

## 7 1 Corinthians. Exercising the Gifts to Strengthen the Body

Introduction. Around 50-52 AD, during his second missionary journey, Paul founded the church in Corinth, capital of the Roman province of Achaia (in Greece; Acts 18:1-18; 1 Corinthians 2:1-5; 2 Cor. 1:19). Then, about 56-57 AD the Apostle wrote 1 Corinthians from Ephesus (16:8; today Turkey) and probably sent it via the three men named in 16:17. Nevertheless, “1” Corinthians was not the first letter that Paul wrote to the house-churches of Corinth but the second, since 5:9 mentions an earlier letter, apparently lost or perhaps now forming part of 2 Corinthians (6:14--7:1?).

The sexually disreputable ancient Greek city of Corinth was destroyed by the Romans in 146 BC, and a new Roman colony was founded by Julius Caesar a century later (44 BC). The new Roman colony was inhabited primarily by ex-Roman soldiers and former slaves, both coming from Italy. Therefore, when 1 Corinthians 5--7 (concerning sexuality) is interpreted, it is erroneous to cite as being directly pertinent classical authors who wrote about the sexual profligacy of the ancient destroyed Greek city.

The house-churches in Corinth consisted primarily of women and slaves, poor and marginalized people with little formal education (1:26). However, for the first time in history, the Christian community in Corinth began to attract a few more cultured and prosperous persons, principally Gentiles, which created a great diversity. Some sought to develop the community in conformity with Hellenistic rhetoric and religiosity, others according to the Jewish tradition of Palestine (“I belong to Cephas/Peter,” 1:12). The major problem Paul confronted in Corinth, therefore, was the proliferation of factions, with resulting elitist tendencies to divide the church (1:11 -12). Consequently, the fundamental theme of the letter is the unity of the various house churches in Corinth: all of Paul’s rhetoric and reasoning aim to establish this unity in diversity (economic, social) of those “called into koinonía-solidarity” in Christ (1:9-10).

To promote a unity that transcends elitist sectarianism, Paul for the first time developed his teaching on the church as the “body of Christ.” This image, repeated throughout the letter (1:13; 6:15-20; 10:16-17; 11:29; 12:4-27), is derived from a political analogy popular in the Greco-Roman literature to represent social cohesion. Faced with similar conflicts, Paul repeated the image in his letter to the Romans (12:3-8). The deuterio-Pauline letters thirty years later picked up this body image, but used it to speak of the church

universal rather than local assemblies and elaborated the image to include reference to Christ as the “head” (source/ authority) of this body (--> Colossians 1:18, 24; 2:16-19; Ephesians 1:22-23; 4:4-16; 5:22, 30).

Paul’s pastoral and theological methods are clearly evident in his letters to the Corinthians: these letters integrate a sequence of personal visits with oral and written interchanges based on concrete historical situations in which the Apostle responds to various questions the community addressed to him (1 Corinthians 7:1, 25; 8:1; 12:1; 16:1, 12). Paul’s method thus is not abstract, authoritarian or dogmatic but dialogical in nature with the church invited to participate in a creative and flexible reflection, starting from real life and a pastoral praxis. Today the letter continues to be of maximum significance for its perspectives on (1) the poor, weak and marginalized, (2) women, and (3) human sexuality.

## Outline

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- |       |   |
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1 Egotism: eloquence, wisdom and knowledge, 1:18--4:21

1.1 Elitist eloquence and wisdom, 1:18--2:16

1.2 Elitist “knowledge,” 3:1-23

Rejection of arrogance (1:26-31; 3:18-23)

2 Specific Expressions of Elitist Divisiveness:

2.1 Porneia, 5:1--7:40 (prostitution, sexual exploitation; 5:1, 9-11; 6:9, 13, 15-16, 18; 7:2)

Porneia (as incest), 5:1-13

Resulting legal battles: divorces, inheritances, 6:1-11

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Paul as Apostle: paradigm of authentic freedom, 9:1-27

Idolatry (2): Exodus paradigm: slavery, liberation, Israel in the Desert, (idolatry, food, porneia) vs. the Christian Passover festival (Eucharist), 10:1-22

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3.1 Divisions resulting from two traditions (11:2, 23):

The tradition of head coverings for women and the risk of offending or being raped by angels in worship, 11:2-16

