

Courting Daimons in Corinth:

Daimonic Partnerships, Cosmic Hierarchies and Divine Jealousy in 1 Corinthians 8–10

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The term δαιμόνιον occurs only four times in the space of two verses in the undisputed letters of Paul:¹

The things they sacrifice, [they sacrifice] to daimons and not to God, and I do not want you to become partners with daimons (κοινωνοὺς τῶν δαιμονίων γίνεσθαι).

It is not possible to drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of daimons, it is not possible to share the table of the Lord and the table of daimons. (1 Cor 10:20–22)²

This solitary reference is surprising given the amount of times scholars have applied the adjective “demonic” to the various “elements,” “rulers,” “principalities” and “powers” that Paul refers to, and is symptomatic of a general preference in Pauline scholarship to combine all these references in Paul into a generalized mass of impersonal, hostile forces that rule the present evil age.³ This results in the application of the term “demonic” to many things which Paul does not describe this way, and also means that when Paul does talk about actual daimons, as in the passage above, these can be similarly depersonalized and abstracted. Hence Anthony Thiselton writes of this passage that Paul “is less likely to be thinking of personalized entities than the

¹ In the disputed letters of the Pauline corpus there is only one further reference, 1 Tim 4:1.

² Unless stated otherwise, all translations are my own.

³ See Jung Young Lee, “Interpreting the Demonic Powers in Pauline Thought,” *NovT* 12 (1970): 54–69; Pierre Benoit, “Pauline Angelology and Demonology: Reflexions on Designations of Heavenly Powers and on the Origin of Angelic Evil according to Paul,” *Religious Studies Bulletin* 3 (1983): 1–18; Walter Wink, *Naming the Powers: The Language of Power in the New Testament* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984), 100. This tendency is sharply criticized by Emma Wasserman, *Apocalypse as Holy War: Divine Politics and Polemics in the Letters of Paul*, AYBRL (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2018), 4–11, 122–23; cf. Dale B. Martin, “When Did Angels Become Demons?” *JBL* 129, no.4 (2010): 657–58.

power of demonic forces which reflect powers of evil greater in collective force than human resources. They represent active evil powers which are hostile to God.”⁴ In order to avoid the later baggage of the terms “demon” and “demonic”, which come to represent purely evil forces, I will instead use the term “daimon” as an anglicized form of the Greek terms δαίμων and δαιμόνιον.⁵

If one wants to achieve greater clarity on the nature and function of daimons for Paul in his historical context, then discussion usually reaches as far as the Greek translators of the Hebrew scriptures. Here, the gods of the nations and the recipients of Gentile sacrifice are occasionally identified as daimons (Deut 32:17 LXX; Ps 95.5 OG; Ps 105:37). This is undoubtedly a crucial context in which to place Paul, but can lead to the impression that Paul’s thoughts about daimons are entirely canonical, and distinctively Jewish.⁶ But Paul’s language and thought needs to be treated in a broader cultural and intellectual context that includes wider discussions about daimons from predominantly Greek philosophical writers. The nature and extent of Paul’s relation to the popular moral philosophy of his day has been studied by scholars such as Edwin Judge, Abraham Malherbe, Stanley Stowers and Troels Engberg-Pedersen. A general consensus situates Paul’s thought within the “popular intellectualism” of his day, in which “one simply picks up and uses the vocabulary and technical ideas and fashionable notions of the time wherever they come from ... exploiting the material rather than subjecting oneself to

⁴ Anthony C. Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, NIGTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 775. Cf. F. F. Bruce, *1 and 2 Corinthians*, NCBC (London: Oliphants, 1971), 96.

⁵ Paul’s use of δαιμόνιον rather than δαίμων mirrors the general Jewish and Christian preference, and was possibly intended as a diminution of their divinity and status. See Dale B. Martin, “When Did Angels Become Demons?” 658 n. 4.

⁶ His position is labeled distinctively or strongly Jewish by e.g., Guy Williams, *The Spirit World in the Letters of Paul the Apostle: A Critical Examination of the Role of Spiritual Beings in the Authentic Pauline Epistles*, FRLANT 231 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2009), 150; Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, rev. ed., NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2014), 520. On the Judaism/Hellenism divide in Pauline scholarship see Troels Engberg-Pedersen, ed., *Paul Beyond the Judaism/Hellenism Divide* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2001).

it.”⁷ Increasingly, scholars are also beginning to consider how Paul interacts with the philosophical cosmology of his day.⁸

