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'Paul's life'

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1 Paul's life

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Opinions of Paul have always been divided. He had been a man of conflict before his sudden conversion on the road to Damascus, bitterly opposed to the Jesus movement. He remained a subject of controversy after that event not only among his conservative Jewish countrymen but also within the early church. In modern times generations of scholars have hailed or blamed him as the true founder of Christianity, granting that Jesus himself had not crossed the borders of ancient Judaism. Obviously the apostle of the Gentiles was and is a challenge that leaves little room for indifference. Nevertheless sound scholarship must aim at balanced views that have a chance of convincing a majority of those who are ready and able to dig deeper and listen to the sources rather than to the praise or disdain of modern friends or foes. Positive or negative judgments on Paul are usually based upon some well-known doctrinal statements of his, isolated from the argument of their context and quoted without regard to the circumstances of his life and times. Instead of such more or less arbitrary opinions, to do justice to the person and work of the apostle demands a careful consideration of the character of our sources and an interpretation of his teaching as conditioned by his social and religious background and as part of his ministry of founding and fostering young churches in the Mediterranean world outside Judaea.

THE SOURCES

Historical knowledge of the life of Paul comes almost entirely from the New Testament, mostly from the Acts of the Apostles as the only narrative source, supplemented by a number of autobiographical passages or remarks in the letters of Paul (including some letters whose authorship is disputed). Both types of source concentrate on the years when Paul was a leading figure of the missionary outreach of the early church, i.e. the 50s of the first century CE, leaving large parts of his life open to speculation. In what evidence they offer, both sources are historically valuable but not free of

BIRTH AND EDUCATION

There can be no doubt that Paul was Jewish by birth (Rom. 11:1; 2 Cor. 11:22; Phil. 3:5). More precisely he claimed to be a member of the tribe of Benjamin (Rom. 11:1; Phil. 3:5), and therefore it makes good sense that his parents gave him the name of Israel's first and only king from this tribe, *Saul* (used by the risen Lord in Paul's Damascus vision, Acts 9:4; 22:7; 26:14 and with the Greek ending (*Saulos*) by Luke for Paul from Acts 7:58 to 13:9). Since Benjamin was the youngest of the sons of Jacob/Israel, Paul may be alluding to his Benjaminite origin in 1 Cor. 15:8, where he calls himself the last and smallest of the apostles and in some sense the product of an abnormal birth (cf. Gen. 35:16–20). The name Paul (of Latin origin – meaning 'small'), under which he became famous, was not a result of his conversion but a second name to be used in communications with a Graeco-Roman public (like Silvanus along with Silas).

According to Acts 9:11; 21:39; 22:3 Paul was born and at home in Tarsus in Cilicia, and was therefore a member of the Jewish diaspora. As such he visited the synagogues of Hellenistic Jews at Jerusalem (Acts 9:29). On the other hand he called himself a 'Hebrew' (2 Cor. 11:22) or even 'a Hebrew of Hebrews' (Phil. 3:5) – a term which in the light of Acts 6:1 marks the opposite of Hellenistic Jews, i.e. Jews of the motherland who spoke 'Hebrew' (or rather Aramaic, in our terms). Even according to Luke, Paul could and did speak 'Hebrew' when addressing a crowd in Jerusalem (Acts 21:40; 22:2). The apparent contradiction is bridged by the information given in Acts 22:3 (in Paul's own words): 'I am a Jew, born in Tarsus of Cilicia, but brought up in this city here [Jerusalem] . . .' As W. C. van Unnik has shown, the term 'brought up' (*anatethrammenos*) refers to early childhood and not to later education or formal training for a profession.³ So Paul seems to have come to Jerusalem as a child. His family must have had close ties to Jerusalem: Acts 23:16 mentions a son of his sister who lived there and helped to rescue Paul from a plot against his life.

Acts 22:3 mentions Gamaliel (i.e. Rabban Gamliel the Elder), a famous Pharisaic teacher of Torah (Acts 5:34), as the one who was responsible for young Paul's initial or later education (the name is placed between the participles *anatethrammenos* and *pepaideuomenos*). This has caused many interpreters to conclude that Paul had been trained to become a teacher of Torah himself. But *paideuo* is not the usual term for any sort of professional training, and in the following clause the result of the influence of Gamaliel on Paul is not spelled out in terms of wisdom but in terms of religious zeal leading to action. Paul must have been brought up in the house of Gamaliel

or in a school under the supervision of Gamaliel. There is no evidence that Paul was or was preparing to become a teacher of the Torah.

Some scholars have doubted the historical value of Acts 22:3 because in Acts 5:34–9 Gamaliel is depicted as rather tolerant towards the Jesus movement. However, if one of these two Gamaliel traditions in Acts is wrong, the reasons for doubt are stronger in the case of Acts 5, where the chronology of Theudas and Judas cannot be reconciled with the information given by Josephus. Apart from this, Gamaliel's plea for tolerance must be seen in the context of the rivalry between Pharisees and Sadducees (cf. Acts 5:17 and 23: 6–9), and as an example of the general tendency of the Pharisees to avoid death sentences (even where demanded by the written Torah), while Sadducees were stricter in their application of criminal law. Apart from this, the situation of Acts 5 was different from the development after the conflict with Stephen when the disciples of Jesus lost the support of the populace (cf. Acts 5:26 and 6:12).

