

**Paul's Use of Temple Imagery in the Corinthian Correspondence and the
Formation of Christian Identity:
A Contextual Reading from the Perspectives of A Chinese Malaysian
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1.0 Living under the Shadow of the Temples in Malaysia

Taking a tour within the heritage enclave of the UNESCO World Heritage Site in George Town, the capital of the northern island state of Penang, one can easily be enveloped up in the smell of sweet incense offered to numerous deities by the devotees in many magnificent ancient temples that dotted the historic city centre and its surrounding areas. The *Kuan Yin Teng*, the oldest Chinese temple in Penang, is dedicated to the worship of Kuan Yin, the Goddess of Mercy. The Tua Pek Kong, the God of Prosperity, is worshipped in the *Cantonese Tua Pek Kong* and *Hock Teik Cheng Sin* temples. *Seng Ong Beow*, the temple of dedicated to the worship of the City Protector and Chief Magistrate of Hades, can also be found in the historic centre. *Thean Hock Keong*, a temple intricately and ornately embellished with exquisite stone carvings built by the Hainanese clan, is dedicated to the worship of Ma Poh Chor, the Patron Deity of the Seafarers. *Wat Chayamangkalaram*, a Thai temple that is a stone's throw away from the historic centre, houses the largest reclining Buddha in the world.

Apart from the worship of diverse Chinese deities, the worship of one's ancestors as an expression of filial piety also constitutes an indispensable part of Chinese custom. The elaborate *Chung Keng Twee* Temple, built by the Chinese Kapitan that bears his name, is dedicated for the worship of his ancestors. The *Han Jiang Teochew* Ancestral Temple is another prominent temple built by the Teochews, one of the main Chinese dialect groups that migrated to Malaysia, for their ancestral worship.

The different Chinese clan associations also built large scale association halls and temples as symbols of their unity and strength. The most distinctive and grandest Chinese clan association building is the *Leong San Tong Khoo Kongsi*. It houses a temple, *Cheng Soon Keong*, that enshrines the patron saints of the Khoo clan, Ong Soon Yah the Great Duke and Tua Sai Yah the Noble. An ancestral hall, *Ee Kok Tong*, is dedicated to the ancestral worship of the Khoo clan.

Outside the heritage enclave, one is greeted by the imposing *Kek Lok Si* Temple, the largest Buddhist temple precinct in South-east Asia built on a hillside overlooking the city of George Town. Found within the temple precinct is the iconic seven-tiered pagoda of 10,000 Buddhas and a giant 30.2m-tall bronze statue of Kuan Yin, the goddess of Mercy, sheltered by a three-tiered 61m roof pavilion supported by 16 granite pillars, reputed to be the tallest structure of its kind in the world. When illuminated with bright lights at night, the entire temple precinct commands a very imposing presence overlooking the island of Penang.

Further away from the city centre, the well-known *Temple of Azure Clouds*, also popularly known as the Snake Temple built to venerate the deified Buddhist monk, Chor Soo Kong, is located.

Every first and fifteen day of each month in the lunar calendar, these temples will be filled with devotees making offerings and sacrifices to their ancestors and different deities. Major Chinese festivals, such as the lunar new year and the hungry ghost festival that falls on the seventh month of the lunar calendar, are auspicious dates where temples would be filled with devotees, chanting, and social gatherings in the temple precincts. The smell of incense and smoke from the burning of joss sticks will fill the air.¹

If one were to live in such an environment where temple worship and rituals are closely associated with one's symbolic universe, culture, and existence,² where ancestral worship is seen as concrete expressions of one's filial piety and piousness, and where its activities are clear demonstration of one's social network and participation in the communal life, how would one, who used to be a part of such social and cultural background but is now a member of the community of Christ-followers, would have reacted and responded if the following words are heard:

“Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you? If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy that person. For God's temple is holy, and you are that temple.” (1 Cor 3:16-17)

“Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, which you have from God, and that you are not your own?” (1 Cor 6:19)

“What agreement has the temple of God with idols? For we are the temple of the living God.” (2 Cor 6:16)

What would have crossed the mind of the hearers? Would the temple imagery recall their understanding of their previous cultic activities and participation in one of the many temple festivals? Would such a use of the temple imagery cause them to pause and reflect on their current status in Christ? What function does the temple imagery that once represents the powerful expression of one's former symbolic universe and existence play in the identity formation of a community of Christ-believers? How would the use of temple imagery create the maximum impact in communicating the truth of the gospel?

2.0 The Temples in Corinth

The city of George Town is not unlike the city of Corinth in the days of Paul. Corinth was a centre of cultic worship graphically attested to by its many magnificent and imposing temples, statues and shrines dedicated to both Greek and Roman gods such

¹ For further discussion on Chinese festivals in Malaysia, see C. S. Wong, *An Illustrated Cycle of Chinese Festivities in Malaysia and Singapore* (Singapore: Jack Chia-MPH, 1987).

² Interestingly in Malaysia, one's ethnicity is often closely associated with one's religious faith, culture and language. The Malays are Muslim, speak Malay as first language and practices the distinct Malay custom and culture. Similarly, the Chinese generally practice Buddhism or Chinese folk religions, and speak Chinese or one of its dialects while the Indians embrace Hinduism and speak Tamil. One example where such distinctive division can be observed is the way the Federal Constitution of Malaysia defines a Malay. According to Article 160(2) a Malay is defined as a “person who *professes the religion of Islam*, habitually speaks the Malay language, (and) conforms to Malay custom” (emphasis mine).

as Apollo, Athena, Tyche, Aphrodite, Pantheon, Demeter, Kore, Dionysus, Neptune, Asklepios, Venus, Octavia, and Poseidon. Pausanias referred to at least 24 sanctuaries and temples found in Corinth in his *Description of Greece*.³ In addition, there were also temples dedicated to the Roman imperial cult and the Egyptian cults of Isis and Sarapis. Such juxtaposition not only clearly defined the varieties of deities that are well-represented but also the extent to which religion penetrated every sector of life in Corinth. The strong religious attitudes of Corinth were reflected in coins, terracotta and marbles statues, mosaic flooring and other daily household wares.⁴ When travellers arrive in Corinth from the port of Cenchreae or leave the city to head west to Sicyon, they would be greeted by the temples of Aphrodite and Isis and the temple of Apollo, respectively. As such, the Corinthians literally lived continually in the presence of the gods with the smell of fragrant offerings wafting out of the temples. Paul is keenly aware of this, having stayed there for more than a year when he lived under the shadows of the temples (cf. Acts 18.11).

