

PAUL'S MISSIONARY JOURNEY INTO POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY

*'The voice of Paul has roused the people of God from
inertia at many turning points in their history'*

- J. S. O'Leary

*'O the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God!
How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways!
'For who has known the mind of the Lord?
Or who has been his counselor?
Or who has given a gift to him, to receive a gift in return?
For from him and through him and to him are all things.
To him be glory for ever.
Amen.'*

- Romans 11, 33-36

In this final reflection on Paul (for the Jubilee year) I want to begin with a resume of some older theologies that have influenced our reading of Paul, and move on to the way Paul might influence some of our recent political philosophies.

THE OLDER (THEOLOGICAL) PERSPECTIVE

Confessional interpretations of Paul have been with us at least since the Reformation. There is a classically Protestant interpretation of Paul, and a classically post-Reformation Catholic one.

I have noticed that Protestant ministers often know more about Paul than Catholic priests do, and have read the letters with more attention to detail. **Protestantism** always had a great interest in Paul. The reformers (especially Luther and Calvin) had problems with the late medieval piety that was then normative for ordinary Christian people. It was a religion of legalism. It advocated salvation by 'works', that is, by doing these pieties, and by 'obedience', that is, to the rules of the church. The reformers wanted to highlight deep personal faith-experience in place of all that. They maintained that salvation was a pure gift of sheer grace. So they read Paul as a first century proto-Protestant, and as fighting for grace against law.

In doing so they made what is now seen by all as a **double caricature**: they presented *Judaism* as a religion of legalism, and they made *Paul* out to be primarily fighting against this Judaism. [This vision implicitly favors Protestants against Catholics!]. Judaism is not fairly presented like that, in the historical knowledge we now possess, and Paul cannot be seen historically as so opposed to that kind of Judaism.

There are **two basic convictions** of developed traditional (Reform) evangelicalism: that the death of Christ involved penal substitution, and that justification is marked by faith alone. That, for this view, is the heart of the 'gospel'. It goes back to Luther himself. For Luther, the real question was how a sinful man could be justified before God. The answer was that our sins were imputed to Christ on the cross, who atoned for them, and that then Christ's righteousness was imputed to us through faith, the result of a special grace to us. That double imputation was the heart of the gospel. Luther said it was the 'standing or falling article of the church'. This was also the conviction of Calvin, who appealed to Augustine for its inspiration. Largely, Protestantism has held to this since the Reformation. It upheld what Stendahl was to call the 'introspective conscience of the west'. It deliberately emphasized the guilt of the sinner, and the sinner's absolute inability to get out of the guilt. Only Christ could do that for anyone.

This theology has always criticized other Christian groups (especially the Catholic Church) for using the language of grace but not entering into the real experience of grace, the lived meaning of which was not understood in these groups. Late Medieval Catholicism referred to grace, almost obsessively at times, but did not grasp the lived point of grace at all. It was a grace conditioned by a man's good works and by the reception of various sacraments.

Through the middle period of the last century, evangelicalism did not produce much new theology – it largely reprinted earlier works. Recently, traditional evangelical theology has fallen into what many of its adherents call bad times. Its focus is on the self and on subjective experience rather than on the objectivity of the salvation process in Christ's death. It has turned to psychology and anthropology and away from the bible. But it is having something of a revival now. There has been a flood of traditional evangelical theological literature in this vein since the late 1980's. At a popular level, it is on the increase. It is making inroads into Catholic theology.

This thinking has always appealed to Paul as the paradigm of an authentic experience of both sin and grace, that is, of the atoning death of Christ, and of the imputed righteousness of Christ. Paul was presented as the supreme example of a good Evangelical Protestant!

The New Perspective on Paul has been developed in recent decades by biblical scholars across confessional lines. It is very different from this picture of Paul. As a result, there is at present a strong reaction to the NPP from traditional evangelical theologians. A group of evangelical scholars associated with Westminster Theological Seminary in Philadelphia has produced a book opposing the NPP. [Cf. *Justified in Christ: God's Plan for Us in Justification*, ed. K.Scott Oliphint, Christian Focus Publications, 2007.] For these reasons, and commitments, the traditional evangelical scholars do not like NPP. They demand more in Paul's Damascus road experience than a recognition of Jesus as Messiah and Risen. They demand a 'conversion' of Paul along the traditional Protestant lines of moral conversion. For most of them, the New Perspective has not shed much light on the transition of Paul from radical guilt to radical grace.

They do take some elements on board from it, such as the narrative approach to Scripture, the historical dimension of redemption, the biblical character of all theology, the objective nature of righteousness through the cross rather than the subjective understanding of it through psychology. This gives them a new emphasis on community in the church and its sacraments: it is the faith-community of those who realize that only Jesus on the cross can save anyone, and that the further salvation of an individual from individual guilt depends on a further free grace.

