

## **The Struggle for the Progress of the Gospel at the Heart of the Pauline Mission<sup>1</sup>**

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One core aspect of the Pauline Mission involves Paul, his associates and, by extension, his converts struggling for the progress of the Gospel. This can be demonstrated from a narrow synoptic sampling of what are usually classed as an undisputed Pauline letter, a post-Pauline and pro-Pauline Acts, and then substantiated by an overview of the documents in all three strata. Cannot other such thematic readings achieve positive results, studying the neglected Pauline Mission in all thirteen letters and Acts?

Our subject, though sharply focussed, requires consideration of some preliminaries. This is because the basic question confronting whoever would investigate any aspect of the Pauline Mission is simply this: How are we to go about studying it? And although various answers are easily found, none turns out to be without difficulty. Ought we, for example, to comb the letters of Paul - all of which are occasional pieces - in order to extract enough material for stitching together some sort of reconstructed Pauline Mission as it might have looked? Alas, close reading of the letters alone fails to provide us with sufficient data for a proper contextualization of the various evangelistic efforts, the planting of churches, the renewed visits of Paul or the circumstances which sooner or later called forth his written correspondence. Anything like substantial agreement on a fixed and reasonably complete chronology of Paul's life and ministry continues to elude scholars; and this is essentially due to the fact that, even when all the biographical details harvested from

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<sup>1</sup> An embryonic version of our present proposal was put before a non-specialised audience in October 1998, in the form of the inaugural lecture at the Free Faculty of Reformed Theology, in Aix-en-Provence. Hitherto unpublished, that lecture's bones acquire some flesh here. However, we have not included here the conclusions drawn on that occasion as to how one might preach and apply in our day the double-sided coin of the progress of the Gospel word through conflict and suffering.

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the letters have been assembled, we have only a minimum yield or, put another way, the puzzle of the Pauline Mission still has too many missing pieces. Thus Paul's letters, by themselves, offer insufficient evidence for piecing together the stage-by-stage development of the spreading of the Gospel undertaken by Paul and his associates.

How can this first obstacle be overcome? Might we, at this point, allow the Acts of the Apostles to be our guide, given that Luke's second volume recounts the ups and downs of Paul's life between his ignominious entry to Damascus as a blind man and his triumphal arrival at Rome as a chained man? Unfortunately, as is well known, trying to harmonise the detail involving Paul in Luke's account with the information found in Paul's letters is nothing short of a brain-teaser: Whilst Paul-on-Paul and Luke-on-Paul show marked resemblances at some points, a combination of the two sets of facts gives rise to at least as many problems as it solves. And neither Paul nor Luke can really be held responsible for that: Paul didn't write his letters so that, one day, we might use them for chronicling his life, times and activities; others than he were ultimately responsible for gathering his correspondence together into the collection we now possess. As for Luke, it cannot be said to have been his intention to tell his readers everything about a quarter of a century of Paul's missionary activity in part of the Mediterranean basin. In consequence, neither Luke nor Paul is to blame if our combination of the indices drawn from Acts and Paul's letters puts some missing pieces into place, but considerably enlarges the incomplete puzzle in the process.<sup>2</sup>

The inherent difficulties of our investigation into the Pauline Mission and its strategies are further compounded by the contributions - be they assured results or just commonly accepted conclusions - of international specialist study in the public domain. There are two familiar, complicating factors to be reckoned with.

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<sup>2</sup> A good example of the difficulties and their possible solutions is provided by L.C.A. Alexander's recent attempt at establishing a Pauline chronology, based on careful harmonization of Paul's letters with Acts, in *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters*, Leics, 1993, pp. 115-123.

Firstly, whilst the New Testament Canon presents thirteen letters bearing Paul's name, the dominant scholarly consensus rules that Pauline authorship in the strict sense is only to be extended to seven of them in their final form: that is, those to Rome, Corinth, Galatia, Philippi, the first to Thessalonica and, usually, the letter to Philemon. Only these, after the customary tests have been applied, qualify as genuinely Pauline.<sup>3</sup> On the frontiers of true Pauline territory, the letter to Colossae and the second to Thessalonica are subject to border disputes, with scholars divided roughly half-and-half in favour of recognising or of discounting their claims to Pauline authenticity; read either way, the former is a sort of frontier post marking the crossover point from Paul to his heirs;<sup>4</sup> the latter's possible rejection, based mainly on supposed imitation of the first Thessalonian letter, finds a parallel in the similar argument whereby Ephesians, for its alleged use of Colossians as well as its summary qualities, is placed firmly across the border by a majority of Paul's modern students. A larger proportion still of Pauline specialists consigns the Pastoral Letters, generally seen as an indivisible group,

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<sup>3</sup> We may take just one recent study of the Pauline corpus and one up-to-date Theology of Paul as examples. Charles Cousar, *The Letters of Paul*, Nashville, 1996, while refusing to treat the disputed letters, as so many do, as "pale reflections of Paul that hardly warrant mention" (p.165), nevertheless regards them as, at best, "in tune with Paul's voice" (ibid.) and all, in one way or another, as contemporizing Pauline tradition for their own day, after his death (p.166). James Dunn, in his *The Theology of Paul the Apostle*, Grand Rapids / Cambridge, 1998, p.13 n.39 subscribes eight genuine letters, regarding II Th. as also Pauline (a position he did not state in his article *Pseudepigraphy* in the *Dictionary of the Later New Testament and its Developments*, Grand Rapids / Leics., 1997, p.981), and taking Colossians to have been penned by Timothy just after Paul's death. Although Dunn regards Ephesians and all the Pastorals as definitely post-Pauline, they "should not be wholly dis-regarded when the attempt is made to describe the theology of the apostle whose name they bear" (ibid.).

