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Feminist Perspectives on Paul's Reasoning with Scripture

The fact that Paul in a significant number of passages in his letters refers explicitly or implicitly¹ to the Scriptures is taken as obvious evidence that he perceived Scriptures as authority not only for his own life but for the life of the Christ-followers he addresses as well.² This perception of the Scriptures as the unquestioned authority at least in the life of Paul (and most likely the other apostles as well) constitutes the starting point of such excellent and divergent analyses as C. D. Stanley's two monographs, R. Hays' monograph and volume of essays, J.R. Wagner's volume on Isaiah in Romans to name only a few. Although these analyses differ in their focus, methodology and conclusions³ they presuppose that the reference to 'the authority of Scripture' is self-explanatory, thus none of these approaches further investigates what 'the authority of Scripture' in their view actually means. Stanley seem to take it for granted that reference to the authority of Scripture is made '...in order to ground an argument or settle a dispute'⁴ If the authority of Scripture is acknowledged '...direct quotations from the holy text would be greeted with respect and (Paul hoped) submission.'⁵ Hays also does not further elaborate on the question of 'authoritative text' when he asserts that 'Paul is seeking to ground his exposition of the gospel in Israel's sacred texts.'⁶

It comes as no surprise that analyses of Paul's references to Scripture which imply that 'the authority of Scripture' is self-explanatory come to the conclusion that these

¹ Cf. Stanley 1992 and 2004 and Hays 1989 and 2005.

² E.g. Stanley who states that 'From the way Paul refers to the Jewish Scriptures in his letters, it seems clear that he not only accepted the sacred text as authoritative for his own life but also expected a similar response from his audiences...' (2004: 40), cf. also Hays 1989:165.

³ Stanley 2004:11 and also 20.

⁴ Stanley 2004:40.

⁵ Stanley 2004:59. Wagner (2002) does not discuss the issue, and Hays notes that the voice of Scripture is regarded as authoritative in one way or another (1989:14) and concerning Paul states that 'His faithis one whose articulation is inevitably intertextual in character, and Israel's Scripture plays the "determinate subtext that plays a constitutive role" in shaping his literary production.' (1989:16).

⁶ Hays 1989:34.

references, quotations and allusions are a tool in Paul's argumentative strategy to exercise power-over the addressees and render them obedient, that is, submissive to his views. These approaches operate, uncritically in my view, with a limited paradigm of power, which identifies power with power-over, and power-over with domination. From this perception of power, conclusions are drawn what 'the authority of Scripture' must mean without further analysis.⁷ The conclusion that Scripture is referred to with the intention to settle the argument without further debate or with the expectation that submission to the authors' views is achieved is coherent with such a perception of power and authority. Starting with the perception of power and authority with which Stanley and others operate, their analysis is sound, and conclusive. But without denying that the references to Scripture in the Pauline letters have something to do with a perceived 'authority of Scripture', I would like to question the assumption that this 'fact' in and by itself actually clarifies sufficiently the function and purpose of these scriptural references. Thus the question I would like to address in this paper is, what if Paul's references to Scripture are analysed in conversation with paradigms of power which differ from those mentioned above? What difference does this make concerning the perception of the 'authority of Scripture' and subsequently to the evaluation of Paul's scriptural references? These are the two main aspects I would like to focus on here.

Divergent Perceptions of Power

It cannot be ignored that the recent debates on 'power' are still shaped or at least influenced by the thought and writings of Max Weber. Although his definition of power is far from being uncontested, no contemporary approach can ignore Weber's contribution. Debates evolve in agreement, variation or differentiation from Weber's classical definition of power as '...the probability that one actor within a social relationship will be in a position to carry out his own will despite resistance, regardless of

⁷ Although Stanley does refer to the issues surrounding the perception of 'written oracles' this discussion still operates with a paradigm of power as power-over in the vein of a command-obedience structure.(2004:58-60) In addition, the socio-political context of the attribution of divinity to an 'oracle' is should also into account.

the basis on which this probability rests.’⁸ Although Weber asserts that domination is a specific application of power he nevertheless perceives domination to be one of the most important elements of social interaction. This perception of power as ‘power-over’ has been differentiated and challenged from numerous perspectives in the last three decades. I cannot elaborate on this discussion in detail in this paper but will come back to specific aspects of the debate concerning power in the form of power-over.⁹

Other scholars perceive power as a capacity or ability to do something, to have an effect on something – ‘power-to’ – achieve what an individual or a group set out to do. This aspect has been particularly highlighted in the last century by Hannah Arendt who defined power as ‘the human ability not just to act but to act in concert.’¹⁰

Hannah Arendt and Communicative Power

An early significant challenge to the perception of power as power-over and thus inherently dominating or at least dangerous has been formulated by the German political theorist Hannah Arendt in her analysis *On Violence* (1970). She maintains that the logical consequence of a definition of power as power-over – or, in her perception, according to a command-obedience model – is that violence is the ultimate form that power can take. Violence then is a particular way through which power can be exercised. This reduces power to domination in various forms which in her view have nothing to do with power at all. She distinguishes power from strength, force, authority and violence,¹¹ and notes that ‘power is indeed of the essence of all government, but violence is not.’¹² She even maintains that ‘power and violence are opposites; where the one rules absolutely, the other is absent.’¹³ It is violence which always invokes a command–obedience structure whereas power is neither command or rule but collaboration and action, it is ‘...the human ability not just to act but to act in concert. Power is never the property of an

⁸ Weber 1957:152. Or as he put it earlier in the same work ‘Power means every chance within a social relationship to assert one’s will even against opposition.’ Weber 1925:16.

⁹ For a more detailed discussion see Ehrensperger 2007:16-34.

¹⁰ Arendt 1970:44.

¹¹ Arendt 1970:44-7.

¹² Arendt 1970:51.

