

REV. ANTONIO MAGNANTE

DOES THE PAULINE CLAIM TO BE “IN CHRIST” REPRESENT UNIFORMITY IN CHRIST-FOLLOWERS?

A b s t r a c t. As an apostle and theologian Paul deserves to be discovered. He is really complex and multifaceted. To deal with him is always a challenge and one has to accept it in order to discover the depth of his theology. Since I started dealing with him professionally I have been haunted by a question: Did Paul cease to be a Jew after his conversion experience or continue to perceive himself as a member of his own Jewish lineage¹? In other words, how did he think he was after his experience along the Damascus road²? Most likely the best way to solve the problem is to discuss the consequences of his conversion experience, even though nobody knows what really happened to Paul along the Damascus road. Certainly it was not a moral conversion. He was not in need of a new ethical way of life, so his conversion was not spiritual. It was rather theological³, which implied “a reversal or transvaluation of values”⁴, that led Paul to revisit radically the basic system of values and commitments of his traditions.

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His previous system “is turned upside down, reversed and transvalued. The religious goal or target remains the same in the sense that righteousness or

Rev. Dr. ANTONIO MAGNANTE IMC, SSL (Biblicum), STD (Urbaniana), Biblical Theology, Head of Biblical Department TUC, Nairobi, Kenya; address for correspondence: e-mail: magnante2005@yahoo.it

¹ Cf. J.C. M i l l e r, *Paul and his Ethnicity: Reframing the Categories*, in: *Paul as Missionary. Identity, Activity, Theology and Practice*, T.J. B u r k e - B r i a n s & S. R o s n e r (Eds.), London: T & T Clark 2011, p. 37-50, 49.

² Cf. J.D.G. D u n n, *Who did Paul Think He was?*, “New Testament Studies” 45(1999), p. 174-193.

³ Cf. Ph. H. M e n o u d, *Revelation and Tradition*, “Interpretation” 7(1953), p. 131-141.

⁴ J.G. G a g e r, *Some Notes on Paul’s Conversion*, “New Testament Studies” 27(1980-1981), p. 697-704, 700.

justification continues as the focus of Paul's religious concern both before and after the conversion. But whereas the law had been the chosen path to this goal, and the Christ the rejected one, beforehand, their order is reversed after the event"⁵ of his experience at Damascus.

That "reversal and transvaluation" of values led Paul to understand himself as an apostle of the Gentiles and to focus passionately on the interpretation of the total event of Christ. That reinterpretation of the Jewish tradition, we believe, it was rather painful for Paul. He was a Pharisee and imbued with the Mosaic law, as he writes to the Galatians: "I advanced in Judaism beyond many of my own age among my people, so extremely zealous was I for the traditions of my fathers" (1:14). In the letter to the Philippians he takes up again the matter and says: "As to the law, a Pharisee, as to the zeal a persecutor of the Church, as to righteousness under the law blameless" (3:6). The antecedents to his conversion experience are very clear. Paul is conscious he has been without any stain and was persecuting the followers of Jesus moved by a kind of religious zeal. The new movement, according to the traditional Judaism, was made up of impostors, because a crucified Messiah was nothing but an absurdity⁶.

Both for Paul and every Jew a crucified Messiah is a tremendous stumbling block, since he had fallen under the sentence of the law: "Cursed be everyone who hangs on a tree" (Dt 21:23, quoted in Gal 3:13). For them a crucified Messiah cannot be the means of salvation for the human being. Consequently "the blasphemous claim that Jesus is the Messiah must be exposed, and its upholders must suffer"⁷. Paul is, then, confronted with the stumbling block of Jesus' cross and he is entangled at the corner of this contradiction in terms: a crucified Messiah. Paul cannot escape from that corner and a sudden and miraculous turning point is required. This happens to him along the Damascus road. According to J. Jeremias⁸ Damascus and not Jerusalem is the key to the understanding of Paul's Theology. In order to justify his statement Jeremias lists ten motives, which emphasise the importance of the Damascus: 1) Paul's fellowship with Christ; 2) Paul's under-

⁵ Ibid., p. 700.

⁶ H.G. Wood, *The Conversion of Paul: Its Nature, Antecedents and Consequences*, "New Testament Studies" 1(1954-1955), p. 276-282, 278; see also: J.D.G. Dunn, *Jesus, Paul and the Gospels*, Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans 2011, p. 153-154.

⁷ Wood, *The Conversion of Paul*, p. 278.

⁸ J. Jeremias, *The Key to Pauline Theology*, "Expository Times" 76(1964/1965), p. 27-30, here 28.

standing of the cross as a means of salvation; 3) Paul's knowledge that grace is omnipotent; 4) his idea of selection and predestination; 5) his knowledge of sin; 6) his radical opposition to legalism⁹; 7) his emphasis on hope; 8) his sense of missionary obligation; 9) his understanding of his role and authority as an apostle; 10) his doctrine on the Church.