After all, in mentioning Gamaliel as the main influence on young Saul/Paul, Luke does nothing more than give a name and circumstances, while Paul himself claims to have been a Pharisee (Phil. 3:5; Acts 26:5) or 'a Pharisee, born of Pharisees' (Acts 23:6). Thus, the Jewishness of Paul is specified as an allegiance to one of the three or four major strands of ancient Judaism, according to Josephus the most influential one in his lifetime. Joachim Jeremias made a case for the heritage of Gamaliel in Paul to be identified in terms of a *Hillelite* tradition which he thought could be detected even in the later writings of the apostle.⁴ But the points of contact which he described are not sufficiently distinctive of Hillelite teaching or can be traced back to the Jesus tradition which Paul must have somehow embraced after his conversion. Above all, Jacob Neusner has shown that the rabbinic tradition that Gamaliel was a (descendent and) follower of Hillel is too late and a product of later concerns, so that it cannot be trusted historically.⁵ Neusner goes even further and draws attention to certain affinities of some Gamaliel traditions with teachings of the stricter school of Shammai.⁶

EARLY EXCELLENCE IN A MILITANT RELIGIOUS TRADITION

A Pharisaic background alone cannot account for the most conspicuous fact of Paul's pre-Christian career: his commitment to exterminate the Jesus movement (cf. Acts 7:58; 8:1; 9:1–2, 5, 13–14, 21; 22:4–5, 7, 19; 26:9–11, 14; 1 Cor. 15:9; Gal. 1:13, 23; Phil. 3:6; 1 Tim. 1:13). He mentions it among those things he could be proud of as a Jew (Phil. 3:6) and as the aspect of his life by which he exceeded his Jewish contemporaries (Gal. 1:13–14).

This activity was not the result of Paul's own conviction and initiative (Acts 8:3; 22:4; 26:10) and he was even tortured in order to force him to recant (cf. Acts 26:11 with 1 Cor. 12:3). Paul was voted for death sentences against him by the court of his time had the *right* to be to conspiracies of vigilantes. Not content with his success in his activity to centres of the Jewish movement had fled in order to

As for the reasons for this, one explanation: Paul was in his law); see Acts 22:3–4; Gal. 1:13; of violence against renegades in biblical history such as Phineas (1 Macc. 2:26.54; 4 Macc. 18:18.40; 19:14), Jehu (2 Kgs. 10:10). Jews of Paul's day is documented 'thousands of vigilantes, full of ancestral traditions, merciless' (2. 253).

It is this ideal of Judaism which lies behind at the turning point of Paul's life. Paul has in mind when commenting on his reacting fiercely to Jewish opposition (Thess. 2:14–16).

This background must be kept in mind if it is compared with Jewish sources. It reveals: rabbinic Judaism did not contribute to leading Israel into the hands of the Romans. It had been the Judaea (Acts 22:3) which called for action in the face of danger. It is this strategy of humbling the enemy, only unnecessary and futile because of Christ in his sacrificial death on the cross.

CONVERSION: SURPRISE

Paul and his experience on the cross are a biblical for a life that is divided in

This activity was not the result of an office he held but born out of his own conviction and initiative (Acts 8:1-3; 9:1-2). It included imprisonment (Acts 8:3; 22:4; 26:10) and beating (Acts 22:19) of Christians, pressure or even torture in order to force Christians to 'blaspheme' (i.e. to curse Christ; cf. Acts 26:11 with 1 Cor. 12:3). In Acts 26:10 Paul even confesses to having voted for death sentences against Christians. (We do not know which Jewish court of his time had the *right* to capital punishment. The allusion could be to conspiracies of vigilantism such as that mentioned in Acts 23:12-15.) Not content with his successes in Jerusalem, Paul planned to extend this activity to centres of the Jewish diaspora to which members of the Jesus movement had fled in order to escape persecution (Acts 8:1; 11:19).

As for the reasons for this commitment, the relevant texts give us but one explanation: Paul was inspired by the ideal of *zeal* (for the Lord or his law); see Acts 22:3-4; Gal. 1:13-14; Phil. 3:6. As a religious motive of violence against renegades this ideal goes back to famous figures of biblical history such as Phineas (cf. Num. 25:6-13; Ps. 106:30-1; Sir. 45:23; 1 Macc. 2:26.54; 4 Macc. 18:12), Saul (cf. 1 Sam. 28:9), Elijah (1 Kgs. 18:40; 19:14), Jehu (2 Kgs. 10:16).⁷ Its popularity even among diaspora Jews of Paul's day is documented by Philo of Alexandria, who speaks of 'thousands of vigilantes, full of zeal for the laws, strictest guardians of the ancestral traditions, merciless to those who try to abolish them' (*Spec. Leg.* 2. 253).

It is this ideal of Judaism which Paul strove to live by, which he left behind at the turning point of his life (Phil. 3:7-11), and which he still has in mind when commenting on the essence of Judaism (Rom. 10:2) or reacting fiercely to Jewish opposition to his missionary work (Gal. 4:29; 1 Thess. 2:14-16).

