The Concept of "COMPASSION" in the Authentic Pauline Letters

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Abstract

The aim of this paper is to offer a nuanced study of 'compassion' in the context of the Pauline Letters. The Letters are considered within the socio-political context of imperial Rome. 'Compassion' is a complex emotion; therefore, it has been necessary to include, in my analysis, cognate sentiments such as patience, kindness, gentleness, and perseverance. Since this is a semantic study, the Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament based on Semantic Domains, *compiled by Louw and Nida (L-N), is used extensively. A dictionary provides a potential meaning, but it is the context of the sentence, the sentence within a larger unit of the text as a whole considered within the prevailing social conditions, that influences meaning. This method reveals that Paul envisages 'compassion' as the means to establish communities, not enslaved by the values of 'the world', nor grasping things for themselves at the expense of others. In Paul, 'compassion' is expansive and inclusive, where the good of the whole community is valued. His paradigm is the sacrifice of Christ.*

Introduction

The perceptions of Paul through the ages are quite diverse. The Biblical scholar Wayne Meeks refers to him as 'the Christian Proteus' (Meeks & Fitzgerald 2007: 693).[2] This title reflects the diverse reception of Paul and the range in the 'horizon of expectation' of his readers: the interpretation of the text coloured by the expectation and life experience of the reader.[3] There are many notable examples of this: for St. Augustine, reading Romans 13: 13-14 inspired him to take on the Christian way of life (Bentley-Taylor 1980: 40). Martin Luther discovered in Paul the way of 'faith' which relieved the burden of 'works'. Friedrich Nietzsche saw Paul as the corrupter of Jesus' teaching. For Bernard Shaw, Paul reinforced religion as a superstitious practice (Martin 2009: Lecture 14)[4]. Crossan (2007: 143) raises the

question of the reception of Paul as being either 'appealing or appalling' which sums up what was stated above. Paul himself says: 'I have become all things to all men' (1Cor 9: 22).

However, in this article Paul is received through the lens of 'compassion'. It is a semantic study to discover how the concept functions in the authentic letters, arranged in a relative chronology rather than canonical. I have selected verses from **1 Thessalonians, 1 and 2 Corinthians,** and one example from **Philippians** to illustrate the method used. These letters were selected because they provide a contrast in tone: a new, willing community; a sophisticated and complex community; and one example that does not use the word 'compassion' but embodies the essence of it. It is beyond the scope of this article to illustrate all the references. The verse is given in Greek and English which is then considered within the whole pericope. The pericope numbers are stated where appropriate.

Paul's words for compassion

These are the principal Greek terms for 'compassion': ἔλεος and οἰκτιρμός, as well as the cognate sentiments expressed by σπλάγχνα, χάρις, χρηστεύομαι, ἀγάπη, μακροθυμία, πραΰτης and ὑπομονή.

Cognate forms of the concepts are also included in the enquiry. *L-N* speaks of 'near synonyms'. The criteria used in choosing the words are their shared semantic features, but these words also have distinctive features. The following example illustrates how the Domains are set out.

> Domain 25 - Attitudes and Emotions
> Sub-Domain 25.33-58 - Love, Affection, Compassion
> φιλέω, ἀγάπη, σπλάγχνα
>
> The shared semantic feature in this group, compatible with the concept of 'compassion', is kindness, benevolence.
> σπλάγχνα – the distinctive feature is compassion, directing the kindness to the suffering or misfortune of others.
> φιλέω does not appear because the reference to φιλέω in 1 Corinthians 16:22 is used to express 'love of God' and in this example does not convey the meaning of 'compassion'.
>
> Sub-Domain 25.167; 25.174 – Patience, Endurance, Perseverance
> μακροθυμία, ὑπομονή - shared features are steadfastness, patience, perseverance.
> These features were chosen to reveal that 'compassion' is not fleeting, but perseveres to improve the conditions of misfortune and suffering.
> Paul's use of μακροθυμία and ὑπομονή in 1 Corinthians 13:4 also

supports the choice.
Domain 88 – Moral and Ethical Qualities and Related Behaviour
Sub-Domain 88.59 – Gentleness, Mildness
πραΰτης - a shared characteristic of 'compassion', as mercy, mildness and gentleness. It is not harsh or retributive (cf also Nussbaum 2001:365).

