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RESEARCH ARTICLE

Knowledge bloats, love builds: Paul on how we are (not) to know things

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Abstract

Paul's epistemology was famously mapped onto his eschatology by J. Louis Martyn, but it must be mapped also onto his ecclesiology. For Paul, knowing is bound always and indissolubly to living with others. To understand how Paul would have us know things, then, we must focus not on knowledge as such, but on epistemic practices in ecclesial communities. Whereas the Corinthians' use of wisdom and knowledge made for fragmentation and dissolution in the body of Christ (1 Cor 1–4; 8–10), Paul would have practices with knowledge instantiate communion and care for one another, as is proper for Christ's body. Integral to theological knowing is a sense of what and whom theology is for, a sense being critically explored in recent evaluations of theological education.

Keywords: 1 Corinthians; epistemology; knowledge; love; Paul

James McBride's remarkable short story, 'The Under Graham Railroad Box Car Set', is about how our knowledge of something is always bound to what our knowledge of that thing is for – whether domination or commodity or redemption. In the story, three ways of knowing converge on the toy train that Robert E. Lee commissioned for his son Graham, who died before he received it.[1] The general knew that train as a key to domination, since it was designed by the famed gunmaker Horace Smith. Its miniature steam engine, if scaled, would have given the South a decisive advantage in the Civil War, but an enslaved woman escaped with the train to her freedom. The toy collector who discovered the train over a century later in the possession of the Reverend Spurgeon T. Hart knew it as an invaluable commodity. The commission from its sale would realise his dream of retirement in Maui. And the Reverend Hart knew the train as history that could redeem the people whose story was stolen from them. The way we live in the world with others has everything to do with how we come to know any given thing.

[1]James McBride, *Five-Carat Soul* (New York: Riverhead, 2018), pp. 8–44. I appeal to this story not as a mere illustration, but as a narrative argument about the ways knowledge is bound to life. My analysis is helped by Judie Newman, 'African American History and the Short Story: James McBride's "The Under Graham Railroad Box Car Set"', *Studies in the American Short Story* 1/2 (2020), pp. 180–86.

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Saint Paul's correspondence with the Corinthians reflects an understanding that how we know things is entangled with how we live with each other now that Christ has risen from the dead. To put it too bluntly, Paul does not have an epistemology so much as he does an ecclesiology.[2] He evaluates how the Corinthians know things in terms of how they care for others and maintain communion within Christ's body. Paul sets forward Christ as the wisdom of God and folds what we do when we know things into the practice of self-giving love with those whom God joined together in Christ. Although this could be taken to suggest that we cannot do anything to better our knowledge of God, Paul refers to his own apostolic work as a model of good epistemic practice for the Corinthians – circumscribing the power that knowledge affords, giving credit to no one but the Lord, and entrusting judgment to God. In attempting to learn from Paul's letters how to think about what knowing God is like, I consider this essay an exercise in theological interpretation.[3]

Epistemology in the body of Christ

Among the Corinthians, Paul resolved to know nothing except Jesus Christ crucified (1 Cor 2:2), on whom two ways of knowing converged. In his essay, 'Epistemology at the Turn of the Ages', J. Louis Martyn refers to these as knowledge *kata sarka* ('by the norm of the flesh') and knowledge *kata stauron* ('by the norm of the cross').[4] He maps these ways of knowing onto Paul's eschatology, drawing especially from the temporal language in these sentences:[5]

> So, from now on we know no one by the norm of the flesh (κατὰ σάρκα), even if we have known Christ by the norm of the flesh. But now we no longer know in that way. So, if anyone is in Christ – a new creation. The old passed away. Look! The new has come. (2 Cor 5:16–17)

For Martyn, to know *kata sarka* is the way of knowing that belongs entirely to the old age, knowing that encompasses not only observable historical things, but even those incorporeal spiritual things that some Corinthians claimed to intuit. By contrast, to know *kata stauron* is to know in the light of new creation's dawning, which came

[2]In his study of Paul's 'implicit' epistemology, Ian Scott finds that Paul has a coherent approach to knowledge even as he stands outside of both ancient and modern epistemological discourses and 'betrays no interest … in the kind of epistemological debates and self-conscious logic which were a staple of elite philosophical discourse'; see Ian W. Scott, *Paul's Way of Knowing: Story, Experience, and the Spirit* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2008), p. 4.