<sup>4</sup> One may recall Käsemann's famous dictum that if Colossians is Pauline, it must be as late as possible and if it is not, as early as possible after his death. Dunn (*Pseudepigraphy*, op.cit., p.982) calls Colossians "the bridge between Pauline and post-Pauline."

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to a more distant post-Pauline hinterland - often, it must be said, with noticeable relief.<sup>5</sup>

Whatever our view of the true paternity of any of the disputed letters, the seven-letter benchmark adopted by the scholarly guilds represents a more or less stable state of affairs; these constitute the unambiguous Pauline core. This judgment obliges us to ask, are we then only entitled to scrutinize seven letters for undisputed evidence of the apostle's life and work?

Secondly, there is the knotty problem of how to handle Acts. Do we or don't we find there a reliable portrait of Paul? The evidence of Acts has long been considered problematic and of limited worth, in historical judgments on Paul, essentially because Luke is often held not to have known Paul or his activities personally but to have composed a largely rose-tinted account of both, at some remove from the events. And the genre for classifying Acts, in this line of argument, approximates to the modern historical novel;<sup>6</sup> in

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<sup>5</sup> A particularly robust rehabilitation of Paul is undertaken by Neil Elliott, *Liberating Paul: The Justice of God and the Politics of the Apostle*, Sheffield, 1995. In his chapter *The Canonical Betrayal of the Apostle*, Elliott seeks to "face the facts of pseudepigraphy" (pp.27ff) by unambiguously pronouncing Ephesians and the Pastorals, at least, to be forgeries, "however devoutly motivated they may have been" (p.29), and denying their authors any euphemistic titles such as 'disciple' or 'heir'. A representative remark is the following: "we should be prepared to judge that the author of I Timothy, for example, was as much a betrayer of Paul as his 'disciple', a saboteur of one form of Pauline community as much as a member of a Pauline 'school' (ibid.). This approach allows Elliott to speak unapologetically of 'pseudo-Paulines' and to exonerate Paul of much of the blame which, in his view, arises from the lingering stigma these letters have left.

<sup>6</sup> Thus, although he does not judge Acts to be an historical novel, Philip Esler, in *The First Christians in their Social Worlds*, London / New York, 1994, p.39, believes that the analogy with such a writing holds for Acts: Some demonstrably reliable historical details do not allow us to extrapolate out to a generally reliable work as a whole; for Esler, the unhistorical nature of the Cornelius narrative, for example, has been "so meticulously exposed by German scholarship in particular, that the persistence into the present of a belief in its historicity is a cause for wonder" (ibid.). Among the sources of wonderment which Esler will no doubt continue to find we

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consequence Luke's 'history' strives only, at best, for a certain verisimilitude. Whilst this Acts model is currently under considerable strain, it continues to be frequently assumed or defended. So again, the question for our purposes here is, may we in the circumstances use any data from Acts for investigating the Pauline Mission?

To sum up, we find our chosen route to the heart of the Pauline Mission barred by a rather formidable combination of four obstacles.

- 1 - our knowledge of the real Paul and his real apostolic ministry proves, in fact, to be quite limited;
- 2 - maximizing what we do know is not simply a matter of combining Luke-on-Paul with Paul-on-Paul, for such harmonization is extraordinarily difficult;
- 3 - the various problems posed by certain of Paul's letters lead many to the conclusion that they were written by other hands than his;
- 4 - the Lukan Paul is customarily adjudged to be a late and partisan portrayal of the apostle.

Another way of describing these obstacles is to say that New Testament scholarship today confronts us with several different Pauls. The pages of our New Testament show us, at one and the same time :-

- (a) - a Paul who wrote some letters (here, we have called him Paul-on-Paul);
- (b) - a Paul in whose name and style others wrote letters reminiscent of him (we might call him Paul-after-Paul?);
- (c) - a Paul who is a kind of hero in Acts (here, we have called him Luke-on-Paul).

Putting things in this way, we would have to go on and add at least one additional Paul - the one found in II Pe. 3:15,16, where mention is tantalisingly made of difficult passages in Paul's letters and of

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may cite Ben Witherington's socio-rhetorical commentary on Acts, Grand Rapids / Carlisle, 1998, pp.339ff!

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how the untutored may twist them! And even with four such identifiable Pauls already, his influence is not thereby exhausted; many would acknowledge that a Pauline shadow falls across Hebrews and I Peter (positively) and also James (negatively). At this point, one could be forgiven for abandoning all hope of ever saying anything at all about the Pauline Mission, let alone about what might lie at its core! For, how are we to identify the real Pauline Mission if there is such difficulty in getting the real Paul to stand up?

