

# INTERNATIONAL SEMINAR ON SAINT PAUL

Casa Divin Maestro, Ariccia (Rome)  
*19-29 April 2009*



SOCIETY OF ST PAUL

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## PRESENTATION

From 19 to 29 April 2009 has taken place in the Casa Divin Maestro of Ariccia (Rome) the **International Seminar on Saint Paul**, participated in by 73 members of the Pauline Family from 26 nations (44 Paulines, 17 Daughters of Saint Paul, 5 Pious Disciples, 3 Pastorelle, 2 Apostoline, 1 Annunciationist, 1 Gabrielite).

The theme of the VIII General Chapter of the Society of Saint Paul, **To be Saint Paul living today**, the content of its general objective and the operative line regarding the programmatic theme indicated for an annual Letter of the Superior General emphasize the constant sensibility and renewed interest of the Paulines in regard to Saint Paul.

Exactly because thought of beforehand, when Benedict XVI, on 28 June 2007, announces a **Pauline Year** from 28 June 2008 to 29 June 2009, as Paulines we have felt even more motivated and stimulated to organize this meeting also in the name of the entire Pauline Family.

Through the celebration of the Seminar we have wanted to offer, in the last months of the **Pauline Year**, an additional occasion to deepen the specific vocation of the apostle Saint Paul in the evangelizing mission of the communities of the primitive Church and its function as model for the Paulines, called to be missionaries in communication of all times, according to the specific mission entrusted to us by blessed James Alberione.

Knowledge, meditation and assimilation of the "Gospel" of Paul and of his style of evangelization constitute the basis for strengthening and reelaborating the identity of the Pauline charism in a context of society, culture, Church and communication that evolve rapidly.

The main objective of the **International Seminar on Saint Paul** has wanted to put in hermeneutical relation the originality of the mission of Saint Paul among the gentiles in the preaching realized by the primitive Christian communities, with the mission of the Paulines sent to evangelize through communication today, whether through media, multimedia or internet. The argument has been developed in three successive stages:

1. *From Sunday 19 to Friday 24 April 2009.* The specificity of the faith experience and pastoral activity of Saint Paul in the commu-

nities of the early Church, taking into account above all his evangelization among the gentiles which motivated him to rethink the contents of the faith and the manner of proposing it. Exegetical, theological and pastoral aspect.

2. *Friday 24 and Saturday 25 April 2009.* The mediation of blessed James Alberione in assuming Saint Paul as model of the Pauline charism. Historical-charismatic aspect: blessed Alberione, interpreter of Saint Paul.

3. *From Sunday 26 to Wednesday 29 April 2009.* Distinctiveness of the faith experience and pastoral activity of Paulines in today's Church, taking into account their mission to evangelize through communication. Hermeneutical aspect: Paulines want to be **Saint Paul living today**.

The Seminar, actually, will have to exercise influence on our spirituality, formation, apostolate and Pauline consecrated life so that these are lived better and proposed better to the youth of today. The continuous deepening of Saint Paul for a more complete understanding and an enthusiastic living of the Pauline charism for those who already belong to the Pauline Family, must also produce a vocation commitment to propose to young people the "fascination" of our style of life, characterized by a busy contemplation of God in history, with a mission to make possible encounter with God even in every form of contemporary communication.

For documentation regarding the **International Seminar on Saint Paul**, for the Dossier with articles which served as a preparation for the Seminar and for other information, refer to the website [www.paulus.net/sisp](http://www.paulus.net/sisp). There is also a PPT presentation entitled *Paul, Pioneer in the Field of Evangelization*, by Prof. Carlos Gil from the University of Deusto, Spain. The contents of his talk are not available due to copyright restrictions.

Sr. Cristina Cruciani, PPDM, made her own contribution to the Seminar with an audiovisual presentation: *St. Paul interpreted in the art of the Pauline Temple in Alba. From spirituality in art to spirituality in the apostolate*. This was offered only to the participants.

## FINAL MESSAGE

*Dearest Brothers and Sisters,*

During these past days we 73 brothers and sisters from the Pauline Family have gathered from five continents, in the house of the Divine Master at Ariccia to participate in the International Seminar on St. Paul organized by the Society of St. Paul.

With the help of internationally known biblical scholars, we first of all nourished ourselves with an ample and articulate reflection on the life, spirituality, theology and mission of the apostle Paul.

After that, guided by various sisters and brothers of the Pauline Family, we proceeded to reflect on the spirit of the Apostle through the lens of our father Alberione, in order to try and imagine a hermeneutic of our Founder that would update our charism and be the foundation of the everyday reality of the specific mission to which we have been called – a mission articulated in apostolate, spirituality, poverty and study.

Lastly, we gathered in 9 groups according to language (3 Spanish, 3 English and 3 Italian) and questioned ourselves in order to carry out a communitarian discernment to draw up guidelines for relaunching the Pauline charism in its triple perspective of apostolic content, the pastoral dimension and spirituality.

Here in brief is the fruit of what we elaborated during the Seminar that we experienced together these days.

### **The contents of Pauline witness**

1. The primary content is Christ, communicated in the style of Saint Paul. At the same time, as the Apostle reminds the Philippians (cf. Phil 4:8), every area of human research, even what is not explicitly Christian, is included in our apostolate as long as it responds to the criteria of truth, nobility and justice. Every question that promotes the truth about human beings and their natural ambient is by definition not foreign to us.

2. Our apostolate calls us to be prophetic and critically aware in all cultures regarding the great themes of the current times, above all in societies such as ours, characterized by the phenomenon of

globalization, secularization and afflicted by the negative consequences of the structure of sin (poverty, exclusion, egoisms, indifference, etc.).

3. As Daughters and Sons of Paul at the service of the Church and the social contexts in which we are present, we feel the call to be interpreters of the “signs of the times,” with the necessary discernment:

- a) promoting the role of women in the Church, in society and in the Pauline Family;
- b) supporting a greater responsibility of the laity in the Church;
- c) emphasizing the need for unity through a frank interreligious and ecumenical dialogue;
- d) relaunching the values of solidarity, communion and faith;
- e) defending the Christian meaning of the family, its importance and its value in society;
- f) denouncing the havoc wrought by people and nations against nature and natural beauty, without however giving in to a simplistic environmentalism.

4. We are concerned about the transmission of the faith to the new generations: for this reason we feel called to address them, forcing ourselves to use their own language and to promote the educational agencies that share our same vision of the human person.

### **Pauline strategy and pastoral style**

1. The pastoral service which has been entrusted to us is that of addressing a public that is always more heterogeneous in its concrete context of life, culture and degree of adhesion to the Church and the Gospel; a public that communicates in an always more “interactive” way with the sources of the message and thus is always less a passive receiver.

2. Among the privileged members of our audience, by the explicit indication of Blessed James Alberione, we must address our works to the so-called *opinion leaders*, both lay and religious, and to those who work in social communications.

3. Our apostolate is called to be “a spearhead” and “a bridge,” that is, one that looks ahead without fear in regard to contents and means; and one that is capable of creating relationships and dialogue not just between the church and the people of today, but also among these people themselves.

4. We feel the call to collaborate always more within the Pauline Family, promoting together our biblical and charismatic formation with the goal of increasing our sense of family and drawing up common projects also on the basis of already existing realities.

5. We are aware of the need to adopt a style of evangelization that is flexible, humble, communal, marked by gratuitousness and conscious that it is precisely in personal and communitarian weakness that the strength of the apostle and the apostolate resides.

6. We want to commit ourselves to form and involve more deeply in our apostolate the Pauline Cooperators and the other consecrated lay men and women of the Pauline Family. Furthermore, we consider it essential for our mission to bring about a greater involvement of prepared and motivated laity.

7. We consider it equally necessary to collaborate on the formative, cultural and apostolic levels with other publishers, both religious and lay.

### **The spiritual motivation of our identity**

1. Ours is an apostolic, Eucharistic and liturgical spirituality founded in Christ Way, Truth and Life, whose purpose is that we might be conformed *to* and live *in* Christ. It is also a spirituality of communion in the Pauline Family.

2. We feel the need to “liberate Paul,” striving to know him better in a vital way, so as to understand him always better as the model for an apostle: this with the purpose of strengthening in us a spirituality that is at one and the same time mystical and apostolic, avoiding risky dichotomies.

3. As Pauline men and women, we must become more aware of the necessity of witnessing in order to be “agents of change” as Paul was, above all in view of the three-year preparation for the centenary celebration of the birth of the Pauline Family.

4. Finally, we desire that the Pauline charism be relaunched by means of an updated hermeneutical re-reading of Paul and Alberione.

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We express the lively desire that the interest manifested in the Apostle during these days by all the participants might not end with the closing of the Seminar, nor with the closing of the Pauline Year.

Thus we assume the commitment to deepen our knowledge of the thought and life of our “father, model and founder St. Paul” and to transmit to our brothers and sisters throughout the world what we have lived, learned and reflected on together during these days.

THE PARTICIPANTS IN THE INTERNATIONAL SEMINAR ON SAINT PAUL

*Ariccina, 29 April 2009*



## PARTICIPANTS

1. Fr. Silvio Sassi, Superior General
2. Fr. Jose Pottayil, Vicar General
3. Fr. Juan Antonio Carrera, General Councilor
4. Fr. Juan Manuel Galaviz, General Councilor
5. Bro. Giuseppe Galli, General Councilor
6. Bro. Walter Rodríguez, General Councilor
7. Bro. Takahito Tokuda, General Councilor
  
8. Fr. Ricardo González Vílchez (Argentina-Chile-Perú)
9. Fr. Alberto Scalenghe (Argentina-Chile-Perú)
10. Bro. Alexandre Carvalho da Silva (Brazil)
11. Fr. Valdecir Uveda (Brazil)
12. Fr. Ciro Monroy (Colombia-Ecuador-Panamá)
13. Fr. Gustavo Nova Nova (Colombia-Ecuador-Panamá)
14. Fr. George Kaitholil (India-Nigeria)
15. Bro. Emanuele Corso (Italy)
16. Fr. Ampelio Crema (Italy)
17. Bro. Luca De Marchi (Italy)
18. Fr. Eustacchio Imperato (Italy)
19. Fr. Mario Moscatello (Italy)
20. Fr. Dino Mulassano (Italy)
21. Fr. Giacomo Perego (Italy)
22. Fr. Sante Sabatucci (Italy)
23. Fr. Stefano Stimamiglio (Italy)
24. Fr. Vincenzo Vitale (Italy)
25. Bro. Seiichi Oyama (Japan)
26. Fr. Kenji Yamauchi (Japan)
27. Fr. Agustín García Cortés (Mexico)
28. Fr. Miguel Ángel García Coss (Mexico)
29. Bro. Salvador Ramírez Martínez (Mexico)
30. Fr. Andres Inting (Philippines-Macau)
31. Fr. Reynaldo Reyes (Philippines-Macau)
32. Fr. Ricardo Ares (Spain)
33. Fr. José María de la Hera (Spain)
34. Bro. Vicente Hernández (Spain)
35. Fr. Jeffrey Mickler (United States)
36. Fr. Ernesto Tigreros (United States)

37. Fr. Francis Kochupaliyathil (Australia)
38. Fr. Fray Santiago Peña Escobar (Canada-France)
39. Bro. Luigi Boffelli (Congo)
40. Fr. Sebastiano Lee Chang Hang (Korea)
41. Fr. Witold Wisniowski (Poland)
42. Fr. Rui Tereso (Portugal)
43. Bro. Naudy Mogollón (Venezuela)
44. Fr. Norman Peña (Community Canonico Chiesa)
45. Sr. Águida Mari Puell, FSP (Brazil)
46. Sr. Teresa León Martínez, FSP (Colombia)
47. Sr. Élide Pulita, FSP (Colombia)
48. Sr. Judith Hidalgo Mejia, FSP (Czech Republic)
49. Sr. Eliane Guignard, FSP (France)
50. Sr. Teresa Mele, FSP (Germany)
51. Sr. Meera Alburquerque, FSP (India)
52. Sr. Nadia Bonaldo, FSP (Italy)
53. Sr. Olimpia Cavallo, FSP (Italy)
54. Sr. Ana Maria Killing, FSP (Italy)
55. Sr. Pelagie Banze Mukangalata, FSP (Ivory Coast)
56. Sr. Anna Muindi Nduku, FSP (Kenya)
57. Sr. Santina Yun Soon, FSP (Korea)
58. Sr. Shalimar Rubia, FSP (Philippines)
59. Sr. M. Leonora Wilson, FSP (Russia)
60. Sr. Raymond M. Gerard, FSP (United States)
61. Sr. Kathryn James Hermes, FSP (United States)
62. Sr. M. Necitas Derama, PDDM (China - Hongkong)
63. Sr. Paulcy Thelakkada, PDDM (India)
64. Sr. M. Daniela Musumeci, PDDM (Italy)
65. Sr. María del Refugio Saldate, PDDM (Mexico)
66. Sr. M. Concepción López, PDDM (Spain)
67. Sr. Cesarina Pisanelli, General Councilor SJBP
68. Sr. Maddalena Longobardi, SJBP (Albania)
69. Sr. Carmen Mastella, SJBP (Italy)
70. Sr. Laura Cenci, AP (Italy)
71. Sr. Sandra Rosina, AP (Italy)
72. Enza Baione, IMSA (Italy)
73. Francisco Loera, ISGA (Mexico)

## THE SPEAKERS



### **Francesco Bianchini**

Priest of the Archdiocese of Lucca, Italy. He has obtained a Doctorate in Biblical Sciences in 2006 at the Pontifical Biblical Institute. He has taught Sacred Scripture at the University LUMSA in Rome. At present he teaches Pauline Letters at the Institute of Religious Sciences in Pisa, the Interdiocesan Theological Study of Camaiore (Lucca), affiliated to the Theological Faculty of Central Italy of Florence, and at the Theological Faculty of Southern Italy of Naples. Author of the essay *L'elogio di sé in Cristo* (The praise of oneself in Christ). *The use of periautologia in the context of Philippians 3,1 – 4,1* (Rome 2006) and of the commentary *Lettera ai Galati* (New Testament – exegetical and spiritual comment; Rome 2009). He writes articles and reviews of biblical argument, with particular attention to the Pauline writings.



### **John J. Pilch, Ph.D.**

He is an associate professor in the theology department at Georgetown University, Washington, D.C., where he has been teaching Scripture since 1993; visiting professor at Studium Biblicum Franciscanum, Hong Kong; and associate professor in the Department of New Testament Studies, University of Pretoria, South Africa. Biblical scholar, international speaker, and author of books, articles, and multimedia resources, he also serves as book review editor for the *Biblical Theology Bulletin*.

John Pilch belongs to The Context Group which uses the social sciences (especially Mediterranean anthropology and its cultural context) to interpret the Bible. His numerous publications include *Introducing the Cultural Context of the Old Testament* (2007<sup>2</sup>); and *Introducing the Cultural Context of the New Testament* (2007<sup>2</sup>); *Social Science Commentary on the Pauline Letters* and *Social Science Commentary on Acts of the Apostles* both w/ B. Manila (2006<sup>3</sup>); *Stephen: Paul's Social Network: Brothers and Sisters in Faith* (2008<sup>3</sup>).



### **Elisa Estévez López**

She has a Degree in Theology from the University of Deusto (Bilbao, Spain) and a Licentiate in Biblical Sciences from the Pontifical Biblical Institute (Rome). She is titular professor in the Department of Sacred Scripture and History of the Church at the Pontifical University Comillas (Madrid). President of the Association of Spanish Women Theologians, she is a member of the Council of Directors of the Spanish Biblical Association

since 2001. She is also a member of the Society Biblical Literature and of the European Society of Women in Theological Research.

Her activity in research at present unfolds on two principal lines: about "The Christian origins from the socio-cultural perspective" and about "The women during the Christian origins", with a project on Authority and leadership of women in the centuries I-II. She has written various books and many articles including *Mediadoras de sanación* for San Pablo, Madrid (2009).



### **Romano Penna**

Priest of the diocese of Alba, Italy. Since 1983 he has been ordinary professor of the New Testament at the Pontifical Lateran University, becoming its Professor Emeritus. At present he is also by invitation professor of the Gregorian University. He has also taught at the Pontifical Biblical Institute of Rome. He has specialized in

particular in the study of Paul of Tarsus, becoming one of the most known specialists of the Corpus Paulinum and of the Christian origins in Italy, but his fame is international.

For SAN PAOLO Editions he has written *The Apostle Paul. Studies in Exegesis and Theology* (1991); *The Original Portraits of Jesus the Christ* (2003); *Gospel and Inculturation* (2006); *The DNA of Christianity. The Christian Identity at the Nascent State* (2007). He has moreover worked on the Italian edition of: *Dictionary of Paul and of his Letters* (San Paolo 2000). For the Dehoniane of Bologna he is the author of various commentaries among which a monumental commentary in several volumes of the Letter to the Romans, of which have come out the first two volumes (that have already undergone a first reprinting) and the third volume is about to come out).



### **Neil Elliott, Ph.D.**

The Rev. Neil Elliott is a New Testament scholar and writer based in Minneapolis, USA. He served until mid-2005 as chaplain at the University Episcopal Center at the University of Minnesota, and previously as associate director of a nonprofit organization in Haiti in 2000-01. He is a member of the Haiti Justice Committee of Minnesota (founded in 1991).

Neil writes about religion and politics, particularly within the context of U.S. foreign policy and the theology of empire. A member of the Episcopal Peace Fellowship, he also writes on issues of “just-war” theology and nonviolence. He is the author of *Liberating Paul: The Justice of God and the Politics of the Apostle* (1994); and *The Arrogance of Nations: Reading Romans in the Shadow of Empire* (2008). Member of the Society of Biblical Literature, the Anglican Association of Biblical Scholars, and the Studiorum Novum Testamentum Societas.



### **James D.G. Dunn, Ph.D., D.D.**

Widely regarded as one of the foremost scholars in the world today on the thought and writings of St. Paul, James D. Dunn is Lightfoot Professor Emeritus of Divinity at the University of Durham in England.

His principal research field is New Testament Studies and specializes as well in early Christianity. His work is important beyond the NT field in church history and Christian doctrine, and often relates to contemporary religious movements such as Pentecostalism, ecumenism, and Jewish-Christian dialogue.

Author of numerous books about the New Testament, including several important commentaries on various epistles of Paul. Among these commentaries are *Romans* (Word Biblical Commentary, 2 vols.), *Galatians* (Black’s New Testament Commentaries), and *Colossians and Philemon* (New International Greek Testament Commentary), *The Cambridge Companion to St Paul*, (University Press, Cambridge 2003), *The Theology of Paul the Apostle* (1998) and *The New Perspective on Paul* (1998, revised edition, 2007).

Dunn is associated with the New Perspective on Paul - having coined the term in 1983. It has been stated, as a popular quote about Dunn, "Anyone who is interested in the rigorous study of early Christianity and who has not engaged with the works of James D. G. Dunn is not really interested in the rigorous study of early Christianity".



### **Andrea Riccardi**

One of the most authoritative laymen of the international religious panorama and a noted Italian scholar of the Church of modern and contemporary age. Riccardi lectures in Contemporary History at the Terza Università degli Studi Roma Tre. He has published numerous works reprising the themes of the difficult rapport between Christianity, Culture and Moder-

nity in the XX century.

He is known in the international sphere for having founded in 1968 the St Egidio community in response to the Second Vatican Council. His commitment for peace has seen him mediator in talks for the resolution of the conflict in Mozambique. The peace signed in Rome on October 1992 has been the result of more than two years of negotiations carried out in the Roman seat of the Community of St Egidio. In the following years, the commitment for peace is pursued on multiple scenarios.

Among the numerous awards conferred upon him as founder of the Community of St Egidio, and for his intense commitment for peace: the World Methodist Peace Award (1997), the Niwano Peace Prize, by the Niwano Peace Foundation (1999), the Felix Houphuet-Boigny UNESCO Peace Prize (1999), the Legion honneur of the French Republic (2002) because of his commitment "in favor of the excluded and for the just cause of reconciliation and peace". In 2004 the prestigious Premio Balzan for Peace and Brotherhood among Peoples. He has received in Aquisgrana together with the Community of St Egidio the prestigious International Prize "Charlemagne" 2009, assigned in December 2008.

He has published various books also with San Paolo and recently with the Daughters of Saint Paul, *Paolo uomo dell'incontro* (Paul, man of encounter) (2008).



### **Silvio Sassi, SSP**

Superior General of the Society of St. Paul since May 2004, he has a license in Theology from the Seraphicum in Rome; he has specialized in the Science of Communications at the Sorbonne in Paris and has completed studies as researcher in Semiology at the École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales, also in Paris, with a thesis on Semiology of publicity. From 1983 to 1998 he has been Director of the International Pauline School of Social Communication where he has taught semiology, linguistics and publicity. He has been professor of Ethics and Communication at the Istituto Superiore di Teologia Morale in the Accademia Alfonsiana of Rome.



### **Antonio Girlanda, SSP**

A Pauline priest and a biblist. Ordained a priest in 1956, he has taught Sacred Scripture at the theological faculty of Saint Bonaventure in Rome. Actually, he is redactor of the biblical sector of the Edizioni San Paolo, for which he has directed the collection "Nuovissima versione della Bibbia" in 46 volumes (1967ff), and with Frs. Rossano and G. Ravasi, the *Nuovo dizionario di teologia biblica* (1991).

Among his published works we point out a course of biblical initiation in two volumes: *Antico Testamento* (1992) and *Nuovo Testamento* (1994) and *Come leggere la Bibbia: Grammatica elementare per leggere correttamente la Sacra Scrittura* (2002) (How to read the Bible: Elementary grammar to read correctly Sacred Scripture).



### **Élide Pulita, FSP**

Daughter of Saint Paul from Brazil, she studied Philosophy, Theology and Missionology. She is presently Executive Directress of the Paulines SAL (Servicio Apostólico Latinoamericano) with seat in Bogotá. Before that she has been General Councilor for the Apostolate and then Directress General of the Apostolate in Brazil.



### **Giusto Truglia, SSP**

Pauline priest, in 1987 he joined the editorial staff of *Famiglia Cristiana*, becoming a professional journalist in 1989. He has a Degree in Literature from the University of Bari; from 1994 to 1999 he has been Director of the monthly *Lettura*. Successively he has assumed the direction of *Vita Pastorale*, *Gazzetta d'Alba*, *Stadium*, *Televiva* and *Telesubalpina*. From 1 February 2008 he is co-director of *Famiglia Cristiana*.

He has been a member of the Office for Social Communications of the Diocese of Alba and of that of the Episcopal Conference of Piedmont, National Consultant of FISC (Italian Federation of Catholic Weeklies), member of the Council of the Apostolate of Saint Paul in Italy. He is a member of the CTIA (International Technical Committee of the Apostolate), an organism of the SSP.



### **Ricardo Ares, SSP**

At present he is Director General of the Apostolate of the Province of Spain, Society of Saint Paul. Ordained priest in Rome in 1957, he spent the first years in Spain but soon blessed James Alberione invited him to Venezuela and some years after destined him to Chile. He re-entered Spain in 1974, dedicating himself above all to editorial work, as Editorial Director or General Director. He has also been Provincial Superior of

Spain (1984-1988), Member of the CTIA (1988-1998), Councilor in the Executive Committee of CIDEP (1991-1996) and Regional Superior of Portugal (1998-2002).



### **Elena Bosetti, SJBP**

Since 1968 she is a sister of *Gesù Buon Pastore* (Good Shepherd Sisters). She has obtained from the Pontifical Gregorian University a Baccalaureate in Philosophy, a license in Dogmatic Theology and in 1988 the Doctorate in Biblical Theology with the thesis *Poimên kai Episkopos: the figure of the shepherd in the First Letter of Peter*.

She has spent various periods of research at the

Studio Biblico Francese and at the École Biblique of Jerusalem. She has hosted the TV program “Le ragioni della speranza” (The reasons of hope) on RAI 1.

She teaches exegesis of the NT at the Gregorian and in various Atheneums. She is engaged in activities of formation and biblical pastoral on the national level.



**Vincenzo Marras, SSP**

He is a priest of the Society of Saint Paul since 1979. After his studies in philosophy and theology he has perfected his specialization in communication at the Faculty of Science of Education in the Salesian University of Rome.

A professional journalist, since 1984 he has worked with the monthly of culture and religious actuality of the Saint Paul Periodicals, Jesus,

of which he has become Director in 1996.

In the month of May 2008 he has been named Director in-charge of Telenova & Telesublapina, TV stations of San Paolo Group



**Regina Cesarato, PDDM**

Superior General of the Pious Disciples of the Divine Master since April 2005. She has obtained a baccalaureate in philosophy and theology at the Pontifical Institute of St. Anselm and, in 1984, licentiate in biblical theology at the Pontifical Biblical Institute of the Gregorian.

From 1993 to 1999 she has guided the present Province of Italy, as Regional Superior and in April of 1999 she has been elected as General

Councilor, an office that she has held for one mandate, until her election as Superior General. During her service as General Councilor she was part of the Secretariat of Spirituality and of the Center of Studies on Charism and Mission.

On 2 April 2008 she was elected vice president of USMI - *Union of Major Superiors of Italy*.



## **PART ONE**

Exegetical and Theological Moment

THE SPECIFICITY OF THE PASTORAL ACTIVITY  
AND THE FAITH EXPERIENCE OF ST. PAUL  
IN THE EARLY CHURCH,  
TAKING INTO ACCOUNT HIS MISSION TO THE GENTILES



PAUL. WHO WAS HE?  
IN SEARCH OF THE APOSTLE'S IDENTITY\*

Francesco Bianchini

If there is one figure in the history of Christianity that has been the source of argument and cause of disagreement, it is surely Paul of Tarsus. In fact, the Acts of the Apostles tells us that immediately after the Damascus event, there were already doubts and reservations regarding this man (Acts 9:26). And if the Apostle was a controversial figure during his life, marked by misunderstandings and sharp opposition, deriving mostly from his relationship with his fellow believers in Christ<sup>1</sup>, he has certainly been no less so in the history of interpretation. Without going into the development of Pauline hermeneutics and the dialectic between Paulinism and anti-Paulinism, it is enough to recall how Paul has been a figure of decisive importance in Christian thought (and beyond) throughout the centuries, and is still so today<sup>2</sup>.

The conflicting nature of the various viewpoints expressed about the Apostle should warn us of the complexity of his person, marked by many facets. This same impression also emerges upon reading the Acts of the Apostles, and above all from his letters, in which Paul manifests a considerable variety of aspects, regarding himself and his way of thinking, which place both the reader and the exe-

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\* This article has appeared contemporaneously in *Rivista biblica* 57 (2009) 43-69, with the title "Alla ricerca dell'identità dell'apostolo Paolo". – *Translation by Peter Waymel - Sr. Raymond Gerard, FSP.*

<sup>1</sup> On the basis of some witnesses, it is even possible to hypothesize that some Jewish Christians, together with the Jews of Rome, were involved in the decisive intervention of the Roman authorities that led to Paul's martyrdom. CLEMENS ROMANUS, *Epistula I ad Corinthios* 5.5 (a text written between 96-98 A.D.), indicates that the Apostle was killed "due to jealousy and discord." Also, in a passage from the Pauline tradition, 2Tim 4:9.14-15:16, reference is made to a climate of tension, with informants and desertions, around Paul while he is incarcerated; this can be dated to the period of his Roman imprisonment.

<sup>2</sup> Regarding this, we refer the reader to R. FABRIS, *Paolo. L'apostolo delle genti* (Milano: Paoline 1997) 534-565, for a historical outline of Pauline research, and to M. QUESNEL, "Etat de la recherche sur Paul: questions en débat et enjeux sous-jacents," *Paul, une théologie en construction* (éds. A. DETTWILER – J.-D. KAESTLI – e.a. [Genève: MoBi 51, 2004]) 25-44, for the current situation, also characterized by studies emanating from the Judaic environment and from social-historical readings, as well as political and philosophical ones.

gete in serious difficulty when they attempt to trace a portrait of the Apostle. Thus, showing who Paul is, as we propose to do, is a task that is anything but easy, and it can be accomplished only by taking into consideration the numerous elements of his personality and by fleeing from the comfortable (but blind) path of simplification, set on defining the personality of the Apostle through a single, all-encompassing point of view.

If until now we have paused to reflect on the difficulty of our path in search of Paul's identity, we should also point out an advantage, which constitutes one of the peculiarities of the Apostle. An attentive observation of the New Testament texts reveals that none of their authors dares to put his own person in relief by speaking of himself, except Paul, who not only has no qualms about involving himself in the text of his letters, but even places his own story at the center of his arguments<sup>3</sup>. Therefore, we have the good fortune to possess firsthand material that will prove to be of vital importance in reconstructing the Apostle's profile.

Keeping in mind the difficulties as well as the prospects opened by our research, our intent is to reconstruct Paul's identity in order to discover not only who he is, but also what image of himself he wished to present to his listeners, considering his original manner of telling about himself. The study comprises three parts, which are progressively developed throughout the investigation. Thus, we shall begin by analysing what others have said about Paul, and will then examine both data provided by Acts as well as letters from later authors, with particular attention to contemporary interpretations. In this first part, we will pay attention above all to the Apostle's cultural and religious background. Thus we will examine his Greco-Hellenistic, Judaic and Roman origins, together with his link, developed after his encounter with Christ, with the tradition of the primitive Church, in order to discover finally the richness of this aggregate of different roots.

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<sup>3</sup> In the OT there is another personage who speaks diffusely about himself: the prophet Jeremiah (cf. the so-called *confessions* in Jer 11:18-12:6; 15:10-21; 17:14-18; 18:18-23; 20:7-18). It is interesting to note how on two occasions in which Paul refers to something about his person, he recalls the texts and figure of the prophet. In fact, in 2Cor 10:4; 12:19; 13:10, the same couplet "destroy-build," which in Jer 1:10 describes Jeremiah's mission, is utilized for Paul's. In the same way, in Gal 1:15 he links, with very similar expressions, the call of the Apostle with that of the prophet presented in Jer 1:5.

In the second part, the sources used to delineate Paul's profile will be exclusively comprised of his writings, particularly the autobiographical texts of his epistolary. Among these, three passages stand out, which more than any others prove significant for our purpose, and will be attentively analyzed: Gal 1:11-2:21; Phil 3:1-4:1; 2Cor 11:1-12:18, for the purpose of discovering the *what* and the *how* of the Apostle's self-presentation. Dividing the study in this way, we shall not neglect other exegetes' use of Pauline texts to reconstruct the Apostle's identity. However, we intend to highlight what *Paul* wants to tell us about himself, and how he says it. In other words, we will keep in mind a common aspect of human experience: the relevant difference between what each person thinks and wants to show of himself, and what others perceive of him. And, in fact, it is precisely this disparity that must have contributed to the conflicts that have always surrounded our figure. We believe, therefore, that for the purposes of delineating Paul's profile, in contrast to what is usually done, it is fundamental to give greater attention to his autobiographical texts: attention that is not simply of a thematic order, but argumentative and rhetorical.

The third and last part will be dedicated to the conclusions of our research, which we hope will furnish us not only with a clear picture of the research conducted up to this point on Paul's identity (a presentation of the whole picture that is difficult to find in exegetical literature), but also some novel elements to better identify what the Apostle wanted his addressees—the members of his communities—and us, his readers today, to understand regarding the *mystery* of his person, after almost two thousand years of debate regarding his figure.

## 1. Paul According to the Others

The interpretative work on Paul's identity has produced, down through the centuries, an impressive mountain of contributions. Depending upon the historical moment, now this, now that aspect of his figure has been accentuated. In particular, the basic choice has been between his Greco-Hellenistic and his Judaic background. Important studies, such as that of Hengel,<sup>4</sup> show how first century

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<sup>4</sup> M. HENGEL, *Juden, Griechen und Barbaren. Aspekte der Hellenisierung des Judentums in vorchristlichen Zeit* (Stuttgart, 1976).

Judaism and Hellenism are not easily separated, so much so that Judaism, whether in the motherland or in the Diaspora, is a *Hellenistic* Judaism. If through these studies such a dichotomy seems to have been overcome today by the greater part of Pauline exegetes,<sup>5</sup> there is still much discussion regarding which of the two influences prevails, and how they are integrated in the Apostle's personality.

For our part, we will seek to show the main points of each of the diverse elements that represent Paul's roots. By listening to the testimony of Acts and the contributions of successive interpreters, we will search for a general picture in which to place the man from Tarsus, to compare this, in the second part of our study, with the testimony he gives about himself.

### 1.1 Greco-Hellenistic influence

Paul's Greco-Hellenistic background is without a doubt the aspect that has been most strongly emphasized, until roughly thirty years ago. In support of this, the book of Acts affirms the Apostle's origins in the important Hellenistic city of Tarsus (Acts 9:30; 11:25; 21:39; 22:3). It is necessary to note that the Pauline letters do not confirm this piece of information, and as a result doubts have arisen as to its historicity. However, as Murphy-O'Connor<sup>6</sup> rightly sustains, the author of Acts, on the basis of his theological geography, would have had no interest in conceiving Paul's origin in Tarsus, but rather in Jerusalem (cf. Acts 1:8), and therefore the Lucan information is trustworthy. On the basis of testimonies from the classical authors,<sup>7</sup> being born in Tarsus in the first century meant coming into the world in a flourishing place, both from the economic as well as a cultural point of view. It was a cosmopolitan city, a center of literary, philosophical, and rhetorical studies. In the end, developing this perspective further, the author of Acts does not simply mention Paul's mastery of Greek (21:37), but above all leads his hero to hold the famous discourse in the Areopagus of c. 17, before stoics and epicureans, also recording his erudite citation of a Greek author.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>5</sup> The title alone of certain works is significant, for example, T. ENGBERG-PEDERSEN (ed.), *Paul Beyond the Judaism/Hellenism Divide* (Louisville, 2001).

<sup>6</sup> J. MURPHY-O'CONNOR, *Paul. A Critical Life* (Oxford, 1996), 32-33.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. for example FLAVIUS PHILOSTRATUS, *Vita Apollonii* 1.7; STRABO, *Geographica* 14.5.13; XENOPHON, *Anabasis* 1.2.23.

<sup>8</sup> ARATUS, *Phaenomena* 5 in Acts 17:28.

This element of the Apostle's Greco-Hellenistic culture is taken for granted and does not raise any particular question in the history of interpretation until the XIX century, when, in the ambit of the "School of Tübingen," Paul's Christianity, precisely because it is oriented towards Hellenism, is considered in total opposition to Peter's, of Judaic inspiration.<sup>9</sup> On the trail of these positions, there moves the later *Religionsgeschichtliche Schule*, which intends to explain the identity and thought of the Apostle, the true founder of Christianity, against the backdrop of gnosis and of the Greco-Roman mystery religions.<sup>10</sup> The highlighting of Paul's Hellenistic influence becomes the absolutely prevalent line in exegesis (and not only among Protestants), up until the end of the 1970's. Such a conviction led to emphasizing the Apostle's total rejection of the law and of Judaism, a religion of works (Romans and Galatians were thus considered by far the most important letters) and, on the other hand, his reference to religious, philosophical, anthropological and ethical models deriving from the Greco-Roman world.

Today, in a very changed picture due the revolution provoked by Sanders' thesis,<sup>11</sup> it is possible to evaluate the Greco-Hellenistic bearing on Paul with greater balance. In this way, authors<sup>12</sup> identify some of the main elements that the Apostle has borrowed from this culture: the use of the Greek language which was more diffused at the time, the *koiné diálektos*, the various references to Greek philosophy (particularly that of the cynics and stoics), the military and political language, the competitive and bodily metaphors, the relevant themes such as liberty, conscience and reconciliation, the recourse to rhetoric. From the mid-Seventies onwards, it is precisely this last aspect that has been taken heavily into consideration by exegetes. In consequence, rhetorical analysis,<sup>13</sup> attentive to both the

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<sup>9</sup> Cf. F.C. BAUR, "Die Christuspartei in der korinthischen Gemeinde, der Gegensatz des petrinischen Christentums in der ältesten Kirche, der Apostel Petrus in Rom," *TZ* 4 (1831) 61-206.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. W. WREDE, *Paulus* (Tübingen, 1904).

<sup>11</sup> Cf. E.P. SANDERS, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism. A Comparison of Patterns of Religion* (Philadelphia, 1977).

<sup>12</sup> For example, G. BARBAGLIO, *Il pensare dell'apostolo Paolo* (Bologna: BibSt 9bis, 2004) 34-37; T. ENGBERG-PEDERSEN (ed.), *Paul in His Hellenistic Context* (Edinburgh: SNTW, 1994); U. SCHNELLE, *Paulus. Leben und Denken* (Berlin-New York, 2003), 62-69.

<sup>13</sup> H.D. BETZ, "The Literary Composition and Function of Paul's Letter to the Galatians," *NTS* 21 (1975) 353-379, constitutes the pioneering study of this new trend.

epistolary and the discursive dimensions of the text, has become a main tendency in the realm of Pauline studies.

In my estimation, it becomes possible once more to evaluate Paul's Greco-Hellenistic background from just such a perspective of interpretation. A mere surface reading of his letters shows a plurality of rhetorical elements, while a deeper analysis shows that knowledge of rhetoric and its procedures is essential for understanding the Apostle's mode of argumentation and the coherence of his texts.<sup>14</sup> Furthermore, it is necessary to consider that the Hellenistic culture of the first century was profoundly imbued with rhetoric, "l'enseignement roi" according to the illuminating words of Marrou.<sup>15</sup> Every person who was at least moderately prepared possessed a basic rhetorical formation. To sum up, Paul's interpreters must begin their studies from the heart of that civilization, so as to understand what type of influence all these various elements present in that cultural context exercised upon the Apostle.

## 1.2 Jewish influence

In recent years, the cultural influence that has been most examined with respect to Paul is undoubtedly the Jewish one. In this regard, the data deriving from Acts is unequivocal, beginning with the Hebrew name 'Saul,' linking our man to the first king of Israel (7:58; 8:13; *passim*). Furthermore, in the same book, Paul demonstrates his knowledge of Hebrew-Aramaic (21:40; 22:2); he is not afraid to call himself a Jew; he belongs by family tradition to the Pharisees (23:6); was instructed in Jerusalem by the famous teacher Gamaliel (22:3); and he affirms to have spent his youth in this city, living according to the norms of his religious group (26:4-5), for the rigorous faithfulness to which Saul persecuted the transgressors of the Law, the believers in Christ (9:1-2). Evaluation of this news, from a historical point of view, has varied, depending upon the confirmation found (or not) in the Pauline literature. In fact, regarding the name 'Saul,' we find support in the Apostle's declara-

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<sup>14</sup> Cf. J-N. ALETTI, "La rhétorique paulinienne: construction et communication d'une pensée," *Paul, une théologie en construction*, 47-66.

<sup>15</sup> H.I. MARROU, *Histoire de l'éducation dans l'antiquité* (Paris, 1948), 269.

tion of belonging to the same tribe of Benjamin, from which his predecessor descended (Rom 11:1; Phil 3:5). With regard to language, the data has been confirmed by the expression "a Hebrew from Hebrews" (Phil 3:5), underlining the cultural and linguistic aspect of Paul's Jewishness. Similarly, his Pharisaic education is mentioned; it is the reason he comes to the point of devastating the Church (Gal 1:13-14; Phil 3:6). As Fabris<sup>16</sup> opportunely argues, if on the one hand it is very probable that the young Saul received his formation in Jerusalem, considering that Palestine is where the Pharisaic movement was born and developed, on the other hand, the fact that Paul's parents belonged to the same group and the link with Gamaliel could serve Luke's historical-theological project, and might not be reliable from the historical point of view.

Paul's Jewish identity did not constitute a problem until the beginning of the Reformation. At that point, with the intention of showing the novelty of the Pauline doctrine of justification by faith, a process began of detachment and separation of the Apostle from the Judaism of his times. With the German exegesis of the XIX and XX centuries and its emphasis on the Greco-Hellenistic background, this process also took on sinister anti-Semitic aspects. After the tragedy of the *Shoah*, Pauline studies began to re-evaluate Paul's Jewish heritage and to question the traditional interpretation which placed the thought of the Apostle and Judaism in strong contraposition, despising the latter.<sup>17</sup> However, the real change occurred with Sanders, who, making use of the rabbinical sources, totally disputed the image of Judaism as a religion of works and of self-justification obtained through the observance of the Law, which had been the dominant paradigm of exegesis up until then. After the initial earthquake, Sanders' theses not only contributed to re-evaluating Judaism as a religion of the covenant and of grace, but have above all favoured a more attentive study of the religion by Pauline exegetes. From these new analyses have emerged the realization that there were different Judaic currents in the first century and that Paul could have been variously influenced by them.<sup>18</sup> As a

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<sup>16</sup> FABRIS, *Paolo*, 39-44.

<sup>17</sup> For example, W.D. DAVIES, *Paul and Rabbinic Judaism. Some Rabbinic Elements in Pauline Theology* (London: SPCK, 1948).

<sup>18</sup> Despite support garnered for Hengel's thesis on the impossibility of distinguishing between Hellenistic and Palestinian Judaism in the first century, there are

result, his link with Pharisaism<sup>19</sup> above all and with rabbinical exegesis<sup>20</sup> was underlined, as well as with the Judaic apocalyptic current<sup>21</sup> and the texts of Qumran.<sup>22</sup>

Thus, various authors<sup>23</sup> recall the most important aspects of the Apostle's thought deriving from his Judaic background: the foundational recourse to the Scriptures and their interpretation (with Adam and Abraham as the most cited figures), the emphasis on monotheism, the confirmation of Israel as God's chosen people, the reference to Jewish worship, the moral perspective (above all, regarding the idea of sin and the list of vices), the insistence on the Law and on works, the concept of justice (both human and divine), the belief in God's final and universal judgement in connection with the resurrection of the flesh.

From this brief overview, it is clear that today it is no longer possible to present Paul as the creator of the rupture between Judaism and Christianity. Rather, it is necessary to frame him within his Hebrew roots, so that his faith in Jesus Christ is shown as the complete fulfilment of the divine promises made to his forefathers. Yet, as often happens when the research pendulum swings completely to one side, the road opened by Sanders and his *New Perspective* has led to an overvaluation of the Jewish influence on the Apostle, to the detriment of his Greco-Hellenistic origins. As a result, from some corners one hears a call for a return to the Lu-

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authors, such as J. BECKER, *Paulus. Der Apostel der Völker* (Tübingen, 1989) 34-59, who underline the influence of Diaspora Judaism on Paul, and others, like J. FREY, "Paul's Jewish Identity," *Jewish Identity in the Greco-Roman World* (Hrsg. J. FREY – D.R. SCHWARTZ – e.a. [AJEC 71; Boston: Leiden, 2007]), 285-321, who instead underline the link with the Judaism of the homeland.

<sup>19</sup> For instance, A. LINDEMANN, "Paulus - Pharisäer und Apostel," *Paulus und Johannes. Exegetische Studien zur paulinischen und johannaischen Theologie und Literatur* (Hrsg. D. SÄNGER – U. MELL) (Tübingen: WUNT 198, 2006), 311-351.

<sup>20</sup> For instance, C.D. STANLEY, *Arguing with Scripture. The Rhetoric of Quotations in the Letters of Paul* (New York, 2004).

<sup>21</sup> For example, J.C. BEKER, "Recasting Pauline Theology. The Coherence-Contingency Scheme as Interpretative Model," *Pauline Theology. Volume I: Thessalonians, Philippians, Galatians, Philemon* (ed. J.M. BASSLER [Minneapolis: SBLSS 4, 1991]) 15-24.

<sup>22</sup> For example, K.P. DONFRIED, "Rethinking Paul. On the Way Toward a Revised Paradigm," *Bib* 87 (2006) 582-594.

<sup>23</sup> For example, BARBAGLIO, *Il pensare*, 28-33; FREY, "Paul's Jewish Identity," 285-321; SCHNELLE, *Paulus*, 56-62.

theran Paul.<sup>24</sup> For our part, we maintain that in order to reach a correct equilibrium among these positions several things are necessary: on the one hand, an ever-greater knowledge of the Judaic sources, above all the intertestamentary ones (for ex., Philo, 1-4 Mac; *Jubilee*, etc.)—neglected by Sanders in favour of later rabbinical texts—and, on the other hand, minute analysis of the Pauline passages that utilise and comment on Scripture, marked by the employment of Judaic exegetical techniques.

### 1.3 Roman influence

Usually, in biblical studies Paul's Roman citizenship was considered a mere piece of biographical data, to be included within his Hellenistic side, without any specific importance regarding the Apostle's identity. In the last few years, however, some Pauline interpreters<sup>25</sup> have proposed going deeper into this aspect of his background, with the help also of a sociological perspective. We, too, maintain that it is worthwhile to pause attentively upon the Apostle's *Romanness*.

First of all, the testimony of Acts in this regard is fairly clear. In fact, in various passages of the book (16:37-39; 22:25-29; 23:27; 25:10-12; 26:32; 28:19), Paul's Roman citizenship, from his very birth, is well noted. In particular, it constitutes the motive for his recourse to Caesar and the consequent voyage as a prisoner to Rome. The Apostle's letters never hint at this civil *status* of his, and for this reason various scholars<sup>26</sup>, through the lens of a sometimes unfounded mistrust of the Lukan data, have sustained the historical unreliability of this claim. Beyond the important fact of Paul's name (very rare among non-Romans<sup>27</sup>) attested by Acts as well as by his letters, decisive and convincing arguments have been presented in re-

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<sup>24</sup> Cf. WESTERHOLM, S., *Perspectives Old and New on Paul. The "Lutheran" Paul and His Critics* (Grand Rapids-Cambridge, 2004).

<sup>25</sup> For example, N. ELLIOT, "Situer Paul à l'ombre de l'Empire: pratique apostolique, idéologie impériale et cérémonial impérial," *Paul, une théologie en construction*, 157-186.

<sup>26</sup> For example, W. STEGEMANN, "War der Apostel Paulus ein römischer Bürger?" *ZNW* 78 (1987) 220-229.

<sup>27</sup> Cf. M. HENGEL, "Der vorchristliche Paulus," *Paulus und das antike Judentum. Tübingen-Durham-Symposium im Gedenken an den 50. Todestag Adolf Schlatters* († 19. Mai 1938) (Hrsg. M. HENGEL – U. HECKEL [Tübingen: WUNT 58, 1991]), 197-199.

sponse to the denials of his Roman citizenship.<sup>28</sup> Thus, some Pauline scholars<sup>29</sup> identify, in the Apostle's letters, the aspects most directly linked to such a condition: the specific geographical denominations and the plans for missionary work exclusively within the realm of the empire, the usage of juridical categories of Roman law (emancipation, being a minor, adoption: Rom 8:15.23; 1Cor 6:20; 7:21-23; Gal 4:1-7; 5:1) and finally the list of Christians' civil duties, with the recognition of the public authority of the empire in the celebrated text of Rom 13:1-7. But it is above all in the letter sent to the Christians of the Roman colony of Philippi that Paul uses categories deriving from his being a citizen of the empire: the political language and that of citizenship (πολιτεύεσθε in 1:27; πολιτευμα in 3:20),<sup>30</sup> the polemical reference to the imperial cult (cf. 2:6-11; 3:20-21),<sup>31</sup> the theme of boasting and of confidence in his own *status* (cf. 1:26; 2:16; 2:6-11; 3:1-4:1).<sup>32</sup>

What remains is to ask about the consequences on the whole that Roman citizenship has produced in the life and thought of Paul. Regarding this we must note that in recent studies of a marked philosophical nature,<sup>33</sup> the Apostle's universalism has been underlined against any view of ethical and religious particularism, causing this element to derive from his Greco-Hellenistic culture. This aspect of Paul's thought is, in our opinion, of great relevance and constitutes the novelty brought by his figure into the early Church. He not only has affirmed how "in Christ" the ethnic, sexual and social differences are no longer relevant (Gal 3:28) and how the gospel is offered without distinction for the salvation of every man, called only to believe in Christ (Rom 1:16-17), but he has ef-

<sup>28</sup> For example, SCHNELLE, *Paulus*, 44-47.

<sup>29</sup> For example, FABRIS, *Paolo*, 29-31.

<sup>30</sup> Cf. P. PILHOFER, *Philippi*. Band I: *Die erste christliche Gemeinde Europas* (Tübingen: WUNT 87, 1995), 114-134.

<sup>31</sup> Cf. P. OAKES, *Philippians*. From People to Letter (Cambridge: SNTSMS 110, 2001), 129-174.

<sup>32</sup> Cf. J.H., HELLERMAN, *Reconstructing Honor in Roman Philippi. Carmen Christi as Cursus Pudorum* (Cambridge-New York: SNTSMS 132, 2005). See also F. BIANCHINI, *L'elogio di sé in Cristo. L'utilizzo della periautologia nel contesto di Filippesi 3,1 – 4,1* (An Bib 164; Roma 2006), 251-266.

<sup>33</sup> In particular we refer to A. BADIOU, *Saint Paul. La fondation de l'universalisme* (Paris: Les essais du Collège International de Philosophie, 1997) and G. AGAMBEN, *Il tempo che resta. Un commento alla lettera ai Romani* (Turin, 2000).

fectively lived out his mission with a universal spirit and scope of action. In effect, it is precisely this openness in regard to different peoples that the Roman Empire evoked and proposed, thanks to the relevant extension of its domain. In our opinion, it penetrated as such into the mentality of the citizen of Tarsus who, once become a believer in Christ, made full use of such a bearing of his Roman culture to the exclusive advantage of the universal announcement of the gospel (cf. Rom 15:17-21).

#### **1.4 Believer in Christ**

Saul the Hebrew, coming from the Hellenistic city of Tarsus and in possession of Roman citizenship, underwent on the way to Damascus, according to the three accounts of Acts (9:1-19; 22:4-24; 26:9-18), a total upheaval of his personality in the encounter with the Risen One. From here a new story began: that of the believer in Christ, lived out against the backdrop of the history and the tradition of the early Church.

The book of Acts gives great importance to the Damascus event, so much so that it presents it three times (the first account in third person, the others in first person). While recognizing the diversity of each of the three accounts, the author intends on the whole to show the change produced in Paul by the encounter with Christ, which has made of the persecutor an apostle of the gospel. Furthermore, such a call is for Luke a fundamental moment for the first Christian community because through it, God opens the mission of the Church to all peoples, in overcoming the barrier between Jews and Gentiles. In particular, in the first two accounts the intervention of the Church of Damascus is underlined, through the person of Ananias, who restores Paul's sight and baptizes him. According to the successive account in Acts, Paul, who has become a disciple of Christ and his announcer, stays for a certain length of time with the community of Damascus. Then he visited the Church of Jerusalem, in which he was welcomed with a certain diffidence, and finally he was obliged to depart for his hometown because of threats from Hellenistic Jews (9:19-30). After a period of time, Barnabas, who had introduced Paul to the Apostles and the Jerusalem Church, brought Paul with him into the mixed community of

Antioch (11:25-26), which officially sent the Apostle and his trusted companion into mission (13:1-3). It is Antioch that will constitute a fundamental hub in the sphere of the three missionary voyages that the Apostle undertakes and to which the author of Acts will dedicate all his attention, presenting Paul as the greatest evangelizer of the budding Church.

Regarding the *Christian Paul*, the authors point their attention both towards the conversion/call,<sup>34</sup> as well as to his link with the community of Antioch and the tradition of the early Church. If the traditional interpretation (of Lutheran origin) saw in the event of Damascus an experience of justification by faith—a central theme for the Apostle's theology—today scholars look rather at the consequences successive to the encounter with the Risen One for Paul's theology and his mission. Thus, on the one hand, some<sup>35</sup> think that the Damascus event, in which Christ reveals himself as the end of the Law, is the origin of Paul's theology and apostolate, which constitute thus a direct development of the event; on the other hand, other exegetes,<sup>36</sup> belonging above all to the *New Perspective*, find exclusively in such an event the Apostle's call to be a missionary for the Gentiles, underlining, on the contrary, the long evolution of his thought, and specifically his concept of the Law.

Taking a middle-of-the-road perspective between these two opposing views, some<sup>37</sup> show the fundamental importance of Damascus, because of the encounter with Christ that will transform forever Paul's identity and his vision of the world, revealing however that his theology, above all in regards to the Law, had to be formed little by little and also developed in response to the ne-

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<sup>34</sup> The discussion regarding the most appropriate term to designate the Damascus event is not as decisive as some scholars think. Cf., for example, G. PANI, "Vocazione di Paolo o conversione?", *Atti del I simposio di Tarso su Paolo apostolo* (Turchia: la Chiesa e la sua storia 5; Roma 1993) 47-63. In any case, in our opinion, the ancient term of "conversion" can still be used (though neither Acts nor the Pauline letters use the semantic field attached to this term), as long as one excludes from it the idea of a passage from one religion to another, and includes instead the notion of a radical change in one's existence.

<sup>35</sup> For example, S. KIM, *Paul and the New Perspective. Second Thoughts on the Origin of Paul's Gospel* (Grand Rapids-Cambridge, 2002), 1-84.

<sup>36</sup> For example, J.D.G. DUNN, "'A Light to the Gentiles' or 'The End of the Law?'" *Jesus, Paul and the Law. Studies in Mark and Galatians* (Louisville, 1990), 89-107.

<sup>37</sup> For example, SCHNELLE, *Paulus*, 88-94.

cessities of the communities to which he wrote. In agreement with this last approach, we can affirm that Paul's experience of the Risen One provokes in him a radical change with the understanding that salvation now depends upon a link with Christ, of whom he understands that he has become an announcer.<sup>38</sup> In this event one finds *in nuce* the Christological principle that will structure all of his thought, which will be developed in contact with the life of the Churches, in a fruitful osmosis between the personal perspective of the Pauline experience and the universal perspective of his hearers, and, finally, of all men called to salvation through faith in Christ.

The same *Religionsgeschichtliche Schule* at the beginning of the XX century delved deeper into Paul's relationship with the Antiochean community and, in consequence, with the tradition of early Christianity, which has put in relief the Apostle's Greco-Hellenistic identity; some scholars have also highlighted this aspect in more recent times.<sup>39</sup> In this perspective, Antioch constitutes the link between the early community of Jerusalem and Paul himself, who is considered the founder of Christian theology. Through the Antiochean church, the Apostle would have entered into contact with the early Christian tradition and he would have taken the most relevant elements of his thought from this community's *kerygma*. For our part, we believe that it is not possible to underestimate the significance of the community of Antioch, as the origin of the *Christian Paul*, where for the first time he entered into full contact with the tradition of the early Church. However, we do not want to emphasize this link too much, considering that, according to Acts, the Apostle resided for a greater time in other places, such as Corinth and Ephesus (cf. Acts, 11:26; 18:11-18; 19:10; 20:31). Moreover, it is often difficult to identify with certainty the material reaching Paul from tradition and that which is his own. We risk, in our estimation, making the Apos-

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<sup>38</sup> On the basis of the literary context of the three accounts in Acts, it is difficult to say whether the role of the Apostle to the Gentiles was understood by Paul in the moment of his encounter with the Risen One, or later on (for example, 9:20 indicates that the addressees of the Pauline announcement are the Jews, and 22:21 leads us to imagine a later vision in which God notifies Paul of his specific mission).

<sup>39</sup> SCHNELLE, *Paulus*, 110-113, furnishes a summary of the various positions on this issue.

tle a mere repeater of what he has received from others.<sup>40</sup> While there is not sufficient space in this study to offer a real demonstration, we maintain that, since a reading of the NT makes immediately evident the notable independence and strong originality of Pauline theology with respect to that of other authors, it is reasonable to imagine an entirely creative and personal relationship between Paul and the tradition of the early Church.<sup>41</sup>

### 1.5 A Plurality of Roots

At the end of this brief overview of elements that form the backdrop of Paul's identity, which the Acts of the Apostles and the studies of his interpreters present us, there has emerged a reference to a diversity of roots: from the Greco-Hellenistic influence to the Jewish one, from his Roman background to that of the early Christian tradition. Such a plurality well describes the complex profile of the Apostle that also constitutes the original richness of his personality, transformed but not annulled by the Damascus event. Rather, it is necessary to note how he put at the service of the gospel this mass of cultures that distinguishes him, managing to share not only the language of his interlocutors, but also their own categories of thought, and managing to travel in his missionary journeys, though the use of roads and administrative systems in use at that time, tens of thousands of kilometres by land and by sea. Summing up, in modern terms we could speak of a fully *globalized* man,<sup>42</sup> who finds in his ministry to announce the Risen One, of whom he has had an experience, the point of unity among all the different *souls* that dwell in him.

Having reached the conclusion of the first part of our study, it is now time to pass from the comparison between Acts and the Pauline interpreters to listening to the Apostle's own testimony.

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<sup>40</sup> Cf. M.B. THOMPSON, "Tradition," *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters* (eds. G.F. HAWTHORNE – R.P. MARTIN – e.a. [Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1993]), 943-945.

<sup>41</sup> Cf. D. GERBER, "A propos des traditions christo-sotériologiques préépistolaires dans les lettres incontestées de Paul," *Paul, une théologie en construction*, 187-213.

<sup>42</sup> Cf. G. BIGUZZI, *Paolo, comunicatore. Tra interculturalità e globalizzazione* (Milano: Paoline, 1999) for an elaboration of a divulgative nature—but also interesting—on the argument.

## 2. Paul According to Paul

As we have already mentioned, Paul is the only author of the NT who treats of his own person in his writings, so that in the epistolary that can be attributed to him, beyond his message, his figure also emerges. In particular, the author's "I" is noted above all in the passages of an autobiographical nature: in them we have the possibility of grasping the Apostle's identity, as he intends it to be known. Among these, the most significant seem to be Gal 1:11-2:21; Phil 3:1-4:1; 2Cor 11:1-12:18 (the three passages are presented here according to the probable chronological order of their composition). We will now dedicate our attention to these with the awareness of finding ourselves before a personal testimony and not one coming from others, whether the book of Acts or modern interpreters.

It is our intention to go deeper not only in the contents of these texts to better discover Paul's profile, but also into the original manner in which he speaks about himself. In fact, the reader's sensation of encountering in such passages a bothersome and cumbersome "I" requires an adequate response, linked also to the search for the specific purpose of the texts themselves within their literary context. Finally, after having taken into account the particular elements of each pericope, in closing our analysis we shall try to trace some global lines of interpretation of the Pauline autobiography.

### 2.1 Galatians 1:11 – 2:21

Within the letter addressed to the believers of Galatia,<sup>43</sup> the passage of 1:11-2:21 constitutes the first argumentation, intended to show the non-human but rather divine origin of the gospel announced by Paul. Because of this in 1:11-12 he announces the *propositio* or thesis of our text: the Apostle's gospel does not come from men, but has been revealed to him by God. The two sides of the *propositio* (one negative, one positive), in conformity with the rhe-

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<sup>43</sup> For a more ample justification of the positions taken up here, above all regarding the rhetorical composition of the text, I take the liberty of referring the reader to F. BIANCHINI, *Lettera ai Galati. Nuovo Testamento – commento esegetico e spirituale* (Roma, 2009), 23-61. In addition, see also J.-N. ALETTI, "Galates 1 - 2. Quelle fonction et quelle démonstration?" *Bib* 86 (2005) 305-323.

torical rules, are taken up and proved in the following *probatio* or demonstration.<sup>44</sup> The *probatio* has three stages, marked by the various events of his life (in rhetorical terms, these are called the proofs of fact): 1:13-24; 2:1-10; 2:11-14a—to which there is added the brief discourse of 2:14b-21 that brings the argumentation to its high point.

1:13-24 recounts the radical transformation in Paul from a persecutor of the Church to an apostle of Christ. With this initial stage, Paul intends to prove the first part of the *propositio*, concerning the non-human origin of his gospel. He insists first on the ideal difference between Saul and the Risen One, and then on the geographical distance between this new believer in Christ and the Jerusalem apostles. In particular, for our purposes of reconstructing the Pauline identity, note how the text begins from Paul's conduct in "Judaism,"<sup>45</sup> marked by his persecution of Christians and by progress in Judaic religiosity (vv. 13-14). He was "zealous," an exemplary Jew, because of his faithful observance of the Jewish traditions handed down by his ancestors, so much so that he surpassed all his contemporaries. Such traditions, as oral law, were put on equal footing with the Torah as written law, within the Pharisaic movement (cf. Flavius Josephus, *Ant.* 13.297.408). In vv. 15-16a the decisive encounter with the Risen One is described in terms of a call and a revelation, with the ultimate purpose of his announcing Christ to the Gentiles.<sup>46</sup> On the other hand, vv. 16b-22 shift our attention to the relationship between the one who has become a disciple of Christ and the primitive Christian tradition. In the text, the accentuation of Paul's physical distance from the apostles and the mother Church of Jerusalem serves to prove that no one has catechized him regarding the gospel. Despite this, that author cannot

<sup>44</sup> To be noted also are the terminological links between 1:11-12 and the rest of the passage: εὐαγγέλιον, *euangélion*, 1:11; 2:2.7, ἀποκάλυψις, *apokálypsi*, 1:12; 2:2.

<sup>45</sup> As A. PITTA rightly underlines in *Lettera ai Galati* (SOC 9; Bologna 1997), 67, the term is not to be read in opposition to the later term "Christianity," as if we were already before two autonomous religions, but rather to that of the "peoples" (cf. 1:16).

<sup>46</sup> Here, too, as we have affirmed regarding the relative tales of Acts, it is not possible to say whether God's call and the mission to the Gentiles coincide. In fact, from a syntactical point of view, the announcement to the pagans of v. 16 is found within a final phrase that informs us of the final purpose of revelation from God, without being able to say such an intention was made manifest to the Apostle in that moment.

deny having been in Jerusalem, though trying his best to minimize the episode.<sup>47</sup>

Thus in 2:1-10, a new passage recalls Paul's second encounter with the apostles, fourteen years after the first and due to a revelation, but only to demonstrate that part of the *propositio* concerning the divine origin of Paul's gospel. In particular he emphasizes that his hearers are the Gentiles and that the Apostle's mission to announce the gospel is complementary to that of Peter, who is directed instead towards the circumcised (vv. 2.8).

The last proof, in 2:11-14a, regarding the incident at Antioch, intends to show that Paul has preferred the truth of his gospel (which had already been recognized by the Church), to Peter's prudent but ultimately incoherent attitude. If the *last* of the apostles has had the courage to openly reprove the *first* of the apostles, it is not due to human self-assurance, but out of fidelity to the divine revelation he received. At any rate, these passages confirm the importance of Paul's link with the community of Antioch, a theme of which we have already spoken.

The last verses of our passage show the absolute novelty that has occurred in Paul's identity after his encounter with the Lord. There has been a paradoxical substitution of the living subject: Christ in place of the Apostle's "I" (2:19-20).

From the viewpoint of content, the text of Gal 1:11-2:21 clearly shows Paul's Jewish identity. In particular it seems to outline a typically Pharisaic pre-Christian profile, with the relative persecuting activity towards Christians. The experience of meeting the Risen One, though succinctly described, proves decisive for the person of the Apostle and for the divine origin of his gospel. It is precisely starting from the particularity of this gospel that Paul's original place in the early Church emerges, with which however he lives out a relationship of full communion. In the end, it is not simply the link with Antioch, but above all the missionary openness towards the Gentiles that reminds us of the Apostle's capacity to enter into harmony and communication with the pagan world, thanks to his Roman and Greco-Hellenistic roots.

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<sup>47</sup> Vv. 18-19 states that it is only after three years from the revelation received that Paul went to Jerusalem, he remained there hardly fifteen days, and did not meet anyone beyond Peter and James.

After having seen the content of the text in particular relation to the question of Paul's identity, it is now necessary to analyze how the author presents these events of his life. Above all, according to what has opportunely been shown by Aletti,<sup>48</sup> we do not find ourselves before a true autobiographical story, as some think.<sup>49</sup> In fact, for there to be such a tale, there must be a common thread that links and determines the sequence of events, while in Gal 1:11-2:21 we find only some facts of the Apostle's life, linked by the ideas enunciated in 1:11-12. These verses better serve the purpose of a *propositio*, so that the text rather serves as an argument. Thus Paul is speaking about himself, by presenting autobiographical details with a precise argumentative purpose: to convince his listeners, who are detaching themselves from the gospel previously proclaimed by him in Galatia (cf. 1:6), of its divine and non-human origin. Finally, if the Apostle's "I" turns out to be the foreground, it is certainly not out of the desire to glorify himself (considering his new way of life that has moved from being centered on himself to being centered on Christ), but for the good of his hearers, who have an urgent need to be re-conquered by the truth of his announcement because, according to Paul, they are departing from their faith in Christ (cf. 5:4).

## 2.2 Philippians 3:1 – 4:1

In the context of the letter addressed to the community in Philippi, marked by a personal and relational tone, the Apostle alternates between exhortations for the benefit of his hearers and narrations regarding himself. Among the various autobiographical passages of the epistle, there emerges the text of Phil 3:1-4:1, marked by the "I" of the author, who tells about himself, presenting his itinerary "in Christ."<sup>50</sup> The pericope's logic is marked by the use of the literary genre of the *περιαυτολογία*, *periautologia*,<sup>51</sup> that is,

<sup>48</sup> ALETTI, "Galates 1 – 2," 308.

<sup>49</sup> For example, A. GIGNAC, "Une approche narratologique de *Galates*. État de la question et hypothèse générale de travail," *ScEs* 58 (2006) 5-22.

<sup>50</sup> For an elaboration and the bibliography, see BIANCHINI, *L'elogio di sé in Cristo*.

<sup>51</sup> For an excellent study on this literary genre, see L. PERNOT, "Periautologia. Problèmes et méthodes de l'éloge de soi-même dans la tradition éthique et rhétorique gréco-romaine," *RevEtGr* 111 (1998) 101-124.

self-praise. This genre is particularly evident in 3:4b-14, where nearly all the verbs are in the first person singular, though also extending its influence to the verses preceding and following the passage.

After the transition of 3:1, vv. 2-4a comprise an exhortation and the relevant justification, and serve as an introduction to Paul's praise of himself, by presenting the adversaries (also mentioned in vv. 18-19) and seeking to safeguard his own from their influence—a typical reason for having recourse to a *περιαντολογία*. This prepares the way for the laudatory *transfert*<sup>52</sup> from the author to his listeners; in the end is inserted the rhetorical element of the comparison between the Apostle and his antagonists and, correspondingly, between “trusting in the flesh” and “boasting in Christ Jesus.” It probably involves Jewish Christian opponents, with whom Paul contrasts himself in other letters as well (cf. 2Cor 10-13; Galatians), who seem to be pressuring the ethnic Christians to accept the proper signs of Judaism as necessary requisites to complete their faith.

The self-praise, true and proper, developed in vv. 4b-14, occurs in three moments (Judaic boast, *overturned* boast “in Christ,” subdued Christian boast) and finds its paranetic conclusion in vv. 15-16, characterized by the use of “we.” In particular in vv. 4b-6 we witness the boasting “in the flesh”—that is, Paul's Judaic boast—through a list of 7 elements, which are divided into two different categories: the gifts he has received (first four) and the merits he has acquired (the other three). The first category emphasizes that Paul was circumcised on the eighth day like a true Jew; that he is a member of the people of Israel; that he belongs to the prestigious tribe of Benjamin, and that both his father and mother are Hebrews. On the other hand, the merits he has acquired are linked to his education within the Pharisaic current of Judaism (the most rigorous regarding the practice of the Law), as well as to his zeal for the Law (as a result of which he has persecuted the Church), and finally also to his irreproachable behavior, based on justice deriving from legal observance.

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<sup>52</sup> The word has a strictly rhetorical significance, meaning the transference of this state of reference to other subjects before beginning the discourse, and is a method used to make acceptable the praise of oneself, for example, by veiling it under praise for his hearers.

The change in such a “granite-like” personality could not have occurred except by divine intervention, the only thing capable of overturning the life of that Pharisee, in the manner described in vv. 7-11, which constitute the *overturned* boast “in Christ.” In particular vv. 7-8 state, using a rhetoric of excess, that Paul has come to hold those excellent gifts and acquired merits (“gains”), as “a loss,” or better, σκύβαλα, *skýbala*, (“garbage/manure”). The reason for such a change is entirely to be found in the encounter with and the knowledge of the Risen One. Vv. 9-11, in turn, show what derives from this upheaval: being united with Christ—with a justice before God not based on observance of the law, but on faith, and a loving relationship with Christ marked by the progressive daily conformity with his death, together with the hope of arriving at the final resurrection. Thus, in the unit of vv. 7-11, the text carries out a radical periautological *transfert*; Paul’s boast is completely transferred to Christ and is motivated not by his successes, but by what he has left and by the work that the Lord has fulfilled in him. His has thus become a paradoxical self-praise, reproducing the Christological itinerary of 2:6-11.

If vv. 7-11 could cause one to think the Apostle had already reached the end of his journey “in Christ,” vv. 12-14 clarify this misunderstanding, through a humbler rhetoric more at the service of a subdued Christian boast. Like his addressees, Paul is still *in itinere*, hoping to attain the heavenly prize. For his part, the exhortative conclusion of vv. 15-16 is geared towards fully involving the listeners in the Apostle’s itinerary, thanks also to a periautological *transfert*, by which they, together with Paul, are declared τέλειοι, *téleioi*, (“mature”).

The exhortation of v. 17 with its two motivations (vv. 18-21), together with the conclusion in 4:1, closes the entire pericope of 3:1-4:1. The positive invitation serves as a *pendant* to the negative one of v. 2, and finds its central content in the imitation of Paul that the Philippians are called to fulfill together. Of the two respective justifications, the first is motivated by the presence of their adversaries (vv. 18-19),<sup>53</sup> while the second depends on the condition of the

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<sup>53</sup> If in v. 2 we have identified an allusion to the Jewish Christian opponents, we maintain that in vv. 18-19 there is no other group, but rather a widening of the discourse to include all those who lead a life contrary to the gospel of the cross of Christ.

Christians at Philippi, and is set in a rhetorical confrontation with the preceding group (vv. 20-21). Regarding these last verses, it must be noted that in the exhortation to imitate the Apostle, the ethical purpose is highlighted and justifies the *περιαντολογία* of 3:1-4:1: Paul has presented himself as an example of life "in Christ" so that the Philippians may imitate him. Furthermore, in vv. 20-21 the process of the *transfert*, begun in vv. 15-16, between the author and his listeners reaches its completion through a praise of the group identified as "we," which in turn serves as praise to Christ, the Lord of creation and of history. Thus, just as for Paul, the Philippians' (and each believer's) every boast must be in the Lord (cf. 1Cor 1:31).

With regard to its content, this passage could not have more strongly emphasized Paul's Jewish identity and, specifically, his attachment to the Torah before meeting the Risen One. By this his Pharisaic profile is clearly confirmed, together with his coherent zeal as a persecutor of the first Christians. On the other hand, the use of the literary genre of *περιαντολογία* reminds us of the Greco-Hellenistic influence on the Apostle. In addition, in our text the encounter with Christ is shown to be fundamental for Paul, causing (both textually and in his very life, after the event) a process of complete re-thinking of his preceding identity in Judaism, with the consequent choice to abandon justice deriving from the Law in favour of that based on faith in Christ. Finally, the reference to the Jewish Christian adversaries underlines the Apostle's specific position within early Christianity, with its relative conflictive nature.<sup>54</sup>

The *περιαντολογία* of Phil 3:1-4:1 possesses an eminently paradoxical character: Paul sings his own praises by putting in the forefront not his successes, but the work of God in him, in such a manner that the Apostle can speak of himself as of another person, because by now his "I" has been uprooted from his own identity and transplanted into Christ. The Pauline path, in its "losing in order to find" and in its assimilation of the death and resurrection of Christ, reproduces that of his Lord, humiliated to the point of death on the cross, and because of this exalted by God in the resurrection (2:6-11). In conclusion, the author places his person in the forefront only

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<sup>54</sup> For what regards the relationship with the Christian tradition, some scholars have hypothesized that in vv. 20-21 Paul uses material that derives from it. For example, J. BECKER, "Erwägungen zu Phil. 3:20-21," TZ 27 (1971) 16-29.

for the purpose of edifying his hearers, so that they might imitate his itinerary “in Christ,” reproducing it (each one according to his own ability) in their lives so that they might become a praise of the Lord.

### 2.3 2Cor 11:1 – 12:18

If the Second Letter to the Corinthians is the subject of heated debate, above all regarding the issue of its integrity,<sup>55</sup> there is instead a uniformity of opinion regarding the subdivision of the letter, and in particular its identification of the section of chapters 10-13, which are generally considered of an apologetic tone, since Paul is defending his apostolate from the accusations of adversaries.<sup>56</sup> In effect, it is the author himself who claims to be presenting his defence in 12:19 (ἀπολογούμεθα, *apologoúmetha*), thus confirming the position taken by scholars. But within our section we must note the exceptional relevance of the language of boasting,<sup>57</sup> linked to the perspective of comparison with the other,<sup>58</sup> and the preponderous use of the “I”.<sup>59</sup> These elements have led scholars, beginning with John Chrysostom,<sup>60</sup> to find in the text the dynamic of the περιαντολογία.

But how and where is the self-praise inserted into the apologetic context of this section? Pitta<sup>61</sup> reveals with accuracy Paul’s manner of proceeding. After having introduced his apology (10:1-6), he intends first to confute the accusations raised against him by his adversaries (10:7-18) and then to furnish the proofs in favour of his own apostolate (11:1-12:18), so that, having resolved the conflict

<sup>55</sup> Cf. A. PITTA, *La seconda lettera ai Corinzi* (Roma: ComBib 2006) 17-31.

<sup>56</sup> For example, G. BARBAGLIO, *La teologia di Paolo. Abbozzi in forma epistolare* (BibSt 9; Bologna 1999; <sup>2</sup>2001), 288; H.D. BETZ, *Der Apostel Paulus und die sokratische Tradition. Eine Exegetische Untersuchung zu seiner „Apologie.“ 2 Korinther 10-13* (Tübingen, BHT 45, 1972) 13-42; PITTA, *Corinzi*, 68-69.

<sup>57</sup> καυχόμαι, *kauchómai* (10,8.13.15.16.17[2<sub>x</sub>]; 11,12.16.18[2<sub>x</sub>].30[2<sub>x</sub>]; 12,1.5[2<sub>x</sub>].6.9); κούχησις, *káuchēsis* (11,10.17).

<sup>58</sup> ἐγκρίνω, *enkrínō* (10,12); συγκρίνω, *synkrínō* (10,12[2<sub>x</sub>]); ὑπερ(-), *yper* (with a meaning of superiority: 10,14; 11,5.23[2<sub>x</sub>]; 12,6.7[3<sub>x</sub>].11).

<sup>59</sup> Cf. PITTA, *Corinzi*, 26, which shows how the “I” is used 74% of the time, in contrast with 26% for “we.”

<sup>60</sup> Cf. M.M. MITCHELL, “A Patristic Perspective on Pauline περιαντολογία”, *NTS* 47 (2001) 354-371.

<sup>61</sup> PITTA, *Corinzi*, 387-390.

with the community, he can prepare well his next visit to Corinth (12:19-13:10).<sup>62</sup> The real boast, with its emphasis on the author's "I," is enclosed within the text of 11:1-12:18, which, though variously described, is often referred to as "the fool's discourse,"<sup>63</sup> because of Paul's praise of himself. This passage furnishes important autobiographical elements and requires a deeper analysis, which we shall now undertake.

Before all, in our opinion, 11:1-21a constitutes a progressive preparation for the *περιαντολογία* true and proper, that will begin only in v. 21b. In fact, Paul has to justify, as one usually does in this literary genre, his recourse to self-praise—and all the more so given his exclusion of the credibility of any human boasting in 10:17. Thus, after having requested tolerance from his listeners for the self-praise he is about to sing, he reminds them that he is forced to do it because of the danger they run of being misled and because of the presence of the very adversaries who accuse him—some of the most common reasons for making use of this literary genre (cf. Phil 3:2-4a).

With v. 21b, through the element of the rhetorical comparison, his *περιαντολογία* finally begins (cf. Phil 3:4b). Paul begins with a boast that is foolish, as it is "according to the flesh" (cf. vv. 17-18). Above all, he emphasizes his Jewish origins, highlighted by delineating his ethnic derivation, his religious origins, and his belonging to the stock of Abraham (v. 22). If on this plane he is equal to his adversaries, he is instead superior to them regarding the Christian ministry (v. 23). Thus, here, too, his opponents are Jewish Christian missionaries; however, contrary to what is going on in Philippians, they seek to contest the Apostle's authority. In any case, Paul shows the excellence of his condition as a servant of Christ through a long list of adversities, presented as a rhetoric of amplification, that he has borne as a result of his ministry (vv. 24-29). In the context of the Greco-Roman culture, this list, as Watson<sup>64</sup> points out, could find a reference in the sufferings undergone by a philosopher or teacher,

<sup>62</sup> The section closes with the epistolary post-script of 13:11-14.

<sup>63</sup> On the question of giving a title to the text and of the use of language of folly/immoderation, see A. PITTA, "Il 'discorso del pazzo' o periautologia immoderata? Analisi retorico-letteraria di 2Cor 11,1-12,18", *Bib* 87 (2006) 493-510.

<sup>64</sup> D.F. WATSON, "Paul and Boasting," *Paul in the Greco-Roman World. A Handbook* (ed. J.P. SAMPLEY [Harrisburg-London-New York, 2003]), 88.

considered the proof of the truth of his philosophy or his teaching, and also, according to what Thrall<sup>65</sup> sustains, in the catalogue of difficulties met by famous historical or mythological personages, or in the series of their own *res gestae*.

In v. 30, the Apostle marks a change in the text with the introduction of a paradoxical praise, which has as its object that which is normally despised and scorned, that is, his own weaknesses, with the consequent complete inversion of the boasting in the flesh he has engaged in up till now. As the proof of this, Paul presents in vv. 31-33, with a certain self-irony, the episode regarding his flight from Damascus—an event that reveals him to be the complete opposite of the defenceless hero that seemed to emerge from the catalogue in vv. 24-29. And thus closes the first part of the *περιαντολογία*.

The second part opens in 12:1 with reference to visions and revelations, preceded by a brief comment on boasting. Following the line begun in 11:30, Paul decides to begin a radical process of periautological *transfert*, praising, as a result of his charismatic experiences, not his own person but his “I” that is now “in Christ,” and thus viewed from a distance as another man: regarding himself, he has nothing to boast of but his weaknesses (12:1-6). Emblematic of these weaknesses is the “thorn in the flesh,”<sup>66</sup> which constitutes the final and climactic element of the whole *περιαντολογία* and which shows all the powerful presence of Christ in Paul, the Apostle’s only true claim to glory (12:7-10).

The conclusion of the self-praise in 12:11-18, with the passage from the “I” to the “you,” returns to the necessity of boasting to which Paul has had recourse in order to defend, against the accusations of his adversaries, his own apostolate, which has not been adequately defended by the Corinthians. In addition, to v. 19, at the beginning of the passage that prepares the upcoming visit of the Apostle, we find the typical ethical purpose of the *περιαντολογία*: the edification of his listeners.

From the viewpoint of its content, the passage of 2Cor 11:1-12:18 shows Paul’s Jewish origin, without indicating any upheaval to it, while the use of the *περιαντολογία* indicates his Greco-Hellenistic

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<sup>65</sup> M.E. THRALL, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians* (Edinburgh: ICC, 2000) II, 755-758.

<sup>66</sup> For a *status quaestionis* regarding its identification, see PITTA, *Corinzi*, 506-508.

identity. However, here his identity as an apostle (an accredited one due to the adversities suffered in carrying out his ministry), doubtless takes on greater relief, distinguished as it is by a specific role within the early Church that leads him to assume original positions (the refusal to be maintained economically by the Corinthians, cf. 1Cor 9:4-12) and to enter into conflicts (the encounter with his adversaries). In the end, also in this pericope, as in the previous two we have examined, Paul's identity is marked by a radical de-centering, so that he finds in Christ his new center of gravity.

The logic of the text is characterized by a paradoxical *περιαντολογία* that recalls that of Phil 3:1-4:1. At the center of 2Cor 11:1-12:18 we find in fact a praise of his own weaknesses, the condition in which the full power of Christ can operate. The person of the Apostle, dispossessed by now of every motive of self-glorification, can only praise his "I" grafted in Christ, thus weaving a true and proper praise of his Lord. This key to reading is immediately linked to the apologetic purpose of the passage, in which Paul intends to defend his own apostolate from his adversaries, whose influence has been entirely deleterious for the Corinthians; thus, he is forced to expose himself. Therefore, the comparison with his opponents, though departing from their own level of "fleshly" boasting, is won by recourse to a self-praise that is completely alien to the motives of human praise, but which, for this very reason, accredits Paul as a true apostle of that Christ who was crucified out of weakness (cf. 2Cor 13:4).<sup>67</sup>

## 2.4 An original manner of presenting himself

After having analyzed, one-by-one, the three passages representative of the Pauline autobiography, we wish to propose some lines as a conclusion regarding the particular representation that the Apostle offers of himself.

From the viewpoint of content, in these texts Paul underlines above all his Jewish origins, but also touches upon (though indirectly) his Greco-Roman culture, by way of the literary models and arguments he utilizes. Yet, against this backdrop, what is truly put

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<sup>67</sup> Considering our conclusions, we sincerely do not understand why PITTA, "Il 'discorso del pazzo'," 509, insists on speaking of an immoderate *περιαντολογία*.

in relief is his adhesion to Christ, as a radical change that has occurred in the Apostle's "I" and as a new perspective point from which to understand himself. Finally, we cannot overlook the particular role assumed by Paul within early Christianity as one sent to evangelize the Gentiles, and the conflicts that result from this.

More relevant, however, in our estimation, are the clues regarding the way the Apostle talks about himself. In the first place, in none of the three passages can one speak of a true autobiography, containing its own continuity and completeness; rather, there are only some biographical facts. In effect, Paul is not interested in expounding his own story, but rather using what has happened to him to further his argument, made for the benefit of his listeners and for his ministry to announce the gospel.

A second observation regards the role taken up by the Apostle's "I," which, at first sight, appears excessive and tending towards egocentrism. The analysis of the texts has permitted us to comprehend how Paul speaks of himself to speak of Christ, exalting the work that his Lord has done in him, which has changed his identity forever. In addition, this use of the first person singular also becomes an efficacious instrument for the benefit of his hearers, triggering a process of identification through which the hearer-reader is brought to enter into Paul's Christian events to relive them in his own life.

In the third place, Paul, because of his most particular experience in which God has changed this persecutor into an apostle, treats his history as a gospel, so that, just like what occurs in some OT prophets, we find ourselves before a full union between message and announcer. In fact, as is underlined in the brief autobiographical reference of 1Cor 15:8-10 (as well as in our three passages), the events of the Apostle's life become the very content he is announcing.

Finally, by deepening in our knowledge of the passages we have presented, it is also possible to grasp the novelty of Paul with respect to the cultural context of antiquity, in which the "I" is hardly every placed in the forefront, since it is generally the community that prevails over the individual subject. In this regard Vouga,<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> F. VOUGA, "La nouvelle création et l'invention du moi," *ETR* 75 (2000) 335-347.

following an intuition of Vernant, affirms, after studying the letter to the Galatians, that the Apostle finds himself at the culmination of a cultural and literary journey begun by Homer with his discovery of the individual as an autonomous entity with respect to the social context, which continued with the Greek lyric poets with the invention of the subject who expresses himself in his own name. Now, the next step belongs to Paul, with the discovery of the "me," that is of the person, capable of reflecting on himself and therefore conscious of his interiority and uniqueness. In our consideration this theme is true not only for Gal 1:11-2:21, but also for Phil 3:1-4:1 and 2Cor 11:1-12:18 and therefore for the whole Pauline autobiographical perspective, marked by the most unique awareness that the Apostle has of himself.

### 3. In Synthesis

The last part of our study cannot represent a true synthesis regarding Paul's identity, as it would constitute an undue reduction of the *mystery* of his person, shot through as it is by a multitude of influences. We intend to propose, rather, a conclusion of our work that has set out to listen, on the one hand, to the various testimonies about the Apostle coming from Acts and his interpreters, and on the other hand, to the most relevant Pauline texts, from the autobiographical point of view.

In comparing the two perspectives, which we have entitled "Paul according to the others" and "Paul according to Paul", we have found to be justified the relevant interest shown by scholars in the Apostle's Jewish profile, considering that he himself underlines this element in his self-presentation. At the same time, today it is necessary to deepen our knowledge of the literary and argumentative models coming from Paul's Greco-Roman culture, in order to understand his method of reasoning and take up once again (now that we have abandoned the prejudicial confessional readings) the question of the relation between him and the early Church. In the end, the search for the point of unity of Paul's complex identity finds an answer not only according to the testimony of Acts, but also according to that of the Apostle himself in the ministry to announce that Christ who has changed his life once for all, as he affirms in 1Cor 9:19-23.

However, and lastly, it is important to highlight that the novelty of our study is found above all in having outlined the profound dynamic of the Pauline autobiography, centered on an "I" that is by now completely transformed and rooted in Christ, so that to speak of himself becomes the most apt and efficacious means for announcing the gospel. And precisely because of this special self-awareness and of this singular capacity of introspection, we believe that still today the event and the personality of the man of Tarsus cannot but continue to interest and fascinate.

# EVANGELIZATION IN THE MISSIONARY ACTIVITY AND IN THE LETTERS OF PAUL

John Pilch

## 1. How Paul's World Works. Here Are My Working Assumptions

Much of what I will be sharing with you in these presentations has already been published by Alba House (Canfield, Ohio, USA) as noted in my list of resources. That audio presentation comes with a printed study guide. I have based these presentations on that study guide and on the commentary that I published subsequently with my friend and professional colleague, Dr. Bruce J. Malina (Creighton University) with Fortress Press (2006). Our friendship and collaboration spans more than sixty years. If you are familiar with the Alba House program, these presentations will be a pleasant review and expansion of those ideas.

Paul belonged to that generation of the Jesus movement which stood between the Jesus group and the Evangelists. His seven undisputed letters make it clear that Paul considered himself to be an Israelite prophet sent by the God of Israel to Israelites who were residing as minority groups among non-Israelite majorities. He had little to no interest in non-Israelites (Gentiles), including those who believed in Jesus. Paul considered them to be like branches grafted "contrary to nature" on to Israel, the true root (Rom 11:24). These reflections on Paul as an Evangelizer in his missionary activity and his letters will present him in a fresh perspective. Participants are invited to explore Paul as a "change agent" commissioned by God to proclaim and prepare for the forthcoming theocracy soon to be inaugurated by the return of the Risen Jesus, appointed by God as Messiah and Cosmic Lord.

### A. Terminology

**No Christians** before Constantine (325A.D., Nicaea).

- *Jesus Movement*: Jesus and the group of his immediate circle of followers.

- *Jesus-Groups*: those who followed after Jesus' death and resurrection.
- They called themselves: *Followers of the Way* (Acts 9:2; 19:9, 23; 22:4; 24:14, 22).
- Outsiders called them: *Christians* (Acts 11:26; 26:28; 1Pet 4:16-17) with negative connotation.
- We might call them "**Messianists**" since the majority of them were "Judeans" who accepted Jesus as Messiah.

We can view this information thus:

First Generation	Jesus, Apostles, their families, various followers. Etc. The Jesus Movement
Second Generation	Paul and his associates: Timothy, Silas, Apollo, Lydia, Phoebe, et al. Jesus-groups
Third Generation	Evangelists Mark and Matthew
Fourth Generation	Luke (and Acts)

## 2. **No Jews** before the Talmud (circa 500 A.D.)

- First Temple Judaism (950–587 B.C.): Israelites (literally "sons of Israel"—Ex 1:1; Gen 35:10)
- Second Temple Judaism (520 BC to 70 AD): "Judeans" (*Yehudim, Ioudaioi*), all who lived in the Persian colony: Yehud. (See Neh 1:2; 2Macc 6:1; and the NT). Hence the Jesus Group members are Judeans.
- After 70, Yohanan ben Zakkai founds the Academy at Yabneh (Jamnia) in which Rabbinic Judaism took root eventually culminating in the Talmuds: Babylonian and Palestinian. Modern day Judaism is rooted in Talmudic practices. (The English word, Jew, is a medieval English word and inappropriate to describe anyone prior to 500 AD).

Thus, Jesus groups were: "Israel awaiting the theocracy proclaimed by Jesus."

Ben Zakkai groups who formed after 70 were: "Israel awaiting the restoration of the Temple."

Paul, therefore, is a “Messianist” in ongoing conflict with fellow Judeans who refused to believe that Jesus is the Messiah.

In his letters, *Paul never call himself a Judean*, although he claims Judean birth (Gal 2:15; self-definitions Phil 3:5; 2Cor 11:22). For Paul, the world consists of Israel and all other peoples (*ta ethne*, the out-group), while his Israel consists of Judeans and Hellenes (misleadingly translated as “**Jews and Greeks.**” Hellas did not exist in the first century! See Rom 3:9; 10:12; 1Cor 1:24; Gal 3:28). Italian: *Giudeo e Greco* (not accurate); Spanish: *judío y non-judío* quite accurate).

Judeans were Israelites with ties to Judea and its customs. A Hellene was a person who was cultivated, who spoke a common Hellenic language, practiced some Macedonian or Athenian or, increasingly, Roman customs and behaved in what was considered to be a cultivated or “civilized” life-style. A Hellene could be a Roman, an Egyptian, an Israelite, or whatever. In other words, “Judean and Greek” refer to status and not a country or a state.

## B. Letters

Five of Paul’s seven authentic letters—1Thess, 1-2Cor, Gal, Phil—deal with (interpersonal) problems faced by Jesus-groups founded by Paul. Romans deals with travel arrangements. Philemon serves as a runaway slave’s letter of recommendation that his master accept him back. To put Paul and his all letters into context, consider this chart:

As for Paul’s letters, they can be viewed in this perspective.

First generation Pauline documents trace back to Paul and his interaction with persons in the small groups (“churches”) that he founded

Seven authentic letters:  
1Thess, 1-2Cor, Gal, Phil,  
Phlm, Rom

Second generation Pauline documents

Colossians and 2Thess

Third generation Pauline documents

Ephesians (a sort of letter to non-Israelite Jesus-group members), Hebrews (a sort of letter to practicing Judean Jesus groups), and the Pastoral letters (1-2Tim, Titus)

Such chronological information is important in helping modern readers avoid the pitfall of **anachronism**. It also helps a modern reader to trace development in Paul's thinking, etc. But there is another pitfall with equally potential devastating consequences: **ethnocentrism**. Modern readers interested in Paul's "theology" are at particular risk of falling into this pit. Let us return to Paul's life and letters from a social scientific perspective for a fresh understanding.

### C. Paul's Life in Social Scientific Perspective:

#### Who is Paul?

#### 1. Paul is **not a Roman Citizen**.

Acts 21:39, he is a citizen of Tarsus; several other passages in Acts indicate that Paul was also a Roman citizen (16:37; 22:25; 23:27). However, a Roman citizen could not be exposed to the abuse heaped upon Paul (2Cor 11:24-25). Thus Paul's testimony in his letters conflicts with Luke's "spin" in Acts. The Stegemanns (p. 302) call the Acts portrayal a "literary fiction."

#### 2. Paul is of **lower social status**. Paul's noteworthy (upper) social position in Acts has no basis in his own letters. He worked as an artisan and depended on others for financial support (2Cor 11:8-9; Phil 4:10ff). He may have been just above subsistence level. (See the Stegemanns).

#### 3. Paul is an **Israelite, Benjaminite, of a family practicing Judean customs** (Phil 3:5-6). First century persons defined themselves,

as a rule, in terms of gender, genealogy and geography. Here Paul implies gender and geography, but specifies genealogy, first in terms of kinship (Israelite, Benjaminite), of a family practicing Judean customs devotedly [that is what “Hebrew” meant], then in term of his associational or fictive kinship affiliation (Pharisee). See also 2Cor 11:22.

4. **Persecutor of Messianists.** See Gal 1:12-14, 22-23, and Acts 7:58–8:3. Paul was an Israelite who persecuted Israelite Jesus groups in Judea.
5. **Called by God to be an Apostle.** See Gal 1:15-17. Paul didn’t “convert” to Christianity for two reasons. Christianity didn’t come into existence until after 325 AD, and conversion means moving from one group to another. Paul remained an Israelite to the end of his life. He cared nothing about non-Israelites.
6. **Apostle to Israelites living among non-Israelites (“Gentiles”).** See Galatians 1:15-17 with its allusions to Jer 1:5 and Isa 49:1. Compare Mt 10:5; 18:17; 28:19. Paul was an Apostle of God (1Cor 1:1) commissioned to preach the “gospel of God” (Rom 1:1)—something entirely new, hence Paul would be called a “change agent” today, someone who is to communicate and diffuse some innovation. We shall reflect at some length on the concept of a change agent.
7. **Paul’s field of Evangelization was the Western Diaspora.** From earliest times, there were two Diasporas (East - from Palestine to Babylonia; and West - from Palestine to Asia Minor, Macedonia, Achaia, Rome, etc.) with Palestine in the middle. This involved two languages (Aramaic and Greek) and two literatures (Oral Torah, the Talmuds; and the Septuagint). Palestine and the Eastern diaspora were observant; the Western diaspora was totally enculturated so much so that one could not distinguish an Israelite from the non-Israelites.
8. **Paul was a holy man in his culture (saddiq/hasid).** All cultures recognize such individuals (e.g., Shamans) who have immediate

access to the world of the spirits, and who can broker gifts (especially healing but also information) from that world to this.

Given Paul's approach, his presumptions—that his audience knew Israel's story and knew Israel's scripture and that his essential task was to proclaim how the God of Israel was revealed in the resurrection of Jesus thus appointing Jesus Israel's Messiah with a forthcoming Israelite theocracy—makes it quite clear that Paul's message was meant for Israelites. And given the range of Israelites in the first century, the perception both of the message and of approaches to the message would follow the patterns of the recipients of this innovation spread by Paul, a change agent in Israel.

**In summary**, we (Malina and Pilch) offer the following chart comparing the prevailing modes of interpreting Paul's letters and the viewpoints adopted here:

### Received View

Paul is the apostle to the Gentiles.

Paul is an apostle with a ministry.

Paul is a source of theology

Paul is the second founder of Christianity, after Jesus.

Paul is apostle to heterophilous groups, i.e. non-Israelite Gentiles.

Paul's doctrine is eschatological, sometimes apocalyptic.

### Social Science View

Paul is the apostle to Israelites living among Gentiles.

Paul is change agent with an innovation to communicate to Israel.

Paul is focused on interpersonal relations in Jesus group formation.

God is founder of Christianity

Paul is a change agent to homophilous groups, i.e. Israelites living among Gentiles.

Paul's doctrine is political religion, proclaimed theocracy, for fictive kin groups.

Paul writes to religious groups.

Paul is directly and immediately relevant to 21<sup>st</sup> century churches.

Paul is a monotheist.

Paul is a universalist.

Paul writes to fictive kin groups with a domestic religion, awaiting the kingdom of God (political religion in abeyance).

Paul was directly and immediately relevant to 1<sup>st</sup> century Jesus groups.

Paul is a henotheist.

Paul is an ethnocentric particularist.

**D. Chronology of Paul’s Life (Murphy-O’Connor)**

What has been learnt from the letters can now be summarized as follows:

Birth:	<i>c. 6bc</i>
Commissioning:	AD 33
Arabia:	34
Damascus:	34-37
Jerusalem (1st visit):	37
Syria and Cilicia:	37-?
Jerusalem (2nd visit):	51

These conclusions, however, must be confronted with the evidence of Acts.

The results of this analysis and calculations can be tabulated as follows:

Antioch	Winter 45-46
Departure from Antioch	April 46
Journey to Galatia	April-September 46
Ministry in Galatia	September 46 - May 48

Journey to Macedonia	Summer 48	
Ministry in Macedonia	September 48 - April 50	
Journey to Corinth	April 50	
Ministry in Corinth	April 50-September 51	51: 1Thess
Journey to Jerusalem	September 51	
Conference in Jerusalem	October 51	

We are now in a position to complete the above table.

Jerusalem Conference	October 51	
Antioch	Winter 51-52	
Journey to Ephesus	April-July 52	
Ephesus	August 52 - October 54	53: Gal, Phil, [Col], Phlm  54-55: 1Cor, 2Cor
Macedonia	Winter 54-55	
Illyricum	Summer 55	
Corinth	Winter 55-56	56: Romans
Journey to Jerusalem	Summer 56	
Jerusalem-Caesarea	57?-61?	
Journey to Rome	September 61-Spring 62	
Rome	Spring 62 - Spring 64	
Spain	Early Summer 64	
Around the Aegean	64-66?	
Death in Rome	67	

Paul was born in Gischala in Upper Galilee. His family was sold into slavery after 4 BC and likely bought by a Roman citizen in Tarsus. He was an Aramaic speaking Israelite, though outside Palestine he spoke Greek. He knew the LXX well; quoted it about 90 times. He was educated in Tarsus likely at the University there, so he became familiar with Stoicism (everything happens according to divine reason, so acquiesce!). About 15 AD (20 years old), after finishing his education, he was a relatively assimilated Diaspora Israelite. He went to Jerusalem (500 miles, six weeks of walking) where he became a Pharisee (two-thirds of their teaching concern diet, purity, agricultural produce). Paul was a Jerusalem Pharisee for about 20 years before accepting the Messiah Jesus (about age 40). Though their lives overlapped, Jesus and Paul never met while Jesus was alive. Their critical encounter took place in an alternate state of consciousness (1Cor 15:8).

Paul or his letter carriers could average 20 miles a day (including sickness, injury, bad weather, waiting for caravans, etc). As noted above, the letters were written in one city to Jesus groups he founded living in other cities. He wrote at least six letters from Ephesus where he lived two years. To illustrate, Corinth is about 320 miles along the coast from Thessalonica. In Corinth Paul worried about the new believers in Thessalonica, so he sent Timothy to inquire. This would take 2-3 weeks. He'd stay a while then 2-3 weeks for the return trip. Paul would wait two months to get news about them. Then he wrote his letters to them. Thus "Paul was out of touch with his converts most of the time, even when they were in greatest need of him."

### Resources:

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- PILCH, JOHN J. *The Cultural World of Paul*. Canfield, OH: Alba House, St. Paul Publications, 2005. An audio presentation (approximately 8 hours) with study guide.
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## 2. EVANGELIZATION IN PAUL'S LETTERS: PAUL, GOD'S CHANGE AGENT

Paul the Apostle can be viewed as a change agent. He had something new and different to share, and was authorized by God to announce this change to fellow Israelites in the Western dispersion. Thus, in the case of Paul,

Change Agency = God  
 Change Agent = Paul  
 Clients = those who need the change.

Change agents invariably have the following seven tasks, occurring in no fixed order apart from the first and last steps.

### Step 1: Need for Change

The book of Acts presents idealized scenarios of how Paul performed this initial function of the diffusion of innovation and how he made listeners realize they needed to adopt the change he was preaching. See Acts 17:1-9.

### Step 2: Information Exchange

This is precisely the stage at which Paul's letter writing activity and emissary exchange fits in. All the letters but Romans were sent to groups who adopted the change Paul preached ("the gospel of God"). It is also with a view to information exchange that Paul sends emissaries such as Timothy (1Thess 3:6; Phil 2:19, 22; 1Cor 4:17; 16:10), Apollo (1Cor 16:12), Epaphroditus (Phil 2:25), and Silvanus (2Cor 1:19) to the new Jesus-groups. The Jesus-groups in turn send emissaries to Paul with reports and/or questions. Chloe's group informed Paul about problems in Corinth while he was in Ephesus (1Cor 1:11). The purpose behind such an information exchange relationship included the following sequence of three steps: diagnose problems, create intent to change, and prevent discontinuance. Let us consider these in order.

### **Step 3: Problem Diagnosis**

Paul had to diagnose his clients' problems arising from the innovation proclaimed by him. E.g., among the Thessalonians he strove to restore order (1Thess 4:9-12), to assuage their concerns about believers who died before the Parousia (1Thess 4:13-18), and to tell them more about that event which he considered imminent (1Thess 5:1-11).

### **Step 4: Create Intent to Change**

Paul's information exchange relationship likewise encourages his clients to persevere in the decision they had made to join the Jesus-group. Such perseverance requires client-centered motivation. The phrase Paul repeats most often to motivate the recipients of his letters to continue to change is "for us" or something equivalent. See 1Thess 5:10; Gal 3:13-14.

### **Step 5: Translate Intent into Action**

Change agents always want their clients to translate their intent to change into action, into actual change. Intellectual agreement will not suffice. Paul's urging at the close of all of his exhortations is to do what he suggests, to behave accordingly. He exhorts the Thessalonians no less than four times! (1Thess 1:11-12; 4:1; 4:10; 5:14).

As a good change agent would do, Paul presents himself as a model for imitation. In other words he offers concrete "how to" information. "Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ" (1Cor 11:1; see also 4:16; Phil 3:15; 1Thess 2:14).

"How to" knowledge is often accompanied by "the reason why" knowledge. His exhortation to the Philippian believers to imitate him is contrasted with those who live "as enemies of the cross of Christ" (Phil 3:18). These would be fellow-Israelites who refused to recognize Jesus as Messiah, and Israelite Judaizers who insist on imposing the requirements of Torah righteousness as practiced in Judea upon assimilated Israelites living in the dispersion.

## Step 6: Stability and Prevention of Discontinuance

Clients often adopt innovations only to discontinue them. The change agent's task is to stabilize adoption and prevent discontinuance. Galatians is a parade example urging clients not to discontinue in favor of an alternative version of the innovation. Paul omits the customary expression of personal indebtedness (the so-called "thanksgiving" section) in this letter and begins instead by saying: "I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting him who called you in [the] grace [of Christ] and turning to a different gospel – not that there is another gospel...!" (Gal 1:6). So certain was he of his gospel that Paul leveled a two-fold curse against such activity.

The only reason Paul can think of to explain why the Galatians abandoned his innovation for another is that someone must have cast the evil eye upon them. "You foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you?" (Gal 3:1). See also 1Thess 4:1

## Step 7: Achieve a Terminal Relationship

When a client group adopts an innovation in some stable way, the change agent's goal is to achieve a terminal relationship, to end the ongoing relationship. First and second generation Jesus-group change agents are succeeded by local central personages, at times by a board of elders ("presbyters," 1Tim 4:14; Titus 1:5-6), at other times by a single central person ("episkopos" best translated as "supervisor," 1Tim 3:1; Titus 1:7).

## Summary

These seven features mark Paul's "apostolate to [Israelites living among] the Gentiles." Homophilous and heterophilous communication seems to confirm that he had little interest and activity among non-Israelites.

Homophilous = like minded people, common education, beliefs, social status, etc. Horizontal communication.

Heterophilous = no common education, beliefs, social status, etc. Vertical communication, such as the conversion of a King or Prince, (e.g., in Poland, 966 A.D.) means everyone in the country converts also.

## How the Innovation was Received

Both from the statistics cited and from the literature itself, that is, Paul's letters and Acts, it is evident that those who accepted the innovation that Paul preached were perhaps far fewer than those who rejected it.

## Paul: Model for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century?

Private revelations notwithstanding, the God of Israel has not commissioned a new change agent nor communicated a fresh innovation.

Perhaps, like Paul, contemporary followers of Jesus Messiah, "Abraham's seed according to the promise," ought to discern how faithfully and accurately the innovation that Paul preached has been accepted and is being implemented now, in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Pope Benedict XVI has led the way with such **clarifications** (e.g., limbo; Stephen not a deacon).

Already in 1949, Fr. Edward Siegman, an eminent American biblical scholar noted that many scripture passages were correctly interpreted and applied to support dogma, but he identified three problems that characterized texts which were wrongly used. These problems are still worth addressing today. The first is mistranslation. The second error is tearing a verse from its context in the Bible. The third error is reading into a text something which the author could never have intended (eisegesis).

## Conclusion

In his book, *Jesus of Nazareth* (2007), Pope Benedict XVI wrote: "It goes without saying that this book is in no way an exercise of the Magisterium, but is solely an expression of my personal search 'for the face of the Lord' (Cf. Ps 27:8). Everyone is free, then, to contradict me. I would only ask my readers for that initial goodwill without which there can be no understanding" (Ratzinger xxiii-xxiv). I can think of no better way to conclude my reflections on Paul the Evangelizer best understood as a change agent, appropriate model for the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

## Resources

- ASCOUGH, RICHARD. *Lydia: Paul's Cosmopolitan Hostess*. Paul's Social Network: Brothers and Sisters in Faith. Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 2009.
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### 3. PAUL ADDRESSES PROBLEMS IN CORINTH CAUSED BY THE CHANGE

#### I. 1Cor 1:1-8 Letter Opening (Superscription)

#### II. 1Cor 1:9–6:20 Reaction to a Report from Chloe’s People

Section One: 1Cor 1:9 – 3:23. Reported In-group Conflict and Reminders to Facilitate the Restoration of Harmony.

Section Two: 1Cor 5:1 – 6:20. Reported Complacency with a Case of In-group Incest and Directives for Dealing with It.

#### III. 1Cor 7:1–15:58 Response to Corinthian Questions

Part One: 1Cor 7:1-40: About Marriage Now.

Part Two: 1Cor 8:1–11:1: About Foods and Dining.

Part Three: 1Cor 9:1-27: About Jesus-Group Change Agents and Their Entitlements.

Part Four: 1Cor 10:1–11:1: About Showing Respect for Images.

Part Five: 1Cor 11:2-34: About Behavior at Jesus-Group Gatherings.

Part Six: 1Cor 12:1–15:40: About Phenomena Induced by the Spirit.

Part Seven: 1Cor 15:1-58: A Reminder about Paul’s Gospel and the Resurrection of the Dead.

Part Eight: 1Cor 16:1-4: Questions Concerning the Temple Tax.

#### IV. 1Cor 16:5-24: Letter Closing: Travel Plans, Salutations and Blessings

In this letter, Paul was responding to all the information he had received through previous channels (reports from Chloe in 1Cor 1:11; from Timothy in 1Cor 4:17; and a letter from others in 1Cor 7:1). According to this information, it seems that the Corinthians are “reinventing” the gospel of God which Paul preached to them. All his letters indicate that his gospel of God did not remain unvaried during the process of its diffusion. Such context-based change is called “refraction.” The questions and reports put to Paul in this letter derive from the “reinventions” in Corinth.

In the first part of the letter, Paul responds to information brought by Chloe’s people. Cliques have fractured the group (1:11ff), a deviant conjugal union scandalizes them (5:1ff), in-group lawsuits are taken outside the group (6:1ff). The second part responds to questions the Corinthians asked: about having children (7:1ff), arranging marriage (7:25ff), eating foods set before images (8:1ff), gifts of the Spirit (12:1ff), about his own idea of a collection for Jerusalem (16:1ff) , and about Apollos (16:12). Thus Paul seeks to diagnose and offer solutions to problems resulting from the innovation adoption. He also seems to maintain their intention to adhere to the innovation they have accepted, and to stabilize changes and prevent discontinuance.

## **I. LETTER OPENING: 1Cor 1:1-8.**

Paul reminds the Corinthians that they are part of one cosmopolite gathering with but one Lord Jesus Christ. Though they pattern themselves after the Greco-Roman household, they embrace Israelite political religion (Jesus returning to initiate theocracy). Thus the Jesus-group is in contrast with the political system of the Roman Empire which stands over against their hope and aspirations.

## **II. REACTIONS TO THE REPORT FROM CHLOE’S PEOPLE:**

**1Cor 1:9–6:10**

### **Section One: 1Cor 1:9–3:23. In-group Conflict and Restoring Harmony**

Baptism brings individuals from the “outside” into the Group. They are now insiders, and the point is not so much forgiveness of

sin and repentance as with John the Baptist, but rather mutual fellowship with Christ. Chloe and Stephanas were opinion leaders in Corinth. Apollos was a traveling Jesus-group member, either a prophet or teacher. Paul almost always uses the Aramaic name, Cephas, indicating that he locates Peter in the "Judean" (uncivilized) category.

Wisdom (mentioned 19 times between 1:17-2:9) derives from Hellenistic society. It means understanding how to live and be successful in life, as in Stoicism, Platonism, etc. Paul was not sent to baptize (v. 17) but to proclaim the gospel of God, that Jesus crucified by Judeans was raised by God from the dead soon to return to initiate the theocracy in Jerusalem.

Paul's argument is with Israelites of all stripes: barbarian (i.e., Judeans who seek signs), and civilized (i.e., Hellenists who seek philosophical reasons). The crucified Jesus, source of the life that human wisdom seeks, is wisdom for us. The Corinthians' trust in God did not derive from human wisdom but from the power of God demonstrated in Jesus' resurrection and the Corinthians' altered states of consciousness experiences ("demonstration of the Spirit and/or power," 2:4). "Rulers of this age" (2:8) are other-than-human beings (e.g., stars) who control human life. God's Spirit helps us understand the gifts God bestows on us. "Unspiritual" people who don't experience ASCs simply cannot understand. Jesus-group wisdom comes solely from God, through Christ crucified, by means of the Spirit of God. Cliquishness destroys God's temple, the community of believers. Still, Paul does not merely want to shame these in-group members but to mend in-group relations. As father (not guardian), Paul wants his children to imitate him and not reinvent the innovation he proclaimed to them. He wants to stabilize the Corinthians' intent to change while preventing discontinuance. The reinvention here is clique formation with a new focus on "wisdom." Paul diagnoses of the root of the problem as arrogance (4;18-19; see v. 6 "puffed up in favor of one against another" = exaggerating personal worth). This is a challenge to the honor of Paul, God's authorized change agent.

## Section Two: 1Cor 5:1–6:20. Complacency about In-group Incest and Directives for Dealing with it.

A – 5:1-13, instance of *porneia* (deviant sexual behavior)

B – 6:2-13, lawsuits

A' – 6:14-20, *porneia*

**A 5:1-13.** A stepson/stepmother conjugal union (Lev 18:8; 20:11). Deut 22:21, 22, 24 and elsewhere implies death by community stoning. Here Paul “hexes” the party instead: “hand over the guilty party to Satan (tester of loyalty).” He will eventually be saved with the rest of the Corinthians. Meanwhile, Paul presents a purity rule: keep rigid boundaries, do not mix with those who commit *porneia*.

**B 6:1-11** The unrighteous are former Israelite acquaintances wise in the ways of Israelite law. They rejected the gospel of God when it was offered to them. Paul Advises: stick with insiders.

**A' 6:12-20** Resumption of reflection on *porneia* (see v. 13, 18). Believers are now one with Christ and should not enter such liaisons.

### III. RESPONSES TO CORINTHIAN QUESTIONS:

1Cor 7:1–15:58 (see 7:1, 25; 8:1; 12:1; 16:1; 16:12)

#### Part One: 1Cor 7:1-40 About Marriage Now

Two principles: time is short; remain in the status in which God called you. The innovation that Paul preached caused some problems.

7:1-6 Married Jesus-group members. Better translation: “It is well for a married couple not to have children.”

7:7-8 Unmarried and widows. Unmarried could mean bachelor or widower. Paul was likely a widower. The status in which God calls a person is a gift, so remain in the gift.

7:9-11 Married group members thinking of divorce. No divorce; if separation occurs, remarriage is not permitted (Mark 10:2-9).

7:12-16 Group members married to an outsider.

7:17-24 General principle: stay in the state in which you were called. Don't bother about male genital mutilation. Obey the commandments. Same with slave status.

7:25-35 Arranging marriages now. Paul speaks as a prophetic change agent called by God. Time is short; don't bother.

7:36-38 About Levirate marriages. (Better translation/interpretation):

If anyone thinks of being shamed about the matter of his "virgin," in case she be close to menopause, and it must thus happen, let him do as he desires; he does not sin. Let them marry. But if he is firm in his heart, not being compelled, for he has power over what he desires, and he has judged this in his own heart to keep his "virgin" he does well. Therefore he does well to marry his own "virgin," but the one not marrying does better.

7:39-40 Widows and marriage. Stay in the state in which you were called.

## **Part Two: 1Cor 8:1–13: About Foods and Dining**

Meals are always a social act. Who eats what, with whom, when, where, how, and why. Here Paul corrects Corinthians so that in their eating they would express the set of meanings proper to those in Christ.

It is not about "idols" but "images" either of gods or ancestors, and eating sacrifices offered to them during periodic funerary celebrations. These images are like shadows, alter egos (Peter's shadow has healing power Acts 5:15). Thus, the issue is how one interprets images and their shadow power. Are they effective or not? It depends on one's belief. Many Israelite Jesus-group members still retained a belief in other gods, as Philo (20 BC – 50 AD) who calls the Israelite God "the Supreme father of the gods"

(*Spec. Laws* 2, 165), acknowledging the existence of other deities. This is not monotheism but rather henotheism. For Paul, lack of concern for the weak eradicated group integrity (“holiness”) that was to be its hallmark. The weak seeing others eat these offerings might be tempted to resume their previous practices. To revive the habits, feelings, and beings of the weak dishonors them as well as Christ.

