

Chapter seven. **The Paschal Community and the Eschatological Marriage.**

Introduction.

In chapter five we saw that Paul had a corporate dimension in mind when he used the term ‘body of Sin’. There is however one area which could undermine this conclusion. Paul refers to himself as ‘unspiritual, sold as a slave (*doulos*) to sin,’¹ and in 1 Corinthians he says; ‘You are not your own; you were bought at a price.’² Such statements are a clear challenge to the corporate claims that have been made, for these descriptions of slavery suggest individualism. However, in chapter 4 we found that Paul’s use of *doulos* does not relate to slavery, but to servanthood. The meaning of *doulos* has its roots in the LXX where it was repeatedly used of the prophets, Israel as the Lord Servant, the Messianic Servant who was anticipated at the end of the age and of the kings themselves who ruled on God’s behalf.

Marriage through the looking glass

To answer the difficulties that purchase language throws up it will be necessary to clarify the Biblical understanding of two related themes. The first is the ultimate purpose that lay behind the covenants, both old and new, and the second, since it leads from the first theme as we shall see, is the Hebraic pattern of establishing a marriage. To deal, then, with the first of our questions: What was the ultimate purpose of the old and new covenant?

It is widely accepted that Paul shared the OT perspective that the ultimate relationship between God and His people was to be likened to the marriage relationship.³ When Israel betrayed Yahweh, it was promised that following her exile the establishing of the New Covenant would secure this relationship between God and His people.⁴ It was Hosea who through the tragic failure of his marriage grasped the depth of the sinfulness of Israel’s rejection of Yahweh’s love. As his own heart broke through the faithlessness of Gomer he learnt the depth of Yahweh’s grief caused by Israel, his faithless spouse. It was not just the rejection of a moral or religious code, but of love itself - God’s love. Robinson claimed that Hosea came to see Israel’s faithlessness in a totally different way from any other of the prophets, it was; “not any accident that the most common metaphor for apostasy in this book is fornication”.⁵

Opposing lessons.

It is because the image of marriage carried two deep but opposing lessons that it became so widely used. It expressed something of the depth of the relationship Yahweh sought to establish with his people, but it also revealed the evil of rejecting the love that Yahweh sought to give them. Robinson again expressed this succinctly when he said: “Hosea has, after all, through his own bitter agony, reached deeper than any other prophet into the secrets

¹ Rom. 7:14, although note the corporate interpretation given earlier.

² I Cor. 6:19-20.

³ Hos. 1:2; Ps 44; Jer. 31:3-4; Cant. 8:6; Ezek. 16; Isa.54:5-9; 62:3-5; 2 Cor. 11:2; Eph. 5:25-27; Rev. 19:7.

⁴ Isa. 62:5; Jer. 31:3, 31-34; Ezek. 36:24-30; Hos. 2:19-20.

⁵ Robinson, *Prophecy*, 81.

of religion.”⁶

Both in the Old and New Testaments the marriage relationship between God and His people is always seen as something that is yet to be consummated, it is always treated as an eschatological goal.⁷ Two reasons can be given for this. The first is that if such a relationship actually existed in this age it would introduce concepts that could so easily slide into the practices condemned both in the old and NT,⁸ i.e. those of the fertility religions which resulted in sacred prostitution. Such practices would have totally undermined fidelity to the covenant. The second reason is that the concept of sonship served the principle of obtaining an inheritance better. Under Hebrew, as it was later to be under Roman law, it was the son who received the inheritance from the father, and not the wife.⁹ This concept, of the Church in this age being the son, and in the next age being the bride, not only avoided the danger of distorting Biblical morality, but provides for a concept of salvation which is yet to be, and at the same time already is.

The value of the woman.

The second Biblical practice which needs exploring is how a marriage was arranged. How did a man ‘obtain’ his wife? It is a matter of controversy amongst scholars as to how a wife was secured in ancient Israel. There are Biblical texts which appear to suggest that wife purchase was practised. Jacob worked seven years for Rachel.¹⁰ David paid 100 foreskins to Saul for his daughter Michal.¹¹ Not all scholars would see these cases as examples of bride purchase. Wright says that the money was not a purchase price but was intended to bind the two families together.¹² Burrows¹³ and de Vaux¹⁴ rejected the suggestion that such practices could be tolerated in Israel, while Robinson argued from the same evidence for the opposite conclusion.¹⁵ De Vaux acknowledged that in the tenth commandment a man’s wife was put amongst his possessions such as cattle, servants and house. De Vaux argued that despite this evidence the nobility of womanhood in ancient Israel would not permit such a degrading practice. He claimed that the money, or payment made to the woman’s father (which clearly cannot be regarded as a dowry, as it is not handed over to the daughter, but retained by the father), was not a purchase price but a payment for loss of service that the father incurred in giving his daughter in marriage. It would appear from such a definition that we might conclude that purchase never takes place in any business transactions; it is only the compensation owed because the previous owner no longer possesses what was once available to him, whether it be car, house, or anything else! It is extremely difficult to see how de Vaux could maintain his position, even if one has sympathy with his concern to uphold the ideal of womanhood in ancient Israel. But would the dignity of womanhood be

⁶ op cit, 78.

⁷ At least from the exile onwards, see note 4 for OT refs and in the NT, Matt. 22:1-14; Jn. 3:29-30; Rom. 7:1-4; 2 Cor. 11:2; Eph. 5:25f and Rev. 19:7f.

⁸ Hos. 11:2; Ezek. 16:20-22; Eph. 2:1-3; 5:3-7.

⁹ Edersheim, *Life*, 2:243

¹⁰ Gen. 29:18, 20, 30.

¹¹ 1 Sam. 18:22-27.

¹² Wright, *ABD*, 2:761-769(766).

¹³ Burrows, “Institutions”, 134.

¹⁴ de Vaux, *Israel*, 27.

¹⁵ Robinson, *HDB* 1:326. c.f. also Gordon, *World*, 115; Matthews, “marriage”, 2:136 and Patterson, “marriage” 3:270.

jeopardised if payment was established? It is all too easy to read values of the twenty first century A.D. back into history (such reading back of values into history is known as mirror reading). At the beginning of our era the Roman woman had a degree of freedom for which modern women's liberation movements are still striving, and yet they never objected to the practice (admittedly only tokenary) of bride purchase.¹⁶ We shall soon see that there are theological considerations that will lead us to conclude that bride purchase was practised in the ANE and that this model was used by Paul.

Theological guidelines.

There is another field of investigation open to us. Just as the meaning of *doulos* has been settled by its context and theological associations, so the concept of bride purchase can be examined from a perspective wider than its immediate sociological setting. It can be examined from theological considerations.

Paul's classical treatment of the marriage relationship is found in Eph. 5:22-27. He says: 'Wives, submit to your own husbands in the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the Church, his body, of which he is the Saviour. Now as the Church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything. Husbands love your wives, just as Christ loved the Church and gave himself for her, to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, and to present to himself as a radiant Church, without taint or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless.'

Clearly Paul exhorts Christian husbands to have such a high regard for their wives which is based on their worth. He says that the regard Christ had for the Church was such that he paid for her with His own life. He 'gave himself for her'. This is enforced still further in his address to the Ephesian elders at Miletus where, exhorting them to be faithful to their calling, he said, 'Be shepherds of the Church of God which He brought with his own blood.'¹⁷

It is clearly a purchase price that Jesus has been paid to secure the church as his bride. If this is so, then the Epistle to the Ephesians takes on a wider perspective. When Paul talks of them having been redeemed¹⁸ he echoes the redemption of Israel from Egypt. The church's destiny is, like Israel's was, to become the bride of the Lord (Eph. 5:22-27).

The epistle fits naturally into an Old Testament setting and in that context it becomes clear that it is dealing with salvation history.¹⁹ This perspective is supported by Caird²⁰ who sees Paul's reference to Christ leading captivity captive and ascending on high in Ephesians 4 to be based on Moses' ascent into Mt. Sinai and subsequent gifts given to Israel for her blessing, a key event in Israel's redemptive history.

This concept of bride purchase is upheld in I Cor 6:13-20 where Paul writes: 'The body is not meant for sexual immorality, but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body. By his power God raised the Lord from the dead, and he will raise us also. Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ himself'? Shall I then take the members of Christ and unite them with a

¹⁶ Balsdon, *Women*, 179-180.

¹⁷ Acts 20:28; or as some MSS. "of the Lord which he bought with his own blood".

¹⁸ Eph. 1:7.

¹⁹ See my forthcoming volume, *Paul the Law and the Spirit*.

²⁰ Caird, *Prison*, 75.

prostitute? Never! Do you not know that he who unites himself with a prostitute is one with her in body? For it is said “the two will become one flesh”. But he who unites with the Lord is one with him in the Spirit.’

‘Flee from sexual immorality. All other sins a man commits are outside of his body, but he who sins sexually sins against his own body. Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honour God with your body.’