Much of life in Corinth centred on the temples and their associated activities. Apart from being places of worship, temples are also centres for social activities, providing platform for expanding one's social network. As such, encounters or participation in activities within the temples and shrines in Corinth were almost unavoidable for the Christ-believers. As noted by Garland: 'If Christians took part in civic life, they would have been expected to participate in festivals which included sacrificial meals in some form or another.'⁵ This is evident from Paul's extensive discussion related to pagan cultic practice in canonical letters to the Corinthians.⁶ In 1 Cor 8-10, Paul deals with the issue of consuming food sacrificed to idols both in the temple precincts (1 Cor 8:7-11; 10:14-17) and in private homes (1 Cor 10:27-30). Since meat sold in the meat market or *macellum* had already been sacrificed to idols, consuming such meat is almost unavoidable (1 Cor 10:25).⁷ Paul may have also dealt with some of the Christ-

³ See Pausanias, *Description of Greece*, Book II on Corinth. For further discussion, see Donald Engels, *Roman Corinth: An Alternative Model for the Classical City* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), 92-120; John R. Lanci, *A New Temple for Corinth: Rhetorical and Archaeological Approaches to Pauline Imagery*, SBL 1 (New York: Peter Lang, 1997), 25-43, 89-113; Nancy Bookidis, 'The Sanctuaries of Corinth,' in *Corinth, The Centenary 1896-1996*, Vol. 20, ed. Charles K. Williams II & Nancy Bookidis (Athens: The American School of Classical Studies at Athens, 2003), 247-259; Daniel N. Schowalter & Steven J. Friesen, eds. *Urban Religion in Roman Corinth: Interdisciplinary Approaches*, HTS 53 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2005), in particular the article by Nancy Bookidis, 'Religion in Corinth: 146 B.C.E. to 100 C.E.,' 141-64; Panayotis Coutsoumpos, *Paul and the Lord's Supper: A Socio-historical Investigation*, SBL 84 (New York: Peter Lang, 2005), 171-180; and Panayotis Coutsoumpos, 'Paul, the Cults in Corinth and the Corinthian Correspondence,' in *Paul's World*, Pauline Studies 4, ed. Stanley E. Porter (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 171-80. On textual and archaeological evidence on social, political, and religious activities in Corinth, consult Jerome Murphy-O'Connor, *St. Paul's Corinth: Texts and Archaeology*, 3rd ed. (Collegeville: Liturgical, 2002).

⁴ For images of some of these statues now housed in the Corinth Museum at ancient Corinth, see Nicos Papahatzis, *Ancient Corinth: The Museums of Corinth, Isthmia and Sicyon* (Athens: Ekdotike Athenon, 1977), 88-97.

⁵ David E. Garland. *1 Corinthians*, BECNT (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003), 347.

⁶ Apart from addressing and appealing to the Greco-Roman cultic practices, Paul also alludes to Jewish cultic imagery as reflected in 1 Cor 5:6-8; 9:1-14; 10:14-22, amongst others. See Kar Yong Lim, 'The Sufferings of Christ Are Abundant in Us': *A Narrative Dynamics Investigation of Paul's Sufferings in 2 Corinthians*, LNTS 399 (London: T & T Clark, 2009), 64-96 for further treatment on the use of cultic imagery in 2 Cor 2:14-16.

⁷ See Murphy O'Connor, *St. Paul's Corinth*, 186-191; Wendell Lee Willis, *Idol Meat in Corinth: The Pauline Argument in 1 Corinthians 8 and 10*, SBLDS (Chico: Scholars Press, 1985), 13-15; Coutsoumpos, *Paul and the Lord's Supper*, 9-37. For further treatment on the issue of food sacrificed to idols, see Wong Fong Yang, *Freedom & Consideration: The Christian's Dilemma Concerning Food*

believers participating in temple prostitution in 1 Cor 6:12-20.⁸ In addition, Paul's reference to the body imagery in 1 Cor 12:12-26 is most likely drawn from the prevailing practices of offering terra cotta replicas of the parts of the body healed by Asklepios in the temple.⁹

From his correspondence with the Corinthians, it is evident that many of the issues that Paul has to deal with the Christ-community arise not because the Christ-community exists in the pagan world but that too much of the pagan values and practices from their former religious beliefs are still being carried over and practiced in this new found community in Christ.¹⁰ As rightly argued by Winter, these problems arose partly because the Christ-believers, as citizens of Roman Corinth, 'had grown up in, and imbibed that culture' and they reacted to some of these issues 'on the basis of the learnt conventions and cultural mores of Corinthian *Romanitas*.'¹¹ If the Corinthians are so rooted in the Greco-Roman convention and cultural norms, how would Paul shape the social identity and values of the Christ-believers so that they are aligned to the message of the gospel of Christ that is proclaimed to them (cf. 1 Cor 1:17-2:5), and being transformed in their symbolic universe as a result of their new status in Christ? If Paul were concerned about establishing an alternative assembly in Corinth,¹² how would Paul address his audience?

3.0 Study of Paul's Use of Imagery

One intriguing approach adopted by Paul in realigning his audience to the truth of the gospel is to use forceful imagery in his communication.¹³ After having spent an extended period of time in Corinth (cf. Acts 18:1), Paul is not only familiar with the wider culture of Corinth but is capable of using relevant images in drawing insights from the symbolic universe of his audience to address them.

Offered to Idols (Petaling Jaya: Pustaka Sufes, 1994); Derek Newton, *Deity and Diet: The Dilemma of Sacrificial Food at Corinth*, JSNTSup 169 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998); Alex T. Cheung, *Idol Food in Corinth: Jewish Background and Pauline Legacy*, JSNTSup 176 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999); Bruce W. Winter, *After Paul Left Corinth: The Influence of Secular Ethics and Social Change* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001) 269-301 and John Fotopoulos, *Food Offered to Idols in Roman Corinth: A Social-rhetorical Reconsideration of 1 Corinthians 8:1 - 11:1*, WUNT 2/151 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2003).

⁸ See Brian S. Rosner, 'Temple Prostitution in 1 Corinthians 6:12-20' *NovT* 40 (1998): 336-351.

⁹ See Andrew E. Hill, 'The Source of Asclepius: An Alternative Source for Paul's Body Theology?' *JBL* 99 (1980): 437-439; Murphy O'Connor, *St. Paul's Corinth*, 186-191.

¹⁰ See Winter, *After Paul Left Corinth*, 27-28.

¹¹ Winter, *After Paul Left Corinth*, 27. See also J. Brian Tucker, "'You belong to Christ': Paul and the Formation of Social Identity in 1 Corinthians 1-4" (PhD thesis, University of Wales Lampeter, Lampeter, 2009), 15, who suggests that the Corinthians were continuing to identify primarily with key aspects of their Roman social identity rather than their identity 'in Christ'. As a result, this confusion over identity positions contributed to the problems within the community.

