

# Aphrahat and Pauline Reception: 1 Corinthians 7 and Baptismal Reasoning in East and West

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In studies of Pauline reception, most scholars limit themselves to works in the second or early third century (often ending with Irenaeus or the Acts of Paul) and to material from the Latin West and Greek East. Although later Syriac sources are rarely engaged, those who do work on this material have long recognised the importance of Paul's letters for that material. The present argument aims to help broaden the dominant discourse on Pauline reception by attending to early Syriac sources, principally the work of Aphrahat the Persian Sage. I focus in particular on his discussion of baptism and marriage in *Dem.* 7.18–20, which has confounded scholars over the years. This passage displays a kind of Pauline 'logic' indebted to 1 Cor 7.20, which can be discerned among other early Christian applications of that passage in similar contexts, in both East and West.

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Across the increasing number of scholarly studies of Pauline reception, certain temporal and geographical limits are often in play. In the first place, the majority of this scholarship stops at the end of the second or beginning of the third century, say, with Irenaeus or the Acts of Paul.<sup>1</sup> Moreover, those scholars

<sup>1</sup> This is perhaps partially due to the lasting influence of A. Lindemann, *Paulus im ältesten Christentum: Das Bild des Apostels und die Rezeption der paulinischen Theologie in der frühchristlichen Literatur bis Marcion* (BHT; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1979) and E. Dassmann, *Der Stachel im Fleisch: Paulus in der frühchristlichen Literatur bis Irenäus* (Münster: Aschendorff, 1979). Recent examples working within this timeframe include D. Marguerat, 'Paul après Paul: une histoire de réception', *NTS* 54 (2008) 317–37; R. I. Pervo, *The Making of Paul: Constructions of the Apostle in Early Christianity* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2010); M. F. Bird and J. R. Dodson, eds., *Paul and the Second Century* (LNTS; London: T&T Clark, 2011); K. Liljeström, ed., *The Early Reception of Paul and his Letters* (Publications of the Finnish Exegetical Society; Helsinki: The Finnish Exegetical Society, 2011); B. L. White, *Remembering Paul: Ancient and Modern Contests over the Image of the Apostle* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014); A. N. Kirk, *The Departure of an Apostle:*

who break out of this mould often work within a limited geography of early Christianity, including material from the Latin West and Greek East, but rarely engaging with sources for Syriac-speaking Christian communities.<sup>2</sup> Those who work on this material, however, have long noted the importance of Paul's letters for a variety of writers and purposes.<sup>3</sup> The goal here, then, is to bring the current discourse on Pauline reception together with Syriac sources that can help illuminate a spread of continuities and discontinuities in early Christian interpretations. Rather than address this issue *in toto*, which would be unwieldy at best, I will focus on one particular author, Aphrahat the Persian Sage.<sup>4</sup>

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*Paul's Death Anticipated and Remembered* (WUNT; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2015) and J. Schröter, S. Buttica and A. Dettwiler, eds., *Receptions of Paul in Early Christianity: The Person of Paul and his Writings through the Eyes of his Early Interpreters* (BZNW 234; Berlin: de Gruyter, 2018). Notable exceptions are the work of Margaret Mitchell (M. M. Mitchell, *The Heavenly Trumpet: John Chrysostom and the Art of Pauline Interpretation* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2002); *eadem*, *Paul, the Corinthians, and the Birth of Christian Hermeneutics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010)); Jennifer R. Strawbridge (J. R. Strawbridge, *The Pauline Effect: The Use of the Pauline Epistles by Early Christian Writers* (SBR; Berlin: de Gruyter, 2015)) and Edwina Murphy (E. Murphy, *The Bishop and the Apostle: Cyprian's Pastoral Exegesis of Paul* (SBR; Berlin: de Gruyter, 2018)).

- 2 This applies to the 'exceptions' cited in the previous note as well as to the present author's earlier work B. A. Edsall, *The Reception of Paul and Early Christian Initiation: History and Hermeneutics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019); cf. the comments in S. S. Taylor, 'Paul and the Persian Sage: Some Observations on Aphrahat's Use of the Pauline Corpus', *The Function of Scripture in Early Jewish and Christian Tradition* (ed. C. A. Evans and J. A. Sanders; JSNTSup; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1998) 312–31, at 315–16 on the general exclusion of Aphrahat from discussions of Paul's legacy. Fortunately, since the publication of Taylor's argument in 1998, the situation has improved somewhat as indicated in the next note.
- 3 E.g. the relatively early discussion (for Pauline reception, that is) in J. H. Corbett, 'Paul in Aphrahat', *iv Symposium Syriacum, 1984: Literary Genres in Syriac Literature* (ed. H. J. W. Drijvers *et al.*; OCA; Rome: Pont. Institutum Studiorum Orientalium, 1987) 13–32; see also M. Westerhoff, *Das Paulusverständnis im Liber Graduum* (PTS; Berlin: de Gruyter, 2008); N. Koltun-Fromm, *Hermeneutics of Holiness: Ancient Jewish and Christian Notions of Sexuality and Religious Community* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), esp. chapters 4–6, and note the role of Pauline reception in the argument of S. K. Skoyles Jarkins, *Aphrahat the Persian Sage and the Temple of God: A Study of Early Syriac Theological Anthropology* (Gorgias Studies in Early Christianity and Patristics; Piscataway: Gorgias, 2014).
- 4 The identity of Aphrahat, the author of the *Demonstrations*, 'the Persian Sage', is in fact quite a difficult problem, though it cannot be pursued here. On this, see especially the recent discussion in J. E. Walters, 'Aphrahat and the Construction of Christian Identity in Fourth-Century Persia' (PhD Dissertation, Princeton Theological Seminary, 2016) 37–43, who concludes that Aphrahat is fundamentally a 'scholarly creation... a by-product of the text', language reminiscent of Foucault's account of the 'author function'; cf. M. Foucault, 'What Is an Author?', *The Foucault Reader* (ed. P. Rabinow; New York: Pantheon, 1984) 101–20.

Aphrahat is important for Pauline reception in Syriac sources for multiple reasons, though of primary interest for the present argument is his reputation as a quintessentially 'Syriac' thinker, representing 'Syriac-speaking Christianity in its purest form, virtually uncontaminated by Greek influence'.<sup>5</sup> Finding a point of contact between his Pauline interpretation and that of Latin and Greek writers, then, is all the more important for understanding the broad, if somewhat opaque and amorphous, network of early Christian discourse about the Apostle Paul.<sup>6</sup> The point of entry into this difficult topic is Aphrahat's discussion of baptism and marriage in *Dem.* 7.18–20, which has confounded scholars over the years. In what follows I will argue that apparent ambiguities in Aphrahat's treatise are in fact evidence of what we might call a Pauline 'logic' of baptism, indebted to 1 Cor 7, which can be discerned among other early Christian applications of that passage in similar contexts.<sup>7</sup> After introducing the passage from Aphrahat, I will briefly sketch other early Christian engagements with 1 Cor 7 before returning to work through Aphrahat's *Demonstration* and situate him within the wider early Christian debate.

