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PAUL'S MOVEMENT IN THE DIRECTION OF INCULTURATION AND INCULTURATING THE GOSPEL AMONG THE MBALA IN THE DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO

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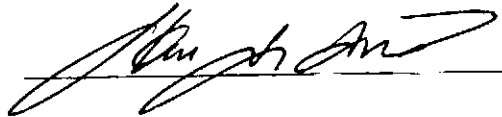
***This Long Essay is submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for a Bachelor of Arts
Degree in Religious Studies.***

**NAIROBI-KENYA
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STUDENT'S DECLARATION

I hereby declare that the material used herein has not been submitted for academic credit to any other institution. All sources have been cited in full.

Signed:



Kimupipa Akaba Didier Delanote, CP.

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GENERAL INTRODUCTION

In reading the life of Paul, we know that Paul was left to determine whether salvation lay in Christ, or meticulous observance of the law. We shall see that Paul has to adapt his Jewish traditional heritage to his new Christian message. Paul brought therefore Christian modifications to his Jewish traditional beliefs. Hence, Paul's dilemma is more or less the same as that of Mbala. The Mbala must integrate Christianity and ancestral belief. Christianity for them is worn like a coat. In times of crisis, it is taken off.

Given this understanding, our reflection is an attempt to discover Christ from the perspective of Mbala culture. We wish to show therefore how Christianity can be inculturated into our African cultures today, after the example of Paul. We are considering the Mbala culture. The Mbala are people living in the western part of the Democratic Republic of Congo.

Since our topic includes the movement in Paul's life from his pre-Christian life to his Christian life, and the direction of inculturation, we will undertake a critical investigation of events, developments, and experiences. We propose an analytical-comparative method. We need, therefore, biblical texts and sources about Paul to support our arguments.

Our topic is addressed in three chapters. In our first chapter, we will try to present Paul as a fanatical defender of the pharisaic tradition, his face turned backwards to the past. Paul clings to his strong faith in the Mosaic tradition, which is salvation in meticulous observance of the law. In the second chapter, we will be concerned with the change that occurs in the life and thought of Paul to demonstrate his movement in the

direction of inculturation. Hence, we shall see that Paul never intended to replace the Law as means of salvation and justification for Jews, but only to add Christ as a means of salvation for ethnic Gentiles. Thus, salvation is no longer meticulous observance of the law, but adherence to Christ Jesus. We shall discover this when we discuss Paul's encounter with Christ, that is, his conversion. In the third chapter, we will attempt to discover Christ's presence among the Mbala in the western part of the Democratic Republic of Congo. Here, we will deal with the inculturation of Christianity among the Mbala after, Paul's example. Finally, in the conclusion, we will summarize briefly our discussion of Paul's mission and inculturation.

CHAPTER ONE:

PRE-CHRISTIAN PAST OF PAUL AS A PHARISEE

We wish to examine the most characteristic traits of Paul's theology of the law, that is, his Jewish social situation. Hence, there are three striking features which concern and command our analysis.

1. Paul and his ancestry where Paul confirms his identity as Jew.
2. The observance of the law such as Sabbath and dietary law where we shall show Paul's obedience to the law.
3. Paul, the Jew, and his belief in the requirements of the Law. The emphasis here is upon the relation between the Jewish nation and God.

It is, therefore, from all this that we must examine Paul's culture, as a Jew. Let us then proceed in our development of the themes.

1. PAUL AND HIS ANCESTRY

First of all, we must always remember that Paul was a Greek speaking Jew, trained in the Palestinian tradition and active among the Gentiles in Greece and Asia Minor. Tarsus, the town where Paul was born (Acts 9:11, 21:39, 22:3), was the centre of the considerable communication around the Cilicia plain which made it culturally important. This city was widely known and had a fine reputation. Tarsus had a mixed population and was dominated by Hellenistic culture. Paul may derive some of his concepts and language from his understanding of Christian community as the "Body of Christ" and from Stoic

philosophy. He was familiar with all the expressions of Hellenistic Greek and Roman culture, but he did not take part in them. As a Jew in the Diaspora, Paul lived in the world dominated by pagan ideas and notions. His parents observed the commandments of the Torah, and they also made efforts to bring up their son in this atmosphere. Paul was trained as a rabbi, and as a rabbi he was required to have a profession. *“He was a tent-maker like his parents and was proud to be able to earn a living in this way and not place a burden on other Christians¹. “*

Hence, Paul was not ashamed of his past. Each letter of Paul and the narratives about Paul in Acts are a unique portrait of Paul. For example, in Acts 22:3, Paul identifies himself in the following terms:

“I am a Jew, born at Tarsus in Cilicia, but brought up in this city at the feet of Gamaliel, educated according to the strict manner of the law of our fathers, being zealous for God as you all are this today².”

In the letter to the community of Philippi, Paul boldly lists his Jewish pedigree: “I was circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew born of Hebrews; as to the law a Pharisee, as to zeal a persecutor of the Church, as to righteousness under the law blameless” (Phil.3: 5-6). Completely in keeping with the regulations of the Torah, he was circumcised on the eighth day (Lev.12: 3, cf. Luke 2:21). Jesus was similarly circumcised in Jerusalem as a child. In the face of criticism about his position concerning Gentile Christians, Paul clearly wanted to leave no room for doubt about his Jewishness. The report about Paul’s circumcision also sheds some light on the

¹ Michael Walsh, Roots of Christianity (London: Grafton Books, 1986), p.100.

² Nelson Thomas, New Revised Standard Version (Second Ed., New York: Wm. Collins Sons & Co. Ltd., 1971), p.135.

religion of his parents. Paul has been circumcised and was marked for life and could be recognized as a Jew. Perhaps it can be stated that *“he looked back with pride on the period in which he appeared as a convinced Pharisee³.”* In his written recollections, Paul preferred to describe himself as a “zealot”. “I advanced in Judaism beyond many of my own age among many people, so extremely zealous was I for the traditions of my fathers” (Gal.1: 14; Phil.3: 6). Paul was a fanatic, consciously a zealot of the Old Testament Jewish tradition. So with the same zeal he was also zealous for the Christian community: “I feel a divine zeal for you, for I betrothed you to Christ to present you as a pure bride to her one husband ” (2 Cor.11: 2). Paul knew his origins, and he received this knowledge from his parents: *“‘an Israelite, a descendant of Abraham and a member of the tribe of Benjamin’ (Rom.11: 1, Phil.3: 5)⁴.”* On one occasion he made use of the sort of rhetoric which speaks for itself: “Are they Hebrews? So am I. Are they Israelites? So am I. Are they descendants of Abraham? So am I” (2 Cor.11: 22). His Jewish origin stamped his life. He grew up as the Jew named Saul (Acts 7: 58). The age-old faith of his fathers meant a great deal to him (Gal.1: 14), but he became a convinced follower of Jesus Christ. *“Saul became Paul. His life changed radically, but he never denied his Jewishness. He died as Christian and as a Jew.⁵”*

By virtue of his birth, Paul was taken up soul and body into a community of faith with an old, venerable tradition. It is possible to say that Paul describes with pride his life as a

³ Den C.J. Heyer, Paul: A Man of Two Worlds (Trinity Press International, 2000), p.40.

⁴ Adolf Deissmann, Paul: A Study in a social and Religious History (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1957), p.91.

⁵ Adolf Deissmann, Paul: A Study in a Social and Religious History, p.96.

Jew of the Pharisaic tradition. Most commentators emphasize the fact that “*he received a strict Jewish training in a family observant of the strictest Pharisaism*”⁶.

2. PAUL AND OBSERVANCE OF THE LAW (TORAH)

To understand the whole Paul from the point of view of observance of the law one must think of the viewpoint of the Pharisaic observance of Mosaic law, according to which Paul led a blameless life (Phil.3: 6). The law still seems to be the key concept of our study. Therefore, we shall present Paul as a Jew of purest blood observing his ancestral traditions.

2.1. PAUL AND OBSERVANCE OF SABBATH LAW

The history of observance of the law among the *Mbala* is not new at all⁷. If today we speak of the regulations of Mosaic Law (Torah), a Mumbala remembers the way his ancestors lived their lives. Observance of the law among the Mbala existed since the origins of their ancestors. The Mbala have a day of observance similar to that of the Jewish Sabbath. For the Mbala, Friday is a day of observance. It is a day for rest from worldliness. Perhaps this is different from the Jewish understanding. For the Jews, “*Sabbath was the centre of religious observance. It began at sunset on Friday and ended at sunset on Saturday*”⁸. Work was prohibited on that day. The Sabbath has always been the focus of Jewish piety. On the Sabbath, Jews gave special acknowledgement to God’s

⁶ Claude Tresmontant, Men of Wisdom: Saint Paul and the Mystery of Christ (New York: Harper Torch books, 1957), p.13.

⁷ “*Mbala*” is a tribe and a “*Mumbala*” is the singular of the plural “*Bambala*”. They talk of a Mumbala when there is one person and Bambala when there are two people. So a Mumbala is from Mbala tribe.