¹² For the argument that Paul seeks to realign the identity hierarchy of the Corinthians that is grounded in the Greco-Roman convention to one that is rooted in Christ, see Tucker, 'You belong to Christ'. Cf. Richard A. Horsley, 'Paul's Assembly in Corinth: An Alternative Society,' in *Urban Religion in Roman Corinth: Interdisciplinary Approaches*, HTS 53, ed. Daniel N. Schowalter & Steven J. Friesen (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2005), 369-395.

¹³ See Raymond F. Collins, *The Power of Images in Paul* (Collegeville: Liturgical, 2008).

In this article, I will be examining the temple imagery used by Paul in the Corinthian correspondence in light of the formation of Christian identity.¹⁴ I will also be examining how a contextual reading from the perspective of a Chinese Malaysian will bring additional insights into the investigation of the temple imagery used by Paul.

The study of Paul's use of images in his letters has gained significance attention in recent years since Herbert M. Gale's earlier publication.¹⁵ Most of these recent studies focused on Paul's use of a particular imagery either in one of his letters or throughout the Pauline corpus, as reflected in the recent works of Aasgaard, Berge, Burke, Byron, Finlan, Hogeterp, Kim, Lanci, and Tsang, amongst others.¹⁶ David J Williams' *Paul's Metaphors: Their Context and Character* reference-type format approach remains one of the most comprehensive studies of the subject matter, and provides extensive information on the socio-historical background drawn from both the Jewish and Greco-Roman sources in illuminating Paul's diverse use of metaphors.¹⁷ However, Williams' treatment follows a thematic outline of Paul's use of metaphors. Such thematic treatment suffers from a major setback in that how these metaphors function within a particular letter of Paul is insufficiently addressed or downplayed. It is not until the recent publication by Collins that serious attempts to trace Paul's use of metaphors within his individual letters are pursued.¹⁸ In his work, Collins investigates how Paul uses metaphors in each of the seven undisputable letters with the purpose of persuading his audience concerning the truth of the gospel.

While there has been progress seen in the study of Paul's use of images, what remains to be explored is how Paul's use of diverse metaphors within a particular letter functions in the formation of Christian identity in relation to cults and rituals; ethical teachings and behavioural patterns; and group dynamics and boundaries with outsiders as collective expression of shaping their formative identity in Christ, and it is hoped this essay would be able to address some of these concerns in some ways.

¹⁴ In a forthcoming publication, I will be examining in greater depth Paul's use of images in the Corinthian correspondence in relation to the creation of Christian identity. I will argue that Paul's use of images is not only a calculated but deliberate attempt in persuading the Christ-believers to remember the founding stories of the Christ-movement, adhere to certain behavioural patterns and ethical norms, and observe certain cults and rituals in the formation of Christian identity.

¹⁵ Herbert M. Gale, *The Use of Analogy in the Letters of Paul* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1964).

¹⁶ Recent studies on Paul's use of imagery, amongst others, include: Reidar Aasgaard, *'My beloved Brothers and Sisters!': Christian Siblingship in Paul*, JSNTSup 265 (London: T&T Clark, 2004); Trevor J. Burke, *Family Matters: A Socio-Historical Study of Kinship Metaphors in 1 Thessalonians*, JSNTSup 247 (London: T&T Clark, 2003); Mary Katherine Berge, *The Language of Belonging: A Rhetorical Analysis of Kinship Language in First Corinthians*, CBET 31 (Leuven: Peeters, 2004); Trevor J. Burke, *Adopted into God's Family: Exploring A Pauline Metaphor*, NSBT 22 (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2006); John Byron, *Slavery Metaphors in Early Judaism and Pauline Christianity: A Traditio-Historical and Exegetical Examination*, WUNT 162 (Tubingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2003); Stephen Finlan, *The Background and Content of Paul's Cultic Atonement Metaphors*, AB 19 (Atlanta: SBL, 2004); Albert L. A. Hogeterp, *Paul and God's Temple: A Historical Interpretation of Cultic Imagery in the Corinthian Correspondence*, BTS 2 (Leuven: Peeters, 2006); Jung Hoon Kim, *The Significance of Clothing Imagery in the Pauline Corpus*, JSNTSup 268 (London: T&T Clark 2004); John R. Lanci, *A New Temple for Corinth: Rhetorical and Archaeological Approaches to Pauline Imagery*, SBL 1 (New York: Peter Lang, 1997); and Sam Tsang, *From Slaves to Sons: A New Rhetoric Analysis on Paul's Slave Metaphors in his Letters to the Galatians* (New York: Peter Lang, 2005).

¹⁷ David J. Williams, *Paul's Metaphors: Their Context and Character* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1999).

¹⁸ Collins, *The Power of Images in Paul*.

4.0 Paul's Use of Temple Imagery in the Corinthian Correspondence

In both the Corinthian letters, Paul uses the word, ναός, usually translated as 'temple', a total of 6 times in 1 Cor 3:16, 17 (twice); 6:19 and 2 Cor 6:16 (twice).

Commentators have frequently emphasized that Paul chooses ναός over ἱερόν and highlighted the semantic differences between these two, with the former denoting the dwelling place of deities and the latter a reference to the entire temple precinct.¹⁹ Support for this argument is often drawn from the usage of these words in the Gospels where ναός is used to refer to the Holy of Holies while ἱερόν the entire temple precinct. Further argument is made that this distinction is also maintained in the LXX. The problem with such a view is that it presumes a very neatly and tightly defined meaning for both ναός and ἱερόν.²⁰ However, this may not always be the case. This can be seen in Matt 27:5 where Judas throws the 30-pieces of silver into the ναός, which certainly refers to the temple precinct and not the Holy of Holies to which he had no access.²¹ Hence, whether Paul narrowly has in mind the Holy of Holies of the Jerusalem Temple when he uses the word ναός in the Corinthians is difficult to sustain.²² On the other hand, ναός could also refer to one of the numerous Greco-Roman temples or shrines found scattering around the city of Corinth. As such, it is best not to assume that when Paul speaks of the community as ναός, the sole referent could only be the Jerusalem Temple.

The first temple imagery appears in 1 Cor 3:16-17 where Paul declares: 'Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you? If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy that person. For God's temple is holy, and you are that temple.' The stern warning against destroying God's temple comes in the midst of a larger rhetorical unit of 1 Cor 1-4 where Paul deals with the issue of dissensions within the community over the nature of leadership as reported to him by Chloe's household (1 Cor 1:10-12).²³ In this context, the Christ-believers are metaphorically referred to as God's temple indwelt by the Holy Spirit. Significantly, this temple imagery is used not to address individual or sub-groups, but the entire community as underscored by the use of plural nouns and verbal forms.