[3]On the kind of hermeneutical collapse between theology and history entailed in theological interpretation, see Karl Barth's essay 'The Strange New World within the Bible', which appears in *The Word of God and the Word of Man*, trans. Douglas Horton (New York: Harper and Row, 1959), pp. 28–50. See further, Joel B. Green, *Practicing Theological Interpretation: Engaging Biblical Texts for Faith and Formation* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011), 13–70.

[4]J. Louis Martyn, *Theological Issues in the Letters of Paul* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1997), pp. 89–110. The essay is a slightly revised version of J. Louis Martyn, 'Epistemology at the Turn of the Ages: 2 Corinthians 5.16', in William Reuben Farmer, C. F. D. Moule and Richard R. Niebuhr (eds), *Christian History and Interpretation: Studies Presented to John Knox* (Cambridge: CUP, 1967), pp. 269–87. For a recent, critical evaluation of the two-age apocalyptic schema with which Martyn and others read Paul, see Jamie Davies, 'Why Paul Doesn't Mention the "Age to Come"', *Scottish Journal of Theology* 74/3 (2021), pp. 199–208.

[5]Unless otherwise noted, translations of biblical texts are my own.

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through Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection. Martyn further distinguishes these with recourse to 1–2 Corinthians – to know *kata sarka* is to regard one's knowledge as superior and perfect, whereas to know *kata stauron* is to be inducted into an epistemological crisis, since the cross puts a question mark at the end of all we thought we knew.[6] As far as it goes, all well and good.

But in speaking of Paul's epistemology, Martyn falls into the trap that so many epistemologists do, which is to reduce the scope of inquiry about knowledge to cognition and mental processes, bracketing out both social relations and moral concerns.[7] To the extent that such aspects of reality are bracketed, epistemologists might theorise about the knowledge of McBride's toy train or Paul's crucified Messiah in terms of 'justified true belief', with due attention to epistemological problems of justification, warrant, and confirmation.[8] But theorising about knowledge by bracketing moral and social concerns is precisely what Paul does not do, since it is on the basis of concerns with ecclesial life that Paul speaks about knowledge at all. If Paul has an epistemology, it is accessible only *in vivo*. In fact, the sentence from which Martyn expounds Paul's epistemology is predicated on the way Christ's death has now changed what human social life is for:

> For Christ's love holds us together, considering that one died for all, therefore all died. And one died for all so that the living would live no longer for themselves but for the one who died and was raised for them. So, from now on we know no one by the norm of the flesh (κατὰ σάρκα)… (2 Cor 5:14–16a)[9]

The logical transition from changed living to changed knowing implies a conceptual unity between the two. To know *kata sarka* is among those ways one might live for oneself. And now that one no longer lives for oneself but for Christ (5:15), one no longer knows *kata sarka* but *kata stauron*. How we know is derived from how we live. It is no mistake that these sentences figure into Paul's defence of the ministry of proclamation in which he and his associates engaged (2:14–7:4). Paul does not want the Corinthians to think that he shares knowledge to grift and beguile for personal benefit (2:17; 4:2;

[6]Martyn, *Theological Issues in the Letters of Paul*, pp. 96–108. N. T. Wright closely follows Martyn, arguing that Paul revises the act of knowing eschatologically and christologically, prompting an '*epistemological* revolution' by which knowledge is 'taken up' into love; see N. T. Wright, *Paul and the Faithfulness of God* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2013), p. 1355; cf. 1354–83.

[7]Though Martyn situates Paul's epistemology within the eschatological and cosmic changes brought on by Christ's death and resurrection, the focus of his essay is on how one regards one's own knowledge with respect to eschatological time and its impact on one's level of epistemic confidence. In the revised edition of the essay, Martyn acknowledges his inadequate connection of Paul's epistemology to daily life in community (*Theological Issues in the Letters of Paul*, p. 109n56). On the way epistemology 'brackets other concerns such as practical, moral, and aesthetic ones', see e.g. Jonathan L. Kvanvig, 'Theoretical Unity in Epistemology', in Branden Fitelson et al. (eds), *Themes from Klein: Knowledge, Scepticism, and Justification* (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2019), p. 40.

[8]Kvanvig, 'Theoretical Unity in Epistemology', pp. 52–4.

[9]The rendering of συνέχω as 'constraineth' (2 Cor 5:14 KJV) is more fitting than 'urge on' (NRSV), 'control' (ESV) or 'compel' (NIV), as the verb was used both literally and figuratively in the sense of keeping things together (*Brill Dictionary of Ancient Greek* [hereafter *BrillDAG*], s.v. 'συνέχω'). Although *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (herafter BDAG) includes 'control' and 'compel' in the semantic range of συνέχω, it adduces no ancient witnesses for such usage (BDAG, s.v. 'συνέχω'). Christ's love holds humanity together because when Christ died, we all did too.

