

Paul's other letters). In both our case studies attention to the larger Old Testament context of the quotations was crucial to determining their function in their new contexts. This goes against the frequently asserted opinion that Paul is ignorant of or at least ignores the original context of his quotations. Secondly, the quotations of Scripture in 1 Corinthians may have played a more formative function in the letter than is sometimes assumed. Much of 1 Corinthians may be implicitly exegetical. Many of Paul's responses to Corinthian problems, although appearing to be emotionally charged and *ad hoc*, may nonetheless be building upon Biblical teaching.

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CONTROLLING THE BODIES

A THEOLOGICAL PROFILE OF THE CORINTHIAN SEXUAL ASCETICS (1 COR 7)

While interpreters of 1 Corinthians 7 used to find evidence only for Paul's preference for celibacy here, now there is a general consensus that some *Corinthians* themselves inclined toward or even advocated and practiced it, and that Paul writes partly to contest their position¹. But why did these Corinthians favor celibacy? How did it fit into their Christian self-understanding? How could they support it on the basis of Christian tradition or theology? Scholarly attempts to reconstruct Corinthian sexual asceticism have provided some generally accepted answers: It is grounded in the belief that celibacy characterizes eschatological existence and in a strong sense of eschatological fulfillment manifested especially in a lively pneumatism.

Yet by no means have we already gained a full and clear picture of Corinthian sexual asceticism and the theology which supported it. The present investigation is offered as an effort to close some of the gaps. It also attempts to fill a lacuna in scholarship by mining 1 Corinthians 7 itself more thoroughly than others have done for a reconstruction of the theological rationale for celibacy in Corinth. In particular, I will argue from this chapter that Corinthian sexual asceticism was based on Corinthian pneumatism, a theology of ἐξουσία, a view of the physical

1. Early representatives of the view that a tendency toward sexual asceticism in Corinth forms the occasion for Paul's discussion here are J. WEISS, *Der erste Korintherbrief* (KEK, 5), Göttingen, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1910, p. 169; H. LIETZMANN & W.G. KÜMMEL, *An die Korinther I* (HNT, 9), vol. 2, Tübingen, J.C.B. Mohr, 1969, p. 29; A. ROBERTSON & A. PLUMMER, *The First Epistle of St Paul to the Corinthians* (ICC), Edinburgh, T. & T. Clark, 1914, pp. 130-133; H. CHADWICK, 'All Things to all Men' 1 Cor. IX.22, in *NTS* 1 (1954-1955) 261-275, pp. 263-264; see also more recently, W. SCHRAGE, *Der erste Brief an die Korinther I* (EKK, VII/1), Braunschweig, Benziger - Neukirchen-Vluyn, Neukirchener, 1991, p. 54, who says that the practice of sexual asceticism by some Corinthians is "so gut wie sicher"; G.D. FEE, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (NICNT), Grand Rapids, MI, Eerdmans, 1987, pp. 269-271; contrast W. SCHMITHALS, *Gnosticism in Corinth. An Investigation of the Letters to the Corinthians* (tr. J. E. Steely), Nashville, TN - New York, Abingdon, 1971, p. 235; G. SELLIN, *Hauptprobleme des ersten Korintherbriefes*, in *ANRW* II 25.4 (1987) 2940-3044, p. 3003; C. CARAGOUNIS, "Fornication" and "Concession"? *Interpreting 1 Cor 7,1-7*, in this volume, pp. 543-559. Not all Corinthians were advocating or practicing sexual asceticism, however, as especially indicated by 7,5. There Paul states that temporary abstinence in marriage must be ἐκ συμφώνου, "by agreement," which implies that some spouses did not want to submit to such a practice.

body as consecrated to the Lord and of sexual union as therefore sin, and the view that the new creation in Christ excluded marriage and sexual union. 1 Corinthians 7 may well suggest other aspects of a theological basis for sexual asceticism not mentioned here, but I do not claim to deliver an exhaustive analysis.

I begin with a brief review of the major reconstructions (I). Then (II) follows my own based on 1 Corinthians 7, which incorporates, but also pushes beyond, the insights of others. The implications for previously suggested reconstructions will be noted at various points, and in the final conclusion (III) I will note briefly the basis for drawing a connection between the sexual ascetics of chapter 7 and the women and men whose behavior is the subject of 11,2-16.

Some cautions must be issued at the outset, however. This reconstruction can only give us a picture of the sexual ascetics in Corinth as Paul portrays them, and we cannot claim more than that. Further, even Paul's understanding of their behavior and its theological rationale is difficult to reconstruct on the basis of 1 Corinthians 7, and we must avoid the temptation to simplify the task through a simple "mirror reading" reconstruction of the ascetics.

I. REVIEW OF MAJOR RECONSTRUCTIONS

Major reconstructions share the view, based on 1 Corinthians 7, that some Corinthians were advocating celibacy, abstinence within marriage, and divorce or breaking off an engagement in order to make possible celibacy. Concerning the rationale for Corinthian sexual asceticism, however, more disagreement exists. Thus the following survey will draw attention to the main distinctive elements in each reconstruction, although the reader should understand that there is also overlap between them.

John C. Hurd thinks that the Corinthians' sexual asceticism rested on the belief that the institution of marriage would cease when the kingdom comes (a belief reflected in Markan and Q traditions, see Mk 12,24-25 [Lk 20,34-36]; Lk 17,26-27), combined with "enthusiasm" and an intense expectation of the imminent parousia, indeed, that Paul himself had originally taught sexual asceticism in Corinth on the same basis and that the Corinthians had remained faithful to his teaching². Similarly, according to David Cartlidge, the Corinthian sexual ascetics had a

realized eschatology (cf. 4,8; 15,12), which, in conjunction with the tradition mentioned above, led to an attempt "to reconstruct their society along eschatological lines [which] resulted in a demand for sexual asceticism"³. David L. Balch suggests that they not only appealed to ascetic words of the Lord, but also through asceticism aspired to become θεῖοι ἄνδρες, the "perfect" and "wise", who attained revelations from, and visions of, God, like the ascetic prophet Moses according to Philo's exegesis of Exodus 34 (Balch traces the influence of this tradition on the Corinthians to Paul's opponents in Corinth, and points in support to 2 Corinthians 3)⁴. Richard Horsley explains Corinthian asceticism in terms of devotion to Sophia, and compares the tradition of spiritual marriage with Sophia as divine Savior in Hellenistic Judaism (Isis religion provides a pagan example). In this tradition "true intercourse was a spiritual one with Sophia". He argues that the Corinthians stand in this tradition, pointing to many of its features, especially as represented by the Therapeutae, which are found in Corinth, including devotion to Sophia, ascetic behavior, an emphasis on ecstatic experiences, and a dualistic division between body and soul⁵. Antoinette C. Wire identifies the sexual ascetics in Corinth as women who have taken up the roles of prophets, advanced themselves socially through asceticism and their prophetic roles, and who espouse a theology that "in Christ all have authority and none are subject to each other but only to the spirit" (in contrast to Paul's stress on the danger of immorality and the continuing validity of the old structures)⁶. Margaret Y. MacDonald draws on 1 Cor 11,2-16 to describe the Corinthian ascetics as pneumatics who have ecstatic experiences in worship and whose asceticism was shaped by a theology of androgyne such as that in the Dominical Saying (recorded in Clem. Al. *Strom.* 3.9.64; cf. Gal 3,27-28) and in later gnostic writings. She suggests that these Corinthians believed they had transcended the material world and returned to primordial perfection in a new sexless state, which was symbolized by women's removal of their veil and which implied avoidance of sex altogether⁷. Wolfgang Schrage sees no eschatological motivation at all on the part of the Corinthian ascetics but

3. D. CARTLIDGE, *1 Corinthians 7 as a Foundation for a Christian Sex Ethic*, in *JR* 55 (1975) 220-234, pp. 227-230.

4. D.L. BALCH, *Backgrounds of 1 Cor. VII: Sayings of the Lord in Q; Moses as an Ascetic* ΘΕΙΟΣ ΑΝΗΡ in *II Cor. III*, in *NTS* 18 (1972) 351-364.

5. R. HORSLEY, *Spiritual Marriage with Sophia*, in *VigChr* 33 (1979) 30-54, pp. 46-51.

6. A.C. WIRE, *The Corinthian Women Prophets. A Reconstruction through Paul's Rhetoric*, Minneapolis, MN, Fortress, 1990, pp. 82-97.