¹⁹ For example, see Archibald Robertson & Alfred Plummer, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the First Epistle of St. Paul to the Corinthians*, 2nd ed. ICC (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1929), 66; Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 146; Anthony C. Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, NIGTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 315.

²⁰ This has been pointed out by Lanci, *A New Temple for Corinth*, 91-93. Cf. John R. Levison, 'The Spirit and the Temple in Paul's Letters to the Corinthians,' in *Paul and His Theology*, ed Stanley E. Porter (Leiden: Brill, 2006), 191 n5.

²¹ Cf. O. Michael, *TDNT* IV, 884. Note also that in *Jos Ag. Ap.* 2.119 and *B.J.* 5.207, ναός and ἱερόν are used interchangeably. See also the use of ναός in John 2:20 that most likely refers to the entire temple precinct rather than the Holy of Holies.

²² As noted in Fee, *First Corinthians*, 146 n 6. However, Fee maintains the distinction in semantic differences in his argument.

²³ The problem of divisions within the Corinthian community is primarily rooted in the manner in which leaders are evaluated based on the prevailing Greco-Roman conventions. See Andrew D. Clarke, *Secular and Christian Leadership in Corinth: A Socio-Historical and Exegetical Study of 1 Corinthians 1-6*, 2nd ed., Paternoster Biblical Monographs (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2006); Timothy B. Savage, *Power through Weakness: Paul's Understanding of the Christian Ministry in 2 Corinthians*, SNTSMS 86 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996); Winter, *After Paul Left Corinth*, 31-43. See also V. Henry T. Nguyen, *Christian Identity in Corinth: A Comparative Study of 2 Corinthians, Epictetus and Valerius Maximus*, WUNT 2/243 (Tübingen, Mohr Siebeck, 2008) and Lim, 'Sufferings of Christ are Abundant in Us', 198.

Moving on to 1 Cor 6:19, Paul once again employs the temple imagery: ‘Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, which you have from God, and that you are not your own?’ In this context, Paul deals with the issue of sexual immorality. By declaring that the Christ-community is the temple of the Holy Spirit, Paul once again emphasizes that their behavior should reflect that of their new status in Christ and be consistent with the presence of God indwelling within them.²⁴

The temple imagery appears for the third time in 2 Cor 6:16: ‘What agreement has the temple of God with idols? For we are the temple of the living God.’ This imagery appears in one of the most debated controversial periscopes in the Corinthian correspondence where its authenticity and integrity have been questioned.²⁵ In addition, this periscope is surrounded by a host of interpretive issues.²⁶ As a result, the use of temple imagery has been somewhat marginalized in the interpretation of this periscope. Whether 2 Cor 6:14-7:1 is a later interpolation or not does not minimize the forceful impact of the temple imagery within this self-contained periscope where Paul exhorts the Corinthians to live up to their status as the temple of God by drawing clear social boundaries for their relationship with those outside the community.

5.0 Christ-Community as Temple Replacement?

It seems that one of the primary motivations for claiming the semantic distinction in the usage of *ναός* and *ἱερόν* as highlighted earlier is to advance the understanding of temple-replacement theology. This is seen in Bertil Gärtner’s work where he argues that the reason *ναός* is chosen over *ἱερόν* is because Paul has in mind that the *Shekinah* presence of God no longer rests on the Jerusalem Temple but is now transferred to the Church who constitutes the true Temple.²⁷ Similarly, Michael Newton, by comparing the notion of purity in the Qumran and Pauline community, argues that Paul’s use of the idea of purity centres upon the view that ‘the believers constitutes the Temple of God and as such enjoy the presence of God in their midst.’²⁸ In light of this, those

²⁴ Fee, *First Corinthians*, 264 argues that Paul applies the temple imagery to individual believers and not the entire community. So Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *First Corinthians*, Yale Anchor Bible 32 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), 269-270. However, this argument may not be that strong if the entire context is taken into consideration. While Paul may have some of the individuals in mind in 1 Cor 6:12-20, his ultimate concern is the entire community. See R. Kempthorne, ‘Incest and the Body of Christ: A Study on 1 Corinthians VI. 12-20,’ *NTS* 14 (1978/8): 568-74; Michael Newton, *The Concept of Purity At Qumran and in the Letters of Paul*, SNTSMS 53 (Cambridge: CUP, 1985), 56-57; D. R. de Lacey, ‘ὄτινές ἐστε ὑμεῖς: The Function of A Metaphor in St Paul,’ in *Templum Amicitiae: Essays on the Second Temple Presented to Ernst Bammel*, JSNTSup 48, ed. William Horbury (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1991), 401-409; Margaret M. Mitchell, *Paul and the Rhetoric of Reconciliation: An Exegetical Investigation of the Language and Composition of 1 Corinthians* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1991), 119.

²⁵ For a survey of scholarship on the integrity and authenticity of 2 Cor 6:14-7:1, see Margaret E. Thrall, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, Vol.1, ICC (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1994), 3-49 and J. Ayodeji Adewuya, *Holiness and Community in 2 Cor 6:14-7:1: Paul’s View of Communal Holiness in the Corinthian Correspondence*, SBL 40 (New York: Peter Lang, 2001), 13-43. For bibliography, see Lim, ‘*The Sufferings of Christ are Abundant in Us*,’ 28-29.

²⁶ See Thrall, *Second Epistle*, I: 25-36. For further discussion, see Murray J. Harris, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, NIGTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 14-25; Victor Paul Furnish, *II Corinthians*, AB (New York: Doubleday, 1984), 375-383.

²⁷ Bertil Gärtner, *The Temple and the Community in Qumran and the New Testament*, SNTSMS (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1965).

²⁸ Michael Newton, *The Concept of Purity At Qumran and in the Letters of Paul*, SNTSMS 53 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 52. See also his discussion in 10-51

who enter this community must observe the standards of purity, distinguishing between the sacred and the profane, the pure and the impure. Like Gärtner, Newton also insists that Paul's choice of *ναός* instead of *ἱερόν* is significant in support for the temple-replacement theology.²⁹

In his work, *The New Temple: The Church in the New Testament*, R. J. McKelvey adopts a biblical theology approach and begins his study by examining the significance of the temple in the OT, Jewish and Greek literature.³⁰ For McKelvey, the eschatological non-literal, spiritual temple 'made without hands has displaced the temple made with hands'³¹ where 'the temple of Jerusalem surrendered its redemptive significance to Christ and his church and thereby dropped out of the plan of God.'³² This temple-replacement theology takes on its full development in texts like 1 Cor 3:16-17; 6:19; 2 Cor 16:7:1; Eph 2:20-22; 2 Cor 5:1-5; 1 Pet 4:17; 1 Tim 3:15 and numerous texts in Revelation, amongst others.³³

