Evangelical Review of Theology

GENERAL EDITOR: THOMAS SCHIRRMACHER

Volume 35 · Number 3 · July 2011

Articles and book reviews reflecting global evangelical theology for the purpose of discerning the obedience of faith

Published by

Paternoster:
thinking faith

WEA
World Evangelical Alliance
Theological Commission

for
WORLD EVANGELICAL ALLIANCE
Theological Commission

ERT (2011) 35:2, 276-287

Confirming the Christian Scholar and Theological Educator's Identity through New Testament Metaphor

John M. Hitchen

KEYWORDS: *Servant leadership, church, apostle, Pharisee, scribe,* Hupēretes*, custodian, manager*

WHO AM I AS A CHRISTIAN scholar or theological educator? The way we understand ourselves, and are understood by those we influence, can be a vital factor in determining the nature and extent of that influence. As the apostle Paul addressed the issues facing the Corinthian church he gave particular attention to perceptions of their theological leaders and teachers. Paul had diagnosed two problems: the Corinthians were stunted in their spiritual growth—still fundamentally immature; and sadly divided by petty jealousy and inter-party quarrelling (1 Cor. 3:1-4). Paul warned they were still 'fleshly' or worldly, mimicking the values of their surrounding culture; like mere humans, 'behaving in a secular fashion', as Andrew Clarke puts it.[1] This paper focuses on one feature of the way the apostle responded to these Corinthian issues.[2]

1 Corinthians 3-4 suggests that to overcome worldly immaturity and disunity amongst Christians requires clear thinking about those who teach and lead the church. For the apostle, inappropriate perceptions of Christian scholars, teachers and leaders, contribute to division and keep believers as mere babes in spiritual experience. In these chapters Paul drew attention repeatedly to the Corinthians' thinking about their teachers: 'What then is Apollos, What is Paul?' (1 Cor.3:5);

1 Andrew D. Clarke, *Secular and Christian Leadership in Corinth: A Socio-Historical and Exegetical Study of 1 Corinthians 1-6* (Leiden: Brill, 1993), 110.

2 See Clarke, *Secular & Christian Leadership*, 109-118 for a careful study of the problems.

***John M. Hitchen**, (PhD Aberdeen), is Senior Lecturer in Mission Studies, Laidlaw College and Laidlaw-Carey Graduate School, Auckland, New Zealand and was formerly National Principal. Earlier he served as Dean and Principal of the Christian Leaders' Training College, Papua New Guinea and his doctoral research focused 19th Century mission in the Pacific. His publications include 'The Missional, Multi-ethnic Nature of the Church', in Bruce Patrick (Ed.),* New Vision New Zealand: Volume III, 2008*, and 'What It Means To Be An Evangelical Today—An Antipodean Perspective',* Evangelical Quarterly *76:1 (Jan 2004), and 76:2 (April 2004).*

'Let no one boast about human leaders' (3:21); 'This, then, is how you ought to regard us…,' (4:1); 'I have applied all this to Apollos and myself for your benefit…,' (4:6).[3] As Gordon Fee says succinctly, 'At issue is their radically misguided perception of the nature of the church and its leadership, in this case especially the role of the teachers.'[4]

We want to take up this apostolic clue as it applies to the role of Christian scholars and theological educators as leaders, opinion formers and teachers within the Christian community. The apostle's argument in 1 Corinthians 3-4 suggests our self-understanding as Christian scholars, and the perceptions attributed to us by those we influence as educators, can promote vital growth to maturity and unity, or they can hinder such proper development in our spheres of influence. We pursue our exploration in three steps, first surveying the dominical background in Jesus' attitude to theological scholars, then tracing Luke's development of one particular metaphor for the scholarly task, before reaching the apostle Paul's mature application of that same metaphor to address the identified problems at Corinth.

