

bounty. When her father tries to marry her off to Joseph, she protests that she will have only the Pharaoh's firstborn son for a husband, not some son of a Canaanite shepherd sold as a slave and with a reputation for sleeping with his mistress. Aseneth stages a rebellion against the system that would deprive her of the identity she has created for herself, quite apart from male interests. And she succeeds in her plan by converting to Judaism.

In *Joseph and Aseneth* the Jewish religion is pictured as one that offers women the following benefits: escape from being treated as mere objects of male lust; access to ineffable divine mysteries and revelations; transformation to immortality in a ritual reversal of Eve's eating the forbidden fruit; a public salvific role; and a new ability to speak to God and be heard by God, so as even to utter miracle-working prayers. Aseneth receives all these benefits because of her conversion. Aseneth's sexuality, however, remains intact. And the gains she makes are set within a patriarchal framework in which women have a subordinate, secondary status.

As the story unfolds, Aseneth is completely swept away by Joseph once she actually sees him in his physical beauty and royal glory. She now wants her father to give her to Joseph "for a maidservant and slave," claiming that she "will serve him for ever and ever" (6:8). She comes to greet Joseph with a kiss, but he, unlike all the other men, resists. He will not take her simply because she is beautiful and desirable. He will only take her when she worships the one true God. His lips will not touch the mouth that blesses dead and dumb idols (8:1-7). He sees Aseneth not as a sexual conquest but as a person with religious commitments that are to be taken seriously. We have to wait a whole week for the kiss while Aseneth repents by prayer and fasting in sackcloth and ashes.

After seven days Aseneth gets an angelic visitation (14:1-15:10). A man from heaven comes and assures her that her words of repentance have been heard and that she is from that day transformed to life incorruptible — and she will also get to marry Joseph. Furthermore, her new name is "City of Refuge" because, as the angel forecasts, "in you many nations will take refuge with the Lord God, the Most High, and under your wings many peoples trusting in the Lord God will be sheltered, and behind your walls will be guarded those who attach themselves to the Most High God in the name of Repentance" (15:7). And so Aseneth is not only herself made new, but she becomes a salvific figure: "in her" many others will experience the salvation of God.

At the conclusion of the book Aseneth fulfills this role toward her own would-be assassins in a dramatic display of mercy (chap. 28). The sons of Bilpah and Zilpah, who have joined in a plot to kill her, raise their swords against her. But Aseneth prays to God and their swords turn to ashes. They repent and plead for mercy, and she hears their request and hides them. Then she appeases the wrath of Simeon and his brothers against these traitors and insists that they should be pardoned and not shown evil for evil. Aseneth has, indeed, become a "City of Refuge" where the repentant find shelter and where the vicious circle of evil and vengeance is broken. Like Joseph, the savior of Egypt in time of famine, Aseneth also becomes a savior (cf. Kraemer, "Book of Aseneth," 881). And in all of this, as well as in the other parallels between Aseneth and either Joseph or Levi throughout the book, Aseneth is exalted as a woman (see Chesnut, "Revelatory Experiences," 112, 115).

Aseneth's ignorance as an idolater, which is thematized in the beginning of the book, is replaced by a supernatural knowledge of divine mysteries, which are revealed to her by an angel (chap. 16). For example, when a wonderful honeycomb miraculously turns up in her storeroom, she knows that it originates from the mouth of the angel. The angel then proclaims her "blessed," "because the ineffable mysteries of the Most High have been revealed to [her]" (16:14). The angel is the one who reveals these mysteries to her, and the revelation is portrayed dramatically: he "called her to himself, and stretched out his right hand, and grasped her head and shook her head with his right hand. And Aseneth was afraid of the man's hand, because sparks shot forth from his hand as from bubbling (melted) iron. And Aseneth looked, gazing with her eyes at the man's hand" (16:12-13). Later on Aseneth utters a miracle-working prayer that contrasts with her prayers as a repentant idolater, which she initially could not even say out loud and which she was not even sure God would hear. She is also privy to the revelations of "unspeakable [mysteries] of the Most High God" to Levi the prophet, who saw "letters written in heaven by the finger of God" and then passed on these mysteries to Aseneth in secret (22:13). Aseneth's new status as an enlightened mystic is thus sustained throughout the book.