7. M.Y. MACDONALD, *Women Holy in Body and Spirit: The Social Setting of 1 Corinthians 7*, in *NTS* 36 (1990) 161-81, pp. 164-173.

2. J.C. HURD, *The Origin of 1 Corinthians*, Macon, GA, Mercer, 1983, pp. 276-278.

denigration of the body and spiritual perfectionism which he traces to a body-soul dualism. On the strength of gnostic parallels, he concludes, "liegt darum eine Zuordnung zu einer gnostisch motivierten Askese am nächsten"⁸. This brief summary will suffice, for to review other reconstructions would be largely repetitive⁹.

What is striking about each of these reconstructions of the Corinthian sexual ascetics is how little those engaged in reconstruction have appealed to the text of Paul which provides the most immediate information we have about the Corinthian ascetics¹⁰. Instead interpreters have been largely content to work only with a feature or two of the ascetics gleaned from 1 Corinthians 7 and to look for links in other parts of the epistle which contribute to a reconstruction of the Corinthians (without paying much attention to the problem for this methodology posed by factionalism and the diversity of views in Corinth, let alone the question of the unity of 1 Corinthians). Or scholars have used texts from other Pauline letters or even other Christian and non-Christian sources as the key to reconstructing Corinthian sexual asceticism. Certainly, we can try to draw parallels and identify genuine and merely superficial ones. But first we need to paint as full a picture of this group as we can on the basis of Paul's interaction with them in 1 Corinthians 7.

II. TOWARDS A RECONSTRUCTION FROM 1 CORINTHIANS 7

1. Celibacy as a Moral Good

It is now generally recognized that Paul is quoting a Corinthian slogan at 7,1b: "It is good for a man not to touch a woman"¹¹. This statement reveals the ascetics' view of continence¹² as morally good, or contributing

8. W. SCHRAGE, *Zur Frontstellung der paulinischen Ehebewertung in 1 Kor 7,1-7*, in *ZNW* 67 (1976) 214-234, pp. 217-228.

9. Cf. also e.g., FEE, *1 Corinthians* (n. 1), p. 269.

10. HURD, *Origin* (n. 2), and WIRE, *Corinthian Women* (n. 6), make appeal more than others to Paul's text for their reconstructions, and their contributions to my reconstruction will be noted in the discussion below. Yet they too have not exhausted the possibilities for a reconstruction based on 1 Corinthians 7, and some of their conclusions will be challenged.

11. So, e.g., FEE, *1 Corinthians* (n. 1), p. 275-276, against the traditional interpretation, which attributed the statement to Paul, so e.g., H. CONZELMANN, *A Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians* (Hermeneia; tr. J. W. Leitch), Philadelphia, PA, Fortress, 1975, p. 115 (for other representatives, see W. E. PHIPPS, *Is Paul's Attitude toward Sexual Relations Contained in 1 Cor. 7.1?*, in *NTS* 28 [1982] 125-131, pp. 125-127).

12. The expression used in the slogan, ἄπτεσθαι γυναῖκός, "to touch a woman", is a euphemism for sexual intercourse (see BAG, s.v. ἄπτω 2.a.; Plato *Leg.* 8.840A; Plutarch

to salvation¹³. It is also possible to infer that they held the opposite view of marriage. For in 7,28.36 Paul denies that the one who marries "sins", which interpreters have taken as his contesting of a Corinthian view¹⁴. Since Paul's Jewish heritage taught him that marriage and procreation were obligatory and part of the created order (cf. Philo *Spec. Leg.* 3.34-36; Jos. *Ag. Ap.* 2.199-200; *J.W.* 2.160; T. Issach. 2:3; cf. also *m. Yebam.* 6.6; *b. Yebam.* 62a, 63a, b; *t. Yebam.* 8.4), he would not have needed to deny that marriage is sin apart from the Corinthians holding such a view¹⁵. Thus we can assume that the sexual ascetics project themselves as rising above the moral weakness of those who engage in sexual intercourse and marriage, notwithstanding Paul's assertions that they underestimate their moral vulnerability (see 7,2.5.9).

2. Theology of Freedom

a) "I have the right over my own body"

We can infer from Paul's rhetoric that the sexual ascetics used the principle of Christian ἐξουσία, "freedom, right", to support their ascetic behavior, although they applied that freedom in a "strenuous", not "unprincipled", way, unlike the sexual libertines¹⁶. As Wire has pointed out¹⁷, the fact that in 7,4 Paul uses two negative formulations

Alex. 21.4; *M. Ant.* 1.17.13; *Jos. Ant.* 1.163; *T. Reub.* 3.15; *Prov* 6,29; *Gen* 20,4.6 LXX; cf. Euripides *Ph.* 946; G. D. FEE, *1 Corinthians 7:1 in the NIV*, in *JETS* 23 [1980] 307-314, pp. 307-308). The expression is widely used for extramarital intercourse as well as for conjugal relations. Thus the Corinthian slogan can support both continence by the married and celibacy as such.

13. For καλός in this sense, see BAG, s.v. καλός, 3.b. The history of the discussion of the meaning of καλός here is a tortured one, largely due to the much debated question whether, and in what sense, Paul's own view is expressed in the statement, "It is καλός for a man not to touch a woman". See the review of the possibilities by HURD, *Origin*, pp. 158-161.

14. So e.g., FEE, *1 Corinthians* (n. 1), pp. 332-333. HURD, *Origin* (n. 2), pp. 177-178, suggests that only a certain class of individuals ("virgins") were thought to sin by marrying, presumably because they would thereby break a vow of celibacy. On the other hand, the Corinthian view of continence as morally good, or contributing to salvation (see 7,1b) could imply a correspondingly negative view of marriage and thus of sexual intercourse as morally reprehensible, or sinful.

15. With FEE, *1 Corinthians* (n. 1), pp. 332-333 with n. 43, who cites *b. Yebam.* 63a, b.

16. HURD uses these two adjectives to describe two different understandings of Christian freedom. But he finds only an ascetic, not a libertinistic, movement in Corinth (*Origin*, pp. 164-165). He addresses the problem for this view posed especially by 6,12-20 by saying that in this passage Paul is simply trying to confront the Corinthians with the possible implications and dangers of their appeal to freedom. Against Hurd, however, Paul's references to actual immorality in 5,1; 7,2a (διὰ τὰς πορνείας), and, more generally, to difference of opinion between the Corinthians over matters of Christian conduct in 8,1-13; 10,25-30 make this explanation unnecessary and unconvincing, notwithstanding Hurd's attempt to minimize some of these problems.

17. WIRE, *Corinthian Women* (n. 6), pp. 82-83.

instead of two positive ones suggests that he means to *contradict* a Corinthian view or slogan. He writes, “The wife does not have the right (οὐκ ἐξουσιάζει) over her own body, but her husband [does], likewise the husband does not have the right (οὐκ ἐξουσιάζει) over his own body, but his wife [does]”. The positive assertions of who does have the right in question are relegated to ellipses (not mentioned by Wire), which confirms the suggestion that Paul is trying to contradict rather than simply inform. The Corinthian ascetics were thus probably saying something like, ἐξουσιάζω τοῦ ἰδίου σώματος, “I have the right over my own body”, namely, the right to keep one’s body from sexual use¹⁸. Ἐξουσία terminology was current in Corinth, as Paul’s letter shows (for ἐξουσία as “right, freedom”, see 8,9; 9,4.5.6.12.18; cf. 2 Cor 10,8; 13,10)¹⁹. In another slogan attributed to the Corinthians, which Paul quotes at 6,12; 10,23, they also claim authority for their conduct: πάντα μοι ἔξεστιν. Ἐξεστιν is a cognate to ἐξουσία, so the phrase could be translated, “I have the right to everything, the freedom to do anything”²⁰. This slogan, of course, is attributed to a different group of Corinthians, the sexual libertines, to support behavior which is the exact opposite of the sexual ascetics’, namely, sexual license (cf. 6,12-20; the phrase is also used to support freedom to eat meat sacrificed to idols, see 10,14-30)²¹. But interpreters have suggested that the ascetics too could have seen this declaration of Christian freedom to support their own conduct²². In its

18. Wire thinks that Paul’s denial of the right over one’s own body contradicts a Corinthian slogan which goes, “The woman has authority over her own body”, and that only women were making this claim in Corinth. She argues that “it would be redundant in that society for a man to claim such authority over himself” (*ibid.*, pp. 82-83). But according to this logic, the Corinthian slogan, πάντα μοι ἔξεστιν (6,12; see further, below), which upholds the freedom of men to visit prostitutes (6,12-20), would also be redundant, since such behavior was socially acceptable for males. Thus we ought not on the basis which Wire suggests to exclude ascetic men from the circle claiming the right to withhold their bodies from sexual use. This claim went beyond the right obtained merely by birth or custom. It was the claim of the πνευματικός to a spiritual authority which transcended all other authorities (on the pneumatism of the ascetics, see below). Men too, not only women, found reason to champion *this* authority.

