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Paul's Missionary Strategy

Goals, Methods, and Realities

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THE EARLY CHRISTIAN MISSION began with Jesus of Nazareth.[1] The record provided by Luke in the Book of Acts indicates that the Twelve initiated missionary outreach after Easter as commissioned by the risen Lord, both in Judea and beyond, to both Jews and Gentiles.[2] The notion that Paul was the most influential missionary among Gentiles in the first century is based on three facts. First, numerous writings of Paul survive, which allow us to describe his theological convictions in which the mission to the Gentiles is repeatedly mentioned. Second, we have a historical record of Paul's missionary work for the years AD 42–60 in the second part of the Book of Acts. Third, we have much less information about John and Peter and no information whatsoever on the missionary work of the other apostles. It is the last point that suggests that the view that the Apostle Paul was the greatest missionary is true less by comparison and evaluation than by default. In the following survey of the goals, the methods, and the realities of Paul's missionary strategy, I will treat the information provided by the book of Acts as a primary source as much as Paul's letters.[3]

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1. Cf. Schnabel, *Early Christian Mission*, 1:207–62.

2. Ibid., 1:389–913.

3. For the relevant arguments see ibid., 1:20–35. On the historical reliability of the Book of Acts see Hemer, *Acts in the Setting of Hellenistic History*; Thornton, *Zeuge des Zeugen*; Winter and Clarke, eds., *Acts in Its Ancient Literary Setting*. For a critique

PAUL'S MISSIONARY STRATEGY: THE GOALS OF PROCLAIMING THE GOSPEL

The strategy that informed and controlled Paul's work as a missionary is best described on the basis of passages in Paul's letters where he refers to his self-understanding. Relevant passages are 1 Cor 3:10–15; 9:19–23; 15:1–11; 2 Cor 2:14–16; 4:7–15; Rom 1:14; 10:14–21; 15:15–21; Col 1:24–29. The following comments summarize the most pertinent aspects that arise from these descriptions.

1 Corinthians 3:10–15

In this text Paul describes his role as founder of the church in Corinth. He had to do this because of the activities of teachers in the Corinthian congregation who denigrated his ministry on the basis of contemporary rhetorical criteria, which they used to evaluate the apostles and the teachers of the church.[4] Paul emphasizes the following facts.

(1) The apostles and teachers are "servants" (διάκονοι, diakonoi, 3:5), i.e., people who get something done at the behest of a superior, assistants who attend to the tasks at hand. This designation implies that all high-handedness and all self-interest concerning successful missionary and pastoral work are rendered impossible. Paul uses metaphors from agriculture and house construction to describe the work of missionaries, preachers, and teachers: they plant, they water, they build (3:6–9), tasks and activities that are no cause for boasting.

(2) God is the "Lord" (κύριος, kyrios) of missionary and of pastoral work (3:5). He is the superior at whose behest the missionaries, preachers, and teachers serve. Missionary ministry and church ministry are both tasks that God has given, work that God has assigned, commissions that God has granted.

(3) The servant relationship between the missionaries and teachers and the Lord establishes the unity of the ministry of all missionaries and

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of the unhistorical treatment of the Book of Acts in New Testament scholarship, see Botermann, *Judenedikt*, 17–49.

4. Cf. Pogoloff, *Logos and Sophia*; Litfin, *St. Paul's Theology of Proclamation*; Winter, *Philo and Paul*.

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teachers who serve the church: they are "one" (3:8), i.e., they have a common purpose. This reality renders all notions of superiority moot.

(4) Paul understands his task to be that of a missionary called by God to "plant" (3:6) and to "lay the foundation" as a "skilled master builder" (σοφὸς ἀρχιτέκτων, sophos architektōn, 3:10), i.e., to establish new congregations.[5] In other words, Paul is a pioneer missionary who travels from city to city proclaiming the message of Jesus Messiah, Savior, and Lord, before audiences who had never heard that message before. He helps them to find faith in the revelation of Israel's God in Jesus Christ who died on the cross and who rose from the dead on the third day. And he gathers the new believers in a new community of people who meet regularly, representing God's presence in the world as his "temple" (3:16). The fact that Paul was active in Corinth for over one and a half years (Acts 18:2, 11, 12) demonstrates that Paul did not regard pioneer missionary work as an evangelistic *blitz* whose results needed to be consolidated by other preachers and teachers. For Paul, "laying the foundation" included the instruction of the new believers in the fundamental content of faith in Jesus Christ and in the basic teachings of Scripture (i.e., the Old Testament).

(5) The foundation that Paul lays is Jesus Christ himself (3:11), specifically the message of Jesus the crucified Messiah (1:23; 2:2). The content of the missionary proclamation is focused on the crucified and risen Jesus Christ.

(6) Missionary success comes from God. This is true both for pioneer missionaries and for preachers and teachers in local congregations: it is God who gives growth (3:6, 7). The decisive factor of missionary work is not the missionary, but God himself: it is only the power of God who convinces people of the truth of the gospel, which otherwise appears to Jewish audiences as a stumbling block and to pagan audiences as nonsense (1:18—2:5). The effectiveness of Paul's missionary work does not depend on grand strategies and specific tactics. It does not depend on rhetorical techniques or methods of accommodation. It is dependent on God's activity alone. Missionaries and preachers are "nothing" (3:7a), "a nothing from which only a creative act of God can make something.

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5. Cf. Shanor, "Paul as Master Builder."

Genuine preachers of the gospel can understand themselves and their work only on the basis of a *creatio ex nihilo*."[6]

(7) The churches that are established as the result of missionary work do not belong to Paul or to other teachers: the church is "God's field, God's building" (3:9b). Since both the establishment and the growth of the church are the effective result of God's power, the church is neither the work nor the possession of the apostle: the church belongs to God.

(8) Paul states that "each will receive wages according to the labor of each" (3:8b). This sentence clarifies two matters: the missionaries and the teachers of the church are accountable to God, and it is God alone who decides what constitutes success or failure of missionary and pastoral work. As regards the "wages" that missionaries and teachers receive, Paul does not specify what he means in 1 Cor 3. Later he speaks of "the prize" (τὸ βραβεῖον, *to brabeion*, 9:24), of an "imperishable wreath" (ἄφθαρτον στέφανον, *aphtharton stephanon*, 9:25), and of "the crown" (στέφανος, *stephanos*) of righteousness (2 Tim 4:8). Paul asserts in 1 Cor 3:12–15 that there is missionary work and that there is preaching and teaching that will be rejected by God in the Last Judgment because the message of the crucified and risen Jesus Messiah was misconstrued and misrepresented. Missionary and pastoral work will "remain" on Judgment Day if and when Jesus, the crucified and risen Messiah and Savior, was at the center of the proclamation and of the behavior of the missionaries, preachers, and teachers.

1 Corinthians 9:19–23

In the context of a discussion about the "right" that some Corinthian Christians claim to have as regards dining in pagan temples, Paul formulates the rule of his life as a missionary.[7]

(1) The basic rule of missionary existence requires the missionary to take the listener seriously in a fully consistent manner: "For though I am free with respect to all, I have made myself a slave to all, so that I might win more of them" (9:19). The behavior of the missionary is subordinated to the preaching of the gospel. Paul is prepared to relinquish his freedom,

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6. Schrage, *Der erste Brief an die Korinther*, 1:292.

7. Cf. Schnabel, *Early Christian Mission*, 2:953–60.

which he has in Christ, if he can win people for faith in Jesus Christ. Paul makes himself dependent upon his non-Christian audiences; he becomes their "slave", i.e., the listeners decide how the missionary lives and how the gospel is proclaimed, since it is the listeners who need to understand the gospel.

(2) Paul does not exclude anyone from his preaching, he is sent to "all." Despite the differentiation of Jewish and pagan audiences and despite his specialized commission as a missionary to Gentiles, Paul always preaches to the "people under the Torah" (9:20).

