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ACCORDING TO PAUL
*Studies in the Theology
of the Apostle*



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CHAPTER ONE

*The Spiritual Journey
of Paul the Apostle*

How did Saul of Tarsus become Paul the Apostle? So we might describe the spiritual journey in the life of Paul the Apostle. But it is not a question merely about the change of name for the Apostle of the Gentiles that is recorded in the New Testament. The question is rather asked about how Saul the Pharisee became Paul the Apostle, how Paul the Jew became Paul the Christian.

Before we try, however, to answer the question about Paul's spiritual journey from Pharisaism to Christianity, it might be well to spell out a bit the significance of the names that he bears in the New Testament.

I. Paul's Name

In his own letters Paul never calls himself Saul, but rather *Paulos*, the name that is used of him also in 2 Pet 3:15, and in the Acts of the Apostles from 13:9 on. Prior to that in Acts his name is *Saulos* (7:58; 8:1,3; 9:1,8,11,22,24; 11:25,30; 12:25; 13:1,2,7), the grecized form of *Saoul*, "Saul." The latter Greek spelling is found only in the conversion accounts, when the risen Christ accosts Paul on the road to Damascus (9:4; 22:7; 26:14) and when Ananias restores his sight (9:17; 22:13). *Saoul* is a Greek transliteration of the Hebrew name of the first king

of ancient Israel, *Šā'ul*, "Saul," as in 1 Sam 9:2, 17.¹ This name means "asked" (of God or of Yahweh), signifying that the mother had asked of God a child, and the one so named was God's response. Thus Paul's spiritual journey begins even with the Hebrew name given to him by his mother at birth, for he himself recognized that God had set him apart before he was born and called him through his grace (Gal 1:15). Named after Saul, the great king of Israel, Paul had a native background that recalled a rich Jewish heritage. It reveals that Paul's spiritual journey was thus foreseen and destined by God even from his birth.

However, the name that he himself used was *Paulos*, the Greek form of a well-known Roman cognomen (or family name), *Paul(l)us*, used by the Aemilian gens, the Vettinii, and the Sergii.² One can only speculate about how Paul got such a Roman name. It is the only thing in his letters that suggests his connection with a Roman background, even if he says nothing in them about his Roman citizenship, of which the Lucan Paul boasts (Acts 22:27-28).³ Though *paullus* in Latin means "small, little," it really says nothing about Paul's stature or modesty, as is sometimes claimed. It does relate him, however, to a number of famous Roman families.

In the Lucan story the Apostle is at first called Saul, but Acts 13:9 marks the transition, *Saulos de, ho kai Paulos*, "Saul, also known as Paul." From that point on in the Lucan story he is called Paul. This change of names takes place several chapters after the first account of Paul's conversion (Acts 9); so the change had nothing to do with his spiritual conversion.

Moreover, it is sheer coincidence that Saul begins to be called Paul in the episode where the Roman proconsul Sergius Paulus is converted (13:7-12), though some patristic writers have so explained the change of names,⁴ suggesting that Paul assumed the name of this illustrious Roman convert from Cyprus.⁵

It is likely, however, that the Apostle was called *Paulos* from birth and that *Saoul* was the "signum" or "supernomen" (added name) used in Jewish circles of the time.⁶ For many Jews of the period had two names, one Semitic (like Saul) and the other Greek or Roman (like Paul).⁷ The names were often chosen for their similarity of sound.

II. Paul's Jewish Heritage

The Apostle was keenly aware of himself as a Jew and boasted of his Jewish background, tracing it to descent from Abraham and to the tribe of Benjamin: "I am an Israelite, a descendant of Abraham, a member of the tribe of Benjamin" (Rom 11:1; cf. Phil 3:5; 2 Cor 11:22). As an "Israelite," Paul recognized his privileged status as a member of God's chosen people, "to whom belong the sonship, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the cult, the promises, and the patriarchs," the seven prerogatives that he lists in the paragraph of Romans in which he expresses his sorrow about the condition of his former coreligionists (9:4-5). As a "descendant of Abraham," Paul recognized the value of the status of rectitude in God's sight as a result of the promises made to Abraham and all his offspring (Rom 4:13). As a member of "the tribe of Benjamin," he belonged to the tribe named after the youngest son of Jacob, beloved by his father, and the smallest among all the tribes. It was the tribe from which came Saul, the first king of Israel (1 Sam 9:1,4), after whom the Apostle was named, and from which came Jeremiah, the prophet from Anathoth (Jer 1:1; 32:8).