Catholic interpretations of Paul worked from a different theology of grace and redemption, and had a different sense of guilt. Basically, they estimated that the flooding of Paul by the grace of risen life was much bigger than anything that might be necessary to heal guilt or forgive sin, while allowing that these issues were looked after as consequences of the larger Gift. The relativization of the problem of guilt, and the promotion of the problematic of resurrection, took recent Catholic Pauline scholarship in a different direction. Among many books, let me mention the work of Stanislaus Lyonnet, s.j., of the Biblical Institute in Rome, and Jerome Murphy-O'Connor, o.p., of the Ecole Biblique in Jerusalem. I have used both in these reflections.

THE NEW PERSPECTIVE ON PAUL

The New Perspective on Paul came to the fore quite slowly. It began with a new perspective on Jewish faith and religion around the time of Jesus and Paul, or 'Second temple Judaism'. This was discovered as a religion of grace, and not of 'works-righteousness' in the sense of the Protestant-Catholic debate. Sabbath laws, the rite of circumcision, and the food laws were not ways to get grace, but were 'boundary markers' of the community that was already graced. Keeping those rules meant remaining in that community and sharing in that community's sense of gift, and indicating that to others.

Traditional evangelicals understood Second temple Judaism much as they understood late medieval Christianity. If it was a religion of a grace, it was one conditioned by man's observance of Torah and Catholic devotions. They largely still see these issues in this way..

Montefiore and Moore were among the first to see Judaism differently, as a mystical religion of grace. Then four scholars developed their point: Stendahl, Sanders, Dunn, and Wright. They all did so in relation to the 'real Paul'.

Stendahl realized that the idea of a guilty conscience was a construct of western Christianity applied to Paul. An unbiased reading of the texts showed that Paul never had a guilty conscience. As to the law, he was blameless. He never had a conversion from guilt to grace. He had rather a realization that Jesus was the Messiah. He then knew he had erred in persecuting the church and in not recognizing that it was the community of the Messiah. [For Stendahl, the heart of Romans was cc.9-11.]

Sanders added to this, that Paul had discovered that Jesus was Messiah for all and not just for Jews. What Paul saw as wrong in Judaism was the fact that it did not believe that, or live up to its vocation to express that. Sanders said that too strong an emphasis on the observance of the traditional boundary markers of Judaism (Sabbath, circumcision, food laws) actually excluded outsiders from inclusion in the community of the Messiah-for-all. Paul saw Christianity (of his kind) as expressing this universal gift.

Dunn went on to say that Paul never had a conversion like Augustine's, or Luther's, or Bunyan's. He had a realization that the universal salvation that comes from Christ is not limited by Judaism, though it includes it. [If both

Roman Catholic and Reformation theologians had understood this, Dunn thinks the Reformation might have been avoided.]

Wright insists that the real gospel is the announcement of Jesus' universal Lordship in this same sense.

In all of this, the New Perspective on Paul (now widespread in the biblical guild) makes no specific reference to the atonement in the Reform sense. It does not explicitly confess that Christ's death was penal and substitutionary. It interprets that death more as a victory over the principalities and powers, in the line of Aulen. It also denies the imputation of Christ's righteousness to believers. It rather thinks that the victory of God in Christ does not need that.

There are several reasons for this. First, the New Perspective on Paul does not uphold the key evangelical claim about what happened to Jesus on the cross as he bore our sins and atoned for them: namely, that only in and through that did he come to a 'righteousness' available to no one else. Secondly, the NPP insists that my sin cannot be imputed to Christ, because it is mine alone, and cannot be imputed to anyone else. Thirdly, the NPP looks on righteousness as an attribute of God which, as such, cannot be imputed to anyone except to Christ crucified.

THE FRESH PERSPECTIVE

It is quite recently, with a new realization of the **Roman Imperial Theology** that authors like Horsley, Crossan and Reed, Wright himself, and others have given us, that we can put historical, social and political flesh on the above bones...

This more *politically located* approach is now sometimes called (as by Wright) a **'fresh perspective'** on Paul, as distinct from just a 'new' one. **It is this approach that I have drawn on - mostly – in these reflections for the Jubilee year.**

Crossan would seem to make the opposition of Paul to Caesar very primary. Crossan sees Paul as (subversively) critical of a bad way of living in empire – in any empire.

WHERE SPIRITUAL THINKING MOVED AWAY FROM PAUL

There was once Christendom, a universal system of Christian living. The **first major shock to this system** was the **Black Death** (which began in Constantinople in 1334 and within 20 years killed one to two thirds of the population of Europe).

There were two responses to it, one from the established believing religious community, the other from the emerging scientific secular community.

The former thought in terms of the supernatural, the spirit world, the esoteric, the pre-Christian practices, the mystiques that had been less explicit in the great days of Christendom. It fostered **a Redemptive Spirituality**, which was accentuated by the upheavals of the 16th century, by the Puritanism and Jansenism of the 17th century, by the reactions to the Enlightenment in the 18th and 19th centuries. Many today do not realize that this Redemptive Spirituality is a hangover of the Black Death.