(3) Paul asserts that missionary accommodation formulates no limitations in advance: he becomes "all things" to all people (9:22). Even though Paul is no longer controlled by the stipulations of the Torah, he does not impede the potential conversion of his Jewish listeners by provocative "lawlessness": ministering to Jewish people, he can live like a Jewish person (9:20) because he wants to win Jews for faith in Jesus Christ. At the same time, when he preaches among pagans, he becomes "as one outside the law" (9:21); he eats what they eat, even if it includes meat that pious Jews would not eat.

(4) Paul states that the goal of his missionary work is to "win" people (9:19, 20a, 20b, 21, 22). To "win" (κερδαίνω, *kerdainō*) a person means to "rescue" him or her (9:22); the person who has a "gain" is not the missionary but the convert. Paul asserts that he seeks to win "more" people (τοὺς πλείονας, *tous pleionas*, 9:19). The unusual Greek phrase does not mean "the majority" or "most," as Paul knows that only some people from any given city come to faith (9:22). In the context of 1 Cor 8–10 Paul asserts, perhaps, that he would win fewer people if he behaved differently, for example if he always displayed the full scope of his freedom.

(5) The normative center of missionary accommodation is the gospel, not the pragmatic motif of effectiveness: "I do it all for the sake of the gospel, so that I may share in its blessings" (9:23). The phrase "for the sake of the gospel" clarifies that Paul promotes cultural relevance rather than cultural relativism. The central content of Paul's missionary proclamation is "the gospel." It is the gospel of Jesus Christ that controls both Paul's preaching and Paul's behavior.

2 Corinthians 4:7–15

When Paul describes the realities of his missionary work in 2 Cor 4, he emphasizes several factors that inform his missionary strategy.

(1) The gospel is a "treasure" contained in "clay jars (ὀστρακίνοις σκεύ–εσιν, *ostrakinois skeuesin*), i.e., the missionaries who proclaim the gospel are, like pottery made of clay, weak and fragile and quite insignificant in themselves.[8] Christians should not take offense if some people regard the missionary or the rhetoric of his preaching as not very impressive: clay jars that contain a valuable treasure are undeserving of specific attention.

(2) The unimpressive nature of Paul's missionary proclamation underlines the fact that the extraordinary power that can be observed in the work of the missionaries comes from God (4:7b). The redemptive effectiveness of missionary preaching derives neither from the dynamic personality of the missionary nor from the strategies that he employs, but from the truth of the gospel and the power of the Spirit.

(3) As Paul lists some of the difficulties and the suffering that he encounters in his missionary work, he describes his life as a paradox: he experiences in his body the death of Jesus Christ (4:10). This means at the same time that the power of God that supports him in the midst of the trials is evidence for the present reality of the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

(4) This is the reason why Paul never abandons the hope that the gospel may be accepted by "more and more people" (4:15).

Romans 10:14–21

In the context of his discussion of the reality of the righteousness of God in salvation history, Paul describes the missionary work of the apostles and thus his own ministry.

(1) Authentic missionary work involves the proclamation of the gospel by messengers who have been sent by the Lord (10:14–15). This is the central reality of missions, as Paul's argumentation demonstrates, an argumentation that consists of four parallel questions that form a logical chain and of a quotation from Isa 52:7. Missionaries do not preach on

8. Thrall, *2 Corinthians*, 1:322–24.

their own authority, and they do not preach a message that they have themselves created. They are ambassadors sent by God and empowered by the Spirit, messengers who proclaim the saving word of God. The primacy of the proclamation of the word is repeated in 10:17: faith comes from the message that is heard and in which the word of the crucified and risen Jesus Christ is manifested.

(2) The missionary work of the apostles and of Paul represents the fulfillment of messianic promises. The quotation of Isa 52:7 emphasizes that the proclamation of the messengers of the gospel brings the salvation that God had promised. By omitting the phrase "on the mountains," which focused the message of the messengers of joy on Mount Zion, Paul highlights his conviction that the mission of the messengers of the gospel is a universal mission. At the same time the "lone herald of the LXX" is transformed into "multiple preachers of the good news."[9] In 10:18, Paul uses the language of Ps 19:5 to describe the universal scope of the proclamation of the gospel: the voice of the gospel can be heard in "all the earth," the word of the gospel goes out "to the ends of the world."

(3) Paul knows at the same time that "only very few" (οὐ πάντες, *ou pantes*; litotes) become obedient to the gospel: the proclamation of the gospel of Jesus Christ has been largely rejected in Israel (10:16). The reason for this rejection is not a lack of messengers, but a lack of faith on the part of those who hear the preaching of the gospel. Paul quotes Isa 53:1 to explain that a word sent by God or a message authorized by God is not always accepted nor accepted by everybody, not even by all the Jewish people.

Romans 15:15–21

In this passage Paul describes his work as an apostle to the Gentiles in the context of his plans for visiting Rome. He speaks of the grace that God has extended to him so that he may be a servant of Jesus Christ for the nations.

(1) Paul describes himself as pioneer missionary: "I make it my ambition to proclaim the good news, not where Christ has already been named,

9. Wagner, *Heralds of the Good News*, 173.

so that I do not build on someone else's foundation" (15:20–21). As an *architektōn* moved from city to city working on major building projects, Paul travels to regions in which the gospel had not been preached and to cities in which no church had yet been established.[10]

(2) The oral proclamation of the gospel is the primary activity of missionary work. The goal of missionary work is to reach people who have not heard the good news of Jesus Christ "by word and deed" (λόγῳ καὶ ἔργῳ, *logō kai ergō*, 15:18). Missionaries proclaim the good news of Jesus Christ (εὐαγγελίζεσθαι, *euangelizesthai*, 15:20). The "word" (λόγος, *logos*) is the message that the missionaries convey: the proclamation of the good news of Jesus Messiah, the crucified and risen Savior.

(3) The reality of Paul's life is an integral part of his missionary work. When Paul states in 15:17 that he boasts of his "work for God," the term "work" (ἔργον, *ergon*) refers to the entire scope of his ministry and experience as well as to his behavior in everyday life as a missionary.

METHODS OF PAUL'S MISSIONARY WORK: TARGET AUDIENCES

Geographic strategies

Some scholars suggest that the geographic scope of Paul's apostolic ministry can be explained with the help of Old Testament prophecies or in the context of Old Testament and Jewish geography. Rainer Riesner argues that Paul interpreted his calling in terms of the mission of the Servant of the Lord that the prophet Isaiah expected for the last days: the mission of the Servant of the Lord reaches the "end of the earth" (Isa 49:6); the "survivors of the nations" that the prophets mention in Isa 66:19 are messengers who are sent to the nations; they first go to Tarshish (Tarsus) and they reach in a semicircular movement in a northwesterly direction Put (Cilicia), Lud (Lydia), Meshech (Mysia), Tubal (Bithynia), Javan (Greece, Macedonia), and the distant coastlands (the regions in the far west, Spain).[11] Riesner suggests that the geographical framework of Isa 66:19 explains why Paul planned a mission to Spain, but not a mission to Gaul.