- 5 S. J. Beggiani, *Introduction to Eastern Christian Spirituality: The Syriac Tradition* (Scranton: University of Scranton Press/London: Associated University Presses, 1991) 17. More recently S. Ruzer and A. Kofsky, *Syriac Idiosyncrasies: Theology and Hermeneutics in Early Syriac Literature* (Jerusalem Studies in Religion and Culture; Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2010) 9 take 'the basic orientation' that Aphrahat is fundamentally independent from 'earlier Christian Greek literature' as the starting point for their analysis of Aphrahat's Christology. The press blurb on back of A. Lehto, *The Demonstrations of Aphrahat, the Persian Sage* (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias, 2010) states that 'the worldview he represents is only marginally hellenized, much closer to its Jewish roots than most other forms of Christianity in his day'. Walters, who is somewhat more agnostic about Aphrahat as a figure, notes that the corpus of the *Demonstrations* 'represents one of the earliest stages of surviving literature composed in Syriac, and thus it offers a unique window into the history of Christianity among Syriac-speaking communities' (Walters, 'Aphrahat and the Construction of Christian Identity', iii).
- 6 The *Demonstrations* are also notable for the fact that they number among the few sources we have for the Old Syriac text of Paul's letters, prior to the dominance of the Peshitta version, alongside esp. Ephrem, the Acts of Thomas and the *Liber graduum*; cf. the comments in Corbett, 'Paul in Aphrahat', 18 and the edition in J. Kerschensteiner, *Der altsyrische Paulustext* (CSCO; Leuven: Peeters, 1970); cf. the helpful biographical sketch in Lehto, *Demonstrations*, 10–13.
- 7 Skoyles Jarkins, *Aphrahat the Persian Sage*, 98 expresses some confusion over the fact that the majority of scholars on Aphrahat have missed the 'fairly obvious biblical basis for Aphrahat's position'. Her point is anticipated by E. R. Hardy, 'Review: *Celibacy, A Requirement for Admission to Baptism in the Early Syrian Church* (Papers of the Estonian Theological Society in Exile 1), by ARTHUR VÖÖBUS, Stockholm, 1951', *Church History* 22 (1953) 170. For an extensive discussion of the variety of early Christian readings of 1 Cor 7, focusing in particular on the fourth century, see E. A. Clark, *Reading Renunciation: Asceticism and Scripture in Early Christianity* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999) 259–329, who nevertheless does not discuss Aphrahat in this connection.

### 1. Marital Ambiguities: Aphrahat and Early Christian Marriage

Aphrahat's seventh *Demonstration*, on penance, contains a well-known tension in relation to baptism, celibacy and marriage. The Persian Sage articulates a clear preference for the ascetic life, praising those who have given up everything to be 'solitary ones' and so have nothing 'behind them' to distract from the struggle of contest ahead.<sup>8</sup> On the other hand, he gives clear instructions for the way in which marriage and baptism should be handled in relation to one another and even suggests that a husband should 'rejoice with his wife' (*Dem.* 7.18). How to solve this evident tension?

At the turn of the twentieth century, F. Crawford Burkitt influentially proposed that in the early Syriac church, including for Aphrahat, celibacy was a prerequisite for baptism.<sup>9</sup> A qualified version of this view was defended fifty years later by Arthur Vööbus,<sup>10</sup> who suggested that Aphrahat himself took a more moderate line – allowing for the baptism of the married – but that his seventh *Demonstration* contained within it a fragment of an older, more strict, baptismal liturgy, which is what produces the evident tension in *Dem.* 7.18–23.<sup>11</sup> Other scholars have been less sanguine about a source-critical solution here and instead focus on the fact that, in these early *Demonstrations*, Aphrahat is writing for a

8 *Dem.* 7.18 (I. Parisot, ed., *Aphraatis Sapientis Persae Demonstrationes I–XXII* (Patrologia Syriaca; Paris: Firmin-Didot, 1894)): 'This struggle (ܘܫܘܪܘܬܐ) is suitable for the ascetics [or "solitary ones", ܘܫܘܪܘܬܐ] because their faces are set to the things before them and they do not remember something which is behind them ...' All translations are mine unless otherwise noted.

9 F. C. Burkitt, *Early Christianity outside the Roman Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1899) 46–54.

10 The similarity between the two positions is also noted by Skoyles Jarkins, *Aphrahat the Persian Sage*, 67.

11 A. Vööbus, *Celibacy: A Requirement for Admission to Baptism in the Early Syrian Church* (Papers of the Estonian Theological Society in Exile 1; Stockholm: Estonian Theological Society in Exile, 1951) 52 and also *idem*, *History of Asceticism in the Syrian Orient: A Contribution to the History of Culture in the Near East*, 5 vols. (Louvain: Secrétariat du Corpus SCO, 1958) 93–7. His view is developed further by R. Murray, 'The Exhortation to Candidates for Ascetical Vows at Baptism in the Ancient Syriac Church', *NTS* 211 (1974) 59–80, who nevertheless also argues that '[w]e must always remember that almost all our early Syriac literature ... is by consecrated ascetics' and that Aphrahat 'produced [his] writings for disciples who in fact took their vows when they were baptized, and who therefore saw baptism as meaning their own self-consecration' (79–80). This, he rightly notes, is in contradistinction to the witness of works such as the *Didascalia apostolorum*, *Testamentum Domini* and the Pseudo-Clementines. See the similar brief comments in M. Lattke, "'Taufe" und "untertauchen" in Aphrahats ܘܫܘܪܘܬܐ (*taḥwyāṭā*)', *Ablution, Initiation, and Baptism: Late Antiquity, Early Judaism, and Early Christianity* (ed. D. Hellholm et al.; BZNW 2; Berlin: de Gruyter, 2011) 1115–38, at 1130 (in which there is a 'syrischen "Liturgie"' proclaimed in *Dem.* 7.20, which extends generally beyond the limits of 'die spezifischen Bundessöhne und Bundestöchter').

restricted audience of ascetics, the sons and daughters of the covenant.<sup>12</sup> Even so, on both solutions, a tension remains between sending away those who are married in 7.18 and providing instructions for their baptism and subsequent place in the ‘struggle’ in 7.20. Even within the small space of this section of *Dem. 7*, Aphrahat is ambiguous about the status of marriage, and we shall have occasion to note later that his *Demonstrations* as a whole bear out a certain ambivalence on the matter. Before turning to a closer reading of Aphrahat, however, it will be helpful to step back and reflect on early Christian debates that preceded him and ranged across geographically distant Christian communities.