In whatever fashion we want to consider the event of Damascus, what seems to be beyond any discussion is that Paul had to operate a readjustment of his traditional thinking; a radical revision of his previous beliefs. He understood that with Christ-event the final age had indeed begun¹⁰.

No doubt that Damascus marks a new beginning in Paul's life and in his way of thinking. A new creature is born at Damascus. In his life some changes have occurred. "The Damascus road encounter with the risen Jesus catalysed the change from Pharisee to follower and reoriented Paul's perspective of the events of salvation history"¹¹. Paul is no longer the persecutor of the Christian community, but a protagonist of its development. Whereas he was so zealous for the traditions of the fathers, now he has love and concern for the Gentile communities. He is no longer the strenuous keeper of the Mosaic Law, but is the defender of justification by faith¹².

At this juncture some questions arise: What has remained in Paul of what he was before? How did he readjust his way of thinking? What do 'being in Christ' and 'being a new creation' mean in Paul's life?

As stated above what seems to be clear is that he had to operate some adjustments in his life. The first readjustment he had to do was to acknowledge that the Messiah awaited by Israel was Jesus of Nazareth. This was well spelt out in the letter to the Romans: "... the gospel concerning his Son, who descended from David according to the flesh and designated Son of God in power, according to Spirit of holiness by his resurrection from the dead,

⁹ Jeremias' statement sounds a bit dated. As far as Paul and Judaism are concerned, nowadays, we have to do with a totally "new perspective". For this see J.D.G. D u n n, *The New Perspective on Paul*, BJRL 65(1983), p. 95-122; I d e m, Romans 1-8, WBC, Word Books: Dallas 1988, p. LXIII-LXXII; I d e m, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle*, Erdmans: Grand Rapids 1988, p. 335-340; D.J. M o o, *Paul and the Law in the Last Ten Years*, SJT 40(1987), p. 287-307; B. B y r n e, *Interpreting Romans Theologically in a Post - 'New Perspective' Perspective*, HTR 62(2001), p. 227-241.

¹⁰ Cf. D. S e n i o r, *The Mission Theology of Paul*, in D. S e n i o r, C. S t u h l m u e l l e r, (Eds.) *The Biblical Foundations for Mission*, New York: Orbis Book 1983, p. 168-169.

¹¹ T.J. R a l s t o n, *The Theological Significance of Paul's Conversion*, "Bibliotheca Sacra" 147(1990), p. 198-215, here 215.

¹² Cf. S e n i o r, *The Mission Theology of Paul*, p. 167.

Jesus Christ, our Lord” (1:3-4). Thus the man of Nazareth is the person through whom God will bring about his plan of salvation.

The second readjustment was to accept the paradox of the cross, since Jesus the Christ exercised his messianic function through his death, burial and resurrection. Paul here has to operate a big readjustment, since “nothing in Jewish tradition had prepared Paul for this paradoxical fact”¹³. Through Jesus’ death and resurrection all human beings with no distinction, may, through their faith, pass from death to life, from sin to God.

The cross, which was a stumbling block for Paul, has become the centre of his theological reflection. He also goes beyond the boundaries of his culture and tradition since he is strongly convinced that the salvation brought about by the crucified Jesus is universal, for “the Jews first, then the Greeks” (Rom 1:16). All, without any possible distinction, are justified, redeemed and atoned through Jesus Christ (cf. Rom 3:21-26).

No distinction texts describe how Jesus’ mission is universal: “For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; the same Lord is the Lord of all and is generous to all who call on him” (Rom 10:12); “For in Christ you are all children of God through faith. As many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. 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” (Gal 3:26-28).

In Paul’s theology there is no mid-way, he proposes an either or choice. Thus one is governed either by “flesh” or by “the Spirit”; one either belongs to “Christ” or to “the power of sin”. Consequently those who believe, that is, those who have appropriated to themselves the effects of Christ-event end up being “in Christ”, “belonging to him”, and being “members” of the body of Christ¹⁴. In other words, it can be said that “each of these polarities is a structure of existence in which one participates, in which one’s existence is defined because the participant is, by definition, ‘open’ to and governed by the structure”¹⁵. The preached gospel, then, is the exhortation to move from one structure to another structure, from the sphere of ‘sin’ or ‘law’ or ‘flesh’ to the sphere of ‘life’, ‘Christ’, ‘Spirit’. Most probably in a context

¹³ Ibid., p. 174.

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 176.

¹⁵ L.E. K e c k, *Paul and His Letters. Proclamation Commentaries*, Philadelphia: Fortress Press 1979, p. 79.

of mixture of ethnicities, one has to move from one culture to another culture, from one tradition to another tradition¹⁶.