10. Cf. Derrett, "Paul as Master-Builder."

11. Riesner, *Paul's Early Period*, 245–53.

This explanation is attractive as it acknowledges the significance of Israel's Scriptures for Paul's theology. However, it cannot ultimately explain the geographical movements of Paul. First, the two geographical endpoints that Paul mentions in Rom 15:19 (Jerusalem and Illyricum) cannot be connected with Isa 66:19. Second, the envoys of Isa 66:19 are Gentiles who have survived God's judgment, a notion that can hardly be applied to Paul who is a Diaspora Jew. Third, the geographical identifications in Isa 66:19 do not fit Paul's movements: Tarshish is usually identified with Tarsus, and Put with Libya or with Cyrene in North Africa. It seems unlikely that Paul abandoned this tradition and adopted the identification found in the Book of Judith which links "Put and Lud" with Cilicia (Jdt 2:23). Riesner's identification of Meshech with Mysia and of Tubal with Bithynia, two areas in which Paul planned missionary work that he was eventually not able to carry out, is selective: in contemporary Jewish traditions, Tubal is identified not only with Bithynia but sometimes with Iberia/Spain (Josephus) and with Europe from Bulgaria to France (*Jubilees*); and Meshech is identified not only with Mysia but also with Cappadocia (Josephus), with Spain and France (*Jubilees*), and with Illyricum (Hippolytus).[12] Also, the first fifteen years or so of Paul's missionary work in Nabatea, in Syria, and in Cilicia between AD 32/33 and 45 remain without explanation if Isa 66:19 provides the blueprint for Paul's mission.

James Scott suggests that the apostles divided the world in terms of the regions in which the descendants of Noah lived, as they are listed in the Table of Nations in Gen 10, and that Paul saw himself as a missionary to the territory of Japhet. Scott argues that this is the reason why Paul preached the gospel "from Jerusalem to Illyricum" (Rom 15:19) and why he wanted to go to Spain (Rom 15:22–24, 28–29): he engaged in missionary work in Asia Minor and in Europe, the territory in which Japhet and his descendants settled.[13]

The diverse geographical identifications in Jewish (and in early patristic) traditions, and the details of Paul's actual missionary work, render it doubtful whether his missionary strategy was informed by the tradition of the Table of Nations. First, this explanation ignores the first fifteen years of Paul's missionary work in Nabatea, in Syria, and in Cilicia. Paul's "independent" mission did *not* begin after the Apostles'

12. Scott, *Paul and the Nations*, 48–49 (Table 3).

13. Ibid., 135–80.

Council in AD 48, but in AD 32/33, immediately after his conversion when he went to Arabia/Nabatea and to Syria and Cilicia (cf. Gal 1:17; 2 Cor 11:32). Arabia belongs not to the territory of Japhet, but to the descendants of Mizraim, i.e., to the territory of Ham. Second, Paul's plan to preach the gospel in the "province of Asia" (Acts 16:6), i.e., in the geographical region of Lydia, is a problem for Scott since Lud was a son of Shem (Gen 10:22). Since Paul was prevented from preaching the gospel in the Province of Asia (Acts 16:6), the hypothesis survives in terms of Paul's actual movement at this point, but not in terms of Paul's intention. When Paul at a later stage reaches the Province of Asia (Acts 19), planting a church in the city of Ephesus, Scott defends his "Japhet" hypothesis by connecting the city of Ephesus, which was established by Ionian colonists, with Javan, one of the sons of Japhet. He maintains that Paul's missionary work in the Province of Asia, i.e., in the territory that the Greeks called Lydia, was a more indirect ministry. This explanation is not convincing. Paul's statement in Col 1:7 ("Epaphras . . . is a faithful minister of Christ on our[14] behalf") suggests that he regarded Epaphras's missionary work in the Lykos Valley (in the eastern part of the Province of Asia) as his responsibility. Third, the only identifications of Japhet's descendants that are not controversial in Jewish and in the patristic traditions are the identification of Javan with Ionia (or the Greeks) and the identification of Madai with the Medes. Paul did go to "Javan" (Athens, Corinth), but he did not go to Media. The suggestion that Paul understood his missionary work as "Japhet mission" is not convincing.

It appears that Henri Clavier is correct when he suggests that if Paul followed a plan that controlled his missionary travels, such a plan was born, developed, specified, and adapted in the course of the events as they unfolded.[15]

The strategy of Paul was simple: he wanted to proclaim the message of God's saving revelation in Jesus Christ to Jewish audiences and to Gentile audiences, particularly in areas in which it had never been proclaimed (Gal 2:7; Rom 15:14–21). The planning for the implementation of this goal was also relatively simple: he traveled on the major Roman

14. For the text-critical problem, see the commentaries. Commentators such as Lightfoot, Abbott, Lohse, Gnilka, Schweizer, O'Brien, Pokorný, Wolter, Barth/Blanke, Dunn, and Hübner agree that the reading ἡμῶν "on our behalf" is to be preferred. The Greek editions of the New Testament continue to prefer the reading ὑμῶν "on your behalf."

15. Cf. Clavier, "Méthode et inspiration," 177.

roads as well as on smaller local roads from city to city, preaching the message of Jesus the Messiah and Savior in synagogues, in market places, and in lecture halls, and gathering the new converts in local communities of followers of Jesus. This is what he did in Arabia, in Syria (Antioch), in Cilicia (Tarsus), on Cyprus (Paphos), in the Provinces of Galatia (Pisidian Antioch, Iconium, Lystra, Derbe), Asia (Ephesus), Macedonia (Philippi, Thessalonica, Berea) and Achaia (Athens, Corinth), and, if he was released from the (first) Roman imprisonment,[16] presumably in Spain (cf. Rom 15:23–28) and on Crete (Titus 1:5). When it proved impossible to reach a certain region in which he had planned missionary outreach, as was the case with the project of a mission to the Provinces of Asia, Bithynia, and Mysia (Acts 16:7–8), Paul's strategy did not break down: there were other cities in other regions whose citizens needed to hear the gospel. It appears that Paul plannned his missionary travels, targeting cities of neighboring provinces: he moved from Antioch in Syria to Salamis and Paphos on Cyprus, a region immediately east of Syria; then he moved from Cyprus to southern Galatia, a region north of Cyprus; then he targeted the Province of Asia, presumably Ephesus, which was the next "logical" step after having reached the cities of southern Galatia. At the same time he was prepared to leave the "tactical selection" of locations for missionary work to God's sovereignty if his initial plans did not work out: when he was not able to reach the Province of Asia, he targeted the Province of Pontus and Bithynia, and when this plan could not be realized, he moved to Europe. The transition to Europe was not part of his missionary plans at the time (cf. Acts 16:9), and yet he spent three years in Macedonia and Achaia.

Since we have no reliable information about the location of the missionary activity of the other apostles, we need to humbly accept the fact that we do not know whether Paul sought to implement a grand strategy of "missionary geography" with regard to his own convictions or with regard to the coordination of his missionary work with that of the other apostles.

Urban Strategies

Roland Allen suggests that Paul's missionary strategy focused on cities—the centers of Roman administration, of Greek culture, and of Jewish

16. *1 Clement* 5:5–7; *Muratori Canon* 35–39; *Acts of Peter* 1; cf. Ellis, *Making of the New Testament Documents*, 278–82.

presence—with the hope that the churches in the cities would eventually evangelize the rural areas.[17] Paul indeed preached in the centers of several Roman provinces: in Antioch in Syria, presumably in Tarsus in Cilicia, in Paphos on Cyprus, in Perga in Pamphylia, in Thessalonica in Macedonia, in Corinth in Achaia, and in Ephesus in the Province of Asia.

Since Paul always sought to preach to Jewish audiences, this list of cities is not surprising: in the Diaspora, Jews tended to live in the major cities, not in rural areas. There are other considerations that suggest that the case for describing Paul's mission in terms of a "metropolis mission" is not as strong as some think. First, we have hardly any information about the first fifteen years of Paul's missionary work in Arabia, Syria, and Cilicia to prove or disprove such a strategy for the years between AD 32 and 45. Second, as regards the thirteen years of Paul's missionary work between AD 45 and 57, we should note that Paul apparently bypassed important cities that were situated on the roads that he travelled: Side in Pamphylia, Termessos and Sagalassos in Pisidia, Cybistra in Lycaonia. Third, Luke's brief comment in Acts 13:48–49 suggests that Paul's missionary work was not limited to cities but also reached rural areas: "When the Gentiles heard this, they were glad and praised the word of the Lord; and as many as had been destined for eternal life became believers. Thus the word of the Lord spread throughout the region." The term χώρα (chōra) refers here to the people living in the towns and villages that Pisidian Antioch controlled. When Harvie Conn asserts that "the book of Acts deals almost entirely with cities; missionary work is almost limited to them,"[18] we need to remember that Luke's narrative is highly selective, which makes comments such as Acts 13:49 all the more intriguing. Luke has much more information than he records; asides such as Acts 13:49 indicate that Paul's mission reached smaller towns and villages as well.

