

Mark T. Finney, *Honour and Conflict in the Ancient World. 1 Corinthians in Its Greco-Roman Social Setting* (LNTS 460; London – New York: T & T Clark 2012) Hardback. Pp. XVII + 288. \$136. ISBN 978-05-670-57-723

### MARCIN KOWALSKI

Institute of Biblical Studies, John Paul II Catholic University of Lublin  
e-mail: xmkowal@gmail.com

*Honour and Conflict in the Ancient World* by Mark T. Finney (MTF) is an elaboration of the doctoral thesis submitted at the University of St. Andrews in 2004. Presently, the author teaches New Testament in the Department of Biblical Studies at the University of Sheffield, U.K. The work offers a general study of 1 Corinthians within its social context, presenting a case for the thematic centrality of *filotimia*, the love of honor, at key points of the letter. The book consists of Introduction, seven chapters, and Conclusion followed by Bibliography, Index of Ancient Authors, and Index of Sources. Bibliography comprises mostly works in English with occasional references to publications in German and French.

In Introduction the author argues for the interrelatedness of *filotimia* and conflict in the ancient world, and briefly presents the outline of the study. MTF claims that conflicts in Corinth were the effect of a crisis of the neophytes' social identity and stemmed from the cultural power of *filotimia*. Paul responds by deracinating social norms and presenting a new, counter-cultural paradigm of believers' life, which is focused on the cross of Christ.

Chapter 1, "Honour & Shame in Contemporary Mediterranean Ethnography and Biblical Studies: Analysis and Critique" (pp. 5-16) provides a brief analysis and critique of employment of the honour-shame model in contemporary anthropological studies and within the Pauline corpus. Following Herzfield, Lever, and Wikan, the author warns against using honor and shame categories generically, "like a dress code", with no sensitivity to the inherently multivalent meaning that honor assumes in various cultural and social configurations. To put it brief, MTF argues against applying cross-cultural social-scientific models to biblical texts and opts, instead, for studying their "social history". The rest of Introduction is dedicated to a brief survey of the semantics of honor in the Greco-Roman world and in the Pauline corpus (the vocabulary of *doxa*, *timē*, *atimia*, and *kauchaomai*).

Chapter 2, "Honour and Conflict in the Ancient World" (pp. 17-48) illuminates the notion of honor and shame, together with its power to generate jealousy, enmity,

and conflict in the Greco-Roman society. The author starts with the Homeric literature (the construction of Homeric male, the honor-conflict scenarios, the Homeric gods, and the honor in family/community) illustrating the “honor culture” in which the primary focus was the maintenance and aggressive enhancement of *timē* perceived as fragile and continuously challenged by others. The social values envisaged in the Homeric poems laid foundations for the later Greek and Hellenistic literature, which the author investigates next. The rhetoricians and writers like Isocrates, Xenophon, Demosthenes, Plutarch, or Herodotus portray the constant quest for honor which provokes envy, animosity and conflict among the Greek males. According to MTF, Aristotle would be responsible for introducing the new components of honor, which are philosophical and philanthropic actions, literate compositions, maintenance of the State, and expenditures in the service of the gods. Honor in the Roman world also played the role of the preeminent social value. Combined with moral reputation and strictly connected with the system of patronage and civic cult, honor was the core component of social life.

Chapter 3, “Setting the Scene” (pp. 49-68) examines first what can be said of Paul’s honor in light of ancient prosopography (the physique and weakness of the apostle). Then, the author moves to reflect on the social context of Corinth and the Corinthian Christ-movement meetings. Besides sketching the socio-cultural profile the city, the author argues for the Christian community comprising from 100 to 150 members which would meet not only in larger *oikoi* but also in *insulae* or rented “*collegia*-style club-rooms”. The profile of the community and the diversified character of their meetings would be a natural factor contributing to the factions and tensions described in 1 Corinthians.

