

An investigation into the historical, cultural-religious,  
mystical and doctrinal elements of Paul's Christology and  
Soteriology: a theoretical study of faith

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## **Declaration**

I declare that AN INVESTIGATION INTO THE HISTORICAL, CULTURAL-RELIGIOUS, MYSTICAL AND DOCTRINAL ELEMENTS OF PAUL'S CHRISTOLOGY AND SOTERIOLOGY: A THEORETICAL STUDY OF FAITH is my own work and that all the sources that I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of the complete references

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## **Summary**

Through his personal spiritual growth process and Jesus' teachings and life, Paul became acutely aware of the vast differences between Prophetic Judaism and the Mystical Traditions in relation to the Temple Cult and Temple-ism in general. Paul's own "history of religion" centred on Abraham's Covenant as the first and preferred, unmediated, spiritual and universal model, against Moses' priestly mediated cultic system designed basically for Jews. Therefore, Paul follows Jesus teachings and mission to "rip the dividing curtain" of the Jerusalem Temple (Heb 6:19, 20); so that all nations can be reconciled to God (Eph 2:11-18). Jesus re-negotiated "a new and better covenant" of God's mercy through repentance to all. Cultic "regulations" and Jewishness as being a special "religious", covenantal "qualification" is now outdated and rather were now dangerous myths in Paul's new religion. Paul knew that bridging concepts and new interpretations of metaphors will have to be part of the transition. God did not need a final special blood cultic sacrifice; to the contrary, only some people needed one so that they can make the mental transition from a cultic religion to a spiritual and personal religion.

To Paul, God was the unknown Father and the Essence of all creation and Jesus-Christ was their leader and master or lord. In the mystical sense however, "Christ" represented the real Spiritual essence of mankind; the image of God in mankind. The core of Paul's soteriology is his growth and participational aspects which constitutes the salvation process and are closely linked. The salvific process starts in the first phase with conversion from cultic Temple-ism and weaning from cultic and ethnic "laws" through the teaching of, and participation in, the spiritual growth process of the "physical" Jesus while the Spirit within us is awakening. The latter heralds the start of the "second" mature spiritual phase of the resurrected and vindicated Christ; sensitising our conscience as our moral identity and source of internal motivation from the real Self; one lives intuitively from loving-kindness; you honour this Gift in your earthly vessel with a fitting response to life. The behavioural element is central and an absolute necessity in the salvific process and he never views it as being secondary. Christianity will have to revise simplistic "faith" to salvation dogmas and broaden its functional scope by again honouring the second personal and authentic spiritual growth phase to be able to manifest a better Kingdom with the aid of Human Beings.

## **Keywords**

Cosmic Christ; Christ Spirit; Cultic regulations; Dysfunctional beliefs; Graded training; Heavenly Adam; Human accountability; Human Being; Image of God; Jewish ethnicity; Participational soteriology; soteriological growth process; Primordial tradition; Prophetic tradition; Simplistic beliefs; Son of man; Spiritual growth; Spiritual maturity; spiritual relationship; Mysticism; Temple-ism; Temple veil; Wisdom traditions

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# Chapter 1

## Stating the problem

### 1.1 Introduction

The classic portrayal of salvation as a godly/human sacrifice in the midst of history is not making sense, especially in the extreme sense of metaphorical and literal letting of blood and is no longer morally acceptable to an increasing number of Christians and former Christians. What is particularly problematic is the dual storyline of the sacrificial story: on the one hand the godly/human sacrifice constitutes an act of mercy while on the other hand a demand for restitution is instituted. One of the classic Reformed theological ways of 'solving' the problem of the double-sidedness is to state that the divine/human sacrifice, on the one hand, is the divine indicative which people have to appropriate in their lives while simultaneously experiencing it as the overwhelming divine imperative they have to obey in their lives. Being obedient is being continuously grateful for the divine gift of the divine/human sacrifice (Ridderbos 1949:310-311).

The salvific doctrines, dogmas and schemes that have been developed in history around the notion of a divine/human sacrifice as a combined merciful and mandatory act requires from people a pure, perfect and sanctified response in their daily experience. Furthermore, doctrinal format of the pure, perfect and sanctified response is never been entrusted in the hands of an individual human being. The godly/human sacrifice has firstly to pass through the medium of a specially ordained category of people such as priests, pastors and ministers entrusted with the task to formulate the godly/human sacrifice into the purest, most perfect and sanctified doctrine and dogma possible which in turn is then to be applied and appropriated by people through a pure, perfect and sanctified life.

The main assumption of a divine/human sacrifice as a once and for all event for all people in history is accompanied by an array of negative effects and consequences, one of which is that it pays little respect to what Derrida in his book *The gift of death* termed the singular irreplaceable character of human beings (1995:10-25). A divine/human sacrifice does not contribute to people being responsible for themselves and accountable to themselves for their uniqueness and excellence in dealing with God, themselves, other human beings and the natural cosmic environment. The mandatory character of the godly/human sacrifice demands from people to be pure, perfect and sanctified and is usually presented as a 'fits one fits all' doctrinal package which is morally unproductive and even harmful to the challenge directed at people to be unique and excellent in the multiple doings of daily life.



The aim of this thesis is to attest to the integrity of Jesus and Paul as real spiritual visionaries and moral practitioners demanding the same level of moral commitment from their followers. The study is undertaken from a faith theoretical perspective which means that the texts of the Judaeo-Christian Bible is not approached with the typical textual tools commonly in use in the Old Testament and New Testament disciplines. In a faith theoretical sense if more people are converted to the ideal of taking God really serious in terms of the “Good news”, thus becoming part of the spiritual, mystical and moral Kingdom (Commonwealth) of God, the world would before long look very different from the one people are used to. After two millennia of Christianity, our world should have had a fuller, wider and deeper moral grounding if the fullness and wholesomeness of God’s Kingdom was more meaningfully understood.

## **1.2 Human responsibility and accountability**

Another problematic aspect of the godly/human sacrifice with its demand of purity, perfection and sanctification is that it has to be acted out and fulfilled by human beings in continuous thankfulness and gratitude towards the once and for all gratuitous and merciful godly/human offering. When the saying from the Judaeo-Christian world “be holy because I am holy” is used as if it is an injunction expressed by God self, it makes only sense to certain people because the carrier statement of the purity, perfection and sanctification doctrine is usually constructed by spiritual leader or gurus for the sole use by other human beings who are not as close to the God or the spiritual mysteries. It is not expressive of the experiential awareness of a unique and excellent, singular and irreplaceable human being taking up his or her responsibility and accountability towards God, him or herself, other human beings and the natural cosmic environment.

The majority of Christian salvific schemes currently doing the rounds in the majority of churches and organisations of faith seem on the surface action-directed especially through the hundreds of this-worldly ritualistic acts which people have to perform, from prayer meetings to gatherings where holy bread and wine are digested as sacred and sacramental analogies of the grand godly/human sacrifice. Underlying all these acts is an otherworldly goal of salvation with its endpoint of a heavenly sphere to which people traverse, if and only if, they have led pure, perfect and sanctified lives which are not only directly flowing but are carried by the godly/human sacrifice. On the surface all these seem enough and satisfactory as the conclusion of the story of the godly/human sacrifice but it is not because people in their lives have to be guided by sacred and sacramental, and specially ‘called’ and ordained people. Even if others view themselves as having the saviour as the whole embodiment of the godly/human sacrifice in their hearts as the driving force on their way to heaven or find their church or their religion the undercarriage which carries them to the heaven of afterlife, they need in terms of the variegated procedure special people as priests, pastors and ministers to

guide them in their way from life to afterlife. People whether measured against a scale of sacramentality and sacredness, or piety and godliness are to be led by others closer to or more expertly informed about the godly/human sacrifice in order to guide them through the whole procedure from this life to afterlife.

For many the endpoint of the procedure initiated by the godly/human sacrifice is unpacked at the same time as the point of beginning as the argument of salvific “faith” by which faith is primarily viewed as faith in the saviour, the one in which the godly/human sacrifice has been embodied. The notion of saving “faith” or an act of faith in Christ endorsing one’s salvation has become the backbone of classical Protestant and post-Protestant salvific schemes. In many instances the notion of saving “faith” is either not coherently defined or its specific relation and connection with the central godly/human offering is not concretely unpacked. For many the godly/human sacrifice is an absolute experiential doctrine in terms of which the quality of someone’s experience regarding the heavenly afterlife is measured and demonstrated in this life. Some of these ‘absolute experiential doctrines’ are the following:

“a divine Jesus should be nestled in a person’s ego-centre as the driving force of all his/her actions and doings in this life and the afterlife; or that a person should be baptised with the Holy Spirit to live a meaningful present life and afterlife; or that some people are elected by God for this life and afterlife while others are rejected.” (Van Niekerk 2005:403)

Socio-political and societal passivity is one of the main results of human workings and doings that have to be pure, perfect and sanctified with its sole purpose of attaining the future heaven established at the end of time. In a similar sense, when the notion of the Kingdom (Commonwealth) of God is regarded as a future event and happening, planned and executed solely by God as an end of time activity it contributes to passivity and passiveness in people.

The passivity scheme is to a large extent embedded in the belief of a sacrificial godly/human atonement event expressed in the “necessary” blood atonement act of God which has set Adam, Eve and the whole of humanity in a passive mode beyond any merit of good works, good deeds and works of law. The background of the passivity scheme is centred in the Genesis drama of Adam and Eve’s falling into sin which is read by advocates of the scheme as a historical event impacting thereafter on all human beings in the follow up of history. In this view any attempt by human beings in taking up their responsibility and accountability in a salvific sense towards God, themselves, other human beings and the natural cosmic world as good-earthly-human-living, is doomed (Wiersinga 1971:188). We have to remember that the main thrust of godly/human sacrifice is to be fused with something such as blood from humans or animals from the natural world around them. Human beings not aware or not acknowledging the act of grace represented in the blood atonement event

are regarded as lost for eternity. What is of interest here is that in history the solution of salvation of a human person not lost for eternity, points in two directions, firstly to a sacramental and sacred sphere called the church which cares, guides and directs a human person from birth to death and thereafter – such as the Roman Catholic solution, and secondly, points in the direction of a ‘divine but less human’ entity or person inserted into the inner part or heart of a human being – such as the evangelical Protestant solution. Of interest at this stage is that the Church in the Catholic solution regards itself as the mediator of the merit of the divine/human sacrifice, while in the Protestant sense the solution is found in the merit of the direct relationship to the divine/human sacrifice of the person called Christ built into the life of an individual human being.

The salvific scheme of passivity which denounces human responsibility and accountability in the name of grace and divine mercy exempts human beings from any personal contribution to the “salvation” process. This eventually results in a world full of “spoiled children of God”, inactive and mostly uninvolved in a troubled world. By telling and reminding God through prayer about the wrong and evil things in our world they transfer their responsibility and accountability regarding the wrong and evil things to God in prayer, in the belief and hope that God will fix it for us. Accompanying and underlying such prayers and expectations are the sometimes passive beliefs that whatever happens, it remains God’s will and should be accepted.

The underlying core procedure of passivity and the undercutting of people’s responsibility and accountability in their everyday experience did not originate and was not the focus of Jesus or Paul. This nonsensical and passive religion of God’s Kingdom that emerges only at the “end times” results in a dogmatic acceptance of sacrificial atonement through the sacrifice of someone totally other than us, sacrificed for us. This in turn results in an institutional interest in numbers and not in the moral and spiritual quality of “Christians” who account for and are responsible for their daily doings before God, themselves, other human beings and the physical natural world.

Firstly, in what is presented in this thesis the Kingdom (Commonwealth) of God is viewed as the moving and meandering processes from beginning to end, from creation to fulfilment of everything as the playground and workplace where the responsibility and accountability of God, human beings and physical-organic natural world towards each other, are cooperatively enacted and worked out (van Niekerk 2006:381). Secondly, while quite a number of salvific schemes in the Christian world are ascribed to Paul’s gospel and letters, it is necessary to revisit his theology in this respect. Deductions and inferences made regarding typical otherworldly schemes of salvation as being supported by Paul’s broad belief system and sense making approach are too simplistic and a misunderstanding of his views.

Admitting, that Paul in his letters is using first century universally practiced sacrificial and blood atonement practices to partly explain the death of Jesus, he however effectively declares these sacrifices permanently obsolete and unnecessary for the future. Furthermore, he also used the concepts of sacrifice and death as metaphors for the purification stage and the ultimate victory over the ego self thereby allowing the resurrection or rebirth of the spiritual Self of which Jesus as the "Christ" was or is representing the "first fruits" of a universal possibility for mankind. He tried to strengthen his arguments for a more inclusive Christianity by emphasising that human equality and morality driven by the Holy Spirit within, is much more important to God than any effort to become Jewish by adhering to ethnic, specific laws and practices and this is also in line with Jesus' message. In most of these arguments about the works of law, Paul uses Abraham as role model and the receiver of the more important earlier covenantal relations in comparison to the law driven one of Moses, which by that time, has become the Jewish national religion. Paul accentuate the productivity of Abraham's faith in God through his faithfulness as being of primary importance for an inclusive universal and spiritual covenant, as he now believes, was the real intent of God for Abraham and his "seed" even before he became to be claimed as a "Jewish" forefather.

### **1.3 Dysfunctional beliefs**

In the present world while religion and religious experience receded in many societies a resurgence of orthodox and fundamentalist views emerged in other societies. In some religions, societies or even churches a strong decrease in attendance of the so called mainline churches and an increasing stepping away from dogmatic religions is experienced while simultaneously an increase of fundamentalist and orthodox views of religion is been detected in multiple forms of new churches and religious organisations. A third tendency amongst many people emerged in the latter half of the previous century, especially amongst people with a first world frame of mind in search of a more functional, realistic and personal spirituality that is more inclusive and wholesome from a human point of departure.

In the present world view the human intellect and scientific accomplishments are again recognised as an integral part of even the human spiritual quest. The offering of a whole array of paradigms of knowledge in a global communications systems are the demonstration of a reaction and rebellion against the ideas of tribal and exclusivist religions and value-systems. Scientific enterprises emerging with different sets of assumptions with various spiritual philosophies all vying for a place amongst the many sense making systems; each offering to be the most wholesome and holistic of them all win more disciples than classical and orthodox Christianity.

On the other hand, we must be aware of some of the mysterious and novel characteristics of modern science as well as the atheistic belief system that is excellently exemplified in the work of

Richard Dawkins in his work *The God Delusion* in which he rolls out human beings and God – a delusionary hiccup in the minds of human beings – as evolutionary constructs of the natural cosmisation processes (Dawkins 2006:113-119; 125-134; especially 118).

To be of help in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, our understanding and our sense making approaches whether these are based on religious beliefs or come from a scientific or socio-political background, should not only help us to survive but deliver wellbeing, wellness and equilibrium in our daily lives. Furthermore, it should be instrumental in tackling the most pressing problems in society such as the prevalence of poverty, skewed distribution of material wealth and the need for jobs and economic survival. Unfortunately in the current world ethos view the economic problems mostly from different types of capitalistic perspectives that do not really care about the poor and powerless groupings.

Ethical and moral decay coupled with the dangers of nuclear weapons in the hands of fundamentalists, nationalistic or religious groups together with the destruction of our worldly habitat is aggravated by vested economic interests and outdated belief systems that ignores population planning and control measures which absence accelerate the process of careless over utilisation of resources.

The problem underlying this study is the inability of most of the present mainstream religions to be of help to mankind in integrating the scientific, practical and spiritual dimensions of their lives because formal religion became largely dysfunctional in making a meaningful contribution towards a comprehensive and practical philosophy for life. The religion-science debate is entering a crucial phase and if we cannot utilise both science and spirituality in harmonious ways, the growing trend of religious fundamentalism coupled with terrorism may very well undo many socio-economic and scientific advances that were made in the last five hundred years and can even destroy humankind itself in the process.

The crisis of reconciling a technological advanced society with an earlier version of a static and “God-given”, pre-scientific view on life is entering a decisive phase also for the Christian religion as presented to us up to now. But Christian religion should also not be based on current scientific human and world views couched in the naivety of reductionist approaches in which a mode, field or dimension of reality is offered as the “salvific medium” of reality. Van Niekerk in pointing to the sense making fallacies of theologism, humanism and naturalist-worldism asserts:

”Since the Renaissance in Europe (1400-1600), and especially in the modern period (1600-2000), the idea of God was put on ice or was suspended from the struggle between humanism (= human beings as the measure of everything) and worldism (= nature or the physical-organic cosmic universe as the measure of everything). As a

separate but less important avenue, theologism or Godism continued into Modernity in theology, the churches and religious faith. Most modern philosophers and scientists have suspended the idea of God in their philosophies and sciences, and either put in its place the (human) anthropic constructivist stance that human beings construct and construe everything in the world, or the (natural) cosmological discoveryist stance that the myriad of universes (= multiverses) in their micro and macro existence determine everything in the world." (Van Niekerk 2009:42-43)

It is necessary for our age, that spirituality and religion should not be based on pre-scientific superstition and irrational beliefs, but should represent a higher order of truth, morality and insight, beyond science and should represent wisdom in its broadest and most inclusive and caring manifestation; representing the true Logos of an all wise and inclusive "One God", unknowable in essence to mankind. It is also true, spirituality and religion should not be based on a scientific know it all attitude and on rational beliefs only, but should move a bit lower to the "truth" of everyday and daily experience beyond religion in the broadest sense of the word. Who makes sense of this paradox makes sense of the central thrust of this thesis.

The many concepts of God from groups within pockets of exclusivity emerging in many societies are not advancing a wholesome approach towards the inclusiveness of God, the humanness of human beings and the naturalness of nature. Many of the global religions unfortunately, still have their roots in tribal and national arrogance and power politics instead of a genuine search for wholesome truth based in humble piety and caring spirituality.

I want to argue that we do not need new religions but a better understanding of many of the old wisdom traditions and sense making approaches, including those of Judaism and Christianity. A more inclusive study of these older traditions indicates that underlying the many thought, moral and spiritual dimensions going deeper than dogma and creeds still deliver exceptional individuals and societies that can help us understand productive spirituality even today. The only real problem is that repeatedly after the death of visionaries, their spiritual philosophies and examples are watered down and institutionalised to suit the spiritual level of the 'uneducated' masses. Or more incisively reflected, the doctrines of the leadership classes according to Althusser are tailor-made for the masses with the purpose of controlling the masses (Balibar 1993:12-13). The leadership struggles emerging amongst different "apostles" in the New Testament times were to a large extent a struggle for the hearts and minds of the people with different levels of understanding and different class levels of understanding (Fromm 1963:15-37). These struggles for supremacy and exclusivity undermine the deeper spiritual teachings that were inherent in the teachings of the visionaries. Variety and not uniformity is the end result and this seems to be the case within the Christian world shortly after Jesus' death.

In the 16<sup>th</sup> century Protestant Reformation and Roman Catholic Counter Reformation there was an interchange and fusion of biblical, church traditional, theological scholastic, philosophical Renaissance humanist and impulses from a changeover from the *via antiqua* to the *devotio moderna* which is intrinsically part of the late medieval period and the Renaissance period from 1350-1550 CE (Oberman 1994:8-21). According to Oberman Protestant reference books and manuals of the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> century were prejudiced towards piety of the mystic sort because it saw mysticism as a phenomenon of a Catholicism far from Scripture, a Catholicism which, along with its sacramental and Marian mysticism was refuted and superseded by the Reformation of the 16<sup>th</sup> century (1994:80). The research of the past fifty years has demonstrated however that Luther as well as Calvin's approaches though not mystical in the true sense of the word are permeated by mystic motifs of piety (*pietas*) (Jones 1995). The category of piety runs through Calvin's *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (1559) from beginning to end especially through his joining of piety and love of God which is a requisite to any true knowledge of God (*Institutes* 1559: I, ii, 1-2).

Different approaches to the phenomenon of mysticism can be distinguished. Firstly in the Roman Catholic world constant reference regarding mysticism is made to Philippus a SS Trinitate, an established interpreter of Thomas Aquinas, who became famous for his *Summa Theologiae Mysticae* first published in Lyon in 1656. His definition of mysticism as quoted by Oberman (1994:80) is

"Heavenly mysticism is that knowledge of God which is made possible through the union of the will with God and through the illumination of the intellect."

For strict supporters of this definition everything else that does not make sense in terms of this definition is false mysticism. This rigid Thomistic definition of mysticism can only be made sense of if the rules of Aristotelian logic are followed. Interestingly the definition of Phillipus has a striking resemblance with Calvin's scheme in the first pages of his *Institutes* of 1559 in which the knowledge of God is distinguished from human knowledge that human beings have of themselves but is linked in alignment with the will of God in piety (Calvin *Institutes* 1559: I,1,1-2).

A second possible approach to mysticism is based on making sense of the Greek verb *mýein* from where the term mystic and mysticism has been derived. The word means 'to close one's lips and eyes'. Mysticism therefore is withdrawal from the distractions of the world while one is concentrating on the spiritual powers of the inner self with the deeper level experience of the detachment of the self from everything that connects the self to time and place. According to Oberman the original Greek meaning has at times provided support for the notion that mysticism is a sort of negative theology:

“Genuine mysticism, in this view, is necessarily negative theology because it stems from the basic paradox that the experience of God’s infinity has to be expressed in finite images, and therefore cannot be expressed. Consequently, all that is left is ‘stuttering’, a poor imitation of clear speech, since in every sentence, experiences are abridged. Negative theology is the opposite of so-called positive theology, which today is termed systematic theology. Systematic theology concerns the interpretation and extrapolation of Holy Scripture and church doctrine. Negative theology is based on the premise that we can speak about God only in a state of amazement and with our tongues tied, stammering.” (Oberman 1994:80f)

There is however a third avenue of tackling the reality of mysticism and that is to view it as part of all religious phenomena. Mysticism as a phenomenon of religions and religiously driven approaches has as its goal the liberation of humanity, specifically of a human being’s innermost core the soul or spiritual realm which to a large degree is bound to this natural earthly world which endangers in many instances the inner core of human beings. Mysticism draws us into absolute, original being permeating our essence, thought, feelings and imagination but keeping it safe and sound by energising and activating our daily experience and social connections. Some forms of mysticism loosen the connection to the natural earthly world while others strengthen the connection through a permeation of everyday experience.

The aspect of interest here regarding Protestant and Catholic God-human-and-world approaches of the 16<sup>th</sup> century is that Protestants, in their view of human beings, had their main emphasis on faith alone (*sola fide*) in Christ who is the sacrifice in whom God’s wrath had been quieted and Catholics have their emphasis on the merit of love and charity alone (*agape*) – in Christ whose suffering passion is the merit and sacrifice of God of in time and eternity.

Protestant groups of the 16<sup>th</sup> century such as Lutheran and Calvinistic groups laid the basis for a multitude of other groups later on in history which follow the main notions of the early Protestants. They laid the groundwork for nearly all modern traditions which base their truth claims especially regarding the godly/human sacrifice and their ethical norms from the “one true Bible” as the only exploration area for truths about God, human beings and the natural world. What happens in Christ in the godly/divine sacrifice is that according to Luther and Calvin the wrath of God is quieted. The whole procedure is well described by Calvin himself in his *Institutes* of 1559:

“God’s righteous curse bars our access to him, and God in his capacity as judge is angry toward us. Hence, an expiation must intervene in order that Christ as priest may obtain God’s favour for us and appease his wrath. Thus Christ to perform this office had to come forward with a sacrifice. For under the law, also, the priest was forbidden to enter the sanctuary without blood...The priestly office belongs to Christ alone because by the sacrifice of his death he blotted out our own guilt and made satisfaction for our sins.” (Institutes 1559:II,15,6)



The majority of later Christian groupings associating with the views of the early Protestants lean heavily on Pauline works for the idea of a godly/human sacrifice as an act of divine justification which according to the main Protestant reading of Roman 1-5 has to flow through the channel of faith alone to be effective in people's lives. My contention is that the majority of these Protestant traditions did as much harm to Paul's theology as they have done to people's responsibility and accountability for their moral behaviour by preaching a soteriology that is based on "belief only" in a third party sacrifice thereby regulating, determining and mandating people's relationships with God from the outside. In such a process the essential spiritual and moral growth which were part of Jesus' and Paul's teachings were left at the wayside of history.

On the other hand the Roman Catholic approach in the Counter-Reformation period of the 16<sup>th</sup> century is also not freed from the notion of a godly/human sacrifice although they set it through an elaborated ecclesial scheme represented by the merit and passion of Christ – the godly/human sacrifice. The sessions of the Council of Trent took place during the years 1546 to 1563 during an extremely difficult period for the Roman Catholic Church. In the hustle and bustle of the Reformation the first session of the Council of Trent (*Tridentinum* as it is commonly called) started on 13 December 1546 and has its last session on 3 or 4 December 1563 a few months before John Calvin died in 1564 (Heussi 1956:335-337). Reading through the records of the different sessions, one is struck by the fact that the Protestant Reformation was taken very seriously. In a sense Trent can be viewed as expressive of an internal, intra-reformation of the Church as well as a counter, contra-reformation to the Protestant Reformation simultaneously. (Van Niekerk 2009:88)

In the Decree on Justification formulated and accepted in the session of January 1547, three terms were used repeatedly in the documents, namely 'justice', 'faith' and 'love'. The Protestant version of God's justification of sinners was that God's godly/human sacrifice taking place in Jesus Christ is affirmed by the justification through religious faith in a human being, who should then in thankfulness walk the road of sanctifying purity and perfection. In the version of Trent the whole process operated through the merit of the most holy godly/human passion (sacrifice) of the Lord Jesus in and through whom the charity (love) of God was infused together with faith and hope and poured into the hearts of those in the process of being justified in the time dimensions of past, present and future (Waterworth 1848:35). The faith, hope and love mentioned in 1 Corinthians 13 played an important role in the Decree on Justification with the main emphasis on love.

The document on the Decree on Justification of the sixth session of January 1547, chapter 11, reads:

“No one ought to flatter himself up with faith alone, fancying that by faith alone he has been made an heir, and will obtain the inheritance, even though he suffered not with Christ, that so he may be also glorified with him.”(Waterworth 1848:39)

In chapter 16 one reads that the crown of justice had been rendered to Jesus Christ by the just judge God, and not only to him, but also to all who love his coming. Jesus Christ continually infuses his virtue of love into those who are justified as the head into the members, and the vine into the branches. The continuous infusion of love precedes and accompanies every one of a person’s good works. In chapter 7 we read that if faith is added without hope and charity (love) being added, neither unites a human being perfectly with Christ, nor makes him or her a living member of his body. Faith without works is dead and profitless and faith works only through love (charity, *caritas*, *agape*).

Faith (as grace) is infused through baptism and is therefore the divine starting block in life, while hope (as grace) is the divine pulling factor from eternity as future. Love, charity, *caritas* or *agape* (as grace) is the continuous pouring in and infusing factor by the Holy Spirit, which embraces and permeates a person’s good works throughout his or her life as the continuous divine driving force. Through love embodied in good works, a person grows in justification. The central notion in the Decree on Justification of the sixth session of January 1547 is justification as a divine operation of grace in, through and with the holy passion –godly/human sacrifice of Jesus Christ which, in the life of a human being, works itself out as the beginning of the process. It is infused and poured in grace as faith through baptism (past dimension), it continues to be infused and poured in love by the Holy Spirit (present dimension) and it will be pulled by the eternal future of God’s Kingdom. Between divine faith and divine hope, love is actually the gracious matchmaker between God’s eternal life and the lives of human beings. Again Paul views in 1 Cor 13, differently than in the Protestant approach with its insistence on faith alone, has been bypassed in favour of a sacramentalist Church which can be expressed by the metaphor of a divine and eternal ship anchored in the ocean of history. With Sacramentalist, church-centeredness embodies a divine socialist caring through carrying ecclesial ship full of salvific sense and meaning for everyone who is a passenger now and life hereafter. In all these the Church is the keeper, holder and provider of divine truth through the Captain – the Holier than Holy Father and his crew – the hundreds of holy fathers on the ship and the thousands of just less than holy lay passengers making the trip to eternity. (Van Niekerk 2006:325f)

In the Protestant blood offering narrative the main factors underscoring the godly/human sacrificial state of affairs are firstly to be found in the generalised forgiveness character of the salvific sacrificial godly/human offering. In the majority of instances the insertion of a foreign merciful agent into the core of human beings’ experience like the narrative of a ‘divine Jesus in the heart of the person’

results in dysfunctional disassociation of people by which they are alienated and estranged from their experiential world of everyday responsibility and accountability. Secondly, the mandatory imperative for restitution flowing from the merciful act is underscored by a demand to be pure and perfect. The generalised demand of purity and perfection people has to comply with by accepting the sacrificial godly/human offering though faith runs directly in the face of the objective of the spiritual and moral growth of every singular irreplaceable human being.

The Roman Catholic blood sacrificial offering drawing passion and merit from Christ's sacrifice through a whole array of sacramental holy fathers who hand out and transfer the passion and merit of Christ to the non-holy underlings set in motion to perform acts of charity and love in the sense of 1 Cor 13 is the counterpart of the Protestant scheme. The generalised meritorious godly/human blood offer rendered in the passion of Christ and administered to people through a team of holy fathers counters and boycotts the objective of unique and excellent spiritual and moral growth of every singular irreplaceable human being.

#### **1.4 Earlier and later eras**

The first element of our main assumption operating in the thesis is that it is more productive to revisit a variety of the religions and God-human-and-world approaches, especially their foundational philosophies, operative in early Christianity. Looking and searching for the elements that influenced Christian experience and thought and that could still make sense in our time and experience, are far better than merely handing on the godly/human offering paradigm which is embodied in the doctrines of many churches and religions. While a major part of people globally still believe in an eternal, just, wise, merciful and compassionate God and an orderly creation it is worthwhile to look at the underlying scientific, moral principles and values of ancient eras with the goal of trying to make sense of how these principles and values made sense to them.

The second element of our main assumption of the thesis is that the myriad of doctrines of churches and religions obscures and hampers many people's spiritual and moral growth. On the one hand, may be, not much has changed in spite of various disparate early Christian views embodied in later church obscurantist doctrines. On the other hand, just may be, many sense making clues and notions valuable and worthwhile for our era lie still idle and buried way back in the past for us to be unearthed and re-interpreted. Whether humanity did become more intelligent and spiritual in the last three thousand years is a moot point. What is however more likely is that we have lost some of the most important spiritual wisdom elements due to misunderstanding and negating of the esoteric traditions present within various religions which include Christian religions and God-human-and-nature views of the past.

The third element of our main assumption of the thesis is while partaking in the quest for a practical and moral universal philosophy we set ourselves open to be informed not only by the many contextual approaches and traditions of our own era by thinkers, philosophers and spiritual sages of the past and present. What is of the utmost importance in our day and age is that productive science practiced by scientists making sense of the Godness of God, the humanness of human beings and the naturalness of the natural world understand their moral responsibility towards all life and its resources in general. This of course implies that we should not be coerced by any cultural heritage that promotes “superior” national and tribal perspectives as their point of departure and for this reason we strongly identify with Jesus and Paul in their quests for a more inclusive approach towards spirituality and morality.

As Paul was the author of the first known body of scripture, later theological thinking in the whole Christian world was and still is, heavily reliant on Paul’s views. Although we are mostly interested in Christian views of salvific sense and meaning (soteriology), one may accept that the godly/human sacrificial paradigm starts with the assumption that there had been a historical “fall” into sin, the effect of which has been propagated into all later generations. The sacrificial blood hypothesis is a direct consequence of the historical “fall” into sin as a once for all act in the beginning of time by Adam. Therefore, as a counterpart the same sacrificial once and for all generations offering in blood and suffering by Jesus Christ makes out the sum of the godly/divine sacrifice. One of the main questions accompanying this investigation is whether the origins and logic of the key elements of the blood hypothesis are attributable in a definitive way to either Jesus or Paul or are we confronted with a new myth based on the misunderstanding of an older one.

The expectations of many could be discarded that Christian Churches can be functional trainers, coaches and mentors of morality and spirituality as well as efficient motivators for social reform if we are unable to resurrect the spiritual teachings of early Christianity with its whole network of practical guidelines, notions and clues mainly from Jesus and Paul and also within their own frame of reference. To make this effort even more valid and productive would be to include a healthy dose of other disciplines such as various philosophies, natural and the human sciences with the one condition that they have to contribute to a wholesome approach of spirituality which covers the totality of people’s experience in a wholesome sense.

In this thesis in terms of an inclusive perspective of human faith, a study of various theories of faith is more adept and appropriate to provide us with clues of the foundational and productive primordial spiritual traditions of Judaism, Jesus and Paul. Of special interest to this study of faith are the beliefs and thoughts of Jesus and the impact they had on Paul as the first writer on Christian theological

issues. A large number of interpretations of his work operate as the undercarriage of a variety of Christian groupings from Charismatic Rhema to Roman Catholic, from Presbyterian Reformed to Greek and Russian Orthodox and from Pentecostal to Theosophical fellowships. Remarkably various spiritual Christian and Gnostic groupings within churches have been forced regularly not only onto the edges of these churches but outside the realms of these churches.

Doctrinal discipline taken to its extremes had been applied to groups following Marcion's approach in the 2<sup>nd</sup> century CE because of their own selection of "scriptures" which excluded the Old Testament books. This procedure forced the "orthodox" leaders to select and prescribe the "real inspired books" from the many that were used by all the Christian groupings (Heussi 1956:51). Heussi terms Marcion's views as extreme Paulinism (*überspannter Paulinismus*) as Marcion viewed Paul as the only apostle that really understood Jesus the Lord Jesus while the first group of apostles and the Church fell back into the lap of Judaism (Heussi 1956:52).

Marcion speedily organised a large marcionitic counter-church with many congregations with own bishops, presbyters, own religious hymns and church buildings and even own martyrs (1956:52). In the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> century CE the marcionitic church covered the area from Damascus and the Euphrates river to present day Lyon and the Rhone river and according to various church historians delivered a threat to what they regarded as the ordinary vulgar Christian views of the orthodox church of the day. Eventually the Gnostic element in the church was ousted from the "one true church". In the history of religion the notion to get rid of dissidents by framing them as strange and weird people because they understood and experience spiritually differently were common. By measuring the beliefs of the "others" against a doctrinal benchmark as decided upon by specific church councils and eventually these dogmatic beliefs were then elevated to the level of divine status. Moreover, the majority of these councils followed the sense making views of the political leaders of the day.

The history of the Protestant world of Lutheranism and Calvinism is rife with similar processes in which the dissidents were driven out of the mainline 'orthodox' church that is the church with the biblically correct Protestant doctrines. In the Reformed world the 17<sup>th</sup> century Holland the struggle of Arminius and the Remonstrants with orthodox Calvinists is well known. Arminius, best known as the founder of the anti-orthodox school of Reformed theology called Arminianism because he made an allowance for a human being to reject freely God's offer of grace they thereby rejected some of the crude and harsh tenets of the predestination doctrine of Calvinism (González 1985:179). The early Dutch followers of Arminius' teaching were also called the Remonstrants, after they issued a document containing five points of disagreement with classic Calvinism, entitled *Remonstrantie*

(1610). Article Five of the Five Articles of the Remonstrants gives one an idea of the connection between the Spirit, Christ and free will:

“That those who are incorporated into Christ by true faith, and have thereby become partakers of his life-giving Spirit, as a result have full power to strive against Satan, sin, the world, and their own flesh, and to win the victory; it being well understood that it is ever through the assisting grace of the Holy Spirit; and that Jesus Christ assists them through his Spirit in all temptations, extends to them his hand, and if only they are ready for the conflict, desire his help, and are not inactive, keeps them from falling, so that they, by no deceit or power of Satan, can be misled nor plucked out of Christ’s hands, according to the Word of Christ, John 10:28: “Neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand.” But whether they are capable, through negligence, of forsaking again the first beginning of their life in Christ, of again returning to this present evil world, of turning away from the holy doctrine which was delivered them, of losing a good conscience, of neglecting grace, that must be more particularly determined out of the Holy Scripture, before we ourselves can teach it with the full confidence of our mind.” (Bratcher 2006:3)

The five articles of the Remonstrants became the focus of the Synod of Dordrecht in the Netherlands, and occasioned The Canons of Dordt, a document of the Dutch Reformed Church that rejected the teachings of Arminius and the Remonstrants and essentially declared their position to be heretical (González 1985:181). Even though Arminius and the Remonstrants were condemned, the controversy did not end and had a liberalising effect on theology in Europe and England, as well as the American colonies. By the mid 1700s, the basic positions of Arminius were refined and expanded in England under the movement begun by John and Charles Wesley the founders of Methodism. In both England and the newly formed United States, the theology of Methodism and other churches were known as following the Arminian-Wesleyan theology. Today, the five points of the Remonstrants still articulate the essential differences between Calvinistic/Reformed traditions and Arminian Wesleyan traditions.

Calvinist groups especially with their view of double predestination and a merciful blood sacrifice while leaning heavily on Pauline works claimed the “correctness” and “truths” of their views from the “one true Bible”. These so called new “insights” of the Calvinist Reformation about Pauline soteriology resulted in many largely passive, believing, praying and singing, emotionally and socially driven religious groupings without any real imperative for personal commitment in the salvific process or to take responsibility for one’s own life and spiritual growth. This popular and painless route to salvation with its simplistic claims to exclusivity is in no small way a contributing cause of a Christian tradition with no real practical and visible impact on our moral and ecological problems in our current world.

My contention is that the majority of these Protestant traditions did as much harm to Paul's God-human-and-world approach as they have done to responsible moral behaviour by preaching a soteriology that is based on "belief only" in a free, "merciful blood sacrifice" of godly origin. This dated soteriology is based on belief systems and metaphors that do not make sense any longer and is unacceptable in this day and age need to be revisited,

- firstly by understanding or making sense of these problematic approaches within the contexts in which they were produced,
- secondly, to look at the underlying sense making values, and
- thirdly, to re-interpret these values for our times.

To inform us in this quest to find a practical as well as moral universal philosophy we will have to be informed not only by our own traditions but by noted thinkers, philosophers and spiritual sages of the past and present as well as productive science that is practiced by scientists that also understands their moral responsibility towards all life and its resources in general. This of course implies that we should not be coerced by any cultural heritage that promotes "superior" national and tribal perspectives as their point of departure and for this reason we strongly identify with Jesus and Paul in their quests for a more inclusive view on spirituality and morality. As Paul was the author of the first known body of scripture, later theological thinking was and still is, heavily reliant on Paul's opinions.

## Chapter 2

### Hypothesis and Hermeneutics

#### 2.1 Hypothesis

A theory of faith is dependent on and is an aware expression of the growth processes of an individual and a group of people's wholesome experience of their salvation and salvific patterns expressed in everyday life. A wholesome and differential faith theoretical approach includes rational, emotional, symbolic, moral, spiritual and cultural facets of the process of development. In direct correlation to the growth processes and experiential patterns are the open and enclosed spaces provided for and allowed by a society of feeding creative wholesome spiritual patterns and allowing freedom to grow and flourish into ethical and moral maturity. The degree of openness of a particular society plays a key role in the intellectual and emotional development of its young people and is therefore a crucial element of the growth dynamics and maturity levels of members of such a society. Ideological indoctrination and religious bullying and authoritarianism combined with people's fear and anxieties are some of the strongest factors that damage an individual's prospects to intellectual and emotional development and growth, especially the ability to adjust and to manage the enactment of multiple roles in daily life within a complex society (Jeunhomme 1970:50-65). These factors largely determine our concepts of God, ourselves as human beings, our understanding of nature and our experiential processes of salvation.

The following premises function as foundational to the development of a balanced and functional theory of faith.

2.1.1 Any society comprises a complex web of power relationships that usually protects the interests of the strongest individuals or group. A second consequence is that they operate in the dominant institutions which in many periods in history had either been the state in the sense of the broadest demarcation of civil society or a major religious institution (or a bundling of religious institutions) which to a more or lesser extent cooperates with the other Institution or group which also possesses real power within such a societal web. Every time the point of gravity of the power matrix shifts and turns, the dynamics of state and religion shift accordingly though it is hardly noticeable to the ordinary citizen. The politics of power is always active in State and Religion for every era in historical time and needed to be recognised in the behaviour of leaders and ordinary people (Hall 1977:197-236).



2.1.2. Religious models making provision for the continuum of “exterior” to “interior” saviours with multiple other variants in different religions, are essentially an integral part of the developmental continuum in human spiritual growth processes and must be catered for in any sound philosophical-religious system. Recognising and measuring these factors against an alleged primordial tradition is necessary because we might rediscover them in the theologies of Jesus and Paul as well as to ascertain their impact on Early Christianity.

2.1.3. Paul's Christology and soteriology are coherently based on his personal, cognitive and spiritual development which is inclusive of prevailing diverse cultural and religious beliefs of his day and is primarily influenced by his understanding of the teachings and life of Jesus. Given the complexity of his mission of bringing Jews, “God-fearers” and all sorts of “Gentiles” from many different backgrounds into his brand of an universal Christianity while living in a world ruled by the Roman emperor, another “Son of God”. The emperor with his own temples and circles of priests demanded reverence to the emperor and the empire. In the close connection of emperor and empire, political mavericks were not tolerated. Paul's measure of success warrants a comprehensive analysis and was definitely not just another sacrificial cult on the world map of religions.

2.1.4. In conclusion, neither Jesus nor Paul was champions of third party (godly/human) blood sacrifices as a final solution towards atonement. Neither of an easy atonement by “administering belief” in sacramental solutions without any serious obligation to support the growth and development of spirituality in terms of a Spirit driven life of love and service in the (new) Kingdom of God. Therefore the belief in a blood sacrifice through a salvific scheme of “mercy” and “gratuity” is with great difficulty ascribed to the teachings of either Jesus or Paul. The doctrine of the godly/human sacrifice is a later construction based on a misunderstanding and a simplification for the sake of growing the membership without the burden of moral and spiritual obligations. By using verses selectively and metaphors out of their time bound context, both the Roman Church and Protestant leaders of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, later ignored the necessary processes and experiential patterns of spirituality usually accompanying spiritual transformation and serious life commitment.

Jesus as the ultimate servant of God was living proof of God's original intention with mankind. His fearless but humble life of love and service; his inspiring spiritual teachings; his certain death in the service of unwelcome truths about a merciful God and the real Kingdom which defines the practices and beliefs of the Temple Cult as well as his warnings that we must deliver the fruits that befit a child of God, are virtually ignored in the soteriological equation of present day Christian churches. It is not difficult to understand why we are living in a world where human made civil and criminal laws are again seen as the answer to an open and “advanced” world society and nobody wants to take

personal responsibility for the general decline in ethics and empathy, morality and compassion. It is not surprising that apocalyptic phases emerge in which supporters of world religions expect their sole salvation from God, especially in eras of political turmoil and economic hardship and recession.

The seemingly universal and important religious need for salvation, based mainly on God's mercy and the necessary values and moral commitment that have the ability to transform people and their worlds, seems to be also the driving force and focus of the theology of Paul and Christianity. Salvation as it is used in this thesis is not only based on certain beliefs and belief patterns but is mostly acknowledged and recognised by processes of spiritual growth and fulfilment of patterns of experience that eventually lead to spiritual understanding, illumination and personal transformation. There is therefore a need of living a moral and compassionate life while we experience our localised bodiliness of being here, meaningfully through our personal contribution to a better world. In this state we feel ourselves as at peace with God, oneself and others and it is normally the final aim of the human spiritual quest for many spiritual pilgrims.

## **2.2. A theory of hermeneutics and a theory of faith**

Human development is a complex and continuous process of which the level of maturity attainable is influenced by the level of cultural openness, the level of scientific development, philosophical integration of different knowledge systems as well as the level of acquired wisdom in a particular society. In a strong sense it is also influenced by the individual's freedom to experiment and therefore, by the level of freedom from coercion of thought and speech.

This social freedom is again influenced by our personal capabilities, education and personal genetics as well as the mentioned personal environmental dynamics. It is therefore evident that the traditional "wisdom" of a fundamentalist or strong idealistic culture influences the majority of people in a profound, if not definitive way; only the strongest and the exceptionally talented individuals escape from this social coercion to become totally individuated and therefore mature and fully integrated human beings, subject only to internal authority. Due to this powerful hold of culture and religion on the individual, new knowledge and insights must constantly be sought and integrated with honest and unbiased interpretations of the factors that will influence the composite wisdom of the specific tradition. This implies that we must understand the dynamic forces that constitute proper and relevant hermeneutics, as well as the nature of the complexity.

The fulfilment of salvation and salvific processes as the final aim of a spiritual quest is a multidimensional and multifarious state of human affairs which constitutes the culmination of a complex web of facts, perceptions, beliefs and practices which we want to tackle and describe with

the 'best practice' methods available. An approach of tackling the problematic in the investigation is found in Gadamer's 'hermeneutical theory of understanding' with its strong emphasis on the intersubjectivity of human subjectivities, strongly undergirded by the linguisticity of reality (Gadamer 1979:432-433). As a second approach I will be making use of is that of Van Niekerk from whom the descriptive term of a 'theory of faith' is borrowed, albeit slightly differently used in the thesis (1996:1).

For Gadamer, therefore, the universal task of hermeneutics lies in its task of studying 'all experiences of understanding'. He writes:

"What I am describing is the mode of the whole human experience of the world. I call this experience hermeneutical, for the process we are describing is repeated continually throughout our familiar experience." (Gadamer 1976:15)

Without belabouring the concept of hermeneutics too much we will just look at a few specifically relevant definitions and discussions for a topic like soteriology that is be riddled with historic baggage from many different religious systems.

Gadamer, according to Linge (1976: xii) also said,

"hermeneutics has its origin in breaches in intersubjectivity, this bridging of a picture, message or between the 'subjectivities' of a person in the present, from a person in the past, can only be complex, taking into account the extent, the breadth and depth of knowledge of the individual and culture as well as belief systems in place at the time."

Gadamer sets out by assuming the primacy of linguisticity – *Sprachlichkeit* - as the inescapable medium of hermeneutical interpretation and historical understanding. Gadamer was one of the strongest advocates of the linguistic turn in the 20<sup>th</sup> century in which the movement was to step away from pure logicity. Language is the universal medium of understanding. Language is the basic condition for hermeneutical and historical interpretation, understanding and communication in the social domain (Derksen 1983:11-13; 245). Gadamer encapsulates all areas of understanding, including all the sciences, into what he calls the 'communication community' that constitutes for him the 'hermeneutic universe' – an interpersonal universe of understanding (Derksen 1983:246). He employs a double focus, which is another way of saying that the horizons of at least two different cultural contexts are been set within the hermeneutic universe as temporal horizons of 'now' and the 'then'.

In order to understand the expression of ideas over an expanse of time and across cultural boundaries, there must be, in Gadamer's term, a 'fusion of horizons' – *Horizonverschmelzung*. This

fusion of horizons is a metaphorical meeting of understanding minds – including translation - through the changing but interconnecting medium of language (Gadamer 1979:273ff). In trying to meet the necessary conditions that make meeting of minds and translation possible Gadamer, following Heidegger, has tried to rehabilitate the concept of 'prejudice'. Prejudice in the sense of a shared or 'fore-structure of knowledge' forms the basis of an intellectual and linguistic continuum or tradition (1979:235; Heidegger 1962:191). Language must accommodate a meaningful dialogue with the past. Only a naïve and pre-critical intentionality will deplore such dialogue as a series of unfortunate misreading. Existentially, there can be no 'intersubjectivity' beyond language in some sense. What is left is interpretation: the practical and localised effort to gain that measure of understanding circumscribed by the 'hermeneutical circle'.

A further aspect of this phenomenon is brought out by Basil Wile (Nineham 1976:312) who points out that different periods are dominated by different interests, and that these interests control not only the sort of questions asked but also the sort of answers that satisfy the people; the sort of explanation by which they are satisfied. By anchoring their various practices in the will of the gods, or the wisdom and experience of earlier generations, they provide assurances that the practices in question are in accordance with the nature of things and can be relied on to contribute to the well-being of the community. Examples are sacrifices for forgiveness, slavery as "normal" societal phenomena and other discriminatory practices as if it is warranted by the inherent incapability of the person or group.

Halbibavchs (Nineham 1976:312) goes so far as to say,

"Society is in essence a memory because the corporate memory so largely controls the beliefs, institutions and practices of a society that it is impossible to understand, or participate in, the life and faith of a society apart from its memories and myths. That is to say, through socialization, in a thousand subtle ways, he will be encouraged or, more accurately, compelled not merely to learn and understand the institutions and meanings of his community, but to interiorise them and make them his own."

It is also important to note a further complication, that this historical "realities" can be multilayered and multifaceted, as in fact, is now known about the history behind the biblical gospel narratives. Their view on the world and on mankind being so distant and pre-scientific that certain things cannot even make sense anymore and we need total re-interpretation of their "essences" by understanding the meaning of the story behind the story and the values it wants to communicate. We need to penetrate to the fundamental concern of the writer, what he means and what he claims. Despite the complexities discussed above of cultural pressures and traditions, one must still bear in mind that socialization is not totally a one-sided affair.

Erasmus van Niekerk (1996:3) pointed out that,

“Human beings are not passive material and they participate in the process of social formation to a lesser or greater degree. It is therefore also important to take into consideration the writer’s intention, interest and character as well as his psychological mode and mood at the time of writing.”

Furthermore, Van Niekerk says that this “mode or mood factor is much more important in understanding human nature than the resultant communications that follow” (1996:3). He wants to bring to our attention the complexity of human activities; there is no action that can be described as consisting of “pure” reason, “pure” faith, “pure” imagination, and “pure” emotion. In fact, this holds true for any other human descriptive category. Human activity is always a complex, interrelated affair.

Van Niekerk (1996:8) likens his theory of differentiation to an extreme mechanistic metaphor of a gigantic Oshkosh heavy vehicle’s gearbox. “The changing of the gears signifies the change to a specific, periodic dominant mode and mood of being.” You change to a specific gear because of a cluster of internal and external reasons, represented by the other “cooperative gears” in the gearbox. The important point is that although a dominant mode/mood is engaged, most of the many gears in the gearbox are always engaged and doing their thing, although in a different ratio to each other. Van Niekerk continues,

“This complicated episodic emphasis of thinking, while the rest are involved; verbalizing while thinking is part of the rest, believing while thinking and verbalizing are part of the involved rest. The change to a next emphasis entails the loosening of the previous emphasis set-up and the setting up of the next involvement in a different ratio. Before one gets too fixated and too slotted in, fragments come free and a new event takes us to another gear. If you furthermore couple this differential complexity to the concept of phase of being, then the phrase of ‘I believe’ in its experiential, episodic understanding puts on a new dimension of change in tune with the implication that on the continuum of our life’s journey, no two successive experiences could be exactly the same.” (1996:8)

Therefore, if you now want to convey certain messages to a group where the members differ in their level of understanding and spiritual development you might have to choose different metaphors and explanations so that you do not lose one or more individuals or a whole sub group, through your choice of words. The fact is that no two of Paul’s statements about law, faith and works could possibly have exactly the same meaning. They will all differ in a final or material way depending on the situation, the composition of the audience and his personal gearing or intentions at that stage.

Therefore, van Niekerk (1996:3) admits to a feeling of discomfort if one human field of experience is the constant basis of all other positions,

“The remedy is to involve a differential philosophy to experiences by realizing and to concede to the reality of episodic changing of gears, in which a mode of experience or cluster of modes is only episodically filtered through another mode of experience or it is episodically locked into or Velcro-ed to another field of experience. Another important implication and danger of one human experiential field and its associated theories can become a funnel for constructs of all other theories and experiences.”

These observations of van Niekerk are specifically important in the interpretation of Paul's letters because each of them addresses certain problems or issues that he thinks needs clarification in a certain community of believers. To construct a unified theology from any one letter will be a grave mistake. It will be more productive to look for a common story or belief system that informs Paul's different stories to different people. However, a discourse and the words used in it, is always within a network of concepts and the presumed understanding thereof.

Despite many efforts of “corrective translations”, there are still obvious terms of Mystery Religions in some of the New Testament books, especially in Paul's earlier letters. There are unfortunately few scholars that follow the ancient esoteric and mystical traditions as an interpretational approach in a systematic or faith theoretical way and this thesis is a humble effort in this direction.

A fresh translation by Schonfield (1998), who tried to honour original terminology, shows this phenomenon more clearly. If one takes into account that these letters have been copied many times before we arrive at the oldest extant manuscripts, this complicates and compounds the problem even further. We will also see that a freer, broader translation of Jesus' words from Aramaic texts opens up a wonderful new world of meaning, much more in harmony with the mystical and Gnostic strands of Christianity.

Gadamer's horizon in front of the text consists of the reader's specific qualities plus the cultural horizon and biases from which he operates. All previous personal conditioning might influence him, plus the complication of his own predominant or periodic gearing and biases. If one could be balanced enough to realise your preferences and “gearing” and can also make allowances for those of the writer, a rich but variable and meaningful dialogue will be established. This “fusion of horizons”, in Gadamer's terminology, is the essential mechanism of learning and understanding (Linge 1976: xix). For Gadamer the meaning of the text builds upon what he calls the “excess of meaning” that it finds in the text, and excess that goes beyond the author's intention, explicit or implicit, of what he created. Every generation or Epoch will have to understand a text handed down to it in its own way, for it is subject to the whole of the tradition in which it has a material interest in

and in which it seeks to understand itself. This understanding according to Gadamer is not a reproductive procedure, but rather always a productive one. It suffices to say that one understands differently when one understands at all, especially if the understanding of van Niekerk (1996:3) is honoured that human periodical differentiation of mode and mood will add to the complexity represented in Gadamer's scheme.

There is therefore no canonical or final interpretation of any text or any artwork; they stand open to ever-new comprehensions and meanings given to them by each reader or observer. Furthermore, if we want to understand the belief system of Jesus and Paul we need to look at all consequent belief systems that claim their teachings as their own foundation and not just ones of the later more powerful or dominant traditions.

The old truth that it is more convincing to others to live a good life than only to preach about a good life remains relevant. If one works with many different texts and ideas, claimed to be "inspired", then it will be more productive for classification and evaluation, to look for and identify the lifestyle and values that support the different spiritual concepts and practices and to correlate them as an integral part of the understanding needed from both an idealistic and pragmatic point of view. We also need to try to identify and understand the "buzzwords" or private jargon or code words that were used in closed or threatened societies if we want to understand the core of their belief systems. It seems that both, too much and too little, were read into some remarks and buzzwords used by certain persons and groups and we will have to get clarity on what they meant at the time within their own peculiar framework of understanding.

In all spiritual traditions and most philosophical traditions, followers normally work with the ideal of God's will for human development and behaviour as an integral element of human salvation and our function within an orderly and free society. Therefore, different opinions of respected, wise and spiritual persons and groups in time are also studied for their opinions on mankind and what they thought about the ideal human being in an ideal society. If we cannot marry human spirituality and practical commonsense in a world that is worth living in, to decent and productive religious belief systems, then theories about God and salvation is useless in any case.

I therefore strongly believe a valid and necessary hermeneutic perspective is the one undergirded by the notion of the "ideal" human being that is professed to be the heirs of the image of God and endowed with a cosmic spiritual orientation, which should again regulate our attitude, behaviour as well as our spirituality. This idealistic "view from below" should be considered next to human reports on revelation as a necessary control to fraudulent and coercive revelations and interpretations of "Gods will" in dogma and in "holy" books.

The cosmic spiritual feeling of the heirs of the image of God which cannot be made clear but should be kept alive is described by Albert Einstein (in Lesikar 1999:3):

“It is very difficult to elucidate this cosmic spiritual feeling to anyone who is entirely without it.... The religious geniuses of all ages have been distinguished by this kind of religious (spiritual) feeling, which knows no dogma... In my view, it is the most important function of art and science, to awaken this feeling and keep it alive in those who are receptive to it.”

Lastly we need to acknowledge the knowledge available at the time as well as the intelligence and moral behaviour of the social and religious leaders under investigation as useful tools to really understand their teachings. Therefore, a hermeneutic tool continuously used in this study is an evaluative perspective of the ideal, knowledgeable, rational and moral human being, operating from kindness and with enough common sense, as an additional way of evaluating the ideas under scrutiny. Especially in the cases of Jesus and Paul, we at least need to respect them as special people; if we think their thoughts and deeds are worth studying, we should not blindly take for granted possible absurdities and irrational beliefs ascribed to them by lesser human beings within different coercive groups later in history when they were not around to defend themselves. We should at least give Jesus and Paul the benefit of the doubt instead of assuming ignorance on their behalf on well known worldly, scientific or philosophical issues at the time and be very cautious to accept opinions from reports of people with a narrow and more restricted understanding of the great variety but disparate textual evidence on Jesus and Paul. Various schools of scholars in later times persisted with strong scientifically based perspectives by which a narrowly constructed Jesus and Paul from the texts are presented as the definitive interpretation readers of the Bible have to follow. A good example of a narrowly constructed image of Jesus and Paul in which the esoteric and mystic dimensions of the Jesus and Paul story are underplayed emerges in the newly published work of I.J.J. Spangenberg, *Jesus van Nasaret* (2009).

As we have discussed above, language and terminology can convey different meanings to different people and therefore we must clarify what is meant by any author if he/she uses a specific concept. Only the most important ones will be discussed and hopefully logical deduction will qualify others

### **2.3. Conceptual Analysis of Some Relevant Concepts**

It is important that we share as accurately as possible what we mean by certain concepts and words as to have a productive and valid discussion.



### **2.3.1 Spirituality and Mysticism**

Because the word spirituality is used so variously, and it is very often used as a synonym for religion, it is necessary to define the writer's use of this term. Spirituality has to do with an inner, experiential and intuitive aspect of people that relates to our innate need to understand and to derive meaning from our existence in the world and cosmos; there must be more to life than gratification of the senses and the accumulation of money. Spirituality and mysticism is often coupled in the face of complexity; who and what is this Power that could conceptualise and drive the miracles of nature, cosmos and life; a feeling that our personal destiny is somehow coupled to these wondrous and mysterious realities and can one understand or communicate with this awesome Power that organises all.

Concepts and experiences of awe and wonder, piety, reverence, mystery, an unspecified longing to understand, unconditional love as well as wondrous peaks in an awareness resulting in a special "knowledge" that we somehow are part of an orderly, mysterious Unity. This feeling of "no self" and unity with this All is said to be coupled with joy and exuberance by most Mystics. Many possible combinations of these mentioned experiences can be present at different times and it is mostly coupled to a state of heightened awareness as well to an intuitive dimension that somehow feels that these experiences are true and real.

Since these feelings and experiences are inherent in all mature human beings it is my contention that we must steer clear of special cases and types of spirituality such as paranormal phenomena and altered states of consciousness induced by physical exercises or the use of psychogenic substances when discussing normal human spirituality. Any altered state of consciousness that overrides ones sense of personal responsibility to maintain decent human behaviour is not part of meaningful human spirituality and should be called something else.

Due to personal differences and cultural pressures, spirituality may lead to certain religious orientations or preferences and are coupled to your present spiritual and cognitive development. In a broader sense mysticism seems to involve human awareness of the subtle aspects of existence and ultimate values, accompanied by awe and wonder of the mysteries of life, the universe and of the existence of an awesome Power. It virtually always seems to include a feeling of interconnectedness with the rest of creation in the mature stages of spiritual development.

Victor Frankl (1988:38) reports that the results of a survey of schoolchildren in Vienna brought to light that eighty per cent of the children already felt that life was meaningless. Both happiness and success are mere substitutes for fulfilment and that is why the pleasure principle, as well as the will

to power, is a mere derivative of the will to meaning. So, also, is self-actualization only an effect of meaning and fulfilment (1988:38).

Albert Einstein quoted in Lesikar, also related spirituality to the search for meaning,

“The man who regards his life as meaningless is not merely unhappy but hardly fit for life.” (Lesikar 1999:3)

Furthermore, Frankl observed that,

“If people cannot feel themselves part of a larger cosmic picture, if they are nothing more than a cosmic accident, then life becomes empty and the existential vacuum phenomenon becomes obvious in materialistic pursuits and power play, pre-occupation with pleasure, sex and entertainment in an effort not to face this lack of personal purpose and spirituality.” (1988:50)

For Ellison and Smith (1991:37), the human spirit is what enables and motivates us. It stimulates us to search for the supernatural and search for a meaning that transcends everyday life. It is the spirit that synthesises the total personality and provides some sense, energizing direction and order. Spirit is used here as the intangible or invisible aspects of human nature consisting specifically of the facilities of intellect, agency (or will) and affection or emotion. Frankl adds to this,

“Meaning and spirituality are also personal in that no two persons share exactly the same genetics or personal experiences. People have to decide for themselves whether they are going to base their responsibility to life on their own consciousness or on society, nature, God or a combination of them. Meaning cannot be given arbitrarily but must be found responsibly and sought for conscientiously.” (1988:63)

The last aspect in our spiritual quest for meaning is that there seems to be a general consensus that true human spirituality is fulfilled in an active life of service and work that also transcends our own personal interests. Spirituality and mysticism, is what open us up to connection and relationships with our inner self, others, nature and the cosmos and with whatever else the individual may take as the ultimate Power; Cosmic Conscience, the Infinite, the Unknowable or God. This relationship helps us to define our own essence and helps us to take up the challenge of life in a meaningful way. Our spirituality will also inform our philosophy of life, which could culminate in our own metaphysical or speculative spiritual philosophy or theory of faith. Alternatively, one could join a religion, which satisfies this need, depending on our personal insights, temperament and stage of development.

As to the reality of economic survival and the plight of the spiritual person, the principle for competitiveness and success is spelled out by an unknown author in the following as, “Nice guys

finish last”, one would do well to remember that the spiritually orientated people should run the race differently, encouraging all to complete the race and to encourage synergy instead of egoistic competitiveness.

The notion of Mysticism sometimes means different things for different people. Errico says of mysticism that,

“...the word itself derives from ‘mystery’, ‘secret.’ A dictionary definition of the term ‘mysticism’ is as follows: ‘A spiritual discipline aiming at direct union of communion with reality of God through deep meditation of contemplation.’” (2002:46)

Errico's own way in describing Mysticism is,

“Knowledge gained through subjective, intuitive experience. It is a way of *knowing* that goes beyond ordinary circumstances, persons, places, and things. In other words, it is *knowledge* discerned through transcendental realizations.” (2002:46)

Errico further distinguishes biblical mysticism as of two kinds. One form he has called mundane mysticism and the other is an inner, spiritual form of mysticism. Mundane mysticism seems to be the category of the so called paranormal gifts and popular “new age” quests which may include the biochemical phenomena of certain primal religions through exercise and trance. Inner spiritual mysticism is for Errico manifested through the prophets’ inner sensitivity to the moral climate and spiritual fibre of their nation, they could discern what kind of discipline and correction was needed. (2002:47)

Rudolf Steiner (1995:xix) asserted that one can also describe inner spiritual mysticism as intuitive knowledge derived from serious intellectual engagement with a problem, followed by a period of *subconscious activity* that also engage our memory and previously learned experiences resulting in a intuitive “gut feel”, certainty or wisdom, sometimes called gnosis. This would also perhaps be a good description of the creative process, but the very important “subconscious activity” is now directed to an ethical and moral level and can result in a life changing re-evaluation of values and of consequent moral behaviour. It is then normally ascribed to the actions of the “Image of God” or as I like to understand it as a “well developed conscience”, latent in us all because of the indwelling Spirit in mankind. If we dearly want the Spirit to manifest it will guide us to becoming what we should be a Human Being as we will later on discuss in more detail.

Douglas Harding classifies different types of mystical experiences in three main groups. Firstly what he calls “Popular Mysticism” which include, mysterious, odd, weird and beyond belief, occult and incompatible with science, kind of experiences. Secondly the “Peak experiences” type of mysticism

which seems to group the various and mostly religiously explained insights and euphoria that accompany these short lived, non repeatable experiences. Thirdly, the more “authentic” experience, in his view, because it is repeatable at will and at any time and by any willing person and it describes the realisation when the mystic is looking within in a conscious and disciplined way. This is described commonly as the awareness of being “no-thing” and the “residing” in the “void”, “free from all qualities or content or functions” which he therefore prefer to call “*anti-mysticism* and certainly *anti-mystification*.” (2002:40)

This more “understandable” descriptions of the different kind of mysticism also resonates with Richard Rose who personally identify more with the Harding’s latter description and advises the spiritual seeker of making the journey within, his/her highest priority. What can you learn about God if you do not even know the real self? Rose accentuate that you first and foremost have to realise that what you think is “you” is normally only a human robot driven by your mind, ideas and memories with its accompanying emotional programs. You have to deconstruct the “un-truths” in you and your “reality” continuously and as a way of life, to get progressively nearer to truth and personal Realisation from pure awareness, which will then result in authentic well understood mystical experiences (1979:i). Easier said then done, but at least wise advice and a seemingly more worthy process than some others?

### **2.3.2 Religion and Philosophy**

The reason why these two concepts are grouped together is that both are better understood in relation to each other. Human life depends literally and figuratively on the acquisition of knowledge and wisdom, where knowledge of the functional type relates more to our physical survival, while wisdom may have one leg in this life and in meaningful relationships and the other in a spiritual dimension.

According to Lesikar, Albert Einstein once commented that a person who asks after the meaning of life has already started on his spiritual and religious quest (1999:3). At a fundamental level, we could say that philosophy aims at personal wellbeing, mental health and a meaningful life while religion concentrates primarily on God and salvation although both may have spiritual dimensions. Religion has much in common with philosophy, although there are very crucial differences that we need to clarify; we have to clear these concepts from the woolliness that normally clouds them.

The Bible does not furnish us with a definition of religion, or even with a description of it, though it contains enough wisdom, communicated to us through the prophets and mystics, to realise what

God requires of us as human beings. In the New Testament the Epistle to the Hebrews contains this indicator to religion:

“Wherefore receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us have grace, whereby we may offer service well-pleasing to God with reverence and awe.” (12:28)

In another New Testament monograph, James (1:27) adds specific elements to his definition:

“Pure religion and undefiled before God and Father is this, to visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unspotted from the world.”

We will later also contemplate other opinions on the type of religion that God demands from us according to the prophets and Jesus that is in alignment with those mentioned here.

As an opening remark in this discussion, one should expect that philosophy normally works within the sphere and ambience of science, observation and verifiable knowledge, using reason and logic as instruments of constructing a valid theory, while avoiding, as far as possible, beliefs, revelations and metaphysical speculation. Religion, on the other hand, normally starts with revelations and beliefs and is sometimes invoking science and reason to explain or defend underlying beliefs. In extreme positions says Barr, one would expect that if the “Scriptures” and science are at loggerheads, the religious leaders ignore science and uphold the scriptural “truths”, while the philosopher backs the more scientific argument (1977:102).

The most fundamental difference is that for the philosopher, as for the scientist, knowledge is always provisional and open to correction or improvement. On the other hand, for most traditionally religious people, their Sacred Scriptures consists of selected writings, which they regard as infallible with timeless truths. In the case of the Bible this selection is called the “canon” or measure, which is believed to be divinely inspired and inerrant, and it contains all needed knowledge. The Bible in the ambience of a more fundamentalistically inclined approach is a super, unchangeable handbook of life and afterlife, not open for critical discussion or revision, seemingly understandable only to particularly trained theologians coming from certain seminaries (Barr 1977:102f).

Philosophy is aimed at dealing with the fundamental uncertainties of life on the level of thought, facts and logic. If human life is seen as a meaningful project that confronts each human being, then we need to know the rules and choose our game plan. Our life policy is derived from our philosophy of life and functions to guide our decisions and actions. According to Lou Marinoff, Socrates said that, “An unexamined life is not worth living”, encouraging us to know ourselves in our search for truth, and meaning, while Aristotle said: “An unplanned life is not worth examining” (1999:v), reminding us that knowledge must be ordered and correlated into a meaningful plan to be of any use. It was the

ideal of many philosophers and scientists over the ages to rid humanity of the crippling and dehumanizing effect of ignorance and superstition.

The abdication of reason in favour of blind obedience to the gods was and still is, not in the interest of human intellectual and spiritual development. Religion in the form of a national cult was mostly managed to the sole benefit of the secular and priestly rulers and also represents the oldest and most powerful business in history. We can deduce that science and philosophy ask different questions while they both look for truth, through fact and reason. Science does empirical research from controlled observation and experimentation while philosophy uses this result to ask its own questions. Science inquires into the “laws”, the “causes” as “facts” while philosophy asks the “why” questions; looking for the reasons and “meaning” behind occurrences. Philosophy also does this by the methodology of independent investigation while it is also a theoretical stance coupled with rational justification, but remaining open for revision or correction.

None of these principles is applicable to religion from within its own ranks and when doing theology. Religions start with a specific body of beliefs, the fundamental stance is that of a faithful believer, rational justification is not the departure point, divine revelation is, and furthermore it is not open for revision to any significant extent.

Everybody has a philosophy, it may be crude, ad hoc, borrowed for the moment or well informed, rational and consequent, either way, it will influence the way one looks at himself, others, the world and, if he chooses, the supra natural. The point is that atheists and agnostics may not have an official recognisable religion but their philosophy and spirituality is reflected in their behaviour. According to Branden,

“Reason is the facility that makes distinctions and connections, that abstracts and unites, that differentiates and integrates. Reason generates general principles from concrete fact and relates new knowledge or information to our existing context of knowledge. Its guide is the law of non-contradiction...Reason is highest manifestation of the integrative function inherent in life itself. Reason is the principle of integration made conscious. The quest of reason – this can hardly be stated often enough – is for the non-contradictory integration of experience... *Whoever continually strives to achieve a clearer and clearer vision of reality and his proper place in it – whoever is pulled forward by a passion for clarity – is, to that extent, leading a spiritual life.*” (1977:39) (Emphasis JAG)

The latter part of Brandon’s description of reason as simultaneously part of the quest for a clearer vision of reality and being pulled forward by a passion for clarity as leading a spiritual life draws many agnostics and atheists into the cluster of spiritual persons. In an atheist world, coming of age as our world, we are no longer called to look unto a *deus ex machina* for deliverance and salvation

and as answer to our questions but we experience God's blessings in the midst of God's absence and our spiritual quest in the world (Bonhoeffer 1978:360f).

Our singular spiritual experiences are no longer to be judged and validated by an outward and outside merit disseminated by God who has to use either a whole array of ecclesial priests or a Holy Book through which the paradigm of the godly/human sacrifice has to be effectuated. This may sound paradoxical and is to a large extent in terms of the traditional view of a perspective of faith as a divine or semi-divine mode through which people make contact with God.

The medieval philosopher and theologian Thomas Aquinas' view was that faith is a virtue added to the intellect. Faith could not be irrational because God is not irrational (Aquinas 1948:655). In Aquinas' view faith is supernatural and reason natural, the supernatural area is built on top of and adjoining the natural area of life. Audi (1995:31) comments:

"Thomas holds that it is impossible for those things revealed to us by God through faith to be opposed to those we can discover by using reason. For then one or the other would have to be false; and since both come to us from God, it is not possible..."

Thomas operating with a double order (*duplex ordo*) or two level sense making view of God-humanity-nature could only present his system through a paradoxical validation. On the one hand, faith is no longer really human but divinely transformed faith from above and reason no longer divine but human with very little of the divine built into it. In Aquinas' scheme faith can be known by the light of divine revelation and reason by the light of natural reason (Aquinas 1948:5). Thought and reason work together but also separate and on different levels. On the surface the outcome for the Thomistic sense making scheme is that the outcome for faith is always divinely biased and supernatural while the outcome for reason should be the result of unbiased and logical natural reasoning free from any restraints.

In a wholesome view of reality one's sense making revolves around God, humanity and the natural world. The Thomas' two levels theory of supernatural faith mainly centred on the divine and natural reason expressive of rationality as a human ability and capacity has to actually collapse into each other before it could stake a claim of being of the wholesome sense making sort. In moving away from a two level view, Van Niekerk proposes that in a wholesome perspective of human faith the pointers of God, humanity and the natural world should play an equal and equitable role in the reflection processes of theology as a theory of faith,

"That theology been seen as a perspective of faith, from which one can speak about God, humanity and the world. This is an inclusive, comprehensive stance where faith should be seen as the

spectacles through which one looks to be able to speak about God, humanity, and the world. It is important that we acknowledge the fact that faith is something essentially human.” (1988:155)

Van Niekerk furthermore, reminds us that it is human beings who believe, not God or the Spirit. In this sense as a theoretical perspective of faith, theology is pertinently concerned with such things as the church as a social structure, the sacraments, various creeds, spirituality and the church’s role in society. It is concerned with formulating a functional image of God, humanity and the world in terms of faith (1988:128). According to van Niekerk a more comprehensive definition of religion would be,

“...an indication of an overall system of ideas, concepts, values and experiences; while the term faith or belief functions as a specific and particular segment or perspective of the religious ideological whole. Religion is directed at ‘salvation’, ultimate meaning and destination, the supreme good.” (1988:129)

From a human perspective, personal spiritual awareness and experience could be to some the most important facet of their religion, while others would rather prefer a more social and emotional gratifying religion that is governed by clear rules, while others may prefer an integrative religion, which will also function as part of their philosophy of everyday life. Obviously one will normally find an endless combination of all these perspectives. A specific religion normally starts from the exceptional spiritual capabilities of a founder that resulted from a personal sacred experience, which is later generalized into a social religion with rules and regulations. Once the religion is formalized, institutional power struggles become part of the dynamics. Thereafter, you either accept the total package, or leave on own account or are thrown out. Spirituality is therefore a universal human attribute that is coupled with experience and growth and therefore also very personal. Religion is normally a close system of beliefs and practices specific to a person or group which may also have spiritual components but it must normally be sanctioned or interpreted within the teachings of the specific religion.

The form of religion that was regarded by the philosophers, Gnostics and mystics as the most productive was exemplified by spiritually inclined people who are driven by an inner intuitive knowledge or conviction, based in spiritual longing and awareness of the mystery of being, not totally devoid of rationality and enriched by personal experience arising from various forms of contemplation of the mysteries of life. Spiritual leaders, like Moses, Jesus and Paul developed a personal conviction and practised a “personalised version” of one of the broader religious or metaphysical traditions and may even accept spiritual clues from more diverse or distant traditions before accepting its wisdom as part of their own frame of reference. The important aspect is the quality of spirituality, which at the level of an inner, esoteric and personal level seems to be quite similar to all great mystical traditions as we will see later. The particulars of their stories, myths,



legends and gospels as the specific carriers of the group's ideas, could differ substantially within indifferent traditions.

### **2.3.3. Faith**

As the cornerstone of the interpretation of Pauline theology hinges on his understanding and use of the term faith it will be prudent to discuss this term in its many different applications and from different perspectives. No theory of faith or religious thought system can be conclusively proved or disproved scientifically and therefore they all belong to the category of faith or even metaphysical speculation. The real problem with faith shows itself in the concern of Erasmus van Niekerk,

“When one mode of looking and explaining, one gear in the Oshkosh gearbox, becomes the predominant gear and the funnel through which everything else is forced. Then faith starts to get a life of its own and wants to dictate its specific mode of understanding to all the other modes of being.” (1996:6)

In our “beliefs” and ideas concerning nature, science and technology where proven facts are not yet available, our rational gear should be the main secondary gear, working in conjunction with our beliefs, whilst in that mode of inquiry. When we come to the theories and beliefs about creation, it is impossible to verify motive and conditions before and during the reported events, the secondary gears then range from creative imagination to deduced logic depending on the personal disposition and the cultural, ideological bias that informed the personal beliefs of the individual at that stage of his total development.

We can again visually represent the different degrees of faith on a continuum starting with faith, as an extension of factual knowledge; as extrapolating facts to realistic expectations, where knowledge fails us and cannot inform us any further; as an intuitive type of knowledge, based partly on factual knowledge and partly on faith of what is best or what we were taught, in a supra logical framework. Another perspective is faith from hope, which can also be compatible with a belief system of a specific religion, i.e., while I work on my problem diligently and efficiently, I have high hopes, or faith in a positive outcome. On the other hand, one could indulge in a childish hope for the same positive outcome which is based only on faith in a supernatural intervention representative of a belief system and attitude of reduced responsibility and effort towards the outcome.

Faith within most religions also has at least three modalities. Firstly, a faith based either on a “revelation” to somebody else and was recorded in a “holy book”, which is not open to reinterpretation and has to be accepted as is. You then have to subscribe to, or buy into the existing theory and explanations.

Secondly, that you personally had a profound, or unique religious experience, like the one Jesus had in the Jordan River and Gethsemane or Paul had on the road to Damascus, which influences and transforms your whole life in a definitive way.

Thirdly, there is faith from ignorance and superstition, which is normally based on the fear of “unknown powers” and often misused by others to create irrational, imaginative constructs which they use to coerce or manipulate the gullible.

Uncritical and uninformed people can easily fall prey to beliefs such as everything is controlled by blind chance, or, “our” revelations is the only correct ones to bring you to salvation, or that God will provide, no matter what I contribute. You are then stuck in one gear, which normally leads you to a dead end and frustration and may cause many others to suffer because of these simplistic beliefs within the complex reality of present day life. Healthy faith will have an element of reason in the sense of a reasonable expectation as intuitive “logic” based on related facts which emerged through different experiences and sound reasoning. Much of intuitive reasoning have a range which is beyond science and is not incarcerated within the narrow realm of scientific experimentation.

Faith that is fixed in non-negotiable presuppositions will eventually find itself out of date or out of step with reality and would then depend more and more on coercion to sustain itself. Human faith in a technologically driven world will be partly intellectual and will carefully weigh propositions not yet proven, or not yet clear. Propositions or beliefs should seem reasonable or at least originate from balanced, trustworthy people or institutions with proven integrity. Faith is therefore for most people a “gut feel” based on logic and knowledge that could be substantiated or strengthened by own experience or the testimonies of “reliable others”. Faith however, that rests solely on the testimonies of others without a rational, intellectual, experiential or intuitive input from within is only a second-hand faith. Second hand faith in the sense an uncritical adopted theory of faith or theology will be void of internal motivation and of worthwhile fruits and will not result in a living and dynamic personal religion. These observations represent the central problem of the sterility of most social, dogmatic religions and explain the lack of moral fruits of societies which professed to be Christian or some other organised religion based on a set of beliefs alone.

The most important aspect that we need to contemplate about the concept of someone’s “faith” is its real or implied content and its meaning in time as well as within its cultural context. Statements like faith in Jesus, in Christ, in his name, in the cross, in his blood, in his resurrection, in his ransom, like Abraham etc., must have had specific faith content and this content needs to be unpacked to see whether it makes any sense for us now. When we discuss the Aramaic and Syrian texts, their

metaphors and interpretations of idioms, it seems to challenge many present day “Christian” concepts derived from them.

#### **2.3.4 Laws, ethics and morality**

The way we differentiate between these related words need to be clarified. We see laws as rules and regulations imposed on people and societies by a governing body or institution and it is mandatory that everybody obey them as promulgated. Non confirmation will be punishable by their enforcing agents. Ethics on the other hand are more flexible and mostly drawn up in a consultative mode or agreed upon by certain parties as a set of rules to regulate behaviour. Morality is seen as an inner, consequent and natural disposition or motivation that is based in an internalised value system to respect and revere others as one would like to be treated by others. Jesus’ and Paul’s appeal to a spiritual life of love and service are based on morality and it is represented by a life motivated through the Spirit within and modelled to the ideal human being; not based on obedience to laws and fear of reprisal, neither on contractual agreements and covenants or a wish to earn immortality by conforming to dogmatic religious observance.

#### **2.3.5. Salvation and conventional and unconventional religions**

How must we define this mysterious and sought after concept called salvation? The means by which “salvation” might be achieved seems to be closely related to the manner in which spiritual meaningfulness has being conceived and to what has been deemed to be the cause of man’s need of it. Salvation when understood as an external, supra natural act of deliverance or redemption from disease, misfortune and poverty also figures prominently in many religions, but originated in the religions of ancient pre-scientific communities. When modern religion is still propagating simplistic supernatural and unilateral interventions to benefit certain believers, it fuels the main topics of the present day science-religion controversy which raises many other philosophical and moral issues that will have to be faced and that have the potential to render these religions obsolete in future.

According to the Encyclopaedia Britannica ([EncyclopaediaBritannica.com/Salvation](http://EncyclopaediaBritannica.com/Salvation)), the study of the relevant evidence shows the menace of death as the basic cause of salvific concerns and actions. The idea that man finds himself in some dire situation is a complex issue with a long dubious history. These dilemmas from which we seek to be saved from were the subject of intense speculation and from many perspectives. The required solutions may or may not imply that superior powers are needed depending on the meta-narrative employed. The perceived causes and conditions of our predicament will in each case involve the Creator, us as human beings and the world we lives in.

The process of salvation and its determinants, as well as the relevant concepts, need to be analysed to clarify the different variations of salvation theories that manifest in different historical religions. Different individuals, groups and cultures differ in their understanding of the human plight and their conceptualization of the preferred state of human well being worth striving for in our present life and hereafter. Ideas on the potential of human well-being and our ultimate destination may be linked to a belief in an “afterlife” worth striving for; or the present life is part of a journey within different concepts about immortality. This blessed state can be won through a Saviour or Redeemer that earned this immortal prize on our behalf or by an inner, personal developmental process. In every possible belief system on salvation, a specific concept of God, humankind and the cosmos will be part of the package.