Social Strategies

Paul had contacts with members of the ruling elite, some of whom were converted to faith in Jesus Christ, while others were friendly towards him. Examples include Sergius Paulus the proconsul of Cyprus (Acts 13:6–12); the "prominent women" in Thessalonica and in Berea (Acts

17. Allen, *Missionary Methods*, 13.

18. Conn, "Lucan Perspectives."

17:4, 12); and the Asiarchs in Ephesus (Acts 18:31).[19] Luke's reference to the high social position of these people does not serve some political agenda: he reports the hostile actions of "the God-fearing women of high standing and the leading men" in Pisidian Antioch (Acts 13:50), and he mentions governors who keep Paul in custody despite the fact that they know Paul to be innocent (Acts 24:27; 25:9). The high social position of the people with whom Paul has positive encounters is a function of Luke's description of the progress of the early Christian mission. Several factors are relevant. First, persons of a high social status have houses in which the new communities of believers can meet. Second, aristocrats with whom Paul maintains friendly contacts are able to protect Paul and the local Christians in politically critical situations. Third, and perhaps most importantly, the gospel evidently reached not only the lower classes and the poor, but also the upper classes and the rich.

Did Paul intentionally aim at reaching members of the elite with the gospel? The fact that Paul traveled from Paphos on Cyprus to Pisidian Antioch, a small Roman colony in the Anatolian highlands, suggests that he did. When Paul engaged in missionary work in Paphos, he encountered Sergius Paulus, the proconsul (governor) of the senatorial Province of Cyprus, who, according to Luke's report in Acts 13:12, was converted to faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. This Sergius Paulus is possibly identical with Lucius Sergius Paullus who is mentioned in an inscription from Rome where he is described as one of five curators of the Tiber River (*curatores riparum et alvei Tiberis*) who were responsible for regulating the flow of the Tiber during the principate of Claudius between AD 41 and 47.[20] The conversion of Sergius Paulus in Paphos could help explain why Paul and Barnabas traveled from Paphos straight to Pisidian Antioch, bypassing the cities of Perga and Attalia: inscriptions[21] indicate that the family of the Sergii owned estates in southern Galatia and had contact with Pisidian Antioch in the Julio-Claudian period (assuming that the identification with the Sergii Paulli of the Tiber inscription and of the Antioch inscription is correct).[22] It is entirely plausible to assume

19. Gill, "Acts and the Urban Elites," 108–9.

20. Cf. Mitchell, *Anatolia*, 6–7; Nobbs, "Cyprus," 284–85.

21. *MAMA* VII 486; *MAMA* VII 319; *MAMA* II 321.

22. Mitchell, "Population and the Land in Roman Galatia," 1073–74 n. 134; Riesner, *Paul's Early Period*, 276; Halfmann, *Senatoren*, 30, 55–56, 101–2, 105; cf. Fox, *Pagans and Christians*, 293–94.

that Paul received letters of introduction from Sergius Paulus to the governor's relatives in southern Galatia. This does not necessarily contradict W. M. Ramsay, who suggested in connection with Gal 4:13 ("you know that it was because of a physical infirmity that I first announced the gospel to you") that Paul had contracted malaria in Pamphylia and that this was the reason why he traveled to southern Galatia with its higher elevations.[23]

As Luke narrates Paul's mission to Antioch, he mentions the "leading men of the city" (τοὺς πρώτους τῆς πόλεως, *tous prōtous tēs poleōs*, Acts 13:50), i.e., the members of the local elite in the municipal aristocracy, people who controlled public life in Antioch on account of their social standing and their wealth that came from their estates. If Paul came to Pisidian Antioch as a result of his encounter with Sergius Paulus, hoping that he could find similar access to the aristocracy of this Roman colony in the border region of Phrygia and Pisidia, the Jews of Antioch thwarted the potential of this plan according to Acts 13:50.[24]

Ethnic Strategies

In his brief comment on his self-understanding as a missionary in the introduction to his letter to the Christians in Rome, Paul asserts: "I am a debtor both to Greeks and to barbarians, both to the wise and to the foolish" (Rom 1:14). Paul states that God has commissioned him to proclaim the gospel to all people without any distinction. Paul seeks to reach the "Greeks" (Ἕλληνες, *Hellēnes*), i.e., the elites of the Greco-Roman world. But he also seeks to reach the "foreigners" (βάρβαροι, *barbaroi*), i.e., the people who have no Greek culture and whom the elites exclude from the decision-making processes. He preaches to the "wise" (σοφοί, *sophoi*), i.e., to the people who are educated. But he also preaches to the "foolish" (ἀνόητοι, *anoētoi*), i.e., to the uneducated. This programmatic list suggests that Paul deliberately disregards the traditional social and cultural categories and classifications, which were defined and drawn up by the elites. Paul sees himself obligated, in the words of U. Wilckens, "to exclude neither the Greek because he belongs as educated person to the ruling elite, nor the barbarian because he has no culture and is of no

23. Ramsay, *St. Paul the Traveller*, 92.

24. Cf. Breytenbach, *Paulus und Barnabas*, 48.

significance (cf. 1 Cor 1:26ff.). The gospel concerns everybody without regard to who he or she is, as it makes everybody *coram deo* equal."[25]

Paul generally began his missionary preaching in a city in which he had newly arrived in the local synagogue. Paul always understood himself as a Jew, even and especially as a missionary among the Gentiles. He accepted the Jewish jurisdiction of the synagogues for himself, as is demonstrated by the fact that he was punished five times with the "forty minus one" lashes (2 Cor 11:24). As Paul had been trained as a rabbi, he would quickly be invited to preach in synagogue services. As a missionary who sought to reach pagans with the gospel, he would find Gentiles in the synagogues: proselytes, i.e., Gentiles who had converted to Judaism, God-fearers, i.e., Gentiles who acknowledged Israel's God and who attended synagogue services, and other sympathizers. Seen from a tactical point of view, Gentiles who believed in Israel's God were the best candidates for successful evangelism. This alone suggested that a Jewish Christian missionary to the Gentiles should begin missionary work in the local synagogue where he would encounter not only Jews but also Gentiles.

Many Gentiles who converted to faith in Jesus Christ, perhaps the majority of the non-Jewish believers, were God-fearers and sympathizers with the Jewish faith. This can be inferred from the fact that Paul could presuppose as a matter of course that the believers in the churches that he had established, at least the leading teachers, were familiar with Israel's holy Scriptures and with Jewish traditions and customs. Stephen Mitchell surmises correctly that "the transformation of the pagan world to Christian monotheism" is hardly conceivable without the pagan God-fearers in the synagogues who had a monotheistic notion of God.[26]

Simultaneous to preaching in the local synagogue, Paul established contact with the citizens in the agora, i.e., in the commercial and political center of the city. The evidence for Paul preaching in the marketplaces of cities is not very extensive, but unambiguous: Luke reports in Acts 17:17 that Paul went "every day" to the marketplace and spoke "with those who happened to be there."[27] The Greek construction (present

25. Wilckens, *Der Brief an die Römer*, 1:81.

26. Mitchell, "Wer waren die Gottesfürchtigen," 64.

27. Reinbold, *Propaganda und Mission*, 200, asserts that Acts 17:17 is a stylized picture of Paul used by the author who allegedly wanted to allude to Socrates, the Athenian philosopher. Reinbold believes that Paul's ministry took place in small settings, "in

participle παρατυγχάνοντας, *paratyngchanontas*) implies that going to the agora and speaking with passers-by was a routine that the apostle followed regularly.