19. Ἐχειν ἐξουσίαν in 1 Cor 7,37; 11,10 has the meaning, “to exercise control over” (so also Rom 9,21; Rev 9,3, *et al.*; see further J. DELOBEL, *1 Cor 11:2-16: Towards a Coherent Explanation*, in A. VANHOYE (ed.), *L’Apôtre Paul. Personnalité, style et conception du ministère* [BETL, 73], Leuven, University Press – Peeters, 1986, pp. 369-389, esp. 387 with n. 64); the polemic about Christian freedom is absent there. The ἐλευθερία terminology also appears in this discussion of Paul with the Corinthians (cf. 9,1.19; 10,29). ἐλευθερία is interchangeable with ἐξουσία (cf. 8,9; 10,29).

20. The theological position expressed in this slogan may be derived from Paul’s doctrine of freedom (so CONZELMANN, *1 Corinthians* [n. 11], p. 109).

21. Cf. *ibid.*, p. 109: “This slogan spans the whole content of chaps. 6-10”.

22. A. SCHLATTER, *Paulus der Bote Jesu. Eine Deutung seiner Briefe an die Korinther*, Stuttgart, Calwer, 1956 (followed by C.K. BARRETT, *A Commentary on the First Epistle to*

own way their ascetic behavior was also audacious and required strong theological support. Refusal of marriage or remarriage, divorce, and withdrawal from conjugal relations – behaviors which the Corinthian ascetics were taking up, as seen in 1 Corinthians 7 – upset existing conditions in the community and were at odds with social and religious expectations²³.

In 7,2-5 Paul refuses ascetic husbands and wives the right which they were apparently claiming, the right to keep their own bodies from sexual use, even though he is favorable toward aspirations to celibacy by the unmarried, so long as they practice continence (cf. 7,8-9.25-26 etc.). His argument in 7,2-5 against withdrawal from conjugal relations and that against divorce in 7,10-16 indirectly confirm in several ways the hypothesis that the Corinthian ascetics appealed to Christian ἐξουσία in support of asceticism.

b) *Freedom or Danger?*

First, the argumentation given here is Paul’s characteristic argumentation against misuse of Christian freedom. He makes the same two points in 7,2-5 as he does elsewhere against the use of freedom which he regards as invalid. These points are (1) that unbounded ἐξουσία works to the detriment of oneself and (2) that it works to the detriment of one’s fellow Christian as well (cf. 6,12.18; 8,7-13)²⁴. Thus, in the present case,

the Corinthians [BNTC], London, Black, 1968, p. 155; cf. HURD, *Origin* [n. 2], p. 164), proposed that not only libertinism but also asceticism in Corinth arose from the sense of unbounded spiritual authority which comes to expression in the slogan πάντα μοι ἔξεστιν: “Die Ehelosigkeit wird von ihnen ebenso wie der Gang zur Dirne als Betätigung der christlichen Macht, als Vollendung der im Christus gegründeten Freiheit gewertet” (p. 213). Schlatter explains: the ascetic “sträubte sich gegen die Ehe, weil sie vom Willen des Gatten abhängig macht. Der unbegrenzten Vollmacht, die man das Merkmal des Christen hieß, setzte sie eine Schranke”. By contrast, “der Enthaltsame ist stark; er bewährt durch den Verzicht auf die Frau seine christliche Kraft” (pp. 216, 213). But Schlatter’s assumption that the ascetics not only rejected marriage but also embraced sexual immorality, all in the name of Christian freedom, is unconvincing. Rather, we ought to distinguish between two groups who used their freedom with respect to sexuality in opposing ways.

23. This statement is true whether we place the Corinthian ascetics in a Greco-Roman or Jewish milieu. On the obligation of marriage and procreation in Judaism, see above with n. 15. On the Augustan legislation which aimed to preserve the political and social stability of the state by prescribing marriage, rewarding childbearing, and penalizing childlessness, see S.A. COOK *et al.* (eds.), *The Cambridge Ancient History*, vol. 10, Cambridge, University Press, 1952, pp. 441-456; J.P.V.D. BALSDON, *Roman Women. Their History and Habits*, London – Sydney – Toronto, Bodley Head, 1962, pp. 14, 75-77, 89-90. In an early Christian setting also, the ascetics’ behavior could have met with resistance. Paul suggests its socially destabilizing force in 1 Cor 7,17-24 and shows the contradiction between the ascetics’ stance on divorce and the teaching of Jesus (7,10, see below).

24. On these two points in Paul’s general argumentation against misuse of Christian freedom, see W. FOERSTER, Art. ἐξουσία κτλ, in *TDNT* 2 (1964) 560-575, p. 570.

Paul argues that aspiring ascetics who withdraw from the marriage bed put themselves and their spouse in danger of falling into immorality. He faces the readers with this danger in 7,2 and 7,5. "On account of acts of sexual immorality, let each [husband] have [sexually] his own wife, and let each [wife] have [sexually] her own husband!"²⁵. And, after a temporary period of abstinence, which constitutes an exception to the prohibition of such in marriage, they must "come together again, lest Satan tempt you on account of your lack of self-control". There is a dark side to freedom, and that dark side is the possibility of a new bondage to sin (cf. 6,12: "Not everything is beneficial... I will not be mastered [ἐξουσιασθήσομαι] by anything")²⁶. The Corinthian ascetics with their particular kind of theology of ἐξουσία are running that risk, in Paul's mind.

c) Freedom or Obligation?

Second, Paul's line of argument and choice of terminology in 7,2-5 betray the Corinthian ascetics' theology of ἐξουσία. He pits the presumed freedom or right of the ascetics not only against the good of the other, which should be their concern, but also against the *right* of the other, which they are neglecting. The nonascetic spouse too has a "right", namely, the right of conjugal relations. This "right" is implied in the ellipses in 7,4: ἀλλὰ ὁ ἀνὴρ ..., ἀλλὰ ἡ γυνὴ ..., which can be rendered, "but the husband [has the right over the wife's body]" and "but the wife [has the right over the husband's body]". Paul thus makes it a case of one right against another.

If the nonascetic spouse has a right, it follows that the ascetic spouse has a duty. This is exactly what Paul points to in 7,3: "Let the husband fulfill his duty (ὀφειλή) to his wife, and likewise the wife to her husband!". Ὀφειλή refers to the obligation of conjugal relations which is based on the right of the spouse. The term is generally taken simply as a euphemism here. But, as I have suggested, through the context it acquires polemical connotations and thus refers to Christian obligation which stands in tension with the claim to Christian freedom²⁷. In this case Paul gives obligation to the "other" priority over one's own right.

25. For ἐχειν with the meaning, "have sexually", cf. Exod 2,1; Deut 28,30; Isa 13,16 LXX (with FEE, *1 Corinthians* [n. 1], p. 278).

26. Paul implies that the sexual ascetics, by denying the right of a spouse over their bodies, ironically put themselves in the same danger of "being mastered" as do the sexual libertines.

27. Paul simply assumes here that conjugal relations are an ὀφειλή, "duty". SCHRAGE, *Frontstellung* (n. 8), p. 229, sets this idea against the background of the created order and the Christian duty of love.

d) Freedom or "Robbery"?

The statement μὴ ἀποστερεῖτε ἀλλήλους ("Stop depriving one another!" 7,5), I think, also reflects the polemical situation and is directed specifically against the Corinthian theology of freedom. Ἀποστερεῖν means literally "rob", figuratively "deprive", and refers here to the depriving of conjugal relations. But it too is hardly a mere euphemism here. Paul has just established that the spouse has the right to conjugal relations, so that the deprivation of rights is in view. Paul is characterizing the ascetic's "freedom" as the other's suffering of injustice. Only when abstinence in marriage is ἐκ συμφώνου, "by agreement" (7,5), not by imposition of the ascetic's "freedom", does it escape this fatal characterization.

In summary, Paul's arguments against the ascetics in 7,2-5, and especially the terms ὀφειλή and ἀποστερεῖν in the context of the assertion of the nonascetic spouse's "right", aid us in reconstructing Corinthian sexual asceticism as based on a theology of ἐξουσία.

e) Free to Divorce or Bound to a Spouse?

