

Reading Paul in the Twenty-First Century

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Introduction

The jubilee year of Saint Paul, from June 28, 2008 through June 28, 2009, was called for by Pope Benedict XVI, to mark the occasion of the 2,000th anniversary of the birth of Paul, arguably the most important figure in earliest Christianity. Though his name, *Paulus*, means small or humble, Paul was a larger-than-life figure. He was not only proud of his Jewish heritage, but in his own estimate had far surpassed others in the study and practice of Judaism (Phil 3:4-6; Gal 1:13-15). Likewise, he was not only proud and certain of his apostolic calling but, in this too, considered himself to be the best, “having worked harder than any of them,” (1 Cor 15:9-10). He was indefatigable in preaching the gospel and, along with women and men co-workers, established communities throughout the Mediterranean. When Paul believed the truth of the gospel was being compromised, he was its most fierce defender, willing to suffer whatever consequences to ensure its integrity. In his own words, he became “all things to all people, so that by whatever means, I might save some” (1 Cor 9:22b). In so far as he considered his own life to be conformed to that of Christ, he proposed himself to the communities he founded as a model worthy of imitation (1 Cor 11:1; Phil 3:17).

Yet, for all that, Paul was not always well-received or esteemed by his contemporaries and often found himself at the center of controversy. To Jews, Paul’s sudden turn from zealous persecutor of the Christian movement to its staunchest defender must have been a source of confusion and disappointment. For the Jerusalem leaders and Jewish Christ-believers, Paul’s outreach to the gentiles with his apparently law-free gospel brought him to clash with whomever wavered with regard to the gentiles, including Peter (cf. Gal 2:1-14), and raised a host of theological questions about the relative status of Jews and Gentiles in Christ, the centrality of the Law and the fate of non-believing Jews - to name a few - which were never fully resolved in his own lifetime. Paul was no less a puzzle to gentile believers as reflected in the Corinthian correspondence. How could he be a true apostle when he refused financial support, was an ineloquent preacher proclaiming an absurd message about a crucified messiah, and a frail figure who failed to demonstrate the power of the gospel in signs and wonders?

Though Paul perceived himself as rather transparent, to his contemporaries he seems to have been a complicated and difficult person to decipher. The same seems to have been the case with his letters. After Paul’s death, disputes about how to interpret his letters led one NT author to remark, “there are some things in them hard to understand” (2 Peter 3:16). This evaluation certainly pertains to the complexity of Paul’s thought as well as the manner in which he structured and expressed it in writing. But it also points to the hermeneutical problem arising from the fact that Paul had addressed his letters to newly converted believers of the mid-first century A.D. whose social cultural context as well as the problems and questions they confronted, were quite different than the situations and problems of later believers.

To render Paul relevant and preserve his legacy for his own day, the early Church began to recast and domesticate the larger-than-life Paul of the mid-first century A.D. for new generations who had neither encountered this controversial figure, nor necessarily understood him or the situation of the believers he had addressed decades before. By the end of the first century, we find Paul portrayed as an apostle for the whole church, even for those who had never met him (Col 2:1),

a mystagogue making known the inscrutable riches of the gospel, bringing to light God's plan of salvation, a mystery hidden from ages past, now being actualized among the gentiles (Col 1:25-27; cf. Eph 3:1-13). In the Pastoral Epistles, faith, which for Paul was a dynamic response to the person of Jesus, becomes adherence to sound doctrine of which Paul is both faithful transmitter and guardian (1 Tim 2:5-7). In his own day, particular exigencies arising in specific communities founded by Paul, elicited his response. In the Pastorals, Paul dispenses general guidelines for men and women in 'every place' (1 Tim 2:8-15) so they may live in accord with sound doctrine (cf. Tit 2:1-10). Whereas in his own letters Paul offers himself as a model for imitation since he so imitates Christ, in the Pastorals, Paul is not only a worthy model to be followed in view of his orthodox teaching and right living (2Tim 3:10), he is now the prototype of faithful endurance for which he is worthy of a martyr's crown (2 Tim 4:8). In Acts, Paul is accorded center stage in the drama of salvation history, journeying over rough terrain and sailing tempestuous seas, single-handedly, so it seems, spreading the good news throughout the Roman Empire, as far as the imperial capitol. Though the author of Acts never accords Paul the title 'apostle', which he claimed for himself, Paul is described as the 'chosen instrument of God' and his mission to the Gentiles is considered as of paramount importance to the outworking of the gospel which is the offer of salvation to all who through faith in Christ (Acts 15:11). Paul, discredited by the Corinthians for his failure to work prodigious signs, is instead presented in Acts as a miracle-worker (14:8-18; 19:12; 20:7-12; 28:7-10), a powerful instrument of the gospel and a special object of Divine providence (Acts 27:21-25).

Outside the NT, the portrait of Paul as the prototype of the true Christian martyr is prominent in writings of the apostolic fathers (cf. e.g., Ign. *Eph* 12). In the Patristic period, Paul emerges in the writings of Chrysostom, as the archetypal image of Christian perfection whom believers are encouraged to imitate in the pursuit of their own ethical and religious perfection.¹

In sum, over time an image of Paul developed which stressed his universal apostleship, concern for orthodoxy, support of the social *status quo* and his model status as a martyr for the gospel. By divorcing Paul from his religious roots in Judaism and from the social and cultural world in which he unfolded his ministry, the later church was able to showcase a figure who was compatible with its interests and needs. But the Paul of history --that lively and explosive personality who fought vigorously and passionately for the union and equality of Jew and gentile in the gospel, said harsh things, stood up to his detractors, shared his ministry with women and fought for, and at times with, his first converts to ensure that they remained faithful to his gospel, began to fade from view. In time, attention to the unique character of each letter which reflected the particularity of the situations Paul addressed gave way to efforts to harmonize and systematize the content of Paul's letters into one coherent theology.

With the rise of historical critical consciousness and the application of historical critical methods to the study of the bible, scholars have been engaged in efforts to re-anchor Paul within his own first century Greco-Roman world, re-root him in his ancestral religion, Judaism, and to re-encounter him, in all his vigor and passion, through his letters where his own voice can still be heard. While much remains to be known about Paul, his world and his message, the emergence of new sources, greater understanding about his social and religious context, and the application of new methods have helped to bring Paul and his message into sharper focus.