Paul also boasted of his Pharisaic background: "as to the law a Pharisee" (Phil 3:6), one "extremely zealous for the traditions of my fathers" and one who excelled his peers "in Judaism" (Gal 1:14). The name "Pharisee" probably means "one cut off, set apart" (from Aramaic *pērīšāy*), a member of the sect of Palestinian Jews that differed from other Jews and laid great stress on oral tradition or the "oral *tōrāh*" (*tōrāh šē-bē-'al-pēh*). It was the Jewish sect that considered itself "set apart" from the rest of the Jews (Sadducees, Essenes, and "his rabble that knows not the law" [John 7:49]) because of its strict interpretation of the Mosaic law. Its principle is expressed in the opening paragraph of the Mishnaic tractate *Pirge Aboth*, "Sayings of the Fathers":

Moses received the law from Sinai and entrusted it to Joshua, and Joshua to the elders, and the elders to the prophets; and

the prophets entrusted it to the men of the Great Synagogue. They said three things: Be deliberate in judgment, raise up many disciples, and make a fence around the law.⁸

To be "deliberate in judgment" meant to interpret the law of Moses strictly; to "raise up many disciples" meant to proselytize; and to "build a fence around the law" meant to guard the written *tôrâh* with the oral interpretation inherited from the traditions of the Fathers. This was the sect of Jews, then, that was influenced by the Hellenistic ideal of virtue as *aretê*, "excellence," and believed that it could produce a holy and virtuous people by instruction and education in the Mosaic *tôrâh*.

This Pharisaic background may well explain what Paul meant when he says of himself in Romans that he was "set apart for God's gospel" (1:1). In other words, he may have been playing on the name "Pharisee" and looking on his Pharisaic background, his training as "one set apart," as divinely ordained. For it prepared him to become a preacher of God's gospel. Yet it is ironic that that gospel should turn out to be, not a proclamation of strict observance of "the deeds of the law" (Rom 3:20) in the Pharisaic sense, but of justification by grace through faith "apart from deeds of the law" (Rom 3:28), apart from that which meant so much to the Pharisee of his day.

There is a paradox in all of this, since many of the items that seem so characteristically Jewish in his letters and even sloganlike, echoing what seem like typical phrases that one would tend to ascribe to his Pharisaic background, are now known to be associated more with Essene tenets than with Pharisaic. (See further chap. 2.)

Apart from such a Pharisaic or other Jewish background to the spirituality of Paul, however, one otherwise notes that Paul lives in the world of the Judaism of the Old Testament. His God is the God of his fathers, the God of "the old dispensation" (2 Cor 3:14), who spoke through the prophets, and indeed, who announced his gospel beforehand in the prophets (Rom 1:2).

Paul thinks and expresses himself in Old Testament categories and makes abundant use of Old Testament images, quotations, and allusions. He cites the Old Testament more than 90 times.⁹ Though he usually quotes the Old Testament

according to the Greek Septuagint, his use of it is similar to that of the authors of contemporary Jewish writings or other intertestamental literature.¹⁰ Even his introductory clauses or phrases, when he cites the Old Testament explicitly, are consonant with Jewish practice, even if they are closer to those of Qumran writings than to the Mishnaic.¹¹

Paul does not quote Scripture as one would in the twentieth century, but his mode is close to that of contemporary Jewish writers. He may accommodate the Old Testament or give it new meaning (e.g., when he announces his theme about salvation by faith and quotes Hab 2:4 in Rom 1:17 or Gal 3:11); he may allegorize it (e.g., when he make use of the story of Sarah and Hagar and quotes Gen 16:15 or 17:16 in Gal 4:21-25); or he may wrest it from its original context (e.g., when he quotes Deut 25:5 about not muzzling the ox that treads the threshing floor and applies it to Christian preachers in 1 Cor 9:9). In such use he is no different from contemporary Jewish writers.