The latter community, the scientific secular one, fostered **a Creation Spirituality**, and thought in terms of earth processes understood for their own sake (and so in terms of modern medicine and modern scientific research).

These two responses did not correlate, nor did the two communities making these responses. The **'worlds' they created were themselves not in touch**, indeed were very separate, and very suspicious of each other. The result was a very protected world of religious devotionism, quite different from the heyday of Christendom, and a very new secular world in which civil dimensions were not subordinated to or integrated in religious dimensions and in which the sense of an active Creator was less and less strong.

The process since the 14th century that created this dichotomy is a double one. One element of it is **secularization**, and it continues. The other element of it is re-**spiritualization**, and it too continues. Perhaps that is why the 'catholic' community generally contains subgroups that tend in these different directions.

One of the most important of these subgroups is Latino-Iberian piety. It was already formed prior to the Black Death, but took on new and significant traits after that time.

The real historical roots of Latino popular piety lie in Manicheism. Mani, in the 3rd century (who called himself the 'apostle of light') articulated a worldview. He was trying to bring out the distinctiveness of Christianity as he saw it. But he was a dualist: he saw things in terms of polarities, good and bad, right and wrong. He said that the physical world was the creation of a jealous demigod (whom he identified with the God of Israel, not the true Christian God!). This world-flesh-devil-institution complex was inherently painful to live in, and radically evil. It was the Kingdom of Satan.

This led to the view that salvation means denying this whole world in terms of another dualistic set: the spiritual soul and the physical body. So: save your soul by torturing your body. Salvation = asceticism, mortification. Not love.

This mentality emerges here and there from time to time, but is specially notable among the Cathari and Albigenses in the early 13th century. They advocated self-flagellation. Crusades were mounted against them. Dominicans were founded to refute them. Almost immediately after this episode, there came into Europe the Bubonic plague we call The Black Death. This led to fanaticism, and a new masochism. It took the form of processions, flagellations, and other passion centred hysteria. It occurred especially in Latino and above all Italian-Spanish situations, and within a short time the typical Italian-Hispanic spiritual discipline was characterised by it. Within 100 years, by the end of the 14th century, the processions were no more, but their place was taken by religious confraternities devoted to the passion of Christ and the sorrows of Mary. These groups are the real origin of the passion plays of the 15th century – where something of the earlier passion hysteria was contained when scripted into the play. The successor to these plays was the Jesuit mission tradition of the 17th and 18th centuries, and the Redemptorist mission tradition followed in its wake.

All this has largely disappeared in modern Europe and North America, but is still present in the third world, especially in places with a traditionalist Latin heritage, e.g. the Philippines. It has now come to light

in Opus Dei, and similar sectarian movements. [It has surfaced in Mel Gibson's Passion movie.]

There are times when I wish Paul had gone to Spain....

Paul must be seen now as a major resource for an understanding of Christian life that is different from 'Christendom' of old, and different from the varieties of Christian response to the Black Death and its aftermaths. Paul's vision is larger than all that. It transcends the difference between the spiritual and the secular. The difficulty, and it remains a real difficulty, is that of translating Paul's vision into today's world, which has largely gone beyond older problematics. I will focus on a political problematic, since we have traveled with Paul in encounter with the politics of the Roman Empire.

THE IMPLICATIONS OF THE FRESH PERSPECTIVE IN PRESENT POLITICS

Paul and our world today.

The aim of this last reflection is to try to do some sort of translation of Paul into our world today. It will look at some key areas of politics:

1. a comment on political theory at the moment;
2. a comment on ecclesiology at the moment;
3. a comment on American politics at the moment;
4. a comment on European politics at the moment.

1. Political theory

It is good to note that Paul is of interest to thinkers who are not 'theologians'. Political philosophers think about him. From him they look at questions of identity, relationship to history, the tension between the particular and the universal, the role of Law, the freedom of the human Subject, the wonder of gift, and the need for generosity and gratefulness.

Almost all political theories are dealing with a tension between hegemony and counter-hegemony. Hegemony is a word for law; and counter-hegemony is a word for its opposite, viz. freedom from law. And that tension is always unresolved. Politics is basically all about that unresolvedness.

A dream or a theory will never do that. It doesn't touch real life. The thing you need to resolve that kind of tension would have to be something like an **event** – a happening, that didn't come out of some theory. It is a real incident, if you like, a real moment in history. From then on, the resolution of the tension amounts to a **fidelity to that event**, and out of the fidelity to that event comes a certain **charisma** that allows you to resolve your tension. That's the model that is proposed fairly commonly at present. You can easily make an application of that and say the **event is the resurrection of Jesus**. Paul is the first political scientist who realized that, and presented it to us as the key to it all, and told us that from then on it is **faith in that Jesus, and fidelity to that faith** that really counts, and that if we really believed that and lived like that experientially, **charisms** or spirit-gifts will flow from Jesus through us into other people.