Traditionally the end of this passage is interpreted as referring to having been freed from slavery to sin by the payment of a price. Before examining this view to see whether it is a valid interpretation, we need to carefully note the context of the passage. It is dealing with sexual immorality and the immediate problem is the case of incest spoken of in 5:2. Paul then follows his statement of being bought with a price (6:20) by dealing with pastoral problems relating to marriage (7:1ff). To introduce a slave purchase concept here is to insert something that is not directly relevant. In addition, the immediate passage²¹ is full of marriage language. ‘The Lord for the body...One flesh... he who unites himself to the Lord.’²² Paul is not appealing to the Corinthians people who are owned as slaves, but to people who are related at a much deeper level, as those who belonging as a marriage partner. A few months later he wrote to them, ‘I have promised you to one husband, to Christ, so that I might present you as a pure virgin to him.’²³

Exegetical difficulties.

Examination of the accepted view of sacral manumission, as advocated by Deissmann,²⁴ and generally followed by most commentators²⁵ reveals exegetical difficulties. Deissmann’s argument is that in 1 Cor. 6:20 Paul focused on the process adopted for the release of a person from slavery. He points out that in the ANE a slave could pay a sum of money into the treasury of the local temple and through this the god of that temple technically purchased him. He was freed from his old master because he had become the property of the god.²⁶ This sort of practice had its parallel in Israel. Jesus criticised those who avoided their family responsibilities because they had dedicated their property to Yahweh. Through this dedication of their wealth to the temple they officially owned nothing, and therefore had no means, it was claimed, to fulfil their normal family duties to relatives who needed their financial help.²⁷ The reality was that the one who had made such a dedication continued to enjoy the property to the full; it passed into the temple treasury only at death. Christ saw the practice as reprehensible and denounced it.

Questioning tradition.

The question that must be settled is whether Paul had Deissmann’s slave

²¹ 1 Cor. 6:13-20.

²² 1 Cor. 6:13-17.

²³ 2 Cor.11:2.

²⁴ Deissmann, *Light*, 324 followed by Käsemann, *Perspectives*, 44.

²⁵ So Conzelmann, *Corinthians*, 112; Deluz, *Companion*, 76; Moffat, *Corinthians*, 70; Morris, *Corinthians*, 104; Hays *Corinthians*, 106 and McKelvey, *Temple*, 104, contra Schrange, *Korinthes*, 2:35 note 373.

²⁶ This form of slave purchase, sacral manumission, rather than purchase from a slave market, is preferred by most scholars to be behind the concepts here because of the temple context assumed because of what is seen to be a reference to the sacred prostitute in the reference of the harlot. I shall examine this assumption shortly.

²⁷ Edersheim, *Life*, 2:18f see Mk. 7:11.

purchase concept in mind, or whether it was wife purchase. We have considered the case for wife purchase; we shall now examine Deissmann's case.

There are a number of difficulties that Deissmann's suggestion presents. First: is it conceivable that Paul would have used such a morally confused argument? The liberated slave, now the property of a new master, had, in fact, no more moral or religious responsibilities once the transaction had been completed, than he had previously had. He lived as other men lived, in practice no more devoted to the god whose property he now was, than one who was born free. It was merely a technical ownership. If Paul had argued from this practice he would have introduced into the Corinthians' minds the very concepts he was wanting to remove. They would have concluded that redemption was technical ownership but nothing more than that. It would encourage, not discourage the Corinthians to live lives that had no relation to the price paid. If Paul had been using sacral manumission as his model, he would have been endorsing the Corinthians' attitude to libertarianism.

The second difficulty for the sacral manumission model is that it would lead to theological confusion. To say that Paul used the temple practice of redemption as his illustration is to reverse the entire emphasis of Pauline theology. For Paul, man has absolutely no part in his redemption; it is entirely a gift given by a sovereign electing God.²⁸ An illustration in which the whole drift is of man paying for his own release, which is then attributed to his god, is totally contrary to Paul's theology of redemption. The illustration takes the initiative completely out of God's hands and puts it entirely into man's, and this cannot be attributed to Paul.

The argument of Deissmann has also been rejected by Ridderbos who comments: 'It is highly doubtful, however, whether such a connection may be made. Irrespective even of the material differences (with regard to price etc.) there is no formal similarity here. For in Paul's representation God does not appear as the purchaser, nor does the priest standing in his service, but Christ, who through his death redeems his own. The price is not paid by God but rather to God. And with that the real point of resemblance has fallen away.'²⁹ Ridderbos claims the support of Buchsel and Jeremias that the key to understanding the concept of redemption is found in passages such as I Tim. 2:5-6; Tit. 2:14; Mk. 10:45; 20:28. He goes on to note the problem presented to theologians by the concept of ransom or payment over the centuries, but insists that whilst there is no business transaction between Christ and God, yet: "one should no less care to see that the objective character of what is here called "to redeem", "ransom", etc. is not compromised."³⁰

The 'objective' character of these concepts is perfectly preserved, without compromise, when the concept of the annulling of the covenant through Christ's representative death is incorporated into the work of redemption.³¹

A Question of whose body ?

The idea of the Corinthians, or a Corinthian, being united with a harlot³², which has normally been seen to be a reference to a temple prostitute, has

²⁸ Rom. 8:29ff; Eph. 2:1-10.

²⁹ Ridderbos, *Outline*, 193.

³⁰ *op cit*, 193-4.

³¹ See chapters 5 and 9.

³² 1 Cor. 6:19-20.

been challenged by the foregoing exegesis because it has questioned the temple links by challenging the meaning of 'bought with a price'. Is there an alternative setting for this statement that will make better sense of the surrounding text and that will be in harmony with bride purchase?

There are in fact a few scholars who have tentatively suggested a corporate setting for this passage. For example, Kempthorne has queried the traditional understanding of *body* in verse 18 and has suggested that it refers not to the body of the offending man, but rather, to the church, the body of Christ. Kempthorne thus argues that sinning against the body is sinning against the church.

However, Gundry,³³ in assessing the view of Kempthorne³⁴ that *soma* in 1 Cor. 6:18 refers to the Church as the body of Christ, says: "But we may suspect over-interpretation in the proposal of a double meaning. And the precipitous importation of the Church as The Body of Christ, a theme wholly undiscussed so far in the epistle and presumably unknown to the Corinthians, once again proves problematic. Moreover, the association of 6:12-30 with chapter 5, by which an individual reference is supplied, raises a doubt. Although *porneia* occurs in both passages, in 6:12-20 the female partner in immorality is *porne*, a prostitute, but in chapter 5 the female partner is the wife of the man's father. An equation between the two, therefore, seems doubtful, especially if the *porne* is a temple prostitute, as the figure of the temple in verses 19-20 and the local color of the Temple of Aphrodite near Corinth both suggest."

On these grounds Gundry rejects Kempthorne's view³⁵, and having already reviewed the various expositions put forth, he decides upon the view of Alford, quoting from him as follows: "The assertion (that every sin is outside the body), which has surprised many of the commentators, is nevertheless strictly true. Drunkenness and gluttony, e.g., are sins done in and by the body, and are sins by abuse of the body, - but they are still *ektos tou swmatos* - introduced from without, sinful not in their act, but in their effect, which effect it is each man's duty to foresee and avoid. But fornication is the alienating of that body which is the Lord's, and making it a harlot's body - it is sin against a man's own body, in its very nature, against the verity and nature of his body; not an effect on the body from participation of things without, but a contradiction of the truth of the body, wrought within itself".³⁶

The difficulty of this interpretation which Gundry favours is that it introduces a way of thinking which is nowhere else evident in Paul's letters. Indeed, it gives a distinct impression of a pattern of thought which derives from a western analytical mind with a background of psychological research rather than the biblically based reasoning of the Apostle Paul. Besides this, it is totally against the New Testament understanding given by Jesus of the true origin of defilement; 'All that causes defilement comes from within a man.'³⁷

And it is clear elsewhere that Paul saw a far wider category of sins as being relevant to the argument being advanced by Alford. 'For this you can be sure: No immoral, impure, or greedy person - such a man is an idolater - has any inheritance in the Kingdom of Christ and of God. Let no one deceive you

³³ Gundry, *Soma*, 75, so also Byrne, "Sinning", 612.

³⁴ Kempthorne, "Incest", 568-74.

³⁵ As does Schrange, *Korinthes*, 2:32 note 355.

³⁶ *Soma*, 72.

³⁷ Matt. 15:16-20

with empty words, for because of such things God's wrath comes on those who are disobedient - therefore do not be partners with them.'³⁸

A Twofold Assessment

But what of Kempthorne's argument? Is Gundry's criticism valid? I would suggest that it is not reasonable of Gundry to argue that the body concept was unknown to the Corinthians at this point. Acts shows that Paul realised from the outset the existence of solidarity between Christ and His people. He was arrested by the very statement 'Why do you persecute me?'.³⁹ Munck says that Paul's call was part of his missionary preaching.⁴⁰ One can only assume therefore, that some explanation of this phrase would have been sought by an inquirer at an early stage to understand the significance of the statement for Paul's message. It surely cannot be maintained that this concept had developed no further in his thinking until it emerged in I Cor. 12-14. The bride/bridegroom analogy from which, some believe, the body of Christ concept came, had existed for centuries within Judaism, and Paul's statement in 2 Cor. 11:2 that he had espoused the Corinthians to Christ certainly does not suggest that the Corinthians lacked understanding concerning the imagery, for Paul does not bother to explain himself beyond the statement.