PAUL’S IDEA OF TRANSFER

To answer the question as to what has remained in Paul of his ethnic identity after the conversion experience, we have to look to the Pauline “transfer terms”, as Sanders calls them¹⁷. Paul’s missionary strategy, as it appears in the Acts of the Apostles, had to do with a multiplicity of ethnic peoples living in Asia Minor. In the region, among others, there were Mysians, Bithynians, Lycaonians, Cappadocians, Cilicians, Pontians, Galatians¹⁸. From Rom 9:24 we learn that the Pauline Christian communities were composed of both Jews and Gentiles. Paul’s main concern, however, “was not to make the Gentiles Jews and the Jews Gentiles, but to unite them in a new perspective of faith and in a new type of communitarian relationship”¹⁹. More precisely we may state that “Paul is not just breaking down social barriers between Jews and Gentiles; he is telling the new followers of Christ that they are a new ethnicity/people/group [...]. He is not just declaring unity in Christ and the creation of a community that accepts all people. He is declaring that the followers of Christ are a new and different ethnicity and that their primary identity and group association must change from their old self-identity to this new one”²⁰.

Paul supports the idea of ethnic identity and unity when “he cites [...] a formula (widely thought to be pre-Pauline) used either as part of the rite [of baptism] or (more likely) in preparation for it. ‘There is neither Jew nor

¹⁶ Cf. S e n i o r, *The Mission Theology of Paul*, p. 176.

¹⁷ E. S a n d e r s, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism*, Philadelphia: Fortress Press 1977, p. 463.

¹⁸ Cf. J.D. H a y s, *Paul and the Multi-Ethnic First-Century World: Ethnicity and Christian Identity*, in T.J. B u r k e, B.S. R o s n e r (Eds.), *Paul as Missionary. Identity, Activity, Theology and Practice*, London: T & T Clark 2011, p. 76-87, here 78-79.

¹⁹ R. P e n n a, *Vangelo e Inculturazione. Studi sul rapporto tra rivelazione e cultura nel Nuovo Testamento*, Cinisello Balsamo: San Paolo (2001), p. 330.

²⁰ H a y s, *Paul and the Multi-Ethnic First-Century World*, p. 84. The same contention can also be found in: D.K. B u e l l, *Rethinking the Relevance of the Race for Early Christian Self-identification*, HTR 94(2001), No 4, p. 449-476; D.K. B u e l l and C.J. H o d g e, *The Politics Interpretation: The Rhetoric of Race and Ethnicity in Paul*, JBL 123(2004), No 2, p. 235-251. Arguing against this view of ethnic identity and unity is Ch.H. C o s g r o v e, *Did Paul Value Ethnicity?*, CBQ 68(2006), p. 268-290.

Greek, there is neither slave or free, there is no male and female, for you are all in Christ’”²¹. Taking this formula to be pre-Pauline Christian confession, those who accepted to be baptized were acknowledging first that among them there were divisions and second they were ready to commit themselves to eliminate them. “Certainly the proclamation of the elimination of divisions in the three areas should be seen first of all in terms of spiritual relations: that before God, whatever their differing situations all people are to be accepted on the same basis of faith and together make up the one body of Christ. But these three couplets also cover in embryonic fashion racial, cultural, and sexual implications as well”²².

BAPTISM AS A MEANS OF UNION WITH CHRIST

In Gal 3:27-28, Paul spontaneously shifts from faith to baptism, for faith is “adequately understood when it is linked to his teaching on baptism”²³. It is through baptism that the believer identifies himself with Christ’s death, burial and resurrection. Paul makes this clear in Rom 6:3-14 where he explains how Christians are united to Christ’s death, which ends up in his resurrection. The main theme, however, of Rom 6:3-14 is not baptism, but the intimate union of the believer with Christ, and baptism is the means that makes it possible²⁴. Paul’s teaching on baptism focuses on an existential link between two persons, that of the believers and that of Christ²⁵. Identified with Christ’s death, the believers are dead to sin (Rom 6:2.11); they are set free from sin (Rom 6:18.22); their old self is crucified and “the body of sin” destroyed (Rom 6:6). In other words, the believers are no longer slaves to sin (Rom 6:6); sin has no longer dominion over them (Rom 6:14). In a positive way, believers are alive to God (Rom 6:11); life coming from

²¹ F.G. D o w i n g, *A Cynic Preparation for Paul’s Gospel for Jew and Greek, Slave and Free, Male and Female*, NTS 42(1996), p. 454-462, here 457.

²² R.N. L o n g e n e c k e r, *Galatians*, WBC 41, Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers 1990, p. 157.

²³ J.A. F i t z m y e r, *Paul and his Theology. A Brief Sketch*, Prentice-Hall: A Simon & Schuster Company 1989, p. 86.

²⁴ See S. R o m a n e l l o, *L’identità dei credenti in Cristo secondo Paolo*, Bologna: EDB 2011, p. 116.

²⁵ See A. V a n h o y e, *Lettera ai Galati. Nuova versione, introduzione e comment*, I Libri Biblici, Milano: Paoline 2000, p. 103.

death (Rom 6:13). All this is made possible by sharing in Christ's death and resurrection through baptism. In this deep and unique participation in the Christ-event, believers share a new life (1Cor 6:17) and become "a new creation" (2Cor 5:17; Gal 6:15).