This reconstruction may also find support in 7,10-16. Paul's treatment of the permissibility of divorce there can be seen to presuppose the ascetics' claim to ἐξουσία for divorce. Apparently some Corinthian ascetics saw divorce as the way to deal with spouses who balked at "spiritual marriage", or with the problem of marriage to an unbeliever²⁸. This assumption explains why Paul addresses the topic of divorce in his discussion of sexual asceticism²⁹. The ascetics could have justified their position on divorce by appealing to Christian ἐξουσία. And they would have needed such a strong justification for their position, if we can assume with Wayne Meeks that the saying of Jesus against divorce, or some form of it, was known and "used in the Pauline circle as a rule"³⁰.

28. To this effect, see J. MURPHY-O'CONNOR, *The Divorced Woman in 1 Cor 7:10-11*, in *JBL* 100 (1981) 601-606, p. 604. The question whether Paul has in mind an actual case of divorce in Corinth is disputed and revolves around the interpretation of 7,11, ἐὰν δὲ καὶ χωρισθῆ, "But if indeed she is separated". For the view that this phrase indicates an actual case of divorce, see *ibid.*, pp. 602-603; D.L. DUNGAN, *The Sayings of Jesus in the Churches of Paul. The Use of the Synoptic Tradition in the Regulation of Early Church Life*, Philadelphia, PA, Fortress, 1971, pp. 89-93. Against this view, see FEE, *1 Corinthians* (n. 1), pp. 294-296.

29. So, e.g. FEE, *1 Corinthians* (n. 1), pp. 290-291.

30. W.A. MEEKS, *The First Urban Christians. The Social World of the Apostle Paul*, New Haven, CT - London, Yale University, 1983, p. 101. In this connection the discussion about the Corinthians' knowledge of the sayings of Jesus, which may be presupposed in 1 Cor 4,8; 13,2, *et al.*, is relevant. Cf. C. TUCKETT, *1 Corinthians and Q*, in *JBL* 102 (1983) 607-619, p. 619; J.M. ROBINSON, *Basic Shifts in German Theology*, in *Interpr* 16

They would have argued, then, that a Christian is not bound by any law, but is free to live out the new life in the Spirit. Πάντα μοι ἔξεστιν means, "I am free also to divorce". That argument could be particularly persuasive in the case of mixed marriages. For certainly, the ascetics would have thought, the freedom of a Christian can suffer no restriction through an unbeliever³¹.

Did they in fact argue in this way? An affirmative answer may be suggested by Paul's language of "being bound" and "being free" (with respect to marriage) in 7,15.39, which could be directed against the Corinthian claim to "freedom" to divorce, although the use of δέω and ἐλεύθερος elsewhere in the same sense³² makes it impossible to determine whether Paul's language here is chosen specifically to refute a Corinthian theology of freedom. "If any brother has an unbelieving wife and she consents to live with him, let him not divorce her. And if any woman has an unbelieving husband and he consents to live with her, let her not divorce her husband.... But if the unbeliever wants to leave, let him/her leave. The brother or sister *is not bound in such circumstances*" (οὐ δεδούλωται ... ἐν τοῖς τοιοῦτοις, 7,12-13.15). "A wife is bound (δέδεταί) as long as her husband lives. But if the husband dies, she is free (ἐλευθέρα) to be married to whom she wishes, only in the Lord" (7,39). Paul's assertion that freedom comes only with the death of the spouse, and the exception, "the brother or sister is not bound...in such circumstances", both contrast to the ascetics' unconditional claim to freedom, πάντα μοι ἔξεστιν, "Everything is permitted to me". Divorce is an exception, not a matter of freedom³³. Even the exceptional divorce is not an exercise of Christian freedom, but acquiescence to the unbeliever's wishes.

(1962) 76-97, esp. pp. 82-86; H. KOESTER, *Gnostic Writings as Witnesses for the Development of the Sayings Tradition*, in B. LAYTON (ed.), *The Rediscovery of Gnosticism*, vol. 1: *The School of Valentinus*, Leiden, Brill, 1980, 238-261, esp. pp. 247-249; H.-W. KUHN, *Der irdische Jesus bei Paulus als traditionsgeschichtliches und theologisches Problem*, in ZTK 67 (1970) 295-320; BALCH, *Backgrounds* (n. 4), pp. 352-358.

31. We might compare the type of reasoning which Paul puts in the mouths of the "strong" with respect to the restriction of their freedom by the "weak" in 10,29: "Why is my freedom judged by another's conscience?"

32. For δέω and ἐλεύθερος in the figurative senses of being bound or free by law or duty to a husband or wife, cf. Rom 7,2-3 *et al.* (BAGD, s.v. δέω, 4; s.v. ἐλεύθερος, 2).

33. The rule is the Lord's prohibition, which Paul cites in 7,10. But cf. the discussion of Paul's faithfulness to the Lord's prohibition in 1 Corinthians 7 in A. LINDEMANN, *Die Funktion der Herrenworte in der ethischen Argumentation des Paulus im Ersten Korintherbrief*, in F. VAN SEGBROECK *et al.* (eds.), *The Four Gospels 1992*. FS F. Neirynck, Leuven, University Press - Peeters, 1992, vol. 1, pp. 677-688; F. NEIRYNCK, *The Sayings of Jesus in 1 Corinthians*, in this volume, 141-176, pp. 166-176.

3. *Celibate Pneumatics*

Closely related to the ascetics' theology of freedom is their pneumatism. The experience of the eschatological gift of the Spirit and the claim to Christian freedom for boldly divergent behavior complement one another, as the whole Corinthian correspondence shows. Perhaps it goes without saying that the Corinthian ascetics are pneumatics, since the church in Corinth seems thoroughly pervaded by an interest in and practice of spiritual gifts, especially ecstatic ones (cf. esp. chapters 12-14). But just as it was instructive to note the distinctive use of Christian freedom by the ascetics, so also it is appropriate to examine the ascetics' pneumatism on its own terms.

a) *Claim to Have the Spirit*

The final verse of chapter 7 hints that close under the surface of Paul's debate with the Corinthian ascetics lie their claims to the Spirit and to the Spirit's authority or illumination: δοκῶ δὲ κἀγὼ πνεῦμα θεοῦ ἔχειν, "Now I also think that I have the Spirit of God" (7,40; cf. Paul's debate with the Corinthians over what it means to be πνευματικός, "spiritual", esp. in 2,10-3,4; 14,37)³⁴. C.K. Barrett comments, "*I too* probably means that the Corinthians claimed the authority of the Spirit for their opinions"³⁵. In other words, Paul's appeal to the Spirit is prompted by that of Corinthian ascetics. In support of this reconstruction we can point to the fact Paul himself rarely makes appeals to the Spirit for his views³⁶.

Paul's appeal to the Spirit in 7,40 is not a compelling argument. For such a claim is open to contradiction and to counter-claims to the Spirit's legitimation, and finally leaves the argument at an impasse³⁷. Rightly, then, Paul has avoided this argument up until now in chapter 7. But he does not need compelling proof for the opinion he wants to

34. Cf. CONZELMANN, *1 Corinthians* (n. 11), p. 136, on 7:40: "Is it a subtle thrust at the pneumatics in Corinth?" (also LIETZMANN & KÜMMEL, *Korinther* [n. 1], p. 37; ROBERTSON & PLUMMER, *1 Corinthians* [n. 1], p. 161; FEE, *1 Corinthians* [n. 1], pp. 356-57). Conzelmann, however, dismisses the idea that the Corinthians already denied Paul's possession of the Spirit, as presupposed in 2 Corinthians.

35. BARRETT, *1 Corinthians* (n. 22), p. 186. κἀγὼ, "I too", provides the subject of δοκῶ, "I think", and may not be taken with the supplementary infinitive ἔχειν, "have". Thus we should translate, "I also think that I have the Spirit", not "I think that I also have the Spirit" (with ROBERTSON & PLUMMER, *1 Corinthians* [n. 1], p. 161). Paul's point is thus that his opinion, γνῶμη, is not a mere human judgment but also based on illumination by the Spirit. This translation, however, does not exclude an implicit comparison between the Corinthians as those who have the Spirit and Paul as one who has the Spirit too.

