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SHORT TITLE

SPIRITUAL MARRIAGE IN THE EARLY CHURCH

A DEDICATED INTERPRETATION OF 1 CORINTHIANS 7:36-38

SPIRITUAL MARRIAGE IN THE EARLY CHURCH

A Thesis Presented to the Faculty
of Concordia Seminary, St. Louis,
Department of Dogmatic Theology
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Master of Sacred Theology

By
Richard H. L. Sebold

June 1958

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SPIRITUAL MARRIAGE IN THE EARLY CHURCH:

A SUGGESTED INTERPRETATION OF 1 CORINTHIANS 7:36-38

A Thesis Presented to the Faculty
of Concordia Seminary, St. Louis,
Department of Exegetical Theology
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Master of Sacred Theology

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THE PROBLEM OF INTERPRETATION
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But if any man think that he behaveth uncomely toward his virgin, if she pass the flower of her age, and need so require, let him do what he will, he sinneth not: let them marry. Nevertheless he that standeth steady in his heart, having no necessity, but hath power over his own will, and hath so decreed in his heart that he will keep his virgin, doeth well. So then he

CHAPTER I

THE PROBLEM OF INTERPRETATION

In his commentary on First Corinthians, Karl Heim writes concerning chapter 7, verse 36,

Nun kommt die Stelle, die von jeher der Auslegung die groeszte Schwierigkeit bereitet hat. Hier wird besonders vermiszt, dasz wir die Fragen, die die Korinther an Paulus gestellt haben, den Fragebogen der Korinther, nicht zur Hand haben.¹

The lack of conclusive materials to reconstruct the problem in Corinth has led to an over-simplification. The ancient exegetes began the tradition to interpret this section as a father-daughter problem relating to permitting or prohibiting marriage. Until recent times, this interpretation was almost universally adopted.

The nature of this problem also adds to the difficulty of translation. Any translator becomes an interpreter of this passage. A few samples of translations serve to illustrate.

The Authorized Version reads:

But if any man think that he behaveth uncomely toward his virgin, if she pass the flower of her age, and need so require, let him do what he will, he sinneth not: let them marry. Nevertheless he that standeth steadfast in his heart, having no necessity, but hath power over his own will, and hath so decreed in his heart that he will keep his virgin, doeth well. So then he

¹Karl Heim, Die Gemeinde des Auferstandenen (Muenchen: Neubauerlag, 1949), p. 95.

that giveth her in marriage doeth well; but he that giveth her not in marriage doeth better.²

The German translation of Martin Luther reads:

So aber jemand sich laasset duenken, es wolle sich nicht schicken mit seiner Jungfrau, weil sie eben wohl mannbar ist, und es will nicht anders sein, so thue er, was er will; er suendiget nicht, er lasse sie freien. Wenn einer aber ihm fest vornimmt, weil er ungezwungen ist und seinen freien Willen hat, und beschlieszt solches in seinem Herzen, seine Jungfrau also bleiben zu lassen, der thut wohl. Endlich, welcher verheirathet, der thut wohl; welcher aber nicht verheirathet, der thut besser.³

James Moffatt translates:

At the same time, if any man considers that he is not behaving properly to the maid who is his spiritual bride, if his passions are strong and if it must be so, then let him do what he wants--let them be married; it is no sin for him. But the man of firm purpose who has made up his mind, who instead of being forced against his will has determined to himself to keep his maid a spiritual bride--that man will be doing the right thing. Thus both are right, alike in marrying and in refraining from marriage, but he who does not marry will be found to have done better.⁴

Goodspeed introduces another view:

But if a man thinks he is not acting properly toward the girl to whom he is engaged, if his passions are too strong, and that is what ought to be done, let him do as he pleases; it is no sin; let them be married. But a man who has definitely made up his mind, under no constraint of passion but with full self-control, and who has decided in his own mind to keep her as she is, will be doing what is right. So the man who marries her

²1 Cor. 7:36-38, Authorized Version.

³1 Cor. 7:36-38, nach der deutschen Uebersetzung Dr. Martin Luthers.

⁴James Moffatt, The First Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians (New York: Harper and Bros., n.d.), p. 98.

does what is right, and the man who refrains from doing so does even better.⁵

The Revised Standard Version follows this view:

If any one thinks that he is not behaving properly toward his betrothed, if his passions are strong, and it has to be, let him do as he wishes: let them marry--it is no sin. But whoever is firmly established in his heart, being under no necessity but having his desire under control, and has determined this in his heart, to keep her as his betrothed, he will do well. So that he who marries his betrothed does well; and he who refrains from marriage will do better.⁶

These translations serve to demonstrate the problem which faces the student of the New Testament. The three leading interpretations are stated in the above translations: (1) the father-daughter; (2) the engaged couple; (3) the spiritual marriage, or virgines subintroductae. The translator must first examine the evidence regarding the text and study all possible interpretations. Only after he has made his choice of interpretation dare he set forth a translation consistent with his research.

This study will begin with an examination of variant readings to establish the text.

Five known interpretations of 1 Corinthians 7:36-38 will be presented with critical evaluation. Both favorable and unfavorable arguments will be discussed.

⁵J. M. Powis Smith and Edgar J. Goodspeed, The Complete Bible, An American Translation (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1954).

⁶1 Cor. 7:36-38, Revised Standard Version.

The final chapter is devoted to the development of a case for the spiritual marriage view resulting in physical marriage. The argument will present evidence of a general ascetic attitude in the ancient church. Historical evidence for παρθένος τυχεύσασκος or virgines subintroductae will follow, together with references to canons of church councils which sought to abolish this practice. This view will be examined in the light of vocabulary study and grammatical construction. Evidence will be presented to show that this interpretation is consistent with Paul's view on marriage. The conclusion will be the author's translation, reflecting the "spiritual marriage" view adopted in this study.

CHAPTER II

EXAMINATION OF TEXTUAL PROBLEMS

The only variant indicated for verse 36 in the Nestle text is $\gamma\alpha\mu\epsilon\acute{\iota}\tau\omega$ for $\gamma\alpha\mu\epsilon\acute{\iota}\tau\omega\sigma\alpha\gamma$. For the singular, we have D*, G, and the Peshitto. Perhaps Robertson and Plummer are right, when they state that the singular was introduced by these witnesses "to avoid the awkwardness,"¹ which the elliptic plural causes. The weight of evidence supports the plural. It may be stated here that the awkwardness of providing a subject for the plural verb is not solved satisfactorily by the statement, "The plural is elliptic, but quite intelligible: 'Let the daughter and her suitor marry.'²

The position of $\acute{\epsilon}\delta\epsilon\alpha\tau\omicron\varsigma$ in verse 37 "comes last in its clause with emphasis."³ Witnesses to this word order are N, A, B, D, E, P, and Vulgate. Although K, L, Papyrus 46, and the Peshitto place it immediately after $\acute{\epsilon}\sigma\tau\eta\kappa\epsilon\nu$, and F, G, d, e, Aeth., Arm. omit it entirely, the weight of Vaticanus and Sinaiticus establish its place at the end of the clause.

¹Archibald Robertson and Alfred Plummer, A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the First Epistle of St. Paul to the Corinthians (Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1929), p. 159.

²Ibid., p. 160.

³Ibid.

Since only K and L omit $\alpha\upsilon\tau\omicron\upsilon$ before $\acute{\epsilon}\delta\rho\alpha\tau\omicron\varsigma$, we conclude with Robertson and Plummer that it belongs in the text.⁴

The only manuscript to omit $\acute{\epsilon}\nu$ each time before $\tau\eta\ \kappa\alpha\rho\delta\acute{\iota}\alpha$ in verse 37 is Papyrus 15.

The Nestle text does not refer to the variant $\alpha\upsilon\tau\omicron\upsilon$ for $\acute{\iota}\delta\acute{\iota}\alpha$ with $\kappa\alpha\rho\delta\acute{\iota}\alpha$ in verse 37. Robertson and Plummer comment:

After $\kappa\acute{\epsilon}\kappa\epsilon\kappa\epsilon\nu$, $\acute{\epsilon}\nu\ \tau\eta\ \acute{\iota}\delta\acute{\iota}\alpha, \kappa\alpha\rho\delta\acute{\iota}\alpha$ (N, A, B, P) is to be preferred to $\acute{\epsilon}\nu\ \tau\eta\ \kappa\alpha\rho\delta\acute{\iota}\alpha\ \alpha\upsilon\tau\omicron\upsilon$ (D, E, F, G, K, L).⁵

Nestle also omits the reference to readings which add $\tau\omicron\upsilon$ before $\tau\eta\rho\epsilon\acute{\iota}\nu$ in verse 37. Robertson and Plummer refer to it: " $\tau\omicron\upsilon$ before $\tau\eta\rho\epsilon\acute{\iota}\nu$ (D, E, F, G, K, L) should be omitted (N, A, B, P, 17, e, d)."⁶

The most interesting variant reading in relation to this study is $\acute{\epsilon}\kappa\ \gamma\alpha\mu\acute{\iota}\zeta\omega\upsilon$, twice substituted for $\gamma\alpha\mu\acute{\iota}\zeta\omega\upsilon$ in verse 38. The oldest witnesses, Sinaiticus (N), Vaticanus (B), and Alexandrinus (A), in addition to D, E, and 17 read $\gamma\alpha\mu\acute{\iota}\zeta\omega\upsilon$. The Koine group, including K, L, P, and the majority of later manuscripts testify to $\acute{\epsilon}\kappa\ \gamma\alpha\mu\acute{\iota}\zeta\omega\upsilon$. The addition of the prefix $\acute{\epsilon}\kappa$ -is clearly a later introduction to the text. One might raise

⁴Ibid.