Through baptism one is transferred into "the domain of Christ, his field of force"²⁶. Paul expresses the change of one's own identity with the verb "to put on" or "to clothe". When the Greek verb "enduo" is followed by "a personal object, it means to take on the characteristics, virtues and/or intentions of the one referred to, and so to become like that person"²⁷. So those who have put on Christ must have become like him. They have to have the same mind-set as that of Christ (cf. Phil 2:5). This obviously means to shift from one mode of existence to a new one. This is supported by the fact that in Christ, as already pointed out, there are no longer racial, cultural, and sexual distinctions. They all are unified in Jesus Christ. In him, therefore, "there is a new 'oneness' that breaks down all the former divisions and heals injustices"²⁸.

In the end, baptism not only brings about a change in relationship, but also a change in the very self, expressed by the expression "to put on". Putting on Christ demands a radical change and transformation. In the first letter to the Corinthians, after the mention of all the vices of the pagans in order to mark their new situation, Paul adds: "And this is what some of you used to be. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God" (1Cor 6:11).

The first fruit of being baptized in Christ is the commitment of eliminating, as already mentioned, racial, cultural and sexual distinctions. Once baptized, the believers belong to a different category of people; they are "a new creation" (Gal 6:15), which is accessible to Jews and the Greeks as well. The only pre-condition is to have faith in Jesus Christ who died and is risen²⁹. So when divisions break out among Christians something is wrong. They must have lost sight of their true identity. The divisions that broke out among the Christian Corinthians were strongly reprimanded by Paul (cf. 1Cor 1:10-17). Each group attached itself to a particular person such as Apollo, Paul, Cephas and Christ and the consequent slogan was: "I belong to...". Paul was

²⁶ K e c k, *Paul and His Letters*, p. 58.

²⁷ R.N. L o n g e n e c k e r, *Galatians*, p. 156.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 158.

²⁹ See V a n h o y e, *Lettera ai Galati*, p. 104.

very quick in restating his common teaching. For him Christ is undivided and indivisible. It was Christ, and not Paul, as he remarks, who died for the Corinthians, so they belong only to him.

For Paul “baptism ‘in the name of Christ’ makes it impossible for believers to feel bound to any other than Christ. The ‘name’ (Jesus Christ) that was invoked over them denotes the Lord to whom they exclusively belong from the time of their baptism”³⁰. Paul speaks of “being baptized in his death”, and “being buried with him” (cf. Rom 6:4). Since “Christ is not a ‘sphere’ into which we are plunged, but the personal Christ with all that happened to him; our baptism ‘into Christ’ has the goal of uniting us with Christ and with everything that happened to him”³¹. Due to a genuine and deep union with Christ it is really difficult to think that those so united with him may claim to belong to their previous ethnic group³².

In Gal 2:19 Paul states: “For through the law I died to the law, so that I might live to God. I have been crucified with Christ”. The first segment of this sentence is highly paradoxical. What does it mean to die to the law through the law? “In Pauline usage ‘to die to’ something is to cease to have any further relation to it (cf. Rom 6:2.10-11; 7:2-6). Conversely ‘to live to’ someone means to have a personal, unrestricted relationship with that one (cf. Rom 6:6-11; 14:7-8; 2Cor 5:15)”³³.

For Paul the believers die to the law through the law because they have been crucified with Christ, who really died to the law of Moses through the very same law. In his Gospel John spells it out clearly: “We have a law, and according to that law he ought to die” (19:7). While Jesus dies to the law through the law, he also dies to the law, because any law has no longer power on those who are dead. However, Jesus did not die to remain dead, but to rise again. So as he rises to a new life, and that life he “lives to God” (Rom 6:10). This is also applied to the believers. Through their baptism, they are united to Christ’s death and resurrection (cf. Rom 6:3-5) and the life they

³⁰ R. S c h n a c k e n b u r g, *Baptism in the Thought of St. Paul. A Study in Pauline Theology*, New York: Herder & Herder 1964, p. 19.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 25.

³² J.L. M a r t y n, *Galatians*, AB 33A, New York: Doubleday 1997, p. 383, writes that Galatians 3:26-29 is describing the “community of the new creation in which unity in God’s Christ has replaced religious-ethnic differentiation. In a word, religious and ethnic differentiations and that which underlines them – the Law – are identified in effect as ‘the old things’ that have now ‘passed away’, giving place to new creation (2Cor 5:17).”

³³ L o n g e n e c k e r, *Galatians*, p. 91.

now live is a life to God. It is a life at different level, where the Mosaic law has no power whatsoever³⁴.

