεν ὑπερ τῶν αμαρτιῶν ημῶν (15:3). This teaching lies as the bedrock of the community's existence.

The first part of Paul's answer to Corinthian quarrelling over leaders then, is found in 1:13 that is in his insistence that the unity of the congregation consists in the fact that Christ was crucified for all of them. They belong neither to him, nor to Apollos nor Cephas, but to the Christ who was crucified for them, who has "bought them with a price". (6:20). Paul is keen to distance himself from the

possibility of becoming the focus of partisan loyalties, so he stresses the role he played in Corinth as evangelist, rather than as baptiser. He was chiefly the means by which they came to hear and accept the gospel of Christ crucified, rather than one who stands in a patronal relationship with them as their initiator into the community. This tack is taken up again in 3:5ff., where again he examines the role that both he and Apollos played during their time in Corinth, minimising their significance over against "God who gives the growth". It makes no sense to claim himself or Apollos as identity-giving figures. They are merely "servants through whom you believed".

THE CROSS AS CRITIQUE OF CORINTHIAN ARROGANCE

While on the surface Paul has to deal with Corinthian division over apostolic loyalties, the deeper problem comes from a group of the congregation claiming Apollos as model, still strongly influenced by pagan Greek ideas and behaviour, and adopting a stance of arrogant withdrawal both from poorer members of the congregation and from Paul. This issue lies more hidden within the text for several reasons. The report of Chloe's people accused most if not all of the richer people in the church of breaking into factions. Paul can thus address that issue openly without appearing to take sides, adopting the position of the neutral observer. The other issue, the behaviour of the Apollos group about which his own supporters have rightly complained is more sensitive. Open criticism risks appearing to take the side of the 'Paul' group, thus invalidating his criticism of division over names of apostolic leaders. Criticism of this group and its behaviour therefore has to remain subtle and often indirect, naming no names, woven into the more generalised criticism of the whole church.

Paul introduces the notion of wisdom in the transitional verse 1:17. As has been argued above, this is to be taken as in part an issue of rhetorical ability, and in part the ideal of σοφία behind it. It is the 'wisdom' which values rhetorical skill (σοφία λόγου v. 17) admires the δυνατος and εὐγενεις (v. 26), boasts in its ethical freedom (5:1–2), disregards the scruples of the weak (8:9–11), looks down on an artisan apostle (2:3; 9:22), humiliates the poor (11:22) prides itself in superior knowledge (8:1) and spiritual endowment (14:37), and denies the resurrection (15:12).

Paul opposes this wisdom of the world (v. 20) with the wisdom of God (v. 21). In stark contrast, God's wisdom, or mind (νοῦς), is revealed in the scandalous 'choice' of a crucified messiah as the means of salvation. God displayed the radically different character of his wisdom by choosing to save people through the word (λόγος) v. 18, κηρύγμα v. 21) of the cross. Whereas Corinthian society prefers what is wise, strong and honoured, God chooses and values what is foolish, weak, low and despised. The central symbol of God's character-revealing wisdom is the historical cross of Christ as the means of salvation. Paul illustrates this with two highly significant examples. First, (vv. 26–31) he calls the attention of his readers to the poor in the community. God has by and large not chosen the highest level of society for his church; in fact he has often chosen those who are despised by the world. Κλῆσις in v. 26 must refer to 'social standing', and so Paul very deliberately brings into the discussion the presence of the poor of the congregation, τοὺς μὴ ἔχοντας (11:22). Paul's second witness to God's preference for the 'foolish' is himself. 2:1 introduces his own rhetorically unskilled, physically and spiritually exhausted persona into the discussion. God has chosen not only despised people for his church, he has chosen an unimpressive apostle as his messenger.

These two are chosen as examples precisely because they are the two targets of the Apollos group's disparagement. They humiliate the poor (8:11; 11:22) and they disregard Paul (4:18; 9:3). Paul's polemic is plain: *God has chosen what they have rejected*. Just as divisions in the community displays their failure to grasp the crucified Christ as the ground of their unity, so the arrogance of the Apollos group in an even more startling way displays their total failure to grasp God's wisdom, revealed in

his scandalous choice of a crucified messiah as the means of salvation. To scorn the weak, poor and foolish is simply to reveal how wedded they are to the wisdom and values of the world which God will destroy (1:19). The cross therefore not only acts as the foundation of the congregation's unity, it also deconstructs the Apollos group's 40 Epicurean-influenced theology of wisdom and knowledge. It counters not just competition for power within the church, but the underlying claim to independence and superiority over others.