According to medieval Anselm (cf. Audi 1995:28), theology is said to be faith-seeking understanding. The critical question is whether our faith is a “first hand”, authentic one, as William James (1958:42) calls it; your own particular understanding coming from your own quest and experience, or a “second hand” one; a comprehensive belief system taken over, usually nearly uncritically in the form of a specific religion or religious ideology. The difference is vast and meaningful if we consider the importance of salvation and the implications of taking the “wrong way”. Salvation through the merit of second and third party Saviours versus salvation through becoming and growing into God’s Image as was intended with creation, were both represented within the Early Christian traditions. Wrong beliefs and resultant praxis can have serious consequences to believers.

## Chapter 3

### Methodology and scope of study

#### 3.1 Introduction

Paul came from Tarsus, a prominent city in the Empire and there is no way that an intelligent and eager learner could escape the multiple influences that was part of this world. From the complexity of Paul's personality and theology many misunderstandings and even misinterpretations were carried into many local theologies of early Christian groups. The problem with static dogma in general can be stated in broad terms as a failure to welcome and incorporate the ever developing scientific body of evidence of the different sciences, especially the Biblical sciences, archaeology and history as well as their implications on human spiritual growth within its frame of reference.

In the time just before and after Paul's life, dogma was not fixed yet and it is obvious that Greek rationality and spirituality played a significant role, not only in Greek philosophy but also in metaphysics and the religious thoughts of some Christian groups. The various Gnostic and Mystic groups represent ample evidence to their effort to understand the cosmos and their place in it. Although each group came to different conclusions on most points it is important to note that there were also a fair level of consensus philosophically on some aspects.

#### 3.2 Identifying some important aspects that need clarification in our search for the true message of Jesus and Paul's interpretation thereof

The following themes seem to be important:

(a) The history of the Early Christian Church and their perceptions of the Jewish and other Christian groupings.

(b) Unwillingness of Christians to recognise their own selective use of some texts and borrowed concepts from other traditions incorporated in novel and related new theological constructs.

(c) The neglect and lack of effort to try and define the "Faith of Jesus" as foundational to Paul's tradition as well as the determinative influence this oversight had on Paul's and other Christian groupings' theories of faith. Some scholars like Spangenberg, are of the opinion that Paul was not really interested in Jesus as person and that his opinion about Jesus can only be deduced from reading between the lines of the variety of approaches of his argumentation. Spangenberg, however, concedes that Paul believed that his message was radically different from that of Jesus

(2009:164,168). While Spangenberg's conclusions are basically valid the contention of this thesis is that more could be understood of Paul's approach to Jesus if the esoteric and mystical trajectories in both Paul and Jesus' sense making God, human and world views are more strongly taken into account.

(d) Some orthodox Christian Fathers' lack of understanding of the nature and functions of myths, legends and metaphors. They have to be understood within their historical context thereby extracting the underlying value system, message and teachings for its usefulness in later eras.

(e) The possibility that most early "Church Fathers" who compiled dogma, totally underestimated the ability of intellectuals like Jesus and Paul to assess the philosophical and cultural complexity of their times as well as the level of spiritual development of their target audiences. Both Jesus and Paul could integrate their knowledge of human spiritual growth phases into their message within their established methodology of graded moral and esoteric teachings at different training settings. One should therefore be careful not to elevate a specific way of articulating a certain truth to the level of a universal principle when they addressed a certain group or person at a specific point in time. Such a contextual truth did not operate in all circumstances and was not helpful to everybody in every group that they worked with. In a similar sense, the "truth" for a pre-school child is different from that of a teenager or a young ambitious priest and very different for wiser older people. However, the relative values underlying these truths point in the same direction and prepare people for the next growth experience within a specific spiritual tradition.

(f) That Paul's arguments about the law within a conservative faction of the Jerusalem group, was never about the moral laws but was directed against the tribal/ethnic aspects of Judaic laws versus fruits of the spirit. As a matter of fact, Paul in following Jesus was very strict about the moral and ethical behaviour of his followers and very clear on the consequences of a life that lacks these virtues. To interpret his argumentation as if moral behaviour is unnecessary in the salvific equation and only a matter of optional, grateful obedience is just not possible in the context of what he expects of people who must "die" with and be "resurrected" again with the living Christ whilst living in this world.

(g) Did Paul focus more on an esoteric message of which Jesus' life and death, which was to him a new "this worldly" spiritual model for Christians wherein Jesus was the "first fruits" and archetype within the esoteric traditions of his day; a new universal spiritual dispensation and if so, what did he meant by this theoretical construct?

(h) The possibility that Paul's mentioning of the "sacrificial" death of Jesus as fulfilment of the cultic and ethnic laws of the old system (saved through blood), is solely accentuated to function as the first steps to get them cured and freed from the national gods and their petty laws as well as the cultic nonsensical notion of a blood sacrifice for obtaining righteousness, which the majority of prophets were speaking against. At a time in which people were told from mother's knee to understand salvation in terms of sacrificial blood offerings, it might have been the initial first steps of building a faith bridge for a "new" more inclusive spiritual covenant. The distinct possibility that the new emphasis of the salvific message of the prophets by Jesus that one is saved by repentance and grace, was amplified by Paul and meant to totally and radically replace the old ethnic and cultic sacrificial laws and practices. Paul rather concentrated on the universal, inclusive esoteric meanings of Jesus' life and death as a new functional salvific model and tried to reconcile Jesus' new teachings with the "history" of Jewish monotheism especially with the personal piety of Abraham.

My underlying thesis regarding Paul in the teaching of his followers is that once one has seen through the coercive character of the old sacrificial systems and the ethnic "superiority" laws, Jesus' version of the good news is believable, thus of starting with a merciful and forgiving God. This thesis regarding Paul's unique transcendence of the old sacrificial systems and ethnic exclusivist laws is underscored by the view of Streng that the deepest aspects of the human spirit are unique as they,

"...cannot be reduced to psychological, sociological, economic, chemical, or physical forces. It is also exhibited by unusual people who have liberated themselves from national, religious, racial, and class prejudices and from enslavement to honour, fame and pleasure, who also seem to operate from a caring and deeply, integrated self." (1985:115)

Paul's version of Jesus' good news about a merciful and forgiving God is simultaneously an enlightened instructive briefing to follow a new life of participation in the life and teaching of Jesus by repenting one's sins and by starting one's spiritual journey in getting baptised. In this journey, one is sacrificing one's egoistic and "earthly" self and one is encouraging the "Holy Spirit"; "Christ's spirit", "Image of God" or "heavenly Adam" to be one's new spiritually orientated Self or "New man or woman". Through participation in "the way" of Jesus by being reborn again or to be resurrected in the Spirit after having died "with Jesus" in the "flesh", the "heavenly Man" governs the journey of the "new you", the "new one" whereby you become a newly "anointed one" or "a Christ" active in the ongoing creation of the new spiritual and moral Kingdom on this earth.

### **3.3 Other disciplines and traditions that might prove productive in understanding Paul's theology**

Important lessons from other religions that informed Judaism and Christianity including Paul are to be learned by reflecting and discussing relevant notions within the ambience of seven perspectives.

The following perspectives operate as broad pointers, not necessarily in a discursive way, of constructing a broad field of networking, interlinking and fusion in the undergirding of Paul's theology:

- (i) A perspective from human logic, ethics, morality and spirituality. The emphasis herein is on a "view from below"; informed by scientific and philosophical theories as a valid way to look at the human condition. From this perspective rational scientific and philosophic evaluation and directives also partially inform our search for spiritual truth.
- (ii) The politics of power inherent in formal religions and governments are taken into consideration.
- (iii) Historical-critical research is undertaken of a variety of important, influential philosophic and spiritual traditions as code and mode structures of social and cultural expression which influenced Paul and his potential converts. Some Persian, Egyptian and Jewish traditions' influences on Jesus' teachings and various Gnostic and Mystic traditions are included.
- (iv) The nature and history of the Mystery Traditions, extant mystical theories and indications of "secret" traditions within the Gospels combined with Paul's own mystical and intuitive experiences as influences on his mystical theory of Christ.
- (v) The hermeneutics of a poetic language like Aramaic in a mixed society consisting of many cultures and its translation into very different and unrelated languages and the special challenge of recognising the esoteric message of Jesus in some translations.
- (vi) An analysis of Paul's letters in an attempt to look for the structure and logic of his brand of Christianity and mysticism as worked out in his Christology and soteriology.
- (vii) Finally, correlating these aspects above with the current main view of Christology and doctrine of salvation of the churches of our day.

Dated religions on the brink of asphyxiating themselves to death as an intrinsic part of colonising of large parts of the world from the 15<sup>th</sup> century onwards, made little sense from a 21<sup>st</sup> century perspective as an attempt to colonise people's minds. The main reason for selling dated religions as solutions to third world populations was to liberate, cure and heal them from their so called primitive and magical experiences. While the process of the decolonising of the mind has as yet not been completed a new onslaught of dated religions struggling for survival is directed at third world societies in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Many in third world societies are not only susceptible to the magical thinking of these religions but enter in strong alignment with grounding doctrines of these religions.

There are many opinions about the philosophy of Nietzsche regarding primordial sin and the wrath of God on humanity but he had a clear idea of the damage this dogma had done to the psyche many sensitive souls over time as well as the coercive force that it inherently possesses within a power hunger manipulative church. He says,



“When will these shadows of God cease to darken our minds? When we complete our de-deification of nature? When may we begin to naturalize our selves in terms of a pure, newly discovered, newly redeemed nature?” (1974:109)

A better choice to come to a better understanding of spirituality even from a Christian perspective, is to accept the changes in the world with its new cultural, scientific and philosophical perspectives and re-interpret older wisdom systems with their concomitant myths and legends by utilising the perennial wisdom still inherent and intrinsic in these wisdom systems. Such a re-interpretation which is actually a perpetual renewed effort of making sense have the main goal of extracting and unearthing of the underlying spiritual values and deeper spirituality of these ancient systems, etc. The superficial well known detail of the cultural exoteric myths and particular miraculous histories and stories of the churches and religions sold as “divine” history and “divine” salvific schemes are still standing in the way of the liberation of the minds of many people.

It is important to note that the majority of ancient myths, legends and metaphors functioned as aids in societies with strong story-telling ambiances in which meaning and salvific significance were established and disseminated to people taking part in these communicative ambiances of story-telling. In my view the communicative story-telling ambiances of the ancient past as a salvific interactive and spiritual construction areas has not sufficiently been dealt with in research on past societies with high levels of story-telling cultures. The strategy of strict memorising of the stories in a mainly oral society had the function of maintaining the underlying meaning and values established through these stories. These stories (=systems, etc) still contain the real esoteric meaning or lessons which was hidden and are mostly lost because of factors such as antiquated obsolescence whereby these stories did not fit into the meaning settings of later societies or repressive actions such as active opposition have been undertaken – in many instances prosecution. Furthermore, simplistic literal interpretations of myths and legends that informed magical theological constructs are always time bound and will be out of step with good science and moral theories of today.

In terms of the all embracing permeation of wisdom in various religions and religious movements people acknowledge that a religion has at least a two-tier structure. The first is the national/social/culture specific level and the second is the personal and more mature spiritual and moral phase that is driven by the Spirit within and not subject to the cultic management and their laws and taboos. We are desperately in need of room for personal development integrally part of any theological system that simultaneously demands wise and sensitive leaders who are able and capable to satisfy the needs of beginners or converts and the spiritually mature groups. This practical differentiation is the key of understanding any functional productive and efficient religious system and is as reflective notion maintained through the thesis. My hope is that by the end of this

quest for a better understanding of the esoteric traditions of Early Christianity, the construction of a possible authentic and relevant Christian perspective could serve as a philosophic-spiritual theory of faith that will not only help us to make better sense of the teachings and life of Jesus and Paul but also be able to employ their teachings more productively in tackling the immense task of creating a better world in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

## Chapter 4

### Human spiritual growth harmonising with general growth patterns and developmental phases

#### 4.1 Introduction

Genetics and its biological programs as well as cultural and economic factors play important roles in our struggle for survival but we also have a spiritual dimension which also evolves with time and which helps us in striving to give meaning to our earthly existence. Apart from our own cultural programming we are very dependent on personal spiritual experiences to broaden our horizons and stimulate our personal growth.

Biblical and religious texts and any other text for that matter, if it is to be meaningfully understood need careful multidisciplinary contextualisation in their interpretation. The majority of Paul's congregational and theological problems revolves around attempts to get his own messages effectively through to his converts and to refute the controversial and also some ideological arguments of his adversaries. This task he had to fulfil by means of general letters addressed to the whole community of faith, comprising of Jewish Messianic believers, Jews in foreign countries, gentile Judaic proselytes and gentile so called "God-fearers" from different socio-economic statuses, ethnical and sexual orientation. Furthermore, they are at different levels of general and religious education and differ in their level of spiritual development. The challenges he faced in the communicative sense of reaching all of them in a satisfactorily manner are enormous.

Addressing all the members at different levels of theological preparation and spiritual maturity within the diverse groups demands special insight and wisdom and an additional few methodological tricks and strategies. These complexities of communication here only touched upon in a provisional and introductory manner are more extensively dealt with in the context of his letters to different groups. For a theoretical framework our focus is directed at human intellectual development, emotional development, moral development as well as spiritual maturity in relating to the developmental challenges of Jesus' and Paul's prospected converts.

The central aspect that is emphasised here is that there seems to be a "best time" for different developmental stages for processes to emerge and for their coming into manifestation. These stages influence the vocabulary and methodology employed and the learning and understanding

applied. Only when the pupil is ready to assimilate and appropriate the new insights can the teachers make headway. Progress is made by building on current knowledge of the subject with suitable knowledge and appropriate experiences added in the assimilation and creation of a new awareness normally resulting in a stream of new questions directed at useful answers that clarify and enlighten the phase at hand. The problem any letter writer, not only Paul is faced with is a communicative need to anticipate new questions as they arise in the reading and in his absence in conjunction with imaginative but real answers that is directed at their real life experience in advance.

A child at the magical stage will still entertain magical concepts and beliefs as part of his reality. They lack the ability and capability of comprehending abstract concepts of morality or a bundle of differential aspects on the essence of God and will fail to benefit from a discussion of the multiple goals and purposes of humanity. For the same reason it is highly problematic in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, not to say impossible, for a highly developed intellectual, spiritual and moral person to accept blood sacrifices as the only way of satisfying a “loving” God’s need of punishing his whole creation because ancestors ate forbidden fruits in ancient “history”.

## **4.2. Growth patterns of a human being**

Ken Wilber says he has studied more than one hundred developmental theories formulated over a long time span and originating from many cultures. Wilber says that,

“There has recently been something of an explosion of interest in the development of a ‘science of consciousness’, and yet there are at present approximately a dozen major but conflicting schools of consciousness theory and research. My own approach to consciousness studies is based on the assumption that each of these schools has something irreplaceably important to offer, and thus what is required is a general model sophisticated enough to incorporate the essentials of each of them.” (2005:4)

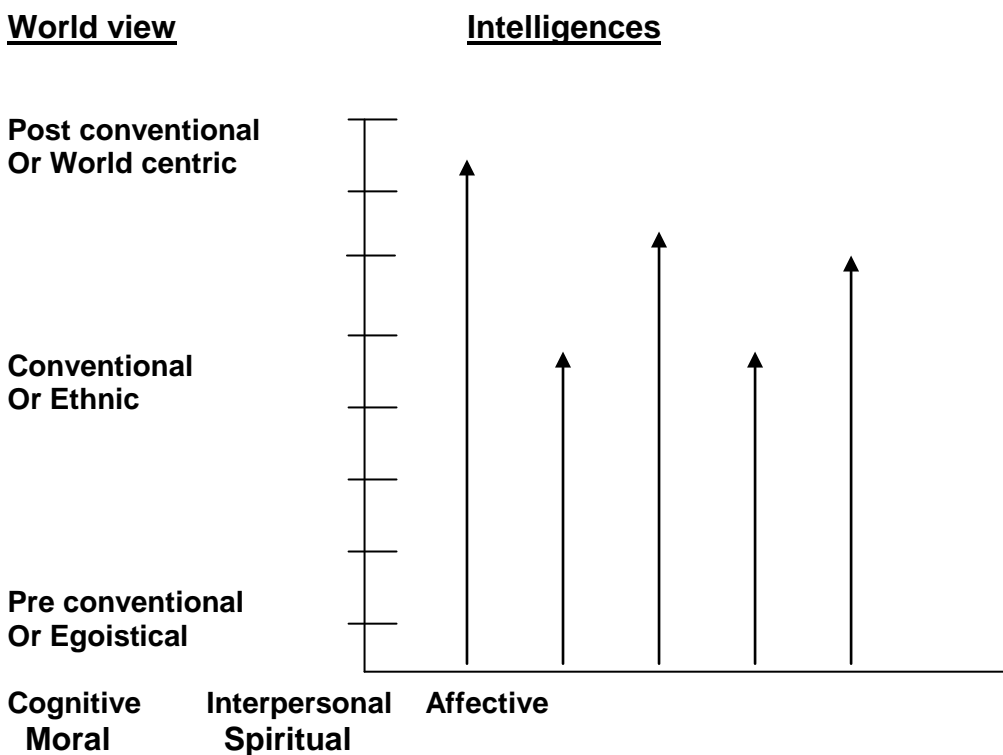
Despite the multiplicity of perspectives Wilber’s attempt is helpful to celebrate variety while attempting to consolidate different growth paradigms. The result of his study that general human development trends throughout all times and cultures are very much alike in an astonishing and universal way, is enlightening and makes a contribution to the whole new area of investigative meandering through the differential and integral schemes, processes and networking of developmental stages and phases of human beings.

The next two schemas are adapted from Wilber’s (2005) “The Integral Operating System” DVD and CD program, and we also want to highlight Gardener’s concepts of multiple intelligences at the basis and the need to understand and respect variety in humanity. We concentrate on a simplified and

representative growth scheme in conjunction with states of consciousness that is helpful and supportive of the understanding of human spirituality.

The Graph below shows a specific individual's scoring at a certain level of development. One has to note how our world view differs in the different personal categories as well as the terminology describing the world view and defining the growth phases as moving from an egoistical view to ethnic and then to a world centric view of life in a practical and effective way. These facts are particularly valid in Paul's battle with the Judaizers where a combination of egotism and tribal concerns are still very obvious. Jesus and Paul were then already within a world centric stage of development and Paul's argumentation around Abraham is a desperate effort to explain his more mature insights to some of his own group as well as the Judaizers, operating obviously on a lower overall level of spiritual development.

### The integral Psychograph



In the example above the right hand side of the graph represents the phase of development and we note that in this example, the person is cognitively on a World-centric phase of development but morally and spiritually he is still in the Ethnic phase. Here one has to keep in mind also the discussion above on the complexity of human behaviour by referring to van Niekerk's metaphor of gears of an Oshkosh multiple gear gearbox in different gear settings expressing metaphorically differential perspectives and moods in human behaviour. Without metaphorically perpetrating a

burglary through an open door, one has to state that the more complicated matters are, the more complicated are matters in communication between people with highly dissimilar developmental levels.

### **4.3 Paul changing strategies with different audiences**

Moral and spiritual development is intrinsically part of cognitive development and depends to a certain degree on the ability of intellectual development standpoint to be able to distinguish egoism from tribalism and essential universal human categories from localised petrified perceptions. Variances in different areas, as seen above, can be substantial even in a single person. The management of those variances within single persons and groups are very challenging. The dynamics in each are different and have to be taken into account. Any successful leader such as Paul has to have a thorough and penetrating understanding of the dynamics of the variances in people. Paul sometimes not only improvised on his strategies of 'exegesis' by reading between the lines what is happening in and around his audiences, but he also adapted at times some of his strategies to explain difficult new insights to his audience from his conception of the "first principles" involved. One expects vast differences in perception between people with different world views and these differences can lead to misunderstandings. Spiritual teaching is more effective within homogeneous groups and even more successful if it is taking place on a one to one basis.

One may direct at this stage the attention to Paul's different strategies employed in his letter to the Romans (Rom 1-5) and his first letter to the Corinthians (1 Cor 13). In Romans 1-5 Paul describes faith (belief) as basic access avenue of every stage and phase of human development. In some sections faith (belief) is identified with God's grace. Paul changes strategy in 1 Corinthians 13, where love (Greek = *agape*) is presented as the basic category and access port in which the Godly things are experienced: "And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love" (1 Cor. 13:13). Conjunctively, the relativising of faith is done in the previous chapter by Paul in 1 Cor 12 where faith is listed as a gift of the Spirit and does not have the undergirding foundational character of love of the first letter to the Corinthians. The foundational position of faith is fully operational in the Letter to the Romans.

The emphasis of the 16<sup>th</sup> century Reformers Luther and Calvin in their writings was on faith (*pistis*) as the access route to God while being declared justified before God through faith which is treated on a par with God's grace by the Reformers. The Reformers extracted the doctrine of the justification by faith from Romans 1-5 and they were generally not aware, in spite of their newly acquired interpretation techniques, that Paul's strategy of faith was carried by his in depth knowledge and experience of the levels of experience of the group to which he directed his letter in

Rome. The Catholics of the 16<sup>th</sup> century in the Counter-Reformation emphasised love (*agape*; *caritas*) as the access route to God demonstrated in the actions and activities of people acted in love.

Significantly, many Roman Catholic traditions in history gave primacy to love (Latin = *caritas*) concerning the experience of God, the human self and the natural physical-organic environment. The theological and philosophical work of the great Roman Catholic theologian of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Karl Rahner, despite the strong emphasis on faith and belief in many of his writings, can be read from a perspective in which love has primacy over faith (Van Niekerk 2009:88).

In Protestant traditions since the Reformation the emphasis has solely been on faith as the access route of opening up God's graceful countenance towards God's people. In the 20<sup>th</sup> century the Swiss neo-orthodox theologian Karl Barth and the liberal American Paul Tillich in different contexts proclaimed the supremacy of faith and belief with regard to accessing the spiritual experience of God. For both Barth and Tillich all other aspects of human 'experience' have indirect access to God through the central and embracing position of faith. Tillich even stated that everything in relationship to God has to pass through the door of faith – the Protestant principle (cf. Van Niekerk 2009:101).

Luther and Calvin replaced the Roman Catholic emphasis on love (*caritas/agape*) with faith (*pistis*) as the exclusive Protestant emphasis for the experience of God. What they in effect did was to replace Paul's strategy of 1 Corinthians 13 with Paul's strategy of Romans 1–5 without realising that Paul was operating with principles and methods experientially proven in many secret traditions through the employment of different strategic access routes to stages and phases of differentiation and integration of spiritual development.

Jesus and Paul were very able and sensitive human leaders intensely aware of many of the principles and methods of nearly all the secret traditions. They applied these experientially proven principles and methods in their individual and group strategies of teaching, initiations as well as in their teachings in a relevant sense to each grade of initiation. The particularity of the relevant level determines the particular approach to the arguments, examples and metaphors that are employed and applied. In a mixed audience, it will be expected or at least hoped for, that the more mature segment of the group will also understand these principles good enough to compensate for and be supportive and helpful through empathy to their "weaker" brothers and sisters.

#### **4.4 Spiritual growth and graded teaching methods**

Carpenter says,

“Man developed gradually from crass superstition, senseless and accidental, to rudimentary observation, and so to belief in magic, thence to Animism and personification of nature-powers in a more or less human form, as earth-divinities or sky-gods or embodiments of the tribe; and then to placation of these powers by rites such as sacrifice and the Eucharist, which in turn became the foundation of morality.” (1920:15)

It is at this point in Judaic development that Jesus and Paul enters history to take them to the next level.

Wilber (2005 DVD) offer this more comprehensive scheme of development for our consideration:

	→			
	<b>Gross</b> (Waking) (Dreaming)	<b>Subtle</b> (Deep sleep)	<b>Casual</b> (Altered consciousness)	<b>Non dual</b>
<b>Integral</b> (Spiritual)	u	u	u	u
<b>Pluralistic</b> (Post modern)	p	p	p	p
<b>Rational</b> (Modern)	r	r	r	r
<b>Mythic</b> (Traditional)	*	*	*	*
<b>Magic</b>	#	#	#	#
<b>Archaic</b>	a	a	a	a

### Stages

Any discussion of a perennial philosophy or mystical and gnostic traditions are in need of a theoretical framework for the symbolism enclosed in them to be made intelligible. One has to note that the focus here is directed at a model of the interplay of broad cultural development stages versus different states of awareness. Wilber says that though **States are free** (meaning everyone can enter these states at will) **Stages are earned** (meaning conscious effort is involved). Therefore, healthy growth implies also a certain input and effort which is normally well understood from an intellectual and academic perspective. But any person at any stage of growth can have an experience of an altered state of consciousness, *but everyone at a specific stage will interpret this experience from the same specific level of growth* that he/she are engaged in at that moment as well as from the specific cultural/religious orientation dominant in their perceptions in at that point in time. (Emphasis JAG)



At each stage the content and interpretation of the states therefore, correlate with the level of development of the individual and it is difficult to someone to appreciate the interpretation of the same state of people in a higher state of development. For instance, we cannot really know what John had actually experienced on Patmos as described in the biblical book of Revelation, chapter 1 because we do not know enough about the person, his maturity level, emotional health, circumstances or from which state he relates and express his impressions. Especially in mythical texts and with parables, what one understands from it is informed by one's own level of growth; one's present level of understanding within our present belief system.

This development theory also partially explains the question why some people find "end time" visions such as John's so fascinating. At a certain level of development some are certain that John knows the mind of God and is thus telling them very important secrets acquired from the mind of God as to how to attain salvation while such an understanding is flying in the face of current understanding of what is actually happening with John in terms of a psychological stance. On the one hand, the presence of archaic, magical and mythical beliefs and "prophesies" in these types of writings such as the book of Revelation in the Bible make them patently dangerous if interpreted in a fundamentalist mirroring way as "stuff" that has to be mirrored and appropriated in one's life as totally alive and meaning giving (Barr 1977:355). This has further been demonstrated in over and over again concerning "interpretations" of "interpretations" of a second generation of "prophets" and their follower's of the "end times" and "second comings" (Barr 1977:198).

On the other hand some of us are not even vaguely interested in the vindictive, gruesome, fanciful as well as judgmental "truths" of some parts of these texts and it only serves as an indication of the level of consciousness of the specific "prophet" which has to be reinterpreted by people of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Certainly such a prophet is not taken seriously by anyone who left the magical mirroring and imagery stage behind while still crying out for help and support in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Help and support might rather come from within and from other mature, spiritually grownup and developed persons who also draw from a Cosmic Presence or Spirit within, if you like.

A theory of hermeneutics based on spiritual growth levels simultaneously engaged and involved with different interpretations and evaluations is also valid for many other text applications such as the alternate gospels of the Nag Hammadi library as well as certain of Jesus' teachings and Paul's letters. Some people recognise and acknowledge the deeper spirituality of these writings as well as the Biblical Gospels while fundamentalist mirroring Christians, scratching usually on the surface of the divinely declared texts ridiculing gnostic and mystic myths and narratives that are similar to some of the central doctrines of the fundamentalist mind-set (Ostow 1990:105f). The myth of the 'inerrant and infallible' text that emerged in the modern era of each little letter or verse as divinely

endorsed and authorised is the main stumbling block in the quest for a deeper spiritual meaning (Ostow 1990:101). The second regressive step is undertaken by claiming that these 'inerrant and infallible' texts express real history that supposedly has to function as undercarriage of current modern real life experience. Fundamentalists generally use mirroring schemes because they are affixed to the surface of the texts and had very little exposure to the esoteric and symbolic meanings that the Mystics value above all texts.

Wilber correctly emphasises that States are free and accessible at any Stage representing a level of growth, but the specificity of a Stage of growth is earned through education and self education and aware experiences. You do not jump from a level of Magical thinking and understanding to an Integral Worldview without making a series of fairly drastic changes in your thinking and conceptual framework. You likewise do not grow from an egoistic or tribal religious consciousness to a universal inclusive spirituality without metaphorically dying off the previous attachments and being reborn with a totally new frame of mind. Growth is not for sissies! You work at it and become a physically and spiritually mature person or you stay fixed in the mindset and spirituality of an egoistic teenager. Therefore, if Jesus said that we must be like children to enter the Kingdom of God (Matthew 18:1-6; Luke 10:15, 18:17), he does not mean we must be childish and gullible but be humble and honest as little children. Jesus, according to several texts of early Christianity, has told us that the Kingdom of God demands also the highest moral and spiritual levels of experience; of spiritual wellness and wellbeing. Jesus and Paul, views such a stage as that of people in which fellowship becomes co-workers and co-creators in the Kingdom of God (1 Corinthians 3:9; Colossians 4:11).

Many of the passages in the Judeo-Christian scriptures that are used to confirm and affirm dogma and authorise doctrines are already second hand versions of what somebody else had experienced first hand and later was written down or orally handed on. In a second hand sense the original experience expressed in words and sentences is then translated and copied and again translated and copied. Through all these processes of translation and copying theologians and spiritual leaders extract, design and format doctrines and dogmas which people have to obey to be able to lead meaningful lives and to attain salvation in a so called heaven in afterlife.

The history of church discipline through the inquisition in the Roman Catholic church and church discipline in the Protestant worldview, that have not toed the official doctrinal line with its divinely set of doctrines and dogmas made woeful history. For Catholics the divine authorisation has been given by the Holy Father paradigm and for Protestants divine authorisation was given by Holy Spirit embedding itself in the words, sentences and texts of the Holy Book. What does the dependency of people on the Holy Father and the Holy Book with its whole array of official interpreters mean for making sense of people's first hand spiritual experiences of their private life and experience of the

world? How can we come to a better understanding of “Scripture” and the “Christianity” of Jesus, Paul and other groups so that our own spirituality can blossom also?

Firstly, we need much more realism and respect for other people’s experience as well as higher dosages of healthy doubt and humility in the search for truth when we attempt to make sense of literature expressive of experiences of ages long ago. How do we ‘read’ people’s experiences from long ago? One has to co-sensibly negotiate with a spiritual mind and mindset in terms of our societal and cultural context with ancient texts such as Judaeo-Christian texts of the Bible and other ancient texts handed to later generations by the transmitters of oral ‘texts’ from long ago, or the later compilers and writers of biblical texts. The oral transmitters, compilers and writers fused into their experiential contexts the oral compilations and writings of the generations before them as cumulative sense making experiences through interchange and exchange with past generations.

Secondly, what is different between eras of ancient texts and an era like ours, however, is that we have in all fields, modes and dimensions of experience immense additions, accretion and accumulation of knowledge, skills and tools that were not part of generations before us. On the other hand what they had in earlier eras was deeper spiritual layers of wisdom which had been obfuscated by superficial modern fundamentalist mirroring text approaches. We live in a later era with similar and other sense making approaches that revolve around the interconnectedness and otherness of God, ourselves as human beings and the natural cosmos. We look for the mystery of how spiritual experiential clues, cues and hues from long ago can be merged and fused with our current spiritual experiences through processes of interchange and exchange of what is similar and what is other between them and us. The more we study and manage to understand as many as possible versions of spiritual orientations the better are our chances of getting closer to the essential characteristics and attributes of specific and particular truths. In departing from a reductionist perspective, the more strongly biased and narrow is the interpretative and sense making approach one employs to select ‘books’, traditions and oral ‘texts’ in the quest for truth. Reductionism in all its modern forms of underscoring our claims to truth takes us further away from the truth we intended to find.

#### **4.5 Simplified and integrated growth schematic: mapping the important growth factors and possible outcomes**

Campbell points out that a modern human being has a particularly difficult problem of reconciling everyday existence with religion. During the week he/she lives in the rationalistic, scientific and economic reality of the Western tradition, while Sunday some time is spent with Job, with the result that on Monday he/she finds him/herself on the psychiatrist’s couch. Campbell (1996: audio) says further that ancient religions could be typified into two main classes. Religions of “address”, which

emphasise salvation through belonging to a group, that had a special covenant with God, like Judaism, and, secondly, religions of personal “identity”, where one had to look within oneself to discover and develop one’s relationship with God.

Two other types of religion could be added to the two above. Thus, a third type of religion is where salvation belongs to those believing in a godly/human sacrifice such as the main approach of orthodox Christianity. A fourth type is that of a religion that normally starts with the one of the above types of religions as the cultural religion and point of departure but develops in a following phase into a more personalised belief system as a religion of identity. Within the ambience of a religion of personalised identity one has to look within to discover and develop one’s relationship with God. In this way one is capturing the basic progressive system of belief of the perennial traditions and early Mystical and Gnostic religions. One develops through the tribal/ethnic/cultic/doctrinal stage of religion and matures into one’s own personalised religion manifesting as a personal spiritual relationship with the God of one’s heart. A personalised religion normally operates with a more developed, universal and inclusive view of God and within a more personalised salvation process such as those of Jesus and Paul.

Myth and philosophy inform religion and Campbell is convinced that general misconceptions about the true nature and function of myth are at the heart of our present dilemma of impotent religions and therefore our feeling of meaninglessness (1974:2). He furthermore states

“Religion robbed humanity of his inner identity with divinity, while science in turn robbed the Church of its claim to infallibility. The result is that modern man has a new dilemma, to try to find a new base for a value system that will serve his present reality and to bring meaning back into his life...All cultures have produced such elemental themes as the great mother, miraculous child, and resurrected hero. This is true of all the great world religions – Buddhism, Christianity, and Islam – as well as folklore, allegories and local, tribal religions.” (Campbell 1974:3)

The one indisputable fact about the human life cycle is that of continuous growth and progress from birth to death. One has to admit that it is only an indisputable fact for those who are aware and consciously recognising continuous growth. For those unaware and unconscious the direction is that of shrivelling and regression to superficiality. Intellectual, emotional and moral growth and progression are recognised and acknowledged in any productive and meaningful philosophy or theology. This has been done through the centuries in the arcane philosophies of the Mystery religions, Gnostic religions and also in Jesus’ and Paul’s theologies.

In the 20<sup>th</sup> century the pedagogical philosopher from the Netherlands, Ph A. Kohnstamm developed a personalised philosophy in which he stayed true to the many elements of truths from his old tradition as a Jew in his new setting as a Christian (Hofstee 1973:30f). Personalised religion and

personalised philosophy as a dialectic stance between idealism and materialism, between impersonal rationality and monistic emotionalism, between Gnosticism and Mysticism and existentialism and structuralism indicates a direction that Kohnstamm personally has undertaken in his personal growth in the processes of his life history (Hofstee 1973:91-106). In fact the filtering out of developmental aspects and graded spiritual teaching is the main reason for spiritual stagnation in many mainline religious systems today.

One can safely say that in our times science and philosophy agree that there is no fix pattern of development that is governed by fix time lines and outcomes in the growth process but the general normal progression should be from lower left to top right on my schematic effort to integrate the more important aspects as provided on the next page:

<b>Age + Life Stage</b>	Dominant mode of Being for the <b>Ego or Physical self</b>	<b>Fully Integrated Being</b>				Dominant mode of Being for the <b>Higher Self</b>
		<u>Ego personality</u> ↔ <u>Higher Self</u>				
<b>75. Aging</b>	Not good company Lost grip on reality	<u>Worldly</u> ↔ <u>Spiritual</u>				<u>Oneness</u> with nature, humanity and "God" – Ready for final transition – immortality  <u>Interdependence</u> – Knowing and caring with Insight Accommodating and understanding  <u>Repositioning</u> with ___ knowledge of self and realities
		<u>Law</u> → <u>Ethical</u>		<u>Moral</u> → <u>Spiritual</u>		
<b>60. Wisdom</b>	Ideologically fundamentalist or Count Money and polish trophies	Physical aging			Oneness with creation Re Birth Compassion Peace of mind	
<b>45. Midlife</b>	Failed in making the transition <u>Re-evaluation</u> of values and meaning of life	Mental and Emotional Maturity		Meaningful Life and Relationships with Self and Others	Spiritual awareness experiences Seeking truth communion	
<b>30. Maturity</b>	<u>Co-operative &amp; Competitive</u> Striving for success and power	Building Mental capacity	Financial Career Success Family Stability			
<b>15. Puberty</b>	<u>Independent</u> Physical mature	Physical Development				
<b>Birth</b>	<u>Survival &amp; Change</u>	Dependence      Independence      Interdependence      Oneness				
	<u>Survival &amp; Total dependency</u>	Survival	Meaning		Salvation	

## Chapter 5

### The primordial tradition as common denominator of Esoteric, Gnostic, Mystery and ancient Secret religions

#### 5.1 Introduction

In this chapter we are primarily searching for hints, clues and facts in the history of religious experiences and religious dimensions in different societies to help us understand how the age old triad of humanity, the natural world and God underpins theories of salvation of different Christian groupings in history. Furthermore, such an understanding of certain theories in history also functions as a guideline to ascertain whether these theories of salvation are still viable options for a 21<sup>st</sup> century understanding of Christianity.

One of the main notions of the approach in this chapter is captured in the views of the 19<sup>th</sup> century Reformed theologian, Schleiermacher who operated with the idea that religious consciousness as human awareness of God is an universal element in human nature and is attained through self-awareness of oneself as a human person in conjunction with an awareness of co-existing with other people (Schleiermacher 1988:1-5). For Schleiermacher, in his main work, *The Christian faith* (1986), piety or immediate awareness of God, awareness of being oneself and awareness of others presupposes a fully formed, mature personality and does not belong to some childlike phase of human development. While we attain this awareness of God on the strength of our presence in the world with other people, the discovery of the awareness as such is reserved for the personal self (Schleiermacher 1986:49).

The other important notion operating in this chapter is that in describing developmental aspects of humanity we approach the 'common knowledge' of the era that regulates the sweeping 'logic' of the life-worlds of Jesus and Paul. Both of them made statements 'uncommon' to us that could be from their view, common cultural and social practices of their era. In this sense many of what they have said were not conspicuous but borders on to the ordinary for their times but not necessarily in later times. On the other hand, both Jesus and Paul made startling statements pertaining to children, women, rich people, salvation and how one must live in this world. Paul's own statements from his letters had been endorsed and promoted to divine texts from which the real Paul could escape only with great difficulty.

One does not even have to make an in depth study of the lives of Jesus and Paul but by only looking at their compiled stories, it is clear that they lived the life of a typical hero figure of their

times. Their lofty spiritual value systems and integrity took them on a collision path with the political and cultic powers of the day and the narratives about them are indicative of their different personal stances and opinions on socio-economic and political realities.

Therefore, on the one hand it is fairly easy to discover the common or ordinary, generally known knowledge about Jesus and Paul from existing texts but to discover the generally unknown or esoteric “insider” views and values we have to look broader and deeper into their teachings and lives to notice the strange or startling ideas, sayings or actions. We also need to unearth the philosophical ideas and the idealised theories of philosophers and reflectors of wisdom that underpinned the “standard premises” of the social theories, thought schemes and practices of those days. In other words, we need to understand why they thought what they thought and said what they said in the context of their life-worlds. Especially of interest to us is whether their thoughts and sayings are still valid to us. One could argue that if Jesus and Paul had no interest in influencing civil society of their day, whether the transfer of their lofty spiritual ideals to us in a purely “literal” way, is not a move backwards of many ordinary sense making schemes of today’s world. Furthermore, is religion not ultimately useless if it does not transform lives and do not serve as change broker for the betterment of all in this world?

## **5.2 The functions and purpose of myths and the notion of the universal hero figure in wisdom traditions**

Myths and legends had various social and religious functions in ancient societies. One of these was pedagogical by which children were taught certain core values as well as how they ought to behave. A substantial part of all religious oral narratives and scriptures started off with mythic and legendary stories. The main question here is how much qualitative weight and merit do we have to ascribe to the literal or “factual” aspects of myths and legends in the service of religious orientations, thought schemes and belief practices. One also has to understand that there are an array of categories and levels of truths within myths which poses a challenge to us to extract their real moral and spiritual truths and to ascertain whether they are still relevant and worthwhile truths for our time.

The first function of myth, according to Campbell (1996: audio), is to

“...reconcile consciousness to reality, as we perceive it, and to life itself. Considering that life’s basic character is monstrous – life eating life – and when consciousness becomes aware of this, a sense of terrific horror, awe and fascination results from this recognition.”

Campbell says there are three basic responses to this dilemma:

- One is affirmation and a desperate effort to understand and explain it as well as possible.



- The other one is rejection, which Campbell calls the “great reversal”, a feeling or belief that things went terribly wrong and life should not have been. (This answer represents some of the later Gnostic thinkers.) Even Buddha shares it in part: life is a fire that should eventually be extinguished.
- The third option is that we will affirm it, *on condition that it is understood as we explain it* in our books and revelations. (1996: audio) (Emphasis JAG)

The second function of myth is to “present a totalising image of the cosmos”, a cosmological scheme that will explain and confirm these realities as we see them. Realities as we see them may differ in time and space but essences remain the same. In the late modern philosophical debate the notion of an essence seeking quest of any phenomenon or fact is viewed with high dosages of scepticism and suspicion. Finding and unlocking the same essence in two contextual settings two thousand years apart is just bordering on the unhistorical or legendary.

The third function is to “instate, validate and maintain a certain moral order.” This element can differ much in time and at different places.

The fourth and last function of myth according to Campbell (1996: audio), is to “deepen the psyche.” This represents the philosophical and spiritual unearthing and interpretation of the myth to find and apply its deeper meanings. “*The literal story functions as a complex and fanciful riddle*”, called the “outer mystery” by the Mystery religions, and some Christian and Gnostic traditions, while the spiritual explanation and application becomes the “inner mystery” accessible only to the spiritually advanced seekers and taught in private according to the level of development of the seeker to ensure correct understanding and prudent application.

As discussed already, human understanding is in direct correlation to growth. In the early stages, human understanding departs and develops from mythical understanding by being fascinated by the magic of the myth. Through a deeper understanding of the myth and myth making processes, fascination (as is the case with hypnoses) induced by the story ensures access to and acceptance by the unconscious mind which assimilates and remembers the story or “outer” mystery through bypassing the brain’s critical rational censoring mechanism. By meditating on the meaning inherent in the myth different “meanings” is internally processed from there to understand more advanced lessons of these inner mysteries through higher levels of consciousness.

The elevation to higher levels of development in the human story are concretely illustrated by Spangenberg in his book *Jesus van Nasaret* (2009) in referring to the graded dogmatic teaching of parents and churches in the Christian world. Usually the starting point is with a children’s edition of the Bible progressing to Sunday school and later to Catechism. Spangenberg discusses the three

phases also in three different chapters (2009) but in terms of the main hypothesis of this thesis a lack of awareness and guidance is detectable in his book which should have touched on a phase termed the “deepening of the psyche”. In such a phase the spiritual teachings for mature spiritual development inherent in Jesus’ and Paul’s approaches are neglected.

Another aspect of myth is the fact that a myth over time, exhibits a virtually unified core story with accompanying values and challenges directed at human beings in different social settings. Thomas L. Thompson really clarifies many stories of the Bible from the perspective of its writers,

“Although the creation story in the first chapter of Genesis may appear to us very naïve, it still honestly reflects the world that that people experienced. Light, earth, air and water, the four basic elements of the creational story, answers to the expectations of traditional elements in Hellenistic philosophy... and they answer to experience...The list of names attached to the beginning of stories lies at the heart of the central story-line...” (Thompson 1999:82; 89)

According to Thompson the story in Genesis also want to describe the position and nature of mankind in relation to God and refers also to heroes and their stories and lessons to be learned as well as “facts” about nations that were important to them then. (1999:89). The typical stories about the important people of in different groups are also recognised by Campbell, (1949) in his book, “The Hero with a Thousand Faces”, by calling such myths collectively, the universal or “monomyth.” This phenomenon is ably confirmed, explained and applied by Riley (1997) in his book “One Jesus, Many Christs” in which Jesus is the earthly spiritual pilgrim or hero, developing through trails and tribulations the latent spiritual aspect or divinity; the Christ within and we will discuss the relative pivotal points in Jesus’ life later in more detail.

Furthermore, the purpose and functions of initiation rites of the spiritual hero in the universal monomyth are to aid or help humanity through the difficult phase-transfers as an integral part of consolidating the previous growth period while simultaneously introducing the person to the next phase of growth. The rite serves to connect the new knowledge and phase with the relevant experience that is needed to validate the transition within the human psyche and it was deemed to be absolutely essential. The graduation from different growth stages is therefore celebrated in such a manner that the waking consciousness of the pilgrim in an ongoing sense is permanently changed as preparation to take up the new challenges for the next phase of growth. Campbell in considering the graduation processes from different growth stages asserts.

“The so-called rites of passage that occupy such a prominent place in the life of a primitive society (ceremonials of birth, naming, puberty, marriage, burial, etc.) are distinguished by formal, and usually very severe, exercises of perseverance, whereby the mind is radically cut away from the attitudes, attachments, and life patterns of the stage being left behind. *Then follows an interval of more or less extended removal from societal routine, (stopover in the*

*desert or wilderness) during which enacted rituals designed to introduce the life adventurer to the forms and proper feelings of his new state so that when, at last, the time has ripened for the return to the normal world, the initiate will be as good as reborn.” (1974:10) (Emphasis JAG)*

Campbell in terms of his psycho-analytical standpoint asserts with amazement that a great number of the ritual trials and images correspond to those that appear automatically in dream at the moment the psychoanalysed patient begins to abandon his infantile fixations and progress into the future (1974:10). Psycho-analytically a prime function of mythology and rite to Campbell always has been to supply the symbols that carry the human spirit forward, in counteraction to those other constant human fantasies that tend to tie it back to the previous stages. Campbell continues by venturing that the very high incidence of neuroses in his social context could be ascribed to the decline of effective spiritual aids such as myths of higher enlightened states of mind in people around him (1974:10).

People remain fixated to the unexercised and untrained images of their infancy, and are therefore disinclined to take the necessary steps into the future which are paradoxically already embedded in the present passages of their adulthood. The positive awareness that someone is being introduced to his or her own passages of adulthood can remedy the fixation on the infantile past.

The question may be asked at this stage whether the fixation on the past of many Christians on the orthodox mirrors and images of Jesus and Paul embedded and embodied in church doctrines and dogmas are not the best depiction of people fixated to their own infantile past. What they should be doing regularly is to acquire liberating clues and hints from the visionaries Jesus and Paul and to take full responsibility and account to themselves for their growth now in their present life-world in being themselves as well as being aware of the different stages and phases of growth.

### **5.2.1. The universal spiritual hero**

As we have discussed above, the universal spiritual hero is represented by each and every spiritual pilgrim without regard from which tradition or culture he or she originates. We will differ only in the literal and cultural aspects of our stories but not in the psychological-spiritual essences of being human. The different cultural and religious heroes are only examples of the real and essentially human quest.

The universal spiritual hero is described by Campbell as follows,

“The hero is the man of self-achieved submission; but submission to what? What is this submission that, always and everywhere, is the primary virtue and historic deed of the hero?...The first work of the hero is to retreat from the world scene of secondary effects, to

those causal zones of the psyche where the difficulties really reside, and there to clarify the difficulties, eradicate them in his own case (i.e., give battle to the 'nursery' demons of his local culture) and break through to the undistorted, direct experience and assimilation of what C. G. Jung has called 'the archetypal images.'" (Campbell 1949:18)

The spiritual journey and development of the universal pilgrim is so well embedded in our human psyches that the different stages of development, according to Jung are represented by universal symbols and or archetypal images present deep within the subconscious of humanity and are present in all populations over all known history. The Christian Biblical gospels and especially the Gnostic myths also relate only different stories of their spiritual heroes for those who have "ears to hear" that needs to become the foundation of their own personal stories. On the wide consensus on the collective unconsciousness, Campbell quotes the following people, beginning with Jung, Nietzsche, Adolph Bastian (on "Elementary Ideas") and Franz Boas (Campbell 1949:19).

According to Campbell, Sir James G. Frazer said,

"We need not, with some enquirers in ancient and modern times, suppose that the Western peoples borrowed from the older civilization of the Orient the conception of the Dying and Reviving God, *together with the solemn ritual in which that conception was dramatically set forth before the eyes of the worshippers.*" (1922:386) (Emphasis JAG)

An important universal aspect of the story of the hero is the dying to a previous stage or a lower personal level of being and be revived or resurrected, to the following higher manifestation of the hero. See Gal 3:1, and also my discussion of that section which seems to be referring to such a specific rite in Pauline Christianity to commemorate this important personal "resurrection".

According to Campbell, Toynbee presents us with a very interesting series of scenarios and preconditions as part of his six-volume study of the laws governing the rise and disintegration of civilizations. Schism in the soul and schism in the body social will not be resolved by any scheme of:

- Return to the good old days (archaism),
- Or by programs guaranteed to render an ideal projected future (futurism),
- Or even by the most realistic, hard-headed work to weld together again the deteriorating elements.
- *Only birth can conquer death – the birth, not of the old thing again, but of something new.*" (Toynbee 1934:169; 169-75 in Campbell 1949:20) (Emphasis JAG)

Toynbee is hinting that as is the case with societies in disintegration, a human being can only really heal his/her soul by becoming something new by the process of rebirth and not by trying to fix elements of his/her nature or live in the past or future. The perennial philosophical way of tackling life and religions based on truths that emerge from the perennial philosophical ambience, like many early Christian traditions, assert that the egoistic, materialistic self must die to make room for the

godly heir to the realm of immortality. According to Toynbee the final task of the hero is, as all the mythologies of humanity indicate, “to return then to his people, transfigured, and teach the lesson he has learned of life renewed”.

The universality of this spiritual process is also emphasised by Campbell:

“Whether the hero is ridiculous or sublime, Greek or barbarian, gentile or Jew, his journey varies little in the essential plan. Popular tales represent the heroic action as physical; the higher religions show the need to be moral; nevertheless, there will be found astonishingly little variation in the morphology of the adventure, the character roles involved, the victories gained...The cosmogony cycle, is presented with astonishing consistency in the sacred writings of all the continents, and it gives to the adventure of the hero a new and interesting turn; for now it appears that the perilous journey was a labour not of attainment but of re-attainment, not discovery but rediscovery. The godly powers sought and dangerously won, are revealed to have been within the heart of the hero all the time. He is ‘the king’s son’ who has come to know who he is and therewith has entered into the exercise of his proper power – ‘God’s son,’ who has learned to know how much that title means. From this point of view the hero is symbolical of that divine creative and redemptive image which is hidden within us all, only waiting to be known and rendered into life.” (1949: 38, 39)

This process of becoming or growing, even through deadly challenges, can also be seen in the lives of Moses, Socrates, Jesus and his true followers as well as in some of his parables, especially that of the prodigal son. The real life story of Stephen, James, Peter and Paul are excellent examples of the spiritual hero and is in my opinion one of the reasons for the amazing growth of early Christianity; these were real life heroes and not mythical or legendary ones.

The essence of God is not directly and objectively accessible to humanity. One can by accepting the revelations and doctrines of a formal religious group or at a later stage, through growth and inner, subjective experiences come to knowledge of the divine working in and through us. The latter is what the myths and stories about the heroes want to teach us and must be understood as revelations of some hidden order of reality. Such an approach has three distinct components:

- firstly, the authority of “the story” is normally unquestioned as the carrier of the truth; you just accept the story as it is;
- secondly, you must battle with the meaning of it and might receive supernatural help if needed;
- thirdly, you eventually have to apply it to your own quest and help and teach others to grow.

The phenomenal growth of Christianity was in my opinion mainly due to the fact that virtually all cultures in the Empire could identify with a good hero story. Christianity therefore had a distinct and unique advantage in that their heroes started off with the historical person of Jesus and the story of his life and teachings, whether all claims about him are factually true in all aspects or not; he

represents the combined wisdom of the spiritual and moral traditions of many in his day. Some might say that his quest was only a religious one and in obedience to otherworldly ideals and immortality, but this is not true if his actions are analysed from a caring human socio-political perspective. As we are interested to discover the broadest possible perspective of the existing traditions that influenced Early Christianity we also have to consider the dominant philosophic-religious traditions of the day.

### **5.3 The History of the Primordial Tradition**

Like the monomyth of the universal hero discussed above, the term 'perennial philosophy' refers to the underlying thesis that the same timeless truths about the nature of the human "self", the natural world, the meaning of life, and the deity, reappear again and again, time after time, regardless of culture, sense making approach or belief-system, differing only in external culturally-determined details. The existence of such a universal wisdom tradition has been variously argued by Aldous Huxley, Huston Smith, Ken Wilber, and representatives of the Traditionalist movement, among others. ([http://www.kheper.net/topics/perennial\\_philosophy/perennial\\_philosophy.html](http://www.kheper.net/topics/perennial_philosophy/perennial_philosophy.html))

Our interest in the Primordial Tradition is much more restricted and rather concentrates on the commonalities that exist between ancient religions regarding their esoteric teachings. We are interested whether their systems of spiritual thought and metaphysical truths correlate with other religions and esoteric traditions of humanity. We are therefore specifically interested in their views on the essence of humanity and our relationship to God and the natural world from the esoteric or mystical perspective in time.

Although it is not always possible in ancient texts to demarcate their philosophy from religious beliefs, as they were normally combined in an integrated view on life, we look at certain aspects of their myths and narratives searching for common ideas. We will therefore look at some other metaphysical systems and will try to recognise the common language and concepts present within these different groups.

#### **5.3.1. From Thoth to Hermes Trismegistus**

Although we are not sure how old is the oldest tradition of Hermes Trismegistus is, it is obvious that many of the concepts and ideas about God and man look very familiar from the perspective of the Christian esoteric tradition and warrant our attention as a possible influence.

As background information that might prove helpful, Thoth as divine scribe was the inventor of writing and lord of wisdom, and the priesthood attributed much of its sacred literature to him including, for example, parts of the Book of the Dead, the common name for the ancient Egyptian

funerary text. Wallis Budge says that “The Book of the Dead” was a description of the ancient Egyptian conception of the afterlife and a collection of hymns, spells, and instructions to allow the deceased to pass through obstacles in the afterlife (Budge 1960:3).

During and after the reign of Alexander the Great the Greeks settled in many of the conquered areas and their culture and gods were spread throughout the Middle East. This introduction, as well as the quotations that follow direct after this one, serves as a general introduction to the Hermetic literature. It specifically wants to indicate the cross pollination of religious ideas and the relations of the different gods of the area to each other.

Budge comments that in later versions of the Book of the Dead certain chapters were attributed to the god Thoth, the Egyptian “lord of the divine books” also “lord of the divine speech” and “scribe of the Company of the Gods”; these chapters “written by Thoth” certainly belonged to what the Greeks called “Hermetic” and were also acknowledged by Clement of Alexandria as part of the sacred books of the Egyptians (Budge 1960:23).

The quotation below is an introduction to the “Book of the secrets of secrets”, by Jeremiah Genest, which is a text translated from Arabic in the middle of the twelfth century. Genest says it was perhaps the most popular book in the Middle Ages. As an encyclopedic reference work, it contained much of occult nature ([www.granta.demon.co.uk/arasm/jg/tris](http://www.granta.demon.co.uk/arasm/jg/tris)).

“The Greek settlers, also, identified Thoth with their god Hermes. In Hermes’s case this relationship prepared him as well for his characteristic function in the Hellenistic period, as the *logos* or ‘word’, the interpreter of the divine will to humanity. This Hellenistic, Hermes-*logos* was a thoroughly cosmopolitan divinity: The Lycaonians, who were sufficiently un-Hellenized to have retained their native language, had no difficulty in recognizing the apostle Paul as Hermes that come down to earth, ‘because he was the chief speaker.’ Thoth’s Greek twin Hermes and personifying the Grecian Logos also informed the Christian Logos of John...Hermes Trismegistus, then, was the cosmopolitan, Hellenistic Hermes, Egyptianized through his assimilation to Thoth, and in fact known throughout the Roman world as ‘the Egyptian’ par excellence. So too in the philosophical Hermetica, Hermes is a mortal who received revelations from the divine world and eventually himself achieves immortality through self-purification, but remains among men in order to unveil to them the secrets of the divine world.” ([www.granta.demon.co.uk/arasm/jg/tris](http://www.granta.demon.co.uk/arasm/jg/tris))

Lee Irwin, in his review of “The Secret Lore of Egypt: It’s Impact on the West” by Erik Hornung, said that Hornung does anchor the Hermetic perspective in the 12<sup>th</sup> Dynasty (c. 1800 BCE), at the Temple of Thoth in Hermopolis, in the Book of Two Ways, as a true work of Egyptian wisdom on the afterlife:

“Thoth was transformed by the Egyptian priests under Greek rule into Hermes Trismegistus (‘thrice great’) and after 240 BCE a historic religion of Hermes can be traced. It is to be noted that according to Hornung above, the ‘re-enactments of sacred stories involving death, rebirth’

so common in the Mysteries, with minor variations in their symbolic and esoteric meanings and also practiced in Christianity was actually a public and not a secret affair in about 240 BCE in Egypt!"(www.esoteric.msu.edu/Reviews/Hornung Review:1)

Erwin continues on the relatedness of the Egyptian religion and Thoth to the Greek Hermes and the Zoroastrian religion that will be discussed later:

"Assmann has described a Hermetic philosophy of a unitary cosmos 'of a single god hidden in the multiplicity of things' whose name was secret, arising in Ramessid (New Kingdom) period, thus affirming the possibility of a transmission of an Egyptian 'hermetic' philosophy into later Greek and European thinking. Hermes, as the Greco-Egyptian god, was compared by Diodorus (c. 50 BCE) to both Moses and Zoroaster, the three forming an esoteric, syncretic triad that would influence both Renaissance and later generations of European esotericists...On Egyptian alchemy, Hornung notes that Zosimos of Panopolis (Akhmim, Egypt) was an Egyptian who united teachings of Hermes with those of Zoroaster and wrote in Greek." (www.esoteric.msu.edu/Reviews/HornungReview:2)

Different religious and philosophical groups borrowed from each other and integrated Egyptian, Persian, Jewish and Greek religious and philosophical ideas in their efforts to understand and explain reality as it appears to them. We may therefore deduce from Clement of Alexandria, Budge, Hornung and Assmann's views that the main premises of the corpus Hermetica came from a much earlier phase in Egyptian-Grecian religious thoughts.

In a very important "revelation", the Divine Pymander, called Poimandres, or the Vision, is believed to describe the method by which the divine wisdom was first revealed to Hermes. It was after Hermes had received this revelation that he began his ministry, teaching to all who would listen to him, the secrets of the invisible universe as they had been unfolded to him. "The Vision" is the most famous of all the Hermetic fragments, according to Hall (1977: XXXVII) and contains an exposition of Hermetic cosmogony and the secret sciences of the Egyptians regarding the culture and enfoldment of the human soul. For the sake of clarity, the narrative form has been chosen in preference to the original dialogic style, says Hall (1977: XXXVII), and obsolete words have given place to those in current use. Though it is difficult to judge the correctness of Hall's interpretations the result is very interesting and stimulating from a historical point of view. For reasons of space, only certain relevant extracts for our background and study will be quoted and discussed.

"The Mysteries taught that the Universal Life was personified as a dragon and in his vision the Great Dragon called Hermes, by the name, and asked him why he thus meditated upon the World Mystery. Terrified by the spectacle, Hermes prostrated himself before the Dragon, beseeching it to reveal its identity. The great creature answered that it was Poimandres, the Mind of the Universe, the Creative Intelligence, and the Absolute Emperor of all. Hermes then besought Poimandres to disclose the nature of the universe and the constitution of the gods. The Dragon acquiesced, bidding Trismegistus to hold its images in his mind." (Hall, 1977: XXXVII)



The universal quest of understanding life and therefore God who we were told, is running the cosmos, is a timeless endeavour. The concept of God is amazingly advanced and impersonal. Herein one can see the parallels in all enlightened philosophies and religions over time and into the present era. The next few quotations are given to get an idea on some interesting ideas relating to Genesis and the Gospel of John about the Word, Creation and the Son of God as well as interesting markers to the esoteric teachings about Jesus by Paul and others about the Heavenly Adam or universal Human Being. In this text translated and paraphrased by Hall, the “Word” was portrayed as the Son of God and also Reason as the offspring of thought and therefore can be a reference to divine Wisdom/Light establishing Truth:

- “I Thy God am the Light and the Mind which was, before substance was divided from spirit and darkness from Light. And the Word which appeared as a pillar of flame out of the darkness is the Son of God, born of the mystery of the Mind. The name of that Word is Reason. Reason is the offspring of Thought and Reason and shall divide the Light from the darkness and establish Truth in the midst of the waters. Understand, O Hermes, and meditate deeply upon the mystery. *That which in you sees and hears is not of the earth, but is the Word of God incarnate. So it is said that Divine Light dwells in the midst of mortal darkness, and ignorance cannot divide them. The union of the Word and the Mind produces that mystery which is called Life.* (1977:XXXIX )(Emphasis JAG)
- “*Then the Father—the Supreme Mind—being Light and Life, fashioned a glorious Universal Man in its own image, not an earthly man but a heavenly Man dwelling in the Light of God. The Supreme Mind loved the Man It had fashioned and delivered to Him the control of the creations and workmanships.* (1977:XXXIX )(Emphasis JAG)
- “Then Hermes asked how the righteous and wise pass to God, to which Poimandres replied: ‘that which the Word of God said, say I: ‘Because the Father of all things consists of Life and Light, whereof man is made.’ If, therefore, a man shall learn and understand the nature of Life and Light, then he shall pass into the eternity of Life and Light.’(1977:XXXIX).
- “Hermes next inquired about the road by which the wise attained to Life eternal, and Poimandres continued: “*Let the man endued with a Mind mark, consider, and learn of himself, and with the power of his Mind divide himself from his not-self and become a servant of Reality.*” (1977:XXXIX )(Emphasis JAG)
- “Hermes asked if all men did not have Minds, and the Great Dragon replied: ‘Take heed what you say, for I am the Mind—the Eternal Teacher. I am the Father of the Word—the Redeemer of all men—and *in the nature of the wise the Word takes flesh.* By means of the Word, the world is saved. I, Thought —the Father of the Word, the Mind—come only unto men that are holy and good, pure and merciful, and that live piously and religiously, and my presence is an inspiration and a help to them, for when I come they immediately know all things and adore the Universal Father. *Before such wise and philosophic ones die, they learn to renounce their senses, knowing that these are the enemies of their immortal souls’.* (1977:XL)(Emphasis JAG)

This heavenly man resonates well with Paul's esoteric interpretation of the Jewish creation story as well as the Christ of the gospel of John. Furthermore, this heavenly man dwelling in the light of God needs to look within to find the real Self and become awakened to serve Reality. In Hall's view, the ‘Vision of Hermes’, like nearly all the Hermetic writings, is an allegorical exposition of great

philosophic and mystic truths which hidden meaning may be comprehended only by those who have been 'raised' into the presence of the True Mind.

"The mysteries of Hermeticism, the great spiritual truths hidden from the world by the ignorance of the world and the keys of the secret doctrines of the ancient philosophers, are all symbolized by the Virgin Isis. Veiled from head to foot she reveals her wisdom only to the tried and initiated few who have earned the right to enter her sacred presence, they tear from the veiled figure of nature its shroud of obscurity, and come face to face with Divine Reality." (Hall, 1977: XXXIX, XL) (Emphasis JAG)

The content and context of this "revelation" can be regarded as one representing the foundational "truths" of the "Primordial Tradition" regarding its esoteric teachings which is being represented by the ancient mystical traditions and which in fact influenced many other "Mysteries" and esoteric philosophies, including the Greek philosophers, Christian Gospels and the Gnostics as we will see further down. These ideas strongly relate to ideas of the mystics of most mystical traditions and are presented in a logical way and resonated over time with the intuition of many intelligent spiritual people.

Most esoteric traditions emphasise a high view of humanity but is only valid if the pilgrim has discovered elements of the inner Man mostly accompanied by an advanced moral and spiritual level of development in which as in the mysteries of Hermeticism above only Isis is unveiled. This is a veritable struggle in oneself to realise the Self, the essence of life and God. The journey is not for the arrogant or lazy of mind and dull in spirit. These ideas and their typical "stories" of the mature initiates will surely have been part of the background knowledge of Saul of Tarsus and Jesus of Nazareth. In fact the Jewish and some Christian traditions, especially Paul's ideas on Genesis, God and the creation of mankind, with only minor changes, follows the same logic and relational "truths" as this story of Hermes discussed above.

### **5.3.2.1 The Universal Strategy of the Mysteries**

The group specific story or myth is mainly the carrier of deeper truths and has to be interpreted to "unveil" the universal principles of the esoteric tradition and taught as an advanced teaching or as a spiritual or mystical "secret" on a personal, one to one basis and only to the spiritual mature pilgrim. This instruction is coupled with a system of practices to facilitate key experiences of spiritual enlightenment. Kingsland states:

"In all ages of which we have any literary records, we find a tradition of a recondite knowledge which could not be disclosed to any save to those who had undergone the severest test as to their worthiness to receive it. This knowledge was very generally known under the term of the Mysteries...Associations of men and women, bound together by oaths and obligations into esoteric fraternities, have descended from the earliest times and bear

witness to a natural inclination to perpetuate doctrines which lead to the good of mankind.”  
(William Kingsland quoted by Drake in Hall 1977:1)

These secret Associations or Mysteries were cross cultural and common phenomena. They were in essence developmental associations that graduated from the mundane level of spirituality of the state religions to follow their own individual path to become “twice born” or enlightened human beings. Henry L. Drake, of the Philosophical Research Society sums up the core merits of these secret societies:

*“Historically the secret societies were closely identified with state religions...In the program of the Mysteries each individual must grow into the comprehension of truth. Before he could be entrusted with the divine powers of the Mind and will, he must accept knowledge as a responsibility to his creator and this world, rather than as an opportunity for the advancement of personal ambitions. After initiation, they are regarded as ‘Twice-Born’, for they had come to the second birth from the womb of the mysteries. These adept-philosophers were the truly evolved human beings...The end of the sacred sciences was the abstraction of the human soul from bondage to the senses and its preparation to receive within itself the light of vast truths. Those who do not understand the spiritual sciences, and may I add those who are not part of the society, question their use of unusual symbols, myths, and figures employed to conceal the essential teaching.” (Drake 1977: I, II)*  
(Emphasis JAG)

One can see why these associations were popular for the spiritually ambitious pilgrims, but according to Riley, it was expensive to join and therefore mostly for the elite classes. The aim of advancing human spiritual awareness to a higher level than the ordinary masses were interested in, was key to their success, but it excluded the poor and disenfranchised. Therefore the new Christian religions also saw their merits and the functionality of their teachings. Was it a case of copying a winning concept with minor adjustments? Later on in the development of Christianity, the assimilation process perhaps went too far and incorporated too much of the pagan state religion (1997:147). Riley, further says that,

*“To the enlightened inhabitant of the first-century Greco-Roman world the new group called Christians looked like a new mystery cult. It did bear some resemblance to a school of philosophy and Christian writers often tried to present it as such but it was immediately classified by nearly all as a mystery religion.”(1997:147)*

This assimilation of too much local religious lore, in our opinion, partly led to the unfortunate emphasis on the literal content of the myths itself and the consequent phasing out of the esoteric tradition within the young church. The situation even deteriorated as the “Church” became more and more a mass institutional religion and later on the state religion of the Empire. The myths of the Mysteries and some of their common exoteric beliefs were effectively taken over by the Christian tradition according to Carpenter:

“And an extraordinarily interesting fact, for us, is that notwithstanding great geographical distances and racial differences between the adherents of these various cults, as well as differences in the details of their services, the general outlines of their creeds and ceremonials were – if not identical – so markedly similar...One may say roughly that of all or nearly all the deities mentioned above, (virtually all of the known pantheons) it was said and believed that:

- They were born on or very near our Christmas Day.
- They were born of a Virgin-Mother.
- In a Cave or Underground Chamber.
- They led a life of toil for Mankind.
- And were called by the names of Light-bringer, Healer, Mediator, Saviour, and Deliverer.
- They were, however, vanquished by the Powers of Darkness.
- And descended into Hell or the Underworld.
- They rose again from the dead, and became the pioneers of mankind to the Heavenly world.
- They founded Communions of Saints and Churches into which disciples were received by Baptism.
- And they were commemorated by Eucharistic meals.”(1920:21).

There were also miraculous births attributed to other people outside the Christian tradition, such as Krishna, Zoroaster, Pythagoras, Alexander the Great, and some Roman Emperors from within their narrative traditions. The esoteric explanations and application of these typical “histories” of the gods and avatars form the basis of the many stories that informs the “secrets” of the common developmental goals of the esoteric traditions.

When it comes to the mysteries of life and death, learning that leads to “practical wisdom” is of dubious value because of the quality and nature of the knowledge that is required. This type of practical knowledge is not applicable in the realm of the “higher objects” which is more intuitive, but from sound principles and therefore too abstract for most. Faith, compassion and personal experience must now augment knowledge of the principles involved to manifest intuitive wisdom.

Aristotle (1980:33) in his *Nicomachean Ethics* says that,

“Wisdom must plainly be the most finished forms of knowledge. It follows that the wise not only know what follows from first principles, but must also possess truth about the first principles. Therefore wisdom must be intuitive reason combined with scientific knowledge – scientific knowledge of the highest objects which has received as it where, its proper completion.”

To reach the stage of sublime or spiritual wisdom we need to assimilate spiritual or metaphysical knowledge and reconcile it to our concepts and experience of reality. To accomplish this higher form of wisdom, we need a multilayered mechanism that ties in with the dynamics of personal development. Such a powerful tool is supplied by exhausting the mythic message to its deepest level with the help of competent teachers and contemplation.

- Firstly, the outer form or story, that relates sequence and events to us in a mythical, magical and emotional way to sidestep our critical, rational censoring mechanism in the brain, and also to help us to remember a long, complicated story.
- Subsequently, intelligible, allegorical interpretation of the abstract and complex meanings must follow, to realise the inner teachings and meaning of the myth, which should now aid our understanding of life's mysteries and serve as practical directives.
- However, as we know, understanding is coupled to intelligence, knowledge and experience. Therefore, the esoteric message should allow further grading or layered interpretation, to benefit as many as possible, provided they are motivated enough to take up this difficult task.

In real life we have to start off with one self as the prospective "hero" who has the will and stamina to complete his/her mission to meaning and spiritual maturity so that he/she could help others to achieve their mission. The hero must therefore, have the determination to "kill", "crucify" or "die to", the opposing internal hindrances, instincts, "lower soul" or "flesh", that want to keep him/her in the so-called pleasure and power mode, so that he may be "resurrected" or be "born twice" in a more advanced state. Thereby, accepting the challenge of the higher ideals of the "higher soul" or spiritual sphere, and make progress in this eternal human quest. If one accepts this explanation of the workings of myth and its meaning for the universal everybody and "spiritual heroes" of all times and places, then the rest is but culture specific detail.

### **5.3.3. Gnosis, Gnostics and Gnosticism**

A good introduction to the discussion of this complex topic is to examine Barrett's (1994:57) opinion of Paul; versus other groups he labels Gnostic. Barrett reminds us that religions of salvation were not scarce in Paul's environment and their presuppositions were not unfamiliar. The problem with Barrett's description of the "Gnostics" is that he uses one specific group to typify all the many variants of the Gnostic phenomena:

*"Some of Paul's contemporaries thought of a world that had been wrong from the start, that it was wrong in itself and could only cease to be wrong by ceasing to be itself. Creation was an unfortunate error that had to be undone; salvation could be thought of as de-creation... This was the basic proposition which the various Gnostic myths expressed in an endless series of mythological fantasies — fantasies indeed, but not fantasies that can be regarded as objects of scorn, for they were the products of sensitive minds burdened by the world's evil which they took as seriously as it deserved to be taken."* (Barrett 1994: 57) (Emphasis JAG)

Barret seemingly wants to categorize Gnostics as including only those who rebelled against what they believed to be "faulty creational happenings", resulting in an unjust world where the good

suffered with the bad. Various philosophical groups and religions as well as everybody alive try to give reasonable answers to this basic perceived problem that our world is far from just and perfect. We will be discussing some other answers coming of different groups, but you can be sure there will be many explanations on offer.

As the Roman military machine conquers more and more nations, an Empire steeped in Greek culture and Roman law where now only a few had citizenship and the Emperors needed law abiding people as well as religious uniformity for political stabilization; plenty of conquered gods and their priestly managers needed to find new strategies for survival. The Romans practically conquered their victims' gods with their respective cults, including the Jewish one and the Jewish Temple cult were not in healthy state anymore. This process of regrouping and re-thinking among conquered groups to make sense again of their particular god's plans and to give the necessary explanations of what went wrong, was inevitable. This re-engineering process produced new "revelations", representing many views from many different perspectives and most were desperately looking for converts to share in their beliefs.

I did not find the study of the different outer mysteries or myths of most Gnostic groups very rewarding until I realised that they are just different versions of an effort to understand life, self and God. They combined mythic speculation about God and creation with known philosophical and other religious "insights" and thereby created their own theories of faith that mostly now concentrated on personal growth as the aspirations of their national gods were very bleak. Their ideas, like any other religious, speculative philosophy originating in specific groups originated from charismatic and intelligent leaders that were very creative. Naturally one could also recognise many mavericks and "way out" groups but from their recovered writings one must acknowledge the godly lives of some of the Gnostic leaders and their followers.

The gnostic myths had to explain why "things" went wrong since creation and why life seems to be so cruel, brutish and haphazard, and they also busied themselves with Job's universal question, why the righteous suffers and the wicked flourish. So, as in Job's time, they also did not have any easy answers to offer and Early Christian period was therefore a colourful spectrum of belief systems as we will again see from Paul's arguments also.

The expected behaviour of people is closely linked to their choice of "creation and salvation" options. A common inner truth of all the Gnostic spiritual systems seems to be that there is a need for self-knowledge and that leads you to personal discoveries and a type of knowledge that gets you to realise your godly potential that can lead to salvation or metaphorically, to get you out of Egypt into

the Promised Land. But only you can do the necessary work to get yourself back on your way to reunite with God. These “facts” were well known to Gnostics and spiritual people of the time and applied also by Apollonius, a contemporary of Jesus, in his efforts to reform all “pagan” religions where the Priests stopped to teach these inner forms of wisdom (Mead 1966:4).

The gnostic groups were more accessible for gentiles as a new and improved Mystery religion and continued to exist openly for many centuries until hunted virtually to near extinction by the orthodox state sponsored Christians. Many Church Fathers complained about the gnostic elements in their churches; they had the habit, the Fathers objected, that they agreed with the creeds but after church held informal and, mind you, “unauthorized” private meetings to practise their private “heretic beliefs” (Riley 1997:147).

In the gospels of the New Testament, says Pagels (1994:3),

“The claim is made that Jesus rose once from the dead, bodily, and disappeared bodily into heaven. The Gospel of Philip is another gnostic gospel, found at Nag Hammadi, and it ridicules this idea as the faith of fools. It says the Resurrection is a moment of transformation of existence. The Resurrection is moving from death to spiritual life. It is very much like some Buddhist teachings, talking about moving toward the moment of enlightenment and the understanding of reality. They do not deny the possibility or even the reality of life after death. What they don’t believe in is bodily life after bodily death.”

It is interesting that the early church even in the times of Clement and Origen in Alexandria had still a strong dualistic structure regarding the Gnostic element as representing the more mature Christians in relation to the other “believers”. Pagels says:

“At Alexandria, Origen sometimes argued that all four gospels were partly historical and partly symbolical while relating the first mainly to the first phase of spiritual development and the latter esoteric interpretation to a more mature spirituality. Gnosticism is not so much being born again or instantaneous enlightenment, (that may come later) but a willingness to make some sort of spiritual search. At least that is what the Gospel of Thomas says.” (1994:4)

Pagels comments that what is different about the gnostic gospels is that they have different perceptions of Jesus. The Gospel of John says He is the only begotten Son of God, and if you believe in Him, you are saved. If you don’t believe in Him, you’re condemned. The Gospel of Thomas says, “If you come to know yourselves, then you will know that it is you who are the children of God, and the kingdom of God will be found within.” Therefore, “the message here is that every person can discover that he is, so to speak, Jesus’ twin brother” (1994:4).

Therefore, we can say that one’s conception of God, his creation, his plans and the nature of man and life’s realities, either argued for, intuitive or adopted, forms the basis of your speculative spiritual philosophy, theory of faith or our explanation of our religious beliefs. This theoretical belief construct

could develop from a primarily faith basis into gnosis, a kind of experiential intuitive knowledge, if it makes “inner sense”, and therefore will more likely manifest in a moral and contemplative life. Joining up with Socrates, Plato and Aristotle, it becomes an examined and planned life, lived in a loving, virtuous way as a matter of habit, with due regard to the godly elements within; your conscience or inner voice or Spirit within, reveals to you the desired course. All these efforts to understand God the world, as well as man’s role in it all, are therefore Gnostic in nature. It is based on a universal wish to understand even the seemingly unfathomable facts of life.

Gnosis yields redemption and Elaine Pagels says that Irenaeus tells us that for the Valentinians gnosis was the redemption of the inner, spiritual man and not the body or the soul. She explains that gnosis could be sensitively translated as “insight”. God has to be looked for inside oneself rather than externally (1989: xix). According to the Gospel of Thomas (Saying three), Jesus said,

“If you look for the kingdom of God in heaven or in the sea, the birds and the fish will precede you. Rather, the kingdom is inside you, and it is outside you. When you come to know yourselves, then you will become known, and you will realize that it is you who are the sons of the Father. But if you will not know yourselves, you dwell in poverty and it is you who are in poverty.”

As used at present, the terms gnosis, gnostic and Gnostics are loaded, depending from which doctrinal camp you approach them, and that makes it presently still a confusing field of study. We need to exercise special care not to misuse the name Gnostic and all its derivatives as names for alternative or “heretic” Christian theological views used and applied to those that are not of our group. In principle, we can say that the concept gnosis wants to describe a type of knowledge that should follow on moral and spiritual maturity as a form of experiential and intuitive insight coming from a contemplative life in the belief that there is an “Entity or causal factor” called God, and our own essence or real Self is a derivative of the Spirit of God within all humanity. Our essence or Spirit can be dormant and inactive depending on our level of spiritual development and self realisation.

From this perspective any professed knowledge of God, comes from the Spirit of God within us and this category of “higher wisdom” is coming mainly from intuition and that is validated by personal experience, results in a form of “gnosis”, a kind of spiritual knowledge. Then all persons who profess such special, experiential or intuitive, non-ordinary-scientific knowledge are “Gnostics”. There is no way that we can verify “gnosis” scientifically or teach this type of knowledge in an objective, rational way; we either experience this realisation through spiritual enfoldment or accept the “revelations” of someone else, his/their gnosis, but then it is for us, just another form of faith.

All spiritual growth is essentially “work in progress” and normally in harmony with human growth our spiritual wisdom should also grow day by day and cannot remain static as the learning and aware



experiences of today should have changed our internal reality of yesterday. Inherent in gnostic philosophy is the recognition therefore that gnosis can only be personal and all that we can do for one another is to help by listening and prompting each other to pursue truth and personal realisation in a caring way; by living out our values as an example as well and an encouragement to others while attending to our own growth to wholeness as a Human Beings.

It is therefore obvious that Gnostics do not recognise a “universal unchanging creed” as sufficient for their spiritual needs. To the Gnostics, Jesus was to be followed in your own unique way; to have “faith” in Jesus meant to be belief in what he taught and to be “faithful” to his teachings is to aspire to become like him, a unique veritable spiritual hero. This was also the very core of Paul’s teachings and also of many Gnostics and the spiritually matured disciples of Jesus. With very few exceptions, most Gnostics groups revered Paul as a special envoy of Jesus. His emphasis that he teaches the “resurrected Christ” is a specific indication that he teaches the inner meaning of the spiritual resurrection necessary for all mature spiritual people; to become like Christ through the Spirit that was in Christ that is latent within all. It is precisely this clear manifestation of the in-living Spirit that made Jesus “the Christ” for Paul. To be “resurrected with Christ”, you have long passed the simple phase of a faith that proclaims that you can only be saved through a substitutive blood sacrifice. Therefore, for the Gnostics, Jesus is definitely not a divine sacrifice for the sake of divine justice as demanded by God, in which you need to “believe” to earn His grace, and thereby “believe” yourself into everlasting life. This historical “remedy” of a sacrifice was used only as a metaphor and slogan to wean the fresh converts from the different sacrificial Cults and their law-pushing priests so that they could commence their real spiritual journey.

#### **5.4. The Primordial Tradition as the universal mystical way and its inherent multiple tiers of graded teachings**

As our interest in the history of Christianity centres around traditions that could still be valid for 21<sup>st</sup> century Christians, the mystical traditions of Jesus and Paul are viewed as our best chances in this respect. It is therefore also of interest what modern scholars of mysticism have to say about mysticism although this can not be done in a definitive way within the scope of this work. We will therefore look only at a few more ideas in conjunction of what was already said in the section on clarification of concepts about mysticism and in the section above about Gnostic mysticism in general. At the end of this section we will try to integrate the realities of the Institutional religious phase with that of the personal mystical one in a visual way for a more complete religious landscape.

