

# PAUL and 'PAULS AFTER PAUL'

## From the Backyard to the Cosmos

*Time is running out in this year of Paul, and I would like here to honor a number of other writings in the Pauline corpus, however briefly. Some are generally accepted as from Paul himself, others are debated – they may well be from some 'Pauls after Paul'.*

### FIRST, PAUL HIMSELF

#### SUMMARY

##### *Philemon*

This is a very short, incidental letter, more a 'billet' or note than an epistle or letter, probably written by Paul roughly at the same time as Philippians, and, I think, written from Ephesus. Onesimos is usually understood to be a runaway slave belonging to Philemon. Paul delicately asks for his freedom from slavery and acceptance as a freeman by Philemon. This change of status is not demanded by normal Christian living: because the time is short prior to the Parousia, it was the general Christian practice not to change social relationships, and so to allow slavery. Paul asks Philemon, in the name of his own conviction about **unlimited Christian freedom**, to give the runaway his freedom and accept him into his own family as an equal.

#### HISTORICAL NOTES

**Philemon, Ephesians and Colossians** have been regarded as 'captivity epistles' and often seen as written by Paul when imprisoned in Rome. Of course it could relate to an earlier captivity, e.g. in Caesarea or in Ephesus, and I have sided with Ephesus in the paragraph above. Paul, we know, was born a citizen of Rome (not just of the Empire, but of the city of Rome). This made him something of a VIP, (a bit like an Indian KBE?). He was in Rome at his own request, for two full years, living – it seems - at his own expense (was he allowed to make tents? Did anyone need them there?). There is no mention anywhere, not even in Acts, of an eventual hearing of his case, or acquittal, or conviction, or execution. The time limit for presenting such cases may have elapsed before prosecution got round to it. We do not know for sure the date of his death in Rome.

---

There are many different **interpretations** of this letter. Usually, we are told that Onesimus is a slave who has run away from Philemon, his master. Paul never actually says that in the text. It is only after John Chrysostom that this reading takes on general acceptance. Others say Onesimus was sent by Philemon to bring food, etc, to Paul in

prison, and Paul wants him released from this chore. This sounds too weak. Others still think Onesimus has not run away from his master, but that there is some unresolved domestic difference between them, and he seeks Paul as a friend of each of them to mediate in the matter. There is a recent view that Onesimus is not a slave at all, but Philemon's younger brother! It seems that a certain resistance to Paul's intervention on behalf of a slave is going on here. I continue to read the letter in the traditional way.

In ancient lists of bishops an Onesimus is bishop of Ephesus around the year 100.

---

## INTERPRETATION

It is interesting to note the language Paul uses to Philemon. In a recent reflection on Philemon, Murphy O'Connor writes that 'the keystone of Paul's pastoral practice was his conviction that he **could not impose a moral decision** on his converts by means of a direct command. He could not treat a church as if it were an army of which he was the superior officer. ...' Paul 'prefers to appeal to Philemon'. 'I prefer to do nothing without your consent in order that your goodness might not be by compulsion but of your own free will'. To bind someone is make that person a prisoner. It is to remove their freedom. Goodness by compulsion goes against the nature of humanity and of Christianity. Only a freely chosen action has any moral value. 'Each one must do as he has made up his mind, not reluctantly nor under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver' (2 Cor 9,7) Unredeemed humanity is enslaved to Sin or the Law. Pagans get swept along by the general consensus to false values (Sin) and Jews give blind obedience to torah (Law). They are all programmed and controlled. But Paul tells them 'you are set free for freedom' (Gal 5,1). For Paul – or anyone else in a Christian community - to give orders regarding moral actions would be to return Christians to their unredeemed state.

This is also why Paul **did not personally select individuals to occupy positions of authority** in his churches. It would be imposing something. He rather wants the churches to 'identify those who labour among you and take the lead in the Lord and admonish you, those you esteem very highly in love because of their work' (1 Thess 5, 12-13). They are not selected, elected or appointed or invited, they are simply the obvious ones because of their work. For example, at Corinth, it was the household of Stephanas (the first converts of Achaia). Paul also recognized Gaius at Corinth, Phoebe at Cenchreae, and the married couple Prisca and Aquila and the committee made up of Philemon, Apphia, and Archippus (Phm 1-2). It did not matter if was individual or shared, if it was men or women. It was just the way things worked.

The situation with Philemon and Onesimus is a very clear example of Paul's attitude. He will not tell Philemon what to do. But he will – with tongue very much in cheek –

cajole Philemon into doing it! This fragment of a letter is a telling critique of the dominative practice of later Churches....

