

## Suffering

2 Cor is Paul's most personal letter. It speaks of how his suffering is transforming weakness and giving evidence of God's power

2 Cor 1:3-11, 2 Cor 4:7-16a (not lose heart)

2 Cor 11:30 boasting in weakness—modelled on Christ's suffering  
*see also* Phil 3:10, 2 Cor 4

Cross/Resurrection = model for ministry

weakness, relying on and trusting in resurrection power

suffering, enduring for future hope and glory

## Church: *Paul's spirituality is corporate*

Paul writes mostly to churches not individuals (Note the plurals in his exhortations.)

Holy Spirit in 'you' plural in Eph 5 (Eph 2:12-22 – corporate model)

Godliness is exercised in community

Ethics are corporate in Eph 4-5, Rom 12-14

Paul emphasises that we belong to Christ & hence 'each other'  
body to maturity in 1 Cor 12; Eph 4

**Labour:** Paul works hard, as can be seen in biographical narrative in Acts

testimony in 2 Cor 11:23-28, 1 Thess 2:9

testimony to Ephesian elders

2 Tim 4:5-8 – fought good fight, etc

He encouraged people to work in teams, mentoring, supporting, communicating. We see that in Timothy, Titus, Barnabas working together. We see it in the lists of names at end of letters: Mark, Luke  
Gifts in 1 Cor 12, 14 Purpose of his ministry in Eph 4:11ff

## Conclusion: key to spirituality is Jesus

anchored in cross/resurrection grace

resonant with thanksgiving

Phil 4: rejoice always, Col 3:16 singing, Eph 1:3ff – to God's glory

Jesus is Paul's Lord, love and joy

nothing is too much in service of Christ

longs for glory to God/Christ (2 Cor 3; Eph 1)

Christ is exalted Lord before whom all will kneel (Phil 2)

# WHO WAS ST PAUL?



*Canterbury Council of Churches Lenten Series*

*Year of St Paul*

*2009*

**THE JEW, THE CITIZEN, THE APOSTLE**

**AN INTRODUCTION TO ST PAUL**

**St Dominic's Catholic Church, Canterbury, March 1st 2009**

*Br Paul Rowse, O.P.*

A brief and unassuming inscription is found on a marble tablet atop an ancient sarcophagus in a certain church in Rome. The abbreviated text reads in Latin, *Paul Apostle Martyr*. Since the earliest times, Christians have journeyed to the Roman Basilica of St Paul to honour the life and work of the Apostle and seek his intercession. St Paul's remains were initially preserved by a devout woman, Lucina, and later by popes and Roman Emperors. The simplicity of this inscription, which must be earlier than the fourth century, only lends greater credence to the claim that this tablet covers the tomb of St Paul himself – there being no need for pre-Constantine Christians to spell out beyond these few words who this man was, since the identity of a "Paul" who is both apostle and martyr was well-known. For us too, we have a great degree of familiarity with this apostle and martyr. We often refer to him just as "Paul". His is a household name. Our lectionaries include a large number of readings from his letters and other accounts of his life and work. Bible studies and prayer groups often make use of Paul's writings in their little journeys of faith. Quotes from his letters are among our favourites. Our Paul is the most famous by that name by a long shot, and one of the most remarkable and important figures in Christianity.

The Year of St Paul which we are celebrating until late June recalls the birth of the Apostle about two millennia ago. This year emphasises for us a return once again to the Word of God and allow it opportunities to speak into our lives. Perhaps foremost among all the good reasons why we'd keep this Year of St Paul is the re-engagement of Christians with one of the authentic sources of our faith, the Scriptures. Interaction with the Word of God whether through the liturgy or private prayer, or study or preaching, is good for the spiritual life. Meeting the Word of God in Scripture is salutary for the Church as a whole. An encounter with the Word is an encounter with God, and so we do well to make a habit of reading and praying with the Scriptures – when we do, our relationship with God invariably shines through for others to see. What is more, the Word of God contemplated and lived nourishes us as it did Christ himself (Deuteronomy 8:3; Matthew

Ephesians 2:1-10 – emphasis on grace

Romans 3:21-31 – gospel righteousness of Christ

Paul believed that our motivation, power, and confidence all depend on grace

Paul believed that the Christian life is foretaste of future life, a life empowered and enlivened by the presence of Holy Spirit

The Christian life is one that is gripped by God, where the Holy Spirit reveals Christ, opens our lives to the mind of Christ, and converts us. (1 Cor 2:16)

**Godly Character was important to Paul**

This is often overlooked today. His gospel was the fruit of a godly life. For Paul what we believe and how we live need to be consistent with the character of God.

Romans 6: *let not sin reign*

Romans 12:1-2 *mercy a self-offering, love of others, weak*

Ephesians 4:1ff – *character/behaviour = fruit of gospel*

Colossians 2:24ff *similarly*

2 Corinthians 3 – *transformed into likeness of Christ mind of Christ*

Paul defends his own integrity:

1 Thess 2:3-8, 10/ frequently in 2 Cor (eg 4:2)

Paul's concern for godly character is shown in the priority he gives to love over gifts: 1 Cor 13— *love is moral, godly, fundamental*

**Means of Growth in Godliness**

The power to become godly (like Christ) derives from the cross/resurrection powerful message of cross in 1 Cor 1:18-2:5

'mercy' a change in Romans 12ff

grace's power in Titus 2

word of scripture's power in 2 Tim 3:16

ministry not only of words (rhetoric) but power (1 Cor 1-2; 1 Thess 1:5)

ministry of word a maturity in Eph 4

take every thought captive 'to obey Christ' in 2 Cor 10:5

let word of Christ dwell in your richly (Col 3:16)

keep in step with HS (Eph 5:18)

role of Holy Spirit (Rom 8; Gal 5)

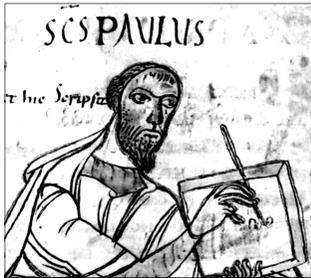
work of spirit in transforming (2 Cor 3)

future hope's power: Phil 3:7-16, Colossians 3:1, 1 Cor 15:5 'therefore'

we close: for Paul *mission is a matter of being faithful communities of the gospel*. That is why he himself planted churches, travelled the empire, wrote letters and poured out his life. God's purposes of salvation are worked out not through strategies, or campaigns, or heroic individuals. They arise from the life of faithful believers who together learn what it is to follow Jesus, and who offer that life as an example and witness to the world.

But, if we are doing that, isn't some form of verbal proclamation the inevitable result, the natural outcome? Evangelism becomes in this understanding a testimony to the story that shapes our lives and gives those lives meaning. And, in our own ways we can all do that.

Our time has gone. But I hope that our consideration of Paul's mission has become an encouragement to become faithful communities of the gospel ourselves.



### PAUL'S SPIRITUALITY

St Dunstan's Anglican Church, Canterbury, April 5th 2009

*Archdeacon Rev Paul Barker's notes*

#### **Spirituality**

Spirituality is not in fact a biblical word, however it is concerned about the spiritual life and about the practice of faith

My plan is to take six headings although they are not exhaustive.

We need to recognise that Paul's theology/gospel/spirituality overlap.

Paul's view on church & mission interacts with his spirituality.

#### **Gospel foundation**

We cannot understand Paul's spirituality without appreciating his gospel/theology. It is a theology where the cross & resurrection are central.

1 Cor 15:1-11 as theological core

4:4). Our Christian ancestors meditated on the Scriptures for a taste of heaven. It's to be remembered that St Paul himself meditated on the Torah and the rest of the Bible of the Hebrews; so much so that it really became part of himself. This is evidenced by his being able to drop into any of his letters a string of references from the Old Testament to buttress his theology (for example, see Romans 3:10b-18). The Word becomes flesh in us whenever we make it our own in prayer and contemplation, which we then take with us into the world in which we live.

When St Paul wrote to the churches, he shows us his deeply paternal disposition towards them. With the exception of the churches in Rome and Ephesus, and perhaps also Colossae, he had founded them personally and raised them from their infancy. For example, when he addressed the Thessalonians, among whom the Gospel had taken with particular strength despite the high personal cost to Paul of working at night as well as by day, he says to them, "As you know, we dealt with each one of you like a father with his children, urging and encouraging you and pleading that you lead a life worthy of God, who calls you into his own kingdom and glory." (1 Thessalonians 2:11-12). The messages he sent to his churches have an abiding meaning for us as well. In a sense, he writes to us also. The questions we can have about the meaning of personal suffering, the efficacy of Christ's death, the manner of the general resurrection, are answered in Paul's own way in his letters. This Year of St Paul invites a re-visiting of St Paul's wisdom and teaching, that he would be to us as he once was to the Philippians, to the Thessalonians, to the Galatians and Corinthians. We read St Paul so that he would truly be our Apostle of Christ Jesus (2 Corinthians 1:1).

Another reason for the Church's commendation of the Year of St Paul is the example to us of the Apostle's own Christian life. His is a lived witness to the power of the Gospel and to its enduring eloquence in every age of human history. For example, in his letter to the Philippians, Paul manifests to us his stubborn resolve to be a servant of Jesus Christ (Philippians 1:1), confident of the veracity of his Gospel: "It is my eager expectation and hope that I will not be put to shame in any way, but that by my speaking with all boldness, Christ will be exalted now as always in my body, whether by life or by death." (Philippians 1:20). Our Paul shows us what holding fast to the death of Jesus means, and also what is possible, of what fruit might come if we remain true to the universal call to Christian holiness.