On the understanding that blocked roads are for clearing, we might nevertheless, at this juncture, want to attempt the foolhardy thing and set about trying to remove the debris that much mainstream scholarship seems to have littered across our path. For instance, by bringing in heavy machinery from those who have been patiently bulldozing the crumbling Haenchen paradigm on Acts.<sup>7</sup> Or, by putting back upright at least some of the fallen Pauline letters, such as perhaps Colossians<sup>8</sup>, II Thessalonians or II Timothy.<sup>9</sup> Or again, by opening an agreed corridor through the rubble with the help of some minimum consensus on a Pauline chronology.<sup>10</sup> However,

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<sup>7</sup> The twenty-five essays in *Witness to the Gospel: The Theology of Acts* (eds. I.H. Marshall and D. Peterson), Grand Rapids / Cambridge, 1998, clearly represent an altogether different consensus that makes the older German-generated paradigm look decidedly *passé*.

<sup>8</sup> P.T. O'Brien's brief discussion on authorship in his article on Colossians in *DPL* (op.cit.), pp.150-2 is a good starting-point for reviewing the case for reading the letter as genuinely Pauline, as O'Brien himself did in his 1982 commentary. A contrasting theological case for a post-Pauline origin has recently been assembled by A.J.M. Wedderburn, *The Theology of the Later Pauline Letters*, Cambridge, 1993, pp.3-71.

<sup>9</sup> Jerome Murphy-O'Connor, *Paul: A Critical Life*, Oxford, 1997, argues that "realistically, the only scenario capable of explaining the acceptance of the Pastorals, is the authenticity of one of the three letters" (p.357). Murphy-O'Connor follows M. Prior, *Paul the Letter-Writer and the Second Letter to Timothy* (JSNTSup 23), Sheffield, 1989, and separates II Timothy from the allegedly homogeneous block of three Pastorals; he then uses the letter to illumine the final phase of the apostle's life and work (pp.357-368).

<sup>10</sup> Such as that carefully and suggestively assembled by Rainer Riesner, *Paul's Early Period: Chronology, Mission Strategy, Theology*, Grand

others are actively engaged in all of these clearing operations and, given the 'listed building' status of many old paradigms, completion of the work of demolition and rebuilding could be held up for some time yet.

Meanwhile, we propose simply to hurdle all the barriers and run on. Our purpose, here, is to investigate the struggle for the progress of the Gospel which we consider to lie at the very heart of the Pauline Mission. Despite influential arguments to the contrary, we consider that it is methodologically appropriate to sift *all* the available evidence. Since the New Testament Canon offers thirteen letters to individuals and to ecclesial communities bearing Paul's name and since much of Acts is devoted to Paul's missionary activities, all this material has some relation to the Pauline Mission, and everything should be taken into account. Ours will therefore be a thematic sort of synoptic reading: Accordingly, in view of the critical constraints, our strategy will be to ask an identical question of the various different Pauls.

Our method, in this essay, will entail beginning with an uncontested letter of Paul the apostle in which may be found, unambiguously expressed, a concern for the advancement of the Gospel, couched in terms of combat. Next, we will necessarily locate the same issue in a letter of Paul which specialists often label deuter- or post-Pauline, and assign to some unknown disciple. And lastly, we will demonstrate that the Lukan Paul shares a similar concern, in a comparable context of struggle. We are asking, is there not a way to follow the trajectory of this struggle for the Gospel's advance by traversing all the various parts of the Pauline tradition in the New Testament? And if so, is there not a cumulative argument for recognising this struggle for progress as being something of central importance for the work undertaken by Paul and his co-workers? If such a trajectory exists, then it may be that some of the rubble allegedly strewing the path may clear itself away.

We propose to ask our question first of the letter to the Philippians; though there are some difficulties about its final form, this letter is

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incontestably from Paul himself and bears witness to arguably the most intimate apostle-to-church relationship of all the communities he founded. As for the Acts of the Apostles, we will consider the episode that recounts the arrival of Paul, Silas and Timothy as missionary preachers in the same location, Philippi; it will be remembered that this is, moreover, the first Acts narrative where events are recounted in the first person plural, that is, an account where the author purports to have been personally present, or incorporates an eye-witness source, or else pretends one or other of these. Finally, the second letter of Paul we will examine, thought unassailably post-Pauline by most modern scholars, is I Timothy: and we simply recall, at this point, that Philippians has as its joint senders Paul and Timothy, that the latter is shown by Acts, too, to have been a close collaborator of the apostle, and that there is a good case for some, at least, of II Timothy having been part of correspondence in which Paul bequeathed a genuine legacy to his younger lieutenant.

Our investigation will therefore mainly concern one Pauline church - at Philippi, in Macedonia - and two key members of the missionary team that came there with the good news of Jesus, Paul and Timothy. However, we will try, as far as space permits, to indicate the wider contours of our chosen theme as they define the broader terrain of the rest of the letters and Acts.