----

In broader terms, Paul wanted his Christians to provide for themselves and carry their own financial burdens. He objected to conspicuous consumption, ostentatious dress, lavish lifestyle. He advocated godliness with contentment. He liked hard workers, and never looked down on manual labor. He thought that those who will not work should not be expecting to eat, freeloading on the congregation and its meals. Get rid of freeloaders by starving them! When real need existed, then the members of the community were expected to step in and bear one another's burdens, (as a fulfillment of the Law of Christ). Teachers were worthy of financial support, and communities should expect to support them, but they are free to refuse such support. Paul himself wanted to be free wherever he went, and do ministry on his own terms without entangling alliances. He was open to accepting travel funds and supplies, as long as there was a parity relationship not a patron-client one. [There was a culture of paid teachers/philosophers/rhetoricians who could be 'bought' to say what pleased their paying audience.] Not many had grasped the idea of giving without concept of return, i.e. of free grace, or real self-sacrifice. In Cenchraee Phoebe 'supported' Paul. According to Acts, Lydia did so in Philippi. He would not do mercenary ministry. He did not advocate self-sufficiency on a Stoic model, but God-sufficiency on a resurrection model.

The workman was worthy of his hire. Christ was the ultimate burden bearer. No one is saved by good works, but where there is time and opportunity to do them, one will not be saved without them. They are not optional extras in the Christian life.

-----

## **SECONDLY, 'PAULS AFTER PAUL'**

'Paul has been an absentee from Catholic preaching. We have had more affinity with the Paul of the deutero-Pauline letters (Colossians and Ephesians), the Pastorals and the Acts of the Apostles than with the figure who addresses us in the letters that are more assuredly from Paul's own hand, especially Galatians and Romans'. [J.S.O'Leary]

## **AN INTRODUCTORY WORD**

This is an attempt to say something, however briefly, about other letters that are at times linked with those that Paul indisputably wrote. Space and time limit this quick look at them. I have just looked at the short 'note' to Philemon: this is genuinely the historical Paul. Now I will look at Colossians and Ephesians, and the ending of Romans, which

many scholars do attribute to the historical Paul, but – just as probably - they come after Paul's time. I will then look at a group of letters that is not usually regarded as historically from the hand of Paul, but from someone down the line using the name of Paul: 2<sup>nd</sup> Thessalonians, 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Timothy, and Titus. Finally, I will mention Hebrews, which is clearly not Paul, nor in the line of Paul's thinking. In a strange twist of mathematics, we then have seven 'extra' letters to complement the usually accepted authentic seven we have used for our reflections over the past year (1 and 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Romans, Philippians, I Thessalonians, Philemon). [In the new testament we also find the 'catholic epistles', namely James, 1 and 2 Peter, Jude, 1 2 and 3 John, none of which have connections or affinity with Paul.

---

## FRIENDS OF PAUL

Paul was with people almost all the time. He wintered with some; others were his companions, accompanying him on mission and in captivity. They were 'with' and 'around' him, and he 'with' and 'around' them. He was not a fanatical evangelist, without heart, and without need for warmth and love. But in his letters he never uses the word 'friendship', and never calls anyone 'friend'. He does – often – refer to someone as 'synergos', fellow worker with whom there is 'synergy'. In fact, this word is used 13 times in the new testament, and 12 of those times are in Paul's letters. People were not so much with or around Paul, as working-with him. He used the same syn-prefix to describe his relation with the risen Jesus, and his with Paul. Paul is not primarily a solitary, for sure, but he is not primarily a friend either. He told the Corinthians he was their 'father', and he told the Thessalonians he was their 'mother'. He refused to be called anyone's 'pedagogue'.

His first real 'friend' was Barnabas. Barnabas gave him protection in the early days, introduced him to the key people in the Jesus movement, in Jerusalem and in Antioch. They were on mission and inseparable for about 12 years. Together they created the idea of a 'missionary journey'. In the end, they split. It was less a personality thing than different options for mission – Barnabas took John Mark and went to Cyprus, while Paul went to Turkey (Asia Minor). Beneath that, however, is a difference about what Messiah means. Barnabas went back to the Jerusalem position of Peter and James, while Paul clearly refused it.

For the next period of his missionary work, Paul had two people with him, Silas from Jerusalem and Timothy from Lystra. There were many others around them.

Titus emerges as 'second only to Paul', and with him are Tychicus, Luke (not the gospel writer, I think) and Philemon.

Towards the end of Rm Paul mentions a number of people by name. Maria; Andronicus and Junias; Ampliatus; Urban; Stachys. In 2 Tim others are named: Prisca and Aquila, the family of Onesiphorus, Erastus, Trophimus, Eubolus, Pudens, Lin, Claudia....