I The Dominical Background:

Jesus Challenges Theological Scholars of His Day

In Jesus' day, a well recognised group of Jewish theological scholars was responsible for interpreting and preserving the theological and religious writings of their people. They taught the principles and requirements of those writings. They served as legal specialists in applying the writings to daily life, and some, at least, studied the writings for a better understanding of their theological content. They are spoken of often in the Gospels. Older English Bible versions call them, the 'scribes'; or in more recent versions, 'lawyers', or 'teachers of the law'—the '*grammateus*' word-group in Greek.[5]

a) The 'Bad Press' of the Scribes in the Gospels.

While the level of critique varies between the Gospel writers, as Twelftree shows,[6] the overall impression is that the scribes consistently opposed Jesus: by questioning his grasp of the Law and his credentials as a teacher; criticizing his social connections and failure to maintain ritual purity; plotting to destroy him after he cleansed the Temple; and even scoffing as he died on the cross (e.g., Mk.2:6, 16; 3:22; 11:18.27; 15:1, 31). This kind of theological scholar, common in Jesus' day, whatever their status in Judaism, from the perspective of the Gospels, was not very highly esteemed because of their traditionalism and basic refusal to accept the way of Jesus.

3 Biblical quotations throughout this paper are from the TNIV

4 Gordon Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* [NICNT] (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1987), 128.

5 G. H.Twelftree, 'Scribes', in Joel B. Green & Scot McKnight (Eds.), *Dictionary of Jesus & the Gospels* (Downers Grove, Ill: Intervarsity, 1992), 732-35.

6 Twelftree, 'Scribes', 734-35.

b) Jesus' critique and response to the Scribes.

Jesus criticises the scribes in his teaching—challenging their use of the Law, desire for status, and manipulation of their followers (e.g., Mk.12:35-40). His most stringent critique links the scribes with the Pharisees in Matthew 23. While respecting the dignity of their role as Moses' interpreters, Jesus upbraids them for hypocrisy, self-serving abuse of their influence, selfish ambition and distortion of the intention of the word of God. It would be easy to assume Jesus opposed scholarship and the profession dedicated to the theological version of it, if that was as far as it went. But there is another aspect to Jesus' view of such scholarly work. As his critique of these scribes reaches its climax, Matthew 13:33-34 reads: 'You snakes! You brood of vipers! How will you escape being condemned to hell? Therefore I am sending you prophets, and sages and scribes. Some of them you will kill and crucify; others you will flog in your synagogues and pursue from town to town…'

Jesus' final response to scribes who have gone so seriously wrong was to send another kind of spokesperson, wise persons and learned scribes whose message and meekness will be so radically different that the usual scribes will react in violent persecution. Jesus opposed the wrong kind of theological scholarship, not theological scholarship as such. His counter strategy specifically included a new kind of scribe amongst those he commissions to continue his work, even though their learning and lifestyle will provoke costly opposition and persecution. This new genre of scribes and wise people will have a special role in his ongoing mission. The kingly rule of Christ depends on the contribution of gifted theological scholars responsive to the commissioning and deployment purposes of their new King.

c) Distinctives of the new Christ-ruled scribe.

Jesus had developed this idea of a new kind of scribe in his concluding 'parable of the kingdom,' in Matthew 13:52.[7] The parable focuses on scribes who have been discipled for, by, or in the Kingdom of Heaven. This discipling involves 'recognition of the revelation [Jesus] is and brings, and submission to the reign he inaugurates and promises'.[8] Once transformed in this way, this new kind of scholar is, 'like a household head—an *oikodespotes*—bringing treasure out of his store—both old and new' (Matt.13:52).

The metaphor of this parable likens the task of theological scholarship to filling a household storeroom with a rich supply of insight, experience and lessons, for maintaining and enhancing the daily lives of the whole household. Christian scholar/educators, like the wise household head, through the kingdom-oriented discipleship process, 'bring out of [their] storeroom new treasures as well as old'.

