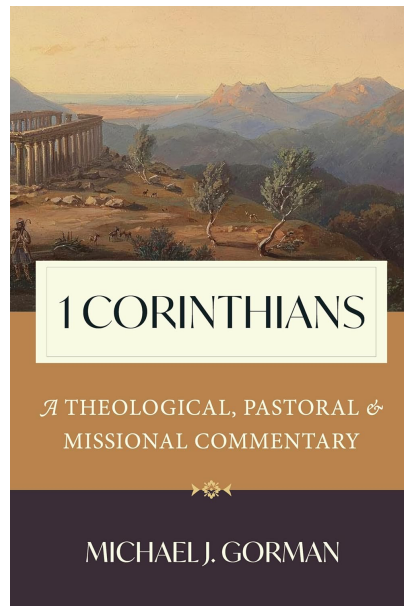


RBL 11/2025



Michael J. Gorman

1 Corinthians: A Theological, Pastoral, and Missional Commentary

Eerdmans, 2025. Pp. xxiii + 453. Hardcover. \$39.99. ISBN 9780802882660.

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This new commentary on 1 Corinthians is a mid-level exegetical and theological reflection. Michael J. Gorman, the Raymond E. Brown Chair in Biblical Studies and Theology at St Mary's Seminary and University in Baltimore, is well known for his concept of cruciformity (*Apostle of the Crucified Lord: A Theological Introduction to Paul and His Letters.*), and he brings it as the lens to analyze the Corinthian correspondence in a fresh way. He explores key Pauline themes (many familiar from his earlier works) and draws out the contemporary significance of Paul's teaching for the life and mission of the church. One of the most notable features of this commentary is how Gorman frames the letter around the four marks of the church from the Nicene Creed: one, holy, catholic, and apostolic. While these fourth-century categories postdate Paul, Gorman argues that using them as an interpretive lens allows us to perceive things we might not otherwise see in 1 Corinthians. In the introductory chapters, Gorman describes the fundamental problem in Corinth as a failure to understand the cruciform nature of the gospel. The community was entangled in factionalism and status-seeking, symptoms of a deeper misunderstanding of the real-life consequences of the gospel of Jesus, the crucified Messiah. From this vantage point, this commentary is structured in four movements corresponding to the church's ecclesial identity.

Chapters 1–4 stress unity through the wisdom and power of the cross (the church is one). Gorman highlights Paul's extensive plea for ecclesial unity in a community fragmented by rival allegiances and pride. In other words, Paul counters the Corinthians' divisions with the wisdom of the cross. Gorman

emphasizes that, for Paul, the message of Christ crucified stands in opposition to the honor-seeking values of the Roman world and even to the misguided notions of the Corinthians' spiritual wisdom. The commentary carefully discusses how God's power is revealed in weakness. True Christian leadership (whether Paul, Apollos, or Cephas) must be evaluated by the foolishness of the cross, not by worldly standards. Reading through the lens of cruciformity, Gorman shows how Paul preaches Christ crucified (1 Cor 1:23) and calls the church to a cruciform mindset (117). The unity in the Corinthian church can only be achieved by embracing the cross together. Put another way, Paul refers to a unity rooted, not in human boastfulness, but in the shared humility of being "in Christ Jesus, who became for us wisdom from God ... and crucified" (1 Cor 1:30). By anchoring the oneness of the church in the cross, Gorman illuminates Paul's strategy of undercutting the source of divisions (social status, rhetorical eloquence, etc.) through a radical different vision of wisdom and power. Gorman stresses that Paul's pastoral theology is inherently missional; that is, the unity and lowliness of the Christian community serve as a witness, so that outsiders' faith will rest on God's power, not human wisdom (1 Cor 2:4-5). "Not only did God not *choose* the wise and powerful, but God did not *use* the wise and powerful" (124).

The subsequent chapters (5-7) contain a series of moral and communal crises that threatened the church's holy identity. In this section, which Gorman labels "Addressing Moral Chaos: Holy Living between the Cross and Parousia," the commentary deals with issues of sexual immorality (the case of the man living with his father's wife in ch. 5), legal disputes among believers and sex with prostitutes (ch. 6), and the questions about marriage, divorce, and singleness (ch. 7). Gorman interprets these diverse issues through the same lens of the church's mark of holiness. The Corinthian congregation is called to be a sanctified people, set apart from the prevailing moral norms of the city. Gorman shows how Paul's ethic here is cruciform and communal. Believers are "not their own" but bought with a price. Thus, the believers' bodies must glorify God, honoring Christ's self-giving sacrifice (1 Cor 6:12-20). Gorman's analysis in this section situates Paul's instructions in a broader narrative of the cross. The Corinthian community had to "be sufficiently spiritually and theologically wise to draw those conclusions from their scripture and the gospel" (197), thus reflecting the holiness of God who called them. By treating these chapters through the lens of the church's category of holy, the commentary draws a clear line from the Corinthians' concrete problems to the theological identity of the church as *ἅγιος*, the sanctified people of God.

