Gentile church is the place where the divine spirit already lives in our midst, already reveals his glory as a sign of what will happen one day throughout the whole world. So, sooner or later, this movement is bound to thrive.

Of course, Paul would not expect all this to happen smoothly or easily. Paul is after all a realist. He would never assume that the transformation of small and often muddled communities into a much larger body, forming a majority in the Roman world, would come about without terrible suffering and horrible pitfalls. Yes, he would be saddened, but not surprised, at the mistakes that would be made in the coming centuries and the battles that would have to be fought. But he will insist that what matters is Jesus and the spirit. *Something has happened* in Jesus, he would insist, something of cosmic significance. This movement doesn't just run on its own steam. It isn't just the accidental by-product of energetic work and historical opportunity. God is at work in the midst of his people to produce the will and the energy. This is bound to have its larger effect, sooner or later and by whatever means.

But would Paul think this theological explanation sufficient? In one sense yes and in another sense no. Paul was very much alive to all the factors the historian, as opposed to the theologian, might want to study. He would have been aware of the way Herodotus demythologized the story in 2 Kings. Paul knew that others in his own day were doing the same kind of thing with the stories in Homer.

But just because he would not wish to copy Herodotus and give a purely naturalistic explanation, he certainly wouldn't want instead to ascribe the whole thing to divine or angelic power operating without human agency. Paul believed that when grace was at work, the human agents themselves were regularly called upon to work hard as a result, not least in prayer. He says this of himself.[14] The Creator works in a thousand ways, but one central way is through people—people who think, who pray, who make difficult decisions, who work hard, especially in prayer. That is

part of what it means to be image-bearers. The question of divine action and human action is seldom a zero-sum game. If the worlds of heaven and earth have rushed together in Jesus and the spirit, one should expect different layers of explanation to reside together, to reinforce one another.

So what was it about Paul and his work that might, humanly speaking, have made the difference? In particular, what was it about Paul the man that made him—let's face it—one of the most successful public intellectuals of all time? What did he have that enabled him to take advantage of the circumstances (a common language, freedom of travel, Roman citizenship) and establish his unlikely movement not only for the course of his own lifetime but thereafter?

The first thing, coming at us throughout his story, is his sheer energy. We feel it pulsing through the letters. We watch as he responds to violence in one city by going straight on to the next one and saying and doing the same things. He is the kind of person to whom people say, "Don't you ever sleep?" He is working all hours, his hands hardened with his tentmaking, his back stiff from bending at the workbench. But he is ready every moment for the visitor with a question, for the distraught youngster whose parents have thrown him out, for the local official worried about his status if people discover he is following Jesus. He is ready to put down his tools for an hour or two and go from house to house to encourage, to warn, to pray, to weep. He is persistent. People know they won't get rid of him, won't be able to fob him off with glib excuses. He is all the while thinking through what he will say in his afternoon lecture in the house of Titius Justus in Corinth or the hall of Tyrannus in Ephesus. He takes time out to call a scribe and dictate a letter. He is relentless. He pauses to say the evening prayers with his close friends. He works on into the night, praying under his breath for the people he has met, for the city officials, for the Jesus-followers in other cities, for the next day's work, for the next phase of the project.

The second thing, the sharp edge of all this energy, is his blunt, up-front habit of telling it as he sees it no matter who is confronting him. He will say "Boo" to every goose within earshot and to all the swans as well. There is a reason why Saul of Tarsus, in his early days in Damascus, is the one getting into trouble, just as there is a reason why the Jerusalem apostles then decide to pack him off home to Tarsus. He confronts Peter in Antioch. I have suggested that the only reason he doesn't say more at the Jerusalem Conference is because Barnabas would have persuaded him to hold back.