In his massive work on the biblical theology of the temple, Greg Beale traces the development of the notion of temple from both the Old and New Testaments.³⁴ Beale demonstrates that the OT never called for a new temple to be built. In fact, Beale argues that the 'the Old Testament tabernacle and temples were symbolically designed to point to the cosmic eschatological reality that God's tabernacling presence, formerly limited to the holy of holies, was to be extended throughout the whole earth.'³⁵ For Beale, the physical temple is to disappear only to be replaced by a literal nonphysical temple, the Church, which is 'fulfillment of the end-time temple prophesied in the Old Testament.'³⁶

From this brief survey, there appears to be an overwhelming support for the understanding that Paul's use of the temple imagery is rooted in the notion that the church has now replaced the Jerusalem Temple.³⁷ The primary assumption is that the sole reference point for Paul's use of temple imagery is rooted in his Jewish eschatological understanding and association with the Jerusalem temple cult. As McKelvey clearly puts it, Paul, as an 'orthodox Jew by upbringing... did not and could not think of many temples, but of one.'³⁸ Lanci has taken issue with this problematic reading by suggesting that the Jewish temple cult also bears several resemblances to gentile cultic practices, and often, it is difficult to determine whether Paul is

²⁹ Newton, *The Concept of Purity At Qumran*, 53-59.

³⁰ R. J. McKelvey, *The New Temple: The Church in the New Testament* (Oxford: OUP, 1969).

³¹ McKelvey, *The New Temple*, 74.

³² McKelvey, *The New Temple*, 75. See also his discussion in 75-91.

³³ See McKelvey, *The New Temple*, 92-178.

³⁴ G. K. Beale, *The Temple and the Church's Mission: A Biblical Theology of the Dwelling Place of God*, NSBT 17 (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2004).

³⁵ Beale, *The Temple and the Church's Mission*, 25.

³⁶ Beale, *The Temple and the Church's Mission*, 253. See also his exposition in 253-59.

³⁷ This reading also finds wide support in commentaries. For example, Graydon F. Snyder, *First Corinthians: A Faith Community Commentary* (Macon: Mercer University Press, 1992), 41-42: 'the faith community has now replaced the Jewish temple... the movement from Jewish temple to Christian faith community became an absolute necessity for the first Christians.' See also Timothy Scott Wardle, 'Continuity and Discontinuity: The Temple and Early Christian Identity,' PhD dissertation (Duke University, 2008).

³⁸ McKelvey, *The New Temple*, 106.

specifically referring to Jewish or gentile religious traditions.³⁹ This is further supported by Malina: ‘The Corinthians need not be concerned about the Jerusalem Temple or pilgrimage or whatever is bound up with Israelite Temple worship, since what that temple offers can be experienced in their gathering.’⁴⁰ Furthermore, while comparative studies between Paul’s use of temple imagery and wider temple theology in the OT, contemporary Judaism and Qumran scrolls may have yielded significant results, they unfortunately reduce the temple imagery into a survey of parallels or connection of ideas through usage of certain catch words.⁴¹ In addition, attempts to explain the use of temple imagery from a biblical theology approach often fails to take into account the context of the passage and how the use of the temple imagery would have meant to Paul’s audience and leaves the significance of the temple imagery grossly undervalued in the minds of the recipients. For useful means of communication and for the full force of the imagery to be felt, it is crucial that both the author using the imagery and recipients reading or hearing the imagery should be able to give the imagery the same content. But if discrepancy in understanding the imagery occurs, then both parties might be speaking in two different languages. As such, it is essential that in using the temple imagery, Paul would have to ensure that it conveys the message that is not only clear to the predominant gentile Christ-community but also one they are able to readily identify with.

6.0 Power of Imagery

The power of imagery lies not only in the mind of the author but also how the audience understands and interprets the imagery within their symbolic universe. The Christ-community in Corinth not only originates from a pagan background but continues to live in an environment where temple architecture and buildings still greet them daily. Furthermore, participation in temple worship and related activities continues to be part of their lifestyle as highlighted earlier. This clearly establishes that the symbolic universe of the Christ-community remains aligned and associated to the pagan temples. As such, it is reasonable to assume that any mention of ‘God’s temple’ would naturally conjure up the reality that is closest and most familiar to the gentile Christ-believers. This reality is almost certainly the pagan temples in Corinth and not the Jerusalem Temple that appears to be far removed from their reality. As such, an understanding of temple-replacement theology operative in the mind of the gentile believers living under the shadow of the pagan temples would not only appear to be odd but also remote.

Similarly, the Christ-believers coming from a temple based Chinese religions, who continue to live under the shadow of the temples, would most likely resonate with the Corinthian believers. As such, we may raise the following questions: If temples in the Greco-Roman world are seen as a powerful symbols and expression of the identity of the adherents, what role does the temple imagery play in the formation of Christian identity and the transformation of the Christ-believers in light of the truth of the gospel of Christ?

³⁹ For a brief survey of scholarship that challenges the notion of temple replacement theology, see Lanci, *A New Temple for Corinth*, 7-23, especially 11-13. See also Hogeterp, *Paul and God’s Temple*, 271-378.

⁴⁰ Bruce J. Malina & John J. Pilch, *Social Science Commentary on the Letters of Paul* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 2006), 75.

⁴¹ This is seen prominently in Beale’s *The Temple and the Church’s Mission*.

7.0 Paul's Use of Temple Imagery in the Formation of Christian Identity

I will employ the theory of social identity formation as part of the interpretative framework in investigating Paul's use of the temple imagery in the Corinthian correspondence. According to Henri Tajfel, social identity process primarily involves three dimensions in establishing the ethos, values, status, and boundaries for a particular group as against other groups in a society - the cognitive, emotional and evaluative dimensions.⁴² The cognitive dimension provides the group members with a strong sense of belonging and distinctiveness as compared to other groups. The emotional dimension brings various rituals and practices to enhance the emotional ties in group dynamics to establish a strong sense of solidarity, identity, and belonging to the group. The evaluative dimension deals with how the members within the group rate themselves in relation to other groups. This social identity formation theory initially developed by Tajfel and further explored by John Turner, has been widely employed in Pauline studies.⁴³

7.1 Cognitive Dimension – Temple as Unifying Symbol

In the first use of the temple imagery in 1 Cor 3:16-17, Paul begins with a rhetorical question: Οὐκ οἴδατε ὅτι ναὸς θεοῦ ἐστε καὶ τὸ πνεῦμα τοῦ θεοῦ οἰκεῖ ἐν ὑμῖν.⁴⁴ Interestingly, similar construction is also found in 1 Cor 6:16 where the temple imagery appears for the second time: οὐκ οἴδατε ὅτι ὁ κολλώμενος τῇ πόρῃ ἐν σῶμά ἐστιν. William Wuellner suggests that rhetorical questions beginning with οὐκ οἴδατε function to increase adherence to what is already accepted in the community.⁴⁵ If Wuellner is right, then it strongly suggests that Paul's use of temple imagery here is of utmost significance and importance. By using the οὐκ οἴδατε construction, Paul is not advocating a new teaching nor reiterating anything that the Corinthians are not aware of. On the contrary, he is reinforcing what they already know - that they God's temple. At the same time, the οὐκ οἴδατε construction may also imply a rebuke⁴⁶ for their failure to comprehend this truth. As such, the temple imagery is not simply a convenient rhetorical device that Paul employs; instead, it is a deliberate and calculated attempt to reinforce the truth of the gospel by appealing to the religious reality that the Corinthians believers are not only familiar with but whose importance in their existence cannot be denied.

