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THE TYPOLOGIES OF ECCLESIAL CONFLICT REFLECTED IN 1 CORINTHIANS

SUMMARY

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First Corinthians is one of the most fascinating and thought-provoking New Testament writings. In studying it closely, we find a world that is very much like our own. It is a world where the mixing of cultures was facilitated by the free circulation of people (as was the case in the time of the Roman Empire, which was instituted by the so-called *Pax Romana*). This contributed to the formation of a diverse society in Corinth where all religions, ethnic groups and cultures could exist. It was a Greco-Roman society in which Greek cultural values had to be adapted to fit a Roman system that was far more highly structured and strict. This is the context in which the Holy Apostles set out from Jerusalem, driven by the Great Commission, to proclaim the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ towards the *ends of the earth*(Mt. 28, 18-20). Though polytheism and syncretism grew to become major obstacles for the Holy Apostles, the proclaimers of the Gospel, they nonetheless remained steadfast in their calling. They were not discouraged by the frail beginnings of Christianity, not even when the Church which they founded came to an impasse.

Similarly, the church today exists in a global context the system of which is more and more opposed to Christian values. Opposition and persecution comes in part from the adherents of other religions who promote aggressive agendas. On the other hand, in our current context Christianity is in opposition to socialism (as it has been throughout the past two centuries, whether socialism manifested as Marxism or Nazism, both of which were secular religions). Yet, while Nazism had no influence after the fall of Nazi Germany in the Second World War,

socialism as manifested through communism, neo-Marxism, cultural Marxism and liberal socialism continues to persist. Manifesting itself through ideas such as so-called political correctness, socialism has influenced and continues to directly influence our society. It seeks to destroy Christianity, whether by way of persecution (China, Nepal, etc.) or through the radical secularization of society. In a distinct fashion, western society is permeated by neo-Marxism and cultural Marxism, which pursue the exclusion of Christianity from the base of society.

Concurrently we must highlight the fact that the cores of some currents of western Christianity have adopted a permissive and liberal theology. This has made room within theology for humanist philosophy along the lines of *political correctness*. These currents of Christianity, which have done away with absolute norms and have been subjugated by post-modernist thinking, promote the idea of *revelation as relative*. The consequences are not difficult to identify, ranging from the embracing of various types of heresies to the acceptance of innovative theological perspectives such as, for example, the acceptance of LGBTQ ideology, the adoption of the idea of ethics as relative, and the promotion of so-called Christian values that exclude the Cross. These are values based on social and permissive love, love not based on a mentality of sacrifice but one of egalitarianism. These ideas are competing to exclude the fundamental principles, which have kept Christianity alive for centuries.

The present context, which becomes more opposed to Christianity by the day, should motivate all who believe and promote these fundamental values of Christianity to take up a vigorous fight. This fight must be one of a spiritual character, aiming to affirm the very identity of Christianity despite denominational differences that may exist between individuals. Likewise, the Church must be more attentive to these influences, which are foreign to the truth of Christ and tend only to violate it. In doing so, the truth loses its power and is not capable of fulfilling the role of being a *light on top of the hill* for this present society, which the Lord Jesus Christ deemed it to be in the Sermon on the Mount.

While the Church is the Body of Christ, within it there are groups of differing people who interact with one another, each spiritually imperfect. Their interactions can, at times, degenerate into conflicts[1] since the visible Church (local and regional) has not yet become what it was

[1] Technically speaking, conflict emerges when the conditions, practices, values and interests of the members of a society become incompatible or antagonistic with one another. Of course, states of conflict develop based on the essence of the pre-existent relationships between individuals or groups. Thus, in analyzing these conflicts one must keep in mind the past interaction of those individuals or groups. For example, in the case of a community such as the

intended to be in Christ, unlike the Church in a universal sense. Most times, ecclesial conflicts have a different cause than conflicts that arise in society and, as such, the appropriate solutions are also different than those generally suitable for the secular realm.

