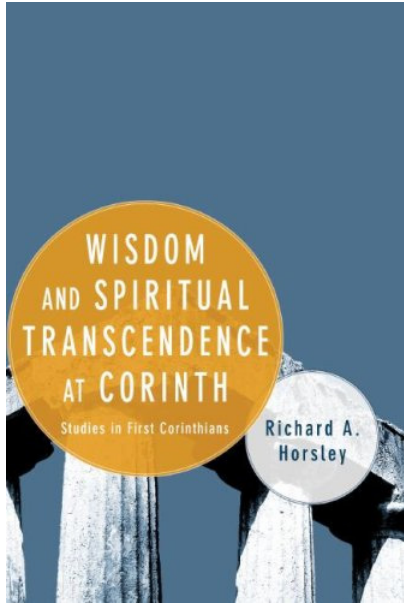


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Horsley, Richard A.

***Wisdom and Spiritual Transcendence at Corinth:
Studies in First Corinthians***

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Seven of these eight studies have been published before, during the period 1976 to 1979. It is useful to have these essays to hand in a single volume. Neil Elliott calls them “landmark essays,” and James D. G. Dunn observes that they have “too often been overlooked.” We begin, therefore, with the one new essay, “Ecstatic Prophecy in Corinth” (ch. 7, 115–27). Horsley rightly regards *πνευματικοί* as the Corinthians’ preferred term in contrast to Paul’s preferred term *χαρίσματα* (1 Cor 12:4). He rightly shows that Paul is concerned with an overevaluation of tongues. Indeed, glossolalia may well be a neologism derived from Paul’s argument. Horsley summarizes “tongues” as (1) speaking to God in contrast to speaking to other people; (2) producing sounds like an indistinct noise; (3) they constitute an act of prayer, but without the mind; and (4) outsiders may perceive them as madness.

Most writers on tongues would find nothing controversial here. The argument becomes more distinctive when Horsley examines “ecstatic Prophecy in praise of transcendent Sophia” in Wisdom of Solomon and in Philo. Philo sees divine ecstasy as the highest form of prophecy, even if in Plato a person should later recollect, and reflect upon, what he or she has earlier spoken. He appeals to *Her.* 249–266 and *Spec. leg.* 4.49 in Philo. He observes, “The prophet never pronounces anything which is his own, but rather he is an

interpreter prompted by another.” This constitutes a striking analogy, the author claims, to 1 Cor 12–14. Philo insists that only the “wise” can be truly “God-inspired.” Wisdom 7:25–26 offers a further parallel. Horsley writes, “Paul may have characterized such ecstatic experiences as ‘childish’ and ‘madness’, and modern psychologists may see them as ‘regressive’” (122). Nevertheless, such “regression” can lead to a new life, rooted in childlike creative energies, released from oppressive social forms. Paul therefore encourages prophecy and tongues, but “interpretation of tongues” transforms glossolalia into an intelligible message. He uses the body metaphor for antielitist purposes and queries the readers’ supposed high spiritual status.

The general argument of the essay merits appreciation and approval. But there are some surprising features that remain open to question. (1) Does 1 Cor 13 represent the “abstract” quality of love (twice, 115 and 125)? I have tried to show in my two commentaries on 1 Corinthians that every attribute ascribed to love has concrete and specific situational echoes at Corinth, as James Moffatt argued much earlier. They are emphatically not “disembodied virtues” (125). (2) Does the view of David Hill, Ulrich Müller, and Thomas Gillespie that “prophecy” includes applied pastoral preaching deserve no mention? In the light of the charismatic movement today, this issue has become crucial. (3) Is it not “some at Corinth” rather than Paul who borrowed so much from Philo and Wisdom? Horsley probably means this, but his phrasing seems not unambiguous. (4) While we may appreciate Horsley’s analysis of tongues, do not Stendahl, Macchia, and Theissen (not to mention the present writer in 1979, 2000, and 2006) deserve credit for this argument? (5) How does “asserting his own authority” cohere with work on apostleship by Best and especially Crafton? (6) Is not 14:33–36 to do with the sifting of prophecy, as I argued in my two commentaries, rather than “intruding” into the argument? The general argument is probably valid, but it reveals gaps in its details and documentation.

