

GLUTTONY AND IMMORALITY AT ÉLITIST BANQUETS

The background to 1 Corinthians 6:12–20

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Brothels and not banquets are what commentators have normally assumed to be the background of 1 Cor. 6:12–20.¹ For example, Gordon Fee concludes that this section is about ‘On going to the Prostitutes’ and reconstructs the situation as follows.

Apparently, some men within the Christian community are going to prostitutes and are arguing for the right to do so. Being people of the Spirit, they imply, has moved them to a higher plane, the realm of the spirit, where they are unaffected by behaviour that has merely to do with the body.²

¹ Others have sought to argue that the aphoristic saying ‘All things are lawful to me’ is really a Pauline statement but misapplied by the Corinthians. I find that not particularly plausible. Paul normally cites ‘traditions’ and corrects any misunderstanding, 5:9–11. His previous discussion on who would be excluded from the kingdom in 6:9 makes the suggestion, that any gospel liberty and libertarianism could be connected, unlikely. Furthermore, Paul had already written to the Corinthians ‘to have no relationships with immoral people’, 5:9. They had misunderstood the application of that letter but it would have been clear by implication that Christians certainly could not engage in immoral conduct and, as Paul explains, they were not to keep company with Christians who were immoral or covetous etc., 5:11.

² G. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 250–51. See also T. Paige, *The Spirit at Corinth* (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Sheffield, 1993), 175, ‘This section of the letter is directed against the problem of believers having concourse with prostitutes, and not with sexual immorality in general’ as he begins his search for elements common to Greco–Roman Hellenism in this period.

Because Fee sees that Paul's argument is against the Corinthians' view of the human body and sexual immorality, he accounts for the abrupt change of direction in vv. 13–4 (where the topic of food and the stomach is introduced) by stating that 'the matter of food therefore is not the issue here at all; rather, it is intended to set up the issue of the body and sexual immorality.'³ Corinth and prostitution are almost synonymous for commentators, as indeed they were in the Greek period in the East. A verb that could be used in Greek for 'I practice fornication' was literally 'I corinthianize' (κορινθιάζομαι)⁴ and the plays of Philetaerus and Poliochus carrying the title 'The Whoremonger' (ὁ Κορινθιαστής)⁵ also fuel the perception of proverbial sexual promiscuity paid for by Corinthians. What tends not to be noticed is that this evidence belongs to Greek Corinth and not to Roman Corinth.

Corinthian sexual notoriety has also been based on a mistaken view that the outrageous religious promiscuity of 1,000 religious prostitutes of Aphrodite related to Roman Corinth. Strabo's comments make it clear that he is talking about Greek Corinth which was destroyed in 146 BC and not Roman Corinth—as temple prostitution was not a Greek phenomenon the veracity of his comments on this point has rightly been questioned.⁶ The second century AD writer, Athenaeus, also confirms that they were in Greek Corinth.⁷ The small Roman temple of Aphrodite on the Acrocorinth rules out that temple as the place for prostitution. Furthermore, by the first century Aphrodite had become Venus, the venerated mother of the imperial family, and the highly respected patroness of Roman Corinth. One can understand why commentators have assumed that some Christians thought nothing of visiting prostitutes for sexual pleasure given that it was after all the city of Corinth.

³ Fee, *First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 253–54.

⁴ Aristophanes, *Fragments*, 354.

⁵ Philetaerus, 13.559a and Poliochus, 7.31.3c, playwrights from the fourth century BC. See Plato, *The Republic*, 404d for 'a Corinthian girl' = a prostitute.

⁶ Strabo, *Geography*, 8:6.20c. Strabo passed through Corinth in 44 BC, the year in which it was founded as a Roman colony and visited it again in 29 BC. For a discussion see J. Murphy O'Connor, *St. Paul's Corinth* (Wilmington: M. Glazier, 1983), 55–56.

⁷ Athenaeus, *Deipnosophists*, 13. 573c–574e.