The Church has not been and is not spared such internal conflict. At times, some have tried to project an unrealistic image of the Church, either by having unrealistic expectations of the interpersonal relationships within it or by negating the existence of the lesser-enjoyed realities that may appear between people in a church. The Holy Scriptures do not paint such an idealistic picture of the local Church, rather recognizing it as a reflection of the entire process of the salvation and spiritual formation of the individual. The process begins with the recuperation of the person found in *conflict* with God due to their sin by the church. It then continues with their transformation into believers, children of Christ, but which do not yet have all the spiritual habits required for a life of faith and harmony in Christian community. To this we must also add the frustrations caused by the permanent *dynamic* of the local Church, a community that is not static or inert but rather animated by the mission of God for it and for the whole world. Believers are thus forced to interact with one another, yet challenged to remain united, keeping in mind and respecting their diversity in terms of social, intellectual and other dimensions.

The Holy Apostle Paul was confronted with such situations in all the Churches he founded during his missionary trips, journeys he undertook in fulfilling his unique calling as an Apostle to the Gentiles. Yet the Corinthian Church, which the Apostle Paul founded during his secondary missionary journey (the first being European – Acts 16-18), was a special case. After proclaiming the Gospel in Macedonia along with Silas and Timothy, St. Paul arrives in Athens. After hosting his famous discourse in the Areopagus (Acts 17), St. Paul leaves for Corinth, the capital of Achaia.

Corinth was not much different from Athens, with which it shared the same social, cultural and religious values (at least in principle). Being located at the Peloponnesian gate, between the two gates of Lichaeum and Cenchrea, Corinth was subjected to strong influences from both the oriental and occidental worlds. The circulation of goods and people, alongside the

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local church, an essential factor to consider in tracing the evolution of conflicts that emerge is the baggage that individuals bring with them into the community. Conflicts usually escalate the moment that identity beliefs and interests are threatened. They also tend to be interactive in nature and, when they appear at the heart of a community, are obviously going to have some effect (to a greater or lesser extent, depending on the gravity of the situation). The result is that the ability of the community to achieve its goals and objectives is reduced, and the community itself may even be destroyed.

agitated lifestyles of the city-dwellers, created an atmosphere defined by religious syncretism and immorality. In the Greco-Roman world of the New Testament times, the expression "as in Corinth" was notorious.

This is the context in which the Holy Apostle Paul began to preach the Gospel, at the centre of which was the cross of Christ, the essence and power of the plan of God for the salvation of all people. All else became secondary, and the crucified and resurrected Christ constituted the way of salvation, which God, in his perfect wisdom, prepared for all people.

After establishing the Christian community in Corinth, the St. Paul spends some time with the newly converted believers, striving to pass on an inherited faith that was spiritually authentic, founded on values, which fully reflected the nature and work of God. For the Corinthian community to have remained and conformed with these spiritual values would have, on the one hand, guaranteed their strong spiritual growth and fulfilled the mission of God for the Church. On the other hand, it would have protected them from conflicts.

Shortly after his departure from Corinth, while in Ephesus on his third missionary journey, St. Paul received news about the Corinthian Church. As he was not pleased with what he heard, he chose to write them a letter to straighten out the issues, which had made the Church dysfunctional.

The information about the Corinthians which had reached the Apostle Paul came from three different sources: from Chloe, *widely*[2] and from a letter the Corinthians wrote and brought to him by way of a delegation made up of Stephanas, Fortunatus and Achaicust. From Chloe, St. Paul finds out about the state of tension that had emerged in the Church, being caused by fragmentation of the community into multiple factions. From reports circulated "*widely*" he finds out about the sin of fornication that had entered the church and about the fact that some of the Corinthians had come to resort to pagan tribunals to resolve their conflicts. The letter sent by the Corinthians to the Apostle has not been preserved, yet by looking at St. Paul's response to this letter in the third part of 1 Corinthians we can decipher the problems which they faced and for which they sought answers.

