

# **St Paul the Apostle in the religious context of the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> centuries - landmarks**

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## **Abstract:**

The study of St. Paul's work and theology has been viewed over time in the most diverse and surprising ways, depending on the approach of those who have made the appreciation, ways that oscillated between an anti-Semite Paul and a Christian who had abandoned any Jewish heritage, between an antifeminist and a liberator of women under a patriarchal authority, or between others alike, depending on those who appreciated Pauline's work. These confused perspectives can be noticed from the early Christian centuries. In this study I would like to point out the perspective according to which Paul can not and should not be considered a theologian in the actual meaning of the word, distinguishing himself from other theologians of his time precisely because he does not have his own theological system, his Gospel being mainly inspired and less systematized.

## **Keywords:**

Paul, Irineu, Policarp, Marcion, Tertullian, Origen, apostle, theology, doctrine, Church, New Testament

## **Introduction**

It has often been said among the New Testament specialists that for some generations after his death, St. Paul was, for most of them, almost incomprehensible. Even during his time, the Apostle was often misunderstood. The second and third centuries were the period when, in the face of increased religious effervescence, the work of the Apostle has been directly or indirectly the subject of extremely interesting controversies. To understand some of the reasons why the Pauline work has been the

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subject of controversies in the following centuries, I think it is necessary to have a radiograph of the characteristics of the context of early Christianity.

### **The Social and Religious Context of the Pauline Age – Aspects**

The idea that the terms Judaism and Hellenism denote cultural antitheses is deeply rooted in the collective psychology of modern neo-testamentary research, and for this reason this issue was analyzed in Copenhagen in 1997 at an international conference with the theme “Paul between Judaism and Hellenism”.<sup>2</sup> Most of the conclusions of this conference have become new research directions on this issue. The main conclusion was that the best way to understand the process of the birth of Christianity must necessarily involve the exact investigation of the methods used by the ordinary human groups, in antiquity, to live and relate.<sup>3</sup>

In this regard, the Christians in Corinth are a great example because there lived a Jewish community of immigrants who left Judea for a world of Hellenism.<sup>4</sup> The language they spoke daily was Greek, though it is unlikely to believe that they were also thinking in the terms of this language (except, perhaps, rare intellectuals like Filon of Alexandria).<sup>5</sup>

Most of the members of this colony were more interested in the practical matters of everyday life. One of these was how to engage in activities aimed at the trade and business of a colony with a strong commercial character without compromising in any way the essential imprint of their Jewish identity. In a very competitive society, where often families of servile origin managed, in two or three generations, to be among

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<sup>2</sup> Pedersen Troels Edgar, *Paul beyond the Judaism/Hellenism divide*, Westminster John Knox Press, London, 2001, p. 3.

<sup>3</sup> Father Constantine Gheorghe reminds of the diaspora communities that have naturally suffered a strong influence from the cultural environment surrounding them, defending the tendency on their part to seek a rapprochement between Judaism and Greek philosophy. In this sense see: Constantin Gheorghe, "Judaism și elenism în epistolele Sfântului Pavel", in: ST, no. 9-10 / 1973, pp. 648-662.

<sup>4</sup> The term *iudeos* does not always have a geographical reference, as it often appears in the New Testament texts, or as A.T. Kraabel in "The Roman Diaspora: Six Questionable Assumptions" in *Journal of Jewish Studies*, 33, 1982, pp. 449-450, referring to an inscription in Smirna. This view was refused by M.H. Williams in "The Meaning and Function of Ioudaios in Graeco-Roman Inscriptions," in ZPE 116, 1997, pp. 249-262.

<sup>5</sup> Kent believes that they clearly spoke both Greek and Latin, especially in official matters. According to archaeological finds in the very first century, Latin was spoken. With the arrival of Adrian Emperor, an immediate and almost complete change of the Latin to Greek inscriptions is observed, which suggests that the Jews had been Greek-speaking until then. See in this problem: J.H. Kent, "Corinth: Results of Excavations Conducted by the American School of Classical Studies at Athens 8/3 Inscriptions (1926-1960), in: *American School of Classical Studies at Athens*, vol. 8, Princeton University, 1966, pp.19 -20.

those who controlled things, it was difficult to compete without triggering dangerous conflicts with other groups. Another problem was how to balance the issues of gains and concessions needed for survival, with ancient traditions that set certain boundaries to preserve identity.<sup>6</sup>

In the period following Alexander the Great, journeys became lighter, the cities grew more and more, with serious reasons for a short or even permanent migration, the appearance of a large number of strangers around the Mediterranean Basin being an obvious fact.<sup>7</sup> Certainly these strangers have developed common strategies to maintain their own identity in a cosmopolitan environment to some extent. In the middle of this strategy was the organization of immigrant associations in each country. Their main interest was the cult of gods in the countries of origin, without the transformation of the association into religious community, as this issue is understood today. However, archeology has produced little evidence and, apart from the New Testament, literary evidence is also little.<sup>8</sup>

