

Paul's Theology in the Context of Early Christian Pluralism

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Abstract: This article deals with theological pluralism prevailing in the early Church and Paul's creative response to it. The author asserts that it was the *sensus fidelium* guided by such figures as Clement and Ignatius of Antioch and helped possibly by the common martyrdom in Rome of the "two pillars" that exercised its discernment within this wide and wild range of opinions. What this discernment signifies is that, on the one hand, a certain orthodoxy was established but that, on the other hand, this orthodoxy accepted a pluralism in which Peter and Paul functioned as the two focal points of an ellipse.

Keywords: Reconciliation, pluralism, early Christianity, theological context, theology of religions.

Our reflection on the theological pluralism prevailing in the early Church can start with an unedifying story. It is the story of the quarrel between Paul and Peter in Antioch as Paul himself reports it in Gal 2:11-15.

When Kephas came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face because he clearly was wrong. For, until some people came from James, he used to eat with the Gentiles; but when they came, he began to draw back and separated himself, because he was afraid of the circumcised. And the rest of the Jews (also) acted hypocritically along with him, with the result that even Barnabas was carried away by their hypocrisy. But when I saw that they were not on the right road in line with the truth of the gospel, I said to Kephas in front of all, "If

you, though a Jew, are living like a Gentile and not like a Jew, how can you compel the Gentiles to live like Jews?"

1. Paul's viewpoint

The reader is invited to sympathize with Paul's disappointment. Apparently the Jerusalem Assembly, reported in Acts 15:1-29 and Gal 2:1-10, had settled the question of circumcision which was a burning issue in the early Church. The theological problem of a Christian identity without circumcision had been solved in favour of the Pauline position. The influential leaders (the *dokountes* of vv 2.6.9) seemed to have been convinced and "extended the right hand of fellowship" (v.9) to the Apostle of the Gentiles. Unfortunately, according to the report of Paul, immediately afterwards, Peter showed signs of weakness and gave way to undignified dilly-dallying. Paul took him rudely to task for his "hypocrisy" (v. 13) and reminded him of the right doctrine.

The modern reader will side with Paul and thank him for his firmness. As the entire letter to Galatians will show, it amounted to the basic question of Christian freedom. Once for all, the Gospel of liberty had been given full expression and set free from the shackles of Jewish legalism and communitarism. Now it could stretch its wings and go flying all over the world.

This is, at least, the common reading of the text. It views Paul's position as the final expression of Christian faith. Henceforth the true believer has only to toe the Pauline line. Catholic authors tend to minimize the issue. They go by the interpretation of Tertullian: "It was an error of attitude not of doctrine,"[1] a kind of venial sin that can be all the more overlooked since the reproof was received with exemplary humility.[2] Non-Catholic commentators are more outspoken: "Peter was dreadfully wrong and Paul right in his rebuke in defence of the Gospel."[3]

In any case it is commonly accepted that Paul's intervention settled the issue. Peter had only to repent and fall into line. His attitude "could well have had serious consequences. Paul stopped Peter from committing such an error."[4] W. Barclay draws the lesson of the story: "Paul's action gives us a vivid example of how one

strong man by his steadfastness can check a drift away from the right course before it becomes a tidal wave.”[5]

2. Peter’s Viewpoint

But was it so? It takes two to tango... or to pick a quarrel and experience teaches us that, in a dispute, both sides deserve to be heard. The account of Gal 2 gives us the version of Paul. It would have been interesting to get the Petrine side of the story. It is not sure at all that it would have reported an ultimate submission to the Pauline stand. Even Paul’s report does not state that Peter was convinced. There are several indications that “the Antioch incident ended in a political defeat for Paul.”[6] Barnabas rallied to Peter’s position (v.13), which shows that Paul’s rhetoric failed to convince the audience. Moreover and mostly, the converging data of Acts and of the Epistles indicate that Paul gave up Antioch as a base for his missionary campaigns. The subsequent account of Acts reports a single passing visit of Paul to Antioch (18:20). As for the Epistles, there is no epistle to the Antiochians and, with the lone exception of Gal 2:11, Antioch is never mentioned at all.[7] “We can reasonably infer from these facts that Paul lost the argument, found himself isolated at Antioch, separated himself from Barnabas and undertook a wide-ranging mission with new co-workers.”[8] “Paul was right, but did not win the day.”[9]

