

**The Variety, Limitations and
Achievements of Paul's Attempts to
Contextualise the Gospel for the Gentiles**

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By

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DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this thesis has been composed by myself and that:

- i. It has not been accepted in any previous application for a degree;
- ii. The work of which it is recorded has been done by myself under the guidance of a supervisor;
- iii. All quotations of no more than three lines have been distinguished by quotation marks;
- iv. All verbatim extracts of more than three lines have been indented;
- v. And all sources of information, in both cases, specifically acknowledged.

Peter Tate
15th September 2003

All Bible quotations are from the New Revised Standard Version unless indicated otherwise.

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Table of Contents

1	Introduction	5
1.1	Variety: the Source of Paul's Model of Contextualisation	5
1.2	Limitations: the Need for Criteria	6
1.3	Achievements: the Use of Source Texts	7
1.4	An Outline of the Paper	8
2	The Variety of Paul's Contextualisation	9
3	The Translation Model	10
3.1	Formal Correspondence and Dynamic Equivalence	10
3.2	Contextualisation in Jewish Christianity	10
3.2.1	The Party of the Pharisees	11
3.2.2	The Leadership of James	12
3.2.3	The Leadership of Peter	13
3.2.4	Hellenistic Judaism	13
3.2.5	A Summary of Contextualisation in Jewish Christianity	14
3.3	Paul and Judaism	15
3.3.1	The Pre-Christian Paul and Judaism	15
3.3.2	The Christian Paul and Judaism	16
3.3.3	A Summary of Paul and Judaism	17
3.4	Indications of a Dynamic Equivalence Model in Paul	18
3.4.1	Law and Faith	18
3.4.2	Old and New Covenant	19
3.4.3	Community without Cult	20
3.4.4	Finding the Kernel	22
3.5	Limitations on Contextualisation from the Translation Model	23
4	The Synthetic Model	27
4.1	The Seed of Faith in the Synthetic Model	27
4.1.1	Listening to Human Culture	27
4.1.2	The Sufficiency of the Spirit	28
4.1.3	Early Pauline Achievements	30
4.2	Textual Approaches in the Synthetic Model	31
4.2.1	Household Codes	31
4.2.2	OT Scriptures	32
4.2.2.1	<i>Spirit versus Text</i>	32
4.2.2.2	<i>The Non Textual Source of Paul's Gospel</i>	34
4.2.2.3	<i>The Textual Source of Paul's Gospel</i>	36
4.2.3	Limitations on Contextualisation from Texts	38
4.3	The Centre of Worldview in the Synthetic Model	40
4.3.1	Worldview in the Early Paulines	40
4.3.2	Worldview in the Later Paulines	42
4.3.3	Limitations on Contextualisation from Worldview	44
4.4	A Note on Paul's Achievements	45
5	The Anthropological Model	46

5.1	Creation Centred Theology	46
5.2	Implications for Contextualisation.....	47
6	The Praxis Model	48
6.1	Orthopraxis versus Orthodoxy	48
6.2	The Liberation of Creation.....	49
6.3	A Preferential Option for the Poor	50
6.4	Liberation from Personal Sin and Guilt	52
6.5	Liberation from the Power of Fate	52
6.5.1	An Over Realised Eschatology	53
6.5.2	Liberation in Corinthians	53
6.5.3	Liberation in Philemon.....	55
6.5.4	A Summary of Liberation from the Power of Fate	56
6.6	Liberation from Unjust Social Structures	56
6.7	Limitations on Contextualisation from the Praxis Model.....	59
7	Conclusion.....	61
7.1	The Variety of Paul's Contextualisation.....	61
7.1.1	Sociology of Revival.....	61
7.1.2	Influence of Culture on Church Leadership Structure	62
7.1.3	Developments in Approach to Mission.....	64
7.1.4	A Summary of Causes of Variety	64
7.2	The Achievements of Paul's Contextualisation.....	65
7.3	The Limitations of Paul's Contextualisation	65
	Bibliography	67
	Books	67
	Essays.....	72
	Articles.....	75

1 Introduction

1.1 *Variety: the Source of Paul's Model of Contextualisation*

A common characteristic of many churches is their desire to follow the NT model of what a church should be like. This raises a fundamental problem in Pauline studies: what model did Paul follow? Since he was instrumental in the formation of the NT church, he did not have any such model to follow. Similarly with mission, churches have different views on how to interact with wider society. Was Paul following some plan in a way that churches today can hope to unearth?

Paul emphasises the ontological nature of his Gospel:

For I want you to know, brothers, that the gospel that was proclaimed by me is not of human origin; for I did not receive it from a human source, nor was I taught it, but I received it through a revelation of Jesus Christ.¹

He supports this by his insistence that it is a Gospel shared by Jewish Christians in Jerusalem.² But he does not make ontological claims about the nature of his Gentile churches or his Law free mission; otherwise he would have been able to easily dismiss opposition from those claiming an ontological basis for circumcision for Gentile Christians. Some may hold that he was applying teaching passed down from Jesus: this seems unlikely since the Gospel writers record a minimal amount of teaching by Jesus on the church, even though they sought to provide teaching for such churches. If it was largely unavailable to them, it is unlikely to be available to Paul, writing his letters before the Gospels. We thus return to an unanswered question: from where did Paul get his model of church and mission?

Until now, I have chiefly discussed church and mission, even though my title refers to the Gospel. Gospel, church and mission are obviously interconnected. Ideally, church comes through mission and mission comes through church. Church represents Paul's attempt to consider how the Gospel may be lived out by a community; mission represents his attempt to consider its presentation to a community. Church and mission are fundamental ways of contextualising the Gospel into a community.

I will consider varieties of church and mission Paul may have followed using available building blocks around him, rather than any ontological basis. I will make use of models given by Stephen B. Bevans in *Models of Contextual Theology*, formed from the building blocks of human culture and authoritative texts. In Bevans' case the texts are those in the Bible; in Paul's case the OT Scriptures.

¹ Galatians 1.11-12

² Galatians 2.1-10 cf. 1 Corinthians 15.1-11

My argument is that Paul's particular model of church and mission was not ontological but functional, and was therefore shaped by different contexts. The function of Paul's model was as a witness to the Gospel of the coming Kingdom of God.

1.2 Limitations: the Need for Criteria

I will observe some limitations on Paul's contextual approach to church and mission. I do not pretend that these are either exhaustive or definitive – after all, even limitations have limitations.³ But they may well be useful as observations on contemporary situations too.

Is there any need at all for limitations on mission? The story is told of an employer looking for a new chauffeur, who tested candidates by asking them to drive along a cliff road. Candidates showed how much closer to the edge they could drive, until one candidate drove as far as possible from the edge – and got the job. Does mission involve “driving close to the edge”, or is the task instead as described in the Pastoral Epistles (the PEs: namely 1 & 2 Timothy and Titus) to *guard the good treasure, to be sound in the faith and to avoid the profane chatter... of what is falsely called knowledge?*⁴

Paul indicates his high risk strategy when he outlines the contextual nature of his mission:⁵

To the Jews I became as a Jew, in order to win Jews ... to those outside the Law I became as one outside the Law ... so that I might win those outside the Law ... I have become all things to all people ...

He continues that this is in order *that by all possible means I might save some*⁶: his purpose is to make the Gospel clear and appealing to any cultural community. Are there limitations to “all possible means”: does he “drive close to the edge” or does he actually “drive over the edge”? At one point, he exhorts the Corinthians to *open wide your hearts*, but follows by a caution on what not to be open to – the danger of syncretism.⁷

My argument then is that while Paul's particular model was shaped by different contexts, it was not subsumed by them.

I will seek to highlight some limitations placed by Paul on contextualisation of the Gospel to pull it back from syncretism. These limitations will take the form of criteria which I consider essential in Paul's presentation of the Gospel. These will come at the end of each section discussing one of Bevens' models.

³ For a discussion on the problems in drawing up such limitations, see Taber 1979 372-3

⁴ 2 Timothy 1.14, Titus 2.2 & 1 Timothy 6.20.

⁵ The following outline of Paul's mission strategy is from 1 Corinthians 9.19-23.

⁶ 1 Corinthians 9.22 (NIV)

⁷ 2 Corinthians 6.11-7.1

1.3 Achievements: the Use of Source Texts

I will seek to use the chronology of the Pauline letters to assess the achievements of Paul's attempts at contextualisation of the Gospel. I will make my case for his thinking from the seven letters widely regarded as indisputably from his hand – Romans, 1 and 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Philippians, 1 Thessalonians and Philemon, without entering the debate on authorship.⁸ Often extensive use has been made of Acts when considering Paul's missionary methods, but since I wish to focus on Paul's *thinking*, autobiography must be preferable to biography, and so I shall lean more on his letters, without minimising the usefulness of Acts.⁹

I shall make considerable use of five of the remaining letters which are disputed as Paul's by some scholars – Colossians, Ephesians and the PEs.¹⁰ Dispute arises on the basis of internal rather than external evidence e.g. perceived differences in vocabulary, grammar and theology. Ultimately this is a subjective judgement – the letter to the Hebrews gained entry into the NT canon on the basis that it was written by Paul,¹¹ but perceived differences mean that now the general consensus is that it was written by an anonymous author, although the KJV still attributes it to Paul. One view is that these five are from a Pauline school, with some or all of them coming after his death in an attempt to answer the question w.w.p.d.: “what would Paul do?”¹² Simply to avoid becoming entangled in another issue, my position in this paper will be that these five letters reflect later thinking within the Pauline school, whether or not Paul himself was involved.

I shall refer to them as “the later Paulines”. Chronology of Pauline letters is a highly contentious issue among scholars. Those holding Paul as author contend that all were written before the death of Nero in CE68; otherwise they are dated

⁸ For an excellent discussion of these issues see Dunn, 1997, 887-93

⁹ Contra Ellis, 1989, 134, who argues that when comparing a dozen letters of Field Marshall Montgomery written in the heat of his battle campaigns with a considered historical survey by a contemporary admirer such as A.J.P. Taylor, the latter would “be generally regarded as giving a more balanced perspective”. He makes a similar case for Acts over the Pauline letters, which he describes as “often rather narrowly and one-sidedly focused on immediate issues and conflicts”. But is it not true that we meet the “real” person when they are in the heat of battle? And does Acts not reveal more about Luke as author than about Paul his hero? They complement each other: the letters are more important for *knowing* Paul while Acts help us to *know about* Paul. See section 4.3.1: “Worldview in the Early Paulines” for an example of this.

¹⁰ 2 Thessalonians is also a letter disputed by scholars, but I shall not refer to it in my paper.

¹¹ McDonald, 1997, 138; Marshall, 1982, 148

¹² Marshall, 1995 suggests this for the PEs. This would certainly explain the personal references in the PEs. My “hunch” is that Colossians was written by Paul; that Ephesians was written originally as a circular letter possibly by Paul himself in order to make his teaching in Colossians universal, hence the lack of personal greetings to a church with which he worked for three years; and that the PEs may have been written shortly after his death as Marshall suggests. Marshall, 1995, 152 refers to Warfield (Warfield, B.B., 1951, *The Inspiration and Authority of the Bible*, London: Marshall, Morgan & Scott, 154-8) who was “careful to observe that there was a process which included the preparation beforehand by God of the right people to pen the right words.” Marshall adds that “the production of inspired writings could involve a process of preparation (e.g. Luke gathering his information) and the activity of several people (e.g. the task of ‘witnesses and ministers of the word’ who provided Luke with his information). Equally the editing of Paul's legacy and the attempt to set down what he said can be seen as tasks carried on under divine overruling to produce documents through which the Holy Spirit continues to speak to the church.”

from then until as late as the second century CE. I shall make two qualifications concerning my terminology:

- Most of my arguments in this paper will stem from Galatians and Corinthians which are widely recognised as among Paul's earlier writings.¹³ Thus the five letters are “later” in the sense that they are later than Galatians and Corinthians.
- While I claim these five letters as *later* Paulines, I do not claim that them as the *latest* Paulines. Other candidates would be the remaining prison letters: Philippians, which I refer to only in passing, and Philemon. Close connections between Colossians and Philemon have been noted by many, and I shall refer to this at the appropriate point.¹⁴

Because they are later, they will be useful in assessing the achievements of Pauline church and mission in a Gentile context.

1.4 An Outline of the Paper

Contemporary church and mission occurs in a world of many contexts, and the same was true in the world of the NT. I will consider three aspects of Pauline contextualisation of the Gospel:

- Variety – shaped by different contexts
- Limitations – not subsumed by different contexts
- Achievements – challenged and changed by different contexts

This will help in seeing Paul’s priorities when planting churches and answering the question of the source of his model of church and mission.

Finally, everything I write in this paper carries an “i.m.h.o.” label – “in my humble opinion”: nothing more and nothing less. I hope it will prove to be a small stimulus to reflection on contemporary church and mission.

¹³ The dating of Galatians depends on issues such as whether it is north or south Galatia and whether the private meetings between Paul and the apostles in 2.1-10 fit with Acts 15.1-20 or Acts 11.30. Depending on views taken, dates range from CE49-57. From the chronology of Acts, 1 Corinthians is taken as between CE52-55, with 2 Corinthians completed a year or so after. The controversy over the role of Jewish Law in Gentile churches is evident in both Galatians and 2 Corinthians, suggesting they were written around the same time. Some scholars hold that 2 Corinthians 10-13 forms a distinct unit, written later and appended to the previous section. This does not create a difficulty here, since my arguments will be taken from chs 1-9, and I will refer to chs 10-13 only in passing. Colossians is taken as the earliest of the “later Paulines”: the imprisonment in 4.18 is widely held to refer to Paul's time in Rome, making the most likely date of the letter around CE60-61, with the other “later Paulines” following that.

¹⁴ See section 6.5.4: “A Summary of Liberation from the Power of Fate”.

2 The Variety of Paul's Contextualisation

I have noted that Paul does not claim an ontological basis for his approach to Gentile church and mission. I will now argue that he made use of ready available building blocks. There are two obvious areas of influence: one is his own Jewish background, with the OT Scriptures and the history of their interpretation; the other is the culture of Gentile communities such as Corinth, Galatia, Thessalonica and Philippi into which churches were planted.

I intend to use Bevans' models of contextualisation to illuminate the church planting practices of Paul. As far as I know, this has not been done before, and as we will see, it throws some new light on the situation in the early church. In the following sections, I will consider four types of model, what Bevans terms as translation, anthropological, praxis and synthetic models. The character of each depends on where their building blocks are hewn from.

- Translation
- Synthetic
- Anthropological
- Praxis

The translation model sees Paul build using core concepts from Jewish texts and Judeo-Christian interpretations, and translate them into equivalents in new cultures. The anthropological and praxis models both see Paul start to build from reflection on the cultural context into which he is planting. The difference between them is in the significance of authoritative texts in the reflection process. The synthetic model sees Paul seek to build so that the textual and cultural areas of influence are somehow kept in balance. Synthetic here does not mean that it is an artificial model – it means that it is a synthesis of the other models.¹⁵

Bevans also uses a fifth model, the transcendental model. I do not consider it here since it is an overarching model, already including the above models. Bevans describes that “because of its character as a meta-model, every authentic theologian might be cited as an example of the transcendental model at work”.¹⁶ Each section takes one of the four models under the umbrella of the transcendental model and explores their usefulness in understanding how Paul thought about church and mission.

¹⁵ Bevans, 1992, 82

¹⁶ *ibid.* 102

3 The Translation Model

3.1 Formal Correspondence and Dynamic Equivalence

The translation model is closely identified with Charles Kraft, whose essay *Dynamic Equivalence Churches: An Ethnotheological Approach to Indigeneity*¹⁷ correlates church planting with approaches to Bible translation. One approach is by formal correspondence, used by the KJV, RSV and NRSV. It aims to translate word forms of the source language into corresponding word forms of the receptor language e.g. “bowels” in Philippians 1.8 (KJV), is retained from the Greek to figuratively refer to affection. The alternative approach is by dynamic equivalence, favoured by the NIV, GNB and NLT. This aims to reproduce the impact on new readers which the writer intended for the original readers. One graphic example: when Saul’s anger flared up at Jonathan, some translations have him say “You son of a perverse and rebellious woman!”¹⁸ One dynamic equivalence translation puts it: “You bastard!” But of course, Bible characters would not speak like that.

How does this relate to models of church? The aim is to take Biblical expressions of “churchness” and translate them into different cultural settings. In a formal correspondence model, the aim is to stay as close as possible to the revealed pattern, although there are limitations to this since cultures, like languages, are not exactly parallel. In a dynamic equivalence model, the image is of a kernel and husk: the basic Christian revelation is the kernel, and the nonessential husk varies depending on the surrounding culture.¹⁹ Like dynamic equivalence Bible translation, the aim is impact.²⁰

In Paul's situation, a translation model would have meant seeking the kernel of the Jewish Christian model of church either from Jerusalem or Antioch,²¹ and translating it into the various Gentile situations he encountered. I will now consider approaches to contextualisation taken by Jewish Christianity and by Paul, and how these fit with the translation model. The basic question in this section is whether Paul used a translation model of church and mission.