Furthermore, Paul uses the same 'body' language when he instructs on the Eucharist in 11:29 and clearly expects the Corinthians to understand the meaning. If it is argued that the term is used to speak of the sacrament, it has to be explained why the section returns to the behavior of the Corinthians and their lack of respect for those who should be cared for (11:33-34). This suggests the sinning against the body is ecclesiastical rather than Eucharist and that the language was not introduced in chapter 12 as Gundry argues. But even if this point is not accepted, there is an earlier text that is indisputable. In 10:17 Paul says: 'Because there is one loaf, we, who are many, are one body, for we all partake of the one loaf.' This use of *soma* is undeniably ecclesiastic in its meaning even though it is within a Eucharist context. This adds support to the meaning argued for 11:33-34, because both are in the same context, that of the Eucharist and the well being of the body. Thus Gundry's rejection of Kempthorne's reading of 1 Cor 6:18 on the grounds that the Corinthians could not understand its corporate use of *soma* is not valid.

Body language.

But above all these considerations is the fact that Paul speaks of the Corinthians being 'members' of Christ in 6:15. Gundry observes this terminology and concedes it to be 'body language' but dismisses the problem by saying it anticipates the introduction of the body concept later in the epistle.⁴¹ He also acknowledges⁴² that if the passage is corporate, then his own interpretation does not stand. Obviously, Gundry is making an argument that equally suits Kempthorne's exposition, for he can also say that the use of *body* in its corporate sense anticipates its later introduction. But Gundry is missing the true significance and importance of the passage. To say that Paul introduces this concept of the Corinthians being members of Christ into his

³⁸ I Cor. 6:9-10

³⁹ Acts 9:4

⁴⁰ Munck, *Paul*, 36-68.

⁴¹ *Soma*, 72

⁴² *Soma*, 60

argument - a concept which has not yet been explained - is to ask us to believe that Paul would leave his readers to guess at the meaning of an expression which is at the centre of his argument, viz. their relationship with Christ and the possibility of it somehow being severed. This is made even more difficult to accept when one realises that this warning is one of the main reasons for the writing of the letter. Paul was anxious to warn them of the consequence of fornication.⁴³ To accept Gundry's interpretation and criticism of Kempthorne's exposition one has to accept the failure of Paul to present his argument, for he has been unable to explain himself in commonly held concepts. It would seem to me that this is not compatible with one whose discipline in logic has been widely acclaimed. I suggest, therefore, that the body concept was already known to the Corinthians and therefore Gundry is wrong in saying that it emerged for the first time in I Corinthians 12.

In addition to these comments on Gundry's position I must also point out our earlier conclusions. We have seen that the allusion in I Cor. 6:19-20 regarding slave purchase, and the Greek background in which the passage is normally set (and this is followed by Gundry), refers not to slave purchase, but wife purchase. The reference to the temple is not in a Greek context, but an Hebraic one, and interestingly, the temple is coupled throughout the New Testament with a bride figure.⁴⁴ In other words, the Church's true worship will be attained when her full relationship is realised. Then the temple, which is a type of true worship and an expression of man's relationship with God, will have no further place. Thus the context which Gundry has assumed and in which he has set his exegesis, is highly questionable, and with it, so is Gundry's exegesis.

The knowledge that is intimate.

That this relationship between the temple and the bride is part of the Apostle's thinking is supported by the Hebrew for bride *kallah*, 'the complete' or 'perfect one'. This is probably the thinking behind Paul's statement in I Cor. 13:9-12: 'For we know in part and we prophecy in part, but when perfection comes, the imperfect disappears. When I was a child, I thought as a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man I put childish ways behind me. Now we see but a poor reflection; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known.'

This suggestion is also supported by his speaking of *knowing*, a verb constantly used throughout the scripture of the marriage relationship. The theme of this passage, which seems to speak of completion in the context of the marriage relationship, is worship (chs. 12 and 14), thus supporting this overall observation regarding the relationship between the temple and the bride. The framework of all of this, as in Rom. 7:1-4, is the New Exodus.⁴⁵ Indeed, Taylor⁴⁶ has suggested that the statement in 1 Cor 6.20 concerning being bought with a price probably reflects Jesus statement in Mk. 10:45, 'to give his life a ransom for many'. Now it is this very statement that Hooker⁴⁷ has claimed refers to the redemption of the firstborn by the Levites following

⁴³ As well as partaking in the table of demons and denial of the resurrection.

⁴⁴ Jn. 2; I Cor. 6:15-20; Eph. 2:19-20 cf. 5:25-33 and Rev. 19:8 cf. 21:22.

⁴⁵ See my forthcoming commentary on *Romans* and my forthcoming volume *Paul Law and Spirit*.

⁴⁶ Taylor, *Atonement*, 23.

⁴⁷ Hooker, *Servant*, 73.

the Passover. She pointed out that the only place in scripture where one human life was substituted for another human life was in the case of the Levites who were substituted for the firstborn following the Passover. Thus there is a hermeneutical model functioning in which the “ransom for many” operates within the Passover scheme, a paradigm already used by Paul to explain the significance of Christ death (5:7). If these observations are correct, then they link 1 Cor. 6:20 with the Passover. The divine marriage between Yahweh and Israel was understood to have taken place at this time. This then supports the claims that have been made earlier that 1 Cor. 6:16 . reflectsthe matrimonial language that is part of the Passover.

This divine marriage is the eschatological goal of the redemption that is in Christ. It is not just here in the Corinthian correspondence. An echo of it surfaces in 2 Cor. 5:5. Paul speaks about the church being prepared for the coming change when she will not be found naked. Ellis⁴⁸ says that the term refers to not having a wedding garment. This suggestion is rejected by Moule⁴⁹. However this work has drawn attention to details that Moule has not considered which I believe make Ellis’s suggestion viable. Webb⁵⁰ has demonstrated that 2 Cor. 2-6 is constructed around the theme of the Second Exodus. Clearly New Exodus imagery is present in chapter five.⁵¹ It would make sense to expect to find a reference to the eschatological marriage in a passage so heavily dependent on the New Exodus theme. There is a further factor that has probably hindered the identification of the wedding theme, and that is that the passage is mostly interpreted, as is the rest of the letter, individualistically. This is not because the grammar demands it, but because tradition has dictated it. As we have seen, the believer is never called the bride of Christ, but the church is. If this is a corporate argument, then the reference to a wedding garment is consistent and makes sense of the flow of the argument. It finishes up with the statement that God would dwell with them,⁵² temple imagery, which is always, as we have seen, closely connected to the theme of the church being the bride of Christ.

Problems considered.

The traditional interpretation of one flesh in 1 Cor 6:16 has constantly thrown up problems in exegesis. Moffat⁵³ explains one of them without seeking any other solutions when he says: “So strong does Paul feel on this point that he actually applies to illicit passion, or cohabitation, what was originally used of married love.” The problem produced in understanding the one flesh concept in the traditional framework causes Conzelmann to say: “*mia sarx* is accordingly for Paul not an essential mark of Christian marriage, but simply, describes sexual union in general. I Corinthians is not to be understood simply as an interpretation of Genesis 2:24.”⁵⁴ Conzelmann says this in spite of the clear allusion to Gen 2:24 in v16. Another problem is noted by Simon who says: “the apostle seems to suggest that once a man’s body has been used for fornication; it is no longer his to offer to God. We may not be able to

⁴⁸ Ellis, “Eschatology”, 211f.

⁴⁹ Moule, “Dualism”, 121.

⁵⁰ Webb, *Home*, 1ff.

⁵¹ I.e. the quote from Isa 52:11 in 2 Cor. 5:17 which refers to the anticipated new creation following the second exodus.

⁵² 2 Cor. 6:14-18.

⁵³ Moffat, *Corinthians*, 125.

⁵⁴ Conzelmann, *Corinthians*, 111.

follow him in the most rigorist interpretation of this line of thought, but we are hardly likely to find a more 'positive' approach to the sins of the flesh than put before us here."⁵⁵

These problems, together with those which we have previously noted cannot be explained adequately while it is held that Paul is dealing 'merely' with the problem of a man having a sexual relationship with a temple prostitute. While we have sympathy with the application of this passage to sexual relationships, restricting it to this setting will never resolve the problems that have been raised.

The conclusion that controls the argument.

The prevailing understanding of Paul's argument in chapter 6 is due to a large measure because the conclusion of the argument has been 'obvious' as has its setting. The meaning of the conclusion has been read back into the discussion and this has in turn controlled the exegesis of the marriage imagery in the text. It is assumed that *Soma* in v19 refers to the individual believer, and it clearly does not. It is assumed that the purchase in v20 reflects sacral manumission, and it does not, for if it did, Paul by his own argument would have done more serious damage to his gospel than any of his opponents were ever able to do. And as important, it assumes the practice of sacred prostitution in Corinth, and we now know that it did not happen.⁵⁶ The prevailing understanding also assumes that the practice of reading the epistles on an individual level is the only way to read the text, because no alternative has ever been raised. We have seen from our consideration of Rom 6:6 that here is a reading of 'the body (*Soma*) of sin' that is a corporate way of reading the passage that cuts across Hellenistic presuppositions, and that at the very least must be considered. Also, there has been a serious failure to take the apocalyptic nature of the argument in chapter 6 seriously. That this is the dimension of the argument ought to be clear in that Paul begins the section with a clear statement concerning the Corinthian believers role in the coming eschaton as judges (1 Cor 6:2). This propels the following argument away from the moral lapses of the Corinthians to the implications that such behaviour has for the eschatological community. It is this context that I am arguing that chapter 6 should be read in.