Since the believers “have been crucified with Christ” they enjoy a very deep union with him, a radical immersion in him, and simultaneously they become free from the law. So Christ has replaced the law that was given on Mount Sinai. With courage Paul has touched the very heart of Judaism, where the Torah was identified with divine wisdom. In Ben Sirach the law itself proclaims:

Before all ages, in the beginning, he created me and for all ages I shall not cease to be...
Come to me you who desire me, and eat your fill of my fruits” (24:9.19).

For the Jews “the law is the word of God, the water that slakes all thirst, the life-giving bread, the vine laden with delectable fruit, in it were hidden the treasure of wisdom and knowledge”³⁵. So even the sacredness of the law for Paul is a loss for “the surpassing worth of knowing Jesus my Lord” (Phil 3:8). The most precious piece of the Jewish tradition, that is, the law, has to give way to Jesus as the only means for justification.

IN CHRIST

Closely related to “to put on” Christ, is the frequent use of the phrase: “in Christ”. By their baptism the Christians are “in Christ”. The expression “in Christ” “becomes the new identity that Paul claims both for himself and for his readers”³⁶. The phrase “in Christ” occurs 61 times in the undisputed letters. The analysis of this expression has led the experts to speak of Pauline mysticism, which is an experience of intimacy with Christ. No doubt that this expression has become “a cipher for Christian identity”³⁷.

What characterizes the Christian should be his “being in Christ”, and not “his being in the world”, “in sin”, or especially “in the flesh”³⁸. This could be the reason why the believers in Christ at Antioch are called for the first

³⁴ See V a n h o y e, *Lettera ai Galati*, p. 75.

³⁵ S. L y o n n e t, *St. Paul: Liberty and Law*, *The Bridge* 4(1962), p. 229-251, here 231.

³⁶ H a y s, *Paul and the Multi-Ethnic First-Century World*, p. 85; see also J.D.G. D u n n, *Jesus, Paul and the Gospels*, Grand Rapids: William B. Erdmans 2011, p. 128-130.

³⁷ R. P e n n a, *Paul the Apostle. Wisdom and Folly of the Cross*, p. 256.

³⁸ Cf. *Ibid.*, p. 258.

time “Christians” (Cf. Acts 11:26). They have passed from one mode of existence to another. Consequently, the “in Christ” language “cannot be reduced over all to a mere label”, but it “denotes transfer of lordship and existential participation in the new reality brought about by Christ”³⁹. From now on the believers are no longer under the enslaving power of sin (Rom 3:9; 5:21; 6:1.6.12-14.17-18; Gal 3:22), but under the lordship of Christ⁴⁰.

With this phrase Paul signals the personal and actual relationship between the believers and Christ. It is a mutual indwelling so intimate that we may speak of a mystical experience, if by the term mysticism we mean “that contact between the human and the divine which forms the core of the deepest religious experience, but which can only be felt as an immediate intuition of the highest reality and cannot be described in the language of psychology”⁴¹. It is a real “I-Thou” relationship, where both Paul and Christ retain their own identity. So there is not a replacement of one individuality with another. It is only a mutual indwelling. Christ’s life penetrates in Paul through faith. Christ does not overwhelm him, but he offers himself as the object of his faith, so Paul’s faith is life of Christ in him and of him in Christ⁴².

This intimate and mutual indwelling is well illustrated by Paul in Gal 2:20: “I live, no longer I, but it 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 for me”. The expression “the life I now live in the flesh, I live by faith” supports the idea that Jesus’ personality does not cancel the personality of the Christians since they still live in the flesh. It is also worth noting that, “the explicit allusion to faith maintains the distinction between the two, between which there is a matter not just of a superimposition, but of a relationship”⁴³.

In the end we may assert that, “being in Christ is [...] communion with Christ in the most intimate relationship imaginable, without destroying or

³⁹ J.D.G. D u n n, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle*, London: T & T Clark 1998, p. 339-400.

⁴⁰ The objective use of the expression “in Christ” refers particularly to the redemptive act brought about by Christ: Rom 3:24; 6:23; 8:2.39; 15:17; 1Cor 1:4; 15:19.22.31; 2Cor 2:14; 3:14; 5:19; Gal 2:17; 3:14; 5:6; Phil 1:26; 2:5; 3:3.9.14; 1Thess 5:18. The subjective use refers more directly to the effects of being “in Christ”: Rom 6:11; 8:1; 12:5; 16:3.7.9.10; 1Cor 1:1.2.30; 4:10; 15:18; 2Cor 5:17; 12:2; Gal 1:22; 2:4; 3:26.28; Phil 1:1; 2:1; 4:7.21; 1Thess 1:1.14; Phm 23. “In the Lord”: Rom 16:2.8.11.12(twice).13.22; 1Cor 4:17; 16:19; Phm 16.

⁴¹ K e n n e d y, *Theology of the Epistles*, quoted by R.N. L o n g e n e c k e r, *Paul Apostle of Liberty*, New York: Harper & Row 1964, p. 170.

⁴² Cf. V a n h o y e, *Lettera ai Galati*, p. 76.