Sub-Domain 88.66/7 – Kindness, Harshness
χάρις, χρηστεύομαι - the shared semantic feature is kindness, which implies a lack of harshness. Kindness is an aspect of 'compassion'.
Sub-Domain 88.76/88.70 – Mercy, Merciless
ἐλεάω, οἰκτίρω

I have referred to the website format of Louw and Nida's *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament based on Semantic Domains* (1996), abbreviated here as *L-N*. It is based solely on the New Testament. There are five thousand entries and twenty five thousand meanings. The proportion of entries to meanings indicates a possible range of meaning given to a single entry. The editors have grouped these into ninety-three Semantic Domains. The above example shows that the Domains relevant to this enquiry are:

Domain 25 - Attitudes and Emotions
Domain 88 - Moral and Ethical Qualities and Related Behaviour

The Domains have sub-divisions as the above examples show. The allocation of these concepts, in this lexicon, does raise the question whether the cognitive aspect of emotions are recognised as having moral and ethical value as the emotions are listed in a separate Domain from the ethical qualities. Paul's use of the terms implies these values. The website of *L-N* includes the entries of Thayer and Strong (in Louw & Nida 1996) in addition to their own.

The philosophical debate

Martha Nussbaum (2001: 354-400) addresses the philosophical debate surrounding the concept of 'compassion' in Chapter Seven of *Upheavals of thought: the intelligence of emotions*. She discusses both sides of the argument: the pro-compassion group and the anti-compassion group. At the heart of the debate is the concept of the dignity of human beings: which ideology best supports this? Both schools of thought acknowledge the cognitive function of emotion, but differ on the value placed on the cognitions. For the early Stoics, e.g. Chrysippus, they were always false; the later Stoics, however, distinguished between ordinary emotion which was not

reliable because it was not guided by reason and εὐπάθεια which was, thus confining the experience to the wise (Sorabji 2002: 47). The concepts of love, kindness, goodwill which are catalogued as εὐπάθειαι, also appear in words to be considered in the Pauline context. Paul clearly placed great value on inculcating these concepts in his communities. Does this imply a level of reasonableness he hoped to achieve amongst them?

In Phil 1: 9 Paul asserts:

> and this I pray for in order that your **love** may increase still more and more in knowledge and perception **10** so that you may discern higher things in order that you may be pure and blameless for the day of Christ [own translation].

I propose he advocates that love is purified by knowledge (reason), resulting in pure emotions, therefore blameless, because the decisions are reliable. The criterium for 'love' in a Pauline context is selflessness, which makes the emotion reliable. I venture that that is evidence to support a Stoic perspective in the Pauline corpus for which there is adequate scholarship in this field to support the inference. Engberg-Pedersen (2004: xx), for example, places Paul within the Hellenistic context and its influences, as a participant not an outsider.

Aristotle does not aim to get rid of the emotions but in the *Nicomachean Ethics* and the *Eudemian Ethics.* His interest is avoiding extremes in emotional expression (Sorabji 2002: 22). Does Paul's prayer in Phil 1: 9 to increase **love** violate the 'doctrine of the mean'? I would conjecture not, because the context implies the presence of 'reason'.

The authentic letters

There are twenty-one Letters in the New Testament, but of these only seven are considered by historical-critical scholars to be authentic Pauline Letters. These are *1 Thessalonians, 1 and 2 Corinthians, Philippians, Philemon, Galatians* and *Romans. 1 Thessalonians* is usually taken to be the earliest Letter written, about 51 CE and Romans to be the latest (cf Perrin & Duling 1994: 194-195).

These letters are considered 'occasional' as they provide the reason or the occasion that evokes the response. Therefore the logical step is to consider the potential meaning provided by the lexicon within the context of the sentence, the sentence within a larger unit of the text and the larger unit within the prevailing social conditions that influence meaning (i.e. the social context of first century Imperial Rome). This approach resonates with Stowers' (1994: 6) insistence that '"language" belongs to a particular

community and texts also derive their meaning from social practices'.