⁸ Rose Mary Goring, Dictionary of Belief and Religions (New York: W&R Chambers, 1992), p.270.

worship and awaited the fullness of his Kingdom. *"Sabbath was therefore a time of sanctity, study, and rest from worldliness⁹."* Its liturgical content celebrated creation at evening, revelation through Torah recitation at the morning service, and redemption at the closing service. Education about the law was the responsibility of the family as the basic unit. The synagogue was the centre of community worship and study. Its main feature is the "ark" (cabinet) containing the handwritten scrolls of the Pentateuch.

Among the Mbala, Friday is observed as a day for the dead ancestors. Work is strictly prohibited in the forest on that day because the Mbala believed that the dead ancestors walked around in the forest on Fridays. So the living leave the forest free that day. Everybody remains at home busy doing manual work. A Mumbala respects the observance of Friday and is fearful of this law because disobedience to it has consequences in daily life. Misfortune, and in some cases death occur within the family because a family member did not observe the law. The observance of the Friday law remains a tradition among the Mbala. It is written upon their hearts in the same way as *"Paul, the Jew, learned the content of the law in the Old Testament and kept it¹⁰."* Paul was beyond reproach in observing what the law recommended. Philo, the Jewish philosopher writes, *"the Jews, since they believed that God revealed their laws and taught them from early childhood, the prescriptions of these laws were imprinted in their hearts¹¹."* Therefore, the Jews were proud to raise their children according to the laws and religious practices which were handed down. They were most important element in

⁹ Crim Keith, The Personal Dictionary of World Religions (New York: Harper Collins, 1981), p.390.

¹⁰ William Barclay, Ambassador for Christ: The Life and Teaching of Paul (Valley Forge: Judson Press, 1973), P.17.

¹¹ Claude Tresmontant, Men of Wisdom: Saint Paul and the Mystery of Christ, p.14.

their lives. So, the Jews were different from members of other societies, because of their knowledge and observance of the law.

The goal of the fulfilment of observances of laws within Jewish and Mbala tradition is essentially the same. The Jews fulfill its requirements for God's favour and the Mbala, for their own local gods. The Jews earned God's favour by fulfilling the requirements of Mosaic Law (Torah) such as observance of Sabbath, dietary laws and requirements for circumcision. The Jews were asked to keep the law in order to be saved. The Mbala acquired merit before the ancestors or gods by fulfilling the requirements of their laws such as the religious observance of Friday and local dietary laws. They worshiped the dead ancestors to whom they offered sacrifice. They considered them to be the gods of the nature. It is up to the dead ancestors to favour the living. What is important to note here is that the observance of laws is a value found in every people, especially in African cultures. The differences in the observance of laws among peoples developed as values were applied in their cultural context. Hence, we cannot avoid divergences and similarities among peoples. Each people develop a culture.

However, Paul was a Pharisee, a strict observer of the law. He himself says that "*he learned the principal content of the law as found in the fifth and sixth chapter of Deuteronomy when he was a boy in the fifth year*¹²." At key points, Paul like the Mbala explicitly identified the observance of the law as "received" tradition from their ancestors (Gal.1: 14).

¹² Joseph Holzner, Paul of Tarsus (New York: B. Herder Book, 1944), p.12.

2. 2. PAUL AND OBSERVANCE OF DIETARY LAWS

The dietary laws of Judaism are not foreign to a Mumbala tribesman. Bambala have a list of forbidden foods: crocodile, snake, certain vegetables such as sorrel (Ngayi-ngayi), hibiscus (Gingombu), vegetables prepared with local bicarbonate of sodium (Yima Yimugedi), the heads of fish and animals. The purpose of these laws, unlike Judaism, is not to attain the ideal of holiness (spiritual matter), but to stimulate health. They sought to prevent sickness. There are laws regarding the slaughter of animals. When a sacrifice is offered to the dead, the sacrifice is placed on the tomb of the ancestors in the cemetery. The Bambala inherited the observance of laws from the ancestors. A Mumbala therefore observes the laws well in his daily life. Today these laws are no longer respected, because of the lack of food. Occasionally, they are observed. For example, when a misfortune occurs the family reverts to traditional observances.

J. Packer says that *"the dietary laws in Judaism came from God; He alone decided what people should eat."*¹³ The Jews had to follow and respect what the law commanded; otherwise God would take note of disobedience and transgression. *"Dietary law dealt not only with permitted and forbidden food, but also with the slaughter of animals"*¹⁴. Its system is based on Leviticus 11:44: "For I am the Lord your God; consecrate yourselves therefore, and be holy, for I am holy." The point of view of the book of Leviticus for this matter is that only cattle or beasts that chew cud and have a cloven hoof are permitted. Leviticus also states that only fish having fins and scales are allowed. He continues by saying that insects must not be eaten, nor any creeping thing. The milk of unclean animals and eggs of unclean birds were also forbidden, as were the sinew of animals and

¹³ J.I. Packer, Merrill C. Tenney and William White Jr., The Bible Almanac (Thomas Nelson, 1980), p. 387.

¹⁴ Dan Cohn Sherbok, A Dictionary of Judaism and Christianity (SPCK, 1991), p.51.

the blood of beasts and birds. This law reminds us in all its application that the food served to us must agree with God's decrees as laid down in Scripture. There was a specific ritual method of slaughtering these animals. This consisted of rigid slitting of the throat of the animal with a knife. After this act, the slaughterer examined the internal organs to see if they showed any sign of injury or disease that would have been likely to cause the animal's death within the year. If such was the case, eating the animal was forbidden. Paul, as well as all Jews, was bound to observe the law. "*Both Philo and Josephus held that Jews were willing to die for the law, and Josephus especially used this statement to prove generally Jewish loyalty to the law*¹⁵." Again and again Jews faced death rather than transgress the law. Each community of people has laws and uses them for the purpose of the needs of their society.

To conclude our brief sketch of observance of the law we wish to note that, "*all life of the Jews and Mbala was to follow the great broad principle of the law.*¹⁶" Paul asserts that he had been "with respect to the law a Pharisee" (Phil.3: 5). In Galatians 5:3, he writes that, "everyone who accepts circumcision is bound to keep the law." According to Acts 22:3, he was educated according to the strict manner of the law of his fathers. Paul sees himself at this point as being extremely zealous for the tradition of his fathers (Gal. 1: 14).

¹⁵ Crim Keith, The Personal Dictionary of World Religions, p.262.

¹⁶ William Barclay, Ambassador for Christ: Life and Teaching of Paul, p.22.

3. PAUL, THE JEW AND HIS BELIEF IN THE REQUIREMENTS OF THE LAW

Paul, the strict Pharisaic Jew, was bound to feel that his compliance with the law was an all-embracing obligation: "everyone who accepts circumcision is bound to keep the law" (Gal.5: 3). He himself, as far as we have seen in both study of ancestry, belief and observance of the law, respected the command of the law. For example, he refused to eat fish or other animals that had not been slaughtered in the orthodox way. Because of this respect for the law, Paul was expected therefore to assume personal responsibility for obedience to the law. However, there can be no doubt that Paul acquired the necessary knowledge of the law to fulfil the immense number of its requirements, involving every aspect of his life. It is true that Paul the Jew takes his stand upon the threshold of a new era accepting as matter of course a good many ideas and customs of his fathers. This alone explains the tremendous tensions of his Jewish past.

The Jews saw the law as a means of gaining salvation. Alstrup Nils Dahl says that *"the dominating factor, however, which supplied the young Paul with a sense of direction, was Jewish in origin: his zeal for the Law¹⁷."* Hence, *"God gave this law as the rule of life in order to help people know how to live¹⁸."* If a person kept the law, God would accept him. Paul, the former Pharisee, believed in it and deduced from this point of view the relation of God and man that was characterized by God's demands in the law and the human person's fulfilment of them. Hence, Paul as a Jew was bound to observe the entire law. For the Jews, the "law was as a revelation of knowledge and truth, so that

¹⁷ Dahl Nils Alstrup, Studies in Paul (Augsburg Publishing House, 1977), p.4.

¹⁸ Alexander BA. Pat, The Lion Encyclopedia of the Bible (A Lion Book, 1978), p.151.

the blind, the ignorant and the dead should be taught God's will" (Rom. 2:18-20). In this light, salvation as sharer in the past was, we can say, restricted to the circle of those within the law. It is from there only that Paul understands the relation of God and humanity. Whatever we may say about the concept of the law, it is clear that all of life was to be lived in accordance with the will of God, that is, by following the commandments. Paul states specifically "*the Jewish idea of 'attaining righteousness' and works of the law in describing the relation to God* ¹⁹." Here the human person is understood in terms of observance of the law before God, because he can believe of the work of the law. The law was therefore central in the life and thought of Paul as a Jew. Hence, Paul remained culturally a Jew embracing Christianity and its difficulties with Judaism.

We have read these magnificent statements about Paul, the Jew. We come to acknowledge that the observance and understanding of the law (Torah) was the object of human existence. It was the precious instrument by which the world was created and the perfect expression of wisdom and knowledge. Paul was essentially first and foremost a fanatical defender of the pharisaic tradition by his understanding of, and obedience to, the law: His was face turned backwards to the past. It is clear that Paul guaranteed the central importance of the Law of Moses as means of salvation. We shall now see below how Paul worked out his principal belief that Judaism was superseded by the Christian tradition. All things like circumcision, the integral observance of the Torah, dietary laws, and the sacrificial system gave way to the new reality in Christ.