We may begin, then, with Paul's letter to the church at Philippi and consider without further ado the use made here of the notion of 'progress'. The word προκόπτω is infrequent in the NT, used once by Luke in his infancy narrative (Lk.2:52) and the remaining eight times by Paul; the distribution of these occurrences is a strict fifty-fifty of the undisputed and the contested letters, but significantly, five of the eight uses are found in the letters to Philippi and I and II Timothy (Gal:14; Ro.13:12; Ph.1:12,25; et I Ti. 4:15; II Ti.2:16; 3:9,13<sup>11</sup>). To the Philippians Paul speaks of their personal progress

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<sup>11</sup> προκόπτω, in the last three cases, has a negative implication, for the progress is not that of the Gospel, as in Philippians, but that of heresy, which is therefore no progress at all; the word's meaning is thus defined, in II Timothy, by its association with the Πλανα- word-group. Compare G. Stählin, in TDNT, vol.VI, pp.715,6.



Campbell, **Pauline Mission** IBS 21 May 1999 and joy in the faith (1:25), having already used the very expression 'the progress of the Gospel', phrase which he appears to have coined himself for the occasion, in 1:12; whatever else this tightly-packed phrase may mean, in context it certainly hints at a close linkage between mission and suffering, between the power of the Gospel and the pain of its bearer, between growth in faith and increase in affliction.

This 'progress of the Gospel', by which Paul interprets what has befallen him, is therefore paradoxical in character. For Paul apparently intends the expression to interpret a state of affairs where he, as a prisoner, is unable to make any obvious advance. As he writes, the indefatigable evangelist that is Paul is under arrest and deprived of his freedom of movement; one would therefore tend to think that Paul has left the battle, that his missionary impetus has ground to a halt, that the spread of his Gospel has been unceremoniously and effectively stopped. Paul himself, however, reads the situation quite differently and insists that things are moving forward just the same, for two reasons: In part, because it is universally accepted (so he argues) that it is for Christ that he is in chains (1:13) - in other words, his incarceration speaks missionary volumes; and in part, because the local Christians, whatever may be the place of imprisonment, have been emboldened by his public testimony to speak up fearlessly themselves for the word of God (ἀφόβως τὸν λόγον λαλεῖν, 1:14).

In this letter to the Philippians, it is this paradoxical quality of real progress out of apparent regress which connects the theme of the Gospel's advancement with its corollary, the evangelical and apostolic struggle. Some fellow-believers are taking advantage of Paul's fetters by rivalling his apostolic proclamation of the Messiah Jesus, and thereby causing him pain (1:17). As for his own combat, it may be that it is approaching its end; Paul wonders out loud whether he will be condemned and so, by dying, win through to Christ, ~~or~~ whether he will be spared to pursue his efforts for the progress of the Gospel. Opting confidently for the latter possibility of staying alive and pressing on, in which case, he tells them, his remaining with them will contribute εἰς τὴν ὑμῶν προκοπὴν καὶ χαρὰν τῆς πίστεως, 1:25, he calls upon the Philippian Christians to stick to their guns and to fight as one man (μῖα ψυχῆ

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συναθλούντες) for the faith of the Gospel, not letting their adversaries intimidate them, and showing themselves to be ready to suffer for the Christ (πάσχειν ... τὸν αὐτὸν ἀγῶνα ἔχοντες), by carrying on the same struggle that they have seen Paul undertake and that he is engaged in even yet (1:27-30). Here, the image of ἀγῶν, for Paul, stands for what Stauffer calls “ the conflicts and sufferings of the Christian life... under the sign of the cross.”<sup>12</sup>

When Paul comes to speak of Epaphroditus, messenger and link between apostle and church, he does so in terms which qualify the Philippian emissary, like Archippus in Philemon 2, as a companion at arms (συνεργός and συστρατιώτης,<sup>13</sup> 2:25,30) who had risked his life for the Gospel cause. And subsequently, Paul exhorts the Philippians, at the point they have attained, to continue advancing together with him (στοιχεῖν, 3:16 - the connotation, here, could be the literal one of a battle-line), a progression for which the example of the Pauline apostolic team's behaviour is to serve them as a role-model for imitation (3:17). In raising the question of the relationship between two female believers, Euodia and Syntyche, Paul encourages the two women to be of one accord and describes them as Christian women who have fought alongside him for the Gospel (ἐν τῷ εὐαγγελίῳ συνήθλησάν μοι, 4:3). A final example which belongs to the register of struggling for the advancement of the good news concerns the famous missionary and combative

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<sup>12</sup> TDNT, vol.1, p.139.

<sup>13</sup> On the curious basis that Paul's use of the στρατ- root vocabulary in II Co.10:3-6 is exceptional, being in this case a non-polemical context (!), Bauernfeind (TDNT, vol.VII, p.710) is unable to grant the word here more than a *general* reference, synonymous with συνέργος. This obliges him to dub συστρατιώτης in Ph.2:25 and the parallel designation of Archippus in Phm 2 as unusual, and to leave the use of στρατεύομαι in I Co.9:7 out of the reckoning, as being too *general*! The argumentation seems to be directed at ensuring that, when considering the Pastorals (p.711), he can claim that the use of the word-group “ for the conduct of Christians “ is transferred (that is, late and non-Pauline), while having to admit that the usage of στρατεία in I Ti.1:18,9 at least is *general* and that in II Ti.2:3-7, whilst less *general*, it is reminiscent of I Co.9:7! This convoluted reasoning, making even an undisputed Paul say less than he actually says, is simply extraordinary!

utterance which typifies the preceding references, namely that Paul can manage anything (I σχύω) through the One who gives him the strength (4:13).

