Introduction

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The books of 1 and 2 Corinthians reveal a vast array of issues in Corinth, ranging from divisive ideologies to resurrection. As Corinth is well known among scholars for its thriving commerce with a vast influx of immigrants from elsewhere in the Roman Empire, the Corinthian community appears to reflect divergent social realities due to its diverse membership from lower to upper classes. Accordingly, it is not surprising for us to see the storehouse of problems in the Corinthian community—a battleground of competing voices coming from the strong and the weak, the rich and the poor, men and women. The current volume of *First and Second Corinthians* in the Texts @ Contexts series features an intercultural reading of the Corinthian correspondence from the diverse cultural perspectives/contexts of the contributors—Africa, Asia, Latin America, Europe, and the United States. It is intercultural at several levels. First, as culture is broadly understood to encompass all kinds of ideologies and the way of life, we in the twenty-first century engage in intercultural conversations with the first-century Corinthian culture. *Intercultural* here means a conversation between those of two different time periods. Second, since most of the Corinthian issues are specifically cultural, our contributors easily find common cultural issues between themselves and the Corinthians such as identity, ritual, and community. *Intercultural* here means intercontextual discussion of cultural issues in Corinth and in our day. Third, since our contributors represent diverse cultural perspectives, they can provide unique interpretations that stem from their personal experiences in their respective environments. *Intercultural* here means a cross-cultural understanding of the given topic; for example, as will be explained later, each of our contributors approaches and discusses the topic of identity differently.

This volume is divided into three parts, arranged according to the various topics of intercultural reading. The overarching theme for part 1 is identity, which includes issues of race relations and privileges in the United States, postapartheid identity in South Africa, and Latino/a identity in the United States. The major theme for part 2 is ritual, which includes purification rites in Africa, ancestor veneration in Chinese culture, and the Lord's Supper in Filipino lowlands. The key word for part 3 is *community*, which includes hermeneutics of love in the community from a classical Daoist perspective, head veil community

in America, and a community of sexual minority in Spain. A brief introduction to each essay follows.

In part 1, Love Sechrest ("Identity and the Embodiment of Privilege in Corinth") discusses identity and privileges in Corinth and in America. Stimulated by concerns about race relations and privileges in America, she seeks to deconstruct and reconstruct identity and privileges through the embodiment of Paul's gospel—specifically in "his likeness to a common, humble, disposable, and fragile piece of clay pottery." According to Sechrest, while keeping cultural heritage or sense of privilege may be important, just as Paul himself is confident in his ethnic religious heritage, Christian identity ultimately comes from the embodiment of a Christlike life, especially when remembered through Christ's crucifixion, through which God's power is revealed. Therefore, what matters is what constitutes privilege and how such privilege is perceived, gained, and practiced. Sechrest's reading challenges modern Christians across the board to envision a new model of Christian identity rooted in selfless love and sacrifice.

Jeremy Punt ("Identity and Human Dignity amid Power and Liminality in 1 Corinthians 7:17-24") similarly handles issues of identity in postapartheid South Africa in light of slavery and God's calling in 1 Cor. 7:17-24, in which Paul encourages his audience to remain in the calling in which they were called (circumcision or slavery). According to Punt, it is difficult to know Paul's firm stance on slavery, because, on one hand, he asks the Corinthians to stay where they were called, and, on the other hand, he asks them to remain with God without becoming slaves of human masters. Is Paul socially conservative, or is he implicitly challenging slavery in society? Or does he stand somewhere in between these extremes? Punt believes that Paul leaves room for his audience to challenge the world with their own interpretations of God's calling, thinking about how to live sensibly with the power of God. Punt's study implies the importance of interpreting God's calling and moving toward the step-by-step improvement of race relations, economic justice, and desirable multiethnic society.

Efrain Agosto ("An Intercultural Latino Reading of Paul: The Example of 1 Corinthians 9:19-23") juxtaposes the context of Latino/a presence in the United States with that of Paul's mission. Rather than presenting Paul as a border-eraser or a kind of imperial colonialist, he interprets Paul in 1 Cor. 9:19-23 as a person who crosses the border not to invade but to engage others in the truth of God's gospel. Using Fernando Segovia's "hermeneutics of otherness and engagement," Agosto argues that Paul's attitude toward others can be helpful for Latinos/as in America because they can identify with Paul in his passion for sharing the gospel to all through the spirit of "otherness and engagement." As

Paul becomes "all things to all people" in his sharing of the good news, Latino people also become "all things to all people" in a new world for sharing the good news of God. He suggests that borders do not signify isolation, separation, or marginalization; rather, they constitute a hermeneutical space for negotiation, engagement, or solidarity with others.