¹⁹ Alexander BA. Pat, The Lion Encyclopedia of the Bible, p.115.

CHAPTER TWO:

THE CHANGE FOR AN INCULTURATION IN PAUL'S LIFE AND THOUGHT

In chapter one, we examined the background from which Paul emerged. Now it is important, however, to explain in what sense Paul made the change in his life from his former zeal for the law to his turning to Christ in the direction of inculturation. Hence, we wish to know the convictions that led a “Pharisee of the Pharisees” (Phil.3: 5-6; Gal.1: 4) to become the “apostle to the Gentiles” (Gal.1: 16). Finally, we will examine his concept of inculturation.

1. CHANGE IN PAUL'S LIFE AND THOUGHT

Having known as best we can, the Jewish past of Paul, we come now to examine the new life that Paul received from his inaugural Christian experience which in turn, transformed him from “his zeal for the tradition of his fathers” (Gal.1: 14) to a “preacher of faith” (Gal.1: 23). Therefore, we can state the content of Paul's change as follows:

1. Paul's encounter with Christ.
2. Paul's recognition of Jesus Christ as “Lord” and “Son of God”.
3. Paul's questioning of the concept and observance of the law.
4. Paul's invocation of Christ as the “end of the law”.
5. The Essence of Paul's Gospel: justification by faith in Jesus Christ.

1.1. PAUL'S ENCOUNTER WITH CHRIST

Paul, the Jew, first comes upon the stage of history as the persecutor of the new body of Christians. Brisebois Mireille expresses it clearly in these terms: "*he was a persecutor of the Christian long before becoming a follower and an apostle*²⁰." Hence, "*he continued the war waged by his party against Jesus and by himself waging war against the group of followers who revered the crucified*²¹." Paul recognized this himself: "For I am the least of the apostles, unfit to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the Church of God" (1 Cor.15: 9; Phil.3: 6). "For you heard of my former life in Judaism, how I persecuted the Church of God violently, and tried to destroy it" (Gal. 1:13). Thus, "*Christianity appeared to Paul like a betrayal of the meaning of the law, and the Christian law like a negation of his ideal*²²." Indeed, Paul had little to hide about his past. The story of his past was therefore widely known, as is witnessed by the following passage from the same letter: "Then I went into the regions of Syria and Cilicia. And I was still not known by sight to the churches of Christ in Judea; they only heard it said, 'He who once persecuted us is now preaching the faith he once tried to destroy' " (Gal.1: 21-23). What roused the anger of Saul, the Jew, against the Christians, and provoked him to persecute them? What gave offence was not at all the Christians' belief that the Messiah had appeared. It was the claim that God's Messiah was sent to the Christians, that is, to the people who were on the fringes of Jewish observance. Whatever it was, it must have been connected with the recollection of his former feelings. In other words, "*his zeal for the law led him in persecuting those who confessed their faith in the*

²⁰ Mireille Brisebois, Saint Paul: introduction to St Paul and his letter (England: St Paul Publication, 1986), p.18.

²¹ Adolf Deissmann, A Study in a Social and Religious History, p.110.

²² Mireille Brisebois, Saint Paul: Introduction to Saint Paul and His Letters, p.18.

*crucified Messiah, Jesus of Nazareth*²³.” As a Pharisee, Paul found that the Christian claim to be “God’s anointed” was an insult to the God of Sinai and a subversion of the law. For Paul, therefore, “*these people weakened observance of the law and diminished Israel’s hope of entering the age to come*²⁴.” In addition, they failed to subject the new converts to circumcision and the Torah. Hence, Paul despised and persecuted them. He specifies persecution as one of the proofs of his former righteousness according to the law (Gal. 1:13). He speaks of this as a logical outcome of his former irreproachable observance of law.

At Damascus, Paul encountered the risen Christ and experienced him. Christ revealed to him, two things at the same time. The first is the recognition that God had freely given his salvation to the despised and persecuted Christians. Secondly, that that salvation was intended expressly for people outside the law, and consequently for the Gentiles too. As the author of this change in his life, a change which is a turning point in religious history, a Jew became a Christian. After the encounter, Paul named the one whom he was to designate in future as his Lord: Jesus Christ. “The persecutor was called and chosen to be the apostle with a very special mission which focused on how the gospel should reach the Gentiles when he appeared to him in his vision on the road to Damascus” (Gal.1: 16). From his encounter with Christ, Paul’s sense of mission was nothing less than the expression and his vision of human destiny. The great doctrine that he is to preach is already stated in the words he had heard: “I am Jesus whom you are persecuting” (Acts 9: 5).

²³ Dahl Alstrup Nils, Studies in Paul, p.4.

²⁴ Dahl Alstrup Nils, Studies in Paul, p.4.

Hence,

“The good news that Paul proclaims is about the proper saving action of God in the world. Commentators on Paul over the centuries have sought to locate the essence of Paul’s gospel in concepts like ‘justification by faith’ and ‘in Christ’²⁵”

as we shall see later on. Thus, the focus upon the Gentile world was the direct consequence of Paul’s call to be an apostle to the Gentiles (Gal.1: 16). Paul hoped that his testimony would penetrate the blindness of Israel and thus pull aside the veil shrouding the glorious finale of God’s salvation plan. Paul moved from Jerusalem around Illyricum, on to Rome, and beyond Spain (Rom.15: 24, 28). His drive to cover rapidly the entire “world” through Asia Minor, Greece (Rom.15: 23), Rome and beyond was fueled by Paul’s commission to preach to the Gentiles about his conviction regarding the eschatological implications of the mission. Paul had to take directly and deliberately to them the gospel of salvation in Christ that he had been granted as an obligation to undertake in revelation. He understood from there that God was not as the strict Jews represented him.

The moment of Paul’s conversion was also the moment he received his mission. His mission to the Gentiles was revealed as God’s will. He is chosen to bear the name of Jesus before “nation, king and children of Israel” (Acts 9: 15-16). Paul reveals his inaugural call “to be a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles” (Rom.15: 16). For Paul, therefore, the continued fidelity of his Gentile communities was a living witness to the eschatological vision he had discovered in Christ. Hence, *“Paul has therefore to continue*

²⁵ Christopher Rowland, Christians Origins: An Account of the Setting and Character of the Most Important Messianic Sect of the Judaism (SPCK, 1985), p.207.

*through time the work of the ransom of men*²⁶." Thus, he was convinced that the way to God is not in the work of the law, but in Christ, the Messiah. The taproot of his universal mission was personal belief in Jesus Christ as Saviour of the world, a belief based upon his own conversion experience and ratified by early Christian tradition and the experience triggered by his ministry. Paul did not want to duplicate what other missionaries had already done, as he moved on a broad scale through provincial centres. His mission was never pursued in isolation from its roots in Judaism. Paul apparently utilized traditional Jewish missionary themes as part of his initial evangelization (Rom.1: 18-32). Despite the utilization of Jewish traditional formulae, the major part of his approach was a direct proclamation of the death and resurrection of Jesus as God's act of salvation. Paul did not have a rigid method of initial preaching. Paul's approach depended on the particular circumstances of his audience. Thus, the convictions forged in Paul's own inaugural experience formed the basic platform of his mission message. Jesus was Christ and God was now offering salvation to all through the death and resurrection of his Son.

In summary, the Damascus experiences, as told in Gal.1: 13-17 was not only a surprise but also inevitable. Christ revealed himself to Paul at Damascus (Gal.1: 16); Christ appeared to him (1 Cor. 15:8); Christ apprehended him (Phil.3: 13) with a view to fulfilling a mission to preach the gospel (1 Cor.1: 17).

²⁶ Jacques Maritain, Living thought of St. Paul (London: Cassell, 1942), p.17.

1.2. PAUL'S RECOGNITION OF JESUS CHRIST AS "LORD" AND "SON OF GOD"

For Paul, the law was surely an "advantage" par excellence, what he considered the great privilege in his past (Phil.3: 6). Hence, "*Paul would never have preached Christ so whole-heartedly and unreservedly if he had not previously been such an earnest Jew*²⁷." However, Paul changed from being a Jew, he became a Christian and a member not of the Christian church at Jerusalem, but of the Hellenistic Church at Antioch. According to Paul's own testimony (Gal.1: 1,1:11-12,15-16; 1 Cor.9: 1, 15:8; Phil.3: 5-6), the great change in his thinking was brought about as a consequence of his vision of Christ, while about to persecute Christians at Damascus. The call that came to Paul near Damascus was of all possible calls the most certain and direct, because it came from the Lord who had been raised up to God. It was entirely personal to him. Paul, after listening to the voice of the Lord, did nothing else other than devote himself to the service of the cause that he had just been persecuting. Johannes Munck says:

*"the zealous Pharisee and tireless persecutor was therefore baptized in the Church of Damascus, and then went out to take the gospel to the Gentiles"*²⁸.

Paul relates his own call to the prophetic call of Isaiah (Gal.1: 15, Rom.1: 1, cf.Isa.49: 1) and Jeremiah (Jer.1: 5, cf.Gal.1: 15).

The Damascus experience changed the course of Paul's life. From being a persecutor of the early Christian movement, Paul becomes one of its protagonists. From one "zealous for the traditions of his fathers" (Gal.1: 14), Paul becomes the "apostle to the

²⁷Jacques Maritain, Living thought of Saint Paul, p.38.