3.2 Contextualisation in Jewish Christianity

The picture in the early chapters of Acts is of Jewish Christian groups continuing to adhere to Judaism. How did they differ from established Judaism after finding Jesus as Messiah? What about the inauguration of the new covenant at Jesus’ last Passover

¹⁷ Kraft, 1979

¹⁸ 1 Samuel 20.30

¹⁹ Bevans, 1992, 33

²⁰ Kraft, 1979, 100

²¹ Acts 10.26-30, 11.25-26 – these two identify with Palestinian and Hellenistic Judaism respectively.

meal?²² Should the Jerusalem church have seen off Jewish practices in light of it? It seems that they did not. Rather than presenting a new covenant to make an old redundant, Peter speaks of Jews of his time as heirs of one Abrahamic covenant through which all nations would be blessed.²³ They continued worship in the temple and the synagogues; they followed the Law of Moses, including involvement in the rituals of circumcision and sacrifice; in common with other Jews, their concern was for the restoration of the kingdom to Israel.²⁴ What marked them as different was their belief in Jesus as Messiah and the practice of baptism for incorporation into the community – normally reserved for Gentiles wishing to proselytise to Judaism, but indicating that these Jews too considered themselves as outside the covenant in the eyes of God and were required to submit to the rite of baptism in the same way as other Gentile converts.²⁵

I will consider several groups within this Jewish church, each defined by how they saw the OT Scriptures relate to the Gospel:

- The party of the Pharisees
- The leadership of James
- The leadership of Peter
- Hellenistic Jewish Christians

Their approach to church and mission may be evaluated by their interaction with non-Jewish groups.

3.2.1 The Party of the Pharisees

This group in the Jerusalem church followed a tradition of mission practices found within established Judaism. This held that anyone could join through conversion, but they were expected to meet certain regulations before the right hand of fellowship could be offered.²⁶ Their conviction was that “since all truth had ‘once and for all’ been delivered to the Jew, it must be, as far as they could understand, supracultural and therefore binding on the Gentiles.”²⁷ This was an unequivocally formal correspondence approach. Proponents of it are found in Acts 15, where a literalist group from the party of the Pharisees advocated circumcision and the Law for both

²² Luke 22.20

²³ Acts 3.25

²⁴ Acts 1.6, 2.46-47, 15.1-16.5, 17.1-3, 21.20-26, 24.17-18

²⁵ Bosch, 1991, 25

It is unclear whether the description that *they devoted themselves ... to the breaking of bread* in Acts 2.42 refers to the Lord’s Supper. This would have been another mark of difference, but elsewhere the terminology simply refers to people eating together, although sometimes it had echoes of religious observance. Compare Luke 9.16, Acts 20.11-12 and 27.35-36 with Luke 24.30 and Acts 20.7.

²⁶ Davies, 1997, 204

²⁷ *ibid.* 207

Jews and Gentiles. Key to their argument would be the “everlasting covenant”²⁸ as found in Genesis 17.10-14:

Then God said to Abraham “... This is my covenant with you ... Every male among you shall be circumcised ... Any uncircumcised male, who has not been circumcised in the flesh, will be cut off from his people; he has broken my covenant.”

Barclay notes how “armed with such unambiguous texts the agitators [later coming from Jerusalem to Galatia] could readily demonstrate that, to share in the Abrahamic blessing, the Gentiles needed to be circumcised; indeed such was the command of God in their Scriptures.”²⁹ Circumcision was expected from proselytes to Judaism, and since this party of the Pharisees was Jewish, they expected it too of converts to the Jewish Christian group at Jerusalem.

External evidence indicates that within wider Judaism this approach grew in strength in the formative years of the early church.³⁰ Revolutionary groups drew solace from texts such as Psalm 125.3: “the sceptre of the wicked will not remain over the land allotted to the righteous”, reaching their zenith in CE66 by declaring open rebellion against Roman rule. This may also explain the prominence given in the Synoptics to disputes between Jesus and the Pharisees on implementation of the Law: this was a live issue – Pharisees were both within and without the early church.³¹

3.2.2 The Leadership of James

Representing an emerging less literalist approach was James. He did not want the Law to become a barrier to Gentiles turning to God, but still expected them to compromise in some matters.³² Tradition has it that he performed a balancing act by retaining his status in orthodox Judaism and yet was able to win some within it to Jesus. The letter of James is noted for subtle references to Jesus and the role of certain non-ceremonial works of the Law as evidence of faith.³³ This indicates a less rigidly imposed formal correspondence, with some adherence to Mosaic Law expected among Gentiles, although without the demand of circumcision.³⁴

²⁸ Genesis 17.13

²⁹ Barclay, 1988, 53

³⁰ Thielman, 1993, 535-6

³¹ Stanton, 1989, 239-41

³² Acts 15.19-21

³³ e.g. James 1.17-18: ... *every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father ... in fulfilment of his own purpose he gave us birth ...* seems a gentler version of John 3.3: *no-one can see the Kingdom of God without being born from above*, with the recurring theme of giving birth, and provision from above; in James 2.14f *works* would be taken as ‘works of the Law’ in a Jewish context.

³⁴ See Acts 15.19-29 for Luke’s account of the adoption of the policy advocated by James, and Galatians 2.11-14 for the attempted imposition of Jewish customs upon Gentiles by *people from James* at Antioch.

Acts 21.20-25 suggests that those following James became significant in the Jerusalem church: the claim there is of the *many thousands of believers there are among the Jews, and they are all zealous for the Law*, and there is concern that Gentiles were turning away from Moses.

3.2.3 The Leadership of Peter

Peter occupies a mediating position between James and Paul. He is willing to meet Cornelius³⁵ and to baptise³⁶ and have table fellowship³⁷ with uncircumcised Gentiles, but under pressure, he tends to revert to the position of James.³⁸ In Acts 11.18, Gentiles are received with no conditions other than that they have received the Spirit, and Peter is prepared to put this into practice in Antioch.

But his influence seems to wane in the Jerusalem church, and after his speech in Acts 15.8-10, his voice falls silent: the openness he advocated after the conversion of Cornelius no longer avails for later Gentile converts. It is the position of James which eventually wins the day.

3.2.4 Hellenistic Judaism

Each of the above groups, centred on Jerusalem, comes under the label of "Palestinian Judaism". Another significant group is from Hellenistic Judaism, a voluntary dispersion of the Jewish people throughout the ancient world.

There is evidence of some early questioning of religious practices by Hellenistic Jewish Christianity. Stephen's speech in Acts 6 suggests that the temple was of limited or even outmoded significance. The fact that the apostles were able to remain in Jerusalem when persecution broke out³⁹ may indicate that Stephen's viewpoint was not shared by them. Bruce contends that "Luke does not say explicitly that the Hellenists in the Jerusalem church were the principal targets of the campaign, but it emerges fairly clearly from his narrative that this was so."⁴⁰ This may have affected their attitude to mission also. Von Allmen holds that "Philip and his Hellenist brothers saw in the persecution that was scattering them a divine call to preach the Gospel outside the limits of Jerusalem."⁴¹ Some scholars hold that this indicates a

³⁵ Acts 10-11: Cornelius is described as a .. *man who feared God* (10.2), a group of people who were attracted to Judaism but had not taken the final step of asking for circumcision. See Bosch, 1991, 25.

³⁶ Acts 10.44-48

³⁷ Galatians 2.12a

³⁸ Galatians 2.12b

³⁹ Acts 8.1

⁴⁰ Bruce, 1969, 215

⁴¹ Von Allmen, 1975, 327

divergence between Palestinian and Hellenistic Judaism. Carson argues for an open attitude also in Palestinian Judaism, by pointing to the following evidence:⁴²

- Their awareness that all peoples would be blessed.⁴³
- Their prayer to speak God's word boldly in face of Gentile opposition.⁴⁴
- The witness of Peter to Cornelius and his household.
- A tradition that Thomas proclaimed the Gospel in India. Luke's silence about this allows that other Jerusalem apostles were in cross cultural mission situations too.

While this suggests a degree of openness, there is no evidence of the level of questioning of the Law and the Temple which occurred in Hellenist Christianity. Instead, we have seen that it is the voice of a more traditional Palestinian Judaism which develops in the church in Acts.

Nevertheless, an older picture of two distinctive Judaisms, one looking outward and the other inward, has been challenged by contemporary scholarship and recent archaeological finds.⁴⁵ On one hand, widespread use of Greek in Palestine suggests outward looking groups there;⁴⁶ on the other hand, there is evidence of more traditional groups in Hellenistic Judaism: Luke presents the first opposition to Christianity leading to martyrdom as coming from a Hellenistic synagogue,⁴⁷ and Barclay quotes the claim by Philo of Hellenist Alexandria that "the Jewish Law is in fact a universal law, a law of nature which corresponds to the order God has created in the world and the reason he has implanted in men."⁴⁸ Stegner summarises this picture in noting that "apparently, Diaspora [Hellenistic] Judaism could be both lax and strict in its observance of the Torah, as could Palestinian Judaism",⁴⁹ although he balances this by continuing that Hellenistic Judaism "was, on the whole, tilted more towards the Greek mindset and assimilation of Greek culture than was the Judaism of the homeland."⁵⁰

3.2.5 A Summary of Contextualisation in Jewish Christianity

My conclusion is that there is a Biblical and external picture of a significant trend within Palestinian Jewish Christianity (similar to Palestinian Judaism) towards a formal correspondence approach to contextualisation. Their kernel included the Law

⁴² Carson, 1987, 231f

⁴³ Acts 3.25

⁴⁴ Acts 4.24-30

⁴⁵ Stegner, 1993, 212

⁴⁶ *ibid.*

⁴⁷ Acts 6.9; Carson, 1987, 231

⁴⁸ Barclay, 1993, 67-8

⁴⁹ Stegner, 1993, 212

⁵⁰ *ibid.* 213

and circumcision, or at least aspects of the Law. This trend was challenged by some in Hellenistic Jewish Christianity.

A formal correspondence approach in the early Palestinian Jewish church was not something which died out quickly. From evidence in Galatians this adherence to Judaism by Jerusalem Christians lasted for at least another twenty years, and external indications are that this only changed after the destruction of the Temple in CE70.⁵¹

3.3 Paul and Judaism

3.3.1 The Pre-Christian Paul and Judaism

How did Paul fit into Judaism prior to finding Christ? Scholars of previous generations placed Paul's background under the category of a more outward looking Hellenistic Judaism, but recent scholarship has concentrated on his greater proximity to Palestinian Judaism.⁵² Several arguments support the influence of Hellenistic Judaism: his early years in Hellenist Tarsus; he wrote in fluent Greek; he used the LXX as his Bible.⁵³ One view is that his churches may have been modelled on the synagogue.⁵⁴ Similarities between early churches and the synagogue included prayers, common meals, absence of sacrifices, the handling of internal disputes, money raising and care for members. But Tidball notes many differences: baptism instead of circumcision, worship including prophecy and tongues, women with a greater role, churches not formed on the basis of adherence to Jewish practices.

While some aspects of synagogue life were influential on Paul, this raises another question: why were they influential, when his own writings emphasise the significance of Palestinian Judaism on his thinking?⁵⁵ Paul describes himself as having been *advanced in Judaism beyond many ... far more zealous for the traditions of my ancestors*⁵⁶ and that his status was *as to righteousness under the Law, blameless*.⁵⁷ He viewed his Pharisee background positively,⁵⁸ since Pharisees received much popular support in bringing practical piety within reach of the ordinary man.⁵⁹

⁵¹ Bosch, 1991, 42

⁵² The most notable scholar linking Paul with Hellenistic Judaism was Bultmann; influential figures advocating Palestinian Judaism include Stendahl and Sanders.

⁵³ Meeks, 1983, 33; Yamauchi, 1993, 386

⁵⁴ Tidball, 1993, 887; he also raises the reading of Scripture in synagogues and Pauline churches, which I will consider in section 4.2.2.2: "The Non Textual Source of Paul's Gospel".

⁵⁵ Stein, 1993, 465

⁵⁶ Galatians 1.14

⁵⁷ Philippians 3.6

⁵⁸ *ibid.* v. 5

⁵⁹ Tidball, 1983, 58-61

Paul took a partial formal correspondence approach, bringing some aspects of Hellenistic synagogue life into Gentile churches. Since Paul had belonged to the party of the Pharisees in Palestinian Judaism, a strictly formal correspondence approach, as demonstrated by the Pharisee party in the Jerusalem church, would have been expected. Paul did not live up to these expectations. I will now consider Paul's attitude to Judaism after his encounter with the risen Christ.

3.3.2 The Christian Paul and Judaism

A significant change in Paul's life was due to the revelation received of Jesus Christ. Did Paul reject Judaism when he found Christ? One interpretation of Paul has been in light of the Reformation "faith versus works" debate. This depends on two assumptions:⁶⁰

1. Judaism started out well as a religion of grace.⁶¹ By the time of Jesus, things had gone downhill, and it had become a religion of works, "a spiralling degeneracy into legalism, hypocrisy and lack of compassion".⁶²
2. Paul was unhappily stuck in a religion he couldn't get out of. He found freedom on the Damascus road. He preached his experience to anyone who would listen. Those listening happened to be outside the tradition.

Stendahl brought to attention that this scenario fitted remarkably well with Luther's own experience, and suggested that scholars had actually imposed the Reformation onto the first century situation of Paul.⁶³ While Luther was 100% true in asserting that justification is by faith and not by works, this may not actually have been the issue Paul was dealing with. This Lutheran interpretation of Paul has subsequently been challenged.

Was Judaism a religion of works? Sanders extensively surveyed literature of the time for evidence of this dark picture of Judaism. One summary of his survey is that "with the exception of the atypical 4 Ezra, salvation came not through achieving a certain number of meritorious works but through belonging to the covenant people of God."⁶⁴ Stendahl writes that for the Jew "the Law did not require a static or pedantic perfectionism but supposed a covenant relationship in which there was room for forgiveness and repentance and where God applied the Measure of Grace."⁶⁵ It is difficult to find evidence that OT writers ever envisaged the abolition of the Law:

⁶⁰ The basic outline of these assumptions as provided by Bewick (unpublished).

⁶¹ Deuteronomy 7.7-9

⁶² Thielman, 1993, 530

⁶³ *ibid.* Thielman there describes the Lutheran interpretation as "a subtle hermeneutical impropriety".

⁶⁴ *ibid.*, 531

⁶⁵ Stendahl, 1977, 80-1

they foresaw that salvation for the nations meant them coming to worship at the Temple in Jerusalem, which remained as the centre of this Gospel of grace.⁶⁶

Was Paul unhappy in Judaism? In Philippians 3.6 he writes that prior to his Christian calling, he had been blameless regarding the righteousness required by the Law, and he continues as a Jew to win Jews to Christ.⁶⁷ Acts sees him remaining faithful to Judaism: he continues with circumcision, the Law and temple sacrifices.⁶⁸ He describes in Galatians 2.15-16 that it was common knowledge among Jews that theirs was not a works based religion: *We ourselves are Jews by birth and not Gentile sinners; yet we know that a person is reckoned as righteous not by the works of the Law but through faith in Christ*: Paul puts the Law into perspective, and marks out the Jewish Christian distinctive of Jesus as the promised Christ.

But if Judaism is a religion of grace, why does Paul seem to argue so loudly against those who espouse justification by works of the Law: in Romans 2.17-3.20, he describes the impossibility of keeping the whole Law; Philippians 3.6 is followed by v. 7f: *yet whatever gains I had, these I have come to regard as loss because of Christ*; Romans 7.7f sounds both introspective and conscience stricken. Several suggestions have been made as to why Paul's view of the Law varied so much – the influence of Hellenism, the difference between ceremonial and moral law, and a result of his mission to Gentiles.⁶⁹ While it is likely that these were influential on Paul, perhaps one suggestion correlates with the diversity in Jewish Christianity described above, and also explains why the Synoptic Gospel writers are so concerned with describing the malpractices of the Pharisees to the early church. Hengel and Deines have suggested that in the time of Paul, there was a “complex Judaism”, where there may have been degeneration from the covenant of grace *by some* within Judaism, who had come to believe that legalism achieved merit with God.⁷⁰ Paul may have been one such, which would explain the reservations he appears to express about *his* Judaism

3.3.3 A Summary of Paul and Judaism

I would summarise Paul's thinking on Judaism:

- Palestinian Judaism was most characterised by a formal correspondence mission approach to Gentiles, a tendency too within Palestinian Christianity.

⁶⁶ Isaiah 2.2-3, 45.14, 60.10-12, Psalm 96.7-9: see Bosch, 1991, 16-20

⁶⁷ 1 Corinthians 9.20

⁶⁸ Acts 16.3, 21.21-26

⁶⁹ Thielman, 1993, 531-2

⁷⁰ M. Hengel and R. Deines 1995 ‘E.P. Sanders’ Common Judaism, Jesus and the Pharisees’. *Journal of Theological Studies*. 46.1 1-70

- Palestinian Judaism seems to have been the most significant influence for the pre-Christian Paul, although with some influences too from Hellenistic Judaism.
- Paul on finding Christ, did not reject Judaism, but affirmed it, while it remained a religion of grace at its heart.

We would therefore expect Paul as a Palestinian Jewish Christian to take a formal correspondence approach to mission. This seems borne out in Acts 15.22-35 with Paul not dissenting to James' policy of having Gentile Christians keep aspects of Jewish Law.

3.4 Indications of a Dynamic Equivalence Model in Paul

It is difficult to assimilate this picture of Paul in Acts 15 with Paul in Galatians 2.1-10, where, instead of adopting the compromise presented by James, he writes that *these men added nothing to my message*. In contrast to a large gathering in Acts 15, he describes meeting *privately* with a “no strings” agreement taking the form of a parallel approach to mission, with Paul recording that he *had been entrusted with the gospel for the uncircumcised, just as Peter had been entrusted with the gospel for the circumcised*. It may be that both accounts can be reconciled, with one following the other in time. But the Galatians account seems more likely to represent Paul's longer term stance, since there is no hint anywhere in his letters that he implemented the conditions in Acts 15 on his Gentile converts.