Yet he does quote the Old Testament to stress the unity of God's action in both dispensations. He looks upon the Old Testament as God's way of preparing for the gospel or preparing for Christ himself (Gal 3:24). Even if he contrasts the "letter [of the law] and the Spirit" (2 Cor 3:6), the Old Testament is still for him the means whereby God speaks to humanity, as he recognizes in Rom 4:23-24, when he acknowledges that what was written about Abraham is still relevant to Christians; cf. Rom 15:4. Indeed, most of Paul's teaching about God, his *theology*, is clearly derived from his Jewish background, echoing in many respects the Old Testament itself.

Yet he is also a Jew of the first century, influenced by *various* currents of Jewish thinking that are now evident from the post-Old Testament world. In any case, we see that Paul's spiritual journey is rooted in his native Judaism.

III. Paul's Cultural Heritage

The spiritual journey of Paul has to take into consideration not only Paul's Jewish background, but also his cultural heritage. For he was not a Jew of Palestine. Though Luke

makes Paul assert that he was brought up in Jerusalem and educated at the feet of Gamaliel (Acts 22:3), his letters never give an indication of the influence of Palestinian Judaism, apart from some points to be discussed in chapter 2. Indeed, part of the paradox is just how the Pharisaic and other Jewish influence, rooted in Palestine, came to affect so markedly a Jew of the diaspora.

Paul's Roman name, his quotation of the Old Testament in Greek and usually according to the LXX, his composition of his letters in Greek reveal his diaspora background, for he was also a child of the Greco-Roman world. His call and conversion were an experience that took place outside of Judea, near Damascus, an important town in Hellenized Syria. If the Lucan tradition is correct that he was a Jew of Tarsus, "a citizen of no mean town" (Acts 21:39), its cultural heritage too would have rubbed off on him. For Tarsus was a city in the ancient world famed for its intellectual and pedagogic tradition. It was accorded the status of a free city in the Roman empire by Mark Antony in 66 B.C., when it was made the capital of the province of Cilicia. In the first century B.C. it had become the seat of a famous school of philosophy.

Paul called himself "a Hebrew" (Phil 3:5), by which he probably meant that he was a Greek-speaking Jew who also spoke Aramaic.¹² That language, however, was widely used in his day throughout Syria and Asia Minor, so that it does not really speak against influence from the Hellenistic world in which Paul would have spent his youth. His writings reveal that he had been liberally educated in the Hellenistic tradition of the time.

Even if Paul had not been trained as a Greek *rhetōr*, his mode of composition and expression often reveals the influence of Greek rhetoric and Greek education. Traces of the Cynic-Stoic mode of argumentation called *diatribē* are found in his letters: a mode of discourse conducted in familiar, conversational style and developed by lively debate with an imaginary interlocutor; its sentence structure is often short, and questions are interjected; antitheses and parallel phrases often punctuate the development (see Rom 2:1-20; 3:1-9; 1 Cor 9).¹³

Even more, his style and his mode of composing letters have been analyzed. They reveal that many of the contemporary modes of Greek rhetorical argument are found in them,

especially in his letters to the Galatians and to the Romans.¹⁴ The rhetorical elements are important indications of the careful argumentation that Paul has made use of in order to present his gospel and his understanding of Christ and his significance for humanity.

Whereas Jesus' illustrations often reflect the agrarian life of Galilee, Paul frequently uses images derived from urban culture and Hellenistic ambience. He uses Greek political terminology (Phil 1:17; 3:20), alludes to Greek games (Phil 2:16; 1 Cor 9:24-27), employs Greek commercial terms (Phlm 18) or legal terminology (Gal 3:15; 4:1-2; Rom 7:1), and refers to Hellenistic slave trade (1 Cor 7:22; Rom 7:14) or Hellenistic celebrations in honor of a visiting emperor (1 Thess 2:19). He employs the Hellenistic ideas of *eleutheria*, "freedom" (Gal 5:1, 13), *syndesis*, "conscience" (1 Cor 8:7, 10, 12; 10:25-29; 2 Cor 5:11; Rom 2:15), and the Stoic ideas of *autarkeia*, "sufficiency, contentment" (2 Cor 9:8), or *physis*, "nature" (Rom 2:14).

