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**«The One God and the Many Gods: Monotheism and Idolatry
in 1 Cor 8:1-11:1 in Light of Philo's Writings»**

This dissertation presents a historical interpretation of 1 Cor 8:1-11:1 in light of Philo's writings. It is about the One God and the many ones; question of monotheism and idolatry in Corinth with a window to the same issue in Meiganga, my home town. I have been motivated by my own experience as pastor working in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Meiganga, Cameroon. My observation, during the period of my work as shepherd is that, believers in my area are in danger of mixing Christian faith with ancestral religion. There is, therefore, risk or threat of syncretism which represents also a big challenge to Christian faith in this 21st century. From my own observations, I turn to what Paul experienced in the first century in Corinth concerning the same issue of monotheism and idolatry, perceived at the bottom of the social issue of eating idol food.

Methodologically, I find innertexture and intertexture as developed by Vernon K. Robbins relevant to this work. These different layers help to focus on other Jewish-Christian texts, then the social context of Paul, the Roman Empire.

This historical study describes in the first chapter the world of Paul and Philo. It displays that both Paul and Philo were Jews of the Diaspora; they shared the same period, the first century A.D., when Rome had control of the whole Mediterranean basin. Both Paul and Philo mastered the Greek language and were important spiritual personalities of their respective community, Corinth and Alexandria. But while Paul was a Christian, Philo was rooted in Judaism. They drew limits in order to save the faith of their fellows living in an environment where there was danger of getting involved in idolatry.

The second chapter concerns Paul's and Philo's monotheism and idolatry. But it first shows that in the first century C.E., there were two monotheistic tendencies: the strict one and the inclusive one. By strict monotheism, I mean the consideration of monotheism at the exclusive level. It depicts God as being one, as a monarch, at the top of other deities who were at his service. The image here is that of deuterio-Isaiah where the other gods come to the God of Israel and surrounded him, and listen to him. He alone is seated at his throne and has the last word. The inclusive monotheism, which is the second tendency, is the view that God is One, but he shares his sovereignty with important figures as the chief of angels, and personal beings as Moses and Enoch. In this chapter, I try to get the picture of Paul's and Philo's

monotheism. I find out that Paul, depicts God as One (Rom 3:27-30; Gal 3:19-20), but the only one God includes Jesus Christ, the Lord at his throne (Col 1:15-20; Phil 2:6-11). Christ, being in the form of God, emptied himself and took the human form, and experienced a deep humiliation by his death on the cross (Phil 2:6-8). God, the Father, raised him and enthroned him in the way that all the creatures in heaven, on earth and under earth, bow before him (Phil 2: 9-11); he is the Son of God, the image of God, the First born of all, the head of the Church and pre-existent (Col 1:15-18). By contrast, Paul describes idols as being the product of human mind. Men, for their own interest, created other gods who had the form of birds, animals with four feet, and human form (Rom 1:18-23). For Paul, these gods were not God at all. In the same line, Philo of Alexandria depicts God as One, the only Creator, and Father of everything. This one God does not need other deities, who were just his creatures. This one God includes the logos, which is the mind and the reason of God; through this logos, God creates what exists. The so-called gods in heaven, on earth, and under-earth were the creatures and products of human mind and should not be worshipped.

The third chapter, which is the largest and main one, is about Paul's Christological monotheism as demonstrated by his attitudes to meat offered to idols. In this chapter, Paul built three scenarios about what to do and what to abstain from in matter of idol food. In effect, he had been asked by the Corinthian Christians on this matter. He first brings a theological argument on which he laid the foundation of his response to them. God is one, idols are nothing; this confession being parallel to the Shema and to Philo's monotheistic conception, discloses to us that probably those who wrote to Paul were from the Jewish background. God is the Father of the believers. He created what exists through the pre-existent Jesus Christ, the Lord. Jesus Christ is the Lord. It is not another Lord, but the one confessed by the Jews in Deut 6:4. Paul has then inserted Jesus in the divine identity to say to those who asked him about idol food consumption, that they should reflect Christ, the Lord, in their behaviour and avoid what could be obstacles to those for whom Christ died. An example of misbehaviour is the fact of eating idol food in idol's temple. He prohibited it; but allows eating any food from the marketplace and during dinner invitation when the nature of food was not connected to idolatry for the sake of conscience.

The second argument he brought to the issue of idol food consumption was that of the danger of fellowship with demons. Paul identifies what he calls many gods and many lords to demons which are not God (1 Cor 10:18-22; Cf Deut 32:17); demons hid behind idols to appropriate sacrificed food for them. In effect, Paul confirms their existence in 1 Cor 8:5 through the expression many gods and many lords. He makes allusion to the Lord Supper and the sacrifice in the Temple (1 Cor 10: 14-18) to illuminate the relation between demons and those who share sacrificed food. Through the bread and cup, believers are united to Christ. Through sacrifice in the Temple of Jerusalem, the sacrificer was united to the altar. Therefore, through idol food consumption, the eaters are united to demons.

Then, the third argument in 1 Cor 9:1-27. In this section, Paul set his own life as an example to be followed. This is remarkable through the repetitive and progressive use

of the first personal pronoun singular and plural: I, we. Paul called his adherents in the church of Corinth to follow his example as he himself followed that of Christ. They, then, should relinquish some of their rights for the sake of the weak brothers and sisters (1 Cor 8:10-13). This flexibility, for the sake of others, is a good paradigm that the Christian Gbaya in Meiganga could follow in order to avoid fellowship with demons, since what is sacrificed is sacrificed to demons and this sacrifice implies fellowship with them.

So, this study reveals that Paul argues by way of the confession that God is One, and this confession (Deut 6:4) is identical to that of the Jewish Christians who wrote to Paul (1 Cor 8:4), and as Philo stresses in his writings. God is the only One. This oneness is axiomatic and is a mark of singularity; this is why Philo says: "He gave no place in His sacred code of laws to all such setting up of other gods" (Dec 81). This singularity is in opposition to other gods as reflected also in the two first Commandments and the Shema (Exod 20:1-3; Deut 6:4). The one God had revealed himself to Moses under the name YHWH and revealed his existence through the creation (Spec. 1:34-35). As for what he is in essence, Philo tells us that it is good to investigate God for the sake of research and knowledge; but impossible to find a satisfactory result, since the "clear vision of God as He really is is denied us" (Spec 1:39-40). His nature is unknowable. He is the Creator, the Father of everything. According to Paul, he has brought everything to existence through Jesus Christ (1 Cor 8:6), the Lord, the Son of God, the Messiah, the image of God; he pre-existed in the form of God, and is the First-born of everything; he is the head of the Church and reflects the glory of God (Col 1:15-20). This conception does not deny the reality of the many gods. The gods were real, since there were many in the Roman world as Paul and Philo say (1 Cor 8:5; Spec 1:13-30), but they do not exist as God. They were God's creatures, and should not be worshipped (Dec 64). They have been created by human mind (Rom 1:18-23; Dec 52-81), and represented great danger to faith, since through them one comes to fellowship with demons.