PAUL'S LETTERS

Paul is known to us primarily through his letters. Obviously, he did not start out as a letter-writer but as an itinerant preacher who had some success and managed to found small communities

¹Cf. M. Mitchell, "The Archetypal Image: John Chrysostom's Portraits of Paul," *Journal of Religion* 75 (1/ 1995), pp. 15-43

of Christ-believers in some of the major cities of the Roman Empire. With two exceptions, Corinth and Ephesus, where Paul's sojourns were lengthy, he seems to have quickly moved on to preach elsewhere, entrusting the communities he founded to the care of local leaders. When Paul was apprised of problems or questions which arose after his departure which he felt needed his intervention, he sent letters.

In Paul's day, the letter functioned as a substitute for personal presence when this was not possible (1 Cor 5:3), or, in some cases, not desirable (2 Cor 2:1-2). Fortunately, someone collected, edited and made some of his letters available. Though thirteen letters found in the NT are attributed to Paul, scholars hold only seven to be indisputably genuine Pauline letters: Roman, 1 and 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Philippians, 1 Thessalonians and Philemon. The genuineness of the other six is disputed. Many scholars argue that they are from the hand of someone other than Paul, perhaps disciples. In addition to the seven genuine letters, we know that Paul had written others, now no longer extant, because he refers to them himself (cf. e.g. 1 Cor 5:9; 2 Cor 2:3).

All seven of Paul's letters are true letters which generally reflect the contemporary Greco-Roman conventions of letter writing.² Each letter has an opening section with its requisite features, followed by the main part of the letter, referred to as the body, where key matters are taken up and, finally, a conclusion. In Paul's day, letters were classified according to their type and purpose. Twenty one (21) different types of letters for different occasions were catalogued by Pseudo-Demetrius in his work entitled '*Epistolary Types*'.³ Among those listed are letters of friendship, letters of advice/exhortation (also called *paraenetic* letters), letters of praising, letters of shaming, letters of recommendation /introduction, letters of rebuke, apologetic letters or what we would call letters of defense. Paul's letters combine many of these elements but, in general, they can be best categorized as paraenetic/ hortatory letters since in them Paul mainly exhorts, gives advice, settles disputes and maintains fellowship with his communities.

Though Paul's letters contain his theology, scholars now recognize that these letters are not theological essays which Paul composed in order to write down his theological thoughts in a detailed and systematic way. Rather, the letters were occasioned, or called forth, by the issues, questions and controversies that arose within particular communities to which Paul responded as a pastor; hence the now widely used designation, "occasional letters". Even Romans, addressed to a community not founded by Paul and the letter once thought to most approximate a theological essay, is now considered an occasional letter addressed to the particular community situation at Rome. Thus, what we find in Paul's letters are *ad hoc* responses intended, primarily, for a particular community and its peculiar needs. In fact, when we read a Pauline letter, we read only one half of a dialogue between partners involved in an on-going relationship. Because of that, many details and facts already known to Paul and the community he addresses are omitted.

Recognition of the occasional and pastoral character of Paul's letters means we cannot take them as timeless theological tracts that give us his fully worked-out final teaching on every topic which we can then isolate from the letter and interpret apart from the context to which it was addressed. This is not to suggest that Paul lacked any theological framework within which he formulated his responses. Rather, it is to caution against assuming that what we read is Paul's coherently articulated and exhaustive last word on all issues. As will be seen below, the recognition that Paul's letters were occasional, is an important consideration in the current in Pauline studies referred to as the "new perspective" on Paul and the law.

²Cf. J. L. White, *Light from Ancient Letters* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1988).

³Cf. A. Malherbe, *Ancient Epistolary Theorists* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1988).

Up until the fairly recent past, a number of Paul's interpreters observed that his letters were lacking in logical consistency, noting, for example, that in the midst of various discourses on specific topics, Paul inserts a discussion that interrupts the flow of thought (cf. e.g. 1 Cor 13). Scholarly attempts to explain Paul's apparent incoherence have usually taken two tracks: 1) Paul was a busy and harried preacher who wrote in haste, often interrupted by pastoral exigencies which caused him to lose track of his thought, or 2) the interruptions are interpolations, that is, pieces of Pauline composition introduced into the text by a later hand which are evidence of later editing. Both explanations presuppose that coherence is demonstrated by a succession of more or less homogenous ideas, developed in a linear fashion. However, the problem of Paul's apparent incoherence dissolves when we take into account the literary patterns of Paul's own day and their inherent logic. Today scholars recognize that Paul used what is called an ABA' Compositional Pattern. The pattern is evidenced when Paul introduces a topic, (A), shifts to another topic, (B), then returns to his original topic, (A'); hence the designation ABA' or concentric pattern. This pattern is illustrated in 1 Cor 8-10 where Paul's discussion of idol meat in ch. 8 (A) and 10 (A') is apparently interrupted by ch 9 (B) where he shifts to discuss his apostolic rights. As scholars now recognize, the B section, once thought to rupture the flow of Paul's thought, actually reinforces the point being made in the adjacent A and A' sections. The B section is actually an example of the rhetorical technique "digression," an insertion into an argument to amplify or support the main point. This concentric way of unfolding an argument clearly contrasts with a linear arrangement of ideas to which modern readers are accustomed. However, it accorded with the accustomed literary patterns of Paul's day. Once we understand Paul's method of unfolding his ideas, his point is more readily apparent and the charge of incoherence can be dropped.⁴

Additional advances in understanding the dynamics and structure of Paul's letters have come through the recent application of rhetorical criticism.⁵ Though a letter and a speech were not identical, the letter substituted for speech, as noted above. In Paul's day, speech was of utmost importance. Political leaders as well as those who claimed to teach religious and philosophical truths were expected to speak eloquently and persuasively. Rhetoric, the study of how to speak or argue persuasively in a given situation, was a main component of Greco-Roman education. Though it was primarily concerned with techniques for researching, constructing and ultimately delivering a winning speech, its aims and conventions also affected how people wrote. Given this overlap between speech and letter, coupled with the fact that Paul designed his letters to be read aloud (Phlm 1:2; 1 Thess 5:27), it is reasonable to expect that Paul employed contemporary techniques of argumentation to make as persuasive a case as possible for his own points.