THE CROSS AND THE CORINTHIAN CHRISTIANS

The three examples of God's foolish wisdom, the crucified Christ, the poor, foolish and weak things of the world and the weak, trembling apostle stand in a carefully constructed theological relationship. The crucified messiah, scandalous to Jews and nonsensical to Greeks, is the starting point of Paul's reflections on God's strange wisdom. That wisdom is exemplified and expressed in his choice of the foolish, weak and lowly, rather than the wise, powerful and well born. For Paul himself, as the apostle of the crucified messiah, this then gives a practical and even political shape to the ministry he is called to perform. It too has to take the shape of the cross, which in social terms means taking up a position at the bottom of the social scale (4:9–13), along with the foolish, weak and lowly. For Paul there is a theological connection between the recognition that came at his conversion that the crucified Jesus was the messiah and his own experience of hardship and weariness in the apostolic life and manual labour. There is also a theological connection between the cross and the relatively low social standing of many in his churches. Yet there is a theological rupture between the cross and the kind of arrogant, self-satisfied power-seeking behaviour he encounters at Corinth.

The connection between the cross and the "low and despised in the world" means for Paul a life of social shame, hard labour, homelessness and misunderstanding. He presents a positive role model in his own self-lowering, which in turn is an imitation of the self-lowering of Christ to the cross (11:1). Yet he does not urge this precise form of social shame upon his city-dwelling churches. This extreme role he reserves for those in the apostolic calling. For the Christians in Corinth, he uses the transitional concept of *servanthood*, the role in which he insists on being regarded by these Christians (3:5; 4:1). For them, the connection between the cross and the poor is to result ethically in love (14:1a, 16:14), the foregoing of ethical liberty for the sake of the poor (8:9), edification rather than self-fulfilment (14:26), the renunciation of privilege for the sake of others.

In practical terms, this leads not to an anaemic 'love-patriarchalism', but to a voluntary self-lowering to the role of servant, expressed in the attitude of love. This is the purpose of chapter 13, coming as it does after material which indirectly accuses some in Corinth of feeling so superior to others in the congregation that they have no need of them. The true content of wisdom for Paul is not γνῶσις but ἀγάπη (8:1–3; 13:2–8). The wisdom which God prizes, and which enables one to discern the thoughts of God (2:11) does not consist of privileged knowledge of the nature of things, but in an attitude of self-giving love towards one's fellow-believers, especially those who are poor. Paul appeals to the "certainty of agape as the ultimate 'norm' of social life". It is this path he sees both in the crucified Christ, and in his own response to Christ's self-giving, in terms of his voluntary loss of social status. His *theologia crucis* possesses not merely soteriological implications, but ethical and ecclesiological ones as well. The true response to the God who saves through a crucified messiah is a life of voluntary servanthood, self-lowering, love, distinctly different from the attitude shown by his opponents, and even his supporters in Corinth.

CONCLUSION: PAUL, GOD, AND POWER

Paul's repeated appeal for imitation (4:16; 11:1) has been seen in some recent scholarship as a bid for power over the congregation. Elizabeth Castelli sees imitation ("mimesis") as an exaltation of sameness, a suppression of difference. In the light of Michel Foucault's understanding of power and oppressive models of patriarchy in antiquity, Paul's claim to be father of the church (4:15), and this call to imitate him are seen simply as an attempt to eliminate opposition and impose repressive hierarchical models of power. Castelli's analysis however is another victim of the failure to contextualise Paul's discourse. She simply does not try to reconstruct the situation into which Paul writes, neither does she examine closely enough the nature of Paul's self-presentation. When it is understood that Paul is addressing not just theological disagreement, but competing claims to power within the congregation, the nature of his argument, as suggesting an *alternative* understanding of power becomes clearer. Paul's appeal for imitation is in fact an appeal to imitate his voluntary *surrender* of relationships based on social, spiritual or intellectual power or privilege. It is precisely the opposite of the power-seeking discourse which Castelli finds in the text, and is enjoined precisely to protect the poor in the congregation who would otherwise suffer rejection and oppression. Paul is actually very happy to celebrate difference in chapters 12 and 14, passages which oppose the desire of some in the Corinthian church to impose 'sameness' by insisting that they do not need those who are different from themselves (12:21–24). Paul's *theologia crucis* presents a vision of community life which resists claims to power by modelling itself on the self-giving and powerlessness of Christ, and the social self-lowering of his apostle.