36. Cf. Rom 8,16; 9,1.

37. Cf. 2 Thess 2,2.

support here, namely, that a widow "is happier if she remains as she is". For the Corinthian ascetics are not likely to disagree. Paul's appeal to the Spirit has primarily a different function. He wants to engender goodwill in his readers by playing on their appreciation for such an appeal. After having contradicted the Corinthian ascetics' views left and right throughout the whole chapter, Paul ends the discussion on an agreeable note, just as he began it with a (seemingly) appreciative quotation of their slogan. He too is a πνευματικός. He too has the Spirit. This is his trump card in the present circle of pneumatics, and he plays it last.

b) *Abstinence for Devotion to Prayer*

The sexual ascetics in Corinth are pneumatics, then. Their understanding of the relationship between celibacy and pneumatism, I will try to show, can be partly inferred from 7,5. Here Paul states for what purpose he allows abstinence by the married, when limited to a set time and by agreement: ἵνα σχολάσητε τῇ προσευχῇ, "in order that you might devote yourselves to prayer". This devotion to prayer is most likely a concession to the Corinthian ascetics upon which they themselves were insisting.

The expression σχολάζειν τινί, "to devote oneself to something", refers to intensive and undivided devotion to or occupation with something, e.g. prayer, God, philosophy or contemplation (cf. esp. Ign. *Pol.* 1,3; Pol., *Phil.* 7,2; also Ign., *Pol.* 7,3; Philo, *Spec. Leg.* 3.1.1; Epict., *Dis.* 2.14.28; BAG, s.v. σχολάζω, 1)³⁸. In numerous occurrences of this expression such devotion often singles out as unusual those whom it characterizes, and rules out other pursuits, especially mundane ones (e.g. Philo, *Spec. Leg.* 3.1-2; Epict., *Dis.* 2.14.23-29). Ascetic behavior sometimes accompanies it (cf. Philo, *Spec. Leg.* 3.1.1; Ign., *Pol.* 1:3)³⁹.

Further, Acts uses a synonymous expression, προσκαρτερεῖν τῇ προσευχῇ/ταῖς προσευχαῖς, "be devoted to prayer", in connection with certain people in the primitive church who fulfilled special roles involving inspiration and empowering by the Spirit, which in turn excluded them from some mundane pursuits⁴⁰. After his ascension Jesus' disciples, men and women, were in the upper room "continually devoting themselves to prayer" as they prepared to "receive power" and be "baptized in the Holy Spirit" for their task as "witnesses" of the

38. See also W. RADL, Art. σχολάζω, in *EWNT* 3 (1982-83) 764-65.

39. N.b. the term ἀθλητής, "athlete," in Ign. *Pol.* 1,3, which can connote ascetic practices. For the idea, cf. *T. Naph.* 8,8, cited below. For prayer together with fasting, cf. Matt 17,21; Mk 9,29 v.l.; Pol. *Phil.* 7,2, et al.

40. For this expression describing the early Christians in general, see Rom 12,12; Col 4,2; Acts 2,42; cf. 1 Thess 5,17.

risen Christ (Acts 1,14 with 1,4.5.8; 2,1-21). δημοθυμαδόν, "continually" (1,14), may imply the foregoing of regular mundane activities, perhaps also continuation of the celibacy practiced by Jesus' disciples during itinerant ministry⁴¹. Then in the aftermath of Pentecost the Twelve resolve, "We will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word" (Acts 6,4), and they delegate to others the mundane task of "serv[ing] tables" (Acts 6,2).

In conclusion, there is evidence for connecting devotion to prayer with ascetic or otherwise atypical behavior, and also with gifts of inspiration through the Holy Spirit by early Christian teachers and preachers. When Paul concedes abstinence in marriage under certain conditions in order to devote oneself to prayer, then, he could have in mind the abstinence practiced by those who pursued prayer for inspiration and empowering by the Holy Spirit⁴².

What prompts Paul to make such a concession? Interpreters sometimes cite *T. Naph.* 8,8 ("There is a time for having intercourse with one's wife, and a time to abstain for the purpose of prayer") or other Jewish texts (e.g., *Ber.* 2,5)⁴³ to explain that Paul's Jewish background provided him with the idea of abstinence for the sake of prayer. Against that suggestion, it is improbable that Paul himself would have given the ascetics an excuse to take advantage of his concession. His obvious concern is to discourage the married from abstinence because of its dangers and to set up rigid conditions for making exceptions. This concern comes out clearly in 7,5: "Stop depriving one another, except perhaps by agreement, for a limited time, in order that you might devote yourselves to prayer, and be together again, so that Satan might not tempt you on account of your lack of self-control". Cf. also 7,2: "On account of instances of sexual immorality let each have [sexually] his own wife...". Although we cannot exclude the possibility that Paul himself inserts the motivation of devotion to prayer into the discussion, we do better to attribute this idea to the Corinthian ascetics since such a move on Paul's part would be at cross-purposes with his stated intentions here. Paul is thus simply assenting to their proposal. *T. Naph.* 8,8 explains not

41. Cf. Lk 18,29, "Whoever leaves house or wife ... for the sake of the kingdom of God ..."; BALCH's discussion of ascetic words of the Lord in Q (*Backgrounds* [n. 4], pp. 352-358). Contrast 1 Cor 9,5, where Paul says that "the rest of the apostles and the brothers of the Lord and Cephas" make use of their "right to lead around a believing wife".

42. The observance of fixed times of prayer in the early church (cf. Acts 3,1; 10,9.30) is not in view (with WEISS, *1 Korintherbrief* [n. 1], p. 174).

43. E.g., CONZELMANN, *1 Corinthians* (n. 11), p. 117 with n. 26; BARRETT, *1 Corinthians* (n. 22), p. 156.

how he came up with the idea of abstinence for prayer's sake, but why he is willing partly to agree to it.

1 Cor 7,5 then suggests that celibacy in Corinth served the devotion to prayer of pneumatics. These people may even have exercised special roles in the community as did the earliest disciples and leaders of the Jerusalem church who devoted themselves to prayer (Acts 1,14; 6,4). They could easily have been inspired teachers and prophets, people whose special calling seemed to lift them out of an ordinary social context and place them in a different category where the expectations of normal married life did not apply.

c) *Inspiration Asceticism in Corinth*

How, we might ask, could the Corinthian ascetics have come up with the idea that abstinence benefits prayer? Sexual (as well as other types of) asceticism was in fact widely associated with religious activities in antiquity. *T. Naph.* 8,8 is just one among numerous texts from Greco-Roman, Jewish and Christian settings which witness to this association⁴⁴. Of particular interest for our purposes here are the texts which show an association between asceticism and divine inspiration and communication with the divine, i.e., those which demonstrate "inspiration asceticism". In this type of asceticism, by avoiding sexual contact with another human being, one prepared oneself for union or communion with the divine which resulted in revelation and inspiration (see e.g., Ovid, *Fasti* IV 649-666; Plutarch, *Def. Or.* 51; Pausanias, II 24, 1; Philo, *Vit. Mos.* II 68-69; *Vita.Cont.* esp. 12, 18, 24, 26, 30, 68, 84-87; further Plutarch, *Is. et Os.* 351F-352A; Apuleius, *Metam.* XI 19-21; XI 6; 1 Enoch 83,2; 85,3; Josephus, *War* II 159; for an implicit connection between celibacy and early Christian prophecy, cf. Lk 2,36-37; Acts 21,9; further, *Did.* 11.11)⁴⁵.

44. See the treatments of H. STRATHMANN, *Geschichte der frühchristlichen Askese bis zur Entstehung des Mönchtums*, vol. 1, Leipzig, Deichertsche, 1914, pp. 158-344; B. LOHSE, *Askese und Mönchtum in der Antike und in der alten Kirche* (RKAMP. 1), München – Wien, Oldenburg, 1969, pp. 17-78; H. PREISKER, *Christentum und Ehe in den ersten drei Jahrhunderten. Eine Studie zur Kulturgeschichte der Alten Welt*, Berlin, Trowitzsch, 1927, pp. 32-37; E. FEHRLE, *Die kultische Keuschheit im Altertum* (RVV. 6), Gießen, Töpelmann, 1910; J. STELZENBERGER, *Die Beziehungen der frühchristlichen Sitte zur Ethik der Stoa*, München, Hueben, 1933, pp. 403-409; L. BIELER, *ΘΕΙΟΙ ANHP. Das Bild des 'göttlichen Menschen' in Spätantike und Frühchristentum*, Darmstadt, Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1976, pp. 70-73.

45. See further J. M. GUNDRY-VOLF, *Celibate Pneumatics and Social Power. On the Motivations for Sexual Asceticism in Corinth*, in *USQR* 48 (1994) 105-126. WIRE, *Corinthian Women* (n. 6), p. 83, draws on the phenomenon of sexually abstinent prophets in antiquity to explain the Corinthian women's behavior. She downplays male asceticism in Corinth and does not think that there is sufficient corroborating evidence for male ascetic prophets in antiquity. The evidence in my article in *USQR* negates that assumption.