This last point, that the example of St Paul considered in this year dedicated to him will fortify our resolve to live as servants of Christ Jesus, is the focus of the rest of this presentation. Hopefully, a little contact with his life and ministry of preaching will win us over once again to reverence for the great Apostle. First, we will consider the early life of St Paul, most especially his Jewish heritage. Second, we will treat of Paul's social status and lifestyle, which will include a look over the question of his Roman citizenship. Third and finally, we ought to address briefly the question of the authorship of the letters bearing Paul's name in the New Testament.

### ***The Jew***

While it would be wonderful to have an ancient source offering us a complete life of St Paul, that is sadly not available. Apart from the letters themselves, the only other source like it that we have is St Luke's Acts of the Apostles. Unfortunately, Acts is often called into doubt and consequently regarded with suspicion by scholars because Luke's account of Paul's life and work doesn't always quite line up with Paul's. For example, Luke mentions five times when Paul goes up to Jerusalem (Acts 9:26-30, 11:29-30, 15:1-19, 18:22, 21:17), Paul himself only three (Galatians 1:18; 2:1-2; Romans 15:25-26). So, there are questions to be addressed before piecing together anything like a complete life of St Paul, which is beyond us this afternoon. But it is refreshing to read a scholar who thinks Acts can be taken seriously as a historical source, and says so. Baltimore Biblicist Michael Gorman and others are convinced that the import of Acts is that it purports to offer a coherent narrative of Paul's missionary activities. While there are still difficulties to be resolved with a maximalist reading of Acts, I believe Michael Gorman and his colleagues are right in not dismissing Acts too quickly, and that we do well to flag the differences in the two accounts as difficulties rather than seek to resolve them hastily given the amount of evidence we have available to us.

Among our many certainties of Paul's life is that he was Jewish and proud of it. He tells us that he was "... circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew born of Hebrews, as to the law a Pharisee ... as to righteousness under the law, blameless." (Philippians 3:4-6). If we take the word of St Jerome, the eminent fourth/fifth-century Scripture scholar, who himself confirms an even older tradition, Paul was an Aramaic-speaking Galilean to begin with – a view which modern scholars are not quick to reject. His parents went to Tarsus some time after 4 BC, in all

idea is counter-intuitive for many people. The need of the church to relate to the wider world, and the responsibility to get the Christian message *out there* suggests that the mission task is primarily one of activity and service. Paul reminds his churches, and us, that mission begins with worship. Word and sacrament the means by which the church learns the story, and this becomes the basis for its wider proclamation. Without a deep theological foundation, the call to engage in mission can easily become a call to a rootless and ultimate fruitless activism.

**2. *A gospel-shaped community is a counter-cultural community.*** Paul's letters are written in response to the challenges of living as a Christian community within a non-Christian culture – a situation that many of us recognize as our own. Faithfulness to the gospel brought these communities into conflict with the wider values of the culture and context in which they were located. How to negotiate the tension between our location in the world and our belief that the world is being changed through the gospel – this is what Paul's letters seem to be about. In particular, scholars are recovering the ways in which Paul's gospel relates to the culture and claims of *empire*. This is a potentially rich theme of reflection for our own communities of faith: to what extent are we complicit in, and to what extent are we called to resist, the ideology, values, practices and commitments of an imperialistic vision?

**3. *Communities of Unity and Hospitality.*** One way of exploring this theme might be to consider the fact that Paul's letters seem to be especially concerned with the unity of the church. At first glance, this seems to have nothing to do with mission, but a moment's reflection makes it clear that a church that lives out the gospel message of reconciliation in its own community life, both earns the right to speak that message in the wider world, and offers a model for the appropriate handling of diversity and resolution of conflict.

**4. *Communities Who Speak the Gospel.*** I have left this point last for good reason. Ask most people what they think mission is, and the response will be in terms of intentional evangelism, or faith-sharing, perhaps accompanied by social action and Christian service in the world. Paul actually says very little about social action (the social vision of Christian faith is resourced by the ministry of Jesus for the outcast), and he also says very little about evangelism. Instead and to state it as clearly as possible before

*Journey* is, essentially, a trip back to the churches founded on the 2<sup>nd</sup> journey. Paul ends up back in Jerusalem, and after conflict in that city is arrested and begins his journey to Rome, though now for different reasons than those that he outlines in Romans 1. Tradition has it that Paul dies in Rome, although Acts 28 leaves us with an image of Paul continuing his mission work from his prison at the centre of the empire.

### **Paul's Missionary Strategy: People**

Although we cannot develop the point here, it is important to note that Paul's work always took place in partnership with others. His letters reveal traces of a network of co-operation between Paul and other co-workers who travelled with him or on his behalf, to visit the churches that Paul planted and that would support Paul. The names of these co-workers are familiar to us: Barnabas, Silas, Timothy, Epaphroditus, but we know far too little about them.

### **Paul's Missionary Strategy: Churches**

I want to conclude by offering some thoughts about the role of churches in the Pauline mission, and as I do to become a little more suggestive as to how our understanding of Paul's mission might help us to think through our own mission challenges. It should be clear from all that I have said before, that Paul expected his churches to be not just recipients of the gospel message, but proclaimers of it. To put it bluntly: Paul's mission was rooted in a vision of what God had done for the world in Jesus Christ therefore, if there grew up communities of people who shared that vision, their commitment to mission was not optional but inevitable.

However, there is very little evidence in Paul's letters to suggest that he expected his churches to formulate mission strategies, or to engage in evangelistic campaigns. Instead, Paul seems to think that the main responsibility of a church is *to be the church* i.e. a community whose life is shaped by the story of Jesus. Four emphases might be mentioned within this overall concern.

**1. The local church as a gospel shaped community.** Paul's letters seems to be concerned with helping churches to (a) understand the gospel and (b) understand the implications of the gospel for their life together. Thus a mission minded church is one that first and foremost *knows the story*. This

likelihood as captives in the political fallout following the death of Herod the Great. Jerome Murphy-O'Connor, a New Testament scholar in Jerusalem, believes Paul was about two years old when his family was captured and taken to Tarsus around 4 BC. Paul's Aramaic was the language of the household, but as he grows older, he picked up the local Greek language from his environs and from his invaluable education.

In his letters, Paul shows knowledge of the Hebrew version of the Old Testament, but he especially favours the Septuagint, the Greek translation. This familiarity with both versions of the Scriptures of the Hebrews shows an unusually high level of training among tradesmen. This gives credence to the hypothesis that Paul's family were not labourers all their lives, and that at a certain point they had sufficient means to educate their boy. We know from Paul's own self-description as a Hebrew-among-Hebrews (Philippians 3:4) that he had excellent schooling in Judaism. This strong Jewish formation for Paul probably began very early, what with the inclusion in his letters of memorised lines from the Old Testament and his eventual accessing of the tutelage of Gamaliel (Acts 22:3). Paul's facility with Greek is competent, but not glossy, and so we can say with reasonable confidence that he also had training in the language and its rhetorical devices; though nothing quite like those of Apollos, who could well have had Philo of Alexandria for a tutor. We know from Paul's letters that he is familiar with key components of ancient Greek rhetoric, but not how to turn it into oratory (2 Corinthians 10:10). His use of imaginary conversation partners (for example parts of Romans 1-11) and the rhetorician's corrective beginning with his famous "May it never be" or "By no means" (for example Romans 3:4), reveal a letter-writer who knew very well how rhetoric, particularly deliberative rhetoric, could be used to the advantage of the Gospel. Gorman points out an irony in Paul's use of rhetoric in his letters: namely, that Paul's own suspicion of rhetoric in preaching the Gospel is put to one side by Paul when he comes to do his own (delayed) preaching in the letters – though it is noted that it is the showmanship of rhetoric which Paul rails against and which was seen in the church in Corinth in his day (1 Corinthians 1:18-25; 2:1-5).

Paul also tells us that he was a Pharisee; in fact, he practically boasts about it, as a badge of Jewish honour in his list in Galatians 1:14 and Philippians 3:5. No doubt, the status of Pharisee in Israel was indeed something of which to be proud. We must be careful here and not confuse Paul

the Pharisee with the Rabbis of post-AD 70 Judaism, the Rabbinic Judaism which emerged after the destruction of the Temple. In the Pharisees, Paul had joined a group devoted to the study and interpretation of the Law, the proud stewards of an ancient tradition whose lives were marked by zealous observance of the Law and great moral fortitude to apply it. Indeed, he was an excellent Pharisee, having come to the vocation relatively late compared with others his own age. Why the Pharisees? Paul had neither the wealth to be a Sadducee nor the lineage to be a priest of the Temple. For a young, middle-class Jew of the tribe of Benjamin, intent on faithfully living out God's election of Israel (Galatians 1:4), the Pharisees with their common life of study and discussion were a good fit.

With evidence supporting Paul's well-rounded education and Jewish formation, we ought be a little stunned that any scholar, especially one as recently published as in 2005, can say as confidently and starkly:

Nothing in [Paul's letters] indicates that he was intellectually discerning or even that he had a superior education.

Rather, he was profound in feeling, not in intellectual acumen.