*It is easy enough to see how, after Paul, a group of 'Paul-influenced' persons could have got together and produced documents along the lines of Paul's thinking.*

----

## A SCHOOL AND A STYLE

It is recognized, more and more, by Pauline scholars, that Paul's writing lies well within the **broad spectrum** of Jewish literature in the 2<sup>nd</sup> temple period. At the same time, while standing within this Jewish tradition, Paul read that tradition in a different light: the afterglow of the resurrection of the crucified Jesus. In this tradition we might count **Jubilees, Genesis Apocryphon, Pseudo-Philo's Liber Antiquitatum Biblicarum, Josephus' Antiquities, Philo's Moses.** It has been suggested that Pseudo Philo may be the most illuminating conversation partner of Paul. Paul also has much in common with the Qumran writers who practiced 'pesher' reading of the Hebrew Scriptures. This **broad 'school'** held that God's rule was intact, that God's plan was unfolding as it should, and that there were meaningful correspondences between episodes of history in the sacred past. Paul went further and found them (especially in Rm) between all Israel's past and her present and future, between the whole of it and the new story of the crucified-risen Jesus. Paul is a re-teller of the enlarged story within a vein of writing he seems to have known well... As a result Paul knew that those who had not been God's people could become so by a gracious act of God that continually amplified the act of raising the crucified Jesus. He could then read into the Hebrew Scriptures a latent sense so brilliant that its original sense vanished from his frame of interest. [Not enough work has yet been done in presenting Paul in the company of these Jewish writers...whose texts are available.]

I want to say this before we look at the work of various 'Pauls after Paul'. They did not have to create an approach from nothing. **They had inherited a way of reading and writing, and a vision.** It is no wonder that a **'Pauline school'** flourished with more writings 'after Paul'.

----

## SUMMARY

*Colossians and Ephesians (and the ending of Romans)*

These writings are probably not from Paul, but from a much later 'student' of the Paul tradition, a kind of 'Paul after Paul'. They add more theoretical, and more spiritual, ideas to what Paul himself wrote. **Wisdom (the shining brilliance of God) is the centre of it all, and is the meaning and source of all creation.** There is a Fullness (Pleroma) in it. It has always been in Christ. So Christ pre-exists all creation, is the agent of all

creation, and all creation is 'for' him and the wisdom that is 'in' him. He is the 'head' of it all. Among humans, he is the 'second' (or, 'only-real') Adam. Among the dead, he is the first-beginning of their resurrection. Among us now, our physical bodies are His 'body', and we take His 'body' into ours, to transform ours, in the Eucharist. Our job here on earth in our lifetime is to 'head-up' all things in this one creative Christ (anakephalaiosasthai). Ephesians calls all this the 'utter fullness of God'. It goes into a hymn to honor the over-riding greatness of the God who set this up and is still doing it....

## COLOSSIANS

**COLOSSAE.** *Colossae is in Phrygia, in the Lycus Valley, near Laodicea, and Hierapolis. These communities were not founded by Paul, but by Epaphras. The drift of this letter is about cosmic forces with power over humans, and the consequent need for asceticism, leading to wisdom. The stress is on the cosmic primacy of Christ. The church is now seen as universal, with Christ the head of it all. This Great Church is the space within which believers are protected from the cosmic forces, and is in that sense 'heaven'. The baptized are already risen from the dead, and have to practice a new ethics. Paul is presented as the universal mediator of all this.*



**Ancient LAODICEA, street ruins, Denizli, Turkey**

*Laodicea was the ancient metropolis of Phrygia Pacatiana, built on the river Lycus, in Anatolia, 2<sup>nd</sup> Century, BCE*

Most commentators think it is impossible to attribute **Col** to the writer of the great epistles. These are interested mainly in the resurrection's triumph over human forces in the social world, and the consequent need for freedom, lived in gratitude. This letter is usually thought to have been written by an author later than Paul. At the time of writing the writer had not been to Colossae. The community there had originally been set up by Epaphras of Colossae.

- \* the tone is very different from Paul's polemics;
- the 'opponents' are characterized vaguely;
- whole phrases are taken from Phil and Phm – it looks like deliberate imitation, a 'cut and paste' job.

The union with Christ theme in both Col and Eph seems to me to be more spiritual/mystical than in Paul. In Paul it is more 'political' – i.e., taking the same public anti-totalitarian stance that Christ took. In Col it seems to be more a spiritual union not so linked with that stance.

Those who do think in terms of Paul as author, are divided about the provenance of the letter: some say Rome, some say Ephesus.

The document interests us now, because it deals with a kind of 'Christian cosmology': it looks at astral powers, the esoteric value of food, the meaning of asceticism...etc. Paul (real or fictitious) is consulted in prison about these things. Tom Wright wonders what Luther would have seen had he read Romans and Galatians in the light of Ephesians and Colossians instead of the other way round!

---

The **authentic Paul** would have seen the large horizon of 'Christ in the world', a little differently from Col.