It should be noted that the text of 1 Cor. 6:12–20 does not state that Christians actually went to brothels but that they were having sexual intercourse with prostitutes.⁸ It will be argued here that the background to 1 Cor. 6:12–20 is banqueting and that the élitist's self-justification for the notorious conduct by the Corinthian Christians—'all things are permitted'—concerned what has been termed the 'intimate and unholy trinity' of eating and drinking and sexual immorality.⁹ For grand civic dinners such as the series of banquets given by the President of the Isthmian Games for the citizens of Roman Corinth, travelling groups of prostitutes could be brought in by the host to cater for the sexual appetites of the large numbers of guests at the dinners themselves.¹⁰ First-century private banquets were often marked by gluttony and drunkenness and the promiscuous activities called 'after-dinners' which were laid on by the host using hired courtesans. The élite who gave private banquets to which they invited clients as well as other guests would provide not only for their physical hunger but also for the sexual gratification of their guests. The service of the prostitutes were provided at the actual banquets: the guests did not go to them in the Corinthian brothels. This was an accepted and agreeable part of the élites' social life not only in Corinth but in the Roman empire generally.¹¹

It is being suggested that the private banquet was the setting for 1 Cor. 6:12–20 and that the participants would have included young, unmarried men who were seen to have come of age with the wearing of the *toga virilis*. This sort of conduct was 'permitted' for those who had reached 'manhood'. In order to explore this it is proposed to examine (1) the origins of the aphoristic phrase 'all things are permitted' which

⁸ The term πόρνη 'prostitute' which was used of the professional engaged in 'casual' sex. For discussion see D. Montserrat, *Sex and Society in Graeco-Roman Egypt* (London: Kegan Paul, 1996), 107–8.

⁹ Citing A. Booth, 'The Age for Reclining and its Attendant Perils' in ed. W.J. Slater, *Dining in a Classical Context* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 1991), 105. Dio Chrysostom, *Or. 77/78*, 28, 30.

¹⁰ Dio Chrysostom, *Or. 77/78.4*. For a discussion of this see my *Seek the Welfare of the City: Early Christian as Benefactor and Citizens* (Grand Rapids and Carlisle: Eerdmans and Paternoster, 1994), 174.

¹¹ Booth, 'The Age for Reclining and its Attendant Perils,' 105–20.

gives some indications of the social strata of those who used it, (2) the evidence for the unholy trinity of gluttony, drunkenness and sexual indulgence, and (3) the ethical standards of the young élite and 1 Cor. 6:12–20.

‘All Things Are Permitted’

It would seem that there was a long-established convention in the ancient world for people of status and power to base their actions on the fact that ‘all things are permitted’. Polybius (200–118 BC) writes of the privileges of a Roman citizen in Carthage—‘He may do and sell anything that is permitted for a citizen’ (πάντα καὶ ποιείτω καὶ πωλείτω ὅσα καὶ τῷ πολίτῃ ἔξεστιν), *Hist.*, 3.24, 12. Dio Chrysostom writing at the end of first century AD, says that the good ruler is one ‘who needs more steadfast control than he to whom all things are permitted’ (τίτι δὲ σωφροσύνης ἐγκρατεστέρας ἢ πάντα ἔξεστιν) *Or.* 3.10. This contrasts with those rulers who misuse their unlimited power to do as they wish—‘they are permitted to do anything’ (ἔξεστι πάντα ποιεῖν) 62.2. Xenophon (428–354 BC) had written long before this of the ruler who used one of the four cardinal civic virtues *viz.* ‘self-control’ (σωφροσύνη).

By making his own self-control an example, he disposed all to practise that virtue more diligently. For when the weaker members of society see that one who is permitted to indulge in excess (ᾧ μάλιστα ἔξεστιν ὑβρίζειν) is still under self-control, they naturally strive all the more not to be found guilty of any excessive indulgence, *Cyr.* 8.30.