These things reveal to us that the Corinthian Church had a profound spiritual crisis on its hands, which was being eroded by conflicts and disagreements. Apostle Paul, the founder and

[2] 1 Corinthians 5:1 (HCSB)

mentor of this church, deemed it his duty to find remedies for the problems plaguing the very core of the community and to re-establish harmony.

In trying to understand the causes, which generated the conflict within the Corinthian Church, I discovered that their problems were not, in essence, cultural, social, economic, and ethnic or even political ones, but rather *spiritual* ones. Disagreement and the refusal of the Corinthians to embrace true Christian spirituality, which St. Paul had promoted, exposed them to different types of conflict. These in turn made the community more vulnerable, transforming it into easy prey for those who sought to cause division, for sin, for deviations in terms of family and for certain liturgical and doctrinal mistakes. Thus they exposed themselves to a threat against their very Christian identity. All other factors, such as the cultural, economic, ethnic and political ones, made up the context in which the conflict in the Church of Corinth evolved. They were not, however, the primary cause of the conflict as the true primary cause was a spiritual one: the abandonment of the Corinthians of true Christian spirituality.

Existing studies on the conflicts that appeared in the Corinthian Church have generally revolved around taking a historic-grammatical and/or a socio-rhetorical perspective. In constructing their case, they start with the context (historical, social, religious, ethnic, etc.) in which the community in Corinth appeared and evolved. As would be expected, these studies favour explanations for the conflict in the Corinthian Church that deem the cause to be the Greco-Roman context of the 1st century A.D. Such approaches should not necessarily be dismissed though, given that if we were to ignore context we would not be able to understand what took place in the Christian community in Corinth. They are nonetheless weak, as they place responsibility for the conflict solely upon context and do not consider the possibility that the cause could have been spiritual. If this possibility were considered, all other contextual problems which transpired, and which cannot be ignored, would become of secondary importance. As they would no longer be primary, their significance would inevitably be impacted.

If we were to consider the strictly spiritual character of the cause of the Corinthian conflict, then all other elements of context would, in spite of their secondary importance, be valuable reflections of the worldly character of the Corinthians. They would reflect a spiritually deformed and immature Church. In other words, elements of context help us to better understand the behaviour of the Corinthian Christians, as they highlight their lack of spirituality. They reflect their mistaken understanding of Christian spirituality, which, in the specific context of the

Corinthian church, produced in the lives of its members a behaviour, which was unworthy of the name by which they were called. Speaking of his disciples, the Lord Jesus Christ said that, *"…they are in the world…"* (John 17:11) although *"…they are not of the world, just as I am not of the world."* (John17:14). It then follows that Christians, who are delivered to a new life in Jesus Christ, no longer belong to the world from the moment they acquire spiritual sight and no longer do the works of the world they yet live in. The lives of Christians have the privilege of reflecting their words, which, in turn, divulge their way of thinking and ultimately the character of their spirituality. Their worldly context cannot generate within them the works and way of speaking characteristic of it so long as believers are spiritual and have a thinking that is renewed through the sanctifying work of the Saviour. Consequently, one cannot argue that the context in which the Corinthian Church found itself in determined that their conduct would be worldly. On the contrary, as they already had a deformed spirituality (rather a worldly one), they adopted an unchristian way of thinking according to the specific worldly context in which they found themselves. The world could not do anything but represent itself through context, so that those worldly things that could be adopted to bear fruit in the Corinthian Church were indeed adopted.

In this context, we must reiterate the fundamental scope of the work before us, namely to demonstrate that the cause of the conflict in the Corinthian Church was a spiritual one, as evidenced through the thinking, speaking and behaviour of some of its members. This spiritual cause has been dressed up as different hypotheses: *elitism, engagement (contextualization/reduction) of the Christian faith according to the philosophy of the time, deficiencies in their understanding of the key theological concepts of the Christian faith (soteriological, ecclesiological, eschatological, pneumatological, anthropological), ethical problems, spiritual immaturity, different forms of syncretism, pre-gnosticism, individualism, compromise, anarchy, egoism, etc.* As the cause of conflict was the Corinthian Church's lack of authentic spirituality, the solutions that St. Paul found to address the problems in the Church were theological and in no way psycho-social or of some other nature.