The Eucharist tradition: the rich abuse the poor, members of the Body, 11:17-34

3.2 Gifts of the Spirit (1): the Body of Christ, 12:1-31a

3.3 The ·gape-love that unites the diverse members of the Body (12:25), 12:31b--13:13

3.4 Gifts of the Spirit (2): tongues that divide, prophecy that edifies the Body, 14:1-40

4 Elitist Ideological Deviations: Denial of Bodily Resurrection, 15:1-58

Conclusion: Gestures of Solidarity, 16:1-24

1-4, The offering for the poor saints in Jerusalem

5-12, Visits by Paul (5-9), Timothy (10-11) and Apollos (12)

13-18, Unifying love; submission to the household of Stephanas

19-21, Greetings and kisses (on the mouth) for all

22-24, Curse, a blessing, love for all

1. Women Silenced? An Outcry from a Violated Text. 1 Corinthians 14:34-35 demonstrates the great value for Bible interpretation of scientific textual studies (textual “criticism”), the study of the Greek manuscripts to establish the preferred text. In this case the common text literally translated reads as follows:

“32 And the spirits of prophets are subject to the prophets, 33 for God is a God not of disorder but of peace. (As in all the ASSEMBLIES of the saints, 34 women should be silent in the ASSEMBLIES. For they are not permitted to speak, but should be subordinate, as the law also says. 35 If there is anything they desire to know, let them ask their husbands at home. For it is shameful for a woman to speak in an ASSEMBLY....)

In the study of the original language texts, specialists commonly recommend that we not “count” the manuscripts (since the great majority are late and of little authority) but “weigh them,” --that is, recognize the importance of the oldest and more accurate. Nevertheless, scholars realize that in a few cases textual errors have been introduced even in the earliest manuscripts of greatest authority, which can be corrected by comparing texts of lesser importance.

Scientific textual studies of 14:34-35, however, take us a step further, providing us with a case study that is almost unique in the Bible. These verses appear in this location in our earliest and most authoritative manuscripts (P46, A, B, etc.). However, in a series of manuscripts called the Western tradition, which also are important (D, F, G, etc.), these verses also appear, but placed at the end of the chapter, after 14:40. Such a shift in place suggests the possibility that a gloss (commentary written in the margin) may have been inserted into a text by a copyist who thought that the words had been omitted from the text itself by oversight.<sup>1</sup>

The scholar also examines the context and syntax to see whether the text is more coherent without the suspect verses. Although obscured by our translations, the context here strongly supports the introduction of a gloss since the repetition of the word “assembly/church” in 14:33b and 34a is disturbing and in poor style (in Greek as well as in English): “As in all the churches of the saints, women should be silent in the churches.” To avoid this awkwardness our translations tend to vary the translation with synonyms (“congregations... churches,” NIV).

The broader context of a document also is pertinent. In this case, significantly, 14:34-35 appears to contradict Paul's earlier comments about women prophesying and praying out loud in the church/assembly (11:2-16). In other New Testament texts, including several from Paul, women freely speak and teach (--> Acts, Galatians, Philippians, Romans; cp. Colossians).

Another difficulty is that the disputed verses support their teaching with a reference to the Mosaic Law, but the Torah says nothing about imposing silence on women during worship. How could Paul, one of the best-educated rabbis of his time, commit such an error regarding the Torah? Finally, the instruction to consult husbands at home overlooks cases of widows and single women who had no such oracle to consult. How could Paul (himself unmarried and collaborating primarily with single men and women --> Romans 16) pretend that every woman had a husband at home to consult? Thus, increasingly, modern scholars conclude that 1 Corinthians 14:34-35 is a gloss (marginal comment), originally composed by a prejudiced scribe, perhaps under the influence of the deutero-Pauline text in 1 Timothy 2:9-15--and then mistakenly introduced by later copyists into the text at two different points. When we recognize that 1 Corinthians 14:34-35 is a scribal addition and that 1 Timothy 2:9-15 does not come from Paul himself, our understanding of Paul's teaching concerning women changes radically!

Nevertheless, some feminist theologians do not recognize 1 Corinthians 14:34-35 as a gloss but rather emphasize the limitation (the head covering) and the inferiority attributed to women reflected in 1 Corinthians 11:2-16.<sup>2</sup> They also correctly point out:

- Paul's omission of women as the first witnesses to Jesus' resurrection (1 Cor. 15:5-8; cf. Mark 16, Luke 24 and Matthew 28);
- the naming of Aquila before Prisca (1 Cor. 16:19); in the other letters Prisca/Priscilla is always named first (see Romans 16:3-5; cf. 2 Timothy 4:19; Acts 18:2-3, 26); and
- the elimination of the category "man and woman" in 1 Cor. 12:13 (cf. the baptismal formula in Galatians 3:28).

