# The *Spirit* and the *Flesh* in the Pauline Anthropological Vocabulary

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*Pneuma (Geist) und Sarx (Fleisch) sind zwei Schlüsselwörter für das Verstehen der paulinischen Anthropologie. Viel mehr als jeden anderen neutestamentlichen Autor betont der Apostel Paulus die Möglichkeit des christlichen Lebens nur unter der Einwirkung des Heiligen Geistes. Der Heilige Geist ermöglicht den Menschen ein gottgefälliges Leben zu führen. Dieses Leben wird beschrieben als eines „nach dem Geist" (Röm 8,4) oder „im Geist" (Gal 5,16.25). Das Gegenteil des Lebens „im Geist" ist das Leben „nach dem Fleisch". Die Absicht dieses Beitrags besteht in einer Kontextualisierung dieser zwei Termini einerseits und in einer semantischen Analyse andererseits.*

*Schlüsselwörter: Pneuma, Sarx, Geist, Fleisch, paulinische Anthropologie, semantisches Feld.*

## 1. Introduction

*Pneuma* and *sarx* are keyword terms in the Pauline theology, being two of the most important elements of Paul's anthropology. In the Pauline corpus they occur 184 and, respectively, 108 times. In 22 instances they are set in contrast with each other[1], but this does not imply that they are taken to refer to opposing parts of the human being, as was the case in Hellenistic anthropology. Rather, Paul uses them to refer to aspects or orientations of a person or a community. The Pauline anthropological dualism is not philosophical but soteriological. For example, Paul doesn't use the possessive pronoun in the case of the incestuous man in Corinth. He doesn't talk about the spirit of the man guilty of incest. Rather, Paul's perspective is on the community. His concern lies with the sanctity of the Church. He exhorts the community to exclude from their midst the man *of the flesh* – so-described because of his incestuous behaviour – so that the community may live under the power of the Spirit and thereby be ready for the Day of the Lord[2]. Thus,

[1] Cf. Sam Creve, Mark Janse, Kristoffel Demoen, *The Pauline Key Words pneuma și sarx and their translation*, Filología Neotestamentaria, Facultad de Filosofía y Letras, Universidad de Córdoba, vol. 20, 2007, p. 15.

[2] Raymond F. Collins, Daniel J. Harrington, *First Corinthians*, Liturgical Press, Collegeville, Minnesota, 1999, p. 213. The language of the *spirit* and *flesh* will be encountered again in 1 Cor, sometimes in reference to a component of the human person, other times in reference to a distinct



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the division in the Pauline letters is not that of the anthropological dualism of the Platonic or Cartesian metaphysics but rather the redemption-oriented division of Biblical theology. This redemption-oriented division is usually referred to as the flesh-spirit antithesis[3].

In the translation of the Hebrew Scripture, the 'spirit' is a rendition of *ruach.* Just as *spiritus*, a derivative of *spiro* 'to breathe', was used with two sense, both 'breathing' and 'breeze', *ruach* also designated either 'breath' (e.g. Ps 135:17 or Gn 6:17) or the 'wind' (e.g. the wind from the East in Ex 10:13). Other metaphorical uses of *ruach* include 'vivacity' (e.g. 1 Kgs 10:5) and the courage that strengthens a warrior in fight (Jo 5:1). The most characteristic meaning is that of a spirit *ruach* from God that comes down over a prophet or a group of prophets and inspires them to have visions, make prophecies, or perform miraculous deeds. It is a power that revigorates and animates, just like a breeze (see Nm 11:17; 1 Sm 10:6; 1 Chr 12:18). The key opposition in this discussion is, however, that between *ruach* and *basar*: that which is powerful and divine versus that which is weak and human (Is 40:6-7)[4].

There are two possible approaches to *pneuma* in the Pauline writings: to regard it (1) in contrast with *sarx* (flesh) and another (2) in relation to God's salvific work in Jesus Christ:

(1) When Paul contrasts the spirit (*pneuma*) with the body (*sarx*), as he does, for example, in Romans 8:12-14 ("according to the flesh…by the Spirit") and in Galatians 5:19-26 ("the acts of the flesh…the fruit of the Spirit"), he is contrasting two opposing powers, two irreconcilable spheres of influence. The two opposing forces are in a relation of tension ("you are not in the realm of the flesh but are in the realm of the Spirit," Rom 8:9; see 7:14 – "spiritual…carnal"), they representing

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entity: (1) The incestuous man in Corinth receives a dualist shock-therapy: his flesh (*sarx*) is being destroyed in order for his spirit may be saved (5:5: "hand this man over to Satan, so that the sinful nature may be destroyed and his spirit saved on the day of the Lord"). (2) Joining oneself to a prostitute in one body or flesh (*hen soma, sarx mia*) is contrasted with the joining in one spirit (*hen pneuma*) to the Lord (6:16-17). (3) The discussion regarding the foundations of an apostle's life contrasts the "spiritual things" (*ta pneumatika*) with the "carnal things" (*ta sarkika*) (9:11). (4) Those from the desert generation were filled with "spiritual food" (*pneumatikon brôma*) and "spiritual drink" (*pneumatikon poma*) (10:3-4). (5) Christ is called the "spiritual rock" (*pneumatikē ... petra*) (10:4). (6) A reference to the Jerusalem Temple service identifies Israel as a nation "after the flesh" (*kata sarka*) (10:18); the expression *kata sarka* will occur 4 more times in 2 Cor (1:17; 5:16; 10:2; 11:18). (7) Spiritual people (*pneumatikoi*) and spiritual goods (*pneumatika*) are the object of the whole argument in chapters 12-14, culminating with a call for confirmation from anyone who "thinks…he is spiritual" (*pneumatikos*) (14:37). (8) The main theme in 2 Cor 3:1-4.18 is the relation between the 'spirit' (*pneuma*), on the one hand, and the 'flesh' (*sarx*) or the 'letter' (*gramma*), on the other hand (cf. Margaret M. Mitchell, *Paul, the Corinthians and the Birth of Christian Hermeneutics*, Cambridge University Press, 2010, p. 44).