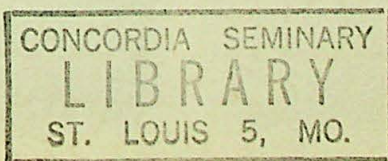
⁵Ibid.

⁶Ibid.

the question whether this indicates either a traditional interpretation of a father-daughter situation by the time of Codex Claromontanus in the sixth century, or whether this addition of ἔκ - is to serve as a deterrent of any possible spiritual marriages. ἔκ γαμίζωρ , the compound form, could only mean "to give into marriage," and would eliminate the possible definition of γαμίζωρ , "to marry," around which much of this problem revolves. We can only raise the question regarding attempts of the textual editors in the sixth century. However, one point becomes clear. The text of the Koine (in this case K, L, P and many other later texts) became the basis for the Greek Testament of Erasmus. It forms the foundation for the Textus Receptus, from which came our Authorized Version, and for the translation of Luther, who used the Erasmus edition. It thus becomes clear why the translation and interpretation of a father giving his virgin daughter into marriage came into unanimous favor until the development of textual studies in more recent times.⁷ Using the principle of accepting the witness of the oldest manuscripts, Nestle is right in choosing γαμίζωρ for the correct reading.

Another textual problem in verse 38 is τὴν ἑαυτοῦ παρθένον . It is supported by N, A, and P. The same

⁷Erwin Nestle, Novum Testamentum Graece (Stuttgart: Privileg. Wuertt. Bibelanstalt, 1956), pp. 68-69.



phrase is found in B, D, E with an inverted word order:

τὴν παρθένον ἑαυτοῦ . The Vulgate has

virginem suam. Omitting the phrase entirely is the Koine tradition, including K, L, and others. Because they are based on the Koine, the later Textus Receptus, both Luther and the Authorized Version omit the phrase in translation. Thus τὴν ἑαυτοῦ παρθένον is well attested in the text, and one can agree with Robertson and Plummer that this word order "is perhaps preferable."⁸

The variations in present and future tense of ποιεῖν in verse 38 are explained by Robertson and Plummer:

καλῶς ποιεῖ (N, A, D, E, K, L, P, p⁴⁶, Vulg.)
rather than καλῶς ποιήσει (B) and
κεεῖσσαν ποιήσει (N, A, B, 17, Copt.) ra-
ther than κεεῖσσαν ποιεῖ (D, E, F, G, K,
L, P, Vulg.). Copyists thought that both verbs must
be in the same tense; some changed ποιεῖ to
ποιήσει, and others ποιήσει to ποιεῖ,
as in AV.⁹

Once the text has been established, the interpreter may proceed in his evaluations.

⁸Robertson and Plummer, op. cit., p. 160.

⁹Ibid.

CHAPTER III

EVALUATION OF VARIOUS INTERPRETATIONS

Karl Heim believes that there are three possibilities of interpretation. He organizes them around the question, "Wer ist der $\tau\epsilon\varsigma$?"¹ He suggests the possibility of a bridegroom with his betrothed, or a father with his daughter, or a spiritual marriage of a man with a virgin subintroducta.

Philipp Bachmann sees four possibilities: $\tau\epsilon\varsigma$ might refer to the father, to the fiancé of an engaged girl, to the protector in a spiritual engagement to an ascetic girl, or to the man who is in a "spiritual marriage" with a virgin.²

As previously indicated, the various translations point to the same three suggested by Karl Heim.

Five interpretations have been suggested by various students, as far as we have been able to determine. The most complete history of studies on this question in recent

¹Karl Heim, Die Gemeinde des Auferstandenen (Muenchen: Neubauerlag, 1949), p. 95.

²Philipp Bachmann, Der Erste Brief des Paulus an die Korinther (Leipzig: A. Deichert'sche Verlagsbuchhandlung Nachf. Georg Boehme, 1905), p. 298.

times is by Werner Georg Kummel.³

The Traditional Father-Daughter View

The oldest and the most general interpretation has looked upon the $\tau\epsilon\varsigma$ in verse 36 as the father. Robertson and Plummer⁴ allow for no other possibility in their discussion. Their outline summarizes all the ideas of other interpreters who adopt this view. According to this view, the Corinthians had asked Paul about the duty of a father with a daughter who has reached the age of marriage. This view looks only at the authority of the father. It is not a question of what the daughter wants to do. The wishes of the father are paramount, according to the ideas of that age. Perhaps friends of the father warned him that he was not behaving becomingly towards his child in not furthering her marriage.

According to this view, the $\tau\epsilon\varsigma$, $\alpha\upsilon\tau\omicron\upsilon$, and $\delta\prime\varsigma$ do not refer to the suitor. "The Corinthians would not have asked about him. It is the father's or guardian's duty that is the question."⁵ Robertson and Plummer also reject the

³Werner Georg Kummel, "Verlobung und Heirat bei Paulus (1 Kor. 7:36-38)," Zeitschrift fuer die Neutestamentliche Wissenschaft, No. 21 (1954), pp. 275-276.

⁴Archibald Robertson and Alfred Plummer, A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the First Epistle of St. Paul to the Corinthians (Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1929), p. 159.

⁵Ibid.

spiritual marriage idea because they assume that Paul would not sanction "so perilous an arrangement."⁶ The main argument advanced by those who favor this view revolves around the use of the word *γαμίζων*. Robertson and Plummer state that *γαμίζων* :

everywhere in the New Testament (Matt. 22:30; 24:38; Mark 12:25; Luke 17:27; 20:35) means "give in marriage." (In LXX it does not occur.) In spite of this, some make it mean "marry." . . . The *γαμίζων* is decisive: the Apostle is speaking of a father or guardian disposing of an unmarried daughter or ward.⁷

A supporting argument is presented:

The repetition of *ἑδωκός* respecting his will and heart, and the change to *ἐαυτοῦ* respecting his daughter, seem to mark the predominance of the father in the matter.⁸

This view looks upon *ὑπέρακμος* as referring to the daughter. This school of thought assumes that a father would be of Paul's opinion to have his daughter remain single "because of the present necessity."⁹

In agreement with this view, A. T. Robertson explains the phrase, *καὶ οὕτως ὀφείλει γίνεσθαι* :

Paul has discussed the problem of marriage for virgins on the grounds of expediency. Now he faces the question where the daughter wishes to marry and there is no serious objection to it. The father is advised to

⁶Ibid.

⁷Ibid.

⁸Ibid.

⁹Ibid.

consent. Roman and Greek fathers had the control of the marriage of their daughters.¹⁰

H. Meyer agrees:

Die erstere Erklaerung ist die gewoehnliche und richtige, naemlich: wenn Jemand schimpflich zu verfahren glaubt gegen seine Jungfrau (Tochter oder Muendel), d. h., wenn er Schande ueber sie zu bringen glaubt, womit aber nicht die Schande des alten Jungfrauenstandes, sondern der Schimpf der Verfuehrung gemeint ist, welchen der Vater oder Vormund durch Verweigerung des Heiraths-Erlaubnisse zu verursachen befuerchtet.¹¹

Bachmann has the same view.¹²

Sickenberger notes that Paul has just spoken of the value of virginity. He therefore uses the term $\pi\alpha\rho\theta\acute{\epsilon}\nu\omicron\varsigma$. Although it does not mean "daughter," he believes Paul means it in the same sense.¹³

In the recent commentary by Grosheide we find the same interpretation. He rejects the possibility of taking $\tau\epsilon\varsigma$ to refer to the fiance, and brushes away the argument that this fits the plural of $\gamma\alpha\mu\epsilon\tau\omega\tau\alpha\upsilon$. He says:

The idea of an engagement is absent here as much as in verse 27. It would be strange to suppose that an engaged man would think of acting in an unseemly manner, if he did not marry his fiancée, for the purpose of

¹⁰Archibald Thomas Robertson, Word Pictures in the New Testament (New York: Harper and Bros., 1931), IV, 135.

¹¹Heinr. Aug. Wilh. Meyer, Handbuch Ueber den Ersten Brief an die Korinther (Goettingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht's Verlag, 1870), p. 214.

¹²Bachmann, op. cit., p. 300.

¹³Joseph Sickenberger, Die Briefe des Heiligen Paulus an die Korinther und Roemer (Bonn: Peter Hanstein Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1932), passim.

betrothal is marriage. Besides, verse 37 also excludes the thought of an engagement, since otherwise the words "to keep his own virgin" would have to indicate a permanent betrothal. The expression "his virgin" would also be a peculiar designation of one's fiancée.¹⁴

He therefore concludes that it must refer to the father. His reference to the causative action of $\gamma\alpha\rho\iota\beta\omega$ is his final proof for this interpretation.¹⁵

This interpretation, however, must face some serious objections. Grafe challenged this traditional view in 1899.¹⁶ Peake enumerates the same arguments in an expanded form.¹⁷ Moffatt¹⁸ and Heim¹⁹ likewise find too many problems with this view.

The first objection is in the absence of references to "father" or "daughter." Moffatt says, "Maid ($\pi\alpha\rho\theta\epsilon\acute{\iota}\nu\omicron\varsigma$) is not equivalent for 'daughter' ($\theta\upsilon\gamma\alpha\tau\eta\rho$) in Greek, unless a parent has been explicitly mentioned already."²⁰

The second objection is found in the use of

¹⁴F. W. Grosheide, Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1953), p. 182.

¹⁵Ibid.

¹⁶Reference in Bachmann, op. cit., p. 298.

¹⁷Arthur S. Peake, A Commentary on the Bible (New York: Thomas Nelson and Sons, n.d.), p. 839.

¹⁸James Moffatt, The First Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians (New York: Harper and Bros., n.d.), p. 99.

¹⁹Heim, op. cit., p. 96.

²⁰Moffatt, op. cit., p. 99.