---

7 While recognising the strength of other views, we accept this verse as one of Jesus' parables, not a concluding addition of Matthew's, as set out by D.A. Carson, *The Expositor's Bible Commentary, Volume 8, Matthew, Mark, Luke* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1984), 303-4.

8 Carson, Expositor's *Bible Commentary, Volume 8*, 333.

They are now equipped with a sense of history. With Christ as King all their previous experience, cultural heritage and learning become potential resources to supply the household needs. They are now alert with a sense of the timeliness and appropriateness of different teachings, recognising how to draw on their varied 'stores' of experience, study and learning to suit each new situation. They now sense the value and relevance of both the old wisdom and the ever growing stores of new experiences and insights from their study and life-reflection now guided by the Spirit of God. No longer able merely to offer old, traditional material, they now discern the cutting edge priority of both old and new truths and lessons for their present contexts.

So Jesus' ministry has confronted the old patterns of theological scholarship and presented a challenge to renew and reclaim that scholarly task for its real purpose, fulfilling the missional intention of the King of Kings. But Jesus is under no illusion and warns about the cost involved in such commissioned and obedient scholarship.

II The Lukan Development:

Christian Scholars as Custodian-Servants—the *Hupēretes* Metaphor

Luke develops the household context in a different direction, taking up the Greek term *hupēretēs* and associating it with the scholarly task. The meaning of this *hupēretēs* term needs clarifying, as does how it relates to other words with which it is associated in the New Testament.

Rengstorf, in his definitive article explains, 'The noun *hupēretēs* is always used in a general sense similar to that of classical and Hellenistic Greek [to mean]: "assistant to another as the instrument of his will".'[9] Thus the term belongs with other words for servants: like a household servant, *diakonos*; farm labourer, *sunergos*; and a household steward, *oikonomos* all of which, like *hupēretēs*, appear in the 1 Corinthians 3-4 passage to which we shall return.

a) But what is distinctive about a *hupēretēs*?

Many nineteenth and twentieth Century scholars analysed the term etymologically and suggested its component root and prefix mean the *hupēretēs* was an 'under-rower' as, for instance, in the crew of the trireme—the third, lowest row of rowers propelling ancient warships.[10] But this explanation is seriously flawed. As Don Carson has shown conclusively, the word never has this 'assistant rower' connotation in any clear ancient reference, and there is no evidence of the word being used in that way in New Testament times.[11]

---

9 Karl Heinrich Rengstorf, 'Hupēretēs, hupēreteō', in Freidrich Gerhard (Ed), *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, Vol VIII (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1972), 539.

10 See, e.g., William Barclay, *New Testament Words* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1975); Leon Morris, *The First Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians* [TNTC] (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1958), 74.

11 Donald A Carson, *Exegetical Fallacies* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1984), 26-28. I acknowledge the advice of my colleague, David Kirkby, in finding this Carson material.

12 Rengstorf, *TDNT* Vol VIII, 539.

So, even if this means, as it did for me, discarding favourite sermon illustrations, this should no longer be taken as the basic meaning of *hupēretēs*. Rather, Rengstorf advises: '…the specific function of a *hupēretēs* is to be gleaned from the context in which it appears. This is true at any rate in most of the NT instances'.[12]

The term *hupēretēs* is sometimes used in a common, everyday sense. Luke and John both use the word nine times, and Mark and Matthew twice each. In most of these the *hupēretēs* is sent by an authority figure—a judge (Mt. 5:25f), the 'Chief Priest' (Mt. 26:58), or 'Chief Priests and Pharisees' (Jn 7:32,45f; Ac.5:22, 26), etc.,—to follow out their commands. So this everyday usage normally refers to 'the [armed] servant of someone in authority'.[13]

But it is noteworthy that each of these references also carries the idea of a 'guard', 'warder', or 'security or custody officer' of some official. Before Pilate, Jesus uses the term in the plural when he says: 'My kingdom is not of this world, if it were, my *hupēretai* would fight to prevent my arrest by the Jewish leaders. But now my kingdom is from another place.' In this passage, we could translate *hupēretai* by 'bodyguards' or 'minders' to bring out the emphasis Jesus intends. This 'custodian' or 'caretaker' function appears important in the Gospel uses of *hupēretēs*.