### **Part Three: 1Cor 9:1-27: About Jesus-Group Change Agents and Their Entitlements**

Following up on his previous advice to the strong to waive privileges, Paul now spells out how he waived his privileges for the sake of the Corinthian Jesus-group. Change agents commissioned by God are entitled to sustenance. However, Paul and Barnabas have waived their entitlement so as not to put an obstacle in the way of fellow group members. Paul (v. 18) believes he was “hired” by God. And he becomes like every kind of Judean to gain as many as possible. He is a homophilous change agent (vv. 19-23)!!

### **Part Four: 1Cor 10:1–11:1: About Showing Respect for Images**

Addressing fellow Israelites (“our ancestors” v. 1), Paul recalls the Exodus story to serve his theme – food and service of images. Paul distinctively identifies the life-sustaining rock (from which the Israelites got water) with Jesus the Messiah. The Golden Calf was an attempt to control God. It caused Moses to shatter the commandments he received. Then he went and received a second set (10 +, see *Didascalia Apostolorum*), and these—according to Paul—were not obliging on Jesus Group members, since through Jesus, Israel’s wilderness sin of attempting to control God was taken away. These additional commandments were to prevent Israel from trying to control God again. These were not obliging on Jesus-group members.

Paul applies this to what Corinthians are now experiencing. “Eat, drink and play.” Play = *porneia*. Notice how Paul switches from Moses to Christ: “You must not put Christ to the test.” Paul’s

Jesus-group members are on the verge of experiencing the end of the ages with the advent of Jesus as Messiah with power. Paul assures them that the tests God sends will not exceed the God-given means to withstand and pass the test.

Paul urges them to resist the desire for evil, the service of images proper (eating, drinking, merrymaking), sexual promiscuity, putting Christ's loyalty to the test, and constant complaining about what God has decided and provided. "Jealousy" (v. 22) is the feeling a person has toward persons and things exclusive to or set apart to them. Only a stronger person can interfere, but no one is stronger than God. In the end, do not seek one's own entitlements but seek to benefit the many so that the many can be saved.

### **Part Five: 1Cor 11:2-34: About Behavior at Jesus-Group Gatherings**

Are the Jesus-group gatherings domestic in nature? Or public? Jesus-groups are fictive-domestic kin, but even if held in a household setting, their gatherings are public. Behaviors will differ accordingly.

**1Cor 11:2-16** Jesus-group gatherings are not domestic gatherings. How should wives and husbands behave at Jesus-group gatherings? Given Paul's instructions, such gatherings are not private but rather public in nature, and husbands and wives must act accordingly. "Head" is the focus of honor: God, Jesus Messiah, husband. In Israelite circles, a male who communicates with God or imparts God's message must have his head uncovered to show respect for God (only later did it become a custom for the male to cover his head in Jewish religion). Similarly, in Israelite circles a female who communicates with God or imparts God's message must have hair braided to honor God. "Because of the angels" refers to Gen 6:2 and unattached females with whom the sons of God had sexual relations.

For Paul and his contemporaries, the word "nature" (v. 14) when applied to people referred to what we call "culture" today. In the Israelite tradition, cultural arrangements derived directly from the God of Israel, the creator of all "nature." Males with long hair in

Paul's society were male transsexuals (see Philo: *Spec Laws* III.7.37-42), a role that in Israelite perspective degraded men. Women had long hair, as a covering for their heads. Thus, wives were expected at Jesus group gatherings to follow the customary behavior appropriate in public gatherings.

**1Cor 11:17-34.** Proper dining behavior at Jesus-Group gatherings. Cliques in these gatherings make them a negative experience, because instead of unity, they take up adversarial positions. Yet this is important in order to ascertain genuine members! The Lord's Supper is a prophetic symbolic action, a tradition Paul received. As the inaugurating ancestor of all who believe in what the God of Israel did in raising him, Jesus himself merits the ancestor reverence previously proper to Israel's great ancestors, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. In this gathering they proclaim the significance of the Lord's death: God waived the satisfaction due to dishonor ("forgiveness of sin"), giving God's spirit to the group, inaugurating a new covenant with God, and providing access to the forthcoming theocracy.

## **Part Six: 1Cor 12:1–15:40: About Phenomena Induced by the Spirit**

A 12:1-31a - Spirit induced phenomena

B 12:31b-13:13 - core central value: agape

A' 14:1-40 - Spirit induced phenomena at Jesus group gatherings.

### **(A.) 12:1-31a. Spirit induced phenomena**

These are alternate state of consciousness experiences of the Spirit of God. Before joining the Jesus-group, Israelites did partake in other gatherings that experienced spirit induced ASCs. The question is: which spirit? In v. 4, the issue is not "gifts" but rather "favor." God's favor is Christ himself, and it is Jesus-group members, each with his or her own *charisma*, who together are Christ in society. The *charismata* are to support and build up the Jesus-group. People must be of service or act on behalf of another. They are received in alternate states of consciousness experiences. Christ pres-

ent is like a body consisting of many members and realized in the social body of Jesus-group members. The Spirit constitutes the body. In this assembly, there is a structure which is not fixed, but flexible, and members ought to endeavor to take on services that Paul lists as greater.

### **(B.) 12:31b-13:13 The Central Value of Agape (Group Allegiance).**

This insert disrupts the discussion of charismata to be continued in 14:1. If Agape does not characterize the exercise of Spirit-induced phenomena, then such phenomena are of little use to the individual Jesus-group member. Of course, they may be of great use to others. The beautiful poem has three parts:

1-3: a progressive comparison of charismata and agape

4-7: a description of agape

8:13: a series of antitheses underlining the excellence and staying power of agape.

### **(A') 14:1-40 More about Spirit-Induced Phenomena**

Paul and his Corinthian Jesus-group members believe that when people speak in tongues, they utter a language that could be understood if someone who spoke that language was present (xenoglossia). Modern linguists say that speaking in tongues does not conform to a natural language. Speaking in tongues is not language but communication... between the Holy Spirit and the speaker, and between the speaker and the congregation.

Paul urges striving for prophecy which is directed to others, serving to build up, encourage, and console members of the Jesus-group gathering. In vv. 18-19 Paul observes that he too has the altered state of consciousness experiences of speaking in tongues, but he sees more value in a few communicable words than in speaking in tongues. Vv. 20-25: If unbeliever Israelites wandered in and the group were speaking in tongues, they would think the group mad. But if they were prophesying, the intruders would be touched, fall down, and reverence the God of Israel quoting Zech 8:23 (v. 25). Vv 33b-36 are an insert that disrupts the discussion of ASCs.

## Part Seven: 1Cor 15:1-58: A Reminder about Paul's Gospel and the Resurrection of the Dead

This section deals with the greatest phenomenon effected by the Spirit of God: the raising of the dead. Paul's gospel was either reinvented or refracted (changed) in Corinth. According to Paul, those who believe in what the God of Israel did in the death and resurrection of Jesus will likewise be raised by the God of Israel. The Corinthian Jesus-group members reinvented or modified the significance of this forthcoming event and thus departed from Paul's message.

Paul argues that God has in fact raised Jesus from the dead; there are witnesses (1-11). Second, he describes how some Corinthian Jesus-group members have reinvented or modified this proclamation (12-19). Third he unpacks the implications of this proclamation filling in what the Corinthians have either not known or overlooked (20-28). After an aside about "if the dead are not raised..." (29-34), Paul concludes with a description of how the dead are to be raised (35-38).

**1Cor 15:1-11.** The word "raised" (passive voice, 18x, God of Israel) also implies a transformation in one's way of being human, a qualitative change in one's humanity.

vv. 12-19. Corinthian Reinvention - no dead are raised, hence not even Jesus. If so, then preachers are shaming God by being false witnesses. Without God's raising Jesus, faith in Christ is futile, salvation from God's wrath is a chimera, and those who have died in Christ are simply dead. This merits pity rather than admiration.

vv. 20-28. What Paul's Proclamation Implied. As death came through the first earthling, so resurrection comes through Christ, enabling all who belong in Christ to be raised eventually at his coming. At the end, theocratic rule will be given over by Christ to God the Patron. All hostile cosmic forces—including death—will be destroyed.

vv. 29-34 Why the dead must be raised. If they are not raised, "baptism for the dead" is senseless. (Recall collectivism: Acts 16:31

The jailer believers and his entire household is saved.) And why would change agents bother at all? Paul concludes by warning against deception and shaming the Corinthians who doubted his gospel.

35-58 How are the dead raised? After considering the stars, Paul contrasts the first Adam as living soul (animate life) with the last Adam as life-giving spirit (spiritual life force). The forthcoming Israelite theocracy, something imperishable, belongs to those who are transformed, not to ordinary human beings. Thus all will be transformed. Paul concludes with an exhortation to constancy and greater excellence, since as they know, in the Lord they do not labor for nothing.

### **Part Eight: 1Cor 16:1-4: Questions Concerning the Temple Tax**

The collection was to help those who had no land (priests and Levites, and the poor who lost land). Paul agreed with the Jerusalem pillars (Gal 2:10) that Jesus-group members living in non-Israelite territory should pay the Israelite tithe for the poor, collected in the third and sixth year of a seven year cycle, specifically their poor fellow Jesus-group members in Jerusalem.

## **IV. 1Cor 16:5-24: LETTER CLOSING:**

### **TRAVEL PLANS, SALUTATIONS AND BLESSINGS**

Paul will spend the winter (rainy season), no doubt to deal with diagnosing their problems, and helping them translate their intent to action. As this letter has indicated, he has to continue working at stabilizing their ways of dealing with the innovation he communicated and preventing discontinuance. Timothy is key to the information exchange, so these few lines (vv. 8-9) are a sort of letter of recommendation for him.

If Apollos is unwilling to visit Corinth, it would seem he did not initiate the clique named after him. Paul hopes he does go to stabilize their commitment to the gospel of God and prevent discontinuance.

Some of the people mentioned have come to visit Paul in Ephesus, from where he writes this letter. Notice also the greetings from others to Corinth indicating the social attachment of Jesus-group members. Those in Corinth in turn learn of the diffusion of their group members. Paul concludes with a curse, presumably forcing unattached an person to leave the Jesus group, and adds a blessing affirming all the good things the Corinthians have experienced from God, and an affirmation that Paul remains attached to them all.

### **Resources**

KEITH, CHRIS. "‘In My Own Hand’: Grapho-Literacy and the Apostle Paul," *Biblica* 89 (2008) 39-58.

MALINA, BRUCE J. AND JOHN J. PILCH. *Social Science Commentary on the Pauline Letters*. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2006, 57-132.

**4. PAUL'S LETTER TO THE HELLENISTIC-ISRAELITE JESUS-GROUP IN ROME: Explaining his Gospel to a Group who only heard of him through the Gossip Network.**

**ROMANS**

I. Rom 1:1-7 - Letter opening (superscription).

II. Rom 1:8-10 - Letter Thanksgiving (indebtedness).

(A.) III. Rom 1:11-17 Introduction and Travel Plans.

(B) IV Rom 1:18-32 "They" and the Ten Commandments.

(C) V. Rom 2:1-16 You Judeans and Judging Hellenists.

(D) VI. Rom 2:17-3:20 Israelites who rejected the gospel of God.

(E) VII. Rom 3:21-8:39 The Present time: Now.

A. We (Inclusive: I and You) and Reconciliation 5:1-6:10.

B. You Romans 6:11-7:25.

A' We (Inclusive: I and You) and the Spirit: 8:1-39.

(D') VIII. Rom 9:1-11:36 Recalcitrant Israel.

(C') IX. Rom 12:1-13:14 You (pl.): Jesus-Group Values.

(B') X. Rom 14:1-15:13 Them (the Weak) and the Torah Commandments.

(A') XI. Rom 15:15-32 Conclusion and Travel Plans

XII. Rom 15:33 Letter Ending

XIII Rom 16:1-27: Appendix: Letter of Recommendation for Phoebe and Doxology

## **Introduction**

Paul didn't found any Jesus group in Rome. Other Jesus-group change agents did. Written from Corinth about 56-58, this lays out Paul's travel plans for Spain. Sections 1-VI look to a period from past to present. Section VII is about the present. Sections VIII-XI deal with future based on present. He sets forth his gospel and its implications lest Roman Jesus-group members believe any other views they might have heard about Paul.

### **I. Rom 1:1-7 - Letter opening (superscription)**

Sender, addressees, and greeting. Paul, "slave" (controlled by Messiah Jesus), and apostle (=change agent) called by the God of Israel (=change agency). Hymn in vv. 3-4 tell who Jesus is: of Israelite origin, Son of God by his being raised by the God of Israel from the dead. Resurrection = a Persian idea adopted in Yehud after 537 BC. (Pharisees = Farsi = Persian). Sadducee traditionalists never left the land and did not share Persian beliefs.

For Paul it is always God who calls to Jesus-group membership; God is the founder of Jesus-group gatherings (called "churches").

All God's beloved in Rome: Israelites and non-Israelites, each with two subsets: those who accepted God's raising of Jesus, and those who rejected it. Non-Israelites were the few who joined the Jesus-group, and the vast majority who stood in contrast with the Israelites.

### **II. Rom 1:8-10 - Letter Thanksgiving (indebtedness)**

Acknowledgment of God's past and present favor (grace) with hope for more, especially the faith (loyalty, trust) of Roman believers. Paul hopes to see them at last.

### (A.) III. Rom 1:11-17 Introduction and Travel Plans.

(The corresponding element in the chiasm is A' - Rom 15:15-32). Paul is a total outsider to this group. He did not lay the foundation, had no say in how they organized, nor who might belong to the group. But "in Christ," he presumes to be an insider and requests in-group assistance. Greeks = civilized (cultured, spoke Greek) and Barbarians = uncivilized (kept their own cultural customs and language). Wise = know how to succeed in life; foolish = lose social status and don't care about success.

Salvation = rescue from a threatening situation, the effects of God's wrath directed at those who shame him. It comes to those who have faith in God's having raised Jesus from the dead, both to uncivilized Israelites (Judeans) and to civilized Israelites (Greeks).

God's righteousness is God's acceptance, first of Jesus whom he raised from the dead, then of those who have faith in the God of Israel who raised Jesus.

### (B.) IV Rom 1:18-32 "They" and the Ten Commandments.

(The corresponding element in the chiasm is Rom 14:1-15:13). This section is concerned with Roman non-Israelites and the Ten Commandments which were spoken by God directly. All the population of the world was capable of hearing them. God is on the verge of demonstrating his wrath against "ungodliness and wickedness," which is giving precedence to other gods and making images of them (first two commandments of the Decalogue). The attitude underlying idolatry is the belief that a human can control God: very shameful and dishonoring.

"Unnatural" is best viewed as culturally unacceptable. Artemidorous (*Oneirocritica* 1.78) says any human sexual position apart from the frontal (which is the only one "taught them by nature") is unnatural. Vv. 28-32 are another presentation of the Commandments in disguise.

**(C) V. Rom 2:1-16 You Judeans and Judging Hellenists**

(The parallel to this member of the chiasm is Rom 12:1–13:14). From “they” Paul turns to a generic “you” singular. The parallel passage suggests it is one or another Roman Jesus-group member. The problem seems to be that some Israelites behave no differently than non-Israelites. God gives them time to repent before unleashing wrath (compare 2Macc 6:12-17). God will punish all people for their evil actions. Being a descendant of Abraham or a Jesus-group member will not obviate divine judgment.

**(D) VI. Rom 2:17–3:20 Israelites who rejected the gospel of God.**

(The parallel to this member of the chiasm is Rom 9:1–11:36). Israelites who boast in the Law but break it dishonor God (2:17-24). Judeans consider non-Israelites as blind, in darkness, foolish, etc. Perhaps they think the same of Hellenistic Jesus-group members. The quote from Isa 52:5 (LXX) implies that it is the behavior of Israelites living among non Israelites that causes the latter to dishonor the God of Israel. It is precisely these Israelites living among the non-Israelites who have been Paul’s target audience for the innovation.

Circumcision (165 BC) was just a nick, not complete removal of the foreskin (2:25-29). That made it easy to “undo” it to fit into Hellenistic society. First in 150 AD the Pharisees required removal of the foreskin. It was quite likely limited to Pharisaic circles in Judea. Who is a true “Judean?” One marked on the heart, inwardly, who obeys God’s directives (Rom 2:15 and Paul’s allusion to Jer 31:33 - circumcised heart).

Advantages of Judaism (3:1-20): the Law. “Justice” means proper interpersonal relations. “Unjust deeds” are inappropriate, unacceptable, deserving rejection rather than approbation. Some in Rome might have said of Paul that he teaches: “do evil so that good may come.” These slanderers are duly condemned. “Under the power of sin” means members of a culture of willingness to dishonor or shame God, to take on God’s honor. Paul then “strings pearls” to make his point, that the Law of Moses triggered aware-

ness among Israelites of the culture of willingness to dishonor and shame God.

**(E) VII. Rom 3:21–8:39 The Present time: Now.**

As the chiasm indicates, this section is the **center of Romans**. It contains the sum and substance of Paul's gospel of God that undergirds all of his authentic letters. This section itself forms an **A - B- A' chiasm**:

- A.** About us (reconciliation now available to Paul and Jesus-group members, 5:1–6:11)
- B.** About you (new condition of Roman Jesus-group members, 6:11–7:25)
- A'.** About us (life with the Spirit available to us, 8:1-39).

Here righteousness receives great emphasis (Rom 1:17). In Israelite tradition, righteousness is a privileged identity deriving from divine acceptance due to Israel's ability to act appropriately toward God and toward other humans. This righteousness means acceptance by God. Paul says this never came from observing the Law of Moses, but rather from divine acceptance of persons who believed in God's activity on their behalf. The first such was the non-Israelite, Abraham, and all subsequent Israelites who believed as Abraham did. Given what God did in Jesus, Israelites who believe in God's activity in this event are accepted by God on the basis of their faith in God, just like Abraham.

**Introduction to the new revelation. 3:21-30**

Since all believers—Judean Israelites and Greek Israelites—have previously shamed or dishonored God, now through their faith in God's raising Jesus they are accepted by God with his favor that restores their status before God (redemption). This takes place in Christ Jesus.

## **Proof of the new righteousness: Abraham. 3:31–4:25**

Law (Torah) is a fluid concept: the whole OT, the section called Law and Prophets (from Gen to 2Kings), Law of Moses, Ten commandments. All written law. The Pharisees added unwritten law, interpretations of written law. “Works of Law” = behaviors prescribed by the Law of Moses. The story of Abraham is in “the Law and the Prophets.” Point: divine acceptance is not due to what Israelites do, but due to what God does, and to people’s faith in what God does. Abraham became acceptable before he was circumcised; hence, he can be the ancestor of all whether circumcised or not.

### **A. We (Inclusive: I and You) and Reconciliation 5:1–6:10**

*We are reconciled with God 5:1-11.* Because we are approved by God, we have peace with God through Jesus (vv. 1 + 11). Recollecting the distress caused by accepting Paul’s gospel (3-5) strengthens the group and loyalty. Thanks to the death of Jesus, God reconciled us to himself.

*The Why and how of Reconciliation with God 5:12-21.* As death came through one human’s act, so life comes through God’s favor (vv. 12 + 21). Sin, death, grace and life are personified here. What Adam and Jesus have in common is that they were first in a long line of descendants. The consequences of Adam’s disobedience was that all except Noah and his family died, and only one was taken up to God (Enoch). The consequences of Jesus’ deed are that many who believe in God’s raising Jesus from the dead are beneficiaries.

*Reconciliation means new living 6:1-10.* Here Paul contrasts the “then” and the “now,” the past and the present. We died to sin through baptism, a symbolic ritual marking a change of status; a status transformation ritual. This new culture is “a new life in Christ.”

### **B. You Romans 6:11-7:25**

The very center of this letter runs from 6:11 to 7:25, and is addressed to you (plural): Roman Jesus-group members.

*Freed from sin and slaves to God 6:11-23.* Slavery was a subset of kinship (domestic slaves) and politics (Temple slaves, etc). Slaves exist for the social utility of the enslaving agent. If one is enslaved to sin? Then death is the outcome! If you are enslaved to righteousness, divine approval and acceptance, then work to please God.

*Three Examples of Freedom from Legally Controlling Authorities 7:1-25.* Paul continues his exploration of before and after: before Jesus' death and resurrection, and after their faith in God who raised Jesus from the dead. Previously, Paul spoke of sin-death/life; enslavement to sin/enslavement to God. Now Paul talks about being under the control of others who lose that control by dying.

*Example 1: Dead husband and his widow 7:1-4.* Just as a wife is free once her husband dies, so Jesus-group members are dead to the Law, freed from its legal entitlements over them through their being in the body of Christ. They belong to another and to the one raised from the dead by the God of Israel. Jesus- group members should bear fruit for God, as the freed wife bears fruit for her new husband.

*Example 2: The Freed Slave 7:5-14.* To be "in the flesh" means to be in Israel, while to be "in the Spirit" means to be in Christ. Life in Israel under the Law was like life under a slave master, a condition entailing loss of life, the social death that slavery was and is. While the Law comes from God's spirit, the Israelites who received it were of the flesh, that is, enslaved in a culture of willingness to dishonor God.

*Example 3: The Successfully Exorcized 7:15-25.* Sin personified is the possessing spirit who controls the person, even if they want to do good. Jesus-group members recollected this. Who will exorcize? Successful exorcism occurs "Through Jesus Christ our Lord" thanks to the God of Israel.

### **A' We (Inclusive: I and You) and the Spirit: 8:1-39**

Paul now includes himself as he compares "us" with "them." We are in the Spirit, they are in the flesh.

*Living in the Spirit 8:1-15.* People living in the traditional Israelite way cannot please the God of Israel. Those in the spirit, in Jesus-groups, have God's spirit dwelling "in you [plural]." They belong to Christ because of this spirit. And through this self same Spirit, God will raise Jesus-group members from the dead as well. The analogy of adoption (vv. 12-15) is Hellenistic. Traditional Israel (and contemporary Islam) do not have the practice of adoption.

*Children of God 8:16-18.* God acting among human beings was considered like the wind (hence Spirit). Holy Spirit or God's Spirit always refers to God's activity. These verses describe an ASC experience, as group members cry out "Abba" (Oh Father!). If we suffer with him, we shall be raised with him

*Children of God: Creation awaits and we await 8:19-30.* The soon to be revealed glorification of Jesus-group members will include all of God's creation, celestial as well as terrestrial entities. All creatures were created for the "freedom of the glory of the children of God"; thus all creation will share in some way in that faith that humans have in God with its favorable consequences. Israel has an after-the-fact predestination perspective. If one got married, one can be sure that God wanted one to be married, etc. If a person was a Jesus-group member, one can be sure that God called that person to become a member. The first-born opens the womb and lets the others out. Because they actually believe in God's having raised Jesus, Jesus-group members have been foreknown by God and predestined to be called. With their call they have been approved and found acceptable by God (that is, justified) and worthy of being honored with their own resurrection from the dead.

*Conclusion: God's role 8:31-39.* These verses conclude the large central section of Paul's letter (3:21-8:30). As the conclusion indicates, Paul and other early Jesus-group thinkers ascribed the origin of the Jesus movement and the Jesus-groups that espoused it to the God of Israel. It was God and not Jesus, Paul, or anyone else who "founded Christianity." No cosmic entities can keep us away from God as we make our way through the cosmos.

### (D') VIII. Rom 9:1–11:36 Recalcitrant Israel.

Paul returns to the topic previously dealt with in (D) Romans 2-3, the parallel member in this chiasm. There Paul spoke of the Law of Moses, Ten Commandments, circumcision, and advantages of Judaism. Now he takes a different perspective. He asks two questions: Why haven't all Israelites believed in their God raising Jesus from the dead? And in view of this refusal to believe, has God rejected the previously chosen people? In the process, Paul expresses his attitudes toward fellow Israelites and toward non-Israelites who have joined the Jesus-group. The fact that he deals separately with the non-Israelites suggests their presence is exceptional and anomalous so far as Paul is concerned.

*Question 1: Why haven't all Israelites believed in their God's raising Jesus from the dead? 9:1–10:4 \*\* Rom 9:1-5 and 10:1-4 form an inclusio marking off this first section.*

Paul's assessment of his fellow Israelites. 9:1-5. That all Israelites did not believe that the God of Israel raised Jesus from the dead provoked a deep, in-group problem for Paul as well as other New Testament authors (Collectivistic personalities). People as a group in antiquity set themselves off from others. Paul lists the characteristics of Israelite collective identity, "ethnicity" (vv. 4-5). Interestingly, Paul makes no mention of common language, circumcision, or homeland, but focuses rather on ancestorism. The reason for this is that he deals with Hellenist Israelites, uncircumcised and with no desire to live in Palestine. Such was the Roman Jesus-group to which Paul writes.

True Israel. 9:6-13. Paul's social identity was in the house of Israel (Phil 3:5). Accepting God's innovation caused him severe cognitive dissonance. Why didn't fellow Israelites accept the innovation? His answer: "For not all Israelites truly belong to Israel, and not all of Abraham's children are his true descendants" vv. 6-7 (similar view in the Synoptics, John, and Revelation). The opposite is true: those who accepted the innovation are the true Israel. These are the children of the promise.

God alone elects the true Israel. 9:14-29. God makes the choice, and the objects of his choice or rejection have nothing to say about it. Again, Paul strings passages together here from Ex 33:19 (v. 15), Ex 9:16 (v. 17), Hosea (1:10, 2:23 - in v. 25), Isaiah 10:22-23 (v. 27), and Isaiah 1:9 (v. 29). Only Hellenist Israelites could appreciate such artistry.

But Israel is rooted in faith. 9:30-10:4. While observant Israelites are zealous for the things of God, they are ignorant of the fact that God's approval and acceptance cannot be acquired by their efforts, but only ascribed by God to those who submit to God's righteousness, through faith in God's revelation in Jesus' death and resurrection. This is how the unobservant Israelites, the Hellenists, have gained God's approval.

A description of Law-Observant Israel's Unbelief. 10:5-21. Again Paul strings together scripture to demonstrate to Israelites that Israelite unbelief and rejection of the innovation of the gospel of the God of Israel is the fault of those Israelites, zealous though they may be, who strive for divine approval and acceptance on the basis of Law. This is their fault, not God's. The citations include Deut 30:12-14 (go up, descend - refers to the Law, but Paul applies it to the Messiah), Isaiah 28:16 (no one put to shame), Isa 52:7 (feet).

Law-Observant Israel's Disobedience. 10:16-21. In Paul's high context argument, it was of Torah-observant Israel that God said: "All day long I have held out my hands to a disobedient and contrary people" (Isa 65:1).

*Question 2: Had God Rejected Law-Observant Israel? 11:1-36.* "Don't be silly!" For the third time, Paul sets forth credentials for his collectivistic group identity (9:1-5; 10:1-2). "Do you not know?" introduces another string of pearls and is a challenge to the honor of Torah experts. With this question, Paul insults the experts. He compares objection to himself with objection to Elijah.

Has God Rejected Law-Observant Israel? 11:1-12. No! "Jealous" means "to provoke a passionate concern for what is rightfully one's own." Non Israelites in the Jesus-group serve this purpose. They

actually have no right to it, but God has let it happen “to make Israel jealous.”

*Non-Israelite Jesus-Group members in Rome. 11:13-24.* This is the **first time** in this letter that Paul take explicit notice of non-Israelite Jesus-group members in the Roman community. The dough of the Israelites (Num 14:12) will make the whole Roman Jesus-group holy. The grafting image is an insult. Non-Israelites (a wild shoot) grafted to Israelites in Christ (the cultivated root) will produce inedible fruit. Like other New Testament writers, Paul, too, is ethnocentric. He has little good to say about the presence of non-Israelites in Jesus-groups. In fact, this section is insulting to the non-Israelites.

*Conclusion 11:25-36.* Paul concludes that a mystery/secret is afoot. God has hardened some Israelite hearts “until the full number of non-Israelites” accept the innovation. Then “all Israel” will be saved (Isa 59:20-21; 27:29). Since Jesus is returning soon, the number of non-Israelites cannot be very large. In the Israelite view, non-Israelites are all and always sinners, “Gentile sinners.” In Paul’s view, the gospel of God is solely for Israelites. He concludes with another tissue of texts that form a hymn.

### **(C') IX. Rom 12:1–13:14 You (pl.): Jesus-Group Values.**

This section relates to C in the chiasm: You Judeans and Judging Hellenists. The literary form of this unit is identified as a “catechesis,” that is, a statement of the attitudes characteristic of the new way of Jesus-group living, a description of various social responsibilities and a concluding reminder of the critical nature of the times, with emphasis on Jesus-group responsibility. The themes are:

- Jesus-group worship behaviors (12:1-8)
- Exhortations derived from Israel’s scripture (12:9-21)
- Subordination to authority (13:1-6)
- Exhortation based on holiness of God (13:7-10)
- Deliberate disentanglement of Jesus-group members from the values and life-style of society at large (13:12-14).

*Sacrifice and One Body.* 12:1-8. Sacrifice has three parts: they make food or drink unfit for human use; this is then directed to a deity; the purpose is to have a life-effect. The Roman Jesus-group is to be transformed to be pleasing to God. Thus, forego competing for honor over fellows, but think within the boundaries of their positive shame and live according to the group task ascribed to them by God. This is called "charism," (see 1Cor 12) which always works (or should work) for the well-being of the whole group. "We are one body in Christ, and individually we are members one of another."

*Generic Admonitions.* 12:9-21 In-group mutual behavior. In general, if one imagines all these attitudes as present in a single person, one will envision a typical character portrait, a Jesus-group character formed after the values Paul sets forth. This is the type of character a Jesus-group member should be and expect to see in other members.

*Civil authorities.* 13:1-6. Be subordinate to "higher ranking, or superior" persons. This has nothing to do with government. Those who have such authority exercise it from God, and in this case, the God of Israel. "Conscience" = opinion of fellow Jesus-group member, believers.

*Conclusion: Final Admonition and Motivation* 13:7-14: Be free of interpersonal indebtedness, except of course to God.

## **(B') X. Rom 14:1–15:13 Them (the Weak) and the Torah Commandments.**

The chiasmic parallel (1:18-32) treats "them," that is non-Israelites and the Ten Commandments. "Weak" refers to persons uneducated in the customs and amenities of the cultivated strata of society. The "weak" are driven by their dreads rather than by rational knowledge. Here the weak are Israelites held in the grip of taboo fears of alleged non-Israelite deities and the alleged obligatory nature of Mosaic Torah requirements. They can not understand that these were abrogated by Jesus' death and resurrection. Those who can are the strong. Thus, the weak are Judeans and Judean hopefuls ("wannabes") and the strong are Hellenists, willing to await

God's inauguration of theocracy in Jerusalem. The word "Welcome" binds the unit (14:1; 15:7).

A. The Weak and Their Observances 14:1-6

B. Exhortation to the Strong 14:7-13

A' Again the Weak and Their Observances 14:14-23

B' The Strong and their Attitudes 15:1-7

C. Concluding Admonition 15:8-14

*The Weak and Their Observances.* 14:1-6. Paul tells the strong in faith (the Hellenist Israelites) to show hospitality to the weak (Judean Israelites) who observe food rules, calendric taboos, and insist on circumcision (15:8). Paul's clinching argument is that if they are in the Jesus-group, "God has received them" (v. 3), that is, shown them hospitality as Patron.

*Exhortation to the Strong.* 14:7-13. Paul reminds his fellow Jesus-group members of the collective and communal nature of their fictive kinship group. So stop blocking the morally-motivated behavior of the weak. Let them alone in what they are doing.

*The Weak and their Observances.* 14:14-23. The strong should not vex the weak by their behavior. The forthcoming theocracy is about God's approval and the presence of God's Spirit providing peace and joy, not about food and drink. The strong are strong because they are flexible, accommodating, capable of giving in to others, compromising, and conciliatory. The weak have none of these qualities, so yield to the weak. The weak still have faith in the Mosaic Law, so if they were to deviate and act like the strong, they would be offending God in their view. Support them even in their weakness, for they are Jesus-group members, too.

*The Strong and their Attitudes.* 15:1-7. The strong should be motivated by Jesus' passion – not as in the Synoptics or John – but as its meaning in Ps 69:9 "The insults of those who insult you have fallen on me." Scripture is for our instruction with a view to endurance and encouragement to maintain hope. The source for this endurance and encouragement is God (not the scriptures).

*Concluding Admonition* 15:8-14. Jesus came in service to the circumcised for two reasons: first, to support the truthfulness of God,

since Jesus' coming to Israel realizes God's promises to Israel's ancestors, and second, to fulfill God's covenant debt to Israel, since non-Israelites who see what God has done for Israel will give honor to God. Through the covenants with Israel God contracts interpersonal obligations with her. Non-Israelites applaud what the God of Israel has done for his people—not for them, the non-Israelites. Paul concludes that he is confident in the goodness, knowledge, and abilities of the Roman Jesus-group members.

### **(A') XI. Rom 15:15-32 Conclusion and Travel Plans**

The chiasmic parallel is Rom 1:11-17 which spoke of travel plans. Paul offers three explanations to the letter recipients. (1) An explanation of why he wrote the way he did, what he included and excluded (vv. 15-22). (2) An explanation for why he did not visit Jesus-groups in Rome yet, given that he is God's apostle to Israelites living among non-Israelites (vv. 23-29). (3) An explanation for why he cannot proceed directly to Rome but must first go to Jerusalem (vv. 30-32).

Rom 15:15-22. He wrote by "way of reminder" of things they already know. He uses the image of a Temple priest offering to God those Israelites who accepted his innovation. This would make them exclusive to God by God's spirit. Moreover, he feels his task is finished. He has preached to Israelites resident among non-Israelites "from Jerusalem and as far around as Illyricum." Obviously, he did not reach all non-Israelites! And he would not "build on someone else's foundation (preaching)," hence he did not come to Jesus-groups in Rome earlier.

Rom 15:23-29. "Spain" marks this section (vv. 24, 28). There would be precious few Israelites there at this time, but they must hear the gospel preparation for the forthcoming theocracy. First, he must deliver the collection to Jerusalem (generalized reciprocity).

Rom 15:30-32. He asks for prayer because he expects conflict with Judeans in Jerusalem (because of his innovation). He also doesn't know whether they will accept the contributions.

## **XII. Rom 15:33 Letter Ending**

### **XIII. Rom 16:1-27: Appendix: Letter of Recommendation for Phoebe and Doxology**

This chapter consists of a letter of recommendation (vv. 1-2), a series of greetings to some 26 persons (vv. 3-15), an exhortation (vv. 17-21), a formal letter closing (v. 20b), a series of greetings from persons who were with Paul (vv. 21-24) and a final doxology (vv. 25-27).

The letter was likely appended to Romans. It was written to Ephesus recommending Phoebe to the Ephesians as she is about to undertake a trip to that city. The people in vv. 3-25 would be residents of Ephesus, known to Paul from his lengthy stay there (1Cor 15:32; 1Cor 16:8). For Paul to direct a recommendation for another to a group of persons he did not know would be shameful and socially irresponsible.

An informal letter of recommendation has this pattern: an opening consisting of a request verb plus the name of the person commended; the credentials of the one recommended; and a statement of the desired action (for Paul's letters see: 1Thess 5:12-13a; 1Cor 16:15-16, 17-18; Phil 2:29-30; 4:2-3; Phlm 8-9).

16:1-2. Phoebe was a deacon, that is, an agent of a higher-ranking person, either as an intermediary in commercial transactions or as a messenger or diplomat. A deacon served a supervising manager. Thus, Phoebe could be a person serving the supervisor of the Jesus-group in Cenchræ (port of Corinth), or of the Jesus-group in general. She was also a patron (not benefactor). Phoebe bestowed her patronage on Paul, so he owed her a debt of gratitude, which he dispenses here, as well as a grant of honor.

16:3-15. The pattern is a verb of greeting, the name of the greeted person(s), and the credentials of the person(s) greeting. They are commended for their work on behalf of other Jesus-group members. Slaves often joined with their masters. These may have been "innovators and first adopters."

16:16. One kisses intimate group members as a greeting, especially those with whom one would eat.

16:17-20. These verses make no sense addressed to Roman Jesus-group members whom Paul did not know. Some, it seems, were argumentative and challenged others on the basis of some teaching. They were "Satan," that is, testing loyalty to God. What motivates their behavior is that they "serve their belly." *Koilia*, belly, is the concrete label for the entire body cavity from throat to anus, symbolizing the hidden, innermost recesses of the human person, or what we call the heart. This means they serve their self-interest or self-centered ambition, which disturbs the peace of the Jesus-group.

16:21-23. Another list of names. Tertius wrote this letter, and may well have been responsible for its chiasmic arrangement. (V. 24 is not in the best manuscripts).

16:25-27. Doxology. This is not Paul's customary way of ending a letter. Perhaps this signals use in worship. He asks the God of Israel, the only wise God, to strengthen the recipients of the letter (which one?) in terms of his proclamation of the gospel of God's raising Jesus from the dead, here called the revelation of a mystery held in silence for long ages.

## Resources

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## 5. PAUL'S LETTER TO THE GALATIANS (Israelite acculturated minorities victimized by Judaizers)

I. Gal 1:1-5: Letter Opening

II. Gal 1:6-9: Introduction

III. Gal 1:10–2:21: Paul Defends his Honor (Form: Encomium, self-praise)

A. Opening: 1:10-12.

B. Paul's Lifestyle: 1:13-17.

C. Paul's Conduct: 1:18–2:10.

D. Comparison of Paul and Others: 2:11-21.

Paul and Cephas at Antioch: 2: 11-14.

Comparison of Paul and Judean Jesus-Group Leaders: 2:15-20.

Epilogue: 2:21

IV. Gal 3:1–6:10: Paul Defends his Gospel (Form: Public Argument).

Section One: Gal 3:1–4:31 Proofs

Section Two: Gal 5:1–6:10 Exhortations

V. Gal 6:11-18 Conclusion

**Murphy-O'Connor:** Galatians, probably Pessinus (modern Balahissar, Turkey), which was the capitol of Tolistobogii, westernmost of three Celtic tribes that made up ethnic Galatia. (People who migrated from the Pyrenees, 3 cent BC.) Common view: Galatians were large, unpredictable simpletons, instinctively generous, ferocious and highly dangerous when angry, but without stamina and easy to trick. They were never Hellenized; the Romans just imposed their system on tribal structures. They spoke Celtic and Greek, and there would be a 3<sup>rd</sup> language the in cities.

**Malina and Pilch:** Paul writes to Greek (“civilized”) Israelites living in this region. They accepted Paul’s gospel of God, but were then attacked by “Judaizers” who believed Israelites should observe Israelite customs as practiced in Judea where the theocracy announced by Jesus would soon emerge. The Jesus-group established by Paul, like all groups, cherished a distinctive social identity that had three dimensions: cognitive (“we” are different from “them”); evaluative (“our” way is better than “theirs”); and emotional (“we” support each other attached to the Lord Jesus and “one another.”).

### **I. Gal 1:1-5: LETTER OPENING**

God is “Father,” which means Patron. Jesus is the broker for believers, the clients. The Patron provides favor (grace), and for Paul this favor is “salvation” (see v. 4).

### **II. Gal 1:6-9: INTRODUCTION**

Lack of the customary blessing at this point is an attack on the collective honor of the Galatians. Instead, he levels a charge against them, of accepting a different gospel. The two competing gospels are Paul’s Torah-free version and the Judaizers’ Torah-rooted version. The latter want Israelite Hellenistic Jesus-group members, who live like barbarians, to adopt Judean practices so as to be “true Israelites.”

### **III. Gal 1:10–2:21: PAUL DEFENDS HIS HONOR** (Form: Encomium, self-praise)

**A. Opening: 1:10-12.** Paul cares nothing about the opinions of others. His gospel came through revelation (an ASC experience). He tells something unknown about the God of Israel and his Messiah, the Lord Jesus.

**B. Paul’s Lifestyle: 1:13-17.** Originally, he was thoroughly observant of the behavior and customs typical of the people of Judea (“Judaism”). That he changed would make everyone suspicious

since such change was viewed negatively and was suspect. Cicero describes the Stoic view: “The Philosopher surmises nothing, repents of nothing, is never wrong, and never changes his opinion” (vv. 13-14).

The change: Paul describes his birth in terms of a prophetic calling (see Jer 1:5; Isa 49:1b, c; Isa 6; Ezek 1; Isa 49:6; Jer 1:6). Thus does he claim a unique role and status in the house of Israel, thanks to the God of Israel. But he did not behave thus in his early life. He accepted authorized violence on behalf of the status quo. Such violent behavior was a “change” from what God originally intended for him. Paul is not now deviant. He is finally on the track God intended, his divinely ascribed role.

Revelation is important since it comes directly from God. The Apostles were commissioned by Jesus.

Education? He studied Pharisaism under Gamaliel (Acts 22:3), but about Jesus he had no human teacher. He was taught by God (v. 16c; see 1Thess 4:9 “theodidaktos”).

**C. Paul’s Conduct: 1:18–2:10.** In Jerusalem (vv. 18-20) with Cephas (Aramaic, ‘barbarian’ name), Paul does not study, but rather seeks to have his claim of having been “taught by God” acknowledged by Cephas and James, the brother of Jesus. In Syria and Cilicia (vv. 21-24), Paul fulfills God’s commission. As he did in Arabia and Damascus for three years, so he did in Syria and Cilicia for fourteen years preaching to Israelite minorities living among non-Israelite majorities. His return to Jerusalem signals his loyalty to the God of Israel whose Temple is there. Again in Jerusalem (2:1-10), Paul travels because directed to do so in an ASC. Titus is a Greek Israelite, thoroughly acculturated in Hellenism. Paul’s problems come from “false brothers.” V. 7 refers to circumcised (Judea and vicinity, since 150 BC) and uncircumcised (everywhere else). By appearing with famous people, Paul’s reputation and honor are enhanced.

Insult: Paul (v. 6 “reputed”); James, Cephas, John (v. 9 “reputed;” right hand of fellowship - cessation of hostilities.).

#### **D. Comparison of Paul and Others: 2:11-21.**

Comparison of Paul and Cephas at Antioch: 2:11-14. “To oppose someone to their face” is a losing posture. The earlier cessation of

hostilities has now resumed; Paul was unsuccessful with Peter this time. Paul first put himself on a par with Peter (2:1-10), but now exalts himself over Peter (2:11-14).

Comparison of Paul and Judean Jesus-Group Leaders: 2:15-20. The contrast is “Judeans by nature” (an “outsider” term) and “sinners of non-Israelite origin” (that is, those hostile to the God of Israel). “Justified” is also a complex term, but here it was considered a characteristic of “Israelites by nature,” (an “insider” term). The best English equivalent: “divine acceptability, acceptable to the God of Israel.” Chosen by the God of Israel. How does it work? By being faithful to Torah? No! Paul argues that “acceptability comes through faith,” that is, by showing trust and loyalty to God, who raised Jesus from the dead. Torah observance alone is good but insufficient to maintain divine acceptability.

### **Epilogue: 2:21**

If Israelite acceptability to God derives from Torah, then Jesus’ death makes no sense.

## **IV. Gal 3:1–6:10: PAUL DEFENDS HIS GOSPEL (Form: Public Argument).**

The Ten Words (Commandments, Ex 20:1) were spoken directly by God to Moses. The rest of the Commandments of the Mosaic Law came from God through angelic intermediaries (Acts 7:53; Gal 3:19-20) through Moses to Israel and included both written and unwritten commandments. Paul excluded the Ten from his reference to the Torah given through Moses. This part of the letter has two sections: 3:1–4:31 sets out proofs of the speaker’s point of view; 5:1–6:10 exhorts the listeners to comply with the truth of the gospel just demonstrated.

### **Section One: Gal 3:1–4:31 Proofs**

**3:1-5** “Hexing” caused the Galatians to lose “sight” of what God did in raising Jesus from the dead.

**3:6-9** Abraham, a non-Israelite, (remember Jacob=Israel, see Gen 35:10) was acceptable to God by faith, trust and loyalty. No Torah

yet existed. Vv. 6-7: acceptance by the God of Israel depends on faith in God's raising Jesus from the dead and all this entails, just as with Abraham, the non-Israelite, who had faith in the God of Israel. What counts then is not blood-line or genealogy but faith which so many of Abraham's descendants lack. This is Paul's first point. V. 8 "all the *peoples* shall be blessed in you" has to mean Hellenistic Israelites and Judean Israelites for Paul, since that quote from Gen 18:18 was made before Israel existed. "Peoples" (*ta ethne*) usually means "people other than Israel," but Israel in this instance does not yet exist.

The seemingly random cluster of citations is known as *haruzin* in Hebrew, stringing pearls. Paul's point: The God of Israel finds acceptable through their faith all Israelites who are blessed with the faith of their ancestor Abraham.

**3:10-14** Jesus restored Israel's honor. Paul notes that no one in Israel observes the whole Law (v. 10), hence they are cursed. Jesus' crucifixion restores the honor of those accursed by the Law since the crucified Jesus was raised by the God of Israel. Notice how "us" refers to fellow Israelites.

**3:15-16** Abraham's true heirs. The promise was to Abraham's seed (singular: *sperma*), not seeds (plural). That individual, single heir is Israel's Messiah, revealed by God to be Jesus whom God raised from the dead.

**3:17-22** Relationship of God's promises to Abraham and God's law through Moses. The promise to Abraham was made centuries before the law given to Moses. Why the Law? Because of the idolatrous episode of the Golden Calf (Ex 32:1-35), an attempt to control God. The Law runs from Moses to the Messiah (v. 19).

**3:23-4:11** Further clarification. Israelites of whatever social rank, whether Judean or Hellenist, whether slave or free, and regardless of gender, are one in Christ Jesus. The bottom line is that by belonging to Christ, the sole heir of Abraham, the collectivistic persons making up Jesus-groups become the true offspring of Abraham, hence heirs of God's promise to Abraham. "To redeem those who were under the Law" means to restore the honor of Israelites. Adoption was not a Judean custom. It was, however, typical of Hellenism; hence this would make sense to Hellenistic Israelites, Paul's audience in Galatia. Abba (Father, not Daddy) signals pa-

tronage, which “kinifies” relations between patron and client. Sky objects were living beings. To return to these is to insult God. As a change agent, Paul fears his Galatians will discontinue the innovation he proclaimed among them. He will lose honor himself.

**4:12-20** Exhortatory interlude. Evil eye, and hospitality. Paul’s anxiety for his Jesus Group.

**4:21-31** Sarah and Hagar. Paul returns to his main argument that Jesus-group members exist in a post-Law situation. He offers an allegorical interpretation of Sarah and Hagar (midrash) with application to Jesus-groups. He is arguing against those in Galatia who have rejected his gospel for the Judaizers’ version, the one supported by Cephas, John, and James. The high context of his reference presumes his audience knows the details and hence are Israelites. The midrash casts Hagar as the Sinai covenant (mountain in Arabia; present Jerusalem and its customs and practices); Hagar (Jerusalem) is in slavery. Sarah stands for the celestial covenant, celestial Jerusalem, bearing children for freedom. She is the true Israelite mother. Paul’s Jesus-group members are in fact children of the free woman, not of the slave and hence subject not to the enslaving covenant of Sinai but to the liberating covenant of the Jerusalem in the sky. The slave and her child – the Judaizers – must be turned away.

### **Section Two: Gal 5:1–6:10 Exhortations**

There are two sections here: One focuses on circumcision and the second on behaviors and their sources: the flesh and Spirit.

**5:1-12.** Circumcision (male genital mutilation). Paul’s key idea here is freedom. Having gained freedom from Egypt, the Israelites surrendered it to the Golden Calf. Circumcision became the main marker of Israelite exclusivity around 150 BC, the Maccabean era. It was just a nick, but it required total obedience to the whole Law of Moses, a step back to slavery according to Paul. Divine acceptance comes from faith. This nick also “cuts one off” from Jesus-Messiah. All that counts is faith in God, who raised Jesus from the dead, along with behavior marked by love, that is, group attachment.

**5:13-26.** Flesh and Spirit. Freedom *from* means freedom *for*. Slave service is always present: if not to one, then to the other. The works of the flesh are the Ten Commandments in disguise. The works of

the Spirit make Law beside the point. The main obstacles seem to be Mediterranean male qualities: arrogance, challenging others, and envy (v. 26). Reject these, and strive for group integrity.

**6:1-10.** General Exhortations. Final medley of exhortation to group integrity and group support. Deception is a key notion here.

## V. Gal 6:11-18 CONCLUSION

Impassioned plea to persuade listeners to accept Paul's point of view.

6:11. Paul was part of the 1-2 % of the population that was literate. There are three forms of Paul's letters: hand-written by himself, dictated, or written by someone else from notes given by Paul.

6:12-17. Summary observations about honor. Vv 12-13 are a strong accusation against Cephas, John, James and their followers. They care mostly about increasing honor by bringing the Galatians into their Judean Jesus-group life-style. Paul concludes by saying if anyone has problems with what he is saying and doing, they should take it up with his master and leave him alone.

6:18. "May the grace of our Lord Jesus Messiah be with your spirit, brothers. Amen."

## Resources

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## Glossary

**Jesus Movement:** Jesus and the group of his immediate circle of followers, their families and friends.

**Jesus-Group:** those who followed after Jesus' death and resurrection. They called themselves: *Followers of the Way* (Acts 9:2; 19:9, 23; 22:4; 24:14, 22). "Christian" occurs only three times in the NT (Acts 11:26; 26:28; I Peter 4:16-17), but it is used by outsiders with negative connotation.

**Generations** = chains of witnesses rather than a set number of years (e.g.,20-30).

**Change Agency:** the one who authorizes the change. In Israel, this is GOD.

**Change Agent:** the one who promotes the change: In first century A.D. Israel, this is Paul.

**Clients:** in the context of change, these are the people who need the change, whether or not they know about it, or even whether or not they know that they need it.

**Innovators:** those who accept and promote the change. Innovators control adequate material and personality resources to absorb the possible failure due to an unsuccessful innovation. They can understand and apply rather complex knowledge. They espouse the value of venturesomeness, that is a desire for the daring, the chancy, and the risky. Finally, innovators are cosmopolites, that is, they have contact with outsiders and most often have social relationships with them.

**First Adopters:** those who are a more integrated part of the local social system than are innovators. They are locally focused people and frequently are opinion leaders. They are not far ahead of the average person and serve as role models for others in adopting the innovation. They are respected by peers and are the embodiment of successful and discreet use of the new idea. They know that they must continue to earn the esteem and reputation of their colleagues if their position as opinion leaders in the social system is to be maintained.

**Refraction:** context-based change of the innovation is called "refraction"

**Reinvention** is the behavior resulting from the refraction of the innovation (e.g., clique formation in Corinth; denial of resurrection also in Corinth).

**Evangelization:** the process of communicating the innovation worked by God in the Israelite Tradition, namely, that the God of Israel raised Jesus from the dead and constituted him Messiah and cosmic Lord, soon to return to inaugurate theocracy in Palestine.

**Heterophilous:** is the degree to which pairs of interacting individuals are *different* in certain attributes such as beliefs, education, social status and the like. Heterophilous communication spreads *vertically* with a system, for example, through the conversion of a king, prince or governor.

**Homophilous.** is the degree to which pairs of interacting individuals *share* the same status and *same* beliefs, education, social status and background. Homophilous communication spreads *horizontally* within a system.

**Collectivistic culture:** a culture in which the individual is embedded in the group and willingly works on behalf of the benefit of the group rather than for personal benefit. That individual is defined by the group and draws identity from the group.

**Law (Torah):** is a fluid concept: it can designate the entire OT, the sections called Law and Prophets (from Gen to 2Kings), the Law of Moses, the Ten commandments. All written law.

**Justice:** proper interpersonal relations.

**Justification:** becoming acceptable to God by reason of the death and resurrection of Jesus. Because of Jesus' redemptive death, God waives his right to avenge the dishonor done to him by those who sin, that is shame him.

**Redemption:** restoration of one's status before God. It was accomplished by Jesus' death.

**Righteousness:** acceptance by God. It is rooted in Abraham who believed in what God did, not in Torah observance.

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## THE PROMINENCE OF WOMEN IN PAULINE GROUPS \*

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The authentic Pauline letters (Romans, 1 and 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Philippians, 1 Thessalonians, and Philemon) offer evidence of real women who were undoubtedly well known in their local groups, exercising in them a variety of leadership roles. We also have testimony of their active collaboration in the mission and in the consolidation of the Christian movement throughout the ancient Mediterranean.<sup>1</sup> Their *power of significance*<sup>2</sup> is an expression of their being believers, and is forged amid trying external circumstances and while handling internal difficulties.

The number of women named in the letters is considerably less than that of men, just as the percentage of women leaders is less than that of men filling the same roles. However, we cannot conclude that this was the historical reality. As occurs with other witnesses who came to light in androcentric and patriarchal societies, women are practically hidden and their concrete existences are barely recognizable in masculine writings.

Given the "cultural obsession for classifying women according to their sexual condition," the fact that only a few of them are said to be married (Prisca<sup>3</sup> and Junias, Mary the mother of John Mark, the

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\* *Translation by Peter Waymel - Sr. Raymond Gerard, FSP.*

<sup>1</sup> They receive titles, just like the men in the Pauline groups: "deaconess," "sister," "collaborator." Their missionary work is also recognized: "they strove hard" in the work of the gospel, protected Paul and the community, gave hospitality in their homes, etc. All these things are positive reinforcement of their leadership in the Pauline communities. Cf. MARGARET Y. MACDONALD, *The Pauline Churches: A Socio-Historical Study of Institutionalization in the Pauline and Deutero-Pauline Writings* (Cambridge: University Press, 1988), 47.

<sup>2</sup> We mean by "power of significance" [Span., "*poder de significar*," which could also be translated as "power to signify," or "power to be of significance"-Trans.], the capacity to create liberating situations, of generating egalitarian relations, of understanding themselves as autonomous and interdependent beings, of favouring new ways of relating to God.

<sup>3</sup> Though in reality, the fact that she is married only appears in Acts 18:2:18, 26. We must be suspicious of this data, since Luke tends to emphasize the respectability of Christian women. Nevertheless, the most likely thing is that they, like others named in the letters "understood themselves and were understood by others in the Pauline movement as married. As noted previously, whether marriages were considered licit in terms of Roman law probably had little impact on perceptions of

mother of Rufus<sup>4</sup>) calls our attention strongly. However, this observation cannot bring us to deduce that all the other women named are celibate. Rather, as Osiek states, “women in ministerial roles in the first centuries were married or widowed and not celibate ascetics, in spite of some evidence of a growing custom of consecrated celibacy.”<sup>5</sup>

Paul refers to these women, who have been his friends, collaborators and benefactors, directly by name and without indicating their civil or family status, even though the respectable customs of the ancient world were against this practice in public. It is true, nevertheless, that the women of the Roman aristocracy gave of their goods to voluntary associations; furthermore, such acts were recognized with inscriptions and statues in their honor. Perhaps this explains why the majority of women’s names in Paul’s letters are found in the Letter to the Romans, “probably the place with the most rapid social change.”<sup>6</sup>

The brevity of allusions to women and the fragmentation of news that the Pauline letters offer about them does not impede us from being able to reconstruct the warp in which their prominence and leadership was being woven, in the bosom of the communities animated by Paul and his team of missionaries, men and women alike. That the Pauline mission was conceived from the very beginning as a *collective task*<sup>7</sup> favored the active and, at least in a certain sense, equal incorporation of women in the creation, animation, and direction of the communities in mission as they were born and consolidated in the ancient Mediterranean. Such communities were conscious of being a universal fraternity that distinguished itself through its faith in Jesus the Messiah. Some concrete facts from the community of Corinth allow us, furthermore, to comprehend how feminine protagonism in the Pauline communities was being spun, and how in some cases, women chose celibacy and were recog-

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marriage within church groups.” Cf. CAROLYN OSIEK-MARGARET MACDONALD-JANET H. TULLOCH, *A Woman’s Place: House Churches in Earliest Christianity* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2006), 28.

<sup>4</sup> In Ignatius of Antioch: the wife of Epitropos (IGNATIUS, *Pol.* 8.2), and others in the acts of the martyrs, like Perpetua and Felicity, her pregnant companion (in her condition as a slave, not legally married).

<sup>5</sup> Cf. CAROLYN OSIEK-MARGARET MACDONALD-JANET H. TULLOCH, *A Woman’s Place*, 6

<sup>6</sup> *Ivi*, 8.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. GERD THEISSEN, *Estudios de sociología del cristianismo primitivo* (Salamanca: Sígueme, 1985), 221.

nized in their identity as women prophets, holding a very different role from that of the Apostle.

We must not forget that we are in a period of development in the Christian movement, where institutionalization is still an essentially open process. This would have contributed, in part, to the fomenting of feminine leadership, though in other cases (as we will see in this chapter), there would also be a restriction on their word.<sup>8</sup> The testimonies of the authentic letters give credit to the affirmation that these Christian groups founded by Paul admitted and developed a diversity of roles and duties. These were exercised by people who held different types of leadership, and who amply contributed to the cohesion of the community. Therefore, we do not find ourselves before communities in which a single type of charismatic authority is recognized.<sup>9</sup> The reality is very different.

We propose in this conference not only to recuperate the presence of women in the Pauline communities, but to enter into the "area of explanation" so as to understand the roles they undertook in these Christian groups, where spatial-temporal, cultural and religious frameworks explained their authority. We will also see how the tensions and conflicts were handled that were caused *ad intra* and *ad extra* (that is, inside and outside the community boundaries), by the prominence of women. In this sense, the study that follows intends to unhinge itself from 'essentialisms' and to restore the identities of these women in the socio-cultural context of the ancient Mediterranean, comprehending them in the diverse frameworks of social, economic, familial and religious relations in which they moved.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Something which, however, is widely perceptible, especially in the Pastoral Letters, but very different from the evolution of the Pauline tradition in the communities represented by the Acts of Paul and Thecla.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. MARGARET Y. MACDONALD, *The Pauline Churches*, 51-60, against: HANS VON CAMPENHAUSEN, *Ecclesiastical Authority and Spiritual Power in the Church of the First Three Centuries* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1997).

<sup>10</sup> "In a recent introduction to a collection of articles published under the title 'Feminism and History,' Joan Scott noted the challenge that the feminist movement today has set, that is, to clear away the cobwebs of essentialism in which it has fallen by virtue of using the category of 'women' to recuperate the past. Making women visible has been a priority task; however, once we have started down this road, we must impose some 'reflective stops' in order not to confuse visibility with transparency." MARY NASH – M<sup>ª</sup> JOSÉ DE LA PASCUA – GLORIA ESPIGADO, EDS., *Pautas históricas de sociabilidad femenina. Rituales y modelos de representación*, (Cádiz: Servicio de Publicaciones de Cádiz, 1999), 11.

The conciseness of the texts does not keep us from perceiving in them women with enormous personal strength, and with great decisive capacity. Some of them enjoyed a high socioeconomic status, which made it easy for them to open the way and obtain some liberties, thus subtracting themselves from the laws of gender and kinship. We intend to comb through these early documents for women's points of view, seeking the textual evidences that have remained and that allow us to reconstruct in a *plausible* manner their own history of prominence and marginalization, or presence and hiding, the manner in which shared beliefs and values affected them, but also how they influenced the transformations that occurred in the configuration of early Christianity.<sup>11</sup>

Then, we shall confront the position of the Pastoral Letters regarding the role of women in society and the Church. As one discovers in these Christian documents, women's prominence in strengthening the early Christian communities and in their missionary expansion became one of the most controversial points, arousing many suspicions in civil realms, as well as in certain ecclesial sectors. These tensions, especially sharp in the Pastoral Letters, are observed equally in other Christian groups, though it is necessary to affirm that other sectors of the Pauline movement, such as the communities of *The Acts of Paul and Thecla*, apostatized as a result of not holding in check the word and teaching of women and not restricting their authority in any realm.

Various groups claimed the apostle's authority to support their positions. The ambiguity of some Pauline affirmations regarding the function of women in the ekklesia brought about, over time, different and incompatible interpretations among themselves.<sup>12</sup> The

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<sup>11</sup> Cf. ELIZABETH SCHÜSSLER FIORENZA, "The Ethics of Biblical Interpretation. De-centering Biblical Scholarship," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 107 (1988) 3-17; BERNADETTE BROOTEN, "Early Christian Women and Their Cultural Context: Issues of Method in Historical Reconstruction," in ADELA YABRO COLLINS (ed.), *Feminist Perspectives in Biblical Scholarship* (Chico: Scholars, 1985), 65-91.

<sup>12</sup> It is enough to cite a few examples: a) the baptismal formula of 1Cor 12:13 explicitly affirms that Jews or Greeks, slaves or freemen, have all been baptized with the same Spirit, but the third couplet "man/woman" (present in Gal 3:28) has disappeared; b) together with the testimony of women who lead as ministers and even as apostles (Rom 16) in the Christian communities, it never ceases to surprise that in 1Cor 11:3 it is affirmed that "the head of the woman is the man"; c) from 1Cor one could support and defend the ascetical and celibate life (*Acts of Paul and Thecla*), but at the same time, one could equally defend marriage and the begetting

variety of forms in which leadership developed in the Pauline communities can also be attributed to this ambiguity.<sup>13</sup>

As with Pauline testimonies about women, here, too, it is necessary to penetrate the “area of explanation.” We must analyze not only the tensions that feminine leadership produced in the communities of Asia Minor, but also the procedures used to discriminate against women in the ecclesial organization and deny them authority to teach and exercise leadership duties. These events take on greater significance if we consider that other communities of the same region fostered women’s empowerment by favoring women ascetics who were gifted in speaking the word, and had the faculty to heal, preach, and baptize; these women exercised a great attraction above all for rich women in search of greater emancipation and recognition.

An analysis of the argumentation rhetoric in these documents, in the light of other testimonies from the Greco-Roman world, will reveal how the social realities came to be modeled (and even distorted), and how power was negotiated among the different social groups and players. It will also allow us to see that there were attempts to stifle such wagers for equality during Christianity’s origins—attempts which, however, were never fully successful.

## **1. Women at the Center of our Investigation: Methodological Questions**

The Pauline letters contain much codified information, whose meaning is not evident for contemporary interpreters, because it is the fruit of a particular and personal (while still coherent and integral) manner of perceiving, explaining and constructing reality within the global framework of first century Mediterranean culture. Through words and their articulation, the biblical authors have objectified real life as they experienced, knew, and described it, in accord with the shared values, beliefs and behaviors of their groups of reference. The texts they have produced are extremely con-

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of children as the appropriate conduct for believers in Christ (*the Letters to Timothy*). In the face of the development of women’s autonomy in the Christian movement, and even more, in the face of the encouraging (or lack thereof) of their authority in the churches, these norms were not indifferent.

<sup>13</sup> M.Y. MACDONALD, *The Pauline Churches*, 51-60.

densed, since in the ancient Mediterranean the system of beliefs and values is highly shared; as a result, it is not necessary for them to explain each individual element. On the other hand, whoever reads and interprets these narrations today is conditioned by the schemas of thought and the behavior in which they have been socialized, which are very different from those of the original Christian communities. It is a fact that the *social situations* of the interpreter and of the original audience to which the gospels were directed are completely different,<sup>14</sup> which means it is necessary to maintain that cultural distance if we wish to comprehend adequately what they recount. Concretely, studying the role of women in the Pauline groups means asking whether some valuable elements have not in fact been left in the shadows, elements that could have been a part of the worldview of the first groups of believers, such as the importance of the relations of kinship, the *real* functions of women in public life, their participation in systems of patronage and euergetism, their participation in the dynamics of honor, etc.

Together with the contributions of the social sciences, it is necessary to incorporate the contributions of feminine biblical hermeneutics to analyze critically our sources and to ask, in addition, about the *ethical consequences* and *political functions* that the narrations had in their own socio-cultural context. This means to analyze how the texts—and later on, their interpretations—support oppressive socio-religious values and beliefs. It also implies rescuing all those elements that contribute to a more liberating vision, and emphasizing the historical contribution of women in the early Christian communities.<sup>15</sup> In this reconstruction, the contributions of the social sciences and feminist studies regarding ancient Christianity and the life of Mediterranean women of the first century can be articulated, to place women at the center of the investigation, not as objects, but as the protagonists of the processes that they lived

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<sup>14</sup> Elliot defines “social situation” as a category that covers all the factors that influence a person or group: their socialization, experiences, perceptions, rational frames of reference, and viewpoints of reality. It also includes other factors such as: gender, age, ethnic roots, social class, roles and status, education, job, nationality, political, social and religious affiliation, traditions, language, etc. JOHN ELLIOT, *Social-Scientific Criticism of the New Testament* (London, 1995), 37-38.

<sup>15</sup> Cf. ELISABETH SCHÜSSLER FIORENZA, “The Ethics of Biblical Interpretation: Decentering Biblical Scholarship,” *JBL* 107 (1988) 10.

through. Besides this, an analysis from such a perspective has the additional duty of exploring the effects the texts have had (and continue to have) in the lives of men and women, and how they do this.

The social sciences and anthropology have contributed theoretical instruments that have proven useful in reconstructing the *implicit cultural givens* shared by the author and his first addressees, though we must equally highlight the risk of an acritical use of these instruments. Some investigations have presented some beliefs, values and norms of the ancient Mediterranean world in an excessively rigid, uniform, and monolithic manner, without taking into sufficient consideration the particular characteristics of the region, the epoch or the ethnic or social group being dealt with. In the majority of these cases, such studies have ignored the existing differences between men and women, or have analyzed them with a general model as static as the image of the ancient Mediterranean society they were presenting, with the pretence of reflecting reality.<sup>16</sup> They have worked with theories, concepts or models in a very abstract manner, and while their efficacy is inarguable, sometimes they have not taken into sufficient consideration that life is much more complex, and that it is necessary to incorporate the viewpoints of men and women, slaves and freemen, country folk and people from the city, etc., to validate the chosen conceptual model.

For instance, at times it has been taken for granted that honor was a masculine value which informed all of men's actions in the public square, while a sense of shame was a value exclusive to women, associated with the domestic realm. Honor and shame have been thought of as a *norm* that affects the behavior of men and women according to their own nature, instead of considering it as a *frame of reference* used to manage and negotiate social interactions.<sup>17</sup>

These polarities (public-domestic, honor-shame, male-female), applied rigidly and mechanically, have oversimplified our concep-

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<sup>16</sup> Cf. CAROLYN OSIEK, "Women in House Churches," in JULIAN V. HILLS ET. AL., eds., *Common Life in Early Church. Essays Honoring Graydon F. Snyder* (Harrisburg 1998), 300-323; ID., "Mujeres, honor y contexto en la antigüedad mediterránea," in CARMEN BERNABÉ-CARLOS GIL (eds.), *Reimaginando los orígenes del cristianismo*, 353-371, centered on the value of honor.

<sup>17</sup> Cf. JILL DUBISH, *In a Different Place: Pilgrimage, Gender, and Politics at a Greek Island Shrine* (Princeton, 1995), 204.

tion of life in the ancient Mediterranean societies, denying any interaction between the private and public realms. They have also contributed to increase the "general myopia"<sup>18</sup> when it comes to working with ancient sources, silencing even more the history of women, making their lives uniform and hiding the diversity of styles and forms they had to face in their lives, according to the region, social class, or their peculiar way of confronting life.

In not a few cases, the almost exclusive use of literary texts bound to the social elite has contributed to the belief that social practice conformed to *their* ideas, and that, concretely, the vision such texts offered of women reflected their experiences, and not the image of women's emotions, capacities, and sicknesses, held by the men who wrote them.<sup>19</sup> And yet, in every testimony or document narrated from a man's viewpoint, there is another version of history, from the viewpoint of a woman, which has been silenced and practically lost, unless we commit ourselves to a rigorous, systematic and disciplined work of creative reconstruction. That the literary texts of antiquity hardly reflect the presence of women in the public arena does not mean that women were not present, as is demonstrated by the evidence of women who held roles in commerce and other professions.<sup>20</sup> Taking into account what we have been saying means putting women at the center of our investigation and, consequently, asking ourselves how they *were affected by* and how they themselves in turn *affected* the ideals that framed their lives.

But these are not the only dichotomies we must transcend. It is fundamental to overcome the opposition between voluntarism and determinism; to do this, it is basic that we recognize the duality implied in each act of social reproduction. As Giddens affirms, the structural properties of social systems are simultaneously the means and the result of the practices that constitute these systems.<sup>21</sup> This

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<sup>18</sup> Cf. ROSS S. KRAEMER, "Hellenistic Jewish Women: The Epigraphical Evidence," in *Seminar Papers SBL 1986* (Atlanta 1986) 184.

<sup>19</sup> Cf. HELEN KING, "Bound to Bleed: Artemis and Greek Women," in AVERIL CAMERON-AMÉLIE KUERT (Eds.), *Images of Women in Antiquity* (London-Sydney, 1983), 109-110.

<sup>20</sup> See the multiple references in ELISA ESTÉVEZ, *El poder de una mujer creyente*, 133-135.

<sup>21</sup> ANTHONY GIDDENS, *Profiles and Critiques in Social Theory* (London & Basingstoke 1982), 15, has termed this "duality of structure." He has developed this con-

contribution is very enlightening for reconstructing the Christian origins and, in particular, for reconstructing the role and functions of women in the Christian movement at its origins, since it implies discarding a vision of human beings as “socially determined,” a conclusion at which one might arrive if one were to apply *rigidly* some sociological and anthropological models and theories.<sup>22</sup> To assume that each social action was a true “act of production,” with the capacity of altering important social pillars,<sup>23</sup> means re-thinking the role of women concretely in the protagonism or marginalization in which they found themselves in Christian origins, and asking about their choices, decisions, thoughts, etc. In short, it is to ask about their active and meaningful involvement in the process of diffusion and consolidation of the Christian movement. Their social thoughts and practices *were structured*, without a doubt, according to the beliefs, values and norms of the societies in which they lived. But at the same time, they were also the means through which those rules, etc., *were reproduced*, opening up a real and actual possibility of altering the social structure. Therefore, in overcoming the opposition between individualism, subjectivism and social determination, a path opens up for our investigation into the power of women in ancient Christianity, and even more, into their capacity to create and give new meaning to symbols, practices and values, starting from their own experiences and their active involvement in the development of the community life.

In addition, it is important not to forget that titles expressed in the masculine plural should not always be understood as referring exclusively to men, keeping in mind both the usage of language and social habits. “In both domains—Osiek states—women were considered to be included with, and embedded in, men, as they still are in many languages and cultures. Yet literary analysis has not completely abandoned the assumption that masculine references refer exclusively to men when it comes to positions of leadership, in

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cept amply in: *La constitución de la sociedad: Bases para la teoría de la estructuración* (Buenos Aires, 1995).

<sup>22</sup> See the critiques of DAVID G. HORRELL, *The Social Ethos of the Corinthian Correspondence* (Edinburgh, 1996), 9-59 [An introduction regarding methodological questions].

<sup>23</sup> As ANTHONY GIDDENS affirms in *Central Problems in Social Theory* (London & Basingstoke, 1979), 210: “The possibility of change is recognized as inherent in every circumstance of social reproduction.”

spite of the *diakonos* Phoebe (Rom 16:1); the apostle Junias (Rom 16:7); teachers of women like Grapte and the Gnostic teacher Marcellina who taught in public and was so effective in the mid-second century in Rome, according to Irenaeus, that she 'exterminated many' (Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 1.25.6; see Epifanius, *Panarion* 27.6); and a number of known "women prophets" (including 'Jezebel,' Rev 2:20)."<sup>24</sup>

## 2. The Feminine Desire to Have a Word and *Space* of their Own

The Pauline documents leave clear evidence, in general terms, of the attraction that Christianity exercised over women of the upper classes.<sup>25</sup> The fact of binding themselves to a new group of kinship meant, in fact, redefining the boundaries of feminine identity, as well as remaking their system of loyalties, their network of relations and their system of beliefs and values. The risk this posed in a society whose pillars were solidly set, and where any transgression was considered a threat to the established order, was certainly very strong.

The conflicts a decision of this kind could create require an explanation. It is necessary to ask *who* these women were and *why* they joined the Christian movement, knowing that their adhesion to the new religion would be considered as conduct hostile to their reference group and even a social embarrassment. The answers must be found in Paul's own letters and in other ancient testimonies. It is necessary, nevertheless, to admit that it is impossible to know with total certainty their real, concrete motives.<sup>26</sup> This does not impede us, in my estimation, from formulating some plausible hypotheses with the fragmentary evidence that exists, if well analyzed from a critical perspective, highlighting their rhetorical interests,<sup>27</sup> and the almost com-

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<sup>24</sup> Cf. CAROLYN OSIEK-MARGARET MACDONALD-JANET H. TULLOCH, *A Woman's Place*, 6.

<sup>25</sup> A similar phenomenon occurred in Judaism: TAL ILAN, "The Attraction of Aristocratic Women to Pharisaism during the Second Temple Period," *Harvard Theological Review* 88 (1995) 1-33; JUDITH M. LIEU, "The 'Attraction of Women' in/to Early Judaism and Christianity: Gender and the Politics of Conversion," *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 72 (1998) 5-22.

<sup>26</sup> So thinks MARGARET Y. MACDONALD, *Las mujeres en el cristianismo primitivo y la opinión pagana. El poder de la mujer histérica* (Estella: EVD, 2004), 220. Original English title, *Early Christian Women and Pagan Opinion: the Power of the Hysterical Woman* (Cambridge University Press), 1996.

<sup>27</sup> JUDITH M. LIEU, "The 'Attraction of Women'," 15.

plete invisibility regarding the words, feelings, and ways of seeing things of these very women.

According to the Pauline texts we are analyzing, *some* of the women named seem to have enjoyed an elevated economic *status*.<sup>28</sup> The existing indications point to women with sufficient financial resources of their own to be able to guarantee them an autonomous life and the capacity to travel, to keep personnel at their service and to exercise influence over different spheres of social life (Chloe: 1Cor 1:11). However, in addition, their high level of wealth is reflected in the ownership of the houses they put at the disposition of the local community, and in their offering hospitality to the itinerant missionaries (Prisca and Aquila: Rom 16:3-5; 1Cor 16:19), and is also manifest in their acting as benefactors to the group of believers (Phoebe: Rom 16:1-2; the mother of Rufus: Rom 16:3<sup>29</sup>). In some cases, the names bear an indication of their social class, as in the case of Euodia and Syntyche, two women with Greek names, which might indicate a link with some group of metics merchants in Philippi.<sup>30</sup> This does not necessarily imply that they were very rich, but certainly implies they had enough resources and independence to be recognized as having the right to participate in the Pauline mission.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> The data concur with other references to rich women: in agreement with Acts, some rich women joined the Christian movement in Thessalonica ("not few of the leading women (πρώτων, *prōtōn*)," Acts 17:4) and in Berea ("distinguished women (εὐσχημόνων, *euschēmōnon*)," Acts 17:12). Lydia trades in purple, a luxury article, and in addition possesses a house, in which she can receive guests, as hostess of the same. Her name, moreover, bears an indication of her Greek origins, which, added to the data regarding her profession, would link her to Greek merchants (Acts 16:14-15). Among these rich women, there would also be Nympha, in whose house the Church of Laodicea would gather (Col 4:15), or Phoebe (Rom 16:1) and Chloe (1Cor 1:11).

<sup>29</sup> Although, as Meeks affirms, it is not possible to establish the social position of this woman with certainty. The Pauline mention of "my mother, too," could indicate that we are dealing with a woman of a certain economic level who helped Paul, and who could travel and could have resided in the East. Cf. WAYNE A. MEEKS, *The First Urban Christians: The Social World of the Apostle Paul* (Yale University Press, 2003), 60.

<sup>30</sup> The authors vary between two positions: either they belonged to a local population of Macedonia or they were immigrants of Asia Minor. Cf. NILS A. DAHL, "Euodia and Syntyche and Paul's Letter to the Philippians," in L. MICHAEL WHITE – O. LARRY YARBROUGH, *The Social World of the First Christians. Essays in Honor of Wayne A. Meeks* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995), 4.

<sup>31</sup> Cf. WAYNE A. MEEKS, *The First Urban Christians*, 57.

As in the case of men, the possession of houses, riches and influence would be linked in the Pauline communities to the exercise of leadership in the Christian movement.<sup>32</sup> The involvement of these women was important not only to favor the extension and consolidation of Christianity, but also because their conversion constituted a testimony of respectability and an argument to halt those who opposed Christianity – or Judaism – as a religion that threatened proper social functioning.

The reasons that moved these women— who possessed goods and patrimony, the capacity to make decisions and a relatively significant margin of autonomy—to bind themselves to the Christian groups, can be found in a phenomenon some scholars have entitled “*status inconsistency*.”<sup>33</sup> In these women, there converged a series of circumstances that would explain, at least from a sociological point of view, their interest in adhering to a movement that was accused by their contemporaries of breaking with the established order and destabilizing the social and civil structure, when, moreover, their joining would give rise to suspicions of immorality, indiscretion, idleness and the abandonment of their duties as wives and mothers. It is not the only reason, however; these women felt the attraction of faith in Jesus Christ, who was preached to them and gave firmness to their convictions, consistency to their words and solidity to their actions. Baptized in Christ Jesus, these women were initiated into the way of discipleship, *reordering their sense of belonging* and affirming their loyalty as believers above all other loyalties, including loyalty to their own family.

Feminine involvement in Judaism, Christianity, and other non-official religions, is a sign of women who used religion as a means to negotiate their own role in society.<sup>34</sup> The new spaces that were opened up to them were not exempt from ambiguity, but they knew how to use them as a frame in which to manifest their personal worth and legitimize their achievements of autonomy, though it is not uncommon to find evidence of the difficulties and opposition that they met, even within the new religious environments.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Cf. GERD THEISSEN, *Estudios de sociología*, 225-234.

<sup>33</sup> Cf. WAYNE A. MEEKS, *The First Urban Christians*, 53-55.

<sup>34</sup> Cf. LILIAN PORTEFAIX, “Women and Mission in the New Testament: Some Remarks on the Perspective of Audience. A Research Report,” *Studia Theologica* 43 (1989) 145.

<sup>35</sup> Cf. JUDITH M. LIEU, “The ‘Attraction of Women,’” 20-21.

## 2.1. A Glance at the Mediterranean World

Some references allow us to see into the dissatisfaction that many wealthy women could have experienced, the limitations suffered for the simple fact of being women, and the conflicts that this generated in them. In the ancient world, the social *status* was determined in function of one's birthplace, language, condition of freedom or slavery, riches, occupation, sex and age. The juxtaposition of these categories could give rise to inconsistencies or dissonances in *status*, that is to say, situations in which some categories entered into conflict with others. In the case of rich, free, Roman or Greek women, who might even be involved in commercial and business work, the fact of belonging to the so-called *weaker sex* would restrict their autonomy and benefits, which men would enjoy in similar conditions. On the *one hand*, they were rich, came from influential families, had power and were educated, but on the *other hand*, it was not uncommon for them to see their socio-political influence diminished as a result of being women. It is plausible that their perception of their own situation in the social hierarchy would not adjust itself to the collective expectations, which considered them citizens with full rights to give generously of their goods, but which denied them the citizenship to assume political duties. These women lived out an incongruence of *status*, and from this their search was born for groups of reference that would recognize their legitimate claims of autonomy.<sup>36</sup> This *status* inconsistency would explain their adhesion to the Christian movement, accused by their contemporaries of breaking with the established order and of destabilizing the social and civil structure, especially since this bond would increase suspicions of immorality, indiscretion, idleness and the abandonment of their duties as wives and mothers.

The evaluation of this "inconsistency of *status*" will be understood better upon analyzing the information that has reached us today. On *one hand*, the epigraphic, numismatic and archaeological data is abundant that testifies to the prominence of women as benefactors (those who practice *eurgetism*), whose work obtained for them influence, honor and favors, just as for their masculine counterparts.<sup>37</sup> In re-

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<sup>36</sup> Cf. WAYNE A. MEEKS, *Los primeros cristianos, El mundo social del apóstol Pablo*, (Salamanca: Sígueme, 1988), 125-126.

<sup>37</sup> "In the 2<sup>nd</sup> century B.C., Euxenia, priestess of Aphrodite in Megalopolis, a city of the Peloponnese, donated a hospice and a wall around the temple (IG 5.2.461).

sponse to their donations and services in favor of the group, they enjoyed distinctions and dignity (honor), opening for themselves the path to leadership and authority.<sup>38</sup> Their *status* granted them a certain margin of independence, prominence in the public sphere, influence in the socio-political<sup>39</sup> and religious life (such as the vestal virgins of

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Tation, daughter of Straton, son of Empedo, of Kyme, built and remodeled at her own expense a synagogue and its surrounding wall, for which the Jews honored her with the two traditional ways of thanking a patron: a crown of gold and a seat of honor (*proedria*). From the terms of the inscription ("The Jews honor her") and her titles we can deduce that she was not a Jew (*CIJ* 2.738). [...] The food programs for poor children were popular ways in which many men and women exercised a civic form of patronage. Besides the imperial subsidy for these benefit projects, such as those carried out in memory of the two imperial Faustinas, other wealthy women discovered that this was a good outlet for their money and a means to ensure that their memory would remain. Crisipa Restituta, of Beneventum, set up a project in this way with the income from her estate in 101 A.D. (*ILS* 6675). Celia Macrina created a fund to administer a monthly meal to one hundred girls in Tarracina (*ILS* 6278 = *CIL* 10.6328). Fabia Agripina, of Ostia, allotted the considerable sum of one million sesterces to such a program for one hundred girls, in memory of her mother (*CIL* 14.4450). [...]"

<sup>38</sup> From the 3<sup>rd</sup> century A.D. onward, a time in which euergetism takes on a more philanthropic nature and is not united to political responsibilities, wealthy women also act as "benefactresses" (women who practice *euergetism*) in the Greek cities, putting their resources at the service of the community, which recognizes their piety and their value. Cf. P. GAUTHIER, *Les Cités grecques et leurs bienfaiteurs*, *BCH Supp.* XII, 1985, 74-75. R. VAN BREMEN, "Women and Wealth," in A. CAMERON – A. KUHRT, eds., *Images of Women in Antiquity* (Detroit: Wayne State University, 1983), 223-242, also arrives at this conclusion regarding the Roman Empire, though the number of women is minimal. See also: B.W. WINTER, *Roman Wives, Roman Widows. The Appearance of New Women and the Pauline Communities* (Michigan-Cambridge: Eerdmans, 2003), 173-211. In Asia Minor, there are many witnesses of rich Jewish women who made donations to the synagogues, thus obtaining honors and a role in the community, such as Rufina, "Ioudaia, archesyngagos." Her duties might have been administrative and exhortative; or Julia Severa or Tation, whom the synagogue granted a crown of gold and the privilege of sitting in a place of honor because of her donations; other inscriptions in Italy mention "mothers of the synagogue," such as Marcela whose role could well have been administrative. For more information, see the studies of: B.J. BROOTEN, *Women Leaders in the Ancient Synagogue: Inscriptional Evidence and Background Issues*, Chico, Scholars, 1982; M.S. COLLINS, "Money, Sex, and Power: An Examination of the Role of Women as Patrons of the Ancient Synagogue," in P.J. HAAS (ed.), *Recovering the Role of Women. Power and Authority in Rabbinic Jewish Society* (Atlanta 1992), 5-22; R.S. KRAEMER, "Hellenistic Jewish Women: The Epigraphical Evidence," in *Seminar Papers SBL* 1986, (Atlanta: Scholars, 1986), 183-200.

<sup>39</sup> It is known that Menodora exercised functions of civil authority such as gymnasiarch, *demiourgos* and *dekaprotos* in Sillyum, and Estacia Marciana Taté, *estefaneforé* and gymnasiarch in Heraclea. Cf. M. RABANAL, *La provincial romana de Asia según la epigrafía griega* (Sevilla: Publicaciones de la Universidad de Sevilla), 1975, 22; R. VAN BREMEN, "Women and Wealth," 223-224.

Rome or leaders of the cults of Isis, Vesta, Ceres, and Fortuna),<sup>40</sup> and even participation in business and travel.<sup>41</sup> In aggressive societies, such as those of the ancient Mediterranean, it is plausible to imagine that wealthy women competed, as is clearly testified in the case of men, for the acquisition of honor and importance in public life, and the example of some of these women would stimulate others to act as benefactresses (i.e., practice generosity) and to abandon the spaces of the *domus*.<sup>42</sup> Contrary to what we usually think, in the mentality of the ancient Mediterranean, one who offers a service or material help is recognized for his/her great honor and authority, while the subordinate position is occupied by the one who receives the help.<sup>43</sup>

The texts of the Greco-Roman world have left proof that women, with husbands or without, administered their houses (e.g., Xenophon's *Oeconomicus*). In the pastoral letters, they are allotted the task of governing (οἰκοδεσποτεῖν, *oikodespoteîn*, 1Tim 5:14; οἰκουργούς ἀγαθὰς, *oikourgoús agathás*, Tit 2:4-5).

In facing our study of the role of women in the Pauline groups, perhaps it is more significant to keep track of the existence of women, generally widows, who administered their households without husbands: for example, Cornelia, the mother of Gracchus (Plutarch, *Life of Tiberius Gracchus* 1.4). In the same way, Tryphaena, in the *Acts of Paul and Thecla*, is at the head of her household. We are dealing with women with the capacity of managing and administering their goods and property, and who directed all the public acts in their households, as, for example, banquets, with everything they involved.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Some exercised leadership in the cults of Isis, Vesta, Ceres and Fortuna. The role of the vestal virgins is significant in Rome. Cf. J.C. SAQUETE, *Las vírgenes vestales. Un sacerdocio femenino en la religión pública romana* (Madrid: CSIC, 2000), 41-67.105-117. In Asia Minor, the high priestesses of the imperial cult (*archiereiai*) stand out. Cf. A. KEARSLEY, "Asiarchs, *Archiereis*, and the *Archiereiai* of Asia," *GRBS* 27 (1986) 183-192.

<sup>41</sup> The inscriptions from Asia Minor contain ample information about the public activities of some wealthy Jewish women: they took on legal and financial roles, like Ammia of Akmonia; others paid for the funeral monuments for their families, or were landowners, though it is not specified whether they were no longer married. Cf. R.S. KRAEMER, "Hellenistic Jewish Women," 194-195.

<sup>42</sup> Cf. ANTHONY J. MARSHALL, "Roman Women and the Provinces," *Ancient Society* 6 (1975) 122-123.

<sup>43</sup> Cf. CAROLYN OSIEK, "*Diakonos* and *prostatis*: Women's Patronage in Early Christianity," *HTS* 61 (2005) 368.

<sup>44</sup> Another testimony: "Valerius Maximus 2,6.8 recounts a story of 'assisted suicide' whose protagonist was a noblewoman from the city of Iulis, on the island of Kea. The woman, who was more than ninety years old, formally gathered all her

It is also a fact that some of them were educated women.<sup>45</sup> Nevertheless, it is necessary to understand this information within the correct frame of ancient societies.<sup>46</sup> Mediterranean beliefs, and stoicism in particular, defended the notion that all knowledge must be subordinated to *utilitas*; if it does not, it is labeled *luxuria*.<sup>47</sup> As in other aspects, gender differences contribute to forming this conviction. Nature has gifted men with physical qualities that make them apt to intervene in public life, which requires a type of knowledge completely different from that of women, who are physically prepared to remain at home and govern the matters of the household (*domus/oikos*), being at the same time obedient and submissive to their husband, and educating their sons and daughters in the ideals of ancient customs (*antiqui mores*).<sup>48</sup> That is their contribution to the *salus publica*. Everything be-

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family, composed of two daughters and seven grandchildren. She invited Sextus Pompey, son of Pompey the Great, who was on his way to Asia, and made a great show of the presence of such an illustrious man at her death. He arrived, and made a speech encouraging her not to take her own life, but later attended at her death. After a libation laced with Mercury, she drank the poison, surrounded by her family, and went on to describe the progressive numbing of her members, in a manner that recalls the death of Socrates. One of her daughters closed her eyes. No mention is made of any male relative, and not even Sextus Pompey considered himself authorized to impede her from carrying out her resolution." Cf. OSIEK-MACDONALD-TULLOCH, 221-222.

<sup>45</sup> Cf. AURORA LÓPEZ, *No sólo hilaron lana. Escritoras romanas en prosa y verso* (Madrid: Ediciones Clásicas, 1994). Regarding educated Jewish women, see DANIEL BOYARIN, "Reading Adrocentrism against the Grain: Women, Sex and Torah Study," *Poetics Today* 12 (1991) 29-53.

<sup>46</sup> In this sense, it is necessary to clarify the affirmation of Ben Witherington, *Women in the Earliest Churches*, Cambridge University, Cambridge 1988, 18, when he says that "Romans saw the education of women not as an extravagance, but as a way to enhance a woman," as it risks giving the wrong impression.

<sup>47</sup> SENECA, *Ep.* 88.

<sup>48</sup> According to XENOPHON, *Oec.* VII 20-28.30.35-36; IX 5, the woman's body, of more delicate constitution, was prepared for the works of the home, while that of the man was prepared to suffer cold and heat, travels and wars—a belief that continues on in later authors. PLUTARCH, *Coniug. prae.* 139D.142A-E. C; MUSONIUS RUFUS, *Dis.* IV 5-12: "It is easy to realize that men's virtues are not different from those of women. Thus it follows that if the man is sensible, the women must be so as well. For what benefit would result from an insensible man or woman? Furthermore, both must live in an equally just manner, for the man cannot be a good citizen if he is unjust, nor can a woman govern the house well if she does not do so justly; rather, if she is unjust, she will offend her husband, as they say that Erifila did." PHILO, *Virt.* 19, justifies a different type of life for men and women, since their bodies are also different; from this he concludes that the public spaces (*ἀγοραί*, *agorai*) should be for men, while the domestic spaces (*οἰκουρία*, *oikouria*)

yond this is *ad luxuriam*, especially daring to teach men, a display of knowledge that does not correspond to their sex.<sup>49</sup>

The education of women certainly increases their *value*, as Plutarch attests regarding Cornelia, daughter of Metellus Scipio and wife of Pompey. Plutarch praises her for being well-trained in literature, music and geometry, besides having accustomed her to listen with profit to philosophical discussions, though he does not say she expressed her thoughts in public.<sup>50</sup> In Hortensia he recognizes her exercise of oratory, but affirms that she possessed a manly soul, and attributes her merits to her father, noting, moreover, that it should have been her brothers to possess these gifts.<sup>51</sup> Educated women are criticized,<sup>52</sup> allowing us to glimpse the tensions their formation generated. Imperial society, both in Rome and in the provinces, developed various strategies to inhibit some feminine conduct and to foment the traditional virtues like *uxor* and *mater*<sup>53</sup>: fidelity, moderation, silence, chastity, submission.<sup>54</sup>

However, because they were women, neither riches nor a good education guaranteed them the possibility of enjoying *all* the rights and privileges due them as *benefactors* of their communities.<sup>55</sup>

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for women: PHILO, *Spec.* III 169-175. In primitive Christianity, the domestic codes are an expression of women's conduct inside the home: Col 3:18-4:1; Eph 5:21-6:9.

<sup>49</sup> ROSA M. CID, "La educación de la niña romana: de *puella* a *matrona docta*," in VIRGINA ALFARO - ROSA FRANCA (Coords.), *Bien enseñada: La formación femenina en Roma y el Occidente romanizado* (Málaga: Universidad de Málaga, 2001), 37-39.

<sup>50</sup> Cf. PLUTARCH, *Pompey*, 55,1-2.

<sup>51</sup> Cf. V. MAXIMUS, VIII 3,2-3.

<sup>52</sup> JUVENAL, *Sat.* VI 434-456, harshly criticizes women who study Homer and Virgil, accusing them of a lack of moderation.

<sup>53</sup> For TACITUS, *Ann.* V 1, Livia, the wife of Augustus, was an example of fidelity and obedience to her husband because "in the face of her husband's infidelities, she made a show of her conjugal fidelity; she allowed herself to be guided by her husband's counsels regarding the austerity she ought to show in public, though she rarely went outside her home, except to attend religious ceremonies and in the company of other married women; she cared for Julia, the granddaughter of Augustus in exile, and until she died."

<sup>54</sup> PLUTARCH, *Coniug. praec.* 139C, 141, 142C-D defines the *ideal* spouse according to those virtues that ensure the husband's honor: reclusion (οἰκουρία, *oikouría*), silence (σιωπή, *siōpē*, cf. ARISTOTLE, *Pol.* 1260a) dignity (σεμνότηρος, *semmnóteros*), good behaviour (εὐταξία, *eutaxía*), modesty (αἰδώς, *aidōs*).

<sup>55</sup> An inscription was preserved (*CIL* 10243, del 153 d.C.) which recognizes a woman's patronage of a professional society of men; however, she was not allowed to participate in the banquet for which she herself had paid. Cf. RICHARD S. ASCOUGH, "Greco-Roman Philosophic, Religious, and Voluntary Associations," in

In accord with the laws and with tradition, the position of emancipated women, such as Plancia Magna, a Roman citizen of Perge (Asia Minor),<sup>56</sup> was *ambiguous*, since a man had to act as a guardian in legal and economic transactions and as a testamentary guardian.<sup>57</sup> The *tutela mulieris* contributed to maintaining the traditional division of spaces according to gender, threatened by the entrance of women into the world of patronage. The social perception of rich women was without a doubt equivocal: on *one hand*, their goods could benefit the cities or help their husbands to earn a reputation, but on *the other*, the exercise of their autonomy was interpreted as disobedience and arrogance.<sup>58</sup> From this stemmed the approval in 169 B.C. of the *lex Voconia*, to prevent riches from accumulating in the hands of women (as a result of the death of many males in war), and to counteract women's growing independence and subject them to their husbands.<sup>59</sup>

We know with certainty that women were denied recognition of political rights (authority), including the right to vote and hold *public office*, except by means of their husbands or sons.<sup>60</sup> It is certain

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Richard N. Longenecker (ed.), *Community Formation in the Early Church and the Church Today* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 2002), 3-24.

<sup>56</sup> M. TALIAFERRO BOATWRIGHT, "Plancia Magna of Perge: Women's Roles and Status in Roman Asia Minor" in S.B. Pomeroy (ed.), *Women's History & Ancient History*, (London-Chapel Hill, The University of Carolina, 1991), 249-272.

<sup>57</sup> Cf. CICERO, *Pro Flacco*, 71-72. So it appears in some inscriptions as well. See the references in: RIET VAN BREMEN, "Women and Wealth," 232. According to GAYO, *Inst.* I 150-154, women could choose their tutor (*tutoris optio*). However, in the Hellenized regions, due to the conquests of the Macedonians, we observe an evolution in women's status in Egypt (whether Greek or native): they were permitted to act legally without a tutor, and rights and moral obligations were acknowledged for both spouses.

<sup>58</sup> Cf. EVA CANTARELLA, *Pasado próximo. Mujeres romanas de Tácita a Sulpicio* (Valencia: Cátedra, 1996), 127-130.

<sup>59</sup> MARCIAL, *Ep.* VIII, 12 affirms: "I do not want to marry a wealthy woman. You ask me why? I want to take a wife, not to become one. May the married woman, Prisca, be submitted to her husband. Only in this way can husband and wife be equal." The negative perception of feminine wealth and the fear for his autonomy can be perceived in: AULO GELIO, *Noct. Att.* XVII 6.

<sup>60</sup> The spouses and family members of the emperors exercised a notable influence in public life, as did the wives of the various governors. An example of virtue is Seneca's aunt, who would receive no one in her house, nor asked anything of her husband, governor of Egypt, nor permitted anyone else to make requests of him (SENECA, *Helv. Con.* 19,9); cf. TACITUS, *Ann.* II 58; III 33; JUVENAL, *Sat* VIII 128-131. Fulvia, the first wife of Anthony, is famous for her political manipulations in favor of her husband and against Octavianus. (PLUTARCH, *Ant.* 10).

that the wives of the elite had influence in palaces and tribunals through the exercise of their patronage, *amicitiae muliebres*<sup>61</sup>. The indirect power they exercise is recognized, though there is an attempt to counteract it, as Seneca did, when he accused them of being spendthrifts, ambitious, and wicked, and, therefore, not virtuous women.<sup>62</sup> We also observe such an attempt by Plutarch, who proposes Aretafila as a model to be followed; she exercised government when it was necessary, but once her city was liberated, she retired “from all indiscrete activity and passed the rest of her life weaving.”<sup>63</sup>

In contrast to these testimonies, there are many literary, medical and philosophical sources of the Hellenic period that reflect both a great concern for the typical virtues of women as good wives and mothers,<sup>64</sup> thus associating them with the traditional roles, and a certain indignation before the growing protagonism of women in social life. Propaganda regarding women intensifies in this moment; whether real or legendary, it espoused the prototype of traditional virtues,<sup>65</sup> that is, women well distanced from any kind of leisure leading to vice.<sup>66</sup> There exists an almost generalized consensus that the public square makes a woman less respectable and leads *naturally* to suspicions about her decency.<sup>67</sup> Her virtue lies in

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<sup>61</sup> Cf. CAROLYN OSIEK-MARGARET MACDONALD-JANET H. TULLOCH, *A Woman's Place*, 200.

<sup>62</sup> SENECA, *Helv. Con.* 14, 2. See, in this regard, ROSA CID's clarifying analysis regarding the vision of women in Tacitus' *domus imperial*, in “Imágenes femeninas en Tácito,” in *Corona Spicea. In memoriam Cristóbal Rodríguez Alonso* (Oviedo: Universidad de Oviedo, 1999), 63-77.

<sup>63</sup> Cf. PLUTARCH, *Mul Virt.* 19.

<sup>64</sup> Augustus expresses himself in this regard in a discourse collected by TACITUS, *Roman History* LVI 3,3, who affirms that there is nothing better than to have a wife who is chaste, home-loving, an administrator of the house, who raises the children, rejoices your health, cares for you in your infirmity; who is a companion in good fortune and consolation in bad, who stops the passions of one's youth and moderates the harshness of old age.

<sup>65</sup> For example, women of the imperial family are asked to behave as ideal matrons, though they may not always be so. They appear on coins, embodying the virtues most admired in Roman women. Cf. ROSA CID, “Imágenes femeninas,” 66; D.E.E. KLEINER – S.B. MATHESON, eds., *I Claudia. Women in Ancient Rome* (New Haven: Yale University Art Gallery, 1996), 58-60.

<sup>66</sup> Cf. *mKet* 5,5.

<sup>67</sup> Augustus sends his troops to Egypt to subjugate Cleopatra, in order to impede a woman from being equal to a man (DION CASIO, L 28,3). Philo denies the title of queen to the Ptolemaic female sovereigns, because he considers them the

not making herself seen in public.<sup>68</sup> The reason for this should be sought in the notion that these excursions *out of doors* threatened the official division of power in society, jeopardizing the secondary, dependent role of women; hence the attempt to control and restrict them as much as possible.

Feminine emancipation was labeled as anarchy, because it broke down the mechanism of subjection to males in obedience.<sup>69</sup> There was an attempt to suffocate every aspiration of equality, under the pretence that women wanted to dominate men.<sup>70</sup> For the most part, intellectuals attributed the relaxing of customs (an increase of adultery, divorce and abortive practices) in imperial society to immodesty, the greatest evil of that age, and one that most of the women practiced.<sup>71</sup>

To combat this decrease in morality, another means was used: Augustus dictated laws to encourage engagements to marriage and increase the number of children.<sup>72</sup> In compensation, free-born women, achieved freedom from *tutela* (legal guardianship) once they had three children, and freedwomen achieved their liberty if they had four. At the same time, the law stipulated penalties if they disobeyed: this applied to women, from twenty years of age onwards; to men, from twenty-five<sup>73</sup>. At any rate, the legislation favored males: if a male was betrothed to a ten-year-old girl, he obtained the same rights as a married man; while in the converse situation, a woman did not obtain the same rights. The reality was that the law did not obtain the hoped for success, and men and women rebelled against this social determining of their roles.

In *synthesis*, imperial society, both in Rome and in the provinces,

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antithesis of modesty, which is the feminine virtue *par excellence*. Cf. DOROTHY I. SLY, *Philo's Alexandria* (London-New York, 1996), 53.

<sup>68</sup> SENECA, *Helv. Con.* 19,6, proposes his aunt as a model of virtue, of whom he remarks that she never allowed herself to be seen in public (*numquam in publico conspecta est*).

<sup>69</sup> Cf. CICERO, *De rep.* 1, 43.

<sup>70</sup> Cf. LIVY, *Hist.* XXXIV 3, 2.

<sup>71</sup> Cf. SENECA, *Helv. Con.* 16, 3-5.

<sup>72</sup> See: DION CASIO, *Roman History*, LVI 1-10. This law was strengthened by Domitian and flourished during the II-III centuries. Censors such as Metello Macedonico (131 A.D.) urged men and women to marry and procreate.

<sup>73</sup> We are dealing with the *Lex Iulia de maritandis ordinibus* and the *Lex Papia Poppaea nuptialis*. Cf. Suetonius, *Aug.* 34, 1; DION CASIO, *Roman History*, LIV 16.1; LVI 10.3; Tacitus, *Ann.* III 25.

considered women's growing emancipation to conflict with their feminine condition. Hence the development of strategies to inhibit some types of conduct and stimulate others. Those behaviors exceeding customary expectations regarding feminine roles were sanctioned; legislation was passed to slow women's access to economic goods and force them to assume their duties as wives and mothers, while official propaganda praised the *exempla* of women who manifested the traditional virtues of *uxor* and *mater*:<sup>74</sup> fidelity, moderation, silence, chastity, submission.<sup>75</sup>

## 2.2. A Glance at the Pauline Letters

The First Letter to the Corinthians indicates some women's dissatisfaction with their functions as spouses and mothers, or with their own religion, as well as their search for a greater measure of decision-making capacity in their lives and a desire for greater autonomy. In 1Cor 7:13, we are informed that some wives converted to Christianity without the express consent of their husbands, and were even willing to divorce them or remain widows, as deduced by the warnings directed to them (1Cor 7:13, 39-40).<sup>76</sup> Some women showed great assertion and determination in remaining married to non-believing husbands, despite the difficulties and tensions that such a choice implied, because they were convinced of the faith they professed (1Cor 7: 12-16).<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> The words of TACITUS are very illustrative, in *Ann.* V 1, about Livia, the wife of Augustus, whom he proposes as an example of fidelity and obedience to her husband: "in the face of her husband's infidelities, she made a show of her conjugal fidelity; she allowed herself to be guided by her husband's counsels regarding the austerity she ought to show in public, though she rarely left her house, except to attend religious ceremonies, and then always accompanied by other matrons; she took care of Julia, the granddaughter of Augustus in exile, and until her death."

<sup>75</sup> PLUTARCH, *Coniug. praec.* 139C, 141, 142C-D, defines the *ideal* spouse according to those virtues that ensure her husband's honor: reclusion (οἰκουρία, *oikouría*), silence (σιωπή, *siōpē*), cf. ARISTOTELE, *Pol.* 1260a) dignity (σεμνότηρος, *semmótēros*), good behavior (εὐταξία, *eutaxía*), modesty (αἰδώς, *aidōs*).

<sup>76</sup> "If any wife has a non-believing husband who agrees to live with her, she must not leave him." "A woman is bound as long as her husband is alive, but if her husband dies she is free to marry whoever she wishes to, as long as he is in the Lord. But in my opinion she will be happier if she remains as she is, and I think that I too am in accord with God's Spirit."

<sup>77</sup> "As for the rest, I say—not the Lord—if any brother has a non-believing wife who agrees to live with him, he may not leave her. And if any wife has a non-

The data that speaks of women prophets or women who stood up in the community to pray, likewise testifies that some women felt a contradiction in being rich and powerful, but having their action restricted and their word limited in society, as a result of having their virtue cloistered behind the doors of silence and passivity.

These types of conduct, which generated intra-ecclesial tensions and suspicions on the part of the surrounding society (cf. 1Cor 14:33b-36, Col 3:18; Eph 5:22-24, etc.), reveal a feminine dissatisfaction, and above all the struggle to obtain greater emancipation. At the same time, they allows us to observe that the ecclesial group perceives this inconsistency in the feminine *status* in a manner similar to the way society itself feels about it. The argument of 1Tim 2:12 points in this direction: "I do not permit the woman to teach nor to have authority (*authentain*) over a man"; that is to say, women were exercising the full recognition of their power and authority, and the author of the letter rejects their pretension as contrary to the created and social order (*according to nature*).

The rich women are not few in number, as can be observed in more than one document of the Christian origins (e.g., the Lucan work, the apocryphal Acts of Thecla and Paul), who accepted the risk of binding themselves to a new group of kinship, which meant reformulating the boundaries of their identity, as well as re-making their system of loyalties, their network of relations and their system of beliefs and values. This binding, which in many cases was very difficult, allows us to see their basic convictions as believers, in addition to their determined and meditated wager for greater protagonism in socio-religious life, and their desire for their authority to be recognized in all realms of their existence. Their decision placed them among the transgressors, and meant they would experience tensions and receive accusations and derision in their families, in society, and very soon, in the churches themselves.

Christianity, however, was not the only out for women who suffered and worked hard to escape this imposed marginalization. There

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believing husband who agrees to live with her, she may not leave him. For a non-believing husband is sanctified by his wife, and a non-believing wife is sanctified by her husband. Otherwise, your children would be unclean, but we know that they are holy. If a non-believer separates, however, let him go—a brother or sister is not bound in such cases, for God has called you to peace. Does a wife know for sure that she will be able to save her husband? Does a husband know that he will be able to save his wife?"

are numerous testimonies mentioning their incorporation in other religions and alternative cults, such as the mystery cults, where they were given other functions that identified them with more liberating symbols and discourses (which, however, were not always translated into real practices, and were, over time, “domesticated” by the dominant culture),<sup>78</sup> and where, above all, they fostered a community that pursued common goals, with other women who shared their search and pursued similar interests.<sup>79</sup>

### 3. From Social Shame to the Public Recognition of Honor in the Christian Group

In the beginnings of the Christian movement, the private houses held a central function as places where communities gathered, were formed and nourished, and where they encouraged one another in the missionary work (Rom 16:5: “I also greet the church that gathers in their house (τὴν κατ’οἶκον ἐκκλησίαν, *tēn kat’oïkon ekklēsiān*) [that of Prisca and Aquila]”; 1Cor 16:19 (this also refers to the church that gathered in Prisca and Aquila’s house); Phm 2: “and to the church of your house (τῇ κατ’οἶκόν σου ἐκκλησίᾳ, *tē kat’oïkón sou ekklēsiā*)” [that of Philemon].<sup>80</sup> In these houses, people prayed, the bonds of fraternity were strengthened among believers, needs were cared for (attention was given to the sick, the imprisoned, widows...),<sup>81</sup> they prac-

<sup>78</sup> For example, Augustus erected a temple to Apollo on the Palatine and transferred there the books of the Sibylline oracles, thus subordinating the cult of Sybil to that of Apollo. Cf. BEN WITHERINGTON, *Women in the Earliest Churches*, 20.

<sup>79</sup> This is the case of the cult of Dionysius in Megalopolis, where the women had free access to the same, in contrast to the men, who were only permitted access once a year. (PAUSANIAS, *Description of Greece*, VIII 31.8; IV 62-3. For the influence of the religions of the East on Rome, see: JEROME CARCOPINO, *Daily Life in Ancient Rome. The People and the City at Height of the Empire* (London: Penguin Books, 1991), 128. Regarding the cult of Dionysius, see: ROSS S. KRAEMER, “Ecstasy and Possession. The Attraction Women to the Cult of Dionysus,” *Harvard Theological Review* 72 (1979) 55-80; MARTIN NILSON, *The Dionysiac Mysteries of the Hellenistic and Roman Age* (Lund: C.W.K. Gleerup, 1957), 4.38.

<sup>80</sup> Cf. EKKEHARD W. STEGEMANN – WOLFGANG STEGEMANN, *Historia social del cristianismo primitivo* (Estella: EVD, 2001), 376; JOHN H. ELLIOTT, “The Jesus Movement Was Not Egalitarian but Family-Oriented,” *Interpretation* 11 (2003) 173-210; WAYNE A. MEEKS, *The First Urban Christians*, 143.

<sup>81</sup> Over time, the social functions passed to the ecclesiastical leaders. For example, the visiting of the sick and imprisoned came to fall under the responsibility of the deacons, once their position was established (OSIEK, 33).

ticed hospitality, basic instruction in the faith was given; these houses were also the points of departure and arrival on all missionary journeys. Without a doubt, this manner of organization contributed to reinforcing the protagonism of women, whose leadership duties would be seen as an extension of their household activities. In this way, women could carry out public functions without openly challenging the social structure, as they were supported by the gender division of public and private spaces.

In consequence, this link with the family realm favored: 1) the opening of new forms of social and religious involvement for women, 2) the re-evaluation of beliefs and values associated with the home, as well as 3) the possibility of going beyond imposed social functions and cultural roles (procreation, caring for the family, attending to the basic needs of the house). Certainly, the home was a space defined and controlled by the patriarchal society of the era and, at the same time, it had a considerable influence on the configuration of early Christianity. However, the Pauline texts treating the role of women in the *ekklesia*, and the conflicts this role unleashed, reveal to us that interaction with this basic institution of the ancient Mediterranean world did not consist of a simple assimilation; rather, there were mutual influences.

It is not plausible to think that the Christian movement completely neglected rules governing the functioning of that principal institution of the ancient Mediterranean: the home. However, we must affirm that the actions of Christian men and women were true “productive acts,” which contributed to altering important pillars upon which the ancient societies were based.<sup>82</sup> For instance, men and women’s leadership in the Pauline communities, or beliefs supporting greater equality between believers (Gal 3:28; 1Cor 12:7), would have undermined the undisputed authority of the *paterfamilias*.<sup>83</sup>

In the new framework generated by this interaction (house-Christian movement), women’s actions contributed to the redefinition of cultural values, such as honor, and the reformulation of the division of roles between men and women. Feminine prominence and leadership in the Pauline communities was not just the fruit of a

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<sup>82</sup> As is affirmed by ANTHONY GIDDENS, *Central Problems in Social Theory*, Macmillan, London and Basingstoke, 1979, 210, “the possibility of change is recognized as inherent in every circumstance of social reproduction.”

<sup>83</sup> Cf. WAYNE A. MEEKS, *Los primeros cristianos*, 134.

very early period of institutionalization. Rather, it is necessary to rescue for the collective memory the implication that the same women had in creating and giving new meaning to symbols and values, starting from their own experiences and active involvement in the development of the ecclesial life. Certainly, in this period of Christian origins, there are some objective conditions that contributed to highlighting the role of prominence for women – especially those who were rich – in the development of the Christian movement. At the same time, it is necessary to emphasize that these Christian women were also active agents in this transformation, making decisions and choices whose consequences were felt in their lives and those of other Christian women, in other times and contexts. Thus, in recuperating the history of Christian women in the Pauline communities, we intend to avoid the danger of “social determinism,” and to take into account the value of feminine subjectivity, a force strong enough to affect the collective progress of a people and recreate socio-religious meanings and practices.<sup>84</sup> At the same time, the feminine leadership in these Christian groups was not unique, but rather was related to leadership practiced by women in other groups (e.g., in Judaism).<sup>85</sup>

The articulation of the Christian and ecclesial life in the domestic realms meant, as a result, the recognition of new fields of action for women, who contributed actively in the construction of the new religious community. Nevertheless, the egalitarian participation in governance, teaching, and animating of the community rearranged values supporting the edifice of the ancient Mediterranean society. In the second century, Celsus already warns of the terrible consequences of having introduced religion (a public realm) into the domestic space reserved for women: a change in roles and functions, rifts in the authority of the *paterfamilias*, the shaking of traditional

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<sup>84</sup> Cf. DAVID G. HORRELL, *The Social Ethos of the Corinthian Correspondence* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1996), 20. I think it is basic to transcend the opposition between voluntarism and determinism, and for that the key concept is the *duality of structure*. As Giddens says: “The dualism of subject and object ... must cede place to recognition of a *duality* which is implicated in all social reproduction, the *duality of structure*. By the ‘duality of structure’ I refer to the essentially recursive character of social life: the structural properties of social systems are both *medium* and *outcome* of the practices that constitute those systems”.