[3] Brian D. Ingraffia, *Postmodern Theory and Biblical Theology: Vanquishing God's Shadow*, Cambridge University Press, 1995, p. 131.

[4] Cf. Graeme Nicholson, *Justifying Our Existence: An Essay in Applied Phenomenology*, University of Toronto Press, 2009, p. 146.



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two antithetical lifestyles: "[be] in the flesh" and "the new way of the Spirit" (Rom 7:5.6).

(2) The antitheses that Paul establishes between the *flesh* and the *spirit* follow from his understanding of the role of the Holy Spirit in the Messianic event. This role is itself understood in light of Old Testament prophecies, in which the time of the salvation was heralded as a time of the Spirit (Ez 39:29, see Acts 2:33; 3:21)[5].

The theological implications of the Pauline concept of 'flesh' (*sarx*) can also be divided into two categories:

(1) *Flesh* as a natural feature of Creation. The use of *sarx* in the sense of physicality, the human body, the human race/person, or the morally neutral space (e.g. the natural space in which human life happens) proves that Paul has retained from his Judaic heritage the respect for Creation. The seemingly negative attitude towards the body of the earthly existence (cf. 2 Cor 5:1-10) must not be taken as a sample of Hellenistic ontological dualism: in Paul's approach both the human body and humanity as a whole are redeemed and become the object of resurrection, despite the fact that they are, in general, weak and prone to corruption.

(2) *Flesh* as opposition to God. Galatians 3:2-3 explains the opposition between flesh and spirit as illustrated by confidence in one's personal achievements as opposed to confidence in the renewing work of the Spirit. Although still living a bodily existence, the regenerated Christian, who is already in the Spirit and under the dominion of God, is called to 'kill the acts of the flesh' (cf. Rom 5:12-21), since s/he is now equipped with a new life in Christ[6].

Just as he uses *psyche* and *pneuma* in a general sense, to designate the inner person, or as a metonymical reference to the entire person, Paul uses *sarx* (flesh) and *soma* (body) to designate the outer person (the tangible and visible body) or as a metonymical reference to the entire person. Thus, terms such as *kardia*, *nous*, *psyche* and *pneuma* are all used interchangeably to designate the inner person, whereas *sarx* and *soma* are used interchangeably to designate the outer person. The distinction between the more general use of these anthropological terms and their more specific, Biblical use in Paul's writings can be established based on the context[7].

**2. *Pneuma* and *sarx*: meanings**

In the Judaic-Hellenized cultural milieu of St Paul, *pneuma* or the *spirit* was a superior reality which had its own power of movement and knowledge. *Pneuma* is a vital element of any living person. For the Apostle, *pneuma* is some kind of a force of life that unites us to God. Christians are one *pneuma* with the Lord (1 Cor 6:17). In Galatians 3 Paul further states that through Christ we have received God's *pneuma* which, in turn, connects us to the blessings promised to Abraham, since we

[5] See Stanley B. Marrow, *Paul: His Letters and His Theology: an Introduction to Paul's Epistles*, Paulist Press, 1986, p. 231 ff.

[6] See Daniel G. Reid, ed., *Dicţionarul Noului Testament* [New Testament Dictionary], Editura Casa Cărţii, Oradea, 2008, p. 155.

[7] Brian D. Ingraffia, *Postmodern Theory and Biblical* Theology, p. 131.



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have become his descendants by having shared into his faith. A similar reasoning can be found in Romans 8. The same *pneuma* or life force that belongs to Christ now dwells in the faithful. Thus, Christians are living, whereas their *sarx* is dead to sin (8:9). Clearly, *pneuma* does not refer to the individual soul or to a spiritual substance. Rather, *pneuma* is an active force that works throughout the universe, but is not an individual thing. Similarly, Paul uses *sarx* to designate something other than the individual body, something, however, no less real than *pneuma*. Part of the problem lies with the Pauline interpretation of *sarx*, which seems to rely on a multiplicity of different uses and meanings of the word[8]. Starting from the earliest historical denotation of the word, we may see how the other meanings emerged via metaphor, metonymy, generalization, or specialization[9].

2.1. πνεῦμα

Its original meaning was 'breathing, breath' from the verb πνέω 'to blow', 'to breathe', from which the noun πνεῦμα is morphologically derived. This meaning occurs only once in Pauline writings in a quote from the Old Testament: "And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord will overthrow with the breath of his mouth (τῷ πνεύματι τοῦ στόματος αὐτοῦ) and destroy by the splendor of his coming" (2 Thes 2:8; cf. Jb 4:9; 15:30).

Meanings of inspiration and of Spirit and divine inspiration can be found in Romans 8:9:

You however are controlled not by the sinful nature but by the Spirit, if the Spirit of God lives in you. And if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Christ.

