

The meanings of μέλος: The polysemy of Paul's member metaphor¹

Joost Zwarts, Utrecht University, 2017

Abstract

Paul's metaphorical uses of the word μέλος "limb, member" show more variation than hitherto recognized. This polysemy is shown to be the result of combining two semantic dimensions: the type of community that is the target of the metaphor (church or two-person bond) and the type of relation it describes within that community (vertical membership or horizontal co-membership/partnership). Recognizing this richer pattern of meanings of μέλος allows for a natural interpretation of its use in 1 Cor 6:15 as being about horizontal partnership in a two-person bond.

1. Miscellaneous membership

The word μέλος "limb, member" occurs 34 times in the New Testament, almost exclusively (29 times) in the Pauline corpus, most often (21 times) metaphorically standing for a person as part of a community.² There is variation within this metaphorical use, as illustrated in the following selection of examples:³

¹ This paper was presented at the 2016 Annual meeting of the European Association of Biblical Studies, Leuven, 18 July 2016

² In the other eight Pauline uses, the plural μέλη stands collectively for the whole body or nature of a single human person (Rom 6:13 twice, 6:19 twice, 7:5, 7:23 twice, Col 3:5). Only three of the 34 occurrences are singular: 1 Cor 12:19 and 26 (twice).

³ Based on NA²⁸, with translations of the RSV.

Rom 12:4 καθάπερ γὰρ ἐν ἐνὶ σώματι πολλὰ μέλη₁ ἔχομεν, τὰ δὲ μέλη₂ πάντα οὐ τὴν αὐτὴν ἔχει πράξιν, 5 οὕτως οἱ πολλοὶ ἐν σώμα ἔσμεν ἐν Χριστῷ, τὸ δὲ καθ' εἷς ἀλλήλων μέλη₃.

(For as in one body we have many members₁, and all the members₂ do not have the same function, so we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members₃ one of another.)

1 Cor 6:15 οὐκ οἶδατε ὅτι τὰ σώματα ὑμῶν μέλη₄ Χριστοῦ ἐστίν; ἄρα οὖν τὰ μέλη₅ τοῦ Χριστοῦ ποιήσω πόρνης μέλη₆; μὴ γένοιτο.

(Do you not know that your bodies are members₄ of Christ? Shall I therefore take the members₅ of Christ and make them members₆ of a prostitute? Never!)

1 Cor 12:27 Ὑμεῖς δὲ ἐστε σῶμα Χριστοῦ καὶ μέλη₇ ἐκ μέρους.

(Now you are the body of Christ and individually members₇ of it.)

Eph 4:25 Διὸ ἀποθέμενοι τὸ ψεῦδος λαλεῖτε ἀλήθειαν ἕκαστος μετὰ τοῦ πλησίον αὐτοῦ, ὅτι ἐσμὲν ἀλλήλων μέλη₈.

(Therefore, putting away falsehood, let every one speak the truth with his neighbor, for we are members₈ one of another.)

Eph 5:30 ὅτι μέλη₉ ἐσμὲν τοῦ σώματος αὐτοῦ

(because we are members₉ of his body)

The uses numbered 1, 2, 7, and 9 metaphorically describe a person (=limb) as part of the community of Christ (=body). These are instances of a metaphor that Jill Marshall calls the

COMMUNITY IS A BODY (or more specifically, CHURCH IS A BODY) metaphor.⁴ However, this characterization does not straightforwardly extend to the other cases given above.

Occurrences 3 and 8 involve the reciprocal pronoun ἀλλήλων “one another”. Here the membership relationship is said to hold, not between a person and a community, but between persons, who are ἀλλήλων μέλη “members one of another”. James Dunn calls 3 “a slightly odd variation of the body metaphor”.⁵ For Bernd Wannewetsch it is even “a transgression of its natural logic [...], to be a member *of someone else*, as Paul phrases, can hardly be understood within the logic of the body metaphor [...] ‘unnatural’ imagery.”⁶ The question is then not only what μέλος means in these verses, but also how that meaning relates to the COMMUNITY IS A BODY metaphor. What is the “logic” of this metaphor that allows for this “variation” in a natural way?