¹³ Arendt 1970:56. This is a conceptual distinction and Arendt is well aware that ‘in the real world’ power and violence are more often than not inextricably intertwined.

individual; it belongs to a group and remains in existence only so long as the group keeps together.’¹⁴ Power cannot be fully realized where violence reigns.¹⁵

In addition to distinguishing power from violence etc. Arendt in agreement with Foucault and others is of the view that power is not something one can possess, not some kind of stuff which some have, which can be stored and then applied over others, and which others do not have. She stresses that power exists only in its actualization; it ‘is alwaysa power potential and not an unchangeable, measurable, and reliable entity like force or strength’; it ‘springs up between men when they act together and vanishes the moment when they disperse.’¹⁶ Thus power derives from reciprocal collective action, that is, it is inherently intertwined with action which takes place within a web of relationships with other actors, and its main purpose is to establish and maintain this relational web or network.¹⁷

Arendt’s definition of power solely as ‘the ability to act in concert’, thus distinguishing power from authority, strength, force and violence, has been criticized as too limited a perception as it excludes any strategic aspects from an analysis of ‘power’.¹⁸ Habermas and others emphasize that the strategic – or power-over – aspect of power cannot be excluded from a definition and critical discussion of power since thereby the dimension which is most troublesome, and which studies of power are often most interested in, would not be addressed at all. Thus concepts which are trying to account for both dimensions of power in various combinations have been developed¹⁹ alongside concepts which adhere to the view that power-over and power-to refer to completely different meanings of the term ‘power’ and that they therefore cannot possibly be subsumed under one and the same definition or theory.²⁰

¹⁴ Arendt 1970:44.

¹⁵ Arendt 1958:200.

¹⁶ Arendt 1958:200.

¹⁷ Cf. Allen 2002:137.

¹⁸ See Habermas’s distinguished critique of Arendt. (Habermas 1977:3-24).

¹⁹ Allen 1999a and Lukes 2005.

²⁰ So Pitkin 1972 and Wartenberg 1990:10-21.

Feminist Theories of Power

Despite such critique, feminist theorists such as Amy Allen have significantly drawn on Hannah Arendt's concept of power in their search for a concept of power beyond a command-obedience, domination-subordination model. This search is motivated by the fact that in traditional concepts of power the relationship between men and women leads to a perception of women's role in patriarchal societies as powerless victims of domination. In contrast to this, Allen views Arendt's concept of power as enabling a perception of power which takes into account that people, even though in a situation of subordination are not just mere powerless victims but in many circumstances are able to form communities and act in concert, which is a form of power in action. Arendt's approach takes into account that groups can be formed, and the mere fact of doing this can be an act of mutual empowerment despite and within a situation of domination.²¹ Out of such empowering group formation the power to act in solidarity can emerge.

Arendt's approach for thinking about power contributes significantly to a perception of power as empowerment, but it is in and by itself too limited. The same applies to perceptions of power which perceive it exclusively as a means to constrain the choices of others. Habermas and Allen, from differing perspectives, thus call for a perception of power which takes both the communicative as well as the strategic aspect of power into account. Allen develops a concept of power which integrates aspects of Foucault's as well as of Arendt's approach, distinguishing three forms of power: power-over, power-to, and power-with. These hardly ever occur in 'pure' form or clearly separable from each other. They are, more often than not in real life circumstances, inherently intertwined.²²

²¹ On the power of subordinate groups in the context of domination see Scott 1990: 108-135. There are similarities between Allen's development of Arendt's approach and Scott's in their focus on the empowering dimension of community for subordinate groups/sub-cultures but Scott perceives this 'hidden transcript of power' more in the vein of a reversal of power structures. In that sense he does not operate with an alternative paradigm of power, but with a reversal of the power-over paradigm. Cf. also Elliott 2004:118.

²² Something which Arendt was well aware of since she states after her definitions of the various categories which she differentiates from power 'It is perhaps superfluous to add that these distinctions, though by no means arbitrary, hardly ever correspond to watertight compartments in the real world, from which they are drawn.' (1970:46).

What is authority?

The differentiation of power as power-over, power-to, and power-with – with its emphasis on relationality leaves the question of authority unanswered so far, and the question of the authority of a set of texts in particular. Although Arendt deals with issues of authority, her approach is limited to the authority of institutions or people rather than texts. Nevertheless her emphasis here again that by no means should authority be confused with domination, force or violence is worth noting. She maintains that ‘Since authority demands obedience, it is commonly mistaken for some form of power and violence. Yet authority precludes the external means of coercion; where force is used authority itself has failed.’²³ Arendt clearly perceives authority as something which includes a hierarchy between those involved. Although her particular elaborations on these aspects are only of limited value for our purpose, her critical distinction of different dimensions within power and authority discourses is worth pursuing further. I cannot elaborate on her distinction between authority and power (which I perceive not as conclusive as Arendt proposes) what I consider significant is the fact that she views both authority and power as being different from force and violence. To me Arendt’s perception of authority shows similarity with a hierarchical dimension she would designate as power because it does not emerge in a community acting in concert with each other.²⁴ The exclusion of hierarchy, or power-over from a concept of power is anachronistic as critics of Arendt have demonstrated. Nevertheless her insight that there is a dimension in human interaction which is hierarchical but not coercive is important. It has been developed by theorist T. Wartenberg who has contributed a useful working hypothesis for relationships which involve hierarchies, that is, which are patterned according to a power-over paradigm without falling into the command –obedience dichotomy. He refers to a model of exercising power-over which takes as a paradigm an educational setting (or a psycho-analytical one). The relationship between student and teacher - or parent and child is clearly hierarchical. The exercise of power over the student/child serves the purpose of supporting/empowering the ‘weaker’ partner in the

²³ Arendt ‘What is Authority?’ in *ibid. Past and Future*, pp.

²⁴ For a critical discussion of Arendt’s perception of power as limited to ‘the human ability to act, that is to act in concert’ see e.g. Habermas 1977, also my discussion in Ehrensperger 2007:22-26.

relationship. Inherent to the exercise of power-over in such a relationship is that it will render itself obsolete. The aim of such a hierarchical relationship is transformative in the sense that the hierarchy is necessarily perceived as temporally limited. In order for the exercise of power to be empowering the use of coercion, force or violence is ruled out. If coercion or domination infiltrate the relationship the aim and purpose of the latter is compromised. Wartenberg calls such power exercised over others transformative power. I think this paradigm of transformative power could well contribute to an understanding of authority, and of the authority of Scripture in particular in as much as I have demonstrated elsewhere that it contributes to a perception of Paul's use of power in a hierarchical yet non-dominating way.

What needs to be clarified through a more detailed analysis than can be provided in this paper is in what sense the emphasis on the relationality of power and authority demonstrated convincingly in my view by Arendt, Foucault, Allen and others impinges on the understanding of the authority of the Scriptures. What seems to emerge is that it is inconceivable from this that there can be some inherent essence, quality in a set of texts which renders them authoritative. The authority of a set of texts can only emerge in the context of a community which attributes and/or recognizes a specific value in this set of scriptures.

