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THE REPORT OF 1 CORINTHIANS 5  
IN CRITICAL DIALOGUE WITH FOUCAULT

*Introduction*

The different views within the Corinthian church concerning marriage, the eating of consecrated meat, the proper practices of the Eucharist, and their dissimilar ways of relating to fellow believers in exercising their spiritual gifts constituted a lot of concern to Paul. 1 Corinthians<sup>1</sup> is structured in a sequence of topics that might fall into the following groups: <sup>2</sup> 1-4, factionalism in the church at Corinth; 5-10, the church's external relations; 15, the resurrection from the dead; 16: 1-4, the collection.

The chapter under consideration (chapter 5) deals with an ethical issue that is of utmost concern to Paul: a case of immorality which Paul claims does not exist even among the Gentiles – “that someone has his father's wife” (5:1).<sup>3</sup> In this

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<sup>1</sup> 1 Corinthians is a response letter (cf. 1 Cor. 5:9) in an ongoing correspondence between Paul and this community of Christ's believers, and its composition might span a certain period of time. For more on this, see among others Hans Conzelmann, trans. James W. Leitch, *1 Corinthians*, Hermeneia (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1975), 2-4.

<sup>2</sup> See James Dunn, *1 Corinthians* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995), 10. Dunn's proposed structure, which curiously does not include chapters 11-14, is, needless to say, just one way among others to organize the letter. Another recent proposition can be found in Roy E. Ciampa and Brian S. Rosner, “The Structure and Argument of 1 Corinthians: A Biblical/Jewish Approach”, *NTS* 52.2 (2006), 205-18.

<sup>3</sup> It is interesting to note that Paul considers the Gentiles as being ethically “Other,” while addressing a group composed mainly of Gentiles. To what extent his embedded ideology of ethnic superiority allows him to use backhanded slur against the very Gentiles he is addressing is difficult to assert. Also, Paul seems to exaggerate his point in stating that such incestuous behavior does not exist among the Gentiles. The prohibition of incest in Lev. 18:8 might indicate that it was a common sexual practice even among the Jews of ancient Israel – otherwise, why condemn it? There is plenty of evidence that this sort of thing, though not tolerated, did indeed take place among the other ethnic groups in antiquity. Various writers (e.g., Cicero) and most Greeks considered it abominable for a man to be in a sexual relationship with someone who

paper I am addressing the following questions: (1) why is Paul concerned about the issue raised in 1 Cor. 5, (2) what prescription does he give to the problem, (3) why does he give that prescription, and (4) what can be learned concerning the fundamental shape of Paul's ethics in critical dialogue with Foucault's conception of sexuality and freedom. The present study builds principally on the work of Elizabeth A. Castelli and Hack Polaski.<sup>4</sup> Both draw on Foucault's analysis of power to discuss the situation in 1 Corinthians. This article presents a focused approach on Paul's ethics as it is displayed in 1 Cor. 5 and engages in critical dialogue with Foucault.<sup>5</sup> It deploys two opposing hermeneutical voices—a hermeneutics of suspicion and a sympathetic interpretation of Paul's ethics—in order to open up a critical and dialogic space between them. The present study also seeks to develop the analysis drawn from Foucault by searching for new directions in which one can read 1 Corinthians. But before moving on, two things in particular need to be made clear: First, my use of Foucault. Even though in several places in the paper I write as if Foucault was reading the Pauline text, one needs to keep in mind that it is I, as an interpreter, who proposes a "Foucauldian reading" of the text. In this sense, Foucault is a constructed reading partner whose body of work is utilized, in a manner as fair as possible to the French philosopher, for the purpose of this study. Second, as stated above, the paper reflects a tension between a sympathetic reading of Paul and a reading made out of a hermeneutic of suspicion. For example, if one reads with a hermeneutic of trust, as opposed to a hermeneutic of suspicion, when it comes to Paul's ethics, the welfare of the whole group is very much at the center, and the community is his primary context for thinking about the believers. It is not that the individual is not important, but, as a member of the body of Christ, the believer can only grow spiritually in community.<sup>6</sup> From the perspective of a

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was once his mother-in-law or step-mother. To the Romans, incest was certainly a major issue (in contrast to the Greeks, in 5th century Tragedy at least). Sexual relations between step-parents and stepchildren were viewed by the Romans as incestuous, which involved being both illegal and morally repugnant. There is a lot about this in Seneca's play *Phaedra*, where the attraction of Phaedra to her stepson is regarded as abhorrent as well as unnatural—"something that is unknown even among barbarians" (see Seneca. *Phaedra* 165ff.). And in the Roman law on incest, which listed relations between whom should be in a marriage relationship, any sort of sexual relationship between stepmothers and stepsons was banned. This meant that a son could not legally marry his father's second wife (his stepmother) even if the father had died.

<sup>4</sup> See Elizabeth A. Castelli, "Interpretations of Power in 1 Corinthians." *Semeia* 54 (1992), 199-222, reprinted in *Michel Foucault and Theology: The Politics of Religious Experience* eds. James Bernauer and Jeremy Carrette, (London: Ashgate, 2004), 19-38; and Sandra Hack Polaski, *Paul and the Discourse of Power* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999).

<sup>5</sup> Another focused work on 1 Cor. 5 is Maria Pascuzzi, *Ethics, Ecclesiology and Church Discipline: A Rhetorical Analysis of 1 Corinthians 5* (Rome: Editrice Pontificia Università Gregoriana, 1997). Her methodology and conclusions are different from those pursued here. See also the recent treatment of 1 Cor. 5: 5 by David R. Smith, *Hand This Man Over to Satan* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2009).

<sup>6</sup> See J. Paul Sampley, *Walking Between the Times: Paul's Moral Reasoning* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991), especially Chapter 4, and the now classic little book by Robert J.

hermeneutic of suspicion, however, Paul's discourse of power may well pretend to place the welfare of the community at the center, but this is to masquerade his individual satisfaction at exercising authority as sole guarantor of life and hope. As one who has authority and as one who denies others the freedom to exercise their spiritual understandings and freedoms in a way that is appropriate to their own cultures and in line with their own perception of faith, Paul simply refuses them the power to be. He wants the members of the Corinthian assembly to behave in a way that places him and Christ at the top, so that the Corinthians can maintain a life that is subservient to Paul's/Christ's authority and power.