Application of the method

To demonstrate the method I have chosen two concepts χάρις and ἀγάπη as given on page two. Due to the scope of this article it is not possible to discuss all the concepts; therefore, I have selected the two concepts that occur frequently in the Letters. Since 1 *Thessalonians* is the earliest letter and χάρις the first of the selected concepts which is used in verse one, this will be the starting point of the semantic analysis.

The first Letter to the Thessalonians was probably sent from Corinth, between 49 CE (the date of the Gallia inscription) and 52 CE. No more than eight months had elapsed between the founding of the community in Thessalonica and the first Letter (cf Malherbe 1987: 2). The letter begins with the epistolary prescript and greeting:

> **1 Thess 1:1**
>
> 1 Παῦλος καὶ Σιλουανὸς καὶ Τιμόθεος τῇ ἐκκλησίᾳ Θεσσαλονικέων ἐν θεῷ πατρὶ καὶ κυρίῳ Ἰησοῦ Χριστῷ, **χάρις** ὑμῖν καὶ εἰρήνη.
> Paul, Silas and Timothy, to the congregation of Thessalonians, in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, **grace** and peace to you [own translation].

The first thing of note is Paul's adaption of the traditional elements of the greeting. The usual greeting in a Greek letter was χαῖρε, which is here transformed to χάρις (cf Crossan & Reed 2004: 72).

L-N (Domain 88) has four entries for χάρις, which occur in four Domains (Emotion; Communication; Possession, Transfer, Exchange; Moral and Ethical), indicating the range of its meaning and usage as well as raising a question about the shared semantic meaning and distinctive meaning. Therefore considering the following list:

> a) goodwill   (Domain 25.89)
> b) thanks   (Domain 33.350)
> c) gift   (Domain 57.103)
> d) a kindness (Domain 88.66)
> di)
> Thayer (in Louw & Nida 1996):
> 1.   grace
> 2.   goodwill, loving kindness, favour
> 3b   a gift of grace, benefit, bounty

The meanings contain good intentions, the common feature is doing good, whereas the manner in which it is done gives the word its distinctive feature. The meanings appear not to be restricted by a physical aspect only, but provide a range of physical, mental and spiritual giving. 'Giving thanks' is not a separate concept according to this list, but is included as an aspect of being a recipient. Within the context of the sentence, however, χάρις, which is usually translated as 'grace', may also include the goodwill that Paul feels towards the Thessalonians, with the intention of continuing to do so as a secondary meaning. Perhaps the letter is considered to be a gift; more precisely, as a token of the spiritual gift. The context of the greeting clarifies the spiritual source of the concept of gift/grace by placing it in 'God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ'. Therefore, in the first line of the greeting Paul emphasises the source of the gift, and separates it from the χάρις which held such importance for the Greek and Roman societies.

It would, therefore, be expedient to briefly consider how the concept functions in the society, by referring to an article by Griffin (2003: 92-113), "*De Beneficiis* and Roman Society":

> The exchange of gifts and services was an important feature of Greek and Roman society at all periods. Its prominence was reflected by the number of philosophical works that analysed the phenomenon. One of Aristotle's followers gave the first clear formulation we have that 'the giving and interchange of favours holds together the lives of men'.
>
> Griffin (2003: 92)

Even at this level of interpretation there is relevance in its Pauline application, because it would be very important to Paul to keep his society together. It is the nature of the gift which differs radically. What has Paul passed on to them that he has received? In *1 Thess 1:5* he speaks of them receiving the gospel not only in word but in power and the Holy Spirit. The tradition of passing on the benefit is given in *1 Thess 1:6.* Seneca's work on the subject[5] also uses the imagery of the Three Graces holding hands and moving in a circle; the acceptance of the gift, the passing on, not letting go but returning it to the initial giver. That passing on to the initial giver, in the Pauline letter, would function as the 'Thanksgiving Prayer'.

Paul's use of χάρις imbues the concept which is a conventional social practice with a new meaning for his community; in the same way he transforms the format of the letter from the conventional to the spiritual. However, it remains a challenge for Paul to change the minds and hearts of his congregation as the next example illustrates.