3.4.1 Law and Faith

How did Paul work this parallel approach out in Galatia where his vision of the Gospel came under significant attack from Jewish formal correspondence Christians? He outlines his strategy in Galatians 2.15-16:

We ourselves are Jews by birth and not Gentile sinners: yet we know that a person is justified not by the works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ. And we have come to believe in Christ Jesus, so that we might be justified by faith in Christ, and not by the works of the law, because no-one will be justified by the works of the law.

His continued adherence to Judaism in Acts gives weight to Dunn's suggestion that *except* (ean me) in v. 16 can be translated in one of two ways, either as an absolute or relative negative, and that here it is intended as a relative negative for Jews: “not Law except also faith”: its use as a relative negative is illustrated in Galatians 1.19, where Paul writes that *I did not see any other apostle except (ei me) James the Lord's*

brother.⁷¹ Paul takes a different approach with Gentiles. If it is not the basis of righteousness within Judaism, then neither should it be for Gentiles. Paul pushes this point in v. 14 and makes the relative negative into an absolute negative for his Gentile converts: “not Law but rather faith”. This fits with the parallel approach advocated in v. 7: for Jews, “not Law except also faith”; for Gentiles, “not Law but rather faith”. There are hints of a dynamic equivalence translation model working across cultures: faith in Christ is the kernel of each but different husks are evident in differing attitudes to the Law.

Davies indicates how this may have worked in practice. He highlights the contrast between Paul

writing to the Galatians about circumcision saying ‘those who want to make a good impression outwardly are trying to compel you to be circumcised ... circumcision is nothing’ (Galatians 6.11-14) and then taking Timothy and having him circumcised (Acts 16.3)! He saw no inconsistency between enjoining others not to keep the Law, and then undertaking a vow – ‘to show that you yourself keep the Law’ (Acts 21.21-24). He even saw no inconsistency theologically (it seemed) between the once-for-all, sufficient sacrifice of Christ upon the cross and his paying expenses for himself and others in the Temple (Acts 21.23-26)!⁷²

3.4.2 Old and New Covenant

This one kernel with different husks is suggested too by Paul’s use of covenantal language. I will consider two approaches apparent in Pauline writings.

In some cases, he describes the Abrahamic covenant continuing, but extended as to its recipients e.g. those *in Christ Jesus*⁷³ and those grafted into the olive tree⁷⁴ are included, not just physical children of Abraham. This fits with the covenantal expectations of OT prophets such as Jeremiah⁷⁵ and especially Ezekiel⁷⁶, who had the hope that the future work of God in the heart would lead to a greater adherence to the existing Law – Ezekiel records the word of the LORD: “I will give you a new heart and a new spirit in you ... and move you to follow my decrees and keep my Laws”. They did not see it as altering the validity of the existing Law, even for Gentiles: Isaiah describes the pilgrimage of nations to worship in the temple at Jerusalem: “the mountain of the LORD’s temple will be established ... all nations will stream to it ... the Law will go out from Zion”⁷⁷. When considering Jewish and Gentile Christians

⁷¹ See Longenecker, 1990, 83-4 for a discussion on absolute and relative negatives.

⁷² Davies, 1997, 208

⁷³ Galatians 3.15f

⁷⁴ Romans 11.1, 24-27

⁷⁵ Jeremiah 31.33-34

⁷⁶ Ezekiel 11.19f, 36.26-27

⁷⁷ Isaiah 2.1-5; see also 19.23, Psalm 96.7-9

together, Paul highlights only one covenant. For OT writers and Jewish Christians, the kernel involved the Spirit fulfilling the husk of the Law of Moses; for Paul and Gentile Christians, it involved the Spirit fulfilling the husk of the Law of Christ.⁷⁸

In other cases, Paul describes two covenants alongside each other. Galatians 4.21-32 has two ways of begetting children of Abraham, which in the context is likely to be the way of the Jewish agitators (referring to Abraham's physical children) and the way of Paul. Drawing meanings from allegory can be fraught with risk, but this interpretation is supported in 2 Corinthians 3.6-18. There, two covenants represent different concepts of Christian ministry: one of Moses, the other of the Spirit. Each ministry is glorious, but Paul holds that a veil is required by those following the ministry of Moses to hide the fact that for Moses the radiance was fading.⁷⁹ Beker summarises well that "the 'old covenant' in Paul (2 Corinthians 3.14) is not the 'Old Testament' but a Jewish misinterpretation of the Scriptures, that is, understanding them as 'the letter' that kills (2 Corinthians 3.6)."⁸⁰

How may these different pictures be reconciled? Davies notes that the adjective translated "new" in Jeremiah 31.31 and by Paul in 2 Corinthians 3.6, can be applied to the new moon which is simply the old moon in a new light.⁸¹ at the kernel of one covenant was a heart made new by the Spirit, but the husk was different to Jewish and Gentile Christians; it is only a 'new' covenant when the Spirit brings renewal.

There is the issue of how this interpretation relates to the letter to the Hebrews which describes Jewish practices disappearing from a Jewish Christian community.⁸² Perhaps with the parallel approach of "not Law except also faith" and "not Law but rather faith", eventually some in the Law group will ask: "If others are getting blessed while not observing the Law, then why should we?" This should be left as a choice for the individual. This essay is primarily about Paul, but one possible answer is that the letter refers to Hellenist Jews who have developed the thinking of Stephen evident in Acts 6.

3.4.3 Community without Cult

Is there evidence from church life that this kernel and husk approach is the same as Kraft's dynamic equivalence model? At various points, Paul considers how faith in Christ is expressed in a Jewish context and then translates it into a Greek context:

⁷⁸ Galatians 5.18, 6.2; cf. 5.14

⁷⁹ Campbell, 1993, 180

⁸⁰ Beker, 1980, 344

⁸¹ Campbell, 1993, 182

⁸² e.g. Hebrews 8.13

- In Hellenistic situations in the NT, the title *Lord* (kyrios) is more prominent than the Jewish Messianic title *Christ* (Xristos).⁸³ Did kyrios have a similar significance to Xristos in a Greek context? Hellenist Jews in the LXX would have referred to God as kyrios e.g. *all who call on the name of the LORD shall be delivered* in Joel 2.32; Paul applies this to Jesus in Romans 10.13 when quoting Joel. It is likely that its significance grew over time due to the different contexts in which it was used: in Hellenistic religious terminology “lords” referred to deities of so-called mystery cults or other pagan religions⁸⁴, and thus Paul was putting Jesus as authoritative over their *many lords* (kyrios polloi);⁸⁵ a further usage was for the Roman emperor, with Hellenistic Christians effectively declaring allegiance to Jesus as Lord rather than Caesar. This suggests a kernel of authority and allegiance to Jesus expressed in different ways in Jewish and Gentile cultures.
- The temple of God is no longer the temple at Jerusalem, but instead is the community of believers in Corinth.⁸⁶ Elsewhere he refers to the human body as *a temple of the Holy Spirit*,⁸⁷ perhaps another reference to the replacement of the Jerusalem temple.⁸⁸ This suggests a kernel of how the Spirit of God resides with people, again with different cultural expressions.
- Paul does not refer to Jerusalem style priests in his churches. They would have been part of temple worship for Jewish Christians in Jerusalem. Instead, Paul refers to himself performing priestly duties.⁸⁹ He calls to those in the Roman church to engage in the priestly act of sacrifice, although it is of their own bodies, not animals.⁹⁰ This suggests a kernel of how someone may have access to God.
- In 1 Corinthians 5.8, Paul urges them to keep the Passover, but replace the sacrifice of a lamb with the sacrifice of Christ.⁹¹ This suggests a kernel of the means of holy living: in Judaism it was a recollection of the Passover lamb, while for Gentiles it was the death of Christ.

⁸³ For example, Romans 10.9, 1 Corinthians 12.3, and Philippians 2.9-11: see Bultmann, 1952, 51-52, 123f. See Tidball, 1983, 73, who notes that “the most common word for Lord in the NT is kyrios which is used on 717 occasions. Of these, 485 occasions are to be found in the writings of Luke and Paul, that is, in writings written for ‘people who lived in areas dominated by Greek culture and language’.”

⁸⁴ Hurtado, 1993, 561

⁸⁵ e.g. 1 Corinthians 8.5-6

⁸⁶ 1 Corinthians 3.16-17, 2 Corinthians 6.16

⁸⁷ 1 Corinthians 6.19

⁸⁸ Dunn, 1998, 545

⁸⁹ Romans 15.6

⁹⁰ Romans 12.1: see Dunn, 1998, 543-6

⁹¹ Some interpreters suggest that this is an allusion to the Lord’s Supper although no link is made to it in 1 Corinthians 11. Others see evidence of a “Christian Passover”, although there is no conclusive evidence.

Paul repeatedly takes concepts from Jewish Christianity and introduces them to Gentile Christians, although he never asks them to follow practices such as temple worship and Passover in a Jewish way. This is what Dunn describes as “community without cult”.⁹²

3.4.4 Finding the Kernel

A difficulty with this approach is deciding what kernel Paul had in mind in each case: we have noted his descriptions of church in the terminology of Judaism, using concepts of temple and sacrifice and the Passover even when writing to Gentile Christians. I have made suggestions of kernel concepts above, but other interpreters are likely to come to different conclusions. If Paul was advocating a translation model of church, he did not make it easy for others to do likewise.

This follows too in the later Paulines, where descriptions of church life may be argued to be related to the culture of the time. An example from the PEs illustrates this: an early church requirement of church leaders was for them to be *mias gynaikos andra, nephalion sophrona kosmion ... (of one wife husband, temperate, sensible, orderly ...)*⁹³ Does this mean that leaders should have exactly these characteristics in every situation, including faithfulness to one wife? Or is there an underlying kernel to be translated? There are two suggested kernels:

1. Kraft proposes that the kernel is unimpeachability in character.⁹⁴ The PEs provide an appropriate list of qualifications in society at that time to demonstrate this. Kraft asks what the equivalent qualifications would be in some contemporary African situations. These may include the ability to lead a polygamous household well, rather than faithfulness to one wife. In African communities, senior respected figures would be polygamous, those starting in life would be monogamous and those single, would be viewed as not yet ready to play a role in society. While God’s ultimate standard could not be considered to be polygamy, examples of OT leadership show that God chose to work in terms of the ways of each culture in order to attain his purposes.⁹⁵
2. A different kernel could be the ‘male-female’-ness of God. Since man and woman are together in God’s image,⁹⁶ leaders are required to exemplify the nature of God. Thus monogamous marriage in leaders is a requirement for all time. But in Western situations, marital status is less significant for indicating leadership qualities, with singleness not seen as a barrier to leadership.

⁹² Dunn, 1998, 543

⁹³ 1 Timothy 3.2

⁹⁴ Kraft, 1979, 103-4

⁹⁵ e.g. Abraham in Genesis 25

⁹⁶ Genesis 1.27

Western culture looks for different social signs of suitability for leadership e.g. role at work.

It may be that the difficulty in finding a kernel is because the concept of a kernel has the implicit notion of revelation as propositional. Instead, Bevans argues that revelation is intertwined with human cultures:

Revelation is not just a message from God, a list of truths that Christians must believe. Revelation is the manifestation of God's presence in human life and society, and the Bible represents the written record of that manifestation in particular times and within a particular society – that of Israel and the early Christian community.⁹⁷

This would suggest that Paul was unable to provide a supracultural kernel for others because it could only be expressed in terms of the Jewish culture into which it was originally given. Bevans concludes that such a kernel does not exist.⁹⁸ I will consider this issue further in the next section, dealing with the synthetic model.

3.5 Limitations on Contextualisation from the Translation Model

I would argue that the above discussion indicates a key criterion necessary in contextualisation: that it is Christological. Central to Paul's argument for two groups to share one faith is Christ:

*for in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith. As many of you as were baptised into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus.*⁹⁹

This recognises unity, and yet diversity, by being “in Christ”. What did being *in Christ Jesus* and *baptised into Christ* mean for Paul? Some have argued for a quasi-physical union with Christ, like being in the air we breathe, while others link it with a Gnostic redeemer figure.¹⁰⁰ The difficulty with these concepts is that Paul elsewhere refers to being *in Adam*, and being *baptised into Moses*.¹⁰¹ Perhaps the simplest idea comes from the understanding that in contrast to Western individualistic society,

⁹⁷ Bevans, 1992, 37

⁹⁸ *ibid.*, 36

⁹⁹ Galatians 3:26: there are alternative readings of ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ in v. 26: either as a statement of incorporation into a body (“in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith” - RSV) or a means by which they become part of that body (“you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus” - NIV). The former is more likely here, since Bruce points out that Paul normally uses the objective genitive to express the latter idea – see ἐκ πίστεως Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ (by faith in/of Christ Jesus) in v. 22. See Bruce, 1982, 184.

¹⁰⁰ Seifrid, 1993, 434

¹⁰¹ 1 Corinthians 15:21-22, 10:2

where each person is considered equally capable of making a choice, Paul lived in a communitarian society, which at its best, acknowledges that choices are often complex and trusts particular figures to weigh up and make the wisest choice for the community. Thus, being “in Christ” would mean that Christ is acknowledged as the corporate head of the community, effectively another way of saying that ‘Christ is Lord’. Wright supports this with an OT case where this idea is suggested: e.g. those under David’s kingship are described as being “in David”.¹⁰²

This section has illustrated two approaches to Christology. A formal correspondence approach recognises unity in Christ but does not recognise diversity. As a result, it is in danger of limiting the relevance of the Gospel to other cultures. This danger applies today to those searching for an NT model of church to be set into any contemporary culture.

Paul's approach to Christology resonates partly with a dynamic equivalence translation model. He advocated a parallel approach in Jewish and Gentile cultures, but with a kernel of unity through faith in Christ.¹⁰³ Groves, a founder of the Brethren movement writes that “the basis of fellowship is LIFE in the Christ of Scripture rather than LIGHT on the teaching of the Scriptures. Those who have part with Christ have part with us.”¹⁰⁴ There are some contemporary implications for this approach.

Firstly, unity does not mean uniformity. Paul allows for diversity within the family of Christ, resisting the imposition of Jewish practices on Gentile converts. On the other hand, he did not impose Gentile non-practice on his fellow Jewish Christians:¹⁰⁵

It is still possible to be dismissive of a religion characterised by tradition and ritual. Perhaps there are those within it who have always known that such things do not make sense unless accompanied by faith in Christ. For such, faith in Christ within their own tradition is what is asked of them: “not Law unless also faith”. [In relation to Gentile converts,] where a particular tradition has its own “badges” of community, it may well discover that there are those who experience faith without them. In the light of such a discovery, it would do well to remember that new converts are not required to wear these “badges”: “not Law but rather faith.”¹⁰⁶

This diversity was not only cultural, but theological too. One part of the family believed in God’s unique presence in the temple at Jerusalem,¹⁰⁷ and that those

¹⁰² 2 Samuel 19.43-20.1 – see Wright, 1991, 47

¹⁰³ Galatians 3.29

¹⁰⁴ Smith, 1986, 10

¹⁰⁵ 1 Corinthians 7.17-20

¹⁰⁶ Bewick (unpublished)

¹⁰⁷ See Gutiérrez, 1973, 190, who outlines that this should have been challenged by experiences such as the Exile, but evidently it was not.

circumcised were more obedient to God. Paul never attempts to ‘correct’ them¹⁰⁸ – as long as this diversity was not imposed on another part of the family, in which case it affected the Gospel: this seems to have been the case in Galatia. One group does not seek to make another group become like them.

1 Corinthians 12.12-31 uses the analogy of the body to indicate unity in diversity. On the basis of v. 27f (*And God has appointed in the church first apostles, second prophets, third teachers ...*),¹⁰⁹ it is rightly taken as describing a diversity of gifts within a community. However v. 13 (*we were all baptised into one body – Jews or Greeks, slaves or free*) suggests it also refers to groups within a community which are defined by their differences: *Jews or Greeks* indicates cultural and theological differences; *slaves or free* indicates social differences.¹¹⁰ Likewise contemporary Christian denominations are often marked by a particular theological, cultural or social characteristic. For Paul, the health of the body is marked by community: every part of the body is to be included: *If the foot would say ‘Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body’, that would not make it any less a part of the body;*¹¹¹ every part is needed even though it may appear weaker: *The eye cannot say to the hand: ‘I do not need you’;*¹¹² each part should have equal concern for the other parts.¹¹³ A danger in denominationalism is that one part of the body may say to another: “I do not need you!”, because it is different or may appear weaker. Paul’s vision was of a community unmarked by social, cultural or theological distinctives other than the Gospel itself, but inclusive of all. It may be that Paul’s model of house churches in Corinth was conducive to this diversity coexisting in one community. While the force of history tends to separate those who are different in the body of Christ, Paul’s vision must surely act as a counterforce towards expressions of unity.

An example of this working in practice is in 1 Corinthians 1-4, where Paul writes of alignments to named individuals, whether Paul himself, Apollos, Cephas or Christ.¹¹⁴ The reference to those who say *‘I belong to Christ’* probably describes Paul’s own position: he asks a series of rhetorical questions in 1.13 which indicate his allegiance to Christ, and this is confirmed in 3.21-22, where he considers that the other three groups in reality are “of Christ”. The Cephas group would represent Jewish Christians, loyal to Peter. Several scholars suggest a link between Apollos and a Hellenist wisdom called sophism, noted for its rhetorical eloquence:¹¹⁵ some in

¹⁰⁸ Acts shows Paul acknowledging an ongoing significance for the Jerusalem temple (21.26-30, 22.17, 24.18, 25.8, 26.21); but see also 2 Corinthians 5.1. Paul circumcises Timothy in Acts 16.3, and some manuscripts read that he circumcised Titus in Galatians 2.5, a reading held by a number of church fathers; but see also 1 Corinthians 7.19.