<sup>85</sup> Cf. ROSS S. KRAEMER, *Her Share of the Blessing: Women’s Religions among Pagans, Jews and Christian in the Greco Roman World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 191-198.

doctrines and social disintegration. For this reason, Christianity loses prestige, and its members are labeled “plotters or impious conspirators” (*Octavius* 8), and the accusation is made that “they cannot persuade anyone other than fools, plebeians and stupid people, slaves, women and children” (*C. Cels.* III 44).<sup>86</sup> Moreover, the Christian movement is accused of granting a suspicious prominence to women, of making the “women’s space” (γυναικωνίτις, *gynaikōnītis*) its place of instruction (*C. Cels.* III 50.55), of favoring women’s participation in public banquets (*Octavius* 9), and of dangerously introducing men into the domestic realm, thus breaking the traditional gender-based division of spaces. They constitute a dangerous group that “arrives to the point of calling each other ‘brothers and sisters’ indistinctly, so as to convert normal fornication into incest” (*Octavius* 9).<sup>87</sup>

The early communities suffered these criticisms and had to respond to them by learning to survive in an adverse world, sometimes *accommodating themselves* to the demands imposed on them and other times venturing along *riskier paths*, which were, however, more liberating for the women and, in the end, for the concrete communities. The titles granted to some women in the authentic letters of Paul are a public recognition of their honor, and an eloquent display of some groups who did not fear to advance through more countercultural roads of discipleship, though the internal and external conflicts would bring Paul to confine some feminine conduct within more *natural* boundaries.

The titles of minister, benefactress, apostle, collaborator, sister, sanctioned and encouraged women’s active and significant involvement in Christianity, and offered that realm of respectability neces-

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<sup>86</sup> Christians “are not able, nor do they wish, to persuade anyone other than fools, plebeians and stupid people, slaves, women and children” (*C. Cels.* III 44). Origen will contest this accusation: “it is also a lie that those who preach the divine word only wish to persuade ‘fools, plebeians, stupid people, women and children.’ To be honest, our religion also calls these persons, to improve them, but no less than to others who are very different from them” (*C. Cels.* III 46). A similar critique is found in the Christian apologist MINUCIUS FELIX, *Octavius* 8-9.

<sup>87</sup> Cf. MARGARET Y. MACDONALD, *Las mujeres en el cristianismo primitivo*, 65-153; IDEM, “Was Celsus Right? The Role of Women in the Expansion of Early Christianity,” in DAVID L. BALCH – CAROLYN OSIEK, eds., *Early Christian Families in Context. An Interdisciplinary Dialogue* (Michigan: Eerdmans, 2003), 157-184; JEROME H. NEYREY, “What’s Wrong With This Picture? John 4, Cultural Stereotypes of Women, and Public and Private Space,” *Biblical Theology Bulletin* 24 (1994), 79-80.

sary for living in societies structured and revolving around honor (i.e., prestige, recognition, and public esteem). The Pauline groups praised and esteemed those beliefs, values and types of conduct that the surrounding society labeled offensive and dishonorable. The social criticisms were transformed into congratulations for those women who, with their intelligence and capacity to share their goods, time and qualities, contributed to the growth of the Christian movement.

The titles represented thus a *visible* word of *authentication* and *accreditation* for these women who, with their works, had earned the right to be socially *esteemed* within their group.<sup>88</sup> In addition, when utilized by the apostle, these terms sanction and legitimize feminine authority and leadership. In fact, it is a firmly rooted belief in the ancient world that approval and praise from one possessing elevated status or enjoying great prestige, increases the honor of the one who receives the praise, position, or recognition of their actions. These women receive their titles from the apostle himself. Moreover, that they are known by communities other than the ones to which they originally belonged (either because they moved among the various communities, or because they were sent with letters of Paul, or through the same letters of Paul that could circulate from one place to another), is a sign that their prestige is very great, since honor grows in the measure that more people recognize it.

The recognition these women gain for themselves, however, transforms the hierarchy of values in ancient Mediterranean society. The accusations of foolishness and corruption (Celsus), of being credulous and “allowing themselves to be carried away by the weakness of their sex” (the opinion of Marcus Cornelius Fronto, preceptor of Marcus Aurelius), which only served to emphasize the stereotypes and prejudices of the ancient world regarding the feminine sex,<sup>89</sup> are countered by highlighting their virtues and the honorableness of their countercultural conduct.

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<sup>88</sup> Cf. BRUCE J. MALINA, *El mundo del Nuevo Testamento* (Estella: EVD, 1995), 48. Original English title, *The New Testament World. Insights from Cultural Anthropology* (Louisville: John Knox Press, 2001<sup>3</sup>).

<sup>89</sup> These labels are none other than an expression of the most profound Mediterranean beliefs, reflected in the Mediterranean conception of the savage nature of women. For more information, see: ELISA ESTÉVEZ, *El poder de una mujer creyente* (EVD, Estella, 2003), 177-201.

They are praised for serving the community with their teaching, like Prisca (Acts 18:26), for offering their homes for community meetings and for offering hospitality to itinerant missionaries and other Christians, as does Phoebe (Rom 16:2). Far from being stupid and fragile, the women are even recognized in the Pauline communities as apostles. Such is the case with Junias (Rom 16:7), a Hellenistic Jewish Christian, of whom it is affirmed that she has had a personal encounter with the Risen One and received a mission (cf. Gal 1:1<sup>90</sup>; 1Cor 9:2;<sup>91</sup> 15:5-9;<sup>92</sup>), thus being constituted a pillar of the community which discovers in her the glory of Christ (cf. 2Cor 8:23: “with regard to the other apostles of the churches (ἀπόστολοι ἐκκλησιῶν, *apóstoloi ekklesiōn*): the glory of Christ”).

While these women are accused of not being committed to the traditional roles of wives and mothers, their contribution to the growth of their *surrogate family* is, however, highlighted; their collaboration with the gospel is proclaimed along with their desire to preach and to extend the Good News, evident in women such as Mary or Euodia and Syntyche. In the face of the scandal caused by the Christians’ “calling each other ‘brother and sister’ indistinctly” (Fronton), the Pauline communities reaffirm themselves in their use of the term “sister,” which designates not only their participation as members of the community, but also the right to carry out roles of animation and leadership, like Phoebe or Apphia.

The Pauline groups of men and women strengthen their identity and encourage egalitarian structures of participation in the ecclesial life, since this flows naturally from following the Risen One. The very announcement of the gospel demands it, as does the consolidation of the Christian movement. They are recognized as deviant groups, but confute the arguments of the established powers by presenting themselves before the others as well-articulated groups,

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<sup>90</sup> “Paul, an apostle not from men nor through a man but through Jesus Christ and God the Father...”

<sup>91</sup> “If I am not an apostle to others, I certainly am to you, for you are the seal of my apostleship in the Lord!”

<sup>92</sup> “...He appeared to Cephas and then to the Twelve. Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers at once, the majority of whom are still with us, although some have died. Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles. Last of all he appeared to me as well, to one born at the wrong time, as it were, for I am the least of the apostles, not even worthy to be called an apostle, because I persecuted God’s church.”

and by presenting their women as possessing authority, models of rectitude, intelligence and striving in service of the community, prototypes of generosity and magnanimity, over and above any established values. At the same time, it is certain that Paul made concessions to the *status quo*, probably due as much to internal pressures as to external ones.

#### **4. *Materfamilias* who Offer Hospitality and Animate the Community Life in their Homes**

Christianity continued to implant itself and take root in the Greco-Roman world around the families that converted and offered their private homes as places for community meetings. The home constituted the basic socio-economic unit of the ancient Mediterranean society; from it branched out relationships of friendship and all kinds of social and economic interaction.<sup>93</sup> Hence its importance for the consolidation of the Christian movement, not only as the generative nucleus of the “domestic churches,” but also as a realm from which the apostle Paul borrowed terms to describe the identity of the members of the *ekklesia* (brothers and sisters, sons and daughters) as well as the distinct communitarian functions and ministries (the missionaries are servants and administrators of the house). Christianity’s social organization manifested, in consequence, a clear “family matrix”; the collective identity began to consolidate around the patrilineal family model, which they reworked and converted (at least in some essential aspects) such as the role of women in this new family.

Those who offered their home as a place of reference for the Christian communities would be considered teachers (at least in some cases); their authority and leadership role was recognized, according to the information we can extract from Paul’s letters. However, it is also clear that in accord with the Mediterranean system of beliefs, the clients (Christians gathering in the homes of these male or female benefactors) hoped to receive benefits in exchange for their respect and submission.

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<sup>93</sup> Cf. SANTIAGO GUIJARRO, *Fidelidades en conflicto. La ruptura con la familia por causa del discipulado y de la misión en la tradición sinóptica* (Salamanca: Universidad Pontificia de Salamanca, 1988), 51-159.

The clearest passage in this regard might be 1Cor 16:15-18,<sup>94</sup> where Paul asks the Corinthians, as good clients, to appreciate (v. 18) and recognize the authority of Stephanas, in whose house they gather and who, in addition, has given hospitality to Paul and of all those who work with him for the gospel (v. 16).

Among these leaders we find various women: Prisca in Ephesus (1Cor 16:19)<sup>95</sup> and in Rome (Rom 16:3-5),<sup>96</sup> possibly also in Corinth (Acts 19:2-3; 18:18-19:1)<sup>97</sup>; Phoebe herself in Cenchreae (Rom 16:1-2),<sup>98</sup> and *possibly* Chloe in Corinth (1Cor 1:11).<sup>99</sup> Among these we could also include Nympha in Laodicea (Col 4:15),<sup>100</sup> Mary, the mother of John-Mark in Jerusalem (Acts 12:12)<sup>101</sup> and Lydia in Philippi (Acts 16:14-15, 40).<sup>102</sup> Furthermore, if Euodia and Syntyche are directors of the community of Philippi, they could well have hosted domestic churches in their respective homes (Phil 4:2-3). As Osiek also affirms, “the widows of 1Tim 5:9-10, who must show

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<sup>94</sup> “You know that those in Stephanas’ household were the first converts in Achaia and that they have devoted themselves (διακονίαν) to help the saints. Well, I want you in your turn to put yourselves at the service (ὑποτάσθησθε) of people like this, and anyone who helps (συνεργῶντι) and works (κοπιῶντι) with them.” The text also gives us the idea that Paul’s work with a team of collaborators was carried out in the same manner by and among the local communities.

<sup>95</sup> “The churches of Asia greet you. Aquila and Prisca greet you fervently in the Lord along with those in the church at their house.”

<sup>96</sup> “Greet Prisca and Aquila, my co-workers in Christ Jesus. They risked their own necks to save my life, and not only I but also the Gentile churches thank them.”

<sup>97</sup> The indication that they offered hospitality to Paul in Corinth, as can be seen from the text of Acts, makes us think that they probably also had a house in Corinth which served to house Paul and a domestic church.

<sup>98</sup> “I commend to you our sister, Phoebe, who is a minister in the church at Cenchreae. Receive her in the Lord in a manner worthy of the saints and help her with anything she may need from you, for she has been a benefactor to many people, including myself.”

<sup>99</sup> “...For some members of Chloe’s household (ὑπὸ τῶν Χλόης, γὰρ τῶν Chlóēs) have informed me, brothers, that there is quarrelling among you.”

<sup>100</sup> “Greet the brothers at Laodicea as well as Nympha and the church at her house.”

<sup>101</sup> “And when he realized this he went to the house of Mary, the mother of John who is called Mark, where a considerable number of people were gathered in prayer.”

<sup>102</sup> “There was a woman named Lydia listening there—a dealer in purple cloth from the city of Thyatira and a worshipper of God—and the Lord opened her heart to heed the words Paul was speaking. After she and her household were baptized she offered this invitation, ‘If you consider that I am a believer in the Lord, come and stay in my house.’ And she prevailed upon us.”

certain qualifications to be enrolled, and the widows of other texts in which they are encouraged not to remarry could have remained in the house of a son or other male relative. If not, they surely managed their own houses, which is more likely if they were expected to take the initiative to show hospitality to visiting Christians and perform works of charity (1Tim 5:10)."<sup>103</sup>

These women acted as *materfamilias* and benefactresses who assisted the lives of the members of the group of believers, by offering information to those who arrived and helping to make contact with individuals. They also acted beneficially towards individual leaders, such as Paul or Ignatius of Antioch (Tavia, Alke). It is to be hoped that these communities' manner of conducting themselves when gathering in these houses, was, as C. Osiek indicates, the same found when gathering in houses owned by men. As hostesses and benefactresses, these women were shown respect, deference and submission as authorities in these groups.<sup>104</sup> These women who offered their houses, might have directed the ritual meals, just as male hosts did, since in the beginnings of Christianity (the first century) "there does not seem to exist any particular concern regarding the requisites of those who directed the meals," as there seemed to be regarding the requisites of those who were teachers. "The ruling tradition in banquets, of asking others (for example, philosophers) to speak after a meal, lent itself very naturally to there being a second person, distinct from the host, who would direct the second part of the order of the assembly, the reading and reflection over written texts." However, it is certain that some women, like Prisca, carried out roles of teaching; it is recorded as such (for example, the prophetess of Revelation (2:20-23), and others belonging to heretical groups, like Marcellina, and the Montanists Maximilla, Prisca and Quintilia).<sup>105</sup>

In the face of social expectations that they be good spouses and bring legitimate children into the world, the Pauline communities recognize the existence of some women whose principal role, as

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<sup>103</sup> Cf. CAROLYN OSIEK-MARGARET MACDONALD-JANET H. TULLOCH, *A Woman's Place*, 159.

<sup>104</sup> Cf. CAROLYN OSIEK, "Diakonos and *prostatís*: Women's Patronage in Early Christianity," HTS 61 (2005) 363.

<sup>105</sup> Cf. CAROLYN OSIEK-MARGARET MACDONALD-JANET H. TULLOCH, *A Woman's Place*, 162.

directors in the *fictive family* (the community), is to ensure solidarity within the group, and group loyalty. This role involves a reformulation of an essential family value in the ancient Mediterranean societies: the feminine character of giving and sustaining life.

The power of generating life is not limited to the feminine uterus. Women serve life with their intelligence, with their goods, acting as hostesses, facilitating instruction (and in some cases, also teaching), and carrying out organizational works for the community life. In their homes, the Christian assembly prayed, celebrated the Eucharist, preached the word and welcomed Christians and missionaries proceeding from other places, all in their homes. By presenting them in this way, the Pauline texts offer us an essential piece of information: in the new Christian family, loyalty to the group and the sustaining of relations of brotherhood stand above other loyalties (family, culture), and overcome the differentiation between persons based on their socio-economic conditions.

The testimonies show women who are active, wholeheartedly devoted to the mission, gifted with regard to the word and who believe in its power, that is, in its capacity to be of significance. In their lives they re-elaborate the value of *care* as an inherent quality by virtue of their sex. They are not identified by their family roles (spouses, mothers, daughters), but rather by their participation in the Christian movement as directors, benefactresses and missionaries.<sup>106</sup>

These women will *care for* their communities, the new surrogate family to which they have joined themselves, while introducing new categories of understanding: they will exercise themselves in preaching, like their masculine counterparts, they will accompany the growth and consolidation of the Christian groups, and in some cases, as we shall see, they will even travel and suffer persecution.

The domestic church of the city of Prisca and her husband Aquila found in their home a place to gather (we have data of this in Ephesus: 1Cor 16:19: "The churches of Asia greet you. Aquila and Prisca greet you fervently in the Lord along with those in the church at their house"; and in Rome: Rom 16:5: "Also greet the church at their house"). On two occasions the woman's name ap-

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<sup>106</sup> With the exception of the "mother of Rufus" (Rom 16:13) and of "Nereus and his sister" (Rom 16:15), where, nevertheless, he would be referring to her condition as a "companion in the mission." Cf. MARY ROSE D'ANGELO, "Women Partners in the New Testament," *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 6 (1990) 73-74.77-81.

pears before Aquila's—Rom 6:13 (cf. 2Tim 4:19) and Acts 18:18—contravening the social cods of the times. Furthermore, at no point does Paul refer to her as a wife (contrary to the usage in Acts), but rather underlines the *full commitment of this woman in the missionary work* on a level of *equality and interdependence* with the man.

This concern for the new family's survival is likewise shown in Chloe's action of informing Paul of the conflicts in Corinth ("For some members of Chloe's household have informed me" 1Cor 1:11) and of asking him for a word to overcome the existing divisions. Who is this woman? It might be a widow, with slaves entrusted with managing her affairs outside the city, or she could be a woman whose husband or father is not a believer, or who would not have wanted to send these emissaries to Paul.<sup>107</sup> If Chloe is a believer<sup>108</sup> (something we cannot know with certainty since we lack sufficient data), then it would be a question of a woman who had taken the initiative to send emissaries to Paul. Contrary to Paul's habit, he cites his source (1Cor 5:1; 11:18; 15:12,35). This data points to her having an important role in the church of Corinth, since the Apostle gives credit to her words and even bases his argument on her when responding to the community. What is more, Paul shares the image of the community that Chloe communicates to him, as we can see from the discourse he makes in the text after mentioning her. This would indicate that Chloe and Paul share the answer for the divisions in Corinth.<sup>109</sup>

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<sup>107</sup> The fact of naming the emissaries "Chloe's people" would indicate that it involves a wealthy woman and that these people are slaves. If they had been family members, the usual practice in the Mediterranean world would have been to refer to them by indicating the name of the masculine head of the household. Cf. MARGARET Y. MACDONALD, "Reading Real Women through the Undisputed Letters of Paul," in ROSS S. KRAEMER – MARY ROSE D'ANGELO (eds.), *Women and Christian Origins*, 200.

<sup>108</sup> The doubt is reasonable, since the same New Testament texts inform us that some slaves joined the Christian movement without the consent of their owners (1Tim 6:1-2; 1Pet 3:1-2). However, we also have the testimony of wealthy women who converted to Christianity (cf. note 11).

<sup>109</sup> ANTOINETTE CLARK WIRE, *The Corinthian Women Prophets. A Reconstruction through Paul's Rhetoric* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1990), 41. For his part, GERD THEISSEN, *Estudios de sociología*, 185, though he opts for identifying the preceding emissaries as coming from the lowest social levels, or affirms that they at least see things "from below," affirms, however, that the news of 1Cor 1:11, in light of the discussion Paul carries on with the Corinthians, was trustworthy for him, and that in addition, "he puts himself decidedly on the part of these members of inferior classes."

If she is not a believer, then it seems probable that there were many Christians in her family/house who would have been under her patronage.<sup>110</sup>

Women offering their homes and directing the communities that gathered there also hosted missionaries and Christians from other groups. Believers from Jewish Christian churches or individuals coming from the gentiles would arrive at their homes. In welcoming them in the name of the community, they expressed with this gesture the overcoming of the differences that caused fear and enmity or generated distance and remoteness.<sup>111</sup> Their praxis questioned the habit of forming one's identity through defensive barriers that impeded the "other's" access. Their gesture manifested the "welcoming and hospitable God, before whom no one is a stranger or foreigner" (Eph 2:11-22).

Just like the men, these women would be hostesses in their homes to people of extremely varied social, economic and cultural backgrounds, creating with their praxis a new "hermeneutic of the stranger" into the ancient Mediterranean societies. With their praxis, they integrated the one who is different, the servant and the inferior, into a level of equality, overcoming differences and affirming care and universal welcome as Christian values. Hospitality was thus an eloquent show of how Christianity not only *disrupted* the boundaries between the public/political space and one's individual/family place, but even caused the collapse of the socio-economic, political, cultural and religious barriers.

Paul may well have enjoyed Phoebe's hospitality, as can be deduced from the appreciation he shows: "for she has been a benefactor (*prostasis*) to many people, including myself" (Rom 16:1-2).

With this title, the apostle seems to indicate she was a rich woman who would have acted in conformity with the systems of patronage and *eurgetism* in Antiquity. Socially, it was hoped that

<sup>110</sup> Cf. CAROLYN OSIEK, "Diakonos and *prostatis*," 366.

<sup>111</sup> Regarding the practice of hospitality in the New Testament communities: RAFAEL AGUIRRE, "El extranjero en el cristianismo primitivo," in: AA.VV., *El extranjero en la cultura europea* (Bilbao: Universidad de Deusto, 1997), 463-483; CARMEN BERNABÉ, *Del Dios desconocido al Dios universal: los extranjeros, la ciudad y los inicios del cristianismo*, in AA.VV., *El extranjero en la cultura europea*, 485-509; ELISA ESTÉVEZ, "De la extrañeza a la familiaridad inclusiva y universal: la hospitalidad en el Nuevo Testamento," in NURYA MARTÍNEZ-GAYOL (ed.), *Un espacio para la ternura. Miradas desde la teología* (Madrid: Universidad Pontificia Comillas, 2006), 109-158.

patrons/patronesses and benefactors/benefactresses would use their resources to benefit individuals or groups. The figure of Phoebe would be very similar to that of Junia Theodora, originally from Lycia, who lived in Corinth. In her house, she hosted the Lycians who were passing through Corinth for business reasons; in addition, she won them the friendship of the Roman authorities, thus facilitating their access to the political powers. One of the many honorary decrees (in the Lycian city of Telmessa) speaks of this woman's *prostasia* (patronage) in the context of hospitality and mediation.<sup>112</sup>

In the light of this and other testimonies, Phoebe, as *prostasis*, benefactress, would have welcomed Paul and other missionaries in her house of Cenchreae, and probably would have also facilitated their access to influential persons in the port city or in other places.<sup>113</sup>

It seems that the attribution of the term "*prostasis*" does not have so much the connotation of "president" of a liturgical assembly – even though such a role is not excluded, given the privileged place of the patron within the assembly – as it does that of the good works done by a patron, and therefore, of the prestige and authority that derive from that position.

According to Acts 18:2-3, Paul would also have been given hospitality at the house of Prisca and Aquila in Corinth. Apollo, for his part, is welcomed in Ephesus; from there he is sent with a letter of recommendation to the Christians of Corinth (Acts 18:26), a fact which ratifies the authority they held. They act in the same manner as Paul himself does, for instance, with Phoebe (Rom 16:1).

These gestures of hospitality, frequent in nascent Christianity, and which we can now identify as a praxis whose protagonists are

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<sup>112</sup> Cf. CAROLYN OSIEK-MARGARET MACDONALD-JANET H. TULLOCH, *A Woman's Place*, 207.

<sup>113</sup> In support of her role as hostess of many people in her house, there is an inscription found in a tomb of Solómos (Corinth) from the IV c. A.D. (but whose edicts would date to the I c. A.D.), where it speaks of Junias Theodora, a female merchant who offered her house in generous hospitality to many Lycians for various reasons (business, exile). In this inscription, there appears the term *προστασίαν*, *prostasian*, which could be translated, depending on the context, as "to give hospitality." However, I am not convinced by the opinion of M. Zappella, that giving hospitality was not the work of women who practiced euergetism, since the inscriptions do not record it. I understand that the system of beliefs widely shared in the ancient Mediterranean results in not making all the facts explicit, and thus does not exclude a *πρόξενος* *próxenos* from being identified with a *προστάτις*, *prostátis*, or *προστάτης*, *prostátēs*. Cf. MARCO ZAPPELLA, "A proposito di Febe ΠΡΟΣΤΑΤΙΣ (Rom 16,2)," *Rivista Biblica Italiana* 37 (1989) 167-171.

women, tell us of the feminine contribution to making the church of the first centuries a community of communities. In addition, women demonstrate a different kind of care than the one society expects from them: they are independent and contribute actively and efficaciously, in the various *ekklesias*, in a reciprocal and gratuitous exchange, characteristic of family relations. Consequently, their behavior goes beyond the community realm; by their praxis they facilitate new paths towards humanization in the Mediterranean societies.

## 5. Sisters and Indefatigable Co-workers in the Mission

The various references to women as co-workers in the Pauline mission are intertwined with those of other relevant men. The mention of their names, along with what they did for the consolidation and extension of the Christian movement in its origins, are expressions of the difficulties suffered together by men and women, and their bravery in announcing the gospel and building up fraternity. They are equally an expression of the “high reciprocal esteem,” in Christ, in which Paul holds them, men and women alike.<sup>114</sup>

The Pauline communities did not have uniform structures of leadership. In these communities there were many collaborators (both male and female) in the mission, with many different tasks: they visited the communities to verify their growth in the faith and encourage them in difficulties (1Thess 3:2, 6); they bring messages from the apostle and letters (Rom 16:1; 1Cor 4:7; 16:10); they inform Paul of community problems (1Cor 1:11); they supervise the local churches, instruct and evangelize (cf. Rom 16; 1Cor 16:10). Some of these men and women remained as local leaders, while others were also itinerants. It is not possible, however, to distinguish well which roles belonged to whom, and there is a certain ambiguity.<sup>115</sup>

The feminine authority is inscribed within this framework, in that the women’s leadership can be seen by the titles they receive, just as for men; these titles testify to their inclusion in the various missionary fields, working to favor the rooting of the gospel in the Mediterra-

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<sup>114</sup> So explains KARL BARTH, in commenting on Rom 16:1-6, *The Epistle to the Romans* (London: Oxford University Press, 1933), 535.

<sup>115</sup> It is not clear, for example, whether Epaphras of Colossus was only a missionary in his local church (Col 1:7ff; 4:12ff), because, in agreement with Phil 2:25-29; 4:18, he was also an itinerant. Cf. BEN WITHERINGTON III, *Women in the Earliest Churches*, 109-110.

nean cultures, and to encourage the life of the Christian groups. Comparison of the data regarding women in these missionary teams (which we are fortunate Paul has left us) with the news describing the activity of the masculine co-workers, one discovers they carried out "an intense missionary activity," performed in their local communities, as well as through journeys, by means of commerce, and through the offices they held, while facing many difficulties and dangers.

One of the designations with which Paul strengthens the authority of the local leadership is "sister." By addressing Phoebe (Rom 16:1) and Apphia (Phm 2) with this official title, he confirms and gives value to their community authority and their collaboration in the mission. Phoebe's significance is amply witnessed, since she is also given two other titles: minister and benefactress. Together with Philemon, Apphia is named a "collaborator/co-worker" (*synergos*); with Arquito, she is named a "companion" (*sustratiôtês*). Like them she is honored with the title they awarded her: "sister" (*adelphê*), probably as a benefactress of the community.<sup>116</sup>

In the light of other Pauline texts, there are two dimensions of Christian life that are underlined: on *one hand*, when the title is granted to individual persons, their contribution in announcing the gospel and their role of leadership are being affirmed (cf. Phil 4:21: "the brothers with me greet you,")<sup>117</sup> as Paul does with Timothy (Phm 1; 2Cor 1:1; 1Thess 3:2). One can note this comparison with two texts: Rom 16:15 ("greet... Nereus and her sister") and 1Cor 9:5 ("Have we no right to travel with a Christian wife, as do the other apostles, the brothers of the Lord, and Cephas?").<sup>118</sup>

In the concrete case of Apphia, we find ourselves before a woman who, like Philemon and Arquito, would be a prominent person in the community. She is not presented as a wife, but rather in her significance for the community, and with her own title, like that of Timothy.<sup>119</sup> As a result, Paul not only wishes her to be a singular witness

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<sup>116</sup> Cf. PHEME PERKINS, "Philemon," in CAROL A. NEWSOM – SHARON H. RINGE (eds.), *The Women's Bible Commentary* (Westminster: John Knox, 1992), 362.

<sup>117</sup> In this text, "brothers" is distinguished from the "saints"; this last term refers to the members of the community.

<sup>118</sup> ELIZABETH SCHÜSSLER FIORENZA, *En memoria de ella*, (Bilbao: DDB, 1989), 221, justifies the interpretation of "sister" as "collaborator in the mission," based on the double accusative ("sister" and "woman") in 1Cor 9:5.

<sup>119</sup> Cf. WENDY COTTER, "Women's Authority Roles in Paul's Churches: Counter-cultural or Conventional?", *Novum Testamentum* 36 (1994) 351; ELIZABETH SCHÜSSLER

of the recommendation he will make to Philemon; he also wants her to take on the responsibility of seeing that this charge is carried out.

On the *other hand*, this term, central to the Pauline conception of the community, is used to strengthen the bonds of group solidarity (1Cor 6:1-11; 2Cor 8-9; Gal 4:15), especially when the community goes through conflicts (Rom 14). That a woman would be explicitly called "sister" speaks for itself of her role in encouraging the community and her work of strengthening the bonds of internal loyalty. These tasks are central to the communities in mission, who need to be strongly bound among themselves and to their center, God himself, in order to set out into the open and manifest the divine love in word and deed.<sup>120</sup>

Phoebe carries a letter of Paul to Rome or Ephesus, depending on which scholars one consults; and if Robert Jewett is right, her task would also have been to prepare Paul's arrival in Rome and his mission to Spain.<sup>121</sup> She receives the title of "minister" or *diakonos*,<sup>122</sup> which makes us wonder what role would cause this title to be attributed to her. We must keep in mind that there are two aspects to highlight:

1) In agreement with the citation in Romans 16:1-2, Phoebe, minister of Cencreae, would have received the charge of representing one church before another, a task which makes up part of the concept of *diakonía*. "A parallel may perhaps be found in two passages of Ignatius. In *Letter to the Philadelphians* 10.1 he encourages the church to appoint (*cheirotónēsai*, the term that will later be the most common for clerical ordination) a *diakonos* as representative (*eis to presbeusai*) to the Syrian church. In *Smyrn*. 10.1 two men called Philo and Rheo Agatopous, who accompany Ignatius (*Letter to the Phi-*

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FIorenza, *En memoria de ella*, 230. Against EDUARD LOHSE, *Colossians and Philemon*, (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1971), 190; FRANZ MUSSNER, *Carta a los Colosenses. Carta a Filemón* (Barcelona: Herder, 1970), 124, who both identify her as the wife of Philemon.

<sup>120</sup> Cf. JOSEPH H. HELLERMAN, *The Ancient Church as Family* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1989) 92-126.

<sup>121</sup> Cf. ROBERT JEWETT, "Paul, Phoebe, and the Spanish Mission," IN JACOB NEUSNER ET AL. (ed.), *The Social World of Early Christianity. Festschrift H.C. Kee* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1990), 142-161.

<sup>122</sup> The title she receives appears in masculine, with the article in the feminine (*he diakonos*). We have no evidence of usage of the term in the feminine (that is, *diakonissa*) until the Council of Nicea (can. 19). It also appears in other late texts: the Latin translation of the Didascalia (though both the date of the edition, as well as the Greek original, are unknown); and also in the *Apostolic Constitutions* (IV cent). See: KEVIN MADIGAN Y CAROLYN OSIEK (eds.), *Mujeres ordenadas en la Iglesia primitiva. Una historia documentada* (Estella: EVD, 2006), 28-29.

*ladelphians* 11.19) were received by the Smyrnaeans as representatives of God (*hos diakonous theou*) when they arrived in Philadelphia. Margaret Mitchell has shown that the officially designated envoy, in the context of the epistolary conventions, was to be received in the same way as the sender would be received and is the authoritative representative of the one who sends. Phoebe functions this way with regard to Paul, as do Timothy and Titus in other situations."<sup>123</sup>

2) With this term, one would also be indicating that the announcement of the gospel is central to her life, as it is for Paul, who calls himself "God's minister" (2Cor 3:6; 11:23; cf. Rom 11:13; 1Cor 16:15; 2Cor 5:18; 6:13). Becoming a deaconess or minister implies having received a call from God to announce the gospel (1Cor 3:5,9), and would imply dedicating oneself to teaching and evangelizing among the communities (1Thess 3:2). Therefore, it would involve a woman missionary, preacher, and teacher.<sup>124</sup> These roles could not have been exempt from tribulations, necessities, fatigues and sufferings of many different kinds, as happened to the apostle himself and his other co-workers (2Cor 6:1-10).

It appears that these tasks were assigned equally to the *synergos* or co-workers, the most frequent title used to refer to Paul's co-workers,<sup>125</sup> and is not used, in contrast, when speaking of believers in general (cf. 1Cor 3:9; 1Thess 3:2; Rom 16:3,9; 1Thess 3:2; Rom 16:21; Phil 2:25; Phm 24; 2Cor 8:23; 1:24). Among the co-workers who receive the title of *synergos*, there are some very important leaders such as Timothy (Rom 16:21<sup>126</sup>; 1Thess 3:2), Apollo (1Cor 3:9), Titus (2Cor 8:23), Epaphroditus (Phil 2:25), Clement (Phil 4:3) and Philemon (Phm 1). Among the women who receive this title are Prisca (Rom 16:2), Euodia and Syntyche (Phil 4:3). Some of these individuals might be itinerants, such as Prisca (and Aquila), since they show up in different cities (in this case the missionary model

<sup>123</sup> Cf. CAROLYN OSIEK-MARGARET MACDONALD-JANET H. TULLOCH, *A Woman's Place*, 215.

<sup>124</sup> Cf. ELIZABETH SCHÜSSLER FIORENZA, *En memoria de ella*, 219.

<sup>125</sup> Of the 13 times it appears in the NT, all but one (3 Jn 8) are in Paul. As ULRIC WILCKENS says, in *La carta a los Romanos. Rom 6-16* (Salamanca, Sígueme, 1992), 483, the meaning of *synergos* is that of a "dignitary of God who works with Paul in the common work of the evangelization."

<sup>126</sup> In 1Thess 3:2, however, Paul calls Timothy a "co-worker for God," perhaps because the Christians might have doubted Timothy's authority to resolve problems in Thessalonica. Cf. CARLOS GIL ARBIOL, *Primera y segunda cartas a los Tesalonicenses* (Estella: EVD, 2004), 73.

combines itinerancy with the sedentary life); in other cases, it could be a question of local leaders (Euodia and Syntyche, for instance).

Euodia and Syntyche possessed indisputable leadership in the community of Philippi in specific, and in the Pauline movement in general, in light of the data we have regarding the Philippians. Both have fought together with Paul *in favor of* the gospel, and are leaders in their community (cf. 1Cor 16:16,18; 1Thess 5:12). C. Osiek's observation is very interesting, that "only with Ignatius in the early years of the second century – for the first time – is there any concern expressed about when and where a true Eucharist is celebrated. Ignatius' model of church leadership requires the knowledge and consent – though not necessarily the presence – of the *episkopos* (*Smyrnians* 8.1). By this point the *episkopos* is unlikely to be a woman, though among the earlier *episkopoi* in Philippi (Phil 1:1), there could well have been women leaders of house churches, especially Euodia and Syntyche (Phil 4:2)."<sup>127</sup>

For this reason the Apostle is worried about their disagreements, since their conflict is not a matter of indifference for community life, nor for testimony outside it. It is not a question of personal problems; rather, the facts of the letter indicate a conflict related to their work of evangelization and the difficulties it implies: like Clement and others, they are co-workers (*synergoi*), and it is plausible that they even belong to the same missionary team.<sup>128</sup> It could easily be that neither one is itinerant, but that rather they are persons who collaborated actively with Paul in the beginning of the mission in Philippi, an important Roman colony, and that once he left, they continued animating the life of this Christian collective. Paul could be directing his words to them in the initial thanks of the letter (Phil 1:3-6).<sup>129</sup> Both women are compared to athletes who have worked hard and even have accepted sufferings for the cause of the gospel, just like Paul.<sup>130</sup>

<sup>127</sup> Cf. CAROLYN OSIEK-MARGARET MACDONALD-JANET H. TULLOCH, *A Woman's Place*, 161.

<sup>128</sup> Cf. WENDY COTTER, "Women's Authority," 353.

<sup>129</sup> L. MICHAEL WHITE – O. LARRY YARBROUGH, *The Social World of the First Christians. Essays in Honor of Wayne A. Meeks*, 6-7.

<sup>130</sup> The parallel of συνήθλησάν μου, *synēthlēsán mou*, with συνεργῶν μου, *synergōn mou*, is noteworthy, as it permits us to think of both women as collaborators, and in addition, is a further indication of the sufferings that the missionary teams underwent.

The apostle's concern brings him to exhort each one<sup>131</sup> to have the same feelings and thoughts as the Lord (Phil 2:2; Rom 12:16; 15:5), something especially important in this letter.<sup>132</sup> The reference to Phil 2:2-4 enlightens the petition made to both women: to have the same feelings as Christ Jesus means to renounce the search for vainglory and the spirit of rivalry, and to cultivate humility, concern for the others and the conviction that the others are superior to oneself. For this, he asks for help of the other members of the community. He invites them to orient all their energy and to overcome all difficulties by uniting themselves to the love of Christ, the only norm for the community.

Paul affirms that various women have worked hard in the Lord: Mary (Rom 12:6), Tryphaena, Trifosa, and Perside (Rom 16:12). The verb *kopiao* is used, "to toil," "to tire oneself," which in Paul comes to take on an almost technical sense: the missionary work (1Cor 3:8; 2Cor 10:15; 1Thess 3:5) and, in some cases, work done out of love, in favor of the community (1Cor 15:58; 1Thess 1:3). Paul refers to his own work of apostolate (1Cor 15:10; Phil 2:16), and to that of the community leaders (1Cor 16:16; 1Thess 5:12) with this same verb.<sup>133</sup>

The references to *synergos* and *kopos* (co-worker and work/fatigue) in the letters cause us to think that they are probably equivalent terms, and that they designate a group of co-workers in the mission,<sup>134</sup> who are recognized as having some kind of authority.

Some texts clarify things in this sense. In concrete, 1Cor 16:16,18 urges the Corinthians to recognize the leadership of all "those who collaborate (*synergoûnti*) and work (*kopiônti*)," with a term that leaves no room for doubt ("submit yourselves," *hypotássêsthe*).

Even more, in 1Thess 5:12, Paul beseeches the Thessalonians to recognize the authority of those who strive (*kopiôntas*) among them, and identifies them also as those who "preside over you (*proistamenos*) in the Lord and admonish you (*nouthetountas*)." The joining of these last two terms would imply that their leadership is linked to having some kind of authoritative word, as the father of a family has.<sup>135</sup>

<sup>131</sup> With each name, he repeats "I exhort you" (Phil 4:2).

<sup>132</sup> The verb φρονεῖν, *phroneîn*, appears more frequently in Philippians than in the other Pauline letters.

<sup>133</sup> HORST BALZ – GERHARD SCHENEIDER, *DENTI* (Salamanca: Sígueme, 1996), 2373-4.

<sup>134</sup> E. E. ELLIS, *Prophecy and Hermeneutic in Early Christianity* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978), 7.

<sup>135</sup> Cf. EPH 6:4; PHILO, Spec. Laws 2.232; JOSEPHUS, Ant. 4.260.

The verb *noutheteô* means basically “to instruct,”<sup>136</sup> to call to memory, to make an observation or warning. Therefore, the leaders of the communities have the task of educating their communities, by means of teaching and/or preaching.

The specific recognition that some women have worked hard for the gospel (Mary, Trifosa, Tryphaena, Perside) implies an affirmation of their leadership. In presiding over their communities, they have given new significance to their role as caregivers, since the verb *proistemi* means to direct, but also to protect and care for; both meanings are united Paul’s letters.<sup>137</sup> That is, these women exercise their leadership by encouraging the communities in their “journey,” with exhortations suited to the moment they are living, even correcting if necessary. On the other hand, that this same term is applied to males who carry out the same roles is indicative of how the masculine authority is redefined in the Church; care is introduced as an indispensable quality.

Furthermore, as we have already seen with the term *diakonos*, here, too, those who have striven hard in the work of the gospel have suffered numerous fatigues for its sake (2Cor 6:5; 11:23,27).

## 6. With Authority to Teach and Evangelize

Going out to the roads to announce the gospel and teaching were two essential functions for the strengthening of the Christian movement in its origins. Those who carried out these tasks counted on a great authority recognized by Paul and their own communities. In the Pauline groups, this authority neither generated nor was nurtured by inequality; rather, it established bonds between persons with a diversity of charisms, for the purpose of putting on Christ and inaugurating the new creation that they eagerly awaited.

Among those who had authority in the mission were the apostles. For Paul, this group was not limited to the Twelve; rather, he claimed for himself this title, giving reasons: he had a personal encounter with the Risen One and had received a mission (1Cor 15:5-9; cf. 1Cor 9:2; Gal 1:1), including that of bringing a collection to Je-

<sup>136</sup> It is a term composed of *nous* and *tithêmi*.

<sup>137</sup> HORST BALZ – GERHARD SCHENEIDER, *DENT II* (Salamanca: Sígueme, 1998), 1145-1146. BO REICKE, “προιστημι”, *proistêmi*, in Gerhard Friedrich (ed.), *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (Gran Rapids: Eerdmans, 1969), 700-703. The link between leadership and care is expressly formulated in 1Tim 3:4, where the terms *proistemi* and *epimeleô* appear.

rusalem (2Cor 8:3). He roots his authority in this, though one cannot speak of established “responsibilities.”<sup>138</sup>

For Paul, the term “apostle” can have many meanings, as, for example, that of being a simple messenger or emissary (e.g., 2Cor 8:23); but it often designates the itinerant missionaries who preach the gospel (2Cor 11:4-6,13; 12:11-12). The context of Rom 16 causes us to think that with all probability, Junias and Andronicus are a missionary couple dedicated to the spreading of the gospel.

It is noteworthy that only one woman is called an “apostle” by Paul: Junias (Rom 16:7). She is named together with Andronicus, but it is not clear whether she is his spouse. Both are Hellenistic Jewish Christians, converted before Paul, and had extraordinary authority. That they had collaborated actively with Paul is an honor for him and a credential he uses to request hospitality from the community of Rome.<sup>139</sup>

The singularity of this data, offered us by Rom 16:7, in speaking of a woman as an apostle, can be seen from the (modern) discussion regarding whether Junias is a feminine or masculine name, and about the meaning of the term “*episêmos*,” “notable” or “known.”

Both the ancient traditions (the Vulgate, Sahidica, Coptic and the Syriac versions) as well as the Patristic commentators are unanimous in reading the name “Junias” as feminine,<sup>140</sup> which coincides with the fact that Junias is a common Roman name for women of aristocratic *families*, or of freed slaves from the same.<sup>141</sup>

A problem is posed by “*episêmos*,” if one allows that Junias is a woman, because in this case the term is translated as “esteemed” or “well-known,” while if one considers Junias to be a man’s name, then the term is translated instead as “notable.”<sup>142</sup>

<sup>138</sup> Cf. WAYNE A. MEEKS, *The First Urban Christians*, 131.

<sup>139</sup> ULRICO WILCKENS, *La carta a los Romanos. Rom 6-16* (Salamanca: Sígueme, 1992), 481-482.485.

<sup>140</sup> See the magnificent study by ELDON JAY EPP, “Text-critical, exegetical, and socio-cultural factors affecting the Junia/Junias variation in Romans 16,7,” in ADELBERT DENAUX (ed.), *New Testament textual criticism and exegesis* (Leuven: Uitgeverij Peeters, Leuven University Press - Paris: Sterling, 2002), 227-291, in this regard, where he demonstrates through an exhaustive and detailed analysis that Junias (Rom 16:7) is a woman’s name. In the same regard: JOHN THORLEY, “Junia, a Woman Apostle,” *Novum Testamentum* 38 (1996) 18-29.

<sup>141</sup> In Rome alone, more than 250 inscriptions in Greek and in Latin have been found, with this name. Cf. BRUCE M. METZGER, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft/United Bible Societies, 1994<sup>2</sup>), 475, no. 39. See also PETER LAMPE, “Junias,” en *ABD* 3.1127.

<sup>142</sup> MICHAEL H. BURER – DANIEL B. WALLACE, “Was Junias Really an Apostle? A

St. John Chrysostom's comment regarding this woman helps us to draw close her.<sup>143</sup> For him, there is no doubt that this woman is not only an apostle, but even prominent among the apostles. She is worthy of great honor, because she has suffered imprisonment like the apostle Paul. The commentary that follows in Chrysostom regards fundamentally the signs of the true apostolate, just as some Pauline texts indicate them (1Cor 4:9-15 and 2Cor 10-12). The apostles appear as persons "condemned to death," a "spectacle for the world"; they are dishonored, insulted and persecuted, they suffer hunger, thirst, nakedness, shipwrecks, dangers on their journeys from all types of individuals.

For St. John Chrysostom, there is no doubt that Andronicus and Junias, Paul's prison companions, have shared with him many of these dangers; because of this, he calls them "apostles." Now they are in Rome, but in agreement with Romans 16:7, they would have shared the mission with Paul before this, which also indicates their itinerancy, at least during some period.

His panegyric continues, because Paul says that they are also "distinguished." Referring to Junias, St. John Chrysostom finds the reason for this trait in her great wisdom (*philosophia*), which, in agreement with the meaning of this term in this Antiochian father, must imbue all of daily life. For St. John Chrysostom, Christian wisdom, as Anne-Marie Malingrey has shown in a study, must be informed by love for Christ, and is proper not only to the monastic life, but to all states of life. Philosophy is the incarnation of the Christian faith, taking on its demands as well as the practice of the virtues. According to the use of the verb *philosophhein*, it can be said that it also includes the teaching and transmission of the faith.<sup>144</sup> Chrysostom's reflection situates us, as a result, before a woman apostle, probably married, who contributed with her teaching and her Christian life to the extension and consolidation of the gospel.

Even though she is not given the function of teacher, Prisca (like Aquila) exercises teaching duties. She dares to correct the insuffi-

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Re-examination of Rom 16.7," *New Testament Studies* 47 (2001) 76-91, they favor the translation "known to the apostles," based on an inconsistent analysis, as is shown by: ELDON JAY EPP, "Text-critical, exegetical," 288-289.

<sup>143</sup> *In ep. ad Romanos* 31.2 (PG 60.669-670).

<sup>144</sup> ANNE-MARIE MALINGREY, "Philosophia." *Étude d'un groupe de mots dans la littérature grecque, des Présocratiques au IV<sup>e</sup> siècle après J.-C.* (Paris: Librairie C. Klincksieck, 1961), 277-288.

cient knowledge of the Alexandrian Jew, Apollo, who according to the text, gave signs of being “eloquent” and, in addition, of having “a sound knowledge of the Scriptures” (Acts 18:24).<sup>145</sup> It is likely that Prisca based her teaching on oral traditions, like many others of the first members of the Jesus movement. The importance of these traditions in the early times would have given an equal participation to men and women in the formation of the emerging Christian traditions. Instead, the passage to written traditions would have had negative consequences for women, who would have been relegated to the functions of teaching and preaching, as a result of not having learned to read or write.<sup>146</sup>

It is likely that this ministry of teaching was carried out by other women as well, but the witnesses that have reached us today are so fragmentary that there is no explicit or direct reference of any other women in the authentic letters of Paul. What we do know very well through the Pastoral letters, is that there was great resistance to women teaching in the Christian assemblies, and that there was an attempt to have the women once more confined to their homes and disappear from the public realms, including that of the *ekklesia*. It is likely that the functions of presiding in the assembly and teaching were two distinct functions until some point in the second century, when the model of the bishop/priest who taught developed.<sup>147</sup>

That Prisca’s contribution as a teacher and missionary is recorded in Acts is very significant, since given the author of this work’s tendency to diminish the leading role of women, it would have been normal for him to have diminished this woman’s prominence. However, her importance must have been such in early Christianity that he could not relegate her to the margins of his account. As Osiek says, “in fact, her legacy was remembered as so significant that she appears one final time at the dawn of the patristic era in the greetings found at the end of 2 Timothy (2Tim 4:19).”<sup>148</sup>

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<sup>145</sup> Cf. ANTOINETTE WIRE, *The Corinthian Women Prophets*, 50-51; ROSS S. KRAEMER – MARY ROSE D’ANGELO (eds.), *Women and Christian Origins*, 145.

<sup>146</sup> FERNANDO RIVAS, “Protagonismo y marginación de la mujer en el cristianismo primitivo. Asia Menor (siglos I-II),” in: XAVIER QUINZÁ LLEÓ, GABINO URÍBARRI BILBAO (eds.), *Responsabilidad y diálogo. Homenaje a José Joaquín Alemany Briz, S.J. (1937-2001)* [Madrid: Universidad Pontificia Comillas, 2002], 385-413.

<sup>147</sup> Cf. CAROLYN OSIEK-MARGARET MACDONALD-JANET H. TULLOCH, *A Woman’s Place*, 162.

<sup>148</sup> Cf. *Ivi*, 30.

## 7. The Authority of Women Prophets in Corinth

The community of Corinth offers us the testimony of women who were believers and who were powerful, that is to say, women who believed in the God of Life, and who also believed in their *power of significance*. Echoing a reflection by Cristina de Pizán, we could say that these Corinthian women, whose names are not recorded, *did not trust another's judgment more than what they felt and knew as women* and received as a gift of the Spirit; *they did not reject what they knew with certainty in order to adopt an opinion in which they did not believe, nor did they recognize themselves in it, since it spoke more of other's prejudices* than of the work God was accomplishing in their lives.<sup>149</sup> They had to face many difficulties: gossip and comments by those surrounding them, saying they threatened the stability and credibility of the church; tensions within their own Christian group, and the discussion with Paul, before whom they had to defend their own points of view, their deepest convictions.

Paul's correspondence with Corinth shows women who believed in their capacity to prophesy and who defended their freedom to choose asceticism, challenging the social conventions. However, at the same time, it reveals to us that even the apostle tried "to control the lives of the women and use the feminine identity as a means to set boundaries and formulate communitarian norms."<sup>150</sup>

In the community of Corinth, a type of prophecy arose which, judging by the testimony given in 1 Corinthians, was different from the type favored by Paul.<sup>151</sup> It was a form of prophecy more associated with the wisdom traditions and ecstatic experiences of transcendence,<sup>152</sup> and mainly women adhered to it (1Cor 11:5; 14:1-25, 26-40), as Antoinette Clark Wire has demonstrated.<sup>153</sup>

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<sup>149</sup> These expressions, found in CRISTINA DE PIZÁN, *La ciudad de las damas* (Madrid: Siruela 2000), 65.68, seem to me more eloquent in revealing why the Corinthian women defended their authority, including discussing it with Paul himself.

<sup>150</sup> Cf. CAROLYN OSIEK-MARGARET MACDONALD-JANET H. TULLOCH, *El lugar de la mujer en la iglesia primitiva* (Salamanca: Sígueme, 2007), 317.

<sup>151</sup> Probably connected to the Alexandrian traditions brought to Corinth by Apollo. Cf. BARBARA R. ROSSING, "Prophets, Prophetic Movements and the Voices of Women," in Richard A. Horsley (ed.), *Christian Origins*, Fortress, Minneapolis 2005, 272; ANTOINETTE CLARK WIRE, *The Corinthian Women Prophets*, 129.153.

<sup>152</sup> BARBARA R. ROSSING, "Prophets, Prophetic Movements and the Voices of Women," in Richard A. Horsley (ed.), *Christian Origins* (Minneapolis: Fortress 2005), 270.

<sup>153</sup> ANTOINETTE CLARK WIRE, *The Corinthian Women Prophets*.

The existence of women prophets in Corinth is clearly reflected in 1Cor 11:5: “Any woman who prays or prophesies with her head uncovered disgraces her head—it is the same as if her head were shaved....” The context shows that they both prayed and prophesied, but without distinctive signs in their clothing to show their subordination. The reference in 1 Corinthians recognizes the prophetic activity of women, something which, furthermore, was normal throughout history, though individuals have attempted to control and contain it within precise limits, as we shall see.<sup>154</sup>

Their prophetic activity links them to other Christian women:<sup>155</sup> the daughters of Philip (Acts 21:9), Amias from Philadelphia (Eusebius of Caesarea, *Ecclesiastical History* V 17.3-4); Maximilla, Prisca and Quintilla, prophetesses of the Montanist movement (*Ecclesiastical History* V 16.9), and Jezebel (Rev 2:21ff), whom the author of Apocalypse judges very negatively. Furthermore, their voices were not silenced. Later on, in Corinth, we know of the existence of two other prophetesses: Theonoe and Myrte.<sup>156</sup> According to the testimony of the Acts of Paul, the prophecy of both women bore characteristics, *on one hand*, of oracular prophecy typical of the Palestinian Israelite tradition, and on the *other*, presented traces of the ecstatic experiences, after the manner of the Corinthian prophetesses: “as it was *revealed* to Theonoe; when the Spirit which had come upon Myrte *was calmed*.”

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<sup>154</sup> The same cannot be said for their preaching, which was usually silenced and de-legitimized. BEVERLY MAYNE KIENZLE – PAMELA J. WALKER (eds.), *Women Preachers and Prophets through Two Millennia of Christianity* (Berkeley – Los Angeles – London: University of California Press, 1998), XIV; Cf. JORUNN ØKLAND, *Women in their Place* (Sheffield: T&T Clark, 2004), 204.

<sup>155</sup> They are linked to a chain of women prophets, some of which are named in the OT: Miriam (Ex 15:20); Deborah (Jdg 4:4); Huldah (2Kings 22:14; 2Chr 34:22), the wife of Isaiah (Isa 8:3), and Noadiah (Neh 6:14).

<sup>156</sup> *HchPl* 10, 2 [3 Cor 2 (Pap. Bodmer 1, 7-8)]: “come to us, - for we believe, in effect, that it has been revealed (ἀπεκαλύφθη, *apekalýphthē*) to Theonoe, that the Lord has snatched you from the hands of the impious, or write to us...”; *HchPl* 11, p. 7,2ss: “and while they were questioning about what this sign might mean, [the Spirit came upon Mirte] who spoke thus: ‘Brothers: why [are you terrified] upon seeing [this sign]? Paul, the servant of God, will save many with the word, so that their number will hardly be able to be counted. The presence of Paul will be made manifest more than that of all the believers, and the glory [of the Lord Jesus] will come upon him with great generosity, so that he will have abundant grace in Rome.’ Later, when the Spirit that had come over Myrte was calmed (κατασταλέντος, *katastaléntos*), [each one] took bread and they celebrated a meal according to the custom [...] intoning the psalms of David and other hymns, and Paul was consoled. The following day, after having passed the night (busy) in the will of God...”

As A. Clark Wire has amply demonstrated, the women prophets of Corinth believed in their authority, because they recognized in themselves a divine inspiration, which furthermore was accepted, recognized and valued in their communities (though there were also those who disagreed).

They stood out, therefore, as being the voice of God for the communities in their journey as believers,<sup>157</sup> in the midst of a history that was difficult and often in conflict with their environment.<sup>158</sup> They were conscious of being the mediators of distinct gifts of God for others (1Cor 12:8-11, 28-30). Paul, nevertheless, tries to restrict prophecy of the ecstatic type, which seems to break loose in contexts of prayer (1Cor 11:5), and which, for the Corinthians, in contrast (men and women alike), enriches their community life by stimulating them to participate in the gifts God gives them, without pausing to differentiate between the various gifts, as Paul does (1Cor 12:2-13).<sup>159</sup>

At the heart of his argument are the women, as can be deduced from the final regulation of 1Cor 14:34-40. In reality, Paul's discourse reveals the strong authority of the women prophets in Corinth, an authority that is at the same level as that of the apostle, who may have even seen his own authority diminished (1Cor 14). Because of this, he tries to silence them, employing sharp rhetoric (v. 36), refuting the feminine claim with spiritual arguments ("If anyone thinks he is a prophet or that he has been favored with gifts of the Spirit he will realize that what I am writing to you is a command of the Lord"; v. 37),<sup>160</sup> and by putting his own authority in play. But these verses confirm that we find ourselves before women who were fully convinced of their spiritual experience, with great confidence in themselves, generating mutual relations and being respected by the group. However, Paul attempts to silence them with his reasoning, by confirming their subordination in the domestic realm and the role the men hold within it, by using arguments regarding nature, habit-

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<sup>157</sup> They consider themselves mediators of God ("to speak the tongues of angels," 1Cor 13:1).

<sup>158</sup> MARGARET Y. MACDONALD, "Reading Real Women," 215.

<sup>159</sup> See the detailed and clarifying study of ANTOINETTE CLARK WIRE, *The Corinthian Women*, 135-158.

<sup>160</sup> Though they remain hidden in the use of the third person singular, it is clear that he is addressing them, as can be deduced from the previous use of the same person in direct questions in 1Cor 14:23.28-31, where without a doubt he is addressing every man or woman who prophesies or speaks in tongues (cf. 1Cor 11:4-5).

ual practices in the churches and the written tradition, and considerations that affirm sexual subordination and the value of shame.<sup>161</sup>

Previously, his argumentation consisted in giving a very negative label to their experience, affirming that in it they seek only their own personal edification and not that of the community, and that their experience is associated with that which is "strange," with immaturity, sterility, madness, and perhaps, with the instruments that are touched during pagan religious processions (1Cor 14:2, 11, 14, 20, 23, 7; 13:1). Behind these stigmas, it is plausible to recognize the voices of the Corinthian women prophets, who saw themselves, rather, as favoring community life, with maturity, wisdom, and the faculty to reveal the mystery of God in Christ.

As Wire argues, these women defend a type of communication that is different from the one Paul considers valid. For them, speaking in tongues is a way of building up the community, emphasizing speaking rather than hearing prophecy as well as tongues. They do not believe that learning and mutual benefit are achieved when someone speaks trying to persuade his listeners. Their "hearing of each other is a speaker's hearing, receiving it as something one could also speak, or joining in at anytime, or overtaking it with another tone or message." In their prophetic praxis, these women defend a different rationality and a different way of listening, which give priority to ecstatic discourse, and affirm the centrality of the Spirit in building up the church. Their ecstatic prayer, speaking in tongues, is the response to the prophecy that God inspires in them, and is the expression of their common identity in Christ. In these women, the oracles they receive are not dissociated from their response, inspired by God, something which Paul, instead, attempts to do. The Pauline differentiation between prophecy and the gift of tongues does not seem to exist for them.

Paul also attempts to control the prophetic activity of these women, limiting the number of those who participate in the assembly, establishing turns, and introducing interpretation as a means of validating prophecy and the gift of speaking in tongues (1Cor 12:10.30; 14:5.13.27-28.39.40). Building up the community is concentrated, in the Pauline vision, in a reflexive voice and not, as the prophetesses of Corinth maintain, in the word that springs from the Spirit's inspiration. Going a step further in his discourse, in 1Cor 14:34-35, Paul attempts to silence the

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<sup>161</sup> "Paul's forcing a spiritual vote of confidence at exactly this point shows that the women's silencing is not a parenthetical matter but the turning point in his argument concerning the spiritual." ANTOINETTE CLARK WIRE, *The Corinthian Women*, 155.

women, either because he thinks they are not capable of placing limits on themselves, or because he is convinced feminine prophecy is strong enough to nullify his own perspective regarding the prophetic gift. That they were not easy to content seems evident from Paul's praise regarding their fidelity to their traditions (1Cor 11:2.16).<sup>162</sup>

Paul had previously challenged the Corinthian women to prophecy with their heads shaved (1Cor 11:6); in doing so he appealed to a central value in the Mediterranean culture: honor.<sup>163</sup> He challenges them to do something he knows they will not accept, which reveals to us something very important about these women: they consider themselves both respectable and respected by their group, and, in addition, wish to be recognized for what they do and how they do it.

In the light of Paul's theological reasoning, reinterpreting Genesis 1, the deepest convictions of these women are revealed: they are a new creation in Christ and the image of God "in the nakedness of their face"<sup>164</sup> (Gal 3:27-28; 1Cor 12:13; Col 3:10-11; cf. Gen 1:26-27; 5:1b-2); they express this in prayer and prophecy, without echoing the established gender distinctions.

Being the image of God the Creator leads them to manifest their rejection of all hierarchies, which favor men more than women. It leads them to reformulate the value of honor, considering that everything that hides their identity (recreated in Christ, in which there is no longer male nor female) is in itself shameful. In many cases it brings them to reject sexual relations ("consecrated in body and spirit," 1Cor 7:34),<sup>165</sup> an expression of masculine power, to dedicate themselves to prayer and prophecy (1Cor 7:1-40).<sup>166</sup> With their con-

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<sup>162</sup> On the other hand, from 1Cor 11:16 it seems that these women were accustomed to overcoming conflicts, and that they were able to perceive them simply as additional challenges.

<sup>163</sup> For this part, see the development of ANTOINETTE CLARK WIRE, *The Corinthian Women*, (cap. 6).

<sup>164</sup> An expression taken from Levinas, to indicate that these women knew themselves to be the image of God in their own right, and not as a result of being subordinated to a man. Dignity, Levinas says, "does not proceed from this or that prestigious institutional label, but from the nakedness of one's face. A face that receives its meaning from itself. A face that speaks to me and calls me to respond." E. LÉVINAS, *Le temps et l'autre* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1985<sup>2</sup>), 83.

<sup>165</sup> Cf. MARGARET Y. MACDONALD, "Women Holy in Body and Spirit: The Social Setting of 1 Corinthians 7," *New Testament Studies* 36 (1990) 161-181.

<sup>166</sup> Paul opposes the "fulfilled eschatology" that the community of Corinth seems to defend, and which many, especially women, would have wanted to express with a spiritual and celibate life.

crete manifestations (celibacy, prophecy...), these women are defying the established order, masculine prerogatives and the structure of the patriarchal house, a concern that can be felt in some moments of Paul's argument (cf. "they would say you were out of your minds, wouldn't they?" 1Cor 14:23), which shows a tension between maintaining one's identity and dialoguing with the surrounding society.<sup>167</sup>

The new creation in Christ, being the image of God, having annulled all differences, being full of the divine spirit and being channels of the spirit for others, are strong beliefs that root and strengthen their authority, which they manifest in this way. They have founded their authority on reflections and interpretations of tradition that are different from the one that Paul now sustains. Therefore, they neither reject tradition nor act without valid arguments; rather, they have arguments with which the apostle must necessarily enter into dialogue, though being of a different mind.

## Conclusion

The Pauline churches recognized in their midst the role of women in the spreading of the gospel (including being itinerant missionaries) and in the animation of the communities in mission. Many of them were wealthy, and opened their houses for the community to gather, pray and celebrate the Eucharist, the center of its life and activity. This fact favored their being recognized as leaders, thus developing a dynamic of functioning that empowered egalitarian and inclusive participation. Their word was listened to, and their gestures helped them to be recognized as an expression of the love of God and of the Kingdom they awaited, and for which they committed themselves. Their active and daring participation and involvement in the spreading and consolidating of the Christian movement is undeniable when one reads the Pauline letters. Phoebe, Prisca, Euodia, Syntyche, Apphia, Junias and many others, are inscribed in the long list of women who, with their voices, their actions, their teachings and their leadership, opened spaces of humanization in the Mediterranean societies of the first century. But,

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<sup>167</sup> "In 1Cor 14 he is supposing that the rituals of the gathering of the community were publicly visible and were without doubt submitted to evaluation by curious neighbours, in such a way that what was done in them was divulged through the circles of gossip or criticism." Cf. MARGARET Y. MACDONALD, *The Pauline Churches*, 117 (cf. 114).

at the same time, their praxis challenged some of the ruling values, and is an expression of the intra-ecclesial and social tensions that men and women had to contend with.

It is important to note that the Pauline letters make visible various real women, in all their prominence, and at the same time, show how they made up part of missionary teams that collaborated to bring the Good News of the Kingdom to the cities and towns of the Ancient Mediterranean. They, like the men, are missionaries, preachers and teachers, as has been reflected in the titles that they have been allotted: "sister," "apostle," "collaborator," "minister." The data regarding the women members of these missionary teams are more fragmentary than those referring to Paul's principal male collaborators. As a result, the reconstruction of the role these women held in the taking root and inculturation of the gospel requires the study of other references where the apostle speaks of the functions that his principal male collaborators and recognized community leaders carried out.

Some of these women defended their authority to prophecy, to communicate their spiritual experiences in the liturgical assembly with a different kind of discourse. The Corinthian women were conscious of being mediators of the divine gifts for the community, and defended before Paul a different kind of rationality, which was not annulled, if we listen to the testimony of the apocryphal Acts of Paul, which mentions two women prophets of Corinth: Theonoe and Myrte.

Upon centering our gaze on the women themselves, and not so much on Paul's attitude towards them, they have emerged with all their power of significance. They are women who believed in themselves, who recreated some social and religious practices, actively involving themselves in the mission and in the animation of the community, who collaborated among themselves and with other men, and who met with difficulties and tensions. By recognizing their own capacity to contribute to generating more inclusive interactions and situations, they favored the re-creation of the social and religious groups.

The histories of the women in the Pauline churches, the recuperation of their voices, the recognition of their contributions in building up the communities and in the expansion of Christianity, is a source of creativity, commitment and resistance, even today. Their memory, re-read, narrated and celebrated, possesses immense potential to awaken and foster paths of equality and interdependency in the society and in the Church.

## THE PAULINE GOSPEL BETWEEN JUDAIC TRADITION AND OPENNESS TO THE GENTILES\*

**Romano Penna**

At least a couple of times in Paul's letters we find that he speaks of his own gospel (cf. Rom 2:16; 16:25), but this happens in rather circumscribed, argumentative contexts, which at any rate do not explain in what this gospel consists.<sup>1</sup> So we must look elsewhere if we wish to find out precisely what is so particular about Paul's announcement. There are other passages that are much more significant. We find them when he refers to "the good news I proclaimed to you" (Gal 1:11), "the gospel I proclaim" (Gal 2:2), "our good news" (2Cor 4:3; 1Thess 1:5), not to mention the passages where the Apostle even offers a formal definition of the gospel itself (cf. Rom 1:16-17; 1Cor 1:18-25) or presents it as a demand from which he cannot excuse himself (cf. 1Cor 9:16:23). These contexts are much more instructive for us, since they illuminate the content of his gospel in greater depth.

In any case, it is only by considering the whole of his letters that we can grasp not so much the specific formula of Paul's preaching (as if a single line could suffice to characterize it), but rather the entire hermeneutic of his gospel, which is complex and articulate. One thing is certain: Paul stands out against the backdrop of early Christianity for his originality. Some time back the famous Albert Schweitzer wrote, "Paul vindicated for all time the rights of thought in Christianity.... Moreover, he is no mere revolutionary. He takes the faith of the Primitive-Christian community as his starting point:

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\* *Translation by Peter Waymel - Sr. Raymond Gerard, FSP.*

<sup>1</sup> In the first text, Paul refers to the "the day when, according to my gospel, God judges men's secrets through Christ Jesus," but the context is that of a judgement upon the Gentiles. In the second text, we are dealing with a doxology ("To Him Who is able to strengthen you according to my gospel and the proclamation of Jesus Christ ..."), which has nothing of an expository nature. We can then add the deutero-Pauline 2Tim 2:8 ("Remember Jesus Christ who was raised from the dead and was descended from David, in accordance with the good news I proclaimed"); but here, too, the mention of a gospel all his own sounds strange, both because the announcement of the resurrection of Jesus, as such, possesses nothing that is typically Pauline, being a common heritage of the pre-Pauline primitive Church, as well as because the Davidic descent of Jesus does not belong at all to his gospel, since the passing reference that he makes to it in Rom 1:3b is of a traditional nature (cf. the comments).

only he will not consent to halt where it comes to an end... to justify, for all periods, the confidence that faith has nothing to fear from thinking.... Paul is the patron saint of thought in Christianity!"<sup>2</sup> Perhaps without knowing it, with these words Albert Schweitzer reformulated, applied to Paul, what St. Augustine had already affirmed in a more general manner: "If the faith is not thought out, it is as if it did not exist."<sup>3</sup> In effect, Paul has rethought the faith, and has done so in terms that are anything but expected.

### 1. Nexuses and Contrast with the Primitive Church and with Judaism.

Paul's theology did not sprout up like a mushroom within early Christianity, nor did it remain confined in splendid isolation. On the one hand, Paul's debts to the primitive Church are undeniable, as can be seen from elements such as: his personal concern with maintaining good relations with those who had come to Christ before him (cf. Gal 2:2,9: "lest I should somehow be running or have run in vain .... They gave to Barnabas and me the right hand of fellowship"); a few explicit citations of a common creed (cf. 1Cor 15:3-5: "For I handed down to you as of primary importance what I, in turn, had received, namely that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas and then to the Twelve"), and the use of texts that literary criticism traces back with all probability to pre-existing Judeo-Christian spheres (cf. the Christological confession of Rom 1:3b-4a: "the good news about His Son Jesus Christ our Lord, who was born from the line of David according to the flesh and was designated Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness by his resurrection from the dead"; and the ample hymnal composition in Phil 2:6-11). If anything, it might be necessary to specify which church transmitted to Paul most of the formulation of the fundamental elements of the Christian faith: Jerusalem or Antioch.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>2</sup> A. SCHWEITZER, *The Mysticism of Paul the Apostle* (Macmillan, [1960]1998), 376-377.

<sup>3</sup> AUGUSTINE, *De praedestinatione sanctorum* 2,5: "Fides, si non cogitetur, nulla est" (= PL 44,963).

<sup>4</sup> The triangle formed by Jerusalem-Damascus-Antioch on the Orontes was decisive for him: since we know little about the Christian community at Damascus, scholars are divided in their preference of Jerusalem or Antioch.

One must then calculate the influence regarding Paul exercised by the Christian Seven of Jewish-Hellenistic origin, represented by Stephen and his preaching (at least according to Luke's narration in Acts 6-7, considering that Paul never speaks of this in his letters), whose critique of the Temple and Mosaic Law could have offered Paul a point of departure, both for his persecution of Christians as well as for his rethinking of the Christian message.<sup>5</sup> On the other hand, Paul had already had in his life a whole series of collaborators who shared his thought before his apostolic work (cf. men such as Barnabas, Timothy, Titus, Epaphras, Epaphroditus, Tychicus, Clement, Aquila; and women such as Lidia, Priscilla, Phoebe, Maria, Junias, Tryphaena, Trifosa, Perside, Julia). After this, there originated a later theological tradition, attested by the so-called deutero-Pauline letters (identified above), as well as by some later authors (such as Ignatius of Antioch, Justin, Irenaeus of Lyon).

What is more, it is necessary to recognize that in no way does Paul deny his Jewish roots. He certainly never declares himself a "Christian," in part because the term post-dates him (despite Acts 11:26). Not only does he declare himself "circumcised on the eighth day, from the people of Israel, the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew from Hebrews" (Phil 3:5), a "descendent of Abraham" (2Cor 11:22), but even goes so far as to wish himself "accursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my brothers, my kinsmen according to the flesh" (Rom 9:3), in whom he recognizes a whole series of distinctive traits: "They are Israelites, and to them belonged the adoption as sons, the glory of God's presence, the covenants, the giving of the Torah, the Temple worship, and the promises; theirs were the patriarchs, and from them came the Messiah according to the flesh" (Rom 9:4-5). Paul shares with them the same "Sacred Scrip-

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<sup>5</sup> The most representative studies in this matter come to differing conclusions. For M. HENGEL, "Zwischen Jesus und Paulus. Die 'Hellenisten', die 'Sieben' und Stephanus (Apg 6,1-15; 7,54-8,3)", in *ZTK* 72 (1975) 151-206, Stephen would be a bridge between Jesus and Paul. According to H. RAISANEN, "The 'Hellenists' - A Bridge between Jesus and Paul?" In *Id.*, *The Torah and Christ* (Helsinki: Raamattutalo, 1986), 242-306, he instead would be more linked to Jesus than to Paul. For his part, S. LÉGASSE, *Stephanos* (LD 147; Paris: Cerf, 1992) maintains that the presentation of Stephen in Acts is substantially Lukan, and thus redactional in nature; so too F. VOUGA, *Il cristianesimo dalle origini: scritti, protagonisti, dibattiti* (Turin: Claudiana, 2001), 47-52. More plausible from the historical point of view is the position of E. J. SCHNABEL, *Urchristliche Mission* (Wuppertal: Brockhaus, 2002), 643-653.

tures" (Rom 1:2), the same monotheistic faith of the *Shema* (cf. 1Cor 8:6), the same hope for the future "day of the Lord" (1Cor 5:5; 1Thess 5:2; etc.), the same basic conception of Israel as the chosen people, loved by God, who has called her "irrevocably" (Rom 11:29). He would thus undoubtedly have continued to consider himself a "Jew," though a Jew "in Christ."

The fact remains that Paul was misunderstood and strongly opposed. This was on the part of the Hebrews of Judaic faith, by whom he was scourged repeatedly ("Five times I received forty lashes less one from the Jews": 2Cor 11:24; cf. also 1Thess 1:14-16), while in other places he was also subjected to violence (cf. Acts 9:23 [in Damascus]; v. 29 [in Jerusalem]; 13:50 [in Pisidian Antioch]; 17:5 [in Thessalonica]; v. 13 [in Beroea]; 18:12-17 [in Corinth]; 21:27 [an attempt to stone him in Jerusalem]). But this opposition was also set in action, surprisingly, by those Jews who followed Jesus Christ, sharing the same Christian faith, but who however maintained a different hermeneutic of the Gospel. He ironically refers to them as "super apostles" (cf. 2Cor 11:4-5.22-26) or "false brothers who slipped in to spy on the freedom we have in Christ Jesus and wanted to enslave us." (Gal 2:4-5; cf. also Gal 2:11-15; 4:29; 5:11; Phil 3:2-3; Rom 16:17-18). These facts lead to the inevitable question: why was Paul so opposed? Here we run into the complex historical and theological problem of so-called 'Jewish-Christianity,' that is, the sector of early Christianity of Jewish provenance (of which James is an exponent, "the brother of the Lord" and author or reference of the letter of the same name), which accepted faith in Jesus Christ but combined this with a continued observance of the Torah or at least part of it.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Regarding this, cf. C. GIANOTTO, "Il movimento di Gesù tra la Pasqua e la missione di Paolo", in R. PENNA (ed.), *Le origini del cristianesimo. Una guida* (Roma: Carocci 2006<sup>2</sup>), 95-127. Accepting the distinction proposed some years back by R.E. BROWN and J.P. MEIER, *Antioch and Rome: New Testament Cradles of Ancient Christianity*, "Introduction" (Paulist Press, 1983), we can divide the Jews who adhered to Christ Jesus into four groups, ranging from a conservative to a liberal position: (1) those who insisted upon the full observance of the Mosaic law, including circumcision (cf. Acts 11:2; 15:5; Gal 2:4); (2) those who did not insist on circumcision, but required the pagans to observe some of the Jewish precepts (cf. Acts 15; Gal 2:11-14; Rev 2:14; these included the figures of James and perhaps Peter); (3) those who did not insist on circumcision or any other Jewish precept (Paul); (4) those who no longer saw any significance in the Jewish worship and feasts (perhaps the Seven of Acts 6:1-6; certainly the Gospel of John and the Letter to the Hebrews).

Here we arrive at the central point of the originality of Paul's thought. It is a matter that has many facets, which must be treated individually.

## 2. The Central Point.

One important question is whether Paul's theology has a center, and what that might be.<sup>7</sup> While the classic Lutheran thesis supports the centrality of justification by faith (R. Bultmann, E. Kasemann, H. Hübner), others within Protestantism point rather to the decisiveness of mystical union with Christ (W. Wrede, A. Schweitzer, E.P. Sanders); still others emphasize the value of the theology of the cross (U. Wilckens, J. Becker) or the apocalyptic dimension of the revelation of God in Christ (J.C. Beker), or the constant tension towards universal horizons (K. Stendahl, F. Watson, J.D.G. Dunn), or even emphasis on Christ himself as the objective, unleashing factor of all of Paul's Christian theology (L. Cerfaux, R. Schnackenburg). This last choice merits our attention, since for Paul, it is the discovery of the figure of Christ and his soteriological value that establishes the cause, the origin and the font of his multi-faceted discourse regarding faith, justification, mystical participation, the event cross/resurrection, and the universal destination of the gospel.<sup>8</sup>

Not that all these various chapters would have been a dead letter without adhesion to Christ. For instance, Paul certainly would have continued to speak of faith in God, even as a simple Jew, given the celebrations of the faith ('emunah) offered in various rabbinical writings.<sup>9</sup> This also goes for the idea of a revelation by God

<sup>7</sup> Recently, the question has been strongly re-proposed by D.A. CAMPBELL, *The Quest for Paul's Gospel. A Suggested Strategy*, (London-New York: T&T Clark, 2005), which however openly supports the position of E.P. Sanders. In second order, cf. also the studies of J. PLEVNIK, "The Center of Pauline Theology," *CBQ* 51 (1989) 461-478; V.P. FURNISH, "On Putting Paul in His Place," *JBL* 113 (1994) 3-17.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. also G.D. FEE, *Pauline Christology. An Exegetical-Theological Study* (Peabody, 2007).

<sup>9</sup> For example, the Babylonian Talmud even synthesizes 613 precepts that tradition attributes to Moses, into a single precept of faith: "R. Simlai [of the III cent.] explained: 613 mizvot were given to Moses, of which 365 are prohibitions, corresponding to the number of days in the solar year, and 248 positive precepts, corresponding to the members of the human body... David came and reduced them to eleven, as it is written (in Psalm 15): 'Lord, who may abide in your tent? Who may dwell on your holy hill? [1] Those who walk blamelessly, [2] and do what is right and [3] speak the truth from their heart; [4] who do not slander with their tongue,

in human history, especially that of Israel, as is expressed in several rabbinical texts, while still making a clear distinction between themselves and the pagans.<sup>10</sup> In addition, though the messianism of the times was a very complex phenomenon,<sup>11</sup> Paul would have at any rate continued to hope for and await the coming of the Messiah as the liberator of Israel, if not of all humanity,<sup>12</sup> even if, due to

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[5] and do no evil to their friends, [6] nor take up a reproach against their neighbours [7] in whose eyes the wicked are despised, [8] but who honour those who fear the Lord; [9] who stand by their oath even to their hurt; [10] who do not lend money at interest [11] and do not take a bribe against the innocent. Those who do these things shall never be moved' ... Isaiah came and reduced them to six, as it is written (in Isa 33:15): '[1] Those who walk righteously [2] and speak uprightly, [3] who despise the gain of oppression, [4] who wave away a bribe instead of accepting it, [5] who stop their ears from hearing of bloodshed [6] and shut their eyes from looking on evil.' Then Micah came and reduced them to three, as it is written (in Mi 6:8): 'He has told you, O mortal, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you [1] but to do justice, [2] and to love kindness, [3] and to walk humbly with your God?' Isaiah came again and reduced them to two, as it is said (in Isa 56:1): 'Thus says the Lord: [1] Maintain justice, [2] and do what is right'. Then Amos came and reduced them to one, as it is said (in Am 5:4): 'For thus says the Lord to the house of Israel: Seek me and live.' To this, R. Nahman objected: '(Does this not perhaps mean) Seek me by observing the entire Torah?' But Habakkuk came and reduced them to only one: 'the righteous live by their faith' (Hab 2:4b)" (*Makkot* 24a).

<sup>10</sup> The midrash *Genesis Rabbà* 52,5, presupposing a revelation even outside of Israel, expresses itself thus: "What difference is there between the prophets of Israel and the prophets of the pagans? One could make the comparison of a king, who found himself in a room with a friend, and a veil hung between them: when the king wished to speak to his friend, he lifted the veil; but when he spoke to the pagan prophets he did not lift the veil, but rather addressed them from behind the veil. One could also compare it to a king, who had a wife and a concubine: the former he would visit openly, the latter secretly. In like manner the Holy One, blessed may he be, spoke to the pagan prophets only with half-words, but to the prophets of Israel with whole words, with the language of love".

<sup>11</sup> See, for example, the plural used by J. NEUSNER, W.S. GREEN, E.S. FRERICHS (eds.), *Judaisms and Their Messiahs at the Turn of the Christian Era* (Cambridge, 1987). Cf. also J.J. COLLINS, *The Scepter and the Star. The Messiahs of the Dead Sea Scrolls and Other Ancient Literature* (New York-London: Doubleday, 1995); G.S. OEGEMA, *The Anointed and his People. Messianic Expectations from the Maccabees to Bar Kochba* (Sheffield: Academic Press, 1998).

<sup>12</sup> Cf. the apocryphal *Psalms of Solomon* 17,21-31 (I cent. B.C.): "Look, Lord, and raise up their king, son of David... and gird him with strength that he might break the unjust rulers... And he shall gather a holy people... and will not permit injustice to dwell among them any longer.... He will keep the pagan peoples under his yoke... so that nations will come from the ends of the earth to see his glory." However, their attempts to calculate the end times were reproved: "Accursed be those who calculate the end, since they only show that, when the end has arrived and

his Pharisaic formation, he would have attributed greater weight to the Torah as the criterion for individuating the true Jew.<sup>13</sup>

But Paul has worked a true and proper “reset” on all these categories, a reconfiguration, re-elaborating them and founding them in a new synthesis, so that each one of them, in the end, is characterized by a semantic different from its original one. If we wish to seek the cause of this innovation, we shall only find it in the perception of the explosive bearing of the figure and works of Jesus Christ. It is he—through his messianic identity conceived differently in relation to the Judaic premises—who redefines both faith in God as well as the idea of the history of salvation, etc. One intuits, therefore, that the novelty of Paul’s thought must absolutely be associated with his decisive experience on the way to Damascus.<sup>14</sup> To this must then be added the fact of a certain development of thought,<sup>15</sup> conditioned from time to time by the diverse situations of the churches to whom his letters (and the positions he takes) are addressed.

### 3. The Soteriological and Universalistic Hermeneutic of the Figure of Jesus the Christ.

So who, then, is Jesus Christ for Paul? The position of those who would see in the Apostle the true founder of Christianity as a religion of redemption, since he would have transformed Jesus into a Redeemer, inevitably clashes against two incontrovertible facts: the fact that even before him, Jesus was confessed as having “died for our sins” (1Cor 15:3: the quoting of a confession of faith previous to

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the Messiah is not here, he will no longer come; instead, wait for him, as it is said: ‘Even if he delays, wait for him’ (Hab 2:3)” (*Sanhedrin* 97b).

<sup>13</sup> The Babylonian Talmud states: “All of the end times have passed (and the Messiah has still not arrived); it depends solely on repentance and good works” (*Sanhedrin* 97b); and the Talmud specifies: “If Israel would repent even for a single day, immediately the son of David would come; if Israel would only observe as they should a single Sabbath, immediately the son of David would come” (*Taanit* 64a).

<sup>14</sup> Cf. C. DIETZFELBINGER, *Die Berufung des Paulus als Ursprung seiner Theologie* (WMANT 58; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 1985); S. KIM, *The Origin of Paul’s Gospel* (WUNT 2.4; Tübingen: Mohr, 1981); ID., *Paul and the New Perspective. Second Thoughts in the Origin of Paul’s Gospel* (Grand Rapids-Cambridge: Eerdmans, 2002).

<sup>15</sup> Cf. for example P. BENOIT, *L’évolution du langage apocalyptique dans le corpus paulinien*, in VV.AA., *Apocalypses et théologie de l’espérance*: ACFEB, Congrès de Toulouse 1975 (LD 95; Paris: Cerf, 1977) 299-335; U. SCHNELLE, *Wandlungen im paulinischen Denken* (SBB 137, Stuttgart: Katholisches Bibelwerk, 1989).

the Apostle), and the fact that he never defines Jesus as Redeemer<sup>16</sup> nor as Saviour,<sup>17</sup> while the abstract formulation, originating out of worship, regarding death “for our sins,” acquires in him a personalistic accent with the expressions “for all, for you, for us, for me, for the impious” (cf. respectively 2Cor 5:14f; 1Cor 11:24; 1Thess 5:10; Gal 2:20; Rom 5:6).

The Apostle shares with primitive Christianity (that precedes him) the scandalous faith of defining as Messiah (*Christòs*) and even Lord (*Kyrios*)<sup>18</sup> not a powerful and glorious sovereign, but an obscure Galilean, miserably condemned to the ignominy of the cross, and whose glory, paradoxically, is believed to derive solely from the fact of having given his life for the others and of having been, precisely “for this reason” (as stated in the pre-Pauline hymn of Phil 2:9: *dió*), unexpectedly resurrected from the dead by God himself. Therefore, at least to a large extent, the first Christians held that Jesus “died for our sins” (1Cor 15:3)<sup>19</sup> and that with his resurrection from the dead he has been “designated son of God in power” (Rom 1:4a). In addition, some forms of mission (Judeo-Christian, within Israel) must have existed even before Paul, although limited and above all exempt from clamorous polemical emphases regarding the Judaic matrix.<sup>20</sup> Therefore, Paul the Jew shares with other Jews (since such were all the first disciples of Jesus) a faith that regards

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<sup>16</sup> Of course, Paul employs the abstract noun “redemption” (*apolytrosis*), but only rarely (only in Rom 3:24; 8:23; 1 Cor 1:30), and moreover, knowing well that this term derives not from any cultic origin, but rather a profane/social one (related to the ransoming of slaves or prisoners).

<sup>17</sup> Paul employs the title of “savior” (*sotér*) only once (in Phil 3:20), and he does so not in reference to the historical or present work of Christ but rather limits it solely to his eschatological coming, as if to say that only at the end of times will he show himself as savior! Cf. F. Jung, *SOTER. Studien zur Rezeption eines hellenistischen Ehrentitels im Neuen Testament* (NA 39; Münster: Aschendorff 2002 [on Phil 3:20: pp. 309-316]).

<sup>18</sup> He never uses the Christological titles of Master or Prophet, which, however, must have been a part of the language of the disciples of the time!

<sup>19</sup> On the existence of disciples of Jesus who, however, did not understand his death as redemptive, cf. R. PENNA, “Cristologia senza morte redentrice: un filone di pensiero del giudeocristianesimo più antico,” in ID., *Vangelo e inculturazione. Studi sul rapporto tra rivelazione e cultura nel Nuovo Testamento*, “Studi sulla Bibbia e il suo Ambiente” 6 (Cinisello Balsamo: San Paolo, 2001), 680-704.

<sup>20</sup> Cf. the detailed exposition by E.J. SCHNABEL, *Urchristliche Mission* (Wuppertal, 2003). 654-883; and F. VOUGA, *Il cristianesimo delle origini*, 36-52 and 88-95; J. GNILKA, *I primi cristiani. Origini e inizio della chiesa* (Brescia: Paideia, 2000), 322-335.

another Jew (though certainly an atypical one), who was extremely human, culturally belonging to a less-than-sparkling Palestinian region of the times. Of course, one ought to be amazed at the fact, from a historiographic point of view, that in the course of few years, things of this type could have been said of a certain Galilean named Jesus (which, by the way, was a very common name in the Judaic environment). This in itself is remarkable.

But going even further, Paul, on his own, retains that this Jesus (Christ and Lord) is the beginning of a new season in history and a new anthropological identity of universalistic implications, eventually comparable not to a king, like David, or a prophet, like Isaiah, or even to a great legislator, such as Moses, but to only one who precedes them all, and who, moreover, does not even belong to the historical people of Israel: that is, [he is comparable] to Adam, the progenitor of all humanity (cf. 1Cor 15:21-22; 45-47; Rom 5:12-21).<sup>21</sup> Thus, with the Christ, a "new creation" takes place in the believer (2Cor 5:17; Gal 6:15). To be sure, Paul does not have a Gnostic understanding of Jesus, as if he were an angelic messenger who had nothing in common with this fallen world and the lights and shades of history; on the contrary, he knows well that Jesus is the descendent of Abraham (cf. Gal 3:16), because it was precisely the Israelite people that produced "the Christ according to the flesh" (Rom 9:4).

But the horizons of this atypical Jew named Paul go much further than Israel: he is interested in man as such, every man, regardless of any kind of distinction, and much less, any cultural or religious contraposition. He confesses it to the Romans: "I am obligated to both Greeks and barbarians, to the wise and foolish alike" (1:14); and he admits to the Corinthians: "I became a Jew for the Jews in order to win the Jews over; for those under the Torah I acted as if I were subject to the Torah ... For those outside the Torah I became as one outside the Torah... I do all this for the sake of the good news, so that I will be able to share in it" (1Cor 9:20-23). What is more, if he has any preference, it is for the Gentiles, that is, for those who were traditionally cut off from Israel's consciousness as a result of their own special election: "Now I am speaking to you Gentiles. As long as I am an apostle to the Gentiles, I will go on

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<sup>21</sup> Cf. G.D. FEE, *Pauline Christology*, 512-529.

praising my ministry in the hope of somehow arousing the jealousy of my kinsmen and saving some of them" (Rom 11:13-14). Regarding this last phrase, it would be out of place to read into it even a trace of anti-Judaism, because immediately afterwards Paul defines as "holy the first fruits and holy the root," on which the Gentiles converted to the Christian faith have been founded, and defines as "good" the olive tree onto which "against nature" the "wild" olive shoot of these same Gentile believers have been grafted (Rom 11:16-24).<sup>22</sup> In these declarations, we do not observe the crazed fervor of a proselytism at any cost, perhaps for its own sake; rather, we see Paul's enthusiasm as one who "lives for Christ" (Phil 1:21), because he has been "grasped" by him (Phil 3:12); he is "controlled by Christ's love" (2Cor 5:14), and he would feel himself a traitor if he did not announce him to the four winds (cf. 1Cor 9:16-17; Phil 1:18). Nor can one speak of fanaticism, which, if anything, characterizes the pre-Christian phase of Paul's life; as a Christian, instead, he exhorts believers "not to have an exaggerated opinion of your own wisdom," not to "pay back evil with evil," to "live in peace with everyone" (Rom 12:16-18), to "test everything and keep what is good" (1Thess 5:21); in a word, to think big: "whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is gracious, if there is any excellence or anything praiseworthy, think of these things" (Phil 4:8).

But the question presents itself again: what, then, does Jesus Christ mean for Paul? In short, and on a superficial level, we could say that in his eyes Christ represents the overcoming of the inequality between Jews and Gentiles not in the sense of eliminating Israel's distinctiveness, but in the sense of elevating the latter to the level of the former. All of Paul's missionary activity (which, in all likelihood, at least in the form known to us, would not have taken place without his adhesion to the Christian faith<sup>23</sup>) consisted pre-

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<sup>22</sup> See further developments in the monograph by T.L. DONALDSON, *Paul and the Gentiles. Remapping the Apostle's Convictional World* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press 1997). See also the exegesis of the Pauline passage in R. PENNA, *Lettera ai Romani - II. Rm 6-11, "Scritti delle Origini Cristiane" 6/11* (Bologna: Dehoniane, 2006; 2007<sup>2</sup>), 356-370.

<sup>23</sup> In all probability, he would have remained within the land of Israel (or would he have returned to Tarsus?), perhaps as the teacher of an 'orthodox' life, in conformity with the rules of the Torah. He is probably referring to this in Gal 5:11, where he admits having 'preached circumcision' when he was not yet a Christian.

cisely in this: eliminating the distance separating Gentiles from Jews, still held to be the people of God's covenant, for the purpose of including also the 'others,' the 'different,' the 'far off.'<sup>24</sup> But the inspiring principle of his commitment was no longer just the desire to procure 'proselytes' for Israel from among the Gentiles, in order to obtain their equality on the basis of observance of the same divine Torah.<sup>25</sup> It was rather the living person of Jesus Christ, inasmuch as he was considered the mediator not of a revelation of a new law imposed upon man, but rather of a grace, a divine favor, which included the Gentiles, regardless of any legalistic or moral criteria.<sup>26</sup> Paul the Jew could even have considered the Mosaic law a grace given by God to Israel (cf. Dt 4:7-8, 37-40; Bar 3:27-4:4), or at any rate something that followed from the fundamental favor of liberating them from Egypt, on which the legitimacy of the Law itself was based.<sup>27</sup> But Paul the Christian believed that with Christ's whole offering of his life and with his resurrection, the grace of God no longer passed through commandments and precepts, but far surpassed the idea of liberation (national and political) connected with the ancient exodus. Moreover, if this liberation was the foun-

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A possible model of activity towards the Gentiles could have been given by the merchant Eliezar, from the time of Claudius, who only occasionally taught the Torah to the pagan Izates, king of Adiabene (cf. FL. JOSEPHUS, *Ant.* 20,43).

<sup>24</sup> "The quintessential aspect of Paul's gospel lies in the acceptance of the 'others,' in his case, the Gentiles, just as they are... There is here a profound message for the Christians of today, who face the challenge of redefining their identity before 'others' in this ever more pluralistic and postmodern global village" (E. CHUN PARK, *Either Jew or Gentile. Paul's Unfolding Theology of Inclusivity* [Louisville-London: Westminster J.K. Press, 2003], IX). In fact, Paul is a Jew who has explained that even we pagans can consider ourselves sons of God, giving us the legitimacy to say so (cf. K. STENDAHL, *Paolo tra ebrei e pagani* [Torino: Claudiana, 1995], 147s).

<sup>25</sup> On this argument, see the entry under "Proselyte" by P.F. STUHRENBURG, in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, (vol. 5.; New York-London: Doubleday 1992), 503-505; and for a wider treatment of the issue, B. WANDER, *Timorati di Dio e simpatizzanti. Studio sull'ambiente pagano delle sinagoghe della diaspora* (SBA 8; Cinisello Balsamo: San Paolo, 2002).

<sup>26</sup> Cf. R. PENNA, "Resto d'Israele e innesto dei Gentili. La fede cristologica come modificazione del concetto di alleanza in Rm 9-11," in J.E. AGUILAR CHIU, F. MANZI, F. URSO, C. ZESATI ESRADA (eds.), "Il Verbo di Dio è vivo". *Studi sul Nuovo Testamento in onore del Cardinale Albert Vanhoye, S.I* (Roma: Analecta Biblica 165, 2007), 277-299.

<sup>27</sup> For a more in-depth treatment of this aspect, see E.P. SANDERS, *Paolo e il giudaismo palestinese. Studio comparativo su modelli di religione* (Brescia: Paideia, 1986) 133-136 (on rabbinism), 382ff (on Qumran). Original English title, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism: a Comparison of Patterns of Religion*, (Fortress Press, 1977).

dition of the Torah, then with the death/resurrection of Christ, the foundation has changed. And since the foundation has been substituted, the Law, too, must be substituted. According to Paul, man can now be considered “just” (that is, holy) in the eyes of God, no longer on the basis of his morally upright actions in conformity with the decrees of the law (its “works”), but on the basis of a simple acceptance by faith of that event of death and resurrection, since it is valid for all men and for every single person. And if the Mosaic law is no longer the distinctive criterion of God’s revelation and of man’s religious identity, then access to God (to the God of Israel!) is no longer reserved to Jews alone, but is open to all Gentiles. And so, Paul’s battle becomes one for inclusivism.

#### 4. Christ and/or the Torah.

To summarize, Paul’s gospel and missionary activity can only be explained on the basis of precise premises, both Christological and Judaic. The Christological premises are the most decisive: they consist not so much in the duty of fulfilling a missionary command of the earthly Jesus, considering that in his letters Paul never cites a single one of Jesus’ words regarding the need for the earthly mission,<sup>28</sup> but rather in the fact of having become aware of the overwhelming bearing of faith in Christ crucified/risen, which in a single leap overcomes every separation and places every man on equal footing. The Judaic premises are of various natures:<sup>29</sup> though the Judaism of the time did not attest to the praxis of any official missionary propaganda,<sup>30</sup> it is undeniable they practiced in various

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<sup>28</sup> And to think that the Proto-Christian tradition has preserved many words about the sending into mission, attributed to Jesus: cf. Mt 10:5-16; 28:19; Mk 13:10; 14:9; 16:15; Jn 17:18; 20:21; Acts 1:8.

<sup>29</sup> To be sure, it is also necessary to take into account the premises offered by the ample Greco-Roman world: cf. R. PENNA, “Aperture Universalistiche in Paolo e nella cultura del suo tempo”, in ID., *Vangelo e inculturazione*, 323-364.

<sup>30</sup> The studies on this issue are numerous and represent differing positions: while some are strongly negative (cf. S. MCKNIGHT, *A Light Among the Gentiles. Jewish Missionary Activity in the Second Temple Period* [Minneapolis: Fortress Press 1991]; E. WILL & C. ORRIEUX, “Prosélytisme juif?” *Histoire d’une erreur*, [Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1992]; M. GOODMAN, *Mission and Conversion. Proselytizing in the Religious History of the Roman Empire* [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994]; E.J. SCHNABEL, *Urchristliche Mission*, 94-175), others, instead sustain more subtle positions (cf. L.H. FELDMAN, *Jew and Gentile in the Ancient World: Attitudes and Interactions from Alexander to Justinian*, [Princeton: University Press, 1993], above all pp. 288-341; R.

forms their duty of being “a priestly people and a holy nation... in the midst of all peoples” (Ex 19:5-6), not only with the witness of a rigorous ethic, but also with prayers for the Gentiles, with their liturgical life and an explicit verbal apologetic.<sup>31</sup> The same fundamental question regarding the “Gentiles” and their lot cannot be explained, except on the basis of a perspective and pre-comprehension of Judaism. Now, Paul moves along two key lines of thought regarding Israel. In consonance with them, he continues to conceive of the proper status of this people and the decisiveness of their historical-salvific role. In addition, he expresses himself in the canons of his culture, both for what regards the anti-idolatrous polemic proper to Judaism of the Hellenistic-imperial time, and especially that of the Egyptian-Alexandrian Diaspora (cf. Rom 1:18-32; 1Thess 1:9),<sup>32</sup> as well as for what regards the same fundamental concept of “justice,” that is, of what forms the basis of the status of God’s acceptance of man, though the Christian Paul puts faith in opposition to works.<sup>33</sup> In dissonance with it, he commits himself to a project of overcoming the separation from the Gentiles, which Israel instead jealously nourished to safeguard her own national and religious identity.<sup>34</sup>

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GOLDENBERG, *The Nations that Know Thee Not. Ancient Jewish Attitudes toward Other Religions* [Sheffield: Academic Press, 1997]; W. LIEBESCHUETZ, “L’influenza del giudaismo sui non-ebrei nel periodo imperiale”, in A. LEWIN, ed., *Gli ebrei nell’impero romano*, [Firenze: Giuntina, 2001] 143-159).

<sup>31</sup> Regarding this, see the interesting conclusions of J.P. Dickson, *Mission-Commitment in Ancient Judaism and in the Pauline Communities*, (WUNT 2.159; Tübingen: Mohr, 2003. Eloquent is the passage from PHILO OF ALEXANDRIA, *Spec.leg.* 1,320-323, where the Jews are invited not to behave like the initiates of the Greek mystery cults, closed in the dark, but to benefit all men “in the midst of the public square” (dià mēsēs agoràs!)

<sup>32</sup> See R. GOLDENBERG, *The Nations that Know Thee Not*, 51-62; Paul shares concepts common to both the Book of Wisdom and Philo of Alexandria.

<sup>33</sup> Cf. M.A. SEIFRID, *Justification by Faith: The Origin and Development of a Central Pauline Theme* (NT Suppl. 68; Leiden: Brill, 1992), above all pp. 78-135; D.A. CARSON-P.T. O’BRIEN-M.A. SEIFRID (eds.), *Justification and Variegated Nomism I. The Complexities of Second Temple Judaism* (WUNT 2.140; Tübingen: Mohr, 2001).

<sup>34</sup> An eloquent symbol of this was the Greek inscription placed in Jerusalem in the temple area between the Court of the Gentiles and the inner courts, reserved to the Israelites, where one could read: “Let no foreigner penetrate beyond the balustrade and wall surrounding the *hieròn*; whomever is caught in transgression of this shall be the cause of his own death that will result from it” (OGIS 598); see also the *Letter of Aristeia* 139 (II century B.C.): Moses “has surrounded us with an impassable trench and with a wall of iron, so that we might not mingle in the least with other peoples.”

Thus, Paul cultivates two apparently irreconcilable attitudes, constituting the fundamental paradox of his thought. On the one hand, he continues to consider himself personally a part of Israel, even enduring various oppositions coming from them and remaining firm in the typical Jewish faith in the eschatological salvation of that people.<sup>35</sup> On the other hand, he maintains that it is now Christ, and not the Torah, that configures the new community of the chosen people of God. In this, he distinguishes himself from other sectors of early Christianity, which, for the most part, above all in Jerusalem, held that Christ and the Torah were mutually compatible, as James openly objected (cf. Acts 21:20: "Brother, you can see how many thousands of believers there are among the Jews, and all of them are zealous followers of the Torah"); instead he considered the two poles substantially antithetical, and thus irreconcilable.

For Paul too, there would have been no tension if with Easter Sunday the last times had imposed themselves definitively: with the inauguration of the *éschaton* the Torah would have normally completed its role, since the function of the Torah and of the Messiah would have been consistent and complementary. But the Christian announcement proclaimed a Messiah who appeared before the eschatological manifestation of the kingdom of God, thus offering justification while history still went on, and thus a salvation of man depending essentially on the acceptance of that Christ and on belonging to the community that confessed him Messiah and Lord.<sup>36</sup> From these premises, Paul drew the most logical (or at least the clearest) consequences, since for him what matters is the principle "For Christ brings the Torah to an end" (Rom 10:4), and therefore: "Therefore, anyone who is in Christ is a new creation—the old has passed away, behold the new has come!" (2Cor 5:17). And so, while considering himself a Jew in Christ, he ends up alienating himself from the sympathies of the larger part of his own people, both those who did not accept the identification of Jesus as the Christ, as well as those who had welcomed and proclaimed

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<sup>35</sup> Always touching are the words spoken by him to the Jews of Rome, when he arrived there as a prisoner: "It is for the sake of the hope of Israel that I am wearing these chains" (Acts 28:20)!

<sup>36</sup> Cf. T.L. DONALDSON, *Paul and the Gentiles*, 290-292; and S.K. DAVIS, *The Antithesis of the Ages. Paul's Reconfiguration of Torah* (CBQ MS 33; Washington: The Catholic Biblical Association of America, 2002).

such an identification.<sup>37</sup> The fact that, despite it all, he did not back down from his own convictions, not only indicates the strength of the impact that the figure of Jesus Christ exercised over his soul (cf. Gal 1:8: "But even if we or an angel from Heaven should proclaim a gospel contrary to the good news we proclaimed to you, let them be accursed!"), but also represents the confirmation that a new hermeneutic of the Christian announcement had begun, whose fascination has not yet ceased, and which we hope will resist every devotional (or worse, moralistic) domestication<sup>38</sup>.

## 5. The Community of Believers in Christ.

The originality of Paul's position in matters of Christology and soteriology, and as a result the reconsideration of relationship with the faith of the people of Israel, involved a reconfiguration of how to understand the community of believers in Christ. Paul never called them disciples or Christians, but only "brothers" (112 times in his authentic letters) and at the most, "saints" (25 times): two terms that highlight, respectively, the familial dimension of the new community (regarding its internal relations) and the sacred dimen-

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<sup>37</sup> On Israel's problematic and dialectical relationship with Paul, cf. S. MEISSNER, *Die Heimholung des Ketzers. Studien zur jüdischen Auseinandersetzung mit Paulus* (WUNT 2.87, Tübingen: Mohr, 1996).

<sup>38</sup> 38 Cf. J.D.G. DUNN, *The Cambridge Companion to St Paul* (Cambridge University Press, 2003), 1-15. We recall here that Dunn has also been the initiator of a so-called *New Perspective* on Paul (cf. "The New Perspective on Paul", *BJRL*, 65 [1983] 103-118), according to which the Apostle would be interested more in announcing the Gospel to the Gentiles than in minimizing the Torah regarding justification. In agreement with this line of thought we find, for example, F. WATSON, *Paul, Judaism and the Gentiles* (SNTS MS 56, Cambridge, 1986), [though this Author has openly changed his mind regarding this position, on the Internet site: <<http://www.abdn.ac.uk/divinity/articles/watsonart.hti>>]; H. RAISANEN, "Paul's Conversion and the Development of His View of the Law", *NTS* 33 (1987) 404-419; e K.L. YINGER, *Paul, Judaism, and Judgment According to Deeds* (SNTS MS 105; Cambridge, 1999), 169-175. Against this position, instead, we find more rightly P. STUHLMACHER, *A Challenge to the New Perspective: Revisiting Paul's Doctrine of Justification* (Downers Grove, 2001 [with a complementary section from D.A. HAGNER, "Paul and Judaism: Testing the New Perspective"] 75-105); and above all S. KIM, *Paul and the New Perspective: Second Thoughts on the Origin of Paul's Gospel*, (Grand Rapids-Cambridge: Eademans 2002). An equilibrium between the two hermeneutics would be more salutary; cf. in this regard S. WESTERHOLM, *Perspectives Old and New on Paul. The "Lutheran" Paul and His Critics* (Grand Rapids-Cambridge: Eerdmans 2005); and M. BACHMANN, Hg, *Lutherische und Neue Paulusperspektive. Beiträge zu einem Schlüsselproblem der gegenwärtigen exegetischen Diskussion* (WUNT 182: Tübingen, 2005).

sion of its distinction from the world (regarding its relations with the outside).<sup>39</sup> This last designation, in all truth, implies also a preliminary dimension that is not only religious sociology, but even more, personal ontology. It is precisely the concept of sanctity, in fact, that distinguishes the Christian from every other kind of moral concept. And it is surprising to note how, writing to the Corinthians and despite their not being, according to our canons, exactly 'saint material' (cf. their internal divisions, the practice of prostitution, their matrimonial irregularities, the conflicts between weak and strong consciences, the tensions among the various charisms), he refers to them at any rate as "saints according to their calling" (1Cor 1:2; 6:11), or simply as "saints" (2Cor 1:1). The reason is that the baptized do not give themselves their own holiness, building it with their own moral efforts, but are "sanctified" (1Cor 1:2) by the grace of God. That is, to use the Apostle's language, they are justified people, forgiven, redeemed, ransomed, liberated, reconciled, by a purely divine gift, which, precisely because it is a gift, does not depend on any type of moral condition (cf. Rom 3:21-31). It is only on this basis that we can understand his insistent exhortations to holiness (cf. 1Cor 6:9-10; Phil 2:14-15; 1Thess 4:3-8), or at any rate the solicitations to lead a life that is morally pure: these exhortations tend to exhort the addressees not to 'make themselves holy,' but to maintain a morally irreprehensible life in consonance and homogenous with that dimension of holiness already present in them by the pure grace of God.

In light of this, we can also understand the original definition of the Christian community as the "temple of God" (1Cor 3:16f; 2Cor 6:16; cf. Rom 8:9). Among the authors of Christian origins, Paul is the only one to use this image, of which there are very partial echoes in other texts,<sup>40</sup> especially in the manuscripts of Qumran.<sup>41</sup>

<sup>39</sup> Other appellations are: descendents of Abraham, heirs, elect, sons of God.

<sup>40</sup> Cf. 1Pet 2:4-5, where it speaks of Christians built up "like living stones" on the cornerstone, which is Christ.

<sup>41</sup> There, one finds the enigmatic expression *miqdash 'adam* (4QFlor 1,6), which has been interpreted in two different ways: either in the personalistic and collective sense of "sanctuary of man", and thus as an allusion to the sect itself, or in a sense more pertaining to worship, of "sanctuary of Adam", seeing in this almost a reference to the eschatological temple as purified and restored to the state of innocence of the first man. But in 1QS 8,5 it is the community Council that is called *bêt qôdesh l' yisrael* (lit. "holy house for Israel"), that has been able to be translated ex-

Overcoming every pagan idea of religiosity linked to a physical-architectural space, exempt from negative forces and thus privileged for the encounter with the divine, the metaphor recognizes in the church, as a human group of believers, the same characteristics of purity that procure immediate union with God. The image is inserted into that more ample one, of Israelite origin and thus less original, of the people of God, as can clearly be deduced from their association in this passage: "We are the Temple of the Living God; as God has said, 'I will dwell and move about among them, I will be their God, and they shall be My people'" (2Cor 6:16, with a citation from Lev 26:11).<sup>42</sup> Even more original is the definition, solely Pauline, of the Church as "body of Christ" (cf. 1Cor 12:28): this is understood best not as an association of persons who, united, form a social body belonging to Christ-head, but as a 'mystical' enlargement of the individual body of Christ himself, therefore not according to a relationship of body-head but of a body co-extensive with Christ himself, so the body of Christ pre-exists the Church, which does not form it but is simply inserted or incorporated into it.<sup>43</sup> A semantic shift instead will be seen in the later deutero-Pauline letters to the Colossians and the Ephesians.<sup>44</sup>

## 6. Projection Towards the Future.

There is one last question to address: the expectation of the imminent end of the world (with the last *parusia* of Christ). It is also true that this unites all the authentic letters of Paul, from the first (cf. 1Thess 4:15: "we who are alive, who remain until the Lord's

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explicitly as "temple for Israel" (C. MARTONE, *La Regola della Comunità. Edizione critica* [Torino: Quaderni di Henoch 8, 1995], 128), so much that in this other manuscript, it is the community itself that is defined as a "dwelling of the Holy of holies" (8,8), and that its function is a priestly one "of expiation in favor of the country" (8,6). In all these texts, however, the point of view is always determined by the reference to the sacred space of the Temple of Jerusalem and to its expiatory function.

<sup>42</sup> For a detailed exposition on the Pauline concept of people of God with respect to other more decisive ecclesiological metaphors, cf. J.-N. ALETTI, "Le statut de l'Eglise dans les lettres pauliniennes. Réflexions sur quelques paradoxes", *Biblica* 83 (2002) 153-174.

<sup>43</sup> For this interpretation, cf. R. PENNA, "La chiesa come corpo di Cristo secondo S. Paolo: metafora sociale-comunitaria o individuale-cristologica?", *Lateranum* 68 (2002) 243-257.

<sup>44</sup> Cf. R. Penna, "Divenire e natura della Chiesa. Da Paolo alla Tradizione paolina", *Annali di Studi Religiosi* [Trento] 8 (2007) 343-355.

coming”) to the last (cf. Rom 13:11: “now your salvation is nearer than when you first believed”).<sup>45</sup> However, contrary to Jewish eschatology, that was and is oriented exclusively towards the future, Christian eschatology surprisingly professes the paradox that the “eschaton” has already begun: not that this new knowledge came to be affirmed only with Paul; it was probably already clear in Jesus of Nazareth (cf. Mk 1:15: “The time is fulfilled”), and must have also belonged to the foundations of the faith of the post-Easter Church (cf. Acts 2:17: “So it shall be in the last days, says God, I will pour out My Spirit on all flesh,” referring to Pentecost, which had already taken place). But though there is no doubt that these two pre-Pauline texts report for us the substance of the matter, they are later redactions, which are certainly laden with a Christian faith that was strongly expressed in a later period.<sup>46</sup> Instead, in the Pauline letters, we have the possibility of grasping this faith in its most ancient and authentic terms, almost “*in statu nascendi*,” as we can attest in two different epistolary passages: in Gal 4:4 (“But *when the fullness of time had come*, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the Torah, to redeem those who were under the Torah”) and in 1Cor 10:11 (where, elaborating on the moral life of Christians in relation to the negative experiences of the Hebrews in the desert of the exodus, the Apostle expresses himself in these terms: “These things happened to them as warnings, but they were written down for our instruction, *for the end of the ages has come to us*”).

Some scholars rightly note the difference in thought between Greek philosophy and St. Paul. While one is interested in the immortality of the soul, the other is more concerned with the immortality of the body.<sup>47</sup> Moreover, it is necessary to point out that the

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<sup>45</sup> However, one will notice that Paul speaks very soberly on this matter: in fact, he neither seeks to determine the time nor to calculate how many might possibly be still alive when this happens; his are simple affirmations on the fact that it will take place and that this will occur relatively soon.

<sup>46</sup> This is most evident in the Fourth Gospel, for instance where Jesus says: “anyone who hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life, and does not come under judgement, but has (already) passed from death to life” (Jn 5:24). But one could well say that the theme runs throughout the whole NT, as can be seen, besides in the passage already cited, also in Eph 1:10; Heb 1:1-2; 9:26; 1Pet 1:20; Rev 4:21b; 5:5.

<sup>47</sup> Cf. J.-B. MATAND BULEMBAT, *Noyau et enjeux de l'eschatologie paulinienne: De l'apocalyptique juive et de l'eschatologie hellénistique dans quelques argumentations de l'apotre Paul* (BZNV 84; Berlin-New York: De Gruyter, 1997), 281 note 64.

idea of a tension in history, towards its own meta-historical fulfilment, is more of a Biblical matrix and certainly not Greek.<sup>48</sup> If, in the Christian realm, there was a slowing down in the expectation of the end, this can be seen most clearly in the transition from the authentic letters of Paul to those of the later Pauline tradition. Thus, in 2Thess 2:2, we read an explicit warning “not to be too quickly shaken in mind or disturbed...” to the effect “that the day of the Lord has come,” while in Col-Eph the prevailing interest is for the current Lordship of Christ, on both a cosmic and ecclesial level, and in the later Pastoral letters, the main focus of attention moves to internal ecclesiastical organization.

I do not think we can *document* with sufficient certainty a similar shift only within the authentic letters of the Apostle. Instead, what is clear is that in Paul, the two moments of “being with Christ,” immediately after death (cf. Phil 1:21) and at the end of time (cf. 1Thess 4:17), coexist, without any apparent contrast. Evidently, he is not concerned with offering a systematic presentation of his thought on this matter. The only decisive factor comes from a reference to Christ: the Christian’s existence has its sole reason for being in Him, and Paul is certain that it will not fail. In Rom 8:38-39, in fact, he affirms decisively that “I am convinced that neither death nor life... will be able to separate us from God’s love in Christ Jesus our Lord,” analogous to what he later declares in 14:8: “If we live, we live to the Lord, and if we die, we die to the Lord.”