ἄσχημονεῖν. For a father to "act unseemly" is possible, but is not a natural phrase to use of the father's conduct.²¹

The third problem is in the plural, γαμειτωσαν. If the previous reference is to the father, this is difficult. The antecedent, in such a case, would need to be supplied. Much more natural is the identification of τὸς as the suitor so that he and the virgin become the subject.

The Allegorical Interpretation of Methodius

A second interpretation has historical interest. It is suggested by Methodius, the Bishop of Olympus, who lived 260 to 312 A. D. Although the antagonist of Origen, he was influenced by the method of Origen in allegorical interpretation of Scripture. In his "Banquet of the Ten Virgins"²² he comments on our passage:

But for him who of his own free will and purpose decides to preserve his flesh in virgin purity, "having no necessity," that is, passion calling forth his loins to intercourse . . . such an one contending and struggling, and zealously abiding by his profession, and admirably fulfilling it, he exhorts to abide and to preserve it, according to the highest prize of virginity.²³

²¹Peake, op. cit., p. 839.

²²Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, The Ante-Nicene Fathers (Buffalo: The Christian Literature Company, 1886), VI, 307ff.

²³Book III, chapter xiv.

Jerome also adopted this view.²⁴ Of modern interpreters, no one has taken *παρθένος* to mean his virgin flesh.

The Engaged Couple Theory

A third interpretation was advanced by W. C. van Manen and is known as the "engaged couple theory."²⁵ Both Goodspeed and the Revised Standard Version so translate. "But if a man thinks he is not acting properly toward the girl to whom he is engaged."²⁶ "If any one thinks that he is not behaving properly toward his betrothed."²⁷ On others who follow van Manen, Kuemmel states, "Van Manen fand Zustimmung bei P. D. Chantepie de la Saussaye, *Studien* 4, 1878, 86f; J. M. S. Baljon, A. van Veldhuizen, G. Schrenk, H. D. Wendland (1954)."²⁸

Craig refers to the possibility of adopting the "engaged couple theory."²⁹ He shows that in later Greek, the

²⁴Kuemmel, *op. cit.*, p. 277.

²⁵Gerhard Dellling, Paulus' Stellung zu Frau und Ehe (Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer Verlag, 1931), p. 87. Refers to an article by van Manen in Theologisch Tijdschrift, VIII (1874), 612ff.

²⁶Edgar J. Goodspeed, The Complete Bible, An American Translation (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1954).

²⁷1 Cor. 7:36, Revised Standard Version.

²⁸Kuemmel, *op. cit.*, p. 277.

²⁹Clarence T. Craig, The First Epistle to the Corinthians, Vol. X of The Interpreter's Bible, edited by George Arthur Buttrick (New York: Abingdon Press, 1953), p. 87.

distinction between such verbal forms as $\gamma\alpha\mu\acute{\epsilon}\omega$ and $\gamma\alpha\mu\acute{\iota}\zeta\omega$ had begun to disappear.

Some insist that he has in mind nothing more than any engaged couple who might at first have decided to accept Paul's advice and refrain from marriage, and then have found that decision increasingly difficult to maintain.³⁰

But Craig goes on to cast his vote for the spiritual marriage interpretation.

A recent article supporting this view is that of W. F. Beck.³¹ He refers to Bauer, Moulton, Lietzmann, and Blass-Debrunner as grammatical authorities for the use of $\gamma\alpha\mu\acute{\iota}\zeta\omega$ in the sense of $\gamma\alpha\mu\acute{\epsilon}\omega$. He suggests that only a young man and a woman could be the subject of

$\gamma\alpha\mu\acute{\epsilon}\iota\tau\omega\sigma\alpha\upsilon$. He states:

The first natural impression which we get from the text is that it speaks of a man and a woman who are planning to marry. To describe the girl whom he has in mind, Paul could not say $\tau\acute{\eta}\nu \gamma\upsilon\upsilon\delta\alpha\iota\kappa\alpha \alpha\upsilon\tau\omicron\upsilon$ or $\gamma\upsilon\upsilon\mu\phi\eta\gamma$ (Rev. 21:9), because these terms mean a wife. He has in mind a woman who has been chosen, but is not yet married; the exact term for such a woman is $\pi\alpha\rho\theta\acute{\epsilon}\nu\omicron\varsigma$, which is used of the Virgin Mary (Luke 1:27). This "virgin" is "his" ($\alpha\upsilon\tau\omicron\upsilon$) girl, because he has chosen her. Paul is advising a man who has chosen a girl and who is now trying to decide whether he should marry or postpone marriage indefinitely. . . . The decision might be "to keep his virgin intact" ($\tau\eta\rho\epsilon\acute{\iota}\nu \tau\acute{\eta}\nu \acute{\epsilon}\delta\upsilon\tau\omicron\upsilon \pi\alpha\rho\theta\acute{\epsilon}\nu\omicron\upsilon$). "His virgin" ($\tau\acute{\eta}\nu \pi\alpha\rho\theta\acute{\epsilon}\nu\omicron\upsilon \alpha\upsilon\tau\omicron\upsilon$) may imply the mutual pledge to marry. Both may well agree not to carry out their pledge for some time but to stay like Joseph and Mary before Jesus was born

³⁰Ibid.

³¹W. F. Beck, "1 Corinthians 7:36-38," Concordia Theological Monthly, Vol. XXV, No. 5 (1954), pp. 370-372.

(Matt. 1:25). The promise to marry would be a check that is not cashed immediately. Such a condition would not continue permanently but would end with the emergency, during which also married people might not live normally.³²

Werner George Kuemmel has also adopted "the engaged couple theory," but for different reasons.³³ He refers to the work of J. Neubauer³⁴ and Strack-Billerbeck³⁵ in bringing to light the Jewish customs and laws on engagement. The engaged couple was bound as though married, and the engagement could be dissolved only by divorce. The Jewish bride was considered a married woman, but before the beginning of the actual married relationship she was still considered a "Jungfrau." Kuemmel acknowledges, however, that we cannot conclude that the Corinthian Christians at this time shared the Jewish views of engagement and marriage.

He furthermore supports his view by noting that, if Paul held this idea of engagement being a binding act, he could not simply tell the man and his virgin to part. There would still be something binding in their agreement to be engaged. The man was required by Jewish law to provide for

³²Ibid.

³³Kuemmel, op. cit.

³⁴Beitraege zur Geschichte des biblisch-talmudischen Eheschliessungsrechts, in Kuemmel, op. cit., p. 292.

³⁵Kommentar z NT aus Talmud u. Midrasch II, in Kuemmel, op. cit., p. 292.

her for a twelve-month period,³⁶ and therefore Paul would suggest that he "keep his virgin." Kuemmel believes that the pair could have remained engaged, remaining as they were for the present necessity, and that in this way each of them could more fully care for the things of the Lord: *μεριμνᾶν τὰ τοῦ κυρίου* .37

Another reason Kuemmel gives for adopting the engaged couple theory is his rejection of the spiritual marriage possibility on the basis that it contradicts Paul's ideas elsewhere. Paul speaks of "caring for the things of the Lord."³⁸ This would eliminate any arrangement involving an unnecessary tie of the Christian to the world. Marriage is one of these, and therefore Paul does not advise the marriage to be completed without giving his preference for the unmarried estate. He will not forbid them from marrying, nor will he overlook the reality of the earthly flesh. Therefore, argues Kuemmel, Paul could not give consent to a relationship between men and virgins, which would add burdens and contradict the fleshly reality. On his interpretation, Kuemmel concludes:

Und erst recht kann er nicht zu einer Beziehung zwischen einem Mann und einem Maedchen raten, die als ἀφειδίαι ἁγιασμοῦ (Col. 2:23) und in der Haltung der

³⁶Kuemmel, *op. cit.*, p. 293.

³⁷1 Cor. 7:33-35.

³⁸1 Cor. 7:32-34.

τὴν ἰδίαν (δικαιοσύνην) ζητούντες
 στῆσατε (Rom. 10:3) durch eine besondere
 anerkennenswerte Enthaltsamkeitsleistung sich vor Gott
 hervortun moechte. Die asketische Unternehmung einer
 "geistlichen Ehe," welche Begrueudung sie bei ihren
 Vertretern auch immer finden moechte, kann daher von
 Paulus nicht gebilligt worden sein.³⁹

To this view, several objections address themselves.

As Delling points out, there is the use of παρθένος.⁴⁰
 This is a peculiar designation for a fiancée. Delling sug-
 gests that γύμνη would have been closer to the meaning.
 Another expression would have been ἡμεσμένη, as
 used in 2 Cor. 11:2. In Matt. 1:18; Luke 1:27; and 2:5
 μνηστευθεῖσα is used. While Beck correctly says
 that παρθένος is used for the Virgin Mary in Luke 1:27,
 he neglects to add that she is called παρθένον
 ἑμνηστευμένην, "virgin betrothed." Neither does
 Kuemmel give any evidence for such a use of παρθένος,
 except to mention the general Jewish custom.

A second problem enters with τηρεῖν. It is un-
 clear how this "guarding" or "preserving" of his fiancée could
 apply. As Kuemmel says, there is no evidence that the Jew-
 ish practice of "keeping" an engaged girl in the engaged
 state obtained in Corinth.

A third difficulty is found in the nature of betrothal.
 It would be strange to suppose that an engaged man would

³⁹Kuemmel, op. cit., p. 294.

⁴⁰Delling, op. cit., p. 87.

think of acting unseemly if he did not marry his fiancée, for the purpose of betrothal is marriage.

The fourth difficulty is in consideration of Kueimmel's statement, that spiritual marriage is contrary to Paul's insistence on remaining unencumbered to be more concerned with the things of the Lord. The value of spiritual marriage was to provide protection for the virgin as well as the guidance of a mature Christian man. For the man, it afforded companionship and household comforts. For both, it was to use the distinctive *χάρισμα* of virginity of which Paul speaks,⁴¹ in mutual helpfulness to each other.