Debating whether there did in fact exist a primordial tradition is now actually unnecessary if you define this tradition from its essential point of view that humanity is partly composed of natural and

biological elements with a more important spiritual dimension that needs to be recognised, integrated and developed as the “way” back to Paradise and God. Of course, as we have seen, none of the many philosophical and religious-mystery groups have exactly the same exoteric myths or stories but they all agree on the above understanding that our “essence” is spiritual and immortal, albeit “hidden” within an earthly and mortal body. For real spiritual advancement the spiritual “Image of God”, or “Human Being”, must be acknowledged, by looking inward and developed to manage the bodily urges designed for survival and pleasure; one should not regress into uncontrolled lust, materialism and the misuse of power that leads to harm of Self, Others and the Cosmos. Campbell’s “Hero” as well as Wilber’s integrated and mature human being has no choice but to do the necessary work to grow to the next phase of development if he/she wants to experience meaning in his/her life.

Rossner in discussing Rudolf Bultmann’s view of locating the basic features of a pre-Christian Heavenly Redeemer myth in an early oriental gnostic tradition as reflected in Mandaean texts operates with the notion that the following characteristics for the spiritual growth process are essentially the same as other Gnostic stories:

“In the cosmic drama a heavenly ‘Urmensch’ or Primal Man of Light falls and is torn to pieces by demonic powers. These particles are encapsulated as the sparks of light in the ‘pneumatics’ of mankind...demons try to stupefy the ‘pneumatics’ by sleep and forgetfulness so that they forget their divine origin...another Being of Light, the ‘Redeemer’, who descends the demonic spheres, assuming the deceptive garments of a bodily exterior to escape the notice of the demons.” (Rossner 1989:97)

The previous part is in practical, spiritual terms and in broad strokes the same as that of the Jewish story of the universal Adam and our human plight. In the part that follows Jesus as “the Christ” fits in very well into this Gnostic story. He came down to teach or awake those who are asleep, teaching the way back, validate his teaching by ascending himself so that others can follow and intend to come back to fetch the remaining kindred spirits in a final act of permanent reconciliation with the godhead.

“The Redeemer is sent to awaken the ‘pneumatics’ to the truth of their heavenly origins and gives them the necessary ‘gnosis’ or ‘knowledge’ to serve as passwords for their heavenly re-ascend...The Redeemer himself re-ascends, defeating the demonic powers, and thereby makes a way for spirits that will follow him...Cosmic redemption is achieved when the souls of men are collected and gathered upward. In this process the Redeemer is himself redeemed, i.e., the Primal Man who fell in the beginning is reconstituted.” (Rossner 1989:97)

Shoneberg Setzer, of the Academy of Religion and Psychical Research, present us with a most insightful of the fifteen apparently constant characteristics of mysticism found also in Gnosticism and

esoteric Christianity. In this quotation Setzer has combined the characteristics with a description of the three identifiable, constant stages of mystical development. Rossner in summarising Setzer reports,

“These universally basic, observable types of mystical experience often cut across both belief systems and ideological linguistic traditions. We include here Seltzer’s outline from his essay *Making the Mystics Make Sense*:

“... a mystic is defined as ‘one who wishes for, and /or has attained, an immediate and unitary contact with things divine, rather than being satisfied with inferred or institutionally mediated knowledge about the divine.’

Also 15 apparently constant characteristics of mysticism are noted, namely:

1. That the mystic believes in the existence of a super-sensory and super-rational ultimate reality,
2. Which can be known only by direct personal contact,
3. In a manner that constitutes union with that reality
4. And that this union is no mere illusion.

Further, the path toward union is:

5. Constituted of active and passive phases,
6. Requires a great love and longing for this ultimate reality, and
7. A disciplined program of self-purification.

The experience of union produces:

8. A view of the harmony of all things within the ultimate reality,
9. A sense of sacredness,
10. A transformation of values
11. A commitment to sacrificial service, and
12. The release of new energies for living.

The experience is:

13. Transient,
14. Ineffable, and
15. Can be related only in poetry, analogy and paradox.

The three stages of mystical development were pointed out as well, that is:

1. Awakening
2. Purification,
3. Illumination” (1989: 40) (Emphasis JAG)

Note that the three stages of *awakening, purification and illumination* correspond with all esoteric teachings as well as the Gnostic traditions and the later Mystical or Contemplative Christian traditions. The experiences that are described here correlate with what Douglas Harding (2002:40) classifies as “Peak experiences” and of a type of mysticism which he seems to group as religiously explained insights and euphoria which are short lived and non repeatable. These types of

experiences must be augmented according to Richard Rose, with the spiritual seeker's journey within him/herself as the highest priority. To know something of God, you have to know yourself as the essential Self and thus as the only true window to get a peep of what God might be for human beings. You have to constantly deconstruct your "un-truths" to get nearer to Truth and personal Realisation which will then facilitate authentic well understood mystical experiences (1979:i).

To recap, in real life there are normally two broad structural levels underpinning religious and mystical systems and they vary in their contribution to a specific system. Therefore, in any formal religious institution there is an original person or group that formulate and manage their vision, mission and objectives and define the modus operandi to be followed for the benefit of the institution, leadership and members and normally in this order of importance. In addition to this formal structure there is the social, emotional and personal spiritual need of the individuals that choose to join or were culturally coerced to join.

There can be a greater or lesser degree of harmony between the objectives of these sub-groups and their interests, which is complicated further by personal differences between members. In an important way both are necessary for the emotional and spiritual growth of the normal human being. At a certain level of development it is necessary to submit to the laws that govern civil life and the social rules that ensure the order through ethical behaviour of a healthy civil or social group. The problem lies only in the fact that the relevant institutions might not like the idea of you making up your own mind as to the merit of these rules and governing beliefs. The following schematic portrayal highlights the different domains with the inherent interests with overlapping to a certain degree:

**1. Personal piety**

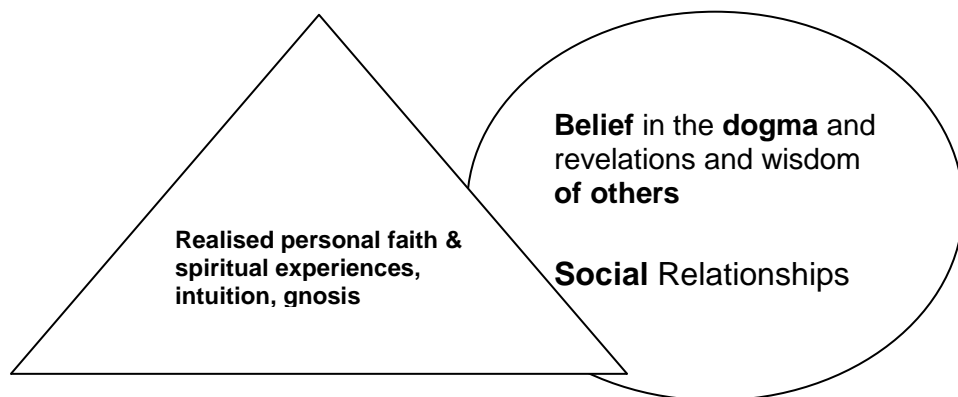
**(Individual spirituality- quest for truth and God)**

**Personal relationship with God**

**2. Religions /Cults**

**(National, tribal and cultic aims)**

**Prescribed Faith in God**



This practical differentiation is the key to understanding the temple cults and institutions as a national asset based on prescribed beliefs and rites versus the personal quest for truth and spiritual experience that leads to individual productive praxis of the fully responsible pilgrim. These mystic-secret groups were always present and had a very profound influence on the spirituality of the more mature pilgrims although their numbers were few in comparison to that of the national cult that served the king and priests in their use and manipulation of power in society. The cultic temple is eventually to be replaced by the bodily temple of the spiritual seeker who from a new inner source wants to live in harmony with God and others according to his/her own conscience. This more advanced spiritual practice was alive and well in pockets of Early Christianity, Rossner emphasises that:

“That fruition, to be real, can only end into bringing to birth the ‘New Being’ in every creature. The goal of human spiritual evolution was, according to the blueprint of the Christian orthodoxy of Greek Fathers from Clement, Origen, and Justin Martyr to Irenaeus and Gregory Palamas, nothing less than the ‘Kingdom of God’ in which Jesus lived, moved, and had His being and is ever to come to reign ‘on earth, as it is in Heaven’...Christian scholars must begin to direct themselves once again, with “right-brained” knowledge and skill, to explore those authentic “inner spaces” of “higher consciousness” in which alone the experience of the “New Birth” of the “Cosmic Christ” in Everyman is to be found.” (1989:126)

We have already discussed the fact that there is a Primordial Tradition focussing on spiritual intuition and insight, derived from common experiences of psychic and mystical insights, which may be found at the roots of most of the major religious traditions which want to develop. Rossner professes about the mystical phenomenon,

“It is our own acquisition of real – not imaginary – psychic and spiritual faculties of perception, and the development within ourselves of higher states and forms of consciousness.” (1989:244)

Ferdinand Cuvelier (1990:103), in his translation from the Coptic Gospel of Thomas, says the core of the mystical tradition is to be found in many of Jesus’ sayings,

“Jezus zei: Hij die zoekt, zal vinden  
En hij die naar **binnen** aanklopt, voor hem zal men open maken” (Saying 92) (Emphasis JAG)

The spiritual seeking must focus on the internal realities of mankind; it is not for objective knowledge but for spiritual, experiential self knowledge. In saying 67, we see that is only through knowledge of the spiritual self that one can be united with the “Al-aanwesige”; Cuvelier (1990:103) in his rendering of the Coptic literal meaning of “the total place” or “the place of the all”. This is a helpful translation to describe the total-ness of the “all” in most other translations; it accentuate the “cosmic totally” as a view on the being of God that also includes us in our new state of inclusive awareness.

Cuvelier put it clearly, the end result of the spiritual therapy of the mystic is unity, integration and integrity; in harmony with All. He also stresses that, “Eenwording en opstanding zijn synoniem” Cuvelier, (1990:139) and this means to me internal unity with God within in a mega framework of cosmic consciousness and that is the real esoteric spiritual resurrection!

In relation to Paul's mysticism Schweitzer comments,

“He who has fallen under the power of the conception of dying and rising again with Christ advances into an ever deeper consciousness of sin, and attains in the struggle to die from sin a quiet certitude of the forgiveness of sin...*we can only bring so much of the Kingdom of God into the world as we possess within us.*” (1998: 389) (Emphasis JAG)

I would like to close this section with the insightful words of Walter Wink on moral and spiritual growth:

*“What I and others similarly inclined are trying to do is to move Christianity in a more humane direction. For that task we seek a Jesus who is not the omnipotent God in a man-suit, but someone like us, who looked for God at the centre of his life and called the world to join him...Even if we are able to recover something of the human Jesus, we might still be subject to the second limitation mentioned above: the poverty of our selves. No matter how vast our knowledge of Jesus' historical period, unless we are also addressing our spiritual inadequacies we will be unable to proceed closer to the mystery of Human Being. We will continue to circle its perimeter, accumulating more information without being changed by the encounter. No scholar can construct a picture of Jesus beyond the level of spiritual awareness that they have attained. No reconstruction outstrips its reconstructor. We cannot explain truths we have not yet understood. We cannot present insights that we have not yet grasped. Our picture of Jesus reflects not only Jesus, but the person portraying Jesus. If we are spiritual infants or adolescents, whole realms of human reality will simply escape us. As Gerald O'Collins remarked, writing about Jesus betrays what we have experienced and done as human beings. Or as very wise black women in Texas once said to me, 'You caint no more give someone something you ain't got than you can come back from somewhere you ain't been.'” (2002:10) (Emphasis JAG)*

From the comments and opinions of van Niekerk, Rossner, Cuvelier, Schweitzer and Wink a fairly diversified but broad sense making pattern of mapping emerges which overlap with the research of Wilber on human growth patterns, especially, regarding the notion that real spiritual insight from a mystical perspective requires a mature moral disposition on a level of consciousness that facilitates perception beyond the ordinary level. Richard Rose points in the ambience of our personal spiritual development to a constant deconstruction of un-truths of any kind in our own perceptions, thoughts and memories in our quest of self-identification as essentially also a search for truth (1981:10).

# Chapter 6

## The foundational Traditions of Christianity

### 6.1 Introduction

In this chapter we will look briefly at some influential traditions in the Ancient Near East and their possible relationship to each other and early Christianity. We accept the fact that the Canaanite and Egyptian religions must have had an influence on Israel because of the geography and it is also generally believed that the Persian religion of Zoroaster influenced the Essenes and Judaism as a whole. The Jewish wisdom tradition also seems an important component in the mix of influences on Christianity. The possibility of covering these topics in fuller detail falls outside the scope of this study. The sub-focus of this chapter which is in support of the main focus is to identify various religious traditions and thought systems that could have had an influence on Paul's sense making approach. One is also accepting therewith that some of the traditions above may have been more important than others in their influence on Paul's life-world. A meaningful and proper evaluation and comparison of the variety of schemes that influenced Paul falls outside the scope of the thesis.

As Abraham and Moses seem to be two pivotal persons in the way Paul understood his religious heritage we will accordingly try to understand basically why they were important to him. We will also endeavour to obtain a basic understanding of other possible religious groups that could have influenced Judaism and therefore also Paul's vision for Christianity.

### 6.2 Pivotal moments in the history of the Jewish religion from Abraham, Moses and Akhenaton to John the Baptist

The history of monotheism seems to originate with Egypt and was possibly an element that plays a role in the Moses tradition. This "history" from the Bible and the cultural memory of the Egyptians and Hebrews forms an important part of the Judaic-Christian religious background as well as the way Moses and his "laws" was remembered by Jewish groups and Early Christianity. As the development of the Jewish Temple organisation seems to be mainly the heritage from the Moses tradition, the comprehensive Egyptian religious systems from different eras certainly exerted influence and contributed to the life-world from which the Moses tradition emerged.

In his book *Moses the Egyptian*, Assmann (1998) asserts that our ideas about monotheism are influenced in many ways by perspectives that originated in the Heliopolitan theology and the

subsequent religion of the Aten of Akhenaten. Monotheism did have its source in Egypt and the Egyptians acknowledged the unity principle, the One, and the many in their “cosmotheism”.

Assmann clearly distinguishes between Moses as a historic figure and Moses as portrayed in the literature. He calls this phenomenon mnemohistory, not as it transpired according to current knowledge of history but as it is remembered by interest groups.

Assmann also subscribes to Freud’s view that Akhenaten’s monotheism was the model upon which Moses had built his own particular cult. Atenism seems to be the earliest monotheistic religious concept ever and was associated mainly with the eighteenth dynasty Pharaoh and prophet Amenhotep IV, better known as Akhenaten, the name he adopted. He introduced Aten as the sole deity in his revolution, in a series of decreed steps culminating in the official endorsement of Aten as the sole universal god for the Egyptian Empire, and beyond. According to Assmann, it was established as Egypt’s state religion for around two decades, in the 14<sup>th</sup> century BC, before a violent return to the traditional Amen and Egyptian pantheon gods, while the name of the ‘heretic Pharaoh’ associated with Aten was virtually completely erased from the Egyptian records (1998:24).

Moses following Akhenaten also wanted his followers to break with Egyptian State religion in favour of esoteric religion of a personal relationship with God. His followers were also not ready and he had to revert to a cultic religion again. Assmann postulates that, Moses then designed the new cultic religion by reversing many Egyptian beliefs to serve as a counter religion to the traditional Egyptian pantheon of gods and as Akhenaten, recognised only one God but with a different name and with no symbolism allowed (1998:25).

### **6.3 Abraham, Melchizedek and their God El versus Moses and Yahweh**

For Paul there seems to be a very distinct difference in the tradition of the “fathers” and by name that of Abraham and the tradition of Moses and the law. In contrasting these two traditions we need to look for specific indicators that could move Paul to make such sharp distinctions between the “faith” of Abraham and the “law” of Moses. Furthermore we need to look at the possible implication of Moses’ law-driven tradition and the faith-content of Abraham’s religion in so far as it could also involve pivotal or broader cultic practices of the Jewish cults at the time.

Deist and Du Plessis (1981), have very interesting theological perspectives on the variety ancient Jewish religious groups. I especially appreciate their willingness to report critically on the many problems concerning correctness of translations, inconsistencies and revisions and mostly their integrity in admitting the stepped evolution of the Old Testament books as new scribal interventions



or additions that follows every important national and theological crisis and when new hope and explanations were needed.

Boshoff et al (2002), also point out that there were substantial differences between the religions of the Northern and Southern Kingdoms.

“After Solomon gained the upper hand and became king in Jerusalem, he was also accepted as king of the north. There are indications, however, that the people of the north and the south *never really united*. For the duration of the United Kingdom, *different conceptions of God, society and kingship* survived in the two communities. After the death of Solomon these differences came to the fore with renewed emphasis.” (2002:97)

Of importance to us is the fact that the religion of Abraham was in certain respects totally different from that of Moses. Deist and the above mentioned scholars pointed out that Abraham’s God’s name was El and there was no evidence of intermediaries, priests or elaborate prescribed routine rituals involved in his method of worship. Abraham had a direct relationship with God without a formal set of laws to govern this relationship. Abraham and his predecessor Enoch were described as “friends of God” and had a special, personal relationship with God. El was also not place bound and could be worshiped everywhere (Deist et al: 22). Deist also pointed out that:

“Moses to the contrary (to Abraham) was brought up in the court of Pharaoh and was doubtlessly conversant with the Egyptian cults and married a Medianite priest’s daughter. He revealed and instituted the law, which had to rule ethical and cultic behaviour within an agreement or covenant made with God, which is now called Yahweh and who lived on mount Sinai (Ps 68:9) at the beginning of this relationship. Elaborate and periodic cultic rituals were prescribed and the priesthood is therefore part of the deal. Communication with Yahweh is through Moses and/or the priesthood (1981: 22).

The promises of El to Abraham are unconditional but that of Yahweh is conditional and subject to obedience to the Law. There is a distinct difference between the way in which God is served as El and the way in which God is served as Yahweh. Abraham had a special and faithful relationship with God and acted therefore from within, and not from fear of the Law, a point the Prophets, Jesus and Paul were also very serious about.

The important differences in the orientation of the El tradition with direct communication between God and the King as His representative and the secondary role of priests versus the cultic law orientated religion of Yahweh as King and the importance of the priest and the Cult in the early Judaism need to be recognised in Paul’s argumentation. Stephen, before his death (Acts 8:54-60) addresses the same differences and some new ones regarding the gentile Christians and Jewish cultic laws. The issues for him were clear, Abraham believed and respected God and is the first receiver of the “main” covenant because it all started with him and while he was not even a Jew yet.

He is “the” forefather who had a personal direct contact with God and Moses came much later and got the Law through “angels”.

Stephen is at one with the prophetic tradition; the laws and sacrifices of the Temple cult, which God does not even need, is now for the Jews more important than a life in the Spirit. “How stubborn you are!” The prophets reprimanded the people continuously over time wanting them to return to a life of faithfulness and the simple direct spirituality of Abraham’s tradition.

The “law” meant for some groups moral and spiritual principles but, for others, nationalistic regulations and “Jewishness”. For the Qumran people the “Aaronic messiah” was co-leader at least with the nationalistic, political messiah and not his servant. My view is that the importance of Zadok as the ideal High Priest for the Essenes, has to do with the capabilities of this historic person and his “family” to be teachers of the higher truths (Teacher of Righteousness); of the Greater mysteries and not only a cultic/political coordinator of rites and manager of cultic finances. Bordeaux maintains that the “greater” mysteries generally taught the unity of God and cosmos as well as our personal relationship and responsibility to both as “the way” to salvation (1978:25).

An additional observation in the debate on whether Jesus’ kingdom message, is for the present or for the end time, one must remember that the Northern Kingdom was organised from the beginning on the basis of a theocracy and should have represented God’s kingdom on earth. It is obvious from the prophets’ point of view as well as that of Jesus, Stephen and Paul, that the real problem was lack of compassion and commitment to this very ideal of an earthly spiritually driven Kingdom where the king and the citizens were supposed to live this reality as Jesus wanted to promote also.

#### **6.4 Babylon, Persia, Zoroaster and Cyrus, Yahweh’s anointed servant – Searching the Scriptures for new answers**

This vast body of information is both intimidating and diffuse. Only certain general clues to possible influences on Early Christianity are to be discussed. Cyrus’ decision to encourage the Jews to rebuild their Temple again after freeing them from the bondage of Assyria was directly influenced by the Zoroastrian principles which accepted other culture-specific national religions because the Zoroastrians knew that there is but one God. It is also noteworthy that their regional religious headquarters was in Damascus at the time!

Deist and du Plessis (1981) as well as Boshoff et al (2000:167, 168) relate the important shift that also took place in the minds of the people in exile regarding the traditional differences in mindsets

pertaining to Northern and Southern kingdoms. A totally new vision of their God transcending its Jewish roots started its birthing process. Deist and Du Plessis report,

“As the Southern kingdom’s belief structure revolved around the patriarchal promises and the Davidic kingdom, the exile was experienced as a traumatic incident. The first reactions were to revert to the tradition of the Northern kingdom, that it is God’s way of punishing them for their sins. This new vision was penned in the Deuteronomist history. Conversion and repentance goes hand in hand. What is interesting in the Deuteronomist, says, is that the restoration of the Davidic kingdom was not propagated, ‘they expect the establishment of a community in which the Law of God lives in the hearts of people far rather than a political kingdom such as that which existed in the monarchic period’ (Jr.31: 31-34), which is probably also of Deuteronomistic origin. *God is going to create something new. All the old answers are not relevant any more. A God that rules the whole earth now replaces their Jewish national view of God. Foreign people can now fulfil even a positive function in God’s plan. Isaiah 44: 28 and 45: 1, call Cyrus – king of Persia – God’s “shepherd” and “anointed”, this heralds a new vision on religion. This important paradigm shift started through the influence of the Persian religion.*” (1981:74) (Emphasis JAG)

This new awareness, mediated by the Persian religion and taken up by many prophets could be seen as the precursor to Jesus’ and Paul’s enlightened interpretation of the universal Kingdom of God as we will see presently.

#### **6.4.1 Zoroaster offers some answers for exilic Judaism**

The Persian religion of Zoroastrianism started with the remarkable reformer of Persian religion, Zoroaster who was an inspired prophet and philosopher that wanted to reform the decadent priestly dominated polytheistic cult of Persia. Nigosian proclaimed that tradition has it that Zoroaster was born from a virgin mother and his mission started at the age of thirty (1993:11, 12). He declared that there is but one supreme God named Ahura Mazda and relegated all the other gods too the status of angels. He got rid of the priests and their cultic practises and propagated a personal and direct relationship with this one God (1993:20, 21).

This theology of Cyrus and Darius resulted from their belief in One God for all and it did not matter what name any group gave to their God and which ever way they structure their religion, was of no real importance, because we all must be worshipping the same Supreme Being. Therefore there is no need for trying to convert people to Zoroastrianism, or for that matter, to any other religion. Naturally they think their religion was the best vehicle to experience God. Nigosian, states that out of this enlightened religious philosophy Cyrus and Darius were sympathetic to all religions and encouraged all people to practise their religion in a moral and direct way (1993:8). It is therefore self-evident that Isaiah and Ezra would hail Cyprus as an anointed one of God and they would incorporate some of this profound wisdom for use in their own efforts of reconstructing their religion.

Of course the part of having no priests was to ghastly to contemplate for the present and future Jewish priestly elite, but many other beliefs were very handy in re-inventing Judaism because it was also essentially an ethical religion. Nigosian, reports that the “end of days” of judgement and resurrection beliefs of Zoroastrianism is virtually identical to that of Christianity; God will eventually judge all people through his personal messenger and saviour called by the Persians, the “Saoshyant” (Saviour) (1993:94). They also believed that when one dies, your soul will be judged over a period of 3 days after which one either goes to heaven or hell. Therefore Jesus also went through this period of trial and was validated by his “resurrection”. This judgement is based on their ethical teachings of three principles:

- (i) good reflection (thinking),
- (ii) good words and
- (iii) good deeds.

The teachings of the seven Amesh Spentas, which are translated as the Seven Beneficent Immortals (Intelligences or Principles) of the One (Wise) God is, present everywhere ([www.Zoroaster.net](http://www.Zoroaster.net) – Zarathustra/Herodotus). These seven principles can be interpreted either as cosmic or personal truths depending on one’s spiritual maturity and insight. Through the understanding and practising of these principles, through applying good thoughts, good words and good deeds of love and devotion we bring about the ideal state of things or what Jesus would call the Kingdom of Heaven here and now. The prescribed daily meditation exercises of the seven Angels of the Heavenly Father and the seven Angels of Mother earth of the Essenes tradition comes to mind. (Szekely 1981:23)

Zoroaster was against sacrifices and priestly interventions on our part. The prophets, Jesus, Stephen and Paul, stood more in the broader tradition of Zoroaster, who according to Herodotus, “even deprived the clergies from their temples and God houses, as they had made it with their own hands” and of no use for God ([www.Zoroaster.net](http://www.Zoroaster.net) – Zarathustra/Herodotus).

The same fate befell Zoroaster as with Akhenaten in Egypt although we cannot be sure that he was murdered by the priests. The “mystery” literature of the Qumran library also value the human body as the real temple of God rather than the one build with stone again emphasising the importance of the esoteric rather than exoteric spirituality.

The most characteristic features of the Persian religion after the time of Zoroaster consist in the teaching that a great calamity is at hand, which will lead to the renovation of the world called

*frashakart* in the Avesta and *frashakart* in Pahlavi. Different saviours will come to enlighten us, born of the seed of Zoroaster, *but in the end the great final Saviour will come that will bring about the resurrection of the dead. He will be the “son of a virgin” and the “All-conquering.” His name shall be “Victorious” (verethrajan), “Righteousness-incarnate” (astvat-ereta), and the “Saviour” (Saoshyant).* Then the living shall also become immortal...” (www.Zoroaster.net – Zarathustra/Herodotus) (Fr 4. 3) (Emphasis JAG)

These beliefs are obvious also part of the belief system of the Essenes and perhaps other Jewish groups and taken over by Christianity. The biological information of the saviour and his names are the same as that of Jesus in the Gospels. Furthermore, Daniels’ Son of Man has Persian inputs as well as the three magi (Persian priests) in the birth narrative confirm the joint belief in a saviour that must come. Unfortunately some time after the death of Zoroaster the cultic priesthood reclaimed their power and old practices were again re-introduced to serve the cultic management.

An interesting fact about the “three day trail” after death is that it seems related to an ancient universal belief that was based on the three days of “uncertainty” at the time of the winter solstice before a visible move of the sun is recognised that heralds a new “growing” phase, or the sun’s resurrection from the death of deepest winter. This most important sign of renewed life was festively celebrated over the whole world and in all religions; it was the most important happening on the calendar, the Sun (God) has resurrected!

These Persian beliefs adapted from the exile were an enormous shift away from a tribal/national religion to a universal religion. Another important development was that the re-invention of their religion and scriptures also seem to have revived the Hebrew secret traditions related to the Creation, Exodus and Ezekiel’s Chariot. These esoteric traditions later became the symbolic carriers of a deeper personal developmental mysticism and a personal relationship with God. God and Israel’s history is now a part of the greater history of the world and also laid the foundation for a broader esoteric interpretation of the exodus happenings, which are now also seen as pointers to the spiritual path of every individual.

## **6.5 The Essenes and the Dead Sea Scrolls**

These documents continue to provide insights into the nature and operation of the extinct communities that deposited them as well as valuable information on their religious and spiritual orientation that could inform our understanding of our own tradition. The scope and variety of the documents is fascinating. Only 25% of them are copies of the Old Testament books and 75% are commentaries and reinterpretation of older books as well as some sectarian and wisdom literature.

The vast variety of ideas contained in this library are interesting although we are more interested in possible esoteric and mystical trends from different groups in the documents that could have had an influence on the religious communities of the first century of the CE. This part of the study is therefore limited.

### **6.5.1 Some clues on Soteriology from the Dead Sea Scrolls (DSS)**

We will have a look at some of these documents that relates to ideas that could have influenced Early Christianity. We are basically only interested in their organisation, teachings and methods of initiation of esoteric sub groups to ascertain whether we can find echoes of their ideas within some Christian communities. In these efforts I am indebted to the summaries of Dr. Gary Gromacki ([http://faculty.bbc.edu/ggromacki/?page\\_id=39](http://faculty.bbc.edu/ggromacki/?page_id=39)) and only a few other contributors.

*The Community Rule and Damascus Document:* The title Damascus Document comes from the references in the catchphrase of the “New Covenant” made “in the land of Damascus.” These works says Gromacki, displays a terminology akin to the mystery religions and one could hardly find a better summary of their meaning than that of Josephus as quoted by him below. It is also interesting to note the “Zadokite” character of these works indicating a combination of Intertestamental Judaism and “secret teachings”. Notable also is the warning, further down, that nobody should experiment with “*Ezekiel’s passage about the chariot as a prophetic reading*”, which forms the basis of the Merkabah mysteries, without proper guidance.

Josephus’ description of Initiation of new members into the Essene Community:

“A candidate anxious to join their sect is not immediately admitted. For one year, during which he remains outside the fraternity, they prescribe for him their own rule of life, presenting him with a small hatchet, the loin cloth already mentioned, and white raiment.

Having given proof of his temperance during this probationary period, he is brought into closer touch with the rule and is allowed *to share the purer kind of holy water*, but is not yet received into the meeting of the community. For after this exhibition of endurance, his character is tested for two years more, and only then, if found worthy, is he enrolled in the society.” (Josephus, War 2.119f) (Emphasis JAG)

Note the phrase above, “*to share the purer kind of holy water*” as indicating the advanced training of initiates and also hinted at by the gospel writers that should lead to the baptism by fire or the Spirit.

On their teaching and methodology, Edmund Bordeaux asserts that some of the foundational traditions from Egypt, Persia, Greece, Rome, the Essenes, and Jewish as well as certain Christian groups taught two different “categories of subjects” in a graded initiation program. This seems to agree with what Josephus said above and some of the Dead Sea Scrolls confirm. Most of these

traditions started their first level training with their own rules, laws, ethics and moral awareness even before the initial initiation. This was also the case in with the Essenes to which John the Baptist seemingly belonged as we shall see later. The ethical and moral teachings normally consists of the “lesser mysteries” and then the “scientific” or cosmological teachings followed by spiritual teachings, the domain of the “greater” mysteries, if there was enough proof of commitment ( Bordeaux 1981: 23).

The candidates for initiation into the “Mysteries” or secret advanced concepts of their traditions were exposed also to real practical and scientific teachings pertaining to their livelihood as in the case of the Essene initiates. They were trained in agricultural and astronomical sciences, the earthly cycles and therefore when to plant and harvest according to “Mother Earth” in conjunction with to the spiritual teaching of the “Heavenly Father” which aims to explain the unity of God, humanity and creation and were called the “greater mysteries.” (Bordeaux 1978:38)

## **6.6 Comparison of the Essene Community and Early Christianity**

No Animal Sacrifices!

*“The Essenes did not offer animal sacrifices, but viewed prayer and godly living as acceptable sacrifices to God. When they become members of the Community in Israel according to all these rules, they shall establish the spirit of holiness according to everlasting truth. They shall atone for guilty rebellion and for sins of unfaithfulness, that they may obtain loving kindness for the land without the flesh of holocausts and the fat of sacrifice. And prayer rightly offered shall be as an acceptable fragrance of righteousness, and perfection of way as a delectable free will offering. At that time, the men of the Community shall set apart a House of Holiness in order that it may be united to the most holy things and a House of Community for Israel, for those who walk in perfection.”* (1QS 9:3-7 as quoted by Gromacki 2007:16) (Emphasis JAG)

Another area of similarity between the Essene community and the early Christians is the practice of water baptism or immersion in water. The practice of immersion in water was associated with repentance, cleansing, and entry into the community according to Gromacki. Both the Essenes and the Christians practiced adult immersion in water. Adult baptism by immersion was also practiced by the early church. The first Christians were baptized after their conversion (Acts 2:41). *Water baptism by immersion identifies the Christian with Jesus Christ in his death, burial, and resurrection. It also identifies the Christian with the Church”* (Gromacki 2007:17). (Emphasis JAG)

This reason for baptism is also a confirmation of a core esoteric truth with huge practical implications for the person according to Paul; not something that you only have to “believe in”, neither a mere sign of joining the club; it is effective participation in Christ death to worldly things; you must “die” to the “world” to be resurrected as a new spiritual being. The Rule of the Community lists the sinful characteristics of the “ways of the spirit of falsehood”, which compares well with Gal 5: 17-21.

The Essene community believed that God has given man a choice to react to his good and bad impulses and no idea of primordial sin is present here either. To the contrary, the spirit within should guide you and Paul would agree.

“God has established the two spirits in equal measure until the determined end, and until the Renewal, and He knows the reward of their deeds from all eternity. He has allotted them to the children of men that they may know good [and evil, and] *that the destiny of all the living may be according to the spirit within* [them at the time] of the visitation.” (1QS 4:23b-26) (Emphasis, JAG)

### 6.6.1 Characteristics of the Messiah of the Essenes

Gromacki says that the “*The Messianic Apocalypse*” (4Q521) consists of eleven fragments and the script is dated to 100 B.C. The term “Messiah” is used in this text without the addition of Aaron or Israel. He says that in the synagogue at Nazareth, Jesus read from the prophet Isaiah portions of Isaiah 61:1-2 and 58:6 (cf. Luke 4:18-19). In comparing the two sets of texts Gromacki, sees a direct relationship but Randall Price writes,

“...the Qumran community may not have had a uniform conception of the Messiah. For example, at times the Messiah appears as a singular ‘Anointed,’ but on other occasions we see a dual ‘Twin-Anointed.’ In most cases, the Messiah is a human being, but on occasion he may also be described with heavenly (or divine) characteristics. We find texts that speak of ‘God begetting the Messiah’ (1Qsa 2:12), or the Messiah as a ‘firstborn son’ (4Q369), and of the Messiah as subordinate to the priests (1Qsa 2:14-20); and yet we also have a text that may read, ‘The heavens and the earth obey the voice of His Messiah’ (4Q521 line 1) and another that speaks of the Messiah ‘raising the dead’ (4Q521 line 12). It’s possible that these differences indicate that the documents had different origins, with some coming from outside the Sect, and others evidencing a developing messianism within the Sect.” (1996:298)

Two aspects of the above Messianic discussion need to be considered. The one was the varied beliefs in and of the Messiah and the second is that none of these multiple beliefs could really describe the “Messianic” role of Jesus as was developed by Early Christianity. The development from Jesus as special prophet greater than Moses, later on, “came to die for our sins”, and graduated to become part of the Trinity were creative developments with various explanations attached to it.

### 6.6.2 Forgiveness and Justification

The Essenes like the Prophets and most other Jewish sects believed that God in his righteousness could forgive their sins:

*“And I, if I stagger, God’s grace is my salvation forever. If I stumble because of a sin of the flesh, my judgment is according to the righteousness of God, which stands forever...In His righteous fidelity He has judged me; in His bounteous goodness He*



*expiates all my iniquities, and in His righteousness He cleanses me of human defilement and of human sinfulness.”* (1QS 11:9-14) (Emphasis, JAG)

These ideas show their beliefs in the fatherly support and mercifulness of God to his humble subjects. Coupled to their aversion of sacrifices, it is obvious that a divine sacrifice was not their idea of salvation.

## **6.7. Jewish theories of salvation**

We need also to look at the two most important aspects of the soteriology of Judaism to understand Christianity, namely the question of sin and forgiveness and the role of the Messiah. Again one has to point to the vastness and the intimidating dimensions of the topic about which one could only attempt to identify the most relevant ideas. The important pointer to be emphasised in this regard is summarised well by Spangenberg (2000:167) as that the Jews (and Paul) grew up in a religious tradition that knew that God is inherently merciful, forgiving, longsuffering and loving.

In a very interesting article addressed to ordinary believers and s titled “How Does a Jew Attain Salvation?” from a Jewish website, the Jewish argument against third party salvation is put forward. We will follow this argument for discussion. Here the beliefs are clear but I am not so sure where the quotation comes from:

“Even when I have told the wicked that he will die, but then he repents, and he does justice and righteousness; when he returns the collateral when he is supposed to, he repays what he stole, he begins to live by the Laws of Life, and does not do evil, he will live, and he will not die.” (<http://www.beingjewish.com/Foshuv/salvation.html>)

The argument starts with the Christian belief of the total corruption of man from birth. This Jewish group argue that this is not true and that we are not doomed, or fated, to sin; quite the contrary. The Torah says: “If you do good, won’t there be special privilege? And if you do not do good, sin waits at the door. It lusts after you, but you can dominate it.” (Genesis 4:7)

The argument is that we have free will, and that is what Judaism has always believed because that is what the Torah teaches. The Torah does not teach – or even mention – that we are “born in sin” or that we are fated to sin. Just the opposite, we have the ability to choose, which means that we can be good, or we can be evil; it is up to us. What is interesting here also is the various meanings that are attached to core words in Christian soteriology that could really influence correct understanding.

“The Jews cannot understand how or why Christians like to say that no one can be righteous in the eyes of God. The Torah says otherwise. The problem is that Christians do not

understand the meaning of the concept 'righteousness'. They think it means that one has never sinned; never sinning is impossible. The Torah says that 'There is no person on earth so righteous that he does only good and never sins'. (Eccl.7:20) Rather, the definition of a righteous person is as taught in Proverbs 24:16: 'The righteous fall seven times seven and still get up, but the wicked stumble in evil.' *Being righteous does not mean that one never sins. It means that after you sin you get back up again, repent, and try again.* You keep on trying; that is being righteous. That means your intentions are right, although you do not always succeed. *Sins that he committed will not be held against him, for he has begun to do justice and righteousness; he shall surely live.*" (Ezekiel 33: 14-16) (Emphasis JAG)

This is an important difference; if my interpretation is correct then the relationship of man to God is rather like that of a parent and child and not that of a judge to an accused. The argument continues,

"We see, therefore, another fallacy of the Christians who argue that 'sin has separated us from a perfectly holy God.' We are not separated from God at all. *All we need to do is repent. But no, say the Christians. Repentance won't work, for some reason that we cannot understand. They claim that 'no one can be close to God without Jesus.'* Was King David separated from God? Yet the Torah says about him that he did one thing wrong (1 Kings 15:5) and yet he was considered righteous and God was with him. (See, for example, 1 Kings 11:34; 1 Kings 18:14) (<http://www.beingjewish.com/Foshuv/salvation.html>) (Emphasis JAG)

This is a very valid argument in my opinion and E.P. Sanders seems to agree, he says the Jewish mindset of the Hebrew authors of the Bible was dominated by the concept of divine mercy. While the grace of God is apparent in the Hebrew Scriptures one cannot escape the warnings of future recompense and judgment which appear in the New Testament. Sanders makes very good points to explain the Christian misunderstanding of Jewish soteriological issues:

"Just as the Old Testament is not exclusively a book of retribution and judgment, the New Testament is not exclusively a book of mercy and grace. Numerous warnings of the coming wrath of God appear in the New Testament. Because of the way Christians tried to justify their salvation we are led not to expect only judgment for wrong in the Torah and in the New Testament only grace. Not only is the Old Testament deemed legalistic but also the mainstream of Judaism from the time of Jesus. *The misrepresentation of the Torah as preaching a 'save yourself by your own good works gospel' contributes to a completely distorted view of Jewish faith during the period of the New Testament. Late Second Temple Judaism therefore, the Judaism during the time of Jesus, was not a salvation by works religion! Most Jewish teachers belonging to Pharisaic and later rabbinic Judaism emphasized God's goodness and willingness to accept all sinners who repent.*" (Sanders 1977:421,422) (Emphasis JAG)

From these statements it seems that Paul either overreacted on the issues of the Law or that some Jewish Christians made an unnecessary issue of the Law because of their insistence that all Christians must become Jewish or both. My contention is that in criticising the multitude of Laws, is in Paul's mind more an ethnic-covenantal issue than salvific one? The moral laws or Ten Commandments are a different issue all together, which obviously also from Paul's perspective, looking at the warnings in his letters, are not negotiable and have a direct bearing on our possible

salvation. But either way, not even from the Judaizers saw sacrifices as such, as mandatory and the sole religious vehicle to salvation. Sanders continues,

“After a careful and in depth examination of Jewish thought from the period, the theme of mercy – whether put in terms of God’s mercy in electing Israel, God’s mercy in accepting repentant sinners (repentance does not earn a reward, but is responded to by God in mercy), or God’s ‘rewarding’ the righteous because of his mercy – serves to assure that election and, ultimately, salvation cannot be earned, but depend on God’s grace. One can never be righteous enough to be worthy in God’s sight of the ultimate gifts, which depend only on his mercy.”...“The law of love from Lev. 19: 18, was considered as the whole Torah. It embodied all the commandments. If one upholds this command, one will observe the rest: ‘Do not take revenge on anyone or continue to hate him, but love your neighbour as you love yourself. I am the Lord.’ *He who honestly tries to live by this command and is sensitive enough to know when he has sinned and then repents and try again, is righteous in God’s eyes; it is good enough for Him and no divine human sacrifice seems to be required.*” (Sanders 1977:421,422) (Emphasis JAG)

If Christians want to use the Hebrew Scriptures to convince the Jews about their new Messiah whose blood offer they also should acknowledge as the only way to salvation or face damnation; should these Christians not do it at least in a proper dialogue with the Jews? How can Christians unilaterally make all the conclusions without studying the Jewish traditional interpretations on the nature God, Adam and their soteriology? From the Jewish argument and Sanders’ comments, it seems that Paul as a learned Jew had a different reason altogether of accentuating the divine, once and for all sacrifice, it could not be for salvific reasons? We will be examining in more depth the validity of a godly sacrifice for salvation for the early Christians. Furthermore, when we look at the vast differences between prophetic and cultic traditions in Judaism and their respective influences on Jesus and Paul, we will see that the national/economical nature of Temple cults stand in a virtually irreconcilable opposition to their spiritual, esoteric traditions.

## **6.8 Jewish Wisdom Traditions: The Way of Solomon**

The theological debates of Paul with his gentile and Jewish converts indicate that he also understood the philosophical ideas of gentile wisdom traditions and the power of the sense making logic of his time to help people make informed decisions in religious matters. Scholars now accept the fact that Eastern religious traditions were already well established in the major communities and cities of the first century CE. With a view on the variety of gentile speculative, philosophical and spiritual traditions that we have discussed previously, Ecclesiastes seem to be the most related and versatile Jewish text from a wisdom tradition point of view, to look for possible common insights that prevailed in the time of Paul. One cannot help to notice an “Eastern” frame of mind in this Old Testament text.

Ecclesiastes, as translated by Rami Shapiro (1999), interestingly professes a different philosophy than Proverbs, which was still very much moulded in the ancient obedience-reward thought constructs of the cultic lore. Ecclesiastes represents intelligent, sensitive analyses of life's realities from a spiritual point of view; much like an Eastern sage would put it or, is this wisdom not also innate in all humanity and accessible to all who search for truth with a compassionate heart and an open mind? We want to cultivate awareness as to what extent Ecclesiastes relates to the beliefs of Jesus simultaneously also found in the Gnostic gospels and the New Testament writings on Jesus' quests to usher in a comprehensive enlightened spirituality. Again one has to emphasise that this project does not pretend to probe deeply into the technical detail of any of these traditions but wants to recognise the timelessness of the human spiritual quest of which the stimulation and influence could be detected in the sense making approaches of Jesus and Paul.

Shapiro (1999:1) says his roommate had stumbled on the fact that the Hebrew word most commonly translated as "vanity" could also mean "emptiness". King Solomon was suddenly transformed in his eyes from Hebrew philosopher to Taoist sage. Let us look at some of the verses in Ecclesiastes and see what the writer wants to convey to us regarding the plight of man, his relation to God, nature and salvation. Please notice the undertone of the mystery and unity of the cosmos and the invitation to adjust our perceptions to accept reality as it is, as well as giving us hints for looking deeper. Also note the many practical mystical hints this text contains. It remains in my opinion one of the most insightful books ever written and there will be a few comments from the writer in brackets behind the some phrases.

Thus do I teach:

- "Under the sun it is all flux and flow, diverse and separate. But under the sun is not the whole, and there is a deeper truth embracing the many in a greater One." (3.11)
- "God pursues you with peace, offering each moment for your appreciation. There is no profit in rejection. But with acceptance comes tranquillity" (3:12-15).
- "From the order of nature I turned my attention to the order of society. I looked for justice and found corruption. I looked for righteousness and found evil." (Nothing new here!)
- *"The righteous accept the flow and find the Way. Letting go of time, they enter eternity; letting go of self they find tranquillity. The wicked insist upon controlling time, forcing the world to conform to their will. Theirs is a battle unending. And the prize is only fear" (3:16-17). (Emphasis JAG) (Who was first Buddha or "Solomon"?)*
- *"Be careful when drawing near to God. Seek not to sacrifice or appease; seek only to hear" (4:17). (Emphasis, JAG – the inner way)*

- *“The fool rushes into sacrifice, hoping to buy what is free to all” (4:17). (Emphasis, JAG- a very profound statement!)*
- *“When standing before God you rush to speak, your heart bursting with needs and urgency. You crowd the air with words of praise and pleading. You leave no room for Silence and none for hearing. It is not God you worship, but your own voice and opinion.”*
- *“The light of truth cannot be purchased. It is free to all who would but step into it.” (You have to develop a yearning for truth)*
- *“Do not be misled by those who promise reward in the world to come. This is ego and vanity, a chasing after wind. Be not distracted from the moment. Do right in this world and let the rest take care of itself” (6:11-12. (Emphasis, JAG – what spiritual insight!)*
- *“Knowledge guards the mind from deception. Wealth protects the body from hunger. But only acceptance of impermanence brings tranquillity” (7:10-12). (Emphasis, JAG- imminently practical; do not fight death it is futile.)*
- *“Consider the working of Reality; learn to set right what you have done wrong.” (Emphasis, JAG- see comments from Rose (1979) further down – we must deconstruct untruth to come nearer to Truth).*
- *“For this is the Way of Reality: good and evil entwined as one. Deny neither; Take responsibility for both; and live with integrity. When you die you leave only dust behind (7:13-14).*
- *“Those who seek salvation in wisdom and righteousness never become truly righteous. Their desire to escape impermanence destroys their capacity for joy. In the end they die, anxious, exhausted, fearful, and no less troubled for all their learning” (7:15-16).*
- *“Better to accept both goodness and evil and know your capacity for both. In this way you avoid pride and prejudice, being thankful for the good you achieve and making amends for the evil you do” (7:17-18). (Jewish soteriology in a nutshell?)*
- *“One who understands reality speaks neither of the body or the soul; but only of That which manifest them both” (7:17-18). (Emphasis JAG – the capital “T” seems to indicate God, Self or Essence?)*
- *“Be wary of wisdom not rooted in Reality. There is no one easier to fool than yourself.” (Most serious realists and mystics would agree)*
- *“Why is this wisdom so rare among us? God fashions us with the capacity to know truth and do good; but we devise many schemes to promote ignorance and excuse evil” (7:28-29). ( Another statement that we are capable of both and have to make our own decisions as to our actions)*
- *“It seems wrong that the same fate comes to all. You want rewards and punishments in accordance with what you do. You want a prize cherished by all but reserved for a few. But who are you to want or denounce? You who live under the sun in a world deluded by visions, dogma, and ego. Madness comes from your self-obsession. Only death ends the struggle for performance. Mercy comes from*

*not dividing, from moving beyond the limitations of self” (9:3). (Emphasis, JAG – if this translation is correct, then “Solomon” could teach the Eastern sages a thing or two!)*

- “Even the most pious cannot be certain of eternity. Better a living dog than a dead lion. Do not live this life as a prelude to the next. Your loves, your hates, your jealousies – all gone, for these are the stirrings of a restless mind deluding itself with autonomy and isolation. Better die now while you still live than to live now and enslaved to fear of death” (9:4-6). (One wonders exactly what did the writer mean by “die now” also in the next verse?)
- “Dying now – go eat your bread in simplicity, appreciation, and joy. Drink your wine with a heart unburdened by yesterday and tomorrow. Reality takes care of itself. You are simply its means; leave the ends to God.”
- “Live joyfully with a lifelong companion. Accept the impermanence of all things. Accept the interdependence of all things. *Seek not to escape your fate, but embrace whatever you encounter with simplicity, humility, grace, courage, honesty, and humour.* Labour and love as best you can, welcoming success as well as suffering. Heed my words well: There is nothing better than this” (9:7-9). (Emphasis, JAG – indeed wise advice!)
- “Those who shatter the moral order will themselves be bitten by the snake of injustice.”
- “*The future cannot be revealed, only encountered.* The past cannot be changed, only accepted. The present requires action and attention, but to this the fool is oblivious” (10:12-15). (Emphasis, JAG – If only all the “End-Day” prophets could realise this truth!)
- “*Toss your bread upon the sea – your fate to unfold as it will. Cast a net of kindness far and wide. Worry not about profit; simply do what is right with compassion.*” (Emphasis, JAG – what insight!)
- “*How shall you live, in youth and in age? Keep God with you always; let the One Who Is All shine through all that are one.*” (Emphasis, JAG – core mystical insights!)
- “*The dust of you returns to earth and the breath of you returns to the One Who Breathes Us All; before all this, know: The whole of life is empty of permanence; there is no certainty, no surety on salvation to lift you out of impermanence*” (12:2-8.) (Emphasis, JAG)
- “*In sum, the Assembler taught us well: stand in wonder before God and deal justly and kindly with all that come our way. Cling to nothing and allow all to pass; and do not imagine that you can buy your way to eternity. You cannot control destiny, nor can you secure reward; yet God brings every deed to fruition, allowing even the hidden motive its due. Whether for good or for ill, the consequences of your deeds will manifest; you will reap what you sow and Order will use Chaos as it will.*”
- “*So when all is said, remember this: open your mind to wonder, your heart to compassion, and your hand to justice, that you fashion a whole and holy world*” (12:9-14). (Shapiro 1999:92) (Emphasis, JAG)

From the point of interest in the esoteric traditions, that influenced Jesus and Paul, this text is an impressive exhibition of wisdom and insight. It is very revealing how God's actions can be equated with Reality, which is also the Truth and, therefore, accessible in total to God alone. Nevertheless, it should be our quest to see reality as clearly as possible in that we can experience Reality in the dim light of our own experience of gnosis and spirituality. God is "beyond finding out" as Plato would have put it; it is for us to acknowledge the good and the bad in us and in the world but to act on our good impulses, but not to despair if we falter occasionally. If there ever was wholesome, scientific and realistically wise theological philosophy, this is it. Judaism and Christianity do not really need Eastern philosophy it is all here; what we collectively lack is *understanding!*

What is also noteworthy is that this spiritual-religious philosophy needs no Institution, building or intermediaries. I personally doubt if one can find any better, sane and realistic system to follow. However, the young and immature still needs guidance before they can embrace these lofty philosophy and principles towards a more mature spiritual understanding. If we cannot find this wisdom in any ancient or contemporary religion's esoteric teachings, than we should consider letting go of formal religion and rather build another "way" for people to reach these level of spiritual maturity. Furthermore, if this an important sample of the wisdom teachings of Judaism then the Jews might have reason to take the Christians to task for certain misinterpretations of their scriptures and religion.

## Chapter 7

### **If Jesus was the founder of the Christian belief system, who was he and what were his beliefs?**

#### **7.1 Introduction**

Paul and his letters are very important for the understanding of Jesus and his mission. Understanding Jesus more comprehensively in the context of his teachings might provide us with a more scientifically friendly as well as a more practically productive spirituality for the 21<sup>st</sup> century. In the approach followed here we are interested to learn more about Jesus the person while examining possible mistaken concepts that might obscure other insights in the portrayal of the contextual position of the person of Jesus. In this regard Walter Wink confronts us with the problem of dysfunctional religion and religiosity in stating that those of us who are to varying degrees disillusioned by the churches feel that it is not only our right but our sacred obligation to delve deeper into the church's records in order to find answers to legitimate and urgent questions such as the following:

- Before he was venerated as God incarnate, how did Jesus struggle to incarnate God?
- Before he became the source of all healing, how did he relate to, and how did he teach his disciples to relate to, the healing Source?
- Before forgiveness became a function solely of his cross, how did he understand people to have been forgiven?
- Before the kingdom of God became a compensatory afterlife or a future utopia adorned with all the political trappings that Jesus resolutely rejected, what did he mean by "the kingdom"?
- Before he became identified as Messiah, how did he relate to the profound meaning in the messianic image?
- Before he himself was made the sole mediator between God and humanity, how did Jesus experience and communicate the presence of God? (Wink 2002:2).

In our spiritual reflexive hunting and gathering of a myriad of clues, cues and hues from various scholars we try to find answers to these questions above. From the perspective of a reflexive and processual patterning of faith and spirituality the reflexive hunting and gathering exercise belongs under the rubric of 'spirituality and culture'. Here spirituality means both the teachings and life of



Jesus as it has been delivered and handed on in various communities' narrative schemes about the person of Jesus. The notion of culture is not necessarily more complicated and cannot be loosened from the notion of spirituality. The reason is that both spirituality and culture are to a large extent mouldings fabricated and forms produced in the manufacturing realm of human experience. In the approach followed here revolving around 'spirituality and culture' clues are drawn from the view of Clifford Geertz who views culture as a complex fabric of meaning and systems of symbols created and manufactured by people which they had to interpret like a text:

"The concept of culture I espouse...is essentially a semiotic one. Believing, with Max Weber, that man is an animal suspended in webs of significance he himself has spun, I take culture to be those webs, and the analysis of it to be therefore not an experimental science in search of law but an interpretation one in search of meaning." (Geertz 1973:5)

The notion of Geertz that culture is a network of webs the meaning of which has to be interpreted or consensually negotiated is also applied to the notion of spirituality as humanly produced in the broad realm of everyday experience. The main difference between Geertz's approach and the approach followed here is that strong emphasis is laid on the individuality and singularity of a person's spirituality and cultural codes and modes.

The relationship between spirituality and cultural codes and modes poses a problem in the nature of its distinction. When the notions of spirituality and culture are set on a continuum as pointers either in an oppositional or complementary way the inclination is to either understand the meaning of spirituality from the point of culture or vice versa. A case in point is Geertz who views religion and spirituality as a cultural system. Geertz views religion as

"(i) a system of symbols which act to (ii) establish powerful, pervasive, and long-lasting moods and motivations in men by (iii) by formulating conceptions of a general order of existence and (iv) clothing these conceptions with such an aura of factuality that (v) the moods and motivations seem uniquely realistic." (Geertz 1973:90)

The same premises apply to the notion of religion as to the more comprehensive notion of culture according to Geertz. The main question levelled at Geertz is why is there not a two-way movement in which culture takes on the garb of religion and spirituality. With all the problems attached to the distinction between spirituality and culture the way that the distinction is employed in this thesis amounts to the idea that spirituality and culture permeate each other in a two way movement. Furthermore, the main operational assumption throughout the thesis is that the questions posed around Jesus and for that matter Paul and the answers we come to is through a bifocal perspective of 'spirituality and culture' as part of the quest of all serious seekers of spiritual enlightenment. This eventuates in a process of arriving time after time in a phase and stage of discovery and

construction of an authentic life true to our selves and in harmony with God, other people and the natural cosmic world around us.

## 7.2 The many faces of Jesus

In order to get an idea of the true message and mission of Jesus we will have to examine the multiple reports of his activities as well as the various identities given to him by different categories of followers in time. This investigation is needed precisely because the person and teachings of Jesus appeared in multiple kaleidoscopic manifestations amongst various spiritual groups just after his death seem to be a veritable puzzle for later theologians and interpreters mesmerised by the variety of these manifestations. A broader view is taken as approach here in which various disciplines assist in the hunting and gathering of spiritual clues and notions from the written evidence to search for the spiritual Jesus. Such a spiritual Jesus is extracted from the written texts as well as from spiritual and cultural experiences of singular persons by looking at a myriad of other voices in the past to position and question the official version that emerged as the main ecclesial construction and discovery set in a web of cultural power games and relations.

Walter Wink put the search for the real Jesus as follows,

“The *present* meaning of the historical Jesus has been the unconscious agenda of the Jesus-quest these past two centuries. Driving that enormous undertaking was an inchoate desire among Christian scholars to recover something numinous and lost within themselves, and within contemporary religion.” (Wink 2002:8)

In conjunction with the spirituality of Jesus an in depth interest in the mythological Jesus expressing the duality of a cultural mythological trajectory and a trajectory of spiritual archetypal humanness of the ‘son of man’ carries the main perspective of the portrayal in this chapter. One must be continuously aware that the different typologies of Jesus can in actual fact be part of two separate perspectives on Jesus. When these perspectives are driven in opposite directions they suit different agendas while in the mean time they should be part of a bifocal perspective in which the two trajectories are intrinsically part of the one perspective. Moreover, one should be aware of ones own bias in understanding Jesus and his mission. Wink makes this very relevant statement,

“It is not, however, a choice between the human, non-mythological Jesus versus the divine, mythological Christ. For *both* are archetypal images. The human Jesus of the quest has already entered into the archetype of humanness, and seems to have affected people even during Jesus’ active ministry. Indeed, the son of man was already archetypally charged as early as Ezekiel 1 and Daniel 7. The quest of the historical Jesus, then, functions in service of the myth of the human Jesus. It attempts to recover the humanity of Jesus in order to liberate it from the accretions of dogma that have made Jesus a God-Man.” (Wink 2002:9)

In an overt sense it seems that the Jewishness of the early Jesus sect is deliberately kept away from ordinary Christians, totally ignorant of the fact that the early followers of Jesus were not “Christians”, as we now understand the term. His divine status as co-equal with God was totally out of the question within Judaism where Jesus could at best be seen as a special prophet, teacher/rabbi or a type of Messiah. Even the synoptic gospels have no sense yet that Jesus was anything other than a Jew with his own personal brand of Jewish theology. The gospels also do not even have a sense that he came to found a totally new religion, an idea completely foreign to all the gospel texts, except for the fact that he opposes many of the practices and laws regulating the Temple cult and seemed to want propagate the Prophetic tradition instead. There are however, definitely other philosophical and mystical insights coming from Jesus in the Gospels, Paul’s insights and the Nag Hammadi library that aligned him with the prophetic and mystical traditions within Judaism.

### **7.3 The “real” Identity of Jesus**

In a very general sense Jesus who really lived is not required by recognised historical science, but by the constructed Christian myth which is not dependent on the evidential notions of historiography. The Christian myth can certainly be helped by it. Historical criticism can fashion alternative images of Jesus that can free us from oppressive pictures spawned by churches that themselves are too often oppressive. Wink (2002:13) asserts that critical scholarship can help us recover Jesus’ “critique of domination”. Scholarship is also important to free us from misconceptions and let us appreciate Jesus without an overlay of dogma claiming absolute truth and negating the value of other approaches in the understanding of Jesus. This overlay of dogma and its repetitive reinforcement in Sunday school, secular school and church became so entrenched in the mind of Christians and the academic and functional leadership of the church that its status became absolute and not to be questioned. In fact the different Christian dominations are more dependent on their dogma as on the Bible itself.

According to Pelikan (1997:1), the identity of Jesus developed into many typologies,

“...the oscillation between describing the role of Rabbi to Jesus and attributing to him a new and unique authority that made additional titles necessary. One such was Prophet, as in the acclamation on Palm Sunday (Matt. 21: 11). ‘This is the prophet Jesus from Nazareth of Galilee.’ The conclusion of the Sermon on the Mount confirms the special status of Jesus as not only Rabbi but Prophet (Matt. 7: 28 – 8: 1)...Rabbi and Prophet yielded to two other categories, each of them likewise expressed in an Aramaic word and then in its Greek translation; the Aramaic form of ‘Messiah,’ translated into Greek as *ho Christos*, ‘Christ,’ the Anointed One (John 1: 41, 4: 25); and Marana, ‘our Lord,’ in the liturgical formula Maranatha, ‘Our Lord, come!’ translated into Greek as *ho Kyrios*” (1 Cor. 16: 22). (Pelikan 1997:2)

As Christianity developed faster within the pagan populations the cultural and religious affinity for the known formulas within religious lore, facilitated the change in the transformation of Jesus' essence to popular varieties of 'sons of God' concepts underscoring the more mythical contexts in which they emerged. Pelikan states therefore that,

"The future belonged to these titles and to the identification of him as the Son of God and second person of the Trinity. But in the process of establishing themselves the titles Christ and Lord, as well as even Rabbi and Prophet, often lost much of their Semitic content... *To the Christian disciples of the first century the conception of Jesus as Rabbi was self-evident, to the Christian disciples of the second century it was embarrassing, to the Christian disciples of the third century and beyond it was obscure.* The beginnings of this de-Judaization of Christianity are visible already within the New Testament. With Paul's decision to 'turn to the Gentiles' (Acts 13: 46) after having begun his preaching in the synagogues, and then with the destruction of the temple in A.D. 70, the Christian movement increasingly became Gentile rather than Jewish in its constituency and outlook. In that setting, the Jewish elements of the life of Jesus had to be explained to Gentile readers (for example, John 2:6)." (Pelikan 1997:2) (Emphasis JAG).

Pelikan gives us a very neat description of the process of adaptation; he says the Acts of the Apostles can be read as a tale of two cities. In the first chapter, it begins with Jesus and his disciples after the resurrection and Jerusalem is the focus of the happenings,

"...but the last chapter reaches its climax with the final voyage of the apostle Paul, in the simple but pulse-quickening sentence, *'And so we came to Rome.'*" (Pelikan 1997:2) (Emphasis JAG)

Pelikan summarised the transition of Jesus from special prophet to the most important "person" of the Trinity very realistically. According to Loader also, the most worn piece of the Jesus puzzle reflects Christian preoccupations with titles of authority. As we are very interested in the esoteric tradition of Jesus, we are also interested in his reasons for his preference in identifying himself with the "son of Man" and what is the real meaning of this concept?

"Of the Messiah there are a few and these are so ambiguous that the most we might dare to say is that if Jesus saw himself in this light he left no history to define its connotation, so that during his ministry it could have had only a chameleon-like quality, corresponding to the myriads of interpretations as we have seen. It seems strange that what seems incidental soon became the symbolic focus of Jewish Christian faith and usurped the kingdom of God as the dominant motive of their preaching. One dark piece of the puzzle seems to fit in two different directions: Son of Man. *It sits quite well with the imagery of future hope as one of a few strands of speculation expounding the great vision of Daniel 7. Others see in it a self-designation of some anonymity.*" (2000:1) (Emphasis JAG)

The strangeness of the term, "son of man" or "son of the man" indicates some importance to Jesus and this mysterious identity will be taken up later from a wider perspective and to explore the possibility of it being an "insider" term of specific content to his spiritually mature followers.

### 7.3.1 Prophetic and Mystic traditions in Judaism

As the ancient Jewish mystical traditions were seen as the spiritual climax by most of their revered religious leaders, training in the philosophy and practice in this tradition was sought by all serious pilgrims and one can assume that it will include Jesus and Paul. The secret traditions of Creation and the “Chariot” of Ezekiel points to a high regard for the inherent spirituality of mankind and our capability of developing into the veritable Image of God.

Wink, says,

“It is not the case then, that we scholars initiated the quest for the human Jesus. Rather, the archetype of the Human Being initiated the quest as long ago as Ezekiel, and, if some scholars are right, even earlier, in myths of the Primal Man. And the archetype continues to provide the dynamic impetus that has driven the quest. We are not the drivers, but the driven.” (Wink 2002:10)

Rossner’s approach consisting of a whole pattern of beliefs regarding the Primordial Tradition and Jesus’ mission is shared by the writer of this thesis, especially the factuality and concrete specificity of its productivity in really understanding the spirituality of Jesus and Paul.

“The Primordial Tradition has left its precious fragments of transcendental intuition throughout the higher religions and philosophies of the ancient and modern worlds, both Eastern and Western. There is evidence that a now-lost esoteric Christianity, complete with belief in a pre-existent, archetypical “God-Man” or “Cosmic Christ,” was once understood by its founder (Jesus) and earliest fashioner (Paul) as a particular synthesis of the larger Primordial Tradition, which had already long entered the mainstream of sectarian Jewish mystical consciousness. Jesus might thus be legitimately viewed as an heir of the mystery traditions of Egypt, Persia, and Greece, and of the wisdom traditions of India, as well as an heir of the ‘Law and the Prophets’ of Israel.” (Rossner 1989:xiv)

That Paul took the concept of the Spiritual Adam seriously is fairly obvious from his letters and we will revisit this topic again in our analysis of his writings. Rossner says that in various Iranian and subsequent Hellenistic Greek and Jewish mythological account of the Primal Man, the latter was the Divine Source Principle in Humanity, or the human principle in Divinity itself.

“The Divine source had – in the beginning – projected its Image, or the Primal Man (Hebrew: ‘Adam Kadmon’) which was as the Farther of Mankind or Archetype the pattern upon which all humanity was formed. This Image or Divine ‘blueprint’ was thus in everyman by virtue of creation as the authentic core or centre of his being. By virtue of his creation, everyman (“Adam”) was potentially the whole human race.” (Rossner 1989:90)

The Jewish mystical tradition like that of the prophets and Qumran, have spiritualized and allegorized the meanings of the terms “Israel” and “Messiah.” Therefore also for Jesus, and Paul, “Israel” is not the physical state of Israel or the Jewish race, but rather the universal spiritual people

of God – whether Jewish or pagan – who respond to the universal, human, metaphysical and spiritual Person, message, and work of God. Whether Paul borrowed from the Persians or only from the Jewish mystical traditions we cannot be sure, but we can be sure he knew all these stories and theories. Rossner sums up the main pointers of this universal narrative up as follows:

“It was this ‘first creation of mankind’, or the ‘first Adam’, which progressively ‘fell’ from the realm of light into denser and denser matter and ultimately lost its way in the darkness, forgetting its identity and becoming deaf, dumb, and blind to the spiritual light and insensitive to the divine ethical laws of the creation...At this point, a ‘second Adam’ was projected from the Primal Man and sent to the rescue of his lost brethren of the first projection. This was the ‘Heavenly Redeemer’ figure, who descends, incarnates into matter, witnesses to the Light, suffers, is rejected by most of humanity, is killed by wicked men, and then rises again to new life while revealing his identity. Those who ‘recognize him’ identify with him, follow him, and are remade after their own perfect original image as ‘beings of Light’. They are refashioned, by acts of their own volition and divine grace, after the original divine image of the Primal Man/God. In Iranian Zoroastrian tradition this figure was known as the ‘Gayomart’ or ‘Kaiomart,’ the ‘one who raises himself up.’” (Rossner 1989:98)

Not much imagination is needed to see how the story of Jesus later on could very easily developed to satisfy this “prophetic” story also. Rossner continues with a very good description of the mystical process, as the central theme throughout the mystical tradition is that a mystical awakening is always involved, which results in an inner process of knowing, the opening of “spiritual eyes” and “spiritual ears”, which refers to subtle faculties in the soul of man, brings about “recognition” of the true nature of the “Man”. From a Jewish perspective,

“Jesus and his works are at one with the Divine Presence, the ‘Shekinah’, which had been known in the Temple and in the lives and works of the prophets (Is. 6:9 – 10)...The church, synagogue, mosque, and temple have often obscured the primal human vision of the primordial tradition and the Cosmic Christ. Religion’s only authentically divine commission is to midwife the birth of the ‘new being’ from the old race, half-beast and half-angel, which has sown the seeds of chaos and destruction all over the face of our sorrowing Mother Earth.” (Rossner 1989:246)

As within the dogma-driven present day Christianity, according to Rossner, their Religion’s “authoritative” interpretations and judgements of the “Law of God,” their own “Gospels”, have often reflected their own myopia and unregenerate subconscious projections.

“And often they have led their people into the dumb worship of their own collective egos masked as ‘God’, which in fact is a tribal war-totem that would wreak havoc and extract vengeance from its enemies. By contrast the lives of the true masters, saints, prophets, and Mystics still stand as a damning judgement upon such ‘wolves in sheep’s clothing’. They effectively reject the unconditional love, compassion, and mercy of God, and the uncreated image of that ‘ideal human person’ infused with the breath of divinity which has been the eternal model for all of the breath of divinity which has been the eternal model for all of the dying-and-rising- god-men, martyrs...” (Rossner 1989:246)

Considering the history of religion and also our present day “orthodox” Christianity, Jesus would most probably agree with Rossner just as he criticised the Cultic and religious leaders in his time for exactly the same reasons which hampered the spiritual development of the ordinary spiritual seeker.

### **7.3.2 The son of man; son of “the” man or the Human Being**

We now will look at Jesus’ favourite self identification which is ironically, inadequate as information by which one could write a biography of Jesus, or even to portray a profile of his personality. Furthermore, it is also true that scholarly reconstructions of the teaching of Jesus (for which we have considerably more data) do not carry the religious impact of the mythologized Gospels. Walter Wink says in this regard that any worthwhile teaching eventually must be able to practically inform us on our own spiritual journey:

*“That is why we must recover the archetypal meaning of the ‘son of the man.’ Only then can we hope to offer an alternative to the perfect, almost inhuman Christ of dogma that has dominated these two millennia of Christian orthodoxy. As Richard Rohr, OFM, comments, ‘without sacred mythology, all we have left is private pathology: my little story disconnected from any group story and surely disconnected from any Great Story.’” (Wink 2002:8) (Emphasis JAG)*

Back to Jesus and how he saw himself. Wink says, there are few expressions in biblical studies as perplexing as the ‘son of *the* man’. Scarcely any topic in the New Testament studies has received more attention, and with less result. Here are few of the facts that define the problem.

“‘Son of man’ appears 108 times in the Hebrew Scriptures, 93 of these uses are in Ezekiel. Curiously, God refuses to call Ezekiel by his given name, but addresses him solely as ‘son of man’ (no definite articles). No one else calls Ezekiel by that name, only God...The same expression appears in the New Testament some 87 times, all but three cases in the Gospels (Matthew, 31 times; Mark, 14; Luke, 26; John, 13). Counting the parallels only once (25 paralleled, 15 unparalleled), and adding uses of the expression in John, there are a total of 53 different sayings in the Gospels that feature ‘the son of the man’ (*ho huios tou anthropou*). This odd Greek idiom is so awkward that virtually all translators omit the second definite article. In this study I will render the expression literally, with both articles, to underscore its oddness and crudity.” (Wink 2002:17)

Rossner gives some additional information on the ‘Son of Man’ figure (Hebrew: ‘Ben Adam’ Aramaic: ‘Bar Nasha’; Greek: ‘Ouios Anthropou’) in pre-Christian Hellenistic Judaism (found in the Apocryphal books of Enoch and Daniel) he says this was a divine figure borrowed from the Primal Man concept of ancient Iranian origin. This figure was,

“An archetype of the human creation itself, it is the perfect Cosmic blueprint for all human beings. This was equated by some ancient writers with the ‘Logos’ or eternal ‘Image of God’

that was said to be in every man that comes into the world. It was a codeword for the *Imago Dei* in Everyman, and consequently meant much the same thing that the phrase 'Son of God' had meant for some classical Greek writers (i.e., a god, or god-man)." (Rossner 1989:190)

Perhaps it is possible even today to shed light on this enigma and to find the missing key to understanding the way the earliest spiritually minded Christians, including Jesus, John and Paul, wanted to portray this truth to us— through the Heavenly Adam that was related through Creation to the soul of Everyman and made visible to us by the historical Jesus.

To even ask whether Jesus and Paul were acquainted with the different other stories and ideas of the Primordial Man is not the question because it will be totally out character for any intelligent, spiritual and mystical person in their time not to have known about them. How you adapt them to suit your cultural and personal preferences as Jew or Gentile will mostly determine how you apply them in your own theory of faith. The importance and centrality of this topic is obvious if one read about the spiritual Jesus, especially in the gospel of John and from the letters of Paul.

### **7.3.3. The Human Being Serves and makes Free**

What seems to happen is that Jesus some times uses the title "son of man" in a self identification style but then still is referring to this "Everyman's potentiality" and sometimes he might be referring specifically to this special "I" participating in the "I AM" of God as a unique principle that has an own life, so to speak. Wink indicates that in the gospel of Mark, further important and neglected characteristics of Jesus and therefore of this internal enigma, is coming to the forefront; that of humble servant as well as liberator from the "slavery" from sin, is coupled to this special title. "*Whoever wishes to become great among you must be your servant, and who-ever wishes to be first among you must be the slaves of all. For the Human Being came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life to liberate [or 'ransom'] many*" (Mark 10:43-45). Wink says that his study questions those assumptions that relate Jesus' death as a sacrifice and this statement will get much more attention as we progress with this study.

"'Ransom' draws its metaphorical power, not from crucifixion, but from slave manumission. The idea is that of liberating people from bondage to the Powers That Be. That is a behaviour that Jesus' disciples can imitate. Insofar as the disciples did carry forward Jesus' struggle to liberate people from the Domination System, they too could participate in the Human Being as a corporate entity." (2008:92)

In this regard Wink also refers to Morna Hooker who asserts that we must conclude that "The son of man" is either a corporate term (as in Daniel) or a designation for one who is closely linked with his followers as in the books of Enoch.



According to Wink, the question is now, does Jesus serve in order to *find* life, or does he serve because he *has found* life?

“Jesus served not in order to get somewhere but because he had gotten somewhere. For him, you do not lose life to serve people, but the reverse: you serve people because you have lost and found your life. You serve out of joy, not obligation.” Here is an important distinction; “*service is not the way, but a consequence of having found the way.*” (Wink 2008:950) (Emphasis JAG)

The question of what was the meaning attributed to son of Man and did all individuals or groups understand it clearly? Wink also addresses this question, and gives possible answers:

“What then is the son of Man in Mark 10:45; what we receive is a new image of human beings, ransomed from what possesses, oppresses, or depresses us. We are delivered from ladder-climbing and from getting ahead, liberated to be responsive to the needs of each other. In this epochal reversal, power itself is cleansed of its association with might, the elite, sovereignty, ranking and stratification. *A new human order is established in which the ambition to excel, to transcend our limitations, and to develop our full potential, is purified of the desire to be on the top.* Jesus’ sayings about serving and giving also preserve the individual/collective complementary that we often see in reference to the Human Being.” (2008:96) (Emphasis JAG)

As in Paul’s argumentation, his concept of the son of man is likely to be “the Christ within” and he also found it very difficult to explain the very different motivational forces active for doing “works of law” versus living the “fruits of the Spirit within”, once the “son of man” manifests in the Self is made free again. Furthermore it is interesting to note the esoteric concepts of being freed from slavery; being led out of Egypt; freed from Satan in the desert/wilderness, is connected to be freed from that which keeps you in bondage. From this valid perspective, Jesus freed us from the bondage of cultic and oppressive, manipulative civil and religious laws to become what we should be; spiritually free citizens of God’s kingdom albeit still in this world.

### **7.3.4 The Human Being in the Jewish Wisdom traditions**

We have already looked in a cursory fashion at the wisdom tradition of Ecclesiastes and other different Mystical traditions to some extent. The question that remains with us for better clarification is what Jesus’ own ideas were on self, others, nature and God. That he did not dance to the tunes of any religious authority, was sure; he rather identified with something deeper than following external rules he did not identify with.

“To what then will I compare the people of this generation, and what are they like? They are like children sitting in the marketplace and calling to one another, ‘We played the flute for you, and you did not dance; we wailed and you did not weep.’ For John the Baptist has come eating no bread and drinking no wine, and you say, ‘He is a demon’; the Human Being has

come eating and drinking, and you say, 'Look, a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!' *Nevertheless, wisdom is vindicated by all her children.*" (Luke 7:31-35 // Matt. 11:16-19) (Emphasis JAG)

To me there is also a very distinctive contrast present in this text and that Jesus also wanted to say; the religious leaders act like children playing games and are interested in superficial judgements instead of pursuing the wisdom of God found only within. Wink analyzes the different texts and he concludes,

"One of the earliest evaluations of Jesus by some branches of the early church may have been based on the figure of Wisdom in the Book of Proverbs...Matthew changes the phrase above to "Wisdom is justified by her *deeds*," suggesting that Jesus is himself Wisdom incarnate. Luke has no interest in a Wisdom Christology, so the presence of this saying in his Gospel must mark an early tradition." (2008:87)

Another interesting theme of Jesus is about Jonah and Nineveh, as Wink pointed out when the crowds were increasing, he began to say,

"This generation is an evil generation; it asks for sign, but no sign will be given to it except the sign of Jonah. For just as Jonah became a sign to the people of Nineveh, so the Son of Man will be to this generation" (Luke 11:29-30) Jesus, within his novel identity, specifically identifies his preaching of repentance with Jonah's. "The Son of Man *will be* to this generation what Jonah was to the Ninevites, namely, a sign, and he will be the *only* sign to be given to it." (2008:87) (Emphasis JAG)

Interesting to note that Jonah was sent by God to the "Gentiles" to preach repentance to an implied "Universal God" and apparently Jesus also saw his mission as inclusive of all who heed and turn to the Wisdom of God.

Wink also brings in A.J.B. Higgins and concludes that he consequently sees no essential difference in meaning between the prediction of the sign of Jonah in Q and the refusal of any sign at all in Mark 8:12.

"The point seems to be that one's standing in the last judgement will be determined by one's response to Jesus' preaching of repentance *now*, in 'this generation.' Wisdoms Child will not come in the future to judge; *rather, he is the present standard by which one will be judged in the future. Repentance – literally "getting a new mind," a mind that goes beyond one's old ways of thinking – is the doorway to the dawning Reign of God.* It is not possible to stand outside the door and to view God's Reign, and then, if it prevails, to throw one's lot with it. Rather, Jesus challenges his hearers to risk everything in the knowledge that one's present life has reached its end, and that *a new life and new world await* on the other side of the door; one simply must leave that old life behind." (2008:91) (Emphasis JAG)

This interpretation also finds its echo in Paul's teachings that action is needed now and cannot be postponed without consequences.

Wink now introduces a new and very interesting element into the uniqueness of the “son of man” method of self referral from within the Middle Eastern context. The Gospels repeatedly depict Jesus using the expression “the son of the man,” as virtually his only form of self-reference:

“Not once in the Gospels does he call himself by his own name. Not once does anyone else call him the son of the man. It appears nowhere outside the Gospels. In short, at the level of the colloquial language, the expression ‘the son of the man’ was for everybody a very strange, even mysterious expression. *‘For Matthew’s readers the expression ‘the son of the man’ was part of their own Christian insider language. They only, not the outsiders, knew about the son of the man, his destiny and his future, and Matthew knew that they knew.’*” (2002:20) (Emphasis JAG)

Wink continues, on this interesting notion that, “there is evidence that the second-and-third-century Gnostics alone used the phrase frequently. But it is the uniqueness and intensity of his usage, concentrated on the human Jesus that demands explanation” (2002:14).

Come to think about it, how could Jesus describe to his followers or refer to this “resurrected”, renewed person, living this new life that is due to this strange inherent power within, in a more fitting way, without making unnecessary waves, than by “their” concept of the “son of man”? This insight seems to me not only plausible but highly relevant in relation to the ample evidence already discussed that Jesus’ real mission for many Gnostics and non-Gnostics, was about his esoteric or “secret” teachings while sidestepping the wrath of the Cultic leaders as far as possible and to give meaning to this real universal identity within the mystic context. Wink further strengthens this argument,

“The easy way out, chosen by some scholars, is simply to opt for mistranslation, and regard ‘the son of the man’ as nothing more than an indirect form of self-reference. Why, then, did the evangelists not use ‘I’ consistently, since they unmistakably thought ‘the son of the man’ meant ‘I’ in at least some cases? Jesus is depicted as showing no hesitation whatever in using ‘I’; he does so scores of times. ‘I’ could have appeared in all the son of the man sayings and we never would have guessed that ‘the son of the man’ once stood there. We can scarcely argue that ‘the son of the man’ is a mistranslation. Anyone capable of rendering a sentence from Aramaic into Greek would know that ‘son of’ is an idiomatic expression simply meaning membership of a class. So why was ‘the son of the man’ preserved at all?” (2002:21)

Seen in the context of a wider reality of the many mystically inclined followers of Jesus as well as Paul’s own mystical theology, the theory of Wink makes total sense and will be true from at least a mystical perspective. In the context of being a fitting symbolic identity within the esoteric and secret teaching of the godly Image in man; the new Man that needs to manifest in the mature spiritual phase. This “lofty” concept of man will be seen as a ridiculous idea within a self-righteous, egoistic, materialistic and morally degenerate society and dangerous to the rulers and priests who reserve

this status only for themselves. Paul used the more familiar Essene term of the “Elect” for this category of enlightened Initiates also to distinguish between the novices and those who have this secret knowledge and are participating in Jesus’ death and resurrection.

Wink addresses another virtually insurmountable problem in biblical translation and it seems there is no real intention to ever correct this misleading practice in relation to all the different superior titles bestowed upon Jesus. The capitalization that one encounters in Bibles and scholarly writings give the false impression that the ‘Son of Man’ is the title conferred to a singular super person.