The angel instructs Aseneth to eat from the honeycomb angelic food that is "[full of the] spirit of life" and that bestows immortality. He breaks off a piece, takes a bite, puts the rest in Aseneth's mouth, and tells her that she now partakes of immortality (16:7, 14-16). The scene apparently symbolizes an undoing of primal history, for it depicts a reversal of the story

about Eve's deception by the serpent, her giving to Adam of the forbidden fruit, his listening to the voice of his wife, and their both being banished from the Garden and the tree of life (cf. Kraemer, "Book of Aseneth," 880).

Aseneth, therefore, is the new Eve. She is a recipient of divine knowledge and a sharer in immortality. Genesis 3 no longer defines her status and role as a woman. Instead, her participation in a new, incorruptible life, as a result of repentance and as characterized by divine knowledge — here ritualized in the eating of the honeycomb — signals her new status and role. Ross Kraemer gives this portrait of woman an ironic twist by suggesting that in the longer text the "subliminal message is that paradise is restored when women are properly obedient to their husbands" ("Book of Aseneth," 881). But this interpretation depends on identifying the angel whom Aseneth obeys, with Joseph, which seems rather questionable.

When the angel beckons, "Come!," thousands of bees arise from the honeycomb and encircle Aseneth from head to foot. They make on her lips another honeycomb and eat from it. Swarming bees around a person can symbolize inspiration or eloquence, as in the case of Pindar, Plato, Ambrose, and others (cf. C. Burchard, "Joseph and Aseneth," in *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, vol. 2, ed. J. H. Charlesworth [Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1985] 230, note f2, [citing M. Philonenko and I. Opelt, though Burchard himself demurs]). If so here too, then Aseneth's reception of divine revelation is again depicted, though this time more symbolically, and she is portrayed as being divinely inspired. And when the angel tells the bees to go off, the ones that wanted to harm her fall to the ground and die, while the others fly away into heaven (16:17y-23) — a detail that may suggest a plurality of good and evil inspiring agents, Aseneth being protected from the evil ones.

As the plot develops it becomes clear that through Aseneth's conversion to Judaism and marriage to Joseph she has escaped the objectification by men that plagued her as a virgin. Yet throughout, she never has to deny her sexuality. She marries the one man who did not treat her as a sex object. She abandons the seclusion of her tower and enters into relationships with other men that are intimate, yet not eroticized. She is especially close to Joseph's brother Levi. At one point the story relates how Levi sat beside her and how she grasped his hand and "loved Levi exceedingly"; similarly, how he loved Aseneth "very much" (22:12-13; cf. 28:15). Their relationship seems to be characterized by the intimacy of fellow mystics, since it centers around Levi's sharing of divine mysteries with Aseneth.

Furthermore, the motif of Aseneth's escape from the sexual advances

of men dominates the whole second part of the book (chaps. 22–29), which tells the story of a failed plot by Pharaoh's son to kidnap her and make her his own. Pharaoh's son had been "cut to the heart" by Aseneth's beauty and was filled with jealousy by her marriage to Joseph. Levi, however, gets a supernatural revelation of the plot and orchestrates a counterattack. In the end, Pharaoh's son dies and Aseneth is forever freed from that threat.

Aseneth's conversion to Judaism, therefore, sets her free from the unwanted sexual advances of men. Likewise, it replaces her ignorance with divine knowledge, gives her a public role in the salvation of others, and transforms her from mortality to immortality as a new Eve.

For Paul, as for the author of *Joseph and Aseneth*, conversion and initiation had significant implications for the status and role of women. We need only look at Gal 3:27–28, which mirrors the baptismal tradition associated with Christian initiation, to see that Paul thought this was the case: "For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. . . . there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus." But neither for Paul nor for *Joseph and Aseneth* does initiation obliterate the difference between males and females — as life in the community of believers, as portrayed by both authors, indicates.

Just as Aseneth remains within the bounds of a traditional female identity by wearing her veil and marrying, so Paul expects the Corinthian women to "cover" their heads to signify their gender identity. He gives them the option, however, of marrying or remaining celibate — which is a possibility that does not emerge for Aseneth — and so departs significantly from assumptions about traditional female roles.

