

# **The Politics of Paul: His Supposed Social Conservatism and the Impact of Postcolonial Readings**

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“Only this: ensure that your politics (Gk., *politeuesthe*) be worthy of the saving news (*euangelion*) of the Messiah.” (*Phil. 1:27a*)

“But our political identity (Gk., *politeuma*) resides in heaven.” (*Phil. 3:20a*)

“The problem with Paul is that he never renounced his Roman citizenship.” With this assertive interjection, a student effectively interrupted a seminar I was leading at the Ecumenical Theological Seminary in Baguio City, Philippines in 1997. The sharp remark came near the end of my opening lecture, surveying issues pertaining to Paul’s apparent social conservatism in regard to gender, economics, politics, and class.

What followed were a few moments of silence which seemed like an eternity. In the back of my mind, thoughts raced: (1) Do I immediately raise the historical question about whether or not Paul was really a Roman citizen, a datum claimed only by the author of Luke-Acts, Paul’s hagiographical biographer some thirty to forty years after his death, and doubted by some biblical scholars?<sup>1</sup> (2) Do I confess right away that, while masquerading as a benign Canadian, I am actually a citizen of “the world’s only remaining superpower,” the self-reference that Americans are fond of?<sup>2</sup> But to what end? My Filipino colleagues had already reminded me plenty enough that Canada, as a member of the G-7, was among the group of “imperialist

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countries” complicit in the newer, and more subtle and insidious form of colonialism, market globalization. The irony was huge — one of those rare occasions when I had to place myself in Paul’s shoes. As the course proceeded, impassioned engagement emerged among many participants, who were inclined to disregard, demote, or reject Paul’s legacy, particularly in respect to his social and political perspective.

Back in the so-called first world, where we have the luxury of theorizing about things which others experience as immediate struggles, it became possible to put a label on the kind of critique my student employed, evident not only in his identifying Paul’s perspective as a problem but also in identifying it in connection with an attitude toward empire, namely, postcolonialism. The term “postcolonialism” emerged in the mid-1980s when, as Arif Dirlik quips, “Third World intellectuals . . . arrived in First World academe,”<sup>3</sup> especially in the fertile territory of the emerging discipline and polemics of “cultural studies.” The term itself has been subject to considerable debate; in general it is used to describe, not a historical period or epoch, but either a condition and subject position, or a critical discourse.<sup>4</sup> The explicit use of postcolonial (or “decolonizing”) criticism within biblical studies can be seen in recent publications and programs devoted both to methodological perspectives<sup>5</sup> and to substantive interpretation.<sup>6</sup>

Briefly, postcolonial discursive criticism, despite its variety,<sup>7</sup> addresses the overlapping issues of empire, race and ethnicity, diaspora, marginality, and hybridity. It aims to: (1) deconstruct the texts, interpretations, ideologies, labels, forms of knowledge, symbolic practices, and definitions of the situation authored by the dominant groups, and to unmask the way they legitimize and reinscribe colonial interests; (2) treat once-colonized “others” as historical subjects, giving people of all subordinated groups their voices back, and taking seriously and celebrating new identities and hybridity (rejecting “binarisms”); and (3) be emancipatory by linking, through varied discursive interventions, the experiences of diverse so-called “others,” potentially brokering new alliances, and (in a field such as biblical studies) by rehabilitating various foundational texts through re-readings relevant to postcolonial interests. As R. S. Sugirtharajah puts it:

Postcoloniality is a critical enterprise aimed at unmaking the link between ideas and power which lies behind Western texts, theories, and learning. . . . [It] is not about the territorial ejection of

imperial powers or about learning, Caliban-like, the art of cursing the evils of empire. . . . It is a discursive resistance to imperialism, imperial ideologies, and imperial attitudes and to their continual reincarnations in such wide fields as politics, economics, history, and theological and biblical studies. Resistance is not simply a reaction to colonial practices, but an alternative way of perceiving and restructuring society.<sup>8</sup>

Postcolonialism shares with postmodernism a reaction against both universal enlightenment reason and the belief in objective textual interpretation and truth; but it sees postmodernism as essentially Eurocentric, as lacking a theory of resistance and a transformative agenda due to its detached attitudes, and as skeptical of any grand narrative, including liberation as a emancipatory metastory. Postcolonialism sees itself in continuity with earlier liberationist interrogations, whether informed by nationalist or Marxist paradigms, but calls into question their use of Western master narratives that perpetuate a Eurocentrism.<sup>9</sup>

What, then, of Paul? Primarily a rhetorician and not a systematician, Paul wrote letters as “instruments of his apostolic praxis.”<sup>10</sup> Yet, the quest to find an underlying coherent thought system in Paul has continued, despite the complexity and tensions (even contradictions) within the rhetoric of his letters, even as the quest has confounded interpreters.<sup>11</sup> But the tensions remain. So, on the one hand, Paul is interpreted as championing the socio-political status quo, perceived either as its rightful guardian or savior, or as the one to blame for repression in the name of Christianity. Others continue to see Paul as one whose vision of a transformed world, and of an alternative community now emerging in the corrupted world, motivates liberating, world-transforming action.