Two constructive attempts are noteworthy. Chris Forbes has analyzed Paul’s language of “principalities and powers,” and “law, sin and death” in the context of Middle Platonism, especially as represented by Philo and Plutarch. In this scheme, abstract features of God or the cosmos were often understood as personified beings, while the characters of mythology were also allegorized to represent cosmological forces.⁹ Troels Engberg-Pedersen has sought to understand Paul’s cosmology in a more thorough-going Stoic fashion, particularly as it relates to the nature and function of “spirit” (πνεῦμα). When it comes to daimons and “spiritual beings” he accepts Forbes’s comparisons with Philo and Plutarch, but seeks to show that the combination of daimonological and cosmological language was equally at home in Stoic thought, and should not be read as characteristically Platonic.¹⁰ This embedding of daimonology within ancient philosophical cosmology is an important contribution, and shows Paul’s affinities with his broader philosophical context.¹¹ Neither Forbes nor Engberg-Pedersen, however, appear to find much use for 1 Cor 8–10 in their discussions, except to demonstrate that Paul evidently thought

⁷ E. A. Judge, “St Paul and Socrates” in *The First Christians in the Roman World: Augustan and New Testament Essays*, ed. James R. Harrison, WUNT 229 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008), 675. Cf. Abraham J. Malherbe, *Paul and the Popular Philosophers* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1989); Troels Engberg-Pedersen, ed., *Paul in his Hellenistic Context* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995).

⁸ Chris Forbes, “Paul’s Principalities and Powers: Demythologizing Apocalyptic?” *JSNT* 82 (2001): 88. An important recent contribution that is not directly relevant to Paul’s daimonology is Stanley K. Stowers, “Paul and the Terrain of Philosophy,” *EC* 6 (2015): 141–56.

⁹ Chris Forbes, “Pauline Demonology and/or Cosmology? Principalities, Powers and the Elements of the World in their Hellenistic Context,” *JSNT* 85 (2002): 72.

¹⁰ Troels Engberg-Pedersen, *Cosmology and Self in the Apostle Paul: The Material Spirit* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 92–98, 234 n. 34.

¹¹ I am not particularly concerned to place Paul on either side of a Stoic / Platonic dichotomy. The discussions by these authors show that many of these concepts were equally at home in both. Cf. John M. G. Barclay, “Stoic Physics and the Christ-Event: A Review of Troels Engberg-Pedersen, *Cosmology and Self in the Apostle Paul: The Material Spirit* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010),” *JSNT* 33 (2011): 407 n. 2.

daimons existed.¹² In neither case does the philosophical context add any particular insight to the interpretation of Paul's use of the term in this passage, or how it relates to Paul's discussion of food offered to idols.

The most sustained reading of Paul's daimonology in 1 Cor 8–10 against its "pagan background" has been provided by Peter Lampe. Lampe identifies a number of ways in which the Greek term δαίμων could be understood, either as a god, a demi-god or as an evil being of some sort. The bulk of his study is devoted to demonstrating that, however the term is understood, it is frequently linked with the motifs of sacrificial slaughter, blood, and killing.¹³ This helps us understand Paul's differing advice in 1 Cor 8 and 1 Cor 10, since the presence of daimons was principally associated with the act of slaughter in a way that would not apply to drink-offerings or the subsequent social enjoyment of the meat away from the altar. In the course of this argument, Lampe notes that there are a number of Greek texts that, like Paul, downgrade certain gods to the level of daimons, so that "intelligent people" (*Verständige*) offered sacrifices "not to gods but to daimons."¹⁴

In what follows I will build on this aspect of Lampe's argument, and focus on the rationale for this downgrading and its attendant assumptions. The philosophical discussions I will explore bear witness to a broader discourse about daimons, which include notions of sacrifice, *koinōnia*¹⁵ and cosmic hierarchies. The particular sources I use date from both before

¹² Forbes, "Pauline Demonology," 73; cf. Forbes, "Paul's Principalities and Powers," 65; Engberg-Pedersen, *Cosmology and Self*, 92–93.

¹³ Peter Lampe, "Die dämonologischen Implikationen von 1 Korinther 8 und 10 vor dem Hintergrund paganer Zeugnisse," in *Die Dämonen: Die Dämonologie der israelitisch-jüdischen und frühchristlichen Literatur im Kontext ihrer Umwelt*, ed. A. Lange, H. Lichtenberger, and K. F. Diethard Römheld (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2003), 594.

¹⁴ Lampe, "Die dämonologischen Implikationen," 588.

¹⁵ The Greek word κοινῶνία admits a number of translations, which all relate to the basic idea of "having *something* in common with *someone*" (italics original), J. Y. Campbell, "KOINΩΝΙΑ and its Cognates in the New Testament," *JBL* 51 (1932): 356. I will mostly provide contextual translations where the word or its cognates appear, but will occasionally use the transliteration "*koinōnia*" when the focus is on the common Greek word underlying the various discussions.

and slightly after Paul (2nd century CE), but I do not claim any particular text as Paul's source. Rather they are all *comparanda* and serve as evidence of a philosophical discourse in which Paul himself can be seen to participate. This discourse provides a further context in which Paul's words about daimons can be understood, while also clarifying and highlighting aspects of this passage that have puzzled commentators.