¹⁰⁹ 1 Corinthians 12.28

¹¹⁰ Witherington, 1995, 259-60

¹¹¹ 1 Corinthians 12.15

¹¹² *ibid.* v. 21

¹¹³ *ibid.* vv. 25-26

¹¹⁴ 1 Corinthians 1.12

¹¹⁵ In Acts 18.24-28, Apollos is described as an *aner logios* (*an eloquent man*), a term suggesting he is being introduced as a sophist, a virtuoso rhetor. Blue points out that *dunatos* (*powerful*) and *epideiknys*

Corinth are critical of Paul for his lack of speaking eloquence.¹¹⁶ Paul stresses that they are working together in harmony on the same task for God, not as competitors, but with different roles – Paul as a planter and Apollos as one who waters.¹¹⁷ It is remarkable that Paul expected such differences in theology, culture and style of ministry to coexist within one community – one expects that the contemporary ‘solution’ would be to form separate denominations.

A second implication is that unity is not at any cost. Paul challenges cultural and theological expressions which deny the existence of one family: hence his opposition to Peter at Antioch over the Jewish custom of table fellowship, which denied access to Gentile believers. If there are aspects within our own tradition which exclude those of other traditions and thus divide the body of Christ, then this must be contrary to the Gospel of Christ.

A further implication is that our own Gospel is tested by diversity. Within their own tradition there would have been little visible difference between James and the agitators in Galatia. Like them, it is when we meet those outside our tradition that we are tested about the Gospel we preach: is it “faith in Christ alone” or is it “faith in Christ plus aspects of how we do things in our tradition”?

Paul envisages one family united by faith in Christ. Within this family is diversity, acceptable because each group recognises each other’s diversity as different expressions of the same Gospel.

(*proving*) also connote rhetorical training, and his identification as a native of Alexandria is significant since the sophist movement thrived there during this period. Blue, 1993, 38

¹¹⁶ 2 Corinthians 10.10

¹¹⁷ 1 Corinthians 3.5-9; 16.12 also indicates Paul's acceptance of Apollos.

4 The Synthetic Model

An alternative to the translation model is the synthetic model, which seeks a synthesis between culture and the Gospel received through OT texts and Christ. Bevans describes it as a model which “tries to preserve the importance of the gospel message and the heritage of traditional doctrinal formulations, while at the same time acknowledging the vital role that culture has played and can play in theology.”¹¹⁸ The analogy is not of a kernel and husk, but of an onion, with the centre changing in different situations: e.g. addressing a Jewish audience, the centre proclaims Jesus as Xristos (Christ/Messiah), while to a Gentile audience the centre has Jesus as kyrios (Lord). To use Taber’s phrase, the Gospel is never addressed “to whom it may concern”, it will always have a context.¹¹⁹

I will consider two approaches to this as described by Schreiter:¹²⁰ one involves planting the seed of faith; the other is the adaptation of worldview, which occurs in the later Pauline writings. I will also consider a textual approach in the later Paulines referred to by Bevans.¹²¹

I have already noted that if Paul used the translation model, then he did not make it easy for others to follow his example: the kernel of his model is not easily apparent since he uses Jewish terminology to describe his approach. The issue in this section is whether the synthetic model is a closer fit to Paul's approach to church and mission.

4.1 *The Seed of Faith in the Synthetic Model*

4.1.1 Listening to Human Culture

This approach is described in Donovan’s account of mission among the Masai in East Africa. His way is to plant the seed of faith in the Masai culture and let it grow wild, leading to a new flowering of Christianity.¹²² He asks questions, listening for basic patterns and structures: why is man not like the wild animals around? why is there a sense of meaning when cows and family are healthy and when there are celebrations of life stages? why does the grass dry up? Emerging themes then interact with the story of the Gospel. Donovan compares this with the experience of the first generation of Christians who

¹¹⁸ Bevans, 1992, 82

¹¹⁹ Conn, 1984, 197

¹²⁰ Schreiter, 1985, 9-12: Schreiter refers to this as the adaptation model, but this is the same as Bevans’ synthetic model: Bevans (on p. 87) quotes from Schreiter’s description of the adaptation model when referring to his own model.

¹²¹ Bevans, 1992, 84

¹²² Donovan, 1985, 77

lived without the four written gospels, basing their lives on the basic message of the gospel. It was out of these communities, born in response to the simple gospel message, staking their lives on this message, and forming their lifestyle according to it, that the first written gospels emerged. Any one of the four gospels represents a step into a cultural interpretation of the original gospel message.¹²³

He gives the example of John's Gospel which he describes as "a masterpiece of adaptation of the Christian message to the Greek culture in terms of Greek philosophy."¹²⁴ He sees his work among the Masai as parallel to the early church, but not derived from it.

We have already seen that Paul expressed the Gospel in terms of Jewish culture. There is evidence that Paul also listened to Gentile culture for basic patterns and structures, and used emerging themes to interact with how he describes the Gospel, drawing upon words such as 'propitiation', 'redemption' and 'reconciliation'.¹²⁵ These words correspond to basic questions likely to have been in society at that time: what is the purpose of making sacrifices (done in most religions in the Mediterranean area, as well as Judaism¹²⁶)? what does it really mean to be a slave? what does it really mean to be free? how is it possible to have community if people are at enmity with one another?

The varying degrees of foreignness of these words to contemporary culture may be gauged by the length of time required to explain them. Following Paul's example, is it possible to express the Gospel in the vocabulary of a new culture by listening for basic questions? For example, within western culture: how may bad people become good without building more prisons? how can everyday things have spiritual meaning? why have the most common contemporary systems of capitalism and communism not worked for the majority of people in the world?

4.1.2 The Sufficiency of the Spirit

Implicit in the synthetic model is the work of the Spirit in the growth of the seed of faith: this link is made by Paul in Galatians. He describes his struggle to plant the seed among the Galatians in 3.1-5. The answer to his rhetorical question in v. 2: *Did you receive the Spirit by doing the works of the law or by believing what you heard?* is that they had received the Spirit through faith in Jesus Christ. Yet, they had sought to go on from there by adding observance of the Jewish Law. Paul argues that faith

¹²³ *ibid.*, 75-6

¹²⁴ *ibid.*, 76

¹²⁵ See Stott, 1986, 167-203 for a description of original cultural meanings of these words.

¹²⁶ Stowers, 2001, 85-86; some evidence that Paul considered religions outside of Judaism is when he writes of libation to the Philippians (2.17). See Bosch, 1991, 138.

and walking with the Spirit are sufficient for them to attain their goal.¹²⁷ He is prepared to provide them with a moral framework, the fruit of the Spirit,¹²⁸ but not a detailed code of duties, and is confident that the Spirit will give them what he refers to elsewhere as a renewed mind¹²⁹ to put the framework into practice.

Barclay writes of the position of the Galatians at this stage:

As Christian converts they had abandoned the worship of pagan deities (4.8-11) and this conversion would have involved not only massive cognitive readjustments but also social dislocation. To disassociate oneself from the worship of family and community deities would entail a serious disruption in one's relationship with family, friends, fellow club members, business associates and civic authorities ... Paul's presence in Galatia and his creation of Christian communities there had helped to establish a social identity for these Christians; the lavish attention they bestowed on Paul (4.12-15) is probably a measure of their dependence on him. His departure from Galatia must then have underlined their social insecurity. They could not now share in their national and ancestral religious practices, but neither were they members (or even attenders) of the Jewish synagogues although they had the same Scriptures and much the same theology as these synagogues ... With such a precarious social identity we can understand how the Galatians were impressed by the agitators' message.¹³⁰

While Paul writes of not depending on the Law for ethical guidance, it is ironic that he then proceeds to a lengthy discussion making extensive use of the Law,¹³¹ but this seems primarily for apologetic rather than ethical purposes. The heartfelt arguments occur in 3.1-5 and 4.8-11, which share a number of similarities:

- He asks them to consider what they have already experienced:

Having started with the Spirit, are you now ending with the flesh? (3.3)
Now .. that you have come to know God, .. how can you turn back again ... ? (4.9)

- He raises fears that he has wasted his effort, something which would have been highly emotive to them considering how much they thought of him:

Did you experience so much for nothing? (3.4)
I am afraid that my work for you may have been wasted. (4.11)

¹²⁷ Galatians 3.3, 5.25

¹²⁸ Galatians 5.22-23

¹²⁹ Romans 12.1-2, Philippians 1.9-10

¹³⁰ Barclay, 1988, 58-9

¹³¹ Galatians 3.6-4.7, 4.21-5.1

- He challenges them to search their hearts using a series of rhetorical questions:

Did you receive the Spirit by doing the works of the law or by believing what you heard? (3.2)

Does God supply you with the Spirit ... by your doing the works of the law, or by your believing what you heard? (3.5)

How can you turn back again ...? (4.9)

Are you observing days ...? (4.10)¹³²

None of his other arguments in 3.6-4.7 have such emotive charge: how moving would arguments about Abraham, Sarah and the Law be to Gentile Christians? Perhaps a contemporary parallel would be learning the grammar of the Greek text of John 1.1 in order to argue for the divinity of Christ the Word; yet the experience of the risen Christ in one's life will always be more personally convincing.

4.1.3 Early Pauline Achievements

Betz may be right to talk of Paul's "almost naïve confidence in the Spirit".¹³³ Paul planted the seed of the Gospel and wanted them to continue by themselves as they had begun in the Spirit. There was only one problem: it did not work. Barclay writes:

The problem was that such an atmosphere of 'freedom' among Gentiles, who lacked Paul's heritage of assumed moral principles, could easily work against Paul's own wishes: its inherent instability could lead either to the libertinism of the Corinthian church or to the Galatian pursuit of more secure moral directives in the Mosaic Law.¹³⁴

Why did it not work? There is no clear answer: perhaps, as hinted above, Paul was from a "good living" background whereas his pagan converts were not; perhaps the good seed would have flourished in virgin soil, but instead it 'fell among thorns', confusing voices from outside the community, which grew up with it and choked the plant; perhaps the seed should have been nurtured for a while before it was allowed to grow wild.

¹³² This is a possible reading of this verse. One manuscript (P46) actually has this verse as a continuation of the question in v. 9: "How can you turn back to ..., by observing days ...?" See Bruce, 1982, 205 for a fuller discussion.

¹³³ Barclay, 1988, 232: there he quotes Betz H.D. 1974 'Spirit, Freedom and Law. Paul's Message to the Galatian Churches'. Svensk Exegetisk Årsbok 39, 145-160

¹³⁴ Barclay, 1988, 232

Bevans writes of a warning that “the inculturation of theology cannot be limited to the ‘first insertion’ of a faith into a culture. The contextualisation of theology must become an attitude.”¹³⁵ But how should the seed have been nurtured? I will consider two ways explicit in the later Paulines: one is the use of texts; the other is the adaptation of worldview.

4.2 Textual Approaches in the Synthetic Model

In the later Paulines, a desire for church directives from written texts becomes apparent. These have two sources: one is household codes; the other is the OT Scriptures.

4.2.1 Household Codes

One sign of a new approach to texts comes from the introduction in the later Paulines of the metaphor of the church as the household of God.¹³⁶ The household was something larger than a contemporary nuclear family, including slaves, workers, tenants etc. Secular ethicists believed that it formed the fundamental building block of society,¹³⁷ and subsequently developed codes for different groups in it. Similarly Colossians 3.18-4.1 and Ephesians 5.22-33 have Christian ethical codes for household groups such as husbands and wives, parents and children, and masters and slaves.

In the PEs, such codes are further extended for non-household roles in the church e.g. men and women, overseers, deacons and deaconesses.¹³⁸ The aim of the church was to *lead a quiet and peaceable life* in the present age.¹³⁹ Dibelius saw this acceptance of societal values as evidence that the church had become middle class. This was in contrast to Paul's reminiscence in 2 Corinthians 11.23f of earlier days when he constantly faced danger:

*.. in danger from rivers, danger from bandits, danger from my own people, danger from Gentiles, danger in the city, danger in the wilderness, danger at sea, danger from false brothers and sisters ...*¹⁴⁰

Towner argues for a deeper motive for the bourgeois lifestyle – that their manner of living was intended to promote the Gospel.¹⁴¹ He points to evidence such as the role of the outsider in the PEs,¹⁴² and the emphasis on salvation as a present reality, as a

¹³⁵ Bevans, 1992, 87

¹³⁶ Ephesians 2.19, 1 Timothy 3.18: perhaps the idea is in its infancy in Galatians 6.10, although it is unclear whether Paul is referring to a church there.

¹³⁷ Towner, 1993, 417

¹³⁸ e.g. 1 Timothy 2.8-3.13, Titus 2.1-3.8

¹³⁹ 1 Timothy 2.2

¹⁴⁰ 2 Corinthians 11.26

¹⁴¹ Towner, 1989, 253

¹⁴² 1 Timothy 3.7, 5.14, 6.1; Titus 2.9, 3.2, 8

‘now and not yet’ phenomenon.¹⁴³ He argues that use of the household code ethic “teaches that institutions of society are necessary avenues for the missionary enterprise, and as far as possible, the Church ought to move along these avenues according to society’s rules.”¹⁴⁴

4.2.2 OT Scriptures

This openness to texts continues in the attitude found in the PEs to OT Scriptures: the foundational writings of the Scriptures is the Law, which is considered good *if one uses it properly*¹⁴⁵ and there is a call for devotion to public reading of the Scriptures,¹⁴⁶ since it is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness.¹⁴⁷ Is it feasible to build a model of church and mission upon texts? Is there a difference between this and the formal correspondence approach of the Jerusalem church? Is there evidence in Paul's earlier writings of how Scripture can be “used properly”?

4.2.2.1 Spirit versus Text

There is no evidence of the use of household codes in earlier letters, but Paul makes ample reference to the Scriptures, particularly the Law. In Galatians, he contrasts life according to the flesh with life according to the Spirit,¹⁴⁸ and it is remarkable that he goes on to cite observing the Law as an example of the flesh.¹⁴⁹ Barclay suggests that Paul views the flesh as “what is merely human”, belonging to the present evil age, at best inadequate and at worst thoroughly tainted by sin,¹⁵⁰ and that Judaism is a “merely human religion”. This is supported by him describing it as zeal for *the traditions of my ancestors* in contrast to the direct divine revelation in his new calling.¹⁵¹ Later he contrasts the Law with the divine activity displayed in the gift of the Spirit, an eschatological token of the age to come.¹⁵² He presents the idea of the Law like a guardian for children who have not yet matured, but that the adult position is life by the Spirit.¹⁵³

Paul draws out this sharp contrast between Law and Spirit in Romans 7-8. *There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free from the law of sin and of death*¹⁵⁴ is often read in light

¹⁴³ Towner, 1989, 119

¹⁴⁴ *ibid.*, 256

¹⁴⁵ 1 Timothy 1.8 (NIV)

¹⁴⁶ 1 Timothy 4.13

¹⁴⁷ 2 Timothy 3.16

¹⁴⁸ cf. also Romans 8.5-18

¹⁴⁹ Galatians 3.1-5

¹⁵⁰ Barclay, 1988, 206-7

¹⁵¹ Galatians 1.14-16

¹⁵² Galatians 3.5, 4.4-6

¹⁵³ Galatians 4.1-4

¹⁵⁴ Romans 8.1-2

of conversion, but it also describes continuing in the Christian life: *so that we are slaves not under the old written code but in the new life of the Spirit*.¹⁵⁵ The contrast is between two ways to attain the goal of holiness:¹⁵⁶ one is external, the other internal. The external way recognises that good people do good things and then says “If we also do these good things, then we too will become good”. The internal way instead says that “the good person brings good things out of the good stored up in his heart.”¹⁵⁷ Paul illustrates this from marriage: a woman with two husbands, one represents Law (the external way), the other Christ (the internal way).¹⁵⁸ He describes the external way:¹⁵⁹

- One seeks to follow Law.
- When Law hits a person, it brings out the worst in them.
- They start to realise what they are really like – they realise they are sinners.

For Paul, frustration with the external way leads to the internal way:¹⁶⁰

- One realises they are a sinner, then they realise too what God is like – that he loves sinners.
- They begin to be thankful, and start to want to do the right thing.
- Life becomes fruitful and the Law even ends up being fulfilled.

If both husbands are alive together then it is adultery. Likewise the believer may not live both by Law and Christ: Law must pass away first and then Christ comes afterwards.

Paul refers to this in Galatians as *walking by the Spirit*¹⁶¹ it depends on relationship, not external commands. He reminds the Galatians that the entry point to this relationship is faith, and that it is a journey: they are to continue in faith, just as they had started off.¹⁶² God has richly supplied them with the Spirit: as well as the working of miracles¹⁶³, they could look back on their experience of acceptance by God,¹⁶⁴ of sonship to God,¹⁶⁵ of liberty.¹⁶⁶ Paul’s point is that “the reality of God’s adoption/acceptance reaches to the motivating and emotive centre of the person”.¹⁶⁷

¹⁵⁵ Romans 7.6

¹⁵⁶ Romans 6.22

¹⁵⁷ cf. Luke 6.45

¹⁵⁸ Romans 7.1-6

¹⁵⁹ Romans 7.18-24

¹⁶⁰ Romans 7.22-8.4

¹⁶¹ Galatians 5.16-18 (RSV)

¹⁶² Galatians 3.1-5

¹⁶³ Galatians 3.5

¹⁶⁴ Galatians 3.14

¹⁶⁵ Galatians 4.6

¹⁶⁶ Galatians 5.1, 13; Dunn, 1993, 295-6

¹⁶⁷ *ibid.* 219

Now they are to look to the same experience for guidance for daily living. Life by the Spirit has set Paul free from the letter of the Law. The driving force is no longer obedience to a written Law, but to the Law written by the Spirit onto the heart.