There is no question that Paul's letters are full of strong expressions of his emotions. It is not unheard of in the letters that he forgets himself in the course of dealing with a community's problem and gives in to his anger and impatience (for example, see 2 Corinthians 7:8-9; Galatians 1:1-24). But Paul was an extremely shrewd leader, who made mistakes sure, but who could win his community back over to his side by a well-structured argument and superb dialectic – as an example, I am thinking here of Paul's refutation in 2 Corinthians 1-9 of both the Antiochene Judaisers and Corinthian spiritualisers. So, Paul was certainly no slouch, and indeed had a good mind for sound rhetoric. We cannot set up emotion and education in opposition to one another. It is hardly likely that his years as a Pharisee alone were sufficient training in rhetoric to write such in his letters. No, with both Paul's use of rhetoric in his letters and yet also his expression of contempt for it, it seems much more likely that Paul had received training in the important skill early in his life, before he became a Pharisee, before he went up to Jerusalem.

### ***The Citizen***

There has been some debate among scholars about whether St Paul in fact had Roman citizenship. The starting point for us for critical reflection on the

Nonetheless, we glean the following information from Luke's account:

**1. *Paul's missionary strategy begins with his call to be 'apostle to the Gentiles'.*** Luke tells us this story in Acts 9, but Paul also gives an account of it in Galatians 1. The latter is especially suggestive in that Paul strongly suggests that his calling was to a prophetic vocation (Galatians 1.14-15 alludes to the call of Jeremiah) within Israel. Paul did not think he was founding a new religion; rather he was called to the renewal of God's people in the light of the Christ event. It is important to note, however, that this initial sense of call took a long time to work itself out, and that Paul during this time was a part of a Christian community where the inclusive demands of the gospel were beginning to be explored. Acts 13 connects Paul with the church at Antioch, and suggests that Paul and Barnabas were sent by that church to engage in preaching and church planting in the Jewish communities of Asia Minor. This journey is narrated in Acts 13-14 (consulting a bible atlas or map showing Paul's missionary travels may also be helpful at this point). It probably took place around 45-47 AD.

**2. *The Crisis.*** As a part of that journey, Luke records how Paul faced opposition from Jews and at Psidian Antioch (a different Antioch than the city of Paul's home church) after preaching a sermon takes a decision to turn to the Gentiles (Acts 13.46-47). Whether Luke gets this right is open for debate, but what is clear is that the question of the inclusion of Gentiles into Christian communities becomes a crucial question from then on, and prompts a crisis in the early church. The meeting that was held to resolve the crisis is described in Acts 15 and probably Galatians 2.1-10 and the outcome seems to have been that Paul is given permission to go to the Gentiles and proclaim the gospel without the need for them to fully obey the Jewish law. Paul parts company with Barnabas (after Barnabas seems to disagree about the Gentile question) and instead embarks on a 2<sup>nd</sup> journey with Silas,

**3. *That second journey is described in Acts 16-18.*** On this occasion Paul travels further, crossing over into Europe, and one gets the sense that he explicitly plans to plant churches in the major, strategic cities of the Roman empire: Troas, Philippi, Thessalonica, Corinth and Ephesus. These are cities that are located on major trade routes and that have considerable populations. Paul is moving west, perhaps with one eye on Rome itself.

**4. *What has conventionally been described as Paul's 3<sup>d</sup> missionary***

way that announces the gospel to the world that God desires to reconcile to Godself. Again, note how this works in 2 Corinthians 5. Paul writes that God has “reconciled us to himself through Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation” (verse 18). While the focus is on Paul and his co-workers, the fact that Paul spends so much time writing to his congregations and helping them to see how they can live together in ways that reflect the gospel indicates that the life of the assembly is a witness to the gospel in the world.

**3. For Paul, however, this was a matter not just of theological vision, but of personal vocation.** Central to Paul’s concerns is the idea that if the gospel is about God’s dealings with the whole world, then the first requirement is that someone takes the gospel to the non-Jewish world. He believed that this was his calling, to be apostle to the Gentiles. In response to that calling, Paul engages in initial evangelistic preaching, plants Churches, develops networks of relationships between his churches and seeks to use the letter as the primary means of keeping his churches faithful to the gospel.

All this comes together in a passage like Philippians 2.1-18. At the centre of this text Paul narrates the story of Jesus. The pattern of Philippians 2.5-11 (perhaps an early Christian hymn of some sort) is of suffering and vindication. It is because Jesus was obedient to death on the cross that God exalts him to the highest place. Jesus is Lord, and the purpose of God’s raising him is so that the whole of creation might recognise that lordship. But note how the chapter begins. This story is to shape the church’s life as a community: ‘Let this mind be among you, that was also in Christ Jesus’ (2.5). The community are to be obedient (2.12) just as Christ was obedient and they are to live in such a way that they ‘shine like stars in the world’ (2.15). Further, churches that are faithful to the gospel are the best evidence of the success of Paul’s own mission and vocation (2.16-18).

### **Paul’s Missionary Strategy: Places**

But what did all this look like in practice for Paul? How does that theological vision work itself out? In actual fact Paul does not give us much information in his letters to help us answer those questions. It is in Acts that we find some helpful suggestions, although we must beware that Acts was written a generation after Paul had died, and offers us an account which is probably too neat and schematic to be a true reflection of the earlier decades.

question is that Paul never mentions it, never even so much as alludes to it in his letters. The only testimony we have on the question is Luke’s (Acts 22:25-29; cf. 16:37). As I have said, there are recurring doubts in academic minds as to Luke’s historical accuracy in Acts, a work rich in romantic readings of events and diplomatic ways of describing failure and disagreement (Council of Jerusalem in Acts 15:1-35; and Paul in Athens in Acts 17:16ff). We need to tread carefully.

That said, the case against Paul’s having Roman citizenship is thin on the ground. Paul’s silence in his letters on the matter is not to be taken as testimony for or against it. One thought goes that Paul’s manual trade betrays his lower class status, which would exclude the reception of Roman citizenship. Conversely, it has been argued that tent-making also involved leather work and linen manufacture for the wealthy, and that Paul’s business, popping up in Thessalonica and Corinth and elsewhere, came with his parents’ reputation back in Tarsus. We can bear in mind as well that this trade, which he had in common with Prisca and Aquila, was lucrative enough for them to set up shop in Ephesus ahead of Paul’s arrival. Another strand of thought not in favour of Paul’s Roman citizenship is the one that goes that he suffered the punishment of scourging under both synagogue and civic authorities (for example, see 1 Thessalonians 2:2). But Josephus tells us that a Judean procurator in the middle of the first century had Jews whipped and crucified even though they were members of the Roman equestrian order, that is, minor Roman aristocracy (Josephus, *Jewish War*, 2.306-308). But we ought to temper that with the magistrates’ apology which was a response to Paul’s protest after the scourging in Philippi (Acts 16:38-39). It is more likely that punishments in the first century were meted out as required and not on the failure to produce a birth certificate, which in Paul’s case could have been lost in a ship-wreck for example.

If Paul indeed had Roman citizenship, we can ask, where did he get it? From Acts we can recall that the tribune attending Paul at his flogging receives the news from Paul that he was born a citizen (Acts 22:28). Murphy-O’Connor sees this as highly likely. It should not be surprising that the number of Roman citizen families in Tarsus expanded in the first century AD. Tarsus was influenced in culture and trade from both East and West, being situated on a major trade route. The city also enjoyed the consistent Imperial interest from major figures like the Caesars Julius and Augustus and also Mark Antony. A simple explanation for Paul’s citizenship is that he

acquired it when his parents did, that is, automatically upon emancipation.

Education of the kind that Paul exhibits in his letters requires a good deal of money, and also time for leisure. These the more influential families had. For those without influence, education would have been the means to acquiring and maintaining higher status. For an ambitious family (remembering they had begun in Galilee, were enslaved, set free and had become citizens), educating their Paul would have been a priority. While attendance at the school of Tarsus, from which Stoic philosophers came (including one Athenodorus of Tarsus), was perhaps not open to many Jews, a Jewish family who held Roman citizenship would have been more likely to put their boy through school.

Apart from maybe getting him a cheap ticket to Rome (Acts 25:10-12), citizenship for Paul meant exposure to the Hellenised Roman culture. Being a citizen in Tarsus opened doors for him in his youth and also once he had begun his missionary journeys. He could speak with Jews as a Jew himself, and preach to pagans on their own terms. In both cases, it meant that he knew how to win them for Christ, how to convince them. We can happily say that the warm reception Paul's Gospel received from pagans as well as Jews was due in some part to his cultural formation, thanks to the doors Roman citizenship opened. The culture to which Paul's citizenship exposed him gave him a common language, as it were, alongside his Jewish heritage, with which to speak to them. Maybe even before he began his ministry, our Paul, a Roman citizen from an emancipated Jewish family, was already *all things to all* (1 Corinthians 9:22). Through the exposure to the Hellenised culture he received, citizenship made Paul more effective as a preacher and witness to the Gospel, able thereby to access people and places that the Fisherman perhaps could not as well.

### ***The Apostle***

Daily life for the Apostle was almost certainly much more labour-oriented than it was back in Tarsus as a leisurely citizen of the middle-class (1 Corinthians 9:19; 2 Corinthians 11:7) or in Jerusalem at the feet of Gamaliel. He had left everything behind for the following of Christ (Philippians 3:8) and had become a tent-maker or leather-worker. Tent-making was an excellent choice for Paul. It was a trade which was easy to learn and whose tools were transported with convenience, which gave him enough work to support himself, and could put him in touch with a large number of people from various backgrounds.

actively engage in evangelistic activity and proselytism. Therefore Paul's concern to spread the gospel is not really explained by his Jewish background.