### 1.1 1 Cor 7 and Early Christian Debates about Marriage

By the early decades of the second century, two impulses were already clear in relation to marriage, though rarely found in a pure form – one ascetic, denying the value of marriage, the other affirming it as an important part of the Christian life. The former is famously represented by Marcion, who rejected marriage and reputedly required divorce as a prerequisite for married baptismal candidates.<sup>13</sup> On the other hand, First Timothy claims the authority of Paul in instructing that ἐπισκοποί and διακονοί should be married (1 Tim 3.2, 12), that widows who are still young should marry (5.14), and twice links childbirth to the life of the godly woman (2.15; 5.14).<sup>14</sup>

12 Note that this solution was offered already before Vööbus’ work by E. J. Duncan, *Baptism in the Demonstrations of Aphraates the Persian Sage* (CUASCA; Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 1945); cf. M.-J. Pierre, *Aphraate le sage Persan: Les exposés*, 2 vols. (SC; Paris: Cerf, 1988–9) 1.110; A. Guillaumont, ‘Monachisme et éthique judéo-chrétienne’, *Judéo-christianisme: extraits des Recherches de Science Religieuse* (Paris: Beauchesne, 1972) 199–218, at 201. Lehto, *Demonstrations*, 18–19, 212 n. 71 notes the high likelihood of a restricted audience even while observing that Aphrahat ‘clearly implies that baptism was not reserved for an ascetic elite’ (quotation from 212 n. 7). J.-M. Garrigues and J. Legrez, *Moines dans l’assemblée des fidèles à l’époque des Pères, ive–viii siècle* (Paris: Beauchesne, 1992) 42–3 argue that the restriction on baptism for the married was temporary, with it becoming a possibility later in life or even on one’s deathbed.

13 Tertullian, *Marc. 1.29.1* (E. Evans, *Tertullian: Adversus Marcionem* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1972)); on Marcion’s rejection of marriage, see esp. J. Lieu, *Marcion and the Making of a Heretic: God and Scripture in the Second Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015) 390–1.

14 See the comments in C. W. Concannon, *Assembling Early Christianity: Trade, Networks, and the Letters of Dionysius of Corinth* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017) 129–30 on the later Pauline tradition, including the Pastoral epistles. In light of the appeal to the story of Adam and Eve in 2.13–14, the claim that women ‘will be saved through childbirth’ (σωθήσεται δὲ διὰ τῆς τεκνογονίας, 2.15) is perhaps best read as an effort to mitigate the curse on childbearing in Gen 3.16 for female believers; that is to say, preservation through childbirth, rather than eschatological salvation, is at stake; cf. the comments and bibliography in P. Towner, *The Letters to Timothy and Titus* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmanns, 2006) 233–4. For a different view, in which ‘it is in (or through) childbirth that salvation takes place’, see

In addition to Marcion, the ascetic denigration of marriage had a number of other supporters in the second and third centuries. The *Acts of Paul* and the *Acts of Thomas*, whose manuscript traditions demonstrate their wide circulation among Greek-, Latin- and Syriac-speaking communities, praise virginity, reject sex within existing marriages, and even link childbearing and sexual desire with heretics and demons.<sup>15</sup> Tatian, too, is well known for his programme of strict asceticism, claiming that Paul and Jesus damn marriage in the very places they appear to allow it.<sup>16</sup>

Therefore, ‘agreement’ (συμφωνία) [*viz.* for continence] enables prayer but corrupt intercourse destroys it (κοινωνία δὲ φθορᾶς λύει τὴν ἐντευξιν). Indeed, he does this through the entirely derogatory way (δυσωπητικῶς) in which he allows it. For, again, in allowing this situation because of Satan and a lack of self-control in this passage, he declares that such a person ‘serves two masters’ – God, through ‘agreement’, or lack of self-control and sexual immorality, and the devil, without such an agreement.<sup>17</sup>

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M. den Dulk, ‘I Permit No Woman to Teach except for Thecla: The Curious Case of the Pastoral Epistles and the *Acts of Paul* Reconsidered’, *NovT* 54 (2012) 176–203, at 199, though he goes on to note that ‘[t]his concept is, to the best of my knowledge, not found in other extant early Christian documents’.

- <sup>15</sup> See the blessings on virgins in Acts Paul 3.5–6, abstinence from marital sex in Acts Thom. 1.12–13 and apparently in Acts Paul 9.21, relating childbirth with heretical characters in Acts Paul 3.14 and sexual desire with demonic forces in Acts Thom. 5.42–3. On the other hand, it is also true that both texts let certain married (conjugal?) relationships pass without comment; e.g. Lectra and Nympha, who are both married and have children in Acts Paul 3, 5, or the specific rejection only of extra-marital sexual acts in Acts Thom. 6; cf. the discussion of the Acts of Paul in Concannon, *Assembling Early Christianity*, 124–8. The text of the Acts of Paul is from R. A. Lipsius, *Acta apostolorum apocrypha: Acta Petri, Acta Pauli, Acta Petri et Pauli, Acta Pauli et Theclae, Acta Thaddaei* (Hildesheim; New York: Georg Olms, 1972), supplemented by R. Kasser and P. Luisier, ‘Le Papyrus Bodmer XL en édition princeps: L’épisode d’Éphèses des *Acta Pauli* en copte et en traduction’, *Le Muséon* 117 (2004) 281–384 for Acts Paul 9; that of the Acts of Thomas is from W. Wright, *Apocryphal Acts of the Apostles*, vol. 1: *The Syriac Texts* (London: Williams and Norgate, 1871).
- <sup>16</sup> This is the interpretation supplied by Clement of Alexandria, through whom we have the relevant fragment from Tatian. On this reading of Clement’s treatment of Tatian, see K. L. Gaca, ‘Driving Aphrodite from the World: Tatian’s Encratite Principles of Sexual Renunciation’, *JTS* 53 (2002) 28–52 and esp. M. R. Crawford, ‘The *Problemata* of Tatian: Recovering the Fragments of a Second-Century Christian Intellectual’, *JTS* 67 (2016) 542–75, at 558–63, with the bibliography discussed there, esp. with reference to Koltun-Fromm.
- <sup>17</sup> From his lost work, *On Perfection according to the Saviour*, preserved in Clement of Alexandria, *Strom.* 3.12.81.1–3 (L. Früchtel, O. Stählin and U. Treu, eds., *Clemens Alexandrinus* (4 vols.; GCS; Berlin: Akademie, 1970)). I place ‘agreement’ in quotes because it is a direct reference to Paul’s instructions in 1 Cor 7.5. Note also the testimony regarding Tatian’s rejection of marriage in Irenaeus, *Haer* 1.28.1 (A. Rousseau and L. Doutreleau, eds., *Irénée de Lyon: Contre les*