4.2.2.2 The Non Textual Source of Paul's Gospel

The above would suggest that the source of Paul's Gospel was Spirit rather than text. No-one would argue that Paul was not greatly influenced by Scripture personally, especially when he began to read it with reference to Christ. But as well as the negative imagery of the Law as a bad husband, some scholars cite further evidence to suggest that he did not give it to his Gentile churches as a building block for their edification.¹⁶⁸

- Von Harnack notes that in the Pauline corpus (which for him, excludes the PEs), there is hardly any mention of the OT except in the four letters where the great question of faith, 'Law and Gospel' is still disputed: Galatians, Romans, 1 & 2 Corinthians.¹⁶⁹ Within these four, there is a paucity of Scripture quotations¹⁷⁰ in Paul's ethical sections, with most occurring in apologetic sections, where Paul explains and defends his doctrine.¹⁷¹ He notes that when Paul recounts what is used at Corinth – a hymn, a lesson, a tongue, an interpretation – that the reading of Scripture is missing.¹⁷²
- There are strong suggestions that other sources exert greater influence than Scripture on Paul's ethics.¹⁷³ The teachings of Jesus are seen in Paul's teaching on divorce, treating enemies, love and paying taxes.¹⁷⁴ Pagan law also features e.g. Roman law as the key factor in Paul's decision to expel the sinner in 1 Corinthians 5.¹⁷⁵ Dodd observes that "the ethical teaching given by the early church (especially Paul) was pretty closely related to the general movement in

¹⁶⁸ See Rosner, 1995 10-19 for a full discussion of these.

¹⁶⁹ Von Harnack, 1928, 28-33

¹⁷⁰ Rosner, 1994, 13-14 discusses statistics: "Of the approximately 100 instances of Scriptural citation in the traditional Pauline corpus, less than 20% occur in the ethical sections of the epistles. Since Paul's ethics comprise, by any standard, significantly more than 1/5 of his letters then one is justified in speaking about the relative paucity of Scriptural citation."

¹⁷¹ *ibid.* 21-2 discusses the distinction in Pauline writings between ethical and doctrinal sections, which some may consider arbitrary. He points to the "perspicacious twofold structure of Romans and Galatians, the first part pertaining primarily to matters of belief, the second to questions of conduct, indicates that in Paul's mind the two, though related, are not indistinguishable." He qualifies this by continuing that "when we speak of Paul's ethics ... we are in no way endorsing a deep cleavage from his doctrine". The two are separate yet interconnected.

¹⁷² 1 Corinthians 14.26

¹⁷³ Rosner, 1994, 12 gives the example of 1 Corinthians 5.1.

¹⁷⁴ Kim, 1993, 474-80: 1 Corinthians 7.10-11 // Mark 10.9-12 // Matthew 5.32 on divorce; Romans 12.14-21 // Matthew 5 // Luke 6 on treating enemies; Romans 13.8-10 // Galatians 5.14 // Mark 12.28-34 on love; Romans 13.7 // Mark 12.7 on paying taxes.

¹⁷⁵ Rosner, 1994, 12

Greco-Roman society towards the improvement of public morals as it was undertaken in the first century by various agencies.”¹⁷⁶

- Paul openly abrogates many parts of the Law, such as circumcision, food laws¹⁷⁷ and Jewish festival days and Sabbaths.¹⁷⁸ Dunn comments that “Paul has abandoned much of the Old Testament.”¹⁷⁹

If it is not Scriptures, what foundation does Paul use for his churches? Paul himself writes that he expected his converts to be ‘taught by God’.¹⁸⁰ Von Harnack argues that “Paul derived his inner life and growth from faith in the crucified and risen Christ, from the Spirit whom he sent and from prayer to God the Father”,¹⁸¹ and continues that he “based his mission and teaching wholly and completely on the gospel and expects edification to come from it and from the Spirit accompanying the gospel.”¹⁸² Schnabel suggests a number of motivations for church and mission given by Paul to his Gentile converts which seem to only require experience of the gracious acts of God:¹⁸³

- Christological, relating to Christ’s incarnation and death: *For the love of Christ urges us on ...; For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ ...*¹⁸⁴
- Salvation-historical, belonging to the time between the ages, using the indicative and imperative argument “become what you really are”: *If we live by the Spirit [indicative], let us also walk by the Spirit [imperative]*.¹⁸⁵
- Pneumatological: the Spirit as the presence of Christ in the life of the believer: *Now we have received ... the Spirit that is from God ... we speak ... in words ... taught by the Spirit ...*¹⁸⁶
- Ecclesiological: the mutual responsibility of believers to one another: *whatever you do, do everything for the glory of God. Give no offence to Jews*

¹⁷⁶ Rosner, 1994, 16 quotes Dodd, C.H. 1951 *Gospel and Law*. New York: Columbia University Press 23

¹⁷⁷ Romans 14.14, 20

¹⁷⁸ 1 Corinthians 7.19; Romans 14.14, 20; Romans 14.5, Galatians 4.9-10

¹⁷⁹ In Rosner, 1994, 11, he quotes Dunn, J.N.D. 1987 *The Living Word* London: SCM 45. Rosner (fn. 11) adds that “Dunn himself does not deduce from this that the Scriptures are no longer a valuable moral guide for Paul.”

¹⁸⁰ 1 Thessalonians 4.9

¹⁸¹ Von Harnack, 1928, 27-28

¹⁸² *ibid.* 44

¹⁸³ Schnabel, 1992, 293-4

¹⁸⁴ 1 Corinthians 8.11-12, 2 Corinthians 5.14-15, 8.9

¹⁸⁵ Romans 12.2, 1 Corinthians 5.7, Galatians 5.1,25 (RSV) – see Rosner, 1995, 17-20

¹⁸⁶ 1 Corinthians 2.12f

*or to Greeks or to the church of God, just as I try to please everyone in everything I do ...*¹⁸⁷

- Eschatological: the believer's hope for the future: *do not pronounce judgement before the time, before the Lord comes ... then each one will receive commendation from God.*¹⁸⁸

It seems then that a textual approach advocated in the PEs is not supported in Paul's undisputed letters. Does this life of faith stand in contrast to the textual approach in the PEs? Is a lifestyle based on the Spirit writing the Gospel on human hearts realistic for contemporary life? Or can there be a synthesis between Spirit and text – the OT in Paul's case and the Bible in ours?

4.2.2.3 The Textual Source of Paul's Gospel

Several comments are required on the above arguments.¹⁸⁹ The first issue is the paucity of Scripture quotations. The true test of Paul's OT usage is not how often he quotes it for ethics in the church community but to ask to what extent it is the basis of his ethics. Rosner considers in detail 1 Corinthians 5-7 which deals with major topics such as incest, exclusion, greed, sexual immorality, the state and marriage. This is text is chosen because at first sight it does not appear to have substantial roots in OT Law.¹⁹⁰ Since Paul considers it has universal relevance,¹⁹¹ it is particularly appropriate to use in considering how his Law-free approach in Romans and Galatians worked in practice. Rosner notes how it is linked implicitly with the Pentateuch in particular:

In 1 Corinthians 5 a case of incest is condemned and discipline employed because of the teaching of the pentateuchal covenant and temple exclusion. In 6.1-11 going to court before unbelievers is prohibited with the Scriptures' teaching on judges in mind. In 6.12-20 going to prostitutes is opposed using the Scriptural doctrine of the Lord as the believer's husband and master, and with advice which recalls early Jewish interpretation of the Genesis 39 story of Joseph fleeing Potiphar's wife. And in 7.1-40 several key texts from the Torah (as understood by much early Jewish interpretation) inform what is said about marriage.¹⁹²

Rosner sees this as evidence that "in spite of the relatively few quotations of Scripture ... [they] are nevertheless a crucial and formative source for Paul's ethics."¹⁹³ He lists

¹⁸⁷ 1 Corinthians 8.9-13, 10.31-32

¹⁸⁸ 1 Corinthians 3.11-14, 4.5

¹⁸⁹ For most of these points, see further in Rosner, 1994, 182-191

¹⁹⁰ *ibid.* p23

¹⁹¹ 1 Corinthians 4.17, 7.17

¹⁹² Rosner, 1994, 8-9

¹⁹³ *ibid.* 24

several occasions where Paul confesses his profound dependence as a Christian ethical teacher upon the Scriptures¹⁹⁴ e.g. in 1 Corinthians 4.6, the community is to learn from the example of Paul and Apollos to take *nothing beyond what is written*: the most natural interpretation is that this refers to Scripture, particularly quotations he has used in his argument up to that point.¹⁹⁵ In 9.10 he describes Scripture as that which was *written for our sake*.¹⁹⁶

The second issue is the use of sources other than Scripture. It is true that Paul used other sources such as the teachings of Jesus and secular ethics. However, much of Jesus' teaching is simply a particular elaboration of Scripture, and while Paul made use of what he found to be true and profitable in paganism and philosophy, this had an apologetic role similar to Acts 17, but with its basis in the God of Israel.

This leads on to the third issue, as to how to consider Paul's negative statements about the Law, especially if we argue that it has been so influential in his teaching. Paul certainly saw some customs as not binding, but only those which restricted the people of God to the Jews by signifying distinctions between the Jews and the Gentiles. This explains his negative statements on circumcision, food laws etc., but not all of them e.g. Law as a "bad husband" in Romans 7-8.

How did Paul view the Law? The new perspective on Paul is helpful in understanding that the OT, including its ethics, is rooted in the redemptive nature of God¹⁹⁷ e.g. the Ten Commandments comes in the context of liberation: "I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery;"¹⁹⁸ in 1 Samuel 12.20-25, the command to serve God is reinforced with the reminder to "consider what great things he has done for you". Making a dichotomy between Law based and Gospel based ethic is a false one. But it is something which the pre-Christian Paul may himself have done: I have argued this earlier as a source of Paul's sometimes negative view of the Law.¹⁹⁹ Paul now saw them as the same Gospel: in Galatians 3.8 he refers to his Gospel also announced in advance to Abraham. Both are ultimately based on the redemptive nature of God.

The basis for Paul's model of Christian community is the same as the basis of Jewish Law. Paul has not reached for the solution as found in the OT Scriptures when giving it to Gentiles. He writes to Jewish Christians in Rome²⁰⁰ that knowing the OT Scriptures is an advantage in that it is a means to *realising* the Gospel, but it is not an *end* in itself.²⁰¹ Paul seeks to implement Christian living which at its centre depends

¹⁹⁴ *ibid.* 191

¹⁹⁵ *ibid.* 192 cites Isaiah 29.14 in 1.19, Jeremiah 9.23f in 1.30f, Job 5.13 & Psalm 94.11 in 3.19-20.

¹⁹⁶ *ibid.* other evidence he presents is found in 10.6 & 11, 14.34 and Romans 7.12, 15.4.

¹⁹⁷ Rosner, 1995, 87

¹⁹⁸ Exodus 20.2

¹⁹⁹ See section 3.3.2: "The Christian Paul and Judaism"

²⁰⁰ Romans 3.1-2

²⁰¹ Romans 3.9-20

upon the Gospel of the grace of God to sinners, and walking with the Spirit in light of this. He is able to use OT Scriptures in his thinking because it shares the same centre.

4.2.3 Limitations on Contextualisation from Texts

I would argue that the above discussion indicates two criteria necessary in contextualisation: that it is to be both Biblical and spiritual. The issue is how they interact e.g. in Galatia, a formal correspondence approach was Biblical without being spiritual; and Paul's problem in Corinth was that they were spiritual without being Biblical.

In Paul's and in contemporary situations, authoritative texts feature prominently in church and mission. In Corinth, the Gospel is at the forefront of Paul's approach, but there is an implicit role for the Jewish authoritative text, as an example of the Gospel within Jewish culture. In Galatia, Paul's Spirit based Gospel approach is at odds with the authoritative text of his day: it is ironic then that letters like Galatians warning against authoritative texts have themselves become authoritative texts. Imposing such texts may bring fear, and fear brings restraint, but restraint does not bring change. The Spirit of grace and thanksgiving brings change.

Thus Paul saw a role for non-Gentile texts in a Gentile culture. I refer back to the synthetic model: how does this relate to the synthesis of the Bible with contemporary cultures? Bevans argues that

each culture has something to give to the other, and each culture has something from which it needs to be exorcised. ... In terms of theology, it will be recognised that it is not enough to extol one's own culture as the only place where God can speak to a particular cultural subject. One can also hear God speaking in other cultures and – perhaps in a particular way – in the cultures in which the Hebrew and Christian scriptures were written.²⁰²

How do we use Biblical texts? In one sense our own experience of the Gospel is parallel to Biblical experience, particularly when considering the early church; but in another sense it is not. Bevans suggests that “revelation is both something finished, once and for all, of a particular place *and* something ongoing and present, operative in all cultures and un-circumscribable in every way.”²⁰³

Pinnock highlights the sense in which Biblical and contemporary experiences of the Gospel are not parallel.²⁰⁴ He points to the uniqueness of Biblical texts by considering that within Christianity, revelation takes the form of salvation history e.g. the incarnation. There was a need for this to be captured and fixed in written documents

²⁰² Bevans, 1992, 84

²⁰³ *ibid.* 84-5

²⁰⁴ Pinnock, 1993, 11-12

so that it could be passed on in a stable, permanent form. This helps to explain the emphasis in the PEs on preservation of traditions and texts, since they would be recognised as a source of salvation history at a time when those who had known Christ were diminishing in the life of the church.

In another sense, our own experience is parallel. Paul contrasts life by the Spirit with a formal correspondence approach to the OT Scriptures. But he does not contrast life by the Spirit with the Gospel which forms the basis of OT Scriptures. We can use Biblical texts to understand the revelation of the Gospel to earlier cultures: how the Spirit changed them, and how sometimes they failed to change.

This provides one of the criteria for recognising the Spirit at work in contemporary situations: continuity with the Scriptural experience of the Gospel. We have already seen this at work in how we may walk with the Spirit. The example of Paul's mission to the Gentiles shows that continuity with the Gospel means being dynamic, adaptive and willing to risk new understandings. Pinnock writes that "for early Christians, loyalty to the truth did not mean loyalty to traditional formulations but loyalty to a truth that transforms and impacts on every new situation."²⁰⁵ In the case of the conversion of Cornelius in Acts 10&11, a different outcome would surely have resulted if a formal correspondence loyalty to Scripture had been followed. But the experience of how the Spirit worked in the life of Cornelius challenged a traditional interpretation of texts, and instead brought out the transforming truth that "God does not show favouritism, but accepts men from every nation who fear him and do what is right."²⁰⁶ The picture painted in Acts 10.45-47 is: "if God has visited the Gentiles, it is surprising and awkward, but who are we to argue?"

This has relevance for contemporary issues in church and mission too e.g. the role of women: does the Spirit provide gifts of leadership and teaching to women in the church today? If this is so, then who are we to argue? The criterion is loyalty to the Gospel: God's acceptance of Jew and Gentile through the Gospel meant that they were able to worship and serve him together without the divisions of the past symbolised by the Jerusalem temple. This must surely be true for contemporary applications such as the role of women too.

However this criterion has the potential to be abused e.g. is the psychological manipulation of mass audiences by disreputable television evangelists also of the Spirit, because it appears successful? Dunn recognises loyalty to the Gospel as one test of authenticity of the Spirit²⁰⁷, but adds two further tests based on the Corinthian letters:²⁰⁸ whether it is motivated by love,²⁰⁹ which involves traits of character,²¹⁰ and

²⁰⁵ *ibid.* 19

²⁰⁶ Acts 10.34-5

²⁰⁷ Romans 10.9, 2 Corinthians 4.5

²⁰⁸ Dunn, 1975, 293-7

²⁰⁹ 1 Corinthians 13

²¹⁰ 1 Corinthians 13.4-7

whether it builds up the community.²¹¹ When all three tests are met we can recognise that it is the Spirit at work. Being Biblical means recognising times of special revelation, but also the commonality of the same Spirit working both then and today.

