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**CÉSAR FRANCISCO ALVES DA SILVA**

**PARENTAL IMAGERY IN PAUL'S WRITINGS**

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**sob orientação de:**

**Prof. Doutor José Tolentino Calaça Mendonça**

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# Parental Imagery in Paul's Writings

## Introduction

When I started to reflect about the theme I had the feeling that I wanted to produce a meaningful and purposeful research. Many factors led me to Saint Paul: the celebration of the Pauline Year proclaimed by Pope Benedict XVI (June 2008 to June 2009); at school I enrolled in classes on Pauline Writings; also, I have always felt a special affection for the Scriptures; and finally, it was getting closer to the fiftieth anniversary of Vatican Council II and the biblical quotations used in it were mostly from Saint Paul.

On reflection it became clear that a study of Saint Paul was at the top of my list. Furthermore, reading through Saint Paul's writings I was impressed by the apparent nonsense about Paul as a nursing mother in 1Thess 2, 7. This was the beginning of the present study. I did not, at the time, realize that it would take me as far as it did.

When I asked Dr. Tolentino Mendonça to be my adviser, he accepted gladly and has guided me wholeheartedly: my sincere gratitude to him.

From the beginning I opted to write in English, not only because most of my bibliographical sources are in English and Spanish, but also because it was an opportunity to develop my skills in the English language. As my command of English is not the best, I also take this opportunity to express my gratitude to all who supported me and spent their time helping me meticulously in this project. Like Saint Paul, I do believe in the power of creating networks, so that our work is shared and is complete.

Being amazed by picturing Saint Paul as a nurse I started to build a new image of this great evangelizer that was in deep contrast with the one I had before, that of a cold and emotionless person. So I was facing the challenge of finding out about the great Saint Paul by studying a complex metaphor.

My aim was to find the parental face of Saint Paul that permeated and gave sense to all his writings. I started to take down notes while discovering how Paul cared for the baptized that he had evangelized with a fatherly and even a motherly love and care. I opted to use "parental" instead of "paternal" to describe this way of Saint Paul in dealing with his communities and coworkers. Firstly, because it has a broader meaning: it can mean "to be a father", "to be a mother" or to be like a parent person, as it is in the case of a nurse. Secondly, speaking about "parental methodology", it is more fitting as it

relates to the conclusion that is expressed in the letter to the Romans where Paul states clearly that God is the only Father of all creation.

**Chapter One** presents a contextualization of Saint Paul and his writings with a concise description of his life and ministry. I have included introductory remarks about the Apostle's context and language that sets the tone for the following work.

The description of Paul's life and ministry, though succinct as it appears in the beginning of this chapter, leads one to recognize each time how great missionary this Apostle was. Even if one cannot speak of a structured Ecclesiology of Paul, there is common agreement among scholars that the Apostle contributed with some very important insights that are still meaningful and current for answering the important question of what is the Church.

Saint Paul's writings are very important if that question is to be answered because the first Christians were inserted into a social structure, and had to profess their faith in accordance with it, and this question is still pertinent for Christians today.

It is important to understand how the parental imagery that Paul uses to approach his community generates a new and valid understanding of what the Church should be and what was to be the mission of the baptized. The succinct remarks that this chapter offers about the social and political context in Saint Paul's time intends to shed light on the way of living that caused the flourishing of the first Christian communities and thus, become inspirational for the present day.

In the final part of this chapter the language phenomena is taken briefly into account. This is so that it can help our approach to the various letters considered later in this study. The use of metaphor was very much a matter of my concern because of its importance in all languages, along with its key role in Saint Paul's overall writings and the weight that it assumed in the present research.

In summary: the understanding of basic notions about Saint Paul's context and the language types, not only gave me a new level of knowledge but also made me delve deeper into some important aspects that had been forgotten when I first studied the letters through the eyes of an ordinary reader.

**Chapter Two** of this study deals specifically with sentences present in some of the "authentic" Pauline letters. This chapter ties together the first letter to the Thessalonians, the letter to the Philippians and the letter to Philemon under the title "Happiness and Trust: The Parental Imagery of Paul". From these letters it is perceived

that, despite having to address certain issues, the writing reveals an Apostle who feels confident about his mission of proclaiming Jesus Christ.

In **Chapter Three** there is a sense that the letter writing marks a change of style. Paul had to assume the role of a more authoritative parent. Therefore, the letters to the Corinthians, to the Galatians as well as the letter to the Romans are considered in this chapter. A particular consideration is dedicated to the letter to the Romans as it is the last focus of our research. This letter represents something that can be called “Saint Paul’s Testament”.

As for the letters to the Corinthians and to the Galatians, some difficulties arose in these communities that made Paul very sad and he became concerned about them. In spite of this it is very important to note that Paul never gave up and always cared for the communities with a parental love. These are the reasons why this chapter is called “Conflict and Reconciliation: the Paths of a Metaphor - a Charming Testament”.

The “Charming Testament” which is in this title refers to the letter to the Romans which is one of the most marvelous pieces of writing in the entire Bible, but also one of the most difficult because of its theological density. The main conclusion in this chapter shows very clearly that Saint Paul continues to inspire all Christians with his theme of paternity. God is the only Father of all creation. Christians are to recognize that they are children of God and love their fellow Christians as fathers and mothers love their children, inspired in the first place by God’s example.

This letter also represents Paul’s synthesis about the powerful metaphor of paternal relationships which are guidelines for Christian lives. God is the one and only Father/Mother of all. The Christians, as they care for the members of their communities, participate in the parenthood of God.

This research work, in its second and third chapters, interprets just a few aphorisms, among many, that reveal Saint Paul’s parental way of dealing with the communities. It can be seen how Paul himself gives different form and shape to this marvelous parental metaphor as his letters are sent out to the different communities.

Two criteria led me to choose these axioms. On the one hand, they are like a light to understand the overall letters and their addressees (communities or individual persons). And on the other hand, these epistles reveal a key that can help the researcher identify an ever clearer image of what it meant for Saint Paul to have a parental methodology and what it means today for Church leaders and for all Christians.

For each letter I opted for a common general framework. First of all, there is an introduction to the letter and to its context. After that, a sentence of the specific letter is taken into account so that it is possible to detect the presence of this strong and multiform Pauline metaphor. Then, the metaphor is somehow brought to its original source, so that some new meanings can irradiate. Finally, each case taken into account is placed before some modern theories in order to understand a little better what would be the consequences of using such figures of speech in Paul's ministry. These final notes are intended to help us appreciate what the value of using such images would be in today's ministry.

I am convinced about the importance of keeping alive such images in order to generate, to maintain and to strengthen the faith of the baptized in light of the goals of Vatican II and the "Year of Faith" proclaimed by Pope Benedict XVI (2012-2013).

# Chapter One – Saint Paul: for an Archeology of his word

## 1. Some biographical notes

Saint Paul, the Apostle, was one of the first and greatest Christians of all times. His writings are among the earliest of the New Testament and represent a major part of it, almost one third.

Many are the studies and notions that have been referred to Saint Paul's life and to his deeds. The goal here is neither a complete biography nor an approach to all the components that have been characterized as part of Paul's life and ministry. Our aim at the start of this study is just to offer a simple, yet substantial, summary about the Saint so that it can enlighten all that follows in this effort.

The scholars tend to agree that Paul was born in Galilee in a year near to Jesus birth itself. Murphy-O'Connor points to the year 6 AC as a possibility. About Paul's death, the same author is not conclusive, saying that by the year 67 AD Paul was in Rome waiting for a sentence from a roman magistrate<sup>1</sup>.

After these hypothetical time remakes, the first consistent thing that we must say about Paul is that he has been one of the most audacious believers in Jesus that history has ever known. Paul had a religious background before Jesus. Known as Saul, he had a Hellenistic heritage and he was also a Jew as he himself states (Cf. Act 21, 39; 22, 2). How are both legacies joined together?

According to the Acts of the Apostles, Paul was born in Tarsus in Cilicia, consequently he was part of a Jewish family in the diaspora (Act 9, 11; Act 21, 39; Act 22, 3). This information has a great deal of importance for understanding the deep knowledge that Paul had of Jewish traditions and scriptures.

Concerning the date of his birth, scholars have appointed a few different dates, but they all agree with the idea that Paul and Jesus were contemporaries<sup>2</sup>, even though Paul never met Jesus Christ before his death and resurrection<sup>3</sup>. The Jesus that Paul did meet was the risen Christ, and this could be one of the reasons for Paul's strong belief and tireless effort to spread the Gospel.

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. MURPHY-O'CONNOR, J., *Pablo, su historia*, San Pablo, Madrid 2008, 14-15.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. COTHENET, E., *San Pablo en su tiempo*, Editorial Verbo Divino, Estella 1985, 5.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. MURPHY-O'CONNOR, J., *Pablo, su historia*, 35.

Saint Paul stood at the intersection of an important time line and cultural setting<sup>4</sup>. The intellectual tools given because of the junction of these settings, allied to Paul's strong belief in Jesus Christ, made this Saint not only a missionary himself, but also a reference for the missionary work of the Church across all generations.

In respect to the religious education of Paul, the scholars agree that he knew fairly well the Greek translation of the Hebrew Scriptures. Together with that, it is agreed that Paul understood the Greek language really well, which explains the vivacity of his letters (though he was not a philosopher).

Paul's cultural setting would also help him to develop his understanding of the world; it would be a very hard, yet rich, the experience of living in the middle of two demanding cultural structures and trying to find a balance (between Jewish and Gentile worlds)<sup>5</sup>. The two important places where Paul received his formation were Tarsus and Jerusalem, two of the richest cities in terms of culture and history in the ancient world<sup>6</sup>.

Residing in Jerusalem, Paul became a Pharisee, and so he was a man that gave a great deal of importance to the law. As the group of Christians was growing in number, Saul would be one of those contesting this movement, mainly because this new "branch" of the Jews gave more importance to the Messiah instead of the law. Furthermore, the Christians were claiming that, although the Messiah was more important, he was not incompatible with the law. Understanding this, Paul knew that the Christians were a danger for the Jewish faith<sup>7</sup>.

The event of Tarsus, the encounter with the Risen Lord, was a changing point in Paul's life. From the letters, it becomes clear that Paul had an experience similar to Peter and the others who had seen the Lord after his death and resurrection (1Cor 15, 5-8). Luke gave us three different descriptions of what happened with Paul that are intriguing because they are quite different from each other (Act 9, 1-25; Act 22, 1-21; Act 26, 1-23). As D. Marguerat claims, the goal of narrating this occurrence in three different moments was to somehow expose to their fullness all the consequences that this event had in Paul's life and how it could be seen from many different perspectives. "The common theme of the three variant accounts of Saul's conversion is to show how

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<sup>4</sup> Cf. COLLINS, R. F., *The Power of Images in Paul*, The Liturgical Press, Minnesota 2008, 1-2.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. MURPHY-O'CONNOR, J., *Pablo, su historia*, 18-21.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. COTHENET, E., *San Pablo en su tiempo*, 5.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. MURPHY-O'CONNOR, J., *Pablo, su historia*, 37.



Saul was violently seized by the exalted Christ, whom he had made his enemy, and how he was called to proclaim his Name among Jews and Gentiles”<sup>8</sup>.

As known, after the Damascus scene, Paul was initiated into the Christian faith and became a preacher of the gospel without parallel in early Christianity, mainly because of his missionary excursions. The most precious testimonies about him are the letters that he wrote or dictated to the different communities that are preserved to this day. Unfortunately there is a good chance that some were lost, but the ones we have offer us examples that permit us a close approach to the way of life of the first communities. They also give us some important peculiarities about Paul’s character which allow an important insight to him. Ultimately, these letters show us the living Lord present in His communities after His resurrection.

Truly, when one looks at Paul’s work, one has to recognize that it was the Holy Spirit which enabled him to start, raise and maintain many groups of Christians at the same time, and to create a network of responsible co-workers who were as captivated by Christ as Paul was.

In conclusion, it should be noted that the main sources for approaching the historical Paul are the Acts of the Apostles and Saint Paul’s letters.

## **2. Paul’s point of view about Ecclesiology**

One important point that seems to have relevant importance is what is called “Paul’s Ecclesiology”<sup>9</sup>. Of course it is not correct to say that Paul had a systematic theory about what the Church was or about or what the Church was supposed to be. Neither is not possible to find in Paul’s writings a Theology in general, or in its different branches as we have it today.

However, this being understood, it is also correct to say that Paul is an important and regularly visited source when a matter of any area of general Theology is to be studied. This is also true for Ecclesiology. Paul left to us many important statements

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<sup>8</sup> MARGUERAT, Daniel, *The First Christian Historian: Writing the “Acts of the Apostles”*, Society for New Testament Studies Monograph Series, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2002, 203.

<sup>9</sup> This brief topic was inspired manly in a study of Jean-Noël Aletti: Cf. ALETTI, Jean-Noël, *Eclesiología de las cartas de san Pablo*, Editorial Verbo Divino, Estella 2010. Also, the chapter seven of “*Para Mí, Vivir Es Cristo*” by Frederico Pastor-Ramos: Cf. PASTOR-RAMOS, F, *Para Mi Vivir es Cristo*, Editorial Verbo Divino, Estella 2010, 433-496.

concerning Ecclesiology that are to be revisited today. Some of them are difficult to understand because sometimes the letters have different positions when defining the Church – many times it seems that Paul’s statements are influenced by the geographical and cultural settings of the different communities<sup>10</sup>.

The theme of this study, the “parental imagery” in Saint Paul’s writings, finds an obvious connection with his viewpoints on ecclesiology, particularly concerning authority. So, since this study will somehow develop this theme, it seems important to point out even now some general and brief presuppositions about Saint Paul’s Ecclesiology. Most of the ideas Paul uses to refer the Church are metaphors: familiar and corporal (body; head and parts<sup>11</sup>). Sometimes he also refers to the Church using semantic fields (sets of words) referring to agriculture<sup>12</sup>.

The word church itself - ἐκκλησίᾳ - is used for the very first time in the New Testament to refer to the recently converted Christians in Thessalonica (1Thess 1,1). The same occurs in the greeting parts in the letter to the Galatians (Gal 1, 2) and in the first letter to the Corinthians (1Cor 1, 1). For the most part, when Paul uses the term “church” he is referring to the local communities. Nevertheless, sometimes this concept adopts a more broad significance, referring to a universal community, composed of all the Christians (cf. 1Cor 15, 9; Gal 1, 13; Phil 3, 6). F. Pastor-Ramos claims that most of the time when Paul uses ἐκκλησίᾳ he is referring to the local communities<sup>13</sup>.

While referring this many times to the church, Paul frequently adds a metaphor that intends to show forth to the church members the importance of being united among themselves. Paul cared so much for unity among the Christians that he spoke several times of the different charismas. Each one has a singular role in the community, and all should converge to a mutual edification (Cf. 1Cor 12, 4-12).

Despite all the difficulties that the theme of “parental imagery” raises, it is clear that the central concern that Paul had for the Church (or the local churches) has been

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<sup>10</sup> Cf. DUNN, J. D. G., *The Cambridge Companion to St. Paul*, Cambridge University Press, New York 2004, 199-200.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. BOUTTIER, M. (et alli.), *Vocabulario de las epístolas paulinas*, Editorial Verbo Divino, Estella 1996, 20.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. ALETTI, Jean-Noël, *Eclesiología de las cartas de san Pablo*, 25.

<sup>13</sup> Cf. PASTOR-RAMOS, F., *Para Mi Vivir es Cristo*, 438.

stability and integrity<sup>14</sup>. J. S. Bosch defends the idea that the element that mostly provided unity in the communities was the celebration of the Eucharist<sup>15</sup>.

And, all this, was bound together by the expression “In Christ”, which “... is primarily an ecclesiological formula. It means the state of having been articulated into the 'body of Christ' [i.e., the church] by baptism”<sup>16</sup>.

## 2.1 Social Identity – Church’s place in the social structure

It is important to note that Church in its original meaning (ἐκκλησία) purports an assembly regularly convened for political purposes. But when Paul refers to the term Church he understands a meaning beyond the Greek classical and Hellenistic significance. Normally when Paul refers to the Church and to its meaning as the assembly of the believers he uses metaphors. These metaphors are not just rhetorical, but with them Paul attempts to give root significance to what it means to be Church. In fact, mainly because of the new usage given by the first Christian communities, the term Church changed its significance, as we can recognize in the New Testament<sup>17</sup>. It is also worth noting that this concept shows an evolution in Paul’s writings. As Aletti claims, this evolution in the significance of the concept “church” is found not only in the proto-Pauline letters, but also in the deutero-Pauline ones. A tension is always present between a centripetal Church (concentrated in being built as a body) and a centrifugal Church (open to the richness of all the different communities)<sup>18</sup>.

For instance, the Church is seen as a field that Paul has planted, Appolos has watered and God gives the growth (1Cor 3, 6-9); it is also compared to an olive tree (Rom 11, 16). These metaphors are quite simple, referring to agricultural settings, which some would claim were derived from the imagery of the prophets.

Becoming more complex, these metaphors assume other patterns: in family terms, God is the Father of the Church connected closely to Jesus Christ (Gal 1, 1; Rom 1, 7); also, the Church members are descendants of Abraham (Rom 4, 1; Gal 3–4).

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<sup>14</sup> Cf. DUNN, J. D. G., *The Cambridge Companion to St. Paul*, 200.

<sup>15</sup> BOSCH, J. S., *Maestro de los Pueblos*, Editorial Verbo Divino, Estella 2007, 531-532.

<sup>16</sup> BASSLER, J. M., *Navigating Paul – An Introduction to Key Theological Concepts*, Westminster John Knox Press, London 2007, 36.

<sup>17</sup> Cf. BOUTTIER, M. (et alli.), *Vocabulario de las epístolas paulinas*, 35.

<sup>18</sup> Cf. ALETTI, Jean-Noël, *Eclesiología de las cartas de san Pablo*, 43-193.

According to this hierarchy, community members are to consider themselves as brothers and sisters, as Paul refers to them many times in his letters and in many other places in his letters: see, for example, Rom 15, 14; Rom 16, 1; 1Cor 1, 11. Beyond the lineage that connects the Christians back to Abraham, is now the new bond that makes the baptized into Christ Himself: “There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus” (Gal 3, 28). Then, the baptized are not just connected as sons and daughters to God by the Old Testament, but are made sons and daughters through the Son Himself<sup>19</sup>.

The fact is, that it seems that this kinship language enables the building of a very strong and deep identity and unity that binds the communities together<sup>20</sup>. This is actually one of the main reasons that the theme of parental imagery in Saint Paul’s letters caught our interest and effort, and motivated us to make this investigation about Paul’s methodologies and language.

Lastly there is another group of metaphors concerning the Church which are the more commonly used in our day: the images of the body and its members which include Jesus Christ and the community members. These metaphors can be found in two of the undisputed letters of Saint Paul (1Cor 12, 12-27; Rom 12, 4-8), together with two other incidences in two of the disputed letters (Col 1, 18; Eph 4, 12). These metaphors can be interpreted in at least two ways. On the one hand, the sense is that this living and organic reality has its strength and source of life coming from the Holy Spirit, who permits this body to be configured into the image of Christ (2Cor 3, 17-18). On the other hand it says that the community has to make an effort to correspond to this gift of God, and train the body to receive its fullness<sup>21</sup>.

These metaphors, as said, are the way that Paul finds suitable to give an explanation to what it means to be ἐκκλησία (church). These images give both depth and complexity to the understanding of the Christian identity.

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<sup>19</sup> Cf. BOSCH, J. S., *Maestro de los Pueblos*, 330.

<sup>20</sup> Cf. DUNN, J. D. G., *The Cambridge Companion to St. Paul*, 205-208.

<sup>21</sup> Cf. BASSLER, J. M., *Navigating Paul – An Introduction to Key Theological Concepts*, 35-43.

## 2.2 Religious identity – Church’s place among the various creeds

From the metaphors that were referred to above, and reading Paul’s letters, it can be agreed that the Christian communities had not only a role in the society, but gradually they built up also a religious identity.

Ultimately, the religious identity of the early Christian communities was drawn from Jesus Christ. Because Paul’s life was shaped by his encounter with Jesus, he transmits that grounding event to the communities that he is writing to.

Perhaps, if we take into account the metaphors that liken the Church to the body of Christ, it remains clear that eventually the Christians are members of the Church because they are members of Christ’s body and not the opposite<sup>22</sup>. Christians are so called because they are baptized into Christ (Gal 3, 27), into Christ’s body (1Cor 12, 13), and into Christ’s death (Rom 6, 3) and because they found in common the fact that they were in Christ they can call themselves church (ἐκκλησία)<sup>23</sup>. It is important to keep in mind that this term ἐκκλησία was very subversive because its original meaning referred to the citizens of a free Greek city that meet together to freely deliberate about their governance<sup>24</sup>.

Knowing this, it is understandable that the sixty-five times (against forty-nine times in all the remaining New Testament) that Paul uses in his writings the term “church” (mainly in its undisputed letters) he is referring to something more than just the name of a social group. As Paul says in 1Thess 2, 14, the church has its origin in God’s grace in Christ<sup>25</sup>.

Another reason that can testify to this religious quality of the church, more than its social meaning, is the plurality and multiform experiences that made it difficult sometimes to find similarities. But there was this fundamental similarity, of being baptized in Christ. It was undoubtedly this reality that gave the profound experience of a common identity. Then this multiform manifestation of Christian life was nothing more than a manifestation that assured the only salvific action of God toward all humanity<sup>26</sup>.

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<sup>22</sup> Cf. BOSCH, J. S., *Escritos paulinos*, Editorial Verbo Divino, Estella, 170.

<sup>23</sup> Cf. BASSLER, J. M., *Navigating Paul – An Introduction to Key Theological Concepts*, 4.

<sup>24</sup> Cf. CROSSAN, J. D., REED, J. L., *En busca de Pablo*, Editorial Verbo Divino, Estella 2006, 207.

<sup>25</sup> Cf. BOUTTIER, M. (et alli.), *Vocabulario de las epístolas paulinas*, 35.

<sup>26</sup> Cf. RIDDERBOS, H. *El pensamiento del apóstol Pablo*, Libros Desafío, Michigan 2000, 431.

## 2.3 Mission

Paul cared deeply for the churches that he founded, always writing to them, thinking about visiting them (e.g. 1Cor 4, 18; 1Thess 2, 17-18) or sending them his delegates (e.g. Phil 2, 19; 1Thess 3, 2).

He tried to maintain proximity with the communities through his letters. These letters had their focus both on the communities and on individuals. It is important to note that Paul addresses the leadership of the communities in a brotherly manner as found in Rom 1, 13 or 1Cor 2, 1.

As R. Aguirre states, Paul could not challenge the imperial order directly. His missionary strategy begins in the houses, which perpetrated a crucial role in the social life level. As some would say, Paul engendered a “domestic religion”. This was so clear that the Christian communities, living within the broad social structure, cultured alternative values and social relationships among them<sup>27</sup>.

The “building up” of the Church was to come by “mutual exhortation and example (1Thess. 5:11; 1 Cor. 8:1; 14; Eph. 4:12, 16). Paul shows himself willing to exclude or even dismiss those in the Church whose behavior threatens the stability or integrity of the Church (e.g. 1Cor. 5:1-5; 2Thess. 3:14-15; Gal. 4:30)<sup>28</sup>. Actually, the verb “to build” has a pastoral meaning and it prompts a positive motivation in the members of the Church who are reading and listening to Paul’s words<sup>29</sup>. Of course this was not a static reality as when Paul wrote and visited the different communities he exhorted them to show forth that they were Christ’s followers, which implied their concrete actions in the world.

Since Paul understands the Church in continuity with the chosen race from the Old Covenant, her mission has to be somehow in accordance with that. However, by introducing a new center to faith, Jesus Christ, Paul also informs the communities that they have a renewed mission in the world<sup>30</sup>. Because of this, the mission of the communities would be both a continuity of the suppositions of the Old Covenant, and they would also be shaped in an irreversible way by Jesus’s message for the world.

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<sup>27</sup> Cf. AGUIRRE, R., *Del movimiento de Jesús a la Iglesia cristiana*, Editorial Verbo Divino, Estella 2009, 153-161.

<sup>28</sup> DUNN, J. D. G., *The Cambridge Companion to St. Paul*, 200-201.

<sup>29</sup> Cf. BOUTTIER, M. (et alli.), *Vocabulario de las epístolas paulinas*, 24.

<sup>30</sup> Cf. RIDDERBOS, H. *El pensamiento del apóstol Pablo*, 429-430.

