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**"I regard them as rubbish,
in order that I may gain Christ"
(Phi 3:8)**

Paul's Radical Dissent with the Past Life Based on the Law

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Abstract

There are a number of stories about St Paul's life and mission which demonstrate that he was also a person of strong dissent to many elements that came across in his life. In this short paper we are focusing our attention on these elements and areas. The author wishes to begin by making a few observations on the concept of dissent. After analysing what dissent is, he explains the context of Philemon (3:8), Galatians and Romans to explore Paul's understanding of dissent. The author concludes by affirming that Paul is not advocating dissent from everything that is traditional and standardized. His dissent is limited to the insufficiencies of the past. It is experience-based and situation-bound.

Keywords

St Paul, dissent in St. Paul, Jewish law, experience of God.

It may look strange to speak of 'dissent' in Paul who is habitually considered to be a traditionalist or a conformist who supports the status quo unquestioningly. Yet in fact there are a number of stories about his life and mission which demonstrate that he was also a person of strong dissent to many elements that came across in his life. In this short paper we are focusing our attention on these

elements and areas. I wish to begin by making a few observations on the concept of dissent.

‘Dissent’! What is It?

Dissent is born out of human capability to critical thinking which enables one to identify the differences in needs, aspirations, achievements, convictions, ideologies, experiences and value systems of both the individuals and groups in a society and to ‘finds one’s own way’ out into the world. Every form of dissent which deviates from the stereotyped modes of thought and behaviour, also implies an assent to something which is different from the established and long-standing traditions and conventions of a system.

“ Authentic dissent includes the readiness to take risks in one’s life and to even risk life itself.. ”

Dissent is never absolute and universal but partial and temporary. The one who wishes to be eternally and universally dissenting will end up in self-alienation and self-annihilation. At the same time authentic dissent includes the readiness to take risks in one’s life and even to risk life itself. Dissent is necessary for opening up inventive possibilities which enable a system to find a way out of hurdles, impasses, deadlocks and stalemates. Therefore, maintaining a creative tension between dissent and assent is imperative in every democratic system.

In the theology of religions sphere, dissent acquires special connotations. One can disagree with the belief system of a particular religion and choose to follow another one. Or one can attempt to reform and / or revive one’s own religion by challenging the rusted and corrupt praxis within it and by resuscitating the religion’s original foundations through prophetic and revolutionary words and deeds. Or one can rebel against one or more religions and religious systems and found one’s own religion or deny every religion.

The New Testament, especially the *Pauline Corpus* presents Paul of Tarsus as one who is caught between his rootedness in Judaism and the gripping experience of the Risen Lord. The New Testament also demonstrates vividly as to how he made sense of the conflict between the contemporary formulations of faith in God held by Judaism and the encounter of the Risen Jesus that was granted to him. The former was something which he had inherited and learned about while the latter was an experience he made for himself. Naturally his personal experience proved to be more powerful and it impelled him to question and to a large extent reformulate his belief system.¹ He did this not just for himself but for the whole of humanity because he strongly felt the urgency of leading all human beings to Jesus Christ. In the process of reformulating his belief for himself and for humanity, he is not in fact overthrowing the foundations of Israelite faith in Yahweh, but the legalistic and reductionist interpretations of the same faith. Following his master Jesus Christ, he does not hesitate to express his dissatisfaction and disagreement with the faith formulations and faith praxis of the time. There are a number of instances in the *Pauline Corpus* which bring to light the 'dissent' of Paul which he senses toward his past life. We, in this short essay, consider a few of such texts.

The Context and Explanation of Phil 3:8

We wish to study Phil 3:8 in its context, because this text contains one of the most powerful expressions of Paul's break with his past life. In this epistle to the Philippians, after emphasizing humility and unity in church life against divisions arising from within and opposition coming from outside the church (Phil 1:12-2:18), Paul begins a new section from Phil 3:1 where he explains the true righteousness.² He begins this discussion on true righteousness

1 A few aspects of the reformulation of Paul's faith is found in Francis Pereira, *Gripped By God in Christ: The Mind and Heart of St Paul* (Bombay: St Paul Publications, 1991), 33-37.