He is the kind of man you want on your side in a debate but who may just alienate more sensitive souls. He confronts the magistrates at Philippi; he is itching to speak to the vast crowd in Ephesus; he tries to explain himself to the Jerusalem mob that had been trying to lynch him; he rebukes the high priest. He knows how to turn the factions in the Sanhedrin against one another. He lectures the Roman governor himself about justice, self-control, and the coming judgment. He tells the ship owner where he should and shouldn't spend the winter, and then says, "I told you so" when it all goes horribly wrong. He spots the sailors who are trying to bolt and tells the centurion to stop them. As a companion, he must have been exhilarating when things were going well and exasperating when they weren't. As an opponent, he could cause some people to contemplate murder as their only recourse.

People today write doctoral dissertations and business books about how successful companies and not-for-profit organizations begin. In ninety-nine cases out of a hundred there is someone like Paul hammering away from the start, getting things off the ground, confronting local authorities, raising money, persuading co-workers about what needs to be done, never losing the vision. Someone who will take the bull by the horns. Someone who will go on and on insisting on what to do and how to do it until it happens.

With all this, there is something disarming about Paul's vulnerable side, which explains why, despite his relentless and in-your-face energy, people loved him, wanted to work with him, and wept when he left. When he says that his heart has been opened wide, that there are no restrictions in his affections for his churches, it rings true.[15] His honesty shines out. With Paul, what you see is what you get, even if it isn't what you wanted. You know where you are. You know he will do anything for you, because (he would say) God has done everything for him in the Messiah.

He will never ask anyone to face anything he hasn't faced himself, up to and including horrible suffering and hardship—which he will then use as a visual aid in proclaiming the gospel. That is why his claims about himself are so credible. When he says he was gentle as a nurse in Thessalonica, we believe him. When he writes the poem about love, we know that the Corinthians would have recognized a self-portrait. When he tells the Philippians, over and over, to rejoice and celebrate, they know that, given half a chance, he would be the life and soul of the party. He modeled what he taught, and what he taught was the utter, exuberant, self-giving love of the Messiah.

People may sometimes have wished he would not give them quite so much of himself—life would not have been dull when he was around, but it would not have been particularly relaxing either—but they would have acknowledged that when they were with him, they saw truth more clearly because they saw it in his face and felt the love of God more warmly because they knew it was what drove him on. He was the sort of person through whom other people are changed, changed so that they will themselves take forward the same work with as much of the same energy as they can muster. If loyalty to the One God and his Messiah was Paul's watchword, one of the reasons why the strange movement he started thrived in the coming days was because his associates were, for the most part, fiercely loyal to Paul himself. He loved

them, and they loved him. That is how things get done. It is how movements succeed.

All this helps to explain at one level why things happened the way they did. But within two or three generations (as happens with the founders of companies and charities) this personal memory would have faded. What kept Paul's influence alive then and thereafter was, obviously, his letters. The flow of words in his daily teaching, arguing, praying, and pastoral work is captured for us in these small, bright, and challenging documents. They (the conclusion is hardly original, but it's important nonetheless) are the real answer to the question, drawing readers as they do into Paul's lecture room, into his crowded little shop, into his inner circle, into his heart. It isn't just their content, strikingly original and powerful though that is. He wasn't just, as many have wrongly suggested, synthesizing the worlds of Israel, Greece, and Rome; his was a firmly *Jewish* picture, rooted in Israel's ancient story, with Israel's Messiah in the center and the nations of the world and their best ideas brought into new coherence around him. Nor was he simply teaching a "religion" or a "theology"; if we were to do Paul justice today we ought to teach him in departments of politics, ancient history, economics, and/or philosophy just as much as in divinity schools and departments of religion.