Because in the world the salvific moment of Christ is present continually in His Church it is natural to say that she has a mission. Going beyond sociological analogies from the political or religious context, the church naturally finds its center in the living Jesus who is present by the Holy Spirit. Jesus is the one summoning his disciples<sup>31</sup>.

In conclusion, the church is defined in a double movement: she is returning always to her center, Jesus Christ, so she can find her source, her reason and her energy; and that there is a movement out, in the context of her presence, to announce Christ to the world. This process happened with the Apostles, as it happened with the Apostle Paul afterwards and still happens with true believers in Jesus Christ. And so, it is correct to say that the church had, since her beginning and still must have today, a double movement: centripetal (toward Christ) and centrifugal (towards the world).

### **3. Sociological context**

To understand Paul's interaction with the different Christian communities we have to look at some key elements in order to understand the social context since it is apparent occasionally that Paul adapts his discourse because of it.

First of all, it is important to note that the questions we can ask are not quite the same as we would use nowadays to analyze a society in sociological, economic or political terms. Since ancient societies were very different from those we have today it is always a risky task to make general statements about their way of living and interacting. Even concerning the New Testament, it is difficult to speak about a general sociocultural setting, mainly because there are different human groups separated by three types of distances: geographical, chronological and cultural. Also, there are many different ways to organize the written testimonies which sometimes are almost contradictory, and cannot be reconciled by the historical-critical method as it would have been understood<sup>32</sup>.

Because of the singularities of each community, this point will be addressed when the different letters are taken into account in chapters two and three. But let us

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<sup>31</sup> Cf. BORNKAMM, G., *Pablo de Tarso*, Ediciones Sígueme, Salamanca 1978, 332-355.

<sup>32</sup> Cf. MIQUEL, E., *El Nuevo Testamento desde las ciencias sociales*, Editorial Verbo Divino, Estella 2011, 17-30.

touch on some general statements in order to set the tone for the remainder of this research work.

In general, it is natural to say that the Pauline communities and the other Christian communities as well, had to live in their world and also maintain their differences in order to be recognized with a distinct identity. This point was important not only so that others could recognize their differences, but also so that they could be recognized especially among themselves by a specific distinctiveness.

It is also important to keep in mind that the Christians outside Palestine had to undergo different challenges from these first communities. Traveling throughout the eastern Mediterranean, through Asia Minor, Greece, Cyprus and Rome, Paul founded different communities that did not have a Jewish tradition, but a Greek one<sup>33</sup>.

Different communities had also different sociologic frameworks and different ways of practicing religion. When Paul writes a letter he takes into account the problems that individuals and communities were experiencing. Jumping ahead, we can point out examples of some social and cultural realities that Paul had to address in order to “Christianize” them: questions related to justice (among community members and in a social forum); tireless combat against idolatry (at Corinth for instance); family life; slavery and many others.

As a final note, it can be mentioned that Paul traveled through the cities of the Roman Empire and he can therefore be called “the first missionary of the cities”. And many of those cities, as we will see in the analysis to each individual letter, were the most important cities in the Roman Empire at the time. As R. P. Seesengood would characterize Paul, he was the man who traveled to several cities of the Roman world declaring, teaching and writing that Jesus of Nazareth was the Messiah<sup>34</sup>.

#### **4. The political situation**

The political reality of Paul’s communities outside Palestine was very different from that of the Palestinian Christians: “while both cultures were controlled by kings, the Greek east revered its leaders and in some cases viewed them as gods”<sup>35</sup>. Also,

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<sup>33</sup> Cf. ERMATINGER, J. W., *Daily life in the New Testament*, Greenwood Press, Westport 2008, 14-16.

<sup>34</sup> Cf. SEESGOOD, R. P., *Paul – A Brief History*, Wiley-Blackwell, Oxford 2010, 14-19.

<sup>35</sup> ERMATINGER, J. W., *Daily life in the New Testament*, 14.



within Paul's project, to introduce a standard behavior that united Jewish and Gentile Christians, was a constant task and involved a lot of effort and some arguments from both sides. Assuming that he is a lawful and respectful member of the Jewish tradition, Paul also has statements that sometimes sound like political flattery. Further, more than opting for one or the other side of the question, Paul introduces Christ's newness, saying, beyond words, that Christ is the one who can make both the Jews and the Gentiles complete, so they would need to believe in Him<sup>36</sup>.

Many of the territories that Paul passed through were conquered and subjugated by Rome and its culture. Scholars still argue today about the kind of relationship that the first Christians had with the Roman Empire. If it is true that Christians wanted to build their identity, it is also acceptable to say that, at least in some communities, Christians were not opposed to the empire directly.

The way of looking to authority was also very different. As we hear in history, some Roman citizens looked to the emperor as a god: "Although Augustus was careful not to declare himself a god in the west, there is evidence that in the east he allowed the Greek culture to prevail and to hail him as a god"<sup>37</sup>.

As S. Kim points out, there are many factors that make an anti-imperial interpretation of Luke's and Paul's texts difficult: there is no specific critique of the Roman Empire; there are no references to the imperial cult (which, as S. Kim explains, is not directly opposed – like in other New Testament books – to the worship of Jesus as the Lord). The author uses the text of Rom 13, 1-7 to explain that Paul and the Christian communities had, in general, a good acquaintanceship with Romans<sup>38</sup>.

In rooting his evangelical task mainly to the cities it is also true that the cities would be more open to his message. "The rural villages tended to be more conservative, clinging to the traditional and previous ways. The cities were more open to new ideas because the population tended to interact with various groups"<sup>39</sup>. The truth is, this

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<sup>36</sup> Cf. FOTOPOULOS, J. (editor), *The New Testament and Early Christian Literature in Greco-Roman Context*, Brill, Boston 2006, 3-15.

<sup>37</sup> ERMATINGER, J. W., *Daily life in the New Testament*, 14.

<sup>38</sup> Cf. KIM, S., *Christ and Caesar – The Gospel and the Roman Empire in the writings of Paul and Luke*, William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company – Grand Rapids, Michigan 2008, 34-43

<sup>39</sup> ERMATINGER, J. W., *Daily life in the New Testament*, 15.

openness was also very challenging to Paul because he often faced cosmopolitan cities with complex political networks and filled with a plurality of religions<sup>40</sup>.

Just to conclude this point, though Paul respected and lived in a concrete social and political environment, he had a new message: Jesus Christ. The freedom that the encounter with Christ created in Paul also brought him enemies in social and political circles: they were not just Jews, but also Greeks and Romans<sup>41</sup>.

## 5. Writing in ancient world

### Letter writing

Letters constitute a major part of the New Testament, and most of them are attributed to Saint Paul. Normally scholars divide the “Pauline Corpus” into two main sections: proto-Pauline letters normally called undisputed (first Thessalonians, Galatians, Philippians, Philemon, first Corinthians, second Corinthians and Romans); and deutro-Pauline letters which are seen as using Paul’s name as a pseudonym (second Thessalonians, Colossians, Ephesians, Titus, first Timothy and second Timothy). Even if there are some differences about this division, there is agreement that Paul was not the first writer using the letter form to communicate, but he was the first “inventing” this method as a powerful and efficient tool to spread and sustain the Gospel he preached. In fact, much of the importance of the letters resided in allowing Paul to maintain a faith-filled dialogue with his communities. Furthermore, the relationship between Jesus’ message and the twenty-first century Christians is strengthened by the letters of Paul<sup>42</sup>.

The letter form, also called Epistle, was uncommon in the Old Testament and certainly the first contact that most Jews had with this kind of writing “was from monarchs, proclaiming a royal mandate or providing authority regarding some event”<sup>43</sup>. This changed in the New Testament as the Apostles felt the need of communicating

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<sup>40</sup> Cf. COTHENET, E., *San Pablo en su tiempo*, 52.

<sup>41</sup> Cf. DUNN, J. D. G., *The Cambridge Companion to St. Paul*, 42.

<sup>42</sup> Cf. BROWN, R., *Introducción al Nuevo Testamento II. Cartas y otros escritos*, Editorial Trotta, Madrid 2002, 541-556.

<sup>43</sup> TISCHLER, N. M., *All Things in the Bible – An Encyclopedia of the Biblical World*, 2 volumes, Greenwood Press, London 2006, volume 1, 196.

among themselves when they were distant from each other. They also used Epistles to maintain closeness with communities that were distant from them.

As is known, the recent discovery of some ancient letters in the Egyptian area brought up a flurry of comparative research into the structure of the New Testament letters. The major discussion deals with the question of whether the New Testament letters, mainly the Pauline ones, follow two, three, four or five structural parts as do some of the ones discovered. As the scholars studied this theme they drew many conclusions but they are not always in consensus. Nevertheless, there is consensus that the Pauline letters have similarities with those written by some ancient writers and by the governors (or from other formal settings) to their peoples. There are similarities in various functional levels: syntactical, semantic and organizational. Of course these similarities diverge from letter to letter. In one way we have to recognize that Paul had knowledge of a letter form in a formal structure. On the other hand, scholars agree that Paul adapted this structure in many situations to find the proper way of addressing certain circumstances or transmitting specific doctrines. So, along with some dependence on traditional letter writing aspects, Paul gave flexibility to his texts<sup>44</sup>. There are really amazing results when we try to combine these two perspectives: it seems that the letter gains more energy after we do this.

Touching on some topics it seems to be important to enunciate some characteristics of the ancient letter writing, mainly around Saint Paul's time. We base these conclusions on the book called "*Life and Letters in the Ancient Greek World*" by J. Muir. First of all, the letter form is recognized as a way of communicating using written words from sender(s) to recipient(s). It is characterized by having three main sections, which can be subdivided in this way: introductory greetings; main body of the letter; conclusion or farewell section. But it should be noted that this form represents an evolution because there are ancient letters that did not have the introductory or concluding parts as described. As these forms developed, they normally expressed more and more the relationship that existed between the correspondents (formal, familial, friendly and others).

As J. Muir mentions, Paul also gave a major contribution to the evolution of these introductory and concluding forms. On the one hand he adapted introductory

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<sup>44</sup> Cf. PORTER, S. E. and ADAMS, S. A. (Editors), *Paul and the Ancient Letter Form*, Pauline studies, Netherlands 2010, 1-29.

forms by identifying himself with particular details, as well as identifying the addressees (cf. 1Cor 1, 1-3). As for the conclusions, Paul was following approximately the stipulated form. Although, it is worth noting that he uses the same idea and words. Every time he wishes that the Grace of Jesus Christ (or God) be with the addressees and finishes with the word “amen” every time (and likewise in all the letters that are part of the Pauline corpus).

Usually, in the body of the letter the expressions depend on whether the sender is singular or plural, and the same with the addressee. Also it depends on the degree of relationship that they have among themselves. Furthermore, in private letters it is normal that the sender presents his current situation in terms of health and life affairs. It is interesting that it is not normal to find letters in which the sender says that he is not in good health or is suffering. As we know, this is not true in Paul’s letters as Paul uses it strategically to transmit his message more clearly. Second Corinthians is example.

The core of the ancient letters also had some common expressions that Paul used as well: “you would do me a favor if...”, “know that...”, “give my best wishes to...”. There were of course some nuances of tone and style which each writer used.

Knowing that the ancient Greek world relied mostly on personal contacts for its business, letters of recommendation held a great deal of importance. As we know Saint Paul also used letters to defend some coworkers (such as Onesimus, as we will see when the letter to Philemon is discussed in this research) or to introduce to the community persons that he appointed to visit them (as Timothy who was sent to the Christian community in Corinth).

Another significant evolution happened when the letters started to be used for more sophisticated purposes like teaching and practical instructions. It started way back with Epicurus, Aristotle and Plato. In many of these letters the letter-writer was separated from the supposed addressee. This caused letters to become sometimes a one-way communicative moment as they had only a didactical and instructional purpose. Over times, these kinds of letters assumed a solid structure and there were persons specialized in writing them, not always the sender (actually it was more common to have a scribe).

In the ancient world the literacy rate was far below 50 percent, and therefore it is an important and crucial point to note that letter writing was a rare action. Along with this it is also important to note, together with J. Muir that writing and reading letters is

obviously one indication to some extent of literacy in various parts of the Greek world. At that time, among the first Christians there were some that were literate, particularly on the part of the sender. Furthermore, is outstanding the contribution given by “simple” letter-writing to Greek, particularly to written language<sup>45</sup>.

In conclusion, though the Pauline letters had some components similar to other contemporaneous writers, Paul gave it a much deeper meaning than anyone else. He gives us a tremendous insight in 2Cor 3, 2, by saying that Christians themselves are far more important than letters or recommendations “You yourselves are our letter, written in our hearts, that everyone can read and understand”<sup>46</sup>.

## **6. Purpose of metaphors**

In spoken language, figures of speech are often used to express one’s ideas in a more convenient way. This is also true in written language. Most of the famous books and texts in the world are so because of the rich imagery they preserve and transmit. The usage of these figures of speech, which refer to a determined reality using an uncommon way in written texts, finds its roots in ancient traditions. Since we are working with the powerful metaphor through which Saint Paul claims his paternity and, after all, God’s paternity for the communities and each person baptized in particular, it is important to have some insights about metaphors beforehand.

### **1. The metaphor in general**

Metaphor, as Paul Ricoeur would say, is the most powerful tool in linguistics. It generates and regenerates new language and new forms that permit different individuals to pursue a common understanding which “generates semantic grids by fusion of differences into identity.”<sup>47</sup>.

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<sup>45</sup> Cf. MUIR, J., *“Life and Letters in the Ancient Greek World”*, Routledge, New York 2009.

<sup>46</sup> Translation from New Jerusalem Bible. New Jerusalem Bible, edited by Henry Wansbrough, Longman & Todd and Les Editions du Cerf, 1985. From here on this Bible translation will be referred by the acronym NJB.

<sup>47</sup> RICOEUR, P. *The rule of metaphor*, Taylor & Francis Group, London 2003, 234.

It is important to keep in mind that metaphor is not just some kind of artistic embellishment. It is a phenomenon that affects all language processes as they are all constructed, at least to some extent, based on figurative language<sup>48</sup>. Aristotle would first define metaphor as “the introduction of an alien term” in some sentence, becoming a successful metaphor if in its new place it seems to belong: “you would say it had not invaded into an alien place but had migrated into its own”<sup>49</sup>. Simply put, metaphor could be defined as a form of communication using forms of language that literally would have a different meaning; but assembled together they tend to link that literal reality to another reality intended by the communicator. In this sense metaphors would be channel to bring closer two different realities, but implying an understanding shift on both dialogical partners. As Paul Ricoeur says: “In its literal sense, the expression constitutes an enigma to which the metaphorical meaning offers the solution”; and concludes saying that “the new pertinence is the kind of semantic ‘proximity’ established between the terms despite their ‘distance’ apart”<sup>50</sup>.

In our days many studies on metaphor are coming out. Scholars recognize in this language figure a master key for understanding different languages as well as a secure way to approach authors and contexts in various writings. Many would even say that metaphors are to be recognized as a principle of all languages.

The Classics would define metaphors according to two basic notions: similarity and substitution. Since the word “metaphor” (μεταφορά) itself implies movement, it involves not only the knowledge of technical vocabulary but also literary criticism in general. Classical culture tended to view metaphor as an ornamental linguistic resource. As the literature developed, the tendency was to see this as a way of expressing oneself in complex but structured form: it became almost a code which practically needed experts in the area either to form or to understand metaphors in their fullness.

Some scholars find difficulties in arriving at a consensual definition of metaphor. This way of communicating assumes many forms. In our day the word “metaphor” is not confined to spoken or written language but also used in other ways such as painting or music. Just as in terms of written text, it assumes many different

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<sup>48</sup> Cf. KNOWLES, M., MOON, R., *Introducing Metaphor*, Taylor & Francis Group, London 2006, 1.

<sup>49</sup> BOYS-STONES, G. R. (editor), *Metaphor, Allegory, and the Classical Tradition*, Oxford University Press, New York 2003, 7.

<sup>50</sup> Cf. RICOEUR, P. *The rule of metaphor*, 229-230.

shapes. One of the links that is found in all metaphors is usually called “underlying analogy”. Normally this analogy is constructed upon three basic constraints which connect both expressed realities: similarity; structure (words being used to pair together both realities) and purpose<sup>51</sup>.

Furthermore, defining metaphor is not simple because every time it is used it finds a connection to some other language figure. Metonymy is one of the closest relatives to metaphors in terms of language, but “for metaphor, we have to do with a mapping across two distinct conceptual structures (be they domains, spaces, categories, or concepts), but for metonymy we have to do with the highlighting of one conceptual structure against the background of another within an encompassing conceptual frame”<sup>52</sup>. As P. Ricoeur would say, metonymy (originally meaning “one name for another name”) is a simpler process of figurative language: “the difference between these two figures is that metonymy follows the order of things and proceeds analytically, whereas metaphor plays on comprehension in a synthetic and intuitive manner, by means of a reaction that begins and ends in imagination”<sup>53</sup>.

In terms of functionality, metonymy and metaphor have fundamentally two different functions: “metonymy is about referring: a method of naming or identifying something by mentioning something else which is a component part or closely or symbolically linked. In contrast, metaphor is about understanding and interpretation: it is a means to understand or explain one phenomenon by describing it in terms of another”<sup>54</sup>. In simpler words M. Silk, taking into account the contributions of Aristotle, Jakobson, Ricoeur and others, states: “metaphor and metonymy are not equals after all, because metonymy is substitutional, where metaphor is interactional, which makes it something else or something more”<sup>55</sup>. It would be a metonymy to say “Edison lit the world”, because of Edison’s inventions. However, it is metaphorical to say “Christ lit the world” just because as we maintain alive that expression in our mind, our imagination will find successive new meanings.

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<sup>51</sup> Cf. BOYS-STONES, G. R. (editor), *Metaphor, Allegory, and the Classical Tradition*, 1-35.

<sup>52</sup> STEEN, G., *Finding Metaphor in Grammar and Usage*, John Benjamins Publishing Company, Philadelphia 2007, 61.

<sup>53</sup> RICOEUR, P. *The rule of metaphor*, 237.

<sup>54</sup> KNOWLES, M., MOON, R., *Introducing Metaphor*, 41-42.

<sup>55</sup> BOYS-STONES, G. R. (editor), *Metaphor, Allegory, and the Classical Tradition*, 140.

Synecdoche is another figure of speech related to, and used with, metaphors. Generally, “where the term synecdoche is used, metonymy has a narrower meaning, and refers just to the process of naming by association”<sup>56</sup>. This figure is generally used to refer to the process of language that substitutes the part for the whole or vice versa. Then, as G. J. Steen explains, in metaphors the meanings within the expression are related by similarity, but as for synecdoche the relation is found by class-inclusion<sup>57</sup>. P. Ricoeur says that synecdoche is much simpler than metaphor because it just does a “simple subtraction of semes”<sup>58</sup> – a seme is a basic component of meaning of a morpheme, especially one which cannot be broken down into more basic components; it is a primitive concept.

An example of synecdoche would be “more hands can save this factory” because the hands refer to the workers needed. But if we say “the salvation of the world is in God’s hands” it is a metaphor because that reason of creating multiple instances of signification in our imagination.

Comparison (or simile) is another figure of speech that has much in common with metaphor. It seems that every metaphor carries an implicit comparison<sup>59</sup>. The main difference pointed out by P. Ricoeur is that in metaphor a specific term of comparison such as “like” or “as” is not used. Of course this small difference causes an enormous shift in the final result of the expression used. Even Aristotle attributes superiority to metaphor over simile, “metaphor sets the scene before our eyes”<sup>60</sup>. G. J. Steen claims that sometimes in using comparative elements, either in written or spoken figures, “simile narrows down the interpretation of metaphor”<sup>61</sup>. The main reasons pointed out by P. Ricoeur for accepting the supremacy of metaphor are that metaphor goes beyond logical arguments and it causes much more surprise than a simple comparison. For example, P. Ricoeur says that it is more surprising to say “Achilles is a lion” (metaphor) than to say “Achilles is *like* a lion” (simile)<sup>62</sup>.

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<sup>56</sup> Cf. KNOWLES, M., MOON, R., *Introducing Metaphor*, 37.

<sup>57</sup> Cf. STEEN, G., *Finding Metaphor in Grammar and Usage*, 222.

<sup>58</sup> Cf. RICOEUR, P. *The rule of metaphor*, 199.

<sup>59</sup> Cf. STEEN, G., *Finding Metaphor in Grammar and Usage*, 64-71.

<sup>60</sup> Cf. RICOEUR, P. *The rule of metaphor*, 26-30; 37.

<sup>61</sup> Cf. STEEN, G., *Finding Metaphor in Grammar and Usage*, 84.

<sup>62</sup> Cf. RICOEUR, P. *The rule of metaphor*, 53.



One thing to be mindful regarding metaphors is that, ordinarily we use them and we are touched by them, but most of these times we just assume their immediate meaning. Nevertheless, if one looks closely at them and analyses each of the words used, then multiple new meanings are discovered. Normally each metaphor transports new elements to the definition of the concerned realities: “the very process of examining conventional metaphors often alerts us to hidden meanings, such as evaluative orientation or ideological position”<sup>63</sup>. S. Glucksberg, analyzing the contraction and interpretation processes of metaphors, concludes that these language figures create new categories in really fluid and quick ways<sup>64</sup>.

P. Ricoeur places much stress on the fact that the choice of the words used to form metaphors is not occasional. And, because the word is the basic unit that defines the lexical level of linguistics, it is important to analyze each singular word. On the other hand it is always important to be mindful of the context where it is used, and at the moment it is used. Paying attention to the singular meaning of the words (predominantly their polysemy) and to the sentence itself (context) it is possible to get renewed meanings for the metaphor<sup>65</sup>. It is also important to be aware of the ideology and social context behind the metaphorical expressions; they play an important role in the search for all the meanings that metaphors can sustain<sup>66</sup>.

The networks created by using metaphors are often multiple. That is the fundamental justification for the possibility of multiple valid interpretations, even sometimes contradictory. As J. Stern states: “semantic orthodoxy is compatible with broad, variegated pragmatic heterodoxy”<sup>67</sup>.

Lastly, it will be interesting to mention the power of metaphors in our life. Studies have shown how metaphors can shape and change lives. The change occurs not only on conceptual levels, but is also reflected in mental changes and in physical health. It is impressive how metaphors are used in every branch of therapy.

A book titled, “*The Transformative Power of Metaphor in Therapy*” in which the author, Sana Loule, affirms time and again how important she found the use of

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<sup>63</sup> KNOWLES, M., MOON, R., *Introducing Metaphor*, 21.

<sup>64</sup> Cf. GIBBS, R. W. Jr. (Editor), *The Cambridge Handbook of Metaphor and Thought*, Cambridge University Press, New York 2008, 67-83.

<sup>65</sup> Cf. RICOEUR, P. *The rule of metaphor*, 128-140.

<sup>66</sup> Cf. KNOWLES, M., MOON, R., *Introducing Metaphor*, 73-93.

<sup>67</sup> STERN, J., *Metaphor in context*, Cambridge University Press, Massachusetts 2000, 169.

metaphor through storytelling in her medical mission as therapist and counselor<sup>68</sup>. Another interesting book by Henry T. Close is “*Metaphor in Psychotherapy*”. In this book Dr. Close offers dozens of practical therapeutic activities involving metaphors<sup>69</sup>.

One conclusion that can be drawn after reading these books is that a master teacher or therapist is such if he masters the use of proper and elucidative metaphors.

From here we can now go on and try to understand how crucial was the usage of metaphors by the flourishing Christian communities of the first century. Also, we can try to appreciate how important it is for Christians nowadays to think about the need for renewal, and create new and powerful metaphors that can be life-giving to faith.

### **Usage of metaphorical speech by the first Christians**

As Francois Vouga states, in early Christianity the pursuit for the truth about the Gospel accepted a plurality of ways to express the same Creed in order to maintain a fundamental unity. Surely this plurality happened because of the impossibility to reduce the God of Jesus Christ to a single person’s view or to a single discourse<sup>70</sup>. This could be one of the reasons why Paul was impelled to use imagery language.

Generally speaking, in the Bible the metaphors are tropes of speech which are largely used to communicate knowledge about God and his message to his children. So it is very important to continually have a deeper understanding of them. At the same time, each metaphor assumes various significances, in the sense that each can be interpreted starting from different angles<sup>71</sup>. It can even happen that the metaphors within themselves can multiply themselves; those are the “metaphors squared” as Beverly Gaventa likes to call them<sup>72</sup>. For instance, when Paul says “like a nurse nurturing their own children” (1Thess 2, 7) he is multiplying automatically its meanings. Later in this study I will take a closer look at this example.