The greatest difficulty with this interpretation is in the use of *παραθένος* without any modifying word to indicate that she is a betrothed virgin.

The Spiritual Marriage View of Achelis

The fourth interpretation is the spiritual marriage view of Hans Achelis. As Delling points out, other students of this passage had come to a similar view before Achelis. "Nach Weizsaeckers Anregung (Das apostolische Zeitalter 1902, Seite 651) hat Grafe diese Hypothese exegetisch begrundet."⁴²

The most comprehensive treatment of this phenomenon in

⁴¹1 Cor. 7:7.

⁴²Delling, op. cit., p. 87.

early Christianity is that of Achelis.⁴³ He gathered all available references to this custom from writings of the fathers and the Councils of the early centuries.

Achelis reconstructs the situation in Corinth. He pictures two persons of different sex living under an impossible situation. This could be solved through marriage. When Paul is asked for his advice, he says, "To marry is good, not to marry is better." However, the close association of a man and a virgin in a spiritual marriage caused some dangerous situations. The man might be tempted to lose his self-control. The problem arose, "Can such a virgin, vowed to virginity in a spiritual marriage, be free to marry?"

Achelis explains the origin of this custom:

Die Jungfrau wollte aus religioesen Gruenden ihr Fleisch unbefleckt erhalten, die Gemeinschaft mit einem Mann aber aus irgend einem Grunde nicht entbehren. Sie lebte mit einem Christen zusammen, aber nicht als seine γυρη , sondern als seine $\text{\pi\alpha\rho\theta\epsilon\iota\omega\varsigma}$.⁴⁴

He believes this relationship would begin with the knowledge and approval of the congregation. This would necessitate the vow of virginity for the young woman, and perhaps for the man. This spiritual marriage permitted every association of marriage with the exception of sexual union. Paul

⁴³Hans Achelis, Virgines Subintroductae (Leipzig: J. C. Hinrich'sche Buchhandlung, 1902).

⁴⁴Ibid., p. 27.

then advises the virgin to marry, if necessity so dictates. She would not be sinning in such a case.

Achelis also answers the question of Paul's silence in forbidding this custom. He believes that the custom met a need which was apparent to Paul. For the man, the "spiritual marriage" was an agreeable household arrangement. The virgin would receive the protection and guidance of a mature Christian. Single girls without protection in the large city needed home and care. Some were servants in Christian homes; others married. Others observed the needs of that time, as outlined by Paul in 1 Corinthians 7. They awaited the *παρουσία*, and for this reason viewed marriage as a doubtful benefit. Those who decided on a single life, took on a position of respect in the congregation. The result was a spiritual companionship between a man and a woman who shared the mutual vow of the ascetic life.⁴⁵

The question arises, "Why did no translator or Greek exegete take 1 Corinthians 7:36-38 as 'spiritual marriage'?" Achelis states that a right understanding of the Corinthian situation was impossible, because the Christian church tried to uproot the subintroductae custom beginning in the third century. This being the case, no exegete would let himself believe that a spiritual marriage ever existed in a Pauline

⁴⁵Ibid., p. 28.

congregation. This would indicate, that the position of virgins had already become so established in the second century, that the marriage of a virgin would have appeared sinful. For an exegete of this period to believe that Paul could have advised marriage to a virgin was impossible.⁴⁶

Achelis realizes the problem of proving the existence of spiritual marriage at this early period. Was Paul the creator of spiritual marriage, or did it exist from another source? Achelis says:

Moeglicher Weise laesst sich die Frage beantworten, und zwar mit Hilfe der Philonischen oder Pseudo-Philonischen Schrift De vita contemplativa. Denn die Genossinnen der Therapeuten, die Therapeutiden, sind Syneisakten, man mag die Erscheinung deuten, wie man will. Entweder hat es schon vor der Gruendung der christlichen Gemeinden im Reich, in juedisch-asketischen Kreisen, das Institut der geistigen Ehe gegeben, und die Zustaeude in Korinth erhalten eine naturgemaesse Erklaerung; oder der christliche Verfasser erzaeht unter Philos Namen von Syneisakten christlicher Moenche.⁴⁷

There are numerous interpreters who follow Achelis up to this point, as we shall see. Achelis observes that a man and a woman in the bond of this spiritual marriage are faced with a decision. He sees Paul's advice to mean, "Let the man give the virgin who is bound in the vow of spiritual marriage to another."

Sie sollen indess nicht sich mit einander verheiraten, wie wir Modernen von unsern Anschauungen aus als natuerlich annehmen wuerden, sondern der Mann soll das

⁴⁶Ibid.

⁴⁷Ibid., p. 29.

Maedchen einem andern jungen Christen als Gattin zu-
fuehren. Das allen besagt das zweimal gebrauchte Wort
 $\gamma\alpha\mu\acute{\iota}\varsigma\ \epsilon\sigma\tau\iota$; es kann nicht heiraten heissen, es
heisst immer verheiraten.⁴⁸

Achelis does not agree with those who take $\gamma\alpha\mu\acute{\epsilon}\iota\tau\omega\sigma\alpha\iota$
as referring to the man and woman in the spiritual mar-
riage, "let them marry." He supports his explanation by
referring to Itala and Vulgate, which have the singular
 $\gamma\alpha\mu\acute{\epsilon}\iota\tau\omega$. The singular he would take as referring to
the virgin, "let her marry."⁴⁹

The contrary view has arguments in its favor. In this
question, we are faced with the uncertainty of knowing
whether or not the Synelsaktentum existed at this early
period. We have evidence of its existence in the second
century, as we shall see later. Either to affirm or to deny
this view on the ground of evidence is difficult. "Our
ignorance as to the origin of many things should make us
chary of pressing the former point. . . . We must beware
of viewing the institution through the scandals which later
discredited it."⁵⁰ The historical traces of this institu-
tion will be treated in Chapter IV.

Another difficulty is presented by Bachmann. " γ
 $\pi\alpha\rho\theta\acute{\epsilon}\nu\omicron\varsigma\ \alpha\upsilon\tau\omicron\upsilon$ kann immer noch leichter jemandes

⁴⁸Ibid., p. 24.

⁴⁹Ibid., p. 25.

⁵⁰Peake, op. cit., p. 839.

Tochter als die jemanden geistlich angelobte geistliche Schwester bedeuten."⁵¹ This may be true, but it still leaves us with the awkward situation of applying ἀσχημονεῖν to the father.

But even if one were to grant the possibility of a spiritual marriage in Corinth, there is a serious difficulty with the view of Achelis. As Peake says, it is "wholly unnatural,"⁵² for the man in this case to give his spiritual virgin to another man. The obvious advice is that the man and his virgin should marry. This is, indeed, suggested by verse 36. Achelis is led to his view by his rigid definition of γαμίζεσθαι. Here, as with the father-daughter view, we need to determine whether this word must always be interpreted in the causative sense. While detailed discussion will be presented in Chapter IV, we can note here that Kittel,⁵³ Moulton,⁵⁴ Lietzmann,⁵⁵ and others find that γαμίζω and γαμέω are equivalent in later Greek.

⁵¹Bachmann, op. cit., p. 289.

⁵²Peake, op. cit.

⁵³Gerhard Kittel, Theologisches Woerterbuch zum Neuen Testament (Stuttgart: Verlag von W. Kohlhammer, 1953), I, 646.

⁵⁴James Hope Moulton and Wilbert Francis Howard, A Grammar of New Testament Greek (Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1929), II, 409.

⁵⁵Hans Lietzmann, Handbuch zum Neuen Testament, an die Korinther I-II (Tuebingen: Verlag von J. C. B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck), 1949), pp. 35-36.

The Spiritual Marriage Resulting
in Physical Marriage

The fifth interpretation looks upon this passage as a reference to a man and virgin in a spiritual marriage, as does Achelis. However, it interprets Paul's advice to mean that the two people involved in their vow to each other should consummate a physical marriage, if that seems to be necessary.

Delling makes a case for this view. His interpretation becomes evident in his translation:

Wenn aber jemand unanstaendig gegenueber seiner Jungfrau zu sein meint, wenn sie hochreif ist, und es musz so geschehen, so tue er, was er will; er suendigt nicht; sie moegen heiraten. Wer aber in seinem Herzen ganz fest steht, keinen Zwang hat, Macht hat ueber seine eigene Wollung, und dies in seinem Herzen fuer gut befunden hat, seine Jungfrau zu bewahren, der wird recht tun. Daher tut sowohl der recht, der seine Jungfrau ehelich macht, also auch der besser tun wird, der nicht ehelich macht.⁵⁶

He finds one purpose for this institution to be spiritual inspiration and help without the added burden of family and children.⁵⁷ He believes another objective of people entering spiritual marriages was to prove their power over spheres of nature. If one could prove his power over sexual nature in the intimate fellowship of a spiritual marriage,

⁵⁶Delling, op. cit., pp. 87-88.

⁵⁷Ibid., p. 90.

he could become more firmly established in his ascetic devotion to the Lord.⁵⁸ He refers to later actions of Cyprian, in which those committed to a spiritual marriage could legally be married in the usual way.⁵⁹

Another supporter of this view is Lietzmann. He is convinced of the existence of Syneisaktentum by the evidence in the writings of the Shepherd of Hermas.⁶⁰ With Achelis, he finds the later references in the councils and in the works of Ephraem Syrus convincing. One quote will serve to demonstrate his view:

Auch Ephrem [sic] Syrus verstand unsere Stelle von einem Syneisaktenverhaeltnis, wie sein Kommentar ausweist (Herklotz in Bible. Ztschr. 14, 344ff.); ueber die geistlichen Ehen in Syrien s. F. C. Burkitt Urchristentum im Orient uebers. v. E. Preuschen 88 ff und Plooij Z. f. nt. Wiss. 1923, 8ff. Durch diese Erklaerung allen wird die ganze Situation ebenso wie dies Ausdruck verstaendlich.⁶¹

We have mentioned Peake, who wrestles with the problem that absolute evidence of this institution in New Testament times is lacking. However, he adopts the view of Delling and Lietzmann. He refers to Paul's personal preference for celibacy. In this context, pledges to remain unmarried

⁵⁸Ibid., p. 91.