Perrin and Duling, as well as a number of other New Testament scholars, believe that *1 and 2 Corinthians* do not consist of two letters only but a number of them. Some letters are lost. The next example is in a section which Perrin and Duling (1994: 181-182) call **Letter III,** in this Letter Paul learns that missionaries have come to Corinth and challenged his authority. The congregation had formed cliques aligning themselves to different apostles in order to gain importance through this association. This practice threatens social cohesion; it is a feature of an agonistic society (cf Hartin 2009:50). Honour or public recognition drives this culture. Paul's opponents encouraged the practice especially in relation to spiritual gifts, giving esteem to those who were so gifted and ignoring those who were not. The agonistic aspect of society in Imperial Rome lacks the altruistic feature of χάρις so it is not surprising that Paul introduces it in his defence against his opponents.

Paul's defence against his opponents

Pericope *2 Cor 6:1-13*

> *2 Cor 6: 1*
> Συνεργοῦντες δὲ καὶ παρακαλοῦμεν μὴ εἰς κενὸν τὴν **χάριν** τοῦ θεοῦ δέξασθαι ὑμᾶς·
> But we being co-workers beseech you that you have not received the **gift** of God in vain.

In terms of Seneca's imagery of the Graces, the Corinthians are in danger of interrupting the rhythm of the dance and break the flow of giving, which means there is no return to the original giver. According to Seneca, a gift is a thing desirable in itself. It has in view only the advantage of the recipient. Both the act of giving and that of returning gratitude are desirable in themselves and not from a motive of self-interest (cf Engberg-Pedersen 2008:19). This description clearly indicates how contrary the agonistic values are.

What would make the gift fruitless and in vain? According to Seneca, the gift being in vain is equal to ingratitude. Paul urges the Corinthians not to receive the gift of God in vain (empty/fruitless). According to the text (*2 Cor* 6:12) the reason that the gift is in vain, or in danger of being so, is the ingratitude and closed-heartedness of the Corinthians.

The word 'thanks' was listed above as a meaning for χάρις. The act of giving and receiving thus appears synonymous, or at best introduces an interesting relationship, where one word is used for actions that are considered opposite.

I now introduce the concept of ἀγάπη in *1 Thessalonians.* It is a

phrase which is so much a part of the English language that it is a little dulled by familiarity. It is a verse found in the *exordium* which Witherington (2007: 52) describes as a preview of coming attractions.

The *Exordium 1 Thess* 1:2-3
Pericope *1 Thess 1:* 2-3

> 2 Εὐχαριστοῦμεν τῷ θεῷ πάντοτε περὶ πάντων ὑμῶν μνείαν ποιούμενοι ἐπὶ τῶν προσευχῶν ἡμῶν, ἀδιαλείπτως 3 μνημονεύοντες ὑμῶν τοῦ ἔργου τῆς πίστεως καί τοῦ κόπου τῆς **ἀγάπης** καὶ τῆς **ὑπομονῆς** τῆς ἐλπίδος τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ ἔμπροσθεν τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ πατρὸς ἡμῶν,

> 2 Since we give thanks to God, always, concerning you all; making mention during our prayers constantly 3 remembering your work that results from faith, arduous and difficult labour that comes from **love** and the **endurance** of hope through the agency of our Lord Jesus Christ who is in the presence of God who is also our Father [own translation].

The semantic details of ἀγάπη :

	L-N	Domain 25 – Attitudes and Emotions
	Gloss	Section
a)	love	25.43
b)	fellowship meal	23.28

> Thayer's definitions (in Louw & Nida 1996):
> 1)   brotherly love, affection, goodwill, love, benevolence
> 2)   love feasts
> Strong – affection or benevolence, specifically (plural) a love feast - (feast of) charity, dear love.

L-N does not provide a range of entries to gauge the common semantic feature but the inclusion of Thayer and Strong (in Louw & Nida 1996) assists in this. I interpret this as an expression of 'care', the particular expression of it provides the distinctive feature.