What matters, I think, is the way in which the letters cover so many moods and situations, the way in which, like the great music of our own classical tradition, they can find you at every stage of life, in every joy and sorrow, chance and challenge. I am reminded of one of the finest British journalists of the last generation, Bernard Levin, who spoke of how the great composers had accompanied him through his life: "Beethoven first, for the boy who wanted to put the world to rights; Wagner next, for the man unable to put himself to rights; Mozart at last, as the shadows lengthen, to confirm the growing belief that there is a realm 'where everything is known and yet forgiven.'"[16]

Thus, for Paul one might say: Galatians, for the young reformer eager to defend the gospel and attack the heretics; 2 Corinthians, for the adult sadly aware that things are more complicated and disturbing than he had thought; Romans at last, to remind us, despite everything, that nothing "will be able to separate us from the love of God in King Jesus our Lord."[17] Like the psalms he knew so well, Paul's letters wait for us just around the corner, to take our arm and whisper a word of encouragement when we face a new task, to remind us of obligations and warn us of snakes in the grass, to show us from one angle after another what it might mean to live in the newly human way, the newly Jewish way, the way of Jesus, to unveil again and again the faithful, powerful love of the creator God.

When we ask why Paul, with seventy or eighty pages of text to his name in the average Bible, has succeeded far beyond the other great letter writers of antiquity—the Ciceros, the Senecas—and for that matter the great public intellectuals and movement founders of his day and ours, this range of writing, from the urgent to the winsome, from the prophetic to the poetic, from intellectual rigor to passionate advocacy, must be central to the answer. The man who could write Philemon and Romans side by side was a man for all moments.

Yes, within a generation people were grumbling that he was sometimes hard to understand and that some folk were taking him the wrong way. That happens. But it is no accident that many of the acknowledged great moments in church history—think of Augustine, Luther, Barth—have come about through fresh engagement with Paul's work. Even those who think that those great men too partially misunderstood Paul will acknowledge the point. Paul had insisted that what mattered was not just *what* you thought but *how* you thought. He modeled what he advocated, and generation after generation has learned how to think in the new way by struggling to think his thoughts after him. His legacy has continually generated fresh dividends. It is a challenge that keeps on challenging.

All this is at the heart of who Paul was and why he succeeded. Of course, Paul himself would say that the One God was behind it all. Of course, skeptics might retort that since Alexander had made Paul's world speak Greek and the Romans had made travel easier than ever before, conditions were right. "So what?" Paul would have said. If the Messiah was sent "when the fullness of time arrived,"[18] perhaps Greece and Rome were part of the preparation as well as part of the problem. I do not think, however, that Paul would so readily have agreed with those who have said that people were getting tired of the old philosophies and pagan religions and were ready for something new. The problem in Ephesus was not that people had stopped worshipping Artemis and so were ready for Paul's message, but that Paul's message about the One God had burst on the scene and stopped the worship of Artemis. Social and cultural conditions can help to explain the way things worked out, but they cannot explain it away.

A better explanation may be found in the new way of life, the new kind of community, that Paul was not only advocating, but making possible through his writings. Paul emphasizes, in letter after letter, the family life of believers, what he begins to call, and subsequent generations will usually call, "the church," the *ekklēsia*. Not for nothing does he repeatedly emphasize the *unity* and the *holiness* of the church. Nor is it irrelevant that he highlights, and even apparently celebrates, the suffering that he and others would and did endure because of their loyalty to Jesus. These tell a different story from the idea of bored ex-pagans looking for something different to do with their "religious" side. This is about a new kind of community, a new kind, we dare to say, of "politics."

Politics is about the *polis*—the city, the community—and how it works, how it runs. Sophisticated theories had been advanced in Paul's day, often by theoreticians (like Cicero and Seneca) who were also hands-on members of the ruling elite. The main feature of Paul's political landscape was of course Rome. Rome had united the world—or so it claimed. But that unity, a top-down

uniformity in which diversity was welcomed as long as it didn't threaten the absolute sovereignty of Caesar, was always creaky, and often ugly. The "diversity" was, after all, still seen in strictly hierarchical terms: men over women, free over slaves, Romans over everybody else. Rebels were ruthlessly suppressed. "They make a wilderness," sighed the Briton Calgacus, "and they call it 'peace.'"[19]

