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STEPHANAS AS MODEL LEADER: A SOCIAL IDENTITY PERSPECTIVE ON COMMUNITY AND LEADERSHIP (MIS)FORMATION IN CORINTH

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This paper studies Paul's recommendation of Stephanas as leader against the background of community formation in Corinth. The divisions in the Corinthian church are shown to be a cultural response to the development of subgroups which expressed loyalty to different Jewish teachers. This resulted in intragroup competition, heightened social tensions, and a communication breakdown between subgroups and their leaders. Social identity theory helps to interpret these events as conflicting norms and values from cross-cutting social identities; the divisions can be understood as benevolent attempts to maintain Christian distinctiveness and social cohesion for these subgroups according to Corinthian cultural patterns. Paul, however, re-envisioned the subgroups as nested social identities in an overarching Christian social identity with its focal point in Christ crucified. Thus, he reorients their search for honor towards the glory of the gospel which is shameful to outsiders and their search for social cohesion towards mutual respect and service. To implement his proposed changes in beliefs, norms, and values, Paul sends a letter, sends Timothy, and plans a personal visit. However, his key for long-term effectiveness is Stephanas, recommended as worthy of imitation in the new Christian leadership style needed for the expanding community.

I. INTRODUCTION

By all appearances, Stephanas was a key leader in the Corinthian church. He was a householder who was baptized with his household by Paul (1 Cor 1:16). He was not only an early convert in the city, but was most likely Paul's first local coworker

(16:15).¹ He participated in and perhaps sponsored the delegation sent from Corinth to Paul with a letter from the church (7:1, 16:17), and he returned to the city with 1 Corinthians in hand and with Paul's wholehearted recommendation of his leadership to the church (16:16, 18). What is the significance of this recommendation of Stephanas' leadership for Paul's proposals to resolve the Corinthian troubles that he had just addressed in this letter?

Since Stephanas is only mentioned in the fringes of the letter, few exegetes make the connection between an expanding leadership role and Paul's strategy to resolve the Corinthian troubles. Quite the reverse, several exegetes are concerned to absolve Stephanas from any self-serving leadership motives.² They wish to avoid the perception that Stephanas, or Paul through him, are seen as self-promoting leaders, or worse, as enhancing their own party in Corinth, which would hinder rather than enhance efforts towards reconciliation and unity. As a consequence, Stephanas' role as model leader for Corinth remains obscure and references to him are treated as coincidental to the main purposes of the letter. This paper proposes that a fuller understanding of Stephanas' leadership role in Corinth opens the door to a better socially-grounded understanding of community and leadership formation in the Corinthian church.

Two methodological issues require attention. First, an explicit leadership theory is needed to gain insight into the leadership dynamics in Corinth. For instance, Barrett denies that Stephanas was appointed by Paul or by the church, but that he appointed himself "in a spirit not of self-assertion but of service and humility,"³ while Garland explicitly contrasts humble service with high social status.⁴ Implicit in these suggestions is the idea that high social status and a serving attitude are incompatible, which represents a particular mental map of leadership that is not explicated. However, every leader has a measure of social influence and status; the key issue is not a leader's status per se, but whether a leader uses this status and social power for self-promotion or for empowering others.⁵ Thiselton does better in describing Stephanas' role as leader because he reckons with recent cultural anthropological research on ancient Corinth.⁶ Such research significantly enhances our understanding of the social and cultural context within which the Corinthian church took shape, but it does not yet provide a social scientific model needed to unravel the leadership processes that take place in community and leadership formation. This study uses a social identity model of leadership, which focuses on the groups' dynamics between leader and followers, to

¹ A meaning for "firstfruits" (16:15) demonstrated by Joel White, *Die Erstlingsgabe im Neuen Testament*, (Tübingen, Germany: Francke Verlag, 2007), 201.

² For instance, David E. Garland, *1 Corinthians*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2003), 768.

³ Discussing the phrase "they have devoted themselves" in 1 Cor 16:15 in C. K. Barrett, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, Black's New Testament Commentary (Peabody, MA: Hendrikson, 1968), 394.