It was asserted by Dio Chrysostom’s interlocutor ‘that whoever is permitted to do whatever he wishes is a free man, and that whoever is not is a slave’ (ὅτω μὲν ἔξεστιν ὁ βούλεται πράττειν, ἐλεύθερός ἐστιν, ὅτω δὲ μὴ ἔχεστιν, δοῦλος) *Or.* 14.13. Dio argues against this view that ‘men in general are not permitted to do what they wish in part’ (οὐ τοίνυν οὐδὲ τοῖς ἄλλοις ἔχεστιν ἃ ἐθέλουσι ποιεῖν) and if they violate the established law, they will be punished, *Or.* 14.13. However by implication, the free man and the élite in power do not have the restraints of those without social status. They can live by the maxim ‘all things are permitted’.

Dio seeks to rectify this when he discusses intemperance, and its antonym, ‘prudence’ (φρόνησις)—

it is not permitted to do mean and unseemly and unprofitable things, but the things that are just and profitable and good we must say that it is both proper and permissible to do (ὄτι προσήκει τε καὶ ἔξεστιν) *Or.* 14.16.

For Dio it is not the powerful or the well-born but ‘the wise persons’ (οἱ φρόνιμοι), i.e. the person exhibiting the cardinal civic virtue of prudence in government, φρόνησις: ‘...the wise are permitted to do anything whatsoever they wish (οἱ φρόνιμοι ὅσα βούλονται πράττειν, ἔξεστιν αὐτοῖς), while the foolish attempt to do what they wish although it is not permissible (οὐκ ἔξόν)’.

He argues that it follows of necessity that while the wise are free and are allowed to act as they wish, the ignorant are slaves and do that which is not permitted for them *Or.* 14.17. As a result he draws a conclusion in his first oration on ‘Slavery and freedom’ that ‘We are forced to define freedom as the knowledge of what is permitted and what is not’ (ὧν τε ἔξεστι καὶ ὧν μή) *Or.* 14:18. While philosophically he is arguing about the nature of freedom, what is striking is the fact that the persons who make this statement, or those to whom they are applied in daily life, were all people of status.

Lists of aphoristic sayings were propagated across the Hellenistic world and were placed so that they were visible to all. However, they contain no examples of the statement in 1 Cor. 6:12, 10:23. Aphorisms such as ‘look after your own things’ (τὰ ἴδια φύλασσε), ‘look after yourself’ or ‘do good to yourself’ (σεαυτὸν εὖ ποίει) and ‘look for advantage’ (τὸ συμφέρον θηρῶ) provide interesting examples of somewhat self-centred ethical imperatives which had common acceptance in the ancient world.¹² The closest we come in the sayings in 1 Cor. 6:12 is ‘do good to yourself’ but it by no means matches the forcefulness of the statement ‘everything is permitted’.

The literary evidence cited in the previous paragraphs shows that it was the prerogative of those who possessed power who could afford to live by that maxim with relative impunity, whether they were privileged citizens or rulers. It was not the prerogative of ordinary inhabitants of a city.

¹² E. A. Judge, *Ancient Beginnings of the Modern World: Documents Illustrating the Final Lecture* (Sydney: Clarendon Printing, 1993), 4-7, citing Sosiades, 33, 96, 110.

Gluttony, Drunkenness and Sexual Indulgence

Plutarch in his 'Advice about keeping well' discusses some of the hazards the élite faced at feasts. There was the problem of social or civic obligations and 'the need to guard against excess in eating and drinking and against all self-indulgence especially when festivals and visits from friends are at hand', 123E. He also extrapolates on the problems of 'unavoidable social engagement' created 'in the midst of company and good cheer' associated with entertaining kings and high officials. Plutarch's suggestions as to how one might refrain from over indulgence at such feasts by means of some subterfuge so as not to cause offence, indicates the enormous social pressure to participate in eating and drinking at banquets, even when one 'is overloaded and in no condition to take part', 123F.