This question also arises for uses 4 and 5 in 1 Cor 6:15, where *bodies* (τὰ σώματα ὑμῶν “your bodies”) are directly related to Christ (μέλη (τοῦ) Χριστοῦ “members of Christ”), and not explicitly to his body. Many commentators still see 4 and 5 as instantiating the COMMUNITY IS A BODY metaphor and relate it explicitly to Rom 12:4-5, 1 Cor 12:12-27 or Eph

⁴ Jill E. Marshall, “Community Is a Body: Sex, Marriage, and Metaphor in 1 Corinthians 6:12–7:7 and Ephesians 5:21–33,” *JBL* 134, no. 4 (2015): 833–47. There is an extensive literature on the Pauline body metaphor, but her article presents the first study of the body metaphor from a cognitive linguistic perspective.

⁵ *Romans 9-16*, WBC 38B (Dallas: Word, 1988), 724.

⁶ “‘Members of One Another’: *Charis*, Ministry and Representation: A Politico-Ecclesial Reading of Romans 12,” in *A Royal Priesthood? The Use of the Bible Ethically and Politically: A Dialogue with Oliver O’Donovan*, ed. Craig Bartholomew et al., SH (Carlisle: Paternoster, 2002), 210.

5:21-33.⁷ But it is not clear that the larger passage around this verse is concerned with the community. Others, therefore, understand uses 4 and 5 as involving a relation with the individual Christ here.⁸ However, under this individual interpretation it is unclear what the word *μέλος* is meant to convey, especially when “the believer’s physical body is to be

⁷ Robert H. Gundry, *Sōma in Biblical Theology with Emphasis on Pauline Anthropology*, SNTSMS 29 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976), 61; Raymond F. Collins, *First Corinthians*, SP 7 (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1999), 247; Anthony C. Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, NIGTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 466; John Paul Heil, *The Rhetorical Role of Scripture in 1 Corinthians*, SBL 15 (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2005), 114; Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *First Corinthians: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, AB (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), 266; Tom Holland, “A Case of Mistaken Identity: The Harlot and the Church (1 Corinthians 5-6),” *ATI* 1, no. 1 (2008): 60; Roy E. Ciampa and Brian S. Rosner, *The First Letter to the Corinthians*, PNTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), 257; Dieter Zeller, *Der Erste Brief an Die Korinther*, vol. 5, KEK (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2009), 225; Marshall, “Community Is a Body,” 843–44.

⁸ Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 285; Wolfgang Schrage, *Der Erste Brief an Die Korinther (1 Kor 1,1-6,11)*, EKKNT VII/1 (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1991), 25; Christian Wolff, *Der Erste Brief Des Paulus an Die Korinther*, THKNT (Berlin: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 1996), 127; Andreas Lindemann, *Der Erste Korintherbrief*, HNT 9/I (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2000), 147–48; Alistair Scott May, “*The Body for the Lord*”: *Sex and Identity in 1st Corinthians 5-7*, JSNTSup (London: T&T Clark, 2004), 111; Jeromey Q. Martini, “The Body Now and Not yet: An Exegetical Study of the Apostle Paul’s Anthropology, Eschatology, and Ethics in First Corinthians” (University of Edinburgh, 2009), 194.

understood as ‘joined’ to Christ’s own ‘body’ that was raised from the dead,” as Fee suggests.⁹ Is the believer’s body then attached to Christ’s body as a body part?

The πόρνης μέλη in 1 Cor 6:15, use number 6, raises similar interpretative difficulties. Extrapolating the COMMUNITY IS A BODY metaphor, a few commentators see the prostitute as a collective here, “a community called ‘the prostitute’,” that is put in opposition to the community of Christ.¹⁰ The indefinite form of πόρνης “of a prostitute” makes such collective reference unlikely, but then the question becomes acute in what sense a man’s body is a “limb” or “member” of a prostitute. Should we follow Dale Martin in assuming a reference to penetration here? “The man who has sex with a prostitute is, in Paul’s construction, Christ’s ‘member’ entering the body of the prostitute [...] hinting that the man’s penetration of the prostitute makes Christ a penetrator of the prostitute also.”¹¹ One can follow Martin’s general insight that for Paul contact with a prostitution pollutes the ‘permeable’ body of Christ’s community, without accepting his specific exegesis of 1 Cor 6:15 here. But is there an alternative way of making sense of the word μέλος in this context, as part of its larger metaphorical functioning in the Pauline corpus?