Alexandra Brown has similarly drawn attention to the danger seen most clearly by some feminist critics that the theology of the cross, especially when seen in its Lutheran guise, can be used to glorify suffering and justify injustice. Such a concern is well founded. The *theologia crucis* is vulnerable to misuse in this way, and Brown does suggest a defence of Paul's thought against this criticism. She does so by interpreting Paul's 'word of the cross' as mainly an expression of God's *love*. The difficulty here is that chs. 1–2 do not clearly focus on God's love as a central theme. Instead, Paul sees the cross in these early chapters as primarily a revelation of God's *power* and *wisdom*, rather than his love. Strictly speaking, his concentration on ἀγάπη in the letter concerns more the love that Christians are to have for one another (cf. ch. 13) than that of God himself. However, Brown is clearly on the right lines, and her point can be developed in another way. In these chapters, Paul understands God's means of achieving salvation, the cross of Christ, as a paradigm for God's action in the world. In other words, God gets things done not by a conventional human use of power, by displays of force, impressive signs or sophisticated wisdom. He achieves salvation through an act of what to human eyes is powerlessness on the cross; he chooses to dwell in Corinth in a group of 'nothings' in the eyes of Corinthian society; he creates these new communities through the preaching of an unimpressive artisan tentmaker. The passage offers a vision of God's use of power through powerlessness. Through this apparent powerlessness, God achieves far more than human power ever could. In the light of this pattern, Paul appeals to these powerful Christians in Corinth not to conduct their business through the conventional means of human power, but through a kind of self-giving love for other Christians which surrenders privilege and may look like powerlessness, but which is much more in tune with the way God acts and achieves.

Brown is right in suggesting that Paul's *theologia crucis* does not sanction submission to injustice, but the point must be upheld on different grounds from those suggested by her. Read in context, the 'word of the cross' is addressed primarily to the wealthier, socially and economically powerful members of the church. It consists of an appeal to them to imitate Christ's and Paul's self-giving, to give the poorer brothers and sisters pride of place in their gatherings (cf. 12:23–4) and abstaining

from attending meals connected with pagan worship when it offends other members of the church. It would be dangerously misused when addressed in the same way to the poor and victimised, to justify their continued exclusion and subjugation.

This *theologia crucis* presents an alternative understanding of power by grounding it in an understanding of God as one whose character and economy are revealed in the scandalous choice of the crucified Christ as the means of salvation. Paul claims that God's action in the cross is paradigmatic for his action in the present, in that just as God chose the weak suffering Christ, so also he chooses socially inferior people, and a weak suffering apostle. The cross therefore has theological significance for Paul, in that it reveals the way God works now, not just the way he achieved salvation in the past. Paul insists that the God who 'chose' the crucified Messiah also 'chose' the poorer Christians and a weak apostle. He works *now* in conformity with the pattern seen *then* on the cross: it is the God of the cross with whom the Corinthians now have to deal. As Richardson has seen, Paul's language in this letter implies a new understanding of God, rooted in OT perspectives, of a God who always achieves his purposes through things which in the eyes of the world are weak and foolish. Our reading however provides a fuller picture of how this understanding of God meets the situation in the Corinthian church.

As Paul seeks to counter the jostling for control of the congregation in his own name, or the claim to power based on superior knowledge, wealth, eloquence or spiritual gifts, the cross becomes for him the central polemical focus. The cross operates as a counter-ideology to the uses of power current within the church, fostering a regard for love rather than knowledge, the poor rather than the wealthy, their trembling apostle rather than the rhetorical ability of any 'rival', mutual upbuilding rather than spiritual showing-off. Theology that begins at the cross is for Paul the radical antidote to any religion that is a thinly veiled copy of a power-seeking culture.

Source: Graham Tomlin, *The Power of the Cross: Theology and the Death of Christ in Paul, Luther and Pascal* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 1999).