Two interrelated motifs appear in the description of Aseneth's and the Corinthian women's initiation into a new life, motifs that help to account for their new status and roles: (1) the presence of the divine Spirit, and (2) the revelation of divine mysteries or inspiration. The Corinthians' initiation is a baptism "by one Spirit" (1 Cor 12:13), from whom they receive gifts of inspiration. These gifts are identified as prophecy, which Paul describes as the knowledge of mysteries (1 Cor 13:2); tongues, which he characterizes as human and angelic (1 Cor 13:1); knowledge; revelation; interpretation; etc. (1 Cor 13:2; 14:26). These gifts of inspiration are apparently mediated by angels (cf. 1 Cor 11:10). Similarly, Aseneth at her initiation eats of the honeycomb "full of the spirit of life" and receives knowledge of "ineffable mysteries" from an angel. Bees, which may symbolize inspiration, come out of the honeycomb to

encircle her and land on her lips. Levi the prophet passes on his revelations to her in secret.

Thus both Paul and *Joseph and Aseneth* portray women initiates as pneumatics or enlightened mystics, in contrast to their former ignorance when they lacked the divine spirit. But whereas the Corinthian women are active prophets and pneumatics in their community (cf. 1 Cor 11:4-5, 10, 13), Aseneth herself does not become a prophet. Instead she develops a close relationship with Levi the prophet, who mediates his revelations to her privately. She has an elite status as a mystic, but she is clearly not the equal of the mystic Levi—a man, who stands between her and the Revealer.

Aseneth's experience of angelic inspiration may supply the background for Paul's enigmatic statement in 1 Cor 11:10, "the woman ought to have control over her head because of the angels." Aseneth experiences a violent shaking of her head when the angel puts his spark-shooting hand on her head, which presumably signifies the mediation of the ineffable mysteries to her. The psychological effect on Aseneth is emphasized: she is afraid and gazes at the man's hand. The scene thus portrays inspiration as accompanied by violent physical effects—in particular, to the head, the part of the body representing the person on whom the divine revelation comes—and as psychologically overwhelming. Against this background it becomes clear why Paul, in the context of women prophesying and praying under inspiration, can speak about the need for a woman to control her head. For the experience of inspiration could be so dramatic as to make one lose control over one's body and speech.

In 1 Cor 14:30-32 Paul expresses precisely such a concern—prophets who lose control under inspiration create such pandemonium that their hearers cannot understand what they are saying, and so are not instructed or encouraged by their prophecies. To deal with this situation, Paul says that the "spirits of prophets [i.e., the inspiring agents] are subject to prophets [i.e., to those being inspired]." The instruction in 11:10 apparently has a similar intent: a woman prophet ought to have control over her head because of the angels—that is, she must keep control under potentially violent angelic inspiration, lest her inspiration become merely a private experience rather than a means of directing the community. Whether Paul also thinks that such a woman is open to some harm through malevolent inspiring agents, as Aseneth was through malevolent "bees," is uncertain.

Corinthian women, it seems certain, had public roles as prophets and leaders in communal prayer. Though this is different from Aseneth's salvific

role as a "City of Refuge," it is comparable in its significance and effect for the Corinthian women's divinely inspired words had power to initiate the community spiritually. Paul describes the effect of glossolali prophecy in 1 Cor 14:22-25 in dramatic terms that compare with powerful effect of Aseneth's miracle-working prayer at the scene of rescue of the sons of Bilpah and Zilpah from death. An unbeliever comes into the Corinthians' assembly when all are prophesying, says will be convicted. The secrets of the unbeliever's heart will be revealed that one will fall down on his or her face and worship God, saying, "is among you." In other words, a Christian woman's prophecy can initiate the salvation of her hearers as well as the edification of other believers.

Just as men are the object of Aseneth's mercy and protection exercise of her new public role, so in the fellowship of Christians are dependent on women in their new roles as pneumatics. Paul makes point in 1 Cor 11:11: "Neither is woman without man nor is man without woman in the Lord." Being "in the Lord" creates a new interdependence between men and women. As the context suggests, it is an interdependence on spiritual gifts. The inspired prayer and prophecy of women are indispensable to men, and vice versa.

For this mutual interdependence in the Lord for spiritual life Paul finds an analogy in the mutual interdependence of men and women for their physical existence: "For just as the woman is from the man, so the man is through the woman" (11:12). Thus in both Paul and *Joseph Aseneth*, women play key roles in the public arena associated with salvation and spiritual good of others, including men. These roles are a result of their initiation, as well as the powers and expectations bestowed in conjunction with that initiation.