What is particularly notable for present purposes is Tatian's evident appeal to Paul's words in 1 Cor 7.5, that married couples should only keep apart temporarily and 'by agreement'. By grounding his view in Paul's instructions, Tatian lays claim to a particular interpretation of Paul, apparently vindicated by Jesus' own words.<sup>18</sup>

On the other side of the debate, however, both Marcion and Tatian had their opponents, who rejected their interpretations of Paul and affirmed the value of marriage (and its attendant sexual activity).<sup>19</sup> In response to Tatian, whose fragment he preserves, Clement of Alexandria argues that Tatian plays the sophist in proving what is untrue by way of the truth.<sup>20</sup> Paul's comments on temporary abstinence are actually part of his broader view in which marriage is affirmed: 'For as does celibacy, so also does marriage have its particular services and ministries (ἰδίας λειτουργίας καὶ διακονίας ... διαφερούσας) to the Lord' (Clement of Alexandria, *Strom.* 3.12.79.5).<sup>21</sup>

After Clement, Origen also affirmed the good of marriage, explicitly rejecting the Marcionite view in favour of identifying marriage as one among the many 'gifts' given to Christians.<sup>22</sup> On the other hand, he viewed continence as superior to sexual intercourse and, like Tatian, claimed that the latter was incompatible

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*hérésies*, vol. 1 (SC; Paris: Cerf, 1979) ), where marriage is seen as 'corruption and sexual immorality'.

18 Cf. the comments in Lieu, *Marcion*, 425 and the earlier analysis in Clark, *Renunciation*, 277. According to Lieu, *Marcion*, 108, 262–8, 390–1, it is probable that Marcion had also attempted to ground his rejection of marriage in Pauline precedent, particularly in 1 Cor 7.

19 In addition to the authors discussed below, note also Concannon's argument that Dionysius of Corinth tried to combat Marcionite tendencies on Crete and Knossos, which also involves the interpretation of 1 Cor 7; Concannon, *Assembling Early Christianity*, 141–54, esp. 148–51.

20 Clement of Alexandria, *Strom.* 3.12.81.3: σοφίζεται δὲ τὴν ἀλήθειαν δι' ἀληθοῦς ψευδοῦς κατασκευάζων.

21 Cf. also *Strom.* 3.12.86.1; see the extensive discussion in D. G. Hunter, *Marriage, Celibacy, and Heresy in Ancient Christianity: The Jovinianist Controversy* (OECs; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007) 105–13; Gaca, 'Driving Aphrodite', 251–5 and now the analysis in D. Wheeler-Reed, J. W. Knust and D. B. Martin, 'Can a Man Commit πορνεία with his Wife?', *JBL* 137 (2018) 383–98, at 396–8; cf. the brief comments in Koltun-Fromm, *Hermeneutics of Holiness*, 160–1 and R. Roukema, *De uitleg van Paulus' eerste brief aan de Corinthiërs in de tweede en derde eeuw* (Kampen: Kok, 1996) 113–14.

22 *Fr. 1 Cor.* 34 (C. Jenkins, 'Origen on 1 Corinthians', *JTS* 9–10 (1908) 231–47, 353–72, 500–14, 29–51, at 503): 'For if a gift is for this one and that one, marriage is a gift (χάρισμά ἐστι καὶ ὁ γάμος). If marriage is a gift, it is evil to restrain the gift of marriage ... it is clear that it is one God who gave purity (τὴν ἀγνείαν) and that gave marriage.' Origen directly addresses Marcionite views in *Fr. 1 Cor.* 37 (Jenkins, 'Origen', 507); cf. the discussion in Lieu, *Marcion*, 142. On Origen's view more generally, see also Hunter, *Marriage*, 124–8 and J. Christopher King, *Origen on the Song of Songs as The Spirit of Scripture: The Bridegroom's Perfect Marriage-Song* (OTM; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005) 92–3.

with prayer.<sup>23</sup> Paul's concession, therefore, was exactly that: a concession to the weakness of his congregation.<sup>24</sup> Nevertheless, Origen understood that some simply were 'enslaved' in marriage before baptism, even while he enjoined those were 'free' to 'not become slaves of others'.<sup>25</sup> The guiding instruction from Paul in this case, then, is that Christians should 'remain in the calling in which they were called' (1 Cor 7.20).<sup>26</sup>

Origen's logic relating marriage and baptism through 1 Cor 7 is anticipated, and articulated with even deeper ambivalence, by Tertullian at the turn of the third century. For his part, Tertullian saw himself struggling against errant views of marriage on two fronts.<sup>27</sup> On the one hand, he himself was married and he rejected Marcion's reputed requirement that only the unmarried can be baptised, requiring divorce for those already wed.<sup>28</sup> On the other hand, he did not want to encourage marriage and divorce among baptised Christians. In response to this problem, Tertullian argues that there can be 'one marriage in faith' (*unum in fide matrimonium*), a possibility that gives meaning to the choice in favour of abstinence Paul calls for in 1 Cor 7.29 (*Marc. 1.29.4-5*). As he makes clear again in book 5, the marriage that is contracted *in fide* can only be with another believer, in Paul's words 'only in the Lord' (*tantum in domino esse nubendum, Marc. 5.7.6-8*).<sup>29</sup> But above the limited good of marriage he

23 Cf. the comments in Koltun-Fromm, *Hermeneutics of Holiness*, 160-2. There are, in fact, two notable points of continuity between Origen and Tatian's interpretation: the emphasis (1) on the relation of prayer and sexual activity and (2) on the concessive quality of Paul's comments on sex in 1 Cor 7.

24 *Fr. 1 Cor.* 34 (Jenkins, 'Origen', 501-3). Origen felt that believers in his church, though, should be better than the Corinthian 'infants' who were not ready for the 'solid food' of the mysteries; cf. the conflation of 1 Cor 3.1-3 and 7.6 in *Fr. 1 Cor.* 12 (Jenkins, 'Origen', 241-2).

25 See the discussion of this interpretation in Clark, *Renunciation*, 300-1, who notes its impact on later interpreters such as Jerome. Interestingly, G. W. Dawes, "But if you can gain your freedom' (1 Corinthians 7:17-24)", *CBQ* 52 (1990) 681-97 supports Origen's reading of slavery as marriage though historical-critical arguments for Pauline use of analogy (note the mention of Origen on p. 682 n. 9).

26 *Fr. 1 Cor.* 38; cf. the comments in Roukema, *De uitleg*, 124.