Nor is it explained by the legacy of Jesus. The gospels make it clear that Jesus' own ministry was oriented towards Israel, and that the Gentiles who encounter Jesus and have faith in him are to be understood as exceptional, although suggestive, examples (see e.g. Mark 7.24-30; Luke 7.1-10). Of course, at the end of Matthew's gospel Jesus utters the words 'Go therefore and make disciples of all nations' (Matthew 28.19). However the gospels were written later than Paul's letters, and the so-called Great Commission bears several hallmarks of later Christian theology, such as the command to baptize 'in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit'. Many scholars, including myself, suspect that the words uttered by Jesus here are actually the result of later Christian reflection on the kind of mission that Paul inaugurated several decades earlier.

No, Paul's belief that the good news about Jesus Christ is to be proclaimed throughout the Roman Empire was the result of some basic, but essential beliefs about God's action in Jesus Christ. We can enumerate these as follows:

1. ***In the death and resurrection of Jesus, God has changed the story of the world forever.*** This is the basis for all that Paul thinks and all that he does. It is the core of his understanding of the gospel. Put in overly simple terms, Paul is convinced that the promise of an 'age to come' contained in Israel's scriptures has now been fulfilled in his own lifetime, and has thereby broken into this age. The key event, or perhaps better the pivot on which history turns, is the death and resurrection of Jesus the Messiah. As Paul puts it: "if anyone is in Christ, there is new creation. Everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new" (2 Corinthians 5.17). Note how that fundamental theological statement leads Paul to declare "So, we are ambassadors for Christ, since God is making his appeal through us" (2 Corinthians 5.20). What God has done in Jesus is the content of the gospel that Paul now feels compelled to proclaim.

2. ***The people of God are now to live by this story in such a way as to make it known to all.*** The message of the gospel creates communities of people that Paul can call 'churches' or 'assemblies'. These assemblies are to be shaped by the gospel and that means among other things that they must live in a

## **Introduction**

The view of Paul that has come to dominate much of subsequent Christian history and thought identifies him largely as a thinker, scholar and theologian. It is true that Paul was the first, and arguably greatest, theologian of the Christian movement. In the same way that the history of Western philosophy can be understood as a series of footnotes to Plato, so the history of (particularly Western) Christian thought can be seen to be a series of repeated attempts to understand the apostle to the Gentiles.

But that title – apostle to the Gentiles – reminds us that Paul was also the first strategic Christian missionary. Others had shared their new found faith in Jesus the Messiah, of course. Yet Paul is the first person (that we know about) who took the time to think through the notion of how, if what he believed about Jesus were true, an intentional strategy for enabling the world to hear that good news was not only desirable, but essential.

In what follows, I hope to provide you with some information about the key theological insights that drove Paul to undertake this extensive missionary activity. We will then spend some time considering the nature of that activity itself, and move on to remind ourselves that Paul's mission was undertaken in constant partnership with others, not least local churches.

## **Paul's Vision of a Missionary God**

The call to engage in mission is often the result of various kinds of pragmatic factors. The idea that the church of Jesus Christ should seek to grow (numerically and/or spiritually) and that it should face outwards towards the world in love and service – this can often be rooted in the desire for the church to be effective, or seen as a way of halting numerical decline. Paul's mission is rooted, by contrast, in an understanding of God revealed in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

It is very likely that Paul's thinking and practice in these areas represents something of an innovation. There is a general consensus that Judaism was not a 'missionary religion' in the sense that we would understand that word. While some non-Jews did find Jewish faith and practice attractive, and therefore connect themselves to the life of a local synagogue (Luke calls these people 'god-fearers': see Luke 7.1-10; Acts 10.1-8), Jews did not

A point that needs to be emphasised before proceeding further into Paul's apostolic life is that the pace of life was much slower than it is now. Travelling, for example, was made safer in the first and second Christian centuries. The Romans had eliminated most national borders and patrolled the main traffic routes, but getting around was still no faster than it had been. And yet Pliny the Younger could report without surprise the disappearance of a Roman knight or a centurion on an Umbrian road. Careful planning was required of travellers to make the 30 kilometre daily average to safe houses and villages, out of the sight of those whose rural poverty had forced them into robbery. Overland road networks had made quite remote destinations more accessible, and a strong imperial naval fleet protected shipping trade routes. I wonder whether at any time in Paul's apostolate was the thought of sending a letter more appealing for a busy apostle, who would rather push on to a new city than finely comb out the problems of an existing community in person. Sailing wasn't all plain either, for our Paul recounts that he had been ship-wrecked three times and spent a night and day adrift (2 Corinthians 11:25). The distances involved in Paul's missionary journeys suggest to us that, while he might have intended to spend as many as nine to 12 months with any one community, he could have no assurance that he would return to them when and as he wished. Subsequent visits would be foreseeable for Paul when he was en route somewhere else, or perhaps giving them a quick check up. A slow pace of life and travel, allowing for the best weather conditions for making long journeys, meant that the paternal affections Paul had for the communities with which he was involved required him to be less ambitious about maintaining them in person himself. He had to make allowances for his long absences from the nascent Christian churches.

There were two principal measures which Paul employed to deal with the tyranny of distance. The first, and probably the one he preferred, was to send someone he trusted, one of his companions, in his stead. Paul was never a 'sole trader' as an Apostle. Even when he had lonely moments, he was on his way from and to people that he knew and had worked with and loved. In all, Paul named some thirty or more co-workers who had spent varying amounts of time with him. Barnabas was his senior co-missionary from the Antioch church, Prisca and Aquila among his closest confidants, Timothy was a great long-time companion and in whom he trusted. Apollos, a Jewish convert to Christianity, had lived in Alexandria, the city second in influence in the Empire and known for its being a centre of learning and

trade. He would have been exposed to a great variety of philosophies. Paul we know also used scribes, one we know was named Tertius (Romans 16:22). The extensive greetings to the leading disciples in various places, in Rome most especially (Romans 16:3-16), show just how many Christian people, men and women, he knew and had worked with at various stages in his apostolate.

The second way Paul exerted his influence from a distance was the letter, which enabled Paul to speak directly and to the whole community at once. Sending a companion in his stead was a much more subtle approach. The letter, on the other hand, was often used by Paul to embarrass and refute his opponents publicly, who in turn had no possibility of debate with him. For example, Paul does not name the Judaizers in his letter to the Galatians, though there is a good chance he knew them from his days in Antioch. Paul also used a letter to get word to the community about some question which had been asked, a practice which the Corinthian Christians seemed to use well – there being at least four letters of Paul to the Corinthians, of which it is thought we have the second (see 1 Corinthians 5:9) and fourth (see 2 Corinthians 2:4).

There are 13 letters bearing Paul's name in the New Testament (Romans, 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Thessalonians, 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Timothy, Titus and Philemon). Of those, scholars are generally agreed that seven (namely Romans, 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Corinthians, Galatians, Philippians, 1<sup>st</sup> Thessalonians) were written or dictated by Paul himself. None of the 13, let alone the seven, is in the original form that Paul wrote. All of his letters have been subjected to a process of revision for the sake of preservation. For example, the Letter to the Philippians is the product of an editor's combining three letters into one (Philippians 1:1-3:1 and 4:2-9; 3:4-8; 4:10-20). I've mentioned the loss of the original first and third letters to the Corinthians, and it is good to note that we do not have the Corinthians' letters to Paul either. In all this, we do well to consider the role and authority of the Apostle in the early Church. A large corpus of writings carry Paul's name and exhibit many attributes of Paul's letters (the identification of the author and greeting to the recipient(s), the message, the prayer, the final greetings and farewell). The authors of these other letters gave them Paul's name to piggy-back on the authority of the Apostle himself to give it a better hearing. Far from fraud, this practice honouring authority was widespread in the ancient world, and is present in the rest of

## Footnotes:

- <sup>1</sup> The *ecclesia/i tou Theou* (gathering/s or assemblies of God) is Paul's usual expression (1Cor. 1:2; 10:32; 11:16, 22; 15:9; 2Cor. 1:1; Gal. 1:13; 1Th. 2:14; and later also in 2Th. 1:4; 1Tim. 3:5; 1Tim. 3:15), with the exception of the occasional *ekklesia/i tou Christou* (church/es of Christ: Rom. 16:16, and maybe also Gal. 1:22; 1Th. 2:14).
- <sup>2</sup> Only the later deutero-Pauline letters refer to Elders in church leadership (1Tim. 4:14; 5:17; 19; Titus 1:5; 2:2), and in Acts they are associated with Jewish and church leaders in Jerusalem (Acts 4:5, 8, 23; 6:12; 11:30; 15:2, 4, 6, 22, 23; 16:4; 21:18; 22:5; 23:14; 24:1; 25:15), with the notable exceptions of 14:23 and 20:17!
- <sup>3</sup> Paul does use the verb form of 'synagogue' (to gather together) twice (Rom. 15:30; 1Cor. 5:4).
- <sup>4</sup> OK, maybe he did finally give up with some (Acts 28:23-31).
- <sup>5</sup> *Hagiasmos* occurs in Rom. 6:19, 22; 1Cor. 1:30; 1Th. 4:3, 4, 7; 2Th. 2:13; 1Tim. 2:15; and elsewhere in the NT only in Heb. 12:14 and 1Pet. 1:2. The related terms *hagiosune* (holiness) occur in Rom. 1:4; 2Cor. 7:1; 1Th. 3:13, and *hagiotēs* (holiness) only in Heb. 12:10.
- <sup>6</sup> Note the range of meanings behind 'body of Christ' in the following texts: Rom. 7:4; 12:5; 1Cor. 10:16; 12:12, 27; Eph. 4:12; 5:23; Col. 1:24; 2:17; 3:15.