⁹ *First Epistle*, 285.

¹⁰ Quoted from Holland, “Mistaken Identity,” 60; also Dale B. Martin, *The Corinthian Body* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), 176; Collins, *First Corinthians*, 247; Fitzmyer, *First Corinthians*, 266; Ciampa and Rosner, *First Corinthians*, 258.

¹¹ *The Corinthian Body*, 176–77. Strangely enough, Martini sees the prostitute penetrate Christ (“Body Now and Not yet,” 196).

2. Members of the church

Let us start with a closer look at those cases (1, 2, 7, 9) in which μέλος metaphorically describes a person as a part of a community, more specifically, the church.¹² Following Marshall in her application of the Conceptual Metaphor Theory, this use can be analyzed as based on a mapping from the source domain of the human body to the target domain of the church.¹³

A domain is a knowledge structure, a interrelated collection of concepts about a part of reality. The domain of the human body involves (among many other things) the concept of the whole BODY itself, with BODY PARTS, like HEAD, FLESH, BELLY, etc. In the church domain we have CHURCH with its CHURCH MEMBERS and a CHURCH LEADER (again, among many other things). Important in both domains is the relation between part and whole: between BODY PART and BODY and between MEMBER and CHURCH. Because concepts can be named by words, the domains in which concepts are organized correspond to lexical fields. In the lexical field for body, for instance, we find words like σῶμα, μέλος, κεφαλή, σάρξ, κοιλία. The word μέλος refers not just to “limbs” or “members” in the strict sense, but to any functional part of

¹² Even though the word under study here is most commonly used in the plural, μέλη, I refer to it with its singular (and nominative) citation form μέλος, following common practice. The frequent plural can be taken to be a consequence of the fact that Paul addresses a plural audience of “members” in combination with the fact that the body naturally presents a plurality of body parts.

¹³ See George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980).

a body: eye (Matt 5:29, 1 Cor 12:17,21), hand (Matt 5:30, 1 Cor 12:21), foot (1 Cor 12:15,21), ear (1 Cor 12:16), head (1 Cor 12:21).¹⁴

The metaphorical mapping between body and church domain involves correspondences between concepts in the body domain and concepts in the target domain. Most importantly, it maps BODY to CHURCH and BODY PART to CHURCH MEMBER. These might be written as separate correspondences (CHURCH IS BODY and CHURCH MEMBER IS BODY PART), but since these correspondences are part of one and the same body metaphor, they can be combined as: CHURCH (MEMBER) IS BODY (PART). The schematic diagram of this metaphor is given in Figure 1. The mapping preserves the ordering of parts and wholes (represented in the diagram in the vertical dimension).¹⁵ On the basis of this metaphor, the words *σῶμα* (associated to BODY) and *μέλος* (associated to BODY PART) are extended to apply to CHURCH and CHURCH MEMBER, respectively, and this allows inferences about these target concepts that are based on the source domain of the body: like a body, the church is an organic unity, with many members, each with their own function, but fully integrated in the whole and dependent on the other members. Furthermore, like a living body, the church is the inalienable possession of a person (Christ). This is the metaphorically shaped message of Rom 12:4-5, 1 Cor 12:27, and Eph 5:30 and the larger passages they are part of (with additional metaphors playing a role in Eph 5:21-33).

¹⁴ Thiselton therefore uses the conjunction “limbs and organs” to translate *μέλη* (*First Epistle*, 465).

¹⁵ This is in line with the *invariance* principle of the Conceptual Metaphor Theory. See George Lakoff, “The Invariance Hypothesis: Is Abstract Reason Based on Image Schemas?,” *Cognitive Linguistics* 1, no. 1 (1990): 54.