⁵⁹Ibid., p. 89.

⁶⁰Parable IX, 10, 6ff., in Edgar J. Goodspeed, The Apostolic Fathers (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1950), p. 184.

⁶¹Lietzmann, op. cit., pp. 36-37.

would receive his praise. Peake thinks that a man and a woman joining

for mutual encouragement in such a pledge would seem perhaps not unfitting. The moral peril would be met by the possibility of marriage in case the strain on continence became too severe. And we must not underestimate the elemental force of primitive enthusiasm, or too hastily apply to the church of the first century our own standards of what is fitting.⁶²

He paraphrases verses 36 and 37:

If in any instance the man feels that he may be guilty of an offense against the virgin's chastity, if he is troubled with excess virility and his nature demands marriage, he may carry out the desire without sin, let them get married. But if he is firm in purpose and driven by no such necessity, and is gifted with self-control and resolved to keep his virgin partner intact, he will do well.⁶³

He does not agree with Achelis, who suggests that the man give his virgin to another. Peake thinks that the rendering "marry" in verse 38 is legitimate.

The most complete and consistent presentation of this view is made by Moffatt.

At the same time, if any man considers that he is not behaving properly to the maid who is his spiritual bride, if his passions are strong and if it must be so, then let him do what he thinks--let them be married; it is no sin for him.⁶⁴

Moffatt does not think this "unseemly" behavior is some kind of physical outrage, but he says:

⁶²Peake, op. cit., p. 839.

⁶³Ibid.

⁶⁴Moffatt, op. cit., p. 98.

but a general term for this spiritual comradeship, as the man now judges it; he considers that the right, fair course for himself and his religious mate is to get married, since the strain of their ideal connexion is proving too much for flesh and blood. Paul agrees that he should. It is no sin, though it would be better if the pair could still have sufficient self-control to live together without any sexual union. To the apostle such spiritual marriages are a noble experiment, but unfortunately the flesh is so weak that they are not wise for all. He contemplates the problem from the standpoint of the man.⁶⁵

To Moffatt, the natural sense of *παρθένος* is the virgin who is the man's spiritual bride. He thinks this is a "case of the elementary, early relationship which soon afterwards developed into the virgines subintroductae of the later Church."⁶⁶ With Lietzmann, he refers to Ephraem Syrus, who knew this institution at first hand and who interpreted this passage as such. Much in the same vein as Achelis, Moffatt says:

It was when knowledge of it had vanished, or when the church did not care to believe that it had ever existed in the primitive days, that the devout either allegorized the passage or readjusted Paul's advice to fit a supposed exercise of the patria potestas by some imperious father who claimed to rule a grown-up daughter's life by his own rigorist scruples.⁶⁷

The possibility of this view is allowed by Karl Heim. He bases his thoughts on the words *τὴν παρθένον αὐτοῦ*. This could not mean "bride," and could not mean

⁶⁵Ibid.

⁶⁶Ibid.

⁶⁷Ibid.

"daughter," for other words would have been chosen. Yet he thinks it is not clear, whether or not two Christians came together in a spiritual bond. To Heim this is a possibility, but not a view which he holds with any degree of certainty.⁶⁸

The most recent commentary to espouse this view is the Interpreter's Bible. Craig writes:

It is more probable, however, that Paul is referring to the custom of a young man's taking a young woman under his protection, and their living together, but under vows of celibacy.⁶⁹

He refers to the tenth parable of Hermas, and admits that although this was at a later time, "it seems to be implied here."⁷⁰ The word ὑπέρακμος is applied to the man, rather than to the virgin, as fitting the inner struggle to maintain self-control. "If it is too difficult for them to maintain the celibate vow, it is no sin for them to marry."⁷¹

Of these five views, the last is the favorite of more recent interpreters. The father-daughter view is not in keeping with the choice of terms. The allegorical view of Methodius is against elementary principles of interpretation. The engagement view has possibilities, but finds difficulties in the use of παρθένος. The view of Achelis is

⁶⁸Heim, op. cit., p. 97.

⁶⁹Craig, op. cit., p. 88.

⁷⁰Ibid.

⁷¹Ibid.

untenable in the light of more recent discussions of

γαμὶς ἕεϋ.

While the last view is the most widely accepted today, it faces two problems.

The first has already been mentioned--the problem of historical evidence. Does the later evidence in church history indicate a much earlier use of spiritual marriages as an institution for *παρθένος συνείσακτος*? The question can be answered only after the sources have been studied.

The second problem is stated by Schlatter, who says that there is no direct word in this text which would indicate the spiritual marriage relationship.⁷²

⁷²Adolf Schlatter, Paulus der Bote Jesu (Stuttgart: Calwer Vereinsbuchhandlung, 1934), p. 246.

CHAPTER IV

THE CASE FOR SPIRITUAL MARRIAGE VIEW

Evidence of Ascetic Attitude in the Early Church

There is early evidence of the ascetic attitude in the Christian Church.

The feeling grew that the ordinary life with its natural duties and obligations is incompatible with the life lived in the spirit. Possession of the spirit requires a life which is extraordinary, where there is no room for worldly affairs, particularly for marriage.¹

An early Gospel, now known only through a series of passages in the writings of Clement of Alexandria, bears witness to this.² It bears a pretentious title, "The Gospel according to the Egyptians." From this title, Vööbus concludes that it could not have been only a Gospel of a minority group, but must have been well known.³ In this Gospel, Salome inquires of Jesus when the things about which she asked should be known. The Lord answers, "When ye have trampled on the garment of shame, and when the two become one and the male with the female is neither male or

¹Arthur Vööbus, Celibacy, A Requirement For Admission To Baptism In the Early Syrian Church (Stockholm: Estonian Theological Society in Exile, 1951), p. 7.

²Montague Rhodes James, The Apocryphal New Testament (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1945), pp. 10-11.

³Vööbus, op. cit., p. 7.

female."⁴ Another word in the same Gospel says, "The Saviour Himself said: I came to destroy the works of the female."⁵ Vööbus dates this Gospel from the second century. Although it originates in the valley of the Nile, this Gospel represents religious ideas of the earliest period in Christianity.⁶

As early Christianity develops, asceticism begins its role in shaping the Christian life. Virginity is the leading phase of this ascetic ideal. This becomes apparent in the apocryphal Acts of the Apostles, which probably date from the second and early third centuries.⁷ Concerning the Acts of Paul and Thekla, Harnack reports:

Thekla was won over from paganism by means of "the word of virginity and prayer" (λογος τῆς παρθενίας καὶ τῆς προσευχῆς . Acts Theclae, ch. vii), a motive which is so repeatedly mentioned in the apocryphal Acts that its reality and significance cannot be called in question. Asceticism, especially in the sexual relationship, did prevail in wide circles at that period, as an outcome of the religious syncretism.⁸

When Thekla became a Christian, she would not be joined in marriage with her bridegroom.⁹ Paul is reported as saying,

⁴Clem. Alex. Strom., iii. 13.

⁵Ibid., iii. 9.

⁶Vööbus, op. cit.

⁷Ibid., p. 8.

⁸Adolf Harnack, The Expansion of Christianity in the First Three Centuries (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1904), I, 478.

⁹Ibid., p. 490.

"Blessed are they that possess their wives as though they had them not, for they shall inherit God."¹⁰ Again, "Blessed are the bodies of the virgins, for they shall be well-pleasing unto God and shall not lose the reward of their continence (chastity)."¹¹

The Acts of Thomas call married life "this dirty communion."¹² In one episode, we have the account of a couple who are influenced by this message and decide during their wedding night to keep virginity.¹³

Glimpses of ascetic practices are also found in the Apostolic Fathers. The Didache says, "If you can bear the whole yoke of the Lord, you will be perfect; but if you cannot, do what you can."¹⁴ In comment on this, Lietzmann says,

A differential ethic had been developed: the "perfect" take upon themselves the entire yoke with the burden of asceticism. The great majority do as much as they are able, according to their ability.¹⁵

This passage indicates the ascetic ideal toward which the faithful may strive.

¹⁰Acts of Paul and Thecla, 5, in James, op. cit., p. 273.

¹¹Ibid., p. 6.

¹²Vööbus, op. cit., p. 26, quotes "The Acts of Thomas in Syriac," ed. P. Bedjan, in Acta Martyrum et Sanctorum, III, 13, 92.

¹³Acts of Thomas, 11-15, in James, op. cit., pp. 369-371.

¹⁴Didache, VI, 1-3, in Edgar J. Goodspeed, The Apostolic Fathers (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1950), p. 14.

¹⁵Hans Lietzmann, The Beginnings of the Christian Church (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1937), p. 272.

The first epistle of Clement lists the gifts of God:
 "Life in immortality, splendour in righteousness, truth in
 boldness, faith in confidence, continence in holiness
 (ἔγκρατεια ἐν ἀγασμῶ)."¹⁶

The second letter of Clement, described by Goodspeed
 as "A Christian sermon, probably of Roman origin, written
 about A. D. 150 to 165,"¹⁷ reports:

For the Lord Himself, when He was asked by someone
 when His kingdom would come, said, "When the two shall
 be one, and the outside like the inside, and the male
 with the female neither male nor female." . . . A
 brother when he sees a sister should not think of her
 at all as female, nor she think of him at all as male.
 When you do this, he says, my Father's kingdom will
 come.¹⁸

An early reference is the work of the Shepherd of
 Hermas. Goodspeed dates it "in the last decade of the first
 century," so that it represents an early source.¹⁹ The sig-
 nificant passage is his ninth parable, in which he describes
 his visit with the virgins in the tower. The virgins say,
 "You shall sleep with us as a brother, not a husband, for
 you are our brother, and in future we are going to live with
 you, for we love you dearly."²⁰ Achelis considers these

¹⁶XXXV, 1-2, in Kirsopp Lake, The Apostolic Fathers
 (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1937), I.