This kind of oppositional approach is interesting and important since it allows one to play with the text in order to show some interesting reading possibilities that might surface when one applies certain hermeneutical lenses to the particular issue raised in 1 Cor. 5.

### ***I. Why is Paul concerned about this issue?***

Two reasons for Paul's concern about this issue can be suggested: immorality and the laxity of the community in dealing with the case. First, Paul is bewildered that there is immorality among this community since they are supposed to be the sanctified ones (*ἁγιασμένοις*, the set apart ones), separated to serve a holy God. For the apostle, because the members of the Corinthian Church are part of a community that reflects new creation in Christ, one should not find immorality among them. Thus, their behavior should be patterned according to or reflect the new creation.<sup>7</sup> Paul is taken aback by the immorality of believers of the new community, and he seems completely baffled by a community that displays a kind of immorality that does not exist even among the categorically evil Gentiles.<sup>8</sup> The case Paul encounters in this community, a supposed model of

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Banks, *Paul's Idea of Community: The Early House Churches in their Cultural Settings* (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, 1994).

<sup>7</sup> On this, see R.B. Hays, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament: Community, Cross, New Creation. A Contemporary Introduction to New Testament Ethics* (New York: HarperCollins Publisher, 1996 and Edinburgh: T & T. Clark, 1997).

<sup>8</sup> In any Jew's mind of the time, Paul the Gentiles were the dogs, the unclean ones, those who are far from God and lost in their heathen ways of living. Hence, Galatians 2:15, "We who are by nature Jews and not sinful Gentiles." On this attitude, see among others Jonathan Klawans, "Notions of Gentile Impurity in Ancient Judaism," *AJS Review* 20/2 (1995), 285-312; Terence L. Donaldson, *Paul and the Gentiles: Remapping the Apostle's Convictional World* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1997), 52-4; N. T. Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992), 240. Wright argues that "there was a general mood, a fixed though often incoherent belief, that Gentiles were unclean and contact with them undesirable, even when pressed the reason given is lame" (italics his). One can also refer to Christine E. Hayes, *Gentile Impurities and Jewish Identities: Intermarriage and Conversion from the Bible to the Talmud* (Oxford University Press, 2002). The most recent and thorough treatment of the Gentile question vis-à-vis ancient Judaism, which I am aware of, is Terence L. Donaldson, *Judaism and the Gentiles: Jewish Patterns of Universalism (to 135 CE)* (Waco, Texas: Baylor University Press, 2007).

morality for both Jews and pagan Gentiles, goes below even the standard of the “evil pagans.” Has Paul preached in vain? Is this a genuine “new creation” community? What would the Jews and the pagans say about this new community of Christ’s believers that claims to have what it takes to please God? In short, where is their testimony to the outside world?

Second, Paul cannot accept the laxity of the community in dealing with the issue at hand. In fact, he focuses his rebuke on the community rather than on the one who has committed what Paul considers to be an odious act. The Corinthians are tolerating in their midst the presence of a πορνός, a “so-called” brother (5:11), who is openly engaged in a prohibited sexual relation (πορνεία).

What would, then, be of interest to Foucault in the particular scenario recorded in 1 Corinthians? The concern for Foucault would probably be the language of authority used by Paul in the whole pericope, and “the way in which sex is ‘put into discourse.’”<sup>9</sup> One needs to realize that Foucault is not so much interested in sexual ethics, but in “problems about techniques of the self,” as expressed in the discourse on sex and, consequently, in the power relations that can be played in the constraints imposed on sexual expressions.<sup>10</sup>

Foucault’s discussion of power structure makes apparent that what is at stake here in 1 Cor. 5 is not so much the “boring situation of a man entering into sexual intercourse with a woman.”<sup>11</sup> The crux of the matter from a Foucauldian perspective lays in how such a sexual act, and the response to it by the congregation, relates to and undermines Paul’s authority and projects. If the previous discourse of Paul was one of liberation through Christ’ death and resurrection, as the Corinthians – or most of them – seemed to have received it or perceived it to be, then, to entertain sexual relationships outside the known

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<sup>9</sup> See Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, Vol. 1, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Pantheon, 1978), 11. Foucault’s *History of Sexuality* focuses on the functioning of sexuality as related to the emergence of a “discipline on sexuality” and of “bio-power” in the West. Foucault’s bio-power views the body as being the primary site for the expression of statements. For Foucault, what we think of as the “repression” of sexuality actually functioned to constitute sexuality as a discursive practice, which in turn became effective by means of bio-power, and by constituting sexuality as a core feature of our own identities. Foucault’s will-to-knowledge of sexuality is likewise a will-to-power over discursive practices that form sexuality.

<sup>10</sup> See Paul Rabinow, ed., *The Foucault Reader* (New York: Pantheon, 1984), 340. Foucault’s interest in power structure in relation to sexuality led him to analyze the archaeology of ancient Greeks in their problematization of sexuality. The motive for elite Greek men to correctly use pleasure was that their ethical fortitude, their masculinity, their potential as important leaders in the *polis*, was reflected in how they viewed it as their right to sexually penetrate members of the social system considered to be beneath them (women, slaves, effeminate/pseudo-men, or boys). For more on this see Michel Foucault, *The Use of Pleasure, The History of Sexuality Vol. 2*, trans. R. Huxley (New York: Pantheon Books, 1985).