This background must be kept in mind when Paul's criticism of Judaism is compared with Jewish sources and the character of Judaism which they reveal: rabbinic Judaism did not follow this militant line, which had contributed to leading Israel into the repeated catastrophes of rebellion against the Romans. It had been the Judaism of Paul himself and of his equals (Acts 22:3) which called for action in order to free Israel from God's impending anger. It is this strategy of human effort which the apostle decries as not only unnecessary and futile but also hostile to the all-sufficient work of Christ in his sacrificial death on the cross (Gal. 2:21; 5:2-4; 6:12-14).

CONVERSION: SURPRISED BY GRACE

Paul and his experience on the road to Damascus have become proverbial for a life that is divided in two by a decisive turning point. Therefore

it is justified to speak of his 'conversion' – as long as it is clear that his was not a conversion from one *religion* to another,⁸ and not a decision taken upon hearing a piece of Christian proclamation. The nature of this event is attested by both types of evidence – Acts and Pauline letters – as a visionary encounter with Jesus, risen from the dead and normally hidden in the realms of heaven. In 1 Cor. 15:8 this experience is grouped with such visions of the risen Lord as are reported in the final chapters of the gospels. This is also true of the result of these God-given revelations: the witnesses of Christ being alive are commissioned to be messengers of his vindication by God; the visions regularly aim at a calling. But in the case of Paul this calling implies an act of *grace* (Rom. 1:5; 1 Cor. 15:9–10; Gal. 1:15). The threefold Lukan report of the event does not use this term, but corroborates its essence by narrative means. The most distinctive element of the dialogue between the heavenly Lord and Saul/Paul is the repeated reproach: 'Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?' and 'I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting' (Acts 9:4–5; 22:7–8; 26:14–15).⁹ In the tradition of prophetic language of the Old Testament such an indictment should lead to the announcing of a divine judgment. Instead, Paul is called to serve the one whose memory he had tried to erase (Acts 9:15–16; 22:14–15; 26:16–18). No wonder that 'grace' became a hallmark of Paul's proclamation of the gospel which he defended relentlessly whenever he met with (or suspected) efforts to earn or justify God's favour by human achievements, however deeply rooted in biblical tradition (cf. Rom. 4:4, 16; 6:14–15; 1 Cor. 1:4; Gal. 1:6; 2:21; 5:4; Phil. 3:6–9).¹⁰ It is open to question whether this calling immediately included the specification on the lines of Gentile mission. It is only the last, less literal repetition of the Damascus story in Acts 26 which makes this an explicit content of the Damascus vision. In this case Luke seems to incorporate the content of the vision of Acts 22:17–21 into the Damascus vision, thus 'telescoping' the two events. Likewise in Gal. 1:16 Paul himself stresses that it had been God's intention to send him to the non-Jews, but not that this aim had been revealed to him right at the beginning.

THE EARLY YEARS AS A MEMBER OF THE CHURCH

In the light of Galatians 1 and Acts 9 alike there can be no doubt that Paul's conversion took place at (or near) *Damascus* and that he joined the Jesus movement in this prominent Hellenistic city on the border of Roman political influence. In Acts 9:2, 20 Luke rightly mentions the existence of more than one synagogue; according to Josephus (*War* 3.561; 7.368) 10,000 or even 18,000 Jewish inhabitants of Damascus were killed by their pagan fellow citizens at the outbreak of the Jewish rebellion in AD 66.

According to Gal. 1:17–18 Paul stayed in Damascus after his conversion but stayed there for one full year and at least parts of that 'able' time), only interrupted by a short stay of this trip to Arabia are a matter of course here. Little more can be said about the events which caused his dramatic departure from Damascus (flight in a basket through an opening in the wall) (Acts 9:25 and 2 Cor. 11:33). In view of the fact that Damascus it sounds plausible to assume that Paul's life in close connection with the powerful witness to Jesus Christ.

Upon his return to Jerusalem he stayed for a fortnight and met no other apostles (Acts 1:18–19). Acts 9:26–30 is less precise about the disciples' at first distrust the sincerity of his conversion. In Jerusalem, Jews in the capital, his opponent Stephen earlier: Acts 6:9–14). The fact that Paul was for another martyr but escorted to Tarsus (Acts 9:30).

A similar reaction is recorded in Acts 21:10–11, to Jerusalem (cf. Acts 21:10–11), where he was displeased at Paul's visit because he was not from the law (Acts 21:20–1). The fact that this was a danger to the peaceful development of the church to convince its countrymen of its truth. Luke does not conceal the tension between the apostle, too, has to concede and to accept (Gal. 2:4.12).

We do not know how long Paul stayed in Damascus, nor what he did there until his return to his ministry in the Syrian metropolis. It is likely that it was at this time that he received his craft (Acts 18:3) – a craft that fitted well in the city. It was also scope during this period of his life for education. Philosophical and religious ideas (irrespective of Acts 22:3) were likely to have reached him now and then. The ability to speak and write in Greek was a necessary source of the existence of Christ.

According to Gal. 1:17–18 Paul did not return to Jerusalem immediately after his conversion but stayed at Damascus for 'three years' (in our terms, one full year and at least parts of two years; Acts 9:23 speaks of a 'considerable' time), only interrupted by a visit to Arabia. The duration and purpose of this trip to Arabia are a matter of speculation which need not detain us here. Little more can be said about the reasons for the threat to Paul's life which caused his dramatic departure from the city, although some details (flight in a basket through an opening in the city wall) are reported in Acts 9:25 and 2 Cor. 11:33. In view of the original purpose of Paul's journey to Damascus it sounds plausible when Acts 9:23 speaks of a Jewish conspiracy against Paul's life in close connection with a summary statement about his powerful witness to Jesus Christ among the local Jews (verse 22).