The Authority of Written Texts

Writing and Texts in the Graeco-Roman world

The fact that Paul refers to the Scriptures, and interacts with a set of texts in peculiar ways in the context of the first century is unique (from a non-Jewish perspective) and not unique (from a Jewish perspective). When looking from a perspective outside of Judaism to refer to a set of particular texts repeatedly thereby indicating that these texts are of extraordinary significance for the 'writer' is a phenomenon which to say the least must have seemed strange. The existence of a set of texts (even though nothing like a later canon of texts) which express and/or incorporate all that is of decisive value and

importance for a particular people is unique for the Mediateranean region of the time.²⁵

It is unclear whether literacy and thus written texts in general were of such significance and thus in such high esteem as is attributed to it in contemporary (Western) societies.

The high esteem for education by the elite of Graeco-Roman and other societies in antiquity is not *per se* evidence for a high esteem for literacy.²⁶ Thus e.g. Crenshaw maintains that ‘In the ancient Near East education preceded literacy...’²⁷ And even in Graeco-Roman societies ‘Eloquent speech remained the most characteristic feature of Graeco-Roman civilization, even in its most learned manifestations.’²⁸ Thus the question might at least be raised whether written texts were of particular value *per se*.

Considerable indications point in a different direction. Written texts, and thus the skills of writing and reading were not in themselves valued as indications of excellent education, or of education as such. They rather were subservient tools and skills which were useful and relevant in as much as they supported educational discourses. The use of a book in itself was not regarded as advisable but rather to the contrary as R.Thomas notes ‘‘you must not navigate out of book’’ as a contemporary proverb went, that is, you needed first-hand experience to learn a craft.....(a book) might be grossly inadequate unless backed up by the help of a teacher himself.’ And she continues that ‘...a text might be regarded more as an aid to memorization of what had been passed on orally by a teacher, as a reminder of those who know.’²⁹ When it comes to essential values concerning written and spoken words it is most likely that notions such as Aristotle’s categorization are permeating Graeco-Roman elite society. He formulates ‘Spoken words are the symbols of mental experience and written words are the symbols of spoken words. Just as all men have not the same writing, so all men have not the same speech sounds, but the mental experiences, which these directly symbolize, are the same for all, as also are those things

²⁵ As Stanley rightly notes (2004:40).

²⁶ Contra Joanna Dewey who maintains that ‘In a world in which most people were nonliterate, writing was both an instrument of power and a symbol of power....Nonliterate would honor reading and writing as symbols of culture and status; they would also fear them as instruments of social and political oppression’. Dewey (1994):44,47. In addition I think Stanley when he presupposes that texts, due to the mere fact of being written, generally in the Graeco-Roman world were attributed some sort of ‘aura of authority’ which then would have influenced gentile Christ-followers’ perception of the Jewish Scriptures. Cf. Stanley 2004:40.

²⁷ Crenshaw 1998:279

²⁸ R.Thomas 1992:159.

²⁹ R. Thomas 1992:161. On the significance of oral performance cf. also Jaffe 2000:31-37.

of which our experiences are images.³⁰ Thus, although both, the spoken and the written words are outer forms of an ideal spiritual reality and meaning the spoken word is that which is related directly to this transcendent reality whereas the written is merely the secondary record of such more immediate (spoken) symbols.³¹

This perception of written texts as of secondary significance, or even as something inferior to speech and oral transmission, may in itself have caused complications for Paul. He apparently shares the perception of a set of texts as of high significance with his fellow Jews, and argues the same thus for the newly formed pre-dominantly gentile groups of Christ-followers. Given that the *ekklesiai* Paul addresses are predominantly non-Jews the expectation that they respond positively to a reference to something which has been written is at least an open question, and should not be taken as self-evident.³² This issue deserves further research in addition to the issue raised by Stanley, whether and how much these non-Jewish Christ-followers actually would have identified and understood as Scriptural references.

In such a context the special role which a set of texts played for a particular people, the Jews, was noted also by non-Jews. But the perception of the content of this set of texts by non-Jews was mostly rather bizarre.³³ Thus the fact that a set of texts are perceived as highly significant is a phenomenon which is at odds with the dominating perception of the significance of texts as such. This aspect in itself adds a question mark behind the assumption that the references to this set of texts/the Scriptures *per se* add power and authority to Paul's argumentation. If this is something alien to the audience such a reference would not necessarily be received as a reference to some higher authority, nor would it be heard as something which settles a dispute or closes the conversation.

Written Tradition – Jewish Perspectives

There can be no doubt that a set of texts, referred to as the Scripture/the Scriptures by Paul, is of very high significance all groups of first century Judaism. Whatever other

³⁰ Aristotle, *On Interpretation* 16a.3-8, quoted in Seidman 2006:81.

³¹ Cf. also Seidman's thought provoking analysis of the literal/spiritual dichotomy in Western linguistics and theories of translation in her 2006:73-11, also Boyarin 1994:14-15. *Cf. also Derrida*

³² Stanley 2004:38-61.

³³ *Insert refs – cf, Stanley 2004:45.*

labels one applies as the common denominator to first century Judaism the various and in some sense very divergent groups all relate to a set of texts as of key importance to them. I am reluctant to use terms like authoritative or sacred as I think we should try to further clarify what such terms actually mean in relation to a set of texts rather than presuming that by applying such labels to them this has been clarified. Prior to analysing the possible significance of a set of texts for a community it has to be noted that, although all known Jewish groups relate to a set of texts, this set is not identical with the later canon of the Christian Old Testament nor of the Jewish Tanakh. The emergence of a set of texts which are regarded as being of special significance by a group, is a process with open boundaries. The boundaries are open not only concerning the inclusion of specific writings but also concerning texts versions themselves. Thus Dungan maintains that ‘...the term *scripture* refers to a semidurable, semifluid, *slowly evolving* conglomeration of sacred texts...’³⁴ Some subsets of texts were most likely shared by all Jews, others were not.

The Qumran findings may serve as an illustration. It is obvious that the question which writings were regarded as Scripture by the Qumranites cannot be answered conclusively. The awareness of the fluidity of what was perceived to be part of this ‘set of texts’ and of the texts themselves renders a straight-forward reference to some ‘authority of Scripture’ questionable. The term ‘scripture’ refers to a not clearly defined set of texts, to a ‘cloud of sacred texts’³⁵ as Dungan calls them – thus in addition to the question in what sense are the Scriptures significant, we need to ask – what are the implications for the perception of some notion of ‘authority of Scriptures’ if there is no commonly agreed collection of texts. A reference to ‘the Scriptures’ then does not inherently clarify what an author actually refers. This means that ‘...one man’s interpreter is another’s Scripture’ and the fact that ‘...the corpus of what constitutes “Scripture” and is therefore the object of interpretation changed over time and varied from one group of readers to the next.’³⁶ In addition to the ‘fuzzy boundaries’ of the collections of writings which were perceived to be ‘the Scriptures’ the issue of the fluidity of the actual text of these writings raises questions concerning the perception of the authority of the Scriptures as well. Textual

³⁴ Dungan 2007:2

³⁵ Dungan 2007:3.