## PAUL AND MISSION

Highfield Road Uniting  
March 22nd 2009

Rev Dr Sean Winter



Church, Canterbury,

Uniting Church Theologi-

resolution. Both his letters and Acts make it plain that he knew that returning to Jerusalem with the fellowship offering was not a wise move, humanly speaking (Rom. 15:30-32; Acts 20:22-23 and following). Yet he persisted. Whether the Jerusalem 'church' accepted the offering, or asked him to spend (some of) it on purifying himself and others in the Temple before they would touch it (Acts 21:17 and following) is not clear. Ultimately, we hear no more of their support. Paul ends up in Rome and is beheaded for his troubles — traditionally on the site outside Rome where St Paul's now stands. 'Church' unity: a forlorn hope? A spiritual reality despite our differences? Something still worth dying for? Maybe our experience suggests it is impossible at the local level, let alone the national and international levels.

Many scholars have emphasised Paul's apocalyptic world view — that he expected the imminent return of Jesus Christ when all things would be fixed up and fulfilled. Certainly there are texts in some of Paul's letters that can be cited in support of such a view, although I think they are motivated more by particular questions, such as those coming from the Thessalonians about sisters and brothers who have already died, for example (1 Th. 4). I think Paul's alleged apocalypticism has been greatly overemphasised. Paul has far more to say about the 'church' in his letters than about the 'End Times'. For Paul the 'church' is evidence of an inaugurated, if not realised, eschatology — it is nothing less than a foretaste of the reign of God, the body of Christ in a struggling world.

Since we now live in the shadows of Christendom-past, we may well have lost sight of how much the transformed and transforming people of God have contributed over the centuries to the wider culture we take for granted. Some respond to the realisation that we are entering a post-Christian age by leaping to defend the last bastions of Christian influence against the perceived threats of secular humanism, Islamic fundamentalism, 'scientific' atheism or family breakdown and immorality. That would not be Paul's response. He was not a fan of defending fading glories (2 Cor. 3:13-16). Rather, he saw the tremendous power of the Spirit unleashed in the *agapic* gatherings of God, and looked forward to the ongoing fulfillment of that transforming reality amongst all people and within all God's creation (Rom. 8).

the Bible. The Pentateuch, for example, was ascribed by Jewish tradition to Moses and the Gospels do not name their authors. It is more helpful for us to avoid trying to distil the authentic writings from the ascribed writings of Paul. Would it not be better to look rather to their place in the New Testament tradition and influence over twenty Christian centuries? If we are too keen on the question of authorship, we run the risk of losing out on the great insights and theological reflection these other letters have to offer us. For example, the Letter to the Hebrews made its way into the canon because it was thought to be one of Paul's, and it isn't, and yet Hebrews is a Lenten favourite. What is more, these letters which were written by those close to Paul are evidence of the influence of the Apostle over the Church in the earliest days. They show us that the whole Church is learning from Paul even in the late first century, and that it is important to preserve his memory and the inspired teaching he bequeathed us who follow him in faith.

\* \*

A final word on St Paul: Paul is the one who, more than any other of the early disciples of Christ, took the message into another culture, namely the Hellenised Roman culture. Paul may be seen as an innovator whose vocation it was to come to terms with and reconcile to a certain degree the culture in which the Gospel was to be proposed. In so doing, Paul's writings have a unique quality about them among those in the New Testament. Paul eluded the influence of the Twelve, of James and the Judaisers so as to present the Gospel in places other than those over which they had influence, due to his conviction that the Gospel has universal application; "For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." (Romans 3:23). The letters lead us to the fact of our call, our vocation, to apostolic witness coming through the wisdom and teaching of Paul himself.

I pray that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you a spirit of wisdom and revelation as you come to know him, so that, with the eyes of your heart enlightened, you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance among the saints, and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power for us who believe, according to the working of his great power.

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**"The Jew, The Citizen, The Apostle: An Introduction to St Paul"** was the first lecture in a series given for the Canterbury Council of Churches' Lenten Journey with St Paul, 1<sup>st</sup> March 2009.

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## **PAUL THE APOSTLE: The Heart of his Theology**

**St Paul's Anglican Church, Canterbury, 8 March, 2009**

**Brendan Byrne, SJ**

that God loves them if they can't escape from the brothel; an alcoholic, if they can't leave behind the bottle; an addict, if they're hopelessly addicted? Probably not much point at all, if it's just words. But if they are already an accepted part of a daily gathering, loved and valued for their new identity and not judged for their old one . . . what kinds of transformation might emerge? Who belongs to our faith communities? Do our wayward sons and daughters still find a loving welcome? What elaborate rituals and membership rules have we devised to keep the 'impure' at bay? Are we enlivened by the Spirit of transformation or slowly being pickled in the spirit of preservation?

### *2.5 The 'church' is a suffering community*

This is not really what we want to hear. The gospel of prosperous, triumphant Christianity seems to sell so much better and generate far larger gatherings. Yet Paul does not shy away from the grim realities of life, whether of his own experiences or of his communities: "If one member suffers, all suffer with it; if one is honoured, all rejoice with it" (1 Cor. 2:26). I have already mentioned some of the realities of life then, particularly in the towns and cities. Very few 30 year-olds in the first century had living parents; very few couples had all their children surviving. Many in the ancient world were terrified of death, and of the dead, and of the consequences of not performing the rituals of dying correctly. Funeral clubs existed for rich and poor to ensure that these things would be carried out properly, so that their spirits would not be left wandering homelessly and hopelessly into eternity.

The early gatherings of God were into palliative care. They sat with the dying and the grieving; they even lived fearlessly with the dead (remember the catacombs?) — not in cheap triumphalism, but in the conviction that death was not without hope (1 Th. 4:13); not with a resurrection belief that denied grief, but one that recognised the deep joy and hope of suffering shared. Will the growing army of grey nomads in our wider community find such a welcoming presence in their suffering years?

### *2.6 The 'church' is a united community*

So we return to where we began: Paul dying for the unity of the 'church' — but not as a second Messiah! I think Acts stops short of telling us about Paul's death for that very reason — to avoid any suggestion that Paul is like a second Jesus. Yet Paul also confronts his destiny with Christ-like

Every time Paul speaks of his 'call experience' (which is a more accurate way to describe what some have called his 'conversion', see Gal. 1:15-16), he refers to himself as being sent by God to the Gentiles. Paul's mission is inseparably linked to his encounter with Christ and his understanding of the 'church' — the new communities of Christ believers. Thus cross-cultural 'mission' (although Paul never uses this particular Latin term himself) is an inseparable part of who Christ is, who Paul is, and what the gatherings embody. So this is a bedrock statement for Paul: "There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female, for all of you are one in Christ Jesus" (Gal. 3:28).

This is all about erasing boundaries of privilege — not about erasing differences. Our 'oneness' ('at-one-ment') is not limited to any particular ethnic, social or sexual identity. It does *not* mean that in the 'church' our identity is swallowed up in the dominant culture, so that we all speak Latin, or Spanish, or English (as various stages of Christian mission have sometimes mistakenly thought). God delights in diversity (as a walk in any garden will testify!), and so if we can't cope with the inconveniences of cultural hybridity, diverse music styles, and multi-lingual worship, we'd better find ourselves a more exclusive club that reaffirms our particular prejudices and keeps alive our myth of superiority. For Paul, the 'church' is multi-cultural (in ethnicity, status and gender) by nature or it is not the 'church' at all.

#### *2.4 The 'church' is a transformed and transforming community*

Just after one of Paul's lists of all that goes wrong in the lives of humans divorced from God (1 Cor. 6:9-10, and the translation of this list is very tricky!) he says of the gathered 'saints': "And this is what some of you used to be. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God" (1 Cor. 6:11). 'In Christ' this motley collection of human beings has been given a new identity, a new start — they are no longer defined by what they once were! And this applies, as far as Paul is concerned, even to the many slaves amongst them who would return from the gathering to whatever physical and sexual abuse their masters might visit upon them. The ultimate reality of their new identity still needed to be worked through in everyday life. It had immediate traction in the gatherings of God (1 Cor. 6:12-20), but the transformation of the wider society would take some time yet (both then and now)!

We may be more cynical than Paul. What's the point of telling a prostitute

A colleague of mine is wont to excuse his neglect of Paul on the spurious and somewhat mischievous basis that he doesn't believe in reading other people's mail. My attempts to explain that none of Paul's letters, even the brief one to Philemon, were really private and that each would have been read out publicly, fall upon deaf ears. But, as a Pauline scholar, I'm delighted that you have chosen to devote your ecumenical Lenten series to a consideration of the Apostle and am very happy to share with you some of my insights about him this evening.

You are, of course, exploring various aspects of Paul in the course of the series. I have been asked to explore with you the heart of his spirituality and theology. I realize that Br Paul Rowse began the series last week with an introduction to Paul's life. I don't want to repeat that. However, I do believe that to explore the heart of Paul's spirituality it is necessary to consider something of his early life as a background to the great turning point that occurred on the road to Damascus.

Paul grew up in Tarsus, a prosperous city, capital of the Roman province of Cilicia, a fertile stretch of land between the Taurus mountains and the Mediterranean Sea. His family, then, belonged to the Jewish Diaspora, the communities of Jews that had spread throughout the major cities of the Greco-Roman world. The proficiency in the writing of Greek and the use of rhetoric later displayed in his letters suggest that his family was wealthy enough to see that he received a good education in both Greek and Jewish learning. In this sense he grew up a man of two worlds—a very good preparation for his subsequent missionary career.