Added to all this is the failure to realise that the arguments are about salvation history, about God's dealing with the church. The neglect of the clear marital imagery that so obviously speaks of covenant and community has, with the other above listed points, been the receipt for a total misreading of the text that drives through all the exegetical clues because they cannot possibly fit into the individualistic reading that has been the followed for most of the church's history.

A proposed corporate interpretation.

⁵⁵ Simon, *Corinthians*, 85. Batey, "Union", 278 acknowledges that the use of this imagery in relation to a prostitute is surprising.

⁵⁶ "Stabbe's comments about 1,000 religious prostitutes of Aphrodite and those of Athenaeus are unmistakably about Greek and not Roman Corinth. As temple prostitution was not a Greek phenomenon, the veracity of his comments on this point have been rightly questioned. The size of the Roman temple of Aphrodite on the Acrocorinth ruled out such temple prostitution; and by that time she had become Venus- the venerated mother of the imperial family and the highly respected patroness of Corinth- and was no longer a sex symbol". Winter, *Corinth*, 87-88. See also Baugh, "Cultic Prostitution" 443-460 who argues for its absence in Ephesus and then extends his argument to cover the whole Roman empire .

I have considered what I see to be the weakness in Gundry's argument, but are there any factors Gundry has missed which if introduced would help to complete the picture which was in Paul's mind? I believe that there are.

First, it needs to be seen that the relationship Paul is so alarmed about in I Corinthians 5:1ff is not a case of a lapse into immorality, but a permanent relationship between a man (the professing believer) and his father's wife.⁵⁷ Bruce translates Paul's complaint as: "and of a kind that is not found even among pagans; for a man is living with his father's wife."⁵⁸ Bruce prefers this more precise rendering because immorality (R.S.V.) is a weak rendering for *porneia*, which means fornication. In fact, *porneia* is occasionally attested for *erwah* in Rabbinical Hebrew, and for *zenut* in the Zadokite Document, of cohabitation within forbidden degrees. Paul could easily quote from the law,⁵⁹ the Jerusalem decree,⁶⁰ and even Pagan authors.⁶¹ It was against every known form of morality, and the pagans themselves denounced its practice in their own societies. Now it is this relationship, of a son and a stepmother, living together as man and wife, that caused Paul such deep concern. They have entered into a permanent relationship. The question that requires an answer before we can go any further in unravelling Paul's thinking is whether he could ever acknowledge such a relationship as being *one flesh*. Would he give it the same status and dignity as a marriage that is according the law of God?⁶²

Following the Paschal argument.

Throughout chapters five and six Paul is concerned only with the son (*this man* I Cor. 5:5), he does not comment on what should be done to the woman, who is, presumably, an unbeliever. Paul, in fact, explains that it is not the duty of the church to discipline the unbeliever in this tragic affair, only the believer. 'What business is it of mine to judge those outside of the Church? Are you not to judge those inside? God will judge those outside. Expel the wicked man from among you.'⁶³ Paul lays down principles for dealing with improprieties within the Church. They are told not to take their problems before the secular court as this will bring disgrace to the church's testimony as a whole. They themselves are to deal with the matter, and are qualified to do so in that they have been appointed to ultimately judge both men and angels.⁶⁴ Paul proceeds to explain that the body has legitimate pleasures, but only within the limits prescribed by the law of God. Once food is misused it leads to gluttony and becomes master of the eater. Equally, once sexual experience is indulged in outside of God's prescribed limits, it also ceases to be the source of marital blessing that it is intended to be. The difference between food and sexual experience, however, is very distinct. Sexual relations engaged in its appointed way, seals relationships with people. Such relationships are part of the much larger community of the church, they are

⁵⁷ "What we have then, is not an attempt to bring pagan standards into the church, but an attempt to be freed from any standards", Harris, "Beginnings", 14.

⁵⁸ Bruce, *Corinthians*, 53.

⁵⁹ Lev.18:8; Deut. 22:30; 27:20.

⁶⁰ Acts 15:20, 29; 21:25.

⁶¹ e.g. Euripides' *Hippolytus* representing the Greeks and Cicero's *Pro Cluentio* 14, representing the Romans.

⁶² Fisk "Violation" 556 comments: "it seems to suggest some degree of permanence or continuity (viz. 'the man who has a sexual liaison with...').".

⁶³ 1 Cor. 5:12.

⁶⁴ 1 Cor. 6:2.

the living units that make it. It is this inter-relatedness that clearly causes Paul profound concern. He sees that corruption of this type in the body of Christ threatens the purity of the whole body: 'Your boasting is not good. Don't you know that a little yeast works through the whole batch of dough? Get rid of the old yeast that you may be a new batch without yeast - as you really are. For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed. Therefore let us keep the festival, not with the old yeast, the yeast of malice and wickedness, but with bread without yeast, the bread of sincerity and truth.'⁶⁵ Incidentally, note the Paschal/Exodus content of the appeal.

Confused relationships.

Now we come to that passage that is the cause of so much difficulty, I Cor. 6:15-20. As Gundry (in common with many others) sees it, we have here the Apostle Paul saying that a man becomes one flesh with a prostitute through coitus, and so the immoral Christian has a oneness with both Christ and a prostitute. Having already discounted Gundry's claim that Paul has a Greek temple/slave-market in mind, is there any other evidence that can be brought to bear to unravel this passage?

Kemphorne's view is that the prostitute figure of chapter 6 is linked with the woman in the case of incest in 5:1 ff. I do not make a link that equates the two as being one and the same person, but I do agree with Kemphorne that the sin against the body, *pan amarthma ho ean poihsē anthrwpos ektos tou swmatos estin*,⁶⁶ probably includes a reference to the corporate body, the church. For as we have seen, Paul is concerned over the influence of the leaven of sin. Paul is disquieted (back in 5:6-8) not only for the offender, but also for the body of which the offender is part, in case it is putrified by the presence of such sin in the body. It is obviously true that the offender does sin against his own body, but both the preceding and (as we shall see) the subsequent arguments have a wider framework than the individual.

Further evidence.

Another point which suggests a corporate understanding is one that Gundry came very close too, but did not quite identify. He noted⁶⁷ that Paul says: 'Shall I take away the members of Christ and make them the members of a prostitute? (*aras oun ta melē tou Christou poihsō pornēs melē*),'⁶⁸ an understanding the original text contains (i.e. the taking away from the body of Christ) which is not generally followed by commentators⁶⁹. It is this statement that supplies the key to Paul's thought. It cannot be a reference to being one flesh with an individual prostitute as is generally accepted, because, in addition to the arguments previously advanced about one flesh, Paul uses a term here that is never used to express a marriage relationship (*melē* - a member). Scripture always reserves the concept of being *members* for a corporate relatedness. It never speaks of a man being a member of a woman or vice versa. It is used by Paul to denote the relationship of the individual believer with the body of Christ.⁷⁰ This passage, if the language of Paul is to

⁶⁵ 1 Cor. 5:6-8.

⁶⁶ 1 Cor. 6:18.

⁶⁷ Gundry, *Soma*, 60 so also Munck, *Paul*, 61.

⁶⁸ 1 Cor. 6:16.

⁶⁹ However it is widely recognised by translators, so ASJ, DRA, NAS, NEB, NIV, KJV, NKJV.

⁷⁰ Eph. 5:30.

be allowed any reasonable degree of consistency, does not refer to an individual prostitute figure, but to a *society* called the harlot. This is supported in that to take away a member of Christ is to take away from the Christian community. To add that member to an individual, so that they become one flesh would lead to an imbalance. This exegesis is confronted by Moule but because of the individualistic/Hellenistic setting he followed he discounted his own insight. He said, commenting on 1 Cor. 6:15: “If whole individual bodies belong to Christ as his limbs, then he must be more than individual body. It is true that in the very same verse, Paul asks the indignant question: “Shall I then take the limbs of Christ and make them limbs of a harlot?” Which, if we pressed the analogy would have to imply that a harlot too, had more than an individual body made up of a plurality of persons....Paul only used the outrageous phrase 'a harlot's limbs', by a kind of false analogy, and simply to emphasise the scandal of intimate union of the same person with both Christ and a harlot.”⁷¹

But Moule's explanation must be challenged. Admittedly the language of making members of the Corinthian congregation into members of the harlot is unique to this passage, but the idea behind it surely is not. In 5:5 he has told the congregation to deliver the offender unto Satan. In 1 Tim 1:20 he says that he has handed Hymenaeus and Alexander: “over to Satan to be taught not to blaspheme”. Similar imagery is found in Rev 2:22 where Jesus says: “So I will cast her on a bed of suffering, and I will make those who commit adultery with her suffer intensely, unless they repent of her ways”. The background is that Jesus is warning the church at Thyatira that if her members continue to tolerate Jezebel and practices all manner of sexually immoral acts with her, and that they continue to eat food sacrificed to idols (the very issues Paul is dealing with in 1 Corinthians), then he (Jesus) will throw them into a bed of suffering with her. In other words, the concept of handing over to Satan is very clearly taught elsewhere in both Paul and the rest of the NT. To use the language of taking members of Christ and making them the members of a harlot is nothing more than a different way of saying the same thing. Thus Paul is not using a false analogy to emphasise the scandal of a Christian being in sexual union with a harlot, but he is describing a spiritual reality of discipline that others had or were to experience. Moule is left, along with others, to resort to this back peddling on the explicit statement Paul makes because he has been interpreting the passage, as indeed the whole letter, in a highly individualistic manner. I have argued that Paul's letters to the churches speak of the church's experience, not the individual's. If this same corporate perspective was brought to this Corinthian text it would resolve the problems that are otherwise endemic in the letter.

