Conclusion

Throughout the thesis, 1 Corinthians 1-4 has been investigated in terms of social and rhetorical approaches for two reasons. One is that these methods have provided the most helpful understandings to the background of the Corinthian Christian behaviour that Paul addresses. The other is that these methods (especially the rhetorical perspectives) have helped me to re-read Corinthian conduct and Paul’s reaction to it from within a Korean-Confucian Christian context. I have thus attempted a dialogue between two extremely different horizons, the first century Corinthian Christian situation and the 21st century Korean-Confucian Christian context.

At the outset, in Chapter One, I dealt with a wide range of scholarly hypotheses about the identification of Paul’s Corinthian ‘opponents’ as implied in 1 Corinthians. Those of Winter and Pogoloff motivated me to reconstruct the social and cultural situation of 1 Corinthians 1-4 in terms of rhetorical and social perspectives. Winter in particular explores analogies between the behaviour of some Corinthian Christians of wealth and high social status and sophistic tendencies in the wider society. These tendencies include student-teacher relationships, patron-client bonds, a spirit of competitiveness and rivalry, the preference for rhetorical abilities, and the high value given to wisdom and eloquence. I have argued that such behaviour was heavily influenced by the social and cultural conventions of first-century Roman Corinth, and played a crucial factor in causing divisions in the Corinthian Christian community, as evident in 1 Corinthians 1-4.

Yet Pogoloff, in a similar way to P.W. Gooch, argues that Paul didn’t reject Greco-Roman rhetorical traditions as such, but rather the behaviour of his Corinthian ‘opponents’ who expressed uncritically the cultural and social values of wisdom and
eloquence in the Christian community. This argument has challenged me to see that no Christian can be free from the impact of the cultural and social practices that predominate in the life of the society where s/he was born and lives. Paul himself demonstrates this by using rhetorical patterns and skills in writing 1 Corinthians 1-4, in order to argue against the uncritical absorption of human wisdom. Hence, we do not have to see in a completely negative way, the contribution of Korean-Confucian traditions and customs to the formation of Korean-Christian faith. Korean-Confucianism has had a profound influence upon the lives of Koreans today, regardless of their religious persuasion. Nonetheless, we need to develop more critical reflection on the Korean-Confucian influences shaping Korean Christian traditions that are in danger of distorting the biblical processes and message, and especially that of Paul in 1 Corinthians 1-4.

In the first part of Chapter Two, I reconstructed the rhetorical situation of Roman Corinth in the time of Paul and argued that Greco-Roman rhetorical traditions and especially Cicero’s rhetorical legacy had a major role in determining the social behaviour of the Corinthians in the mid-first century CE. I used Cicero’s rhetorical handbooks as the principal guide to define 1 Corinthians 1-4 as a rhetorical discourse and argued that the biblical text comprises the characteristics of both deliberative and epideictic rhetoric. I demonstrated that there are specific similarities between Cicero’s rhetorical handbooks and the Pauline language of 1 Corinthians 1-4 in terms of their use of the words, ‘boasting’ and ‘imitate’, and that these words are closely related to the Corinthian Christian preference for social and worldly understandings of wisdom and eloquence as described in 1 Corinthians 1-4. In other words, Paul both uses and critiques Greco-Roman rhetorical patterns and their social legacy.
In the second part, I explored the deep impact of patronage on the civic life of the Corinthians in the time of Paul. The Corinthian people, regardless of social status, were interconnected as patron, and clients by patronal systems that had an adverse effect on the communal life of the gathered followers of Jesus. The majority of these Corinthian Christians were poor and of low social status, for whom patronage was a means of survival in the wider Corinthian civic society. Because of this, the poor Christians could hardly refuse the patronal proposals of fellow Christians of wealth and high social status. On the other hand, to wealthy and high social-class Christians, patronage would be understood as a means of extending and reproducing their social influence in the Christian community. It would also be natural for these wealthy Christians to use their patronal networks to take control of the Christian community and keep it under their authority. Consequently, this patronage-based behaviour in the Christian community appears to have caused tensions with Paul as indicated in 1 Corinthians and especially chapter 9.

