

“Christ, the End of the Law” (Rom 10:4): An Index to Paul’s Conversion Experience

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Paul’s statement in Rom 10:4 that “Christ is the end [*telos*] of the law” has given rise to two major lines of interest. The first concerns what Paul actually meant by the statement. Did he mean that the Christ-event (incarnation, passion, death and resurrection) has rendered the Jewish law, and by extension all laws, obsolete or null and void? Those who take this line of approach would cite in support Paul’s famous statement in Gal 5:1-2: “When Christ freed us he really intended us to be free. Stand firm, therefore, and do not submit again to the yoke of slavery”.¹ Or did he envisage a particular (as opposed to a generalising) application because of the second part of the verse “towards or for righteousness for those who believe”? Even the scope of this second part of the verse is not without its own problems as will be seen later.

The second line of interest concerns the scope of the addressees: were they Jews or Gentiles? The near consensus among scholars is that, whatever its meaning, Paul is here concerned with the inclusion of the Gentiles in God’s work of salvation. Christ being “the end of the law” is thus interpreted in the sense that God’s Gospel, which is Christ (Rom 1:1, 9, 16),² does not require circumcision from the Gentiles as a condition for their acceptance and salvation. Circumcision was the act by which the male Jew was initiated into the Jewish covenant and undertook the obligation of full observance of the law. The whole of Romans is a theological expose of this issue of the inclusion or salvation of the Gentiles outside the Mosaic Law and even outside the law of conscience of the Gentiles.³ In addition, structurally, Rom 10:4 falls within the section which scholars such as Aletti tag “Israel and the Gentiles; the future of Israel”.⁴ The view that the text is concerned with the inclusion of the Gentiles on equal terms with the Jews is thus structurally as well as theologically established. The principle of inclusion is not observance of the law but God’s free gift of salvation given to Jew and Gentile alike out of God’s own righteousness (Romans 1-3).

While not denying the validity of these major approaches to the passage, this presentation wishes to take a different dimension which perhaps in the long run may shed more light on the other two approaches. The core argument of this study is that Rom 10:4 may best be viewed as Paul’s own summary or synthesis of his conversion experience from Judaism (rooted in the law and works) into Christ (rooted in grace and faith, through the energising empowerment of the Holy Spirit). That is, if Paul sees Christ as the end of the Jewish law, in whatever sense, it is not in a vague or theoretically construed theologizing, but a conviction which arises from his personal experience as one who was once “as to the law, a Pharisee . . . as to righteousness under the law blameless” (Phil 3:5-6; with all that went into that self designation) but is now “in Christ” (also with all that goes into this new status). Once converted Paul counted his righteousness and zeal according to the law and everything else “as rubbish” in order to “gain Christ and be given a place in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but one that comes through faith in Christ” (Phil 3:8-9). Paul’s personal experience, his passing from the law into Christ, holds the key for

¹ Galatians is undoubtedly very closely related to Romans, though scholars are at a loss as to the exact chronological and thematic relationship between the two letters. The study will move freely between the two letters for their mutual enlightenment, in a method of inter-textual approach.

² Paul has the highest references to the word gospel in the whole of the NT, most of them in Romans and Galatians (see in addition to the passages here cited, Rom 2:16; 10:16; 11:28; 15:16, 19; 16:25). Source: *Computer Concordance to the Novum Testamentum Graece* (Berlin. New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1985).

³ Paul argues by way of introduction to his letter that though the Gentiles had the law of conscience (traditionally tagged the universal law), they did not keep it. Similarly the Jewish people had the law of Torah and did not keep it. So both stood equal before God, since both lay under the power of sin (Rom 3:9); or “have sinned and fallen short of God’s glory” (3:21). God’s righteousness (*dikaosunē*) in Christ was given as grace, a totally free and unmerited free gift, to both Jew and Gentile without distinction, discrimination or partiality (Rom 3:21).

⁴ Jean-Noël Aletti, “Romans”, in *The International Bible Commentary: A Catholic and Ecumenical Commentary for the Twenty-First Century*; William R. Farmer et alii, eds. (Collegeville: the Liturgical Press, 1998) 1553-1600; here 1554. Douglas J. Moo (*The Epistle to the Romans* [NITCNT, 1996]), also notes that Rom 9:30-33; 10:1-4; and 10:5-13 deal with the inclusion of the Gentiles.

understanding what he meant in Rom 10:4 when he said, “Christ is the end of the law”. It is principally from this experience, incarnation-like, that he was able to proclaim the same to others as a theologically lived argument, be these others Jews or Gentiles who also are called to believe in Christ and be given a place in him.

The study explores this thesis using the narrative and inter-textual methods to examine select issues of how Christ meant “the end of the law” to Paul once he himself became permanently rooted “in Christ”. The phrase “in Christ” (*en Christō[i]*) registers his rootedness in Christ and serves as a mantra in all his writings. The study concludes with some considerations on the significance of Paul’s conversion experience for today. The study essentially is not interested in exploring the place of law and grace in God’s scheme of salvation as Paul does in the letter to the Romans. Rather it simply uses this verse as an entry point into what the movement from the law into Christ meant for Paul. It abstracts from the debate on this topic in the letter to the Romans and focuses rather on how Paul’s experience of conversion in Christ spelled the end of the law for him.