1. Daimons in Graeco-Roman philosophy

Platonic Daimons

A helpful place to begin is with a famous passage from Plato's *Symposium* which references daimons, sacrifice, and *koinōnia*, and contains most of the themes that are echoed and explicated in later writers. In Erixymachus's speech on *Eros*, he glosses both sacrifices and ceremonies controlled by divination as "that which concerns the communion (κοινωνία) of gods and humans with each other" (Plato, *Symp.* 188c). In this context, κοινωνία primarily means communication, and relates to the unity of gods and humans. Later, in the speech of Socrates, these methods of communion, or communication, are said to be made possible because of daimons (δαίμων). These are beings that exist in the space between divinity and mortality, who are responsible for "interpreting and transporting human things to gods," such as prayers and sacrifices, "and divine things to humans," such as oracles. By occupying the middle space between divinity and mortality, the daimonic realm establishes a clear hierarchy and separation between gods and humans and highlights the gap between them. Humans cannot interact directly with the gods; but through the intermediate position of daimons, the two realms are bound together (Plato, *Symp.* 202e).¹⁶

¹⁶ W. R. M. Lamb's LCL edition unhelpfully translates δαίμων with "spirit," and τὸ δαιμόνιον with "spiritual."

Platonic writers of the Roman era expand on Plato's description of daimons as intermediaries between gods and mortals. Apuleius describes daimons as "living beings (*animalia*) by species, rational ones by nature, emotional in mind, aerial in body, eternal in time" (Apuleius, *De deo Socr.* 13.3 [Jones, LCL]). The first three of these features they share with humans, the last they share with the gods, and the fourth—occupying the middle space between heaven and earth—is unique to them. Maximus of Tyre also has daimons share with gods in immortality, and with humans in emotion, and uses the verb *κοινωνεῖν* to describe the shared characteristics that link the hierarchy together (Maximus of Tyre, *Disc.* 9.3–4). Plutarch debates whether in fact daimons are immortal, preferring to see them as greater than humans in power (*δύναμις*), while they share with humans possession of bodily senses and susceptibility to change. Plutarch likens the role of daimons to that of the moon, which stands between earth and heaven, and without which the unity of the universe (*τὴν κοινωνίαν τοῦ παντός*) would be destroyed (Plutarch, *Def. orac.* 415b–416f; *Is. Os.* 360e).¹⁷

One practical thing this taxonomy enables these authors to do is to assign to the daimonic realm figures, myths or rituals that do not fit their philosophical ideal of God (or a god), but are also evidently not human. In the *Symposium*, the race of daimons is invoked to explain what sort of being Eros might be. While most take him to be a god, Socrates becomes persuaded by Diotima that he cannot be a god, since there are things Eros lacks. He desires the things that he lacks, and this is not a state of being consistent with a god, but neither is Eros human. He is in fact between the two as a great daimon (*δαίμων μέγας*, Plato, *Symp.* 202a–e). In Plutarch's *De defectu oraculorum* daimons are assigned various roles in the functioning of the Delphic oracle.

¹⁷ Plutarch's own daimonological views are debated. See Frederick E. Brenk, "In the Light of the Moon: Demonology in the Early Imperial Period," *ANRW* 2, 16.3: 2128–30. For the purposes of this paper it is enough that Plutarch bears witness to certain possible viewpoints, whether or not he personally agreed with them.

In these roles daimons still fulfil a positive function as messengers from the god, but their shortcomings—such as susceptibility to change—also help to explain the more human frailties of the oracular process.

In addition to natural human frailties, some authors also explain the purely negative characteristics ascribed to gods by evoking the passionate nature of daimons. Cleombrotus, in *De defectu oraculorum* wonders whether tales of gods who rape and steal should not more properly be ascribed to daimons (Plutarch, *Def. orac.* 417e). In these cases communication is no longer transmitted up the hierarchy by daimons but rather diverted into their own more passionate and sexual unions. Dionysius of Halicarnassus uses the word “partnership” (κοινωνία) when relating the conception of Romulus and Remus in which their mother, a Vestal Virgin, was raped in the sacred precinct while fetching water for sacrifices. Legend has it that she was raped by Mars, whom Dionysius calls “the divinity (δαίμων) of the place” (Dionysius of Halicarnassus, *Ant. rom.* 1.77.2).¹⁸ Dionysius simply calls the act “rape” (βιασμός), but from the god’s perspective it is described as a “marriage union” (κοινωνία τῶν γάμων). The term δαίμων at this point appears interchangeably with θεός, which is not a particularly unusual use of the word,¹⁹ but when Dionysius adds his own comment to the story he distinguishes the two terms sharply. If such a story is to be believed on any level for Dionysius, it cannot have been the work of a god, but a daimon, as this is not the sort of thing a god can or would do. He ultimately refers judgment to the philosophers on such a matter (Dionysius of Halicarnassus, *Ant. rom.* 1.77.3).²⁰

¹⁸ Initially τοῦ δαίμονος εἶδωλον, οὗ τὸ χωρίον ἦν, and later τῷ χωρίῳ δαίμονα. The term εἶδωλον is best translated “spectre” or “phantom” here, although evidently one with enough substance to molest a person: see LSJ, s.v. “εἶδωλον.”