¹⁷Goodspeed, op. cit., p. 83.

¹⁸Second Letter of Clement, XII, 1-6, in Goodspeed, op.
cit., p. 90.

¹⁹Goodspeed, op. cit., p. 97.

²⁰Parable IX, 10, 6ff., in Goodspeed, op. cit., p. 184.

virgins to be personifications of Christian virtues. He infers from the appearance of this episode in the Shepherd of Hermas, "Die Gemeinde muss ein solches Wesen geduldet haben, wenn Hermas so unbefangen davon sprechen konnte."²¹ Remembering that this was written at the same time as the Apocalypse of St. John, we may well note a trace of a very early attitude toward the spiritual marriage institution.

Evidence of *παρθένου συνείσρακτος*
in the Early Church

An outstanding work is that of Achelis, who gathered most known references to this practice. To him we are indebted for most of the following information.

Achelis believes that the virgins in the community of the Therapeutae, as described in De vita contemplativa, by Philo are *συνείσρακτος*.²² He reports the statement of Philo that they are spread over the whole earth, but especially in Egypt. "Their chief home was in the neighborhood of Lake Marieotis near Alexandria, where they settled in the low hills on account of the excellent climate."²³ Therapeutae did not allow a close fellowship between men and

²¹Hans Achelis, Virgines Subintroductae (Leipzig: J. C. Hinrich'sche Buchhandlung, 1902), p. 17.

²²Ibid., p. 29.

²³F. J. Foakes Jackson and Kirsopp Lake, The Beginnings of Christianity (London: MacMillan Co., 1920), I, 95.

women. "Unlike the Essenes, the Therapeutae admitted women to their society, though they extolled the virtue of virgin life in most extravagant terms."²⁴ Their rules on the Pentecost feast placed men on the right and women on the left. The sexes faced one another in groups in their nightly celebrations. Achelis concludes, "Es ist nicht schwer, in ihnen eine Urform der christlichen Jungfrauen wiederzuerkennen."²⁵ And again, "Die christlichen Jungfrauen in Korinth sind die Nachfolgerinnen der juedischen 'Gottesverehrerinnen' oder 'Beterinnen.' Das Syneisaktentum ist aelter als das Christentum."²⁶ He regards the Corinthian practice of taking virgins into the homes as a variation of this older usage. In a monastic village, such as the Therapeutae had, men and virgins could live in individual huts, each to himself. Achelis believes that the large city and seaport, Corinth, with its proverbial bad reputation, made it necessary for virgins to seek the protection of dedicated Christian men. In this way, he views the association of a male and female ascetic in "spiritual marriage" as a variation of the life practiced by the Therapeutae.²⁷ That the ways of the Therapeutae were known to the

²⁴Ibid., p. 96.

²⁵Achelis, op. cit., p. 31.

²⁶Ibid., p. 31.

²⁷Ibid., p. 32.

Corinthians is not impossible, since Apollos came to Corinth from Alexandria, a center for their movement.²⁸

Another witness to asceticism in marriage is Tatian. Irenaeus reports that Tatian evaluated marriage as *φθορὰ καὶ πορνεία*.²⁹ Vööbus reports how the Persian Diatessaron by Tatian changes Luke 2:36, which reads in the Greek text, *ἤσασα μετὰ ἀνδρὸς ἑτῆ ἑπτὰ ἀπὸ τῆς παρθενίας αὐτῆς*. This text changes it into a state of the celibate, by making it read, "She remained a virgin with her husband seven years."³⁰ This seems to indicate that a message was spread that marriage is an immoral institution and that Christianity finds its realization only in rigid asceticism, in particular, virginity.

Another evidence of asceticism is found in Valentinus. This movement "admitted ascetics only into its church, i.e. believers who were ready to kill their flesh and practice *μυστήριον τῆς συζυγίας*, spiritual marriage, an ascetic substitute for ordinary marriage."³¹

The fourth letter of Cyprian of Carthage, written by Cyprian together with four bishops and some presbyters, was

²⁸Acts 18:24; 10:1; 1 Cor. 1:12.

²⁹Adversus haereses I, 28, 1, in Vööbus, op. cit., p. 17.

³⁰Vööbus, op. cit., p. 19.

³¹Ibid., p. 16.

addressed to Pomponius. The letter answers a question of discipline, for there were virgins who had vowed virginity and were convinced they should share their goods with men. Cyprian answers Pomponius, stating that the living together of virgins and men is not to be allowed, because it brings great dangers.³²

About fourteen years after Cyprian, the bishops meeting in Antioch gave their opinion regarding the matters of Paul of Samosata.³³ He had two virgins with him on his journeys. The custom of spiritual companions is known at this time.

An important document in Armenian is ascribed to Ephraem Syrus. Voöbus believes that the Syriac idiosyncracies in the text make it clear that the original document was in Syriac. This might indicate an earlier author and an earlier date--perhaps the second, and no later than the third century.³⁴ The Christian life is described as a spiritual mode of life. Christians are defined as ascetics who stand in the "state of vow."³⁵ Voöbus infers that this "spiritual mode of life" probably included the $\tau\upsilon\nu\epsilon\acute{\iota}\tau\alpha\kappa\tau\omicron\varsigma$. He believes that this spiritual marriage had a wide popularity in Syrian

³²Achelis, op. cit., pp. 7-8.

³³Eusebius, VII, 30, 12ff., in Achelis, op. cit., pp. 9-10.

³⁴Voöbus, op. cit., p. 23.

³⁵Ibid.

communities. To document this, he points to the efforts of Bishop Rabbula in Edessa in the beginning of the fifth century to eliminate this custom.³⁶ He refers also to the synodical acts of the Eastern Syrian Church. "At the Synod in Seleucia-Ctesiphon in 410 it was decided that no one who practices this custom will be permitted to enter the service of the church."³⁷ This and other synods indicate how much time was needed before this ancient heritage began to recede from the Syrian church.

Tertullian was not known for sponsoring the practice of the $\nu\nu\epsilon\iota\tau\alpha\kappa\tau\omicron\varsigma$. Yet Achelis finds a reference which may refer to the spiritual marriage:

Weshalb bist du, O Christ, so bestellt, dass du ohne Frau nicht sein kannst? Nun, es mag auch die Gemeinschaft wegen der haeuslichen Lasten notwendig sein: so habe irgend eine geistliche Frau, nimm sie aus den Witwen, durch Glauben schoen, durch Armut ausgesteuert, durch Alter besiegelt; du schliessest eine gut Ehe.³⁸

Irenaeus comments about the ascetic practices of the Gnostic Valentinians. He describes certain Valentinians, who decided to enter into a bond with women as with sisters. Later, it was revealed that these "sisters" became "mothers"

³⁶Ibid., p. 25. (He refers to Ephraemi Syri, Rabulae episcopi Edesseni, Balaei aliorumque opera selecta, ed. J. J. Overbeck, Oxonii, 1865, p. 210.)

³⁷Ibid. (He refers to canon III, Synodicon orientale, ed. J. B. Chabot, Paris, 1902, p. 24.)

³⁸Tertullian, De exhortatione castitatis 12, in Achelis, op. cit., p. 12.

through their relationship with these "brothers."³⁹ Achelis finds that Irenaeus does not condemn the practice, but only registers protest against its misuse.

At the time of Epiphanius, bishop of Salamis, who lived between 310 and 403,⁴⁰ the $\sigma\upsilon\nu\epsilon\acute{\iota}\tau\alpha\kappa\tau\omicron\iota$ were a plague to the church. He writes about the Encratites of Tatian, "Dass sie Weiber aus allen Orten bethoerten, mit Weibern reisten und lebten, und sich von ihnen bedienen liessen."⁴¹

Evidence of Church Action to Abolish

$\pi\alpha\rho\theta\acute{\epsilon}\nu\omicron\iota$ $\sigma\upsilon\nu\epsilon\acute{\iota}\tau\alpha\kappa\tau\omicron\iota$

The preceding have been traces of the spiritual marriage custom found in various writers. From the middle of the third century, through the following years, the Church takes a stand of trying to remove this institution because of misunderstandings and dangers. From the beginning of the fourth century onward, the great synods are concerned with the question. For several centuries, in all parts of the empire, various assemblies passed the same resolution, not to tolerate any more $\sigma\upsilon\nu\epsilon\acute{\iota}\tau\alpha\kappa\tau\omicron\iota$. The repeated

³⁹Irenaeus h. I, 6, 3 in Achelis, op. cit., p. 19.

⁴⁰Lutheran Cyclopedia, edited by Erwin L. Lueker (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1954), p. 342.

⁴¹Epiphanius, h. 47, 3, in Achelis, op. cit., p. 20.

resolutions may indicate that some bishops were reluctant to give up the practice of spiritual marriage themselves or to enforce the resolution in their districts.

The first known resolution regarding spiritual marriages was passed by the Synod of Elvira in Spain, which Hefele dates 305 or 306 A. D.⁴² The twenty-seventh canon reads:

De clericis ut extraneas foeminas in domo non habeant. Episcopus vel quilibet alius clericus aut sororem aut filiam virginem dedicatam Deo tantum secum habeant; extraneam nequaquam habere placunt.⁴³

This canon is more severe than the third similar canon of the Council of Nicaea of 325 A. D., since it allows clergy to have in their house only their sisters, or their own daughters. It is noteworthy that these must be virgins and consecrated to God in the vow of virginity.