1. Rom 10:4 in Its Many Translations

The Greek of Rom 10:4 (*telos gar nomou Christos eis dikaiosunēn panti tō[i] pisteuonti*),⁵ has witnessed quite an array of translations. Interestingly, the text has no variant readings, but the translations differ widely and fall into four main categories classified in a) to d) below. At times, the problem is with the meaning to be assigned to the word *telos*; at others the preposition *eis* appears to be the issue.

a) The statement as having a purposeful sense (meaning “so that” or “in order that”)

1. “For Christ is the end of the law so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes” (NRSV, 1989).
2. “For Christ is the end of the law, that everyone who has faith may be justified” (RSV).⁶
Here the word “so” is elliptic, but a purposeful meaning is implied.
3. “For Christ is the end of the law, to justify all that believe”
(Tyndale, Yale, 1989). (Elliptic: “in order” to, implied)
4. “For the end of law is Christ, that all may attain righteousness who have faith in Him” (Con).⁷
This translation maintains the rhythm of the Greek, with *telos* (end) as the subject except that end has a qualifier “the” as in most other translations.
5. “Christ marks the termination of the law, so that now everyone who has faith may attain uprightness” (Gspd).
6. “Christ has brought the law to an end, so that righteousness may be obtained by everyone who believes in him” (TCNT).

b) Emphasis not on the law per se but on it as a means of righteousness

7. “For to every believer, Christ is an end of the law as a means of righteousness” (Centenary Translation: The New Testament in Modern English [Helen Barrett Montgomery, as the translator]).
8. “For Christ has put an end to law as a means of right standing for everyone who puts his trust in him” (Wms).
9. “For Christ means the end of the struggle for righteousness by the law for everyone who believes in him” (Phi).
10. “For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone that believeth” (KJ).

⁵ The text is from Nestle-Aland, *Novum Testamentum Graece*, 27th.

⁶ RSV, 2nd edition used in Nestle-Aland, *Greek-English New Testament*, Stuttgart, 1992.

⁷ The entries in nos. 4-12, 14 are from Curtis Vaughn gen., ed., *The New Testament in 26 Translations* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1967), 694-695.

**c) *telos* interpreted as the completion/fulfillment
(as opposed to “end” meaning last stage) of the law**

11. “For Christ is to every believer the completion of the law that brings righteousness” (Ber).
What is the subject of “brings” here, Christ or the law?
12. “For the consummation of law is Christ, to bring righteousness to every believer” (Wey).
This translation retains the absolute form: “law” in the original.
13. “But the law has found its fulfillment in Christ so that all who have faith may be justified” (NJB).
This translation combines fulfillment with purpose, and makes the law, not Christ, the subject (contrary to the Greek, where *telos* and *Christos* are interchangeable as subject of the sentence).
Moo’s position that “Christ is the climax of the law”, the goal to which the law tended, would fit in here.

d) The superiority of Christ to the law (implying that Christ has rendered the law null and void)

14. “Christ has superseded the law, bringing justification to everyone who will believe” (Knox).
- The above array of translations highlights the difficulty in understanding the passage. The problem seems to hang on the nature of the Greek preposition *eis* (in relation to *telos*). The primary and dominant meaning of *eis* according to BAGD is “towards”, “in”, “into”, though it can also indicate “the result of an action or condition”.⁸ The editors of *La Bible* observe that “le terme grec exprime à la fois le but, le terme et l’accomplissement”.⁹ Equally, *telos* could mean “end” as in the final destination of a journey; or a limit beyond which there is nowhere else to go. John 13:1 states that Jesus loved his own to the end/utmost (*eis telos*). This was a limit beyond which it was impossible to go, a love to which nothing could possibly be added to prove just how much he loved them. Jesus explains this in John 15:13.

Given this line of argument, the preposition *eis* can be taken to express purpose, goal fulfillment and finality combined in the current context. The reason lies ultimately not in considering in the abstract what Paul said but in locating it in the life of Paul himself. The root of the difficulty, in my view, is that attempts to understand the passage have been theoretical or abstract, rather than take life as the basic starting point.¹⁰ This study posits that Paul’s life-long conversion holds the key to the core meaning of Rom 10:4; his life was the basis of his conviction that Christ was the end of the law. For him God’s righteousness in Christ given outside the law (Rom 3:21-22) has rendered the law unnecessary or irrelevant as a means of salvation. “I do not nullify the grace of God; for if justification comes through the law then Christ died for nothing” (Gal 2:21). The study is not located in the letter to the Romans but in Paul’s life of conversion to Christ as seen in many of his letters.

Romans 10:4 is thus best taken in its soteriological rather than in its Christological sense; that is, primarily from the viewpoint of what Christ signifies for the believer rather than of Christ. Paul’s primary concern is not whether or not Christ is superior to, has superseded or brought the law to completion, but how the believer, Jew or Gentile, relates his or her past and present to the righteousness which God has put forward in Christ as a free gift for the salvation of all human beings without discrimination; and recognizes the freedom of others to do the same from their own location. Unless a person receives in faith this divine gift on its own terms, such a person will not understand or appreciate the place of Christ in their lives and in relation to law, be it the Jewish law or the law of conscience both treated in Romans; or civil law or any type of law (cultural included). Paul learnt the truth about this significance of Christ vis-à-vis the law (or law) from his life experience; which he tags “the surpassing or supreme advantage of knowing Christ Jesus

⁸ Bauer, Arnold and Gingrich (*Greek English Lexicon of the New Testament*) give a wide range of usage of *eis*, but the purposeful one is not the most immediate or the most widely used in the NT literature. The Hebrew translation of the Trinitarian Bible Society, **spr hbyl hdsh** (London: Oxford University Press, nd), renders *eis* by the preposition *l*: *ki hāmmāshiah sôph hattôrāh litsdāqāh lekôl-hama’amin bô*.

⁹ *Traduction Oecumenique de la Bible* (Alliance Biblique Universelle, UBS: Le Cerf, 1980).

¹⁰ See further Teresa Okure, “First was the Life, not the Book” (in Teresa Okure, ed.; *To Cast Fire upon the Earth: Bible and Mission Collaborating in Today’s Multi-Cultural Global Context* (Pietermaritzburg: Cluster, 2000), 194-214.

my Lord” (Phil 3:8). His conversion to Christ signaled for him the end of the law as a means of salvation. What God offered in Christ as a means of salvation differed in nature and essence from what the law offered. Random examples elucidate this thesis, starting with a brief review of Paul’s life before his conversion.