This Greek cultural background eventually enabled Paul, the diaspora Jew, to cope with the problems and difficulties of carrying the Christian gospel from its Palestinian Jewish matrix into the world of the Roman empire. But his experience in that world too as the Apostle of the Gentiles also contributed to his spiritual journey. For he not only carried the gospel to the eastern Mediterranean world of his day, but also founded churches and Christian communities in this Hellenistic milieu. His practical experience and concrete contacts with diaspora Jews and with Gentiles of that area had a significant impact on his view of Christianity. Would Paul have written about justification as he did, if he had not coped with the problem of Jewish converts to Christianity in the diaspora trying to insist with Gentile converts that they too had to observe the Mosaic law to be saved? The universal scope of Christian salvation undoubtedly dawned on Paul as he worked continually with Jews who failed to accept his gospel and with Gentiles who did heed his message. Though from his earliest letters he reveals an awareness of the privileged position of his fellow Jews in God's plan of salvation (1 Thess 2:13-14; cf. Rom 1:16; 2:9-10), he eventually had to wrestle explicitly with that problem (Romans 9-11). He admits that he has been "indebted to Greeks and to Barbarians" (Rom 1:14).

Moreover, the church as "the body of Christ" (1 Cor 12:27-28) is almost certainly the result of his understanding of the Christian *ekklesia* in the light of the contemporary Greco-Roman idea of the state as the body politic.¹⁵ This notion would, then, have come to him, not as a result of his experience on the road to Damascus, but rather as a result of his missionary experience in the eastern Mediterranean world of the time.

Such were the Hellenistic influences on Paul of Tarsus, a diaspora Jew called by God to announce his gospel to the Gentiles.

IV. Paul's Call to Be an Apostle

The most important element in the spiritual journey of Paul was the experience that he had on the road to Damascus. That experience was a revelation made to him about Christ Jesus, and his faith in the risen Christ developed from that experience. It was not merely a psychological "conversion" that could be explained in terms of Paul's Jewish background, or even in terms of what he writes in Romans 7. That chapter has often been interpreted as an autobiographical description of Paul himself, as a young Jewish boy reaching puberty and coming to an awareness of what the law would mean in his life; hence, crushed by the law's demands, he would have been freed by conversion to Christ. Such an interpretation of Romans 7, however, does not do justice to the obvious universal situation of humanity confronted by law that is depicted there. For even as a Christian, Paul was able to look back on his Pharisaic past and say of it that "as to righteousness under the law" he had been "blameless" (Phil 3:6). He did not look back, even as a Christian, at his Jewish past as one of failure to cope with the demands of the Mosaic law, under which he lived.

Paul himself speaks of that experience near Damascus as a revelation of the Son accorded to him by the Father (Gal 1:16); in it he "saw Jesus the Lord" (1 Cor 9:1; cf. 1 Cor 15:8). That revelation of the crucified "Lord of glory" (1 Cor 2:8) not only summoned Paul the Pharisee to become an apostle, but made of him the first Christian theologian. The only difference between that appearance of the risen Christ to him (1 Cor 15:8)

and those to the official witnesses of the resurrection (1 Cor 15:5-7) was that his experience occurred much later, and to him as an individual. But it did put him on an equal footing with the Twelve and others to whom the risen Christ had appeared. In defending his right to be recognized as an "apostle," which was apparently contested in the early church by those who knew that he had not witnessed the earthly ministry of Jesus, he exclaimed, "Am I not an apostle? Have I not seen Jesus our Lord?" (1 Cor 9:1). Paul spoke of his call as an event in which he had been "seized" by Christ Jesus (Phil 3:12), and as a "necessity" (or compulsion), which had been laid upon him to preach the gospel to the Gentiles (1 Cor 9:16; cf. Gal 1:16b). He compared that experience to God's initial creation of light: "For God who said, 'Let light shine out of darkness,' has shone in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of God's glory on the face of Christ" (2 Cor 4:6).