2 Here the term 'righteousness' occurs in 3:6 and in 3:9. (cf. Rom 1:17; 3:21-22, 25; 4:3, 5-6, 9, 11, 13, 22; 1 Co 1:30; 2 Co 5:21; 6:7, 14; Gal 3:6, 21; 5:5; Eph 4:24; 6:14). This term is along with the

first by making a contrast between the righteousness based on law³ and the righteousness from God through faith in Christ (Phil 3:2-11). All those who believe in the righteousness based on law are called 'dogs,'⁴ 'evil-workers,' and 'those who mutilate the flesh,' that is, the so called Judaizers.⁵ They are then contrasted with the

phrase 'justification by faith' refer to the same reality, namely, to establishing the '*right relationship with God*.' In the NT the three Greek nouns *diakiosune*, *dikaiosis* and *dikaionoma* are translated either as justification or as righteousness of God. 'Justification by faith' defines salvation from the perspective of the believer, namely, that every believer is saved or justified by virtue of faith in Christ Jesus, while 'righteousness of God' emphasizes the fact that the whole process is a righteous act of God. For a detailed study of 'justification by faith,' cf. James D G Done, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1998), 334-389.

3 When Apostle Paul speaks of 'law' in his epistles, mostly it has a negative tone. Therefore he is criticized for giving a totally distorted picture of the Jewish law and religion and for presenting the mistaken view of the Law as the basis of salvation in Judaism. Cf. H. Räisänen, "Legalism and Salvation by the Law," in *Die Paulinische Literatur und Theologie*, ed. S. Pedersen (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck, 1980), 63-83. However, it should also be said that Paul's understanding of the law is not always negative. For example, in his epistle to the Romans he also makes statements like the law is 'holy and just and good.' In fact, Paul's negative understanding of the Jewish law is founded on his understanding of revelation made through Jesus Christ which is soteriologically directed to all human beings including the Gentiles, while Jewish law would be opposed to such an inclusion.

4 Here the term 'dogs' for human beings sounds a derogatory and contemptuous designation. In fact, the Jews were in habit of referring scornfully to Gentiles as 'dogs,' unclean creatures with whom they would avoid every association. Cf. Otto Michel, κύων, κυνάριον, TDNT 3, 1101-04. Here Paul hurls this term on Judaizers who wanted to promote their ethnic identity through their erroneous teaching which insisted on circumcision as a necessary precondition for eligibility to be baptized. Cf. Robert Jewett, "Conflicting Movements in the Early Church as Reflected in the Philippians," in *Novum Testamentum* 12,4 (1970), 386.

5 By 'Judaizers' we understand the group of Jewish Christians

Christians who, according to Paul, personify the new circumcision and who worship God in spirit and glory in Christ (Phil 3:2-3). In the process he uses his own life as a model to demonstrate what true righteousness is.

First, he presents his life in its pre-Christian stance. As credentials of his pre-Christian life he enumerates his own circumcision on the eighth day, his ethnicity as an Israelite belonging to the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew born of Hebrews, a Pharisee who was blameless under the law and who persecuted the church because of his zeal. After counting these 'gains' as he calls them, he goes on to say that he now counts them all as loss for the sake of Christ. The designation of his past life as a 'loss' (in Greek *zemia*— damage or loss) occurs three times in this section (3:7-8) before he finally calls all his past life as 'refuse' or 'rubbish' or 'dung' (in Greek *skubalon*).