2. Paul’s Life under the Law

In discussing the law (Torah) it is important to remember that the law for the Jew was not a set of propositions or a code to be applied in certain cases as in our civil or canon laws, or something to debate abstractly (though the rabbis engaged in such debates during the second Temple period, in the time of Paul and beyond). Rather the law, for the Jew, was a way of life in which one walked, something which directed, guided, ruled and governed one’s psyche, thinking and every aspect of one’s life from morning, through the night, to morning (cf. Ps 63:6, “on you I muse through the night”). Psalm 119 which celebrates the joy of being given the law as lamp for one’s feet, a light for one’s path and the abiding guide at every stage of life, clearly illustrates this; so, too, the code itself as encapsulated in a key passage from Deuteronomy:

You shall put these words of mine in your heart and soul, and you shall bind them as an emblem on your forehead. Teach them to your children, talking about them when you are at home and when you are away, when you lie down and when you rise. Write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates so that your days and the days of your children may be multiplied in the land that the Lord swore to your ancestors to give them, as long as the heavens are above the earth (Deut 11:18-21, NRSV).

The rabbis believed the whole law was summed up in love of God and love of neighbour (Deut 6:4); the rest was interpretation. Love of neighbour, for Paul, sums up the whole of the law (Gal 5:14). Every aspect of life and theological reflection in Israel had its origin and end (*terminus a quo* and *ad quem*) in the book of the covenant, the Torah; this includes the allegorical works of Philo, the history of Josephus and the exaggerations of a Sirach.¹¹ Sirach summarises his book on wisdom, by saying “All this is the book of the covenant of the Most High God, the law that Moses commanded us as an inheritance for the congregations of Jacob” (Sir 24:23); he then equates this law/covenant with creation by comparing it to the rivers that watered the earth in the second creation account and in the then known world (Sir 24:25-29).

A Pharisee (or “Pharisee of Pharisees” as he is popularly called), Paul was thorough and blameless (*amemptos*) in observing the law; far surpassing in zeal for the traditions of the ancestors his age grade (Gal 1:13; Phil 3:4-6). More than others he lived, walked and was governed by the law, in all of life. He reminds one of “the rich young man” in Mark (or “rich man” in some traditions) who all his life had observed the heart of the law, namely, love of God and neighbour, but was looking for something extra “in order to inherit eternal life” (Mark 10:19-16 and //s). Paul’s zeal in persecuting the church is proof of how his “righteousness that comes from the law” led him beyond what was required by the law.

The Acts of the Apostles seems to project Paul as a leader among the Diaspora Jews who could not stand Stephen because he allegedly criticized the Temple and the institutions of Judaism and their stiff-necked leaders, “uncircumcised in heart and ears” (Acts 7:51; 6:11-15; 7:47-53). Paul was not simply a staunch law observer but also a staunch respecter of authority.¹² Luke seems to imply this when he states that Paul sought letters from the leaders in Jerusalem to arrest in Damascus all followers of the Way and take them back to Jerusalem for trial, obviously not by himself but by the authorities. This is a familiar situation. Subordinates, even today, try to curry favour from the authorities by dealing ruthlessly with perceived erring members. As a Diaspora Jew, Paul would probably have sought to surpass his age grade even in this in order to win the approval of the authorities (something Stephen, most likely a Diaspora Jew, lacked and

¹¹ See, for instance, his tirades against women generally (ch. 9) and on the treatment of daughters (14:9-14).

¹² He will carry this respect for authority, religious and civil, into his life in Christ (cf. Rom 13:1-7).

about which he cared less).¹³ Converted Paul himself would later receive the same treatment, though unlike Jesus (who challenged the one who slapped him to point out what was wrong in what he had said), he would apologise that he did not know it was the High Priest (Acts 23:2-5).¹⁴

In sum, before his conversion, Paul could have been the Pharisee in the Temple who thanked God that he was not like the rest of human beings or like the tax collector with him in the Temple. If the law required that he fast once a week, he would most likely have fasted twice, and so forth. One can imagine him keeping to the letter the 613 precepts or fence around the Torah, to ensure that he did not come anywhere near breaking the Torah itself.¹⁵

The foregoing barely sketches Paul's life under the law. What happened when he moved from the law into Christ can shed further light on his Jewish background and upbringing.

3. Paul's Life in Christ, the End of the Law

Paul's conversion entailed a true pass over, a crossing of boundaries, the most important of which was from law-based righteousness to the righteousness of God in Christ received through faith. We recall that *tsedaqah*, (righteousness; Gk *dikaïosunē*) was a particularly cherished concept among the Pharisees. In that context, righteousness was the fruit of one's unrelenting efforts in observing the law beyond measure, what Paul calls, "righteousness by my own efforts, based on law" (Phil 3:9a). The parable of the Pharisee and the Publican again comes to mind: "I thank you, God, that I am not like the rest of human beings. . . . Or like this publican here" (Luke 18:9-14). In his new life in Christ, Paul sought "the righteousness from God that depends on faith" (Phil 3:9b). Faith essentially moves the action from one's self or personal efforts to God to whom one looks for the fulfillment of God's freely made promises. In that divine plane all humans stand equal as recipients of God's favour; none can boast about anything since each one receives the blessing of salvation on equal terms, as a grace or purely free and unmerited gift from God.