“But the translators have added the capitalization. There is no capitalization in the Hebrew or Greek text of Bible (except in the case of uncials, which are manuscripts written all in capital letters). Nor was the pre-Christian ‘son of the man’ a messianic deliverer; it had not been amalgamated with the Suffering Servant of Isaiah 53. It was not a heaven-appointed judge who would preside over the last judgement...This much should be clear also: Jesus did not use ‘the son of the man’ as a self-deprecating expression of humility. If there is anything Jesus was not, it was modest. Few people spoke with such unmediated authority, or made a higher claim than Jesus: that he was ushering the Reign of God into the world.” (2002:21, 22)

Wink justifies his belief that “the son of the man” functioned as a catalyst for personal and social transformation. He argues that the expression “the son of the man” is an allusion to Ezekiel, and that “the man” in that phrase is the divine figure on the throne who calls Ezekiel “son”; “son” of the Human One seated on the throne. Again it is unthinkable that Jesus would not have known at least the essence of the Jewish mystical traditions of Genesis and of Ezekiel as his own self image; his encouragement to others to manifest this higher materialisation of humanity was at the core of his mission. Wink sums it all up very ably by quoting Matthew and one does not have to add anything to his conclusion,

“The collective implications of this story are made most clear by Matthew, who ends his version with the statement, ‘and they glorified God, who had given such authority to *human beings*’ (9:8). We would have expected Matthew of all evangelists, to conclude that sentence with ‘Jesus’ or ‘the Christ.’ Matthew clearly understands the term as collective. (The Greek term *anthropois* here is equivalent to the Hebrew *benê adam*, ‘sons of man’. *Any person who knows that God forgives sins has the authority to declare another person’s sins forgiven. The authority to heal and exorcise was also given to the disciples* (Mark 6:7-13 par.; Luke 10:9, 17-20). *According to Matthew, then, ‘the son of the man’ in this narrative is not limited to Jesus, but indicates any person who ‘knows’ God’s will regarding forgiveness, indeed, who knows God’s very nature, that God is, at the core, forgiving. Mark summarizes Jesus’ message, ‘the time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God had come near; repent, and believe in the good news.’” (Mark 1:15) (2002:78) (Emphasis, JAG)*

A very interesting observation from Wink is the absolute authority that accompanies the “knowledge” or gnosis of the son of man even in relation to the esteemed prophet Ezekiel. The authority of the “son of man” is intrinsic because he is at one with God; he speaks from his own

authority, from gnosis; he is no mere messenger he proclaims from his inner Image or Oneness with God.

“The story of the paralytic furthers the sense of sovereign authority that we found in the account of plucking the grain on the Sabbath. Surprisingly, in contrast to Ezekiel, Jesus never appeals to God’s authority to authenticate his mission. He never says, ‘Thus says the Lord.’ In Mark 11:27-33 par., a conflict narrative of highest authenticity, Jesus is depicted as *refusing* to claim divine authority for his mission. This attitude is counter to the trend of the developing church. He clearly implies that his authority is ‘from heaven,’ but will not say so, indicating only that it has the same source as John’s. This exalted evaluation of John is also opposite the church’s tendency.” (Matt. 11:11b // Luke 7:28b; John 3:327-30) (2008:79)

We must not overlook the implications of his modesty; he is not divine, but refused to stake the truth of his ministry on external authority only, even God’s. He spoke, as Mark reports people as saying, with authority, and not as the scribes (1:22). Wink says,

“The scribes worked from texts, exegetically – like Christians! They appealed to Scripture to buttress their arguments – like Christians! (Feuerbach would have loved it!) But Jesus simply spoke with authority. And he taught his disciples to do the same...Why then does Jesus say that the Human Being forgives, instead of God forgiving (as his entire tradition would lead us to expect)? Apparently the Human Being is authorised to act on God’s behalf. Jesus does not contemplate a God outside the universe intervening to heal the paralytic, but as a power that can be evoked in suffering human beings themselves.” (2008:79)

Wink then makes a critically important statement,

*“When the church ceased to read the reference to the Human Being here as universal empowerment to forgive sins, and took it instead as a Christological title more or less equivalent to Christ and Son of God, the authority to declare people reconciled to God ceased to be common property of the New Humanity established by Jesus. Instead, it became the sole prerogative of Jesus and, through ordination, of those who continued to represent him as the official leaders of the church. With ordination the rank-and-file members were stripped of the authority to declare others forgiven on behalf of God. The ‘laity’ became passive recipients of grace and thus emptied themselves once again into transcendence. (2008:79) (Emphasis JAG)*

Now add to this radical paradigm shift the fact that we are born in sin due to Paradise happenings, then obviously the power of the church became absolute and synonym with that of Jesus now also God.

Jesus taught that God wants us to repent and by repentance we acknowledge that we understand spiritually unproductive behaviour and with that realisation and acknowledgement, our sins are forgiven and we can immediately start our new mission to become our original Selves a son of man; blood sacrifices of any sort and any reason was not even part of Jesus’ vocabulary. The Human Being as the ultimate manifestation of humanity, functions on the highest possible moral and spiritual level and we also can prepare others for this good news. By deconstructing the lies in and outside ourselves we are freeing ourselves from the oppressive coercion of silly laws about

guilt and their worthlessness before God; we can again become empowered to become Human Beings the creative agents of God. Unfortunately by freeing people from this worst kind of slavery we become the enemies of the overlords of the national-economic-religious cultic systems that are based on financial gain and archaic brutal and power retention measures. The Powers, also according to Paul, are what prevent our becoming but, “The Human Being is the lure towards our becoming. The Reign of God – God’s domination-free order – is the goal of our becoming. Becoming means fidelity to the uniqueness of our own selves” (Wink 2008:83).

We are now starting to get a glimpse of universal esoteric or mystical tradition as taught by Jesus and his mature followers. According to Wink,

“Jesus saw his mission as part of a process of transforming life. He attempted to live by the power of the Holy Spirit within him (Matt. 12:28 // Luke 11:20). His choice of ‘the son of the man’ instead of ‘me’ in the above mentioned texts means that we have three entities to account for: Jesus, the Human Being, and the Holy Spirit. Jesus resists identifying totally with either; with an emergent archetypal image of what it means to be human (the Human Being) or with the immanent power of the life-transformative processes (the Holy Spirit).” (2008:85)

I have no doubt in my mind that the spiritual Christians who were part of the advanced esoteric teachings exactly knew the meaning when Jesus identified with the “son of man” and it is precisely this high regard for the intrinsic Human Being that Jesus exemplified. His harmonious teaching and exemplary life made him a unique spiritual teacher of the Christian esoteric tradition so that all of us who have “ears to hear” can become a Son of the Man.

#### **7.4. The Mission of Jesus; some key moments in his spiritual journey**

That Jesus’ mission was about the Kingdom of God is generally accepted by most theologians, the only doubt is what type of Kingdom and when was it supposed to manifest. As we have seen that it is to be expected that the universal spiritual heroes will follow a certain time proven path, but was Jesus perhaps so unique that he did not follow this well established pattern? What were the key experiential and insightful moments in the life of Jesus; those special, inspired moments when he made important decisions that could illustrate his belief system, teachings and spiritual objectives in a more direct and clearer way than words alone can bring to us?

##### **7.4.1 Jesus baptised by John the Baptist**

This incident, although very well documented, seems not to be taken seriously enough in all its consequences. Baptism is not only a initiative rite which ceremoniously allow the convert into the new brotherhood; the fact is that both John and Jesus supported true repentance as the only way of gaining God’s forgiveness and by baptising the convert, it is also implied that the initiate or

convert is now washed free of past sins. These beliefs and the rite are obviously non-blood sacrificial in nature and a radical, anti-Cultic solution and therefore serve also as a declaration of war from the perspective of the Temple Cult. Furthermore, Jesus had the nerve to openly declare that the repentant person's sins are in fact immediately forgiven by God! This good news for sinners was very bad news for the cultic business. From this moment on there should have been no surprise what will eventually happen to John, Jesus and others, such as Stephen that would dare to criticize the dogma and leadership of the dominant religion and thereby undermine their authority and jeopardise the power and economy of the Temple cult.

In the esoteric or mystical tradition this stage of realising one's need to grow nearer to God and one thereby gets an clearer insight on ones moral shortcomings and "sins" (missing the mark), is called the Awakening stage. This stage should then be followed by the Purification stage and then if one earnestly persists on travelling the spiritual path the Illumination experience will follow; you are now a veritable or true Gnostic, an enlightened Spirit.

#### **7.4.2 Jesus' "40 days in the Wilderness"**

From his special spiritual experience at his baptism, Jesus went into an extended period of purification through contemplation and emotional turmoil to come to grips with his new spiritual awareness and to defeat the conflicting lures of "Satan" on a spirit driven life. This also corresponds in a way with the mystical process and experience of the "dark night of the soul". He eventually made his decision to follow his heart and conscience and started with his mission; "To worship the Lord your God and serve only Him" (Mat.4:10). This decision is a key to the spiritual path of all pilgrims and part of the esoteric story of Israel as well; they had to spend 40 years in the desert as a purification period. Jesus knew that from now on he will have two choices only; continue on his new spiritual path of obedience only to God and face a similar end as all the critical prophets before him or; surrender to the "Powers" that presently run his world and escape the hardships that otherwise surely will follow.

#### **7.4.3. Jesus starts to differ from John the Baptist on the nature of the Kingdom and began his own movement**

Jesus started his spiritual mission in agreement with John's message in the tradition of the Essenes and the Prophets and in opposition to the sacrificial cult but also started to differ from John about many other beliefs especially about some "end time" speculations. Crossan says that,

“One of the earliest statements we have is a statement by Jesus that John was the greatest person ever born on earth, but that the least in the Kingdom of God is greater than John. Now, this is a marvellously ambiguous statement. The first half lauds John to the heavens; the second puts him as the least person in the Kingdom that means exactly what I would expect. It means Jesus is changing his vision of God and the Kingdom of God from what he has taken from John. He is not really denigrating John, but he is saying the Kingdom of God is not exactly what John was teaching.” (Crossan, 2002:1)

If we look at some of the other elements in the teachings of Jesus, there seems to be a critical stance towards some of these prophetic elements, especially in the Gospel of Thomas. So for instance, there are sayings where Jesus says that nobody know when the end will come. In addition, if we look at the way in which he uses some symbols that are connected with these hopes for eschatological intervention then we seem to see Jesus using them in odd ways; ways that suggest he may have been critical of some of those eschatological hopes.

Attridge's, (2001:1) in his understanding and shared by Crossan, as we will see later, is that Jesus probably grew up in an environment where some people nurtured these hopes for divine intervention into human history. He may have shared them at some point in his life, if indeed he was a disciple of John the Baptist and was baptized by him. However, the way in which he worked them out and came to understand the reign of God or the kingdom of God suggests that he did not totally buy in to the eschatological vision that became reworked by his followers into such passages as Mark 13 according to Crossan who now continues, “If we look at the fully developed doctrine of Millennialism that was consequently developed one is annoyed by the seemingly unnecessary complexity of the process and can recognise many Mediterranean imports” (2002:2).

Crossan further believes that this elaborate, abstract process was not the real interest of Jesus. Jesus' interests lay rather in the reality of daily life and its needed and necessary spiritual foundations.

“There is another type of eschatology and he thinks that is what Jesus was more interested in. *He calls it ethical eschatology. That is the demand that God is making on us. Not us on God, but God on us, we must do something about the evil in this world. In an apocalypse, as it were, we are waiting for God. In an ethical eschatology, God is waiting for us.* That is what Jesus is talking about in the Kingdom of God...It demands that we should do something in conjunction with God; as His instruments of righteousness. It is the intended Kingdom of God, but it is His Kingdom which we must manifest in the here and now.” (2002:2) (Emphasis JAG)

I personally also agree with Crossan, Fredriksen and Attridge that end time happenings was not Jesus' interest at all. An intelligent, compassionate Jesus would have respected John's and his contemporaries' beliefs about this grand end time scheme but would have tried to persuade them



from their present positions to a new understanding; focussing rather on the present dismal realities facing them and the much needed Kingdom of God for the here and now.

It is therefore understandable that in conversations he would make use of the argument that the kingdom “has come near”, meaning that the generally expected, future kingdom is nearer than they think and in a small way already present, but of a different kind; it should be lived now! If he could then get them interested and provided they have reached the required moral and spiritual maturity, he would, and then only, explain the following seemingly radical concepts to them; the Spirit of God is within us, and we are capable Human Beings and should manifest the Kingdom here and now by our collective moral and compassionate actions. Therefore, Jesus emphasises that baptism by water is not enough; “Jesus answered, verily, verily, I say unto thee; except a man be born of water *and the spirit* he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and *that which is born of the spirit is spirit*” (Jn. 3:5-6). (Emphasis, JAG) No reference to futuristic happenings, he was talking about the presence.

The Spirit had in the Jewish tradition a very important function in the process of spiritual growth. Paul also uses these metaphors or code words also extensively. Errico says that:

“‘Born of water and the spirit’ means to be completely *cleansed within and without*. Water is symbolic of outward cleansing. Spirit is symbolic of inner purification. *An inner cleansing can only happen through a baptism of spirit that follows purification or moral growth*. It washes away sin and purifies the heart, mind and soul. *Spirit regenerates and transforms*. By using the expression ‘born of water and spirit’, Jesus meant that a total change needs to happen to a person before he can enter (participate in) God’s kingdom. *‘Born of the spirit’ refers to those who have freed themselves from destructive forces and have transcended the material world*”. (Errico & Lamsa, 2002: 44) (Emphasis JAG)

Those born of the Spirit do not judge by outward appearances because they understand the inner workings of the Spirit in self and others. They are not the believers in Gods Kingdom but the doers within the real Kingdom and thereby realising their own essence.

#### **7.4.4 The Temple “Cleansing” means Temple Destruction**

This theme and its associated ideas can very well be stated as the core of Jesus’ protest of the current religious practices and is totally underplayed by cosmeticians. Essentially he wanted to convince the Jews to return to the “true religion” of Prophetic Judaism and constantly argued against Temple-ism and its cultic traditions which serve only to entrench human guilt and suffering with universal sacrificial practices with only slight differences in “divine regulating laws” within the different national and priestly power systems in the known world at that time.

His program was comprehensive, starting with re-education to propagate forgiveness by repentance instead of sacrifices with constant clarification and reinterpretation of all the multiplicity of “laws” which aim was mainly to distinguish the Jews and their Cult as the “the special ones”. Ironically many of these laws were also the proof that most Jews were hopelessly “unholy” and “sinful” and therefore far from God and therefore sick and poor. While bringing to them the good news of God’s mercy, Jesus also went all out in his effort to cultivate the correct understanding of the simplicity of the core spiritual values underlying the moral laws which must culminate in respect for God and love of neighbour.

The quest in making these lofty values your own personal orientation, requires that you believe in the mercy of God but also eventually in your own godly potential as a precious spiritual inheritance and show a steadfast determination to become the Human Being that God intended us to be. To realise these spiritual objectives, Temple-ism stood squarely in the way and had to be exposed as just another sacrificial coercive religion within an institution that wants to dominate everyone. Domination is from its core against real education and empowerment of the masses and therefore especially against the spiritual growth imperative for mankind which will mean emancipation, insubordination and loss of income.

Jesus said he came to give the Law and the Prophets their “real” or “full” meaning (Mat.5:17. If scholars are correct in affirming the Sermon on the Mount as being the core of Jesus’ ethical and moral teachings then we need to answer some serious questions on the development of Christian Christology and soteriology. He hardly ever refers to the sacrificial cult and never in a positive way. It is obvious for anybody who is not brainwashed by sacrificial soteriological slogans that a sacrifice of a god-man as the spiritual solution for a sinful world is the furthest from these teaching of Jesus that one can imagine.

Jesus knew that much of the teachings of Judaism were supplemented by the tradition of the elders, says Errico puts it nicely.

*“Doctrines of men had substituted the teaching of Scripture. How could blind guides lead the people to God? Jesus knew that the system had to collapse. It was of no use to build on a structure that needed to be changed and rebuilt. Religious teachers had first to free themselves from dogmatic traditions so that they could understand the meaning of the new law and principles that he was teaching. These principles were to be engraved on human hearts and not on tablets of stone. This kingdom is present everywhere, but only a transformed human being can perceive and enter into the activity of God’s presence. In modern terminology we would refer to this as an altered state of consciousness. The alteration of one’s heart and mind brings about the ability to see and participate in God’s*

*rule...* God's sovereignty is not discerned with earthly eyes but only through a new spirit and insight." (2002:42) (Emphasis JAG)

Jesus did not try to implement slight modifications or to make cosmetic changes to the national cultic system. Like some of the prophets before him he interpreted the "law" in a strictly moral sense. Love God and your neighbour and then act accordingly. The Temple "cleansing", is according to Crossan, a most unfortunate term for what was actually a symbolic destruction of the Temple:

"This incident is, on much more solid historical ground, because there are three independent sources for this incident. The first version is in the Gospel of Thomas 71, but it contains only a saying without any action, a word without an accompanying deed: Jesus said, 'I shall [destroy this] house and no one will be able to build it'. That is to say, I shall utterly destroy this house...Next comes the version in Mark 11:15-19, which is not at all purification but rather a symbolic destruction. There is here, unlike in the preceding case, first a physical action and then an interpretative saying." (1994:131)

There was absolutely nothing wrong with any of the buying, selling, or money-changing operations conducted in the outer courts of the Temple. Nobody was stealing or defrauding or contaminating the sacred precincts. Those activities were the absolutely necessary concomitants of the fiscal basis and sacrificial purpose of the Temple according to Crossan. One must conclude, Jesus was not condemning part of the process only, he saw through the whole "religious charade" of the cultic systems at the time and he would be especially annoyed because in the case of Judaism, the prophets over time already made it clear that the cult is more often than not an anti-religion than true service to God.

Crossan further comments that Mark himself, knows that Jesus was not just purifying, but symbolically destroying the Temple because he carefully framed his action within the fruitless fig tree's cursing in 11:12-14 and it's withering in 11:20,

"As the useless fig tree was destroyed, so, symbolically, was the useless Temple. He would not allow any one to carry anything through the temple. He taught, and said to them, 'Is it not written, My house shall be called a house of prayer for all the nations' [= Isaiah 56:7]? 'But you have made it a den of robbers.' [Jeremiah 7:11] ...Notice, first of all, the balance of deed and word, action and comment; that action is not, of course, a physical destruction of the Temple, but it is a deliberate symbolical attack. It destroys the Temple by stopping its fiscal, sacrificial, and liturgical operations." Crossan (1994:131).

In conjunction to the argument above it is also important to remember the ideas of Jesus that the physical temple should be replaced by our spiritual transformed body as the new esoteric temple as Paul also accentuated so many times. Also keep the metaphors of the unsuitability of new wine in old bags in mind where wine is represents a religious system or philosophy in the ANE according to Errico and discussed again later on. Crossan points out some other interesting facts,

“The account in John 2:14-17, again show the balance of deed and word. But notice that, despite the use of a different Old Testament text, the word house is still there. John has clearly developed the incident quite differently from Mark, just as he placed it at the start rather than the end of his description of Jesus’ life. In John it is the authorities who are challenged to destroy Jesus’ body as the symbolic Temple rather than Jesus himself who is symbolically destroying their Temple.” (1994:132)

The ideal temple of Jesus is within humanity the above actions and sayings involving the Temple’s symbolic destruction go back to the historical Jesus. Errico gives his opinion from an Aramaic perspective,

“Jesus answered and said unto them, destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.’ (Jn. 2:19.) ‘destroy this temple’ is another Aramaic idiom. *This phrase does not refer to the actual structure of the temple but to Jewish traditions and rituals.* The temple was the centre of Jewish worship, the abode of the God of Israel. When the temple was first built, worship became centralized in the state of Judea. In other words, God also became localized in the Jewish temple...Jesus’ teaching would totally dismantle all false notions, doctrines and beliefs that were built around the temple. His powerful gospel of the kingdom would build a new temple not made with human hands. (2002:38) (Emphasis JAG)

Jesus’ gospel of the kingdom was to establish a religion of humanity, founded on justice and love rather than on a temple embellished with silver and gold. In his infinite understanding of God, he realized that the priesthood and its autocratic power were unnecessary. The temple, its sacrifices and traditions were to disappear in the light and proclamation of the kingdom of God. Errico sums Jesus’ radical theology up,

*“A new temple was to be built in the hearts of every man, woman and child. The God who, until this time, was worshiped by sacrifices was now to be worshipped in spirit...The Lord of hosts, whom the priests and prophets could not see or approach, was soon to be known as the loving Father of all nations and races.”* (2002:38) (Emphasis JAG)

Jesus’ assault on the temple was an attack on the Cult and its priestly management. The priesthood had become a domination hierarchy and a hindrance to a personal, direct relationship with God; it must to come to an end and forever. It was not an attack on the structure made of stones, which had often been destroyed and was soon to suffer that fate again. Errico now brings in an interesting topic that will again appear in the letter to the Hebrews about Melhizedek,

“Through his teaching, Jesus was building a different kind of temple. He was to inaugurate a new, simple religion through his death and resurrection. It was to be a spiritual temple and a religion that did not need Aaronic descendants and high priests. Jesus himself would become like the ancient spiritual leaders of the past, a priest-king after the order of Melhizedek.” (2002:38-41)

There would be no special blood line or genealogy necessary to petition God on our behalf. Humanity was soon to realize that everyone is the temple of God. “And I heard a great voice from heaven saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with humankind and God will dwell with them, and they will be the people of God and God will be with them and be their God.” (Rev.31:3), “*Do you not know that you are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God swells in you?*” (Cor.3:16) Or “do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit that dwells within you, which you have of God, and are not your own?” (Cor.6:16) (2002:38-41)

#### **7.4.5 Jesus in Gethsemane**

The concepts discussed in the following two paragraphs stand central in Jesus’ teaching and the reason why he now is awaiting his unenlightened enemies in Gethsemane. Jesus replied, “The truth is, no one can enter the Kingdom of God without being born of water and the Spirit. (Jn. 3:5) Born of water marked the desire to turn to God by repentance for forgiveness (John the Baptist teaching); but to be born of the spirit is a different story. As we have seen above according to Errico, that in Aramaic, the phrase “*born of the spirit*” means to be regenerated, reborn and restored to the image of the original humans that God had created. This is baptism of those who strive to be a fully integrated Human Being and the topic of the secret teachings of all great religions as well as that of Jesus. This most important spiritual baptism is again exemplified by Jesus by his important teaching intervention with the Samaritan lady when he said to her,

“But the time is coming, and it is here, when the true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and in truth; for the Father desires worshippers such as these” (Jn. 4:23).

In one sentence Jesus told the lady that cultic Temples and holy mountains is out, and spiritual, genuine and humble service to God and man is in, and the time for this real true mind shift to manifest is now.

Another difference between John the Baptist and Jesus mission was the question of inclusiveness. John was active amongst the Jews and Jesus later had a more inclusive view of God’s kingdom. Jesus refused to give the Pharisees a sign except the “sign of Jonah” This saying is not easily understood but, Errico says that,

“According to Near Eastern interpretation, Jonah’s narrative was a vision and not a document describing factual events. Another helpful important point to consider is that according to eastern dream interpretation, a fish symbolizes trouble or sorrow. Interesting, the name *Nineveh* derives from the fish god *Ninos*. The ancient Assyrians worshipped the fish as one of their gods. ‘To be in a fish’ is a Semitic idiom and means ‘to be in a quandary’ or ‘in a dilemma.’ Even to this day, Eastern people often say: ‘He is in the bottom of the sea’; and in

some Aramaic dialects, people say: 'He is in the ear of a fish.' Our English equivalent to describe Jonah's plight would be, 'He is in a pickle,' 'in jam,' 'in hot water,' or 'He is in over his head.'" (Errico, 2002:61)

Interesting that the fish story can also be part of the story behind the story in that the Pagan Fish god who had the people of Nineveh in his power for so long, now spew Jonah out (the 3 days can be also the internal trail- realisation of Jonah for being headstrong) to come to the rescue of the pagans and at the same time admitting the superiority Jonah's real God. Jonah had to go beyond Jewish ethnicity and pride if he wants to be in the service of a universal God and this was apparently not how he preferred to see his mission. The important point is therefore in Errico's opinion also that,

*"No matter how one may interpret this story, the essential teaching is that the Gentiles are also deserving of God's love, care, and forgiveness. Any nation practising justice, mercy, compassion, and understanding, and that recognises their wrongdoing and makes amends, follows the central premise of the Torah."* (2002:64) (Emphasis JAG)

One needs to understand the concerns and difficulties in Jesus' teachings. Jesus' opponents and some of his followers were puzzled by his teaching of God's kingdom, specially turning the other cheek, going the second mile, not resisting evil and loving one's enemies. They questioned how meekness could replace force and the sword? How can non-violence win the hearts of the violent? How should such teaching bring peace and understanding? These valid questions need answers on another level than normal politics and economics. They need a much broader insight and a spiritual and psychological understanding of Jesus beliefs in God, humanity and the world that can only be taught to the disciple that is ready for these insights.

There is a vast difference in Jesus' trails in the "wilderness" to that in Gethsemane; it is easy to decide for the good if your life is not in danger. In Gethsemane Jesus knew he was on an irreversible pathway to his own physical destruction and confessed that "The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak." He thereby acknowledges his human nature while he is not prepared to apologize for his spiritual teachings and whereby he can save his own life. He hoped that there was another solution to show his commitment to Truth and the will of God without having to give his life in opposing the Temple cult. Furthermore, for his life to be meaningful his spiritual teachings have to survive his death and the Kingdom must be able to gain faithful followers to manifest in reality. The Christian answer to the meaning of his death is ironically enough the standard Cultic sacrificial one and is one of the saddest and most contra productive doctrines ever advanced for Jesus' life. In obedience to God only, he consciously developed his spiritual potential with courage and conviction of its inherent truth, unto a sure death, so that we can realise our own full Human

potential by being freed from the slavery of our false identity with our bodies, egoistic thought structures and enslaving religions.

#### 7.4.6 Jesus on the Cross

Jesus taught a new order of life with the danger of losing one's life in this spiritually hostile world and his teaching was in radical opposition to the all powerful sacrificial Cult. Errico and Lamsa said:

*“To believe in his name’, means for Middle Eastern people, to follow his teachings and therefore a non-violent way of living. Meekness, truth, justice and compassion reign in God’s kingdom...According to many Christian denominations, God made Jesus a sin offering for humanity. Yet in John’s gospel we read that when Jesus forgave sinners, all he said was: ‘Go and sin no more.’ He did not say: ‘Offer something to appease God’s wrath.’ Jesus taught forgiveness of sin differently. Luke’s gospel reports the risen Christ saying: ‘And he said to them, thus is it written, and it was right, that Christ should suffer and rise from the dead on the third day; and that repentance should be preached in his name for the forgiveness of sins among all nations; and the beginning will be from Jerusalem. Forgiveness was to come about through repentance – that is, turning to God – and not by blood sacrifice.”(2002:47, 51) (Emphasis, JAG)*

There are two important points in this argument firstly, the Jewish prophets new that forgiveness come through repentance and secondly, they constantly rebuked the Cult for its sacrificial excesses by promoting a archaic rite for the recognising of sin, to an absolute status and thereby twisting God’s will for economic reasons by keeping the masses ignorant of the real spiritual religion. Errico, tried to show this deadly ambiguity within the Jewish belief systems, Prophets versus Temple Cult:

*“This was a shocking teaching that contradicted Hebrew belief. ‘Because nearly everything, according to the law, is purified with the blood; and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness.’ Of course, the Hebrews, just like other nations, often tried to appease God by means of sacrifice and offerings, at times even offering their children...If Jesus’ death on the cross was predicted by the prophet Isaiah he also knew that everyone who would venture to challenge the temple system and the corrupt political systems of this world would meet with death. Not at any time did Isaiah say that Jesus’ death would reconcile god with humanity or pay a debt to anyone or anything. In his teaching, Jesus condemned hypocrisy, injustice, exploitation, and the misuse of religion. All Hebrew prophets who had spoken out against evil kings, princes and the wicked order in their days had met with the same fate. It was because of their outspokenness that they were all killed. (2002:47, 51) (Emphasis JAG)*

Interestingly, the argument for a substitutive salvific remedy by “sacrificial” death from Isaiah is also not correct according to Errico from the above passage.

The death of Jesus was different in that he brought us a complete teaching while he knew he was going to die and did it willing, but importantly he also knew that his essence would rise from death

and be in a better place while it is also true for all Human Beings. Therefore, his death was a triumph for spiritual truth and man's capability to transcend personal interests in the love of God and others; love does not demand human sacrifice because there is nothing in real love that is in need of punishment. We must also remember that the altered states of mind that Jesus experienced will of necessity differ in its interpretation from ours due to levels of development and time bound conceptual frameworks.

## 7.5. The history sacrifices in the Middle East

Not to belabour this point we just want to consolidate evidence of the historical realities as well as the fierce opposition to these sickly practices of spiritual people even before the Temple was destroyed. That sacrifice and blood oaths were the core of most ANE religions is not to be doubted and the Bible (See 2 Kings 3; 27) and other historical documents attested to this fact. But it is precisely this brutal cultic religion that Jesus, Stephen and others fought against at the cost of their lives. Errico also confirms these practices but it became also a major source of income to the Cult:

*"Feudal chieftains settled blood feuds and brought reconciliation among the clans by sacrificing a member of their tribe. Baal worship was founded on this idea of appeasing the gods through human sacrifices and other offerings. But Israel, having been admonished rather through the Mosaic laws, inaugurated the practice of animal rather than human sacrifice...Shedding of blood, animal or human, for reconciliation among people or between God and humanity is a cruel and barbaric human idea. Ancient biblical scribes placed this command for the blood sacrifice on the lips of God. Other prophets besides Jeremiah knew this truth and cried out against the shedding of animal blood." (2002:52) (Emphasis, JAG)*

In the books of the prophets we find strong condemnation against animal sacrifice. The prophet Jeremiah has penned one of the most vigorous criticisms and denunciations of this practice as a means for atonement. He denies that God ever commanded Moses, as described in elaborate detail in the Torah, to slaughter animals for offerings to God.

*"Thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel: Add your burnt offerings to your sacrifices and eat meat which I did not command your fathers to eat. Neither did I command them concerning either burnt offerings or sacrifices in the day when I brought them out of the land of Egypt; But this thing I commanded them saying, Obey my voice, and I will be your God and you will be my people; and walk in all the ways that I have commanded you, that it may be well with you." (Jer.7:21-23)*

Isaiah, the prophet, declared:

*"Of what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices to me? Says the Lord; I am full of the burnt offerings of rams, and the fat of fed beasts; and I do not delight in the blood of bullocks or of lambs or of he-goats. When you come to appear before me, who has required this at your hand, to tread my courts? Bring no more vain offerings to me; their savour is an*



abomination to me; in the new moons and Sabbaths, you call an assembly; I do not eat that which is obtained wrongfully and taken by force. Your new moons and your appointed feasts my soul hates; they are a burden to me; I am weary to bear them. And when you spread forth your hands, I will hide my eyes from you; even though you make many prayers, I will not hear; your hands are full of blood” (Isa.1:11-15) (Emphasis JAG)

The vanity, pretence and prayer without spiritual understanding of their feasts and sacrifices made God “weary” and He does not respond to this “religious” theatrics. Although modern people might have different conceptions of God the principles of truth, humility and sincerity will still be the key to spiritual growth and the relationship to the God of your heart. Isaiah also addressed the Temple issue long before Jesus:

*“Thus says the Lord: Heaven is my throne and the earth my footstool; what is the house that you build for me? And what is the place of my rest? For all those things has my own hand made, and all those things belong to me, says the Lord. And to whom shall I look, and where shall I dwell? But to him who is calm and humble, and trembles at my word. He who kills an ox is like him who slays a man; he who sacrifices a lamb is like him who kills a dog; he who offers a meal is like him who offers swine’s blood; he who burns incense is like him who blesses an idol. Yea they have chosen their own ways, and their soul delights in their idols.”* (Isa.66:1-3) (Emphasis JAG)

In such institutional dominated religions there is a high risk of only creating new idols in doctrine and rites that are not even recognised as such. Hosea, another prophet, says in the name of the Lord of Hosts: *“For I wanted compassion and not sacrifice; and knowledge of God and not burnt offerings”* (Hosea 6:6). (Emphasis JAG)

The Hebrew prophet by the name of Micah cried out against the notion of offering one’s own son as sacrifice.

*“With what will I come before the Lord, and how will I be pleasing before the high God? Will I come before him with burnt offerings, or with calves of a year old? The Lord will not be pleased with thousands of rams, nor with ten thousands of heifers; if I should offer my firstborn it is an iniquity to myself and the fruit of my body, it is a sin against my soul. He has showed you, oh man, what is good and what the lord requires of you, that you will do justice and love compassion and be ready to walk after the Lord your God.”* (Micah 6; 6-8)

Errico then discusses this comments of Micah and asks valid questions about these practices,

*“God never required animal or human sacrifice... ‘if I should offer my firstborn, it is iniquity to myself, and the fruit of my body, it is a sin against my soul.’ Then how could God require Jesus – the beloved son – to sacrifice himself to appease God’s judgement against human sin? Does God demand a violent act in order to become a forgiving, compassionate, loving being?”* (2002:53) (Emphasis JAG)

Without any deviation these teachings accentuate a radical message of a deep spiritual morality without any compromise or sympathy for blind cultic submission to purity and sacrificial laws and nonsensical rites that “must” be preformed in the Temple and that are supposedly needed for God’s forgiveness and salvation. The Essenes and many early Christian groups also abhorred sacrifices and became vegetarians to demonstrate their horror about these practices.

Dogmatic and final pronouncements about God and his plans in doctrines taken from a Book are one such terrible mistake made in ignorance and vanity. The first principles in commonsense and logic, not even to mention humbleness, is not to try and speak on God’s behalf; no matter how “inspired” you think the writer was, it can still only be his experiential truth or beliefs about God and in your case, only second hand “beliefs” in the writers “holiness”. You should rather recognise your internal and tentative truths about God as your own and test them against the text you have read in the Book without making any of the two “holy” truths. Truth belongs to Reality alone and we can only aspire to know what is needed for our spiritual growth by unlearning untruths and by developing enlightened intuition with the help of our conscience which is God’s gift to us to discern the good from the bad. We might also consider thanking Adam and Eve for this gift to be able to differentiate what is good from bad!

### **7.5.1. Soteriology and Sacrifices of the Jewish followers of Jesus**

It is now clear that after Jesus’ death many different groups have developed with different interpretations of Jesus’ life and teachings. It is of the utmost importance to recognise the vast difference between the belief systems of Prophetic Judaism versus Jewish Temple-ism and that of the followers of the new prophet or Messiah, Jesus of Nazareth. It seems that for James and Peter, Jesus’ Messiahship was mainly based on the belief that a special prophet will come in the tradition of Moses, and taken from a prophecy of Moses. This theme is also picked up from Stephen’s speech in Acts 7:35-53. It is also clear that Stephen did not hold a high regard for the Temple cult and it was the main reason why he was killed also.

According to Wilson, some of James’ followers were adamantly opposed to the perceived abandonment of the Jewish Torah by some “gentile Christians” as we shall encounter again in Paul’s letters. By the time of Irenaeus in the second century, however, these followers of James, known as the Ebionites, were themselves deemed “heretical” by the then, mostly gentile Christian Church. It was now Irenaeus’ turn to denounce them as little different from “the Jews”. James was the head of the Jerusalem group; Peter was initially a missionary for the Jewish people, and Paul for the Gentiles. That the Jerusalem group after the “Council of Jerusalem” divided in two factions; those who did agree with James, that the Gentiles should be treated under the more lenient

“Covenant of Noah”, and the Judaizers who wanted strict observance of the law. Some of these groups also denied Jesus’ virgin birth and his deity. They did not believe that his death brought salvation, for the grace of God must be appropriated for yourself by repentance and righteous living within his covenant of mercy. For them, the teaching of the deity of Christ was an assault on true monotheism (1992:249).

James taught nothing about sacrifices and blood atonement in his letter but that, “Pure religion and undefiled before our God and Father is this, to visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction and to keep himself unspotted from the world” (James1:27). Wilson from his historical research says:

“So bitterly has this epistle been hated by Orthodox Christians that they have even questioned whether it is Christian at all. No reference is made of belief in sacrificial atonement for salvation or cosmic, divine status for Jesus. Luther used to tear it from the Bible whenever he found it, denouncing it is an epistle of straw, for it advocates goodness and self-restraint and says nothing about justification by faith only. That is of course a correct deduction by Luther because he wanted to read his misinterpretation of Paul’s arguments back into Jesus’ religion... This new brand of religion is called by some ‘Cross-tianity’, but Jesus would doubtless have found it (the Ebionite’s interpretation) puritanical, but closer in spirit to his own ideas than those of Paul, Irenaeus or Luther, who in his vilely anti-Jewish tirades anticipated the worst excesses of the Third Reich.” (Wilson 1992:249)

Keith Akers reports that the Ebionites also interpreted the Eucharist as a memorial of Jesus. They did not view Jesus’ death as a bloody act of atonement. They also believe that Jesus’ special status of a Spirit filled teacher and messenger of God, became a veritable “Son” of God at his baptism- the so called adoptionist theory and was in essence also so with the anointment prophets, kings and new High Priests. Ackers relates the seriousness of these Jewish Christians against sacrifices:

“Irenaeus says, that in the Gospel that is in general use among them, is called ‘according to Matthew’ however, *their Gospel says: ‘I have come to do away with sacrifices, and if you cease not sacrificing, the wrath of God will not cease from you.’* (Epiphanius, Parnarion 30. 16, 4-5). It is evident from the work of other scholars that certain Christian groups were dead against sacrifices and were vegetarians...This Ebionite ‘Hebrew’ gospel is considered to be a modified version of Matthew (or vice versa?). More accurately, it appears to be a harmony of all the synoptic gospels, with some subtle changes to reflect the writer’s theology. Most importantly, the Ebionites believed in an ‘adoptionist’ Christology – in which Jesus was fully human, but was chosen as the Son of God at his baptism. However, Epiphanius also states that some believed Jesus to have been ‘created like one of the archangels’. The gospel also makes vegetarians of Jesus and John the Baptist by modifying Luke 22:15 and changing the Baptist’s diet from locusts to cake” (Keith Akers: all-creatures.org.) (Emphasis JAG)

Two things stand out; they were dead against sacrifices and Jesus was a mortal man who revealed the Spirit within, to a very special degree. Daniélou supplies further evidence:

“Jewish Christian works was also influenced by Essenism as can be recognized in ‘The Didache’ and the Shepherd of Hermas (Ascension of Isaiah + II Enoch), Epistle of Barnabas and Gospel of Peter (later Judaism)... The Gospel of Thomas seems to have come down by way of a different tradition closer to the original Aramaic. In this connection the work is of interest for the Exegesis of the New Testament and carrying certain features which are typical of Jewish Christianity... Also, the Gospels of the Hebrews and Egyptians with their prominent roles of James reveal Essene influences. The special instruction reserved by Christ for his chosen apostles represents a kind of higher enlightenment, a gnosis. This theme occurs again in the Epistle of the Apostles and was taken up and used by the Gnostics for their own, who claimed in this way to have authority for their teaching. (Daniélou 1964:23, 24)

About sacrifices and Temple-ism Daniélou reports further on early Christian sources such as the Didache and others which were used in their catechism. This Catechism was still in use in the second century and perhaps longer, says Daniélou, but surprisingly, without any reference to the “divine sacrifice” of Jesus as the salvific principle.

“The Didache is plainly also at its basis quite definitely a Jewish Christian work and served as a ‘handbook’ for catechism in some of the early Christian communities. In its original form it dates back to the first Christian community at Jerusalem, though it was no doubt developed after 70 A.D. in a Syrian community. Finally, the extant version has undergone some touching up later than the second century. Nevertheless, it is possibly the most valuable surviving document of Jewish Christian literature. After the Didache, the most precious document still in existence relating to the Jewish Christian liturgy is the Odes of Solomon (and thereafter the Gospel of Peter and Gospel of the Hebrews).” (1964:322)

Even the synoptic gospels present a view of Jesus that is parallel to that of the Ebionites of being stricter on moral issues taking the Sermon on the Mount as an example. Jesus states that there are two primary commandments; to love God and one’s neighbour. When he is asked who one’s neighbour is, he responds with the parable of the Good Samaritan: it is the hated foreigner who befriends the man in need of assistance who is the man’s true neighbour. “The implication is that even hated foreigners are (or should be) our neighbours; thus everyone – even an enemy – is ultimately our neighbour” (Akers 2000:67).

What is important to note in the text below is that Jesus believed that Moses in actual fact wrote certain laws himself and that not all of them were God’s. Moses had to be creative with certain “laws” because the people were not ready or “ripe” to understand the “real” meaning of God’s intentions with the laws. This liberty of re-interpretation seems to go with spiritually mature teachers or the special prophets. The values underlying the “law” and therefore the spirit of the law is much more important for the correct interpretation of the specific law.

“In the case of divorce, Jesus gives a slightly different argument – and argument from a God-created order as being, in fact, the original law of God. When the Pharisees, citing Moses, object to Jesus’ prohibition of divorce, Jesus replies: ‘For your hardness of heart he [Moses]

wrote you this commandment. But from the beginning of creation, ‘God made them male and female.’” (Mark 10:5, 6) (Akers, 2000:68)

In his foreword to “The Lost Religion of Jesus” by Keith Akers, Walter Wink gives us this of the beliefs of the early followers of Jesus by pointing out that there were many differences in opinion about the “real law” that was from God and human creativity from different agendas.

“‘Jewish Christianity’ is not that brand of Jewish Christianity that we find in the modern world, which simply means Jews being converted to Pauline Christianity, but that Christianity of the first few centuries that remained Jewish and rejected Paul outright. These earliest Christians identified with the poor, espoused non-violence and vegetarianism, avoided alcohol, and rejected the virgin birth and bodily resurrection. Their non-violence led to repudiation of both animal sacrifice and human bloodshed, so they condemned both Temple sacrifices and participation in war. Since they held fast to the Law of Moses, they did this by a theory of ‘false insertions.’ Moses, they argued, never said these things, (the cultic sacrificial laws) so they must have added by ‘the lying pen of the scribes’” (Wink in Akers, 2000: xi)...Epiphanius, the *Recognitions*, and the *Homilies* – specifically contradicting Acts – are unanimous in describing the absolute rejection of animal sacrifice by Jewish Christians. The idea of a Jewish Christianity slavishly observing Jewish tradition falls apart at the outset.” (Akers 2000:72)

The idea of Jesus being a divine sacrifice to appease the wrath of God would have been impossible from the perspective of Jewish Christians. We have to admit that Pauline Christianity and Jewish Christianity were not identical movements and that there possibly were many other “in between” factions also.

The speech of Stephen who was the first “Christian” martyr after Jesus also gives us good clues about the various differences for which he was stoned. Stephen’s opponents bring him before the council and accuse him of attacking “this holy place” and the law, saying that they have heard Stephen say that Jesus “will destroy this place” and change the customs of Moses too. (Acts 6:13 – 14) It is obvious that Stephen believed that he understood Jesus perfectly in his opposition to the Temple Cult and that he too was prepared to die in this struggle to universal enlightenment. Akers summed it up clearly:

“‘This holy place’ refers clearly to the temple, and the accusation made towards Jesus at his trial is repeated – *that the intent of the Christians is to destroy the temple*. The Gospel of Thomas 71 actually has Jesus declaring that he will destroy the temple. Stephen’s response to the charges is a discourse on the history of Israel that, in effect, affirms the charges against him. He *does* want to destroy the temple and end the sacrificial system – he denies only that the sacrificial system came from Moses. The first part of Stephen’s speech (Acts 7:2 – 34) is spent in talking about the history of Israel beginning with Abraham and going down to Moses. In this section the rootless nature of Israel in its state of purity before God is emphasised: Abraham, Joseph and Moses were constantly wandering from place to place, yet God was everywhere with them. They had no temple, and yet were regarded as holy...The second part of Stephen’s speech (Acts 7:35 – 53) emphasises the rejection of Moses by the Israelites and *attacks temple-worship as idolatry*. Stephen quotes Moses’

prediction that God will raise up a future prophet – again citing the Ebionites' favourite verse in Deuteronomy predicting the 'true Prophet'" (2000:161)

One should also consider why Stephen in this lengthy speech never even hints that Jesus was any body else as this special prophet that Moses himself prophesised about. Surely if a sacrificial death for Jesus was a core truth for them then he certainly would have mention it.

"The Israelites rejected Moses, says Stephen, and sacrificed animals in the desert, but *this animal sacrifice was not offered to God, but to idols. In support, he quotes part of a passage from Amos that is utterly opposed to animal sacrifice. God does not dwell in the temple anyway, Stephen says, quoting Isaiah in support: 'Heaven is my throne, and earth is my footstool' (Isaiah 66:1).* After attacking Solomon's construction of the temple, Stephen concludes: 'As your fathers did, so do you' (Acts 7:51). *Thus, Stephen liken's the priests' practice of animal sacrifice in the temple to the idolatrous animal sacrifice in the desert!* Stephen ends with more accusations against his listeners: they resisted the Holy Spirit, they betrayed and killed the 'Righteous One,' and they failed to keep the law." (Akers, 2000:161) (Emphasis JAG)

One cannot help to realise that someone could be stoned after such a speech. Akers conclude that we do not even hear a verdict in his case delivered; Stephen's opponents, enraged, simply seize him and have him stoned. As he is being stoned, the Holy Spirit descends on Stephen, and he prays for forgiveness for his enemies (Acts 7:55, 60), following the advice in the Sermon on the Mount" (Akers, 2000:161). (Emphasis JAG)

Ironically, one can also see a certain harmony between the ideas of Stephen and Paul, or did Stephen's speech start Paul's awakening to his new vision about God? Akers makes two other interesting observations regarding the Spirit and Christ within early Jewish Christianity:

"In Acts, the Holy Spirit is spread around almost indiscriminately. In the Pentecost event, the power of the kingdom of heaven descends on many diverse individuals, just as it had earlier been poured out into Jesus: Peter quotes Joel as saying that the spirit of God will be poured out unto all people (Acts 2:14 – 21). *This directly parallels the Recognitions when Peter declares that the same oil that anointed Jesus now anoints all believers (1.45) – and thus all believers have become Christs (another Ebionite theme)...The opponents of the Christians are named repeatedly in Acts: they are the priests and their allies, the Sadducees (Acts 4:1, 4:5-6, 5:21, 5:24, 5:27).*It is only this small (though privileged) segment of the community that opposes the Jesus movement." (2000:162) (Emphasis JAG)

Akers is also undoubtedly correct in stating, that when Jesus disagrees with the religious authorities in moral matters it was because they did not go far enough in their allegiance to the law (2000:69). Another point also becomes clear that mechanical obedience will never be enough to "fulfil" the law because; you have no spiritual understanding yet and only the inherent motivation from a higher order, the Spirit within will give you the capacity to function from your developed

conscience. No trace of easy “belief only” sacrificial soteriology here! Salvation is to live the law of love within a Kingdom ruled by a loving and forgiving God. Furthermore, the law must be tested and interpreted from the intentions of God for his Kingdom on earth from moral intuition and is anchored in service from compassion. Jesus is not equal to God but in his manifestation of the “Image of God” and as the spiritual Adam, he is a Spirit filled prophet and teacher; he is opening up new horizons for us on how to be a Human Being in God’s Kingdom. It is more enlightened than pharisaic Judaism but is light-years away from the national cultic slaughterhouse religion.

### **7.5.2. The mission of Jesus according to different Christian Groups**

As a frame of reference we will be discussing different Christian groups that existed within a few decades of Jesus’ death and that these groups must have been sure that they had good reasons to believe that they were following Jesus. We will for reasons of simplicity, identify four major groups:

- Those whose opinion about Jesus placed them midway between Judaism and Christianity; they acknowledge Jesus to be a special prophet, even a Messiah, in the tradition of Moses or of that of the Essenes; who will re-interpret the Law and bring the ideals of the Prophetic Tradition into practice in a universal Kingdom, but they did not look upon Jesus as an only divine Son of God.
- Another group within James’ group and that the later became known as the Ebionites would insist upon the observance of certain Jewish Laws as well as circumcision, but not the sacrificial laws, they were referred to as the Judaizers. A possible sub-group were those who demanded some form of observance of the gentile groups to certain laws, but did not even insist upon circumcision or becoming Jewish: this was also seemingly the personal position of James and Peter.
- The Pauline Christianity that wanted to be a universal multi national Christianity with pertinent esoteric characteristics that were familiar and fascinated with the Jewish traditions but with a personal mystical touch and understood or might even have belonged to or where attracted to other pagan mystical and philosophic traditions.
- The early Gnostic followers of Jesus that considered his wisdom and esoteric teachings as all important and wanted to break completely with all Temple traditions. While there were also Jewish and Gentile Gnostics and the latter had no use for being Jewish in any way, they all subscribed to a multi national perspective of God and revered Paul as the major apostle of their new faith in Jesus as their role model and their spiritual hero, teacher of esoteric spirituality and therefore they saw him also as their own revealer of godly truths and saviour. There were also other sub groups within the manifold Gentile Gnostic groups who had their own explanations why the world is in such a pitiful state; it

“is surely” due to the “creator” God, who made a few mistakes in his creational efforts and they explained this problem by various myths. They were pretty sure that it was mainly because the creator god was a lesser God (some were sure that he was the Jewish god) to the “Real God” who’s creational experiments went wrong for various reasons. This resulted in many corrective actions by the High God that had to explain many worldly and ethical-spiritual problems. They also revered Jesus as the true representative of the Real or High God and therefore their saviour as teacher of the real esoteric truths. To different degrees they all also acknowledge Paul as an important apostle to Jesus.

Keeping this variety in mind we need to point out again that the pivotal events in Jesus’ life even in the biblical Gospels correlate with the primordial tradition of the hero’s life, death and mission. The esoteric message is left as a mystery to the “hearers” and is revealed by Jesus only to his inner circle of spiritually awakened followers and the Essenic groups and all other secret sects also functioned within the same graded instruction methodology. In this respect Paul, the Gnostics and even the early Alexandrian Church leadership under Clement and Origen just went a step further and opened the “secrets” up for more of the members as encouragement for own spiritual growth within their groups. The Gnostics, even those within the early church, therefore revered Jesus as an esoteric teacher and example of a godly man and by his spiritual resurrection he revealed mankind’s immortality and therefore became their saviour through facilitating the gnosis of our divine inheritance. They had no real interests in divine birth, physical resurrection, blood sacrifices and end time happenings; spiritual growth and the Kingdom of God here on earth is what they cared about most.

## **7.6. The Aramaic Language, its metaphors and proverbs as the Cultural and Spirituality heritage of Jesus in conveying meaning to his audience**

There is a new awareness of the difficulty of translating Aramaic, with its multiplicity of possible meanings of some words, its idioms and within its own distinct cultural mindset, into most Western languages. Our special interest here is in language and idiom as the instruments of communication of the founder of Christianity and its uses in the relevant texts related to key concepts pertaining to Christology and soteriology. The work of Drs. Douglas-Klotz, Errico and Lamsa will be our guides in search of a better understanding of the Semitic culture and beliefs as they were communicated in Aramaic.

Neil Douglas-Klotz’s (1999) audio book, “The Hidden Gospel” offers us an experience of the power and mystery hidden behind the traditional words of Jesus, when viewed from the perspective of his



native language. This new understanding of the meaning of Jesus' words is developed in eight "keys" or insights, designed to revitalize our spiritual life – or to help you "raise yourself from the dead". Like Hebrew, Aramaic allows for multiple translations and interpretations of Jesus' words. The Hidden Gospel explores how these additional possibilities reveal a Jesus who was connected to the body, to nature, and to the cosmos.

"These elements of Jesus' teaching have largely been exiled from Christian spirituality by centuries of Western theological speculation." (Douglas-Klotz (1999:1)

We will only look at a few of his Keys to a better understanding of Middle Eastern spirituality.

"'Alaha Ruhau'—KJV –'God is a spirit' (Gospel of John 4:24) This translation from the Aramaic version (above) is based on the fact that the Aramaic word for 'spirit' also means 'breath', 'air', or 'wind'. The word for 'God' really means 'Sacred Unity', 'Oneness', or 'the Only Being'. *In this view, 'my breath' is not separate from the Holy Spirit and every being is embedded in Sacred Unity.* In addition, Alaha (Sacred Unity) includes what Middle Eastern psychology would call our inner community of voices: the various aspects of the subconscious that influence us, for instance, the sometimes conflicted ways in which we love, work, and learn. It is through and in Alaha that we find the resolution of both inner and outer divisions." (Douglas-Klotz 1999:4) (Emphasis JAG)

The above insights on the unity within diversity are totally in harmony with all mystical traditions. The following new perspective on what it means to be good and perfect from Jesus' perspective is also very much in line with our perspective on spiritual growth within the 21<sup>st</sup>. century!

"'Goodness' means 'Ripeness' the Aramaic words for good (tub) and evil/bad (bisha) carry the essential meanings of 'ripe' and 'unripe'. *This distinction takes these concepts out of the realm of external moral standards and into the realm of timing (or growth).* We are called upon to be in tune and in time with the cosmos, ready for the planting of the seeds of our destiny. The first word of the Beatitudes in Matthew's version (usually translated as 'blessed') uses the root for 'ripeness'. To be in a blessed state means to find one's condition, whatever it may be, within the fabric of divine timing, or ripeness. In the third Beatitude, usually translated, 'Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth', we find this affirmation: 'Blessedly ripe are those who soften what is rigid within, for they shall receive strength and vigour, their natural inheritance, from the energy of nature all around them... *'To be 'pure' or 'perfect' in Aramaic carries the meaning of being 'all-embracing' or completeness.*" (1999:5) (Emphasis JAG)

One can already get the feel of the impulses coming through that these text were also concerned with psychological and spiritual insights and preparation that is important and not religious instruction only. The so called "I am" statements of Jesus from the perspective of the esoteric traditions also get new and valid meanings seen from the "I am" within the "I AM" perspective; of us being a spark from the Cosmic Fire. This is also a key insight in our understanding of the essence of mankind, the Human Being or Image of God within. That in a deeper sense place Jesus' "I am" statements not within the physical level of Jesus' existence but refers to his essence or "the Christ

within” if you will. This mystical understanding then wants to convey the truth that the Human Being within, is the Way, the Truth and the Light of any spiritual Christian also. It is not a dogmatic utterance of a unique, once off god-man.

“The sayings of Jesus in John that use the ‘I am’ formula such as ‘I am the bread of life’ – John 6:35, also point in Aramaic, to a source of renewable life energy; a state of simple presence in which our own individual sense of self is found contained within the only “I Am” – that of the Divine. Since ‘God’ means nothing is excluded, our small ‘I am’ (as well as that of Jesus) is contained within Sacred Unity. In this sense, the passage in John 6:35 can be rendered from the Aramaic as: ‘Inana lachma d’hayye’—*the ‘I am’ – residing in Simple Presence (I AM)* – *is the food that gives life energy to all creation.*” (Douglas-Klotz 1999:7) (Emphasis JAG)

The real and broader meaning of the following concepts is totally in harmony with the empowering message of Jesus’ esoteric teachings. When you are at peace through grace and with others, from your real shared essence, you do not compete with worldly agendas; you realise the limitations of another person’s or groups’ awareness (developmental level) you feel less inclined to judge and rather wants to promote peace instead. Your full potentiality as a Human Being can now be developed. The method of emphasis applied by the writer in the quotations in the next sections is to use cursive accentuation for important notions pertaining to this thesis and bold print to accentuation core or key concepts.

“Peace” means, not the absence of war, but rather the **fullness of potential**. The seventh Beatitude, usually translated, ‘Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called the children of God’, also points to a state of deep peace. It can be rendered from the Aramaic as: ‘Ripe are those who plant peace each season, for they shall become hollowed out as channels and fountains of Unity.’... **‘To be raised from the dead means to find your own rhythm in relation to divine Unity.** John 11:25 quotes Jesus saying (in the KJV translation), ‘I am the resurrection and the life’. From the Aramaic Bible, this can be rendered: ‘Inana nuhama wa hayye’— *the ‘I am’ – residing in Simple Presence (I Am) – provides renewal and energy*. The way that we can find this renewal is by discovering our place, in ripeness, in the texture of cosmic Unity...‘Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that believeth on me, **the works that I do shall he do also; and greater works than these shall he do**’ (John 14:12) Translated from the Aramaic: **‘Those who have the same rooted confidence in Unity that I have shall do the things that I do, and greater than these.’**” (Douglas-Klotz 1999:11) (Emphasis JAG)

It is obvious that from these different meanings the context shifts dramatically to participation of the “I am” with the “I Am” or the inner Self (son of Man) with Unity that represents God. Our spiritual maturity is “blessedness” because it means “ripeness” or spiritual maturity and to be perfect means “wholeness”; to be able operate from the core spiritual Self although we are in this world still. If we then want to acquire the peace that passeth understanding, we should come in tune with the Self and be hollowed out as channels and fountains of Unity, which naturally implies Peace. This high view of mankind is within the scope of our capabilities if we are prepared to get to know the real

Self and attain the required ripeness and act in unity with the One or the Cosmic Consciousness that we call God.

The present day Nazarene Essenes states that Biblical scholars disagree about Jesus' meaning in the Lord's Prayer. Some view it as "existential," referring to man's present experience on earth, while others interpret it as "eschatological," referring to the coming Kingdom of God. They say the prayer itself lends itself to both interpretations. They say that every line of the Lords Prayer could be translated into English in different plausible versions. As an example of how the intent of a passage can be changed, here is one translation of the Lord's Prayer, claimed to be directly translated from the ancient Aramaic language into modern English:

*"O cosmic Birther of all radiance and vibration. Soften the ground of our being and carve out a space within us where your Presence can abide. Fill us with your creativity so that we may be empowered to bear the fruit of your mission. Let each of our actions bear fruit in accordance with your desire. Endow us with the wisdom to produce and share what each being needs to grow and flourish. Untie the tangled threads of destiny that bind us, as we release others from the entanglement of past mistakes. Do not let us be seduced by that which would divert us from our true purpose, but illuminate the opportunities of the present moment. For you are the ground and the fruitful vision, the birth, power and fulfilment, as all is gathered and made whole once again."*  
([http://www.thenazareneway.com/lords\\_prayer.htm](http://www.thenazareneway.com/lords_prayer.htm))

What a difference; if this is what some of the spiritual Aramaic listeners might have heard then an amazing esoteric message comes to light. These statements compliment the deep spirituality and obligations within Jesus' teaching instead of making the prayer another wish list or a task list for God with praise in between.

### **7.6.1 Other important keys to understanding some pivotal Aramaic phrases in the Bible and their meaning for us today**

Here follows some confirmations of already discussed ideas as well as interesting new insights from an Aramaic perspective. None of these sayings or interpretations is in any way related or tries to implicate that Jesus' death is an act of sacrificial atonement or that such a sacrifice was needed; he was rather a unique or special teacher of the truths of God. The emphases within the text are mine.

1. "At some time in the tenth century B.C.E., a Hebrew scribe penned the famous legend of Adam and Eve. In the book of Genesis it follows the prose poem of creation. Most of the time this ancient literary piece suffers from improper and negative interpretations with mistaken notions about the meaning of the narrative. One must avoid the mistake of viewing this as 'original sin' in terms of a universal and abstract notion of sin. *Such a concept is not found in the Old Testament. This notion is Church doctrine and became part of Christian belief.*" (Errico 2002:93) (Emphasis JAG)

2. "When Jesus speaks of himself as **the bread of life**, he refers to the sacredness of his **teachings**. That is, he speaks about his good teaching which nourishes the hearts and souls of the human family. His word brings peace, prosperity and a living, loving relationship with God Who is Life Itself." (Errico 2002:76) (Emphasis JAG)

3. "When Paul stood before the men of Athens in the court at Areopagus, he said: 'For the God who made the world and all things therein, and who is the Lord of heaven and earth, does not dwell in temples made with hands; . . . For in Him we live and move and have our being, as some of your wise men have said, for we are His kindred.'" (Errico 2002:182) (Emphasis JAG)

The word "heaven" according to Errico is used in the Bible as metaphor in expressing the idea of peace, order and harmony. Obviously the Paul knew the frame of mind of the pagan spiritual person.

4. "Noohra is the Aramaic word for 'light,' 'enlightenment,' and 'understanding.' In many passages of the Bible, the term 'light' symbolically represents God's word. It also means a 'true teaching.' Jesus' saying 'I am the light of the world' may paraphrase as: 'my teaching enlightens the world of humanity.' We as human beings see clearly when light is present; and where there is light we need not falter. Again the man from Galilee said: 'He who follows my teaching shall not walk in **darkness [ignorance]**, but shall find for himself the light of life.'" (Errico 2002:184) (Emphasis JAG)

5. "Then she will give birth to a son, and you shall name him Jesus, indeed, he shall bring his people back to life from their sins.' Interestingly, the word 'sin' – *hata* in Aramaic – means 'to miss the mark.' And, the word 'save,' *haiway*, means 'to revive,' 'to restore,' 'to give life,' and 'to resuscitate.'" (Errico 2002:186) (Emphasis JAG)

These concepts made of Jesus a type of teacher and mentor in their relationship with God and not replacement sacrifice.

6. "What did the writer of John's gospel mean by the expression 'only-begotten'? In Aramaic *yeheedaya*, does not mean 'only-begotten.' It means 'sole,' 'only,' 'precious,' 'beloved,' and 'one of a kind.' This word also, by implication, refers to the firstborn son. John uses this term *yeheedaya* to mean that Jesus expressed a unique and beloved relationship with God as father. Jesus' life was a vital and powerful manifestation of divine son-ship. Therefore, he became the known as the "sole heir" and 'uniquely beloved son' of this universal and spiritual truth of divine son-ship for the human family. In his letter to the Romans, Paul says that Jesus is 'the firstborn among many brethren.' An Eastern father glories when he sees his 'firstborn son,' because he sees himself re-created in his offspring. This is what John is saying about God as father: 'the glory as of the only son of the Father.' According to the author, **it is only through Jesus' teaching that people learn of their divine son-ship again.**" (Errico 2002:189) (Emphasis JAG)

7. "But those who received him, to them he gave power to become sons of God, especially to those who believed in his name.' In this verse, the word 'power,' *shultana*, means 'right,' or 'authority'. The Aramaic phrase '**believe in his name**' signifies 'to believe in his teaching'. This idea is repeated in the epistle of John: "My beloved, now we are the children [sons] of God.'" (Errico 2002:189) (Emphasis, JAG)

8. *“Jesus made a statement to the Samaritan woman that God is Spirit. She was not thinking of a ‘Self-Existent Being’; she did not think in metaphysical terms. We cannot localize or headquarter God anywhere in particular. She thought in terms of a localized deity whom the people worshipped on the mountain in Samaria and not in the temple at Jerusalem. God’s essence is Spirit. But what is God? The term “God” in Aramaic is defined as “the Self-Existent One – ithea.” We also may refer to God as the efficacious Presence or Principle. It is from this self-existent principle that all forms of life flow. Thus the root of everything that one sees is Spirit. A human being’s essence is also spirit but manifests itself as soul-body. God is the eternal spirit. And Spirit is enduring, unchangeable, transcendent, and yet immanent. God, as Spirit, is everywhere, an all-pervading presence, and all-inclusive.”* (Errico 2002:211) (Emphasis JAG)

If Errico is right about Middle Eastern spirituality in general, then we got the wrong version of it.

9. *“What is compassion? Compassion is a state of being in which kindness holds sway and in which a state of self-grace establishes itself within the individual. When any individual knows a deep inner compassion within himself or herself, the practice of compassionate love for others is enhanced. This practice does not just stem from a religious regulation for proper human behaviour, but comes from a viable self-motivated state of grace which benefits one’s own being and others. We affirm the biblical claim that humans are the “image and likeness of God” when we, as individuals, come to know the rahme, compassion that is ours through natural birthright. **Genuine compassion and spirituality are nothing more than a human being’s behaving humanely.**”* (Errico 2002:218) (Emphasis JAG)

About the resurrection Errico says:

10. *“The answer to understanding the resurrection of Jesus lies with the apostles and disciples themselves. After all, they were the ones who reported the astounding event. Before Jesus’ death, the disciples did not fully grasp the depth and meaning of his mission and teaching. They had dreams of a messianic kingdom in which they and their lord would rule the nations. But when the crucifixion took place, all their dreams and political aspirations were shattered. Their broken hopes and the painful loss of their teacher were so great that they soon returned to their old occupations. Nevertheless, Jesus’ death began to bring about deep mental and emotional changes within the consciousness of his disciples...His death began to liberate and expand their reasoning and visionary powers. Because of this devastating loss, the disciples would soon experience visions of a resurrected teacher. **They now could transcend their former reasoning and begin to perceive things spiritually.** When this transformation started to take effect within their souls, Jesus, as living presence, could appear to them in visions and dreams. They saw their lord and teacher as the glorified Messiah. He was with them and would infuse them with power and courage...This spiritual influence was so powerful and gripping that the disciples knew Jesus had conquered death. So profound was their experience that they were willing to face death and martyrdom. The Semitic Aramaic expression kam leh, **‘He is risen,’ means ‘He has succeeded,’ ‘He has come though,’ or ‘He has achieved his purpose in life’.** **The risen Messiah-Christ, in his spiritual nature, belongs to the entire human family in every generation and in every age.**”* (Errico 2002:222) (Emphasis JAG)

These mystical insights correspond to the others discussed so far and with spiritual – psychological experiences of different mystics in the Christian tradition.

Critical translation differences between two translations from two traditions could be pointed at in this regard: “He who **believes** in the Son has everlasting life; and he who does **not believe** the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him” (Jn. 3:36-**KJV**). “He who believes in the Son has everlasting life; and he who does not **obey** the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him” (Jn. 3:36-**Peshitta**). We have learned that to believe in a person is to accept his teachings or statements but the second half of the translation of this phrase has a totally different meaning in the KJV. These differences should be avoided because of doctrinal misunderstandings that did follow. Faith should culminate in faithfulness or else what is its worth?

What is very clear from a Middle Eastern perspective is that Jesus was revered for his profound spiritual teachings from a perspective of a unique relationship with God. A very advanced concept of God also surfaces, “He” was seen as the “Self-Existent Principle that flow in all forms of life” or the “All inclusive Reality” or the One or Unity. Jesus steadfast resolve to stay with his intuitive truths of God in the face of certain death became the first human being that really exemplifies the image of God through his life and teachings; he showed the way for everyone that care to follow. That his followers face the same hard realities of overcoming the obstacles, within and without that stand in the way of spiritual growth was not disguised; there is no easy way or once off replacement sacrificial remedy.

## **7.7. Christology and Soteriology in the Gospels of Thomas and John**

As the Gospel of John is very important from the perspective of the Christology and soteriology of mainstream Christianity, it is also important to incorporate some present day scholarly inputs on this Gospel. The Gospel of Thomas also gained a lot of followers lately and is now believed to be an early, independent Gospel that seemed to be ideologically linked to John in the opinion of some scholars. Therefore it also deserves our attention for a broader inclusive esoteric and mystical perspective.

### **7.7.1 Gospel of Thomas**

I personally find it very exciting from an esoteric point of view that the Gnostic Gospel of Thomas could be related to the more esoteric Gospel of John. They both want to “witness about the ‘Light’, that all might believe through him. He was not himself the Light, but came that he should testify about the Light.” (Gospel of John 1:6-9, Schonfield translation)

Lambdin (1990) in his introduction to his translation of the Gospel of Thomas says that another follower of Jesus called Jude or Judas (not Iscariot) also had a bilingual nickname, “the Twin” –

Didymos in Greek and Thomas in Aramaic or Syriac. This is the figure immortalized as Doubting Thomas. In the Gospel of Thomas, Jesus taught that the obligation to seek for the truth is ours and the answers are available within. No third party saviours are allowed; you will have to search for, experience and work out the answers yourself. Believing in dogmas and apocalyptic abracadabra, will not help you, God knows your heart and mind.

To gain an idea of the spirituality of this Gospel here are a few sayings to consider, from the translation by Thomas O. Lambdin (1990). Again we will be looking for soteriological indicators which will include views on human nature and responsibilities and the nature of God's mercy. Emphases and comments in brackets within the texts are mine.

(2) Jesus said, "Let him who seeks continue seeking until he finds. When he finds, he will become troubled. When he becomes troubled, he will be astonished, and he will rule over the All."

This saying reflects the epic personal search of the spiritual pilgrim for his/her higher or godly Self or Image of God within and the experiences during his realisations thereof.

(3) Jesus said, "If those who lead you say to you, 'See, the kingdom is in the sky,' then the birds of the sky will precede you. If they say to you, 'It is in the sea,' then the fish will precede you. Rather, *the kingdom is inside of you, and it is outside of you.* When you come to know yourselves, then you will become known (to God within or godly observer/conscience within), *and you will realize that it is you who are the sons of the living father. But if you will not know yourselves, you dwell in poverty.*

(4) Jesus said, "The man old in days will not hesitate to ask a small child seven days old about the place of life, and he will live. For many who are first will become last, and they will become one and the same."

This reference to the seventh day seems to be linked to the lore of Creation and the seventh day of "rest" which is also coupled to enlightenment and salvation. An enlightened spiritual Being, "seven days old child" will teach the willing older spiritual novice; present domination ranking orders will change to spiritual ones and therefore be virtually reversed and equalised.

(22) Jesus saw infants being suckled. He said to his disciples, "These infants being suckled are like those who enter the kingdom." They said to him, "Shall we then, as children, enter the kingdom?" Jesus said to them, "*When you make the two one, and when you make the inside like the outside and the outside like the inside, and the above like the below, and when you make the male and the female one and the same, so that the male not be male nor the female; and when you fashion eyes in the place of an eye, and a hand in place of a hand, and a foot in place of a foot, and a likeness in place of a likeness; then will you enter the kingdom.*"

This lengthy discussion of the process of integrating the "human being" with the non sexual enlightened "Human Being" to become a fully integrated spiritual individual within a new spiritually

perceived reality which is free of cultural value judgements, has quite a few more unknown symbolic messages. Jesus had a high regard for the innocence, humbleness and truthfulness of small children and these qualities were seen by Jesus as a key indicators of the spiritual person; he certainly did not mean that we must also be as gullible as little children as some coercive religions would like their followers to be.

(24) His disciples said to him, *“Show us the place where you are, since it is necessary for us to seek it.”* He said to them, *“Whoever has ears, let him hear. There **is light** within a man of light, and he lights up the whole world. If he does not shine, **he is darkness.**”* (Emphasis, JAG).

If you are ripe and understood his real esoteric message, the gnosis of the Light within, will become your light and you will be like him and will personify “light” or enlightenment; if you are fruitless because you are unripe from the spiritual perspective, you are still in darkness and remain ignorant about your true essence and will then “be” ignorance personified.

(39) Jesus said, “The Pharisees and the scribes have taken the keys of knowledge (gnosis) and hidden them. They themselves have not entered, nor have they allowed those who wish to. You, however, be as wise as serpents and as innocent as doves.”

Note that Jesus is not even mentioning the Cultic management he only talks about the theologians and our own responsibility to discern spiritual wisdom from coercive dogma.

(45) Jesus said, “Grapes are not harvested from thorns, nor are figs gathered from thistles, for they do not produce fruit. A good man brings forth good from his storehouse; an evil man brings forth evil things from his evil storehouse, which is in his heart, and says evil things. For out of the abundance of the heart he brings forth evil things.”

Your beliefs are vindicated by your deeds it is not a matter of “belief only” theology.

(51) His disciples said to him, “When will the repose of the dead come about and when will the new world come?” He said to them, *“What you look forward to has already come, but you do not recognize it.”*

To be raised from the death, metaphorically means to be spiritually resurrected and therefore the spiritually enlightened followers of Jesus are resurrected with him already; totally in harmony with Paul’s esoteric teachings also.

(52) His disciples said to him, “Twenty-four prophets spoke in Israel, and all of them spoke of you.” He said to them, “You have omitted the one living in your presence and have spoken (only) of the dead.”



Obviously they do not understand a thing what he tried to teach them; they still busied themselves with “end time prophecies” while his personal esoteric teaching in the present is not understood.

(53) His disciples said to him, “Is circumcision beneficial or not?” He said to them, “*If it were beneficial, their father would beget them already circumcised from their mother.* Rather, the true circumcision in spirit has become completely profitable.” (Cultic and tribal nonsense- Paul would have loved this saying)

(62) Jesus said, “It is to those who are worthy of my mysteries that I tell my mysteries.”

The graded teaching is obviously coupled to spiritual maturity or ripeness.

(70) Jesus said, “That **which you have will save you if you bring it forth from yourselves**. That which you do not have within you will kill you if you do not have it within you.”

Saying 62 and 70 again refers to importance of our inward journey. You cannot press unripe fruit ripe; only when you are ready; spiritually and morally developed enough, can you identify with the Human Being within and realise your spiritual immortality.

(77) Jesus said, “It is I who am the light which is above them all. It is I who am the all. From me did the all come forth, and unto me did the all extend. Split a piece of wood, and I am there. Lift up the stone, and you will find me there.”

This saying resonates with Douglas-Klotz analysis that to the Aramaic person, God means that everyone and anything is included the Unity that is God. The “I” in the “I AM”, is the inner spiritual essence of God that is in every created thing and being albeit in different levels of manifestations of awareness.

(91) They said to him, “Tell us who you are so that we may believe in you.” He said to them, “You read the face of the sky and of the earth, but you have not recognized the one who is before you, and you do not know how to read this moment.”

They still want to know “who” Jesus is to “believe” him; no understanding yet of the esoteric and spiritual teachings of Jesus’ and their own shared essences.

(94) Jesus said, “He who seeks will find, and he who knocks will be let in.”

This theme is central to Jesus’ esoteric teaching; you have to have the will and interest to seek the truth and Self, whole heartedly, nobody can do that for you.

(102) Jesus said, "Woe to the Pharisees, for they are like a dog sleeping in the manger of oxen, for neither does he eat nor does he let the oxen eat."

Either the Pharisees as a group or many of them did not know the esoteric teachings any more or did not want to guide others on their spiritual path. The spiritual ignorance of Nicodemus comes to mind in this respect.

(106) Jesus said, "When you make the two one, **you will become the sons of man**, and when you say, 'Mountain, move away,' it will move away."

Thomas seems to fully understand the title "sons of man" and the inherent power within this identity as we have discussed before. It is also totally in agreement with Walter Wink's analysis of this concept and its meaning within the community of initiates in Jesus' time.

(108) Jesus said, "He who will *drink from my mouth* will become like me. I myself shall become he, and *the things that are hidden will be revealed to him*."

To "drink from my mouth" means to learn from me and therefore the esoteric teachings will also be revealed to such a person.

(113) His disciples said to him, "When will the kingdom come?" Jesus said, "It will not come by waiting for it. It will not be a matter of saying 'here it is' or 'there it is.' Rather, *the kingdom of the father is spread out upon the earth, and men do not see it*."

Obviously the Kingdom is not realised in apocalyptic "prophesies" but a moral-spiritual and physical reality, here on earth which can only be discerned by those who understand his spiritual teachings and manifest their potential as Human Beings. According to Davies, Thomas evidently knows of Christocentricity, eschatological traditions carried forward in the name of Jesus' disciples and seeks to undermine those traditions by corrective question-response passage (1992:2).

In our study of Paul's theology we will come back to this topic but I think Davies and his referents got this right:

"Whereas the canonical Gospels focus largely on Christological concerns, such concerns in Thomas are secondary, if not misguided...This is logically entailed in Thomas's overall perspective. If one discovers oneself actually and other people potentially to possess the light and to be the image of God, one thereby discovers also what Jesus is...Thomas offers a view of Christian transformation not terribly different from the Pauline view." (1992:70)

In it seems that Paul would not find much fault with Thomas' ideas as summarised here by Davies:

“The theme of a salvic or restorative return to the time of primordial mythic origins is, of course, a theme commonly encountered in religions throughout the world...It is commonplace in early Christianity that a person who has received the Spirit is one to whom the things that are hidden will be revealed (see, e.g., 1 Cor 2:10-13 [1 Cor 2:9//Gos. Thom. 17]; John 14:26). Further, such a one is like Jesus (John 14:12-17) or, indeed, is one who may identify with Jesus (Gos. Thom. 108; cf. Gal 2:20). The Gospel of Thomas sayings 13 and 108 seem, therefore, to state that through possession by the same Spirit individuals become equivalent to or identified with Jesus.” (1992:4)

### 7.7.2 Gospel of John

It is obvious for any attentive reader that the Gospel of John is in many ways different to the synoptic Gospels. Its conception of Jesus and his mission is much more in the tradition of the mystics and not always clear in a literal reading. Alexander Mirkovic (1995:1), in his work on “Johannine Sayings in the Gospel of Thomas: The sayings Traditions in their Environment of First Century Syria”, in agreement with Fall, 1995, says that:

“Assuming that the Gospel of Thomas originated in Syria, the first step would be to establish intertextual relationship, if there is any, with other early Christian literary works originating from the same geographical and cultural environment. In this paper I have limited this task to the Gospel of John, because the Johannine community, in my opinion, belongs to the same geographical and socio-cultural environment. Furthermore, the Johannine community, not unlike the Thomasine community, found itself on the periphery of the early Church. The difference is that the Gospel of John was preserved for the patristic Church by an ecclesiastical redactor. Thomas Christianity was ‘lost’ when it crossed the borders of the Roman Empire and went deeper into Mesopotamia and further east to India...The similarity between John and Thomas lies in their portrayal of Jesus as a fully self-conscious sage – redeemer whose words and judgments are true and flawless. ...Both gospels claim: *to understand Jesus and his words is to achieve salvation.*” (Mirkovic 1995:2) (Emphasis JAG)

Mirkovic says that Raymond Brown established the fact that the gospels of John and Thomas have some common material. He explains this common material by presupposing that the redactor of Thomas borrowed from John. “A turning point in scholarship on John-Thomas relationship occurred with a continuing interest of Helmut Koester in the problem, resulting in Koester’s book ‘Ancient Christian Gospels’. The most radical step in interpretation of the John-Thomas relationship was undertaken by Gregory Riley. He argues, convincingly that there was a close interaction” (Mirkovic 1995:3).

The conclusion of the Mirkovic study is that the analysis of the parallel sayings material in John and Thomas has shown not only the similarity of tenor and diction, as Raymond Brown believed. The parallels represent the world, Jesus, discipleship, salvation in a very comparable way. Indeed,

one may even speak about the common theology of the parallels (1995:5). By studying a summary of the many common concepts and their respective references Mirkovic make the following statement: *“We have two communities in which salvation comes through the transmission, listening, interpretation of the words of Jesus and acting accordingly (GTh 1, 19, GJn 8:51, 15:7). (1995:3-6) (Emphasis JAG)*

Again Paul would agree that this is true for the mature Christians and it is in obvious resonance with the “perennial philosophy”; realising the divine within and living it here and now, as revealed by Jesus in the Gospel of Thomas. It is encouraging that scholars are now formally recognising these esoteric principles in John also. Jesus is the revealer and exemplar of the Spirit, operational in human beings, as being part of the universal Spirit of God from Adam’s legacy, who is in turn everyone’s forefather. The quality of being human, of a human being, needs to be discovered and put to work in the Kingdom. In Thomas and John this becomes virtually an open secret, while in the synoptics the perennial philosophy is part of the inner hinted at, esoteric or spiritual teachings which was not yet accessible to all.

There is no sign of a unique blood sacrificial remedy for salvation in Thomas or in any of the other recognised Gnostic gospels that we now know of. If we keep in mind that religion had a three tier structure, the national-cultic, the theological-philosophical-social and the private, personal tier, then offering a blood sacrifice remedy can only be applicable in the national cultic tier which is based on ignorance and obedience to the cultic-economic objectives of the ruling classes.

## **7.8 The core of Jesus’ mission: The Kingdom of God on earth**

Crossan (2001:2) says that Jesus talks quite clearly about the Kingdom of God, and there’s no hesitation about it. And that means this is the will of God. Jesus is making statements about what God wants for the earth. And there is no “The word of the Lord came to me,” or there’s no “I’ve thought about this.” It seems self-evident; Crossan says that he thinks that’s exactly what it was for Jesus.

“The Kingdom of God is a radically subversive of the Kingdom of Caesar and that is obvious to Jesus because he had grown up, as it were, at the bottom of the heap, he knows the heap is unjust. It is so obvious to him that it is beyond revelation.... It is coming straight out of the Jewish tradition that this system is not right. Now, of course, his followers are going to ask him a very obvious question: ‘Who are you?’ I find no problem that during the life of Jesus certain of his followers could have said: ‘He is divine.’ And by divine, meaning, ‘This is where we see God at work. This is the way we see God’, or, ‘He is the Messiah.’ But then, they’ll have to interpret the Messiah in the light of what Jesus is doing. He doesn’t seem to be a militant Messiah, or maybe they would like him to be a militant Messiah. All of those options could have been there during the life of Jesus. We have no evidence whatsoever that Jesus

was in the least bit concerned with accepting any of them, or even discussing any of them. He was the one who announced the Kingdom of God.” (2001:2)

But this Kingdom was meant to be firstly a spiritual one that could perhaps develop in an earthly one and not vice versa. About Jesus’ relationship with God, Crossan says he does not think that,

“Jesus thought he had any special relationship with God that was not there for anyone else who would look at the world and see that this was not right. It was to Jesus so obvious that anyone should be able to see it. Now, on the other hand, most people weren’t able to see that in the first century, or in the twentieth. So in that sense, yes, it is a unique relationship. And it is on that which later theology would build, of course.” (2001:3)

Even this special kingdom seemed to have had some variants and Crossan gives different examples of how other people saw the Kingdom of God.