Given the delicate situation, Paul clearly expresses himself quite cautiously in 1 Corinthians when referring to women. Undoubtedly we may perceive limitations in his teaching concerning women that most today do not accept (1 Cor. 11:2-26). Nevertheless, scientific scrutiny of the Bible ("textual criticism" that detects a scribal addition in 1 Corinthians 14:34-35 and "higher criticism," investigating questions of

authorship, date, which concludes that --> 1 Timothy was not composed by Paul himself) assists in perceiving greater diversity in the New Testament and permits a more positive appreciation of a Paul who often transcends his patriarchal cultural background.

In 1 Corinthians 11:2-26 Paul obviously reflects concepts from his patriarchal culture (inferiority of women, with rigid roles that differentiate men from women)--but also, to a certain degree, he transcends. Certain points that remain in dispute are worth emphasizing:

- "The husband is the head of his wife" (11:3). Nevertheless, "head" often did not connote "authority" but "origin, source of life" (Colossians 2:19; Ephesians 4:15-16). Paul, moreover, dialectically relativizes male superiority and privilege by the Lordship of Christ (11:3) and by reminding us that men are born from women and that we all come from God (11:12).

- Paul presupposes a concept of a "nature" (11:14) that determines male and female differences in modes of dressing; however, what Paul calls "nature" we would understand as "culture." Moreover, Paul elsewhere points out that even God delights to act "against nature," but such divine acts are celebrated, not condemned! ( --> Romans 11:24; cf. 1:26-27).

- For those of us who live in the culture of the bikini, it is difficult to understand a culture where a woman could not leave her house without a head covering. Although Paul encouraged women to break with patriarchal religions, form new Christian communities, and to participate freely in the charismatic worship services, praying out loud and boldly prophesying (which implied great authority), the Apostle flexibly adapted to certain cultural concerns by insisting on long hair and head coverings for Christian women, who otherwise enjoyed remarkable freedom.

- Paul's argument concerning long hair and head coverings for women, "because of the angels" (11:10), appears strange to modern readers. Angels were understood to be guardians of order in the world and in worship (1 Timothy 5:21), but they also represented a sexual threat for women (Genesis 6:1-4; Jude 7; 1 Cor. 6:2-3; 2 Cor. 12:7; Romans 8:38).<sup>3</sup>

2. Good News for the Poor. Although unprecedented socio-economic diversity existed in the house-churches in Corinth, most members were poor with little formal education (1 Cor. 1:26, "not many wise...." = few!). Paul called the powerful minority "the strong," in comparison with "the weak." The "strong" (house owners!) particularly could threaten the unity of house churches, so throughout the letter Paul makes clear his

“option for the poor,” exhorting the “strong” to adjust their lifestyle to take into account the needs of the poor and vulnerable.

2.1 1 Corinthians 1-4. In ancient times the techniques of rhetoric and formal education served to maintain and strengthen the elite with their privileges. Paul himself obviously was quite gifted and well trained in rhetoric. But he employed his rhetoric to appeal to the strong to abandon their fascination for rhetoric and their excessive adulation of formal education to focus on the Good News of Christ crucified and the humble community of his followers.<sup>4</sup>

2.2 1 Corinthians 5-7, “Fast Sex”; 8-10, “Fast Food.” The “strong” men could eat meat daily and pay prostitutes and lawyers whenever they wished. In this way they developed a casual and irresponsible sexual ideology, exploiting prostitutes and participating in idolatrous banquets (where meat previously cooked and served to idols was consumed)—a patriarchal male ideology of “fast food and fast sex,” frequently interrupted by quick but costly divorces and legal battles over inheritances. Paul here responds, proposing an alternative theology, focusing on the Christian body as the temple of the Holy Spirit that should never be defiled or damaged.<sup>5</sup>