Considered as centre of the universe or icons of the world, temples in the Greco-Roman world are central to the life and experience of the city dwellers. Pausanias

⁴² Henri Tajfel, *Differentiation between Social Groups: Studies in the Social Psychology of Intergroup Relations*. European Monographs in Social Psychology, 14 (London: Academic Press, 1978), 28.

⁴³ For example, see Philip F. Esler, *Conflict and Identity in Romans: The Social Setting of Paul's Letters* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2003); Alistair Scott May, *'The Body for the Lord': Sex and Identity in 1 Corinthians 5-7*, JSNTSup 278 (London: T&T Clark, 2004); Daniel K. Darko, *No Longer Living as the Gentiles: Differentiation and Shared Ethical Values in Ephesians 4.17-6.9*, LNTS 375 (London: T&T Clark, 2008); and Tucker, 'You Belong to Christ'. For reviews of recent scholarship on social identity in Pauline studies, see Tucker, 'You Belong to Christ', 87-124. For various approaches in exploring Christian identity, see the collected essays in Bengt Holmberg, ed., *Exploring Early Christian Identity*, WUNT 226 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008).

⁴⁴ This is the first in a series of 10 rhetorical questions in 1 Corinthians that begins with οὐκ οἴδατε. See 1 Cor 5:6; 6:2, 3, 9, 15, 16, 19; 9:13, 24.

⁴⁵ William Wuellner, 'Paul as Pastor: The Function of Rhetorical Questions in First Corinthians,' in *L'Apôtre Paul: Personnalité, style et conception du ministère*, BETL 73, ed. A. Vanhoye (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1986), 60.

⁴⁶ Robertson and Plummer, *First Corinthians*, 66.

refers to the sanctuary of Apollos at Dephi as the *Omphalos* or navel of the world.⁴⁷ Livy describes the Capitol in Rome as the stronghold of empire and the head of the world.⁴⁸ Tacitus further describes the Capitol as a temple that is founded as the symbol of imperial greatness and its origin, building and dedication are considered as part of the Roman heritage.⁴⁹ The Parthenon in Athens, the temple of Zeus in Olympia, and the temple of Artemis in Ephesus are testimonies of the centrality of temple in the civic life of the Greco-Roman world.

Temples typically occupy prominent and often elevated ground in the most strategic location of the city. The structures are very elaborate and imposing, and are buildings that first greet the eyes of visitors making their travel or pilgrimage to the cities.⁵⁰ Apart from being places of dwelling for the deities⁵¹ and for cultic activities, temples also play significant roles in the communal development of the society where they function as meeting and dining places for social gatherings. They also offered a resting place for weary travelers. Temples are also major contribution to the economic growth and prosperity of cities.⁵² Apart from the cultic, social and economic functions, the Roman Empire also added another dimension to the function of the temples where officially sanctioned temples also served to advance the political propoganda of the Empire.⁵³

Participation in temple rites not only cement the relationship between the deities and the adherents, but it also serve to bind all classes of the city together.⁵⁴ In Corinth, the temple of Aphrodite played a very significant role in the civic life and identity of the city. Throughout the classical period, the city of Corinth was known as Aphrodite's city.⁵⁵ As such, temples not only define the existence of the community but also symbolize the unity of the community. They also serve as 'vehicle for promoting central systems of values which served to hold ancient societies together.'⁵⁶ As such, temples - and not palaces, town halls, commercial buildings - that are the most important structures and major source of pride of the civic society.

⁴⁷ Pausanias, *Description of Greece*, 10.16.3. Interestingly, Jerusalem is also considered as the navel of the country for the Jews. See *Jos B.J.* 3.52.

⁴⁸ Livy, *History of Rome*, 1.55.5-6.

⁴⁹ Tacitus, *Hist*, 3.72.

⁵⁰ For discussion on architecture for temples in ancient Greek, see John Pedley, *Sanctuaries and the Sacred in the Ancient Greek World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 57-77. See also Eric M. Orlin, *Temples, Religion and Politics in the Roman Republic* (Leiden: Brill, 1997).

⁵¹ For Greek understanding that temple function as the house of God, see Walter Burkert, 'The Meaning and Function of the Temple in Classical Greek,' in *Temple in Society*, ed. Michael V. Fox (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1988), 29-31.

⁵² Acts 19:8-41 portrays the temple of Artemis as representing the wealth, power, status, and influence within the community and the wider world. It is also the economic engine that supports the city's wealth and employment (Acts 19:23-25).

⁵³ For further discussion on functions of Greek and Roman temples, see Lanci, *A New Temple for Corinth*, 95-104. See also Burkert 'The Meaning and Function of the Temple,' 39-44; John Pedley, *Sanctuaries and the Sacred in the Ancient Greek World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005) and Ron C. Fay, 'Greco-Roman Concepts of Deity,' in *Paul's World*, Pauline Studies 4, ed. Stanley E. Porter (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 51-79.

⁵⁴ Pedley, *Sanctuaries and the Sacred*, 11.

⁵⁵ Strabo, *Geography* 8.6.20c, 21b, describes Corinth as the sacred city of Aphrodite. While this description may have referred to the pre-146 BCE city and not the Roman Corinth Paul's visited, it nevertheless underscores the importance of the temple as unifying symbol of the city.

⁵⁶ Lanci, *A New Temple for Corinth*, 104. See also Burkert, 'The Meaning and Function of the Temple,' 39-44.