The only way to understand their strategies of balancing the preservation of national identity with the assimilation process is that of comparing with other groups of immigrants and Jewish communities whose strategies are perhaps better documented, but especially with the strategies that we know from the work of St. Paul the Apostle and from the Acts of the Apostles about the formation of Christian groups. Immigrant associations, like private associations, have depended on benefactors,

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<sup>6</sup> Perhaps the most comprehensive study of these problems is a recent one belonging to J.M.G. Barclay, *Jews in the Mediterranean Diaspora: From Alexander to Trajan* (323 BCE-117 CE), Edinburgh, T & T Clark, 1996. In this paper Barclay points out that the use of terms such as *Orthodox*, *Palestinian* or *Hellenistic* to highlight and delimit a certain kind of Judaism and Jewish answers to the Greco-Roman world, are inappropriate and lose sight of the essence. Instead, he uses sociological terms such as *assimilation*, *acculturation* or *accommodation*. The predominant image of this work is that of a very wide diversity among the Jews of each community and among the different communities. He even states: „The greater the precision in detail, the more generalization becomes impossible” (p.400). Moreover, Barclay insists that “diversity is not the only characteristic of the Diaspora, and that an explanation is needed for how Jewish communities have survived as such cohesive and patient entities” (p.400). Barclay also points out that we cannot speak of *Judaism*, because many differences have not resulted from a separation from the central ideological lines: “If Judaism is defined, as it should be, as a social phenomenon and not just as an intellectual one, it is hard to see how a plurality of Judaisms might apply to the Diaspora” (p. 401).

<sup>7</sup> W. A. Meeks, "Corinthian Christians as Artificial Aliens," in: Troels Engberg-Pedersen, *Paul beyond*, p. 130.

<sup>8</sup> On Delos there are several relics of such groups, mentioned by Meeks in "Corinthian Christians," p. 130.

whether from their own community or from aliens interested in helping them find a place for their various activities.<sup>9</sup>

The pattern of such patronage began with becoming a guest in someone's house, and this house would be given or made available to the association, being remodeled, more or less to be useful to the group. Sometimes, it was later replaced by another building with a more appropriate structure, or in a more public place.<sup>10</sup>

It is not known whether the immigrant Jews in Corinth followed this pattern, although it would have been natural to be so, and if they did, we do not know to what extent this happened when the Apostle Paul came there.

The author of Acts of the Apostles remembers a single meeting place in a residential neighborhood, the house of Titus Iustus, a preeminent of God, who became the first patron of those who responded positively to Paul's speeches. (F.A. 18,7). Paul neither remembers Titus Iustus, nor Crispus (the greatest synagogue), the first convert with his house (Acts 18, 8). However, far from minimizing the importance of such people as these, Paul points out this things including in this category, not only Gaius, but Stephenas (I Cor.16,15), Fortunat and Ahaic, perhaps companions of Stephen (I Cor 16:17), but especially Acvila and Priscilla (I Cor.16,19; Rom.16, 3, F.Ap.18, 2-3) Certainly wherever the Jews were, and no matter what they were called, as Louis Feldman pointed out, they were very well organized. Moreover, in all the cities there is this tendency to unify the Jews in an organization, but nevertheless there have always been more meeting places. Even the author of the Acts of the Apostles speaks of a single synagogue in Corinth. Thus, as several Christian groups founded by Paul met occasionally in Gaius's house (Rom. 16, 23), Christians were certainly having the feeling of being a community.<sup>11</sup>

Every ethnical community in the Greco-Roman world, in order to maintain its identity, must have had distinctive features, but of all, surely, the Jews were more concerned with the boundaries of this ethnic identity than any other. Their characteristic to separate in this sense is one of the things most often mentioned in pagan commentaries on the Jews. The deuteronomic program of centralizing the cult

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<sup>9</sup> Such patronage is evidenced by numerous inscriptions of dedicatory character, of which, in the case of the Jewish groups, one can see the collection of B. Lifshitz, "Donateurs et fondateurs dans les synagogues juives; Répertoire des dédicaces grecques relatives à la construction et à référence des synagogues ", in: *Cahiers de Revue Biblique*, Paris, 1996, cf. W.A. Meeks, *Corinthian Christians*, p. 131.

<sup>10</sup> One of those who analyzed this pattern is L. Michael White, who brought and studied much evidence in this respect, dating from the early period of Christianity. See "The Social Origins of Christian Architecture," in: *Harvard Theological Studies*, vol. 9, Valley Forge, 1966.