Jesus is the Son (of God). He becomes Son (of God) in resurrection. Resurrection is his being engendered by the Father. In that act he becomes fully what he always was. From the beginning he is Son born of the Father in the Spirit. In his whole life, and in his filial acceptance of his destiny, he becomes that more and more: he is always being engendered, he is always in the process of resurrection that will include and reverse and transcend death. His self-consciousness is always filial, always redemptively-including, and always increasing.

The Father delivered him to death, but not as the other actors in the passion drama did. The Father delivered him, to engender him, to place him at the heart of everything. Death was 'necessary' as the scriptures say, so that Jesus could be even in death in his whole filial being and – by sharing it with us - accomplish his saving mission. He had to die to his servile condition, and let increase in him an unlimited space where the fullness of divinity could be received. Where also the fullness of humanity could be received.

What is called kenosis is only the effect of the engendering of the Son in the world. There is a certain eternalization of this death-entered-into-resurrection.

Col opens with a Christological hymn. 1, 15-20. It is probably an earlier hymn in two strophes. The Logos penetrates the universe; Christ is this Logos.

Who is the icon of the unseen God  
The prototokos of all creation,

Who is the beginning,  
the prototokos from the dead,  
So that he be supreme in every way,  
For in him it pleased all pleroma to  
dwell

For in him all things were created  
In heaven and on earth,  
Visible and invisible,  
Whether thrones or ruling forces  
Or sovereignties or powers  
All things were created  
Through him and for him.

to reconcile all things  
Through him and for him, making  
peace  
though blood of his cross, through  
him,

He exists before all things  
And he is the head of the body  
(the Church).

And in him all things hold together

The first stanza fits into Hellenistic Jewish speculation about the Logos. (cf. Philo). The Logos translated Jewish Wisdom into Greek thought. Wisdom texts called Wisdom the shining brilliance of God. We are much earlier than the garden of Eden. Christ here exists before all things and is the agent of creation itself. Creation is created for him. There is a real sense of the pre-existence and pre-existent cosmic activity of Jesus. Jesus is in the realm of the divine.

Paul differs from going ideas about the likeness of humans to God, in so far as he includes the human body in the likeness.

Christ is the firstborn from the dead, the second Adam, and in him the whole pleroma dwells. This takes place through the cross. The headship of Christ is restricted to human beings, and then to the Church, and then to the recipients of this letter.

There is a similar wavering about what the **Body** means... Paul himself said that our physical bodies are Christ's body. He said that the loaf we eat (eucharist) is the body of Christ. He said that together we form the one body of Christ, each part having a particular function. It would seem in Eph that the Body is the Church. Here in Col Christ stands over against the body as its head. It is not clear if Christ is head of this body only or of the whole cosmos. Anakephalaiosasthai: to sum up ta panta in him. The Body then is far wider than the church.

The mystery is that the Unigenitus (only-begotten) has become, for us and in us, the Primogenitus (first-born). There is a conformity in us to the Only-Begotten. It is ontologically founded. It is founded in a participated likeness to divine- Filiation-by-nature. We have to be careful not to downgrade this, because of the word 'participated' or because of the word 'likeness'. It is a real deification. It changes our lived identity. We are not meant to 'be', but to be- active in the Joying of God in us. Philippe de la Trinite, many years ago, said that it is a participation in the actual 'generari' (the experience of being generated) of the Son. It is not just theopoesis (divinization), it is directly huiopoesis (filiation).

The author (in Col 2, 15 ff) says that the powers stripped Jesus naked, held him up to public contempt, celebrated a triumph over him, when in fact God was stripping them naked, holding them up to contempt, and celebrating God's own triumph over them. When the powers had done their worst, crucifying the Lord incognito, on a charge of blasphemy and rebellion, they over-reached themselves and exposed themselves as usurpers of the authority that was his.

----

## EPHESIANS

In this letter, it seems that the writer is not personally known to the addressees – and so not Paul -remember that Paul lived a long time in Ephesus. It is more of a 'circular' letter. It is to and about a worldwide church. It uses pieces from Colossians. There is no reference to justification (as in the authentic Paul) but to salvation and the forgiveness of sins (language Paul did not so typically use). This salvation is already accomplished, and embraces everyone. The church is the body of those who have received it. It is founded not on Christ but on the apostles and prophets. It is the salvation from the wicked powers in the firmament and the air, and salvation is like an escape from their control. To be saved is to belong to Christ as to a heavenly man, but there is no use of the Gnostic theme of a part of the godhead falling to the earth.

The letter uses doxology, prayer, hymn, liturgy – there is a formal and majestic tone in it. It deals with seven great 'unities' – church, spirit, hope, lord, faith, baptism, God. In fact, its tone is quite impersonal – this is strange if it is Paul who knew the people in Colossae really well. It reads like a more formal encyclical to all the communities in Asia Minor.