Christ the End of Law Based Personal Achievements

The protracted debate on the relative merits of faith and works in Paul, especially since the time of Martin Luther, makes little progress because the discussion is not situated in how faith and works operated in Paul's own life. Paul is very clear that God's gift of faith in Christ impels him not to a life of "no works" but to one of even greater works. By his own testimony he worked and suffered for the sake of the gospel far more than any of those who were apostles or disciples before him (or "knew Christ according to the flesh" or "from a human point of view"; 2 Cor 5:16-17): "Are they servants of Christ? – I must be mad to say this – I am a better one, with far greater labours, far more imprisonments, with countless beatings and often near to death" (2 Cor 11:23-24).¹⁶ He carried his previous zeal for works of the law into works of faith in the service of the gospel. The basic difference now is that these works do not constitute the ground for salvation;

¹³ Example is the guard who gave Jesus a slap on the face for daring to answer the High Priest, though there was no wrong in what Jesus said (John 18:22-23).

¹⁴ Interestingly, the High Priests in both incidents have names that are almost similar: Annas (John 18:12), Ananias (Acts 23:2).

¹⁵ See Nehemiah 10 which Morton Smith (*Palestinian Parties and Politics that Shaped the Old Testament*, 2nd ed. [London: SCM, 1987], 132) tags "covenant of extreme separatists"; Philip Birnbaum, "*Perûshîm*" in his *Encyclopedia of Jewish Concepts* (New York: Hebrew Publishing Company, 1995), 513-514; and "Pharisees" in introductions to the NT and theological dictionaries of the NT; Camillus Umoh ("Paul's Conversion and its Challenges for Today", a paper delivered on the "Day of St. Paul", Catholic Institute of West Africa, May 7th, 2009; 17) gives a brief entry on Paul as a Pharisee, pp. 4-5.

¹⁶ See further Paul's list of works and endurance for the sake of the gospel in 1 Cor 4:11-13; 2 Cor 4:7-12; 11:16-12:10 (the last section, 12:1-10 concerns his vision or consolations).

rather they are evidence of the fruit which the believer bears in Christ, as a sign that he or she has received in faith and with joy and thanksgiving God's pure gift of salvation.

Paul thus makes a distinction between salvation as something one achieves by works of the law and salvation as pure grace from God which one receives in faith. His awareness of this truth was so deep that "the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ" constituted a cherished formula of greeting in his letters. Today this greeting has passed into the liturgy at the beginning of Mass: "The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all". Faith in this context is one's openness to accept and believe in the gratuitous gift of salvation given in and through Christ. One is saved by grace, through faith, not by the works of the law one does, merits or deserves. Though this belief is a core message of the New Testament, Paul is its most vocal champion and flag bearer, because of his fight for the inclusion of the Gentiles. His dominant emphasis on salvation as a grace was in service to his gospel that Gentiles should not be subjected to circumcision and the consequent obligation to observe all the precepts of the law as a condition for being saved (Gal 5:3). Since God has freely made a new egalitarian provision for all in Christ, ("When Christ freed us, he really wanted us to be free") it would be foolish to submit again to the yoke of slavery of the law (Gal 5:1-3) or impose the same on others. One cannot go far in Paul's letters without stumbling on his pre-occupation with grace as something for which to give thanks, this time "not unlike" but like the rest of human beings, be they the righteous or tax collectors (Deut 6:4), Jews or Gentiles, slave or free, male and female (Gal 3:28), Greeks, Schythians or Barbarians (Col 3:11).

Christ the End of Exclusive Love

Paul transferred his love and zeal for the Jewish law, to zeal for the law of love in Christ. This love literally drove him to cover a good part of the Gentile world in the service of the gospel, as its entrusted minister. Love constituted the livewire of his apostolic ministry: "the love of Christ overwhelms/impels us" (2 Cor 5:14); it led him to redefine life, creation and all human beings and the Jewish election theology/covenant. Unlike in the Torah, this love is no longer reserved for a fellow Pharisee in the first place (or a fellow Jew; this being the primary meaning of "neighbour" in the Torah). It transcends all barriers and social categories, especially the anthropological barriers of sex, race and class (Gal 3:28; 1 Cor 12:13; Col 3:11). Paul was consumed by zeal to know, experience "the surpassing worth" and love "of Christ my Lord" (Phil 3:8); he counseled his converts to "owe nobody anything except the debt of love", love being the summary of the law, old and new, and the fulfillment of all the commandments (Rom 13:8-18). Whether Paul composed 1 Corinthians 13 or found it in tradition this hymn sums up his new understanding of the law of love. That we have the hymn today is thanks to Paul for recording it in his letter. Equally, Paul transferred his love and respect for authority to upholding the authority of his apostleship given to him by God as pure grace for the service of the gospel.¹⁷ Consequently, he was fearless in exercising this authority: "Being entrusted with [or as we have received] this ministry by the mercy of God, there is no weakening in our part" (2 Cor 4:1).

Not the Letter of the Law but the Spirit, God's Gift

As a convert, Paul experienced the Holy Spirit as the divine energy that motivated, propelled and sustained his life in Christ and his missionary zeal. The letters of the law that embodied the law's precepts were dead or unable to effect what the law counseled. The Holy Spirit on the contrary is the indwelling divine energy that empowers the believer, a child of God, to live as Jesus commanded. The Spirit teaches actively in a way which the "dead" letters of the law do not. In place of walking in/living by the law, Paul emphasizes walking/living in the Spirit (cf. Gal 5:16-26). The Spirit is God's own life "poured into our hearts which

¹⁷ The opening of his letters mention as his credentials his apostleship from God who called him to be a servant of Jesus Christ and of his Gospel. This conviction made pay little attention to those who rejected him as apostle. It gave him courage to proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ as he had received it from God, or as a revelation, not from human beings.

causes us to cry ‘Abba, Daddy’” (cf. Rom 8:15; Gal 4:4-6); God’s seal or stamp of ownership on us, God’s pledge or down payment of what we will be when we see God face to face. The Spirit teaches us to pray; and when we lack words or do not know how to pray, the Spirit pleads for us with groans that cannot be put into words. In that case the Spirit’s prayer becomes a heart to heart talk with God (Rom 8:26-27).