It is tempting to read the history of Christianity as a couple of **transitions**, and maybe another one coming up.

One transition might be to read it as a transition from a greater emphasis on masculine values of life to a greater emphasis on feminine values of life. Perhaps in some ways, that's a transition from some aspects of Jewish law to some aspects of Pauline openness in his community.

There is a second transition from the Pauline or early emphases on feminine dimensions of life, back to masculine ones in the passage from early Christianity to Constantine and the Constantinian church. It's a kind of **double take**, one way, then the other way.

People are now wondering whether we are at the edge of a **third significant transition**. Have we got sick of the masculine emphasis of the Constantinian church and are we starting to discover values that I suppose are more feminine in the original sense, and more Pauline? The question is **whether the inherited institutional fabric of the church can actually hold those re-discovered insights**. Can you put new wine into old wine-skins? It is one way of reading the whole history, and also of locating some of the significance of a re-reading of Paul in such a politically understood Christian history.

Some philosophical-type political thinkers are moving in that direction. **Terry Eagleton** is discovering **universal values** with the help of Aquinas. Others are discovering the sublimity of life beyond the practicality of life, with the help of Augustine. Some **Jewish thinkers** are using Paul in this discussion, such as **Alain Badiou** and **Daniel Boyarin**. Badiou uses an expression **"laicized grace"**. It

suggests that grace is not exclusively in the sanctuary or in church (or synagogue) confines, that grace is as large as the universe. The usual ways we have spoken about grace need a certain laicization. Paul's notion of grace is as large and open and as laicised as the universe. [The expectation of having to be institutionally "churchified" in order to have grace, has dropped almost right out.](#) It is no more necessary to lock up grace exclusively in sacred confines, than it was necessary to circumcise the gentiles, in order to get on the right path to God or into the covenant. There is a change in the whole conception of where God works and what sort of work God is doing among us, and it is very much in more lay connotations and dimensions than people previously were thinking. A lot of authors, and they go back a while, have found grace in secular structures. I haven't heard anybody talk about a secularisation of the concept of grace, and I think that's a first step, and personally I think it is a rather useful one. Perhaps we could call it a non-exclusive sacralization of the concept of grace. Perhaps this is a better way to say it. But "laicized grace" is like a good formula to talk about it.

There is an un-stated assumption in a lot of people, that if you move into the lay area too much, you are doing something bad, and you are losing grace. I'm not saying you have to move into the lay area in order to discover grace, but I believe it can be done, and it is grace of a peculiar and real kind. It is as much authentically grace as any other kind. I'm tending in my own vocabulary not to use the word 'grace' much at all. I tend to talk about 'God's dynamic of resurrection' which means the same thing anyway.

[Cf. Alain Badiou, Saint Paul. La foundation de l'universalisme, PUF 2007. Giorgio Agamben, Le temps qui reste, Rivages, 2004. Slavoj Zizek, Fragile absolu. Pourquoi l'heritage chretien vaut-il d'etre defendu? Flammarion, 2008.]

The real question seems to me to be: within what vision of life are we playing for keeps? You can argue this vs that forever in response to that question. But Paul was able to transcend the question itself and get beyond every this vs that. In comparison with what Paul saw of the Risen One, every vision of life was a parallax error. He would not be drawn into this 'ism' vs that 'ism', since he had been drawn too strongly into the Something Else of Resurrection. He did see it as political option, and this makes his Christianity so different: it makes it public in the arena of public politics.... There is no one way of doing this, and no one of the many ways is at the present stage of history anything more than a few first manoeuvres....

2. Ecclesiology or do we need another name?

What Paul discovered from the Damascus road onward, you could call the **paschal process**. It sums up that whole sublation of crucifixion into resurrection and everything else – paschal process will do as a term for it. Paul discovered it **in the individual Jesus** risen from the dead. I wonder if today we are discovering exactly the same paschal process in a number of **people that we actually know down the street**. I wonder if identically and genuinely it is the same thing. I don't think they are actually risen from the dead and they are having three meals a day – but I think that some of their sufferings out of concern and care for others are being swept up into a positivity that they never grasped before, and they are experiencing that, and they know that it's true, and not only do they know it's true, but a lot of their friends know it's true. So, I wonder, for people, who discover that in one another, are the people they discover it in, having something of the **same function as the risen Christ had for Paul**? Is that too much to say? It would be an interesting possibility. It's a revelation to these people of what life is all about, and from the revelation comes a vocation, a call to live that way, to realize that is the key to life, and from the vocation, perhaps, a certain sense of mission to show other people that this is really the name of the game, whether they are in a church or outside it. I don't want to be self-consciously anti-church - but I think that grace is now more in the world than in church. There are some awfully good people who are not in church, but who have actually gone through the paschal experience, and they are very crucified/risen people, and they can be discovered, and when people discover them, they think they have something like a Damascus road experience. The people, who get into that, do have circumcised hearts as a result, and they do know what Paul calls the power of the resurrection, rather than the details of the resurrection. There is a change in the conception of humanness, and there is a change in the conception of church-ness, and of synagogue-ness too if you like. There's a kind of a God-grouping out there, that hasn't got a formal name, and doesn't come under the umbrellas of the usual institutions, but is no less paschal and no less resurrectional.