In Luke 4:20 the attendant in the Nazareth Synagogue, to whom Jesus returns the Isaiah Scroll after reading from it, is designated a *hupēretēs*. Describing procedures in the Jewish Synagogues of New Testament times, Yamauchi explains:

> The *hazzan* [Heb.] or "attendant" was the one who took care of the Scripture scrolls. Jesus gave back the Isaiah scroll to such an attendant (Gk, *hupēretēs*)… in later practice the *hazzan* was paid and lodged at the synagogue as a caretaker.[14]

Here the *hupēretēs* is identified as a resource custodian. Like any good librarian, the *hupēretēs* knows where to locate, access, make available, then store, care for, and keep secure, the precious scrolls. The warder becomes a warden. The custody officer becomes a custodian. This inherent custodian function on behalf of the one who gives the care-taking responsibility is what appears distinctive about the *hupēretēs*.

In Luke 1:2 and Acts 26:16 *hupēretēs* is twinned with 'eyewitness' or 'witness' as a double description of a particular group of people, or a particular person.[15] Howard Marshall explains,

13 K.Hess, s.v., Serve: 'Diakonéō' in Colin Brown (Gen. Ed.), *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, Vol. 3 Pri-Z (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1975), 546-7; Revised as, Verlyn Verbrugge, (Ed.), *The NIV Theological Dictionary of New Testament Words* [Abridgement of NIDNTT] (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2000), 315.

14 Edward Yamauchi, 'Synagogue' in Green & McKnight (Eds.), *Dictionary Of Jesus and the Gospels*, 782.

15 Both Marshall and Witherington make the point that grammatically in Lk 1:2 the 'eyewitnesses' must also be the 'servants of the word': I. Howard Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke: A Commentary on the Greek Text* [NIGTC] (Exeter: Paternoster, 1978), 42; Ben Witherington, III, *The Acts of the Apostles: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998), 744.

'"(S)ervants [*hupēretai*] of the word", [is] a striking phrase conveying the thought of the centrality of the gospel message and of the way in which [people] are its servants.'[16]

Both these Lukan uses of *hupēretēs* suggest that eyewitnesses have a custodian responsibility. It is not enough to be a witness and simply share the experience of having lived, walked and talked with Jesus. Witnesses must also take responsibility to preserve, protect and hand on faithfully what they have come to know and enjoy. Linking the two terms in this way also implies that the *hupēretēs* as a custodian of the sacred records was not a merely objective guardian—a personal testimonial function was involved, witnessing to the veracity of their manuscripts.

In the opening paragraph of his Gospel, Luke presumably included Mark in this group of those who had both seen the Lord personally and then recorded and handed on their testimony for posterity. Likewise, in Acts 26:16, describing how Paul before King Agrippa conflated what Jesus had said to him directly on the Damascus Road, through Ananias, and through further vision in the Temple,[17] Luke sums up Paul's role as commissioned to bear witness and to serve the risen Lord by preserving that witness for the sake of others. Luke sees Mark and Paul, the New Testament scholars he depended on as major sources for his own Gospel scholarship, as *hupēretai*—the servant term particularly applicable to those entrusted with the tasks of conserving theological biography and letters.