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<sup>68</sup> Cf. LOUE, S., *The Transformative Power of Metaphor in Therapy*, Springer Publishing Company, New York 2008.

<sup>69</sup> CLOSE, H. T., *Metaphor in Psychotherapy*, Impact Publishers, California 1998.

<sup>70</sup> Cf. VOUGA, F., *Una Teología del Nuevo Testamento*, Editorial Verbo Divino, Estelha 2002, 467-470.

<sup>71</sup> Cf. KEACH, B., *Preaching from the types and Metaphors of the Bible*, Grand Rapids, Michigan 1981, 36-39.

<sup>72</sup> Cf. GAVENTA, B. R., *Our Mother Saint Paul*, Westminster John Knox Press, Louisville, 2007, 5.

## 2. The power of images in Paul – the usage of metaphors

Reading through the letters of Saint Paul it is clear that he is a master at using metaphors. Actually, one of his main ways to communicate is through the use of metaphorical imagery. Inspired by his religious genius and his biblical background, and considering that he had a magnificent knowledge of Hellenism, Paul has all the qualities to outline a very persuasive speech. Paul's letters were written in order to persuade his audience about the powerful truth of the Gospel that he learned from Christ himself. Any reader of his letters is delighted by the many images he uses to transmit his message, and these images are very helpful for the reader to get close to Paul himself.

When analyzing a metaphor there is a need to be aware of the context, mainly because metaphors are always born in a specific environment and refer to it. At the same time, there is a need to pay attention to their power: “metaphors ask us to change our minds”<sup>73</sup>. Also, the relationship between intimacy and metaphor is very important, especially in the paternal imagery that Paul uses.

Moreover, Paul in his letters uses many powerful images. This is a very significant point to Raymond Collins in his study called “The Power of Images in Paul”. In this book Professor Collins takes up the seven undisputed letters of Paul and pulls up the metaphors and all the imagery language that Paul uses. Through this study he concludes that Paul uses the ordinary to describe the extraordinary. Actually, it is correct to say that Paul is skillful in this matter and he uses a wide range of metaphors. Using many sources (for instance: secular language, religious language and biblical themes), Paul intends to speak to various audiences. Certainly Paul tries to persuade his addressees and clarify his ideas for them.

It is important to note that metaphors played an important role in Hellenistic rhetoric mainly because of their philosophical traditions. So, as some of Paul's listeners were Hellenistic he had to “speak in their language”. Also, he had to apply the same doctrine to those who had the Jewish faith: “For Paul, a Jew addressing a Hellenistic audience, correct relationships with God and one's fictive kin can be summed up in the dyad “faith and love.” For believers facing the impending eschaton, faith and love must be complemented by hope, the attitude that faith takes in the face of the future”<sup>74</sup>.

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<sup>73</sup> GAVENTA, B. R., *Our Mother Saint Paul*, 10.

<sup>74</sup> COLLINS, R. F., *The Power of Images in Paul*, 38.

## Chapter Two – Happiness and Trust: the Parental Imagery of Paul

During this chapter the focus will be on Paul's language itself, an application to its main corpus<sup>75</sup>. After a brief and general introduction to each letter, some of the sentences where Paul uses the parental metaphors will be isolated. Those seem to be a shining light to the theme approached in this study.

The second and in the third chapters are established according to common proclivities found in the different texts from the Pauline corpus, which will be briefly explained at the beginning of each letter unit that is taken into account. After a brief introduction to the letter itself, a simple lexical analysis of the Greek words will be undertaken, and by doing so, will pursue a deeper understanding of those metaphors. From there, it would be possible to draw some of the implications of such images in their contexts. Also, some connection with Psychology will be expressed, although briefly and just presenting the essence. The goal of this search for connections with Psychology and some modern sciences is ultimately a discovery and proof of how Paul's metaphors are still very much meaningful.

Specifically, parental metaphor is seen from three letters of Saint Paul: first Thessalonians; Philippians and Philemon. As the title states, these letters are not controversial or written with a disturbed tone. From this it seems clear that Paul's trust in the communities and in the individuals is very high. This reason might explain the relative brevity of these letters: they are shorter than the others taken into account in this study.

Despite these facts the first letter to the Thessalonians, to Philippians and to Philemon should not be underestimated. Actually, they are very rich and have a dense theological content. Furthermore, an extensive insight is given on morality and ethics.

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<sup>75</sup> "The seven authentic or undisputed letters of Paul can be divided into three heuristic groups for comparative purposes: (1) those letters where Paul is on a friendly basis and does not need to assert his authority, but rather can assume and play with his established authority in order to reaffirm the existing positive relations between sender and recipient (1 Thessalonians, Philippians, Philemon); (2) those letters where his authority is challenged but their recipients are addressed with a strong pastoral sense of reconciliation and advice (1 and 2 Corinthians); and (3) those letters where Paul offers an extensive claim to his apostleship, in one case within a hated conflict (Galatians) and in other case is a form of self-introduction at the recommendation (Romans)" PORTER, S. E. and ADAMS, S. A. (Editors), *Paul and the Ancient Letter Form*, 66-91.

These letters are definitively essential keys to capture some root lines in Paul's own ecclesiology and mission theology. The first letter to the Thessalonians, as it will be clarified, is generally accepted as the oldest writing that is preserved from Saint Paul and the very first written testimony of the New Testament about the rise of Christianity<sup>76</sup>. As for the letter to the Philippians, it is the leading witness of Christianity coming to Europe<sup>77</sup>; even though written from the prison, Paul preaches the gospel and tries to see further than his own the difficulties by exhorting the Philippians to hope. Finally, the letter to Philemon, written certainly as well from the prison<sup>78</sup>, is a very powerful text in which Paul puts forth his own self. Paul is the one encouraging Philemon and his house church to abide in the path of holiness.

These letters, generally speaking, present an affectionate tone. Like a parent, Paul is exhorting the community to cultivate fraternal love as a superior and concrete way of life which brings them closer to Jesus's message.

## **2. First letter to the Thessalonians**

In the first letter to the Thessalonians Saint Paul is quite happy as he writes. This shows Paul's trust that the Thessalonians are following the Lord's commandments. As many scholars say, this letter did not pretend to transmit a lot of theories, corrections or teachings. The main goal of Paul's letter was just to show a spiritual closeness to his community, exhorting them to be faithful.

Concerning its author, we can see from the beginning that this letter aims to be a co-authored letter (1, 1) by Paul, Silvanus and Timothy (as it is also the case with the second letter to the Thessalonians – 2Thess 1, 1-2). The scholars accept this authorship as true (especially as regards first Thessalonians). Apparently this correspondence with the Thessalonians was started after the departure of Paul and his companions from Thessalonica to Athens – certainly Paul himself was hoping to come back but was hindered (2, 18), although he managed to send Timothy back. So, surely this letter was written after Timothy's return with good news from Thessalonica concerning the

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<sup>76</sup> Cf. BOSCH, J. S., *Escritos paulinos*, 116.

<sup>77</sup> Cf. HOLLOWAY, P. A., *Consolation In Philippians – Philosophical Sources and Rhetorical Strategy*, Cambridge University Press, New York 2004, 44.

<sup>78</sup> Cf. VIDAL, S., *Pablo de Tarso a Roma*, Editorial Sal Terrae, Santander 2007, 167.

stability of the community there (3, 6)<sup>79</sup>. So, from Athens<sup>80</sup>, a little after the year 50, Paul is rejoicing, full of happiness with the good news Timothy brought, and showing, at the same time, his interest for his fellow missionaries<sup>81</sup>.

Together with Ugo Vanni I agree that there are three different parts in this letter. First, there is an autobiographical part where Paul speaks about himself as he recalls some aspects of the community. For instance he says “We cared so much for you that we were pleased to share with you not only the Gospel of God but also our own lives, because you had become dear to us.” (2, 8). Some say that Paul produced this letter just a few months after the foundation of this community, so it is interesting to see how he indicates right away the highest ideals of Christian faith. In the second part Paul exhorts and explains what it means to be a Christian<sup>82</sup>.

It is also important to note that the first letter to the Thessalonians was very close to the preaching of Paul himself. The community was just in its beginning when Paul wrote to them. It also signifies that Paul was doing his first experiments on letter writing. Generally scholars accept that this letter was the first one that Paul ever wrote to a Christian community<sup>83</sup>. But, the shortness and the “experimental” nature of the letter do not discourage researchers from studying it: “Despite their brevity and their relative lack of significantly developed theological themes compared to the other letters in the Pauline corpus, the two letters to the Thessalonian Christians have become the object of much recent examination, particularly in the areas of rhetorical criticism, sociological analysis and the early development of Pauline theology”<sup>84</sup>.

In the beginning of this letter Paul presents himself as a role model of sincerity and integrity for his co-workers. Paul believes that a sincere faith is the key to his success as an Apostle. Also, the ministers of the Word should transmit by their own examples the Word that they preach. This means, an incarnate Word. It is fair to say, like in all Paul's letters, that in this letter he claims the primacy of Jesus for all his work.

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<sup>79</sup> Cf. J. W. Simpson Jr., “Thessalonians, Letters to the” in *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters*, edited by G.F. Hawthorne, R.P. Martin and D.G. Reid, InterVarsity Press, Leicester 1993, 932-939.

<sup>80</sup> Or from Corinth, as other academics claim: cf. ARBIOL, C. J. G., *Primera y Segunda Cartas a los Tesalonicenses*, Editorial Verbo Divino, Estella 2004, 30.

<sup>81</sup> Cf. MURPHY-O'CONNOR, J., *Pablo, su historia*, 151-154.

<sup>82</sup> Cf. VANNI, U., *Las Cartas de Pablo*, Editorial Claretiana, Buenos Aires 2002, 30.

<sup>83</sup> Cf. ARBIOL, C. J. G., *Primera y Segunda Cartas a los Tesalonicenses*, 22.

<sup>84</sup> J. W. Simpson Jr., “Thessalonians, Letters to the”, 932-939.

As it happens in all his letters, Jesus is that true center to which all the communities should gravitate<sup>85</sup>.

## 2.1 Paul as a nurse (2, 7)

ἀλλ' ἐγενήθημεν ἥπιοι ἐν μέσῳ ὑμῶν ὡς ἂν τροφὸς θάλπη τὰ ἑαυτῆς τέκνα.<sup>86</sup>

but we were gentle among you, like a nurse keeping warm her little children;<sup>87</sup>

Paul wants to be considered in the role of father and mother, founding his authority in Jesus<sup>88</sup>. Actually, it is in this context that Paul calls himself a nurse. In Greek the word τροφός does not mean a biological mother but a figure that symbolizes the care: its root is the word τρέφω which means to feed and also to make grow or to increase<sup>89</sup>. We are really before a challenging metaphor.

Just the word τροφός is full of symbolic meaning. This term refers to an “adoptive mother”, a nurse<sup>90</sup>. As such, the word τροφός gives us a sense of motherhood, and, even though it is not a biological mother, it is a mother who nurses “her own children” (ἑαυτῆς τέκνα)<sup>91</sup>. It is interesting to note that the word τέκνον appears 99 times in the New Testament, integrating, in several cases, a Habraistic phrase. It refers to the child’s relationship to his or her parents, and is etymologically related to τίκτω (“bear/beget”). In the case of 1Thess 2, 7 it is also used in its literal sense: it refers to the relationship between children and their parents<sup>92</sup>.

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<sup>85</sup> Cf. VANNI, U., *Las Cartas de Pablo*, 29-31.

<sup>86</sup> ROBINSON, M. A., PIERPONT, W. G., *The New Testament in the Original Greek - Byzantine text form – 2005*, Chilton Book Publishing, Massachusetts 2005. This is the version used for all the Greek text quotations found on this study.

<sup>87</sup> Translations of biblical texts are my own unless otherwise noted.

<sup>88</sup> Cf. BORNKAMM, G., *Pablo de Tarso*, 218-232.

<sup>89</sup> Cf. ZERWICK, M., GROSVENOR, M., *Análisis gramatical del griego del Nuevo Testamento*, Editorial Verbo Divino, Estella 2008, 723.

<sup>90</sup> Cf. BALZ, H., SCHNEIDER, G., *Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament*, 3 volumes, William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company – Grand Rapids, Michigan 1993, Volume 3, 371.

<sup>91</sup> Cf. RICHARD, E. J. *First and Second Thessalonians*, Sacra Pagina, Minnesota 2007, 82-83.

<sup>92</sup> Cf. BALZ, H., SCHNEIDER, G., *Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament*, Volume 3, 341.

Going deeper in the analysis, it is possible to conclude that Saint Paul shows that, in reality, those “children” are not his own but Christ's children, the Lord of all<sup>93</sup>. If that is true, it is also true that he loves them just as if they were his own. Consequently, this metaphor is full of tender care. It is important to take a look at the verb that expresses the action of nursing, even more, of “bestowing a great care on”<sup>94</sup>: θάλπη. Literally, this verb means “to keep warm”, like a bird keeping warm her eggs.

As Raymond Collins claims, the images used by St. Paul are powerful. In this case he says that the word νήπιοι (children) used by Paul describes his coworkers. He also notes that there are some doubts about this word: some scholars argue that the word here should be ἥπιοι (“gentiles”). Like most scholars he does not agree with that position<sup>95</sup>, saying that the word “children” fits better with the metaphor; it even helps to intensify it. The word νήπιοι can even be translated as “babies”, so it goes along well with the word nurse, expressing the closeness and the deep knowledge shared by Paul and the Thessalonians<sup>96</sup>.

If we attempt to find some parallels in the Old Testament the most obvious seems to be in the book of Numbers (Nm 11, 12) where Moses talks with God. He is saying that the Israelites have grown weary of eating only manna and asks God if he (Moses) is the one who fathered and gave birth to this people. As he concludes that he was not, he asks God why does he have to take care of them like a nurse<sup>97</sup>. Saint Paul's view is different, different from Moses: it is better that the Apostles accept the role of being nurses of the founded communities, mainly because through those acts they will show God's solicitude for his children<sup>98</sup>.

There are other texts which parallel the love of God and a mother's love: “Can a woman forget her nursing child, or lack compassion for the child of her womb? Even if these forget, yet I will not forget you” (Is 49, 15). This text is yet more significant because it says that God is even more faithful than the woman in the metaphor.

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<sup>93</sup> Cf. BOSCH, J. S., *Escritos paulinos*, 151.

<sup>94</sup> Cf. BALZ, H., SCHNEIDER, G., *Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament*, Volume 2, 128.

<sup>95</sup> Cf. GAVENTA, B. R., *Our Mother Saint Paul*, 18-20.

<sup>96</sup> Cf. COLLINS, R. F., *The Power of Images in Paul*, 17-18.

<sup>97</sup> The NJB translates: “Was it I who conceived all these people, was I their father, for you to say to me, “Carry them in your arms, like a foster-father carrying an unweaned child, to the country which I swore to give their fathers”? (Num 11, 12).

<sup>98</sup> Cf. TRIMAILLE, M., *La primera carta a los tesalonicenses*, Editorial Verbo Divino, Estella 1982, 35.



The conclusion of Isaiah also uses a standpoint that ties together all these viewpoints by saying that the woman, Jerusalem, has for her children a love like God's love, applying similar terms as first Thessalonians. Actually Is 66, 10-13 finds similarities with some of the texts of Paul that I look at more closely in this study<sup>99</sup>. Isaiah speaks about the act of "nursing" which has a parallel with 1Thess 2, 7; it talks about breastfeeding as in 1Cor 3, 1-2; mentions the offspring as in Gal 4, 19; finally, Isaiah has an apocalyptic sense as in Rom 8, 22-23. So, this passage of Isaiah has to be kept in mind as these texts of Paul are read and analyzed.

Enlightened by these passages we can conclude that the love and concern of the Apostle is a channel for God's love. And this conclusion has two implications: first, it shows that the authority of an Apostle is founded on a vocation to service; secondly, it is a model from where each Apostle should underline his ministry.

## **2.2. Rhetoric of excess – metaphor in context**

It is important for us to see that Paul uses these metaphors to refer to himself, his coworkers and all the Apostles. So they are to be seen as infants and nurses. For sure it is difficult to put together those two archetypes; metaphorically speaking it is possible, but in reality it seems to be impossible for one to be at the same time "νήπιοι" and "τροφός".

In one way this metaphor has a theological purpose. If we recall that this letter is the first one which Paul wrote to the Thessalonians, we notice that with this statement Paul is building some closeness to his community. If Paul is a nurse for that community it means that he is the one in charge of their spiritual well-being. So according to him an Apostle should be the one taking care of his spiritual sons and daughters. The Apostle, imitating Christ himself, has to have much care and concern for the Christians. Here seems to reside the main theological statement conveyed by this metaphor.

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<sup>99</sup> The NJB translates: "Rejoice with Jerusalem, be glad for her, all you who love her! Rejoice, rejoice with her, all you who mourned her! So that you may be suckled and satisfied from her consoling breast, so that you may drink deep with delight from her generous nipple. For Yahweh says this: Look, I am going to send peace flowing over her like a river, and like a stream in spate the glory of the nations. You will be suckled, carried on her hip and fondled in her lap. As a mother comforts a child, so I shall comfort you; you will be comforted in Jerusalem" (Is 66, 10-13).

Together with this conclusion the metaphor assumes not only a theological meaning but also a parenetic one. Since Paul sets himself as an example to be followed, he is exhorting the Thessalonians to act together in harmony<sup>100</sup>. And, if we put together this metaphor with the structure of the letter it gives us another argument to reaffirm the affective nature of the letter. Paul is having a great deal of joy writing to the Thessalonians so he can even use an image that creates a blood connection between them, as mother and child.

This metaphor is also a political statement in the sense that Paul makes himself responsible for taking care of his “children” and, as we know, to be father or mother means a social responsibility for the well-being of the children. So Paul is not a mere friend, or even a boss, a mentor, or a superior – he is the main one accountable for that family, but even more so because he considers himself to be their father and mother. Here it is important to recall that, historically, Thessalonica has been one of the most faithful cities to the Roman emperors.

Paul, in the letter, adopts an unequivocal and provocative tone about the unity and exclusivity of God, causing the cult to the emperor somehow to be shaken<sup>101</sup>.

Thus, when Paul was in Athens, he remembered the Thessalonians and, being happy because of their flourishing development, he was also afraid that their faith might weaken. As a result he sent them an affectionate message which sometimes assumes a shocking and somehow contradictory tone from the images used to do so. Paul presents himself as a “child” (1Thess 2, 7), as a “nursing mother” (1Thess 2, 7) and as a “father” (1Thess 2, 11). The usage of these symbols intends to give an intimate and homelike tone to the letter<sup>102</sup>. As Jerome Murphy-O'Connor asserts, Paul had a special concern for the new Christians that he left behind at Thessalonica. Of course they were under attack, as Paul himself was. However, the physical persecution was just a part of the problem; the true danger was more subtle because Paul knew the Thessalonians were easily convinced by other doctrines and schools of thought. “Paul feared that they would spread because of disillusionment, followed by a disappointment so great as to make

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<sup>100</sup> Cf. D. Marguerat, “L’Apôtre, mère et père de la communauté (1 Th 2,1-12)” in *Études Théologiques et Religieuses* 75 (2000/3), Institut Protestant de Théologie, Paris 2000, 373-389.

<sup>101</sup> Cf. LÁZARO, T. O. (coordinador), *La primera carta a los Tesalonicenses*, Editorial Verbo Divino, Estella 2009, 10-13.

<sup>102</sup> Cf. ARBIOL, C. J. G., *Primera y Segunda Cartas a los Tesalonicenses*, 54.

them renounce their new faith. If the believers in Thessalonica would come to feel cheated, surely all would be lost”<sup>103</sup>.

### 2.3. Reading the network of relationships

If psychologists were to analyze this metaphor of Paul (1Thess 2, 7), they might say that Paul is attempting a therapeutic relationship with the Thessalonians<sup>104</sup>.

God’s love is the main focus used by Paul to express the reasons for a Christian behavior and way of life. Claiming that he is a mother or a nurse, Paul is creating some relations that have similarities with attachment theory. Attachment in Psychology studies the affective development of the child in his or her younger states. Most of the studies conclude that the child develops a special and strong bond with the primary care giver, which most of the time is his or her own mother. From all the different perspectives that we can assume in these studies it is clear in the end that the child is greatly influenced by some biological underpinnings developed in his or her infancy with the care giver. Actually this seems to affect right away the perception of the world and the child’s capacities to assimilate new teaching. This means to say that the relationship developed between the care giver and child is to be linked somehow with educationally relevant outcomes in young children<sup>105</sup>.

So, educators must look forward to binding themselves with their children with secure relationships, showing and building different levels of relationships (for instance, with those who teach the value of responsibility) so that the children can manifest and develop more naturally their various individual characteristics<sup>106</sup>. Even though Paul did not have this kind of knowledge as it is developed today and applied to educational settings, he had a strong sense of the importance of those bonds between him and his children in faith, the newly born of Christ, who were to become sooner or later themselves tutors for the ones to come.

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<sup>103</sup> MURPHY-O’CONNOR, J., *Pablo, su historia*, 131-132.

<sup>104</sup> Cf. BECK, J. R., *The Psychology of Paul*, Kregel publication, Michigan 2002, 174-175.

<sup>105</sup> Cf. MATSUMOTO, D., *The Cambridge Dictionary of Psychology*, San Francisco State University, Cambridge 2009, 58.

<sup>106</sup> Cf. S. Altenhofen and Z. Biringen, “Attachment” in *Encyclopedia of educational Psychology*, edited by Nail J. Salkind, Sage Publications, California 2008, 73-76.

It is then correct to note that these perspectives alone are a little insufficient to deal with the “father” metaphor which Paul uses just a few verses ahead: “ὡς ἕνα ἕκαστον ὑμῶν ὡς πατήρ τέκνα ἑαυτοῦ” – 1Thess 2, 11 (like a father with his own children). Paul calls himself a “nurse” in verse 7, “one among the brothers” in verses 1 and 14, and also claims to be a “father” of the Thessalonians in verse 11. It is especially interesting to parallel the metaphor of Paul as a mother and as a father mainly because it has its continuities, but it also has its disruptions. It is known that fathers held enormous power in earlier times as it still is in some patriarchal societies today. According to these societies, fathers are often viewed as primarily responsible for ensuring that their children grow up with an appropriate sense of values. During Saint Paul’s time “by popular consensus, fathers were primarily responsible for ensuring that their children grew up with an appropriate sense of values, acquired primarily from a study of the Bible and other scriptural texts”<sup>107</sup>.

Some studies claim that the father tends to be the disciplinarian and a mother is the caring-love giver. They also conclude that a mother is often the main channel of affection to the child due to her physical closeness to the baby and due to the absence of the father (especially for reasons of social duties like work)<sup>108</sup>. Although sometimes the authority of the father creates a conflict for the children, it leans towards acceptance and good consideration by the children as they grow up<sup>109</sup>. Therefore, these notes can add some understanding and reason as we consider the fluid use of maternal and paternal imagery by Saint Paul: he is showing his affectionate role and also his disciplinarian role to the Thessalonians.

Of course one should not stereotype these models because they are fluid in the sense that the father also often offers comfort and care (even Saint Paul says that as a father he also encourages and comforts the Thessalonians – 1Thess 2, 12), and similarly the mother also teaches values. So the two roles are important and even though they are complementary, they are not the same. This conclusion seems to justify the option that Paul uses both metaphors: mother (nurse, more exactly) and father.

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<sup>107</sup> LAMB, M. E., *The role of the Father in child developing*, John Wiley & Sons, New Jersey 2010, 2-3.

<sup>108</sup> Cf. MILLON, T. (Editor), LERNER, M. J. (Editor), *Personality and Social Psychology*, in WEINER, I. B. (Editor in Chief), *Handbook Of Psychology Volume 5*, John Wiley & Sons, New Jersey 2003, 31-56.

<sup>109</sup> Cf. MYERS, D. G., *Psychology*, Worth Publishers, New York 2010, 556.

Thus Paul intends to build strong bonds with the Thessalonians even at the blood level (as a fathers or mother, sharing the same blood identity with their children). This does not mean as previously stated, that Paul was using some kind of Psychotherapy with his fellow Christians, but at least he knew which factors made an effective change and he, with the Spirit's help, was indeed an effective agent of change in the areas of service for God that he pursued<sup>110</sup>.