In our approach, we started with two essential factors: (i) an understanding of spiritual inheritance and of the values that St. Paul, the founder and mentor of the Church in Corinth, left the believers there with and (ii) an identification of the types of conflicts that appear in communities. Overlapping these two factors led to the identification of the true cause of the conflicts, which, as with every type and instance of conflicts, is spiritual in nature.

As already demonstrated, the context in which the Church in Corinth was founded cannot be neglected, as this influenced the type of relationships that developed among the members of the Church. Nonetheless, as was also demonstrated, the context plays a secondary role. The diversity of people within the Church, created tension between those more or less educated, more or less influential, wealthy and poor, and free or slave. Concurrently, traditional Judaic ethical values were in inevitable conflict with worldly Greco-Roman values, the world from which many of the members of the Church came from. Harmonizing the ethical values of the Church was not a simple process, and the Apostle Paul would find that he at times had no simple answer to provide the Corinthians, not from the traditional Judaic teaching and not from the teaching of the Lord Jesus either. As a result, he had to assume responsibility for making certain decisions when providing answers, using as guidelines the principles of the Holy Spirit and relying on his apostolic authority.

Chapter 1

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In our study, our starting point was establishing the Greco-Roman context in which the Corinthian Church was situated (following the proclamation of the Gospel of Christ by St. Paul in Corinth) and evolved. The first chapter, entitled *The Socio-Cultural and Religious Context of the Conflict in Corinth*, constructs a bridge through time, "visiting" the world of the Corinthian Church of 1 Corinthians in order to better understand their context. From the affirmation in 1 Cor. 1:26, we know that the Corinthian Church was very diverse. While most of its believing members were simple people, there were also patrons, wealthy people, and people with both influence in society and in the Church. The social stratification of the Church influenced the relationships of its members.

From an ethnic point of view, the Corinthian ἐκκλησία was made up of Greeks and Jews. According to the events recorded in Acts 18, the missional strategy of St. Paul was to focus initially on the synagogue of a community, a cultural and religious centre in the lives of Jews. Jewish values were, of course, deeply entrenched in the consciences of these Jews. Furthermore, they considered them to be *a priori* within the Church in spite of the differing perspectives which the Greek believers brought from their experiences of idolatrous culture.

The Corinthians converts to Christianity brought into the Church with them many elements of the *outside Corinth*, which made the process of forming a united community, and one which would be strongly anchored in Scripture, all the more arduous.

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In order to be able to identify the defining characteristics of the spirituality of the Corinthian Church and of its individuals, a standard to refer to is necessary. Thus, in the second chapter of this work, *Conflict and Spirituality in 1 Corinthians*, we have dealt with the norms of Christian spirituality (especially those specific to Pauline teaching, as it is expressed in 1 Corinthians). By evaluating the realities of the Corinthian Church against the norms which St. Paul established for it, we once again observe that the true source of the conflicts was spiritual.

Pauline spirituality can be defined with the help of five coordinates: a theological coordinate,an ethical and moral coordinate, a coordinate regarding holiness, a mystical/sacremental coordinate and, lastly, a coordinate which deals with the spiritual disciplines. Regarding the theological aspects, we can observe, especially in the correspondence with the Corinthians, that St. Paul puts emphasis on Christ-centred soteriology expressed through the cross, on ethics, on worship and on eschatological teaching. These theological reference points are the result of conflicts with St. Paul identifies in the Church: *disunion*(chap. 1-4), *licentiousness and judgements* (chap. 5-6), *marriage and the celibate* (chap. 7), *idolatry* (chap. 8-10), *worship* (chap. 10-14), and last but not least, *eschatological teaching* (chap. 15).