Speeches, or arguments, were classified according to three types, each ordered to a distinct purpose and appropriate to a different setting.⁶ The forensic or judicial speech, proper to the courtroom, was used to defend or accuse someone in view of a past action. The deliberative speech, for use in the assembly, sought to persuade or dissuade about future courses of action. Finally, epideictic speech, appropriate to a variety of public occasions, employed praise or blame to affirm important values and reinforce the audience's current adherence to them. Speeches normally began with an introduction and concluded with a recapitulation of key points. In between, other standardized components were incorporated depending on the type of argument. However, every argument had two indispensable parts: a statement of the thesis, or point to be proved, followed by

⁴For further reading on Pauline literary patterns, cf. J. J. Collins, "Chiasmus, The 'ABA' Pattern and the Text of Paul," in *Studiorum Paulinorum Congressus Internationalis* (AnBib 17-18; Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute Press, 1963) 575-84.

⁵On the revival of interest in rhetoric, its application to the NT, the variety of approaches embraced by the term 'rhetorical criticism' and an extended bibliography, cf. D. F. Watson - A. J. Hauser, *Rhetorical Criticism and the Bible. A Comprehensive Bibliography with Notes on History and Method* (Leiden: Brill, 1994).

⁶Cf. Aristotle, *Ars Rhetorica*, I.III.1-9.

the proofs. Persuasion, regardless of the speech type, ultimately depended on three factors: the moral character of the speaker, or proof based on ethos; the ability to evoke the proper emotional response from the audience, or proof based on pathos, and finally, logical arguments, or proof based on logos.⁷ Most of Paul's letters fall into the category of deliberative rhetoric but Paul also mixes speech genres, sometimes including apologetic and epideictic features.

Rhetorical criticism can help us to understand better both the structure and the aims of Paul's letters. For example, until recently, the overall purpose of 1 Corinthians escaped many scholars who saw the letter as little more than an *ad seriatem* treatment of diverse topics. By applying the conventions of ancient rhetoric to this letter, Margaret Mitchell⁸ has been able to show that the whole letter is an example of deliberative rhetoric in which Paul sets out a series of proofs or arguments in support of his thesis, expressed at 1:10, that the Corinthian community be united. According to Mitchell, individual segments of the letter, once thought to be unrelated, all contribute to Paul's overall aim to exhort the Corinthians to unity for the sake of the up-building of the whole community.

Rhetorical criticism also serves to underscore a very important point about Paul's letters: ultimately, they were written to persuade those who had recently converted to Christianity to remain faithful to the gospel, and manifest that fidelity in transformed living. It is a naive, but common assumption, that for the first believers conversion entailed an immediate social and moral transformation to a new way of life rooted in gospel values. Certainly the metaphors used to speak about conversion suggest a radical re-socialization. But the reality was otherwise as clear from the problems and issues Paul treats in the letters.⁹ The first converts were adults who were products of their own social and cultural worlds, still prone to all kinds of vices and community-destroying behavior, still looking for something more persuasive and compelling to live by than the good news of a crucified savior, still doubtful about so much. Paul had to deal with the reality that conversion was a slow process and that the transformed gospel living he expected of his communities could not be forced. It would have to be chosen by those convinced of his gospel. Ultimately, it was not by assertions of authority or commands or force that Paul pastored his congregations, but by appeals to reason, to their own experiences and sensitivities, and to his own character as a trustworthy preacher of a true message of salvation.

By examining Paul's letters through the lens of rhetoric, we can appreciate Paul's style of communication in light of the communication techniques of his own day. This allows us to more easily perceive Paul's thesis and follow the contours of the arguments he sets out to prove his thesis. It also allows us to better appreciate that Paul's letters are artfully crafted attempts to communicate with his contemporaries according to conventions they would recognize for the sake of persuading them to remain faithful to his gospel.

PAUL'S JEWISH THOUGHT WORLD

Paul was a Jew. But, as scholars have come to recognize, the Judaism of Paul's day was not a monolith, nor is it possible to maintain rigid distinction between Hellenistic Judaism and Palestinian Judaism, as if the latter remained free of Hellenistic influence. The fact is, there were a wide variety of sectarian groups and currents of Jewish thought in Paul's day. Paul's description of himself as a Pharisee, one of the few autobiographical facts he discloses (Phil 3:5), does not provide us with as much insight about Paul as one might assume. Direct knowledge of 1st century Pharisaism is quite

⁷On the three kinds of proofs, cf. Aristotle, *Ars Rhetorica*, I.II,3-7.

⁸M. Mitchell, *Paul and the Rhetoric of Reconciliation* (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1991).

⁹On the re-socialization of the first believers, cf. W. Meeks, *The Moral World of the First Christians* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1986) esp. ch.1.

limited. Much of what has been said about Pharisaism has been based on later Rabbinic texts. However, their value for constructing an accurate picture of 1st century Pharisaism is increasingly questioned.

What scholars do agree on is that Paul shared with other Jews of his day an apocalyptic view, that is, a view rooted in the conviction that God was in control of history and centered in the hope that God would intervene to overthrow the evil order now reigning in the world. Those who believed that God's purpose was to lead all of history to the goal He had set for it, lived in anticipation of God's final judgement against all the powers of evil. When God finally intervened, they believed, the present evil age, under evil powers and rulers, would be abolished and God would establish a new order under His sovereignty that would be characterized by righteousness. All people would be reconciled to God and obedient. Because God's plan for the transformation of history is hidden, a mystery not known unless God revealed it (Grk. *apokalyptein*), this way of understanding reality was called the apocalyptic world view. Essentially, it was an attempt to make sense of history, of the world here and now, based on what God had already revealed of his purposes to and through the people of Israel. Paul, too, expected this coming judgment and shared the apocalyptic view of reality.

In fact, according to Paul, God's judgement had been unleashed (Rom 1:18) and God had indeed intervened powerfully as hoped but, in a most unexpected and paradoxical way, through the mystery of Christ crucified, God's power for salvation (cf. e.g., Rom 1:16; 1 Cor 1:18ff.). As a result, Paul believed that Christians were now living at a crucial juncture point: the world they knew and inhabited, the world in its present form, was passing away (1 Cor 7:31; 10:11); the old order characterized by sin, corruption and death and identified with the first man, Adam (Rom 5:12-14) was giving way to the new order (2 Cor 5:17b) characterized by grace, faith, and reconciliation, and identified with the New Adam, Christ (Rom 5:15-21).