Thus the compulsion of divine grace pressed Paul into the service of Christ and his gospel. His response to that call was one of vivid faith, in which he confessed with the early church that "Jesus is Lord" (1 Cor 12:3; cf. Rom 10:9; Phil 2:11). In a creative act, God illumined the mind of Paul and gave him an insight into what a later disciple of Paul would call "the mystery of Christ" (Eph 3:4).

We can sum up the effects of that experience on Paul in three ways: (1) That "revelation" (Gal 1:12, 16) impressed Paul with the unity of divine action for the salvation of all humanity, which is manifest in both the Old and the New Dispensations. As a result of that encounter with the risen Christ, Paul did not become a Marcionite, rejecting the Old Testament. The Father who revealed his Son to Paul was the same God that Paul the Pharisee had always worshiped and served. He was the creator, the lord of history, the God who continually saved his people Israel, and who proved to be a faithful lord of the covenant despite Israel's infidelities. The experience near Damascus did not alter Paul's basic commitment to the "one God."

(2) That vision instructed Paul in the soteriological value of the death and resurrection of Jesus the Messiah in God's salvific plan. If Paul's basic *theology* did not change, his *christology* did. As a Jew, Paul shared the messianic expecta-

tions of his people (see Dan 9:25; cf. IQS 9:11, where Palestinian Jews were said to be awaiting the coming of a prophet [like Moses, Deut 18:15-18] and Messiahs of Aaron and Israel). He had looked forward to the coming of a messiah (of some sort). But the vision accorded to him near Damascus taught him that God's Anointed One had already come, that he was "Jesus our Lord, who was handed over (to death) for our offenses and raised for our justification" (Rom 4:25). Before his experience near Damascus, Paul certainly knew that Jesus of Nazareth had been crucified, "hung on a tree," and hence "cursed" by the very law that Paul himself had so zealously observed (Gal 3:13; cf. 1:14). But that revelation impressed on him the messianic, soteriological, and vicarious value of the death of Jesus in a way that he never suspected before. With a logic that only a Pharisee could appreciate, Paul saw Christ Jesus taking upon himself the law's curse and transforming it into its opposite, so that Christ became the means of freeing humanity from malediction. The cross, which had been the stumbling block to Jews, became in his eyes "the power and the wisdom of God" (1 Cor 1:24). Henceforth, Paul would understand that crucified "Lord of glory" (1 Cor 2:8) as his exalted Messiah.

(3) That revelation also impressed Paul with a new vision of salvation history. Before the encounter with the Lord, Paul saw human history divided into great periods: (i) from Adam to Moses (the period without the law [Rom 5:14a]); (ii) from Moses to the Messiah (the period of the law [Rom 5:14b]); (iii) the messianic age (the period when the law would be perfected, fulfilled, or even done away with). The experience near Damascus, however, instructed Paul that the messianic age had already begun; it thus introduced a new perspective into salvation history. The *eschaton*, "endtime," so anxiously awaited before, had already been started; the ages had met (1 Cor 10:11), although a definite stage of the last age or newly inaugurated *eschaton* was still to be realized (as was hoped, not too far in the future). The Messiah had come, but not yet in glory. Paul realized that he (with all Christians) thus found himself in a double situation: one in which he looked back upon the death and resurrection of Jesus as the inauguration of the

new age, and another in which he still looked forward to Christ's coming in glory, to his parousia.

Thus, far more than Paul's Pharisaic background, or even his Hellenistic cultural roots, the revelation of Christ on the road to Damascus gave Paul an ineffable insight into "the mystery of Christ." It enabled him to fashion his "gospel," to preach the fundamental good news of salvation in a form that was distinctively his own. But Paul did not immediately understand all the implications of the vision granted to him. It provided only a basic insight that was to color all that he was to learn about Jesus and his mission among human beings, not only from the early church's tradition that preceded him, but also from his own apostolic activity in preaching "Christ crucified" (1 Cor 1:23).