I have argued that by using their money and social prestige, some of wealthy and high social-class Christians assumed they would have leadership positions and to be patrons of the Corinthian Christian *ekklēsia*. They then assumed that they would establish patronal relationships with Paul, and offered him financial support. Nevertheless, Paul refused to accept their financial support (1 Cor 9:12, 15-19). He saw in their offer of monetary gifts that they were strongly influenced by the social phenomenon of patronal systems and social control through money and status. He did not want them to implicate him and take advantage of their patronal networks and continue to exercise their social privilege in the Christian community. Rather, he reminded them that their social privilege and patronal hierarchical systems did not ensure leadership positions and give them the right to take control of the Christian
ekklēsia (1 Cor 1:26-29). Paul further challenged them to make a pure commitment to the gospel of Christ crucified, which he preached to everyone free of charge (1 Cor 9:15-18).

In the last part of Chapter Two, I investigated the social environment of Roman Corinth in the day of Paul. The city was crowded with a great number of inhabitants and a wide range of people groups who migrated and visited from all over the Roman Empire. Paul made a number of Corinthian converts in such social circumstances. Hence, the Pauline community at Corinth was made up of a diversity of social and ethnic backgrounds. I have argued that there were three major ethnic groups: Greeks, Jews, and Romans. The members of Greek origin were the largest group in number, and those of Jewish origin were the second largest (see 1 Cor 1:22; 12:13). Most of these two groups were poor and of the socially lower classes, although there were a few wealthy and high social status members. By contrast, the members of Roman origin were the minority group in number, but many of them possessed wealth and higher social positions.

In Chapter Three, I showed that the social and ethnic distinctions amongst the Corinthian Christians seem to have also been a cause of conflicts in the Christian community (1 Cor 1:10-12; 11:18-19). In response to these conflicts, Paul reminds the Corinthians that he himself baptised Crispus, Gaius, and Stephanas who were the key leaders of each ethnic group (1 Cor 1:14-16). In so doing, Paul argues that though the Corinthian congregation comprised different ethnic groups and social classes, it should be united as the body of Christ (1 Cor 12:12-31). Furthermore, Paul seems to have deliberately named Stephanas together with Crispus and Gaius, as an ‘afterthought of special note’ (1:14-16). Paul would have known that more prominent members of the Corinthian congregation followed Crispus and Gaius as leaders than
Stephanas, because of their higher social status. Paul, however, draws attention to the dedication to the Christian community of the household of Stephanas again, just before the completion of 1 Corinthians (16:15-18). I argued that this is part of Paul’s rhetorical strategy. He appears to have presented Stephanas (and his household) as the best example of the whole congregation to follow in terms of Christian ethics, leadership, and dedication to the Christian mission in Corinth.

In the last part of Chapter Three, I argued that Paul criticises the behaviour of the Corinthian Christians in misusing Greco-Roman rhetorical conventions and patronal systems in the Christian community. The frequently occurring phrase *sophia logou* refers to the cultural-conventions-oriented wisdom and eloquence that some Corinthian Christians of wealth and high social status valued more highly than Jesus Christ crucified and the gospel message which Paul preached in Corinth (1:18-25). They also boasted about themselves as possessing such human-based wisdom and rhetorical skills and even encouraged fellow Christians of lower social class to imitate them. This is reflected, to some extent, in Paul’s ironic use of ‘boasting’ and ‘imitator’ (1 Cor 1:29-31; 4:16). Paul deliberately uses these two words and also refers to himself as the ‘father’ of them, for rhetorical effect in 1 Corinthians 1-4 (1:29; 3:18: 4:7, 15). In so doing, he subverted the social-and cultural-conventions-rooted thinking and behaviour expressed in the Christian community. Paul demonstrates Christ crucified as the wisdom of God and gives the highest value to Him (1 Cor 1:24). He further challenges the Christians to boast of Jesus Christ as the Lord (1:31) and imitate the humility and sacrifice he exercised as a servant of God (4:8-13, 16).