“For Philo, The Kingdom of God is what the world would be if God were directly and immediately in charge. Therefore, the wise and the virtuous already partake in the kingdom or kingship of God and only political dominions with laws modelled on God’s are worthy even of the title of kingdom...The second example is also a Jewish work, says Crossan, the ‘Wisdom of Solomon, written, most likely, during the reign of the emperor Caligula, between 37 and 41 C.E. The true and lasting rule is not that which the kings of the earth now exercise but that which they would receive if they submitted themselves to Wisdom’s own rule. The Kingdom of God is the Kingdom of Wisdom eternally present – available, on the one hand, to anyone who heeds her call, and transcendent, on the other hand, to all the evil rulers of the world.” (1994:58)

Crossan wants to balance the scales of Jesus mysticism with his practical moral social philosophy which is also needed to become whole, “to make the inner like the outer”. The way Jesus has lived and socialised was in total contradiction to Jewish social traditions and is suspiciously underplayed by theologians. He was a social and religious rebel in many ways. Crossan describes this fact clearly:

“Jesus did not simply eat together with whoever was seeking spiritual guidance. It is not a matter of simple table fellowship, but is what anthropologists call commensality – from ‘mensa’, the Latin word for ‘table’. It means the rules of tabling and eating as miniature models for the rules of association and socialization...The social challenge of such equal or egalitarian commensality is the parable’s most fundamental danger and most radical threat. In terms of the original situation, therefore, Jesus’ action puts him on a direct collision course with priestly authority in the Temple. After touching a leper he can hardly turn around and tell him to observe the purity code that he himself has just broken. This is not, by the way, a case of divine law against human law, compassion against legalism, gospel against law, let alone Christianity against Judaism. *It is more likely a case within Judaism of Galilean peasants against Jerusalem priests.*” (1994:58) (Emphasis JAG)

Amazingly, many scholars chose to belittle the radical behaviour of Jesus and try to make out that Crossan is only another liberal theologian while totally ignoring the facts. Crossan rightly comments,

“To remove, however, that which is radically subversive, socially revolutionary, and politically dangerous from Jesus’ actions is *to leave his life meaningless and his death inexplicable.*” (1994:93) (Emphasis JAG)

Jesus was a mystic with an eminently practical mission and Wink adds to this scenario:

“Jesus proclaimed the Reign of God (or God’s Domination-Free Order”), not only as coming in the future, but as having already dawned in his healings and exorcisms and his preaching of good news to the poor. He created a new family, based not on bloodlines, but on doing the will of God. He espoused non-violence as a means for breaking the spiral of violence without creating new forms of violence. He called people to repent of their collusion in the Domination System and sought to heal them from the various ways the system had dehumanized them. Using a critique of the Domination System as my critical lens enables to recover emphases lost as the gospel was domesticated in the early church. This critique of domination does not replace the historical criteria worked out with care by New Testament scholars. It does provide the primary criterion for discerning what was revelatory in Jesus’ life and message.” (Wink 2002:15)

What we do know is that Jesus was perceived as a threat by the Cultic management and not without reason; he was a threat to them from more than one perspective. Wink says that in building on the words of the prophets, Jesus hammered out the first consistent critique of domination that we know of since the world began. Virtually everything Jesus did or said involved unmasking the Domination System. Jesus was setting the captives free, and the captors were not pleased. Thus his death was consistent with his life.

“He shows us not just the liberating God, but the consequences of following such a God in a world organized for exploitation and greed: *‘If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me’* (Mark 8:34). This means that the earliest theological explanation of the death of Jesus – the ‘Christos Victor’ theory – was historically correct. Christ was the ‘victor’ who overcame the Powers by exposing them for what they were, trumping their final sanction, which is death. The Powers wanted him dead. *He was not a ‘sacrifice’, but rather a victim of judicial murder. The Gospels are, in their essence, merely a theological elaboration of that historical fact.*” (Wink 2002:98) (Emphasis JAG)

Please note the simplicity of the process for a sinner to become a real son of Abraham as we will again encounter in Paul’s arguments about Jewishness as a Christian criteria. Wink explains further:

“Zacchaeus caught sight of what someone called ‘the God-possible response.’ *He grasped the incompatibility between his life and desire to become a Human Being. Jesus declares, ‘Today salvation has come to this house, because he too is a son of Abraham. For Wisdom’s Child came to seek out and to save the lost.’* This conclusion places the particularity of ‘the practice of Jesus’ in the universal context of the arrival of God’s new order. *The Human Being may be a wanderer (Luke9:58), but is not lost; rather, it seeks what is lost. To see this, and not want to share it, was unthinkable.*” (Wink 2002:98) (Emphasis JAG)

Remembering the section on power relations in politics and religion where we analysed the power of these two domains in the lives of people especially in the time of Jesus, Wink gives a very clear of its effects on Jesus and his true followers in the spirit.

“Wisdom’s Child, the son of the man, *seeks to incarnate God in the human species. The Domination System is able to survive only as long as it can delude people into believing that it is in their best interest to abandon their best interests. Domination is taught from the start, in the home (‘domination’ is from the Latin ‘domina’, the one pertaining to a house, or the subduing one). It seduces its devotees into competing for a limited amount of prestige, wealth and honour in an economy of scarcity, and it serves the right to pronounce acceptance and rejection. To take on those who have power over our lives inevitably will require that one “suffer and be treated with contempt’ and ‘be rejected by this generation.”*” (2002:101) (Emphasis JAG)

Knowing one self is to know the difference of competing for scares material things and prestige is a different mindset from operating from the true Self who is centred in compassion and in harmony with the Conscience of the Human Being. Wink says to be in touch with the Human Being, is to be vulnerable to suffering at the hands of the collective.

“Jesus warns people to expect suffering. This reading is buttressed by another saying about the human Being that also anticipates suffering: ‘Blessed are you when people hate you, and when they exclude you, revile you, and defame you on account of the son of the man’ (Luke 6:22). But here it is disciples generally, and not just Jesus, who are the objects of rejection. *Historically, the Human Being in this beatitude had been identified with Jesus. Perhaps we can see it instead as Divine Wisdom pressing for actualization in Jesus and in his disciples. For what is emerging is a new human being who no longer lives from the enticements, blandishments, and treats of the prevailing order. Rather, the new human being offers immediate relationship with the truly human One, who alone holds the secret of our true nature and the society that could be.*” (2002:101) (Emphasis JAG)

On a more personal level and bringing spirituality within the ambit of social sciences, Wink quotes Jung who is both a mystic in his own right as well as a renowned scientist.

“*Individuation is, in Jung’s terms, the progressive unification of unconscious and conscious, inner and outer, spirituality and social transformation. It is a long and arduous process, and people often mistake the vision of a fuller life (which we are given to entice us to onto the path) with its achievement. Wholeness as image and wholeness as reality are two different things. The self actualized is never the same as the self hoped for.*” (Wink 2002:105) (Emphasis JAG)

One must however keep in mind; his social ministry and practice were not motivated by obedience to laws or personal piety claims that are also from the ego but from a deep inner compassion based in his direct spiritual relationship with God. If I could do it better I would have tried but for now I will leave it up to Wink to summarize Jesus' teaching on cultic, cultural and social issues.

"Jesus condemned all forms of domination:

- The patriarchy and the oppression of women and children;
- the economic exploitation and the impoverishment of entire classes of people;
- the family as chief instrument for the socialization of children into oppressive roles and values;
- hierarchical power arrangements that disadvantage the weak while benefiting the strong;
- the subversion of the law by the defenders of privilege;
- rules of purity that keep people separated;
- racial superiority and ethnocentrism;
- The entire sacrificial system with its belief in sacral violence." (2002:103)

Although Jesus' social reform program represents the fruits of his spiritual development and it will reflect his mystical awareness of the will of God, it is not the core of his soteriological imperatives because that lies in the source and motives for behaving like he did. The keys to these, in my opinion, lies in the process of development from self to Self. Knowledge of the reality, starting with the most important foundation of grace and forgiveness and is inclusive of the uncovering of the Self, which is not our mundane, egoistic and culturally approved personalities, is the key factor in spiritual growth and realisation. "Seek (earnestly and honestly) and you shall find".

It might be appropriate, then, to end this section on a personal note by Wink by meditating with him on the ways we reject the Human Being and treat it with contempt due to our ignorance of our real essence and from dogmatic indoctrination that insist to label and proof humanity to be use-less and not fit to be associated with Jesus.

"Why, if God is trying to incarnate in me through Wisdom's Child, do I resist it? What would it mean for the way I live if I were in touch with this suffering and rejected aspect of the human Being? Do I care enough about the integrity of God's new order that I am willing to take on the Powers, even if it means loss of a job, public disgrace, rejection by friends and family, threats and even death? Why am I reluctant to be 'treated with contempt'? What in the Domination System still has the power to silence me, or to keep me in compliance? Can I repudiate the current world order and experience what Paul called "the glorious liberty of the children of God." (Rom. 8:21 RSV) (2002:103)

Whatever one can deduce from Jesus' message and life, he did not subscribe to third party sacrificial fantasies as a salvific measure. Anything that can be related to such a theory is either a metaphor on included at a very later stage within certain writings by religious communities because it can surely not be a general deduction as being the core of his message, either from an exoteric



or esoteric viewpoint. He was plainly antagonistic and at best, just not interested in the sacrificial Temple Cult. We now hopefully, have a more comprehensive view on Jesus, his beliefs and his teachings to see whether Paul in actual fact followed Jesus more closely than is generally conceded or did he in fact started a new related movement.

## Chapter 8

### Possible clues and hints towards a framework to the Good News according to Paul

#### 8.1 Introduction

Paul was the first “Christian” that had to deal with major changes in which cultural, social and religious realms in a societal and in the individual experiential sense intersect in his religious writings. The way that Paul dealt with the intersecting realms on a real time basis could make or break his brand of the young religion. Although it was already obvious that the Jews as a nation was not to be a major political power in the Middle East, Paul did not have the luxury of hindsight when he composed his letters to manage and steer the young religion in a sensible direction. He most probably knew that different religious fundamentalists and politically minded Zealots could only worsen the Jewish groupings and that total destruction of Jerusalem and their cultic temple practices could be expected following on any political uprising inspired by religious or political zeal. Moreover, Paul wanted to elevate his belief in his Jewish concept of the Messiah-ship of Jesus to a multinational religious solution for the benefit of all Jews and Pagans alike. His own Messianic ideas did not correspond to that of Jewish Zealots and Judaizers. To complicate matters further, the return of his proclaimed Messiah, Lord of the new inclusive earthly Covenant and Kingdom of God, did not materialise as expected.

The young religion he was advocating operated mainly with a belief that tried to combine a form of Judaism without a Messianic Davidic king with a belief in a multi cultural “Messiah” or “Christ” that died, was “resurrected” and who did not re-appear to claim his universal kingdom. He had to try and understand what possibly could be the will of God for his notion of a universal, inclusive earthly and spiritual kingdom under these circumstances and was forced to “search the scriptures” and other philosophical and religious sources in extraordinary ways as to be able to lead Jews and Gentiles through their present desert and onto their promised land.

One of the most intriguing questions arising in a study about Paul is by what original term was this group of people, involved in the young religion or new God-human-world approach, referred to in the general discourse early in Paul’s life-time. The first term that comes to mind is the term “Christian” and “Christians” as used by the author of the book of Acts. One reads in the biblical book of Acts 11 that Barnabas the missionary departed for the city of Tarsus to seek Paul,

“And when he had found him, he brought him to Antioch. So it was that for a whole year they assembled with the church and taught a great many people. And the disciples were first called Christians in Antioch.” (Acts 11:26)

On the occasion of Paul's appearance before King Agrippa the Roman Caesar the latter was asked by Paul:

"....King Agrippa, do you believe the prophets? I know that you believe." Then Agrippa said to Paul, "You almost persuade me to become a Christian." (Acts: 27-28)

While one could accept that the term "Christian" and "Christians" used twice in the book of Acts as designation for people belonging to the new grouping was widely in use, one learns earlier in the book of Acts that when Paul was still named Saul,

"still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest and asked letters from him to synagogues of Damascus so that if he found any who were of the Way whether men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem." (Acts 9:1-2)

The phrase "people (men and women) of the Way" (Acts 9:2), "this Way" (Acts 22:4), "the Way" (Acts 19:9; 24:14) and "knowledge of the Way (Acts 24:22) seemed to be in use as alternate term for "Christian" and "Christians" when many of the events and happenings revolving around Paul were described by the author of Acts. In Acts Paul's direct words of his orations, on several occasions, Paul used the phrase "the Way" or "this Way" as designation for the followers of Jesus. According to the following text of Acts Paul has the following to say about "this Way":

"I am indeed a Jew, born in Tarsus of Cilicia, but brought up in this city at the feet of Gamaliel, taught according to the strictness of our fathers' law, and was zealous toward God as you all are today. 4. I persecuted this Way to the death, binding and delivering into prisons both men and women, 5. As also the high priest bears me witness, and all the council of the elders, from whom I also received letters to the brethren and went to Damascus to bring in chains even those who were there to Jerusalem to be punished." (Acts 22:3-5)

According to the author of Acts Paul referred to the "the Way" in his defence of himself addressing the governor Felix:

"But this I confess to you, that according to the Way which they call the sect, so I worship the God of my fathers, believing all things which are written in the Law and in the Prophets." (Acts 24:14)

Of interest is that in Paul's own writings the term "Christian" and "people of the way" or just the substantive "the Way" as substantive designations for the followers or supporters of the new God-human-world approach are omitted. The meaning of the phrase "the Way" and the fact that Paul omitted the phrase in his writings could give rise to all sorts of reflection schemes. What was actually understood by the term "the Way" is clouded in uncertainty. Various biblical commentators

view the expression “the Way” as an early designation of Jesus’ followers who believed that “faith” in Christ was the fulfilment of the Old Testament, the true way of worshiping God.

I proceed in the direction that Paul in the omission of the expression “the Way” as well as the term “Christian” or “Christians” incorporated “the Way” as part of himself in a personified way; a way personifying his spiritual embeddedness as “being in Christ”. A substantive designation that amounts to a dogmatic or doctrinal lever by which the followers of the young religion could be known might be a possible hindrance in the way of transferring and imparting the message of the Kingdom of God to other people. Paul himself uses the term “a way” in a singular and exceptional sense in his first letter to the Corinthians chapter 12. Paul emphasises through the whole chapter the diversity of gifts given to different members, the unique and singular individuality of each member as a part of the spiritual body of Christ. Paul closes the chapter with the following train of reflection:

“Now you are the body of Christ, and members individually. 28. And God has appointed these in the church: first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, after that miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, administrations, varieties of tongues. 29. Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Are all workers of miracles? 30. Do all have gifts of healings? Do all speak with tongues? Do all interpret? 31. But earnestly desire the best gifts. And yet I show you a more excellent way.” (1 Cor.12:27-31)

The last sentence expressing “a more excellent way” is a subversive protest of the “Are all...?” and “Do all...?” statements spelled out earlier. The “more excellent way” that he shows to them is that of uniqueness and individual singularity of members, spiritually bound together as different members of the body of Christ. The emphasis through the whole chapter is on the individual singular uniqueness of a member, connected together by their spirituality as the body of Christ. Quite clearly a more excellent way showed to them cannot be identified with a dogma, a doctrine or a doctrinal objectified template that every member has to be fitted into it rather point to a individuated process.

Though Paul writings may be dated earlier than some of the Gospels the strong statement of Jesus according to the rendition of John might be seen in the light of Paul’s view of the announcing of the “the Way” as something that can be transferred and imparted – thus so to speak handed on to another human person: “I am the way, the truth, and the life. None comes to the Father except through me” (John 14:6).

These words of Jesus according to the rendition of John could easily fit into Paul’s spiritual embeddedness in Christ which has to be handed on to others; as being in Christ. Moreover, it could mean that everyone could be “the way, the truth and the life for others” in a radical spiritual

transference sense that is if one is embedded or initiated in the real sense as “the way, the truth and the life”; becoming the Christ through radical identification and transformation of the old self. It is precisely on this point that the godly/human sacrifice breaks down because it is a replacement of a human person’s responsibility and accountability before God, one self, other human beings and the natural world.

As we presently need to do again in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, Paul revisited all the important pivotal aspects of the Jewish religious history and philosophy of his day together with all other possible clues from different sense making orientations to look for new solutions and meanings. He challenged all “sacred cows”; contrasted the traditions of Abraham and Moses and the Temple Cult; he brought in Jewish mysticism to augment the known Mystery Religions in his research for a broader perspective on God, life and salvation within a more inclusive Christian religion.

He therefore challenged both the Greeks and especially the Hebrews with his new sense making insights with sometimes strange sounding and awkward logic. Like his spiritual and philosophic predecessors, Abraham, Zoroaster, Melchizedek, Akhenaton, Moses, David, Solomon, the Essenes, and Jesus, he knew that there is but one God but many seekers and that their real strength, wisdom and motivation for a spiritual life was from within. He also knew, as they did, the relative importance of the mature spiritual phase of personal religion in comparison to the less important social / cultural exclusive first level of the cultic-national religion. The latter only fulfil the power-needs of the national and cultic leadership and the social and emotional needs of the general population, while a spiritual relationship with God should result in a moral and compassionate life and spiritual peace of mind.

He has learned a lot indirectly from the life and teaching of Jesus and specifically from his own Damascus experience. He knew from this experience that the “spiritual Jesus” or “the Christ” had survived its bodily death on the cross. This ecstatic spiritual experience of personal mystical contact with “Christ” made a profound difference in his life and he spend a couple of years in “Arabia” (most probably with an Essenic or other mystical group) to come to grips with the meaning of it all. The Persian tradition of Zoroastrianism, which also had their regional head quarters in Damascus, also had a profound influence on second Temple Judaism as well directly or indirectly on Paul in relation to the so called second coming and end time happenings to be expected.

He found his own answers to the universal spiritual questions through a mixture of indicators from the Jewish Scriptures and mystical traditions as well as Persian religious philosophy, eschatological beliefs of the time and his personal beliefs in the meaning of the life and death of Jesus including his knowledge of the different Mysteries active at the time. Greek philosophy and

its analytical tradition also played a role but, I now believe a much lesser role. After he came to his own conclusions and he formulated his own spiritual insights and decided what his mission must be, he started on his new spiritual quest, driven from within and not from second hand dogma.

Using a rare combination of ideology, logic from compassion, he wanted to built a bridge between a Jewish messianic sect and a universal, inclusive, philosophical and metaphysical system by accepting the reality of natural human spiritual development and therefore the necessity of at least a two-tier spiritual philosophy with related, stepped insights. Paul's background knowledge was therefore a complex mixture of the functionality, spirituality and methodology of the "Mystery traditions" together with the Persian apocalyptic ideas, in conjunction with the Jewish Prophetic, Mystical and Wisdom traditions. This vast body of ideas worked together towards explaining the expected Kingdom of God, as a new "Christian" mystery story or exoteric belief system, and the reign of the "Lord" or "Christ within", here and now, as an esoteric mystery.

The geniality of Paul becomes evident in the fact that the spiritual Kingdom in the present is not necessarily dependent on the eschatological expected earthly messianic Kingdom. You must and can live in this world already under the rules of the coming Kingdom as if it is present reality, if you are "blessedly ripe". In fact this spiritual Kingdom of Paul's gospel is vastly more important than the worldly and culturally conditioned Messianic expectations, because we will be judged according to the values of the present spiritual Kingdom whenever the "eschatological Kingdom" and its King appears. However, he really believed that the final "world to come" was very eminent and there was no time to be wasted on petty religious arguments and posturing that could perhaps lead to even more of an other worldly focus in his mission.

Important issues Paul had to face in his mission:

- How to reconcile the Jewish religious history with that of his pagan congregations. Creative ideas about a universal but one God had to be formulated to influence their thinking about the Greek, Roman, Egyptian and many other pantheons; Yahweh definitely did not suit the bill and was also problematic to gentile Christians, especially with the many tribal-national traditions fresh in their minds.
- His customer base varied from traditional messianic Jews, gentile God-fearers frequenting the Jewish Synagogue, Samaritans in exile, Jewish and other Mystery tradition followers, Mystics from every tradition and pagans of all sorts. He had to understand their respective points of departure and spiritual needs to guide them to a more inclusive understanding of personal spiritual liberation.

- Problems with the “official” recognised religious cults by luring away their “sacrificial customers” and therefore eroding their income base. This confrontation was also encountered by the higher initiates of Zoroaster, Akhenaton, the Prophets, and again experienced by John the Baptist, Jesus and Paul.
- How to convince them that no sacrifice to the gods was ever needed again, definitely not after the new gospel of Jesus was made known. One universal once and for all sacrifice was needed to accommodate all newcomers with cultic backgrounds – bad news for all the cults including the Temple Cult of Jerusalem and one of the main reasons Jesus was killed.
- How do you replace important religious, social and nature feasts that were very important to everyone in the Ancient Near East? Especially those that replace guilt sacrifices, the paschal lamb and the two sacrificial goats – the situation demanded another universal role for Jesus from a pagan perspective and new “prophesised” role for a novel Jewish Messiah.

## **8.2 The Faith of Jesus Christ: a search for the Narrative Substructure of Paul’s Theology**

As Paul represents a very early theological layer of Christianity it is of vital importance to try and understand what he believes Jesus stood for and how it influenced his subsequent own spiritual journey beyond Jesus the man. Fortunately, many scholars such as Richard B Hays again opened the old debate on the faith “of” Jesus versus the faith “in” Jesus and its repercussions on Christian soteriology. This topic will be handled by way of introduction here and then discussed later again in more depth as we tried to integrate Jesus’ theology and Paul’s interpretation thereof in search of a possible narrative substructure for his belief in Jesus.

The core soteriological slogan of Christianity is that humans are put into the right relationship with God through faith. The concept “faith” is then used as if it is self defining and everybody knows what its precious and vital content is. Every Christian “knows” that Jesus died for our sins and therefore if we believe in this sacrifice we will go to heaven. Is this really what Jesus and Paul taught? We saw that this was *not* what Jesus taught. Did Paul in fact alter the soteriological formula of Jesus and if so, why did he change Jesus’ enlightened non cultic soteriology? Is it not more logical to try and understand the belief system of the leader of the movement than to use

ancient cultic lore as mantras? We did have a look at what we think the core of Jesus' beliefs were and what he taught his mature disciples to be the correct beliefs, values and actions through which he himself came in to the right relationship with God and attained salvation.

In his Foreword, Luke Timothy Johnson commented on Richard B. Hays' book, *The Faith of Jesus Christ* as follows,

“Although Hays focuses on a single passage in Paul's letter to the Galatians (3:1 – 4:11), he seeks from the perspective of that analysis to engage one of the most difficult of all questions concerning Paul the Apostle, whether he had any coherence to his thought at all, and if he did, where is it to be found. Hays rejects the available options: that Paul has a single theological principle (like righteousness by faith) or a specific symbolic framework (like eschatology) that governs his thought. He offers instead the daring thesis that what appears explicitly in Paul's arguments is really directed by what seldom appears explicitly and directly but is always present implicitly, namely the story of Jesus the Messiah.” (Hays 2002:xiii) (Emphasis JAG)

On several of these points we must agree with Hays; within Paul's mission religion, philosophy and life was too complicated for singular answers. Furthermore, enough was known about Jesus that Paul could not improvise to much especially with regularity that one or more of the Jerusalem group “inspected” his work. To look at his theology, Hays invites us to read Galatians (and perhaps Paul's other letters) as discourses that clarifies and corrects an implicit narrative about Jesus that is shared by Paul and his readers; and the heart of that story of Jesus is “his faith” in the faith “of” Jesus himself.

“Hays' argument moves in three stages he begins with the puzzle presented by two short passages in Galatians (4:3-6 and 3:13-14) that all scholars perceive both as having a certain formal pattern and as standing in some sort of relationship with each other, but that no other has been able satisfactorily to solve. By applying Greimas' actantial analysis Hays identifies the two passages as narrative fragments that represent ‘two tellings (performance manifestations) of the same story’, one formulation from a Gentile point of view and the other from a Jewish point of view. The story is how God sent his Son to redeem humans. Critical to this entire analysis, however, is the fact that ‘faith’ is clearly a quality or power exercised by the human person Jesus, not something directed to Jesus by others.” (Hays 2002: xiii). (Emphasis JAG)

A valid point is made here that the story of Jesus, his beliefs and meaning to people had to look different for Gentiles against that needed for Jews to be understandable within the different frames of reference that would underpin cognition. The significance of Hays' accomplishment here should be noted, says Johnson. The long-standing debate over “faith of/in Christ” – a one-sided debate, to be sure – had tilted in favour of the objective reading for three major reasons:



“The supporters of the subjective reading tended to be quirky, they failed to face all the problems head-on, and, above all, they could not really account for Paul’s usage in Galatians. Hays’ dissertation decisively turned the debate (though it has not entirely ended) toward the subjective reading precisely because he established it in the hardest passage. The arguments being made simultaneously by other scholars on the basis of Romans therefore became more persuasive because of the heavy lifting Hays had done in Galatians...The third major stage of Hays’ argument is to follow the entire argument of Galatians 3:1 – 4:11 in light of the analysis he had carried out on 3:13-14 and 4:3-6. How do these narrative fragments fit within Paul’s clearly non narrative discourse? Hays consider in turn, three efforts at cracking Paul’s dense argumentation.” (Hays 2002: xiii)

One needs to always remember that more things are not said in Paul’s arguments as were brought up just because so much was taken as already common knowledge and need not be repeated. Without a narrative structure of Paul’s beliefs it is not possible to really understand all he wanted to bring across and the margin of possible error increases. Johnson says that G. M. Taylor thinks that a juridical logic is at work; N. A. Dahl argues that Paul is using midrashic logic, and H. D. Betz reads the section in terms of rhetorical logic.

“Hays recognises that each suggestion contributes something but falls short of grasping the real point of the passage, *which is to clarify the import of the story of how God has made humans righteous through the faith of the Messiah Jesus*. What holds Galatians 3:1 – 4:11 together, Hays says, *is an implicit participationist soteriology*, or, to use simpler terms a story in which Paul and his readers have been caught up: *Paul’s reasoning is most fully comprehensible when this section of Galatians is understood as Paul’s attempt to articulate in discursive language the meaning of a story whose protagonist is Jesus Christ*. Christ is not only the ground of their salvation; through baptism, Paul’s readers have come *to participate in the story of Jesus*.” (Hays 2002: xiii) (Emphasis JAG)

To my mind these are crucial arguments because if this is correct then faith in Jesus’ own faith and his methodology and way to come in the right relationship with God is also crucial. This faith has a greatly wider scope as sacrificial slogans. As salvific pathways, participation is worlds apart from mere beliefs in sacrificially produced mercy. Johnson goes further and says that Hays himself presents a number of corollaries to his thesis beyond his claim to having solved the puzzle of Gal. 3:1 – 4:11. He proposes that his position helps to solve the long-standing debate between Pauline scholars over the question whether “justification by faith” or “participation in Christ” is more central to the Apostle’s thinking. I agree with Hays statement that the two phrases are set in false opposition with each other. In my view one has to add that the procedure and strategy of the notion of “justification by faith” is nonsensical and useless in any debate, unless one is not formulating what is meant by “faith” with all the reasons why it makes sense to depart from such a reflection pattern and system. Hays is at least trying to do just that in his attempt of opening the debate further by elaborating and reflecting on the faith of Jesus that “makes one righteous”:

*“ If one grasps that the faith which, by baptism, Christians grasps that the faith that makes righteous is Jesus’ own faith and that his story is the one in which, by baptism, Christians have been incorporated, the two sides of the debate can best be seen **as moments in the same narrative process**. ...Hays perceives that his thesis has real implications for Pauline ethics in the way that the Christ story serves to shape the readers’ sense of the self and the world. Once more he sees that a constant conflict within Protestant theology between faith-righteousness and works-righteousness is relieved in this reading of *Paul, in which the faithful obedience of Jesus shapes the story of the believer, so that the faithful obedience of Christians does not replace but continues the story of Jesus*. (Hays 2002: xiv) (Emphasis JAG)*

Here again, the arguments about faith-righteousness and work-righteousness also needs unpacking before productive argument can even commence. Apart from the content of faith, it seems that work-righteousness is not so easy definable either as it assumed meaning could differ between different groups also.

Finally, Hays thinks, according to Johnson, that Paul can be much more fruitfully read when his discourse is seen as more reflexive and responsive than is sometimes thought.

*“Galatians is not ‘foundational language’ in which Paul lays down for his readers what they do not already know. Instead, his language serves a more indirect, even poetic, function. Unless we understand that Paul and his readers share a story and that Paul seeks both to allude to and to apply that story in ways that correct their misapprehensions and clarify the story’s implications, we do not read him right.” (Hays 2002: xxiii) (Emphasis JAG)*

In my opinion also, Hays did in fact put his finger on the right place to understand Paul. In addition to these insights, Paul surely was totally aware that his new religion based on a special Messiahship of Jesus will need a multilayered process of understanding from the conversion phase to participation and spiritual maturity. Firstly you need to **“believe”** that the God is “One” or inclusive and for all nations and that Jesus is his special prophet or “Messenger/Christ” who had the mission and authority to reinterpret the Jewish Cultic laws and usher in a new era of the purer religious ideals of Pietistic Judaism without the converts having to become Jews again. Then and only then, can you start the next phase of **esoteric understanding** and **then participating**, in Jesus’ spiritual path of dying to your cultic and worldly orientation and old self and be resurrected in the everlasting spiritual realm. We join Hays in his quest to uncover the most likely story behind the understanding of Paul and his followers of what Jesus really believed in and what it meant to them by examining all his letters. The key questions to be answered are:

- Every Christian “knows” that Jesus died for our sins and therefore if we believe in this sacrifice we will go to heaven. Is this really what Paul taught?
- Are there in Galatians and Paul’s other letters discourses that clarify or correct an inherent narrative about Jesus that is shared by Paul and his readers at different

levels of understanding, which is the heart of their story of Jesus that was based on the faith of Jesus himself?

- What were Jesus' beliefs and what did he teach his disciples to be the correct beliefs, values and actions through which he himself came in to the right relationship with God and attained salvation?
- Was his journey to salvation materially different, physically and spiritually, to the one they had to follow to participate to reap the same spiritual rewards?
- To solve the long-standing debate between Pauline scholars over the question whether "justification by faith" or "participation in Christ" is more central to the Apostle's thinking. The third option could be that both could be correct, as I think Hays suspects, but the content of the faith is different to what is taught up to now and that this new faith develops in harmony with ones spiritual development, culmination in participation in Jesus' spiritual path to salvation.
- Could it be that the core elements of the primordial mystical tradition and its necessary different stages of enfoldment be detected in Paul's soteriology also? The spiritual novice in his quest is *Awakened* to his moral and spiritual shortcomings and commits through belief in the mercy of God and efficacy of humble repentance to *Purification* which include an inner search for own authentic identity and deconstructing un-truths within and without. Through the process of purification the realisation of his/her innate God given potentiality starts the *Illumination or gnostic* phase and the mature spiritual pilgrim proceed in complete awareness in *Participating* in the heroic spiritual quest of Jesus and also become a son/daughter of God or "a Christ"; a Human Being and then the image and likeness of God becomes visible for others to see.

Hopefully the spiritual growth process described above makes enough sense to 21<sup>st</sup>. century spiritual pilgrims also so that it will not remain only an interesting theory but become a practical "way"?

## Chapter 9

### Studying Paul's Letters with regards to his Christology and soteriology

#### 9.1 Introduction

Our purpose to include the esoteric and mystical traditions in our doctrinal analysis of the different letters of Paul himself and of his "School of thought" or "the reflexive sphere around Paul's writings", we will be using Schonfield's (1998) New Testament translation and chronology as well as correlating texts sometimes with the Peshitta (George M. Lamsa, 1957), King James Version of the Bible as well as Aramaic commentaries of Lamsa, N.D. Klotz, and R. A. Errico are used. Reference to the text will be from the KJV of the Bible. We compare Paul's beliefs with trajectories of current Christian soteriological doctrine and test them for their validity from our perspective on Paul's world and his intentional framework as well as his personal ideas. Where necessary, other non Biblical Christian literature will be referred to in so far as they highlight different opinions and historical strains within the Christian world discussed in previous sections.

Den Heyer (2000:12) points to the fact that while the discussion on the authenticity of Paul's writings started in earnest in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, there were already discussions in earlier centuries in the history of the church. Especially the authenticity of the letter to the Hebrews as from Paul himself was fiercely discussed in the earliest Christian communities. The fact however that it was accepted and incorporated in the Pauline corpus up to at least the 19<sup>th</sup> century ensured its place within the broad outlines of Christian soteriological dogma and is therefore important to this study as part of "the Pauline school of thought" or "the reflexive sense making sphere that emerged around Paul's writings and teachings." In the unfolding of the main narrative of the thesis that Paul in following Jesus as the mainstay of his message operated with esoteric and mystical trajectories within his total sense making God-human-world approach the inauthentic writings and letters of Paul are regarded as part of the "the Pauline school of thought" or "the reflexive sense making sphere of the Pauline world". As far as possible in what follows below the writer of such an inauthentic letter will be referred to as from "Paul" or of "Pauline" origing for short.

#### 9.2 Revisiting some important contextual issues regarding ancient Biblical and related texts

As we are aware of the history of the formation of the Bible, possible copying errors and "corrective" explanations and translations as well as the misuse of biblical texts by applying them out of context, a cautionary note from Schonfield should be in order.

“What we have been accustomed to reading is largely an idealised interpretation created by the various schools of Christian faith and piety. Set aside these hallowed versions the ‘Original New Testament’ is an Epstein among the Old Masters, which may shock and even antagonise traditionalists before it comes to be understood and appreciated. Some of these records in the original simply do not read as they are reproduced to serve the spiritual needs of the Christian Faith. It was felt to be desirable not to employ familiar ecclesiastical terms where these could be avoided, since the use of them would give the impression that that they were peculiarly Christian. This relates to such words as ‘baptism’ (immersion), ‘church’ (community), ‘apostle’ (envoy), ‘bishop’ (supervisor), and ‘deacon’ (administrator), but also sometimes to *words like ‘salvation’, ‘righteousness’, ‘faith’, and ‘grace’, which occasionally do not accurately represent the sense of the original.* Many Greek words have different meanings, according to the context in which they occur, or are interpreting Hebrew words, and it would be quite wrong to always to translate them by the same English expression.” (Schonfield: 1998: x) (Emphasis JAG)

Especially the emphasised words above are particularly crucial for our correct understanding for soteriological purposes. As the Schonfield translation do no use strict chapter and verse demarcations, quotes from his translation will be sometimes indicated by page references and were felt necessary, the relevant KJV chapter and verse.

Schonfield further laments the fact that the account of Jesus produced by the body of his first Jewish followers in the Near East did not get into the New Testament. Consequently, for the most part, Christians have been denied access to highly relevant information affecting their beliefs. The Gospel of these Jewish believers in Jesus as Messiah had been composed in Hebrew, but it was known anciently to the scholars in the Holy Land. Furthermore, Schonfield say that,

“The story of Christian beginnings has commonly been related with little reference to or comprehension of its Jewish aspects, the early history of the comprehension of its Jewish aspects, the early history of the Nazoreans (Jewish Christians). The de-judaising of Jesus was appreciably to affect both the Christian Faith, as in the church’s Creeds, and the comprehension of the New testament, since it was responsible for a good deal of mistranslation and misinterpretation of the text. There still remain in the text itself a few wilful falsifications, rather more of them in the translations.” (Schonfield 1998: xviii)

In view of the fact that early in the history of Christianity already the Eastern Church developed differently to the Western Church and the importance of Aramaic as the language of the ordinary people of Jesus time, we must consider the following comments of Schonfield.

“We also have to remind ourselves that none of the manuscripts of the manuscripts we have are the originals, or can be demonstrated to be the exact copies of the originals. And there are a number of textural differences in the Greek manuscripts and in early translations like the Old Latin and Old Syriac. The authors themselves were frequently in disagreement with one another in their ideas and convictions in the matters they recorded.” (Schonfield1998: xx)

Sadly, trained ministers of religion who particularly must know the history of Bible formation and who proclaim to stand in the service of God and Truth still chose to enforce the erroneous beliefs

of divine infallibility of the Bible. Schonfield says, that for the New Testament the translator has not only to be at home in Greek and Hebrew, he has to be informed of contemporary history, secular and religious, and of a whole library of relevant literature of the general period. His sources should include,

“many Jewish documents, ponderously labelled Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha, known to and utilised by the New Testament authors, certain of the texts being regarded by the Christians as sacred writings in addition to the Old Testament, such as the Book of *Enoch* and the *Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs*. A number of these works have only become generally accessible in the present century.”(Schonfield 1998: xxi)

From whatever point of view in regard to the circumstances the emergence of Christianity was an extraordinary historical phenomenon. I share and support the following statement of Schonfield:

“The native climate of its thought and teaching was that of pietistic and prophetic Judaism, attaching itself to an extraordinary ideology, the Messianic, and to a human believed to embody its fulfilment. But it drew also upon the mysticism and mythology of the non-Jewish world, fusing the longing and expectations of a sick and superstitious age in its own apocalyptic crucible, and generating in the process a white heat of fanatical zeal and anticipation.” (Schonfield 1998:xxii).

The eminently human story of Jesus the spiritual hero of his time, clothed in very well thought out and well understood universal mythology, became a huge success through the commitment of its serious followers. This electrifying Message, the Good News, according to Schonfield, spread madly, eagerly, like a raging fire, challenging the greatest aggregation of human power and authority the world had ever seen, and insisting on its replacement by the peaceful and benign new order of the Kingdom of God. Meanwhile they had also serious, real opposition:

“It is important to remember in trying to understand the different frames of reference that operate within different groups. The Romans saw Caesar as no less exalted as we have seen in an earlier section. The Emperor Augustus, around the time that Jesus was born, had been addressed in an inscription as: ‘Jupiter, who holds from Jupiter his father the little liberator, Master of Europe and Asia, Star of all Greece, who lifts himself up with glory of Great Jupiter, Saviour.’” (Schonfield1998: xxii)

Another important aspect to remember in the interpretation of Early Christian debates and apologies concerns the causes why in the Empire fewer and fewer Jews joined the Christian communities was their composition. Christianity was initially not very highly regarded by the learned communities of the time and its great strength, that of exposing the coercive cultic religious Powers and bringing the “mysteries of God” to the poor; empowering them by self-realisation of their worth before God, did not suit the vain and pompous elite. Schonfield explains:

“Many members were slaves without rights, who found a haven, and some of the dregs of society came to be distinguished both from the Jews and the Gentiles. They multiplied

nonetheless, offering salvation from sin and hope of eternal life by identification with Christ in his death, burial and resurrection, a mystery understandable by that of Mithras. Unlike other associations and cults, which had costly rights of initiation no slave was barred from the community of Christ: he enjoyed equal rights. Inevitably, therefore, the slave and the social misfit, the pervert and the outcast, gravitated towards the Movement, causing a great deal of trouble within, and getting the Christians a bad name without.” (Schonfield1998: xxiv)

These facts are not given their proper status which they deserve within the history of the new religion; they were a key to the uniqueness and merit of Early Christianity and were bound to breed success. Too much emphasis on the exoteric and social dimensions and too little on the spiritual aspects could however be the problem in some communities.

“Salvation was theirs ‘without money and without price’ and a position of favour and comfort when Jesus should return to earth... *The apostle Paul, who had chiefly been responsible for this development, was terribly distressed by the unexpected interpretation of his principle of ‘liberty from the Law in Christ’.* From the Jewish Christian side, and from the more sober Christians, horror at these developments was expressed in open letters sent out in the names of Jude and Peter (Il Peter).” (Schonfield1998: xxiv) (Emphasis JAG)

One needs to understand that “straight talk” could be a very dangerous in a highly stratified society and can be even equivalent to gambling with your life. A system of spying on certain individuals and meetings of citizens had been introduced by Herod the Great, and was still in operation and extended even to religious authorities. When Jesus and even Paul spoke of the coming Kingdom of God, not a heavenly realm in the sky but a new age on earth, this was a dangerous theme. Jesus was forced to speak in parables so that his message would not always be readily intelligible to his audience, signalling what he was doing with the words: “Let him who can catch my meaning do so”. Schonfield also believe with Wink and I agree that the “son of man” identity which Jesus favoured was part of the esoteric or mystical identification in the teachings of Jesus. My opinion is that this “Son of Man” as the special reference to the Spirit operational in humankind, became the universal variant of “Christ” in Paul’s vocabulary.

“Similarly, until he was ready to reveal himself as Messiah at Jerusalem he adopted the synonym of the mystics and referred to himself as the Son of Man, which would not convey to the masses and to government spies that he claimed to be a spiritual king of the Jews.” (Jn 12:34)(Schonfield1998: xxiv)

To be the “spiritual” king or lord for his followers is a dangerous notion within the Roman Empire, to say the least. Lastly, we need to remind ourselves and with reference to the teachings of Jesus that we need to have “an (special) eye to see and an (special) ear to hear” to notice the core issue of Jesus’ mission of converting the nation and from Temple-ism to Pietistic Judaism in a universal garment. Schonfield said that:

“Jesus packed into his teaching all that he felt was of real import for the spiritual and material welfare of his people in their hour of great need, following here in the steps of pious teachers, the Chasidim. In the work called *Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs* it was written: ‘Unless you keep yourself from the spirit of lying and of anger, and love, truth and long-suffering, you shall perish. For anger is blindness, and does not permit one to see the face of any man with truth.’ And again, ‘For the spirit of hatred works for Satan, through hastiness of spirit, in all things to men’s death; but *the spirit of love works with the law of God in long-suffering to the salvation of men.*” (Schonfield1998: xxxiii) (Emphasis JAG)

Here again is a good example of Jewish soteriology if there ever exist something like it, the work of the Spirit is the work of love and that leads to salvation. Jesus’, teaching is totally in line and there is obviously no reason for divine sacrifices; to the contrary you must sacrifice our exclusive human identity with your egoistic thought schemes to realise the indwelling “Christ”.

“Into the brief compass of the Sermon on the Mount is packed all that Jesus felt was real import in those grim and critical times. He cleared away the shifting sands and got down to bed-rock, enunciating those abiding principles upon which alone the community of the Kingdom of God could be securely founded...It remains to add a footnote on theology, since both the translation and the interpretation of the text are in a number of places affected by it. *Christians have understood what they read in terms of the major creedal statements of the fourth century, whereas the present version could only have in view the doctrines of the first century in the forms expressed variously in the Gospels and the Pauline Epistles...*It is only lately that it became possible to appreciate the influence of the *Christology of pietistic Judaism, with its ‘as above so below’ imagination.* Here the redemption would be affected by the heavenly Messiah the *archetypal Son of Man*, incarnating in the Earthly Messiah.” (Schonfield1998: xxxiii) (Emphasis JAG)

This vision on spiritual realities is also very obvious from Paul’s letters and needed to be adapted for Gentile consumption by Paul. Schonfield says that this fusion is represented in a number of sayings attributed to Jesus, notably in the story of his transfiguration. The imagination of the Christ Above is particularly set out in a work known as the *Similitudes of Enoch*, advancing from the Son of Man image in the biblical book of *Daniel*.

“Non-Jewish converts to Christianity understood such teachings only with difficulty since the Messianic concept was alien to them. They could more clearly understand that the Christ as king, was Son of God as the roman emperor was Son of Jupiter, worshipped as such, and the ruler of Egypt was son of the god Ra.” (Schonfield1998: xxxiii) (Emphasis JAG)

### **9.3 Preface to Paul’s Letters**

Paul’s letters are very important to the Christian tradition as they are part of the earliest written writings. When Paul died his letters fell into the hands of his readers. “Did they do him justice? Did they let him say what he had wanted to say? Or did they make him a ventriloquist’s dummy?”(Den Heyer 2000:3) The debate of how many letters are authentic and how many are not is a moot point which is better left to the Pauline textual specialists. While Den Heyer (2000:14) states that the



vast majority of scholars hold the view that the three Pastoral Epistles I Timothy, II Timothy, and Titus as well as the Letter to the Hebrews could not come from Paul himself, these writings are regarded in this thesis as emerging from what could be termed “the sense making reflexive sphere around Paul” or “the Pauline school of thought” which overwhelmingly express similar sense making sentiments as the letters regarded as flowing authentically from Paul’s own hand. What we are mainly interested in is “the sense making reflexive sphere around Paul” which could also be termed for lack of a better phrase “the Pauline school of thought” which could be regarded as the breeding ground for the writings that is today no longer regarded as authentic from Paul’s own hand or voice. In a specific sense these writings display and offer similar sense making pointers and traces detected in Paul’s authentic writings.

It is also generally agreed that in the *Acts* much of the controversy between Paul and Jerusalem has been toned down or omitted (Den Heyer 2000: 93; 97). Paul, writing on the spur of the moment to particular communities of believers, is singularly revealing of the actual state of Christian affairs in the eastern part of the Roman Empire and it is not idealised “history”.

Paul was often dictating under strong emotion. Schonfield says that:

“He had the further difficulty of trying to convert peculiarly Jewish ideas into Greek terms, which sometimes meant using Greek words in other than their normal connotation, thus creating a kind of *lingua Christiana*. Paul as a student had gravitated towards Pharisee occult and mystical lore, which in many respects was close to that of the Essenes. It had taken possession of him that he was the messianic envoy to the Gentiles preparing the way for the imminent return of the final Son of Man from heaven to raise the dead and set up his terrestrial kingdom.” (Schonfield 1998:273)

Paul claimed for his non-Jewish converts that by accepting his version of the beliefs of Lord Jesus the Christ, they had become part of God’s kingdom ruled by Master Jesus. Some of the following beliefs about the “second Adam being a mediator” that Schonfield attributed to the Jewish mystical tradition, I could not manage to confirm them from other sources.

“For Paul the ascended Jesus was identified with the heavenly Son of Man of the Jewish mystics, who was now the mediator between God and mankind, the second Adam. He had no thought of Jesus as incarnate deity, or the Second Person of a Trinity. Christianity as a new religion did not exist in Paul’s time; *but almost inevitably the pagans who joined the Movement would give rise to it*, which Paul failed to foresee.” (Schonfield 1998:274) (Emphasis JAG)

Schonfield further states that in presenting the letters, his letters have been divided into two groups, those written in the course of Paul’s propagandist activities as the Messianic King’s special envoy, and those written while a prisoner at Rome.

“As far as practicable they have been placed – as they should be – in chronological order, with the approximate dates and places where written. They largely feature the running conflict between Paul and the envoys of the central Christian authority in Jerusalem, some of whom had been personally appointed by Jesus in his lifetime, now headed by James (Jacob) the brother of Jesus, with Peter and John.” (Schonfield 1998:276)

Underlying Paul’s Gospel is his own understanding of what a real, universal religion should be and I am of the opinion now that his own soteriological beliefs are much more dependent on ideas of the prophetic, mystical and esoteric Judaism than on Greek philosophy but he is also more serious about the beliefs, teachings and life of Jesus as most theologians wants to admit. The foundations of his apocalyptic beliefs as mentioned above are more difficult to trace but in my opinion they does fit better into Jewish Pharisaic and Persian traditions than from the Jewish mystical traditions. Due to the complexity and secrecy within Jewish mystical thought systems one might never really know and it might very well be partly his own thought constructs.

In order to understand the belief system of Paul, I found it helpful to group his beliefs in the following categories and to keep them in mind in reading and interpretation of texts:

- Paul’s motivation for believing in a Messianic era, its context and content as well as Jesus’ role in it, including the 2<sup>nd</sup> coming.
- His understanding of Jesus’ own beliefs and teachings as well as how it resonate with his own beliefs.
- His beliefs about the spiritual growth process of Jesus, self and their followers as well as the necessary participative aspects.
- The need and importance for a moral life and fruits of the Spirit.
- His beliefs about the purpose of the life and death of Jesus.
- Differentiation between God and Jesus
- The Jewish cultic and ethnic “problems” and its “laws”; differentiation between moral laws, cultic laws and ethnic/covenantal laws in relation to his mission.

## **9.4 The Letters of Paul**

As mentioned we will follow Schonfield’s chronology and the reader will have to look out for the notes which indicate their difference in location from the ordinary presentation in other Bibles to ensure comparability and orientation. Emphasis within the text is invariably mine and the method of emphasis applied by me in the quotations in the next sections is to use cursive accentuation for important notions pertaining to this thesis and bold print to accentuation core or key concepts.

### 9.4.1 The letter to the Community of Thessalonica (1)

Schonfield reckons that this letter was probably written from Corinth about AD 51 and it struck me that it is fairly straight forward on what Paul believed at this stage of his life. Key passages will normally be accompanied by the KJV or Peshitta translations for special emphasis. Only texts that are directly or indirectly relevant to Christology and soteriology will be considered.

Faith in God our Father, love, and hope in the Lord Jesus Christ covers the opening statement and beliefs.

*“You became imitators of me, and of the Master, welcoming the Message in circumstances of great difficulty with fervent joy, so that you became an example to all the believers in Macedonia and Achaia. For from you the Master’s Message resounded not only throughout Macedonia and Achaia, but indeed far and wide your faith in God has penetrated, so that there is no need for me to speak of it. The people of those parts themselves tell of the effect of my visit to you, how you turned from idols to serve the Living and True God, and to await his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, Jesus our rescuer from the coming Wrath.”* (Thes 1:6-10) (Emphasis JAG)

He is addressing the pagan converts specifically and his message is on this level. They all already believed in the “true” God and heard the “Master’s Message”, not a message about him and they became “examples” to others. Jesus’ life and death is vindicated by God by his resurrection and therefore will rescue them from the end time wrath to be expected.

Paul is an envoy of Christ and

*“became counterparts of the communities of God in Judea which are in Christ Jesus; for you yourselves have suffered similarly from your own countrymen as they from the Judeans, who put to death the Lord Jesus and the prophets, and hounded me out, who incur God’s displeasure, setting themselves against everyone, hindering me from speaking to the Gentiles that they might be saved and so filling up in every way the measure of their sins.”* (Thes 2:14-16) (Emphasis JAG)

You are not popular anywhere if you change religious allegiance and the tension between Paul and the Jewish Temple Cult is obvious. His Judeans countrymen killed the prophets as they killed Jesus; not a godly sacrifice. The animosity seems at this stage not to be with their counterparts in Jerusalem but the national religious system.

*“The Lord make you increase and abound in love for one another and for all others, as my love goes out to you, so as to lift up your hearts blameless in holiness in the presence of God our Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his saints”* (Thes 3:12, 13).

A very high moral standard is advocated for them to honour God and reap the fruits at Jesus' second coming. Further on Paul says that they must behave themselves as he "instructed them on behalf of the Lord Jesus" (4:2) as his envoy and that

*"doing the will of God implies your consecration.(4:4)... God has not called us to impurity but to consecration. Accordingly, whoever disregards this breaks faith not with men but with God, who has given us his Spirit which is holy" (4:8). (Emphasis JAG)*

There is no doubt that Paul operated from the faith and instructions of Jesus; there is no sign of any other way than "doing the will of God for your consecration" but it is also part and parcel of their *faith not to be broken*. Doing the will of God *is the faith* from the Spirit for the purpose to *live* holy. We will later see that that to live holy can only be done by the Spirit working through us.

Should this be the first letter or at least an early one, Paul in these next few verses presents the first references to Jesus' death in relation to "salvation" or is it "deliverance "from God's wrath?"

*"But let us who belong to the day be sober, clad in the corselet of faith and love, and helmeted with the hope of deliverance. For God has not destined us to Wrath, but to be preserved for deliverance by our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us, that at once – whether awake or sleeping – we should be alive with him. So encourage one another and fortify each other, as indeed you are doing." (5:9-10) (Emphasis, JAG)*

In the KJV, "For God hath not appointed us to wrath, but *to obtain salvation* by our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us, that, whether we are awake or sleeping, we should live together with him (1Thes 5:9, 10). Here is quite a big difference; the Schonfield translation couples soberness, faith and love with their hope of deliverance and to rescue them from the day of wrath and to ensure life with Jesus as well as with, a yet undefined, "Jesus who died for us". The KJV in stead coupled his death directly and in causal relation to their "salvation" which is not yet fully unpacked from Paul's letter so far. Den Heyer also states about these verses that "the apostle had not (yet?) developed any 'doctrine' in which the thought of representation or vicarious suffering stood at the centre" (2000: 117).

As this theme of Jesus' death is an important one it is perhaps productive to look at this stage already at the possible different meanings it might have had for Jesus himself, as well as from the viewpoint of the many different Christian groupings. Errico, (2002:52) says,

*"It is often said that 'Jesus died for our sins' and that our sins could never have been forgiven without his death. The primary meaning of the Aramaic word *mittol* is 'because of' or 'on account of' and lastly 'for'. We understand this to mean that Jesus died *because of our sins and not for them....* According to some scholars, God made Jesus a sin offering for humanity. Yet in John's gospel we read that when Jesus forgave sinners, all he said was: 'Go and sin no more.' He did not say: 'Offer something to appease God's wrath.' Jesus*

taught forgiveness of sin differently. Luke's gospel (24: 46, 47) reports the risen Christ saying: 'And he said to them, thus is it written, and it was right, that Christ should suffer and rise from the dead on the third day; and that *repentance should be preached in his name for the forgiveness of sins among all nations*; and the beginning will be from Jerusalem.'" (Errico, Lamsa: 2002:52) (Emphasis JAG)

What the text in Luke wants to reinforce with "should suffer and rise on the third day" is not clear here but what they should teach is abundantly clear, "repentance should be preached in his name for the forgiveness of sins among all nations". As we have seen the phrase "in his name" in Aramaic means "as he has taught you" and we have no right to insert any other meaning on Luke's behalf. Forgive me for stressing the point made by the Aramaic scholars as I believe this misunderstanding is at the heart of the misconceptions about the many "belief in Jesus" phrases; it was surely not meant to be passive beliefs; it implies specific deliverables from very particular beliefs! Errico and Lamsa explain it well:

"'Believing in the son' *means practicing* the teachings of the son; 'not believing the son' refers to those who do not follow the practice of the teaching of the son. Jesus' gospel teaches love, truth, justice, kindness, compassion, forgiveness to mention a few. When we practice these things we have life and not death.'" (2002:64)

The following example and explanation, if it is correct, should rewrite much of the Christology of Christianity:

"I am the way, the truth and the life', means '**what I teach is the path of truth and eternal life.**' (Jn. 14:6, 7) *Jesus personified his teaching. He was the living example of truth in action and the image of the living God.*" (2002:171) (Emphasis JAG)

We also did already discuss the above verse from another perspective above that also seems to indicate needed disposition and "way" as well as participation in Jesus' teaching rather than a high Christological proclamation only.

Errico and Lamsa go further and qualify what Jesus meant in (John 6; 53) as well as the Eucharist formulation points to a very practical injunction. Wine was also metaphor for a body of teachings or a religion.

"The Jews could secure this liberty only when they would identify themselves with him in the martyrdom that his teaching would bring. This is what he meant by 'eating his flesh and drinking his blood.' *They would be taking on his sufferings and responsibilities to bring about not only their own salvation but that of the entire world.* Besides, it was against the Torah for a Jew to drink blood. They misunderstood Jesus and thought that he was literally speaking of his own flesh. *They had no knowledge of the spiritual food that never perishes or the teaching of God that was revealed to their prophets.* 'Eating Jesus' flesh' means to make his truth a part of one's daily life. He called on the people to work hard and suffer as he had been working and suffering. The Aramaic phrase 'Eat the book' means 'Make this book a part of your life' or 'memorise the book.'" (2002:146) (Emphasis JAG)

From the above it seems fair to say that when Paul writes that they must believe in Jesus or the beliefs of Jesus, it normally means to believe in his teachings as a whole and most likely not one specific introductory belief i.e. that he died for our sins which, become like Erasmus van Niekerk states the whale in the swimming pool that takes over all other possible nuances and meanings within their belief system (E van Niekerk 1996:3).

Amongst the many different viewpoints on the phrase “he died for us” of that period in time, the following few will be considered. Jesus’ own beliefs might include that:

(i) He was willing to “sacrifice” or lose his life in order that his truth might survive and be told. As were the case with other prophets including John the Baptist that challenged Temple practices, priests and rulers, they also knew that they were inviting the Cult’s wrath. If he did not persist proclaiming the true message of God to mankind and capitulated instead, his teachings would have died while he might have lived. For this reason he “died for us” by challenging the Cult and preserved the truth and was consequently vindicated by his resurrection. His followers can now all share by believing in his message and participating in his way to enlightenment and everlasting life.

(ii) That some regarded his willingness to die for his good news as the inauguration of a new era, prophesied by the prophets, with a new covenant of truth and obedience to God and His Kingdom, which replaces the Mosaic and cultic covenant and leading in the final judgement.

(iii) A new and final sacrifice replacing the ones of the Temple tradition. As we have seen, Ancient Middle Eastern religions as well as ancient Jewish beliefs include the belief that blood is the cleanser of guilt and they even offered sacrifices of people and children to attain forgiveness of their gods and from other rulers. It later changed to only animal blood that was needed but the Temple cult in Jerusalem as well as some of Paul’s new customers will be coming to the new religion with these beliefs that were practiced daily in different temples all over the Empire and including the Emperors own temples as Sons of God.

(iv) The metaphor of a ransom used mostly for the freeing of slaves is also used by Paul in certain letters and it signify giving up something, your money, freedom or life for the *freedom of others*; this acquired freedom need also be specified to understand the metaphor properly.

The belief that the killing of the scapegoat or sacrificial lamb automatically brought final salvation should rather not be entertained but the notion that it is rather a reminder of sins is the outstanding

feature encapsulated in the ritual practice. Sacrifices are an ancient practice, but according to the Prophets, Essenes, John, Jesus and Paul a dated practice and replaced by repentance and commitment God. The act of sacrificing was at best symbolic admittance of guilt and therefore a ritual way of repentance. The question debated here is who needs the dead scapegoat or animal; it is definitely not for the benefit of God, it is one of the many coercive beliefs and practices to benefit the religious establishment. Furthermore, did any prophet, except “Moses” and his followers, ever teach that you can attain salvation by sacrificing animals? In the case of the blood of the Pascal lamb, it saved the Israelites from God’s wrath on Pharaoh and it did not bring them “salvation”.

Key questions to be answered are, did Paul in the above text in his letter, made a definite choice from the above possible meanings; did he mean that Jesus died for us as sufficient cause for our salvation and that nothing else mattered? Definitely not in this part of the letter; when Paul’s uses these type of phrases one has to establish what he really wants to convey through them and whether he implicated that it should be a core belief by which a new convert will gain salvation or on the other hand, that he just used them as a part of the unlearning process of dated sacrificial traditions to enable the converts to accept a new truth or covenant with new game rules taught by Jesus and himself. We have to accept that he used these phrases variously for different audiences and need see how they fit in with his other teachings about salvation.

The rest of this part of the letter is in the spirit of “Test everything: retain the good; Refrain from anything that looks at all wrong.” Also, “Now may the God of peace himself sanctify you completely, and *may you in your entirety, spirit, soul and body, be kept blameless* till the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ” (5:23). (Emphasis JAG)

God sanctifies and the whole person must be blameless; if salvation is by faith alone that to be blameless is a bit of overkill? Sadly enough for them, the triumphant coming did not happen for Paul and his loyal supporters. It is obvious however, in this letter that spiritual values; a life driven by loving-kindness is not optional; no alternative was advanced as being a necessary and sufficient cause for salvation.

#### **9.4.2. To the Community at Thessalonica (2)**

Although this Letter is regarded as exclusively Pauline (Den Heyer 2000:117) we observe that the second coming was also an ethical issue as it was for most people. The writer expects that evil should meet justice somewhere, somehow. Please regard the reference to Paul as meaning Pauline.

“This is evidence of God’s strict justice, in having treated you as worthy of the kingdom of God, for which indeed you suffer. For that being so, it becomes just on God’s part to repay affliction to those who afflict you, and to give to you who are afflicted relief with us when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with his mighty angels with flaming fire inflicting retribution on those who do not acknowledge God and do not respond to the News of our lord Jesus.” (2 Thes 1:15-9).

For Paul retribution seems to be much more of an issue than for Jesus; one can even say they differ in principle on this issue. To be a Christian, according to Paul is a “vocation” and salvation not a gift to the idle believers.

“To this end we invariably pray for you, that *our God may make you* worthy of your vocation, and enable you *to accomplish every praiseworthy object and devoted deed* which may serve to glorify the name of our lord Jesus among you, *and you in him*, by the loving-kindness of our Lord Jesus Christ” (2 Thes 1:11, 12). (Emphasis JAG)

Again he is explicit on the “tradition” that they were taught and they must “stand fast, and keep a firm hold” on it (2:15). He states further,

“I have confidence in you *in the Master that you are following* and will continue to *follow my injunctions. The Lord (here seems to be Jesus as Christ) directs your minds to the love of God and the constancy of Christ!*” (3:4, 5) (Emphasis JAG)

They are *following* the “Master”, who is actively directing their “minds to the love of God” and the “constancy of Christ” The **KJV** has this as, “And we have confidence in the *Lord touching you, that ye both do and will do the things which we command you.*’ And the Lord directs your hearts into the love of God and into the ‘patient waiting for Christ’”. (2 Thes 3:4-5) (My emphasis) The “constancy of Christ” becomes the “patient waiting for Christ”. The Peshitta (Lamsa, 1933:1184) has it as “into the patience of Christ”. It seems Paul wants to accentuate the importance of the love of God and the perseverance of Christ as a necessary attribute of a Christian in a hostile world?

“The greeting I subjoin in my own, Paul’s, hand. It is the mark of authenticity in every letter. This is how I write. *The loving-kindness of the Lord Jesus Christ be with you all*” (2 Thes 3:15). (Emphasis JAG)

Note how Paul sums up the essential characteristics of Jesus as “loving-kindness”. In this letter the salient points are: God demands moral behaviour and he saves; follow Jesus he clarifies and leads the way by persistence even unto death and lead with loving-kindness; Paul interprets Jesus correct and he is also a good example based on Jesus’ teaching and that is his opinion also!

### **9.4.3 Letter to the Communities of Galatia**

We have already discussed Hays’ opinion on Gal. 3:1-4:11 on the faith **of** Jesus as the being the best candidate for a narrative substructure of Paul’s beliefs and will try not to repeat too much of that topic here.



Paul uses the following statement of belief,

“May peace and prosperity be yours from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, who *gave himself for our sins to reclaim us from the present evil world* in accordance with the will of our God and Father, to whom be praise for evermore. Amen.” (Gal 1:3-5)

Three things are now evident, firstly Paul here, as also in all previous texts make a clear distinction between God the Father and Lord Jesus Christ. The Aramaic scholar, Errico says,

“Christ is a title, not a proper name. It comes from the Greek word *Christos*, which, in turn, comes from the Aramaic language. In Aramaic *m’sheeha*, ‘messiah’ has three meanings: ‘the anointed’, ‘the ordained’, and ‘the consecrated’. *It may also mean ‘the appointed’, ‘one who carries the light of God’.* According to Hebrew Scripture, kings, priests, and sometimes prophets received the anointing oil when taking on their respective offices. What is most interesting is that the biblical kings also had the title of *m’sheeha* – ‘messiah’ or ‘christ’. *This meant that they were anointed ones of christed ones*” (2002:186) (Emphasis JAG)

Anointing with consecrated oil, applied to the crown of the head like an ointment, is a very ancient rite. Errico says the act of anointing is a transfer of divine powers to the person who receives the special anointing.

“*Thus, one became known as the ‘Lord’s anointed’, In other words, the anointed one became a son of Yahweh (the Lord) by adoption (that is, through the act of anointing).* David called King Saul, ‘the Lord’s anointed’, or ‘Yahweh’s anointed’, **a Christ of God.**” (2002:186) (Emphasis JAG)

Secondly, we see that Paul’s use of the title Christ can be a messianic title of the ultimate spiritual leader which is not well defined by him as yet and he probably did not want to make it a “Jewish” title for the sake of his Gentile converts. It is important to note that any “anointed” of God become “Christ” which is indicative of special adopted sons of God. Paul’s messiah is their leader, their lord and their spiritual king and not part of the “Godhead”. Thirdly, we again see a variation of what Jesus meant to them, “*who gave himself for our sins to reclaim us from the present evil world*”, which besides the other possible perspectives discussed above can also include a “Gnostic” meaning that emphasise the process through which Jesus’ teaching of God’s truths in opposition to Temple-ism; he died because he brought them the truth, the good news and showed them *the way* by which they could *free themselves* from “the present evil world” and gain spiritual immortality. Den Heyer (2000:219) warns us not to read too much of Luther’s formula of faith concerning salvation in these verses as “Paul was not in search of a gracious God” which he in any case knew as the God of grace from his youth.

Now we come to the core reason for Paul to write this letter and it seems to fit my explanation above as he wants to expose the different “truths” of opposition groups.

“I am amazed that you have turned your backs so quickly on the one who called you in Christ’s mercy for some *other version of the News*. It is not really another, *but there are certain people who are confusing you and want to **alter the terms** of the News of Christ.*” (Gal1:6, 7) (Emphasis JAG)

He wants to straighten out their confusion created by Judaizers with new “terms” or conditions and his credentials are now at stake.

“If I were still pleasing men I should be no servant of Christ. I must make it clear to you, brothers, that *the News as proclaimed by me is no human contrivance*, for I neither obtained it from anyone, nor was I taught it: *it came through Jesus Christ’s own revelation*” (Gal 1:11, 12). (Emphasis JAG)

This line of argument is repeated in Gal. 1:15, 16. Paul is clear, he taught them what the “risen Jesus” had told him in a vision and therefore his news is also from God who sends Jesus to bring His good news and not the watered down version of the Judaizers who want to smuggle in through Judaic cultic lore as part of Jesus’ message. I think the code words of “risen Jesus” means two things, firstly “fresh and personally communicated knowledge” from Jesus, but then also spiritual knowledge or gnosis, if you will; not pertaining to the physical Jesus, but on an advanced level of spiritual understanding.

Paul then tells them of his Jewish background and studies, “more advanced in the Jew’s religion” and “for none was more keenly enthusiastic than I to master the traditions of my ancestors” and that God revealed, “His Son to me that I should proclaim him to the Gentiles”.

Firstly it is significant that he mentioned two different aspects of Judaism as the religion of the Jews and the traditions of the forefathers (“doctrines of the forefathers” in the Peshitta). Then only comes his exclusive, first hand knowledge from the “risen Jesus”; he knew the Jewish religion better than the Judaizers but also knew the advanced mystical teachings of Judaism and therefore the Judaizers version of the gospel is God “wrong, old news” in relation to Jesus’ teachings. He therefore needed none of the apostles to verify his knowledge, “I did not take immediate steps to consult any earthly authority, and neither did I go up to Jerusalem to interview those who were envoys before me”. (Gal 1:14-17)

Then he went to Arabia and only after 3 years he met with Peter and James. To prove his independence from the Jerusalem tradition he only went back there after 14 years of own ministry.

“After that, some fourteen years later, I again went up to Jerusalem with Barnabas, and also took Titus with me. I went there by a revelation and reported to them the terms of the News I

proclaim to the Gentiles. This was *privately to those of repute*, in case I should strive or had been striving to no purpose. But there was no forcing of Titus, who accompanied me, to be circumcised, Greek though he was, despite the infiltrated false brothers who had crept in to spy out *the liberty we enjoy in Christ Jesus in order to **enslave us***. *Not for an instant did we strike our colours, so that the true character of the News might be preserved to you...* As for those of repute – whatever they were makes no difference to me: God takes no one at face value – they imposed on me nothing additional.” (Gal2:1-10) (Emphasis JAG)

Paul was his own man and the “Pillars” accepted his version of the Gospel as correct for the Gentiles but some “followers”; infiltrated false brothers who crept in to spy out “the liberty we enjoyed in Christ Jesus to enslave us.” This was a touchy point for Paul; moral laws, yes they must comply; it is God’s will and Jesus’ teaching and example also, but ethnic and cultic lore, a definite no! Social coercion was tremendously strong, even Peter was influenced also, because “other Jews played up to him”. Paul was resolved and clear, Gentile converts to Christianity should not be enslaved to ethnic and cultic rules because universal Christianity is surely not just another form of becoming a religious messianic Jew. One has to realise that Paul effectively broke with the cultic Temple tradition and only accepted the “liberal” prophetic interpretation of piety as was his understanding of Jesus. He was sure that Jesus wanted him to adapt this universal tradition of Abraham and to fit them to spiritual needs of the Gentile converts. One fundamental principle he was adamant about, this is not a new Jewish religion anymore but a world religion.

He then repudiated Peter for hypocrisy as he formerly agreed with him and now acts like a traditional Jew. He makes a very bold statement,

“So when I saw that they were not acting in conformity with the *true character of the News* I said to Peter in front of them all, ‘if you, a born Jew, live like a Gentile, why do you force the Gentiles *to keep Jewish ways?* We who are of Jewish race and not Gentile sinners, knowing that *no one is exonerated by following regulations but by faith in Jesus Christ*, even we have trusted in Jesus Christ so as to exonerated by faith in Christ and not by following regulations’; for by following regulations ‘not a single human being will be exonerated.’” (Gal 2:14-16) (Emphasis JAG)

Interesting to note that in Gal. 2:16, both Schonfield and the Peshitta uses “faith **in** Jesus”, while the KJV uses “faith **of** Jesus” although we have seen “faith in” Jesus for the Aramaic people really means “faith of Jesus”. Interestingly Schonfield use “regulations” instead of Laws when it pertains to Jewishness. Accordingly to “following regulations” to Paul this should not even be an argument; as all Christians should know that the laws governing Jews as a nation are not applicable to Christians. Furthermore, Jesus’ interpretation and insistence of laws were always moral and totally different from cultic regulations; it is spiritual and it boils down to love of God and fellow man but he never insisted on any ethnic qualifications.

A very interesting personal statement and argument then followed in two phases, that qualifies Paul's position and thereby also that of his interpretation of Jesus' message in no uncertain terms.

*"But if, while seeking to be exonerated in Christ, we ourselves are found to be sinners, does that make Christ sin's agent? God forbid! So if I rebuild what I have demolished it is I who became a transgressor of my own accord. For in law I have died in the legal sense, so as to live in the divine sense." (Gal 2:17-19) (Emphasis JAG).*

An illuminating recognition of Paul and it deserves our attention, the first "found to be sinners" was obviously meant to refer to the Judaizers that will apply their "regulations" and may judge them to be as "gentile sinners". Then Paul's reaction, "So if I rebuild what I have demolished it is I who became a transgressor of my own accord"; he knew he now ignores many regulations but that is for his account not Jesus' but he did rebuild spiritually values on the "legal ruins" that which he thought was important for a universal Christianity. When Paul uses the term sinners, one need to consider the contexts, as it may mean people who do not abide by cultic regulations, which of course will include all Gentiles and not necessarily from God's or Jesus' perspective which is the "divine sense" of the word. He has now said goodbye to the Jewish national religion (Temple-ism) "to live in a divine sense" or spiritually aligned to God, (Peshitta: live to God) telling us what he understood what Jesus' message is all about!

Then he proceeds to second phase teachings which is again very personal and he tells us how he did comply with God's message through Jesus and what his experience and understanding were of sharing Christ cross:

*"I have shared Christ's crucifixion. I am alive, it is true, but strictly speaking it is not I who live, but Christ who lives in me. My present physical existence is by virtue of the life of God's Son, who loved me and **gave himself for me**. I am not going to be the one **to refuse God's mercy**. For if rectitude could be assured by law **then** Christ died in vain." (Schonfield, 1098: 289) (KJV, Gal. 2:20, 21)*

It is important to realise that you cannot just couple two phrases because they follow each other and say the one is the necessary and final cause of the latter because, in the authors mind they may carry two distinct and separate truths. The fact that he says that Jesus gave his life for him is not necessarily "the" definitive and causal result of God's mercy. Jesus might have given his life in the service of God's truth so that you now are saved by repentance and grace and not by cultic regulations! Which I am sure is the correct interpretation in this instance. Paul makes a very strong point with a mystical and participative core; he now totally identify with the teaching, life and death of Jesus who gave his life that we might fully understand God's mercy and do what God wants from us, repentance and loving-kindness. Paul lives by "virtue of **the life** of God's Son, who loved me and gave himself for me"; Jesus' teaching and life tells us about Gods mercy and how to obtain

salvation without sacrificial Temple-ism! “I am not going to be the one to refuse God’s mercy”; and by now we know Jesus preached mercy from repentance and intention and not from sacrifices. This truth seems to me the core of Jesus message, life and death and also for Paul and one of the most ignored truths of Jesus’ message.

He then puts the final touch on this argument by saying, “For if rectitude could be assured by law then Christ died in vain”; to my mind, Paul means that if Temple-ism and sacrificial and cultic lore is the correct way and adherence to Jewish laws is mandatory for salvation then Jesus’ message of a merciful God, without a Jewish preference, was in vain and he therefore he died in vain. Christianity is not about Jewish cultic regulations or for that matter any cultic regulations; it is about developing your inherent spirituality and morality in accordance with Jesus life, example and teachings; to be in the right relationship with God. Den Heyer also makes the important point that Paul’s training as a Pharisee (Acts 22.2) at the hand of Gamaliel had far reaching consequences, because “he had not learned rigidity and immovability, but wisdom, prudence, moderation and flexibility in the exposition of scripture and tradition (2000:224).

*As the following section is a popular theme in Paul’s letters we are only going to discuss this line of thought again if there seems to be some difference to this one or if there is a shift in emphasis in other texts to come. What are very interesting here are his statements in the first verses of chapter 3,*

“You senseless Galatians, who has cast a spell over you; you *before whose gaze Jesus Christ was publicly displayed as crucified?* I only wish to know this from you; did you **receive the Spirit by following regulations** or by the **response** of faith? *Are you so senseless, that having made a start spiritually you are now going to end up physically? Have you experienced so much to no purpose? Does he who mediates the Spirit to you and effects miracles among you, do it by following regulations or by the response of faith, just as Abraham ‘believed God, and it was accounted to him as rectitude’”? (Gal 3:1-6) (Emphasis JAG)*

The Peshitta has this as, “*Jesus Christ, crucified, has been pictured before your eyes*” This section is most probably referring to a rite that they all have experienced as an advanced imitation ceremony. Their belief in Jesus’ message and death and therefore their “*response of faith*” qualified them for the rite which included a “representation” of Jesus’ death on the cross and which mediated the spiritual phase whereby they received the Spirit and should have become spiritually inclined instead of still clinging to regulations or again end up “physically”! A typical “Gnostic” Christian message and practice; the Spirit is active in us then we *become* Jesus’ teachings in our life not remain in the state of adhering to regulations of ethnicity and cultic religions.

Paul then carries on about Abraham's, precedence of Moses and the promise by God to him to start a universal religion and that Jesus was this prophet / messiah / saviour promised by God and he should be believed because "the just shall *live* by faith"; the emphasis must be on *live* based on the new faith and in the here and now not one day in heaven. (Gal 3:11) Hope on following regulations, although it had a function at the time of Moses within a special Jewish covenant remains an immature stage of spirituality. It is interesting to note that the verse implied by "regulations to live buy", Lev. 18:5, starts off by what Assman (1998:64) discussed as how counter religions become new religions; the Israelites must not do as the Egyptians and Canaanites; they should do this ..... instead; "another" religion upside down. Remember that Abraham was regarded as God's friend through a personal relationship based in faithfulness and through following a bundle of regulations. Moses was the lawman and brought in all these "unnecessary" ethnic and cultic "regulations". But, in any case, Paul said nobody could comply to Moses' regulations so they will all be judged according to this "laws", but "the just", meaning Abraham's faithful obedience God's direct injunctions "shall *live* by faith"; it is only through the belief in the mercy of a the "universal" God, exemplified by Abraham and Jesus that you will make the grade, and it includes everyone that serves God, "so that Abraham's blessing might come to the Gentiles", in this era, it is by Jesus Christ.

What and how did this important religious change happen? "Now that faith has come we are no longer under a disciplinarian (KJV-schoolmaster) (Peshitta-pathfinder). You are all Sons of God by faith in Jesus Christ; for those who *have been identified with Christ by immersion have assumed Christ's personality*. (KJV-put on Christ)( Peshitta-clothed with Christ).It is impossible for there to be a Jew or Greek, slave of freeman, male or female; *for in Jesus Christ you are all one and the same person*. If you are *in Christ you are 'the Seed of Abraham', heirs in accordance with the promise.*"(3:25-29) (Emphasis, JAG)

There could hardly be a better description of the symbolism of baptism and the radical change that should be effected in your life by internalising the new belief in the enlightening teachings of Jesus. The different categories of tribal and social classification are also abolished and only the Human Being as portrayed in Jesus is now important. What is of more importance to realise is that this emphasis on belief refers to a total new belief system that represent a new universal way to salvation and was propagated by Jesus and now taken forward by Paul into the "whole world"; the belief versus law debate never could have meant a single belief in a new sacrifice; this dogmatic slogan is utterly simplistic and borders on absurdity.

Notice that spiritual growth is also explained here in a narrative way.

“What I am saying is this: that so long as the heir is under age, though he is actually master of the estate, his position hardly differs from that of a slave: he remains under supervisors and managers until the time fixed by his father. *So it is with us. We too were under age, in subjection to the elemental forces of the universe.* Then, when the time had arrived, God sent out his Son, *born of a woman, born under law,* that those under law might be redeemed, that we might *receive adoption as sons.* And because you are now sons, *God has sent his Son’s spirit into our hearts, crying, ‘Abba!’* Thus no longer is it a *slave* crying, but a son, and if a son, then by God’s providence and heir also.” (Gal 4:1-7) (Emphasis JAG).

This section is also very rich in explaining Paul’s beliefs on different levels. Jesus as son of God was born of a woman, and received adoption as son, no miracle birth. He was under the law and therefore a Jew to bring the new message of God’s universal mercy that they might be “redeemed” from the “curse” of ethnic-cultic laws to become sons by adoption by receiving the Spirit and that is also open for you as Gentiles! Moses and his laws was only a preparatory period for an immature nation until the “seed” of Abraham in the person of Jesus came to close off this un-spiritual law regulated era! Paul obviously also implies that the process of growth from immature heir who is equal to the slaves to maturity and freeman and sonship is also a universal personal spiritual growth parable.

It seems later that Paul wants to argue that Isaac is the true universal Christian and freeman whilst Ishmael is actually the Jewish one enslaved by regulations? The following text is also important to affirm the narrative sub structure of Paul’s beliefs and it should have been placed a little earlier in the letter as it describes the Gentile and superstitious phase of the converts.

“There was a time when not knowing God *you were enslaved* to those who in reality are no gods. But now acknowledging God, or rather being acknowledged by God, how comes it that you have turned back to the feeble and abject elemental forces? Do you intend to be enslaved to them all over again? *You have begun to observe special days and months, seasons and years.* I begin to fear for you that I may have been wearing myself out for you to no purpose.” (Gal 4:8-11) (Emphasis JAG).

It is clear in my opinion, Paul is talking to Gentile converts that were enslaved to “elemental forces” parading as “gods” and partook in Pagan feasts that were similar to those of the Jews and which they should by now know, are a nonsensical and a form of subtle coercion from Temple-ism in all its different regulations.

The part verse Gal.4:14, “you welcomed me as *if I were God’s messenger, as if I was Christ Jesus in person*” should settle the question whether Paul spoke for himself or on behalf of Jesus. Jesus is God’s messenger; he continued,

“It is good to be counted for a good purpose on all occasions, and not just when I am present with you, my children for whom I travail once more *until Christ is formed in*

*you*. I only wish I could be with you at this moment, and change my tone, for I am quite distracted about you.” (Gal 4:18-20) (Emphasis JAG)

Again we see the powerful change in life orientation that should happen and there can be no question of superficial emotional, short-lived conversions; Christ, the mystical code for the Spirit or Image of God must form in them and become their new inner identity!

Paul now becomes really desperate with their lack of spiritual understanding:

“I, Paul, tell you plainly that *if you become circumcised Christ is of no avail to you*. And I declare to every circumcised person that he is obligated to observe the whole Law. You have become severed from Christ Jesus it is neither circumcision nor uncircumcision that is efficacious, *but faith stimulated by love*.” (Gal 5:2-6).

We can not add to this, it is clear “circumcision” as an ethnic-cultic regulation and has nothing to do with Jesus’ teachings about a universal God’s mercy for all; if you want to become Jews, forget about Christ and his whole message because you need to cultivate a radically new spiritual orientation.