Thus that experience on the road to Damascus was a turning-point in Paul's spiritual journey. It made of him not only an "apostle of the Gentiles" (Rom 11:13), but a founder of Christian communities, an interpreter of the Christ-event, and the first Christian theologian whose interpretation we have inherited. It was a turning-point, because Paul's career did not end with that experience. Thereafter, as a result of his preaching, his founding of churches, and his writing of letters to the churches in various places, he continued to grow in the knowledge of Christ Jesus. He learned to interpret the effects of what Christ Jesus had done for humanity in his passion, death, resurrection, exaltation, and heavenly intercession. In other words, he learned to interpret the various effects of the Christ-event.

V. The Effects of the Christ-Event As Seen by the Mature Apostle

When Paul looked back at the Christ-event, he saw it as a complex unit, something like a ten-sided solid figure. When he gazed at a panel of it from one direction, he said that Christ "justified" us; when he gazed at it from another, he said that Christ "saved" us; or from another, Christ "transformed" us, and so on. In other words, Paul made use of images drawn from his Jewish or Hellenistic background to describe what

was really indescribable. In doing so, he made use of ten different images or figures:

(1) *Justification*. Christ Jesus “justified” us; he brought it about that all sinful human beings might stand before God’s tribunal acquitted or vindicated, that they might stand before him as righteous persons. Thus Paul drew upon his Jewish background (Deut 25:1; Ps 7:9–12) and derived from it the image of justification as an effect of the Christ-event. What Jews of old sought to achieve in God’s sight by observing the deeds of the law, Christ Jesus by his death and resurrection brought about for all sinners, Jews and Greeks alike. In his experience near Damascus Paul realized the truth that all human beings have sinned and have failed to attain the share of divine glory destined for them, but also that that share was now achievable through what Christ Jesus had obtained for them vicariously (Rom 3:21–26). Thus, Paul realized that the righteousness that he and other Christians have is not their own; it is a “righteousness from God” (Phil 3:9; cf. Rom 10:3), a gift freely bestowed by God because of what Christ Jesus has done for humanity. God thus became for Paul the source of life “in Christ Jesus,” because God had made him “our righteousness” (1 Cor 1:30), the means whereby Paul himself became upright or righteous.

(2) *Salvation*. Christ Jesus “saved” us; he has delivered us from evil (from physical harm, psychic harm, cataclysmic evil, and moral evil); he has restored us to a status of wholeness in the sight of God. Thus Christians “are being saved” by the cross of Christ (1 Cor 1:18,21). Salvation as an effect of the Christ-event has not yet been wholly achieved, for it still has an eschatological aspect (1 Thess 2:16; 5:8–9; 1 Cor 3:15; Rom 5:9–10). That is why Paul tells the Philippians, “work out your own salvation in fear and trembling” (2:12), adding, however, immediately, “for God is the one working in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure” (2:13), lest anyone think that salvation can be achieved without God’s grace. Thus Paul realized that his own salvation depended on what God by his grace had wrought in him because of the death and crucifixion of Christ Jesus.

(3) *Reconciliation*. Christ Jesus has “reconciled” us with the Father; he has altered our relationship with God, changing our

status from one of hatred, enmity, and hostility to one of love, friendship, and intimacy. Again, the initiative lies in God himself, for through Christ he has drawn us from alienation to peace and intimacy with himself. Thus, Christ has made us *to be at one* with God; he has atoned us (Rom 5:10–11). Moreover, this effect of the Christ-event also has its cosmic effect, because “God was in Christ, reconciling the world (the *kosmos*) to himself” (2 Cor 5:18–19). Thus Paul makes use of a social-politic image drawn from his Hellenistic background to express yet another effect of the Christ-event. Moreover, he applies it not only in an anthropological sense, but also in a cosmic sense. He sensed that his own spiritual journey had been advanced by this Christic reconciliation and atonement.