Actually Paul’s radicalism was rather one-sided. Peter and the others had their own reason to look at things from another angle. They all agreed that access to the new Israel was no longer obtained through circumcision and the Law but through faith in Jesus Christ. But there remained the practical problems of social intercourse and conviviality between Jewish and Gentile believers in Christ. Where the community was homogeneously made of Gentile Christians, as was generally the case in Greece and further West, Paul’s rigorous attitude raised no problem. But in the case of mixed communities as it happened in Antioch, a *modus vivendi* had to be found especially as regards the food to be served in common meals, the calendar of feasts, the Sabbath observance, not to speak of mixed marriages, etc.[10] Could Jewish Christians be required to sit at table and share in the unclean food of the Gentiles? Whatever be the theological

presuppositions, the cultural rift subsisted. We know the problem in India. Peter and Barnabas faced a problem similar to that of De Nobili and Ricci, and all the pioneers of inculturation.

3. Luke's Viewpoint

Was it not normal to expect mutual concessions on both sides? This is what is suggested by the Lukan account of the Jerusalem Assembly in Acts 15. The construction of the chapter is rather surprising. First the main problem of the circumcision is solved. Peter formulates the basic principle that all are saved by faith "through the grace of the Lord Jesus" (Acts 15: 9-11). This is followed by a general silence of assent welcoming the wonders of God among the Gentiles (v. 12). But the debate seems to rebound when James, while joining with the general agreement (vv 14-18), proposes an amendment limiting this agreement with restrictive conditions concerning matrimonial impediments and rules of *kasruth* (vv 19-20).[11] It seems to be a case of the left hand taking away what the right hand has given. Or better it looks like the small print appended to a contract: the agreement is clear but conditions apply. Moreover in his lengthy discussion of the problem of idolothytes in 1 Cor 8-10, further resumed in Rom 14:1-15:5, Paul does not seem to be aware of the restriction proposed by James. On the opposite side, in Rev 2:14, on the same question of food offered to idols, the church of Pergamum is judged not on the Pauline principle of flexibility but on the strict Jacobite rule.

From the historico-critical point of view, "most exegetes agree that the 'kosher' observances from Lev 17-18, imposed on Gentile converts in Acts 15:20, 29, do not belong historically to the Jerusalem agreement between the pillars and Paul." [12] But the Lukan text as it stands is the expression of a community or communities which could not go by the strict application of the Pauline principle and, like Peter, had to adjust to the concrete situation.

4. The Antiochian Situation

The background of such a situation is found in the decision of the Jerusalem Assembly reported by Paul in Gal 2:9: "When they

perceived the grace that was given to me, James and Cephas and John, who were reputed to be pillars, gave to me and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship, that we should go to the Gentiles and they to the circumcised.”

This text has been subject to much speculation. How is the agreement to be understood? Does it refer to a kind of personal jurisdiction which would reserve Jews to “Peter” and exclude Paul from any contact with Jews?[13] But this does not correspond to the praxis of the Apostle who made himself “Jews with the Jews and Greek with Greeks” (1 Cor 9:20). Or does it refer to a territorial partition, reserving Palestine to Peter and giving the rest of the world to Paul?[14] It would be a very unequal division and it would leave out major areas of the world that anyway remained outside the Pauline orbit, like Egypt and Cyrenaica in Africa, Mesopotamia and Persia in the East. We must more probably think rather of cultural areas from a Jewish perspective. Africa (Egypt, Nubia, Libya, and possibly Ethiopia) had long been exposed to an influential Jewish presence: in Alexandria of Egypt, one third of the population was Jewish. Equally substantial was the Jewish presence in Asia (Mesopotamia, Media, Persia and possibly India). To those countries could be applied the words of James in Acts 15:21: “from early generations Moses has had in every city those who preach him, for he is read every Sabbath in the synagogues.” Those parts of the world had long been exposed to Jewish culture. Everybody did not “belong to the circumcision” but Jews could presume that Moses and his Law were sufficiently known to all. Such was not the case in the West where, until the events of 70 which brought a number of Jewish slaves all over the Roman Empire, and with the exception of Rome, Jewish presence was minimal or totally non-existent. For the Jerusalem Assembly, the East (Asia) and the South (Africa) were the world of “circumcision” deeply penetrated by Jewish presence and culture. It was left to the “pillars.” And it was indeed the area where Paul did not go. West was the pagan world, unexposed to Jewish culture. This was left to Paul.[15]

Antioch of Syria was on the intersection of both worlds. It was the capital of “pagan” Syria but had an important Jewish Diaspora. Hence the meeting of the two apostles and the conflict of policies.