2.3 1 Corinthians 11:2-16. Women, socially vulnerable, enjoyed freedom in the churches to reject the idolatrous ideologies and religions of their fathers and husbands. Further, in the worship services they prayed out loud, directly addressing the deity without male priests as intermediaries, and they spoke to the assembled church with divine authority (“prophecy,” which could strongly criticize the dominant oppressive patriarchal theologies). Such unprecedented freedom brought counterattacks from the threatened patriarchal culture, which sought to deny such freedoms for women (see the “backlash” gloss, 14:34-35). Paul insisted on freedom for women in principle, but did accommodate to the cultural tradition that women keep their hair long and heads covered. According to Paul’s thinking, women’s head covering avoided scandal and guaranteed essential freedom for Christian women. He may also have believed that women would thus be protected from possible sexual abuse by angels.<sup>6</sup>

2.4 1 Corinthians 11:17-34. The Lord’s Supper (Eucharist) was not a ritual in a temple but a complete meal in the homes of more affluent believers, i.e., in the homes of the “strong,” who owned their own spacious houses. In these meals the strong, persons of leisure, arrived punctually to enjoy the food and wine of the host, to the point of drunkenness, illness and even death in some cases (from excesses?). The

majority of the members (slaves, widows and other poor people) came later, after finishing their day's work and their household chores. When they arrived, they found only the remains of the meal and suffered hunger pains during worship. Paul fervently denounced this scandalous practice, insisting that this elitist banquet had ceased to be the Lord's Supper and that the strong, who did not discern the needs of the poor members of the Lord's Body, were going to be judged: oppression, injustice and class struggle should never come to characterize the Body of Christ.<sup>7</sup>

2.5 1 Corinthians 12--14. In the house churches' worship services (charismatic and democratic) everyone participated with their spiritual gifts, but in this context the poor and vulnerable had a certain advantage. The strong, as owners of spacious houses, could seek to dominate and maintain order with their gifts of teaching and administration of funds. However, what were they to do with the motley illiterate majority, who sought to contribute by speaking in tongues, interpretations, prophecies, healings, etc.? Here, as in the case of head coverings for women, Paul firmly insists on freedom and justice for the poor, but seeks a certain accommodation with the dominant culture to avoid creating unnecessary scandals. Although the poor and vulnerable could prophesy and even speak in tongues, in the worship service they should do so only with interpretation of tongues while maintaining some kind of "order" (always a concept relative to a given culture!). Above all, however, Paul exalted the sacrificial mutual love that unites the church as being more important than any charismatic gift.<sup>8</sup>

2.6 1 Corinthians 15. The strong, influenced by their elitist Greco-Roman education, questioned Christian teaching concerning the resurrection of the body, the last divisive issue Paul sought to correct in this letter. The poor and weak, lacking formal education, easily accepted the idea of miraculously resuscitated bodies (with flesh and blood as before). Decades later, Luke (ca. 80 AD) spoke of Jesus' resurrection as a resurrection of the flesh (Luke 24:39; Acts 2:24), and John (ca. 90 AD) also stressed the death and resurrection of Jesus as tangibly physical (John 19:33-34; 20:27). Paul, however (agreeing with the "strong" elite), conceded that "flesh [Greek sarx] and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God" (1 Cor. 15:50); he also insisted (with the poor) in a resurrection of the body— but a "spiritual body!" To us this phrase may appear to be a complete contradiction in terms, like "square circle."

Our problem with Paul's language here, however, is that we are heirs of the Catholic philosopher, René Descartes (1596-1650), who established our modern meaning for the word "spiritual" as something "not

material.” In ancient times, nevertheless, the S/spirit, although invisible, was just as “material” as the body (like the wind, or breath of God, in the creation; Genesis 1–2). Obviously the resurrection involves issues beyond our finite comprehension. Nevertheless, Paul insisted in a resurrection of the body (both of Jesus and of humanity), but as a “spiritual body,” “glorified” and “transformed.” In solidarity with the poor and vulnerable in Corinth, Paul maintained the “materialist” tradition of Judaism and Jesus, insisting in the importance of the body, with its physical necessities (daily bread). However, he also accommodated to certain objections of the strong by recognizing that the fundamental teaching of bodily resurrection in the Christian Gospel was not equivalent to common superstitions about resuscitated corpses. Paul thus insisted that his Gospel—of Christ crucified (1 Cor. 1–4) and resurrected (1 Cor. 15)—is always Good News for the poor.<sup>9</sup>

2.7 1 Corinthians 16:1-4. Paul’s proclamation of Jesus’ Good News, with its option for the oppressed, focuses finally on common elements in Christian praxis: the Apostle’s “rainbow angel” dream project of the offering for the poor in Jerusalem (→ 2 Cor. 8–9; Rom. 15:25-29)—an international and multicultural project that sought to bridge the growing gap between predominantly Gentile churches and the impoverished original community in Jerusalem.