Gorman interprets the largest section of the letter, 1 Cor 8-14, under the category of catholicity. By catholic, Gorman means the church's wholeness and universality. In this section, Paul argues for the inclusion of all kinds of people and the ordered worship that builds up the entire body. These chapters address what Gorman calls "liturgical chaos" in Corinth, namely, controversies about idol meat (ch. 8), propriety in worship gatherings (ch. 11), and the misuse of spiritual gifts (ch. 12). At first glance, grouping these chapters under the heading catholicity proves rather unconventional. However, Gorman makes a case that a unifying thread is the church's call to live as a universal community in which love and concern for the other outweigh individual rights and status. The

commentary, on the one hand, draws out this formula “although X, not Y, but Z” (248) in Paul’s ethic, meaning a practical model of cruciformity whereby one’s freedom or rights are laid down, not exploited, in order to serve others in love. “This is catholic, Christoform neighbor love, community concern, and salvific intentionality.” (238) This single insight points to the fact that the community’s catholic identity requires an outward-looking love that seeks the salvation and edification of all. On the other hand, the theme of catholicity continues in the sense of inclusivity and order in the one body. Thus, in this section Gorman effectively links the Corinthians’ internal liturgical issues with the outward, inclusive dimension of the community’s ethical behavior in an ecclesial framework of love, unity, and mission.

Finally, Gorman turns to 1 Cor 15–16, which he groups under the heading of apostolicity. The focus in this final section concerns the apostolic gospel of the resurrection and the continuity of the apostolic mission. In 1 Cor 15, Paul addresses the “theological chaos” caused by some Corinthians denying the future resurrection of believers. Gorman treats this chapter as the climactic theological moment of the Corinthian correspondence. Paul reasserts the foundational apostolic witness, namely, the death and resurrection of Christ, and he insists that the hope of believers’ resurrection is nonnegotiable for true Christian faith. The commentary analyzes Paul’s argument from the common creed he received to his personal testimony as “one untimely born” who saw the risen Lord, leading Gorman to conclude that 15:1–11 grounds the Corinthian church in the apostolic tradition. The church is apostolic insofar as it remains faithful to the message preached by the apostles and attested by the eyewitnesses. Later, Paul deals with the implications of denying the resurrection (1 Cor 15:12–19) and positively discusses the nature of the resurrection body and the ultimate victory over death (15:35–57). The theme of apostolicity carries into the brief chapter 16. Gorman reads it as more than miscellaneous concluding remarks. In this chapter, Paul considers the collection for the Jerusalem church (16:1–4), travel plans and coworkers, and final exhortations. For Gorman, this chapter reinforces the letter’s ecclesial character, that is, one, holy, catholic, and apostolic church. Thus, the commentary’s analysis of the final chapters strengthens Gorman’s claim that apostolicity in 1 Corinthians is not an abstract notion but rather is revealed in fidelity to the apostolic gospel of the cross and resurrection and in continuity with the apostle’s mission of building up a universal and inclusive church.

No review would be complete without mentioning some general observations or areas of potential debate regarding Gorman’s method and conclusions. First, Gorman’s exegesis in this commentary is organized by larger discourse units, rather than a verse-by-verse approach. One key element of this commentary is that it is deeply informed by scholarship but not overly burdened by academic minutiae. Second, at the end of each major section, Gorman offers a bibliography for further reading, categorized by level from accessible to advanced works. This feature turns this commentary into a springboard for deeper study, guiding interested scholars to the wider scholarly conversation. In comparison to these observations (rather positive), there are also two critiques or areas of potential debate observed in this commentary. (1) Gorman’s choice to use the Nicene marks of the church as

an interpretive framework risks imposing later theological categories onto Paul's letter. That said, even a skeptical reader would agree that Gorman's framework illuminates important themes in 1 Corinthians. (2) Another area of critique relates to Gorman's treatment of contemporary ethical issues, which he has drawn in this commentary. For instance, when discussing sexual immorality in 1 Cor 6, he claims, "Paul's theology of the body ... challenges ancient and modern claims suggesting that human beings have inalienable rights to the control and use of their bodies and to the sexual practices of their choosing" (200). Readers from a more progressive perspective may disagree, even as they acknowledge the genuine thought-provoking nature of the analysis. On the whole, Gorman's commentary offers a model of practical theology focused on ecclesiology that opens 1 Corinthians as a pastoral, liturgical, missional, and contemporary text.