²⁸ Johannes Munck, Paul and the salvation of mankind (London: SCM Press Ltd., 1959), p.11.

Gentiles". From a blameless keeper of the law, he becomes the one who completely discounts the law's value for the Gentiles (Phil.3: 5-6). The Jewish zealot for the Torah was converted and became a follower of Jesus Christ (Rom.1: 1). The enemy of Christ became Paul the slave of Christ (Rom.1: 1). Paul became a devout man whose way God blocked through Christ who had died a shameful death on the cross. The most expressive witness of what took place inwardly is given in 2 Cor 4: 6: "For it is the God who said, 'let light shine out of darkness' who has shone in our hearts to give the light of knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ." It was therefore the same God whom he had served as a Pharisee and a persecutor of the Christians who made his Son Jesus appear to him in heavenly glory. Thus, for Paul, *"the law belongs to the Old World, for God had made it obsolete by sending his Son to those who were outside the law"*²⁹. This means that the *"ancient Jewish conception of the law is taken up and preserved, with the sole difference that henceforth it is transferred to Christ"*³⁰. The God of the law had revealed Himself as Jesus the Christ. The observance of the law which he had once esteemed so highly, he reckoned a complete loss, nothing more than a refuse in comparison to his life's new direction: "To Christ Jesus, my Lord." (Phil.3: 4-11). The law has expired therefore in Paul's eyes, because of the new arrival from outside of something (indeed, someone) that was greater than the law. Hence, Christ surpasses the law by what he is and what God has done to him. The time of the law is past only because Christ has appeared. In Christ, the "new creation" is possible. For Paul,

*"the universal access now of the people to God no longer passes through the law but through Christ, our new wisdom from God, justification, sanctification, and redemption (1 Cor.1: 30)."*³¹

²⁹ Johannes Munck, *Paul and the Salvation of Mankind*, p.66.

³⁰ Carolyn Osiek, *Galatians* (Michael Glazier, Inc., 1979), p.27.

³¹ Thielman Frank, *A Context Approach: Paul and the Law* (Inter Varsity Press, 1994), p.35.

In any case, Paul felt that his encounter with Christ was so real, so close, and so indissoluble a union that it could be expressed in no other way than to say that he lived in Christ, and Christ lived in him.

To conclude this section, we can say that Paul understands that Christ is indeed the climax of salvation history. He is the New Adam, the first of the new race (Rom.5: 12; 1 Cor.15: 5) and the man that is “in Christ is a new creation (2 Cor.5: 17; Gal.6: 15). Paul sees Jesus as the power of God for salvation to everyone that believes (Rom.1: 16). Hence, Paul understands that through Christ’s arrival, God has led him from error to truth. Conversion brought significant modifications to his life. This is what we discuss in the following section.

1.3. PAUL'S QUESTIONING OF THE CONCEPT AND OBSERVANCE OF THE LAW (TORAH)

It is clear that prior to his conversion Paul was a committed and zealous Jew. However, here, Paul was concerned to introduce a new way of looking at God’s requirement.

“Paul rejected the Jewish conception of the mediating and saving function of the Torah. It is not because he considers the law weak and imperfect, but because he recognizes that henceforth the definitive revelation of the righteousness of God, of the merciful restoration of the right relationship for human beings with God, took place in Jesus Christ, and especially in his death on the Cross³².”

The Jews would have said:

“You must earn the favour of God; you must

³² Penna Romano, Paul The Apostle, Wisdom and Folly of the Cross: A Theological and Exegetical Study (Vol.2, The Liturgical Press), p.126.

keep law, you must live a life entirely obedient to the law's commands, and then you will earn and receive the favour of God³³."

Hence, "Paul did not certainly see the Law as something which had no more importance in the divine economy³⁴." The Law is holy and the commandment holy, just and good (Rom.7: 12). God's Torah has been reinforced as the 'law of faith' (Rom.3: 27) and as the 'law of Spirit' (Rom.8: 2). Paul was not against the law as such, but against the use of the law as a means of salvation (Gal.3: 19). The whole duty of a Jew was to earn God's favour. It was assumed that following the rule of law earned one the favour of God. Paul rejected the Jewish conception of this kind of relationship between God and man. According to Paul, keeping the law does not save us. We can only keep the law because we are saved. The principle of law-keeping belongs to the age of spiritual immaturity. Now that Christ has come, those who believe in him have attained their spiritual majority as responsible children of God. The law pronounces a curse on those who fail to keep it in every detail. Those who place their trust in the law put themselves in danger of that curse (Gal.3: 10).

"Christ, by His death on the cross, bore the divine curses in His people's place and delivered them from the curse, which the law pronounces (Gal.3: 13)³⁵."

"He redeemed those under the law, in order that they would receive sonship" (Gal.3: 26).

The law imposed a yoke of slavery. Faith in Christ brings liberation: "*The Law is for the*

³³ William Barclay, The Mind of Paul (New York: Hender & Herder, 1962), p. 145.

³⁴ Christopher Rowland, Christians Origins: An Account of the Setting and Character of the Most Important Sect of the Judaism, p.220.

³⁵ Carolyn Osiek, Galatians, (Michael Glazier), pp. 32-33.

*Christians therefore a thing of the past because of the death of Christ*³⁶". Christians have died for it. Paul regards the law as abolished as norm and standard, both as a way to salvation and as an expression of God's will while remaining in force as prediction, promise and paraclesis. Paul perceives that for the Christian, the law of God (Christ) comprises more than the mere letter of the Mosaic Law.

Paul was quite clear that behind the breakdown of the law, he could see the working of sin and other demonic powers. Paul, in his description of his own struggle with sin (Rom.7), has an acute sense of the power of sin. It is almost a personal enemy that does its utmost to destroy the soul. It takes advantage of the flesh. It brings all the members in bondage to its principle, which Paul calls the law of sin (Rom.7: 23). It reduces man to utmost wretchedness, from which only God through Christ can deliver him. This leads to a consideration of the saving activity of God in Christ. Hence, "*the work of Christ on the Christian is seen as an objective sacrifice provided by God on the basis that sins may be remitted.*"³⁷" Paul is convinced by bitter experience that the law is completely ineffective as a means of salvation, not because of any inherent deficiencies in the law, for man's better self actually delights in the law (Rom.7: 22). The law is ineffective because of man's own deficiencies.

Having turned to a new law (Christ), Paul looks out at the old law (Torah) that he has abandoned and contrasts it with the nature of the new. Paul characterized the new law by the word "Spirit". The word implies that the old person is "flesh". Paul stresses the sinful nature of humanity by calling it "flesh". By this, he means moral rather than physical

³⁶ Heiki Raisanen, *Paul and the Law* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986), p.59.

³⁷J. D. Douglas, *The New Biblical Dictionary* (Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1962), p.1104.

sinfulness. Paul understands that the natural life with all its associations and impulses rules the body (2 Cor.5: 16, Phil.3: 4). Paul condemns both sin and piety that consist in only following the law. "While we were living in the flesh" (Rom.7: 5) can refer equally to a sinful and to a self-righteous past. Paul is careful in differentiating "sinful" flesh and "man's" flesh. It is clear that Christ had become man to redeem man, for that is basic to Paul's doctrine of two Adams (Rom.1: 12f). On the other hand, "*when Paul speaks of the Spirit he sees Christ, the power by which the Christian enters the Christian life, the power in which he lives the Christian life.*"³⁸ For Paul, to live in the Spirit is to live in the presence of the Risen and Living God. For Davies,

*"the Spirit of God is therefore set over against the flesh (Rom.8: 4f), gives life in place of death (Rom.8: 11), bears witness to the Christian's sonship (Rom.8: 14f), and intercedes for them in accordance with God's will (Rom.8: 26f)"*³⁹.

Christian life is, therefore, not a matter of submission to a legal code, but a life controlled on the basis of a new law which involves such qualities as righteousness, peace, joy, hope, and love (Rom.12: 3 f, 11; 14: 17; 15:13,30).

We have thus far found in Paul a clear statement to the effect that the old law has indeed been superseded in Christ. Hence, Paul's statements about the law are loud assertions that salvation comes only through faith in Christ.

³⁸ J. D. Douglas, The New Biblical Dictionary, p.285.

³⁹ W. D. Davies, Paul and Rabbinic Judaism: Some Rabbinic Identity (University of California Press, 1994), p. 201.

1.4. PAUL'S INVOCATION OF CHRIST AS THE END OF THE LAW

It is important to observe in what sense Paul understood that Christ was the end of the law. On the one hand, Paul described the law as a yoke of bondage, something from which men needed to be redeemed, from whose authority they had been discharged (Rom.7: 6), of which Christ was "the end". On the other hand, we find Paul exalting the law, ascribing to it divine authority, and practicing it, even in some of its most external ritual. Only the contemplation of Christ and of the event that took place in him is capable of causing the function of the law to be obscured and to expire, however holy "the law may be, or however holy and just the commandment "(Rom.7: 12).

