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PAUL'S APOSTOLIC COMMISSION, GENTILE-MISSION CONVICTION
AND HERMENEUTICAL PRIORITY
IN THE LETTER TO THE GALATIANS

1. Introduction:

According to Paul's own understanding of his experience on the road to Damascus, he said: "But when he [God] who had set me apart before I was born, and had called me through his grace, was pleased to reveal his Son to me, in order that I might preach him among the Gentiles [Gr. *hina evangelizomai auton en tois ethnesin*], I did not confer with flesh and blood, nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those who were apostles before me, but I went away into Arabia; and again I returned to Damascus" (1:15-17; RSV).¹ To Paul's mind, this commission experience marks the radical beginning of his new era: he is transformed immediately from a persecutor of the Christian Church to a preacher of the gospel of Christ (1:13-17; cf. 1 Cor 15:9).² From then

¹In this paper I am indebted especially to an insightful study of my dissertation supervisor, Professor James D.G. Dunn, "'A Light to the Gentiles': the Significance of the Damascus Road Christophany for Paul," in *The Glory of Christ in the New Testament, Studies in Christology in Memory of G.B. Caird* (edited by L.D. Hurst and N.T. Wright; Oxford: Clarendon, 1987), pp.251-266, now reprinted with additional notes in J.D.G. Dunn, *Jesus, Paul and the Law: Studies in Mark and Galatians* (London: SPCK; Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1990), pp.89-107. A brief version of the argument is found in J.D.G. Dunn, *The Partings of the Ways: between Christianity and Judaism and their significance for the character of Christianity* (London: SCM, 1991), p.122. And I would like to thank Professor Joel Green for reading an earlier draft of this paper and for offering some very valuable comments on it.

²There is no strong evidence that Paul went to Arabia for the purpose of solitary communion with God or reflection/contemplation on his Damascus experience or in trying to sort out his post-conversion "cognitive dissonance" (cf. R.N. Longenecker, *Galatians* [WBC 41; Dallas: Word, 1990], p.34; N. Taylor, *Paul, Antioch and Jerusalem: A Study in Relationships and Authority in Earliest Christianity* [JSNTS 66; Sheffield: JSOT, 1992], pp.67-74). It is all the more likely that Paul went straight (note the adverb "immediately" [Gr. *eutheos*] at

on, Paul understood himself as being "called to be an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God" (Rom 1:1; cf. 1 Cor 9:1f, 15:8f).

But more importantly is Paul's added qualification of what he meant by his apostleship: he made explicit reference to himself as being *an apostle to the Gentiles*. Thus in Rom 11:13, Paul says: "Now I am speaking to you Gentiles. Inasmuch then as I am an apostle to the Gentiles [Gr. *emi ego ethnon apostolos*]." Paul understood the divine appearance as a commission for his apostleship *to the Gentiles*, in that so far as Paul was concerned, his ministry was to bring the gospel of Christ to the Gentiles: "through whom we have received grace and apostleship to bring about the obedience of faith for the sake of his name among all the nations [Gr. *en pasin tois ethnesin*] (Rom 1:5); "I have written to you [the Roman congregation] very boldly by way of reminder, because of the grace given me by God to be a minister of Christ Jesus *to the Gentiles* [Gr. *eis ta ethne*] in the priestly service of the gospel of God" (Rom 15:15f).³

Is there any theological significance for Paul to understand himself as "apostle to the Gentiles"? In what sense does this divine commission "to the Gentiles" bear on his strong commitment to work among the Gentiles, his self-understanding as an apostle *to the Gentiles*, and even his reading of Torah, his establishment of hermeneutical priority and starting-point? Why is it that Paul interpret the Torah, especially on the example of Abraham and the requirement of circumcision on Gentile Christians, so different from his Jewish Christian opponents in Galatia? In what sense can Paul claim to "fulfill" the Law, remain loyal to biblical tradition, while insisting that circumcision is not required of Gentile Christians?

In this paper we shall take Paul's letter to the Galatians as a

1:16b) into missionary activity and so later on even those Jewish Christians in Judea came to know about his mission activity (1:21-24); cf. H. Schlier, *Der Brief an die Galater* (MeyerK 7; 15th edition; Göttingen: JCB Mohr, 1989), p.58; H.D. Betz, *Galatians: A Commentary on Paul's Letter to the Churches in Galatia* (Hermeneia; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979), p.74; F.F. Bruce, *The Epistle of Paul to the Galatians: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (NIGTC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), p.96; R.Y.K. Fung, *The Epistle to the Galatians* (NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), pp.68f.