³⁶ Kugel 1997:35.

critics, especially since the emergence of newer findings in Qumran, emphasize that the reconstruction of one single version as ‘the original version’ of any book of the later canonical Hebrew Scriptures seems to be impossible. This leads Emmanuel Tov to the suggestion that ‘it may be time to abandon the whole idea of “reconstructing the original text”’.³⁷ And the quite often blurred boundaries between biblical text and interpretation raise questions about biblical interpretation in antiquity ‘at almost the most elemental level’. Bernstein formulates as follows ‘When does the writing of a biblical text cease and when does a biblical interpretation begin ? When and where do we stop talking about the Bible and begin talking about the re-written Bible ?’³⁸ This latter dimension raises significant questions whether issues of word order or versions of a particular text were issues under debate at all and if so in what sense.³⁹

Given that the collection of texts perceived significant and the texts themselves were fluid, at least to some extent, in what sense then can such a ‘cloud of sacred texts’ be involved in the life and discourses of communities who hold them significant enough to transmit them through generations and geographically to the places where such communities live. Or to put it another way: what does a reference to ‘sacred scriptures’ (1 Macc 12.) invoke in the life of a community ? In what sense are such scriptures relevant/significant ? What do they contribute to the power and authority discourse of communities relating to such Scriptures ?

The Jewish Scriptures and Authority and Power

Despite the fuzzy boundaries of the collection and the fluidity of the texts within collections there can be no doubt, that by the time of the Second Temple it was the shared conviction within Judaism that some sort of a set of texts encompassed/embodied the most important traditions of the Jewish people. Since these traditions all were related to the divine in some way or another such a collection was referred to as ‘the scripture/s’,

³⁷ Tov quoted in Dungan 2007:5. Cf. e.g. Stanley 2004:92.

³⁸ Bernstein 2004:227.

³⁹ Which subsequently leads to the question whether issues such as a supposed ‘reversal’ or ‘change’ of word order as an issue at all. Cf. Stanley e.g.

the Torah of Moses, etc although the attribute ‘sacred’ does not occur as frequently as might be expected.⁴⁰

Although the significance of a collection of texts for the different Jewish groups of the first century can be affirmed it is far from self-evident what this actually meant. The fact that some sort of collection of texts was perceived to carry traditions important for the respective community, and ‘school’ or group in particular, in itself does not disclose any information concerning in what sense these texts were significant. I introduced right now the term tradition – which is hinting at the content of such a collection. The transmission of traditions which are related to the divine is of course not peculiar to Judaism, but to do so in written form light enough to travel, is. This peculiarity is noted e.g. in 1 Macc 3.48, where a parallel between the function of the Torah and certain pagan practices is drawn ‘And they opened the book of the law to inquire into those matters about which the gentiles consulted the images of their gods’.

The traditions transmitted in written form in Judaism all represent and are related to the divine realm. That writing acquired a significance which went beyond the technical function of serving as a back-up system for memory is indicated by some scriptural narratives themselves. Although the central role of a collection of writings for the Jews can be found with some historical reliability only after the exile upon the return of some Jews to Judea, traces which attribute a specific significance to written words of God can be found in earlier traditions.⁴¹ Thus Jeremiah is requested to write and re-write prophecies, and it seems that the preservation of the written texts is the means by which a future possible effect of the prophecy, repentance and return of the people to God, is secured (Jer 36).⁴² Also Ezekiel is reported to have had a special connection with a written text which contained the word of God. According to Ez 2.8-3.3 the prophet is invited to eat and digest a scroll – and only then to proclaim the word of God to the people. And Moses, the prophet of the prophets in Jewish tradition is given the privilege

⁴⁰ I am only aware of 1 Macc 12.9 actually using the term βιβλία ἁγία, whereas Paul once refers to γραφαί ἁγίαι, and once to ὁ νόμος ἅγιος and ἡ ἐντολή ἁγία (Rom 7.12). Further research into the terminology used in Second Temple literature needs to be pursued.

⁴¹ I find H.Najman’s position concerning such pre-exilic traditions quite conclusive. She maintains that in order for Ezra’s introduction of some ‘written’ tradition as authoritative there must have been some dimension of continuity with previous traditions in order to be intelligible and effective. (2004:140). Najman also refers to Kugel 1986:17 (cited in Najman 2004:140).

⁴² Cf. Najman 2004:161-65.

to re-write the word of God on tablets after he had shattered the tablets with the text which had been written by God himself (Exodus 32 – 34).⁴³ These traditions witness to a significance of written words testifying to the will and promises of God beyond the mere fact that they are written, and thus serve as a back-up for the memory of his people. What is significant to note for the purpose of this paper is that nowhere is the written text written by the hands of God, and nowhere is the written text identified as the direct production of God. The written text is attributed to Moses, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and although at certain points identified as a record of the word of God, it is never attributed to be directly ‘word of God’. This may explain the absence of references to the Scriptures as ‘sacred’ almost throughout the (now canonical) Scriptures themselves. This careful distinction between the divine and the written record of the divine word has bearings on the perception of the authority and subsequent interpretive traditions of the Scriptures. The context in which a clearly identifiable key role is attributed to a collection of written texts as ‘Scriptures’ is upon the return of some Jews from exile. The central unifying event for the community which had to re-organize itself in the context of return was, as attested in Neh 8.1-8 ‘was neither revelation mediated by a prophet, nor the coronation of a Davidic kingInstead the central event was a public reading of the Mosaic Torah by Ezra who was said to be both priest and scribe and who had interpreters at hand to supply explanations.’⁴⁴ Two aspects are of crucial significance here: firstly, the text is read to the people, that is, rather than to one sole ruler-king-figure, it is read to all members of the community. Concerning this quite remarkable scenario Kugel notes that ‘The incident does provide a useful index for the growing role of Scripture in this community...The Torah if it is to function as a central text for the community must truly be their common property, and properly understood by everyone.’⁴⁵ Thus the hearing and responding to the guidance of the Torah, the written tradition which would also be referred to as the Scriptures, is the responsibility not of an elite but of the entire people. As a community, not as subordinates to a ruler, they are responsible for their life as people of God. The incident reported here in Nehemiah and Ezra witnesses to the fact that no text or collection

⁴³ Najman notes that ‘Like the first set of divine testimonial tablets in Exodus, this divinely written text will not be directly accessible to the Israelite readers. Instead, Ezekiel must internalize the text and then present the material which has now, quite literally, digested.’ (2004:170)

⁴⁴ Najman 2001:33.