In part 2, Ayodeji Adewuya ("2 Corinthians 7:1 against the Backdrop of African Purification Rites") helps us understand holiness in Paul's text through the lens of purification rites in African tradition. Adewuya, defying the Western notion of purification in Africa as an empty myth, argues that purification rites are holistic and govern all aspects of life, personal and communal, psychological and spiritual, realistic and ideal at the same time. He goes on to say that Paul's exhortation to the Corinthians emphasizes the cleansing of all aspects of life in serving God and neighbors so that they too can be holy. The implication of this study is that purification or holiness affects every aspect of our lives as we engage in the community, neighbors, and ourselves.

Menghun Goh ("The Issue of *Eidōlothyta*: An Inter(con)textual Interpretation of 1 Corinthians 8:1—11:1 and Chinese Ancestor Veneration") addresses ancestor veneration in Chinese culture and the issue of food offered to idols in 1 Corinthians 8–10. Goh warns that ancestor veneration must not be misunderstood as an evil practice that involves elevating ancestors to idol status. Rather, the ritual of ancestor veneration is a cultural practice that honors deceased ancestors. Through ancestor veneration, members of the community find a symbolic space of unity and solidarity with one another. According to Goh, the problem of food offerings to idols in Corinth was not the idol or the food itself but the will of the strong people who ignored the conscience of the weak by consuming the food offered to idols. The implication of this study is that rituals, such as ancestor veneration, can be examined by their context. In Chinese culture, ancestor veneration serves the community in a positive way. In Corinth, meal culture (in this case, eating the food offered to idols) did not serve the whole community very well.

Ma. Marilou Ibita ("A Conversation with the Story of the Lord's Supper in 1 Corinthians 11:17-34: Engaging the Scripture Text and the Filipino Christians' Context") constructs a conversation between the story of the abuses of the Lord's Supper in Corinth and the story of meal culture in the lowland Filipino context, which emphasizes mutual care, growth, unity, and shared identity. This contextual study implies that ritual activity such as the Lord's Supper should not be limited as a practice in service but rather represent an integral part of one's life through inviting and embracing all the members of the community in the poor area. At the Lord's Supper, people find their identity

in community strengthened because of the mutual care and love they feel as they remember both Jesus' feeding of the multitudes and his death. In the end, Ibita seems to ask how we can participate in the Lord's Supper while billions of people are in hunger or in poverty.

In part 3, K. K. Yeo ("Pauline Theological Counseling of Love in the Language of the *Zhuangzi*: A Reading of Love in 1 Corinthians in a Chinese Philosophical Context") opens discussion about Paul's concept of love in 1 Corinthians and the Chinese reading of love in Zhuangzi's language. Through the study of intertextual and intercultural aspects of love, Yeo suggests that Paul's concept of love and his counseling of the church can be well understood through the lens of classical Daoism, where love is other-centered wisdom and action toward others. Despite cultural-linguistic differences between Paul and Zhuangzi, Yeo argues that Chinese Christians easily understand Paul's exhortation of love to the Corinthians. The implication of Yeo's essay is that a comparative literature study can be beneficial in deepening our understanding of Paul's text and enriching our cultural heritage. Both Paul and Zhuangzi share the wisdom of deconstruction by seeking selfless communal spirit rather than self-centered pride.

Janelle Peters ("Reading 1 Corinthians 11:1-16 through Habits and Hijabs in the United States") compares the contemporary practice of women head veiling for Catholics and Muslims in America with veiling in Paul's house churches in Corinth. She argues that women's head covering in Paul's house churches was intended not for the subordination of women but for enhancing women's positive role in the church. Women in Paul's church exercised their freedom in worship, which was different from the Roman practice of worship, where only male priests wore head coverings. Paul therefore sought to establish a subculture in Corinth where women and men could find themselves in unity but yet remain separated from the dominant culture. Likewise, the modern practice of head veiling in America for Catholic and Muslim women can be understood through the lens of honor/respect or agency attached to them within their subcultures. The implication of this study is that outsiders should not judge certain religious practices because they do not like or understand them.

Luis Menendez Antuña ("What Queer Hermeneutics Can Do for us in Spain: The Case of 1 Corinthians 6:1-9") deals with the issue of homosexuality in Spain and examines a similar issue in 1 Cor. 6:1-9 and also Rom. 1:26-27. He argues that the Spanish church and the Spanish government must go beyond both the traditional conservatism of the church and the liberal position of the government so that the more-diverse or rich understanding of sexuality may

be reflected in the current debate about homosexuality. Analyzing the theory of meaning with regard to sexuality and ideological issues of interpretation, Menendez warns that the Scriptures should not be easily construed for one's interests. It is the task of the reader to critically engage both the text and the world in order not only to foster a more just community but also to defy fixed definitions of community.

In closing, we are reminded that our life journey is not a solitary one. We can learn from the Corinthian struggle—the yearning for a just world and a meaningful existence in it. I hope this volume will invite Christian readers everywhere to critically reengage in the Corinthian correspondence so that the good news of God would be reinterpreted and enlivened in our day so as to benefit all—the creation of God. I thank all of our contributors for the diligence, energy, and insight they poured into this volume.