Between the cultural and theological tensions undoubtedly residing within the historical person himself, between Paul the visionary and Paul the pragmatic pastor, Paul’s restrictive, cautionary, and conservative words seem most apparent, and have been preached most loudly.<sup>12</sup> Indeed Paul’s words are more easily used and manipulated by systems of domination than any other parts of the New Testament, perhaps of the Bible. While social conservatives have held up Paul’s advice as warrant to maintain the current social order, and while some rest content in merely explaining his social conservatism, still others have decried what they see as his “limited application” or “failure of nerve,”

suggesting that Paul's own theology should have led him to more radical steps in the real world.<sup>13</sup> Not surprisingly, Paul's apparent and assumed social conservatism has led many interpreters in situations of domination to reject, demote, or disregard his legacy in this area.<sup>14</sup>

In contrast to these interpreters, still others have argued that Paul's texts reveal a posture more liberating and radical than often thought, albeit one that focuses on the emergence of an "alternative society" or "communities of resistance" in anticipation of God's final transformation. For instance, Neil Elliott has argued that it is Christian interpretation that has both depoliticized and then repoliticized Paul.<sup>15</sup> It has depoliticized Paul's gospel, by mystifying his understanding of the cross and resurrection, losing sight of its rejection of all imperial rule outside of God's, and leaving merely a gospel of private, spiritual salvation. Prevailing interpretation, Elliott argues, has then repoliticized Paul's gospel both as a weapon against Judaism, and as essentially pro-Roman ideology, by making Romans 13 the canonical center of his political perspective (and by misreading his comments on slavery and women), so that Paul has for centuries been in the service of death. Precursors of this alternative reading include the works of Klaus Wengst<sup>16</sup> and Dieter Georgi.<sup>17</sup> More recent examples can be found in works edited by Richard Horsley.<sup>18, 19</sup>

In contrast to the received interpretation of Paul, which assumes that he was largely pro-Roman in perspective,<sup>20</sup> and which typically reads the imperial situation itself as providing the favorable and necessary context for the emergence of Christianity,<sup>21</sup> these interpreters have suggested that Paul should be read as far more critical, challenging, and antagonistic toward the Roman empire, perhaps even as fundamentally anti-Roman or anti-imperial, which in turn would explain, among other things, his execution (most likely on the grounds of treason).

What, then, are the main lines of evidence for such a reading of Paul's political perspective? Paul's critical stance with regard to the Roman empire is evident from three lines of evidence: (1) the underlying millenarian script in his letters; (2) the use of politically loaded words to describe liberation and deliverance (salvation), the Messiah, and the Messiah's community; (3) Paul's own experience of arrest, imprisonment, torture, and eventually execution at the hands of the Roman *imperium*.<sup>22</sup> As a final topic (4) we will revisit Romans 13 in the light of those three lines of evidence, and will try to make some sense

of the tension that emerges. It will become clear, I hope, that it is best not to start with Romans 13 when trying to understand Paul's overall political perspective.<sup>23</sup>

### **The Underlying Millenarian Script**

Undergirding all extant and authentic<sup>24</sup> Pauline texts and his entire life's work is a comprehensive millenarian script, one that comes to explicit expression from time to time, that is often evident implicitly but never far from the surface.<sup>25</sup> I deliberately use the term "millenarian" (or "millennial"), instead of "apocalyptic" for three reasons: (1) It points to the broader cultural phenomenon of millennialism as usually entailing a variety of modes of reaction and resistance to imperial, colonial, and cultural domination across time and place.<sup>26</sup> Indeed, "millennialism" or "millenarianism" are the preferred terms for the anthropological study of similar phenomena of world-transforming mythologies, while derived from the reference in the book of Revelation to an idyllic future 1000 years, a "millennium," of the Messiah's reign on earth. To that end, using "millennialism" links biblical and Pauline millennialism with millennialism throughout history, at least analogically, while sometimes causally. (2) It highlights the strange, scandalous nature of Paul's framework and language relative to that of the educated western academy and theology. Millennialism is, usually by definition, assumed to be irrational, irresponsible, and escapist. Christians have become accustomed to the notion of a "crucified Messiah," which Paul thought to be the big unintelligible scandal; but in our time, I think it is the millennial moorings of New Testament writings, if truly understood, that constitute the true scandal for those who would seek to follow Messiah Jesus. (3) The term "millenarian" heightens the potential political valence of this sort of mythology. This is not to say that all millenarian movements are necessarily politically engaged in some sense.<sup>27</sup> Though millenarian movements are often treated as irrational, irresponsible, or escapist, forms of Christian millennialism in the Philippines, for instance, have certainly energized (and continue to energize) pockets of resistance, first to Spanish and then American colonial domination for over 150 years.<sup>28</sup> Similarly, a new reading of Jewish apocalypticism in the first century C.E. suggests its close connection to historical

action.<sup>29</sup> The scandal of millennialism for us is perhaps not so much a matter of its intelligibility but of our own social and political location.