There is no reference to ἀγάπη and physical work, and τοῦ κόπου implies arduous work. The phrase suggests an antithesis of ideas. In order to appreciate what Paul is conveying to his community, it may help to take a brief look at the prevailing social conditions in which his community functioned.

According to Braund (1996: viii) 'the Roman elite who were wealthy, educated elite, of well born and well-connected families, divided their time between "business" – primarily politics, competing for power and status - and leisure'.

The phrase under consideration is not applicable to these activities, primarily the actions are 'self centered' and the term κόπος does not fit the description of their activities, which no doubt required a lot of energy, but not in physical labour.

Paul does remind the Thessalonians in **1 Thess 2:9** of the work he and his companions did to support themselves which may also be an example of τοῦ κόπου τῆς ἀγάπης. The entry for ἀγάπη in Liddell and Scott (1977: 6) gives love, love of husband and wife, and especially the love of God for man and man for God. The third entry shows that Paul does not introduce a new meaning into ἀγάπη but extends its usage to demonstrate how practical and immanent God's power is: the meaning suggests this.

The lexicon does not give examples of first century literary works, therefore it is not likely that the concept ἀγάπη was in common use, but a specialised term, introduced by Paul.

The *L-S* entries do show that the concept describes a close bond as in husband and wife. I therefore think examples also point to the 'concept of duty' with the addition of affection, respect and benevolence. Paul's use of the word extends its range of operation by its inclusiveness. The texts do show that Paul acknowledges the source of ἀγάπη is God revealed through his son Jesus.

Pericope *1 Thess 5:1-11*
This triad appears again in *1 Thess 5:8* but as a military metaphor.

> 8 ἡμεῖς δὲ ἡμέρας ὄντες νήφωμεν ἐνδυσάμενοι θώρακα πίστεως καὶ **ἀγάπης** καὶ περικεφαλαίαν ἐλπίδα σωτηρίας·
>
> But as we are of the day, let us be restrained, having put on a breastplate of faith and **love,** and hope as a helmet of salvation [own translation].

Isaiah in 59:17a uses a similar military metaphor, but in *1 Thessalonians* Paul includes ἀγάπη as part of the armoury which Isaiah does not; again Paul uses antithetical concepts - 'love and war'. Seneca also uses military metaphors according to Wilson (in Braund & Gill 1997: 63).

> The imagery of battle in Seneca's prose has been called, without too much exaggeration, 'all pervasive'. … the philosopher's role is

more akin to that of a general exhorting his troops before entering into action than that of a physician.

It is possible to see a similarity in the description of Seneca and Paul. In verse eight Paul uses the hortative subjunctive, calling the community to arm against excesses, for he says: 'Let us be self controlled' νήφωμεν (Liddell & Scott 1977: 1175) ἐνδυσάμενοι – an aorist participle which may be read as an exhortation referring to a single action 'Let us put on'.

The imagery of darkness/light; sleep/awake, in this pericope, suggests that they are called to guard against the tyranny of 'desire'[6.] Paul encourages the community, by saying they are already of the light, they are capable of victory! He uses metaphorical language because the real battle is not physical, active participation too is required; this is not a passive process. It is interesting to note the prime part Paul allocates to ἀγάπη, it is pivotal to salvation. This concept carries the same sense of power as it does in *1 Thess 1:3*, but in this verse it operates at a different level. It is said that Seneca's battle was against Fortune. I think Paul's battle was against 'Death'. His example is 'Christ who was raised from the dead': Christ's victory over death. Paul has used the concept of ἀγάπη in this Letter to illustrate its power and expand its domain beyond the world of benign relationships.

Paul's advice

Paul received a letter asking for clarity on certain issues in the Corinthian congregation. The discussion to follow refers to one of the questions put to Paul concerning the eating of meat sacrificed to idols. Perrin and Duling (1994: 227) point out that this question of food offered to idols allows appreciation of the practical difficulties Paul's converts encountered. The sacrifice of animals at temple altars formed an integral part of ancient civic life. Scholars interpret this practice as two dimensional. The vertical dimension creates a divine-human relationship and preserved what the Romans called the *pax Romana*. The horizontal dimension bonded communities. It was also used to reinforce the position of the privileged in the hierarchy commencing with the gods and proceeding in a descending order (cf Crossan & Reed 2004: 298). The slaughtered meat was distributed by priests, the distribution followed a social hierarchical order again in a descending scale. Many people would have the meat at the forum as a public meal (cf Crossan & Reed 2004: 300).