In this imperial world there appeared, in groups of six here and a dozen or two there, through the energetic work of this strange man Paul, a vision of a different kind of community owing allegiance to a different *Kyrios,* offering a different vision of unity, hosting a different kind of diversity. Unity and diversity were the pressure points for Paul, both for the individual communities (such as the church in Corinth, challenged by Paul's vision of the Messiah's single but very diverse "body") and for the worldwide "family" (such as the churches of Gentiles and Jews, both challenged by Paul's collection project). But what Paul had been doing was undoubtedly "political" in the sense that he was founding and maintaining an interrelated network of communities for which the only analogies, as we saw earlier, were the synagogue communities, on the one hand, and the Roman army and civil service, on the other. But Paul's communities were very different from either.

However, they had—and Paul's work and lasting achievement is unthinkable without this—the deepest of roots. Paul's Messiah communities were not simply a freestanding innovation. Rome traced its story back nearly a thousand years; Augustus had been careful to have his court poets and historians explain that his innovatory rule was the appropriate climax to Rome's long history and noble traditions. The synagogue told and retold the still longer story that went back to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, to Moses and Joshua, to David and Solomon. Paul told that story too and regularly explained to his communities that *they had been grafted into that great tradition.* His communities may have been a novelty in one respect. In other respects, they were claiming—he was teaching them to claim—that they were Abraham's family. This,

in Paul's work, was as much a social and communal strength as it was a theological one.

There may, in other words, have been a different kind of vacuum into which the Jesus message made its way. It was not so much a matter of people giving up an old "religion" and then finding a new one. Nor was it explicable as dissatisfaction with existing philosophies and the discovery of the new one that Paul was teaching. Rather, people who were used to one kind of political reality, albeit with its own history and variations, were glimpsing a vision of a larger united though diverse world—and then, as they looked around them, they were discovering at the same time that Rome, after all, could not really deliver on its promises. When the new communities spoke of a different *Kyrios,* one whose sovereignty was gained through humility and suffering rather than wealth and conquest, many must have found that attractive, not simply for what we would call "religious" reasons, but precisely for what they might call "political" ones. This looked like something real rather than the smoke and mirrors of imperial rhetoric.

Paul did not, of course, have the time or the need to develop his picture of the differentiated unity of the Messiah's body into a larger exposition of the church as a whole. He had not articulated a political theory to match that of Aristotle or his successors. But it was that kind of social experiment—developing a new way of living together—that the churches of the second and third century were attempting. And when you ask what inspired them to do what they were doing, the lines go back to Paul. Paul's stress on unity, to be sure, stemmed from his theological vision. It was not mere pragmatism. But it also had, and Paul probably realized that it had, the power to generate an alternative social and cultural reality, to announce to the watching world that Jesus was Lord and Caesar wasn't. What Paul was articulating in his letters, often in haste and to meet particular crises, was being reused to encourage Jesus-followers to glimpse and practice a refreshingly new kind of human society.

If the fact of a different kind of cross-cultural social diversity-in-unity had a powerful appeal, the same is true of holiness. This is counterintuitive for modern Westerners, who generally resent from an early age the fussy moralisms of home, school, and church: How could a new and demanding standard of behavior ever be attractive? In the ancient world, however, this was good news for many, especially for those—women, the poor, ethnic minorities, slaves, children—who were most vulnerable to the normal patterns of pagan behavior. This perception seems to lie behind the sneaking admiration (mixed, to be sure, with bemusement) that came from the famous second-century doctor Galen. In his only mention of the Christian movement, he comments on two points that to him made the followers of this strange new cult appear to be crazy: they believed in the resurrection of the body, and they didn't sleep around.[20] The two went together. The human body was attaining a new dignity, a new valuation. Nobody had imagined that kind of way of life. Paul taught it; the early Christians were modeling it.