Upon his return to *Jerusalem* Paul says that he stayed with Peter for a fortnight and met no other apostle except James, the brother of Jesus (Gal. 1:18–19). Acts 9:26–30 is less precise but adds the information that 'the disciples' at Jerusalem at first did not welcome Paul because they did not trust the sincerity of his conversion. Later, when he disputed with Hellenistic Jews in the capital, his opponents plotted violence against him (as against Stephen earlier: Acts 6:9–14). The Jerusalem church, however, had no wish for another martyr but escorted Paul to Caesarea on the sea, with a ticket for Tarsus (Acts 9:30).

A similar reaction is recorded in connection with Paul's last journey to Jerusalem (cf. Acts 21:10–11), when conservative Jewish Christians were displeased at Paul's visit because public opinion held him to be an apostate from the law (Acts 21:20–1). The persecutor turned preacher was felt to be a danger to the peaceful development (Acts 9:31) of a church that was eager to convince its countrymen of its full loyalty to the national heritage. Thus Luke does not conceal the tensions between Paul and Jerusalem which the apostle, too, has to concede and to discuss time and again (cf. Rom. 15:31b; Gal. 2:4.12).

We do not know how long Paul stayed in Tarsus, where he had been born, nor what he did there until he was called by Barnabas to join him in ministry in the Syrian metropolis of Antioch (Acts 11:25–6). We may guess that it was at this time that he received his training as a tent-maker (Acts 18:3) – a craft that fitted well into the economic profile of Cilicia. There was also scope during this period for further progress in secular Hellenistic education. Philosophical and religious influences which in former times (irrespective of Acts 22:3) were attributed to Paul's being *born* in Tarsus might have reached him now and contributed to his way of thought and ability to speak and write in Greek. There is not the slightest hint in our sources of the existence of Christian communities founded by the apostle

THE CHURCH

There is no doubt that Paul joined the church on the border of Roman Syria. The existence of the church (Acts 3:561; 7:368) was threatened by their persecution in AD 66.

during this Cilician period of his life. A conviction that he was called to become a messenger to the Gentiles (Gal. 1:16; Acts 22:21) need not have led to immediate action without proper preparation.¹¹ We have to keep in mind that Paul's original zealot mentality must have created a rather hostile attitude towards Gentiles (except when they decided to undergo circumcision: Gal. 5:11). The sudden revelation of the truth of the gospel in that one moment on the road to Damascus does not preclude the necessity of a longer process of remodelling and development of new concepts for Paul's future life and ministry, especially in view of the universal scope of his new commission.

The first 'parish' or 'pulpit' of Paul was located at *Antioch*, once the capital of the empire of the Seleucids, then capital of the Roman province of Syria and the centre of Rome's military presence in the East. Until his move from Tarsus to Antioch Paul had acted upon his personal sense of calling but had no accepted function within the structures of the early church. It was Barnabas who made him a leading member of the church at Antioch and shared with him his task of teaching (Acts 11:25-6; 13:1). The nucleus of this congregation had come from Judaea as refugees from persecution after the death of Stephen, and some of them had started a deliberate evangelistic outreach to the Greeks (Acts 11:19-20).

Another novelty of the development at Antioch was that (according to Acts 11:26) it was there that the Jesus movement came to be known as *Christianoi* – a Latin term, apart from the Greek ending, styled after other terms for the followers of some leader, whether still living or already dead (such as *Pompeiani* and *Caesariani*). Apparently it was this logic of the term *Christianoi* that caused Roman authorities to conclude that the quarrels among Roman Jews that led to their expulsion from the city under Claudius were the work of a ringleader named Chrestus (wrongly for *Christus* in Suetonius, *Life of Claudius* 25.4). It is open to question whether the term was coined by the Christians themselves (and only then could the new name reveal some new feature of their identity) and not by the Roman authorities, who had to register and survey any new association.¹² In any case it is quite wide of the mark to regard this designation as proof of a break with Judaism and the emergence of a new religion. The very form of the term *Christianoi* does not sound like the name of a new cult worshipping Christ: the appropriate term for such a cultic fellowship would have been *Christiastai*.¹³

In twentieth-century studies on the history of the primitive church, the congregation of Antioch has been the object of flourishing speculations. Scholars viewed the city as a melting pot of cultures and traditions comparable to places like New York or Los Angeles today. Wilhelm Bousset

(1865–1920) and his follower Rudolf Bultmann, 1884–1976, perceived the process of hellenization and its impact on the Important New Testament for Jesus were attributed to a radical theological innovation. From that time on, however, perceptions have changed. 'Hellenists' (i.e. Greek-speakers) had already played an important role in the first years (Acts 6:1–7) and the Jewish homeland had been under the influence for three and a half centuries. The impact of Greek culture had sufficed in Jerusalem and in cities near it. On the other hand, the inclusion of Gentiles in an organized missionary outreach was a novelty of Antioch that is mentioned in Acts 13:2:11–14, the conviction of Gentiles that they could share their daily life with Jews was not firm enough to warrant a mission coming from Jerusalem. At the beginning of a parting of the ways between Paul and Barnabas (Acts 15:2), Paul (son). Luke mentions only once the name of Antioch. Sometimes it is inferred from Acts 13:14 that the congregation at Phoenicia was engaged in missionary activities in the region of Antioch. It seems to have been the place of Paul's first missionary journey (Acts 19:10).