It may fairly be said that, whereas the threat of death hanging over Paul and the deep concern he has for his churches are sufficient to justify the space given, in this letter, to the struggle for the progress of the Gospel, they nonetheless fall short of explaining the theme satisfactorily. Instead, we need to recognize that there is a backdrop of common experience. If Paul takes the time to inform the Philippians of his current struggles, it is undoubtedly because they, of all people, are well able to understand. This is the case, not only because, as he expressly says, they are the only church to have had an active participating role (ἐκοινωνήσεν) with him in the proclamation of the Gospel (4:15,16), but also because of a kind of *entente* which marks the whole tone of the letter and which requires adequate explanation.

For that necessary clarification, we may profitably turn to Acts 16. There, in Luke's account of the beginnings of the Gospel proclamation in Philippi itself, we find an evocation of what remains unexpressed (because it goes without saying) in Paul's letter. Prevented from pushing farther into Roman Asia, the missionary team had aligned its prospects with Paul's vision and crossed the Aegean for Macedonia. We may notice, in passing, that this constitutes an important new phase, a new bridgehead, in the ongoing adventure recounted by Luke of how the good news of Jesus travels from Jerusalem to Rome. One among the various objectives the author of Acts sets himself is surely that of showing the successful onward march of the Word, finding an ever broader hearing among the citizens of the eastern and northeastern Mediterranean area, spawning new disciples and causing the Church to proliferate (Ac.6:7; 12:24; 19:20). In chapter sixteen, we should carefully note the especially numerous references to the proclamation and the reception of the preached Word (Ac.16:6, λαλῆσαι τὸν λόγον; v.10, εὐ'αγγελίσασθαι, v.13, ἐλαλοῦμεν; v.14, ἤκουεν, ἧς ὁ κύριος διήνοιξεν τὴν καρδίαν προσέχειν τοῖς λαλουμένοις ὑπὸ τοῦ Παύλου. v.17, καταγγέλλουσιν ὑμῖν ὁδὸν σωτηρίας; v.21; v.32, ἐλάλησαν αὐτῷ τὸν λόγον τοῦ κυρίου.

For the missionaries' arrival in Philippi, a crucial new development in the Word's westward expansion, Luke has chosen to relate three instances of effective, apostolic preaching: The first concerns, as hearers, the women who gather at the place of prayer outwith the walls, and includes in particular the response to the Word made by one of their number, Lydia, involved in the purple trade; the third brings about the conversion, in spectacular circumstances in the middle of the night, of the gaoler and tells of his entry, with the members of his family and home, into the household of faith. In between these two occasions for sharing the message of the Gospel, however, is sandwiched a word of exorcism in the name of Jesus, directed at the slave-girl possessed by Python, which provokes the arrest of Paul and Silas. As centre of the Pauline Mission as it impacted Roman Philippi, Luke has therefore located a powerful pronouncement that provokes a fracas, summary (in)justice and an imprisonment. As with other stages in the Word's advance, Luke is content only to report on the founding of the church at Philippi, leaving the sequel to the story untold; but the origins of that church have, at their core, trials encountered and overcome and a battle joined and won, all for the cause of the Word.

It is this very church at Philippi which, year upon year, will fight as one for the very same Gospel cause and will, in due course, receive from its founder a letter, written in yet another prison. It follows that, from its very inception, this church at Philippi was characterized by an awareness that the progress of the Gospel, through the overcoming of whatever obstacles presented themselves, lay at the heart of their apostle's vocation and mission, as well as of their own Christian experience; the reference to their unique involvement with Paul from the very start (4:15,16) says as much. When Paul talks of the fight of faith, they are well placed to comprehend what he is talking about, for his experience and their own are closely intertwined.

But here we pause to take account of Timothy. As Luke has it (Ac.16:1-3), Timothy was recruited by Paul at Lystra (in Lycaonia, or southern Roman Galatia) and joined the apostolic team as a co-worker just prior to the episode at Philippi. Of Timothy Paul says, in his Philippian letter, that he is the only colleague really to have

given himself over with Paul to the selfless service of the churches and the Gospel (ἐδούλευσεν εἰς τὸ εὐαγγέλιον, 2:22), as the Philippians themselves well know and can testify. Or, as Paul puts it to the Thessalonian Christians, Timothy is a collaborator (συνεργός) with God for the Gospel of Christ (I Th.3:2) who, in time, as a διακονούντος. (Ac.19:22) and veritable right-hand man to Paul, will be capable of being given the direction of more than one Christian community.