2.8 The Exodus Paradigm: from Oppression to Poverty to God’s Liberating Justice. Two passages in 1 Corinthians make especially clear how fundamental is the Exodus paradigm for Paul’s understanding of his own and the Corinthians’ experiences of oppression, poverty and God’s liberating justice. He addresses the largely Gentile church as those whose spiritual forefathers were the Israelites in the Exodus whose liberation is the type of Christians who find a “way out” from their testings and oppressions (1 Cor. 10:1-11). The Eucharist, thus, is not viewed (as in Matthew) as a solemn reminder of sin and call to penitence and forgiveness, but as a joyous Festival celebrating the liberation of slaves from oppression, with Christ the Passover lamb whose sacrifice results in redemption (5:7-8; cf. the absence of Matthew’s forgiveness motif in 1 Cor. 11:17-34 and other Gospel parallels). In such a celebration any focus on sin has in view primarily the sins of the oppressors and the liberation of the oppressed, not the sins—universal though they are—of the oppressed and poor.

Speaking from his own experience (→ catalogs of oppression, 2 Cor.), Paul links his own deprivations (1 Cor. 4:10-11a) to the oppression and violence he repeatedly suffered (4:11b-13

“buffeted...reviled...persecuted...defamed”). Such experiences enabled him to realize (epistemological privilege of the oppressed) that human courts are characterized by injustice and oppression ('adik- term, 6:1) and hence rarely defend the poor when they suffer oppression and violence ('adik- terms, 6:1, 7-9). The vice list (6:9-10) then details examples of the oppression and injustice of covetous and rapacious persons, who cannot participate in God's new just order (see the inclusion and repetition of “kingdom,” 6:9-10; cf. below under sexual minorities for homophobic mistranslations of 6:9). The “justification” celebrated in 6:11 thus refers to God's liberating justice: vindication and acceptance of the poor, weak, oppressed and marginalized, which results in freedom from control freaks (6:12). Similarly, in 1:30 God's liberating justice (dikaioσ<sup>ne</sup> // “redemption”) vindicates and liberates precisely the poor, marginalized and despised (1:26-29) incorporating them without discrimination into the body of the church (cf. 8:9; 9:1; 10:29; 15:34). In our earliest account of the Lord's Supper, the focus is not on “sin” in general, but only on the sins of the rich who failed to discern that the poor--perhaps mainly slaves who arrived late for the love-feast and were left hungry--also were members of Christ's body (1 Cor. 11:17-34). Even this liturgical celebration scandalously becomes in effect a mechanism of oppression and marginalization that lets the poor go hungry! Authentic love, Paul thus insists, can never party over such oppression (13:6; cf. oppression in 15:9, 25, 32; 16:9).

3. Good News for Sexual Minorities (1 Corinthians 5--7; 16:5-24). 1 Corinthians names 14 living persons, but only two of these are specified as married couples: Cephas/Peter and his wife (1:12; 9:5) and Aquila and Prisca/Priscilla (16:9; other texts name Prisca first; also see 5:1, where a man who is living with his father's wife is mentioned). Much more numerous are single men (Timothy, 16:10-11; Apollos, 16:12) and male pairs (Paul and Sosthenes, 1:1; Crispus and Gaius, 1:14). We also have the household (not “family”) of Stephanus with his two companions Fortunatus and Achaicus (a couple? 1:16 and 16:15-18), which gives us a total of nine unmarried men. (If Stephanus had been married, the emphasis on his household without mentioning his wife would have been strange.) Paul also mentions a single woman, Chloe, probably a merchant like Lydia, with her “people” (not “household”; 1:11, see HCSB note).

Obviously, then, neither the house-churches in Corinth nor Paul with his surroundings in Ephesus reflect an environment dominated by married couples. (--> Romans; 1 Thessalonians; Philemon; Philippians, and Colossians.) The letter does indicate (1 Cor. 9:5) that other missionaries were married (such as Prisca and Aquila; see Andronicus and Junia in Romans 16:7) and that Jesus had married brothers (James and Judas).

However, the great majority (10 of 14 people named) appear to be single or same-sex couples. Of all the New Testament authors only James and Jude appear to have been married (1 - 2 Peter probably did not come directly from Peter). Given such a context, we may suspect that the Good News Paul proclaims in 1 Corinthians is not Bad News for sexual minorities. Is it true?