In the Pauline letters a πνεῦμα is assigned to both God and to man. But God's πνεῦμα can be identified with divine inspiration, whereas the πνεῦμα received by man is, in fact, part of God's own pneu/ma, as suggested in 1 Cor 2:10-12:

But God has revealed it to us by his Spirit. The Spirit searches all things, even the deep things of God. For who among men knows the thoughts of a man except the man's spirit within him? In the same way no one knows the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God. We have not received the spirit of the world but the Spirit who is from God, that we may understand what God has freely given us.

The main meaning in the Pauline corpus is πνεῦμα as inspiration (c. 75%) because St Paul shows that, by the coming of the Messiah, the Gentiles have gained the possibility of receiving the Spirit of God, the pledge of salvation and of eternal life. Thus the 'spirit' (*pneuma*) was a natural choice of a word for St Paul to describe the people of the new era. In the same manner, the 'flesh' (*sarx*) could just as well be read as a description of the life of the old era[10].

*Pneuma* is usually regarded as an integral part of the natural man. It is generally mentioned in contrast with *sarx*. Once it also appears in contrast with *o physikos*

[8] Matthew Levering, *Reading Romans with St. Thomas Aquinas*, CUA Press, 2012, p. 2.

[9] Cf. Creve, Janse, Demoen, *The Pauline Key Words...*, p. 18.

[10] Mark Strom, *Reframing Paul: Conversations in Grace & Community*, InterVarsity Press, 2000, p. 93.



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*anthropos* (which consists of both *sarx* and *psyche*). In other places *pneuma* has a natural meaning, in the sense of 'human' or 'human spirit'. Finally, in yet another place it has the meaning of inner disposition. *The man's spirit* (*to pneuma tou anthropou*) is not only the most frequent but also the most complex notion in the dictionary of Pauline anthropology. "Without being inconsistent regarding the meaning of this expression, [Paul] nevertheless endows it with multiple overtones, according to the context and the idea he is trying to express"[11] [my translation]. Πνεῦμα as integral part of the natural man occurs, for example, in 1 Cor 2:11 (in the narrower sense of self-awareness of the human being) and in 1 Cor 5:3-5 and Rom 8:10 (where it designates in fact the human soul)[12].

Occasionally, influenced by Hellenism, Paul uses *psyche* (soul) and *pneuma* (spirit) interchangeably, contrasting *psyche* with *soma* (body) and *pneuma* with *sarx* (flesh). Paul nevertheless evinces a preference for *pneuma* over *psyche*, probably due to the special emphasis he places on the role of the Holy Spirit in salvation. The Spirit of God comes through Chirst and is opposed to the spirit of this world[13]. Given the 'spiritual nature' of the human being, the Holy Spirit can abide in each. The Apostle wants to avoid the Greek dualist trap of *pneuma/psyche* while nevertheless acknowledging the crucial relation between *flesh* and *spirit.* Paul's anthropology is cautious[14]. He prefers to talk about the 'spiritualization of the body'. Transformed in a body of glory (Phil 3:21), the spiritualized body allows us to "bear the image of the heavenly Adam" (1 Cor 15:49)[15].

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[11] Grigorie T. Marcu, *Antropologia paulină* [Pauline Anthropology], Sibiu, 1941, p. 58.

[12] Also see 1 Cor 7:34; 16:18; 2 Cor 2:13; 7:1.13 and 1 Thes 5:23 etc. In places like these it is easy to see how πνεῦμα τοῦ ἀνθρώπου and ψυχη are related.

[13] Michael Demkovich, *A Soul-Centered Life: Exploring an Animated Spirituality*, Liturgical Press, Minnesota, 2010, p. 61.

[14] In Clement of Alexandria (c. 150-215) we notice an eclectic use of Platonism and Stoicism which favors some kind of a subdivision of the soul under one leading power. In Clement's view, the human person consists of a trichotomy made up of the body, the soul, and the mind (*nous*). Clement does not, however, provide a clear definition of the soul as a spiritual substance. The mind, or the soul, is the intellectual image of God. Later on, Gregory of Nyssa (c. 330-395) identifies the soul with a rational substance, this substance being the organic principle of a unique body endowed with feeling and self-movement. In *De hominis opificio*, the soul is one in nature; it is intellectual and immaterial, having powers that it can then confer upon the material body (cf. Tomáš Špidlík, *Spiritualitatea Răsăritului creştin* [The Spirituality of the Christian East]*, II. Rugăciunea*[Prayer], Editura Deisis, Sibiu, 1998, p. 279). With Gregory Christianity begins to forma a doctrine on the soul. Both the intellect and the will are understood as powers of the soul – the soul. The soul empowers the body, breathing into it life, whereas the body, through its senses, communicates with the world that lies outside of the intellect (soul) (cf. Demkovich, *A Soul-Centered Life*, p. 63-64).

[15] The Patristic tradition regards *pneuma* as a denial of *sarx*. The ascetic authors are always wary of the temptations that come from the lower side of the human being. "If you want to pray in spirit, do not hate anyone, then you will not have a cloud obstructing you in the time of prayer," says Abba Evagrius (*De oratione* 128). There are many more such texts in which the 'body' is always opposed to the 'spirit' that gives wings to the soul that it may rise up to God. Although this terminology is greatly tributary to Platonism, Christian thought does not however concur with Platonism: the 'flesh' or the 'body' is a term with a generic moral connotation, including everything that resists the Holy Spirit. Hence the primary ascetic requirement that calls for the 'annihilation of the flesh' in prayer



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Just like in the Old Testament, in Paul, the antithesis between *pneuma* and *sarx* is initially the same as the antithesis between the power that comes from the outside to man and the weakness of man. Along the same lines, God or *Kyrios*, or his Spirit, or his promise, can also be regarded in contrast to *sarx*. In Gal 3:2.5 the *pneuma* is undoubtedly understood as miraculous power: v. 3 states that the Galatians have started out as *pneumatic* but were acting as if they wanted to end up *sarki*, that is, as if they wanted to rely more on human strength than on the power of God.