<sup>11</sup> See Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, vol. 1; particularly Part 1 and Part 2. Curiously, for the author of *The History of Sexuality*, “Sex is boring.”

legitimate sexual boundaries could be seen as a justifiable act from their perspective.<sup>12</sup> Paul, in this sense, in drawing from Foucault's insights concerning the relationship of freedom to power, is the one repressing the freedom that the Corinthians perceived they gained in Christ through a certain understanding of the apostle's previous message to them. Thus, the apostle epitomizes the danger of going back to a life of restriction in which they cannot express themselves sexually and charismatically since they are circumvented by Paul's power and authority, as opposed to the total freedom which some – or even most of them – thought was available in Christ.<sup>13</sup>

Paul is upset that the Corinthians are allowing such an offence to go on within the community without severe judgment and punishment. He reprimands the Corinthians with these words: καὶ υμεῖς πεφυσωμένοι ἐστέ καὶ οὐχὶ μᾶλλον ἐπενθησατε (You have even become arrogant, and have not mourned instead). Paul is very disturbed that the Corinthians are boasting of something that he thinks is to their shame when the situation should, instead, push them to mourn. As later readers of the epistle, we lack the context necessary to fully comprehend what Paul is saying about the boasting on the part of the believers in Corinth. One hypothesis argues that the reason for the silence of the Christian community on such perceived outrageous behavior is that the man involved was a rich patron.<sup>14</sup> If it was the case, it was probably the man's social prestige, influence and power which kept many members of the Corinthian church silent. The fact that Paul received his reports of happenings in the congregation from Chloe's people (the social clients of a patron named Chloe, perhaps), as indicated in 4:11, suggests that the incident was a problem or an issue to at least a group of them. This also relates to the fact that the church would have been composed of numerous voices, giving rise to power struggles and negotiations (as attested in 1 Cor. 1-4).

The social stratification suggested by Andrew Clarke, for example, draws attention to the possibility that the leadership in Corinth was dependent on

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<sup>12</sup>Some (perhaps most) of the Corinthians seem to have taken a different view of liberation in Christ than what Paul had in mind.

<sup>13</sup> For a very useful overview and interesting insights on what Paul says about his authority and how his discourse aimed at reinforcing his apostolic authority see Hack Polaski, *Paul and the Discourse of Power*. It is important to note that for Paul, absolute freedom does not exist. Either one serves the right master (Jesus), and thus can act to the fullest of one's capacity (cf. Rom. 6), or one serves the wrong master and is limited in the use of his abilities. Paul's engagement of power is, admittedly, more complex than just a plain and simple rejection of any move towards autonomy by one of his congregations. But this incident referred to in 1 Cor. 5 and the way in which Paul responds to it may serve as a glimpse or as an iceberg to a more symptomatic phenomenon in Paul.

<sup>14</sup> See J.K. Chow, *Patronage and Power: A study of Social Networks in Corinth* (JSNTS 75; Sheffield: JSOT, 1992), 139-40.

hierarchy.<sup>15</sup> Some of the members may have been bound to the man caught in this sexual relationship as his clients, and to offend him could have entailed serious social consequences.<sup>16</sup> Though this is an interesting possibility there is not enough textual evidence to support it. That he was wealthy would explain the silence, but not necessarily the boasting. If the members of the Corinthian church are willing to boast, then it suggests something other than the social positioning of the man, since boasting is usually free from constraint. Another possibility could be that some or most of the Corinthian Christians were boasting and allowing this state of affairs to go on without any reproach in the name of “tolerance,” or of “love,” to show others how open-minded they were, and how comfortable they were in their own culture.<sup>17</sup> And one may conjecture that they might have been proud of their acceptance of this man, thinking that their way of dealing with the situation demonstrated something good about them.<sup>18</sup> Either way, Paul does not accept the logic coming from the Corinthians and he is concerned that anything might come before the gospel of Christ preached to them.

Problematizing the question from a Foucauldian perspective leads one to conclude that this particular congregation, by their overall consent and/or their approval of the relationship between the two individuals was operating with an idea of freedom inspired by Paul’s own preaching. Foucault’s archaeology of power structures in relation to the ethics of the self invites one to problematize the discourse of Paul threatening to discipline the congregation if it does not fix what he considers to be a serious problem.<sup>19</sup>

## *II. What prescription does Paul give to the problem?*

Paul does not choose diplomacy in addressing the issue. He is blunt and casts a severe judgment both on the congregation and on the offender: καὶ ὑμεῖς πεφουσιωμένοι ἐστέ καὶ οὐχὶ μᾶλλον ἐπενθήσατε, ἵνα ἐξάρθῃ ἐκ μέσου ὑμῶν ὁ τὸ ἔργον τοῦτο πράξας (And you have become arrogant, and have not mourned instead, in order that the one who has done this deed might be removed from your midst) (5:2). The fact that Paul does not judge the woman with whom the act has been done seems to indicate, as many commentators have observed, that

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<sup>15</sup> A.D. Clarke, *Secular and Christian Leadership in Corinth: A Socio-Historical and Exegetical Study of 1 Corinthians 1-6* (Leiden: Brill, 1993). Particularly, chapter 7.

<sup>16</sup> See Wayne A. Meeks, *The First Urban Christians: The Social World of the Apostle Paul* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1983). For more on the social dynamics of Paul, with interesting observations concerning the passage under consideration.

<sup>17</sup> Arrogance could also be constructed as the general attitude of the Corinthian community; it might not be just related to that particular instance. In fact, Paul takes issue with their self-confidence on several occasions (also in 2 Cor.).

<sup>18</sup> See Bruce W. Winter, *After Paul left Corinth: The Influence of Secular Ethics and Social Change* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001). On the reverberation of the ethics of the wider secular Greco-Roman world on this emerging Christian community.

<sup>19</sup> See Castelli, “Interpretations of Power in 1 Corinthians,” 19-38.

she is probably not a believer. Paul is concerned with the way of living of Christian believers and not with those outside the Christian faith.<sup>20</sup> Paul actually affirms this train of thought by stating later on in 5:12: τί γάρ μοι τοὺς ἕξω κρινεῖν... (For what have I to do with judging outsiders?), and in 5:13: “But those who are outside, God judges.” Hence, Paul is committed to, and concerned for, those inside the Christ-confessing faith communities, while leaving the judgment of those outside to God.

On the other hand, verses 3-5 of chapter 5 give ample support as to why the Christians in Corinth should listen to Paul:

For I, on my part, though absent in the body but present in spirit, have already judged him who has so committed this, as though I were present. In the name of our Lord Jesus, when you are assembled, and I with you in spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus, I have decided “to deliver such a one to Satan...” παραδοῦναι τὸν τοιοῦτον τῷ Σατανᾷ...