Furthermore, Paul’s position must be judged within the wider movement of thought that characterized Christian eschatology of the I and II centuries. The thesis (following the old theories by A. Loisy and A. von Harnack) of a change in perspective, and thus of an ever greater Hellenisation, conflicts with the testimony of many literary texts. In fact, we can verify that interest in futuristic eschatology and even in apocalyptic language, at least in some sectors of the Church, is even greater after Paul. This is proved sufficiently by John’s Apocalypse, the Letters of Peter and of Jude, and the successive apocryphal Christian apocalypses (of Paul, of Peter, not to mention the Shepherd of Hermes); even the post-Pauline Letter of

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<sup>48</sup> Cf. the classic study by M. ELIADE, *The Myth of the Eternal Return: Cosmos and History* ([trans. Willard R. Trask] Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1971); and also R. NIEBUHR, *Faith and History. A Comparison of Christian and Modern Views of History* (Read Books, 2007).

James states that “the *parusia* of the Lord is near” (Jam 5:8). This phenomenon parallels the renewed interest in the apocalypse in the Jewish field between the end of the I and the beginning of the II century (as is testified by the apocryphal 4 Ezra, 2 Baruch, and Apocalypse of Abraham). Thus, any judgment regarding a change of interest should be much more circumspect than often happens.<sup>49</sup>

*In conclusion*, we must recognize that a renewed approach to Paul on the part of the Church today can only be beneficial. He, in fact, could help the Church to refresh the characteristic traits of her identity, and to represent herself to the world with new incisiveness.

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<sup>49</sup> For ulterior developments of this theme, cf. R. PENNA, “Aspetti originali dell’escatologia paolina: tradizione e novità”, in ID., *Vangelo e inculturazione*, 581-611; ID., “Pienezza del tempo e teologia della storia”, in *Ibid.*, 729-745.

## PAUL BETWEEN JERUSALEM AND ROME A POLITICAL UNDERSTANDING OF HIS APOSTOLATE

Neil Elliott

I am very grateful to the Society for the honor of the invitation to participate in this seminar, and especially to the Society of Saint Paul for their generous assistance in making my participation possible.

It is a paradoxical honor to gather with you in the city where Paul met his death. Not in Jerusalem, where he hoped his messianic vision of Israel and the nations united in worship would come to reality, but in the capital of a great Empire that executed him after the failure of his vision in Jerusalem, surrounded now by the monuments of that Empire. It is a city where the apostle's bones have been treasured by the Church through the centuries and recently brought again nearer the light. But of course, the apostle's legacy extends far beyond Rome, as this remarkably international gathering attests. I am a priest in a church that bears the apostle's name, in a city that bears his name, in a diocese founded as a mission diocese when Minnesota was a frontier territory of the United States. Part of my work at St. Paul's Episcopal Church has been to ask the congregation again and again to consider what their founding as a church named "St. Paul's" might mean for their vocation.

"And so we came to Rome."<sup>1</sup> I confess I have been as eager to visit the Basilica of St. Paul as any pilgrim, but your invitation has drawn me not so much because we gather near the apostle's bones, as because his spirit, his mind, his apostolate, which are so important for the charism of this Society, have been important in my own formation as well as a member of the church. If a number of contemporary philosophers can declare themselves to be Paulinists even though they are not Christians,<sup>2</sup> I declare that I *am* a Christian *because* of Paul and *as* a Paulinist.

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<sup>1</sup> Acts 28:14.

<sup>2</sup> See ALAIN BADIOU, *Saint Paul: The Foundation of Universalism* (trans. Ray Brassier; Cultural Memory in the Present [Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003]); JACOB TAUBES, *The Political Theology of Paul* (trans. Dana Hollander; Cultural Mem-

I have also been formed *as a scholar* by a contemporary community of scholars, employing diverse methods—historical-critical, social-scientific, postcolonial, and others—to explore the apostle’s thought, his history, his experience, the communities around him, and—I would argue, most importantly—his imagination. One result of that formation is the recognition that while Paul may be important to our Christianity, Christianity as we know it was not important to Paul, indeed did not exist. The company of Paul’s scholarly interpreters now includes a number of world-renowned Jewish scholars, and many of their insights into Paul *as a Jew* are compelling. The weight of those insights suggests that it is anachronistic to read Paul as a Christian theologian.<sup>3</sup> Rather Paul provides us one expression of the range of Judean life and thought in the first century C.E., and more specifically, I argue, one expression of the range of Judean responses to the Roman Empire.<sup>4</sup> I do not mean to dismiss the theological interest in Paul, and as a Christian I share it and consider it vitally important. But as a historian I believe it is

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ory in the Present [Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004; German original 1993, compiled from lectures given in 1987]); SLAVOJ ŽIŽEK, *The Fragile Absolute: Or, Why Is the Christian Legacy worth Fighting for?* (New York: Verso, 2000); GIORGIO AGAMBEN, *The Time That Remains: A Commentary on the Letter to the Romans* (Trans. Patricia Dailey [Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005]); and Christian theologian THEODORE JENNINGS, JR., *Reading Derrida/Thinking Paul: Justice* (Cultural Memory in the Present [Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006]), and my own reflections in “Ideological Constraint and the Christ Event: A Marxist Response to Alain Badiou’s Paul,” in *Paul’s Journeys among the Philosophers* (ed. Douglas Harink [Eugene, OR.: Cascade, forthcoming]).

<sup>3</sup> Here several works bear particular mention: ALAN F. SEGAL, *Paul the Convert: The Apostolate and Apostasy of Saul the Pharisee* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990); DANIEL BOYARIN, *A Radical Jew: Paul and the Politics of Identity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994); MARK D. NANOS, *The Mystery of Romans: The Jewish Context of Paul’s Letter* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996); PAULA FREDRIKSEN, *From Jesus to Christ: The Origins of New Testament Images of Jesus* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.; New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000); PAMELA EISENBAUM, “Paul, Polemics, and the Problem of Essentialism,” *Biblical Interpretation* 13:3 (2005) 224–38, and *Reading Paul as a Jew* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, forthcoming); and AMY-JILL LEVINE, *The Misunderstood Jew: The Church and the Scandal of the Jewish Jesus* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 2006).

<sup>4</sup> Here I use the term *Judean* rather than *Jew* to include the ethnic and national connotations that *loudaios* bore along with the religious connotations we associate with the English word *Jew*: see my discussion in *The Arrogance of Nations: Reading Romans in the Shadow of Empire* (Paul in Critical Contexts [Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2008]), 16.

only after we have understood Paul *as a Jew*, situated “between Jerusalem and Rome,” that we should ask what theological sense to make of him for our own very different time. That is the burden of this presentation.

It is also important for us to attune ourselves to the resonances of Paul beyond the confines of the church and of professional scholarship. Who is “Saint Paul” *in the world*? For that is surely where *he* took his stand; not staying comfortably within the Jerusalem temple, or the synagogue in Antioch, or among fellow philosophers on the Hill of Mars, but taking his place *in the world*. Indeed, given the metaphors that fill his letters, we might imagine that he found himself as much at home among military conscripts, athletes, and manual labourers as among the “religious.” I will return to the subject of “Saint Paul in the world” in a second presentation.

### Moving beyond Reading Paul in Terms of Ethnicity

I take the invitation to speak on “Paul between Jerusalem and Rome” to be quite precise. To situate Paul between these two cities—what we might call the capitals of two empires, one the supreme political reality in Paul’s world; the other the *basileia* that was the focus of ancient Israel’s hopes and, for Paul, the place where Israel’s messiah and the world’s true *Kyrios*, Jesus, would be honored by all the nations of the earth<sup>5</sup>—is an important way to frame our understanding of Paul. It is different from asking where Paul stood in relation to “Jews” and “Gentiles” (or *pagani*). The latter is certainly the dominant way we have all learned to talk about Paul: to understand his gospel as the proclamation of universal access to God, open to everyone regardless of their ethnicity, and to contrast that gospel with what we must, on this reading, imagine was the “exclusivism” practiced by Jewish communities in Paul’s day. In the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century one of the most prevalent textbooks on the apostle, Günther Bornkamm’s *Paul*, declared that in Romans, “Paul’s opponent is not this or that section in a particular church, but the Jews and their understanding of salvation,” by which he meant “their claim to possess [salvation] exclusively.”<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Rom 15:1-13, 18-19, 25-27.

<sup>6</sup> GÜNTHER BORNKAMM, *Paul* (New York: Harper, 1971), 94-5.

But there are important reasons to ask whether that approach is adequate or accurate for understanding Paul, and important reasons to move beyond that approach to ask as well about the social, cultural, and political aspects of Paul's environment and of his gospel. I take the phrase "between Jerusalem and Rome" to point us toward those larger political realities.

The hallmark of the so-called "new perspective" on Paul is the recognition that we simply cannot pose Paul's theology over against Judaism as its primary foil. Jewish scholars have long objected to the habit of posing Paul over against stereotyped portraits of Judaism as a religion of "works-righteousness" and, more recently, of ethnic exclusivism. But it is especially in the decades after the Holocaust that Christian scholarship has awakened to the dangers of anti-semitic assumptions and anti-Jewish themes New Testament interpretation. E. P. Sanders's work has produced a "paradigm shift" by demonstrating that the sort of works-righteousness that Christian theology and New Testament scholarship have long attributed to Paul's Jewish contemporaries was the dramatic exception, to the extent it existed at all. James D. G. Dunn has ushered in a "new perspective" on Paul by insisting that Paul remained a faithful Jew even as he became an apostle of Jesus Christ, and that we must not purchase our appreciation of the apostle at the expense of caricatures of the Jew or of Judaism.<sup>7</sup>

Other scholars, including Lloyd Gaston, William Campbell, and Stanley Stowers, have taught us to take seriously the fact that Paul wrote his letters *to non-Jews*, rather than to Jews, and to be much more cautious in drawing conclusions regarding "Paul's view of the law" or "Paul's view of Judaism." It is clear that Paul did not want non-Judeans in the churches to accept circumcision; but it is also clear he wanted them to respect both the Torah, which was "holy and just and good" (Rom 7:12, 13, 14), and Israel, whose calling from God was "irrevocable" (Rom 9:1-4, 11:29). Instead of asking "what, in Paul's view, was wrong with Judaism?" these scholars invite us to ask a more precise question with regard to

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<sup>7</sup> E. P. SANDERS, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism: A Comparison of Patterns of Religion* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1977); JAMES D. G. DUNN, "The New Perspective on Paul." *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library* 65 (1983); *The Theology of Paul the Apostle* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998).

Paul's letters: "what, in Paul's view, was wrong with the way non-Judeans in the Christ assemblies were regarding Judeans, Judaism, and the Torah?"<sup>8</sup>

The answers that emerge when we ask that question are very different. In Galatians, the agenda that Paul opposes is not primarily a "Jewish" agenda. It is rather the desire of non-Judeans in the Galatian churches to adopt a few signal Jewish practices as a sort of religious camouflage, hoping to avoid the suspicion and harassment of their pagan neighbors.<sup>9</sup> In Romans, Paul's concern is not anxiety that his non-Judean audience will "fall" into Jewish practice or be seduced by propaganda from the synagogue, but (quite the contrary) that their open disdain for the Judeans around them will jeopardize his project of gathering the "offering of the nations" before it has a chance to succeed.<sup>10</sup> These are not "Jewish" problems against which a Christian apostle struggles; they are misunderstandings or false directions taken by non-Jews in the Christ assemblies that Paul opposes as a *Jewish* apostle.

The challenges to the traditional habit of posing Paul against Judaism are not only historical challenges. We are aware as never before of the anti-Judaism that has been a part of much Christian interpretation, even when overt anti-Judaism was not its primary driving force. Martin Luther shared in the anti-Jewish prejudice of his day, but he also developed an interpretation of Paul that served his polemic against the Roman Catholic Church. He posed Paul against the Jewish works-righteousness of his contemporaries, even of the other (Jewish) apostles, as a way of driving a wedge between

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<sup>8</sup> LLOYD GASTON, *Paul and the Torah* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1987); WILLIAM S. CAMPBELL, *Paul's Gospel in an Intercultural Context* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1991); STANLEY K. STOWERS, *A Rereading of Romans: Justice, Jews, and Gentiles* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994).

<sup>9</sup> In different essays, LLOYD GASTON proposed different readings of Paul's critique of "works of law" as alternatives to the Lutheran reading: that it represented an anxious Gentile legalism, or that it represented the poisonous "work" (effect) of the law regarding Gentiles specifically (*Paul and the Torah*, 57-58, 69-72, and 100-6). I pursued similar arguments in *Liberating Paul: The Justice of God and the Politics of the Apostle* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1994), 134-38; 197-98. See now the important arguments by BRIGITTE KAHL, *Galatians Reimagined* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2009), and MAGNUS ZETTERHOLM, *Approaches to Paul* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2009).

<sup>10</sup> This summarizes my own approach to Romans in *The Rhetoric of Romans: Argumentative Constraint and Strategy and Paul's Dialogue with Judaism* (Sheffield Academic Press, 1990); in *Liberating Paul*; and in *The Arrogance of Nations*.

his interpretation of “apostolic” (Pauline) Christianity and the authority claimed by Rome as the See of Peter. In the modern period, some feminist and liberationist theologies have often aligned Judaism and the Jewish law with patriarchy and oppression in their efforts to portray Jesus or Paul as champions of liberation. Minority ethnic communities in the United States have embraced Paul’s gospel of “universalism” as an alternative to the dominance of an Anglo-Saxon majority, just as Alain Badiou embraces Paul as the “foundation of universalism” to oppose a racially tinged Gallic nationalism in France. But often these moves have required aligning “Judaism” with racial prejudice. It would seem that wherever contemporary men and women “use Paul to think with,” they are tempted to use a representation—or a misrepresentation—of Judaism “to think with” as well.<sup>11</sup>

The net effect is not only that a pejorative stereotype of Judaism is perpetuated, but also that *ethnic difference* is made into the central problematic category in Paul’s thought. This is not only a historical problem, as I will argue below. It also raises acute questions about the politics of contemporary interpretation. Some postcolonial interpreters have protested that just such concentration on ethnicity minimizes the significance of other, deeper dynamics, especially the continuing social and political dominance of global capitalism (and its military shadow) even in the “post-colonial” period. “Postcolonial” theory today is a battleground between theorists who emphasize the complex and ambiguous dimensions of culture, ethnicity, and identity in the colonial and “post”-colonial situation, and those who insist that power relations, including enforced disparities in economic power, must be the primary focus of analysis.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Here important criticisms have been raised especially by ELISABETH SCHÜSSLER FIORENZA: see *In Memory of Her: A Feminist Critical Reconstruction of Christian Origins* (New York: Crossroads, 1983), and most recently, *The Power of the Word: Scripture and the Rhetoric of Empire* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2007). See also TAT-SIONG BENNY LIEW, “Margins and (Cutting-) Edges: On the (Il)legitimacy and Intersections of Race, Ethnicity, and (Post)Colonialism,” in *Postcolonial Biblical Criticism: Interdisciplinary Intersections* (ed. Stephen D. Moore and Fernando F. Segovia; London and New York: T. & T. Clark, 2005), 114–65.

<sup>12</sup> CHANDRA TALPADE MOHANTE speaks in this context of a “harmonious, empty pluralism” that “bypasses power as well as history” in its analysis (*Feminism without Borders: Decolonizing Theory, Practicing Solidarity* [Durham, N.C.: Duke University

Indeed, the focus on ethnicity may be seen as a trope of imperial ideology: highlighting ethnic difference as the most important problematic in human relations implies that *other* aspects of an imperial order are stable and satisfactory, if only the not-yet-civilized “natives” would learn to get along with each other. Contemporary U.S. culture provides abundant examples of the trope, as when we speak of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict as only the latest stage of a primordial ethnic conflict, without reference to post-war history or the role of imperial powers in creating and aggravating the conflict: “those people have never gotten along in that land for thousands of years.” Or when North Americans celebrate a “post-racial era” with the election of a president with an African father, disregarding the tremendous disparities that continue to separate African Americans from other Americans in terms of household income, life expectancy, incarceration rates, and other indices. Or when we look on conflicts in the former Yugoslavia or in Darfur as primarily “ethnic” in character without recognizing the role that Cold War politics and the contemporary geopolitical strategy of outside powers have played in channeling both resources and weapons to rival groups.<sup>13</sup> It is telling that in the United States, Martin Luther King is officially remembered as a champion of racial harmony; his criticism of capitalism and of U.S. imperialism in the Vietnam War, voiced with increasing stridency in the last year before his assassination, are scarcely mentioned in polite society.

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Press, 2003], 193); LEELA GANDHI, of the tendency for some “post”-colonial discourse to ignore “problems of ‘neocolonialism’—held in place by transnational corporations and the international division of labour” (*Postcolonial Theory: A Critical Introduction* [New York: Columbia University Press, 1998], chap. 9, “The Limits of Postcolonial Theory,” 175). MAHMOOD MAMDANI continues to document the quasi-ethnic aspects of Western discourse about Muslims that erase the political conditions that have generated radical Islamist groups (*Good Muslim, Bad Muslim Good Muslim, Bad Muslim: America, the Cold War, and the Roots of Terror* [New York: Pantheon, 2004]). AIJAZ AHMAD calls theorists to begin from the starkest recognition of the “structural distortions” of the present “global hegemony” of global capital (*In Theory, Classes, Nations, Literatures* [London and New York: Verso, 1992], chap. 8).

<sup>13</sup>MAHMOOD MAMDANI offers a case in point in his history of the Darfur crisis, *Saviors and Survivors: Darfur, Politics, and the War on Terror*. (New York: Pantheon, 2009). I discuss the tendency in the West to ignore political realities and to focus on “ethnicity” as the root of conflicts, and offer further examples, in *The Arrogance of Nations*, 47-50.

A similar point pertains with regard to the study of Paul. Focusing our interpretation of Paul on the categories of ethnic inclusion and exclusion restricts the horizon of our imagination and prevents our recognizing the political dimensions of Paul's environment, and thus of his thought and practice. And it serves to isolate Pauline interpretation from meaningful interaction with larger themes and concerns that are vital to the survival of the majority of the world's people in the contemporary global order.

### Jews under Roman Rule

In his recent book *Rome and Jerusalem: A Clash of Civilizations*, historian Martin Goodman is concerned precisely with how Jews fared in the Roman Empire. His interest, and mine, is in the ever-shifting patterns in Roman policy and their actual effects on Jewish populations (as distinct from the *declared* policies of one or another Emperor). His work, like the work of others (Seth Schwartz, Erich Gruen, John Barclay), focuses attention on the complexity of interactions between Jews and the Roman imperial order in different places and at different times, and necessarily goes beyond a single, essentialized understanding of Judaism as a religion in the Roman Empire.<sup>14</sup>

My thesis in *The Arrogance of Nations* is that what Paul says regarding Jews, Israel, and the law in Romans must be read in the wider rhetorical context of other discourses, especially Roman imperial ideology and propaganda, concerning the same subjects. Paul was not offering theological generalities or a "summary" of his gospel in this letter; he was responding to tensions between Judeans and non-Judeans in (and probably surrounding) the Roman congregations. But these tensions were not simply the inevitable, quasi-"natural" result of ethnic formations as such. They sprang from a specific history with social and political contours. Romans

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<sup>14</sup> JOHN M. G. BARCLAY, *Jews in the Mediterranean Diaspora: From Alexander to Trajan (323 B.C.E.—117 C.E.)* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1996); ERICH GRUEN, *Diaspora: Jews amidst Greeks and Romans* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2002); MARTIN GOODMAN, *Rome and Jerusalem: The Clash of Ancient Civilizations* (New York: Vintage, 2007); SETH SCHWARTZ, *Imperialism and Jewish Society 200 B.C.E. to 640 C.E.* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004).

can be read—I argue, Romans *should* be read—as Paul’s response, as a Jewish apostle of Jesus Christ, to the representations of Israel and of Judeans current in Roman imperial ideology.

As John G. Gager has pointed out in his study of *The Origins of Anti-Semitism*, after Octavian’s defeat of Antony in 31 B.C.E. “Roman power was the basic fact for all the inhabitants of the Mediterranean basin,” and it was Roman power “that created the conditions” in which anti-Semitism, exemplified in the crisis in Alexandria, came to life.<sup>15</sup>

From the time of Pompeii’s subjection of Jerusalem in 63 B.C.E., the Roman aristocracy had looked upon Judeans as a defeated people. Cicero had derided them as a people “born to servitude” (naturally enough, since many of the Jews around him would have been the children of the captives Pompeii had brought back from Jerusalem as slaves). Cicero spoke of their contributions to the Jerusalem temple as a sign of their misanthropy: they deprived their local economies of the funds that they sent to a foreign power. Julius Caesar patronized the Judean population to win their support in his rivalry with Cicero and others, and Augustus continued a policy of favor toward the Judeans, but only after Herod submitted himself after having backed Antony against him.

In 19 C.E., the Emperor Tiberius deported four thousand Judeans to Sardinia to fight pirates and expelled the rest of the Judean community from Rome. Philo regarded the Emperor as the pawn of his viciously anti-Jewish advisor Sejanus (who probably represented a deeper vein in the Roman aristocracy); Josephus considered Tiberius’s action an overreaction to a local scandal in which some Judean conmen had defrauded a Senator’s wife of money. The expulsion might also have been a routine imperial reaction to unrest: Leonard Rutgers notes that there were riots in Rome protesting grain shortages, and Tiberius may simply have struck at a convenient target, a minority population both conspicuous and vulnerable, to make an example of them and thus restore law and order in the streets.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> JOHN G. GAGER, *The Origins of Anti-Semitism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983), 43. For what follows see also *The Arrogance of Nations*, chap. 3.

<sup>16</sup> LEONARD V. RUTGERS, “Roman Policy toward the Jews: Expulsions from the City of Rome during the First Century C.E.,” in *Judaism and Christianity in First-*

Popular resentment of taxes in Egypt helped to spark the disaster in Alexandria in 38. Some Judeans had petitioned the governor to be granted citizenship and thus relieved of taxation. Once Gaius ("Caligula") came to power, Greek aristocrats in Alexandria—who knew that the Roman governor, Flaccus, had opposed Gaius—blackmailed Flaccus into enacting anti-Judean policies. These included the confiscation of synagogue property, a decree that Judeans were "strangers and aliens" in the city, and forced relocation of Jews into the first known "ghetto" in the world. Flaccus then allowed the arrests, humiliation, and scourging of elders of the Judean community, which deteriorated into a general pogrom that lasted for weeks. The Emperor Gaius used force to suppress the unrest and quickly removed Flaccus (whom he condemned to death). Philo tells us what happened next: the Greek aristocrats and the Jewish leadership sent rival embassies to Rome to appeal their case to Gaius. The Emperor treated the Jewish embassy with open contempt and revealed the devastating news that he had ordered a statue of himself erected in the Jerusalem Temple. Only his assassination by a conspiracy of his own officers—and the shrewd delay of his governor in Syria, Petronius—prevented the catastrophe that would have followed.<sup>17</sup>

Upon his accession in 41, the Emperor Claudius moved quickly to put down the violence in Alexandria, sentencing two of the Greek instigators to death. But he used the harshest language against the Judean population, blaming them for the most recent violence, denying them any right to citizenship, cutting off immigration from Judea and Syria, and warning that he would respond to any further trouble by treating the Judeans as the source of a "plague" that had contaminated Roman Egypt.<sup>18</sup>

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*Century Rome* (ed. Karl P. Donfried and Peter Richardson [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998], 93-116). I discuss this sequence of events in *The Arrogance of Nations*, 91-100. Primary sources are JOSEPHUS, *Ant.* 18.3.5, and PHILO, *Embassy*, 159-61.

<sup>17</sup> Here our primary source is PHILO, *In Flaccus*; see JOHN G. GAGER, *The Origins of Anti-Semitism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983), 43-54, and PETER SCHÄFER, *Judeophobia: Attitudes toward the Jews in the Ancient World* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997).

<sup>18</sup> SCHÄFER, *Judeophobia*, 137-38; Josephus, *Ant.* 19.278; an alternative version of Claudius's edict was discovered in the 20<sup>th</sup> century: A. FUKS, V. TCHERIKOVER, and

At this point Roman policy was beginning to crystallize as hostility to the Judean cause and to Judean populations. Wildly pejorative caricatures of the Jews had been given a serious hearing in Rome. The promise of Roman law and order had been that people in the provinces could aspire to “becoming Roman” while “staying Greek”—or Judean—through two channels: first, civic piety (adjusted in the case of Judea to mean the daily sacrifices offered in the Temple on the Emperor’s behalf); and second, euergetism, the doing of “good works” on behalf of the city (and thus emulating Augustus himself, whose “good works” were a centerpiece of Roman ideology, not least in the *Res Gestae*).<sup>19</sup> In Alexandria, that fragile promise had collapsed, and Philo gives us reason to imagine that this collapse brought on an acute crisis for Judeans throughout the Roman Empire.

The next episodes took place in Rome itself. In 49, Claudius expelled at least some Judeans from the capital. Interpreters have usually assumed that his reasons had to do mostly with Judean misconduct, and a distinctly “Christian” interpretation has assumed that their misconduct was the violent rejection of Christian evangelists in Rome. A more likely explanation is that Claudius, urged on by an advisor as anti-Jewish as Sejanus had been in Tiberius’s day, “rounded up the usual suspects”—the vulnerable Jewish population—to quell a wider popular unrest in the city. “Rome intervened,” Leonard Rutgers argues, “because there were disturbances” in the city in which some Jews may have taken part; the Judeans may have been “just a convenient group whose expulsion could serve as an example to re-establish peace and quiet among the city populace at large.”<sup>20</sup>

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M. STERN, eds., *Corpus Papyrorum Judaicarum* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1964), 2:36-55.

<sup>19</sup> GREG WOOLF, “Becoming Roman, Staying Greek: Culture, Identity, and the Civilizing Process in the Roman East,” *Proceedings of the Cambridge Philological Society* 40 (1994) 116-43; and “Beyond Romans and Natives,” *World Archaeology* 28:3 (1995) 339-50.

<sup>20</sup> See N. ELLIOTT, *Arrogance of Nations*, 96-99; H. DIXON SLINGERLAND, *Claudian Policymaking and the Early Imperial Repression of Judaism at Rome* (Atlanta: Scholars, 1997).

## Nero's Rescript and the Occasion of Romans

It is now practically a consensus among interpreters that Romans was written to respond to the aftermath of that expulsion.<sup>21</sup> Claudius died in 54 C.E.—poisoned by his wife and his stepson, many in the streets believed—and was quickly deified by an act of the Senate, prompted by his successor, Nero. The young Emperor quickly fashioned a new persona emphasizing his mercy, *clementia*, which surpassed even the benevolence of the great Augustus. It is only a hypothesis, but widely accepted as a cornerstone of interpretation today, that one of Nero's acts of clemency was to cancel Claudius's edict of expulsion and to allow former Judean residents to return to Rome. These Judeans—whether or not they had been a majority of the city's Judean population—would have returned under unfavorable circumstances. Their homes and businesses would have been confiscated; their social institutions, including the social spaces for assembling together, for some measure of self-governance, and for securing their own foods, would have been weakened at the least. After this point we read the Roman satirists using "weak" Judeans as stock characters in their satires: beggars who foul the city's parks, poor Judeans who smell of the inferior vegetables they use in their soups.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> See, for example, the essays in *Romans* (Pauline Theology, vol. 3, ed. DAVID M. HAY AND E. ELIZABETH JOHNSON; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993). One exception is PHILIP F. ESLER, who seeks to minimize the importance of Claudius's expulsion in order to explain conflicts in Rome on the basis of a theory of ethnic conflict (*Conflict and Identity in Romans: The Social Setting of Paul's Letter* [Minneapolis: Fortress, 2003]).

<sup>22</sup> WOLFGANG WIEFEL first put this argument forward in "The Jewish Community in Ancient Rome and the Origins of Roman Christianity" (original essay 1971, reprinted in *The Romans Debate*, rev. and exp. ed. by Karl P. Donfried [Peabody: Hendrickson, 1991], 85-101). On Judean beggars in public, MARTIAL, *Epigram* 10.57.13; JUVENAL, *Sat.* 2.11; 6.541-44. On diet, Juvenal ridicules the figure of a Judean beggar who subsists on beans, leeks, vinegar, and boiled leather (*Sat.* 3). JOSEPHUS describes priests who could maintain a kosher diet only by subsisting on figs and nuts (*Life* 3). HANS-WERNER BARTSCH attributes the conflict between "weak" and "strong" (Romans 14-15) to just these circumstances ("Die antisemitischen Gegner des Paulus im Römerbrief," in *Antijudaismus im Neuen Testament?* [ed. W. Eckert et al.; Munich: Kaiser, 1967], 27-43, and "Die historische Situation des Römerbriefes," *Studia Evangelica* 4 [1968]: 282-91); his arguments are much more fully developed by MARK REASONER, "Weak" and "Strong" in *Romans 14:1—15:13* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

Wolfgang Wiefel gathered many of these threads into his argument that Paul wrote to a Christ assembly in which non-Judeans had come to look upon the returning Judeans with contempt, and that Paul wrote specifically to oppose that attitude (as he does with the prophetic warning in Rom 11:13-24). Christian interpreters have tended to embrace one half of Wiefel's argument—to agree that Paul wrote to warn non-Judeans not to show arrogance to an apparently fallen Israel. But while Wiefel provided abundant evidence for anti-Jewish attitudes *in the wider environment of Rome*, many Christian interpreters have given his argument a peculiarly theological spin. They have argued—or more often, assumed—that the reason for the arrogance shown by non-Judean believers in Christ was that Jews had rejected the Christian gospel. It was, on this view, a “failure of the Christian mission” that put Jews in such a bad light and that prompted Paul to respond with this agonizing letter.

I disagree with that tendency for several reasons. First, it isn't necessary to explain Romans: Wiefel's demonstration of a wider Roman animosity to Judeans accounts for the letter's occasion by itself. Second, it makes no sense of parts of Paul's letter that Christians have often had difficulty assimilating; namely, those parts where Paul insists that, though Israel has “stumbled,” they have *not* “stumbled so as to fall” (11:11), God has *not* rejected them (11:1). Some interpreters read Romans as if those are the inevitable consequences of Paul's own theology, and that Paul fails to draw them only because his deeply felt sympathy for his own people prevents him from seeing that. I disagree. It seems hardly likely that Paul should work so vehemently to deny a perception that he shared, namely, that Israel had in fact “fallen.” We can read the agonized rhetoric in chaps. 9—11 as prompted by the historical situation of Judeans in Rome without assuming that their reaction *to the Christian gospel* was a factor.<sup>23</sup>

### The Purpose of Romans

My disagreement with this widely accepted viewpoint is part of a larger view of the purpose of Romans. Much of Christian in-

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<sup>23</sup> I make this argument at much greater length in *The Arrogance of Nations*, 107-11.

terpretation has read the letter as an argument with Judaism or a critique of Judaism, taking its cue from the imaginary dialogue that begins in 2:17: “so you call yourself a Jew?” Sometimes this reading has focused on Paul’s supposed critique of Jewish works-righteousness; sometimes, more recently, it has seen Romans as Paul’s effort to legitimize the “Gentile church” against the objections of a prejudicial Jewish-Christian wing of the church that included the other apostles.

I have argued in several books that a close reading of the rhetoric of Romans leads to different conclusions. Paul addresses himself throughout to non-Judeans, to “the nations” (*ethnesin*, “among whom you also are,” 1:6, 13-14). This letter is an effort to advance Paul’s larger apostolic mission, which is to achieve “the (faithful) obedience of the nations” (1:5; 15:18). One expression of that mission is the collection, gathered from Macedonia and Achaia, which Paul is prepared to take to Jerusalem (15:25-27). He has not had time to gather financial contributions from the Romans, though he implies that he would have liked to, and would like to still in the future (15:22-32). In the meantime, however, he writes this letter of exhortation to secure a form of obedience among the nations *in Rome* that will ensure the sanctity of the offering of the nations that he takes to Jerusalem (15:14-16). Note that Paul thinks in priestly terms (1:9, 15:16): his first motive is to ensure that the offering he makes to God is holy. That requires that the Roman believers present *themselves* as a holy “living sacrifice,” and that requires in turn that they resist conformity to the “mind” of this world (12:1-2)—a resistance that sets the stage for the exhortations that follow in chapters 12—15.

Everything that comes before this exhortation leads up to it, builds toward it. With a growing number of scholars I regard chapters 9—11—the chapters that concern Israel and that warn non-Judeans against arrogance and boasting—as the climax of the letter. But that means these chapters are not a digression, nor are they the result of a wishful nostalgia on Paul’s part. *They express the purpose of the letter.* The earlier chapters are intended to prepare the audience for the appeal Paul makes regarding Israel.

I think this makes sense if we recognize different kinds of *disso-*

*ciative argument* in this letter, arguments that distinguish what *seems* to be the case from what actually *is* reality.<sup>24</sup>

- Paul may first set up an implicit contrast between the power of God, who has raised the Son of God from the dead by a spirit of holiness, from the fraudulent claims of a Roman order that assigns Emperors to heaven and identifies “sons of God” by senatorial decree (1:1-4)—imperial claims that were the object of ridicule among the Roman elite in just the time period when Paul wrote this letter.<sup>25</sup>
- He then dissociates the false claim of justice, made by human beings who in their injustice suppress the truth, from the true justice of God, which is manifest in the punishment of evildoers (1:15-32);
- This means that there is no basis for presuming on God’s mercy to relieve one from accountability: there is no “impunity” before God; all are subject to God’s absolute requirement of obedience (2:1-16).
- An imaginary dialogue with “the Jew” shows that the Jew agrees with all this: Jews, whatever their misconduct (in recent civic disturbances, perhaps, in Rome, or in Alexandria?), do not claim any presumption on God’s mercy; rather they acknowledge that God’s judgment is absolute and right (2:17—3:20).
- The consequence of all this is that those who are in Christ do not have any basis to presume on God’s mercy; they, too, must present themselves bodily as instruments of justice; being “in Christ” provides no excuse for sinning (3:21-31; 6:1-23). (Thus the audience is prepared for the exhortation in 12:1-2 and following.)
- The intervening chapters are aimed specifically to non-Judeans to counteract possible misunderstandings of Paul’s gospel. Yes, they may have become children of God, but that does not mean that they have supplanted the Jews, for being a child of God

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<sup>24</sup> I draw the category of “dissociative argumentation,” on which I rely throughout *The Arrogance of Nations*, from CHAIM PERELMAN and L. OLBRECHTS-TYTECA, *The New Rhetoric: A Treatise on Argumentation* (trans. John Wilkinson and Purcell Weaver [Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1965]).

<sup>25</sup> *The Arrogance of Nations*, 59-72.

has always been a matter of faithful obedience—not of ethnic ancestry (Romans 4). (I presume, though many Christian interpreters do not, that other Jews would have agreed with Paul on this point.) And yes, they may enjoy the forgiveness of past sins through Christ’s death, but Paul takes pains to emphasize that Christ came *not* to provide an infinite, ever-renewable “bailout” to the ongoing indebtedness of human sin, but to make possible obedience to God in the reign of life rather than slavery to sin in the reign of death (Romans 5).<sup>26</sup>

- Most importantly, in chapters 9–11, Paul seeks to dissociate the apparent results of history—that Israel *appears* to have stumbled and fallen, to have been “broken off” as branches so that others could take Israel’s place—from reality: that Israel has *not* fallen; that Israel’s calling is “irrevocable”; that God is able to graft dead, broken branches back onto the living tree. Once we read these chapters as dissociative argument, we see that in these chapters any “typology” between the elect and the damned, the chosen and the lost, is completely absent.<sup>27</sup>

One comparison may highlight the distinctiveness of this reading of Romans. A conventional theological reading finds in Romans 8 a series of assurances to the Christian that nothing “will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord” (8:39). These assurances stand in dramatic contrast to the pathos Paul expresses in the words that follow: “I have great sorrow and increasing anguish in my heart, for I could wish that I myself were accursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my own people” (9:3). Christian readers have naturally gravitated to the assurances, which are taken as simple declarations of fact, and wondered what to do with the expression of pathos—other than to say, “poor Paul.”

But a rhetorically sensitive reading notes the echoes, the connections, against the artificial boundary that a subsequent Christian scribe inserted between chapter 8 and chapter 9. It is the Spirit who assures those who are in Christ that they are children of God (8:16), but it is the same Spirit who testifies to Paul’s sorrow, and by whom

<sup>26</sup> I elaborated this argument in *The Rhetoric of Romans*.

<sup>27</sup> *The Arrogance of Nations*, chap. 3.

he takes an oath (9:1-2). All that is said about God's "foreknowledge" in the predestination of God's children (8:29-30) is surpassed in the privileges bestowed on Israel (9:4-5). And the solemn assurance that *nothing* "in all creation" can separate those "in Christ" from the love of God finds its dramatic contrapuntal echo in Paul's devout wish to be separated from God for the sake of his fellow Israelites (9:2). The contrasts are meant to evoke an emotional response that strengthens the argumentative appeal in 9:1-5. That is, the assurances in Romans 8 are meant to intensify the evocation of emotion in Romans 9. Paul wants to move his non-Judean audience, not merely to overhear but *to share*, his concern for his people.<sup>28</sup>

But this is not enough for Paul (which is why the letter does not end at 9:5). He does not speak to the non-Judeans in the Roman church as people secure in their position, able to look down from a position of privilege on the poor, forlorn Judeans. The warning to which Paul is driven in 11:13-25 makes clear that they can *not* presume on their position, rather it can be lost—they can be lost, "cut off," if they continue in arrogant contempt of Israel (11:22). Paul declares that the "broken off" branches of Israel can be grafted in "for God has the power" to do so (11:23), but he makes no parallel assurance here to the non-Judeans in the Roman church. *Their* situation is more precarious.

Past generations of Christians have read this letter as a charter of Christian privilege: "nothing can separate *us* from the love of God." And we have even imagined that this is a privilege Israel no longer shares. But Paul's purpose is quite the contrary. Even the status of being "in Christ" will *not* avail those who persist in contempt of Israel; they can yet be "cut off" from God because of their blindness, their failure to lift their eyes from present circumstances to recognize God's eternal purpose. It is not Israel that is imperiled in Paul's vision, it is the nascent Church.

### **Paul and the Ideology of Imperialism**

Please pardon my self-indulgence in reciting themes in my recent book. My purpose is to emphasize the distinctive aspects of a

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<sup>28</sup> I explored these connections first in *Rhetoric of Romans*, 261-64.

reading of Romans that takes seriously both the rhetorical dynamics of the letter and its possible effect on an audience already shaped not only by their previous exposure to a gospel about Christ, but by their undoubted exposure—what we should presume had been their *saturation*—in a gospel about the salvation available in the Roman order.

What might imperil the Roman congregations, what might place them in the position of those who have rebelled against God (1:18-32)—that is, of those for whom Paul does *not* hold out hope—is their succumbing to the dominant themes of Roman imperial ideology. From Cicero and Virgil to the *Res Gestae* and the poets of Nero's age—Paul's contemporaries, who waxed eloquent on the glorious salvation brought near in Nero's accession—Rome proclaimed a clear, consistent, and unavoidable gospel. Piety and "works" went hand-in-hand: so proclaimed the statues of the pious Augustus in every Roman city. Roman law secured justice for all who were faithful. The clemency of the Emperor might be extended to those who had resisted Rome in the past but now surrendered in obedience. The present order expressed the final consummation of human history, the outworking of ancient promises given by the gods to the ancestors of the Emperor and now extended, through his beneficence, to the Roman people and to all who held faith with them.<sup>29</sup>

The inevitable implications were clear enough. Those who did *not* enjoy the blessings of cordial relations with Rome were the stubborn opponents of a divine order, the enemies of heaven. These obviously—visibly—included the Judeans who clogged the alleyways of Rome itself.

Given this context, Paul's protests *in this letter* must have seemed counter-intuitive, improbable, even impossible. That is why Paul cannot rely on what any reasonable person could observe. He must resort to solemn oaths before God (9:1), the testimony of scripture (throughout the letter), and the pronouncement of "mysteries"

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<sup>29</sup> Here poets like CALPURNIUS PISO and CALPURNIUS SICULUS, and the anonymous author of the Einsiedeln *Eclogues*, are invaluable testimonies to the ideological currents contemporary with Romans. I argue in *The Arrogance of Romans* that such texts, alongside Israelite scriptures, should be the object of any investigation of "intertextuality" in Paul's letters (27-43).

(11:25). History is *not* what it so evidently seems. It is only the misleading prelude to the ultimate and inevitable revealing of God's purposes.<sup>30</sup>

### Hearing Paul in Our Own Day

I stated earlier that I believe we should seek to apprehend the apostle theologically only after we have made sense of him in his historical context. I have read Romans not as a Christian theological treatise but as an articulate *Jewish* protest, made by a Jewish apostle of the messiah Jesus, against the representations of Roman imperial ideology of Israel as a defeated people. Romans marks a moment of tremendous stress, of crisis, in the first-century struggle "between Jerusalem and Rome." It is, so far as we know, the last text from the first century that held out hope that the ancient aspirations of Israel would survive the power of Rome. (Others, we know, carried such aspirations with them into the decade following Paul's death, but they did not leave texts behind; meanwhile, the texts in our New Testament that follow Paul's letters all come from the terrible period after the destruction of Jerusalem by Rome, and are in part reactions to it.<sup>31</sup>)

What are we to make of this theologically? I will not presume to speak here with any authority but my own. However, *every* interpretation of the past relies on analogy, and we must own our responsibility for the terms of analogy that we choose.<sup>32</sup>

I consider it evident enough that we have misunderstood Paul in important ways when we have read him through the later epistle to the Ephesians, and rendered his gospel merely a matter of ethnic unity in Christ. In Ephesians, the church itself has become the "mystery" revealed to Paul, which already shows that the horizon of Paul's own vision has collapsed (compare Eph 1:9; 3:3-6 with Rom 11:25-26). Perhaps that was inevitable: Paul's own vision was so clearly disproved by history. The "offering of the nations" did *not*

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<sup>30</sup> This aspect of Paul's "dissociative argumentation" is the concern of chaps. 3 and 5 in *The Arrogance of Nations*.

<sup>31</sup> This is especially the argument of FREDRIKSEN, *From Jesus to Christ*.

<sup>32</sup> FREDERIC JAMESON, *The Political Unconscious* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1981), chap. 1 (on interpretation).

awaken the regime in Jerusalem to the dawning of a new messianic age as Paul expected. To the contrary, his gesture was perceived as an untimely and intolerable provocation and was immediately suppressed (according to Acts 21:17-26). And that, the author of Acts declares, is how, eventually, “we came to Rome,” and (though Acts demurs from continuing the story) to Paul’s death. But the failure of his vision in the first century, and the failure (or at least deferment) of liberatory projects in our own, mean that in precise terms Paul is our contemporary.

Further, while it is of the utmost importance to recognize and counteract centuries of Christian anti-Judaism, important voices—from within the Jewish community as well as isolated Christian voices—remind us today that we cannot simply gloss “Israel” in Paul’s letters by equating it with present-day Jews in any way that would constitute Christian acquiescence in the policies of the modern state of Israel, including the brutality carried out in the occupied territories.<sup>33</sup> Such an equation obscures the real disparity between the political vulnerability of Judeans in Roman cities—which, as I have argued, is an important factor in the context of Romans—and the military strength and political impunity enjoyed by the current state of Israel because of the continual intervention of its superpower patron, which shields it from accountability to international law.

It is clear that for Paul, Judeans were among “the poor” (in Jerusalem: Rom 15:26-27) and “the weak” (Rom 14:1-2, 15:1); his exhortation to non-Judeans is framed by the command to “take your place alongside the oppressed” (Rom 12:16). That was not a romantic perception of his own people. It was a view shared, and encouraged, by the Roman proponents of imperial propaganda, from Cicero to Seneca, who regarded the Judeans as a defeated people incapable and unworthy of sharing as full participants in Roman

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<sup>33</sup> Here, unfortunately, the protests of MARC ELLIS (*Unholy Alliance: Religion and Atrocity in Our Time* [Minneapolis: Fortress, 1997], and other works) and ROSEMARY RADFORD RUETHER (*The Wrath of Jonah: The Crisis of Religious Nationalism in the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict* [Minneapolis: Fortress, 2002]) and, most recently, MARK BRAVERMAN (a current project on mainstream Christian acquiescence in Zionism) are rare enough that they are normally labeled “prophetic,” a euphemism for “marginalized.”

civilization. Again, it is just this *imperial* representation that I hold to be the object of Paul's polemic in this letter.

It is not an inappropriate analogy, then, for us to reflect on Paul's legacy today by asking pointed questions about our own time and the present world order:

What myths about the "end of history" are current among the elite today?<sup>34</sup>

What stereotypes prevail in our societies about the poor, and especially foreigners, as inferior peoples not deserving of the benefits that the rich enjoy (even as they make the comforts of the rich possible)? What myths about the inevitability of the present capitalist order and about the necessity of adapting our economies to safeguard the wealth of the rich surround us?<sup>35</sup>

What representations concerning the innocence of powerful nations fuel campaigns of domination and conquest today?<sup>36</sup>

And most important for Christian theology: what social, political, economic, and cultural pressures are exerted upon the churches to elicit approval, or at least acquiescence, in these patterns?<sup>37</sup>

These questions are not alien to Christian theology, at least as practiced by the theologians of liberation. It is not surprising that they have from time to time found Paul not only a resource, but a

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<sup>34</sup> The most obvious reference is to FRANCIS FUKUYAMA's *The End of History and the Last Man* (New York: Penguin, 1992). The celebration of the "end of history" was cut short, at least in the U.S., by the attacks of Sept. 11, 2001, which have been represented in official U.S. rhetoric as signaling the final cosmic confrontation between good and evil, a "clash of civilizations." See *The Arrogance of Nations*, chap. 5.

<sup>35</sup> Obviously these are the themes of much recent national debate in the United States—and locally as well, where spokesmen for the "conservative" cause have repeated shrill warnings in letters to the newspaper that the wealthy will "take their money and leave" if they are threatened with the repeal of tax cuts.

<sup>36</sup> Critics in the United States have observed that President Obama's declared rationale for a troop buildup in Afghanistan is virtually indistinguishable from President Bush's rhetoric during the Iraq War: "... the United States of America stands for peace and security, justice and opportunity. That is who we are, and that is what history calls on us to do once more" (March 27). The families of numerous civilians killed (as "collateral damage") by U.S. airstrikes might well have a different view of what the United States stands for.

<sup>37</sup> I pursued these questions with regard to churches in the U.S. in "A Famine of the Word: A Stringfellowian Reflection on the Situation of U.S. Churches," *The Bible in the Public Square: Reading the Signs of the Times*, ed. Ellen B. Aitken, Jonathan Draper, and Cynthia Briggs Kittredge (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2008).

foundation as they have articulated a theological bias for the poor and for a “civilization of poverty” and solidarity over against a civilization of wealth and exploitation.<sup>38</sup> The greatest peril facing the churches may be the temptation to avoid such questions and retreat into a narrowly “theological” reading of the apostle.

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<sup>38</sup> I consider JON SOBRINO’s recent work *No Salvation Outside the Poor: Prophetic-Utopian Essays* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 2008) the clearest available articulation of these themes and a powerful manifesto for the future of the church.

# MAIN ASPECTS OF THE THEOLOGY OF PAUL

James Dunn

## 1. WHO DID PAUL THINK HE WAS?

### 1.1 The Second Founder of Christianity?

There were three absolutely crucial figures in the first generation of Christianity – Peter, Paul, and James the brother of Jesus. Of these, Paul probably played the most significant role in shaping Christianity. Prior to Paul what we now call “Christianity” was no more than a messianic sect within first century Judaism, or better, within Second Temple Judaism – “the sect of the Nazarenes” (Acts 24:5), the followers of “the Way” (that is, presumably, the way shown by Jesus).<sup>1</sup> Without Paul this messianic sect might have remained a renewal movement within Second Temple Judaism and never become anything more than that. Almost certainly that is how James would have preferred the new movement to remain. Peter may have been more ambivalent – somewhere in between James and Paul, a bridge-figure perhaps, a *pontific* indeed. But it was Paul who transformed this new Jewish sect which believed Jesus to be Messiah into something more. Paul’s mission *was the single most important development in the first decades of Christianity’s history*. Paul’s mission and the teaching transmitted through his letters did more than anything else to transform embryonic Christianity from a messianic sect, quite at home within Second Temple Judaism, into a religion hospitable to Greeks, increasingly Gentile in composition, and less and less comfortable with the kind of Judaism which was to survive the ruinous failure of the two Jewish revolts against Rome (66-73, 132-135 CE).

The crucial impact of Paul’s work was made during his mission in the Aegean, recounted in Acts 16-20. For one thing it marked a decisive shift *westwards*. This development alone was sufficient to shift the centre of gravity in earliest Christianity from Jerusalem and the eastern seaboard of the Mediterranean towards the metro-

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<sup>1</sup> Acts 9:2; 19:9, 23; 22:4; 24:14, 22.

politan centers of Asia Minor, Greece and then Rome. For another, the churches founded by Paul were increasingly *Gentile*, non-Jewish, in membership. These two factors alone might have been sufficient to ensure the transformation of a Jewish sect into a predominantly Gentile religion. But in the longer term the third reason was even more decisive. For *it was during his Aegean mission that Paul wrote most of his letters* – almost certainly his most important letters, but possibly *all* the letters which can be attributed to Paul himself.<sup>2</sup> Paul's letters are the only Christian writings which can assuredly be dated to the first generation (thirty-five years) of Christianity. And it is these letters which ensured that Paul's legacy would continue to influence and indeed to give Christianity so much of its definitive character.

In other words, the eight or so years of Paul's Aegean mission stand alongside the three years of Jesus' own mission, the first two or three years of the Jerusalem church's existence and the initial expansion of the new sect led by the Hellenists.<sup>3</sup> Like these earlier periods, the period of Paul's mission was absolutely crucial for Christianity's existence and enduring character. And it is Paul's Aegean mission and its lasting outcome, in terms of both churches established and letters composed and circulated, which makes appropriate the title sometimes accorded to Paul—"the second founder of Christianity." This title was first given to Paul at the beginning of the twentieth century, initially with some degree of disparagement: "The second founder of Christianity" who has "exercised beyond all doubt the stronger—not the better—influence" than the first (Jesus).<sup>4</sup> But it has been revived more recently as a way of giving proper recognition of the debt which Christianity owes to Paul.<sup>5</sup> And as a title it is deserved not because Paul was the first to preach the gospel to Gentiles, or the first to preach Christ in Rome, or the first to break out from the matrix of Second Temple Judaism; but

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<sup>2</sup> Certainly 1 and 2 Corinthians, Romans, 1 (and 2) Thessalonians, probably Galatians, and possibly Philippians, Colossians and Philemon are all to be dated to Paul's Aegean mission.

<sup>3</sup> Acts 6-8; 11:19-26.

<sup>4</sup> W. WREDE, *Paul* (London: Philip Green, 1907), 180.

<sup>5</sup> M. HENGEL, and A. M. SCHWEMER, *Paul Between Damascus and Antioch* (London: SCM, 1997), 309.

because *it was Paul's mission which made it impossible for Gentile believers to be retained within the traditional forms of Judaism, and because his writings became the most influential reinterpretations of the original traditions and forms of the new movement.*

Precisely because Paul stands at the fulcrum or transition point, where a Jewish messianic sect began to become something more, he is a controversial figure. For most Jews interested in Christianity's origins, Paul is one who abandoned his past, and sold his birth-right. He is a traitor to his people, an apostate from Israel, now a Christian and no longer a Jew. So we start by asking, who did *Paul* think he was? How did he see his own role? How would Paul have thought of himself? How would Paul have introduced himself to a stranger?

There are a number of passages in his letters where Paul speaks in explicitly autobiographical terms. Apart from the self-introduction of his letters, where he describes himself most often as "Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ," the most relevant are:

- Rom 11:1 – "I am an Israelite, of the seed of Abraham, of the tribe of Benjamin";
- Rom 11:13 – "I am apostle to the Gentiles";
- Rom 15:16 – "A minister of Christ Jesus for the Gentiles, serving the gospel of Christ as a priest";
- 1Cor 9:1-2 – "Am I not an apostle? Have I not seen our Lord? ... If to others I am not an apostle, at least I am to you";
- 1Cor 9:21-22 – "To the Jews I became as a Jew, in order that I might win Jews; to those under the law I became as one under the law (though not myself actually under the law) in order that I might win those under the law; to those outside the law I became as one outside the law (though not actually outside the law of God but in-lawed to Christ) in order that I might win those outside the law";
- 1Cor 15:9-10 – "I am the least of the apostles, not worthy to be called an apostle... but by the grace of God I am what I am";
- 2Cor 11:22 – "Are they Hebrews? So am I. Are they Israelites? So am I. Are they seed of Abraham? So am I. Are they ministers of Christ? ... I more";

- Gal 1:13-14 – “You have heard of my way of life previously in Judaism, that in excessive measure I persecuted the church of God and tried to destroy it, and that I progressed in Judaism beyond many of my contemporaries among my people, being exceedingly zealous for my ancestral traditions”;
- Gal 2:19-20 – “I through the law died to the law ... No longer I live, but Christ lives in me”;
- Phil 3:5-8 – “Circumcised the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of the Hebrews, as to the law a Pharisee, as to zeal a persecutor of the church, as to righteousness which is in the law, blameless. But what was gain to me, these things I have come to regard as loss on account of the Christ. More than that, I regard everything as loss on account of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord.”

Four striking aspects of Paul’s self-identity come to vivid expression in these passages.

## 1.2 No longer “in Judaism”

Gal 1:13-14 – “You have heard of my way of life *previously in Judaism*, that in excessive measure I persecuted the church of God and tried to destroy it, and that I progressed *in Judaism* beyond many of my contemporaries among my people, being exceedingly zealous for my ancestral traditions.”

It is clear from Gal 1:13-14 that Paul regarded his “way of life within Judaism” as something past. As a Christian, he would no longer describe himself as “in Judaism.” However, it is important to appreciate that the “Judaism” referred to in Gal 1:13-14 is not to be confused with what we today denote by the term “Judaism” or describe as “Second Temple Judaism.” The historical term (“Judaism”) was coined in the second century BCE to describe the Judeans’ spirited religio-nationalistic resistance to their Syrian rulers.<sup>6</sup> It will

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<sup>6</sup> 2Macc 2:21; 8:1; 14:38.

be remembered that the regional Syrian super-powers were attempting to enforce an empire-wide homogeneity of religion by suppressing the distinctive features of Israel's religion, particularly Torah, circumcision, and laws of clean and unclean. The Maccabean revolt resisted this to the death. And "Judaism" was the term which emerged to denote this resistance. So 2Macc 2:21 describes the Maccabean rebels as "those who fought bravely *for Judaism*." Verse 8:1 describes their supporters as "those who had continued *in Judaism*." And 14:38 describes the martyr Razis as one who had formerly been accused of *Judaism* and who had eagerly risked body and life "*on behalf of Judaism*." Reflecting the same traditions, 4 Mc 4:26 describes the attempt of the Syrian overlord Antiochus Epiphanes "to compel each member of the nation to eat defiling foods and to renounce *Judaism*." So *loudaismos* was the term coined in the Maccabean period to denote the unyielding resistance which the Maccabees maintained against *hellēnismos* and *al-phylylismos* ("foreignness").<sup>7</sup>

Gal 1:13-14 confirms that Paul used the term "Judaism" with this same sense: the "way of life" he described as "in Judaism" was his life as a zealous Pharisee; the "way of life" was marked by a readiness to persecute, even to destroy fellow-religionists who (as we shall see) were considered to pose a threat to the holiness and distinctiveness of this "Judaism." The same point emerges from Paul's other look backwards – Phil 3:5-6.

Phil 3:5-8 – "Circumcised the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of the Hebrews, as to the law a Pharisee, as to zeal a persecutor of the church, as to righteousness which is in the law, blameless. But what was gain to me, these things I have come to regard as loss on account of the Christ."

Here too it is clear that what Paul had turned his back on and now regarded as so much "garbage" (*ta skubala*) was particularly the same Pharisaic zeal and righteousness.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>7</sup> 2Macc 4:13; 6:24.

<sup>8</sup> *Ta skubala* can denote "excrement" (BDAG, 932).

So, the “Judaism” Paul converted from was his zealous Pharisaism. Previously he had been as “zealous” as Phinehas in Numbers 25 and as the Maccabees. That is, he had dedicated himself to safeguarding Israel’s holiness. Like them he had been willing to take violent action (persecution) against those who threatened Israel’s set-apartness to God. We will go into this in more detail in the third lecture.

It was this “zeal,” then, from which Paul had been converted, turned away from, by his encounter with the risen Christ on the Damascus road. So we can certainly say that as a result of his conversion and commission to serve as an “apostle of Jesus Christ,” as “apostle to the Gentiles,” Paul no longer thought of himself as belonging to “Judaism.” But in so saying, Paul was thinking only in terms of Pharisaic Judaism, that is, of the Pharisaic understanding of Israel’s heritage, or in particular, of the zealous faction of what we today call Second Temple Judaism.

But can or should we say more? Had Paul, for example, ceased to think of himself as a Jew?

### 1.3 Paul the Jew?

If Paul no longer thought of himself as being “in Judaism,” does it not also follow that he no longer thought of himself as a Jew? For it is difficult to avoid an ethnic sense in the term “Jew” (*Yehudi*, *Ioudaios*). The term, after all, derives from the region or territory known as “Judea” (*Yehudah*, *Ioudaia*). And Paul remained ethnically Judean in origin, even though he had initially been brought up as a Judean living in the Diaspora. It is true that for more than a century *Ioudaios* had been gaining a more religious (not dependent on ethnic) connotation—better translated as “Jew” rather than “Judean.”<sup>9</sup> But recent discussions have concluded that ethnicity remained at

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<sup>9</sup> S. J. D. COHEN, *The Beginnings of Jewishness: Boundaries, Varieties, Uncertainties* (Berkeley: University of California, 1999) concludes that prior to the Hasmonean period *Ioudaios* should always be translated “Judean,” and never as “Jew” (70-1, 82-106); the shift from a purely ethno-geographical term to one of religious significance is first evident in 2Mc 6:6 and 9:17, where for the first time *Ioudaios* can properly be translated “Jew”; and in Greco-Roman writers the first use of *Ioudaios* as a religious term appears at the end of the 1st century CE (90-6, 127, 133-6).

the core of Jewish identity.<sup>10</sup> So the question stands: How could Paul have left “Judaism” behind without leaving behind his religious (or ethnic, or cultural) identity as a “Jew”?

Something of the ambiguity in which Paul’s identity was caught is indicated by two references in his letters. In Romans 2 Paul addresses his interlocutor as one who calls himself a “Jew”: “... You call yourself a Jew and rely on the law and boast of your relation to God” (2:17). But Paul then goes on to indicate his disapproval of the attitudes and conduct which he attributes to the interlocutor: “If you call yourself a Jew ... (why) do you dishonor God by breaking the law?” (2:17-24). Here he seems to distance himself from the “Jew.” Yet in Galatians 2 Paul represents his rebuke to Peter at Antioch, and continues by appealing to Peter, “We (two, you and I) are Jews by nature and not Gentile sinners” (2:15). In this case Paul’s continuing identity as a “Jew” was precisely the basis of his exhortation to Peter.

More striking is the fact that a few sentences later in Romans 2, Paul offers a definition of “Jew” which removes the defining factor of Jewishness from what is outward and visible in the flesh (presumably ethnic characteristics as well as circumcision itself). This is what he says: “For the Jew [we might translate “the true Jew,” or “the Jew properly speaking”] is not the one visibly so, nor is circumcision that which is visibly performed in the flesh; but (the Jew) is one who is so in a hidden way, and circumcision is of the heart, in Spirit not in letter.<sup>11</sup> His praise comes not from men but from God” (2:28-29).<sup>12</sup> We should not conclude that Paul thereby

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<sup>10</sup> J. M. G. BARCLAY, *Jews in the Mediterranean Diaspora from Alexander to Trajan (323 BCE - 117 CE)* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1996), 404. P. M. CASEY, *From Jewish Prophet to Gentile God: The Origin and Development of New Testament Christology* (Cambridge: James Clarke, 1991) similarly concludes his discussion on “identity factors,” that ethnicity outweighs all the rest (especially 14). Note also the observation of L. H. SCHIFFMAN, *Who was a Jew?* (Hoboken: Ktav, 1985), that “Judaism is centred on the Jewish people, a group whose membership is fundamentally determined by heredity,” and his argument that even heretics did not lose their “Jewish status” (38, 49, 61).

<sup>11</sup> For detail see my *Romans* (WBC 34A; Dallas: Word, 1988), 123-4. The seer of Revelation uses similar language – Rev 2:9 and 3:9.

<sup>12</sup> Note how Paul retains the word play from Gen 29:35 and 49:8: in Hebrew, “Jew” = *Yehudi*, and “praise” = *hodah*. “In popular etymology it [the patriarchal name Judah (*Yehudah*)] was often explained as the passive of *hodah* (someone)

disowned his Jewish identity. For in fact he was using the term “Jew” in a positive way. Indeed, he immediately proceeds to affirm “the advantage” of “the Jew” in the very next sentence: “What advantage has the Jew? ... Much, in every way ...” (3:1-2). Moreover, the contrast between outward appearance and inward reality is one which had been long familiar in the religion of Israel<sup>13</sup> and more widely.<sup>14</sup> At the same time, however, by switching the emphasis away from the outward and visible, Paul in effect was playing down the role of the term “Jew” as an ethnic identifier. “Jew” as a term denoting distinctiveness from the (other) nations was no longer relevant. On the contrary, the positive mark of “the Jew” was nothing observable by others but was determined primarily by relationship with God.<sup>15</sup> So a degree of ambiguity remains.

Even more striking is 1Cor 9:21-22, already cited.

To the Jews I became as a Jew, in order that I might win Jews; to those under the law I became as one under the law (though not myself actually under the law) in order that I might win those under the law; to those outside the law I became as one outside the law (though not actually outside the law of God but in-lawed to Christ) in order that I might win those outside the law.

The striking feature in this case is the fact that Paul, even though himself ethnically a Jew, could speak of *becoming* “as a Jew.” Here, “to become as a Jew” is obviously to follow the patterns of conduct distinctive of Jews, to “judaize.”<sup>16</sup> In other words, Paul speaks here

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praised’” (J. A. FITZMYER, *Romans* [AB 33; New York: Doubleday, 1993], 323). The pun, of course, would probably be lost on Paul’s Greek-speaking audiences.

<sup>13</sup> Cf. particularly Jer 9:25-26.

<sup>14</sup> See especially A. FRIDRICHSEN, “Der wahre Jude und sein Loeb: Röm. 2.28f.” *Symbolae Arctoe* 1 (1927), 39-49.

<sup>15</sup> Note the similar argument regarding circumcision in Phil 3:3: circumcision is reaffirmed, but redefined in terms of the work of the Spirit in the heart; see my “Philippians 3:2-14 and the New Perspective on Paul,” in *The New Perspective on Paul* (WUNT 185; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2005; revised, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), ch. 22, 465-7.

<sup>16</sup> The meaning of “judaize” should not be confused by the 19<sup>th</sup>/20<sup>th</sup> century use of “judaizer” to refer to Paul’s Jewish opponents = Jews who wanted Gentile con-

as one who did not acknowledge “Jew” as his own identity, or as an identity inalienable from his person as an ethnic Jew. Instead he treats “Jew” almost as a *role* which he might assume or discard. The term denotes not so much an actual identity, an identity integral to him as a person, but rather an identity which could be taken on or put off as needs or circumstances demanded.<sup>17</sup> Here again, therefore, it is clear that Paul wanted to disentangle the term “Jew” from the narrower constraints of ethnicity, and to treat it more as denoting a code of conduct or a manner of living.<sup>18</sup>

In short, whereas Paul seems to have been willing to regard his time “in Judaism” as past, he was nevertheless unwilling to abandon the term “Jew” as a self-referential term. As a term marking off “Jew” ethnically from “Gentile,” or “Jew” culturally from “Greek,” it still had a functional role.<sup>19</sup> As a term denoting an inner reality and relationship with God in which non-Jews could participate, it still had meaning to be cherished. But as a term giving the distinction between Jew and non-Jew any continuing religious validity, or as signifying a divine partiality towards the “Jew,” its role was at an end.<sup>20</sup>

#### 1.4 “I am an Israelite”

Apart from Gal 2:15, Paul never called himself a Jew; and even there he uses the term only as a way of claiming common ground with Peter.<sup>21</sup> Paul shows similar ambivalence with regard to other terms usually understood to denote national or cultural identity. In Phil 3:5 “*Hebrew*” is a status which he seems to consign to the

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verts to become Jewish proselytes. The term was used at the time of Paul to denote the action of non-Jews living like Jews. See my *Beginning from Jerusalem* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), #27 no. 255.

<sup>17</sup> C. K. BARRETT, *1 Corinthians* (BNTC; London: A. & C. Black, 1968), 211.

<sup>18</sup> Cassius Dio comments on the name “Jews”: “I do not know how this title came to be given them, but it applies to all the rest of mankind, although of alien race, who affect [better ‘emulate’ – *zelousi*] their customs” (37.17.1 – *GLAJJ* #406 = 2.349, 351).

<sup>19</sup> Hence Paul’s frequent use of the pairs, Jews/Greeks, Jews/Gentiles – Rom 1:16; 2:9-10; 3:9, 29; 9:24; 1Cor 1:22-24; 10:32; 12:13; Gal 2:15.

<sup>20</sup> Hence Rom 2:6-11; Gal 3:28.

<sup>21</sup> Only in Acts does Paul declare, “I am a Jew” (Acts 21:39; 22:3).

rubbish bin – “a Hebrew of the Hebrews, ... But what was gain to me, these things I have come to regard as loss on account of the Christ” (3:7-8). Yet in 2 Corinthians 11 Paul affirms his continuing identity as a “Hebrew” in vigorous rejoinder to those who were operating in opposition to him in Corinth: “Are they Hebrews?” he asks; and quickly affirms, “So am I” (11:22). Evidently, there was something important about himself and his missionary role which could still be expressed by the term “Hebrew,” however foolish he thought it to continue investing too much significance in the term (11:21).

Membership of “*the tribe of Benjamin*” and descent from Abraham are caught in much the same ambivalence. The former seems also to be something once valued but now discarded as of lasting importance. Being of the tribe of Benjamin, once counted as “gain,” but now is regarded “as loss on account of the Christ” (Phil 3:5). Yet in Romans 11 the status is affirmed without disclaimer: “I am an Israelite, of the seed of Abraham, of the tribe of Benjamin” (11:1). And *descent from Abraham* (“of the seed of Abraham”) is again strongly affirmed, albeit polemically in 2Cor 11:22, and similarly without qualification in Rom 11:1. In the same polemical context Paul’s identity as an “*Israelite*” is also asserted alongside his being a “Hebrew” and “of the seed of Abraham” (2Cor 11:22). And belonging to the race of Israel is part of the heritage discounted in Phil 3:5-7. But again “I am an Israelite” is affirmed as self-identification *ex anima* and without qualification in Rom 11:1.<sup>22</sup>

What is striking about the Rom 11:1 reference is that the verse comes after Paul has attempted to redefine both who can be counted as “Abraham’s seed” (ch. 4; also Gal 3), and what constitutes Israel as Israel (Romans 9). The identity of Israel is not defined or determined by physical descent. For the promise came through Isaac alone, and not through Ishmael, even though Ishmael too was a child of Abraham (9:7-9). Nor is it defined or determined by doing what the law requires, living like a Jew. For it

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<sup>22</sup> Note also Rom 9:4: Paul’s kindred according to the flesh “are [still] Israelites” – “are,” not “were”; the covenant blessings (9:4-5) now enjoyed by believing Gentiles remain Israel’s blessings.

was Jacob who was called, not Esau (Rom 9:10-13). No, *the identity of Israel is defined and determined solely by the call of God*; “the purpose of God in election operates not in terms of keeping the law but from him who calls” (9:12). And that calling includes Gentiles as well as Jews—all “whom God calls” (9:24-26).<sup>23</sup> In so arguing, we should recognize that Paul was attempting a redefinition of “Abraham’s seed” and of “Israel” which transcends (or should we say, absorbs) the ethno-religious distinction indicated by the contrast, Jew/Gentile.<sup>24</sup> The significance of Paul’s self-identifying confession, “I am an Israelite” (Rom 11:1), therefore, becomes clear. That it includes an ethnic identification is not to be disputed. In the context of Paul’s exposition in Romans 9-11 the point is hardly deniable. For he insists that in the end “all *Israel* will be saved” (11:26), where “Israel” must be the same Israel, the ethnic Jews, the great majority of whom were rejecting the gospel of Jesus Messiah (11:7-12, 25). Ethnic Israel continues to be “beloved”; “the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable” (11:28-29).

So when Paul confesses, “I am an Israelite” he is confessing an identity primarily and precisely as *determined by God*. It is a different kind of identity from the term “Jew,” where identity is expressed by making a distinction from other nations—Jew and not Gentile. And it is a different kind of identity from one determined by conformity to *halakhic* principles, as was to become the emphasis in rabbinic Judaism.<sup>25</sup> Rather, Paul’s whole concern was to reassert Israel’s identity as primarily determined by God and in relation to God, and thus as transcending ethnic and social distinctions and as absorbing ethnic and social diversity.

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<sup>23</sup> See my *Romans*, 537; also *The Theology of Paul the Apostle* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark/Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 510-1.

<sup>24</sup> Note that in the climax of his argument in Romans (Rom 9-11), Paul switches from the predominant Jew/Greek, Jew/Gentile usage (“Jew” appears nine times in Rom 1-3) to predominant talk of “Israel” (in Rom 9-11, “Israel” 11; “Jew” 2); and that in Rom 9-11 the topic is not “Israel and the Church,” as so often asserted, but solely “Israel,” that is, his people viewed from God’s perspective (see my *Romans* 520; *Theology of Paul*, 507-8).

<sup>25</sup> See C. T. R. HAYWARD, *Interpretations of the Name Israel in Ancient Judaism and some Early Christian Writings* (Oxford University, 2005), 355.

## 1.5 “In Christ”

Probably, however, we should allow our appreciation of how Paul thought of himself to be determined primarily by *frequency of usage*, rather than the few explicit self-references thus far reviewed. That directs us at once to Paul’s pervasive use of the phrases “in Christ” and “in the Lord” in his letters. The phrase identifies by self-location, by indicating where one sets oneself, where one belongs. As such, it is Paul’s primary reference point for understanding himself as well as his converts. The phrase “in Christ” appears some 83 times in the Pauline corpus (61, if we exclude Ephesians and the Pastorals). Similarly, “in the Lord” is used 47 times in the Pauline corpus (39, if we exclude Ephesians). And we should not forget the many more “in him/whom” phrases with the same referent.<sup>26</sup> The term “Christian” had recently been invented as a new word, a neologism to denote those deemed to be followers of the one known as “(the) Christ” (Acts 11:26). Paul never uses the term. But the phrase “in Christ” at times does service in its place, and is often translated as “Christian” in modern translations.<sup>27</sup> Its co-referent in corporate terms is the less frequently used, but obviously important talk of “the body of Christ” (particularly Rom 12:4-8 and 1Cor 12).<sup>28</sup>

The importance of the self-understanding thereby encapsulated is indicated by two of the passages quoted earlier:

Gal 2:19-20 – “I through the law died to the law ... No longer I live, but Christ lives in me”;

Phil 3:5-8 – “circumcised the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of the Hebrews, as to the law a Pharisee, as to zeal a persecutor of the church, as to righteousness which is in the law, blameless. But what was gain to me, these things I have come to regard as loss on account of the Christ. More

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<sup>26</sup> Full details in my *Theology of Paul* #15.2 (with bibliography). See also C. J. Hodge, “Apostle to the Gentiles: Constructions of Paul’s Identity,” *BibInt* 13 (2005) 270-88.

<sup>27</sup> See e.g. BDAG, 327-8 gives various instances where the phrases can be treated as periphrases for “Christian” (328); see further *Theology of Paul* 399 no. 48.

<sup>28</sup> *Theology of Paul*, 405-6, but noting the variation in usage (no. 76). See further below #4.

than that, I regard everything as loss on account of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord.”

In both cases we see a shift in identity, or in what constitutes self-identity for Paul. He has “died to the law” (Gal 2:19), a phrase which epitomizes Paul’s conversion. As a result of his conversion he had abandoned what he had previously valued about and for himself (Phil 3:4-6)—his ethnic identity, his righteousness as a Pharisee, his zealous defense of Israel’s covenant prerogatives, his faithful observance of the law. As a consequence of his encounter with Christ, he counted all that as so much “garbage” (3:8) in comparison with what now really mattered to him.<sup>29</sup> And what really mattered now was to “gain Christ,” to “be found in Christ” (3:8-9), to “know Christ” (3:8, 10), to become like Christ in death as well as resurrection (3:10-11). Alternatively expressed, “Christ in him” was now the determining and defining character of his living (Gal 2:20). Similarly in Rom 8:9-11 Paul comes as close as he ever does to providing a definition of a Christian, of what determines whether a person “belongs to Christ” – “If anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, that person does not belong to him” (8:9). The indwelling Spirit, or alternatively, “Christ in you” (8:10), is what determines Christian status.<sup>30</sup> That was what now determined Paul as a person, his values, his objectives, and his identity. The other identifiers need not and should not be entirely discounted and devalued. But in comparison with being “in Christ” nothing else really counted for anything very much at all.

One indicator of the shift in Paul’s self-understanding is given by the transition from Romans chapter 11 to chapter 12. For in Rom 9-11, as already noted, the concern was exclusively with Israel, including his hopes for ethnic Israel. But in Romans 12 the

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<sup>29</sup> See more fully my “Philippians 3:2-14 and the New Perspective on Paul”: “The sharpness of the contrast is not so much to denigrate what he had previously counted as gain, as to enhance to the highest degree the value he now attributes to Christ, to the knowledge of Christ, and to the prospect of gaining Christ” (*New Perspective on Paul*, 475).

<sup>30</sup> See also A. DU TOIT, “‘In Christ’, ‘in the Spirit’ and Related Prepositional Phrases: Their Relevance for a Discussion on Pauline Mysticism,” *Focusing on Paul: Persuasion and Theological Design in Romans and Galatians* (BZBW 151; Berlin: de Gruyter, 2007), 129-45.

first social context within which Paul wanted his readers/hearers to recognize and affirm themselves was *the body of Christ* (12:3-8).<sup>31</sup> We will again return to this in lecture 4. Here we need simply to note that for Paul the community called out and constituted by Christ was to be the primary reference by which Christians' identity and mode of living were determined. Paul would hardly have thought otherwise about himself, as his "in Christ/Lord" language clearly indicates.

### 1.6 A changing identity

"Identity" is a much used term today in attempts to achieve satisfactory self-definition. The problem is that it is a more slippery term than we often care to admit. Is a person's identity defined or determined by his or her parents? By physical appearance? By place of birth and upbringing? By DNA? By memories? By education? By career? By likes and dislikes? By friends or family? The same person will have many identities—a son or daughter, a brother or sister or cousin, a father or mother, a colleague, a friend, and so on. So when we talk of Paul's identity we could speak of his multiple identity—a Jew, an Israelite, a believer in Jesus Messiah, and more. Does one disqualify the other, make it any the less true?

What we can speak of is Paul's *changing* identity. He no longer thought of himself as "in Judaism." He was now "in Christ." His self-understanding as a Hebrew, as of the tribe of Benjamin, as a Jew, was more ambivalent, not valued by him as he had previously valued them. His identity as one of the seed of Abraham, as an Israelite was still highly valued but had been redefined.

And when we ask the question, "Who did Paul think he was?" the simplest answer is the phrase he used evidently of himself in 2Cor 12:2—"a person in Christ."<sup>32</sup> He had not ceased to be an ethnic Jew, but no longer counted that as definitive of his relation to God, and therefore of his identity. The key factor for Paul himself,

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<sup>31</sup> See further my *Romans*, 703; *Theology of Paul*, 534-5, 548.

<sup>32</sup> That Paul intended a self-reference at this point is almost universally agreed among commentators.

was that his identity was primarily determined by his relationship to Christ, even though that did not entirely deny the value of his other identities (particularly as a circumcised Jew). Gal 3:28 sums up Paul's position clearly: "There is neither Jew nor Greek; there is neither slave nor free; there is no male and female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus."

All this is of continuing relevance not only for our understanding of Paul, but for our understanding of Christian identity. For Paul did more to define the identity of *Christianity* than any other contributor to the New Testament. Indeed, Paul himself embodies and expresses Christian identity as no one else does. For Christianity and Christians generally must never be allowed to forget

- that Christianity came out of the religion of Israel—that within the purposes of God Christians belong with Israel;
- that Jesus is only Jesus Christ as Israel's Messiah;
- that all the first Christians were Jews;
- that two-thirds or three-quarters of the Christian Bible are Israel's scriptures;
- and that the saving promise of God fulfilled in and through Christ is the promise God made to Abraham.

So we Christians can only understand *ourselves* in the terms given us by the Hebrew Bible, by the Jewish scriptures—that is, in Jewish terms. *The Jewishness of Christianity is integral to Christianity.* And it is Paul who wrestles most effectively with the tensions and questions which Christianity's Jewishness continues to raise for us. As Paul wrestled with what it meant to be a Jew who believed in Jesus Messiah, so must we wrestle with what it means to be a Gentile who believes in the Messiah of Israel. As Paul wrestled with the issue of what is central in Israel's heritage and what continued to be the Word of God for him, so must we. And as Paul resolved these issues, so far as he did resolve them, by making the key defining factor the purpose of God and the relationship with Christ, so may we learn to resolve the issues which plague us by the same priorities. Not tradition, not Church, not even Scripture, is the primary test of Christian identity, of belonging to Christ, but only being "in Christ."

## 2. APOSTLE OR APOSTATE?

### 2.1 Paul the apostle

In 1990 Alan Segal, a prominent Jewish scholar of early Christian and Jewish literature, wrote a book entitled, *Paul the Convert: the Apostolate and Apostasy of Saul the Pharisee*.<sup>33</sup> The title nicely sums up the ambiguity and contested character of Paul's identity and lasting significance—apostle *and* apostate? Apostle *or* apostate? Jews who take any note of Paul have little doubt that he was an apostate—a traitor to the Torah, an apostate from Israel. And Christians equally have little doubt that he was an apostle, even if not one of the Twelve. But both remind us of Paul's changing identity, and both titles have greater problems and carry a greater weight of implication than most Jews and Christians realise.

We start once again with Paul's own estimate of who and what he was. In our previous survey of Paul's autobiographical claims we have omitted one which was of first importance for Paul himself—his self-claimed title "apostle." It is clear from the way he introduces himself in most of his letters that this was how Paul wanted to be heard and known:

- Rom 1:1, 5 – "Paul, a slave of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God ... Jesus Christ our Lord, through whom we received grace and apostleship with a view to the obedience of faith among all the nations for the sake of his name";
- 1Cor 1:1 – "Paul, called to be an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God";
- 2Cor 1:1 – "Paul, apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God"
- Gal 1:1 – "Paul, apostle, not from human beings nor through a human being, but through Jesus Christ and God the Father"
- Col 1:1 – "Paul, apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God."<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> New Haven: Yale University, 1990.

<sup>34</sup> Similarly Eph 1.1; 1Tim 1.1; 2Tim 1.1; Tit 1.1; if these letters are post-Pauline, the openings indicate how established the usage and status had become.

For convenience I repeat the relevant references from the first lecture –

- Rom 11:13 – “I am apostle to the Gentiles”;
- Rom 15:16 – “a minister of Christ Jesus for the Gentiles, serving the gospel of Christ as a priest”;
- 1Cor 9:1-2 – “Am I not an apostle? Have I not seen our Lord? ...If to others I am not an apostle, at least I am to you”;
- 1Cor 15:8-10 – “Last of all, as to an abortion, he appeared also to me. For I am the least of the apostles, not worthy to be called an apostle... but by the grace of God I am what I am”.

Here we have the answer to the earlier question, “How would Paul have introduced himself?” “Apostle of Messiah Jesus/Jesus Christ” was his chosen self-designation, what he would have printed on his “calling card,” and how he in fact did introduce himself in his letters.

There are two important implications of at least several of these references. One is that Paul thought it necessary to lay claim to this title (“apostle”), and the other that his claim to this title was contested by some, indeed by a significant group within earliest Christianity. The unusual opening to Galatians is itself quite remarkable. Paul does not even begin his letter with the usual (and his) courtesies of such a letter—reference to his thanksgivings and prayers on their behalf.<sup>35</sup> Instead he swings at once, abruptly and discourteously, into a sequence of denials/affirmations—“an apostle not from human beings nor through a human being, but through Jesus Christ and God the Father” (Gal 1:1). And throughout the first two chapters it is clear that Paul was very much aware that his status as an apostle, independent of Jerusalem, was being questioned, at least by those “causing trouble” in Galatia (Gal 5:12). He asks, “Am I now seeking human approval?” (1:10). He insists, “The gospel that was proclaimed by me is not of human origin; for I did not receive it from a human source, nor was I taught it...” (1:11-12). He objects that after his conversion, “I did not confer with any human being, nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those who were already apostles before me...” (1:16-17). Clearly there were those who claimed that

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<sup>35</sup> Rom 1:8-10; 1Cor 1:4; Phil 1:3-5; Col 1:3-10; 1Thess 1:2-3; 2Thess 1:3, 11; Phm 4-6.

apostleship belonged to the Jerusalem leadership, and that only if Paul had gone up to Jerusalem and been inducted there, could he claim apostolic authority for the gospel which he preached. So he protests with an oath, "I did not see any other apostle except James... In what I am writing to you, before God, I do not lie!" (1:19-20). Clearly the apostolic authority behind Paul's preaching to non-Jews was under serious question from the more traditionalist Jewish believers. This is no doubt why Paul was so relieved that at the Jerusalem council his commission and engracement for that mission to the uncircumcised was recognized and affirmed by the Jerusalem leaders, the "pillar apostles" (2:1-10).

In the same connection, we should also note that Paul did not meet the conditions for recognition/election of an "apostle" as indicated by Luke. It should be recalled that, according to Acts 1:21-22, when Judas' place as an apostle, one of the Twelve, was filled, the qualifications for apostleship were clearly defined. Candidates for the position vacated by Judas should have been with Jesus from the time of his baptism by John until his ascension; and they should have been witnesses of Jesus' resurrection—that is, according to Luke, a witness of the resurrection appearances which lasted for 40 days before Jesus' ascension (Acts 1:3). Paul, of course, would not qualify as an "apostle" under such criteria. This probably means that Luke's later description of Paul and Barnabas as "apostles" (Acts 14:4, 14) was intended by Luke to be understood as denoting their function as "apostles or representatives of the church of Antioch," missionaries sent out by the church of Antioch. Paul also knew (as we might say) lesser "apostleship"—"apostles or delegates of the churches" (2Cor 8:23); Epaphroditus, the apostle or messenger from the church of Philippi (Phil 2:25). But his consistent insistence that he was apostle by appointment of God indicates Paul's unyielding refusal to be regarded as "apostle" in any lesser sense than "those who were apostles before me" (Gal 1:17).

What, then, did Paul's claim to apostleship and the title "apostle" signify to Paul?<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> The bibliography on "apostle" is extensive; see e.g. the reviews by H. D. BETZ, "Apostle," *ABD* 1.309-11; J. A. BÜHNER, "apostolos," *EDNT* 1.142-6; P. W. BARNETT, "Apostle," *DPL* 1.45-51.

## 2.2 Apostle of Christ

The basic sense of “apostle (*apostolos*)” was “one sent out,” so “delegate, envoy, messenger, authorized emissary.”<sup>37</sup> What gave it the weight which Paul obviously saw in it, and claimed by using it in self-reference, was the fact that the commissioning authority was *Christ*, “by the will of God.” It was as an emissary of Christ, in accordance with God’s will, that he was an apostle, and as such his appointment carried the full weight of that authority behind it. This was what he was insisting on so emphatically in the opening of Galatians.

The act of authorizing appointment was still more restricted. Paul had not simply been appointed by Christ (a status and role which could legitimately be claimed for many pioneering evangelists in subsequent centuries). He had been *appointed by the risen Christ in the course of his resurrection appearances*. This is the claim that Paul explicitly makes twice in 1 Corinthians: “Am I not an apostle? Have I not seen our Lord?” (1Cor 9:1); “Last of all, as to an abortion, he appeared also to me” (15:8). In the latter passage Paul makes a threefold assertion and implication:

- the appearance to himself was of the same order and significance as the appearances to Peter, the twelve ... and “all the apostles” (15:5-7);<sup>38</sup>
- the appearance to himself was “last of all,” the almost explicit inference being that after Paul nobody else had been granted an appearance of the risen Christ;
- his description of his conversion as an “abortion” is equally significant. An abortion is an unnaturally early birth. So the impli-

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<sup>37</sup> BDAG, 122.

<sup>38</sup> “All the apostles” seem to have included Barnabas (Gal 2:9; 1Cor 9:5-6), and Andronicus and Junia (Rom 16:7); see also W. REINBOLD, *Propaganda und Mission im ältesten Christentum: Eine Untersuchung zu den Modalitäten der Ausbreitung der frühen Kirche* (Göttingen: Vandenoek & Ruprecht, 2000), 37-9, 40-1. Is the plural in 1Thess 2:1-12 “so personal to Paul that Silas and Timothy could not be included” in 2:6-7 (an “epistolary plural”), as A. J. MALHERBE, *The Letters to the Thessalonians* (AB 32B; New York: Doubleday, 2000), 144 argues (similarly REINBOLD, 39-40)? And given Apollos’ relative late appearance on the scene, it is less likely that he would have been numbered among “the apostles” referred to in 1Cor 15:7, though he may be included in the “apostles” of 1Cor 4:9.

cation of the jibe is that Paul's birth (as a believer) had to be unnaturally hastened in order to ensure his inclusion within the circle of apostles before that circle finally closed.<sup>39</sup>

On the first two points, we should note, Paul was in agreement with Luke. For Luke too, the qualification to be an apostle was a resurrection appearance, because the essential role of an apostle was to bear witness to Jesus' resurrection (Acts 1:22). And the resurrection appearances as such continued only for a limited period (1:1-3); consequently after the end of the appearances there would be no grounds for the appointment of other apostolic witnesses.

Paul's claim, therefore, was to a unique status and authority. That was no doubt one of the reasons why Paul's claim to the status was questioned by some, although we have already noted that his claim was in effect acknowledged by the Jerusalem leadership, though possibly with qualifications.<sup>40</sup> But probably the greater question mark was put against Paul's *understanding* of his apostolic commissioning.

### 2.3 Servant of the gospel

Equally worthy of note is the degree to which Paul understood "apostle" and "gospel" as in a mutually reinforcing symbiotic relationship:

- in Rom 1:1 the two self-introductory phrases, "called to be an apostle" and "set apart for the gospel of God," are coterminous;
- as "a minister of Christ Jesus" his function was to "serve the gospel of Christ as a priest" (Rom 15:16);
- as apostle his role was to proclaim the gospel (1 Cor 15:11);

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<sup>39</sup> On "abortion" see my *Theology of Paul*, 331 no. 87.

<sup>40</sup> In Gal 2:7-9 some hesitancy on the part of the Jerusalem leadership may be indicated by the fact that whereas Peter's mission is designated as "the apostleship (*apostolēn*) of the circumcision," Paul's is described only as "for the Gentiles" (*apostolēn* is not repeated) (2:8). "The agreement must have recognized Peter's apostleship, but left Paul without a specific title" – H. D. BETZ, *Galatians* (Hermeneia; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979 82, 98). "... Unmistakably failing to grant formal apostolicity to Paul's labors" – J. L. MARTYN, *Galatians* (AB 33A; New York: Doubleday, 1997), 203.

- Paul's insistence that he was an apostle, "not from human beings nor through a human being, but through Jesus Christ and God the Father" (Gal 1:1), is mirrored in his equally vehement insistence a few sentences later that his gospel was "not of human origin; for it was not from a human being that I received it, neither was I taught it, but through a revelation of Jesus Christ" (1:11-12).

As has been pointed out by others, Paul's agitation in Gal 1-2 was not so much in *self*-defense as in defense of his *gospel*, because he feared that "the truth of the gospel" (2:5, 14) was being endangered by the attacks on his evangelistic success as falling short of what God demanded.<sup>41</sup>

The authority which Paul claimed as an *apostle*, therefore, was the authority of the *gospel*. In fact, "the truth of the gospel" was his *first* concern; his own apostolic status was secondary to and in service of the gospel. Which explains

- why Paul was willing to acknowledge the prior status and authority of "those who were apostles before me" (Gal 1:17),
- why the thought that the Jerusalem apostles might not approve his gospel caused him such anxiety,
- and why in trumpeting the agreement achieved in Jerusalem, Paul in effect acknowledged the right of the pillar apostles to approve his preaching (2:2).

It was more important that the *same* message should be preached by *all* the apostles. So Paul ends his reference back to the gospel by which the Corinthians were being saved (1Cor 15:2) with the joyful affirmation, "Whether then it was *I or they*, so we proclaim and so you have come to believe" (15:11). Just as later, when in prison, it was more important that Christ was being proclaimed, even if some of the proclamation was intended to increase Paul's suffering in imprisonment (Phil 1:17-18).

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<sup>41</sup> "Apostolic authority was conditional upon the gospel and subject to the norm of the gospel" (*Theology of Paul*, 572; with bibliography in no. 35); "apostleship and the gospel were inseparable for Paul" – P. STUHLMACHER, *Biblische Theologie des Neuen Testaments* (2 vols. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1992, 1999), 1.249.

In short, it was more important for Paul that his preaching of the gospel should be affirmed by the Jerusalem apostles (Gal 2:6-9), than that his apostleship should be formally acknowledged. For the apostle was ever subservient to “the truth of the gospel.” Which brings us to the really sensitive issue.

## 2.4 Apostle to the Gentiles

It would appear that Paul saw his commissioning, apparently from the first, as a commissioning to take the gospel to the Gentiles. We can never be sure when the full significance of Paul’s conversion came home to him. But so far as our evidence goes, Paul never saw himself simply as “apostle,” with some roving commission. He had been specifically commissioned to preach the gospel *among the nations*.<sup>42</sup>

- he had “received grace and apostleship with a view to the obedience of faith among all the nations for the sake of his name” (Rom 1:5);
- in his major treatment of “Israel” he does not hesitate to assert simply, “I am apostle to the Gentiles” (Rom 11:13);
- he was “a minister of Christ Jesus for the Gentiles” (Rom 15:16);
- God chose to reveal his Son in Paul, in order that Paul might preach his Son “among the Gentiles” (Gal 1:16);
- The later letter to the Ephesians emphasizes that “the mystery of Christ” had been especially revealed to Paul, and that he had been specially commissioned to enact the mystery. This mystery was that “the Gentiles have become fellow heirs, members of the same body, and sharers in the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel” (Eph 3:2-6).

It is sufficiently clear from Gal 1-2 that this was where “the shoe began to pinch” for Paul, where the problems arose, when his role as apostle and servant of the gospel came to be evaluated by others. The point is too important for our appreciation both of Paul’s self-

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<sup>42</sup> The Greek *ethne* can be translated equally “nations” or “Gentiles,” “the Gentiles” being one way of describing all the (other) nations (other than Israel). See also D. J.-S. CHAE, *Paul as Apostle to the Gentiles* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 1997); Reinbold, *Propaganda*, 164-81.

understanding and of how he carried out his commission, to be passed over. For one thing, it was precisely this commission which Paul claimed to have received, to take the good news of Jesus to non-Jews, which proved so controversial in the beginnings of Christianity. So controversial was it indeed, that it caused a schism in the early Jesus movement, a schism which stretched into the next three centuries in the hostile relations between what became the mainstream of Christianity and the so-called Jewish-Christian heretical sects. And for another, it was precisely this commission which caused Paul to formulate “the truth of the gospel” so clearly and definitively—as an offer of God’s acceptance to *all* who believe, without further qualification, “justified through faith in Jesus Christ and not by works of the law” (Gal 2:16). In these words Paul crystallized the heart of the Christian gospel in effect for all time. We return to this theme so central to Paul’s apostleship in the third lecture.

It was this understanding of his commission, apostle = missionary = evangelist, which gave the Christian concept of “apostle” its distinctive sense. And not only distinctive, but ground-breaking sense. For while the concept of “apostle” = “messenger, emissary” was self-evident (*apostolos* from *apostellō*, “send”), and *apostolos* was used in that sense, the sense of “apostle” as one commissioned to win adherents to one’s faith, to convert others, was new. We know of Jewish apologists, concerned to help their fellow-Jews to take a proper pride in their religion and to explain its peculiarities to others. We know of wandering philosophers who sought to persuade others of the wisdom of their views. To be sure, the model provided by Jesus, of a summons to radical trust in God in the light of the coming kingdom, had already broken old moulds, and was resumed by the first believers in the risen Jesus in their initial preaching in Jerusalem and Judea. But it was this sense of commission to convert others, to win adherents to the new movement from well beyond the boundaries of Second Temple Judaism by summoning them to faith in Israel’s Christ, which gave the Christian understanding of “apostle” its distinctive character.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Cf. E. J. SCHNABEL, *Early Christian Mission: Vol. 1. Jesus and the Twelve; Vol. 2. Paul and the Early Church* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2004), 536-45; C. ROETZEL, *Paul: The Man and the Myth* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1999), ch. 2.

Here we should recall that Judaism was not a missionary religion.<sup>44</sup> Pharisees and Essenes were more naturally concerned to win fellow Jews to a stricter devotion to their covenant obligations;<sup>45</sup> but they were not in the business of trying to win *non*-Jews to adopt their praxis.<sup>46</sup> Judaism was, after all, the national religion of the Jews; it was not a matter of going out to convert non-Jews to a non-ethnic religion. Israel was very welcoming of God-fearers and proselytes, and looked for an influx of the nations to Zion as part of the eschatological home-coming of the Diaspora; but an outgoing effort to persuade Gentiles to come in was not part of the script. So what Paul believed himself called to do was exceptional and mind-blowing and established Christianity's character as essentially a missionary religion.

## 2.5 Apostle of Israel

Less explicit, but, we may judge, equally important for Paul, was the conviction that his commission as "apostle to the Gentiles" was not only in accordance with the will of God, but was also *an extension of Israel's own commission from God*. This inference is clearest, once again, in Galatians.

- Gal 1:15-16 contain clear echoes of Jer 1:5 and Isa 49:1-6 in Paul's description of his conversion/calling: "... the one who set me apart (*aphorisas*) from my mother's womb, and called me through his grace... in order that I might preach him among the Gentiles..."

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<sup>44</sup> See particularly S. MCKNIGHT, *A Light among the Gentiles: Jewish Missionary Activity in the Second Temple Period* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991); M. GOODMAN, *Mission and Conversion: Proselytizing in the Religious History of the Roman Empire* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1994); R. RIESNER, "A Pre-Christian Jewish Mission?," in J. ADNA and H. KVALBEIN, eds., *The Mission of the Early Church to Jews and Gentiles* (WUNT 127; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2000), 211-50; L. J. L. PEERBOLTE, *Paul the Missionary* (Leuven: Peeters, 2003), ch. 1; Schnabel, *Mission*, ch. 6.

<sup>45</sup> This is probably where Mt 23:15 comes in. The readiness of "scribes and Pharisees" to "cross sea and land to make a single proselyte" probably refers to the zeal of an Eleazar to ensure that would-be converts to Judaism, like Izates, were converted all the way (JOSEPHUS, *Ant.* 20.38-46).

<sup>46</sup> 4QMMT can now be seen as a classic example, written with the explicit hope of persuading fellow Jews to accept and follow the rulings listed in the letter (C26-32).

- Jer 1:5 LXX – Jeremiah expresses his sense of call: “Before I formed you *in the womb* I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you; I appointed you a prophet *to the nations*.”
- Isa 49:1-6 LXX – The Servant of Yahweh = Israel (49:3) speaks: “*From my mother’s womb* he called my name. (...) Behold I have set you for a covenant of the people, to be for a *light of the nations/Gentiles*, for salvation to the end of the earth.”

There can be little doubt, therefore, that Paul saw his conversion as a prophetic commissioning—a prophetic commissioning like that of Jeremiah in Jer 1:5 (“appointed a prophet to the nations”);<sup>47</sup> and more specifically in terms used for Israel, the Servant of Second Isaiah (to be given “as a light to the nations”—Isa 49:6). This continuity between his own vocation and that of Israel (the Servant of Yahweh—Isa 49:3) was evidently an important part of Paul’s self-understanding. What happened on the Damascus road *was* a conversion, a conversion from Saul’s previous understanding of how God’s will and purpose for Israel was to be carried forward. But Paul saw it as a conversion *to* a better, the correct understanding of that will and purpose for Israel. Apostle to the Gentiles, yes; but not thereby an *apostate from* Israel; rather an *apostle of* Israel, commissioned to carry forward Israel’s destiny as “a light to the nations.”<sup>48</sup>

Equally striking is Paul’s handling of the original promise made to Abraham in Gen 12:2-3 and repeated to Abraham and to the patriarchs regularly thereafter. The two most prominent strands of the promise were the promise of seed for Abraham, descendants from Abraham;<sup>49</sup> and of land, the promised land, so prominent once again in the politics of modern Israel.<sup>50</sup> Paul takes up both strands, in the slightly curious argument of Galatians 3 that the promise of

<sup>47</sup> See further K. O. SANDNES, *Paul – One of the Prophets?* (WUNT 2.43; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1991), ch. 5 (but he fails to bring out the “to the nations” dimension integral to the call). The *aphorisis* (“set me apart”) of Gal 1:15 may also be a deliberate play on the word which gave the Pharisees their nickname (= “separated ones”): his “separatism” as a Pharisee in service of the law was replaced by his “separation” to be an apostle in service of the gospel.

<sup>48</sup> See further my “Paul: Apostate or Apostle of Israel?,” *ZNW* 89 (1998) 256-271.

<sup>49</sup> Gen 13:16; 15:5; 17:2-4, 19; 18:18; 22:17; 26:4.

<sup>50</sup> Gen 12.7; 13.14-17; 15.18-21; 17.8; 26.3.

“seed” is fulfilled in and through Christ (Gal 3:16), and in the parallel argument of Romans 4, where the promise of land is also expanded to the promise that Abraham “would inherit the world” (Rom 4:13).<sup>51</sup> But here our interest is particularly in the way Paul takes up the *third* strand of the promise to Abraham, the covenant promise that “In you shall all the nations be blessed.”<sup>52</sup> This third strand is not much mused upon in Israel’s scriptures, though implied in the commissions of Jeremiah and the Servant to go to the nations, and in the story of the prophet Jonah.<sup>53</sup> But Paul goes much further. Indeed, he describes the promise that the Gentiles will be blessed in Abraham as “the gospel preached beforehand” (Gal 3:8). Here it is clear that Paul identified the *gospel* as the good news of God’s covenant grace *extending to the Gentiles*. This he no doubt saw as an integral part of Israel’s commission. And clearly, from what Paul says in Galatians 3, he understood his own role as carrying forward precisely that agenda, God’s own agenda for *Israel*, the gospel for Gentiles as well as Jews.

The same point follows from what Paul says about his role as “apostle to the Gentiles” in Rom 9-11. For there he is clear that his role vis-à-vis the nations/Gentiles is part of God’s great scheme—the “mystery” of the divine purpose—to extend mercy to *all*, not least, including Israel (11:13-15, 25-32).<sup>54</sup>

In short, Paul would have strongly resisted the charge that historic Judaism has laid against him, that he was an “*apostate* from Israel.” To the contrary, Paul’s claim is in effect that he was not only an apostle of Christ Jesus, but also an “apostle of *Israel*.”<sup>55</sup> Sad to say, this self-claim, and claim for his apostleship and gospel, has not

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<sup>51</sup> Cf. Sir 44:21; 2Bar 14.13; 51.3; see further my *Romans*, 213.

<sup>52</sup> Gen 12:3; 18:18; 22:18; 26:4. The Genesis texts can be variously understood (see e.g. G. J. Wenham, *Genesis* [WBC 1; Waco: Word, 1987] 277-8), but Paul’s interpretation is clear.

<sup>53</sup> See further J. R. WISDOM, *Blessing for the Nations and the Curse of the Law: Paul’s citation of Genesis and Deuteronomy in Gal 2.8-10* (WUNT 2.133; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2001), 36-42.

<sup>54</sup> See also A. J. HULTGREN, “The Scriptural Foundations for Paul’s Mission to the Gentiles,” in S. E. PORTER, ed., *Paul and His Theology* (Leiden: Brill, 2006), 21-44.

<sup>55</sup> The case was pressed earlier, particularly by J. MUNCK, *Paul and the Salvation of Mankind* (London: SCM, 1959), and J. JERVELL, *The Unknown Paul: Essays on Luke-Acts and Early Christian History* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1984), chs. 3-4.

been adequately appreciated within historic Christianity and ignored within historic Judaism. On this point not least, Paul needs to be listened to afresh, and in his own terms.<sup>56</sup>

## 2.6 Eschatological apostle

If we are to understand the first generation of Christianity adequately it is of crucial importance that we take into account the eschatological temper and perspective of the first believers. For they believed that in Jesus Messiah the new age had dawned—not just a new age, but the final age, the *eschaton* (= “last”) in which the ultimate promises of God and hopes for Israel would be realized. This conviction focused on two features:

- Jesus’ resurrection as the beginning of the general/final resurrection;<sup>57</sup>
- and the soon-coming return of Jesus as manifestly Messiah and Lord (Acts 3:19-21).

Luke does not make much at all of this emphasis—presumably because Luke chose not to highlight the eschatological motivation, which we may assume to have been a factor in that expansion, beyond the echoes in old traditional forms that he took over (Acts 2:17; 3:19-21).

With Paul, however, we can see how this eschatological perspective shaped his understanding of his calling as an apostle—again, not from what Luke tells us of Paul, but from his own letters.

- He recalls how the Thessalonian believers had “turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God and to await his Son from the heavens” (1Thess 1:9-10; as in Acts 3:19-21);
- He seems to have believed that he would still be alive when Jesus returned: “We who are alive, who are left until the coming

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<sup>56</sup> See further my “Paul: Apostate or Apostle of Israel?”; also “The Jew Paul and his Meaning for Israel,” in *Paulinische Christologie: Exegetische Beiträge* (U. SCHNELLE & T. SÖDING, eds., H. HÜBNER FS [Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2000]), 32-46; reprinted in T. LINAFELT, ed., *A Shadow of Glory: Reading the New Testament after the Holocaust* (New York: Routledge, 2002), 201-15.

<sup>57</sup> Rom 1:4; 1Cor 15:20, 23.

(*parousia*) of the Lord..." (1Thess 4:15); similarly, 1Cor 15:51: "We will not all die, but we will all be changed";

- Christ's resurrection was the "first-fruits of those who have died," that is, the beginning of the (general/final) resurrection (1Cor 15:20, 23);
- He encouraged his converts in Corinth to refrain from marriage, because "the time is short," "the form of this world is passing away" (1Cor 7:29, 31);
- He believed that "the night is nearly over, and the day (of complete salvation) is near" (Rom 13:12).

That this perspective shaped Paul's understanding of his apostleship<sup>58</sup> is clearest from three passages in particular:

### (1) 1Cor 4:9:

It seems to me that God has put us apostles on display as the grand finale [*eschatous apedeixen*], as those doomed to die [*epithanaticious*], because we have been made a spectacle [*theatron*] in the eyes of the world, of angels, and of humankind (Thiselton).

Here Paul takes up "the metaphor of a great pageant, in which criminals, prisoners, or professional gladiators process to the gladiatorial ring, with the apostles bringing up the rear as those who must fight to the death."<sup>59</sup> In other words, he conceives of the whole sweep of history, or of God's program for the world, as climaxing in the acts of the apostles. The apostles constitute the last act on the stage of cosmic history (watched also by angels). The imagery is somewhat vainglorious, though the imagery is hardly of a "stage triumph." In the terms of the metaphor they have been "condemned to death" (*epithanaticios*) in the eyes of the watching

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<sup>58</sup> My interest in this aspect of Paul's self-understanding goes back to A. FRIDRICHSEN, *The Apostle and his Message* (Uppsala, 1947) – "this idea that an *apostolate* is to stand in the centre of the eschatologic development between the resurrection and return of the Messiah" (4); O. CULLMANN, *Christ and Time* (London: SCM, 1962), 157-66; and MUNCK, *Paul* 36-55, though their interpretation was too heavily dependent on a very disputable interpretation of 2Thess 2:6-7.

<sup>59</sup> A. C. THISELTON, *1 Corinthians* (NIGTC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 359; see further W. SCHRAGE, *1 Korinther* (EKK VII/4; Düsseldorf: Benziger, 2001), 1.340-2.

cosmos; their public execution would “bring the curtain down” on the pageant of history.

## (2) Rom 11:13-15:

I am speaking to you Gentiles. So then, inasmuch as I am apostle to the Gentiles, I magnify my ministry, in the hope that I might provoke my kindred to jealousy, and might save some of them. For if their rejection means reconciliation for the world, what shall their acceptance mean other than life from the dead?

The point to note here is Paul’s hope and expectation for his apostolic ministry. He pressed forward with his mission to the Gentiles, not because he believed his own people had been cast off by God, and therefore had turned to the Gentiles in despair of his own people. Rather, his hope was that his success as apostle to the Gentiles would “provoke his kindred to jealousy” and bring them to the faith which he preached. In Paul’s perspective that “acceptance” by and of his own people would mean something still more wonderful than “reconciliation for the world.” In fact, it would mean nothing less “than life from the dead,” that is, the final resurrection at the end of the age/history.<sup>60</sup> In other words, Paul hoped that his own mission would trigger the end events, including the coming of the deliverer out of Zion (11:26). That was why his mission had such overwhelming priority for him.

## (3) Col 1:24:

Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake and I fill up what is lacking of the afflictions of the Christ in my flesh for the sake of his body, which is the church.

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<sup>60</sup> “The eschatological force here is put beyond dispute by the *ek nekron*, which elsewhere always denotes resurrection. [And] the rhetorical structure demands that the final phrase should describe something which outstrips the earlier...; here ‘life from the dead’ presented as something more wonderful still than ‘reconciliation of the world’” (DUNN, *Romans* 658; where I also note that most commentators agree that final resurrection is in view here); see further D. J. MOO, *The Epistle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 694-6; B. WITHERINGTON, *Paul’s Letter to the Romans* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), 269.

Here Paul, or his co-writer, probably takes up the imagery of Christ's sufferings and death as the eschatological tribulation (commonly referred to as "the messianic woes") expected as a crucial antecedent to the age to come.<sup>61</sup> Paul himself had no qualms about the thought of sharing Christ's sufferings,<sup>62</sup> or indeed of himself in some measure fulfilling the role of the Servant of Yahweh. The logic of a suffering still being shared, of course, is of a suffering not yet ended, an incomplete suffering. The writer of Colossians, however, is bold enough to regard Paul's apostolic sufferings as actually completing, "filling up" this *hysterēma* ("lack or deficiency"), with the corollary that the work of redemption/salvation would then be complete.<sup>63</sup> Here again the claim smacks of a vain-glorious exaltation of Paul's role.<sup>64</sup> But it is simply the most striking expression of Paul's conviction regarding the importance of his apostolic mission. It was this last apostolic act on the stage of cosmic history which would complete God's purpose in history and trigger "the consummation of all things."

It is difficult for us who read such language nearly twenty centuries later—especially when neither the end of history nor the coming of Christ has taken place. It is difficult for us to enter with much sympathy into such a conception of Paul's apostolic role. But we need to make the attempt, since it presumably provided much of the motivation and energy which brought about such major results and such lasting effects. Paul's eschatology was integral to his sense of apostolic mission. At the same time, it should always be recalled that the decisive eschatological consideration for Paul was not what was still to happen, but what God had already done in and through Christ, particularly in raising him from

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<sup>61</sup> For details see my *Jesus Remembered* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), #11.4c and 395.

<sup>62</sup> Particularly Rom 8:17; 2Cor 4:10-12; Phil 3:10-12; see further my *Theology of Paul* #18.5.

<sup>63</sup> See further my *The Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon* (NIGTC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 114-6; H. STETTLER, "An Interpretation of Colossians 1:24 in the Framework of Paul's Mission Theology," in *Mission of the Early Church* (ÅDNA and KVALBEIN, eds.), 185-208; J. L. SUMNEY, "I Fill Up What is Lacking in the Afflictions of Christ: Paul's Vicarious Suffering in Colossians," *CBQ* 68 (2006) 664-80.

<sup>64</sup> "A theologically untenable glorification of the apostle by one of his followers" (H. HÜBNER, *EDNT* 3.110); others in my *Colossians* 116.

the dead. That was the eschatological act which determined all else. "Paul's gospel was eschatological not because of what he still hoped would happen, but because of what he believed had already happened."<sup>65</sup>

## 2.7 Apostate or apostle?

So our question about the status of Paul, "apostate or apostle," can be answered so far as Paul's (and Christianity's) relation to Judaism (or Second Temple Judaism) is concerned. As Paul understood his mission he was no apostate from Israel. On the contrary, he was engaged in endeavoring to fulfill Israel's own apostolic mission—to be a light to the nations, to proclaim the good news of God's covenant love and, as we shall see, of God's saving righteousness to Gentiles as well as Jews. As such he is an authentically Jewish voice, drawing his inspiration and motivation in large part from Israel's own scriptures. He is a Jewish contributor to a Jewish debate—as to how Israel remains true to its gifts and calling. His voice has been almost wholly ignored within that debate. He is still predominantly regarded as an apostate from Israel. But in fact he is one of numerous other voices from Second Temple Judaism—also in that debate, also disputing among themselves and with one another. Paul deserves to be brought back into that debate and his voice heeded—argued with, no doubt, but not ignored.

But the question "apostate or apostle" also has to be asked and answered within Christianity. For Paul seems to have moved on well beyond Jesus' own message. He was an awkward voice within earliest Christianity, calling in question the mother church's understanding of the gospel. In opening the door to the wider world he began a process of transforming an eschatological messianic sect into a predominantly non-Jewish religion. He was not one of Jesus' own immediate circle of disciples, and his status as apostle was questioned from within infant Christianity itself. His claim to apostleship direct from Christ and independent from the mother

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<sup>65</sup> DUNN *Theology of Paul*, 465.

Church of Christianity sets an uncomfortable precedent for similar claims in later years. Indeed it is arguable that Paul was only retained within the New Testament because it is the milder, more irenic Paul of the Acts and the Pastoral epistles who was canonized, whereas the Paul of the earlier epistles was too controversial, too demanding for the Church's peace of mind. If truth be told, Paul is an awkward and somewhat uncomfortable member of the New Testament canon. It is little wonder that many Christian traditions effectively ignore him. The Gospels provide all the material for our homilies that we could ever want. A homily on an early epistle of Paul is too demanding to contemplate.

And yet, what do we thereby miss? What do we miss by reading Paul only canonically, an ecclesiasticized Paul—that is, softening his awkwardness by reading him only through Acts and the Pastorals? Israel, I claim, by dismissing Paul as an apostate, may be missing those emphases of their own scriptures and tradition which inspired Paul. So today, in a similar way, by largely ignoring Paul, we may be ignoring the voice of the Spirit who inspired Paul. The diversity and tensions within the New Testament canon are what help to prevent us falling asleep and remaining content with the old ways, even when they are demonstrably failing to give effective voice to the gospel, even when they no longer express the vitality of mission. And here is where we need to listen again to Paul with new ears, to ask why his gospel was so effective, his mission so vital, and whether his gospel and mission can point the way forward for us and for the Church of the twenty-first century.

### **3. THE GOSPEL – FOR ALL WHO BELIEVE**

#### **3.1 What made the difference?**

In the light of what we have so far seen we can and have to say that Paul changed: He changed from being a traditionalist Jew to become a Jew “in Christ.” He changed from being a Pharisee, to become, at least in his own eyes, an apostle, indeed, the apostle to the Gentiles. What made the difference? To answer this question we have to consider first of all the change which took place in Paul,

that is, what is called by common consent Paul's *conversion*. So our question—What made the difference?—becomes a two fold question: What was he converted *from*? And what was he converted *to*? We have already considered a large part of the answer to the second question. He was converted to become an apostle to the Gentiles. But we have still to plumb the depths of the question. It is the way the two questions tie in to each other, the way in which the answer to the question—What was Paul converted to?—depends on the answer to the prior question—What was he converted from?—which we have now to explore.

### 3.2 Paul's previous conviction

The most striking feature of Paul's pre-Christian past as he himself recalled it was his role as a *persecutor* of the church, that is, of his fellow-Jews who believed Jesus to be Messiah. He refers to this pre-Christian past several times: "I persecuted the church of God" (1Cor 15:9); "I persecuted the church of God in excessive measure and tried to destroy it" (Gal 1:13); "as to zeal, a persecutor of the church" (Phil 3:6). In Gal 1:23 he recalls that he was commonly known among the Judean churches as "he who persecutes us," "the persecutor."