In Pauline spirituality no distinction is made between *theological concept* and *Christian praxis*. St. Paul also emphasizes, alongside foundational theological teaching, the need for holiness; nonetheless this cannot be realized on one's own or individualistically, but only in community. Furthermore, the holiness to which the Apostle refers to, beyond the experience of people with Christ through baptism, isa prolonged process.

The fellowship with God denotes an authentic Christian spirituality, maintained through the spiritual disciplines, which, in turn, are diverse: prayer, fasting, reading of the Holy Scriptures, submission, celebration, worship, service, silence, charity and others like these.

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The first conflict situation addressed in this work comes from 1 Cor. 1:10-4:21, in which St. Paul formulates a response to the problem of disunity, the problem which he finds out about from "Chloe", the first source from which he receives information regarding the Church in Corinth. The responses of the Apostle are complex and do not only deal with the effects of the conflict but also with its causes.

The fragmentation of the church according to leaders, each of which had in some way or another left a lasting impression on the members of the Church in Corinth, reveals profound malfunctions, flowing out of the Corinthians' lack of authentic spirituality and which the Apostle Paul unravels: not understanding the value of baptism (1 Cor. 1:13-14), not understanding the Gospel of the Cross (1 Cor. 1:18-31), embracing philosophical elitism (1 Cor. 2:1-16), evaluating

those who serve incorrectly (1 Cor. 3:4-23), exacerbating the spiritual aspect (1 Cor. 4:1-21) – all of these manifesting themselves in a state of spiritual childishness (1 Cor. 3:1-3). Some of the people wanted to negate the apostolic authority of St. Paul and instigated a conflict over this, considering him to be unspiritual, without authority, and with incorrect teaching. The Apostle would defend himself against these accusations (especially in chapter 9).

Of course, the social and ethnic factors had an impact on this type of conflict, yet it is easy to see that the essence of the cause of conflict, the cause which produced the disunity and created factions, was of a spiritual nature.

Following an analysis of the biblical text, I have identified the following solutions. Firstly, the Apostle clarifies the confusion regarding baptism, reminding the Corinthians that the value of baptism does not rest in the character of the one baptizing, but rather rests in Him for whom baptism is done, Christ (1 Cor. 1:13-14). A powerful argument in favour of unity constitutes the unity and indestructibility of Christ. If the Church is the Body of Christ (1 Cor. 12:12), and Christ cannot be divided, then neither can His Body be divided; this would be a blasphemy against the Head, which is Christ. After presenting a series of antagonisms with the scope of opening the eyes of the Corinthians so that they could make the distinction between what is spiritually authentic and what is false, St. Paul clarifies his relationship with Apollo (1 Cor. 3:4-6), whom he considers a collaborator. Apostle Paul asks the local workers in the church to evaluate their motivation for serving in the church, reminding them that if they do not serve correctly (if they build up materials incompatible with the foundation) their work will be burned. Even worse, if they try to change the foundation, they will be reduced to nothing, given that they would have spoiled the Temple of God (1 Cor. 3:11-18). The Apostle's final argument against disunity goes to the core of the problem: it is time for the recipients of the letter to pursue spiritual growth and to transform from fleshly people into people who are truly spiritual (1 Cor. 3:1-3).

Chapter 4

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Chapter 5 of 1 Corinthians makes the transition to the second segment of the epistle. In this context we observe that the source through which the St. Apostle received information regarding the Corinthian Church changes. Beginning with Chapter 5, another conflict situation will be dealt with which was created by ethical issues. The response of St. Paul to these ethical issues which appeared in the Corinthian Church can be found in 1 Corinthians 5-6, as well as in chapters 8-10. I have chosen to deal with these two passages together, given that they both descibe conflicts of the same type.

Having found out about the sin in the Church from *widely* circulated reports, the Apostle Paul gives the Corinthians firm warning regarding the gravity of the sin, which not only affects the one who commits it but the entire community as a whole (1 Cor. 5-6). The argument against licentious sin will be dealt with again in the second part of chapter 6.