<sup>11</sup> L. Feldman, *Jew and Gentile in the Ancient World.: Attitudes and Interactions from Alexander to Justinian*, Princenton, Princeton University Press, 1933, p. 64.

and of separating Israel from the other nations around, the contemptuous attitude of prophets during exile and of the post-exilic prophets towards idolatry, the reforms of Ezra and Nehemiah, and the experience of the diaspora generations grew both in the scriptures and in customs, into a tradition of separation, even though certain practices varied widely in the diaspora communities. In this sense, can be noticed of tracing boundaries even in the Pauline correspondence. We find here people who insist on avoiding meat offerings offered to idols. Paul's complex reply to this problem also respects the Jewish tradition of idolatry, and includes a comment on the golden calf issue of the episode mentioned in Exodus 32,6.<sup>12</sup>

When Paul speaks of a man of the Corinthians who lived with his father's wife, he points out that this case is an example of fornication that is not mentioned among the pagans (1 Corinthians 5: 1). Thus, he discovers that his own feeling about the place of Christians in the world is polished by the experience of the Jewish diaspora. Moreover, he reinforces his advice with allusions to the Jewish ritual traditions and, finally, with a direct quote from Deuteronomy (1 Corinthians 5: 1-13).

Another problem, that of proselytes, is viewed differently among Jewish immigrants to other immigrant groups. This difference became central to the problem of self-definition of the early Christians. Thus, when one of the pagans wanted to approach Judaism, he could apparently enjoy a large circle of possible relational forms with the Jewish community, but was not considered to be a proselyte, in the true sense of the word, for it being needed a change of social location.<sup>13</sup> Thus, it was possible for someone outside of the Jewish community to manifest gestures of worship for the God of Israel without really becoming a Jew or exhibiting an exclusive attachment to Him. This explains numerous altars dedicated to a great number of gods. From this point to the complete return from the idols to the service of the Living God, as Paul describes the conversions in Thessalonica, using a language that certainly came from a Jewish practice (I Thess. 1, 9), is an act that shows profound resocialization, an identity change, and an essential element of faith.<sup>14</sup>

The feeling that can be notice in all of Paul's epistles is that he addresses people who have experienced this radical and total transfer into a new community. This process of incorporation into the Christian community was taking place around the

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<sup>12</sup> See W.A. Meeks, "And They Rose Up to Play: Midrash and Paraenesis in 1 Corinthians 10, 1-22" in: JSNT 16,1982, pp. 64 -78.

<sup>13</sup> S.J.A. Cohen investigated this issue in a number of essays, gathered in: *The Beginnings of Jewishness: Boundaries, Varieties, Uncertainties*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999.

<sup>14</sup> See: Joyce Reynolds and Robert Tannenbaum, *Jews and God-Fearers at Aphrodisias*, Cambridge, 1987, pp. 48-66; A.J. Malherbe, *Paul and the Thessalonians: The Philosophical Tradition of Pastoral Care*, Philadelphia, Fortress, 1987, pp. 34-52.

baptismal act, being even symbolized by it.<sup>15</sup> However, this baptismal process was more like the act of receiving the proselytes by the Jewish community than by initiating it in any mystery cult.<sup>16</sup> Recognizing this functional equivalent, in the Epistle to the Colossians, baptism is described as circumcision not made by the hand (Col 2, 11).<sup>17</sup>

Jewish emigrants, in the desire to preserve their own identity, followed a pattern that other groups of emigrants had developed during the Hellenistic and Roman periods, forming communities centered on the cult of the deities in the countries of origin, and establishing rules for that community, rules that were meant to draw guidelines, meant to keep in touch with their place of origin and also to preserve their most important habits. The Jews reinterpreted the biblical ideas regarding the process of receiving aliens in the cultural life of Israel, in order to link them to their new situation of resident aliens in which they were. There is now a special event with those who were initiated into the Messiah because they separate from the Jewish communities of emigrants and become a distinct cult that is no longer characterized by a single ethnic identity. This separation seems to have taken place very quickly in all places where Paul worked, especially since this process did not take place uniformly elsewhere.<sup>18</sup>

At the time Paul writes the epistles to the Corinthians, the dominant majority of the new cult is no longer formed of Jews, but of pagans, according to Paul himself (I Corinthians 12: 1-3). This multiethnic community appears and acts in some ways as a Jewish community, in the idea that it receives new proselytes, but at the same time, all are proselytes, whether Jews or Greeks. The act of baptism has a disassociating effect because it creates boundaries where they have not been, before indicating the union of people of various origins into one body, of brothers and sisters.<sup>19</sup> Also in Corinthian correspondence, Paul speaks of another extremely important ritual, the Lord's Supper,

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<sup>15</sup> See Constantin Preda, "Doctrina și practica botezului după Faptele Apostolilor," in: O, XLIX, no. 3-4, pp. 36-65.

<sup>16</sup> Ioan Bude, Conotații biblice despre "jertfa vie" și limbajul imnic-euharistic, Ed. Alma Mater, Cluj-Napoca, 2006, p.77.