In particular, those who have studied the life of the church in the second, third, and fourth centuries have emphasized that, again against the expectations of our own day, the Christian message provided a much better prospect for women than the pagan world could. For a start, there would be more of them. Pagans routinely practiced infanticide for unwanted children in general and girls in particular, but the Christians followed the Jews in renouncing such behavior. The consequent shortage of marriageable girls in the pagan world and the surplus of them among the Christians resulted in many marriages between Christian women and pagan men, who might then either convert or at least give consent for the children to be brought up as Christians. And, once again against the common perceptions of our age, the fresh evaluation of the role of women, though it came ultimately from Jesus himself, was mediated not least through Paul—the Paul who

listed several women among his colleagues and fellow workers (including one "apostle"), who saw early on that in the Messiah's family there was ultimately no "male and female," and who entrusted Phoebe with the responsibility of delivering and almost certainly expounding the letter to the Romans.

Now we must pursue a parallel train of thought. If we simply focus on unity and holiness we may miss the fact that Paul's communities were essentially *outward looking* and that the face they turned outward was the face of active care. Medicine in the ancient world was almost entirely reserved for those who could afford it; within a few generations, the Christians were setting up hospitals and caring for all within reach. When a plague struck a town or village and the rich and respectable retreated to their country houses away from the risk of infection, the Christians would stay and nurse the sick, often at the risk of their own lives. Nobody had ever dreamed of living like that before. Paul doesn't mention this kind of social imperative, but it belongs with the work of healing, which characterized his own ministry, at least from time to time, and it flows directly from the things he says about the life of the community whose members were like shining lights in a dark world.

In the same way, education in the ancient world was almost entirely for the elite. Jewish boys were taught to read and write; they would, after all, need to study the Torah. But a great many ordinary pagans were either functionally illiterate or able only to read what was required for daily tasks. Some estimates put the level of literacy at between 20 and 30 percent; some of the older Greek cities and islands had a tradition of elementary education for citizens, but for many people, again especially for women and slaves, this would have been minimal. The early Christians, however, were enthusiastic about education, and particularly reading. When we ask ourselves what the "teachers" in Paul's communities were teaching, I suspect that part of the answer was "reading,"

since if they were teaching the converts (as they surely were) the scriptures of ancient Israel, this would have involved basic skills that many of those converts had hitherto lacked.

As we know, the early Christians were technological pioneers when it came to books, abandoning the scroll with its natural limitations and developing instead the codex, the ancestor of the modern bound book. They would only have been doing that if they wanted more and more people to be able to read the books the community was producing. This insistence on education and particularly reading can be traced directly back to Paul. It is Paul, after all, who tells his churches to be grown-up in their thinking, to be transformed by the renewing of their minds. He wanted Jesus-followers not only to think the right things, but to think in the right *way*. Though he did not himself (so far as we know) found what we today would call "schools," when such things came about, they would have him to thank for their underlying impetus.

All this comes down to the basic imperative that we see as the assumed norm in Paul's very first letters and that then becomes a major and attractive feature of the church in subsequent centuries. "Remember the poor," the Jerusalem apostles had urged Paul. "Yes," he replied, "that is precisely what I am most eager to do." For Paul this eventually took one particular focus, namely, the collection for Jerusalem, but all the signs are that each local Jesus community had the same priority, presumably of course because of Jesus himself. Paul congratulated the Thessalonians on their practical "love," *agapē,* and urged them to work at it more and more. "Do good to everyone," he wrote to the Galatians, "and particularly to the household of the faith." "Celebrate with those who are celebrating, mourn with the mourners." "Shine like lights in the world." The gospel itself was designed to generate a new kind of people, a people "who would be eager for good works"; in fact, the new kind of humanity that was brought to birth through the gospel was created for the specific purpose of

"good works."[21] This point has often been missed when people have read the phrase "good works" as meaning simply "the performance of moral rules," especially when that in turn has been played off against "justification by faith alone." Morals matter, faith matters, but that isn't the point here. Paul's emphasis here is all about communities through whose regular practice the surrounding world is made a better place.