As John Mark accompanies his uncle Barnabas and Paul on their first missionary journey, Luke describes his function in Acts 13:5 as that of a *hupēretēs*. Some scholars suggest John Mark served as a catechist, responsible to teach new converts about the life and ministry of Jesus.[18] F.F. Bruce explains, '…some scholars have taken [*hupēretēs*] to mean that he put at their disposal his special knowledge of certain important phases of the story of Jesus, in particular the passion narrative'.[19]

We have already warned about the way scholarly flights of fancy have distorted our understanding of this term. But, even allowing for due interpretive caution, we can summarise Luke's use of the term in the Gospel and Acts by suggesting Luke saw *hupēretēs* as particularly applicable to the work of those who researched, wrote, transmitted and cared for the Scriptures. A consistent understanding of the mean-

16 Marshall, *Luke*, 42.

17 F.F. Bruce, *The Acts of the Apostles: The Greek Text with Introduction and Commentary* (London: Tyndale, 1951), 444.

18 E.g., William Barclay, 'A Comparison of Paul's Missionary Preaching and the Preaching of the Church', in Ward Gasque and Ralph P. Martin, (Eds), *Apostolic History & the Gospel* (Exeter: Paternoster, 1970), 169-70.

19 F.F. Bruce, *Commentary on the Book of Acts: The English Text with Introduction, Exposition and Notes* (London: Marshall, Morgan & Scott, 3rd Ed. 1962), 263. Bruce (*Acts: Greek Text*, 255) had earlier explained, 'Even at this early stage [John Mark] may have begun to take notes of the Kerugma, especially as proclaimed by Peter, who was a welcome guest in his home; this would make him a useful companion to the missionaries. He may also have had first-hand knowledge of some of the momentous events of Passion Week.'

ing of the term as he employed it in Luke 1:2, 4:20, Acts 13:5 and 26:16 would be, 'trusted resource custodian'.

III Apostolic Application:

Paul's Use of the *hupēretēs* Metaphor in 1 Corinthians 3-4.

From the series of metaphors Paul used in 1 Corinthians 3-4 to explain the right way to regard Christian teachers and leaders, we focus only on the way he develops the *hupēretēs* term.[20] At a crucial point in his prescription for correcting the identified problems of immaturity and division in the Corinthian church (at 4:1), Paul advises, 'Think of us in this way, as servants of Christ and stewards of God's mysteries…'

Paul's word for 'servant', used here in the plural, is the Greek word *hupēretai*. The verse is pivotal in its immediate context—closely linked to the previous paragraph as well as to what follows. The previous paragraph sets the conceptual context in which the *hupēretēs* term functions in 4:1.

a) The welcoming, inclusive epistemological context

This immediate context differentiates between God's and the world's wisdom. In 1 Corinthians 1:10-3:17, Paul had already challenged the Corinthians to grasp the difference between the wisdom of this age and the apparent 'folly' of God: a foolishness evidenced by the way God works through a crucified Messiah, uses insignificant people of no social status, and relies on preaching about the cross to communicate the strange wisdom of his purposes through the Spirit. Such strategies leave the Corinthians no grounds whatsoever to boast in different human leaders, least of all their Christian educators.

In 1:18-2:16 Paul had particularly shown that God's wisdom appeared foolish from the perspective of human wisdom. Now in 3:18-23 he says human wisdom is foolish from God's viewpoint.[21] The supposed wisdom of this world is narrow and selective. Indeed, it fostered jealousy and divisiveness as the Corinthians demonstrated all too well with their claims, 'I am of Paul', 'I am of Apollos'. God's radically different wisdom is broad, embracing and generous toward others with different teaching emphases.

God's wisdom readily utilises a wide range of resources. In the tightly packed reasoning of the paragraph, Paul notes key features of his understanding of acceptable epistemological resources for building up the church to maturity.

b) A theologically welcoming epistemological context.

Instead of fostering factions between rival theological instructors, God's

20 The metaphors are: household servant, *diakonos* in Greek, 3:5; farm labourer, sunergos, 3:9; construction worker, *oikodomos*, 3:10; resource custodian, *hupēretēs*, 4:1; responsible steward, *oikonomos*, 4:1; fool for Christ, *moros*, 4:10; and parent in the faith, *pater*, 4:15.