The Spirit also actively builds community by distributing gifts to enable each member participate in the work of building up the community till all attain to maturity, Christ’s own maturity (Eph 4:13), even as parts of a human body each playing a unique function for the mutual building up of the entire body (Rom 12:4-8; 1 Cor 12:4-30). These Spirit empowered activities are things the law inscribed in tablets of stone could not effect. The letters of the law remain external to the one who practices the law; God’s Spirit on the contrary indwells in the believer and causes the believer to live the God-life as at the beginning God had intended us to live it. Paul experienced the workings of God’s Spirit in his life, as divine energy that energises us. The law by itself does not energise. Human beings give life to the letters of the law otherwise the law remains dead, powerless to operate. The Spirit causes to live (cf. John 6:63) and even to say “Jesus is Lord” (1 Cor 12:3).

4. Other Consequences of Paul’s Discovery of Jesus, God’s Gospel

A major consequence of Paul’s discovery of Jesus as God’s gospel, a free gift of salvation offered to all without discrimination was his reinterpretation of his Jewish traditions (the covenant, circumcision and the election theology). The reinterpretation was occasioned by the imperative to make the truth of the gospel (Gal 2:1, 14; 4:16; 5:7) reach the Gentile believers. Its concrete fruit was Paul’s relationship with the Gentiles and, especially, with gentile women whom he celebrated as collaborators in the work of spreading the gospel. The greatest consequence perhaps was his emphasis on resurrection as a way of life here and now.

Reinterpretation of Election Theology

The depth of Paul’s conversion or pass over from the law to Christ is best discovered in the letter to the Galatians. Here he sees the law as a baby sitter/nurse, a tutor, a disciplinarian that was bringing us to Christ (Gal 3:23-29). Further he turns upside down Israel’s election traditions, declaring that believers (Jews and Gentiles) are the true children of Sarah/Abraham, while the unbelieving Jews are those of Hagar/Abraham (an African woman, by no means a slave girl, though Paul following tradition calls her that; Gal 4:21-31). Its polemic nature notwithstanding, this letter, more than any other, shows how total Paul’s transfer from the law into Christ was. Had someone dared to make this type of comparison before his conversion, Paul would have stoned such a person to death.

In Israel’s religion, circumcision was the gateway to one’s membership of the chosen people of God. Women and Gentiles were excluded (unless the latter, if they were men, were ready and willing to be circumcised and accept to keep the entire burden of the law). In place of circumcision, Paul and the early Christians put baptism by which every baptised man, woman and child, irrespective of race, becomes God’s child with the full right and privilege to call God “Abba, daddy” (Gal 4:4-6; Rom 8:14-17). Further, baptism for Paul was the true circumcision; those who held on tenaciously to circumcision proved they lacked true circumcision (Phil 2:3). The intimacy with God given at baptism is a far cry from the dominant Jewish practice whereby God’s name was not even to be mentioned, or mentioned with utmost respect. The author of 1 John is amazed that we should not only be called God’s children, “but that is what we really are” (1 John 3:1). In the old dispensation, Israel alone was God’s special people, his heritage and portion. The status of children given to believers ruled out this theology of election. In the gospel righteousness freely

bestowed on all by God, Jewish and Gentile believers are God's heritage and even inheritors of the very God: "heirs of God and coheirs with Christ" (Rom 8:15-17). Every baptised becomes "a new creation" (*kainē ktisis*; 2 Cor 5:17; Gal 6:15), "a new human being" (*kainos anthrōpos*; Eph 2:15; 4:24) called to put on a new mind (*kainon noun*) and way of life (Rom 6:1-14).

Relationship with Gentiles

The separation between Jews and Gentiles was entrenched in the Torah. In his pass over to Christ, Paul had to transcend the religious, social and cultural and cultic barriers between him and the Gentiles that he had inherited as a Jew and a Pharisee and taken great pride in: "All these that stood so much to my advantage, I count as so much rubbish, by comparison to knowing Christ my Lord and him as crucified". Instead of viewing Gentiles as inferior, "unclean", "uncircumcised", "sinners" (Gal 2:15), thus a source of contamination to be shunned as the law commanded, Paul learned to love, embrace and call them brothers and sisters; eat from the same natural table and cultic table of the Lord with them and drink from one and the same cup (cf. 1 Cor 11:17-26). The social aversion to eating with Gentiles cannot be overemphasized. Peter's "hypocrisy" in Antioch, copied by other Jews in the community, including even Barnabas (Gal 2:11-14), shows how deeply rooted was this aversion. The demands of fraternities (*haburôth*) allowed table fellowship only with fellow Jews generally and, for Paul, with fellow Pharisees in particular. Paul had to overcome this aversion because of his faith in Christ. His statement in Galatians has become a household word: "As many of you as were baptised in Christ have put on [clothed yourself in] Christ. There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; all of you are one in Christ" (3:27-28). Paul came to this truth from the grace of his first encounter with Jesus on the way to Damascus (Acts 9). From that experience he understood that believers (irrespective of race, sex or class) were one with Jesus; since Jesus identified himself with them: "I am Jesus, and you are persecuting me" (9:5). Paul's view of believers as the body of Christ, irrespective of any human considerations, also derived from this initial encounter with Jesus. His outreach to Gentiles given to him as a direct mandate of his apostleship (Acts 9:15-16; Gal 3:7-10) was a practical consequence of this grace.