### 3. Letter to Philippians

Today, when we read the letter to the Philippians it is important to keep in mind that this letter represents the first testimony from a church in Europe. For sure the church in the city of Philippi in Macedonia was the initial church that Paul founded in Europe as well. This might be the reason why this letter is so personal, perhaps the most intimate of all his letters. Some say that this letter is the most eloquent text about friendship not just in terms of Biblical writings but in general<sup>111</sup>.

On the other hand, this letter is not so theological compared to the others. It seems to intend to give the Philippians basic roots on how to live as Christians<sup>112</sup>.

The content of the letter is simple, however, it is not easy to answer some questions about its authorship, time and place concerning its origin. If questions arise about the authorship, the truth is that the scholars conclude in the majority that this text was written by Paul himself<sup>113</sup>. Nevertheless, this puts in question Phil 1, 1 “Paul and Timothy...”. The presence of Timothy's name would be justified because Paul wanted him to be linked with his own ministry, and so showing to Philippians the importance of Timothy. About Paul's authorship, church history and modern scholars tend to accept it with corresponding reasons for it<sup>114</sup>.

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<sup>110</sup> Cf. BECK, J. R., *The Psychology of Paul*, 162.

<sup>111</sup> Cf. BROWN, R., *Introducción al Nuevo Testamento II. Cartas y otros escritos*, 633.

<sup>112</sup> Cf. STAAB, K., BROX, N., *Cartas a los Tesalonicenses Cartas de la Cautividad Cartas Pastorales*, Editorial Herder, Barcelona 1974, 147.

<sup>113</sup> Cf. G. F. Hawthorne, “Philippians, Letter to” in *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters*, edited by G.F. Hawthorne, R.P. Martin and D.G. Reid, InterVarsity Press, Leicester 1993, 708.

<sup>114</sup> For instance the testimonies of Clement of Rome and Policarp (in the early second century) claim the unmistakably Pauline character of the letter's content and form. Cf. STAAB, K., BROX, N., *Cartas a los Tesalonicenses Cartas de la Cautividad Cartas Pastorales*, 250.

Another important question is its unity. It seems to be an abrupt change from Phil 3, 1 to Phil 3, 2 and the following text. Reading the text it seems to us that in Phil 3, 1 the text is coming quietly to its conclusion, but it does not, and actually it changes drastically the tone from Phil 3, 2 continuing through Phil 4, 3. It is also an impressive observation that Phil 3, 1 fits together so exactly with Phil 4, 4, and both of them indicate a concluding form. Those are some of the questions raised by some scholars to argue that this letter, as we have it, does not come from a unique letter<sup>115</sup>. If this is true, there are also some strong reasons defending the unity of the letter: “(1) The fact that there is a disjointedness about Philippians and that Paul does interrupt himself at 3:2 should not be surprising in a personal, conversational letter, perhaps not all written or dictated at one time, by a person accustomed to abrupt shifts of style without notice (cf. Rom 16:16–19; 1Thess 2:13–16). (2) There are no Greek manuscripts, no matter how far back one goes, nor is there any early Church Father offering the slightest indication that Philippians ever appeared in a form different from that which now exists. (3) It is difficult to isolate one part of the letter from another because the same terms, word-roots and motifs pervade all of its so-called parts”<sup>116</sup>.

Searching for the date when the letter was written it is necessary in the first place to agree upon the place from where Paul would have written it. There are various possibilities to which the dates have to be adjusted<sup>117</sup>. To find the place where Paul wrote the letter, we have to keep in mind some indications within the text itself: Paul was in prison when he wrote (Phil 1, 7; 1, 13; 1, 17); that he could be killed because of his trial (1, 19-20; 2, 17) or released (1, 25; 2, 24). It is also important and very helpful to know that there was a “praetorium” where he was imprisoned (1, 13), as well as people who belonged to the household of Caesar (4, 22). “There are also some other important details: that Timothy was with Paul (1:1; 2:19–23); that extensive, effective evangelistic efforts were going on around him (1:14–17); that Paul planned to visit Philippi when he was acquitted (2:24) and that apparently several trips—possibly as many as four—back and forth between Philippi and the place from which Paul wrote Philippians were made by different people within the time span of his

<sup>115</sup> Some scholars would say that the unit is to be questioned because in Phil 3, 1 the author seems to end the letter and the passage to Phil 3, 2 is too sharp. Cf. STAAB, K., BROX, N., *Cartas a los Tesalonicenses Cartas de la Cautividad Cartas Pastorales*, 250.

<sup>116</sup> G. F. Hawthorne, “Philippians, Letter to”, 709.

<sup>117</sup> Cf. BARBAGLIO, G., *La Teología de San Pablo*, Ágape, Salamanca 2005, 198-199.

imprisonment.”<sup>118</sup>. From there, we can assume four places, namely: Rome, Ephesus, Corinth and Caesarea.

If we consider Rome, it is clear that it is a very strong hypothesis: it has “on its behalf the account of the older tradition”<sup>119</sup>, namely Act 28, 30s. On one hand, it fits almost all the characteristics that were mentioned above. But it still raises questions: Rome and Philippi could be too far to enable travelers to make the distance back and forth four times; also there is no indication in Acts that Timothy was with Paul in Rome. Another reason is that, as we know, when Paul was imprisoned in Rome. He had plans to go to the West (Spain) as Rom 15, 24-28 states, and not to Philippi (this would contradict Phil 2, 24). Also, “it has been inferred from 1:30 and 4:15–16 (cf. also 2:12, 22) that Paul is stating here that he had not returned to Philippi since he and Timothy had founded the church there—a statement he could not have made were he writing from Rome, since he had been to Philippi twice between the establishment of the Philippian church (Acts 16) and his journey to Rome (Acts 20:1–6).”<sup>120</sup>

Ephesus is another option. From the information gathered, there was a praetorium there and also Caesar’s household. The text of Acts affirms that Timothy was with Paul in Ephesus (cf. Act 19, 22); the distance between Ephesus and Philippi is much shorter than from Rome to Philippi<sup>121</sup>. Although the Ephesus hypothesis collects much popularity it is not without objections: it is still just an inference. “Nothing is said in Philippians about the “collection” for the poor in Jerusalem - certainly a matter of immense importance to Paul during his Ephesian stay - and for Paul to accept gifts for himself from the church at Philippi during this period of fund raising for the Jerusalem church is inconceivable (Phil 2:25; 4:10–20). The church in the city from which Paul wrote was a divided church - divided over him (Phil 1:15–17) - a fact that does not at all fit the picture of the church in Ephesus (Acts 19; 20:17–31). Paul speaks rather harshly about all the Christians around him except for Timothy (Phil 2:19–21), a strange feature when his best friends, Priscilla and Aquila, were in Ephesus when he was there (Acts 18:2, 18, 24–26; 1Cor 16:19).”<sup>122</sup>

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<sup>118</sup> G. F. Hawthorne, “Philippians, Letter to”, 709.

<sup>119</sup> STAAB, K., BROX, N., *Cartas a los Tesalonicenses Cartas de la Cautividad Cartas Pastorales*, 102.

<sup>120</sup> G. F. Hawthorne, “Philippians, Letter to”, 710.

<sup>121</sup> Cf. BARBAGLIO, G., *La Teología de San Pablo*, 199.

<sup>122</sup> G. F. Hawthorne, “Philippians, Letter to”, 710.

The geographical closeness to Philippi and the certainty of the existence of a praetorium are reasons to also consider Corinth as a possibility. Certainly, Paul wrote to the Philippians before his polemic with Jewish Christians because there is no mention of that, and therefore this letter would be written before first Corinthians. So the letter to the Philippians could be written when Paul was still among the Corinthians. Furthermore, we know that Paul faced some strong opposition, even in terms of morality, which would justify his imprisonment. The reasons that go against this hypothesis are similar to the ones raised against Ephesus: we are just doing it for a conjecture, and also Paul would mention Priscilla and Aquila who were with him in Corinth (cf. Act 18, 1-2).

Caesarea seems to be a stronger hypothesis because the objections are not sufficient to eliminate it. One objection to it would be the distance between Caesarea and Philippi, but we have considered the number of communications back and forth between those two cities (this is also a valid argument for the Roman hypothesis). So, it is a possibility that the letter to the Philippians could be written from Caesarea. Nonetheless not all questions can be answered in this matter and we cannot conclude for sure that Paul wrote this letter from one of the locations that we mentioned above<sup>123</sup>.

The question of the date would depend on the place where the text was written: if from Rome, early 60s (60-63); if from Ephesus between 54 and 57; if from Corinth around 50; finally, if from Caesarea, between 58 and 60<sup>124</sup>.

To conclude this introduction, is important to obtain a brief orientation on the contents of the letter. It can be divided into six parts. The first part is a salutation from Paul and Timothy to the community (cf. Phil 1, 1-2). From Phil 1, 3 to Phil 1, 26, Paul thanks God for the Philippians and gives a brief account of his imprisonment.

In the third part, he exhorts the Philippians to live according to the Gospel, care for each other as blameless children of God (cf. Phil 1, 27-2, 18).

The fourth part is where Paul speaks about his reliance on Timothy and Epaphroditus as his co-workers, presenting them as models to the Christians in Philippi, and so fitting to be his messengers to this community. This seems to us a key point in

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<sup>123</sup> The tradition points to Rome as the most likely place from where the letter to Philippians was written, as well as the other “captivity letters”. Cf. STAAB, K., BROX, N., *Cartas a los Tesalonicenses Cartas de la Cautividad Cartas Pastorales*, 104.

<sup>124</sup> For the periods concerning to Rome and Caesarea see: STAAB, K., BROX, N., *Cartas a los Tesalonicenses Cartas de la Cautividad Cartas Pastorales*, 101-105.



this letter because Paul even speaks about Timothy as his own son (cf. Phil 2, 19–3, 1). In fact, that is the part where our reflection on this letter will be centered.

In the fifth part Paul changes his tone, becoming more severe. Paul shows his irritation against those who try to subvert the Philippians and are not in conformity with the correct doctrine and belief in Christ – those are “enemies of the cross of Christ”. So, this part of the letter is an exhortation to live in a proper way, not just in the name of Paul, but primarily, accordingly to Jesus Christ himself (cf. Phil 3, 2-21). The last words of the letter show the deep desire of Paul for the unity of the Church, especially among the leaders, and he thanks all of them for their help and support. Then the letter ends with a doxology to God, the usual greetings to all and a benediction (cf. Phil 4:1-23)<sup>125</sup>.

### **3.1. Timothy, son of Paul (2, 22)**

Τὴν δὲ δοκιμὴν αὐτοῦ γινώσκετε, ὅτι ὡς πατρὶ τέκνον, σὺν ἐμοὶ ἐδούλευσεν εἰς τὸ εὐαγγέλιον.

But you know his proven character, because like a father’s son, he has served with me in the gospel ministry.

This verse, at first glance, has at least two meanings: showing the true affection that Paul has for Timothy; and also a recommendation, so that the Philippians would receive him well when he would be among them.

It is interesting that, considering the deutero-Pauline literature, “Onesimus, Titus (Titus 1:4), and Timothy (1Cor 4:17; Phil 2:22; 1 Tim 1:2, 18; 2 Tim 1:2; 2:1) are the only specific individuals which Paul refers to as his children”<sup>126</sup>. Raymond Collins explains the verse this way: “An old Jewish proverb proclaimed the wisdom of a father teaching his son his own trade because of his love for the child. As a loyal child, Timothy worked with Paul in the proclamation of the gospel (2:22; 1Cor 16:10). No wonder Paul could say that Timothy was like a son to him”<sup>127</sup>. This kinship language

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<sup>125</sup> Cf. G. F. Hawthorne, “Philippians, Letter to”, 707.

<sup>126</sup> C.S. WANSINK, “74. Philemon”, in *The Oxford Bible Commentary*, edited by J. Barton and J. Muddiman, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2007, 1235.

<sup>127</sup> COLLINS, R. F., *The Power of Images in Paul*, 62.

describing Paul's relationship with Timothy reveals that Paul felt the responsibility of taking care of him; this means mostly that Paul wanted the community to receive Timothy well since he was being introduced to the Christian faith by Paul.

When Paul testifies that Timothy is a proven character (δοκιμή) he is referring to his faithfulness to the ministry by which the authentication of the announced gospel is confirmed. Timothy is, in this sense, an impeccable announcer of the Gospel to whom the Philippians should look as a role model.<sup>128</sup>

It is also interesting to take a closer look to the word "father", used by Paul, because in most biblical cases, it is referred to God alone. Actually, the word πατήρ occurs 414 times in the New Testament in which more than 250 are referring to God<sup>129</sup>. In Paul's image it is used with another meaning; here it is intended to signify the kind of relationship between Paul and Timothy. That deep spiritual relationship could be understood metaphorically as father (Paul) and son (Timothy).

The other interesting idea that Saint Paul makes clear is that, though they maintain a relationship of son-father, their ministries are linked by the verb δουλεύω (to serve). It is interesting that this verb is normally applied for slavery work, which presents here the idea of unconditional submission to the preaching of the Gospel. As some scholars claim, in the New Testament the use of the word slave refers especially to the followers of Christ. These followers are metaphorically slaves of Jesus, which is a sure path to salvation. Thus, here Paul and Timothy share this constituent and essential note of the Christians: the unconditional service of the Gospel in their lives<sup>130</sup>. On other occasions Paul calls his coworkers "Christ slaves" (cf. Col. 4, 12). So, Christ is the Lord to which all should serve without reserve.

### **3.2. Rhetoric of excess – metaphor in context**

Calling Timothy his son, Paul's first meaning and intention are to show affection. By revealing this kind of relationship he is also exposing himself to the

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<sup>128</sup> Cf. GERHARD, K., GERHARD, F., *Grande Lessico del Nuovo Testamento* (16 vols), Paideia, Brescia 1966, Vol. II, 1413. From here on this lexicon will be referred by the acronym GLNT.

<sup>129</sup> BALZ, H., SCHNEIDER, G., *Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament*, Volume 3, 53.

<sup>130</sup> Cf. GLNT, Vol. II, 1450-1456.

Philippians. It also was the intention of offering them a role model of how relationships among Christians should be.

As we read earlier, this letter is very intimate. So Paul takes the freedom to write to them and, at the same time, he shares with them some personal matters. This attitude shows that, among Christians, there should not be any deviation caused by status or some other reason. As we might say, Paul did not need to say that Timothy was like a son to him, he just needed to say that he was a co-worker. But that was not enough for Paul: even in a formal document like a letter, he took the freedom to cross the boundaries of formality. That might be one of the reasons why the letter becomes so attractive and, at the same time, convincing.

It is similarly clear that, when somebody says about another that he is like a son to him, it has also a legal and political strength behind it. If somebody feels the responsibility of father for another person, it means that he has to provide direction for his “son”, taking accountability for his behavior. As we know, the figure of the “paterfamilias” was very important in ancient Rome. To some extent, Paul is identifying with that figure, taking upon himself all the responsibilities that were behind it. The “paterfamilias” was the head of the family, representing them before the civil law and before the religious requirements<sup>131</sup>.

As a result, Christians must feel responsible for their fellow brothers and sisters in the faith, and even more so the ones that were in charge in the communities who introduce new members to Christian life. They are to be like Paul was to Timothy, namely, parents in the sense that they take upon themselves responsibility for their sons and daughters.

### **3.3. Reading the network of relationships**

Psychologically speaking, one might say from Paul’s approach that the Philippians would be driven to respect Timothy right away. This is because, normally, the father is the one who is responsible for the discipline of children<sup>132</sup>. That would

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<sup>131</sup> Cf. ESPLUGA, X., VINAIXA, M. M., *Vida religiosa en la Antigua Roma*, Editorial UOC, Barcelona 2003, 180.

<sup>132</sup> Cf. S. Althenhofen and Z. Biringen, “Attachment”, 271.

cause the Philippians to give credit to Timothy automatically because he was the “son” of their founder and master.

From another viewpoint, Timothy would be more confident going into the midst of the community in Philippi. He would know that he had the protection of Paul and so he would be accepted. Nonetheless, in another way, he was to go as a representative of Paul himself. As his son he should be obedient, transmitting Paul's message as it was intended by his “father”.

This text gains intensity because it is both a spoken text and a printed word. It means that the listeners, when the letter was proclaimed, would try to understand the meaning of the words, that is, that Paul intended to say that Timothy was like a son to him. That is the process which happens when somebody is listening to an oral word, having to increase concentration according to the complexity of the spoken discourse. This process forms new images in the listeners' minds: “these types of knowledge help us solve the segmentation problem in a language that we know, even though we perceive an unknown language as an undifferentiated string of sounds”<sup>133</sup>. Written words also take the same effort to be understood and, even if not read aloud, they have the capital gain of being permanent in time.

As for the letters of Saint Paul, and this sentence in particular, they were meant to be read aloud in the assemblies not just once. Besides, these writings were to be preserved; they represent important testimonies of faith coming from a certified person: the Apostle Saint Paul. Moreover, these writings had the goal of promoting self-esteem in their listeners. According to some psychologists, the increase of self-esteem potentiates the achieving of the goals of individuals and communities<sup>134</sup>.

We could also say that, in this simple verse, Paul is showing how much he cares for the Philippians. The sending of his own son, and increasing the self-esteem of the community and Timothy, could direct us to two conclusions: on the one hand, Timothy would be glad because he would be mindful that he was following proudly the footsteps

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<sup>133</sup> MILLON, T. (Editor), LERNER, M. J. (Editor), *Personality and Social Psychology*, in WEINER, I. B. (Editor in Chief), *Handbook Of Psychology Volume 5*, 529.

<sup>134</sup> “There have been a number of models of emotional needs suggested (e.g., Veroff & Veroff, 1980; Wlodkowski, 1988), but the need for self-worth or self-esteem seems particularly relevant.” REYNOLDS, W. M. (Editor), MILLER, G. J., *Educational Psychology*, in WEINER, I. B. (Editor in Chief), *Handbook Of Psychology Volume 5*, 117.

of his father; on the other hand, the Philippians would rejoice knowing that Paul entrusted his son to them.

#### **4. Letter to Philemon**

The letter to Philemon is the shortest letter of Saint Paul, with only 335 words in Greek. It is also the most personal text that we have from Saint Paul. Though a very short text, it offers us a major contribution in many areas: we can notice some characteristics of Saint Paul that are not so noticeable in some of the other letters; we can also draw an image of the cultural and social settings in the first century. Finally, it is possible to approach the new contribution of Christians in these specific settings, being able to recognize some of their structural identity bases.

It is also important to know that this letter raised many questions for scholars and continues to do so. It has many historical, literary and interpretative problems that are unsolved.

The theme of the letter can be summarized in the question about Onesimus, Philemon's slave. We do not know how it all started, but we know that Onesimus became a coworker of Paul in spreading the Gospel (Phm v. 9). This situation raised some questions in terms of the law concerning slavery. Paul knew that Onesimus, as Philemon's slave, should return to his lawful owner. So, because Paul had a great esteem for Onesimus, he writes this letter imploring Philemon "not only to receive back Onesimus (Phm 17), to forgive (Phm18) and acknowledge Onesimus' new status as a fellow believer (Phm 16). Then also to relinquish all claims upon Onesimus so that he can continue serving with Paul (Phm 13-21)"<sup>135</sup>. This question was the reason why this letter was written.

The scholars who follow the historical-critical method usually accept the authenticity of this letter, saying that it was written by Paul when he was held captive in Rome. Most scholars accept that this letter was written between the year 58 and 63.

Generally, the letter is divided into four parts: the first three verses include Paul's greetings; between verses 4 and 7 is Paul's thanksgiving and prayer; the major part is the

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<sup>135</sup> Cf. A. Patzia, "Philemon, Letter to" in *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters*, edited by G.F. Hawthorne, R.P. Martin and D.G. Reid, InterVarsity Press, Leicester 1993, 703-707.

third which has the intercession for Onesimus (vv. 8-22); from verse 23 to 25 is the final greetings and benediction.

The letter itself states that it was addressed to Philemon (cf. Phm v. 1). About Philemon there is just a little information, but we could reconstruct this atmosphere based in some assumptions. He could be a distinguished and prudent citizen of Colossus. He had, at least, some connections with the Christians offering them his generosity and hospitality<sup>136</sup>.

Even though these assumptions are generally accepted, there are some continuing questions of interpretation. Starting with Onesimus, it is still a doubt whether he was a “runaway slave” or “sent messenger”. Traditionally, he was viewed as an escaped slave probably stealing something from his master. Some scholars would have a different approach saying that the departure of Onesimus and the consequent separation from Philemon did not imply that he ran away. It is also very important to note the perspective brought by P. Lamp: he said that, under certain conditions of Roman law governing slavery, it was possible for a servant to seek out an intercessor to help him with his condition in order to get freedom<sup>137</sup>.

It is still also an open question about the nature of the letter: whether it was private or public<sup>138</sup>. The brevity and direct appeal to one person seemed to indicate that this letter was private. Nonetheless, different authors present many reasons to show that Paul had a public intention when he wrote: “(1) the length exceeds that of most private letters; (2) the greetings are extended to more than one person and, in fact, include a house church; (3) it was customary to read Paul’s letters to the entire church in worship; (4) the legal and technical language are more characteristic of a public document than a private letter; (5) it has all the characteristics of Paul’s longer letters addressed to churches, such as the inclusion of Timothy as a cosender, salutation, thanksgiving, body

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<sup>136</sup> It seems that Philemon was a wealthy and distinguished citizen of Colossus, who owned perhaps one of the businesses. He might have had his house available for Christians to gather, and, following Paul’s description, he would be generous in helping to meet Christian needs. Cf. STAAB, K., BROX, N., *Cartas a los Tesalonicenses Cartas de la Cautividad Cartas Pastorales*, 158.

<sup>137</sup> Cf. A. Patzia, “Philemon, Letter to”, 703-707.

<sup>138</sup> Raymond Collins claims that, despite of the many characteristics of a personal letter, it is actually a letter addressed to an entire church. Cf. COLLINS, R. F., *The Power of Images in Paul*, 68.

and greetings; (6) the designations “fellow worker” (*synergos*), “sister” (*adelphē*) and “fellow soldier” (*systratiōtes*) in Philemon 1–2 suggest church titles”<sup>139</sup>.

Despite these unsolved questions, we can recognize in the letter some thoughts with theological significance. Truly, the historical and interpretative problems should not detract us from the beauty and the meaning of this letter<sup>140</sup>. As A. Patzia claims, it is important to note in the first place the personal relationship that Paul enjoyed with his friends and coworkers. Besides, even though slavery is not condemned directly, Paul says that there is a new type of a relationship among Christians. They are all parts of the same family despite their condition, slave or free, male or female, Jew or Greek (cf. Gal 3, 28). We could say that this letter is a masterpiece of diplomacy in terms that invite Philemon and Onesimus to guide their future relationship enlightened by Christian principles and not by Roman laws. So they are to be reconciled with each other. Finally, we can say that even though we do not know how the story ended, we suspect that Onesimus from his slavery condition became a brother in Christ<sup>141</sup>.

Finally, it is worth noting that there are some scholars who think that the letter to Philemon was the only one written directly by Paul’s hands<sup>142</sup>.

#### 4.1. Onesimus, son of Paul (v. 10)

Παρακαλῶ σε περὶ τοῦ ἐμοῦ τέκνου, ὃν ἐγέννησα ἐν τοῖς δεσμοῖς μου,  
Ὀνήσιμον,

I appeal to you for my child, whom I have begotten while in my chains,  
Onesimus,

From this verse of this short letter, we can feel that Paul not simply uses a formal way to speak to Philemon; he also shows his own deep feelings saying that Onesimus is his child. Actually, as H. Ridderbos says, Paul is not against slavery directly, and he does not need to say so: the new social grammar for inter-relations among Christians is

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<sup>139</sup> Cf. A. Patzia, “Philemon, Letter to”, 703-707.

<sup>140</sup> Cf. VIDAL, S., *Pablo de Tarso a Roma*, 177-178.

<sup>141</sup> Cf. A. Patzia, “Philemon, Letter to”, 703-707.

<sup>142</sup> Cf. BORTOLINI, J., *Introducción a San Pablo y sus Cartas*, San Pablo, Bogotá 2007, 48.

clear, the only Lord and Master is in heaven<sup>143</sup>. As this seems to be very much understood, it is right to note that this new look at social organization triggers a tension. Furthermore, this tension seems to be continually an important element of the Christian gospel which still is current, maybe more now than ever.

This is a new type of relationship which Paul intended to create as a concrete sign of Jesus living in the disciples. Specifically, in this letter Saint Paul shows all the depth of the message he wants to get across. Although a slave, by becoming a Christian one is freed from that yoke. Onesimus becomes Paul's son, among others.