Supportive language.

The identification of the prostitute as a community explains how Paul can use the same language to describe her relationship with her members as he uses to describe the body of Christ's relationship with its members. So in 1 Cor. 6:16: ‘Do you not know that he who unites himself with a (th) prostitute is one with her in body? For it is said, “The two will become one flesh”. But he who unites himself to the Lord is one with him in spirit.’ And in Eph. 5.30

⁷¹ Moule, *Origins*, 73.

he says; 'For we are members of his body. For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh'. This is a profound mystery - but I am talking about Christ and the Church.'

In both passages we have parallel expressions which clearly relate to one another. The language of marriage is used in both passages to indicate the corporate relationship that exists, one that is obviously based in covenant. It might be reasoned, however, that Paul speaks about the immoral believer being 'one with her in body'⁷², which must surely be evidence of a physical union, and that he is therefore speaking of a prostitute. My answer is 'Yes, it is a physical union, but no, it does not necessarily mean an individual prostitute'. Paul's doctrine of the Church is more than 'spiritual', it is also physical. 'Your bodies are members of Christ Himself.'⁷³ Because Paul as a Hebrew cannot separate people from their bodies, he sees the Church as possessing a physical dimension. There is a physical dimension to the relationship between Christ and His people; if there were not, the relationship that existed would be incomplete. Indeed, Paul is perfectly consistent in explaining that the final act of redemption is to change the believer's body.⁷⁴ He never abandons the essentially Hebraic nature of his thinking and therefore sees an importance in the body that a Greek mind could never accept.⁷⁵ It is this relationship which Paul admits is a profound mystery,⁷⁶ and it is this relationship which allows him to describe the Church and Christ as being one flesh⁷⁷ and to make full use of the marriage analogy. Also, it is because this is the Church's relationship with Christ - physical, one body - that he can use the same language to describe the relationship between the immoral Corinthian and the harlot, for as we have seen, she is the Church's counterpart.

The temple is One.

I would continue to argue for a corporate setting for the passage by considering Paul's statement in verse 19: 'do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit,' (*h ouk oidate oti to swma humwn agiou pneumatatos estin*). This is normally interpreted as a reference to the believer's body being the dwelling place of the Holy Spirit,⁷⁸ but this overlooks the fact that *swma*(body), is singular, whereas *humon* (your), is plural. It is their corporate body, themselves as a Church, not their individual bodies that Paul is referring to as the temple of the Holy Spirit. Indeed, the traditional individualistic interpretation is contrary to all other usage's of the New Testament writers in regard to the concept of the living temple. Elsewhere this concept is always applied to the Church,⁷⁹ never to the individual. The only occasion that it is used of the individual is when it refers to Christ's own body.⁸⁰ All of this is supported by the use Paul makes of the definite article

⁷² I Cor. 6:15.

⁷³ I Cor. 6:15.

⁷⁴ Rom. 8:11, 8:18-25; I Cor. 15:35-49; Phil. 3:20-21; I Thess. 4:13-18.

⁷⁵ Acts 17:32

⁷⁶ Eph. 5:32.

⁷⁷ Eph 5:31-2.

⁷⁸ So Lang, *Korinther*, 85; Zimmer, "Temple", 44; Dunn, *Baptism*, 123; Fisk, "Violation", 557; Thiselton, *Corinthians*, 459; Hays *Corinthians*, 106 & 108 and Witherington, *Narrative*, 282.

⁷⁹ 1 Cor. 3:16, 6:19; 2 Cor. 6:16; Rev. 21:3.

⁸⁰ Jn. 2:19.

coupled with the singular for temple. Their 'body' is *the* temple of the Holy Spirit (*to swma humwn naos tou en umin agiou pneumatōs estin*).

This corporate exegesis is supported by Grosheide⁸¹ who says: "Your body: Paul's words regard the body of every believer; but also the bodies of all the believers together. In vs 15 your bodies implies the individual bodies are members of Christ, but your body implies that the whole of the bodies is a temple of the Holy Spirit. The singular noun 'temple' goes with the singular noun 'body.'" I agree with Grosheide, but make clear the distinction that I think he has not emphasised adequately, that while all believers (bodies) are members of Christ, and all believers are indwelt by the Holy Spirit, yet the believer's individual body is not the temple of the Holy Spirit. It is collectively, as the Church, that they are the temple of the Holy Spirit.

Finally, in support of a corporate setting, we can also note that in his closing statement, 'you were bought with a price', *hgorasthhte gar timēs* (v. 20), Paul uses the collective plural pronoun, not the singular. This marries with the rest of Paul's statement regarding redemption, where the price paid is always for the Church and never for the individual.⁸²

Summary.

I conclude that the traditional interpretation has been contrary to all grammatical considerations, and has prevailed solely because the passage has constantly been placed within a Greek framework and interpreted from a Greek individualistic perspective. Once the Hebraic eschatological setting has been identified, with its New Exodus framework, and the letter is interpreted as addressed to the church, speaking of her corporate experience, then the passage takes on a new meaning which, unlike its alternative, is consistent with logical, theological and grammatical considerations.

The picture that has emerged is that Paul threatens the offending members of the Corinthian church with being delivered onto Satan. If the church will not do this she is in danger of the same judgement. It is parallel to Israel who failed to maintain her purity and was ultimately delivered over to her enemies in exile. This fits Witherington's⁸³ suggestion that in 1 Cor. 5:2 it is the spirit of the congregation not the individual that is the focus of salvation and that the model is Israel's historic experience of judgement.

Old Testament imagery and the language of Paul

We have seen earlier that there are strong OT themes operating throughout the passage. In 5:7 there is the explicit statement that Christ's death is a Paschal sacrifice - the very event when Yahweh redeemed Israel to be his bride. 6:11 is seen by many to be baptism language and if so then it anticipates 10:2, the Exodus, when Israel became Yahweh's bride.⁸⁴ There is clear martial language in 6:16 and the purchase of the Corinthians church in 6:20 is, once the unacceptability of sacral manumission is appreciated, echoing Israel's purchase by Yahweh to be his bride. Added to all of this is the realisation by some scholars that lurking behind the imagery that Paul uses is the story of Hosea with Gomer going after other gods and playing the

⁸¹ Grosheide, *Corinthians*, 151-2 supported by Kempthorne, "Incest", 257. Witherington, *Quest*, 215 says of Paul's corporate understanding: "corporate identity is primary, individual identity is derived from it."

⁸² Acts 20:28; Rom.3:24 ff; Gal.3:13; Eph.1:7; 5:24; Col. 1:13-14; see also Mk. 10:45

⁸³ Witherington, *Quest*, 216-7.

⁸⁴ For detailed discussion see chapter 7, The paschal community and baptism

harlot.⁸⁵ The tragedy of Hosea was greatly compounded for it spoke of *corporate* Israel's infidelity to Yahweh. It is this corporate concern that is at the heart of Paul's discussion and it is natural to see how Israel's history becomes the canvas on which Paul expresses his concern for the faltering people of God at Corinth. The OT marriage language and imagery continues in 7:4,⁸⁶ and the language of children being sanctified in 7:14 makes no sense outside of the covenantal imagery of the OT. In 8: 1-13 Paul covers the serious issue of eating food sacrificed to idols, the very thing Israel did in Exodus 32:6 when she committed idolatry and came under the covenant curse for her unfaithfulness. This is picked up in 10: 1-22 with members of the Corinthian congregation dying for the sins of the community. The whole back-cloth to this unfolding argument is made apparent when the scriptures Paul quotes or alludes to are examined. They are woven into Paul's appeal to the Corinthians not to be like Israel in the Exodus. The texts gathered from the Pentateuch⁸⁷ follow Israel's redemption and then her fall from grace. Paul's focus is therefore much greater than an individual's behaviour important as that is, it is how this behaviour, i.e. that of the son with his father's wife, putrefies the community and brings her into judgment.

The harlot, her identity.

The question that is posed by the above interpretation is, what or who is this *porne*? She is corporate, she has members, but is there anything else we can discover about her? I believe that there is, and this will become apparent from identifying who she is. She is that same community which has already been identified as the body of Sin, and it is precisely because she is the Church's counterpart that Paul can use ecclesiastical language concerning her. She is that same *porne* that John speaks of in Rev. 17:5 when he says,

This title was written on her forehead
Mystery
Babylon the Great
The Mother of Prostitutes
And of the Abomination of The Earth.