⁴⁵ Kugel 1986:22 cited in Najman 2001:35.

of texts can become ‘Scripture’ irrespective of a community who perceive such a collection to be more than a mere record of events in the past. The narrative about the scene upon the return from exile shows how a text is accepted as ‘Scripture’ by a community, in re-enacting the story of the people Israel accepting the Torah at Mount Sinai as the guidance for their way of life.⁴⁶ The second characteristic which needs to be noted is the fact that the reading of the texts is accompanied by interpretation. This refers to a perception and practice of interpretation which ever since the attribution of a special role to written tradition as related to the divine realm is inherently intertwined with this process. Nowhere is there a reference to a set of such texts/scriptures without interpretation of this text, even where it is clearly referred to as the record of words of God. To identify the written words as records of words of God does not render interpretation, the search for meaning of these words obsolete. The reading of the texts or referring to the texts without interpretation was apparently perceived to be meaningless. The text of the Scriptures does not speak for itself! The transmission of written texts as ‘Scriptures’ is envisaged from the very beginning as a process which was accompanied by interpretation.⁴⁷ These two dimensions, the response-ability of the community and the inherent relation between Scripture and interpretation, point to a perception and practice of ‘religious’⁴⁸ authority which does not fit a paradigm of power-over exercised in the vein of domination or according to a command-obedience paradigm. In as much as the Scriptures played not merely a ‘role’ but as Bernstein notes many roles in all aspects of Jewish life and creativity⁴⁹ none of these roles played into a one-dimensional perception of power and authority.

It could be argued that this perception of the roles of Scripture could be an ideological construct by a (scribal) elite which may want to claim that Torah/the Scripture were accepted in a quasi-democratic process by the entire people and the situation on the

⁴⁶ As W.A.Graham notes ‘A text becomes “scripture” in active, subjective relationship to persons and as part of a cumulative communal tradition. No text, written or oral or both, is sacred or authoritative in isolation from a community.’ (1987:5).

⁴⁷ Concerning the Torah Stone formulates ‘...the very fact that the divine law was written created the necessity to base in it by a process of exegesis, the whole corpus of unwritten law which it, needs be, engendered.’ (1985:220), cf also my 2004:.... Kugel 1997:1-49.

⁴⁸ The term is anachronistic as there was no such concept as ‘religion’ in antiquity. I cannot elaborate on this here but see e.g. Ehrensperger 2007:9-13 and Esler 2003.

⁴⁹ Bernstein 2004:237.

ground differed significantly in the first century from this idealized picture of Nehemiah. Thus e.g. Snyder reconstructs a scenario which attributes ‘scribes’ a rather exclusive access to the Scriptures and its interpretation. This in turn creates an extreme power hierarchy between those who know and those who are ignorant, thereby maintaining a structure of domination.⁵⁰ In a brief section Snyder then depicts Paul in the vein of such supposedly powerful ‘scribes’ who restrict access to the Scriptures to an exclusive group around himself – and thereby setting up a structure of power-over in his churches according to a command-obedience model, which easily leads to domination.⁵¹ There are a number of issues which would need to be discussed here, but for our purpose here it is sufficient to note that Snyder’s reconstruction does not take sufficiently into account what recent research demonstrates: the significance of orality and memory on the one hand⁵² and the actual presence of synagogues throughout Palestine and in the Mediterranean diaspora at the time.⁵³ Insights from both strands of research contribute to an informed reconstruction of a scenario concerning the roles of Scripture and the familiarity of more than an elite with these which comes close to the image depicted in Nehemiah and Ezra.⁵⁴ Although it is far from clear how discourses of interpretation should be envisaged, it seems inconceivable to restrict access to an interpretive community to a class of scribes and literate people. The assumption that a conversation over the meaning of a text/tradition can only be performed among people of formal education is an anachronistic literate-driven perception! Certainly Josephus and Philo depict a different image of the role of Scripture in first century Judaism.⁵⁵ Even if the act of reading and interpretation in a synagogue setting was the privilege and task of men educated to do so, the access to such education was not as exclusively limited to a tiny elite as it was in Graeco-Roman society in general.⁵⁶ In addition, inherent to the narrative of Ezra’s reading of the Scriptures not to a ruler or specific class or elite is a

⁵⁰ Cf. e.g. Snyder 2000:181-89.

⁵¹ Snyder 2000:194-205.

⁵² Cf. Gerhardson, Byrskog, Bauckham, Jaffe 2000, Stuckenbruck 2007

⁵³ Levine 2001, Olsson, Zetterholm 2004. Also Hogeterp who notes that ‘Within first century CE Jewish culture of scriptural interpretation, the synagogue was an important place for the reading and interpretation of Scripture.’ (2006:244).

⁵⁴ Cf. Ehrensperger 2007:119-126.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Cf. Ehrensperger 2007:117-36.

somehow ‘democratic’ element which undermines any elitist claims to power and authority.⁵⁷ There was no institutional restriction to the access to the Scriptures and no institutional control or restriction to its interpretation! In as much as specific groups could have claimed superiority for their interpretation over the interpretation of others, as such claims involved power struggles (cf Qumran and Temple hierarchy ??), there existed neither a concept of ‘original’ meaning nor was there an institution which could have instigated any interpretive decisions as binding upon all Jews. Except for the obviously commonly agreed duties concerning the Temple and its ritual practices, including calendrical issues relevant in relation to the celebration of Shabbat and the festivals there is no evidence for any body or authority concerning divergent interpretations.⁵⁸ Whether divergent interpretations always and necessarily lead to power struggles or separation of different groups is at least questionable. Concerning the group at Qumran it has been proposed that interpretive issues concerning the calendar played at least a partial although most likely not the decisive role in their supposed opposition to the Temple hierarchy. A later Rabbinic tradition concerning the schools of Hillel and Shammai could be an indication to the contrary. Despite their differences in issues of interpretation of the Torah the tradition attributes to them that they had lived in mutual esteem and friendship.⁵⁹ This later tradition of debate and interaction between different Jewish groups over the interpretation of Scripture which did not provoke separation of hostility between disagreeing stances is mirrored in a sense in Gospel narratives of Jesus interacting in conversation with Pharisees. The conversations are not depicted as hostile throughout nor as always essentially negative. Most important they witness to a practice of conversation (sometimes this includes table-fellowship) which is based on a shared interest – life according to the Scriptures. This image of interaction and conversation between Jesus and Pharisees depicted by some gospel narratives may not have been as unique as has previously been thought. It could well mirror a practice shared at the time by other Jews as well in that the role of the Pharisees as teachers and interpreters of Torah need not

⁵⁷ Stone notes that ‘...the writing down of sacred scripture set in movement processes which combined with political events to undermine high-priestly authority.’ (1985:220).