There is no evidence that Paul visited pagan temples with the purpose of proclaiming the gospel before worshipers present in the temple precinct. As Paul was familiar with the political, social, and religious power structures of Greek and Roman cities, such a strategy is not likely. The Christian missionaries and the small Christian communities who were repeatedly threatened by local opponents had to abstain from provocative actions if they wanted to be tolerated in the Greek and Roman cities. Paul's assertion in Rom 2:22 that there are Jews who rob temples has been interpreted in terms of Jews illegally removing objects from temples of pagan shrines,[28] or in terms of trading in objects that have been stolen from pagan temples.[29] As the context in Romans 2 is critical of such behavior, it is plausible to conclude that Paul would have disagreed with the early medieval missionaries who profaned images of pagan deities, altars, and sacred groves, destroying temples and shrines.[30] Paul would never have used force in order to advance the gospel among pagans. Nor did Paul emulate pagan customs in organizing processions and carrying objects with him that could have enhanced the acceptance of himself or of his message. And we hear nothing of prayers or hymns recited and sung in public that may have impressed pagans.[31]

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families, houses, small groups, (small) *ekklesiai* etc." (104); he concludes: "The mission of the historical Paul was characterized by micro-communication, not by public or semi-public speeches, sermons or similar appearances" (205). This interpretation cannot explain the public accusations, the legal proceedings, and the personal attacks that Paul endured in cities both in Asia Minor and in Greece.

28. Cf. Dunn, *Romans*, 1:114–15.

29. Käsemann, *Romans*, 71. Many interpret Rom 2:22 as a metaphorical reference to Jews robbing God of things that belong to him; cf. Cranfield, *Romans*, 1:169–70.

30. Cf. von Padberg, *Mission und Christianisierung.*, 146–51; cf. ibid. for the following note.

31. The early medieval missionaries carried with them mobile altars, containers for consecrated oil, crosses, pictorial representations of Christ on boards, relics, and priestly garments. They often entered pagan territories with supplicatory processions during which hymns of confession, hymns of praise, and petitions were sung.

Local strategies

The early Christian mission was closely connected with private houses. In the ancient world, the term "house" (οἶκος, *oikos*; Lat. *familia*) described the "house as living space and familial domestic household." J. Becker is correct when he points out that the private house became the "base of missionary work, the foundational center of a local church, the location of the assembly for worship, the lodging for the missionaries and envoys and at the same time the primary and decisive place of Christian life and formation."[32] There are several reasons why the early missionaries chose private homes as meeting places of the new Christian communities. First, attempts to meet in the local synagogue repeatedly failed as the local Jewish leadership opposed Paul. Second, the houses of converted Jews and Gentiles were immediately available as meeting places. They did not have to be remodeled or refurbished since the meetings of Christian believers did not require any special architectural features. Third, Jews were accustomed to meet in private houses, both in Palestine and in the Diaspora. Jews, proselytes, and God-fearers who converted to faith in Jesus Christ would thus not have been surprised about the choice of private homes as meeting places for religious activities. Fourth, a private home provided excellent conditions for important elements of the meetings of Christian believers such as familial fellowship and common meals during which the Lord's Supper was celebrated. Fifth, private houses allowed the Christians to meet in a relatively inconspicuous manner, which became a pressing necessity as soon as the local synagogues no longer tolerated the believers in Jesus Messiah.

REALITIES OF PAUL'S MISSIONARY WORK: THE COMMUNICATION OF THE GOSPEL

Establishing Contact

Paul spoke very deliberately of the "entrance" (εἴσοδος, *eisodos*) to the people who heard his proclamation of the gospel (1 Thess 1:9). Paul obviously reflected upon the factors and the conditions that come into play during the process of establishing first contacts with Jewish and Gentile listeners.[33] Paul first visited the local synagogue, presenting himself as

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32. Becker, "Paulus und seine Gemeinden," 125. On this subject see now Gehring, *House Church and Mission*.

33. Cf. 1 Thess 1:9; 1 Cor 2:1–2; 16:8–9; 2 Cor 2:12; Gal 4:14; Col 4:3.

an experienced interpreter of Scripture. He used the customary readings from the Torah and the Prophets in his synagogue sermons as opportunities to proclaim Jesus of Nazareth as Messiah. With only one exception (Acts 20:7), all Sabbath passages of Acts are related to Paul preaching in synagogues.[34] At the same time, as the brief remark in Acts 17:17 indicates, Paul sought to get in contact with the general population of a city in the agora, i.e., the central, public place where he could reach a numerous and diverse audience, including the decision makers of the city.

It appears that Paul's behavior as an "orator" surprised educated Gentiles both at the point of initial contact and afterwards. In 1 Cor 2:1, Paul reminds the Christians in Corinth of the events that took place when he first visited the city: "When I came to you, brothers and sisters, I did not come proclaiming the mystery of God to you in lofty words or wisdom." Paul's forceful remarks in the context of this passage (1 Cor 1:18—2:5) can most appropriately be understood against the background of Greco-Roman orators. Bruce Winter suggests that an analysis of the orators of the Second Sophistic helps us to understand this passage.[35] The first visit of a sophist in a city gave him the opportunity to provide the citizens with a taste of his oratory. When Aristides visited Smyrna for the first time (in AD 176), the citizens came out to greet him. The most gifted young people offered themselves as students, a date for a lecture by Aristides was set, and an invitation formulated. Before the day on which the lecture was to take place, Aristides had a "dream" in which he was told to declaim in the council chamber at ten o'clock that very day. He was able to arrange this impromptu appearance at very short notice. Even though hardly anybody had heard of this turn of events, the council chamber was so packed "that it was impossible to see anything except men's heads, and there was not even room to shove your hand between the people." Aristides delivered the preliminary speech sitting down, the following declamation was presented standing up. The excited audience was spellbound throughout his delivery, so much so that "every man counted it his gain, if he should bestow some very great compliment on me." Aristides's "dream" was probably prompted by a rival sophist, "an Egyptian" who happened to present a declamation in the odeion on that particular day at two days' notice. Aristides was thus able to carry off a complete victory over the Egyptian, whose event at-

34. Cf. Acts 13:14–15; 16:13; 17:2; 18:4.

35. Winter, *Philo and Paul*, 147–65.

tracted only seventeen people.[36] This story confirms what other sources tell us: the sophist orators wanted to impress their audiences with their declamations, both the young men of the leading families of the city and invited guests and other people who would pay for the experience of listening to the oratory. The first "coming" of an orator to a city evidently followed certain conventions, as he sought to establish his reputation as an orator. If he was successful and found acceptance, he could profit socially and financially.

In the eyes of the pagan citizens of a city, Paul was an orator who was looking for an audience. Compared with the conventions of the contemporary orators, however, Paul's conduct was unconventional. Paul asserts that his behavior was deliberate: "When I came to you, brothers and sisters, I did not come proclaiming the mystery of God to you in lofty words or wisdom. For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and him crucified. And I came to you in weakness and in fear and in much trembling. My speech and my proclamation were not with plausible words of wisdom, but with a demonstration of the Spirit and of power, so that your faith might rest not on human wisdom but on the power of God" (1 Cor 2:1–5). The term πίστις (*pistis*) in 1 Cor 2:5 takes up a rhetorical term: Paul specifically addresses the expectations of his listeners in terms of his rhetorical abilities. Aristotle links πίστις ("confidence", "conviction") with the combined application of three proofs: τὸ ἔθος (*to ethos*), τὰ πάθη (*ta pathē*), and ἀπόδειξις (*apodeixis*; Aristotle, *Rhet.* 1.1.1356a). The orator persuades by *ethos* when he delivers his speech in a manner that demonstrates that he is worthy to be trusted. For Aristotle, this was the most effective means of proof. In order to be believed, the orator needs to convey a sympathetic picture of himself as a credible and likable person. The term *pathos* describes the feelings of the listeners that can be utilized strategically in order to guarantee the effectiveness of the oration. The term *apodeixis* describes the method by which an orator can prove what is not certain by referring to what is certain, i.e., to specific arguments. Paul uses in 1 Cor 2:4 not only the term *apodeixis*, but also δύναμις (*dynamis*, "power"), a term that is used by Isocrates and Aristotle in their definition of rhetoric: rhetoric is the "power" to detect the means of persuasion, rhetoric is the "power of speaking" (δύναμις τοῦ λέγειν, *dynamis tou legein*). In 1 Cor 2:4 Paul

36. Aristides, *Or.* 51.29–34.

uses the verb πείθω (*peithō*; Lat. *persuadere*, "persuade"), which is often used in definitions of rhetoric. Quintilian speaks of *vis persuadendi*.