Like the author of *Joseph and Aseneth*, Paul defines a woman's status and roles against the backdrop of primal history. *Joseph Aseneth* retains the gender difference based on creation as male female—even while transcending it by portraying Aseneth as a new elevating her to the level of a mystic who has angelic inspiration delegating to her a salvific role comparable to Joseph's. The book, ever, appears to retain a gender hierarchy among mystics, for Aseneth continued access to divine mysteries is still only through the prophet Levi. Paul may appear to negate gender difference based on creation Gal 3:28: "there is no male and female." Yet interpreted in its context this statement only makes maleness and femaleness adiabporous—

are irrelevant for membership in the eschatological community — and does not declare them abolished.

Further, Paul does not set aside all of the implications arising from the difference between male and female, which is what some of the Corinthians seem to have been doing. In fact, Paul insists on expressing gender difference through distinct male and female headress (1 Cor 11:2-16), and he does so by appealing to creation in 1 Cor 11:7-9: "man is the image and glory of God; and woman is the glory of man"; "man is not from woman but woman from man"; and "man was not created for woman but woman for man." On the other hand, he does not insist on different roles for women and men *in the community's worship* on the basis of the difference between male and female, but implicitly approves both women's and men's praying and prophesying in the assembly. Thus both Paul and *Joseph and Aseneth* can be seen to be moving beyond an understanding of gender identity and roles based simply on created differences. We can attribute this development, in both cases, to the way in which the s/Spirit that brings immortality shapes a woman's new identity and empowers her for new roles.

In addition, Paul goes on to support a Christian woman's new identity and roles by developing fresh perspectives on women from creation itself — which betrays his concern to hold on to creation as a theological determinant of gender identity and roles in Christ. He argues from the created order that "the man is through the woman," as well as from the notion of God as creator that "all things are from God" (11:12), in order to support the statement that "man is not without woman in the Lord" (11:11). Taken as a reference to the "spiritual" dependence of men on women *pneumatics*, this verse essentially reverses the *exclusive* male/female gender hierarchy on the basis of Genesis 2 by pointing to a parallel female/male hierarchy in the body of Christ, which has its mundane analogy in creation (i.e., the priority of a woman to a man in procreation; for a more detailed argument on the interpretation of 1 Cor 11:2-16 given in this essay, see my "Gender and Creation in 1 Corinthians 11:2-16: A Study in Paul's Theological Method" in *Evangelium — Schriftauslegung — Kirche* [Essays in Honor of P. Stuhlmacher; ed. O. Hofius et al.; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1997] 152-71). Paul's novelty over against *Joseph and Aseneth* is in seeing a Christian woman's new identity in relation to men as *consistent with creation* read in the light of the new creation.

The foregoing discussion has reviewed three partly overlapping, partly

distinctive constructions of women and gender within Judaism, all of have a certain degree of Hellenistic influence. Sirach operates thoroughly patriarchal, at points misogynist, perspective. Philo's patriarchalism of Sirach, but merges it with Platonic categories produces the possibility of gender equality at the price of disembody and denial of sexuality and sexual difference. *Joseph and Aseneth* also within an overall patriarchal framework but, in contrast to Philo, co- a Jewish regard for the body and gender difference. Within this framework, *Aseneth* — and, by implication, other women who can attain impressive social gains and freedom from severe forms of oppression through patriarchy as a result of her transformation to new life through the power of the divine spirit. Paul's view of women and gender has in common with *Joseph and Aseneth*. But what is striking about the view in Paul's first letter to the Corinthians — that is, about those who out of a patriarchal mold and become by the inspiration of God? prophets and community leaders — is that not only are they indisposed in their roles, but they are also just ordinary, even nameless, women (necessarily) exceptional virgins or individuals like *Aseneth*.

4. The Implications of Paul's Conversion for His View of Women and Gender

Did Paul change his mind on women and gender as a result of his experience on the road to Damascus? From our brief sampling of Jewish authors have seen that a variety of views were current in various strands of Judaism in Paul's day. Furthermore, it is difficult to know exactly what would have believed before his conversion, since we have only his Corinthian writings, in which no direct statements on his pre-conversion views of women appear. Some inferences, however, may be drawn, though somewhat guardedly.