For Paul, this entire transition from the old aeon to the new, hinged on Christ's death and resurrection, the eschatological (end-time) salvation event through which humanity gained the renewed existence that Jewish tradition associated with the end-time. Christians, Paul proclaimed, were living in the last days; they were the ones 'upon whom the end of the ages had come' (1 Cor 10:11). And now, on account of Christ's death, believers were washed, redeemed, sanctified (1 Cor 1:30; 5:7; 6:11) and bought back for God (6:19-20; 7:23); they now have peace with God through Christ through whom they have access to this grace through faith (Rom 5:1-2). According to Paul, those who through faith were 'in Christ' had already died to sin and had begun to live a new spirit-impelled life (Rom 8:1-13). The outpouring of the Spirit on those in Christ had occurred. Believers were now children of God and co-heirs with Christ, destined to share his glory if they share his suffering (Rom 8:14-17). Coincident with this salvation event, God was now calling into Christ's fellowship the new end-time communities of believers (cf. Rom 1:6; 1 Cor 1:9) who are now God's holy ones, God's church. According to Paul, together, believers formed the body of Christ (1 Cor 12:12-27); together they were a new creation (2 Cor 5:17).

Since Paul believed that all this had been accomplished by God through Christ, to whom the new communities of believers owed their existence, Paul continuously brings his christological insights to bear on the situations he addresses in his letters. Paul re-evaluates all human wisdom in light of God's wisdom and power shown forth in Christ crucified (1 Cor 1:18ff.). Paul cites the humility and self-emptying of Christ as the model for Christians who persist in self-aggrandizing and quarrelsome behavior (Phil 2:5-11). He anchors the hope for the Christian dead, in the second coming of Christ, when perfect union with Christ will be attained (1 Thess 4:13 - 18) when sin and death would be finally overcome and God's plan of salvation would be fulfilled. In the meantime, that is, between the inauguration of the new age and its fulfillment at the second coming, Christians were to live in the present, guided by the Spirit, confidently expectant that they too would share in

Christ's resurrection. For Paul, all this was made by possible by the initiative of God, by what God had done *in Christ*, apart from the law.

PAUL, THE LAW AND ISRAEL

Especially in the letters to the Romans and Galatians, one encounters an antithesis between law and gospel, faith and works which leads naturally to the question, Why did Paul so oppose the law? What did he find so wrong with the law which had been given by God himself through Moses? And what, if anything, does this antithesis reflect about Paul's attitude toward his ancestral religion? Today, no aspect of Paul's thought is as much discussed and disputed as his view of the law.

Up until the 1960's, there was a rather uniform answer to this question of Paul's opposition to the Law, now usually referred to as the old perspective on Paul and law. But since then, Pauline studies has witnessed the emergence of a new current of thought which is a wholesale repudiation of the traditional reading. Here we can provide only a brief summary of the old perspective and outline some of the main features of the 'New Perspective' which are more or less agreed upon by new perspective advocates.

The Old Perspective on Paul

For the sake of brevity, the old, or traditional, perspective on Paul and his views on the Law can be summarized as follows: Paul was a frustrated Jew who tried to earn his salvation by doing the works of the law. But no matter how hard he tried, he could never quite do them perfectly (Rom 7: 7-25). In consequence, he was filled with anxiety, fearful that he might not attain his salvation. Then one day, Paul had an encounter with the Risen Lord which brought about his conversion from Judaism, a legalistic religion of works-righteousness, to Christianity. For Paul, Christianity was a superior religion of grace. Salvation and justification were offered freely by God to be received through faith in Jesus Christ, through whose death and resurrection God had brought about salvation. Having come to faith in Christ and recognized that salvation is a grace which comes only through faith in Christ, Paul repudiated his ancestral religion and criticized the law as inefficacious, since through doing the works of the no human could be justified before God. Jews who believed that they could merit favor with God or earn salvation by doing good works, were simply wrong and demonstrated an arrogant and mistaken belief in their own capacity.

This traditional interpretation of Paul's life and view of the law, with its negative portrayal of Judaism as a legalistic religion of works-righteousness and, of Jews, as arrogant, self-righteousing people, is usually associated with the great reformer, Martin Luther. His views were reinforced in a number of 19th century studies in which Paul's theology was shown to be antithetical to Judaism, and the apostle himself as hostile to his fellow Jews. These 19th century studies greatly influenced the next generation of 20th c. NT scholars especially R. Bultmann who offered a most scathing assessment of Jews and Judaism which, he claimed, both Jesus and Paul rejected.¹⁰ In this old perspective, a complete disjuncture was posited between Judaism and Christianity and between Paul and his ancestral religion.

Already in the late 1800s and early 1900s, a few Jewish and Christian scholars argued that Luther's reading of Paul seriously distorted both Paul and Judaism.¹¹ However, these earliest challenges to the reformation reading of Paul went unheeded. The negative understanding of Judaism and hostility toward Jews remained largely intact until the 1960's when scholars began to

¹⁰Cf. R. Bultmann, *Primitive Christianity in its contemporary setting (Das Urchristentum im Rahmen der antiken Religionen;* trans. R H. Fuller; Cleveland: Collins, 1956) esp. ch. 6.

¹¹Cf. e.g. George Foot Moore, "Christian Writers on Judaism," *HTR* 14 (1921) 197-254.

have a more informed understanding of second temple Judaism (500 BC - 70 A.D.), and more insight into the occasional nature of Paul's letters. Additionally, in the aftermath of the holocaust, many scholars were especially troubled over the way the letters of Paul had been used to underwrite two millennia of anti-Semitism. This concern instigated a new investigation of Paul's letters by scholars dedicated to rescuing his writings from centuries of misinterpretation, to setting the record straight on his views about the Jews and Judaism, and to overcoming the wedge which traditional Christian interpretation had driven between Paul and his ancestral religion. The work of these scholars constitutes a current within Pauline studies which J. G. Dunn dubbed the "New Perspective on Paul".¹² Many scholars have now joined in the work of the new perspective, but its impetus and origins are associated especially with Krister Stendahl, E. P. Sanders and J. G. D. Dunn.¹³ What follows are just some of the many important insights about Paul's views on the law and the Jewish people that have emerged from "new perspective" scholarship which continues to develop along many new avenues.

The New Perspective on Paul

New perspective scholarship has offered a truly new and decidedly positive portrait of both 1st century C.E. Judaism and Paul. While there is much in this new perspective on Paul and Judaism to question, new-perspective scholarship has called attention to a number of important factors which must be considered when attempting to understand and interpret Paul and his posture toward the law.