When Paul writes in 1 Cor 2:1, "When I came to you, brothers and sisters, I did not come proclaiming the mystery of God to you in lofty words or wisdom," he emphasizes the fact that he intentionally dispenses with the traditional contemporary conventions of rhetoric when he preaches the gospel before Jewish and pagan audiences. He has no interest in being the center of attention or in being praised by others. He does not want to gain in prestige, he does not compete with other orators, nor does he have any financial interests. And, more importantly, he knows that the character of the gospel of Jesus Christ makes it impossible to rely on the strategies of traditional rhetoric as described by Aristotle, Cicero, or Quintilian, to mention only three of the more well-known rhetorical theorists. The message of a crucified Messiah is a "stumbling block" for Jewish listeners and "nonsense" for pagan listeners (1 Cor 1:23). The "proof" (ἀπόδειξις, *apodeixis*) for the validity of the gospel of Jesus Christ is not to be found through the application of logical inference or deduction. The "proof" for the truth of the gospel is to be found in the power of the Holy Spirit. When Paul proclaims the gospel (ὁ λόγος μου καὶ τὸ κήρυγμά μου, *ho logos mou kai to kērygma mou*, 1 Cor 2:4), he speaks "not with plausible words of wisdom" (οὐκ ἐν πειθοῖς σοφίας λόγοις, *ouk en peithois sophias logois*). Rather, he relies "on the demonstration of the Spirit and of power ἐν ἀποδείξει πνεύματος καὶ δυνάμεως (*en apodeixei pneumatos kai dynameōs*)" (1 Cor 2:4). This genitive construction is to be understood as a subjective genitive: the preaching of the gospel is not a demonstration concerning the Spirit or concerning the power of the preacher; rather, it is a demonstration effected by the Spirit and by "power," i.e., by God himself. The powerful Spirit of God "proves" the truth of the proclamation of God's redemptive revelation in Jesus Christ's death and resurrection.[37] This "proof" is the fact that Jews and pagans living in Corinth are being persuaded to accept the message of Jesus the crucified and risen Messiah. The supernatural proof for the validity of Paul's missionary proclamation is the conversion of Jews and pagans to faith in Jesus, the crucified Messiah and Lord.

In 1 Cor 2:5, Paul explains why he renounces traditional rhetorical methods: "so that your faith (ἡ πίστις ὑμῶν, *hē pistis hymōn*) might rest not on human wisdom but on the power of God." Paul knows that the message of the cross cannot be adapted to the theological, rhetorical, or aesthetic expectations of his audiences. It was impossible, in the first century, to speak in a rhetorically alluring manner about a man who had been executed on a cross.[38] The reality of crucifixion was too gruesome, and needed too much explanation, for rhetorical competence and brilliance to be of much help. When Paul taught new converts, he described Jesus as "new Adam"[39] and as the "savior of mankind,"[40] as the "Son of God"[41] and as the "firstborn of the dead."[42] These are terms and categories that could be packaged as attractive religious content when introducing the message about Jesus to Jewish and pagan audiences. Paul asserts, however, that he never dispensed with preaching Jesus the crucified Savior in his missionary proclamation (1 Cor 2:2). The preaching of a crucified Savior makes it impossible to employ the traditional rhetorical methods with their strategies of persuasion. Paul continues to preach a crucified and risen Savior because this is the message that has been given to him to pass on to those who have not heard the gospel, and because he knows that it is the almighty Lord himself, the Creator of the world, who causes Jews and pagans to come to faith.

Standard communication models help us to illustrate the situation in which Paul finds himself as a pioneer missionary.[43] The model of mass communication developed by B. H. Westley and M. S. MacLean distinguishes five elements.[44] The "source" or the communicator (A) focuses on a "universe" of possible objects or events in the environment ($X_{1-\infty}$) and formulates a message (X') which is transmitted via a gatekeeper or opinion leader (C) to a receiver or audience (B). The gatekeeper (e.g., a spokesperson or a journalist) sends the message in connection with his or her knowledge of reality (X_{3c}) to the audience (X''). The audience or receiver sends feedback (f_{BA}) to the source of the communication. At the same time there is feedback from the gatekeeper to the source (f_{CA}) and from the receiver to the gatekeeper (f_{BC}). In the communication model of C. E. Shannon and W. Weaver, a further element plays a role: noise (D).

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37. Cf. Voss, *Das Wort vom Kreuz*, 131; Kammler, *Kreuz und Weisheit*, 171.

38. Cf. Hengel, *Crucifixion*, on the shame connected with crucifixion.

39. Cf. Kreitzer, "Adam and Christ"; Hofius, "Adam-Christus-Antithese."

40. Cf. Gill, "Saviour for the Cities of Crete," 220–30.

41. Hurtado, "Son of God"; Hurtado, *Lord Jesus Christ*, 101–8.

42. Hofius, "Erstgeborener."

43. Cf. Reck, *Kommunikation*.

44. Cf. Burgoon et al., *Human Communication*.

The transmission of a message is generally accompanied by disturbances, unwanted stimuli that can influence the accuracy of the message, e.g., static interference during a phone conversation, called "noise" in human communication.

God, the Primary Communicator

When we apply this model of communication to Paul's mission and to Paul's description of his mission, it becomes quickly evident that Paul regards God and Jesus Christ as the "source" or the "communicator," and that he understands himself and the other apostles as messengers (or "gatekeepers") of the gospel, who have been called, sent and empowered by God and Jesus Christ.[45] The basic texts in which Paul clearly expresses this conviction are 1 Thess 2:13, 2 Cor 5:18–20, and Rom 10:14–17. Paul asserts in 1 Thess 2:13: "We also constantly give thanks to God for this, that when you received the word of God that you heard from us, you accepted it not as a human word but as what it really is, God's word, which is also at work in you believers." The message that Paul conveys in his missionary work is not his own message, but "the word of God," i.e., the saving word that God himself speaks. Similarly, in Rom 10:17 Paul asserts that the message that he preaches in his missionary work is "the word of Christ." In 2 Cor 5:20, Paul declares that he and the other apostles are "ambassadors for Christ, since God is making his appeal through us." When Paul challenges both Jews and Gentiles to believe in God's redemptive salvation in Jesus Christ, it is God the Almighty himself who appeals to sinners to be reconciled to him through faith in Jesus Christ.[46]

The Message

When Paul describes in 1 Cor 2:1–5 his missionary preaching in the city of Corinth, emphasizing that he dispenses intentionally with the art of rhetoric when he proclaims the gospel of Jesus the crucified Messiah and Savior, he implies that this message required neither an *enkomion* on the greatness of the city of Corinth nor a *dialexis* aiming at putting

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45. Reck, *Kommunikation*, 180–83.