By recounting his past credentials Paul demonstrates that he was a pure and proud Jew and that he had invested enormous energy in keeping the details of the law and was without fault in the eyes of his fellow Jewish lawyers. It was not until he had the so called Damascus Experience that he came to realize the bankruptcy of his past religious dedication. Not even in his wildest dreams Paul would have thought of his past life as refuse or rubbish, until he met Christ. Interestingly Paul is counting seven items as his credentials and the number seven implies completeness and includes every other facet of Paul's past life which he might have thought to be a gain. This becomes clear from what he says in 3:7-8, namely, that he considers everything as loss.

In fact, there is a progression in Paul's consideration. He expresses it in four steps. First he considers his past life as loss in v

who insisted that the Gentiles should first be circumcised before they can be baptized. Such a demand went against the Gospel as proclaimed by Paul the Apostle who insisted that there was no need of any circumcision before baptism. This serious matter of concern is discussed both in Gal 2 and in Acts 15 which contain the two presentations of the so called Jerusalem Council. Cf. John C. Hurd, "Reflections Concerning Paul's Opponents in Galatia," in *Paul and His Opponents* ed. Stanley E. Porter (Boston: Brill, 2005), 129-148.

7 and then moves to regarding all things as loss at the beginning of v 8. The rest of the verse 8 contains the next two steps, namely, that he has actually suffered the loss of all things and in the end that he regards them all as refuse or rubbish or dung. Among the four, the third step is particularly significant for two reasons. First the phrase 'I have suffered the loss of all things' emphasizes the fact that Paul lost everything for the sake of Christ. And second, the Greek verb used in this phrase to express the act of 'losing,' namely *zemioo*, is in the aorist passive (*ezemioothen*)⁶ which actually denotes a definitive break with the past. Such a break with the past is further corroborated by the particle *menounge* meaning 'on the contrary' at the beginning of v 8. The same particle is also used in Rom 9:20 and in Rom 10:18⁷ where it is used to depict a contrast between two elements.

Paul considers all his past credentials as a loss or as rubbish for the sake of Christ. This is expressed in three different ways in v 8. The three phrases are: 'for the supreme good or surpassing value of knowing Christ,' 'for his (Christ's) sake,' and 'for the sake of gaining Christ,' The knowledge of Christ⁸ here should not be understood in the Greco-Roman mystery religions sense or the

6 In the New Testament Greek, the aorist tense is used to express the punctiliar aspect of an action. Cf. F Blass, A Debrunner, *A Greek Grammar of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, ET Robert W Funk (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961), 169. The aorist tense also refers to an action as 'terminated.' cf. James Swetnam, *An Introduction to the Study of New Testament Greek: Part I: Morphology* (Roma: Editrice Pontificio Istituto Biblico, 1998), 456. An action expressed by aorist form is considered definitive and could not be repeated. In other words, such actions happened once and for all.

7 Cf. Marvin R Vincent, *The Epistles to the Philippians and to Philemon* (Edinburg: T T Clark, 1902), 100.

8 The genitive in the 'knowledge of Christ' can be understood both as subjective as well as objective, implying both the knowledge one has about Christ and knowledge possessed by him. What is held as of high value by Paul here is the fact that he knows Christ and as well as he is known by him. Cf. Gerald F Hawthorne, Ralph P Martin, *Philippians*, WBC 43 (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2004), 190-1.

gnostic sense of a secret ‘insight’ received by the initiates,⁹ but in the Old Testamentsense of ‘personal experience’ which implies a relationship of love and obedience.¹⁰ What is experienced here is the loving revelation of Christ and the response made through obedience. The point is that for Paul experience of knowing and relating to Christ was of more value than anything else in his heritage and more precious to him than anything else in his present experience. It was more valuable because it is a saving, personal, and transforming experience.

The second expression ‘for the sake of Christ’ implies that Paul considered his heritage, achievements and accomplishments as nothing but dung, because of his commitment to and preaching of Jesus Christ as the messiah. The third expression ‘for the sake of gaining Christ’ uses the verb ‘to gain.’ On the one hand this verb reminds the reader of the ‘gains’ of v 7 which are considered by Paul as a loss. On the other this verb anticipates the gain of v 9, namely, having the righteousness that comes from God through faith, as the only thing that mattered in his life. Paul also provides two further reasons in vv 9-10 for considering all his past credentials as rubbish. They are first that he might be found in Christ, and second, that he might know Christ and the power of his resurrection.