Apart from the pressure of social and civic obligations, there was the issue of unbridled gluttony. In his discussion on 'Virtue and Vice' Plutarch notes that 'at dinner (vice is) an expensive companion owing to gluttony, 466B. In 'The Eating of Flesh' he says that 'it is not so much our belly that drives to us to the pollution of slaughter;¹³ it is itself polluted by our incontinence.'¹⁴ He says we should eat flesh because of hunger, but it was being done 'not for nourishment or need or necessity, but out of satiety and insolence and luxury', 996E–997A. Those who engaged in such indulgence were 'living the soft life' (ἀβριδίατοι ἦσαν) 225F. He discusses how one might avoid 'adding fire to fire, as the proverb has it, and gorging to gorging (μὴ πῦρ ἐπὶ πυρὶ ὡς φασὶ πλεσιμονή τις ἐπὶ εἰα πλεσιμονῆ), and strong drink to strong drink', 123F.

Other evidence from Plutarch's *Moralia* also shows that gluttony and sexual indulgence at dinners could be equated.

just as with women who are insatiable in seeking pleasure, their lust tries everything, go astray, and explore the gamut of profligacy until at last it ends in unspeakable practices; so intemperance in eating passes beyond the necessary ends of nature.... For it is in their own company that organs of sense are infected and won over and become licentious when they do not keep to

¹³ He is discussing the terrible cruelty animals suffered while being slaughtered for banquets in the belief that they could made more tender to eat.

¹⁴ Athenaeus, *Deipnosophistae* III, 97, 'You glutton, whose god is your belly, and with no whit for anything else.'

natural standards.... From this our luxury and debauchery conceives a desire for shameful caresses and effeminate titillations, 997B.

Is there any difference for a man who employs aphrodisiacs to stir and excite licentiousness for the purpose of pleasure, or one who stimulates his taste by odours and sauces? Plutarch asks elsewhere, *Moralia* 126B. He also notes that ‘intemperate intercourse follows a lawless meal, inharmonious music follows a shameless debauch’, 997C. Gowers has shown in Roman literature ‘the common links between the two sensual pleasures of eating and sex’ and how ‘forms of greed, avaricious and sexual, are often expressed in terms of gluttony’.¹⁵

The nexus between insatiable greed, unrestrained drinking and immorality is reflected in the well-attested saying ‘in well-gorged bodies love (or passion) resides’ (ἐν πλησμοναί Κυπρί) which Plutarch cited elsewhere ‘In surfeit love is found’, *Moralia*, 126C, 917B.¹⁶ The saying is also found in Aristotle, *Prob.* 896A where mating habits of animals are discussed. There he notes that man does this ‘any time’ and also says ‘For sexual appetite accompanies satiety’ (ἐν πλησμονῇ γὰρ Κύπρις).

Athenaeus makes the interesting addition to the stock saying ‘For love dwells where plenty is’, when he says of those who are poor ‘but among those who are hard up Aphrodite will not stay’, *Deip.* 1.28F. Elsewhere he observes that ‘For in a empty belly no love of the beautiful can reside, since Cypris is a cruel goddess to them that hunger...’ and then goes on to cite Euripides ‘For love dwells where there is surfeit, but in a hungry man, no!’ (πλησμονῇ τοι Κύπρις ἐν πεινῶντι δ’ οὐ) *Deip.* 463E.¹⁷ The identical citation is also found twice in Menander of the fourth century BC, and it is boldly declared that ‘love is at its greatest power where surfeit is’ (ἐν πλησμονῇ μέγιστον ἡ Κύπρις κράτος).¹⁸ It is possible that by the early empire ‘but in a hungry man,

¹⁵ E. Gowers, *The Loaded Table: Representations of Food in Roman Literature* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), 101, 200, n. 319.

¹⁶ Cypris was a name for Aphrodite, from the island of Cyprus and became an appellation for love or passion. Cited elsewhere cf. A. Nauck, *Tragicorum Graecorum Fragmenta* (Hildersheim: Olms, 1964), Euripides 895.

¹⁷ By contrast Philo, *Vit.* 56 says ‘one may well pray for what men most pray to escape, hunger and thirst, rather than for the lavish profusion of food and drink found in festivities of this kind.’