Likewise, the same could be said of Malaysian Chinese Christ-believers, who could easily identify with the function of the temple as unifying symbol. The notion of filial piety and ancestral worship practised within the temples of large-scale Chinese clan associations serve to unite the entire clan and also function as a symbol of unity and strength of the clan to those outside the community. As such, Paul's use of temple imagery is not merely a serious reminder to Christ-believers about the importance of temples in their symbolic universe, it also constitutes nothing less than a frontal critique of their failure to appreciate and comprehend what a temple should be and all that it represents. Rather than appropriating the unifying presence of Christ to bind them together as a powerful and attractive icon to the immediate society and beyond where the values aligned to the gospel of Christ could be promoted, the Corinthians have allowed their dissensions to create divisive provincialism and dire damage to the temple of God. Instead of building up the temple of God that would have defined their identity in Christ, the Corinthians are going the opposite direction in destroying the temple. In Paul's eyes, these acts of causing dissensions are not merely casual, but criminal.⁵⁷ As such, for failing to remember the symbolism of temples, only the severe penalty that corresponds with the seriousness of the crime awaits them (1 Cor 3:17). This reading also serves as a reminder to the Chinese Christ-believers in Malaysia of the crucial importance of the need to remain united as a body of Christ, and any dissensions and divisions are to be avoided for the sake of the gospel.

7.2 Emotive Dimension: Temple Destruction and Desecration

Since temples define the existence of the community, any destruction of an iconic symbol that fosters the self-definition, pride, and identity of the community is viewed as a shameful and despicable act of desecration. Tacitus describes the destruction of the Capitol in Rome which brought the entire city into chaos as 'the most deplorable and disgraceful event that had happened to the Commonwealth of Rome since the foundation of the city.'⁵⁸ As the stronghold of the empire and the head of the world,⁵⁹ its destruction is tantamount to the destruction of the metaphorical head of the government.

Paul picks up this notion in his warning to the Corinthians in 1 Cor 3:17 where he declares, 'If anyone destroys (φθείρει) God's temple, God will destroy (φθερεί) that person.' What does Paul mean when he uses the word φθείρω? Lanci argues that φθείρω refers to ruin or damage⁶⁰ while Shanor contends that it refers to damage done to a building under construction and that Paul never intends it to refer to complete destruction.⁶¹ Garland rightly points out that this interpretation fails to appreciate Paul's use of metaphor.⁶² In this context, Paul is issuing a stern warning to the Corinthians. Two interesting facts are to be noted in Paul's language of temple destruction in 1 Cor 3:16-17. First, Paul is not talking about the temple being destroyed by the enemies or outsiders, but by the devotees themselves. Second, the

⁵⁷ Levison, 'The Spirit and the Temple,' 192.

⁵⁸ Tacitus, *Hist*, 3.72.

⁵⁹ Livy, *History of Rome*, 1.55.5-6.

⁶⁰ Lanci, *A New Temple for Corinth*, 67-68

⁶¹ Jay Shanor, 'Paul as Master Builder: Construction Terms in First Corinthians,' *NTS* 33 (1988): 470-71.

⁶² Garland, *1 Corinthians*, 120.

language of destruction in 1 Cor 3:17 stands in sharp contrast with the flow of Paul's argument in 1 Cor 3:10-15 where the imagery of construction is employed to describe the building of the temple of God that constitutes the people of God.⁶³ This contrast is further amplified in 1 Cor 6:19 where Paul appeals to the temple imagery in rebuking the Corinthians for desecrating it by participation in sexual immorality. Therefore, the impact of Paul's rhetoric and the force of the temple imagery can be strongly felt. Paul could not have made it clearer that any destruction to God's temple is tantamount to a serious offence and a sacrilegious act of desecration, and this warrants a corresponding severe penalty of divine judgement of destruction.

It is interesting to note that this announcement of severe punishment appears in a series of failures of the Christ-believers – the adultery involving a person's father's wife (1 Cor 5:1-13); lawsuits among believers (1 Cor 6:1-8); visiting prostitutes (1 Cor 6:9-20); marriage and divorce (1 Cor 7); consuming idol food (1 Cor 8-10); chaos in worship (1 Cor 11:2-14:40); and possible doctrinal error (1 Cor 15) – but none evokes such severe penalty. This penalty of divine judgement is extraordinary. Even an act that outstrips the most outrageous pagan sexual practice only receives the penalty of temporary ostracism from the community (1 Cor 5:1-8). But those who divide the church are subject to a severe divine judgment, an act that not only underscores the seriousness of the offence but creates a deep sense of shock to the hearers and serves as a stern warning for those who deliberately attempt to cause dissensions in the community.

By publicly declaring their failures, Paul is shaming the Corinthians. The divisions of the Corinthian community into numerous parties contradict the unity of the one Temple in which God chooses to dwell through his Spirit. Instead of building up the temple that could be a source of pride and identity for the Christ-believers, their practices of competitive partisanship (1:10-13); boastful arrogance boasting (1:29, 3:21; 4:7); jealousy and strife (3:3), on the contrary, have contributed to the destruction of the temple. Paul allows his readers to imagine that their own actions are not only incompatible with the ethos of their existence as a temple of God but also undermine the survival of this fledgling community.

As such, Paul's use of the temple imagery speaks of shame, horror, and shock that are beyond words. This imagery conjures up a very powerful visual appealing to the emotive dimensions of the Corinthians, causing them to pause and reflect on how far they have fallen short of their error in causing dissensions in the community. It is a harsh imagery that summons miserable memory of temple destruction. By calling the community to function in a way that is similar to the way temples in the Greco-Roman world would have functioned, Paul is able to underscore the fact that the temple of the deities serves as a powerful symbol of the unity existed between the deity and the worshippers. It also powerfully conveys the message of how serious their error is that in their own internal strife, they have forgotten the common good that they should uphold. Like all Greek temples where the deity dwells, the temple of God that Paul envisions in the Corinthian community is also one that is indwelt by the

⁶³ For the argument that the building imagery in 1 Cor 3:10-15 constitutes the construction of God's temple that climaxes at 1 Cor 3:16-17, see Levison, 'The Spirit and the Temple,' 193; Mitchell, *Paul and the Rhetoric of Reconciliation*, 99-105; Hogeterp, *Paul and God's Temple*, 311-331.

Holy Spirit.⁶⁴ By using this imagery, Paul is realigning the Corinthians into the new symbolic world of the gospel he proclaims. Paul is certainly very concerned that the temple he has been building (cf. 1 Cor 3:10-15) is now being destroyed by the Corinthians. To bring home the seriousness of the actions of the Corinthians in dividing themselves into factions, Paul declares that the inevitable act of judgement would inescapably fall on them as the very punishment from God.

Similarly, the same could be said to the context of the Christ-believing community in Malaysia. As religious practice, culture and ethnicity are closely interwoven in Malaysia, any hint of the destruction of the temple of a particular religious faith is also seen as a direct confrontation and attack against the particular ethnic group. This imagery of temple destruction would have evoked in the mind of the Chinese believers of the seriousness of any deliberate negligence and error in causing divisions. Any hint of temple destruction is tantamount to the despicable act of temple desecration and deserve nothing less than severe punishment.