In the well-known verse in 1 Thes 5:23 ("May your whole spirit, soul and body, be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ") *pneuma*, along with *psyche* and *soma*, must be understood, within popular anthropology, as a constitutive part of the human being. Paul adopts non-critically the Jewish use of *pneuma* as a psychological notion. *Pneuma* is for him a *pneuma* given by God, and he takes this understanding for granted. The fact that Paul often talks about the soul, the spirit, and the body as distinct units has made some claim to have detected some kind of a 'trichotomism' in his writings. On the other hand, from his anthropology we also infer a state of opposition between the *psyche* and the *pneuma*, between the *psychikos* man and the *pneumatikos* man. Paul typically uses the adjective *pneumatikos* (*spiritual* man) when he contrasts *pneumatikoi* with *psychikoi*. In 1 Cor 2:13-15, *pneumatikos* is the man who knows the salvific work of God through the Holy Spirit, whereas the *psychikos* is the man who is ignorant about it or blind to it. The contrast is especially stark since Paul doesn't seem to allow for any neutral ground between the two. Not having the *pneuma* of God means being governed by the *pneuma tou kosmou*[16]. The *physikos* man is the man of sin, of concupiscence, whereas the *pneumatikos* man is the man in a state where he is being acted upon by the grace of the Spirit[17]. The Apostle Paul does not therefore seem to refer so much to a substantial duality of the soul but rather of a stratification of functions. The higher function, which is reason, is the gate through which the renewing and sanctifying powers of grace are channeled into the human

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does not entail that the human body is regarded as not participating in prayer. In fact, the participation of the body in the elevation of the mind to God as a foretasting of the eschatological transfiguration and spiritualization of matter is, in principle, accepted by all the Fathers. St Gregory Palamas says that "For just as the divinity of the Word of God incarnate is common to body and soul […] so, similarly, in spiritual man, the grace of the Spirit, transmitted to the body through the soul, grants to the body also the experience of the things divine" (*Triads For The Defense of Those Who Practice Sacred Quietude*, II,2.12; cf. Tomáš Špidlík, *Spiritualitatea Răsăritului creştin* [The Spirituality of the Christian East], p. 236).

[16] Kittel, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, p. 437.

[17] "Soul and spirit are not two different entities for Paul; they are the one and the same power *psyche*, *nous*, or *pneuma*, depending on how the state of relation in which this concept is being regarded. If it is considered in its relation and functions with regard to the body, then it is called *psyche*; if it is considered in terms of the received grace, then it is called *pneuma* or *pneumatikos*, i.e., a life-giving spirit" (Ioan Gh. Savin, *Mistica şi ascetica ortodoxă* [Orthodox Mystics and Ascetics], Sibiu, 1996, p. 55).



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being and the place where God resides in us. This higher faculty of the soul is also what the mystics are talking about[18].

The soul of man is according to the image of God, and as God is threefold – Mind, Word, and Spirit – so also does the soul have mind, reason, and spirit. The soul of man is iconic, which means that it cannot be understood outside of Christ the Word, because the soul is the icon of the icon, that is, it is the icon of Christ[19]. [my translation]

In 1 Cor 14:14, the *pneuma* given to the spiritual man, which is clearly distinguished from a man's *nous*, can also be called 'his' *pneuma*. Romans 1:9 speaks, for example, of the Spirit of God shared individually to the Apostle. It is important to note that this *pneuma* which dwells in man is nothing more that something which is placed in him as a result of him being in a relation with God. It is not some kind of a soul made perfect by the *pneuma* of God. Paul never says that *psyche* finds its fulfillment in *pneuma*. Speaking of a 'vehicle' for the Spirit of God, Paul calls it a *pneuma* and states clearly that it does not belong to man but is given to him by God (Rom 8:15 ff; 1 Cor 2:11). He sets a person's *pneuma*, which is transcendent to man and properly belongs to God, in contrast with both *psyche* and *soma*. This contrast can be either positive, e.g. when the *pneuma* is distinguished from the human *nous*, (1 Cor 14:14), or negative, e.g. when Paul avoids to use the term *pneuma* when describing the inner self of the pre-Christian man[20].

2.2. σάρξ

Exegetes have long acknowledged the complexity of Paul's use of the Greek term *sarx*, although this word has often been rendered in modern translations as 'flesh'. More recently, however, linguistic approaches have managed to shed some light on the nature of this complexity[21].

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[18] Ioan Gh. Savin, *Mistica şi ascetica ortodoxă* [Orthodox Mystics and Ascetics], Sibiu, 1996, p. 56.

[19] Hierotheos Vlachos, *Psihoterapia ortodoxă, continuare şi dezbateri* [Orthodox Psychotherapy, follow-up and debates], Editura Sophia, 2001, p. 204.