<sup>17</sup> Evidently baptism was of particular importance to Corinthian Christians, and Paul, while distancing himself from a baptismal understanding that would promote the division (1 Corinthians 1: 14-17), strongly reaffirms the creation of the Spirit by baptizing a community among others (sI Corinthians 12, 13).

<sup>18</sup> W.A. Meeks, „ Breaking Away: Three New Testament Pictures of Christianity's Separation from the Jewish Communities ; To See Ourselves as Others See Us: Christians, Jews, „ others” in Late Antiquity ”, in *Scholars Press Studies in the Humanities*, Chicago, The University of Chicago Press, 1985, pp. 93-111.

<sup>19</sup> See Constantin Preda, "Doctrina și practica botezului după Faptele Apostolilor", pp. 168-174.

which had functions similar to baptism. (1 Corinthians 10: 16-21; 11: 23-24). The Pauline groups of Corinth separated from the rest of society in characteristic Jewish ways.<sup>20</sup>

In addition to the idea that the new social form invented by Paul and his Corinthian converts owes much of its practical inspiration to the strategies of the Jewish immigrant groups, it can also be observed that the form and language of Paul's epistles owes much to the principles of Greek-Roman rhetoric, issues and subjects discussed in the Greek-Roman philosophical schools, as well as to the Greek-Roman sermons.<sup>21</sup>

Throughout the literature that survived from Hellenic or Roman Jewish or Jewish authors, it is easy to see a very vivid and varied adaptation process that combines the form and substance of Israel's traditions and scriptures with that of Greek-Roman literary traditions and culture. Through the voices of these writers we hear talking an Israel that has a clear moral conception of his identity: to be part of Israel means to have some moral conduct in the community and certain obligations imposed by the God of Israel. In the public areas of the most important cities of the Greco-Roman world, such a moral vision had to merge with other visions with multiple and always changing attitudes and outcomes. For a stranger to engage in such an experience, at whatever level, it involves a certain degree of re-socialization and reconstruction of a personal moral universe.<sup>22</sup>

Such moral formation or re-socialization did not depend only on religion at that time, but was something that devastated or, better said, it could have happened in any community, influenced by external factors from interaction with other groups in the same cultural complex and, by extension, this also took place in any of the convert

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<sup>20</sup> These strategies, however, come only in a Hellenistic framework and are used not only to create a community of strangers but also to separate it from Judaism in what social reality means (see Meeks, *Corinthian Christians*, p. 135) .

<sup>21</sup> See Margaret Mitchell, *Paul and the Rhetoric of Reconciliation: An Exegetical Investigation of the Language and Composition of 1 Corinthians*, Louisville, Westminster / John Knox, 1993, according to which the entire 1 Corinthians Epistle can be read in analogy with the speeches that support civic virtues .

<sup>22</sup> Meeks notes that the formation of a sect on the outskirts of a Jewish group, a group that becomes a multiethnic cult and practically only semi-Jewish, undoubtedly implies the need for such re-socialization. We can see in this regard the works of W.A. Meeks, *The Mural World of the First Christians*, Philadelphia, Fortress Press, 1986; "The Poliphonic Ethics of the Apostle Paul," in: *Annual of the Society of Christian Ethics*, 1988, pp.17-29; "The Circle of Reference in Pauline Morality," in: *Greeks, Romans and Christians: Essay in Honor of Abraham J. Malherbe*, Minneapolis, Fortress, 1990, pp. 305-317; *The Origins of Christian Morality: The First Two Centuries*, New Haven and London, Yale University Press, 1993.s

communities, such as the Pauline Christians.<sup>23</sup> Moreover, there are many ways of adjustment and interaction of Jews with the different cultural forms and with the different places where they were. At the same time, when the evidence provides an almost complete overview of a community, we cannot fail to notice the modes of assimilation, adaptation and updating, starting from an individual, family and going to an entire community.<sup>24</sup>

### **Paul the Apostle's Opera in the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> centuries**

Such an example is the *Kerygramata Petrov*, in which, around AD 200, Paul the Apostle is considered neither more nor less than an enemy, a servant of evil, and an impostor preaching a false gospel. His legitimacy was attacked, he was called a liar because he claimed an apostolic reference that would come into a vision directly from Christ.<sup>25</sup>

While some suspected Paul the Apostle of magic or other alike, some were either ignorant of his epistles, or knowingly ignored them. In the second century bishop Ignatius of Antioch was arrested and sent to Rome for death. On the way to Rome he wrote seven letters and made only five or six references to the Pauline body in matters of little importance. For this reason, Schneemelcher affirms, more or less correctly, that "Ignatie's theology is not a pauline."<sup>26</sup>

Contemporary with Ignatius was the young Polycarp (69-155 AD), a bishop in Asia, who wrote a preface for a collection of Ignatius's letters, a preface in which he referred to Romans, I Corinthians, Philippians, and probably Galatians and Ephesians.<sup>27</sup> In this preface he testifies that neither he nor anyone else could "follow the wisdom of the blessed and glorious Paul." This appreciation does not mean that the Pauline epistles would have had any theological significance for Polycarp.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Most researchers believe that one cannot speak of a standard model that the Jewish communities in the empire have followed and which has been a standard reference for the birth of Christian communities as well.