Why did Paul take on the role of persecutor? The answer he himself gives has just been mentioned: he did so as an expression of his "zeal": "As to zeal, a persecutor of the church" (Phil 3:6). The account of Paul in Acts agrees. According to Acts Paul testified that he had been trained as a Pharisee "at the feet of Gamaliel, educated strictly according to our ancestral law, being a zealot for God. And I persecuted this Way to the point of death" (Acts 22:3-4). Why did Paul's "being a zealot for God" cause him to persecute the followers of the Way, the sect of the Nazarene? Why did zeal motivate him to persecute those who he subsequently identified as "the church of God"? Somewhat surprisingly, this answer to our question, Why did Paul persecute his fellow Jews?, has not been given the attention it deserves, even though it is actually Paul's own answer to the question. So it requires more attention than it has been given.

a) The answer lies partly in Paul's training as a *Pharisee*, as indeed a Pharisee who progressed in Judaism beyond many of his contemporaries among his people being so exceptionally zealous for his ancestral traditions (Gal 1:14). Now we know that the name "Pharisees" was probably something of a nickname—the *perushim*, the "separated ones" (from the Hebrew *parash*, "to separate").<sup>66</sup> This indicates the conviction of the Pharisees that in order to maintain their level of purity, or holiness, they had to maintain a high degree of separation from the sources of impurity and defilement. Since for the Pharisees, these sources were other people, other Jews, who did not maintain such a strict level of law observance, that meant separation from other Jews. So Pharisees were notable for their practice of eating their meals among themselves, separate from other Jews, probably maintaining the level of purity required for priests while in service.<sup>67</sup> We see indications of this in the criticism of Jesus' table-fellowship with tax collectors and sinners which the Gospels attribute to Pharisees.<sup>68</sup> "Sinners" were those who broke the law. So for Pharisees, who interpreted the law with scrupulous accuracy and exactness (*akribeia*),<sup>69</sup> in order to observe it more faithfully, other Jews who did not share or follow the Pharisees' interpretation, their *halakhoth*, were law-breakers, "sinners."

Since Paul was such a zealous Pharisee we may assume that the same reasoning determined his own conduct. In his pre-

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<sup>66</sup> See SCHÜRER, *History* 2.396-7; S. J. D. COHEN, *From the Maccabees to the Mishnah* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1987), 162; A. J. SALDARINI, *Pharisees, Scribes and Sadducees in Palestinian Society* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1988), 220-5.

<sup>67</sup> See further e.g. SALDARINI, *Pharisees*, 212-6, 233-4, 285-7, 290-1; M. HENGEL & R. DEINES, "E. P. SANDERS' 'Common Judaism,' Jesus, and the Pharisees," *JTS* 46 (1995) 1-70 (here 41-51); H. K. HARRINGTON, "Did the Pharisees Eat Ordinary Food in a State of Ritual Purity?," *JSJ* 26 (1995) 42-54; J. SCHAPER, "Pharisees," in *Judaism. Vol. 3: The Early Roman Period* (W. HORBURY, et al. eds., [Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1999]), 402-27 (here 420-1). The old view that the Pharisees sought to extend the holiness of the Temple throughout the land of Israel, on the basis of Ex 19:5-6, is probably still warranted (SCHÜRER, *History* 2.396-400; A. F. SEGAL, *Rebecca's Children: Judaism and Christianity in the Roman World* [Cambridge, MA: Harvard University, 1986], 124-8).

<sup>68</sup> Mt 11:19/Luke 7:34; Mark 2:16-17; Luke 15:2.

<sup>69</sup> JOSEPHUS, *War* 1.110; 2.162; *Ant.* 17.41; *Life* 191; Acts 22:3; 26:5; see particularly A. I. BAUMGARTEN, "The Name of the Pharisees," *JBL* 102 (1983) 413-7.

Christian state he would have counted it as of first importance to maintain his separation from sin, and from “sinners.” He would have conducted himself as one who saw it as a priority to observe the patriarchal traditions. He would almost certainly have condemned and looked down on other Jews who did not share that priority. This was what “righteousness which is in the law” demanded, and Paul could claim that in terms of this righteousness he had been “blameless” (Phil 3:6). That is, not that he had never sinned, but that he had lived completely within the terms of the law, including faithfulness to its requirements and atonement for his failures. But there is more to it. The language of “zeal” takes us more deeply.

- b) *The theology of zeal* within the religion and traditions of Israel is not hard to trace. Integral to the concept of “zeal” or “jealousy” (it is the same word, Hebrew *qn'*), was the fundamental conviction that YHWH is a jealous/zealous God. YHWH’s zeal was expressed in his insistence that Israel must not worship any other gods but remain dedicated to him alone. “You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I the Lord your God am a jealous God...” (Ex: 20:5).<sup>70</sup> E. Reuter notes that the relationship between YHWH and his worshippers “is characterized by an intolerant demand for exclusivity: it is Yahweh’s will ‘to be the only God for Israel, and... he is not disposed to share his claim for worship and love with any other divine power.’”<sup>71</sup> In the LXX God himself is described as a “zealot.”<sup>72</sup>

It was this “zeal” of YHWH which was seen as requiring and providing the pattern for Israel’s own “zeal”—a “zeal” for holiness, as Yahweh is holy (Lev 19:2). Holiness was understood here as being set apart to God alone. But it was taken for granted that to be set apart *for* God unavoidably meant also being set apart *from* the other nations. Consequently, “zeal” was a burning

<sup>70</sup> So too Ex 34:14; Dt 4:23-24; 5:9; 6:14-15; 32:21; 11QT 2:12-13.

<sup>71</sup> E. REUTER, *qn'*, TDOT 13.54, citing G. VON RAD, *Old Testament Theology* (2 vols.; Edinburgh: Oliver & Boyd, 1962), 1.208. Paul’s plea to the Corinthians, “I am jealous for you with the jealousy of God” (2Cor 11:2), is a direct echo of this divine zeal/jealousy.

<sup>72</sup> Ex 20:5; 34:14; Dt 4:24; 5:9; 6:15.

concern to maintain Israel's identity as a people set apart to God, a passionate concern to protect Israel's holiness over against other nations. This gives us the clue to why Paul's zeal caused him to persecute his fellow Jews.

The most famous of Israel's "heroes of zeal" was Phinehas, who, when an Israelite brought a Midianite woman into his tent (into the congregation of YHWH), forthwith slew them both, "because he was zealous for God" (Num 25:6-13). In Num 25:11 Phinehas' zeal is understood as a direct reflection of YHWH's zeal.<sup>73</sup> For this single deed he was often recalled and his zeal praised,<sup>74</sup> and he became the model and inspiration for the later Zealots who led Israel's revolt against Rome.<sup>75</sup>

Other examples in Israel's roll-call of heroes of zeal are easily catalogued:

1. Simeon and Levi who "burned with zeal" and avenged the seduction of their sister Dinah, "the pollution of their blood" (Jdt 9:2-4), by slaughtering the villagers where she had been seduced (Gen 34).
2. The Maccabean revolt against their Syrian overlords was sparked off by Mattathias of Modein, when, "burning with zeal" for the law, just like Phinehas's, he executed the Syrian officer and the fellow-Jew who made to apostatise by offering forbidden sacrifice (1Macc 2:23-26). Mattathias rallied the rebellion by crying out, "Let everyone who is zealous for the law and supports the covenant come with me" (2:27; Josephus, *Ant.* 12.271), and his death-bed testimony is a paean in praise of the zeal displayed by the heroes of Israel (1Macc 2:51-60).

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<sup>73</sup> "Like Joshua's zeal on behalf of Moses (Nm 11:29), Phinehas's zeal on behalf of Yahweh realizes Yahweh's own jealousy... which otherwise would have consumed all Israel" (Reuter, *qn'*, *TDOT* 13.56). As A. STUMPF observed (*TDNT* 2.879), the term ("zeal") is linked with "anger" (Dt 29:20) and "wrath" (Nm 25:11; Ez 16:38, 42; 36:6; 38:19); see also 1QH 17[= 9].3; 4Q400 1.1.18; 4Q504 frag. 1-2 3.10-11; 5.5); similarly M. HENGEL, *The Zealots* (1961, <sup>2</sup>1976; ET Edinburgh, T. & T. Clark 1989), 146-7.

<sup>74</sup> Ps 106:28-31 (the deed was "reckoned to him as righteousness"); Sir 45:23-24 ("third in glory for being zealous in the fear of the Lord"); 1Macc 2:26, 54 ("Phinehas our ancestor, because he was deeply zealous, received the covenant of everlasting priesthood"); 4 Mc 18:12.

<sup>75</sup> HENGEL, *Zealots*, ch. IV.

3. Philo bears witness to the same attitude when, writing possibly only a decade or so before Paul's role as a persecutor, he warned that "there are thousands... who are zealots for the law, strictest guardians of the ancestral customs, merciless to those who do anything to subvert them" (*Spec. Leg.* 2.253).
4. And in the same spirit are the rulings preserved in the Mishnah: "If a man... made an Aramean woman his paramour, the zealots may fall upon him. If a priest served (at the altar) in a state of uncleanness his brethren the priests did not bring him to the court, but the young men among the priests took him outside the Temple court and split open his brain with clubs" (*m. Sanh.* 9.6).

In the light of this evidence, we can see that the tradition of "zeal for the Lord/Torah" was marked by three features in particular:

1. It was sparked by the sight of fellow-Jews disregarding the law, particularly when it meant that *Israel's set-apartness to God and from the defilement of other nations and their gods was being threatened or compromised.*
2. It could be *directed against fellow (compromising) Jews* as much as against the foreign "others" whose involvement marked the breach of Israel's boundaries.<sup>76</sup>
3. It regularly *involved violence and bloodshed*, as necessitated (in the view of the zealots) by the severity of the danger to Israel's exclusive set-apartness to and holiness before God.

All this, of course, explains why "Zealots" was the name used for those who led the revolt against Rome in the 60's. Their revolt was the ultimate attempt of Second Temple Judaism to maintain its loyalty to God alone, and to retain its set-apartness to God and from other nations.

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<sup>76</sup> "Sinners and lawless men" in 1Macc 1:34 and 2:44, 48 certainly included those whom the Maccabees regarded as apostate Jews, Israelites who had abandoned the law; see further my "Pharisees, Sinners and Jesus," *Jesus, Paul and the Law* (London: SPCK/Louisville-Westminster: John Knox, 1990), 61-86 (here 74).

What is immediately striking for us, of course, is that the three features provide a remarkably accurate description of Paul's persecution of the Jews who believed in Messiah Jesus. For Paul's persecution was directed against fellow-Jews (the Hellenists) and was evidently as fierce as the tradition of zeal documented—"I persecuted the church of God in excessive measure and tried to destroy it" (Gal 1:13). Since the latter two of the three characteristics of Israel's tradition of zeal match Paul's own persecuting zeal (violence directed against fellow Jews), it suggests that the first characteristic was true of Paul's zeal too. That is, Paul probably persecuted the first Christians because he regarded the Hellenists, those identified with the views of Stephen, as *a threat to Israel's set-apartness to God*. For reasons we cannot fully explain, Paul seems to have regarded the attitudes and actions of some (representative) Hellenists as a threat to Israel's holiness and separateness. Presumably Paul saw the threat posed by the Hellenists as potentially breaching the protective boundaries formed by the law and maintained by doing the law. That could also be described as "zeal for the law"; but in this case it was the law in its role as a bulwark against the corruptions and the defilements of other nations. This understanding of the role of the law is classically expressed in the Letter of Aristeas 139-142:

"In his wisdom the legislator [i.e. Moses]... surrounded us with unbroken palisades and iron walls to prevent our mixing with any of the other peoples in any matter, being thus kept pure in body and soul... To prevent our being perverted by contact with others or by mixing with bad influences, he hedged us in on all sides with strict observances connected with meat and drink and touch and hearing and sight, after the manner of the Law" (Charlesworth).

If this function of the law, if Paul's concern to shelter behind the protective boundary of the law, and his zeal to maintain Israel's holiness in separation from the Gentiles explains what Paul was converted from, then what was he converted to?

### 3.3 To what was Paul converted?

- a) One answer must be that Paul came to the conclusion that Jesus was indeed God's Messiah. In fact, that belief in Jesus as Messiah does not seem to have motivated sustained persecuting zeal against the Jerusalem Jews. But certainly Paul "the persecutor" would have been convinced that Jesus was *not* Israel's Messiah. As a crucified criminal he was under God's curse (Gal 3:13). A crucified Messiah made no sense, a "stumbling block" indeed to Jews generally (1Cor 1:23). But on the Damascus road, Paul encountered Christ, saw Christ alive and exalted to heaven (1Cor 9:1; 15:8). In Gal 1:15-16 he describes his conversion as God revealing his Son "in me." And in Phil 3:7-11 it is clear that it was the wonder of gaining Christ, and the hope of being found in him and of sharing fully in his death and resurrection, which transformed everything which he had previously counted upon into mere rubbish. According to Acts, the heavenly Christ confronted Paul, struck down on the Damascus road, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?... I am Jesus whom you are persecuting."<sup>77</sup> Whatever the detail of the event itself, it must have been a shattering blow to Paul, and must have convinced him that he had been totally wrong about Jesus. He was converted to what he had previously denied.
- b) Bound up with this would be the revelatory realisation that those he had been persecuting were right after all. He had persecuted them for their readiness to set aside Israel's previous policy of maintaining separateness from Gentiles, for the threat of their being more open to Gentiles than the law allowed. So presumably Paul's conversion also included a conversion to such openness. This indeed is what Paul expressly states in Gal 1:15-16, that God had revealed his Son in him "in order that I might preach the good news of him among the Gentiles." This is why several scholars have argued that what happened on the Damascus road was more of a commissioning than a conversion. It is hardly necessary to regard the two aspects as

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<sup>77</sup> Acts 9.4-5; 22.7-8; 26.14-15.

mutually exclusive. We have seen clearly enough that Paul's conversion was indeed a turning from. But it is very striking that Paul emphasized the commissioning character of his conversion so strongly. This is what was at stake for Paul in his insistence that he was an apostle (Gal 1:1, 11-12). He was an apostle because he had seen the Lord (1Cor 9:1). His apostleship was as "apostle to the Gentiles" (Rom 11:13)—a commission which the leading Jerusalem apostles had readily conceded when they met in Jerusalem (Gal 2:7-9). And it is also worth noting that here too Acts accords with the Pauline letters. Each of the three accounts of Paul's conversion in Acts includes the element of Paul's commissioning to take the gospel to the nations.<sup>78</sup> In other words, it was Paul the convert who took up the very tendencies which he had so violently opposed and transformed them into active mission; the openness of the Hellenists to the Gentiles became the Gentile mission of Paul the apostle.

- c) As we have seen (#2.5), Paul did not regard this as a betrayal of his Jewish heritage. Quite the contrary, as an apostle of Jesus Christ he was also an apostle of Israel, not an apostate from Israel. His commission was towards the fulfilment of Israel's commission to be a light to the Gentiles. His claim is elsewhere reinforced by Paul's exposition of Israel's own fundamental creed to make the point. Thus in Rom 3:29-30 he presses this very point: if indeed God is one, as he is indeed (Dt 6:4), then he is not simply God of the Jews but also God of the Gentiles. And as such he will justify the uncircumcised through faith just as he justifies the circumcised through faith.

The same basic logic of Paul's gospel is indicated in his use of the key motif, "the righteousness of God." This phrase, we recall, is at the centre of the thematic statement of Paul's principal theological writing, his letter to Rome:

I am not ashamed of the gospel, since it is the power of God for salvation, to all who believe, Jew first but also Gentile. For the righteousness of God is being revealed in it from faith to

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<sup>78</sup> Acts 9.15; 22.15, 21; 26.16-18.

faith—as it is written, “He who is righteous by faith shall live” (Rom 1:16-17).

No one with knowledge of Israel’s scriptures could fail to recognize here a major motif of Israel’s theology and understanding of how God conducts his dealings with his creation and his chosen people (Israel). For “righteousness” in Hebrew thought refers to the meeting of obligations which arise out of a relationship. So the phrase, “the righteousness of God,” refers to God’s enactment of the obligation he had accepted in so creating the world and in so choosing Israel to be his people.<sup>79</sup> His righteousness was the obligation he had taken upon himself to sustain and save both creation and people. For Jews the phrase had an inescapably covenant connotation: it denoted God’s *saving* righteousness, which is why the Hebrew term *tsedhaqah* (“righteousness”) is often better translated “deliverance” or “vindication,” as we see in modern translations.<sup>80</sup> Since God’s righteousness was revealed by the gospel, “the power of God for *salvation*,” Paul had surely done enough to ensure that the recipients of his letter would understand this “righteousness” as *saving* righteousness. It was Martin Luther’s realization that this is what Paul had in mind—“God’s righteousness” as saving righteousness (“the righteousness by which through grace and sheer mercy God justifies us through faith”), and not God’s righteousness as his “justice” (“that justice whereby God is just and deals justly in punishing the unjust”)<sup>81</sup> – which gave birth to the Reformation and to the key Reformation doctrine of “justification by faith.”

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<sup>79</sup> For “righteousness” as a relational term, denoting that which meets the obligations laid upon the individual by the relationship of which he/she is part, see my *Theology of Paul* 341-4 and the bibliography there. I also note that the relational character of God’s righteousness undercuts the traditional debates of post-Reformation theology as to whether “the righteousness of God” is a subjective or objective genitive, “an activity of God” or “a gift bestowed by God”—a case of unnecessary and unjustified either-or exegesis (344).

<sup>80</sup> E.g. Ps 51:14; 65:5; 71:15; Isa 46:13; 51:5-8; 62:1-2; Mic 6:5; 7:9.

<sup>81</sup> *Luther’s Works* (ed. J. PELIKAN; St Louis: Concordia, 1960), 34.336-7, as cited by R. BAINTON, *Here I Stand* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1951), 65; full quotation in my *New Perspective on Paul* 187. See also E. LOHSE, “Martin Luther und die Römerbrief des Apostels Paulus – Biblische Entdeckungen,” *KD* 52 (2006) 106-25.

For Paul, of course, the key point was that this gospel is “*to all who believe, Jew first but also Gentile.*” This is not a simple statement of (naïve) universalism (“to all who believe”). The “all” Paul had in mind, here as elsewhere in Romans,<sup>82</sup> was the “all” that transcends and breaks down the barrier between Jew and Greek,<sup>83</sup> between Jews and Gentiles.<sup>84</sup> So, for Paul, the gospel which he had been commissioned to proclaim was precisely the good news of God’s saving righteousness, of God’s covenant grace, now extending beyond Jew to embrace also Gentile. That was what Paul had been convinced of by his Damascus road conversion. That was at the heart of the gospel for Paul—Israel’s good news for Jew and Greek, for Gentile as well as Jew.

### 3.4 The confirmation of God’s Spirit/grace

Without in any way diminishing the importance of Paul’s conversion in transforming his understanding of God’s saving purpose for humankind, there is another factor which must also be noted. This is the fact that the conviction which came to Paul, regarding the openness of God’s saving grace to Gentiles, was confirmed by the actuality of that grace bestowed on Gentiles. This includes the fact that the same grace was bestowed on Gentiles solely on the basis of their believing the gospel of Jesus Christ, and without their being circumcised. The point came home with decisive force at two points in the earliest Christian mission.

- a) *Acts 10-11.* The first, according to Acts, was Peter’s mission to the Roman centurion Cornelius, living in Caesarea (Acts 10-11). One of the most striking features of this account is that before Cornelius could be converted, *Peter himself had to be converted*, that is,

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<sup>82</sup> “In all the nations” (1:5); “to all who believe” (1:16); “to all who believe” (3:22); “father of all who believe” (4:11); “to all the seed” (4:16); “to all” (5:18); “gave his Son for us all” (8:32); “to all who believe” (10:4); “all who believe” (10:11); “he is Lord of all, rich towards all who call upon him” (10:12); “everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord” (10:12); “God has confined all in disobedience in order that he might have mercy on all” (11:32); “all the nations, all the peoples” (15:11); echoed in the all’s of 1:18, 29; 2:1, 9, 10; 3:9, 12, 19, 20, 23; 5:12.

<sup>83</sup> Rm 1:16; 2:9-10; 3:9; 10:12.

<sup>84</sup> Rm 3:29; 9:24.

to change his mind on the acceptability of Gentiles. The episode is vividly told, and referred to no less than three times by Luke, since evidently it had been so important in determining the development and transformation of earliest Christianity.

The conversion of Peter was on the issue of the inherent uncleanness of Gentiles. It was this conviction of Gentile uncleanness which lay behind Israel's need to keep themselves separate from the other nations and which lay at the root of Paul's persecuting zeal. What is less well understood is that the Torah laws of clean and unclean foods were an expression of the *same* conviction. The laws of clean and unclean were based on the premise of Gentile uncleanness and reinforced the separation required of Israel. This is nowhere more clear than in Lev 20:22-26:

You shall not follow the practices of the nations that I am driving out before you. Because they did all these things, I abhorred them. ...I am the Lord your God; *I have separated you from the peoples*. You shall *therefore* make a distinction between the clean animal and the unclean, and between the unclean bird and the clean; you shall not bring abomination on yourselves by animal or by bird or by anything with which the ground teems, which I have set apart for you to hold unclean. *You shall be holy to me; for I the Lord am holy, and I have separated you from the other peoples to be mine.*

In other words, the laws of clean and unclean were important because they indicated the importance of Israel's separation from the uncleanness of other nations.

To recognize this helps us to understand Peter's reaction when, on the rooftop in Joppa, he was given a vision. The vision was of a large sheet let down from heaven and crowded with clean and unclean animals. When the heavenly voice told Peter to "kill and eat," Peter's immediate reaction was to refuse: "By no means, Lord, for I have never eaten anything that is profane or unclean" (Acts 10:13-14). Peter is presented as a loyal Jewish traditionalist, who had never breached the laws of clean and unclean. But the heavenly voice immediately rebukes this attitude: "What God has made clean, you must not call

profane" (10:15). This happened three times, says Luke. And what did Peter learn from this? When the messengers from Cornelius invite him to go to Cornelius, he goes with them without question, to this Gentile's house. And when he arrives, what is the first thing he says? Not that God had shown him that it was all right for him to eat unclean food, to share table fellowship with his Gentile host. No, what he says is, "God has shown me that I should not call any *person* profane or unclean" (10:28). This, we may say, was fully the equivalent of Paul's conversion. As Paul had been changed from one who regarded openness to the Gentiles as a threat to Israel's holiness, so Peter had been changed from one who regarded Gentiles as such as unclean and a threat to Israel's purity.

But the story is not complete. For as it began with the conversion of Peter, so it climaxes with the conversion of Cornelius. Following his welcome by Cornelius, Peter had been preaching the gospel to Cornelius and his friends. And he had hardly begun to speak, so Acts narrates (11:15), when the Spirit fell upon his audience in a visible and indisputable way (10:44; 11:15). What happened to Cornelius was just so similar to what had happened to Peter and the first disciples at Pentecost, that they simply could not fail to recognize that God had accepted Cornelius and his friends—and had done so without any expectation that they would have first or as a consequence to be circumcised.<sup>85</sup> *Here was a case where God's Spirit had acted in disregard for the sacred traditions which had hitherto governed Jewish faith and praxis.* The Spirit had rendered one of Israel's most defining scriptures null and void. So much so that even the more traditional Jewish believers, both those who had accompanied Peter and those to whom he reported in Jerusalem, could not gainsay what had happened or its significance.<sup>86</sup>

- b) *Gal 2:6-9*. In the account of Acts it is this episode which proves decisive when the first Christians met in council in Jerusalem to decide whether circumcision should be required of Gentile be-

<sup>85</sup> Acts 10.47; 11.15-17; 15.8-9.

<sup>86</sup> Acts 10.45-48; 11.18; 15.14.

lievers (Acts 15:5-29). The equivalent crucial decision is recalled somewhat differently by Paul. In Gal 2:1-10 he tells how, in what was probably the same Jerusalem meeting, some "false brothers" had tried to insist that Titus, the Gentile believer accompanying Paul and Barnabas, should be circumcised. Paul recalls how he had vigorously resisted this. The issue was essentially the same as in the Acts account: whether Gentiles who had believed the gospel must be circumcised before they could be regarded as full members of the Jewish sect of Jesus-messianists. And the outcome was essentially the same. For the assembled Christians, says Paul, were so impressed by Paul's account of the mission success of Paul and Barnabas that they had little choice but to accept the conclusions which Paul drew. *They recognized the grace* which had so evidently been given to and through Paul and Barnabas. They recognized that God was manifestly working through the mission to the uncircumcised just as he was working through Peter's mission to the circumcised (Gal 2:7-9). Since Paul saw "grace" and "Spirit" as overlapping terms, presumably he was thinking of God's grace manifested to Paul's converts in the terms he uses a few verses later, when he recalls the Galatians to their reception of the Spirit (3:2-5).

This is a very important point to take on board: that *the development of Christianity was shifted on to a new track by the manifest work of the Spirit*. Christianity might have remained a Jewish messianic sect had it not been for the unexpected and scripture-breaking, tradition-breaking initiative of the Spirit. The Spirit opened up a whole new vista for the first Christians, and they were brave and bold enough to follow where the Spirit showed the way. If we are to fully appreciate Paul the apostle, Paul the theologian, Paul the church-founder, we must take full account of this vital aspect of his gospel. Having been converted by the Christ to recognize that God's saving righteousness reached out to embrace Gentile as well as Jew, Paul was also quick to recognize that God's Spirit was breaking away from the old patterns established by scripture and sanctified by tradition. This is why we need to rediscover Paul and to let him provide a fresh challenge to our own traditions where they no

longer express the life of the Spirit, and to restore to us a fresh vision of how the initiative of the Spirit may once again be taking us in unexpected directions.

### 3.5 The double dimension of justification

One of the corollaries which come home forcibly from all this is that there is a social dimension to the gospel which is integral and fundamental to the gospel

- a) As we all know, Paul's doctrine of justification by faith was at the heart of the Western Reformation. But typically within Reformed theology the doctrine of justification has been understood in very individualistic terms: how the individual is accepted by God; how the individual can find peace with God. As part of this, Paul's slogan, "a person is justified not by works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ" (Gal 2:16), has been traditionally understood in terms of an antithesis between faith and good works. The individual cannot earn his way to heaven by performing good works; justification before God cannot be attained by merit and self-achievement.

This is all true, and Paul clearly affirms that God "justifies the ungodly" (Rom 4:5), that God operates by grace (11:6). But the typical Reformed exposition of justification has left to one side an important dimension of Paul's teaching on justification, a dimension which was actually central to Paul's own gospel and teaching.<sup>87</sup> For when Paul speaks of "works of the law" he was not thinking primarily of "good works." He was thinking of doing what the law demands. By "works of the law" he was thinking primarily of the obligations which Jews had taken on. This is why the issue for Paul was whether *Gentiles* should be expected to observe works of the law. This was why his great statement in Gal 2:16 is the climax of his rejection of Peter's attempt in effect to compel the Gentile believers in Antioch to "judaize," that is, to live like Jews (2:15). To do the works of the

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<sup>87</sup> For my understanding of Paul's theology of justification, see my *Theology of Paul* #14.

law is to judaize, to live like a Jew. This was why the whole issue arose out of the two episodes recalled in Galatians 2: the attempt in Jerusalem to require Gentile believers to be circumcised; and the attempt in Antioch to require Gentile believers to observe the laws of clean and unclean. These were the works of the law that the false brothers and Peter had attempted to impose on the Gentile believers. And it was these attempts to compromise and constrict the gospel that Paul resisted so forcefully.<sup>88</sup>

The point for Paul, then, was, as we have seen, that the gospel of Jesus Christ is good news for *all* who believe, for Gentile as well as Jew. Alternatively expressed, the gospel is the fulfilment of God's purpose to bring Jew and Gentile to worship God together. The point is made most explicitly in two other passages in the Pauline corpus.

- b) In the conclusion to his great letter to Rome (Rom 15:7-12) Paul sums up and rounds off what this great letter was all about, and what he regarded as the central passion of his own life and mission. Christ, he reminds his Roman audiences had "become servant of the circumcised" (15:8). Why? "For the sake of the *truth* of God"—that is, for the sake of the reliability and integrity of God and of the constancy of his purpose. This purpose of God is, and Paul would say, always has been twofold (15:8-9). One was to confirm the promises of the fathers; as in 11:29, Paul reaffirms the irrevocable nature of God's calling of Israel. And second, that "the Gentiles should give praise to God for his mercy" ("mercy," that key term in both Israel's and Paul's understanding of God's purpose).<sup>89</sup> Here not least is confirmation, if confirmation were needed, that *central to Paul's gospel and the primary motivation of his apostleship and mission, was precisely the realisation of that vision: the fulfilment of God's promises to Israel, and Gentiles praising God for mercy.* Here as the climax of

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<sup>88</sup> I discuss all the issues involved in this exegesis in my *The New Perspective on Paul*.

<sup>89</sup> Ex 34:6-7, a theological insight and assertion frequently echoed in Israel's scriptures. The theme is prominent in Rom 9-11: Rom 9:15, 18; 11:30-32 (*eleeo*); 9:23; 11:31; 15:9 (*eleos*).

this letter, the letter in which he laid out most carefully and most completely his understanding of the gospel and of God's saving righteousness, Paul sums up his hope and prayer in scriptures drawn from all sections of the Tanak, from law (Dt 32:43), prophets (Isa 11:10) and psalmist (Ps 18:49; 117:1). Paul's supreme goal and sublime hope were that Jews and Gentiles would rejoice together and together praise God (15:9-11); and that Isaiah's vision of the Messiah's rule embracing the nations (Gentiles) and of the Gentiles finding their hope in him (Is11:10) would now, finally be realized (15:12).

- c) The other passage is the clarification that the letter to the Ephesians brings to the mission and theology of Paul. For it insists that Christ's saving mission was all about bringing in the Gentiles. They had been "without Christ, aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus those who once were far off had been brought near by the blood of Christ" (Eph 2:12-13). In his flesh Christ had made both groups into one and had broken down the dividing wall of hostility between Jew and Gentile, the partition which in Jerusalem's Temple prevented Gentiles from entering nearer to the divine presence (2:14). Christ had abolished the law, the law which demanded and maintained the separation between Jew and Gentile, "that he might create in himself one new humanity in place of the two, thus making peace, and might reconcile both groups to God in one body through the cross, thus putting to death that hostility through him" (2:15-16). Consequently, Gentile believers were "no longer strangers and aliens, but citizens with the saints and also members of the household of God," growing into "a holy temple in the Lord" , "built together in the Spirit into a dwelling place for God" (2:19-22). In the following chapter Paul's own role in this great enterprise is underlined. The mystery of God's purpose to include Gentiles among his people had been specially revealed to Paul, and he had been specially commissioned to bring this gospel of God's riches in Christ to the Gentiles (Eph 3:1-10).

### 3.6 Implications for the social and ecumenical dimensions of mission

To conclude, it is well worth reflecting on this dimension of Paul's mission. And not just well worth doing, but essential that we draw the appropriate conclusions from our recognition of this dimension of Paul's mission.

- a) *The social dimension.* This emphasis on Paul's apostleship for the Gentiles is not just an incidental add-on to what else can be said about his apostleship. It is not a case of describing Paul's role and status as an apostle, and then adding, "Oh yes, and he was also apostle to the Gentiles." No, this was central to Paul's apostleship. This is what Paul's apostleship had been all about. This was why he was prepared to allow a breach with James the brother of Jesus to grow. This was why he was prepared to rebuke Peter in public. This was what he directed all his energies and his very life to accomplish.

Alternatively expressed, we should not be content to say that for Paul the gospel is about how individuals are accepted by God—by faith. And only then to add, "Oh yes, and that means that Jew and Gentile can come together in the same community, can eat together, and be fully accepted by each other." For that was at the heart of the gospel for Paul. It was not gospel unless it meant that Jew and Gentile could worship together, could sit at the same table, together form the one body, the one worshipping congregation.

Another way of putting it is that for Paul the gospel had both a vertical dimension and a social dimension. It could not function on the one dimension unless it also functioned on the other dimension. Paul did not work with a facile distinction between the gospel as a purely spiritual phenomenon, opening people to the grace of God and bringing the grace of God to them, and the social corollaries of that gospel as something quite different. For too long evangelicals, whose name reminds us that their position is determined by the gospel, operated with a distinction between the gospel and the social gospel—the assumption being that the

social gospel was a departure from and corruption of the true gospel. But Paul would never have agreed. For Paul, if the gospel did not have a social effect, a breaking down of racial and national antagonism and disharmony, it was not the gospel. If the gospel did not bring together different races and nations and classes in the one worship, round the one table, then it was not the gospel. If it did not express itself in believers truly loving their neighbours as themselves, it was not the gospel. It simply is impossible for me to be accepted by God if I do not accept those who are also accepted by God.

In a word, Paul teaches us that if we forget the horizontal dimension of the gospel we lose the gospel for which he gave his life.

- b) *The ecumenical dimension.* What continuing weight do we give to one of the most fundamental of Paul's statements: that "no human being is justified by the works of the law, but only through faith in Jesus Christ" (Gal 2:16)? It seems straightforward enough: that faith in Christ is the one thing that matters, indeed, is the only thing that matters to God; that to require anything more than faith, some legal requirement or ritual obligation, is to undermine the gospel, to destroy what Paul calls "the truth of the gospel." The issue had come home to Paul in all its sensitivity and sharpness in the incident at Antioch. There Peter and the other Jewish Christians had withdrawn from table fellowship, no doubt including eucharistic fellowship, with the Gentile Christians. In effect, Paul says, they were trying to compel the Gentile believers to live like Jews, to observe Israel's sacred laws of clean and unclean. In effect they were trying to add works of the law to the gospel's invitation to faith alone.

How does Paul's gospel speak to our ecumenical scene today? For we all are in one degree or other in a position similar to that of Peter and the other Jewish Christians. We say to fellow believers, in effect, we cannot sit at the same table as you, there are certain things we cannot do with you, because you do not recognize traditions and rituals which we hold as central to our own identity as Christians. And in effect we make our traditions and distinctive beliefs as important as the gospel itself, as im-

portant as belief in Christ, as important as being in Christ. We deny Paul to his face: we affirm by our actions that a person is *not* justified by faith alone, but must also observe certain works of tradition. We take the side of Peter and like Peter we abuse and forsake the truth of the gospel. Do we really think that Paul would commend us for our unwillingness to sit at the same table as our fellow Christians, at *his* table? I think not. I think rather that he would say with John Wesley: "If your heart beats with mine in love for our common Lord, then give me your hand," and let us sit and eat together, let us stand and worship together, let us go forth together and tell the good news of Jesus Christ.

#### 4. THE CHURCH – PAUL’S TRINITARIAN ECCLESIOLOGY

When we turn to Paul’s understanding of the church, much of what we have already been looking at becomes still more relevant. Not least of importance, what we have already seen prepares us for what might be called the Trinitarian character of Paul’s understanding of the church. So we look first at the very concept of “church” as “the church of *God*.” This will include a parenthesis on what we can say of the historical actuality of the Pauline churches in the first century. Then we turn to Paul’s other principal way of speaking of the church as “the body of *Christ*.” This will include an attempt to clarify Paul’s concept of apostles as church founders. Finally we turn to church as “the fellowship of the *Spirit*,” or shared experience of the Spirit. This will inevitably include further clarification of Paul’s concept of the body of Christ as a charismatic community.

##### 4.1 The Church of God

If there is a single term in the NT writings which denotes the existence and character of the embryonic Christian movement in various centers where it became established, that term is *ekklēsia*, “church.” The word occurs 114 times in the NT; 23 in Acts; 62 in the Pauline corpus; and 20 in Revelation.<sup>90</sup> The choice of the term *ekklē-*

<sup>90</sup> E.g. Mt 18:17; Acts 5:11; 8:1, 3; etc.; Rom 16:1, 4-5, 16, 23; 1Cor 1:2; 4:17; etc. Jas 5:14; Rev 2-3; 1 *Clem.* inscr.; Ign. *Eph* inscr.; *Did.* 4.14; Herm. *Vis.* 2.4.3.

*sia* is interesting in itself. In common usage it denoted simply an “assembly or gathering” of people for some shared purpose. It occurs in this sense twice in Luke’s account of the city assembly in Ephesus (Acts 19:32, 40). It has also been found occasionally in reference to some associations or the business meetings of some clubs (*collegia*).<sup>91</sup> But its predominant usage was to the regularly summoned citizen body in legislative assembly.<sup>92</sup> So the earliest Christian usage could have been simply to denote the “meeting” which their coming together constituted. The alternative term, *synagōgē*, was equally capable of signifying a “gathering or coming together,” but it probably had already become too much identified as the “assembly of Jews, the synagogue.”<sup>93</sup> It is not very likely, however, that Paul used the term to imply that the Christians in a Mediterranean city saw themselves as an alternative to or in competition with the assembly of citizens. The fact that Paul can speak both of *ekklēsiai* (plural) in a region,<sup>94</sup> and of individual *ekklēsiai* (house churches, probably more than one) which met in the same city<sup>95</sup> suggests that the common sense of “gathering, meeting” was in mind, and was so understood by others who heard it being used.

The determining factor for Paul’s usage, however, was almost certainly the LXX use of the term *ekklēsia* to translate the “assembly of YHWH/Israel” (*qahal* YHWH/Israel). This is indicated by Paul’s frequent reference to “the church of God” or “the churches of God.”<sup>96</sup> To be noted is the fact that this usage also indicates a background in the Aramaic-speaking congregations, and that *ekklēsia*

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<sup>91</sup> Examples of *ekklesia* used for voluntary associations and their meetings are provided by J. S. KLOPPENBORG, “Edwin Hatch, Churches and Collegia,” in B. H. MCLEAN, ed., *Origins and Method*, J. C. HURD FS (JSNTS 86; Sheffield: JSOT, 1993) 212-38 (here 215-6 no. 13, 231 no. 65).

<sup>92</sup> LSJ 509; K. L. SCHMIDT, *TDNT* 3.513-4.

<sup>93</sup> Cf. LSJ 1692 with BDAG 963; see further E. SCHÜRER, *The History of the Jewish People in the Age of Jesus Christ*, revised and edited by G. VERMES and F. MILLAR (4 vols. Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1973-87), 3.90-1, 95-8.

<sup>94</sup> 1Cor 16:1 (the churches of Galatia); 16:19 (the churches of Asia); 2Cor 8:1 (the churches of Macedonia); Gal 1:22 (the churches of Judea).

<sup>95</sup> Rom 16:5; 1Cor 16:19; Col 4:15; Phm 2. There is wide agreement that the greetings of Rom 16:14-15 have in view other house churches in addition to the meeting in the house of Prisca and Aquila (16:5).

<sup>96</sup> “The church of God” – 1Cor 1:1; 10:32; 11:22; 15:9; 2Cor 1:1; Gal 1:13. “The churches of God” – 1Cor 11:16; 1Thess 2:14; 2Thess 1:4.

probably emerged as the translation of *qahal*, again in preference to *synagōgē*.<sup>97</sup> The point, of course, is that the inspiration for the use of the term *ekklēsia* was almost certainly more theological than political.<sup>98</sup> Paul's usage was not original to him or to his mission, as his reference to "the churches of Judea" (Gal 1:22) also implies. It embodied not so much a claim to be a new political entity as a claim to be in direct continuity with Israel, the Israel that God called out (*ek-kalein*) to be his people in the world. To be "the church of God" meant to be in line with God's purpose for his people from the time he first called them out to be his people. Here again the regularity of Paul's use of the plural ("churches") is worth noting: Paul evidently thought of separate gatherings, in houses or cities, several in a city or region, as individually "churches." The thought of "the church" as a national or universal entity had not yet come to expression.<sup>99</sup> Wherever a group of believers in Jesus as Lord came together (*syn-agomai*), there was "the church of God."

The richer vision of the universal church which we find in the later Paulines we should certainly not ignore. Particularly striking is the way the letters to the Colossians and the Ephesians envisage the Church as the place of reconciliation, where reconciliation between different nations and warring parties takes place (Eph 2:13-22; Col 1:18-20). But here I wish to focus more on the house churches so typical of Paul's mission, since we need to be aware of the historical realities Paul had in mind when he spoke about church and about its functioning and organization.

## 4.2 House churches

It is probably unnecessary to point out that when Paul speaks of the Corinthian believers "coming together in church" (1Cor 11:18), the thought was not of "church" as place ("in a building"). Rather it was of the individuals themselves coming together to *be* church, *as* church. "Church" denoted people not place. In view of the later

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<sup>97</sup> In LXX *qahal* is translated by *ekklēsia* 68 times and by *synagoge* 36 times; see H.-J. Fabry, *TDOT* 12:546-61 (here 561); details in Hatch & Redpath 433 and 1309-10. Note again Acts 7:38.

<sup>98</sup> See also J. ROLOFF, *ekklēsia*, *EDNT*, 1.412.

<sup>99</sup> See further my *Theology of Paul*, 537-40.

connotations which have become attached to “church” (= “building”) it might be less confusing to use terms like “congregation,” “gathering,” “meeting,” “assembly.” That said, of course, an important question is: Where did the first believers come together in the cities of the Aegean mission? What accommodation did they use for their comings together? This involves something of a parenthesis, but one which I hope will be worthwhile.

a) *The archaeological evidence.* Since the Pauline mission almost certainly began as a rule in one or other of the synagogues in the city entered,<sup>100</sup> it is useful to begin by noting what we know of first century synagogues in the western Diaspora. Archaeology has uncovered several synagogue buildings which were almost certainly already established in the first century in Italy, Greece and Asia Minor—for example, at Ostia (Rome’s port), at Stobi (in Macedonia), on the Aegean island of Delos, and at Priene, between Ephesus and Miletus.<sup>101</sup> In many, probably most cases, however, the Jewish community had to make private houses serve as synagogues, wherever there was a significant Jewish community.<sup>102</sup>

What then of the meeting places of the first believers, when the latter moved out of the immediate synagogue context? Archaeology has uncovered no structure which can be both identified as a “church” and confidently dated earlier than a century or more later than Paul. So we have to assume that these meetings took place either in private homes or in larger premises rented for the occasion. Nothing in our sources indicates that the

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<sup>100</sup> Acts 13:14; 14:1; 16:13; 17:1, 10; 17:17; 18:4, 19; 19:8; 28:17, 23. See further my *Beginning from Jerusalem*, #29.5b.

<sup>101</sup> Details in C. CLAUSSEN, *Versammlung, Gemeinde, Synagoge: das hellenistisch-jüdisch Umfeld der frühchristlichen Gemeinden* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2002), 191-206.

<sup>102</sup> L. M. WHITE, “Synagogue and Society in Imperial Ostia: Archaeological and Epigraphic Evidence,” in K. P. DONFRIED and P. RICHARDSON, eds., *Judaism and Christianity in First-Century Rome* 30-68: “The evidence indicates that most, if not all, of the earliest synagogues were renovated from existing buildings, usually houses” (34); see further his *The Social Origins of Christian Architecture* (2 vols.; Harvard Theological Studies 42; Harrisburg: Trinity Press International, 1996-97), 1.60-101. The synagogue buildings at Priene, Stobi and Dura Europos were originally private houses (SCHÜRER, *History*, 3.24, 67; CLAUSSEN, *Versammlung*, 208).

latter was realistic in the great majority of cases. The cost of regular bookings would probably have been beyond the means of the first small groups, and in any case local associations would hardly welcome competing societies to their premises. And temple property would hardly be conducive to a Christian gathering. The only obvious conclusion is that the first believers met as "church" in each other's houses, with the wealthiest member and the largest house providing a regular venue for "the whole church" in different centers. This deduction is strengthened by the various references to house churches in Paul's letters, and by Paul's reference to Gaius as "host to the whole church" at the end of his letter to Rome (Rom 16:23), which was written from Corinth. Paul likewise speaks of "the whole church" in Corinth coming together for worship (1Cor 14:23), so presumably in both cases he was thinking of those occasions when all the local believers could meet together, as distinct from the several and more frequent(?) smaller gatherings in smaller homes.

What then does archaeology tell us about such homes in the larger cities fringing the Aegean? Some sites are no help whatever. For example, Thessalonica in Macedonia and Smyrna in Asia Minor, as indeed also Rome, have been so built over that little remains open to view. Fortunately, however, the changing geography and economic fortunes of places like Ostia, Corinth and Ephesus, have left substantial remains which are still being worked on and from which we can gain a good grasp of the range of housing stock in such cities during or around our period. Attention has usually been caught by the more substantial properties, occupying most of a small block within a network of streets. But in some places, the ruins extend above the first floor level (Ostia in particular) and give us a better idea of what must have been one-room or small apartments in tenement blocks.

In his article in the *Oxford Classical Dictionary*, Nicholas Purcell sums up the situation well:

"By the imperial period, multi-storey tenement blocks, which were usually known as *insulae*, housed all but a tiny fraction of the population of Rome and other big cities. Not all this accommodation was of low quality; some was sited in attractive areas,

some *cenacula* (apartments) were sufficiently large, those on the lower floors were not inconvenient... and many people of quite high status could afford no better."<sup>103</sup>

Juvenal in his *Satires* 3.193-202 gives a vivid picture of the shoddy buildings which during the second half of the first century period must often have been built too hastily and too high by landlords anxious to maximize their rental income:

We live in a city shored up for the most part with gimcrack stays and props: that's how our landlords arrest the collapse of their property, papering over great cracks in the ramshackle fabric, reassuring the tenants they can sleep secure, when all the time the building is poised like a house of cards. I prefer to live where fires and midnight panics are not quite such common events. By the time the smoke's got up to your third-floor apartment (and you still asleep), your heroic downstairs neighbor is roaring for water and shifting his bits and pieces to safety. If the alarm goes at ground level, the last to fry will be the attic tenant, way up among the nesting pigeons with nothing but the tiles between himself and the weather.<sup>104</sup>

- b) *The size of first century churches.* What deductions can we make concerning the churches which met within the range of property which literature and archaeology has revealed to us? Given that the majority of any group of converts in any city was likely to be illiterate, lacking in influence and low-born (1Cor 1:26), we certainly have to assume that their accommodation would have been at the lower end of the scale. That is to say, if Purcell is correct, most would have lived in multi-storey tenement blocks, perhaps several stories above the ground. Presumably some gatherings at least took place in such apartments, or at least the larger ones nearer street level. A church in such a "house" would consist of only a small group, of, say, up to twelve. Though since the word "house" inevitably carries connotations of a larger property, such cell groups would probably be better referred to

<sup>103</sup> OCD<sup>3</sup>, 731-2.

<sup>104</sup> As quoted by S. GOODENOUGH, *Citizens of Rome* (London: Hamlyn, 1979), 62.

as “tenement churches.”<sup>105</sup> Again, if Purcell is correct, even the relatively prosperous Aquila and Priscilla could almost certainly have been able to afford no more than a larger ground-floor apartment of a more substantial tenement property, so that the churches which met in their houses (Rom 16.5; 1Cor 16:19) might only have been fifteen or twenty-five strong.

However, it is sufficiently clear that most city groups of early disciples would have included at least some higher status members. And the probability is that these latter would have invited the local believers to meet as church in their larger property. Gaius has already been mentioned as hosting “the whole church” in Corinth (Rom 16:23), making it possible for “the whole congregation” to come together (*synerchesthai*) “at the same place (*epi to auto*)” (1Cor 11:20; 14:23). And Philemon’s house in Colossae could accommodate both several guests<sup>106</sup> and some slaves.<sup>107</sup> If, then, we should envisage Christians coming together as churches in more substantial houses, houses with an atrium and a dining room (*triclinium*), we can certainly assume that larger gatherings were accommodated. How much larger is a matter of some dispute. The best estimates run up to fifty,<sup>108</sup> though quite how such a large group could meet as a single, coherent meeting is less than clear. Were they divided among two or more rooms? When the church met for the common meal, not all, presumably, could have been accommodated in the triclinium, a fact which probably helps to make sense of the unsatisfactory arrangements for the only church about whose gatherings Paul speaks (Corinth).<sup>109</sup> Certainly numbers able to be accommodated should not be calculated on the bare data of square feet or square meters,

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<sup>105</sup> R. JEWETT has for some years insisted on the more realistic term “tenement churches” rather than the potentially misleading “house churches” (with reference to villas uncovered in places like Pompeii and Corinth); see his “Tenement Churches and Communal Meals in the Early Church,” *BR* 38 (1993) 23-43; now also R. JEWETT, *Romans* (Hermeneia; Minneapolis: Fortress, 2007), 53-5, 64-6.

<sup>106</sup> Phm 22: “Prepare a guest room for me”; not “the guest room.”

<sup>107</sup> There is no suggestion that Onesimus, the subject of the letter to Philemon, was the latter’s only slave.

<sup>108</sup> R. J. BANKS, *Paul’s Idea of Community* (Exeter: Paternoster, 1980), 40-2; J. MURPHY-O’CONNOR, *St. Paul’s Corinth* (Wilmington: Michael Glazier, 1983), 153-8.

<sup>109</sup> 1Cor 11:17-22.

since space would presumably be taken up with furnishings and possibly also statuary or ornaments.

The basic point which emerges is that the earliest house churches, in most cases, must have been fairly small, a dozen or twenty people in all. And even when “the whole church” in a city or section of a city could meet as church in one place, we may very well be talking of only forty or fifty people, and not necessarily gathered in a single room. The dynamics of church life, of the shared life of believers in most cities, must have been dependent on and to some extent determined by the physical space in which they were able to function as church. We, of course, are accustomed to visualizing huge church buildings and congregations which can be numbered in the hundreds or even thousands. So it is important for us to remember that the typical church of the first century or more of Christian history was the gathering of a small cell comprising twenty or so, and less regularly up to about fifty. This is important, since we are now well aware that the social dynamics of small groups is very different from that of large groups. And the accompanying theology needs to take such factors more into account than is usually the case. In many cases our concern should be not that our churches are too small but that they are too large!

The same applies when we turn to the second aspect of Paul’s Trinitarian ecclesiology—the body of Christ.

### 4.3 The body of Christ

In the first two lectures I emphasized the strong continuity between Paul and his Jewish heritage. In Rom 9-11 in particular Paul insisted that God remained faithful to his covenant with and promises to Israel. This strong sense of continuity is underlined by his use of *ekklēsia* to denote the gatherings of believers in Messiah Jesus – Christians gathering as the *qahal YHWH*. It is notable, however, that when Paul turned from the subject of Israel and its future, in Romans 12, he reached for a different image or metaphor for the assembly of Christians—the body of Christ. In the first lecture I also emphasized that for Paul himself the principal identity

factor was not so much his own status as an Israelite, but his being “in Christ.” Here the point which needs to be emphasized is that the communal equivalent to the individual believer “in Christ,” the corporate equivalent to being “in Christ,” is “the body of Christ.” “We are all one body in Christ” (Rom 12:5). “Just as the body is one and has many members... so also is Christ” (1Cor 12:12). “You (Corinthians) are Christ’s body and individually members” (12:27). To be “in Christ” is to be a member of “the body of Christ.” Why this image?

a) *One body, many members.* Much the most plausible source of the imagery is the use of the metaphor of the body as a vital expression of the unity of a community despite the diversity of its members. The image of the city or state as a body (we still use it in speaking of “the body politic”) was already familiar in political philosophy. The famous fable of Menenius Agrippa, narrated by Livy and Epictetus, is the best-known example.<sup>110</sup> The point being made by Menenius Agrippa was that plebs and patricians could not cease to cooperate with each other. It would be like the limbs of the body refusing to cooperate with the bodily organs, with disastrous results for the body. Paul’s exposition in 1Cor 12:14-26 closely echoes the concerns of the fable: that the unity and well-being of the state depended on the mutual interdependence of its diverse members, the trade guilds and national groupings, being fully recognized and lived out in mutually beneficial interaction. Paul seems to have adapted this familiar metaphor of community and drew from it the same implications for mutual recognition and cooperation. The Christian assembly is a body, like the body politic. It functions as a unity only by the different members acting in harmonious interdependence. However it is different from the body politic precisely because its distinctive and identifying feature is that it is the *body of Christ*.

The significance of this should be pondered. For Paul in effect shifts the corporate image of the Christian community from that of the nation state (historical Israel) to that of the citizen assembly. That is, he shifts the image from a community identified by

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<sup>110</sup> LIVY, *Historia* 2.32; EPICTETUS, 2.10.4-5.

ethnic and traditional boundary markers to one whose members are drawn from different nationalities and social strata, and whose prosperity depends on their mutual cooperation and their working harmoniously together. The identity of the *Christian* assembly as “body,” however, is not given by geographical location or political allegiance, or by race, social status, or gender. It is given but by their common allegiance to Christ, visibly expressed not least in baptism in his name and in the sacramental sharing of his body. The implication is clear. Only when that common allegiance is given primacy in mutual relations can the potential factional differences be transformed into the necessary mutual cooperation for the common good. It is the common commitment to Christ, being “in Christ,” which determines our communal character as the body of Christ. Anything which diminishes or obscures that central fact diminishes and obscures the reality of the body of Christ. And if Christ is present on earth in his body, through his body, as his body, then our failure to embody that central fact actually hinders and prevents Christ’s presence and ministry for the world. That is a sobering corollary to have to draw. For Paul, the term “Jew” had to be redefined not by circumcision but as one praised by God (Rom 2:28-29). And the term “Israel” had to be redefined not in ethnic or national terms but as those “called by God” (Rom 9:6-12). So we, too, should try to ensure that the definition of the body of Christ is not confused by political status or traditional ritual but remains determined first and always by the attachment of each of its members to Christ.

- b) *The apostolic church.* When we look at the ministries in Paul’s understanding of the church as the body of Christ, the most prominent is that of apostle: “God has appointed in the church first apostles” (1Cor 12:28). This enables us to tie in Paul’s concept of his role as apostle with his understanding of the apostolic church. For one of the fundamental aspects of Paul’s apostolic mission was to found (or plant) churches. For Paul, an apostle was commissioned, sent forth, to found churches. This is clearest in 1Cor 9:1-2: “Am I not an apostle? Have I not seen our Lord? ...

If to others I am not an apostle, at least I am to you; for you are the seal of my apostleship in the Lord." Here the authority of the "apostle" is very much tied in to the apostle's role in establishing a church: Paul was not apostle to others, because he had not converted them, had not founded their churches; but he was to the Corinthians, because it was through his evangelism that the church of Corinth had come into existence. In other passages in the Corinthian letters Paul's conviction that he had been commissioned as a church-planting missionary comes to repeated expression:

- 1Cor 3:5-15 – "like a skilled master builder" he laid the foundation;
- 15:10-11 – he worked harder than the other apostles to bring his audiences to faith;
- 2Cor 5:20 – he saw his role as an "ambassador for Christ."

This ties in to the agreement to which Paul was party in Jerusalem: that he (and Barnabas) would be responsible for the Gentiles (Gentile believers) and for mission to the Gentiles (Gal 2:9). It is important to note that Paul did not regard his apostolic commission as something very general, apostle to all believers. Rather, it was specific—to the Gentiles. So it was to that extent limited to the churches for which he was responsible, and Paul seems to have accepted that it was so limited. This is why he became so angry when others encroached on his territory and was so hesitant about overstepping the limitations of his own commission (2Cor 10:13-16). Here we should note the symbiotic relation between apostle and church which Paul thus worked with. So when he says that "God appointed in the church first apostles" (1Cor 12:28) he was most likely *not* thinking of the universal church and of apostles with universal authority.<sup>111</sup> Rather he was most likely thinking of "the church" in the sense that the Corinthian believers came together to be the church in Corinth (11:18; 12:27). The "apostles" of 12:28 were the apostles who had estab-

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<sup>111</sup> See also particularly J. HAINZ, *Ekklesia: Strukturen paulinischer Gemeinde-Theologie und Gemeinde-Ordnung* (Regensburg: Pustet, 1972), 252-5.

lished them as believers, brought them together to be the body of Christ in Corinth. The apostles appointed to the church in Corinth were, in the first place, Paul himself, and possibly also Apollos (1Cor 4:9). We can probably draw similar conclusions from Paul's description of Andronicus and (his wife?) Junia as "outstanding among the apostles." Here we should note that Andronicus and Junia are the only apostles Paul mentions in regard to the Roman Christians. So the most likely explanation is that Andronicus and Junia were the apostles who founded (one or more of) the house church(es) in Rome.<sup>112</sup> Should we be embarrassed at the thought that one of the founding apostles of the church in Rome was a woman? If so, why, since Paul himself seems to relish Junia's apostolic role?

So the second Trinitarian feature of Paul's ecclesiology is his understanding of the church as the body of Christ. What of the third feature?

#### 4.4 The fellowship of the Spirit

Paul brought two words into play in his references to the church. One was *koinōnia*; the other was *charisma*. Each calls for attention.

- a) *The shared experience of the Spirit.* The key phrase comes in the parting benediction of 2 Corinthians: "The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the *koinōnia* of the Holy Spirit be with you all" (2Cor 13:13). The phrase is usually translated "the fellowship of the Spirit." This is misleading, because it is usually taken as referring to the community of the Spirit—as in "The Women's Fellowship," an organization within a church. But repeated studies have made it clear that the basic meaning of the phrase is better given in a translation like "participation in the

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<sup>112</sup> On Junia as a female name—so Andronicus and Junia possibly the only husband and wife among "all the apostles" of 1Cor 15:7—see now particularly E. J. EPP, *Junia, The First Woman Apostle* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2005), with extensive bibliography. For the meaning of the phrase *episemōi en tois apostolois* as meaning "outstanding among the apostles," rather than "well known to the apostles," see Epp 72-8 and JEWETT, *Romans*, 963.

Spirit."<sup>113</sup> That is to say, what is in view is not a physical entity, like a congregation, but the subjective experience of the Spirit as something shared, mutually participated in. The point is, then, that what draws and keeps believers together for Paul was not simply a common membership of a congregation, but the common experience of the Spirit. It was believers' awareness that their experience of the Spirit was one which others had also shared which provided the bond of mutual understanding and sympathy.

As we saw earlier, it was precisely this recognition—that un-circumcised Gentiles were experiencing the Spirit of God just as those at Pentecost had experienced the Spirit, the same Spirit, the same experience of being baptized in the Spirit (Acts 10:47; 11:15-17; 15:8)—which ensured that the Gentile believers would be accepted as full members of the church without their being circumcised. The unity was the direct outcome of the *koinōnia* of the Spirit, the shared experience of the Spirit. Paul drove home the same point in 1Cor 12:13: it was their common experience of being baptized in *one* Spirit which constituted them as *one* body; it was their common experienced of being drenched with *one* Spirit which rendered irrelevant their differences of nationality and social status. And in Eph 4:3-4 the same point is reinforced. The unity of the church is understood as the direct outworking of the unity of the Spirit. The choice of verb us instructive: "Make every effort to preserve (*tērein*) the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace." The unity of the Spirit was something given, the basis of unity, not something they could create or contrive. All that believers could do, bound together as they were by their shared experience of the Spirit, was either to preserve that unity, or destroy it.

- b) *The charismatic community.* Perhaps the most striking feature of Paul's understanding of the body of Christ is that in each of the

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<sup>113</sup> J. Y. CAMPBELL, "Koinōnia and its Cognates in the New Testament," *JBL* 51 (1932), reprinted in *Three New Testament Studies* (Leiden: Brill, 1965), 1-28 (especially 25-27); F. HAUCK, *TDNT* 3.804-8; J. HAINZ, *EDNT* 2.203-5, drawing on his larger study, *Koinōnia: "Kirche" als Gemeinschaft bei Paulus* (BU 16; Regensburg: Pustet, 1982).

passages in which Paul expounds the concept at some length he envisages the body of Christ as a charismatic community.

Just as in one body we have many members, and all the members do not have the same function, so we all are one body in Christ... having charisms which differ according to the grace given to us (Rom 12:4-6).

There are diversities of charisms, but the same Spirit. There are diversities of service, and the same Lord. There are diversities of activities, but the same God, who effects all things in everyone. [Note again the Trinitarian ecclesiology] To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. (...) One and the same Spirit distributes to each as he wills. For just as the body is one and has many members and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so also is Christ. For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free, and all watered with the one Spirit. For the body does not have one member but many... (1Cor 12:4-7, 11-14).

To each of us has been given grace in accordance with the measure of the gift of Christ... "He gave gifts to humans." ...And he gave some as apostle, some as prophets... (Eph 4:7, 8, 11).

The key word in the Romans and 1 Corinthians passages is *charisma*, "charism." It is a word whose status in Christian theology we owe almost entirely to Paul. It had little significance before he took it up. And in the NT there is only one occurrence of the word outside the Pauline corpus.<sup>114</sup> Obviously *charisma* is formed from *charis*, "grace," and can be described in shorthand terms as the result or effect or expression of grace. *Charisma* for Paul is that which brings grace to expression, to concrete reality. Here again we should recall that it was such clear evidence of grace in the lives of Paul's converts which convinced the Jerusalem leadership, not just that God was working through Paul on behalf of Gentiles, but also that such Gentile converts had to be fully accepted as part of the church of God, without requiring any further work of the law. So for Paul, a charism is divine

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<sup>114</sup> Rom 1:11; 5:15, 16; 6:23; 11:29; 12:6; 1Cor 1:7; 7:7; 12:4, 9, 28, 30, 31; 2Cor 1:11; 1Tim 4:14; 2Tim 1:6; 1Pet 4:10.

grace coming to effect and expression in word or deed—as clearly in the lists of charisms in Rom 12:6-8 and 1Cor 12:8-10. Conscious of the imagery of the body, Paul defines a charism as the “function” (*praxis*) of an organ or limb of the body. And conscious of the point of the body metaphor, Paul is quick to insist that the charism is not for personal use or benefit, but as a function of the body, and so “for the common good” (1Cor 12:7), for the benefit of others, for the benefit of the whole.

To gain a proper grasp of Paul’s concept of the body of Christ as charismatic community, we need to observe a number of other points.

*First*, Paul conceives of a rich diversity of charisms. The lists he offers in the three passages just referred to were certainly not intended as a comprehensive or complete list. The fact that several of the charisms he includes in these lists are rather vague or overlap makes the point—for example prophecy and exhortation, sharing, caring and acts of mercy in the list in Romans. The list in 1 Corinthians 12 obviously had in view the particular experiences and fascinations of the Corinthian assembly, particularly speaking in tongues, and experiences of inspiration, healings and miracles. The point is that for Paul, a word or action was a charism whenever it brought grace to expression. One corollary which follows is worth noting immediately: that we should beware of limiting the concept of “means of grace” to the sacraments or the preaching of the Word. For Paul, any word or action through which grace comes to expression for the benefit of others is a charism, a means of grace.

*Second*, Paul did not think of charisms as limited to few, to a special order within the body of Christ. In his fuller exposition of the body of Christ in 1 Corinthians 12 he makes a special point of denying that the functioning of the body could be limited to the gifts or ministry of one individual. In fact he draws a cartoon to show how ridiculous that thought could be. He draws, as it were, a large eye, with a little head, arms and legs, or a large ear, with a little head, arms and legs. Is that a body? Could that single individual, that single ministry function as a whole body? “If all were a single member, where would the body be?” (1Cor

12:19). Where indeed? A church so dependent historically on its order of priests, individual congregations historically so dependent on its priest, need to take Paul's question with more seriousness than they have hitherto. We have hardly begun to appreciate what "the ministry of the whole people of God" involves or requires. When ministry is limited to the few, the result is a grotesque parody of the body, a body eighty or ninety percent paralyzed, with only a few organs functioning, and functioning to little effect, since the effectiveness of the body depends on its diversity functioning in unity.

*Third*, the lists of charisms Paul provides include not just the eye-catching prophecy, speaking in tongues, or miracles. Also charisms are "helpful deeds," "giving guidance" (1Cor 12:28), sharing and doing acts of mercy (Rom 12:8). In his fuller exposition in 1Cor 12:14-26 Paul makes a point of insisting that no charism, however modest or humble it may seem to be, is to be looked down upon or regarded as unnecessary. Once again, the ministry of the whole people of God needs to be paid more attentions than the lip-service which it has so often been given. Paul did not split his concept of the body of Christ into those who ministered and those who were ministered to. To each was given the manifestation of the Spirit. The variety of ministries, of charismatic function, extended to all members.

*Fourth*, Paul also makes a point of noting that the charisms include a system of checks and balances. The charism of speaking in tongues should always be checked and in a sense controlled by the charism of interpretation of tongues (1Cor 14:13-19, 27-28). The charism of prophecy should always be evaluated (1Cor 14:29; 1Thess 5:20-22), checked by the charism of "discernment of spirits" (1Cor 12:10). All charisms are to be regarded as of less importance than the manifestation of love (1Cor 13).

*A final aspect* of Paul's concept of assembled believers as the body of Christ, a charismatic community, should not be overlooked. This is Paul's understanding of what we might call the balance of authority in the congregation. Of course there were the authoritative ministries of apostle, prophet and teacher. And Paul did not hesitate to exercise his own authority when

he deemed it necessary, as in 1Cor 11:16 and 14:37-38. But he also recognized the responsibility and authority of the congregation itself. On several occasions he exhorted *all* members of different churches to teach, admonish, judge and comfort.<sup>115</sup> In exhorting the Corinthians he never seems to envisage a recognized leadership group, overseers or elders, to whom he could appeal to maintain better order in the shared meals and worship gatherings. His hope was rather that when they came together as church someone would be given a word of wisdom to lead them (1Cor 6:5). As Stephanas and his household had “appointed themselves” to a ministry for the saints which they saw was lacking (1Cor 16:15), so he presumably hoped that others would respond to the prompting of the Spirit to speak or act. So too the congregation was responsible to recognize such charisms when they were displayed (16:18; 1Thess 5:12). And not just the prophets were responsible to evaluate particular prophecies (1Cor 14:29), but the whole congregation, all the members of the body, were responsible to “test everything” (1Thess 5:21).

For those who think of the church functioning primarily or even solely by orders of ministry, by ecclesial hierarchy, it is a sobering thought to reckon with what Paul thought of the body of Christ functioning charismatically, that is, by the function of the different charisms in harmonious interaction. Yet this seems to be what Paul had in mind—an interplay of authority, of apostle, prophet and teacher on the one hand, and of the charismatic community on the other. Hans von Campenhausen’s summary description of Paul’s “vision of the structure of the community as one of free fellowship, developing through the living interplay of spiritual gifts and ministries, without the benefit of official authority or responsible ‘elders’ still seems to be closer to the reality envisaged in Paul’s letters than most other formulations”.<sup>116</sup>

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<sup>115</sup> Rom 15:14; 1Cor 5:4-5; 2Cor 2:7; Col 3:16; 1Thess 5:14.

<sup>116</sup> H. VON CAMPENHAUSEN, *Ecclesiastical Authority and Spiritual Power in the Church of the First Three Centuries* (1953; London: A & C Black, 1969), 70-1.

What is important here is the full recognition of the third dimension of Paul's Trinitarian ecclesiology. "We believe in the Holy Spirit" does not mean—surely cannot mean—belief in the Spirit given only through the sacraments, shut up in the Bible, in effect subordinated to the hierarchy. The Spirit of Pentecost, the Spirit who broke through the boundaries around Israel to open the grace of God to Gentile as well as Jew, is not, cannot be so bound. As Hans Küng warned forty years ago, "In a Church or community where only ecclesiastical officials rather than all the members of the community are active, there is grave reason to wonder whether the Spirit has not been sacrificed along with the spiritual gifts."<sup>117</sup>

#### 4.5 Conclusion

In sum, then, if we could recapture the full sweep of Paul's Trinitarian ecclesiology it would save us from many of our traditional failings. As the church of God, the church stands in full continuity with the *qahal YHWH*; recognition of that fact might well have saved Christianity from its hateful tradition of anti-Judaism. So too the church as the place where reconciliation happens between God and humankind, between Jew and Gentile, between races and cultures might have been much more of a reality than it has been. As the body of Christ, the church is Christ's bodily presence still in the world today. But our failure to recognize that all "in Christ" are the body of Christ has surely disabled and crippled Christ's bodily presence in the world for far too long. As the fellowship of the Spirit, the church should function as charismatic community, the body functioning by the grace bestowed by the Spirit. But we have fled from God's Spirit for too long; we have hidden ourselves from the Spirit. And when the life of the Spirit bubbles up in charismatic excess without learning the lessons which history teaches, without drawing on the wisdom of tradition, we don't really know what to do. But one thing which would help is if we were fully to recover Paul's Trinitarian teaching on the church.

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<sup>117</sup> H. KÜNG, *The Church* (London: Burns & Oates, 1967), 187.

## LIBERATING PAUL

### *Pauline "Evangelization" in the Shadow of Empire*

Neil Elliott

We gather in a paradoxical time. This is a year, the *Anno Paolino*, in which Paul is more the focus of global attention than has long been the case. Yet it is also true that the apostle has become a liability, an embarrassment, a hazard, for many in our churches and in wider society, for reasons that are easy to name.

From the slave trade in the North Atlantic to racial apartheid in South Africa; from the repression of women to violence against homosexual persons; from the Holocaust of Nazi Europe to the "counter-insurgency" wars in Central America—and the ongoing "war against the poor" being waged today through the insidious interaction of economic policies, political exploitation, and military force—again and again the legacy of Paul has been woven into the fabric of violence in our world:<sup>1</sup>

"Be subject to the governing authorities." "Remain in the condition in which you were called." "Wives, be subject to your husbands." "Slaves, obey your masters." "The one who resists the authorities resists God."<sup>2</sup>

It is Paul's voice that has sounded repeatedly to promote the status quo, to legitimize the subordination of some to others, and to suppress all dissent in the name of absolute obedience to authorities, whether political or ecclesiastical. They are Paul's words with which we are exhorted again and again to lift our eyes from present injustices as if they were of no consequence and to focus our energies on the promise of a blessed afterlife alone.

The toxic aspect of Paul's legacy, the ways in which Paul has been made an instrument of death, destruction, and oppression, is rightly the object of theological reflection today. For many people,

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<sup>1</sup> JACK NELSON-PALLMEYER, *The War against the Poor*; 73-88, depending in part on DOM HELDER CAMARA, *The Spiral of Violence* (London: Sheed and Ward, 1971). See NEIL ELLIOTT, *Liberating Paul*, chap. 1.

<sup>2</sup> Rom 13:1; 1Cor 7:17, 20, 24 (NRSV: on the translation see *Liberating Paul*, 32-40); Eph 5:22 and parallels; 6:5 and parallels; Rom 13:2.

in our various churches and in our universities and seminaries, the case is clear: Paul's voice is one we would do well to ignore or to oppose. The predominance that Paul's voice continues to enjoy in our churches may be an important reason that so many people consider the churches no longer relevant, unwelcoming, even dangerous places.

Two personal anecdotes may illustrate the point. Several years ago, I was asked to give a guest lecture at a local Christian university. As I prepared to speak, a young woman approached me and asked whether I would be speaking about the apostle Paul, and what I would say about him. I offered her my outline and asked her what her concern was. She said that she had just left a relationship with a violent boyfriend, who had insisted that she had to do whatever he said, because the apostle Paul insisted that women must be subordinate to men. Her psychologist had urged her, for her own psychological health, to avoid any conversation in which the apostle Paul was mentioned.

Her case is not unusual. In the 1980s in the United States, two clinical social workers published research showing that one of the most important predictors that a woman was in imminent danger of violence from her domestic partner was that he had begun to quote New Testament passages that insisted on the woman's subordination to the man. Those passages appear under Paul's name.<sup>3</sup>

A second anecdote, on a larger scale: from March 2003, the week the U.S. began the war against Iraq with the bombing of Baghdad. That week I was in the hometown of the famous 19<sup>th</sup>-century American author Mark Twain, best known today for his humorous writings but world-renowned in his own day as one of the founders of the Anti-Imperialist League and a stalwart opponent of U.S. wars of imperialism. He had written a satirical essay, *The War Prayer*, in which a mysterious stranger explains to a congregation that their fervent prayers for the victory of "their" troops in war are also prayers that innocent men, women, and

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<sup>3</sup> R. EMERSON DOBASH and RUSSELL DOBASH, *Violence against Wives* (New York: Free Press, 1979), chap. 3; see also SUSAN FALUDI, *Backlash: The Undeclared War against American Women* (New York: Crown, 1991).

children be killed and maimed and made refugees in another land. There were different versions of *The War Prayer* on sale everywhere in Hannibal but no one I spoke with knew what the book was about. Meanwhile churches advertised prayer services to "pray for our troops" without a hint of irony. As one pastor explained, "it is the Christian's duty in a time of war to support the president"; he cited Romans 13. I was impressed that in Mark Twain's own hometown—a community that survived by trading off his literary legacy—his anti-war and anti-imperialist writings had not touched the community's minds, and that Paul's words, which had nothing to do with war, had decisively shaped the imagination in a very narrow way.<sup>4</sup>

I began my 1994 book *Liberating Paul* with a catalogue of injuries to innocent people in which Paul has been made a spiritual "accessory."<sup>5</sup> In the years since then, the available illustrations have only grown, and I am sure that any of us could add items to such an indictment. My purpose in that book was, first, to draw the attention of the academy and the church alike to the harm that has been inflicted in Paul's name as a priority for our sustained reflection—not simply an incidental or marginal concern; second, to show that recent scholarship offered the elements of a very different understanding of Paul; and third, to challenge church and academy alike to wrestle with the legacy of Paul openly, honestly, and in a spirit of engagement with vulnerable and oppressed people in our own time.

That does not mean that we simply seek to defend Paul's honor against all charges. Here a word about the title of my earlier book is in order. In English, *Liberating Paul* is a pun. Its Italian translation (by Editrice Missionaria Italiana), *Liberare Paolo*, and its Portuguese translation (by Paulus, São Paulo), *Libertando Paolo*, get at one meaning of the phrase. But the English phrase can also mean *Paolo che libera* or *Paolo que livra*. My purpose in that early book was not just to ask whether *we* might liberate *Paul*, but also whether *Paul*, understood in the light of contemporary scholarship, might open our eyes—in the academy, in the church, in the wider society—to a

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<sup>4</sup> See *The Arrogance of Nations*, 5-6.

<sup>5</sup> See *Liberating Paul*, chap. 1.

more just vision of life together. But one of the most important lessons from the history of the church's interpretation of Paul is that we cannot hide behind Paul's authority as if our own interpretations were innocent and transparent to his purposes. We must take responsibility for ourselves.

### Developments since *Liberating Paul*

I wish to mark three important developments since the publication of *Liberating Paul*. First, beginning earlier with Dieter Georgi's little book *Theocracy* and gaining wider currency with Richard Horsley's book *Paul and Empire*, the subject of Paul's place in and attitude toward the Roman Empire—and how we might interpret Paul with an eye toward the circumstances of contemporary imperialism as well—has found a place in scholarship. In the Society of Biblical Literature, the "Paul and Politics" group continues to explore the politics of Paul's world and the politics of contemporary interpretation.<sup>6</sup>

Second, not least in the context of those discussions of "Paul and politics," feminist and liberationist scholars have repeatedly warned against any attempt to "rehabilitate" Paul that simply repeats patriarchal patterns. If all the wider public hears in our scholarship is the message that "Paul isn't so bad after all," we will in effect have saved Paul's reputation at the expense of those who have been injured or degraded in his name—one of the foremost symptoms of patriarchy. I think those warnings are of utmost importance especially as they are directed to my own work.<sup>7</sup>

Third, in the last two decades some of the most intriguing writing on Paul has come from outside the company of biblical scholars. If, according to Acts, Paul was abandoned by the philosophers who had no use for his talk of "resurrection," leaving only a handful of faithful followers,<sup>8</sup> today it is a handful of phi-

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<sup>6</sup> DIETER GEORGI, *Theocracy* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991); RICHARD A. HORSLEY, ed., *Paul and Empire* (Harrisburg: Trinity Press International, 1997).

<sup>7</sup> Here especially ELISABETH SCHÜSSLER FIORENZA's work is important: see *Rhetoric and Ethic: The Politics of Biblical Studies* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1999) and *The Power of the Word: Scripture and the Rhetoric of Empire* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2007).

<sup>8</sup> Acts 17:16-34.

losophers—self-declared atheists and “dialectical materialists” who have no interest in Paul’s talk of “resurrection”—who have made public calls for renewed attention to Paul as “our contemporary,” a “radical” and “revolutionary” thinker far beyond what they consider the dim religious perception of the churches. I am not convinced they have taken Paul’s radicalism seriously enough; but it is equally true that the church has rarely taken their plea for a truly radical, “religionless” appreciation of Paul seriously enough.<sup>9</sup>

I use that term as the German theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer used it in the last year of his life in speaking of the need for a “religionless Christianity” that would rise above the most self-justifying impulses of the surrounding culture. In the United States, one of the most important voices calling for my own church to renounce the impulses to institutional and national self-justification has been that of William Stringfellow. Behind them both stand Israel’s prophets, who repeatedly criticized their thoroughly religious nation for its arrogance and injustice.<sup>10</sup> I use the term because I do not believe that Paul intended to establish a new religion, or that we should describe him as a “convert” from Judaism to something called “Christianity.” Nor do I think it is appropriate to refer to him as a “pastor” or a “missionary” (to judge by the relatively short time he spent in the assemblies he founded!). He was an “apostle,” one sent to proclaim the advent of a new lord and what we might provocatively call a “change of regimes,” bearing in mind that the language of *euangelion* and *euangelizesthai* bears political connotations. But what, then, was he doing when he called a new assembly (an *ekklesia*) into being? His letters suggest that his foremost concern in the formation of assemblies was to make present the body of Christ.

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<sup>9</sup> My reference is of course to the works of AGAMBEN, BADIOU, TAUBES, ŽIŽEK, AND JENNINGS (cited in the first paper); on Paul’s radicalism see my essay “Ideological Constraint and the Christ Event” in *Paul, Philosophy, and the Theopolitical* (ed. DOUGLAS HARINK; Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2009).

<sup>10</sup> DIETRICH BONHOEFFER, *Letters and Papers from Prison* (enlarged edition ed. Eberhardt Bethge; New York: Simon and Schuster, 1997), 278-81; the most accessible anthology of STRINGFELLOW’S works is BILL WYLIE-KELLERMAN, ed., *A Keeper of the Word: Selected Writings of William Stringfellow* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994).

### *Habeas corpus Christi*

It is an old principle of law in the Anglo-American tradition that no king or court has the sovereign right to seize bodies and confine them without offering a justification before common law. The people have a right to demand of the rulers and of the courts: *habeas corpus*, “produce the body.”

Paul’s apostolate was, I suggest, an effort to *habere corpus Christi*, to “produce the body of Christ” in the world. If we listen to the language he used in referring to the life of the assembly and to the apostolic task in relation to the body of Christ, I think we hear an important vocation for the church today. The marks of that vocation are to keep present the memory of the character of Jesus’ death, both as torture and execution inflicted upon him and as obedience to God; to practice a mutualism that begins with obligation to the “have-nots”; and to resist and repudiate any ideological claim that would legitimize inequality and injustice as the fulfillment of human history.

(1) The gathering of the assembly was intended to “proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes” (1Cor 11:26). This was the Lord whose shameful death “in the form of a slave” was a mark of his obedience to God (Phil 2:6-8). Crucifixion was one of the ways the Roman Empire inscribed onto some human bodies its absolute power over them. Distinguishing slave bodies from free—bodies that could be whipped, cut, pierced, and crucified with impunity from bodies that could not be so treated—was of crucial importance to the Roman slave economy. But Paul refused just this crucial distinction. The *ekklesia* for Paul was not a community of the “free,” the safe, the citizens, but a community that refused that imperial distinction and took on the form of the slave. One joined this “body” by being baptized into the death of the crucified (Rom 6:1-11).

In our day, the world’s most militarily powerful nation has claimed impunity from international law. The United States has claimed that international standards concerning torture do not apply whenever it says they do not, and with regard to any bodies it declares are “enemy combatants”; that *habeas corpus* does not apply whenever the government says it does not apply. A new admini-

stration is in place, but that administration has resisted calls for criminal investigation of torture and has defended the preceding administration's policies in U.S. court. The new administration has called for closing Guantanamo Bay, but not for closing the prisons at Baghram or Abu Ghraib. Under the new administration, the CIA has declared it will close down "black sites" where torture was conducted—but these are sites that the CIA has long insisted did not exist. The U.S. Army school that trained the chief abusers of human rights throughout the Western Hemisphere continues in operation. My point is that the burden of international law regarding torture cannot be left to depend on the good graces of one president or another.

As William Cavanaugh has argued, out of the experience of the church in Chile under Pinochet, and as church campaigns to "restore historical memory" in Guatemala and elsewhere have shown, to produce the body of Christ, *habere corpus Christi*, in a world that tortures requires always making common cause with those who are tortured and refusing to forget those who have been "disappeared" (*desaparecidos*).<sup>11</sup> A church that ignores the tortured no longer "carries about the dying of Jesus."

(2) Paul insisted that far more important than the growth and increased prosperity of the Corinthian church was its foundation, its calling as a community of the "weak," the "low and despised," "those that are nothing" as God's way of shaming the powerful (1Cor 1:26-31). Whenever the assembly gathered to eat bread and drink wine but some were still hungry after the assembly had dispersed, "it is not the Lord's Supper that you eat" (1Cor 11:20-21). What the assembly owed to the poor in its midst, to the poor around them, and to the poor in other cities—even in distant lands—was a debt, not to the powerful but to the weak, determined by need, "that there might be equality." This (as Lawrence Welborn has argued)<sup>12</sup> is an economics of mutuality "more radical than

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<sup>11</sup> WILLIAM CAVANAUGH, *The Eucharist and Torture* (London: Blackwell, 1998). The Guatemalan Church was responsible for the campaign for Recuperación de la Memoria Histórica - REMHI (see [www.fhrg.org/remhi](http://www.fhrg.org/remhi)).

<sup>12</sup> LAWRENCE WELBORN, *That There May Be Equality: Pauline Radicalism and Marxism* (Paul in Critical Contexts; Minneapolis: Fortress, 2010).

Marx,” fundamentally opposed not only to the patronage and benefaction codes of the Roman world but fundamentally at odds with the logic of capitalism in our own day. Drawing on the teachings of Ignacio Ellacuría, Jon Sobrino has written compellingly of the difference between a civilization of capitalism as a civilization of greed and a civilization of poverty as a civilization of solidarity. The church, he insists, is always the second if it is true to its vocation. A church that accepts the logic of “the market” but despises the needs of actual people has lost touch with its vocation.<sup>13</sup>

(3) Paul argued in Romans that present circumstances—the present disposition of power and wealth, the apparent demise of some nations and peoples and the apparent triumph of others—cannot be read as the expression of justice or of God’s will. The argument of the letter turns on the revelation of a “mystery”: that God has *suppressed* the course of history to *prevent* the natural unfolding of present disparities. The future, he states, will be something very different precisely because (as he says in Galatians) the present is an “evil age.” Whatever we may think of the “mythological” aspects of Paul’s apocalyptic thought, this fundamental distinction of present and future, this fundamental refusal to recognize the present as the inevitable and proper climax of human history, is of undeniable importance to his apostolate.<sup>14</sup>

Alain Badiou has commented on a peculiar irony in the present moment: that with the fall of the Berlin Wall and of the “Iron Curtain,” it suddenly became necessary for rich and powerful nations to build new walls, quite literally, to keep Mexicans and Guatemalans out of the United States, to contain Palestinians, to separate armed Shiites from armed Sunnis in Iraq. Instead of speaking of the “first (developed) world” and the “second” and “third (undeveloped) world,” Badiou insists that “there is only one world” where the enrichment of some depends on the impoverishment of others. A church today that cannot speak with similar clarity; a church that cannot practice an obstinacy similar

<sup>13</sup> JON SOBRINO, *No Salvation Outside the Poor* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 2008).

<sup>14</sup> In *The Arrogance of Nations* I discuss Paul’s apocalyptic statements as efforts to achieve “ideological closure,” gestures of refusal of Roman imperial claims regarding the present: chap. 5 and Epilogue.

to Paul's; a church that acquiesces in claims that the present order is inevitable and (by implication) that the rich and the poor have simply received what they deserve—that is a church that cannot lay claim to the legacy of Paul.

Especially in the current economic turmoil no one seems quite sure what alternative to recommend, beyond the modest claim (of the World Social Forum at Porto Alegre) that "another world is possible." But Paul, too, was tongue-tied and declared at last (Rom 11:25) that what he was talking about was a "mystery," not a matter of observation. If we stand in a similar situation—if our present looks as unpromising as his—then perhaps that shows that we really are his contemporaries. Perhaps that means we should lift our eyes toward the horizon that he saw:

"Let love be genuine ... rejoice in hope, be patient in suffering, persevere in prayer. Contribute to the needs of the saints; extend hospitality to strangers... Live in harmony with one another; do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly ... You know what time it is, how it is now the moment for you to wake from sleep. For salvation is nearer to us now than when we became believers; the night is far gone, the day is near."<sup>15</sup>

This is a *public* ethic, not one meant just for religious application inside "the church." In that sense, too, we are Paul's contemporaries; we cannot limit our efforts or our vision to the scope of what our societies declare to be "religion." "The joy and hope, the grief and anguish of the men of our time, especially of those who are poor or afflicted in any way, are the joy and hope, the grief and anguish of the followers of Christ as well. Nothing that is genuinely human fails to find an echo in their hearts. For theirs is a community composed of [those who ...] are bearers of a message of salvation intended for all."<sup>16</sup> The tasks of bringing forth the body of Christ, of refusing to let the dying of that body slip into convenient oblivion, of refusing to let that body be divided into

<sup>15</sup> Rom 12:9-13, 16; 13:11-12 (NRSV).

<sup>16</sup> *Gaudium et spes*, Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World (Second Vatican Council, 1965), 1.

worthy and unworthy members, of giving voice to the Spirit's groaning as we yearn for "the freedom of the glory of the children of God," these tasks are fundamental to a Pauline sense of the church's vocation.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Rom 8:19-21 (NRSV).

## PAUL AND CONTEMPORARY MAN \*

Andrea Riccardi

### A Christianity without Paul

Paul is the apostle of Jesus: "Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle"—we read at the beginning of the Letter to the Romans.<sup>1</sup> Paul sings that nothing will be able to separate him from the love of Christ: "Who will separate us from Christ's love? Affliction, distress, persecution, famine, destitution, danger, or the sword?"<sup>2</sup> Yet a long history has insisted upon separating Paul from Jesus, making of Jesus a noble heavenly figure. The Apostle, they allege, would instead have been a crafty manipulator of the message of the Galilean rabbi, founding a universal religion. Separating Paul from Jesus has seemed to some the way to reach the authentic figure of the Master, freeing him from the scaffolding of a great mass religion, of a distorted and popularized Judaism, that Christianity would have become.

But the Church has always fought against this current, right from the very canon of Scripture, affirming that the witness of the apostle Paul, the letters that are attributed to him and the Acts of the Apostles, are an integral part of Christian revelation, as Scripture. To separate Jesus from Paul would mean separating him from the Word. It means striking at the Gospel, as a message that speaks of faith, liberation, forgiveness and unity among men and among peoples.

Friedrich Nietzsche has seen in the Apostle "the very opposite of the 'bearer of good news'; he represents the genius for hatred," motivated by a Jewish instinct for power: "Paul's invention, his device for establishing priestly tyranny and organizing the mob: the belief in immortality...." Through Paul, the world of the weak and the rejected has been exalted to the point of victory, destroying paganism, the dominion of the strong and the wise and the nations: "The large numbers became the masters;"—writes the German philosopher—"the democratic tendency of Christian instincts was

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\* *Translation by Peter Waymel - Sr. Raymond Gerard, FSP.*

<sup>1</sup> Rom 1:1.

<sup>2</sup> Rom 8:35.

victorious.... Christianity was not national, it was not conditioned by race; it was addressed to every kind of person disinherited by life, and found allies everywhere. Christianity has at its base the *rancune* [grudge] of the sick: an instinct directed against the healthy, against health. Everything that is well done, proud, arrogant, above all beauty, offends its eyes and its ears. I recall again the inestimable expression of Paul: 'That which for the world is weak... God has chosen': this was the formula, *in hoc signo vinces*, it defeated the *decadence*. *God on the cross...Christianity*" — Nietzsche concludes — "has continued to be, until our time, humanity's greatest disaster."<sup>3</sup>

This quote sums up the recurring critiques against Paul. There you can read the dislike for a Christianity of the weak, which overcomes the boundaries of nation and race. Christian universalism, founded on the strength of the weak, on the resurrection and eternal life, according to Nietzsche, is the ruin of humanity, in which Paul has a decisive role. And because of this Paul, the greatest of the first generation preachers, must be struck down.

The Nazi ideologue Alfred Rosenberg moved in the same direction, following upon the German philosopher: "Paul has intentionally gathered up the lepers from every nation and culture in every country of the globe, in order to unleash an insurrection of inferiors."<sup>4</sup> Nazism made itself the patron of a positive Christianity, emancipated from ecclesiastical orthodoxy and imbued with the German racial will to power. The "Aryan Jesus," typical of the confused Nazi mystic, must be separated from Paul, the Hebrew who had Judaized Christianity and had led it to world conquest, by using the lepers of the earth.

The tragic event of Nazism, of the Nazification of German Christians, to the point of purging Christianity of all traces of Judaism and of Paul the Hebrew, demonstrates how the great battle for the defense of Christian orthodoxy and for the integrity of the Scriptures has a value that is sometimes overlooked in everyday polemics.<sup>5</sup> To strike at Paul is to amputate Christianity, in favor of

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<sup>3</sup> F. NIETZSCHE, *The Antichrist*, Kessler Publishing 2004. Original citation from the Italian translation, *L'anticristo, Maledizione del cristianesimo* (Milano, Adelphi 1998), 55 e 72-73.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. J. GNILKA, *Paolo di Tarso, apostolo e testimone* (Brescia: Paideia, 1998), 21.

<sup>5</sup> I have attempted to develop this reflection in A. RICCARDI, *La fede d'Israele e l'umanità*, in *La fede di Israele* (Milano: M. Impagliazzo, 2008), 47-58.

a vague worship of Jesus, making of it the religion of a single nation or civilization. But Christianity has been (and still is) something completely different, as we see from Paul's Christian adventure.

## Weakness

In the face of Greek wisdom, of the Jewish messianism that impassioned so many, and above all before the dominant power of Rome, Paul has put weakness at center stage. Nietzsche guessed correctly. Along with a handful of brothers and sisters, of people on the fringe of society, Paul receives the revelation of a weak God, whose image is Christ crucified. He announces: "God chose the weak of the world to shame the strong."<sup>6</sup> The weak ones, the weak reality of the Christian communities, have the mission of confounding the strong: cultures and the consolidated mentalities, all the idolatries, power in all its forms. The weakness of our communities is not decadence but a starting point. The first chapter of the first letter to the Corinthians is a decisive text: "God's foolishness is wiser than human wisdom, and God's weakness is stronger than human strength."<sup>7</sup>

Weakness and foolishness pervade the figure of Paul. This is how he presented himself to the Corinthians: "I had made up my mind to know nothing while I was among you except Jesus Christ, and the fact that he was crucified. I came to you in weakness, fear, and trembling ...."<sup>8</sup>

"Therefore I'm all the more pleased to boast of my weaknesses,"—Paul says—"so that Christ's power may dwell with me. For this reason I delight in weakness, insults, hardships, persecution, and difficulties for Christ's sake, for when I am weak, that is when I am strong."<sup>9</sup>

Paul does not flee from or hide his weakness. But he expresses the "weak strength" of Christianity, that is not too arrogant to show its poverty, and is not ashamed of the humble cloth of weakness

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<sup>6</sup> 1Cor 1:27.

<sup>7</sup> 1Cor 1:25.

<sup>8</sup> 1Cor 2:2-3.

<sup>9</sup> 2Cor 12:9-10.

that is common to nearly all people. The coupling “weak/strong,” in the *corpus paulinum*—Angelo Colacrai notes—shows the strength of the weak and the weakness of the powerful.<sup>10</sup> The Apostle, along with the Gospel, proposes an even greater leap that makes the poor man rich and the weak man powerful: this is the leap of the Beatitudes. The weak, trusting in grace, strong in the power of Jesus, are already “blessed.” This is the intuition of Francis of Assisi: “Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.”<sup>11</sup> Yes, these weak ones, in a very special way, different from the empires of the world, will possess the earth. It is not necessary to align oneself with the economic, cultural, or political powers. Through weak disciples, Jesus is communicated to men and, in this way, the world is changed. The great French Orthodox theologian, Olivier Clement, wrote: “the only creative revolutions of history have been born from the transformation of hearts.”

And so the meek will possess the earth. In order to possess the earth, Paul has chosen to speak to the hearts of men and women. He has chosen the weakness of the word: “God chose through the foolishness of our proclamation to save those who believe.”<sup>12</sup> Nascent Christianity, burning with the passion for speaking the name of Jesus, chooses the word, the encounter, the voyage, the letter, the writing, the discussion, the liturgy and love. Paul and his followers will encounter man after man, group after group, city after city, in order to communicate the Risen Christ.

And this is not only true of the original, heroic stage of Christianity: it is in the chromosomes of Christians from every time period. In the story of our Christian origins, there is a difference with the origins of Islam and the life of Mohammed. In addition to the spoken and written word, Mohammed chose political and armed warfare. He chose to dominate a given territory in order to extend Islam throughout the world by an advancing tide of faith and power. Not so the kingdom of the crucified *Kyrios*. Paul went about the world weak and without political power. And so it has been for centuries in Christian history; it is in the very chromosomes of Christianity.

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<sup>10</sup> A. COLACRAI, *Forza dei deboli e debolezza dei potenti* (Cinisello Balsamo: Milano, 2003).

<sup>11</sup> Mt 5:5.

<sup>12</sup> 1Cor 1:21.

## A Man like Us

Many scholars have insisted on Paul's culture, almost raising him above the men of his times.<sup>13</sup> Paul is a man of several worlds: a Jew from the Diaspora with studies and ties to Jerusalem, a Greek from Tarsus, and a Roman citizen. He knows the world as a result of having lived in various places and having crossed paths with various groups of people. But let us be careful not to make of Paul a product of his special culture, a cosmopolitan by instinct, as if it were natural for him to throw himself into that mission. In doing so, we would devalue the immense leap in his existence that such a mission implied!

It is necessary to speak of Paul's weakness, in order to grasp the strength that makes him accomplish that leap into the world to communicate the Gospel. Despite the particular grace of his encounter with Christ, Paul is not an individual detached from the Christian community. A community of believers welcomes him, frees him, accompanies him, and confirms him. People who feel the passion of communicating the Gospel to others. First, there is the Damascene community: Ananias knows Paul is a persecutor, but with docility he goes to welcome him, following the Street called 'Straight' in Damascus, to lead him into the midst of the brothers. I always think of his feelings, while he walked those steps to visit the "enemy" of those who invoked the name of Jesus. Barnabas, the Cypriot, goes to seek him out while he lives the dark years of Tarsus, and he introduces him into the Christian mission. Paul, as one sees from his relationship with Peter and the Apostles, with Jerusalem, does not want to separate himself from those who are custodians of Jesus' message. Sustained by the community in his weakness, Paul makes an enormous jump to become a communicator of the Gospel, becoming strong in weakness.

The great John Chrysostom, impassioned communicator of the Word of God at Antioch and Constantinople between the fourth and fifth centuries, had grasped the risk of mythologizing Paul. For him, it is possible to imitate Paul: "...let us make every effort to become like him and let us not think that it is impossible. I will not tire of saying what I have said so many times: he had a body like

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<sup>13</sup> G. BARBAGLIO, *Paolo di Tarso e le origini cristiane* (Assisi: Cittadella, 1985), 83.

ours, he ate just like us, he had the same soul, but his will was great, and his commitment was magnificent; this was what made him great. Let no one go astray, let no one turn back..."<sup>14</sup>

For Chrysostom, Paul is the example of conversion for all who communicate the Gospel. From age to age, Christians must measure themselves against the passion and faith of Paul, and not just against his theology: they are interpolated by his radical "woe to me if I do not announce the Gospel!" It could be completed with a blessing,<sup>15</sup> with a beatitude, saying that Paul's happiness is to communicate the Gospel: blessed is the one who communicates the Gospel!

### *Walls and Multiculturalism*

It is necessary to return to Paul! The walls that separate the world are high. Great are the abysses between cultures, even if people of different cultures live side-by-side. The worlds that Paul confronted were consolidated, proud of their tradition: to enter there, with the weakness of the Gospel, was indeed madness. At the Areopagus of Athens, after having listened to Paul speak of the resurrection, the people said goodbye to him ironically: "We will hear more about this from you later."<sup>16</sup> Yet the story of Paul's journeys is indicative of the Apostle's ambition. He wants to touch the people of the multicultural civilizations of his times who lived together, more or less peacefully, under the power of Rome. Paul aims at the great cities and, finally, at Rome, the capital of the empire.

Pier Paolo Pasolini grasped the enormous human and cultural jump made by Paul—the folly of the preaching that brought him to go beyond himself and his world. He portrays this foolish leap in the script of a film (never completed) on Saint Paul for *Sampaolofilm*, which he worked on in the Sixties and Seventies.<sup>17</sup> He places the

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<sup>14</sup> JOHN CHRYSOSTOM, *Panegyric on Paul*, (Italian title: *Panegirici su Paolo*, Roma: Città Nuova, 1995), 74.

<sup>15</sup> Here, where I have used the term "blessing," the author has used the Italian term (not widely known) of *'macarismo.'* The root of the word is Greek, μακάριος, and means "blessed." It is the word used repeatedly in the Gospel passage of the Beatitudes (i.e., "Blessed —μακάριοι— are the poor in spirit... Blessed —μακάριοι— are the meek..." etc.) [Trans.].

<sup>16</sup> Acts 17:32.

<sup>17</sup> A. MONGE, "Rimpianto per il 'Paolo' di Pasolini", in *Paulus* (2008), 1, 66-67.

Apostle between Paris, Rome and New York. This last metropolis, the heart of the West and capital of the Empire, is Paul's Rome. Paul—as Pasolini chooses to portray him—dies on the fire escape of a cheap apartment in New York, killed by two gunshots.<sup>18</sup> Pasolini tried to offer a representation that expressed the drama of the great leap that led Paul into the heart of the empire.

Paul dares to confront different worlds, because he believes he has a treasure to communicate that ear has never heard; a truth that the world does not know. It is the “eternal plan He carried out in Christ Jesus our Lord.”<sup>19</sup> This is Paul's awareness, that leads him to overcome the boundaries of the Judaic world (a theme we cannot go into in this present work), without uprooting the Christian faith from Judaism, and without forcing new believers to submit to the Halakah. It is an enormous shift, and a difficult and even traumatic one for the first followers of Jesus. It is born from the Gospel that has been revealed to Paul: “I did not receive it from a man nor was I taught it. I received it through a revelation of Jesus Christ.”<sup>20</sup> The Gospel is also for Gentiles.

But the expression “Gentiles” poorly represents the complex Mediterranean pluralism. It was a world that had lived through the globalization of the imperial dominion of Rome. Globalization is the expression used to represent our world after the collapse of the Soviet empire, the opening of the markets. But this is not the first globalization. The first occurred with the colonial empires, such as the conquest of America. Every empire is, in its own way, a globalization. Rome was one, characterized by that political unification that left alive the ethnic, cultural, and religious diversities. It was a world that invested much in communication, above all in roads, which Paul used for his mission. It was the pluralized world of the great cities.

Rome did not homogenize other cultures, forcing them to conform to its own model. Rather, it allowed cultures and religions to keep living, even as it made its dominating presence felt. The Mediterranean was inhabited by many gods and their sacred places. The pluralism was religious, even if the Roman religion

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<sup>18</sup> P.P. PASOLINI, *San Paolo* (Torino: Einaudi, 1977).

<sup>19</sup> Eph 3:8-11.

<sup>20</sup> Gal 1:12.

dominated under the control of the political authority (there was a strong link between religion and State). Rome exercised an inclusivist politics toward foreign cults. The religious ritualism of so many cults founded the *pax deorum* upon a kind of pact, somewhat impersonal and legal, with the gods. Judaism, an exclusivist monotheism, had been recognized however as a *religio licita*.<sup>21</sup> The life of the citizens and subjects of this pluralistic world flowed through many gods and sacred places that had no exclusivist pretensions.

Down till today, many have insisted upon the intolerance brought about by monotheistic exclusivism. Projecting onto the past, these individuals have looked back with nostalgia on the phenomenon known as "paganism": an expression of tolerance and liberalism before the intolerant claims of the various monotheisms. Alain de Benoist, in a book published a few years ago, *On Being a Pagan*, affirmed that "paganism, to tell the truth, never really died," but lives in the rejection of the pretence of a single God, in the possibility of uniting oneself to the divine in its multiple forms, in the rejection of original sin. That world would be the ideal condition for man, rather than the one 'forced upon us' by Judeo-Christian exclusivism.<sup>22</sup> These thoughts return, under various guises, even today. Is not Christianity exclusivist?

### *Pluralism between Tolerance and Radicalism*

In the Mediterranean cities of that time, as in ours, there were no homogenized spaces: people of different faiths lived side-by-side. The world of many gods is also that of many different ethnic, cultural, and linguistic communities. In the cities of that time, as in the Ottoman empire of the past, different languages mixed among different temples, between separation and confusion. We have recently become more accustomed to this multiplicity of cultures in our countries, where immigration has brought with it peoples of religion. As a result of globalization in the last few decades, no community lives on its own. There are almost no remaining ho-

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<sup>21</sup> M. REASONER, *Roma e il cristianesimo romano*, in *Dizionario di Paolo e delle sue lettere*, G.F. HAWTHORNE- R.P. MARTIN- D.G. REID, eds. (Cinisello Balsamo: San Paolo, 1999), 1348-1349.

<sup>22</sup> A. DE BENOIST, *On Being a Pagan* (Italian title: *Come si può essere pagani?* [Roma: Basaia Editore, 1984], 13).

mogenous ethnic or religious environments. One lives together with the other. Globalization draws us close, but in doing so it also makes us feel threatened in our identity. In this way ethnic, religious and cultural identities are reborn, sometimes with aggressive and conflictive attitudes.

These different worlds are found not only in Paul's environment, but also in Paul himself. Paul had a "frontier soul," coming as he did from Tarsus, where the Semitic and Hellenistic cultures met. He was a man of the Diaspora. His mother tongue was Aramaic, but he had learned the Septuagint in Greek. Greek was his language, spoken as *koinè*. He had lived in Tarsus next to a Stoic center of philosophy and a flourishing, sensual mystery cult. He had listened to the wandering cynic preachers. Paul had frequented three worlds and three cultures: Judaic, Greek and Roman (he was a Roman citizen). Like so many in the Judaic elite, Paul was a polyglot, accustomed to different languages and alphabets.

This cosmopolitan man from the olive-world, a typical product of Greco-Roman globalization, made a choice: he was a Jew fervent in the faith of his fathers. For the pluralistic world does not only create relativism, it also leads to defining one's own identity. Paul deepened his faith at the feet of the great Gamaliel in the Pharisaic tradition of his family, establishing a strong Jewish identity. Even Jerusalem, where Paul had a sister, was marked by cosmopolitanism, becoming, with its 70,000 inhabitants, a human mosaic. One can only hypothesize Paul's reaction to this cosmopolitanism and to so many different interpretations of Judaism that seemed far from the tradition of its fathers. Despite his studies with Gamaliel, Paul's identity, as we see from his anti-Christian struggle, borders on fanaticism. It is thus that we see him during Stephen's martyrdom, "breathing threats and massacres against the disciples of the Lord" all along the way that leads to Damascus: a radical, a fanatic, an integralist.

Globalization often has the effect of forming in individuals a strong and even aggressive identity. In fact, in a world buffeted by so many winds, one cannot live naked and without an identity.<sup>23</sup> Because of this, it is opportune to question ourselves on how to live and

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<sup>23</sup> P. ROSSANO, *Introduzione to Lettere di Paolo* (Cinisello Balsamo: San Paolo, 1978), 9-36; J. HOLZNER, *San Paolo e la storia delle religioni* (Roma: Ed. Paoline, 1983), 46-47. See also P. DREYFUS, *Paolo di Tarso* (Casale Monferrato: Marietti, 2000) 37-41. Cf. also A. RICCARDI, *Convivere* (Roma-Bari Laterza, 2006).

communicate the Christian life in a pluralistic world, and how to attain the art of living together in a society that risks ethnic conflicts.

In the multiculturalism and mobility of the Mediterranean cities, Paul initially cultivates his own identity: great must have been his worry of contamination and assimilation, which tempted the small Jewish minority that met in the synagogues, respected the Law and practiced the Sabbath rest. Conversion does not bring him to renounce monotheism, but rather to deepen it, in a faith founded on the only savior, Jesus. In this perspective, a new universalism opens up for Paul. He believes the Gospel must become the hope of all humanity.

### *The Gospel in a Pluralistic World*

Is Christianity just one more sect among those that percolated in the cities of the Mediterranean? It seemed just another group in that plural world: it was the world of Rome where, as Giovenal writes, "the Orontes has long since poured into the Tiber." It was the world of Antioch on the Orontes. Here in the *Kaisareion*, next to the theatre, there was a basilica where the cult of Rome was practiced, as a unifying and predominant element.<sup>24</sup> Today, in a pluralistic world, we are led to believe that peace among different groups requires us to remain respectfully outside the others' groups. But peace is not the hibernation of identities, one next to another, like a great Lebanon. Peace is made out of love for the other who is different from me, with the vital communication of the faith, with the presence of a small Christian community. It is that peace that is founded on the faith proclaimed by Paul: "He in fact is our peace."<sup>25</sup>

In a pluralistic world, Paul believes that this Jesus is the Lord, the *Kyrios*, of every man and woman, the destiny of diverse peoples, the heart of a kingdom of peace. Barbagli wrote: Paul "feels obligated to overcome the deepest ruptures that then divided humanity, fractured into opposing camps of Greeks, barbarians, pagans and Jews. According to his conviction, the Gospel of Christ constituted the decisive factor of nations called to form a new universal human community, in which the socio-cultural differences cease to be a motive of violent discrimination..."<sup>26</sup>

<sup>24</sup> J. MCRAY, Antiochia, in *Dizionario di Paolo e delle sue lettere*, 79-81.

<sup>25</sup> *Ivi*, 14.

<sup>26</sup> G. BARBAGLIO, *Paolo di tarso e le origine cristiane*, 102.

This is how Grundmann reconstructs Paul's attitude: "When Paul proclaims the name of the Lord Jesus in a city, making it known through the preaching and the announcement of his message, he takes possession of that city for his *Kyrios*, and if it is the central city of a province, he takes possession of that province. Having proclaimed the Lord Jesus there, he subjects it to the lordship of this *Kyrios*. It is secondary whether the various citizens there know and recognize this."<sup>27</sup> In that city, through the preaching of the Gospel and the existence of a Christian community, there is a seed of peace. The communities pray to the Lord in that place and announce the Gospel of peace. We are not talking about thousands of Christians: more probably the members were only in the hundreds.<sup>28</sup> Renan writes that "A country was considered to be evangelized when the name of Jesus had been pronounced there and a dozen or so persons had been converted."<sup>29</sup>

And yet Paul takes these small communities so seriously that he addresses to them theologically elaborate texts, deep in human suffering. Paul is not lacking in his consideration of an esteem for these communities, even if sometimes they are laughable and unfaithful. He is atremble with affection for them. Their faith deserves to be deepened, as can be seen from the contribution the Apostle offers them. But what can the existence of a small group of Christians change in the life of a city? The Christian mission, which Paul introduces, brings the disciples of that city to a renewed interest in the others. It brings them to not stop at the others' diversity, to not dodge them, to not give up before the abyss that separates them in their beliefs and their customs. In this sense John Paul II has taught that dialogue and mission belong to the same horizon of love for the other, for the entire human community.

### *The Gospel through Different Cultures*

Paul knew the world in which he spoke, not as an academic, but as one who lived in it. It is significant that, precisely at the beginning of Paul's first missionary voyage, the author of Acts underlines

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<sup>27</sup> *Ivi*, 101.

<sup>28</sup> J. GNILKA, *Paolo di Tarso, apostole e testimone*, 168.

<sup>29</sup> E. RENAN, *San Paolo* (Milano: Dall'Oglio, 1963), 376.

(albeit discretely) the change in his attitude towards the “others” marked by the change of his Jewish name, Saul, to the Latin form, *Paul*.<sup>30</sup> Paul does not stop at the walls and chasms dividing the diverse cultures. He enters into them. His faith came from a culture, the Jewish one, his native soil. It was necessary to pass over to another culture, the Greek one. But this does not mean flattening out his own culture. Beginning from the strength of his faith, he forged, in the biblical sense, even the meaning of his words: it is enough to think of the key words, such as *soteria* (salvation) and *hamartia* (sin). He avoids the ecstatic language of pagan and Dionysian mysticism.<sup>31</sup> I do not have the competence to insist on this linguistic theme, but it is clear that Paul enters, with his message, into the cultural and linguistic worlds. He does not simply endure them, but he rehabilitates them with the faith. It is not acquiescence. Paul exhorts: “Do not conform yourselves to the mentality of this age, but be transformed by the renewal of your minds...”<sup>32</sup> He has something new to communicate, but he enters into the mentality of one who listens, transfiguring and accepting it at the same time.

The sense of a radical and irrenounceable novelty does not exonerate Paul from paying attention to the cultural picture and the existential reality of the men to whom he is speaking or writing: he communicates the Gospel differently at Ephesus than at Thessalonica or when he writes to the Romans. Paul, the master, is also a man of listening and of sensibility for the other—for his values, for his language, and for his problems. The weakness of the preacher requires faithfulness to the Gospel, but also sensibility to the culture and the mentality.

Paul has only one instrument: the word, easily defeated, yet revealing an unexpected energy, strong enough to make men pass from one concrete situation to another. Recall the episode of the two apostles, Peter and John, men who were different from one another, before the paralyzed man, symbolic of a beggarly and paralyzed humanity: “I have neither silver nor gold, but what I do have I will give to you—in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk!” And he lifted him up by the right hand.<sup>33</sup> This is the power

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<sup>30</sup> Acts 13:9.

<sup>31</sup> P. ROSSANO, *Introduction alle Lettere*, 11 and p. 14.

<sup>32</sup> Rom 12:2.

<sup>33</sup> Acts 3:6-7.

of the Word. A weak strength before the powers of political, economic, and mercantile control of the world.

The word is communicated through human encounters. Peter raises up the paralytic, he does not merely speak to him. The word lives in relation. And not only words: "our proclamation of the good news"—Paul says to the Thessalonians—"did not come to you in words alone but also with power, with the Holy Spirit, and with complete certainty. You know what we were like for your sake."<sup>34</sup> The brothers have not merely had an experience of Paul's humanity, but have lived together with him. Father Riciotti wrote in his life of Saint Paul, more than half a century ago, that the "cerebral" scholars have investigated the theoretical Paul, but "the only true book composed by Paul is that of his life."<sup>35</sup>

Paul says: "you became imitators of us and of the Lord." The relationship takes on many tones: "we were gentle with you, like a nursing mother comforting her child." And not only a mother: "...you also know how, like a father with his own children, we exhorted you..."<sup>36</sup> Pietro Rossano said: "One must transmit in love, to living and concrete hearers who are loved, and on account of this the Gospel is transmitted to them."<sup>37</sup> In this way the Gospel becomes life in others: it enters into a mentality and—as John Paul II said—it creates a culture of faith, that is, a way of living, thinking and feeling.

### *The Relevancy of Paul Today*

Paul's relation with the worlds of his time seems typical of the origins of Christianity. Would living like Paul today lead to conflicts with others? Can Paul's universal pretence be lived in today's pluralistic world, among the borders of religious communities, without indulging in proselytism? Has not Paul's spirit been overcome by the spirit of Assisi?

The Romans spoke of a kind of *pax deorum*, when they respected the commitments to the gods. But it was a different peace that Paul spoke of: "we are at peace with God by means of our Lord Jesus

<sup>34</sup> 1Thess 1:5

<sup>35</sup> G. RICCIOTTI, *Paolo apostolo* (Roma: Coletti 1949), 588-589.

<sup>36</sup> 1Thess 1:6, 2:7-11

<sup>37</sup> P. ROSSANO, *Sulle strade di San Paolo* (Fossano: Esperienze, 1992), 68.

Christ.”<sup>38</sup> Gospel peace is a non-aggressive hope that is communicated, accompanied by love. The city in which Paul entered was re-dressed by an energy of love, due to the presence of the Word. To live Paul’s spirit today does not mean adopting belligerent attitudes, but understanding that peace is not indifference. The profound hostility between God and men, and among men themselves, is healed by the gift of the grace of God. In him, that peace which seems unreachable becomes possible. It is peace and salvation, which Paul’s fellow shipmates find at Malta, because—as he tells them—“God grants you the safety of all who are sailing with you.”<sup>39</sup> The presence of Christians who love everyone regards also those do not believe.