It is hard to date it. Those who hold it is authentic Paul usually put it late in his life, around 61-63, and have it written from Paul's prison in Rome. Those who do not hold for its authenticity from Paul himself, usually think it was written some time between 80- 100.

Some have suggested that Ephesians as we have it is a baptismal homily, or a sapiential discourse, or a theological essay, or a refutation of Gnosticism, or an apologia for Christianity, or an introduction to Paul by an pseudonymous teacher, etc. The majority think the author is Jewish, and the audience is predominantly Gentile. The situation may well be the spread of a Judaizing tendency in early Christianity, with an apocalyptic mysticism, and an interest in having visions and revelations. It may be well located in western Asia Minor, with a local interest in astrology, magic, and mystery religion.

The key theme is unity (henotes) and the term is found only in Ephesians (4,3 and 4,13). It is unity in love. Everything is rooted and grounded in love. Everything is headed up by love into The Full Christ, who is multifaceted. See J.Bernard, Unity in Christ: the purpose of Ephesians, Expository Times, 2009.

----

Most commentators look carefully at Eph before assessing authorship.

- \* The oldest tradition of the text gives **no name** as an address.
- the term **mysterion** is used much more often than in Paul's authentic letters, and with a different meaning; in Eph it means the union of all things in Christ;
- all the emphasis in Eph is on **resurrection**, with very little on the cross;
- the author has a **complacent** view of his whole apostolate, as Paul did not;
- there is **no detail given re Paul's hardships**;
- **Israel** is a thing of the past, and the Law is destroyed (by Christ);
- The universal **Church** is single entity, and there is no sense of 'churches';
- The **style** is 'almost liturgical in its rotundity' – the pace is that of a glacier working its way through the valley inch by inch;
- Paul regarded **marriage** as an appeasement for the weak, while this author honours it by comparing it with the relation of Christ to the Church;
- Christ is viewed in a **cosmic** perspective, since he is enthroned in heaven.
- There are **phrases slavishly taken from Col.**

So who wrote Ephesians?

Holtzmann spoke of a common authorship for Col and Eph.

Goodspeed thought Eph was a preface written for the published collection of Paul's letters.

Goguel suggested that Eph is an expansion of a genuine Pauline letter.

Boismard suggested that there was an Eph written by Paul from Rome, and then expanded by an author familiar with Col. [Boismard thought Col was an expansion of the Letter to the Laodiceans – written by Paul himself - mentioned in Col. 4,16]

Muddiman said that Eph was originally written by Paul at Ephesus as a letter to the church at Laodicea. Then it was expanded by someone familiar with Pauline tradition.

Wansborough settles for a celebration of Paul's teaching by a follower of Paul, using Col as a template. The author passes on an interpretation of the Pauline tradition in a way that speaks to his readers. He is a kind of 'Paul after Paul'.

Oakman (2009) suggests that it was a Christian living in Colossae late in the first century who collected the authentic letters of Paul in one volume. He wrote a cover letter for the collection. To do so, he used a letter of which he was aware from Paul to Colossae. He adapted it, and his adaptation of it is what we call Ephesians. Oakman thinks man was Onesimus, the bishop of Ephesus, and that's why it's called Ephesians. Maybe.

----

The main point of Ephesians

It is the coming together of all things in Jesus Christ: it is the cosmic reach of the gospel. In 1,10 we read of God's desire and design, which is to sum up all things, and to do so in Christ. In 2,10, we are told that God plans and does the big thing, that is, the renewal of both heaven and earth in a new creation, and that God does it through the little individual things that we do – what we do actually 'does' bit by bit the grand design. In 3,10 we learn that it is through the church that this manifold wisdom of God takes effect: the key is not Caesar, but Jesus, and you see that manifestly when the church is being the church. It is then a sign to the powers that this is the way it is, God planned it this way. Chapters 4 and 5 then tell of the unity and holiness of the church, and chapter 6 addresses the spiritual warfare that has to go in the in-between: in between the achievement of Jesus and the accomplishment of the whole plan, when heaven and earth do come together. In this in-between we implement the former and anticipate the latter. It is then through what we do that God will wipe away all tears, and our little contributions are signs and little bits of this hope....

The blessing of Ephesians

The lyrical blessing is 1,3-14, than the first three chapters are like a prayer...Dunn calls it a 'mind blowing Christology'.

The blessing extends from before the world was made, to when the times had run their course. In the prayer, only here in Eph is Christ described as seated 'in the heavenly places'. Emphasis is on the overriding greatness of the power which has set him up so.