The Synod of Ancyra in 314 A. D. said in canon nineteen, "τὰς μέντοι πυνερχομένας παρθένους τισὶν ὡς ἀδελφὰς ἐκωλύτα μὲν . We also forbid virgins to live as sisters with man."⁴⁴ Hefele interprets this canon as referring to the

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⁴²Charles Joseph Hefele, A History of the Christian Councils, translated from the German and edited by William R. Clark (Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1871), p. 148.

⁴³Ibid.

⁴⁴Ibid., p. 218.

⁴⁵Ibid.

The Council of Nicea in 325 A. D. resolved in canon three:

Ἀπηγόρευσε καθόλου ἡ μεγάλη Σύνοδος
 μήτε ἐπισκόπῳ μήτε πρεσβυτέρῳ μήτε
 διακόνῳ μήτε ὅλως τινὶ τῶν ἐν τῷ
 κλήρῳ ἕξειναι συνείσακτον ἔχειν
 πλὴν εἰ μὴ ἄρα μητέρα ἢ ἀδελφὴν ἢ
 θείαν, ἢ δὲ μόνα πρόσωπα πάντα
 ὑποψίαν διαπέφυγε. 46

Hefele translates:

The great Synod absolutely forbids, and it cannot be permitted to either bishop, priest, or any other cleric, to have in his house a συνείσακτος (subintroducta), with the exception of his mother, sister, aunt, or such other persons as are free from all suspicion.⁴⁷

In his commentary on the third canon, Hefele refers to the ancient practice of spiritual marriage:

They were known by the name of συνείσακτος, ἀγαπητά, and sorores. That which began in the spirit, however, in many cases ended in the flesh; on which account the church very stringently forbade such unions, even with penalties more severe than those with which she punished concubinage: for it happened that Christians who would have recoiled from the idea of concubinage permitted themselves to form one of these spiritual unions, and in so doing fell.⁴⁸

It is of interest that the Council no longer deals with the

⁴⁶Ibid., p. 379.

⁴⁷Ibid.

⁴⁸Ibid., pp. 379-380.

possibility of a daughter living with a cleric, as did the Synod of Elvira.

The next few centuries finds the church working to enforce this resolution. Achelis mentions among other later synods, the Synod of Carthage in 397; the second Synod of Arelate; the Statuta ecclesiae antiqua in the first part of the sixth century; the Synod of Orleans in 538; the Synod of Tours in 567. These refer to the stand taken by Nicaea in 325. Achelis mentions also the attempts in Spain: canon seven of Gerunda in 517; canon fifteen of Ilerda in 523; canon three of Toledo II in 531; canon five of Toledo III in 589; canon three of Hispalis in 590; canon forty-two and forty-three of Toledo IV in 633; and canon four of Bracara III in 675.⁴⁹ These references serve to emphasize the fact that this institution was generally accepted and widespread. Its deep roots made reform difficult.

Another document which indicates the presence of this practice is De singularitate clericorum. It may have been a circular letter. The author is Pseudo-Cyprian. The writer forbids a clergyman to have a strange woman in the house. The writer refers to the clergy who tried to find spiritual marriages in the Bible. Among some others are Elijah and the widow, Jesus and the women who served Him, John the Apostle taking Mary into his home. Achelis points out that

⁴⁹Achelis, op. cit., pp. 34-35.

the fact that clergy used Scriptures to support the spiritual marriage idea indicates their deep conviction that it was God-pleasing.⁵⁰

An interesting case is that of Parergorius, a seventy-year old Presbyter, who soon after 370 A. D. received the command from his bishop to separate from his *ὑπεύρακτος* a young virgin. He found this order hard to take, and contrary to the widespread custom. He turned to the great bishop, Basilius in Caesarea, with an appeal. The answer of Basilius clearly points to the canon of Nicaea. He does not doubt the reputation of Parergorius, but he enforces the rule. He threatens excommunication for failure to obey.⁵¹

Aphraat, in his homilies, counsels the monks in the far East either to marry or to be monks and to avoid any compromise.⁵²

Gregory of Nazianzen opposes this institution in his Epigrams. Achelis reports his opinions:

Auch er richtet sich an Moenche und Nonnen, und zeigt ihnen, dass sich die Virginitaet mit dem Syneisaktentum nicht vertrage; die "bessere Hoffnung," das Moenchtum, habe Mann und Weib getrennt. Die Jungfrau habe Christus zum Fuersorger und Braeutigam, und beduerfe keinen irdischen Vertreter. Das Verhaeltnis zwischen Moench und Nonne, dieser *ἄγαμος* *ἄγαμος*, habe ein recht zweifelhaften Charakter; soll man sie zu den

⁵⁰Ibid., pp. 36ff.

⁵¹Basilius, ep. 55, in Achelis, op. cit., p. 46.

⁵²Achelis, op. cit., pp. 48-49.

Verheirateten oder den Ledigen rechnen? . . . Die Synesisakten verderben den guten Namen der Christen.⁵³

The final historical reference is that of Chrysostom, who writes to those who have virgins and to virgins who have monks in the spiritual marriage arrangement. He opposes this relationship.⁵⁴

What conclusions can we draw from these references? Of one thing we can be sure: there was hardly a church province in ancient Christianity in which spiritual marriages were unknown.

The fact that they were so general and prevalent would seem to indicate that they rest upon a very old Christian tradition. One influence upon Christian development was the thought of the Greek world. In his chapter on "Greek and Christian Ethics," Hatch points to a desire for moral reformation in Greek life at this time.

A kind of moral gymnastic was necessary. The aim of it was to bring the passions under the control of reason, and to bring the will into harmony with the will of God. This special discipline of life was designated by the term which was in use for bodily training,
 ἀσκησις .55

In the Greek view, a man held a high regard for his soul, which was considered immortal. The body was not so regarded.

⁵³Ibid., p. 51.

⁵⁴Ibid., p. 52.

⁵⁵Edwin Hatch, The Influence of Greek Ideas and Usages Upon the Christian Church (London: Williams and Norgate, 1892), pp. 147-148.

Perhaps this is why Paul went into detail in presenting the resurrection of the body in 1 Corinthians 15. Again, in Colossians 2, Paul presents the eschatological view of man when he rebukes those who are guilty of "neglecting the body."⁵⁶ The Christian view considers all of man, soul and body, both as a gift of God and as being redeemed in the atonement of Jesus Christ. The church of Corinth may have been influenced to some extent by this Greek view of man.

Add to this Greek influence the existence of a primitive pattern for spiritual marriage in the Therapeutae and the early reference in Hermas. The result is to acknowledge the possibility of spiritual marriages in the Christian community of Corinth. A custom so well established by the third century must have rested upon a very early Christian tradition.

Evidence from Vocabulary Study

An examination of four key words in this passage will help us determine if there is a case for spiritual marriage, or if the text militates against this view.

The first key-word is ἀσχημονεῖν, which Arndt-Gingrich translate, "If anyone thinks he is behaving

⁵⁶Colossians 2:23.

dishonorably toward his maiden.⁵⁷ In the noun form, $\lambda\omicron\chi\eta\mu\omicron\sigma\upsilon\nu\eta$, it is used for shame, or nakedness, or the private parts (sex organs).⁵⁸

Thus understood, it could hardly refer to the father, in an inordinate lust for his daughter. More easily it refers to the desire of the man toward his virgin, thus eliminating the father-daughter theory and pointing either toward the engaged couple or the spiritual marriage interpretation.

Another key word is $\pi\alpha\rho\theta\acute{\epsilon}\nu\omicron\varsigma$. This is always "virgin" in the New Testament.⁵⁹ Kittel comments:

Einen speciell asketischen Sinn hat $\pi\alpha\rho\theta\acute{\epsilon}\nu\omicron\varsigma$ wahrscheinlich 1 K 7:34, 36-38 und wohl auch 25 (vielleicht von Maedchen und Maennern) und 28. Es handelt sich um Maedchen der Gemeinde, die sich mit einem Manne zu einer Hausgemeinschaft zusammengeschlossen haben, um in ihr in wirtschaftlicher Unabhaengigkeit das christlich-asketische Lebensideal zu verwirklichen. Die Deutung auf unverheiratete Toechter stoeszt auf schwer ueberwindbare philologische Hindernisse.⁶⁰

This word does not say "daughter," or "engaged" virgin.

When it is used of the Virgin Mary, St. Luke says

⁵⁷William F. Arndt and F. Wilbur Gingrich, A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1957), p. 118.

⁵⁸Exodus 20:26; Deut. 23:14; Rom. 1:27; 1 Cor. 12:23; Rev. 16:15.

⁵⁹Arndt-Gingrich, op. cit., p. 632.

⁶⁰Gerhard Kittel, Theologisches Woerterbuch zum Neuen Testament (Stuttgart: Verlag von W. Kohlhammer, n.d.), V, 835.

πρὸς παρθένον ἐμνηστευμένην. The phrase "his virgin," nevertheless, points to a relationship with some individual. The use of the word here suggests the interpretation of spiritual marriage rather than the other theories.

Another word, used only here in the New Testament, is ὑπέρ ακμος . It may apply either to the man or to the woman in our section. Applied to the woman, it means "past one's prime, past marriageable age, past the bloom of youth."⁶¹ So the Authorized Version translates. Luther tempered the meaning: "Weil sie eben wohl mannbar ist." Applied to the man, the prefix ὑπέρ- would not be understood in the temporal sense, but to express intensification: "with strong passions."⁶² So Goodspeed, Moffatt, and the Revised Standard Version translate. On this usage Moulton writes, "D. Smith (L. and L. of St. Paul, 268, n. 6) favors 'exceedingly lusty' rather than 'past the flower of youth,' and cites ὑπεράκμω = excell in youthful vigor (Athen 657D)."⁶³

Moffatt renders, "if his passions be strong." He believes this denotes the surge of sexual passion which some

⁶¹Arndt-Gingrich, op. cit., p. 847.