<sup>24</sup> In this sense, it is not unnatural to find controversy in the Pauline communities and differences even in Paul regarding certain ways of thinking, speaking and acting, issues that the scholars have often separated.

<sup>25</sup> Edgar Hennecke, *New Testament Apocrypha*, Philadelphia, Westminster/John Knox Press, 1964, vol.2, pp. 111-127.

<sup>26</sup> W. Schneemelcher, "Paulus in der griechischen Kirche des zweiten Jahrhunderts", in ZKG 75 (1964), p.16, cf. Calvin J. Roetzel, „Paul in the second century”, in: J.D.G. Dunn, *The Cambridge Companion to St. Paul*, Cambridge, University Press, 2008, p. 240.

<sup>27</sup> See C.C. Richardson, *Early Christian Fathers*, Philadelphia, Westminster, 1953.

<sup>28</sup> H. von Campenhausen, *The Formation of the Christian Bible*, Philadelphia, Fortress, 1972, p.7.



While Ignatius knew who Paul the Apostle was and what work he had accomplished, Papias (60-130 AD), who also had knowledge of religious leaders of the Apostolic Age, makes no reference to Paul. The lack of any reference to Paul the Apostle is surprising. On the other hand Saint Justin the Martyr (100-165 AD) who was born of pagan parents in Samaria and converted to Christianity in AD 130, becoming an important predictor of Christianity, in his apologies made more references to the Pauline epistles, but does not clearly mention Paul's name. So does Bishop Theophilus of Antioch, who, recalling chapter 13 of the Epistle to the Romans, does not mention Paul the Apostle.<sup>29</sup>

It is very important to note and emphasize that the second century of Christianity has diversity as an important feature, and there is no white thread at this time separating heresy from orthodoxy or a single point of reference to verify the truthfulness of the claims of any of the confessions. Thus, many groups such as the Marcionites, the Valentinian Gnostics, the Ebionists, the Montanists, or others, claimed to be the true Christians. In this context, it can be said that in the 2<sup>nd</sup> century, Orthodoxy and heretical sects were not part of a relationship in which a party was considered the first and the other the second. This will change with the gesture of Constantine, which has given a special favour to Christianity, giving the Church the opportunity to free itself from heretics.<sup>30</sup>

From Marcion's original work, nothing has been preserved, but, based on critics' references, a life-sketch and his teachings can be reconstituted. From their appreciation we find that Marcion was born at the end of the first century in Sinope, an important port on the southern coast of the Black Sea, and was accustomed to the Jewish communities in the area. Hippolytus (170-236 AD) tells us that Marcion's father, who was a bishop in Sinope, excommunicated Marcion because he had seduced a virgin.<sup>31</sup> Marcion's theology has its roots in the letters of St. Paul who he had encountered while still in Asia Minor.<sup>32</sup> Around 150 AD, St. Justin the Martyr

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<sup>29</sup> This avoidance of Paul by these personalities inevitably suggests that the apostle was deliberately left to one side. It is W. Schneemelcher's opinion in "Paulus", pp. 7-8.

<sup>30</sup> W. Bauer, *Orthodoxy and Heresy in Earliest Christianity*, Philadelphia, Fortress, 1971, p. 131.

<sup>31</sup> J.J. Clabeaux, "Marcion," in: ABD 4, 1992, p. 514. Clabeaux recalls that Marcion came from a wealthy and influential family. He became a benefactor, giving 200,000 sesterces to the Roman Church and, at the same time, was the owner of the ship. Along with these, he studied Stoicism, becoming a good connoisseur of texts and a critical critique of their content.

<sup>32</sup> In connection with this, he affirmed that Paul's teaching could not agree with the theology of the Church. This conviction led him to a confrontation with Policarp, who called him Satan's son because Marcion rejected the Old Testament and made a myth of two gods (see: J.J. Clabeaux, "Marcion," p. 514). The fact that at one point Marcion goes to Rome,

remarked that marcioned churches had spread throughout the empire, and his gospel was preached for almost 20 years. Such a dating of Marcion's activity supports the idea of some scholars who see an anti-media polemic in the pastoral epistles and in Acts of the Apostles.<sup>33</sup> In Rome, in front of the council, Marcion was sentenced and definitively excommunicated but at his death, around 160 AD, he left behind a movement that competed the Church in number of followers. In 207, Tertullian made the remark that Marcion's gospel could include the entire world.<sup>34</sup>