¹⁹ Martin, “When Did Angels Become Demons?” 662.

²⁰ Cf. Plutarch, *Numa* 4 for the possibility of sexual κοινωνία between human and divine.

Outlandish rites, particularly stories of human sacrifice, can also be attributed to passionate daimons fulfilling their sexual desires in other ways. Cleombrotus again:

I should say that these acts are not performed for any god, but are soothing and appeasing rites for the averting of evil daimons (δαιμόνων φαύλων). Nor is it credible that the gods demanded or welcomed the human sacrifices of ancient days, nor would kings and generals have endured giving over their children and submitting them to the preparatory rites and cutting their throats to no purpose, save that they felt they were propitiating and offering satisfaction to the wrath and sullen temper of some harsh and implacable avenging deities (ἀλάστορων), or to the insane and imperious sexual passions of some who had not the power or desire to have intercourse in a bodily way. (Plutarch, *Def. orac.* 417c–d)²¹

An ἀλάστορ is an “avenging deity”, which could sometimes be paralleled with an evil daimon (e.g., Aeschylus, *Pers.* 354). It is clear from the context that Cleombrotus wishes to conflate the two, and effectively say: the things they sacrifice, they sacrifice to daimons and not to a god. It is also clear from this passage that the less desirable partnerships, while not attributable to a god, still establish a hierarchy as they require propitiatory sacrifice from humans to keep the more powerful daimons at bay (cf. Ps 105:36–37 OG). Alternatively, the presence of these passions could also be used to question the usual hierarchy, downgrading the status of (at least some) daimons lower than humans so that they can be safely ignored.²² This is the view expressed by some in Plutarch’s *Life of Pelopidas*, who argue that none of the “superior beings

²¹ Translation modified from Babbitt, LCL.

²² The adjective φαῦλος, translated “evil” above, could also mean “of low rank” or “common” LSJ, s.v. “φαῦλος.”

above us” would find such practices as human sacrifice acceptable. Consequently, if there were such daimons that require human blood, then they must be disregarded as ἄδυνάτα, “powerless,” since “only weakness and depravity of soul could produce or harbour such unnatural and cruel desires” (Plutarch, *Pel.* 21 [Perrin, LCL]).

Stoic Daimons

Stoic cosmologies, with their generally more monist and immanent conceptions of the divine, had less need for the mediating role of daimons in effecting the unity (κοινωνία) of gods and mortals. Most of the main Stoic thinkers incorporated daimons into their systems one way or another, generally as souls either in or outside of a human body, but their role was less vital than in the Platonist systems we have already discussed.²³ For Epictetus all rational beings are bound together with God by reason (κατὰ τὸν λόγον ἐπιπεπλεγμένα), so that they have a special kinship and share in God’s society (Epictetus, *Diatr.* 1.9.5–6). The lofty goal of a true Stoic is to “have his purpose set upon fellowship with Zeus (πρὸς τὸν Δία κοινωνίας, Epictetus, *Diatr.* 2.19.27).”

Hierarchy and sacrifice do still have a part to play in Stoic conversations though, as the hierarchy of the cosmos is invoked as a model for the orderly administration of the city. In Dio Chrysostom, the unity of the cosmos is mediated by the king, who by imitating Zeus and excelling in righteousness can become a companion (ὁμιλητήν) of Zeus (Dio Chrysostom, *Borysth.* 38). One of the epithets of Zeus that a king must also make his own is “Guardian of the Race”, which for Dio reflects the tie of kinship (τὴν τοῦ γένους κοινωνίαν) that both gods and humans share (Dio Chrysostom, *1 Regn.* 40; cf. *Dei cogn.* 75–76). It is the model of the gods in

²³ See Keimpe Algra, “Stoics on Souls and Demons,” in *Body and Soul in Ancient Philosophy*, ed. Dorothea Frede and Burkhard Reis (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2009), 359–87; Peter van Nuffelen, *Rethinking the Gods: Philosophical Readings of Religion in the Post-Hellenistic Period* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 119.

fellowship (κοινωνίαν) with one another, free of the strife that human communities face, that serves as the basis for the orderly administration of the universe. Humans can partake in this fellowship by imitating the gods and by virtue of their shared reason (Dio Chrysostom, *Borysth.* 22–23). This mirroring of the city with the cosmos is a common topos in ancient rhetoric that functions to reinforce the existing hierarchy of society.²⁴ The human and divine spheres are most truly united when each individual occupies their proper place in the universe, and in society.²⁵

Daimons could occasionally be brought in to help reinforce this hierarchy, as in Dio Chrysostom’s third kingship oration. He argues that the “happy and god-given polity” in which the stronger govern and care for the weaker is illustrated by the parallel government of the universe by “the first and best god” (Dio Chrysostom, *3 Regn.* 50 [Cohoon, LCL]). Just as this first god also has lesser gods under him, as well as good daimons and heroes (δαίμονας καὶ ἥρωας ἀγαθούς), so the human king has worthy governors that rule under him (Dio Chrysostom, *3 Regn.* 52).²⁶ The ideal king recognizes his place within this hierarchy and honors both the gods and daimons above him by all means possible, including by correct sacrifice. Peter van Nuffelen writes of this passage:

Honour is the natural response to the hierarchy in the universe: the attitude of subjects to their king is paralleled, and even identified, with that of their king and themselves towards the gods. The continuation of traditional religious practice is thus construed by Dio as essential for keeping up the cosmic order.²⁷

²⁴ Dale B. Martin, *The Corinthian Body* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), 40–41.