As a young man, to deepen his knowledge of his ancestral faith, Paul went to Jerusalem. Here he became a Pharisee, a member of that movement in Judaism that saw the Law of Moses supplemented and interpreted by a host of oral traditions which they—the Pharisees—guarded and preserved. Early in his letter to the Galatians Paul assures readers that he advanced beyond many of his contemporaries in his zeal for the traditions of the ancestors:

You have heard, no doubt, of my earlier life in Judaism. I was violently persecuting the church of God and was trying to destroy it. I advanced in Judaism beyond many among my people of the same age, for I was far more zealous for the traditions of my ancestors. (Gal 1:13-14).

Soon the young Pharisee found himself principally exercising his zeal by

seeking to root out and suppress members of a movement within Judaism who believed that a certain Jesus of Nazareth, crucified as a Messianic pretender by the Romans a few years before, had been raised by God from the dead. For them this proved the truth of the claims they were making concerning him: namely, that he was the Messiah.

We do not know what precisely it was about this new movement within Judaism that so provoked the ire of young zealot. But it would seem that he inflicted such injury upon the community that the memory of his brief persecuting career remained bitter and dogged him long after he had himself joined its ranks.

### ***Conversion and Call***

The turnaround in Paul's life on the road to Damascus must be reckoned one of the truly momentous conversions in religious history. Aside from the three accounts in the Acts of the Apostles (Acts 9.1-19; 22.1-16; 26.2-23), Paul himself refers to it in various places in his own letters. The briefest but the one I believe goes immediately to the heart of the matter is tucked away in a clause of a longer sentence again early in the letter to the Galatians (1.15-16):

But when God, who had set me apart before I was born and called me through his grace, was pleased to reveal his Son to (in, through) me, so that I might proclaim him among the Gentiles, I did not confer with any human being, nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those who were already apostles before me, but I went away at once into Arabia, and afterwards I returned to Damascus...

'(T)o reveal his Son to me': the last phrase, 'to me', is richly ambiguous, especially if we are right to hear echoes of biblical (OT Hebrew) language behind the Greek. Does Paul mean 'to reveal his Son to me', or 'in me' (that is, in my inmost being), or 'through me' (that is, as an instrument of the gospel to the nations)? Perhaps he means all three. The key thing, though, is that the crucified Nazarene, one whose mode of death (hanging on a tree), according to the Book of Deuteronomy, attracted the curse of the Law (Deut. 21.23; cf. Gal. 3.10-13) and whose proclamation as Messiah, therefore, amounted to nothing less than blasphemy, was now revealed to him as God's only Son. The revelation turned upside down Paul's understanding of God, and God's ways with Israel and the world as a whole. Perhaps this is

sociologists might call a 'fictive kinship group') in any 'normal' sense (whether the first-century patriarchal model, or the modern 'nuclear' family), but only insofar as God is 'Father', Jesus is 'firstborn' (Rom. 8:29) and we are all sisters and brothers. This is an open, extended family, where we may well have differing functions and roles, but where all are valued equally and all contribute to the well-being of the gathering.

## **2. How does Paul describe the way the 'churches' (*ekklesiai*) work?**

### ***2.1 The 'church' is a gifted body (charismata for all)***

We can easily overlook how radical some of Paul's teachings are. When Paul states: "To *each* is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the *common* good" (1 Cor. 12:7), we should try to hear it as if we were the lowest slave in a big household. Even if it could be affirmed then that a slave had gifts, they would be seen as serving the interests of the head of the household and his patron above him. But Paul speaks of *each* of us having gifts (*charismata*) for the benefit of all of us (*common* good), to bring us together and to build us up. We have sometimes turned this idea of 'giftedness' into another form of elitism, or into a life-long quest for some mysterious spiritual charism. Paul states flatly that *we are all gifted*, not for our own benefit but for others. Whether it be stacking chairs, washing dishes, sitting with the dying, playing music or preaching sermons — surely we can find something that each of us can do to 'build up' the community.

### ***2.2 The 'church' is a built-up body (oikodome)***

And that is precisely the awkward word that Paul uses over and over again: 'house-building' or 'up-building'. It is awkward, because we have said that Paul doesn't talk about 'church' buildings at all, and yet here he is using (some 24 times in the Pauline letters) this very practical word that is all about 'building'. He uses it, of course, in contexts entirely to do with people (1 Cor. 8:1), or 'one-another' (1 Th. 5:11), or the *ekklesia* (1 Cor. 14:4). Does it mean to build each other up in character, in knowledge, in confidence, in love, in numbers, perhaps even in more practical ways still — food and clothing for the needy, comfort for the grieving, housing for the destitute? Yes, I think it does. All of the above. How do we know we have a 'gift of the Spirit'? First test: it will achieve exactly these sorts of things, and 'up-build' the community.

### ***2.3 The 'church' is an inclusive body (Gal. 3:28)***

the *sema* of the *psyche*), Paul affirms that the *soma* is the shrine of the Spirit!

#### 1.4 The 'church' as the temple of the Holy Spirit

This is a remarkable statement for Paul to make. At the very time when the re-building of the Jerusalem Temple was nearing completion as one of the wonders of the first century world (after a 70 year building project begun by Herod the Great), Paul has the temerity to suggest that the Spirit of God resides instead in the communal body of believers (1 Cor. 3:16-17; 6:19). Note carefully that the correct translation (if not the correct grammar!) of 6:19 is: 'The body of *youse* is the temple of the Holy Spirit.' Paul is not emphasising here the individual indwelling of the Spirit — we need to go to other texts for that. This is not a call to personal bodily sanctification and privatised ethics. The 'you' is unmistakably plural in Greek: "the body of *you all* is the temple of the Holy Spirit" — but unfortunately this gets lost in our English translations. Paul is stating emphatically that the very Spirit of God revealed in Jesus is present and honoured ('en-shrined' and 'worshipped') within the inter-relatedness of our gathering and sending out.

Again, this is not 'just a metaphor', a future hope, or a nice goal for an idealized community — it is a present reality: the faith community embodies the Trinitarian life of God through the Spirit. If Paul even makes this claim about the Corinthian community with all its obvious failures, then we must not shrink from claiming it still today and living out its consequences.

#### 1.5 The 'church' as the extended household of God

Paul does not adopt uncritically the Greco-Roman family language and metaphors of his day when he speaks of the 'church'. To do so would be to affirm a patriarchal structure where the father (*pater familias*) had absolute power and all ownership rights over every member of the household. Paul occasionally speaks ironically of himself as 'father' of 'his churches' (1 Cor. 4:15; 1 Thess. 2:11), but overwhelmingly he reserves use of the word 'father' for God (as also in the Jesus tradition, Matt. 23:9!). So when looking for 'family language' that is consistent with his understanding of the gatherings of God, Paul repeatedly uses sibling language (brother/sister), reflecting the most stable and mutual relationships of the first century Mediterranean world.

For Paul then, the 'church' cannot be described as a 'family' (or what the

what Caravaggio wished to convey the most famous of his depictions of the scene.

Paul gives a more sustained theological description of this moment in 2 Corinthians. Speaking of the divergent reception the preaching of the gospel receives he writes:

'For it is the God who said, "Let light shine out of darkness", who has shone in our hearts to light up the knowledge of the glory of God on the face of Jesus Christ' (4:6).

The language here is uncannily reminiscent of the Fourth Gospel (John 1.1-5), isn't it? "Let light shine out of darkness". Paul seems here to think of coming to faith as akin to the act of creation: to God's saying in the darkness of unbelief: 'Let there be light' — a light which reveals the crucified One to be the Son of God, the very image (*eikôn*) of God.

It is impossible, I think, to overestimate the radicality of this experience, the way in which it completely cancelled out everything that Paul thought gave him value in the sight of God hitherto. This is how he describes the transfer from one way of life to another in Philippians 3:4-12

...If anyone else has reason to boast in the flesh, I have more: circumcised on the eighth day, a member of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew born of Hebrews; as to the law, a Pharisee; as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to righteousness under the law, blameless. Yet whatever gain I had, I have come to regard as loss because of Christ. More than that, I regard everything as loss because of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things, and I regard them as garbage, in order that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but one that comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God based on faith. ... Not that I have already obtained this or have already reached the goal; but I press on to capture it in the same way that Christ Jesus has captured me.

That last phrase sums up the experience so powerfully. Paul strives to 'capture' the prize as Christ has 'captured' him. The Greek verb suggests the

kind of vigorous action a parent might take when grabbing a small child who has suddenly headed out on to a dangerously busy road.

So when we ask what was central to Paul's faith, we have the response right here: it is this sense of being 'captured' by Christ. The risen Lord has taken over his life completely, displacing the Torah (Law of Moses), which had up till now been everything to him. This is how he sums up his new existence in Galatians 2:19-20

For through the law I died to the law, so that I might live to God. With Christ I hang upon a cross; it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself up for me.

Where Paul the Pharisee would have said, 'For me to live is the Torah', Paul the believer in Jesus can simply say 'For me to live is Christ' (Phil 1.21a).

That sense of being grasped by the Son of God in a love that was both deeply personal, and supremely costly in that it involved death by crucifixion, is the heart of Paul's spirituality and the engine of his mission. It is surely remarkable that the most striking sense of being loved by Jesus in the New Testament comes from one who, in contrast to the remaining apostles, never actually knew Jesus 'according to the flesh' (cf. 2 Cor 5:16). This reflects the situation of all subsequent believers, including ourselves. Paul guarantees that we can have a relationship with the Lord just as intimate as those, like Peter and John and Andrew, who walked and talked with him on the dusty roads of Palestine.