It is in the former sense that the law has come to an end. Paul found himself emancipated from the law as bondage as a consequence of his faith-union with Christ. Paul was free to proclaim the discovery, which had been forcing itself upon him during his Jewish days that the law had failed. The law held out a prospect of leading men to "life", the commandment was ordained unto life (Rom.7: 10); "that he who performs all these things shall live by them" (Gal.3: 12). The Law had proved itself experimentally a law that led to sin and death (Rom.8: 2). Paul says the same thing in 2 Cors. 3:7: "a form of administration which issued to death." Hence, the recognition of its failure is expressed with a note of indignation. The law, because of its historical relativity, laid a snare for men to tempt them to make a mistake, which Paul discovered to be simply fatal. *"So the attitude which the law had fatally encouraged men to adopt towards God was that of making a claim upon Him (God), what Paul describes as "boasting" (Rom.4: 3)⁴⁰.*" The law had offered itself as a divine authority, and as a method of attaining the

⁴⁰ Daniel J. Harrington, Romans (Sacra Pagina) (Liturgical Press, 1996), p.95.

righteousness that God required. Paul draws a conclusion, that the function of the law as a system for regulating the relation between God and man has been only relative and transitory. The function of the law was to bring to light the real nature of the disease: "I had not known sin except through the Law (Rom.7: 7). Through the law comes the knowledge of sin (Rom.3: 20). The recognition of sin as sin, which was facilitated by making it as 'transgression', was essential to the discovery of the true value and the gift of God in Jesus Christ. Now in Christ the promise is fulfilled and faith renders the law as a system irrelevant (Gal.3: 17- 42) and inferior, (Gal.3: 19). "*The law of Christ which is a code of authoritative 'words of the Lord', has been substituted for Mosaic Law*⁴¹." This law of Christ is identical with Mosaic Law as far as its content is concerned. The law has not been changed at all. What has changed with Christ is man's possibility of fulfilling the law (in Spirit). Paul, as a Jew, had thought that men should keep the law in order that they might be saved. As a Christian he saw that men must be saved in order that they might keep the law. It was understood that the keeping of the law established no claim upon God, that it could be kept in any real sense only by those who had accepted salvation in Christ as God's free gift of grace.

With Paul's saying that the law had come to end, he ought to have insisted that the law was given for a limited period of time. In other words, "the law was to be in force 'till the offspring' should come to whom the promise had been made, i.e. until the coming of Christ" (Gal.3: 23-25; 2 Cor.3). It is clear, therefore, that

"the law was to be a poor slave or jailer, to make men ready to hear the gospel of Christ (Gal.3: 21-24), for Christ is the end of the

⁴¹ Noel David Freedman, The Anchor Bible Dictionary (Vol.5., New York: Doubleday, 1992), p.95

law, that everyone who has faith may be justified (Rom.10: 4)⁴²."

1.5. ESSENCE OF PAUL'S GOSPEL: JUSTIFICATION BY FAITH IN JESUS CHRIST

Paul had been accustomed to speaking of Jewish ideas like 'attaining righteousness' and 'works of the law' in describing the relation to God, which he now recognized as false. Paul realizes his short sightedness:

" 'but now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from law. The righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe ... since all have sinned ... they are justified by grace as a gift, through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as an expiation by his blood, to be received by faith. This was to show God's righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins ... For we hold that a man is justified by faith apart from works of the 'law'' (Rom.3: 21-28)⁴³."

Paul obviously experienced a radical revision in his perception of Jesus of Nazareth. In turn, this caused radical changes in Paul's understanding of God's plan of salvation, the role of the law, the place of Israel and the role of the Gentiles in salvation history. Paul was convinced after his conversion experience and subsequent reflection that Christ and Christ alone was God's means for salvation of all. Whenever he spoke about his conversion experience and his vocation he makes it clear that they originated by a decisive act of God.

Hence, there is no word so near the centre of Paul's belief as the word "faith". For

⁴² Richard Longenecker, Paul Apostle of Liberty (New York: Harper & Row, 1964), p.144.

⁴³ Eugene H. Maly, Romans (Michael Glazier, Inc., 1979), p. 21.

Paul, faith is complete trust and complete surrender to Jesus Christ. It is the total acceptance of all that He said, of all that He offered, and of all that He is. Hence, faith in Christ is a faith that works by love and thus fulfils the law of Christ (Gal.10: 6, 13). We may sum it up in this way:

“Faith is the response of trust of a man’s total personality to the love of God as shown to us in the life and death of Jesus Christ. It is that righteousness in a right relationship with God which ought humanly speaking to have been impossible for sinners, but which in the mercy of God is made available for us⁴⁴.”

Christ’s coming and self-sacrifice betoken the turning point in the aeons, as is expressed in this beautiful passage from Romans 10: 4: “For Christ is the end of the law, that every one who has faith may be justified.” Paul gives faith a central place throughout his conversion. We have only to read his letters to see that Paul believes the word “faith” sums up the very essence of Christianity. “Rom.3: 22 lays down the great truth about which we have been thinking: ‘righteousness is by faith unto all that believe⁴⁵.’” This means for Paul, therefore, that the only way to right relationship with God is to take Jesus at His word, and to cast us on the mercy of God, believing utterly what Jesus says about God. In Ephesians 2: 8 he writes: “By grace are you saved through faith.” This is a highly compressed saying. In Paul’s thought grace is something that we could never deserve, which we could never have earned, something that is given generously and freely for the accepting. Paul throughout his conversion shows the righteous of God and his authorship of man’s present salvation (Rom.5: 11). For Paul, salvation consists essentially in present possession, or in hope of a coming transformation of the world. As a Christian, Paul

⁴⁴ Brendan, Byrne, Reckoning with Romans: A Contemporary Reading of Paul’s Gospel (Michael Glazier, Inc., 1986), p. 47.

⁴⁵ Brendan Byrne, Reckoning with Romans: A Contemporary Reading of Paul’s Gospel, p. 21.

concludes that what leads men to God are not pious deeds, but divine grace and human readiness to receive it. Paul's tradition was founded upon the God's act of salvation for Greeks and Gentiles. The importance of all this for Paul is that his belief in Jesus Christ formed his historical consciousness and gave him an overall vision of human destiny. This vision, in turn, nourishes his understanding of his own ministry as apostle to the Gentiles. Paul became aware of his vocation to be an "ambassador for Christ" and minister of reconciliation. So the Good News which Paul proclaims is about the power or saving action of God in the world. This manifestation of God's righteous character, the ultimate salvation for those who believe involves judgment, God's wrath, and a stand against all that is opposed to God.

Reading these magnificent statements about the essence of Paul's Gospel, we note that the essence of his Gospel was justification by faith in Jesus Christ. Hence, Paul states that the Hebrew Testamental perspective has almost disappeared. Paul's point is, briefly, that Judaism as a religious system has been cancelled by what God has done in Christ. *"Christ is the goal of a whole vast process of movement and transformation within nature and of the long history of mankind from creation down to the present moment⁴⁶."* It is therefore of supreme importance that we understand something of what Christianity meant to him.

⁴⁶ Joseph, Blenkisopp, Jesus is Lord: Paul's Life in Christ (London: Paulist Press, 1967), p. 37.

2. PAUL AND INCULTURATION

We have previously seen that the Christian in Pauline theology is one who has died and risen with Christ. The Christian lived in Christ. The mystery of Christ and his definitive role in God's plan of salvation holds the key to the understanding and correct implementation of inculturation for Paul. Our next major task in this study, therefore, will be to try and clarify what inculturation means from the Christological, incarnational perspective. In doing this, we shall concentrate upon examining the different ways in which inculturation took place in the life and thought of Paul.

2.1. TOWARDS AN UNDERSTANDING OF PAUL'S INCULTURATION

Generally, *"The concept of 'inculturation' is understood as the effort to adapt the Christian message to the way of thinking and acting of non-occidental peoples⁴⁷."* For Mungambi, *"Inculturation is the conviction that Christ and Good News are dynamic and challenging to all times as they become better understood and lived by each people⁴⁸."* For the rest of his life, Paul remains absolutely free. A. Shorter states, *"inculturation is said to be a dialogue between the Christian message and human culture⁴⁹."* For Gerald Arbuckle, inculturation is the

"dynamic relation between the Christian message and culture or culture; an insertion of the Christian life into a culture; and ongoing process of reciprocal and critical interaction and assimilation between them⁵⁰."

⁴⁷ Theoneste Nkeramihigo, "Inculturation and the Specificity of Christian Faith" In: J.M. Walligo, *Inculturation: Its meaning and Urgency* (St. Paul Publications-Africa, 1986), p. 67.

⁴⁸ J. N. K Mungambi, *Jesus in African Christianity* (Initiatives Publishers (Nairobi, Kenya), 1989), p. 14.

⁴⁹ Aylward Shorter, *Toward A Theology of Inculturation* (Geoffrey Chapman, 1988), p. 59.

⁵⁰ Gerald A. Arbuckle, *Earthling the Gospel: An Inculturation Handbook for Pastoral Works* (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1990), p.17.

Inculturation is the reciprocated critical process of adaptation through which a culture is judged in the light of the Gospel and incorporates the values of it. Teresa Okure says,

“It has to do with seeing the whole of culture itself, as the fertile soil in which the Good News is planted, which it fertilizes; and from which it draws nourishment in a process of mutual enrichment”⁵¹.”