It is important to understand Paul's own language to feel all the intensity that he gave to the words. The verb γεννάω (be or become the father of, beget) appears 65 times in the New Testament, 6 of them in Saint Paul's authentic letters. For two of these Paul claims to be the father himself (cf. Phm 1, 10; 1Cor 4, 15). In the letter to the Corinthians he is the father of the community and here in Philemon, he is the father of a single person, which results in a more personal approach. As some say Paul acts like a rabbi, but he becomes more personal, as a father, which helps the "mystagogue through initiation into the mysteries (...) In his mission he seeks people that they might be begotten and born (Gal 4:19; Phlm v. 10)"<sup>144</sup>. The verb γεννάω used by Paul also has a single rhetorical emphasis: it recovers its Jewish meaning, and gains a new intensity when used with the expressive power of Saint Paul<sup>145</sup>.

Finally, we should be aware that the honor given by the Christians to a Father is reserved to God; that is truly clear. But, considered as metaphor, this also applies to the Apostle<sup>146</sup>. This is to say that Paul does not want to be seen as Father, opposing or challenging God's paternal image, but it has a pastoral goal: that his teachings might be accepted by his fellow Christians as children accept the advice of their parents. So this metaphor is not in contradiction to Mat 23, 8-10, where Jesus teaches his disciples that they should not call anyone Father because there is just one Father, the one in heaven. Instead, this metaphor is following the indication of Mat 23, 11 "The greatest among you will be your servant", because here, Paul is acting like a father not to become

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<sup>143</sup> Cf. RIDDERBOS, H., *El pensamiento del apóstol Pablo*, 414-416.

<sup>144</sup> BALZ, H., SCHNEIDER, G., *Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament*, Volume 3, 56-57.

<sup>145</sup> Cf. GLNT, Vol. III, 400.

<sup>146</sup> Cf. BALZ, H., SCHNEIDER, G., *Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament*, Volume 3, 57.



somehow dominant but to say that he is at the service of everyone: he does not want to be the “greatest”, but the “servant” of all<sup>147</sup>.

#### 4.2. Rhetoric of excess – metaphor in context

By saying that Onesimus is his son, Paul is showing the level of intimacy that was built from the time they met, probably when Paul was imprisoned in Rome<sup>148</sup>. And, this image of a father and a son provides to the letter a powerful rhetorical dynamism. Paul even says that he begot Onesimus in prison. And so, he is driven to write to Philemon asking for the acceptance of Onesimus, his former slave, but now with a new condition, that of being a Christian.

From here we cannot presume that Paul is encouraging a social rebellion. However, he is still making a statement about what Christians say to slavery. The Christian life does not stand for slavery because Christians are all brothers.

It is clear that Paul creates an intimate atmosphere by describing Philemon as his friend, someone whom he loved: τῷ ἀγαπητῷ - our dearly beloved (Phm v. 1). So, it is reasonable to say, as Raymond Collins uses the expression, that this letter is a clear testimony of mutual love. And this mutual love gains strength as they understand each other, especially in the topic concerning the reacceptance of Onesimus<sup>149</sup>. Moreover, this plea of Paul is based on a metaphorical sibling connection between Paul and Philemon attested to in the vocative “brother” in verse 7: ἀδελφέ.

Actually, giving back Onesimus to his rightful owner shows that, in one way, Paul is respecting the law. But, also, he is going beyond the law, offering the possibility of a new life-giving law. The legislative framework in which Onesimus is portrayed is replaced by a new one as he became Christian. Now Onesimus is not any more a slave for Philemon, but a brother in Christ (Cf. Phm v. 16)<sup>150</sup>.

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<sup>147</sup> The NJB translates Mat 23, 8-10: “You, however, must not allow yourselves to be called Rabbi, since you have only one Master, and you are all brothers. You must call no one on earth your father, since you have only one Father, and he is in heaven. Nor must you allow yourselves to be called teachers, for you have only one Teacher, the Christ”.

<sup>148</sup> Cf. HENDRIKSEN, W., *Comentario Al Nuevo Testamento - Colossenses y Filemón*, Libros Desafío, Grand Rapids 1999, 38.

<sup>149</sup> Cf. COLLINS, R. F., *The Power of Images in Paul*, 70-71.

<sup>150</sup> Cf. VANNI, U., *Las Cartas de Pablo*, 79.

In point of fact, receiving back Onesimus as a Christian becomes a “family matter”, as the letter unfolds it in the middle part. Verse 10 shows that the crux of Paul’s request refers to a “renewed” Onesimus, acknowledged by Paul as “my child”. As said before, this image provides the text a great rhetorical power. So, the “brother” of Paul is in charge of Paul’s newborn son, and it is very likely that Philemon would receive Onesimus well<sup>151</sup>.

This image of father, meaning the one who ministers the Gospel to Onesimus, reminds those from Jewish backgrounds the duties of a Jewish father toward their children: teach the Torah to them. More than this, the specialists say that “to appreciate the full effect of Paul’s family language, the letter must be read in Greek. Paul uses sibship language to speak of Timothy, Apphia, and Philemon before he mentions Onesimus. He makes an appeal on the basis of love without mentioning Onesimus. He pleads on behalf of the child whom he has begotten while he languished as a prisoner in chains. Only then does he name the child whom he had begotten. Onesimus is the last word in the Greek text of verse 10”<sup>152</sup>.

This metaphor is also very important because it shows the apostolic authority of Paul, or better still, the apostolic authority wanted by Paul<sup>153</sup>. On the one hand, we can say that Paul is imposing his authority, explaining how Christians should behave, and in this case, how to behave with slaves who were baptized. But this authority is not imposed according to his authority alone or based on some written law. This process of acceptance is based on the fundamental law, common to all Christians, which is the law of love. So, Onesimus should be accepted as a brother because his fellow Christians would be driven to do so out of love<sup>154</sup>.

On the other hand, a powerful insight can be understood from this short verse. If we consider that Paul is personalizing the Church in Onesimus, we would find a suggestive image, namely, that the Church is the one freed from slavery by Jesus Christ.

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<sup>151</sup> Cf. COLLINS, R. F., *The Power of Images in Paul*, 72-73.

<sup>152</sup> COLLINS, R. F., *The Power of Images in Paul*, 73.

<sup>153</sup> HENDRIKSEN, W., *Comentario Al Nuevo Testamento - Colossenses y Filemón*, 247.

<sup>154</sup> Cf. VANNI, U., *Las Cartas de Pablo*, 78.

### 4.3. Reading the network of relationships

Applying a psychological understanding to this text, it is acceptable to say that Paul, as a father, is protecting his son. Actually that is one of the duties of a father. When the children are facing some difficulties, the parents should protect them<sup>155</sup>. And if some other people are causing danger for the children, the parents should show them that they are protecting and caring for the well-being of their children. In the case of this letter of Paul, the process is clear; he is trying to protect his newborn Onesimus from possible discontent towards him at the time of his return<sup>156</sup>. The case of Onesimus as a new Christian is quite comparable to that of a newborn baby: “Newborns and infants by their nature are solely dependent upon the adults around them to care for their every need. If the responses infants experience involve consistent, nurturing meeting of their needs, they will learn to develop a sense of trust and security”<sup>157</sup>.

Because of the language, it is natural that the relationship between Paul and Onesimus was well developed, in the sense that Paul built a long-lasting and strong interpersonal relationship that permitted Onesimus to feel comfortable enough to face a socio-emotional environment who challenged him as he assumed the new condition of being a Christian. The “experiences of shared or co-regulated internal states in the parent-child relationship have an impact beyond the moment. Over time, we come to internalize beliefs, rules, standards, and expectations, based in part on our understanding of what our parents think and feel”<sup>158</sup>.

Now, if we turn to the relationship that Paul has with Philemon and his house church, we could sense that Paul is using a kind of affectionate firmness to communicate with them. Actually, as many psychologists would say, a proper way to proceed in teaching would be to use affection, but, at same time, to delineate some basic and essential rules by which the learners would guide themselves. In parenting the process is similar: “parents need to work toward a certain type of control, within a

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<sup>155</sup> Cf. MATSUMOTO, D., *The Cambridge Dictionary of Psychology*, 362.

<sup>156</sup> “Paul's main concern was evidently for a positive reconciliation between the two. He clearly did not expect Philemon to punish Onesimus, as Philemon might have claimed the right to do”. DUNN, J. D. G., *The Theology Of Paul The Apostle*, William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, Michigan 1998, 700.

<sup>157</sup> MATSUMOTO, D., *The Cambridge Dictionary of Psychology*, 76.

<sup>158</sup> DEATER-DECKARD, K., *Parenting Stress*, Yale University Press, New Haven 2004, 77.

context of generally positive emotion and sense of well-being, that leads the toddler toward learning and success”<sup>159</sup>. From there the parents can be assured of a positive response to the propositions they make to their children. So, it seems that Paul is using the same methodology with the Christians who are to receive Onesimus. It is certain that Paul calls Philemon brother (Phm v. 1 and v. 20) and Apphia sister (Phm v. 2)<sup>160</sup>, but he is being a parent for them in the sense that he is telling them how to behave. Also, he is being a good parent because, establishing the fundamental principle (to receive Onesimus as if he was Paul’s “very heart”, Phm v. 12), he is doing so out of love and care, not out of a rightful authority that he also has (“Therefore, though I have enough confidence in Christ to order you to do that which is proper, yet for love's sake I rather exhort you” Phm vv. 8-9)<sup>161</sup>.

In conclusion it is correct to say that, behind the magnificent rhetorical discourse of Paul is a loving heart that always directs him to give an understanding of how humanizing the faith in Jesus Christ should be, and that causes him to speak with pure and deep love – like a caring parent. So, it is not just a matter of understanding Paul’s process of persuasion (inspired by classical Greek), but it is also letting ourselves, as readers and listeners, identify with the persuaded Christians.

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<sup>159</sup> BORNSTEIN, M. H. (editor), *Handbook of Parenting, Volume 1 Children and Parenting*, Lawrence Erlbaum Associates Publishers, New Jersey 2002, 58.

<sup>160</sup> Perhaps we could also consider that Paul is extending, as well, his brotherly greeting for all the house church gathered around them.

<sup>161</sup> The concept of authoritarian control combined with warmth and involvement has been suggested by psychologists as an ideal for parents. Cf. BRADLEY, R. H. and BORNSTEIN, M. H. (series editor), *Socioeconomic Status, Parenting, And Child Development*, Lawrence Erlbaum Associates Publishers, New Jersey 2003, 137.

## Chapter Three – Conflict and Reconciliation: the Paths of a Metaphor - a Charming Testament

The letters to the Corinthians and the letter to the Galatians are an expression of a suffering Apostle because when Paul looks at the communities that he founded he finds that they are not following the correct path to holiness.

As we will see, these letters are very much pragmatic: they intend to address and solve problems that were created among community members. As we will point out and as Paul himself says, between the two letters to the Corinthians he even wrote a letter of “tears”. The conflict that is present in all these letters does not just end as a conflict, but it leads to reconciliation: reconciliation of the community with Paul and reconciliation among the community members. Saint Paul never gave up hope for their conversion, as we see from these letters and from the continuous usage of the parental metaphor.

### **1. First letter to the Corinthians**

As the founder, Paul feels the responsibility to take care, at least through letter writing, of all his communities. The first and the second letters to the Corinthians are documents that express that concern of Paul for the community at Corinth and all the communities in the region of Achaia. In first Corinthians Paul applies his theological convictions, mainly regarding Christology and Eschatology, when facing practical issues in the Church.

The authorship of the letters to Corinthians is generally accepted and undisputed, that is, they are accepted to be Paul’s letters. The foundation of the Church in Corinth (as attested to in Acts 18) took place between the years 49-51 as part of Paul’s second missionary journey. After Paul left, the Corinthians had some problems, mainly concerning ethical exclusions. So Paul, as the scholars agree, wrote a letter to them (which was lost) correcting them and giving them some specific advice. Then the Corinthians sent a letter back saying that they did not understand, or they did not agree with Paul (which also was lost). So, the canonical first Corinthians followed, answering this previous letter from the Corinthians (cf. 1Cor 1, 11; 5, 1; 16, 15-18). Paul was probably staying in Ephesus trying to make arrangements to go to Corinth when he wrote this letter. In the meantime he sent Timothy to visit the Corinthians on his behalf

(1Cor 16, 10-11; Acts 19, 22). This happened between the autumn of 52 and the spring of 55. The visit of Timothy, and the sad news brought by him triggered a “painful” visit of Paul to Corinth (cf. 2Cor 2, 1; 2, 5-8; 7, 8-13; 11, 4). Then Paul wrote a second letter, which was to be at least the third, following the study line of some scholars, and called by many the “tearful letter” which he mentions in the second canonical letter (2Cor 7, 6-13)<sup>162</sup>. That text is involved in mystery because it got lost or is somehow spread among the two canonical letters.

Concerning the general structure of first Corinthians it is right to say that it has five main parts<sup>163</sup>. The first part is a salutation (1Cor 1, 1-3) in which there are two situations that should be noted: first, it is a joint authorship “Paul (...) and our brother Sosthenes” (even though afterwards there appears mainly the pronoun “I”); secondly this letter is addressed to the Corinthians “together with all those who are calling upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ in every place”. The second part of the first to the Corinthians is an “opening thanksgiving” in which Paul, despite the problems of the community, thanks God for them; the problems in Corinth are not due to their spiritual gifts *per se*, but to their attitude toward them and use of them (cf. 1Cor 12–14). From 1Cor 1, 10 to 6, 20 is the third part in which Paul responds to the reports that he received about Corinth and also tries to clear the Corinthians’ misunderstanding of his earlier correspondence. The fourth section of this letter responds to the letter from Corinth, dealing with specific issues like marriage (cf. 1Cor 7, 1-40), and food and idols (cf. 1Cor 8, 1–11, 1); in chapter 10 Paul shows what are to be the consequences of their sinful acts, calling them to be instead “imitators” of him. Between chapters 12 and 14 Paul turns his attention to what it means to behave like Christ in worship. Finally Paul closes this part calling to mind the cross of Christ on which he had grounded his letter (cf. 1Cor 1, 18-25), drawing from there the consequences for the Christians, particularly regarding the resurrection (cf. 1Cor 15, 1–16, 12). The letter is completed with some concluding remarks, which contain a closing sequence of admonitions (especially the need for perseverance in one’s faith as it works itself out in love) and greetings from Paul and those with him in Asia (cf. 1Cor 16, 13-24)<sup>164</sup>.

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<sup>162</sup> Cf. S. J. Hafemann, “Corinthians, Letters to the” in *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters*, edited by G.F. Hawthorne, R.P. Martin and D.G. Reid, InterVarsity Press, Leicester 1993, 164-179.

<sup>163</sup> Cf. BOSCH, J. S., *Escritos paulinos*, 201.

<sup>164</sup> Cf. S. J. Hafemann, “Corinthians, Letters to the”, 164-179.

Taking a closer look at the third chapter of the first letter to the Corinthians, there is a metaphor that, again, shows the deep affection that Paul has for his communities. Despite the immense sin of the recipients, Paul is still showing a tender care in his letter. Actually, this metaphor seems like a strategy to get their attention and to make them listen to something important. Even though Paul was saying that the Corinthians “are babies in Christ” (νηπίοις ἐν Χριστῷ) and he fed them with milk (γάλα) (1Cor 3, 1-2), it also points out what is wrong among them. He reminds the ministers that they are to be humble (1Cor 3, 5); reaffirms equality among all the members of the community (1Cor 3, 6-10); reminds them that they are built upon the same foundation (1Cor 3, 11-15); says that they are a Temple and in them the Spirit of God is dwelling (1Cor 3, 16-17); and, at the conclusion of the chapter he alerts each member to not fall because of merely human assessments (ministers especially) and manipulative attitudes (1Cor 3, 18-23)<sup>165</sup>.

### 1.1. Paul feeds his babies in Christ (3, 1-2)

Καὶ ἐγώ, ἀδελφοί, οὐκ ἠδυνήθην ὑμῖν λαλῆσαι ὡς πνευματικοῖς, ἀλλ’ ὡς σαρκικοῖς, ὡς νηπίοις ἐν χριστῷ. Γάλα ὑμᾶς ἐπότισα, καὶ οὐ βρῶμα· οὐπω γὰρ ἐδύνασθε, ἀλλ’ οὔτε ἔτι νῦν δύνασθε·

But I, brothers, was not able to speak to you as spiritual people, but as fleshly people, as babies in Christ. I gave you milk to drink, not solid food: because you were not yet able to receive it, in fact, you are still not able;

In 1Cor 3, Paul has a corrective tone, but it is still very affectionate. There can be found the parental imagery once again, but this time it has a different approach. The newness lies in the action of “feeding with milk”, and calling the community “babies/children” (νήπιος).

Actually here is the big difference from 1Thess 2. It is clear that this familiar metaphor starts right away with the word "brothers" (ἀδελφοί). But instantaneously he changes his discourse, calling these "brothers" "little children", the ones who should see

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<sup>165</sup> Cf. THISELTON, A. C., *The First Epistle to the Corinthians: a commentary on the Greek text*, Eerdmans Publishing, Michigan 2000, 276-315.

Paul as someone capable of feeding them spiritually. He does not feed them with solid food because they were immature in terms of faith.

In the first case, when Paul calls the Corinthians as *νήπιος* he is saying that they have to change their behavior. According to the literal sense of *νήπιος* it refers not just to a child, but it intends to illustrate a certain behavior, generally used with a negative charge or as a negative comparison<sup>166</sup>. But to have a more vibrant approach to the meaning given by Paul by the word *νήπιος* we should read 1Cor 13, 11<sup>167</sup>. Here it is clear that Paul is telling the Corinthians that they should leave aside some former behaviors, the ones that are not according to the newness of the gospel.

It is also very interesting that Paul uses a contrast between "milk" (*γάλα*) and "solid food" (*βρῶμα*). Various scholars have intended to give a meaning to this contrast. For example, R. Collins does this, claiming that Paul does not propose two types of membership in the Church or two levels of preaching and acceptance of the Gospel message. Also, according to Collins, any pursuit of specific references for "milk" and "solid food" seems to be inconsistent with his thought. Actually, Paul does not say that he has provided solid food to anyone. Surely the pursuit of specific references for milk and solid food is not what should be done mainly because it deprives Paul's metaphor of its rhetorical force. Paul simply wants us to understand the sense of contrast between milk and solid food. It fits with Paul's metaphorical description of the Corinthians as mere infants. "Proclaiming themselves to be fully mature, they are really like infants who can only drink milk, incapable as they are of eating solid food"<sup>168</sup>. Paul is also saying that his apostolic preaching is only at the beginning, so the Corinthians should prepare themselves for a more elaborate exposition that will demand a deeper commitment to the gospel<sup>169</sup>. Even the phrase construction has some implications for our interpretation. Paul uses the phrase "have given to drink milk". The use of past perfect tense shows the paternal (perhaps maternal) affection with which Paul nourished them. It is quite natural that this metaphor is to say that the Corinthians are in the first

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<sup>166</sup> Cf. BALZ, H., SCHNEIDER, G., *Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament*, Volume 2, 464.

<sup>167</sup> The NJB translates: "When I was a child, I used to talk like a child, and see things as a child does, and think like a child; but now that I have become an adult, I have finished with all childish ways".

<sup>168</sup> COLLINS, R. F., *The Power of Images in Paul*, 116.

<sup>169</sup> Cf. GLNT, Vol. II, 339.



stage of preaching the Gospel, so Paul has to feed them with a nourishment like as for young children<sup>170</sup>.

Collins also clarifies that Paul intended to describe himself as a servant of Jesus. He was a keeper of his “little brothers”<sup>171</sup>. Also, in constructing the notion that the early Christians had about Saint Paul, the word “milk”, which seems unimportant, played a decisive role in drawing Paul’s personality and history. On the reports of Paul’s martyrdom it is written that from him was spread milk when he was decapitated<sup>172</sup>.

It is also important to understand what Paul is referring to when using the contrast between people πνευματικοῖς (of the spirit) and people σαρκίνους (of flesh). In this case it seems that the concept of σαρκικός is opposed to the wisdom of God. The people of flesh would not be able to understand Jesus’ Gospel and God’s plans<sup>173</sup>. But, as Erickson points out, the concept of “flesh” is very complex in Paul’s letters and most scholars would agree with that. The difficulty finds its roots on two principles which seem contradictory: first it seems consistent to say that the flesh is a natural aspect of creation; in the other viewpoint, flesh denotes the sinful element of human nature. The first principle is easily understood recalling the creation accounts from the book of Genesis which refer to the creation of the body (Gn 1, 26-31 and Gn 2, 4-24). The second indicates those realities which take us away from God and his Grace. The later one is the most common in Paul’s writings. Through this distinction, Paul is building “an apocalyptic dualism which proleptically views the regenerate Christian as already «in the Spirit» and under the rule of God by faith while still living «fleshly» in this present age”<sup>174</sup>.

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<sup>170</sup> Cf. BALZ, H., SCHNEIDER, G., *Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament*, Volume 21, 232.

<sup>171</sup> Cf. COLLINS, R. F., *The Power of Images in Paul*, 117-120.

<sup>172</sup> It is interesting to read the references to milk on the “Acts of Paul” (apocryphal book), especially the martyrdom of Saint Paul. For sure the text is not historic, but at least reflects the notion about Paul that the early Christians had (“Acts of Paul” – Πράξεις του Παύλου – was known at least in the beginning of the III century). According to this writing Paul was a martyr; he was decapitated. At the moment this happened, “milk” was spread unto the cloths of the decapitator. So it is very interesting to see the image of the very last moment of Paul that the communities had of him. Cf. LAMELAS, I. P., *São Paulo: textos apócrifos: actos de Paulo e Tecla- carta aos laodicenses*, Tenacitas, Coimbra 2009, 137.

<sup>173</sup> Cf. GLNT, Vol. XI, 1338.

<sup>174</sup> R. J. Erickson, “Flesh”, in *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters*, edited by G.F. Hawthorne, R.P. Martin and D.G. Reid, InterVarsity Press, Leicester 1993, 306.

As regards spiritual people, Paul is referring simply to those who conduct their lives in a way that they are continuously saying “Yes to God”<sup>175</sup>. This “Yes” is enabled by one’s faith. Indirectly, Paul is reaffirming once again the importance of a strong and well founded belief in Jesus Christ. Faith is the strength which furnishes one’s little spiritual strength so as to have an extra sight in order to see all things through the Spirit. This “Yes to God” is ultimately the perfect imitation of Christ himself.

Reviewing this summary about those two paradigmatic images, it is fair to conclude that Paul urged the Corinthians to grow in their faith in order to be able to communicate as Spiritual Persons (πνευματικοῖς). It is also true that Paul is sincere because he “goes down” to their level and sows in their hearts the desire to grow to a higher level of faith in Jesus Christ.

At this point, it is important to recall the goals of the letter so that would be possible for us to form a more accurate understanding of it. In 1Cor 4, 14-15, Paul is very affectionate, and it seems that he wants to hold his audience tightly, for he had been a little strict with them because of their behavior. In 1Cor 4, 14 (and again in 1Cor 4, 17) Paul uses again the figure of τέκνον to describe the kind of relationship between the Corinthians and himself: “the relationship to one’s teacher or Apostle is described as being a (spiritual) child in faith”<sup>176</sup>. It is important to note that this letter is not to embarrass or exclude the Christians in Corinth but it is intended to bring them again to the correct faith and proper behavior. He reminds them that he had “fathered” them “in Christ Jesus through the Gospel”. It is also important to keep in mind that Paul himself shows his own unworthiness of the Gospel (cf. 1Cor 15, 8), perhaps saying indirectly that the Corinthians still have a chance and should take it. Here Paul says that he became a son of God through Christ’s revelation, but in a very strange way – he was “abnormally born”, ἑκτρομα.

## **1.2. Rhetoric of excess – metaphor in the context**

Once again, if somebody looks at those statements of Paul, one is automatically surprised by a rather strange imagery. If we keep in mind that Paul is talking to adult

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<sup>175</sup> Cf. R. Meye, “Spirituality” in *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters*, edited by G.F. Hawthorne, R.P. Martin and D.G. Reid, InterVarsity Press, Leicester 1993, 906-916.