³See also 1 Thess 2:16; Col 1:24-29; Eph 3:1-9; 1 Tim 2:7; 2 Tim 4:17; cf. Acts 9:15, "for he is a chosen instrument of mine to carry my name before the *Gentiles* and kings and the sons of Israel"; Acts 22:15, "for you will be a witness for him to *all men* of what you have seen and heard"; Acts 26:16-18, "for I have appeared to you for this purpose, to appoint you to serve and bear witness to the things in which you have seen me and to those in which I will appear to you, delivering you from the the people and from the *Gentiles* - *to whom I send you* to open their eyes, that they may turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me." For more careful assessment of the Acts evidence, see G. Lohfink, *The Conversion of St Paul* (ET; NY: Franciscan Herald, 1976); C.W. Hedrick, "Paul's Conversion/Call. A Comparative Analysis of the Three Reports in Acts," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 100 (1981), pp.415-432. Note also the work of J. Munck, *Paul and the Salvation of Mankind* (ET; London: SCM, 1959).

test case for our investigation: how this unique experience of Paul on the Damascus road, his basic self-understanding as "apostle to the Gentiles" and his hermeneutical priority (for the Gentiles) might be closely interrelated. On comparing Paul's interpretation of biblical traditions with his Jewish Christian opponents, we wish to explore how Paul's apostolate - "to the Gentiles" - had in turn contributed to the shaping of Paul's exegesis. It is our wish that this exploration can contribute to our contemporary reading of God's Word and challenge us to fresh readings of Scripture.

2. The Origin of Paul's Apostolic Commission:

Despite Paul's fairly clear emphasis on the divine intervention ("Christophany") on the Damascus road as the very beginning of his Gentile-mission conviction, some scholars tend to place the focus of the divine encounter elsewhere, with the call to the Gentiles understood, explicitly or implicitly, as a second thought, a consequence, or a deduction. For example, some have argued that the main impact of the Damascus road epiphany is *Christological*: it is said that the primary purpose of the encounter was to bring home to Paul the Messiahship of Jesus (the crucified Jesus was indeed the expected Messiah), and then from this christological fact comes the soteriological significance.⁴ But it is not clear, or not adequately explained, how this christological change, "Christ died" and "Christ crucified," would lead to Paul's conviction regarding the mission to the Gentiles.

Some have therefore tried to improve on the first view by arguing that Paul's Gentile-mission conviction comes as a consequence of his *soteriology* which is transformed by the Christophany. Before his conversion Paul thought salvation was possible through the law and so out of zeal for the law (Phil 3:6) he fiercely persecuted the first Christians (or at least the Hellenists) who believed that salvation was through Christ. Then the Christophany on the Damascus road convinced him that there has been a decisive transition in the terms of salvation-history: Christ is the "end" of the law (cf. Rom 10:4). And since salvation is now through Christ rather than through the law, it follows that this gospel must be open to all humanity and not just Jews.⁵ But nowhere does Paul make such a logical link between the

⁴E.g. P.H. Menoud, "Revelation and Tradition: The Influence of Paul's Conversion on his Theology," *Interpretation* 7 (1953), pp.131-141; H.G. Wood, "The Conversion of Paul: Its Nature, Antecedents and Consequences," *New Testament Studies* 1 (1954-55), pp.276-282. Fung, *Galatians*, p.72: "His Gentile mission more likely followed with logical necessity from his experience of God's revelation to him: since Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God and the exalted Lord, and salvation is no longer dependent on observance of the law but only on faith in Christ as the appointed Savior of all, the message of salvation by grace through faith can be, and is to be, carried to the Gentiles as well as the Jews."

⁵E.g. J. Dupont, "The Conversion of Paul, and its Influence on his Understanding of Salvation by Faith," in *Apostolic History and the Gospel: FS F.F. Bruce* (edited by W.W. Gasque and R.P. Martin; Exeter: Paternoster, 1970), pp.176-194; U. Wilckens, "Die Bekehrung des Paulus als religionsgeschichtliches Problem," *Rechtfertigung als Freiheit:*

argument of justification by faith (through Christ and not through the law) with his mission to the Gentiles.