27 See the discussion of Tertullian in Hunter, *Marriage*, 116-20, who argues even further than here that the later Tertullian even came to view remarriage at all as a kind of adultery; cf. also Koltun-Fromm, *Hermeneutics of Holiness*, 159-60; C. E. Hayes, *Gentile Impurities and Jewish Identities: Intermarriage and Conversion from the Bible to the Talmud* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002) 98-9 and C. Daniel-Hughes, "'Only in the Lord"?: Debates Over Paul's View of Remarriage in Early Christianity', *Science et Esprit* 66 (2014) 269-83, at 272-9.

28 Tertullian, *Marc. 1.29.1* (Evans, *Adversus Marcionem*); cf. esp. Lieu, *Marcion*, 262-8, who notes the proximity of Tertullian's ascetic impulses to those of Marcion he was rejecting.

29 Note that Tertullian draws on ethnic categories with the term *allophylus* and his appeal to restrictions on exogamous marriage in the Law. On this aspect of early Christian discourse, see the wide-ranging discussion in D. K. Buell, *Why This New Race: Ethnic Reasoning in*



vaunts virginity and continence (*Marc.* 5.15.3). The limitation to a single marriage 'in faith' signifies an important aspect of Tertullian's view, clarified in the treatise addressed to his own wife. There Tertullian rejects the view of some that Paul's injunction in 1 Cor 7.12–14 (to remain married to one's unbelieving spouse) opens up the possibility for believers to marry non-believers. Against that view, he points out that Paul says 'one who *has* an unbelieving wife' and not 'one who *takes* an unbelieving wife'.<sup>30</sup> One may enter the faith while married to a non-believer and, in fact, those who are 'called' within marriage, citing Paul, should remain so.<sup>31</sup> The moment of being 'apprehended' by the faith (2.2.9), at conversion and baptism, is the defining point for Tertullian. While continence and virginity are by far the best and the main principle is to remain in the state of one's calling, after baptism marriage is only allowed once and *in fide*. This point is made more explicit in Tertullian's treatise on baptism. Speaking about baptismal postulants, he writes:

No less should they be delayed for being unmarried (*innupti*) – those for whom temptation is prepared, for virgins through their ripeness just as also for widows through their wandering – until they either marry or are established in continence (*aut nubant aut continentiae corroborentur*). If they understand the weight of baptism, they fear its attainment rather than its delay. Perfect faith (*fides integra*) is secure in its salvation.<sup>32</sup>

For Tertullian, the possibility of marriage *in fide* is a mere stopgap for those unable to remain continent, a way of avoiding the destructive effects of post-baptismal sin. In his ideal, one's status at baptism is set and sanctified for the remainder of one's Christian life.

Tertullian's ambivalence alongside the range of different positions – all established at least partially with reference to 1 Cor 7 – raises the question of how such different readings of the same passage could be warranted. Elizabeth Clark, for one, has shown how these varied interpretations 'provide exegetical solutions to real-life problems that faced patristic commentators'.<sup>33</sup> Even beyond this, however, Paul himself appears to take with one hand what he gives with the other in 1 Cor 7: it is good for a man not to touch a woman (7.1) ... but each should have sexual access to their spouse to defeat the wiles of Satan (vv. 2–5) ... but this is a concession rather than a command (v. 6) and those who are

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*Early Christianity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), who does not discuss the present passage.

30 *Ux.* 2.2.2 (C. Munier, ed., *Tertullien: A son épouse* (SC; Paris: Cerf, 1980)).

31 *Ux.* 2.2.9; cf. the comments in Daniel-Hughes, 'Debates', 276–7 and Roukema, *De uitleg*, 119.

32 *Bapt.* 18.6 (E. Evans, *Tertullian's Homily on Baptism* (London: SPCK, 1964)).

33 Clark, *Renunciation*, 328.

married should live 'as if not' (v. 29) since he wishes everyone were like him in this regard (i.e. unmarried, v. 7, and undivided in devotion, vv. 32–4) ... and, of course, one should remain in the state in which they were called (vv. 20, 24).<sup>34</sup> In other words, Paul's discussion of marriage and sex is at least as ambivalent as that of some of his later interpreters, and it is not hard to understand how interpretive decisions were felt necessary about which aspect of his instructions reflected his true position.<sup>35</sup> The Pauline baptismal 'logic' articulated by Origen, Tertullian and (as we shall see) Aphrahat, then, is not strictly speaking *the* logic of Paul's argument but rather one particular arrangement of his statements into a logic fit for their own argument, against other interpretations of the same material.

## 2. Baptism, Marriage and 1 Cor 7 in Aphrahat, *Dem.* 7

Let us return, then, to Aphrahat. By the time he was writing in the middle of the fourth century, the debate sketched above was in full swing. Within his Syriac-speaking Christian literary tradition, the popularity of texts such as the *Acts of Thomas* and *Acts of Paul* bears witness to the presence of certain pro-celibacy ascetical impulses, associated commonly with Tatian and Marcion, as we saw.<sup>36</sup> At the same time, though, the *Didascalia apostolorum*, a church order document

34 While the majority of contemporary scholars see 1 Cor 7.1b as a citation of the Corinthian position that Paul is modifying (e.g. G. D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987) 273; W. Deming, *Paul on Marriage and Celibacy: The Hellenistic Background of 1 Corinthians 7* (SNTSMS; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995) 110; W. Schrage, *Der erste Brief an die Korinther* (4 vols.; EKK; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 1991–2001) II.59–60; cf. J. Fotopoulos, 'Arguments Concerning Food Offered to Idols: Corinthian Quotations and Pauline Refutations in a Rhetorical Partitio (1 Corinthians 8:1–9)', *CBQ* 67 (2005) 611–31), early readers did not make this distinction. Note that D. Zeller, 'Der Vorrang der Ehelosigkeit in 1 Kor 7', *ZNW* 96 (2005) 61–77, at 62–3 has raised objections to this view on historical and literary grounds, and D. B. Martin, *Sex and the Single Savior: Gender and Sexuality in Biblical Interpretation* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2006) 24–5 has highlighted the difficulties of scholarly rhetoric about 'text as citation'. In addition to such rhetorical solutions, the difficulties of the passage have been approached from the perspective of Jewish marriage halakhah and purity discourse (e.g. Hayes, *Gentile Impurities and Jewish Identities*, 92–8), pragmatic concern for communal unity (e.g. Koltun-Fromm, *Hermeneutics of Holiness*, 89) etc.

35 Cf. the brief analysis of the two different trajectories in 1 Cor 7 in Daniel-Hughes, 'Debates', 269–72, who is drawing on the wider-ranging arguments for ambivalence in B. H. Dunning, *Specters of Paul: Sexual Difference in Early Christian Thought* (Divinations: Rereading Late Ancient Religion; Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011) 1–28 and *passim*.