⁵⁸ As Stemberger concludes as far as the Second Temple period is concerned that ‘...die Frage nach Entscheidungsfindung und – durchsetzung (bleibt) völlig offen. Religiöse Kontrolle und Vereinheitlichung hielten sich in ganz engen Grenzen.’ (2007:20).

⁵⁹ *B.Yebam.* 14a-b.

have been a ‘one-way didactic interaction between Pharisees and common people. Expositions of Scripture in Palestinian synagogues could convey ideas and norms which developed out of debates between the pluriform Jewish movements. This is more likely to have been the case than a supposed segregation of closed movements with a homogenous system of beliefs and practices.’⁶⁰

Despite differences in interpretation and the conclusions drawn from these, the differing groups within Judaism did perceive a specific collection of texts as their Scriptures – most likely most of these were shared with other contemporary groups – as most decisive for shaping their way of life. In that sense it could be said they regarded this pluriform collection of texts as authoritative. They were Word of God as transmitted by Moses, Ezra, David, the Prophets. But this shared perception of the Scriptures (whatever the collection actually precisely encompassed) did by no means settle or close the at times controversial conversation over its meaning in relation to issues of contemporary life. The almost ‘unimaginable number of forms’ of interpretation in Second Temple Judaism is a impressive literary witness to this conversation in its diversity.⁶¹ Thus the acknowledgement of a collection of Scriptures as ‘Word of God’ and in that sense as authoritative actually includes the search for interpretation and meaning. The fact that it is a collection of diverse texts in itself indicates that diversity is at the heart of the Scriptures. They are perceived as living word of God which triggers diversity and thus obviously vivid debates rather than closing such debates. To refer to the Scriptures thus indicates not a claim to divine authority on the part of the conversation partners but rather that they perceive themselves as participating in a discourse which is shaped by a perception of life and the world according to the Scriptures, that is, according to a Jewish social and symbolic universe. At the centre of this is of course the relationship with the One God who committed himself in covenant and promise to his people Israel.⁶² To refer to the Scriptures as part of participating in a relationship is something entirely different from a so-called ‘use’ of Scripture as proof-text or as reference to divine authority on the part of the interpreter. It could rather be described as a reference to one’s foremost loyalty

⁶⁰ Hogeterp 2006:250-51.

⁶¹ Bernstein 2004:237.

⁶² Of course at the centre of this perception of the world is the relationship with the One God of Israel. I cannot elaborate on this here.

and an acknowledgement/claim to be a response-able participant in a life and discourse according to the guidance of the God of Israel. The hierarchy in the relationship between God and his people is not adequately described when perceived as involving dominating power. I have argued elsewhere that ‘The power of God is perceived as relationality which rules out any form of force, coercion, or domination. God calls Israel not into a new realm of domination, but into a realm of interdependence.’⁶³ Applying feminist terminology in the vein of Hannah Arendt, the power of God could be described as power-with, in that, God is committing himself in a relationship, the covenant, which is neither maintained by domination nor by force or coercion but care for the other/the people. Scriptures which are perceived to be the record of the Word of God cannot but mirror such an understanding of power and authority. Since they have something to do with this non-dominating relationship between God and his people, to perceive them as authoritative in the sense of force or coercion is in contradiction to its actual contents. ‘To live in the realm of this God means to be in a relationship....for which the renunciation of power in the sense of domination is constitutive.’⁶⁴ The actual practice of the way of life which is in accordance with this relationship is neither engraved in stone nor written on parchment but needs to be rediscovered and enacted again and again in an ongoing conversation of a community who perceives itself to be called by God. Viewed in this light it would be anachronistic to perceive these Scriptures as authoritative in the vein of domination. Moreover, it should be noted that most temporary theories of power agree that power or authority is not some substance which can be possessed.⁶⁵ There is no power or authority inherent in this collection of texts called the Scriptures. In as much as power is not something someone could possess, but which only emerges, according to Arendt when people act together in concert – the power of Scriptures unfolds in as much as a community interacts and responds to its words/traditions. They provide guidance in as much people commit themselves to seek guidance through it and entrust themselves to them as the testimony to the living God. Without a community, that is, without partners in conversation, the Scriptures cannot be part of a discourse of power. Power emerges in the interaction of a community in conversation with each other and with the Scriptures.

⁶³ Ehrensperger 2007:164.

⁶⁴ Ehrensperger 2007:164.

⁶⁵ Cf. Ehrensperger 2007:17-26.

Thus, although the Scriptures are attributed many divergent roles in the Second Temple period, to attribute to it some force of coercion or dominating power seems anachronistic to say the least. ⁶⁶I think there is something in Paul's emphasis which comes close to Arendt's perception of 'power as the ability to act in concert', when he mentions that the Scriptures are meant to be part of a discourse of encouragement and empowerment! (Rom 15.4)

Paul, Power and the Authority of Scripture

No doubt Paul was part of and participated in the social and symbolic universe of first century Judaism. He participated in the interpretive conversation over the meaning of Scriptures before and after his call experience. Taking into account what has been argued above, that the perception of the Scriptures as authoritative included interpretation in a diversity of forms, stances, and communities, Paul then is seen as being part of a tradition of interpretation which includes conversation and diversity. Paul's self-designation as a Pharisee (Phil 3.5) indicates more precisely that he had been educated in Jerusalem, and was able to participate in a interpretive discourse which was at least bi-lingual.⁶⁷ Identifying himself as a Hebrew of Hebrews may refer to such bilingualism although other meanings cannot be ruled out.⁶⁸ Although this supposed Pauline bi-or even trilingualism is highly interesting on a linguistic and cultural level and raises all sorts of issues of translation, this is not the aspect which is most significant for the purpose of this paper. The significance of finding traces of bi-or trilingualism in Paul's Greek Scriptural references lies in the indication this provides for Paul's interpretive context. I have argued elsewhere why I am of the view that the arguments for locating Paul's schooling and participation in interpretation in Jerusalem are convincing.⁶⁹ Thus, his interaction

⁶⁶ Stanley attributes such a force to the Scriptures at the hand of Paul. Cf. 2004:181-82, I will come back to this below.