At Assisi, John Paul II did not renounce Paul’s inheritance to become the leader of the league of religions, but communicated his impassioned love for peace: “I humbly repeat here my conviction: peace bears the name of Jesus Christ,” he said. Then he affirmed: “Peace is a workshop open to all and not only to specialists, to the wise and to strategists.” Christians, communicating the Gospel and their love, work for peace. It is a preventive peace, as I have written, that makes one rediscover the profound connections among people, that humanity is not fractured, that it does not have different destinies.<sup>40</sup>

Our future does not lie in the clash of civilizations or of religions. It does not mean that we must renounce speaking, loving and communicating. Our future cannot be created in a respect marked by indifference. Peace has need of Paul. Our future is one of living together among different peoples: in other words, to establish the civilization of “living together” that is, for me, the idea of our times. A civilization of peace, exchanges, crossroads, matrixes, unity and free distinctions. But the Christian community, humbly convinced of this truth, is a decisive seed in this civilization of living together.<sup>41</sup>

The fraternity among Christian communities is a sign of the unity among peoples. It is a soul of that unity. We see it in Paul. The Apostle dedicates himself to cementing the unity of his communities: their cultural diversity, fragility and geographical dis-

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<sup>38</sup> Rom 5:1-2

<sup>39</sup> Acts 27: 24.

<sup>40</sup> Cf. A. RICCARDI, *La pace preventiva* (Cinisello Balsamo: San Paolo, 2004).

<sup>41</sup> Cf. A. RICCARDI, *Convivere*.

tances could lead to divisions. Why should I feel myself the brother of someone who lives far away? Why should I feel that I share a single destiny with someone I never see? Racism has always insinuated itself into the Church like an ancient sickness.

Paul's letters stand to show how no community, no matter how problematic, is forgotten by the Apostle. Between the Apostle and the communities there is a brotherhood that knows no boundaries, so much so that it feels itself to be a single family in this world. This affection, tangible and concrete, is seen in the collection encouraged by Paul for the poor (or the 'saints') of Jerusalem. The poor in this mother-community are in the hearts of all the communities, because they are all one family. The collection is a bond of unity that links each individual Christian.<sup>42</sup>

The family of God creates a globalization of Christian fraternity, which lives from the collection, in communion and in concern for the various communities, in hospitality for the brothers that are travelling through, and in prayer. One can see how the Christian communion lives in a world ethnically and geographically divided.<sup>43</sup> The fraternity that exists between the communities in this world is already the seed of a new world. Paul loves to point out how "there is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female – you are all one in Christ Jesus."<sup>44</sup> Already a united world!

This is not the fruit of an institutional logic of international organization, but is born out of the life of a people, and one that amalgamates cultures, that creates communication and communion, since it unites hearts and lives. We live in a time in which borders are stockaded, houses are locked up, and neighborhoods are walled in, out of fear of 'the other.' We are afraid and therefore we look at others with suspicion. It is not enough merely to say that we are all equal, and then take care only of our own interests. The Gospel calls us not to live in fear: what is security? In God alone my soul is at rest... We must tear down borders with the love of Jesus. In fact, peace is not made by constructing borders and drawing away from others. Tomorrow there will be war! We must construct

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<sup>42</sup> Cf. J. GNILKA, *Paolo di Tarso, apostolo e testimone*, 197-209.

<sup>43</sup> Cf. J. RATZINGER, *L'unità delle nazioni*, 21 (The Unity of the Nations).

<sup>44</sup> Gal 3:28.

a true peace, first! A Christian of the nineteen hundreds, Angelo Roncalli, gazing on the divided world of Istanbul, said to his faithful on Pentecost of 1944:

“Behold, we Latin Catholics of Istanbul, and Catholics of the Armenian, Greek, Chaldean, Syrian, and other rites, are a small minority that live on the surface of a vast world, with whom we have only external contacts. We love to differentiate ourselves from those who do not profess our same faith: Orthodox brothers, Protestants, Israelis, Muslims, believers or non-believers of other religions: ‘our’ churches, ‘our’ traditional forms of worship and ‘our’ liturgies. I understand well how differences of race, language, education and contrasts from a past littered with sad events, still keep us at a distance that is mutual, not friendly, and often disconcerting. It seems only logical that each one should keep to himself... closed within the small circle of his own group, like the inhabitants of many of the cities from the Iron Age, where each house was an impenetrable fortress, and people lived on the bastions or in strongholds. My dear brethren and children: I must tell you that in the light of the Gospel and of Catholic principles, this logic is false.”

A small, weak minority can do a lot. He added with emphasis: “Jesus came to break down these barriers; he died to proclaim a universal brotherhood; the central point of his teaching is charity, that is, that love that binds all people to him....” Roncalli foresaw a whole nexus of relations that Catholics could establish: “there are an endless number of relations and contacts that are in full conformity with the laws of this country, and that permit, in a horizon of recognized individual freedom, many possibilities of transmitting the divine message.”

Returning to Paul, to his Gospel, to his love for communicating it, to his passion for others, means—I believe—not forgetting that Jesus came to tear down barriers. Paul was not a man of the sword, but of peace. He is the one to guide us towards building a preventive peace in a world that is ever more in risk of fracture! Because of this, I believe we need Paul!

## **PART TWO**

Bl. Alberione's appreciation of St. Paul

**BLESSED JAMES ALBERIONE'S ROLE  
IN TAKING ST. PAUL AS A MODEL  
OF THE PAULINE CHARISM**



# FATHER ALBERIONE INTERPRETER OF SAINT PAUL TODAY\*

Silvio Sassi, SSP

## 1. Father Alberione's admiration for Saint Paul

1.1. "Saint Paul: the saint of universality. [Father Alberione's] admiration and devotion began chiefly with the study of the Letter to the Romans and meditation on it. From then on, Paul's personality, his holiness, his heart, his intimacy with Jesus, his contribution to dogmatic and moral teaching, his impact on Church organization and his zeal for all peoples – all became topics for meditation. Paul came across to him indeed as the Apostle, and thus every apostle and every apostolate could draw from Him. The Family was consecrated to Saint Paul. The cure of P.M. too is to be attributed to Saint Paul" (*Abundantes divitiæ gratiæ suæ*, 64).

It is not possible to reconstruct in a documented, historical form the genesis and development of Father Alberione's knowledge and assimilation of Saint Paul. However, the above cited text, written by him on the occasion of the fortieth anniversary of the foundation of the Society of St. Paul, constitutes the most reliable witness from which we can deduce the profound effect that Saint Paul had on Father Alberione during his seminary formation.

The numerous spiritual and apostolic gifts which Father Alberione lists for Saint Paul lead to the conclusion that the Apostle is a **model** for "every apostle and every apostolate." From these considerations, we already can perceive the **double interest** that Father Alberione had in Saint Paul: he is the point of reference for every believer and, above all, the prototype for every apostle and the inspirer of every apostolic activity.

1.2. Charged by the Bishop to also teach pastoral theology in the seminary, Father Alberione, with the help of the experience of several pastors, prepared the manual *Notes in Pastoral Theology* (1912 and 1915) as a formative instrument for the young priests of the diocese of Alba.

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\* Translation by Sr. Raymond Gerard, FSP.

An examination of the biblical citations shows that Saint Paul is the most quoted author of letters from the New Testament. Using primarily the *Letter to the Romans* and the *Second Letter to the Corinthians*, Father Alberione intended to present and promote a model for pastors of souls.

The priest "will be careful to avoid a solitary life spent almost totally within the walls of the rectory, secluded, insensible or in the dark about what goes on among the population... Saint Paul 'rejoiced with those who rejoice, wept with those who weep' (Rom 12:15)" (ATP, 128). The pastor is like Saint Paul, "a debtor toward all" (Rm 1:14). "This could even be the motto of a pastor of souls: to save everyone, to work and pray for all" (ATP, 140). To justify the need for preaching, he quoted Rm 10:17: "Faith comes from what is heard, and what is heard comes through Christ's word" (cf. ATP, 241). Saint Paul wrote: "For we do not proclaim ourselves - we proclaim Jesus Christ as Lord and ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake" (2Cor 4:5), and the application to parish ministry is: "Why is it that today countless preachers do not make conversions? Because they seek themselves" (ATP, 243).

1.3. To strengthen the ministry of parish priests with the help of women, Father Alberione wrote *Woman Associated with Priestly Zeal* (1915). Reference to Saint Paul served the Founder above all to explain the **mission of the priest**. Like Saint Paul, the priest generates spiritual life (cf. DA, 15): "I was the one who begot you in Christ Jesus through the good news" (1Cor 4:15); preaching is a responsibility to generate spiritual life (cf. DA, 15); "Woe to me if I do not proclaim the good news!" (1Cor 9:16); the priest must address everyone (cf. DA, 19): "For I am obligated to both Greeks and barbarians, to the wise and foolish alike" (Rm 1:14).

In addition, to promote **the work of women at the side of the priest**, Father Alberione quotes Saint Paul. Referring to Rm 16, he comments: "The Apostle recalls the name of various women who helped him" (DA, 45); to motivate the women's contribution to the apostolate of prayer, he offers as an example the Apostle who prayed constantly for the Christians of his communities (cf. DA, 72). Woman can reach with her words where the priest cannot reach with his preaching; thus like Saint Paul he makes the most of the help of women (cf. DA, 90); Saint Paul (cf. 1Cor 7:14) reminds us that the faithful woman can sanctify her unbelieving husband (cf. DA, 140).

The references to Saint Paul in the two texts that Father Alberione wrote during his tenure as teacher of pastoral theology in the seminary are the fruit of his desire to relaunch the mission of the priest and justify the involvement of women in **parish pastoral activity**.

## 2. Father Alberione interprets Saint Paul in beginning the apostolate of the press

2.1. Starting with the awareness that came during the night of adoration between 31-12-1900 and 1-1-1901, and reflecting on the vastness of the masses abandoning the Gospel also because of the anticlerical press, Father Alberione desired to satisfy the invitation of Christ: "*Come to me all of you*" (Mt 11:29) He did this above all through his ministry and with his teaching in the seminary, renewing the awareness of parish ministry in the young priests. Together with this activity, he cultivated within himself the desire for a particular form of evangelization: the apostolate of the press.

When he recalls how the idea matured to utilize a group of religious rather than a group of laity for the apostolate of the press, he specified: "Toward 1910, following a greater light, he took a definitive step" (AD, 23-24). We have the confirmation that, while he was preparing the two texts for the renewal of **parish ministry**, he continued to reflect on how to begin the **ministry of the apostolate of the press**.

2.2. With the desire to bring into being a group of "religious men and women" who would carry out the apostolate of the press, Father Alberione went in search of the foundational element for apostolic activity: **a spirituality suitable for the specific mission**.

Father Alberione examined various spiritualities, and even though he judged them valid, he did not deem them adequate for the apostolate of the press because each of them considered only one aspect of Christ. Then he discovered: "But if one then moves on to the study of Saint Paul, one finds the Disciple whose knowledge of the Divine Master is complete; he lives the whole Christ; he scrutinizes in depth the mysteries of his doctrine, of his heart, of his sanctity, and of his humanity and divinity: he sees him as Healer, Victim, Priest; he presents the whole Christ to us as he had already proclaimed himself to be: Way, Truth and Life. This angle contains religion, dogma, morals and worship; this perspective encompasses

the whole Jesus Christ; through this devotion Jesus Christ completely embraces and conquers the human person" (AD, 159-160).

Father Alberione expended great effort in **parish ministry** so that, with a new awareness of his mission, the priest might promote a **complete life of faith**, avoiding the fragmentation that occurs from a doctrine that is too abstract, a liturgy that does not permit the conscious participation of the people, and a morality restricted in practice to merely some precepts. In the **pastoral activity of the apostolate of the press** he continued his concern to offer the faith in its totality to the whole person. Saint Paul is the example of a person who lived and preached the whole Christ, in his definition as "Way, Truth and Life."

**The entire Pauline spirituality was elaborated according to Saint Paul:** "The Pauline Family strives to fully live the Gospel of Jesus Christ, Way, Truth and Life, in the spirit of Saint Paul, under the gaze of the *Queen of Apostles*" (AD, 93). "The spirit of Saint Paul is drawn from his life, his letters and his apostolate. He is always alive in the Church's dogmatic and moral teaching, in her worship and in her organization" (AD, 94); to live the Pauline spirituality it is necessary: "to reflect on and nourish oneself with every word of the Gospel, in accord with the spirit of Saint Paul" (AD, 95).

Leaving aside other ways of sanctification, Father Alberione chose a method for himself and for the Pauline Family from the spirituality of Saint Paul who lived his experience of faith affirming: "For me life is Christ" (Phil 1:21) to the point that "It is no longer I who live, it is Christ who lives in me!" (Gal 2:20). At the same time, in his activity of evangelization he worked for the communities he founded "until Christ takes form in you" (Gal 4:19). In the volume *Donec formetur Christus in vobis* (1932), tracing out in a systematic manner the path of **sanctification as Christification**, Father Alberione has recourse to numerous citations from the Letters of Saint Paul: Gal 2:20 and 4:10 are the passages most frequently quoted.

2.3. With the permission of the Bishop who, on 8 September 1913, allowed Father Alberione to become the director of the weekly publication *Gazzetta d'Alba*, "the hour of God struck (he was waiting for the bell to strike) charging him to devote himself to the diocesan press. This opened the way for the apostolate" (AD, 30).

The intuition that synthesizes the entire Pauline charism in using the press for evangelization is: “**written preaching at the side of spoken preaching.**” The example of Paul, who preached the Gospel to the Gentiles with his word and his letters, constitutes from the very start the model for the apostle and for the apostolate of the press.

Father Alberione paid particular attention to the teaching of the Popes of his time regarding the press. He accepted the analysis of Catholic sociologists and examined initiatives of the good press already attempted or those existing at the time. On the basis of these, and gathering intuitions and slogans on the importance of the press for evangelization, Father Alberione wanted to translate into action the affirmations of Bishop Ketteler (1811-1877), the Archbishop of Magonza: “**If Saint Paul were to return to the world, he would be a journalist.**” In *La primavera paolina*, a collection of the issues of the *Unione Cooperatori Buona Stampa* from 1918 to 1927, we can verify the recurring citations of this phrase of Bishop Ketteler to demonstrate with facts that it was accomplished in the press apostolate (cf. pp. 63, 505, 542, 660, 667, 670, 907, etc).

In order to offer a manual of formation for the apostle of the good press, Father Alberione gathered together what he had previously written in the *Gazzetta d'Alba*, in *Vita pastorale* and in *Unione Cooperatori Buona Stampa*, into a systematic text of apostolic formation: *Apostolato stampa* (1933). Father Alberione refers to the person and Letters of Saint Paul when he needs an authoritative justification for his interpretation.

“Feel with St. Paul for souls... *Instruction* must be given with the spirit of St Paul in the Areopagus; like St. Paul in the letter to the Romans. ...Christian morality must be presented differently: the publishing Apostle must be all to all” (*Apostolato stampa*, p. 33).

With a year's difference in publication, Father Alberione thus intended to provide follow-up and to complement the text *Donec Formetur* (1932) – which concluded with a reference to the apostolate (cf. no. 93-97) – with the text *Apostolato Stampa* (1933), offering the integral vision of the Pauline Charism: **Pauline spirituality for the publishing apostolate.**

2.4. The publication *Mese a San Paolo*, in the manuscript version of Father Alberione (1918) and in the three successive editions with additions from Blessed Timothy Giaccardo (1925, 1932 and 1941),

contains a series of meditations aimed at reflection on St. Paul, but the considerations on the Apostle served to make the Paulines question themselves: Saint Paul is like a mirror in which the Pauline must see the reflection of his own identity.

All the meditations display the intention of paralleling Saint Paul with the Pauline, the apostle of the good press; but the reflection on the sixteenth day – *Saint Paul apostle of the good press* – contains the explicit expression: “Bishop Ketteler wrote that if Saint Paul returned to the world he would become a journalist: and he would certainly utilize the best means to do good. Today, that would be the press. But as for us, what ease we have in exercising this apostolate! We can write, we can compose, we can print, we can disseminate, we can make people read, remove from their hands dangerous magazines and books” (in *Paul the Apostle Inspiration and Model*, p. 93)

The meditations given during the Spiritual Exercises preached by Father Alberione to the Pauline priests in 1938 were gathered in *Sectamini fidem* and republished in 1972 under the title *Mihi vivere Christus est*.

Numerous citations from the Letters of Saint Paul are applied to the “Sampaolino” priesthood, completed by the presence of the Disciples, so that they would understand well its nature: “It is good to have much to do: but before all else be apostles of the press: the other things take second place” (in *Viviamo in Cristo*, p. 220).

In the manuscript that was the fruit of Father Alberione’s *Spiritual Exercises of 1947* (his 40th anniversary of priestly ordination) he used the Letters of Saint Paul to reflect, through the Apostle’s example, on the value and importance of the priesthood, especially as it could be exercised with the press apostolate. “Our great need: let Christ live, reproduce him in us; so that our people, our readers may read in our life the life of Christ: the Gospel” (in *Paul the Apostle Inspiration and Model*, p. 154). Referring to the vocation of Saint Paul, Father Alberione commented: “A vocation similar to ours. Called to preach: through his voice [and] writing; ... using the most powerful means, those that best respond to the needs of today” (*idem*, p. 156).

2.5. The XIX centenary of the Letter of Saint Paul to the Romans was celebrated in 1958. It was this letter that had so fascinated Father Alberione with Apostle, and this occasion provided the opportunity to apply this text to the press apostolate, now called the

“apostolate of the editions.” “The Letter of Saint Paul to the Romans is the first and principal model for the apostolate of the editions, the example on which every Pauline edition must pattern itself. For this reason, when the church dedicated to Saint Paul at the Mother House was constructed, my desire was to represent in a beautiful picture the Apostle dictating and addressing his great letter to the Romans. In general, this painting represents well the purpose and goal of our apostolate: to bring the Gospel to all peoples of all times” (meditation for 3 February 1958, in *Spiritualità Paolina*, p. 88).

Father Alberione’s question, as developed in this meditation, is still relevant for the Pauline charism: “In what way must this great Pauline Letter be considered the model for our editions? In the sense that all our preaching, writing and diffusion must be modeled on it. But in what way?” (*idem*, p. 92).

Applying the Letter to the editorial work of the apostolate of the editions, he explains: “Saint Paul interpreted, explained and adapted the principles of the Gospel to the people of his time, especially the pagans. We too, following his example, must always keep our audience in mind – who the readers are and the viewers of the cinema – so as to give them what can do them the most good” (*idem*, p. 93).

### 3. Father Alberione interprets Saint Paul in founding the Pauline Family

3.1. The contemporary application of Saint Paul carried out by Father Alberione developed in concentric circles. The press apostolate of the **Society of Saint Paul** was the starting point for making Saint Paul live again *today*; the following year, 1915, the Founder, moved by the convictions expressed in *Woman Associated with Priestly Zeal*, gave birth to the **Daughters of Saint Paul**, thus involving the woman and the sister in the same apostolate.

On the occasion of the 40th anniversary of the foundation of the Society of Saint Paul, when the **Pious Disciples of the Divine Master** (1924) and the **Sisters of Jesus the Good Shepherd** (1938) had previously been founded, Father Alberione already at that point described the four Congregations as an organization founded on a single spirituality and with apostolates that completed one another: “There is a kinship bond among them, because all of them is-

sued from the Tabernacle. There is a sole spirit: to live Jesus Christ and to serve the Church. There are those who represent everyone in their prayers of intercession at the Tabernacle; those who spread, as from above, the doctrine of Jesus Christ; and those who are in direct person-to-person contact. There is close-knit collaboration among them on the spiritual, intellectual, moral and economic levels" (*AD*, 34).

3.2. Besides presenting how the four Congregations are united, Father Alberione specified the unity that they form in the Apostle: "Saint Paul Apostle is our Father, Teacher, and Protector. He has done everything. ...The life of the Pauline Family comes from the Eucharist; but it is communicated by Saint Paul. ...Saint Paul Apostle is the true Founder of the Institution. In fact he is its Father, Teacher, exemplar and protector. He created this family with an intervention so physical and spiritual that not even now, upon reflecting on it, can it be understood fully; and much less explained. ...It did not happen like when a protector is chosen for a person or institution. It is not we who chose him; rather, it is Saint Paul who chose us. The Pauline Family must be Saint Paul living today, according to the mind of the Divine Master; operating under the gaze and with the grace of Mary Queen of the Apostles" (*San Paolo*, July-August 1954, in *Carissimi in San Paolo*, pp. 145.147).

On the same occasion, in a sermon given to the Pauline Family on 20 August 1954, Father Alberione expressed similar convictions: "The Pauline Family was raised up by St. Paul to continue his work. It is St. Paul alive today, composed of many members. We did not choose St. Paul; he is the one who chose and called us. He wants us to do what he would do if he were alive today. And what would he do if he were alive today? He would fulfill the two great precepts as only he knew how to do. ...He would use the greatest 'pulpits' fashioned by modern progress: the press, cinema, radio, television; the greatest discoveries [to transmit] the doctrine of love and salvation: the Gospel of Jesus Christ. St. Paul made himself our 'form.' ... Let us be true Paulines. Paulines! Thus our general resolution should be to become true Paulines." (*To the Daughters of St. Paul*, 1954, pp. 144-145).

In the October issue of *San Paolo*, 1954, Father Alberione indicated forcefully the ideal of being Saint Paul today: "'O God, you who enlightened the peoples with the words of the Apostle Paul...' This corre-

sponds to the second purpose of the Pauline Family: preaching the dogmatic, moral and liturgical doctrine of Jesus Christ and of the Church with the fastest and most efficacious modern means.

“This means to represent and live Saint Paul today: thinking, working, praying and sanctifying oneself as Saint Paul would if he were living today. He lived the two precepts of love toward God and toward his neighbor in such a perfect way that he showed forth Christ in himself: ‘Christ lives in me’ (Gal 2:20). He began the Society of Saint Paul of which he is the Founder. The Society of Saint Paul did not choose him, but he chose us; even more, he generated us: ‘I was the one who begot you in Christ Jesus through the good news’ (1Cor 4:15).

“If Saint Paul were living today, he would continue to burn with that double flame from a single fire, zeal for God and for his Christ and for all the people of every nation. And to make himself heard, he would ascend the highest pulpit and multiply his word with the means of progress: press, cinema, radio and television. ...May the Pauline Family, composed of many members, be a living-Paul in a social body” (*Carissimi in San Paolo*, pp. 1151-1152; cf. *Anima e corpo per il Vangelo*, pp. 61-63).

3.3. During the month-long Spiritual Exercises of 1960, Father Alberione affirmed: “Now the Pauline Family is complete” (*Ut perfectus sit homo Dei*, I, 19), and then he listed the Congregations, aggregated Institutes and the Pauline Cooperators giving a rapid description of each; he concluded: “The *spirit* must be only one: that contained in the heart of Paul, ‘The heart of Paul was the heart of Christ;’ the *devotions* are the same, and the various *purposes* converge in a common and general goal: to give Jesus Christ to the world, in a complete way, as He defined himself: ‘I am the Way, the Truth and the Life’” (Ivi, I, 20).

Continuing the reflection on the Pauline Family, he defined it as “the Pauline parish” and specified: “How these Institute are united: 1) by their common origin 2) by their general purpose 3) by the same Pauline spirit, even in the diversity of works 4) by their convergent, cooperative, dynamic activities nourished by the same lymph” (Ivi, I, 381).

3.4. During the course of Spiritual Exercises given to the Pious Disciples of the Divine Master, 12 May – 1 June 1964, Father Al-

berione offered further clarifications about the way he envisioned the Pauline Family. Responding to the question: "How is the Pauline Family composed?" He emphasized the involvement of all the states of life of the ecclesial community: "The important thing is to consider that Pauline life is 'in Ecclesia,' as willed by Jesus Christ and the Church. Thus Jesus wanted 12 Apostles. This corresponds to the Priests. Jesus Christ willed to have 72 disciples. These correspond to the Disciples.

"Jesus willed that they go into the whole world, yes. And thus the mission, the spirit of mission in the whole world. Jesus willed to be served by pious women, with Mary as their head. And thus, the Sisters. This is how the Institutes are to consider themselves: the Pious Society of St. Paul, the Family of Disciples, the Gabrielites and Priests of the Union of Jesus the Priest so that the masculine apostolate might be complete; to which is then added the Union of Pauline Cooperators because everyone in the Church must cooperate" (*Alle Pie Discepolo del Divin Maestro*, 1963, p. 169).

Father Alberione situated his foundations in the context of the Church, which mobilizes all of its forces in evangelization: men and women in all the areas of life (culture, school, economy, politics, etc). And he concluded: "The Pauline Family mirrors the Church in its members, its activities, its apostolate and mission. Thus it is not a random thing, like simply adding something different or new, but it is the completion of the Pauline Family since we must live in Christ, as Christ taught and did and as the Church teaches and does" (*idem*, p. 172).

"Therefore the Institutes have to live a common spirit with a color that then brings out the particulars, but the general principles are the same for all, and those are: the spirituality is always in Jesus Master, Way, Truth and Life. ...Hence the nature is common for all: in the way of forming..., in the way of praying, and in the way of carrying out the apostolate. ...All of this because we form only one body in Christ and in the Church" (*idem*, 173.174). "This is the Pauline spirit: to live in Jesus Christ Master Way, Truth and Life, according to the way Saint Paul presents him, Jesus Christ the Master. Thus the necessity of reading Saint Paul" (*idem*, p. 175).

Referring to a gathering of Daughters of Saint Paul, he recalled that a non-Pauline priest during the meditation reminded them of the importance of Saint Paul; Father Alberione concluded: "There-

fore, life in Saint Paul and through him; the way Jesus Christ is explained and presented by Saint Paul" (*idem*, 176).

During the commemoration of the 50th anniversary of the foundation of the Society of Saint Paul, Father Alberione commented on the meaning of the Pauline coat of arms. Explaining the pen, he wrote: "The pen is the first instrument of social communication and stands for the whole series of other instruments: machines, paper, film, radio, television, records, etc. That which the Pauline of 1914 used widely and felt profoundly and with certainty as apostolate, today has the most solemn approval. It has become the duty of everyone, alongside the word, according to the Decree of the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council. In the Pauline Family there are those who instruct with the word, those instead who do so with technical instruments and those who use both" (*San Paolo*, July-August 1964, in *Carissimi in San Paolo*, p. 208).

Concluding his text, the Founder affirmed: "In Jesus Master, Way, Truth and Life; the protection of Mary *Queen of Apostles*; the example of Saint Paul, who more than all the apostles used the technical means, his letters, associated with the word" (*idem*, p. 21).

#### 4. Considerations on Father Alberione's interpretation of Saint Paul

4.1. To set the objective of getting to know Father Alberione as an interpreter of Saint Paul by reading what **he wrote and said** as a commentary on Paul's Letters would produce very limited conclusions. Father Alberione was not an exegete nor even a theologian specialized in Saint Paul; he did not offer a significant contribution in research on Saint Paul, and one could be very disappointed in studying how he interpreted the contents of the Letters of the Apostle, even by just comparing him with biblicists and theologians of his time.

It is necessary to take into consideration the entire thought and work of Father Alberione in order to understand the way in which he was an original interpreter of Saint Paul: **his knowledge of the Apostle moved him to action**. The goal that Father Alberione established for himself was **to make Saint Paul live again** with the preaching of the apostolate of the press and the progressive foundation of the Pauline Family. In synthesis: **Father Alberione interpreted Saint Paul by bringing him to life in the Pauline Charism**.

4.2. Father Alberione's understanding of the Apostle is due to a certain viewpoint of his time: Saint Paul was considered in the same way he is described in the Acts of the Apostles and as he manifested himself in all the Letters, including that to the Hebrews.

His constant meditation on this whole spectrum of Saint Paul, for the most part, was not carried out with instruments of exegesis. Instead, it was guided by interpretive criteria derived from a general theological vision which attributed to the Apostle a synthesis of the whole faith in its components of doctrine, cult and morals (the method way, truth and life). By observing any comment that Father Alberione makes regarding the person of Saint Paul or a passage from one of his Letters, one can easily tell what concern the Founder was responding to in that reflection.

Often Father Alberione's interpretation shows a *doctrinal* necessity to explain the contents of the faith; other times the intention is to extract a teaching of an *ascetical* nature; sometimes with a quote he wants to *confirm* a thought that comes from various sources. In all these cases the most important fact is that Saint Paul, even though interpreted in various ways, is Father Alberione's habitual reference point and often, the exclusive [source] for his applications.

The Christology that Father Alberione willed to place as the foundation of the spirituality of the entire Pauline Family is: Christ Master Way, Truth and Life. So then, from the strict viewpoint of terminology, only "**Christ**" is present in the Letters of Saint Paul; "**Master**" is a Christological title proper to the Synoptics and "**Way, Truth and Life**" is a definition from the evangelist Saint John. Just the same, the contents of this Christological definition for Father Alberione are mediated by Saint Paul, considered as the one who lived and expressed the faith experience in the most complete way.

4.3. Father Alberione's interpretation employs as its inspirational criteria a global vision of Saint Paul: complete in love for God and in love for neighbor; Paul knew how to unite contemplation and action; mysticism and apostolate; prayer and work; dogma, morals and cult; he preached with the word and with letters; he knew how to organize the Christian communities that he founded; he involved other men and women in his work of evangelization; he was tender and strong; father and mother; merciful and demanding; aware that he had to carry out a mission, but with the power of the Spirit of Christ.

From Saint Paul's Letters and missionary activities, Father Alberione single out above all what was useful for **elaborating the Pauline Charism** and for **founding the Pauline Family**.

It should not surprise us that there is a **gradation of interest** in the way that Father Alberione reads, quotes and indicates Saint Paul as an example; in fact, we should take it for granted that some themes from the Letters or episodes in Saint Paul's mission are treated in a reduced manner or are even absent. A documented research of a quantitative order is necessary to reach observations of a qualitative nature.

Even at the risk of over-simplification, the spirituality and the apostolates of the Pauline charism could be synthesized with some recurring passages of Saint Paul: **his spiritual experience**: "For me, to live is Christ" (Phil 1:21), "until Christ takes form in you" (Gal 4:19), "to be conformed to the image of His Son" (Rom 8:29) so as to arrive at "It is no longer I who live, it is Christ who lives in me!" (Gal 2:20). **His missionary commitment**: "Woe to me if I do not proclaim the good news!" (1Cor 9:16), "I have become all to all" (1Cor (9:22), "I am a debtor toward all" (Rom 1:14), "I strain ahead" (Phil 3:13).

The **first heritage** that the Pauline Family received from Father Alberione, in view of a creative fidelity, is the **thought and missionary work of Saint Paul**: without Saint Paul the Pauline charism would not exist; consequently, the study, assimilation, imitation of and prayer to Saint Paul are instruments for updating the charism.

4.4. The indisputable merit of Father Alberione is to have taken inspiration from Saint Paul, who evangelized with his word and with his writing, in order to plan out a **complete project of new evangelization** centered on the press. To consider Father Alberione only as the person who placed the press at the service of evangelization would be to minimize the originality of his work. In fact, he was not the first nor the only one to have the idea of the "good press." The distinction that he made right from the beginning between the "good press" and the "apostolate of the good press" helps us understand his specific contribution.

In defining his thought, he wrote: "But between this Good Press and the Apostolate of the Press there is still an abyss. The Apostolate of the Press is a totally different thing, immeasurably superior.

That apostolate is the dissemination of thought, of morals, of Christian civilization; in a word, of the Gospel, with the means of the Press, precisely as one would do with the word" (*Unione Cooperatori Buona Stampa*, 20 January 1926 in *La primavera paolina*, p. 668).

Because there exists equality between "spoken preaching" and "written preaching," it is necessary that both include **all the elements of evangelization**: the apostle, the contents that it presents, the means it uses, the efficacy it wants to achieve, the public it wants to reach.

Father Alberione was aware that in order to place the press at the service of evangelization it is not enough to use it as a simple "**instrument**;" rather, it requires a complete project: "The world needs a **new, long and profound evangelization**. ...Adequate means are necessary, along with souls on fire with faith. No other means is as adequate for providing this except the press, and no other apostles use it as ardently as youth. ...New missionaries are necessary! New missionaries for this new and fruitful apostolate!" (*idem*, 20 August 1926, in *La primavera paolina*, p. 680.681.682).

In order to carry out the press apostolate he thought of: the **audience** to be reached (the masses and educated persons far from the Church); the **contents to be communicated** (the whole Christ and speaking of everything in a Christian way); the **pedagogical method** to be used (address the whole person); the **necessary means** (the press with its consequent organization in writing, production and diffusion); and above all, the **Pauline apostle** who must be sought (**vocational promotion**), formed (all the stages for an **integral education**), rendered capable of living and working in community (**religious life and the vows**) and moved by a missionary spirit drawn from Saint Paul (**the Pauline Spirit**).

The mission will be such if it is founded on the spirituality; the spirituality will be adequate for evangelization with the press and the other means if it brings us to "make ourselves all to all."

The **second heritage** that Father Alberione left to the Pauline charism – interpreted with the missionary faith of Saint Paul – is preaching with "the fastest and most efficacious means" of every historical era, carried out with a **pastoral mentality and method**: all the forms of communication are utilized so that they may become

“salvation.” “Concern and vigilance must be employed so that the apostolate is maintained at that pastoral height expressed in the letters of Saint Paul. Love for Jesus Christ and souls will make us able to distinguish and carefully separate what is apostolate from what is industry and commerce” (*Carissimi in San Paolo*, p. 59).

4.5. With the successive foundation of the various Institutes that form the Pauline Family, Father Alberione made it possible for all the states of life of the ecclesial community (priests, consecrated laity, sisters, lay men and women of the consecrated secular life and the cooperators) to participate in **preaching with the press**. Naturally the application was thought out differently for each individual component of the Pauline Family, but **all** received from the Founder an indication for how they are to help in some way: by prayer, by sensitivity, by diffusion, by example, by education, by vocational proposal, by some commitment compatible with the professional life. **Written preaching alongside spoken preaching**, which marks the beginning of a process in view of “being Saint Paul living today,” is by the will of the Founder **constitutive** also in the development of the Pauline Family.

Having willed that all the Institutes live the common missionary spirituality of Saint Paul, even though with the necessary adaptations that take into account their specific apostolates, Father Alberione also willed to make Saint Paul live again in a “**social body**.” This objective was accomplished by entrusting each Institute with the duty to emphasize a particular **component of the mission** of Saint Paul: preaching with the means of today, contemplation which is indispensable for the apostolate, the pastoral goal that must always be present, utilizing every vocation in the ecclesial community, the function of being leaven in every area and activity of society with the witness of professionalism.

The **common** spirituality, drawn from Saint Paul, also permits the achievement of a **convergence** of all the apostolates not only in the contribution of each one to evangelization with communications, but also by living in a more accentuated way one aspect typical of the Apostle, thus keeping alive in the variety of ecclesial sensibilities the **tradition of the “Gospel” of Saint Paul**.

The **single Pauline spirituality** permits the **convergence of all the apostolates** of the Pauline Family to the extent that it brings

each one to act with the **contents** of faith elaborated by Saint Paul and with his apostolic method: his Christology, pneumatology, ecclesiology, pastoral approach; his appreciation for freedom, grace, mercy, the new creature, charity, universality; his "being all to all," his "straining forward," his feeling strong in weakness, his confiding in the Spirit, etc.

To study Saint Paul in depth, as Father Alberione interpreted him for beginning the written preaching and for founding the Pauline Family, means to become always more aware of the **identity of the charism** and the **nature of the Pauline Family**.

Remembering the warning of the parable of the talents (cf. Mt 25: 14-30), it is to be hoped that along with this International Seminar we can equip ourselves with suitable instruments for a "creative fidelity" to Saint Paul like Father Alberione accomplished: the charism is entrusted to the breath of the Spirit; to us falls the task of becoming receptive so as to let ourselves be urged forward and not immobilized in the past, like the women who went to the tomb of Jesus, simply resigned to embalm him (cf. Lk 23: 55-56 and 24:1).

**THE APOSTOLIC ACTIVITY OF SAINT PAUL  
AS A MODEL FOR THE PAULINE CHARISM**

*His presence at the origins and during the development  
of the Pauline Family \**

**Antonio Girlanda, SSP**

**INTRODUCTION**

Father Alberione was so fascinated by Paul that he considered the person and mission of the great Apostle almost as an ideal reference point for his own mission. As the Founder watched his work grow and be consolidated, he could say and write that “he is not the one who founded the Pauline Family, but Saint Paul himself is the founder, model, protector, father; He chose us; we did not choose him”(cf. *AD*, 2).

Father Alberione said during one of his sermons that “we prayed much before placing the Institute under the protection of Saint Paul the Apostle. We wanted a saint who excelled in holiness and at the same time was the example for the apostolate. Saint Paul united in himself holiness and apostolate.”

However, it seemed that the Founder had a certain concern about immediately indicating the apostle Paul not just as Protector, but as the almost emblematic figure and reference point of his work or foundation. As we know, at the beginning he called this work “The Typographical School” for the boys, and “The Feminine Workshop” for the girls. But behind these generic names, which in themselves do not say anything significant, was the name of Father Alberione which did indeed stand for something in the entire diocese of Alba. Only seven years after the foundation (20 August 1914), in the 15 July 1921 issue of the bulletin *Unione Cooperatori Buona Stampa* he could write: “Finally... there is a sufficient number of persons who are bound together in a society of souls, of will and of hearts for the work of the Good Press... Now we must begin. The House will take on its true name: Pious Society of Saint Paul.”

The Founder of the Pauline Family was not afraid to aim high, encouraging his sons and daughters to compare themselves with a

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\* *Translation by Sr. Raymond Gerard, FSP.*

model who never held back. In fact, Paul always appeared in continual tension within himself as he carried out the mission entrusted to him – “woe to me if I don’t proclaim the good news!” (1Cor 9:16). He was always attentive to utilizing everything that could make the mission more efficacious. This unceasing effort must have been one of the elements that, despite the greatness of his personality, made him seem congenial to Father Alberione and to the work which he was bringing to life in the Church: to contribute in an original way to the evangelization of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, like Paul did in the 1<sup>st</sup> century.

We will try to indicate some aspects and phases in the life and apostolic activity of Paul with which we can approach aspects and phases of the life and activity of Father Alberione, who fixed his eyes on this model and sought to accomplish what the Spirit suggested within him. We will approach this with no pretense of exhausting those possibilities, and not even with the pretense that those mentioned are indisputable.

## PAUL - EXCEPTIONAL AND NORMAL

What is most impressive about Paul, for the little that we know of him, is certainly his great and untiring work as an apostle and the founder and animator of many Christian communities. Paul was the itinerant missionary who did not remain in the locality where he gave birth to a Christian community. He “stopped and formed,” as Father Alberione said, until a time that he judged suitable, and then he took up his journey again, going to other places where he repeated the proclamation of Christ and his Gospel. Paul was almost continually urged on by the appeal that created his vision of a world totally in need of salvation and which made him exclaim: “God wishes that all may be saved” (1Tim 2:4). Insofar as it was possible, he made himself all to all, because he felt himself a debtor to all: “*Omnibus debitor sum*” (Rom 1:14; 1Cor 9:19-22).

An element typical of Paul’s personality that struck Father Alberione was his universal outlook on the world of his time: his world, the world to be evangelized from the east to the west of the Mediterranean! We know the text where Father Alberione speaks about this universality of Paul as an enthusiastic discovery: “Saint Paul: the saint of universality. [His] admiration and devotion began

chiefly with the study of the Letter to the Romans and meditation on it. From then on, Paul's personality, his holiness, his heart, his intimacy with Jesus, his contribution to dogmatic and moral teaching, his impact on Church organization and his zeal for all peoples – all became topics for meditation. Paul came across to him indeed as the Apostle, and thus every apostle and every apostolate could draw from Him. The Family was consecrated to Saint Paul" (*AD*, 64).

We have mentioned Paul's universal mentality as he considered the whole world and because of which he felt himself a debtor called to bring everyone the message, the truth and the grace of Christ. Just the same, we must immediately emphasize that – "beyond this universality in a quantitative sense" (numerous Christian communities, founded in various regions and among diverse peoples) – what appears to be even more significant and important is what we could call "universality in a qualitative sense." This refers to Paul's ability to unbind Christ from his Judaic culture and ambient (in which some Judeo-Christian groups tended to close him), in order to make him and his Gospel a ferment of new life and of salvation for peoples of every land and culture. This was undoubtedly due to the fact that Paul belonged to three cultures: the Judaic, the Greek and the Roman,<sup>1</sup> which allowed him to appreciate and also relativize each one, since none of them could or should possess Christ in such a way as to condition him by binding him to their own uniqueness. For Paul, Christ is the new man, the new Adam (Rom 5:14; 1Cor 15:23, 45) who belongs to all peoples and all cultures, because all of them are in need of a new progenitor, a bearer of salvation.

For Father Alberione: "Saint Paul is the model Apostle... 'Paul will always be the glory of the Church... We must read him as the model of the highest wisdom that transcends all centuries, places and questions and as the model for the press apostolate'" (cf. G. Roatta, *Spirito paolino*, p. 72).

Was Father Alberione just letting himself be overtaken by enthusiasm in this last expression of praise? It would be difficult to imagine this of him. Rather, the passage tells us that he sees Paul as one who appreciated and used the means of his time to amplify the efficacy of his apostolate. Thus Paul became a symbol for the Foun-

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<sup>1</sup> P. ROSSANO *et al.*, *Le lettere di San Paolo*, Introduction (Cinisello Balsamo: San Paolo 2007<sup>9</sup>).

der to utilize the means of his time, those of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, with their particular structure, in a totally apostolic function for Paul's same goal: to diffuse the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Paul could only carry out an "instrumental preaching" by dictating his admirable letters. Father Alberione had the possibility of using the apostolate of the good press at the beginning of the last century as an "instrumental preaching," and as such, this preaching was for him a normal ecclesial activity on the same level as spoken preaching.

Paul did not preach less with his letters than he preached with his words! It is too easy to say that Paul still preaches today in God's Church simply because he etched his inspiring and enlightening words from the Spirit on scrolls and parchment. And if some think that very active persons are seldom also persons of thought, Paul's letters also reveal in him the gift of an extraordinary capacity for reflection and doctrinal formulation. Through this capacity, Paul elucidated and explained the new creation which the Spirit was bringing forth in the Church, especially through him. What makes Paul so up-to-date is certainly what he realized with his activity as a writer through his letters. Many Christian communities founded by Paul in the eastern Mediterranean area have disappeared from the pages of history. Instead what has remained in the Church as a perennial heritage for the faith and life of believers of every time and culture is what Paul succeeded in thinking and articulating with the linguistic and expressive means which he mastered.

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Doubtlessly, Paul appears to us as an exceptional Apostle who has become almost "mythical"; but other aspects of his rich personality are sometimes overshadowed. They bring him back into the area of "normality" and make him an accessible model for everyone called to mission in the Church.

Paradoxically, we must note that the "special case" among the Apostles was not Paul, but the Twelve. These were called directly by Jesus in the course of his earthly life and mission; they lived with him and personally listened to him for years; they had "heard, seen and touched the word of life" (1John 1:1) in a unique and unrepeatable way, concluding with the Resurrection and Pentecost. Paul had not experienced any of this. The meeting at Damascus with "God's glory in Christ's face" (2Cor 4:6), which oriented and determined his

entire life, was an experience of Christ closer and more similar to that of other saints than to that of the Twelve: that is, it was an experience of a “spiritual, mystical” character, strictly personal, which only he had and not those who accompanied him (see Acts 9:7).

Then Paul entered the Church “in a normal way” through the common door of Baptism and the mediation of ministry in the person of the disciple Ananias, who administered it to him and also imposed hands on him so that he would receive the Spirit. Ananias also indicated in substance the mission to which Christ had called Paul (cf. Acts 9:15-19)

Moreover, despite the sudden and unexpected event of Damascus, Paul’s impact with Christ actually occurred after a providential cultural preparation for the mission that awaited him, even though he was not aware of it. Paul was a man of three cultures: Hebrew, Greek and Latin, as we said, and although he was a fierce supporter and defender of the Hebrew culture of his people, according to the Pharisaical current, he appreciated the others and utilized them according to the needs and circumstances of his mission, without becoming a prisoner of any of them. He felt himself to be and truly was only a “prisoner of Christ,” as he defined himself in the opening of the brief letter to his friend Philemon. This freed him from all other conditioning.

Father Alberione’s passage, quoted at the beginning of this talk, speaks of this universality. He took his cue from the Letter to the Romans, Paul’s theological masterpiece, where he expresses his global vision of the human person and God’s work in the history of humanity. But if this letter is Paul’s masterpiece, it is also the one that perhaps more than any others, owes much to his cultural preparation: study and knowledge of the Bible, the ability to reason and dispute according to the laws of the rabbinic and Greek cultures, fluency in the Greek language, which was very widely spoken, to express what he wanted to communicate about Christ and God, the Church and the Christian life, even inventing some words when the ones he knew did not seem sufficiently expressive.<sup>2</sup> Aside from the details, it is important to note our normal and indispensable need for preparation in the use of the means of communication, because to evangelize is essentially to communicate, in the fullest meaning of

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<sup>2</sup> An example of this would be some composit verbs with the preposition *syn*.

the word, transmitting to our receivers not just some notions, but incentives for assimilating into their lives what they have received.

Early on, Father Alberione warned that an apostolate of this nature “is not for superficial people, but for true apostles... that it requires prepared personnel ... that the writer must first be permeated by the content of the divine book in order to be able to instill it” (CISP 806f; *Pensieri*, p. 175). And he knew that for the pastoral dimension - being accessible to people using these means of communication - “it is not enough to have a mediocre knowledge. Rather, a higher level of knowledge is necessary, to which we must add study [to reach] the maximum ability to present it clearly to everyone” (*Pensieri*, p. 174). Thus, with a perspective that might seem too ideal, he thought of “forming schools for journalists and writers, priests and laity, with specific studies and deep theological education” (*Mi protendo in avanti*, p. 504). He wrote this in 1922 in a letter addressed to Bishop Re, when initiating the process for approval of the Pious Society of Saint Paul – a letter Bishop Ray enclosed with the request he sent to the Sacred Congregation for Religious.

Then, let us not forget another very human aspect of Paul, which we often fail to remember, since we are so used to images that always represent him with the unforgettable sword, a book or scroll in his hands and a severe look on his face. His letters, instead, reflect his profoundly human and affective relationships that bound him to his communities, whom he felt he generated in Christ like a mother, rather than a father, by communicating the Gospel to them. “For though you may have innumerable guides in Christ, you do not have numerous fathers – I was the one who begot you in Christ Jesus through the good news” (1Cor 4:15); “My children, once again I’m suffering birth pains until Christ takes form in you” (Gal 4:19). Besides these expressions, so meaningful and strong, we can also read chapters 1-3 of 1Thess, or the letter to the Philippians to see how Paul felt this relationship with his communities, with his children. A touching testimony in this regard is also offered by Luke (Acts 20:17-38) in Paul’s discourse at Miletus, which was his last greeting to the leaders of the Church at Ephesus (see especially, toward the end, verses 36-38).

His interior mystical tension did not isolate him with Christ, but reinforced his human and Christian rapport with all his sons and daughters, especially the closest ones such as his collaborators

whose absence he felt keenly when he was alone and even more so in prison (“everyone has abandoned me”), and he begged dear Timothy to come to him as soon as possible (cf. 2Tim 4:9-16).

Two Paulines had the happy idea to search and gather together in one volume<sup>3</sup> personal recollections of some sons and daughters of the Pauline Family. This was published in 2007 on the occasion of the centenary celebration of the priestly ordination of the Father of this Family which took place 29 June 1907. For those who did not know Father Alberione very well, it is surprising to read in these personal writings how he manifested himself to his sons and daughters in a relaxed manner, sometimes even joking, and with the kindness of a father who has no problem showing himself in all spontaneity to his family.

Connected with the apostolic activity of Paul, we also remember the concern he had in regard to his own self-sufficiency. He provided with his own work all that was necessary for his sustenance in order to avoid giving the impression that his mission was an excuse to live off his communities (cf. 1Cor: 9:14-15; Acts 20:33-35). But he also gratefully accepted spontaneous offerings from his children. (cf. Phil 4:10-18).

Father Alberione also showed himself particularly sensitive in appreciating that dimension of the “apostolate” which is the work with which we provide for the community. The typography work or work at the printing presses, in which the young boys also participated for some hours each day, was not solely in view of the mission (production of Bibles, Gospels and catechisms to diffuse), but likewise served as training in the typographical arts. Moreover, it created in everyone the attitude toward work that contributed to the maturing of the young apprentices regardless of what their eventual choice of life would be. Undoubtedly, Father Alberione also sought help from those who wanted to assist in his work. The bulletin *Unione Cooperatori Buona Stampa* provided information about his projects, problems and initiatives connected with the apostolate of the good press and with the preparation of the “apostles.” This was the first Pauline periodical and is practically the only source for the history of the first years of the Pauline

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<sup>3</sup> E. SGARBOSSA-A. VAGNONI, eds., *Don Alberione. Umanità e fascino* (Alba: Società San Paolo, 2006).

foundation and for Father Alberione's pressing concern which also undermined his health.<sup>4</sup>

## THE APOSTOLIC COMMUNITY OF PAUL

Our Founder was well aware that the mission the Lord inspired in him would require numerous personnel. At first he had thought of a group of Christian laity, spiritually animated and coordinated in a sort of editorial society. But later, "illumined by a greater light," already by 1910 (*AD*, 24) he understood that this group must consist of writers, technicians and propagandists who would be religious men and women. They would be consecrated persons who belong totally to God and are fully dedicated to the sanctifying mission of announcing the Gospel of Jesus Christ, as a mission entrusted to them by the Church, and thus official. It would imply above all an ordained priesthood uniting many other consecrated persons, who, according to Father Alberione, would together form "the Pauline priesthood."

Thus this "instrumental preaching" in the press sector – the only form that existed in the beginning and for many years – was structured as writing, technical work and propaganda or diffusion, like three inseparable phases. For Father Alberione the union of the persons who carried out this preaching, for which they were particularly consecrated to God, constituted the "Pauline priesthood."

Even before the Vatican Council, he had this vision in mind regarding the "Pauline charism," as he expressed in *AD* nos. 40-42, where he mentions somewhat circumspectively a "quasi priesthood" for the Disciples, in a perspective that would later reach maturity in the Church especially with the Second Vatican Council.

With a bit of irony, someone used the term "holy quarrel" to describe the difficulties that Father Alberione encountered with the Roman Congregations when he tried getting through the "Leonine walls" his idea of "instrumental preaching" as an authentic ecclesial ministry – a ministry which would involve persons dedicated to it

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<sup>4</sup> Regarding his health, it is probable that the illness that struck Father Alberione in 1923 was due to an excessive expenditure of energy provoked by the new foundation and his preceding duties in the seminary and in the diocese which he maintained for a good number of years. He was miraculously cured from this grave illness (cf. *AD* 64 and 152 and the relative note).

in an ecclesial, priestly, apostolic mission, and who would consistently seek and assume adequate structures, even secular ones, as “instruments” for this mission. Providence came to his rescue by enlightening two of the great Pontiffs of the first half of the 1900’s, Pius XI and Pius XII, who were particularly attentive to the importance of the media of social communication and were attracted to initiatives and projects like those of Father Alberione.<sup>5</sup>

The Council, especially in its Constitution *Lumen Gentium* (cc. II and IV), would describe the Church as the “people of God” with a “priestly” dimension, according to the expression in 1Pet 2:9 (already quoted by Father Alberione in *AD*, 41). It would speak of the Church’s specific duty in the area of social communications with the document *Inter Mirifica*, affirming that the use of these means is “intimately linked with their [the Bishop’s] ordinary preaching responsibility” (IM, II, 13), that is, with the first and fundamental mission of the Church, which is evangelization.

We read in *AD*, 23-24 of Father Alberione’s immediate awareness of the need to find and welcome committed collaborators in a form of life totally consecrated to God for “instrumental” evangelization. Even in this he found inspiration in Paul. Paul was quite persuaded that alone he would only be able to carry out God’s mission in a very limited way. He had founded various communities, but did not remain permanently in any of them. His true community was the “apostolic” one which he went about establishing by gathering to himself young people fascinated by the Christ he announced and by his personality and missionary charism (see the “vocation” of Timothy, Acts 16:1-5). Paul involved them in his own mission. Along with others, theirs are the names that appear at the beginning and end of his letters, where Paul lists the disciples who were with him at that time: “Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy to the church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ – grace and peace be with you!” (1Thess 1:1).<sup>6</sup>

Paul undoubtedly appreciated his collaborators whom he called “collaborators of God” (2Cor 6:1), placing himself on the same level

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<sup>5</sup> For information on the origins of the Society of Saint Paul, we are all familiar with Father G. ROCCA’s precious work of research on our beginnings: *La formazione della Pia Società San Paolo 1914-1925*, published in 1982.

<sup>6</sup> Thus begins the first letter of Paul and also the New Testament, since Paul’s letters are chronologically the first New Testament writings.

with them. In fact, he realized, for example, that in the tense situation that occurred at Corinth, he was not the best person to bring about understanding and peace. So he sent Titus, a patient and capable “weaver,” who repaired the lacerations. Paul gives him recognition in 2Cor, where, among other things, he pays a most beautiful homage to Titus and his work.

Naturally Paul lived with his “apostolic community” even less than with the local communities. But the “community” that exists in view of the mission brought them “to live together and profoundly” the same ideal for Christ and in Christ, even when they were “dispersed” in mission in the various communities where Paul sent them and from which they returned to him – almost like blood that leaves and returns to the heart, giving life to the whole body.

Taking inspiration, even if not explicitly, from Paul, Father Alberione could say: “For us, common life is born from the apostolate and is in view of the apostolate” ((UPS I, p. 285); thus ours is an “apostolic consecrated life,” in which apostolicity is inherent in consecration: one is consecrated for the specific apostolate of evangelization through the instruments of social communication. Therefore, our “common life,” at least in spirit, finds its inspiration in the “apostolic community” of Paul. That is, it is lived according to the demands of our apostolic commitments. Certainly, when the press apostolate demanded much manual labor, typographical production was organized around work shifts that favored a common life similar to that lived in a monastery.<sup>7</sup>

In this setting of collaboration, despite the Pharisaic tradition in which Paul grew up and was formed – a tradition that ignored women when not totally despising them – he was not prejudiced against women. In fact, he esteemed and appreciated their collaboration in his apostolic mission.

Jesus’ example of relating with women, which continued in the life of the first Christian community, led Paul to imitate the Master also in this area.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> So much so that some spontaneously called us “the Benedictines of the XX century” (*ora et labora – work and prayer*).

<sup>8</sup> We remember from Luke’s Gospel Martha and Mary (Lk 10:38ff), Mary of Magdala, the women who accompanied and helped Jesus during his apostolic journeys (Lk 8:1-3), and all the others that he welcomed with infinite compassion and love, without a problem, just as he welcomed the men whether honest or sinners.

And so Paul not only did not avoid women, but he sought them out and appreciated their collaboration in the apostolate of evangelization. Chapter 16 in the Letter to the Romans, where about ten women are remembered as having worked for the Gospel and the community, witnesses to Paul's great appreciation and gratitude.<sup>9</sup>

It is well known how, even as a young priest in the first years of parish ministry, Father Alberione understood the need for valuing the woman and including her in the pastoral activity of the parish. This is what led him to write his book *Woman Associated with Priestly Zeal* (cf. *AD*, 109), which he had already begun in 1911. Then he himself demonstrated not just how much he believed in this "association," but according to the Spirit's leading, even in the midst of misunderstanding and opposition, he founded four Congregations of consecrated women (besides the Secular Institute of Mary Most Holy of the Annunciation), integrating them all into his great and "admirable Pauline Family." In the foundation of the Sisters of the Good Shepherd (the Pastorelle), we have perhaps the most typical example of Father Alberione's perseverance in his projects. The first "inspiration" to form a group of Sisters oriented to pastoral collaboration rose up in him during his early years of priesthood and pastoral experiences (the years 1907-1908). But the "hour," the favorable time for founding the Sisters of Jesus the Good Shepherd, did not arrive until thirty years later, in 1937-1938 (*AD*, 46).

## PARCHMENT AND SCROLLS AS SUPPORT FOR THE WORD

We see in Paul the first apostle who frequently, we could even say regularly, used the written means to "evangelize," to communicate Christ and continue the Christian formation of his communities, which were launched through oral preaching. He was con-

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<sup>9</sup> With a little imagination and even humor, we could see *Phoebe* (Rom 16:1-2) as an ancestor of the Daughters of St. Paul. She placed in her bag the written word of God (Paul's most important letter) and then left to bring it to the faithful in Rome. Or, take *Priscilla*... (Rom 16:3-4) as a first Sister of the Good Shepherd; she taught "catechism" to Appollo in the "parish" of Ephesus, and thus completed what was lacking to his Christian formation (cf. Acts 18:24-28). Or, look for the first Pious Disciple in *Tecla* who, according to tradition, sat at the feet of Paul, listening to him speak about Jesus, and was so taken that she dedicated her entire existence to him; love for Christ cancelled all her other life projects despite mistreatment and persecution.

scious of the import of his letters and recommended that they be read to the whole community: "I adjure you by the Lord to read this letter to all the brothers" (1Thess 5:27). He recommended that the Colossians and Laodiceans exchange the letters he had written to the two communities (Col 4:16) – letters in which he had evidently touched on subjects of interest to both of these Churches. He consciously gave the same binding value to what he communicated in writing as he did to what he announced in person regarding faith and Christian life<sup>10</sup>

But besides this, it is important to emphasize that Paul had almost habitual recourse to this means with no problem. The "written" investiture of the living word is somewhat like its "incarnation" in paper; for this reason someone coined a play on words, speaking of Jesus not just as the "Word incarnate" but also as "Word impapered" [the play on words in Italian is more obvious: "Verbo incarnato" and "Verbo incartato"].

Paul's inspired word was imprinted directly onto the paper and remained as a permanent teaching, as the Word of God, even if Paul might forget what he had dictated. In any case, the writing which resulted was like the incarnation of the living word that reached the churches in this poor and fragile material.

If "God sent His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh" (cf. Rom 8:3) to reveal himself and his saving love, mankind can utilize all the human means that are invented to amplify his possibilities for communication and place them at the service of his word.

Thus, Father Alberione would say with conviction that our pulpits are the printing machines, the microphone, the projector and the screen...; our church is the typography, the production rooms and projection halls..., the transmission room... And in this church, we must not "talk only about religion but talk about everything in a Christian way" (*AD*, 87).

He understood well the meaning and value that the "written means" took on for Paul, that is, the equality between the "spoken"

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<sup>10</sup> No letter of Paul to the Laodiceans has survived, unless this refers to the Letter to the Ephesians which some authors believe was a "circular letter," that is, copies were sent to various communities. Paul had already addressed a single letter to different communities: the Letter to the Galatians was addressed "to the churches of Galatia" (Gal 1:2); the second Letter to the Corinthians was addressed "to the community of Corinth and to all the saints throughout Achaia" (2Cor 1: 1).

ministry and the “written” ministry of the apostle: Paul evangelized, catechized and built up the Church as much with his writing as with his word. And he saw in Paul the model of what the Spirit was suggesting to him: the integration of “verbal” preaching and “instrumental” preaching. For Paul, this consisted in what was fixed in writing, by using the instruments of his time and with the work of a scribe to whom he “dictated” his letters and sometimes added a word at the end in his own handwriting (cf. Gal 6:11; 1Cor 16:21-23).

For Father Alberione, the instrumental preaching of the beginnings and for several decades, was the press with the equipment and organization required at that time. But the same applies for all the new means of communication, each of which demands suitable equipment, technology, organization and language, and thus adequate preparation in order to accomplish with each means the same goal: it is always a matter of evangelization, which is the first and fundamental mission of the Church, a priestly mission assigned to persons officially authorized, as well as prepared, for this “instrumental preaching.” This is why Paul recommended, as we said, that his letters be read publicly in the churches (cf. 1Thess 5:27), so that all the brethren would come to know them. He also invited the communities to exchange their respective letters (cf. Col 4:16). They contained a “preaching” that would remain for the benefit of the Church even after the apostle departed from the scene, and they contributed, as witnesses, in maintaining the apostolic tradition in its wholeness regarding faith, liturgy and morals (see, for example, 1Cor 11:23-26 for the institution of the Eucharist, and 1Cor 15: 3-11 for the Christian belief about the value of the death and resurrection of Christ).

## **BRING THE GOSPEL WHERE YOU FIND PEOPLE AND WHERE THEY LIVE**

In Paul’s time, there were no “empty churches,” because... there were no churches! We know from Acts that Paul began to habitually announce Jesus Christ and his Gospel in the cities where there were Hebrew communities, and thus he presented himself in the synagogues. In fact, there he encountered the local Hebrews, who were the first that he felt had the right to hear Jesus Christ and his Gospel announced. There, too, he usually met some of the “proselytes,” that

is, pagans who were well-disposed toward the Hebrew religion and moral system, even though only a few actually converted to the Hebrew religion. The majority remained sympathizers who did not enter the community.

However, in those pagan nuclei, it was easy to establish a relationship of cordial interest with Paul. This offered him the possibility to form a little community of Christians, which could then grow through the interest that it aroused and through the credible witness of faith and life on the part of those who had already welcomed Jesus and his Gospel.

In the first Christian centuries, the expression "domestic church" indicated the gathering of faithful in the house of some Christian who owned a space capable of welcoming a certain number of persons. The first Christian communities, starting from the one formed at Jerusalem, certainly did not have places designated specifically for their gatherings. These only began to be built around the 4th century. But the first Christian communities, usually few in number, did not feel the need for these edifices. Jesus instituted the Eucharist with his disciples in the private house of a friend. And he said that wherever two or three of his disciples were gathered in his name, he was present in their midst. Paul would later say explicitly that the faithful form the temple of the Spirit and the very body of Christ. When they got together, they did not feel the need for "suitable locales," because it was their own presence that "created" the suitable space. So when Paul met with his Christians at Troas (Acts 20:7-12), or at Miletus (Acts 20:17-38), he was surely not concerned about the place where they gathered.

For many centuries now, we have an infinite number of Churches, from beautiful cathedrals and basilicas to the most simple churches and chapels. But Father Alberione already a century ago, in the face of the anti-religious and anti-Christian culture that continued to make great strides, was not afraid to say: "They will leave the churches empty." However, in the face of this prospect, he did not abandon himself to complaining... His mentality and character drove him instead to react and take up the challenge. If the people were leaving the Church, it was necessary to seek them out where they were living! After all, Jesus lived the three years of his public mission journeying continually throughout Palestine. And Paul, too, travelled the eastern Mediterranean area, and from

Rome he might have even reached Spain, according to his project (cf. Rom 15:28), preaching Jesus and his Gospel.<sup>11</sup>

Father Alberione's program is consistent with this: go to the people where they live... with suitable means for reaching them...; the Society of St. Paul is directed to "evangelize with the written word as preachers do with the spoken word" (*Mi protendo in avanti*, pp. 504-505).

Today the Word, besides being printed, is variously recorded and set in other forms, or transmitted so that it can reach the receivers in many ways.

Certainly, the means are important and varied, and for this reason there is a need for priests, men and women religious who do "only" this, in the sense that this commitment is their specific, fundamental mission. For this mission, it is indispensable to have an equally specific preparation of education for the content, pastoral sensibility for the form and professional ability in order to activate in the best way the specific means of communication to be used.

## CONCLUSION

### *The unitary project of the Pauline Family*

Father Alberione sought to follow Paul in living a quasi symbiosis with Christ. If Paul could confess: "It is no longer I who live, it is Christ who lives in me!" (Gal 2:20), we note that this is the phrase of Paul that most struck Father Alberione and which appears most frequently in his writings: at least 150 times.<sup>12</sup>

We know that the Christ who lived in him took on the features of "Master Way, Truth and Life" from which he elaborated a rich Christological spirituality. Father Alberione, then, did not just help the Church become aware of the importance and validity of "instrumental preaching," he also developed his own Christology which he proposed first of all to his sons and daughters. Now, to live, deepen and announce Jesus Christ Way, Truth and Life with the means of communications belongs to the very life of the Pauline Family.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> According to recent calculation, even though approximate, it seems that Paul covered more or less 17,000 km during his missionary journeys by land and by sea.

<sup>12</sup> G. ROATTA, *Spirito paolino*, p. 35, counted 150 citations of Gal 2:20.

<sup>13</sup> *To Give to the World Jesus Christ Way, Truth and Life: The Pauline Family Unitary Project*. This is the meaningful title of the volume that contains the work of the In-

Others will illustrate this fundamental theme. We can conclude by renewing our commitment to “be Saint Paul living today” as individual Paulines and as the Pauline Family, in personal fidelity to our own consecration and in full adhesion to the life and initiatives of our “admirable Family.” In this way, the voice of “Saint Paul living today” can be heard loud and clear throughout the Church.

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ter-congregational Study Commission on the charismatic and ministerial identity of the Pauline Family, published at the beginning of the new millennium: 19 March 2001.

## **PART THREE**

Moment of Actualization  
Hermeneutics of St. Paul for Paulines Today

DISTINCTIVENESS OF THE PASTORAL ACTIVITY  
AND FAITH EXPERIENCE OF A PAULINE  
IN THE CHURCH TODAY  
TAKING INTO ACCOUNT THEIR MISSION  
AS COMMUNICATORS



# PAUL THE APOSTLE THE GREAT COMMUNICATOR \*

Ricardo Ares

## I. PAUL'S PREACHING OF THE GOSPEL: CONTENTS AND STRATEGIES

### 1. Premise

In this presentation, we shall try to develop some themes that will shed light on the topic requested by the organizers of this Seminar, which is "to offer materials on Paul's experience of faith as well as materials for the multi-media Pauline international publishing." Living and celebrating the Year of St. Paul is, without a doubt, the most opportune occasion to examine deeply the personality of St. Paul, the evangelizer of the Gentile world. He is the Apostle par excellence. The Pauline spirit is the energy of our being missionaries.

### 2. To be St. Paul living today. A Congregation that strains forward.

This is the theme that animated our 8<sup>th</sup> General Chapter. And it is the challenge for our present and our future. We are well aware of what Blessed James Alberione said, moved by deep reflection and divine inspiration: "Everyone must look at St. Paul the Apostle as the only father, teacher and founder." Our task is to follow in his footsteps and live his spirit. The Founder traces for us the path to follow with these words: "What does the Pauline spirit consist in? It consists in this: St. Paul is the one who indicates to us the Divine Master. In other words, Paul took the Gospel, reflected on it profoundly, and then adapted it to the world, to the needs of his time and of different nations... In the same way, we must apply the Gospel to our own days and give it to the present world with the means which human progress provides, in order to transmit the thought and the doctrine of Jesus Christ."<sup>1</sup>

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\* *Translation by Gil Alisangan, SSP.*

<sup>1</sup> J. ALBERIONE, *Preachings on Apostolate*, (PrA {apostolate}. FSP Collection, (unpublished).

*STRATEGY: The Founder points out the way and the goal: "To bring the Word of God to men and women of today with the means of today."*

### **3. St. Paul's personality**

We know very well the bearing that the person of St. Paul carries for evangelization of the pagan world and the Church's teaching. Let us highlight some aspects:

#### **3.1 Paul had an intrepid and enterprising character**

Paul himself testified, without batting an eyelash, that he surpassed his contemporaries in his zeal for Judaism and for the ancestral traditions. And he affirmed that he "went to extraordinary lengths in persecuting the church of God and trying to destroy it" (Gal 1:13-14). As an excellent strategist, he was not afraid to ask for letters of recommendation from the Sanhedrin so that he could arrest the converts of Damascus (Acts 8:3). Christ awaited him during that expedition and "took possession" of him (Phil 3:12). A decisive turn of events took place in his life. Paul possessed an excellent knowledge of the Old Testament Scriptures, but now he discovered that the true Messiah is Jesus of Nazareth. Paul was an active and dynamic man. He began to preach, first to the Jews, who did not tarry to stop him mid-way. Paul managed to slip away and continued his mission. At the end of his life, he could say: "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith." (2Tim 4:7).

*STRATEGY: "Strain forward" with the zeal and the courage of St. Paul: "Go into the deep," said John Paul II.*

#### **3.2 Tireless missionary**

Paul had a clear conviction about his mission to the pagans; he moved in all directions, always restless, looking for new challenges (Rom 15:17-24). His strategy was totally new and did not accept limits or shortcuts. He felt the urgency to let people know Christ and his Gospel (Rom 15:16; 1Cor 1:17).

Fr. Silvio Sassi, explaining Paul's motto of "being all to all," synthesizes Paul's missionary style. At the beginning of his evangelizing activity lies his encounter with Christ. "For proclaiming the

good news is not my boast, since I do so under compulsion – woe to me if I do not proclaim the good news!” (1Cor 9:16).<sup>2</sup>

*STRATEGY: “True love shows itself in our daily eagerness for the apostolate: it makes us **think, run, organize**” (Alberione).*

### 3.3 Paul, the Apostle in love with Christ

Fr. Sassi, in his reflection, comments on St. Paul’s deepest experience: “For me, to live is Christ and to die is gain” (Phil 1:21). “It is no longer I who live, it is Christ who lives in me!” (Gal 2:20). “Christ’s presence in Paul’s life,” says Fr. Sassi “is not a divine possession that eliminates the human personality [...]. It is a matter of a permanent condition of Paul’s existence [...] that maintains autonomy in his decisions and his response”.<sup>3</sup> “Christ is the cause, the mover, the meaning, the energy, the motivating reason, and the driving force of the Apostle’s entire existence”<sup>4</sup>.

In his letter to the Philippians, Paul shows his life’s trajectory after the Damascus event: “But whatever I had gained from all this, I have come to consider it loss for the sake of Christ. In fact, I consider everything to be loss for the sake of the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have cast everything aside and regard it as so much rubbish so that I will gain Christ” (Phil 3:7-8). All his apostolic effort was done for Christ and those being evangelized.

On the other hand, we should not forget that Paul’s passion for Christ is directed to the vocation for a special mission: “To me, the least of all the saints, was given the grace of proclaiming to the Gentiles the unfathomable riches of Christ” (Eph 3:8).

*STRATEGY: **The General Objective of the 8<sup>th</sup> General Chapter:** “To intensify, as individuals and communities, the **experience of Christ** in the manner in which it has been lived by the Apostle Paul... in such a way that we may proclaim the Word of Salvation to every people **with the most appropriate languages** of the current culture of communication.”*

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<sup>2</sup> S. SASSI, “New Wine into Fresh Wineskins”, *To be St. Paul Alive Today. A Congregation that Strains Forward. Reflections and Documents of the 8<sup>th</sup> General Chapter of the Society of St. Paul* (Rome: Society of St. Paul, 2004), 170.

<sup>3</sup> *Ivi*, 154

<sup>4</sup> *Ivi*, 155

### 3.4 Paul: a different priesthood

Paul was a lay person, but in Romans 15:16, he speaks of a special privilege granted him by God: "To be a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles in performing the priestly service of the gospel of God, so that the **offering up of the Gentiles** may be acceptable, sanctified by the holy Spirit." This is the different priesthood in which Paul likens us to the Priests and Disciples of the Divine Master, with the exception of the ministerial priesthood. All of us are called to evangelize. "St. Paul felt as if he was performing a sacred rite while preaching the Gospel in cities and regions of the Roman Empire".<sup>5</sup>

*STRATEGY: Our parish is the world: our priesthood is evangelization through the means of social communication.*

### 3.5 Pauline thought

It is not easy to make a synthesis of Pauline thought. Paul was not a theologian by profession, but a **Pastor** who had to answer **the questions which his communities presented** to him. Therefore, his thought appears as taking the form of an apostolic reaction. This explains the variety and spontaneity of his writings. In spite of being addressed to different recipients, we are able to discover **his basic lines of thinking**, the nucleus of which is centered on **the person of Christ** and the life of salvation which he gained for us through his death and resurrection.<sup>6</sup>

The above statement helps us understand the insistence of our Founder on **the pastoral aspect** of our mission.

It is interesting to observe what Fr. Jose Bortolini said in his address to the 8<sup>th</sup> General Chapter: There is a danger that St. Paul may appear with a mistaken profile. "...For some people, Paul is this master of the truth [... something rejected] in our post-modern world, characterized, among other things, by subjectivity. [...] Certainly, he possessed a **broad framework of convictions** that gave him directions in action and in the Letters that he wrote. [...] I pre-

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<sup>5</sup> Cf. G. BIGUZZI, *Pablo, Comunicador. Entre inculturalidad y globalización* (Madrid: San Pablo, 2008), 43.

<sup>6</sup> J. J. BARTOLOMÉ, *Diccionario de San Pablo* (Burgos: Monte Carmelo, 1999), 874-876.

fer to see and present our Father as a man of dialogue with the world and the culture of his time.”<sup>7</sup>

*STRATEGY: What characterizes our mission is its pastoral spirit: to go out and meet the receivers with the most modern and efficacious means and with adequate languages.*

### 3.6 Paul, an apostle with an imaginative and creative spirit

Paul did not like to enter into territories where others had already worked. He frankly wrote to the Christians in Corinth: “We are not going beyond the limits of our ministry and boasting about the work of others. Our hope is that... we will be able to proclaim the good news to lands beyond you and will not have to boast of work already done in someone else’s area” (2Cor 10:15-16). Paul was a pioneer and a sower. He was not afraid of **contact with other cultures**; on the contrary, he knew them, mastered them, and made use of them for the sake of evangelization. He was a citizen of the world; he did not discriminate. This is an important aspect for our globalized world<sup>8</sup>. Someone said that people were lacking in Paul’s regard, but Paul was never lacking to his people.

*STRATEGY: Creativity should be the outstanding quality of a Pauline. Find out whom to reach out to, with what content and with what means.*

### 3.7 A good strategist with clear and precise plans

It is a fact that in Paul’s time, there were philosophers, preachers and propagandists who covered big and populous cities looking for adherents and followers, but none had a strategic plan as complete and as organized as Paul’s. “Others moved like nomads, while Paul advanced,” wrote an author who coined this happy formulation.<sup>9</sup>

*STRATEGY: Strategic planning is indispensable for the efficiency and efficacy of our apostolate. We should not act without it.*

#### a) Paul worked with collaborators

It is good to recall Paul’s capacity to coordinate a network of collaborators, an urgent topic for the survival and the growth of our

<sup>7</sup> J. BORTOLINI, “A memorial of Paul”, *To be St. Paul Alive Today...*, 75-76

<sup>8</sup> *Ivi*, 67

<sup>9</sup> G. BIGUZZI, *Pablo Comunicador*, 104

[...] mission in the world [...] This theme always opens for us, ever more, apostolic cooperation, especially with the lay persons.<sup>10</sup> Paul is our model and teacher. He knew how to coordinate and efficiently inspire his collaborators, whether individuals or communities. We can take, for example, the case of Barnabas (Acts 13:43, 46, 50), Paul's companions (Acts 13:13) Luke, Mark, and other individuals and families he mentions in his letters.

*STRATEGY: The collaboration of the laity is necessary. But it has two prerequisites: professionalism and a sense of communion with our mission.*

## **b) The option for the big cities**

In his plan of evangelization, Paul did not remain in less populous areas; he set his steps towards the great cities and capitals. We can cite thickly populated centers like Philippi, Thessalonica, Athens, Corinth, Ephesus, and Rome. "Paul searched for the great centers of Hellenism, culture, commerce, and political and economic powers".<sup>11</sup>

All roads led to Rome. There were about one million inhabitants in that city. Corinth was strategically located between two seas and became the capital of Achaia; it had half a million inhabitants. It was a veritable crossroad of communication. Thessalonica and Ephesus were likewise port cities with favorable areas for politics, culture and entertainment.

"For Paul, **the city was the center of energy**; from it the Gospel would spread to the interiors and to the provinces by virtue of its dynamism" (G. Biguzzi).<sup>12</sup> The Acts of the Apostles bears this out: "You can see and hear that not only in Ephesus but in practically the whole province of Asia this Paul has persuaded... a considerable number of people" (Acts 19:26). "To reach large urban centers was part of his pastoral strategy, to create in them a Christian nucleus capable of generating other nuclei (2Cor 10:15 -16)".<sup>13</sup>

**The Pauline Family in Brazil** organized in March 2008 a big symposium on this theme. It is interesting to know the more important topics discussed there.

<sup>10</sup> J. BORTOLINI, "A memorial of Paul", *To be St. Paul Alive Today...*, 72-73

<sup>11</sup> G. BIGUZZI, *Pablo Comunicador*, 108-109

<sup>12</sup> *Ivi*, 112

<sup>13</sup> J. BORTOLINI, "A memorial of Paul", *To be St. Paul Alive Today...*, 73

*STRATEGY: To use the best means of communication and networking, in order to reach a more specific urban audience.*

### 3.8 Community-Family-Communities

#### a) Community

**“The concept of community is central** in the thought of St. Paul. With it, the Apostle expresses the intimate union of the faithful with God and among themselves... Common participation in the Spirit (2Cor 13:13) cements this union among them, convinced that they have only one faith and one Lord. Love is the force which unites them.”<sup>14</sup>

#### b) The Family

From this concept of community there is a natural passage to the family. The family was composed of parents, children, relatives, slaves, servants, and even invited guests all living together... It was here that **social transformations** happened. The community then moves on to become God’s house. The development of Pauline thought was directed toward this, as we see in the pastoral letters.

#### c) The Pauline communities

These communities rose under the influence of Paul’s thought. They constitute what came to be called “Pauline Christianity.” Their birth was an **eminently urban phenomenon**. Cities were the central points and reference for the whole territory. Generally, they had a mixed character: distinct ethnic groups, cultures, social conditions, etc. For this reason, cities generated **great mobility** which favored the propagation of the Christian faith. The foundational and inalienable principle of Paul in his mission was always to be **open to the Gentiles** (Gal 3:28). The Pauline groups had **inclusiveness** as a fundamental characteristic.

*STRATEGY: The theme of community has a captivating force in our globalized world which, however, is being divided by business interests.*

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<sup>14</sup> F. CUENCA - C. BERNABÉ, *Diccionario de San Pablo*, 213-215

#### d) The family house

The family house was **the basic, organizational structure of the local Church**. The family or the family house became the **determinant model** of formation in Christianity. As pointed out earlier, the family house was composed of a wide variety of members: parents, children, slaves, relatives, friends, etc. It was in these houses that the **domestic assemblies** were celebrated. These constituted the smaller nuclei which formed part of a greater unity, that is, “the Church of God.”

*STRATEGY: In our time, there is need to rescue and restore the community of the family vis-à-vis ideologies which threaten to destroy it.*

#### e) Women in Pauline writings

One of St. Paul’s more controversial aspects is his treatment of and protagonism given to women. In the letter to the Galatians (3:28) Paul affirms the **equality of man and woman**: “There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female – you are all one in Christ Jesus.” We have been re-created by faith in Christ and we are all brethren, children of God. Civil, social, and religious barriers fall. We all form a new reality. We do not enter here into the multiple arguments and the opinions of those involved. In **Paul’s authentic thought**—apart from the social conditions of his time—it is clear that all social discrimination has been broken, to be replaced by interdependence and complementarity between man and woman. “Among Christians, there is no woman without man, and no man without woman.” (1Cor 11:11).<sup>15</sup>

*STRATEGY: The theme of woman as protagonist is growing in interest and in initiatives of promotion. We have to take this into account in our apostolic initiatives.*

### 3.9 Paul as communicator and writer

In his Letters, we discover the more authentic Paul in his missionary activities. His continuing influence is basically owed to his literary activity. The Letters, addressed to very direct receivers,

<sup>15</sup> E. ESTÉVEZ LÓPEZ, *Diccionario de San Pablo*, 813-814.

were the fruit of **his personal reaction to concrete circumstances and needs.**

In the Greek-Roman period, letters were a **well-utilized form of communication.** St. Paul transformed letter-writing and made it a more effective instrument to communicate with the communities from afar. The receiving communities found in these letters the Pauline gospel as an **answer to their real situations.** Paul knew very well how to adapt the letters and illuminate them with the Gospel. The Roman network of roads facilitated Paul's apostolic communication with the communities. "Writing a letter was for him an apostolic act, **an act of teaching and pastoral guidance.** To the letters he would give all his energies, writing with intense emotion" (G. Biguzzi).<sup>16</sup> Paul confesses that at times he wrote "with tears in his eyes." He personalized them to the point of affirming: "**You are our letter,** written on our hearts, for all to know and read. Yes, you are clearly a letter from Christ delivered by us, written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on stone tablets but on tablets of human hearts" (2Cor 3:2-3). After Paul's death, his disciples made use of letter-writing. We can therefore state that Paul "transformed a profane means of communication into **a means of apostolic action**" (G. Biguzzi).<sup>17</sup>

**Also today,** letters are means of teaching and ecclesial action; for example, the Papal encyclicals. Fr. Alberione clearly entrusted us with bringing the Christian message to the world "with the fastest and most efficacious means." He had surely meditated on and learned from St. Paul.

*STRATEGY: St. Paul offers us a challenge: to use the best technologies (for example, digital technology) to communicate the Word of God with an inculturated language.*

### 3.10 Paul and inculturation

The 8<sup>th</sup> General Chapter in operational guideline 3.1.1 and priority 3.2 calls us "to evangelize **all cultures with all the means and languages**" and "in dialogue with culture, propose an updated vision of reality, in order to orient Pauline apostolic action."

<sup>16</sup> G. BIGUZZI, *Pablo, Comunicador*, 85.

<sup>17</sup> *Ivi*, 99.

If St. Paul is our model, what was his stand vis-à-vis the diverse cultures with which he came into contact? It is true that, coming from the city of Tarsus and being a Pharisee, he breathed the air of a new culture and of new viewpoints. He was open to the world he was evangelizing and to its diverse languages. We are aware of Paul's great sensitivity to **the new challenges posed by the Gentile world**. As an example, it is enough to see how Paul used the language taken from urban life. He spoke of architecture, the circus, sports competition, military parades, musical instruments, etc. All this he did to **re-create an inculturated and evangelizing message**. His letters are the most eloquent proof.

*STRATEGY*: Fr. Jose Bortolini offers us this strategy: *"We have ahead of us a great cultural challenge because the major population concentration in countries is found in big urban centers, generators of a culture that no longer dialogues with the rural culture present in the Gospels. Would it not be the case of studying better the Letters of our Father in order that we may become effective in our mission?"*<sup>18</sup>

## II. CHALLENGES TO PAULINE INTERNATIONAL/MULTI-MEDIAL PUBLISHING

### 4. Premise

Up to this point, we have considered the more salient aspects of the mission and style of Saint Paul. Now we will attempt to focus on the world in which we are living, **from an international perspective, basing ourselves on the documents that touch on this matter**. The Superior General, Fr. Silvio Sassi, in his presentation at the 8<sup>th</sup> General Chapter (*New Wine into Fresh Wineskins*), speaks of the necessity of having a **global project for the whole Congregation** and, if possible, for the Pauline Family. Without such a project, "the continental, circumscription and local projects could result in favoring an autonomy that becomes autarchy and ends up becoming anarchy".<sup>19</sup> It is true that the CTIA is making a laudable effort in the animation and planning of **international initiatives through regional and linguistic groups** like CIDEP, CAP-ESW and the EUROPE

<sup>18</sup> J. BORTOLINI, "A memorial of Paul", *To be St. Paul Alive Today...*, 73

<sup>19</sup> S. SASSI, "New Wine into Fresh Wineskins", *To be St. Paul Alive Today...*, 202

GROUP. However, I believe that there is still a ways to go as a Group or as global directives.

In this present work, **we will refer to the Apostolic Exhortations** of the Holy See for each of the **five Continents** on the occasion of the Synods. In them we find **criteria and global objectives** which help to orient our mission in the different continents and to project concrete priorities. **The General Government** already has traced some clear lines of action that we will take into account.

#### 4.1. Synodal documents for the five continents

At the start, it is good to point out what is the **central objective** of evangelization brought out in each Synod.

- a) **Ecclesia in Africa (E/Africa)**: The special Assembly of the Synod for Africa “shall trace the *various aspects of the mission* of evangelization which the Church has to confront at the present time: evangelization, inculturation, dialogue, justice and peace, the means of social communication” (cf. no. 8).
- b) **Ecclesia in America (E/America)**: Pope John Paul II announced the theme of the Synod in the following terms: “*Encounter with the Living Jesus Christ: The Way to Conversion, Communion and Solidarity in America*. The theme thus formulated clearly expresses *the centrality of the person of the risen Christ*” (cf. no. 3)
- c) **Ecclesia in Asia (E/Asia)**: The Synod Fathers underlined the complexity of a vast continent to trace out a unique objective. However, it came out that for this part of the world, “the issue that is highlighted is the **encounter of Christianity with ancient cultures and religions**. This is a **great challenge** for evangelization... and a renewed commitment to the mission of making **Jesus Christ better known** to all” (cf. no. 2).
- d) **Ecclesia in Europa (E/Europa)**: The Synod Fathers affirmed clearly the growing desire to trace out and interpret the situation, with the purpose of **discovering the tasks** which await the Church; they proposed “**vital directions** that will make the *face of Christ* ever more visible through a more effective announcement, corroborated by coherent personal witness” (cf. no. 3).
- e) **Ecclesia in Oceania (E/Oceania)**: “The heart of the matter is inspired by a passage from the Gospel of John where **Jesus speaks of himself as the Way, the Truth, and the Life** (cf. Jn 14:6).

Through the Holy Spirit, the Father is calling the believers to walk the path that Christ walked, to announce to all the nations the truth revealed by Jesus..., and to live the fullness of life which Jesus lived and continues to live in us" (cf. no. 8).

*COMMENTARY: It is very interesting to notice how the person of Christ is the central axis around which almost all the continental Synod documents revolve. Above all the Synod of Oceania calls our attention because in it everything is based on **Jesus Christ, Way, Truth and Life**. We shall gather the points that appear in the documents cited, trying to find guidelines for the content and receivers of our Pauline mission.*

## 4.2. The great problems and challenges of humanity

St. Paul sought answers the questions which the pagan world presented to him. He studied the problems and planned **strategies for evangelization**. This is what we intend to do now, since we want "to do something" for our world today.

Fr. Silvio Sassi, in his presentation at the 8<sup>th</sup> General Chapter, states that "**the programming** of the Pauline apostolate, on the basis of its theological foundation and effective pastoral experience, is **called to integrate itself**, through its specific service, **into the continental projects of the Episcopal conferences** and of individual bishops"<sup>20</sup>. In this present talk we shall try to gather together, almost to the letter, the **sentiments of the continental Synods** with the purpose of integrating ourselves into their plans, in the best way possible.

There are numerous challenges before us. Let us underline some. Along the way, each Continent, Zone or Country **will discern** what to prioritize in its apostolic undertaking.

After the official texts that go along with each challenge, we will offer **some comments**.

### 4.2.1 The challenge of "communicating the Word of God to the world today with the means of today" in Christ, the Word made flesh.

a) **Africa**: "The Bishops of Africa **entrusted their Continent to Christ, the Lord**, convinced that he, with his Gospel and with

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<sup>20</sup> S. SASSI, "New Wine into Fresh Wineskins", *To be St. Paul Alive Today...*, 189, 2.33

his Church, can save Africa from its present difficulties and heal it of its many ills" (*E/Africa*, 10).

- b) **America:** "Jesus Christ is the 'good news' of salvation made known to people yesterday, today, and forever... Everything planned in the ecclesial field must have **Christ and his Gospel** as its starting point. Therefore, the Church in Latin America **must speak increasingly of Jesus Christ**, the human face of God and the divine face of man" (*E/America*, 67).
- c) **Asia:** "The Synod was an ardent **affirmation of faith in Jesus Christ the Savior**. The Church's faith in Jesus is a gift received in order to be shared; it is the greatest gift which the Church can offer to Asia. **Sharing the truth of Jesus Christ** with others is the solemn duty of all who received the gift of faith" (*E/Asia*, 4; 10).
- d) **Europe:** "In the context of the present ethical and religious **pluralism** which characterizes Europe more and more, it is necessary to **confess and propose the truth of Christ** as the only mediator between God and human beings and the only Redeemer of the world.... Whoever meets the **Lord knows the Truth, discovers Life and recognizes the Way** which leads to it."
- d) **Oceania:** "The main preoccupation of the Synodal Assembly was to find adequate paths in order to **present today to the people of Oceania Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior**. He is the Prophet and King not only of those who follow him, but also for all peoples of the earth. **The Father offers him as Way, Truth and Life to all men and women, to all families and communities, to all nations and to all generations**" (*E/Oceania*, 5).

COMMENTARY: "In order to understand Scripture and discover in it the Truth, it is necessary to also consider Jesus as Way, Truth and Life" (*Alberione, Vademecum*, 595).

*The continental Synods hinge their pastoral activity on the person of Christ, Word made flesh.*

*The General Government, for its part, underlines this as priority for us: the communication of the Word of God.*

#### 4.2.2 The challenge of catechesis

- a) **America:** "The new evangelization in which the whole continent is engaged specifies that **faith cannot be taken for granted**, but

must be explicitly proposed in all its breadth and richness. This is **the principal objective of catechesis**.... Catechesis is a **process of formation in faith, hope and charity**; it involves the mind and touches the heart, leading the person to embrace Christ fully and completely" (*E/America*, 62).

- b) **Europe**: "It is necessary for Christian communities to mobilize themselves in order to **propose an adequate catechesis for the diverse spiritual itineraries** of the faithful of different ages and situations in life, foreseeing adequate forms of spiritual **accompaniment** and of **re-discovering** one's own Baptism" (*E/Europa*, 51).

COMMENTARY: *The Synods of America and Europe call for mobilization of catechesis. "Faith cannot be taken for granted." In a world which is losing its faith, it is necessary to commit ourselves to catechesis nourished by the Word of God.*

#### 4.2.3 The challenge of unbelief

**Europe**: "At the root of the loss of hope is the striving to allow to prevail **an anthropology without God and without Christ**." This has opened a very wide field for **nihilism and relativism**. "We see here **worrisome signs**, like interior emptiness, loss of the meaning of life, egocentrism, etc" (*E/Europa*, 17; 18).

COMMENTARY: *Modern ideologies fight to sow an "anthropology without God and without Christ." The relativism and nihilism denounced by Pope Benedict XVI have taken up residence in our developed world.*

#### 4.2.4 The challenge of new paganism

**Europe**: "The **de-Christianization** of society in what is called the First World and the weakening of the ecclesial fabric cannot simply be attributed to the modern process of **secularization**; it is being accompanied by the eruption of a **paganism** which affirms and presents itself as an alternative to Christianity."<sup>21</sup>

<sup>21</sup> E. BUENO DE LA FUENTE, *España entre Cristianismo y Paganismo* (Madrid: San Pablo, 2002), 59-67

Pope John Paul II used to say that “**the mission of the Church** is in its beginnings.” The methods of the New Evangelization ought to be modernized.

COMMENTARY: *A new paganism, with its new idols, is invading the First World most of all. “The mission of the Church is in its beginnings” (John Paul II). What initiatives does this ask of us?*

#### 4.2.5 The challenge of seeing the world as a “global village.”

Marshal McLuhan affirmed that the world has become a “global village.” Yves Congar has made his own the phrase of John Wesley: “The wide world is my parish.” In the 7<sup>th</sup> General Chapter, we Paulines have consecrated the slogan, “**Our parish is the world.**” Today, things have changed due to diverse factors: the spectacular progress in **telecommunications** and the increasing “frontier-less” world. Pope John XXIII used to say: “Every Catholic, as such, is and ought to consider himself or herself a citizen of the world.” “There begin to be promising signs of a sense of co-responsibility for the good of the whole human family. Four great publishing agencies control today 95% of information for the whole Planet.”<sup>22</sup>

COMMENTARY: *“The world is our parish.” What meaning does this principle have for us? Is it leading us to a “change of mentality and attitudes”?*

#### 4.2.6 The challenge of globalization

The world is being directed and is characterized by **global capitalism**, by dominion of multinational companies, and **globalization of the market**. All these are being supported and power-driven by **the means of communication**. We can affirm José Arturo Chávez’s statement: “The future of each one of us is being constructed on a world-wide scale” There are many people who call for urgent regulation of this type of globalization. It generates deep inequality. The rich become richer and the poor poorer. The

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<sup>22</sup> GONZÁLEZ-CARVAJAL L., *Los cristianos del siglo XXI*, (Santander: Sal Terrae, 2003<sup>3</sup>), 13.

challenges for evangelization are very strong, since in the world there are more hungry people than ever before. St. Paul denied the Corinthians the right to keep celebrating the Eucharist due to their discrimination and their lack of sharing goods (cf. *1Cor 11:18-34; 2Cor 8:13-15*).

*COMMENTARY: Globalization can also offer **positive aspects**, especially in the world of **communication**. How capable are we of assuming the benefits of globalization, at least on the level of zone groupings?*

#### 4.2.7 The challenge of migration

- a) **Europe:** The state of misery and underdevelopment which, unfortunately, still characterizes various countries, “produces a **growing phenomenon of migration**” which confronts the Church in Europe with “the question about its capacity to **find forms of welcome and intelligent hospitality**. There is need to widen the perspective in order to meet the **needs of the whole human family...**, to recognize the fundamental rights of all migrants... and to achieve a more authentic integration” (*E/Europa, 101; 102*).
- b) **America:** The phenomenon of “migration affects numerous individuals and families from Latin American countries.... The ecclesial community tries to see in this phenomenon a **specific call to live the evangelical value of fraternity... and a more incisive evangelizing activity**” (*E/America, 65*).

*COMMENTARY: Migration is a recent phenomenon. It calls for **evangelizing and humanizing** initiatives. Are we doing anything to meet this challenge?*

#### 4.2.8 The challenge of cultures

##### a) **Diversity of cultures**

“Because the world has become smaller compared to yesterday and because migration will multiply in the near future, **the meeting of diverse cultures will become ever more frequent**”.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> L. GONZÁLEZ-CARVAJAL, *Los cristianos del siglo XXI*, 62.

This encounter is necessary, but it is not a matter of making an idol of cultural diversity. It is necessary, comments Fernando Savater, **“to break the self-focused mythology of those cultures that demand to be conserved just as they are. But this does not mean a ‘cultural amalgamation’ without developing the hidden potentials in each of them. It is important to have intercultural dialogue in a climate of reciprocity, convinced that each culture is called to give and to receive, to learn and to teach”**.<sup>24</sup>

- b) **America: With Christian perspective**, the Synod Fathers of America have considered that “the new evangelization asks for an effort that is clear, serious and ordered to the **evangelization of culture**.” Pope Paul VI affirms: “The rupture between the Gospel and culture is without doubt the drama of our time.”

#### 4.2.8bis Inculturations of Christianity

There exists a **historical sin** in the thinking of Christians: the identification of **Christianity with the Western culture**. But at present, there is a rising phenomenon that will cause the end of that identification: **the relocation of the Catholic Church to other lands**. European Catholics continue to diminish, but in other places Catholics increase in number: each year eight million are added in Latin America, four million in Africa, and nine hundred thousand in North America.

For many centuries, mission was oriented toward reproducing the same model in the whole world. We have before us a **challenge of great magnitude**. The Church must **choose between inculturation and globalization**. Vis-a-vis the Third World, says Paul Richard, **we need a Catholic Church**, not a Global Church.... Christianity can recover its credibility only through the path of **inculturation**. The true encounter between the Gospel and a given culture happens in a **local community**. This presupposes “a change in order to even imagine inculturation,” Michaël Analadoss affirms.

- a) **Africa**: The Synod Fathers affirm that “**a deep interest for a true and balanced inculturation of the Gospel is necessary so as to avoid confusion and alienation in our society which is undergoing rapid evolution**” (*E/Africa*, 48).

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<sup>24</sup> *Ivi*, 63.

- b) **Asia:** "The Church lives and fulfils her mission in the **actual circumstances of time and place**. If God's People in Asia are to respond to the will of God, through the new evangelization, it must have a profound **awareness of the complex reality of this Continent**" (*E/Asia*, 5).
- c) **Oceania:** The Synod Fathers of Oceania underlined with frequency **the importance of inculturation for an authentic Christian life....** "Inculturation is born out of respect for the Gospel and also for the culture in which it is announced and received" (*E/Oceania*, no. 16).

*COMMENTARY: A new culture is forcefully being born, due above all to the power of social communications media. We are challenged to **inculturate the message with new criteria and with new languages.***

#### 4.2.9 The challenge of ecology

- a) **America:** "To men and women, the crown of the entire work of creation, the Creator entrusts the **care of the earth** (cf. Gen 2:15). This carries **very concrete obligations** in the area of ecology for every person.... Selfish attitudes and lifestyles lead to **the depletion of natural resources....** Devastations could lead to the desertification of many parts of America" (*Cf. E/America*, 25).
- b) **Europe:** "Serving the Gospel of hope means striving to have a new and **correct use of the goods of the earth**" (*E/Europe*, 89).

*COMMENTARY: The theme that is frequently discussed in International forums concerns ecology. What can we do, with the use of our means, to make people aware of the correct use of the goods of the earth?*

#### 4.2.10 The challenge of growing urbanization

- a) **America:** "On the increase in America is the phenomenon of **ongoing urbanization**. For some time now the continent has been experiencing a **constant exodus from the countryside to the city....** As the Synod Fathers pointed out, 'in certain cases, **some urban areas are like islands** where violence, juvenile delinquency and an air of desperation flourishes'" (*E/America*, 21).

- b) **Asia:** “In the process of development, **materialism and secularism** are gaining ground, especially in **urban areas**. These ideologies, which undermine traditional values, threaten Asia’s culture with **incalculable damage**” (*E/Asia*, no. 7).

COMMENTARY: *St. Paul the Apostle chose as the heart of his evangelizing strategy the urban centers. These centers are melting pots of what is good and bad in human beings. It is important that we, too, strategically select our receivers and the places of evangelization.*

*Fr. Silvio Sassi warns the General Directors of CIDEP: “I refer, first of all, to the recipients of our apostolate. We must avoid the danger of being solely concerned with ‘what to say’ so as to ask ourselves with greater depth ‘to whom do we want to speak?’ ”.*<sup>25</sup>

#### 4.2.11 The challenge of inter-religious dialogue

- a) **America:** “Muslims, like Christians and Jews, call Abraham their father. Consequently throughout America these three communities should live in harmony and work together for the common good” (*E/America*, 51).
- b) **Asia:** In *Tertio Millennio Adveniente*, referring to the Special Assembly for Asia of the Synod of Bishops, Pope John Paul II noted that in that part of the world “the **issue of the encounter** of Christianity with ancient local cultures and religions is a pressing one. This is a great challenge for evangelization” (*Tertio Millennio*, 38; *E/Asia*, 2).
- c) **Europe:** “In every task of the New Evangelization... it is necessary to establish a **profound and intelligent inter-religious dialogue**, in particular with Judaism and Islam” (*E/Europe*, 55).

COMMENTARY: *Question: Is it possible to have some initiatives that would lead to encountering the non-Christian religions?*

#### 4.2.12 The challenge of ecumenism

- a) **Africa:** “The Assembly has underlined the importance of **ecumenical dialogue** with other Churches and ecclesial Communities, as well as dialogue with the traditional African religion and with Islam” (*E/Africa*, 49).

<sup>25</sup> *San Paolo*, Official House Bulletin of the SSP, 430 (2008), 51.

- b) **America:** It was suggested by the Synod Fathers “that Catholic Christians, pastors and faithful foster **the encounter between Christians** of the different confessions, in cooperation, in the name of the Gospel” (*E/America*, 49).
- c) **Europe:** “Certain that the unity of Christians corresponds to the command of the Lord, ‘that all **may be one**’ (cf. Jn 17:11), all the Churches and ecclesial Communities are being invited to **interpret the way of ecumenism as ‘journeying together towards Christ’**” (*E/Europa*, 30).

COMMENTARY: *Another question: Do we have initiatives in favor of the ecumenical journey? This is a favorite theme of Benedict XVI.*

#### 4.2.13 The challenge of the family

- a) **Africa:** “An important challenge, almost always underlined by the Bishops’ Conferences of Africa, concerns **Christian marriage and family life**. What is at stake is very high: in effect, **the future of the world and of the Church passes through the family**” (*E/Africa*, 50).
- b) **America:** “There is urgent need of a **broad catechetical effort** regarding the Christian ideal of conjugal communion and family life, including a spirituality of fatherhood and motherhood.... On a continent like America characterized by significant demographic development, there needs to be a constant increase of **pastoral initiatives directed to families**” (*E/America*, 46).
- c) **Asia:** “The people of Asia hold dear **the values of respect for life**, compassion for all living beings, closeness to nature, filial respect towards parents, elders and ancestors, and a highly developed **sense of community**” (*E/Asia*, 6).
- d) **Europe:** “In order to serve the Gospel of hope, it is necessary to pay **adequate and primary attention to the family**; without doubt, families must carry out a **task that cannot be substituted** with regard the Gospel of hope” (*E/Europa*, 44).
- e) **Oceania:** “One of the most known characteristics of the people of Oceania is its deep sense of **community and solidarity in the family**, tribe, village or neighborhood. This means that decisions are made through **consensus** done through a process of dialogue, frequently in large and complex measure” (*E/Oceania*, 7).

COMMENTARY: *The General Government* sees this as the **second apostolic task**: to give priority to the family. The Synod documents clearly identify the option for the family. This assumes that our initiatives take account of **parents, young people, children, the elderly, etc.**

#### 4.2.14 The challenge of young people

- a) **Africa**: “Our century **thirsts for authenticity**. Above all, in reference to young people, it is said that they have a horror for what is fictitious, what is false, and that **they seek above all truth and transparency**” (*E/Africa*, 2)
- b) **America**: “Young people are a **great evangelizing force**. They represent **quite a large part of the population** in many nations of America. **On their encounter with the living Christ** depends the hope and expectation of a future of greater communion and solidarity for the Church” (*E/America*, 47).
- c) **Asia**: “Despite the influence of modernization and secularization, Asian religions are showing signs of **great vitality** and capacity for renewal.... **Many people, especially the young**, experience a **deep thirst for spiritual values**, as the rise of new religious movements clearly demonstrates” (*E/Asia*, 6).
- d) **Europe**: “Particular attention should be given so that **young people and those about to marry** receive an **education in love** through programs specifically designed for the preparation for the sacrament of marriage” (*E/Europa*, 92).
- e) **Oceania**: “The Synod Fathers wanted to touch above all **the hearts of young people**, many of whom are **searching for truth and happiness**.... **Christ ought to be presented in an adequate way** to the new generation which suffers the rapid changes in the culture in which they live” (*E/Oceania*, 14).

COMMENTARY: *The Synods strongly emphasize the necessity of pastoral attention to young people.*

*Benedict XVI declares*: “Young people look for answers and meaning in their life.... For the Church to continue to be present with its message in the ‘great Areopagus’ of social communication, and not end up being a stranger to the **wide areas where many young people move**, it must spread with **new forms, voices and images of hope through the net-**

*works that cover our planet with meshes which become always more dense” (Benedict XVI to Vatican employees, 10 Dec., 2008).*

#### 4.2.15 The challenge of the dignity of women

- a) **Africa:** “During the discussion in the Assembly, it became clear that questions over increasing poverty in Africa, urbanization..., demographic problems and the **threats that weigh heavily on the family, the emancipation of women,** etc. form part of the **fundamental challenges** examined in the Synod” (*E/Africa*, 51).
- b) **America:** “Unfortunately, in many regions of the American Continent, woman is still the **object of discrimination.** Thus, it can be said that the face of the poor in Latin America is also the **face of many women....** There is need to help women in America to take an **active and responsible role** in the Church’s life and mission” (*E/America*, 45).
- c) **Asia:** “Reflecting upon the situation of women in Asian societies, the Synod Fathers noted that although the **awakening of women’s consciousness** to their **dignity and rights** is one of the most significant signs of the times, **their poverty and exploitation** remains a serious problem in Asia” (*E/Asia*, 7).
- d) **Europe:** “The Church is aware of the **specific contribution of women in the service of the Gospel** of hope.... There are aspects of the contemporary European society which are a **challenge to the capacity of women to welcome, share and generate in love....** The Church asks that laws which protect women should be applied effectively” (*E/Europe*, 42; 43).

*COMMENTARY: Among the fundamental challenges of the Synods is the theme concerning women. St. Paul was the prime promoter and liberator of the capacity of women to generate and nurture life. Here also lies our task.*

#### 4.2.16 The challenge of the lay faithful and the renewal of the Church

- a) **America:** “Pastors should have a profound esteem for the **witness and evangelizing work of lay people** who, incorporated into the People of God through a spirituality of communion, **lead their brothers and sisters to encounter the living Jesus**

**Christ. The renewal of the Church in America will not be possible without the active presence of the laity.** Therefore, they are largely responsible for the future of the Church" (*E/America*, 4).

- b) **Europe:** "The contribution of the lay faithful to ecclesial life cannot be renounced; effectively, their role is **irreplaceable** in the proclamation and service of the Gospel of hope.... **We need pedagogical programs** which enable the lay faithful to witness to the faith in contemporary conditions" (*E/Europa*, 41).
- c) **Oceania:** "One of the remarkable features of these programs (of Christian renewal) is the **involvement of many lay faithful**. We are grateful for the various gifts which God has given to the lay men and women, to carry out their mission" (*E/Oceania*, 15).

*COMMENTARY: The renewal of the Church and the work of evangelization will not be possible without the active collaboration of the lay faithful. To be involved in their formation is a challenge for Paulines. Moreover, we have to take seriously their incorporation into the spirit of our apostolate.*

#### 4.2.17 The challenge of social communications media

- a) **frica:** "The Assembly takes into serious consideration the social communications media, a matter of enormous importance; it involves at the same time **instruments of evangelization** and **means of diffusion** of a **new culture** which needs to be evangelized" (*E/Africa*, 52).
- b) **America:** "For the new evangelization to be effective, it is essential to have a **deep knowledge of the culture of our time** in which the **social communications media are most influential**. Therefore, **knowledge and use of media**, whether the more traditional forms or those more recently introduced through technological progress, is indispensable" (*E/America*, 72).
- c) **Asia:** "The Synod Fathers underlined the external **influences** brought to bear on Asian cultures. New **forms of behavior** are emerging as a **result of over-exposure to the mass media** and the kinds of reading, music and films that are proliferating on the Continent. **Without denying** that the means of social communication can be a great force for good, we cannot disregard the negative impact which they often have" (*E/Asia*, 7).

e) **Europe:** Given their importance, the Church in Europe has given **particular** attention to the **complex world of social communications media**. Among other things, this requires **adequate formation** of those Christians who work in this field and the users of the communications media, with the purpose of acquiring a **good command of their languages**. The document underlines the need to have **competent persons**, exchange of **information**, and participation in the **elaboration of a code of ethics** for social communications media. (*E/Europa*, 63).

*COMMENTARY: Today's culture is nourished and lives by social communication. The Synods insist on this. The General Government defines this as our third objective: the world of communication and formation in the culture of communication.*

# CONTENTS OF THE EXPERIENCE OF FAITH IN ST. PAUL AND CONTENTS OF THE INTERNATIONAL PAULINE MULTIMEDIA PUBLISHER \*

Elide T. Pulita, FSP

## 1. INTRODUCTION

### The Apostolic Vision of the Paulines

This seminar confirms that, like Paul of Tarsus and James Alberione, we have received from God a specific mission for our times. We feel, with them, the “*seriousness of the mission that the Lord has entrusted to us*” (AD, 209).

The objective of the last days of our seminar is to rethink together *that which is specific about the pastoral action and experience of faith of the Paulines in the Church today, keeping in mind our mission as communicators*. This challenge will lead us to the genuine sources of our vocation and to seek the fundamental reference points that permit us to qualify our experience of faith and the contents of the Pauline International Multimedia Publisher.

The “*centrality of communication as new evangelization*”<sup>1</sup> is a constitutive, perennial element of our mission. For *preaching* with the means of social communication, Alberione has created the Congregation of the Pauline Priests and Brothers (1914) and of the Pauline Sisters (1915), with the scope of configuring a new form of evangelization.

Reflecting on the contents of the experience of faith in St. Paul and on the contents of the Pauline International Multimedia Publisher, we must consider that the “*Pauline charism is a unity inseparable from a spirituality centered in Christ the Master and a specific pastoral service in the ecclesial community*.”<sup>2</sup> For this “*new vocation*” in the Church, Alberione sought a spiritual approach inspired by St. Paul, for the formation of “*new apostles*” full of wisdom and fer-

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\* *Translation by Peter Waymel - Sr. Raymond Gerard, FSP.*

<sup>1</sup> S. SASSI, *Revision of the Apostolate from the Aspect of the Charism*. IX General Chapter, Daughters of St. Paul (Ariccia, 2007), 1-3.

<sup>2</sup> *Ivi*, 1

vor.<sup>3</sup> Alberione did not intend to found a Catholic publishing house, but to create a new vocation, a new “preaching” in the Church.

The hermeneutical key to St. Paul and James Alberione is the pastoral approach—an evangelizing, communicational pastoral activity that has its own requisites. With a supernatural vision, Alberione affirmed that the purpose of our apostolate is pastoral, that is, to give God to men and to give men to God, in Christ Jesus (*Vademecum*, 1205). The apostolate of communication is the fruit of a spirituality lived by each member in particular and by the congregation in general. That is, in terms of the mission, editorial production without a life in God is not enough. It is from this life that the editorial products become a strong testimony of a living experience.

Both in Paul’s vision as well as in Alberione’s, one cannot isolate the experience of faith from the global unity of the Pauline mission. That is, the contents, the means and languages to be used in the announcement of the Gospel, cannot be treated independently of the commitments assumed in view of the interlocutors, cultures and traditions of those for whom our vocation is carried out.

It is necessary to specify that Saint Paul is the prototype of the follower of Christ that Alberione sets as the basis of our mission, since he intends to fuse these elements—expressed in the preceding paragraph—into a single unity, that is, the preaching of the Good News. Already in 1925, writing to the Cooperators, Blessed Alberione explains this task of Paul, first of all in relation to the addressees of Paul’s mission, who are the gentile peoples, the farthest away, and secondly in the sense that St. Paul is formator of apostles: “the Letters of St. Paul form souls and hearts for the apostolate, they form the apostles according to the heart of Jesus, strong, holy, fruitful, apostles of their own times.”<sup>4</sup>

Thus, we wish to make an excursion into Paul’s contexts, contents and pastoral strategies, to give greater vitality to our Pauline apostolic roots.

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<sup>3</sup> J. ALBERIONE, Prayer “Immaculate Mary.” In: *Prayers of the Pauline Family* (Boston: Daughters of St. Paul, 2003), 221.

<sup>4</sup> ID., In: Introduction to *Donec formetur Christus in vobis*, Opera Omnia (Rome: Society of St. Paul, 2003), no. 165.

## 2. THE HISTORICAL CONTEXT OF PAUL'S EVANGELIZATION

### Paul in the context of the Early Church

The question of the origins of Christianity is closely linked to the position regarding its truth, its identity and its diversity. Despite the relative abundance of documents, we know few things about its beginnings and its first developments as a community, and about the life of its first members. Rahner joins the idea of its beginning with the essence of Christianity. He affirms:

The Apostolic Church<sup>5</sup> is a qualitatively unique mode, the object of divine intervention. It carries out a function that is unique and irreplaceable in the whole rest of the history of the Church. Its beginning enjoys an originality, irreducibility and purity in the expression of its essence that are proper only to this first phase. The Apostolic Church is not only the first period of the Church in time, but also the permanent foundation and the norm for the whole future.<sup>6</sup>

Thus, for Francois Vouga, "the story of early Christianity, the complexity of its evolution, must not be reduced to any simple system," because it is difficult to arrange the quantity of elements that the articulation of this new experience of Faith in Christ implied.

In the history of early Christianity, one observes a multiplicity of phenomena and currents that are not easy to situate in establishing the relationship between them. One can speak of plurality in the origins of early Christianity. By way of example, we could cite the *itinerant preaching* (also called *itinerant radicalism*), the *Christian rabbinicalism* of Judaic Christianity, the *sapiential tradition*, and the *school of the beloved disciple*. In the 30's and 40's of the first century, the time of the first developments of the Christian era, the "missionaries are itinerants." They work in Galilee and Syria, particularly among the Jews. Geographical and numerical growth obliges them to create new forms of organization, to choose new

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<sup>5</sup> The precise meaning, in this case, given by K. Rahner, shows the Church at the time of its foundation, in the first generation, during which it still finds itself *in progress*.

<sup>6</sup> K. RAHNER, *Inspiration in the Bible* (New York: Herder, 1966), 53-56.

animators and missionaries (Acts 6:2-6). This leads directly to a re-reading of the Jewish Scriptures with new eyes.