That there is some commonality as well as difference between Christian views and those of his non-Christian Jewish contemporaries is apparent. The commonality and difference apply both to the more patriarchal and to the more egalitarian features of his thought. So Paul does not to be entirely unique in a first-century Jewish setting, especially Diaspora. Nevertheless, Paul develops specifically Christian grounds views, and that is what we must draw attention to in conclusion.

Paul's ideal of one humanity without gender discrimination (Gal 3:28) is grounded in the reality of incorporation into Christ by faith, but this is not understood to entail a rejection of the body that bears the marks of gender difference. A believer's new identity in Christ does not erase maleness or femaleness, which Paul's Jewish heritage taught him to value. Rather, it is as either women or men — not as beings beyond sex and gender — that Christians live out their new lives. And the lives of believers in Christ are characterized by the gifts of the Spirit of Christ, who does not discriminate according to gender.

In Paul's day, of course, Christians lived out their lives under the conditions of patriarchy. And we find Paul himself *advocating* certain patriarchal forms of expressing the distinction between male and female. Yet he also has specifically Christian reasons for doing so. In his view, Christians had to live "in the world," and they had a mission to that world which was dominated by a patriarchal culture. Christian presence and mission within such a world, therefore, necessarily took on certain of its patriarchal characteristics, including a degree of inequality between men and women. We probably ought not, however, to speak of "accommodation" to patriarchy, as if Paul could have completely abstracted from his socio-cultural context and distinguished between what the gospel implies about gender identity and roles, and what the cultural situation demands.

It would be unjustified, therefore, to portray Paul at his conversion as having experienced a radical transformation from patriarchalism to egalitarianism. Nevertheless, it is also clear that the gospel was central in his thinking about women and gender. It is precisely because of Paul's understanding of what it means to be "in Christ" and a part of "the body of Christ" that he can burst out of a patriarchal framework — at points quite dramatically — without resorting to a denial of the body. This novelty was also possible within a Hellenistic Jewish framework, as we observed in *Joseph and Aseneth*; that is, it does not necessarily depend on specifically Christian beliefs.

Whatever his beliefs before conversion, however, it is clear that Paul's Christian beliefs played a key role in his theologizing about gender after Damascus. His letters, in fact, suggest that those beliefs were formed communally with women and men who shared his faith in Christ. More precisely, his letters show that his Christian beliefs about women and gender were formed in interaction with these women and men in common reflection on the central events in the Christian life: baptism and corporate worship, which was rich in *pneumatika*, or spiritual gifts, especially inspired speech.

Though the task of this essay was not to reflect on the implicit of Paul's views on women and gender for Christians today, it is appropriate to note here that his views are both culturally determined and grow in the common gospel faith that Christians of all cultures share and work of God's Spirit in God's people. This points to the need for contemporary Christian reflection on a culturally appropriate, as well as gender and Spirit-oriented, theology of gender.

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Paul's Conversion and His Ethic of Freedom in Galatians

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HOW does one determine the impact of Paul's conversion on his ethic? One clue can be found in tracing the thread of his references in Galatians to God's gracious *call*. The first reference to God's call points to the version of the Galatian Christians: "I am amazed that you are so quickly deserting the one who *called* you by the grace of Christ" (1:6). The second discloses Paul's own experience: "He *called* me though his grace" (1:15). The third introduces Paul's ethical appeal: "You were *called* to free brothers and sisters" (5:13).

These three references to the call of God cast considerable light on both the nature of Paul's conversion and the basis of his ethics. For the in which Paul parallels his own call by grace (1:15) with the Galatians' experience of God's call by grace (1:6) indicates what he means by the term "call" in both cases. Certainly in the case of the Galatian Christians, God's call was the effective cause of their conversion. And use of "call" in 1:6 is consonant with Paul's use of the term elsewhere in his letters to refer to God's initiative in the salvation process (cf. Rom 1 Cor 1:9; 1 Thess 4:7). Likewise, Paul's rebuke of the Galatians for desertion from the call of God leads to his account of his own loyal God's call (1:15).

In Galatians, of course, Paul explicitly says that when God called him he was summoned to a new career as an apostle to the Gentiles (1:16). Paul's experience of God's call cannot adequately be described as an