⁴ Garland, *1 Corinthians*, 768.

⁵ MaryKate Morse, *Making Room for Leadership: Power, Space and Influence* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2008), 56-57.

⁶ Anthony C. Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians: A Commentary on the Greek Text of New International Greek Text Commentary* (Carlisle, Cumbria: Paternoster, 2000), 28. See also Robert J. Banks, *Paul's Idea of Community: The Early House Churches in their Historical Setting* (Exeter, Devon, UK: Paternoster, 1980), 164-65.

allow a more explicit discussion of leadership processes than has thus far been achieved.⁷

Second, this paper studies the text of 1 Corinthians in order to understand Paul's action model for implementing his solutions for Corinth. This text is part of a larger conversation between Paul and the church in Corinth, so it is an important step to listen closely to the meaning of the text in its historical context. Additional steps are needed to understand what the author intended to accomplish with his text, and how he planned to do so.⁸ The four analytical steps typical in many schools of practical theological interpretation present a helpful approach. The steps are an empirical description of the situation at hand, an interpretation of that situation with the use of social science models, normative reflection about the situation drawing on theological and ethical resources, and strategic action planning. To put it more simply: What is happening? Why is this happening? What should be happening? How should it be done?⁹

II. COMMUNITY AND LEADERSHIP FORMATION AT CORINTH

What was happening in the church at Corinth when Paul wrote 1 Corinthians (55-56 AD)? In the six years since its founding, the church had grown and developed subgroups that divided along lines of loyalty. Some were loyal to Paul, others to Apollos, Peter, or Christ (1 Cor 1:12). Earlier scholarship interpreted these divisions along doctrinal lines, but recent studies acknowledge their social nature.¹⁰ Each subgroup expressed loyalty to a favored Jewish teacher, which reflects their respect for the Jewish origins of the gospel. As was customary in Corinth, these distinctive loyalties led to rivalry and competition between these subgroups.

Scholars point out two cultural phenomena to explain this rivalry. Structures of patronage played an important role. Social status, honor, and wealth determined the flow of community life in Corinth. Relatively few high status individuals provided resources and leadership for their dependents which included the extended household and a long list of clients, with honor flowing back towards the patron.¹¹ One way patrons could raise their honor was by hosting famous traveling teachers or sophists, for instance to enhance the status of their dinner parties. Patrons and their dependents would often engage in rivalry over their favored teachers, which occasionally degenerated into vicious jealousy and competition.¹² These cultural influences apparently influenced the Corinthian believers in their subgroup formation, since Paul reproaches them for quarreling (1:12), jealousy, and strife (3:3).

⁷ This model has recently been published in textbook format: S. Alexander Haslam, Stephen Reicher, and Michael J. Platow, *The New Psychology of Leadership: Identity, Influence and Power* (New York: Psychology Press, 2011).

⁸ This roughly parallels the distinction in speech act theory between the locutionary, illocutionary, and perlocutionary acts.

⁹ For a representative exposition of these steps, see Richard R. Osmer, *Practical Theology: An Introduction* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2008).

¹⁰ See Thiselton, *First Corinthians*, 121-133 for an extended discussion of this debate.

¹¹ Andrew D. Clarke, *Secular and Christian Leadership in Corinth: A Socio-Historical and Exegetical Study of 1 Corinthians 1-6* (Leiden, Netherlands: Brill, 1993), 23-40.

¹² Bruce W. Winter, *Philo and Paul Among the Sophists: Alexandrian and Corinthian Responses to a Julio-Claudian Movement*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2002), especially chapters 8 and 9.