The group, to which Stephen belonged, with a Hellenistic influence,<sup>7</sup> interpreted the Bible differently. The Hellenistic communities were converted on the basis of the Christian mission that was carried out later. This resulted in not only Jews but also Gentiles being won over through the preaching of the Gospel by these persons (Gal 2:11-14). Due to the structure and organization of Paul and of the mission itself, Western Christianity, from the forties to the seventies, tended to become an *urban movement*<sup>8</sup> of Hellenistic and Roman society. This trend was facilitated by the mobility of persons in the great Empire, by the persecutions against the initial community and the change of the political, religious and cultural *situation*. In roughly thirty years, the Gospel spread throughout the Empire (Acts 1:8), as a result of Paul's travels and those of the other apostles. Without a doubt, this development generated a radicalization of the conflict with the "brothers" in Jerusalem. Paul and Barnabas, followers of the Hellenistic perspective, set out to seek new missionary horizons (Acts 9:29-30), in which they developed a different model of the Church from the one being lived out in Jerusalem. This Church is guided by Peter, and its structures are taken from the Judaic tradition,<sup>9</sup> though in communion with the new elements assumed from the experience of faith in Jesus.

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<sup>7</sup> The Hellenistic term refers to the Jews who speak Greek (Acts 1:29) and to Jewish Christians who speak Greek (Acts 6:1). There are two groups: one is gathered around the apostles, while the other, the Hellenists (Greek speaking Christians), have their own meeting places. In a parallel fashion, each group follows its own evolution. Soon enough, the Hellenists were victims of persecutions (Acts 6:8-8:1; 8:2-3). The consequence of this conflict was the dispersion of the Hellenists and as a result, the expansion of Christianity.

<sup>8</sup> F. VOUGA, *Los primeros pasos del cristianismo. Escritos, protagonistas, debate* (Navarra: Verbo Divino, 2001), 136.

<sup>9</sup> This "primitive community" maintained its position of prominence at least until the death of James. With the destruction of Jerusalem in the year 70, the ecclesial trace of a model of the Church did not disappear from the center, where the historical events of Jesus and of his passion, death and resurrection took place. Antioch, at the beginning of the Second century, distinguished itself as the center of the province of Asia. With its episcopal see, it claimed authority beyond its geographical limits. In the mid-II century, the Church of Rome, due to its central location, founded and claimed ecclesial authority over all the Churches.

## Paul in the Context of the Roman World

Paul's journeys were undertaken between the years 46 and 58 A.D. Throughout this time, the Empire's central government continued its efforts to concentrate power and riches in Rome. In addition, it sought to preserve the so-called "*Pax Romana*," which favored international trade, the collection of taxes and tributes. As a result, slavery increased in the peripheries, while luxury increased in the center, with a consequent relaxing of morals. To guarantee the "*Pax Romana*," the Empire introduced obligatory worship of the emperor.

Pauline Christianity and the ideology of Roman imperialism found themselves in a radical conflict of meaning. Roman imperial theology was the ideological center of the power assumed by the emperor. Augustus' name, as well as that of his successors, was characterized as *son of the gods, god and god of gods*. He was the lord and redeemer of the world. The term *Kyrios*, "lord," always indicated the emperor. These "truths" were found everywhere, much like publicity and propaganda today. The Romans believed that Rome's success in war and conquest was due to its morality and its religious practice ("*pietas*" and "*religio*").

Without examining the archaeology of Roman imperial theology, it is difficult to comprehend the exegesis of Pauline Christian theology and its respective pastoral methods. The Roman Empire, for example, was founded on the common principle of *peace through victory*. Paul, a follower of Christ Jesus, found himself in head-on opposition with this theology. For his part, he affirmed that the Kingdom of God is already present in the world, proposing peace through justice, or, more clearly, through faith, in the covenant with the "living and true God" (1Thess 1:9) *and in his Son, Jesus Christ who died and rose*.

From this are drawn the words, "*Grace and Peace*" from God our Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ, present in the initial greeting of Paul's letters, which summarize his message and his mission, his faith and theology and which are more subversive than anyone can imagine.

It is necessary to clarify that the Greek word *Ekklesia*, with which Paul indicated the Christian community, was originally used to indicate the citizens of any Greek city, gathered in assembly, who were able to make clear and determining decisions regarding self-government.

The content of Paul's preaching drew the Romans' attention, awakening some suspicion. Christians, in proclaiming Jesus as Son of God, deliberately meant to deny Caesar and his highest title and to announce Jesus as Lord and Saviour; this implied a direct betrayal of the Emperor, clearly prophesying centuries of martyrdom.<sup>10</sup>

Christianity appeared to the elite and to the philosophers as an irrational phenomenon; they disqualified it and treated it as a *superstition*, since it was a new religion in the Roman Empire, foreign, obscurantist and without any recognized tradition. The paradox is that the same thing that caused the despisal of Christianity among the intellectuals became the reason for its success in the social environments within the cities, that is, it entered in a direct way into the most popular environments of the empire. The themes of the preaching presented, on the one hand, an exclusivist monotheism, and on the other, a rigorous ethic upon which it was possible to construct one's individual conscience and personal identity as a human being.

From the historical and contingent point of view, the new Christian movement appeared at a time in which it could respond to the search for a personal and social identity in wide circles of the Roman Empire. The mystery religions and the healing gods no longer offered satisfying elements for human existence. The triumph of Christianity was due to the structure in which its system of beliefs was expressed: it was open to Jews and Greeks, slaves and free men, men and women, without any preconditions.<sup>11</sup>

It was not easy to preach Jesus of Nazareth in the Roman world. He had been condemned by the Roman Empire, represented in Palestine by Pontius Pilate. The list of martyrs of the first centuries confirms this information.<sup>12</sup> Paul himself, according to tradition, was beheaded by the imperial sword, during the reign of Nero (54-68 A.D.).

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<sup>10</sup> J.D.CROSSAN & J. L. REED, *In Search of Paul* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 2004), 8 and 21.

<sup>11</sup> F. VOUGA, *Los primeros pasos del cristianismo*, 138.

<sup>12</sup> In the years 37-41 A.D. a crisis occurred provoked by Caligula. He intensified worship of the emperor, with the objective of unifying the Empire. His statue was placed in all the temples of the other divinities. Flavius Josephus narrates that in 39 A.D. he ordered his statue to be placed in the temple of Jerusalem, arousing general protest. With the death of Caligula, Claudius named Herod, who died in 44 A.D. Later, Rome declared Palestine a Roman province. These situations left pro-

## Paul in the Judaic Context

The influence of Judaism on non-Jews in the Roman Empire was deep and lasting. It demonstrated a tremendous vigor through the diffusion of the Talmud, gaining proselytes and sympathizers. On the one hand, the exclusiveness of Jewish worship and the rigor of its laws generated a barrier between Jews and Gentiles. On the other, there was something in the Jewish religion and community that satisfied the basic existential necessities in the Roman Empire and beyond.<sup>13</sup>

Around the III century, Judaism had become the most popular religion among the pagans. As a result, it was a powerful rival to Christianity. This helps us to understand the tensions between the early Church and the Jewish synagogues in the first centuries of Christianity.<sup>14</sup>

The period of the origins of Christianity has a "problematic" character. The idea of a unitary apostolic tradition is inadequate, due to the diversity of elements present in its origins. The Judeo-Christian communities developed in the synagogues until the end of the first century. Christianity's relationship with the synagogues caused violent conflicts, particularly in the years around 40 A.D. Paul himself informs us of the first persecutions of Christians on the part of the synagogues (Gal 1:13.23; Phil 3:6). The Pharisees had decided to exclude from the synagogue all those who confessed Jesus (Jn 9:22; 12:42; 16:2a). Paul was often punished in the synagogues (2Cor 11:24-25), for exactly the same reasons for which he had persecuted the Christians of that region (Gal 1:13.23). In the Roman and Hellenistic cities, Christianity became a rival of Judaism, after having been diffused in the synagogues and thanks to the network that they maintained among themselves.<sup>15</sup>

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found traces in the Jewish people, and re-inflamed anti-Roman sentiment and mistrust of foreigners. First, the growth of the nationalist movement took place, with the increase of internal differences among the Jews. From the 40's onwards, the rebellion grew in strength and the communities suffered the persecution of Herod Agrippa (Acts 12:1-3).

<sup>13</sup> W. LIEBESCHUETZ, "The Influence of Judaism Among Non-Jews in the Imperial Period." *Journal of Jewish Studies*, 52 n<sup>o</sup> 2, (2001).

<sup>14</sup> R. F. TANNENBAUM, "Jews and God-Fearers in the Holy City of Aphrodite." *Biblical Archeology Review*, 12 (1986) 54

<sup>15</sup> F. VOUGA, *Los primeros pasos del cristianismo*, 138-140.

Paul's radical break with his Jewish past, after the event of his conversion, the abandonment of the Mosaic Law with the rigorous observance of its precepts, the preaching of the non-necessity of circumcision for salvation—all cultivated enmity with his former brothers in the faith. In his letters Paul mentions sufferings, opposition and injuries from some Jews (1Thess 1:6; 2:2): "they impeded him to preach to the gentiles" (2:16). The assembly celebrated in Jerusalem (towards 48 A.D.), demonstrated, however, that even though threatened, the unity was not broken. Without a doubt it constituted, at the same time, the dividing line between the various currents. Up until the moment of the assembly, everything revolved around the community of Jerusalem and its most representative figures, above all Peter. From that moment onward, however, all of them "disappeared" beyond the horizon and Paul entered into action, and became with his work the main event of the early Church.

### 3. THE CONTENT OF PAUL'S PREACHING

#### Paul's Hermeneutical Key

Paul applied to the reading and interpreting of the Scriptures a new hermeneutical key based on the mystery of Christ, convinced that in Jesus, the Son of God, all the promises made in the first covenant have their fulfillment (2Cor 1:19-20). In this horizon of Christological faith, the events and personages of the Jewish scriptures are changed into figures that anticipate the Christian experience.<sup>16</sup>

In his Christological reading of the Bible, Paul depended upon the early Christian tradition present in the first communities. In them, the essential foundations of the announcement of faith are integrated with the prophetic testimony of Scripture: "*Christ died for our sins, in accordance with the Scriptures (...) he was raised on the third*

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<sup>16</sup> Thus, Adam finds his counterpart in Jesus Christ (Rom 5:12-19; 1Cor 15:20-22.45-49). Abraham, for his part, is the prototype of the just ones who receive the "Good News" (Rom 4:1-25; Gal 3:6-8). The crossing of the Red Sea during the Hebrew's flight from Egypt and the events that followed in the desert are a prefiguring of the Christian experience. "*These things happened to them as warnings, Paul says, but they were written down for our instruction, for the end of the ages has come to us*" (1Cor 10:11; Cf. Rom 15:4).

day, in accordance with the Scriptures" (1Cor 15:3.4).<sup>17</sup> In this perspective, he underlined the continuity of God's action in the history of salvation, which reaches its fulfillment in Christ Jesus.

In Paul, the mission to evangelize is the fundamental condition to live and witness to the salvific action of Christ Jesus, who died and rose. Because of this, he could affirm vigorously: "*For proclaiming the good news is not my boast, since I do so under compulsion – woe to me if I do not proclaim the good news!* (1Cor 9:16)."

## Paul's Gospel

A fundamental fragment reveals to us the root of the Gospel<sup>18</sup> preached by Paul: "*I want to remind you, brothers, of the good news I proclaimed to you, the good news you received and in which you stand firm. You will be saved through the good news if you hold fast to the message I proclaimed to you, unless you believed in vain.* (1Cor 15:1-2)."

According to this text of Paul, the Gospel saves. In Galatians (1:8-18), "*Gospel*" means for Paul the "*Apocalypse*," that is, the "*Revelation*" of Jesus Christ in his life. In Greek, one says "*Apocalipsis*" of Jesus, which means the way Christ lives in me. Apocalypse, in this sense, is a manifestation. In other words, it lifts the veil in order to observe reality directly. Paul, as a Jew, believed in works and in the law. Now, he has experienced Jesus Christ. He evangelizes with this, as he declares to the Galatians:

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<sup>17</sup> This confession of Paul's faith is the most ancient text testifying to the origins of Christianity. In addition, it is the only information from the first decades of the Christian communities that has been preserved (Cf. F. VOUGA, *Los primeros pasos del cristianismo*, 33).

<sup>18</sup> The term "*Gospel*" indicates a Greek word, used in the Greek language and literature. For Christians, Gospel means "*Good News*." In the Greek and Roman world it meant the following: "Two armies are fighting on a battlefield. The winning general sends a soldier from his camp to tell the king: "*we have won the battle!*" In this moment, the messenger gives the news to the king and his people. This is a cause for joy. But he could also have given the opposite news, "*we have lost the battle,*" generating fear among his fellow citizens." In Paul and throughout the New Testament, the meaning of "*Gospel*" not only goes beyond the profane usage, but is more existential. The word "*Gospel*" occurs seventy-six (76) times in the New Testament, with an original Christian meaning, that is, one that comes from God. Of this number, sixty (60) of these references are found in the letters of Paul. Of these, roughly forty-one (41) are found in the proto-Pauline letters, that is, those of which the scholars today recognize Paul as the author. Therefore, the one who coined the meaning and the original course of the term "*Gospel*" was Paul. Thus, whoever wants to know where to find the primordial significance of "*Gospel*" must take it up with Paul (H. CARDONA, *Itinerario espiritual de San Pablo* [Bogotá: Paulinas, 2009]), 32-33).

"I want you to know, brothers, that the good news I proclaimed is not a human gospel, for I did not receive it from a man nor was I taught it—I received it through a revelation of Jesus Christ (Gal 1:11-12). But when the One Who set me apart from my mother's womb and called me through His grace was pleased to reveal [apocalypse]His Son to me so that I might proclaim his good news to the Gentiles, I didn't immediately consult with flesh and blood (Gal 1:15-16). For I handed down to you [tradition] as of primary importance what I, in turn, had received, namely that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures"(1Cor 15:3-4).

As this text says, Paul did not invent the Gospel. On the contrary, he received it whole from the community, at the beginning of the 30's, when he had the "Apocalypse" of the *Risen One*, at the moment he experienced salvation encountering Christ on the road to Damascus. This clarity of Paul also appears in the Letter to the Romans: "For I am not ashamed of the good news – it is God's saving power for everyone who believes, first the Jew and then the Greek as well" (Rom 1:16).

What does the *Risen One* do in a person? Paul answered this question by referring to his existence and taking examples from the situations of daily life. The one who makes room for the *Risen one* becomes "Gospel," witness and good news for the others. There is an intrinsic force (*dynamys, enérgeia*) in the Gospel that comes from the Spirit, capable of penetrating a person's heart and transforming him. Above all it results in a modification of one's scale of personal values.

By assuming the force of the Gospel in his life, Paul exceeded the works of the Torah, which emphasizes one's personal effort and capacities. The Torah gives strong value, from this perspective, to one's own "I." For those who are in Christ, the importance is oriented towards *others*. A *conversion happens*, represented by the Greek term "*metanoia*," which literally translates as: *change of mind and a mind in continual change*. For Paul, an individual's conversion is equal, identical to the event of Jesus' death and resurrection in all its fullness. When this occurs in a person, Jesus crucified-risen is transforming him into an individual like Him. Paul, in various passages of his letters, names this process "*baptismal life*," understood as

an immersion of the individual in the death and resurrection of Christ to enter into a new condition, placing ones own qualities at the service of others.<sup>19</sup>

Therefore, the Gospel is not an ideology but a way of being. Paul knows that after the interiorization of this vital word, one must transmit it with his own life, "in a concrete situation." In a word, there can be no communication of the Gospel without an involvement of the life of the one who announces it. One who makes the Gospel his/her own life irradiates it vitally (2Cor 4:6.16). Thus we can deduce that the Gospel is communicated also by example and by a witness of life. This implies that the word is not only interiorized, but is made vital by transforming it into actions, which can enter into the world and transform it.

### Paul's Kerygma

The term "kerygma" used by Paul calls our attention to the verb with which it may be linked, since in Greek, "*kêrýssein*" (to announce, give testimony), has the same root as "*kerygma*" (announcement, festive and joyful sign, reliable testimony).<sup>20</sup>

Thus, one can conclude that Kerygma, in Greek *kerysso*, means to preach. For this reason, this word indicates the apostolic preaching of the first era of Christianity, when the disciples set out to make known their new way of living, marked by their encounter with the Risen One. The nucleus of their preaching could not be simpler: Jesus is risen! The only kerygmatic dogma was the salvific event of Jesus (1Cor 15:14.1). The faith was founded on him.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> The description of the baptismal life as a transforming reality is clear in Paul, above all in the letter to the Romans (6:1-11). Perhaps there is no clearer description of the Pauline significance of baptism or of baptismal life.

<sup>20</sup> In the Second Letter to the Thessalonians, the word is "*kerigma*" (announcement, shout), "*rhema*" (voice), "*apología*" (exposition), "*martyrion*" (witness), "*paráklesis*" (exhortation), "*phthongos*" (sound). There is a wider use of the following verbs: "*lalein*" (to say), "*euangelizo*" (to evangelize), "*kerysso*" (to announce, to shout), "*martyrein*" (to give witness), "*gnorizzo*" (to make known), "*faneroó*" (to manifest) and "*peithein*" (to persuade). To stimulate the salvific dynamism of the faith and to call people to communion, God has chosen the weak and fragile instrument of the word. "*God has wanted to save those who believe with the foolishness of the message we preach*" (1Cor 1:21).

<sup>21</sup> C. FLORISTÁN – J. J. TAMAYO (dir.), *Diccionario abreviado di pastoral* (Navarra: Verbo Divino, 2002), 250.

The practice of the proclamation sought to make persons question themselves and invite them to conversion, that is, to accept not only the announcement as such, but also the person of Jesus as Lord. In this sense, it confronted a person with a reality, a perennial and transcendental event. Furthermore, it invited him to accept the *Kerygma* as an act of faith that produces salvation. From this perspective, the faith, lived and witnessed, caught on and spread. All this was sustained by their experience of the living Christ, “*seated at the right hand of God,*” and present in their midst through his Spirit.

The one who announced spoke in the name of God, like the prophets, because he was not only making known some elements of the mystery of redemption, but was aiming at enabling persons and society itself to change their behavior in many aspects. His word became efficacious: when it was welcomed it produced that salvation which revealed Jesus’ resurrection; that is, the person—in his innermost being—was transformed by the action of God. This is the mission of whoever decides to announce the word (Rom 6:3-11). The *Kerygma* included the interpretation of the meaning of the event – Jesus Christ, both in himself and in man.

For Paul, the *Kerygma* is not just the content of the first announcement—the Death and Resurrection of Jesus—but also the pastoral method for making him known: an announcement which, for its value and importance, must provoke a great moral impact, bringing the person to conversion and full adhesion to Jesus Christ.

The *Kerygma* prepared the way for a progressive formation, detailed, united and ordered, through catecheses (*Didaché*, *Catechesis* or *Didascalía*). The following phases were to follow: conversion, baptism and initiation into a coherent Christian life. The consequences of these elements lead to a rupture with the past, in order to assume a different life. The new faith, from this position, led to a new comprehension of life and of man.

Therefore, the intended audience of the *Kerygma* was everyone, but with special emphasis on the neophytes and the Christian sympathizers.<sup>22</sup> However, due to historical circumstances, the proclama-

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<sup>22</sup> The *Kerygma* announced and preached by Jesus was directed to all. It required conversion, because the message was new in its way of understanding God – and the coming of his Kingdom – in the way of manifesting his presence and in the way of considering the Law. It was very different from what his contemporar-

tion of the good news had the possibility of extending itself throughout the gentile-pagan world, whose mentality and conception of reality was completely different. For the carrying out of this task, it was necessary to adapt the language, so that the transmission of the good news would be comprehensible to other cultures, such as the Greco-Roman (Hellenistic) one. Paul was an exponent of this new way of proclaiming the good news.<sup>23</sup> It is necessary to clarify how this expansion of the *Kerygma* resulted directly in a more solid evolution.

### Paul's Exhortations

Paul knew how to use the art of exhortation to move individuals to act; he knew how to discover those key points, coherent with the doctrine that he is expounding, necessary to bring persons to behave differently. I "*exhort you*," in his line of thought, means to infuse courage, to comfort. This expression is used to trigger mechanisms that stimulate a change in life. That is, it presents the way of "living in the Lord" (Cf. Phil 4:8). Obedience and surrender are the proper response to these announcements (Rom 12:1-2). In other words, the Pauline exhortations, in their spiritual nature and reasonable character, arouse a life coherent with what God wants. The horizon of the exhortation is the mercy of God, in a love of belonging.

## 4. PAUL'S PRINCIPLES AND PASTORAL STRATEGIES

Paul never declared himself the pastor of any particular community that he founded, but assumed his condition as an apostle of that group (Cf. Rom 1:5), animating these communities, accompanying them and communicating to them the divine life with the announcement of the Gospel and the dedication of his entire life. However, a more detailed analysis of his letters reveals him to be a pastor concerned with instructing and guiding his communities. Paul's pastoral activity became a way of life "*in the Lord*" (Cf. Phil 4:8; Col 3:17; *1Cor* 7:39) that transformed itself into a service of unity of communion and of ecclesial mission.

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ies thought. Thus, not only was he a "stumbling block," but he ended up on the cross, condemned as a blasphemer and agitator of a revolt.

<sup>23</sup> C.H. DODD, *La predicación apostólica y su desarrollo* (Madrid: Sígueme, 1975), 26.

Paul's mission among the gentiles is presented as an organized missionary undertaking. His task was to bring the Gospel where the name of Christ was still unknown (Rom 15:20). The main objectives of his strategies were those of creating communities in the urban centers, involving a great number of collaborators and instructing through his letters.

*The Gathering of Believers as "Body of Christ"  
in the Home and in the Family*

As in the synagogue, Paul was undoubtedly one of the first to consider the *home-family* as part of his missionary strategy,<sup>24</sup> forming new Christian communities alive in the faith.<sup>25</sup> The *home* was the gathering place par excellence for the Christian communities. Homes took on a decisive importance in the evolution of Hellenistic Christianity, because they were social units that later converted as a whole to the Gospel. They became cells of faith in the midst of life's daily realities, as can be seen from Paul's own list of greetings. The *home* was the place for the announcement and hearing of the Word. In it, Christians shared the Lord's Supper in the breaking of the bread, in prayer, in instruction and in bodily nourishment.

The pastoral principle that guided Paul in his activity of evangelization was that of leaven: *Do you not know that "A little yeast leavens all the dough?"* (1Cor 5:6). He believed it necessary to diffuse the Word with its transforming power throughout the whole Roman Empire, through small living cells constituted as communities of faith. These were the result of a significant process of inculturation and a communitarian sense of the pastoral activity. The organization of the Churches in the Hellenistic and Roman cities clearly cannot be attributed to Paul: it was not his invention. These struc-

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<sup>24</sup> The local structure of the Christian groups was based on the family, considered the basic cell of the rising movement. The meeting places were private homes.

<sup>25</sup> There are wonderful pages in his letters that speak of the dignity and vocation of families, exhorting them to live in a holy manner (Eph 5:21; 6:9; Col 3:18; 4:1; 1Tim 5:16). Quality, not quantity, was important for Paul. For instance, he noticed Aquila and Prisca and converted, formed and filled them with Christ, so that they would become a source of irradiation of the Gospel in their city.

tures already existed for social meetings among families; Paul adopted them for his strategy of evangelization.

The Church as Body of Christ, in which each member derives vitality and fertility from the Head (2Cor 12:12-26; Eph 1:22-23; Col 1:18-20), constitutes the pastoral basis of Paul's ministry. Regarding this he says: it is Christ the Head "*from whom the whole body, nourished and held together by its ligaments and sinews, grows with a growth that is from God*" (Col 2:19; Eph 4:15-16), without forgetting the gift of the Spirit, through Baptism and the Eucharist (1Cor 12:13). The community, on the one hand, is a body, a living organism that transmits life and, on the other, it is not a question of a structure, system or scaffolding, but represents the Body of Christ.

In this model, "*the Church is community around the Lord's table,*" because it is united by the bread, which represents the manner in which all the baptized are called to participate in the "Body of Christ." It is constituted as a community of service and of life deriving from the Eucharist, which gives it, in this way, through the Christian event, a social structure (1Cor 12:12-27).<sup>26</sup>

Paul encountered *difficulties and challenges* (perhaps some of the worst in his mission and proclamation of the Word) within the groups he had founded. He speaks of preachers who, out of envy, teach insincerely (Phil 1:16-18), wanting to impose Judaic practices on new Christians. In addition, he speaks of internal divisions (1Cor 1:10-13), of fanatical charismatic persons (1Cor 12:1-3). And there were those who saw the Lord's Supper as an occasion to exclude the poorest (1Cor 11:27-22). In the communities of Galatia people discredited Paul's preaching, because he did not demand circumcision of the gentiles, or even the observance of the Jewish laws (Gal 4:21; 5:4). All this was the beginning of an ethical and religious distancing of the communities (1Cor 5:1).

A question arises: what was Paul's reaction? He states that this was one of his greatest sufferings as an apostle. On the one hand he is hard, even sarcastic, with these persons (2Cor 11:5); on the

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<sup>26</sup> A system of "officials" is created in Paul's communities, who direct the community, with the bishop who presides over the Eucharistic gathering and is responsible for the direction of the local community, aided by deacons in the charitable and organizational tasks (Phil 1:1).

other he reacts with wisdom, using his ability as a pedagogue and pastor. Almost all his letters aim to sustain, clarify, and form the communities.

### *Paul, Evangelizer of the Cities*

Today it is agreed that Christianity was an urban phenomenon during its beginnings in Palestine,<sup>27</sup> given that Paul and his collaborators turned towards the large cities situated along the main roads of communication of that age.<sup>28</sup> They were the initiators of the evangelization of the main cities, because these provided the possibility for founding communities of the new faith in their midst.<sup>29</sup> Thus the Christian faith opened itself to the members of the world's cities, people who were not necessarily part of the people of Israel.

New and heterogeneous groups of Christians adopted modes and places of living out the particular experience that was making itself known. In the cities of the Mediterranean Basin, there were people of different cultures and social conditions (freemen and slaves). In addition there were neighborhoods arranged according to ethnic and occupational affinities. Paul, without a doubt, sought out the "quarter of the tentmakers," with whom he went to work. He dedicated his free time to the apostolate (1Thess 2:9; 1Cor 4:12; 9:1-24; Acts 19:11-12).

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<sup>27</sup> In the first decades after Jesus' crucifixion, the Palestinian rural culture passed to the background, while the Greco-Roman cities became the dominant place of the Christian movement (W. A MEEKS, *Los primeros cristianos urbanos* [Salamanca: Sígueme, 1998] 26).

<sup>28</sup> The Roman Province of Asia was found in the northeast region of the Mediterranean, from Syrian Antioch to Macedonia and Greece, passing through Anatolia (Galatia, Licaonia, Pisidia) and along the western coast. Antioch, Derbe, Lystra, Iconium, Antioch of Pisidia, Colossae and Ephesus were important cities along the so-called "common roadway." In addition, Phillipi, Thessalonica and Troas were important towns of the "Via Egnatia."

<sup>29</sup> The term *Pauline communities* is applied to those communities that followed and developed the known instructions which came from Paul directly or indirectly. Included under this term are not only those communities that he founded or directed, through visits or letters, but also those who received his teachings and ideas through his disciples. All these communities make up what is known as "Pauline Christianity."

### *Missionary Collegial Work*

Paul's apostolic organization involved numerous collaborators, who worked with him (1Cor 3:9; Phil 2:25) and preached the gospel (1Cor 16:16; 1Thess 3:2), following the divine mandate (1Cor 3:9; 1Tim 3:2).

With his ministry, Paul established the foundation of the pastoral activity of the Church. His letters show that he was never a lone worker, but always conceived his missionary work as a collegial matter. His collaborators were co-responsible for founding and maintaining the communities, as well as keeping in touch with them through visits and letters.

He had three groups of collaborators:

1. *Those sent by the Church*: these individuals were present in the communities at the disposition of the Pauline mission with definite and limited duties, such as delivering his letters, transmitting information, and helping the other apostles.

2. *The regular collaborators*: a restricted group, including Barnabas, Silvanus and Timothy, who closely supported Paul's mission and the communities founded by him.

3. *Independent collaborators*: Paul encountered, more or less by chance, a group of persons who, for a certain time, collaborated in the Pauline communities. Among these were Prisca and Aquila.

His own letters testify to the commitment to "*socializing the Pauline mission*,"<sup>30</sup> and the success of the communities which resulted from this indicates the great activity of the *collaborators*, among whom there were numerous women. The *home-family* and the heads of these households became the ones who not only sustained the apostle's activity, but also supported the members of other communities who passed through their region.<sup>31</sup>

### *The Letters: Paul's Strategy of Apostolic Communication*

The apostolic letters, written by Paul for his communities, are the first attempt to think out and represent the Christian faith in its own self-understanding, as a system of rational and coherent convictions. They express the profound meaning of the experience of

<sup>30</sup> S. VIDAL, *El Proyecto mesiánico di Pablo* (Salamanca: Sígueme, 2005), 322.

<sup>31</sup> *Ivi*, 323.

those who have accepted the faith. Paul requested, as a pastoral duty, that his letters be read in the gatherings of all the believers (1Thess 3:2-6) and that they should be passed around to the other communities. He wrote them together with his companions in the mission.

Paul's letters were not aimed solely at resolving problems that arose in the communities, but were part of a strategy of apostolic communication, understood as a modality to maintain a dialogue capable of widening the interpretation of the announcement of Christ. Considered under the aspect of their composition, the epistolary communication implies, on the part of the author or sender, a personal commitment and an effort to be sincere that other forms of writing do not demand at the same level, because they make known his personal experience as well as his understanding of the world. Considered from the viewpoint of the receiver, the letter has a weight and efficacy different from that of a conversation or a conference given before an audience, since it can be reread, interpreted and preserved for the future. Paul's letters became a form of apostolic authority and a literary genre *par excellence* specific to the apostolic age.<sup>32</sup>

## 5. PAUL'S EXPERIENCE IN THE CHARISM OF ALBERIONE

Fr. Alberione became aware of the presence of "new times"<sup>33</sup> during the period of his formation. Born April 4, 1884 in San Lorenzo di Fossano, Piedmont, Italy, he had the good fortune of living in a culturally elevated climate and being able to count on wise and learned teachers. Gifted with a profound intelligence, original, imaginative and intuitive, he was a lover of thought and reflection.<sup>34</sup>

<sup>32</sup> F. VOUGA, *Los primeros cristianos*, 191-192.

<sup>33</sup> In his autobiography *Abundantes Divitiae*, Alberione cites some of the elements of the "new times." He speaks of the changes in the socio-cultural field, such as the advance of socialism, masonry, liberalism, modernism, materialism, class struggle and the development of the sciences. But he also mentions the great discoveries that were revolutionizing production, such as cinema, radio and television. The press and schools are acquiring considerable strength (...). In the ecclesial sphere he speaks of the pastoral, liturgical and catechetical renewals and of the biblical movement (cf. *AD*, 48-57).

<sup>34</sup> T. TORBIDONI, "Un ritratto grafologico del giovane Giacomo Alberione come risulta dai manoscritti (1900-1907)". In *AA.VV., Conoscere Don Alberione (1884-1907), Strumenti per una biografia*, (Roma: CSP, 1994), 315.

As a young seminarian, while he was in the Cathedral of Alba, during the night of passage to the new century, 1900-1901, the Lord intervened. In a prolonged period of prayer he lived the experience of Christ in the Eucharist summed up in the words of Paul: "He loved me and gave himself for me" (Gal 2:20). He felt, then, the responsibility of the call "Come to me, all you..." (Mt 11:28). In this light he understood the social and ecclesial realities of his time. The Master opened his mind and heart to the challenge of a *special mission* in the new century: *to be apostles of today*, using today's means. From then on, he felt obligated to prepare himself to serve the Church and men and women of the new century, working in community (cf. *AD*, 15. 20). The experience of this "greater light" irradiating from the Master (cf. *AD*, 153), the risen Christ, the same light that oriented Paul (cf. *AD*, 159), constituted the root of the Pauline charism, made concrete in the Pauline Family.

At this point we must ask ourselves: what are the decisive ideas of St. Paul that later influenced the defining of the Pauline charism shaped by Fr. Alberione? Both in Alberione and Paul, we find two converging dynamics. Above all, Fr. Alberione aspired to form apostles according to the needs of the new times. For this task he sought to foster in young people a profound relationship with St. Paul, for the purpose of arousing love and enthusiasm for a living apostolate of the good press as a means and work of evangelization. Furthermore, Alberione, as an instrument of God, felt the duty to give life, identity and development to an institution that would reach everyone apostolically as a new form of preaching in the Church. For this task he took inspiration from Paul's missionary and organizational impulse, having found in him, through study and meditation on the Letter to the Romans, the true significance of the apostle. As a result, everyone who wants to surrender to such a task can learn from St. Paul (cf. *AD*, 64).

Fr. Alberione was profoundly persuaded that St. Paul participated in the establishment and identity of the Pauline Family: "Everyone must regard Saint Paul the Apostle alone as father, teacher, exemplar and founder. It is so, in fact. The Pauline Family was born through him, it was he who nourished it and raised it, its spirit is from him" (*AD*, 2).

Moreover, he formed the members of the Pauline Family to live in the "Pauline spirit," which flows from the life, letters and apos-

tolate of St. Paul.<sup>35</sup> This spirit must imbue and characterize the life of the "House," that is, the entire Work. For this reason, Alberione adopted the name "Society of St. Paul." We must remember that the first house and chapel were also called by this name. The same name was given to the church under construction,<sup>36</sup> because in it the Pauline spirituality is contained, and from it new missionary men and women depart towards the mission countries.<sup>37</sup>

## 6. THE EXPERIENCE OF FAITH AND THE CONTENTS OF THE MISSION OF THE PAULINES TODAY

### New Contexts and New Pastoral Needs

At the beginning of the new millennium, Pope John Paul II presented a new challenge: "*put out into the deep.*" And he exhorted us to give new impulse to our *spiritual and pastoral commitment* (NMI, 1) and to dedicate ourselves resolutely to the passionate task of *pastoral rebirth* (NMI, 29). This dynamism, the Pope reminds us, does not derive from sophisticated methods, nor even from multiplying activities and well elaborated plans and demanding techniques, but from the strength and action of the Spirit united to the experience of the God of Jesus Christ in the spiritual life of the pastoral workers.

Already in 1926, Alberione affirmed: "*the world needs a new, ample and profound evangelization.*"<sup>38</sup> This was because he knew the changes and the challenges of the socio-ecclesial reality, and had perceived that the press could offer a new way of reaching people, in conformity with Christ's invitation: "*Come to me, all of you...*" (Mt 11:28). And so because of this, he created a pastoral project that includes theological content and operational policies for "*a new evangelization (...), rooted in Christ the Way, Truth and Life, as members living and operating in the Church, after the example of Paul.*"

The evangelization carried out by the Paulines integrates itself into the mission of the Church, since it is lived as a gift received that becomes a gift shared with others. This sharing is carried out

<sup>35</sup> *Unione Cooperatori Buona Stampa*, 8 (1927) 1; *Abundantes divitiae*, 94.

<sup>36</sup> *Ivi*, 8 (1927) 10-11.

<sup>37</sup> J. ALBERIONE, In: Introduction to *Donec formetur Christus in vobis*, no. 166.

<sup>38</sup> *Unione Cooperatori Buona Stampa* 8 (1926) 3-4.

through communication. Thus, the whole of our apostolic multi-media production must be oriented towards generating quality in our personal and communitarian faith. We believe that the experience of faith qualifies the Pauline charism, just as it did with St. Paul's mission. It is necessary to specify that faith is understood as the welcoming of a personal revelation: *"But when the One Who set me apart from my mother's womb and called me through His grace was pleased to reveal His Son to me so that I might proclaim his good news to the Gentiles"* (Gal 1:15-16).<sup>39</sup>

By 'evangelization' is meant the announcement of the Good News of the Kingdom and of the Father's love, manifested in Christ who died and rose for the salvation of everyone. We may affirm that evangelization and pastoral activity are not the same thing. Rather, they require and complete one another reciprocally. Evangelization is the duty that we seek to carry out, while pastoral activity is the way we carry it out concretely. In fact, the roots of the Pauline charism are of a biblical-theological character: that is, the Pauline charism takes on the mission as expressed by Jesus, the Son of God, in the Gospel (Mt 11:28), but its realization is of a pastoral character, inasmuch as it seeks to reach all persons and communities, like Paul, with languages and means they can understand.<sup>40</sup>

The document of Aparecida (*DocAp*)<sup>41</sup> places evangelization within the complex reality of today, in which we can contemplate in the *"sorrowful and glorious face"* (NMI, 25-28) of Christ, the humiliated face of many men and women of our peoples, as well as their vocation to the freedom of the sons of God, towards the full realization of their personal dignity and towards fraternity with all (*DocAp*, 31). Evangelization is historical, and so exists only inasmuch as it is incarnated in history, and is marked by the diverse factors that give it its specific identity in every time and place.

Taking as our basis the ecclesiology of Vatican II, above all regarding the *"Mystery of Jesus," "the absolute foundation of all pastoral*

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<sup>39</sup> S. SASSI, *Revision of the Apostolate from the Aspect of the Charism*. IX General Chapter, Daughters of St. Paul, Ariccia 2007.

<sup>40</sup> ID., *Fedeltà creativa al carisma paulino*, XIV Provincial Chapter SSP-Italy (Ariccia, 2006), 39.

<sup>41</sup> DOCUMENTO DE APARECIDA, *V Conferencia General del Episcopado Latinoamericano y del Caribe* (Venezuela: San Pablo, 2007).

activity" (NMI, 15), we can affirm that pastoral activity "is the ministry of the Church, the People of God, which, under the impulse of the Holy Spirit, carries out the evangelizing praxis<sup>42</sup> of Jesus, for the building up of itself and the extension of the Kingdom of God in the world."<sup>43</sup>

## 7. THE CONTENTS OF THE PAULINE INTERNATIONAL MULTIMEDIA PUBLISHER

### New Cultural Areas and New Areopaghi

In re-thinking and updating the contents of Evangelization with today's means of communication, we Paulines are called to contemplate the historical context and current reality "with the eyes of faith and reason," (DocAp, 19) to discern and lay out the pastoral aspects of the contents and forms of our evangelizing communication.

Pope John Paul II recognized that the rapid and profound changes that characterize today's world have a great influence on missionary activity. *"New cultural areas and modern areopaghi appear. The first Areopagus is the world of communication, which is unifying humanity, transforming it into a global village"* (RM, 34-37). Benedict XVI goes beyond this idea when he affirms: *"The new media – telecommunications and internet in particular – are changing the very face of communication. Today, communication seems increasingly to claim not simply to represent reality, but to determine it..., even 'to create' events."*<sup>44</sup>

The web, one of the greatest inventions of recent history, offers an extraordinary opportunity for the diffusion of knowledge through digital technology. The users are passing from being receivers to being creators of content. A new subject is being born, a

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<sup>42</sup> The term 'praxis' indicates an intentional action with a transforming purpose (Cf. C. FLORISTÁN, *Teología práctica. Teoría y praxis de la acción pastoral* (Salamanca: Sígueme, 1993), 173-181]. F. TABORDA affirms that praxis is not opposed to theory. On the contrary, it is the combination of action/reflection with which man constructs history. It is there that the unity of action/reflection is shown (Cf. *Sacramentos, Praxis y fiesta* [Madrid: Paulinas, 1987], 25).

<sup>43</sup> Cf. S. VALADIZ FUENTES, *Espiritualidad Pastoral. ¿Cómo superar una pastoral sin alma?* (Bogotá: Paulinas, 2005), 22-23.

<sup>44</sup> BENEDETTO XVI, *The Means of Social Communication: at the Crossroads Between Protagonism and Service. Seeking the Truth in Order to Share It*. 42<sup>nd</sup> World Day for Social Communication (2008).

new consciousness, a new spirit of cooperation and a new communicative practice. In this context, there is no such thing as priority or privileged contents, since it is the public that establishes their validity. The current communicative praxis places the interlocutor at the center of communication. This new form of communication challenges Paulines to inculturate the salvific message in a new and different way.

The Document of Aparecida denounces the reality that *“in general in evangelization, in catechesis and in pastoral activity, there remain languages that are of little significance for the current culture, particularly for the youth”* (DocAp, 100 d). Moreover, due to these changes, reality in general is becoming ever more opaque and complex for persons, creating a crisis of meaning, frustration and anguish (DA, 36).

Regarding the religious situation, we cannot ignore one particular concern: today individuals seek to construct a personal religion with fragments from other doctrines, putting together practices from different religions. Persons often refuse to belong to any religious institution, considering their own convictions part of an *“invisible religion,”* belonging to the private sphere, with little or no external practice.

The novelty of these changes, in contrast with similar changes in the past, is that they have a global impact and affect the whole world (DocAp, 34). In this way they disturb the life of our peoples, the religious and ethical sense of their lives, their faith and experience of God (DocAp, 35).

Our questions in regard to this might be: In what way does the complexity of the current context affect and question the quality of our contents and our proposals for evangelization? Who are our interlocutors (audience) today? What are their existential and spiritual needs? What forms and languages do they understand?

## 8. THE CHARISMATIC ROOT OF THE CONTENTS OF OUR APOSTOLATE

### The Pastoral Sensitivity of Alberione

Alberione, sensitive to the action of the Spirit in history, perceived the need for *“new apostles”* for these *“new times.”* In other

words, it is indispensable to be of our times, using new means. The use of the adjective “*new*” reveals the measure in which he perceived historical changes. Some phrases show us the validity of Alberione’s pastoral vision. Christianity is not a complex of ceremonies, rites and external practices, but a *new* life. It involves the whole person, integrating and consecrating him (ATP, 81). Christianity is a way of living out the Christian experience fully, taking on the values of the Gospel.

The preaching<sup>45</sup> that announces it must be a communicative act, that is, one that is transmitted effectively. Here lies the pastoral problem of our preaching: the announcement must lead us not to falsify the word of God, but to arouse the capacity to listen, assimilate and live out today the relevance of the Scriptures (cf. Heb 3:13.15; Lk 2:11; Mt 6:11; Dt 10:19).

### The Alberionian Paradigm of the Contents of Our Evangelization

In Paul’s perspective, Alberione’s paradigm is constituted by the word *everything* (*tutto*), particularly when it refers to our interlocutors (audience) and the contents of our mission: “*We must bring the whole (tutto) Christ to the person and give the whole (tutto) person to God, through Jesus Christ.*”<sup>46</sup>

Let us analyze this expression in greater detail:

– “*The whole Christ*”: Alberione is seeking among the genuine sources of Christian life and spirituality the global content of our editions/productions: Sacred Scripture and Liturgy.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> Alberione himself clarifies the word “preaching”: it is “The preaching of the divine word through our publications. That is, it is the announcement of the truth that saves, the evangelization of the good news. Preaching must be original, carried out with our publications. Just like oral preaching, written or printed preaching diffuses the Word of God, multiplying it and causing it to arrive everywhere...” J. ALBERIONE, *The Publishing Apostolate*, Opera Omnia (Rome; Society of St. Paul, 1999), nos. 12-13.

<sup>46</sup> G. ALBERIONE, “Le Figlie di San Paolo e l’apostolato catechistico” in *Il Cooperatore Paolino*, XXXI (1959) 12, 10.

<sup>47</sup> Putting the Bible in our hands, Alberione invited us to concentrate our attention on Christ the Master: “You have irreplaceable riches in Christ the Master, the Way, Truth and Life. This is your specific guide. Since the Heavenly Father has sent for our salvation his Son, who is the Way, Truth and Life, we have no other model to follow.” (Cf. CENTRO PROMOZIONE E FORMAZIONE, *Catechesi Paolina*, Società San Paolo, Roma 1986, 263)

– “*The whole person to God, through Christ*”: Alberione means by this the necessity of the person to live in Christ Jesus with all his being and in all his being.<sup>48</sup>

– “*All this, from the Church*”: Alberione inserts our mission into the life of the Church, the column and foundation of truth (Heb 3:10; 1Tim 3:15), to transmit, with a guarantee of authenticity, the contents of evangelization. Our apostolic action has a reason for existing only inasmuch as it is “*in Cristo et in Ecclesia*” (CISP, 179).

### **The Alberionian Pastoral Directives Regarding the Content and Form of Evangelization**

1° *Give, above all else, the doctrine that saves* with the explicit announcement of the Christian mystery and the catechesis that makes one’s faith grow in relation to one’s life. This must be given primacy because it is the proximate rule of our faith.

2° *Give the Word of God*, because it is the model from which the writer-apostle who is writing must inspire himself. Furthermore it is the book that we must show with our movies, press, radio, recordings, and films and with all the means that the Lord prepares for us.<sup>49</sup>

3° *Speak of everything in a Christian way*. Even if the apostolate of the press takes care of all the necessary fields, of all the works and initiatives, it must include catechesis, culture, the sciences, education, formation, legislation;<sup>50</sup> that is, it must penetrate all of human thought and knowledge with the Gospel (*AD*, 87).

This paradigm determines the meaning of the Pauline Publisher. Therefore, one must conclude that the lines and projects realized in production (on one hand, books, magazines, music, DVDs, radio programs, appearances on television; and on the other, animation programs consisting in courses and initiatives of a cultural, biblical, and catechetical nature) must transmit the message of the faith in an explicit and integral manner to the whole human person. In this light, it is necessary to verify whether our publishing is truly Pauline, that is, if it is inspired by St. Paul. Thus, we need explicit and clear points of reference that may orient all those who work in the various areas of our publishing house.

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<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>49</sup> G. ALBERIONE, *UPS III*, 10; 307.

<sup>50</sup> *ID.*, *The Publishing Apostolate*, 7.

## 9. CRITERIA OF OUR EDITORIAL LINES

### 1. The Centrality of the Word of God Today in the Church

The work of Alberione inserted itself into the Church's biblical movement at the beginnings of the XX century. In 1893, Leo XIII, with the encyclical *Providentissimus Deus*, reaffirmed the importance in the Church of reading and studying the Sacred Scriptures. His successors continued in the same line, and Alberione took inspiration from them, recommending to his sons and daughters: "We must consider it an obligation never to stop reading the Bible (...). When the Gospel is always carried with us and practiced, then our progress will be evident and the Institute will make great strides, and we will fulfill the mission God has entrusted to us in the Church."

Beginning with Vatican II, there was an awakening in the Catholic Church of unprecedented interest in the Bible, especially in the New Testament. The Bible has ceased to be a "veiled" book, or one that interests only a few people; it has become a text of radical importance for all. Currently, the XII Ordinary Assembly of the Synod, on the theme: "The Word of God in the Life and Mission of the Church," is of exceptional importance for the life of the Church and of humanity. The XXXI Ordinary Conference of Aparecida in Latin America and in the Caribbean and the projects for the continental mission of Latin America consider the Bible the main foundation of formation for missionary disciples and for the Christian life in general.

Thus, Biblical pastoral activity<sup>51</sup> and Biblical animation of pastoral activity<sup>52</sup> have become a phenomenon of considerable impor-

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<sup>51</sup> BIBLICAL PASTORAL ACTIVITY can be understood in two ways: old and new. In the old sense, "biblical pastoral activity" principally made the Bible an object of a pastoral program, a biblical one, just as the family is the object of evangelization for family pastoral activity; in the new sense, "biblical pastoral activity" makes of the Word of God contained in the Bible the subject of evangelization, the soul of evangelization of all the members of the Body of Christ and of all peoples. Thus, "biblical pastoral activity" is the diffusion of the Bible through courses, workshops and seminars offered to those interested in getting to know the Sacred Scripture (Cf. CONFERENCIA EPISCOPAL DE CHILE, *Orientaciones para la animación Bíblica de la Pastoral*, [Santiago: Librería Pastoral, 2006], 102).

<sup>52</sup> In the new sense, "biblical pastoral activity" is BIBLICAL ANIMATION OF THE CHURCH'S PASTORAL ACTIVITY, that is, making of the Word of God, transmitted in the Bible, the content (that which is announced) and the source (where we draw our

tance for today's evangelization and catechesis, which will arouse a profound ecclesial renewal and a new missionary impulse. Since it offers divine revelation, Sacred Scripture is "wisdom" that animates and forms the disciple in the following of Jesus, Head of his Body, and thus it cannot be lacking in any pastoral program. This means that the Word – as Grace and Love – is an indispensable mediation for encountering the living Christ.

The circumstances and the historical/cultural method are relevant,<sup>53</sup> because they favor an ample knowledge of the origins, developments and limits of the Bible. Facilitating a reading from different situations and needs will allow us to place different moral, political, cultural, and mystical emphases in the life of each person. The important thing is that in reflection, the whole Christian community may perceive the substantial elements as well as the marginal aspects of the testimonies that are transmitted and the faith that is lived out. The reading and interpretation of the Sacred Scriptures begins anew in every epoch, with every culture, with each individual, opening itself up to a future that is always fuller, which takes on and completes the preceding positions.<sup>54</sup>

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inspiration) of the Church's evangelizing activity and of the growth of the disciples of the Lord. In this sense, "biblical pastoral activity" principally makes of the Sacred Scripture a school of interpretation, of communion with God and of evangelization, particularly through *Lectio divina*. Thus, *Biblical Animation of Pastoral Activity* does not consist in carrying out new works related to the Bible, but in acquiring a *new mentality*: that of considering in the pastoral activity of the Church the Word of God as an *indispensable mediation for the encounter with the living Jesus Christ*. This does not mean that biblical pastoral activity must cease to exist as a task of a specialized team, since it is necessary to offer programs that may make of the Sacred Scripture the soul of evangelization (*Ivi*, 86).

<sup>53</sup> From the XVIII century, the Bible began to be considered under its human and historical aspect. The discovery in the Middle East, in the XIX century, of texts similar to and more ancient than the Bible, such as the Mesopotamian creation myths, the Canaanite psalms and the Egyptian proverbs, has had an influence in this regard. The information obtained from archaeological discoveries has contributed to situating and understanding certain biblical writings. Linguists and scholars of literature, in particular, have considered and discussed the importance of literary genres. The human sciences, for their part, have helped make us aware that the Bible is a form of communication based on oral traditions. See in this regard the first chapter "Methods and Research for Interpretation," in the Document of the Pontifical Biblical Commission, *"The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church"* (1993).

<sup>54</sup> H. SIMIAN-YOFRE, SJ in E. ARENS, *La Biblia sin mitos* (Lima: Paulinas, 2006<sup>3</sup>), 1-15.

For some time now, greater value has been given to the *human communication* manifested in the Bible, that is, the value of the oral traditions, and traditions of the people or communities where the various writings took shape; the role of the redactor; the influence of the environment and the culture. The Bible is appreciated today, more than before, as an ensemble of vital expressions, witnesses of historical experiences and of the faith. They are writings born from life and for life. Because of this, today the communicative dimension is valued, without leaving aside the presence of God in the process of formation of the writings. This presupposes that the reader can enter into the world of the biblical authors, their history, the circumstances that have influenced them; he or she can enter into their feelings, convictions and existential expectations. Only in this way can we appreciate the sacred texts as bearers of messages pertinent for people today and not as biographies or ethical, philosophical or theological treatises.<sup>55</sup>

Valuing the human dimension of the Bible does not reduce the importance of its sacred character. On the contrary, it situates it in the world where it originated and was elaborated.<sup>56</sup> Thus, it is necessary to value its cradle, its historical-cultural moment. The biblical writer has been inspired by God in an everyday environment. So it was for the prophets and St. Paul. It is a question of fidelity to the original message of the author and continuity with his original intention. Without a doubt it is Word of God, infused by Him, expressed in human terms that are historically and culturally situated. As a result it is subject to many limitations and conditionings. This leads us to overcome a fundamentalist reading of the Bible.<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> E. ARENS, *Los Evangelios ayer y hoy. Una introducción hermenéutica* (Lima: Paulinas, 2006<sup>3</sup>), 13-17.

<sup>56</sup> ID., *La Biblia sin mitos*, 17.

<sup>57</sup> Fundamentalism is the most extensive and dangerous current today. It is especially linked with radical Islam and some small groups. It is a mental attitude that sustains and propagates the "foundations" of a specific political, social and religious belief that belongs to a past that no longer exists. This is done in an aggressive, fanatical, proselytistic and acritical manner, closed to dialogue. Its "foundations" are categorical, dogmatic and unquestionable. Fundamentalism is developing in the three monotheistic religions: Judaism, Christianity and Islam. It is characterized by integralism, conservatism, traditionalism and the restoration of everything ancient. Fundamentalism does not wish for progress. On the contrary, it remains static, paralyzed. It fears change, pluralism, the new, freedom, maturity. It takes refuge in the past. Christian fundamentalism accepts the Bible as the sole

Hermeneutics is important in order not to fall into superficial, naïve, or dogmatic answers. That is, it protects us from the trap of subjectivism, of “ideological” prejudices, of the manipulations and deformations of its message. Thus, it is indispensable that the biblical content of our publications utilize correctly the *sources of our roots*, those from which our Christian identity derives.

## 2. The Centrality of Jesus Christ

Pope Benedict himself, in his book *Jesus of Nazareth*,<sup>58</sup> which has become essential for Christian and Catholic culture, warns that his writing is “solely an expression of my personal search for the face of Lord.” And thus, everyone is free to contradict it.<sup>59</sup> From this perspective he confronts the question of the real Jesus, the historical Jesus, in the true and proper sense.

The exegetical and theological problems of the historical and critical methods proper to the investigation of the last centuries, regarding the question of the historical Jesus and the Christ of faith, demand from us Paulines an attention to the contents we publish about Jesus.

We must progress in a theological interpretation and a more acute exegetical sensibility, that guarantees a “living relation with Jesus the Way, Truth and Life,” so that our people may find strength in Him, as the document of Aparecida suggests. With this intuition, it is necessary to overcome the profound disconnect between the historical Jesus and the Christ of faith, because the Jesus of faith without the Jesus of history becomes “*subjective fideism*,” and the historical Jesus without the Jesus of faith degenerates into “*meaningless archaeology*.”<sup>60</sup> If this situation does not come about, the

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authority to sustain its doctrines and customs. It must be read and interpreted literally in all its details. It insists upon divine inspiration and the absence of error in the Word of God. It is opposed to the use of the historical-critical method and the scientific method for the interpretation of the Bible.

<sup>58</sup> J. RATZINGER in the Foreword of *Jesus of Nazareth* (New York: Doubleday, 2007), XXIII.

<sup>59</sup> *Ivi*, XXIV.

<sup>60</sup> The problem of the historical Jesus, to whom we have access through the Gospels and with the help of scientific methods of modern historical investigation, has had a central importance and ample space dedicated to it over several centuries, from the beginning of historical investigation, with Herman Reimarus

authentic point of reference with Jesus Christ remains uncertain.<sup>61</sup> Rudolf Schnackenburg, one of the most important Catholic exegetes of the mid-twentieth century, perceived the danger of this situation for the faith, in his book, *"The Person of Jesus Christ Reflected in the Four Gospels."*

The encyclical *Divino afflante Spiritu* by Pío XII (1943), important for Catholic exegesis, already opened the doors to the use of the historical-critical method in Catholic theology. Since that time new steps have been taken and other methodological visions have been developed, both for what concerns rigorous historical work as well as for the collaboration between theology and the historical method in interpreting Sacred Scripture.

A decisive step was taken by the Constitution *Dei Verbum* (Vatican II, 1965), on Divine Revelation, when it clearly highlighted, as a principle of theological exegesis, the unity of the biblical texts, adding that one must consider the living tradition of the whole Church, the analogy of faith and the internal correlation of the faith (cf. DV, 12).

Important perspectives in the field of "Methods and criteria for interpretation" and exegetical investigation are found in the two documents of the Pontifical Biblical Commission: *"The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church"* (1993) and *"The Jewish People and its Sacred Scriptures in the Christian Bible"* (2001).

Modern exegesis has shown that the words transmitted in the Bible become Scripture through an ever new process of rereading: the ancient texts are recaptured in a new situation, and are read and understood in a new way.

To conclude, I wish to cite once more the words of Ratzinger in the introduction to the book mentioned above: "The historical-critical

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(1694-1768). Cf. G. NARANJO SALAZAR, CM. *Conferece: ¿Jesús histórico, sacerdote del Señor?* In: *Actas del Congreso Teológico* (México: Arquidiócesis di Guadalajara, 2007), 31.

<sup>61</sup> RUDOLF SCHNACKENBURG, in his book *Jesus in the Gospels*, sets forth conclusions that are still valid. "(...) A reliable view of the historical figure of Jesus of Nazareth through scientific effort with historical-critical methods can be only inadequately achieved" (p. 316); "(...) The efforts of scientific exegesis to examine these traditions and trace them back to what is historically credible" draw us "into a continual discussion of tradition and redaction history that never comes to rest" (p. 318).

method<sup>62</sup> is and remains an indispensable tool of exegetical work given the structure of the Christian faith. For it is of the very essence of biblical faith to be about real historical events.... The *factum historicum* (historical fact) is not an interchangeable symbolic cipher for biblical faith, but the foundation on which it stands: *Et incarnates est*—when we say these words, we acknowledge God’s actual entry into real history. If we push aside this history, Christian faith as such disappears and is recast as some other religion. So if history, if facticity in this sense, is an essential dimension of Christian faith, then faith must expose itself to the historical method—indeed, faith itself demands this.”<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> The *historical-critical method* continues to be indispensable in the structure of the Christian faith. Though it involves one of the fundamental dimensions of exegesis, it does not exhaust the duty of interpretation for those who see the biblical texts as the only Sacred Scriptures, and believe them to be inspired by God. Thus, it is important to recognize not only the importance of the historical-critical method, but also its limits. The first limit consists in that, by its nature, it must leave the word in the past; the second is that since it studies the word insofar as it is human, it leaves it on that level; the third is that, because of its object, it cannot affirm the unity of the Scriptures except as a hypothesis.

The *historical method* seeks to speak about various factors seen in the context and time in which the texts were formed. It seeks to know and understand, with the greatest possible exactness, the past as it really was, in order to discover what the author was able to say, or wanted to say, in that moment, given the context of his thoughts and of the events at that time. It seeks attentively to grasp the “added value” contained in the words. Thus, it seeks to perceive a higher dimension, and in doing so initiates the method’s transcendence of itself. Yet its proper object is the human word inasmuch as it is human. The historical method must above all necessarily go back to the origin of the various texts and, in this sense, situate them in their past, to then complete the process going forward, following the formation of the present textual unity through time.

“*Canonical exegesis*” (which has been developing for over 30 years in Latin America) proposes reading the various biblical texts in the unity of the Scriptures, showing them in a new light. Certainly, Christological hermeneutics sees in Jesus Christ the key to the whole Scriptures, and from Him, learns to understand the Bible as a unity, something that presupposes a decision of faith and that cannot arise from the mere historical method. However, this decision of faith has its reason – a historical reason – which allows us to see the internal unity of the Scriptures and to understand, in a new way, the various elements of its development, without depriving it of its historical originality. “*Canonical exegesis*” is not opposed to the historical-critical method, but develops it in an organic way, transforming it into true theology (cf. J. RATZINGER, *Jesus of Nazareth*, XII-XVIII).

<sup>63</sup> *Ivi*, XVII.

### 3. Do Not Speak Only of Religion, but of Everything in a Christian Way (AD 87).

Everything that is true and just, everything that is worthy of love (Phil 4:8), is the object of our publications. Therefore, the change of epoch, cultural and religious pluralism, interculturality and interdisciplinarity interrogate us regarding the language and content to offer the people of today's world, under the experience of new life in the Spirit.

*1. Listening to the Spirit in History* teaches us: the art of inculturating the contents, languages and forms of the message of salvation in the various peoples; the way of discovering new faces of society; the possibility of opening ourselves up to dialogue and ecumenical and interreligious collaboration with our identity as Paulines in the Church.

The consequence will be the ability to transmit the certainty of the Spirit that *irrupts* into history, touching and impelling persons individually and socially towards God, towards interiority and action. As a result, the love that comes from the Father and the Son is translated in history as solidarity, justice and fraternity beyond borders. The Spirit does his part and is the builder of the unity of relations. He announces freedom to prisoners and sight to the blind, frees the oppressed and manifests the favorable year of the Lord (cf. Lk 4:18ff).

*2. Our Mission in the Heart of the World.* Our publications take on the responsibility of convoking and committing all persons of good will to collaborate in the process of humanizing society. That is, they send out an appeal to all human beings to commit themselves in the mission to build up the human family in the "common house of creation."

*3. All that is Human is Ours.* The situation and problems of humanity make up part of our apostolic concerns, just as they did for Alberione and the development of his vocation, in the context that surrounded him when he asked the question: *where is humanity going?* We must communicate the announcement of Jesus and of the Gospel as the light of God and paradigm for all the problems and situations that humanity is living.

Therefore, we look to the whole society, with its aspirations, its

projects, its humanism and its thirst for God, just as Paul did. This implies knowing our society with its economic, social, ecological, cultural and democratic crisis, in situations of poverty, exclusion, violence and persecution. In addition, it means taking it into consideration when constructing common projects, gestures of solidarity and prospects for a better future. Keeping in mind this panorama, it is necessary to propose another alternative to the world, as a metaphor and symbol of the novelty of the kingdom which is glimpsed among us. It is still necessary to clarify that the new humanity is a work of the Spirit. We await it and collaborate with all our being and our mission so that it may come about.

**4. Give expression to the Universality of Peoples and Cultures** through a great "network" of solidarity, which in its diversity can aim at creating union (cf. Jn 21:11), *sharing gratuity* in order to guarantee worthy living conditions: health, food, education, homes and work for all. Jesus tells us with his actions that he who has nothing, the excluded ones, are the managers of the Church's mission, participants in God's project, because with them a space is opened up to show the signs of justice and the reasons for our hope. Taking this as our point of departure, in an ever more pluralistic society, we will be able to integrate our strengths, which will allow us to build a just, reconciled and supportive world.

**5. All the Baptized are Missionary Disciples of Jesus.** From this criterion is born our commitment to be formators of all the missionary disciples among the baptized. Because of this the Document of Aparecida recommends following "more carefully the stages of the first announcement, Christian initiation and maturing in the faith" (*DocAp*, 3). It is necessary to promote coherence between faith and life, the incarnation of the values of the Kingdom, insertion in the community with the goal of equipping it to give reasons for its hope and the discovery of the service that the Lord asks of each one in the Church and in society.

**6. Assume an Ecclesiology of Communion** in a world that promotes individualism and personal interest. The diversity of charisms, ministries and services opens the horizon to the daily exercise of communion, putting one's gifts at the disposition of others and allowing charity to circulate (cf. 1Cor 12:4-12). In this way the ecclesial community becomes a "house and school of communion"

(NMI, 43). Therefore it is indispensable to encourage experiences of communion in dioceses and parishes.<sup>64</sup> This is done in turn to form disciple communities, which are missionary, welcoming, integrative and supportive and that configure the *new man in Christ*. This includes taking on the characteristics of the prophets and pilgrims who denounce situations of sin and unjust structures, and who announce the values of fullness of life in Christ.

**7. *Human Dignity and the Good News of Life.*** Put our mission at the service of the fullness of life. “*I have come so that they may have life and have it to the full*” (Jn 10:10). The announcement of Jesus Christ regards the whole human being and brings the person to develop his existence “in the personal, familial, social and cultural dimensions.”<sup>65</sup> The living conditions of many abandoned people, excluded and ignored in their miseries and sorrows, go against the plan of the Father and urge believers to greater commitment on their behalf. Under this aspect it is necessary to emphasize the inseparable relation between love for God and love for one’s neighbor. Considering the context in which a great part of the population lives, our production must demonstrate that the message is at the service of life, particularly in those dehumanizing situations that are incompatible with the hope of the Kingdom.

**8. *Ecology.*** Announce the Good News to reestablish order in the environment, and promote a favorable conscience that is committed to conservation, as John Paul II did when he launched an appeal to all the leaders of our planet to protect and conserve the nature created by God. Based on this criteria, we cannot permit our world to become an ever more degraded and degrading land.<sup>66</sup>

**9. *Promote Education and the Intellectual and Political World.*** The Church in its role as educator must create—together with its agents in the educational field—spaces of formation and prophetic dialogue, for the purpose of forming witnesses of the Good News of the Kingdom in the contemporary world. This implies the consolidation

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<sup>64</sup> Among the ecclesial communities we distinguish the Parishes, living cells of the Church, the Dioceses, the privileged places of communion, the Ecclesial Base Communities and the Small communities (Cf. *DocAp*, num. 178-179).

<sup>65</sup> BENEDICT XVI. *Inaugural Speech at Aparecida*, no. 4.

<sup>66</sup> JOHN PAUL II, *Homily during the Celebration of the Word for the faithful of the Southern Zone of Chile*. Punta Arenas, April 4, 1987.

of a Christian conscience in politicians and legislators that may promote the construction of a just and fraternal society, according to the principles of the Social Doctrine of the Church (DA, p. 2).

**10. *The Communication of Evangelization.*** We Paulines, with the force of our charism, are convoked to intervene in the new historical, social and ecclesial situations, to communicate the Good News of the Kingdom in the appropriate forms and according to our experience of faith, coordinated and integrated in the pastoral activity of the Church.

Conscious that today people “live in network,” that is, immersed in the flow of a limitless communication, and that the digital culture is “creating a new subject,” modifying the forms of living and of relating to one another, we feel the urgency to discover a new missionary style, one that values the logic of network connectedness, that may arouse synergy and collaboration and help the circulation of faith experiences. We find ourselves immersed in new symbolic spaces, in original forms of relating to one another, in opportunities for new identities, in different subjects.<sup>67</sup> Communication, as a form of evangelization, finds in the “all things for all men” of the apostle Paul creative settings for the development of our mission.

## 10. THE CURRENT CHALLENGES OF THE PAULINE APOSTOLATE

To conclude, I wish to underline a few points that seem important for us Paulines:

1. Take up and manifest the apostolic vision of Alberione: “Your apostolate does not only aim at the individual progress of the person, but at forming a new mentality in society. This means giving it a new imprint, a new direction.”

2. Enter personally and as a community into the apostolic-spiritual experience of Paul, which consists in acquiring “a Pauline mentality,”<sup>68</sup> as the IX General Chapter of the FSP of 2007 recom-

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<sup>67</sup> Cf. J. T. Puntel, “*Nuevas tecnologías, nuevas relaciones.*” (May 24, 2009), [Online] Available from: <[http://www.cnbb.org.br/ns/modules/mastop\\_publish/files/files\\_498887755ad22.pdf](http://www.cnbb.org.br/ns/modules/mastop_publish/files/files_498887755ad22.pdf)>.

<sup>68</sup> “To carry out an *integral and ongoing Pauline formation* helps us to: live and share the word of God according to the communication style of the Apostle Paul

mends. This means that, like Paul, we Paulines must have a Pauline attitude regarding communication and evangelization. We are invited to evangelize in communication and with the means of communication, not as capable professionals, but as consecrated persons who live a new style of sanctity in communications, as apostles of Christ in communications. Our editorial production must have something specific to contribute to the Church's evangelization.<sup>69</sup>

Just as Paul communicates something radically new, which springs from his interior experience of Christ and from his style of missionary organization, transformed into a living witness, so for us Paulines, the personal and communitarian experience of the Risen One must lead us to generate a new way of evangelizing through communication in the Church today.

3. "Communicate the truth in charity to all,"<sup>70</sup> as Alberione taught. Truth that is never completely possessed, but always sought, in harmony with the ecclesial community and with the magisterium of the Church. This requires from us Paulines the capacity to express ourselves adequately, according to the current context, to associate evangelization with the various processes of global communication. Communication and evangelization form a relation of complementarity and reciprocity, in which preaching takes on and values communication, while communication, too, opens up new prospects for evangelization.

4. The question of the contents of our evangelization acquires a transcendent value for us. It demands a continual process of incar-

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by studying, reflecting on and assimilating his Letters, so as to acquire a "Pauline mentality" that will help us improve the quality of our interpersonal relationships and our identity as communicators of the Word to everyone" (DAUGHTERS OF ST. PAUL, *Chapter Document*. September 2007. Art. 22,a).

<sup>69</sup> S. SASSI, *Revision of the Apostolate from the Aspect of the Charism*. IX General Chapter, Daughters of St. Paul, 2.

<sup>70</sup> Speaking of the receivers of our "preaching," Alberione seeks the root in St. Paul: Let us feel, like St. Paul and in St. Paul, debtors towards **everyone**, ignorant and cultured alike, Catholics and communists, pagans and Muslims, (Regina Apostolorum, April 1951). It is necessary to reach **everyone**. To have a heart bigger than the seas and the oceans (...) To love **everyone**, to think of **everyone**, to work with the spirit of the Gospel that is universality and mercy: "come to me **all you**." Thus, like the apostle St. Paul, always directed towards the peoples who have not yet received the light of Christ (UPS, III, p. 117-118). The apostle of communication must make himself **all things** to **all men** (UPS, III, p. 120).

nation or inculturation of the Gospel in the various peoples, for the building up of new experiences of faith, of new communities that may speak of these experiences and of new human relations. From this is born the necessity to reinvent the missionary style, valuing not only the interests of the community with whom the work of evangelization is carried out, but also arousing the circulation of life in God, through Jesus Christ. Recent General Chapters of the Daughters of St. Paul recommended: "*Qualify the choice of contents and production, committing ourselves to translate our faith into the various media languages in response to the new needs of the peoples*" (1995). We must ask ourselves, in the context of today's cultural and ecclesial changes, whether our mission is an authentic communication of the Gospel and whether we are carrying out faithfully and dynamically the inspiration of Fr. Alberione (2007).<sup>71</sup>

Before the seriousness of the current problems, we are all learners. We do not have a surefire answer, but we trust in the Lord with an open heart and place our hope in the light of the Gospel. Hope is the central message of biblical faith (cf. SpS, 2).

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<sup>71</sup> DAUGHTERS OF ST. PAUL. *Chapter Document* (2007), art. 25



# THE MULTIMEDIALE PAULINE PUBLISHING: CONTENTS AND STRATEGIES FOR OUR TIME \*

Giusto Truglia, SSP

## Premise

The world of communication today is characterized by some peculiarities that I would synthesize in these terms: velocity (real time), virtuality, accumulation of knowledge, destructuring of learning and relativizing of truth.

## Paulines inserted in the world of communication:

Since they have to carry out an apostolate with the instruments of social communication, Paulines have to act according to the rules concerning these instruments. They have to know these rules and apply them correctly. This is what we mean by *professionalism*.

But besides this, in the exercise of their apostolate today, Paulines are not alone. They work with and avail themselves of the collaboration of numerous laity, without whom our apostolate would be impoverished and incomplete.

Paulines and laity together do not carry out merely an editorial or industrial activity, but perceive their commitment and accomplish it as apostolate. They believe they are carrying out a mission that had its historical genesis in Father Alberione and has evolved over time.

The model and inspiration of the mission of the Paulines, by the express indication of Father Alberione, is the apostle Paul.

## The contents of Saint Paul's faith experience:

I have no intention of tackling the immense material concerning the life and letters of Saint Paul. Rather, I will limit myself to some suggestions that could be useful for a reflection for our times and capable of illuminating the concrete choices that Paulines must make everyday in their apostolate.

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\* *Translation by Sr. Raymond Gerard, FSP.*

First of all, Paul presented himself as a convert. The explosive effect of his condition is described in Acts 9 with a triple dimension: Christ heals and restores strength to those who invoke him; the disciple must suffer like Christ; Christ called Paul for a mission.

Paul's experience of Christ was not exhausted by adhering to an ideology, moral system or doctrine, but it became adhesion to a person, to his sentiments, his behavior, and his sufferings: it is not a matter of simple knowledge, but of communion.

Only in this way did Paul perceive the grandeur of the mission entrusted to him, for which reason he made himself all to all in order to bring everyone to Christ, since Paul lived for Christ and had the same sentiments as Christ.

This becoming all to all explains the great and revolutionary novelty of Christianity: the logic of the Incarnation put into act by God through his Son.

Paul interpreted and applied this logic of the Incarnation not just to his strategy of preaching addressed to the gentiles and the uncircumcised, but above all in the contents of his preaching.

This is the reason for his very strong concepts regarding justification by faith in Christ rather than through the works of the Law. It also accounts for his emphasis on the fact that at the center of our salvation is the Son of God who became incarnate; this is not the work of man, or a law or custom.

The Son of God, who saved us by becoming incarnate and to whom we owe our adherence of faith, is the Christ of the cross, a scandal for the Jews and foolishness for the pagans. God saves by abasing himself, in his Son, to the lowest human conditions, redeeming all that is human.

Not only is the human condition redeemed by the incarnation of the Son of God, but everything is recapitulated in Christ. All creation is suffering and groaning in the travails of birth, just as we too are awaiting our adoption as sons.

The rule and method for announcing the Christ of the cross, who saves and recapitulates everything in himself, is the truth in charity, that is, the gradual accompaniment of everyone until all are brought to Christ, respecting their process of growth and spiritual maturing.

## **The faith experience of Paulines**

Paulines, too, live the same faith experience as Paul: an experience of conversion, of adhesion to the person of Christ unified in the trilogy Way, Truth and Life. Paulines feel themselves to be apostles, called and sent for a mission, and they make themselves all to all so as to bring everyone to Christ by living as coherent and credible witnesses.

With coherence both in their life as called, as well as in the exercise of their apostolate, Paulines apply the Pauline logic of the incarnation. That is, they look at all of reality with a positive attitude; they speak not only of Christianity, but of everything in a Christian way, because they are aware that everything is being recapitulated in Christ, that all souls are called to Christ and all of created reality has been redeemed by Christ.

## **The contents of the Pauline apostolate**

The editorial guidelines of 2005, which the Society of St. Paul adopted according to the directives of the Chapter, take up and delineate the concepts illustrated here, specifying reference points, the audience, the contents and the strategies for the Pauline apostolate.

They are themes that were amply treated in the Chapter Documents of 1969 (which in my opinion are charismatic texts that remain unsurpassed up to the present).

The points of reference are our being called to evangelize contemporary society, with the heart of Paul, by giving the word of God incarnated in history.

The preferential option is to build up the human dimension - which today is in "most serious crisis" - as the presupposition for carrying out the evangelical proclamation in history and contemporary society. From this flows the required attention to human dignity, social justice, universal brotherhood, interreligious dialogue, progress, peace and authentic communication.

In all of this, Paul remains the model for Paulines and lay communicators involved in the apostolate.

Human promotion is a strategy for reaching the goal - which is to bring everyone to Christ, precisely according to the logic of the

incarnation, and by making ourselves all to all. We can thus understand what is required of the Pauline apostle: the capacity for service to men and women; an attitude of dialogue; the ability to speak of everything in a Christian way, without boundaries or walls, assuming a prophetic attitude in a cutting-edge apostolate of while maintaining a clear Christian identity.

Singling out three specific fronts around which to unite our Pauline apostolic activity and rationalize its content (Bible, family, communication – with corresponding centers of study) certainly does not mean impoverishing our apostolic action. Like the famous Alberionian triad, Bible, family and communication are intended as a way of focusing the apostolate around some important and determining centers, which are capable of giving it renewed thrust, direction and visibility because of their high potential. But is clear that the content of the Pauline apostolate is the whole Christ for the whole person and the whole person for the whole Christ.

To accomplish this, professionalism is needed for Paulines and the laity involved, so as to break out of a homespun approach. Planning is necessary on the part of the Congregation, with directives, policies, controls and interventions wherever the apostolate is developing. A multimedia perspective and methodology are needed so as not to lose the opportunity to arrive precisely where the new instruments and new models of communication are “winning souls.” A prophetic dimension is necessary, that is, the ability to read the signs of the times and offer adequate responses, without letting ourselves be trapped in traditions, bureaucracy and customs within and outside the Church.

### **Some practical consequences**

Faced with a theoretical picture of the contents of our apostolate starting from the faith of Paul and the Paulines, I do not want to miss the opportunity to take up some questions that are a little more down-to-earth, but which concretely express our acquisition of a spiritual, cultural, apostolic and operative style that is truly Pauline. I'll mention some examples.

The organizational and business dimensions which the professionalism of our apostolate require, along with the use of costly in-

struments and the complexity of some apostolic structures, must drive out the residual incrustation of a certain obsequious pauperism which would desire a redimensioning of the apostolate in the name of a mistaken sense of witnessing to poverty. What would Paul say – he who saw in the “collection” (and thus in money) a “grateful sacrifice that was pleasing to God?”

The same goes for those dangerous free agents who, in the name of a mistaken freedom or again in the name of a misunderstood poverty, do not follow or conform to the apostolate of the Congregation – scornfully defined as “organized apostolate” – claiming other and undefined areas of action.

However, the organizational and business complexity of the apostolate and its required professionalism must persuade us to keep seriously in mind the distinction between canonical authority and delegated authority, with respect to roles and competencies.

Furthermore, the very complexity of the necessary business structures of our apostolate often gives rise to the idea that it is better to abandon our instruments of apostolate so as to use those of others. What’s the use of having our own periodical or TV if we can write for already existent magazines, or participate in a lay TV program, giving our “beautiful” witness there? Certainly, these are also possibilities, but in this case we would be lacking the overall apparatus that underpins our Pauline apostolate which proposes to speak of everything in a Christian way, presenting all human realities as a way to God and as realities that will be recapitulated and saved in Christ. If the scope of our apostolate is the whole person and the whole Christ, it is not enough to participate in a program or write an article. This participation and this article would be inserted in a vision of reality which, most of the time, is not Christian, thus situating our witness and relativizing it with others that are completely different.

We need to remove from our language and our concrete behavior a presumed superiority of prayer and liturgical ministry over action and apostolic ministry, as well as those attitudes that weaken and undermine the foundation of the credibility and consistency of the Pauline apostolate - before we even leave the gates of our communities. For Paulines, the typography is a church and the machine is a pulpit. Our instrumental apostolate is true and proper

preaching, liturgical action, and evangelization - even when it proposes a recipe for the kitchen... to the point of inducing Alberione to see our apostolic work as our "penance."

The most recurring complaint at the beginning of a new initiative is that personnel are lacking or they are too old. If Paul had reasoned like this, he would not have gone any further than Antioch or, at the most, Ephesus. Instead, he journeyed untiringly to bring the Gospel to the nations, to those who did not yet know about it. Paul's style was to plant and keep watch, while others watered and, probably, reaped. It is a style that we have not widely adopted where we are lacking sufficient personnel - probably because of an erroneous idea that the apostolate is only and exclusively "clerical." We forget, especially after Vatican II, the enormous contribution that the laity can and must give. The development of an apostolate such as that of the Pauline Family will continue far into the future, but even more so is the development of an apostolate that fully involves the laity. Whoever said that the Gospel cannot be proclaimed only because there are not Paulines in sufficient number? And whoever said that in a country the Gospel cannot be announced even without a Pauline religious community? Could we not hypothesize an itinerant Pauline, like Paul, who founds and visits the apostolic activities that he/she has established - similar to what is already being done in some countries for the book centers?

Are we convinced of the positive nature of all human realities (and not just those that are strictly religious) which are to be fulfilled and brought to maturity, that is, recapitulated in Christ? And if the answer is yes, how are we to conduct ourselves in the face of realities that are far from the ecclesiastical/clerical world? How are we to respond to Alberione who invited us to go to homes if people no longer go to church? And what are we to do if they "leave us the churches and take the souls?" Do our books, media centers, periodicals and multimedia products go in search of the lost sheep (today we should instead say "the 99 lost sheep") or do they feed only the satiated? Do we base our editorial choices on these situations of distance on the part of the majority, or do we concern ourselves exclusively with doctrinal correctness and precision, with products that are almost totally for those who already know Christ?

Furthermore, to accept the positiveness of all human reality in which Christianity is incarnated signifies that these realities must

be known, studied, reflected upon deeply and assessed. This calls into question the quality of our studies and preparation. Specialists are needed for the Pauline apostolate, not unskilled laborers. Perhaps we need to reinvent and update Alberione's famous invitation to write at least one book before priestly ordination.

And this is not all. To accept the logic of the incarnation means going to the heart of our manner of carrying out the apostolate. We are not talking about a coating or a fad, but rather its very substance. To accept this means revolutionizing our way of doing the apostolate. And I ask myself: when will we have a chapter or seminar on this very theme?

Keeping in mind Paul's universality and his courageous announcement of the Gospel to the gentiles, and examining globalization and "cross-breeding" on the one hand and nationalism to the point of racism on the other, are we managing to give our apostolate that sense of Catholicity, that is, universality, because of which in the eyes of Christ there is neither Greek nor Jew, neither slave nor free persons? This is where the novelty of the Gospel of Christ and its liberating dimension come into play regarding all the peoples of the earth.

But let us reflect still more deeply. We know that the mass media exercise a leveling activity with regard to cultures and language, lifestyles and values and that they globalize everything. Christianity also presents itself as a universal message that goes beyond every culture. Thus the necessity of detaching our apostolate from the accusation (historically founded) of colonizing, which sweeps away individual cultures, especially the weakest. If we believe that faith in Jesus Christ is an instrument of universal liberation, which frees peoples of every culture and confers dignity on all cultural expressions without favoring any of them but acting as a leaven in each one, then the consequences are very clear. On the one hand, we have to remove the pretext of those who identify Christianity with only one culture, one language model and a single philosophy. To use Paul's expression, this would be like a new circumcision imposed on the gentiles. On the other hand, however, we must also remove the pretext of being able to so inculturate the whole of Christianity in all cultures, that we devalue its dimension of scandal and foolishness, that is, attenuate the fact that it cannot be reduced to any single system of human thought.

All of this cannot be separated from the knowledge and consideration that we must have with regard to the receivers of our apostolate: their social, cultural, political, economic and spiritual situation. This is where our Pauline dimension of being all to all comes into play.

If we must have a preference concerning our audience, it can only be put into effect according to the perspective of the cross, of kenosis and incarnation – all of which are dimensions that cannot be exhausted in private devotions, but rather in precise choices made in favor of the least and the suffering.

Even though called to be apostles and to exercise this mission prophetically, do we tend to stoop to agreements with the political, religious, cultural and economic powers of the moment, renouncing our freedom and our prophetic dimension and thus falling short in coherence and witness? The reference here is the episode of Peter and Paul at Antioch (Gal 2:11-16).

Insufficient knowledge of Paul and the Gospel, as well as insufficient knowledge in the broad sense, often bring about a lowering in the quality of our publishing, and even a decline into devotionism. It is precisely knowledge of Paul and reflection on the Gospel that are the antidote to this tendency. Devotionalism means falling again into the works of the law, instead of those of faith. The doctrinal solidity of Pauline publishing does not consist in a slavish and generic profession of fidelity to the Roman Pontiff regarding the apostolate, but must be pursued and applied coherently to our editorial productions. This is not in contrast with the widely popular character of some products: quality can never be sacrificed for simplicity.

Assuming the instruments of communication for the apostolate demands the acceptance of some fundamental rules. Among these is the medium is the message, since the instrument conditions the contents and the way of communicating them. Thus the effort must be made on the level of Pauline publishing (and often it is not) to keep in mind the characteristics of the instrument, so as not to reduce it to simply transferring unsuitable content into unsuitable instruments. This is the temptation (sometimes upon explicit request) that comes about when we try to put the Mass and rosary on television as if we were in a church. Or when we would want to transform a current weekly program into a catechism lesson. The Bible,

as the story of salvation, already shows us a typical model which is that of narration: a biblical film can communicate more than many sermons. The family is another gold mine of stories, relationships, issues to develop, always in the Pauline spirit of saving all of reality. And the very world of communication presents itself not just as simple information or abstract theory, but as action to be accomplished through business concepts, production processes, human, economic, political, cultural, and social relationships, and for us Paulines, as the place in and through which our apostolic mission is expressed.

Here we must also clarify another dichotomy which systematically lessens and puts in doubt the efficacy of our multimedial apostolate, especially in regard to its aspects of massification, virtuality and limited involvement on the personal level. In short, we reason according to the principle that the ministerial/liturgical apostolate is always better than the instrumental one. Apart from what I already said regarding the equality for us Paulines of the two apostolates and the positiveness of human realities, we must also keep in mind the different levels of personal involvement. Precisely for this reason we must reaffirm the function of pre-evangelization, which many of the instruments of communication carry out, without expecting miracles and without perverting the instruments themselves.

In carrying out our apostolic mission, we Paulines are conscious of operating in a Pauline way according to the Spirit which saves and not according to the law which kills. We are aware that whatever we do, we do in the name of the Lord. However, this does not exempt us from observing some criteria and bearing in mind the different dimensions of communication: with regard to the news, ethical correctness and professionalism; on the level of opinion, speaking of everything in a Christian way; on the level of formation, maintaining our Christian identity and fidelity to the magisterium.

Our presence in the world of social communication, characterized by the prophetic dimension of our apostolate, must keep us always vigilant and active in exercising the critical function of communication, which cannot be reduced (unfortunately also at times through our own contribution) to massification and even less to a megaphone of political, economic, cultural, ideological (and why not? clerical) interests.

Appreciation for human reality implies that in the communicative process we Paulines and the Church in general take into account public opinion. The people of God and society as a whole grow if those who communicate and guide allow freedom for the Gospel of Christ to mature and if they educate to true freedom in Christ, rather than manipulating consciences. Attention to concrete situations, to the problems of the common people and perceiving the needs and tragedies that lurk in the man and woman of today – all of this is a useful exercise in listening not just for helping society to grow, but for maturing the Christian conscience and bringing it closer to Christ who became human like us.

Our presence in the world of communication has the goal of helping our receivers meet (as human persons) the human-divine person of Christ and of entering into an evangelical style of life in a context of evangelical values, through the communication of stories and credible testimonies, with respect for the nature of the instruments. We are aware and we believe that the true life is Christ, who communicates himself to us through his Word, through the Sacraments and through the community of the people of God. We strive to help everyone enter into and attain true life, through our humble apostolate (see the Secret of Success) centered on the Bible, on the family and on communication.

## THE PASTORAL STYLE OF SAINT PAUL AND THAT OF THE PAULINE CHARISM (I)\*

Elena Bosetti, SJBP

The subject matter of the presentation entrusted to me, if I have understood well, consists in two strictly connected themes. We could call it a *double track* that goes from Paul to Alberione and from them to the Pauline Family.

- a) Paul's pastoral style (according to the hermeneutic of Alberione)
  - b) The Pauline charism's pastoral approach.
- The relationship between these two poles or tracks, in my opinion, is due precisely to Father Alberione's charismatic reinterpretation. He was fascinated not just by the doctrine of the Apostle, but by his mysticism and spirituality, by his living of Christ and for Christ, by his way of communicating the Gospel and of being Church.
  - Clearly, there is also a subjective component in the Alberionian interpretation, just as there is in every hermeneutic. It is necessary to be aware of the subjective "filter," both cultural and historical, which characterizes every interpretation, even that of Father James Alberione.<sup>1</sup>
  - On the other hand—and here we are already on the second track—we are aware that this pastoral dimension constitutes an arduous challenge for our entire Family since the Founder's intention was not to limit the Family only to making the Apostle and his letters known, but even more, to revive his spirit and passion. It is necessary for us to be "Saint Paul living today!"
  - Paul is above all the Apostle—a title that eminently qualifies him. But with good reason we can also consider him a "pastor" of the Church, and this is how Father Alberione proposed him to the Pastorelle. As a model of pastoral activity. Not by himself, but together with Peter. Peter and Paul, apostles and pastors, are patrons of the Church of Rome (and of the fourth congregation of the Pauline Family).

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\* *Translation by Sr. Raymond Gerard, FSP.*

<sup>1</sup> For a deeper reflection on this, see the talk of Father Sassi.

- I would like to ask a question directly to our Founder: why were you so in love with Saint Paul? What attracted you to him? How beautiful it would be if we could hear his voice again, soft but firm, which many of us (including me) had the grace to listen to—a voice capable of enthusing and reassuring. And yet that voice is not distant; it is still living in us. And it seems to me that the secret of Father Alberione’s fascination for Saint Paul made him understand Paul in many ways. Above all, Fr. Alberione let transpire a certain affinity which I dare to call **mystical and pastoral**. In his eyes, Saint Paul is the best interpreter of Christ Way, Truth and Life, according to a perspective that is total and organic, both on the anthropological level (mind-will-heart) and on the ecclesial/pastoral level (theology-ethics-liturgy).

**Paul, “pastor” of the Church.** To speak of a “pastoral style” means attributing to Paul the status of “pastor” besides that of “theologian.” As a consequence, it means being attentive to the way the Apostle is concerned with the *effects* of his gospel: not just in the initial stage (*kerigma*), but also in the successive stage which consists in the growth and formation of the Christian community.

- On this point, Dunn is very explicit when he affirms: “Paul never spoke other than as a **pastor**. His theology was a living theology, a practical theology through and through.”<sup>2</sup>
- It would be useful to verify the solidity of Dunn’s affirmation by re-reading the Letters that the Apostle wrote to the communities he founded. This could be a very stimulating activity for group work, in the various workshops of this seminar. Obviously, I could also do this, but I would prefer to **begin with an icon** from the Lucan portrait of Paul the pastor (Acts 20:17-36). It is a fascinating icon, which permits us to gather in a general way some characteristic features of Paul’s pastoral style.
- In the **second part** of my presentation, I would like to pass the word directly to the Apostle, listening to the way he revisits his history particularly his relationship with Peter. We will pause on three passages from the Letter to the Galatians that seem very precious to me and rich in points for hermeneutics and the updating of the pastoral action of the Pauline Family. In the per-

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<sup>2</sup> J. D.G. DUNN, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle* (Grand Rapids-Cambridge: B. Eerdmans, 1998) 626.

spective of the relationship between Peter and Paul, we could re-read the Alberionian idea of *romanità* and the vow of obedience to the Pope regarding the apostolate.

- For the **third part**—in dialogue with Father Vincenzo Marras—I would like to enter more directly into the pastoral activity of the Pauline Family. We will focus on some indications that seem indispensable for re-launching the Pauline charism in the third millennium of Christianity—with great joy and gratitude for the opportunity to share in this meeting the pastoral emphasis of the Pauline charism.

## THE LUKAN PICTURE OF PAUL THE PASTOR

### The meeting with the elders of Ephesus

#### 1. Context: toward the end of the third missionary journey (Acts 19-20)

The narrative in Acts 19-20 offers valuable indications regarding Paul's pastoral style. In the first place we note his long stay in the metropolis of Ephesus, which was the operative base and propelling center of his evangelization in Asia. The Apostle "held discussions" every day with all the inhabitants, according to Luke (Acts 19:9). This is a significant indication of Paul's "method," but let us understand this well. It is nothing like certain of our "discussions!" The type of *discussion* we are speaking of here describes Paul's art of "persuasion" regarding the "kingdom of God" (Acts 19:7-8).

- On the first level there is the *kerygmatic and catechetical* activity of the Apostle. This action was confirmed—like that of Jesus—by prodigies and healings. It is not to be underestimated since it tells us, in Luke's perspective, that Paul resembles Jesus. He was not simply an intellectual, a great Rabbi or a prestigious philosopher, but a charismatic man, one who "imposed hands" and communicated the Spirit (Acts 19:6). In the Church of Ephesus, the figure of Paul as "**formator**" emerges, as he dedicates time to his newly baptized (cf. Acts 19:6).
- One notable aspect is "**pastoral discernment**." The project is defined: to visit the communities of Macedonia and Achaia, then go to Jerusalem and from there to Rome. "Paul decided **in the Spirit**" (Acts 19:21). The decision to go to Jerusalem was made by

Paul in harmony with the Spirit (an aspect that is highlighted in the new “Bibbia Via Verità e Vita<sup>3</sup>,” note on page 2310).

- His “**method**” too reflected that of Jesus, as described in Luke 10. When the discernment was made and the decision taken in the Spirit, Paul “sends ahead” his collaborators to prepare the communities (Acts 19:22). He sent Timothy and Erastus, like Jesus sent the evangelizers before him two by two.
- There was **opposition** against Paul and “those who followed the Way” (Acts 19:23).<sup>4</sup> The reason for the great tumult at Ephesus, instigated by the silversmith Demetrius, was clearly of an economic character (the goddess Artemis brought in good money!). Paul’s gospel was a threat to the religious market; it did not align itself with the business and interests of this world...
- How did Paul conduct himself in this situation? I would say that he interpreted the various happenings as **signs for moving beyond** [this city]: he called the disciples together, greeted them and set out for Macedonia (Acts 10:1). From there he went to Greece, where other plots (this time from the Jews) forced him to change plans. Instead of sailing directly to Syria, he went back to Macedonia (on the Roman *Via Egnatia*). He demonstrated concretely the ability to obey God who speaks not only in the Scriptures, but in everything that happens, including opposition and misfortune. A **flexible pastoral style emerges, docile to the action of the spirit who guides history**. Paul did not resist nor did he become disheartened: he was always ready to re-enter the situation, to change **his plans, but not his objective**.
- **An international team**. The rest of the account demonstrates the “company code.” Paul set out “accompanied” by seven men, whose names and place of provenance are mentioned. This shows that it was a delegation composed of members from various ecclesial communities, both Greek and Asian. The members of this team were Sopater of Beroea, Aristarchus and Secundus from Thessalonica, Gaius from Derbe, Timothy (his origin is not mentioned probably because he was well-known) and the Asians Ty-chicus and Trophimus. Most probably they were in charge of the collection to help the church of Jerusalem. A **pastoral style** that

<sup>3</sup> Bible *Via Verità e Vita* (Cinisello Balsamo: San Paolo, 2009)

<sup>4</sup> An expression that indicated the Christians; it recurs frequently in Acts: cf. 9:2; 16:17; 18:25.26; 19:9; 22:4; 24:14, 22.

speaks of openness, involvement and **co-responsibility** becomes evident. Paul did not govern in a vertical and managerial manner, but rather in a communal way, giving rise to a network of collaboration. On the other hand, the presence of the most faithful Timothy among these seven men is sufficient indication of the Apostle's responsibility and control in that collection for the mother Church which he had so much at heart.

- Now we will reflect on Paul's discourse to the elders (presbyters) of Ephesus, whom the Apostle met at Miletus "so he wouldn't lose time... because he was hurrying to be in Jerusalem... for Pentecost" (Acts 20:16).

## 2. The discourse to the presbyters of Ephesus (Acts 20:18-35)

I do not intend to enter into a detailed exegesis of this splendid discourse addressed to the *presbyters* (v. 17)—also called *episkopoi* in v. 28—who had a role of responsibility and pastoral guidance in the church of Ephesus. I will limit myself to some highlights that are connected with our theme.

1. **The exhortation** focuses on the exemplariness of Paul's behavior. It is prompted by a witness of life that is common **knowledge**: "You know **how I was** the whole time I was with you." He does not say: "you know what I taught," but "how I conducted myself," which means **how I lived**. It is from this "living" that we can learn, according to Luke, the "pastoral style of Paul."
2. **Everyone knows how the Apostle lived**. It is sufficient to recall to mind some constants:
  - I served the Lord with all humility
  - Among tears and trials
  - I did not hold back / I did not spare myself... in order to "preach to you all God's plan." (v. 20; cf. v. 31: for three years, both night and day, I did not cease exhorting each one of you with tears).

**What kind of pastoral style?** One of service, humility and total dedication to the mission. In the first place is the *kerygmatic* aspect: preaching, instruction and catechesis. We know that this is not everything, that there was much more in Paul's pastoral ministry, but this dimension is a priority and remains indelible in the memory of everyone of his collaborators. Besides that, it

coincides with the identikit that the Apostle made for himself: Christ sent him to preach!

3. Looking ahead: we see the emergence of a **non-knowing which, however, knows** (a clear presentiment). “The Spirit is compelling me to go to Jerusalem, not knowing what will befall me.” Paul declares that he **does not know** what awaits him, and yet he does **already know**: “The Holy Spirit testifies to me in every city that chains and suffering await me” (v. 23). What will happen is exactly what the Lord had predicted to the just and fearful Ananias of Damascus: “I will show him how much he will have to suffer for my name” (Acts 9:16). Therefore, no triumphalism, but rather a **pastoral crucified style!**
4. Paul perceives himself as totally **in function of a service** entrusted to him by the Lord: “But I set no great value on my life as long as I am able to finish the course and the ministry I received from the Lord Jesus—to bear witness to the good news of God’s grace” (Acts 20:24; cf. 2Tim 4:6-7: “I have finished the race, I have kept the faith”).

Paul does not consider himself as worthy of anything: he is only concerned with finishing the race, that is, the work of evangelization that the Lord Jesus entrusted to him. To give “witness to the gospel of grace”: *confessio laudis!* Another important aspect emerges regarding Paul’s pastoral style: a strong sense of mission in which experience and the witness of *grace* are integral parts. Paul is the cantor of divine mercy, the herald of the gospel of grace.

5. **Pastoral directive**, or *parenesi testamentaria* (this is the only text where we find pastoral terminology on the lips of Paul; an affinity with the pastoral norm found in 1Pet 5:1-4):

“Watch over yourselves and all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has appointed you **as bishops to shepherd the church of the Lord** which he gained through his own blood” (Acts 20:28).

The harmonizing effort of Luke is obvious enough. Just as the elders of the mother Church, so too those of Ephesus must concern themselves with orthodoxy, guarding against the heralds of erroneous doctrine (Acts 20:30). But in contrast to their Jerusalem colleagues, the leaders in Ephesus remain essentially *episkopoi* (guardians, custodians) called to pasture the Church of God.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> For a deeper reflection on this theme, I recommend my doctoral thesis: “Il

6. **The consignment:** “And now I commend you to God and to **His word of grace**, which can build you up and give you an inheritance among all His holy ones” (v. 32).
7. **The epilogue** (vv. 33-35) refers back to the exhortation: it re-proposes the **exemplariness** of Paul’s behavior and his pastoral style. A characteristic tract appears, which corresponds to what the Apostle considers his “boast”: having maintained himself with his own work, renouncing the “right” to live from the Gospel so as not to be a burden to the community in any way:

“I have never desired anyone’s silver or gold or clothing—you yourselves know that these hands of mine provided for my needs as well as for the needs of those who were with me. In every way possible I have shown you that we must help the weak by working hard like this, mindful of the words spoken by the Lord Jesus himself, ‘*It is more blessed to give than to receive*’” (Acts 20:33-35).<sup>6</sup>

That is the portrait that Luke offers us of Paul as pastor, and of his pastoral style! It does not betray, but rather confirms, the image the Apostle offers of himself in 1Cor 9:1-18. His boast is that he announces the Gospel free of charge, “without taking advantage of the right” conferred on him by the Gospel like the other apostles did, including Peter (1Cor 9:5). Instead Paul and Barnabas made the choice of economic independence providing by their own work for personal maintenance and even assistance to the most poor.

- The dimension of “work” is a fundamental element for Fr. Alberione and for his own concept of pastoral ministry. But **how** is the “style of gratuitousness” present in and **characteristic** of the pastoral ministry of the Pauline Family?

## II. IN COMMUNION SO AS NOT TO RUN IN VAIN

Paul took leave of the elders of Ephesus and headed for Jerusalem where he hoped to arrive in time for the feast of Pentecost. Against the backdrop of this last ascent to Jerusalem, we can imag-

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Pastore, Cristo e la chiesa nella Prima lettera di Pietro” [*The Pastor, Christ and the Church in the First Letter to Peter*] (EDB, 1990), above all pp. 167-201.

<sup>6</sup> The last expression quotes a saying of Jesus that is not reported in the Gospels; but it is similar in content to the sermon on the mount and in particular, to Luke 6:38: “Give and it will be given to you.”

ine—in a sort of *flashback*—the previous ascent which the Apostle himself remembers in his letter to the Galatians.<sup>7</sup>

Three aspects emerge regarding the complex relationship between Paul and Peter:

- Paul **at the side of** Peter: Gal 1:18
- Paul **with** Peter: Gal 2:1-10
- Paul **contesting** Peter: Gal 2:11-20

## 1. Paul at the side of Peter

“Three years later”—writes the Apostle—“I went up to Jerusalem to get to know Cephas, and I stayed with him for fifteen days” (Gal 1:18). This was more than a courtesy visit! Paul goes to Cephas not simply to get to know him but to “consult” with him. It was a visit that could not prescind from what united them profoundly: their **dedication to the Gospel of Jesus Christ**.

## 2. Paul with Peter

The second meeting occurred 14 years later (from the conversion, or from their first meeting?). In any case the trip is the one referred to in Acts 15, and Paul describes the motive: so as not to risk “running or having run in vain.”

The narration of this second ascent to Jerusalem is much more articulate with respect to the first and much richer in details. New persons enter the scene besides Paul, who is no longer a solitary evangelizer (see also Gal 1:2). He is accompanied by Barnabas and Titus, who were decisively important in view of the scope of the journey. In addition, Peter is no longer the only interlocutor of Paul, but also the “notables” of the Jerusalem community, those persons who were held in repute, who were “considered as pillars”: James, Cephas and John.

How did Paul act in this circumstance? I would say with great caution and **diplomacy** because at risk was something very precious: **freedom** in Christ. Let us observe how Paul, who we are used to defining as free and frank, proceeds with great pru-

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<sup>7</sup> For a deeper reflection, I recommend commentaries on the Letter to the Galatians in the various languages.

dence. He does not speak immediately to the whole community; he does not expose to everyone what he thinks and preaches; he does not “empty his sack into the four winds.” Instead, what does he do? Here is what he wrote in Galatians: “I met privately with those held in repute and set out for them the gospel I proclaim among the Gentiles” (Gal 2:2).

This is authentic **diplomatic ability**! Paul cannot allow himself to lose the battle—not for himself, but for the cause in question: Christian liberty! And so he studies carefully how to proceed. He begins with the persons held in repute. If he gains their agreement, the rest will be easier. He will not be **alone against everyone**. He can face the “false brothers”—the conservative intruders—by availing himself of the conquered support of the three most influential men: James, Cephas and John. It was the beginning of a consensus that culminated in a nice handshake, the sign of communion and unity.

**So as not to run in vain.**<sup>8</sup> In the context of the Jerusalem assembly, the fear of having run in vain regarded the destiny of the Christian communities coming from paganism. But the case itself of Titus shows that Paul has not run in vain. If Titus was not obliged to be circumcised, it means that what was valid for him was also a valid principle for everyone. The “company code” began to show good fruits!

**The Gospel entrusted to Paul and to Peter.** A notable attitude of faith is present in the Jerusalem assembly. Peter’s experience, as important as it was for the first Christian community, does not exhaust the manifestations of divine action. The persons of repute saw (with the gaze of believers) that Paul was entrusted with **the Gospel for the uncircumcised** like Peter was for the **circumcised** (Gal 2:7-8). And here Paul’s pastoral environment was clarified; they recognized that the privileged audience of his gospel would be the pagans, the “uncircumcised.”

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<sup>8</sup> The verb “**correre**” [to run] belongs to the language of amateur sports: along with the idea of progress, it also expresses tiring effort and expenditure of energy. Paul loves this verb for describing his own spiritual and apostolic experience. Paul’s “**running**” is strictly united to the “running” of his community. He wrote to the Christians of Philippi, telling them to be irreprehensible and simple, holding fast the word of life: “so that on the Day of Christ I will be able to boast that I did not work or toil in vain” (Phil 2:16).

### 3. Paul contests Peter

I do not like to call this “the incident at Antioch” since it is decidedly something more, which left a deep wound in Paul’s soul. Note, however, that in the letter to the Galatians (2:11-14) we hear only one bell: that of Paul. Peter’s “reasons” are not communicated (which does not necessarily mean that he had none). The Acts of the Apostles ignores this painful event... and controversy.

- Paul was concerned that the community of Antioch would be confused by the ambiguous behavior of Peter, who probably sought to mediate between the different groups, especially after the arrival of the Judeo-Christians from Jerusalem who had difficulty accepting the table communion as it was practiced in the mixed community of Antioch.
- Here the **spearhead** man (Paul) meets the **bridge** man (Peter). Not for a personal matter, but for “love of the Gospel”: Christian freedom is at stake. The Gospel does not allow compromises. Here in all its force we see the Pauline *parresia* (confident frankness)...
- What does this *parresia* mean for the pastoral ministry of the Pauline charism?

## III. THE PASTORAL MINISTRY OF THE PAULINE CHARISM

Without any presumption of being exhaustive, I will propose in this last section a sort of pastoral “pentagram,” trusting that the Spirit will stir up the varied and beautiful sensitivities present in the Pauline Family.

### 1. Pastoral Kerygma: the Primacy of the Gospel

- “I do everything for the sake of the Gospel,” Paul affirms. And with this he intends to express at one and the same time the absolute priority of the mission received and his personal and total dedication to it. “I was not sent to baptize, but to preach.” In this, too, we can clearly recognize a feeling, a priority. The affirmation does not exclude the fact that Paul did also baptize, but it emphasizes that in the order of his priorities, the sacramental dimension is secondary to the *kerygmatic*—not in itself, but in the pastoral priorities of the Apostle. Others baptize and with this

they are giving sacramental continuity to the life generated by the proclamation of the Gospel. Others dedicate themselves mostly to accompanying the journey of growth and the ordinary administration of the community. He felt that he was sent to preach the Gospel.<sup>9</sup>

- *Evangelize, Evangelize.* It is the key word that circles like a halo around Blessed James Alberione and encompasses those antennae of the heavens that speak concretely of the new forms of *preaching/evangelizing*. The Gospel that the Daughters of St. Paul wear as an emblem on their habit functions as a memorial for all of us: it is the coat of arms of the entire Pauline Family.

## 2. A lively sense of the Church and thus an ecclesial sense of the mission

Paul is keenly aware that **the mission** belongs to the church. It is the whole community of Antioch that prays, fasts and invokes the Spirit. It is the **liturgical assembly** in the front line: "Now as they were worshipping God..." (Acts 13:2). It is a living, Eucharistic, charismatic Church from which evangelization sets out with the first missionary journey of Barnabas and Saul.

What does the relationship Spirit-Church-Eucharist mean in Paul's pastoral action? We could say that Paul's pastoral style reflects his vision of Church as "communion" precisely in the liturgical experience where instinctual contrasts and discriminations are overcome. Social status is irrelevant, circumcision is irrelevant and so is sexual difference. What counts is no longer being Jew or Greek, slave or free, masculine or feminine, but being a new creature in Christ (Gal 3:28).

Now, if we relate this aspect to the charismatic story of Fr. Alberione, we cannot but see here, too, some common points.

Where was the apostolic passion of our Founder born—his urgency to preach the Gospel to everyone? He breathed it deeply in

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<sup>9</sup> It is this decisive priority of the Gospel that we could say harmonizes Alberione so strongly with St. Paul. That is, the awareness that "faith comes from what is heard, and what is heard comes through Christ's word" (Rom 10:17). Thus the priority of the announcement is imposed. In fact: "And how can they put their faith in him if they have not heard of him? How will they hear unless someone preaches?" (Rom 10:14).

an ecclesial community, especially that of the seminary of Alba, enlightened by the holy and wise guidance of the theologian, Canon Chiesa. It was our Founder who recounted in *Abundantes Divitiae* the decisive impact of that Eucharistic adoration which lasted more than four hours and was like a bridge connecting the two centuries (1800 and 1900). All of us were born there: from the Eucharistic Christ.

From this experience, a strong Eucharistic-liturgical imprint came about with regard to “pastoral style.” It found its apex in the foundation of the Pious Disciples, who are the so-called roots from which the entire evangelizing work of the whole Pauline Family draws its vital lymph. On the other hand, the presence of the Pious Disciples is a memorial of the common maternal womb: the Eucharist. If Fr. Alberione loved to say “You were born from the Host” (and he said this not just to the Pious Disciples, but also to the Daughters, the Pastorelle...), obviously this dimension cannot be neglected.<sup>10</sup>

### 3. A pastoral action of communion and participation, which makes use of the charisms and the feminine.

Even in situations of apparent controversy (as in the case of Antioch), Paul never lost sight of the ecclesial dimension of the mission. This strong awareness also shines through in practice: it is enough to think of the large network of collaborators (men and women) who were involved in the work of evangelization.<sup>11</sup> Consider the role of Prisca and Aquila in the community of Corinth and in that of Ephesus, of Phoebe, *diakonos* (deaconess) of the community of Cenchræ (the eastern port of Corinth), of Timothy and Titus, of Euodia and Syntyche at Philippi. **Paul was a man of “networking,”** capable of maintaining multiple relationships of collaboration, in-

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<sup>10</sup> The apostolic work of the Pious Disciples is situated in this perspective, but so too is the liturgical animation of the Pastorelle in the local churches.

<sup>11</sup> On the whole, there is mention of about eighty of these collaborators: 65 in the Letters of Paul, 13 in the Acts of the Apostles. Paul calls them “brothers,” according to the usual designation in the ecclesial community. But he also uses specific terms that indicate their shared missionary and pastoral commitment: *koinonòs* = companion, co-participant; *synergòs* = collaborator; *syndoiùlos* = acting together in the Lord (Col 4:7); *systратиotes*, “companion in struggle” (Phil 2:25; Philemon 2); *synaichmàlotos*, “fellow prisoner” (Rom 16:7; Col 4:10; Philemon 23).

volvement and promotion, in line with his strongly charismatic and ministerial vision of the Church.<sup>12</sup>

- We cannot forget that our Founder's first great resource was precisely the collaborators (Pauline Cooperators!) and that his mission was and is expressed through a wide integration of women (of his five religious congregations, four are feminine!).
- What does all of this mean for the pastoral action of the Pauline Family? We are becoming always more aware of how important it is to recognize and appreciate one another as brothers and sisters who share the same charism with different characteristics and emphases. It is time to be "family," to work with greater synergy in view of the one, great objective: to communicate Jesus Christ, Way, Truth and Life in the manner of St. Paul.

**4. A prophetic pastoral action: daring, freeing, open to all that is true, beautiful, just ... which does not fear being criticized and causing discomfort, according to the wisdom of the Cross**

**A hope-filled, encouraging and joyous pastoral action.** Blessed James Alberione never tired of repeating to the Pastorelle sisters that the secret of their pastoral ministry is joy!

The **vocational dimension** is also of great importance; it cannot be considered just an added aspect, but a fundamental work that permeates the entire pastoral activity of the Church. In the Pauline Family, it finds its charismatic accentuation in the fourth feminine congregation.

**5. A pastoral action that adopts the paradoxical Pauline logic: "when I am weak, that is when I am strong" (2Cor 12:10).**

We experience daily that the life which is most commonly prized is marked by certain adjectives, like beautiful, young, slim, dynamic, strong... and the list could go on. But the Apostle teaches us to value **all** life, entering decisively into Christ's paschal mystery. The wisdom of the world is unmasked as "foolishness," while the

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<sup>12</sup> We owe to St. Paul some of the more significant images of Church recovered by Vatican Council II, such as "body" of Christ, his bride, temple of the Holy Spirit...

cross of Christ manifests the *dynamis* of God, his powerful, salvific energy (1Cor 1:25). Not **power** (success, prestige, affirmation...), but **weakness** (limitations, suffering, infirmity...) is for Paul a motive for boasting.

The icon he uses in the second Letter to the Corinthians to describe his own ministry plainly associates the contrast: **a treasure in vessels of clay**. God amuses himself by overturning the rational plans that would seek to keep the treasure in a safe rather than a terracotta vase!

Paul is aware of being the bearer of a "treasure," Christ and his Gospel. Nevertheless, he is keenly conscious of his own fragility and weakness which contributes to the manifestation of the divine action: "so that this extraordinary power will be seen to be from God and not from us" (2Cor 4:7).

Could it be any different for **the pastoral action of the Pauline charism**? Fr. Alberione lived this logic in his own **body**. Here is how Paul VI immortalized him: "**Behold him: humble, silent, untiring, always vigilant and recollected in his thoughts which run from prayer to work, always intent on scrutinizing the 'signs of the times,' that is, the most ingenious ways of reaching souls...**"

I would like to conclude with the words of Fr. Alberione to the Pastorelle. He invites us to look at St. Paul who made himself **all to all, so as to bring all to Jesus Christ**:

"Look at St. Paul.... Peter and Paul were the two bearers of Christ to Rome, that is, of Christianity to Rome.... So then, Paul is the example, model and protector of the apostolate for souls. What did Paul not do after his conversion?! He did everything for everyone, like a mother, like a father, like a brother and like a servant, a slave, a prisoner: for Christ, so as to lead all to Jesus Christ the Savior of souls. What more could he do except incline his head to be struck by the sword? All that remained were his last energies and the last proof of his great love for Jesus Christ and his great love for souls" (James Alberione to the Pastorelle, 29 June 1960).<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Cf. AAP, 1960, 69, no. 135.

## PAUL'S PASTORAL STYLE AND THE PASTORAL STYLE OF THE PAULINE CHARISM (II)\*

Vincenzo Marras, SSP

I want to begin these notes by clarifying that I am well-paid for being a professional journalist in my daily effort at the forefront of the Pauline mission, and so I am little accustomed to writing notes, doing analysis and conceptual elaborations. For these things I am obviously in debt to many studies and many fathers.