4.3 The Centre of Worldview in the Synthetic Model

Schreiter describes a further approach to contextualisation within the synthetic model which concerns worldview.²¹² Instead of asking questions to find basic patterns and structures which relate to the Gospel, this approach is more comprehensive, dealing with the worldview of the culture. Kraft describes culture as “a people’s way of life, their design for living, their way of coping with their biological, physical and social environment”.²¹³ Within that is worldview “the deep level of culture ... underlying how a people perceive and respond to reality.”²¹⁴ Thus, people govern their cultural surface level behaviour on the basis of their worldview. Hiebert gives an example:

Most Westerners assume that external to themselves is a real world made of lifeless matter. People in South and Southeast Asia, however, believe that this external world does not really exist; it is an illusion of the mind. And tribal peoples around the world see the earth as a living organism to which they must relate.²¹⁵

How does this relate to church and mission? Bevans describes the worldview approach as “more like producing a work of art than following a rigid set of directions ... one needs to place emphasis on message at one point, while at another, one needs to emphasise cultural identity.”²¹⁶ He describes that some features of a culture such as clothing and styles of music are ambivalent, some are clearly good and need to be encouraged, while others are clearly bad and need to be challenged by the Gospel; he gives examples of the beauty of weaving, and the former custom of headhunting within Kalinga culture.²¹⁷

4.3.1 Worldview in the Early Paulines

In Paul's time, there were a number of widespread and influential worldviews coming from schools of philosophy e.g. Platonists, Stoics, Epicureans and Cynics. The best known description of an encounter between Paul and philosophy is in Athens:²¹⁸ Paul is portrayed in the manner of Socrates – he uses philosophical arguments and

²¹¹ 1 Corinthians 10.23, 14.3, 12, 17, 26

²¹² Schreiter, 1985, 9-10

²¹³ Kraft, 1998, 385

²¹⁴ *ibid.*

²¹⁵ Hiebert, 1995, 45

²¹⁶ Bevans, 1992, 85

²¹⁷ *ibid.* 84

²¹⁸ Acts 17

quotations,²¹⁹ but concludes with distinctively Christian elements of God's delayed judgement and his work through a risen human being.²²⁰ From this description we would expect philosophical ideas to appear prominently in the Pauline letters, but this is not necessarily so. After Athens, Paul travels to Corinth, but there is a stark contrast between his approach in Athens and how he describes his approach in Corinth, which Fee judges as "the most Hellenistic city in the NT".²²¹ In Athens, Paul is at ease interacting with philosophers,²²² but in Corinth he writes how he came: *When I came to you, brothers and sisters, I did not come proclaiming the mystery of God to you in lofty words or wisdom*²²³ this in spite of the fact it was something which Greeks like the Corinthians were noted as looking for.²²⁴ Instead Paul's message is characterised by what they would consider as foolishness,²²⁵ with Paul indicating his desire: *to proclaim the gospel, and not with eloquent wisdom, so that the cross of Christ might not be emptied of its power.*²²⁶ In Athens he is an assured public speaker, but in Corinth he has changed: *I came to you in weakness and fear and in much trembling.*²²⁷ Some hold that after a difficult experience in Athens, Corinth marks a significant change to Paul's approach to philosophy, now unwilling to use it. We shall, therefore, require caution in how we proceed.²²⁸

Some areas of philosophical influence on Paul's writings have been noted. Malherbe argues that Paul took an approach in his ministry in Thessalonica similar to Cynic philosophers.²²⁹ In Romans 1.19-20 his use of natural theology concurs with the Stoic theme of the knowledge of God's existence through the observation of a rational and purposive order in the universe. Numerous similarities between Paul's language and that of Stoic language and thought, especially that of Seneca,²³⁰ have long been noted, e.g. his use of *autarkeia* (*self-sufficiency*)²³¹ and *autarkes* (*self sufficient*)²³² as "technical terms in Cynic and Stoic dogma to express the contentment of the wise person with a 'life in accord with nature'";²³³ his approach that genuine contentment is not self-sufficiency but Christ sufficiency;²³⁴ in Romans 1, his analysis of human

²¹⁹ Acts 17.22-29

²²⁰ Acts 17.30-31; Paige, 1993, 716; Gibson, 2000, 318-23

²²¹ Fee, 1987, 4 fn.12

²²² Aune, 1993, 795

²²³ 1 Corinthians 2.1

²²⁴ 1 Corinthians 1.22

²²⁵ 1 Corinthians 1.23

²²⁶ 1 Corinthians 1.17

²²⁷ 1 Corinthians 2.3

²²⁸ This highlights the difference between biography and autobiography as discussed in section 1.3: "Achievements: the Use of Source Texts" referring to Ellis, 1989, 134. Luke portrays Paul as the hero in Acts, giving a faultless performance throughout. It is only in Paul's letters that we learn of his struggles in public speaking and interacting with other cultures.

²²⁹ Malherbe, 1989, 35-77

²³⁰ Paige, 1993, 717; Gibson, 2000, 310-3

²³¹ 2 Corinthians 9.8

²³² Philippians 4.11

²³³ Paige, 1993, 717

²³⁴ Fee, 1988, 143

rebellion using a series of characteristically Stoic phrases e.g. phusis in v. 26 ‘what is contrary to nature’ – his teaching here is similar to Stoic natural theology, although Dunn notes that contrary to it, Paul gives prominence to the thought of creation.²³⁵ Malherbe cautions that “it may well be the case that the Hellenistic [philosophical] elements do not lie at the centre of his thinking but provide the means by which he conducts his argument”:²³⁶ he may simply be using language of common parlance at that time e.g. people who describe an available choice as “kosher” without necessarily being Jewish.

4.3.2 Worldview in the Later Paulines

The only place where the term philosophia occurs in the Pauline corpus is in Colossians 2.8: *See to it that no one takes you captive through philosophy...* Central to this letter is a creedal hymn in 1.15-20. O’Brien contends that “the long prayer report of 1.9-14 leads up to this paragraph in praise of Christ, while subsequent references in the epistle either echo some of its statements or are a spelling out of their implications.”²³⁷ On the basis that it contains unusual vocabulary differing from the language of the surrounding context, many scholars consider it as a pre-Pauline hymn inserted into the text. Possible backgrounds suggested have been remarkably varied e.g. proto-Gnosticism, rabbinic Judaism, an OT Wisdom milieu or Hellenistic Judaism,²³⁸ with no prevailing consensus; those advocating Paul as author note the nascent theology in places such as 1 Corinthians 8.6, 1.24, 2.6-10 and Romans 11.36. While the question of where the hymn comes from must remain open, there are strong indications on one of the places it is going to.²³⁹ Paige and Dunn note similarities with Stoic thought within this new representation of Christ and the church.²⁴⁰ For example:

- Dunn describes that “fundamental to the Stoic conception of the wholeness and coherence of reality was the conviction that the cosmos was an organic unity, just like a body, of which each element in the universe was a part”.²⁴¹ Colossians holds that it is Christ and the church which gives coherence and unity to the whole cosmos. The church itself is now understood as a cosmic entity.
- *All things hold together in him* (v. 17) reflects the Stoic belief that the deity existed in everything throughout the universe, sometimes as “spirit”.

²³⁵ Dockery, 1993, 317; Dunn, 1988, 58

²³⁶ Malherbe, 1989, 76

²³⁷ O’Brien, 1982, xlv

²³⁸ *ibid.* 37-40

²³⁹ The other significant use made of this representation is in Ephesians 2.11-22, regarding the Jew/Gentile division within the early church.

²⁴⁰ Paige, 1993, 713-718; Dunn, 1992, 157

²⁴¹ *ibid.*

- In Stoic thought, the deity is a craftsman who does not create from nothing. In v. 17, Christ is described not only as God's instrument in creation, but as having preceded the physical universe: *he is before all things*.

It is likely that this hymn had considerable impact upon its first hearers. Yet there are aspects of Stoic thought which do not fit with Colossians:

- God is never identified with nature or the universe in the same way as the Stoa did. He remains transcendent over the world he has created (v. 19).
- Even though all things are held together in Christ, he retains his Lordship over all things: *...so that he might come to have first place in everything* (v. 18).
- In a parallel passage in Ephesians 1.20-22, Stoic cosmology is transformed still further. Dunn writes "the church [is] seen as that which is (already) filled by Christ; the implication being that Christ's filling (or having already filled) the church is the beginning of Christ's filling everything in every way, that the church is the focus and medium of Christ's present role in the cosmos."²⁴²

Thus, some aspects of Stoic worldview are retained, others are rejected and still others are extended. A contemporary proximity might be to take the human aspirations of a song such as Lennon's "Imagine" and to dare to claim that with Christ at the centre it begins to be fulfilled through the church. Many commentators hold that *hollow and deceptive philosophy* (NIV) in 2.8 describes a philosophy which is in direct opposition to Christ e.g. O'Brien holds that "as 'deceitful' it stands opposed to the gospel."²⁴³ Is it possible that Colossians instead means exactly what it says? For example, Lennon's song appears to promise much, but at its centre it provides no means to deliver. Is the argument then that Stoic philosophy appears to promise much, but it is deceitful in the sense that it is hollow – it is only when Christ is put at its centre that it can start to deliver? Perhaps another example is a northern European pagan festival around the winter solstice which celebrated the return of sunlight into the world. This was adapted by Christian missionaries to celebrate instead the coming of the True Light into the world. Within a few generations, the original pagan meaning had diminished.

This approach does not hold that one particular philosophy is inherently "right" while another is inherently "wrong". For example, human economic systems such as communism or capitalism, no matter how carefully and idealistically crafted, will never create a better world. All in the end are corrupted by self-interest or greed. It is

²⁴² Dunn, 1992, 159

²⁴³ O'Brien, 1982, 110; Wright, 1986, 101 allows for this alternative interpretation when he describes that philosophy "like the façade of a grand house which remains standing when the insides have been demolished, promises much and gives nothing."

only when the human heart is dealt with by Christ that any economic system will really work.²⁴⁴

4.3.3 Limitations on Contextualisation from Worldview

When considering the translation model, I highlighted the necessity that contextualisation was Christological, allowing unity and diversity in the church. Discussion on worldview highlights Christology again, this time its significance not for church, but in mission. Mission does not mean unquestioning acceptance or rejection of worldviews expressed in human cultures and philosophies: instead it means putting Christ at their centre.

How can this be developed in practice? A major difficulty in studying our own worldview is that everything appears “normal” to us and it is difficult to perceive how anything else could be different. Hiebert discusses the influences of rationalism and neo-Platonism on western worldview,²⁴⁵ and concludes that “we need to examine our cultural assumptions carefully [because] many of them run counter to Christian thought ... we must critically examine [our worldview] in light of Scripture. If we do not, we are likely to confuse it with the gospel and introduce a culture bound gospel to others.”²⁴⁶

One way of becoming aware of our own worldview is through interaction with new cultures. In Pauline thought, mission was the mother of theology. In Colossians, interaction with Gentile cultures forced new thinking on Gospel expression, in terms of Stoicism. Ephesians 3.17-19 says that it is *together with all the saints*, including those of different cultures, that we can *grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge – that [we] may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.*²⁴⁷ It is when church and mission is ‘together with all the saints’ that new expressions of the love of Christ will develop, and hence, new understandings.

The worldview approach must surely be fraught with risk. Bevans writes that it is “always in danger of ‘selling out’ to the other culture or tradition, and so always needs to be appropriated with some suspicion.”²⁴⁸ The thinking described in Colossians and Ephesians must be considered as approaching the limits of contextualisation, “driving dangerously close to the edge”.

²⁴⁴ See New Internationalist 342, Jan-Feb 2002 30 “Give us your dreams” – a point made by Stewart Lane

²⁴⁵ Hiebert, 1995, 111-37

²⁴⁶ *ibid.* 137

²⁴⁷ Cheesman, 1997, 96

²⁴⁸ Bevans, 1992, 88

4.4 A Note on Paul's Achievements

The use of one form of the synthetic model in the early Paulines, and a movement towards other forms in the later Paulines, warrants a comment on the achievements of Paul's attempts at contextualisation. I will defer this for now, and will comment in my conclusion, within the context of a wider picture.

5 The Anthropological Model

5.1 Creation Centred Theology

The discussion of Stoicism in Colossians raises the issue of how Paul thought of human society with its diversity of worldviews and cultures. How should any model of church be shaped by surrounding culture? This depends on our view of human culture. Bevans makes a distinction between creation centred and redemption centred theologies.²⁴⁹ The former holds that culture and human experience are generally good, and that while there is sin within them, they are capable of being built upon and perfected in a supernatural relationship with God. From this comes the anthropological approach to church and mission.

While in the synthetic model one plants the seed of the Gospel into a culture, in the anthropological model one “attempts to listen to a particular culture in order to hear within its complex structure the very Word of God, hidden there like a dormant seed since the beginning of time and ready for sprouting and full growth.”²⁵⁰ There is evidence for this in Acts 14.17: [God] *has not left you without a witness in doing good – giving you rains from heaven and fruitful seasons, and filling you with food, and your hearts with joy.* Also, early Christians did not view the world as wholly evil. Tidball notes that “certain institutions, such as government, were in fact, God-ordained structures and even if they did not always work in an ideal way, they were to be accepted and treated in a manner which would bring out the best in them.”²⁵¹

Does Paul build on this, seeking what is good in human cultures? It seems not. Although he refers to creation, he also writes of a new creation.²⁵² He recognises that sin has damaged creation, subjecting humankind to death and the natural world to decay.²⁵³ Bevans describes how even the most radical practitioners of the anthropological model recognise that discovering the Gospel emerging from a particular culture is a romanticism, and that they also use language of redemption.²⁵⁴ Paul's is a redemption centred theology, with human culture seen as distorting God's good creation and in need of radical transformation or total replacement. He awaits its liberation from its bondage to decay, and as one having the firstfruits of the Spirit he awaits the redemption of his body.²⁵⁵ This leads on to the praxis model, which I will discuss in the next section.

²⁴⁹ Bevans, 1992, 16-17

²⁵⁰ *ibid.* 51

²⁵¹ Tidball, 1983, 108 referring to Romans 13.1-7 and 1 Timothy 2.1-2

²⁵² 2 Corinthians 5.17, Galatians 6.15

²⁵³ Romans 5.12-14, 8.19-22

²⁵⁴ Bevans, 1992, 54

²⁵⁵ Romans 8.18-23

5.2 Implications for Contextualisation

Although evidence for an anthropological approach in Pauline thought is difficult to come across, some lessons may still be gained from it:

1. It is extremely unlikely that circumcision would have been an issue in Paul's churches if an anthropological approach had been taken. The problem stemmed from a translation approach, which runs the risk of introducing controversy on irrelevant issues, e.g. in the PEs, where Jewish myths were being introduced to a Gentile audience.²⁵⁶
2. By contrast, an anthropological approach will ensure that the model of church arrived at will address issues never arising in a translation model. Even though Paul sees no intrinsic value in circumcision²⁵⁷, he does not seek to translate its non-practice to Jewish Christians²⁵⁸, since it was a means of expressing obedience to God within Jewish culture.²⁵⁹ Puberty rites ceremonies in African traditional religion prepare girls for marriage, but to provide moral cohesion in society, the church may need to experiment with a “Christian puberty rites ceremony”, since there is no precedent for one in the NT church.²⁶⁰

There is a danger that the church today becomes waylaid in issues arising from Biblical cultures which are not relevant in contemporary culture, while at the same time neglecting relevant issues because they are not in the Bible. The strength of the anthropological model is in avoiding this danger.

²⁵⁶ 1 Timothy 1.3-4, Titus 1.13-14

²⁵⁷ 1 Corinthians 7.19

²⁵⁸ Acts 16.3

²⁵⁹ Davies, 1997

²⁶⁰ This was the experience of the author among the Santrokofi people in south-east Ghana.

6 The Praxis Model

I have argued that Paul rejected a formal correspondence translation model as advocated by the party of the Pharisees in his mission to the Gentiles; if he adopted a dynamic equivalence approach, then he did not provide it in a way for others to follow. There is evidence instead that he sought a synthesis between human culture and the Gospel, as revealed to him personally and matching his experience of OT Scriptures. Initially this took the form of planting a seed of faith, with the Gospel expressed in terms of questions arising in Gentile cultures. Later it involved putting the Gospel at the centre of Gentile worldview.

In this section, I will consider the praxis model. Like the anthropological model, it is concerned with human culture, but unlike it, it concentrates especially upon the dynamics of social change. How much was Paul concerned for social change? Paul describes that he awaits liberation in the inauguration of the Lordship of Christ, when *the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and will obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God.*²⁶¹ This theme of life in anticipation of liberation is most prominent in the praxis model. I will consider thinking behind the praxis model in the areas of orthopraxis, liberation and a bias to the poor, and how much it shares with Paul's approach to church and mission.

6.1 Orthopraxis versus Orthodoxy

While the praxis model shares with the synthetic model the concept of planting the seed of the Gospel in human culture, it does not share the concept of “allowing it to grow wild”; instead it seeks to implement change through a continuous process of orthopraxis reflective action. Orthodoxy differs from orthopraxis in that it “seeks to distil an inductive logic and a ‘timeless doctrinal system’ from the [apparently] pragmatically oriented thought of Paul.”²⁶² But evidence shows Paul more concerned with orthopraxis than orthodoxy:

- In his writings there is a close connection between ethical behaviour and theological thought e.g. Romans 12.1 *Therefore I urge you brothers, in view of God's mercy ...* (NIV). His earlier theological thought was developed because of the need for ethical behaviour, not “just for the sake of it”.²⁶³
- In the undisputed letters, Paul brings the Gospel into specific human situations affecting the church e.g. 1 Corinthians with its question and answer style on church issues. By contrast some of the later Paulines are more concerned with

²⁶¹ Romans 8.21

²⁶² Beker, 1984, 42

²⁶³ Towner, 1989, 253-4 makes a similar point in the PEs, where he takes the creeds and faithful sayings to show their relevance for ethical behaviour.

making Pauline theology universally relevant e.g. it would be difficult to determine the historical situation of Ephesians using internal evidence – even the *in Ephesus* label in 1.1 is missing from some early manuscripts.