Ministry of reconciliation/Ambassadors for God

Paul's greatest pass over into Christ lies perhaps in his understanding of God's work of redemption as a ministry of reconciliation. As a Pharisee, Paul was by nature and socialisation schooled in the separatist, election theology mentioned above. But now he became deeply committed to the ministry of reconciliation in the awareness that "God was in Christ reconciling the world to the divine self, not counting their trespasses against them" (2 Cor 5:18-19). Extensively he devotes Romans 5 to this topic. But he first experienced God's reconciliation of himself, in that though he was a persecutor of the church, God did not count that against him. Rather God reconciles him and entrusted him with this ministry of reconciliation. Accordingly in his dealing with his converts, he employed the method of appealing, instead of arresting and imprisoning or even stoning and killing. His authority in this ministry to the young gentile churches, though firm, is hortatory, rather than mandatory/authoritative.¹⁸ He challenges them often to use their common sense: "Judge for yourselves, is it right?" Or "We appeal to your consciences"; "examine yourselves to see whether you are holding to your faith. Test yourselves" (2 Cor 13:5). For Paul reconciliation was a personal way of life as well as a ministry entrusted to him by God for the sake of the

¹⁸ See, for instance, 2:1-11 where he uses Christ's own example of humility in the famous hymn (vv 6-11) to persuade the saints at Philippi to cultivate Christ's mind in their dealings with one another. His policy of "becoming all things to all peoples" is an integral part of this persuasive, hortatory approach, which he learned from God: "It is as if God were appealing through us", as God had appealed in person in Christ.

gospel. I have argued elsewhere that the ministry of reconciliation holds the key to Paul's answer to the problem of "the other", especially in Corinth.¹⁹

Partnership with women as collaborators

Paul's outreach to Gentiles as brothers and sisters and as close collaborators is recorded in Acts and in Paul's own letters. His relationship with women, especially Gentile women is quite remarkable. Paul's closest and most cherished long distance collaborators in spreading the gospel were from Philippi, a Roman colony and the main city of the region of Macedonia (Acts 16). He seems to have entered into a special relationship or covenant with this community to form life-long partners in his missionary work (cf. 2 Cor 8:1-5). Women were the first converts of that community and the first converts of Europe (Acts 16:11-15). Lydia's house became the mother church of the region of Macedonia.²⁰ From Paul's letter to the Philippians (a genuine letter of his), the named leaders in that community were women (Evodia, Syntyche). The same applies to Chloe in Corinth and the long list of women in co-workers of Paul in Romans 16.²¹ Today the impact of Paul's crossing the barrier in his attitude to and relationship with women may not strike one as revolutionary as it would have done in his time. That Paul could call women his co-workers and name them by name in writing, in a society where it was considered unseemly to speak to a woman in the street even if that woman were one's wife, shows the depth of his conversion in Christ. This is ironic especially since Paul is popularly regarded as a misogynist. Some women biblical scholars have argued that if the church through the ages had continued in the footsteps of Paul in his collaborating with women, the place of women in the church today would be very different.²²

The Resurrection as a Way of Life

Moving from a law oriented spirituality to a Christ centered one, Paul experienced a personal pass over with his crucified and risen Jesus. This is a recurrent theme in his letters. He considers himself "dead to the law" but "alive to God" (Gal 2:19); he is crucified with Jesus and the life he lives is no longer his own but Jesus living with him (Gal 2:19-20; 3:1). He carries in his body the marks of Christ (Gal 6:17). Here in this share in Christ's paschal mystery lies the crux of Paul's statement that Christ is the end of the law. Christ died to break the curse of the law and put an end to it. When anyone is in Christ, that person also dies to the law; the law no longer has the power and authority to enslave the person through sin (Rom 3:9; Gal 3:10-14). His letters are replete with pleas to his converts to live as and in the risen Christ (cf. Rom 6:1-1), by putting to death the old self, life of the flesh; and put on the new self, alive in the Spirit, recreated in Christ Jesus. On the road to Damascus, Paul first encountered Christ as the risen one. The risen Christ was the core of Christian faith which he received from others (1 Cor 15:3-8). Festus' summary of the case against Paul has become proverbial: "A dead man Jesus whom Paul alleges to be alive" (Acts 25:19).

As a Pharisee, Paul already believed in the resurrection of the dead, unlike the Sadducees. This party belief was not required by the law. His encounter with the risen Christ brought a new dimension to this belief: belief in the resurrection was now something that affected life here and now, as a way of life. This new way of life requires all believers to reject their former ways of life (the law of the flesh which makes one obey one's evil passions), "put to death" the things of the flesh, break with sin and be filled with joy and

¹⁹ Teresa Okure, "The Ministry of Reconciliation (2 Cor 5:14-21): Paul's Key to the Problem of 'the Other' in Corinth". *Power and the Other. Mission Studies*, 23/1 (2006) 105-121.

²⁰ On the significance of this see Roger W Gehring, *House Church and Mission: The Importance of Household Structures in Early Christianity* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 2004), esp. 121-122, 131-132, 289.

²¹ For a précis on the women in Paul's ministry see appropriate commentaries in Carol A. Newsom and Sharon H. Ringe, eds., *The Women's Bible Commentary* (London: SPCK; Westminster, John Knox, 1992).

²² See for instance, Carolyn Osiek, "Galatians", in *The Women's Bible Commentary* previous note, 333-337; and Jane Schaberg who in her commentary on "Luke" (in this same book, 275-293, esp. 278-282) argues that unlike Paul, Luke introduced the marginalization and exclusion of women. Others like Elizabeth Schüssler-Fiorenza have argued for a discipleship of equals based on Paul's theology of oneness in Christ in such passages as Gal 3:25-29).

thanksgiving to God in the Spirit (Rom 6:1-14). Comprehensively this new life entails loving believers and the entire human race as God loves them. Living Christ's type of life is proof that at baptism one truly rose with Christ to new life; a life that is possible because believers are under the law of grace, not under the law of sin (Rom 6:14). True, Paul still saw the resurrection as something that lay in the future ("resurrection from the dead" to which he gives a long expose (1 Cor 15:12-58). But this was the end of a life journey that is on-going even now.