Chapter 4, “Conflict & Honour in 1 Corinthians 1–4” (pp. 69-109) focuses on the topics of partisanship, wisdom, and rhetoric in 1 Cor 1–4. In the first four chapters of the letter, Paul exposes his *theologia crucis* which stands at sharp contrast to the ideology of *filotimia*. Factionalism caused in Corinth by competing parties of Apollos, Peter, Paul and Jesus was, according to MTF, provoked by the pursue of honor, which stands above concord and unity in ancient culture. Rhetoric, the pinnacle of education and the tool to gain social prestige, would also be a divisive factor. Paul’s preaching, lacking the professional articulation and training, combined with his low status of manual worker, were an easy target for the protagonists of the “honor culture”. The paradox of the cross served Paul to undermine the agenda that divided the body of Christ and to disclose a new paradigm radically opposed to *filotimia*. MTF analyzes a number of key-texts in 1 Cor 1–4 to show how “God’s folly” is revealed in the Corinthians’ low social origins (1 Cor 1:26-31), in the kerygma that differs from the wisdom of this world (1 Cor 2:6–3:4), and in the apostles who are mere servants (1 Cor 3:5–4:5) and whose life is a mockery of *filotimia* (1 Cor 4:6-2).

Chapter 5, “Social Tensions within the Community: 1 Corinthians 5–7” (pp.110-146), examines the social tensions in Corinth over such issues as sexual relations, law courts, and purity. The author defines the case of the incestuous man from 1 Cor 5 as controlled by the social-honored based constraints of patronage and deference. Paul appeals to the laws of purity (Exod 12; Lev 18:8; Deut 22:30) and to the crucified Christ described as the Passover lamb to challenge the Corinthians’ perceptions of honor and to call them to responsibility for the body of the church. 1 Cor 6 is then analyzed by MTF from the perspective of honor and conflict in the secular law courts. In 1 Cor 6,1-11 men of high status seem to assert their honor and position by making full use of the judicial system, whereas in 1 Cor 6:12-20 they attempt to maintain their rights in acts of sexual immorality. In both cases it has destructive effects for the unity of the community and dishonors it as a temple of God. Finally, in 1 Cor 7:1-7, the author perceives the two influential ideologies: the first one regarding marriage as an institution to enhance one’s property and status, and the second one judging celibacy as a superior call and an ideal worth of pursuing. Paul responds in 1 Cor 7:7-24 by admonishing the Corinthians over their obsessive preoccupation with status-enhancement and cultural lust for upward-mobility.

Chapter 6, “Honour, Conflict & Dining: 1 Corinthians 8–11” (pp. 147-177) starts from the analysis of commensality in the Greco-Roman world within the context of sacrifice and fellowship meals. MTF first asserts the profound importance of sacrifice and dining in the ancient world: they made a statement about one’s status and were a vital arena for accrue ment of honor. Subsequently, the author moves to the Judean context of idolatry which is also strictly connected with the issue of honor: the worship of idol dishonors God and provokes Him to jealousy. The above observations allow a perspective upon the social scenarios of 1 Cor 8:1–11:1 and 11:17-34, analyzed by MTF in next paragraphs. Discussing the issue of *eidōlothyta* in 1 Cor 8:1–11:1, Paul shames “the strong” who sought to maintain and enhance their prestige and status by pagan cultic meals, and establishes a new code of honor for the Corinthian community (the cross as the fundament of Christ-centered praxis and loving relationships). Next, the author reads 1 Cor 11:17-34 through the lens of fellowship meals in the voluntary associations, whose essential element was always status recognition. *Schismata* and *aireseis* in Corinth were caused by the fact that the believers ate together in the same space, yet separated into antagonistic social groups demarcated by cultural concepts of appropriating honor. Once again in 1 Cor 11:24-25 Paul points that such a behavior stands in contradiction to the very essence of Eucharist, which is a remembrance of the “dishonorable” death of Christ.