Furthermore, I have argued that the evidence suggests some Corinthians would have considered the Christian community as similar to a kind of *collegia* –
collegia tenuiorum and collegia sodalicia where patronage commonly operated to interconnect patrons and clients of a diversity of social levels within the social associations. This group of wealthy Corinthian Christians continued to assume the validity of hierarchical patronal systems and boasted about their social privilege and prestige in the Christian ekklēsia. To challenge them to leave behind such behaviour, Paul differentiates the fundamental structure of the Corinthian congregation from that of such collegia. Contrasting with the latter, he describes the former as an oikos community where God is the only paterfamilias and all the members are interconnected as brothers and sisters in Christ and share the love of God the Father and Jesus Christ the Lord (1 Cor 13:1-13).

Nevertheless, though Paul is critical of some aspects of Greco-Roman social and cultural conventions, he himself makes use of such conventions and persuasive rhetorical strategies, even briefly claiming to be a paterfamilias of the community (1 Cor 4:15) in order to effect change. In so doing, he does not devalue the Corinthian Christians’ ethnic particularities and traditional customs (especially those of the Jews) (see 1 Cor 1:26; 7:17-24). He does argue against a particular ethnic group claiming superiority over the other (1 Cor 12:13), because these social, cultural, and ethnic elements played a major role in dividing the Corinthian Christians into factions (1 Cor 1:10; 3:3; 11:18-19). To reclaim them from the grips of factionalism, Paul presents Jesus Christ as the One who transcends social, cultural, and racial boundaries and encourages the Christians to exercise unity and harmony in Christ as one body (12:12-13).

The attitude Paul expressed towards Greco-Roman social and cultural elements that characterised the social fabric and civic life of first-century Roman Corinth, motivates me to see the value of Korean-Confucian cultural traditions and
customs where I was born and have lived. These traditions and customs have been heavily influencing and deeply penetrating the lives of Korean people for hundreds of years. Hence, it is impossible to speak of Korean culture without referring to Korean Confucianism. The mixed Pauline attitude to Greco-Roman culture provides significant analogies and insights for me in attempting to re-read 1 Corinthians from my own cultural perspective.

In Chapter Four, therefore, I have evaluated the reconstruction of the social and rhetorical background of the Corinthian behaviour and Paul’s response to it as addressed in 1 Corinthians from a Korean-Confucian Christian context. In so doing, I have attempted to dialogue cross-culturally between the two extremely different social and cultural contexts, that of the mid-first century Roman Corinth and that of 21st century Korea. I have also explored analogies, intersections and differences in these two contexts. In this intercultural dialogue, I have employed a collective methodology of historical, social (sociological), philosophical, and contextual approaches rather than the same methods – social and rhetorical approaches – as I used for the reconstruction of the social and rhetorical environment of 1 Corinthians 1-4. In particular, the rhetorical perspective is not so helpful for the investigation of the Confucian situation of Korean society. The civic society of first-century Roman Corinth was influenced by Greco-Roman social and cultural conventions such as rhetorical and patronal elitism. Korean society, in contrast, does not place much importance on eloquence as such. Koreans instead consider written documents more important than eloquent speech. It is commonly understood in Korean society that to gain higher social status and take leadership positions, one should obtain good marks in the written – not oral – exams that the Korean government provides, or those of the giant private companies.
I have used historical analysis to examine the history of Korean Confucianism, especially as exemplified the life of T’oegye, and to study Confucian understandings of wisdom. In a social (sociological) sense, I have explored how Korean Confucianism has influenced, to a large extent, the structural formation of Korean society (e.g. social, educational, family, political, and religious structures) and the shaping of a Korean worldview, mentality, and social behaviour. On this basis, I have attempted to re-read some of Paul’s critique of Greco-Roman culture within Korean-Confucian culture, with the following insights.