46. Thrall, *2 Corinthians*, 1:437 asserts, quoting Barrett, *2 Corinthians*, 178: "This means, on the one hand, that the message is not Paul's own, but, on the other hand, that 'where Paul speaks, God speaks.'"

his listeners in a good mood. He did not depend on a critical audience suggesting a subject for a public declamation, expecting a demonstration of rhetorical expertise. The subject-matter of his public discourses had been determined long before he arrived in the city. Paul emphasizes that his public speaking as a missionary always focused on Jesus, the crucified Messiah and Savior: "I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and him crucified" (1 Cor 2:2). He did not allow himself to be distracted by any other subject when he initiated contact with the citizens of Corinth. Passages such as 1 Thess 1:9–10 and Rom 15:20–21 confirm Luke's account in the book of Acts: Paul's missionary discourses included an explanation of the necessity to turn from idols to the true and living God, of the death and resurrection of Jesus, of the identity of Jesus as Messiah and *Kyrios* and Savior, of the coming day of judgment, and of the expected return of Jesus.

The Messenger

The "gatekeeper" of missionary communication is the apostle. Paul was very much aware of the fact that personal credibility is an important factor when an orator visits a city for the first time, seeking to establish contact with the citizens. In the local synagogue, Paul had credibility on account of his training as a rabbi in Jerusalem under Gamaliel (Acts 22:3), and on account of his competence in interpreting Scripture.[47] In the public agora, Greek and Roman citizens would have been impressed by his Roman citizenship[48] if they were aware of it, by his international travel experience,[49] and by miracles (2 Cor 12:11–12; Acts 13:12; 19:12).[50] To assert his personal credibility, Paul refers to his behavior and ministry: his travels, his homelessness, and his economic independence (1 Thess 2:9; 1 Cor 4:11–12; 9:6–18; 2 Cor 6:5; 11:7–10, 23–29). He refers to his personal relationship with the people who have come to faith in Jesus Christ through his preaching (1 Thess 1:4—3:10). He rejects recommendations by others, including letters of recommendation (2 Cor 3:1–3).

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47. Cf. Hays, *Echoes of Scripture*; Stanley, *Paul and the Language of Scripture*.

48. Cf. Acts 16:37–38; 22:25–29; 23:27; cf. 25:10–11; 28:19; see the discussion in Riesner, *Paul's Early Period*, 147–56; Hengel and Schwemer, *Paul between Damascus and Antioch*, 16, 160.

49. Cf. Schnabel, *Early Christian Mission*, 2:1030–1292; see also Rapske, "Acts, Travel and Shipwreck."

50. Cf. Schreiber, *Paulus als Wundertäter*; Twelftree, "Signs, Wonders, Miracles."

Paul is concerned that at least the Christians know that his missionary work is no money-making business (1 Thess 2:2; 1 Cor 2:17; 5).

The Audience

The encounter with Jewish audiences in the local synagogues was initially unproblematic. Since there were no comparable models for traveling missionaries in Second Temple Judaism, the one notable factor concerning Paul, a rabbi trained in Jerusalem, was the fact that he was a teacher who visited synagogues in the Diaspora without having been sanctioned by the Sanhedrin. The Jews in the local synagogues were presumably surprised about Paul's initiative and commitment to the message that he proclaimed. The fact that Jewish teachers championed divergent doctrines was not a fundamentally novel experience for Paul's audiences, however. Jewish exegesis of the Second Temple Period was used to diverging opinions, the discourse of the rabbis proceeded in controversial discussions.

Paul's audiences in the synagogues must have regarded at least four aspects of his teaching as extraordinary: (1) his conviction that the long-awaited Messiah had arrived, fulfilling the prophets' promises of salvation; (2) his insistence that Jesus Messiah had been sentenced to death by crucifixion, that he died, and that he rose from the dead; (3) his assertion that faith in Jesus Messiah was now the only valid condition and criterion for receiving God's forgiveness and redemption at the Last Judgment; (4) his emphasis that the messianic era of salvation had dawned and that Gentiles come to faith in Israel's God and in Jesus and that they are incorporated into God's people without being circumcised and without keeping the Torah's purity and food laws. The first two points provided good topics for robust discussion. The third emphasis questioned the Jewish listeners' status as God's elect people, and it tied salvation to a human being. Here everything depended on the question whether Jesus was indeed the promised Messiah as the heavenly Son of Man and Son of God. The fourth emphasis jolted the traditional social structure of the Jewish people: the notion that God granted salvation to large numbers of pagans, apart from circumcision and observance of the dietary laws, was surprising in view of the expectation that the nations would come to Zion and worship the one true God in the context of Israel.

The patterns of reaction that Luke reports in the book of Acts cover the entire range from neutral listening to positive acceptance and

emphatic rejection.[51] These various reactions can be explained with the mentality of the Jewish listeners. When Jews become convinced by Paul's preaching that Jesus is the Messiah, they join him and the new community of believers in Jesus, and they are willing to endure opposition. When they reject Paul's message, they have hardly any other option than to take action against Paul and to try to silence him, following the rules of Scripture concerning the handling of false prophets, seducers of the people, and blasphemers.

As regards pagan audiences, Paul's discourse about pagan religion would not have caused much protest during the initial contact—pagans would have heard similar evaluations of their religious convictions from the local Jews and from some philosophers who questioned the existence of the Olympian gods. They would have been familiar with the claim of Jewish teachers that their gods were nothing compared to the reality of the God of Abraham. Gentile listeners would have regarded at least four emphases of Paul's teaching as extraordinary: (1) the exhortation to believe not only in the one true God of the Jews, but also to accept the offer of grace by one single mediator of salvation; (2) the message that this mediator of salvation was a crucified man from provincial Judea; (3) the claim that this Jesus came back from the dead; (4) the expectation that they would gather in a new community that was being established in the city in which neither ethnic origins nor social status played any role. The claim that there is only one single mediator of salvation was extraordinary: neither the gods, nor the emperors or the heroes whom people worshiped demanded exclusive loyalty, although the notion of exclusive salvation would have reminded them of the religious convictions and praxis of the Jews. The information that the mediator of salvation was a human being would not have been curious for Gentile listeners, as they worshiped heroes and gods with human traits. But the emphasis that salvation is tied to faith in a person who had been executed by crucifixion and who was said to have risen from the dead was sensational or, rather, nonsensical.

Luke reports the following patterns of reaction by Gentile audiences:[52] (1) god-fearing Gentiles who sympathized with the Jewish faith listen willingly and attentively (Acts 16:14); (2) pagans are prepared

51. Cf. Tyson, *Images of Judaism*, 132–45; Setzer, *Jewish Responses to Early Christians*; Schnabel, *Early Christian Mission*, 2:1349–51.

52. Schnabel, *Early Christian Mission*, 2:1352–53.

to listen to what Paul and his fellow missionaries have to say (Acts 13:7; 24:24); (3) pagan philosophers take the initiative to dialogue with Paul about his teaching (Acts 17:18–20, 32); (4) pagan officials of provincial administrations and of city magistrates acknowledge that Paul does not teach subversive beliefs (Acts 18:14–16; 19:35–40; 25:25, 31); (5) pagans are deeply affected by miracles that happen in the course of the missionaries' ministry (Acts 13:12; 19:17); (6) pagans are so impressed by the miracles that they want to honor the missionaries as gods in human form (Acts 14:11–13); (7) pagans are stunned on account of the content and the claims of the Christian message (Acts 24:25); (8) god-fearing pagans who sympathize with the Jewish faith come to faith in Jesus, including aristocratic women and men (Acts 13:43, 48, 49; 14:1, 21; 16:14; 17:4, 12; 18:4, 7); (9) pagans come to faith in Jesus, including a Roman governor and a member of the "Council for education and science" in Athens (Acts 13:12; 14:21; 16:33–34; 17:34; 18:8; 19:18); (10) pagans who have come to faith in Jesus rejoice in the preaching of the missionaries and are filled with joy (Acts 13:48, 52; 16:34); (11) God-fearers who attend the synagogue service reject the teaching of the missionaries and their offer of salvation (Acts 13:48); (12) pagan philosophers make fun of the message that the missionaries proclaim (Acts 17:32); (13) pagans ridicule and reject the proclamation of Jesus the crucified Savior (1 Cor 1:23); (14) pagans initiate legal proceedings against Paul, accusing him of disturbing the peace and of illegal introduction of alien Jewish customs (Acts 16:20–21); (15) on some occasions pagans are motivated by the financial loss that the activities of the missionaries have caused (Acts 16:16–19; 19:23–27); (16) pagans organize a protest meeting against the missionaries (Acts 19:29–34); (17) praetors have Paul and Silas flogged by the lictors and throw the missionaries into prison (Acts 16:22–23).