Finally, chapter 7, “Problems of Worship and Belief: 1 Corinthians 12–15” (pp. 178-218) engages with the problems of worship, divine gifts, and honor

in Corinth. Paul's discourse inverts the symbolic universe of the first-century ideology according to which honor was granted on the basis of social standing, wealth, or superior spiritual gifts. The apostle argues, instead, for a new world view in which the Corinthians constitute one body arranged by God and governed by mutual love and care (1 Cor 12–14). When reading 1 Cor 15, the author exposes first its Judean context with the notion of resurrection perceived as a reward for the righteous believer. In the Greco-Roman ambience, on the other side, there was little room for ideas of bodily resurrection. According to MTF, in 1 Cor 15 Paul presents the vision of a new, imperishable, and glorious body which leaves behind the old and corrupt flesh and soul; it will be animated by the Holy Spirit and composed of immortal and incorruptible aspects. The victory of Christ will be extended to his believers, together with his honor and glory. Paul's argument here, as the author notes, involves the whole of creation theology and touches upon the honor of God who is capable of recreating within the believer the very image of his resurrected Son.

In Conclusion (pp. 219-223), MTF confirms his initial contention that the model of honor "has a compelling claim to provide the primary social context for a holistic reading of the letter and the conflict within it" (p. 223). The rapacious pursuit of status enhancement and honor in Corinth was in many ways responsible for strifes and factions within the community. Paul, by constantly referring to the Christ crucified, wanted the believers to discover that the source of their honor is the plan of God that made of them one body bound by brotherly love and sharing in the glory of his Son.

There are many things for which *Honour and Conflict in the Ancient World* by Mark T. Finney deserves to be praised. The first one is a sound and clearly defined methodology which the author exposes right at the beginning of his book. MTF is interested in the social history of the Corinthian community, and his work is rich in multiple and valuable references to ancient literature. Next, the author aptly demonstrates the argumentative unity of 1 Corinthians expressed in the leading motif of the *theologia crucis*. 1 Cor 1–4 are truly radiating upon the entire letter providing a conceptual frame for the apostle's discourse. Third, the notion of honor is indeed crucial for the culture in which Paul and his communities lived, thus giving us a plausible explanation and background for the conflicts in Corinth.

Notwithstanding the mentioned merits of the book, one can disagree with the author on some specific issues. The first one is the Aristotle's putatively novel perception of honor, in which the praise of God is included (p. 34). One would rather think that honor based on the worship of gods seems to be well-rooted in Homeric literature much before Aristotle and belongs to the ancient core values. Second, is Paul really concerned *first and foremost* with the disunifying effects

of the behavior of some members upon the community in 1 Cor 5–15? (p. 115). It's certainly an issue in 1 Corinthians but it seems to be only a background in 1 Cor 7 and 15. The thesis advanced before MTF by Margaret Mitchell (*Paul and the Rhetoric of Reconciliation*) seems to force some parts of 1 Corinthians into a straitjacket of rhetorical composition.

Further, in Cor 7, the author focuses almost exclusively on the issue of celibacy, skipping the scandalously counter-cultural issue of the indissolubility of marriage. MTF should definitely pay attention to the divorce ban which was a true blow to the honor of men and women alike, closing the path to personal freedom, social promotion and enrichment. It's also hard to agree with what the author states at page 205: "Some traditional and popular myths which told of the dead living in a shadowy existence in Hades may well have still held credibility for a few, but for many it was an emphasis upon the salvation of the soul, emanating from Platonic thinking [...], which came to the fore". In the first century, the mythical views on afterlife instilled in masses by Homer, Virgil and others would be definitely much more popular than the platonic philosophy. It can be proved by the language that Paul uses in 1 Cor 15 and elsewhere, which bears no allusions to specific philosophical currents but rather to popular mythical images of astral bodies and corporeal transformation (1 Cor 15:40-51). The last issue regards the author's statement on the doubts in the resurrection of Jesus himself in Corinth (1 Cor 15:1-8) (p. 211). In the opening verses of 1 Cor 15 Paul calls upon the fact of the resurrection of Christ to subsequently prove the resurrection of the believers. If the first truth is not shared by the Corinthians, the apostle's argumentation has little sense.

One can disagree with the author on a couple of points but it doesn't deny the true value of *Honour and Conflict in the Ancient World* by Mark T. Finney. The book is an excellent study of the notion of honor in ancient literature and provides the reader with important and interesting background material for the study of Pauline letters. It is a must to read for the scholars and students working on 1 Corinthians. I will also be appreciated by the critical followers of Bruce Malina and Jerome Neyrey, as well as by those who use social history and anthropology of culture to read the New Testament texts.