For Marcion, St. Paul was the true apostle whose true gospel was exactly that of Christ. Because considered Paul's truth as the only truth, and the other apostles did not give Paul the whole approval, Marcion called them false apostles. He rejected Matthew because he appreciated the law (Matt. 5:17), and he probably did not know John. As a result, he chose Luke before Mark because of his inclination towards the Gentiles and made a gospel together with the Pauline epistles.<sup>35</sup>

The essence of Marcion's teaching was given by the contrast between the God of the New Testament and that of the Old Testament. He used the expression "the God of this age" (2 Cor 4: 4) to refer to the God of the Old Testament, a God of a tough judgment, offering salvation only to those of the Jews, while the other offered it to all, God who incites to violence and death, and another who called for peace and life.<sup>36</sup> The Old Testament God, in Marcion's opinion, offered straightening through the facts of the law, while the new one offered it by faith (Gal. 2:16). According to Marcion, Jesus just seemed to have an earthly body and was sent by God as a sacrifice.<sup>37</sup>

Irineus took an attitude against Marcion, accusing him of changing the canon of the books of Scripture and being in contradiction with the apostolic teaching. Irineu de Lyon's approach relied on God, Christ and the history of salvation, desiring to

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where he makes a generous gesture of charity and participates in his life, raised many questions. Clabeaux notes that he may have been excommunicated by the Church of Asia Minor.

<sup>33</sup> See J. Knox, *Marcion and the New Testament: An Essay in Early Christian History*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1942.

<sup>34</sup> J.J. Clabeaux, „ Marcion ”, p. 515.

<sup>35</sup> According to Marcion, this new testament devalued the old one and provided the basis for a reform (Roetzel, "Paul", p. 227).

<sup>36</sup> See: Stelian Tofana, *Introducere în Studiul Noului Testament*, Vol. II, Text and Canon, *Epoca Noului Testament*, Cluj-Napoca, 2002, pp.79-80.

<sup>37</sup> Roetzel appreciates Marcion as a radical paulinist who, at the same time, understood and did not understand the Apostle Paul. He understood Paul's emphasis on grace, the love of Jesus, on the theme of equality between men, on the intimate relationship between salvation and freedom, but on the other hand, Marcion falsified the paulin message, or simplified it too much, or even did not understand it (Calvin J. Roetzel, "Paul", p. 230).

discredit Marcion and re-affirm the orthodoxy of Saint Paul.<sup>38</sup> Irineus argued his theology through a number of quotes from some Pauline texts. In response to the Marcionist teaching of the two gods, Irineu appeals to I Cor. 8.6, which refers to "one God the Father, out of whom are all." He pointed out that the God of Jesus Christ and that of the Jews from the scriptures are one and the same<sup>39</sup>. Moreover, referring to Rom. 10,4 He points out that Christ is "the fulfillment of the Law," not the end of the Law, as Marcion believed and sustained.

Irineus used Saint Paul's Epistles to emphasize a continuity between Abraham and Christ, showing that Abraham prefigured the Church, being "his heirs" (Rom. 4:13, and others). Irineus concludes, on the basis of this idea, that the way God relates to humanity has not essentially changed, even though it has undergone changes in the manner in which it is achieved.<sup>40</sup>

Although in some directions of understanding Irineu has similar views to Pauline, there are also disparities. For Irineu, faith was an acceptance of the doctrine of the Church and of its sacramental power. Thus, Irineu appears to be interested in using St. Paul more to legitimize his doctrine than to faithfully represent the Pauline theology. Interesting to remember is when Irineu responded to the Valentinians telling them that they had totally misunderstood the Apostle Paul and that they were in madness, reproaching all the wrong meanings given to the texts taken from the Pauline Opera, in spite of this attitudes, Gnostic valentianism has flourished, becoming seductive for many Church servants.<sup>41</sup>

In close connection with Marcion is the work of Tertullian who received a classical education in law and rhetoric and even practiced the right in Rome. In 195 he converted to Christianity and returned to Catargina, where he was made priest and began his work as a writer, most of all writing against Marcion, using the Pauline Opera in this approach. The portrait that Tertullian makes to Paul is particularly complex and varied, well anchored in the Pauline epistles and in the problems and characteristics of the Greco-Roman world. At the center of Tertullian's view is the

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<sup>38</sup> C.J. Roetzel, „Paul”, p. 233.

<sup>39</sup> R.A. Norris, "Irenaeus Use of Paul in his Polemic Against the Gnostics," in: W.S. Babcock, *Paul and the Legacies of Paul*, Dallas, Southern Methodist University Press, 1990, p. 85.

<sup>40</sup> On the basis of Rom. 5, 12-21, Irenaeus claimed that the inheritance of sin and death by humanity, starting with Adam and continuing with all his followers, was, in his opinion, inverted and resolved because the Lord of the *dead* and the *living* Rom. 14: 9) is the One who binds the past of the present and of the future, and through his divine intervention in the history of humanity he has adopted all those who are faithful in Christ and has incorporated them into the body of Christ by the resurrection. See in this regard: R.A. Norris, "Irenaeus", p. 88.