[20] An exception in this sense is 1 Cor 5:3-5, the meaning of which is not fully clear: the *pneuma* of the sinner that must be released/saved is the *self* given to him by God, a part of the Spirit of God. It is not of an indelible nature, for St Paul does consider the possibility of perdition of the *sarx* if is not judged (sin? death? 11:30; cf. Acts 5:1-11). It is rather the new *self* of man which perishes if he fully ceases to be a Christian. *Sarx* must undergo a purifying judgment so that this horrid final possibility may be removed. Here and in Col 2:5, the *pneuma* of the Apostle must be viewed as a gift of the Spirit of God which has been given to him, which is a sign of his authority and which, in turn, exerts an influence that goes beyond its physical presence.

[21] Daniel G. Reid, ed., *Dicţionarul Noului Testament* [New Testament Dictionary], Editura Casa Cărţii, Oradea, 2008, p. 152. We note that the degree of concordance is often relatively high in old or deliberately archaizing translations of the Bible, whereas some of the more recent translations adhere to the extreme opposite, as can be seen in the rendition of σάρξ. In the *NJB* excerpt, 'nature' is used both "human nature" and in "natural inclinations." On the other hand, apart from those places where it means 'breath' and a few other cases, πνεῦμα is generally translated concordantly. This translation of πνεῦμα which is concordant even in the more interpretative translations contrasts blatantly with the wide array of expressions which translate σάρξ as 'human nature', 'self-indulgence', 'natural



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The oldest historical meaning of σάρξ is that of 'matter around the skeleton', the term being defined, in contrast with κρέας (the meat of a sacrificed animal, Rom 14:21 and 1 Cor 8:13)[22], as 'not for consumption' (1). In the Pauline Epistles, this use of σάρξ is almost exclusively used in reference to the human body:

To keep me from becoming conceited because of these surpassingly great revelations, there was given me a thorn in my flesh, a messenger of Satan, to torment me (2 Cor 12:7).

In other places, σάρξ is also used metonymically to describe humanity as a whole, in its natural and material dimension (2). Humanity is regarded not only as a synchronic but also as a diachronic unit (descent). This sense accounts for a number of expressions: (a) humanity as a synchronic unit: "Therefore by the deeds of the law there shall **no flesh** be justified in his sight" (Rom 3:20); "to reveal His Son in me so that I might preach Him among the Gentiles, I did not immediately consult with **flesh** and blood" (Gal 1:16); and (b) humanity as a diachronic unit: „What then shall we say that Abraham, our forefather according to the **flesh**, discovered in this matter?"(Rom 4:1); "Inasmuch as I am the apostle to the Gentiles, I take pride in my ministry in the hope that I may somehow arouse **my own people** to envy and save some of them." (Rom 11:13-14)[23].

The physical dimension of humanity is used metaphorically as a 'carrier of the moral state'.Thus *sarx* may designate the field of action of sin: "For when we were in the realm of the flesh, the sinful passions aroused by the law were at work in us, so that we bore fruit for" (Rom 7:5); "For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh,) dwelleth no good thing: for to will is present with me; but how to perform that which is good I find" (Rom 7:18); "in my mind am a slave to God's law, but in my sinful nature a slave to the law of sin" (Rom 7:25). In 1 Cor 5:5 the *flesh* designates humanity in its weak and sinful dimension.

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inclinations', 'sinful nature' a. o. Whereas concordant translations continue to use the word *flesh* in most of the contexts, the more interpretative translations prefer to paraphrase the notion in some of the contexts, whether to clarify certain associations (e.g. 'sinful nature'), or to rule them out (e. g. 'human nature') (Creve, Janse, Demoen, *The Pauline Key Words...*, p. 29). As for example we indicate the translation of *sarx* from Romans 8:3-5 in two editions of the Bible: „For what the law could not do in that it was weak through the **flesh**, God did by sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful **flesh**, on account of sin: He condemned sin in the **flesh**, that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us who do not walk according to the **flesh** but according to the Spirit. For those who live according to the **flesh** set their minds on the things of the **flesh**, but those who live *according to the Spirit*, the things of the Spirit" (*NKJ*) (http://www.biblegateway.com/versions/New-King-James-Version-NKJV-Bible/); „What the Law could not do because of the weakness of **human nature**, God did, sending his own Son in the same **human nature** as any sinner to be a sacrifice for sin, and condemning sin in that **human nature**. This was so that the Law's requirements might be fully satisfied in us as we direct our lives not by our **natural inclinations** but by the *Spirit*. Those who are living by their **natural inclinations** have their minds on the things **human nature** desires; those who live in the Spirit have their minds on *spiritual things*" (*NJB*: *New Jerusalem Bible* http://www.catholic.org/bible/).

[22] http://www.biblestudytools.com/lexicons/greek/nas/kreas.html.

[23] Creve, Janse, Demoen, *The Pauline Key Words...*, p. 21.