Recently some have even argued that Paul's mission to the Gentiles does not stem from the Damascus experience, but is rather a consequence of his *mission failure* among the Jews. So argues F. Watson: "At an early stage of his Christian activity, Paul had preached the gospel only to Jews" (citing 1 Cor 9:20f; Gal 5:11), then "Paul (and others) first preached to the Gentiles as a response to the failure of their preaching among the Jews."⁶ In a similar vein, N. Taylor argues that Paul came to full realization of his mission to the Gentiles only later on, in that "2 Cor 12:2-4 reflects an apocalyptic vision experienced by Paul, in the course of which he received his commission to Christian apostleship, possibly with a particular directive for mission to the gentiles." But according to Paul's description of the Damascus encounter, the purpose of his calling is made quite clear there and then: "in order that I might preach him among the Gentiles" (1:16b; note the Greek conjunction *hina*) when God revealed his Son to him (1:15-16a).⁸ Furthermore, with this third view, one has to engage in a great deal of speculation and reconstruction in order to come to terms with Paul's own witness that he was called an apostle to the Gentiles on the Damascus road!

In our opinion, it is better to take Paul's own testimony seriously: on the road to Damascus, Paul was transformed by God from a persecutor of the Church to a preacher of the gospel, and he was called at the same time by God to preach among the Gentiles. In sum, Paul's Gentile-mission conviction is a direct and immediate consequence of God's commission: it originated at the very moment when God revealed His Son to him, and Paul was convinced that his specific ministry was "to the Gentiles."⁹

Paulusstudien (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 1974), pp.11-32; P. Stuhlmacher, "'The End of the Law'. On the Origin and Beginnings of Pauline Theology," in *Reconciliation, Law, and Righteousness: Essays in Biblical Theology* (ET; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1986), pp.134-154; and more recently and thoroughly S. Kim, *The Origin of Paul's Gospel* (WUNT II.4; Tübingen: JCB Mohr, 1981).

⁶See F. Watson, *Paul, Judaism and the Gentiles: A Sociological Approach* (SNTSMS 56; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), pp.28-38; quotes from pp.28, 31.

⁷N. Taylor, "The Conversion and Apostolic Vocation of Paul" (SBL seminar paper, 1991), p.14.

⁸*Contra* Taylor who argues that the Greek conjunction *hina* refers to a later occasion, insisting that "While it is clear that the purpose of the revelation was that Paul should proclaim the gospel, it is not apparent whether or not this purpose was clear to Paul at the time of his conversion" ("Conversion," p.4).

⁹So Dunn: "Paul's own testimony, that his commissioning to preach Christ to the Gentiles was given him in his encounter with the risen Christ on the road to Damascus, ought to be accorded greater importance in discussions of Paul's conversion and of the origin of his characteristic and distinctive theological emphases. Paul's conclusion, 'therefore to the Gentiles,' seems to lie closer to the root of his theology than has generally been recognised" ("A Light to the Gentiles," p.100).

3. Paul's Gentile-Mission Conviction in Galatians 1-2:

When we look at Paul's letter to the Galatians, especially in the first two chapters,¹⁰ we notice that Paul mentioned a number of times this crucial "Gentile" factor in relation to the gospel. In the *exordium* section (1:6-12), the noun "gospel" (Gr. *euangelion*) and the verb "preaching the gospel" (Gr. *euangelizomai*) appear altogether seven times. Usually Paul began the letter with an expression of thanksgiving, but instead he said, "I am astonished" (Gr. *thaumazo*; 1:6), an expression of dissatisfaction and astonishment, and in this context the term "gospel" appears two times in 1:6f together with the verb "preaching the gospel" three times in 1:8f. Similarly, when Paul introduced the disclosure formula at 1:11 - "For I would have you know" (Gr. *gnorizo hoti*), which is used to introduce the key problem (the *stasis* of the letter) - the words "gospel" and "preaching the gospel" appear again. This strongly suggests that the meaning of "gospel" is a key issue in the Galatian crisis.