36 In fact, as has long been noted, there is clear evidence for a continuing Marcionite presence in Roman Syria and Persia well into the fourth century; see the recent discussion in Walters, 'Aphrahat and the Construction of Christian Identity', 90–5, 101 and the earlier account in Vööbus, *Asceticism*, 45–54, 161–2 and *passim*.

originating in the third century, drew deeply on material from First Timothy to articulate a church structure within which marriage was widely expected, even regulated.<sup>37</sup> In this context, how can one best navigate, or at least understand, the apparent tension noted above: between Aphrahat's instructions on sending away married candidates from baptism in *Dem.* 7.18 and his instructions for baptising married candidates in 7.20? What is at stake here can be clarified somewhat by expanding one's view, first to the rest of the seventh *Demonstration* and then to the collection as a whole.

In the first place, although discussion of the seventh *Demonstration* has long focused on questions of liturgical and baptismal development, this is only an incidental concern for Aphrahat. His main goal in *Demonstration* 7 is to encourage the practice of penitence – the declaration of one's sins to a community leader. On one hand, there are those who sin but do not repent or acknowledge their transgression, and on the other hand there are the leaders who do not grant repentance and forgiveness to those who *do* repent.<sup>38</sup> If other early Christians, such as Tertullian, were concerned about post-baptismal sin, Aphrahat shares the concern while trying to modulate the strictness with which certain leaders respond to these transgressions into a more moderate and pastorally sensitive key.<sup>39</sup> In the process, however, he does not want his exhortations about penitence and his scripturally based guarantees of forgiveness to encourage any lax behaviour among the solitaries who are engaged in the 'struggle'.<sup>40</sup> While sin must be exposed and treated like a spiritual gangrene (*Dem.* 7.3), a healed soldier is not as strong or reliable as one who has never been wounded, nor is a repaired wall as secure as one that has never been breached (*Dem.* 7.17 etc.). This is

37 In addition to appropriating the view of 1 Tim 3.2, 12 that bishops and deacons should marry (and that only once!, Didasc. apost. 3.1, 3), and 1 Tim 5.14 that young widows should marry (Didasc. apost. 14), it goes further to specify that female orphans adopted into the church should be married off at the appropriate time (Didasc. apost. 17) and that all young men should be married to avoid the temptations of extra-marital sex (Didasc. apost. 22) (A. Vööbus, ed., *The Didascalia Apostolorum in Syriac* (4 vols.; CSCO; Leuven: CSCO, 1979)). On the impact of the Pastoral Epistles in the reception of Paul, which omits the Syriac sources, see J. W. Aageson, *Paul, the Pastoral Epistles, and the Early Church* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2008) chs. 5–8.

38 *Dem.* 7.25; cf. 7.4, 11. On this theme in early Christianity, see C. B. Horn, 'Penitence in Early Christianity in its Historical and Theological Setting: Trajectories from Eastern and Western Sources', *Repentance in Christian Theology* (ed. M. J. Boda and G. T. Smith; Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2006) 153–87 (her discussion of Aphrahat is on pp. 175–82) and A. Torrance, *Repentance in Late Antiquity: Eastern Asceticism and the Framing of the Christian Life c. 400–650 CE* (OTRM; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), whose focus begins in 400 CE and therefore only mentions Aphrahat in passing.

39 So also Horn, 'Penitence', 181; in addition to Tertullian (see above and further below), cf. Didasc. apost. 5, which states that whoever 'does evil after baptism' is condemned to fiery punishment.

40 Cf. the comments in Horn, 'Penitence', 180.

why proper preparation and vetting must take place *before* baptism in order to ensure that only those truly committed to the ‘struggle’ are engaged in it. The reasoning here is manifest in the structure of Aphrahat’s argument in his seventh *Demonstration*: §§1–16 focus on repentance and penitence; a transition at §17 exhorts the reader not to become lax as a result of the preceding discussion; and §§18–23 examine the importance of proper baptismal vetting for those who desire to become ascetics. This reasoning helps to explain the tension regarding marriage that is under discussion here.

*Dem.* 7.18 begins by identifying the two principal demographics Aphrahat has in view in this section: the baptismal postulants – those summoned to the struggle – and the community leaders who are responsible for them.<sup>41</sup> The first group comprises those who are considering an ascetic calling and are in the final stages of baptismal preparation.<sup>42</sup> In a riff on the instructions to Israel in Deut 20.2–9, Aphrahat outlines four kinds of material and personal commitments that disqualify one from becoming a ‘solitary’ and risk distracting from the spiritual struggle.<sup>43</sup> These examples are, of course, to be taken symbolically and it would seem likely that Aphrahat expected his reader to pick up the scriptural allusion which supplies an authoritative foundation for his exhortation to winnow the ascetic hopefuls. In this context, those who are afraid, those who have previous and ongoing commitments – illustrated by planting a vineyard and building a house – and those who wish to marry should ‘turn aside’ from their intended

41 The phrase ܡܫܘܒܝܢ ܠܡܫܘܒܝܢ may also be rendered ‘prepared for the struggle’, as it is in Lehto, *Demonstrations*, 210; see the discussion of these addressees in T. Jansma, ‘Aphraates’ *Demonstration VII* §§18 and 20: Some Observations on the Discourse on Penance’, *Parole de l’Orient* 5 (1974) 21–48, at 39–41, who nevertheless plays down the address to postulants in his emphasis on the two principal groups: the leaders and the penitents.

42 As an analogy, one might also point to John Chrysostom’s witness to monastic catechumens in *Hom. Heb.* 25.3 (MPG 63). While Aphrahat never uses ‘catechumen’ or related terminology in his *Demonstrations*, it may be that Ephrem bears witness to a catechumenate among Syrian Christians, in Nisibis and/or Edessa (note the appeal to catechumens in his comments on Eph 1.1 and Col 1.1, which are unfortunately only available in Armenian: Ephrem, *Srboyn Ep’remi Matenagrut’iwnk* (Venice: Monastery of St. Lazarus, 1836) 139 ll. 3–4, 165 ll. 19–21). The Nicene Canons (§§2, 11–12, 14; W. Bright, *The Canons of the First Four General Councils of Nicaea, Constantinople, Ephesus and Chalcedon: With Notes* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1892)) indicate a widespread catechetical institution by the early fourth century which would make its presence among Syriac-speaking Christian communities unsurprising. Similar initiatory practices – such as restricting access to the Eucharist for new converts until after baptism – are found in Didasc. apost. 10 ), which may also bear oblique witness to the increasingly common use of the term ‘hearers’ to designate a category of catechumens (cf. the use of the term ܡܫܘܒܝܢ, ‘hearers’, in Didasc. apost. 5, 19). On the development of the catechumenate, see esp. the full account in P. L. Gavrilyuk, *Histoire du catéchuménat dans l’Église ancienne* (trans. F. Lhoest, N. Mojaisky and A.-M. Gueit (Initiations aux Pères de l’Église; Paris: Cerf, 2007) and chapter 2 of Edsall, *The Reception of Paul*.