7.3 Evaluative Dimension – Temple Purity and Holiness

In 1 Cor 6:12-20, Paul expresses his concern that the Christ-believers are still behaving like the society surrounding them with some justifying their sexual immorality practices as ‘all things are lawful for me’ (6:12). In order to emphasize the seriousness of this immoral relationship, Paul appeals to the temple imagery in 6:19: ‘Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God?’ As I have argued earlier, Paul’s use of οὐκ ὀΰδατε is to underscore that the Corinthians are already aware that they are the temple of God.

It is also interesting to note elsewhere in this letter, Paul advocates that believing spouses are to remain with unbelieving spouses in order to make the unbelieving partners holy (1 Cor 7:12-16). In other words, Paul believes the Christ-community is intended to make those who are outsiders holy. But the direct opposite is now taking place where the believers are now polluting themselves by uniting themselves with prostitutes by means of illicit sexual activity, and thereby further polluting the Christ-community. As such, Paul appeals to the temple imagery by imposing the holiness boundary as one of the critical pillars of the community self-understanding and self-definition for the Christ-believers.

Moving on to 2 Cor 6:14-7:1, the theme of holiness emerged with greater intensity with Paul’s charging the believers as ‘unequally yoked’ with those outside the Christ-community. To provoke the Corinthians to evaluate their relationship with the outsiders, Paul once again appeals to the temple imagery by declaring in 2 Cor 6:16: ‘For we are the temple of the living God.’ It is interesting to note that Paul’s use of the temple imagery comes immediately after a series of five rhetorical questions formulated in an antithetical fashion that demonstrates the incompatibility of relationships between Christ-believers and pagans. Each pair on each side of the antitheses speaks of the mutually exclusive relationships standing in direct and stark

⁶⁴ Cf. Thiselton, *First Corinthians*, 474-75. ‘The universal presence of images of the deities in Graeco-Roman temples would have made the principle more vivid to first-century readers...and Paul declares that the very person of the Holy Spirit of God, by parity of reasoning, stands to the totality of the bodily, everyday life of the believer...in the same relation of influence and molding of identity as the images of deities in pagan temples.’

opposition between the ‘insider’ and ‘outsider’ respectively as seen in the following diagram:

righteousness	against	lawlessness
light	against	darkness
Christ	against	Beliar
believers	against	unbelievers
temple of God	against	temple of idols

The declaration that the Christ-believers are the temple of God in 2 Cor 6:16 further justifies the segregation of incompatible relationships. This is further elaborated by a direct command (2 Cor 6:17-18) and an exhortation to purity and holiness (2 Cor 7:1).

Paul’s language here clearly highlights the fact that the more positively the outsiders is valued, the more positive conformity with them is valued. As noted by Barnett: ‘it is precisely at the point where that “temple” meets the culture of “idols” in the Gentile metropolis of Corinth that the challenge to compromise and syncretism becomes most painful, and to which the Corinthians are in danger of succumbing.’⁶⁵ As can be seen from Paul’s call to preserve purity of the community by expelling the sinful brother (1 Cor 5:1-13) and shunning sexual immorality (1 Cor 6:18), it is evident that purity and holiness are the social boundaries that define the Corinthians believers from the rest of the society.⁶⁶ As such, Paul’s urgent tone suggests there is a pressing call for the immediate need to correct the behavior of the Christ-believers. Already there are disunity and dissention and numerous problems and issues of non-conformity affecting the unrepentant and recalcitrant community that is summed up in 2 Cor 12:20-21. Paul cannot afford to allow the non-conformity of those Christ-believers to continue persistently. Thus Paul makes a desperate cry by appealing to the temple imagery to urge the believers to align themselves to the value of the gospel of Christ, without which, the very existence of the Christ-community as an alternative assembly would be at stake, severely challenged, and its witness severely compromised.

In using the temple imagery, Paul is differentiating his audience from the surrounding society by promoting positive group identity and moral standards that are compatible with their new status in Christ.⁶⁷ According to Pickett, Paul’s use of cultic language emphasizes that only certain patterns of behavior are congruous with the identity conferred by this language.⁶⁸ As such, the temple must remain pure if God is to be present, and this means that the members must preserve strict standards of behavior that reflects the attributes of the dwelling deity. In this respect, Paul is challenging the Corinthians to evaluate their relationships with the outsiders. It is worthwhile observing that Paul casts his opinion of the outsiders in 2 Cor 6:14-7:1 in an extreme negative and condescending manner. This only magnifies Paul’s rhetorical force in highlighting the fact that he now has reasons to believe that the Corinthians have given up their quest for holiness with a passion for the unholy. It is these faults that

⁶⁵ Paul Barnett, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 351.

⁶⁶ For discussion on Paul laying down conditions for the maintenance to preserve purity of the community as a temple of God, see Newton, *The Concept of Purity At Qumran*, 79-114.

⁶⁷ Cf. Jerome H. Neyrey, *Paul, in Other Words: A Cultural Reading of his Letters* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1990), 96-97.

⁶⁸ Raymond Pickett, *The Cross in Corinth: The Social Significance of the Death of Jesus*, JSNTSup 143 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997), 92.

the temple metaphor so acutely addresses and drives home the point that the temple of God evokes an image of a community of holiness that is aligned to a holy God, a community comprising Christ-believers who devote themselves to God and to one another, and a community that is distinct and unlike the other communities existing in Corinth – and these are the standards that the Christ-community has failed to live up to.

The temples built by different association clans and the notion of ancestral worship in Malaysia rightly serve as sober reminders of the importance to uphold the good name of one's ancestors and family name. Any actions that bring shame to the honour of one's family are to be rejected and frowned upon. Likewise, the Chinese Christ-community as the temple of God should also uphold the good name of Christ. One's character, attitude and behavior should also rightly reflect the very nature of the gospel of Christ that one believes in. Any failure to live up to this standard is to bring shame to the gospel and the name of Christ.

8.0 Conclusion

By employing the temple imagery in the Corinthian correspondence, Paul creatively draws on the previous symbolic universe of the Christ-community and uses it powerfully in his appeal to realign the community to the ethos of the gospel of Christ in the formation of a distinct Christian identity. What emerges from Paul's use of the temple imagery is a vivid and extraordinary image that holds together a number of different notions such as community identity, the building up of community, and the appearance of the community to the outsiders. For Paul, what identifies the Christ-community and what will identify it to the outside world is the fact that this community is a unified community, a holy community, a distinct community being set apart from the surrounding society – one that is transformed by the gospel of Christ. Paul's vision in creating an authentic Christian identity rooted in this gospel is for the ultimate purpose that this Christ-community will serve both as an attraction and invitation to those outside of it, and thus preventing it from being conformed to the value systems of this world. This very vision of Paul remains the same for the Chinese Christ-believers in Malaysia.

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