When we turn to I Timothy, we find several passages where Paul makes - or is said to make - a number of recommendations to Timothy, details which are sometimes conceded, by those who deny Pauline authorship, as possible reflections or extracts of genuine letters now lost. Amongst these injunctions to Timothy are certain declarations that are of interest to our present concern: Paul recommends that Timothy fight the good fight (στρατεύομαι / στρατεία), holding the faith and a good conscience (1:18,19) - for if we work on and struggle on (κοπιᾶω / ἀγωνίζομαι, 4:10), this will testify that we hope in a living God; furthermore, Paul exhorts Timothy to knuckle down to his ministry, so that his personal progress (προκοπή), as an exemplar for the truth of the Gospel, might be evident to everyone (4:15). One last time, Paul returns to the same theme: Fight the good fight (this time, ἀγωνίζου τὸν καλὸν ἀγῶνα) of faith and grasp hold of eternal life to which you have been called (6:12). Paul speaks to Timothy as to a resistance fighter. If he, Paul, carries the daily burden of the welfare of the churches (II Co.11:28), Timothy is, for Paul, the only one to be found, as we have already noted, to share this solicitude (2:20,21). It is no surprise, then, that Paul should reserve for Timothy the charge of fighting the good fight of faith (I Ti.1:18,19; 6:12).

For clarity's sake, we may anticipate a wider reference to the whole Pauline corpus and refer to II Timothy at this stage. Whatever the precise link between the two letters to Timothy, an examination of the second at this point confirms what the first has already made clear: Paul who, after maybe fifteen years of working with Timothy, hands responsibility over to him as a father might to his son (II Ti.2:1), exhorts his younger second-in-command to be prepared to suffer like him, if necessary, for the Gospel's sake (initially, in 1:8,

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συγκακοπάθησον τῷ εὐαγγελίῳ), developing the idea of suffering as a struggle (συγκακοπάθησον ὡς καλὸς στρατιώτης / στρατευόμενος, 2:3,4).

As to the Philippians, Paul can speak to Timothy of offering himself as a sacrifice to God: Ἐγὼ γὰρ ἤδη σπένδομαι (II Ti.4:6) takes up the similar image for apostolic self-giving and service of σπένδομαι ἐπὶ τῇ θυσίᾳ καὶ λειτουργίᾳ τῆς πίστεως ὑμῶν, (Ph.2:17).<sup>14</sup> And like the Philippian church, no stranger to the opposition amidst which it was born, Timothy, who had witnessed and participated in Paul's trouble-laden ministry from that same point onwards, could appreciate, as they did, an appeal to take up Paul's arms, as it were, of the faith: Though Paul's combat draws to a close, τὸν καλὸν ἀγῶνα ἠγωνίσαι (II Ti.4:7), Timothy's struggle carries on.

Before broadening our purview to include the rest of the evidence that would tend to reinforce or corroborate what we have found, let us briefly recapitulate. We have so far focussed almost exclusively upon Roman Philippi, the Philippian church, Paul who first brought the Gospel there and eventually wrote that church a letter, and Timothy who was his associate for both the early preaching and the later letter. The rapprochement of the various data has meant tracing a precise trajectory through a genuine Pauline letter, then backwards, via the Acts account, to the antecedent founding of the community addressed, and forwards, through a possibly post-Pauline letter, to the stage - whether contemporary or remembered - where Paul is decreasing and his associates, like Timothy, increasing. Although recent canons of historical research upon the New Testament often differentiate between the good, primary evidence to be garnered from an authentic Pauline letter, and the less useful secondary, problematic testimony of the pseudo- or post-Paulines or of a tendentious Acts, we have simply found that Paul-on-Paul, Paul-after-Paul? and Luke-on-Paul all speak essentially with one voice in this case.

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<sup>14</sup> " The form of the conflict is supremely suffering... and the meaning of suffering is sacrifice ", Stauffer, op.cit., p.139.

We have allowed the three documents to illumine each other's more limited exposure of a quite specific common theme, in such a way as merely to accumulate the relevant details and allow them to contribute to a unified picture. It seems that, even if Acts and one or more of the Pastorals were, for the usual reasons, to be considerably removed from both the horizon and time of Paul, this has not prevented an authentic element of the Pauline Mission from living on in supposedly post-Pauline or pro-Pauline documents - that element being, in this case, the sense of participating in the Pauline Mission and Gospel as a purposeful struggle to move the proclamation of Jesus forward, a combat for real progress despite apparent setbacks. Paul raises the issue with his converts. Acts confirms that these very converts, in particular, would have understood fully what he was talking about. I Timothy is addressed to a co-worker whose experience, according to both genuine Pauline letters and to Luke, matched that of the apostle and the Philippian church in this matter.

We have considered an aspect of the Mission of three Pauls: an uncontested Paul, who speaks directly of the progress-through-trials of the Gospel in his own undisputed letter to the Philippians; an allegedly embellished Paul, hero of Luke and his church in their day, as characterized by Acts, who is called upon to suffer (fulfilling the Word of Ac.9:16) as he moves on and out in the service of that Word; and a would-be Paul, revered mentor of those who, it is argued, carried on his legacy, constituted his school and wrote in his name after his death, whose advice to his trustee, Timothy, preserves the self-same emphasis of combat for the faith. These three Pauls merge into one when we follow the motif of Gospel progress as spiritually-armed struggle through the primary and secondary witnesses to the Pauline Mission; together, at least as they relate to one key location, one key church and one key fellow-worker, they convey one and the same message.