¹⁸ A. Meineke, *Fragmenta Comidarum Graecorum* (Berlin, De Gruyter, 1970), 4.23, and

no!’ had become a well-known addition to the stock saying. A well-gorged body and not a hungry one went hand in hand with sexual licence.¹⁹ The context for these sayings was the banquet which wealthy guests attended, and the pejorative comments about the hungry unashamedly asserted by the former shows that the non-élite were simply not part of that scene.

Philo of Alexandria records that special tables were reserved for ‘the drinking bouts which followed as part of but not the only event in “the after-dinners” as they call them (τὰς λεγομένας ἐπιδειπνίδας)’, *Vit.* 54. Athenaeus in a second century AD work, *Deipnosophists* (‘The Learned at Banquet’) which is fourteen volumes of extended ‘table-talk’ with a Roman knight, devotes a whole book to the role of women in relation to the banqueting occasions. It shows that the real purpose of their presence at the meal was primarily for ‘the after-dinners’. The presence of prostitutes whose task was not only to adorn the banquet but also to provide entertainment afterwards is widely attested in this volume of his work which alone carries any title—‘Concerning Women.’²⁰

While there had been a long history of eating and drinking and immorality at dinners in the East of the empire, Philo notes that the first century had change in ‘the method of banqueting now prevalent everywhere through hankering for the Italian expensiveness and luxury’, *Vit.* 48. He refers to the extravagant dress which aimed ‘to give pleasure to the eyes of the beholders’, but which only heightened the anticipation of sexual indulgence that would follow, *Vit.* 50, 57. There are grounds for seeing the Corinthian banquets as the possible *Sitz in Leben* for 1 Cor. 6:12–20 because the ‘Italian’ conventions would certainly not be absent from the Roman colony of Corinth.

Élitist Ethics and 1 Corinthians 6:12–20

It is being suggested that the catch-cry in 6:20 ‘All things are permitted for me’ was that used by the élite. To many scholars the latter finding would immediately rule out the possibility that Corinthian Christians could be involved as they have been perceived to be among

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¹⁹ Cf. ‘the portly’ (ὕγιεῖνοι) which is the term reported by Philo, *Det.* 34.

²⁰ Athenaeus, *Deipnosophists*, 13.571f on their conduct at an actual banquet.

‘the poor’ or, what has been suggested was, ‘the middle class’. It has been argued elsewhere that the former term can be misleading as an adequate description of the social structures of a Roman colony, as indeed is the latter. There were some in the church whose social register indicates that they were among the élite.²¹

The Corinthian Christians who argued that everything was permitted for them could rationalise the exercising of their privileges on the grounds of first century Platonic anthropology and philosophical Hedonism.²² An outline of such an argument is preserved where the body is said to have been ordained for pleasure and that the immortal soul was unaffected by any such conduct. In fact, the enjoyment of life was what ‘nature’ intended, bearing in mind that view that ‘nature’ was seen in the ancient world to determine custom or convention. Gluttony could be justified because ‘food is for the belly and the belly is for food’ and by implication ‘the body is for sex and sex is for the body’ (τὸ σῶμα τῇ πορνείᾳ καὶ ἡ πορνεία τῷ σώματι). The self-centred aphorism they argued is brought out by the emphatic place of the personal pronoun in the sentence πάντα μοι ἔξεστιν and best translated ‘For me everything is permitted’.

Dio Chrysostom responded to this form of argument which the élitist espoused with a rhetorical question ‘Who needs more steadfast control than he to whom all things are permitted?’ (τίνι δὲ σωφροσύνης ἐγκρατεστέρᾳ ἢ πάντα ἔξεστιν) *Or.* 62.3. The aphoristic saying at the end of Dio’s sentence is that which was also used by some of Corinthian Christians in 6:12 to justify their conduct.