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Specialists have also considered the semantic field of *sarx*: the physical dimension, the human being (humanity), the neutral moral sphere, the negative moral sphere, the rebellious human nature[24]. "The σάρξ category differs in its definition according to the historical situation in which it is used"[25].

a. *Sarx* denotes the physical body[26] or physical relations of relatedness, without any negative connotation (Rom 11:14; 1 Cor 6:16; 15:39; Eph 5:29.31; Col 2:1; cf. 2 Cor 7:1).

b. *Sarx* includes the Hebrew notion of weakness (Rom 6:19). *Sarx* cannot inherit the kingdom of God because it is corruptible and mortal (1 Cor 15:50). It is mortal (2 Cor 4:11), prone to tribulations and suffering (2 Cor 7:5), and it is characterized by weakness (Gal 4:13-14).

c. The synecdoche *the flesh and the blood* designates that which is in opposition to God (Gal 1:16); a life lived "in the body" as opposed to "in the Son of God" (Gal 2:20); Onesimus is a 'dear brother' not only as "a fellow man" but, significantly, also "in the Lord" (Phlm 16); the metaphor of the 'thorn in the flesh' underlines the human weakness as opposed to the power of God (2 Cor 12:7-9); and, finally, life "in the body" is in contrast with being "with Christ, which is better by far" (Phil 1:22-23).

d. *Sarx* correlated with the man's incapacity of justifying himself before God (Rom 3:20; Gal 2:16). *Sarx* that cannot boast before God (1 Cor 1:29). Through the flesh, the law is weak (Rom 8,3). "Those who are in the realm of flesh cannot please God" (Rom 8:8).

e. *Sarx* in antithesis with *pneuma*: a circumcision understood only as something shown in the flesh is a misinterpretation: the circumcision that God wants is that "of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the letter" (Rom 2:28-29). "For the mind of the flesh is death, and the mind of the Spirit is life and peace" (Rom 8:6)[27]. "After beginning by means of the Spirit, are you now trying to finish by means of the flesh" (Gal 3:3). Then Paul sets them in contrast again: "This I say then, Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh. For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other: so that you cannot do the things that you would" (Gal 5:16-17); after which

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[24] See Reid, *Dicţionarul Noului Testament* [New Testament Dictionary], p.152-154.

[25] R. Jewett, *Paul's Anthropological Terms: A Study of their Use in Conflict Settings*, Leiden, Brill, 1971, p. 454.

[26] In 1 Cor 15,39: the living bodies of humans and animals, as opposed to the meat for consumption. In this context, *sōma* is used similarly to *sarx* (1 Cor 15:38-39; cf. Col 1:22).

[27] „In Romans 8:5-8 two ways of human existence are expounded...To be *carnally minded* – v. 6; lit. *to have the mind of the flesh* – means to choose to have one's whole existence, soul and body, captivated by sin. This is a turning against God and His righteousness, an **enmity** (v. 7) with God rather than peace with Him. The *carnally minded* cannot be **subject** to (v. 7) or **please** (v. 8) God…. **To be spiritually minded** (lit. *to have the mind of the Spirit*) means to choose to be liberated by the Holy Spirit, so that one's whole nature becomes spiritual, body and soul…When fire penetrates iron, the iron becomes fiery hot without ceasing to be iron. So our human nature, body and soul, in its union with Christ becomes like God without ceasing to be human" (*The Orthodox Study Bible*, Thomas Nelson Publishers, Nashville, Tennessee, St. Athanasius Orthodox Academy, p. 356).



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he lists the 'acts of the flesh' (a list of social vices) as opposed to the 'fruit of the Spirit' (5:19-23). Similarly, in Philippians he underlines very clearly: "For it is we who are the circumcision, we who worship by the Spirit of God, who glory in Christ Jesus, and who put no confidence in the flesh" (Filip 3:3). Finally, the contrast between *pneuma* and *sarx* is not a contrast between immaterial/material. *Soma pneumatikon*, the resurrected spiritual body of the saved Christian will be released of its flesh and soul, retaining only its *pneuma*[28].

f. *Sarx* as a source of corruption and hostility towards God. "Because the carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be" (Rom 8:7). "make not provision for the flesh, to fulfill the lusts thereof" (Rom 13:14). "And they that are Christ's have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts" (Gal 5:24). "For he that sows to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that sows to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting" (Gal 6:8; cf. Gal 5:13; Eph 2:3; Col 2:13.18.23).

Naturally, the expression *kata sarka* mirrors the same semantic field: the "Israel *kata sarka*" (1 Cor 10:18) concerns relations according to the flesh, as opposed to relations which are *kata pneuma*: „Concerning his Son Jesus Christ our Lord, who was made of the descendants of David according to the flesh (*kata sarka*), and declared to be the Son of God with power, according to the Spirit of holiness (*kata pneuma*), by the resurrection from the dead: Jesus Christ, our Lord" (Rom 1:3-4; cf. 9:5). Abraham as *our ancestor kata sarka*, as opposed to Abraham as the "father of all them that believe" (Rom 4:1.11; cf. 9:3). Sometimes *kata sarka* denotes the relation of a slave to his master as opposed to the much more important relation of one to his heavenly Master (Col 3:22-24; Eph 6,5-6); "not many wise men *kata sarka*" (1 Cor 1:26). Paul's own mindset is no longer *kata sarka*, that is, inferior and inadequate by the standards of the *kata pneuma* mindset (2 Cor 1:17;5:16). He no longer acts *kata sarka* (2 Cor 10:2-3). He denounces the boasting *kata sarka* (2 Cor 11:18). Moreover, he warns dramatically: "For if you live after the flesh– *kata sarka* - , you shall die: but if you through the Spirit do put to death the deeds of the body, you shall live" (Rom 8:13) and shows the antithesis between those born *kata sarka* and those born *kata pneuma* (Gal 4:23.29) and those who "are after the flesh [and thereby] do mind the things of the flesh" and those who "are after the Spirit [and mind] the things of the Spirit" (Rom 8:5). More straightforwardly, *kata sarka* denotes a life lived at the level of perishable materialism, where fulfilling one's greed and one's lusts is the highest goal; the Apostle identifies people who live like this as ones "whose end is destruction, whose God is their belly, and whose glory is in their shame, who mind earthly things" (Phil 3:19)[29].