It is not easy to define the meaning of the term ‘dung’ (in Greek *skubalon*). This can be related to the ‘dogs’ of 3:2 and interpreted as something that was thrown to the dogs. This term was used to refer to ‘useless or undesirable material that is subject to disposal,’ be it excrement, refuse, manure, kitchen scraps or garbage.¹¹ In any case, the usage of this term in relation to his past life with its credentials expose the “utter revulsion” Paul felt “toward those advantages he surrendered.”¹² The choice of such a ‘vulgar’ term

9 Walter Schmithals, *Paul and the Gnostics* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1972), 90-92.

10 Gerald F Hawthorne, *Philippians*, 191.

11 Cf. “σκύβαλον,” in Frederick William Danker, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 932.

12 Gerald F Hawthorne, *Philippians*, 192.

only emphasizes the vigour and completeness of the renunciation. Thus this text affirms Paul's attitude of dissent towards his previous accomplishments that was disapproving. Similar revolt against the Jewish understanding of righteousness under the law forms the polemic also in Galatians and Romans.

In Galatians

The polemic Paul intends to present in his Epistle to Galatians can be read at every stage of the Epistle. Already in the opening formula he attributes his commission and authority directly to Jesus Christ and to God the Father when he claims that he was "an apostlesent neither by human commission nor from human authorities, but through Jesus Christ and God the Father, who raised him from the dead" (cf. Gal 1:1). Further, in the autobiographical reports found in Gal 1:11-24 Paul speaks about how he received the Gospel through a revelation of Jesus Christ. Paul himself never speaks of an encounter of the Risen Christ on the road to Damascus, but speaks of his experience of the Risen Christ in a sober and succinct manner in a few other places (1 Cor 9:1; 15:8) in order to assert the independency and the truth (reliability) of the gospel proclaimed by him and to assert his apostolic authority. The whole attempt to demonstrate the independency and the truth of his gospel was to expose the invalidity of the works of the law for the salvation of the Christians.

From Gal 1:13-2:21 Paul narrates a series of incidents to consolidate his position that adding law to grace is to destroy grace and to make a mockery of the cross. In 1:13-17 he takes pains to show that he never even consulted with any of the apostles in the first three years after his conversion as to the validity of the gospel he proclaimed, and even when he did first visit Jerusalem, the visit was brief and only included time spent with Peter (1:18-24). Finally, when Paul did consult with those who were of reputation in Jerusalem (2:1-10), they both refrained from demanding the circumcision of Titus (2:1-5) and gave hearty approval to Paul's gospel (2:6-10). So strong was this approval, in fact, that Paul later felt the freedom to rebuke the chief of the Jerusalem apostles, Peter himself for hypocrisy, when the two were in Antioch (2:11-21).

In fact, when Paul and Barnabas are in Jerusalem there were the so called ‘false brethren’ who were secretly brought in to bring Paul and Barnabas into bondage (Gal 2:4). These ‘false brethren’ were the same as the Judaizers¹³ mentioned above in this essay. That they tried to bring Paul and Barnabas into bondage is a reference to their attempt to make the law of circumcision as a precondition to every Gentile who wanted to become a Christian through receiving baptism. Paul refutes such an argument by asserting that adding law to grace is to destroy grace and to make a mockery of the cross (cf. 2:15-21) and categorically declaring that no one is saved by the works of the law but only through faith in Christ Jesus (cf. Gal 2:16). The intensity with which Paul asserts the redundancy of the works of the law is demonstrated in Gal 2:16 where he repeats the same negation three times:

Statement 1: “... a person is justified *not by the works of the law* but through faith in Jesus Christ.”