While Dio argued for the cardinal virtue of ‘self-control’, *Or.* 62.3, Paul put forward different objections. His arguments are preceded by the bridging section of 6:9–10 where he lists those who will be excluded from the kingdom of God by reasons of their lifestyle and cites ‘fornicators’ (πόρνοι), ‘adulterers’ (μοιχοί) ‘effeminate’ (μαλακοί)

²¹ Meeks, *The First Urban Christians: The Social World of the Apostle Paul* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1983), 73 where he sees the ‘typical’ Corinthian Christian as ‘a free artisan and small trader’. For a response to that and the use of terms ‘rich’ and ‘poor’ in A. J. Mitchell, ‘Rich and Poor in the Courts of Corinth: Litigiousness and Status in 1 Corinthians 6:1–11,’ *NTS* 39 (1993), 562–86, see my ‘Civil Litigation in Secular Corinth and the Church,’ in B. S. Rosner (ed.), *Understanding Paul’s Ethics: Twentieth Century Approaches* (Grand Rapids and Carlisle: Eerdmans and Paternoster, 1995), 101–3, on the social register of the Corinthian Christians.

²² See Philo, *Det.* 32–34.

and ‘homosexuals’ (ἀρσενοκοῖται) and also includes ‘drunkards’ (μέθυσοι) 6:9–10 cf. 5.11. He indicates that ‘such were some of you’ but you were washed, sanctified and justified. Paul’s subsequent discussion explicates why gluttony often epitomised by drunkenness at banquets followed by immorality were proscribed for Christians whose status and lifestyle represents a break with their past vices by reason of the work of God in Christ.

Who in Corinth could make the affirmation ‘All things are permitted to me’? It would certainly not be the prerogative of those without status. Was there a time in the lives of those who possessed status in Roman Corinth when they saw themselves free from constraints? We know that those who received the Roman *toga virilis* around their eighteenth year were seen to have reached ‘the age for reclining’ at banquets and were also exposed to ‘its attendant perils.’²³ Booth refers to ‘conventions concerning the age at which license freely to participate in the *symposium* and *convivium*, license to accept invitations there to recline.’²⁴ It was acknowledged the donning of the *toga virilis* was seen as the most important ritual as a symbol of adulthood and the assuming of responsibility. Writers saw in this important milestone of receiving that toga persistent dangers for young men.²⁵ Tacitus, for example, said ‘the elegant banquet...along with the use of the toga...are the enticements of Romanization, to vice and servitude, Ag. 21. Nicolaus of Damacus in his life of Augustus records that at that age he was not ‘to be in attendance with the young men as they get drunk, nor to remain at drinking parties past evening, nor to have dinner...[and he] abstained from sex just at the time when young men are particularly sexually active’, 36. In Athens when ‘the new adult, aged eighteen, usually acquired the right to accept invitations to recline...he was considered sufficiently mature to cope with sexual advances.’²⁶ Xenophon says “Hercules has reached the *ephebic* age (equivalent to that of receiving *toga virilis*) and he has the freedom of choice, and must select ‘between

²³ Booth, ‘The Age for Reclining and its Attendant Perils.’

²⁴ Booth, ‘The Age for Reclining and its Attendant Perils,’ 107.

²⁵ Booth, ‘The Age for Reclining and its Attendant Perils,’ 107 and T. Wiedemann, *Adults and Children in the Roman Empire* (London: Routledge, 1989), 91.

²⁶ Booth, ‘The Age for Reclining and its Attendant Perils,’ 117.

the joys of eating, drinking, and lovemaking...and edifying toil',” *Mem.* 2.1.21.

The problem which confronts Paul could well relate to young men reaching the age of reclining when promiscuity was theirs by choice and convention. The accusation he brings against them is that they are committing ‘fornication’, 6:13. He states that those who commit a sexual act with a prostitute thereby create a ‘one flesh’ relationship and cites Genesis 2:24 and not, as one would expect, the appropriate charge of adultery where the ‘one flesh’ relationship of the married persons is broken, 6:15–16. The injunction, then, is not to flee ‘adultery’—he has already drawn a distinction between fornicators and adulterers in 6:9—but to flee fornication.²⁷ Furthermore, the action is not described as adultery i.e. a sin against his wife, but as ‘a sin against his own body’, 6:18.²⁸