So it reaches its climax when it brings an individual or a community to enter into a process of identification with Christ. However, when speaking of the “inculturation” of Paul, in our study, we have attempted to understand it not as our predecessors define it, but as a particular form of adaptation that occurs in the historical context of contact between Paul and Christ. The inculturation of Paul has to do with bringing Christ into the very centre of his life. Paul had, first and foremost, to understand the mystery of Christ, to lay hold of him, and to point or adapt his mind. So Paul had to learn to ‘enter into Christ’, to ‘appropriate’ and assimilate the whole of reality of incarnation and redemption, in order to find himself. Not only that, but Christ became his determining factor, and organizing principle for assessing the value of everything: his life, his traditional religion and his culture. Paul realized that the Jewish law would not be the means of salvation because it was only for Jews. He presented the law as leading both to a sense of inadequacy, because of its possession of the means of salvation and also to self-righteousness and boasting before man and God. During Paul’s inculturation, he rejected what was at issue in works of the law for membership in the historical Israel and replaced it by the law of Christ. Hence,

“inculturation arose for Paul as a by-product of his effort to understand the mystery of Christ, as God’s

⁵¹ Teresa Okure, Paul Van Thiel Et Alii, Inculturation of Christianity in Africa (AMECEA Gaba Publications, 1990), p.59.

*final and unique agent of salvation.*⁵²”

This is the situation that has given birth to the concept or the process of inculturation.

We have therefore attempted to show here how the concept of “inculturation” was implicitly understood by Paul. It is, of course, rooted in a Christological, incarnational perspective.

2.2. CONCEPT OF INCULTURATION IN THE LIFE AND THOUGHT OF PAUL

Paul’s entire cultural outlook had been formed and shaped by the law. This means, *“he had been made to believe, on God’s word, that observance of the law was the only way to salvation, and was to be kept and observed in perpetuity”*⁵³. Paul assumed and lived the Jewish cultural life of his days, identifying himself concretely with his people. Indeed, the personal lifestyle of Paul was largely counter-cultural, with respect to his attitude towards Mosaic Law and towards the Sabbath, the most revered of Jewish religious observances. Paul manifested a deep and profound respect for the values and way of life of the Jewish people. In addition, Paul used, as Jesus did, ordinary human experience, common concepts and ordinary activities as the medium for revealing and teaching about the gospel to the people (Phil.3: 5-6). Paul also used the Jewish social and religious celebrations, as the natural settings for revealing the identity of Christ to Jews and Gentiles alike.

His acceptance of Christ did not involve the rejection by him of the culture of his people nor denial of community with them. It did not mean,

⁵² Teresa Okure Paul Van Thiel Et Alii, Inculturation of Christianity in Africa, p.65.

⁵³ Teresa Okure Paul Van Thiel Et Alii, Inculturation of Christianity in Africa, p. 65.

“Paul stopped being a Jew; but it rather meant that he had to change his Jewish religiosity and mentality, to welcome Christ into his whole life as a member of the one body of Christ⁵⁴.”

In the light of all this, it would be erroneous to think that Paul regarded Christianity as the antithesis of Judaism as has often been claimed. On the contrary, it appears to Paul that the Christian faith was the full flowering of Judaism. In being obedient to the Gospel, he was merely being obedient to the true form of Judaism. The Gospel for Paul was not the annulment of Judaism but its completion. W.D. Davies sums it up by saying,

“The source of Pauline Christianity lies in the fact of Christ, but wrestling to interpret the full meaning and implications of that fact Paul constantly drew up concepts derived from Rabbinic Judaism⁵⁵.”

In other words, Paul borrowed motifs from his own heritage, adapting them to his new Christian message. For instance, Paul appealed to the Gentiles to ‘turn from idols to serve a living and true God’ (1 Thess.1: 9; Rom.1: 18-32). Conversion from ‘idols’ to the ‘true and living God’ described the total transformation that was the goal of Paul’s preaching. He desired to deliver humanity from bondage to sin and death to accept the Lordship of Christ. Paul brings substantial Christian modification to this traditional Jewish motif. ‘Knowing God’ or being “known by him” (Gal.4: 8-9) as a description of conversion. In Jewish literature “knowing God” could refer either to knowledge of God through nature or to a broader sense of “knowing” as total relationship and commitment to God. “Paul used “knowing” in the deeper sense. He meant deliverance from the ignorance of being bound to false gods (Gal.4: 8). Paul adds a new dimension when he

⁵⁴ Teresa Okure Paul van Thiel Et Alii, Inculturation of Christianity in Africa, p.65.

⁵⁵ W. D. Davies, Paul and Rabbinic Judaism: Some Rabbinic Elements in Pauline Theology, p. 323.

speaks of being “known by God.” For Paul, “Being known” was equivalent to God’s choice or election and has no parallel in Jewish literature. Paul apparently utilized traditional Jewish missionary themes as part of his initial evangelization. He utilizes a traditional formulation, which summarized the basic gospel message of Jesus death, burial, and resurrection (1 Cor.15: 3-4). Paul preserved the most genuine characteristics of Jewish nature when he became a Christian.

However, Paul did not simply accept and endorse indiscriminately everything he found in Jewish culture. Paul rejected the distorted ideas about Mosaic Law and ritual. Paul sees Judaism as a religion that was arid and devoid of spiritual feeling. For Daniel Boyarin, “Paul became violently disillusioned with Judaism because of its commitment to ‘works of righteousness’⁵⁶”. In addition,

“the Jewish practices (Torah) undertaken by Paul were part of a past aeon and were themselves pointing towards a greater purpose of God which had now been revealed in Christ⁵⁷.”

Paul’s values had to give way. Now, Paul could freely regard all of his previous advantages as loss. The law itself became considered irrelevant in view of Christ. In many instances, Paul concretely and effectively challenged his Jewish culture:

“His basic assumption is that whatever exists and whatever is good in culture and creation, comes from God and exists from God through Christ. Thus, Paul was led to the amazing recognition that salvation lays solely in Christ⁵⁸.”

⁵⁶ Daniel Boyarin, A Radical Jew: Paul and the Politics Identity (University of California Press, 1994), p.41.

⁵⁷ Christopher Rowland, Christians Origins: An Account of the Setting and Character of the Most Important Messianic Sect of Judaism, p.76.

⁵⁸ Teresa Okure, Paul Van Thiel Et Alii , Inculturation of Christianity in Africa, p.67.

In Colossians, Paul sums up this idea by saying "There is only Christ; he is everything and in everything" (Col.3: 11). Commenting on this passage, the New Jerusalem Bible makes the following elaboration:

"the new creation will not be divided into races, religions and cultures and social classes, in the way the present creation has been since the fall; this unity is based on Christ."⁵⁹ "

In Jesus Christ all discriminations based on race, sex, culture, education and social status are meant to be eliminated:

"For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus; and if you are Christ's then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise" (Gal.3: 27-29, Col.3: 11).

At Damascus, Paul was convinced of his call and commission to proclaim the Good News to his people and to the Gentiles too. He learned that he was richly endowed with the Holy Spirit for his task. *"His sense of mission to his people and the gentiles constituted his greatest and all-inclusive resource for inculturation"⁶⁰.*

Paul serves as our constitutive model as he did for the Jews and Gentiles, since it is still his personality and obedience to the law of Christ that determines the quality of inculturation. Jesus in the totality of his teaching, his person, his words, and his death and resurrection, had not merely replaced the 'Old Torah', but had assumed the significance of a 'New Torah'. In fact, W. D. Davies sums this up by saying,

" Being a Christian, Paul had encounter with the living Christ, the awareness of living in a new creation, had the experience

⁵⁹ Henry Wansbrough, The New Jerusalem Bible (Standard Edition, London: Darton, Longman & Todd Ltd., 1985), p. 1948.

⁶⁰ Teresa Okure, Paul Van Thiel Et Alii, Inculturation of Christianity in Africa, p.64.

*of a new moral Exodus, the discovery of a New Torah and the advent of the Spirit*⁶¹.

When speaking of his inculturation, we have to remember that Paul never intended to completely disregard the law as the means of salvation and justification for Jews. He intends to add Christ as a means of salvation for ethnic Jews and Gentiles. “*Paul elevated therefore the meaning of the law and gave it a new and full meaning in Christ.*”⁶² This means Paul “*shifted from a wrong way of honouring God to the right way and from persecution of Christians in the name of God to the service of Christ in honour of the same God*”⁶³. The values that Paul possessed for the task of inculturation were rooted in his commitment to Jesus and his mission. It is from that context that we may regard Paul’s life as one sustained act of inculturation.

However, our effort in this chapter has been to explain the attitude of Saint Paul towards the Mosaic Law. We have seen that Paul characterized the Mosaic Law as something “fading away” (Gal.3: 11), as opposed to the new covenant, which is permanent. To speak exactly, Paul was convinced that the law (Torah) was not a necessary condition for salvation. Paul finds himself opposed to the written law as the ultimate embodiment of God’s saving purposes (2 Cor.3: 6). Paul shifted from a Jewish past life to a Christian life. Our examination of the relevant aspects of the life and thought of Paul is now complete.

⁶¹ W. D. Davies, Paul and Rabbinic Judaism: Some Rabbinic Elements in Pauline Theology, p.285.

⁶² Daniel Boyarin, A Radical Jew: Paul and the Politics Identity, p.42.