Notably, 1 Corinthians 5--7 (three entire chapters) is the only detailed treatment in the New Testament of what we would call "sexual" matters (a modern category). Apart from this we have only the isolated verses of Jesus (e.g., concerning divorce to remarry and against adultery) and brief texts in the epistles (--> 1 Thessalonians 4:3-8, the most detailed). In the Hebrew Scriptures we have an entire book of erotic poetry, the Song of Solomon, with a focus on sexual love, not matrimony (much less is it an allegory of God's love for Israel or Christ's love for the church, the traditional interpretations for 2,000 years!). The obvious question is whether Paul's teaching reflects basic continuity with his Hebrew Bible (especially the Song of Songs' erotic love poems), or if the Greco-Roman and oriental influences subverted this perspective toward a negativism regarding physical expressions of sexual love. Does Paul speak as a defender of the poor, vulnerable and marginalized in these chapters, or does he place himself on the side of the strong and a controlling and oppressive patriarchal sexual ideology?

Historically 1 Corinthians 5--7 has been of considerable importance as the purported basis for St. Augustine's sexual ideology (sexual relations only within marriage and only for procreation), the dominant paradigm in most churches almost until the present. Furthermore, from the Reformation until the present, Protestants commonly have interpreted 1 Corinthians 5--7 as representing matrimony as the Christian norm. Here St. Augustine and the medieval tradition are more faithful to Paul than modern Protestants, since they recognized that Jesus' single life is the norm for Paul and the majority of his colleagues.

The ideological prejudice is noted in the common tendency to put "marriage" as the title of 1 Corinthians 7 in most Bibles, when in fact the chapter deals in much greater detail with virginity (7:25-40), directs widows not to remarry because of the proximity of Jesus' Second Coming (7:8-9, 29-35; --> 1 Timothy 5:11-14), and underscores the great superiority of celibacy for those who want to serve God (7:7). However, contrary to St. Augustine's sexual ideology, procreation never enters into Paul's (apocalyptic!) perspective when dealing with sexual matters!

In Paul's discussion of marital sexual relations in 7:1-5, he transcends his patriarchal culture by insisting on justice, equality, and mutuality of conjugal rights. However, sexual relations in matrimony are described only as an "obligation," not as pleasure! Neither procreation of children (Genesis 1-2) nor love appear in Paul's perspective at this point (1 Cor. 13!). Matrimony is reduced to a type of control technique to deal with sexual passion (7:9; cf. the exaltation of the husband's love in Ephesians 5, which is deuteropauline).

When Paul deals with married men, who had money to pay prostitutes (6:9-20), he starts from a concept of the individual Christian's body as the temple of the Holy Spirit and points out the great danger for this body in having sexual relations with a pagan prostitute. If Christian wives insisted in a great deal of sexual abstinence for ascetic motives (1 Cor. 7:5), we may understand why their husbands paid prostitutes. However, Paul's teaching in 6:9-20 presents many problems.

- The notion that contamination of the Christian body by contact with a prostitute appears to contradict another of Paul's convictions: that a Christian woman married to a pagan man would have a more powerful effect in making holy not only the pagan husband but also in producing "holy" children (i.e., "not contaminated" by paganism, 1 Cor. 7:14).

- Jesus also gave example of the sanctifying power of the Holy Spirit (purifying lepers and bringing cadavers back to life by touching them), and taught that it was not exterior things that contaminate us but evil thoughts that proceed out of the heart (Mark 7, Matthew 15; see Romans 14:14, 20 and Titus 1:15 with their affirmations that all things are clean). Does Paul here fall into the error of thinking that sex is something dirty and impure or that prostitutes do not also bear the image of their Creator?

- Jesus was a friend of prostitutes and tax collectors (Luke 5:30; Matthew 21:31-32; 11:19), whom he treated with loving respect and chose as special instruments in the proclamation of his dominion (Luke 7; John 4). Resurrected, he appeared first to Mary Magdalene. For Paul, however, the pagan prostitute does not appear as a person, much less as a potential disciple of Jesus, but as unclean, a threat to Christian purity that must be avoided. Nevertheless, Paul's condemnation is not directed to the prostitutes but to Christian husbands who exploited them.