At any rate, it cannot be said that Pauline orthodoxy got the upper hand. The two courses of action just came to meet. It did not result in a unified common statement. Rooted in two different cultures, they were the expression of two different perspectives.

5. Theological Implications

It was not only a question of missionary tactics. Different theological perspectives stemmed from these various cultural backgrounds. Addressed to non-Jews, Paul's is a theology of rupture, a theology in black and white, made of antitheses: law and freedom, works and faith, Spirit and flesh, old and new humanity, kenosis and glory, grace and merits, etc. This sense of disruption might also be connected with the shattering experience of his conversion, an experience which attuned him to the needs of a non-Jewish listeners.

For Matthew, on the contrary, the stress is on "fulfilment":

Do not think that I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I did not come to abolish but to fulfil. For truly I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter or stroke shall pass from the Law until all is accomplished. Whoever then annuls one of the least of these commandments, and teaches others to do the same, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever keeps and teaches them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven (Mt 5:17-19).[16]

In the context of this solemn introduction, the so-called antitheses which follow (5:21-42) do not really express contradiction but fulfilment. There is nothing wrong in condemning murder, adultery, and perjury. Even the law of retaliation is a law of justice intended to limit tribal vendetta. The literary form of those statements is not that of a rhetoric contraposition but of rabbinical *peshet*. To the text of the Torah, which is in no way abolished, Jesus gives a new interpretation in terms of the new righteousness.

There might even be a touch of antipaulinism in 5:19 referring to those "who teach others." [17] Even if Paul himself is not personally criticized, it would concern a tendency to ultra-pauline anomism which had developed by the time Mt was written. A similar reaction against Pauline or Deutero-pauline anomism can be traced

in Mt 7:21-23.[18] It is not irrelevant to note that modern scholarship has connected the Matthean work with the church of Antioch.[19]

The Antiochene origin of the Gospel of Luke is a moot point. It is stated by Eusebius (*Hist. Eccl.*, 3.4,6) and Jerome (*De Vir. Ill.*, 7). But equally ancient sources mention Achaia,[20] and scholars suggest at random, Pisidian Antioch, Philippi, Cyrene or Rome. Whatever be the birth place of Luke and the place of composition of his double work, the solution he proposes to the Jerusalem conflict in Acts 15 is quite "Antiochian" as it goes along the lines of Peter's position in the conflict at Antioch. This tallies with his general tendency to express the newness of the Gospel in terms of continuity. Luke is the evangelist of continuity, continuity of a salvation history moving progressively from the time of the prophets to the time of Jesus and the time of the Church.[21] Unlike Paul, Luke does not set Law and Faith in Christ in contrast. He rather emphasizes their continuity. In his Gospel, the old economy is represented by a galaxy of prophets inside (Zacharias, Simeon, Anna) or outside (Elisabeth, Mary) the Temple of Jerusalem. In the Temple also, the "child" is attentive to the teachings of the scribes (Lk 2:46). In the Acts of the Apostles, Jews get the priority of the Gospel. This continuity extends even to the time of the Nations: Roman officials are presented in a favorable light. Caesar brings unwittingly Paul's ministry to its climax in Rome as in the beginning; Augustus Caesar had been unconsciously but quite effectively the mediator of the fulfilment of the Davidic prophecies (Lk 2:1-5). With his scheme of continuity in the unfolding of the divine plan of salvation, Luke is too keen on ecumenical *koinonia* to give way to anti-paulinism. He is a disciple of Paul but not without qualifications. His double work represents an attempt to propose a middle way.

Therefore it follows that the New Testament itself situates Paul in the midst of a lively interaction between various currents attempting to account for the significance of the Christ event in different circumstances and settings.

Close to Matthew is the stand of James:

What use is it, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but he has no works? Can that faith save him? If a brother or

sister is without clothing and in need of daily food, and one of you says to them, "Go in peace, be warmed and be filled," and yet you do not give them what is necessary for their body, what use is that? Even so faith, if it has no works, is dead, being by itself. But someone may well say, "You have faith and I have works." Show me your faith without the works, and I will show you my faith by my works (Jam 2:14-18).