43 Cf. the discussion in Jansma, ‘Aphraates’ *Demonstration VII*, 25–6.

ascetic life. There is no censure in Aphrahat's discussion here, unless it be found in the practical concern that the 'sons of the covenant' should not think of what is behind them. As already noted, the one who marries is, in Deuteronomic terms, to 'rejoice with his wife' (*Dem.* 7.18). Once the group of those being baptised into an ascetic life has been established, referred to as 'those who remain', they are then tested in the waters of baptism, after which a final evaluation takes place (7.21).

When the issue of marriage is broached again in 7.20, Aphrahat signals his principal concern: selecting those who can fulfil a vow to be part of the 'covenant', which includes a vow 'for virginity and holiness' (ܠܒܚܘܬܐ ܘܠܩܘܕܫܘܬܐ).<sup>44</sup> Therefore, one who would like to be married – 'his heart is set' on it (ܠܚܘܬܐ ܠܚܘܬܐ) – should not be baptised as part of joining the ascetic community.<sup>45</sup> Turning back from such a commitment *before* baptism occasions no shame, but those who do so are excluded from the spiritually elite ascetics, at least for the time being.<sup>46</sup> Those who put on the armour and then turn away are in a worse place, however: they are 'ridiculed' and pose a danger to their fellow covenanters (7.20).

This account fits neatly with Aphrahat's ambivalence elsewhere concerning the married state: it may be 'very good' (ܘܫܘܒܐ ܥܘܠܐ), but 'some things are better than others'.<sup>47</sup> It is a yoke that distances one from the yoke of Christ and opens up a dangerous space for the male believer, at least, since women have been used by Satan to lead men astray in the past even within marriage (6.3).<sup>48</sup> In light of the potential spiritual danger posed by marriage, a covenanter who is engaged in the struggle should not seek to change his or her marital status. Of course, Aphrahat is well aware that some only come to faith after they are already married, in which case male and female ascetics can choose to live apart from their spouse, lest they return to their marital activities and be considered adulterers (6.4). Further, in extreme cases, Aphrahat even counsels that male ascetics should openly marry rather than living in lust, following Paul's advice in 1 Cor 7.9 (*Dem.* 6.4). This concession, however, is not without its consequences. If, as Aphrahat claims, sex between two ascetics who were already married counts as

44 See the discussion in Skoyles Jarkins, *Aphrahat the Persian Sage*, 98–105 and Lehto, *Demonstrations*, 32–3.

45 On the distinction between the ascetic community and the broader church, see *Dem.* 18.1; 20.14 and the comments in Lehto, *Demonstrations*, 17.

46 As to Aphrahat's view of such non-covenanters, it is difficult to discern; cf. A. Lehto, 'Women in Aphrahat: Some Observations', *Hugoye* 4 (2001) 187–207, at 201 n. 28, who states, 'We don't know what Aphrahat's opinion of married Christian women was. His audience consisted of male and female ascetics, and he says very little directly about the lay state.'

47 *Dem.* 18.8: ܘܫܘܒܐ ܥܘܠܐ ܘܠܩܘܕܫܘܬܐ ܘܠܒܚܘܬܐ ܘܠܩܘܕܫܘܬܐ; cf. the comments in Skoyles Jarkins, *Aphrahat the Persian Sage*, 98–102.

48 On this passage, see the comments in Koltun-Fromm, *Hermeneutics of Holiness*, 170–2 and note her broader discussion of Aphrahat's 'yoke' imagery and sexual renunciation on pp. 163–7.

adultery, how much worse must it be for the unmarried who make a covenant of virginity only to break it later. In this case, Aphrahat's distinction between the 'good' of marriage and the more excellent state of celibacy becomes quite sharp: the good here is only relative to losing control of one's sexual passions. And one in such a bad way is no longer suitable for membership among the *bnai Qyāmā*.<sup>49</sup> It is far from the best option.

In the 18th Demonstration, which has a markedly moderate view of marriage in response to a 'Jewish' criticism, Aphrahat makes clear that 'no one who has it [i.e. the superior gift of virginity] and loses it finds it again' (*Dem.* 18.12).<sup>50</sup> This is more than just the obvious point that one's virginity cannot be regained after it is lost; this virginity also carries *status and benefits* that will likewise be lost. That is to say, if an ascetic marries *after* baptism, he or she is no longer suited for the ascetic community. The fact that some ascetics are married does not indicate anything beyond the fact that they were married *before* coming to faith, as we saw above, and even still they must live separately.<sup>51</sup> Once baptised, those already married cannot divorce – which would contravene a Dominical command – and the single ought not become married, at least in the case of the single covenanters to whom Aphrahat is principally speaking. This would be to break their vow to Christ, for virginity and holiness (*Dem.* 7.20).<sup>52</sup> In this way, Aphrahat follows the Pauline injunction that all should 'remain in the calling in which they were called' (1 Cor 7.20): the married remain married (though they should not continue to cohabit) and the single remain single. This scriptural warrant becomes explicit in *Dem.* 18.12: 'And the Apostle said, "Because of hardship in the world, it is better for one to remain as he is"' (1 Cor 7.26).<sup>53</sup>

49 Pace Vööbus, *Celibacy*, 45, who suggests that ascetics who break their vows to marry would remain a part of the ascetic community.

50 For an excellent discussion of scholarship on the question of Aphrahat's interaction with Jews, see now esp. Walters, 'Aphrahat and the Construction of Christian Identity', 55–70, who offers his own position on pp. 153–92.

51 A parallel can perhaps be drawn here with Acts Thom. 1.12–13 (Wright, *Apocryphal Acts*, 180–1), noted above, in which a newly married couple are dissuaded from sex by Jesus himself in the bridal chamber and then devote themselves to his service, despite the fact that they would remain married.

52 This appears to be related to Aphrahat's construal of baptism as the time of receiving the Holy Spirit in purity, which must be maintained subsequently in 'holiness' (*Dem.* 6.14); cf. the comments in Walters, 'Aphrahat and the Construction of Christian Identity', 127–8 and Lattke, 'Taufe', 1130–1.