⁴³ R. P e n n a, *Paul the Apostle*, p. 259.

minimizing – rather, only enhancing – the distinctive personality of either the Christian or Christ”⁴⁴.

At this point we have to notice that Paul draws an ethical consequence from the new reality of being in Christ. The mutual indwelling between the believer and Christ is only made possible if the believer follows in the footsteps of Christ even unto death. New creation blossoms only from death (cf. Jn 12:24). Rom 6:11 illuminates this: “So also you must reckon yourselves dead indeed to sin and alive to God in Christ”. The life the believers live to God after being dead to sin, is then, totally new and differently motivated and controlled by God (cf. Rom 6:12-14).

This new life for Paul was not only affecting the individual believers, but also the Christian community as a whole. They must have felt themselves to be totally renewed and also “must have sensed Christ as a living presence which pervaded their assemblies and their daily lives and which conditioned their response to God’s grace through and through”⁴⁵.

THE BODY OF CHRIST

There is no doubt that Paul’s use of the phrase “body of Christ” is closely related to the phrase “in Christ”. In Paul’s mind it is quite clear that both Jews and Greeks must have equal access to salvation, because Jews and Greeks are members of Christ’s body. Before describing the metaphor of the body of Christ in 1Cor 12, Paul has already prepared his community in 1Cor 6:15, where he says: “your bodies are members of Christ”. When he is faced with the misunderstanding and abuse of the Eucharist he uses the same image: “The cup of blessing that we bless is it not a sharing in the blood of Christ? The bread that we break is it not a sharing in the body of Christ? Because there is one bread, we who are many, are one body, for we all partake of the one bread” (1Cor 10:16-17).

Paul also uses the metaphor of “the body of Christ” in connection with both baptism and Eucharist in 1Cor 12:12-13: “For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. For in the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body – Jews or Greek, slaves or free – and we were all made to drink

⁴⁴ Longenecker, *Galatians*, p. 156.

⁴⁵ Dunn, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle*, p. 408.

of the Spirit". And again in 1Cor 12:27 he says: "Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it"⁴⁶.

Two remarks must be made about Paul's concern for the unity of the Christian Churches. First the Christians in Corinth, who enjoyed magnificent *charismata* should not boast of them, but they have to use them "for the common good" (1Cor 12:7). Second, we have to keep in mind that Paul had to cope with various factions within the community. No factions, no divisions, but the unity of all the believers in Christ, was for Paul something pertaining to the nature of the Church, and "this unity could only ultimately be based on one thing, or, more precisely, on one person"⁴⁷. However the unity that Paul speaks about marks a decisive and new reality, which demands a separation from where one was belonging previously. Consequently, "in speaking of the 'body of Christ' Paul is not speaking merely of members of a society governed by a common objective, but of members of Christ himself"⁴⁸. In other words, their unity transcends their own origin through the possession of the Holy Spirit (Cf. 1Cor 12:13; Rom 8:9-11).

The same metaphor of the Christian community as the "body of Christ" also occurs also in Romans 12. In the preceding chapters (Cf. chs. 9-11) of the same letter, Paul discusses the monumental problem "concerning God's fidelity to his promises to the Jews"⁴⁹. Paul is really in pain for the so famous Jewish problem and within three long chapters he seeks to show how God really remained faithful to the promises sworn to the Patriarchs. However, soon after in Rom 12, he shifts from the category of Israel to a totally different image – that of the body. It is not so difficult to understand the reason for such a change of subject. The Gentile Christians must have found it difficult to identify themselves as Israel, so "the more meaningful or realistic imagery was that of the body, and specifically the body of Christ"⁵⁰.

The various Pauline Churches must have most probably found their unity in the body of Christ despite their numerous differences. The Christian communities shift from being "identified by ethnic and traditional boundary markers to one whose members are drawn from different nationalities and social

⁴⁶ Cf. S a n d e r s, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism*, p. 456.

⁴⁷ A.J.M. W e d d e r b u r n, *The Body of Christ and Related Concepts in 1Corinthians*, "Scottish Journal of Theology" 24(1971), p. 74-96, here 79.

⁴⁸ F i t z m y e r, *Paul and his Theology*, p. 91.

⁴⁹ P.F. E l l i s, *Seven Pauline Letters*, Collegeville: The Liturgical Press 1982, p. 202.

⁵⁰ D u n n, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle*, p. 548.

strata and whose prosperity depends on their mutual cooperation and their working harmoniously together"⁵¹.