John had already described her activities in Revelation 17:1-2 saying; *Come, I*

⁸⁵ At the heart of Paul's call to sexual purity in 6:12-20 is the idea that God is the believer's husband (6:16-17) and redeemer/master (6:20). That Paul had been influenced by Scripture in his choice of indicatives upon which to base his imperatives, at least in a general sense, can be seen in the same combination of ideas in Isaiah and Hosea. Isaiah 54:5 states: "your Maker is your *husband*-the Lord Almighty is his name-the Holy One of Israel is your *Redeemer*".....An even closer parallel may be drawn with Hosea 3:1-3. Just as Paul exhorted the Corinthians not to go to prostitutes, so in Hosea 3:3 Hosea commanded Gomer not to be a prostitute ("you must not be a prostitute")." Rosner, *Ethics*, 132. Rosner loses the way in transferring the corporate application of Hosea's tragedy because like most commentators he has interpreted the temple as the individual and the payment of the price in 6:20 as sacrificial manumission. Indeed, he comments that: "Few commentators hold the view that Genesis 2:24 is used by Paul in 6:16 not only to prove the seriousness of sexual union with the harlot but to introduce the notion of the believer's nuptial union with Christ". Rosner then goes on to argue for seeing this influence in Paul's argument. What is significant is that Rosner says "God is the believer's husband" *op cit.* . This highly individualistic view of the believer's relationship with Christ is found nowhere in Scripture. In both OT and NT understanding it is the community, and only the community, that is the bride of either Yahweh or Christ.

⁸⁶ "1 Corinthians 7:4, a verse describing conjugal rights in marriage, reflects back marriage connotations into 1 Corinthians 6:12b". Rosner, *Ethics*, 133. In other words, chapter seven is working out the practical implications of the theology in chapter 6, a typical Pauline method of teaching ethics, so for example Eph 5: 25-6: 4.

⁸⁷ 1 Cor 5:7 alludes to Exod 12. 1 Cor 5:12 alludes to Deut 17:7; 19:19; 2:21, 24; 24:7. 1 Cor 6:16 cites Gen 2:24. 1 Cor 6:20 alludes to Exod 12 and Isa 52: 3-4 & 9-10. 1 Cor 8:4 alludes to Deut 6:4. 1 Cor 9:9 cites Deut 25:4. 1 Cor 10:2 alludes to Exod 14:21-22. 1 Cor 10:3 alludes to Exod 16:13-16. 1 Cor 10:4 alludes to Exod 17:6. 1 Cor 10:5 alludes to Num 14:29. Note the clear statement that: "these things occurred as examples to keep us from setting our hearts on evil things as they did" 1 Cor 10:6.

will show you the punishment of the great prostitute, who sits on so many waters. With her kings of the earth committed adultery, and the inhabitants of the earth were intoxicated with the wine of her adulteries.

That John follows what is being argued by Paul, of two covenant communities, is evident by the fact that he proceeds, after describing the judgement of the prostitute (ch.18), to present the true bride, adorned for her husband.⁸⁸

‘Then I heard what sounded like a great multitude, like the roar of rushing waters, and like loud peals of thunder, shouting:

“Hallelujah:

For our Lord God Almighty reigns.

Let us rejoice and be glad

and give him glory!

For the wedding of the Lamb has come,

and his bride has made herself ready”.’

The question that must be answered is whether scholarship will support these conclusions regarding the identification made, and the principles employed to reach it. The identification of the harlot of Revelation 17 gives rise to five distinct lines of interpretation.

1. The historic interpretation⁸⁹ makes a straight equation between Babylon and the Roman Empire. Turner, an exponent of this view, points out the problem it has to face in the following extract: “One would think this (great harlot) more appropriate of Jerusalem than of Rome. The Hebrew prophets constantly accused the holy city of the spiritual sin of fornication, namely religious syncretism and imprudent association with foreign kings; in v.2 this city, whatever it is, is accused of just that kind of association with the kings of the earth. It is difficult to resist the conclusion that all this is very fittingly applied to Jerusalem. Such a conclusion is strengthened by the observation that the last words of chapter 18 (in her was found the blood of prophets and of saints, and of all who have been slain on the earth”) remind us vividly of words which Jesus used of Jerusalem in Mtt.23:25 (‘that upon you may come all the righteous blood shed on the earth from the blood of innocent Abel to the blood of Zechariah.....O Jerusalem, Jerusalem; Killing the prophets.....’). So once more the question arises whether Revelation is not directed against militant and persecuting non-Christian Judaism, which arrested the spread of the Gospel in its earliest days, rather than secular Rome. On the other hand there are considerable difficulties in the acceptance of such a view and the rejection of the more usual identification with Rome. V.12, for instance (the ten kings), would most naturally be a reference to the Roman emperors, and the seven hills of v.9 look like those on which Rome is built.”⁹⁰

2. The second interpretation⁹¹ applies the image to Rome specifically, but also with a wider application to godless society. This interpretation overcomes the problem Turner has noted for the historical interpretation, but it would require

⁸⁸ This is vindication for using John to interpret Paul. While there are obviously distinctives about their individual theologies, they were nevertheless within the common framework of the church's common New Exodus understanding.

⁸⁹ Supported by such as Caird, *Revelation*, 146; Aune, *Revelation*, 3:915; Farrer, *Revelation*, 147; Mounce; *Revelation*, 321; Fiorenza, *Revelation*, 96; Metzser, *Understanding*, 85; and Hunter, *Revelation*, 148.

⁹⁰ Turner, “Revelation” *PBC* 149.

⁹¹ Represented by such scholars as Mounce, *Revelation*, 307-8 and Torrance, *Apocalypse*, 140-6.

us to accept that John sees beyond the historical situation to the universally historic manifestation of Babylon. While this is more attractive as it overcomes the problems the historical interpretation faces, it is difficult to understand why, if John could see beyond the Roman Empire to succeeding, or even previous Empires, he should make Babylon apply particularly to Rome and secondly to the principle of rebellion exhibited elsewhere. If he had the breadth of vision that enabled him to see beyond his own immediate situation, he would better have first established the general principle and then applied it to the particular situation he was in. This, as we shall see, is in fact the position of another interpretation.

3. The third interpretation made up mostly of the reformers and their followers⁹² sees Babylon as representing the Papacy which links religious and secular authority, as it did in the middle ages. While it would solve the problems Turner has noted, it has been challenged by the reformed scholar Hendriksen.⁹³ He has pointed out that the description used by John is not *an adulteress* (as the reformers interpretation of the Roman Church having forsaken the covenant would require) but she is described as an harlot having no covenant with Yahweh.

4. The fourth interpretation⁹⁴ is an updated presentation of the reformer's view. It sees Babylon as the Roman Church, and many of the images used are seen as describing her influence in the emergence of a new Europe that will become a second Holy Roman Empire. Such views were popular while the EEC was made up of seven states, symbolising, in this view, the seven hills of Rome, but the view has serious problems, one of which is that the community has outgrown that number. The position clearly lacks credibility.

5. The fifth interpretation which we will call the eschatological interpretation sees the harlot as unredeemed human society. Ladd, a representative of this point of view, says: "The great harlot is seated upon many waters. This is a very important statement and provides us with one of the clues in the identification of the harlot. This description does not fit historical Rome, for while the Tiber flows through the city Rome was not built on many waters. The phrase does describe the historical Babylon because the city was built upon a network of canals. Jeremiah spoke of Babylon as the city which dwells on many waters (Jer. 51:13). John himself interprets the meaning of this phrase, "The waters you saw, where the harlot is seated, are peoples and multitudes and nations and tongues" (v.15). Babylon became the personification of wickedness, and John has taken over the Old Testament symbolism and used Babylon to represent the final manifestation of the total history of godless nations. The city had a historical manifestation in first-century Rome, but the full significance of the wicked city is eschatological. Rome could be seated on many waters in the sense that she drew her strength and sovereignty from her conquest of many nations, but it will be even more true of eschatological Babylon who will seduce all the world to worship that which is not God."⁹⁵

This eschatological setting for Babylon, with its existence rooted in pre-eschatological history, supports the exegesis I have given on 1 Cor. 6:19-10.

⁹² Barnes, *Revelation*, 21 and Scott, *Revelation*, 357.

⁹³ Hendriksen, *Conquerors*, 274.

⁹⁴ See Noll, *Scandal*, 173-4, the view is widely supported by the television evangelists of the USA.

⁹⁵ Ladd, *Revelation*, 221-2.