The question put to Paul about certain members of the Christian congregation, who were participating in this practice, implies that a

prohibition had been placed on it by him. But certain members of the congregation, who claimed to be empowered by the gift of γνῶσις, experienced a freedom which signalled that they no longer had to observe the prohibition (*1 Corinthians* 8:1-13).

The next example of ἀγάπη situated in *1 Cor 8:3* is Paul's response to questions from members of the Corinthian community.

Pericope *1 Cor 8:1-6*

> Περὶ δὲ τῶν εἰδωλοθύτων, οἴδαμεν ὅτι πάντες γνῶσιν ἔχομεν. ἡ γνῶσις φυσιοῖ, ἡ δὲ **ἀγάπη οἰκοδομεῖ**.
>
> But concerning food offered to idols, we know that we all have knowledge. This knowledge puffs up but **love builds up** [own translation].

and Scott (1977: 1964) give the meaning of φυσιόω as 'puffed up'. The verbal form relates to the nominal form φῦσα, 'a pair of bellows, breath, wind', linking 'air' to 'puffed up'. However, this sense of enlargement in the members of the congregation, professing to have γνῶσις, has limitations, (*1 Cor* 8:2). The claim on the knowledge and the impact of this on the congregation is causing disunity. The UBS has interpreted the word φυσιοῖ as 'to cause conceit', an interpretation which does not fully reflect Paul's insight into the limits of γνῶσις as suggested by *1 Cor* 8:2.

Ἀγάπη οἰκοδομεῖ, on the other hand, functions in a larger domain, focused on God and on the welfare of the community *1 Cor* 8:3. This reflects a larger view, considering the spiritual wellbeing of the whole congregation. There *L-N* indicates that in love there is sharing, but the use of γνῶσις does not imply sharing. This phrase pertains to 'building up', as does 'goodwill' and 'benevolence', definitions given by Thayer (in Louw & Nida 1996). These qualities have a common feature: they are directed to the well-being of another, not the well-being of oneself.

In *1 Cor* 8:3 Paul states that if anyone loves God, then he is loved by God. The implication is that the love spoken of in *1 Cor* 8:1 is the love of God working through those devoted to him. This suggests a difference in the range of perception between those acting from γνῶσις and those acting from ἀγάπη.

Paul begins with an inclusive, 'We know', followed by, 'we all have γνῶσις'. The phrase, 'we know', was possibly reassuring to the particular members of the congregation to whom the statement was aimed. Immediately, he downplays the special value of γνῶσις by saying that we all have it. In a final thrust he reveals that γνῶσις is limiting (*1 Cor* 8:2). The

affective aspect of love in this verse *1 Cor* 8:1 is the characteristic of working for someone else's growth. It is reminiscent of the ancient Greek concept of *eudaimonia*, which Nussbaum (2001: 31) translates as 'flourishing', instead of 'happiness'. Paul again repeats the idea of building up in *1 Cor* 13:14 where he gives each gift its value.

The final example is *The Letter to the Philippians.* Paul wrote this Letter from prison. The locality of the prison is debated. According to Fee (1995: 1) and Peterman (1997: 20), it is in Rome about 62 CE; Crossan and Reed (2004: 272) think of Ephesus. Paul was held in military custody, chained to a soldier. The action of friends, the amenability of the officials, either through their humanity or by bribes, affected the quality of the imprisonment (cf Crossan & Reed 2004: 272).

The cause for his imprisonment is not clear, but the seriousness of it is indicated by Paul – the possibility of his execution. He moves from hope to despair, but despite his circumstances he manages a confident tone to reassure the Philippians (cf Crossan & Reed 2004:274).

Philippians 2:5-11. In this example the complete pericope is given in both Greek and English.