The late layers of the NT will show a tendency to emphasize that middle course. Interestingly 1 Pet also tries to steer a middle course since, while "closer to the missionary enterprise of James and Peter than to the mission of Paul," it shows "close relationship to Pauline thought." [22] Rather closer to Luke's gentleness is 2 Pet when it expresses politely its uneasiness towards Paul's letters "in which are some things hard to understand, which the untaught and unstable distort, as they do also the rest of the Scriptures, to their own destruction" (2 Pet 3:16).

6. Reconciliation and Pluralism

Historically did Paul and Peter themselves get reconciled? Scriptural data are silent about such a possible move. A solid tradition largely accepted reports that both of them were martyred in Rome under Nero. In these early 60es they would have been together in the capital of the Empire, sharing the fate of the persecuted community. How did they happen to find themselves together? Was it deliberately or by chance? What kind of relationship did they entertain at that time? We do not know.

What we do know is that the early Christian tradition reconciled them by canonizing and celebrating them together. This "canonical reconciliation" cannot be taken for granted. The situation in Rome was rather confused. The 1^a Clem at the end of the 1st century reminds the Romans that "envy and jealousy assailed the greatest and most virtuous pillars of the Church" (Peter and Paul) "till death ended their days." Post- apostolic developments amplified the differences and radicalized them. On one side, an anti-pauline movement developed among Jewish Christian Ebionites. For them, Paul was an apostate. Acc. to Epiphanius:

they explained Paul's apostasy from the Jewish Law with a story presenting Paul as born of pagan parents. He became a proselyte and underwent circumcision in Jerusalem so as to wed the daughter of the High Priest. Since his request was turned down, out of anger he began to write against the Law and circumcision.[23]

On the opposite side of the spectrum, among Gentile Christians, an anti-Jewish tendency rejected the Old Testament. Marcion (ca 140) restricts the canon of the Scriptures to the single Gospel of Luke and ten Pauline letters (minus Pastoral and Heb). Less radical than Marcion, the Hellenists, without going all the way to a rejection of the Old Testament, are more radical even than Paul in that they do not share in the Apostle's "great sorrow and unceasing grief... for the sake of (his) brethren, (his) kinsmen according to the flesh" (Rom 9:2-3).

Thus did the early Post apostolic Church witness a theological development presenting a wide spectrum of opinions, with an anti-Pauline trend on the extreme left (Ebionites, Pseudo-Clementine) and a Marcionite rejection of Israel and of the OT on the opposite side:

<i>Anti-Pauline</i>	<i>Ebionites</i>	<i>James-Mt-Lk</i>	<i>Peter</i>	<i>Paul</i>
<i>Hellenists</i>		<i>Marcionite tendencies.</i>		

In this wide range of positions,[24] Paul and Peter do not appear any longer as the opposite terms of an antithesis. They represent rather the kind of middle course implied in their common belonging to the people, "to whom belongs the adoption as sons, and the glory and the covenants and the giving of the Law and the *temple* service and the promises, whose are the fathers, and from whom is the Christ according to the flesh, who is over all" (Rom 9:4-5).

The Canon of scriptures (2d c Muratori Fragment) is the outcome of this quest for a middle way consensus in which Paul and Peter would be equally listened to while eliminating extreme opinions going against the *sensus ecclesiae*. Among those positions, those situated within the range from James to the Hellenists were accepted in the Canon. The two extremes Ebionites and Marcionites were rejected as heterodox.

7. Conclusions

It was the *sensus fidelium* guided by such figures as Clement and Ignatius of Antioch and helped possibly by the common martyrdom in Rome of the “two pillars” that exercised its discernment within this wide and wild range of opinions. What this discernment signifies is that, on the one hand, a certain orthodoxy was established but that, on the other hand, this orthodoxy accepted a pluralism in which Peter and Paul functioned as the two focal points of an ellipse. The range of orthodoxy is now somewhat restricted but remains sufficiently extensive:

<i>James-Mt-Lk</i>	<i>Peter</i>	<i>Paul</i>	<i>Hellenists</i>
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1. This historical and canonical variety shows that Paul does not monopolize orthodoxy. To the Spirit-inspired common sense of the people of God, orthodoxy is plural. To some extent, it can be said that the Pauline agenda has monopolized the attention of Western biblical scholarship. We know the importance of St Paul for the Protestant Reformation and the Catholic Counter-reformation. Present day scholarship has enlarged its perspectives and is now giving their due to the letter of James, Peter and to the Gospel of Mathew. Yet the horizon remains that of the Pauline, anti-Pauline and ultra Pauline developments. For the West, the East and the Eastern Churches mean Jerusalem and Antioch, or at most Constantinople and Edessa. In India we do not feel quite comfortable with this definition of the “East.” This may account for the special interest Indian biblical scholarship bears to the work of John. An Indian approach to the Captivity Letters could also be enlightening.