This observation leads to a second - namely, how Paul has qualified the word "gospel" with reference to his mission to the Gentiles. At 2:2, Paul writes that he laid before the leaders of the Jerusalem Church "the gospel which I preached among the *Gentiles*." And in comparison with Peter, Paul asserted that he was entrusted with "the gospel to the *uncircumcised*," just as Peter had been entrusted with the gospel to the circumcised (2:7). And Paul went on to say (probably echoing an "official statement" of the Jerusalem conference): "God who worked through Peter for the mission to the circumcised worked through me also for the *Gentiles*" (2:8).

Another crucial point is how Paul related his mission to Gentile Christians - he fought for their rights! For example, when Barnabas and Paul went up to Jerusalem presumably as delegates of the Antioch Church, they were under pressure from the "false brothers" to circumcise Titus, a Gentile uncircumcised believer (2:3), but they firmly rejected their demand so that (Paul said) "the truth of the gospel [Gr. *he aletheia tou euangeliou*] might be preserved for you [Gentile Christians]" (2:5). On another occasion, when Peter withdrew from table-fellowship with Gentile Christians at Antioch after "certain men from James" arrived (2:11f), Paul reacted strongly and challenged Peter's hypocritical behavior because Paul judged "they were not straightforward about *the truth of the gospel*" (2:14a). In this crucial Antioch Incident, Paul feared that Peter's changing behavior would have created immense pressure on Gentile Christians "to live like Jews" (Gr.

¹⁰We can roughly analyze this deliberative letter in six sections: epistolary prescript (1:1-5); *exordium* (1:6-12); *narratio* (1:13-2:21); Paul's address to Peter included, 2:15-21); *probatio* (3:1-4:31); *exhortatio* (5:1-6:10) and *conclusio*/the epistolary postscript (6:11-18); *contra* Betz's apologetic genre analysis (*Galatians*, pp.14-25). See especially D.E. Aune, *The New Testament in its Literary Environment* (Library of Early Christianity 8; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1987), pp.207f; G.A. Kennedy, *New Testament Interpretation through Rhetorical Criticism* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1984), pp.144-152; R.G. Hall, "The Rhetorical Outline for Galatians: A Reconsideration," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 106 (1987), pp.277-287.

ioudaizein; 2:14b),¹¹ and in the long run or by implication, Gentile Christians would have to judaize all the way, accepting circumcision, and by becoming proselytes in order to be received as equal partners in the Christian Church. According to Paul's understanding of both occasions (Jerusalem and Antioch), the status and Christian lifestyle of Gentile Christians are under serious threat. In Paul's own words, "the truth of the gospel" (2:5 and 2:14a) is in danger of being compromised.

Therefore, one can see how Paul's apostolic commission to preach "to the Gentiles" has worked out in his very strong conviction for Gentile-mission and his passionate concern for the rights of Gentile Christians. Thus in Paul's fierce response to the opponents' faulty version of the gospel ("a different gospel" and "another gospel" 1:6f), he strongly defended what he meant by "the truth of the gospel" for the *Gentile Christians* at Galatia. The gospel of Christ is not just for the Jews (the circumcised, the elect people of God), but also for the Gentiles (the uncircumcised, the outcast, the outsider). And Paul also had to defend the equal rights of Gentile Christians in the whole Christian Church.

4. Paul's Hermeneutical Priority: the "Gentile" Factor?

In the last two sections we have tried to demonstrate how Paul's strong conviction on Gentile-mission could be related back to his apostolic commission received on the Damascus road. Paul (among others) is convinced that the gospel of Christ is not just for the Jews, but also for the Gentiles. So is there any uniqueness of Paul's universal application of the gospel? Is this universal perspective not already found in the OT tradition? In fact it is. There were already examples and hints of Gentiles being accepted or incorporated into the Israelite community. For example, when the Israelites came out of Egypt, a "mixed crowd" also went with them (Exod 12:38); Rahab's family were brought out by the spies sent by Joshua with their lives spared and allowed to live in Israel ever since (Josh 7:22-25). The Israelite religion had also inculcated a positive attitude towards the non-Jewish strangers or sojourners (Heb. *gerim*) who lived within the borders of Israel (Exod 20:10; 22:21; 23:9, 12; Deut 1:16; 5:14; cf. 2 Sam 15:19-23).