⁶²Ibid.

⁶³James Hope Moulton and Wilbert Francis Howard, A Grammar of New Testament Greek (Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1929), II, 352.

were able to control, while others felt they must yield to it, in spite of some original determination. Moffatt lists two good reasons why the translation "past the flower of her age" is wrong. First, there is no change of subject. The subject remains the same throughout the entire verse. It is the $\tau\epsilon\varsigma$ of the first clause. Second, there would be no point in marrying off a woman after she had reached a certain age of maturity. The full-blooded life of the man in this spiritual marriage was being dangerously stirred by the close associations of their life together.⁶⁴

The one word which has caused greatest divergence of opinion is $\gamma\alpha\mu\acute{\iota}\zeta\epsilon\upsilon$, as used in verse 38. Exegetes who insisted that this verb must be defined in a causative sense, because of $-\acute{\iota}\zeta\omega$, were led to adopt a corresponding interpretation. Moulton-Howard say,

The meaning of a verb in $-\acute{\iota}\zeta\omega$ often depends on the context. . . . We have the pairs, $\psi\sigma\tau\epsilon\epsilon\acute{\rho}\epsilon\omega$ - $\psi\sigma\tau\epsilon\epsilon\acute{\rho}\acute{\iota}\zeta\omega$; $\kappa\omicron\mu\epsilon\omega$ - $\kappa\omicron\mu\acute{\iota}\zeta\omega$ to remind us that this distinction (causative and transitive) is not invariably observed.⁶⁵

What renders the decision most difficult, is that the word is used only in the New Testament, and then only four times. Twice we find it in verse 38, and once in Matthew 24:38 and Mark 12:25. Lietzmann comments:

⁶⁴James Moffatt, The First Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians (New York: Harper and Bros., n.d.), pp. 99-100.

⁶⁵Moulton-Howard, op. cit., p. 409.

In der Tat ist die philologische Exaktheit, mit der versichert wird, $\gamma α μ ί ζ ε ι ν$ bedeute "verheiraten" und nicht "heiraten" nur eine scheinbare. . . . Bei schulmaesziger Korrektheit, ist ein Verbum auf $-ί ζ ω$ das neben sich eins auf $-ε ω$ hat, als Causativum zu behandeln.⁶⁶

Then he quotes the rule of Apollonius, as found also in

Arndt-Gingrich:⁶⁷

ἔστι γὰρ τὸ μὲν πρότερον [i.e. $\gamma α μ ῶ$]
 $\gamma α μ οῦ$ μετὰ λαμβάνω, τὸ δὲ $\gamma α μ ί ζ ω$ $\gamma α μ οῦ$
 τινὶ μετὰ δίδωμι

Lietzmann lists several exceptions. In addition to the two pairs in Moulton, he cites:

$\gamma ν ω ρ ί ζ ω$ ist zwar Causativ zu $\gamma \epsilon \gamma ν ῶ σ κ ω$, aber heisst doch recht oft "ich erfahre" (zum Beispiel Ph. 1, 22). Diese Erscheinung wird dadurch begreiflich, dass zahlreiche Verba auf $-ί ζ ω$ von Hause aus ja keine kausative, sondern intransitive Bedeutung haben:
 $\chi ρ ο ν ί ζ ω$, $\acute{o} ψ ί ζ ω$, $\acute{\epsilon} λ π ί ζ ω$, $\acute{\epsilon} ρ ί ζ ω$,
 $\acute{\upsilon} β ρ ί ζ ω$.⁶⁸

He refers to Wendland, who stated that the itacistic pronunciation of the aorist $\acute{\epsilon} γ ά μ η σ α$ sounds like

$\acute{\epsilon} γ ά μ ι σ α$.⁶⁹ He continues, "A. Debrunner erinnert mich an die Verba auf $-ί ζ ω$, die 'ein Fest feiern' bedeuten wie $\pi α ν ν υ χ ί ζ ω$ und andere: da koennte $\gamma α μ ί ζ ω$ recht gut--'hochzeit feiern' sein."⁷⁰ He therefore concludes, that

⁶⁶Hans Lietzmann, Handbuch Zum Neuen Testament, an die Korinther I-II (Tuebingen: Verlag von J. C. B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1949), pp. 35-36.

⁶⁷Arndt-Gingrich, op. cit., p. 150.

⁶⁸Lietzmann, op. cit., pp. 35-36.

⁶⁹Ibid.

⁷⁰Ibid.

it is possible for a writer as Paul to use the rare word $\gamma α μ ί ζ ω$ for $\gamma α μ έ ω$.

To change the sense of verses 36 and 37 because of strict observance of a rule regarding causative verbs is not good exegesis, especially since the use of verbs in $- ί ζ ω$ is so unpredictable. To translate, "he who marries his virgin does well, and he who does not marry shall do better" coincides with the obvious translation of $\gamma α μ ε ί τ ω τ α υ$ in verse 36, "let them marry," referring to the man and his virgin as subject.

The study of these four words leads to the definite conclusion, that this passage refers either to the engaged couple or to the spiritual marriage. To this writer, it seems to indicate spiritual marriage, because of the use of $\pi α ρ θ έ ν ο ς$ without qualification.

Evidence from Grammatical Construction

The construction of our text portion also lends credence to the spiritual marriage interpretation. The clearest way to understanding the entire section is to make the man involved in the spiritual marriage the subject. To alternate between the man and the virgin in verse 36, by making him subject of $\gamma ο μ ί ζ ε ι$, and the virgin the subject of $έ λ ν η υ π έ ρ α κ μ ο ς$, and then making the man subject of $ο υ χ έ μ α ρ τ ά ν ε ι$, would be violating the natural sense.

Evidence from Paul's View on Marriage

The "spiritual marriage" view is coherent with Paul's view on marriage. There is the eschatological influence upon his thought, quite apparent in the entire chapter of 1 Corinthians 7 and in 1 Thessalonians. We gain the idea that marriage belongs to the scheme of this world and that in the coming age there is no marriage, as in Mark 12. "We shall always be with the Lord," in 1 Thessalonians 4:16,17 means a lasting union with Him. As long as the world exists, we may continue living according to its pattern. Yet institutions of this life must not be taken more seriously than they deserve, for Christians adapt themselves to the truth that this world with its customs will pass away. The stress of the times, in the light of the $\pi\alpha\rho\omicron\upsilon\rho\acute{\iota}\alpha$, may have given rise to Paul's suggestion of remaining unmarried. This view would fit the situation of those who chose the "spiritual marriage" as an aid in keeping their virginity.

The other possibility of Paul's attitude in chapter 7 is to construe it as viewing celibacy as one of the charismatic gifts. Paul may well think of celibacy as a gift which permits those who have been blessed with it to do a service to the Lord. Paul does not establish an ascetic principle for all or hold up the ascetic ideal as one to which everyone should strive in his dedication to the Gospel.

He speaks clearly of marriage as a blessing of God and urges husbands and wives to live with each other in the Lord (1 Corinthians 7:2-5). Paul demonstrates also in 1 Corinthians 12 that gifts to Christians are all different. Life in the unmarried state may be more favorable because of the impending distress (v. 26). But for those who do not have this charismatic gift, "it is better to marry." This is further underscored by 1 Corinthians 7:1: "It is good for a man not to touch a woman" (μη ἄπτεσθαι). ἄπτω is the word often used for sexual intercourse.⁷¹ Paul also addresses himself to ascetic groups in Colossians 2:21, who had the regulation, "Touch not, taste not, handle not." Here the word for "touch not" is ἄψῃ, suggesting the possibility that this may have referred to the prohibition of marriage and the expression of sex. Paul places the whole problem in the context of the Gospel, warning against the "rudiments of the world," "ordinances," and the "doctrines of men."⁷³ In this light, we can see how Paul may have viewed the custom of spiritual marriage as a way of developing the charismatic gift of non-marriage.

⁷¹Arndt-Gingrich, op. cit., p. 102.

⁷²Colossians 2:20.

⁷³Colossians 2:22.

Argument of Naturalness

Which interpretation seems the most natural in the light of our discussion?

It would seem that the natural way of interpreting $\pi\alpha\rho\theta\acute{\epsilon}\nu\omicron\varsigma$ would be simply "virgin." No other meaning can be given without introducing a strained element.

The phrase $\tau\eta\rho\epsilon\acute{\iota}\nu\ \tau\grave{\eta}\nu\ \acute{\epsilon}\alpha\upsilon\tau\omicron\upsilon\ \pi\alpha\rho\theta\acute{\epsilon}\nu\omicron\nu$ fits more easily into the form of the $\tau\upsilon\nu\epsilon\acute{\iota}\sigma\alpha\kappa\tau\omicron\iota$ than for an engaged man to his betrothed. The problem of how a betrothed man keeps his virgin experiences difficulties. But the expression fits well the custom of keeping the virgin in the vow of spiritual marriage.

The Translation

Indeed, the evidence is not conclusive. The historical gap is great. The knowledge of the social milieu of New Testament times is limited. Yet the best choice, to this writer, seems to be the spiritual marriage, as reflected in the following translation:

But if any man thinks that he is acting improperly toward his virgin in his spiritual marriage, if his passions are strong and that is what ought to be done, let him do what he wants--let them be married; he is not sinning.

But the man who has firmly made up his mind, under no constraint of passion but with full self-control, and has decided in his own mind to keep his virgin in her present state, will be doing the right thing.

Thus the man who marries his virgin does well, and he who does not marry will do better.

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