Permissiveness, born out of a pre-gnostic philosophical ideology and characterized by a separation of the spiritual and bodily existence (spiritism), became a likely trap for the Corinthians. This was the case due to the local ministers lack of spiritual authority in the Church and and the Church's lack of understanding of the fundamental teachings on salvation and the church. These factors find their origin in the same lack of authentic spirituality which made the Corinthians vulnerable, as much at an individual level as at the level of the community.

The Apostle's solutions are once again firm and exact. For the first time in this epistle, St. Paul formulates a syllogism, found in chapter 5 and 6. This is form which he will repeat in several times in the course of his letter (chapter 8-10, 12-14). The interposing of the problem of judgement between two passages which make reference to licentiousness had the purpose of

making it plain to the Corinthians why they should keep their bodies undefiled. The only chance for redemption that the licentious one had was to be taken out of the *spiritual space* of the church; he was given over to Satan (1 Cor. 5:5), so that he could come to understand his spiritual depravity and then seek salvation. St. Paul urges the Corinthians to exercise their spiritual authority by passing judgement on the small occurences of conflict that arise within the Church so that they could then also judge those that are spiritual and more complex in nature. Of course, the Apostle's strongest argument against licentiousnes is the resurrection and glorification of the human body in the Day of the Lord. If the body is the Temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 6:15) and if it will be resurrected (1 Cor. 6:14), this means that is must be kept holy.

Ethical conflicts in the Corinthian Church were also worsened through the participation of some of its members in feasts dedicated to idols. St. Paul responds to this kind of conflict in chapter 8-10. Some Corinthians (who considered themselves *strong*) permitted themselves to participate in these idolatrous rituals at the pagan altars. This created a state of tension in the Church since, for the Jewish converts to Christianity, this behaviour was unacceptable given that they had moral values that were veterotestamentario In consequence, those newly converted (which were considered *weak*), would be negatively impacted spiritually by this behaviour and were in danger of returning to their old, idolatrous ways of life.

The expressions of the Corinthians' lack of authentic spirituality consisted not understanding the fundamental theological concepts regarding God and the spiritual world, being inconsiderate of weaker brothers, lacking understanding of the value of the Sacramemnts and being inconsiderate of the Body of Christ, the Church, through lack of love. St. Paul's solutions are provided in the form of a syllogism, in which the true liberty of the Apostle, manifested also in his ability to renounce his rights to another (chap. 9), is used in chapter 10 for presenting the last arguments against idolatry. The Apostle requests of the Corinthians the understanding that in their relationships with one another, love, rather than knowledge, must take first priority. Knowledge makes one feel superior and puffed up (1 Cor. 8:1) while love builds up. On the other hand, those who claim to be *strong* must realize the risk that they expose the weak to and strive to protect them (1 Cor. 8:9-13), since, in exercising liberty, the Christian must take into account the rest of the community. St. Paul will make use of the example of old Israel (1 Cor. 10:1-6) and of the spiritual principles of Communion, through which the believer is united with Christ, in order make it clear to the Corinthians that participating in the feasts of idols signifies

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Chapter 5

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In the third section of the first epistle addressed to the Corinthians, St.Paul addresses a series of problems which appeared in the Corinthian Church. The first problem he responds to familial: marriage, divorce and celibacy. In this section, St. Paul responds to a letter which the Corinthians had sent him through a delegation made up of Stephanas, Achaicus and Fortunatus in which they ask the Apostle a series of questions about the family (chap. 7), ethics (chap. 8-10), worship (chap. 11-14) and certain teachings – especially resurrection (chap. 15).

It appears that teachers who negated marriage or urged the rejection of family had infiltrated the Corinthian Church. They provided many motives for doing so: they argued that unity had to be mutually exclusive, and so unity with Christ was incompatible with unity with a spouse. Furthermore, unity with an unbelieving husband would be all the more dangeorus as it would hinder the believing wife in her persuit of holiness. It thus came to be that the *angelic*

spirituality which some Corinthians had come to adopt was no longer was compatible with marriage. Man could not be loyal to two covenants at once, they argued. The eschatological confusion of the Corinthians is obvious, as is their lack of understanding of true spirituality and of spiritual gifts. All of these have a common root cause: lack of authentic spirituality.