Statement 2: “And we have come to believe in Christ Jesus, so that we might be justified by faith in Christ, and *not by doing the works of the law*,”

Statement 3: “because *no one will be justified by the works of the law*.”

Further in the epistle, Paul tries to corroborate his argument by presenting a number of illustrations in the section 3:1-4:31, where his description of justification through grace also gets clarified. He begins in 3:1 by drawing the attention of the Galatian Christians to the fact that when they became Christians they received the gift of the Spirit not by the works of the law but through faith in Christ Jesus (3:1-5). Therefore, they should not fall back to doing

13 J. Louis Martin calls this group of people simply as ‘teachers’ who are otherwise called ‘Paul’s opponents’ by the modern authors. He also explains in his commentary on Galatians that these teachers were preaching the law as the good news and that circumcision is the commencement of the law. Cf. J. Louis Martin, *Galatians: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (New Haven, Yale University Press, 1997), 117-126.

the works of the law which they once tore down (cf. Gal 2:18). Then he continues with the example of Abraham to illustrate that one is justified by faith, not by the works of the law (3:6-14) and concludes that the law, which came 430 years after God's covenant with Abraham, cannot invalidate the promise (3:15-18).

Such an understanding of justification naturally raises the question as to why the law was given (3:19). If the same God gave the promise, why would he add the law? Paul answers this question (3:19-4:6) by attributing to law the function of a disciplinarian or custodian (Gk: *paidagogos*) till Christ came (3:23-25). In fact, Paul's understanding of the law in Gal 3:18-16 is rather negative. This section considers the law "inferior by virtue of its character (vs. 18), its origin (vs. 19b) and its moral weakness (vs. 21)."¹⁴ This view of Paul should be understood as his overreaction to the exaggerated view of the law by his opponents. In any case he is quite emphatic in drawing the line between the time of the law and the time of Christ in 3:24-25.

And finally Paul illustrates the break with the past by instructing the Galatians to live as children of freedom and not to fall back into the old slavery.

“ Paul invites his readers to dissent by throwing away the traditions of the past that are no more relevant. ”

Here he first points out that the Galatians had experienced slavery as pagans worshipping false gods (4:8-9). Now he tells them that by accepting the Judaizers' message, they would simply replace one kind of slavery with another (4:10-11). Thus the Judaizers' message did not only alienate the Galatians from Paul (4:17), but also robbed them of their freedom and joy in Christ (4:15). The allegory of Hagar and Sarah for law and grace respectively in 4:21-26 also has the purpose of inviting the Galatians to live as children of freedom and not of slavery. Thus Paul is also inviting his readers to a dissent that amounts to throwing away the traditions of the past that are no more relevant.

14 John W Drane, "Tradition, Law and Ethics in Pauline Theology," in *Novum Testamentum* XVI, 3 (1974): 169 (167-178).

In Romans

Such a polemic attitude towards the law is found also in Romans, which presents Paul's more complete understanding of and attitude towards the law. This polemic begins already in Rom 3:21-30 where Paul describes the revelation of God's righteousness and his love in Jesus Christ. V 21 states that righteousness of God is disclosed apart from the law, though the latter is attested to by prophets and law. Further it is said that all are justified by his grace as a gift and through the redemption in Christ Jesus (v 24) whom God put forward as sacrifice of atonement (v 25). That a person is justified by faith in Christ apart from the law is reiterated again in 3:28. In the following chapter, as he has already done in Galatians, Paul takes up Abraham as a paradigm example who is saved by faith and not by the works of the law. In doing so, Abraham is presented as the model of faith. The description of Abraham here in Romans is more extensive than in Galatians.