(4) *Expiation*. Christ Jesus has “expiated” our sins; he has wiped away the sins of humanity. For through the death of his son and the shedding of his blood, the Father has publicly displayed Christ Jesus as the new Mercy-Seat. What the sprinkling of the ark of the covenant with the blood of animals by the high priest each year on *Yôm Kippûr* symbolized for Israel (Lev 16:14–20), that Christ Jesus has obtained for all humanity by his own blood and by his death (Rom 3:25). Thus, Paul has again derived from his Jewish background yet another image to explain an effect of the Christ-event. He thus became aware of the significance of the death of Jesus in the expiation of his own sins and how that death contributed to his own progress in his dedication of his life to the service of God and his gospel.

(5) *Redemption*. Christ Jesus has “redeemed” us; he has ransomed us from bondage to evil and enslavement to sin. For Christ has become “our redemption” (1 Cor 1:30). Again, Paul sees this effect of the Christ-event as also having eschatological and cosmic aspects, for “through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus” (Rom 3:24), Christians “await the redemption of the body” (Rom 8:23), and all (physical) “creator” is groaning in expectation of that event (Rom 8:19–22). It is not easy to determine whence Paul has derived this image; it may be drawn from his Hellenistic background, the Greco-Roman world in which slavery and emancipation were commonly practiced. But it may also be drawn from the Old Testament idea of Yahweh as *gô’ēl*, “redeemer,” acquiring his people as he freed

them from Egyptian bondage (Isa 41:14; 43:14; 44:6; 47:4; Ps 19:15; 78:35). Paul himself recognized that in his spiritual journey he too had enjoyed this emancipation brought about by God through Christ Jesus.

(6) *Freedom.* Christ Jesus has "freed" us; he has given Christians the rights of citizens in a free city; he has made them citizens of heaven: "our commonwealth is in heaven" (Phil 3:20), i.e. the real Christian homeland, a stake in the life that the risen Christ himself enjoys in the glorious presence of the Father. Again, this image is derived from Paul's Hellenistic background, from the world that knew of cities and states and that enjoyed "freedom" in the Roman empire. Paul not only exhorted the Galatians to "stand fast in that freedom with which Christ has made you free" (Gal 5:1), but he knew that his own spiritual journey shared in this liberated status, "Am I not free?" (1 Cor 9:1).

(7) *Sanctification.* Christ Jesus has "sanctified" us; he has dedicated us to the awesome service of God, thus marking off Christians from the profane and the secular to engage them in the awesome worship and praise of the heavenly Father. So Christ has become "our sanctification" (1 Cor 1:30; cf. 1 Thess 4:7), i.e. the means whereby human beings may be so dedicated. This image Paul has derived from his Jewish background, which spoke of the sanctification of persons and objects, dedicating them to the service of Yahweh in his Temple (Isa 48:2; 64:10; Exod 19:14; Lev 19:2). Paul personally was aware of such service, for he compared his own preaching of the gospel to the liturgical or cultic act of the priests who served in the Jerusalem Temple (Rom 1:9). Thus his own spiritual journey included the evangelization of the Gentiles and the priestly offering of them to God as "sanctified by the Spirit" (Rom 15:16).

(8) *Transformation.* Christ Jesus has "transformed" us; he has gradually reshaped those human beings "who turn to the Lord" so that they behold the glory of the Lord and are "transformed into a likeness of him from one degree of glory to another" (2 Cor 3:18). Paul explains how the glory of the risen Christ has become a mirror reflecting the glory coming from the creator God: "It is the God who said, 'Let light shine

out of darkness,' who has shone in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of God's glory on the face of Christ" (2 Cor 4:6). This is the most sublime of the effects of the Christ-event that Paul has sketched for us. He has not hesitated to derive from his Hellenistic background an image used in Greek mythology, because even such a rich image could aptly express what for Paul was the magnificent calling of the Christian. As the caterpillar is transformed into the butterfly, Paul himself was transformed; from the Pharisaic Jew he became the Christian apostle of the Gentiles. Greek patristic writers often used this Pauline idea in developing their teaching about the *theōsis*, "divinization," of the Christian.¹⁶

(9) *New Creation.* Christ Jesus has "created" us "anew"; what God did at the beginning of all things, that Christ Jesus has done again in a new way (Gal 6:15; 2 Cor 5:17). He has given us "newness of life" (Rom 6:4), and because Christ has given us a share in his risen life, he has become "the last Adam" (1 Cor 15:45), i.e., the Adam of the *eschaton*, the Adam of the endtime, the head of a new humanity. Again, Paul has derived this idea from the Old Testament teaching about the creator God. He realized that in his spiritual journey he too had become part of this new humanity. His Adamic existence had become a Christic existence.