²⁵ van Nuffelen, *Rethinking the Gods*, 151.

²⁶ van Nuffelen, *Rethinking the Gods*, 150.

²⁷ van Nuffelen, *Rethinking the Gods*, 151.

This is true elsewhere for Dio, even if the gods themselves did not require or desire sacrifice, as participation displays one's disposition towards them, and acknowledges their superior position in the cosmos (Dio Chrysostom, *Rhod.* 15–16).

Summary

Taking part in sacrifices placed one in a cosmic hierarchy, and displayed and reinforced one's place in that hierarchy. In the words of A. D. Nock in his classic essay on the subject, "To the Greeks, laymen and theorists alike, sacrifice was primarily a matter of gift ... Even if the god's part of the victim was small, the giving of it recognized his superior prerogative."²⁸ This is the case whether one is sacrificing directly to a god, through the faithful mediation of daimons, or to propitiate and avert the lusts of a passionate daimon. Correctly recognising that hierarchy, and one's place in it ensured the proper order and administration of the cosmos, including fellowship with each other, and with the gods.

2. Daimons in 1 Corinthians 8-10

Paul's Cosmos

Reading Paul's discourse about idol food in the context we have just surveyed shows up a number of similar concerns and themes relating to the correct population and hierarchy of the cosmos. Paul's argument can be broadly divided into two main strands: the "softer" argument of 1 Cor 8:1–9:27; 10:23–33, in which idols and sacrificial food are seen as insignificant in themselves, but should best be avoided for the sake of others with weaker consciences, and the "harder" argument of 10:1–22, in which active participation in idolatry involves fellowship

²⁸ W. S. Ferguson and A. D. Nock, "The Attic Orgeones and the Cult of Heroes," *HTR* 37, no.2 (1944): 149.

(κοινωνία) with daimons and incurs divine judgment. Despite these apparent differences, both arguments are based on appeals to the correct constitution of the cosmos. The main texts that frame Paul's cosmology are 8:4–6 and 10:19–20.

We know that an idol is nothing in the cosmos and that a god is nothing, except one. For even though there are those called gods, whether in heaven or on earth, as indeed there are many gods and many lords, but for us there is one God, the father, from whom are all things and for whom we exist, and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom is everything and through whom we exist.

He then picks up again on this discourse in 10:19–20 to introduce his “harder” argument:

What then am I saying? That idol-meat is something? Or that an idol is something? No! Rather that what they sacrifice, they sacrifice to daimons and not to God.

Paul starts to draw his cosmic map at the beginning of chapter 8 in which his argument hinges on the knowledge that “an idol is nothing in the cosmos.” Denying the worth and status of cult images is, of course, standard fare in Jewish polemic against foreign religious practice, but it also has a long tradition in Greek thought.²⁹ The positive content of Paul's cosmos in 1 Cor 8:6 also derives from a seamless mix of the Jewish *Shema* of Deut 6:4 and Greek prepositional metaphysics.³⁰ How exactly the prepositions fit into the broader philosophical context is a matter

²⁹ See Harold Attridge, “The Philosophical Critique of Religion under the Early Empire,” *ANRW* 16.1: 45–78; Clifford Ando, *The Matter of the Gods: Religion and the Roman Empire*, *The Transformation of the Classical Heritage* 44 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008), 21–42.

³⁰ For the *Shema* as background see N. T. Wright, *The Climax of the Covenant: Christ and the Law in Pauline Theology* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1992), 127–30; James F. McGrath, *The Only True God: Early Christian Monotheism in Its Jewish Context* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2009), 38–54. For prepositional metaphysics see Eduard Norden, *Agnostos Theos: Untersuchungen zur Formengeschichte religiöser Rede* (Leipzig: Teubner, 1913), 240–50; Gregory E. Sterling, “Prepositional Metaphysics in Jewish Wisdom Speculation and Early Christological Hymns,” *StPhiloA* 9 (1997): 219–38.

for debate, but the overall effect of Paul's words is to express "God's creative power and control over the origins and destiny of the cosmos"³¹ as well as the unique mediating role of the Lord Jesus. The inclusion of "we" in the formula in 1 Cor 8:6 positions Paul's Christ-followers in their proper place in the hierarchy, which he later explains they participate in through sharing (κοινωνία) with the body and blood of Jesus (10:16). Thus, while the Platonic hierarchy, which ensures cosmic *koinōnia* broadly consists of humans, daimons, and gods, for Paul it consists of believers, one Lord, one God. Other beings evidently exist, as will be discussed below, but they do not intrude on this hierarchy. Even "intermediary" beings such as angels appear below believers in a cosmic hierarchy, as they will be judged by them according to 1 Cor 6:3.