The role of the local Corinthian leaders in these divisions is not immediately obvious. One indication of their role derives from the bizarre incest case, which was tolerated in the church even though it was unacceptable outside the church (5:1-2). Perhaps the Corinthians were proud of their freedom from moral law (e.g., 6:12),¹³ but more likely this passage points to an incestuous Corinthian patron and church leader whose dependents could only confront him on the matter at great personal expense.¹⁴ Moreover, it would be very disadvantageous for the honor of their favored Jewish teacher to publicly criticize and desert their leader in this quest for honor. Thus, the dependents of this leader felt socially constrained to overlook his immoral behavior and to focus instead on their intragroup competition. Other local leaders may well have found it embarrassing to put their immoral social peer out of the community, since they would continue to be associated in political and civic contexts. Thus, leaders and community alike prioritized the demonstration of their loyalty to Jewish teachers over individual moral affairs. Their arrogance (5:2) does not indicate pride in moral freedom, but rather pride in their Jewish teachers, which they considered more valuable than the moral purity of one of their leaders.¹⁵

Another indication of leadership behavior comes from the lawsuits between believers (6:1-8). The courts were often an instrument for the social elite to publicly shame an opponent,¹⁶ so that this passage most likely refers to two Corinthian church leaders involved in an open dispute. It would be unthinkable for these leaders to ask the church, consisting of at least some of their dependents, to settle such a dispute. Instead, dependents were obliged to support their patron in his quest for honor at the expense of another patron and his dependents. Oddly, such court cases offered the opportunity to enhance intragroup competition over their favored Jewish teachers, so that in this situation public competition between leaders was not only considered permissible but perhaps even expedient for the cause at hand.

In this way, the formation of subgroups along the lines of patrons and their dependents led to intragroup competition within the church in Corinth, compared to which such serious ethical issues as incest and lawsuits took second place. Additional divisions in the church ran along socio-economic lines. The language of factionalism permeates Paul's discussions of domestic discord (1 Cor 7), of tensions between the strong and the weak, referring typically to those with and without political advantage (1 Cor 8, 10), of unequal privilege in common meals (1 Cor 11:17-34), and of unequal participation in community functions (1 Cor 12, 14).¹⁷ In these situations, it appears that leaders did not engage in intragroup competition between their patronage groups, but that socio-economic inequality created a rift between a few socially privileged believers

¹³ Charles H. Talbert, *Reading Corinthians: A Literary and Theological Commentary on 1 and 2 Corinthians*, Rev. ed., Reading the New Testament Series (Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys, 2002), 29, who attributes this to the Corinthians' over realized eschatology.

¹⁴ John K. Chow, *Patronage and Power: A Study of Social Networks in Corinth*, Journal for the Study of the New Testament Supplement Series (Sheffield, UK: Sheffield Academic Press, 1992), 75-80.

¹⁵ See Clarke, *Leadership in Corinth*, 74-77, for a discussion about whether the Corinthians were proud of the incest or *in spite of it*.

¹⁶ Chow, *Patronage and Power*, 123-30.

¹⁷ Margaret M. Mitchell, *Paul and the Rhetoric of Reconciliation: An Exegetical Investigation of the Language and Composition of 1 Corinthians* (Tübingen, Germany: Mohr Siebeck, 1991), 121-75.

and the rest of the community. Paul's comments show that the unity within each of the subgroups observed in 1 Corinthians 1-6 is very fragile. As long as subgroups focused on intragroup competition, subgroup members gained a sense of belonging and unity, but as soon as members of various subgroups participated together in community activities the usual socio-economic divisions surfaced. In such situations, higher status leaders usually associated closely with peers and kept their distance from people of lower social strata. The close style of interaction within the Christian community may well have accentuated these socio-economic tensions more than usual.

It should come as no surprise that communication between leaders and their subgroups often broke down, which is evident not only from their chaotic procedures in participating in the Lord's Supper, but also from the fact that some believed that there is no resurrection (15:12). In spite of their competitive loyalty to favorite Jewish teachers, such an erroneous belief could apparently go unchallenged in one (or more) of the subgroups in Corinth. The leaders evidently did not succeed in aligning their communication about such basic elements of their common faith. Ironically, the way they expressed their loyalty to their Jewish teachers obscured some of the very basic teachings that they had received from them.