Most of the other seven essays will be familiar to many. Chapter 1, on “spiritual status among the Corinthians,” appeared in *HTR* 69 (1976): 269–88 and examines Corinthian claims to be *πνευματικοί* in contrast to *ψυχικοί*. Horsley rightly opposes Wilckens’s theory about gnostic material. The contrast parallels that between the mature (*τέλειοι*) and children (2:6–3:4). This also relates to Philo’s exposition of two types of people alluded to in 15:44–54. Reference is similarly made to the Jewish Wisdom tradition. Horsley writes, “Wisdom had become identified with the Torah or Law” (17). He concludes by seeing the origins of the contrast in Hellenistic-Jewish tradition. If this essay had been written today, we might have expected greater caution in using the term “Hellenistic-Jewish” in the light of work by Martin Hengel and others.

The second essay, “Wisdom of Word and Words of Wisdom,” was published in *CBQ* 39 (1977): 224–39. It rightly takes account of appeals to the gnostic Sophia myth and to

Wisdom Christology. But it is no longer true that there is “very little attention to the motif of speech” in the interpretation of earlier chapters in 1 Corinthians. Stephen Pogoloff’s *Logos and Sophia* (1992) is among the most important, followed by Andrew Clarke (1993), Duane Litfin (1994), John Moores (1995), Bruce Winter (1997), and others. Still, Horsley rightly and convincingly argues that the Corinthians viewed Paul as a Wisdom teacher, while Paul rejects the place that they gave to Sophia (35). The third chapter continues the theme with “Spiritual Marriage with Sophia.” This was first published in *Vigiliae Christianae* 33 (1979): 30–54. Horsley examines spiritual marriage in Wisdom and Philo. Sophia brings “the soul” into intimacy with God. In Philo, this becomes complex. The author compares the asceticism of the Therapeutae. All contributes to the Corinthians’ devotion to Sophia. However, Paul opposes spiritual marriage with Sophia. This is a useful and coherent argument.

The fourth chapter, “Gnosis in Corinth,” was first published in *NTS* 27 (1979): 32–51. Horsley concedes that superficially Paul quotes the Corinthians’ slogan, “We all possess γνῶσις” (8: 1). The nothingness of idols features not only in Paul but also in Wisdom and Philo. Philo furnishes numerous examples and parallels. In 8–10 Paul provides a “dialectical” response (85). Horsley rejects Conzelmann’s claim that the Corinthians are “correct.” What he says about “the strong” amounts to a careful “put-down” of Corinthian claims about *gnosis*. The fifth chapter concerns “The Confessional Formula in 1 Cor. 8: 6.” This was first published in *ZNW* 69 (1978): 130–35. Horsley discusses Norden and the Hellenistic and Jewish background in Philo. The essay is useful, but nowadays we might do better to look at the recent work of Larry Hurtado on the subject.

The sixth and eighth essays, respectively, are on “Consciousness and Freedom” (from *CBQ* 40 [1978]: 574–89) and “How Can Some of You Say That There Is No Resurrection?” (from *NTS* 20 [1978]: 203–31). The sixth essay discusses consciousness, conviction, and “conscience” in 1 Cor 8–10. It is generally recognized today, especially after Gooch, that *συνείδησις* is more than an exact equivalent to “conscience” but also includes the notion of being secure in a firm conviction. The eighth essay considers the impact of the Sophia tradition and of various other crosscurrents upon the Corinthians’ difficulties and questions about the resurrection. Paul’s approach to the resurrection is very different from Philo’s dualism and his notions about the immortality of the soul (149). He does not base his argument, like Philo, on “the true self” of the individual (155). Horsley succeeds in tracing the varied motivations and influences that determine questions about the resurrection in Corinth. Paul answers them by speaking of belief in God the sovereign Creator.

We have already discussed the seventh essay. The conclusions are level-headed and useful. Many, however, has been overtaken by more recent scholarship and are now

widely familiar. They successfully attack some views that were once fashionable and may even come into vogue once again. The greatest disappointment lies in the bibliography and the failure to acknowledge the progress of recent scholars. But if this is viewed as a classic of earlier exegesis, it is more than useful to have these essays collected in one volume.