The metaphor of the body of Christ is illustrated by the charismata present both within the Christian community in Rome (Cf. Rom 12:4-8) and in Corinth (Cf. 1Cor 12:4-27). The Greek word *charis-ma* indicates "a concrete materialization of God's grace"⁵². So by definition, a charism is the result of the gracious activity of God, who showers his gifts over believers so that they may build up the community. In Paul's mind it seems very clear that the character of a charismatic community should be one of mutual interdependence. All the members of a body are useful, both those which are noble and those which are less noble. Paul explains this with two examples. The first one concerns the foot: "If the foot would say, 'because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body', that would make any less a part of the body" (1Cor 12:15). The second example concerns the ear: "If the ear would say, 'because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body', that would not make it any less a part of the body" (1Cor 12:16). For him all the members of the body are important and have a role to play, and also, according to him, the diversity is necessary for the wholeness of the body itself. The body cannot consist solely of an eye or solely of an ear (cf. 1Cor 12:17). The wholeness of the body "depends on its diversity functioning in unity"⁵³.

In the end we have to accept the different charisms, services and activities (cf. 1Cor 12:4-6), because such diversity constitutes the perfection of the body itself. Since all of them are "free, unmerited gifts", consequently their functions "should not generate rivalry in the community"⁵⁴, but they should generate fellowship, communion (*koinônia*).

A TENTATIVE SOLUTION

At this point of our investigation a cascade of questions arises. What is really the means by which all the members of the body, though different from one another, may perform their peculiar role harmoniously? Would not the variety and diversity of members need a very clever choirmaster in order

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 551.

⁵² E. Nardoni, *The Concept of Charism in Paul*, CBQ 55(1993), p. 68-80, here 74.

⁵³ D. Dunn, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle*, p. 560.

⁵⁴ Nardoni, *The Concept of Charism in Paul*, p. 73.

to work together? Is it possible to shift from one's own culture, tradition and values to "a common identity for Christ-followers"⁵⁵? Can "being in Christ" or "being baptized in Christ", or "putting on Christ" affect human identity? In other words, could we speak of an over-arching identity, which can amalgamate the various human identities⁵⁶? Or could we accept the idea that "sees the identity in this world as being hybrid through Christ, but leading to a new transcendent identity that overcomes difference finally in the world to come"⁵⁷? How could we say that racial, cultural and sexual distinctions evaporate for those who are "in Christ"? How could we envisage that all the believers belong to a totally new and different ethnicity and that their previous one has to dissolve?

The contention, concerning an over-arching identity, envisages something more like a trans-national identity such as "African", "American" or the like. This proposal is more idealistic than real and practical. All the more it does not solve the problem of the co-existence of different cultural identities. It is as if from a particularity of context one should continually transmigrate to a status "above" himself. "Being in Christ" or "being baptized in Christ" should not be a supra-contextual reality. On the contrary it should be a total renovation of the contextual reality.

The other contention, concerning a hybrid identity, namely Christ/Jewish or Gentile identity seems "to diminish the significance of Christ identity"⁵⁸, which would be placed at the same level as that of a human identity. The concept of hybrid identity, though it might be insightful, is meaningless as identity marker. One would end up being neither totally "in Christ" nor totally Jew or Gentile. We may, however, assert that "being in Christ" or "being baptized in Christ" did not entail cultural extinction⁵⁹.

I am not sure whether we are at this point able to say how much Jewishness remained in Paul after his conversion experience and how it could

⁵⁵ W.S. Campbell, *Universality and Particularity in Paul's Understanding and Strategy of Mission*, in T.J. Burke, B.S. Rosner (Ed.), *Paul as Missionary. Identity, Activity, Theology and Practice*, London: T & T Clark 2011, p. 199.

⁵⁶ See P. Esler, *Conflict and Identity in Romans: The Social Setting of Paul's Letter*, Minneapolis: Fortress Press 2003, p. 40-50, 152-153.

⁵⁷ Campbell, *Universality and Particularity in Paul's Understanding and Strategy of Mission*, p. 200.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ See R. Jewett, *The Law and the Coexistence of Jews and Gentiles in Romans*, Int 39(1985), p. 341-356, especially 354.

coexist with the transformation that the encounter with the risen Christ brought about in his life. The coexistence between human identity and "in Christ" identity is a tremendous challenge especially for those who are to live in an international context, for those who like speaking of "unity in diversity", for those who foster strongly a kind of cultural cross-pollination. In his process of re-evaluation of the states of existence for Jews and Gentiles, Paul does not rule out their continuing diversity. No one of them is given precedence as he says to the Corinthians: "Let each of you lead the life that the Lord has assigned, to which God called you...Let each of you remain in the condition in which you were called" (1Cor 7:17.20).

Their diversity, difference, and particularity remain even after their transformation in Christ. In one word, Jews remain Jews and Gentiles continue as Gentiles. However, all of them are actually members of the same body, the body of Christ, and so eventually they might be able to coexist⁶⁰.

Paul is aware of the problem of coexistence between various ethnic groups and so offers two ways, which might eventually enable different cultures to coexist, though retaining their original identity. The first suggestion is the participation in the Spirit, who would be the energizing power that can bring about unity and harmonious relationship. We have to notice that in Paul's mind "what is in view is not a physical entity (like a congregation), but the subjective experience of the Spirit as something shared. 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 the awareness that their experience of the Spirit [...] was one in which others had also shared which provided the bond of mutual understanding and sympathy"⁶¹. In the absence of this common participation in the Spirit, believers cannot be of the same mind, cannot have the same love, and all the more cannot be in full accord and of one mind (Cf. Phil 2:2).