Barth summarises well Paul's orthopraxis approach: “the true hearer of the word is the one who puts it into practice.”²⁶⁴

6.2 *The Liberation of Creation*

Like Paul, Gutiérrez is concerned with the liberation of creation and writes of salvation as “the central theme of the Christian mystery”.²⁶⁵ He sees this working out at three levels, which are “not a matter of three parallel or chronologically successive processes ... [but] are three levels of meaning of a single, complex process, which finds its deepest sense and its fullest realisation in the saving work of Christ.”²⁶⁶ They are:

1. Liberation from personal sin and guilt, for a grace filled life. Gutiérrez describes how man seeks “an interior liberation, in an individual and intimate dimension.”²⁶⁷ While this expresses the human side, he leaves no doubt of its source:

... Christ is presented as the one who brings us liberation. Christ the Saviour liberates man from sin, which is the ultimate root of all disruption of friendship and of all injustice and oppression. Christ makes man truly free, that is to say, he enables man to live in communion with him; and this is the basis for all human brotherhood.²⁶⁸

He describes the effect of grace:

the knowledge that at the root of our personal and community existence lies the gift of self communication of God, the grace of his friendship, fills our life with gratitude ... Only gratuitous love goes to our very roots and elicits true love.²⁶⁹

2. Liberation from the power of fate, for responsible action. Brown summarises the problem as being

²⁶⁴ Attributed to Barth, K. in Gutiérrez, 1988, xxix

²⁶⁵ Gutiérrez, 1973, 149

²⁶⁶ *ibid.* 37

²⁶⁷ *ibid.* 30

²⁶⁸ *ibid.* 37

²⁶⁹ *ibid.* 206

a sense that one's situation is foreordained, and that there is nothing that can be done about it. If one is born poor, that is the way it was meant to be; if one is born rich, that, too, is the way it was meant to be ... the liberation message on this level is that things need not remain the way they are, that the biblical God is working actively for justice, and seeks to enlist all people in the struggle. The operative word is *hope*.²⁷⁰

3. Liberation from unjust social structures, for participation in creating a just society. These structures may be political, economic or cultural, growing out of warped attitudes based on race, class, nation or sex.

I will consider whether Paul's contextualisation of the Gospel includes the concept of liberation within these three areas.

6.3 A Preferential Option for the Poor

We are confronted immediately with a problem: liberation theology points to God's "preferential option for the poor", with examples of liberation of the weak and oppressed from slavery in Egypt and the exile in Babylon.²⁷¹ It is difficult to find such examples in the Pauline writings. Paul writes of his desire to remember the poor in Jerusalem,²⁷² and Ephesians 4.28 encourages sharing with the needy, but these examples are rare. Some have suggested reasons for this:

- Paul tends to spiritualise wealth and poverty²⁷³ to indicate "an interior attitude of unattachment to the goods of the world."²⁷⁴ Brown adds that "the flip side of the coin is that one need not be over concerned about those who lack material goods, for material goods always threaten to dominate their lives."²⁷⁵
- Schmidt suggests that "the emerging consensus is that Pauline churches represented a fair cross section of urban society: few extremes on either end of the socioeconomic scale, and a preponderance of artisans and traders at various levels of income"²⁷⁶, and that Paul's neglect is "due in part to the lack of direct relevance of poverty to the Pauline churches."²⁷⁷

Slaves are one group which some consider as among the weak and oppressed in society, and which feature extensively in the Pauline writings. The treatment of slaves

²⁷⁰ Brown, 1990, 104-5

²⁷¹ cf. Psalm 82

²⁷² Galatians 2.10, Romans 15.26

²⁷³ e.g. Romans 11.12, 1 Corinthians 1.5, 2 Corinthians 6.10

²⁷⁴ Gutiérrez, 1973, 289

²⁷⁵ Brown, 1990, 56

²⁷⁶ Schmidt, 1993, 826

²⁷⁷ *ibid.* 827

varied greatly: at one extreme, there are cases where masters showed considerable kindness to their slaves (Pliny the Younger sent one of his slaves to Egypt to recuperate from serious illness);²⁷⁸ Tidball notes that the trend in the first century was for the introduction of more and more humane legislation;²⁷⁹ but at the other extreme, fear and mutual hostility governed the master slave relationship, with Tacitus describing crucifixion as “a punishment belonging to slaves”.²⁸⁰ Thus, Paul is able to use slavery as a metaphor describing a breadth of experiences:²⁸¹ slavery both to sin and to righteousness²⁸² and both to idols and to God²⁸³.

Even though slaves may have been well looked after by some, two passages give significant insight into how Paul viewed their status in society. They both concern the incarnation: Philippians 2.6-7 describes how Christ *who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God something to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave ...*; 2 Corinthians 8.9 gives further insight on the nature of the incarnate Christ, how *though he was rich, yet for your sakes, he became poor*. The nature of a slave was considered one of poverty, humility and absence of rights. Hopkins notes that “Roman literature abounds with incidental cruelty to individual domestic slaves”²⁸⁴ and concludes that “the viciousness of Roman slavery, the exploitation, cruelty and mutual hostility are worth stressing because modern accounts often focus instead on ... the humanitarian treatment of slaves”²⁸⁵. Harris adds that

At the heart of slavery, ancient or modern, are the ideas of total dependence, the forfeiture of autonomy and the sense of belonging wholly to another. A slave lacked the power of refusal, in the sense that he knew that if he refused to obey his master, he would suffer dire consequences. His was the frustration not only of powerlessness, but also of relative hopelessness, for even in the first century setting, manumission was never guaranteed and even a promise of emancipation could be revoked by the arbitrary decision of the master.²⁸⁶

We shall consider then how Pauline thought interacts with the three levels of liberation as outlined by Gutiérrez, with a particular interest in advice towards slaves.

²⁷⁸ Harris, 1999, 41

²⁷⁹ Tidball, 1983, 115

²⁸⁰ Harris, 1999, 43

²⁸¹ *ibid.* 81-2

²⁸² Romans 6.15-23

²⁸³ 1 Thessalonians 1.9; Harris, 1999, 86. By contrast, James writes about adultery with the world, but there is no indication of the metaphor being used positively, which suggests that unlike slavery, it could not be morally neutral.

²⁸⁴ See Harris, 1999, 42, where he quotes Hopkins, K., 1978 *Conquerors and Slaves: Sociological Studies in Roman History 1*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 118

²⁸⁵ See Harris, 1999, 43-4, again quoting Hopkins K., 1978, 121, 123

²⁸⁶ Harris, 1999, 44-5

6.4 Liberation from Personal Sin and Guilt

Paul sees all people as sinners who have to face a time of moral accountability.²⁸⁷ Sin is primarily an offence against God.²⁸⁸ The death of Jesus was for sinners, so that they might become the righteousness of God.²⁸⁹ Paul's life is motivated by gratitude for the overwhelming experience of the love of God which he has received through the death of Christ. In Romans 5.5 he writes that *God's love has been poured into our hearts* and in 2 Corinthians 5.14 that *the love of Christ urges us on*.

It is especially in the later Paulines that this aspect of liberation is applied specifically to the situation of slaves. Slaves are not particularly highlighted because of their own sin, instead the issue is: how may the slave achieve salvation from the domination of sin, which causes oppression and hinders right relationships? Since many believers have to cope with consequences of sin inflicted by others and is beyond their control, it is worth noting how slaves were to do so:

- Christological: their work is service unto the Lord rather than their earthly master.²⁹⁰ Paul calls them to reinterpret their experience as slaves: even though they are not physically free, the Lord considers them as freedmen, not as slaves.²⁹¹
- Eschatological: there are clear indications of future punishments for wrongdoing and rewards for whatever good they do.²⁹²
- Missiological: the missionary task of the church is that *in everything they may be an ornament to the doctrine of God our Saviour* to unbelieving masters.²⁹³

In the later Paulines, slaves were not given expectations of physical freedom, but were given internal freedom from the power of sin, because of their hope of God's ultimate triumph in Christ, which was already at work in them.

6.5 Liberation from the Power of Fate

The unambiguous message in the later Paulines is that slaves should support the status quo, with spiritual resources provided to cope with their situation. Is this also the case in the early Paulines?

²⁸⁷ Romans 2.16, 1 Corinthians 4.5, 2 Corinthians 5.10

²⁸⁸ Romans 8.7, 1 Corinthians 8.12

²⁸⁹ Romans 5.8, 2 Corinthians 5.21

²⁹⁰ Ephesians 6.5-7, Colossians 3.22-23

²⁹¹ 1 Corinthians 7.22

²⁹² Ephesians 6.8, Colossians 3.24-25

²⁹³ 1 Timothy 6.1, Titus 2.9-10

6.5.1 An Over Realised Eschatology

It seems likely that the institution of slavery was challenged in the early church because of an over realised eschatology, the desire to bring the kingdom of God from the future into the present. This is clearest expressed in 2 Timothy 2.17-18: some there taught that the resurrection had already taken place. Goulder explains the problem:

For Jews, the resurrection of the dead was naturally expected to mark the end of the age: there might be another age, the kingdom of God, to follow, or even an intermediate age, a millennium, but it would be the end of the world as we know it. This is why the resurrection of Jesus is so crucial. It marks the end of the age, and it is the 'good news' which the church has to proclaim. There is a problem with it, in that the Book of Daniel²⁹⁴ had led people to expect that *all* the dead would be raised together, and Jesus alone had been raised so far.²⁹⁵

Paul's own teaching seems to address this dilemma: Romans 6.4 marked a big change in the life of the believer: Therefore we have been buried with him by baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life; in 6.13 Paul argues that they should live *as those who have been brought from death to life*. It seems that some took this to mean that they had died and been raised to life already, and that the afterlife was already happening. Hence Paul's sarcastic remark in 1 Corinthians 4.8: *Already you have all you want! Already you have become rich! Quite apart from us you have become kings! Indeed I wish you had become kings, so that we might be kings with you!* Later his emphasis on the resurrection stresses it as future and bodily, not past and spiritual.²⁹⁶

6.5.2 Liberation in Corinthians

The consequences of this thinking are all too apparent in the church at Corinth.²⁹⁷

- Spiritual gifts such as tongues are much in evidence and miracles were occurring, read as signs that the new age had already come.
- Paul's charter in Galatians 3.28 is that in Christ *there is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female*. Paul had implemented the Jew-Greek part of the charter, and now others were attempting the rest: women shrugged off cultural restraints placed on them by

²⁹⁴ Daniel 12.1-3

²⁹⁵ Goulder, 1994, 167

²⁹⁶ *ibid.* 171 – see 1 Corinthians 15.12f

²⁹⁷ Towner, 1989, 33-36

worshipping with heads uncovered,²⁹⁸ and voicing their opinions about prophecies in the worship meeting.²⁹⁹

Judging by Paul's teaching in 7.21f, slaves were affected too, or were in danger of being affected, although he does not give any clues of actual incidents.

1 Corinthians 7 is effectively Paul's commentary on his charter. Paul's teaching is that whether Jew or Greek,³⁰⁰ slave or free³⁰¹ or "male and female" or single,³⁰² each should *in this let him remain*.³⁰³ Is Paul saying that slaves should behave in church as though already free according to his charter, or is he calling them to observe the status quo?

The difficulties in 1 Cor 7.21 are illustrated when two translations of the text render the same Greek words with an opposite meaning. The NRSV in addressing slaves has: *If you can gain your freedom, make use of your present condition now more than ever*. It also footnotes the alternative: *If you can gain your freedom, avail yourself of the opportunity*. The phrase *mallon xresai*: "rather use [it]" can reasonably be translated as either "make use [of your slavery]" or "take advantage [of your freedom]". The first refers back to *in this let him remain* in vv. 17, 20, and 24 with the assumption that what they are to remain is their slavery. But in v. 18 'calling' occurs with circumcision: *was anyone called at the time of his circumcision?*: Paul's text would be stretched to mean that anyone was called to be circumcised so shortly after birth. Everywhere else in Paul's writings, it refers to either the general Christian calling to belong to Christ, or the calling of Israel.³⁰⁴ 'Make use of your slavery' seems unlikely then.

The alternative approach is to link what they are to make use of with *freedom* in the immediate context. Bartchy argues that Paul is not discussing rebellion but manumission, contra Elliott.³⁰⁵ Rebellion followed by asylum in the first century was not possible, and slaves remained in slavery as long as the owner wanted to keep them. Moreover, when the owner decided to manumit him, the slave became a freedman whether or not wanted it.³⁰⁶ Thus Bartchy paraphrases the verse as "But if

²⁹⁸ 1 Corinthians 11.2-16

²⁹⁹ 1 Corinthians 14.33-35

³⁰⁰ 1 Corinthians 7.18-20

³⁰¹ 1 Corinthians 7.21-24

³⁰² Witherington, 1988, 77 notes that Paul breaks the parallel structure in Galatians 3.28 by saying *no longer male and female* (in contrast to prior clauses, which have *no longer Jew or Greek ... no longer slave or free*), which alludes to Genesis 1&2. Paul may have been affirming that there was a place for the single person in Christ just as much as the married couple. Thus Paul may actually be saying in his charter that marriage or singleness is not important when "in Christ", which is what he argues in 1 Corinthians 7. See also Towner, 1989, 35.

³⁰³ 1 Corinthians 7.17, 20, 24

³⁰⁴ Romans 11.29

³⁰⁵ Elliott, 1995, 32-40

³⁰⁶ Bartchy, 1973, 109

indeed your owner should manumit you, by all means (as a freedman) live according to God's call".³⁰⁷

6.5.3 Liberation in Philemon

Is openness to manumission also present in the letter to Philemon? One interpretation of the letter is that whatever Paul's private thoughts about slavery, they never interfered with the call to duty: the demand of Roman law and Christian morality bound Paul to return Onesimus. This interpretation holds that Paul never demands his release or even assumes that Philemon will set him free; he accepts slavery as an existing social condition and as a legal fact; and so, he returns Onesimus to his rightful owner with a promissory note to cover any indebtedness.

However, Petersen suggests the use of narrative techniques in the letter to bring argumentative force upon Onesimus.³⁰⁸

- In vv. 1-2, Paul addresses the letter to the whole community rather than Philemon alone, who consequently will feel himself answerable not only to the distant Paul but also to the Christians who come regularly to his house. Up until now he has led a comfortable double life both in the domains of the world and the church.
- In v. 16, he introduces the thought of Philemon welcoming Onesimus better than a slave, as a dear brother.
- In v. 19, he reminds Philemon of his profound indebtedness to Paul, and in vv. 17&21, he appeals to his sense of honour, that he should treat Onesimus as Paul himself.
- Before he concludes with the customary greetings, in v. 22 he asks Philemon to prepare a guest room for him, since he hopes to visit Colossae soon – Philemon can no longer have any doubts about Paul's overall intention – he is coming to check and see how Philemon is handling this thorny question.

Paul does not wish to force Philemon into setting Onesimus free – the decision must rest with Philemon, and be taken in freedom.

³⁰⁷ *ibid.* 159

³⁰⁸ Elliott, 1995, 44-5 and Bosch, 1991, 152 both discuss Petersen, N.R. 1985 *Rediscovering Paul: Philemon and the Sociology of Paul's Narrative World* Philadelphia, Fortress.

6.5.4 A Summary of Liberation from the Power of Fate

While the later Paulines support the status quo, early writings steer a middle way between this and over realised aspirations of freedom. 1 Corinthians 7 shows Paul as favourable towards the process of manumission. In Philemon, Paul at least causes discomfort within the conventions of church relationships.

It may be difficult to hold this position bearing in mind the close connection between Colossians and Philemon: how can Paul tell slaves to obey masters in Colossians 3.22-25 and yet seek freedom for Onesimus? Some take this as further evidence of later or non-Pauline authorship of Colossians. But perhaps Paul looked on Onesimus as a personal friend without considering the full implications for slavery. Paul shows signs of advocating salvation from the unquestioning power of fate: the issue is whether we can take specific incidents and turn them into general conclusions about Paul's opposition to slavery. We shall now consider that issue.

6.6 Liberation from Unjust Social Structures

It is difficult to find any evidence that Paul challenged unjust social structures outside of the church. Thus Ellis writes that

although the Apostle never encourages humanitarian programs of social change, much less political revolution, he does recognise that Christian ministry, such as his own ministry of exhortation, will have its effects on the behaviour of believers. This behaviour will itself have effects in society and is to reflect those virtues that even pagan moralists would find commendable.³⁰⁹

The difficulty with this approach is highlighted forcefully in the Kairos Document, when it analyses discussions between church leaders and leaders of apartheid in South Africa:

At the heart of this approach is the reliance upon 'individual conversions' in response to 'moralising demands' to change the structures of society. It has not worked and it never will work. The present crisis [under apartheid] with all its cruelty, brutality and callousness is ample proof of years and years of Christian 'moralising' about the need for love. The problem that we are dealing with here in South Africa is not merely a problem of personal guilt; it is a problem of structural injustice.³¹⁰

This raises a fundamental question: if slavery, even in difficult conditions, was seen as a Biblical means of serving the Lord, why on earth was it abolished in the 19th

³⁰⁹ Ellis, 1989, 23

³¹⁰ Kairos, 1986, section 3.2

century Christianised West? I would suggest that the seed lay within Pauline thinking on the source of the Gospel.

Wright argues that while the source may be connected with ideas from Hellenism, such as a technical term for “news of victory” or the announcement of the birth or accession of an emperor, the Jewish background was foundational to Paul's thinking, especially the second section of Isaiah in chs. 40-53. Isaiah 40.9 and 52.7 in the LXX both contain the root of the word ‘gospel’ in ‘bringer of good news’. This refers to both physical and spiritual salvation: “the enthronement of YHWH and the dethronement of pagan gods; about the victory of Israel and the fall of Babylon; about the arrival of the Servant King and the consequent coming of peace and justice.”³¹¹ Wright argues that Paul brings this Jewish Gospel into the pagan world. In Galatians, *the elements of the world* are confronted with a new ruler.³¹² Subsequent Christians were martyred because the Gospel caused them to confront the divinity of Caesar. This understanding of the Gospel would be a profound challenge to those wrongfully claiming authority in the world. It would lead to confrontation with slavery in the 19th century.