Thus, Paul bases his judgment on his apostolic authority and on the name of the Lord Jesus. By placing his judgment on par with the Lord, Paul seems to imply that rejecting his judgment is tantamount to rejecting the claims of the Lord on the Corinthians, since he “believes that his role and status are established by God.”<sup>21</sup>

But the situation outlined in 1 Cor. 5 is, from a Foucauldian perspective, one constructed around manipulation and power.<sup>22</sup> The two had sex probably because they had a desire to, they had time for it, and there probably was a relation of social inequality in one finding the justification to take power over the

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<sup>20</sup> This is in line with J. Paul Sampley’s observation: “In Paul’s thought world, judgment of outsiders is not the task of believers.” See Sampley, *Walking Between The Times* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1986), 67.

<sup>21</sup> Ben Witherington III, *Conflict & Community in Corinth: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary on 1 and 2 Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 145.

<sup>22</sup> Power in Foucault, as noted by several scholars, cannot be easily defined since Foucault elaborates his thoughts on the subject obliquely. Power, for Foucault, seems to be a complex quality which characterizes different social phenomena and discourses. He envisions power as sets of dynamic and highly contextualized discursive utterances (not necessarily vocal) or “force relations” that actively create differentials, hierarchies, similarities, and transformations and that ultimately “crystallize” into institutions, general consensuses, and laws. Foucault posits his theory of power as a “moving substrate of force relations,” asserting in the *History of Sexuality*, our need to “immerse the expanding production of discourses on sex in the field of multiple and mobile power relations,” Foucault, *History of Sexuality*, 93, 98. See Foucault, “The Subject of Power,” 221-24; *History of Sexuality*, Vol. 1: 92ff; *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interview and Other Writings, 1972-1977*, ed. Colin Gordon; trans. Colin Gordon et al. (New York: Pantheon, 1980), 198-99; *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Vintage Books, 1977), 26-7.

other considered in a weaker position.<sup>23</sup> It is the domination of one man over a woman in order to use his masculinity to signify himself as an up-and-coming leader in the congregation. The fact that Paul is so blunt and casts judgment both on the congregation and on the offender, and not on the woman, might also mean that Paul is exasperated to witness the major prize of his mission field—the Corinthian congregation—evaporating from his masculine control by reverting to the control of another masculine proponent.<sup>24</sup> One may also guess that it is because Paul is concerned with the male subject as the epitome figure for ethics that he does not mention the woman.<sup>25</sup> Further, it is possible that Paul is ignoring the woman because she is not considered a moral agent in the situation, and because she is considered the man's property and, thus, it would be a property offence to rebuke her directly. Moreover, one may conjecture that Paul's attitude towards the woman might be symptomatic of his perception of outsiders rather than of his attitude towards women. The issue of "outsiders" is interesting because of the way such "exclusion" in the discourse functions in relation to Foucault's work on discipline and regulation.<sup>26</sup> In this sense, the woman is constructed as an outsider being acted upon with no voice and with no possible active role, which might yet tell us more about the power structures within the church at Corinth.

Paul tries to revert to the status quo, in which he, the authoritative father figure, supposedly mandated from above, tells his children (1 Cor. 4:14-15; 4:21) —recall how the Roman *paterfamilias* has served as a paradigm of powerful masculinity—what to do and how to behave. He is not willing to let the Corinthians enjoy *hic et*

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<sup>23</sup> In Foucault's research on the archaeology of the ancient Greek's consideration for what was deemed the correct use of pleasure he discovered that those who were considered to be better people (mostly free adult males) were seen as being justified in taking positions of power over those considered ethically weak. See Foucault, *The Use of Pleasure*, 78-86.

<sup>24</sup> See the article by David J.A. Clines, "Paul, The Invisible Man" in *New Testament Masculinities* ed. by Stephen D. Moore with Janice Capel Anderson. Semeia Studies (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature Publications; Leiden, Netherlands: E. J. Brill, 2003), 181-92. In this article, Clines studies what he considers "characteristic of masculinity" in Paul, namely, strength, violence, powerful persuasive speech, male bonding, and womanlessness. The strong binary man/woman is, of course, highly problematic (see Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. New York: Routledge, 1999), but the volume, as a whole, along with *Men and Masculinities in Christianity and Judaism: A Critical Reader* edited by Björn Krondorfer (London: SCM Press, 2009) constitute treasure chests for anyone interested in masculinity studies as related to early Christian texts. See also Jennifer Larson, "Paul's Masculinity," *JBL* 123/1 (2004) 85-97 for a nuanced treatment of how Paul's opponents, especially in 2 Cor. 10-13, may have used gender norms of the time to discredit Paul's authority, and how the apostle tries, not consistently, to find an alternative way of (re) defining masculinity.

<sup>25</sup> On this possibility, particularly as this relates to chapter 6 of 1 Corinthians, especially verses 12-20, see Halvor Moxnes, "Asceticism and Christian Identity in Antiquity: A Dialogue with Foucault and Paul," *JSNT* 26:1(2003), 3-29.

<sup>26</sup> See Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*.

*nunc* the fullness of the heavenly reality of the world to come that the members of the Corinthian congregation—or most of them—thought they had already begun to enjoy as members of Christ’s resurrected and elevated body (1 Cor. 4:8). Paul wants to place them in the position of what was considered to be the weaker sex—the woman—subservient to the whim and desires of the powerful male figure in authority, which he represents. Reading Paul’s ethical teaching in terms of an authoritative discourse does not place Paul himself above or outside the complex power relations operating within the church. Paul’s rhetoric demonstrates his awareness of the precariousness of his authority in relation to competing ideas and discourses put forward by different members of the church at Corinth.