Actually it is in Rom 7 that Paul takes up a more complete discussion on law. In 7:1-6 he describes that we have acquired freedom from the law through the death of Christ by drawing an analogy taken from the institution of marriage. Like the Jewish wife who becomes free from the 'law of the husband' when her husband dies,¹⁵ so too the Christians who have died 'through the body of Christ' have become free from the law (7:2.3.4).¹⁶ The death Paul is referring to in this section is the death the Christians experience in and through Christ at their baptism (cf. Rom 6:3-4). If they have already died, then the law which is binding only on the living cannot exercise any control over them. This analogy

15 That the Jewish wife becomes free from the law of marriage at the death of her husband is not found in the Old Testament but in later rabbinic literature, e.g., in m. *Qidd.* 1:1: "she acquires freedom by a writ of divorce or by her husband's death." Cf. Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *Romans: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (New Haven, Yale University Press, 1993), 457.

16 *Ibid.*, 455-456. In these pages the author also makes two lists as to what Paul mean by the usage of the term 'law' in Rom 7:1 and in 7:2 respectively.

is similar to the allegory of Hagar and Sarah of Galatians (cf. Gal 4:21-26) in that they both aim at establishing the freedom of the newly baptized Christians.

Then in 7:7-25 Paul describes how the gap between the law and the Christians gets widened because of the former's collaborative association with sin. In fact, Paul never asserts that the law is itself sin. On the contrary, he shows that the law is in itself holy, upright and good but goes on to maintain that the law amounts only to giving human beings knowledge of sin(7:7) which exploits the law itself as a tool to produce acts of sin in a person and leads the person to death (7:10), though in the absence of law, sin is as good as dead (7:8). Thus the effect of the law becomes counterproductive, that is, the law ends up producing sin instead of life it is supposed to produce. The counterproductive effect of the law is not due to its existence but to the presence of sin and the weakness of human beings. Here Paul rightly recognizes that the real problem is not with the law but with the human beings who are weak and are made of flesh and therefore are prone to succumb to sin which dwells within them. Thus the law appears to be at the service of sin which is the dynamic overlord who induces in human beings "a spirit of rebellion against God and of disobedience to his commandments."¹⁷ Because of such indwelling of sin, human beings fail to achieve what God desires of them. Not so with the grace that is given to everyone who has faith. This grace is recognized by the inmost self and by the mind of every believing human being. The wretched state¹⁸ of human beings can thus be remedied only through Jesus Christ our Lord (v 25) through whom the assistance is provided to the human beings in the form of grace to enable them to set their minds on the law of God and not on the law of sin (cf. Rom 8:5-7).

17 Ibid., 463.

18 Paul refers to the 'wretchedness' of human beings in 7:24. This wretchedness is born of the discrepancy between human faculties of 'willing' and 'doing.' Such a conflictual condition of the human beings is described by Paul in 7:15-16 and in 7:19-20. For more info on the discrepancy between 'willing' and 'doing,' kindly see Michael Wolter, *Der Brief an die Römer: Teilband 1, Röm 1-8*, Evangelisch-Katholischer Kommentar Zum Neuen Testament (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlagsgesellschaft, 2014), 447-452.

There is yet another interesting text in Romans 10:4 which makes Paul's break with the past even more definitive by making the emphatic assertion: "For *Christ is the end of the law* so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes." This verse is placed in the context of Rom 9-11 which deals with the topic of salvation for all including those Israelites who have hitherto rejected Jesus Christ. In 10:1-4 Paul depicts the ignorance on the part of the Israelites to understand the righteousness revealed by God in and through Jesus Christ. In their attempt seeking to establish their own righteousness, they have failed to understand God's uprightness in Jesus Christ who marks the end of the law. Now the term 'end' (*telos* in Gk) can refer to a number of related meanings such as termination or cessation (cf. Lk 1:33; Heb 6:11; 7:3; 1 Pet 4:7), close or conclusion (cf. Mt 24:6; Mk 13:7; Lk 21:9; 1 Cor 10:11) or goal (cf. Rom 6:21-22; 1 Pet 1:9; 4:17).¹⁹ Here in Rom 10:4 all the three meanings are applicable and implies that the salvation offered through Jesus Christ has achieved the goal of the Old Testament law leading it to conclusion and terminating it by making it redundant and superfluous.