St. Paul responds to these misunderstandings one by one. The Apostle forbids sexual abstinence in the family, apart from the well-defined periods of time dedicated to prayer and fasting, the duration of which the spouses had to reach mutual consent. His forbidding of sexual abstinence is motivated by three realities: lack of self-discipline, Satan, and burning desire (1 Cor. 7:1-8). St. Paul requests the Corinthians to be loyal, as much to the covenant with God as to the covenant of marriage they are in and to not separate from their spouses (1 Cor. 7:10-11), even if the spouse is not a Christian. Those who are not married and who are widowed he urges to stay that way as the time is short and Jesus Christ can be served with greater liberty by someone who has no other responsibilities, such as familial ones.

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A last conflict situation which I have identified in the epistle of 1 Corinthians is liturgical and doctrinal in nature (1 Cor. 11:15). By no means coincidentally, the Apostle Paul begins his series of responses to the problems regarding worship in the Church by referring to the family (1 Cor. 11:1-16), as order in the Church is preceded by order in the family, and it is in the family that St. Paul identifies the roots of certain problems in the Church.

The first cause of disorder in worship in the Church was the lack of understanding of the hierarchy of spiritual authority in the family. The second cause was the superficiality with which Communion was regarded, and the third major cause of anarchy when it came to worship was the lack of order in the manifestation of spiritual gifts. In this way, the failure to recognize the hierarchy of spiritual authority – especially by the women which considered themselves holier than the rest of the members of the Church (1 Cor. 11:1-16) –; the abscence of spiritual discernment in terms of the Eucharist (1 Cor. 11:17-34) and the exacerbation of spirituality, which flowed out of the manifestation of some of the spiritual gifts, especially speaking in tongues and prophecy (1 Cor. 12:1-31), created confusion and disorder in the Church. Once again, the Corinthians' lack of authentic spirituality exposed a slippery slope for the Church.

The Apostle Paul estabilizes a clear hierarchy of authority within the family and within the Church, and then reaffirms the values and benefits of participating in Communion. In trying to present to the Corinthians the ensemble of the Body of Christ, St. Paul formulates the principle

of unity in diversity with respect to spiritual gifts and the supremacy of love relative to these gifts.

In the last part of the epistle, the Apostle Paul responds to the Corinthians' questions regarding resurrection. The cause of this spiritual conflict was the philosophical permeation of pre-gnostic teaching into the Church, a teaching which disregarded the material creation. As a result of this lack of understanding of the soteriological and eschatological dimensions of the message of the Gospel, the Corinthians were caught up in an eschatologic heresy, namely the rejection of the idea of resurrection. If they had been powerfully anchored in authentic spirituality, as defined by the teaching of the Apostle, they would have been protected from such heresy, yet their spiritual superficiality and childishness made them vulnerable to it.

The Apostle Paul summarizes the role and power of the sacrification work of Christ, which is normative for salvation (1 Cor. 15:3-11); then he paints a picture *ad absurdum* – if Christ had not been resurrected (1 Cor. 15:12-19) –, presenting to them the eschatologic implications of his teaching (1 Cor. 15:20-28).

Conclusions

Following out scientific approach as presented in this work I was able to draw the following conclusions:

- The Christian community in Corinth was an accurate reflection of the demographic diversity and dynamics of the Greco-Roman Corinth, and many of the existing socio-economic, ethnic and philosophical tensions found their way into the Church.
- The Corinthian Church did not adoptt he Christian spirituality which St. Paul proclaimed when he was in Corinth.
- The lack of authentic Christian spirituality made the community vulnerable, and the context (social, economic, ethnic, etc.) in which the Church found itself made the outbreak of certain conflicts, as much interpersonal ones as intergroup ones, more likely.
- With regard to the splitting up into different parties (chapter 1-4), we understand from the responses and solutions which St. Paul provides that the root of this problem is a lack of Christian spirituality, as evidenced through the major deficiencies in the Corinthians' understanding of baptism, the Gospel of the Cross, true wisdom, and motivations for serving. The Apostle's conclusion is evident: the cause of the conflict in athe Church is

the spiritual childishness of the members which make it up.