Synthesis of Paul's Experience of Christ, the End of the Law

Above random examples support the thesis that Paul's declaration that Christ was the end of the law grew out of his personal experience of life in Christ. The belief was not theoretical; it was rooted in his concrete experience of God's grace, different from his previous efforts to attain justification or perfection through strict and zealous observance of the law. Though rooted in life, the belief had its origin from God; it was as a revelation (Gal 1:11-12) which came alive in the course of proclaiming the gospel. Here he saw God giving the grace of justification in Christ to both Jews and Gentiles, that is, people outside the law without discrimination based on any of the restrictions the law imposed (race, sex, class). This was proof that salvation was not something one gives to himself or herself by doing the works of the law or a reward for faithfully observing the law. The law can only tell one what to do or not do and convicts one when its precepts are flouted, but it lacks the dynamic power to transform a person. God, on the contrary, gives believers his living and dynamic Spirit to enable them share in God's own life as God's children, "heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ (Rom 8:14-17).

Paul's insight that salvation is God's work of pure grace occurs so repeatedly in his letters that it is impossible not to hear him. Paying close attention to what life in Christ meant for him, in contrast to his previous life in the law (or life without Christ), helps one to understand and appreciate not only Paul's statement in Rom 10:4 but also all he says about the law/works, faith/grace and righteousness under each category; and the audacity to radically re-interpret his Jewish traditions of covenant and election as he does in Galatians 3 - 4. His staunch defence of God's gospel, "the truth of the gospel" (Gal 2:1, 14; 4:16; 5:7) which is both Jesus and his proclamation (Rom 1:2-3, 16) rested in this belief.

Paul personally struggled to internalize, assimilate and live the new life in Christ: "I have been crucified with Christ and it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I live now in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave himself for me" (Gal 2:19-20). He committed himself to a nonstop run "to capture the price for which God captured" him in Christ (Phil 3:12-14); entering into the race with those to whom he preached, "lest having preached to others", he should find himself "disqualified" (1 Cor 9:27). His pass over from the law to Christ assured him and believers of ultimately sharing in the life of the risen Christ after death (Phil 3:20-21; 1 Cor 15:43, 49, 53), "sharing his sufferings so as to share his glory" (Rom 8:17).

Though Paul dropped the belief in salvation as something won by oneself, he could not drop certain basics of his previous life. He could not, for instance, stop being a Jew, from the tribe of Benjamin; neither could he delete the marks of circumcision from his body. The basic difference was that these values, race, sex and creed, no longer had any discriminating significance for him; or any significance at all: "Circumcision means nothing and the want of it means nothing" (Gal 5:6; 6:15). Most importantly, Paul retained those aspects of his Jewish character which in Christ marked him out among the early disciples, namely, his loving zeal and commitment to the mission, his daylight honesty, courage and whole hearted service of the truth of the gospel. The fact that he was a Diaspora Jew (from Tarsus in Cilicia, a city of no mean standing, and a Roman citizen by birth (though scholars dispute this claim for him by Luke-Acts), most likely facilitated his openness to the Gentiles than would have been possible if he were a Jew from Palestine.

Thanksgiving was an enduring principle of religious piety in Judaism which Paul carried over into his life in Christ. It was embedded as a way of life in the Torah, the later aberrations of racial pride and personal achievements notwithstanding. Deut 7:7-8 reminds the people that God's choice of them rested solely on God's love, not on anything they themselves had done. The misplaced sense of gratitude (or pouring incense on oneself) such as the Pharisee displayed in the Temple does not nullify the value of thanksgiving in Jewish faith. This thanksgiving culminates in Christ, as Eucharist, his body and blood given for full and enduring life of the world.²³ Thanksgiving to God governed Paul's thinking and permeated his letters: "In all things give thanks" (cf. 1 Cor 10:31; Col 3:17).

Paul embodies the two testaments, as our conference theme indicates. God appointed him as apostle to the Gentiles. He teaches us by his Christ-rooted life and proclamation of God's gospel of grace and freedom. Paul's love for Christ, who first loved him and gave himself for him, gave him the courage to be free and to seek to liberate others from stipulations that though they have the appearance of piety actually camouflage or nullify the grace of God in Christ. So total was Paul's love for Christ that he was able to let go his previous religious convictions and practices in order to gain Christ and be given a place in him. For him Christ was the treasure hidden in the field, God's field of grace. His one goal in life was "to know Christ Jesus and the power of his resurrection, to share his suffering so as to be and be given a place in him, in his resurrection". The eagerness to get his "place" in Christ gave him the incredible energy to do and to endure all things for Christ (cf. 1 Cor 4:8-13; 2 Cor 11:1-30) with perfect freedom, knowing that in Christ he could not be labouring in vain.

5. Towards a Conclusion: Challenges of Paul's Experience for Today

The study has highlighted how Paul's life in Christ gave expression to his belief that Christ was the end of the law. The abiding challenge of Paul's experience is how believers today can also make their life in Christ a living testimony that Christ is the end of law for them, as did Paul. How do one's life experiences become the privileged place for encountering God and discovering in that encounter the freedom which God gives in Christ? How does each believer make a personal life-long entry into the righteousness of God (Rom 3:21) as Paul did? To what extent do Christians believe that salvation is God's pure gift of grace to be received in faith with gratitude, not something that one earns by one's prowess and "working for God"? Do Christians believe that they live now, not they but Christ lives in them?