PAUL'S PROFILE

When Paul speaks of his calling (Acts 13:16; 22:3) (1) that he considered himself a Jew (Acts 11:13; Gal. 1:16; 2:7); (2) that he was a missionary pioneer in planting churches in places 'not laid by somebody else' (Rom. 15:20).

There is evidence, however, that Paul was in line with these two criteria. He said, 'I became like a Jew, to win Jews' (1 Cor. 9:20). Rom. 11:14 (although this text is often understood as a metaphorical expression of Paul's desire to reach the Jews).

(1865–1920) and his followers in the History of Religions School (such as Rudolf Bultmann, 1884–1976) regarded Antioch as the scene of a rapid process of hellenization and other pagan influences on early Christian thought. Important New Testament features such as the titles 'Son of God' and 'Lord' for Jesus were attributed to this assumed hot-bed of religious and theological innovation. From the last decades of the twentieth century, however, perceptions have changed. It has been increasingly recognized that 'Hellenists' (i.e. Greek-speaking Jews from the Western diaspora) had already played an important part in the 'mother church' at Jerusalem in her first years (Acts 6:1–7) and that by the time of the primitive church even the Jewish homeland had been hellenized (to a lesser degree, of course) for three and a half centuries.¹⁴ Those who were open to the influences of Greek culture had sufficient opportunities to follow their inclinations in Jerusalem and in cities nearer to Jerusalem than Syrian Antioch. On the other hand, the inclusion of Gentiles in the church (and the beginning of an organized missionary outreach to other regions) is the only innovation of Antioch that is mentioned in the New Testament. And according to Gal. 2:11–14, the conviction of the Christians at Antioch that Jews and Gentiles could share their daily life and services (including table fellowship) was not firm enough to withstand the pressure of more conservative Jews coming from Jerusalem. Many scholars believe that this conflict was the beginning of a parting of the ways between Paul and this congregation (and between Paul and Barnabas, although Acts 15:36–41 gives a different reason). Luke mentions only one more stay of Paul at Antioch (Acts 18:22–3). Sometimes it is inferred from Phil. 4:10–16, 2 Cor. 11:8–9, and Acts 18:5 that the congregation at Philippi became the new major support of Paul's missionary activities in the regions around the Aegean Sea, while Ephesus seems to have been the place of his longest stay in one place as a free man (Acts 19:10).

PAUL'S PROFILE AS AN APOSTLE 'AT LARGE'

When Paul speaks of his ministry he sometimes stresses two priorities: (1) that he considered himself as called to evangelize among non-Jews (Rom. 11:13; Gal. 1:16; 2:7); (2) that he preferred as a rule to play the part of a missionary pioneer in planting churches and not to 'build on the foundations laid by somebody else' (Rom. 15:20; 1 Cor. 3:6; 4:15; Gal. 4:19).

There is evidence, however, that he did not restrict his work to activities in line with these two criteria. First, in 1 Cor. 9:20 he writes: 'To the Jews I became like a Jew, to win the Jews.' This is in principle confirmed by Rom. 11:14 (although this text does not speak explicitly of a work *among*

Jews), and by several stories in Acts where Paul at each new place of his missionary journeys first visits the synagogue and tries to win believers from the Jewish congregations (see Acts 13–14 and 17–19). The wording of Rom. 1:5–6 suggests that Paul may have understood the Gentile destination of his calling as a matter more of geography than of ethnicity: ‘apostleship to provoke the reaction of faith *among* all nations (or non-Jews) . . . *among* whom you, too, are living, called by Jesus Christ’. In Acts 22:17–21 Luke even suggests that Paul would have preferred to remain a witness to Jews but was compelled by a command from heaven to leave this vision behind in order to become a missionary to the Gentiles.

We cannot be sure whether Paul considered this principle of ‘non-intervention’ in congregations founded by others as imperative or whether he simply preferred it when he had a choice. In Rom. 15:20 he calls it his ‘ambition’, and that puts the matter on a level with his decision not to receive his livelihood from the communities he served (1 Cor. 9:12–18). Of course we know from Acts of quite a number of places where Paul (together with colleagues and helpers) founded a church or – to use more modest terms – at least assembled a group of believers: in Cyprus, in the cities of southern Galatia, at Philippi, Thessalonica, Beroea, Athens, and Corinth. But Ephesus (where Paul worked for more than two years) can hardly be added to this list (cf. Acts 18:19–21, 24–7), and even at Corinth Aquila and Priscilla had already settled before Paul appeared on the scene (Acts 18:2). Can we imagine that their household had not been a house *church* prior to Paul’s arrival? In both cases, Corinth and Ephesus, we get the impression that Paul ‘founded’ these local congregations by organizing separate meetings and structures, i.e. by initiating their independence from the synagogue (Acts 18:7–8; 19:8–10). This development is also reported from other cities and appears to have resulted from either Jewish resistance, or increasing numbers of non-Jews responding to Paul’s message, or a combination of both factors. In the interpretation of Rom. 15:20 perhaps too much weight has been given to the restrictive element in what Paul says. In verse 22 his use of the principle as an excuse for his not yet having visited Rome simply means that he has had more urgent tasks, and the following verses speak of his plan to evangelize in Spain and to visit Rome on the way there. The main idea in Paul’s mind seems to have been his commission to missionary work in universal dimensions, i.e. to permeate with the gospel what his contemporaries considered the ‘Western world’ and liked to talk of as ‘the inhabited world’ (*oikoumene*), that is, the Mediterranean world under Roman rule. It is this ‘universal’ horizon of Paul’s sense of calling that made him feel responsible for ‘all churches’ (2 Cor. 11:28) or allowed him to send greetings to Rome from ‘all churches’ (Rom. 16:16).¹⁵