It is as new as Paul, and Paul thought of it like that. What I think is new to me is the number of people, who seem to be chalking up experiences like that. I think there are more than there used to be. There would always have been some, but the some in the past might have either kept quiet about it, or translated it into highly institutional terms. I think now people are not keeping so quiet about it, and are talking about it in more laicized secular terms. There's a larger world out there.

I wonder what Paul would make of people, such as I'm talking about, if he were around today. Would he have gathered them in the sardine shop and said: "This is what Jesus was on about – and what he was doing – do it in memory of Jesus." He would have encouraged those people and reinforced those people - to live in a non-totalitarian non-dominative mode of existence politically, and more in a kenotic openness, with a gentleness that was verging on love. For him they would have been with the Israel of God, and the church of God in that sense too.

I think church might become fuzzy at the edges a bit in that sense, and there would at least be a pen-umbra around it. Maybe that is where more action is taking place than within the official parameters. I think we might develop a collection of narratives and stories and incidents. That wouldn't be too hard to do. The realities are there, if we could only collect the data, frankly.

But that could be incredibly threatening to the prevailing institutions today, as I reckon what Paul was doing in the sardine shop was threatening to the prevailing institutions of his day. It is a fair translation of Paul into our scenarios now, but it is something you could find it hard to preach from a pulpit on a Sunday. If you did, you'd have nobody there the next Sunday. It depends what you are being paid for. What I've been trying to do is create a bridge from Paul into the world of today.

3. American Politics

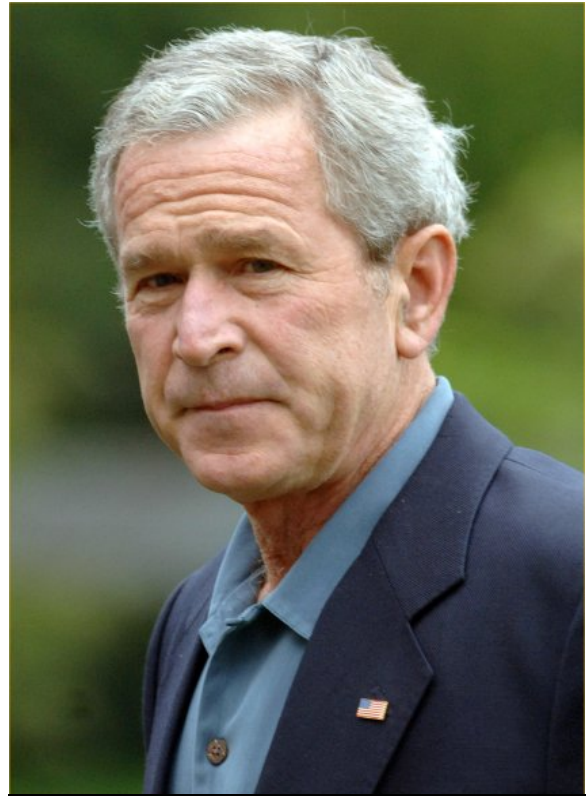
Pauline studies now frequently work on contrasts between an Empire system and a kenotic system. There are obvious links between the Roman Empire reality and the American reality today. Richard Horsley's book is very frank about it. Tom Wright is too.

I have lived in US long enough to have quite a profound appreciation of genuine American life. I am rather criticizing the Bush administration and foreign policy.

What it is based on, I think, is a perception that there is such a thing as moral good in the world. That in itself is a very good perception. There is then a very real distinction between good and evil, moral good and moral evil. So far I have no problem. In fact, I would support it.



Caesar Augustus



President George W. Bush

Then comes the next step – that the good, or the moral good, is identified with the present form of American way of life and with no other way of life. So that the secular alleged democracy of the American way of life is regarded as the only way of living moral good in a public political sense. The politics of the USA seems to me not the only political way of being moral. There was a lot of persuasion in the Bush administration that it really is. There is a lot of missionary activity in a military sense throughout the world to make the colonies come into line with that mainstream. The morally bad or the politically awful in the Bush vision equals all tyrannies throughout the world, especially Islamic ones, and that therefore they have to be overcome with military force, so that the true religion, if I could call it that, could be spread throughout the world.

That is a derivative of the philosophy of Nietzsche. It comes into the Bush-Washington administration through two American scholars, both of whom were following Nietzsche. One is Leo Strauss, and the other is Alan Wohlstetter. We might add Alan Bloom.