In the first place, Luther mistakenly read Paul as if he developed his statements on justification by faith to solve the problem of his troubled conscience which could never rest assured that he had done the law well enough to please the Lord. But, as most scholars now agree, Paul had no such crisis of conscience. Rather, the apostle had a "robust conscience" reflected in so many of his own statements, e.g. 2 Cor 1:12a, 1 Cor 9:27, 2 Cor 5:10, most especially in Phil 3. It was Luther who lived with a troubled conscience. Out of his own angst, he misread Paul's letters as providing the solution to his personal crisis. But Paul's comments about justification by faith were not intended as answers to Luther's, or anyone else who asked, "how do I a sinner find justification & acceptance before God? This was not Paul's question.

Second, Paul was and remained a Jew his whole life. In light of this fact, new perspective advocates believe that the term "call" rather than "conversion" offers a more accurate description of what occurred in Paul's life, especially in light of Paul's own comments in Gal 1:15-16. If the traditional word "conversion" is retained, then it must be used with the awareness that while Paul's convictions changed with regard to the Messiahship of Jesus, he did not move from Judaism to Christianity. The naive assumption that in Paul's day there already existed a distinct religion known as Christianity to which he converted and therewith became an "ex-Jew" has made it easier for Christians to pit Paul against his ancestral religion. But such was not the case. Paul was born into first century Judaism which comprised a variety of different sects. Jews, like Paul, who came to believe in Jesus constituted one more Jewish sect within Judaism. As new perspective scholars observe, there was more continuity between Paul and Judaism than the term "conversion" ordinarily conveys.

¹²Cf. J. D. G. Dunn, "The New Perspective on Paul," *BJRL* 65 (1983) 95-122.

¹³Cf. K. Stendahl, "The Apostle Paul and the Introspective Conscience of the West," *HTR* 56 (1963) 199-215; *idem.*, *Paul Among Jews and Gentiles* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1976); E. P. Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism: A Comparison of Patterns of Religion* (London: SCM, 1977); *idem.*, *Paul, the Law and the Jewish People* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983); J. D.G. Dunn, *The New Perspective on Paul. Collected Essays* (WUNT, 185; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2005).

Third, Paul is more accurately understood when viewed and heard within the framework of the intra-Jewish sectarian debates of his own day. In other words, we have to remember that Paul was involved in “Jewish family fights”. These fights were essentially over identity. Jews fought over who was a true Jew, over what the boundaries of Judaism should be and over who and what could be included within those boundaries, much the same way that Christians today argue among themselves over these same issues. Back in 1st century Judaism, when some believing Jews, including Paul, proposed admitting Gentiles into the people of God, other Jews who did not confess Jesus as Messiah, and even many Jews who did, vigorously debated the implications of this for Jewish identity. Therefore, it is important to remember that the struggles were between Jews and Jews. The debates over the Gentiles and the Messiahship of Christ created division among Jews, not between Israel and the Church. Failure to appreciate the difference between “intra-Jewish” and “anti-Jewish” easily leads to mistaken assumptions. Two of the most often repeated are (1) that Paul intended his statements about the law and circumcision as a frontal attack on the Jewish people and (2) that his teaching on justification by faith was a polemical doctrine aimed against Judaism which Paul considered a bankrupt religion of legalism and works-righteousness.

Fourth, as a result of new perspective scholarship, it is now recognized that in addition to not answering Luther’s question, Paul’s statements were not intended as an attack on Jews or Judaism *per se*. Why? Because, as new perspective scholars observe, Paul was involved with an entirely different question. As a traveling missionary and founder of communities, Paul who was specifically called to be the apostle to the gentiles was concerned with the question, How are Gentiles included in the blessing and salvation promised to Israel through Abraham? As a pastor to largely gentiles communities, Paul had a practical pastoral problem: to figure out on what basis gentiles, who had never had the law, were to be included fully and equally with Jews among the people of God. Thus we need to consider Paul’s remarks about the law in the specific context of his attempts to defend the rights of gentiles and to delineate the terms upon which gentiles would be admitted to the community of faith to share fully in God’s promises alongside Jewish believers.

Fifth, when we hear Paul at his harshest with regard to Jewish issues such as law-observance and circumcision, we must bear in mind that this criticism is found in his letters where there is disagreement precisely over how and whether gentiles are to be admitted into the people of God. What Paul is against, is not Judaism, his ancestral religion. Rather, Paul is against the ethnocentric Jewish exclusivism that would keep Gentiles from participating fully and equally in God’s promises. For Paul, Christianity could not be a two-tiered community where Jewish believers would enjoy primacy over Gentile believers. In Paul’s theology, all those in Christ, whether Jew or Gentile, were equally one in Christ through faith, equally co-heirs to the promises of God (cf. esp. Gal 3:26-29); the only prerequisite for full participation was faith.

Sixth, by bearing in mind the occasional nature of Paul’s letters and the context in which, and for which, he wrote, one can appreciate that Paul’s letters cannot be taken as unbiased portrayals of Judaism or as sources from which we can construct an accurate portrayal of what Jews thought about themselves, their religion and especially the law. Paul writes as one who believes that the promises of God are actualized in Christ. As someone writing Christian theology, Paul’s presentation of the law and its inefficacy, is highly filtered through the lens of Christ and what he believes God has now accomplished for all persons, without distinction, in and through the death and resurrection of Christ.

These are all important insights afforded by the new perspective which help us to read Paul’s views on the law with a much sharper perspective and greater insight. As noted above, there is

much to question about the new perspective. Among other things, concern has already been voiced about the degree to which the new perspective is theologically impoverished,¹⁴ the extent to which it ignores the evidence which suggests that Jews sought righteousness through doing the works of the law,¹⁵ and its wholesale dismissal of Luther who, despite his own struggles, may not have misinterpreted Paul to the degree claimed.¹⁶

But questions and critiques notwithstanding, we can no longer ignore the pastoral problem Paul faced in his own day, nor can we return to a reading of Paul that portrays him as hostile to the Jews and to his own ancestral religion, nor as one who crafted his theology to deal with his own, Luther's or anyone else's guilt-ridden conscience. Regardless of both its shortcomings and excesses, most agree that the new perspective has contributed immeasurably to our understanding of Paul's views on the law and has forced us to abandon many mistaken notions, especially the long entrenched view that Paul completely repudiated Judaism, a legalistic and inferior religion. As a result, there exists a greater possibility of fruitful dialogue with the Jewish people.