A glance at the second and third centuries is enough to confirm that all these things, particularly when we see them together, offer good explanations for the spread of the Christian communities. These Jesus-followers, strange though their views might have seemed to those around, antisocial though some might have supposed them to be, were doing things that really did transform the wider society. By the end of the second century, Roman officials were not particularly aware of the nuances of Christian teaching, but they did know what the word "bishop" meant—it meant someone who kept on agitating about the needs of the poor. And at point after point these strands of community life went back to Paul. He had planted these seeds. He died long before most of them began to sprout, but when they did, a community came into being that challenged the ancient world with a fresh vision and possibility. The vision was of a society in which each worked for all and all for each. The possibility was that of escaping the crushing entail of the older paganism and its social, cultural, and political practices and finding instead a new kind of community, a *koinōnia,* a "fellowship." A family.

As the historical question invites the theological one back into the room, no wonder the theologians of the second and third centuries often emphasized, when speaking about the crucifixion of Jesus, their belief that on the cross he won the victory over all the dark powers. That wasn't just a theological theory about an abstract "atonement." It was the necessary foundation for the lives of the communities in which they lived and worked. The communities could exist only because the old gods, much as they

might try to strike back, really had been overthrown. Mammon, Mars, and Aphrodite had been shown up as impostors. Caesar himself was not the ultimate Lord. The theology was hiding under the historical reality, the political reality. These communities were demonstrating, on the street, in the home, in the marketplace, what it meant to follow a different Lord, to worship the One God.

It was Paul too who provided some of the major intellectual infrastructure for this community. Here again this was not because the other major intellectual constructs of the ancient world had run out of steam. The Stoics, the Epicureans, and the up-and-coming Middle Platonists had serious, articulate, and in many ways attractive spokespeople. With hindsight, however, Paul's Jesus-focused vision of the One God, creator of all, was able to take on all these philosophies and beat them at their own game. They were all, in the last analysis, ways of understanding the world and ways of finding a coherent and meaningful human path within it. When later generations wanted to articulate the Christian version of the same thing (which was, to say it once more, the Jewish version with the Jesus-based reframing), it was to Paul that they looked for help. Of course, other sources remained vital. The prologue to the Gospel of John, a piece of writing that I think would have had Paul himself on his knees, is an obvious example. But it was Paul's robust engagements with the triple traditions of Israel, Greece, and Rome and his translation of them all into the shape of Jesus and the spirit (Jesus as Israel's Messiah and the spirit as the agent of resurrection, the ultimate hope of Israel) that offered a platform for the great thinkers of subsequent generations.

Although the thinkers were seldom the people who made the gospel spread—that accolade belongs to the local communities that were living out the gospel imperatives, often under the threat or the reality of persecution—the church would not have survived or thrived without their work. Theology is the backbone

of a healthy church. The body still needs limbs and organs, joints and tissue. Paul, with his own image of the Messiah's body, would have been the first to insist on that. But without a backbone the body will not survive. The survival and flourishing of the church of subsequent centuries look back to Paul's achievement in teaching his followers not only what to think, but how to think. He knew only too well what that would cost, but he believed it was the genuinely human way, a way that would win out precisely by the power of that genuine humanness. And with that, we have our answer.

There are, then, several lines of explanation that converge on Paul himself. His was the vision of the united, holy, and outward-facing church. He pioneered the idea of a suffering apostleship through which the message of the crucified Jesus would not only be displayed, but be effective in the world. He could not have foreseen the ways in which these communities would develop. He might well not have approved of all that was done. But the historian and biographer can look back and discern, in Paul's hasty and often contested work, the deep roots of a movement that changed the world. This is not the book to address the next question, as to what difference it might make if the church in our own day were to reassess its policies and priorities in the light of Paul's work. We, after all, have seen the electronic revolution produce a global situation just as dramatically new, in its way, as the one the first-century world had experienced with the sudden rise of Rome. What might the church's response and responsibility be at such a time?