For our purpose we could concentrate on how about this universal perspective in relation to eschatological hope, "the day of the Lord"? In the prophetic traditions there is also an imagery of the *ingathering*¹² of the Gentiles: when God establishes the kingdom the

¹¹This word *ioudaizein* appears only once in the NT; but see Esth 8:17 (LXX); Eusebius, *Praeparatio Evangelica* 9.22.5; Josephus, *Jewish War* 2.17.10 (§454) and 2.18.2 (§§462-3). The word *ioudaizein* does not mean simply to circumcise, but can denote a range of meanings: from "to adopt the rituals of the Jews" to "to live a Jewish mode of life, specifically to adopt circumcision." See S.J.D. Cohen, "Crossing the Boundary and Becoming a Jew," *Harvard Theological Review* 82 (1987), pp.13-33, especially p.33; J.D.G. Dunn, "The Incident at Antioch (Gal. 2:11-18)," *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 18 (1983), pp.3-57; now reprinted with additional notes in *Jesus, Paul and the Law*, pp.129-182, here pp.149f, 180f; F. Mussner, *Der Galaterbrief* (HTKNT 9; 5th edition; Freiburg: Herder, 1988), p.145,n53.

¹²This ingathering procedure or *centripetal* perception in contrast to

Gentiles will turn to worship him (Isa 2:2f; Mic 4:1f; cf. Ps 22:27; Isa 45:22f; 56:5f; Zech 2:11), bringing with them also gifts of wealth (Isa 60:3, 5f) and service to the people (Isa 61:5). But one thing is not clear or ambiguous at least with regard to the eschatological pilgrimage of Gentiles: this prophecy does not give detail about precisely what the Gentiles should do when they turn to the God of Israel. Should they become Jews? Should they accept circumcision, observe the Jewish food laws, Sabbath and all the other parts of the Torah?¹³ What is clear is that Gentiles will come to worship YHWH in the Last Days, but it is not certain and remains vague on how Gentiles will be accepted into the community of God's people.

In fact this might be one of the problems that troubled the early Christian Church, especially when more and more Gentile believers were converted. Should these new Gentile converts accept circumcision (see 2:1-10)? Should they observe scrupulously all Jewish food laws (2:11-14)? In the Galatian churches, the crisis is, should these Gentile converts accept circumcision (5:3, 6:12f) in their living out of Christian life?

Some would say Yes. For example Paul's Jewish Christian "opponents"¹⁴ in the Galatian churches who were also committed to mission among the Gentiles came along to persuade the Gentile converts that they should observe the "works of law" (Gr. *erga nomou*; 2:16),¹⁵ the traditional Jewish identity-confirming and boundary-defining markers such as circumcision, food laws and Sabbath observances, in order to be fully incorporated into the (Jewish) Christian community.¹⁶

the NT perspective of worldwide mission, the *centrifugal* perception (eg. Matt 28:18-20; Acts 1:8) seems to be quite prominent: Gentiles will take the initiative to come and join with God's people; it is not necessary for Jews to go out and to invite Gentiles to come in. Cf. S. McKnight, *A Light Among the Gentiles: Jewish Missionary Activity in the Second Temple Period* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991).

¹³See e.g. E.P. Sanders, *Paul* (Past Masters; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), p.50.

¹⁴See J.L. Martyn, "A Law-Observant Mission to the Gentiles: The Background of Galatians," [1983] reprinted in *Scottish Journal of Theology* 38 (1985), pp.307-324; T.D. Gordon, "The Problem at Galatia," *Interpretation* 41 (1987), pp.32-43; J.M.G. Barclay, *Obeying The Truth: A Study of Paul's Ethics in Galatians* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1988), pp.36-74.

¹⁵On this social understanding of "works of law" within the first century Jewish context as "covenantal nomism," see especially Dunn, *The Partings of the Ways*, pp.135-138 and "The Theology of Galatians," *Jesus, Paul and the Law*, pp.242-264, here pp.242-246. Dunn's earlier formulation is found in "The New Perspective on Paul," *Bulletin of the John Rylands University Library of Manchester* 65 (1983), pp.95-122, now reprinted with additional notes in *Jesus, Paul and the Law*, pp.183-214, here pp.191-195. *Contra* T.R. Schreiner, "'Works of Law' in Paul," *Novum Testamentum* 33 (1991), pp.217-244; C.E.B. Cranfield, "'The Works of the Law' in the Epistle to the Romans," *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 43 (1991), pp.89-101.