Bush himself hasn't a consistent philosophical position. He is a combination of the centre-right neo-conservatism, and southern Protestantism, but his people around him have been philosophically influenced along the Nietzschean stream.

This is at the opposite pole to Paul. Nietzsche advocates the absoluteness of man over men, and a totalitarian victory with that, by whatever means you like, including military means. This consistent philosophy is **very, very close to Augustus**, and very, very far away from Paul. And that has caused, as I know from a lot of American friends, a lot of grief in the hearts of good Christians in America, who understand Paul, particularly through more recent ways of looking at Paul, and they are embarrassed by their own country's politics at the moment.

Can you see that Paul and a Pauline vision of Christian life have profound political implications at the moment? Then, of course, if you wanted to bring in Islam, Islam is not exactly innocent, in many of its derivatives, of a certain desire for military violence. It is so often, when you get a conflict, **both sides are really pretty similar** or you don't really get a decent game. That's what happens really. So how you get out of all this, I have absolutely no idea, but it would be interesting to reflect on it in the light of what we've been reflecting about Paul all year.

I think if Paul were around today, and saw what was happening in today's world, he'd be deeply distressed, not just at the present state of churches, but at the present state of the world. Paul was always more interested in the world than in the churches. After all, his world was itself religious. It would certainly be worth pondering a little bit.

A new turn?

In 2008 the Obama presidential campaign has shown us a new politics of community organizing. It has roots in the south side of Chicago rather than Columbia and Harvard. It comes (remotely and with differences) from Saul Alinsky and reminds us of Dorothy Day. There are traces of Maritain....

It begins with the now-usual things: to listen, to have faith in the other, to tell and merge the stories. But it goes further.

It realizes that the 'self-interest' of ordinary people (what makes them tick) is beyond their 'immediate interest' (beyond the small talk, the sketchy biographies, the received opinions).

It realizes that the faith of ordinary people is rooted in their shared hopes – of survival and of freedom. Without that hope, that sense of future, they do not

have faith. When they have that kind of faith, they want to move beyond the vagueness of dreaming....

What they need to do that, is 'technology' (know how) that gives them, ordinary people, the ability to act. This 'technology' demands that they are recognized, that they are responded to, that they are accorded public presence.

When they take their first steps like that, they threaten the system, the power structure and the power people. Their action gets a negative reaction. That is when they need to stay cool and not react to the reaction. They need to keep believing in their hopes, dreams, ideals, and values, and not put their energy primarily into here-and-now 'I'll get you back' tactics. They need a larger 'politics' than the usual one, and to explore the viability of that larger politics to carry their point.

They need to become, and present themselves as a vessel that is more true than this generation or the previous one, and that will carry that truth willy nilly to the next generation. That is how they turn dreams into reality. They are a group that delivers... Yes, they can.

I do not know whether America now and in the future will do this. I hope so. I do know that for a brief moment of the first century, Paul did it. He went beyond the immediate. He gave hope, in resurrection life. He enabled his people to act resurrectionally. His sardine shops were a public presence that threatened the system. When he failed in some agenda, and he did most often, he remained kenotically cool. He formed those who shared his experience into a group that would remain...and deliver...

4. European politics

The news from Europe is incredibly, and surprisingly, better. There is a major turn in European history going on. The formation of the European Union is certainly an event in the history of civilization, and it's almost unbelievable that it exists, after a European century of wars and violence. They are deliberately opting for a peace that is not based on victory – that is based rather on mutual understanding and reconciliation. Now that's the Pauline side of the old argument. The motto of the E.U. community in French is: L'unité dans la diversité, which means "Unity in the diversity" and the American one is: *e pluribus unum*, which means "a unity out of many different backgrounds". This is a diversity, it

is not primarily a unity. It's the opposite angle and line. The EU is trying to propose a constitution for itself at the moment that would amount to a single treaty with a charter of basic rights, a juridic personality and so on. It has not yet happened, and there are significant resistances, but time will tell.

Now, in all of that, leaving out the obvious details, the real issue is VALUES. It's not economy. It's not free-market. It's a spiritual, moral value-system of Europe and of all Europe, everybody included. So there's an inclusiveness in it. And all the previous political groups, like nations, like ethnic groups, like churches, are all going to have to see themselves differently. They are not "it" any more. They are "a bit" of a larger European reality. I think that is a de-fusing of absoluteness or a kenotic step-down as Paul might call it. And I think it is really marvellous to see.

Of course, it hits the churches a bit heavily – some more heavily than others – because the churches are going to say that all this is lay and is secular, but **we** the churches have the sacred, holy place. I don't think they will get away with that quite as much in this new horizon.