Paul made a clear distinction between *sarx* and *sōma* ('body'), but this distinction is not substantial, that is, it does not indicate any kind of duality, at least, not without the additional notions of *psyche* and *pneuma*. They are not two

[28] Paula Fredriksen, *Sin: The Early History of an Idea*, Princeton University Press, 2012, p. 162-163.

[29] James D. G. Dunn, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle*, Eerdmans, Michigan, 1998, p. 67-68.



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separable entities; rather, they concern modes of human existence. Paul distinguishes, for example, between the life lived *in the flesh* (*en sarki*: 2 Cor 10:3-4: "For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh. For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal") – a life that is inevitable since man is a bodily being – and life lived *according to the flesh* (*kata sarki*:: "For you are yet carnal: for while there is among you envying, and strife, and divisions, are you not carnal, and walk as men?", 1 Cor 3:3) – i.e. a morally wrong lifestyle, one that must be abandoned if one wants to reach the kingdom of God and receive the chance of resurrection[30].

The semantic field of *sōma* is generally neutral from a moral point of view, whereas for *sarx* it is negative. Moreover, *sarx* doesn't usually require a context to connote negatively: it is already negative on its own. An interesting challenge to this generalization is posed by two expressions in Col 1:22 and 2:11, unique in the Pauline corpus, which speak of "the body of the flesh" (*sōmati sarkos*) of Christ – *sarx* acting here as a descriptor for the physical character of the body of Jesus[31].

For the greatest part, however, Paul evaluates *sarx* negatively, setting it in contrast with *pneuma* and using it to describe "this world." In Galatians 5:16-17 he goes as far as to establish a radical dualism between *sarx* and *pneuma*: "This I say then, Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh. For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other: so that you cannot do the things that you would"[32]. Moreover, *sarx* is often used in close proximity to *porneia*: "Now the works of the flesh are manifest, which are *these*: adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, strife, jealousy, wrath, selfishness, divisions, heresies, envyings, murders, drunkenness, revelings, and such like" (Gal 5:19-21a). For Paul, the choice of pursuing the desires of the flesh is very dangerous, it leading to an exclusion from the inheritance of the kingdom of God (Gal 5:21b: "they who do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God"). In Romans 7:5-6, the Apostle further emphasizes this correlation of *sarx* with sexuality[33].

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[30] Paul S. MacDonald, *History of the Concept of Mind*, vol. 2, Ashgate Publishing, 2003, p. 100.

[31] Dunn, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle*, p. 71.

[32] For a longer passage where Paul contrasts *sarx* and *pneuma* see Rom 7-8.

[33] Here *sarx* denotes the old lifestyle, characterized by sexual reproduction and cycle upon cycle of life and death ("the fruit of death"): "For when we were in the realm of the flesh (ἐν τῇ σαρκί), the sinful passions (τὰ παθήματα τῶν ἁμαρτιῶν) aroused by the law were at work in us, so that we bore fruit for death. But now, by dying to what once bound us, we have been released from the law so that we serve in the new way of the Spirit, and not in the old way of the written code." Note that the 'realm of the flesh' is presented here as being rooted in the observance of the Law. The new life in the Spirit is in opposition with the life in the body and is acquired, in part, by repression of the sinful passions. Paul sums this up in Romans 8:6: "for the mind of the flesh is death, and the mind of The Spirit is life and peace."The 'flesh' is used metonymically with regard to the old lifestyle under the Law – a lifestyle that preserved distinctions related to the degree of relatedness or ethnic identity (e.g. circumcision, Phil 3:2-3) (cf. Susanna Laing Drake, *Sexing the Jew: Early Christian Constructions of Jewishness*, ProQuest, 2008, p. 55-56).



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Paul's views on the body are not very positive, and this primarily because his anthropology was intrinsically cosmological: the body (*sōma*) and the soul (inclusively the *nous*) belong to the earthly realm, and are thereby intrinsically 'bodily'; in the case of the faithful, the body and the soul have received a new breath of the divine, heavenly *pneuma*, which has now started its work of transfiguration in them; eventually, this *pneuma* can spiritualize both the body and the soul, thus removing them completely from the earthly realm of *sarx*[34].

Although he forcefully condemns the decadent and sinful behavior of some of the members of his Churches (1 Cor 5:1-6.11-12; cf. Rom 6:1-2.11-12; Gal 6:7-10; Col 2:20-23), the Apostle nevertheless exhorts those who are 'spiritual' (*hoi pneumatikoi*) to act in a peaceful and forbearing manner towards those who have fallen into error (Gal 6:1-2). The believer lives between two eons (Rom 8:23). At the Parousia the Christians will be risen and given "spiritual bodies" (1 Cor 15:42-54; 2 Cor 5:1-5). Life in the Spirit is demonstrated by what the Apostle calls "the fruit of the Spirit" (Gal 5:22-23), which is in stark contrast with "the acts of the flesh". The ethical nature of the Spirit and of His work is stated very clearly in 1 Thes 4:7-8, which says that whoever does not have a life dedicated to God is actually rejecting "God, who has also given unto us his Holy Spirit" (1 Thes 4:8). Therefore, those in whom the Holy Spirit dwells should demonstrate moral purity. In 1 Corinthians 6:19-20 the Apostle further argues that "your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have of God." The ethical nature of the Spirit also derives from the fact that the Spirit is the Spirit of Christ. The Spirit creates in the being of the believers the new nature the archetype of which is Christ; this nature is the nature they will have in the life to come (2 Cor 3:17-18). At the level of the communion of the Church, the Spirit gives each one a different gift which they then have the duty to use in one another's service, as limbs of a single body, thus forming the Body of Christ on earth (1 Cor 12:4-31)[35].