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7:4).[10] He narrates the bodily degradations he suffered as an apostle to make credible the claim that 'we do not proclaim ourselves but Jesus Christ as Lord, and ourselves as your slaves for Jesus's cause' (4:5).[11] For Paul, how one now dies and lives with Jesus informs how one deals in knowledge with those whom Jesus bound together in life and death.

To understand how Paul wants us to know things, then, we must focus not on knowledge as a cognitive process or mental possession, but on what Robert C. Roberts and W. Jay Wood describe as 'epistemic practice' – the kinds of activites and dispositions that lead to excellence in acquiring, using, and sharing what we know with others.[12] Within the frame of epistemic practice, knowledge is inseparable from social conduct and interpersonal relations, and, as a result, intellectual virtue is practically indistinguishable from moral virtue.[13] That is, knowledge is always for something, always bound to persons in relation to others. Or, as John Swinton states it, 'knowing God is a social practice'.[14] Paul's most direct reflections on knowledge in his letters arise out of his concerns for how the Corinthians conduct themselves with what they know. In his Corinthian correspondence, Paul does not ground epistemic practices in a theory of knowledge as such, but in what it means to live together as the body of Christ.[15] These focuses on epistemic practice and the priority of social relations in how Paul evaluates knowledge will be developed in relation to two case studies in the Corinthians' misuse of knowledge and wisdom, centered, respectively, on 1 Corinthians 8–10 and 1–4.

Either knowledge or love among the Corinthians

Having been incorporated into Christ's body, the Corinthians were joined together with God in communion and enjoined with the work of caring for one another. David

[10]Heidi Wendt situates Paul among a recognisable class of 'freelance religious experts', whose loose attachment to institutions made them 'highly vulnerable to connotations of interest, ambition, and profit, qualities that were readily exploitable for any who would denounce them, including other participants in the same phenomenon'; see *At the Temple Gates: The Religion of Freelance Experts in the Roman Empire* (New York: OUP, 2016), p. 10.

[11]Ignatius of Antioch would follow Paul's rhetorical example by pointing to his own sufferings to make credible his epistemic claims about the bodily sufferings of Jesus (*Smyrnaeans* 2.1–4.2; *Trallians* 9.1–10.1). See Robert F. Stoops, 'If I Suffer: Epistolary Authority in Ignatius of Antioch', *Harvard Theological Review* 80/2 (1987), pp. 161–78.

[12]Robert C. Roberts and W. Jay Wood, *Intellectual Virtues: An Essay in Regulative Epistemology* (Oxford: OUP, 2007), pp. 113–20. From them I have learned to speak of knowledge as an 'epistemic good' (pp. 32–58) that is not only acquired but also 'maintained, transmitted, and applied' (p. 149), a habit of speech that helpfully gestures toward how knowledge involves social exchange. The unfortunate limitation of this metaphor in the scope of this essay, as Jason Moraff observed to me, is that it conceptualises knowledge as a commodity.

[13]Ibid., p. 61. Approaching Paul's understanding of knowledge within the frame of epistemic practice comports with Ian Scott's argument that for Paul the way the Spirit helps bring people to the knowledge of God is through the restoration of human *moral* constitution, freeing us from the idolatry and ingratitude through which we first lost the knowledge of God; see *Paul's Way of Knowing*, pp. 15–48; cf. Rom 1:18–32; 1 Cor 1:17–2.16.

[14]John Swinton, 'Empirical Research, Theological Limits, and Possibilities', in Pete Ward and Knut Tveitereid (eds), *The Wiley Blackwell Companion to Theology and Qualitative Research* (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley-Blackwell, 2022), p. 88.

[15]I have chastened some of my language about the church in this essay in light of the incisive questions David Congdon has raised about the way 'theological interpretation makes the church a norm of biblical exegesis', even as he recognises that theological interpretation arises from within ecclesial and social contexts; see David W. Congdon, 'The Nature of the Church in Theological Interpretation: Culture, Volk, and Mission', *Journal of Theological Interpretation* 11/1 (2017), pp. 115; cf. 104, 116–7.