The practical consequence of this for Paul's argument is that since an idol is nothing, the thing offered to the idol, the εἰδωλοθύτον, is similarly inconsequential. "The earth is the Lord's and everything in it" (10:26), so Paul does not seem to think there is anything physically polluting about the food itself. This is the position he upholds with surprising consistency throughout all the other vacillations of the argument, which applies equally to the food eaten in the pagan and "Christian" meals.³² In 1 Cor 8:8 he writes, "food will not commend us to God, we will not lack if we do not eat, nor are we better off if we do". In 10:3–5, "they all ate the same spiritual food and drank the same spiritual drink ... Nevertheless, God was not pleased with most of them"; in 10:19, "What then am I saying? That idol-meat is something? Or at that

³¹ Emma Wasserman, "'An Idol is Nothing in the World' (1 Cor 8:4): The Metaphysical Contradictions of 1 Corinthians 8:1–11:1 in the Context of Jewish Idolatry Polemics," in *Portraits of Jesus: Studies in Christology*, ed. Susan E. Myers, WUNT 2/321 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2012), 227. For the debate see, in addition to the previous note, Jerome Murphy-O'Connor, "1 Corinthians 8:6: Cosmology or Soteriology," *RB* (1978): 253–67; Richard A. Horsley, "The Background of the Confessional Formula in 1 Kor 8:6," *ZNW* 69 (1978): 130–35; Orrey McFarland, "Divine Causation and Prepositional Metaphysics in Philo of Alexandria and the Apostle Paul," in *Paul and the Greco-Roman Philosophical Tradition*, ed. Joseph R. Dodson and Andrew W. Pitts, LNTS 527 (London: T&T Clark, 2017), 117–33.

³² For this reason I am not convinced by arguments that see idol-food itself as inhabited by daimons: Martin, *Corinthian Body*, 188; Peter David Gooch, *Dangerous Food: 1 Corinthians 8-10 in Its Context*, Studies in Christianity and Judaism 5 (Waterloo, ON: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1993), 86.

an idol is something?”, a rhetorical question anticipating the answer “no.” And in 10:27 he counsels “eat whatever is set before you without raising any question on the ground of conscience.” Paul still advises caution when dealing with food offered to idols, but this is not because it holds any metaphysical significance, rather because of the practical concern for the weaker consciences of others. The rest of 1 Cor 8–9 is concerned with this practical ethical principle. 1 Cor 10 starts to introduce what Paul does perceive as a real problem though, which is not εἰδωλόθυτα, “idol meat,” but εἰδωλολατρία, “idolatry,” and this is where daimons enter the discussion.³³

Denying the efficacy of an idol is not the same as denying the reality of the god it may represent. Plutarch ridicules those who cannot distinguish between statues of the gods and the gods themselves and then say such silly things as “Jupiter Capitolinus was burned and destroyed in the Civil War” (Plutarch, *Is. Os.* 379d). The statue may be gone, but Jupiter is still alive and well. This is where Paul’s cosmic map becomes more convoluted as he acknowledges the existence of other gods, but seeks to reclassify them within his own cosmology. In 8:5–6 they are simply so-called gods, relativized to the one God and one Lord. Seeking to positively identify them in 10:20 Paul adopts what we have now seen is a familiar strategy among other Greek authors accounting for gods who are not gods, by calling them daimons. He does this by adopting the language and reasoning of the Greek translators of Deuteronomy and the Psalms, which downgrade the status of all Gentile gods to the status of daimons. Paul’s opening comment echoes the language of Deut 32:17 LXX, which states that while the Israelites were in the wilderness they sacrificed “to daimons and not to God” (δαίμονις καὶ οὐ θεῶ). Psalm 105:37 OG also positions δαίμόνια in parallelism with the images of Canaanite gods to whom

³³ So David Horrell, “Theological Principle or Christological Praxis? Pauline Ethics in 1 Corinthians 8:1–11:1,” *JSNT* 67 (1997): 101–3; Wasserman, “An Idol is Nothing,” 217.

disobedient Israelites sacrificed their children. Psalm 95:5 OG declares straightforwardly that “all the gods of the nations are daimons (πάντες οἱ θεοὶ τῶν ἔθνῶν δαιμόνια), but the Lord made the heavens.”³⁴

This could be viewed from a certain angle as a form of Jewish *interpretatio*—the well-known practice of identifying foreign gods with members of one’s own pantheon.³⁵ Just as Zeus can be accounted for in the Roman pantheon as Jupiter, and Ares as Mars, Paul concedes that there are indeed many gods and lords in the cosmos, which need to be accounted for within the cosmological and theological frame of “one God, and one Lord.” This is an act of *interpretatio* that requires an ontological change—it is not just a renaming, but a reclassifying—but it is a change that we have seen Greek authors are happy to make with their own gods, or at least with their own stories about the gods.