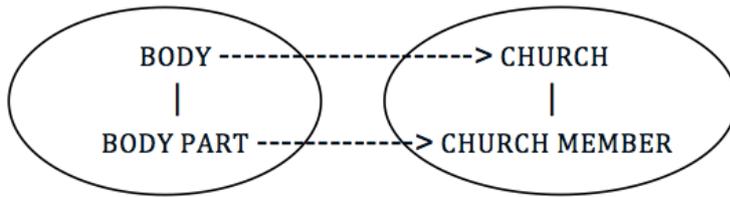


Figure 1: Metaphorical mapping CHURCH (MEMBER) IS BODY (PART)

3. Members of the same church

Against this background, we now take a closer look at the reciprocal uses 3 and 8, where people are said to be ἀλλήλων μέλη “members one of another”. In use 1, 2, 7, and 9, the word μέλη involves the *asymmetric* relation between individual persons and the church: it can only hold in one direction, which corresponds to the vertical dimension in Figure 1 above. The reciprocal use, however, requires symmetry in order to make sense at all. Two persons A and B can only be each other’s μέλη if A is the μέλος of B and B is the μέλος of A, i.e. if the relation holds in both directions. This is impossible with the asymmetric part-whole meaning of μέλος of use 1, 2, 7, and 9. The word μέλος must apply to a slightly different, “horizontal” meaning in use 3 and 8, and the only meaning that really makes sense in the context of the reciprocal is one that we might call “co-member” or “partner”: being members of the same church.¹⁶

¹⁶ Several less literal English translations reflect this interpretation, in different ways, for example by using the symmetric verb *belong* (“we belong to each other”, Rom 12:5b, CEV) or by making the shared membership of one body explicit (“we are all members of one body”, Eph 4:25b, NIV). The English word *family member* also has a horizontal meaning (“relative”). The phrase *my family members* refers to people that are members of the same family as myself.

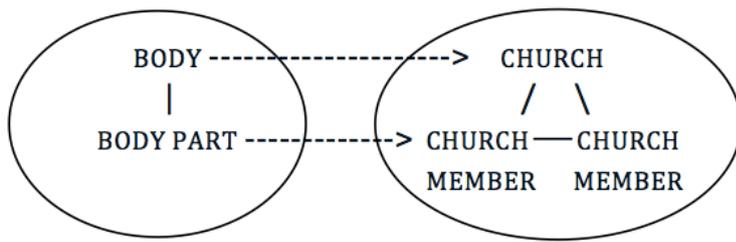


Figure 2: Vertical and horizontal membership in the church

Figure 2 extends Figure 1 with this horizontal relation, that holds between two arbitrary persons that are both (vertically) members of the same church. When the conceptual metaphor CHURCH (MEMBER) IS BODY (PART) maps the body domain to the church domain, it extends the word μέλος from the BODY PART concept to both the vertical and the horizontal dimension of CHURCH MEMBER. On this basis, Rom 12:5 and Eph 4:25 make the point that our vertical membership with the church (as the body) implies that we have a horizontal partnership with each other (as the other body parts). Note that in Eph 4:25 this horizontal, symmetrical relationship is also supported by the mention of πλησίον “neighbor”, which is a relation of the same, horizontal type.

4. Members of the same bond

Now that we have seen that μέλος does not only have a vertical meaning (the member-community relation), but also a horizontal meaning (the member-member relation), we turn to the uses 4, 5, 6 in 1 Cor 6:15. The proposal of this paper is that also there μέλος concerns a *horizontal* relation: either between a person and Christ or between a person and a prostitute. This horizontal use of μέλος requires that the two are members of something that is metaphorically taken as a body. What this body is becomes clear in the verses 16 and 17,

through the quotation of Gen 2:24 from the LXX.¹⁷ There it applies to a man and woman who are united into the small “community” of marriage, metaphorically describing this formation as οἱ δύο εἰς σάρκα μίαν “the two into one flesh” (verse 16).¹⁸ Paul extends that metaphor to the physical “community” with a prostitute and the spiritual “community” with Christ. This metaphor is evident from his use of the word κολλώμενος “being joined” for those two relations, in line with the way προσκολληθήσεται “he will be joined” describes how a man will relate to his wife in Gen 2:24. Thiselton documents the basic, physical use of κολλάω as “to glue, to stick”, in which the metaphorical meaning of κολλώμενος as “united in intimacy” (his translation) is rooted.¹⁹ The underlying body metaphor for the three pairs also surfaces in the common use of the numeral “one”: ἐν σῶμα (person + prostitute), σὰρξ μία (person + wife), ἐν πνεῦμα (person + Christ). Paul maintains parallelism at one level (each of the three unions is

¹⁷ Christopher D. Stanley, *Paul and the Language of Scripture: Citation Technique in the Pauline Epistles and Contemporary Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 195. Bruce N. Fisk writes: “vv. 16-18 provide a ground for 6.15: it is *because* ‘joining’ to Christ or to a harlot establishes a ‘one body/spirit’ union (16-17) that Paul can speak of the body being a ‘member’ of Christ or of a harlot (15)” (“PORNEYEIN as Body Violation: The Unique Nature of Sexual Sin in 1 Corinthians 6.18,” *NTS* 42, no. 4 [1996]: 552).