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Horrell has argued that such communion and care – what he calls 'corporate solidarity' and 'other-regard' – are grounded in Paul's Christology and norm his guidance about all other moral matters, things like sexual union, the worship of idols, and what one may eat, among other things (1 Corinthians 5–6; 8–10).[16] Corporate solidarity is conveyed through rites of baptism and the Lord's Supper (10:16–17; 12:12–13), the image of the church as one body with many members (12:14–31), the obligations owed to one another as siblings (8:11–13), and the call to maintain communion in the face of schism (1:10).[17] Similarly, the kind of regard for another's well-being that involves circumscribing one's own power, interests, and freedom is what Paul supposes conforms the church to Christ's self-giving love (Rom 14:1–15:5; 1 Cor 8:1–11:1; Phil 2:1–11).[18] As will be seen, corporate solidarity and other-regard are also the fundamental *epistemic* commitments that govern how Paul wants us to know things. Paul evaluates the Corinthians' acquisition, use, and sharing of knowledge in terms of whether it makes for corporate solidarity and other-regard in Christ's body. He finds that with God's gifts of 'speech and knowledge of every kind' (1 Cor 1:5), the Corinthians shattered communion and wounded those for whom Christ died (1:10; 8:11). For reasons that will become clear, I begin by analysing how Paul evaluates the Corinthians' knowledge in terms of other-regard (8:1–11:1) before moving on to his critique of wisdom as cause for schism (1:10–4:21).

As Paul begins to address the topic of food sacrificed to idols, he quotes the Corinthians who said, 'We all have knowledge' (1 Cor 8:1). As Paul's quotation suggests, he understood that the Corinthians' problem was as much about knowledge as it was about food. His discussion of food sacrificed to idols can be illuminated by Martyn's contrast between knowing *kata sarka* and *kata stauron* – each a way of knowing bound to a certain way of living with others:

> Knowledge bloats, but love builds. If anyone supposes they have known something, they do not yet know as they ought to know. But if anyone loves God, they have been known by God. (8:1b–3)[19]

This knowledge that bloats – what Paul elsewhere calls knowledge *kata sarka* (2 Cor 5:16–17) or, as will be seen, the world's wisdom (1 Cor 1:20; cf. 2:4–6, 13; 3:19) – imbues those who possess it with the power of liberty in moral judgment and action (ἐξουσία, 8:9).[20] In the case of food sacrificed to idols, Paul contends with those he (pejoratively?) describes as 'the knowledge-haver' (τὸν ἔχοντα γνῶσιν,

[16]David G. Horrell, *Solidarity and Difference: A Contemporary Reading of Paul's Ethics*, 2nd edn (London: T&T Clark, 2016), p. 302.

[17]Ibid., pp. 109–45.

[18]Ibid., pp. 183–270.

[19]Paul contrasts bloating and building, two kinds of growth possible in Christ's body (cf. Eph 4:12–16). The term φυσιόω is related to φῦσα, which in some medical literature was used either of the bladder or intestinal bloating from gas (*BrillDAG*, s.v. 'φῦσα'). Following the KJV, most modern English translations render the phrase 'knowledge puffs up' (1 Cor 8:1), which is accurate, but, one might say, trite. Is it not now better to speak of bloating, swelling or distension?

[20]Anthony Thiselton argues that ἐξουσία is a kind of 'right to choose' that is analogous to the Corinthians' earlier insistence about what is lawful (ἔξεστιν) for them (1 Cor 6:12; 10:23); see Anthony C. Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2000), pp. 566–7.

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8:10).[21] Knowledge-havers suppose no fault can be found with them eating food that pagans offer to non-gods because they have worked out that there is 'no idol in the world; … no God but one' (8:4, 6–9). As if to settle any doubt, Paul registers his agreement with these Corinthian sayings in his christological rearticulation of the *Shema* (8:6).[22] But then Paul takes aim at the epistemic practices of the knowledge-havers. Other former pagans in the congregation are not so convinced about pagan deities. These impressionable believers risk moral defilement, if not destruction, if they eat food sacrificed to idols (8:7, 10). In using their knowledge of God to engage in risky moral conduct – knowingly eating food offered to idols, perhaps even in pagan temples – these Corinthians build up their brothers and sisters into idolatry (8:10).[23] The knowledge-havers sin against Christ because 'the weak one is destroyed by your knowledge, this brother or sister for whom Christ died' (8:11–12). The presumption that knowledge grants freedom in moral action is reflected in what is likely a Corinthian conviction articulated by Paul earlier in the letter: 'The pneumatic person judges all things and is himself judged by no one' (2:15).[24] Such a person judges that 'all things are permitted', whether consorting with prostitutes or flirting with idolatrous practice (6:12; 10:23). The knowledge-havers do not know as they ought to know (8:2).