These patterns of reaction can also be explained with the mentality of the Gentiles, e.g., with the curiosity of Athens' philosophers or with the religious excitement of the citizens of Lystra after the astounding miracle that the missionaries caused. It is plausible that economic losses became the cause for actions of Gentiles against the missionaries. It is striking to note that the sources do not report plans of pagans to eliminate Paul. This fits the tolerant attitude concerning religious affairs both of the Roman authorities and of the local populations. People with particular spiritual needs could worship any deity or hero who appeared

useful and helpful. As long as the authorities knew that Paul did not endanger the public order, they could leave Paul alone.

The Obstacles

What communication models describe as "noise" are the obstacles that make missionary proclamation difficult. The offer of salvation as liberation from guilt and sin, the offer of hope for a perfect existence after death, the offer of fellowship with people from all walks of life and all classes of society, were attractive convictions that Paul could emphasize. Despite the attractiveness of these important elements of the early Christian preaching, the central emphasis of Paul's proclamation of a crucified Savior was difficult if not impossible to grasp for Jewish and Greek audiences (1 Cor 1:18–23; 2:14; 3:19).

For Jewish audiences, Paul's insistence that the crucified Jesus of Nazareth was the Messiah and that faith in this crucified Messiah was necessary for salvation was utterly startling, indeed bizarre and scandalous (σκάνδαλον, skandalon, 1 Cor 1:23). This emphasis, as well as the teaching that pagans who believe in Jesus Messiah are incorporated into God's people without circumcision, repeatedly provoked massive disagreement that disturbed the communication process to the point of complete collapse, forcing Paul to leave the synagogue. The message that God's messianic revelation and salvation no longer took place along the traditional fault-line between Jews and Gentiles, but within both Jews and Gentiles, was extraordinary indeed.[53] Paul's letters indicate that Paul was persecuted by his fellow Jews for the following reasons:[54] (1) he preached faith in Jesus the crucified and risen Messiah as necessary for salvation; (2) he argued for a radical re-evaluation of the privileges of the chosen people of God that fundamentally defined and described the identity of pious Jews; (3) he encouraged, indeed exhorted, Jewish believers to ignore important parts of the Torah, for example the purity laws and the food laws; (4) he did not teach the necessity of circumcision as prerequisite for membership in the people of God; (5) he allegedly abrogated all ethical norms and standards since the Torah no longer played a central role.

53. Stenschke, *Luke's Portrait of Gentiles*, 287.

54. Kruse, "Apostle," with reference to 1 Thess 2:15–16; Gal 1:13–24; 2:15–21; 4:29; 5:11; 2 Cor 11:24, 26, 30–33; Rom 3:7–8; Phil 3:4–8.

As regards contacts with pagan audiences, the insistence that Jesus, the exclusive mediator of salvation, was a Jew must have been provocative. More importantly, pagans regarded Paul's emphasis that Jesus was executed by crucifixion and that it was precisely this death that reveals and procures salvation as nonsense (μωρίαν, *mōrian*, 1 Cor 1:23). Also, the proclamation of Jesus' resurrection was regarded as extraordinarily strange: Gentiles might have been able to theoretically acquiesce to a hero coming back from the dead. But to suggest a glorious resurrection for a prophet and teacher who had been rejected by his own people and who had been executed by the governor of a Roman province who sentenced him to death by crucifixion was unbelievable.

Conversion

The goal of missionary proclamation is the conversion of Jews and pagans to faith in Jesus Messiah, Savior, and Lord, the transformation of traditional patterns of religious, ethical, and social behavior, and integration into the community of fellow believers. Paul interprets conversion and its consequences as "demonstration of the Spirit and power" (1 Cor 2:4; cf. 1 Thess 1:5). Turning to the true and living God and to Jesus the crucified Messiah presupposes acknowledging God's salvific revelation in sending Jesus into the world and to the cross. According to Rom 10:9, conversion happens through the confession by which individuals turn to and submit to God and his Messiah. The "confession" (*homologia*) consists in "the acknowledgment that the believer stands before God as transgressor who can win his salvation not by his own ability but only through God's grace and through the help of the *Kyrios* (cf. Gal 2:16; 1 Cor 1:26–30)."[55]

Paul asserts that when Jews turn to the Lord and believe in Jesus Christ, God removes "the veil" that has prevented them from understanding the Scriptures as pointing to Jesus the Messiah (2 Cor 3:16). Paul understands his mission as to help Gentiles to turn (ἐπιστρέφω, *epistrephō*) "from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God" (Acts 26:18). When pagan polytheists are converted, they "turn to God from idols, to serve a living and true God" (1 Thess 1:9), they turn away from "the weak and beggarly elemental spirits" (Gal 4:9). Luke refers in his account of Paul's missionary work to the "conversion" (ἐπιστροφή, *epistrophē*) of individuals and families (Acts 13:38; 17:30; 20:21; 26:18, 20).

55. Stuhlmacher, *Biblische Theologie des Neuen Testaments*, 1:344.

Paul's exhortation of the Corinthian believers in 1 Cor 6:9–11 helps us to understand Paul's understanding of the conversion of Gentiles: "Do you not know that wrongdoers will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived! Fornicators, idolaters, adulterers, male prostitutes, sodomites, thieves, the greedy, drunkards, revilers, robbers—none of these will inherit the kingdom of God. And this is what some of you used to be. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God." The "vices" that Paul mentions represent, in part, accepted behavior of pagans: visiting prostitutes, worshipping various Greek, Roman, and Egyptian gods, indulging in homosexual activity, being greedy, and getting drunk during banquets represents behavior that did not raise eyebrows. Paul's missionary preaching did not present a solution to a moral crisis that his pagan listeners would have perceived as such. Rather, Paul's preaching revealed that their moral contentment was the result of their failure to recognize the consequences of their behavior on the Day of Judgment. In the words of Stephen Chester, Paul seeks to move his pagan listeners "from false contentment to crisis to security in Christ."[56] The transformation that conversion to faith in the true and living God and to faith in Jesus Christ brings is both "an inward affair of the conscience" and "a radical change of moral and social identity." This transformation results from the repentance of unrecognized sin. It involves a break with many of the traditional values of contemporary pagan society. And it entails obedience to Scripture, to the word of Jesus Christ and to the teaching of the apostles. Another important result of conversion is joy (1 Thess 1:5–6), a gift of God's Spirit that transcends the grievances of human existence (Rom 8:18, 22), a joy that proves its worth in the midst of suffering (Rom 8:31–39). This joy was a reality that was a new experience for the Gentiles (Acts 13:48, 52; 16:34).[57]

Paul's missionary work did not end with the oral proclamation of the good news of Jesus Christ and with the conversion of individuals. Paul established churches, communities of men and women who had come to faith in Jesus the Messiah and Savior, and who came together to study the Scriptures, to learn what Jesus Christ had done and taught, and to live according to the will of the living God.

56. Chester, *Conversion at Corinth*, 147; the following quotation ibid.
57. Cf. Hawthorne, "Joy"; see Michel, "Freude," on the concept of joy in Greco-Roman literature.

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