We've talked about new "laicized grace". The French have always talked about a "laïcité" – a "laicity" – you can't translate that into English. It's a peculiarly French thing. But it really more and more is looking to zones of living that are not quite owned by the state, and not quite owned by any religious group either. Could I say they are "just human!" and the fact that such "just human" fluid zones are being named, is something new. And when you start naming them it's about the sense of existence and what it means. It's about common values, it's about ethical convictions, it's about areas that neither state nor religion have any right or capacity to make final decisions about. It goes on to what the majority of genuine human people largely accept as being genuinely human, if you could say it very simply like that. It's a kind of public ethic and it's not closed off and it's not finalized – it's like a process that's open-ended democratically, full of compromises, seeking public consent all the time, and never assuming it's got it, representing a humanity largely, rather than sectarian interests – the sectarian either in the secular or the religious sense – it's value-laden stuff, is what I'm trying to drive at.

Of course, many of the churches, sometimes many religious people outside churches, are objecting to this. There's a whole group, including the European bishops, that say you've got to write the word 'God' into the constitution and the response is "Well, O.K. – but what about people who don't believe in God or

who don't say they believe in God? We live with them too, and they're around, aren't they? So, how do you write in, that our community believes in God and respects cordially people who don't believe in God." It's a sort of contradiction, isn't it? So, why don't you just drop it and don't say anything. Can you see the opening up and the broadening of frontiers that is taking place a little bit?

But will the Europe of tomorrow be one that doesn't say in an articulate way that it believes in God, but has discovered openness to one another and to God without naming it? This is not far from what Paul was doing in his own day. There's a new **outside** to which church people are not insiders. It's outside the confines of defined church life, and people who live within defined church life are not insiders to what's going on out there. But there **is** something going on out there. And the something is not all bad. In fact a lot of it is remarkably good. There are instances where people are doing the Pauline or the Jesus thing without using those words for it. But isn't it better to **do** it, than to name it? You see people are saying : You've got to say Christianity is the principal source of values in Europe. Well, it's **one** of them. What about Jews? What about Islamics? What about Greeks? What about Romans? What about Celts? What about Slavs? And what about the Enlightenment itself? Isn't that a source of real living in Europe? What about **today**, when people are getting beyond all of that, and are discovering positive things by getting beyond it. There are questions around.

I think Paul was always discovering himself in different contexts and names. Is it possible that the whole rise of secularization, and the separation of church and state, is it possible that was a defence mechanism against violence created by churches? It's possible in some aspects at least. I think, it's not only possible to say it, but a lot of people are saying: "Yes, there's some truth in this!" And there is an opening of the eyes to something a little larger, and surely that's what Paul was getting people to try and see.

Many say that Europe needs to re-discover its **soul**. I think it is soul that's animating a larger body – a bigger framework of existence – much in the way that Paul would have said that his communities needed to discover the **true Israel**. It was a true Israel including a whole larger group than just card-carrying Jews. There are parallels around for sure.

Pope Benedict is a European, through and through. He hasn't taken the name of Benedict, the patron of Europe, for nothing. But the dominant model of living, of people in the first world anywhere, is **materialism**. It's a world of exaggerated

comforts and amenities, comfortable liberalism and so on. The **church has got something to say** to that and it's a **philosophy of the human person**. The whole ethics of family life is often dictated by too much individualism, secularism in the wrong sense there, and I think the church has got something to say there in a **philosophy of relationships**, to bring out the genuine potential in authentic human civic living outside church matters.

But much of the inherited classical philosophy here does not take count of the amplitude of possibilities for communication and relationship that are available at present. A larger world needs a larger soul!

There are all sorts of ecology questions. The church has a tradition of **respect for creation** that would leave viable land for the future – and the whole **bio-tech area**. I don't think the church is against experimentation – it **respects genuine values** – but to say that, and to say it as **one** voice among many voices, discovering a bigger future, is much better than to slam it down as if we are somewhere else and **we** know. I think Paul would have got in there very happily and tried to do it in the kenotic way rather than in the patronizing way.

I think what Paul would be talking about if he were around today would be the transformation of humanness that can come through genuine openness to one another as a result of less selfishness. That's the **circumcision of the heart**, and the openness to the gift, and the subsuming of pain into love and grace etc. That's what it's about. And I think Paul would be genuinely happy to see just a few little glimpses of this.

One of the really interesting things I find for the future is how the new US is going to react to the united Europe. Much of the agenda may come out of that, really, even theologically, because I think that is actually calling the shots in much of it at the moment.

What I'm trying to suggest is that if you dig back into a **political vision of Paul**, you might see some connection, rather than some distance. It's important that the ditch between church and the new secular world does not widen. I think it is terribly important that it closes up a good deal – at least not widen any further. To do that, I'd hope the church would be less centralist and dogmatic and authoritarian and much more open to collegiality, subsidiarity – whatever word you use for openness within its own community, but in doing that it would only be implementing Vatican II anyway. It has said all that anyhow, but it hasn't implemented it to the fullness that it might.