One problem with Paul's contrast between knowledge and love is that Paul wants the Corinthians to know things. Paul has asked them, 'Do you not know you are a temple of God?' (1 Cor 3:16; cf. 6:19); 'Do you not know we will judge angels?' (6:3); 'Do you not know the unjust will not inherit the kingdom of God?' (6:9; cf. 5:6; 6:15–16; 9:13, 24). What knowledge they have is a gift from God (1:5). There is hope yet that they may come to 'know as they ought to know' (8:2). But if Paul wants the Corinthians to have knowledge, does he want them to have that which inflames conceit? Or is it the case that his contrast between knowledge and love is overwrought? On the contrary, Paul's stark contrast between knowledge and love can be maintained in view of Paul wanting the Corinthians to know things, because Paul speaks of love as its own way of knowing. When Paul prays for the Philippians, he asks that 'this love of yours may yet overflow more and more with knowledge and all moral judgment, for you to

[21]Paul does once call the knowledge-havers 'strong', but only later in the discourse when he asks 'Or are we provoking the Lord to jealousy? Are we stronger than he?' (1 Cor 10:22 NRSV; cf. 1:25). In referring to 'knowledge-havers', I play on Beverly Gaventa's term 'faith-havers' for those who come under Paul's critique in Romans 14–15; see Beverly Roberts Gaventa, 'Reading for the Subject: The Paradox of Power in Romans 14:1–15:6', *Journal of Theological Interpretation* 5/1 (2011), pp. 5–6.

[22]On which, see Richard Bauckham, *Jesus and the God of Israel: God Crucified and Other Studies on the New Testament's Christology of Divine Identity* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2009), pp. 210–8.

[23]For Paul, eating food sacrificed to idols is a moral risk and not a morally indifferent matter of conscience (*contra* Horrell, *Solidarity and Difference*, pp. 183–224). For a reading to this effect, see Robert E. Moses, 'Love Overflowing in Complete Knowledge at Corinth: Paul's Message Concerning Idol Food', *Interpretation* 72/1 (2018), pp. 17–28. I would add that in ancient Jewish thinking, idolatry was one of few sins that caused moral defilement (alongside bloodshed and sexual misdeeds), on which see Jonathan Klawans, *Impurity and Sin in Ancient Judaism* (Oxford: OUP, 2000), pp. 21–60; cf. 1 Cor 8:7. That Paul considered idolatry a grave sin is suggested by Albert Schweitzer, who identified participation in idolatrous practice along with Gentile circumcision for obedience to the law and sexual misdeeds as the only three actions that Paul thinks can 'annul … being-in-Christ'; see Albert Schweitzer, *The Mysticism of Paul the Apostle* (New York: Henry Holt, 1931), p. 200.

[24]For deliberation about the extent to which this sentence represents the Corinthians' voice or Paul's, see Timothy A. Brookins, *Corinthian Wisdom, Stoic Philosophy, and the Ancient Economy* (Cambridge: CUP, 2014), pp. 82–3, 94.

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find out what things are best' (Phil 1:9–10a).[25] That practices in love include the acquisition, use, and sharing of knowledge is also suggested in an apparent paradox in what Paul says of love and knowledge later in 1 Corinthians. The sentence 'Love never does collapse. … As for knowledge, it will pass away' (1 Cor 13:8) is followed closely by 'Now I know in part, but then I will know in full, even as I have been fully known' (13:12). So, Paul will know in full, but only after knowledge passes away and love endures.[26] Our knowledge now is partial not for a deficit of knowledge but of love. All this to say, Paul does not contrast a mental process (knowledge) with a moral and affective one (love). Instead, Paul contrasts knowledge and love as two kinds of knowing, each of which attach the acquisition, use, and sharing of epistemic goods in the company of others to some purpose.[27] There is theological knowing that empowers living for oneself (*knowledge bloats*) and theological knowing produced by love for God (*love builds*).

Paul's intervention for the Corinthians' epistemic problems with food sacrificed to idols is to subsume all epistemic practice – all that is involved in acquiring, using, and sharing knowledge – to the kind of regard for others that limits what knowledge is good for. Whatever power knowledge affords is circumscribed by the regard they owe to their brothers and sisters in Christ (8:13). He sets forth his own apostolic ministry as a model of epistemic conduct (which is also moral conduct, as is more frequently noticed).[28] Paul and the Corinthians both know, whether from social convention or from Torah, that his apostolic work deserves remuneration, but Paul discerned that receiving their financial support would have hindered their acquisition of the gospel, so he shared it free of charge (9:7–14). Paul's moral obligation to care for others norms the way he deals in epistemic goods. Instead of practicing moral discernment to render one's own actions immune to critique, Paul would have the knowledge-havers consider what is beneficial in terms of what builds up Christ's body (6:12; 10:23). Such a person ought not seek their own interest, but that of the other, just as Paul himself does (9:19–23; 10:31–11:1).