It is common place today to emphasize that life, or experience, is the first school of theology. Liberation and Third World theologians largely brought this to the fore. The official church on its part has declared the split between the gospel and people's experiences and cultures to be an unfortunate and unacceptable approach in the work of evangelisation. Increasingly ventures in global Bible commentaries require of participating authors to situate their commentaries in their own distinctive contexts. At times this is carried to the point of ignoring the context of the biblical author.²⁴ The project of "reading with the ordinary reader" is an attempt to bring to consciousness how the situation of the ordinary reader can impact the meaning of scripture differently from that of experts.²⁵ Yet other scholars have conducted comparative studies on how interpretations of the same biblical texts differ significantly between Western and African readers.²⁶

²³ On thanksgiving as a Jewish way of life, see, Brad H Young, *Jesus the Jewish Theologian* (Peabody, Mass: Hendrickson, 1995), 119-125.

²⁴ Cf. *Global Bible Commentary*, Daniel Patte, T. Okure et alii, eds. (Nashville: Abingdon, 2004) and the nascent series of Texts @ Contexts to be published by Fortress/Augsburg; with Daniel Patte, Teresa Okure and Nicole Durand as the NT editors.

²⁵ I have elaborated on this in other works and so will not delve into it here. See for instance, Teresa Okure, "First Was the Life, not the Book", in T. Okure, ed., *To Cast Fire upon the Earth: Bible and Mission Collaborating in Today's Multi-Cultural Global Contexts* (Pietermaritzburg: Cluster, 2000) 194-214 and eadem, "'I will open my mouth in parables' (Matt 13:35): A Case for a Gospel-Based Biblical Hermeneutics" *NTS* 46 (2000) 445-463.

²⁶ An example is Grant LeMarquand, *An Issue of Relevance: A Comparative Study of the Story of the Bleeding Woman (Mk 5:25-34; Mt 9:20-22; Lk 8:43-48) in North Atlantic and Africa Contexts*, Bible and Theology in Africa, vol. 5 (New York, Washington DC/Baltimore, Bern Frankfurt am Main, Berlin, Brussels, Vienna, Oxford: Peter Lang, 2004).

The need to relate scripture to life is thus not in question. The question is whether in doing so readers have captured Paul's effort to internalize his conversion encounter with Christ and make that event the organizing principle or operative fundamental of their life and mission to proclaim the gospel. Unlike Paul's life-centered theological approach, contemporary life related scripture readings tend to remain largely academic, even when the reader begins by narrating or defining her or his context as the operating hermeneutic of the reading and ends by drawing conclusions from or for the given life context. In brief, it is possible to do a life oriented reading of scripture without that reading actually touching or impacting the reader's life.

This approach is very different from that of Paul. For him "life [his life] meant Christ". Paul started with life, his own life, not with life in the vague as hermeneutical principle. His writings bear witness to what Christ meant for him personally, incarnation-like; he shared with his converts his life-long struggle to "put on Christ"; "be in Christ", knowing that he had not "already won" (Phil 3:12-14). Whatever he said about Christ grew out of his ongoing and ever growing life of faith in Christ. He wrote his letters not as academic exercise but in a pastoral mode to promote in other converts the same life of faith in Christ that he himself had experienced. He compared this ministry to being "in the pain of childbirth till Christ be formed" in them (Gal 4:19). His life oriented approach was a carryover from his Jewish upbringing. That upbringing, as in African traditional settings, entertained no separation between life and religion, religion and politics, the sacred and the secular or between church and state.

This work may thus conclude as it started by re-emphasising that until we discover what Christ, God's gospel, meant practically to Paul in his life, we will not fully understand or appreciate his statement in Rom 10:4, that Christ is the end of the law. Further, we will not understand what Christ means or should mean in our own lives either, unless like Paul Apostle of the Gentiles, we make similar sustained efforts to grow daily in Christ or better still to allow Christ to grow and live in us, "I live now not I but Christ lives in me". For this to happen, we need to embrace or be open to God's law of grace, of the Spirit and of love with constant thanksgiving. Thanksgiving flows from and promotes a heart that is open to receive God's blessings as opposed to one that, like the elder brother of the prodigal son (Luke 15:25-29), thinks that he/she has to "slave" for God or win divine favour, even salvation, by sheer personal efforts. It guards against the temptation to "nullify the grace of God" (Gal 2:21) by acting as if our progress and successes in life and ministries depended on our personal efforts, the fruits of our achievements. It energises one to cooperate with God's grace as a free gift.

A genuine appreciation of Paul's awareness that Christ is the end of the law challenges us to revisit our own traditions and belief systems: the traditions of our ancestors (including our ancestors in the faith), cultural, social and religious, to see if they enhance or impede our life in Christ and our gratitude for the grace God has given to us in Christ. We would include in this review our church traditions, theological traditions and traditions of biblical interpretation. We need christological courage and freedom rooted in love to be able to do this. Blessed John Paul II in his *Novo Millennio Ineunte* reminded us of the need to do this.²⁷ Over and above all as foundation, we need to commit ourselves to collaborate with God's grace in our lives and world as Paul did. When we do this, we too will experience even now the power of Christ's resurrection and be given a place in him. In this way we will with Paul continue to strive to capture the prize for which God has captured us in Christ.

The study had no intention to explore Paul's theological stance on the relationship between Christ and the law as a means of salvation. He treats this question systematically in the letter to the Romans. A further study might be to revisit Paul's theological treatise in Romans in using his personal experience as guide or

²⁷ John Paul II (*Novo Millennio Ineunte: At the Dawn of the Third Millennium* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2001) counsels that we return to our roots in Christ and revisit all that we have done in the past two centuries to see where we deviated from the gospels and launch into the deep to act correctly this time under the guidance of Christ, *duc in altum*.

mirror. Such a study might help to resolve or at least shed much light on some of the seemingly contradictory passages in the letter to the Romans.