But Paul's vision of a united and holy community, prayerful, rooted in the scriptural story of ancient Israel, facing social and political hostility but insisting on doing good to all people, especially the poor, would always be central. His relentless personal energy, his clarity and vulnerability, and his way with words provided the motor to drive this vision, and each generation will need a few

who can imitate him. His towering intellectual achievement, a theological vision of the One God reshaped around Jesus and the spirit and taking on the wider world of philosophy, would provide the robust, necessary framework for it all. When the church abandons the theological task, with its exegetical roots in the work of Paul and his colleagues, we should not be surprised if unity, holiness, and the care for the poor are sidelined as well.

★ ★ ★

There is one more thing on which Paul and his successors would insist, and that is prayer. We return, as we now probe cautiously into the last days of Paul, to the pattern of prayer he had learned from childhood and then developed in the light of Jesus and the spirit.

Paul always knew that his labors might cost him his life. He did not expect to die at home in his own bed, even supposing that after leaving Antioch in the late 40s he ever had a place he could call "home." Whether he faced death after the two years of his house arrest at the end of Acts or whether he made subsequent journeys before a second arrest and a final trial, I think we must see his preparation for death and the event itself when it came in relation to the life he lived, and particularly the prayers he had prayed all throughout.

There is a famous story of how Rabbi Akiba, one of the greatest Jewish teachers of all time, went on praying the *Shema*, declaring his loyalty to the One God and his determination to stand for his kingdom, as the Roman torturers, catching up with Jewish rebels after the Bar-Kochba revolt in AD 135, ran steel combs through his flesh until he died a horrible and lingering death.[22] He continued to pray: "*Shema Yisrael,* Hear, O Israel: the LORD our God, the LORD is one. You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might . . ." ("soul" here means "life"). His disciples, standing by

like Socrates's friends as he drank the hemlock, asked him in awe and horror how he could go on praying that prayer even now. His answer, recorded much later but reflecting what we know of the man, is a model of wise, humble Jewish thought. All his life long, he explained, he had been troubled by the words in the prayer "and with all your soul." He wondered what that meant and if he would ever have the opportunity to fulfill *that* part of the prayer. Now that he finally had the opportunity, he declared, he was going to seize it. This, then, was what it meant to love the One God with one's *life*. Akiba died with the word *echad*, "one," on his lips: "Hear, O Israel, the LORD our God, the LORD is *one*." *Echad*. A statement of loyalty. Of loyalty even to the death.

In my mind's eye I see Paul, perhaps also surrounded by friends, awaiting the executioner. He too will be praying, and it might well be the prayer of loyalty and love, of Jewish-style loyalty, of Messiah-shaped loyalty, the monotheism of the inaugurated kingdom: "For us there is One God (the father, from whom are all things, and we to him); and One Lord (Jesus the Messiah, through whom are all things and we through him), *and you shall love him . . .*" It flows better in Greek than in English:

> *Heis theos, ho patēr, ex hou ta panta kai hēmeis eis auton,*
> *Kai heis kyrios, Iēsous Christos, di'hou ta panta kai hēmeis di' autou.*

This is what made him who he was. This is the reality that burst upon him on the road to Damascus. This, he would have said, is the ultimate explanation for why his work, so contested, so agonizing, so demanding, so inevitably open to misunderstanding, would not go to waste, but would grow, would produce not just "a religion," but a new kind of humanity—new people, a new community, a new world. A new *polis*. A new kind of love. It would do things he could hardly have dared to imagine.

He prays the prayer, over and over. He prays it with the rhythm of his breathing. He prays it with the spirit's breath in his innermost self. He declares his *pistis,* his loyalty, his love one more time. One God, one Lord. One. His life's work has been to bear witness, openly and unhindered, to the kingdom of God and the lordship of Jesus, and that is what he now does in prayer as the executioner draws his sword. Loving this One God with his heart, his mind, and his strength. And, finally, with his life.