If certain Corinthians pursued knowledge to authorise a way of life that Paul might characterise as seeking one's own interest (1 Cor 10:24; 2 Cor 5:14–17), their search for wisdom underwrote prideful comportment and produced divisions in the assembly (1 Cor 1:10–4.21). As Paul develops a contrast between the world's wisdom and

[25]On the way Paul understands the practice of love to generate moral understanding (αἰσθήσει), see Stephen E. Fowl, *Philippians* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2005), pp. 32–3.

[26]As observed also by Susan Eastman, who advances an argument quite similar to that put forth in this essay, that 'Paul is teaching the Corinthians a new relational mode of cognition and communication that issues forth in concern for one another', see Susan Grove Eastman, 'Love's Folly: Love and Knowledge in 1 Corinthians', *Interpretation* 72/1 (2018), p. 14. However, I take for granted that for Paul knowing involves social relations and then attempt to put the matter the other way around. For Paul a form of communal life constrained by Christ's love gives rise to epistemic practices that maintain communion and cultivate love.

[27]Timothy Brookins offers compelling arguments that some of the Corinthians embraced Roman Stoic philosophy and aspired to the self-sufficiency and inviolability of the sage. In so doing, he sets forward a plausible social and philosophical context in which the acquisition of wisdom empowered one to pursue one's own interests. His work comports with and has informed my reading of the Corinthians' problems with knowledge. See Timothy A. Brookins, *Rediscovering the Wisdom of the Corinthians: Paul, Stoicism, and Spiritual Hierarchy* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2024), pp. 41–3, 179–90; Brookins, *Corinthian Wisdom*, pp. 62–103, 153–200.

[28]If it is true that Paul's moral reasoning in 1 Corinthians 8–9 tells us a great deal about his metanorm of other-regard in his ethics (so Horrell, *Solidarity and Difference*, pp. 186–200), all the more so that it is a norm in how he thinks we are to know things.

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God's wisdom, he attends to what we make of Jesus' crucifixion (1:18–25). The worldly wise consider the crucifixion foolish, but those whom God calls come to know the crucified Messiah as the wisdom and power of God. But what does wisdom have to do with the schisms at Corinth? One promising development in the interpretation of Paul's difficult argument about wisdom involves situating the discourse in a socio-historical context that illuminates why wisdom caused schism, whether in the realm of political allegiances, or sophistic rhetorical practices, or elite social values, or rivalries between philosophical schools.[29] Whatever the situation was exactly, such studies attempt to do justice to Paul's speech about how the Corinthians' wisdom induced boasting, judgment, and rivalry that fragmented communal relations (3:18–4:5). As with the knowledge of the knowledge-havers, the wisdom of the wise Corinthians attended a form of social life incompatible with the wisdom of God that is Christ (cf. 3:18). This is why, after first contrasting the world's wisdom and God's wisdom, Paul asks the Corinthians to consider whom God called and chose to be in Christ (1:26–31). Their recognition of the cross as God's wisdom can be done only in view of their incorporation with others into the body of Christ, 'who became wisdom from God for us' (1:30).

Based on Christ having become wisdom for us, one might say that theological knowing and participating in Christ are basically indistinguishable and that theological knowledge for Paul just *is* the way that God's revelation transforms us into Christ's likeness.[30] Even so, this grace of God does not bypass human epistemic agency or practice. Paul sets forward his own and Apollos' epistemic conduct as a model of communion in the work of helping the Corinthians to believe the gospel (3:5–15).[31] Rather than comparing his work to Apollos', Paul employs agricultural and architectural metaphors to show God's work to be indispensable. If the apostles' work of planting and watering in the field appears to precede God's work, it is nevertheless God that causes growth and makes apostolic work fruitful (3:6–9). If the apostles' work of building can be judged on its merits, it is nevertheless God's previous work of laying down Jesus Christ as a foundation that made their work possible (3:10–15). By appealing to God's work to relativise the apostolic work through which the Corinthians came to believe (3:5), Paul dismisses any tendency to boast in apostolic servants and models what it means to 'let the one who boasts to boast in the Lord' (1:31; cf. 3:21). The mirror image of his imperative to boast only in the Lord is Paul's disavowal of making judgments about people

