



1 Cor 11:2-16: One Step Further

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1 COR 11:2-16: ONE STEP FURTHER

In a recent issue of this journal Jerome Murphy-O'Connor challenged an earlier article by Wm. O. Walker, Jr. on the question of the non-Pauline character of 1 Cor 11:2-16.¹ Murphy-O'Connor's critique struck at two points in Walker's hypothesis. First he challenged the view that vv 2-16 are an interpolation in which v 2 is the work of the interpolator. He also questions the viability of Walker's thesis that the interpolation is itself composite and made up of at least three discrete sections. In making this criticism, Murphy-O'Connor has raised the proper questions but reached doubtful conclusions.

It is helpful to note the common ground that the two articles have established. Both writers agree that the phenomenon of later interpolation in the genuine Pauline letters is not unknown. Most critics will agree with Murphy-O'Connor's assessment of that evidence. 2 Cor 6:14-7:1 and 1 Cor 14:34-35 are virtually certain interpolations but other alleged instances are far less certain.² It should be noted, however, that this evidence tells us that there has been an editorial hand at work in the Corinthian correspondence and that those insertions are less than tidy both syntactically and in terms of congruence with Paul's thought elsewhere in the genuine letters.

In order to move the discussion another step forward, I suggest that the following theses deserve consideration. (1) Murphy-O'Connor is correct in saying that Walker's claims about all of vv 2-16 as interpolation are weak, especially with regard to the redactional character of v 2. He is wrong, however, in assuming that he thus dismisses the evidence for interpolation. (2) Murphy-O'Connor may be correct in doubting Walker's thesis that the interpolation consists of three separate traditions crudely sewn together, but incorrect in thinking that the verses are therefore still to be considered Pauline.

Thesis 1. Walker argued that the person responsible for inserting vv 2-16 into this context in 1 Corinthians created v 2 himself as a way of making his insertion fit into the chapter. By repeating a reference to commendation similar to that already present in v 17, the interpolator hoped to give the appearance of unity to the revised chapter.³ But Murphy-O'Connor observes that the removal of vv 2-16 leaves v 17 just as unattached from 11:1 as it now is from 11:16. Neither writer has examined the possibility that the insertion here is like that found in 2 Cor 6:14-7:1; that is, an interpolation in mid-sentence.

If the break is read between vv 2 and 3, a new view of the interpolation emerges. Now v 2 leads to v 17 as follows:

I commend you because you remember me in everything and maintain the traditions even as I have delivered them to you. But in the following instructions I do not commend you, because when you come together it is not for the better but for the worse.

Here the connections are precise. Paul commends the Corinthians for proper maintenance of the words of the supper tradition (*παρέδωκα* in vv 2 and 23) but objects to their practices connected with that tradition. The adversative conjunction *δὲ* is now appropriate. Moreover, this reading

¹Jerome Murphy-O'Connor, O. P., "The Non-Pauline Character of 1 Corinthians 11:2-16?," *JBL* 95 (1976) 615-21 and William O. Walker, Jr., "1 Corinthians 11:2-16 and Paul's Views Regarding Women," *JBL* 94 (1975) 94-110.

²"The Non-Pauline Character," 615 n. 3.

³"1 Cor 11:2-16," 98-99. It should be noted that Walker does say that vv 3-16 may be the interpolation but his argument assumes that v 2 is redactional.

actually confirms and strengthens Walker's own position that the subject matter of chaps. 8–11 is eating practices and that this theme is disrupted by the interpolation in vv 3–16. This interpolation has been accomplished in just the same manner as that in 2 Cor 6 where the inserted Essene-like fragment breaks into a thought just as abruptly. So the evidence requires that Walker's hypothesis be amended. 1 Cor 11:3–16 is the interpolation, not vv 2–16.

Thesis 2. The greatest strength of Walker's original article lay in his showing that the content of the interpolation is out of harmony with the material found in the rest of the genuine letters. The most glaring example of this is the use of the "head/body" analogy just one chapter before the powerful and logically opposite analogy of the body in chap. 12. Walker has shown that the content of 11:3–16 is suspect *in any context*.

Murphy-O'Connor's attempts to point to an inherent unity in this section are forced. Perhaps the interpolator thought it was transparent that an "Adam and Eve" argument led easily to a "does not nature itself teach you" argument about long hair on men but he certainly did not communicate it well. Perhaps the interpolator knew what he meant in referring to "because of the angels," but few others have been able to understand it. In other words, even if Murphy-O'Connor is right and a single hand composed vv 3–16 at one time, that would do nothing to support the view that the hand was Paul's. There is even a further non-Pauline trait in the verses. Paul uses the term "church of God" with care. For him there is only one "church of God" composed of several "churches of Christ" (cf. Gal 1:13 and 1 Cor 1:2).⁴ Nowhere else does he call upon "the churches of God" as an authoritative support for an assertion, as is done in v 16.

It follows that the literary solution to the problems of 1 Cor 11 is the view that vv 3–16 are a non-Pauline interpolation. One may even suggest that it was done in the same way and perhaps by the same person responsible for the insertion in 2 Cor 6. Both interpolations probably also consist of quoted material but the passage is too short for any certainty in the separation of the sources, identification of the sources, or a clear picture of redactional intent. Walker's suggestions are the best available.

Finally, Murphy-O'Connor is correct when he observes that the evidence for interpolation might "rehabilitate Paul" but does not resolve the problem of biblical authority on a thorny contemporary issue. There are some who would hold that the evidence that Paul was not a chauvinist but an egalitarian, when combined with evidence about Jesus' attitudes and practices, counts as authoritative "canon within the canon" truth. There are others who share Murphy-O'Connor's view that the whole canon must be dealt with and who must seek a principle by which to deal with the "non-Pauline" texts as well. There are others who could care less. But for the student of early Christianity the growing evidence that Jesus, Paul, and at least some of the earliest churches were egalitarian while later Paulinists and churches were not does become an item of some importance for understanding the development of Christian thought and practice. 1 Cor 11:3–16 is, in any case, a non-Pauline interpolation and one wonders why it has taken male scholars so long to see it.

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⁴The only exception in the entire Pauline corpus is found in 2 Thess 1:4, in a letter of widely doubted authenticity.