Paul later said that some are “progressing well” in their “new persuasions” and they should consider no “other beliefs” (Gal 5:7-10) “So much for the ‘abolition of the obstacle of the cross’”! Obviously a lot of old and new beliefs should be considered. In a literal sense the idea of a crucified Messiah (spiritual hero) was repugnant to the Jews but through the new understanding of Jesus this became a spiritual strength. “It would be a good thing if those who unsettle you over the circumcision would cut themselves off” (Peshitta-expelled) (Gal 5:11, 12).

Paul now clearly draws a distinction between the physical stage of the law’s development and the spiritual/moral stage. Den Heyer wants us to note that in Gal. 5:14 Paul is positive towards the Torah, “for the whole law is fulfilled in this one word: ‘You shall love your neighbour as yourself’” which seems to be a contradiction to his standpoint about the Law (2000:231). I disagree on this point with Den Heyer because it is clear from the context that Paul discriminate against the cultic laws not the moral laws. The following text sums up the whole argument that the moral law is now working from within and you have no need for the rest of the Temple lore.

“Now the deeds of the physical nature are obvious, (and he lists them for clarity, but added) and everything of the same description, about which I have warned you, just as I am warning you now, *that those who act in this way will not inherit the kingdom of God*...But the spiritual products are love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, loyalty, gentleness, self-control. **Against these no law is operative**. *Those who are in Christ Jesus have crucified the physical nature with its passions and desires. If we are to live spiritually, let us also*



*accept spiritual discipline.* Let us not become self-assertive, defying one another, malicious to one another.” (Gal 5:19- 26) (Emphasis JAG)

This is quite clear where you will end up by not bearing the fruits of your new identity. Note the participational elements signalling the importance of bearing our cross in conquering the old ways to affect spiritual rebirth or resurrection, if you will. Cultic regulations are totally different from moral injunctions. This is obviously core teachings; serious business and not only nice ideas.

Paul does not even stop here.

*“Bear one another’s burdens, and thus carry out Christ’s law.* But if anyone fancies himself to be somebody, when he is nothing of the kind, he suffers from self-delusion. *Each must carefully examine his own work,* and then he can have something to be proud of in his own right instead of in another’s; *for each must shoulder his own load.* But let him who has the Message imparted to him share all credit with his instructor... (Gal 6:2-6) Harbour no illusions. God is not to be hoodwinked. *Whatever a man sows he will also reap.* He who sows for his physical nature will reap decay as the physical consequences, while he who sows for the spiritual nature will reap eternal life as the spiritual consequences. *Let us never grow weary of doing what is right; for by never relaxing we shall reap in due course. So as opportunity is afforded us let us labour for the welfare of all, particularly of our kinsmen in faith.*” (Gal 6:7-10) (Emphasis JAG)

All these directives forms part of the new “beliefs” inherent in the system and is part of the new Law “of Christ” and all of it echoes Jesus’ own message and moral teachings also.

An important statement follows here.

*“Look how I have written to you in large characters with my own hand!* Those who want to make a favourable impression in the physical sense press you to be circumcised, *but only to evade persecution for Christ’s cross.* It is not as if these circumcised people were *themselves observant.* They only want you to be circumcised so that they can boast of your physical condition. For myself, God forbid that I should boast of anything but *the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world!* It is neither circumcision nor uncircumcision that counts for anything, ***but a new creation.*** To all who *toe this line,* peace and mercy be upon them, and *upon the Israel of God.* (Gal 6:11-16) (Emphasis JAG).

Paul puts his hand self to paper as to ensure that they understand the core message. This is a powerful message of Paul’s deep understanding of the life of compassion and obedience as that of Jesus that culminated in his death; the cross symbolises the process overcoming this worldly orientations which are spiritual stumble blocks including the fear of the people who killed him. We also, need to overcome our own physical loveless orientation by dying to it and to join in Jesus’ quest and triumph. We have to become “a new creation”; a veritable Human Being. This is patently only for serious pilgrims and not easy beginner’s beliefs coupled with social interaction.

#### 9.4.4. To the Community at Corinth (1)

In his introduction to the correspondence to Corinth, Den Heyer reminds us that Paul was primarily a “practical” theologian: “There is no systematic discussion of theological themes in any of his letters. What he was concerned about was not teaching but life” (2000:138). Schonfield (1998:297), reckons that there are actually 4 letters written to this group and the first one is written from the Ephesus possibly in AD 55 and it starts, relative to the KJV at, 1 Cor 9:1. The main topic in the beginning is the legitimacy of Paul’s envoyship of Jesus’ message and the fact that the physical needs of envoys should be met by the community he serves. Of more importance to us is to recognise the relevancy of the spiritual growth process in these arguments. Paul is mainly concerned about spiritual understanding and behaviour and not so much about the envoys and their peculiar teachings. In the mature understanding of “Jesus crucified” they must have transcended favouritism, personalities and who baptised who; it is mere ego games, which is still on the persona level of the beginners in faith.

On how the cultic system works Paul had this to say and one should take note of the significance of his example and the inherent indication that the Temple now only serves as an example to bring forth the new Christian practice.

“If we have sown spiritual seed in you, is it too much to expect if we reap material things from you? ...Are you ignorant that those who perform priestly duties partake of the Temple dues, and that those who serve the altar share in what is offered at the altar? In the same way the Master has laid down that those who proclaim the News should live off the News.” (1 Cor 9:14)

Paul then discusses his personal strategy to win converts for Jesus’ message by accommodating both belief systems, those under the Jewish cultic law as well as those “without the law”.

“So I have been a Jew to Jews to win over the Jews. I have been subject to law to those under the law – not being under the law myself – to win over those under the law. I have been alien to law to those without law – *though not alien to **God’s law** and legally bound to Christ* – to win over those without law.” (1 Cor 9:20, 21) (Emphasis JAG).

Paul makes an important distinction also again between “the law” as being the Jewish cultic laws and God’s Laws; the moral laws that correlates with Jesus’ interpretation of the laws representing those based on mercy and loving-kindness; the latter are the only ones he feels bound to. It is therefore wrong to say that Paul was against “law” and for “faith” as both need qualification and content before any intelligent discussion can take place, let alone to draw final conclusions from them from certain texts alone.

Paul is discussing spiritual growth; our spiritual development is instrumental to our receiving the life “hereafter” and he then tells them what they should not do.

“Are you ignorant that though all the runners race on the same course, only one receives the prize? So run as if you mean to win. And every contestant exercises complete self-mastery, but they do it for a perishable garland, we for an imperishable. (1 Cor 9:25)... Consequently, dear friends, *make good your escape from idolatry*. I am talking to men of sense. Consider carefully what I say. *Is not the cup for blessing that we bless fellowship with Christ’s blood? Is not the bread we break fellowship with Christ’s body?* For us **many are one** loaf of bread, one body, since we all have a part of the one loaf of bread. *Look at the physical Israel. Are not those who partake of the sacrifices in fellowship with the altar of sacrifice?* Of course I am not suggesting by this that an offering to an idol is anything, or that an idol is anything. Of course not. *What the Gentiles sacrifice they sacrifice to demons, and not to God, and I want you to have no fellowship with demons. Neither can you share the Lord’s Table and the table of demons.* You cannot drink the Lord’s cup and the cup of demons. Are you to arouse the lord’s jealousy? Are we stronger than he?” (1Cor 10:18-22) (Emphasis JAG)

Note that those that they commemorate their “fellowship” with Christ’s blood and body with the cup and the bread and it is in opposition to, as well as supersedes the practices of the “physical Israel” who partakes in sacrifices in “fellowship with the altar” or God. Gentile sacrificial participation is absolutely forbidden for a Christian. To share in a meal with pagan sacrificial food, especially for the newly converted, is totally out of the question because they are in the early stages of spiritual growth, as we shall see later and needed to be weaned from these practices by partaking in the new Christian fellowship meal. The Christian communal meal of wine and bread is, according to Paul here, essentially a fellowship meal remembering their relationship with Jesus and his death in bringing the good News of God’s mercy and pledging faithfulness to their new tradition and not a meal commemorating a sacrifice in the cultic sense. This difference can also be deduced from the contexts in the Didache (see below) as an early catechism, where no mention was made of divine sacrifices as salvific remedies.

“Now concerning the Eucharist, give thanks this way. First, concerning the cup: We thank thee, our Father, for the *holy vine of David Thy servant, which You madest known to us through Jesus Thy Servant*; to Thee be the glory for ever.

And concerning the broken bread: ‘We thank Thee, our Father, **for the life and knowledge which You madest known to us through Jesus Thy Servant**, to Thee be the glory for ever. Even as this broken bread was scattered over the hills, and was gathered together and became one, so let Thy Church be gathered together from the ends of the earth into Thy kingdom; for Thine is the glory and the power through Jesus Christ for ever..

But let no one eat or drink of your Eucharist, unless they have been baptized into the name of the Lord; for concerning this also the Lord has said, “**Give not that which is holy to the dogs**” ([www.earlychristianwritings.com/text/didache-roberts](http://www.earlychristianwritings.com/text/didache-roberts)). (Emphasis JAG)

Obviously the context of praise to Jesus is his life and knowledge and it should not be shared with those not yet spiritually advanced enough to understand the meaning of this rite!

Schonfield then says that 2 Cor 6:14 most probably follows on this section. Paul elaborates further to illustrate the differences between the cultic and spiritual systems.

“And what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For *we are the temple of the living God*; as God hath said, *I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will be their God and they my people.*” (KJV: 2 Cor 6:16) (Emphasis JAG)

Note again, that nothing good is said of the Jewish Temple, it is not where God live! The instruction is about the Christian as person being the temple of God as the “spiritual Israel” versus the Pagan temples for idols.

“Having therefore these promises, dear friends, let us cleanse ourselves from all physical and spiritual defilement, *discharging our sacred duties* in the fear of the Lord.” (2 Cor 7:1) (Emphasis JAG)

Obviously Paul does not think much about Temple-ism anymore, whether it is Jewish or Pagan; the real spirituality is from within mankind itself and according to the teaching of Jesus this is the core of the new beliefs also. Again Paul is very clear about physical and spiritual “cleanliness” in discharging our “sacred duties”. Their new “beliefs” do have new “laws”. This ends the first letter according to Schonfield (1998:301).

#### **9.4.5. To the Community at Corinth (2)**

Written from Ephesus possibly in the autumn of AD 55 and starts at I Cor 1.1 with reference to the KJV (Schonfield, 1998:303)

“Just as the testimony to Christ was so firmly established among you, so have you never lacked for any spiritual gifts while waiting for the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ. God is faithful, who has chosen you for *fellowship with his son Jesus Christ our Master.*” (1 Cor 1:9). (Emphasis JAG)

Note that our relationship to Jesus is one of fellowship and he is their master or leader.

The core problem for this letter is illustrated by the Paul’s formulation, in the following text.

“Now in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ I urge you, brothers, all to hold together and not to have divisions among yourselves, but to accommodate yourselves to the selfsame outlook and viewpoint...I mean this, that you are variously saying, ‘I side with Paul’, or ‘I go with Apollos’, ‘I take Cephas’s view’, or, ‘I take Christ’s’. Has Christ been split up? Was Paul crucified on you behalf? Or were you immersed in the name of Paul?” (1 Cor 1:10-14)

Here again it is shown that Paul regarded Jesus' crucifixion and the fellowship with Christ as central to the Gospel although he do not give detailed content to this statement of their core beliefs. In the next quote the difference of philosophical and theological speculation and spiritual wisdom or gnosis is highlighted. It is through physical and emotional suffering that spiritual insight and growth is attained. The so called "worldly weak" persons must become the spiritual heroes; it is an inverse version of the pure functional and instrumental "wisdom" of that of the "mighty ones" of this world.

"The message of the cross may be foolish to those who are perishing, but to those who are being saved – to us – it is the power of God; for it is stated...What becomes of a sage, the scribe, the scholar of this world? Has not God made nonsense of the world's wisdom? For since in God's wisdom the world failed to know God by wisdom, it pleased God to save those who believe by the folly of preaching. For while the Jews demand a sign, and the Greeks require wisdom, we preached the crucified Christ, an obstacle to the Jews and non-sense to Gentiles. But to those who are chosen (Peshitta: *called*) – Jews and Greeks alike – *a Christ who is the power of God and **the wisdom of God***. For God's folly is wiser than men, and God's weakness is stronger than men."(1Cor 1:18-25) (Emphasis JAG).

Paul is contrasting worldly wisdom to godly wisdom with reference of interpreting the meaning of Jesus' life and death; it is obvious that Paul regard the secular wisdom of the Greeks and the Jews as folly in relation to the spiritual wisdom or the gnosis of "*a Christ*", which is also the "*wisdom of God*". The KJV and Peshitta leave out the "a". In the mind of the ancients, the hero is always successful and not crucified, but Paul tells them that the story about Jesus as Gods messenger of a higher wisdom, "the wisdom of God" and that these "unspiritual" people cannot understand it. This is a powerful confession and one can intuit the inspiration for the opening of John's Gospel by portraying Christ as the Wisdom of God. What is clear that Paul wants to remind his followers of Jesus' and their own spiritual nature and the uniqueness of their beliefs within the esoteric context of Jesus as the Christ and this gnosis as sacred and experiential knowledge has nothing to do with worldly wisdom?

He again emphasises these spiritual truths and connects them in an extended confession,

"But you are *his (God's) offspring* in Christ Jesus, who was begotten *to be wisdom to us* from God, yes, and *vindication consecration and ransom*, (KJV: righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption) so that, as it is stated, 'Let him who boasts do it in the Lord'" (1Cor 1:30). (Emphasis JAG)

Paul wants to accentuate this is a new and radical message about God and man; it is not coupled to any known philosophical tradition or cultic belief system but it is spiritual wisdom from God which vindicated Jesus that freed (ransom) and saves us from our spiritual ignorance to salvation. Jesus brought us this heavenly wisdom and it behoves us not to turn it into ego gratification. We need

also to keep in mind the inherent problems with the translation of these terms and concepts as discussed above. One needs to be aware that the original hearer could understand it differently due to the nature of their known understanding, cultural-linguistic variances and the level of spiritual awareness that was reached. We need to be On top of these factors; later “Church talk”, predispositions, dogmas and slogans can also cloud their real meanings. We will have to be aware of the different places where the foundational narrative surfaces to see whether we are still comfortable with our proposed understanding.

So far we can say that Paul believed that Jesus’ belief in a universal, loving and merciful God and his message about God resulted in his death by hostile forces of Temple-ism but he was “vindicated” in his message and life by his resurrection and his consecration (synonyms: dedication, blessing, sanctification), can be seen a “sacrifice”, (seen in a wider personal sense and not likely as a necessary cultic salvific remedy) but was definitely seen also as a “ransom” to free Paul and his followers from the bondage to the Jewish and cultic “laws”; meaning also from the wrong/dated cultic belief system reserved only for Jews and lastly, also to free them from the judgement and “wrath” of God that was expected by them at the second coming of the Cosmic Christ.

Paul now talks to the initiates.

“In my disclosing you *the Divine Secret*, (KJV: *testimony* of God; Peshitta: the *mystery* of God) not with imposing speech or wisdom; for I was determined to be conscious of nothing while among you but *of Jesus Christ, and of him crucified*...I arrived among you; and my speech and proclamation was with not persuasive words of wisdom, *but with spiritual and phenomenal demonstration*,( KJV: but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power) so that your conviction should rest *not on human wisdom but on divine power* (1 Cor 2:4). (Emphasis JAG)

The differentiation of the different types of wisdom is present again and the accentuation on the “crucified Christ” seems to be a key concept for the spiritual or mature teachings which is indicative of faithfulness to Christ that must lead to participation in Christ. If the Schonfield translation is nearer to what was said, it might be that Paul is also referring to certain visual dramas as rites that are related to the crucifixion of Jesus that accompanied his spiritual teachings. The text seems to imply mature spiritual teachings and indicates experiential and participating processes and not only rhetorical slogans.

Then follows a very distinctive and direct reference to Paul’s mystical teachings and it corresponds to what was already said about this phase. To keep the flow of the argument we will keep this rather long teaching as a whole.

“There is a wisdom which we employ with the initiated; but it is **a wisdom that has nothing to do with this world**, or with the transient forces governing the world. It is the **Hidden Wisdom of God contained in a Mystery**, which God formulated of old to be our glory *before the Ages began, unknown to any of the forces governing this world*; for had they known it **they would never have crucified the Lord of Glory**. But as it is stated,

*What eye has never seen, nor ear heard,*

*What never entered the mind of man,*

*God has prepared for those who love him.*

Yet **God has revealed it to us by the Spirit**, for the *Spirit delves into everything, even into the profundities of God. For who among men knows a man’s ideas except the human spirit which is in him?* So too, **none can know God’s ideas except the Divine Spirit**. Now what we have received is not the spirit of the created world, **but the Spirit that emanates from God**, so that **we may know what God graciously grants us to know**. Those are the things we speak of, not in the language that human wisdom provides, **but in the fashion of spiritual instruction, bringing spiritually-equipped people into contact with spiritual realities**. The **materialist cannot entertain the ideas of the Divine Spirit**: to him they are nonsense, and he cannot grasp them, *because they have to be discerned spiritually*. But the spiritually-equipped person discerns all these things, *though they are to be discerned by no one unaided*, ‘for who has ever known the mind of the Lord that he should teach him? **But we have Christ’s mind.**’ (1Cor 2:6-16) (Emphasis JAG)

This pivotal text is self explanatory; it confirms much of what we have said about Paul’s real spiritual teaching as well as being an excellent example of the Mystical tradition that is still honoured today! Obviously Paul is now addressing the core Christian teachings by using also the known insider language of the Mysteries and with clear reference to the initiation rites for the spiritually mature initiates. Their belief system could now include that they have received the Spirit that emanates from God; which quickens their “human spirit” in the Image of God within; and through spiritual instruction to spiritually discerned people, they have acquired the “mind of Christ”, which is not phantom like “Christian” jargon or nonsense, but directly related to the spiritual orientation of the “universal Adamic Christ” or primordial Man, son of man, Human Being coming to realisation within us, through our own Spirit mediated, spiritual growth process! Their focus is now on the “crucified Christ”, or resurrected spiritual Christ, beyond elementary beliefs in the teachings even of the physical Jesus; they are therefore now shared in Jesus’ death on the cross by being dead to this world and therefore also are in fellowship with the Christ within Jesus. They are also now adopted by God as his true children and are vindicated by God through their own spiritual resurrection because Jesus has proven our spiritual immortality already. This “hidden Wisdom of God” is the real Christian gnosis and is now revealed by “the mind of Christ” which is also now their minds. This wisdom was also part of God’s Wisdom from the beginning when God formed the universe and mankind.

The above ideas of Paul seems to fit Schonfield (1998:305) note 10, which reads:

“The Jewish (Pharisee) mystics had two branches of hidden Wisdom, the Lore of Creation (in Gen 1) and the Lore of the Chariot (In Ezekiel). Paul had been initiated into the former, as

revealed in his letters. This dealt with the Heavenly Man as the image of God, the Messiah Above.”

Paul consequently lamented their lack in spiritual growth and understanding in the beginning, despite his longing to share the advanced teachings.

“It was impossible, however, brothers, for me to speak to you as spiritually-equipped people, only as physically equipped, *as infants in Christ*. I had to feed you with milk rather than solid food, for you were not equal to it. Neither are you equal to it yet, for you are still at the physical stage” (1 Cor 3:2, 3). (Emphasis JAG)

We hopefully will encounter what are the teachings for the first stage or “babes in Christ”. Paul then continues his instruction about the foundation of his teaching.

“*There can never be any other foundation laid than what has been laid, the foundation that is Jesus Christ. But upon it, it is open to anyone to erect an edifice of gold, silver, precious stones, wood, straw, or rush. The material in each case will be evident, for the Day will reveal it...* (Note what is built on the foundation is personal and up to us. Then again Paul reiterates a core concept of the advanced esoteric teaching, but he is clearly irritated that they understood so little of it) Do you not realize that ***you are God’s temple, and that the Divine Spirit resides in you?*** If anyone dishonours God’s temple God will dishonour him; *for God’s temple is holy, as you are meant to be.*” (1Cor 3:16-17) (Emphasis JAG)

This should now be abundantly clear; the new temple and spiritual dwelling that should be holy is us. The implications are clear –no more Temple religions but personal piety based in a godly relationships. Consequently, we should be regarded merely as Christ’s assistants, stewards of the “Divine Mysteries”, which qualifies the “*requirement in stewards that they should be found reliable.*” (KJV: faithful). (1 Cor 4: 1-2) (Emphasis, JAG) The Christian is the “steward” of the Divine mysteries and need to live up to it; not a believer only!

Later on he takes the argument further,

“It is I, *I in Christ*, (KJV: in Christ Jesus I begotten you) who *have begotten you by the News. Copy me*, therefore, I entreat you. That is why I have dispatched Timotheus to you, who is not only a dear child of mine but loyal to the Master, to recall to you *the course I follow in Christ*, which I commend everywhere to all the communities ( KJV: church)... *For the Kingdom of God consists not in speech but in spiritual power*” (1Cor 4:16, 17, 20). (Emphasis JAG)

They are begotten by the *Gospel* of Christ. There can be no argument that Jesus as the Christ is central to the gospel of Paul; furthermore Jesus as the Christ must be followed with spiritual power, which also means they must produce the fruits of their conversion towards salvation it is one reality.



Here one needs to be aware of Paul's strategy to really see that this part may have more than one meaning to them.

"There is no justification for your boasting. Are you not aware that 'a little leaven leavens the whole lump'? Get rid of the old leaven that you may be a new lump, once more in the unleavened state, *for our Passover – Christ – has been sacrificed*. Consequently, *let us observe the festival, not with the old leaven, nor with the leaven of vice and immorality, but with the unleavened bread of purity and sincerity* (1 Cor 5:6-8). (Emphasis JAG)

Bearing in mind Jesus' reference to the leaven of the Pharisees meaning their false teachings, Paul reminded them that their Passover is totally different; Christ was sacrificed for their new covenant and teaching of purity and sincerity. Obviously they must now move on, beyond cultic lore and Temple-ism and their own new rites are the substitutive evidence of their progress from the old Passover feasts. It should now be clear that "Christ has been sacrificed" is linked to their core moral teachings and a very important part of the content of their beliefs that also underlie his slogan or code phrase "Jesus Christ as crucified"; we are done with the old religion. "Leave God to judge those outside, while you 'put away the wicked from among you'" (1 Cor 5:13).

Again we can verify what Paul believed about those who do not adhere to the new teaching of Jesus.

"Instead, you injure and defraud, and even your own brothers too! *Are you ignorant that evil-doers shall not inherit the Kingdom of God? Do not delude yourselves*. Neither the immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor thieves, nor usurers, nor drunkards, nor the foul-mouthed, nor extortionists, shall inherit the Kingdom of God. *That is what some of you were; but you have been cleansed, you have been consecrated* (Peshitta: sanctified), *you have been exonerated* (Peshitta: made righteous) *by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ* ("name" not sacrifice- ANE meaning: by following the teachings of Jesus) *and by the Spirit of God.*" (1 Cor 6:8-11) (Emphasis JAG)

It is necessary to recognise this as a shortened version of the process of salvation, which still needs further verification but seems now to be:

- Repentance leads to forgiveness and cleansing of sins and therefore the rite of baptism;
- by understanding the real meaning of the crucifixion and the resurrection of Jesus;
- committing to the same process by carrying your own cross and of dying to this worldly ego to be in fellowship with Jesus;
- You become a spiritual being and behave like one because you are now driven by the Spirit of God and you share the kinship of Jesus with God.

This became all possible by the preaching of Paul in the “name of our lord Jesus Christ” meaning Jesus’ gospel or teachings of truth represented by his life as envoy of God to the spiritual Israel and “the God who raised up the Master will also by his power raise us up” (1Cor 6:14).

Paul then again emphasizes the need to behave morally because they are now one in the Master and in the Spirit there should not be any argument about how they should behave!

“But he who unites himself with the Master **forms a single spirit**. (1Cor 6:17)...Or are you ignorant that your body is the temple of the *Holy Spirit which is in you, which you have received from God*, and that you are not your own, having been acquired at a high price? *Then praise God with **your body and in your spirit, because they belong to God.***” (1Cor 6:19, 20) (Emphasis JAG)

The instruction on the “new” temple is surely important to Paul because the Holy Spirit from God is now active in you, you should behave like Jesus, who paid a high price so that you could know the way to God and godliness, since you now also belong to God.

We must also take note of the section that follows which again addresses futility of debating nonsensical religious “knowledge”. They should now have godly insight or gnosis, which is not ordinary knowledge but godly wisdom.

“Now as regards offerings (Peshitta: sacrifices) to idols, we are aware that we all have *knowledge*. But **knowledge puffs up** while affection (KJV: charity) builds up. If anyone thinks he knows something, he still does not know it as well as he should: *but if anyone is devoted to God he is given **insight** by him*. For example, as regards food offered to idols, we are aware that an idol has no actual life and that there is no God other than the One. For even if there are many so-called gods, whether of heaven or earth – since there are many ‘gods’ and many ‘lords’, *for us there is still only One God, the Father, from whom all things derive, and to whom we belong, and one Lord Jesus Christ, through whom all things come, and by whom we are. But this knowledge is not general*”... (1 Cor 8:1-7) (Emphasis JAG)

The factual position is that there is but One God the other gods and lords are fictitious, therefore the strong in faith can eat everything, disregarding the laws, because they know that they are only eating meat and do not share in the erroneous beliefs in these other gods and their sacrificial teachings. Should this however be a stumbling block for the “babes” in Christ, rather be considerate and let them do what is right for their conscience. This section is in fact also again a general indication what he thinks of Temple-ism in general, except that the Jewish Temple was at least dedicated to the One God but supposed to be a place of prayer for all nations according to the Prophets and Jesus. One must keep in mind also that the teachings and life of Jesus resulted in such a radical change in Paul’s perception and level of consciousness that the rhetoric phrases like the one above, “through whom all things come, and by whom we are” might not always refer to

concepts and ideas from the “Mystery of Creation”, or from other fancy ideas, but can be understood plainly from an esoteric perspective as an acknowledgement of Jesus’ crucial spiritual role, through his teachings and by living the “hidden truths” they were also now “raised from their death” and own ignorance.

Paul elaborates on the lesson in kindness and consideration to others to the lesser brothers.

“I am free to do everything, but everything is not advantageous. I am free to do everything, but not everything is beneficial. Let no one study his own interests, but those of his fellows. Eat whatever is sold in the meat market without making inquiries, for ‘the earth is the Lord’s with all it contains’ (1Cor10:23)...But why should my freedom be governed by another man’s conscience? If I partake with the pleasure, why should I be abused over what I am thankful for? The answer is that whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do everything for the glory of God. Be free from offence both to Jews and Gentiles, and to God’s Community, just as I accommodate myself to everyone in every way, not studying my own convenience but that of the multitude, that they may be saved. *Copy me, as I copy Christ.*” (1Cor 10:30-33; 11:1) (Emphasis JAG)

There should be no doubt who was Paul’s role model and mentor; he is sure in his mind that he is following Christ. This lesson also harmonises with his typical description of Jesus’ character as one of “loving-kindness” found in virtually all his letters; this must also be their point of departure in all their relationships and therefore cultivated by his followers.

It seems that this “freedom in Christ” made a few of the women folk of the community over confident but they were still living in a man dominated culture. For the Jews, so also, virtually in the whole Empire, the women should be “in their place” this “excessive” freedom became a “cultural scandal” at certain places and Paul had to revert to cultural coercion to defuse the situation. The plea to consider everybody especially the “lesser” brothers/sisters seemed to be not working that well. Den Heyer makes an interesting observation in this regard, the fact that the Greek goddess Aphrodite and the Egyptian goddess Isis were also worshipped in Corinth, perhaps made some womenfolk a little too “bold”? (2000:128)

Now follows very important statements of beliefs:

*“I indeed received from the Master what I have transmitted to you that the Lord Jesus on the night he was betrayed took bread, and when he had given thanks broke it and said, ‘This signifies my body broken on your behalf. Do this in commemoration of me.’ In the same way he took the cup after the meal, saying, ‘This cup signifies the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in commemoration of me.’ So as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup you are making mention of the Master’s death until he returns. Consequently, **whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup unworthily** will be held responsible for the Master’s body and blood. So let a man examine himself, and after that eat the bread and drink the cup; for he who eats and drinks is eating and drinking a judgement on himself, not*

discerning the body. That is why many of you are infirm and ailing, and a number have gone to their rest. ***If we have passed judgement on ourselves we shall not be judged; but if we are judged by the Master we are punished, so as not to be condemned with the world.*** (1Cor 11:23-32) (Emphasis JAG)

It is important to read the Jewish Cultic nuances into Jesus' and Paul's words as representing a double message; but this is now a "new" rite commemorating a *new covenant* on the basis of their new spiritual truths and beliefs using the old cultic beliefs as metaphors. Jesus should be remembered for the fact that he gave up his life (bodily) for the true message of God. His "blood" is metaphorically now the seal of the new covenant as was the practice in those times. Under this new covenant, nothing of the old covenant is required anymore; people should live by "loving-kindness" and will be judged only on this basis. Therefore they must examine their behaviour and *judge themselves* according to the new criteria of faithfulness and praxis before they partake in the signs or rites of this new covenant. If they are unable to judge their own weaknesses and rectify them they will be judged by Christ or could even share the "wrath" of God at his second coming. The old blood covenant with the physical Israel is totally replaced by a new bloodless rite one where the wine drinking is only *in remembrance* of the Jesus' "blood" and thereby replaces all blood sacrifices and is not a new form of cultic sacrifice. Due to incessant brain washing through dogmatic slogans this subtle though very important difference is mostly ignored.

To interpret this new rite as a new cultic sacrifice for a new cult will be the most un-Jesus like interpretation thinkable. By using known concepts and metaphors Paul wants to exactly do the opposite; to get them weaned from their old feasts and sacrificial practices and to explain the new spiritual and moral injunctions to cancel out old cultic interpretations. It was the aim of Jesus and Paul to bring new spiritual insights to them as a living practices, to replace Temple-ism, Jewish and Pagan alike with the tradition of the Prophets. The primary markers are Jesus' condemnation of the Temple practices; his conversations with Nicodemus, the Samaritan woman and the Sermon on the Mount as well as his own key and pivotal growth and enlightenment experiences are the core issues in this new covenant.

It seems that the Corinthian group's new exposure to spirituality also went a little overboard and that Paul was the first one to encounter "new age" type novel psychic experience seekers and enthusiasts in his congregation.

"Are all envoys? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Are all mediums? Have all gifts of healing? Do all speak in tongues? Are all interpreters? Make the higher gifts your aim. *Yet let me point out to you a still better course to pursue.* (1 Cor12:29-31) (Emphasis JAG).

And he did just that in magnificent prose!

“Though I speak the tongues of men and angels, and *have not love*, I have become a clanging gong or clashing cymbal. Even if I possess the *power of prophesy and know all the mysteries and secret lore*, and *have such faith that I can remove mountains*, but *if I have not love I am of no account* (Peshitta: nothing). Even if I share out my possessions and *give my body to be burnt*, if I have not love it avails me nothing. (1Cor 13:1-3) (Emphasis JAG)

Loving-Kindness and pure spiritual awareness rules supreme as the way to salvation and he then went on to define love and morality. Also note the mention to physical self sacrifice (body to be burned) as a work of law means nothing if it was not done out of love of God and others. Also worth mentioning is his reference to growth from childhood to manhood. In matters of life, justice and spiritual knowledge, love “delights in truth” although we will not know “truth” completely this side of the grave. “So far I know imperfectly, but then I shall know as fully as I am known. At present faith, hope, and love, all three continue; but the most enduring (Peshitta: greatest) of them is love.” (1Cor 13:13)

1 Cor 14 verse 20 from the Peshitta translation is very informing:

*“My brethren, be not as infants in your intelligence; only in evil things be like innocent children, but in your understanding be mature.”* (Emphasis JAG).

It is often said that Jesus and Paul wanted us to “believe” like little children. These beliefs are then assumed and prescribed according to selective verses and then offered as church salvific dogma. But what more likely was meant here is that Children are culturally not fully conditioned yet and therefore innocent of the many biases and gender role-plays; therefore more innocent, holistic and inclusive in their perception, while on the other hand, spiritual truths are not always accessible to cold reason and the ordinary logic. Never did Jesus or Paul mean that you can earn extra points to heaven for being childish, ignorant, superstitious, or acting plain stupid. Order and learning are important and spiritual growth is a never ending process, continuous work in progress.

*“Is it not desirable then, brothers, that when you come together each should have a psalm, an instruction, a revelation, a tongue, or an interpretation, so that everything contributes to edification?”* (1 Cor 14:26) (Emphasis JAG).

The following section is very important with respect to the soteriology of Paul and it revolved around the doubts about resurrection and represents the first order teachings or the normal introductory, dogmatic beliefs. This formal formulation seems a bit out of place in time, considering the ideas in the Didache and the fact that the first three points did not receive much detail attention from Paul but we need to deal with it at face value. Note the absence of the virgin birth and other and any reference to the living Jesus at all.

“Now I would draw your attention, brothers, to the News I proclaimed to you (which you accepted, on which you have based yourselves, by means of which you are being saved) in the very form in which I proclaimed to you, if you have *retained it, unless you believed in a heedless manner* (Peshitta: if your conversion was not in vain). *For I delivered to you as basic* (Peshitta: first of all) **what I had myself received:**

- That Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures;
- That he was buried and raised up the third day in accordance with the Scriptures;
- That he was seen by Cephas, then by the twelve, after that he was seen by James, then by all the envoys.
- Last of all, as if by an untimely birth, he was seen even by me; for I am the most insignificant of the envoys, who does not deserve to be called an envoy, because I persecuted God’s Community” (1 Cor 15:1-9). (Emphasis and Listing format JAG)

Paul says this is the basic or first level teaching that he also received from the others but remember he claimed his vision of Jesus as being alive as his own and his esoteric teachings are not included in the above summary. That Jesus died *for* our sins; the word translated as “for”, as we have discussed above in Aramaic, can also mean *because* as *result of* and we discussed the different perspectives which we will not repeat now. It can mean in a cultic sense, that Jesus is the final and sufficient sacrifice to wean them from sacrifices is also possible; but that one can be “saved” by “only believing in such a blood sacrifice” is not mentioned anywhere so far and not here either and is not even a possibility from a Judaic even Cultic perspective; you need to bring your offers regularly as a token of repentance and it is part of the remuneration of the priests. Neither from Jesus’ and Paul’s theology and soteriology up to now, is a “sacrifice”, the final sufficient and effective way to salvation. That Jesus was resurrected; Paul had no doubt because he had a mystical encounter with Jesus himself. Otherwise, to be frank the above belief system really has no real meaning from a spiritual point of view and one wonders of this is not also a point Paul wanted to make; this “received” facts is too “basic” indeed to be of much spiritual worth?

He proceeds to his interpretational point which carries the substance of the narrative: “And if Christ did not rise, **your belief is in vain and you are still in your sins**” (1 Cor15:17). (Emphasis JAG)

What belief is Paul referring to? If he meant that Jesus was the last and sufficient sacrifice under the new dispensation or the final and efficient cause for our salvation, why would *resurrection* be directly coupled as the real core for salvation then? I propose that he meant exactly what he said and meant that the belief in Jesus’ resurrection is of primary importance as that will validate a certain new belief system, brought to us by Jesus that our salvation comes through repentance and the mercy of God, available for all, and precisely not from sacrifices; his resurrection and inherent immortality is the proof of these new truths and he was vindicated in this by God. If he did not rise from death, his whole new spiritual message and soteriology of repentance to mercy, was

wrong and they will be still under the law of the cultic system and therefore made a horribly wrong religious choice! Either the cultic sacrificial system is right or Jesus- both cannot be right because they are in principle exclusive of one another in their respective soteriologies!

Our provisional but conclusion at this stage is the following: The dying Jesus and resurrected Christ represents the universal immortal Human Being and is the focal point of this whole new spiritual teaching. This new covenant is not sacrificial in nature but the resurrection is the factual underscoring and foundation on which the esoteric and mature teachings and soteriology is vindicated by.

We also see now, the first attempt of Paul to “argue from Scripture” in conjunction with his position on the resurrection of Jesus and his followers. To a large extent he is forced to go this route because of “un-spiritual believers” who want to still argue and belabour the resurrection in an un-spiritual or technical manner. Paul seems to try his hand at the mystical lore of Creation and the Son of Man according to Schonfield (1998:321). What I have gathered so far in reading about these topics, is that it centred on personal re-creation or growth in relation to the Creation story.

“But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead as the first fruits of those who have gone to their rest. For since *by man came death, so by man also came resurrection from the dead*. For as in Adam all die, so in Christ will all be brought to life, through each in his proper order, first Christ, followed at his coming by those who belong to Christ, then the remainder when he has handed over the Kingdom to God, to the Father, after abolishing all other government, authority and powers.” (1 Cor 15: 20-24) (Emphasis JAG)

I am not an expert on the above topics and will refrain from comments on these beliefs of Paul at this stage. One thing is clear to me however, Jesus in his mind brought the truth and reality of this ancient Jewish “mystery” to life and therein lays Paul’s belief in this righteous teacher and special messenger from God. Surely as this ancient mystery becomes true in Jesus this “must” inaugurates the final phase of God’s will with mankind and this sick world! The Jewish mystical tradition now made sense to him; it seems to indicate that the now known story about the godly Adam has manifested in history and Paul now called him Christ. We now have proof through Jesus’ resurrection that this “mystery” is now available for all who realise Jesus’ life and teachings and will then be vindicated too. This is his esoteric and mature message, we can now all share in this phenomenal growth process from an earthly Adam to a heavenly Christ, because Jesus Christ as the first fruits was resurrected! I am not sure whether his Jewish and especially non Jewish converts were acquainted with all the details of this specifically Jewish story “from scripture” but the mature initiates could understand what he wanted to say even if it was with reference to the dying and resurrected god-man of the other Mystery religions and the very similar Primal man version.

The following few sections seem to validate the total emphasis on resurrection and the “sacrifice” is not mentioned again; instead, you should watch your steps.

“If the dead are not raised, ‘let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die’. Oh no, do not delude yourselves! ‘Bad company ruins good character’. Sober up completely, and do not go to the bad; for some of you seem to ignore God’s existence. I say this to shame you. (1 Cor 15:33, 34)

In the following section he, in desperation, tells them that although some have been introduced to the advanced teachings they still lent out their ears to other dogmatic ideas and useless arguments viewed from a spiritual perspective and we seem not to get rid of this nonsense even in our time!

“But someone may say, ‘How are the dead raised, and what kind of body do they have?’ You dunce! ... So is it with the resurrection of the dead. What is sown as perishable is *raised imperishable*. What is sown in humiliation is raised in honour. What is sown in weakness is raised in vitality. What is sown as a physical body is *raised as a spiritual body*.” (1Cor 15: 35-44) (Emphasis JAG)

Then Paul again reverts back to Genesis to explain,

“The first man Adam became a living soul, so the last Adam became a vitalizing spirit. It was not the spiritual that came first but the physical, and after that the spiritual. The first man was dust form the earth, the second man was from heaven. As is the nature of dust so are the creatures of dust; and as is the heavenly nature so are the heavenly beings. *Just as we have worn the likeness of the dust nature, so shall we wear the likeness of the heavenly nature.*” (Peshitta: “And as we have born the image of the earthy, we shall also *bear the image of the heavenly*. Now this I say **flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God**; neither does corruption inherit in-corruption.” (1 Cor 47-50) (Emphasis JAG)

There seems to be no doubt in Paul’s mind that the resurrection is spiritual and not physical. Schonfield reminds us of the importance of the Jewish mystical traditions to spiritual people like Paul and I have no doubt that Paul took these traditions seriously:

“The reader must apprehend Jewish occultism, one branch of which (Maaseh Bereshith) dealt with the creation of man in Genesis. According to the Jewish mystics God created the Heavenly Man as his image, the Archetype (Son of Man), in whose likeness Adam was formed. The Heavenly Man, the Messiah Above, was incarnated in Jesus as the Messiah Below, thus constituting him as the Second Adam, as Paul elaborated. See the Book of Enoch, and Paul’s letters to the Asian communities, and those at Philippi and Colossae.” (1998:323, note 67)

Paul chose to use the model of creation from Gen 2:7 instead of the one in Gen 1:26-29 to make his point about human growth. Paul is also clear, salvation represents a radical change and there are no earthly bodies in heaven. But unfortunately he got the timing wrong as would anyone before and after him who tries to read the “mind of God” and publish God’s plans. “See, I will let you into a



secret, we shall not all be laid to rest, but all of us will experience a change, in an instant, in the flicker of an eyelid, on the final trumpet note” (1Cor 15:51).

Paul wants to get a last punch in for the Judaizers.

*“The sting of death is sin; and the strength of sin is the Law. But thanks be to God, who has given us victory through our Lord Jesus Christ! Consequently, dear brothers, be firm and unmoveable, **always fully engaged in the Master’s work**, knowing that you toil for the Master is not in vain.”* (1 Cor 15:56, 58). (Emphasis JAG)

This again points out his beliefs on the mortal consequences of sin and sacrificial beliefs are not mentioned as a remedy; you have a moral vocation like Jesus and Paul followed.

#### **9.4.6. To the Community at Corinth (3)**

Written from Ephesus possibly in the Spring of AD 56 and starting at 2 Cor 10:1, according to Schonfield (1998:325)

“. . . Now I, Paul, personally entreat you *by the mildness and moderation of Christ*, I who am ‘humble when in your presence, but overbearing towards you when absent’. I pray that I do not have to be overbearing when I am present with the kind of persuasion I contemplate employing against those who reckon me as one who ‘moves on the material plane.’” ( 2 Cor 10:1-2). (Emphasis JAG)

This must have been a blow below the belt for Paul who saw himself as a very spiritual envoy. He rightfully takes off the gloves and was forced to defend his own reputation as who else will do it? Paul then also lists and discusses his credentials to be God’s and Christ’ envoy especially his mystical relationship with Christ.

“As *Christ’s truth* is in me, I am not going to be denied this boast in the regions of Achaia!” As there are imposters; “Such people are false envoys, deceitful agents, masquerading as envoys of Christ. (2 Cor 11:13)...If I must continue to boast, undesirably as that is, I will come to visions and revelations of the Master. I know a man in Christ, who fourteen years ago – whether in the physical or astral state, I do not know, God knows – was caught up as far as the third heaven. I know that this man – whether in the physical state or otherwise, I do not know, God knows – was caught up onto ‘the Garden’ and heard ineffable words which no human is permitted to utter. Of someone like this I will boast, but about myself I will not boast, only of my disabilities.” (2 Cor 12:1-5).

This is a person that knows the current mystical traditions but who also is aware of taking some “paranormal” states too seriously and then forgetting what needs to be done on the earthly plain.

“I have said previously, and being absent now I give warning as if present a second time, to those who have fallen into sin and to all the others, that should I come once more I will not spare you, since it is proof you require, *that Christ speaks by me*. He at least is not weak, but

powerful among you; *for though he was crucified from weakness*, he lives now by the power of God. *And though we are weak in him, **we too live with him by the power of God, who is within you.*** Test yourselves; **examine yourselves, whether you are in the faith.** Or do you yourselves not know that Jesus Christ is in you or whether by any chance you are frauds? But I trust you will realise that I am no fraud.” (2 Cor 13:2-5) (Emphasis JAG)

Again, it is obvious that the message of Christ was important and Paul has to show his true envoyship. An important theme of the “correct faith” is “examining” yourself in the way you live! Interestingly Paul says the Jesus was crucified in “weakness” but as the resurrected Christ he “lives in power” an ultimate distinction. The crucifixion of Jesus is normally placed within the history of the deaths of true prophets; it was due to ignorance and malice and executed *through or by* “religious” opposition parties! He was killed **by** “them” for daring to think otherwise about God and humanity. Participation in Christ spirit means he “is in you” and if you do not produce the fruits “you are frauds”! This means: “don’t tell me about your beliefs but show me your faith in the way you live”; I am afraid Martin Luther got this one also totally wrong. The “faith only” slogan, (probably faith in God’s mercy through some beliefs and actions that replaces the Cultic laws) can only be a synopsis or shorthand for a complete and new belief system for the benefit of the new group of Jewish and Gentile Cultic converts because, in contrast to the later Roman Church and “Reformers”, Paul’s followers knew what it meant! Also notice how Paul us the Spirit of God and the Chris Spirit or just Christ as synonyms for God’s power within mankind in different texts.

The usual clear statement is again at the end of the letter spelling out the core values and relationships in their new belief system, “The *Loving-kindness of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all.*” (2 Col13:14) (Emphasis JAG).

#### **9.4.7. To the Community at Corinth (4)**

Schonfield (1998:331) says it is probably written from Philippi in the summer of AD 56 and it starts with 2 Cor1:1.

“Blessed be the God and Father of our Jesus Christ, Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our afflictions that we may be enabled to comfort those who are in any affliction with the same comfort we have received. Blessed be he, *that has a full share of Christ’s suffering*, so equally have I had my full share of comfort through Christ... Rather for myself did I take it to be sentence of death, so that I should place no reliance on myself but on *God who raises the dead.*” (2 Cor 1:3-9) (Emphasis JAG)

Again Jesus’ relationship with God as his Father and Paul’s and our participation in Jesus’ suffering are acknowledged as well as his preoccupation with being raised from the dead.

Paul again emphasises what it really means to be a Christian:

“My pride, **the testimony of my conscience**, is this, *that I have conducted myself* in the world, not by means of any materialist philosophy *but by divine mercy*, in all *innocence and utter sincerity*, especially in my relations with you (2 Cor 1:12)...It is God who has secured (Peshitta: confirmed) both us and you for Christ, who has had us duly signed and sealed (Peshitta: anointed us), and has given us the *advance payment of **the Spirit in our hearts***. *I call God to witness for my life*, that it is to spare you I have not come again to Corinth! Not that I claim any jurisdiction over your faith: I am but a contributor to your happiness. *In faith you have your own standing*. (2 Cor1:21-24) (Emphasis JAG)

According to Paul here, an important practical, human but divine truth is mentioned casually but in my opinion it is of paramount importance in our spiritual development; the Spirit/Christ within should operate intuitively from our conscience if we are “blessedly ripe”, it need not be such a mystical “mystery” except for those totally oblivious of its presence in us! He then proceeds with the essential aspects of being Christian:

- (i) He believes in “divine mercy” and he “conducts himself” from this understanding following the teachings of Jesus, and
- (ii) because God gives “the Spirit in our hearts” to guide us as well as
- (iii) a life that is according to these premises will be “witnessed by God”, and
- (iv) sorry, no third party saviours; you are responsible for your own faith and faithfulness in this process because “*In faith you have your own standing*”.

Here in the next section, we must also read between the lines to recognise Paul’s pet aversion of the laws in books or stone; it amounts to technical compliance, in stead of being in the hearts; functioning from the inner values of truth, justice, kindness and consideration.

“It is plain for all to see that you are Christ’s letter on my behalf, recorded not in ink but in the *Spirit of the Living God*, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of the human heart.” (2 Cor 3:3)...Such is the confidence I have towards God through Christ. It is not that I am adequate in myself to deal with anything as of myself. *My competence comes from God*, who has qualified me to act as an administrator of a *New Covenant, not in letter but in spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit vitalizes.*” (2 Cor 3:4-6) (Emphasis JAG)

The last sentence above also introduces the discussion that follows; to prove that through the gospel of Jesus, but from God, a new spiritual covenant was established which is replacing the outmoded cultic one of Moses but also introduce the principles of the real esoteric teachings.

“For till to-day, whenever Moses is read, *the veil lies upon their mind*. Yet whenever that mind *‘shall be turned to the Lord’* the veil will be taken off (Peshitta: Nevertheless, whenever a man turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away). ‘The Lord’ means the Spirit, (Peshitta: the Lord is that very Spirit) and where the Spirit of the Lord is there is freedom. *So all of us, having our face unveiled to the glory of the Lord, reflecting as in a mirror the same image, **are being transformed from glory to glory**, as from the Lord who is Spirit.*” (2 Cor 3:15-18) (Emphasis JAG)

This passage represents one of the finest descriptions of Paul as to the process that heralds the mature phase of spirituality. It is obvious that Paul argues that Moses and his Cultic covenant is correspondingly, inferior to Jesus' teaching to "turn to the Lord" in a direct personal relationship with God. The following aspects emerge in this description of Paul in that when

- (i) if the mind ( any mind) is turned to God the "veil" hiding the true spiritual principles is lifted; Temple-ism and mediation is replaced with principles of Prophetic Judaism and a direct relationship with God is established that guides our conscience
- (ii) the Lord is Spirit and we are made free from cultic written laws by operation from the Spirit within
- (iii) through receiving the Lord or his Spirit which is One, a new direct understanding of God replaces the cultic mediated or "veiled" one
- (iv) Everyone, who turns to the Lord will then start to see the real Image of God and starts their spiritual growth process of spiritual transformation. This is the faith of the mature pilgrims and must follow on the initial faith which led them through the transition phases of various "Temple cults" or institutional religions and their "faith in laws" to a personal relation with God manifested ideally in its most mature level by pure unbiased awareness and intuition from Conscience.

Although it is fair to say that Paul also saw Jesus Christ as the visible Image of God for us to start realising the real nature of such an Image in mankind in general, a serious concern arises while comparing different translations; two contemporary Afrikaans translations had it that they are transformed not into the image of God but to that of Christ in verse 18 already. This seems to be a fairly common problem with the different "Lord/lord" titles for different worldly and divine realities and the developing dogma to make Jesus God's equal for the benefit of the Pagans. This could never have been acceptable for Paul and Jewish Christians in that era of the development of Christianity. Paul's Christ had a complex of meanings due to his beliefs in the final "happenings". On the one hand, as in his esoteric teachings Christ means exactly the Image of God, the Spirit of God in mankind, or our godly part and do not refer to the physical Jesus. Then in the second coming "the Christ" becomes something of a all powerful Judge and agent of God, which can be very confusing for our normal understanding; at least to those that do not partake in this segment of his beliefs because it has no real intrinsic worth for our spiritual growth except contra productive fear motivation.

Paul elaborates on the problems concerning the advanced teaching and the "veil" that hinders understanding.

“Having this administration, therefore, as mercy has been shown me, I am no shirker, *but have renounced base subterfuges*. I do not use cunning devices, *nor water down God’s Message, but by plain truth make contact with every human conscience in the sight of God*. If my news is veiled at all, it is veiled to those who are perishing, where the god of this world has blinded the perception of the infidels, so that they *should not see clearly the luminosity of the News of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God*. For I do not proclaim myself but Christ Jesus **as Master**, and myself as your servant for Jesus’ sake, because *it is the God who said, “Let light shine out of darkness”, who has illuminated my mind with the luminosity of the knowledge of God’s glory on the face of Christ.*” (2 Cor 4:1-6) (Emphasis JAG)

As minister of the new covenant Paul here again talk about mature religion beyond simple faith as he “renounced the hidden things of shame” (Peshitta) and with the plain truth targeted “every human conscience in the sight of God” and revealed the real core of this phase of belief is the “luminosity of the News” is that “Christ” (not Jesus) is the “Image of God”, but not God! We must note the serious impact on “human conscience” of the true message of God; it is not a “watered down” easy “belief only” issue; our “light must shine in the darkness”. He is our Master and Teacher to attain this glorified state and this precious knowledge or gnosis, comes direct from God who “has illuminated his mind”. What is more important from the above argument to see is that, we all, can partake in this new becoming by “turning to God” and away from dogmatic binding. For so long as any person, group or religious dogma impose beliefs on us or mediates your relationship with God, your religion will be a second hand affair and will not represent your own personal experience with God.

He now openly expounded his esoteric teaching for who ever have ears to hear.

*“We have this treasure in an earthen vessel, however, that the super-abundance of the power may be of God, and not emanate from myself. I am harassed on every side, but not hemmed in; in great straits, but not devoid of resources; hard-pressed, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed, always carrying around in my body the death-state of Jesus, that the life of Jesus may also be evident in my body.* (2 Cor 4:7-10)...For this reason, we do not grow weary; for though our outward man perishes, yet **the inner man is renewed day by day.**” (2 Cor 4:16) (Emphasis JAG)

This reference to the “death-state” of Jesus seems to insider concepts of the initiates, referring to participating through conscience and praxis, in the death to sin and the life in the Spirit that every convert must strive for. This is a very clear statement of Paul’s esoteric teaching that the “earthly” Adam will die gradually but the “heavenly” or spiritual Adam which is the “Image” of God and revealed to us by Christ again, is renewed as we grow spiritually, to conform to this Image that Jesus portraits. One can summarise this process by saying that after the initial weaning period from Temple-ism, the convert enters the cleansing phase where Jesus Christ as the carrier of Gods Image, is the one to imitate, then follows the mature stage were you need do develop your own Image of God to become an enlightened Human Being or Christ-like.

In this process we are responsible for our progress and will be judged accordingly:

“That is why I strive so eagerly, whether present or absent, to satisfy him, for we must all stand revealed before Christ’s tribunal *that each may be required for his bodily actions, whatever he has done, either useful or worthless.*” (2 Cor 5:9, 10) (Emphasis JAG)

In this part of his letter Paul still battles to work out the death of Jesus “for all”.

“Whether I have been ‘raving’, it has been for God, or in my senses, it has been for you; for Christ’s love deeply affects me. *I have reached this conclusion that as one died for all, all then were dead, and he died for all that those who live, should live no longer for themselves but for him who died for them and rose again. From now on, therefore, we know no one in the physical sense. Even if we have known Christ in the physical sense, we do so now no longer.*” (2 Cor 5: 14) (Emphasis JAG)

As Jesus lived a life of loving service to God’s truth and mankind, died and was vindicated by his resurrection, he did so for his followers’ benefit and they must now also die towards their own physical, egoistic orientation and live a life of spiritual dedication. The emphasis is here on living a spiritual life. He died for all so that all are freed from ignorance and the wrong self-identification; we are children of God and in no need for Cultic interventions and least of all for blood sacrificial remedies without any causal relation to behaviour. He died and rose not pacify God but for a new understanding of God and a new spiritual orientation. He then proceeds emphasising that we should then be a new being:

“Consequently, if anyone *is a follower* of Christ he *is a new creation. The old relationships have gone, replaced by the new. It is all God’s doing*, who through Christ has reconciled us to himself. *And he has given us the administration of this reconciliation*, the position being that in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not *charging men’s failings against them, and entrusting us with the Message of reconciliation.* Accordingly, we plead on Christ’s behalf, as though God were entreating by us, *we beg you on Christ’s behalf, ‘Be reconciled to God’.* He made *him who knew no sin* to be as sin for us, that we might be guiltless with God by him.” (2 Cor 5:17-21) (Emphasis JAG)

Here it seems that Paul’s mystical teaching about Jesus and the Christ being the Image of God or the heavenly Adam is again implied. The core of the new “relationships” are spiritual and based on Jesus’ “message of reconciliation”; Jesus in his teaching of the mercy of God and in a direct spiritual relationship with God was addressed directly to the ordinary people while ignoring the Cult management.

This “Christ” “who knew no sin”, is the Image of God, the heavenly Adam, within Jesus and not the physical Jesus or “Christ in the physical sense” who Paul said is not important anymore although he was crucified innocently and did introduce us to the real gnosis from God. For Paul it must have

been a “mystery” that a Human Being must “die” for us to see the truth of God’s mercy and our immortality; he really wanted to solve this mystery for himself and others. That he uses metaphors from their cultic background is unavoidable to get them to new an understanding of a “better” covenant. But it should be clear that his intention is not just a new sacrifice in the context of an outmoded cult. We no longer are physical followers of Jesus but in a spiritual fellowship or in partnership with the risen Christ. By becoming this totally new Being we share with him through our spiritual identity; *“this treasure in an earthly vessel”* that we were meant to manifest again:

“Or what harmony has the temple of God with idols? For you are the temple of the living God; as it is said, ‘I will dwell in them and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people’.... ‘and I will be a Father to you, and you will be my sons and daughters, said the Lord Almighty.” (2 Cor 6:16, 18)

This is the core teaching about the new spirituality that Jesus and Paul want to re-introduce; Paul only refers to the spiritual temple of God which should be mankind itself, as did Jesus and the prophets so taught also, which was directly in opposition to the Temple business in Jerusalem with its cultic management.

So far as the question of a sacrificial interpretation is concerned for this part of his letter, I think Paul is clear again:

“Although I grieved you in the letter, I have no regrets. Even if I had regrets, seeing that the letter in question had to cause you even an hour’s distress, I am glad now, not that you were distressed, *but because you were **distressed into penitence** (Peshitta: repentance), distressed indeed as God like’s to see, so that you were in no way harmed by me. **For pain of the divine kind produce penitence** (Peshitta: enduring repentance) **leading to restoration** (Peshitta: life), not to be regretted; but pain of the world’s kind produces death.” (2 Cor 7: 8-10) (Emphasis JAG)*

A fitting comment from Den Heyer is that Paul was a very creative person and his religious and cultural background made it easy for him to relate to some of the wisdom loving readers in Corinth (2000:160). Against the backdrop of such a comment the procedure emphasised above is central to salvation although it might sometimes begin with a bridging belief in a new final sacrifice at the very beginning of the convert’s spiritual journey. That is to say, that that might be true for a uneducated person living in the first century Roman Empire. In our view the sacrificial notion was not a valid belief of salvation for the Prophets, Jesus and Paul and neither is for a 21<sup>st</sup> century Christian.

#### **9.4.8. Introduction to the letter to the Romans**

Should the dating and order of the letters up to Romans be correct, then Paul already had a fairly good idea of the problem areas in the new religion within its different communities. It seems that he felt a need now to address religious matters in this letter a little more methodically and “theologically”

as to formalise his thinking. We see the same themes again, the 600 plus Jewish “regulations”, should not be part of a universal religion which singular law must only be love of God and neighbour in our life praxis through the Spirit within and by instinctually following Jesus’ teachings on spiritual development.

In his debate about Abraham and his “seed” Jesus, who represents the universal “spiritual” Israel versus Moses and his cultic laws, Paul seems to agree with Assmann who showed us that Moses’ religion is in fact a counter religion in reaction to the Egyptian Temple cult and therefore shares many of its rites only specifying different variations in its regulations. The religion of Moses is therefore a rival to the extravagance of the other Pagan Temple cults although it honours the “real” God and not “idols”. Furthermore, the Abrahamic religion is much “older” than the Mosaic one and predates Moses’ laws by more than 400 years according to Paul. The Abrahamic belief system that Paul favours is therefore very much different to the Mosaic one as we have seen and discussed earlier. Abraham’s belief in a universal God, spiritual not concrete, which is omnipresent and not localised in a Temple; requires a moral life and obedience to Him through a personal relationship and no cultic intermediaries are needed.

As with the Jewish “law”, the faith of Abraham and Jesus is also a complex of beliefs or a system of beliefs, though much simpler and consisting of fewer “necessary” beliefs in comparison with the many of the Jewish Cultic system. The challenge is therefore to unpack the code word “faith” of Abraham and Jesus and to see if Paul differentiates between Moses’ moral and cultural laws. At this stage of our investigation there is no doubt in my mind that Paul regarded the moral laws, now summarised as “loving-kindness” and equated with Jesus’ character, as an essential factor in the salvific process. His numerous statements on the necessity of living a moral life are obviously central to his teaching as well as necessity in his belief system for salvation. The “life in Christ” which also means a life as that taught and lived by Christ cannot be ignored. But the moral imperative does not exclude the, not so spiritual, need of sidestepping the wrath of God when a very differently defined type of “Christ” comes as the feared end time Judge.

Paul’s “Christ” starts to look more and more like Jesus’ “Son of man” as a code word meaning much more than the worldly anointed one. Whether it is related to the other Jewish mystical stories from Ezekiel and Daniel also or only to the Genesis’ creational story is not certain. I personally believe that the Genesis and Ezekiel’s “mysteries” are both compatible with the Son of man or mystical Christ but that Daniel’s Son of Man belongs to the end time Christ as Judge and consists of beliefs that are not central to the soteriological process itself. As this “treasure in an earthen vessel” and “hidden pearl” were universal themes of all mystical traditions one just has to accept Paul will use it as he thinks fit with different audiences.



In Romans he admitted that it was said of him by his rival Judaizing envoys, that he encourages lawlessness and he now wants to disprove their interpretation as incorrect because they lack understanding. It is also seemingly true that some early Christian groups practice weird types of “freedoms” from the law in ways that gave Christianity a bad name in certain areas. This was obviously a real problem and he needed to address various serious moral and behavioural problems that stems from “unripe” or lack of understanding of his spiritual message. Unfortunately it seems that Paul did not get his argument of the law and works of law versus faith clear enough as not to cancel out “excessive” freedom as well as to expel the nonsensical deductions that religious moral behaviour, or fruits of the spirit, were not an essential part of the salvific process.

The use of the word “faith”, simplistically and undefined, as a code word or slogan for a complete belief system seems to be part of the problem as it is not helpful for “outsiders” including some of his readers then and some Christians many centuries later. Up to the last century, we did not really study any new possibilities but accepted the simplistic dogmatic sacrificial interpretation as representing in fact, many really unknown factors in Paul’s concept of “belief”. We did not take seriously the possible existence of other Meta narratives explaining the different beliefs referred to by Paul as well as the processes and rites which constitutes the rich content of this new “faith”.

For Paul the first phase of becoming a Christian is to believe in the “real” God and unfortunately for Gentiles it is the “Jewish” concept of God that is favoured and this fact leads to elitism from the Jewish Christians that also wanted the Christian converts to convert to being “Jews”. This will mean adherence to a vast number of foreign regulations that were not needed for salvation; which must rather to be abolished according to Jesus’ and Paul’s new version of Prophetic Judaism within a classless universal context.

I am not even going to try to make sense of Paul’s peculiar use of various texts from “Scripture” to prove his conclusions and the “fact” that Jesus is the real and only “seed” of Abraham to implement the universal phase of God’s kingdom on earth as I think at this stage that his form of exegesis is understandable only to Paul alone and within his own objectives and audiences. Den Heyer in this regard made the incisive observation that Paul was a man with the awareness of concrete reality and real life experience: “His letters inspired and irritated people because he did not argue in the abstract but contextually (2000:244). The focus for us is rather to see what Paul *wants to tell us* about his beliefs, including his belief in Jesus as well as his beliefs about the salvation process in this “new covenant” of God’s grace and the loving-kindness of their master.

We also need to remember that the spiritual growth process which is demarcated by certain rites should manifest in different behaviour patterns, will be taught differently to Jews and Gentiles as well

as to philosophically informed prospective converts due to their different educational and cultural backgrounds.

We must keep in mind constantly that all Pagan or Gentile converts, except the few already enlightened elite, came from a particular Temple Cultic system of continuous sacrificing and different offers for all kinds of every “sin” imaginable. Some cultic invented reasons motivate people to pay their temple dues, even include selfish forms of motivations through which they can obtain prosperity from their gods. But furthermore, according to Paul and the Jews, the Gentiles believed in “idols”. So they will have to be weaned both from these “idols” also and have to accept the “real” God who shaped the Jews in history. Paul will have to convince Jews and Gentiles that the God of the Jews actually did not favour the Jews because of their “Jewishness” but because they only recognised the “I AM”, the authentic God, at an earlier stage, thanks to Abraham, Akhenaten and Moses.

In his arguments to explain the spiritual principles of the new religion and to oppose the Judaizers, the key role players were Abraham and Jesus. However, both Gentiles and Jews, because of Moses’ influence, need to be weaned from Temple-ism and blood sacrifices. In this process they will need, as a point of departure, a final blood sacrifice; a very special sacrifice, a “person” like the “godly ones” of the Mystery religions; a Son of a God, half human and half God to also accommodate the Greek and Roman belief systems. There is no such clear story from the Hebrew side and Paul will have to adapt some prophetic utterances and combine them with some Jewish sacrificial rites to accommodate this final sacrifice.

Jesus must now fulfil this sacrificial role for the “Pagans” also. For the Jews to be weaned from Temple-ism, a new and final/new Paschal lamb or “scapegoat” offer, need to be made so that they also can progress to a new “spiritual” covenant based on the “faith of Jesus” in a merciful God who accepts repentant individuals that commit to a moral life of loving-kindness driven by God’s Spirit and/or the Image of God from within. We will not discuss known arguments in the text and will look only for confirmations, differences or new ideas.

Den Heyer puts his finger on the socio-religious pulse of Paul’s sense making approach when he states: “Paul, the man of two worlds, knows from his own experience that people can sometimes be ‘drawn into two directions’” (Phil. 1.23) (2000:246). In another sense, one might say that Paul is a man of three worlds when his mystical and spiritual side is included in his battle to merge Judaism with his new brand of Christianity. At least Paul’s comprehensive sense making approach is inclusive of all three of these religious trajectories.

### 9.4.8.1. Paul's letter to the believers in Rome

A reminder is perhaps in order; the method of emphasis applied by the writer in the quotations in the next sections is to use cursive accentuation for important notions pertaining to this thesis and bold print to accentuate core or key concepts.

According to Schonfield (1998: 343) this letter is probably written from Corinth early in AD 57. In Rom 1:14 Paul stated plainly that he was called to bring the gospel to all including Greeks, Barbarians, the wise and unwise.

“Paul, servant of Jesus Christ, a chosen envoy, assigned to the proclamation of God's News, *which he had previously announced by his Prophets in the Sacred Writings*, concerning his Son, Jesus Christ our Master, *born in the physical sense of the line of David*, ( Peshitta: and who came to be known as the Son of God with power and with the Holy Spirit, because he was arose from the dead) ***but potently demonstrated to be God's Son in the sanctified spiritual sense by resurrection from the dead.***” (Rom 1:1-4) (Emphasis JAG)

Here we see that Paul make a distinction between Jesus' physical state and his spiritual nature and coupled the verification of his sonship of God to his resurrection. It affirms the importance of Paul's mystical relationship with Jesus and the importance that he place on the “risen Jesus” as opposed to the Jesus according to the flesh.

“For I am not ashamed of *the News* (Peshitta: gospel of Christ) *it is God's means of deliverance for all who believe, **whether Jews or Gentiles.*** For by it God's justice is revealed by faith, as is stated, ‘*By faith the just shall live.*’” (Rom 1:17) (Emphasis JAG)

If this “faith” is only faith in a new salvific sacrifice then Paul would have said so but is now about the “faith” in “*the News*”; the gospel according to Jesus. Paul said that the process entails speaking or proclaiming the gospel so that the people can believe and then they will be transformed by their beliefs with the assistance of the Holy Spirit of God. It is this use of “faith” as a code word or “shorthand” for the whole belief system as well as the actual process of salvation that is in need of reinterpretation. If however, this “faith” seems to be the exact same belief system of Jesus but now only verified or vindicated by his resurrection which is now proclaimed to the whole world, then the current Christian dogma, is in need of major revision. Obviously Paul now started to realise the majority of potential converts will come from the Gentiles and he will have to sort out the Judaizers for once and for all.

Paul is an exceptional person and he now shows his own spiritual maturity by speaking in such a very mature way about God and the lack of spiritual insight in many, that with small changes in the nature of the idols of today, it is still valid for us.

“But God’s wrath is revealed from heaven *against all impiety and iniquity* of men who **wilfully suppress the truth**, since they are well aware of the facts about God, *for God has made these plain to them* (Peshitta: for God had revealed it to them). For ever since the creation of the world those unseen qualities of his (God), his immaterial nature, power and divinity, could be clearly perceived, apprehended through his works (Peshitta: by his creations). So there is no excuse for them, when being acquainted with God, they have neither praised nor thanked him as God, but have indulged in idle speculations and obscured their senseless minds. Professing to be wise they have behaved with utter folly, *and have converted the glory of the imperishable God into the portrayal of the likeness of the perishable men, birds, four-footed beasts and reptiles*. (The glory of God was tainted by equating Him with idols in the likeness of men and animals) Therefore, God has given them over to their hearts’ desire for depravity, to the abuse of their bodies among themselves, they who have exchanged God’s truth for a lie, and worshipped and served the thing created instead of the creator, blessed be he for ever. Amen. (Rom1: 18-25) (Emphasis JAG)

The idol “in the likeness of men” is still with us it is only the animals that were traded in for more modern variants of idols that mankind has given themselves over to in their ignorance that these idols can bring them “happiness” in their escape from reality. This reference to the wilful suppression of truth that Jesus also alluded to against the religious leaders of his day, is now again becoming an epidemic in certain Christian circles that bluntly and wilfully ignores modern sciences including the developments within the biblical sciences.

Paul further wants the Jews to understand that this problem of the wickedness that followed idolism is not a “Gentile” problem only and that the Jews should not judge them as they participate in the same kind of behaviour.

“Now we know that God’s sentence is a just one on those who have acted in this fashion. Do you reckon, therefore, you who judge those who have acted like this and yet do the same yourself, that you can escape God’s sentence? Or do you affect to scorn the wealth of his consideration, forbearance and long-suffering, **ignoring that God’s consideration is designed to lead you to repentance**, preferring on account of your hard and impenitent heart to store up wrath for yourself in the day of Wrath and disclosure of God’s just doom. He it is who will **‘render to every man according to his deeds’**, *for those who by persistence in worthy actions seek glory, honour and immortality, it will be Eternal life, while for those who are of a contentious nature and will not comply with the truth – but readily comply with falsehood – it will be wrath and anger*. There will be affliction and anguish for every human who engages in evil, first for Jew then for Gentile; *but glory, honour and peace for all who do good, first for the Jew then for the Gentile; **for there is no partiality on God’s part.***” (Rom 2: 2-11) (Emphasis JAG)

This section is very clear and he explicitly declares the mercy of God as preached by Jesus and himself must lead to repentance and a moral life which will lead to immortality and the reverse outcome for evil doers! The process and consequences are clear no easy beliefs are considered in the operational or functional phase for salvation and there is no merit of being Jewish as such.

Now he makes it clearer still:

“As many as have sinned without law shall perish without law, and as many as have sinned under law will be sentenced by law, on the day God judges *the hidden things in men’s lives* by Jesus Christ, according to my presentation of the News. For it is **not the hearers of law who are right with God, but the keepers of law who are exonerated**. When, therefore, such Gentiles as have no law *act instinctively as the Law requires*, these having no law are their own law. *They thus display the operation of that law which is written in their hearts, their conscience endorsing such action, though in the meantime their reasoning faculties may be engaged in a mutual conflict of accusation and defence.*” (Rom 2:12-15) (Emphasis JAG)

Paul, by inference, was not talking even about the cultic law; it is the law of love operating from conscience and from the heart, which will inspire moral behaviour and bring you in the right relationship with God and to salvation. It is not obedience to law performed publicly within cultic observance but kind and rightful living from own conscience in relationship with the Spirit within. The cultic-ethnic laws of nations are obviously not part of God’s universal laws and this obvious distinction is crucial to the correct understanding of Jesus and Paul.

Which beliefs make up Paul’s gospel? In Rom 2:16, (Peshitta translation) Paul says it directly that “God shall judge the secrets of men **according to my gospel by Jesus Christ**” The KJV “God shall judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ according to my gospel.” If Jesus Christ judges it will be in according to the beliefs of Jesus himself in any case! If this is the case then one must also admit that Jesus did not regard his mission as *primarily one of a new blood sacrifice that will erase all believers’ sins* but the evidence shows that the prime reason why God forgave mankind is when they repented and then are sanctified *by living* from “loving-kindness”. The reader must excuse these repetitive discussions of this particular point as it is a core contention in that we need to discern from Jesus and Paul whether a moral life is mandatory in the process of salvation and that it *must* follow conversion or alternatively, is moral behaviour only a result that follows as a token of gratitude for salvation earned already by just believing in a new unique cultic sacrificial remedy as seems to be the majority vote by Christians.

Paul again warns against simplistic “regulation” driven teachers who mislead spiritual infants because their knowledge is but partial truths.

“Now you on the other hand are one *who bears the name of Jew*. You rely on law and boast in God. You are acquainted with his will, and can make clear distinctions, being instructed out of the Law. You are convinced that you are a guide to the blind, a light to those in darkness, a tutor of the backward, a teacher of infants, *because in the Law you have the whole corpus of knowledge and truth.*” (Rom 2:17-20) (Emphasis JAG).

He then starts his argument against their cultic “sure truths” with a very powerful new truth,

“Circumcision is a definite advantage if you observe the law; but if you are a lawbreaker your circumcision is converted to uncircumcision. *So if the uncircumcised person observes the moral principles of the Law (KJV: the righteousness of the law), is it not his uncircumcision to be reckoned as circumcision?* And has not that uncircumcision which is by nature his right, having carried out the Law, to judge you who in spite of both code and circumcision are a lawbreaker? For he is **no Jew who is only one in appearance**, nor is circumcision simply what appears physically. *The real Jew is he who is one internally, and the real circumcision is that of the heart, spiritual not literal, whose praise comes not from men but from God*”. (Rom 2:25-29) (Emphasis, JAG)

No matter which translation you prefer it is obvious that Paul is juxtaposing the moral law and mature spirituality with a cultic-ethnic perspective of being a Jew; it is about “Jewish” ethnicity and he is not even discussing other pure cultic regulations here. The issue is the circumcision of the “flesh” within an old belief system national-religious identity against the belief system from the universal non nationalistic spirituality of Jesus and himself in a new spiritual Kingdom that has absolutely no need for fleshly signs; they are now the new spiritual Israel. The Jews had an advantage as they should by now know the One true God but this advantage is nullified by them making the same moral mistakes as the gentiles and he tried to prove it by linking several different passages in the Psalms and Prophets that bewailed the sinfulness of the Jewish nation. So before the phase of realising your incompleteness and humbling yourself before the mercy of God, all are in the same position and there is no advantage by being a Jew in the flesh or to be within the Jewish Cultic system.

“But now, independent of law, the righteousness of God has been made patent, attested both by the Law and the Prophets, that the righteousness of God, which is *by faith in Jesus Christ, available to all who believe*. (Peshitta: “but the righteousness of God is by the faith **of** Jesus Christ to everyone, also to every man *who believes in him*, for there is no discrimination...”) *There is no distinction; for all have sinned and failed to reach God’s standard.*” (Rom 3:22, 23) (Emphasis JAG)

God wanted a holy nation to bring the rest of the world in this exemplary relationship and not a Jewish Cult with many of their own regulations that do not even serve the bigger purpose. He wants them to understand that belief in the faith of Abraham which is the real precursor to the **gospel of Jesus and the new spiritual covenant** of mercy from love is the only valid option; they will have to accept this new true belief system to become part of the real universal Kingdom of God.

Then follows a section seems to contradict the “spiritual” interpretation of (i) realisation of sinfulness; (ii) repentance; (iii) a radical internal moral makeover (iv) continuous spiritual growth to realise the Image of God and it rather emphasises the simple belief in a new cultic sacrifice?

“These, by God’s mercy, are freely exonerated through the discharge of liability by Christ Jesus, by their reliance on his blood, whom God has appointed as an expiatory sacrifice in demonstration of his righteousness. In God’s forbearance he overlooked the sins of past

generations in view of the demonstration of his rectitude at the present time, so as to be both just himself, and the exonerator of whoever places his faith in Jesus. Where then does boasting come in? It is excluded. By what law? Of works? No, *by a law of faith; for we have reckoned that a man is exonerated by faith independent of legal regulations.* For is he the God of the Jews only, and not of Gentiles? Surely of the Gentiles also, if God is truly One. He exonerates the circumcised by their faith, and the uncircumcised by means of their acquired faith. Are we using faith to invalidate law? God forbid! Rather we are confirming (Peshitta; we uphold) the law.” (Rom 3: 24-31) (Emphasis JAG)

Is this above mentioned seemingly contradiction real? I would argue not, the special sacrificial model is unfortunately a necessary metaphor for the time. Especially at the level of this particular argument which is obviously in the ambit of a cultural-ethnic context of Jewish elitism and evidently Paul’s “opposition” is lacking spiritual understanding from the perspective of a universal One God for all peoples. Both Jewish and Gentile converts to the new Messianic covenant need to make the transition from different ancient cultic Temple-ism to a new direct spiritual relationship with God, and now have to function without the “help” of their different national Temple Cults.

It is obvious that the “Jews” are playing a game of superiority in religious matters and this irritates Paul intensely; not only are they vain and arrogant but they do not even understand the basic differences between a Jewish religion and a universal religion across all ethnic boundaries. The need for a different approach to religion and spirituality that exceeds the Jewish cultural heritage and is spiritual in the authentic human sense of the word transcends the Jewish understanding of the day. The sacrificial metaphors act as bridges in aid of transformative understanding, representing only the corrective first level of beliefs in relinquishing the tribal and cultic religious phase before the mature phase could be introduced. Before this transition is made there can be no real understanding and participating in Jesus’ teaching, life and be initiated in the “death to sin” phase and thereby to share in the “first fruits” of his resurrection from inner spiritual motivation. How can they possibly relate to the Image/Christ within to become a Human Being if they do not even understand the difference between tribal gods to the One Spiritual non warring God? We must never forget that Paul has to keep both contexts and scenarios of the death of Jesus in mind; the cultic one and the esoteric or participative one, when he speaks to mixed audiences of “infants” and spiritually advanced converts. He sometimes even combines the cultic first phase unlearning “sacrificial” propositions with the mature “own cross and death to sin” sacrificial teachings but hopefully they will be understood differently as we have seen from Ken Wilber’s growth model, while the mature brothers and sisters will hopefully help with the contextual explanations.

In the last part of Rom 5, Paul is working towards the argumentation of his esoteric teachings involving the two Adams, Genesis and the Jewish Mystic traditions.

“Never-the-less, death reigned from Adam down to Moses, *even over those who technically had not sinned in a manner corresponding to the transgression of Adam, who prefigured him who was to come....* So then, as a single transgression led to condemnation for all mankind, so equally a single worthy action led to acquittal, spelling life for all mankind.” (Rom 5:18)

Now whether Paul actually believes this last verse in a simplistic literal sense is doubtful if one also considers his enlightened and spiritual teachings. It still can be part of the “purging of the psyche” and transitional sacrificial slogan although the first Adam was created bodily from earthly material but also in the image of God spiritually and therefore timeless and he knew that. I think he is trying to say that Jesus as the Christ is the first person who clearly realised this immortality through his life, teachings, death and resurrection and therefore, only now can all share in it in a *general* more accessible way. The real gnosis from God as manifested in Jesus’ life and teachings are now available to all through his efforts of bringing these truths to us in a unique but real life, death and resurrection. Paul also knew Jesus cannot be the first person who survived this earthly life because this will of course contradict other Old Testament texts.

In Chapter 6 Paul seems to summarise his argumentation from Abraham’s faith before circumcision and that Jesus is his “seed”, who must inaugurate the multinational Kingdom of God. He still battles to defend him against his alleged teaching of lawlessness also and now rephrases his stance to show his seriousness against this “misunderstanding”:

“What are we to say then? Are we to continue in sin that mercy may be magnified? God forbid! ***We who have died so far as sin are concerned, how can we still live in it? Can you be ignorant that those who have become associated with Christ by immersion have become associated with his death? Through this association with him by immersion we are thus united with him in burial, so that as Christ was raised from the dead by means of the Father’s glory, we too should conduct ourselves in newness of life.***” (Rom 6:1-4) (Emphasis JAG)

By the first rite of baptism they also commit to die to sin themselves and identify totally with his death and to follow in his footsteps; “we have died so far as sin is concerned”. Why is it so difficult to convince people that the emphasis in Paul’s letters about Jesus’ death and resurrection is overwhelmingly not about the beginners need for godly sacrifice but a very practical teaching metaphor to instruct them and us in our own spiritual awareness and transformation?

“For if we have become identified with the manner of his death, surely we should be with his resurrection also, **knowing this**, that **our former self has been associated in crucifixion** to dispose completely of the sinful body, that we should **no longer be enslaved to sin**; for *the dead has met all the claims of sin upon him.*” (Rom 6:6)

The “dead” are those that died to sin as Jesus did also. Jesus had to die to himself first to be able die for God’s truths and that momentous decision was finally made in by him in Gethsemane.



Otherwise God's real message of mercy would have died instead if he decided that he rather wants to live than to take on the management of Jewish Temple-ism.

He now further explains the fact that, if the Christian has died to sin with Jesus, how on earth can we still be slaves of the body or sin!

“Therefore do not let sin rule your mortal body by obeying its lusts, nor offer your organs as instruments of iniquity where sin is concerned. *Rather offer yourselves to God as alive from the dead, and your organs as instruments of rectitude to God. Sin shall not have dominion over you, for you are not under law but under mercy.*” (Rom 6:14) (Emphasis JAG)

We have been so thoroughly indoctrinated in dated sacrificial remedies for salvation that we do not notice and understand the refrain of repentance and fruits and spiritual resurrection anymore. Throughout Paul's letters he rebels against Temple-ism represented by his shorthand term for the cultic system, “works of law”, which he constantly contrast with the true spiritual tradition of Pietistic or Prophetic Judaism, as represented by the message of John the Baptist and Jesus, of *personal and direct repentance* to share in God's mercy and live accordingly.