Korean-Confucian-rooted wisdom (as exemplified by T’oegye’s legacy) deeply penetrates the life of Korean churches and Christian communities. Some Korean Christians insist on the importance of social achievements and boast of their social prestige in the Christian communities due to the strong influence of Korean Confucianism and its emphasis on wisdom, education, knowledge, and the reputation of person and family. Hence, some Korean Christians who are wealthy, educated, and of high social status easily dominate leadership positions in the church, while poor and uneducated Christians are marginalised from decision-making groups. In reaction to this, however, I have presented Paul as arguing that no one should boast about his/her social privilege – wisdom, high education, wealth, power, and high social status – but about Jesus Christ crucified as the wisdom of God in Christian communities (1:26-29).

Korean Christians were compelled to attend Shinto shine worship by the Japanese government during Japanese imperialism in the early 20th century. Some Christians regarded it as idol worship, while others understood it as an act of demonstrating respect to a Japanese emperor. This caused divisions amongst members in the Christian communities at that time, and even affects many Korean Christians
today, who tend to blame those forefathers who expressed veneration to Shinto shrines, and judge them as compromising their Christian faith with the world and committing idolatry against God. In response to this issue, I have suggested the primacy of Paul’s argument that rather, it is a sin to damage the conscience of another by our deeds and words, causing the Christian community to split, and that one should take care lest our behaviour wound the conscience of another and lest it cause the person to fall (1 Cor 8:9-10).

Ancestral ritual continues to be a controversial issue in Korean Christian (Protestant) homes today. In some Christian homes the issue of ancestor veneration causes divisions amongst family members. Some express a critical attitude towards ancestral commemoration and see it as idolatry, and others view it as a filial act whereby they venerate and commemorate the deeds and words of the dead. In response to this crucial issue, I have encouraged those Korean Christians who define ancestor veneration as idol worship based on Exodus 20:4-5 and its wider context (20:1-23), to reconsider their understanding of the Scripture that, in fact, does not address the issue of ancestral veneration. The Hebrew word pēšēl (‘idol’) in such biblical verses does not mean to include their dead ancestors – such as Abraham and Jacob – as those whom the people of Israel worshiped as idols. It can be concluded, therefore, that their understanding is taken out of its biblical context.

Moreover, Paul does not refer to Exodus 20:4-5 in 1 Corinthians 10:23-11:1, where, as I have argued, he addresses the issue of eating food at domestic dinner parties in the context of household cults and most probably ancestral veneration (10:27). Paul here appears not to challenge the Corinthian believers to remove the performance of household (and ancestral) rites from their homes. This is clearly a different attitude from that which he expressed in the preceding verses (10:1-22) as
part of the broader context (1 Cor 8:1-10:22). In these texts, Paul does argue against some Corinthian Christians who appear to have acted on their superior knowledge and participated in dinner feasts taking place in the context of the worship of gods and emperors in temples and involving imperial cults. These dinner feasts commonly included sexual immorality (e.g., 1 Cor 5:1-13; 6:12-20). They thus behaved idolatrously from Paul’s point of view (8:1-5), in a way similar to that of the Israelites in the wilderness (see 1 Cor 10:5-11; also Ex. chs. 13-17, 32; Num. chs. 11, 14, 16, 20, 21, 25). To correct such idolatrous conduct, Paul takes a direct quotation from Exodus 32:6 and commands them, in an imperative tone, “Do not be idolaters as some of them (the Israelites) were; as it is written, “the people sat down to eat and drink and rose up to dance” (1 Cor 10:7), and “shun the worship of idols” (10:14). As such, I have arrived at the conclusion that in 1 Corinthians 10:23-11:1, Paul appears neither to have regarded ancestor veneration as idolatry nor challenged the Corinthian Christians to stop themselves from performing it in their homes. Rather he seems to have introduced Moses, his deceased ancestor, as a hero and encouraged them to venerate and commemorate the deeds of his Jewish ancestors who had been “baptised into Moses” (1 Cor 10:1-4). This may well also be the key to understanding Paul’s apparent acceptance of the practice of ‘baptism for the dead’ (1 Cor 15:29), whereby whole households were baptised into Christ, including their ancestors.