It is plausible to set the Corinthian ascetics' devotion to prayer against the background of this widespread tradition of inspiration asceticism because prayer is strongly associated with inspired speech in Corinth⁴⁶. Paul speaks of "praying in a tongue" (προσεύχωμαι γλώσση), which he can also call "praying with the spirit" (προσεύξομαι τῷ πνεύματι, 14,14-15). In fact the Corinthians have such a strong interest in this type of prayer that Paul has to reinforce "praying with the mind" (προσεύξομαι τῷ νοῖ) so that others may be understood and edified (14,13-19). Further, prayer is also associated with inspired speech in the difficult passage, 11,2-16. The Corinthian women uncover their heads and the men cover their heads while praying and prophesying (πᾶς ἀνὴρ προσευχόμενος ἢ προφητεύων ... πᾶσα δὲ γυνὴ προσευχόμενη ἢ προφητεύουσα, 11,4-5). The Corinthian ascetics thus could have seen abstinence to facilitate both prayer as inspired speech and other types of divine inspiration⁴⁷.

d) *Celibacy for Χάρισμα or Celibacy as Χάρισμα?*

Against these pneumatics who apparently practice abstinence in order to facilitate gifts of inspiration by the Spirit, Paul argues that the capability of continence itself is a χάρισμα, "spiritual gift" (7,7). One needs to have this χάρισμα in order to live a celibate life, rather than live a celibate life in order to attain χαρίσματα. Continence is not obligation but gift⁴⁸. Paul is implying that the ascetic pneumatics ought to be more "charismatic", we might say. They should see abstinence not as a moral good (cf. 7,1) but as the Spirit's enabling, given to some, but withheld from others. "Each has his/her own χάρισμα from God, the one in this way, the other in that way" (7,7). The married do not have the χάρισμα of continence, otherwise they would not have married, Paul's argument assumes⁴⁹. Instead they have a different χάρισμα (or χαρίσματα). And they should practice what they have been given, not what God has withheld from them⁵⁰. Paul does not want to exclude the ascetics' χαρίσματα, their gifts of inspiration, but their asceticism insofar as it is

46. On prayer as Spirit-inspired speech, cf. H. BALZ, Art. προσεύχομαι, in *EWNT* 3 (1982-83) 396-409, pp. 404-405.

47. It is not clear how the Corinthian ascetics, or for that matter other ancients, would have understood this facilitation to take place. Cf. the discussion by FEHRLE, *Kultische Keuschheit* (n. 44), pp. 76ff., 96-97, and the critique of Fehrle by STRATHMANN, *Geschichte* (n. 44), pp. 214-215.

48. Cf. FEE, *1 Corinthians* (n. 1), p. 284.

49. LIETZMANN & KÜMMEL, *Korinther* (n. 1), p. 29.

50. Paul does not mean to say that marriage is a χάρισμα, but that God gives other spiritual gifts to those without the gift of celibacy (with BARRETT, *1 Corinthians* [n. 35], pp. 158-159; against FEE, *1 Corinthians* [n. 1], p. 285).

their own achievement⁵¹. They should continue to pray and prophesy and speak from the Spirit but not to force abstinence on themselves and their spouses. This is Paul's instruction, even though he does seem to agree in principle that abstinence benefits those who devote themselves to prayer. For he allows even those without the *χάρισμα* of celibacy to exercise their own will-power for a period of intensive prayer in order to attain what gains that may bring. But abstinence is not necessary for receiving and exercising gifts of inspiration. "Each has his/her own gift", and some have not only gifts of inspiration but also the gift of celibacy, which enhances the former.

4. *The Body, Marriage and Sexual Union*

a) "*Holy in Body*"

The Corinthian ascetics' theology of freedom combined with their pneumatism might speak in favor of a reconstruction of a gnosticizing or otherwise dualistic brand of asceticism in Corinth⁵² – if it were not for 7,34. The description of the celibate in this verse leads in a different direction because of the positive view of the physical body implied. Paul writes: "The unmarried woman and virgin⁵³ is concerned about the things of the Lord, that she might be holy both in body and in spirit (ἵνα ᾗ ἅγια καὶ⁵⁴ τῷ σώματι καὶ τῷ πνεύματι). But the married woman is concerned about the things of the world, how to please her husband"⁵⁵. C. K. Barrett finds the implication that the married woman is not "holy in body", as the unmarried woman, inconsistent with Paul's teaching in general that "all Christians, married or unmarried, must be holy (ἅγια) in body"⁵⁶. For example, all Christians are called to "present your

51. SCHRAGE, *Frontstellung* (n. 8), p. 233, suggests that *χάρισμα* here has the implication of service, *διακονία*, and that Paul means that celibacy should be undertaken for the service of others, not for the "cultivation of one's own pneumatic personality" (translation mine). But this characterization of the Corinthian ascetics as disinterested in serving others is an unsubstantiated assumption. It is more likely that Paul defines celibacy as *χάρισμα* in order to counteract the ascetics' view of celibacy as obligation.

52. Cf. *Ibid.*, p. 222: "Aus der Dämonisierung des Soma und der enthusiastisch-pneumatischen Vollendungsgewißheit resultiert die libertinistische oder asketische Absage an die der Sarx verfallene Welt inklusive Leiblichkeit und Geschlechtlichkeit". He compares Corinthian asceticism with Clem *Strom* III 48.1, gnosticizing opponents in the Pastorals (cf. 1 Tim 4,3; 2 Tim 2,18), and later evidence for gnosticism (pp. 220-222).

53. On the difficult question of the distinction between ἡ γυνὴ ἢ ἄγαμος καὶ ἡ παρθένος, see BARRETT, *1 Corinthians* (n. 35), pp. 180-181.

54. Some early and diverse mss. omit this καὶ (P⁴⁶ A D P 33 1175 2495 a t).

55. The parallel statement regarding the man in 7:32-33 omits the description "holy in body and in spirit".

56. BARRETT, *1 Corinthians* (n. 35), p. 181.

bodies as a living sacrifice, holy, pleasing to God" (Rom 12,1, παραστήσαι τὰ σώματα ὑμῶν θυσίαν ζῶσαν ἁγίαν εὐάρεστον τῷ θεῷ). All Christians must serve and glorify God, not sin, with their bodies (Rom 6,12-13; 1 Cor 6,13.15.20). For "your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit in you" (τὸ σῶμα ὑμῶν ναὸς τοῦ ἐν ὑμῖν ἁγίου πνεύματος, 1 Cor 6,19). Paul prays for God to "sanctify you entirely" (ἁγιάσαι ὑμᾶς ὁλοτελεῖς), that "your spirit, soul, and body be preserved complete, blameless (καὶ ὁλόκληρον ὑμῶν τὸ πνεῦμα καὶ ἡ ψυχὴ καὶ τὸ σῶμα ἀμέμπτως, 1 Thess 5,23)⁵⁷. Barrett also notes Paul's assertions in 7,14 that the *married* husband or wife "sanctifies" (ἁγιάσται) the unbelieving spouse, and that the children of this marriage are "holy" (ἅγια), so that for Paul holiness in body is not juxtaposed with marriage and sexual union. On the basis of these contrasts between what is said in 7,34 and Paul's own views noted above Barrett concludes: "In [the statement] 'that she may be holy both in body and in spirit' we have words quoted from the Corinthian ascetical party". They believe that, *unlike the married*, the celibate are set apart *bodily* for the Lord, whereas Paul would not confine such an idea to the unmarried and therefore would not have come up with such a statement⁵⁸. This conclusion seems to be justified, unless Paul is simply inconsistent here, or unless he admits to a special bodily consecration of the unmarried which is different from the bodily consecration of all Christians.

Paul's critique of the Corinthian ascetic view may be found in 7,32a: "I want you to be free from anxiety" (ἀμερίμους). It is possible that Paul has in mind here not only the anxiety of the married person, who "is concerned for the things of the world" (μεριμνᾷ τὰ τοῦ κόσμου, 7,33.34c), but also the anxiety of the unmarried person, who "is concerned for the things of the Lord" (μεριμνᾷ τὰ τοῦ κυρίου, 7,32b.34). That is, Paul criticizes the ascetics for overanxious consecration to the Lord (μεριμνᾷ τὰ τοῦ κυρίου is interpreted in the immediately following ἵνα clause: ἵνα ᾗ ἅγια καὶ τῷ σώματι καὶ τῷ πνεύματι)⁵⁹.