“What then? Shall we sin because we are not under law (read: cultic) but under mercy? God forbid!” (Rom 6:15)...“Thus freed from sin, you have *become enslaved to righteousness*. (I am employing human terms because of the limitations of your physical nature.) For just as you offered your organs as slaves to uncleanness and lawlessness, for (in aid of) lawlessness, so have you now offered your organs as slaves to righteousness, for consecration. (Rom 6; 19)...But now we are severed from the Law, that by which we were being controlled being dead, so as to serve **in a new way of the spirit and not in the old way of the letter.**” (Rom 7: 6) (Emphasis JAG)

This is Paul's “new or inner” man, the old have died to sin! It is far beyond their weaning stage from cultic beliefs; they now live by a new Spirit!

Then Paul reopens the debate again to depict the battle of bad and good within ourselves and concludes that to try and do works of law for salvation, mechanically or from obedience and without a change of heart, is impossible; the answer is only in God's mercy and through the Spirit changing our outlook, orientation and behaviour.

“Thus there is no condemnation whatever for those who are in Christ Jesus; for the **law of the Spirit of Life in Christ Jesus has freed me from the law of sin and death.** For the Law's powerlessness, due to its weakness because of the physical factor, was remedied by God sending **his own Son in the likeness of sinful physical nature.** And as regards sin he *passed sentence on sin in Christ's physical being, so that the Law's claims should be satisfied* so far as we are concerned, **we who do not lead the physical but spiritual life.** For those who are physical are concerned with material matters. **The materialistic mentality spells death; the spiritual mentality spells life and peace.** That is because the materialistic

mentality is hostile to God; for it is not subordinated to God's control, nor can it be. Those who have the physical outlook cannot please God" (Rom 8:1-8). (Emphasis JAG)

One must always bear in mind that Paul's preoccupation with law, sacrifices and justice form a major part in his problems concerning his battle against many cultic regulatory systems but mainly the Jewish one. He wants to explain their errors from all angles and sometimes it seems that his efforts are in vain. Paul, in my opinion have to marry two perspectives of man in relation to salvation through the "Spirit of Life" in "Jesus Christ" **is the** "Son of God" for the benefit of Jew and Gentile. Adam and Jesus the man is composed materially; it is true of us also we are both "physical" and "spiritual" as Human Beings.

The Mosaic covenant is mainly driven by Law-Obedience-Justice or retribution; the new covenant by Repentance-Mercy-Loving-kindness. The Son of God, Heavenly Adam or Spiritual Son had to take on "physical life" in an exemplary, way to rescue us from our spiritual ignorance and again, like many prophets, he will have to die "through" us and "by" us again if he came today, because we do not want to take heed or change our ways. Surely we need to give Paul credit for this spiritual interpretation also which must of necessity follow the sacrificial slogans in his time. On the other hand, is it so difficult to see that an act of physical and blood sacrifice cannot by any stretch of the imagination, fit into any decent, moral and spiritual religious philosophy? If Jesus and God are characterised by mercy and loving kindness respectively, it is an insult to both to couple such a belief to them; it is precisely what Jesus and Paul want to eradicate from their new spiritual orientation.

"If Christ is present in you it means that the body is dead as a vehicle of sin, **but the spirit is alive as a vehicle of righteousness.** And if the Spirit that raised Jesus up from the dead resides in you, then he that raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also **give life to your mortal bodies by the very reason of his Spirit indwelling in you.**" (Rom 8:11). (Emphasis JAG)

This spiritual phase is obviously beyond Temple-ism and Paul time and again, reminded them about the seriousness of remaining in the infant stage and that the immortal Spirit is now already present in their mortal bodies.

*"So then, brothers, we are under no obligation to our physical nature to live on the material plane; for if you live on the material plane you will surely die. Whereas if by the spiritual you put to death the practices of the body you will live; **for it is those who are led by the Spirit of God who are the sons of God.** You have not received a servile spirit, to put you again in fear. It is a final spirit (Peshitta: Spirit of adoption) you have received, whereby we cry 'Abba!' (Father!) **This Spirit joins its witness to our spirit that we are God's children.** And if children, then heirs, **first heirs of God, and then joint-heirs with Christ.** In that case we suffer together so as to be ennobled together also. I personally, count the sufferings of the present*

time as quite unworthy to be compared with the future glory that is to be revealed in us.” (Rom 8:12-18) (Emphasis JAG)

Paul now explicitly says that we should be able to rule our instincts and egos if the Spirit within is operative and then we all are truly children of God. God’s mercy and grace must result in a new spiritual life and any other teaching concerning the mature phase of Christianity is surely wrong and endangers our spiritual growth. Let Paul say it his way:

*“The eager longing of the Creation itself waits expectantly for the revelation of the Sons of God. (Rom 8:19)...For man was made subject to vanity, not willingly, but by reason of him that gave him free will in the hope that he would choose rightly; because man himself will be delivered from bondage of corruption into glorious liberty of the children of God.” (Rom 8:20-21, Peshitta translation) (Emphasis JAG)*

So much for the nonsense about the absolute sinfulness of mankind; we should realise our connectedness to God and therefore through following the spiritual path we can control our natural impulses in a healthy enough way to again becoming children of God as was the intention of God in the beginning. One should also realise that before the stage of realising the spiritual impulses and launching ones inner quest, these lofty ideas about mankind can even seem pathological in the eyes of some. The spiritual journey must be explained from a virtually infinite variety of starting points which include harsh words about our sinfulness in certain cases- it might be even the “normal” starting point for many, but it cannot be the only point of departure or only “truth” about human nature and valid for everyone at any stage of spiritual awareness.

Paul’s belief in Jesus was remarkable and nearly always coupled to the powerful love of Jesus for others that made Paul understand the extent of God’s mercy and love for mankind and how God’s mercy and love should look in the children of God.

*“Yet in all these circumstances we are easy victors through him who has loved us. I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor powers below, nor any other created being, will be able to sever us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Master.” (Rom 8: 38-39) (Emphasis JAG).*

Interesting how Paul keeps on talking about the Christ aspect of Jesus in the present tense and proving his mystical relationship with Christ. Just when one would think he is now done with Israel (the Judaizers and Moses), and Abraham, his seed, faith and law reappear from a different angle! He is obviously adamant to show the Jews that God could have “sons” from the Gentile nations also and that His real wish was that the whole world will repent and turn to God and thereby becoming the real or spiritual Israel. The Judaizers are missing the mark and live in a false security of a misunderstood covenantal relation to God’s real intent for the world.

Paul again wants to indicate the correct process to be followed: (i) Jesus' message of God's mercy and his death and resurrection must be "preached" (on two levels cultic and spiritual participative) (ii) you have to accept it and belief in it as well as have it in your "mind" (iii) live righteously and be saved; "*for belief is by the mind for righteousness, and affirmation is by mouth for salvation.*"

"The Scripture does indeed say, 'Everyone **who believes in Him** will never come to grief'. There is no distinction between Jew and Gentile: the same universal Lord is sufficient for all who invoke him, 'for all who **invoke the name of the Lord** will be saved.'" Rom 10:8-13).

As I understand this last verse, this is again one of the classic confusions with the different "Lords" as with believing "in" Jesus. The "scriptures" can only mean Jewish scriptures at this stage and note the same phrases of "beliefs in" and "invoke his name" is used of God and surely did not mean anything else as being faithful and active followers of God; no chance for it meaning only passive beliefs are sufficient. From verse 11, "for all who invoke the name of the Lord will be saved"; the saving is from God not by Jesus although we know this through Jesus' teachings about God how one can again come in the right relationship with God without cultic intervention.

The need of the Gentiles for a new and more enlightened God than their own Pantheon delivered have resulted in deifying Jesus in certain communities and perhaps resulted in multiplying many double barrel concepts that steadily led to new concepts and translations. But of course, "confesses Jesus Christ" in verse 9, also can mean invoking and adhere to his teachings as we have learned. One also sometimes feels that Paul really just rants on with novel ideas without thinking of what his so called arguments, might mean to the vast variety of listeners and readers who eventually have to make sense of it; most of whom did not even have an interest in the Torah or his peculiar exegesis thereof.

Paul is adamant to "prove" that now, as in Elijah's time, God saved by grace and "faith". The difficult question is, why only a few people seek God, is answered by Paul through his belief in pre-selection consisting of those who respond to the call of God. This belief in "predestination" stems from a foundational belief of Paul that God is a God of order and therefore nothing is left to chance; there must be an explanation and he is always willing to offer one.

"Or are you unaware of what the Scripture says in the person of Elijah, where he speaks to God about Israel, saying '*Lord, they have killed your prophets, thrown down your altars, and I alone am left, and they seek my life*'? But what does his Interlocutor say to him? '*I have reserved for myself seven thousand men, who have not bent the knee to Baal*'. Just so at this present time by a merciful choice there is a remnant. *If it is by mercy it is no longer by deeds, otherwise mercy would no longer be mercy* (Rom 11:2-6). (Emphasis JAG)

The total misuse of this verse and the glorification of only certain texts consisting of Paul's beliefs and words is one of the biggest problems with Christian dogma on salvation. Paul wanted to bring across the fact the Mosaic covenant and obedience to laws is not the reason why God chooses the "remnant" but through mercy and their belief in the real God and by living in piety within the prophetic tradition. It should now be obvious that salvation according to Jesus and Paul is normally not a belief in one happening in history but a complex growth process and of course, every argument about the salvation process will start with a pre-understanding of a merciful God but who demands loving kindness as a life guiding orientation, in return. Mankind is supposed to be God's own creation and from which texts in the Torah or within Pharisaic Judaism, did Paul get this fancy idea of election and selective predestination? In my opinion it is simply his effort to explain the reality of so few people who manifests spiritual inclinations on earth and perhaps fighting the gentile Gnostics ideas that a lesser god is the reason of the unspiritual phenomena. The term "elect" was also a commonly used to identify spiritual initiates in some Essenic groups as seen from the Dead Sea Scrolls.

Despite the explanation above one has to recall that deep inside Paul he also regarded the Jews as a special "elected" group by God. Through Abraham onwards, they at least recognised the "real" God which were simultaneously the starting points of his new religious convictions. Den Heyer puts it emphatically, "the Gentile-Christian community is not viable without the Jewish Christian tradition...the Jewish Christians is still the elect people of God but even that part of the people which has turned away from Jesus Christ is not lost for ever." As an apocalyptic writer he also writes to "encourage the 'elect.'" (2000:261)

The issues implicit in this "belief" about election are therefore much more complex; we were created to be like God in certain aspects and with virtually unlimited potential for personal variations. From a human perspective we have a wonderful capacity to think, allowed free will and inherited strong survival instincts. Lastly and hopefully we have an urge to understand life and give meaning to our existence, all these are given to us by God and surely cannot make us evil if we stumble! We can miss the mark, be ignorant, childish, and unripe; do insensitive and wrong things but, it is possible to change and we should change, this is what Jesus' and Paul's message is all about. This is also the opinion of the all Wisdom literature as well as Pharisaic and Prophetic Judaism according to many scholars as we have seen above. So dogmatic reasoning to conclude the salvation process with a primordially elected group and a simplified "faith and grace through sacrifice" slogan is not only wrong but totally irresponsible from a spiritual and moral perspective. It is also ridiculous from the perspective of the overwhelming evidence of Jesus' and Paul's focus on ethical and moral issues. Paul should perhaps on certain points just conceded that the mysteries of God is too high to come by even for him and so must we all.

When I once asked one young Protestant minister in the process of completing his doctoral studies of the church I once belonged to, why do they neglect the moral teachings of Jesus and Paul and concentrate so much on church dogma, his answer was “not to moralise to much and thereby undermining the teachings of Gods mercy”! So, Paul warns us also,

“Mark, then, the kindness and severity of God; severity towards those branches which drooped, **kindness to you**, provided **you continue to merit his kindness.**” (Rom 11:22) (Emphasis JAG)

Paul constantly battled with the problems of the “unbelief” and lack of “understanding” of his message by “Israel of the flesh” and tried to show that the end times were dependent on Jesus’ coming and the gathering in of the Gentiles. This is an obvious element of Paul’s belief system and is coupled to his belief in the eminent second coming. These beliefs made his theology a bit one-sided from a this-worldly perspective; if the end is not coming so soon one would perhaps give a little more attention to the sustainability of Gods new Kingdom on earth. These beliefs of Paul and others, need perhaps to be acknowledged and revised as dated ANE ones from ancient traditions and were taken over by Paul as they do still encourage a view dominated by future happenings and have the effect that Christians tend to wait on God and Judge “Christ” to tackle evil in this world?

“I would not have you ignorant of this secret, brothers, in case you should ‘give yourselves airs’, that partial immobility has come to Israel until the full complement of Gentiles has come in; and so all Israel will be saved, as it is stated, ‘The redeemer will come out of Zion: He will banish ungodliness from Jacob. For this is my covenant with them, when I take away their sins.’” (Rom 11:25-27).

I respect Paul’s beliefs in these matters but it is sure some of his uses of Scripture for “Christian” interpretations should be contested today.

Note that it is God who is the “Caller” and who initiates acts of grace.

“As regards the News they are out of favour for your sakes, but as regards the Choice (election) they are dear to God for the Patriarchs’ sake; for *God never goes back on his acts of grace and his calling*”. (Rom 11:28, 29) (Emphasis JAG)

Paul seems to try to reconcile man’s freedom of choice with the few spiritually inclined people on earth and God’s “election” with the “mystery” of God? He is totally aware that no human being could understand God or his plans but do believe that certain “intelligent” deductions can be made from scripture, history and reason. These beliefs, including his ideas on the mystical Christ and the eminent second coming of the judging “Christ” is, in my opinion, in order if one just keeps in mind that these beliefs of Paul are still on the level of beliefs only and can not literally be “God’s own

Words” or his “final plans” as Christian dogma would have it to be. To my mind such proclamations by any person in whatever Book, including in Paul’s revered letters must be classed as bordering on blaspheme. We will ever know what Jesus really said about God’s plans as all his sayings were second person interpretations at best, but I have a hopeful-need to believe, that through Jesus’ esoteric message, God through his Spirit, keeps us on a “need to know for personal growth basis” only and that Jesus would not have succumbed to these outlandish prophesies on God’s behalf.

Paul then correct himself with more humble beliefs,

“For God included all men in (their) disobedience, that he might have mercy on every man. (Rom11:32, Peshitta translation)...O the depths of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgements, and *his ways past finding out!* For who hath known the mind of the Lord? Or who has been his councillor? ... For of him, and through him, and to him, are all things: to whom be glory for ever. Amen.” (Rom 11:33-36) (Emphasis JAG)

I have read somewhere that Plato’s also thought that God *was “past finding out”*? I personally think that Paul knew all worthwhile philosophical and metaphysical traditions of his time and could and did therefore, also argue his new “gospel” on virtually every level of understanding. But if God is past understanding how can he and so many “Prophets” and “traditions” know so much of His future plans? The point I want to make in my otherwise, genuine appreciation of Paul and the spirituality that he wants to midwife into his converts, he is also just a very special spiritual pilgrim himself who had the unique privilege to learn from a greater Master. Is it not prudent in our day to accept these end time “prophesies” as historically “real” for the ancient people and in their time only, but to regard them as somewhat arrogant as they may be putting men’s words in the mouth of God. What is their productive spiritual value for Jesus’ and Paul’s esoteric message and our spiritual growth in any case; they only predict terrible judgements for some and halos for others some time in the future.

Paul in Chapter 12, again emphasises their moral commitments based on Jesus’ teachings, but one can take note of his insightful reference to their bodies as “living sacrifice” and as their religious duty as a more spiritually helpful application of the sacrifice metaphor.

“I exhort you, therefore, brothers, by God’s tender mercies, *to offer your bodies as a holy living sacrifice well-pleasing to God, which is your plain religious duty.* Do not accommodate yourselves to the age we live in, but ***transform yourselves by a mental renovation***, so that you are competent to determine what is the good, well-pleasing, and perfect will of God.” (Rom 12:1, 2) (Emphasis JAG)

I think this is actually the most correct way of interpreting his beliefs. The cultic sacrifices should now be replaced by the transforming yourself by mental renovation towards true spirituality and the new sacrifice is now to be of service to God’s kingdom and here is how it is done:

*“Let love be unfeigned. Repudiate what is evil. Cleave to what is good. In brotherly love be affectionate to one another. In honour give precedence to one another. In diligence do not be backward (Peshitta: “be not slothful in business”). In spiritual matters be ardent. Be willing slaves to the Master, joyful in hope, patient in affliction, persevering in prayer, sharing in provision for the necessities of the saints, **ready** with hospitality (Rom 12: 9-13). (Emphasis JAG)*

Interesting comments by Schonfield (1998:363) on verse 14, KJV: “Bless them who persecute you: bless and curse not” he prefers; “Bless those who are so **ready**: bless and curse not.” Because he says that the alternative rendering “those who persecute” is unsuitable in the context. The same word “ready” has just been used in association with hospitality. This might again be an indication that it is worthwhile only to bless the spiritually “ready” enemies, not those still “physically inclined” because they will at best, not really understand why you are blessing them or they might even ridicule you or at worse, think you insult them through ridiculing them.

Again Paul shows he takes moral behaviour very seriously and in totally in harmony with Jesus’ teaching:

*“If possible, where it rests with you, be at peace with everyone. Do not avenge yourselves, dear friends, but give anger a wide berth, for it is stated, ‘Vengeance is mine, I will requite, says the Lord’. Rather, ‘If your enemy is hungry, feed him, if he is thirsty, refresh him; for by so doing you will fill him with remorse’. Do not be overcome by evil. But overcome evil by good” (Rom 12:18-21).*

From this it is not difficult to see who Paul’s teacher was. However, Den Heyer reminds us that “scripture and tradition had taught Paul that the relation between God and human beings was venerable” (2000:266).

In chapter 13 Paul advised them not to get into trouble with the authorities as Roman law was generally held in high regard because it brought in a good measure of stability and freedom to most people especially travellers. What is noteworthy is that he also agrees with Jesus on the centrality of loving kindness as the fulfilment of the law thereby indicating again which laws he revered and which he thinks is now unnecessary and even contra productive. It is clear from this section; Paul’s ideas on following “regulations” and “Works of Law” are not references to the moral laws.

*“Owe nothing to anyone except regard for one another; for he who shows another love has met all the requirements of law. ‘You are not to commit adultery, you are not to murder, you are not to steal, you are not to covet’, and whatever other commandment there may be is summed up in this, ‘You are to love your neighbour as yourself’. He who loves his neighbour will never do him an injury: *so love is the sum total of law*” (Rom 13:8, 9).*



Apart from the fact that the human Paul got at least his timing of the second coming wrong it is interesting that he uses the Gnostic and Greek terminology of “awaken from sleep” to denote their latent spirituality or “deadness”.

“This further, because I know that it is high time for you to awaken from sleep; for our deliverance is much nearer than when we believed. The night is far advanced.” (Rom 13:11-12).

The final verse in this chapter is becoming his new slogan for the second phase of Christian development and is indicative of the level of identification with Jesus he wanted them to strive for. “But *clothe yourself* with our Lord Jesus Christ, and disregard the lust of the flesh.” (Rom 13:14) (Emphasis, JAG)

In chapter 14, Paul makes the following comments,

“Associate with the man who is weak in faith, but not for controversial arguments. For one believes he may eat anything, while another of weaker calibre keeps to a vegetarian diet.” (Rom 14:1).

Here again we see that the “weak” in faith are those that do not understand that God made everything and no human regulations are applicable to what you can and cannot eat or do. The mature in “faith” know you can eat everything while giving thanks to God. Three remarks are in order, the first as discussed the level of understanding differs and the using of “faith” as a collective term for a complex phenomena, in this case it most probably means that dietary and cultic regulations is a special case in the belief system of the “weak in faith”. The second is the specific mentioning of a vegetarian diet as we saw in the section of Jewish Christianity that they were mostly vegetarians. Now this is improbable that it was so for health reasons; to the contrary, some of them had such an aversion to sacrifices that in their gospel “to the Hebrews”, as mentioned earlier, it is quoted that God will not withdraw his wrath from the Jews if they do not stop sacrificing! Paul obviously does not share this aversion for meat. What seems to be true is that Paul was also no fan of the Temple Cult or its sacrificial system and it is very unlikely that the Jewish Christians would ever regard any blood sacrifice as the prime remedy to appease God’s wrath.

Paul then further explains his view on other unnecessary laws or regulations,

“One man distinguishes one day above another, while someone else treats all days alike. *Each must fully satisfy his own mind* (Rom14:5). (Emphasis, JAG)

A clear indication that certain things is left up to the “beliefs” of the individual to decide but all factors should be considered in your choices. Paul then restates his belief in Jesus as his Messiah that will

come back and judge the people on behalf of God so that every tongue will make “full confession to God” (Rom 14:11). “So then each of us then must render an account for himself to God” (Rom14:12). “I know and am convinced in the Lord Jesus that nothing is impure in itself, but if someone considers anything to be impure, for him it is so” (Rom 14:14). But you must consider your “weaker” brother and do not let beliefs in regulations keep you from acting from loving-kindness.

Paul then sums up the issue of the value of regulations and the real law in a brilliant way; it is not about silly beliefs but a loving spiritual orientation in the service of the Kingdom:

“For the Kingdom of God is *not food and drink, but righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit*. Whoever in such matters, serves Christ, is both well-pleasing to God and agree-able to men.” (Rom 14:17, 18). (Emphasis JAG)

The last part of verse 23 makes for very interesting translation variations “For whatever is not done from *conviction* (Peshitta and KJV: faith?) is sin.” This also to my mind opens a window on Middle Eastern thinking and the understanding and use of the word faith as a complex term which sometimes include the concepts of conviction or of faithfulness as actions from faith? It is true that faith and conviction can be seen as near to each other, even as synonyms but faith can be less concrete and conviction could be considered opinion or faith that stems from own conviction or experience; a personally and internally qualified belief. So to contrast “regulations” with “convictions” or inherent faithfulness would make Paul’s argument much clearer to me.

In the following text, Paul gives us an interesting insight into his belief system concerning Jesus:

“Therefore associate with one another for the glory of God, just as Christ associated himself with you (Peshitta: *just as Christ brought you close to the glory of God*). For I say that Christ became a representative of circumcision, as God’s honour required, so as to make good his promise to the Patriarchs, and that the Gentiles should praise God for his mercy (Rom 15:8) (so that all Gentiles and nations can praise God)... May the God of hope so fill you with joy and peace in believing, that you overflow with hope *by virtue of the Holy Spirit!*” (Rom 15:13) (Emphasis JAG)

So what are the active principles of these beliefs that bring hope, joy, and peace? In this context it seems to be their believing in God and his mercy to include Gentiles also; if they accept Jesus’ message to repent and turn to God as the Ninevites did when Jonah brought them the warning to repent. We will also have to try to understand in what way Paul’s concept of the Holy Spirit differ from the Spirit of God or the Christ Spirit or the Spirit within man as the Image of God to eliminate unnecessary interpretive mistakes. It seems to me that the first two are treated as the same and the last two goes together?

Now Paul says what the important characteristics of a mature spiritual group are. “Naturally, I personally am completely convinced of you, my brothers, that you are the very soul of kindness, fully provided with all essential knowledge, and most competent to admonish one another” (Rom 15:14).

Firstly, “the very soul of kindness”; secondly, “fully provided with all essential knowledge”; lastly, competent to judge what are core beliefs and what are nonessential regulations. These ideal requirements will hold for any society in any period of time and lies at the core of any peaceful, decent and free society. To think that Paul in his spiritual practice stood for illogical beliefs, moral freedom and effortless salvation is just totally wrong.

In the last part of his letter he again reiterates in broad strokes his personal version of his Messianic beliefs without any details to consider except that he seems to be the one who is be able to correctly interpret the relevant Prophetic Scriptures:

“Now to him who can establish you in accordance with my presentation of the News and the proclamation of Jesus Christ in accordance with the revelation of the mystery for long ages kept secret, but now disclosed through the Prophetic Scriptures by order of the Eternal God, and made known to all nations to procure their loyal submission, to the only wise God be praise through Jesus Christ for ever and ever. Amen.” (Rom 16:24-27).

Paul ends again in his familiar fashion but it is a pity that some translations use “grace” in the place of “loving-kindness” as it confuses the theological use of “grace”, as mercy, normally attributed to God, with quite another characteristic of Jesus or God. “The loving-kindness of our Lord Jesus be with you all.” (Rom 16:27)

#### **9.4.9. Preface to Paul’s Second Series Letters**

Schonfield (1998: 373) says that,

“We are without the assistance of the *Acts* for knowledge of the close of Paul’s life, we have to depend entirely on what can be gleaned from the second series of letters, those written from Rome. From these it is clear that, although confined under guard in a rented apartment while waiting for his case to be heard, Paul had full freedom of communication and the ministrations of his friends to solace him. Paul had enemies inside the Christian community as well as outside, who worked against him, and the first hearing of his case was indecisive.”

Schonfield also believes that Paul did not leave Rome and that his death was not later than the Spring of AD 64. The Great Fire of Rome for which the Christians were held responsible took place late in that year. The order and dating of the letters of this period has been governed by this hypothesis. Schonfield (1998: 373) states that many scholars have also drawn attention to the differences of style and vocabulary in some of the letters compared with the earlier ones, and in

those to Titus and Timotheus (1), to evidence of advanced Church government, thus throwing doubts on the Pauline authorship. Some would say that Pauline material has been worked up by other hands. The arguments for some posthumous editing are very strong, but not conclusive.

As scholars are now more certain about the authorship of some letters we want to assume that the others are related to “the Pauline school of thought” and will be discussed in what follow hereafter. These include the Pastoral letters. While we accept that the letter to the Hebrews is from another hand than Paul, it operates in a similar sense making sphere as Paul and it is therefore an important letter with regard to the soteriological views of early and present day Christianity. The letter to the Hebrews is therefore included in this study.

Schonfield correctly remarked that, what is notable about the letters to Philippi and the Asian communities are their mystical passages, where “Paul” employs Jewish (Essene and Pharisee) occult doctrine to describe the nature of Christ and his relationship with the Church. Schonfield is also convinced that Paul in his youth had been an adept in one branch of this doctrine, the *Mystery of the Creation* (from *Genesis*.) Unfortunately these sources have largely been neglected by Christian exegetes and theologians, who thus have very largely failed to comprehend Paul's concepts. It is hoped that the present rectification will be of service. I therefore include some of his notes on this topic and hopefully this could help us understand Paul's mystical beliefs (1998:373).

#### **9.4.10. To the Community at Philippi**

Estimates of the dating of this letter is that it was probably written from Rome about AD 61-2. Paul addresses their spiritual growth and he is hoping that they will still grow in wisdom and in the fruits of the spirit.

“God is my witness how I long for you with all the yearning of Christ Jesus! And so it is my prayer that *your love may bring you ever deeper insight and perception in distinguishing points of difference*, that you may be unalloyed (KJV: sincere) and untarnished till the Day of Christ, laden with the fruit of rectitude that comes through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God.” (Phil 1:9-11) (Emphasis JAG)

The theme of growth is again obvious and fruits of their integrity should prove their progress.

In this letter we can see there are still people that dispute his brand of Christianity but he is more at ease, because this community seems to be already settled and knew “right from wrong”; although his adversaries had slightly different objectives and he points out that, “whether in pretence or sincerity, Christ is proclaimed” as more important than minor differences.

“So if there is any encouragement in Christ you can give me, any consolation of affection, any fellowship of spirit, any deep concern and compassion, do fill me with the joy of it. So that in thus thinking alike, having the same affection, *being kindred souls with a common viewpoint*, there will be no trace of rivalry, *no trace of self-importance, but only that humility of mind which regards others as superior to one’s self, each studying not his own interests but those of his fellows.*” (Phil 2:1-4). (Emphasis JAG)

These are very difficult and advanced moral directives, which implies working towards a definitive victory over the ego and false ego identification as well as a deepening of the spirit.

“*Let your disposition, indeed, be that of Christ Jesus, who though he had godlike form, did not regard it as a prize to be equal to God, but divested himself, taking the form of servant. Appearing in human likeness, and disclosed in physical appearance as a man, he abased himself, and became subject to death, death by the cross. That is why God has so exalted him, that at the name of Jesus every knee, heavenly, earthly and infernal, should bend, and every tongue acclaim Jesus Christ as lord, to the glory of God the Father.*” (Phil 2:5-11) (Emphasis JAG)

This seems to be a sort of a refrain or song as we already came across these ideas in previous letters. As we have seen that Paul, as a Jew and as Christian definitely did not regard Jesus as God’s equal and that Paul’s mystical concepts of his Messiah or heavenly Adam, Image of God could be described as a special godly being in the service of God in the earthly sphere, the words “*equal to God*” is perplexing at this stage of dogmatic development. These types of statements about the godliness of Jesus were generally accepted concepts of enlightened people and initiates from the Mysteries as well as within Platonic philosophy and could be utilised especially if he was addressing converts from Paganism outside the ambit of Jewish mysticism. He continues to affirm his opinion on ranking in that Jesus as Christ must be their king, leader and lord but still to the “glory of God the Father”. We must never forget that Pagan converts, from any previous religious orientation, were not interested in a Jewish Messiah but rather in a new religion with a more enlightened and moral godhead in relation to their old religion. Paul’s wordplay here can nevertheless be explosive and contra productive to his Jewish hearers, if this was indeed his own original word choice.

We again encounter powerful moral directives directly coupled to salvation but made feasible by God through the quickening of the Spirit within.

“Therefore, dear friends, as invariably you have been obedient, not only when I have been present, but much more credible now in my absence, *earn your salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who is prompting you both to want and to carry out what is well-pleasing.* Do everything without murmuring or argument, *that you may be irreproachable and faultless, blameless children of God* in the midst of a ‘perverse and crooked generation’, in which you shine out like luminaries in the dark universe, radiating a message of Life, my proud

proof on the Day of Christ that I have neither striven nor toiled in vain.” (Phil 2:12-16) (Emphasis JAG).

Paul’s moral imperatives even now include earning your salvation with fear and trembling and to be blameless before God quite a radical stance?

Paul then again warns this group also again against the “circumcisers” in the form of Jewish tribalism and the “Dogs” meaning Pagan immoral people. The circumcision of the heart is important; *“It is we who are the Circumcision, we who are in service to God’s Spirit and exult in Jesus Christ, and place no reliance on the physical, though I could well do so”* (Phil 3:2, 3). (Emphasis, JAG) Although he is also a Jew, it is obvious that Paul again is keeping the different groups in mind as the Judaizers, vulnerable new converts and the mature Christians that are in service of God’s Spirit and beyond the beliefs of the ideology of ethnic superiority.

Now Paul again tackles the rival teachings concerning Jewish regulations in no uncertain terms but in the process, gives a very good account of his mature belief system.

“But the very things that were an asset to me, these I regard as a dead loss where Christ is concerned. Indeed I definitely regard everything as a dead loss *because of **the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my lord, for whom all** (unnecessary beliefs) **is well lost and I regard it as so much rubbish, that I may gain Christ, and be found in him,*** not with my own rectitude which derives from law, but with that which is through faith in Christ, *the rectitude which derives from God on a basis of faith. **My concern is to know him, and the power of his resurrection, to have kinship with his sufferings, entering as closely as possible into the manner of his death,*** if by any means *I may attain the resurrection from the dead.”* (Phil 3:7-15) (Emphasis, JAG)

Here the obedience to regulations of the old belief system is very explicitly discarded as even rubbish, in favour of the mature teaching of participation in Jesus’ death. That does not mean that Paul is perfect yet, the important thing is to make constant spiritual progress.

“There is no question of *my having already been perfected.* But I pursue, if I may but overtake, even as I was overtaken by **Christ Jesus.** Brothers, I do not recon myself to have overtaken as yet. But there is this at least, forgetting what lies behind, and reaching out to what lies ahead, ***I drive hard at the mark for the prize of God’s high calling in Christ Jesus.*** Let those who *would be perfect* be thus minded; but if you feel differently God will surely make this plain to you. *The main thing is, to whatever extent we have forged ahead, to keep on the same course.”* (Phil 3:7-15) (Emphasis JAG)

Paul again spells out the objectives and processes involved: His objective is to be Christ-like and therefore be resurrected like Christ. To attain this he has the mystical spiritual goal to *“gain Christ, and be found in him”*. How will he materialise his spiritual goals; I give my opinion of Paul’s understanding, in brackets.

- To know Jesus as the Christ (Anointed messenger of God about godly wisdom or spiritually, as the godly factor in mankind, heavenly Adam, Image of God)
- To partake in his sufferings (which also implies some background or insider knowledge; to overcome personal vices *and* the suffering coming from the wrath of the Cults and rulers)
- The power of his resurrection (which implies some advanced teachings; vindication for Jesus life and teachings; mankind's' spiritual immortality now proven possible by his resurrection and the immortal Christ within). Den Heyer makes it clear that Paul's vision is a key to the understanding of his view of Jesus as the Christ. Paul's vision "revealed the crucified Jesus had been raised from the dead by God. In an unexpected way 'curse' was turned into 'blessing (Gal. 3:13) (2000:263).
- To enter as closely as possible into the manner of his death (also implies insider knowledge and most likely an associate rite; to die to the world- curtails the egos' freedom to exercise unnecessary power and to advance only own interest; followed internally, by the birth of Christ within and externally – "be passers by" in a world that will always be hostile to spiritual and moral truths.)

He then made it clear that this is a difficult process and not a "happening" from belief. He even insinuates that he might be not only competing with himself but even with Jesus Christ and that "I drive hard at the mark for the prize of *God's high calling in Christ Jesus*"; he sees the life of Christians as a calling from God coupled to the example of Christ Jesus. Long pass the initial believers stages; this is praxis to even become "perfect". We also have seen that the other meaning of the word "perfect" in Aramaic is "whole" or a fully integrated human being or the Human Being as the "son of man", if you will. It is also interesting that this passage and translation also accommodate the idea that "Christ" is the godly Spirit in Jesus that Paul wants to quicken in himself and Jesus Christ is his earthly and spiritual master.

Then Paul encourages them to strengthen their belief in God and Jesus and to behave accordingly, which will result in a wonderful peace that comes from experiencing that spiritual truths sets you free and you can experience a reconciliation with God.

"Rejoice in the master always. I repeat, rejoice! Let your moderation be known to everyone. The Master is at hand. Have no anxiety, but always make your requests known to God by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving; *and God's peace, which towers above all*

*reasoning, will stand guard over your minds and thoughts in Christ Jesus.” (Phil 4:7) (Emphasis JAG)*

The way in which the last three words, “in Christ Jesus” is sometimes used also seem to mean “as taught by Jesus” or “from the belief system of Jesus the Christ” as indicated by Errico and Lamsa earlier?

“Finally brothers whatever is honest, whatever is reputable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is likeable, whatever is elevated., if there *is something virtuous or laudable, concentrate on such things. Practice all you have learnt* and received and heard and seen in me, and the God of peace be with you.” (Phil 4:8) (Emphasis JAG)

A hard act to follow but coupled to verse 13 to bring in some modesty; “I can do all things through Christ which strengthen me”. Here again Christ, seems to be the godly principle and he is not using Jesus Christ the example and master. On the personal level, “May the loving-kindness (KJV: grace) of the Lord Jesus Christ be *with your spirit.*”(KJV: with you all) (Phil 4:23) (Emphasis, JAG)

#### **9.4.11. Letter to the community in Ephesus**

This letter is regarded as a Deutero-Pauline letter and here he again please read Paul as a “Pauline writer” from the “the Pauline school of thought. This letter discusses versions of basic, mystical as well as “end time” beliefs. It is obvious that the audience here is predominantly Gentile as Paul is painting his picture in the language of the Mysteries and the mystical Christ and the end time divine Christ as judge and ruler are brought into focus.

“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed *us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly spheres in Christ, just as in him God made a choice of us in love before the universe was founded,* that *we should be holy and blameless in his presence.* For he *designated us in advance for adoption as his own through Jesus Christ,* as it pleased his will, to the great renown of his loving-kindness with which he has favoured us in the Beloved. In Christ we have redemption by his blood, absolution from transgression, *by virtue of the wealth of loving-kindness which God has lavished upon us, in having made known to us in all wisdom and understanding,* as it pleased him, the secret of his intention, which he purposed in Christ, for the ultimate Government when he shall have brought everything under Christ’s jurisdiction both in heaven and on earth.” (Eph 1:3-10) (Emphasis JAG)

Paul’s mystical Christ is part of the heavenly spheres and obviously part of God’s intent for mankind from the beginning so that “**we** can be” blameless in his presence. This heavenly Son manifested in Jesus Christ on earth and he leads us all through his loving-kindness to adoption by God to regain our original spiritual nature and therefore connecting us again to the heavenly spheres. But he also died for us in a final cultic sacrifice to end the old covenantal era. God has through Christ made



known to them the wisdom, understanding and secrets. It is obvious that he are talking to predominantly gentile converts. Christ also has a specific leadership role in the final episode according to Paul. Christ seems to be linked also to the Daniel Son of Man, as Schonfield expected.

Here again we encounter Paul's shorter formula; Hearing, believing, participation through the Holy Spirit that is operative now in the Gentiles also.

“In him (Christ) also you (the Gentiles) after hearing the Message of Truth, the News of your salvation, and after believing in him, were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise which is the advantage payment on our inheritance, the promise to redeem what was purchased, to God's great renown.” (Eph 1:13-14)

He then follows that up with clues to the functioning of the mystical growth process and one now can see how easily the mystical Christ can become the divine Jesus Christ to the pagan mind in these “end time prophesies”.

“Consequently, I too, having heard of the faith you have in the Lord Jesus, which is common to all the saints, never cease giving thanks on your account, making mention of you in my prayers, **that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ**, the Father of glory, *may give you a spirit of wisdom and revelation to acquire knowledge of him. I pray that with your mental vision illumined you may know the nature of the hope of God's calling, what the glorious wealth of his inheritance in the saints is and the surpassing extent of his power available to us who have believed.* This was indicated by operation of the **mighty force God employed with Christ in raising him from the dead** and seating him at his right hand in the heavenly spheres high above every entity that has existence not only in this world but in that which is to come. He has indeed ‘put everything under his feet’, and over and above has given him headship of the Community, which is his Body, *the full dimension of him who fills the entire universe*” (KJV: of him that filleth all in all). (Eph 1:15-23) (Emphasis JAG)

It is again obvious that the core message that Paul wanted to emphasise is this “mighty force” of God by *raising* Jesus from the death; it is not his death that is central to Paul's teaching because it was to be expected, but his resurrection. This resurrection is now available to all Christians and also their new inheritance through the groundbreaking work and teachings of Jesus Christ. To be a Christian is a formidable calling and your mental vision must be illumined with the wisdom and insight from God resulting in a life of loving-kindness as its praxis. The returning victorious Christ is now getting a life of his own and unfortunately for the Jewish Christians, can slowly take over the religious landscape.

Paul then repeats the core ideas using the popular mystical-philosophical terminology in use at the time and made popular by the Gnostics.

“You [Gentiles] too *were once dead in the trespasses and sins* in which you lived in conformity with the Aeons of this world, the Archon of the government of the lower atmosphere, the spirit of him who now animates the Children of Disobedience. We likewise [all we Jews] were once

tarred with the same brush in the indulgence of our physical passions, fulfilling our physical desires and inclinations, and by nature Children of Wrath like the rest. But God being full of compassion because of the great love he had for us *even when we were dead in trespasses, **has brought us all back to life with Christ** – it is by mercy that you have been spared – and has raised us up together, and seated us together in the heavenly spheres in Christ Jesus. For it is by mercy that you have been spared through faith, not in any way by your own efforts; – it is God’s gift so that no one should boast. We are entirely his handiwork, created in Christ Jesus for those good deeds with which God prearranged that we should be occupied.*” (Eph 2:1-10) (Emphasis JAG)

“Paul” wants to emphasise that by God’s mercy and by Jesus Christ’s mission we are led back to a spiritually defined life. The last sentence seems to say that God created us to be Christ-like and inherently able to do good deeds.

In this letter Paul is using some interesting concepts to explain the way in which Jesus Christ brought Jew and Gentile together in one religion.

“So bear in mind that you were once Gentile in the physical sense, termed the Uncircumcision, by those who termed it so in respect of an operation in the flesh, because at that time you were without the benefit of Christ, *aliens to the body politic of Israel*, and strangers to the covenants of promise. But now in Christ Jesus you who were once far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. *For he is our peacemaker, who has united both Jew and Gentile, having abolished the dividing partition-wall, and **having in his person neutralised the cause of enmity**, the Law of commandments **set down in ordinances**, so that the two should in him be welded into **one new man***. Thus he has reconciled both to God by one through the cross, *having in his own person killed the enmity*, and by his coming **proclaimed** ‘peace to you the far off, and peace to the near’, *because **through him by one Spirit we both have access to the Father.***” (Eph 2:11-18) (Emphasis JAG)

What is interesting here is first of all, that the Gentiles were excluded from knowing the real God of Israel through their theological politics, because “at the time” they were without the benefit of “Christ”? That is even before Jesus was born so is this sloppy argumentation or did he mean that the Christ principle in all was only revealed by Jesus and validated by his death and the splitting of the Temple veil symbolising a new unity of vision in the One God. Note Jesus’ function was demolishing the Cultic hold on God and his relationship to people! Through his enlightened teachings and life neutralised the cause of enmity which resulted from ethnic and cultic inspired ordinances so that all spiritual pilgrims could be united into one identity – that of the spirit led Human Being. His “sacrificial function” is obviously only secondary.

The picture becomes even clearer; the total “destruction” of the Temple Cult is in process while many new human bricks now represent the new Temple.

“So now you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow-citizens of the saints, parts of God’s house, having been built upon the *foundation of the Envoys and Prophets with Christ Jesus himself as the coping-stone*, where each block having been closely fitted together grows

course upon course into a sacred temple in the Master, *into which you too have been built as a spiritual abode of Go.*" (Eph 2: 19-22) (Emphasis JAG)

A very confident Paul now talks about Gods "mysteries" in Jesus Christ in all its "multitudinous aspects". The heavenly Authorities, which I think have to do with the mythical and mystical teaching that addresses ones progress through the heavenly spheres with the necessary "code words" as representing victories over certain vices that one need to know/overcome to pass through the different heavenly "authorities" to reach the presence of God.

"To this end I, Paul, am the prisoner of Jesus for you Gentiles. You must surely have heard of the *administration of God's mercy granted me for your benefit, how by revelation he acquainted me with the secret*, as I have previously stated it above. From this you may gather *how well-versed I am in the Messianic Mystery*, which in previous generations was never made known to mankind and is *now revealed under inspiration to God's holy envoys and prophets, the secret that by the News the Gentiles were to be joint-heirs, jointly incorporated [in Israel], and joint participants in the promise in Christ Jesus*. Of this news I was made a minister, by the gift of God's mercy granted me in accordance with the operation of his power. To me, the least of all saints, was this privilege given, that I should proclaim to the Gentiles the inexhaustible wealth of Christ, and publish the details of the secret kept hidden from the Aeons by God who created all things (KJV: who created all things by Jesus!) (Peshitta; God created) ; **so that the Wisdom of God in all its multitudinous aspects should now be made known through the Community** to the Rulers and Authorities in the heavenly spheres, in accordance with the Plan of the Ages which God formed in Christ Jesus our Master. **In him, we enter God's presence boldly and confidently**. So I beg you not to take hardly my trials on your behalf, which are an honour to you." (Eph 3:1-13) (Emphasis JAG)

The message is that by the revelation of the secrets the "News" of the Gods wisdom through Jesus Christ now includes the Gentiles in the new Israel that was promised by God to Abraham and the prophets. The mechanism of the "in Jesus Christ" is not made clear here but we saw above that it was in opening up the real temple within humanity; we now can "*enter God's presence boldly and confidently*" and gives a clue that the new dispensation at least replaces the intermediaries of the Jewish Temple cult.

The translation discrepancies are disturbing; did God create the world or did God do it "by Jesus"? Could this be a clue to John's gospel that Jesus Christ was seen by Paul also as the wisdom of God personified but just in the next section, he then further explains and then says it is the Father that created everything? Nevertheless, the next section is very clear on the spiritual essence of this new movement with its emphasis on growth, gnosis and love to realise or experience God through participating in Christ as the inner self.

"To this end *I bend my knees to the Father, from whom every order of being both in heaven and on earth derives its existence*, that in accordance with the wealth of his glory *he may grant you by his Spirit to be powerfully strengthened in the inner self*, that **the Christ may make**

**his abode in your minds** by faith, that being *deep-rooted and well-grounded in love* you may be able to grasp with all the saints what is the Breadth, the Length and the Depth and the Height, that you may know, **what indeed surpasses knowledge, the love of Christ, that you may be filled with the immensity** (Peshitta: fullness) **of God.**” (Eph 3:14-19) (Emphasis JAG)

Notice it is again the impersonal form of the “The Christ” that must make his abode in your mind; to install love (of Christ) which surpasses knowledge. A powerful statement by Paul is that if the inner man is operative then we are filled by the immensity or fullness of God, this indicates a radical change that is far beyond faith and obedience.

“Now to him who is supremely powerful to do infinitely more than we can ask or think, in accordance with the **power that operates in us**, to him be glory in the Community and in Christ Jesus to all generations for ever and ever. Amen.” (Eph 3:21) (Emphasis JAG)

Here again it seems the convention holds that the implied, singular “Christ” represents “the power of God within” and Christ Jesus is the example/teacher/messenger for all generations seems to work.

Paul then summarises the important aspects of the important role-players and relationships. The ideas of either be imprisoned by “this worldly powers” or by “Christ our master” is also one of the important salvific metaphors. To be freed from the slavery of the cultic binding; by being ransomed through Jesus’ teachings because the truth is in and through him. It is also applicable to the personal developmental level; you need not be enslaved to sin anymore, but rather to Jesus Christ and his new spiritual value system.

“I entreat you therefore, *I the Master’s prisoner*, to behave in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with long-suffering, being patient with one another in love, striving to keep unity of spirit by the binding force of peace. There is one Body and Spirit, just as you were called with one expectation of your calling, one Master, one Faith, one Immersion, *one God and Father of all, and through all, and in all.*” (Peshitta: One God and Father of all, *who is above all and through all*) (Eph 4: 1-6) (Emphasis JAG)

No room for misunderstanding here; all substitutive titles are ignored; it is God who is in us all! This is a direct spiritual statement of Paul’s advance concept of God and man which is normally ignored in favour of more fanciful mystical analogies and descriptions about Gods presence in us. Therefore said Paul they must not live as other Gentiles do; do as Christ taught:

“– that is, if you have attended to him *and been instructed by him*, **as the truth is in Jesus** – namely, that you *should abandon what accords with the former mode of life of the old degenerate personality* with its treacherous lusts, that you *should have the temper of your minds renovated, and put on the new personality fashioned after God in rectitude and sanctity of truth.*” (Eph 4:20-24) (Emphasis JAG)

The Peshitta translation of verses 20, 21, 23:

“But that is not what you have been taught by Christ; If you *have truly heard him* and have been taught by him, as the truth is find in Jesus...be renewed in the spirit of your mind...**put on the new man who is created by God in righteousness and true holiness.**”

This is what Jesus the Christ was all about, truth and the teaching thereof, moral and mystical teachings in praxis. One is inclined to commend, “say no more” this is perfectly clear; by being instructed by Jesus in the truth about God and your own identity and thereby changing your orientation by renovation your mind **everyone**, can put their identity as a the new man, the Human Being; this is how God created us; with this enormous potential and what God wants us to be!

Here Paul again repeats the important elements of the process of salvation, starting with behavioural matters and also includes the standard sacrificial slogan, but here Christ is God's example also.

“And do not grieve God's Holy Spirit by which you have been sealed for the Day of Redemption. Put aside all bitterness and passion, anger, harshness and abuse, and every kind of malice. Instead be kindly disposed to one another, large-hearted, merciful to each other as God has been merciful to you in Christ. Follow God's example, then, as dear children, and behave with affection, just as Christ loved you and offered himself for you as *‘an offering and sacrifice of pleasing odour to God’*. But let there be no mention among you of vice and any kind of impurity or lechery, as befits saint, nor obscenity, levity or facetiousness which are unbecoming. Preferably let there be thanksgiving. *You surely know this, that no immoral person, nor impure, nor rapacious (which means an idol-worshipper), shall have any inheritance in the Kingdom of Christ and of God.*” (Eph 4:30- 5:5) (Emphasis JAG).

In Schonfield's translation the phrase, “*an offering and sacrifice of pleasing odour to God*” is a quote and if it is from the Prophets, *it means metaphorically exactly the opposite of cultic sacrifices but loving service to mankind*. This is also in my opinion the only way you can understand Paul from his esoteric teaching and the only type of sacrifice wanted by God. Paul concludes this argument in no uncertain way; do so, or, find yourself in a totally different kingdom. This message is repeated time and again; how is it possible that it can be so easily dismissed in dogma by the “pious fathers” of our faith? There is no real “faith” without fruits they are inseparable.

*“Rouse yourself, sleeper,  
And arise from the dead,  
And Christ shall shine on you!*

Pay strict attention, therefore, to the way you behave, as wise people, not unwise using the time profitably for these are evil days. **So do not be stupid**, but comprehending, as to what are the Master's (Peshitta: God's) wishes” (Eph 5:14-17). (Only the bold emphasis is by me as Schonfield reckons this was part of a song)

Now Paul comes back to his cultural agenda that the women and slaves must not stir up trouble and disturb the peace as the cultural roots of discrimination lie as deep as cultic sacrifices.

“Be submissive to one another in the love of Christ, the wives to their husbands as to the Master; for man is the head of woman as Christ is the head of the Community, being as he is the preserver of the Body.” (Eph 5:22-23)

Now he switches to another gear, the spiritual one on how the growth pattern unfolds; faith-perseverance (purification)-spirit filled.

“To complete your equipment, hold before you the shield of faith with which you will be able to extinguish the flaming darts of the Evil One, and take the helmet of preservation, and the sword of **the Spirit** – *which means God’s Word.*” (Eph 6:17) (Emphasis JAG)

Now this is very interesting; here God’s Word is the Spirit within, our true conscience and not any existing written document. It again correlates well with the Prophets, Jesus and Paul’s message of the new law and covenant that is obeyed from the law of love within, alone. No other laws and dogma is needed from this stage of spiritual development onwards. Paul wants them also to pray for him so that he can “make known the Mystery” (Peshitta and KJV: Mystery of the gospel) on account of which he is an ambassador (Eph 6:19).

It is by now an open secret that Paul recognised at least two levels of maturity within Christianity of which the second level was handled within the context of an advanced mystical teaching to be understood properly only if you “are in the Spirit” and are not “still in the flesh”. This mystery is God’s mercy on repentance and the actualisation of immortal Christ/Spirit/Image within, through participation in the spiritual growing process mediated to us by Jesus Christ.

#### **9.4.12. To the Community at Colossae**

Den Heyer reckons that “Colossians stands as it were between the authentic letters and Ephesians” (2000:17). In this letter “Paul” seems to be speaking mainly to the spiritual mature Christians, as they have heard the “true” gospel and “knew the grace of God in truth” and also are bearing the “spiritual fruits” as Epaphras told Paul of their “love for spiritual things” (Col 1:6-8).

“Accordingly, I too, from the day I heard, have never ceased to pray for you, and to request that that you may be *filled with the knowledge of God’s will in all wisdom and spiritual comprehension, so as to behave in a manner worthy* of the Master to his entire satisfaction by every good deed you do. You are thus producing fruit and increasing in the knowledge of God, endued by his glorious power with every capacity for much patience and long-suffering with joy.” (Col 1:9-11) (Emphasis JAG)

It is obviously the “knowledge” and understanding of God and man is the new “truth” that activates them to bear the fruits.

Then follows a declaration from Paul in idiomatic mystical language, addressing them within the complex background of Paul himself and his hearer's new "insiders" framework of understanding about the relationship between God – Christ- Jesus – and them, with reference to the creation story or "mystery". It also serves as a summary of the complete mystical teaching which includes the initial stage of the final sacrifice. Please note that the "dear Son" that is the "image of the Unseen God" is also the "firstborn **of every creature**"; is not to be lightly identified as being the special man Jesus – these mystical concepts refers more likely to the Spirit of God within all living creatures which was evident as the "Christ" in Jesus.

"I give thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share the lot of the saints in light, who has rescued us from the dominion of Darkness and *transferred us to the Kingdom of his dear Son*, by whom we obtain redemption, absolution from our sins. **He is the image of the Unseen God, the firstborn of all creation** (Peshitta and KJV: **of every creature**), that everything in heaven and earth might be founded on him, seen and unseen alike, whether angelic Thrones or Lordships or Rulers or Authorities. Everything was created through him and for him. *He is the antecedent of everything, and on him everything was framed*. So also is he Head of the Body, the Community, that is to say the fount and origin of it, the first born from the dead, that in every connexion he might take precedence. For it pleased God that by him – *his making peace through the blood of the cross – to bring everything once more into harmony with the Divine self, whether on earth or in heaven.*"(Col 1:13-20) (Emphasis JAG)

These mystical concepts of being brought out of the darkness of ignorance into the "Wisdom" or Kingdom of light, is accomplished by the Son, in the Image of God and that Image is also now visible in Jesus and thereby he reconciled heaven and earth again as it was meant to be from the Creation story. Apart from being in God's image, this high opinion of mankind as the crown of creation is also illustrated by the story that God brought all creatures to Adam to be named; some say it even seemed like a cooperative creational process and in a mystical understanding this is also true. It seems that the Pauline term "Christ" when used in a mystical context, refers also, depending on your level of understanding to the Spirit (Word of God, Eph 6:17), Image and Wisdom of God in Jesus and mankind but also in the whole of Creation. Interestingly, here Jesus Christ brought harmony by his blood and it might be again a reference to Ephesians (2:11-18), where Jesus was seen to bring Gentiles into the universal covenant of God by destroying the dividing veil of the cultic Temple; this is more likely the metaphoric blood of the new inclusive covenant of harmony of all nations, all beings, with God within the new inner Temple of humanity itself. This whole text was not simply written to lead us to belief in another old fashioned cultic divine blood sacrifice for salvation; it has many levels of understanding for those who have ears to hear and the least important of them all is the bridging wrath appeasing sacrifice.

In the following text Paul alluded again to the Christian mystery which is also essentially the "Perennial Mystery" brought to "everybody" by Paul.

“So I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and make good in my flesh the deficiencies of the Messianic woes for the sake of Christ’s Body, namely the Community, of which I was made a minister to preach to you, in accordance with God’s message, *the secret kept hidden from all the ages and generations*, but now published to his saints. To them God would make known that wealth of Glory this secret holds also for the Gentiles, **namely Christ in you, the expectation of glory** (Peshitta: hope of our glory). *He it is whom we proclaim, advising everyone and teaching everyone with all wisdom, that we may present everyone perfect in Christ.*” (Col.1:24-27) (Emphasis JAG)

One need not add much here, the mystical perennial “secret” is *the* Christ/Spirit or Word/Wisdom or Image/Son of God in all, including the Gentiles; this heavenly wisdom factor is our hope of glory and perfection of wholeness before God. Paul takes the argument to conclusion in verse in verse 28, “... that we may cause *every man to become perfect* in Christ.” So that we become “whole and mature – a Human Being”; this is the end purpose or goal of spiritual growth. Nothing short of that should be their aim; they must realise and develop the Christ spirit within or the Image of God given to all mankind from creation to become whole again; it is now a serious matter of *becoming* not believing anymore!

One gets the feel that Paul is actually trying to convince them that the other rival “mysteries” is also fulfilled in the teachings and example of Jesus as the Christ by putting so much emphasis on revealing the secrets of the mysteries.

“This is what I toil for, striving with his energy who so powerfully motivates me. Indeed, I wish you to know what a severe trial I am undergoing on your account, and on account of those of Laodicea, and of as many others as have seen me personally, that their minds may be encouraged, being confirmed in their love and in the solid wealth of *absolute certainty in knowledge of God’s secret*, yes, of *Christ himself, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge*, I say this in case anyone should mislead you with specious arguments.” (Col 2:1-3) (Emphasis JAG).

Paul said he emphasised this so that no one could teach them otherwise; gnosis or experiential spiritual insight, is the “*absolute certainty in knowledge of God’s secret*” and the content is “*Christ himself, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge*” but eventually it will be added that you must become your own unique Christ. One can see that the Johannine community was very aware of the mystical tradition explained by Paul.

Paul now declares that there is specific content to “the faith” and it was “taught” by him; whenever he uses “faith” as a slogan one should realise it was a heavily loaded concept.

“As, therefore, you have accepted Christ Jesus **as Master, behave in his way, base yourselves and build yourselves on him** and maintained *in the Faith as you have been taught*



*it, excelling in it with thanksgiving.* Take care that no one gets hold of you with philosophy and worthless craft belonging to a human tradition, to the elemental forces of the world instead of to Christ; *for it is in him that the immensity of the **Divine Wisdom corporately dwells**, and it is in him – Head of all Rulers and Authorities – that you are made complete.* (Then Paul summarises the new religion's salient points again.)... It is in him too that you have been *pared by a circumcision, being buried with him by immersion. In him equally you have been raised up by faith in the might of God who raised him from the dead.*" (Col 2:6-12) (Emphasis JAG)

It should now be clear to the converts that it is not the old type of circumcision but the spiritual one they are now participants in this cosmic drama that Jesus played out and far beyond believing only. It is also obvious from the text that follows on the above that true Christianity is not about literal crosses, blood and physical resurrections; it is all about copying Jesus in "dying" to sin and resurrection to our essential God given "Spirit", it is not a new cult!

Then he starts again with the ABC of the Christian belief system to make sure they understand the two main phases, if one can look beyond the unnecessary otherworldly jargon.

*"So you who were dead in transgressions, and in your physical un-circumcision, God have brought you to life with him (Christ), having forgiven us all our transgressions. He not only cancelled the writ against us with its stipulations, which were adverse to us, but also took it away entirely, nailing it to the cross. After having despoiled the angelic Rulers and Authorities, he paraded them in public by the cross. *Let no one judge you, therefore, in matters of food and drink, or in such a matter as a Jewish festival, New Moon, of Sabbath, which represent only shadow of things to come, and of which Christ is the substance. Let no one arbitrarily influence you to fast and engage in the worship of angels, inducing you to share his visions, being vainly puffed up by his physical mind and not holding to the Head, from whom the whole body, connected and integrated by the joints and ligaments, grows in God's way.*" (Col 2:13-19) (Emphasis JAG)*

Paul takes them from blood and cross to shared vision with Christ and growth in God's way! It is again the Judaizers but now also some other "weird" groups that became a nuisance to Paul and his gospel?

He contrasted the growth phases again it is irreversible if at all genuine.

*"If you have died with Christ..." how can you still also be in the infant phase? (Col 2:20)...If, therefore, you have been raised up with Christ, seek the things that are on high, where Christ is, seated at God's right hand. Set your minds on the things that are above, not on what is on earth." (Col 3:1)*

You can never go back, only more towards becoming more renewed and whole if you dare to grow beyond beliefs. Paul repeats this cardinal message again but in very interesting and direct terms, the "mystery" is now in the open.

“Do not lie to one another, having *divested yourselves of the former man and his deeds*, and *having put on the new man, renovated in knowledge, in conformity with the likeness of God who created him*, where there can be no question of Gentile and Jew, circumcision and un-circumcision Barbarian, Scythian, slave or freeman, **but of Christ wholly and completely.**” (Col 3:9-11) (Emphasis JAG)

Note that they too as the “new man are in the likeness of God” and that the new man is also Christ within. Again the necessary fruits that herald this total new man are pressed on their hearts in the verses that follow. He again spells out that behaviour counts,

“Whatever you do, do it with real goodwill, as having the Lord in mind rather than men, knowing that you *will receive from the Lord the recompense that is due*. Serve the Lord Christ; for he who does wrong will be paid back for his wrong-doing, *and there is no partiality shown.*” (Col 3:24, 25) (Emphasis JAG)

One needs to understand that in the mature spiritual or mystical phase, Christ, Spirit, New Man, Jesus Christ, Paul’s Christ and Christian Christ are flowing easily into one another and normal ego or physical identities becomes irrelevant.

#### **9.4.13. To Philemon**

Estimates place this letter to Philemon and Titus was written from Rome about AD 62. Paul, in this letter wanted a slave owner to take back his slave without penalising him. The value for our purposes is only in the fact that Paul respects the laws of the country but also wanted the owner to have a change of heart as regarding the equality of people before God. His plea is actually an argument with a directive.

The following three letters, according to the latest scholarship, was not written by Paul but “disciples” of him (Den Heyer 2000:14) or in terms of our approach these letters were written by someone operating within the Pauline sense making sphere of experience. Thus, someone or may more than one person within “the Pauline school of thought” operating within the sense making sphere of Paul’s thought might be the possible writers of these inauthentic Pauline letters.

#### **9.4.14. The letter to Titus**

As we are concentrating on soteriological perspectives we look at possible new developments in this regard. “Paul” see himself as servant of God, and envoy of Jesus Christ for purposes of faith in God’s elect and “the knowledge of true godliness;” who again brought to us the message that, “God promised in the remote past”, by order of “God our Saviour, to Titus...” (Titus 1:1-3). Here the true knowledge of godliness seems to be alluding again to the Judaising opposition’s failure to understand the “mystery” of *God* as Saviour, promising eternal life long ago of which Jesus is now

proof. He is again drawing their attention to due process, “It is for you to state what is consistent with sound teaching, to tell the older men to be sober, dignified, discreet, sound in faith, in love, in consistency” (Titus1:1, 2).

He then proceeds in reminding them of good social and civil behaviour. God and Jesus are both called saviours but a new tone of emphasis on rebuking within the community and obedience to authorities seems to creep in (Titus 2:15; 3:1, 2; 3:10-11).

Interestingly the mechanism of saving is here very clearly defined as acting on Gods mercy, it is the baptism that follows repentance and Jesus is our deliverer.

“But when the goodness and benevolence of God our Saviour became clear, not because of any righteous actions I had performed, but in accordance with his mercy, *he saved me by the washing and the renovating power of the holy Spirit* which he lavished upon me richly through Jesus Christ our Deliverer (Peshitta: Saviour); so that exonerated by that act of grace I became an heir in accordance with the expectation of Eternal Life.” (Titus 3:4-7) (Emphasis JAG)

Interesting that there is here also no emphasis on a sacrifice but they are saved by the workings of the Holy Spirit within.

The wrong beliefs in the eminent second coming are now obvious and Paul must now instruct them to get “a regular job” (according to Schonfield, but to “keep on doing good” according to the Peshitta and KJV) to keep them from theologising too much as well as to keep them out of mischief.

#### **9.4.15. Letter to Timothy (1)**

Here again God is the Father and Jesus Christ the Master. He is again battling with Judaizers and certain myths which can be of Jewish or Gentile origin.

“The essence of the precept still is love, **love out of a pure heart, a clear conscience, and unfeigned faith**. From these some, having missed the mark, have gone off at a tangent into senseless talk, wanting to be teachers of the Law, but neither understanding what they are talking about, nor what they are really driving at. We all know how valuable the *Law is if it is consulted legitimately*. But we recognize none the less that the law is not put there for the upright, bur for the lawless and unruly, the impious and the sinners, the ungodly and profane.” (1Tim 1:5-9) (Emphasis JAG)

Here again Paul makes the point that the Law is only necessary for the “fleshly/earthly” types and not for Spirit filled people, who should be governed by values and principles from own conscience and a pure heart therefore, any arguments from law about the law only show lack of spiritual understanding.

It is again clear that Paul is copying Jesus and they should copy him if they really believe in the message of Jesus and now also of Paul. What is also very clear throughout Paul's writings is that the "price" he is looking forward to is eternal life and that could raise some spiritual questions.

*"This is a true saying and deserving of unqualified acceptance that 'Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners.' Of these I am foremost. But I obtained mercy for the very reason that by me Christ Jesus **might exhibit** (Peshitta and KJV: **pattern to them**) **his full forbearance as a general indication** to those who would come to believe in him for Eternal Life. To the imperishable, invisible King of the Universe, the Only God, be honour and glory for ever and ever. Amen." (1Tim 1:15-17) (Emphasis JAG)*

Another point one should keep in mind is that Jesus as the Christ, was surely instrumental in saving sinners and also from many different perspectives as discussed above and here he was a "exhibit and general indication or pattern" to us of our own godly inheritance. The exclusive focus on him as being a cultic blood sacrifice and then made central to salvation in the Christian creed is problematic. The sacrificial cultic remedy is actually the most dated perspective of all. His personal sacrifice of his life for perseverance in the God's truth or as ransom from cultic lore and as pattern for life, all make sense and are revered and honoured even today by all mystical Christians.

The next group of ideas are interesting as Paul personally value the freedom that was achieved by Roman domination and want them to pray for this orderly government as it allows them to devote their lives to the Kingdom of God. However the next quoted text is potentially the most dangerous one that we came across so far, if interpreted in a cultic sense.

*"This is proper and well-pleasing in the sight of God our Saviour, who desires everyone to be saved and come to **acknowledge the Truth**. There is **One God**, and **one intermediary between God and mankind, the Man Christ Jesus**, who gave himself as **ransom** for all, as will be demonstrated in due course. To announce this I was made a herald and envoy – I am telling the truth, I am not lying – a faithful and true teacher of the Gentiles." (1Tim 2:3-7) (Emphasis JAG)*

From a temple or church perspective, the priests or cultic management would like to see themselves as functional intermediaries between man and God; this is a very dangerous, in actual fact, a spiritually deadly idea and it was pursued to perfection by the "mighty" Church in its efforts to control its members. All that the prophets and Jesus fought for a direct relationship with God by demolishing the power of the Cult over people's spiritual lives, is now in danger- the foundation is laid again for "someone" to be reinstated anew as a mediator "*between God and mankind*"; *a new High Priest of a new cult* ! If however it is interpreted alternatively, in this case, because he used the specific title of "**man** Christ Jesus" then he meant exactly what happened- Jesus brought to us, as messenger of God, the truth and wisdom of God and then he is only a special case of a prophet of God that brings

the good news of God's mercy and our shared godly origins to us. Unfortunately it seems that this text became the basis is a new binding for a new third party or "middle man" between mankind and God in the form of the Church, which means it is only a new management from the Temple variation that took over control of the mediation process!

"Christ" can "ransom" us from a wrong religious system to the light of truth as Wink already made us aware; the ransom scenario Jesus was a mediator/liberator for us to escape from ignorance, or to gain freedom from slavery from the wrong group or religious system and this interpretation makes much more sense to the spiritual mature convert than cultic sacrifices. As we will later see he is also a legitimate "mediator" of the new covenant to be accepted by the converts from cults. But here lies the problem, if he mediates between man and God on a permanent basis, then we are back to square one; someone else regulates our relationship with God in place of the cultic priests that were effectively fired by Jesus. By taking these types of rhetoric statements out of context and ranking them wrongly in the faith system especially, in the salvific process, we create serious misunderstandings and wrong dogmas and sterile religions.

It is obvious that the new freedom from law and equality in the eyes of God resulted in "unbecoming" and "undisciplined" behaviour in many Christian communities as this was also independently reported by Pagan writers. The problem is clear and there is no easy fix; Paul's arguments for freedom can only apply in a more mature phase of intellectual and spiritual growth! The uneducated and superstitious masses need discipline as do young children! Women who were treated as physical property and not normally allowed to be educated will of course be bewildered and even confused with this sudden freedom; it just did not work. "Paul" is now forced to pull rank and to seriously re-interpret Genesis to bring them in line, i.e. to submit them again to the domination of the men folk.

In the next text "Paul" then advises on "Church" regulations and concludes chapter 3, with a summary of the new doctrine where Jesus' teaching and life story is the real "mystery" and the embodiment of devoutness for all Christians in the *new temple* which is formed by the community of Christ but now taking on the life an institution:

"I am writing to you in this way, hoping to visit you shortly, but in case I am delayed, that you may know how life ought to be *lived in the house of God*, which is the Community of the Living God, the prop and stay of the Truth. Admittedly it is a great thing, this Mystery of devoutness (Peshitta; righteousness) which  
*Was made visible physically,*  
*Vindicated spiritually,*  
*Seen by angels,*  
*Proclaimed to the Gentiles,*

*Believed in, in the world  
Taken up again in glory*

If you put these things to the brothers you will be a worthy minister of Christ Jesus, primed in the principles of the Faith and in the right teaching you have consistently followed.” (1Tim 3:14-16) (Emphasis JAG)

The implication that the Christian community is the new temple also becomes an automatic directive to life up to this new holy structure but, here already is a subtle difference. This new temple or “house of God” is not within the individual soul’s body but a “collective soul” soon to become a cathedral. Something else that is interesting to note in this text as a creedal summary, here too, no mention is made of any cultic sacrificial necessary belief.

He then continues to warn about unsuitable behaviour and emphasises the fitting responses according to the teachings of the Lord they should live by:

*“sound principles, those of our Lord Jesus Christ, and instruction that is consistent with godliness, he (false teachers) is befogged, knowing nothing clearly, crazy about issues and fights over words, which strife rise to antagonism, rivalry, slanders, evil suspicions, and violent altercations of men whose minds are warped and bereft of truth, imagining good business to be the same thing as godliness. But godliness plus contentment is the best possible business; for we have brought nothing into the world, neither is there anything we can take out of it. Having food and shelter, let us be content with these.”* (1Tim 6:3-8) (Emphasis JAG)

Paul wanted to curb worldly ambitions and to promote discourage greed. He gives advice to those who want to be rich because they,

*“expose themselves to temptations and pitfalls, and too many foolish and harmful cravings, which drag men down to ruin and perdition. The root of all evils is avarice (Synonym: greed; Peshitta: love of money) and some having clutched at it have strayed from the Faith and racked themselves with many torments.”* (1Tim 6:9, 10)

They as “men of God” must,

*“flee from these things. But pursue rectitude, devoutness, faith, love, constancy and gentleness. Fight the gallant contest of the faith to the finish. Put up a real struggle for Eternal Life, to which you were called. Having made the noble confession before many witnesses, I charge you before God the Source of all life, and before Christ Jesus who **made the noble confession** (Peshitta: a good testimony; KJV: a good confession) before Pontius Pilate, to keep the injunction unsullied, unimpeachable, until the visible appearance of our Lord Jesus Christ, which the blessed and sole Sovereign will display in due course, the King of kings and Lord of lords, who no man has seen, nor can see. To him be honour and everlasting might. Amen.”* (1 Tim 6:11-16) (Emphasis JAG)

No question that you should live like this only out of “thankfulness”; this is how you should live from conviction! The “noble confession” said Schonfield; (1998:409) is that he was king of the Jews. But surely Jesus would have meant whatever he said in a spiritual sense and not in a political sense; as

a son of God or leader of the spiritual Israel and was wilfully quoted wrongly by the ignorant power mongers? The focus on heaven instead of fixing the worldly problems is becoming dangerously one-sided; material welfare is virtually condemned instead of trying to advocate balance development and restraint.

Reading between the lines one can see that the early Christians were by this time in battle with a variety of problems including behaviour problems and that the Judaizers are not the main problem anymore. It also look like Paul's admonition about old wife's tales and myths might be addressed to some of the many Gnostic groups that now surfaced with their fanciful myths; "Guard what is committed to your care, Timotheus, avoiding the irreverent jargon and contradictions of the falsely termed "Knowledge", which some professing have fallen into error regarding the Faith." (1Tim 6:20) Or, is the real mystical teaching of Jesus and Paul not so popular any more at this stage of the development of the Roman Church and already becoming an issue?

#### 9.4.16 Letter to Timotheus (2)

It seems that certain groups had a rite of "laying on of hands" whereby they "received" the Holy Spirit; in this translation it can also mean that the existing Spiritual spark within is fanned into a flame rather than a "new" gift. To reinforce this understanding Paul again refers to the "mystery" of Creation to support his claim. Jesus as Christ now realised this "mercy bestowed on us" in the beginning of time and we now share in its activation through his life and teaching.

"It is on this ground that I would urge you to fan the flame of the divine gift imparted to you when I ordained you (Peshitta: by the laying on of my hand); for God has not given us a spirit of timidity, but of resolution, devotion and correction. So do not be ashamed *of the testimony of our Master*, nor of me his prisoner, but bear your share of hardship for the News as God enables you. He has served us and *called us with a holy calling, not in accordance with our actions, but in accordance with his own purpose and mercy bestowed on us in Christ Jesus before the Ages began, but now tangibly expressed through the visible appearance of Christ Jesus our Deliverer, who has put death out of action and brought (Peshitta: revealed) Life and imperishability into operation by the News* (Peshitta: gospel), of which I am appointed herald, envoy and teacher. (2 Tim 1:6-11) ...Hold fast the outline of sound principles you have heard from me **by the faith and love that is in Christ Jesus. Keep safe the noble deposit which by the Holy Spirit resides in us.**" (2 Tim1:14) (Emphasis JAG)

It stands to reason by way of the Creational "facts" that the Image of God is in everybody and now "tangibly expressed" by Christ Jesus whereby he becomes our teacher and deliverer from ignorance and superstition. The "noble deposit", the Spirit within, was not a selective dishing out of the Spirit by God but rather point to our spiritual awakening; it is a quickening of that Spirit within all Adam's progeny.

Again Paul summarises the salient points of his message and includes a “saying” or teaching which again emphasised his participationist view as well as God’s faithfulness. In my opinion, Paul uses the term Elect as the Essenes and Pythagoreans did, as an in-group title as a reference to an advanced grade of initiate.

“Always remember, Jesus Christ of the lineage of David was **raised from the dead** in my presentation of the News. For this I suffer hardship to the extent of imprisonment, like a malefactor. But God’s Message is not fettered. Because of that I submit to everything for the sake of the elect, that they too may obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory. It is a true saying,

*‘If we died with him, we shall also live with him;*

*If we are constant, we shall also reign with him;*

*If we disown him, so he will disown us;*

*If we are disloyal, he will still be faithful.’” (2 Tim 2:8-13) (Emphasis JAG)*

To the new group of “sons of man” who had to become the “elect” in a gentile environment, this “true saying” is totally devoid of the “pivotal” cultic sacrifice but only the mystical “resurrection” is important as well as mandatory “faithfulness” as it should be for those interested in the “raised” Christ.

In the following text Paul again emphasised that our calling is to be competent before God who in his mercy gave us this valuable treasure of the possibility of becoming a Human Being through the “message of truth”; if this message consisted only of a final sacrifice, he would have said that.

“Be at pains to *prove yourself competent to God*, a workman who has no need to be ashamed, having kept to *the straight line with the **Message of Truth.***” (2 Tim 2:15) (Emphasis JAG)

Chapter three starts with a doom and gloom prophesy that was not a characteristic of other Pauline letters, but in verse 10 he lists the important elements of his teaching and values as well as the value of the “scriptures”, which in this unspecified way does not make much sense from the perspective of his Gentile ministry and his fights with the Judaizers. This section also has a feel of different “objectives” coming from a much later time than that of Paul.

“But you have closely followed *my teaching, my method, presentation*, forbearance, devotion and constancy, the persecutions and sufferings I met with at Antioch, Iconium and Lystra, the various kinds of persecution I underwent, from all of which the Lord rescued me. And indeed all who desire to live dutifully in Christ Jesus must expect persecution. ***But wicked men and imposters will flourish as time goes by***, deceiving and being deceived. You, however, adhere to the things you have learnt and been convinced of, seeing from whom you learned them, and that from *infancy you have known the Holy Scriptures, which have power to **make you wise for salvation by faith** that is in Christ Jesus. Each document is divinely inspired*, and consequently advantageous for instruction, reproof, reclamation and moral discipline, so that the Man of God may be expert, fully equipped for every useful undertaking.” (2 Tim 3:10) (Emphasis JAG)



The moral standard of the congregation is obviously problematic; their influence on the community is not sufficient and again one gets the feeling that they are losing heart in the battle against the "wicket" who persecute them signalling the beginning of "the end"?. Now, which Holy Scriptures are these, the Jewish ones? Not likely as the rift between Jewish and Gentile Christians was not narrowing in time. This very verse, by Christian opportunism, became to mean the whole "Christian" Bible and the claim to its inerrancy. Obviously here is something very funny going on here besides being unrealistic claims and patently coercive; an excellent text to enforce dogmatic coercion and discipline within the ignorant, gullible masses.

#### **9.4.17. Introduction to the Epistle to the Hebrews**

Although the discussion on the authenticity of Paul's letters started in the nineteenth century, Den Heyer says that there were already fierce discussions about this letter in the first centuries of the history of the church and the then Christian communities (2000:12). The fact however that it was accepted and incorporated in the Pauline corpus up to at least the 19<sup>th</sup> century ensured its place in Christian soteriological dogma and is therefore important to this study as part of "the Pauline school of thought" or "the reflexive sense making sphere that emerged around Paul's teachings." Den Heyer states: "Central to the Christology of Hebrews is the notion of Jesus Christ as the high priest who 'has offered himself for once and for all'" (Heb. 7:25-28) (2000:14). We will therefore discuss this notion also during the review of the text.

Schonfield (1998:418) in his introduction to this letter which he calls the "Homily on The High Priesthood of Christ" for Jewish readers stated that though the his viewpoint is in many respects Pauline in his style, the language use was totally different. Among the suggested writers the most probable is Apollos Paul's esteemed co-worker. He is described in the *Acts* as an Alexandrian Jew, a learned man, well-versed in the Scriptures, fully in keeping with the character of the work. (Schonfield, 1998:418) Schonfield comments further on the writer:

"He is at home in the Greek language, which he employs with considerable literary skill, and with delight in shades of meaning and plays on words. For his Old Testament quotations *he employs the Alexandrian text of the Greek version*, and he was evidently *well acquainted with the works of Philo*, the Alexandrian Jewish philosopher of the first century AD. The document furnishes three other notable pieces of information, that the believers in question had suffered some persecution, that Timotheus had been imprisoned but was now released, and that the author was probably writing from Italy. With the evidence that the Temple at Jerusalem was still standing, this suggests a date of composition around AD 65-67; but of course it could be later." (Schonfield 1998:418) (Emphasis JAG)

How correct Schonfield was in his assumption that the writer used some of Philo's ideas and especially on the Logos topic might be debatable but it is still interesting as it is obvious that he also grounded his story in the Genesis Creation narrative about Wisdom being there from the beginning and made part of the nature of humanity while now made visible and operative in Jesus as the Son.

From our point of view we are interested in any major shift in the Pauline soteriological recipe as well as metaphors that are different, or for Jewish consumption, versus that needed for Gentile understanding of the new religion. In studying this letter with due attention again, I soon realised that Schonfield is absolutely right in saying the writer of this letter was a learned and educated man. It became obvious that he also tried to make sense out of the different Pauline arguments and to present them to the first Century Jewish converts in a very sensitive and insightful way. It also occurred to me that in my concluding remarks I will have to paraphrase or quote extensively from this translation and that I cannot criticise most of its content from what I now understand to be Pauline beliefs.

I therefore owe a sincere word of gratitude towards Schonfield and the writer of this letter, who so unwittingly helped me to phrase my own sentiments. I will therefore make my introductory remarks on the conclusions I have made in this long journey of personal learning and then proceed with the content of this letter as part of my own sentiments and findings. At the end of the analyses of this letter I will then continue my observations and remarks in a more general way.

The only caution that I want to share, comes from the theme of the letter as a homily to the High Priesthood of Jesus Christ and if one is not careful, it might be become a very handy new slogan again if your intentions are to introduce a new intermediary between God and mankind as the Church was adamant to do for their own reasons. As we have seen from 1Tim 2:3-7, "*There is One God, and one intermediary between God and mankind, the Man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as ransom for all, as will be demonstrated in due course...*" can be misconstrued if taken as a absolute spiritual truth.

The second observation is that although one does not expect that all Jews will agree with the new religion that Jesus was their final Messiah or that his history is in accordance of what they expected of their different recorded Messiahs. However, one cannot help to wonder how is it possible that after so many years there seems still to be such wide differences of opinions about the theology of Paul and related dogma. The problems of misinterpretation might have started from his peculiar logic and sometimes unstructured letters that mixed different levels of beliefs in complex constructions with mystical statements and insider slogans. There are also good reasons in creating misunderstandings with short topical and personal letters that sometimes "philosophise" too much

on certain topics. Nevertheless, Paul might not be the biggest problem in creating confusion but, later wilful theologising, through selecting certain texts without looking at the bigger picture, to proof preconceived ideas. The following our group's "expert" interpretations of heavenly "truths" from the dogma created by "inspired" reading seems rather to be the real culprit.

Although it is not easy and even possible at this stage to recognise beyond any doubt the later imports and possible alterations in Paul's letters, I am convinced that Paul was a true mystic and ardent follower of Jesus' esoteric teachings and a very exemplary one at that. Without Paul's letters we may never have had a good understanding of the early Christian mystical and Gnostic traditions. There is no doubt that Paul wanted to bring his good News to everyone that was interested but he was also very clear and adamant that only the Spirit filled, loving-kind converts will be saved. There are no real grounds to deduce that he proposed simplistic beliefs in a third party sacrificial salvific remedy can ever be, mankind's final solution to salvation. Rather if one takes all historical, cultural, religious and spiritual factors into consideration and take Paul's soteriological program and the related processes seriously one notices his profound understanding of human nature and his insistence on the spiritual growth imperative for Self-realisation for salvation.