I will limit my reflection to going over well-beaten paths here and there. And it could not be otherwise. In every case I will be following the advice of Romano Penna: "Do not domesticate Saint Paul," to which I think it is obligatory to add and integrate in our regard: "Do not domesticate Alberione." Penna advised us concerning the course to take: "We have not set out on a path to just wander around, but we have a fixed goal and means that have been studied and perfected." He could have exhorted us with the words of Fr. Silvio Sassi, Superior General: "The Pauline charism is nomadic like St. Paul, who undertook his journeys. The Pauline charism is, by its very nature, in movement, dynamic, attentive to changes, capable of recognizing and integrating the new. It is not sedentary, but in continual pilgrimage toward God and toward our contemporaries."

I want to circumscribe my notes on this theme with two fables that evoke consequences in the attitudes and style of our religious life and our apostolic commitment.

Here, then, is the story of a pilgrim who passed by a man sitting in a field. Other men were nearby working on a building.

"You look like a monk," the pilgrim said.

"I am," responded the monk.

"And who are those men working on the abbey?"

"They are my monks; I am the abbot."

"Oh, that's marvelous," commented the pilgrim. "It's very beautiful to see how a monastery is constructed."

"They are demolishing it," the abbot clarified.

"Demolishing it?" the pilgrim started. "How come?"

"So that we can see the sunrise," the abbot responded.

St. Paul's life is a permanent example of every life consecrated to the demands of the Gospel. He is the apostle for whom "to live is Christ." He is the founder and organizer of communities for whom he declared himself to have the heart of a father and mother. He is the polemicist who attacked errors and abuses.

The passionate temperament of Paul, impetuous and tender at the same time, is captivating. His word, which ignored subtleties and euphemisms, contained the eloquence of the truth and the uncontainable force of a deeply rooted conviction.

His being "all to all" could certainly be understood as the synthesis of his untiring apostolic zeal; he could be intent on one undertaking while his thought hurried toward the next one. This definitely belongs to us sons and daughters of Blessed James Alberione, and makes us - feel like the Apostle of the gentiles - "debtors to all people, ignorant and educated, Catholics, communists, pagans, Muslims."

Father Alberione wrote that Paul "was always and everywhere with everyone and with all the means, despite his weak health, great distances, mountains and sea, the indifference of the intellectuals, the strength of the powerful, the irony of the pleasure-seekers, chains and martyrdom. He had that flexibility of adaptation demonstrated in his varied ways of treating people according to their physical, intellectual, moral, religious and civil conditions."

Father Alberione did not simply give his "Family" the name of the great evangelizer. He wanted to model and pilot it according to the example of the Apostle of the gentiles, imitating his promptness, vast horizons and dedication to a single goal.

On various occasions he affirmed that the apostle Paul is the true "founder." "Paul initiated the Society of Saint Paul of which he is the founder," Father Alberione wrote in 1954. "The Society of Saint Paul did not choose him; rather he chose us. Even more, he generated us: 'I was the one who begot you in Christ Jesus through the good news' (1Cor 4:15)."

But how did Alberione arrive at this point? By considering some very clear *exclusions* and some equally unequivocal *choices*, we can understand the stages of Alberione's journey toward Saint Paul, and from Saint Paul toward the apostolate of the editions in order to focus the spirituality of the new Congregation on a radical Christ-centeredness, in a social-cultural totality of which the apostle Paul is considered the precursor.

The *exclusions*: the 19<sup>th</sup> century witnessed the birth and flowering of many new congregations of the active life. Consider the field of assistance and teaching and the great personalities who began them. Alberione, who felt himself called “to do something for the new century,” according to the indications of Leo XIII (*Tametsi futura*), excluded immediately a commitment of this type in social work and instinctively directed it elsewhere; he sought new pathways.

The *choices*: his youthful enthusiasm for the encyclicals of Leo XIII did not cloud over his reflection on the role of the papal magisterium and the problems of evangelizing in a society that had become hostile. Moreover, he observed that, not just the supreme magisterium, but the entire Church with its bishops, laity and means of apostolate were gasping for breath. From his very first writings and talks, he repeated that he wanted to see the bread of the Word of God distributed at the convent doors; others could provide the other kind of bread.

This is where Saint Paul entered the scene. Father Alberione said that the new apostles of the Word of God - written, printed and diffused - should know that “Saint Paul is for them the model apostle.” He further declared that in Paul “we find the disciple who knows the divine Master in his fullness. Paul lived him totally. He plumbed the depths of the profound mysteries of the Master’s doctrine, his heart, his holiness. Saint Paul presents to us the whole Christ: Way, Truth and Life. He amalgamated and adopted the most disparate elements in the service of an Idea, a Life, a Being: Christ... to the point of saying: ‘It is no longer I who live, it is Christ who lives in me!’ (Gal 2:20).”

During the First General Chapter of the Society of Saint Paul (1957), Father Alberione synthesized the experience of forty years: “The Pauline Congregation wants to live and give Jesus Christ in his entirety as Saint Paul interpreted, lived and gave him to the whole world; and all this under the protection and in imitation of Mary Queen of the Apostles and of all apostolates, since she gave to the world Jesus Master Way, Truth and Life.”

He continued: “Saint Paul’s spirit can be perceived from his life, his Letters and his apostolate. He is always alive in the Church’s dogma, morals, worship and organization. The secret of greatness and richness is to model oneself on God, living in Christ. Thus our way of thinking is always clear: to live and work in the Church and for the Church; to insert ourselves like wild olives onto the living

olive tree, the Christ-Eucharist; to nourish ourselves on every phrase of the Gospel, according to the spirit of Saint Paul."

In another passage Alberione literally places the Gospel in the hand of the apostle Paul as though the Gospels were already a book at that time: "Saint Paul took the Gospel, meditated on it deeply and adapted it to the world, to the needs of his times. He applied it like a preacher does when he adapts its language to his listeners. This is how we are to apply the Gospel to our times."

The Founder also wrote: "The letters of Paul are a (precious) commentary on the Gospel." And he emphasized: "We use the term Pauline spirit to say that Saint Paul interpreted and presented the Gospel to us in his sermons and in his letters."

It was not by accident that he chided – almost reproved – those Paulines who, with the excuse of some difficulty with the language, left aside the letters of the Apostle and limited themselves to reading the Gospels and Acts. He told the Pauline sisters: "Those who read Saint Paul, who familiarize themselves with him, gradually acquire a spirit similar to his. (Sisters), even if we do not understand Saint Paul's letters, let us read them just the same. A child does not understand (immediately) what his mother says to him, and yet he repeats the words with her." "At first sight, Saint Paul appears somewhat difficult; if you tell me that you find it hard to understand (his letters), I repeat: say to Saint Paul: 'Father, explain yourself to us.'"

How eloquent is this highly inspired text that we find in a homily from 1934: "Live on, Paul! It is necessary that Saint Paul live. This means that he must live with his wisdom, his zeal; that he must live with his spirit. We must aspire to this: To revive his spirit in ourselves; to learn his wisdom; to revive and reawaken his most sublime zeal as an Apostle. Live on, Paul! Live again with your wisdom, your spirit, zeal, fervor and holiness. Live on and enlighten darkened minds. Live on and sustain ardent apostles in the struggles of our times. Live and bring your heights and contemplation to souls who love the most intimate communion with God! Live as you lived in Saint Mark. Live as you lived in Saint Titus. Live as you lived in Saint Timothy. Live as you lived in Saint Luke. Live as you lived in Saint Thecla! May the spirit of these saints live again in our midst. Yes, live in all of us, Saint Paul."

"Untiring traveler, founder of churches throughout the world, inflamer of hearts: this is the figure of Saint Paul, whose heart was the heart of Christ: 'The heart of Paul was the heart of Christ.'"

This definition of the Apostle leads us to emphasize what Alberione came to call "Paul's radical Christ-centeredness." "Jesus Christ is the lens or the prism which Saint Paul used to study all the aspects of the life of man, and resolve all the problems of Christian life."

In Philippians 3:12 we find the most intense definition that Paul gives of himself: "Christ [Jesus] has made me his own." This would be better translated: I have been grasped/seized by Christ, as one grips a sword. The Apostle with the sword – as we so often see him pictured in iconography – is certainly the sign of his entire vocation: a man, an apostle "grasped" by Christ.

Paul experienced his vocation as a gratuitous, sudden and unexpected event completely attributable to the love of Christ: "Now that you know God – or, rather, are known by God" (Gal 4:9). The verb "know" indicates much more than intellectual activity; it involves one's entire existence.

Alberione's admiration for Saint Paul was born from the synthesis between love for Christ and love for the apostolic mission that the Apostle lived fully and which the Founder did not hesitate to recommend to his communities as a model to imitate. And Paul, "a servant of Christ... set apart for the proclamation of God's good news" (Rom 1:1), could not conceive of himself except in function of the mission received: "For proclaiming the good news is not my boast, since I do so under compulsion – woe to me if I do not proclaim the good news!" (1Cor 9:16). He would feel at fault if he did not carry this out: "For I am obligated to both Greeks and barbarians, to the wise and foolish alike" (Rom 1:14).

Indeed, it is not too bold to say that the following prayer could have issued from the lips of Paul; and we should not be surprised to find it in the Founder's writings. This passage was in the Pastoral Letter that the then Archbishop of Milan, Giovanni Battista Montini, wrote for Lent to his Milan church in 1955: "O Christ, our only mediator, you are necessary for us: to reach communion with God our Father; to become the Father's adopted children with you, who are the only Son and our Lord; to be regenerated in the Holy Spirit. You are necessary, our only true master of the hidden and indispensable truths of life, in order for us to know our being and destiny and the way to reach it. You are necessary, O our Redeemer, for discovering our misery and healing it; for understanding the concept of good and evil and the hope for holiness; for deploring

our sins and for receiving pardon. You are necessary, O first-born brother of the human race, for finding again the true reasons for the brotherhood of men, the foundations of justice, the treasures of charity and the highest value of peace. You are necessary, O great patient of our sorrows, for comprehending the meaning of suffering and giving it a value of expiation and redemption. You are necessary, O conqueror of death, for freeing us from desperation and denial and for having certainties that will never be betrayed. You are necessary to us, O Christ."

Passion is the response of those who feel themselves to be loved with the love of predilection, and who set out on the journey to follow more closely the footsteps of Jesus Christ, even to the most extreme consequences: "But whatever I had gained from all this, I have come to consider it loss...for the sake of the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have cast everything aside" (Phil 3:7-8).

The passion that springs from a heart deeply in love, like that of Paul, is what gives meaning and visibility to what one is and does. From this flows his untiring zeal and the constant decision to carry out fully the mission entrusted to him regardless of the cost in sacrifice, suffering, fatigue, misunderstanding and death.

Paul's entire life was founded on love for Christ, or rather on the awareness of being loved by Christ and chosen for this reason. The mission flows from this: a heart that is in love radiates the joy of the Gospel – to announce Jesus Christ who has loved and loves us.

This conviction is what fed Paul's missionary energy: "For I am not ashamed of the good news – it is God's saving power for everyone who believes, first the Jew and then the Greek as well" (Rom 1:16). In fact, he suffered and struggled for it (Col 1:29). "To this end I toil and strive, and Christ's mighty energy is at work in me" even in prison (cf. Col 4:3, 10, 18): "At the same time, pray for us, that God may open for us a door of opportunity to proclaim the mystery of Christ, for the sake of whom I am in prison"; "My fellow prisoner Aristarchus greets you"; "Remember my chains!"

Thus, we could affirm that for Paul the mission is essentially defined as witness, that is: only the life of one who lives in Christ is capable of generating life in his other members.

The authentic missionary spirit has always been characterized by urgency and anxiety. It has always been a synthesis of passion and action. We can think of Christ who had compassion on the multi-

tude, who was almost “devoured” by the crowd, in a growing gift of himself for his preaching and for the care of the sick, until his surrender when he abandoned himself to death out of love.

We can think of Paul, energetically defined by that brief, unforgettable expression: “Woe to me if I do not proclaim the good news!” (1Cor 9:16). And in the same verse: “Proclaiming the good news is not my boast, since I do so under compulsion.” It was as though a force, a passion overwhelmed him and now coursed through his veins: the force and passion of the Gospel.

Like Paul, Father Alberione never ceased working for the Gospel. He followed in the footsteps of the great Apostle, sharing in his zeal right down to the details. It was precisely from Saint Paul’s letter to the Philippians – the *Magna Carta* of the Pauline project and missionary style – that the sons and daughters of Father Alberione drew two essential apostolic directives. The first is engraved in Latin on the cornice of the Temple of Saint Paul in Alba: “Constituted a defender of the Gospel.” The second was chosen as the title of a volume prepared in 1954, on the occasion of the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of foundation of the Pauline Family: “I strain ahead.”

From this is born the duty to dare the impossible in order to announce Christ: “The apostle of the editions must be like Saint Paul: with a great heart that embraces all of humanity, in untiring and heroic activity. He must learn from his model the art of becoming ‘all to all’.”

The central element of our identity is to be consecrated for the mission. The Pauline does not simply carry out the apostolate: he is an apostle. In other words: we communicate by being; we communicate by being what we are.

Our presence as Paulines and apostles is like yeast in the dough: we become a presence that communicates by giving itself, and by communicating defines itself, in our time and place of work, in the today of history.

If we had assigned this duty to ourselves, perhaps we could also decide to renounce it, as one could renounce a prestigious honor. But the duty was entrusted to us; and the Gospel must always occupy the highest place in our desires and our concerns.

In 1922, Father Alberione wrote: “The Divine Savior’s *go and teach all nations* is always the command of the Divine Master to preach to all peoples. In every age, this is vested in forms that are most suitable for new social conditions, for the rhythms of scientific prog-

ress, for the new life of humanity. And today it takes the form of the good press.”

In 1933, he further clarified this thought: “Just like spoken preaching, what is written or printed diffuses the Word of God, multiplying it so that it can reach everywhere, even where the spoken word cannot. This is according to the example of God himself, who gives us his divine Word in the 73 books of Sacred Scripture, and according to the example of the Church, which unites spoken preaching to printed preaching in every age.”

Paraphrasing Paul in his Letter to the Romans (15:20), we have to hold it as a point of honor not to announce the Gospel except where the name of Christ has not yet reached, so as to avoid building on the foundation of others.

Let us consider the anxiety for the salvation of everyone that led Father Alberione to express these intense thoughts: “It does not matter whether we use one means or another; the important thing is that there be ardent hearts and souls who want to pour out all their fullness into the hearts of people.” And in another place: “How many times do you ask yourself the great question: where is mankind heading, how is it moving, toward what goal is this humanity aiming, as it renews itself at least every century, if not more, on the face of the earth? Humanity is like a great river flowing into eternity. Will it be saved? Will it be lost forever?”

With regard to the media and the places where communication is born and carried out (from the most traditional media to social forums), it seems evident that it is not a question of choosing to participate or not. An individual might avoid them, but certainly not a large organization, and even less we, daughters and sons of Blessed Alberione, daughters and sons of the Apostle Paul. A computer network that today connects million of users, in exponential growth – where information circulates in real time and distances in physical space are annulled, a plaza, a great public square like the world, anarchic and chaotic and with innumerable possibilities for good and evil – how can this be ignored by those who are to diffuse the message of the Gospel?

There is no doubt that in order to respond today to our mission as evangelizers aimed at the masses, with the means of mass communications, we must develop our capacity to listen with an accelerated effort so as to discover the questions, the desires of the men and women of today, the process of professionalization so as not to

render our announcement fruitless, thus muting the Gospel, and the development of organizational validation so as not to lose opportunities.

But at the same time, and with the same determined effort, we must face and overcome the risk of impoverishing the faith motivations that are at the root of our apostolate. This is an impoverishment favored by the current culture, which dangerously lowers our missionary temperature, not just as generic missionaries, but missionaries "of" and "in" the world of communications.

It seems to me that this is a matter of the most risky confrontation and most stimulating challenge that we must face. In fact, we cannot evade either the commercial demands of our mission or its spiritual demands.

It is not licit to make a preferential choice between these two dimensions: we must assume them both with complete awareness.

This is how it was with Paul, whose missionary style included his docility to Him who asked him to change paths and start out in the mission. In this mission, Paul manifested a strong and decisive style, resistant to every adversarial attack, capable of avoiding obstacles, proud of his human prerogatives placed at the service of the Gospel, marked by the greatest generosity and maximum availability. He made himself a servant of everyone so as to win over the greatest number of people (cf. 1Cor 9:19).

For his part, Father Alberione insisted: "We must save the people of today because time is passing. It is useless to say: once things were not like this, or no one did these things! The souls of the past are already in heaven or hell. We must save the souls of today!"

The many points of contact between Alberione and Saint Paul can be condensed in two fundamental themes: the intransigent need to evangelize the world, and total openness to every occasion for making the Gospel reach all people. Father Alberione wrote in 1955: "Your office includes the boundaries of the whole world, that is, the number of people who are living on earth today." And in 1957, "All those we meet are creditors, creditors of the truth." He stressed: "The Apostle, more than ever today, must enlarge his mind and heart to 'love everyone and think of everyone.' He must work with the spirit of the Gospel, which is universality and mercy..., just like the spirit of the Apostle Saint Paul; always straining ahead toward the people who have still not received the light of Jesus Christ...."

That which characterized Paul's apostolic work was not the power and wisdom of this world, but the folly of the Cross and evangelical weakness.

"Jews ask for signs and Greeks look for wisdom, but we proclaim Christ crucified - a stumbling block for Jews and foolishness to Greeks" (1Cor 1:21-22); "...for God's foolishness is wiser than human wisdom, and God's weakness is stronger than human strength" (1Cor 1:25); "for when I am weak, that is when I am strong" (2Cor 12:10).

Aware of the weakness of the Catholic presence and of our own Congregation in the communications sector, Father Alberione recalled the biblical image of David before the giant Goliath. During a convention on cinematographic activity he said: "We are like Cinderella; we are truly the reduced gauge film." But he added: "Alongside the power of gold, of the dollar, of arms, of industrial associations, there is also the power of the goal we possess and the trust that we have in God. Let us keep in mind that David also went to combat Goliath, and the weapons of the two were so disproportionate! And who won? David, because the power of God was with him."

Even without great armaments, Alberione – and Paul, who was totally free and made himself a slave to all (cf. 1Cor 9:19) – was aware that our apostolate cannot renounce the freedom of movement and of speech. He wrote with extraordinarily expressive force in November 1956: "The new difficulties which today more than ever block our apostolate of the cinema will not run it aground, but will launch it into new conquests. We need not feel dismayed, but pray and focus on our independence of action in the Church, seeking to pass between the drops without getting wet and without getting mixed up. I don't know when or how, but we must have, and will surely have, freedom of action in the Church, because our mission requires it."

There is another point of contact between Paul's style and that of Alberione: the sense of work. Work for the Apostle is a source of sustenance and autonomy: "We labor and work with our own hands" (1Cor 4:12). "For you remember, brothers, how we labored and toiled – we worked night and day so we would not be a burden to any of you while we proclaimed God's good news" (1Thess 2:9).

The Apostle worked to preserve his autonomy and freedom, so that there would be no obstacles to announcing the Gospel. He

wrote: "We labor and work with our own hands" (1Cor 4:12). He even recalled this in his spiritual testament to the elders of Miletus: "you yourselves know that these hands of mine provided for my needs as well as for the needs of those who were with me. In every way possible I have shown you that we must help the weak by working hard like this, mindful of the words spoken by the Lord Jesus himself: 'It is more blessed to give than to receive'" (Acts 20:33 ff). And we cannot forget – even more so in our daily fatigue, right where we are called to work – the admonition of the Apostle: "anyone who refuses to work should not be allowed to eat" (2Thess 3:10).

Thus, work (along with prayer) is also the fundamental rule of the Pauline Family. Father Alberione was convinced that "in these apostolates a greater spirit of sacrifice is called for together with more profound piety. Frustrations, sacrifice of sleep and schedule, lack of funds, incomprehension on the part of many, spiritual dangers of every sort, shrewdness in the choice of means." And almost jokingly he added, "For the lazy, Pauline life is a big disgrace."

There is a summary of the theology of work in a footnote of our charismatic text, *Abundantes divitiæ*: "Redemptive work, apostolic work, tiring work. To expend in God's active service the whole of our strength, even our physical activity: is not this the way of perfection? Is not God pure Act? Are we not talking here of true religious poverty, that of Jesus Christ? Is it not work that pays homage to Jesus the Worker? Is there no obligation, even more so for religious, to comply with the duty to earn one's living? Was not this a rule that Saint Paul imposed on himself? Is it not only by fulfilling this social duty that the apostle can stand up to preach? Does this not make us humble? Is not the pen in the hand and the pen of the machine essential for the apostolate of the Pauline families? Is not work [synonymous with] well-being? Does it not save [us] from laziness and many [other] temptations? ...If Jesus Christ chose this path, was it not because it was one of the first points to be restored? Is not work a means of merit? If the Family works, does it not root its life in Christ under a basic point? (...) Hence the abundance of work introduced into the Pauline congregations. To vary one's occupations is itself a rest. Everyone to work! Moral, intellectual, apostolic, spiritual [work]."

Saint Paul is a teacher for every apostle of all times and places. But Father Alberione chose him as a model of the mission to the

gentiles, that is, of the authentic missionary who goes among non-Christians. Paul was chosen beforehand by Christ for this mission.

He reveals this in his writings with clear awareness: "Inasmuch then as I am an apostle to the Gentiles" (Romans 11:13). This conviction is expressed constantly at the beginning of his letters (Romans 1:1,5; 1Cor 1:1; 2Cor 1:1; Galatians 1:1; Ephesians 1:1; Col 1:1; 1Tim 1:1; Titus 1:1-3). He believed that he was invested and charged to bring the Gospel of Jesus Christ to the gentiles. Like Peter was entrusted with announcing the Gospel to the circumcised, the same Lord entrusted Paul with the mission to the uncircumcised (Gal 2:7-9).

Paul began with the uncircumcised. The first missionary journey he undertook was to Arabia immediately after his conversion. We were reminded of this by the Spanish theologian and biblicist Ariel Álvarez Valdés, who noted that normally this is not mentioned when someone lists apostolic goals. It is the Apostle himself who tells us: "But when the One Who set me apart from my mother's womb and called me through His grace was pleased to reveal His Son to me so that I might proclaim his good news to the Gentiles, I did not immediately consult with flesh and blood, nor did I go up to Jerusalem to see those who were apostles before me. Instead, I went off to Arabia and later returned to Damascus. Three years later I went up to Jerusalem to get to know Cephas, and I stayed with him for fifteen days" (Gal 1:15-18).

And in the Letter to the Romans: "God has given me the grace to be a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles and to perform a priestly service for God's good news, so that the offering of the Gentiles may be acceptable to God and sanctified by the Holy Spirit" (Rom 15:16).

Father Alberione had a similar awareness: "The world needs a new and profound evangelization" because the crowds are deserting Christian faith and life, and the press has a determining importance in this mass exodus. We have to abandon the sterile reaction of "useless complaints" and have the courage "to leave aside complacency and launch into action," "come out of the sacristies to go where life pulsates": because "the press and the periodical are now creating thoughts, sentiments, the person. They form public opinion, which is the governing, true, only and absolute sovereign of the society today." It is necessary to "oppose press with press," "the good press with the bad press."

So as not to suffocate vitality and evangelical freshness, or compromise the prophetic force of the announcement, Father Alberione with reckless generosity (sometimes it is necessary to “demolish” the monastery...) “set out into the deep” to reach the women and men of today as they are and where they are, and not as and where we would wish them to be.

To avoid disregarding these expectations, a precise choice must be made. The apostolic method of the new evangelization cannot do other than start off by listening to the receivers: “Know the souls, know their needs, study their tendencies, and study how to approach souls, how to multiply the good, which kind of organizations are necessary. All of this is the practical part which for you is the pastoral part. Everything in right proportion.” These are the words of Father Alberione.

But neither can we risk abdicating Christ’s mandate, limiting ourselves to cultivating the group of practicing believers - cultivating them in devotional gardens - or limiting ourselves to feeding those who are already full (as Father Leonardo Zega used to say). And then, unfortunately, for the rest of society (the far greater majority of those who do not have faith or religious practice), reducing our activity to an extremist defense of a stunted list of non-negotiable values.

Another fundamental characteristic in Paul’s missionary activity was team work. His mission was not the work of only one person. He surrounded himself with collaborators (men and women), whom he then delegated as formators and guides (including women) in his various communities.

This is a point that brings us to highlight the communitarian and organizational perspective of our specific mission.

Father Alberione was unequivocal: “The apostolate of social communication demands a strong group of writers, technicians and propagandists. They must all work together, just like the musicians who present a beautiful opera. How much willpower and disconnected, disorganized energies are exhausted in desires, attempts and delusions! It is necessary that everyone together prepare the bread of the spirit and of the truth.”

He further insisted: “It is necessary that we understand each other. The propagandist says what is needed and the author should be ready; the technician hears the suggestion of the propagandist and at the same time should allow himself to be directed by the

author, so that from the union of everyone we can give what is truly useful for souls, in the most suitable form, the form that is more advantageous for greater diffusion."

In explaining the meaning of Pauline communitarian life, he specified: "'The common life' is born from the apostolate and is in view of the apostolate. This characteristic of a society directed toward a goal includes the common good of the members; but at the same time, the observance of conventual life has its own organization which takes this into account: 'We are at the service of souls,' religious-apostles."

The communitarian perspective is above all a demand of our specific mission, as our Chapter Documents of 1971 energetically affirm: "We must not forget that to completely reach the apostolic goals of our mission is the concern of the Congregation as such and not necessarily of each of its members. Each member reaches the specific goal through the Congregation, inserted in its organism, in the community, in the apostolic group where he lives, prays and works. Because of an insufficient reflection on this aspect, many could pass their life pursuing an abstract unreachable ideal and as a consequence, could find themselves frustrated in regard to a point that is so vital for their own vocation, contrary to its profound meaning which is the community perspective and not the individualistic. This principle, in practice, signifies that in the field of social communication few remain in the spot light of public opinion and that these few must count on some very diligent experts who are usually unknown, and on a numerous and anonymous rear-guard of generous souls who collaborate with prayer, suffering, teaching, organization, administration and even the most humble services. We must add that the communitarian perspective, with the conclusion just mentioned, does not refer only to each individual of the Congregation, but also to every specialized sector of the apostolate, which obviously reaches the specific goal of the institute by carrying out the work or the mission to a particular public that has been assigned to them."

"Organization" is a key word in Alberionian language. Just in the brief book *Abundantes divitiæ* it occurs at least ten times. He spoke of it insistently when the new foundations needed to be organically linked on the national and international levels: "We must give great importance to organization... Organize the good. Organizations are a great force. One person alone can become a saint, but by himself he

is only a twig. If, however, instead of one twig many branches are tied together, then this becomes a force. Unfortunately, a person alone in our times will be eaten alive. We must always keep in mind: strengthen ourselves by uniting! This goes for the press as well as the cinema; it goes for all the Catholic forces."

"The apostle," writes Father Alberione, "must learn from his model, Paul, the art of 'being all to all,' with that flexibility of adaptation that appears in his various ways of treating the people according to their physical, intellectual, moral, religious and civil conditions. Some times it will be necessary to re-cloth oneself with the depths of charity and mercy – as the Apostle of the gentiles demonstrated in welcoming Onesimus or, in the sweetest elevations, as with the virgin Thecla; at other times instead by using strong exhortations such as at Corinth; or the elevated form of preaching before the Areopagus, or with the simplicity he used in speaking to Philemon. And the apostle of the editions will not find great difficulty in this, if he knows how to discover the secret of Saint Paul's adaptation: charity, 'charity in everything.'"

This is a mandate for the Church in every age, which is called to proclaim the Gospel in concrete situations, to the men and women of today, by removing uncertainties, hesitation, and with no discrimination or exclusion. It means recovering the sense of the true mission, which is that of announcing a God who welcomes the unwelcome, a God who listens, a God who sees (the open eyes of Jesus are more important than the closed eyes of the man born blind, for example), a Samaritan God who bent over the road going toward Jericho.

The "Gospel we have received" (cf. 1Cor 11:23 and 15:1) is the criteria. The Gospel is the norm. We may not and must not – to use one of the most eloquent images of the apostle – chain the Word of God (2Tim 2:9), which is not the property, and much less the exclusive possession, of the one who announces it.

Thus we must return to the biblical sources of the Gospel and to its historical witnesses. Is this not obvious? Ancient things are to be re-discovered (and others must be helped to rediscover them) so as to be able to assume attitudes and personal and apostolic choices which become patient stitching, dialogue, hope, the work of peace and of justice.

From this comes the need for a prophetic function and also for a critical function.

Paul never held back when the situations required him to take a position. He was not afraid to confront Peter about a subject regarding which he did not share Peter's actions and his thought: "But when Cephas came to Antioch I opposed him to his face, because he was clearly wrong" (Gal 2:11).

In summary, communicating "opportunistly and inopportunistly" cannot be foreign to our apostolic charism: proclaim the word, insist upon it whether it is convenient or inconvenient" (2Tim 4:2). Precisely. The Bible is all crisscrossed with appeals "not to keep quiet," to "cry out with force," and for us today, to be sentinels who lacerate the silence of indifference, which is the profound ulcer of our times.

Woe to us, Bishop Tonino Bello would warn, if we let ourselves be persuaded by all those aphorisms and popular sayings that exalt silence – "silence is golden," "if we keep silent we never make a mistake" – culpably forgetting the Christian virtue of boldness. From this flowed his invitation not to tremble in the face of threats, not to trim off parts of the Word, not to take "discounts off the cover price when the rights of God are subordinated to the interests of numberless idols that presume to take his place."

I'll leave the word to this unforgettable and courageous bishop of Molfetta: "The apostles were prohibited many times from speaking of Jesus. But in the face of a command of this sort, even though they were aware of the tortures they might have to undergo for their disobedience, they proclaimed the truth with courage. 'They announced the Kingdom of God and taught those things regarding the Lord Jesus with all frankness and without impediment.' This is the final verse of the Acts of the Apostles. With all frankness. With outspokenness, in other words. Without toning down the goals in order to live in peace. Without muting the irrepressible strength of the truth. Without the contrived cunning of the preoccupation to save one's skin. Without the stratagems of sneaking away during times of trial, out of fear of committing oneself too much."

We could paraphrase Saint Ignatius of Loyola who affirmed that he would be worried about the Company on the day they were no longer the object of contestation and persecution. To his confreres who asked what he meant by this, he responded: if we no longer cause discomfort, it is because we are failing in our mission.

"Paul teaches us the necessity of going into the frontiers, even the most difficult: not to content ourselves with our own gardens,

but to also face the open sea, the places apparently most hostile." Bishop Gianfranco Ravasi reminded us of this in an interview. Today if we want to really be apostles in the culture of communication, we cannot avoid immersing ourselves in it with courage and full availability, and with the creativity that marked Paul and Alberione.

Ours is a favorable time for daring to emerge from our closed environments and listen to the voice of the Lord in the signs of the times and places. It is time for discernment and creative fidelity which are the guarantee of a true re-foundation. "You are not obliged to complete your work, but you are not free not to begin to initiate it," the Talmud reminds us.

This is why the Divine Word (and "whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is gracious, if there is any excellence or anything praiseworthy," Phil 4:8) must resound throughout the computer arteries of the Internet, the channels of on-line virtual diffusion, the chat rooms and instant messaging, the social networks, MySpace and Facebook, podcasts, CD's, DVD's and so on; it must appear on television and cinema screens, through the sound waves of radio frequencies, in the press, in cultural and social events.

In this hour of grace we need to visit the future, to see where the Spirit is asking us to go. These times, where tensions and trials are not lacking, are also full of opportunities. They invite us to concentrate on the essentials of our life and our mission, so as to then go out meet the women and men of this time in which we are given to live.

There is an archetype to extract from the communicative style of the Gospels, like "narrated story, "narrated communication," incarnating the highest truths in the daily lives of the most humble people.

So, to continue with the communicative style I've used so far in this talk, and which is more in accord with the way one talks with brothers and indulgent friends, I want to conclude and therefore circumscribe my notes with a second apologue. I draw my inspiration from a note on a film theme from the writer, journalist and playwright Ennio Flaiano (his name is almost always accompanied by another adjective, "agnostic." Goodness!)

It seems to me that this could evoke various emphases which we have referred to and allow us to focus our attention on what is and

must be essential in our life as Christians, as sons and daughters of Paul, as disciples of Blessed Alberione and apostles in the culture of communication.

Flaiano imagined that Jesus returned to earth in our times. A message was spread through all the information networks and all the continents, advising everyone about an appointment for a kind of spiritual rave-party. The crowd was immense, from every language, people and nation. All the big networks had direct programming, conducted by the most prestigious anchormen; daily and weekly newspapers sent their best men. Armed with the most recent technological novelties, bloggers put images and comments on the web.

From that overwhelming crowd one cry went up, calling out for themselves and for others: miracles, miracles. "Heal me." "Make me see." "Save my son from death." And the miracles occurred: a paralyzed person began to walk, a blind person began to see; with just five loaves and five fish everyone was fed. "Another miracle, another miracle." Some neurotics were healed and even a priest was converted. "More, more," the crowd continued to scream.

In the midst of this crowd which was never satisfied, a man and woman made their way. The man was carrying a child in his arms: their only daughter who was seriously ill. No one paid attention to them. Finally they arrived before Jesus, to whom everyone was still crying out for more miracles. "What do you want me to do?" Jesus asked. And the father, gazing at the child responded: "I do not ask that you heal her but that you love her." Jesus said, "Truly I say to you, this is why I have come. This is the only miracle I know how to do, the greatest miracle." Jesus bent over the child and kissed her, and then he disappeared in a glorious light.

The crowd dispersed little by little, commenting on the miracles, as the journalists challenged one another in recounting them with the most astonishing terms, even creating caricatures. But not one spoke of the stories, the anguish, the desolation of those millions of men and women touched by the gratuitous love of Jesus. Neither did they speak or write about the greatest miracle, the only miracle that Jesus came to do.

# THE MISSION OF THE PAULINE FAMILY: TO BE SAINT PAUL LIVING TODAY\*

Regina Cesarato, PDDM

## Introduction

I am happy to share with you the values regarding Saint Paul which are written in our “Pauline” life, so as to witness to them in the Church and in dialogue with culture.

I am convinced that this International Seminar on Saint Paul is a true grace because if, on the one hand, it has led us to revisit the life and writings of the Apostle, founded on a solid exegetical base, on the other hand it has imposed on us a work of hermeneutics. That is, to confront the realities lived in our communities with the ideal proposed by our Founder, Blessed James Alberione: to be, as the Pauline Family, *Saint Paul living today*.

I will tackle the theme entrusted to me by mirroring above all the vital experience of Father Alberione, Founder of the Pauline Family, in that of the Apostle. I hope that the fruit which matures in this hermeneutic comparison, with all of its consequences, will make us co-responsible in promoting the development of the charismatic heritage we received as a gift, for the good of the Church and humanity.

By reason of the charism and our belonging to the Pauline Family, we are in fact called, at this moment of history, to make Saint Paul live again: *as apostle and mystic, that is, as a living Gospel of Jesus Christ!*<sup>1</sup>

According to the desire of Fr. Alberione, the Pauline Family should therefore manifest itself today as the “essence” of the values lived by the apostle Paul.

Due to the time limit of my presentation, I have chosen to emphasize just one of the many possible approaches to the theme—one of vital importance—and that is, the Pauline *vocation as grace* and as call to the *apostolate*. These two aspects are inseparable.

The Pauline Family is called to be the *Gospel of Jesus Christ* incarnated in the third millennium and communicated from within

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\* Translation by Sr. Raymond Gerard, FSP.

<sup>1</sup> F. Rossi De Gasperis, *Paolo di Tarso evangelo di Gesù* (Roma: Lipa, 1998).

the culture. Paul *apostle and mystic*, man of synthesis and integrality, advanced into all the frontiers of communication of the Gospel affirming of himself: "For me, to live is Christ" (Phil 1:21). Even more: "I have been crucified with Christ! It is no longer I who live, it is Christ who lives in me! And this life I live now in the flesh, I live through faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself up for me" (Gal 2:19b-20). In fact: "(God) was pleased to reveal His Son to me so that I might proclaim his good news to the Gentiles" (Gal 1:16).

Father Alberione also arrived at this vital synthesis and indicated to us, his daughters and sons, that the "essence of the Pauline spirit" is realized in the encounter with Jesus Christ as it was lived, presented and communicated to the world by Saint Paul.<sup>2</sup>

## 1. Before Damascus

Who was Saul of Tarsus? What do we know about him, and what type of knowledge do we have of him who Fr. Alberione defined as "father, teacher, exemplar and founder" (*AD*, 2) of the Pauline Family? The answer to this question is fundamental for knowing *how* to be "Paul living today."

It is not for me to narrate his life here, but I will recall some features of his personality in relation to the perspective chosen:

- a) *before Damascus*
- b) *during the meeting on the Way to Damascus*
- c) *after the unexpected meeting with the Risen One.*

*Saul* (Acts 7:58); *Paul* (Acts 13:9) was born at *Tarsus in Cilicia* around 5 AC (Acts 9:11; 21:39; 22:3). Tarsus was an important center of Greek culture situated about 15 kilometers from the Mediterranean Sea. It had a very busy port and a Roman road which favored the connection between East and West.

He was a *Roman citizen* (Acts 16:37; 22:25) by birth (Acts 22:28) with the possibility of a brilliant career and a secure job as a producer of tents and other leather goods (Acts 18:3). In Judaism, this occupation was learned from one's father, starting at thirteen years of age, with a rigid discipline that occupied the youth from morning until night.

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<sup>2</sup> G. ROATTA, *Spirito paolino. San Paolo e la Famiglia Paolina nel pensiero di Don Giacomo Alberione* (Roma: Società San Paolo, 2009) 36-52.

As a Jew of the *Diaspora*, he knew the Greek culture (cf. Acts 17:28). Coming from a well-to-do family, he had the opportunity to be educated at *Jerusalem* (Acts 22:3; 23:16; 26:4-5) at the feet of Gamaliel, a disciple and nephew of the great Hillel (Acts 22:3). Irreprehensible student and *Pharisee* with regard to observance of the Torah (Phil 3:6; Acts 23:6-8) and all the oral tradition (*Halakah* and *Haggadah*), Saul followed the *Halakah* of the Pharisees (which applied the Torah to the details of daily life) with a fanatical zeal for the paternal traditions (Gal 1:13-14; 2Cor 11:21-22; Phil 3:4-6).

Saul, guardian of the cloaks (Acts 7:58), was among those who approved the stoning of Stephen (Acts 8:1). Stephen's interior freedom began to disturb Saul, who became an unwilling eye-witness of the luminosity of Stephan's face as he pardoned his murderers and consigned himself into the hands of the Father, just like Jesus with whom Stephan identified as a disciple.

The Pharisee Saul was allergic to Jesus, who the Law considered cursed because he was hung on a *cross* (Jn 19:7; Gal 3:13). Saul persecuted excessively and devastated (*kat'hyperbolén*) the WAY (*halakah*) of the disciples of Jesus (Acts 9:2; 22:5; 26:12; 1Cor 15:9; Phil 3:6; 1Tim 1:13; Gal 1:13).

In his letters, the Apostle confirms that before his encounter with Christ on the way to Damascus, he was a Pharisee, zealous in sustaining the traditions of the Fathers, (2Cor 11:21-22; Phil 3:4-6), and as such he considered it his duty to work actively against the Name of Jesus the Nazarene; he behaved as a violent persecutor (Gal 1:13-14; 1Tim 1:13), coherent in his faith and life.

## 2. Saul's encounter with Jesus, the Crucified and Risen One

The situation of Saul the Pharisee changed unexpectedly and in an unexplainable way, on the road to *Damascus* (Gal 1:23).

Paul's vocation was an extraordinary event for the Christian community of the first generations and of all times. Saul, the fierce persecutor of the disciples of Jesus—that is, of those who followed his WAY (*halakah* Cf. Acts 9)—was dazzled by the blazing light of the glorious Christ on the road to Damascus and became not only a *disciple* but an *apostle*.

In the Acts of the Apostles, St. Luke repeats the story of Paul's vocation three times (Acts 9; 22; 26), emphasizing its importance for the life of the Church.

Luke's first account is not just of Paul's conversion, but already of his apostolic vocation, and Saul is designated as *the vessel chosen by God to bring the Name of Christ to the Gentiles and their kings and before the sons of Israel* (cf. At 9:15; 22:15; 26:15-18). From these accounts we can already see that, according to the evangelist Luke, the conversion and apostolic vocation of Paul are strictly united.

In his letters, Paul confirms what is narrated in Acts, without repeating the story already known by the community. He said: "I am not even worthy to be called an apostle, because I persecuted God's church" (1Cor 15:9).

The Apostle insists also on the fact that the risen Christ appeared to him, and this meeting was the basis of his apostolic vocation: "Last of all he appeared to me as well, to one born at the wrong time, as it were, for I am the least of the apostles, not even worthy to be called an apostle..." (1Cor 15:8-9); and again with a challenging tone: "Am I not free? Am I not an apostle? Have I not seen Jesus our Lord?" (1Cor 9:1).

The apparition of the Lord Jesus is strictly connected with his apostolic vocation, and the Christians told one another: "the one who persecuted us is now proclaiming the faith he once tried to destroy" (Gal 1:23). It is clear that a profound change occurred in him: the persecutor came to be called an apostle! This surprising feature characterized Paul's vocation and is the fundamental feature of every vocation which is always a surprising event, even when it comes about without exceptional happenings, because every vocation—Paul's, Fr. Alberione's and ours—is a *work of God*, humanly unexplainable.

In fact, the normal way for Saul would have been to continue along the lines of his temperament and according to the formation he received at the feet of the Rabbi Gamaliel—proud to declare himself "blameless as to righteousness under the Torah" (Phil 3:6). The Pharisee Saul could have continued in his attachment to the Law of Moses and all its observances, in conformity with his violent temperament.

His apostolic vocation led him to admit the contrary and head in the opposite direction: instead of blocking the faith in Christ he became its most zealous preacher; instead of proclaiming the privileges of the observant Jews, he opened the treasures of the faith to the pagans.

All of this was the fruit of pure grace. The about face was the work of God who had chosen a “blasphemous and violent persecutor” (1Tim 1:13), in order to make of him an apostle—an absolutely gratuitous initiative of the love of God (1Cor 1:26-28).

The *Risen Christ appeared to him*: there is a strict connection between this apparition and his vocation (*kalein*) as an apostle. In the Pauline Letters the action of calling is always referred to God. “The One Who set me apart from my mother’s womb and called me through His grace was pleased to reveal His Son *to me* so that I might proclaim his good news to the Gentiles” (Gal 1:16). The divine action of revelation *is interior*, even if the event has an external aspect as Luke (not Paul) recounted in Acts. God made the light of Christ shine in the heart of Paul, like the light in the darkness at the time of creation (2Cor 4:6).

The verb form used by Paul indicates that this was a blazing *revelation* (concerning Peter, see Mt 16:17): only God can reveal his Only Begotten Son. Every Christian vocation is an action of the Father who places the person in a profound relationship with his Son, in the Holy Spirit.

Saul was introduced into the Trinitarian Life, a knowledge which begins with *personal communion*: “Last of all he appeared to me as well, to one born at the wrong time” (1Cor 15:7-9); “Am I not an apostle? Have I not seen Jesus our Lord?” (1Cor 9:1). The *apostolic mission* corresponds to the internal revelation, “so that I might *proclaim his good news* to the Gentiles” (Gal 1:16), a victory of love for everyone. The Gentiles, too, are admitted in Christ Jesus to form the same body, to be participants in the promise (Eph 3:6-8).

This presupposes a *personal relationship* with Christ: grasped by Christ (Phil 3:12), he runs to grasp the prize with completely different values: “I consider everything to be loss for the sake of the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord” (Phil 3:7-8). It was a passionate adherence to the person of Christ who will lead him to say, when he is older, “It is no longer I who live, it is Christ who lives in me!” (Gal 2:20).

The trust that God has in him corresponds to the sense of *responsibility* of the Apostle, who is father and mother of the communities (1Thess 2:7). The Gospel was entrusted to him by God (1Thess 2:4; Gal 2:7; 1Tim 1:11; Titus 1:3), and Paul seeks to please God alone “who is able to discern what is in our hearts” (1Thess 2:4; 2:3-6).

Paul has entered into freedom of spirit through a journey of gradual expropriation of himself, of his privileges as a Pharisee and even in his way of preaching Christ. It is a liberty that is not arbitrary or presumptuous, but a sense of absolute and total belonging as a slave and as a servant of Christ, and thus, freedom from all human opinions. In this sense, freedom becomes a most rigorous form of service: "You have been called to freedom, brothers—just do not let your freedom become an opportunity for the flesh. Serve (literally, be *slaves*) of one another through love" (Gal 5:13).

### 3. Paul's transfiguration: apostle and mystic

As we contemplate God's action in Paul of Tarsus as "Gospel of Jesus, the crucified Messiah made glorious Lord through the resurrection from the dead" (cf. Acts 2:36; Rom 1:1-4),<sup>3</sup> and as we consider the experience on the road to Damascus, let us pay attention to the *questions* that Saul addresses to the Lord, who erupted into his life,<sup>4</sup> and to the *answers* he receives. "I fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to me, 'Saul! Saul! Why are you persecuting me?' 'Who are you, Lord?' I answered. The voice said to me, 'I am Jesus of Nazareth, whom you are persecuting!' ...So I said, 'What should I do, Lord?' And the Lord said to me, 'Get up and go to Damascus, and there you will be told everything you are to do'" (Acts 22:7-10).

The Damascus experience revealed to Saul how the Name, against which he fought in good faith, persecuting the disciples (cf. Acts 9:3-5; 13-14; 21, 26), was the Living One, forever the Lord of Glory who had thrown him down as his persecutor.

Once he saw and believed this, everything that Paul knew about Jesus from his preceding experience as a Pharisee was turned upside down and appeared completely different, in that blinding light. The consequences of this revolution of his mind, heart and life accumulated like the waters in an overflowing river.

The fact of the singular resurrection of Jesus, the Nazarene, was impressed on Saul on the road to Damascus with undoubtable clarity. As a Pharisee, he was more capable than many of the first disci-

<sup>3</sup> Cf. F. ROSSI DE GASPERIS, *Paolo di Tarso evangelo di Gesù*, 49-79.

<sup>4</sup> The two questions of Saul are inserted into the context of a personal call of the Apostle according to the biblical style of prophetic vocations: cf. Gal 1:15-17 with Isa 6; Jer 1:4-10.

ples and perhaps even more than the Twelve, of understanding its full meaning. If Jesus has risen, it means that the era has begun of the Life which will never die; that victory over death – the ultimate enemy (1Cor 15:26) – is annulled and that its empire has begun to decline (1Cor 15:54-58). Jesus has in fact arisen, to live forever.

Paul's meeting with the gloriously living Jesus obliged him to accept facts which he previously believed he had to discard and even combat against. However, once these facts were accepted, Saul, in his awareness as a Pharisee, possessed an entire accumulation of knowledge that could open up to him the profound meaning of those facts. The reality of Jesus became an *event* for him, the Event to be embraced as primary and absolutely conditioning and determining for his entire Hebrew and Pharisaic faith.

From the men with whom he had been in contact up to that moment (in the Sanhedrin and within the Pharisaic party), Saul had received the conviction that Jesus the Nazarene, was NOT the Messiah Lord. Paul was persecuting him in his disciples, while this very Jesus knew him by name (Acts 9:4; 22:7; 26:14), and Saul was already within the power of his love. The era during which Paul entered on the road to Damascus, and which becomes also, according to each person's way, the model of the condition of every man and woman of the New Alliance, is the post-Messianic and pre-parusiatic time in human history, both for the Jews and for the Gentiles. For this reason it inspires an urgent, consequent moral (cf. 1Cor 7:17-40; 1Thess 4:13 – 5:1; and also Mt 22:23-33; Mark 12:18-27; Luke 20:27-40).

This hour was predicted in all the Scriptures as the time in which the final era of the history of the covenant between YHWH and Israel would begin. After many renewals of the covenant throughout the centuries of its own history, the community of the first disciples of Jesus, made up of devout and zealous Israelites, became aware that it was entering into and living, through faith and the following of Jesus the Messiah, into the final era of the history of Israel. The Jesus event signaled for them the initial fulfillment of the last renewal of the economy of the covenant (with Abraham and the patriarchs; at Sinai; with David, etc.): that new covenant of the last times, which was already known and experienced by Israel returned from exile and prophesied especially by Jeremiah and Ezekiel.

A renewed theology of the Torah is connected with the implications evoked by the Name of Jesus, only Son of the Father, who

made him Lord and Messiah with power through the resurrection from the dead; it is connected, too, with the eschatological awareness of the times regarding the nations, inaugurated by Jesus' manifestation and consigned to the Church as a mission to carry out in history.

This position of Paul is comprehensible not outside of, but within, the Jewish and Pharisaic tradition. The possibility offered by the Mosaic Torah, to assure Israel's communion with the Lord God by making Israel walk according to YHWH (Gen 17:1), was fulfilled in the observance of all the commandments and precepts of the Lord (the "ten words" and the 613 *mitzvot* [blessings and duties]: 248 positive and 365 negative).

The Christological experience that Paul lived in his encounter with the risen Jesus revealed (Gal 1:12) that in Christ is found the solution to the Hebrew problem of communion with God through the Spirit, which up to then was entrusted to observance of the Torah. The last page of the Scriptures does not induce us to tear up the preceding pages; the light of midday does not obscure that of dawn. The arrival of the final stage of God's design does not make the intermediary stages disappear. They were traversed before the end stage and contain the conditions for reaching it.

Thus Paul discovered the Torah as a teacher which leads the person to Christ, to be justified by faith (in him). The observance of the works of the Torah is the fruit of an obedience of the person to the teacher, while awaiting the arrival of the final and true Master (Gal 3:19-29).

Our awareness, with regard to its contents, is not the final source of our behavior. It is, and must always remain, the awareness of disciples conformed as closely as possible to their Master, the Messiah and Lord Jesus Christ (cf. Rom 8:28-30). He is our living, oral Torah, that is, the interpretation of the written Torah that the Father calls us to become, through his Spirit. Prolonged contemplation of the risen person of the Master, nourished by the attentive and diligent reading and listening to all the Scriptures, especially the Four Gospels and Pauline Letters, aims to make each of us and the entire Pauline Family a *fifth living gospel* which fulfills our life in Christ Jesus. These are the "saints" of the Christian Church and of the Pauline Family, because in the Son they are conformed to the Holy One, by virtue of his Spirit: 1Cor 4:16; 11:1; 1Thess 1:6. To be-

lieve in the Son means to give ourselves to him in a passionate, unconditional and definitive discipleship.

As disciples in Jesus, we are committed throughout our entire existence to educate our mind and our heart, conforming ourselves to his mind and heart (in Hebrew *lev*: the free center of the person, where the freedom to offer oneself resides). This does not mean to copy this or that action of his, or repeat this or that word of his, but to receive his Spirit, who guides us to speak our words and carry out our actions—which should be actions and words of disciples and lovers of Jesus Christ. Our most intimate desire is that our conscience might be permeated by the Spirit of Jesus. This is the only true Christian liberty—freedom from every carnal concession (cf. Gal 5:13-26). We are committed to this with all the zeal that a Pharisee would employ in observance of the commandments of the Lord, to contemplate, love and identify ourselves with the mind, freedom and heart of Jesus Messiah and Son, as he is revealed to us in the Scriptures of the New Testament, according to the Spirit.

In fact, Paul the Apostle's experience, first at Damascus and then throughout his ministry, directs us toward a Christological content of his experience of God: "I have been crucified with Christ! It is no longer I who live, it is Christ who lives in me" (Gal 2:19-20). Precisely because Paul was a "mystic and apostle,"<sup>5</sup> Fr. Alberione took him as a model for himself and indicated him to the Pauline Family as *founder and father* in living the mystery of Christ and serving the Church, thus bringing us to a high level of Christian maturity.

#### 4. After Damascus

Paul's vocation as a *disciple and apostle* of Jesus Christ was manifested coherently until his martyrdom. Adhesion to Him who appeared to Paul on the Way to Damascus had enormous consequences for him, for the Church and for the peoples of the world.

Jesus Christ became his *halakah*, that is, his WAY, his rule of life, passing from an autonomous morality to a dialogic morality.

The fascination of *freedom* in Christ Jesus (Gal 5) and the experience of "he loved me and gave himself for me" led Paul to preach the Gospel gratuitously (1Cor 9:17-18). Paul became an employee

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<sup>5</sup> CH.-A. BERNARD, *San Paolo mistico e apostolo* (Cinisello Balsamo: San Paolo, 2000).

like a slave, working with his own hands (1Cor 4:12) day and night (1Thess 2:9; 2Thess 3:8) and accepted economic help only from the Philippians (Phil 4:5). He suffered hunger and nakedness (2Cor 11:27); he lived as an indigent (2Cor 6:10) and when it became necessary, he took up collections for the poor of Jerusalem (1Cor 16:1-4; Gal 2:10; Rom 15:25-28; Acts 24:27), building communion among the Christian communities. He founded Christian *communities*, wrote *letters* and made numerous *journeys* (app. 15,000 kilometers), thanks to the good Roman system of roads; every 30 kilometers (one day's journey) there was an inn.

His relations with the Christian communities were always "triangular": God—Paul—community. In Acts 20, Paul's farewell discourse at Ephesus, he made a synthesis of his life that we could adopt as a *program of Pauline life*. The new *halakah* (way) can be synthesized in charity, which is the fulfillment of the Torah (Rom 13:10).

The dynamic of apostolic charity conforms us to Christ, dying to ourselves and rising to new life in Him (2Cor 4:10ff; 13:4; Rom 6:3ff; Col 2:12-15; 3:1-3; Gal 2:20; Eph 2:1ff; Phil 2:5ff; 3:10-11, 18-21). In fact Christ, the "last Adam" (1Cor 15:45) is the definitive form of redeemed human nature (1Cor 15:21-22; Rom 5:12-21; Col 3:9-11; Eph 4:22-24).

But we will know "the power of his resurrection" only if we participate in "the fellowship of his sufferings and become conformed to his death" (Phil 3:10). This conforming to the Paschal Mystery of the Lord is the work of the Holy Spirit and becomes evident in the transformation of our existence, like a Liturgy of life, or apostolic mysticism which the Apostle speaks of in Romans 12:1-2.

## 5. The apostolate as a liturgy of life

In Galatians 1:15-16, St. Paul does a theological reading of his vocation which, as in the triple account of Acts, places his vocation in direct relation to his mission. Actually, God chose a *persecutor* to make of him an *apostle*. God chose what is weak to confound the strong (cf. 1Cor 1:26-28).

The *origin* of his vocation is God and belongs to his free decision, within a precise project: "When the One Who called me through His grace was pleased (*eudokesen*)" (Gal 1:15). The wondrous initiative of God's gratuitous love came from afar so that "all things work

together for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose" (Rom 8:28-30).

It was God who called Saul. In the Pauline letters, the subject of *kalein* (to call) is always God; Christ sent him to evangelize (mission), but the vocation is a call from God. In calling him, God "reserved him for himself." Saul is "*set apart*." God reserved Paul, placing him in a privileged relationship with God—like the victims chosen for sacrifice in the Temple (Ex 29), the Levites for liturgical service (Nm 8-11) and all the chosen people: "I have separated you from the other peoples to be mine" (Lev 20:26).

This special relationship with God carries with it a mission: *the divine action solicits a free response from the one called*. Like the prophets of the Old Testament:

- Jer 1:4-5: before I formed you in the womb, I knew you...
- Isa 49:1-6: From my mother's womb you called me; you spoke my name...

Paul felt called to enlighten the nations with the Gospel – *continuity with and going beyond* the Old Testament because this was not a call in "justice" (Isa 42:6) but by means of the *grace* manifested in Christ. It was a gratuitous and unmerited act of generosity, of the *Karis* of God. As a persecutor, Paul did not merit to be called and constituted an apostle (1Cor 15:9). It was a grace he received (1Cor 3:10).

Paul's vocation was born on the way to Damascus, as he said: "God was pleased to reveal His Son in me *so that I might proclaim his good news* to the Gentiles" (Gal 1:15. For Peter cf. Mt 16:17). It was not through flesh and blood, but through an interior revelation *in me*. It was a profound personal experience. Paul was enlightened interiorly, and he entered into an intimate relationship with Jesus: "For the God Who said, 'Out of the dark a light will shine,' has caused His Son to shine in me" (cf. 2Cor 4:6), like a new creation.

This internal revelation has a direct relationship with Paul's apostolic mission: "so that I might proclaim his good news to the Gentiles." *Being set apart* is not a matter of segregation, but is in line with the prophets. Saul is sent to announce the good news of Jesus, with whom he has a special rapport, by whom he has been grasped (Phil 3:12), and this will be Paul's only goal in his life as a disciple and apostle of the Lord.

The verb used by the Apostle—"to set apart," "to separate"—is meaningful in Paul's particular vocation. This is how he presented himself at the beginning of the Letter to the Romans: "Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle *set apart* for the proclamation of God's good news" (Rom 1:1). God *reserved Paul for himself* like the offerings and first fruits were reserved for God in the Temple liturgy.

In the Old Testament this verb often has a meaning connected with *worship* and was applied to victims chosen for sacrifice (Exodus 29:26-27), to the Levites who were set apart for liturgical worship (Num 8:11) and to the whole chosen people: "You shall be holy to me; for I the Lord am holy, and *I have separated you* from the other peoples to be mine" (Lev 20:26).

Paul was removed from the common way of life to be introduced into a special relationship with God. However, the context makes it clear that this was not a segregation, because the Apostle's election carried with it the *mission* to introduce others, especially the pagans, into the same relationship of covenant with God in Christ Jesus.

Paul's vocation, though, should not be seen in an "administrative" perspective as though God assigned him a *function* for the good of others. Rather, it must be understood as a personal, internal grace which then made possible a mission addressed to other persons. It was a witness, a liturgy of life that required a commitment of the whole person springing from an experience of personal and deep relationship with Christ. Paul received "in himself" the revelation of the Son of God and was introduced into an intimate rapport with him, to the point of complete conformation to his mystery. In fact, he himself affirmed: "For the God who said, 'Out of the dark a light will shine,' has caused His light to shine in our hearts to reveal the knowledge of God's glory in Christ's face" (2Cor 4:6). God made the light of Christ shine in the heart of Paul, that is, that place which in biblical anthropology indicates the seat of interiority, freedom and conscious choice.

For this reason, there is a profound connection between the internal revelation and the apostolic mission. The revelation of the Son of God was given to him, he said, "so that I might proclaim his good news to the Gentiles" (Gal 1:16), that is, to bring the good news to everyone so that they may enter into the economy of the new and definitive covenant and "be co-heirs, members of the same body, sharers in the promise" (Eph 3:6).

The living and dynamic relationship with the Person of the Son of God inaugurates the liturgy of life. It is no longer a cultic relationship, as in the Temple of Jerusalem, but an existential one which transforms all the moments of daily life. It overturns the schema of sacredness that was typical of the Temple. Contact with God no longer comes about by *separation*, but by *immersion* in the mystery of Christ because of the Incarnation.

Paul felt himself to be grasped by Christ Jesus (Phil 3:12), and his scale of values, even in the religious field, was turned upside down. "Whatever I had gained from all this, I have come to consider it loss for the sake of Christ. In fact, I consider everything to be loss for the sake of the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have cast everything aside and regard it as so much rubbish so that I will gain Christ" (Phil 3:7-8). In order to preserve his unity with Christ, Paul placed himself with all his strength at the service of his neighbor in evangelization. The love of Christ that he experienced urged him to give his life for the Gospel.

Drawing from his prolonged experience in the Temple, the apostle-become-Christian underwent a radical change of perspective. In Rom 12:1-2, Paul "dared" to take the technical terminology used for the Temple liturgy of Jerusalem and apply it to the Christian life.

For Paul, the liturgy became the "natural" framework in which Christian life is lived in all its sacredness. He applied this perspective first of all to himself and described his apostolate with the language of worship. At times the verb "to serve" in certain contexts seems to recall liturgical service (1Thess 1:9-10; Gal 4:8-11).

In the work of evangelization, Paul is a "*leitourgos* of Christ" (cf. Rom 15:16),\* who renders worship to God with his very existence (Rom 1:9-10). Even if neither Jesus Christ nor Paul ever personally offered sacrifices in the temple of Jerusalem, their very existence came to be described with worship language in the Pauline letters.

The apostle imbued Christian life with a liturgical sense, without making distinctions between ministerial and communal actions and

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\* Translator's note: In this section, I have taken the liberty of inserting some Greek terms in order to convey the connection between "life and apostolic action" and "liturgy," as the author is stressing. This is clearer in some of the Italian Scripture translations than it is in English, where the terms "minister" and "ministry" are generally used. For example, the Greek *leitourgos* [literally priest] is rendered "*liturgo*" of Christ in Italian, whereas it is rendered "*minister* of Christ" in English.

likening the conclusion of his own life to a sacrificial libation: his blood “was about to be offered as a libation” (cf. Phil 2:17; 2Tim 4:6).

His apostolic ministry is worship which he offers “to God in the Spirit” (Rom 1:9). He described himself as one who “performs a priestly service for God’s good news” (Rom 15:16) in his ministry among the gentiles.

His full dedication to the inhabitants of Philippi is a sacrifice carried out within him to the advantage of the faith of the Philippians, which he calls “a libation” and a “sacrificial offering” (Phil 2:17).

The collection of funds carried out in the Greek communities for the church of Jerusalem is called a “liturgical act” [*leitourgein*]\*\* (2Cor 9:12), and Epaphroditus, sent by the Philippians to assist Paul during the discomforts of his imprisonment to carry out those humble services which the apostle needed, was referred to as “protagonist of a liturgical action” [*leitourgos*]\*\*\* (Phil 2:25).

Baptism places us in a completely new situation with respect to the liturgy of the Temple of Jerusalem. This fact allows the apostle to transfer all the terms proper to Temple worship to the Christian life: “So I beg you by God’s mercy, my brothers, to offer your whole lives as a living sacrifice which will be holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual worship. Do not pattern yourselves after the ways of this world; transform yourselves by the renewal of your minds, so you will be able to discern what God’s will is, and what is good, pleasing, and perfect” (Rom 12:1-2).

After explaining in the first part of the Letter to the Romans the new situation of the Christian life, Paul concludes by inviting the believers, in the name of all the mercy they have experienced, to present the offering of themselves to God. This oblation impetus, lived out in the concrete circumstances of daily life, is the liturgy of life. Here lies the secret of the spiritual adventure of St. Paul and of every Christian life. Here there is no longer a *dichotomy* between being a disciple and being an apostle of the Lord. Here, in my opinion, lies the essential foundation and the necessary pedagogy for living the Pauline spirituality and being as a Family: St. Paul living today.

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\*\* The English translations render this “ministry” or “service.”

\*\*\* The English renders this “minister” or “attend’ to my needs.”

## 6. Fr. Alberione called and sent

I will limit myself to a parallel reading of the vocation of St. Paul, *mystic and apostle*, with Fr. Alberione's narration of his experience during the night between the two centuries, in the Cathedral of Alba, following the text of *Adundantes Divitiae gratiae suae* (nos. 13-25). It is easy to compare this text with the conversion of Paul narrated in the Acts of the Apostles and other Pauline texts.

During the night between the two centuries, the young Alberione became aware of his mission. This event was prepared for by the conferences of Toniolo who demonstrated the necessity of a society irrigated from the fonts of the Gospel and by the encyclical "Tametsi future" of Leo XIII where the Pope said that the new century must be seen in the light of Christ "Way, Truth and Life." This encyclical offered an operative meaning and established the apostolic and pastoral vision of the Church of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Situated in this context is the experience of the sixteen year old Alberione: "Particular enlightenment came from the Host..." (*AD*, 15).

This apostolic light was accompanied by another light regarding his own nothingness and by the unfailing assurance that came to him from Jesus-Host. The light came from the Eucharist, but did not suspend his mental operations. It was developed in his meditations and led to the idea of an apostolic organization.

The impulse that he was given gradually matured within and conditioned him totally (*AD*, 21). The concrete application would follow the natural order of things (*AD*, 22) and without forgetting the natural conditioning of the apostle himself.

The apostolic impulse is inseparable from a certain perception of the world, and, in Fr. Alberione, the idea of spiritual dynamism which was presented with particular intensity, expanded into a special dimension, that of universality (*AD*, 65).

### *Adundantes Divitiae gratiae suae: nos. 13- 25*

#### *a) Night of light: the particular mission*

The night that divided the last century from the present one was crucial for the specific *mission* and particular *spirit* in which his future Apostolate would come to light and be lived out.

b) *Precise time and space*

He was in *solemn and prolonged adoration* in the *Cathedral (Alba)*, after the *solemn midnight Mass*, before Jesus exposed [in the *Blessed Sacrament*]. The seminarians of Philosophy and Theology were free to remain as long as they desired.

c) *Context*

Not long before there had been a congress (the first he had attended). He had fully grasped Toniolo's calm but profound and fascinating speech. He had read Leo XIII's invitation *to pray for the coming century*. Both spoke of *the Church's needs*, of *the new means of evil*, of *the duty to combat the press with the press*, *organization with organization*, of *the need to get the gospel [message] across to the people*, of *social issues...*

d) *A personal experience: God and history – formation of conscience*

A particular *light came from the Host*, greater understanding of that invitation of Jesus "*venite ad me omnes*;" he seemed to *fathom the heart of the great Pope*, the *Church's call [for help]*, and the *Priest's true mission*.

What Toniolo said about the *duty of being Apostles today and of using the means exploited by the opposition* made sense to him.

e) *Responsibility*

He felt *deeply obliged to prepare himself to do something* for the Lord and for the women and men of the new century with whom he would spend his life.

f) *Faith and trust in God*

He had a clear grasp of *his own nothingness*, while concurrently he experienced in the Eucharist "*vobiscum sum usque ad consummationem sæculi*," and that he could count on the Host, on Jesus, for light, nourishment, consolation and victory over evil.

g) *Positive openness to the future and the social-ecclesial complexity*

Projecting himself mentally into the *future* he felt that in *the new century generous people would experience what he was feeling*; and that *teamed up into an organization* they could bring about what Toniolo kept on repeating: "*Unite*; if the enemy finds us alone he will defeat us one by one."

He already had the trust of fellow clerics; he with them and they with him, *all of them drawing from the Tabernacle.*

*His prayer lasted four hours after the High Mass: for the century to be born in Christ, in the Eucharist; for new apostles to reform the law, education, literature, the press, morals; for the Church to give fresh impetus to mission; for good use to be made of the new means of apostolate; for society to welcome the great teachings of Leo XIII's encyclicals – explained to the clerics by Canon Chiesa – especially with regard to social questions and Church freedom.*

*h) Orientation of his energies*

His mind and heart became so fixed on the *Eucharist, the Gospel, the Pope, the new century, the new means, on Count Paganuzzi's thinking regarding the Church and the need for a new band of apostles*, that from then on these things always dominated his thoughts, his prayer, his spiritual work and his yearnings.

*He felt an obligation to serve the Church, the women and men of the new age, and to work with others in an organized way.*

*i) External signs of his transformation*

At ten that morning he must have let slip something of his inner feelings, because a cleric (later Canon Giordano), meeting him, expressed his astonishment.

*l) Commitment and integral formation*

From then on these thoughts were the inspiration of his reading, his study, his prayer and the whole of his formation. This idea of his, which at first was quite confused, became clearer and with the passing of time became more specific.

His overriding thought was that in view of one's own salvation and in view of a more fruitful apostolate one needs to *develop the whole human personality: mind, will and heart*; this was the meaning of the inscription that he placed on the tomb of his friend Borello (1904).

*m) The foundational project:*

*from an organization to religious, community life*

His initial idea was for a Catholic organization of writers, techni-

cal people, book-sellers and retailers; Catholics to whom he would give direction, work and a spirit of apostolate....

Toward 1910 he took a definitive step. It became much clearer that the writers, technical personnel and promoters would have to be *religious men and women*.

On the one hand, *this would lead people to the loftiest perfection* – the perfection of those who also practice the evangelical counsels – and to the *rewards of the apostolic life*.

On the other hand, it would give more cohesion, stability and continuity, [not to mention] a more supernatural sense to the apostolate. He was to form an organization, an organization of religious. Here efforts would coalesce, dedication would be total and the doctrine purer. A society of people who would love God with all their mind, all their strength and all their heart; people who would offer to work for the Church, happy with the wages God pays: “You will receive a hundredfold, and inherit eternal life.”

He rejoiced then at the thought that some of these people would belong to the militia of the Church on earth and some to the Church triumphant in heaven.

In the prayer that he offered every morning to the Lord with the chalice his first thought was for the area of the *Cooperators* that is at present (December 1953) still limited: for [their] intellectual, spiritual and financial cooperation. His second thought was the *Pauline Family*. These are intentions that Jesus the Master listens to favorably every day

## **7. Fr. James Alberione: mystic and apostle – St. Paul living today.**

Among the New Testament authors, Paul is the one who spoke the most about his spiritual life. He possessed an exceptional intensity of life together with an extraordinary ability to express it, as for example: “For me, to live is Christ” (Phil 1:21; Gal 2:19-20).

Paul speaks to us in terms of experience and communicates in first person what he lives.

Paul’s interior life was not derived only from his personal encounter with Christ on the way to Damascus; it was inseparable from apostolic action. “Woe to me if I do not proclaim the good news!” (1Cor 9:16). It is obvious that his spiritual experience developed in view of his apostolic commitment to service of the Church.

St. Paul perceived his vocation as a commitment with two directions: the mystery of Christ and the history of men and women: "But when the One Who set me apart from my mother's womb and called me through His grace was pleased to reveal His Son to me so that I might proclaim his good news to the Gentiles" (Gal 1:15-16). And even more concise: "This is why I have appeared to you—to make you my servant and a witness for what you've seen" (Acts 26:16).

In fact, there cannot be a separation between spiritual life and ministry for any apostle: "In my flesh I am completing what is lacking in Christ's afflictions on behalf of his body, that is, the church" (Col 1:24). He reacted interiorly to the various situations of his communities: "Apart from these external things, I experience daily cares and anxiety for all the churches. If anyone is weak, I too am weak! If anyone is led into sin, I too am ablaze with indignation!" (2Cor 11:28-29).

For anyone seeking the path that leads to the mystery of Christ, the letters of the Apostle offer a special light, since they are the description of the spiritual situation of every Christian. Paul lived what he wrote – at times even in an exceptional way such as on the road to Damascus (Acts 9; 22; 26).

Fr. Alberione, our Founder, drew inspiration for his life from St. Paul and begged us to do the same: "Saint Paul: the saint of universality. His admiration and devotion began chiefly with the study of and meditation on the Letter to the Romans. From then on, Paul's personality, his holiness, his heart, his intimacy with Jesus, his contribution to dogmatic and moral teaching, his impact on Church organization and his zeal for all peoples—all became topics for meditation." (*AD*, 64). The Apostle's universality had two sides: interior life and apostolate.

Primo Maestro affirmed in addition that St. Paul "was the most accomplished and faithful interpreter of the Divine Master; he understood, elaborated with strong synthesis and tight logic and gave the whole and applied Gospel, in such a manner that Gentile humanity found what it was unconsciously looking for" (*DF*, 63). As a matter of fact, it is not possible to separate the apostolic spirit of Saint Paul from the doctrine that he elaborated. This is also true for Fr. Alberione when he recounts his experience of God, in Christ Jesus which is strictly connected with his activity as apostle and founder. It is a "mystical, apostolic" experience: in him, as in Paul,

there is no distance between the mystical perception of God, understood as a direct intervention by the Lord in his life, and the call to the apostolate. Enlightened faith is a form of life in the Spirit, and its function is to be both a principle of sanctification and the source of apostolic dynamism.

It is not sufficient to take note of spiritual manifestations and their suddenness; to speak of a mystic life, *continuity* must also be present. This can be verified by the progressive maturing of the interiority of the Apostle, but also in the organization of his ministry: he organized his journeys with the awareness that he was obeying the Spirit, from whom he perceived interior movements. In the face of "revelations" or suggestions from the Spirit, he felt "passive." God, who called him, urged him ahead constantly, and he followed God's path, on fire with desire for meeting Christ: "I forget what is behind me and reach out for what is in front of me. I strain toward the goal to win the prize—of God's heavenward call in Christ Jesus" (Phil 3:13-14).

In fact, he acknowledges that he "worked and toiled" (cf. Phil 2:16): "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith" (2Tim 4:7) without losing time and energy to ask himself what the Lord was doing and what he must do. In fact, everything is of God: "Who is leading us both to desire and to work for His chosen plan" (Phil 2:13).

Paul has a keen awareness that he is a "chosen instrument" (Acts 9:15) who has collaborated in God's work with his whole being: "In accordance with the grace God has given me I laid the foundation the way a wise master builder would" (1Cor 3:10).

Every gift and charism is given first of all for the sanctification of the one who is its primary beneficiary, setting in motion the dynamism of love: "Since we have these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from every defilement of flesh and spirit and come to perfect holiness in the fear of God" (2Cor 7:1). The apostolic life contributes human richness to the concrete exercise of charity with those characteristics of authenticity described in 1 Corinthians 13 and that can be documented with the life of the Apostle himself.

The mystic life understands a particular aspect of God, as the perception of an absolute reality whose salvific love embraces all of reality. This becomes a personal experience and permits Paul to

know the mystery hidden in the heart of the Father and now manifested in Christ with the power of the Holy Spirit. This knowledge is dynamic in the sense that the Apostle is driven to mission so as to share with others the gift he received. Actually, the impulse Paul received was often accompanied by particular movements that carried him where the Spirit willed. In this area, too, Paul felt himself to be “passive” and responded with the obedience of faith.

Observing the experience of some active mystics, the Jesuit scholar P. Bernard<sup>6</sup> held that a prolonged mystical experience prepared an apostolic commitment and that knowledge drawn from prayer enlightened the action to be undertaken. So too, Saint Paul’s apostolic action was submitted to the motions of the Holy Spirit. It is the same Holy Spirit who directs certain choices according to the project of God in the night of faith and the zeal of hope according to the needs of the Church and the cultural context in which the Founder lived, but starting from the initial impulse. In fact to speak of “apostolic mysticism” it is necessary that the initial commitment include a reference to Christ and a spiritual impulse received passively. The forms are countless.

With respect to Fr. Alberione, the same P. Bernard analyzed his experience emphasizing that the details of his interior journey are few because our Founder “was not accustomed to taking notes and did not know what to say about many things: he preferred to leave everything to God who knows all things well.” In general, just like other mystics dedicated to the apostolate, Fr. Alberione had neither the desire nor the time to speak about himself and to consider in detail the trajectory of his spiritual life so as to relate it to the intuitions he received in prayer. He felt that his being in Christ and his desire to serve the Church were sufficient guarantee of the spiritual value of the apostolate. From *Abundantes Divitiae*, which he wrote in 1953 (forced by his followers), we can see the type of re-reading he made of his personal and apostolic life, and thus we are able to have some kind of “revelation” regarding the connections between his interior life, his apostolic action and his activity as Founder.

For Fr. Alberione, the idea of spiritual dynamism presented a notable depth and extension, and in his experience we can easily see what powerful dynamism can be freed up by a mystic impulse.

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<sup>6</sup> Cf. CH-A. BERNARD, *Le Dieu des mystiques* vol. III, (Paris: Cerf, 2000) 347-401.

It is not that the spiritual light distinctly anticipates the various apostolic undertakings in which its power will be expressed, but it gives them the impulse.

Fr. Alberione initially thought of a Catholic organization that would take to heart the press apostolate in its entirety. But toward 1910, he took a decisive step which consisted in transforming this organization into communities of men and women religious (*AD*, 23-24). And the idea of the Cooperators, who were the first to be born in his mind, he considered still not sufficiently developed in 1953 (*AD*, 25).

Furthermore, already in 1908 he had thought of the idea (which was very bold for those times) to associate women to priestly zeal in its diverse forms, and in 1911 he foresaw this collaboration with the book "Woman Associated with Priestly Zeal." But the concrete foundations of the feminine Congregations came about later (*AD*, 109).

Little by little as he carried out his ministries and duties in the local Church—social, pastoral, liturgical and art conferences—Fr. Alberione gave concrete form to his spiritual intuitions.

The first accomplishment was the founding of the FSP as a parallel to the SSP. It seemed important to our Founder that the *different aspects of a total vocation* be manifested in a distinct way in the various Congregations. The necessary "spiritual circulation" was assured by the fact that the various Congregations would form a single Pauline Family and would be nourished from the multiform riches of the Priesthood. For Fr. Alberione, the priest was essentially a man of cult, sacrifice and sacrament (the Tridentine theology).

Fr. Alberione thought of the spiritual life according to dynamic patterns: the anthropological application that corresponds to Christ Way – Truth – Life is described as mind – will – heart, thus freely changing the order of the terms in the quote from John 14:6.

By introducing a certain parallel with the theological disciplines, he associated the triptych mind-will-heart with dogma-morals-liturgy (*Donec Formetur*, nos. 53-54). It is important to note the place given to liturgy, sometimes referred to as "cult" (*AD*, 99; 140). Liturgy took the place of the "life of piety" and would be the foundation of the Congregation of the Pious Disciples of the Divine Master.

In the same way, as he remembered his experiences in pastoral ministry, he insisted on pastoral theology (*AD*, 84; 77 and his book "Notes in Pastoral Theology" of 1912).

Fr. Alberione's preoccupation with "wholeness" can be seen in the breadth of the apostolate of the Pauline Family (*AD*, 65). Beginning from contact with Saint Paul, "the saint of universality" (*AD*, 64), he traced out concrete consequences as they are presented in the circumstances of the concrete apostolates.

Spiritual light seeks its external expression. In the case of apostolic and charitable light, it is action which constitutes this expression. There is the continuation between inspiration and apostolic action. This does not exclude the validity of the initial mystic impulse, or the value of the apostle's effort. Simply speaking, every apostolic commitment requires continual verification. In Fr. Alberione's case, the realization of his initial impulse implies an extremely complex ramification (*AD*, 59). On the basis of a valid inspiration, the work of evaluation and actualization becomes always necessary and urgent for the Pauline Family.

From the spiritual and mystical perspective it is interesting to note the co-penetration between initial inspiration and practical consequences that derive from them for the life of the apostle. Fr. Alberione applies this both to the means of apostolate and to the practices of piety (Cf. the book: "The Publishing Apostolate"). For him, the Pauline vocation contains in an inseparable way practical aspects, indicated with precision and details, and the spiritual foundations of the apostolic life.

Fr. Alberione displayed an acute awareness of the invitations of God in his life and saw in persons and events the interventions and guidance of God's Providence directed to the apostolate (*AD*, 58-59). This perception required an interior sight, and he perceived in a particular way that all the forms of ministry that were entrusted to him were dispositions of God (*AD*, 78); in this, the authority of the Church represented a visible mediation (*AD*, 80;82).

Fr. Alberione experienced the action of Providence as a constant experience (*AD*, 82); this is an attitude typical of the apostle who feels the action of God in his history as "fortiter et suaviter" ["mightily and sweetly"] (Wis 8:1; cf. *DF* no. 21; *AD*, 44; 78).

God's action is perceived in patience and waiting for the hour of God (*AD*, 43-44; 106). This implies an aspect of passivity: "it suffices to be on the alert, to let oneself be guided" (*AD*, 44). But this "passivity" is not laziness; rather it requires supplication and the offering of one's own life (*AD*, 161).

To let oneself be guided by Providence is not possible without faith in the Lord who disposes everything, both in the natural order and in the order of grace (*AD*, 43). This principle is without restrictions and tends toward the development of the whole personality: natural, supernatural and apostolic (*AD*, 146), involving the responsibility of the person who is called to the correct use of freedom in time and eternity (*AD*, 150; 148).

Regarding the natural development of the individual apostle, Fr. Alberione made his own the indications of Canon Chiesa (*La chiave della vita* in *DF*, 15) and he indicated the ways (*DF*, 15). It is clear that for the apostle natural realities have their role and exercise pressure just like the interior and supernatural ones.

The great apostles have insisted on a total commitment at the service of the Church, but this apostolic activity is also a purifying "trial." Perseverance appears to be a principal virtue. In Fr. Alberione, crucial, personal moments or those relating to the various foundations followed one another. In difficulties, Fr. Alberione found a fundamental support in the *Eucharistic Presence*, source also for every apostolic inspiration (*AD*, 29) and of the unity of the Pauline Family (*AD*, 34).

The mystical recourse to the Eucharistic Presence lies in the fact that he was not capable of making a choice or of carrying out an apostolic initiative without establishing an interpersonal meeting with Christ and being enlightened by him. This enlightenment consists in transformation in Christ so as to be an extension of him through apostolic action (*The Publishing Apostolate*, 383 [in the English]).

Together with the Eucharist was the importance of the Word of God for him, especially the Letters of St. Paul. All this is highly recommended by the Founder and is the secret of the apostolic life of the Pauline Family.

## Conclusion

I will close with what our Founder, Primo Maestro, said:

"Everything came from the Eucharist, the life of the Pauline Family; but it was transmitted by Saint Paul. (...) The Institute was inspired by him. He is its father, its light, its protector, its teacher, everything. (...) The Pauline Family, composed of many members, must be *Saint Paul Living Today*, in a social body.

(...) We did not choose St. Paul; it was he who chose us and called us. He wants us to do what he would do if he were alive today" (*Vademecum*, no. 651).

In the Preface to the book by Fr. Alberione, "*Paul the Apostle, Inspiration and Model*," the Superior General of the SSP, Fr. Silvio Sassi, reminds the Pauline Family that:

"Fr. Alberione's admiration for the personality of Saint Paul comes from the synthesis of *love for Christ and love for the apostolic mission* that the Apostle lives in full and that he does not hesitate to indicate to his communities as a model to imitate. The Pauline charism has its source in the commitment to *Christification*, from which flows total *dedication to the apostolate*. Saint Paul embodies these two complementary dimensions of a mature faith: It is not me anymore that lives, but the Christ who lives in me" (Gal 2:20) and "I have made myself all for all" (1Cor 9:22). (...) *Saint Paul-form* constitutes the point of reference for all the Institutes that form the *Pauline Family*. To all members Fr. Alberione has given the same *spirituality* mediated by Saint Paul: "...the Disciple who knows the Divine Master in his fullness; ...he presents to us the total Christ, as the latter had already defined himself, Way, Truth and Life" (*AD*, 159).

During the Easter Octave one of my sisters at the Generalate passed me a book by Massimo Cacciari titled: *Tre Icone*<sup>7</sup>. I was surprised by the depth with which the author considered the image of the *Risorto di San Sepolcro* painted by Piero della Francesca (ciclo di Arezzo) in the fullness of his intellectual and artistic maturity.

The painting exalts the Risen Christ, standing upright on the beam of his own, stable figure, between a row of trees on the left and two trunks on the right. No garden surrounds him and no gentle flower. In the painting, the ground is hard and harsh, but allows a person to put down solid roots. In the center of this scene stands the Son of Man, like an unmovable mast, perfect in every fiber of his glorious Body, with its perfect proportions and with total simplicity, as he interpolates us with an unwavering gaze.

We can see the wounds of the Crucified, but now they belong to him forever as the keys of life and death.

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<sup>7</sup> Milano: Adelphi 2007<sup>5</sup>, 31-42.

The gaze of the *Risorto di San Sepolcro* is fixed on us, while at his feet the soldiers are an image of that *sleep* from which the *awakening* of new light emerges.

Christ *is alone* as he was in the desert and in Gethsemane. He has faced his passion and death head on. Now, Risen, he seems in this icon about to face another journey: that of light which is revealed in the darkness but which nevertheless remains obscure. Darkness can never erase this figure who has risen and will never reach the measure of his freedom.

He appears Risen but there is no one who awaits him and is disposed to believe. Still he remains erect, solid, with the strength of divine patience that knows how to keep watch until the end of the night. He has chosen a new coming, showing himself alive in a perfectly free and gratuitous way. He asks nothing in return. In the end, he did not expect to be recognized, but just the same he appeared and re-appeared, and he will return again at the end of the ages.

For us Pauline Family, to be a Gospel of Jesus Christ in this complex and fragmented world will mean witnessing to the beauty of this divine gratuitousness, in line with Fr. Alberione and the other *fathers* and *mothers* in the Pauline vocation who have generated us in Christ Jesus, Lord, Master and Good Shepherd.

# THE PAULINE CHARISM INTERPRETS SAINT PAUL TODAY \*

Silvio Sassi, SSP

## 0. Premise

0.1. From qualified exegetes, we have listened to the interpretation that today's **scholars** offer about Saint Paul. We have also considered how **Father Alberione** understood Saint Paul as he began the Pauline Charism of preaching through the apostolate of the press, and his successive creation of the Pauline Family. Now we are concluding the most important phase and we want to gather the fruits of the preceding stages. We have reached the stage of creative fidelity, of our personal and original contribution to the interpretation of the Pauline charism **today** regarding Saint Paul, with the objective of enriching our common spirituality and creating a unifying convergence among the various apostolates of the Pauline Family.

Perhaps our encounter with the current exegetical conclusions, and Father Alberione's understanding of Saint Paul, has made us even more aware of the **particular way** that the Founder read, assimilated and valued Saint Paul. An indisputable fact remains that I wish to express with a passage that Saint Paul wrote in the Second Letter to the Christians of Corinth: *"You are our letter, written on our hearts, for all to know and read. Yes, you are clearly a letter from Christ delivered by us, written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on stone tablets but on tablets of human hearts"* (3:2-3).

Father Alberione's interpretation of Saint Paul yielded the fruits of the Pauline charism of evangelization with communication, the Institutes of the Pauline Family and benefits, known to God alone, in favor of innumerable men and women who have received good from us. The **Pauline letter** that Father Alberione added to those written by Saint Paul and those of the Pauline tradition is **we ourselves**: our preaching of Christ in communication and with the apostolic work of the whole Pauline Family.

It is now up to us to write in the **third millennium another "letter" in the Pauline tradition**, in fruitful continuity with Blessed

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\* Translation by Sr. Raymond Gerard, FSP.

James Alberione. This can be done with the positive contribution of a greater knowledge of the thought and missionary work of Saint Paul. It also takes into account the development of ecclesial life from Vatican II until today, the originality of our social-cultural context and the wealth of current communications, and the real possibilities of persons and resources of the various Institutes of the Pauline Family.

0.2. On the occasion of the fortieth anniversary of foundation of the Society of Saint Paul, Father Alberione was conscious of the **mission received** that must continue after him: "Everyone must regard Saint Paul the Apostle alone as father, teacher, exemplar and founder. It is so, in fact. The Pauline Family was born through him, it was he who nourished it and raised it; its spirit is from him. As for his poor self: he has accomplished part of God's will, but he must fade from the scene and from people's memories, even though, because he was older, he had to take from the Lord and give to others" (*AD*, 2).

At the height of his activity as Founder, Father Alberione insistently called forth creativity from his spiritual sons and daughters: "When someone brings me this or that book written by him, I rejoice and offer it immediately to God; we must carry out this duty" (*Mihi vivere Christus est*, 68, in *Viviamo in Cristo Gesù*, p. 188).

During the Spiritual Exercises of 1960, Father Alberione took stock of his activities as Founder and repeated what he had already written in 1954: "Before God and man, I feel the gravity of the mission entrusted to me by the Lord who, had he found a person more unworthy and unfit, would have preferred him. Nevertheless, for me and for everyone, this is the guarantee that the Lord has willed and has done everything himself" (*AD*, 350).

To complement this reference, on the same occasion the Founder added: "No matter what: Fr Alberione is the instrument chosen by God for this mission. This is why he worked for God and in accordance with the inspiration and will of God. This is why everything was approved by the highest Authority in this world, and why he was followed by so many generous people" (*Ut perfectus sit homo Dei*, I, 374).

The Pauline charism, through the power of the Spirit and the Founder's spiritual and organizational wisdom, has a **future** in

history: "There are articles in the Constitutions that do not allow the Pauline Family to grow old or to become useless in society: it suffices to interpret them properly or to make them operative: there will always be new activities in view of our one apostolate and based on it" (*AD*, 130).

To **maintain the Pauline charism young**, we count on the intercession of Blessed Alberione who assures us: "It is as a servant that I intend to belong to this marvelous Pauline Family, both now and in heaven. There, I shall concern myself with those who use the most effective modern means to do good: [working] in holiness, in Christo [et] in *Ecclesia*" (*AD*, 3).

## 1. The centrality of Saint Paul for the Pauline charism

1.1. Just as it was for Father Alberione, so it is for us: the Pauline charism cannot exist nor merit this name without Saint Paul. To know, meditate, assimilate, imitate and pray to Saint Paul is **to understand and live the Pauline charism** in its totality as spirituality and mission.

The Apostle is not just the protector; he is the **model** of the Pauline charism. The Pauline charism makes its own the invitation that Saint Paul often addresses in his Letters to the communities he founded: "*Be imitators of me as I am of Christ*" (1Cor 11:1 and cf. 1Cor 4:16 and Phil 3:17).

We know that in the history of Christianity the apostolic activity and the Letters of Saint Paul were interpreted **in various ways**, which can be classified between two extremes: condemning him as an apostate and exalting him as a model for the perennial novelty of faith. With his own interpretation, Father Alberione succeeded in realizing "something new" even though his exegetical and theological interpretation, in light of current studies, can seem limited and rather dependent on the knowledge of his time. Taking liberty with a classic Latin phrase that reads "*non nova, sed nove*," Father Alberione summarizes his work: "*non nova, sed noviter*," that is, "not something new, but in a new manner" (*Mihi vivere Christus est*, 22, in *Viviamo in Cristo Gesù*, p. 77).

Paulines and the entire Pauline Family, assisted by the current understanding of Saint Paul, are called to formulate our **interpretation** of the Apostle if we want to be—with a unique spirituality,

with evangelization in communication and with the other convergent apostolates—**Saint Paul living today.**

1.2. Using the results of current studies, we have to reflect deeply on the profound, personal **relationship** that exists between Saint Paul and Christ, who died and rose. Saint Paul's program of life always attracts us. He felt himself "possessed by Christ" (cf. Phil 3:12): "For me life is Christ" (Phil 1:21), "It is no longer I who live, it is Christ who lives in me!" (Gal 2:20) to the point that nothing and no one could separate Paul from Christ (cf. Rom 8: 35-39).

This model of life confirms the validity of our Pauline spirituality as an ongoing process of "**Christification**" of the whole personality. Father Alberione drew this from Saint Paul and then described it—using ascetical indications from authors of the spiritual and pastoral life whom he valued—as **transformation in Christ the Master Way, Truth and Life.**

Paulines and the Pauline Family are called to think up and organize, based on biblical, theological, spiritual and ecclesial foundations, a "**pedagogy**" of "Christification" that takes particular account of the sensibility of the young Pauline generations. This is to be done by keeping in mind the development of the theology of the spiritual life starting from the Second Vatican Council, the directives of the magisterium on religious life, and the best understanding of the heritage of the Founder.

This will permit us to overcome those spiritual interpretations of the teaching and example of Saint Paul, and those directives of the Founder that could justify an intimist and solitary spirituality that is weak in the "**missionary**" dimension of one's experience of faith in Christ. Saint Paul, on the contrary, demonstrates that the more one lives in harmony with Christ, the more we enter into a **network of relationships** that move from Christ toward the Father and the Spirit and, at the same time, toward everyone else and the history of the entire cosmos.

Following the example of the organization willed by Father Alberione for the month-long course of Spiritual Exercises of 1960, it would be a blessing for the Society of Saint Paul and the Pauline Family to organize each year a **month-long course of Spiritual Exercises** using the **Pauline method.** It could be described like this: our personal experience of Christ is by its very nature missionary,

lived in a precise context of Church, society, culture, communication and the Congregation.

This immersion in the totality of the charism would avoid “spiritualistic” derivatives not approved by the Founder himself: “A few years ago I heard something which definitely impressed me. During the course of a whole annual retreat, the apostolate was not even mentioned once. How can the sisters form convictions, be enthusiastic about writing, about the technical apostolate and especially about propaganda? They will be done only physically, with fatigue” (*To the Daughters of St. Paul, Explanation of the Constitutions, 1961*, p. 261 [English Edition, FSP Boston, USA]).

1.3. The missionary thrust of Saint Paul’s lived experience of Christ died and risen characterized the Apostle from the moment of his encounter on the road to Damascus: the mission to the “gentiles” was not a **later addition**, but was simultaneous with the call of Saul. His vocation was for the mission to the “gentiles”; our spiritual life which aims at our own “salvation,” in the spirit of Saint Paul, is also sensitivity to the urgent need to help everyone “save themselves.”

Like Father Alberione, we Paulines too and the whole Pauline Family have the duty to live our faith experience in its double component of “love for God” and “love for neighbor,” in “**contemplation**” and “**action**.” The evolution of the theology of religious life permits us to have a mentality more suitable for thinking and living a missionary faith in the apostolate: not only is there no contradiction or fracture between these two dimensions, but their balance is also not to be understood as mere temporal succession: “first contemplation and then action.” The Apostle helps us understand that we enter into an experience of “**reciprocal fecundity**” where contemplation includes action and action includes contemplation: **an active spirituality and a prayerful activity**.

While today, in some cases, we still experience a mentality and pedagogy of distinction, almost antagonism, between contemplation and action, Father Alberione reminds us of the example of Saint Paul and places the **receivers** of our mission totally within contemplation: “The Pauline writer is in a special position, inasmuch as he is a preacher, not with words, but with paper and film. A preacher must always ask himself two questions, and the writer must do likewise in his own field. The first question he should ask

is: who is it I am addressing? Let him picture his readers in his mind's eye or those he hopes to have some day; let him consider the masses of people, or to put it better, the group of faithful he wishes to reach.

“Especially after Communion, after the visit, let him consider their souls: not only is Jesus the Way for me, but He is the Way for my readers, the Way for all those I am addressing, for those in whom I have something to inculcate. Jesus is the Truth: it is not enough for you to do your spiritual reading for yourself alone. You have been given the duty of writing, and what truths do you want to communicate? Let us ask for an increase of faith for ourselves, so as to be able to communicate it to readers. Pray for all our readers, to have the grace of understanding their needs and finding the way to their hearts” (*To the Daughters of St. Paul. Explanation of the Constitutions*, p. 382-383 [English Edition, FSP Boston, USA]).

1.4. When the experience of a faith that is missionary from its very source becomes “**witness**” to others, it finds itself in needing to choose its **receivers**, the **means** for reaching them and the **contents** to offer.

With the abundance of studies on Saint Paul at our disposition, with the Church's development from Vatican II until today, with the understanding and commitment to evangelization, with the magisterium's pronouncements on communication, we Paulines and the whole Pauline Family are invited to formulate a “**new project of evangelization.**” We follow in the footsteps of Blessed Alberione who elaborated his integral project of evangelization for the society of the XX century, with the press.

The methodological criteria that inspire a Pauline program of evangelization today must be drawn from the example of Saint Paul: “**I made myself all to all**” (1Cor 9:22). The proposal of Christ who died and rose must become “**salvation**” for those who utilize communications today, as it was salvation for the “gentiles” to whom the Apostle preached. The entire apostolic commitment of the Paulines and the entire Pauline Family must be characterized by **pastoral sensibility**: a truth of faith that generates “life” in all who come in contact with it.

The reminder contained in *Una pastorale della cultura* (23-05-1999), for getting to know the public to whom evangelization is addressed,

is the fruit of attentive observation and prudent communication: "It is not enough to speak in order to be understood. When the receiver was in fundamental harmony with the message, by reason of his traditional culture permeated by Christianity, and at the same time globally well-disposed in its regard because of the whole socio-cultural context, he could receive and understand what was proposed. In the current cultural plurality, it is necessary to join together the announcement and the conditions for its reception" (no. 25).

Recalling some of Father Alberione's directives on our **apostolic method** is useful for authoritatively motivating our Pauline pastoral commitment: "We don't need many methods, because there is the divine method and this is the one Jesus used. This is what we have to do: consider the needs of humanity; then go to Jesus, reflect on the sacred truths, make a beautiful Visit to the Blessed Sacrament and thus, take from Jesus that knowledge which the world needs and break it up for the little ones... Two things, therefore: 1. Consider the needs of people, then consider those we must address: whether they are children, or learned people, or pagans; 2. Take the truth from him who is Truth itself, and therefore Wisdom, and break it for the people who need this bread" (*Vademecum*, 1178).

The Letters of Saint Paul were motivated by the **needs of the communities** founded by him; and Father Alberione's and the Pauline's pastoral work is characterized by **attention to the public** we want to reach: "We must know what we are giving, and whether it is suitable to the age, intelligence and needs of the person. But first of all, we have to know the contents of the book, if it is to enlighten. Books can be medicinal, but we have to proportion them according to the needs of the individual to whom we present them.

"It is necessary to know the times we live in. We cannot offer things which are too old. Then, too, the temperament of the various nations must be known – there is quite a difference between one nation and another" (*To the Daughters of St. Paul. Explanation of the Constitutions*, p. 177 [English Edition, FSP Boston, USA]).

## 2. The Pauline charism interprets Saint Paul in order to evangelize in communication

2.1. We are aware that the Pauline charism was born from the need for evangelization with the **press** and successively with all the

**“fastest and most efficacious means”** of communication in every era. Just as Father Alberione referred to Saint Paul who preached with word and with his Letters, so too we Paulines of today engage Saint Paul to evangelize in the whole current field of communication.

With this Seminar’s contributions, too, we can more strongly motivate Paulines to have recourse to Saint Paul for evangelizing in communication and with communication.

Even though it is easy to document how in the early years of the Christian communities the Gospel was made known even to persons who did not belong to the Hebrew people, with the call of Saul and his Christian experience in the community of Antioch, it became clearer that the **“gentiles”** could indeed become Christians.

With the birth of the press, the rise of the other mass means and with digital communications, the proposal of the Gospel of Christ finds a **“fresh environment”** where it can be proclaimed. Just as Saint Paul received from the Risen Christ the duty to become the apostle to the **“gentiles,”** so Paulines have the Church’s approval to evangelize in **“communications”** of every era. Certainly, Saint Paul was not the first nor the only one who evangelized the **“gentiles,”** and Paulines, too, are not the first nor do they have a monopoly on evangelization in **“communication.”**

2.2. The mission of Saint Paul was the fruit of his **faith experience** and not preaching for self-seeking. He himself reproached the **“super-apostles”** who were only seeking material interests or personal glory. The Apostle did not allow others to provide for the maintenance of his preaching, and he earned his bread with the work of his hands; he did not want to found his preaching on the rhetorical ability to convince with the force of words, nor did he accept the domestication of the Gospel with human criteria.

In **“weakness”** he announced what he had intensely experienced: Christ who died and rose—not rhetorical ability, not philosophical wisdom, and not spectacular signs. Saint Paul is a witness, almost **“a celebrant of a spiritual worship”** (cf. Rom 15:16). He is not a mercenary or functionary of Christ, and he was aware of having worked more than all the other apostles, with the grace of God.

Father Alberione used the term **“apostolate of the good press,”** to distinguish it from **“initiatives of the good press”** with which he

was familiar, so as to avoid considering these activities simply as honest work, preparation of good products, and partial treatment of subjects of the Christian faith. He formulated the equivalence between “oral preaching and written preaching,” and he thought of it as a “**priestly**” mission, where the priest lives and experiences first for himself what he then communicates to others, aided by consecrated laity and sisters, who with the indispensable complement of the technical means and of propaganda exercise in fact a “**quasi-priesthood**” (cf. *AD*, 40; *Vademecum*, 92).

The relationship that exists between the Pauline and his preaching is described by the Founder with the image of a “shell” which, in order to give water to others, must first be filled (cf. *Alle Pie Discepolo del Divin Maestro*, 1963, p. 192). **The apostolate is the Pauline’s expression of the consecrated life, both personal and communitarian.** We understand why Father Alberione placed Paulines on their guard so as not to separate their religious life from their mission: “Neither businessmen, nor industrialists, but a Society of Apostles” (*Mihi vivere Christus est*, 185 in *Viviamo in Cristo Gesù*, p. 220). We have to accept the warning that the apostolate is justified only as an expression of our interior life, even in that historical period when, due to a conscious pastoral choice, we adopted business methods for organizing our apostolate, and, with the same farsightedness, we asked the help of lay collaborators to overcome the self-sufficiency of the beginnings.

2.3. Particularly from the letter to the Galatians we can grasp Saint Paul’s **apostolic mentality**, which was confirmed during his meeting in Jerusalem: “...when they saw that I had been entrusted with the gospel for the uncircumcised just as Peter had been entrusted with the gospel for the circumcised - for the One Who worked through Peter for the apostleship of the circumcision also worked through me for the Gentiles - and when they realized the grace that had been given to me, James and Cephas and John, who were considered the pillars, gave me and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship. We were to go to the Gentiles, and they to the circumcision” (Gal 2: 7-9).

This conclusion was reached after Saint Paul had recounted the **reason** for his meeting with the apostles in Jerusalem: “...I went because of a revelation; I met privately with those held in repute and

set out for them the gospel I proclaim among the Gentiles" (Gal 2:2). The division of the areas of mission, "We were to go to the Gentiles, and they to the circumcision," was not established on the basis of belonging to a certain people, but included the need to announce a "**different Gospel:**" when the audience changes, the contents must be adapted. We heard again during these days how Saint Paul **envisioned a Christianity** for the "gentiles."

In order to become aware of our area of mission, we Paulines have the duty to **know**, in all its complexity, the current communication field. Paulines must acquire a theoretical and practical competency in order to be synchronized with the phenomenon of communication. From the invention of language and writing up to digital language, the phenomenon of communication has successively changed its identity, passing from individual technologies to an articulated culture, to the point of becoming a free individual and social project.

The integrated vision of current communication is the indispensable instrument for translating into suitable contents and expressive forms, the totality of the faith. From the degree and quality of knowledge that we have of communications derives the necessary creativity for evangelizing in an efficacious manner.

From this urgency is born the necessity of furnishing the entire Congregation with a **Pauline observatory of communication and culture**, to promote specializations in communication among Paulines so that they may be titled and recognized researchers, to empower the Faculty for Communication in Brazil and other centers of teaching (Comfil in Mexico, etc); to be pioneers in the reflection of "**evangelization and communication**," giving particular attention to the "pastoral dimension."

A Congregation and an entire Family that has experts in Saint Paul and in communication, lives the Pauline style willed by the Founder: "**theory for practice.**"

2.4. From the Letters of Saint Paul we can also draw his **pastoral method** in proposing the Gospel of Christ to the various communities. For good reason it has been observed that the Letters are not a theological treatise that he offers his readers with the intention of placing a series of truths before them. His writings are redacted to respond, from his own experience of Christ, to prob-

lems, questions and situations of ideas and behavior that come up from time to time.

Reflecting on the various Letters, we have proof that the theological thought of Saint Paul was formulated as a **response** to communities, an application to concrete and historical needs, not just a collection of abstract ideas.

So too, the development of the Apostle's thought is in strict relationship with the follow-up of his Letters: we can observe the diverse wealth of content in the First Letter to the Thessalonians and in the Letter to the Romans. His experience of Christ is integral, but along with his evangelization, he desired to offer a solution, propose something new and surprising, but in a certain sense, requested.

If we want to utilize the same pastoral method for evangelizing communication, the choice and study of the **receivers** is priority for an efficacious proclamation. Identifying the desires, questions and hopes of our public is not in function of modifying something of the truth of faith. But it is necessary to be able to insert the proposal of Christ into the arena of everyday life, since the Gospel is not a philosophical system, a theological treatise or an ideology, but a "**force**" that transforms individual and social life.

From the Letters of Saint Paul we must learn to **read** history and the news through the perspective of the Gospel of Christ who died and rose; our **editorial guidelines**, our **style of journalism** and our **criteria for diffusion** must be formed on the Apostle.

2.5. With an overall view of the Letters of Saint Paul and those of the Pauline tradition, we can perceive a **panorama** where faith in Christ is proposed starting from the initiative of grace on the part of the Father in Christ and continues through the Spirit. Thus it might favor in those who accept it the divine gift of relationship with God in prayer, and the individual and social comportment of a new style of life. Faith, therefore, is explained, argued, exhorted by Saint Paul as the totality of a **process of exchange**: the awareness of the meeting with the love of God produces a life of love. Thus Saint Paul organized his **project of evangelization**.

The contents of the Pauline apostolate willed by the Founder, as we know, can be summarized in the effort to present the whole Christ (dogma, morals, and cult) to the whole person (mind, will

and heart) and the whole of earthly realities in light of the values of the Gospel. It is up to our multimedia publishing to understand the **contents** of the “Gospel of Paul” so as to correspond to the apostolic priorities indicated by Father Alberione. Faith, as thought, lived and communicated by Saint Paul, is what Paulines, too, must live and translate into their apostolic witness if they want to be continuers of the “**Pauline tradition.**” A “**Pauline spirituality**” must produce a “**Pauline apostolate,**” not one of another sensibility.

From Saint Paul’s apostolic style, we can draw out elements for elaborating a **project** for the new evangelization which will have communication as its pastoral **departure point** and Christification as its **reason for being**. To program evangelization starting from the reality of communication means to be concerned that the Gospel become “**salvation,**” and it permits a well-motivated and consistent **co-ordination** among the four wheels of the “Pauline cart.” With this methodology of programming the project, the category of “communication” becomes central and is no longer limited to being considered only as “means of communication.” **Communication is an adequate and innovative category for considering the charism**, in its totality of spirituality and mission and in its components (the four wheels of the Pauline “cart”). Assiduous, frequent reference to Saint Paul permits us to interpret him also as a “communicator;” in fact, Father Alberione himself willed us to be “communicators” capable of “saving the souls of today, not those of two centuries ago when there was no radio, no television, cinema or other” (*Vademecum*, 382).

### 3. The Pauline Family interprets Saint Paul today

3.1. When Father Alberione defined the group of Institutes that make up the Pauline Family as “**Saint Paul living today in a social body,**” he intended to consider with a supernatural vision the objective of his entire work of foundation. As a “social body,” the Pauline Family has a **common spirituality** and **convergent apostolates**.

In collaboration with the design of Providence, Father Alberione interpreted Saint Paul **by giving life** to the Pauline charism of evangelization with the press that involves, even though in different ways, all the Institutes; and further, he **strengthened** the unity of the charism itself by entrusting to each of the Institutes the duty of em-

phasizing one of the aspects that compose it (preaching with medial communication, contemplation, the pastoral dimension, the vocation to collaborate with God) and to witness to faith in the Pauline style with **all the forms of ecclesial life** (priests, consecrated laity, religious, lay men and women in consecrated secular life, laity) and in **every area** (family, parish, social and professional life).

To convince ourselves of this foundational strategy, it is important to remember yet again what Father Alberione said in the course of the Spiritual Exercises of 12 May – 1 June 1963, to the Sister Disciples of the Divine Master regarding the Pauline Family: “The Pauline Family reflects the Church in her *members*, in her *activities*, in her *apostolate* and in her *mission*. Therefore it is not a random thing, like adding something different or new, but is rather a completion of the Pauline Family in that we have to live in Christ, as Jesus Christ taught and did and the Church teaches and does” (*Alle Pie Discepolo del Divin Maestro*, 1963, 163).

3.2. With our greater knowledge of Saint Paul, as Pauline Family we have to commit ourselves to fulfilling our identity as traced out by the Founder: “The nature is common: in the way of forming, giving formation, in the way of praying, and in the way of carrying out the apostolate” (idem, 165).

These specifications guard us from having a restricted understanding of the “common nature,” concluding that it is a matter only of spirituality; as we can see, this common nature regards: spirituality, formation and apostolate. A deeper knowledge of Saint Paul should have as its fruit also a better understanding of the elements that make up the totality of the various Institutes joined in one Pauline Family. We have to rediscover what is common in our **spirituality, formation and apostolate**.

3.3. As we reflect on the heritage of the Founder, from 1971 until today there have been many initiatives that helped us understand and live our common **Pauline spirituality** in creative fidelity. The deepened reflection on Saint Paul during this Pauline Year declared by Benedict XVI and also this International Seminar direct our common commitment with at least one clear indication.

Even though keeping in mind the adaptations for each Institute begun by same Founder, Saint Paul remains the fundamental refer-

ence point for the Christology of the Pauline spirituality. As a consequence, it is to be hoped that his teachings and his apostolic example become the object of constant reflection in meditations, retreats and spiritual exercises, and courses of ongoing formation. The Founder's frequent appeal to remain faithful to the "color" of our spirituality, without begging from others, must strengthen our determination. **More Saint Paul and less of other authors;** more of the Letters of Saint Paul as an object of study and meditation and **less** of other books and booklets: "Not many books of spirituality, no; and not even a seeking of schools of spirituality, since the spirituality is one: to live in Christ Jesus, Way, Truth and Life" (*Alle Pie Discepolo del Divin Maestro*, 1963, p. 238).

This is clearer still: "A well-known author said that 60% of books on asceticism should be burned, or at least not printed. How much more this is true now when there is an inundation of books that pass from one nation to another and create disorientation in souls. Certain books truly do cause disorientation" (*Fedeltà allo spirito paulino*, 1965, p. 34).

Saint Paul and his Letters are **the way to unity** for the Pauline spirituality. During the last meeting of the **General Governments of the Pauline Family** (7-11 January 2009), we were able to document how the Founder gave Saint Paul to all the Congregations as a point of reference; with a similar study we could prove that the Apostle was entrusted to the other Institutes of the Pauline Family. Christ, Way, Truth and Life, adapted so as to be understood as Master or as Shepherd, by the express will of Father Alberione, is to be interpreted and lived according to Saint Paul for **everyone**.

3.4. Together with the whole ecclesial community and as Pauline Family we must reflect on the heritage of our common aspects regarding the stages of Pauline **formation**. This will be done through the help of theological and pedagogical reflections on the formation of priests and of men and women religious, aided also by important documents from the Church's magisterium on the same subjects.

After being the object of reflection for several gatherings of the General Governments of the Pauline Family, during their meeting of 10 January 2009 the Superiors General approved the text "**Formation in the Pauline Family**. *Formation Guidelines According to the Thought of Blessed James Alberione*," which will be introduced into

the *Ratio Formationis* of the Congregations of the Pauline Family. It is a concrete application of the Founder's effort to seek common principles in diversity: the Christological-Trinitarian dimension, the integral anthropological vision, love for the Church, the pastoral-apostolic purpose, the consecrated religious life and faith rooted in the spirit of the "Pact" or "Secret of Success."

It is easier to reach an understanding among the Congregations, but regarding formation in the other Institutes, it would be useful to come to an agreement on the common principles of Pauline formation willed by Father Alberione, with adaptations that are more important for their different style of life.

The reference to Saint Paul as a "**form**" is like a pattern in filigree according to which Pauline formation is etched. This "form" is indispensable for understanding and living the process of "**Christification**" that is transformed into witness with every apostolate. The integrality of formation for reaching the "stature of Christ" (cf. Eph 4:13) in our apostolic mission means to form the "Pauline personality," the "Pauline adult in Christ."

3.5. In view of realizing always better the **convergence** of our apostolates, motivated with a common **spirituality** and carried out by persons prepared with common principles of **formation**, the study of Saint Paul permits us to identify: the indispensable foundation of a personal **faith experience** that is so absorbing as to give meaning to our entire existence; an **apostolic mentality** that lives a missionary faith with the joy of knowing it was received as a gift; a **pastoral method** that organizes its witness into a project of evangelization which is based on the needs of the receivers.

The **first** accomplishment of this convergence is the laborious awareness of everyone's effort, although in different ways, for **evangelization in communication**. The whole ecclesial community, starting from the document *Inter mirifica* and motivated by the Church's teaching on communication, is fully mobilized in this form of evangelization. Considering this and the indisputable dispositions given by the Founder, it would be very strange if some Institutes of the Pauline Family were to decide that this is a duty which does not concern them.

As a **second** concrete application, I ask myself if the time has not perhaps come for each Congregation and all the Institutes, in refer-

ence to Saint Paul and with Father Alberione's interpretation of him, to agree on **common principles** that motivate our various *apostolic projects*. We would thus avoid giving the impression, at times, that there is not a true inspiration from the "Gospel" of Saint Paul in the apostolate, which in turn creates the sensation of real **schizophrenia** between "Pauline" spirituality and an apostolate with another "color."

We would also avoid the danger, within the apostolate of the same Institute, of **disorientation**, which is the fruit of confusion, contradiction, and the incomprehensible denial of contents, mentality, methods and concrete initiatives that should instead find clear inspiration for everyone in Saint Paul.

I would like to conclude this reflection by paraphrasing a quote from Saint-Exupery: "If you want to build a ship, ...teach [people] to long for the endless immensity of the sea;" concluding the International Seminar on Saint Paul, we could say: "If you want to understand and fully live the Pauline charism, let yourself be fascinated by Saint Paul."

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