One hermeneutical approach has been to take such texts from the OT on an earthly level where they have “an accidental relationship with political history”,³¹³ but on a spiritual level in the NT, where the “true sense” is conveyed. This interpretation has more to do with Greek dualistic matter-spirit thought than Paul's Jewish holistic thinking. The Gospel also applies on an earthly level in the NT. Tidball suggests that why it did not in practice must be because the wider issues of government and socio-economic policy were not the concern of the average citizen, whether Christian or not – Paul's teaching deals with the world as he experienced it.³¹⁴

But why, even in a church context, does Paul not seek to implement the kingdom of God? I suggest that the reasons are found in how Paul viewed the world:

1. Paul writes to the Corinthians believing that the world in its present form was about to end and gives ethical advice based on that.³¹⁵ 1 Thessalonians 4.15 and 1 Corinthians 15.50-52 show that he expected to be alive at the parousia. This would affect his attitude to slavery. He deals with this in 1 Corinthians 7: in v. 31, the Christian is able to “use the things of the world”, indicating that Paul does not have a separatist bent e.g. his advice to those who buy is directed to those who will go on buying, an action he does not forbid. Their attitude however, is to change in that they are not to act as though they own what they buy (v. 30). Those who are married should fulfil their marital

³¹¹ Wright, 1994, 227

³¹² Galatians 4.3, 9

³¹³ See Gutiérrez, 1973, 166 where he quotes Grelot, P. 1962 ‘Le Sens Chrétien de l’Ancien Testament’ in Desclée & Cie (eds.) 1962 Tournai 396.

³¹⁴ Tidball, 1983, 104-5

³¹⁵ 1 Corinthians 7.29-31

obligations, as indicated in vv. 2-5, although admittedly the tenor of these verses is of marriage as a last resort (v. 29). Fee suggests that for Paul:

The world as such is neither good nor evil; it simply is. But in its present form it is just passing away. Thus while one uses the world, one must be “as if not” ... that is, be “not engrossed” or “absorbed” in it.³¹⁶

Paul argues that believers should limit their involvement in everyday life in light of the imminent parousia. This included advice that “those who had wives should live as though they had none”.³¹⁷ Was this good or bad advice? Christians have disagreed on this question: the answer will affect one's attitude to involvement in issues of social justice.

2. Paul looks for signs of the forces of the future age already at work in the world. Modernist thinking is that we live in a closed system and that any thought of something beyond is merely wishful thinking for a utopia, an opiate for those unable to cope. What evidence did Paul find for a future age? For Paul, the resurrection of Jesus was not an isolated miraculous event but rather the firstfruits of the general resurrection of the righteous dead.³¹⁸ The Spirit is described as the firstfruits³¹⁹ and the guarantee of God, with believers assured of their redemption based upon the present possession of the Spirit.³²⁰ Gifts of the Spirit such as healing and administration are signs of the coming age.³²¹ Paul lists normal human interaction in a community as ‘works of the flesh’ e.g. jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition – what one would expect in any popular soap opera – and then indicates behaviour not normally expected, e.g. love, joy, peace and patience, as being the fruit of the Spirit. Gutiérrez contends that

the historical, political, liberating event *is* the growth of the Kingdom and is a salvific event; but it is not *the* coming of the Kingdom, not *all* of salvation. It is the historical realisation of the Kingdom, and therefore, it also proclaims its fullness.³²² ...the church finds its full

³¹⁶ Fee, 1987, 341

³¹⁷ 1 Corinthians 7.29

³¹⁸ 1 Corinthians 15.20-23

³¹⁹ Romans 8.23

³²⁰ 2 Corinthians 1.22, 5.5

³²¹ It is easy to see how healings would fit with this, but I am not too sure on Paul's thinking on administration. It is interesting to note that the miracles in John's Gospel, which deal with issues such as marriage, work, health, food are described as miraculous *signs*, indicating that they provide evidence of something else beyond everyday life.

³²² Gutiérrez, 1974, 177

identity as a sign of the reign of God to which all human beings are called.³²³

Thus involvement in issues of social justice is seen not as an attempt to inaugurate the Kingdom of God, but as representing the firstfruits of the coming Kingdom.

Paul's thinking fits with aspects of the praxis model – liberation from personal sin and guilt, and from the power of fate – in light of the coming parousia. It is not possible though to place his approach to social justice within the praxis model.

6.7 Limitations on Contextualisation from the Praxis Model

I would argue that the above discussion indicates a further criterion necessary in contextualisation: that it is to be prophetic. In practical terms, Paul's sphere of influence reached no further than inner liberation. But the consequences of his concept of inner liberation should not be diminished, because in effect, it exercised a revolutionary influence on society. Tidball argues that "his teaching had the effect of alienating souls from the ideals of the state."³²⁴ He notes that this eventually led to the death of slavery in the Roman Empire: "Christian teaching ... entered the existing structures of society and gave them a new heart. The permeation of this new spirit meant that in the end the old existing structures could not continue unaltered."³²⁵

But the apparent lack of attention to social issues in Paul does not absolve the contemporary Christian from such involvement, when the OT source of Paul's Gospel is considered. The function of the church in light of the coming parousia is not withdrawal from the world, and acceptance of its values through silence. And neither is there evidence that the early church expected to transform the world into a utopia by human means, an expectation of early liberation theologians.³²⁶ Bosch highlights the tension between expectations arising from the Gospel, and present reality:

We should not deceive ourselves into believing that everything lies in our grasp and that we can bring it about, now; ... [This] does not reflect a compromise ... with "realities" ... We need a vision to direct our action within history ... We have to turn our backs resolutely on our traditional dualistic thinking, of setting up alternatives between the body and the soul, society and the church, eschaton and the present, and rekindle an all-embracing faith, hope and love in the ultimate triumph of God casting its rays into the present.³²⁷

³²³ *ibid.* 1988, xxli

³²⁴ Tidball, 1983, 120

³²⁵ *ibid.* 116

³²⁶ Bosch, 1991, 444-5

³²⁷ *ibid.* 446-7

The early church awaited the kingdom of God to be brought in by God himself.³²⁸ Beker describes the church as “the beachhead of the new creation and the sign of the new age in the old world that is ‘passing away’.”³²⁹ For now, the church is called to be the firstfruits of God’s kingdom, as a community of hope in the context of the world.³³⁰

³²⁸ Tidball, 1983, 107-8

³²⁹ Beker, 1980, 313; 2 Corinthians 5.9-11

³³⁰ Philippians 2.15

7 Conclusion

I will seek to draw to a conclusion the findings from my paper on the variety, limitations and achievements of Paul's attempts to contextualise the Gospel for the Gentiles: firstly variety, then achievements and finally limitations.

7.1 *The Variety of Paul's Contextualisation*

We have encountered considerable variety in possible NT models of church e.g. Paul in a Jewish church observing OT practices and then in Gentile churches refuting them, writing to one church in Corinth viewing the Gospel in Greek terms with suspicion and another in Colossae where it is influential, churches like Galatia where the seed of faith is planted compared to Colossae again where the worldview is Christianised, and churches with different emphases on the role of the Spirit, foremost in Corinth, less obvious in Ephesus in the PEs. The prospect of finding a consistent NT model of church would appear to be diminishing. However some trends may be discerned which suggest why this is so:

7.1.1 **Sociology of Revival**

Characteristics of Paul's Galatian and Corinthian churches include situations where faith in Christ is central, where “what happens at church gatherings originates in the Spirit and flows through the whole membership for the benefit of all”³³¹ and order and authority are secondary concerns:³³² Corinthians has no reference to elders and there isn't even a treasurer, judging by 16.1-4; the household of Stephanas were almost elders, but church members were voluntarily subject to them.³³³ By contrast, in the PEs mention of the Spirit has diminished,³³⁴ concern is for preservation of “the faith” as a body of teaching,³³⁵ and there is a greater emphasis on church government, with elders appearing for the first and only time in the Pauline corpus,³³⁶ and the role of overseers and deacons becoming more clearly defined and regulated.³³⁷

While some consider one situation charismatic and the other institutional, it is more likely that “there never were two diametrically opposed patterns but differing degrees of emphasis and a tendency for the process of institutionalisation to become more

³³¹ Banks, 1993, 133

³³² *ibid.* 132

³³³ 1 Corinthians 16.15-18

³³⁴ Only five references, two of which have raised debate as to whether they refer to the Holy Spirit: 1 Timothy 3.16, 4.1, 2 Timothy 1.7, 14 and Titus 3.3-8.

³³⁵ e.g. 1 Timothy 2.7, 4.1, 6, 2 Timothy 4.7, Titus 1.13, 2.2

³³⁶ 1 Timothy 5.17-19, Titus 1.5-9

³³⁷ 1 Timothy 3.1-13

pronounced.”³³⁸ Migliore contends that “spiritual vitality without some form and structure is chaotic, just as institutional form without spiritual life is empty and deadening.”³³⁹ Some may argue from silence that institutionalisation was just as prominent in the early church and that the Spirit was just as prominent in the later church, but that is not the impression given, and it is always dangerous to argue from silence.

Sociologists have noted that movements of spiritual renewal tend to become progressively institutionalised in subsequent generations with the flexibility of fresh religious experience becoming hardened into set forms.³⁴⁰ This happens for many good reasons. The first generation face issues such as: how do we educate our children about our own experience of Christ? how do we pass on our leadership? where do we meet physically? how should we interact with churches different from us, if at all?

I would suggest that some of the differences in Pauline church life were due to sociological reasons for institutionalisation, making it difficult to clarify a single model of church throughout the NT.

7.1.2 Influence of Culture on Church Leadership Structure

We have noted the influence of OT practices on Jewish church life, and how Paul sought to remove these from his Gentile churches. However culture seems to also have affected the structures of the early church. In the Jerusalem church, James, the brother of Jesus, holds a position of prominence.³⁴¹ This was following a Jewish tradition of family succession in religious leadership, since James was succeeded by Simeon, a cousin of Jesus.³⁴² By gathering round him a body of elders,³⁴³ it has been suggested that James was following a pattern of Jewish synagogue government,³⁴⁴ and that the pattern has striking similarities to the community at Qumran.³⁴⁵ Some see this as a kind of prototype for an episcopal structure of church.

Luke hints at a very different kind of structure in the Hellenist church at Antioch, where church leadership is in the hands of the prophets and teachers.³⁴⁶ This is borne out in Paul’s own writings, where prophets and teachers are given prominence,³⁴⁷ and church is a charismatic community, where each member has some gift to contribute.

³³⁸ Giles, 1997, 220

³³⁹ Migliore, 1991, 200

³⁴⁰ Dunn, 1975, 349

³⁴¹ Acts 15.13ff, 21.18; Galatians 2.12

³⁴² Donovan, 1989, 10; Tidball, 1983, 58

³⁴³ presbyteros; Acts 11.30, 15.2, 4, 6, 22f, 16.4, 21.18

³⁴⁴ Dunn, 1990, 109

³⁴⁵ Hinson, 1991, 184

³⁴⁶ Acts 13.1-3

³⁴⁷ 1 Corinthians 12.28

While Paul as an apostle and church founder had a unique ministry, his influence was confined to his sphere of mission;³⁴⁸ even though he was a prominent teacher at Antioch, he did not have special influence there in the dispute with Peter over table fellowship.³⁴⁹ Some see this as more like a congregational structure, where authority lies with the gathered people, with Paul only reluctantly taking a leadership role,³⁵⁰ something well suited to his own house churches.³⁵¹

Some also see first signs within the PEs of a presbyterian style of church government, noting that “the overall superintendence of the believers on a wider than congregational basis is in the hands of Timothy and Titus, Paul's delegates”,³⁵² and that Titus appointed elders *in each city*.³⁵³ Dunn sees this representing “the fruit of a growing rapprochement between the more formal structures which Jewish Christianity took over from the synagogue and the more dynamic charismatic structures of the Pauline churches”.³⁵⁴

While there are differing views over terminology, examination of practices would at least suggest a level of diversity in church models in the NT. Niebuhr has outlined how the form of church has been shaped by surrounding culture in a wide range of historical situations³⁵⁵ e.g. why congregationalist style churches fit well in democratic countries such as Baptist churches in the US. A further example is in contemporary society, where the “social philosophy of individualist humanism developed in which the individual, not the community, is the basic unit of human life.”³⁵⁶ Van der Ven traces subsequently that

there are theologians who believe that market thinking can contribute to the clarification of the functioning of the local church. In that context, people see it as a producer and supplier of religious services that are produced by paid people (priests, deacons, and pastoral workers). On the consumer side, we find members of the church, including marginal members, who make use of the services.³⁵⁷

There are advantages in using a business model of church in that its methods and language are readily familiar;³⁵⁸ but as in business, so in the church, these methods

³⁴⁸ Galatians 2.7-9, 2 Corinthians 10.13-16

³⁴⁹ Acts 11.26, Galatians 2.11ff

³⁵⁰ e.g. 1 Corinthians 6.2, 9.12, 18, 2 Corinthians 2.6-8, 8.8: see Dunn, 1998, 571-8.

³⁵¹ Rom 16.5, 1 Cor 16.19, Col 4.15 and Philemon 2

³⁵² Giles, 1997, 223

³⁵³ Titus 1.5

³⁵⁴ Dunn, 1990, 115

³⁵⁵ Niebuhr, 1957

³⁵⁶ West, 1999, 75

³⁵⁷ Van der Ven, 1996, 453

³⁵⁸ See particularly Warren, N. 1996 *The Purpose Driven Church*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan

have resulted in a tendency to focus on numerical growth at the expense of community and “professional burnout” for ‘managers’.³⁵⁹

I would suggest that some of the differences in NT church structures were due to surrounding Jewish and Gentile cultural influences. This again makes it difficult to find a consistent model of church throughout the NT.

7.1.3 Developments in Approach to Mission

Schreiter describes different approaches to contextualisation at different stages when a missionary enters a new culture:

translation models are generally the first kind of model to be used in pastoral settings, because pastoral urgency demands some kind of adaptation to local circumstances ... It calls in many ways for more familiarity with what has been done in church tradition than what is done in the local cultural setting. For that reason it can be done by persons foreign to the local setting.³⁶⁰

He continues that “often the adaptation [i.e. synthetic] models appear in a second stage of development of a local theology. They try to take the local culture much more seriously.”³⁶¹ The “seed of faith” approach would be the most obvious synthetic model to use first, since it requires less familiarity with local culture than the worldview approach.

In this light, it is surely significant that the early Jerusalem church took a more formal correspondence translation approach, that Paul sought to plant the “seed of faith” in Galatia and Corinth, and that adaptation of worldview occurred in the later Colossians and Ephesians letters. This again obviates against finding one static NT model.

7.1.4 A Summary of Causes of Variety

Migliore holds that “order in the church should be understood functionally, not ontologically; provisionally, not permanently; interactionally, not hierarchically.”³⁶² When someone claims that their church is following the NT model of church, then they are probably partly correct. Since the NT model was dynamic, not static, various church models can claim to be based on it, as it changed in different situations. The danger of understanding church order ontologically is that it is held in supernatural awe and cannot be changed.³⁶³ Like the early church, the challenge to contemporary churches is to be able to change as situations change.

³⁵⁹ Donovan, 1989, 43, 47, 109

³⁶⁰ Schreiter, 1985, 6

³⁶¹ *ibid.* 8

³⁶² Migliore, 1991, 200

³⁶³ See Avis, 1992, 85 for fuller discussion.

7.2 The Achievements of Paul's Contextualisation

Schreiter's view above³⁶⁴ of different models at different stages of mission is useful for summarising Paul's achievements in church and mission. It would be all too easy to consider Paul's mission in Galatia and Corinth as a failure – but Paul himself was more than aware of failings in each situation: this was the reason for his letters.

I would prefer to think of Paul's missions as belonging to different stages in a progression: he opposed a formal correspondence translation model because of his familiarity with Gentile culture, and was aware of the unsuitability of the Gospel wrapped in Jewish culture; he sought to plant a “seed of faith” in Galatia because he did not want his Gentile converts encumbered with Jewish trappings; and as familiarity with Gentile culture developed, perhaps he (or someone close to him) was able to write to Colossae and Ephesus about the implications of Christ at the centre of a Gentile worldview. In each situation the priority remained as the Gospel of Christ. The great achievement in Pauline thought was openness to change.

7.3 The Limitations of Paul's Contextualisation

Throughout the paper I have noted some limitations on contextualisation. I have highlighted that Paul's attempts at contextualisation were marked by the following criteria:

- Christological: by acknowledging Christ as Lord, each community is to be united with the other by being “in Christ”. Within this unity is diversity of worldviews and cultures, but mission seeks to put Christ at the centre of each.
- Biblical: faithfulness is to be to the Gospel as found in the Scriptures, with its record of how it changed people, and how sometimes they failed to change.
- Spiritual: willingness to recognise the Spirit moving in new ways is to be balanced with faithfulness to the Biblical Gospel.
- Prophetic: the Gospel is to be worked out in each worldview and culture, affirming that which is consistent with it, and challenging that which is not.

I have noted that there is no one static NT model of church and mission to be used in any culture: instead the model is dynamic. If there *was* one supracultural model, then unchanging-ness from that model would be another criterion of contextualisation. However, since this is not so, I add a final criterion:

³⁶⁴ See section 7.1.3 “Developments in Approach to Missions”.

- Openness: in light of the above, openness within one's situation to change which, at its basis is both Biblical and Spiritual.

This is the true mark of a Pauline church.

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