Foucault’s critique of power structure underlines how Paul’s language here is filled with threats in the hope of instilling fear in his readers, and eventually rallying them to his cause. Paul, as a male judge, has decided “to deliver/to turn/to hand over such a one to Satan for the destruction of his flesh (παραδοῦναι τὸν τοιοῦτον τῷ Σατανᾶ εἰς ὄλεθρον τῆς σαρκός), in order that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord.” Dale B. Martin, reflecting on this injunction, concludes, “The destruction of the flesh that endangers the whole church constitutes the battle ground. (...) The individual offender is merely the breach in the wall that Paul so desperately attempts to build to keep the cosmos out of the church and *sarx* from contaminating *pneuma*.”<sup>27</sup> A Foucauldian reading of this decision, however, shows that this particular hole in Paul’s authoritative fence opens up the possibility for this community to move outside the apostle’s sphere of influence. The pronouncement to hand over the man to satan seems to demonstrate that, by placing his judgment on a par with the Lord—who, incidentally is not recorded to have spoken in such a manner—, Paul implies that rejecting his judgment is tantamount to rejecting the claims of the Lord. Thus, he buttresses his authority by aligning himself with the figure of a superhero that has, in his view, the authority to determine the fate of everyone. And what Paul/the superhero dictates concerning the fate of the one who is deemed to be excluded from the community is far from clear.<sup>28</sup>

One question needs to be addressed: From what law is Paul extrapolating, and how would the community hand the man over to Satan (τῷ Σατανᾶ)?<sup>29</sup> A

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<sup>27</sup> Dale B. Martin, *The Corinthian Body* (New Haven/London: Yale University Press, 1995), 173.

<sup>28</sup> What Paul says concerning the fate of the one who is deemed to be excluded from the community in verse 5 has been the ground for several interpretations, which I will not take the time to go into in this study. See the major modern commentaries on 1 Corinthians (e.g. Conzelmann, 1975; J. Murphy-O’Connor, 1979; Gordon Fee, 1987; C.H. Talbert, 1987; E. S. Fiorenza, 1988; Ben Witherington III, 1995; R. Horsley, 1998; *passim*

<sup>29</sup> Note that Paul uses the Hebrew-Aramaic term τῷ Σατανᾶ instead of the Greek διαβολος. Does the usage of τῷ Σατανᾶ intend to create a fearful image of the King of Demons in the imaginary consciousness of his audience? In other words, does he

possible response could be: Do not have any contact with him and let him reap what he sows; let him succumb to the negative consequences of his acts; let him be at God's mercy, or, simply, curse him so that he can suffer!<sup>30</sup> The consequences could be varied. It could be sickness, shame, exclusion from the community, and so on.<sup>31</sup> In other words, let him live with the consequences of his sin. "For his spirit might be saved" might indicate, in the perspective of a reading sympathetic to Paul, that there is a possibility for the man to realize his awful situation, come back to his senses and be restored. In the midst of despair there could be a note of hope for this man engulfed in sin; he would eventually be saved in the day of the Lord. Sampley<sup>32</sup> proposes a somewhat similar interpretation when he writes: "The man will be expelled from the community and will therefore be exposed directly to God's judgment. Such discipline leaves the man with no self-imposed delusions regarding good self-assessment and community sanction." In the end, however, "it is impossible to know, and difficult to imagine, what Paul had in mind for the unfortunate man who had been sleeping with his stepmother,"<sup>33</sup> and, as a consequence, one may simply speculate as to what the exact meaning of Paul's injunction is.

In his *Archeology of Knowledge*, Foucault demonstrates how all discourses constitute a matrix within which various positions of power are forged, maintained, and made obscure.<sup>34</sup> Foucault sees religious discourse, for example, as participating in a certain 'fellowships of discourse' where those within the closed religious community participate in a discourse that functions through various schemas of exclusivity.<sup>35</sup> Following Foucault's thoughts at this juncture

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suspect that the appeal to this particular reference carries a different view with the Corinthians? To what juridical construct is he appealing?

<sup>30</sup> See J. G. Gager, ed. *Curse Tablets and Binding Spells from the Ancient World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992). This group of texts, which also refer to handing over their victims to a demon, illuminates the language of Paul in 1 Cor. 5, which is a similar language to the injunctions found in the curse tablets from the ancient world. For a thorough and fresh magical reading of 1 Cor. 5:5 see the monograph by David R. Smith, *Hand This Man Over to Satan* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2009). In this work, Smith demonstrates that Paul's thought in this particular passage is better understood in the context of cursing, physical destruction and the exclusion of the man from this association of Christ's believers. For arguments against this interpretation see among others J. T. South, *Disciplinary Practices in Pauline Texts* (Lewiston, N.Y.: Mellen Biblical Press, 1992), 1-88, 181-98, "A Critique of the 'Curse/Death' Interpretation of 1 Cor. 5: 1-8," *NTS* 39 (1993), 539-61; Maria Pascuzzi, *Ethics, Ecclesiology and Church Discipline: A Rhetorical Analysis of 1 Corinthians 5* (Rome: Editrice Pontificia Università Gregoriana, 1997).

<sup>31</sup> See Ben Witherington, *Conflict & Community*, 158. Witherington talks about a "shock therapy" that would shame the man. He would, as a result, feel as if dead, because in a Greco-Roman culture shame was analogous to death.

<sup>32</sup> *Walking Between the Times*, 68.

<sup>33</sup> Dale B. Martin, *The Corinthian Body*, 171.

<sup>34</sup> See Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge and The Discourse on Language*, trans. A. M. Sheridan Smith (New York: Pantheon Books, 1972).

<sup>35</sup> Foucault, *The Discourse on Language*, 225.

means that the hermetic and strange discourse of Paul may function as a manipulative discursive device to control and to (re)gain power over a group that is challenging and deserting him. What is imagined in such a controlling discourse of power is a series of binary divisions (“pure vs. impure,” “Paul vs. the others in the congregation,” “Christ vs. Satan”) that pile up on top of each other. The binary discourse of Paul is clear: “You are with me and with the superhero or you are demonized with satan.” The whole discourse is one of ascribing a privileged status to Paul by means of his supposedly unique relationship with Christ over and above everybody else. The reader, as Castelli remarks, “is urged to see things from Paul’s point of view, to view other positions in caricature.”<sup>36</sup> And the whole discourse is one of overconfidence that does not entertain the slightest possibility that the other side may also have a certain understanding of faith and a relationship with Christ.