PAUL'S GOSPEL WITHIN THE CONTEXT OF THE EMPIRE

While new perspective scholars have been preoccupied in the past thirty years with Paul's posture toward Israel and the law, other scholars have been engaged in another avenue of investigation which focuses on reading Paul's gospel in the context of the social and cultural reality of the Roman empire.¹⁷ The believers evangelized by Paul were, like Jesus and his first followers, subjects of the Roman Empire. If as the New Perspective has shown, Paul was not opposed to his ancestral religion, a closer look at his letters reveals that Paul stood squarely opposed to the Roman Imperial order and the ideology and propaganda by which Rome gave order and meaning to life. Read against the context of Empire, Paul's gospel and praxis takes on a decidedly anti-imperial character which had implications with regard to Paul's vision of Christian communities. In the following we will consider some salient features of the Roman imperial order and Roman ideology and then one example from Paul's letters and life which suggest that the apostle opposed his gospel to the Roman imperial order and all for which it stood.

The Roman Imperial Context

By the time Paul began proclaiming Christ, in the late thirties A.D. the Roman Empire had been up and running for almost 60 years, following the collapse of the old Roman republic. The victor in the civil wars that ended the Republic was Octavian, Caesar's heir. He took the title Caesar Augustus¹⁸ and became Emperor for life from ca. 27 B.C. through 14 A.D. He ushered in the "Pax Romana" and ruled over a vast empire that continued to grow under his successors.

¹⁴ Cf. e.g. B. Byrne, "Interpreting Romans Theologically in a Post 'New Perspective' Perspective," *HTR* 94 (3/2001) 227-241.

¹⁵ Cf. e.g. C. H. Talbert, "Paul, Judaism and the Revisionists," *CBQ* 63 (1/2001) 1-22.

¹⁶ Cf. e.g. S. Westerholm, *Israel's Law and the Church's Faith* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988); *idem.*, *Perspectives old and new on Paul: the "Lutheran" Paul and his critics* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004).

¹⁷ Cf. among others, R. Horsley ed., *Paul and Empire. Religion and Power in Roman Imperial Society* (Harrisburg: Trinity, 1997); *idem.*, *Paul and the Roman Imperial Order* (Harrisburg: Trinity, 2004); N. Elliott, *Liberating Paul. The Justice of God and the Politics of the Apostle* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1998); J. D. Crossan - J. L. Reid, *In Search of Paul. How Jesus's Apostle Opposed Rome's Empire with God's Kingdom* (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 2004); J. Reiger, *Christ and Empire. From Paul to Postcolonial Times* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2007).

¹⁸ Augustus' honors and titles, and the occasions for which they were accorded, are recorded in the *Res Gestae Divi Filii*, (The Deeds of the Divine Caesar). In this first person account, Augustus recalls that he was given the title 'Augustus' by the Senate in Jan 27 BC, after having restored the *res publica* to the Senate and people of Rome, cf. *Res Gestae*, 34.

Though Rome proclaimed the inauguration of a new golden era of peace, order and well-being, few subjects experienced any benefit. As one ancient critic of Rome claimed, the Romans brought devastation and called it peace. They tortured, pillaged, crucified; they levied taxes and, in collaboration with the wealthy elites of the conquered cities, Rome set up a social-political infrastructure that underwrote its power and the power and privilege of a few at the expense of many. Not all the conquered peoples quietly acquiesced to Rome. Galilee of Jesus' day was a hot-bed of revolutionary activity against Rome. Jesus himself was one of the victims of the Pax Romana. Eventually, Jewish resistance brought down the destructive power of Rome on Jerusalem in 70 AD; More than a century earlier, Rome destroyed the Greek city of Corinth, leaving it desolate for 100 years until Julius Caesar rebuilt it as a Roman colony in ca. 44 B.C. Despite its propaganda, what Rome actually brought to the Mediterranean world was insecurity and instability. Besides violence, displacement of peoples and enslavement, three other factors contributed to the fact that the Rome emerged as the greatest ideological, economic, social and military power the world had ever seen.

Patronage¹⁹

The patronage system was a key factor in holding the empire together. It was the elaborate network of personal relations between the imperial family and the local provincial elites in each of the major cities of the empire. These elites cultivated the personal favor of the emperor whose benefaction to them kept them in power and privilege; in return these local elites would promote Rome in their cities, in all aspects of civic life, erecting monuments and public works to the glory of Rome and garnering for themselves honor and appointments to high office. The patronage system was replicated on every level; those of lesser status carried the favor of the local elites and in return for their benefaction were obligated to the local elites who were obligated to Rome. With all lesser subjects depending on the local elites and the latter depending on Rome, everyone was either directly, or indirectly tied to Rome for their well-being. This hierarchical system of patronage was ultimately a system of control that functioned to keep everyone obligated to someone and ultimately all to Rome, allowing a relatively small imperial administration to rule an entire empire".²⁰

Imperial Cult and Theology

The single most significant factor in unifying the vast multi-ethnic Roman empire was the cult of the emperor.²¹ What Augustus accomplished was referred to as "evangelion" - good news, gospel. He was referred to as "divi filius" son of the divine one, the son of God (cf. Virgil, *Aeneid* 6.789-794);²² since he had done what no other human had done in conquering the world, he obviously was no mere mortal. He was not only the top political figure, but also the top religious figure, the chief priest or the "pontifex maximus", the bridge between the world of humans and world of gods. Worship of the reigning emperor, his predecessors, and the imperial family, permeated the entire culture. It was a complex cult that was theo-political in nature since the cult expressed allegiance not only to deified humans (the emperors) but to a deified cultural and political entity, in the form of the goddess *Roma*; she was the personification of this cultural and political entity.

¹⁹On the Roman patronage system, among others, cf., A. Lintott, *Imperium Romanum: Politics and Administration*. (New York: Routledge, 1993) 168-74; P. Garnsey - R. Saller, "Patronal Power Relation," in (ed.) R. Horsley, *Paul and Empire. Religion and Power in Imperial Society*. (Harrisburg: Trinity, 1997) 96-103.

²⁰R. MacMullen, *Corruption and the Decline of Rome*. (New Haven: Yale, 1988) 121.

²¹As S. R. F. Price observed, the ruler cult was created and organized by the subjects of the Roman empire, especially in the Greek east, in order to represent to themselves the new ruling power and make sense of their situation of subjugation, *Rituals and Power: the Roman Imperial Cult in Asia Minor*. (Cambridge: Cambridge, 1984).