Communication troubles are also evident from the various voices from Corinth that reach Paul.¹⁸ The church succeeded in writing Paul about some of their concerns (7:1, 8:1, 12:1), and sent this writing along with the delegation led by Stephanas (16:17-18). This testifies to a measure of agreement and coordination among the subgroups and their leaders. However, the divisions and the abuse of the Lord's Table is reported to Paul by "Chloe's people" (1:11), by an unidentified source (11:18), and most likely also by Stephanas and his fellow travelers, Fortunatus and Achaicus (16:17-18). The communication within the church is inconsistent and sometimes different voices compete for dominance, so that their various divisions are intensified rather than bridged.

In summary, within about six years since its founding, the Corinthian church had developed into several house churches. On one level, subgroups and their leaders competed against one another for dominance; at another level, close interaction of the members accentuated the normal socio-economic differences. These divisions led to inconsistent communication, both within the church and towards the outside.

III. SOCIAL IDENTIFICATION AND LEADERSHIP IN CORINTH

Insights from social identity research help to interpret these processes of community and leadership formation and answer the question why this was happening. *Social identity* refers to a person's sense of "us"; of belonging to a group.¹⁹ Social

¹⁸ For this way of phrasing it, see Cornelia C. Crocker, *Reading 1 Corinthians in the Twenty-First Century* (London: T & T Clark, 2004), 115-118.

¹⁹ Henri Tajfel, *Differentiation Between Social Groups: Studies in the Social Psychology of Intergroup Relations*, European Monographs in Social Psychology (London: Academic Press, 1978), 63. For a more elaborate presentation of social identity theory, its developing leadership theory, and the relevant literature, see Jack Barentsen, *Emerging Leadership in the Pauline Mission: A Social Identity Perspective on Local Leadership Development in Corinth and Ephesus*, Princeton Theological Monograph Series (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2011), chapter 3.

identity is usually in mind when one describes oneself by one's nationality, company, family, or church, which changes depending on which group one identifies with in different situations. People identify with a number of these social identities, which provides a sense of self in a particular context. This in turn determines particular styles of behavior and interaction. People are very flexible in identifying with different groups in different contexts. When people attend a soccer match, they think, feel, and behave differently than when they participate in a family gathering. They think of themselves and fellow group members in terms of a few relevant similarities that connect them together as ingroup members, while they distinguish themselves from outsiders by a few relevant differences that make the outgroup different from the ingroup.²⁰

Social identities interface in complex ways. Some function in hierarchical layers where each higher level in the hierarchy of identities fully encompasses the lower levels. The lower-level social identities are nested as subgroups in the higher-level, superordinate social identities. Other social identities cut across two or more identity hierarchies, where the interests of two or more social identities may conflict with one another. A typical example of *cross-cutting social identities* is a working mother who balances demands from work and family; a typical example of *nested social identities* is a large firm at the superordinate level which encompasses several departments, with each department encompassing a number of production or administrative units.²¹

Furthermore, some group members evidently fit the group's social identity better than others, and are perceived as more representative or prototypical than others. Prototypical members embody the beliefs and values of the group better than other members, so that other group members tend to identify with them. This allows a representative group member to gain influence and rise to leadership status within the group, especially if he or she demonstrates self-sacrificial behavior on behalf of the group.²²

This all too brief explanation of social identity and leadership theory suggests that beliefs, norms, and values are not abstract concepts but are embodied by groups, especially by prototypical members who influence other group members in maintaining those beliefs, norms, and values. This provides significant help in interpreting the situation in Corinth.

The patterns of social identification in the Corinthian church now become visible. First, honor for the patron and his dependents, as well as loyalty to favorite teachers were key values in Corinth. Patronal groups claimed their place in Corinthian society by competing for honor; success in this effort enhanced social identification and thus a sense of belonging to and social cohesion of the competing patronal ingroup. A belief in the resurrection was culturally not relevant for such competition and was thus ignored.

²⁰ S. Alexander Haslam, *Psychology in Organizations: The Social Identity Approach*, 2nd ed. (London: Sage, 2004), 30ff.