- From the second source, what had been *widely* reported, the Apostle finds out about the sin of licentiousness which had lodged itself in the Church (chapter 5-6). Beyond the firmness with which the Apostle addressed the sin, we see a glimpse of the vulnerability of the Corinthians to pre-gnostic influences, which had opened the door to permissiveness. In turn, the lack of a firm attitude on behalf of the local ministers demonstrated that they had no spiritual authority over the believers. This is evidenced, for example, by the fact that some of the members of the Church had chosen to take their disputes to the pagan tribunals. Once again, superficiality in spiritual things made it difficult for the Christian community to express its holiness.
- Not even the family was spared of conflict (chapter 7). The grave theological issues, such as, for example, the lack of understanding regarding fundamental eschatological and pneumatological concepts endangered the family institution. The responses of St. Paul were more than pastoral but rather theological, addressing the Corinthians' needs for spiritual growth. They would instruct the Corinthians in how to adopt a correct attitude towards life-long partners and towards Christ.
- Some Corinthians had demonstrated disloyalty to the Saviour Jesus Christ – they permitted themselves to participate in the sacrifices given on the altars of the idols (chapters 8-10). Their lack of depth in their relationships with Christ was also expressed through their inconsiderate treatment of weaker brothers in the Church. Profound theological confusion and lack of knowledge of the spiritual reality that existed around the altars demonstrates their lack of solid theology, and the effects of this would become evident soon after in their spiritual lives as well.
- The lack of spiritual authority of the leaders of the Church in Corinth was manifested through the anarchy in their community worship: the authority as given to creation was inversed, so that the women which considered themselves more holy than the other members of the Church (and, implicitly, than their own husbands) had created a true chaos (chapter 11-14). The disorder was also evident also in the way in which the believers partook in communion and in the way in which they manifested their spiritual gifts. The exacerbation of the spiritual and unsubmissive aspects – as clear indicators of an authentic Christian spirituality – was the focus of Apostle Paul's response.

- The zenith of the Corinthians' lack of spirituality is expressed in chapter 15, in which the essence of the believer's hope, the future resurrection, is put under question, and even negated. St. Paul is firm in this respect also and his responses are profoundly apologetic. The spiritual superficiality of the believers and the Greek philosophy which influenced them resulted in the Corinthians' lacking the crowning jewel of the Christian faith: glorification through resurrection and eternal life.

Looking at the epistle of 1 Corinthians as a whole, we observe a diverse community, worn down by conflicts and living under the pressure of a polytheistic society and its accompanying lower moral values. The members of the Corinthian Church needed to seek true Christian spirituality, conforming themselves to that which St. Paul had professed. By still being like children, in a spiritual sense, they let themselves easily caught in the conflict's noose. These conflicts would bring to the surface their lack of authentic Christian spirituality and make it easy to see. Socio-cultural, economic, ethnic and political factors were secondary causes or just factors which made conflict more likely. St. Paul does not bring to the Corinthians sociological or political solutions, as deviations from true Christian spirituality cannot be corrected except through spiritual solutions, ones that are theological in nature.

The synthesis of this truth, namely that all the conflicts which appeared in the Corinthian Church appeared due to a lack of spirituality or that all solutions to the problems of the Church in Corinth had to be sought in the holy domain (both extracted by way of analysis of 1 Corinthians), opens up a myriad of opportunities for continuing study of these hermeneutical coordinates: for spiritual problems, spiritual solutions must be provided, from the Scriptures.