Thus in the epistle to the Romans Paul reverses the understanding of the law. Even though the Torah had originally been given by God himself through Moses, still Paul is courageous enough to point out its redundancy in the face of the grace that has been given through Christ. He does not accept it even as a complement to grace. He resolutely rejects the law as something superfluous.

In Other Epistles

Expressions of Paul's dissent and break with his own past life and that of the Christians are found also in the other epistles including the ones which are not always considered to have been written by Paul himself. Given the size of this paper, it is not possible to make a

19 Cf. Frederick William Danker (ed.), *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and other Early Christian*

Literature (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2000), 998-999.

detailed study of those texts which contain such examples. However, a brief mention of such texts could be made along with pointing out how Paul deviates from the traditional positions expressing his dissent with the past. We begin with one of the authentic epistles of Paul, namely, 1 Cor2:18-25, in which he contrasts divine-human understanding of wisdom and power by identifying divine wisdom and power in the cross, whereas the human wisdom fails to make such an identification. Paul substantiates his argument saying that the Greeks who seek wisdom and the Jews who seek power find the cross as foolishness and stumbling block respectively. In this section the message about the cross questions the wisdom of the world by explaining that a human wisdom that is incapable of understanding the real wisdom of God revealed on the cross, cannot be wisdom at all. So also the human power that does not recognize the power of God on the cross is not power at all. By arguing this way, Paul presents the cross as the basis for Christian identity²⁰ which stands opposed to the fundamental values of a fallen, sinful world.²¹

The second issue we consider is taken from 1 Cor 12-14, a section in which Paul is discussing the theme of spiritual gifts. While the Corinthian Christians, especially those who possessed the gift of speaking in tongues, seem to be taking pride in the spiritual gifts considering them to be the result of their spiritual enlightenment, Paul is making an attempt to drive home in their minds the fact that such gifts are free and gratuitous gifts of God and not achievements of the Corinthian Christians themselves. Paul does this by using the Greek term *charismata*(cf. 1 Cor12:4.9.28.30.31) which expresses the 'given' nature of such spiritual gifts in place of the Greek term *pneumatika*²² (cf. 12:1) which simply means 'things of the spirit' and which would have led those who possessed them feel superior to the rest of the community members. Paul expresses his dissent

20 Cf. Anthony C. Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, NIGTC (Grand rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2000), 148.

21 Cf. C. Blomberg, *I Corinthians*, NIVAC (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 52.

22 This term *pneumatika* must have been a term used by the Corinthian Christian themselves to refer to the spiritual gifts and probably they must have used it to express their pneumatic enthusiasm.

to the conviction of the Corinthian Christians by giving them a corrective, namely, by telling them that the spiritual gifts are also charisms at the same time. Paul is making this terminological shift to steer their attention to the grace-given character of the spiritual gifts. Here Paul's courage to correct the Corinthian Christians from misunderstanding and distorting the message he proclaimed to them in spite of the fact that the church in Corinth was at its fledgling stage.

Another such point of disagreement between Paul and the community members was related to the conflicting understanding of apostleship.²³ That an apostle was understood to be a messenger or proclaimer of the gospel message was current in all the churches of Early Christianity. Yet Paul does not seem to have been accepted by the Christians of Galatia and Corinth without any dispute. That is why he tries to establish his apostolic authority and credibility in the first two chapters of Galatians. Further, he also attempts to correct the popular understanding of apostles among the Christians especially in Corinth. While the Christians of Corinth expected the apostles to be super-apostles, Paul insists that they be slaves and stewards of the gospel (cf. 1 Cor 4; 2 Cor 2-4; 11-12).