⁶³ Martin Dibelius, Paul (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1953), p.46.

CHAPTER THREE:

PAUL'S INCULTURATION IN A PARTICULAR AFRICAN CONTEXT

We have seen that Paul's life was rooted in a Christological, incarnational perspective. In this third chapter, our study now proceeds to the questions of Christian inculturation among the Mbala, after the example of Paul, in the Western part of the Democratic Republic of Congo. This requires us to identify two realities that need to be united and mutually enriched. These two realities are the Christian faith and the African reality of Mbala culture. Indeed, we need Paul to bring the gospel message among the Mbala.

The point of this ongoing reflection will be to highlight the different principles and elements of inculturation that every Mbala must embrace and apply to the local cultural situation. We will examine Paul's concept of inculturation and traditional Mbala belief, Paul and ancestral Mbala traditions, and the Pauline and Mbala's concept of reconciliation. Finally, we will make some brief suggestions about inculturation in Africa precisely among the Mbala.

1. PAUL'S CONCEPT OF INCULTURATION AND TRADITIONAL MBALA BELIEF

Paul broke with the law and opted for Christ as the sign of God's redemptive work (Eph.2: 16). Paul found a suitable expression of inculturation by beginning with a Christological, incarnational perspective. This understanding of the nature of Paul's inculturation is actualized through the cross and the mission of the Church. In the traditional culture, the Mumbala worshipped God called by the name of "*Nzambi-Mpungu-Maweshi*⁶⁴" who was found in nature. He was a God who could respond directly in various ways through natural elements by the power of the ancestors.

The elder of the family was the representative of the family before these ancestors. He possessed their spirit and had therefore a great role to play between the living and the dead. He was a bridge or a mediator and communicated with the ancestors. For instance, he whistled in the cemetery and then pronounced the name of the common ancestor. Here, the elder asked for protection for his family. The Mbala believed that when the living were not in a good relationship, the ancestors also were not. Therefore, there was no peace. What followed was misfortune in the family of the living because they disobeyed the will of the ancestors.

However, the missionary does not bring the Good News to the Mbala. He simply brings new information about a God already known and worshiped by them. Paul's God is therefore none other than the God who is already known in the framework of the

⁶⁴ "*Nzambi-Mpungu-Maweshi*": "*Nzambi*" means God, "*Mpungu*" means fetish and "*Maweshi*", superforce, powerful, almighty, the spirit. Here is expressed the idea of the Trinity, that one God, the almighty distinct in three persons. This God was powerful in his response to his people.

traditional religiosity. Paul's understanding of God is brought to a people deeply rooted in their culture. Mungambi says:

“they had their own understanding of God; they had their form of worship, their rituals, symbols, cleansing and reconciliation ceremonies, and they had their own world view⁶⁵.”

They perceived their situation vis-à-vis their environment in their own particular way. God in His wisdom revealed himself to the African in his own situation. The names by which God was known in various tribal settings were simply different from that presented by Paul. Thus, *“God was, therefore, known early through African traditional religion via the revelation in nature⁶⁶.”* The Mbala community has a God represented as a totem. They have to live according to the requirements of what the totem of the family is saying. The Mbala present the gods through nature: trees (Mukasa, Musongi), the cat (Nyahu), the Jackal (Gibulu), and the loft (Ngunzu). These are sacred things. The law requires that certain trees should not be cut. Certain animals are not killed when they are hunting. A stone cannot be thrown at the loft. They venerate them as manifestation of the gods.

The good news comes to an already rich culture. This culture receives the Word of God and becomes richer because of the gospel message. The Mbala and other African peoples accept the gospel, not because of its uniqueness and absolute truth, but because it clarifies African traditional understandings of God and the world. Christ is the source and principle of inculturation who comes to the African cultures to enrich them.

⁶⁵ J.N.K. Mungambi, *Jesus in African Christianity* (Initiatives Publishers (Nairobi/Kenya), 1989), pp.13-14.

⁶⁶ Eitel E. Keith, *Transforming Culture: Developing a Biblical Ethic in African Context* (Evangelical Publishing House, 1986), p.50.

2. PAUL AND ANCESTRAL MBALA TRADITIONS

Paul as Jew, was bound to keep the law. He characterizes his pre-Christian life as “blameless” (Phil.3: 6) with reference to legal obedience. This is also what happens among the Mbala. They possess cultural traditions that help them understand the world. For instance among the Mbala, *“the marriage was primarily for the perpetuation of the family, with children being central in the whole relationship”*⁶⁷. For the African, the aim of marriage is procreation in order to enlarge and enrich the family. Marriage is centre of all life in Africa. *“He who refuses to marry was a ‘curse’ to the community, he was a rebel and a law-breaker, he was not only abnormal but sub-human”*⁶⁸.” We have other recommended traditions among the Mbala regarding women and men. A Woman, for instance, was not supposed to eat snakes. People believed that if she ate a snake, she might give birth to a snake. She was not supposed to beat the drum otherwise her breasts might become long. After the death of her husband, she was asked to continue to sleep with him as they were sleeping when the man was alive. This proves her love for him. She was not supposed to eat until the time of the burial, because it was a burden for her who was remaining alive. She was required to spend forty days in the house, mourning every day around five o’clock. The husband, on the other hand, was not supposed to do the dishes, not to clean the house, otherwise he may not find work outside the house. These prohibitions also involved the young men. If they violated these prohibitions, they could not marry. The husband was supposed to mourn in the same manner as the woman when she died. He was not supposed to eat certain vegetables, the heads of fish, and

⁶⁷ Richard J. Gehman, African Traditional Religion in Biblical Perspective (Kesho Publications ‘Kijabe, Kenya’, 1989), p. 61.

⁶⁸Richard J. Gehman, African Traditional Religion in Biblical Perspective, p. 53.

certain animals otherwise he might fall sick. There were tough punishments for those who did not respect the traditions recommended by the society. This action dishonoured the family. To get rid of unwanted persons, the elders called for "*Lemba*⁶⁹," that is, they were to sell the troublemaker of the family to another family far away from their own home area. This person was forgotten completely the rest of their lives. The one sold became a slave in the family who received them. Everything he owned belonged to the elder of the family. Needless to say, the Mbala were obliged to respect what the society required as regulation. The Mbala lived under such prescriptions in order to lead the good life in society. Like Paul, who was blameless in the tradition of his fathers, a "*Mumbala*" also had prescriptions to respect the society left by the ancestors. Everything that the Mumbala does has support from the ancestors. The ancestors were considered to be gods who directed the lives of the people and all their doings. A Mumbala was supposed to respect the requirements of the society otherwise he was disobedient to the power of the elders and of the dead ancestors called "*Munengu*" or "*Mutaku*".

Paul was the first to introduce us to the concept of inculturation. Salvation does not come in keeping the law, but it is in faith in Christ Jesus. The message had to be conveyed to foreign cultures. The question today is this: whether the Mbala should continue with their ancestral traditions. Should they retain with the beliefs and the requirements of the ancestors? We shall come back to this later when we will speak of Paul's inculturation and the Mbala. Let us move on to a description of the pre-Christian life of the Mbala.

⁶⁹ We call "*Lemba*" in the family the one who has been chosen by all the members of the family. This Lemba maybe young or old, but as he has been elected by all, everybody has to respect him. He is the one to represent the family in anything that involves the family and he can change any decision for his family members.

3. PAUL AND MBALA'S CONCEPT OF RECONCILIATION

Among the Mbala, the lack of respect for the traditions, such as observance of the “Mukasa” tree and the lack of observance of food laws were called “Mulonga” or sin. Performing prohibited acts brought conflict among the living and the dead ancestors.

The reconciliation rite called “*Kangamakoki*” occupied a great place within the Mbala community life for solving conflicts. When there was misunderstanding among the Mbala, the elder as a representative and confessor of the family had the authority (“Munengu” or “Mutaku”) to gather together all the family members. He listened to them and invited them with their friends to assist in the ceremony of reconciliation. All were gathered around a basin of water. One coin was put under the basin of water. The elder had first to address the ancestors at the opening of the ceremony so that they might assist him first and then bring peace in the family and return them to normal life. After, the elder called those experiencing problems to wash their face and hands (“Guzobula mema”). He invited every member of the family to do the same with those who came to assist them at the ceremony. When everyone finished, the elder asked again that those with problems shake hands. After this sign, people clapped their hands to signify that the problem was finished. They returned to their old relationship. They are reconciled. A big celebration was held in honour of the people who reconciled. The elder ordered all the women of the family to cook and bring together their meals to share them together. Wine and water had an important role to play in these ceremonies. The wine united people and water washed the skin in the same way that it washed away bad feelings or behaviours. In addition, a conflict between the living and the dead was resolved by a ceremony called “*Guladiga Hamvumbi*”. It is held in the cemetery on the tomb of the ancestor who

complained and caused misfortune in the family. The elder slaughtered a cock or a goat in the presence of the all family members and friends who came to assist with the ceremony. He took the blood and poured it on the tomb of the ancestor asking for forgiveness for “Mulonga” or sin.