²²The "divine one" of whom Augustus is son, is Julius Caesar who claimed divine descent from Venus through Aeneas, was given divine honors during his lifetime (cf. Dio Cassius, *History* 43.45) and after his death, deified by senatorial decree in 42BC, and thereafter referred to as 'divus Iulius'.

The cult was in every major city of the empire; it pervaded all public space. Throughout the provinces Roman citizens were expected to participate in the imperial cult and even non-citizens were expected to worship “Roma” and the emperor. In Palestine, thanks to Herod, two cities were dedicated to the emperor, Caesarea Maritima and Sebastia (Grk for Augustus), along with three temples and games in honor of the emperor!²³ By Paul’s day, imperial cult temples dominated the landscape; every city had coins with the emperor’s image; cities celebrated the emperor’s birthday, his accession to the throne, deeds, conquests; the result was a packed liturgical calendar of ceremonies, festivals, parades and sport spectacles all in the emperor’s honor. The imperial cult was not just religion it was one’s civic duty.

The worship of Rome and the Emperor was accompanied by a theological narrative which told of Rome’s role in bringing about the will of the gods and about the emperor, the great patron and protector father of all, who was divinely appointed. This story of salvation was told and retold through the media in use in that day: coins, statues, drama, inscriptions, monuments, poetry. Though incomplete, one inscription dating from 9 BC found at Priene on Turkey’s Aegean coast, gives us an idea of the content of the good news of Caesar. It reads, “Since Caesar through his appearance (*epiphania*) has exceeded the hopes of all former good messages (*evangelia*), surpassing not only the benefactors who came before him but leaving no hope that anyone in the future would surpass him, and since for the world the birthday of the god was the beginning of this good news (*evaneglion*)...” In Rome, the *Ara Pacis*, the great altar to Augustan peace, depicts in stone the regeneration of the earth, and redemption of nature brought about through Augustus and Rome. Of Augustus, Virgil said, “it is a god who wrought for us this peace, and a god he shall ever be to me..” (*Eclogues* 1,6-8).

The great eschatological time of redemption, renewal and abundance which Jews awaited, the Romans now proclaimed, and believed, had come in Augustus, a god, a savior, the true Lord. To this proclamation, all the subjects of the Rome were expected to respond with thanksgiving, awe and loyalty. While this imperial good news was proclaimed throughout the Empire, Paul and his companions proclaimed another, alternate gospel. For Paul, God had emphatically not acted through the violent power of Rome and the Caesars, but through the Christ-event. Paul believed and announced that the great end-time of redemption, renewal, abundance, peace and salvation had indeed come about but through Christ, a powerless, crucified Messiah, the true son of God, savior and Lord, the unique agent of universal salvation. This was no minor difference of theological opinion about who God was and how God’s plan of salvation was being realized. Either one believed it was through Rome and Caesar or Jesus, the crucified messiah.

Rhetoric

Rhetoric was defined by Aristotle as the ability to persuade. In Greece, rhetoric developed as a means of participation in politics; free assemblies of local citizens (*ekklesiai*) met to hash out what course of action the citizenry should adopt and persuasive speech played an important role in their deliberations of the people. In Rome, there was no need for deliberation; all decisions were made at the imperial level or through the empire’s local yes-men, and passed down. Local assemblies were abolished and law courts were conducted by those who supported Rome and upheld the local aristocracies. Under the Romans, oratorical eloquence was put at the service of imperial propaganda. At festivals, public speeches were little more than encomiums to Rome and its policies through which the world had become a better place. Along with all the material media, rhetoric was used to announce the party-line, to create through words a *reality* that everyone was supposed to

²³As Josephus relates, “... there was not any place of his [Herod’s] kingdom fit for the purpose that was permitted to be without something that was for Caesar’s honor; and when he had filled his own country with temples, he poured out the like plentiful marks of his esteem into his province, and built many cities which he called Caesarea”, *BJI*.21.4

embrace; and that reality was the divine design for humanity was now outworking itself in and through the Roman Empire, in the peace, security, abundance which Rome brought.

Paul's Anti-Imperial Message

This was the world in which Paul proclaimed that Jesus of Nazareth who had been crucified by Rome as a common criminal, and raised from the dead by God, was the true *divi filius*, son of God, the true bring-er of redemption and peace, the true Lord of the world, to whom all should bring allegiance, Paul's gospel must have been perceived as anti-imperial. Consider for a moment the famous Philippians hymn in Phil 2, an early "Christological Hymn" used by the first believers in their worship, which Paul took over and included in his letter to the Philippians.

When this text is read against the background of the Roman Imperial cult and the practice of honoring the Emperor with special titles another avenue of interpretation opens up which suggests that an implicit contrast is being made between Christ and the Emperor.²⁴ The most telling clue that Paul was opposing Christ to the Emperor comes in v. 6 *isa theo* - equal to God. In Greek culture where the awarding of honors was an obsession, to be acclaimed "equal to the gods" was the highest honor one could receive in recognition of extraordinary benefaction, of a kind usually attributed to the gods. In the new political reality which emerged with Caesar Augustus, it was clear to those in the eastern provinces where the awarding of honors was a way of life, that the emperor *alone* was deserving of the *isotheoi honor*. From this perspective, we can begin to see that the Phil hymn which assigns the honor, *iso theo* to the humiliated and crucified Jesus, is not simply impolitic; it is a challenge to the very foundation of imperial theology and cult. As the hymn proclaims, Jesus himself does not grasp after divine honors, (which the emperor does), but in the end it is exactly this status he receives from God; Jesus is exalted, with the name above all other names; only he is to be confessed as the Lord. The divine honors comes to one who seeks no honors, as a result of his life of humble obedience and submission for the sake of others; here, we find a pointed critique of those who grasp after honors, especially the Emperor. In the exaltation, enthronement language of 2:9-11, it is Jesus rather than Caesar who is depicted as the true Lord and ruler of the world. Without much reading between the lines, the implication is clear: the Emperor is just a false pretender to the throne, no divinity at all! Whether Paul wrote this hymn or borrowed it, it serves a cultural-critical role. Moreover, it functions to create social cohesion within the community of believers at Philippi where the imperial cult was well established by giving community members a common language to articulate their understanding of who Christ is and to honor Christ, not the emperor, as equal to God.