21 Gordon Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, [NICNT] (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1987), 152.

wisdom requires 'no more boasting about human leaders' (3:21).[22] Rather than feel bound to loyally follow and obey just one of their teachers, as if they owned you, or you are 'of', and belong to one of them, the call was to embrace them all (3:21-22). In the apostle's understanding of God's wisdom, the different perspectives, insights and emphases represented by Peter, Apollos and himself are complementary. Each is necessary for full-orbed growth and health in the body. Christian teachers and leaders were not to be seen as owning and controlling their students or followers. Rather, the teachers belonged to their students to learn from as servants who brought them to maturity.

c) A welcoming, multi-disciplinary epistemological context.

Moreover, not only the full range of Christian teachers, but also all the resources of the cosmos were to be accepted as potential learning and instruction material. Whether the secular world itself, or the wide ranging lessons of life, or the darker experiences of death—these were God's resources, all given to the children of God for them to learn from, explore, and study. The Corinthians were to gather the contributions from across the time spans, past, present or future, never becoming stuck in a single generational time warp. 'All are yours!' (3:22).

d) A welcoming multi-cultural epistemological context.

Again, the triad 'Paul, Apollos and Cephas' challenged the Corinthians to transcend cultural and international ethnic boundaries as they drew on needed resources for a mature and united church. In European Corinth, Peter, especially when attributed his Aramaic name, Cephas, represented the first generation eyewitness knowledge of Christ from a rustic, Galilean-fisherman's perspective, with a strong Galilean accent to his testimony and teaching.

Paul would have been very different: a Hellenistic Jew born in Tarsus, schooled in their diaspora synagogue, and tertiary-trained under Gamaliel as a strict Pharisee in Jerusalem, before his transforming and intellectually reshaping encounter on the Damascus road and its aftermath in Arabia and Cilicia. Paul's blend of Hebraic scriptural loyalty with Greek overtones from the Roman provinces, gave him a quite distinct cultural perspective from Peter.

The scripturally well-versed, eloquent, Alexandria-born African, Apollos was different again. Racially of Jewish stock, but a diasporean migrant whose personal tertiary formation owed much to the homely, trans-gender theological tutoring he received in the provincial Asian capital of Ephesus, he would appeal to the oratorically sophisticated amongst his Corinthian hearers. The cultural and social backgrounds and theological training pathways of the three could hardly be more diverse. But over them all, the apostle wrote, 'All are yours'.

This inclusive call presented a dis-

22 C. K. Barrett, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* [Black's New Testament Commentary] (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1968), 94-95.

tinctly new way of responding to the fact that human wisdom is folly in God's sight. The believer was not to withdraw from the world into a theologically or culturally isolated Christian ghetto, nor to huddle around the one favoured leader/teacher who endorsed all the preferred doctrinal options without deviation. Far from it. Here was a God-given charter for Christian scholars and theological educators to embrace the full diversity of viewpoints in the family of God. They and their hearers were not to retreat into what we might call a denominationally, ethnically, theologically, ideologically or stylistically bounded isolation, accepting instruction only from those whom they naturally preferred.[23] The wisdom of God, in 1 Corinthians 3:22b, banished even the dualism which separated sacred and secular and accepted only the former as valid instructional material. Every area of study and investigation was here sanctified as resource material for the growth and unity of the people of God.

So if we may make the hermeneutical leap to a twenty-first century vantage-point, we could say: whether it is study of this 'world/age' through physical, social, and medical sciences; or study of human experience of the 'life-death' continuum through philosophy, anthropology, psychology or counselling; or the 'past-future' continuum through history, economics, or theology, they are all God-given resources to interact with constructively for Christian life, witness and maturity growth.

e) The evangelical heart of the epistemological context

There was, however, one proviso. '…They are all yours, but you are Christ's' (3:22-23). The Corinthian believers did belong to one person—not Paul or Apollos or Cephas, as they boasted—but to their Lord, and to him both teachers and taught must be loyal at all times, especially in their scholarship and learning. The full breadth of study and exploration was to be brought consciously under the Lordship of Christ Jesus. He, in turn, ensures it will glorify God the Father (v.23). Such a missional freedom and generous expansiveness of viewpoint provides scholarship with an academic freedom securely rooted in the theological realities of the Lordship of Christ and the unity of the Godhead.