The Example of Christ

5 Τοῦτο φρονεῖτε ἐν ὑμῖν ὅ καὶ ἐν Χριστῷ ᾽Ιησοῦ,
6 ὅς ἐν μορφῇ θεοῦ ὑπάρχων οὐχ **ἁρπαγμὸν** ἡγήσατο τὸ εἶναι ἴσα θεῷ
7 ἀλλὰ ἑαυτὸν **ἐκένωσεν μορφὴν δούλου λαβών** ἐν ὁμοιώματι ἀνθρώπων γενόμενος· καὶ σχήματι εὑρεθεὶς ὡς ἄνθρωπος
8 ἐταπείνωσεν ἑαυτὸν γενόμενος ὑπήκοος μέχρι θανάτου, θανάτου δὲ σταυροῦ
9 διὸ καὶ ὁ θεὸς αὐτὸν ὑπερύψωσεν καὶ ἐχαρίσατο αὐτῷ τὸ ὄνομα τὸ ὑπὲρ πᾶν ὄνομα
10 ἵνα ἐν τῷ ὀνόματι ᾽Ιησοῦ πᾶν γόνυ κάμψῃ ἐπουρανίων καὶ ἐπιγείων καὶ καταχθονίων
11 καὶ πᾶσα γλῶσσα ἐξομολογήσηται ὅτι κύριος ᾽Ιησοῦς Χριστὸς εἰς δόξαν θεοῦ πατρός.

5 This you must think (is) in you which is also in Christ Jesus. 6 Who, beginning in the form of God, did not regard being equal to God as something **to grasp after**. 7 But **he emptied himself, taking the form of a slave**, when he became in the likeness of man; and, being found in the likeness (as) a man, 8 he humbled himself becoming obedient to the point of death, death on the cross. 9 On which account also God exalted him to the highest position and gave him the name which (is) above all name(s) 10 in order that every knee shall bow at the name of Jesus, of those in the

heavenly world, on the earth and also under the earth 11 and every tongue shall confess that the Lord Jesus Christ is for the glory of God the Father [own translation].

In 2:5 the use of the imperative φρονεῖτε indicates the tone of the sentence. Paul gives his listeners a paradigm to shape their thinking, the authority for the paradigm is Jesus Christ. What follows is called a 'hymn' by a number of scholars, and whether Paul is the author is also debated. According to Perrin and Duling (1994: 234), if the basics of the hymn were 'pre-Christian', Paul himself probably added 'the death on the cross' (verse 8b). The phrase breaks the rhythm of the hymn, and the theology of the cross is one of Paul's favourite emphases. Fee (1975: 193) is not certain whether or not it is a hymn, but is appreciative of the exalted and poetic nature of these verses. He does caution that the narrative aspect of it should not be missed. However, the reading of the Letter to the congregation would have had a considerable aural impact. Not only the concepts, but also their rhythmical arrangement would have an impact.

Verses 5-11 are profound and I do not wish to oversimplify the textual analysis. There are two concepts that are antithetical:

$$\dot{\alpha}\rho\pi\alpha\gamma\mu\acute{o}\nu$$
$$\dot{\varepsilon}\kappa\acute{\varepsilon}\nu\omega\sigma\varepsilon\nu$$

The Philippians would have witnessed people in powerful positions, grabbing things for themselves. In fact we, too, observe this; that is why power is so attractive and a means of self-enrichment.

The example put to the Philippians is totally the opposite. The most powerful image the mind can conceive – 'being equal to God' – is introduced. Then 'emptying himself': the verb κενόω is obviously used metaphorically and the only metaphorical usage of the verb is ascribed to Paul in Liddell and Scott (1977:938).

From the position of all power, Jesus assumed the form of the powerless – a slave. Fee (1975: 208) points out that 'his equality with God' found its truest expression when 'he emptied himself'.

In the Thanksgiving prayer, 1:3-11, the theme is giving and sharing. The paradigm of Christ's behaviour elevates gift giving because of the totality of the example.