⁶⁷ As Hogeterp convincingly in my view has demonstrated, since there are no indications of Pharisaic education outside Jerusalem. (2006:202-35). Cf. also Dochhorn who in a detailed linguistic study argues that Rom 16.20a is evidence that Paul participated in a 'polyglotte Schriftgelehrsamkeit'. He thus maintains 'Es spricht also einiges dafür, dass Paulus als kundiger Rezipient eines hebräisch-aramäischen Wissens zu gelten hat...' (2007:210).

⁶⁸ See Schwartz' analysis of the use of Hebrew as an identity sign in the context of the striving for Jewish independence during the two revolts. (1995)

⁶⁹ Hogeterp 2006:202-34.

and references to the Scriptures in the context of his conversations with the assemblies of Christ-followers he addresses in his letters will be analysed in view of the arguments and findings above.

I will limit my analysis to two focal points, and in some sense they emerge in conversation with aspects of Chris Stanley's and Richard Hays' approaches.

The embeddedness of Paul in first century Jewish interpretive discourse has implications for a perception of the function of the reference to Scripture in the Pauline discourse. This seems to be stating the obvious but the issue of source and target comes into play here as well, a dimension C. Stanley has drawn attention to in a significant way. I will focus here primarily on the source – that is – the possible perception of the function of the Scriptural references and the possible 'power-play' inherent in the factuality of these references by Paul and his apostolic colleagues/ and co-workers in Christ. I am aware that a similar evaluation is necessary in view of the addressees' reception which might depict a different image. One of the functions of the Pauline references to the Scriptures and of his letters more generally are neatly summarized by Origen.⁷⁰ I agree with this perception and think one of the roles of Paul can be described very accurately as that of a teacher.⁷¹ To teach the gentile members of the Christ movement the implications and the way of life in Christ implied that they had to learn the ways of the Lord/God as outlined in the Scriptures. In order to get a grasp of what it means to be/live in Christ gentile converts had to be socialized into the Jewish Scriptural symbolic and social universe.⁷² Such a process, like any successful educational process, is a process of transformation, which of course includes a hierarchical relationship between teacher and student. But the exercise of power-over in such a relationship has as its purpose to render itself obsolete, and in order to be transformative can neither be dominating nor coercive. Rather, in order to be transformative it has to be based on trust, providing guidance and encouragement. Those who like Paul have invited people to join the Christ-movement and thus to begin an educational/socializing process of learning Christ, which implies learning Christ and the Scriptures, and thus gaining a growing sense and understanding of being in a relationship

⁷⁰ Cf. Hays viii.

⁷¹ Ehrensperger 2007:117-34.

⁷² Bartchy 2005:54-60.

with the one God of Israel cannot but try to live the relationship they initiated according to the pattern of Christ/the Scriptures. In the Scriptures the relationship of God and his people is sometimes itself depicted in the vein of a parent-child or teacher-student relationship, a relationship which is based on nothing but trust.⁷³ The perception of the power discourse in Paul's relationship to his communities as transformative combined with the perception of the Scriptures as the record of the Word/s of God whose exercise of power consists in a renunciation of any form of domination have significant implications for our perception of the function of the Scriptural references in the Pauline letters. The location of the Scriptural discourse as part of and participating in the first century Jewish discourse of interpretation is another decisive factor which influences the perception of the Pauline Scriptural discourse and the power and authority discourse inherent in it. The significance of this is often overlooked as this implies not only that Paul at some stage in his life *was* part of Jewish conversations over the meaning of Scripture but that he still is and continues to be. He is part of the interpretive community which perceives the Scriptures as authoritative, whether the members of this community are Christ-followers or not. In addition, also, within the movement he is certainly not the only lonely apostle and interpreter of the Scriptures but one of a team.⁷⁴

For the purpose of this paper I will focus on a number of passage in the Pauline letters where obviously Paul's role and understanding of apostleship is challenged, and he refers to Scriptures in the course of his argumentation, as it seems most likely that a power discourse is involved in such passages. I will focus here on 2 Corinthians, but it would of course be most interesting to pursue further analyses of other passages in light of the above outlined presuppositions and insights. I will limit this sketchy survey to explicit references although I think Paul's Scriptural reasoning encompasses far more than direct quotations.

What is interesting to note right at the outset is that although it is generally agreed that in this letter(s) Paul seems to see a need for taking challenges to his role and understanding as an apostle head-on, the references to the Scriptures are not most frequent where they

⁷³ Cf. Alexander 2001, Rendtorff 2005:618-21.

⁷⁴ Ehrensperger 2007a:35-62.

would be expected if their function were actually to support his authority claims. But passages where Paul addresses the issue most directly, such as 2. Cor 1.5-11; 3.1-3; 4.7-15; 6.1-10 and chapters 10-13, show only occasional references to the Scriptures whereas elsewhere in the letter the density is higher – only matched by the references in Romans (which does not address challenges to his role and understanding of apostleship). This seems to come as a surprise if it is presupposed that especially in a situation where Paul is involved in a controversy about his role he would try to establish his power and authority through a supporting appeal to a higher, divine authority. The only scattered references as such seem to indicate that something different is going on. In 2 Cor 1.5-11 no reference to the Scriptures is made although Paul sets the tone and scene for what is to follow. The focus of his understanding of apostleship, not only his own but of the role of apostles generally in the movement has something to do with what is difficult to swallow from the perspective of the Graeco-Roman value-system – suffering and weakness are introduced as characteristics of true leaders!⁷⁵

In 3.1-3 when the issue of his apostolic credentials becomes explicit in relation to the lack of letter of recommendation Paul does refer to the Scriptures. His formulation in v. 3 (‘and you show that you are a letter from Christ delivered by us, written not in ink but with the Spirit of the living God *not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts*’) although not a direct and identifiable quotation is an explanatory or illustrating formulation rather than a reference to some higher authority in support of proof for his perception of the Corinthian assembly of Christ-followers. He describes accordingly what he perceives them to be in the words of the social and symbolic universe to which this group is supposed to relate and from which its identity is formed.⁷⁶

2 Cor 4.7-15 is a description in as such an acknowledgment of great difficulties which are part of Paul’s experiences as an apostle. In view of a value system which perceived suffering and weakness as signs of failure, Paul tries to demonstrate that such experiences are inherent to life in Christ under the contextual circumstances of life under Roman rule.⁷⁷ The verse of Scripture in v. 13 has been regarded as rather obscure.⁷⁸ Even

⁷⁵ See the more detailed discussion Ehrensperger 2007: 104-06.