(10) *Glorification.* Christ Jesus has "glorified" us; he has made it possible to attain "the glory of God," of which all sinful human beings had fallen short (Rom 3:23). "Those whom he [God] predestined he also called; and those whom he called he also justified; and those whom he justified he also glorified" (Rom 8:30). Here Paul has taken another image from the Old Testament, the "glory" (Greek *doxa*, Hebrew *kābôd*) as the sign of the presence of God to his people or his world. He now sees Christ Jesus obtaining for Christians access to the glorious presence of the Father that he already enjoys as of his resurrection. For the destiny of the Christian is "to be always with the Lord" (1 Thess 4:17), i.e. to share in the risen Lord's own life and existence in the Father's presence. Paul debated with himself, as he lay in prison, whether it would be better for him to be freed to continue his evangelization or to die and "be with Christ" (Phil 1:23): "For to me to live is Christ, to die is gain."

(1:21). Thus he envisaged the goal of his spiritual journey, to share in the glory of the risen Christ, the goal for which the Father had predestined him.¹⁷

So Paul summed up in a striking way the effects of the Christ-event and their bearing on his own spiritual journey. He has thereby made us understand the heights that he himself attained in his journey. In his attempt to formulate for Christians of all generations what Christ Jesus has achieved for them, he has revealed the road that he himself had travelled.

We can do no better than terminate this discussion of Paul's spiritual journey than to quote his own reaction to it all:

Would that you would bear with me in a little foolishness! Do bear with me! I feel a divine jealousy for you, for I betrothed you to Christ to present you as a pure bride to her one husband. But I am afraid that, as the serpent deceived Eve by his cunning, your thoughts will be led astray from a sincere and pure devotion to Christ. For if some one comes and preaches another Jesus than the one we preached, or if you receive a different spirit from the one you received, or if you accept a different gospel from the one you accepted, you submit to it readily enough. I think that I am not in the least inferior to those superlative apostles. Yet even if I am unskilled in speaking, I am not in knowledge; in every way we have made this plan to you (2 Cor 11:1-6).

Paul himself realized that the spiritual journey that he had made in his life and ministry of preaching Christ crucified resulted in a "knowledge" that was not inferior to that of those whom some people regarded as "apostles" superior to himself. Paul again battled with those who refused to recognize him as their equal, as one on a par with the Twelve. He had not been a member of the Twelve, for he had not witnessed the ministry of Jesus himself. Yet he turned out to be a superior proclaimer of Christ crucified. For, as he says,

I must boast; there is nothing to be gained by it, but I will go on to visions and revelations of the Lord. I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago was caught up to the third heaven—whether in the body or out of it I do not know, God knows. And I know that this man was caught up into Paradise—whether in the body or out of the body I do not know, God knows—and he heard things that cannot be told, which no one may utter. On behalf of this man will I boast; but on my own behalf I will

not boast, except of my weaknesses. . . . But God said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness" (2 Cor 12:1-9).

This, then, is the height to which the Apostle Paul travelled in his spiritual journey. He was made perfect by Christ's grace, despite the weaknesses that he himself experienced in his ministry of preaching Christ crucified. He had journeyed far ("from Jerusalem all the way around to Illyricum," Rom 15:19) and labored hard to become not only "the Apostle of the Gentiles" (Rom 11:13), but an "ambassador for Christ" (2 Cor 5:20), led in triumph by Christ, who has spread the fragrance of the knowledge of God everywhere (2 Cor 2:14).