¹⁸ Within the New Testament, it is quoted in relation to marriage in Mark 10:8 and Matt 19:5. Its status in Eph 5:31 is more complex.

¹⁹ Thiselton, *First Epistle*, 466; *pace* the economic interpretation of Stanley E. Porter, “How Should Κολλώμενος in 1 Cor 6:16-17 Be Translated?,” *ETL* 67, no. 1 (1991): 105–6; For the corresponding Hebrew root *dbq* see J. Duncan M. “,” “Right and Wrong Sticking (1 Cor 6,18),” *EstBib* 55, no. 1 (1997): 95; Also Aaron W. White, “Pauline Rhetoric Revisited: On the Meaning of Κολλώμενος in the Context of 1 Cor 6,12-20,” *ETL* 90, no. 4 (2014): 751–59.

one metaphorical body), while creating contrast at another level (the bond with Christ as a matter of *πνεῦμα* instead of *σῶμα* or *σὰρξ*).²⁰

So, alongside the metaphor CHURCH (MEMBER) IS BODY (PART), we can recognize here a metaphor with the same source domain (BODY) but a different target domain (BOND). This metaphorical mapping establishes the correspondences BOND IS BODY and MEMBER OF BOND IS PART OF BODY. We can write the metaphor as: (MEMBER) OF BOND IS (PART OF) BODY. Figure 3 shows how this conceptual metaphor presents a variation on the metaphor that we saw earlier: instead of the larger community of the church, we have the small community of a two-person bond here. This bond also has a vertical dimension (membership) and a horizontal dimension (co-membership). The implication is that the two MEMBERS of a duo are “co-members” or “partners” of each other because they belong to the same BOND. That is why a believer can be called a μέλος “co-member” of Christ and a man who visits a prostitute becomes her μέλος “co-member”.

²⁰ James L. Breed speaks of “a bodily union too, but in a spiritual sense” (“The Church as The ‘body of Christ’: A Pauline Analogy,” *TRev* 6, no. 2 [1985]: 19). Fee writes: “[T]his is another instance where the language has been dictated by its parallel. Since the union to which this is in contrast was constituted through sexual intercourse, [Paul] could scarcely describe it in terms of becoming ‘one body’ with the Lord.” (*First Epistle*, 287). Lindemann provides a more principled characterization of the contrast: “Gemeint ist nicht, daß die Beziehung zur πόρνη den Leib, die Beziehung zu Christus hingegen das πνεῦμα des Menschen betrifft; sondern die (ganzheitliche) Beziehung des Mannes zur πόρνη ist durch das σῶμα, die (ebenso ganzheitliche) Beziehung desselben Menschen zu Christus ist durch das πνεῦμα bestimmt”. (*Der Erste Korintherbrief*, 150). It is this “holistic relation” that the body metaphor pertains to.

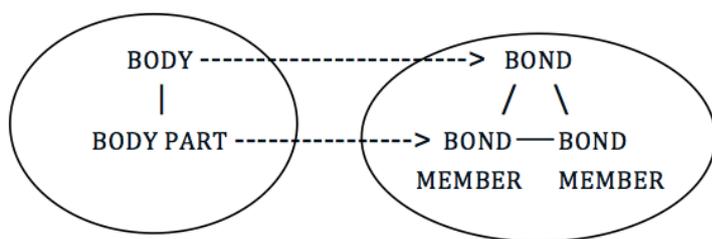


Figure 3: Metaphorical mapping (MEMBER) OF BOND IS (PART OF) BODY

A few remarks are in order about this analysis.