57. Barrett also cites 1 Cor 15,44; 2 Cor 4,10; Gal 6,17; Phil 1,20; 3,21, but these references offer only general support for a positive view of the body in Paul.

58. Barrett's explanation contrasts to that of WEISS, *1 Korintherbrief* (n. 1), p. 204: "Es läßt sich bei dem überlieferten Texte nicht leugnen, daß P. hier wirklich eine höhere Stufe der Heiligkeit innerhalb der allgemeinen Geweihtheit der Christen annimmt und damit mönchischer Gesinnung Vorschub leistet". FEE struggles to ward off the impression that "Paul is moving in the direction of the Corinthian asceticism, which viewed sexual relations per se as unholy or not 'good'" (*1 Corinthians* [n. 1], p. 346).

59. So e.g., BARRETT, *1 Corinthians* (n. 35), pp. 179-181. Alternatively, Paul is using μεριμνᾷν (1) in a positive sense for the unmarried and a negative sense for the married, or (2) in the sense "care for" without having anxiety (see FEE, *1 Corinthians* [n. 1], p. 344).

If this reconstruction is accurate, then we can hardly attribute to the Corinthian sexual ascetics a dualistic view of the physical body as “demonized” and beyond the reach of the Spirit and of divine grace⁶⁰. Rather they thought that the body as well as the spirit participated in redemption. A Christian is consecrated to Christ both in body and in spirit.

The ascetics seem to have taken the general Pauline teaching of bodily consecration to Christ further than Paul himself as implying nothing less than sexual abstinence. Although Paul did not draw this radical conclusion, he does, however, argue similarly in 1 Cor 6,13b-17, which illustrates the possibility of the kind of reasoning which the Corinthian ascetics may have employed. Namely, Paul argues that the fact that the physical body belongs to Christ excludes a certain type of sexual union.

The body is not for fornication but for the Lord (τὸ δὲ σῶμα ... τῷ κυρίῳ) and the Lord is for the body. Don't you know that your bodies are members of Christ (τὰ σώματα ὑμῶν μέλη Χριστοῦ ἐστίν)? Shall I then take the members of Christ and make them members of a prostitute? May it never be! Or don't you know that the one who is joined to a prostitute is one body [with her]? For it says, ‘the two shall be one flesh’. But the one who is joined to the Lord (ὁ κολλώμενος τῷ κυρίῳ) is one spirit [with him]”.

For Paul belonging to Christ precludes sexual unions with one who can hardly belong to Christ, who cannot be a member of his body. A Christian's sexual union is conceivable only within the body of Christ⁶¹. The ascetics drew more far-reaching conclusions for Christian sexual union: since the body is consecrated to Christ it should not be used for sexual union at all.

b) *Marriage and Sexual Union as Sin*

This reasoning explains why the ascetics concluded that marriage is “sin”, a view which Paul imputes to them indirectly in 7,28.36 (see

60. Against SCHRAGE, *Frontstellung* (n. 8), p. 216. With C.H. TALBERT, *Reading Corinthians. A Literary and Theological Commentary on 1 and 2 Corinthians*, New York, Crossroad, 1987, p. 52. The sexual libertines are the ones who had such a negative view of the physical body. Their position is opposed in 6,13: “The body belongs to the Lord” (ὁ κύριος τῷ σώματι). 6,18b may contain a slogan of the sexual libertines which presupposes such a view of the body: “Every sin which a person commits is outside the body” (πᾶν ἀμάρτημα ὃ ἐν ποιήσῃ ἄνθρωπος ἐκτὸς τοῦ σώματος ἐστίν). In other words, for them the body was soteriologically irrelevant. Contrast the ascetics' theology of consecration of the body to the Lord.

61. Mixed marriage, i.e., marriage of a Christian to an unbeliever, here needs and gets a special justification in 7,14. Eph 5,25-32 is compatible with Paul's thought in 1 Corinthians 7. The church as the bride of Christ is “holy, set apart” (ἁγία) for Christ, and “we are members of his body”. This mystery of the relationship between Christ and the church, does not exclude sexual union, rather it even supports the Christian marriage ideal that husbands love their wives as Christ loved the church, his body, for the husband and wife are one flesh, one body.

above, II.1). Marriage, and by implication sexual union, violates the body's special consecration to Christ and thus constitutes sin. Again Paul's own argumentation provides an illustration for this way of reasoning. The body is a temple of the Holy Spirit (6,19). “You have been bought with a price”, so that “you are not your own” (6,19-20). Since the believer's physical body belongs to God and is a temple of the Holy Spirit, to unite sexually with a prostitute is sin. “The fornicator sins (ἁμαρτάνει) against his own body” (6,18). Paul is incredulous that a Christian would do such a thing⁶². In similar fashion the Corinthian ascetics could have seen any sexual union as violation of the body's consecration to Christ and been horrified by such a “sin” as marriage entailed. Their moral judgment on sexual intercourse and marriage (cf. 7,1b.28.36) thus does not need to stem from a dualistic denigration of the body but is compatible with a positive view of the body.

5. “*In Christ there is No ‘Male and Female’*”

Finally, as I have argued elsewhere⁶³, the Corinthian sexual ascetics were using the baptismal tradition of Gal 3,28, “in Christ there is no ‘male and female’ (ἄρσεν καὶ θήλυ)”, as a theological rationale for sexual asceticism. They understood this eschatological slogan with its negative allusion to Gen 1,27 LXX (“male and female [ἄρσεν καὶ θήλυ] he created them”)⁶⁴ to alter or abolish the implications of the created sexual distinctions ‘male’ and ‘female’, namely, marriage, sexual union and procreation. Instead of male and female, in Christ there are...ascetics!

We can infer their use of the tradition in this fashion from 1 Corinthians 7, as will become clear in the following. In this chapter Paul himself applies the tradition (n.b. his mention of the three pairs which occur in Gal 3,28)⁶⁵, even though it could undermine his primary purpose here.

62. See the series of rhetorical questions in 6,15-19 and the μή γένοιτο in 6,15.

63. The following thesis is argued in much greater detail in my article, *Male and Female in Creation and New Creation. Interpretations of Gal 3,28c in 1 Cor. 7*, in T.E. SCHMIDT & M. SILVA (eds.), *To Tell the Mystery. Essays on New Testament Eschatology*. FS R.H. Gundry (JSNT SS, 100), Sheffield, JSOT, 1993, pp. 95-121. The reader should consult this work for full argumentation and documentation.

64. On the allusion to Gen 1,27, see e.g., K. STENDAHL, *The Bible and the Role of Women. A Case Study in Hermeneutics* (tr. E.T. Sander), Philadelphia, PA, Fortress, 1966, p. 32; E. SCHÜSSLER FIORENZA, *In Memory of Her. A Feminist Theological Reconstruction of Christian Origins*, New York, Crossroad, 1985, p. 211.

65. I.e., “Jew/Greek” (here “circumcision/uncircumcision”), “slave/free”, and “male/female” (here “man/woman”). The difference in terminology in 1 Corinthians 7 and Gal 3,28 does not destroy the parallel. See S. SCOTT BARTCHY, *First-Century Slavery and 1 Corinthians 7:21* (SBL DS, 11), Missoula, MT, Scholars Press, 1973, pp. 162-163.

He is trying to argue against the changes in male/female relationships which the Corinthian ascetics were advocating and had also partly undertaken (e.g., celibacy, withdrawal from conjugal relations, divorce to practice celibacy). "Remain in the condition in which you were called!" (7,20), he exhorts them, using the examples of circumcision and uncircumcision, slavery and freedom (7,18-24) as illustrations for the point about men and women (7,1-16.25-40). But the eschatological tradition is ill-suited to this purpose. The tradition *fomented* social change, not inhibited it⁶⁶. The declaration of Gal 3,28c is seen to lie behind the socially disruptive behavior of the "eschatological women" in Corinth as well as that of early Christian slaves, and even behind the tensions over Jewish-Christian/Gentile-Christian relations⁶⁷. The omission of the pair "male/female" in 1 Cor 12,13; Col 3,11, where the tradition occurs in a different form, is probably an attempt to reduce the unwanted effects of the eschatological declaration⁶⁸. Why then does Paul apply it here, where it is so obviously in danger of being countereffective? The answer must be that he had to because the ascetics were using it – in his view wrongly – and he is trying to reinterpret it for them.