We have already seen that for Dionysius of Halicarnassus, it is unthinkable that Mars himself could have been responsible for the rape of Rhea Silvia. For Plutarch also, Apollo himself could not have been directly involved with inspiring the Pythia at Delphi. Instead daimons take the place of the gods. This is not quite the same as downgrading Mars or Apollo themselves to the status of a daimon, but rather downgrades the stories and rituals that involve them to ones involving daimons. If we look at some further examples however, in *De Iside et Osiride*, some specific gods are, at least temporarily, downgraded to the level of daimons. Isis and Osiris, as well as heroes Heracles and Dionysus, were once daimons, Plutarch says, and it is to this daimonic stage of their existence that one must assign stories of their outlandish exploits.

³⁴ See further Wasserman, *Apocalypse as Holy War*, 142–51.

³⁵ Matthew V. Novenson, “The Universal Polytheism and the Case of the Jews,” in *Monotheism and Christology in Greco-Roman Antiquity*, ed. Matthew V. Novenson, NovTSup 180 (Leiden: Brill, 2020), 32–60 who draws on Robert Parker, *Greek Gods Abroad: Names, Natures, and Transformations*, Sather Classical Lectures 72 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2017), 33–74.

But they were later, on account of their virtue, translated and transformed into gods (Plutarch, *Is. Os.* 361d–e). Plutarch identifies Osiris with Dionysus, who also received the additional appellation Serapis when his nature changed from daimon to god (Plutarch, *Is. Os.* 362a–b). This act of *interpretatio* both identifies foreign gods with existing deities, but also changes the status of such gods to accommodate their mythical histories.³⁶ The formula “a daimon and not a god” therefore is one that can be used just as effectively by both Jewish and Roman or Hellenistic authors as a way of accounting for stories and experiences to which others attribute divine status, but does not fit the author’s own cosmology or theology. It is a polemical move, to be sure, but it is also a logical one in the intellectual climate of Paul’s day.

Daimonic Partnerships, Cosmic Hierarchies, and Divine Jealousy

The cosmology that Paul’s daimons find themselves in is an antagonistic one. Rather than bridging the gap between human and divine, they form a rival hierarchy. Rather than transmitting honor to the one God, daimons divert honor away from him, which falsely places humans under their power (1 Cor 10:21). Paul does not elaborate on the nature or immediate effects of being partnered (κοινωνούς) with daimons, only that he does not wish it on the Corinthians. But we may compare it to the relationships established with the passionate daimons in the *Life of Pelopidas*, who also diverted honor away from the proper hierarchy. The more sophisticated explanations of divine / human *koinōnia* appealed to the mixed substances of the cosmos (οὐσίας τοῦ κόσμου), as a result of which daimons, as an intermediate race could unite (or combine, ἐπιμιγνόμενον) with both gods and humans (Dionysius of Halicarnassus, *Ant. rom.* 1.77.3; cf. Plato, *Symp.* 202e; Plutarch, *Numa*, 4). Paul may have thought in similarly substantial terms

³⁶ Brenk notes how Plutarch gives a thoroughly Greek interpretation of Egyptian religion (Brenk, “Demonology,” *ANRW* 2, 16.3: 2123).

about the presence of daimons at sacrifices, although not in the sacrificial food itself, as argued above.³⁷ As for effect, Rom 1:18–32 does not mention daimons, but provides us with Paul’s fullest picture of the effects of idolatry.³⁸ It is interesting to note in this connection the role given to unbridled desire (ἐπιθυμία), impurity (ἀκαθαρσία), and dishonorable passions (πάθη ἀτιμίας) as the natural result of idolatry, since these are some of the most prominent characteristics that daimons are said to share with humans in the texts we have surveyed. Paul elsewhere lists passion as a particular characteristic of idolatrous Gentiles (1 Thess 4:3–5; 1 Cor 6:9–11). Israelite idolatry in the wilderness also resulted in sexual immorality and “evil desires” in 1 Cor 10:6–10.³⁹ Fellowship with daimons through idolatry facilitates a share in their characteristics.

In this context, however, Paul does not seem to envision any real threat from the daimons themselves. In 1 Cor 8:10 he does not fear for the person reclining in an idol’s temple, only for the person watching, whose conscience is built up to commit idolatry. Likewise in 1 Cor 10:20–22 it is not ultimately the daimons that are to be feared, but the Lord (τὸν κύριον), who will be provoked to jealousy by the cultic slight (1 Cor 10:22). Note, also, that in Rom 1 it is God who hands idolaters over to their passions (Rom 1:24, 26) thus keeping the one God firmly at the top of the cosmic hierarchy. Emma Wasserman correctly identifies the heart of the problem for Paul, “Though *daimonia* pose no real threat ... publicly worshipping them angers the truly powerful

³⁷ Cf. Lampe, “Die dämonologischen Implikationen,” 595–96; For a parallel view of God’s *pneuma* as divine substance for Paul see Stanley K. Stowers, “What is ‘Pauline Participation in Christ?’” in *Redefining First-Century Jewish and Christian Identities: Essays in Honor of Ed Parish Sanders*, ed. Fabian E. Udoh (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2008), 352–71; Engberg-Pedersen, *Cosmology and Self*, 92–98.