[29]The exact relation between wisdom and schism at Corinth remains a matter of debate and speculation due to limited historical evidence. On political allegiances, see Laurence L. Welborn, 'On the Discord in Corinth: 1 Corinthians 1–4 and Ancient Politics', *Journal of Biblical Literature* 106/1 (1987), pp. 85–111. On rhetorical practice, see Stephen M. Pogoloff, *Logos and Sophia: The Rhetorical Situation of 1 Corinthians* (Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1992); Bruce W. Winter, *Philo and Paul among the Sophists: Alexandrian and Corinthian Responses to a Julio-Claudian Movement*, 2nd edn (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2002). On elite social values, see Andrew D. Clarke, *Secular and Christian Leadership in Corinth: A Socio-Historical and Exegetical Study of 1 Corinthians 1–6* (Leiden: Brill, 1993). On rivalries between philosophical schools, see Brookins, *Rediscovering the Wisdom of the Corinthians*.

[30]For a helpful account of theological knowledge as ecclesial participation in 'triune communion', see Justin Thacker, *Postmodernism and the Ethics of Theological Knowledge* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007), pp. 37–64. On the way knowledge is personal, transformative and embodied in Paul, see Mary Healy, 'Knowledge of the Mystery: A Study of Pauline Epistemology', in Robin Parry and Mary Healy (eds), *The Bible and Epistemology: Biblical Soundings on the Knowledge of God* (Colorado Springs, CO: Paternoster, 2007), pp. 134–58.

[31]On how the difficult verb μετασχηματίζω (1 Cor 4.6) allows Paul to address schisms in the church under his and Apollos' names while setting forward their communion with each other as a model for the Corinthians, see Brookins, *Corinthian Wisdom*, pp. 202–4.

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(4:1–5).[32] Just as reward and wages are accorded to apostolic workers by God (3:8, 14), so will God be the one who commends apostles like Paul (4:5). Because the work of judging is the Lord's, Paul would have the Corinthians reserve judgment until the Lord's coming (4:5). By boasting only in the Lord and reserving judgment about apostles like Paul and Apollos, the Corinthians are to learn not to become inflamed with pride against each other (4:6). These epistemic practices that Paul models and commends to the Corinthians arise from the gracious work of God in the apostolic mission and reflect the communion among God's people that befits the body of Christ.

What theological knowing is for

Paul's contrast between knowing and loving, between embracing the world's wisdom or the wisdom of God, arises from what is possible now that Christ has risen from the dead. The form of life we have with Christ informs how we come to know things. Because our knowledge is bound to an ecclesial life that leaves something to be desired in love and communion, we can now know only in part. Paul would have us believe that we are in Christ and that Christ is for us wisdom from God. But when we regard ourselves wise we must become fools, and when we regard ourselves learned we have not yet known as we ought to. We are, as it were, *simul sapientes et stulti*. In all of this, how we know things is the same as how we learn, how we teach, and how we use knowledge in the company of others.[33] The recognition of the limits of our knowledge of God encourages circumspection in judgment and credit to God for whatever good comes of knowing as we ought. The recognition of the limits of our love commends an evaluation of knowledge that takes into consideration what epistemic practices and goods are used for.

Recent works in the series aptly titled 'Theological Education between the Times' reckon with how the acquisition, use, and sharing of theological knowledge have been attached to purposes at odds with communion in Christ's body and self-giving love for others. It is possible to know even Christ *kata sarka* (2 Cor 5:16). Ted A. Smith finds that nineteenth-century shifts in theological institutions in the United States made them complicit in settler colonialism, even as they instrumentalised knowledge for professional status and reason (and, more recently and unintentionally, debt).[34] Elizabeth Conde-Frazier traces how theological education in Latin America and the Spanish-speaking Caribbean was influenced by postbellum configurations of economic and imperial power through missions from the United States.[35] Willie James Jennings reckons with 'the racial character of institutional life in the colonial West', where some

[32]Notwithstanding that Paul boasts in 2 Corinthians 10–13 because of judgments made about him, an appeal to the Corinthians made necessary by his marginal ethnic and social location, on which see the fascinating treatment in Ryan S. Schellenberg, 'Paul, Samson Occom, and the Constraints of Boasting: A Comparative Rereading of 2 Corinthians 10–13', *Harvard Theological Review* 109/4 (2016), pp. 512–35.

[33]On reading, debating, teaching, and learning as epistemic practices, see Roberts and Wood, *Intellectual Virtues*, pp. 120–42.

[34]Ted A. Smith, *The End of Theological Education* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2023), pp. 94–114; cf. pp. 115–37, where Smith also enumerates some of the twenty-first century's 'affordances' for theological education.