I don't think the agenda is entirely inside church any more. I don't think you can operate like that any more. You've got to see bigger than the previous narrow confines. And if there's any implementation of Vatican II, it's a message to the larger world. See, that is exactly Paul as I grasped him. He wasn't just writing a message to his few little communities. He was giving a huge message to the Roman Empire. And ultimately I'd hope it was a healing one. The results are not in yet. If you are pro-Caesar, I don't think you'll agree with much of what I've been saying.

Are there certain arenas of impossibility where you can't say 'Yes' and 'No' about the same thing without different angles of vision? Yes, but also maybe no! I think in dialectic logic, there is contradiction between various positions, but I don't believe dialectic logic is the only one in the world. There might be a different form of logic out of which something will happen that is not contained in the black and white of dialectic. Maybe we're on the thresh-hold of that, in which case it isn't quite open and shut, but who knows? I think that's what Paul was trying to say all the time, when Paul said that crucifixion/death is subsumed into resurrection-life, he was saying what on the surface of things is dialectically a contradictory statement. In black and white, it's not true. But in some kind of God-logic that he believed in, he discovered it was true. That's what the discovery is all about.

People, who are totally committed to the clear-cut difference position in life, can never understand what Paul was saying. If they say they believe it, they are just being publicly good, but they don't know what you are talking about. It is **fideism** rather than faith.

To have faith in it, is to believe that God can do something that looks to all the world contradictory, and to have Christian faith is to believe that God has actually done this in the case of Jesus.. And that's what hit Paul. And the rest is history.

There are many points of contact between a serious study of Paul as he was, and a serious look at where we are now. The connections are not accidental or peripheral. The agenda is very similar. And the intuition is very similar. But the problem is how to connect one to the other. It's a problem Paul was facing all the time.

I mean Paul found his best audience in the God-worshipper, God-fearer types – people out there who really wanted to be Jews and weren't game to join Israel. There are people now who want to live Christian lives and don't want to join the churches. There are loads of them around - value-Christians, that are not signed-on Christians. Paul said: "You'll do. Come on!" Still we need a bit more initiative to say to these people that, what we believe in, is what they'd like to believe in. We maybe can learn a little bit from them in their paschal process in their own lives that we can recognize and name as being the same as in Jesus, and we would feel that would confirm a lot of people. But they are the links that I see are possible.

TO CONCLUDE

Tom Wright says:

'Christianity is not a new way of being religious; it is not a new way to connect with one's inner self; it is not a new way to make sure you get to heaven when you die. It teaches customs that it is not lawful for citizens of the Empire, or worshippers of equivalent political systems, to adopt or observe. It is not purely and simply a private religious claim. It engages and challenges and overturns the public square. It tries to turn the Empire-world upside down. If the resurrection has really begun in Jesus, then the empires of all Caesars are in real trouble.

'Modern Christianity – unfortunately – does not think like that. It has moved towards a denial of the activity of God and Jesus in the real, political world. They are out of the play, in a world of their own. 'Suave politeness tempers bigot zeal' (Ronald Knox). Private 'feeling' corrects public 'believing'. We have become timid and called it tolerance.'

My own observation is that, in Paul's day, there was a lot of 'paschal process' outside of Israel. And in our day, there is a lot of 'paschal process' outside of any church or religious institution.

These were Paul's people. Paul did not help them have better private feelings, and he did not urge them to fight institutional dominance and so repeat it. He asked them to transcend all those issues, and discover the Risen One, as they became sensitive to the oppressed who were rising from their troubles into a new kind of justice and peace.'

'Neither Jesus nor Paul was teaching a timeless system of religion or ethics, or even a message about how human beings are to be saved. They thought of themselves as actors in the drama staged by Israel's God in fulfillment of his promises. This is 'Jewish eschatology'.

Jesus and Paul believed they had a particular role in that drama.

Jesus believed he was the one through whom God's strange purposes for Israel would reach their climax. He announced that the kingdom had arrived. It would not look like the kingdom his contemporaries had imagined. It would not endorse their agendas. Especially their desire to have a war of liberation from Rome. Jesus thought that would be an unmitigated disaster.

Jesus in his entry to Jerusalem and his temple scene knew he would suffer as a Jewish martyr. He enacted the great symbol of the new exodus, the great liberation, encoded in a final passover meal with his followers. He had a deeper vocation than Messiah. He enacted God's return in person to Israel. He symbolised it. If he died in obedience to this mission, he would rise from the dead, without delay.

Paul believed Jesus had succeeded. Paul was to announce to the whole world that Israel's history had been brought to a climax in this way. Israel's God the creator was taking his power and reigning. He was showing in Jesus the true way to be human.

David Harold-Barry, True Power in Paul, [Thinking Faith](#), January 2009.

B.Bourguine, Saint Paul et la philosophie: crise du multiculturalisme et universel chretien, [Revue theologique de Louvain](#), 2009, 78-94.