**4. Conclusions**

a. Overall, Paul's thinking is in terms of the work of the Spirit of God which underlies the entire existence of the believer. The Spirit reveals to the believer the salvific life in Christ and makes him understand and accept it responsibly. For this reason, although forever the Spirit of God and never exhausted by being shared individually with man, the *pneuma* is also the innermost and deepest self of a someone who no longer lives by his own being but by the grace of God given to

[34] See Troels Engberg-Pedersen, *Cosmology and Self in the Apostle Paul: The Material Spirit*, Oxford University Press, 2010.

[35] See Daniel Reid, ed., *Dicționarul Noului Testament* [New Testament Dictionary], p. 347-349. Finally, the neutral vs. negative uses of *sarx* can also be disambiguated based on the grammar: (1) *kata sarka* ('according to the flesh') + verb (e.g. 2 Cor 1:17; 5:16) is morally negative, whereas *kata sarka* + substantiv (e.g. Rom 4:1; 9:3) is morally neutral.(2) All the negative occurrences of *sarx* omit the article. (3) With one exception, all the generic occurrences of *sarx* (in the sense of 'humanity') occur in the LXX configuration *pasa sarx* ('toată carnea'). (4) Almost invariably, *sarx* in the context of rebellion against God occurs with an definite article (Cf. Reid, *Dicționarul Noului Testament* [New Testament Dictionary], p. 154).



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him.[36] The Holy Spirit influences the entire human being and cannot be explained psychologically. But the thesis that there is no anthropological *pneuma* in Paul's writings is hard to support. In Romans 8 it is stated that the choice of walking in the Spirit – the choice of the path of life – is possible even beginning with now: "This I say then, Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh" (Gal 5:16; cf. 1 Thes 1:4-10; 4:3-8; Rom 8:4.12-17).

b. *Sarx*, a translation of *basar*, denotes the human species with all its weakness, as opposed to God. Paul's definition of *sarx* 'flesh' is neither consistent not easily mapped on the conceptual ground between Jews and pagans. Paul seems to alternate between a negative value of *sarx*, often in drastic opposition with *pneuma*, and a neutral moral value as evinced by literal hermeneutics: historicity, relatedness, ethnicity, or body. The various other connotations of *sarx* surface only with context.

c. In the Pauline Epistles, πνεῦμα and σάρξ are used as keywords. They occur in a variety of contexts, and often in contrast with each other. The main theological contrast is that of the Hebrew Scriptures, that is, that between *sarx* and *pneuma* – a duality superposed over the neutral human being consisting of *soma* and *psyche*. *Pneuma* comes from God and is different from *psyche* which is inherent to the human being. Paul main point is that one should 'walk in the Spirit'. The Spirit can then dwell within us and become the main feature of our Christian life, until the life of the entire being (*soma* and *psyche*) can be described as spiritual. This point is especially clear in 1 Cor 15:44, where the risen body is a spiritual body[37].

d. In Pauline thought, the contrast between *sarx* (and *sōma*[38]) and *pneuma* is not a contrast between body and soul. This can be seen clearly in Rom 8:6, where Paul speaks about the mind of the flesh, in 1 Cor 3:3, where carnality is correlated with spiritual issues such as jealousy and envy, or in Gal 5:19ff, where the "acts of the flesh" include spiritual issues such as idolatry, witchcraft, envy, etc. Paul doesn't speak of the sanctification only of the *psyche* and *sōma*, but also of the *pneuma* (1 Thes 5:23). He exhorts the Christian community to "purify [themselves] from everything that contaminates body and spirit" (*sarx* şi *pneuma*) (2 Cor 7:1). The contrast is therefore not between the body as the locus of sin and the spirit as something above sin. Paul does not regard the body as having a lesser value. To the

[36] G. Kittel, ed. *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, vol. 6, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1995, p. 434-436.

[37] See Graeme Nicholson, *Justifying Our Existence: An Essay in Applied Phenomenology*, p.146-147.

[38] "Man consists of body and soul, of *soma* and *pneuma*; *sarx*, the flesh, is available as an alternate to *soma*, so that man can also consist of flesh and soul. *Soma* and *sarx*, however, are not only synonyms, but *sarx* can also stand for the matter out of which earthly *soma* is formed. Thus the concept of *soma* acquires the meaning of a form into which various substances, not *sarx* alone, may enter. Moreover, the meaning of *soma* can be expanded to include not just the body in contrast to *pneuma*, but also the human person as a whole" (Eric Voegelin, *Race and State*, University of Missouri Press, vol. 2, 1997, p. 133). For more on *soma* see Robert H. Gundry, *Soma in Biblical Theology: With Emphasis on Pauline Anthropology*, Cambridge University Press, 1976.



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contrary, he exhorts the Church: "present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your *spiritual* worship" (Rom 12,1; cf. 6,13; 1 Cor 6,13.15)[39].

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[39] G. C. Berkouwer, *Man: The Image of God*, Eerdmans, 1962, p. 205.



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