From a Foucauldian perspective, Paul’s intent can be seen as authoritative through and through as he maneuvers the discourse of power for effective social control. He prescribes the exclusion of the incestuous man not primarily for the spiritual interest of the Corinthian community, but for his own. He is concerned that the church in Corinth behaves as a separated religious group free from the influence of the wider societal mores, and he is preoccupied to restrain the release of emotional enthusiasm that marks this community composed of largely dis-privileged and marginal members of the society (1:26). Paul is at pains to impose rules and structure on a charismatic community where freedom of expressions and of gifts (especially the gift of speaking in tongues) was highly celebrated (chapters 12-14). This positioning of Paul in the sociological spectrum helps us understand his ambivalence towards the ideals and practices of this particular community—a charismatic renewal community within the lower stratum of Jewish society—and the ensuing reality of life for this social group that, in Paul’s view, needs to be ordered in a certain way.<sup>37</sup> In other words, Paul is imagining a new world order shaped in and around Christ, who as a conquering general authorizes his arch-soldier Paul to come (ἐν ῥάβδῳ) “with a stick” (4:21), if need be, to straighten this “deviant” congregation.<sup>38</sup>

### III. *Why does Paul give that prescription?*

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<sup>36</sup> See Castelli, “Interpretations of Power in 1 Corinthians,” 21.

<sup>37</sup> See J. Gager’s analysis, *Kingdom and Community: The Social World of Early Christianity* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1975), 33-36.

<sup>38</sup> On Early Christianity and the creation of deviants see John M.G. Barclay, “Deviance and Apostasy: Some Applications of Deviance Theory to First-Century Judaism and Christianity” in *Social-Scientific Approaches to New Testament Interpretation*, edited by David G. Horrell (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1999), 287-307. In this article, Barclay shows how in 1 Cor. Paul creates insiders and outsiders on his own terms without any regard to where the Corinthians themselves would draw the boundary for their own community. See also Barclay, “Thessalonica and Corinth: Social Contrasts in Pauline Christianity,” *JSNT* 47 (1992), 49-74.

From one perspective, Paul's intent is pastoral (not to be confused with Foucault's use of the term as different techniques and procedures for analysing conscience) through and through.<sup>39</sup> He prescribes the exclusion of the incestuous sinner for the spiritual interest of the Corinthian community because he is concerned that the church in Corinth does not live a life that reflects its calling: a community of those sanctified/separated for God and by God because of the work of Christ.

Furthermore, Rosner<sup>40</sup> argues that "the main subject of 1 Corinthians 5 is not incest but exclusion from the community (...) and that his [Paul's] concern to expel the man [was] for the sake of the church, as an example to dissuade further disobedience." Though, in a sense, Paul's concern seems to have been for the spiritual health of the church, it is not clear why his main concern would not be the subject of immorality as well, considering that purity is, in Paul's view, one of the hallmarks of the people that are called by the holy God. One may remark that Foucault would probably concur with Rosner that "the main subject of 1 Corinthians 5 is not incest," or "the boring sexual act of two consenting adults." But the French philosopher would, then, nuance Rosner's observation. The matter of obedience and disobedience would be reframed by asking: who would be the beneficiary of the obedience? How would the man's expulsion be for the benefit of the church, since the community as a whole seems to be in harmony with the man thus far? Was Paul's concern for the church or for himself?<sup>41</sup> In other words, who holds the power and how does the discourse shape the power relations? Or, if Paul's concern was for both the church and himself, are these two concerns inseparable and part of the same discourse of power?

To understand the case of the incestuous member of this particular gathering, Gerald Harris<sup>42</sup> suggests:

First, the failure to condemn the man would be typical of a group that lacks cohesion, for the more cohesive a group, the stronger the demand for conforming behaviour. Secondly, the incident suggests a church that has a relatively non-authoritarian structure. That the church stood in opposition to and even resented Paul's authority is evident in both 1 and 2 Corinthians. And thirdly, the church's acceptance of the man points to a group that is secure in its cultural setting, for the more threatened a group feels, the greater its rejection of deviant members.

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<sup>39</sup> Dunn states, "Paul never spoke other than as a pastor." See J.D.G. Dunn, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans/Edinburgh: T & T. Clark, 1998), 626. The present study, and many others, demonstrates however that, many times, Paul does indeed speak other than as a pastor.

<sup>40</sup> "Paul's ethics" in *The Cambridge Companion to Saint Paul*, 220-221.

<sup>41</sup> See Bengt Holmberg, *Paul and Power: The Structure of Authority in the Primitive Church as Reflected in the Pauline Epistles* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1980).

<sup>42</sup> "The Beginning of Church Discipline: 1 Corinthians 5" in *NTS* 37 (1991), 1-21.

This analysis, though helpful, needs to be used with due caution. In a sympathetic reading of the text, the church is the focus of Paul's concern more than the man. Paul stresses cohesion so that the demand for conforming to a certain type of behaviour – one that is worthy of God – might be the desire of the group and, in such, the group might enforce the conformity to Christ. Paul asserts his authority based on Christ and on Christ's authority to turn the Corinthians to model their lives on him and, ultimately, on Christ. In this manner, Paul's instructions challenge the group not to identify with their cultural milieu,<sup>43</sup> but to act as temples of the Holy Spirit (3:16-17). However, contrary to Harris's suggestion that the case of the incestuous member of this community supposes that the group lacks cohesion, a different reading seems to indicate that the community functions well as a typical non-authoritarian structure. In particular, the Corinthians seem to thrive in this particular structure which allows them to compete for social status, honor, wealth, power, and, seemingly, to have some fun – yes, heated debates, fights, i.e., all the normal social human dynamics – along the way.