In spite of this, many Korean Christians tend to disregard the value of ancestral veneration in Korean culture and express a critical and judgmental attitude towards it. This attitude hurts other Christians who perform it as a filial act to the dead and further causes conflicts and divisions in the church and Christian home. In response to such attitudes, I have presented Paul as arguing that a Christian should use his/her exousia to build up unity and harmony in the church and Christian home rather
than cause divisions in it (1 Cor 10:23, 32). Christians are called to exercise it for the advantage of fellow Christians, not for their own (10: 24, 33), for the glory of God (10:32), and for salvation of other people (10:33; 9:22). I have also encouraged Korean Christians to have a less judgmental attitude towards ancestor veneration. Thus they should not consider it as idolatry but as an integral part of Korean-Confucian traditional customs and thereby build up Korean cultural customs within our Christian faith.

I have argued that the performance of ancestral veneration can consist of superstitious characteristics: participants may believe that the spirit of the dead protects their household from evil and misfortune, if they please it through the ancestral rites. This superstitious element may be equated with the Christian understanding of worship by which Christians pray to God to protect their families from the harm of the Devil. Such elements incorporated into ancestral veneration would seem to be against Paul’s argument in 1 Corinthians 8 that all things, including protection from evil, come from God the Father (v. 6). Christians should examine critically these sorts of superstitious ingredients in ancestral veneration before performing it in their Christian homes.

Lastly, I have evaluated the problem caused by the ethnic diversity amongst the Corinthian Christians and Paul’s response to it from a Korean-Confucian Christian context. Most Koreans have been deeply impacted by the spirit of danil minjok and over-emphasise the homogeneous aspect of national identity. Consequently, they tend to have an exclusive attitude towards people of different races, different skin colours, and mixed blood. This tendency further penetrates the life of Korean Christians in Korea and diaspora Korean Christians overseas, especially those of the first generation migrants. Some of these diaspora Korean Christians have difficulty
building close relationships with people of different ethnic origins and different language backgrounds in multicultural societies, such as Australia and America. Many migrant Korean churches in such countries tend to be mono-ethnic (and monocultural) and not to welcome as members those Christians who come from different ethnic backgrounds and speak different languages. In response to Korean Christians of such ethnocentric tendencies, I have underscored the Pauline message of 1 Corinthians 12:12-13 (and Galatians 3:28). In these verses Paul does not claim that the Corinthian Christians should give up expressing their own ethnic and cultural particularities in the Christian communities. He instead refers to Jesus Christ as the agent who transcends ethnic, social, and gender distinctions (1 Cor 12:13; cf. Gal 3:28) in order to reclaim the Corinthian Christian community from the spirit of factionalism (1 Cor 1:10-12; 11:18-19). He further encourages them to break through their racial differences (and boundaries), embrace one another as brothers and sisters in Christ, and be united into one body by one Spirit (1 Cor 12:13).

As above, I have attempted a cross-cultural (or intercultural) dialogue between the two polarising social and cultural contexts and evaluated critically the Pauline message of 1 Corinthians and chapters 1-4 from a Korean-Confucian Christian context. This sort of biblical hermeneutics encourages contemporary readers who practise the Christian faith in the context of multiculturalism (e.g. Australia and America), to value their own cultural traditions and respectfully study them. The readers then interpret these traditions critically in terms of the biblical (Pauline) message that comes out of the early Christians’ encounter between the Gospel and their social and cultural contexts. In so doing, the readers can find clues for a dialogue between Christianity and other cultures, analogous to the dialogue between the
insights of this rhetorical and social analysis of 1 Corinthian 1-4 and the Korean-Confucian Christian context today.