Pleroma. It literally means the cargo of a ship, or the population of a town, of the contents of a book. Gal uses it as the fullness of time. In Col and Eph the idea is that God fills the earth. It is Wisdom's presence in all things. As in Stoic philosophy, the divine principle fills all and is filled by all. In Col, it is mostly passive: God wanted all fullness to be found in him. In Eph it is also active, Christ lives in your hearts and you may be filled with the **utter fullness of God**. Then we will all form the perfect Man, mature with the fullness of Christ himself.

Salvation in Paul is in the future, but here it has been won already. In Paul (Rm) the Gentiles were grafted into the olive tree of Israel. Here the grafting is in the future. The main image is that of a wall. The wall of hostility is broken down...

----

## THE JEWISH AND HELLENISTIC BACKGROUND OF THIS THINKING

It is clear enough that in Col and Eph we meet themes that are close to Hellenistic thinking. They are usually said to be at some distance from Jewish thinking. I mean particularly the themes linked with Wisdom and Logos. They are defining characteristics of middle Platonism.

I would like to suggest that while this is so, there was also a developed Jewish Wisdom/Logos theology in the latter part of the first century ce, and that is just under the surface of these texts. It has been suggested (by D. Boyarin for example) that the Prologue of John is also redolent of it. It would be interesting to study the Prologue in conjunction with the major texts of Col and Eph. Cf. Daniel Boyarin, *The Gospel of the Memra: Jewish Binitarianism and the Prologue to John*, Harvard Theological Review, 2001, 243-284.

It has been usual to think that Christianity and Judaism separated very early, and that Christian Wisdom and Logos theology has little to do with Palestinian Judaism. Many historians are now rejecting this construct.

Wisdom and Logos theology is integral to the 1<sup>st</sup> c Jewish world. It is a common element in much Jewish imagination. For at least one or other branch of pre-Christian Judaism,

there is nothing strange even about using the word 'god' (theos) about this Wisdom/Logos. The beginning of binitarian if not trinitarian reflection is then in *non-Christian Jewish accounts of a second and invisible God – the Logos, Memra, Wisdom, Son*.

It is (much) later rabbinic Judaism that is a reaction against Hellenism. In this early time, Judaism and Hellenism were not so far apart.

---

### INSERT – JEWISH LITERATURE AND THIS THEME

There is a Hellenistic-Jewish tradition of Wisdom/Logos theology that finds expression in *Philo Judaios*. In Philo the Wisdom/Logos is linked with the Light. The Wisdom/Logos is God, and is with God.

Evidence is also found in para-rabbinic *Aramaic translations*. The *Memra/Shekinah/Kabod* is actual divine entity, a person.

---

### INSERT – THIS THEME IN THE PROLOGUE OF JOHN

The prologue is a *homiletic/preaching situation*, not one of praise or adoration. It is a retelling of the *beginning of Genesis*. It is interpretation, narrative, not liturgical hymn. It is a synagogue homily of the proem type. It is midrash, not hymnic. It is not a poem, but a narrative, chronologically ordered. It is a homily on a pericope of the Pentateuch invoking texts from the Prophets and the Hagiographa, especially *the Wisdom literature*.

The Genesis text is Gn 1,1-5. *The Wisdom text is Prov 8,22-31*. The Wisdom hymn is not the formal model of Jn, but the intertext for the midrash. There is free use of the figure, the epithets, the qualities of the deuterios theos. This includes the understanding of wisdom as personified (as was the Logos). *This is all pre-Christian, from a common Jewish world of ideas – a general theologoumenon*.

*“In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth, and the earth was without form and void”. “then I was beside him”. “With thee is wisdom.” “Afterward she appeared upon earth and lived among men”.*

*A myth guides the use of all this in Jn*. It is the *myth of wisdom’s frustration in her and God’s desire to find a home for her on earth*. The new cure for this problem is incarnation. **The originality of the 4<sup>th</sup> gospel is not Logos theology at all, but incarnational Christology:** Jn did not invent the Word, but is original in speaking of the Word become flesh.

*“Wisdom could not find a place in which she could dwell; but a place was found for her in the heavens. Then Wisdom went out to dwell with the children of the people, but she found no dwelling place. So Wisdom returned to her place, and she settled permanently among the angels.” [1 Enoch 42,1-2]*

*Wisdom did come into the world earlier than in Jesus. It was non-received, even though it was the Light. The ‘uprightness’ of Israel drove Wisdom back to heaven, to the angels. But some did receive this Wisdom. A certain number (of Jews) did receive the Logos. One was Abraham.... Those who did became the children of God. Through the Logos Asarkos.*

**The beginning of the specifically Christian kerygma occurs exactly here:** Jn says that this Wisdom/Logos came back from heaven and was incarnated in Jesus, and thus was able to be a better light and a better teacher of divine childhood to people...