He also may be indicating, as did other writers, that while youths themselves maintained that there were no restraints on them as their manhood was now formally recognised, they had to be warned of the persistent dangers into which they could fall. ‘Assumption of the *toga virilis* was on the one hand recognised to bestow freedom to recline [at dinner], and on the other to render desirable some restraint and guidance.’²⁹ Juvenal, *Satire* 14, 7–10 observes how a youth can learn the sin of gluttony from his father. The Roman *convivium* fostered ‘a degree of decadence associated not only with the pleasures of the palate but also of the pillow.’³⁰ Seneca the Younger expressed his concern that the luxurious banquet and immorality were ‘symptoms and causes of decadence in the young’, *Ep.* 95.24. Persius recalled the choices in sexual experimentation on assuming of the *toga virilis* —‘At the age when the path of life is doubtful, and wanderings, ignorant of life, parted my trembling soul into the branching of cross-ways’, 5.34–44.

²⁷ For a discussion of OT allusions which are the basis of Paul’s reply see B. S. Rosner, ‘Joseph and Paul fleeing immorality,’ *Paul, Scripture and Ethics: A Study of 1 Corinthians 5–7* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1994), ch. 5. A clear distinction needs to be drawn between the possible sources of the ‘theological’ background of Paul and the ‘foreground’ i.e. the problem and its background in Corinth.

²⁸ See B. N. Fisk, ‘ΠΙΟΠΝΕΥΕΙΝ as Body Violation: The Unique Nature of Sexual Sin in 1 Corinthians 6.18,’ *NTS* 42.4 (Oct., 1996), 540–58, for an excellent discussion of Paul’s argument on this point.

²⁹ Booth, ‘The Age for Reclining and its Attendant Perils,’ 108.

³⁰ Booth, ‘The Age for Reclining and its Attendant Perils,’ 106.

Cicero was to write in *Pro Caelio* 20.48 of those who argued against the view ‘it is permitted’ (λιχίτυμ εστ):

If there is anyone who thinks that youth should be forbidden affairs even with courtesans, he is doubtless eminently austere, but his view is contrary not only to the licence of this age, but also to the custom and concessions of our ancestors. For when was this not a common practice? When was it blamed? When was it forbidden? When, in fact, was it that what is allowed was not allowed? (θυοδ λιχετ, νον λιχερετ)

The strong adversative ‘but’ used on both occasions in 6:12 was Paul’s way of putting the case against highly–argumentative youth and giving clear warnings against choosing the path of gluttony, drunkenness and whoring that epitomised conduct at banquets attended by young men who had gained the freedom of adulthood. If Christian youths affirmed that they had come of age and all was now permitted, Paul countered with a statement that not everything was beneficial (συμφέρετ), i.e. actually secured their welfare as Christians. Fornication was one of the grounds of exclusion from the kingdom, as was drunkenness 1 Cor. 6:9–10.

Philostratus records of Isaeus that in his early youth he was ‘the slave of eating and drinking...[and] was often in love’ *Lives of the Sophists* 513. Again, Paul warns, in the face of the affirmation by some Christians that everything is permitted, of the addictive power of living on the basis of their aphorism. Therefore, he asserts, as a personal choice he himself will not be enslaved by anything, 6:12b. The linguistic relationship alluded to by Liddel and Scott between ‘it is permitted’, ἔξεστιν and the passive form of ἐξουσιάζω ‘I am brought under the power’ may be overlooked in this verse when seeking to understand Paul’s response.³¹ He has obviously framed it in order to counter their aphorism and not in any way to qualify it.

One of the sense perceptions referred to in Philo’s summary of the justification of ‘riotous living’ of the élite in Alexandria was the appetite, *Det.* 32–34. These Christian men may well be affirming their right to gorge themselves at banquets. Paul in response to their aphorism that food was destined for the stomach and the stomach was created for food and therefore gluttony was acceptable, countered with the truth that God will destroy both the stomach and food, 6:13. It will be

³¹ The noun ἐξουσία and ἔξεστιν in 1 Cor. 8:9 and 10:23 is also overlooked.

remembered in Philo that the opponents of the so-called lovers of virtue contrasted the ascetic and pathetic existence of the latter with their well-fed state, having noted that at death sense perceptions ceased, *Det.* 33.