[35]Elizabeth Conde-Frazier, *Atando Cabos: Latinx Contributions to Theological Education* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2021), pp. 12–27; cf. pp. 29–38, 60–74, where Conde-Frazier goes on to describe how Latin American theologians' understanding of theology as *misíon integral* has subsequently shaped theological education, in light of which she offers a vision for a 'collaborative educational ecology'.

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spectre of whiteness deals in theological knowledge for the sake of mastery, domination, and control.[36] Those of us alive now did not choose to be heirs to institutional histories where theological knowledge was bound to aspirations to master a new world. These histories precede us and exceed any one of us. We may swim against their current, but they carry us downstream nonetheless. To know Christ *kata stauron* does not so much empower us to work against such histories as to see them for what they are and, by the grace of God, to be taken into another current. Jennings, Conde-Frazier, and Smith consider what kind of patient institutional and intellectual work is needed for sustaining theological knowing that builds up, even as they find such work attended by moments of revelation, where we discern how exchanges in knowing involve us together in the communion and love not possible apart from the wisdom of God.[37] These are moments where church *happens*, so to speak.[38]

The same history that Smith, Jennings, and Conde-Frazier find North American theological education caught in – the colonialisation of the Americas, the transatlantic slave-trade and the institutions and society built on it – comes into striking articulation in McBride's story about the toy train. Throughout the story, the toy collector was confounded and outraged that the Reverend Hart, who worked four jobs and still could not pay his phone bills, would not understand that the train he possessed was an object of unimaginable monetary worth. And although the toy collector possessed knowledge about the train's historical provenance and significance that attached value to it, he was disconcerted never to have learned from the Reverend Hart the more recent history of the train. After the train was sold, the toy collector finally happened upon its story. He found himself in a crowd of young people who had convened at a club to hear a certain Dr. Skank. In Dr. Skank's 'litany of nonstop cursing, roaring, funky, low-down, skuzzy, earth-scrapping, to-the-bone brilliant rhyming lyrics', the toy collector came upon a different way to know the toy train.[39] He recounts:

> And amid this story was that of a little boy many years ago who had once owned a toy, … a simple train, which was more than a train, it was a weapon dressed as a train; the story of a boy dying in agony, an innocent child paying for generations of stolen trains, stolen cars, stolen land, stolen horses, stolen history, stolen people, arriving at a strange land inside a merchant ship, their innocence and freedom forever soiled, and then God's punishment for their captors, passed down for generations to their captors' innocent children, whose forefathers were fools stealing for today while leaving nothing for tomorrow, robbing their own young of their future,

[36]Willie James Jennings, *After Whiteness: An Education in Belonging* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2020), p. 63. Whiteness for Jennings is neither a reference to European descent nor to an identifiable group of people. Rather, whiteness is 'a way of being in the world and seeing the world that forms cognitive and affective structures' aimed at self-sufficiency, mastery and control (Ibid., p. 9). Jennings imagines theological institutions that form people who work with fragments of faith, colonial(ised) cultures and commodity to cultivate belonging, for which his focal image is Jesus teaching the crowds – though it may just as well have been Christ's body inhering in communion and love (Ibid., pp. 23–46).

[37]See e.g. the stories to this effect in Jennings, *After Whiteness*, pp. 145–8; Conde-Frazier, *Atando Cabos*, pp. 52–6, 80.

[38]The phrase 'where church happens' plays on a phrase from Rowan Williams, *Where God Happens: Discovering Christ in One Another* (Boston: New Seeds, 2005), p. 24.

[39]McBride, *Five-Carat Soul*, p. 71.

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> all of them, both captor and slave, suffering God's justice and inexplicable will, the punishment of a gigantic wrong gone awry for centuries, and the payment thereof of generations, whose clumsy attempts to try to right wrongs with war or half-hearted stumblings toward the right created even more pain and war. Suffering, all of it, greed, horror, a holocaust against decency causing unbearable agony. Pain upon pain upon pain. Suffering, all of it, because of some great wrong. 'You reap what you sow, you dog!' … [Dr. Skank] shouted, releasing a torrent of vicious curse words that ricocheted across the room like machine gun bullets, yet from his mouth they sounded not like filth, but more like redemption.[40]

Having heard this, the toy collector 'turned and left'.[41]

[40]Ibid., pp. 72–4.

[41]Ibid. I am thankful to David W. Congdon, Jason F. Moraff and Cory B. Willson for their constructive feedback on earlier drafts of this article.

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