Paul gives us the light of knowledge about the death of Christ on the cross after his conversion. In his life as a Jew, Paul seemed to have been successful and fully committed. He gave up everything after his conversion. *“He abandoned observance of circumcision and dietary requirements in favour of another principle, the Law of Christ, the Law of Spirit”⁷⁰.* Paul rejected the Torah and began his own encounter with Christ: “What was for me advantage has become a loss because of Christ” (Phil.6: 7). Here Paul helps us understand ideas about inculturation. After his conversion experience, Paul was convinced that the God of Israel exercised his sovereignty over all creation by freely choosing to call all to salvation through Jesus Christ. His conversion had transformed his view of history and made him aware of his vocation to be an “ambassador for Christ” and a “minister of reconciliation”. In 2 Cor.5: 16-20, Paul himself says:

“All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. So we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us.”

Paul is profound when speaking of reconciliation. Paul’s thoughts can be source of reflect for the missionary wishing to inculturate the gospel among the Mbala. With reference to his past life, Paul says: “But now through Christ this alienation and isolation have been dissolved (Eph.2: 13). He continues saying that Christ reconciled both Jew and Gentiles

⁷⁰ Christopher Rowland, Christians Origins: An Account of the Setting and Character of the Most Important Messianic Sect of the Judaism, p.222.

to God in one body through the cross, thereby bringing hostility to an end (Eph.2: 16). Through his ministry, Paul actualized and concretely experienced the redemptive work of the cross (Eph.1: 22-23). The central reconciling act of Paul is that he breaks down the walls of division and thereby carries out God's cosmic plan of salvation in the death of Jesus. In his pre-Christian life, Paul remained a Jew, but later on he became a Christian. Paul centres everything on Christ. Being a Jew and persecutor of Christians, Paul thinks about his future and looks forward to the coming of the Messiah. He rejected what was of advantage to him, as a strict observer of the law, for Christ. Paul makes a move from his ancestral traditions in the direction of Christ, whom he accepted completely throughout his whole life. The Mbala are called to view Christianity with a critical eye and decide to adopt and adapt it after Paul's example.

4. PAUL AND MBALA'S INCULTURATION OF THE GOSPEL TODAY

Inculturation among the Mbala means the synthesis between Christ and Mbala culture. Whenever, Paul speaks about his work of inculturation, he makes it clear that it originated in a decisive act of God, that is, his contact with Christ. For the work of Christian inculturation among the Mbala, the question we raise here is this: Whether the Mbala can accept everything from Christianity and completely abandon their culture. Does Christianity completely replace African cultures?

Regarding the culture itself, the Mbala need to recognize that not everything is "Gospel truth". While selecting the positive values and concepts of Christianity, Mbala also need to challenge its negative and oppressive elements. It means that the Mbala must

adopt or adapt Christianized forms to their culture and should find elements that fit their local situation. We listen to T. Okure Alii:

“Jesus came specifically to liberate, enrich, gather together, reconcile and reunite all peoples to God and to one another in his own person (Eph.2: 11-22, 2 Cor. 5:19)⁷¹.”

Indeed, the challenges that Paul’s inculturation posed about the question of the law compares well with the question of the inculturation of Christianity in Africa. It is hoped that the Mbala will confront the issue of ancestral beliefs courageously and victoriously after the example of Paul. Jesus Christ is the Good News, whom the Mbala people need to receive, live and proclaim. In their inculturation, they need to concretize Jesus so that they can experience him as a living person who can exercise dynamic influence upon their lives. Jesus Christ must be brought into the center of Mbala life and culture as Paul did after his conversion. Christianity emerges as a way of life to be adopted or adapted (Rom.6: 23). *“The Gospel of Jesus Christ and its values should serve, as guide and yardstick for what may or may not be assumed from culture⁷².”* The Mbala first must develop a Christology which speaks directly to Mbala religious sensibilities.

The Mbala must strive to understand Christianity as “Person” and “Event”. As an “Event”, Christianity has a history. This history can help the Mbala to understand the “Person” of Christianity. This history, of course, has strengths and imperfections. Paul emerged from his conversion with the beginnings of a resolution of two cultures: Jewish

⁷¹ Teresa Okure, Paul Van Thiel Et Alii, Inculturation of Christianity in Africa, p.70.

⁷² Teresa Okure, Paul Van Thiel Et Alii, Inculturation of Christianity in Africa, p. 74.

and Christian. Paul himself states that what was advantage in the past for him became loss. However, he does not completely disregard his Jewish past. This is the really foundation for inculturation. He brings a substantial Christian modification to the traditional Jewish heritage. Paul adapts his understanding to this new Christian message. This is a perfect example of inculturation, that is, a dynamic and critical interaction between the Gospel and the culture. Paul helps the Mbala to discover what is good and what to retain in traditional Mbala culture and what needs to be changed because of the introduction of new meanings. Paul gave up Jewish traditions for Christ who he recognized as the Messiah. Paul himself did not change the law, but changed from a different way of honouring God to the service of Christ for the honour of the same God. This means he relinquished the misunderstanding and misuse of the law as a way of salvation to God in Christ. Christ then commissioned him to serve among the Gentiles as his minister.

In the light of all this, the Mbala are to enter into dialogue with Christianity about inculturation. They must make choices about what is important to retain and to discard. An evaluation of the Christian missionary method must occur as it is implanted into African culture. Christianity grew up from Jewish culture and took from it what was positive in order to build another culture. Christian culture would not have expanded if it did not refer to Jewish culture. If the Mbala wish for a true Christian inculturation, they need first to reflect upon the realities of their own culture as the foundation and then incorporate elements from the outside to make up what may be lacking in their religious and social expression. It is from their own culture that they will be able to understand foreign cultures. For the Mbala, God was called "*Nzambi-Mpungu-Maweshi*" meaning

“the almighty God, creator of all”. The coming of Christianity had only to actualize these names by validating the new names for God and expanding Mbala understanding. Christianity makes sense only when seen, experienced and understood in the light of traditional culture. Christianity cannot be an element that is simply added to the Mbala’s lifestyle or culture. It must enrich it and become an integral part of it. It is hoped that Christianity’s contact with other cultures might allow for this sort of mutual exchange. This is how we should understand the meaning of Christian-Mbala inculturation.

In the third chapter, we tried to examine Christianity not as a total replacement of African cultures, but as integration after the example of Paul’s inculturation. Wherever Christianity becomes appropriately inculturated, not only does the particular culture tend towards Christ, but Christ himself also tends towards that culture. We are indebted to Paul’s personal example and undaunted commitment to the call to inculturate the Gospel in foreign lands.

GENERAL CONCLUSION

Our concern in this reflection has been to explain the impact of Paul's desire to inculturate the Gospel among the Gentiles. The inculturation of Paul was rooted in a Christological, incarnational perspective. When speaking of Paul's inculturation, we have been concerned to tell person of an experience-based faith by which they might live. Paul has set down his own experience of the Risen Lord so that people may follow. He wanted his life to affect the entire life and thinking of humanity. He desired that all people might change from the old to be born anew with the arrival of Christ, the new man. For Paul, the resurrection of Jesus Christ is the supreme fact of human experience that can change their lives and their thinking. Thus, the personal experience of Paul shows how one can be perfectly satisfied with oneself and the values that fill one's life (Phil.3: 5-6) when the message is truly integrated and accepted.

Paul's main concern focused upon the determination of where salvation could be found: Is salvation found in Jesus Christ or in meticulous observance of the law. In the two first chapters, we outlined the polemical contrast between "righteousness from the law" which speaks of Moses (Rom.10: 5) and the "righteousness from the law" which speaks of Christ (Rom.10: 6). In the first chapter, we saw that Paul characterizes his pre-Christian life as "blameless" (Phil.3: 6) with reference to legal obedience. He was a fanatical defender of the pharisaic tradition; his face turns backwards to the past. In this light, salvation was restricted to those who observed the law. In the second chapter, we saw that Paul developed a Christology rather than a Toralagogy. Paul came to view the knowledge of Jesus Christ as incomparably superior to what he had earlier known. In the

light of the gospel, his previous advantages and accomplishments, great as they were, could only therefore be regarded as rubbish (Phil.3: 7-8). As a Jew, Paul was influenced by speculation about his future. He had looked forward to the coming of the Messiah. Paul renounced the law for the Christ who he encountered on his way to persecuting the Christians at Damascus. His conversion is presented in the form of call narrative, like that of the prophets (Jer.1: 4-10). This is clear from his most extensive account in Gal.1: 11-17 where the experience is seen to involve two main elements: the revelation of Jesus as God's Son and commission to preach him to the Gentiles. In the third chapter we concentrated upon the establishment of the concept of inculturation among the Mbala after the example of Paul. For Paul, inculturation arose as a by-product of his effort to understand the mystery of Christ as God's final and unique agent of salvation. If the Mbala want to inculturate Christianity today, they need to adopt or adapt Christianized forms in their culture. They recognize that not everything is the "Gospel truth". This means the Mbala need to challenge its negative and oppressive elements. The subject of inculturation among the Mbala is therefore the revelation of God in their situation. The Mbala must trace out its consequences.

Despite appearances, the points raised in this study are by no means exhaustive. It is hoped that this reflection will serve to stimulate further attention to encourage the reader to think more about the questions we have raised during this study. We apply on the words of Gaston Bachelard to the conclusion of a study which is not complete: "if the science is growing, it is because of errors."

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