It is now appropriate to cast our net more widely, and to ask if material consonant with a sense of struggling for the progress of the Gospel has left its mark elsewhere on the remaining Pauline corpus and on the rest of the Acts narrative. The flag is seen still to fly, first of all, at the Pauline frontier; whether or not he wrote Colossians, to a church born out of Epaphras's preaching, the terms of Co.1:5,6

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already unmistakably reflect the Philippian conviction: the λόγος τῆς ἀληθείας τοῦ εὐαγγελίου (v.5) continually bears fruit and increases (v.6, καρποφορούμενον καὶ αὐξανόμενον). Confirmation comes later, in the expression of the apostolic vocation to suffer for the churches' sake: Νῦν χαίρω ἐν τοῖς παθήμασιν ὑπὲρ ὑμῶν καὶ ἀνταναπληρῶ τὰ ὑστερήματα τῶν θλίψεων τοῦ Χριστοῦ ἐν τῇ σαρκί μου ὑπὲρ τοῦ σώματος αὐτοῦ, ὃ ἐστὶν ἡ ἐκκλησία, Co.1:24, a ministry described in context as a struggle (κοπιῶ ἀγωνιζόμενος 1:29, and ἠλίκον ἀγῶνα ἔχω, 2:1). And whether or not Paul wrote a second time to the Thessalonians, the marked progress of their faith and increase of their love (ὑπεραυξάνει / πλεονάζει, II Th.1:3) strike a by now familiar chord.

Even though labelling as Pauline Colossians as a whole causes hesitation, the use of ἀγωνίζω – ἀγων that we have noted in Co.1:29, 2:1 is obviously an authentic linkage; and Epaphras, apostolic associate, stands with Paul and with the community at Colossae as one ἀγωνιζόμενος ὑπὲρ ὑμῶν (4:12). The context, here, is one of prayer, as is also the case when Paul asks the Roman Christians to struggle alongside him (συναγωνίσασθαι, Ro.15:30). Paul describes his work for the Gospel, in possibly his earliest letter, as an ἀγων amid perils (I Th.2:2). For Stauffer, “ there seems to belong to the whole concept of ἀγωνίζεσθαι the thought of obstacles, dangers and catastrophes through which the Christian must fight his way.”<sup>15</sup>

The Thessalonians had received and responded to the Word ἐν θλίψει πολλῇ (1:6), in circumstances Paul compares with those of Philippi (2:2): Indeed, λαλῆσαι πρὸς ὑμᾶς τὸ εὐαγγέλιον, τοῦ θεοῦ ἐν πολλῷ ἀγῶνι is as pregnant a statement of Gospel advance through trials as any other, Philippians included. Just as their apostles had suffered to bring them the good news, and expected to do so again (θλίβεσθαι, 3:4), so also the Thessalonian Christians had suffered persecution for living it (2:14) and needed fortifying for the resultant afflictions (3:3). The stability (σῆμαι, 3:8) and growth in faith of the Thessalonian church is progress

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<sup>15</sup> TDNT, vol.1, p.138.



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which sustains Paul and his companions in their ongoing trials and inspires Paul's prayer (3:11-13). In this context, the extreme brevity of ἀδιαλείπτως προσεύχεσθε (5:17), in keeping with the terseness of the other injunctions, should not blind us to what we have found to be a regular organic link between struggling, progress, and prayer.

Staying on indubitably Pauline ground, of however unstable a sort, the apostle can write to Corinth and compare the service of the Gospel cause (I Co.9:23) to the *agony* or strict discipline of the athlete (9:25). In the second letter, he can tell the Corinthians (II Co.10:15) of his hope that their faith will be augmented (αὐξανομένης) and the apostolic activity on their behalf increased, also (μεγαλυθῆναι). These sentiments form part of the apology for apostolic authority and action presented from II Co.10:1 onwards, in the course of which an extended combat metaphor is developed: στρατεύομαι, στρατεία ( τὰ γὰρ ὄπλα τῆς στρατείας ἡμῶν), αἰχμαλωτίζω, ἐκδικάω (10:3-6).

With these references from the two Corinthian letters, we have almost completed our conspectus of the undisputed correspondence, having found the Philippian theme of Gospel progress through suffering to be variously present in Romans, I Thessalonians and even, by association, in Philemon. Only Galatians remains. In the Galatian churches, the early progress of Paul's Gospel, which had produced life in the Spirit (3:3-5) as a sign of their divine sonship (3:26), has given way to slippage into substitute powerless rites; those who from ignorance had come to know God and to be owned by God were falling back into slavery (4:9) and forfeiting their joy of salvation (μακαρισμός, 4:15); thus, the virulence of Paul's writing reflects the perceived peril of his converts, so that the letter as a whole represents an acute form of the concern he has for the building up of all the churches. When, in conclusion, Paul brings up the scars he bears for Jesus (Ga.6:17), he does so in respect of the apostolic troubles (κόπους) which he would rather not see compounded; his birth-pangs for bringing forth mature christlike believers (ὠδίνω, 4:19), whose lives bear appropriate fruit (5:22,3), suffice. Persecution for genuine apostolic ministry and for co-crucified Christian life in the Spirit is also assumed to be customary in this letter (2:19; 5:11; 6:12, for which compare 5:24).