The justification of youth that nature had created the body with its sexual drive and therefore they were meant to enjoy it, was certainly the testimony of those who attended the Roman *convivium*. If the aphorism of some was that the body is for sex, Paul responded by introducing the central theological theme that the body was meant 'for the Lord' and 'the Lord was meant for the body'. He concluded with the command that the Christian men of Corinth were not justified in asserting their self-centred aphorism for 'they were not their own' and therefore they must glorify the Lord in their bodies, 1 Cor. 6:19–20. Under no circumstances were they to engage in fornication with prostitutes which, we have noted, was part of 'the after dinners'. The interesting feature about the Christian men involved was that they defended their conduct by repeating the secular aphorisms of the élite, and were apparently in the position to replicate the life-style of such young Corinthians by attending banquets.

The above discussion is important for two reasons. Firstly, it establishes the social context for 1 Cor. 6:12–20 where gluttony and fornication occurred together. Secondly, the aphoristic saying used to justify conduct has been shown to be that of the élite and is a further indicator of the social status of some of the Corinthian Christians. In stating this, it is not being affirmed that all the Christians from that colony were from the élite. However, it would fly in the face of evidence to conclude that none were from among 'the wise, the well-born and the powerful'. Therefore the emergence of conduct typical of young men from that class, and arguments justifying it, should not particularly surprise us.³² It was Plutarch who reminded Nicander who had reached

³² For a discussion of the background situation reflecting the aphorism 'all things are permitted' in 1 Cor. 10:23 defended by some Corinthian Christians who had the right to attend civic banquets see my 'Civic Rights' in *Seek the Welfare of the City*, ch. 9. This article is part of an extended discussion on élitist ethics in the whole of 1 Cor. and will appear in 'Élitist Ethics and Christian Permissiveness' in my *After Paul Left Corinth: The Impact of Secular Ethics and Social Change* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, forthcoming).

adulthood 'you are no longer subject to authority', have assumed the male toga (*toga virilis*), *Moralia* 37C.

Abstract

Brothels and not banquets are what commentators have normally assumed to be the background of I Cor. 6:12-20. Noting the difference between the Greek Corinth and Roman Corinth, this essay argues, however, that the background to I Cor. 6:12-20 is banqueting and that the élitist's self-justification for the notorious conduct by the Corinthian Christians -- 'all things are permitted' -- concerned what has been termed the 'intimate and unholy trinity' of eating and drinking and sexual immorality. The author examined (1) the origins of the aphoristic phrase 'all things are permitted' which gives some indications of the social strata of those who used it, (2) the evidence for the unholy trinity of gluttony, drunkenness and sexual indulgence, and (3) the ethical standards of the young élite and I Cor. 6:12-20. He concludes that (1) the social context for I Cor. 6:12-20 is where gluttony and fornication occurred together, and (2) the aphoristic saying used to justify conduct has been shown to be that of the élite and is a further indicator of the social status of some of the Corinthian Christians.

撮要

釋經家一般都認為哥林多前書六章 12 至 20 節的背景為妓寨而非盛宴。本文分析希臘哥林多城與羅馬哥林多城的差別後，提出哥林多前書六章 12 至 20 節的背景應該是盛宴，這段經文是精英為那些聲名狼藉的哥林多信徒——他們認為「甚麼事都可以作」——荒誕宴樂和淫亂的行為辯護。本文的作者探討了（1）「甚麼事都可以作」的始源，這句話本身也暗示了說話人的社會階層；（2）貪吃、醉酒、放縱情慾的例證；（3）年青的精英和哥林多前書六章 12 至 20 節的道德標準。筆者總結：（1）哥林多前書六章 12 至 20 節的社會背景是奢宴與淫亂同時發生；（2）「甚麼事都可以作」是精英行為的自辯，暗示了某些哥林多信徒的社會階層。