IN-HOUSE CONTROVERSY MINISTRY OF PAUL

If we were dependent on the evidence of the New Testament we could scarcely know much about Paul. Fortunately 1 Thessalonians, possibly a summary of the contents of his letters, offers a glimpse of his behaviour among the new churches (cf. 2:1–12 with 4:1–12). On the one hand Paul’s concerns as a teacher of new churches are striking. They offer concrete teachings in general terms or a large amount of argument against practices deemed dangerous for the church (Gal. 2:5, 14).

In the early decades of the first century in Germany, were fond of the idea of a *house church* (a term coined for the nightmare scenario and which came true in the First Century Jewish) *legalism* and (primarily) *libertinism* – an idea modelled on the one hand and the enthusiasm of the efforts (especially of Wilhelm Loebe) through the letters of Paul. The *house church* threatened larger parts of the Pauline ‘mother church’ in Judaea was the result of the attempt to combine Christian evangelism with the desire of Gentile Christians to convert to Judaism (rite of circumcision). This program of Jewish Christians of the mission was rejected and had been rejected at the Jerusalem Council. But it lived on as a ‘counter-mission’ (Gal. 2:11–14) and promised to ‘win’ the world by his preaching of the gospel. The program reached its climax in Galatia, i.e. Paul’s first missionary journey who lived in the presence (Acts 13–14).¹⁶

Paul reacted with a fierce counter-mission (much too polemical to be labeled as a chapter that cannot be dated with certainty) to discuss topics that had been pro-

IN-HOUSE CONTROVERSIES DURING THE MINISTRY OF PAUL

If we were dependent on the Pauline letters as our only sources we could scarcely know much about how Paul worked as a missionary. Fortunately 1 Thessalonians, possibly Paul's earliest surviving letter, gives a summary of the contents of his preaching (1 Thess. 1:9–10) and a reminder of his behaviour among the new converts as a model for their own lifestyle (cf. 2:1–12 with 4:1–12). On the whole, the epistles of Paul are a mirror of Paul's concerns as a teacher and 'spiritual director' if not leader of existing churches. They offer corroboration of his central message, ethical teachings in general terms or advice on topical questions or queries, and a large amount of argument against opinions and activities which the apostle deemed dangerous for the churches and contrary to 'the truth of the gospel' (Gal. 2:5.14).

In the early decades of the twentieth century many scholars, especially in Germany, were fond of the idea that Paul had to fight a 'war on two fronts' (a term coined for the nightmare of German foreign policy under Bismarck and which came true in the First World War), that is, a war against (primarily Jewish) *legalism* and (primarily Gentile) 'enthusiasm' coinciding with libertinism – an idea modelled on Martin Luther's struggles with the papacy on one hand and the enthusiasts (*Schwärmer*) on the other. However, the efforts (especially of Wilhelm Lütgert, 1867–1938) to trace these two menaces through the letters of Paul did not prevail. The only challenge that threatened larger parts of the Pauline mission field and its relations with the 'mother church' in Judaea was the attempt of conservative Jewish Christians to combine Christian evangelism with Jewish proselytism by urging Gentile Christians to convert to Judaism (in the case of men including the rite of circumcision). This programme emerged as a criticism voiced by Jewish Christians of the missionary strategy of the congregation of Antioch and had been rejected at the Jerusalem 'council' (Acts 15 and Gal. 2:1–10). But it lived on as a 'counter-mission' backed by parts of the Jerusalem church (Gal. 2:11–14) and promised to 'complete' the work which Paul had begun by his preaching of the gospel (Gal. 3:3). The movement seems to have reached its climax in Galatia, i.e. in the congregations founded during the first missionary journey who lived in a region with a very strong Jewish presence (Acts 13–14).¹⁶

Paul reacted with a fierce counter-attack in his philippic to the Galatians (much too polemical to be labelled as an apology!) and in Philippians 3 (a chapter that cannot be dated with certainty). Romans 1–11 continues to discuss topics that had been prominent in this controversy, and the news

which Paul received on his arrival at Jerusalem (according to Acts 21:20–1) revealed that the majority of believers in Judaea had been won over by his opponents or at least believed the charges that had been circulated against him.