1) A bond is presented here as involving *persons*, but 1 Cor. 6:15 talks about *bodies* as members: τὰ σώματα ὑμῶν “your bodies”. This possessive construction presupposes that people “have” bodies and for Paul these bodies are involved in relations that people have, in marriage, in πορνεία, and with Christ.²¹ The issue of πορνεία foregrounds the bodies of the addressees in Paul’s argumentation and this leads Paul to use τὰ σώματα ὑμῶν instead of just ὑμεῖς “you (pl.)”, in order to emphasize the involvement of the body, not only in the sexual relation with a prostitute, but also in the relation with Christ.²²

2) The notion of BOND should be taken in a sufficiently general way, covering marriage, the relation with Christ, and the relation with a prostitute. It is elaborated in different ways, depending on the nature of members and their bond, with entailments that are specific to

²¹ Bultmann famously claimed that man does not *have* a σῶμα, but *is* a σῶμα (*Theology of the New Testament*, vol. I [New York: Scribner, 1951], 159). For a detailed criticism of Bultmann’s identification of *sōma* with the whole person and a defense of its physical meaning, see Gundry, *Sōma in Biblical Theology*.

²² For 1 Cor 6:15, Marshall has the conceptual metaphor INDIVIDUAL BODIES ARE ITS PARTS, where IT refers to CHRIST’S BODY, but this seems to build into a conceptual metaphor what is really an independent fact about humans (“Community Is a Body,” 844).

those elaborations. However, all three bonds are targeted by the body metaphor, which generates entailments that they have in common: that the members are intimately related and that this relation creates a unity that is more than the sum of its parts.

3) As often observed, the body plays a complex, double role in this passage (1 Cor 6:12-20) and the word *σῶμα* shows corresponding variation. Of the eight occurrences of *σῶμα* in this passage, seven refer to the individual human body in the physical sense (as part of the source target domain) and only in verse 16 (*ἐν σῶμα*) is it metaphorically used for the bond with a prostitute (in a target domain).²³

4) The plural statement of 1 Cor. 6:15 needs to be “distributed” over the individuals of the audience.²⁴ For each individual the message is: “your body is a co-member of Christ”.²⁵ This individual partnership differs from the situation in Eph 5:31-32, where the one body partnership involves the collective of the church, metaphorically conceptualized as a wife.²⁶ Two different metaphorical mappings are composed there. The “nuptial” metaphor CHRIST AND CHURCH ARE HUSBAND AND WIFE creates the notion of a marriage bond to which the body metaphor BOND IS BODY is applied.

²³ Ibid., 843.

²⁴ Fee, *First Epistle*, 285; Derrett, “Right and Wrong Sticking,” 99; Marshall, “Community Is a Body,” 844.

²⁵ As Fee writes: “Here the concern is with one’s relationship to the Lord himself” (*First Epistle*, 285). Also Lindemann: “Bezogen auf Christus ist jedes einzelne *σῶμα* ein μέλος” (*Der Erste Korintherbrief*, 147).

²⁶ Marshall, “Community Is a Body,” 839.

5) There might be a nuptial metaphor at work in the conceptualization of the relation of an individual believer with Christ in 1 Cor 6:12-20.²⁷ In that case there would be a conceptual metaphor CHRIST AND BELIEVER ARE HUSBAND AND WIFE. The bond with Christ would then be the metaphorical target of two source domains, body and marriage, and the two would reinforce each other against the background of the Gen 2:24 citation. In Eph 5:21-33 both metaphors play a role too, but in a different, as we saw.²⁸

6) The symmetrical nature of the co-membership relation between the believer and Christ in verse 15 fits the way the believer and Christ are put side by side through closely parallel formulations connected by *καί* “and” in verse 13 and 14:

τὸ σῶμα τῷ κυρίῳ	<i>καί</i>	ὁ κύριος τῷ σώματι	(13)
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“the body for the Lord”	“and”	“the Lord for the body”	
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τὸν κύριον ἤγειρεν	<i>καί</i>	ἡμᾶς ἐξεγερεῖ	(14)
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“(God) raised the Lord”	and	“(God) will raise you”	
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Fee concludes that “the believer’s physical body is to be understood as ‘joined’ to Christ’s own ‘body’ that was raised from the dead.”²⁹ This “joining” resonates with the horizontal co-member relation in verse 15.