### ***No 'holy nation'***

Paul's brief allusion to his conversion early in the letter to the Galatians (1:16) that I cited a moment ago suggests that he considered his coming to faith in Christ and his vocation to be missionary to the nations to be virtually one and the same. In particular, his passionate belief that believers from the non-Jewish world ('Gentiles') were not to have imposed on them the obligation to become Jews first before they could be members of the community of salvation flowed directly from it. What he had experienced so personally—namely that all his righteousness under the Jewish law really counted for nothing (Phil 3:4-9)—played itself out in his personal strategy of mission. There was no longer any 'holy nation', walled up in righteousness

12:31), and despite all their many failures, they were given a new identity, a new hope, and a new 'family'.

### ***1.3 The 'church' as the body of Christ***

Paul's 'body language' is very interesting in the context of the Greco-Roman world, where it was common to see naked statues on every street corner of the big cities, naked competitors in Olympic and other games, and mixed nude bathing. Paul doesn't seem to be too concerned with nakedness as such, but is emphatically opposed to the exploitation and abuse of 'the body' (especially of 'slave bodies', regarded by the free as 'talking tools') so prevalent in his day (see 1 Cor. 6 and Paul's frequent attacks on immorality/*porneia*). But rather than let the widespread nakedness and abuse of 'bodies' put him off using the word altogether, Paul repeatedly makes the extraordinary claim that those who are 'in Christ' are indeed the very 'body of Christ'. This is not just a nice metaphor, a desirable goal, but a present reality for Paul: "You (plural!) *are* the body of Christ . . ." (1 Cor. 12:27).<sup>6</sup>

The word 'body' (*soma*) is of particular significance for Paul, especially in the Corinthian correspondence, where it is used of the individual human body and the corporate body of believers in close proximity (1 Cor. 6); of the eucharistic body of Christ (1 Cor. 10–11); of the ecclesial body of Christ (1 Cor. 12–14); of cosmic and other natural bodies (1 Cor. 15:40); of 'soulish' and spiritual bodies (1 Cor. 15:44); and of the resurrection body (1 Cor. 15). All of these references imply a corporate dimension (even when we don't hear it in English), with the exception of those few (of the forty-six occurrences in 1 Corinthians!) that are explicitly singular (1 Cor. 5:3; 7:4; 9:27; 13:3) or refer to a collection of individual bodies (1 Cor. 6:15). We should not make neat distinctions between these various meanings of *soma* — Paul had the vocabulary if he had wished so to do. Rather, we are left to ponder the mystery of how (not *whether*, but *to what extent*) the 'body of Christ' is the corporate, eucharistic, ecclesial, cosmic and resurrected body — and as Paul affirms, that body is us!

Alongside the fascination for fit, young, athletic bodies in Greco-Roman (and Australian!?) culture there was a widespread understanding that the old, grey, wrinkled body would one day be discarded as irrelevant as the liberated soul (*psyche*) ascended through the heavens to the Divine. Paul will have nothing of this. His holistic Jewish traditions do not permit the disembodiment of God's creation in this way. Indeed, rather than affirm the popular Greek epigram that the body is the prison of the soul (the *soma* is

interpret this as evidence that Paul was anti-Jewish or that he had turned his back on his fellow Jews, because Acts makes it very clear that Paul continued to visit synagogues whenever he could to evangelise the ‘God-fearers’ (Gentile ‘hangers-on’ who had not yet converted to Judaism). Rather, Paul avoids addressing synagogues directly in his letters because he understands himself as called to be the apostle to the Gentiles. The synagogues were part of Peter’s mandate (Gal. 2:7-9), and even though Paul never tired of trying to persuade his kinsfolk that in Christ Jesus the Gentiles were now also part of the covenant people, he was not asking Jews to forsake the synagogue or their traditions.<sup>4</sup>

We should be careful not to over emphasise only the ‘gathering’ as defining ‘church’, as obviously it was the ‘gatherings’ that also did the ‘sending out’ (*apostello*) that Paul affirms and identifies with so strongly. For Paul, ‘churches’ are gathering and sending communities.

### 1.2 The ‘church’ as the ‘different ones’ (*hagioi*) in Christ

Like other New Testament writers, Paul refers to the followers of Jesus as the *hagioi* (the holy ones, the set-apart and different ones — later on translated by the Latin word ‘saints’). Significantly and distinctively, Paul also uses *hagiasmos* (the related noun meaning holiness, sanctification) as a description of these groups<sup>5</sup>. Unfortunately today these words can give us the impression of stuffy ‘holier-than-thou’ elitism, as if an arrogant moral superiority was the major hallmark of the earliest Jesus people. If we had time to read 1 Corinthians together (chapters 5 and 6!) we would see that nothing could be further from the truth.

Living the Way of love (*agape*, a favourite Pauline term) certainly led to different values, ethics and hopes, but it did not magically remove the Pauline communities from the squalid world of slavery, sexual abuse, and prostitution so common in larger cities like Rome and Corinth. There is ongoing scholarly debate about the social profile of the Pauline communities (how many were wealthy, wise and free? See 1 Cor. 1:26), but the recent work of Justin Meggitt, Rodney Stark, Jennifer Glancy, Robert Jewett and others has given us a much more realistic picture of conditions in first century cities. Life for the vast majority was ‘nasty, brutish and short’ — there was no ‘middle class’ — but being part of the body of Christ had immediate practical and ethical implications. There was no chance of abolishing slavery at that time, but the *hagioi* were still able to live differently. They practiced ‘the more excellent way’ of love (*agape*, 1 Cor.

over against the ‘unclean’ nations of the world. In the crucified Messiah God had swept away that separate holiness and exposed its sinfulness (Rom 3:21-30). In the face of a human alienation from God that was truly universal, the gospel was calling into being a community of believers, made up of Jews and Gentiles alike, made holy through baptism and the gift of the Spirit. This divine outreach of grace meant that it was outdated and indeed contrary to God’s purpose to try to enforce Gentile converts to become ‘holy’ through taking on ritual observances of the Jewish law. The barrier between ‘holy nation’ and ‘unholy rest’ had irrevocably been cast down:

You are all sons (and daughters) of God in Christ Jesus. Inasmuch as you have been baptized into Christ, you have put on Christ. There is no longer Jew or Greek, slave or free, male and female. For you are all one person in Christ Jesus (Gal 3:26-28).

It was in the name of this truth that Paul felt himself obliged to issue his celebrated rebuke to Peter at Antioch, when Peter, who had previously eaten with Gentile believers, withdrew to a separate table following the arrival of more law-observant believers associated with James (Gal 2:11-14):

But when Cephas came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he stood self-condemned; for until certain people came from James, he used to eat with the Gentiles. But after they came, he drew back and kept himself separate for fear of the circumcision faction. ... But when I saw that they were not acting consistently with the truth of the gospel, I said to Cephas before them all, “If you, though a Jew, live like a Gentile and not like a Jew, how can you compel the Gentiles to live like Jews?” We are Jews by birth and not ‘Gentile sinners’. Yet knowing (or ‘having come to know’) that a person is justified not by works of the law but by faith in Christ, we have put our faith in Christ Jesus in order that we might be justified by faith and not by works of the law’ (Gal 2:15-16).

What Paul is doing here is recalling the fundamental ‘conversion conviction’ that all believers of Jewish origin such as Peter and himself had come to share. God had thrown down the barrier that had previously meant so much to them. To seek to re-erect it by establishing separate tables is truly to ‘transgress’ (v. 18); it is to fly in the face of God’s act, rebuffing the

supremely costly work of Christ (Gal 2:18-21).

It is also important to note, I believe, that what Paul is insisting upon here is very much in continuity with what we know from the Gospels was the practice of Jesus. Jesus kept ‘bad company’—or what a lot of people at the time thought was bad company—by dining with ‘tax collectors and sinners’, celebrating with them the outreach of God’s mercy:

And as he sat at dinner in the house, many tax collectors and sinners came and were sitting with him and his disciples. When the Pharisees saw this, they said to his disciples, “Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?” But when he heard this, he said, “Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. Go and learn what this means, *‘I desire mercy, not sacrifice.’* For I have come to call not the righteous but sinners.” (Matt 9:10-13).

Paul’s mission strategy is totally in line with this practice of Jesus.

### ***A New Humanity called into being by God’s Grace***

So what does Paul think he’s doing? What is God’s dream for humanity that he thinks he’s implementing by going around the world in the service of the Gospel? Paul saw that dream sketched out in Scripture—what for us, of course, is the Old Testament. To be more specific, he focused very much upon the figure of Abraham. In Paul’s view, when God called Abraham and promised him that he would become the ‘father’ of a great many nations, that in his offspring (‘seed’) all the nations would find a ‘blessing’, when God did that, God wasn’t just calling into being the nation of Israel; there was also a wider promise being made: that in one particular descendant of Abraham, the Jewish Messiah, God’s original plan for humanity as set out in the story of creation at the beginning of the Bible, would begin to be fully realized.

That original design, for human beings and for the entire world, had been and continues to be, frustrated by human sin. Paul has a very sophisticated view of sin. For him it is ultimately a radical selfishness, poisoning relationships in all directions: with God, with one’s fellow human beings, with one’s body, with the non-human remainder of the world (Rom 8:18-22). The life of Jesus Christ, above all his self-sacrificing death upon the cross, represents an outpouring of God’s grace and love sufficient to turn back the vast tide of human sinfulness (unleashed for Paul in Adam) and

26:28; 1 Peter 4:14). So we should be very careful not to make glib statements like: ‘Paul became a Christian on the road to Damascus’ or ‘Paul was the greatest Christian missionary’. Such statements assume a separate Christian identity much too early. Paul would not be happy at all with the great schism between Judaism and Christianity that occurred later on, as Romans 9-11 makes abundantly clear. For Paul there were Jewish followers of Jesus and there were Gentile (or ‘ethnic’) followers of Jesus, and it was important that the ethnic followers did not have to become Jews in order to follow Jesus. The nickname ‘Christian’ was apparently not yet part of the discussion in Paul’s day.