<sup>41</sup> C.J. Roetzel, „Paul”, p. 234 and p. 237.

strong connection between Paul and the Old Testament, in order to clarify the idea of salvation in history, understanding the coming of the Messiah, the proclamation of the Gospel, and the work of the Holy Spirit. Tertullian uses St. Paul's work to reaffirm and emphasize the importance of the Old Testament (I Corinthians 9: 9).<sup>42</sup>

Tertullian also insisted on the relationship between the divinity of Jesus and His human nature. The Pauline Vision of I Cor. 5.50, according to which "flesh and blood can not inherit the kingdom of God," seemed to support the Marcionist point of view and question the humanity of Jesus Christ. Tertullian interpreted the text in I Cor. 15.50 claiming that these words refer to the idea that "the deeds of the flesh and blood" are those that degrade humanity for the inheritance of the kingdom of God. Against Marcion's view that the body of Jesus Christ was only apparent, as Marcion understood Philip.2,6-7, Tertullian brings Philip 2.9 into discussion, stating that Jesus could not have been "obedient till death, and also death upon the cross," if the body of Jesus had not been made of a substance.

For Tertullian the Pauline portrait had a strong idealized character. For him, Saint Paul appears as a holy icon, as a Gentile teacher, as the most holy apostle. Paul appears in Tertullian's vision as being driven by the desire to separate from the flesh to be with Christ (Phil. 1: 23).<sup>43</sup> Moreover, Tertullian emphasizes that Pauline teachings are totally in agreement with those of other apostles. Even the episode, in Antioch, between St. Peter and Paul (Gal. 2: 11-21) is presented by Tertullian in a favorable light. Thus, in his opinion, Paul does not reject Peter for wrong teaching, but for error in judgment. Tertullian insisted that Saints Peter and Paul were considered equal from the point of view of their martyrdom, and consequently Tertullian also considered them equal in the purity of the doctrine. In this direction of approaching the issue, Tertullian was considered by some scholars as wishing for a certain "taming" of St. Paul.<sup>44</sup>

Tertullian's work has opened the way for a better use of the Pauline work in the fight against Marcion and Valentin. For these Gnostics St. Paul was an extraordinary source of inspiration and argumentation. Taken out of context, many Pauline texts

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<sup>42</sup> Roetzel recalls that based on the verse in Rom. 7, 7 *What shall we say then? Do the Law go wrong? Not at all.* Tertullian is even showing a disgust at Marcion. Despite the references to the Old Testament, Tertullian does not show an approval and acceptance of Judaism. From his point of view, God took Paul from Judaism to redirect him towards the development of Christianity. He presents Paul as *a wise master* (I Cor. 3:10) and shows that Paul does not give up his Jewish past and foundations, but rather his formalism and opacity (Paul, p. 235).

<sup>43</sup> R.D. Sider, "Literary Artifice and the Figure of Paul in the Writings of Tertullian", in: Babcock, *Paul*, pp. 109-112.

<sup>44</sup> R.J. Hoffmann, *Marcion: On the Restitution of Christianity*, Chico, Scholars, 1984, pp. 235-237.

appear to support the Gnostic view: "He dwelleth not in me, that is, in my flesh, what is good" (Romans 7:18), "Who will deliver me from the body of this death? Rom.7: 24); "Flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God" (1 Cor 15:50); "But ye are not in flesh, but in the Spirit" (Rom.8: 9). There are other texts that seem to support the Gnostic doctrine. The reference in Ephesus. 3.21 at "the age" was used to support the Gnostic doctrine of eons; the distinction in I Cor. 2.6-3.3 between the spiritual, unholy and fleshly was used to support Gnostic tripartite anthropology; the statement in I Cor. 6:12 that "all are permitted to me" was used to support the idea of the Gnostics to be free from all kinds of compunctions, from any kind of church rules or laws.<sup>45</sup>

Those who have placed St. Paul's work at the center of Christianity are Clement of Alexandria and Origen. Origen's theological system has included numerous comments on Paul's comments that have influenced the theology of the West over the centuries. What St. Paul wrote in Epistle I to the Corinthians encouraged Clement and Origen to identify with the Gnostic thinking, and this was also done by their descendants. We discover that a spiritual person who teaches spiritual things to some spiritual people (I Cor. 2:13) discovers mysteries and explains the scriptures in allegorical ways (1 Corinthians 9: 9, 10: 4,<sup>46</sup> also developing the beginnings of a hermeneutic in their support: the letter kills, and the Spirit gives life (II Cor 3: 6). St. Paul the Apostle himself was an ascetic (1 Corinthians 9) who sustained celibacy (1 Cor. 7) and always emphasized the weaknesses of the flesh and the body. The Apostle gives advice on prayers (1 Cor.14; Rom.8; 1 Tim.2), suffering, being himself a martyr. Moreover, St. Paul was a mystic who was abducted to the third heaven (II Corinthians 12: 2) and had a vision with God (1 Corinthians 13:12).<sup>47</sup>