53 *Dem.* 18.12: ܩܘܡܘ ܩܘܡܘܢ ܥܘܕ ܠܢ ܠܢ ܕܢܘܨܬܘܢ ܕܩܘܡܘܢ ܕܩܘܡܘܢ ܕܩܘܡܘܢ. The translation of ܩܘܡܘܢ (*ἀνάγκη*) is somewhat difficult, since it often means simply a necessity or obligation in Syriac, while the Greek underlying the present citation suggests unwanted compulsion or distress; cf. the comments and glosses in M. Sokoloff, *A Syriac Lexicon: A Translation from the Latin. Correction, Expansion, and Update of C. Brockelmann's Lexicon Syriacum* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns/Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias, 2009) 63.

It is this reasoning that operates under the surface also in *Dem.* 7. In 7.18, those who are summoned to the struggle first must evaluate whether they wish to be married or have other worldly entanglements that would hinder their participation in the spiritual battle. Those who do wish (or expect) to be married are to turn away from the commitment to virginity and holiness before they are baptised. Baptism itself is not withheld, as is clear in 7.20, but one's marital status is to be settled *prior* to baptism and not reversed later. Paul's statement, then, enables Aphrahat to develop a 'logic' to manage the difficult relation between marriage and baptism in the context of debates about the virtues of the former and worries about the dangers of sin after the latter.

### 3. Aphrahat, Pauline Reception and a Network of Early Christian Discourse

Taking the above material in the round, then, it is apparent that Aphrahat's Pauline reasoning in *Dem.* 7 bears a striking resemblance in particular to the views of Origen and Tertullian, described briefly above. All three writers are well aware of the tension between a strong ascetic impulse and pastoral necessities in addressing the realities of early Christian marriages. Beyond this, however, each of the three rejects extreme forms of marital renunciation, represented by Marcion and Tatian, while nevertheless lauding chastity above marriage, though the latter is seen as good only in a qualified sense. All three, as well as Clement of Alexandria, articulate their views by drawing on Paul's instructions on marriage in 1 Cor 7. More specifically, Tertullian and Aphrahat lean particularly on Paul's 'command in all the churches' that believers should remain as they were at baptism – not changing their marital status after beginning their Christian life. Even so, both Aphrahat and Tertullian recognise that sometimes one marriage *in fide* is necessary in view of human weakness, for the lay Carthaginian Christian and Persian ascetic alike.<sup>54</sup> On the other hand, Aphrahat strikes a milder tone than Tertullian with respect to repentance. For the latter, sin after baptism makes one liable for punishment and even destruction. Repentance, if perhaps possible for some offences, cannot be had for adultery or fornication.<sup>55</sup> For Aphrahat, though, all sins should be confessed so that the believer can be healed of the gangrenous effects of sin.

54 One may recall here the extreme cases in which Aphrahat advocates that a male ascetic should marry (*Dem.* 6.4), noted above.

55 Contrary to the position of, e.g., the Shepherd of Hermas, rejected by Tertullian as the 'Shepherd of adulterers' (*pastor moechorum*): *Pud.* 20.2 (C. Munier and C. Micaelli, eds., *Tertullien: la Pudicité* (SC; Paris: Cerf, 1993); cf. the discussion of Tertullian's views on penitence in Horn, 'Penitence', 158–64 (discussion of his reaction to Hermas on pp. 163–4).

Let us return, then, to the issues raised at the beginning of the present argument, offering some reflections on what the above analysis means in relation to studies of Pauline reception as well as to a broader understanding of early Christian discourse. In the first place, locating Aphrahat within the scope of the early Christian debate on marriage, linked so closely with the interpretation of 1 Cor 7 and tied up with Paul's subsequent epistolary legacy, illuminates further the widespread impact of the Apostle. If some sources associated with Syria are often seen to be non- or even anti-Pauline, this is not the case for Aphrahat in the mid-fourth century or even in the earlier *Didascalia apostolorum*, which we noted briefly was indebted to the tradition from 1 Timothy.<sup>56</sup> Views associated with Paul were authoritative, and unproblematically so, for the Persian Sage. Even before asking the question about how we can relate the debate in Syriac sources historically to the argument happening to the West in Greek and Latin, attention to this material offers a way to broaden out current discussions of Pauline interpretation.

Finally, bringing Aphrahat's Pauline interpretation together with these other writers is not a matter of drawing up lines of direct influence on the Persian Sage. This is, rather, an act of scholarly production. There is no question that in important respects Tertullian and Aphrahat, for instance, are not directly related: the latter had not read the former.<sup>57</sup> On the other hand, the ascetic impulse associated with Marcion and Tatian, but also evident in popular early Christian novels such as the *Acts of Paul*, was widely influential and it appears highly plausible that both writers – Aphrahat in Persia in the fourth century and Tertullian in Carthage at the turn of the third century – were engaged in the same long-standing debate. The concrete social pathways through which both ascetic and pro-marriage impulses circulated in early Christian communities are, by and large, no longer evident to scholars working today.<sup>58</sup> For the most

56 The Syriac texts often identified as non- or anti-Pauline include the Didache and the Pseudo-Clementine *Homilies*. The traditions associated with Thomas (both the Gospel of Thomas and the Acts of Thomas) are also occasionally cited for their lack of Pauline influence. Recently a similar view has been put forward in relation to the theology of the frescos in the Dura-Europos church; see M. Peppard, *The World's Oldest Church: Bible, Art, and Ritual at Dura-Europos, Syria* (Synkrisis; New Haven: Yale University Press, 2016) and note the critique of these arguments in M. R. Crawford, 'Review: *The World's Oldest Church: Bible, Art, and Ritual at Dura-Europos, Syria*, by Michael Peppard. *Comparative Approaches to Early Christianity in Greco-Roman Culture*. New Haven, CT: Yale University, 2016. Pp. xi + 320', *Theological Studies* 78 (2017) 231–2.

57 A similar point could be maintained about the plausibility of Aphrahat's direct literary relationship to Origen or Tatian, as argued on different exegetical grounds in Walters, 'Aphrahat and the Construction of Christian Identity', 139.

58 On precisely this aspect of early Christianity, see recently the attempt at tracing Christian social networks in the second century by Concannon, *Assembling Early Christianity*, who explores the network related to 'sexual politics' on pp. 122–54.



part, what is left for contemporary historians are the traces of debates that moved through social networks, mobilised by travel and trade. Somewhat like archaeologists, we have only an impression, a textual fossil marking an absence, a residual 'network of discourse' that is assembled by scholars. Recognising the possibilities and limits of such a discursive network enables us to bring texts from Christian writers in disparate parts of the ancient world together to better understand the impulses and problems at work in them. In relation to the issue at hand – this early Christian debate about the merits or otherwise of marriage and the interpretation of 1 Cor 7 – one is able to catch a glimpse of a broad discussion by assembling mutually illuminating texts from heterogeneous geographical and chronological places, without the burden of first needing to determine direct lines of influence.