²¹ Michael A. Hogg, Dominic Abrams, Sabine Otten, and Steve Hinkle, "The Social Identity Perspective: Intergroup Relations, Self-Conception, and Small Groups," *Small Group Research* 35, no. 3 (2004): 261.

²² Michael A. Hogg, "A Social Identity Theory of Leadership," *Personality and Social Psychology Review* 5, no. 3 (2001): 188-191, Barbara van Knippenberg and Daan van Knippenberg, "Leader Self-Sacrifice and Leadership Effectiveness: The Moderating Role of Leader Prototypicality," *Journal of Applied Psychology* 90, no. 1 (2005): 25-28.

This reflects the way in which the subgroups in Corinth competed for distinctiveness and for their place in the church. It can be understood as a case of influence from the beliefs, norms, and values of cross-cutting identities.²³

Second, this influence from cross-cutting identities is most likely not malignant opposition. This rivalry simply affirmed to believers that they participated meaningfully in the Corinthian culture with which they identified, even if their competition was between believing subgroups rather than with other believing outgroups. It made them count and gave them a place in Corinth's social and religious life. Moreover, such competition served to maintain the honor of the Jewish founders and teachers of the Corinthian church and safeguarded their status as prototypical group members, while the competition also affirmed the various subgroups as important players in this Christian community. This provided several points of social identification and enhanced the social cohesion for each subgroup. In other words, this influence from cross-cutting identities represents a benevolent attempt to maintain the cohesion of the Christian community and the honor of its Jewish teachers in ways that fit with Corinthian traditions.

Third, Paul and subsequently Apollos had apparently left Corinth before the development of subgroups became problematic. Thus, the Corinthians probably had no other mental model than their cultural traditions for how to cope with developing subgroups in an expanding community. The difficulties they experienced were essentially part of a church growth process in a particular culture, for which new forms of social identification and new leadership strategies were needed. The unreflected influences from cross-cutting identities point to the fact that Christian social identity was a relatively new concept and experience in Corinth, so that even first converts like Stephanas still experienced a steep learning curve in their social identification.

Fourth, the influence of Corinthian leaders still flowed largely along their traditional roles of maintaining a strong leadership profile while engaging in public honor competition. Their understanding of Christian social identity probably led these leaders to give priority to defending the honor of their favorite Jewish teachers as distinctive within the larger Christian community. This may well explain why some Christian leaders were willing to go to court, because it enhanced their leadership profile and the distinctiveness of their subgroup, while they neglected to confront the incest offender because of its potential risk to one particular subgroup and its leadership. They sought a leadership style that confirmed their social status as leaders with a strong local power base, while providing stability to the Christian subgroup they represented. Thus, even if the leaders redirected their efforts towards the honor and stability of the Christian community, their leadership style had not developed fully in line with the beliefs, norms, and values that belonged with Christian social identity—at least not in the way Paul saw it.

The Corinthians' understanding of Christian social identity had, as yet, imperfectly developed when Paul wrote 1 Corinthians. This imperfect understanding is reflected in the influence of cross-cutting identities in community and leadership formation in Corinth, which can be interpreted as a benevolent attempt to provide honor

²³ See also Charles K. Robertson, *Conflict in Corinth: Redefining the System*, Studies in Biblical Literature (New York: Lang, 2001), 81-114, who proposes a similar analysis from systems theory and a consideration of overlapping relational networks.

and cohesion for the various Christian subgroups in Corinth as they attempted to accommodate the growth of the church into various subgroups.

IV. AN ALTERNATIVE VISION OF IDENTITY AND ITS IMPLICATIONS

In rapid social change, such as occurred through the church's expansion in Corinth, social identification is usually guided by comparable earlier experiences. Thus, the Corinthian church and its leaders attempted to accommodate their expansion by contextualizing community formation in terms of their own culture, as demonstrated above. The question now arises: Is this what should have been happening? It is clear from his letter that Paul did not think so.