With the introduction of the Pauline epistles into the canon, the way they circulated was affected, but even the way they were read. Now they were being part of the biblical canon, Paul became part of a biblical world in harmony with the other books of the Old and New Testaments. During time, the original context in which it was written was lost, and its content was more and more generalized. Many of the Christians who read them were expecting to learn from them about God's relationship with the world through Jesus Christ.<sup>48</sup>

Even though other apostles, like John, contributed to the spread and understanding of Christianity, when we think of what Christianity does different from Judaism, we must turn to Paul the Apostle. An example in this sense is when, in

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<sup>45</sup> Elaine Pagels, *The Gnostic Paul: Gnostic Exegesis of the Pauline Letters*, Philadelphia, Fortress, 1975, p. 66.

<sup>46</sup> Munteanu G.L., *Epistola Sf. Apostol Pavel către Galateni*, p. 102.

<sup>47</sup> R. Morgan, „Paul's enduring legacy”, p. 247.

<sup>48</sup> Regarding this aspect see H. von. Campenhausen, *The Formation of the Christian Bible*, London, 1972.

Antioch, St. Paul defines faith in Christ as the truth of the Gospel, and not the observing of the law. Now the boundaries of what more Jews considered to be Judaism are overcome, and the Messianic movement loses its sect label.<sup>49</sup> Paul the Apostle considers that his Jewish brothers, in the future, would be integrated into the work of God that he pursued through the apostles (Romans 11:25). That is why St. Paul has made efforts for his mission among the nations to be accepted by the Church of Jerusalem. Otherwise, it is very possible that Gentile Christians have cut off any connection with their Jewish roots even before Marcion appeared. Paul was always considered to be a Jew.<sup>50</sup>

The intake that St. Paul's work brought in the development of Christianity among the Gentiles without an important role of the Law has greatly contributed to the break from the synagogue and to the development of a Christian literature.

### Conclusions

The second Christian century was marked by a large number of religious movements, of various polemics between different churches, polemics in which the work of St. Paul the Apostle was often involved. However, the work of St. Paul survived these interpretive efforts. Schneemelcher even suggests that the Church of Rome would have preferred at some point to exclude Pauline epistles from the canon, but at the end of the second century it was too late, because Paul the Apostle already enjoyed a legendary status.<sup>51</sup>

Contemporary Christianity owes much to the example of St. Paul's life, the teaching of his epistles and their impact on important figures in the history of Christianity.<sup>52</sup> Pauline epistles played a very important role in stimulating and supporting the different ways in which believers respond to God's call. The epistles have, over the centuries, supported the various forms of Christian and Christian faith.

Even though the contribution of Paul the Apostle to the spreading and development of Christianity seems to be the most visible when we talk about his work, the influence of his work on the thinking of believers in general has also had an important role. St. Paul is considered by some to be the second founder of Christianity, placing a great emphasis on the role of the Pauline theological conception of the apostles' epistles and the Lucan account of the Acts of the Apostles. However, it is not

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<sup>49</sup> See J.L. Martyn, *History and Theology in the Fourth Gospel*, New York, Harper & Row, 1968 and D. Rensberger, *Johannine Faith and Liberating Community*, Philadelphia, Westminster, 1988.

<sup>50</sup> See D. Boyarin, *A Radical Jew: Paul and the Politics of Identity*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1994.

<sup>51</sup> W. Schneemelcher, *Paulus*, p. 11.

<sup>52</sup> Robert Morgan, „Paul's enduring legacy”, in: James D.G.Dunn, *The Cambridge Companion to St. Paul*, Cambridge, University Press, 2008, p. 242.

to be forgotten the past traditions of Pauline activity and the theological developments owed by a work other than Pauline. Moreover, the growing role of the spread of Christianity among the Gentiles was also due to the fall of Jerusalem.<sup>53</sup>

In order to fulfill the social mission of Christendom everywhere, the guidance given by Saint Paul to the readers of his epistles is still precious today: "they constantly remind us that all men are equal before God, that all must gain the existence of honest work that exploitation of the work of others is a perversion of eternal punishment, that war is a monstrosity, that peace is the first condition for the spreading of Christian life, and that the love of the neighbor is the supreme commandment of the divine law."<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> W. Wrede, "Paul", London, Philip Green, 1907, p.179.

<sup>54</sup> Vlad Sofron, "Sfântul Apostol Pavel -păstor de suflete", in: *Studii Teologice*, no.7-8, 1951, p. 459.