¹⁶One wonders why the demand on circumcision for Gentile Christians come back again when it had already been decided in the Jerusalem conference (2:1-10). According to our reconstruction of events surrounding Paul's

Since the OT tradition with regard to how Gentile worshippers should behave in the Last Days is unclear, they insisted that Gentile converts should be absorbed or incorporated *into* the Jewish community, not least by accepting circumcision and becoming proselytes. And it does appear that the example of Abraham in Gen 17 strongly supported their circumcision demand also (cf. Gal 3-4 and Rom 4).¹⁷ One can even say that this is the most natural reading of Torah also. We can therefore infer that these Jewish Christians were more concerned with the Torah, the Jewish identity and the primacy of Jewish people. From their perspective, Gentile converts are secondary to Jewish believers. Thus we can deduce that their hermeneutical order of priority is "God/Christ-Torah/Israel-Gentile," with the implication that the (ethnic) "Israel" holds an important role in their exegesis.

But Paul would say No. And Paul seems to take a rather different procedure in tackling this problem on circumcision: for this apostle to the Gentiles, "Gentile" is an important factor. Since Paul is convinced that Gentile believers are accepted by God *as* Gentiles through faith in Christ because of the faith(fulness) of Christ,¹⁸ he argues also that these Gentile converts should remain *as* Gentiles, and not become Jewish or God-fearers, in their continuing expression of faith.¹⁹ For Paul, there is only one requirement for all Christians, namely "faith" with respect to Christ, whether it is for the initial beginning of Christian

controversy with some Jewish Christian missionaries, it is very likely that the Antioch Incident (2:11-14) had marked a watershed or turning point in the formative period of the early Christian Church. It is possible that they had a different understanding of the Jerusalem agreement: from the perspective of the Jerusalem "Pillars," it is a concession made for Gentile converts that circumcision is not required; but from Paul's perspective, it is a matter of principle that circumcision together with all other Jewish covenant markers are exempted for Gentile Christians. Thus when they were confronted with the issue of food laws in Antioch, they were shocked to know how poles apart their understandings of the Jerusalem agreement were. Therefore it is possible that some conservative Jewish Christians realized that the concession policy on circumcision did not work and went back to demand for circumcision on Gentile converts and to insist on all the requirements of the Jewish covenant markers.

¹⁷On the opponents' use of the Abraham tradition and Abraham in Jewish literature, see G.W. Hansen, *Abraham in Galatians: Epistolary and Rhetorical Contexts* (JSNTS 29; Sheffield: JSOT, 1989), pp.167-199.

¹⁸On this unique Greek phrase of Paul "*pistis Christou*," we take the subjective genitive view: "faithfulness of Christ" rather than the objective genitive "faith in Christ." See especially R.B. Hays, *The Faith of Jesus Christ. An Investigation of the Narrative Structure of Galatians 3:1-4:11* (SBLDS 56; Chico: Scholars, 1983); M.D. Hooker, "ΠΙΣΤΙΣ ΧΡΙΣΤΟΥ," *New Testament Studies* 35 (1989), pp.321-342.

¹⁹Cf. Sanders, *Paul*, p.50: "He [Paul] took the view that in 'the last days,' which had now arrived, the Gentiles should be included as Gentiles. They should not become Jews. Neither were they the same as 'God-fearers';" Dunn, "Theology of Galatians," p.249: "it was now time to reach out to and bring in the Gentiles on equal terms with the Jews (that is, without their ceasing to be 'Greeks' as distinct from 'Jews')."

life ("how to get in") or for the continuing living out of Christian life ("how to stay in").²⁰ Therefore Paul argues that the example of Abraham centres on his "faith" rather than circumcision, and insists that "it is men [people] of faith who are the sons of Abraham" (3:7) and "those who are men [people] of faith are blessed with Abraham who had faith" (3:9).

In Paul's opinion, the ambiguity of the OT tradition with regard to the eschatological Gentile believers is clarified: Gentile converts should not be persuaded to become Jewish, nor should they accept circumcision in order to be incorporated into the Jewish believers community. According to Paul's hermeneutic, the true meaning of Torah and Torah-observance has to be reinterpreted in new light so that circumcision is not required of Gentile Christians (see 5:6, 14, 22f; 6:2, 15)²¹ and that "Gentiles" could be included as equals together with all other Jewish believers in the Christian Church (3:26-27; 6:15f). From Paul's perspective, the community of God's people is defined not in the ethnic Jewish sense, but by "Christ," with whom we had been cocrucified (2:19). The "new creation" (6:15) or the new "Israel of God" (6:16) consists of believers of Jewish and Gentile origins on equalstanding.