It is interesting to note that Paul uses the second-person plural a number of times to address the believers in Corinth as a group. He wants the discipline to be carried out as a group when they are gathered in assembly (5:4) since his very intention is to purge the community of believers there. A sympathetic reading of Paul's idea of the community as a place of independence (from selfish desires and licentious living), dependence (on Christ), and interdependence (one lives for the other and with the other), seems to suggest that the believers need Christ and one another to help fight sins, and that they also need to pray to avoid God's strict judgment. For Paul, in this way, the church stands together with Christ or it falls.

Another way to look at the situation, however, indicates that the open defiance of the so-viewed culprit deprives Paul of his pleasure in exercising authority, control, and virility over this particular congregation. The sexual act of the two involved, Foucault would possibly articulate, takes away Paul's way of manipulating them to his own satisfaction. In other words, the sexual act committed liberates the congregation from the self-imposed right of Paul acting as the active and aggressive partner in the relationship. Here, the aestheticized language of death stemming from Paul exercises its control over the congregation. Moreover, the church's acceptance of the man points to a group that is secure in its cultural setting, secure in its mode of functioning, secure in its diversity, and even secure in its theology of a presupposed total freedom in Christ. Paul, then, would be the one who is out of sync with this vibrant and highly charismatic community. He stresses cohesion and conformity with the society at large in order to foster a manipulative program worthy of his ego. Paul

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<sup>43</sup> See, among many recent dissenting voices on simply equating the Corinthians with fornicators, Victor Furnish in *The Theology of the First Letter to the Corinthians*, NTT (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 2. He has challenged the common view of Corinth as a city notorious for sexual immorality. For him, "the moral of the city was more a relentless competition for social status, honor, wealth, and power."

asserts his authority based on a rigid Christ, and on Christ's authority, in order to coerce the Corinthians to model their lives on his life and on his representation of the superhero, Christ. From a Foucauldian standpoint, Paul is a disciplinarian who wants his measures of discipline to be carried out as a group in order to produce "docile bodies."<sup>44</sup> He manufactures his discourse of consent to place the Corinthians in a state of psychological dependency towards him, so that he may appear as the one who helps them avoid God's strict judgment.

This portrayal of the situation, may reply Paul—or some of his interpreters—is based on a relativistic and pluralistic worldview, which does not take into account the standard of truth to which Paul is calling the Corinthians and the fact that, as the leader and founder of this church, he is justified in so doing. This sexualized portrayal of "power-raping" could be used to describe all of the prophets, even Jesus Christ himself! Paul's authority to rule over other Christians was due to his union with Christ which has freed him from the realm of sin. He speaks with authority not because he enthrones himself as the representative of Christ in Corinth but because he, more than others, actually lives the Christ-life that is in the realm of the Spirit, therefore giving him the authority to tell the truth to them. For Paul, his authority and the spiritual welfare of the community are inseparable—he genuinely believes that his God-given role is to guide the community and ensure they are prepared for the judgment of God. This does not mean he does not employ various discursive and rhetorical techniques to assert this authority, but equally it seems difficult to make a case for Paul as simply power-hungry and obsessed with authority as an end in itself.

This debate between the two hermeneutical camps is important as it shows the different reading possibilities that might emerge from the same text. The two lines of enquiry may go on without any resolution between them but they allow one to play with the text in order to have a multifaceted reading experience.

#### *IV. What can be learned about the fundamental shape of Paul's ethics through study of this particular passage?*

From the perspective of a hermeneutic of trust, as opposed to a hermeneutic of suspicion, in regard to Paul's ethics, the welfare of the whole group is very much at the center, and the community is his primary context for thinking about the believers. It is not that the individual is not important, but, as a member of the body of Christ, the believer can only grow spiritually in community.<sup>45</sup> What one can learn about the fundamental shape of Paul's ethics from this perspective is that the Christ believer has to behave in such a way as to please Christ in order to maintain a healthy spiritual life that would be of benefit to the church. Sin is not a private affair; the church has the responsibility to discipline anyone who lives

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<sup>44</sup> Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 135-169.

<sup>45</sup> Sampley, *Walking Between The Times*, especially Chapter 4, and the now classic little book by Robert J. Banks, *Paul's Idea of Community: The Early House Churches in their Cultural Settings* (Hendrickson Publishers; Revised edition, 1994).

in sin for the salvation of other members in the church community. In this sense, for Paul, God saves, not an isolated individual in his privileged private religiosity, but a people— the body of Christ. Read from this angle, Paul's very concern seems to be the edification of the church of Christ. For him, individuals are saved for community and grow in community.<sup>46</sup> Anyone aware of the grievance of another should not be complacent, rejoice, or boast in the sin of the individual (1 Cor. 5:6), but, instead, mourn and find a way to help the offender get out of the situation so that the community might be pure and holy as God has called it to be.

Reading the text without any critical awareness of questions stemming from certain readings of Foucault's works indicates that what transpires is not so much an admonition against a certain destructive behaviour, though that is at the fore, but a theological affirmation of the new era that demands a standard of communal practice which is according to the Spirit and not according to one's social and cultural mores.<sup>47</sup> Thus, Paul's basis for ethics is the new reality of the new creation in the resurrected Christ. For the apostle, Christ's death effected the shift of the two ages, and "the old yeast" must give way to "a fresh batch just as you are, without fermentation, for Christ our paschal Lamb was also sacrificed" (νέον φῦραμα, καθὼς ἐστε ἄζυμοι· καὶ γὰρ τὸ πάσχα ἡμῶν ἐτύθη Χριστός) (1 Cor. 5:7). The recommended ethical behaviour, therefore, is to "become in your character and conduct what God's action in Christ has made you to be."<sup>48</sup> This is why Paul concludes his thoughts on this particular Christian ethical breach, as laid out in the report, by this direct order: ἐξάρατε τὸν πονηρὸν ἐξ ὑμῶν αὐτῶν (Drive out the wicked person from among you) (1 Cor. 5:13). The injunction to "purge the evil among you" (Deut. 17:7; 19:19; 22:21; 24:7) links this "new creation" community to the community of the Israelites in the wilderness, and aims to steer the Corinthians away from the fate of the lost wilderness generation.