Paul brings several negative consequences of their manner of expansion to the attention of the Corinthian community and its leaders. Instead of viewing their subgroup competition as healthy participation in community life, he labels it as "division" (1:10) and "jealousy and strife" (3:3), indicating the unintended results it leads to.²⁴ Paul believes that their practice creates confusion about group boundaries, since they tolerate immorality instead of "purging" the perpetrator from the community (5:13), and since they ask the unrighteous outside the kingdom of God to adjudicate issues between community members (6:6, 9). Even foundational community beliefs about the resurrection are compromised (15:12) through the current manner of expansion and organization. Paul evaluates these consequences as harmful for the continuing formation of the church, and not as harmless byproducts of expansion.

Moreover, Paul's leadership as apostle for Corinth is in danger of being marginalized to the subgroup level, as may be indicated by the defense of his apostleship (9:3ff). This creates a difficult communication problem for how to resolve these divisions and how to regain the loyalty and trust of all the subgroups, without being seen as self-promoting and trying to achieve dominance for the "Paul party." And yet, by the time Paul reaches the end of his letter, he speaks out frankly on the resurrection as apostle for the whole Corinthian church, and unapologetically recommends Stephanas, apparently not hampered by any fears that he might still be seen as self-serving.²⁵

Paul proceeds to suggest alternative behaviors. He does so not only because he has a different (spiritual) rule book in mind or because he is better informed about Christian belief in the resurrection, but primarily because he has a different vision of

²⁴ Even though Horrell also uses social science models to understand the divisions in Corinth, he does not engage with theories of community formation and social identification which provide greater definition and clarity. See David G. Horrell, *The Social Ethos of the Corinthian Correspondence: Interests and Ideology from 1 Corinthians to 1 Clement*, Studies of the New Testament and Its World (Edinburgh, UK: T & T Clark, 1996), 114ff.

²⁵ Many scholars are, however, fearful that Paul might have been perceived as self-serving in recommending Stephanas. See, for instance, Garland, *1 Corinthians*, 768. Understandable as this scholarly concern is, an analysis of Paul's self-portrayal in the course of his rhetoric shows that he did not share this concern in writing the last half of this letter.

Christian social identity, which incorporates those norms and beliefs. This vision in turn determines the appropriate modes of expansion.²⁶

Paul's essential proposal is to view the different subgroups as nested social identities, encompassed by the higher order social identity that finds its focal point in "Christ and Him crucified" (2:2). The honor any subgroup may strive for is not the honor of a favored teacher, but the glory of the gospel that God has decreed from ages past for "our glory" or honor (2:7). Commentators regularly discuss theological issues in 2:7, such as the mystery, God's sovereignty, and divine glory, but they miss the social point that all subgroups therefore share the same glory by divine decree; Paul refers to "our" glory.²⁷ Thus, all subgroups are united in the glory of the gospel of the crucified Christ, which is rather a point of cultural shame and dishonor in comparison with Greek wisdom or the Jewish quest for signs. This reorients the Corinthian believers in their perspective on their internal differences, while affirming the boundary between the believing community and the outside world.

Paul proposes, second, that internal differences contribute meaningfully to the entire Corinthian community. He positions both Apollos and himself as "God's fellow workers" (3:9), "servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God" (4:1), emphasizing equality in their service for the community, while simultaneously affirming their distinctive contributions as one who plants and lays a foundation versus one who waters and continues to build on the foundation (3:6, 10). In other words, internal differences are not ignored or denied as if they were an obstacle to unity, but are acknowledged and respected in order to affirm a higher level of unity amidst their diversity. In this way, Paul escapes the dilemma of speaking as a subgroup leader for the whole community: he and his imagined competitor Apollos are both stewards of God. Paul thus raises both Apollos and himself to the level of leader of the whole community, which is united in one encompassing social identity centered in Christ crucified.