It is close to the position of Mounce and Torrance, but rather than saying Babylon is Rome, with a secondary application to society in general, this view sees Babylon as godless human society, and in the first century that was epitomised in Rome. But I have in fact gone beyond Ladd to see in the harlot a deeper significance for the history of salvation. Babylon is the body of Sin, with all the covenantal implications we have discussed. This wider covenantal interpretation has the support of Olshausen who, seemingly without appreciating its significance, not only identifies the whore of Revelation with the harlot of I Cor. 6 as argued here, but supports seeing her as the counterpart of the Church. Commenting on I Cor. 6:15-16 he says: "The whole passage is evidently grounded upon the comparison which is instituted between Christ and His Church (Eph. 5:23 ff), and it is not improbable that, when the apostle said that he that is joined to an harlot is one body with her, he had in view the great whore that sits upon many waters (Rev. 17:1)."⁹⁶

Although Farrer and Beasley-Murray identify Babylon as Rome, their comments on the comparison John makes between Babylon and Jerusalem in fact support the interpretation of seeing the harlot as being contrasted with the true bride, the Church. Farrer says: "The mysteries they show are an emphatic pair: Babylon the harlot, Jerusalem the bride."⁹⁷ While Farrer does not expound this further, when it is appreciated that Jerusalem is the symbol of the Church, then the contrast assumes the significance we are suggesting. Beasley-Murray gives further support to this exposition when he says: "As for the woman portrayed in ch.17, it seems certain that John is at pains to present her in colours that contrast in the strongest possible manner with his picture of the woman who in chapters 12 and 21 represents the community and city of God."⁹⁸

In addition to these scholars, Torrance's remarks on Babylon supports the connection between the harlot and unredeemed man. Although he identifies the immediate representation of Babylon with the Roman Empire, he goes on to say: "Babylon is, in fact, an imitation Kingdom of God; based on the demonic trinity. Ostensibly Babylon is a world-wide civilisation and culture, magnificent in her science and arts and commerce, but it is drugged with pride and intoxicated with its enormous success - Babylon is the worship of this world, the deification of economic power and worldly security - There is no doubt but that our world is in the grip of this wicked Babylon today - Babylon represents human collectively."⁹⁹

Common themes.

Therefore I Cor. 6 and the identification of the harlot as godless human society have been established. It was a theme that was not confined to Paul, but shared by the writer of the Apocalypse, and by implication, the whole church, otherwise they would have missed its significance.

The link between the harlot of 1 Cor. 6 and Rev. 17 is made more probable when 2 Cor. 6:14ff is considered. There are those who claim that this passage is an interpolation¹⁰⁰ of a genuinely Pauline fragment but from another letter. Having been dislodged from its original context, the passage, it is claimed,

⁹⁶ Olshausen, *Revelation*, 110.

⁹⁷ Farrer, *Revelation*, 181.

⁹⁸ Beasley-Murray, *Revelation*, 250.

⁹⁹ Torrance, *Apocalypse*, 140.

¹⁰⁰ See Guthrie, *Introduction*, 423ff.

was inserted into its present location.

The majority of scholars see it to originally have followed 1 Cor. 5:17-21. The passage would however also perfectly fit into the position following 1 Cor. 6:20.¹⁰¹ In this position it would function as an exhortation to be faithful to the Lord who had bought them (v20). Also, in this position there are clear links with the temple language in 6.19 which comes up again in the allegedly dislocated passage.

Whatever the merits or otherwise of the suggested setting for relocation, what is important to note is that the passage uses the same eschatological themes as found in Rev 17ff. The call to come out from among them,¹⁰² the promise that God would be their God¹⁰³ and God's promise to live with them.¹⁰⁴ Regardless where the passage was originally located, it shows clearly Paul's familiarity and use of the same terms found in Revelation and which I have argued are the correct sphere for interpreting the meaning of the harlot in 1 Cor. 6.

There is yet another section of Paul's writings that might be related to John's vision of the eschatological harlot. In 2 Thess. Paul, writing about the ultimate manifestation of evil before Christ's return says: "Concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our being gathered to him, we ask you, brothers, not to become easily unsettled or alarmed by some prophecy, report or letter supposed to have come from us, saying that the day of the Lord has already come. Don't let anyone deceive you in any way, for that day will not come until the rebellion occurs and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the man doomed to destruction. He opposes and exalts himself over everything that is called God or is worshipped, and even sets himself up in God's temple, proclaiming himself to be God. Don't you remember that when I was with you I used to tell these things? And now you know what is holding him back, so that he may be revealed at the proper time. For the secret power of lawlessness is already at work; but the one who now holds it back will continue to do so till he is taken out of the way. And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord Jesus will overthrow with the breath of his mouth and destroy by the splendour of his coming. The coming of the lawless one will be in accordance with the work of Satan displayed in all kinds of counterfeit miracles, signs and wonders, and in every sort of evil that deceives those who are perishing. They perish because they refused to love the truth and to be saved. For this reason God sends them a powerful delusion so that they will believe the lie and so that all will be condemned who have not believed the truth but have delighted in wickedness."¹⁰⁵

The mystery of iniquity.

In verse 7 he has spoken of 'the secret power of lawlessness'. It is this term, used in such an unusual way, that may be further evidence that we are rightly discerning Paul's mind. What is this mystery of iniquity?¹⁰⁶ It would seem to be linked with the title observed in Revelation 19:5, 'Mystery, Babylon the

¹⁰¹ So Weiss, cited by Webb, *Home*, 20. Webb himself argues that the passage is not dislocated and that it is now in its original setting. He argues this on the basis of identifying a New Exodus theme running through the letter from ch 4 onwards.

¹⁰² 2 Cor. 6:17 c.f. Rev.18:4.

¹⁰³ 2 Cor. 6:18 c.f. Rev. 21:7.

¹⁰⁴ 2 Cor. 6:16 c.f. Rev. 21:3.

¹⁰⁵ 2 Thess. 2:1-12.

¹⁰⁶ A.V., or "secret power of lawlessness".

Great', and if it is, it would be a reference to the manifestation of the secret principle of evil. But can this be upheld?

Coppen outlined the use Paul makes of the term 'mystery'. He noted that Paul's use of the terms 'revelation', 'mystery', 'knowledge' and 'perfection' are linked very closely together to form "a network of theological concepts." Coppen observes that in Paul's earlier letters the calling of the Gentiles is a special aspect of the mystery, but in later letters; "The mystery becomes principally the mysterious being of Christ, the universal significance of his being, and the mystical participation in this being, the fullness of divine grace."

As the theme of the mystery develops in Paul's writings, Coppen claims that we find a development, so that when we get to the Captivity Epistles we find that; "The mystery is no longer primarily the ultimate salvation of the Jews, nor the calling of the Gentiles, nor the miracle of the parousia, nor the glory of the final beatification in God; rather all of that is recapitulated in Christ."¹⁰⁷

Such an observation ought not to surprise us. It is, in fact, the inevitable result of the logic on which Paul has been basing his message. If (as from the very beginning he has in fact done) Paul has built his understanding on the concept of solidarity and representation, and if he has argued that God has put forth Christ as the last Adam to regain all that was lost by the first, then the final goal can be nothing less than the recapitulation of all creation. The relevance of this recapitulation for the Church is that she will be the bride of Christ. Coppen says of that final state; "Christ then is the mystery of God made visible, as the church in its turn will render the mystery of Christ visible."¹⁰⁸

Commenting on 2 Thessalonians 2:3 Coppen says; "It remains that the Qumran literature offers numerous partial parallels to our text....But we must not lose sight of the differences; the texts do not speak, as does St.Paul, of a personage who will be the ultimate incarnation of impiety, nor do they evoke the Messiah as the adversary and the conqueror of the man of sin."¹⁰⁹

It is this basic difference that we must note, for Paul speaks of the mystery of iniquity being related to the appearance of the man of sin. How are we to understand Paul's concept of mystery here? There is, in fact, only one key that we hold. As explained by Coppen, the mystery of Christ is to do with redemption, and finally, to the total recapitulation, when Christ shall be all in all. If Paul is consistent in his use of this technical expression we can only conclude that it is the opposite which is here taking place - the full display of man's alienation from God. The mystery of iniquity is the full revelation of unredeemed man's relationship with Sin itself as he yields himself to be its servant. Surely it is this concept of unrestrained evil, and willing service of the anti-Christ that binds Paul's statement in 2 Thessalonians 2:3 to John's statement in Revelation 17:5. In both, the idea of mystery is tied in with the eschatological goal of the unredeemed in their relationship to Sin,¹¹⁰ just as the term is elsewhere used of Christ and the Church. This equating of the mystery of the harlot with the mystery of the man of sin is supported by Sweet, who says, commenting on Revelation 17: "Mystery in the Bible means

¹⁰⁷ Coppens, "Parallels", 133.

¹⁰⁸ op cit, 14.

¹⁰⁹ op cit, 104.

¹¹⁰ cf Mounce, "Eschatology", 166 who commenting on the parallels between Thessalonians and Revelation says: "behind the two eschatological preservations is a common source of apocalyptic concept and imagery."

something hidden from men of “this world” but revealed by God to his prophets (cf. Dan.2:29 ff, I Cor:2.6-10) - here it is the mystery not of God (10:7) but of lawlessness (2 Thess.2:7).”¹¹¹

The fellowship of demons.

As a result of identifying the harlot figure of I Corinthians 6 we can turn to other passages in Paul’s letters to see if her exposure throws any new light on Paul’s statements. The first such passage is I Corinthians 10: 15-33 in which Paul warns the Corinthians concerning attending meals which were held in honour of pagan deities. Paul’s concern was, as Bruce expresses it, that; “those who shared such a feast under the patronage, for example, of Serapis, whether in his temple or in his private house, were considered to have perfect communion with him.”¹¹²

Paul warns them: ‘Therefore, my dear friends, flee from idolatry. I speak to sensible people; judge for yourself what I say. Is not the cup of thanksgiving for which we give thanks a participation in the blood of Christ? And is not the bread that we break a participation in the body of Christ? Because there is one loaf, we, who are many, are one body, for we all partake of the one loaf. Consider the people of Israel; Do not those who eat the sacrifices participate in the altar? Do I mean then that a sacrifice offered to an idol is anything? No, but the sacrifices of pagans are offered to demons, not to God, and I do not want you to be participants with demons. You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons too; you cannot have a part in both the Lord’s table and the table of demons.’