Paul's no to patronage and eloquent rhetoric

The Roman patronage system provides an interesting context for re-examining Paul's own choice to work and support himself rather than accepting the patronage of communities. His renunciation of patronage is apparently a point of controversy between himself and the Corinthians (cf. 1 Cor 9). Ordinarily when religious teachers and philosophers arrived in town, they carried with themselves 'letters of recommendation' in which they were praised by someone of status and recommended to a local patron who would sponsor the preacher in his own home. Roman writings are filled with satirical accounts of how such philosophers and teachers were reduced to pandering to their hosts, rising early to greet them, walking in their entourages so that the patron would be seen as a supporter of philosophy; in brief, these traveling teachers and preachers were little more "kept men," reduced to functioning as sieves for their patrons to whom they were obligated.

²⁴Cf. e.g. E. Heen, "Phil 2:6-11 and Resistance to Local Timocratic Rule. *Isa Theo* and the Cult of the Emperor in the East," in (ed.) R. Horsley, *Paul and the Roman Imperial Order*. (Harrisburg: Trinity, 2004) 125-54.

Acts 18:1 ff. tells us that when Paul arrived in Corinth he found work with a Jewish-Christian couple doing tent-making. Paul himself testifies that he worked to be self-supporting so that he would be under obligation to no one and could preach his gospel to all free of charge (1 Cor 9). Though no one can say with absolute certainty, the fact that Paul renounced the financial support of the community, to which he had a right as an apostle and minister of the gospel, and chose to work for a living can reasonably be taken as a deliberate choice to avoid entanglement in the patronage system with its obligation. Paul could not afford to be a bought man because he could not afford to compromise the gospel proclamation and spin it to accord with what his benefactors wanted to hear.

Paul's refusal of Corinthian patronage caused him a great deal of trouble throughout his ministry at Corinth; the fact, that he did not take financial support from the community was thrown back in his face as proof that he was no real apostle, since real apostle's are supported by the community; moreover, the fact that Paul took no support could only mean he was a second-rate, inferior preacher, since top preachers were payed top dollar in the patronage system. Additionally, in 2 Cor we see that Paul was even suspected of supporting himself by pilfering money from the collection for Jerusalem, while claiming to be self-sufficient; this probably explains why Paul was at pains in 2 Cor 8, to assure the community that if they came through on their pledge to collect money for the poor of Jerusalem, he would not touch the money but send emissaries to collect it (2 Cor 8,20ff). Despite being misunderstood, Paul never caved into societal patronage expectations; he refused to be a "kept man" under obligation to a patron/ or a community since he was already under obligation to the Lord at the service of the gospel!

By Paul's day rhetoric was an instrument of imperial propaganda, announcing a story aimed at soothing the masses and convincing them that salvation had come through Rome; this was the imperial good news. Paul would have none of that. He came announcing only Christ crucified and had no intention of repackaging his gospel in persuasive words. Beginning in 1 Cor 1:18, Paul articulates his disdain for the sheer power of eloquent speech; because rhetoric that wins allegiance through the sheer power of persuasive words draws attention to itself and fails to express the true wisdom of God which finds expression not in power and glory but in a crucified messiah. Though the cross was folly to Greeks and a scandal to the Jews, Paul asserted that God saved humanity in the cross of Jesus and in doing so God worked in defiance of the world's norms. As Paul saw it, the substance of that gospel, wisdom manifested in the absurdity and weakness of the cross, determined the appropriate style of proclaiming the message. This style which eschewed powerful and persuasive speech, was the one Paul adopted and for which he was scorned. While the rhetoric of the empire was smooth and easy to hear because it announced to humans a salvation story rooted in power and victory, Paul preached the true "good news" of what God had done in Christ which confronted humans with a story that both offends and contradicts human expectations of who God is and how God should act. But Paul had no intention of obscuring the horror of the cross through which God had annulled the power of the rulers of this age and their boasting and upon which the new communities of faith were founded.

When read against the context of Roman Imperial theology and propaganda, the words and practices of Paul take on an entirely new significance. The traditional view that Paul was narrowly focused on religious matters, unconcerned about the affairs of this world, now seems less certain. Paul's gospel appears to have been both religious and political, not one or the other, but both. As scholars have observed, Paul's own life choices appear to have been intentionally anti-imperial, as were his expectations for the communities he founded.²⁵ They were to distinguish themselves by having the mind that was in Christ Jesus, seeking the good of others, in a world obsessed by status and self-promotion (Phil 2:6 ff.). They were to operate from an ethic of concern for the up-building

²⁵Cf. e.g. R. Horsley, 1 Corinthians. A Case Study of Paul's Assembly as an Alternate Society," in (ed.) R. Horsley, *Paul and Empire*, 247- 9; further, E. Schüssler-Fiorenza, "The Praxis of Co-Equal Discipleship," in (ed.) R. Horsley, *Paul and the Empire*, 224-43.

of the community rather acting autonomously based on one's rights (1 Cor 8-10). They were called to share wealth horizontally across communities of believers rather than imitating the empire in a vertical down distribution of wealth based on patronage (2 Cor 8-9); They were expected to distinguish themselves from the pagans and the culture of sexual gratification tolerated by Rome. They were to stand apart from the crookedness and perversions of society as lights in the world (Phil 2:15). In sum, everything about their lives was to manifest their commitment to their Lord and King Jesus rather than the self-proclaimed Lord, Caesar. The counter-cultural behavior that Paul expected from believers, he proclaimed in word and lived in practice; this is why he could say to believers: Be imitators of me as I am of Christ! (1 Cor 11: 1, Phil 3:17).

Whether Paul wrestled with Jewish theology and practice or with Rome and imperial claims, what compelled him to live and write as he did was his steadfast conviction that the God of Israel, had acted in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ to fulfill his promises and bring about the salvation of the world. For Paul, what God had done in Christ was no mere abstract theological enunciation but a lens through which Paul negotiated the world around him. In the end, to understand Paul, we must understand both his world and his gospel, the truth of which he sought to bring to bear on the lives of real flesh and blood people who shared with Paul the struggle to make sense of their world, their purpose and place in it, and to satisfy their deepest human longings and desires.

In this jubilee year, we celebrate Paul, not as a relic of the past, but as a still living voice who continues to speak to the perennial human struggle to make sense out of our world and our fragile existence. Some things in Paul will probably always remain hard to understand. We will never be able to access fully his world and his mind . However, the Pauline scholarship in the last half century has brought us closer to the Paul of earliest Christianity, the Church's first Christian theologian, whose life and letters continue to shape and challenge Christian thought and practice.

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