Given the absence of our chosen thematic trajectory from the letter to Titus, it only remains to consider Ephesians among the disputed Paulines. That this is really a general or circular letter is well-known, as for example the unnecessary allusion (for the Ephesians, who knew Paul well) to apostolic responsibility, *οικονομία*, in Ep.3:2 confirms. In one familiar passage, Paul develops a military theme where the letter's Christian recipients are twice exhorted to don full battle dress and equipment (*πανοπλία*, 6:11,13, broken down into its constituent parts in vv.14-17), so as to stand firm and to hold out (*στηναι* 2x, *ανιστηναι*). Although the detailed correspondences between the various arms and the Christian qualities each represents is without parallel elsewhere in the Pauline corpus, it is instructive to note the familiar culmination in the arena of prayer; the prayer-warrior's due vigilance (*αγρυπνέω*) and perseverance (*προσκαρτερήσις*), 6:18,19, are directed at the difficulties of Paul's missionary task: His addressees are asked to stand and resist with him, so that the Word may be on his lips (v.19a), the Gospel's mystery freely made known (v.19b) and his task of proclamation duly carried through (v.20). Here, once again, in a picture especially reminiscent of the Philippian letter, we have Paul's struggle to propagate the Gospel despite his chains.

Turning now to Acts, a broad sounding produces, in addition to the references, in chapter sixteen, to the Word proclaimed and received, many similar ones (8:4,14,25; 10:44; 11:1,19; 13:5,7,44,48; 14:3,25; 15:35,6; 17:11,13; 18:5,11). More specifically, the advance of the Word is drawn attention to, on several occasions, in strategically placed summaries: 'Ο δὲ λόγος τοῦ θεοῦ ἤρξανεν καὶ ἐπληθύνετο 12:24, repeated verbatim from a longer summary in 6:7, and κατὰ κράτος τοῦ κυρίου ὁ λόγος ἤρξανεν καὶ ἴσχυεν, 19:20. " This unusual application of the language of growth signifies the advance of the Gospel and the movement it creates."<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> David Peterson, *Lukes's Theological Enterprise: Integration and Intent*, in *Witness to the Gospel: The Theology of Acts* (op.cit.), p.541. For M.H. Grumm, *Another Look at Acts*, ExpT 96 (1985), pp.335,6, the progress of the Word is a veritable *cantus firmus* of Luke's message. The Word (10x), the Word of God (12x), of the Lord (10x), of his grace (2x), of his

More significantly, for our purpose, all three summaries bring to a climax narratives where conflict is resolved or opposition and persecution overcome;<sup>17</sup> the very structuring of Luke's narrative mirrors the conviction of Paul, expressed in Philippians 1, that the Gospel progresses in spite of appearances to the contrary - suffering and the successful progress of the Word, in the ministry of the Lukan Paul, go hand in hand.

It is true that we see something of Luke's authoreal purpose when, episode after episode, he describes how Paul and his fellow-combatants both face and face down many trials. But this is no mere literary conceit, shaped to serve his pen. Paul himself, writing to the Corinthians (II Co.11:23-28), lists a catalogue of sufferings that is at least twice as long and that is concentrated in a daily care - ἡ μέριμνα πασῶν τῶν ἐκκλησιῶν, v.28. It appears, then, that the normal apostolic vocation, in the service of the spread of the Gospel concerning Jesus, was experienced and understood, by Paul and his associates (as by Luke, in part their biographer), to entail being regularly tried and tested in the crucible of suffering. We have been content, here, to juxtapose Paul's Philippians with Luke's Philippi, but further corroboration would arise from comparison of the Thessalonian letters with Acts 17. This structural reflection, in Acts, of a key set of Pauline convictions is, in itself, of sufficient import as to beg further questions of the old consensus that Luke-on-Paul is a romance, not to be taken too seriously for historical purposes.

What have been the results of this inquiry? Our investigation has upheld the view that the struggle for the progress of the Gospel is an idea to be found at the very heart of Paul's reflection on his apostolic ministry, as this missionary thinking finds expression in his missionary letters. The same emphasis persists in the disputed letters and proves to have almost programmatic significance for Luke in the Acts. All of the New Testament materials specifically related to Paul, with the exception of the letter to Titus, have at the very least some of the terminology (Romans, Philemon) which transmits this progress-through-conflict mindset. The letters to

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gospel and of his salvation (1x each) is almost a personified hero of Luke's narrative.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid*, p.542.

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churches founded by the Pauline missionary circle are either strongly marked by a consciousness of a vocation for the Gospel's proclamation which must incur adversity en route to progress (Philippi, Thessalonica, Colossae) or, at least, show by more incidental confirmation that this is a perceived norm (Galatia, Corinth). The letters to Timothy, co-author with Paul of all the correspondence most strongly coloured by this mentality, share the same horizon of missionary advance via apostolic ordeals. And in all the evidence presented, apostolic experience shares an interface with that of the converts themselves.

If it is possible, in this way, successfully to undertake a narrowly focussed thematic reading of a core aspect of the Pauline Mission, could such a synoptic approach commend itself for further study of Paul's somewhat neglected missionary thought and strategy?<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Riesner, *op.cit.*, has perhaps blazed a new trail in this area.