<sup>176</sup> BALZ, H., SCHNEIDER, G., *Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament*, Volume 3, 341.

persons, it is surprising how he is not afraid to call them to another level as we saw before. But, more than that, he uses a wonderful technique to do that. Paul startled his readers, as he still does today. Actually if people read those verses today and conclude that Paul is saying that they are still immature concerning faith and should be called “little children”, of course it will cause the readers at least some confusion. But, after confusion, would come the discernment moment intended.

In another perspective, it seems reasonable to say that when Paul began his ministry in Corinth, he could not immediately bring the neo converts to the deepest mysteries of the Christian faith. Knowing that he could not treat them like Spiritual persons, he had to speak with them as a people still under the influence of the flesh. As beginners they were still unable to go deeper. And, even though it was still a mirage, it seems that Paul had already the expectation that they would be able to eat solid food<sup>177</sup>. Somehow, Paul is being affectionate with the Christians at Corinth by not requiring what they could not handle yet, but clearly stating that they were expected to grow.

At Corinth the first purpose of Paul would be to awaken their faith, calling them to the highlights and obligations of their new life in Christ (ἐν Χριστῷ), as perfect imitators. So here we have the parenetic target of this imagery: “There are two specific places in 1 Corinthians where Paul urges the Corinthians to become imitators (mimetai) of him”: 1Cor 4, 16 and 1Cor 11, 1. (...) In terms of concrete action this imitation demands that the Corinthians seek the well-being of others rather than their own”<sup>178</sup>.

Paul also had “the mind of Christ” (1Cor 2,16). Through the wisdom and insight that the Holy Spirit had given to him, he understood the basic principles of Christianity in tremendous depth. “Under the gentle superintendence of the Spirit, he was able to give inspired teaching in his letters even on matters that his spectacular experiences had not directly addressed”<sup>179</sup>. In 1Cor 3, 1-2, it is clear that the Apostle Paul wants all Christians to have a profound understanding of the Christian faith. The Corinthians were rebuked for being carnal, not having the mind of Christ as he did.

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<sup>177</sup> Cf. KUSS, O., *Carta a los Romanos – Cartas a los Corintios – Carta a los Gálatas*, Editorial Herder, Barcelona 1976, 202.

<sup>178</sup> S. E. Fowl, “Imitation of Paul/of Christ” in *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters*, edited by G.F. Hawthorne, R.P. Martin and D.G. Reid, InterVarsity Press, Leicester 1993, 428-431.

<sup>179</sup> PIPER, J., GRUDEM, W., *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*, Crossway Books, Wheaton 1991, 240.

### 1.3. Reading the network of relationships

In Psychology there is a concept called “motherese” (also baby talk, infant-directed speech, babysitters speech). It is a speech directed to infants and young children, altered in relatively systematic ways across speakers. Sentences uttered to infants generally consist of simplified structures and convey relatively simple meanings. Also this kind of speech engages in frequent use of diminutives and in frequent repetition. “Motherese is not characterized by the presence of correction; in fact, errors produced by children seldom are corrected, particularly if they involve form rather than meaning”<sup>180</sup>. This kind of communication with little children seems to be common to all cultures even though caretakers of children across the world do not all uniformly alter speech directed at infants and young children.

Saint Paul is definitely saying metaphorically that he is using this kind of speech with these babies. The challenge seems to be that: neither the Corinthians are babies, nor is Saint Paul using “baby talk”. However the fact that Paul writes “speaking to you (...) babies” has some other meanings: Paul himself is the caretaker; he is talking as to babies (the Corinthians are still dependent on that kind of speech). It is also to be noted that in “motherese” correction is rarely used. Actually, putting it all together in 1Cor 3, 1-2 Paul says “in fact, you are still not able” which means that the Apostle knows that the Corinthians are not to be corrected because by their nature they are still babies in Christ<sup>181</sup>. Like a mother or a caretaker Paul expects those babies to grow and he wants to be able to talk with them as “grown-ups”. But for now, he is cautious of their abilities. Even though Paul does not identify himself as a permissive parent<sup>182</sup>, he does not defend the opposite, like an authoritarian parent.

Weaning is the word used to identify the transition between breast feeding and the beginning of solid food diets. At that time the babies experience another level of detaching from their mothers, it generates some conflicts mainly because of the strong affection that is built and explained by the “attachment theory” that I mentioned before.

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<sup>180</sup> MATSUMOTO, D., *The Cambridge Dictionary of Psychology*, 318.

<sup>181</sup> Cf. BOSCH, J. S., *Escritos paulinos*, 479.

<sup>182</sup>Cf. MATSUMOTO, D., *The Cambridge Dictionary of Psychology*, 65; 370.

The mother should be careful with this transition because this can cause some interference in the future<sup>183</sup>.

With these insights from Psychology it is fair to say, using Paul's metaphor, that Paul is a responsible mother who knows when to proceed to the "weaning" of his children. He wants them to grow without much turbulence, so that they can become responsible as adults in their faith in Jesus. In another way, Paul is also showing his leadership skills, saying that he has reasons for doing what he is doing and he explains that clearly to the Corinthians.

## 2. Second letter to the Corinthians

From the introduction to first letter to the Corinthians we know that the second canonical letter to the Corinthians could be actually the fourth letter that Paul wrote to the Corinthians. So from the introduction to first letter to the Corinthians, we can understand more or less the settings where this second letter was written. Despite that it is important to keep in mind that first letter to the Corinthians is very different from second one.

In first Corinthians we do not find a so severe tone from Saint Paul as we find in the second Corinthians. Also "there is no consistent treatment of the theme of the Corinthians' rejection of Paul, the influence of Paul's opponents within Corinth, or the offender of 2 Corinthians 2:5-11"<sup>184</sup>.

About the internal unity, as in the first Corinthians, the second Corinthians presents a weak harmony<sup>185</sup>. Some scholars would find different parts in this letter which would be from other letters. According to most biblical experts, just a minority of them would maintain the literary unity of the entire letter<sup>186</sup>.

One of the main goals of this second letter would be preparing Paul's third visit to Corinth, which we can sense reading through chapter 1 to 9. From this perspective this letter would be written by Paul in the year 57, at least the mentioned chapters<sup>187</sup>.

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<sup>183</sup> Cf. MYERS, D. G., *Psychology*, 556.

<sup>184</sup> S. J. Hafemann, "Corinthians, Letters to the", 176.

<sup>185</sup> Cf. KUSS, O., *Carta a los Romanos – Cartas a los Corintios – Carta a los Gálatas*, 180.

<sup>186</sup> Cf. S. J. Hafemann, "Corinthians, Letters to the", 176.

<sup>187</sup> Cf. BOSCH, J. S., *Escritos paulinos*, 226.

According to this information we could conclude with R. Brown that Paul had frequent contact with the Corinthians (13 times are attested by this scholar). Among those contacts are included 4 letters and 3 visits<sup>188</sup>.

So if we try to find and group the main parts of the text, we can discover three distinct parts after the usual epistolary heading, blessing and praise to God for freeing him from a serious need (2Cor 1, 1-11). First the Apostle begins a defense of his own ministry, which reveals the tension lived by Paul and this community (2Cor 1, 12-7, 15). The second part is centered around the theme of the collection for the Christians in Jerusalem, one of the most affectionate projects that Paul undertook as an Apostle solicit to all Christians (2Cor 8, 1-9, 15)<sup>189</sup>. In the last part the Apostle recuperates his own example as in the first part, so he could not only call the Corinthians to perfection<sup>190</sup> but also justify his authority as an Apostle<sup>191</sup>. It is important for us this section because it is here where Paul expresses his “godly jealousy” because he feels that he has the right to decide about the “marriage” of the community to its rightful husband, Jesus (2Cor 11, 2). Finally, Paul ends the letter with greetings and blessings.

## **2. 1. Paul is the one giving the community in marriage (11, 2)**

Ζηλῶ γὰρ ὑμᾶς θεοῦ ζήλω· ἡρμοσάμην γὰρ ὑμᾶς ἐνὶ ἀνδρὶ παρθένον ἄγνην παραστῆσαι τῷ χριστῷ.

[I am] jealous over you with a godly jealousy, because I have promised you in marriage to one husband, to present a pure virgin to Christ.

This text of 2Cor 11, 2 shows clearly that Saint Paul is claiming the paternity of the community. As we know, in the ancient world the father was the one presenting his daughter to her husband when she got married. Actually, today it continues to be the same. Normally it is the father of the bride who brings her to the altar. Through this

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<sup>188</sup> Cf. BROWN, R, *Introducción al Nuevo Testamento II. Cartas y otros escritos*, 705-708.

<sup>189</sup> Cf. S. McKnight, “Collection for the Saints” in *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters*, edited by G.F. Hawthorne, R.P. Martin and D.G. Reid, InterVarsity Press, Leicester 1993, 143-147.

<sup>190</sup> Cf. KUSS, O., *Carta a los Romanos – Cartas a los Corintios – Carta a los Gálatas*, 181.

<sup>191</sup> Cf. BROWN, R, *Introducción al Nuevo Testamento II. Cartas y otros escritos*, 707.

metaphor, Paul is requesting the right to be the one guiding the bride (Corinthians' community) to her rightful husband (Christ).

When Saint Paul speaks about jealousy (ζήλω), he is describing his own feelings, as he begins a self-apology in order to get the attention of the Corinthians. He tries all possible ways when doing so. He even describes himself "as a fool" (ἄφρων) if they would accept him as such<sup>192</sup>. This self-apology is used as a last tactic to convince the Corinthians that they can trust in this Apostle (who is not a super-Apostle - 2Cor 11, 5 - but nothing less than them). Once their trust is gained, Paul expects them to start changing their ways, making options according to the Gospel. Also, the word ζήλω used by Paul, in this case, indicates a personal relationship with a particular Christian community for which he has a burning concern. He does this, not to show special favour but to bring them to obedience to the gospel that he preached. The emphasis seems to be made on the basis of a strong personal commitment<sup>193</sup>.

Saint Paul compares his jealousy for the Corinthians to the jealousy of God. The image of God's jealousy can be found in the Old Testament, normally associated with the transgression of the first command of the law. This is one of the beautiful examples of how the Old Testament uses anthropomorphic language to refer to God. For instance, in the Book of Ezekiel, the Prophet uses this language to refer to God (cf. Eze 5, 13; 35, 10-11; 36, 6; 38, 19). In these cases the Prophet shows the anger of God toward his stubborn people. But this anger is not an end within itself: it means that God loves his people so much that He gets furious with them, but, as was said, this fury is out of love. And, because Saint Paul compares his jealousy to the jealousy of God, he is actually saying that his jealousy has a positive logic within itself; a logic of protection and care for the Corinthians.

This comparison to God's jealousy is also very important because the biblical meaning of jealousy, when applied to people, is very negative. To be jealous in the human way is to be angry and unhappy when someone else has something that is wanted by the one who feels jealous. To this negative meaning the Bible also adds the concept of sin because it is the fruit of an uncontrolled desire; this is the idea expressed in the last commandment of the "Mosaic Law" (Dt 5, 21). Consequently, the positive

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<sup>192</sup> The self-apology can be found in 2Cor 12, 1-21. Cf. KUSS, O., *Carta a los Romanos – Cartas a los Corintios – Carta a los Gálatas*, 380-384.

<sup>193</sup> Cf. GLNT, Vol. III, 1514-1516.

meaning that we mentioned above has the strength of this last one (because it implies the deep desire for the whole human person), but it is used in a positive way: that of withdrawing from sin, bringing to a holy way of living<sup>194</sup>. So, God's jealousy is usually presented as a path for redemption and salvation, as the Prophet Isaiah does (Is 9, 6; 37, 32; 41, 14; 42, 13-17)<sup>195</sup>. From here we can have an insight of what Paul was referring to when saying that God was jealous.

It is worthy also to note that the verb *παρίστημι* means "to join together (in marriage)"<sup>196</sup>. Before the sacramental meaning and significance that marriage assumed among Christians, marriage had just a social meaning and implications. In ancient Israel, marriage was not marked by any religious act. But still, it was a reality that was considered to be blessed and desired by God, and so it was against the will of God to break the marital bound<sup>197</sup>. Also, for ancient societies in general getting married was a reason for celebration and happiness; the breaking of the bound was generally shameful and not a desirable situation for married couples<sup>198</sup>.

It seems that Saint Paul, rather than speaking about a formal and lawful marriage, is referring to a spiritual marriage of the Corinthians with God. This spiritual significance is as important as the formal one in the sense that it creates a deep link between God and his people. Of course, it finds echoes in the Old Testament background, adding to it a renewed spiritual strength<sup>199</sup>. Speaking about the spiritual meaning of marriage with God, it is very helpful to consider the "spiritual marriage" explained by John of the Cross, by which he means the inseparable and reciprocal bond that a soul should establish freely with God<sup>200</sup>.

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<sup>194</sup> Cf. W. Bauder, "Celo", in *Diccionario Teológico del Nuevo Testamento*, Vol. III, 245-247.

<sup>195</sup> A recent work about jealousy in the Old Testament was presented by Bernard Renaud. He advocates that anger and love are two inseparable expressions, coming from the anthropomorphic language used in the Bible, when referring to God. Cf. RENAUD, B., *Un Dios celoso – Entre la cólera y el amor*, Editorial Verbo Divino, Estella 2011.

<sup>196</sup> Cf. BALZ, H., SCHNEIDER, G., *Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament*, Volume 1, 153.

<sup>197</sup> "The marriage imagery used by Paul to speak of the unique and unsullied relationship that ought to exist between the church and Christ also has its roots in the biblical tradition where Israel was pictured as the bride of YHWH" COLLINS, R. F., *The Power of Images in Paul*, 177.

<sup>198</sup> Cf. Vallin and B. Wannenwetsch, "Marriage", in J. Y. Lacoste (editor), *Encyclopedia of Christian theology*, Routledge, New York 2005, Volume 2, 983-992.

<sup>199</sup> Cf. KUSS, O., *Carta a los Romanos – Cartas a los Corintios – Carta a los Gálatas*, 370.

<sup>200</sup> Cf. M. Longchamp, "John of the Cross", in *Encyclopedia of Christian Theology*, Volume 2, 824-826.



In conclusion it is important to be reminded that Paul uses the word ζῆλος with various meanings in his different letters. But, in this specific case, Paul presents himself metaphorically as the father of the bride. As so, he is eager to present her daughter (the church of Corinth) “as a pure bride to Christ”<sup>201</sup>. He is the parent who intensely considers his obligations toward his children, despite the non-reciprocal response from them (cf. 2Cor, 14-14).

## 2.2. Rhetoric of excess – metaphor in context

The term jealousy would also remind the Corinthians of Greek mythology. In fact the jealousy motif appears many times in histories and myths about the relationships that the gods had among themselves and with human beings.

Normally the attitude of jealousy was due to love affairs or because the gods thought that others, both fellow gods and humans, had more happiness than themselves. This last reason was caused because the deities thought and observed that human beings lived with an excess of happiness, in some cases perhaps more than goddesses themselves<sup>202</sup>.

Jealousy caused because of love could easily increase affection, or it could have the opposite effect and cause animosities and revenges. Normally this was due to an overprotective attitude. For example, the relationship of Zeus with Hera was often affected by jealousy<sup>203</sup>.

It seems that in 2Cor 11, 2 Saint Paul, other than this traditional meaning, he has in mind the biblical positive background of the jealousy concep. In this case he is giving to that concept all its positive significance<sup>204</sup>. An identical significance to it is given in 1Cor 12, 31, 1Cor 14, 1 and 1Cor 14, 39. There, Saint Paul is encouraging the

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<sup>201</sup> BALZ, H., SCHNEIDER, G., *Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament*, Volume 2, 100.

<sup>202</sup> Some of the petitions formulated by people in ancient Rome had the purpose of stopping the gods' jealousy towards them. Cf. ESPLUNGA, X., VINAIXA, M. M., *Vida religiosa en la Antigua Roma*, 45.

<sup>203</sup> “The marriage of Hera and Zeus was not a happy one, because Zeus was unfaithful to his wife and Hera was angry and jealous”. Cf. DALY, K. N., *Greek and Roman Mythology A to Z*, Chelsea House Publications, New York 2009, 67.

<sup>204</sup> Following the New Testament Greek text it is reasonable to say that Saint Paul gives a different connotation (even opposite) to “jealousy” in the following places: 1Cor 13, 4; 1Cor 14, 1; Gal 4, 17; Gal 4, 18.

Corinthians to embrace their path to greater gifts with all their strength. That is, with a jealous strength, they should have the priority of following Jesus message in their lives<sup>205</sup>. So, remembering some mythological scenes, Paul is saying that he feels jealousy for the Corinthians in the sense that he loves them very much and wants to protect them as they walk in the path of faith.

Concerning the marriage theme, the context of Saint Paul was quite different from the one eastern societies generally have in today's world. In the ancient societies, contemporary to Saint Paul, marriages were conceived mainly from political and social perspectives<sup>206</sup>. In the case of women, marriage in ancient Greece was normally conceived as transference of her ownership from one lord to another. The bride's father had something like custody over her until her marriage. Marriage marked the transference of this custody from her father to her husband<sup>207</sup>. This information is very important because to some extent all the power of this metaphor is disclosed here: the Christian community at Corinth is the bride presented by Paul; she has to be given in marriage to Christ in the eschatological future, consummating at that time the new bond promised in the baptism.

So Paul, when referring to marriage, is evoking in the Corinthians the idea of that reality as the original basis of their society<sup>208</sup>. Doing so he is also saying that they are promised to that husband, but they have to walk in a way that the husband will accept and rejoice with his wife. So, in this metaphor Paul joins together a parenetic perspective and an apocalyptic one: he is encouraging them to live the Christian faith to its fullness, knowing that Christ is to be their husband.

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<sup>205</sup> It is also noteworthy that the concept of ζήλωσ (filled with jealousy or envy) is used mainly by Saint Paul (1Cor 12, 31; 1Cor 13, 4; 1Cor 14, 1, 1Cor 14, 39; 2Cor 11, 2; Gal 4, 17) and especially in relation to the Corinthians. In the remainder of the New Testament this concept of being envious or filled with jealousy appears three times: Act 7, 9; Jas 4, 2; Rev 3, 19.

<sup>206</sup> "A marriage contract commits the husband to clothe and feed his wives and children according to Greek customs". ERMATINGER, J. W., *Daily life in the New Testament*, 96.

<sup>207</sup> "Marriage involved the transfer of a woman from one *kurios* to another, usually from her father to her new husband. In most Greek communities laws governed this process, because the institution of marriage affected inheritance and the citizen status of children". BOGUICK, P., (Editor in Chief), *Encyclopedia of Society and Culture in the Ancient World*, Infobase Publishing, New York 2008, 454.

<sup>208</sup> For a brief description on marriage at Paul's time (both in Greek-Roman and Jewish settings) consult: ERMATINGER, J. W., *Daily life in the New Testament*, 103-106.

The parenetic perspective is clearly stated by the idea of a wife who is pure and is a virgin. The ideal of virginity in a biblical background was mostly associated with the purity of women until marriage: the most obvious example is found in Mary, Jesus' mother, who is called virgin directly in Lc 1, 27 and indirectly in Mt 1, 23. Mary's virginity can have a double connotation: in one sense it shows Mary's purity since she was not married, yet she became pregnant. Some would say that the reference to Mary's virginity had the fundamental goal of showing God's paternity of Christ<sup>209</sup>.

If this gives some light on the biblical take on virginity it is also important to take a closer look at what in general virginity represented for Greeks and Romans. There are two ambits: cultural and religious. They are confluent in the sense that they consider virginity as a value<sup>210</sup>. From a religious viewpoint virginity was seen as a sign of dignity and as some kind of connection with the deities: for instance, in Rome the guardians of the sacred flame of the hearth goddess were the Vestal virgins<sup>211</sup>. Not forcing the connection, it seems possible to find some correlation between the Vestals and the baptized: the Vestals, when elected (coming from important families) to their duty of caring for the sacred fire, were to remain virgins until the end of their duties<sup>212</sup>; the Christians, after the very special election to Baptism are to remain pure (a purity metaphorically entitled virginity) until they proceed to the eschatological marriage to Jesus Christ.

Following this line of thought, Gregory of Nisa produced a treatise on virginity: "Peri parteneias". He was surely influenced by a neoplatonic mystic accent: "the treatise uses the metaphor of virginity to insist on a simplification of the person; stripping off the "tunic of flesh," the soul is to be wedded to the divine"<sup>213</sup>.

In conclusion, it seems fair to say that, when the Corinthians heard or read this verse of 2Cor 11, 2 they would have the tools from their earlier education, culture and religion to decode what Paul meant by using the expression "giving in marriage" as a

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<sup>209</sup> Cf. PAREDES, J. C. R. G., *Mariología*, Biblioteca de Autores Cristianos, Madrid 1995, 225-249.

<sup>210</sup> Cf. Cf. Beyreuther, "Mujer", in L. Coenen, E. Beyreuther, H. Bietenhard, in *Diccionario Teológico del Nuevo Testamento*, Vol. III, Ediciones Sígueme, Salamanca 1993, 131.

<sup>211</sup> Cf. BOGUICK, P., (Editor in Chief), *Encyclopedia of Society and Culture in the Ancient World*, 197.

<sup>212</sup> Cf. ESPLUGA, X., VINAIXA, M. M., *Vida religiosa en la Antigua Roma*, 124-125.

<sup>213</sup> TOO, Y. L., *Education in Greek and Roman Antiquity*, Brill, Netherlands 2001, 420.

“pure virgin”<sup>214</sup>. Moreover, they would know and recognize in Paul his authority, symbolized by the authority of a parent toward their children: orientating them in the path of happiness and realization; expecting them to be obedient and faithful to their Baptism. Clearly, more than just severe orders, Saint Paul is using, through an affective tone, a parenetic exhortation. This exhortation would have its culmination in the eschatological marriage with Christ.

### 2.3. Reading the network of relationships

In today’s world, as it was in Saint Paul’s time when the word “jealousy” is used, the fundamental tendency is to consider it as a negative feeling that denotes some kind of undesirable behavior.

Jealousy is negative as it normally creates division among groups of people and even between individuals. It was a reality in Saint Paul’s time and it is still truth in today’s world, even among Christians. It seems that it was very common in Corinth to be divided because of jealousy; actually it was one of the reasons that made Saint Paul disconcerted, causing him deep anguish and even tears<sup>215</sup>. In today’s world jealousy is also very common. Like in Saint Paul’s time, jealousy would be defined today as: “the emotion experienced by a person who desires what another person possesses. Envy. This term is most commonly used in cases of romantic jealousy when one person wants to supplant another in a relationship”<sup>216</sup>. It seems that, to some extent all of us feel jealousy, even in scientific environments<sup>217</sup>. Actually, some scholars claim that jealousy is a cross-cultural reality; they also agree that it is very dangerous, especially sexual

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<sup>214</sup> “Paul presents himself as the matchmaker between Christ and the Corinthian community. Subsequently, he carefully watches over the Corinthian church like a father watches over his daughter in order to be able to hand her over as a virginal bride to her husband when she is introduced into his house. Cf. COLLINS, R. F., *The Power of Images in Paul*, 176.

<sup>215</sup> The jealousy due to different charismas was, among Corinthians, generator of many divisions. Cf. KUSS, O., *Carta a los Romanos – Cartas a los Corintios – Carta a los Gálatas*, 281.

<sup>216</sup> MATSUMOTO, D., *The Cambridge Dictionary of Psychology*, 271.

<sup>217</sup> Cf. FREEDHEIM, D. K. (Editor), *History of Psychology*, in WEINER, I. B. (Editor in Chief), *Handbook Of Psychology Volume 5*, 512.

jealousy, which can cause homicides<sup>218</sup>. Of course it is quite clear that Paul is not referring to sexual jealousy, but he is addressing jealousy in general, taking into account all its potential and trying to redirect it for a good purpose. In this case it is very easy to find the current importance of Paul's message for today's world. It is actually one of the goals that Saint Paul had: to provoke jealousy in gentiles and Jews so that they would be converted to Christ (cf. Rom 11, 11)<sup>219</sup>.

The concept of marriage is also very meaningful today: it still represents a reality that is considered to be a bond uniting a man and women for life. One of the problems in modern times regarding marriage is the growing percentage of divorce. Despite this, some analysts would conclude that in newlyweds more than 75 percent believe that their marriage is for life. But, in reality, divorces are slightly over 50 percent of marriages in general<sup>220</sup>. A sad truth is that divorce has increased exponentially in the last 40 years; in some countries they doubled their rate<sup>221</sup>. This data is very important to understand the power of Paul's message nowadays. Actually some say that Paul was the first to use this imagery of the Church as the bride of Christ: she should prepare herself for a marriage that was to be everlasting<sup>222</sup>.