From our discussion, it does appear that Paul had rearranged the traditional order of priority by shifting forward the "Gentile" factor: "God/Christ-'Christians' (both Jewish and Gentile)-Torah."²² According to this crucial rearrangement of Paul, Christian faith is no longer defined by the traditional narrow conceptions of Torah or Israel confined to the ethnic Jewish people. For Paul, when "the truth of the gospel" (2:5, 14a) was defined with an eye on the legitimacy of Gentile believers and with respect to his own specific apostolic commission to preach *to the Gentiles*, he had to swim against the tide and to open up new possibilities in the reading of God's Word. For Paul, the equality of Jewish and Gentile Christians in the body of Christ is crucial; "Gentile" becomes a crucial factor in Paul's thought.

5. Concluding Remarks:

From the above study, we have tried to relate Paul's unique

²⁰At 2:15f Paul draws on the believing experience of Jewish Christians to highlight the importance of faith and to spell out more clearly (in comparison to the early Jewish Christian perception of faith and justification at 2:16a) that justification is only through "faith of/in Christ" and not through "works of law" (2:16c). See Dunn, "New Perspective on Paul," pp.195-198, 207-209, 212. Later on at 2:19f, Paul defines Christian living as by "faith" and "Christ."

²¹On the "law of Christ" in 6:2 and fulfilling the law in 5:14, see the careful discussion of various views in Barclay, *Obeying the Truth*, pp.125-145. Barclay concludes that "Christians do not 'observe' the law, they 'fulfil' it, and they fulfil it through the one love-command and as it is redefined as 'the law of Christ'" (p.142).

²²A parallel pattern can be established from the Exodus episode: the salvific act of YHWH comes before the giving of Ten Commandments; the divine act of deliverance/salvation brought forth first of all a chosen people, the formation of a community of God's people, then only did God give them the Torah (cf. Exod 19-20). It is possible that Paul would argue that "people" should be given priority over "covenantal nomism."

apostolic commission received on the Damascus road to preach to the Gentiles (1:15f) to his concern for "the truth of the gospel" for Gentile Christians (2:5, 14) and also to his rather radical hermeneutical principle "God/Christ-'Christians' (both Jewish and Gentile)-Torah." From Paul's perspective and in his personal conviction, Gentile believers are to be accepted as Gentiles, and both Jewish and Gentile Christians are equal partners in the same body of Christ. "Gentile" is an important factor in Paul's thought. Thus for Paul the reading of Torah is open to new interpretations and fresh applications in the mixed Christian Church.

In our opinion, Liberation Theology, in its reactions to the socio-economical problems in some Third World countries, has taught or reminded the Church once again of a very important biblical teaching which is often neglected or ignored (by the middle-class Church?): God is on the side of the Poor. This truth is already there long ago in the biblical tradition, but it seems to take us a long time to realize or to be convinced of the need for action. It does appear that when the Church commits to mission and is open to challenges, whether it is from outside or inside, it is then more open to fresh readings of Scripture.

If there is anything we can learn from Paul's experience and his theology through praxis (his struggle with Gentile-mission), it is Paul's vital *conviction* that God called him to be an apostle to the *Gentiles*, the "outsider" (from the Jewish perspective), the disadvantaged, the underprivileged, those beyond the pale. Since Paul was so convinced of this "Gentile" factor and concerned for the equal rights of Gentile Christians, his reading of Scripture had shed new light. Paul, apostle *to the Gentiles*, is also apostle *for the Gentiles*. It is our wish that the Church seek to listen more carefully to God's voice and to respond more readily to His calling that we can discern where and what is our priority, and so to read the Word of God afresh in response to the cry of "Gentiles."²³

²³When the Church today is generally more aware of its mission and commitment to the "poor," the disadvantaged, the underprivileged, the sinned-against, we should not confine the "poor" to economical poverty. At times the suffering of "Gentiles" in modern society is more sophisticated, such as racial prejudice or sexual discrimination.