This has significant implications for how they express their beliefs, values, and norms. Paul's proclamation of Christ's crucifixion highlights that believers seek their honor in something perceived as shameful by the outgroup. Christ's sacrifice provides the norm for moral purity while keeping the boundary with the outgroup clear (5:7-8). Christ is their source of wisdom so they should adjudicate internal differences without the involvement of unbelieving judges (6:5). The strong should respect the socially weak, since they ought not to harm a brother for whom Christ died (8:11), and since socially weaker group members are equally parts of Christ's body (12:22ff). Thus, Paul argues that their belief in Christ should transform their social relationships in yet unexpected ways.

Honor is found not in internal competition over leaders but in a common celebration of Christ crucified (3:22-23), which also maintains clear boundaries (and thus a clear testimony) to outsiders (5:13). Social cohesion is not found in rivalry, but in mutual submission, where especially the socially strong are called upon to submit to the

²⁶ Horrell speaks of this process as Paul drawing "upon the symbols, rules and resources of the Christian symbolic order," using an earlier sociological model to discuss the same findings (Horrell, *The Social Ethos*, 195).

²⁷ See, for instance, Thiselton, *First Corinthians*, 242-244.

judgment and actions of the whole community (5:11-13, 6:2-5). Claiming a place in Corinth is not accomplished through confrontational leadership, but through giving place to people of every social rank to participate in the community (11:33, 12:21-26). Competition for honor, cohesion, and social space are not ruled out as evil or worldly. Instead, Paul transforms the role which these cultural values and norms play in the community by aligning them with their foundational beliefs in Christ. To put in it social identity terms, their superordinate Christian social identity dictates the beliefs, norms, and values of the community and its nested subgroups, which represents Paul's alternative vision of social identity as compared with Corinthian cross-cutting identities derived from other social networks in Corinth.²⁸

V. LEADERSHIP TO EFFECT A CHANGE

The Corinthian Christians had coped as best as they could with their continuing expansion, using social strategies familiar from their own experience and culture. Paul evaluated their efforts as harmful, since beliefs, norms, and values from their cross-cutting identities introduced division, strife, jealousy, and inequality into the community. He clarified his own vision of Christian social identity, and specified how this should transform their beliefs, norms, and values. This leads to the last question: How did Paul propose to put this into effect?

Paul's immediate action was to send a second letter (cf. 5:9) to communicate his views, which was most likely carried back by Stephanas and his delegation (16:17-18). Paul apparently did not expect this letter to be sufficient to accomplish his purposes, so he also sent Timothy to Corinth (4:17) whom he expected to arrive in Corinth sometime after his letter was read to the church (16:10). Timothy would be able to teach Paul's "ways in Christ" (4:17) more effectively than apparently even Stephanas could after having visited Paul. Even with all this support, Paul still planned to visit Corinth again personally to set things right (4:18-21).

What is the role that Stephanas plays in Paul's action plan?²⁹ Paul's identification of Stephanas as "firstfruit" (16:15) indicates a leadership role, which presents Stephanas as a prototypical group member. Stephanas' labors highlight his self-sacrificial service on behalf of the group. Paul also positions Stephanas as his coworker (16:16), affirming his leadership status within the community. The exhortation to "obey" and "recognize" (16:16, 18) such believers directs the group to attribute leadership status to him and similar group members. Paul is not concerned to avoid all appearances of leadership and honor, since he regularly portrayed himself as exemplary leader and founding apostle; rather, he seeks to recast leadership in terms of seeking honor for the whole group and achieving social cohesion by mutual submission and sacrificial service. It appears then, that Paul encouraged the community to see Stephanas as a prototypical member with increasing leadership status; in effect,

²⁸ Dunn, having supervised Robertson's dissertation (see note 23), phrases it as follows, "Paul's counsel to the Corinthians to subject themselves to such as Stephanas (16:16) can be seen as an attempt to marshal the Corinthians into patronal relationship more amenable to Paul's own concept of discipleship and church" (James D. G. Dunn, *1 Corinthians*, T & T Clark Study Guides [London: T&T Clark, 2003], 52).