Today, when facing problems concerning marriage, it is still very important that Christians hear one of their first spiritual fathers telling them that they should prepare themselves in order to be pure for an everlasting marriage with Christ. This message is to be taken both individually and communally as its importance requires.

For sure, the time of preparation for marriage is very important. Among other reasons, an inadequate betrothal period would cause a serious increase in marital dissatisfaction and, perhaps, divorce<sup>223</sup>. In the passage of 2Cor 11, 2 Saint Paul is also referring to a time of betrothal because the bride is already promised to the husband. The time of betrothal that Paul is denoting describes the eschatological condition of the

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<sup>218</sup> Cf. GALLAGHER, M. (Editor), NELSON, R. J. (Editor), *Biological Psychology*, in WEINER, I. B. (Editor in Chief), *Handbook Of Psychology Volume 5*, 26.

<sup>219</sup> Cf. RIDDERBOS, H. *El pensamiento del apóstol Pablo*, 453.

<sup>220</sup> Cf. MATSUMOTO, D., *The Cambridge Dictionary of Psychology*, 491.

<sup>221</sup> Cf. GOLDSTEIN, A. M. (Editor), *Forensic Psychology*, in WEINER, I. B. (Editor in Chief), *Handbook Of Psychology Volume 11*, 180.

<sup>222</sup> Cf. COLLINS, R. F., *The Power of Images in Paul*, 176.

<sup>223</sup> Cf. NOLLER, P., FEENEY, J. A., *Understanding Marriage*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2002, 474.

Corinthians<sup>224</sup>. Although, it seems to be a future event, it has implications on the present: Corinthians have to be ready for their marriage with Christ, their final hope.

Concerning virginity in today's Church and world, it is still considered a value that is not opposed to the richness and beauty of marriage, but is a sign of deep charity for God and for one's brothers and sisters<sup>225</sup>. So, virginity is considered a sign that expresses closeness to God and to his message. In one way, Saint Paul is encouraging virginity in the true sense of the expression as one possible mode of approaching Christ's message; in another way he is encouraging all Christians to become perfect imitators of Christ and totally committed to his message both in faith and action (that is symbolized by virginity).

In conclusion, together with H. Ridderbos, it is fair to say that Paul did not have dualistic or ascetic concepts about marriage or virginity. Paul had a great deal of esteem for marriage which was to be lived to its fullness by Christians<sup>226</sup>. Virginity in the consecrated life because of the kingdom of God was one way to live the Christian faith to its fullness, just as being faithful to marital vows was another way. In this metaphor Paul joins together both of them, creating an image for the Corinthians that would help them to understand the paternal approach that the Apostle intended. Finally, it is important to remember that this metaphor (2Cor 11, 2) is part of the introduction to the "fool's speech". In a moment of inspiration Paul uses one metaphor to represent the Church that had not yet been used. It became one of the most used metaphors to refer to the Church, as it is true nowadays<sup>227</sup>.

### 3. Letter to the Galatians

In this letter Paul shows some anger about the behaving of the Galatians, even going to the extreme of calling them "foolish Galatians" (3, 1). Hence, freedom and

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<sup>224</sup> Cf. COLLINS, R. F., *The Power of Images in Paul*, 176.

<sup>225</sup> "The council then mentions virginity or celibacy consecrated to the Lord. The excellence of this form of life does not in any way denigrate marriage, but Vatican II recalls the doctrine of St. Paul (1Cor 7), according to which the consecrated state powerfully favors a complete charity for God and in him for everyone" LAMB, M. L., LEVERING, M., *Vatican II Renewal within Tradition*, Oxford University Press, New York 2008, 43.

<sup>226</sup> Cf. RIDDERBOS, H. *El pensamiento del apóstol Pablo*, 406.

<sup>227</sup> Cf. R. Fisichella, "Balthasar, Hans Urs von", in *Encyclopedia of Christian theology*, Volume 1, 141.

unity in Christ are central themes of Paul's letter to this community. There were some problems among the Galatians, so Paul in writing to them rehearses a number of perspectives with the goal of strengthening those Christians who were influenced by Judaizing Christians<sup>228</sup> or other deviant models.

About the authorship, all the scholars (except a few radical critics) accept that Paul wrote this letter and it is considered as a standard example of Paul's style and theology. The proximity of themes between the letters to the Galatians, second Corinthians and Romans (particularly connected by the controversy over the role of the Jewish Law in Gentile churches) may perhaps indicate that these three letters were written during the same time. If that is true, it is also true that it does not help much to define an exact year when Galatians was written. It is still a "fascinating historical puzzle", but the outcome does not have much effect on the interpretation of the major themes of the letter. Despite all the controversies it is at least generally accepted that this letter was written after the so-called "second missionary journey" (after Acts 18, 22), sometime between 53 and 57<sup>229</sup>. Following Murphy-O'Connor, Paul wrote this letter in the first year that he has staying at Ephesus (between 52 and 53)<sup>230</sup>.

Regarding its construction, this letter shows some influence of the regular appearance of an ancient letter form. According to Betz, the letter can be grouped as follows: Epistolary Prescript (1, 1-5); *Exordium* ("introduction", 1, 6-11) *Narratio* ("narration", 1, 12-2, 14); *Propositio* ("proposition", 2, 15-21); *Probatio* ("confirmation", 3, 1-4, 31); *Exortatio* ("exhortation" 5, 1-6, 10); *Peroratio* ("epistolary postscript or conclusion", 6, 11-18)<sup>231</sup>. In a simpler way, following G. W. Hansen, this letter can be divided into four sections: "salutation" (1, 1-5); "rebuke" (1, 13-4, 11); "request section" (4, 12-6, 10) and "subscription" (6, 11-18).

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<sup>228</sup> "The Judaizers in Galatia were glorying in circumcision and making it the channel and means of the attainment of a higher spirituality. Such procedures appeal to human pride and are no longer of interest to Paul, for he has been crucified to the world. This does not mean that Paul opposed the practice of circumcision for Jews as Jews (...) but all such religious matters came to be viewed as part of the worldly system and no longer as an object of pride or glory". LADD, G. E., *A Theology of the New Testament*, William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company Grand Rapids, Michigan 1993, 439.

<sup>229</sup> Cf. G. W. Hansen, "Galatians, Letters to the" in *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters*, edited by G.F. Hawthorne, R.P. Martin and D.G. Reid, InterVarsity Press, Leicester 1993,, 232-334.

<sup>230</sup> Cf. MURPHY-O'CONNOR, J., *Pablo, su historia*, 199-225.

<sup>231</sup> Cf. G. W. Hansen "Galatians, Letter to the", 329.

In the salutation Paul states clearly that he is an Apostle (so he is speaking with authority), and calls to mind already the unavoidable reality that has to accompany Christians at all times with all its mystery, that is, the Cross. After that Paul starts to censure the Galatians using not just his own life as an argument (cf. 1, 13–2, 21) but also Scripture (3, 6-21). Then Paul turns from rebuke to request “become as I am” (4, 12) is the starting statement of a section where Paul uses again his own life (4, 12-20) and an allegory from Scripture (4, 21-31) to ask the Galatians not just to understand him but also to change their lives. Paul ends the letter to the Galatians as was common in Hellenistic letters: he summarizes all the contents and, also, shows how confident he is of the conversion of his listeners.

Particularly in Gal 4, Paul writes about the Galatians’ first experience of Christianity and all its main roots: the newness of the Gospel overcomes all of the Law (vv. 1-7); their conversion to Christ was a joyful choice (vv. 17-18); the community has a close relationship with Paul and they participate in his mission (vv. 12-16); and there is negativity in those who wanted to pervert Paul's preaching (vv. 17-18). In verses 19 and 20, the ones important here, Paul shows his affection for the community. Finally, this chapter ends with a biblical argumentation which intends to explain that the primacy of Christ above the Law is already contained in the same Law.

### 3.1. Paul has labor pains (4, 19)

Τεκνία μου, οὐς πάλιν ὠδίνω, ἄχρι οὗ μορφωθῆῖ χριστὸς ἐν ὑμῖν,

My children, for you again I am in labor pains, until Christ is formed in you,

In this text it is understood that Paul speaks metaphorically about himself as a mother: like a mother having labor pains. As Otto Kuss explains, Paul suffered like a mother for the Galatians, trying to bring them to be born in Christ. Here Paul expresses his own heart: this powerful statement seems to arise from the depths of his core<sup>232</sup>.

The fact is that the verb ὠδίνω (that translated means “having labor pains”) attracts our attention right away. Its usage presumes a double significance: in one way it expresses force in the sense that Paul has difficulty giving birth to his spiritual children

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<sup>232</sup> Cf. KUSS, O., *Carta a los Romanos – Cartas a los Corintios – Carta a los Gálatas*, 533.



into a perfect life of faith; in another way, Paul recognizes the frailty of those “little ones”, meaning that they do not have yet spiritual strength to resist the attacks coming from outside thinkers. Paul urges, at the same time, the heads of communities to have an active presence in their communities, considering the “little ones” as a priority to their care. Paul also implies himself in the process because he says that he is the one who again has to “«bear amid pangs,» namely, now, after their conversion, in his renewed and painful efforts on their behalf”<sup>233</sup>.

If we go back to the beginning of verse 19, we see that the words τέκνα μου (my children) are not just rhetoric. It is interesting to search for the other times that Paul used the word τέκνα (children) in his letters. In fact, Paul (in his seven undisputed letters) used the term fourteen times<sup>234</sup>. However, Paul calls the communities “his” children five times<sup>235</sup> (2Cor 12, 14; Gal 4, 19; 1Thess. 2:7; 2, 11). Of course the contexts are different but these passages seem to have in common Paul’s intention of speaking “heart to heart”<sup>236</sup> with the recipients. In this case of Gal 4, 19 (likewise in 1Cor 4, 14) Paul uses the figure of τέκνον to describe his relationship with the Galatians. It is like the relationship to a teacher with his or her (spiritual) children<sup>237</sup>.

The option of putting together “my children” and “having labor pains” puts us again before another case of “metaphor squared”. If we rationalize the sentence, it seems to be nonsense, but if we take it as a metaphor which has the purpose of translating the dynamics of faith, it has a deep and broad significance.

These dynamics of faith grow, and though they can be arduous at times, they are meant to be continuous. This idea is explained by saying that the growing process of the Galatians happens as the community awaits Christ’s body to take shape among them. They still have to grow spiritually as individuals and as a community “until” (μέχρι)

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<sup>233</sup> BALZ, H., SCHNEIDER, G., *Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament*, Volume 3, 506.

<sup>234</sup> Rom 8, 16; 8, 17; 9, 7; 9, 8; 1Cor 4, 14; 7, 14; 2Cor 12, 14; Gal 4, 19; 4, 27; 4, 28; 4, 31; Philm 2, 15; 1Thess. 2:7; 2, 11. The parents are to warn their children (1Thess 2, 11); from there Paul pulls his right to warn the communities as he compares them to children (1Cor 4, 14; 2Cor 6, 13; Gal 4, 19). Cf. G. Braumann, “Niño”, in *Diccionario Teológico del Nuevo Testamento*, Vol. III, 167-171.

<sup>235</sup> In other times “his children” is referring to the expression “children of God” (except Gal 4, 28 and Gal 4, 31 in which Paul is referring to passages from Old Testament).

<sup>236</sup> This is a quotation from Cardinal Karl Lehmann that Bishop António Couto likes to use in his lectures on Saint Paul’s Pastoral Methodology.

<sup>237</sup> Cf. BALZ, H., SCHNEIDER, G., *Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament*, Volume 3, 341.

Christ might be formed in them<sup>238</sup>. The act of Christ “taking form” (μορφόω) in the Galatians is an outstanding expression here because it is unique in the whole Bible. This powerful verb seems to indicate that the transformation is not simply for them to develop spiritually or morally or christologically. “The formation of Christ among the Galatians is simultaneously their crucifixion with Christ”<sup>239</sup>.

The adverb *πάλι*, meaning "once again" is also noteworthy. It tells us that this suffering is not the first time for Paul. “Christ must be formed in the Galatians once more, i.e., the Galatians must be conformed to the crucified Christ (2:19-20)”<sup>240</sup>.

If we attempt to find some parallels with the Old Testament, one of the things that would come to mind in the first place is the pessimistic idea about what happened to barren women: that is, they were somehow cursed<sup>241</sup>. Paul as a mother does not suffer from this shame; he is having children. However, he is suffering from the pains of child birth. These pains are referred to already in Gn 3, 16 as the cause of the original sin<sup>242</sup>, the turning away from God. This verb *ὠδίνω* (suffer birth pangs, bear amid throes) expresses two feelings: in one way, Paul bears witness to the most sublime event of all, the beginning of a new life; in other way, this verb is imbued by the mortal danger of such an event and also the pain that it causes<sup>243</sup>.

Of course Paul was inspired by Is 54, 1 in Gal 4, 19, which he quotes literally in Gal 4, 27<sup>244</sup>. In this section of the book of Isaiah the theme is the covenant of peace (Is 54, 1 until Is 55, 6). In the first fourteen verses of this section (Is 54, 1-14) the prophet talks about the spousal dimension of the covenant. This text gives fullness to the prophetic theme of the God-people relationship, of which the initiator was Hosea. But, here we find an innovative insight: the introduction of a spousal dimension. Now the Lord and his community, instead of being two powers united by onerous ties and obligations, are to be seen metaphorically as two spouses who are seeking joy and

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<sup>238</sup> *μορφωθῆ* is the verb *μορφόω* (to be formed) in the subjunctive aorist passive 3rd person singular. This is to indicate that Christ is the one being formed and formatted the Galatians.

<sup>239</sup> GAVENTA, B. R., *Our Mother Saint Paul*, 36.

<sup>240</sup> MATERA, F. J., *Galatians*, Sacra Pagina, Minnesota 2007, 166.

<sup>241</sup> For example, such idea is present in Gn 29, 21-30. Cf. Beyreuther, “Mujer”, in *Diccionario Teológico del Nuevo Testamento*, 130-131.

<sup>242</sup> Cf. H. Seebass, “Adán”, in *Diccionario Teológico del Nuevo Testamento*, vol. IV, 62-65.

<sup>243</sup> Cf. G. Bauer, “Nacer, engendrar”, in *Diccionario Teológico del Nuevo Testamento*, Vol. III, 152-162.

<sup>244</sup> Cf. COLLINS, R. F., *The Power of Images in Paul*, 85.

intimacy. And because the Lord is the Father, Israel is not anymore a barren mother and now can be glad and exult<sup>245</sup>. So, inspired by this text and some others from Isaiah, Paul uses a mother and father imagery<sup>246</sup>.

### **3.2. Rhetoric of excess – metaphor in context**

With O. Kuss it is possible to say that this letter was the most passionate that Paul ever wrote. The letter to the Galatians is uniquely passionate because it exposes to us clearly, and with great strength and inspiration, the need for preventing the relapse of Christianity into legalistic Judaism; it shows the determination of Paul to defend the message he had been entrusted with against distortions and Judaizing<sup>247</sup>. This explains the times when we sense that Paul speaks with suffering; he suspects that the community is falling into some traps.

This letter is the most perfect example of Paul's great affection for his communities and his care for them like a mother, also feeling the pain of children who are stubborn or unprepared for the trials.

Even though the affectionate tone is very deep in this letter, Paul has just enough clarity to stick with the theological principles that he is not willing to give up. Most of all he has in front of him the Cross of Christ and the extreme love manifested through this powerful act. This leads him to see himself as a mother and as a father. He is the one responsible to transmit a correct doctrine to the Galatians, a doctrine that puts all Christians on the same level, accepting all of them as his children. As so, they should behave among themselves as brothers, as he states in the farewell part of the letter (Gal 6, 18). Also, Paul wants the Galatians to be begotten and born as truly Christians<sup>248</sup>.

A. Badiou would say that Paul held Love to be the “universal power”. Of course the Christian does not exclude the law from his daily life (Rom 7, 12), but he should not fall into legalism<sup>249</sup>. The letter to the Galatians states clearly: “we have believed in

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<sup>245</sup> Cf. MARCONCINI, B., *El Libro de Isaías (40-66)*, Editorial Ciudad Nueva, Madrid 1999, 147-153.

<sup>246</sup> Cf. R. COGGINS, “22. Isaiah”, in *The Oxford Bible Commentary*, edited by J. Barton and J. Muddiman, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2007, 433-486

<sup>247</sup> Cf. KUSS, O., *Carta a los Romanos – Cartas a los Corintios – Carta a los Gálatas*, 393.

<sup>248</sup> Cf. BALZ, H., SCHNEIDER, G., *Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament*, Volume 3, 57.

<sup>249</sup> Cf. BADIOU, A., *Saint Paul: the foundation of universalism*, Standford University Press, California 2003, 86-92.

Christ Jesus, so that we might be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the law” (Gal 2, 16).

R. Collins argues that, by writing these two short verses (Gal 4, 19-20), Paul transmits what a mother would feel about her own children: “just before his exposition of the Sarah-Hagar allegory, Paul writes to the Galatians as a frustrated mother might do: “«My little children (teknamou), for whom I am again in the pain of childbirth (odino) until Christ is formed in you, I wish I were present with you now and could change my tone, for I am perplexed about you»”<sup>250</sup>. Collins explains that the image of the pain of a woman in labor was found in classic Greek literature. It is important to be aware that in the ancient world “childbirth was a dangerous time not only for the child but for the mother”<sup>251</sup>.

Even Homer, Plato and Sophocles made use of this image in a very large spectrum of representative situations. The use of Paul seems to be different from those authors because Paul wants to tell the Galatians that they are members of the same family and so they should act accordingly. As Collins continues, even though the internal image is still current, he says that the meaning in this context is quite different from that of the other metaphor found in the letter to the Thessalonians. In 1Thess 2, 7-8 Paul uses this metaphor to show the affection he had for them while he was with the community. As for Gal 4, 9, on the other hand, the image of a mother that he applies to himself is used to speak about the sufferings caused by the community. This image gets stronger if placed together with the two ideas transmitted by Paul: in one way, Paul feels again “labor pains” (πάλιν ὠδίνω); in another way, he continues to be puzzled “until Christ is formed” (μορφωθῆ Χριστὸς) in them<sup>252</sup>.

### 3.3. Reading the network of relationships

It is important here to take a brief look at the main stages during pregnancy and post-partum on the psychological level for the parents, going beyond the act of giving birth in itself. As many say, even though the pregnancy is a beautiful time for parents, is also a stressful time. In some cases, the anxiety of becoming parents can cause serious

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<sup>250</sup> COLLINS, R. F., *The Power of Images in Paul*, 84.

<sup>251</sup> ERMATINGER, J. W., *Daily life in the New Testament*, 110.

<sup>252</sup> Cf. COLLINS, R. F., *The Power of Images in Paul*, 85.

problems of adjustment even prior to the child's birth. At the same time, there is no pattern from which we could draw a general scheme applying to all cases. As Kirby Deater-Deckard declares: "examination of changes in parenting stress requires consideration of the changes in individual, family and parent circumstances that may be specific to each family or parent"<sup>253</sup>. It is quite interesting to see that Paul is somehow passing through this state of anxiety himself. In his case, it is justified, because he is aiming for a spiritual birth of the Galatians, but in a way that Christ will be formed in them. The "stress" of Paul lies in the fact that he is not quite sure that the Galatians are able to be born this way.

As for mothers, the experience of giving birth is very painful, not only physically but also psychologically. The psychologists tend to recognize that it is common for mothers after giving birth to pass through painful psychological moments; this time is normally known as "postpartum depression"<sup>254</sup> or "baby blues". Some say that this can occur because of the uncertainties that a new life brings. This time, according to E. Erikson, is also very delicate for the children: it is the time for them to establish a basic trust in their care giver<sup>255</sup>. For us, this data matters because Paul somehow is disturbed and afraid of the moment that the Galatians might be separated from him, and that they may not be able to keep up their faith. The second point is also very important: we know that Paul is correcting the Galatians, but he has extreme caution with them in order to show them that he is trustworthy.

It is quite important to know that the parents who have fewer resources to deal with parental stress are those who are at greater risk of having problems in their parenting. As it was said, Paul feels the risk of this "birth" and so it is quite reasonable that he shows some concern for it. Here Paul faces some problems even before the birth, and these are based on the behavior of the Galatians in terms of faith.

Lastly, it seems to be important to note that when the infants are healing from some previous problems or birth problems, they tend to be less responsive to their

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<sup>253</sup> DEATER-DECKARD, K., *Parenting Stress*, 12.

<sup>254</sup> Cf. DEATER-DECKARD, K., *Parenting Stress*, 42; Cf. MATSUMOTO, D., *The Cambridge Dictionary of Psychology*, 393.

<sup>255</sup> Cf. MATSUMOTO, D., *The Cambridge Dictionary of Psychology*, 554.

parents<sup>256</sup>. This applies here in the sense that Paul might be saying that the Christians have to heal from their Judaizing predispositions (which, summarizing, wanted the Christians coming from paganism to be submitted to Mosaic Law). In fact, as he explains in Gal 4, 8 to Gal 5, 12, it is the Gospel which makes them free men.

#### 4. Letter to the Romans

The letter to the Romans is probably the last letter that the New Testament preserves from Saint Paul himself. It is also seen as the most important letter from the Apostle and, as some claim, it is the most significant document in the New Testament and in the whole Bible.

Those are some of the reasons why this letter will be summarily approached. It is very interesting that, as it will be explained, the parental metaphor is used to refer to God. In Paul's synthesis, this metaphor is also clarified: God is the one and only Father/Mother of all. Christians, as they care for the members of their communities, participate in the parenthood of God.

Once more Paul refers to this metaphor as a way to see the relationship that God has with his people, inferring that, beyond everything else, the Incarnation of Jesus Christ was a sign of God's Parental Love.

As J. Dunn explains, the letter to the Romans is bold but it is the least controversial and the most important of the major New Testament letters. Actually this text is a well-developed theological statement by a Christian theologian and one which has had incalculable influence on the framing of Christian theology ever since. Concerning the author it is accepted (as it has been through the centuries) that the letter to the Romans was written by Paul. Most scholars would point to its date as somewhere between the year 55 and 57, probably when Paul stayed at Corinth for three months. Surely Paul had to calm down and concentrate in order to write this marvelous work<sup>257</sup>.

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<sup>256</sup> "Some infants are not responsive to their parents' attempts to interact. (...) For example, infants who have medical problems or are recovering from problems at birth are less able to engage in these coherent face-to-face interactions". DEATER-DECKARD, K., *Parenting Stress*, 100.

<sup>257</sup> Cf. J. D. G. Dunn, "Romans, Letter to the" in *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters*, edited by G.F. Hawthorne, R.P. Martin and D.G. Reid, InterVarsity Press, Leicester 1993, 838-850.

Concerning the recipients it should be noted that some manuscripts omit the word “Rome”, so it is necessary to search deeper for who were to be the recipients. As Paul himself states, some of the recipients would be Jews. It is known that there was a large Jewish community in Rome in the first century (between 40,000 and 50,000). It is also known, from the letter to the Galatians, that there were some Christians who were bringing the Gospel to “the circumcised” (Gal 2, 9). Actually, those Christians had a fruitful ground among the Gentile proselytes and “God-fearers” who were attached to many Diaspora synagogues, as the book of Acts points out. So the proclamation of the Gospel was not just for Jews but also for Gentiles, hence “to Jew, but also to Gentile” (Rom 1, 16; 2, 9-10; 3, 9; 3, 29; 9, 24; 10, 12). Actually, Paul writes not only addressing special groups of people but seeing the larger social context. In fact, Jews, Christians and Gentiles who were attached to Judaism were largely influenced by Roman culture. Also there were among them some issues to address, at the least because they did not have a central spiritual authority in Rome<sup>258</sup>.

About the purposes of this letter it can be said that they are drawn from the context that was just described. For sure one of the goals of Paul’s letter was to provide a support base for his projected mission to Spain (cf. Rom 15, 24-28). Also, Paul had an apologetic purpose because he felt himself and his understanding of the Gospel under attack and needing to be justified. So this letter is an apology for the Gospel and also for himself (that is to say, for self-apology), since his whole life's work was bound up with the preaching of the Gospel. Along with this purpose the letter shows a pastoral reason mainly because Paul was writing to heal potential or real divisions among churches in Rome. It will therefore be both a preventive and a corrective letter.