The whole homily in the prologue bridges the gap between the pre-existent Logos and the incarnation, and explains chronologically the motive of the incarnation.

*Jesus thus fulfills the mission of Moses, and does not displace it.* The Torah simply needed a better exegete, the Logos Ensarkos, a fitting teacher for flesh and blood. Oral teaching is more transparent and authentic than written texts (Derrida). God tried the text, then sent his voice incarnated in the throat of Jesus.

**It is only because the Logos Ensarkos is a better teacher, a better exegete than the Logos Asarkos – ekeinos exegesato – that the Incarnation takes place.**

The real distinction between Christians and non-Christian Jews is not theological. The real distinction between them is the association by the former of various Jewish theologoumena and mythologoumena with the particular Jew, Jesus of Nazareth.

Jn 18: cf “Rabbi Eliezer the son of Rabbi Yose the Galilean says: Nine hundred and seventy four generations before the world was created, the Torah was written and lying in the bosom of the Holy Blessed One and singing son with the serving angels, as it says: ‘I was his nursling/, or, I was his little child/, or, I was his betrothed, and I was daily his delight, playing before him at all times’” Prov 8,30. Cf also “Have I conceived all of this People; did I given birth to it, that you should say to me, ‘Carry him in your bosom, as the nurse carries the child?’” For the rabbis, the beloved child that the Father carries in his bosom, the son or daughter of God, is the Torah. For the earlier midrash of the 4<sup>th</sup> gospel, she was the Logos, the Son.

---

## THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN THIS AND EARLY GNOSTICISM

There were many tracks in early Christianity. Within them there were people called Gnostics. Gnosticism was a religious current that had been brewing for some time. The word gnosis means knowledge. For Gnostics, it means self-knowledge. They think that the human soul is of heavenly origin. It is the result of a false step by a divine power. Each of us is a divine soul imprisoned in a material body. As a result we have forgotten who we really are. Our Savior (identified with Jesus for Christian Gnostics) calls us to wake up from sleep. The questions put to us would be: who were we? Into what have we been thrown? Whither are we hastening? From what are we saved? What is birth? What is rebirth? Gnostics develop the history of the human self (as a spark of light in darkness). They have narrative myths with powerful imagery. There are many currents within this stream. Speaking generally, the Gnostic separated the creator god of the Hebrew Bible from the redeemer god they had come to know, and who they identified with Jesus. They did not emphasise (and some of them did not accept) Jesus's death on the cross. They did not think their Redeemer God really died. They thought he was spiritually leading them to more and more self-knowledge.

The historical Paul is no Gnostic. He would not think of the resurrected Jesus except as the crucified-resurrected Jesus. He was anchored in the reality of the human, the reality of death, the reality of dirty politics, the reality of a terrorism that included real crucifixion. He came to see that agape, love, is the name of the game, and that no gnosis could ever stand in the way of that agape between the God of Jesus and us. He did not explicitly negotiate the Gnostics, just as he never preached at the agora of Athens, but his position was firmly rooted in different assumptions.

The Colossian and Ephesians letters are not Gnostic. Nor is the Prologue of John Gnostic. They are all immersed in the Jewish Wisdom theology current both in Judaism and in early Jewish Christianity.

----

## THE ENDING OF ROMANS

After various salutations, at the end of the letter to the Romans, there is a doxology. Most commentators think it is added on, in a later redaction, not by Paul, but in the spirit and style of Paul. A doxology is a proclamation of the glory of God.

---

*Glory to God, the only Wise One, who is able to give you the dynamism to live, in line with my gospel, that is, the announcement of Jesus as the Christ, the revelation of the mystery kept secret for endless ages, but now so clear that it must be broadcast to Gentiles everywhere to bring them to the obedience of faith. This is what scripture has predicted: it is all part of the way the eternal God wants things to be. He alone is*

*Wisdom, give glory therefore to him through Jesus Christ for ever and ever, Amen. [Rm 16, 25-27]*

---

This is addressed to God as Wisdom (in its opening and closing sentences). In that Wisdom, there has been an Eternal Silence. A Mystery has been hidden in that Silence. The Mystery has broken the Silence, and revealed itself in the public presentation of Jesus. We MUST then carry on this breach of divine silence and take the Revelation to everyone. There is a LOVE bigger than the need for silence. Because of the LOVE, the silence is broken. The LOVE has erupted as a DYNAMIS to live in love, for and with Jesus revealed. This is Paul's gospel, the only gospel. The church is always tempted to announce and proclaim itself (its dogmatic doctrines, its moral teachings, its rules, etc.). This is not the one gospel Paul gave us. It is not the heart of God. To proclaim Jesus is the only Wisdom.