²⁹ For full argumentation, see Barentsen, *Emerging Leadership in the Pauline Mission*, chapter 4.

encouraging his emergence as “leader among leaders,” as would be expected according to the social identity model of leadership.

Stephanas was not a new leader, since he had been involved from the founding days of the community. As leader and most likely (co)sponsor of the delegation to Paul, Stephanas showed awareness of the church’s expansion and tensions, and initiative to attempt to resolve them. However, it appears that he did not yet have the social influence to implement any solutions, since he had to consult with Paul and ask for his intervention to effect any changes. It is quite likely, then, that Stephanas represents the type of innovative leader necessary in Corinth to move leadership from its location in different competing households to a collegial focus on the whole community. If this is the case, then Paul’s recommendation of Stephanas not only commended him for his effort in visiting Paul, but affirmed leaders like him who emerged to form a collegial level of oversight over the entire community. Paul’s recommendation presented Stephanas as a prototypical leader, worthy not only of respect and a following within the community, but also of imitation by other leaders. Such a recommendation, if followed through, could provide long-term stability in the community, far beyond Paul’s intended visit. Even more than Paul’s personal visit, this is perhaps Paul’s foremost long-term strategy for community and leadership formation in Corinth.

VI. CONCLUSION

What is the significance of Paul’s recommendation of Stephanas’ leadership for a solution to the Corinthian troubles? As an innovative leader, he was recommended because he recognized the need to collaborate at a higher level of organization and group identity even though he did not yet have the social power to implement it without Paul’s intervention. The social identity theory of leadership helped to study the social dynamics in Corinth as observed in 1 Corinthians, and to trace the process of community and leadership formation with finer detail than in other studies thus far.

In an earlier analysis of Paul’s leadership in Corinth, Green et al. used the six styles of leadership and the nine dimensions of culture of the GLOBE leadership studies. They concluded that Paul’s leadership style closely matches Corinthian culture on most of the leadership–culture dimensions.³⁰ Although this helpfully situates Paul as leader, this study does little to unravel the social leadership dynamics in Corinth. In fact, by superimposing the GLOBE leader–culture grid on the Corinthian situation, the different perspectives of Paul, the Corinthian leaders, and the Corinthian church are often glossed over. A social identity approach to community and leadership formation can be used alongside more in-depth exegesis and sociological studies to analyze the dynamics of leadership from a more follower-centric perspective, which is gaining currency in leadership research.

The social identity approach, then, contributes to the ongoing scholarship on leadership in the Pauline mission as a multidimensional tool. It combines sociological

³⁰ Mark Green, Stephanie Kodatt, Charles Salter, Phyllis Duncan, Diana Garza-Ortiz, and Esther Chavez, “Assessing the Leadership Style of Paul and Cultural Congruence of the Christian Community at Corinth Using Project Globe Constructs,” *Journal of Biblical Perspectives in Leadership* 2, no. 2 (2009), 20-25.

research on first-century group and leadership dynamics with an exegetical and theological analysis of Paul's letters. Moreover, it situates Paul and other local leaders in the context of their followers. Finally, it portrays leadership at various levels (Paul, his team, local leaders, and followers) as a leadership dance where different visions of Christian social identity and different strategies for local contextualization compete for dominance. In the process, local Corinthian leaders are seen to emerge against the backdrop of Paul's shadow as those who advance Paul's spirit as entrepreneur of Christian social identity.³¹

Did Paul's action plan succeed in Corinth? Unfortunately, Paul's plans were overshadowed by Jewish-Christian teachers who arrived in Corinth soon after the delivery of 1 Corinthians, before Paul could arrive personally. They offered another competing version of Christian social identity with their own resolution for the problems of cross-cutting identities in Corinth. Second Corinthians tells how Paul almost lost Corinth as a missionary center for his mission, and how he succeeded in regaining the loyalty of the entire congregation and almost all of its leaders. But that is a story for another time.³²

About the Author

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³¹ Haslam, *The New Psychology of Leadership*, 137ff.

³² As told in Barentsen, *Emerging Leadership in the Pauline Mission*, chapter 5.