## Chapter 10

### Consolidating the pivotal arguments from Paul's view of God, Jesus and mankind

#### 10.1 Introduction

We believe that for a functional effective, moral religion you cannot part faith from behaviour and that Early Christianity was not so inclined either. We further believe that the undue emphasis on beliefs versus its necessary fruits in the salvific process was wrongly attributed to Paul by some Church Fathers, Luther and other Reformation theologians. This study is about finding the reasons for these alleged teachings of Paul by trying to study his convictions from a broader historic-cultural, developmental and in an integrated way. Our main objectives are therefore to see if Paul's soteriology from his letters can be reconciled to the following Christian conclusions, namely:

- Man is inherently sinful and totally unable to please God, therefore we need a third party, godly blood sacrifice as saviour, to avert God's wrath on us.
- That this sacrificial blood offer was made by Jesus and therefore the belief in his sacrifice as atonement for the sins of the believer is the effective way to salvation; no other means or conditions will be accepted.
- Therefore good deeds are regarded with suspicion and useless without the first two beliefs because they are not part of the salvation process but only a token of gratitude from this perspective.
- Some dogmatic statements are actually contradictory, regarding the above points, as some seem to take the fruits of the Spirit or moral behaviour as being an essential part of Christian life while still confessing the above exclusions in the salvation process.

As discussed above we will follow the letter to the Hebrews as a very able summary of many of the main points in Paul's teachings if it fits our present and argued understanding. We regard the letter to the Hebrews as emerging from what could be termed "the sense making reflexive sphere around Paul" or "the Pauline school of thought" which overwhelmingly express similar sense making sentiments as the letters regarded as flowing authentically from Paul's own hand. The reader must please excuse the many strategies of emphasis and accentuation as it is really meant to be of help to discern the salient, subtle and core aspects from the rest of the text. We will again use cursive accentuation for important notions pertaining to this thesis and bold print to accentuation core or key concepts.

## 10.2 The letter to the Hebrews as framework for a summary of Paul's main beliefs

As this work also seems to me an attempt to "summarise" the "Pauline school of thought" or "reflexive sense making realm of Paul's writings", it is understandable that in another sense it played an important role in the ecclesial creation of Christian dogmas and doctrines on salvation. The writer of Hebrews starts off by introducing the reader into the history of the real spiritual Israel.

"At various times and in varied fashions God spoke of old to our fathers by the prophets; but at the close of these times he has spoken to us by a Son, whom he appointed heir to everything. By him also he instituted the Aeons. *He, being the reflection of God's glory and the exact expression of his nature (Peshitta: he being the brightness of his glory and the express image of his being), bringing everything into being by the exercise (lit.-expression) of God's power*, when he had effected an expiation (synonyms: penance, apology) for sins, sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in the heavenly heights." (Heb 1:1-3) (Emphasis JAG)

Schonfield (1998:421) notes that by referring to Gen. 1:28, we are brought within "the realm of Jewish mysticism where much was made of man being created in the image of God. An Archetypal (Heavenly) Man was conceived, equated with the Messiah Above (the Son of Man). See *Book of Enoch*. In Jewish-Christian teaching this Man had incarnated in Jesus at his baptism." The importance of the "mystery" of Creation was very instrumental to all early Christians in understanding their relationship with God.

One starts to realise that this refrain of Jesus Christ who "*bringing everything into being by the exercise of God's power*", stated above is what was understood by these Christians as what exactly happened during the Creation of mankind in God's Image and therefore he gave him "dominion" over all creatures! Paul's so called "rival" according to Luther, James (3:9), the Peshitta version, praises God for the privileges and says that a person born from such high heritage (from spiritual Adam) should not speak any evil, "By it (by been given dominion) we bless the Lord and Father; and by it (unacceptably so) *we also curse men who are made in the image of God...*" and then speaks evil things with the same venerable tongue. Peter his other "rival" said in 1 Peter 3:4, to the *ladies!*, "But adorn yourselves with the *spiritual man within*, with meek pride which is incorruptible and an ornament which is rich in the sight of God."

These concepts are describing God's precious gift and high regard for mankind and to elevate the godly part of mankind and not to belittle them to be rotten beyond repair! In the section on Jewish soteriology we saw this concept of "original sin" was totally foreign to them. Furthermore, the Jews say the Torah taught that God said to Cain: "*If you do good, won't there be special privilege? And if you do **not** do good, sin waits at the door. It lusts after you, **but you can dominate it.***" (Genesis 4:7) James agrees in 1:12-15, he also makes it clear that nobody can tempt you to do bad things,

especially not God; you are enticed *only by your own doing* and if you persist you will miss your spiritual prize.

The writer of Hebrews now wants to show that this Son is greater than the angels and that they should worship him. In 1:8, God even called the Son, God with a throne that's lasts for ever! Later however in 2:6, when quoting from the Psalms the writer brings this argument together through the earthly Jesus implying human beings to be only slightly inferior than the angels (2:9) but— does this mean it is two different identities? No ordinary religious Jew would accept anyone with the title God, starting with a capital letter because God is One. From the so called Creation Mysteries, mankind was made in the Image of God and can be godly in certain respects but 1:8 seems to be a new mystery, but is it?

If you recall what was said in Genesis that man now became “like one of them” and God gave them dominion over all creation, then from this standpoint they are “gods” in the sense of this story but not in an absolute way! Interesting that Psalm 82 first warns about judging unjustly and against the powerless ones, and then tells us what should be done. It laments our walking in darkness and lack of understanding. Then it makes the statement that from the foundation of the world *God made us gods*, children of the High, but because of lack of spiritual justice we will die like ordinary men.

Jesus in John 10:34-35 also refers to this text and it clearly indicates his own lofty conception of mankind from Genesis and went on to declare that the “word of God was with them”, which indicates this lofty state was for all of them to realise. The fact that he and the Father are of “one accord” (Peshitta: John 10:30) and therefore he is godly from Gods intention with mankind. Therefore, being a Son of God it mandates him to act godly; why should they (the Pharisees) then be surprised and angry! But he then lamented their *lack of understanding* and one can now only apprehends why he said in the beginning of this passage that *only his own flock will hear the call* of the Sheppard, meaning that you *must have developed an inner ear* to hear what he wanted to convey; you must be spiritually mature enough to realise that we are all gods but only when this truth can be mystically apprehended and you live accordingly.

“Now it was not angels that God made subject to that future state of affairs of which we are speaking; for in one place a certain writer has expressed it thus:

*What is man, that you are mindful of him?*

*Or the Son of Man, that you take account of him?*

*You made him only slightly inferior to angels:*

*You crowned him with dignity and honour.*

*You set him over the work of your hands,*

*And made everything subject to him” (Heb2:6-8) (Ps. 8:4-6) (Emphasis JAG)*

This argumentation tries to prove that Jesus and the “Son of Man” in each of us had to be special according to God’s intent. The next quote says that Jesus- Christ had also to be a normal man as well also but endowed with inherent godly powers to become the new High Priests.

“Consequently it was essential for him to become in every respect like his brothers, that he might be a compassionate and trustworthy High Priest in matters relating to God, to propitiate (Peshitta: make reconciliation) for the people’s sins; for having experienced temptation himself he is able to aid those who are tempted.” (Heb 2:17, 18)

This “first phase” teaching is not new as we have seen that they must be weaned from Temple-ism and must be convinced that Jesus was superior to Moses and inaugurates or “mediates” a new covenant that is better than the one of Moses. The High Priest’s efforts to reconcile Man to God, do not guarantee salvation either; he can only assist in the personal process of reconciliation of the believer to God in any case.

The new and final High Priest came from heaven the (Heavenly Adam) and experienced earthly hardships the (Earthly Adam) to make him also the ideal Priest and is also being appointed directly by God and not by men.

“Thus even Christ did not raise himself to the dignity of High Priest: it was He, who said to him, ‘you are my son: to-day I have begotten you’. And God also said elsewhere, ‘You are a priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek’ (Heb 5:5, 6)...Christ, in the days of his physical existence, having offered petitions, and *indeed supplications, with loud sobbing and tears* to him who could save him from death, **was heard because of his piety. Though he was a son, he learnt obedience by what he suffered. And being perfected, he became for all who obey him the means** (Peshitta: the author) **of their eternal salvation, having been appointed by God as High Priest after the order of Melchizedek.**” (Heb 5:7-10) (Emphasis JAG)

It is important to note Jesus’ own growth process and the details thereof; only when he was ready he taught others the way and those who obey him found their “means of salvation”.

Now we start to see the full story of Jesus; starting from the Man created in God’s image, becoming an earthling that became a son of God at his Baptism and because of his piety and sincerity (5:5) with repentance leads to acceptance. He also needed to learn obedience and is perfected by hardships; taught the truth about salvation, which is by mercy and doing the will of God. Jesus became the ideal and final High Priest and example for those who aim for a direct relationship with God according to the order of Melchizedek. Jesus therefore functions as “author”, teacher and example for human salvation.

The writer battles with the difficulties in explaining the order of Melhizedek as his hearers have difficulty to understand this new priestly order as they were still cultic minded and Melhizedek represents the mystical tradition of a direct relationship with God as we have seen earlier.

“We are minded to say a great deal on this subject that is hard to explain since you have become dull of hearing. *For when by this time you should be teachers, you again need someone to teach you the most elementary principles of the Divine Oracles.* Yes, you have become in need of milk, not of solid food. *For everyone who is at the milk-feeding stage is lacking in moral judgement; for he is a babe. Solid food is for grown-ups, for those who **from long practice** have **had their faculties trained** to **distinguish good from evil.**” (Heb 5:11-14) (Emphasis JAG)*

This passage gives us a remarkably clear insight in Pauline thinking even the phrase that they should be able in the Melhizedek tradition, to distinguish “good from evil”, most likely refers to the episode of mankind becoming “like the gods” by deciding to exercise choice, not to remain “angelic”. Spiritual growth is central to the salvation process as even Jesus had to realise his godliness through spiritual growth, suffering and piety. Note also the choice of words “to distinguish good from bad” was also the metaphor from Paradise for their choice (thanks Eve) to become godly!

The writer explains further and gives a good summary of the process of becoming a Human Being. Note also “the blood sacrifice” is not even mentioned when personal growth process is discussed.

“So leaving the subject of first Christian principles *let us bring ourselves to maturity, **not re-laying a foundation of repentance** of our dead deeds, of faith in God, of instruction about immersions, ordinations* (Peshitta: laying on of hands), *resurrection from the dead and eternal judgement.*” (Heb 6:1, 2) (Emphasis JAG)

The goal is to become a spiritual being through reaching spiritual maturity and the only change that may fit better with the previous Pauline versions is to start off with *faith in God*. Notice that the foundation of the new faith is repentance and not sacrifices. All of these phases have new content and practical applications that differ from Temple-ism as a way to salvation. *The new religion is more an effort to formalise **the process** of how to become a son of God or realise your sonship, according to the Jewish prophetic and mystical traditions.* In showing us the way Jesus’ teaching and life was virtually indispensable and therefore he ransomed us from ignorance and slavery to this worldly powers and silly religions without and within. He was an authentic High Priest starting from a totally different premise that *of assisting people to become what they are meant to be through their own spiritual growth.*

“For it is impossible for those who have once been enlightened, who have experienced the heavenly gift and become sharers of the Holy Spirit, and have truly experienced divine utterance (Peshitta: tasted the gift from heaven) – the powers indeed of the world to come – and then have fallen away, to make a **fresh start with repentance**; for **they have re-crucified**



*the Son of God for their part, and held him up to scorn. For soil that absorbs the rain which falls frequently upon it, and bears vegetation suited to use those by whom indeed it is cultivated, will enjoy God's blessing. But if it produces thorns and thistles it is worthless and the next thing to a curse, and will end up in burning.*" (Heb 6; 4-8) (Emphasis JAG)

Again he accentuates that salvation in the new "way" starts with repentance and naturally from "faith" in the One God and the growth processes involved. What the writer is trying to make clear with the parable is that it is impossible for a person that received and realised the Spirit of God to bring forth evil fruits or as the Aramaic experts put it, to produce "unripe" deeds as a constant result. Such person is a fake and has ridiculed the whole concept and process from Jesus' teaching, life and death. This is also to my mind what Jesus meant by sin against the Holy Spirit.

The next piece is a very important one in our puzzle of the new Christian Mysteries and referring to the promises to Abraham.

*"To this we cling as a safe and secure anchor for the soul, passing in behind the curtain (Peshitta: penetrates beyond the veil of the temple), where Jesus, appointed permanent High Priest after the order of Melchizedek, has entered in advance on our behalf."* (Heb 6:19, 20) (Emphasis JAG)

As Crossan, Wink and the writer argued that Jesus wanted to destroy Temple-ism as he taught that the souls of all his followers *could now penetrate beyond Temple taboos* and become in direct contact and relationship with God within themselves (new mystery revealed from behind the veil) and therefore he is the first real High Priest of the Prophetic and Mystic tradition.

It is important to note James, the brother of Jesus and leader of the Christian community in Jerusalem, in his letter James, 2:1-2: "My brethren, do not with hypocrisy uphold the glorious faith of our Lord Jesus Christ. For if there should enter into your **synagogue...**" a rich and poor man do not discriminate against the poor one. We have more independent evidence of James' murder by the High Priest of his time than that of Jesus' as it was also recorded by Josephus a Jewish historian who mentioned that James was a very good and pious man, a veritable saint. The point that I want to make is that James did not talk about the Temple but only of meetings at the synagogue, although the Temple cult was still in operation in his lifetime. One can safely say that he was murdered by the same powers and for the same reasons that got to his brother; because of his later opposition, or at best his differences with the Temple cult.

The writer is intent to make this point very clear and further explains what is meant by being a priest in the order of Melchizedek and it is becoming clear that *this priesthood is related to the Human Being or Son of God from Creation and not any earthly priesthood.*

“He is in the first place, by translation of his name, ‘king of righteousness’, and in the second place king of Salem, which means ‘king of peace’, without father, without mother, without ancestry, having neither beginning of days nor end of life. **Being therefore a representation of the Son of God**, he remains priest in perpetuity.” (Heb 7:2, 3) (Emphasis JAG)

Remember Paul also described Jesus as from the “flesh” son of David but spiritually son of God as we all should be. The writer again returns to the Melchizedek priesthood to show how totally different the nature of this priesthood is in relation to the Temple Cult.

“For, he to whom these matters relate belonged to a different tribe, no member of which was devoted to the service of the altar. For it is evident that our Master sprang from Judah, concerning which tribe, Moses said nothing about priesthood. And what is of greater consequence, *it is quite clear that a different priest is to arise after the order of Melchizedek, who is made priest not in terms of an evanescent* (synonyms: passing, temporary) **commandment but by virtue of an indestructible life**. For the testimony runs, ‘you are a priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek’” (Heb 7:11) (Emphasis JAG)

The Peshitta version of verse 12 is very direct and to the point; “*Since there was a change in the priesthood there was a change in the law.*” The “law” in the letters of James and Peter also is obviously the moral laws and not the cultic laws and this corresponds to what Paul wanted to explain but not very successfully at times. Later on again the writer also supports Paul’s arguments about the law:

“There has been a definite setting aside of the previous commandment on account of its limitations and unsatisfactory character. For the Law perfected nothing; though **it paved the way for a better prospect by which we draw near to God**. ‘The Lord has sworn, and will not revoke his word: you are a priest for ever’ – to that extent **Jesus had surety of a better covenant.**” (Heb 7:18, 19) (Emphasis JAG)

Obviously to have a surety to a better covenant is excluding salvific remedies of the old covenant and what is more, the concept of having *the surety* refers to new types of guarantees or conditions pertaining to the new spiritual covenant. Note further that the following two verses imply two different religions.

“But he, because he continues for ever, retains the priesthood in unbroken tenure. Consequently he is able to save absolutely those who approach God through him, since he is always alive to intercede on their behalf. (Heb 7:24, 25)( one must remember this is not a reference to the physical Jesus but to the universal Christ or Son)...**The law indeed appoints men with failings as High Priests**; but the terms of the oath-taking **subsequent to the Law**, appoints a Son who has been permanently perfected.” (Heb 7:28) (Emphasis JAG)

The comparing of the old and redundant to the new spiritual “temple” continues.

“To summarize what has been said, we have a High Priest of this sort, who has taken his seat at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens, *a ministrant of the sacred rites*

and of *the True Tabernacle* (Peshitta: sanctuary), which the Lord (Peshitta: God) and not man had erected.” (Heb 8:1, 2) (Emphasis JAG)

The cultic priests presents the offerings in accordance with the “old” Law but they served only “as a *token and shadow of the heavenly reality*, as Moses was directed when he was about to carry out the construction of the Tabernacle. “‘See’, God said, ‘that you make everything after the pattern shown to you on the mountain.’” (Heb 8:4, 5) The writer of Hebrews did not even use “Temple” but Tabernacle, and is perhaps indicative of the dismay with the cult that he rather refers to the pre-temple history? If one read the next few verses within the mental framework that the writer of Hebrews wanted to create, as the inauguration of the new religion based on the personal and direct relationship of Abraham within the prophetic tradition, one should realise that Temple-ism should now be dead and buried and it vindicates only the life and teachings of Jesus and Paul. Their new religion is radically different and personal; it is in fact anti-temple-ism.

“Moses and his laws are but a token to the heavenly things that is brought into operation by Jesus, but for now, Jesus has obtained a more important ministration in so far as he is *the negotiator of a better covenant*, instituted by God on the basis of better promises. For if that first covenant had been entirely satisfactory, there would be no need for a second one.

Expressing his dissatisfaction God says,

*‘But this is the covenant with the house of Israel*

*I will make after those days’, says the Lord.*

***‘I will put my laws into their minds,***

***And on their hearts I will inscribe them.***

*Yes I will be their God.*

*And they will be my people.*

***And they shall teach no more his fellow,***

And each his brother, **saying ‘Know the Lord’;**

***For they all shall know me***

*From the least to the greatest of them;*

***For I will be merciful to their iniquities,***

*And their sins I will remember no more.’* (Heb 8: 10-12) (Jeri 31:31-34) (Emphasis JAG)

This is a very good descriptive quote of what the new personal religion must be like! Verse 13 from the Peshitta describes the final outcome of this drama; “For he has spoken of a *new covenant*; the first one have become old, **and that which is old and obsolete is near destruction.**” The old Temple has now been symbolically and spiritually “demolished” with this new religion and a new the true sanctuary, the Human Being has arisen in its place. Therefore, nobody will have to teach another for they will all know God from the heart. This is a direct move towards spiritualisation of their religion which was initiated by God within mankind from Creation. The spiritual journey must complete our life cycle by becoming again a fully integrated, but spiritual orientated being. Note also that you eventually do not need mediators or teachers as the laws are in their hearts it is patently and obviously different to Temple-ism!

To make sure they understand:

“But while these comprised the furnishings, it is only into the outer Tabernacle that the priests enter regularly in the performance of their duties. Into the inner Tabernacle only the High Priest enters once a year, **not without blood**, which he offers up for his own and **the people’s sins of ignorance**. By this the *Holy Spirit has indicated that the way into the Most Holy is not yet opened up so long as the outer Tabernacle*, which served as an illustration down to the present era, **still remains its function**. In accordance with this both offering and sacrifices are presented **which are incapable**, so far as **conscience is concerned, of perfecting the worshippers simply by meat-offerings and drink-offerings and the various lustrations, material regulations imposed until the Era of Revision.**” (Heb 9:7-10) (Emphasis JAG).

So, now it should now be clear; the whole Temple cult is totally obsolete and incapable of securing salvation and so are sacrifices! *Both must go* before the better covenant of a direct productive relationship with God can be realised. They must stop these obsolete and ineffective practices. For the benefit of the beginner spiritual pilgrim, who came from the cultic tradition, they were told that Jesus’ blood now covers the whole old blood tradition and must end it forever! No wonder that some Christian group’s writings warned that God’s wrath will still be on them if they continue to sacrifice! It is not so obvious however to realise how deep the influence of the old cultic system was on the guilt ridden, spiritually ignorant psyche, of the prospective convert and he/she must be able somehow to purge their conscience while being taught to see the truth of God’s mercy that was kept from them through the now mostly economic necessity of ritual sacrificial practices.

“For if, the blood of goats and bulls, and the ashes of a heifer sprinkled on those who have incurred defilement, restores the ritual purity of the flesh, how much more shall the blood of Christ, who *by his eternal spirit* offered himself unblemished to God, *to purify our consciences from the dead deeds to serve the Living God?*” (Heb 9:14) (Emphasis JAG)

The point that we desperately need to clarify is, did this special sacrifice, now again became the central theme of God’s new covenant? Of course not, the core lies in Heb 8: 10-12, it is a total different religion based on the mercy of God and the righteousness of loving-kindness from the Spirit or Image within. This multi faceted story about the old cultic system, High Priests and blood sacrifices is to bridge the vast psychological and spiritual divide between the two covenants and the final sacrifice is only a necessary known metaphor in this effort to make a successful transition!

“Consequently *he is the negotiator* of a New Covenant; so that from **a death having occurred in discharge of liability for violations of the previous covenant** (*Peshitta: by his death he became salvation for those who transgressed the old covenant*), those who have been called may obtain the promise of the eternal inheritance.” (Heb 9:15) (Emphasis JAG)

This reasoning here is amazing; Jesus’ death absolves them even from their **guilt within the old covenant** and not against God; it implies that that the old covenant as it was enforced by the

Temple management, was not even directly coupled to God? Within the new covenant blood sacrifices does not make any sense because *there blood is not the issue but the opposite is*; a life of loving-kindness based in the development of the new man; once again to realise your true Self, the heavenly Adam.

The writer is now really driving this sacrificial business to make it clear for ever:

“For the Law being a shadow of the good things in store, not the very image of the actualities; the High Priests *can never with those sacrifices which they offer annually perfect for all time those who approach God. If they could, would not the sacrifices have ceased to be offered?* For the worshippers, no longer having any consciousness of sins would have been purified once and for all. But in these sacrifices there is an annual reminder of sins; for it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins. *Consequently when Christ enters the world he says*, (the true message from God)

***Sacrifice and offering you have not desired:***

***A body you have prepared for me.***

***Holocausts and sin-offerings you have not welcomed.***

*Then said I, lo, I have come –*

***In the roll of the book it is written of me –***

***To carry out your will, o Lord.***” (Heb 10:1-7) (Emphasis JAG)

He then explains further and I quote,

“Besides saying, ‘Sacrifices and offerings, holocausts and sin-offerings, you have neither desired nor welcomed’, - these being offered in accordance with the Law – he goes on to say, ‘Lo, I have come to carry out your will’. ***He abolishes the former to establish the latter.*** By this ‘will’ we are consecrated through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once and for all.” (Heb 10: 8-10) (Emphasis JAG)

If we follow this very clear and valid argument, it is obvious that the Blood sacrifice of Jesus is not a central part of God’s salvic plan but separate statement or rhetorical argument for total abandoning of this archaic religious practices and underlying ideas. It became a partial remedy only for the benefit of the *new cultic converts* to be weaned from a dated system to accept a better one.

*“For by one offering he has perfected for all time those who are consecrated.* (Note, this statement has nothing to do with what the Holy Spirit had to say in the next part)The Spirit is also our witness, for after having said, ‘*This is the covenant I will make with them after those days*’, the Lord says, ‘*I will put my laws in their hearts, and on their minds I will write them, and their sins and iniquities I will remember no more*’. ***Where, then, there is absolution from these an offering for sins is no longer required.***” (Heb 10:14-18) (Emphasis JAG)

The point is that Paul’s and the writer of Hebrews’ core message made was that the old cultic system must go and was to be substituted with a new and better spiritual covenant. The resistance to this vital change was the reason Paul battled so much with the Judaizers and Temple bound pagans! It is virtually his life’s work to help them make the transition from the intimidation of ancient cultic religions to progress to a free relationship with the real universal God.

This lesson in theology for the Hebrew is drawing to a close; everything starts with faith in God.

**“Now without faith it is not possible to please God, for he who approaches God must have faith in his existence, and that he rewards those who seek him out.”** (Heb 11:6) (Emphasis JAG)

With this definition of faith, as a necessary starting point and a standard need to be clarified for those Gentiles that believed in “idols”, I have no quarrel. Even for Jewish converts “faith” in a new universal, non-ethnic God was to be a part of a new paradigm for them.

Now after everything is said, how should we behave?

“This being the case, with such a dense mass of witnesses about us, *we too must throw aside every hampering conceit and closely-clinging sin.* Let us run with grim determination our appointed course, keeping Jesus the starter and finisher (Peshitta: **author and perfecter**) **of faith’s race** fixedly in view, who for the sake of the bliss in store for him **bore the cross**, having scorned the shame, and has now taken his seat on the right hand of the throne of God. (Heb12:2) (A very powerful and mature statement about Jesus’ life and death and about us and sin)... **You have not yet come to the point of bloodshed in your striving against sin** (Heb 12:4)...*follow peace with all men, and holiness, without which no man shall see our Lord. Take heed lest any man among you be found short of the grace of God,* or lest any root of bitterness spring forth and harm you, and therefore be defiled.(Heb12:14, 15)...Therefore receiving a Kingdom which cannot be shaken, *let us hold fast that grace whereby we may serve and please God with reverence and godly fear.*” (Heb 12:28) ...Remember your leaders, those who have declared God’s Message to you. Copy their faith, **closely observing the outcome of their manner of life.**” (Heb13:7) (Emphasis JAG)

Here we see, to my mind, the most fitting description of the realities around the death of Jesus that he is “the author and perfecter” of our faith and strived to “*the point of bloodshed*” in his battle against sin and to bring his new message of a direct relationship with God to all who wanted to know. But he lived and taught the way but, *you have you participate in this growth process to be reconciled to your godly Self, Nature and God.*

A very interesting summary follows,

“*Jesus Christ is the same nowadays and always,* so do not be misled by varied and novel doctrines. *It is well for the mind to be confirmed by loving-kindness,* not by food (cultic regulations), from which those who have argued about it have never gained any benefit. *We have an altar off which those who serve the Tabernacle have no right to eat...* Through him, therefore, let us continually offer to God ‘the sacrifice of thanksgiving (Peshitta: praise to God), namely, ‘the fruit of our lips’, confessing his Name. But never neglect social service and fellowship (Peshitta: kindness and fellowship with the poor), for with *such sacrifices God is well-pleased.*” (Heb 13:10-16) (Emphasis JAG)

The old cultic religion cannot be reconciled with the new spiritual religion. We must also notice that if “*Jesus Christ is the same nowadays and always*” they are not talking of the physical Jesus but the Christ principle or nature that we also share with him.

Nowhere in Paul’s letters or in Jesus’ teachings, are fruits of the spirit optional, or decoupled from the process of salvation. Paul in following Jesus and James rather made the behavioural element central and of absolute necessity in the salvific process and never view it as secondary. Jesus, Stephen, James, Peter and Paul battled with the Jewish Cultic system and its laws and regulations which Paul unfortunately, depicted in his shorthand as “works of law”, without spelling it out that he did not include moral laws in this derogative term, which is the main cause of many misunderstandings in later Christianity. Paul in fact, did not only battle with cultic lore but with ideas of ethnic superiority of some Jews while doing his best to get the new spiritual Israel away from these unspiritual foundations. His use of cultic sacrificial imagery was instrumental and of only initial value although he recognises the many different ways one can interpret Jesus’ personal sacrifice ending in his death for persisting in proclaiming God’s truth in the Mystical tradition while ransoming them from their spiritual ignorance and the exploitation of the cultic system.

This stance of Jesus against Temple-ism was not unique from a historical point of view. Through our study of Early Christianity we saw that the Prophets, Essenes and Jewish Christians were dead set against sacrifices and it was also confirmed by the “Fathers” of the Church. Furthermore, soon after 70 CE, if you lived as a Christian and the physical Temple was already history, why would you make a big story out of blood sacrifices for God’s consumption or honour or to satisfy his need to punish mistakes? Why did neither James nor the Didache, their catechism of the time, or any the different Gnostic groups, make this blood sacrificial theme their own central premise? Because, it was and is, historical nonsense and was later kept alive for the benefit of the priestly management and the political powers to keep the population ignorant and “in their place” as well as milk them for goods and money.

From a spiritual perspective, if you accepted the merciful God of the Prophets, Jesus and Paul, who forgive our “unripe”, egotistic, foolish and ignorant acts, based on our genuine repentance, springing from an authentic spiritual search, why would one even mention sacrifices? It was no longer required because the real universal God did not want it in the first place! The slogan of the final sacrifice is for the benefit only for those who were still battling with a primitive mindset and of course for those who want to yield the same absolute power over people’s spiritual lives.

The new “faith” that they will have to subscribe to, is in actual fact very old and came from the Prophetic mystical tradition. Paul’s emphasis on faith was absolutely necessary as the radical

rejection of Temple-ism was a serious leap of faith for any convert; the consequences if Jesus and Paul were wrong is not only social rejection but the prospect of hell and damnation! The Gentiles even had to make a more serious leap of faith; from their ancient religious traditions and gods to a new “foreign” more abstract concept of God! Faith was central and very necessary, but it did not mean “faith” in a new sacrifice as being in the sufficient cause for salvation; it was a totally new system of beliefs that you would need to have “faith” in.

Because Jesus brought this spiritual tradition back again to centre stage and in a very exemplary and practical way, while teaching the mystical tradition to anyone that cared to seek God and had the spiritual ears to hear, the opposition cultic Powers with the help of the hysterical ignorant, fearful followers had to silence him. The wonder and power of his life is centred in the fact that he consciously and willingly faced his death because he would not compromise God’s truth coming from within and therefore his integrity as a true Son of man. That he was experienced as alive after death by his followers is a testimony to their own mystic spiritual maturity and the absolute success of his earthly mission as a very special teacher of the mystery of God in man. This wonderful and enlightened teacher was sadly again reduced to a cultic blood sacrifice in the hands of a new Roman Christian Cult replete with Temples, priests with only new forms of coercive sacrifices; from a spiritual perspective it was a regression back to square one and soon the Gnostics and mystics would even be persecuted.



## Chapter 11

### The Christology and soteriology of Paul the apostle to the Gentile

#### 11.1 Introduction

Israel played an important role in the sense making approach and the belief system of Paul, but says Den Heyer; the promise to Abraham had a universal element (Gen.12.3). “Despite himself, the reluctant prophet Jonah had success in pagan and hostile Nineveh. It could be said that Paul trod in the footsteps of this prophet” but in a willing way (2000:278). Interestingly Jesus also identified with Jonah’s mission of spreading his good news.

Jesus and Paul’s missions were both focussed on effecting radical mind, heart and spiritual changes. To really understand what they were up against, one must understand the ordinary mindset of the people at the time and how ideas got institutionalised from a historical perspective. What is also important is that we need to realise that within any culture and its religious system at their time, there will always be the “ignorant” masses, albeit defined differently depending on the ruling power paradigms that will be managed by the elite for their own purposes. However, there will also be present within the population mix, the philosophers and intellectuals that will not be fooled by these power games. Furthermore, we are not more intelligent now as they were a mere 2 to 3 thousand years ago. We surely have access to more scientific knowledge but do not necessarily have a better understanding of man’s place in the Cosmos or his relationship to the Cosmic Mind behind it all.

Our conception of God could be different to theirs but from a mystical perspective we have no real advantage as the essence of God is unknowable through science. The fact is that the religion served up for the masses are inherently different to the personal experiential religion of the philosophers and mystics and that this difference should have been more easily recognisable or obvious by now because of new scientific insights. Sadly, frozen dogma resulted in frozen and dated religious beliefs that were so effectively forced into the minds of people through religious and cultural indoctrination that mythical “factual” beliefs and spiritual blindness persists up to this day. Paul had the same problems within an even more superstitious, pre-scientific world view to influence cultic and ethnic driven minds as modern day spiritual reformers have with changing the minds of Biblicists and fundamentalists of all persuasions.

## 11.2 Paul's own understanding of the history of religion

In order to have a real chance in interpreting Paul and his arguments in favour of his specific brand of Christianity correctly, we should thoroughly understand his own "history of religion". His theological insights were not unshakeable set and solidified at a particular stage in his life, but developed gradually (Den Heyer 2000:280). According to Paul the evolution of the "true religion" that he wanted to promote started with Abraham. Although Abraham was a man of his day and all religions made sacrifices to their Gods when things went wrong or when they thought or knew that they have "sinned" or when they needed something from God or when they felt happy and blessed. But with Abraham there was a very important difference already; he did his own sacrificing and did not need a priest to intervene on his behalf. Abraham had a personal and direct relationship with his God and was even called a friend of God.

Abraham was not a Jew either. He was, according to tradition, dead set against idolism and probably the first real example of a monotheist, even before Akhenaten but definitely, according to Paul, long before Moses had such a lofty idea. Furthermore, because of his personal relationship with his God, he was always with him and did not reside in a specific building somewhere near national headquarters. God also taught him an important lesson that if he felt a need for sacrificing; to use animals in the future and not people. Abraham's personal religion was transmitted to his sons and their posterity until Moses brought in his cultic, law driven and priestly mediated religion and it was made the national religion. After Paul learned more about the enlightened religion of Jesus and especially after his mystical encounter with Christ, he became convinced that the structured form of cultic Jewish Temple-ism, was a major step backwards from a spiritual point of view. He realised that the prophets already knew that but ignorance, guilt and a well thought out coercive cultic management system, were stronger than the odd prophetic warning about this misguided religious system.

Inherent in the cultic mediated religious system is the negative effect of ethnicity and ethnic pride for a new universal spiritual religion and Paul had also to address it specifically. Abraham's covenant was essentially a spiritual one but Moses' one were, to his mind, too much focussed on Jewishness than on the real moral will of an universal God. Abraham's covenant with God came about because he "belief" in a spiritual, universal God and not in a tribal Temple bound god. His relationship was direct and personal and not for personal gain but he wanted to do what was correct from God's perspective. Abraham's "belief", meaning "belief system", in God was appreciated he and entered into the "true" spiritual or mystical covenant with God as a friend of God. The moral laws of God were in his heart and mind and not on stone or paper; open to all who want to seek God's will, directly and on own responsibility.

In contrast Moses, according to Paul, who's Temple-ism, was based organisationally and fundamentally on cultic laws and rites had some ethnic and even ethnic cleansing or purity undertones, which Paul did not want to incorporate in his new belief system. Sacrificial principles were already dated from the perspectives of the prophetic, mystical and philosophical traditions. The Jewish Essenes already stopped these coercive practices because it was not "God's will from the start". God wanted them to show loving-kindness and justice to all but especially to the poor and oppressed and had no need for the burned fat of steers. In any case the real beneficiaries of the sacrificial system were its Priestly management and the State coffers as it was also a system of tax collection. The office of the High Priest, in Jesus' time already, was allocated by the Romans rulers to the highest bidder on a tender basis.

Obviously and understandably, Paul realised that for any enlightened "believer" in a universal God for all of mankind, all tribal-national-cultic systems were terrible obstacles to general spiritual advancement of people. Paul realised that if Christianity as a universal spiritually inclined religion wanted to lead its converts to a higher concept of God and in his new borderless domain, then national cultic sacrificial regulations as well as ethnic superiority "laws" must go! Being a realist Paul knew that bridging concepts and new interpretive metaphors will have to be part of the transition process. God did not need a final special blood cultic sacrifice, to the contrary; only certain people needed one so that they can make the mental and psychological transition from a cultic religion to a spiritual and personal religion based on the "beliefs" of Abraham. These arguments of Paul had nothing to do with the universal moral and spiritual injunctions of the so-called Ten Commandments. They were needed for all children in the "faith" until they become part of their own conscience and written in their minds and hearts through the Spirit of God within.

To conclude from Paul's letters that the moral laws were the same as and are synonymous with, the cultic, ethnic or purity laws is just totally wrong. The moral laws were sacred and valid for everyone and everybody knew it. Love of God and neighbour was of utmost importance from God's perspective but the more than 600 laws or regulations covering Jewishness, purity and cultic rites and procedures were a bone of contention to the prophets, Jesus and Paul. David and Jesus trespassed some and re-interpret other cultic laws in a bid to bring a bit of common sense to the "letter" of the law. Paul and Jesus were very serious and strict with regard to moral laws and their practical application as the real fruits of their belief system and totally necessary on our way to salvation. See the Sermon on the Mount as well as many of Jesus' parables to this effect. We will later on give some of Paul's many references to stress the necessity of moral behaviour also.

Jesus as special cultic sacrifice was only a transitional belief that should be totally re-interpreted as you grow spiritually and then it should become a metaphor for describing your own participation in

the process of salvation by dying to the “elemental forces”; to stop identifying with your egoistic thought programs as well as recognising wilful coercion; be reborn or resurrected spiritually in the Image of God; putting on the “new man” as a spiritually enlightened and internally driven person; becoming your destiny, a Human Being.

### **11.3 An overview of Paul’s Christology and soteriological ideas.**

Christology and soteriology are always locked in a complex framework of beliefs and convictions that underlie their expression. The most important of these beliefs and convictions being the ones that explains our views on mankind, nature and God. We have now had a look at Paul’s historical environment as well as his take on the real history of the “spiritual” versus “fleshly” Israel.

From the writings of Paul it is clear that his own concept of mankind is related to the Creation story from Genesis and his Christology and soteriology is essentially mystical in the participatory sense of the word. Possible influences of other mystical traditions, such as that of Daniel’s “Son of man” seems to be present only in his “end of time” expectations which include a second coming of “Christ” as judge and could be informed by a combination of many ideas known at the time as well as personal beliefs. These beliefs are however secondary from a salvific or spiritual growth perspective and therefore not of any real practical importance to us.

What is evident is that he believed that God made man capable of manifesting the image of God in the spiritual sense but this is not an automatic or easy process. If you are in any way religiously inclined you will have to embark on this spiritual journey as Jesus and he himself did, because this is the only way to cultivate an authentic relationship with God and realising your spiritual resurrection, experiencing the peace of God in the process.

The fact is that evidence around them and later within themselves, suggests to Jesus and Paul that people are caught up in the grip of coercive cultic religions. A radical change of mind and beliefs were needed to free them from their ignorance. Mankind needed help to realise and overcome their spiritual ignorance or “deadness” and that only God’s truth, unmediated by culture and religious ideology, can make them free. After his Damascus experience Paul became totally convinced that Jesus was part of God’s plan to bring the necessary stimulus, knowledge, example and support for this much needed change in religious orientation and practice which is realised only through spiritual metamorphosis to make it functionally operational and sustainable.

Mature spirituality and religion is in fact a personal relationship with God and you will be personally held responsible for your thoughts, attitudes and actions. The process of understanding and

managing our worldly ego identifications and its survival instincts represents a very daunting task for any spiritual pilgrim. What was even more perplexing to Paul and even to us today, is the fact that most people seems not even interested to undertake this journey of spiritual development. He suspects it is due to the strangle hold of present external ideological and religious coercion as well as their ignorance about the effect of internal ego, emotional and mind programs have on them and he tries to address their ignorance within a time bound, historical and belief framework that sometimes seems weird to the mind of a 21<sup>st</sup>. century scientifically orientated spiritual mind. In our opinion this complex of cultural-religious-historical beliefs of himself and his potential converts are in fact the very reason why later theologians misunderstood Paul on very important points and we will discuss this again a little further down.

In his endeavour to convert any individual from any nation or group to the truths of the One universal and only God, he believed that the Jews had a slight head start and only so because they were brought up with a better concept of God than the Gentiles. The latter group still served obvious “idols” as gods, but they suffer from the same personal and existential problems. Therefore all suffers from unclear perception and spiritual ignorance is enslaved to body, ego and mind games, lusting after self gratification and personal gain. Realising the serious human challenges for survival, that does not make us inherently bad, but to the contrary we also “possess this treasure in an earthly vessel”, which must assist us in our battle for enlightenment.

He also found out that many were depraved and did not even want to listen to his good news and some did not understood what he taught and he therefore proposed a few, not so spiritual reasons for spiritual apathy, ranging from wilful selection by God and explained by the Potter’s autonomy in his creative work. Exactly this dilemma led to the Gnostics alternative answer that a lesser god tried his hand at creation. Luckily, this metaphysical philosophising is not the core of his message or debates with others. But this urge to explain this dilemma did already have other standard answers consisting of God’s wrath and end time interventions described in detail by so called prophets, who “knows” God’s Essence and future plans. Paul did not make a habit of “prophesying” but bought into some, as most did and also installed Christ in them as final judge. Paul concentrated mostly on the marvellous mercy of God as a loving reaction on our genuine repentance as taught by John the Baptist and Jesus. Living in the Spirit saves; the moral laws are now within. (2 Cor 7:9, 10) (Rom 8:1-4; 8:14-23)

As the real core of his mystical view on Jesus, he saw Jesus as the ideal example of the manifestation of the Wisdom of God in mankind; the first fruits of the manifestation of godliness in mankind, which makes him also the human example and special teacher to us helping us to realise our own individual image of God; the Spirit or Christ within. But, most importantly, that Jesus-Christ

as a true Son and messenger of the truth from God was vindicated in his message by his spiritual resurrection of which Paul was also a mystical witness and all serious followers can now participate in spiritual resurrection. (1 Cor 1:23, 24; 2 Cor 3:14-18; 4:4-7, 14; Rom 8:9-11)

Den Heyer summarises the meaning of the cross and the importance of the resurrection for Paul:

“The apostle could only speak positively about the cross because he has discovered that the one who had been crucified had been raised by God from the dead. He did not regard the cross as a sacrifice but as a curse.” (2000:282)

There was no confusion in his mind and in his letters between the role of God and that of his Messiah or Jesus-Christ. God is the unknown Father and the Essence of all creation and Jesus-Christ was their leader and Master or Lord. In the mystical sense however, “Christ” represented the real spiritual essence of mankind; the image of God in mankind. To his mind this Christ factor is somehow also part of the Creational Word or Wisdom of God to whom God also gave extensive powers over creation and therefore made us custodians and co-creators according to Genesis. Paul believed that the principles of truth, righteousness, wisdom and loving-kindness, must be our guiding light and they will also be the criteria for the final judgement at the end time. Beyond the arguments of Abraham’s “belief” (read belief system, which had specific and multiple beliefs incorporated in it) versus Moses’ cultic “laws” as discussed, there were no easy “belief only” soteriology in Paul’s letters; salvation is serious business although it starts always from God’s mercy as he freely forgives us our past sins on repentance but it does not stop there; you must bear the fruits of your genuine productive “beliefs” and face their practical consequences on judgement day!

We are now absolutely convinced that Hays (2002), is correct in that Paul’s mystical beliefs are based on faith in the real unknowable, universal God and His presence in us through his Spirit and are based *primarily on the beliefs and example of Jesus himself* as well as on a special and intimate personal mystical experiential relationship with the resurrected Christ which now became narrowly related with God’s Spirit within. We will address these beliefs systematically again further down. Jesus as Abraham’s seed, had to come at the right time as “Jesus the Anointed successor to Abraham” to inaugurate the spiritual covenant a-new; to bring all nations in the right relationship with God and to establish the real Spiritual Israel with “the Christ” or heavenly Adam within as the operative power in all (Eph 3:2-12; 3:17).

We therefore need to keep in mind the very special importance that Paul placed on Jesus’ mission to “rip the dividing curtain” of the Jerusalem Temple (Heb 6:19, 20); so that all nations can be reconciled to God (Eph 2:11-18) and to re-negotiate “a new and better covenant” (Heb 8:10-13;

9:15). This theme was symbolically and practically a core element in Paul's message or "news" of Jesus' teaching of God's mercy through repentance to all; he demolished the Cultic exclusivity of the Temple and God is now multinational and also unbiased from an ethnic or national perspective. Jewishness as being a special "religious", "covenantal qualification" is now outdated and rather a dangerous myth in Jesus' and especially in Paul's new religion.

Most of Paul's "arguments" were about problems of identification; must they be "Jewish" Christians or "Universal" Christians. He debated the merit, need or problem of becoming "Jewish" or circumcised, within the new inclusive Abraham-Jesus-Christ spiritual religion and these arguments cannot be understood properly in any other context outside the first century Cultic religious scenario. These arguments about the "specialness" of Jews and ethnic purity, were not even needed, or were not relevant, for spiritual orientated Christians, then or now; it was meant to protect the new cultic converts from the Judaizers only; these arguments are time bound and totally unnecessary to even mention in a mature spiritual context; it stands to reason, you do not want even to discuss them – God is One and so is his kingdom! Nevertheless Paul had to face the current practical situation of the superstitious and ignorant repressed masses and then work from there in a real spiritual sense.

The new "Messiah", Christ or "Jesus-Christ" for the Gentiles was according to Paul, Moses' superior, although he could not say it blatantly; Jesus was the "mediator to the new and better" spiritual covenant that had to replace the cultic one. He is not a mediator between man and God but he mediates the new covenant to the people; grounding it in history and in the spiritual tradition of Abraham, the Prophets and Mystics and based mainly on the Genesis Mysteries and Prophetic writings. (Heb 6: 19, 20; 8:10-13; 12:2; Jer. 31:31-34) The "in living" Christ in Jesus Christ made him therefore essentially a tutor and guide as well as an example to people to lead every believer to a radical new understanding of God and Self; their heritage as children of God as well as their place and function within the newly defined Kingdom of God. (Col1:26, 27; Rom 8:16)

For both Jesus and Paul this new Kingdom was essentially a spiritual one that also had the obligation to influence the worldly kingdom. Unfortunately, to my mind Paul much more than was attributed to Jesus, became so obsessed about the end time prophesies and his expectations of the nearness of its materialisation that he sometimes lost track of the longer term obligations for the sustainability of the earthly spiritual Kingdom. This short term vision sometimes made him prone to argue against his own proclaimed principles of gender and political equality not to make too many cultural and political "waves".

In explaining his Messianic concepts to Jews and Gentiles, which were at very different levels of spiritual development, he had to use a variety of methodologies and not always in an ideal logical

progression. Jesus as man was from the line of David and born of a woman, but much more importantly, he was spiritually from the line of the heavenly Adam. He might also be to some gentiles, a representative of various models of Persian and Jewish forms of traditional Messiahs and “end time” Judges and Saviours of mankind. But most importantly, and here all the Mystical and Gnostic groups agree, he was a very special messenger and teacher from God to introduce in a visual, practical and personal way, the new spiritual covenant that had to replace all the Cultic ones, including the one of Moses; to inaugurate the coming of the new universal multinational Kingdom of God. (Eph 3: 1-18; Rom 10:5-13) He wanted to symbolically and effectively destroy the hold of the cultic system on those who have ears to hear. But in the transition period, this Christ or Messiah needs to take over various functions which were mostly dependant on the cultural and religious heritage of his listeners as well as their level of spiritual development. This Christ must replace their cultic lore dependence with new spiritual concepts that sometimes absorb the old beliefs and rites and gave them new specific spiritual meanings. (Heb 9:6-15; 10:1-10; 10:14-18; 12:1-4)

The laws that govern the National sacrificial Cult and also those defining Jewishness within the Mosaic covenant cannot be transferred to a new universal bloodless, Spiritual Tradition. If you want to break free of obedience to Cultic-Ethnic Laws, what new faith content does it require? Who has the authority to fill in the details of this new belief system? This new belief system represents the important part in Paul’s letters and only his own current audience apparently understood all the arguments properly. Later dogmaticians made up their own meta-narratives from arguments of passing importance and from time bound beliefs that were not even relevant for the spiritual and Gnostic Christians themselves by the end of the first century; no Christian in the right frame of mind, by then, did care about debates about cultic sacrificial laws or Jewishness in Christianity any more.

#### **11.4 A summary of important Pauline soteriological ideas**

There were always two very different traditions within Judaism and the “correct” one was the Pietistic and personal religious traditions of Abraham, the Prophets and Mystics. In this tradition, the Wisdom of God or Word of God is the representative or bearer of godly wisdom, power and spirituality and seems to be related also to the Heavenly Adam as the veritable image of God and as the first created Son of God. This ideal human Spirit of God in Adam, called by Paul the Christ Spirit was, in an exemplary way, realised in the person of Jesus to guide and show us the way back to our essential Self and therefore in the right relationship with God. (Eph 4:20, 21; Col1:12, 15, 26, 27; Rom: 8:18, 19) This spiritual, god-like Adam in us had to be quickened again in man at the predestined development stage of the evolutionary development of mankind as was “planned and prophesied” in the “scriptures” and will complete and supersede the Mosaic tradition of law and obedience. This development plan really started to gain momentum with Abraham and was fulfilled



in Jesus as manifestation of the Christ or Messiah for the universal God. This new covenant will not have Levites as priests but as Abraham and even David at times but especially Jesus demonstrated, the new covenant priest-ship will only be defined by your own relationship with God; we must become a veritable “nation of priests” in the new Kingdom as its laws of love and justice are written on our hearts. (Jer. 31: 31-34; 2 Cor 3:13-18)

Paul knew that only individuals, who from a spiritual inclination, stemming from the Spirit of God within can decide to accept God’s challenge to become Human Beings again. Salvation is not a third party happening but a call from God to personal commitment; to return to the original intuitive, conscience motivated relationship with the Father. It surely starts with belief in God and from the premise of a new concept of God as being merciful and not judgmental, that wants us to return home, but somebody else cannot do the travelling for you. Paul’s mysticism is essentially a Spirit mysticism that he variously calls it by different names but mostly Christ within. Albert Schweitzer, made a very valid point in my opinion that,

*“God –mysticism, in the sense of a direct becoming-one with the infinite creative will of God, is impossible of realisation. All attempts to extract living religion from pure Monistic God-mysticism are foredoomed to failure, whether they are undertaken by the Stoics, by Spinoza, Indian or Chinese thought. . . Since human thinking cannot comprehend the eternal in its true nature . . . but in the last resort it must leave the incomprehensible, uncomprehended, and take the path of seeking to be certified of God as the Will of Love, and finding in it both inner peace and springs of action...His (Paul’s) great achievement was to grasp as the thing essential to being a Christian, the experience of union with Christ. . .For Christianity is a Christ-Mysticism, that is to say a ‘belonging together’ with Christ as our Lord, **grasped in thought and realised in experience.**” (Schweitzer, 1998, 377, 379) (Emphasis JAG)*

We agree but on condition that Schweitzer’s “Christ-Mysticism”, must not be coupled to the concept “Jesus-Christ” and thereby smuggling in new intermediaries between us and God again; but it must be related to the Image of God or Spirit of God within us all from Adam’s side of our genealogy as Paul intended in my opinion. Jesus taught but the Spirit activates our conscience. (Eph 4:20-25; 1 Cor 6:19, 20; Col 1:15, 26, 27) Paul wants us to identify with the Spirit of God in mankind; the Christ spirit and not to identify with the unknowable God but with his wisdom and intent for mankind. In this respect it seems that this Christian mysticism does differ in its essence with the more lofty claims of Eastern Mysticism. A mystical experience of unity with the Reality of God’s Creation as an integral part of God, is more acceptable to many Christian mystics than to call it unity with “God” as if, we can know or understand God totally, to make such “enlightened” statements. Mystical experiences of course vary with each seeker and her/his present level of understanding and each must “see” for themselves and interpret what they saw, but it will reflect their present level of understanding and not God’s essence. Pauls mysticism is also not a passive, meditational mysticism but very active in

the sense that this Spirit within, if awakened and followed changes peoples hearts, minds and behaviour in an obvious, productive way.

The most important element of Paul's soteriology according to this study is the participational and growth aspects of the salvation process which are closely linked. (1 Cor 3:1-3-spiritual children), 1Cor 3:16,17-Spirit of God within- you are the temple; 1 Cor 2:2-16- mystery explained-we have the Spirit plus mind of Christ; 1 Cor 4:1,2-must be faithful; Phil 3:9-21-know the power of his resurrection and press onward; victory in Gods highest calling; transformation to the likeness of Christ).

The participation of the Christian in Jesus-Christ is also on two levels firstly, participation in the growth of Jesus the man through our common existential battles to spiritual maturity mediated by the awaking Spirit within (Heb 5:7-10-Jesus grew through suffering to perfection; Phil 2:5,- reasons like Jesus Christ; Phil 2:8- he became obedient to death; Phil 2:12- work out your own salvation likewise; Phil 2:15- to be sincere and innocent children of God; Heb 12:4- fight sin to own bloodshed). Secondly, participation towards perfection or wholeness, in an intuitive mystical relationship with God through the fully operational Spirit or Christ Spirit within; 1Tim 1:5- fulfilment of God's commandment is love from a pure heart and good conscience). The process therefore starts with the awakening of the "treasure in our earthly vessel" within us (2 Cor 4:7).

Sensitising our conscience as our moral identity and source of internal motivation; the real Self, while we progressively recognise, understand and disengage from our bodily dominated ego, as well as our emotional, memory and mind programs as they are all illusionary identities. We need to grow our intellectual and spiritual awareness in the pursuit of truth and wisdom which is also an inherent part of the spiritual conversion process. (Heb 6:1-6- if you repented and is forgiven you must progress, bear fruits and not start at beginning every time; 2 Cor 4:4-Christ in the likeness of God 7- you also have this treasure,16- do not grow weary, renew the inner man daily; Gal 6:5- everyman carry his own burden; Gal 6:12-15- crucified to the world; a new creation ; Gal 3:3- from a genuine spiritual orientation you cannot turn back; Gal 4:19- grow from being little children to the Christ reality in you; 2 Cor 3:16-18- turn to the Lord which is Spirit - the veil will be taken away - be transformed into the same likeness by the Spirit; 2 Cor 4:16- do not grow weary, be renewed day by day; 2 Cor 5:14-18- died in Christ- reconciled with God- new ministry; Rom 6:1-7- baptised in his death; we are buried with him- our old lives is past; Rom 8:4-19- walk in the spirit not flesh; we have the spirit of Christ, which is the Spirit of God and he longs for our manifestation to be "sons of God"; Rom 14:16-19- the kingdom of God is righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit; all other things are secondary; Eph 1:13-18- from Christ you have heard the truth- if honour his truths and God will give you the spirit of wisdom and you will understand the richness of your inheritance; Eph 4: 20-24-the truth is taught to you and it is found in Jesus; lay down former behaviour and be

renewed in the spirit of your mind, put on the new man who is created by God in righteousness and true holiness; Eph 5:8-10- for previously we were ignorant and in the dark- now we must live in the light because we know better, Eph 15-17- now we must live like the wise and not lack wisdom what the will of God is; Col 1:9,10- Paul prayed for them to acquire God's wisdom and spiritual understanding to bear righteous fruits and further grow in the knowledge of God; Col 2:20-23- if you have died to the world you should not concern yourself too much with cultic regulations; Col 3:8-16- put off all bad behaviour and put on the new life which is "renewed in knowledge after the pattern in which it was originally created" (Peshitta:1178), no human ordinances and feasts are important; Phil 1:9-11, grow in love and spiritual understanding, filled with fruits of righteousness as Jesus Christ did to the glory of God).

To make it assessable to us Paul told us that our growth process is very much along the same broad outlines as that of Jesus. His earthly life and own personal growth process gave effect to a special intuitive awareness that enabled him to see through the religious and cultural schemes and atrocities of his time and to develop a profoundly spiritual orientation to life. (2 Cor 4:3,11- the hidden gospel made known; Christ in the likeness of God and that the life of Jesus might also be made manifest in our bodies; 2 Cor 3:18- we shall be transformed into the same likeness; Rom 6:1-7 life through the same tribulations as Jesus did to die to sin; Rom 5:1-5- we also glory in our tribulations; the love of God is poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit that is given to us; Heb 5:7-9 Jesus was "a good Son, because of fear and suffering which he endured he learned obedience" (Peshitta:1198), and became the "author" (Peshitta:1199) of life everlasting; Phil 2:5-8- Jesus was in the likeness of God and form of men, obedient to death).

The same process and example can be seen also in Paul and that makes him an indisputable and authentic teacher of the early Christian mystical tradition. (Gal 2: 20, 21- Paul was crucified with Christ who lives in him; Phil 3:7-21- he persecuted Jesus' followers from the standpoint of law but consider it nonsense now, what is important is the "faith of Christ: which is, the righteousness which comes from God" (Peshitta: 1175), be a partaker of his sufferings, even to a death like his).

As Jesus-Christ did, we also have to become a "new man", a Heavenly or spiritual Adam, Christ-like as we are born physically from physical parents and spiritually from a Heavenly Parent; our lofty genealogy must be obvious in our behaviour. Does this sound easy or do you only have to believe a few beliefs and then are saved? Not at all and if one only care to read Paul's letters with an open mind you cannot help to see how crucially important moral and spiritual behaviour is in the process of salvation. None other topic get so much attention as his warnings against unbecoming behaviour and injunctions to life according to the Spirit.

There is no doubt in Paul's mind that you will only see Jesus or God again if you live in accordance to the Spirit's guidance from within and there is no such thing as a "spoiled child of God", believing but conniving against others in a loveless way and only interested in own "success" whatever their definitions; they will not get favourable judgements from God or judge "Christ" when his/her time comes. As we have discussed this theme within the different letters we will only give a represented few references here. (1Thes 4:8- by doing injustices to men you wrong God who has given you his Holy Spirit; 2 Thes:1:11,12- Paul pray for them that they will live godly that Jesus Christ be glorified in you and you in him; Gal 5:19-26- grow until Christ is a reality within you; Gal 6:7-10- sow things of the spirit so that you reap everlasting life ; 1Cor 3:9- you are God's work and God's building 1Cor 4:1,2- as stewards of the mysteries of God everyone must be faithful; 1Cor 5:6-8- celebrate the new Passover not with the old leaven (teaching or religion) but with the new leaven of purity and sanctity; 1Cor 6:19,20- glorify God with your body; the new temple of God; 1Cor 9:25- run to win the garland which is everlasting; 1Cor 11:1,- take me as an example as I follow Christ; 1Cor 13:1-13 love transcends and grow up spiritually which results in loving-kindness to be the highest of all virtues; 1Cor 15:56-58- the sting of death is sin; do the works of the Lord so that your labour is not in vain; 2 Cor 4:11 the life of Jesus must become alive in our mortal bodies; 2 Cor 5:9-10- everyone will be judged according to his deeds, 2 Cor 5:17-followers of Christ is a new creation; 2 Cor 7:1- serve in holiness and reverence of God; 2 Cor 13:3-5- heal your souls; Christ is in you; "if not so then you are rejected" (Peshitta:1162); Rom1:18- wrath of God for wickedness and suppressing the truth; Rom 2:16- God shall judge the secrets of men " according to my gospel by Jesus Christ" (Peshitta:1123); Rom 3:31-we do not nullify the law but uphold it; Rom 8:6-to be carnally minded is death, Rom 8:9- if man do not have the Spirit of God he does not belong to him, Rom 8:14- those led by the Spirit are sons of God; Rom 11:22- continue in goodness otherwise you will be cut off; Rom 12:1- present your bodies as a living sacrifice to God; Rom 12:2-be transformed to the will of God , Rom 12:18-21- overcome evil by good; Rom 13:8-9 love fulfil the law, which is then listed and are the moral laws not cultic ones; Rom 14:12- everyone shall answer for himself to God; Rom 14:12,17- the kingdom of God is righteousness and peace and joy in the holy Spirit; Rom 15:14- filled with goodness and made perfect in knowledge; Phil 1:10-choose the things that are excellent and pure; Phil 2:3-do nothing through strife or vainglory, but in humility; Phil 2:5-reason within like Christ; Phil 2:13- it is God who inspires you to do good things, Phil 2:15- that you be sincere and blameless, like the innocent children of God- shine like lights; Phil 3:14-press forward to victory of Gods highest calling; Phil 4:8-think only about the virtuous things; Eph 4:6- One God and Father of all , who is above all and through all and in all of us Eph 4:22-32- lay aside the old man; be renewed, a new man, who is created by God in righteousness and true holiness; kind and tender hearted; Col 1:28-everyman to become perfect; Col 3:24,25- rewards according to what you have done; 2 Tim2:15- strive to conduct yourself perfect before God; Heb 12:14- follow peace and holiness, without which no man

will see our Lord; Heb 13:16- do not forget kindness and fellowship with the poor; for with such sacrifices God is well pleased).

Furthermore, every time Paul talks in participational contexts, it implicitly implies that you must become like Jesus-Christ and no blood sacrifice exempts you from these injunctions either. All those verses describing participation applies also to tell you there is no atonement through believing “only”. Our real consolation in the belief department is that we can now belief in a merciful God that forgive repented sins from grace and we do not need to make blood sacrifices any more. We only have to live by our renewed or reborned conscience that informs us about good and evil and now reclaimed by us as our birthright through the heavenly Adam as the Spirit and Image of God in us. Jesus died to make sure that we no longer live in ignorance about spiritual matters; he have shown to us clearly by his life and teachings and the Christ spirit within him that we do not have to fear death anymore. We will now try to summarise within the historical background the logic in the process to salvation that Paul taught.

### **11.5 Paul’s comprehensive processual program of salvation**

Paul’s soteriology seems complicated because he had to address the issue of spiritual growth and salvation within diverse cultures as well as within the convert’s developmental awareness. Therefore the point of departure and immediate teaching objectives will be different for the newly converted members and for the spiritually, more mature members. This is an effort to reconstitute his full developmental program from the study of his letters. We start with the background scenario as well as the basic new beliefs.

- As expected, everything must start with new **belief in** the real, unknowable and only universal God of the Cosmos. Everyone needs first to be weaned from any form of idolism and from inflated national or ethnic opinions. Some of the Jews regarded the old “Covenant” as an ethnic triumph and the Temple God’s “house” which should even be indestructible. Their written Torah and oral traditions as well as their national-cultic laws and sacrificial rites became regarded in some respects “holy” in themselves.
- For the sake of the Gentiles and most Jews this new belief in an *unbiased, universal God* had to be directed away from cultic and ethnic lore to a more inclusive religion. Therefore, to accept these new concepts of grace through genuine repentance, most converts needed, at least for a time, a saviour or final sacrifice to cope with their life long indoctrination of sacrificial remedies and low self esteem as well as their guilt ridden conscience. They were conditioned over centuries about what they “need to do

and bring” to the Temple in order to gain forgiveness. We have seen that these sacrificial beliefs were not recognised as essential to salvation by the Prophets or the Essenes and neither by spiritually mature early Christians; they knew that Temple-ism unfortunately developed into an economically efficient system mainly for the benefit of the cultic and national management as we have seen in our discussion of the relationship of power between State and Religion.

Gerhard van den Heever qualifies it further in saying that all of the temple Cults in Jesus’ and Paul’s time was in fact national religions and was used as a formal structure of strengthening the alliance between the different ruling classes.” (2005:137). Jonathan Smith as quoted by van den Heever says that,

“Religion is the attempt to ‘map, construct and inhabit such positions of power through the use of myths, rituals and experiences of transformation’. It therefore stands to reason that Jesus or anyone after him that challenged this structure will find himself in serious trouble. Therefore also, there would be measures in place to monitor closely what happens within any religious system and Paul would have been aware of this danger.” (Van den Heever, 2005:137)

Therefore, “spying” in service of the coercive forces was a very frustrating topic in Paul’s letters. In his attempt to uncover and reveal the true religion of the prophets and Jesus, the ignorant masses would not easily be able even to realise the wilful binding of coercive cultic regulations on their psyches through indoctrination with “historical” and religious “facts” about sin and how to escape God’s judgement. A last and final special sacrifice was in most cases a necessary transitional belief, but never in Paul’s system did it become a final solution for the salvation of humanity. As mentioned, it was never even intended to be so in the Cultic systems and can at best be a reminder of sin and a “remedy” for past mistakes but cannot make you immune to future mistakes or unhealthy attitudes and habits!

The “new” old truth that Jesus brought to the guilt ridden world was the truth of God’s mercy and his forgiving grace if you live in harmony with your conscience based in the guidance of the Spirit; it is a renewal of the spiritual tradition of the Prophets and Mystics. The following ideas represent my interpretation of the basic salvific process that Paul wanted to share with us as a developmental program covering the important elements of Paul’s gospel. This belief system is also what Paul understood about the teachings of Jesus and based primarily on the Prophetic and Mystical tradition of Judaism and adapted sometimes for Gentile consumption.

- The human urge and need to search for the truth about our spiritual reality and about God is, in Paul’s opinion, initiated by the quickening of the *inherent image of God within*

us all and it heralds the start of ones *calling for spiritual awakening*. It results in a heightened awareness of what is right and wrong. Some people including me, believe that this was exactly the same need that motivated Eve and Adam to eat the fruit from that specific tree of the *knowledge of good and evil* and it came at the high price of acquiring also the responsibility to make your own choices. As this phase of our progress can also be called our *Awakening phase* and we become eager and even anxious, to learn Gods truths in all facets of life. One is able now to see more clearly the coercive worldly forces that thrived on our ignorance and we can now start to deconstruct un-truths to get nearer to real truths with the help of spiritual teachers of which Jesus is the main one in our tradition.

- With their consciences purged from past mistakes and mind cleared from indoctrination, they can now start their spiritual journeys. *Baptism* is the rite of initiation into the new system of repentance-forgiveness and by which you now identify with the life and death of Jesus and intent to participate in the spiritual growth process. You start your personal phase of *Commitment* through baptism which is therefore also personal *statement and proof of accepting the new belief system and you are now cleansed from past sins as well as acceptable to God and part of the Christian tradition*. The “saviour”, if one was needed, had done his work for you and the self help and participative phase of the converts own responsibility for spiritual growth is commencing with the much needed help of the Spirit within; he now has to commit to moral development and the ensuing behavioural change as the next mandatory stage.
- This is the start of the *Purification phase*, the “desert” or “wilderness” phase if you will, of personal moral development. This is a very difficult stage especially if some of your companions are still hanging on to certain cultic aspects and especially “works of law” and beliefs in ethnic superiority with “selection” biases that take your mind off your own necessary personal growth process. One can fully understand Paul’s frustration with these cultic interferences while he wants them now to move on to moral behaviour from a fresh spiritual grounding of understanding and loving-kindness. Paul wants to help them to become mature believers by accepting Jesus and himself as fearless examples and role models. The new value system should now gradually manifest in attitudinal changes and your spiritual motivation comes progressively more from within. *You have to take up your cross* like Jesus and do battle with your demons; wrong mental and spiritual conditioning; your mistaken identities dominated by body, ego, memory and mind games and seriously in search of your essential Self.

- Within this phase, if you are serious about spiritual growth, you might more than likely go through a new crises consisting of terrible doubt whether you are able and fit for this challenge as you sometimes feel uncertain, alone, and unworthy and abandoned by previous friends. This phenomenon is related to Jesus' Gethsemane experience or the "dark night of the soul" of which St. John of the Cross spoke. Should you persist with some encouragement, on you're your journey, one *starts to realise that you have a definitive moral or loving core within yourself* that has the capacity to critically and *objectively observe your own behaviour* and it seems to be in harmony with your intuitive knowledge or gnosis about the will of God. Paul made a special point in all his letters to remind them of the difficulties for spiritual pilgrims in this world and deliberately encouraged them, referring mostly to Jesus Christ and himself as examples for them, to persist in their efforts to deepen their insight in spiritual matters and grow in loving-kindness. One can identify the following topics in this important phase.
- During this stage, it will normally be very helpful to have spiritual friends or teachers to assist and encourage you. You have now entered the advanced teachings and associated rites to understand the theory and practice around the heavenly Adam or image of God within; the Christ within. You *get to learn by participation and experiencing* the same *symbolic* cross bearing and death that Jesus experienced in his personal development. This shared experiential learning *facilitates the true "gnosis" or insight or "spiritual facts" of the Jesus' life and death*. The spiritual convert walks down the same spiritual road that Jesus and Paul did.
- Jesus, through his wilderness experience, had to "die" to sin as well as ego and mind games before he was able to die willingly for the truth of his message in the physical sense. He was resurrected or born again spiritually first, in this life, before he could be resurrected in a cosmic immortal sense after his death. You are now also introduced to the fact that you will have to proceed on the exact same route, participate in this process with the Christ Spirit as your guide so that you to can die to your own "sins", ignorance and "unripeness" to be resurrected in your spiritual form, heavenly Adam or new man and again become the image of God but still solidly on Mother Earth. This phase seems to be accompanied by a rite that pictures Jesus on the cross and you *"receive" the "Holy Spirit" by the "laying on of hands"* of your teachers, signalling your new status as child of God and brother/sister of Christ, sharing in immortality.



- Jesus' resurrection from the Golgotha death was a vindication of his life and teaching that man is spiritually immortal and that you will live with God again if you were successful in reclaiming your spiritual heritage. (Interesting enough is that from all the books and programs that I have read or seen on television in my life time, the so called "departed souls" who were available to be contacted by mediums seem to be on a very mundane, even somewhat immature, emotional and spiritual level still and did not seem to have gained real new spiritual insights through their transition.) Paul was very clear that to him the immortal Christ, Son of God, Heavenly Adam within Jesus was vindication by Jesus' resurrection and the proof of the heavenly pudding, so to speak. Jesus as the Christ was proof of the truth of his own message and life and therefore he ransomed us from the slavery of ignorance and coercive religious nonsense. His real sacrifice was that he was prepared to die willingly to bring and proof to us the truth about the nature and spirituality of the Human Being.
- Should you however, be not really ready to totally commit, not yet serious enough to start the road to "perfection" or wholeness of spirit and body, you fake your commitment by falsely professing empty "faith" there will not be a real change of behaviour visible; no authentic spiritual fruits of the spirit will manifest itself in your behaviour; no spiritual integrity. These are the "Christians" that irritated Paul the most for they were "religious" but live out the "old man" and got into technical, "theological" arguments about laws and non essential dogmatic formulations. They got stuck in a "form" religion with no real spiritual growth and were actually an embarrassment to the spiritual members and a hindrance to the new converts.
- The last phase is that of *being perfected, or made whole again*; you now have spiritual understanding or wisdom for further growth and develop into a fully integrated person totally in charge of your earthly and heavenly aspects; above any law because you are a Human Being and act from your creational character; you have become a Christ in your own right and therefore materialised your spiritual Self; you share in the first born Son from Creation, but function still in this world. You are undoubtedly heir to the world to come, alongside Christ-Jesus who will welcome you there. *You have now partaken in or eaten from the Tree of Life* and will return to Paradise; the guardian angels with the fiery weaponry will let you through because you are now blessedly "ripe" to enter.

Paul's soteriology is very seriously growth orientated and the process is culminating in a spiritual person that functions and lives intuitively from loving-kindness; you honour this Gift in an earthly vessel, with a fitting response to life. He is in agreement with James that there is no real conversion

without spiritual fruits and his soteriology is totally removed from the Christian doctrinal concepts of salvation by a type of faith that says spiritual growth is not mandatory and therefore not directly coupled to the early Christian salvific process. Spiritual fruits are the substance of any faith and for Jesus, James and Paul it is not negotiable and also not an easy process either. This is the narrow “way” that leads to spiritual rediscovery of God’s creational intention and it is the real essence of mankind’s spiritual journey. For many of us this journey as such gives us direction as well as meaning to our lives although we are still battling with many un-truths to be deconstructed and the many difficult practicalities in life. We can marvel with an increased understanding and more peace of mind at the wonder, inter connectedness, complexity and order that represent the Mystery of God, man and Cosmos; striving for more clarity and deeper relational experiences with what we at this stage of our development can be aware of about this immense Mystery called God.

## **11.6 Concluding remarks**

It is clear that spiritual or mystical Christianity is only a variation of the Primordial Mystical Tradition but, it presents to us a far better story as an outer mystery, or narrative that contains the deeper insights than any other tradition; virtually anybody in antiquity including anyone of our present era could identify with this beautiful story. The spiritual hero is a person in legend or history that is special and has a personal mission of obstacles to be conquered and greatness to be realised. Therefore the story of Jesus is a vast improvement on other myths, stories and legends that were known; he can function also as a real life, role model while fulfilling all the necessary plots in the developmental story of the universal Human Being with truth and integrity.

In Jesus’ time the Empire was more stable and Jesus seems to have a longer term view on establishing God’s kingdom on earth. His teachings were based on principles and practices that were idealistic but practical and sustainable although from a very different outlook on life. In Paul’s letters we get a different feeling of “end of the world” expectations that was near to materialisation. This seemed to complicate his theology in a way that one sometimes get the feeling that he is compromising principles to keep the peace within a, not so lofty cultural belief system regarding equality “in Christ”. We must keep in mind that Paul lived in times when the Empire went from strength to relative weakness. Emperor Nero who ruled in Paul’s latter days was not mentally stable and seemed to hate the Christian movement. Paul’s emphases on the end times must be have been influenced by these facts and he still had to have his day in court. In Jerusalem the Jewish people are impoverished, the Temple was run by a High Priest who got the job through offering the highest tender price whilst rebellion was brooding. On top of it all, moral decay was rife all over the Empire; he had good reasons to think that Christ, in his other capacity as a heavenly agent of God from the book of Daniel, should now intervene as things are going from bad to worse.

None the less, the inner mystery or esoteric teaching according to Jesus, would not have survived easily without Paul who developed its logic so that any serious spiritual seeker of any day can strive to become a Human Being. The great pity is that the spiritual phase of the teachings was later so covered in nonsense due to literal reading of a mythically true story and the associated magical thinking that it lost its footing in the tradition. When the Church started to decouple the faith content needed for the children and spiritually naïve from that needed for the mature spiritual and mystical pilgrims, polarisation and exclusion was sure to follow. When the objective became to develop into a Church for the masses, exclusion and then persecution accompanied the banning and destruction of all other existing Mystical and Gnostic writings that could verify and sustain this tradition historically and functionally. All remaining spiritual texts were interpreted in such a way that the real mystical messages became hidden to the listeners including certain aspects of Paul's work. Thanks to the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls and Nag Hammadi Library we now know that other mystical traditions were alive and well in Early Christianity. None of them however, put so much effort in as Paul to indicate to us the real differences of "form" religion to mystical spirituality and explain the processes involved in such detail for our benefit.

If we now look at the scenario at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century we realise that many countries in the world are grossly overpopulated, natural resources have been consumed to the levels that the Earth's ecosystems is starting to rebel. The Twin Towers experience in New York proved to us the insanity of religious fanaticism and what can happen if the likes of these people had access to nuclear arms. Our economic system nearly collapsed in 2008 based on our excesses and greed and a "religious" belief that growing the world's economy is the only real solution to "help" the poor in a world where the gross materialistic culture rules supreme. It is obvious that the idea of consuming more to get richer is producing only more poor people who are not really disposed and not well positioned to be trained to take up highly technical and technological positions, which unfortunately are the only ones that are needed in this mad race of growth and more consumption.

The growing numbers of poor people together with inadequate education only aggravates the problems of the functionally illiterate masses. These factors lead to feelings of helplessness and the senseless passing of time through television viewing, games of all sorts, and frivolities of all natures coupled to a preoccupation with sexuality. The hopelessness of the poor and destitute majority can eventually only turn into anger and destruction to overthrow the rich peoples' present Utopia. It is obvious that many things need to change and this can only happen if there is again a radical change of mind on a global scale.

With this sad but realistic picture in mind, one must ask; what went wrong to produce this unhealthy state of affairs after more than 2000 years of Theistic religious dominance; what happened to religion if the majority of people all over the world do still confess to believe in a God? In my opinion Christianity can still realise the ideals of Jesus and Paul, of attaining a much needed universal human morality based on human spirituality and we do not really have to invent new philosophies and religions. I have argued that a better understanding of the many Ancient Wisdom Traditions coupled with good science, common sense and the spiritual orientation of the mystical traditions, we already have most of the indicators we need to make this world a better place.

We are already familiar with some of their enlightened premises and teachings that came from the Prophets, Jesus and Paul as we have discussed. We now only have to recognise some dated belief systems and expose religious and economic coercive and contra productive dogmatic elements, while continuously searching for better truths concerning our human moral, spiritual and economic necessities.

We need to honestly look at our values and therefore at our Cultural bindings that influence our thinking and behaviour today, Kahil Gibran has this advice.

*“And how shall you rise beyond your days and nights unless you break the chains which you, at the dawn of your understanding, have fastened around your noon hour?” (1967:56)*

The fact that we still prefer to ignore such a vast amount of literature from many different Early Christian traditions within an otherwise enlighten and scientific era is mindboggling. I am not claiming that this study of Jesus and Paul’s spiritual traditions is totally correct but, there is enough evidence now from many other studies, to doubt the “eternal whole truth” of present day Christian dogma especially regarding soteriological, moral and spiritual aspects.

Den Heyer has this sound advice for us about Paul that we have to acknowledge and recognise that much of what he wrote in his letters have little meaning and significance for us because his whole world, in the broadest sense, is long past and Judaism and Christianity have grown apart. The highly strung apocalyptic view of human beings and the world inspires few people any more (222:284). This truth is also applicable to virtually all other works regarded as “inspired” and which are in desperate need of receiving some sort of updating in our world today.

Theoretical, theological revision and inclusion of sound, practical, and sustainable value driven remedies within a comprehensive strategy for life on this planet is urgently needed. Furthermore, if we cannot substantiate and again incorporate a more spiritual understanding of Jesus’ and Paul’s

teachings within Christianity as a second tier spiritual discipline, then it will soon join all its other first century rivals as a forgotten religion. For Christianity to hope for sustainability and growth within Third World countries where myth and magic goes together and still flourish is to accept defeat from a spiritual perspective only to stay alive economically.

Campbell reminded us that ancient religions could be classified into two main classes. Religions of “address”, which emphasise salvation through belonging to a group, that had a special covenant with God, like Judaism, and, secondly, religions of personal “identity”, where one had to look within to discover and develop one’s relationship with God. (Campbell, 1996: audio) The fact is that the first phase of religious awareness is normally within a cultural and social context where myth, legends and stories help us to remember and understand on that level. However, this basic phase should be followed by an individual spiritual growth process that develops the serious pilgrim to realise her true Self that becomes the internal motivation to be part of a more righteous, loving and prosperous Human society; worthy partakers in the kingdom of God.

Paul studied the Way of Jesus and spends his whole life to clarify the inherent truths for us but popular demand and power politics forced Christianity to seek Institutional glory rather than to deepen the human psyche to conform to the ideal of the Human Being created in God’s Image. In the process the Church created dogma from Paul’s teaching that he never intended. In actual fact present dogma work against the developmental process to lead Christians into the high ground of spiritually mature moral people who should constitute the Kingdom of God on earth. Poor and pathetic views about the nature of humanity and effortless historical sacrificial third party remedies based on simplistic unqualified “faith” slogans are on offer. Present popular dogma picturing moral development “as nice to have” because slogans like “Jesus loves you” and “Christ saves!” are dangerous, wrong and impotent formulas and cannot stimulate any worthwhile, internal personal spiritual growth or effect any worthwhile external change in our world except making religious charlatans richer through exploiting their ignorant prey.

Albert Schweitzer correctly sums up the dogmatic problem,

“Christianity must compel them (Christians) to realise that to be a Christian means to be possessed and dominated by a hope of the Kingdom of God, and a will to work for it, which bids defiance to external reality. Until this comes about, Christianity will stand before the world like a forest in the barrenness of winter. ‘Seek ye first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness and all other things shall be added unto you.’” (Schweitzer 1998:384)

Functional religions, with a holistic outlook and an inclusive universal appeal on our shared human values of morality and spirituality can again be key ethical and moral educational spheres and realms for our youth by promoting wholesome healthy growth within caring and productive societies.

We need to again realise that spiritual growth within any religion is a graded process of learning and experiencing that has to be connected or at least correlated with the general trends in human growth patterns. The Church with its present “first phase only” teachings of external saviours and blood sacrifices can only be effective for the first stage of personal and spiritual development and then only applicable to ancient cultures which were trapped in the conglomerations of these ideas.

Although the writer interprets the “Christ” mysticism of Paul from a multidisciplinary and more inclusive universal paradigm, the misunderstandings around Paul’s soteriology is still valid as Schweitzer explains:

“Paul’s mystical doctrine of redemption has not been taken up into Church dogma. It has preferred to adopt the concept of the sacrificial death of Jesus, basing itself on the formulation of this thought which it has received in the Pauline doctrine of justification by faith. *Mysticism can never become dogma. But, on the other hand, dogma can never remain living without a surrounding aura of mysticism.* Therefore Paul’s mystical doctrine of redemption is for us a precious possession, without which we cannot from the right conception either of Christianity or of our individual state as Christians. *It is truth which a man who has been taken possession of by Christ urges his brethren to verify in experience.*” (1998:387) (Emphasis JAG)

The Church will have to revise and broaden its functional scope by again honouring the final substantial developmental phase for developing meaningful and productive human values. Christianity must again honour the mature, experiential, participative growth process that was the core of Jesus’ and Paul’s esoteric spiritual religion to build a better Kingdom with the aid of human beings. From this moral and spiritual base, economic policies cognisant of scarce resources and responsible population and social planning should be devised in harmony with good science and common sense. Alternatively we will have to accept the fact that Christianity’s functional and moral impact will continue to diminish with its spiritual relevance together with other likeminded religions. Selfish and immature, self-gratifying and materialistically minded power brokers operating in an overcrowded world of mostly poor people are capable of undoing any worthwhile progress that was made since Jesus’ and Paul’s pivotal ministries. Poverty of spirit may again become the normal condition of the misguided, depressed and spiritually confused masses whose only hope will be that the end of the world will mercifully come soon.

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