Yet another important area of dissent between Paul and Judaism was related to the universal characteristic of salvation offered in and through Jesus Christ as against the limited understanding of Judaism. Though it is true that Abraham was promised already in Gen 12:3 that in him all the families of the earth shall be blessed, yet the people of Israel understood election as limited only to them (cf. Ex 19:3-8; Dt 7:6; Amos 3:1-2). However, this is relativized by Paul in Rom 1:16 where he writes that the gospel is the 'power of God for salvation to *everyone* who has faith' in spite of the fact that the Jews were the ones who were historically called first. In Gal 3:28 Paul asserts that when one is in Jesus Christ all distinctions

23 For a detailed study of apostleship as a point of contention between Paul and some of the communities he had founded especially the communities of Galatia and the community in Corinth kindly confer N. H. Taylor, "Apostolic Identity and Conflicts in Corinth and Galatia," in *Paul and His Opponents* ed. Stanley E. Porter (Boston: Brill, 2005), 99-127.

between Jew and Greek, male and female and master and slave are abolished. Paul's understanding of universalism reaches its climax in Ephesians. Though it may not have been written by Paul himself, yet this epistle, written in the spirit of Paul, categorically declares that the distinctions between the Israelites and the Gentiles are abolished and as Christians all have become part of the one and the same people (cf. Eph 2:11-22).

We would like to consider one final example which is taken from another deutero-Pauline epistle, namely, from 1 Tim. Speaking of his past life in 1 Tim 1:13-15 Paul calls himself a blasphemer, a persecutor, a man of violence and foremost among the sinners. This text also makes it clear that he sees the transition that has taken place in his life as the result of the "graciousness and mercifulness of God's salvation."²⁴ He says that even though he was formerly a blasphemer, a persecutor, and a man of violence, but he received mercy because he had acted ignorantly in unbelief. Now this goes against what he has said about himself in Phil 3:4-6. There Paul does not seem to regret that he persecuted the Christians, on the contrary, he adds this to a long list of his credentials from his past life. In Phil 3:4-6 it is probably Paul the rabbi speaking and here in 1 Tim 1:15 Paul the repentant sinner. In any case 1 Tim 1:13-15, like Phil 3:4-6, marks Paul's rejection of the past.

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foremost among sinners..
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Concluding Remarks

The revolt of Paul against Jewish the law and legalistic attitude to salvation found there is correlative of Jesus' revolt against the Pharisees and their legalistic approach to life. Paul was a disciple of Jesus Christ and shared and committed himself totally to Jesus' vision of life that was based on his experience of God, humans

24 William D. Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, WBC 46 (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2000), 51.

and cosmos. Such a commitment implied a definite break with his glorious past though such a partition was quite unpleasant and embarrassing and a reorienting of himself to the new way of life. However, Paul does not make the mistake of throwing the baby out with the bath-water. While remaining faithful to the elements that were common to his old and new ways of life, for example accepting the fact that both the testaments speak of the one and the same God, he boldly questioned and rejected his learned traditions that contradicted his new experience considering them as either meaningless or redundant. At the same time he has also successfully integrated from his past life and background whatever was supportive of his new experience and life. Thus his dissent is not ruthless and indiscriminative but a sensible and differentiated one. In all this one aspect of Paul's dissent comes out very strongly, namely, he was always ready to take any risk for its sake. He did not seek mere intellectual clarity on matters of dissent, but made a clear-cut option and jumped into action.

Further, it should be noted that Paul is often accused of being dogmatic in his teachings and does not permit much dissent from his positions. For example after providing instructions on the practice of charisms in 1 Cor 14, Paul writes in v 38: 'Anyone who does not recognize this is not to be recognized.' It must be noted here that most of such demands made by Paul are context-bound and not valid universally and for all times. Further, such dogmatic, seemingly absolutizing demands can be attributed to the intensity of his experience of and commitment to the risen Christ and his passionate concern for the communities he is addressing. Thus, Paul is not advocating dissent from everything that is traditional and standardized. His dissent is limited to the insufficiencies of the past. It is experience-based and situation-bound.

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