---

## A PSEUDO PAULINE EPISTOLARY

There appears to have been a **Pauline 'school'**, probably at **Ephesus**, writing new works in the founder's name. [There are authors who make a case for authentic Pauline authorship of each of the following letters, except for Hebrews, which is unanimously seen as non-Paul. [Vanhoye has said that the allegedly Pauline letter to the Hebrews is not from Paul or his school, it is not a letter, and it is not to Hebrews!] The consensus however is that only the agreed '7' above are truly and without doubt from Paul himself.]

**2 THESSALONIANS:** It is allegedly sent by Paul, Silas and Timothy (the senders of I Thess) but the address may be a literary fiction. Its purpose is the opposite of I Thess. It is about the final days. It opposes thinking that the Parousia is imminent. This is because the many signs that are expected to accompany the Parousia have not yet happened. It is thought to be **delayed**. As a result there is need of an **orderly church community**, with due organization. [Among the signs to come, are an apostasy, a general moral corruption, and the emergence of a 'man of lawlessness', the equivalent of what is elsewhere called the anti-Christ. There are traditions about that: some re Antiochus IV Epiphanes, re Pompey, re Caligula...]

PASTORALS – **1 AND 2 TIMOTHY, TITUS.** These letters are addressed to **individuals as heads of churches**, and they give pastoral instruction. The vocabulary is close to general Hellenistic theology, but not to Paul. [Recently, Luke has been suggested as the author?]

Some authors see 2 Tim as a last will and testament from Paul himself, in prison in Rome. It is as if he sees again a film of his whole life, and hands on the grace he received to Timothy.

2 Tim 4, 5-8 reads like a last will and testament of Paul:

Some are now suggesting that the Pastorals are late, and perhaps even the work of Luke.

---

“As for me, my life is already being poured away as a libation, and the time has come for me to be gone. I have fought the good fight to the end; I have run the race to the finish; I have kept the faith. All there is to come now is the crown of faithfulness reserved for me, which the Lord, the faithful judge, will give to me on that Day; and not only to me, but to all those who have longed for his Appearing...”

---

## POST SCRIPT

‘Hebrews’ is often linked with Paul, but the consensus of scholars is that it is neither Paul nor a follower of Paul. Albert Vanhoye once said that it is not a letter, it is not to Hebrews, and it is not Paul. Origen said that God alone knows who wrote it. It is a homily, not a letter: an oral document, a word of exposition and exhortation. It is like a dialogue in the written form of a monologue. It is meant to start and stimulate conversation. It has lots of rhetorical devices (e.g. rhetorical questions, rhythmic prose) and is a summons to action in the way the group has already been acting. It basically reinforces their position. The language is pictorial. The author seems to know his readers, it seems they are city dwellers, with an upper level social status, with an education in the Jewish scriptures (especially Torah and latter prophets). It reads like much Jewish sapiential literature.

The general point made is that only Christ and life in Christ can fulfill any worthwhile vision of the world, and give any dominion over the cosmos. It is good to dream of rest without work, free from sin, with unimpeded access to divine presence.

There seems to be a liturgical context for the ‘sermon’ and some have thought the author may well be a Jewish priest converted to the Jesus movement somewhat later in the first century (perhaps after the fall of the temple). Perhaps it is a eulogy for a deceased

temple, and a proclamation of its fulfillment in the risen and ascended Jesus. The figure of Melchisedech gives at least a partial idea of Christ as eternal priest.

Cf. B. Witherington, The rhetorical character of Hebrews, paper at SBL Boston, November 23, 2008.

-----

### **POST POST SCRIPT**

A word about the **catholic epistles** (not considered really in the perspective of Paul). Some time in the mid to late second century, there was an intentional design of many in the Christian communities to control the domination of Pauline thinking and to correct what was perceived as Pauline misreading. These people did not want Christian life to be ruled 'by Paul alone'. So seven letters were written and were known as the catholic epistles (James, 1 and 2 Peter, Jude, 1 2 and 3 John). This movement originated in the East, not before Origen, and was known clearly by Eusebius. It is anti Marcion and pro a Judaizing of Christianity.

----

### **APOCRYPHA ABOUT PAUL**

In the **Acts of Paul**, Paul is presented as saying to Caesar: 'if thou behead me, this will I do: I will arise and show myself unto thee that I am not dead but live unto my Lord Jesus Christ, who cometh to judge the world'. Paul came back about the ninth hour, when many philosophers and the centurion were standing with Caesar, and stood before them all and said: 'Caesar, behold, I, Paul, the soldier of God, am not dead, but live in my God. Thou hast shed unjustly the blood of the righteous, not many days hence.' Paul departed from him. Longus and Cestus the centurion went early in the morning and approached with fear unto the grave of Paul. And when they were come thither they saw two men praying, and Paul betwixt them...

-----