7) Fisk contrasts the “*Vertical Inclusion in Christ*” in 1 Cor 6:15 with the “*Horizontal Unification with Another*” in 1 Cor 6:16-18.³⁰ If the analysis of the present article is on the

²⁷ Brian S. Rosner, “The Function of Scripture in 1 Cor 5,13b and 6,16,” in *The Corinthian Correspondence* (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1996), 516; Derrett, “Right and Wrong Sticking,” 89; Heil, *Rhetorical Role*, 116.

²⁸ Marshall, “Community Is a Body,” 838–42.

²⁹ *First Epistle*, 285.

right track then the whole passage is much more coherent: it is about “horizontal unification” throughout, because μέλος in verse 15 has the horizontal meaning of “co-member of the same body”. It is interesting to note that Fisk interprets μέλη Χριστοῦ as “vertical inclusion in Christ”, but remains silent about the directionality in πόρνης μέλη.

8) Quite a few commentators have made the inference from 1 Cor 6:15 that πορνεία brings Christ into a direct relation or union with a prostitute.³¹ This seems almost inevitable under the vertical, part-whole interpretation of μέλος, especially if the fornicating believer remains part of the body of Christ and becomes at the same time part of the body of a prostitute. However, if the horizontal, co-member meaning of μέλος is assumed, then we get an interpretation that seems to fit best with the idea that Paul contrasts two mutually exclusive types of “sticking” (“right” and “wrong”), in Derrett’s terminology; partnership with a prostitute presents the “risk of disloyalty to God (*z^e nūt*), redolent of idolatry.”³²

9) One might think that the horizontal relation of verse 15 is contradicted by the notion of dominance that is introduced in verse 12, where Paul counters the Corinthian slogans by warning not be “mastered” by anything or anybody (ὑπό τινος). Some see a vertical part-whole relation with the prostitute in verse 15 that reflects the dominance relation against

³⁰ Fisk, “PORNEYEIN,” 554.

³¹ Schrage, *Erste Brief*, 26; Renate Kirchhoff, *Die Sünde Gegen Den Eigenen Leib: Studien Zu Πόρνη Und Πορνεία in 1 Kor 6, 12–20 Und Dem Sozio-Kulturellen Kontext Der Paulinischen Adressaten*, Supplements to Novum Testamentum 18 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1994), 158; Martin, *The Corinthian Body*, 176–77; Lindemann, *Der Erste Korintherbrief*, 148; Fitzmyer, *First Corinthians*, 266.

³² “Right and Wrong Sticking,” 89.

which Paul warns.³³ However, we see in the next chapter that Paul - with the same verb *ἐξουσιάζω* - introduces the notion of mutual authority of spouses over each other's bodies. This shows that authority can function in a horizontal relation too, in a reciprocal way.

5 Conclusion: Logic and variation of the body metaphor

The polysemy of *μέλος* reveals something important about the “logic”, that is, the conceptual structure, of the body metaphor, and the variation that it accounts for. There are two independent sources of variation determining the interpretation of *μέλος*:

- (i) whether the body metaphor maps to the domain of the church or the domain of a two-person bond (like marriage),
- (ii) whether the vertical, asymmetric, part-whole relation is targeted or the horizontal, symmetric, part-part relation.

Three of the four theoretical possibilities are found in the New Testament. (What we do not find is a person being described as a *μέλος* of the ‘body’ of a marriage or other bond.) The oddness of reciprocal *μέλος* in Rom 12:4 and Eph 4:25 disappears when we assume this structure and a coherent way of reading 1 Cor 6:15 as part of the whole passage opens up.

At a more general level, this article demonstrates the importance of paying attention to the possibility of polysemy of biblical words, beyond the obvious variation of their literal and

³³ See, for instance, Brendan Byrne, “Sinning against One’s Own Body: Paul’s Understanding of the Sexual Relationship in 1 Corinthians 6:18,” *CBQ* 45 (1983): 614; Jan Lambrecht, “Paul’s Reasoning in 1 Corinthians 6,12-20,” *ETL* 85, no. 4 (2009): 481.

figurative meanings. Even within the figurative senses of words there can be patterns of variation that are important to recognize and understand as part of our interpretive efforts.