In order to have a general understanding of its argument the letter can be divided in seven parts. Firstly, an introduction in which there are the general themes of thanksgiving and prayer (Rom 1, 1-17). After that Paul speaks about the human condition which is common for Gentiles and Jews (Rom 1, 18-3, 2): the sinful nature of the human condition and the equality of everyone before God. The third part speaks about the Gospel itself (3, 21-5, 21): everything should be centered in faith in Christ and belief in the salvation of both Jew and Gentile, and salvation for individual believers as well as for humankind. The next section examines the problem of sin, death and law (Rom 6, 1-8, 39). Then Paul recovers the relation between the special election

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<sup>258</sup> Cf. BOSCH, J. S., *Escritos paulinos*, 281-285.

of Israel by God and the place of the Gentiles in the salvation plan brought by Jesus (Rom 9, 1–11, 36). Having said that, Paul says that the Gospel needs practical application (Rom 12, 1–15, 13): it is essential to live responsibly; it is indispensable to be part of a community of faith; love is the norm for social relationships; it is important to be aware of the imminence of the end; concerning problems with food laws and holy days, Paul explains that Jesus provided the basic hermeneutics for the reinterpretation of the law; in summary, Paul integrates the plea to mutual acceptance and tolerance into the theme of the whole letter. The last section of this letter is the conclusion (15, 14–16, 27) in which Paul describes briefly how his eastern mission went and then turns again to his plans for the future, stating more clearly his reasons for wanting to visit his readers in Rome, and the reasons for his delay<sup>259</sup>.

#### **4.1. All creation is waiting for adoption (8, 23)**

Οὐ μόνον δέ, ἀλλὰ καὶ αὐτοὶ τὴν ἀπαρχὴν τοῦ πνεύματος ἔχοντες, καὶ ἡμεῖς αὐτοὶ ἐν ἑαυτοῖς στενάζομεν, υἰοθεσίαν ἀπεκδεχόμενοι, τὴν ἀπολύτρωσιν τοῦ σώματος ἡμῶν.

Not only this, but we too, having the first fruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting eagerly for our adoption, the redemption of our body.

This verse, as we saw in the introduction to the letter, is tying up the section that talks about the problem of sin, death and law (Rom 6, 1–8, 39) and preparing to introduce the hot theme about the relation between the special election of Israel by God and the place of the Gentiles in the salvation plan brought by Jesus (Rom 9, 1–11, 36).

Clearly in this verse, Paul is showing that all people are on the same path to God, and the baptized especially should have learned that they are to help their brothers and sisters to understand that God is the only Father of all. The verb ἀπεκδέχομαι (await eagerly) has a particular meaning in Saint Paul: it has a connection with eschatological hope. Christians are the ones feeling an eager hope for the realization of God's plans for

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<sup>259</sup> Cf. J. D. G. Dunn, "Romans, Letter to the" in *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters*, 838-850.



them (Rom 8, 25), which started with the gift of the Holy Spirit<sup>260</sup>. This also involves all humankind, and so a metamorphosis of the world, by discovering that they are sons of God (Rom 8, 14).

This verse is also saying that everybody should look forward for being worthy of a filial adoption by God Himself. The “groaning” within human beings finds its fulfillment only in God to Whom all should turn as children turn to their parents. Using the word στενάζω (groan), the Apostle speaks of a threefold cry: that of all creation, that of Christians and that of the Spirit. It is a growing gradation from the bottom up. The reason for this is that creation groans because of Adam’s sin; it is consumed, waiting for the day when the glory of God will be made manifest to its children. The groaning of creation has a corresponding groan of the Spirit<sup>261</sup>.

The words used to express this idea are clear. As for the word υιοθεσία, it refers to someone who is appointed or accepted as a son, to somebody who is adopted. In its general use in the New Testament υιοθεσία refers to “the «adoption» of someone through God in Christ”<sup>262</sup>. To have a deeper understanding of the category of divine sonship applied metaphorically by Paul to Christians, we should go back to Rom 8, 19 where it is clear that this category has something to do with the eschatological revelation that is to come. But, on other hand, Paul states clearly (already in Rom 8, 14) that this perfection of God’s sonship, which is essential in the process of salvation, is not motionless in the future<sup>263</sup>. In fact, it implies the present condition of the baptized; they are already able to cry “Abba! Father!”, and that is because the Spirit given and presented to them bears witness to the new condition of “adoptive children” of God (cf. Rom 8, 15). Thus, this word refers to a reality that is to take place in the future, but it implies the present, and it is still an unavoidable guideline today for all the baptized.

It is also noteworthy that here “Paul associates the idea of Christians as God’s Children with that of their adoption by God”<sup>264</sup>. And, in addition to that, there is the surety of the Spirit<sup>265</sup>; that is, the one giving the necessary knowledge to recognize God’s paternity, and even to know that God is the one taking the initiative of calling all

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<sup>260</sup> Cf. GLNT, Vol. II, 882-883.

<sup>261</sup> Cf. GLNT, Vol. XII, 1044-1046

<sup>262</sup> BALZ, H., SCHNEIDER, G., *Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament*, Volume 3, 381.

<sup>263</sup> Cf. KUSS, O., *Carta a los Romanos – Cartas a los Corintios – Carta a los Gálatas*, 86.

<sup>264</sup> BALZ, H., SCHNEIDER, G., *Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament*, Volume 3, 341.

<sup>265</sup> Cf. KUSS, O., *Carta a los Romanos – Cartas a los Corintios – Carta a los Gálatas*, 315.

to Himself and giving His children the desire and ability to become His adoptive children in the eschatological future, but starting in the present. Consequently Saint Paul is saying that the final goal of life is to achieve the resurrection and the glorification of the body as Christ did<sup>266</sup>. It is still important to reaffirm that the resurrection is a Trinitarian process, and that the necessity of the Holy Spirit in the process is understood: “here we discovered a quite striking idea to the effect that when the physical pneuma, which has been received in baptism, is in operation in believers, their physical bodies of flesh and blood are literally in the process of dying away: atrophying. The takeover by the physical pneuma that will be completed at the resurrection is already underway”<sup>267</sup>.

Here one might say that Paul is not considering himself as father or mother. This truth, at least is clear: he is not applying this metaphor to himself, but first and foremost to the relationship between God as Father and the baptized as children. Actually, Paul considers himself among God’s children. So, when I was rereading the letter to the Romans, I was impressed by this verse because Paul shows that he has things clear: God is the only and true Father of all<sup>268</sup>; Paul is “just” a servant of God, spreading the Gospel of Jesus Christ among his fellow Christians. So our previous reflections have to tie up with this important conclusion: Paul considers himself as father only metaphorically speaking; saying that he is trying to explain that he might be able to guide his communities to the true sonship, which is their “adoption” by God Himself through Jesus Christ in the Spirit.

#### **4.2. Rhetoric of excess – metaphor in context**

Some scholars claim that in this passage, Paul wanted to soothe the Christians as they were facing a challenging situation. Actually, the promise of an eternal life was just not enough; they were still struggling before that mystery. Paul, as a mentor, explains

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<sup>266</sup> Some specialists would say that divine filiation is one of the important foundations of Paul's Christ mysticism. Cf. STAAB, K., BROX, N., *Cartas a los Tesalonicenses Cartas de la Cautividad Cartas Pastorales*, 182.

<sup>267</sup> ENGBERG-PEDERSEN, T., *Cosmology and Self in the Apostle Paul*, Oxford University Press, New York 2010, 55.

<sup>268</sup> This metaphor calling God “Father” is very common in the Bible: it has both a political and legislative meaning and generates a deep personal and communal affection. Cf. GLNT, Vol. IX, 1177-1181.

and comforts them on that matter. He encouraged the community to have faith and to put their trust in God alone, so that their minds could be freed from that heavy burden. If they were to think only according to the flesh they would be hostile to God; that is, they would be unable to recognize His plans<sup>269</sup>.

If Paul uses this image to help the Christians in Rome to increase their faith in God's plans, it is also interesting to see how they would react and think when hearing the metaphors of having "labor pains" and "being adopted".

In most of our societies today, it is fairly unusual to witness a woman giving birth; usually, mothers go to the hospitals and when they leave, the newly born children are already in their arms. It was not like that in the time of Saint Paul. It was quite normal to hear the "groaning" of a mother giving birth. Consequently, everyone in ancient Greece and ancient Rome would understand the notion of what was meant for a mother to give birth<sup>270</sup>.

As for the general concept of adoption, it was normally seen as negative because it meant that a child did not have his or her natural parents (or they were not able to care for their children). If someone was adopted, it meant that the real parents did not want him or her. This could be because the baby got abandoned. It was common to leave babies in the trash; even the selling of babies was somehow allowed in Rome during Paul's time<sup>271</sup>. Therefore, when the Christians in Rome heard those words coming from Paul, they would be astonished and ask for their full meaning. At the same time, we must keep in mind that, even though we do not have much data, it is certain that there were rules in ancient Rome which took into consideration the social status of an adopted child. It had no special consequences on inheritance from the adoptive fathers, to which the adopted child would have access<sup>272</sup>. Hence, knowing this, the Romans would realize that in saying they are to be adopted children of God, it does not mean that they should be ashamed, but on the contrary, it spoke about the magnificent inheritance that they were to have in the future.

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<sup>269</sup> Cf. NIENHUIS, D. R., *Not by Paul Alone – The Formation of the Catholic Epistle Collection and the Christian Canon*, Baylor University Press, Texas 2007, 197.

<sup>270</sup> For a complete description on childbirth in ancient Greece and ancient Rome consult: BOGUICK, P., (Editor in Chief), *Encyclopedia of Society and Culture in the Ancient World*, 193-197.

<sup>271</sup> Cf. ERMATINGER, J. W., *Daily life in the New Testament*, 110-111.

<sup>272</sup> Cf. BOGUICK, P., (Editor in Chief), *Encyclopedia of Society and Culture in the Ancient World*, 450.

In another way, adoption could be a very positive event for children, as they got a better life and a renewed hope for the future<sup>273</sup>. In fact it was supposed to be this way, as it is supposed to be today. It seems that Paul is referring to adoption in this positive sense<sup>274</sup>. Following H. Ridderbos book, when we consider the concept of adoption in Saint Paul we need to take into account some different perspectives. Ridderbos claims that even though the meaning of adoption in the Greek and Roman world is important, the Old Testament concept of adoption<sup>275</sup>, which considered Israel the subject to be adopted by God, is much more important<sup>276</sup>.

This Old Testament perspective suggests that an eschatological point of view is impregnated in the concept of adoption<sup>277</sup>. This adoption is not reduced to a juridical act but, as a matter of fact, refers to the salvation granted by Jesus Christ. Also, it has to be strongly emphasized that this adoption, which produces reconciliation, is due particularly to the works of the Holy Spirit. Since this is so, it is correct to conclude that the term adoption refers as much to the future as it does to the present<sup>278</sup>; and it is for the individual as well as being cosmic.

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<sup>273</sup> A very important and complete study on adoption and about what it meant in ancient Greece and Rome was undertaken by Hugh Lindsay. The structures of adoption and kinship are taken into account; the impact of those realities is considered to be greater than what one would normally think; it even refers in detail to the process of adoption of some influential historical figures of Rome who got adopted (Jugurtha; Clodius and Octavian). Cf. LINDSAY, H., *Adoption in the Roman World*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2009.

<sup>274</sup> Saint Jerome and other theologians advanced the theory that Saint Paul could have been adopted by Sergio Paul the proconsul of Cyprus. They would have met between July of 43 and July of 44 according to this theory. Cf. DECAUX, A., *El aborto de Dios – una biografía de san Pablo*, San Pablo, Bogotá 1995, 111-113.

<sup>275</sup> Some claim, refuting some connection with the Old Testament, that the concept of adoption is different from the meaning of sonship given in the old covenant. This argument is strong because the concept of adoption does not appear in the Septuagint. Cf. HOVE, R., *Equality in Christ – Galatians 3:28 and the Gender Dispute*, Crossway Books, Illinois 1999, 55.

<sup>276</sup> Cf. RIDDERBOS, H. *El pensamiento del apóstol Pablo*, 254-262.

<sup>277</sup> Some claim that “adoption was not characteristically Jewish practice, and in the NT the metaphor occurs only in the Pauline literature (Rom 8, 15. 23; Gal 4, 5; Eph 1, 5)”. DUNN, J. D. G., *The Theology Of Paul The Apostle*, 36.

<sup>278</sup> “The redemption is an “already” (Ef 1, 7) and “yet not” (Ef 4, 30), as it is our adoption (Rom 8, 15. 23) and our justification (Rom 5, 1 and Gal 5, 5). Cf. FEE, G. D., *Pablo, el Espíritu y el Pueblo de Dios*, Editorial Vida, Florida 2007, 53.

To give birth had, likewise, a social meaning. For the child and his parents, it implied passing through some rites. As we know, in the Bible, being pregnant and giving birth was, to some extent, an impure event, and needed some rites of purification, as we can see in the case of Jesus' birth (cf. Lc 2, 22). This impurity was also recognized in Roman culture, and so there were some rites that we can, analogically, call rites of purification<sup>279</sup>. Consequently, those Christians who did not come from a Jewish tradition would also notice that Paul, when he was saying that they were to be reborn. Also implied passing through some rites of purification. Today, it seems important to recall these nuances because it will help the reader to understand more clearly what Saint Paul intends to say.

Furthermore, as we bring together these notes, it is already clear that Saint Paul is once again using a metaphor that, in the first place, seems strange for his listeners. But, once more, if we join together all the pieces of the puzzle it takes us to a new level of understanding and reveals some new viewpoints.

Using a daily life situation to form an uncommon metaphor, Saint Paul seems to achieve the goal of stimulating the Christians in their path to holiness. One of the main goals of this image is to be a parenetic sentence for readers and listeners. Meanwhile, Paul does not omit an affectionate tone because the reality used to construct this transporting metaphor is very close to the experiences of the Christians in Rome, who are men, women and children.

### **4.3. Reading the network of relationships**

As it has been previously noted, this analysis of the letter to the Romans is the closing moment of this study. It is because it seems that, in this letter, Saint Paul offers a more complete perspective about what it means for Christians to be children of God. More than that, he launches a universal perspective which is a cosmic eschatological movement of birth that affects everyone since they are to be reborn in Christ.

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<sup>279</sup> For a brief description of those rites see: ESPLUGA, X., VINAIXA, M. M., *Vida religiosa en la Antigua Roma*, 74-75.

Paul as a parent of the new Christians is using what is called an “authoritative style” of parenting<sup>280</sup>. This means that Paul cares much for the wellbeing of the communities on an emotional level. That is, he takes into account the emotions that they are passing through on their own journey of faith. Doing so, Paul addresses letters to them (because sometimes he was not able to be physically present) approaching emotional issues and giving them support. That is clear in all the verses from the different letters that are taken into account in this study.

More than this, Paul, having a deep and correct concern for the emotional life of new converts, also sets some rules that are to be followed by imposing, to some extent, his authority. Actually, growing in faith in Jesus demands a communal and personal conversion.

Whether Saint Paul is addressing the communities in a happy and trusting manner or in an atmosphere of conflict and need for reconciliation, he always states some basic rules that are to be followed. Doing so, Saint Paul is holding the Christians to the right path for reaching the fullness of Sanctity. Paul explains how the themes of the Old Testament are to be seen correlated with Christ: Adam, the law, image of God and others. Concerning Jesus Christ he explains all the consequences of his incarnation sheds light on what is to come about in the eschatological future. With regards to men and women, Paul claims that they are guided to a higher happiness, to their eternal communion in God. And, as we see in Rom 8, 23, the waiting for adoption by God is felt by all creation. Therefore, the whole cosmos enters in this dynamic of hope for an eschatological consummation in God. Because of these perspectives and all that completes these brief suggestions of Paul’s theology, many scholars claim that Saint Paul was the first Christian theologian<sup>281</sup>.

Regarding the theme of adoption, it is still a very popular metaphor for today’s world. It is known that adoption has become a universal concept. Nowadays it is even

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<sup>280</sup> There are four general parental styles: “authoritarian” – is low in emotional support and imposes strong power on children; “neglectful” – has a very low emotional support for children and does not give any rules or directives to them; “indulgent” – gives a very high support on the emotional level but does not care much for guidelines; finally, “authoritative” – cares a lot for both, supporting their children on the emotional level and giving them fundamental rules for behaving. Cf. GORDON, G., NICHOLSON, N., *Family wars: classic conflicts in family business and how to deal with them*, Kogan Page, Philadelphia 2008, 22-23.

<sup>281</sup> Cf. DUNN, J. D. G., *The Theology Of Paul The Apostle*, 1-23.

possible to adopt children from other cultures and ethnic groups. Also, adoption has a place in the civil rights of almost all countries and it takes into consideration, in general, the orientations of international fundamental human rights. On the other hand, there are still some issues involving laws because the common goal of “the best for children” accepted by all legislators has different interpretations in its meaning<sup>282</sup>.

When Saint Paul speaks metaphorically about adoption it refers as we know to the eschatological stage in which all creation will enter in communion with God. Now, this adoption by God is based on trust that he will have the best reserved for us. There is no need for rules or laws, like human laws, to speak about this adoption. And what is more, as J. Dunn claims: ““adoptionism” properly speaking affirms a taking into sonship of one who was not previously “son.””<sup>283</sup>.

From here it seems correct to say that Saint Paul had a precise understanding of what it meant to be a parent of the new Christians. Together with that, he always made it clear that God was the true Father of the communities. Paul, one might say, was a father of the communities because he participated in the one only paternity of God<sup>284</sup>. The believers live in an eschatological tension between Adam and Christ – between death and life<sup>285</sup>. But, Paul is declaring in the whole of chapter 8 of Romans the firm hope for God’s adoption of all creation (Rom 8, 22-23).

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<sup>282</sup> Cf. GOLDEN, J., MECKEL, R. A., PRESCOTT, H. M., *Children and Youth in Sickness and in Health: A Historical Handbook and Guide*, Greenwood Press, United States 2006, 45-58.

<sup>283</sup> DUNN, J. D. G., *The Theology Of Paul The Apostle*, 243.

<sup>284</sup> Rom 8, 23 has to be seen in a close connection with Rom 8, 15. From there is clear that adoption is already a given, but is to be consummated in the future. The adoption is for the baptized and for all creation. The only Father is God – “Abba”.

<sup>285</sup> Cf. DUNN, J. D. G., *The Theology Of Paul The Apostle* 495.

## Conclusion

Some remarks have become bold as this study was developing. After some biographical notes on Saint Paul it is clear that an approach to his world was an obligatory adventure. We learned that, even though the Apostle did not build a systematic Ecclesiology, he brought forth some essential points on what it meant to be Church, that is to be followers of Jesus Christ in their specific time and environment.

The Greek word for Church - ἐκκλησία - was itself given a new meaning by Paul. In its social and political contexts, Paul helped the first Christian communities to find their identity by maintaining and strengthening their belief in Jesus Christ. This same Jesus was the one, through Paul's letters and preaching, who summoned Christians for His mission of proclaiming the Good News to the world.

It was also very important to understand that Paul was not the first one to use the letter form as a communication method in the ancient world, but he used it in an unprecedented way. The letters that were sent from Paul to the different Christian communities were multipurpose: announcing the mysteries of faith; greeting and maintaining contact; exchanging news; announcing projects; addressing some questions dealing with practical matters; correcting some behaviors and recommending persons who were to be hosted by the communities that received the letters.

Therefore, in order to reveal some key elements from Saint Paul's language, a brief approach to the figures of speech was undertaken. Special attention was directed to the use of metaphor, as it is one of the most powerful figures of speech in general and of which Paul takes advantage.

It was just astonishing to discover how modern studies on metaphor are clear on agreeing that this figure of speech persuades us to change our minds. And this is what Paul did: through his metaphors he persuaded his communities to change their minds, to become more Christ like.

In the specific case of parental metaphor, it was used to describe both Paul's relationship with the communities and God's relationship with all creation. It appears astonishing how it shaped the faith pathway of the first communities and how it can shape the faith of Christians today.



It can be deduced from chapters two and three of this research paper that the parental metaphor is the basic outline which shaped the development of Saint Paul's writings and so too his relationship with all Christians.

In order to explore this powerful metaphor we have to be aware that Paul's writing tone was not always the same. As for the first letter to the Thessalonians, the letter to the Philippians and the letter to Philemon, they present a confident and an affectionate Apostle toward his communities.

As Paul proposed to be seen as a nurse, he wanted to elucidate in words the affection that he felt for the Thessalonians (1Thess 2, 7). Calling them babies the nurse (Paul) is saying that they would not be his, but Christ's children.

As regards the authority of the Church his message is also very clear: an Apostle has a vocation to service. Of course this metaphor does not stop with this parenetic demand; it also has political imports, especially as it means that the care givers have social responsibilities for the well-being of the children that they are taking care of.

The letter to the Philippians also presents this metaphor. There Paul applied his paternity to a specific person, Timothy. As we know, Phil 2, 22 had the specific objective of recommending Timothy to the Philippians so that they would receive him well. But, beyond that, in our analysis it became clear how Paul dealt very affectionately with those who served the Gospel with him.

One last fervent example where Paul uses the paternal metaphor is verse 10 of the letter to Philemon. In this case the deduction is clear: Paul found this metaphor to be the proper channel to bring forth the newness of the Gospel to its fullness into the house Church of Philemon.

Searching for the type of relationship that a care giver has with his offspring, a new level of interpretation is reached by the insights coming from these different letters. Here we can find what normally is called attachment theory. That is a psychological notion which studies the implications and the importance of relationships that children have with their educators. It was a surprise to see how Paul managed well the kind of relations that he had with the Thessalonians. Today one would say that Paul did implement a proper attachment.

In the letters to the Corinthians and in the letter to the Galatians, Paul's tone changed: one can feel a suffering Apostle. When Paul looked back at the communities

that he founded he realized that they were not following the correct path to holiness but were stumbling in their commitments.

One could say that, in modern terminology, an authoritative parenting style was adopted by Saint Paul toward those communities (he cared for both of them, supporting his children on the emotional level and correspondingly giving them fundamental directions for behaving).

It is amazing how Paul, even in tears, did not give up on the Corinthians; he understood that his little children were not yet able to have solid food, but only milk (1Cor 3, 1-2); he still had hope that, like a father, he could bring the Corinthians to marry Christ as a pure bride (2Cor 11, 2).

Writing to the Galatians Paul also showed his concern, mainly because they were easily convinced by any doctrine. It was very hard for the Apostle to steer them in the correct path of faith. This was a situation so painful that Paul even compared it to the labor pains of a mother (Gal 4, 19).

Finally, the letter to the Romans shows forth a synthesis. From an Apostle that represented himself metaphorically as a tender nurse, as a father and as a mother, he comes to be an authoritative parent in fact. It is true that Paul sustains the confidence that the proper parental way of dealing with children should inspire all Christians, mainly those in command in the communities. But, Paul did not ever lose the essential message: the hope for a filial adoption by God Himself of all creation (Rom 8, 22-23).

Surely, the parental perspective is not enough to maintain a theological dialogue with Saint Paul. However, it is necessary and sometimes seems to have been somewhat forgotten. It is precisely in this awareness that a key objective of this study resides. I understand now that I cannot search for Paul in his writings if I am not aware of his fraternal and also his parental way of relating to his communities and coworkers.

More than an historical approach to Saint Paul, this study allowed me somehow to feel the rhythm of his heartbeat as he fell more and more in love with Jesus. It was a heart that rejoiced when he saw the communities growing in faith; it was a heart that suffered when he sensed there were sicknesses proliferating in the communities; it was a heart that gave a permanent answer to God's Love.

A strong and mature heart like Paul's produced an inspired synthesis of what it means to use the parental metaphor in relationships among Christians. This point has been the main objective of this study.

To those who are ordained ministers in the Church and for all those who assume positions of leadership at various levels, it will be necessary to revive this metaphor of parenting in their lifestyles and mission ministry.

Mission work in Europe today feels the urge for a New Evangelization. At the base of this new method is the perspective that Christians of the “old Europe” must rediscover the hidden treasure of being baptized that they seem to have forgotten. Of course this revitalization of “sleepy” Christians calls for a parental approach from the Church, our “mother”.

Nowadays, as it has been from the beginning of Christianity, it is certain that kinship language and metaphors really contribute to build strong and permanent bonds among Christian communities.

If the tradition, the hierarchy and, above all, God are seen as Father and Mother, then Christians will recognize both their responsibility for each other and their family relations. As Saint Paul believed, it is only a bond like that of a family that can support the survival and flourishing of the baptized. This flourishing has to be understood not just as referring to numbers but first and foremost to the quality of relationships among all Christians.

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