2. Accepting the entire Bible as the inspired word of God, we have no ground to select one viewpoint against another. The biblical pluralism invites us rather to keep an open mind and avoid sectarian short-sightedness. No one author, even inspired, can embrace the plenitude of the divine mystery revealed in Jesus-Christ. This is why there are four Gospels.[25] The various currents of the New Testament complement each other. For instance, the theology of rupture underlying Paul’s perspectives gives due emphasis to human sinfulness and the call for radical conversion. This is the aspect that will be further developed by St Augustine, Luther, Barth; it is also

implied in Liberation Theology denouncing the sinful forces and structures at work in the world. Luke's theology of continuity on the other hand highlights the unity of the divine plan through the stages of a salvation history invigorated by the power of the Spirit. It is the viewpoint that will underlie the thoughts of Thomas Aquinas, and Teilhard de Chardin. It is also the basis of a theology of inculturation. One need not choose between Liberation and Inculturation, Paul and Luke.

3. The idea of a Canon within the Canon that would be regulative (for instance Rom as the criterion of Christian authenticity for the Lutherans... or Mt 16:16-19 for Catholic ecclesiology) is historically and theologically wrong. The light Paul received on the way to Damascus did not define a dogmatic position. It opened the way for an-going discovery of the mystery of Christ, a way that was followed by Paul in fellowship with other insights of the apostolic Church. This partnership had its tense moments. The Spirit is a Spirit of life, not of monotony.

4. He is also a creative Spirit. Paul himself gives an example of this bewildering creativity. In a way it could be said that his theological horizon is totally different from that of Jesus.

<i>Jesus</i>	<i>Paul</i>
Within Palestine, and mostly Galilee	the world at large
For the Jews	for the Gentiles
Poor villager from Nazareth	upper (?) middle class industrialist
Rural type of ministry	urban type
Story teller (parables)	argumentative style
Depending on local response (Mk 6:11)	planned on <u>great</u> centres
No human resources (Mk 6:8f)	goes for financing (Phil 4:15f; 2 Cor 8f)
Wonder worker, exorcisms	rare miracles, man of the Word

Paul wants to "know only Jesus Christ and him crucified" (1 Cor 2:2). But his fidelity to Christ is no slavish mimicry. It is inhabited by the creativity and the freedom of the Spirit.

5. Situating Paul in the context of a pluralistic early Christianity does not demean him. On the contrary, it would rather not do justice to him to transform him into a block of rigid authority. Coming down from the monumental statue where Christian admiration has placed him, Paul comes back to life and leads us into the creative vitality of his commitment to Christ in the power of the Spirit.

Notes

- [1] "Conversationis fuit vitium, non praedicationis » (*De Praescr.* Xxiii), quoted by J.M. Lagrange, *Epître aux Galates*, EB, Paris : Gabalda, 1950, 44s. Tertullian would even lay at least part of the blame on Paul who spoke with the overzealous radicalism of a young neophyte: "ferventer adhuc ut neophytes.... Aliquid in conversatione reprehendum existimavit" (*Adv. Marcionem*, 1,20).
- [2] "As for Peter, he received with a holy and saintly humility the useful correction made by Paul in charity. He thus left us a rare and holy example: we must not disregard corrections made by inferiors... So all praise goes to rightful liberty in Paul and to holy humility to Peter" (Augustine, *Epist.* 82,22).
- [3] R.N. Longenecker, *Galatians*, WC 41, Dallas: Word Books, 1990, 79.
- [4] H. Daniel-Rops, *The Church of Apostles and Martyrs*, vol 1, New York: Doubleday, 1960, p.108.
- [5] W. Barclay, *The Letters to the Galatians and Ephesians*, The Daily Study Bible 10, Edinburgh: St Andrew Press, 1976, p.18.
- [6] J.L. Martyn, *Galatians*, AB 33A, New York: Doubleday, 1997, p. 236.
- [7] 2 Tim 3:11 refers to Antioch as to a place where Paul endured "persecutions and sufferings." But this is only a deutero-pauline testimony.
- [8] R.E. Brown and J.P. Meier, *Antioch and Rome. New Testament Cradles of Catholic Christianity*, London: Chapman, 1983, 39 quoting other authors holding this opinion.
- [9] R.N. Longenecker, *Galatians*, p. 79.
- [10] On the complexity of the situation in Antioch and the compromise it called for, see J. Murphy-O'Connor, *Paul His Story*, Oxford: OUP, 2004, 41-44. Murphy-O'Connor attributes the "compromise" to Paul. In fact, it represents rather the position of Peter.
- [11] The four restrictions proposed by James refer to the prescriptions of Lev 17-18 concerning the aliens residing in Israel: food offered to idols,

eating of blood and of meat not ritually slaughtered, intercourse with close relatives. Cf. R.J. Dillon, "Acts of the Apostles," in *NJBC*, 752.