³⁸ Stanley K. Stowers is correct to note that this passage deals specifically with the entrance of idolatry into the world rather than with Adam and the general fall of humanity (*A Rereading of Romans: Justice, Jews and Gentiles* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994), 83–97); see also Dale B. Martin, “Heterosexism and the Interpretation of Romans 1:18–32,” in *Sex and the Single Savior: Gender and Sexuality in Biblical Interpretation* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2006), 52–55; *pace* Morna D. Hooker, “Adam in Romans 1,” *NTS* 6 (1960): 297–306.

³⁹ On this passage see Wayne Meeks, “‘And Rose Up to Play’: Midrash and Paraenesis in 1 Corinthians 10:1–22,” *JSNT* 16 (1982): 68–70.

divine being.”⁴⁰ Paul’s question, “are we stronger (ἰσχυρότεροι) than he?”, has struck many commentators as odd in the context, but is perfectly explicable in the context we have sketched, as it brings to the foreground the question of hierarchy and the implied hierarchies that sacrifice creates.⁴¹ Publicly participating in Gentile cult not only unduly elevates powerless daimons for Paul, but implicitly relegates the status of Christ to one lower than that of the Corinthians themselves. Strength has been a category from the start of 1 Corinthians that denotes status, the human worth of which Paul has repeatedly downplayed in relation to God (1 Cor 1:25–29).

Angels and Daimons

When one studies individual divine or semi-divine beings on their own terms, one can better appreciate the specific distinctions in role Paul gives them, and how they relate to the other beings who populate Paul’s cosmos. This can be seen by comparing the role of daimons in 1 Cor 10 with the role of angels in 1 Cor 11. Directly after Paul finishes his discussion of idol-meat he turns to the ritual setting of praying and prophesying in the *ekklēsia*. He is similarly concerned that the proper cosmic hierarchy is reflected in public worship, and here the hierarchy is further defined from the top down as God, Christ, man, woman. Women are to have their heads covered to reflect their place in this hierarchy, and abandoning this natural order by uncovering their heads places women at risk of having these boundaries transgressed further by angels, who like those in Gen 6:1–4 could be attracted to human women.⁴² Angels and daimons are different types

⁴⁰ Wasserman, “An Idol is Nothing,” 215.

⁴¹ Fee, *First Corinthians*, 523; Brian S. Rosner, “Stronger than He? The Strength of 1 Corinthians 10:22b,” *TynBul* 43 (1992): 171–79; Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *First Corinthians*, AB 32 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), 394.

⁴² Loren Stuckenbruck, “Why Should Women Cover Their Heads Because of the Angels?” in *The Myth of Rebellious Angels: Studies in Second Temple Judaism and New Testament Texts*, WUNT 335 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2014), 257–80; Jorunn Økland, *Women in Their Place: Paul and the Corinthian Discourse of Gender and Sanctuary Space*, JSNTSup 269 (London: T&T Clark, 2004), 173–78. Lampe notes this passage as a parallel to 1

of semi-divine beings, each with their own respective histories that involve sexual exploits with humans. They occupy different spaces, daimons being present in Gentile sacrifices, and angels being present in the worship of the *ekklēsia*. Neither of them is given space in the cultic hierarchies Paul draws, that is, neither mediate worship or divination in either direction for Paul, rather they only appear to intrude when the correct hierarchies are broken.

3. Conclusion

When Paul talks about daimons, he does not refer to abstract powers of evil, nor is he merely regurgitating Jewish insults, but he appropriates a philosophical discourse about the hierarchical constitution of the cosmos, and the role of humans within it, which religious observances such as sacrifice help to constitute and maintain. In labeling the recipients of Gentile sacrifices as daimons he is almost certainly following the lead of his Jewish scriptures, but the conclusions he reaches in doing so are no different to other Greeks and Romans who need to account for the religious beliefs of others on the basis of their own commitments. In this situation, an intermediate being, revered as gods by many, but with human passions and lusts, who demand the sort of sacrifices never required by a real god is a perfect fit for describing the true recipient of Gentile sacrifices. Paul does not ascribe any real power to such beings. Rather he is concerned with safeguarding the honor of the one God, and protecting the Corinthians from the divine jealousy that would result from falsely ascribing status to daimons. Thus, even when Paul is at his most Jewish, denouncing the evils of Gentile idolatry, he is still doing so in a manner thoroughly embedded in his Graeco-Roman culture.

Cor 10 but without attending to the hierarchical elements of the text (Lampe, “Die dämonologischen Implikationen,” 596–97).

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