Such freedom required clear perceptions of who the scholar/teacher is and what he or she is doing as they traverse these now welcoming scholarly fields. Let us note, then, with appropriate present-day application, how our *hupēretēs* term re-appears within this Corinthian epistemological context.

f) Christian Scholars are to be resource custodians

At the centre of this 1 Corinthians 3-4 section on how to perceive Christian leaders and teachers, Paul now says definitively, 'This, then, is how you ought to regard us: as *hupēretai*—resource custodians!' (4:1). Christian leaders need to know their sources in all their depth and breadth theologically, ecclesiastically, culturally and across the disciplines, as the apostle has just shown. They are the ones who locate the appropriate and relevant

23 See Fee's pointed application, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 155-56.

teachings for each particular occasion, and ensure those resources will be kept safe and accessible for the next time they are needed. These are, of course, the basic tasks of research, scholarship and librarianship.

Christian leaders need such scholarly skills. Christian scholars are to be Christ's librarians, discoverers and curators of the wealth of material from the range of sources for effective work in their field of study. This is the way Christians are to conceive their leaders—as the resource persons able to equip and 'service' them for their obedience to Christ wherever he has placed them vocationally as his representatives (cf., Eph. 4:12).

g) Responsible Managers of God's Mysteries.

To the *hupēretēs* term Paul links as a necessary twin the word for a household steward or responsible manager, in Greek *oikonomos*: the servant to whom the household head delegates the managerial responsibilities of the household. The *oikonomos* was classically exemplified in Joseph's role in Potiphar's household, Genesis 39:1-6. As Towner elaborates:

> The dominance of the household concept in Paul's thought… influenced his perception of the ministry and the minister. Paul's ministry thus comes under the category of 'stewardship' (*oikonomia*, 1 Cor. 9:17; Col. 1:25), that is a task entrusted by the master to a member of the household. The one who receives this trust, the minister, is called a 'steward' (1 Cor. 4:1; Titus 1:7). Such a description emphasises the need for faithful execution of duties and accountability to the master.[24]

This link between *hupēretēs* and *oikonomos* in 4:1 is elaborated in two main responsibilities in the following paragraph. The custodian manager is responsible for the 'mysteries of God' (4:1). The gospel was, for Paul, a previously hidden, but now openly manifest message. Its mystery value relates to that earlier hidden-ness.[25] Christian leaders and scholars are responsible to manage and take custodian care of the wealth, resources and dynamic potential inhering in this glorious message centred on the Lord Jesus Christ. This honour carries matching obligation.

Responsible custodian managers are to be faithful and accountable. In a transparently biographical passage (1Cor. 4:1-5), Paul develops the Christian scholar/teacher's sense of accountability by referring to three possible courts which may distort this accountability and with which, therefore, he had come to terms.

Sometimes those being served have unrealistic expectations, or misjudge

---

24 Philip H. Towner, 'Households and Household Codes', in Gerald F Hawthorne & Ralph P. Martin (Eds.), *Dictionary of Paul and his Letters* (Downers Grove, Ill: Intervarsity, 1993), 418.