From the perspective of a hermeneutic of suspicion, however, Paul may well appear to favor the exercise of church discipline for the sake of the community, but it is, ultimately, done for his own benefit. If the church continues to live without any structure and goes on to rejoice in boasting in the act of one individual defying his control, then, the Christian apostle is ready to resort to abusive discursive techniques of engendering fear.<sup>49</sup> In other words, Paul's

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<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

<sup>47</sup> Again, for the significance of the social and cultural behaviours played on the Corinthian Christians, and how Paul strove to communicate alternative ways of beings and livings, see the very informative study by Bruce W. Winter, *After Paul Left Corinth*.

<sup>48</sup> R. Batman quoted by S.C. Mott in the entry on "Ethics" in *Dictionary of Paul and his Letters. A Compendium of Contemporary Biblical Scholarship*, edited by G.F. Hawthorne, T.P. Martin and D.G. Reid (Downers Grove: Inter-Varsity Press, 1993), 269.

<sup>49</sup> One may think of the Superstitious man of Plutarch. See H. A. Moellering, *Plutarch on Superstition: Plutarch's De Superstitione, Its Place in the Changing Meaning of Deisidaimonia and in the Context of His Theological Writings* (Rev. ed. Boston: Christopher, 1963). A very good reference on the relationship between superstition

discourse of power may well pretend to place the welfare of the community at the center, but this is to masquerade his individual satisfaction at exercising authority as sole guarantor of life and hope for this particular social group. And this must be done in a power structure that allows him to be able to exercise authority in a subtle and aestheticized mode. He wants the members of the Corinthian assembly to behave in a way that places him and Christ at the top, so that the Corinthians can maintain a life that is subservient to Paul's/Christ's authority and power. Paul's authority is so strong that he feels comfortable claiming his ability to exercise power and authority on them even when he is absent. Furthermore, drawing on the work of Foucault, a critical reading of the text is suspicious of the communality of Paul. Paul's ethics, in this way, is one in which all that is perceived as masculine resistance, the other side of power for Foucault, is to be fought and put under discipline; it is an ethics where all that is perceived as feminine or passive needs to be "penetrated" and made to be the same. Paul may well have theological basis for what he does, but his "theology becomes effective in Church life only in so far as he is part of its authority structure."<sup>50</sup> His moral convictions may well be inseparable from his theological understandings, but his desire to control, to manipulate, to exercise authority, and make the community surrender to his program is nonetheless telling.

In sum, what emerges from a Foucauldian questioning of Paul's ethics is the struggle to overcome spontaneity by rigidity, and autonomy by rules. What transpires is an affirmation of who Paul is: one who is desperate to satisfy his own pleasure by exercising authority, control, and virility over and above anyone else. Paul is one who feels the urge to violate the situation of variegated theological views and social dynamisms of one charismatic community by manipulating them so that they will operate according to his own satisfaction. The sexual act committed by one individual is the locus where the power of the congregation liberates itself from the self-imposed right of Paul acting as the active and aggressive partner. The rhetorical discourse adopted by Paul seeks to disturb the resisting power of many in the assembly by establishing his own, and by finding pleasure in "a power that questions, monitors, watches, spies, searches out, palpates, brings to light,"<sup>51</sup> in the name of status quo and of Christ.

### *Conclusion*

The aim of this study was to evaluate Paul's ethics, as displayed in 1 Cor. 5, in critical dialogue with Foucault's conception of sexuality and freedom. The result of this dialogue may well yield more questions than answers. In so doing, the text becomes less familiar and a little bit stranger. In re-articulating the discourse

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and godly fear in the contexts of the New Testament and the Greco-Roman milieu is the book by Patrick Gray, *Godly fear: the Epistle to the Hebrews and Greco-Roman Critiques of Superstition* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2003), and another very good reference is Dale Martin's book, *Inventing Superstition from the Hippocratics to the Christians* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004).

<sup>50</sup> Holmberg, *Paul and Power*.

<sup>51</sup> Foucault, *History of Sexuality*, Vol. 1, 45.

of Paul alongside another voice, the rationalizing of Paul's claims is problematized and relativized. It is probably useful to indicate that the appraisal of Paul's ethics through a critical dialogue with Foucault undertaken in this study is not intended to convince a reader to embrace the views of one or the other thinker. In fact, one may see truths and/or exaggerations in both interlocutors depending on one's penchant, background, or acuity. For example, had Foucault—constructed for the purpose of this study—kept on reading the whole letter instead of apparently stopping at chapter 5—appreciate the playfulness or *ludique* enterprise here—he would have learned much more about Paul. He would then, perhaps, have tempered his at times harsh criticisms against the apostle. But that was not what the French philosopher was asked to do in this study.

On the other hand, Paul's arguably forceful/"masculine" language in the chapter under consideration seems to be rather odd in light of the many soft/feminine traits located in "mother Paul"<sup>52</sup> in the on-going Corinthian correspondence and elsewhere.<sup>53</sup> The importance of this uneasy conversation between Paul and Foucault lays in the possibility of having the investigations of a modern philosopher interrupt one's habitual reading of the passage. This is a risk worth taking because it releases the text in order to lead us to places that may enchant us, puzzle us, or even annoy us. And at the end of this potentially rewarding dialogue, one may go away puzzled but, hopefully, eager to go back to the report of 1 Cor. 5 in order to re-evaluate Paul's ethics and continue the conversation by enjoying the text<sup>54</sup> and by watching the very piece one might have thought to possess slip through one's fingers.

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Charles, Ronald. "The Report of 1 Corinthians 5 in Critical Dialogue with Foucault," in *Journal for Cultural and Religious Theory* vol. 11 no. 1 (Winter 2010): 142-158.

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<sup>52</sup> For a very interesting treatment of Paul's theology in general as, in the author's terms, "not a guy thing," see Beverly Roberts Gaventa, *Our Mother Saint Paul* (Louisville/London: Westminster John Knox Press, 2007).

<sup>53</sup> See Larson, 'Paul's Masculinity,' 85-97.

<sup>54</sup> Roland Barthes, *Le Plaisir du texte* (Paris : Seuil, 1973 ; trans. Richard Howard [*The Pleasure of the Text*] (New York: Hill and Wang, 1975).