Other conflicts reflected in Paul's letters seem to have been restricted to local congregations and to matters of less fundamental relevance. Especially at Corinth, opposition to Paul emerged, partly because of some members' enthusiasm for other church leaders such as the apostle Peter and Apollos, a learned teacher and impressive speaker (1 Cor. 1:10–17; 3:1–4:21; Acts 18:24–6), and partly because of different concepts of apostleship (2 Cor. 10–13). Even in this context influences from Judaea can be discerned (2 Cor. 11:22). Of course Paul could never rid himself of the handicap that he had not belonged to the inner circle of the original apostles of Jesus. He can only refer to his having seen the same Risen Lord as they had (1 Cor. 9:1; 15:8) and to the miracles which the Lord had worked through him, too, which were cherished as 'signs of an apostle' (2 Cor. 12:12; cf. Rom. 15:19). But the polemical aspect of Paul's theology has been exaggerated by scholars who tended to detect a 'front' or 'group of opponents' as the implied target of every solemn affirmation of Paul. Not every weakness or danger which Paul saw or suspected in his congregations was the result of a position or programme, and many exhortations may have been given as a precaution.

LOCAL CONFLICTS WITH JEWISH OR GENTILE OPONENTS OF CHRISTIANITY

In Acts we read of a number of conflicts between Paul and local officials and representatives of the Roman Empire. In the light of Paul's own list of calamities in 2 Cor. 11:23–6 these reports are a mere selection from a much longer story. They seem to have been chosen in order to draw attention to typical points of conflict.

In Pisidian Antioch (Acts 13:45,50), Iconium (Acts 14:2,4), Lystra (Acts 14:19), Thessalonica (Acts 17:5), Beroea (Acts 17:13), and Corinth (Acts 18:12–13) opposition arose from local Jewish communities who did not embrace the message of Paul's preaching and who were alarmed at the great numbers of Gentile sympathizers who joined Paul. These Gentiles attracted by Judaism had been a sort of buffer zone between the synagogues and pagan society. Now the Jews may have feared that they would lose their support. For some such reason they persuaded the magistrates or the masses to take action against Paul and his team. Only at Corinth the proconsul Gallio (brother of Seneca) refused to accept Jewish charges against Paul – probably

an act not of tolerance against Paul but of intolerance against the Jews (Acts 18:14–17).¹⁷

In Philippi (Acts 16:16–40) Paul's mission was hindered by economic interests that led to appeals to the cultural identity of the city, which was more dangerous for Paul and his companions (2 Cor. 1:3–11). The climax of Paul's persecution came before Antonius Felix, governor of the province: 'We have found this man to be a troublemaker among the Jews all over the world, stirring up memories of bloody civil wars, and he is a disturber of the peace, not only among the Jews but also among the Greeks, because he is a blasphemer and a noisy one, who could be voiced. Luke leaves no doubt that this was an earlier accusation which had been made against Paul (cf. Acts 21:28; 23:29).

FROM JERUSALEM

No fewer than eight chapters of Acts describe Paul's journey from Jerusalem to Rome. The first chapter left open to the imagination (or to the imagination of the author) the first five years of Paul's life (cf. Acts 1:18–19). It is not been invented it presupposes a long period of Paul's life in Acts 16:37; 22:25–9 (cf. 23:1–5). It is doubtful, no other explanation is given for the case by the Roman authorities. The resolution of Paul's Jewish enemies in the diaspora Judaism. His accusers (Acts 21:21,28; 24:5; 25:2–3,24) were of the same story as an occasion to let the Lord who had called Paul to his mission. A major concern of these speeches was Israel's heritage and hope, and Paul's message to his people (cf. Acts 23:6; 24:14). It is remarkably with the core of Roman law at the end of Acts as God's answer to the prayer for the people's salvation (cf. Rom. 9:3).

However, it is by no means clear that Paul's death sentence. The earliest evidence for Paul's death (first century AD), 1 Clem. 5:6–7

an act not of tolerance against the Christians but of contempt for the Jews (Acts 18:14-17).¹⁷

In Philippi (Acts 16:16-24) and Ephesus (Acts 19:23-40) it was economic interests that led to accusations against Paul which were formulated as appeals to the cultural identity of the city. Both conflicts may have been more dangerous for Paul and his mission than Luke makes them appear (cf. 2 Cor. 1:3-11). The climax of these attacks is reached when Paul is accused before Antonius Felix, governor of Judaea, in the words of a professional speaker: 'We have found this man to be a troublemaker, stirring up riots among the Jews all over the world' (Acts 24:5). To the Romans, with their memories of bloody civil wars and their gratitude to the Julian-Claudian dynasty for having established universal peace, this was the worst charge that could be voiced. Luke leaves no doubt that it was feigned in order to replace an earlier accusation which had not stood the test of closer examination (cf. Acts 21:28; 23:29).