25 Cf., Colossians 1:25-29, where Paul again describes his missional service as a 'management responsibility', *oikonomia*, and outlines its threefold nature. He has a message to make fully known, Col.1:25; riches of the previously hidden but now open secret to bring to people of every culture, namely, that Christ among them guarantees the hope of glory, Col.1:26-7; and Paul has people to bring to maturity in Christ by his preaching and warning, Col. 1:28-29.

the steward's performance. Paul had learned to say, 'I care very little if I am judged by you [Corinthians whom I serve]…' (4:3). Then there are the many 'human courts' which so easily go beyond their rightful claims on a theological teacher's accountability. Paul 'cared very little' about their judgements, too (4:3). One wonders whom he had in mind? Were they examiners, moderators, journal editors, peer reviewers, Performance Based Research Funding Panels, Faculty Research Committees, or College Councils? Perhaps present-day Christian scholars, perfectionists as we often tend to be, find it hardest to join Paul in his next claim: 'Indeed, I do not even judge myself' (4:3).

Our own self-criticism can be the most severe of all our judges. Paul was not claiming some vaunted 'academic freedom' for himself. He has learned a vital secret of Christian leadership and effective scholarship. Ultimately, true freedom does not emanate from a freedom of conscience before any of these three kinds of assessment body. In themselves, important as each may be, they are unable to ensure the commitment to integrity, honesty and depth of commitment essential for academic freedom.

That freedom belongs to those who keep short accounts before their heavenly Judge. Christ the Lord alone includes the Christian scholar's deepest motivation as he judges performance, progress and output. And that ultimate evaluation awaits a very special appointment planned for each teacher, in person. At that assessment the Examiner has a predisposition towards praise, not blame (4:4-5).

Free, indeed, are the theological educators who responsibly manage their custodial roles in such a way that they can accept with equanimity the interim judgements of those they serve, or of the various courts to which they must give earthly accounts, and at the same time are not slaves to the driven-ness, fear, or 'workaholism' that spring from a personal sense of inadequacy about their work. Relaxed expectation and joyous anticipation of judgement from a much higher court than any of these were, for Paul, the way to such freedom, and to more productive study, scholarship and teaching!

h) So, no boasting, only grateful service.

Paul concludes this call to custodian care and faithful management of resources as Christian leaders and theological educators with a reminder that to grasp the point of these verses totally excludes any ground for the boasting and status seeking common in the church at Corinth (4:6-7). So too, for us, healthy self-perceptions on the scholar's part, and a clarified understanding of what Christian leadership and scholarship mean in God's sight, will bring the winsome humility and academic openness that release from the politicking and selfish ambition common in academic circles.

Conclusion

We are all too conscious of the immaturity and petty jealousies and divisions that hinder us as Christ's people in our post-modern world. Our contention has been that one aspect of a resolution to this state of affairs

depends on the self understandings we bring to our task as theological educators and Christian scholars, and the ascriptions of our role and status we accept from others. We suggest that in Christ's and the apostles' metaphors of kingdom-discipled scribes, and the custodian resource manager—the *hupēretēs*—of the gospel mysteries, we have powerful re-orienting, motivating and corrective guidance for renewed commitment to our scholarly task.

These metaphors offer a charter for theological educators of today to break out of ethnocentric enclaves and embrace all of the European Christian heritage, all of the Majority world's non-western breadth of new theological insights, and the distinctive challenges from migrant diaspora church leaders in our day, and responsibly access and dispense them for the growth of the people of God under our care and instruction.

By indwelling these metaphors as essential to our purpose and positioning, the routine, humdrum aspects of data collection, researching, writing and re-writing, cataloguing, filing and retrieving can become aspects of Christ-glorifying daily worship and service. With this as our identity-marker, studying the primary text of Scripture and the ever changing text of culture, drawing out the lessons and translating their message well for the various contexts that comprise our lives and vocations as scholar/teachers can take on new depths of satisfaction and meaning.

Here is a way to make our theology more genuinely faith-producing and devotional and our devotions more theological and obedient. The time is ripe for both the church and academy to catch a glimpse of what kingdom-discipled scribes and responsible resource custodians of the mysteries of the Good News can be and do for Christ's glory.