Perhaps, as in the case of the supposed inferiority of women, their head coverings in worship, and his acceptance of slavery and monarchies, we should question Paul's teaching on sexuality when aspects of

his thought appear incoherent to us. But Paul's praxis as a single man, follower of Jesus (unmarried), his continual formation of intimate partnerships with other males (-> John, Jesus and his beloved disciple), and his establishment throughout the Roman Empire of ecclesiastical communities dominated, not by traditional families but by sexual minorities, enable us to see in the Apostle Paul a paradigm of Christian freedom (1 Cor. 9:1) with a Gospel that is just as much Good News for sexual minorities as it is for women and the poor.<sup>10</sup>

In part our contemporary problems with Paul's teachings in 1 Corinthians 5--7 arise because we do not note the fundamental place that oppression and liberating justice play in this text. Paul makes it clear that oppression and injustice (ἄδικοι, Greek) are incompatible with the New Divine Order that Christian communities should manifest (1 Cor. 6:9-11). Paul then presents the use of prostitutes by wealthy husbands as something unacceptable. Sexual uncleanness is reinterpreted in the first place as injustice and the loss of freedom (cf. Torah!). Porneia is understood as the sexual filth that results from unjust, oppressive, irresponsible sexual exploitation, without mutual freedom, respect, knowledge and love (6:12-20).

As we may observe in --> 1 Timothy, the modern tendency to translate ἄρσενόκοιται ("bed-males," 6:9) as "homosexuals" is totally mistaken. The term does not refer to the modern concept of sexual orientation, nor to lesbians, but to males who engaged in exploitative, abusive and oppressive sexual practices, be it with women, other males or youths. In 1 Corinthians 6:9, the previous Greek word, μαλακοί, literally "soft," at times was a metaphor for undisciplined or effeminate men. However, in ancient times an "effeminate" male could be someone who spent too much time in the company of women and in frequent sexual relations with them. Throughout almost all of Church history μαλακοί has been misinterpreted as a condemnation of masturbation.<sup>11</sup>

## Notes

1. Gordon D. Fee, The First Epistle to the Corinthians, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987); Dale B. Martin, The Corinthian Body (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), 289 n. 2; Richard B. Hays, First Corinthians (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1997), 245-249; Philip Payne has turned up evidence for the absence of 14:34-35 from the text; "Fuldensis, Sigla for Variants in Vaticanus, and 1 Cor. 14:34-35," New Testament Studies 41 (1995), 240-262; see also his unpublished paper, "The Originality of Text-Critical Symbols in Codex Vaticanus," for the Society for Biblical Literature Annual Meeting, Nov. 1999 (AARSBL Abstracts 1999, 267). Scribal notations in Codex Vaticanus indicate awareness of a manuscript with 1 Cor. 14:34-35 totally missing, not just displaced, as in the Western textual tradition.
2. Attoinette Clark Wire, The Corinthian Women Prophets: A Reconstruction through Paul's Rhetoric (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1990); idem, "1 Corinthians", in Searching the Scriptures: A Feminist Commentary, ed. Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza (New York: Crossroad, 1994), 2:153-195.
3. Dale B. Martin, The Corinthian Body (New Haven: Yale University, 1995), 229-249.
4. Ibid., 38-68.
5. Ibid., 69-86.
6. Ibid., 229-249.
7. Ibid., 190-197.
8. Fee, First Corinthians; cf. Martin, Corinthian Body, 87-103; Martin concludes that glossolalia may have been a gift more characteristic of the strong.
9. Martin, Corinthian Body, 104-136; see especially Irene Foulkes, Problemas Pastorales en Corinto: Comentario Exegético-Pastoral a 1 Corintios (San José, Costa Rica: DEI, 1996), who expounds the significance of the letter for the poor, oppressed and marginalized.
10. Martin, Corinthian Body, 250-251.
11. Dale B. Martin, "Arsenokoites and Malakos: Meanings and Consequences," in Biblical Ethics & Homosexuality: Listening to Scriptures, ed. Robert L. Brawley (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1996), 117-136. Frederick Danker acknowledges "the impropriety" of the RSV's translation homosexuals," Walter Bauer, A Greek Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature, 3d ed., rev. by Frederick

W. Danker (Chicago: University of Chicago, 2000), 135. David Fredrickson shows that in 1 Cor. 6:9 the meaning is “those who lack self-control,” “Natural and Unnatural Use in Romans 1:24-27: Paul and the Philosphic Critique of Eros,” Homosexuality, Science and the ‘Plain Sense’ of Scripture, David L. Balch, ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 197, 218-222.

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