FROM JERUSALEM TO ROME

No fewer than eight chapters of Acts (21-8) are devoted to the trial of Paul that began in Jerusalem and led him to Rome, and yet the outcome is left open to the imagination (or the memory) of the readers. They cover four or five years of Paul's life (cf. Acts 24:27; 28:11,30). If this whole story has not been invented it presupposes the Roman citizenship which Paul claims in Acts 16:37; 22:25-9 (cf. 23:17).¹⁸ While some historical details remain doubtful, no other explanation can account for the attention paid to the case by the Roman authorities. This civic status of Paul is balanced by the resolution of Paul's Jewish enemies, who regarded him as a real danger to diaspora Judaism. His accusers (who risked punishment themselves in the case of Paul's acquittal) were official representatives of the Jewish people (Acts 21:21,28; 24:5; 25:2-3,24; 28:17-19). Luke's narrative uses the whole story as an occasion to let the apostle combine his apology with his witness to the Lord who had called him and to the message entrusted to him. A major concern of these speeches is the affirmation of Paul's loyalty to Israel's heritage and hope, and of God's faithfulness to the promises given to his people (cf. Acts 23:6; 24:25f.; 26:6f.; 28:20). This picture coincides remarkably with the core of Romans 9-11, and it is tempting to read the end of Acts as God's answer to the wish of Paul to become a sacrifice for his people's salvation (cf. Rom. 9:3).

However, it is by no means clear that this trial of Paul ended with a death sentence. The earliest evidence for his death as a martyr (from late first century AD),¹ 1 Clem. 5:6-7, takes it for granted that the apostle did

visit Spain (cf. Rom. 15:24) and thus became 'a herald in the East and in the West' and 'taught righteousness to the whole world' – a righteousness quite different from that which the Roman Empire boasted of. Paul may have lived on until the persecutions in the aftermath of the fire of Rome in AD 64 and died together with hundreds of unknown believers. Thus Paul's last years remain as open to conjecture as several years of his early career before his missionary journeys. In any case, his story did not end with his death but has continued in many chapters of church history in which he plays an important role.

Notes

- 1 See D. F. Graf, 'Aretas', *ABD* 1 (1992), 373–6.
- 2 J. B. Green, 'Festus, Porcius', *ABD* 2 (1992) 794–5, gives reasons for assuming the year 59 CE.
- 3 W. C. van Unnik, *Tarsus or Jerusalem: The City of Paul's Youth* (London: Epworth, 1962).
- 4 J. Jeremias, 'Paulus als Hillelit', in E. E. Ellis and M. Wilcox, eds., *Neotestamentica et Semitica: Studies in Honour of Matthew Black* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1969) 88–94.
- 5 J. Neusner, *The Rabbinic Traditions about the Pharisees before 70* (Leiden: Brill, 1971): 'The Gamaliel I-materials . . . contain no hint of a relationship to Hillel' (1.295; cf. 376).
- 6 *Ibid.*, 376.
- 7 See, e.g., T. L. Donaldson, 'Zealot and Convert: The Origin of Paul's Christ–Torah Antithesis', *CBQ* 51 (1989) 655–82; M. R. Fairchild, 'Paul's Pre-Christian Zealot Associations: A Re-examination of Gal 1.14 and Acts 22.3', *NTS* 45 (1999) 514–32. The relevant traditions have been studied exhaustively by W. R. Farmer, *Maccabees, Zealots, and Josephus* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1956), and M. Hengel, *The Zealots* (1961; ET Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1989).
- 8 See James D. G. Dunn, 'Paul: Apostate or Apostle of Israel?', *ZNW* 89 (1998) 256–71, 259.
- 9 The wording is reminiscent of 1 Sam. 26:18, where it is David who addresses the Saul of old.
- 10 Cf. A. B. du Toit, 'Encountering Grace: Towards Understanding the Essence of Paul's Damascus Experience', *Neotestamentica* 30 (1996) 71–87.
- 11 Pace M. Hengel and A. M. Schwemer, *Paul between Damascus and Antioch: The Unknown Years* (London: SCM, 1997) 155–6.
- 12 See H. J. Cadbury in F. J. Foakes Jackson and K. Lake, eds., *The Beginnings of Christianity*, vol. 5 (1933) 384–5.
- 13 Cf. the difference between *Kaisarianoi* for *partisans* of Caesar during the civil war (Appian 3.91) and *Kaisariastai* for people who deemed a Caesar worthy of divine honours (*IGRom* 4.1348).
- 14 See M. Hengel, *The 'Hellenization' of Judaea in the First Century after Christ* (London: SCM, 1989).
- 15 R. Aus, 'Paul's Travel Plans to Spain', *NovT* 21 (1979) 232–62 and (independently) R. Riesner, *Paul's Early Period* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998) 245–53 have

proposed that Isa. 66:18–world-wide evangelism.

16 See S. Mitchell, 'Galatia', *ABD* 2 (1992) 794–5, gives reasons for assuming the year 59 CE. any non-testamentary source by any means' (871).

17 See K. Haacker, 'Gallio', *ABD* 2 (1992) 794–5.

18 See K. Haacker, *Paulus: Der Apostel* (1997) 27–44; Riesner, *Paulus* (1998) 245–53.

proposed that Isa. 66:18–21 provided the scriptural basis for Paul's vision of world-wide evangelism.

- 16 See S. Mitchell, 'Galatia', *ABD* 2 (1992) 870–2: 'There is no evidence in Acts or any non-testamentary source that Paul ever evangelized the cities of N. Galatia by any means' (871).
- 17 See K. Haacker, 'Gallio', *ABD* 2 (1992) 901–3.
- 18 See K. Haacker, *Paulus: Der Werdegang eines Apostels*, SBS 171 (Stuttgart: KBW, 1997) 27–44; Riesner, *Paul's Early Period* 147–56.

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