In the appeal for unity 'do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit' (2:1-4) fits the description of ἁρπαγμόν. 'Renounce the desires' (κενόω), 'consider others better than yourselves' (having taken on the form of a slave): Paul is encouraging an expansion of the individual's and

community's sphere of awareness. In that way one's own affairs are placed in the context of the affairs of others. One is not neglected at the expense of another.

The paradigm exemplifies love/compassion in action. Emptying is an act of love in the affective aspect as 'compassion'.

Paul conveys the totality of giving through the use of metaphor. Thus, he does not use any of the words for 'compassion', but conveys with clarity the full measure of giving. The fact that Paul has used a metaphor suggests the act of giving is beyond the physical act of giving.

Conclusion

Paul, as a skilled wordsmith, used language to create a new world picture, 'compassion' the means to freedom from selfishness, from the values the world lives by. The vision conveyed by the concept of 'compassion' is not an occasional act, but a way of life, an expansive life. The **Letters** convey to us what a challenging task Paul had to change entrenched ways of viewing the world, but the evidence speaks of success.

1.The primary research for this article was done by Rose Rowe. It is based on an MA, which was successfully completed under the supervision of Prof Johan Strijdom (Religious Studies, Unisa).

2.Paul like Proteus in Book IV of the Odyssey changes his shape. "Proteus changed into a bearded lion, and then into a snake, and after that a panther and a giant boar. He changed into running water too and a great tree in leaf. But we set our teeth, held him like a vice". Menelaus needed the secrets of the 'Old Man of the Sea' to learn how to escape from the isle of Pharos (Rieu 1980: 60).

3.I do think that reference to a literary theorist such as Hans Robert Jauss is apposite in considering the underlying principle which guides the interpretation of literary works. It was actually Hans-Gorge Gadamer who argued that a literary work does not pop into the world as a finished and neatly parcelled bundle of meaning; rather, meaning depends on the historical situation of the interpreter. Gadamer influenced 'reception theory' (cf Selden & Widdowson 1993: 52). Gadamer places emphasis on the historical situation of the interpreter, which may account for some of the views on Paul, but Jauss uses the term 'horizons of expectations' to describe the criteria readers use to judge literary texts in any given period. The original 'horizon of expectation' only tells us how the work was interpreted when it appeared, but does not establish its final meaning (op. cit. 52). The emphasis in the 'historical method' of interpretation is the historical situation of the text. Therefore, these different methods with their different points of reference would produce different interpretations.

4.The statements were taken from Dale Martin's (Martin 2009) introductory course on the New Testament made available as Open Yale Courses. He provides a fuller description of the circumstances that contributed to the outlook in an interpretation of St. Paul by St.

Augustine and Martin Luther. Both men identified, in their own psychological way of thinking about themselves, with Paul.

5.Seneca, a contemporary of Paul, provides literary evidence that the topic of 'benefits' was still a question of philosophical interest. In *De Beneficiis* Book 1 (translated by Aubrey 1887) Seneca complains to *Liberalis* that we neither know how to bestow or how to receive a benefit. Further in the conversation he uses the imagery of the Three Graces and discusses why they are holding hands, why they are sisters and why they are smiling and young with loose and transparent dresses. He provides the protocols which underpin the convention of 'benefits', at least from a philosophical point of view. As the 'benefit' should not be motivated by self interest (discussed in Engberg-Pedersen 2008), it would disqualify the 'benefit' as bribe; the imagery also suggests the act is voluntary and transparent. According to Chrysippus the Three Graces are assigned as companions to Venus. This is of interest and relevant to the importance Paul places on ἀγάπη and χάρις.

6. An abstract of Wasserman 2010 (SAGE journals online) *Paul among the Philosophers: The case of sin in Romans 6-8.* She argues that in Romans 6-8 the text manifests certain Platonic traditions about the soul. I suggest a similar case can be made that *1Thess 5:1-11* also exhibits Platonic traits about desire and the need for restraint. In Plato's *Republic* Book V1 485 (Lee 1964: 246) , "... if a man's desires set strongly in one direction, they are correspondingly less strong in other directions ... and he will be **self controlled** and not grasping about money". I would argue that this is the direction to which Paul is guiding the Thessalonians.

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