We can explain how they came to see the eschatological declaration to support sexual asceticism. The tradition makes a negative allusion to Gen 1,27: "In Christ there is no 'male and female'". Gen 1,27 in turn could be understood to support the uniting of man and woman in marriage and sexual relations, and for procreation. The priestly writer himself had this understanding of "male and female he created them", says Phyllis Bird. She argues that this statement in Gen 1,27 is to be linked to the immediately following divine command in 1,28, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth!" "Male and female he created them" provides the necessary statement of humanity's sexual constitution

66. Cf. W. MEEKS, *The Image of the Androgyne: Some Uses of a Symbol in Earliest Christianity*, in *HR* 13 (1974), 165-208, pp. 182-183.

67. See the lengthy discussion of Gal 3,28 in H.D. BETZ, *Galatians. A Commentary on Paul's Letter to the Churches in Galatia* (Hermeneia), Philadelphia, PA, Fortress, 1979, pp. 189-200. E. SCHÜSSLER FIORENZA takes the baptismal declaration to explain "at least" women's exercise of leadership roles in the house churches and mission of the early Christian movement (*Memory* [n. 64], p. 209). On the effect of Gal 3,28 on early Christian slaves' behavior, see J.E. CROUCH, *The Origin and Intention of the Colossian Haustafel* (FRLANT, 109), Göttingen, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1972, pp. 126-127.

68. Cf. R. SCROGGS, *Paul and the Eschatological Woman*, in *JAAR* 40 (1972) 283-303, pp. 291-292. On the household code in Col 3,18-25 as counteracting the social explosiveness of the tradition, see CROUCH, *Origin* (n. 67), pp. 130-144. It is likely that Gal 3,28 represents an earlier form of the tradition than that in 1 Cor 12,13 and Col 3,11, which omit the pair "male and female". Those texts essentially repeat the first two pairs of Gal 3,28 with variations in terminology and, in the case of Col 3,11, elaborations ("barbarian and Scythian"). Rom 10,12 may also reflect the tradition but has only the first pair. See further, SCROGGS, *Paul*.

(viz. sexual differentiation) which is the presupposition of the blessing of increase⁶⁹. In Mk 10,6-9 (par. Mt 19,4-6) Jesus' argument for the indissolubility of marriage is based on the interpretation of Gen 1,27; 2,24 as meaning that one-flesh union of man and woman in marriage fulfills the Creator's intention in creating humanity sexually dimorphic. The rabbis appealed to Gen 1,27-28 to support the obligation of marriage and procreation (*m. Yeb.* 6.6, *t. Yeb.* 8.4, *b. Yeb.* 62a)⁷⁰. On the basis of such a reading of Gen 1,27-28, then, the Corinthian ascetics could have taken the baptismal tradition to mean that, while humanity was originally created sexually dimorphic, "male and female", for the purpose of being fruitful and multiplying and filling the earth, and while marriage and sexual relations thus had a place in the first creation, in the new creation in Christ "there is no male and female" in this sense anymore⁷¹. Sexual asceticism is now the order of the day because Christian men and women are no longer bound by their *created sexual capacities* to certain *sexual duties or social roles*. Sexual asceticism in Corinth is thus eschatologically motivated. The sexual ascetics have a realized eschatology, as their use of the baptismal tradition shows. It is not necessary to posit their knowledge of ascetic sayings of Jesus in order show that their asceticism is rooted in a realized eschatology.

Paul disagrees with the sexual ascetics' interpretation of the baptismal tradition – partly. The created order is not abrogated as such with respect to sexual distinctions. The one who marries "does well" (7,38). The Creator's intention is still honored by the prohibition of divorce (7,10-16). Conjugal relations are a must, given the reality of sexual passion (7,2-5). Yet the dawn of the new creation in Christ presents new possibilities, including celibacy as a spiritual gift. Further, if one already is celibate (and lives so), the "present crisis" and shortness of the time favor remaining celibate (cf. esp. 7,26-29). There is no obligation to marry for the sake of procreation. But if one does marry, the sexual relationship in marriage is now characterized by equality and mutual subordination rather than the subordination of wife to husband.

69. P.A. BIRD, 'Male and Female He Created Them': *Gen 1:27b in the Context of the Priestly Account of Creation*, in *HTR* 74 (1981) 129-159, pp. 146-150; also ID., *Genesis I-III as a Source for a Contemporary Theology of Sexuality*, in *Ex Auditu* 3 (1987) 31-44; ID., *Sexual Differentiation and Divine Image in the Genesis Creation Texts*, in K.E. BØRRESEN (ed.), *Image of God and Gender Models in Judaeo-Christian Tradition*, Oslo, Solum, 1991, pp. 11-34.

70. See D. DAUBE, *The New Testament and Rabbinic Judaism*, London, Athlone, 1956, pp. 76-78.

71. For a discussion and critique of the view that an androgynous understanding of Gen 1,27 is presupposed in the baptismal tradition of Gal 3,28c, see GUNDRY-VOLF, *Male and Female* (n. 63), pp. 102-104; cf. SCHÜSSLER FIORENZA, *Memory* (n. 64), pp. 211, 219.

III. CONCLUSION

The following reconstruction of the Corinthian sexual ascetics has emerged from 1 Corinthians 7. They are pneumatics, people of the Spirit. They seek to facilitate divine inspiration and communication with God through sexual asceticism. One example is their practice of celibacy to devote themselves to prayer. As ascetic pneumatics they play special, perhaps leading, roles in the community. They strive to attain not only a fuller life in the Spirit but also moral superiority over noncelibates. For they avoid the "sin" of violating the body's exclusive consecration to Christ through sexual union. They have a positive view of the body as that which is "holy", consecrated to the Lord. They are not dualists and thus also not proto-gnostics. Their realized eschatology shows through in their appeal to the eschatological declaration, "in Christ there is no 'male and female'", to support their sexual asceticism. "In Christ" the sexual distinctions "male and female" no longer imply marriage and sexual union, as originally in the created order. They see their sexual choices as ascetics to be matters of Christian ἐξουσία, freedom. The ascetic "has the right over her/his own body", namely, to keep it from sexual use, even if this requires divorce. Social, cultural, and religious expectations lose their power in the face of the ascetic's spiritual authority. A variety of sociological motivations⁷² and cultural influences as well as theological supports thus entered into a Corinthian decision for celibacy.

Paul has no problem with the ascetics' interest in gifts of inspiration through the Spirit, and even allows that abstinence can benefit devotion to prayer. But he urges the ascetics to recognize celibacy as a spiritual gift too, not an obligation. It should be taken advantage of, but not imposed from outside. So marriage and conjugal relations are not sinful. In fact they are part of the Creator's intention for man and woman which still has a place in the new life "in Christ". It is not necessary for Christian women and men to extricate themselves from sexual relationships in marriage in order to live out their new existence. They can and ought to remain as they are. Divorce is not legitimized by an ascetic calling. Instead the danger of sin comes from imposing celibacy on those who are not so gifted and as a result fall into immorality. Further, depriving one's spouse of the right to

72. Cf. e.g., WIRE, *Corinthian Women* (n. 6), pp. 64-66; SCHÜSSLER FIORENZA, *Memory* (n. 64), pp. 224-226; GUNDRY-VOLF, *Male and Female* (n. 63), pp. 112-113; further, R. KRAEMER, *Ecstasies and Ascetics. Studies in Functions of Religious Activities for Women*, Ann Arbor, MI, University Microfilms, 1976, pp. 131-132.

conjugal relations amounts to "defrauding". With these arguments Paul undermines the ascetics' theology of freedom.

The significance of this reconstruction reaches beyond 1 Corinthians 7. For a link is suggested between the sexual ascetics of chapter 7 and the women and men in 11,2-16 whom Paul criticizes because of their headdress while praying and prophesying in the assembly. Both groups are pneumatics; the activity of prayer explicitly connects them, and implicitly also gifts of divine inspiration. Both disregard custom or convention with respect to gender. Both have strong profiles in the community. A connection between the two groups has already been suggested by Wire⁷³ and MacDonald⁷⁴. My reconstruction of the sexual ascetics from 1 Corinthians 7 offers both confirmation and new evidence for such a connection. The implications for the interpretation of 1 Cor 11,2-16 have yet to be explored but will, I think, prove significant. For if the theology and behavior of the ascetics can be presupposed for the men and women of 11,2-16, we have a much clearer backdrop for understanding Paul's argument in that text⁷⁵.

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73. WIRE, *Corinthian Women* (n. 6), p. 83.

74. MACDONALD, *Women* (n. 7).

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