- [12] R.E. Brown and J.P. Meier, *Antioch and Rome*, p. 38.
- [13] Opinion of Betz, Hengel, Lüdemann, Schmithals, etc.
- [14] Opinion of Bengel, Blight, Burton, Haenchen, Lagrange, Mussner, Sanders, Fitzmyer, etc
- [15] Cf. L. Legrand, "Gal 2 :9 and the Missionary Strategy of the Early Church," in Tord Fornberg (ed.), *Bible, Hermeneutics and Mission*, Uppsala: Swedish Institute for Missionary Research, 1995, pp. 21-83.
- [16] "These logia affirm not only the continuing validity of the Torah as an essential component of Christian existence, but in doing so they also offer a direct critique of the Pauline view that the appearance of the Christ has brought the Law to an end (cf. Rom 10.4a; Gal 3:23-25)" (D.C. Sim, "Matthew 7.21-23: Further evidence of its Anti-Pauline Perspective," *NTS* 53/2007, 325).
- [17] On anti-paulinism in Mt cf. D.C. Sim, *The Gospel of Matthew and Christian Judaism: The History and Social Setting of the Matthean Community*, Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1998, pp. 188-211.
- [18] Cf. D.C. Sim, "Matthew 7.21-23: Further evidence," 325.
- [19] "Matthew's Gospel must be seen as a theological and pastoral response to a crisis of self-identity and function in the Antiochene church, a crisis that was social and structural as well as theological in nature" (R.E. Brown and J.P. Meier, *Antioch and Rome*, 57).
- [20] Cf. M.J. Lagrange, *Evangile selon saint Luc*, EB, Paris: Gabalda, 1948, pp. 12-16.
- [21] Cf. H. Conzelmann, *The Theology of St. Luke*, New York: Harper & Row, 1961 (tr. from *Die Mitte der Zeit*, Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1953).
- [22] R.E. Brown, *The Churches the Apostles left behind*, London: Chapman, 1984, p. 75.
- [23] H.J. Schoeps, *Theologie und Geschichte des Judenchristentums*, Tübingen: Mohr, 1949, p. 464.
- [24] That would call for further distinctions: cf. R.E. Brown, *The Churches the Apostles left behind*, London: Chapman, 1984. Particularly the Johannine corpus had its own specificity which does not fit in the Pauline-anti Pauline equation. It responds to other concerns in which we find echoes of a more distant world than Western Asia. Its mystical overtones find an echo in the Indian soul and religiosity. Is the link between John and the further East to be found in Ephesus, traditionally

ascribed as the setting of John's Gospel? It was situated at the mouth of the Meander River which opened the way between the Mediterranean world and the highlands of Anatolia, Upper Mesopotamia, Iran and the rest of Asia. It was not only the most important trade center of Asia Minor, it was also the melting pot of cultural influences and of esoteric mystical currents. As shown by the Captivity epistles and the Letters to the Seven Churches of Revelation (Rev 3-4), they were soon to be the epicenter of the earliest Christian heresies, vaguely characterized as "Gnosticism." From the time of Alexander, East and West have begun to interact. Buddhism was Hellenized in the Greco-Buddhist art and reciprocally "gymnosophists" of India and missionaries of Asoka had come to the Mediterranean world. Cf. L. Legrand, *The Bible on Culture*, New York: Orbis Books, 2000, 154-162. Without going to the extreme of tracing Indian sources to the Johannine work, the Ephesian background suggests an Asian world that extended much further to the East than the Mediterranean area in which Paul lived.

- [25] Cf. O. Cullmann, "The Plurality of the Gospels as a Theological Problem in Antiquity," in *The Early Church. Historical and Theological Studies*, London: SCM Press, 1956, 39-54, summarized in the concluding sentence: "Faith cries for manifold witness" (54).