⁷⁶ On identity formation and the role of Scripture see Campbell 2006.

⁷⁷ Cf. Elliott 2000.

⁷⁸ Stanley 2004:98.

without taking the literary context of the Psalm referred into account I consider this to be another example of Paul demonstrating how deeply entrenched his life and language is with the Scriptures. He describes experiences of harshness which not only lead to a questioning of his role and understanding of apostleship but which, as he mentioned in the opening paragraph of the letter, led him to the fringes of death and thus left with nothing than trust in God to cling to life. To refer to words of the psalms in relation to such experiences may be to refer to the language of prayer most appropriate in situations like these. Thus, again I cannot see a discourse of domination here – if a discourse of power then it is an active sharing of Paul of the empowerment and consolation he gets through the words of the Scriptures (διὰ ὑπομονῆς καὶ διὰ τῆς παρακλήσεως Rom. 15.4).

In 2 Cor 6.1-10, the reference in v. 2 stands in obvious relation to the admonition that the Corinthians should not miss the chance of hearing and responding to the grace of God. This is explained by way of interpreting the quotation from Isa 49.8. The interpretation adds weight to the reference in identifying the present time as the time when God intervened in support of his people. Again Paul explains in the subsequent passage that the experiences of trouble and hardship should not be interpreted by the Corinthians as evidence to the contrary to Paul's and other apostles' proclamation of the gospel. But the identification of the time in which the assembly of Christ-followers lives is introduced not to add weight to Paul's claim to power and domination but to explain in what sense the time they live in is the time when God acted in support of his people. The references in the following verses 6.16-18 are illustrations and supportive explanations to the identity of these Christ-followers as temple of God. Thus, rather than being part of a discourse of domination and authority I would describe them as part of a discourse of education (διδασκαλία).

The only more or less explicit reference to the Scriptures in the chapters where Paul most passionately outlines and advocates his understanding of apostleship is found in 10.17. If references to the Scriptures were a strong weapon in the arsenal⁷⁹ of Paul's defence of his understanding of apostleship it could be expected to find a significant number of such references in passages where he actually does deal with precisely what in his view

⁷⁹Cf. Stanley 2004:186.

constitutes apostles. The only quality he attributes to himself and his colleagues, drawn from the Scriptures is that he actually does boast – but in the Lord. This reference actually supports what he argues throughout the letter – that a leader in this movement cannot shape his role and self-understanding according to perceptions of leadership, power and authority according to the value system of the dominating Graeco-Roman world. The ‘world’ Christ-follower’ ought to look for guidance and orientation in is not ‘this world (Rom12.1 ff.) but the Scriptural world of the Jewish people and Christ. Thus boasting if it has to be, and Paul makes it crystal clear that he enters this ring of boasting competition most reluctantly, can only be boasting in God. When we take into account what I have argued above, this includes a perception of leadership/apostleship which orients itself on a God whose ‘use’ of power consists in his renunciation of domination. Although this is a sketchy overview of some passages of 2 Corinthians it emerges that the power discourse of which the Scriptural references are part, is not a discourse of domination or closing debate. It is a power discourse but it cannot be argued from the evidence found so far that Paul referred to the Scriptures to add to his own voice some divine dimension, there is no claim to divine authority on the part of Paul. Nor is there an indication that the references to Scriptures serve the purpose of closing the debate, of being the final last word which would allow no further discussion. The issue at stake is that the Scriptural world provides an alternative to the dominating world-view of Paul’s gentile Christ-followers in particular and the interpretation of the Christ-event in light of the Scriptures and the Scriptures in light of the Christ event certainly provoked discussion among Jews, Christ-followers as well as non-Christ-followers.⁸⁰ That the social and symbolic universe of the Scriptures was the context from within which Christ-followers were supposed to live was a non-negotiable presupposition for Paul as well as his colleagues in leadership roles. Whether this meant that the Scriptures provided a reference point to absolute authority is questionable in my view. Yes, it was in the sense that there could be no other symbolic universe to relate to, if one had chosen to join the

⁸⁰ I cannot elaborate on this aspect here but I think this mutually interactive interpretation needs to be further clarified. The early Christ-followers interpreted the Christ-event in light of the Scriptures, tried to understand a contemporary event in light of their tradition as was the Jewish interpretive practice. The sequence cannot be reversed as there is no meaning of the Christ-event independent from it being interpreted in light of the tradition of the Scriptures. Thus to postulate that Paul reads Israel’s Scriptures in light of the Christ-event is not clarifying the issue sufficiently since the question of the context for interpreting the Christ-event is not clarified.

Christ-movement in as much as this meant to set one's trust into the one God of Israel. But exactly this trust was a trust into a God whose power consisted not in the exercise of domination but in empowerment. To relate to this authority implied that one was called to respond as a response-able member of the movement.⁸¹ This is the vein in which I see Paul referring to the Scriptures – as an encouragement to empower people to life in Christ – as he maintains 'this was written for our instruction, that by the steadfastness and by the encouragement of the scriptures we might hope.' (Rom 15.4).

More research into Paul's reasoning with the Scriptures from the perspective proposed here would need to be done. But what can be concluded at this stage is that the apostle refers to the Scriptures in a variety of ways – there is the function of illustrating and elaborating what is meant; there is the function of demonstrating that this is the symbolic and social world these gentiles are to be socialized into. References are a means of learning the Scriptures as guidance into the ways of Christ. But Paul did not refer to the Scriptures in order to introduce proof texts or a final word which cannot be challenged. He argues with the Scriptures in a way which mirrors the creative and diverse practices of interpretation which are practised in first century Judaism.⁸² The word of God is alive, not static and thus never could a word of God close a debate – it would empower the debate and thus the response-able hearing of the community involved.

⁸¹ Cf. Ehrensperger 2007:155-78.

⁸² I do not see on what basis Stanley comes to the conclusion that 'Like other Jews, Paul maintained a deep respect for the Scriptures of Israel and believed that a quotation from a holy text should close off all debate on a subject.' (2004:173). In support of this view he refers to 20th century analyses by Perelman and White (ibid. note 3) which do not address issues concerning a first century context.

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