Paul's second suggestion can be deduced from the parenetic sections of the letters to the Romans and Corinthians. In writing his letters Paul was not producing idealistic blueprints. He was not a dreamer, but well aware that his communities were easily losing sight of his vision, and that they found it demanding to coexist harmoniously with other ethnic identities. For this reason his vision of the believers as the body of Christ in Rom 12:4-8, is

⁶⁰ Cf. Campbell, *Universality and Particularity in Paul's Understanding and Strategy of Mission*, p. 207.

⁶¹ Dunn, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle*, p. 561-562.

followed by an exhortation about love: “Let love be genuine; hate what is evil, hold fast to what is good; love one another with mutual affection; outdo one another in showing honour” (12:9-10). In chapter thirteen of the same letter Paul presents the great principle of love as the synthesis of the law: “Owe no one anything, except to love one another; for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law [...] and any other commandments are summed up in this word, ‘love your neighbour; therefore, love is the fulfilment of the law” (13:8-10). In chapter fourteen Paul exhorts the Romans to have a charitable attitude towards those who are weak in faith and also towards those in the community who think differently on any point.

There is the same emphasis on charity after the discussion of the body of Christ in 1Cor 12. In chapter thirteen, Paul launches the hymn of love. Here charity is to be taken as an internal reality. In the hymn itself “there is no direct mention of doing good or of doing works of charity”⁶². In fact he says, “If I give away all my possession and if I hand over my body to be burned, but do not have love, I gain nothing” (13:3). Believers can reach a good standard of unity if they possess such love.

To grasp the exact meaning of such love we have to understand what Paul says in Rom 12:9: “Let love be genuine”. The word “genuine” translates the Greek word “anypokritos”, which means “without hypocrisy”. The same expression occurs also in 1Pet 1:22: “Now that you have purified your souls by your obedience to the truth so that you have genuine mutual love, love one another constantly from the heart” (see also 2Cor 6:6). Peter’s passage gives the key to understand what “genuine love” means; it is a love coming from the heart. The real source of genuine and not hypocritical love is the heart.

At this point we may say that no matter what ethnic identity a person may have, no matter what culture or tradition he belongs to, genuine unity becomes effective and productive only if that person, as a person, is welcomed into one’s own innermost being. In Paul’s mind it is not a question of welcoming different identities, or producing in some way uniformity, but it is a question only of welcoming a person as such, because he/she is a person intimately united with the body of Christ and newly created. At this level, two persons, two interiorities welcome one another with a view towards reciprocal exchange and mutual enrichment. From this loving encounter their

⁶² R. C a n t a l a m e s s a, *Life in Christ. A Spiritual Commentary on the Letter to the Romans*, St. Pauls: Mumbai 2003, p. 156.

original identities are re-valued from the standpoint of the transformation brought about in them by Christ. Obviously pride of place should be given to their "in Christ" identity, while their human identity should keep on playing its important role because it forms the wholeness of the body of Christ.

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CZY ZWOLENNICY ŚW. PAWŁA
STANOWIĄ JEDNOLITOŚĆ WYZNAWCÓW „W CHRYSZTUSIE”?

S t r e s z c z e n i e

Jako apostoł i teolog, Paweł z Tarsu zasługuje na ciągłe odkrywanie. Jego teksty są skomplikowane i wielowymiarowe. Każde spotkanie z nim jest zawsze wyzwaniem i zmusza czytelnika do jego przyjęcia, o ile pragnie się rzeczywiście zgłębić jego myśl teologiczną. Odkąd Paweł stał się przedmiotem moich własnych badań naukowych, jego teksty stawiały mi stale jedno pytanie: Czy po swoim nawróceniu Paweł przestał być członkiem wspólnoty żydowskiej, czy też wciąż czuł się przedstawicielem żydowskiego dziedzictwa? Inaczej rzecz ujmując, chodzi o to, co myślał o sobie samym w czasie po wydarzeniach, jakie miały miejsce w drodze do Damaszku.

Najprawdopodobniej najlepszym sposobem rozwiązania tej zagadki jest omówienie skutków jego nawrócenia, choć nikt naprawdę nie wie, co realnie przydarzyło się wtedy Pawłowi. Bez wątplenia jego nawrócenie nie miało charakteru moralnego. Paweł nie poszukiwał nowej drogi etycznej dla swojego życia, więc nie było to nawrócenie w sensie duchowym. Było ono raczej w swej naturze nawróceniem teologicznym, co oznaczało „przewartościowanie, rekonstrukcję systemu wartości”, bo spowodowało ono radykalną zmianę w jego podstawowym systemie aksjologicznym i w jego wierności tradycji.

Słowa kluczowe: św. Paweł, uniformizacja Kościoła.