Similarly, though perhaps a little less straightforwardly, Paul never used the term ‘church’ — well at least not in the sense that ‘church’ is defined in our dictionaries today. Every dictionary I have consulted gives the primary meaning of ‘church’ as something like: ‘**noun.** 1. Building for public Christian worship.’ Paul never speaks of such buildings. The closest reference to a building might be the house of Gaius we mentioned earlier, or the synagogues, houses and lecture halls that Acts mentions when telling Paul’s story. I’m deliberately labouring the point here somewhat, but we do need reminding that Paul’s preferred term, *ekklesia* (or gathering/assembly), refers explicitly to *people*, not to buildings. We are the ‘church’; we don’t ‘go to church.’

### **1. What does Paul say about the ‘church’ (*ekklesia*)?**

#### *1.1 The ‘church’ as gatherings of God*

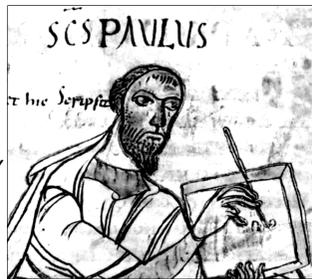
*Ekklesia* is not a particularly religious term at all, but Paul consistently chooses to use it in his letters when he refers to those who gather in the name of Jesus Christ. Interestingly, and again this is in continuity with his Jewish heritage, these groups are known (overwhelmingly) as the ‘gatherings of God’ rather than of Jesus Christ, in Paul’s letters. In fact, if we were to announce the results of the first inter-denominational Cup based on Paul’s letters, it would be Assemblies of God 8 d. Churches of Christ 1 — with none of us Catholics, Anglicans, Uniting Church or Baptists even making the play-offs<sup>1</sup>! Presbyterians (‘elders’) might just claim a spot in the draw, but they seem to be associated more with the Jerusalem church networks than the Pauline circle.<sup>2</sup>

Paul never once uses the word ‘synagogue’ in his letters<sup>3</sup>. But we shouldn’t

His profound sense that it is the impulse of the Spirit poured into our hearts, rather than detailed prescriptions of law, that should regulate and energize Christian life.

**Paul's Understanding  
Canterbury Baptist  
2009**

*Dr Keith Dyer (Whitley*



**of 'the Church'  
Church, March 15th**

*College)*

I think that Paul would be delighted with our gathering here today for the Canterbury Council of Churches Lenten Series. In Romans 16:23, Paul sends greetings to Rome on behalf of Gaius of Corinth, in whose house 'the *whole church*' gathers. Given what we read of the diversity of the various factions at Corinth, this must have been something like the first century equivalent of an ecumenical or inter-denominational event, such as we rejoice in sharing today. Ultimately, as we shall see, it was for such practical expressions of ecclesial unity in diversity that Paul dies. Against all warnings and prophecies (Acts 20:22-23), Paul insists on personally accompanying the 'fellowship offering' from the Gentile 'churches' back to Jerusalem, where he is arrested and then finally ends up as a prisoner in Rome (Acts 21-28). Whatever else we may think about Paul, it is clear from his letters and the stories in Acts that he is passionate about the 'church' and about maintaining connections between all its branches. Before we read too much of our own context back onto Paul, however, we should remind ourselves that strictly speaking, Paul says *absolutely nothing* about the 'Christian church'! For a start, Paul never uses the word 'Christian'. Not once. Not in any of his letters. If he was aware of this nickname that apparently was first used in Antioch, he chooses not to use it. In fact, it occurs only three times in the whole New Testament (Acts 11:26;

reclaim the human race for true humanity in right relationship to its Creator. It is so hard to communicate, in the brief space of this talk, the simple and wonderfully hopeful truth that these texts are asserting over and over:

For if through one man's trespass, many died, *much more* have the grace of God and the gift in grace of the one man Jesus Christ abounded for many. (Rom 5:15)

If through one man's (i.e., Adam's) trespass, death reigned through that one man, *much more* will those who accept the overflow of grace and the gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man Jesus Christ (5:17)

Paul loves that 'much more' on the grace side!

Last year a member of my order of Vietnamese background gave me a little book containing the writings of Cardinal Francis Xavier Nguyen Van Thuan. Thuan was the young and very energetic bishop of Nha Trang in Vietnam, who was imprisoned by the communist regime after the fall of Saigon in 1975 for thirteen years, eight of them in solitary confinement, when he could do simply nothing. (After his release and expulsion from Vietnam, he toured the world giving talks and missions. He came several times to Australia, where his mother lived to a great age. He was made a cardinal by Pope John Paul II and died in 2002.) He described to a friend a very low point of his imprisonment in these words:

My morale was at its lowest. I was almost in despair. In the darkness of my cell, cut off from my diocese, from God's people, from any human contact, I could not do a thing for anyone; I could not even talk to anyone. I felt completely useless. I prayed, but God did not seem to hear. Then all of a sudden I saw, as if in a vision, Christ on the cross, crucified and dying. He was completely helpless .. certainly worse off than me in my prison cell. Then I heard a voice—was it his voice?—saying: 'At this precise moment on the cross, I redeemed all the sins of the world'

I think the grace and insight granted there to Francis Van Thuan expresses precisely Paul's sense of the victorious overflow of God's grace and love in the obedience of Christ's death upon the cross. It was a single act of divine love so great as to overwhelm all the world's evil at a stroke.

### ***The Human Response: Faith and Hope***

What, then, is required on the human side in response to this divine gift? Again, Paul pointed to Abraham as a model of the appropriate response: faith and hope. Faith to believe in a God who deals with sinful and weak human beings on the basis of such love and acceptance; hope that such a God will, despite the continuing existence of evil, deliver on the promise of salvation.

So the Gospel that Paul proclaims is basically a summons to the nations of the world to abandon idolatry—in both its ancient and modern forms—and align themselves alongside Israel with this outreach of divine grace: to be the ‘beachhead’, if you like of a new humanity. Or rather, not a new humanity but humanity as the Creator intended it to be coming true for the first time. That is why Paul says in a typical throwaway line: ‘if anyone is “in Christ”, behold a new creation’ (2 Cor 5:17).

### ***What about Israel?***

This is all very good and well. But Paul, no less than any other early Christian believer, was acutely conscious of a great trauma that has left its mark upon virtually all the writings of the New Testament: the fact that the bulk of Israel, the Jewish people, has not responded to the Gospel but instead continues to cling to the Law. Paul addresses this issue in chapters 9-11 of his letter to Rome. After a long and complex discussion he emerges with a hope for the eventual salvation of ‘all Israel’ on the basis that the calling and promises of God are never revoked (Rom 11:25-32).

Brothers and sisters, I want you to understand this mystery: a hardening has come upon part of Israel, until the full number of the Gentiles has come in. And so all Israel will be saved; ... As regards the gospel they are enemies for your sake; but as regards election they are beloved, for the sake of their ancestors; for the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable.

Relations between Christians and Jews down the centuries may well have taken a less tragic path had the Church not neglected this challenging but ultimately hopeful Pauline text.

### ***The Ekklesia***

Paul is not, then, indifferent to the fate of his Jewish brothers and sisters. But] (Paul) understands himself to be at the service of a mission to the nations, beginning from Jerusalem, continuing in Asia Minor and Greece, and ranging, in ambit at least, as far as Spain (Rom 15:19, 23-24). At the service of this mission his preaching of the gospel amounts to a ‘calling out’ from the nations those destined to be members of the renewed People of God.

In line with early Christian tradition, he refers to this community, whether taken as a whole or in its various local expressions, as in Ephesus, Corinth, or Philippi, by the Greek word *ekklēsia*. This word, which of course comes down to us as ‘church’, refers in everyday Greek usage to an assembly of the citizens summoned (literally, ‘called out’) by the civic herald to gather in assembly to hear official announcements and make an appropriate response. The aptness of this term to designate the community summoned and addressed by the gospel is patent. The community of believers, both local and worldwide, consists of the ‘called out’ ones: called out of darkness into God’s wonderful light. The members of this community enjoy a ‘citizenship’ (*politeuma*) vastly more privileged than of Rome—which in the ancient world was so desirable—the citizenship of God’s Kingdom, with the risen Lord, rather than the Roman emperor, as its ‘Lord’.

I don’t think that Paul believed that each and every human being (Jewish and Gentile) had to become explicit members of the to be saved. I’ve come to believe that he thought of the *ekklēsia* on the model of the ‘Diaspora’ understanding of Israel, in which he had been nurtured and raised: that is, a kind of nation among the nations of the world, a beachhead, if you like, of humanity as God intends it to be, a witness before the rest of the world of the existence and nature of God and of the human dignity and destiny to which the God of grace is calling all people.

I have tried to convey the essence of Paul’s personal vocation and mission. Let me sum up under three heads the heart of his theological vision: Paul’s unique witness to God as a God of grace

His passionate devotion to the person of Jesus Christ, who—like all of us—he never ‘knew’ according to the flesh but whose personal relationship with him simply led him to sum up his life: ‘for me, to live is Christ’.