The nature of the two feasts is clearly equated. The table of demons speaks of the relationship that the participant has with them, just as the table of the Lord speaks of the relationship the believer has with him. Millard has established the Lord’s Supper to be a covenant meal. By comparison with the structure of the Old Testament and Semitic covenants in general, he has shown that the warnings and appeals made to the Corinthians in chapters 10 and 11 follow the ancient pattern, exhibited in the Old Testament, which were given to the covenant community before they were called upon to proclaim their relationship with Yahweh by partaking in the covenant renewal feasts. The direct comparison Paul gives between the two tables clearly implies that what one meant for one community, the other also meant for its counterpart. They both proclaim the existence of a covenant relationship with their respective patron. Now it is patently obvious that Paul does not believe in the existence of such deities, but he does see them as a cloak used by Satan to have control over their devotees. In other words, their relationship, their covenant, is with Satan.

This interpretation, of involvement in evil, is supported by Moffat who says, concerning the passage being considered: “He is thinking as a Jew who believed not so much in monotheism as in what was henotheism. The one God is superior to all other beings of the celestial realm, and yet the latter exists; good angels and spirits are media of his supreme power, while the evil (2:8) are already maimed and in the end to be disarmed, though at present they may, and do, exert an evil influence over any of the Lord’s loyalists who are not careful to avoid their sway, particularly when that sway operates

¹¹¹ Sweet, *Revelation*, 254.

¹¹² Bruce, *Corinthians*, 96.

through their rites of sacrificial worship.”¹¹³

Conzelmann¹¹⁴ sees Paul purposely contrasting the two tables; he writes: “The allusion to competition between pagan meals and the Christian Lord’s Supper is unmistakable: the order (drinking/eating) is the same as in v.16; ‘metexein’ ‘to partake’ (v.17) corresponds to ‘koinonia’ ‘participation’, cf.v.20.”

Deluz holds the same position; he says: “Neither pagan feast nor the Lord’s Supper offers purely bodily nourishment; they go beyond that. But pagan rites do not put the worshipper in communion with Jupiter, Minerva or Venus, for these have no existence. They are merely disguises worn by Satan to entice men to join his unholy carnival.”¹¹⁵

Grosheide also sees the sinister significance in the attendance of the table of demons. He says: “to have communion with demons does not mean to be companions of the idols but rather to be partakers of, to belong to, the world of the evil spirits, to be connected with the powers of darkness.”¹¹⁶

The seriousness of attending the table of demons is such that it is to be compared with the consequences of fornication, which Paul has dealt with earlier. Both bring the believer into a dangerous relationship with Satan, and both expose the lapsed believer to the Lord’s discipline. This relationship of these two areas of Satanic influence is supported by Héring who says: “It is not only treachery to take part in pagan religious banquets, but there is also the risk of defiling the body of Christ to which the Christian belongs and of being cut off from it like a gangrenous limb. So we have here an exact parallel with the warning of chapter 5 according to which debauchery risks bringing expulsion from the body of Christ; even more strongly would it apply to idolaters.”¹¹⁷

Thus Héring not only supports our interpretation of the significance of the table of demons, but also our support for Kempthorne’s view that sin against the body in I Corinthians 6 is with reference to the body of Christ.

conclusions.

To summarise the conclusions in this chapter. The ‘body of Sin’ in Rom. 6.6 is the very opposite of ‘the body of Christ’. This community is in covenant relationship with Satan, and it is also known as ‘the harlot’. When this concept is introduced into both Rom. 6 and I Corinthians 6 we find that it resolves theological and grammatical difficulties previously unresolved. Also, ‘the harlot’ has been seen to be the same community spoken of by John in Revelation and is linked with the eschatological mystery of iniquity in II Thess. 2.5. This suggests, as I have earlier claimed, that the New Exodus theme was fundamental the entire churches understanding and therefore it is not appropriate to claim that there is not a NT theology but many theologies. This does not deny the fact that each author might bring his own insights to the theme, but they were insights that were under the control of the OT model and not the result of flights of fantasy. All this shows that there was a very clear distinction in the early Church between the Church and the world, a distinction that was not merely one of belief, but of covenant relationships.

¹¹³ Moffat, *Corinthians*, passim, so also Millard, “Communion”, 243 and Willis, *Idol*, 209.

¹¹⁴ Conzelmann, *Corinthians*, 174.

¹¹⁵ Deluz, *Corinthians*, 130.

¹¹⁶ Grosheide, *Corinthians*, 236.

¹¹⁷ Héring, *Corinthians*, 96-7.

The corporate setting for the reading and understanding of the epistles is also sustained,¹¹⁸ and NT theology is seen to be nothing less than an extension of OT Paschal theology.

Implications

The above study, along with that of chapter 5. 'The Paschal Community and the body of Sin', has alerted us to a corporate dimension to the thinking of Paul that is not normally appreciated. Indeed, we will soon see in chapter 7 that Paul teaches a corporate baptism of believers and in chapter 9 we will see that he taught a corporate act of justification. While there are sections of his letters that have always been seen to need a corporate reading, not least of all Rom 5, few have appreciated that this was typical of Paul's thought patterns. Almost without exception, western commentators have tended to under appreciate the corporate dimension of NT understanding. Hence their otherwise correct interpretation of Paul in individualistic terms is presented as an overemphasis of his teaching.

But what significance does the corporate identification of the 'body of sin' and the 'harlot' have for Christian understanding. First, it recognises that Paul was as far away from Hellenism with its dualistic understanding of man as it is possible to be. The Hellenistic 'body of sin', with its understanding of the body being in some way sinful, or even the place where sin resides, is from a different world than that inhabited by the apostle. He saw man as the chief of God's creative activity. Certainly he is a prisoner of Sin, bound in the kingdom of darkness, but that does not require that we bring into his doctrine of sin notions that are Hellenistic. This allows us to view man and his creative ability positively. His sinfulness does not lie in some sort of defilement that has taken over him and marred him, so making his physical state itself sinful, but that he is the subject, tragically the willing subject, of the kingdom of darkness. In this condition he is at enmity with God and under his judgment. This is more terrible than we can begin to understand, but we are not to add notions that are not part of the Biblical text. Sin does not dwell in man¹¹⁹, but it does control him because of his membership to its kingdom.

Secondly. By seeing Paul's corporate perspective we are allowed to see that Paul begins with the community and not the individual. This clarifies not only Paul's anthropology, but that of the whole Bible. Man cannot be man other than in relationship to others. This is one reason that there can be no solitary Christians. Man is made in the image of God and the God of the Bible is a God who is Himself a community. By beginning with individual experience, traditional exegesis stripped texts out of their corporate context and built a flawed account of Christian experience. It has left a few texts out of which a doctrine of the church could be built, and what has been built has been woefully inadequate to represent the wonder of God's new creation. By coming to the text corporately, we begin with the doctrine of the church, and the texts that are left over are those that we construct individual experience from. This does not deny the importance of individual experience, it simply

¹¹⁸ See my forthcoming, *Paul and the Spirit* for evidence of this.

¹¹⁹ The only text to support such a view is Rom. 7:13-25 which many now appreciate to have a corporate setting. See Dunn, *Romans*, 2:passim and Ziesler, *Romans*, passim.

locates Christian experience where God intended it to be, i.e. 'in Christ' which inevitably also means 'in his body'. By this Pauline method, we make much of the people of God, the church, and less of the individual. We also make better sense, I would argue, of the whole of scripture.

Finally. By appreciating that the Biblical doctrine of sin is different from the Hellenistic view that has dominated since Augustine brought his Hellenistic searching's into his reading of Paul, we are given a biblical doctrine of sin that allows us to see more clearly the glory of God's creation. We see that sin is relational more than it is legal. In claiming this we are staying faithful to the prophetic vision of sin, appreciated supremely by Hosea who saw that sin was the abandoning of God. This creation is fallen, marred, not what it was in its original conception, but it is not defiled in the sense that Sin has invaded it and made it dirty. There is no place for dualism in Biblical thought, at least certainly not the dualism that, like a parasite, has fed off the Biblical account of the fall of man, resulting in a view of man that denies the ongoing glory of man in creation. Man is defiled by Sin (Satan) and his own sins, but that must be understood in terms of OT categories and not alien concepts imported from outside of the Biblical tradition. Also, we see creation for what it is, and man especially, a creation that God loves and has redeemed. We are thereby able to glory in the immensity of its wonder, beauty and in the case of man, his creativity and potential, even as a fallen being. This is not to deny the awfulness of the condition of sin that man in Adam is in, but neither is it to allow Satan to have more than God has allowed him to have. This doctrine of sin is none other than Old Testament teaching which demonstrates that Paul stayed true to his Jewish heritage.