So, then, what is this underlying script of Paul?<sup>30</sup> It is the story of God's sovereign, imperial faithfulness from creation to re-creation, whereby God will soon triumph throughout creation, signaled by the resurrection of the Messiah, himself victimized by the powers of darkness and death, embodied by the empire (1 Cor. 2:6-8). Whereas the creation was created good, it has suffered the entry of mysterious, created, yet rebellious powers which oppress God's creation. Among these disparate powers Paul includes, for instance, Error, Death, Law, Satan, Rulers, Authorities; but beginning with and through the Messiah, God is in the process of reclaiming all creation for God. Paul's script expresses this through the notion of the "age to come" versus the "age that now stands," a dualism that is at the same time cosmic (God vs. Satan, and their respective forces), anthropological (each individual embodies the tension), historical (the dualism has a *telos*, goal), and epistemological (God's wisdom vs. worldly wisdom). In Paul's understanding, his own generation is on the verge of a cataclysmic world transformation (e.g., 1 Cor. 10:10; 1 Cor. 7:26, 29, 31), which emerges by what Judith Kovaks has aptly called "God's war of liberation."<sup>31</sup> This framework provides much of the foundation of Paul's ethics, including, for example, that of non-retaliation. As Krister Stendahl has remarked, explaining Paul's perspective, "Why walk around with a little shotgun when the atomic blast is imminent?"<sup>32</sup>

The meaning of the "powers" in Paul has been the subject of considerable debate; complicating the problem is that his language in this area is not univocal. It is clear, however, that the "powers" are not primarily or exclusively spiritual and heavenly.<sup>33</sup> Rather, as Walter Wink suggests, they are visible and invisible, representing the interiority and exteriority of human structures and institutions, both personal and social in character.<sup>34</sup> While some texts imply that they are benign and redeemable, arranged under God's ultimate lordship (e.g., Phil. 3:21), other texts indicate that the powers, who are responsible for the unjust death of the Messiah, are paradoxically thereby also unmasked by that death (Col. 2:15) and will be both conquered and destroyed (1 Cor. 2:6-8; 15:21-28).<sup>35</sup>

A crucial text for understanding Paul's millennial and political perspective is 1 Cor. 2:6-8, part of a broader section (1:18-2:16), which parodies aspects

of the social and political order,<sup>36</sup> and which shames “the pretentious elite questing after power, wealth, wisdom, noble birth, and honorific public office.”<sup>37</sup>

Yet among the mature (lit. “perfect”) we do speak wisdom, though it is not a wisdom of this age or of the rulers (*archontes*) of this age, who are doomed to perish. But we speak God’s wisdom, secret and hidden, which God decreed before the ages for our glory. None of the rulers of this age understood this; for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. (1 Cor. 2:6-8, NRSV)

While some exegetes claim that the “rulers” here are essentially demonic powers,<sup>38</sup> others claim that the reference is primarily to earthly political rulers (or the imperial system), as elsewhere in the NT,<sup>39</sup> and still others argue that it is paradoxically to both cosmic (mythological) and earthly powers.<sup>40</sup> Paul’s language is abrupt and elliptical; but in the context of his rhetoric, readers could not have missed thinking about the doom of the Roman imperial system at some level. Reference to the powers in 1 Cor. comes to a climax in 15:24-28, where Paul asserts that all of the enemies and powers of this age will be destroyed: at “the end” the Messiah will “reign” (*basileuein*) and hand the kingdom (*basileia*) to God, “after he has destroyed every rule (*arch*) and every authority (*exousia*) and power (*dynamis*),” so that “God may be all things in all things (or, among all people).” While the final “enemy” is Death, readers again must have also considered the political implications of the rhetoric.

Since the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus the Messiah, then, the world is at the edge of the new age. Throughout the history of Christendom, the death of Jesus has been mystified,<sup>41</sup> robbed of its political dimensions as an act of faithful solidarity in the face of imperial terror against God’s power of good. Granted, Paul’s language about the death of the Messiah too is not univocal. He carries on the tradition handed on to him that Jesus’ death was an atoning sacrifice dealing with the problem of Error (residing in and having mastery over each person).<sup>42</sup> But even more significantly Paul also presents Jesus’ death in all of its raw, accursed (e.g., Gal. 3:13) victimization, seeing the cross as an unmasking of the powers and its imperial terror, an act of solidarity with the lowly, and as a disruption (*skandalon*) in the scheme of things.<sup>43</sup> The resurrection of Jesus is for Paul final proof of the imminent

defeat of the powers, proof of the dawning of the new age. And the imminent return of Jesus will accomplish the final defeat (expressed sometimes in military terms) of all powers and Satanic corruption, so that “God will be all in all” (1 Cor. 15:28). Paul describes the goal of history with images of the supreme, imperial, and cosmic reign by God and God’s Messiah.<sup>44</sup>

But someone might say: Isn’t the apolitical character of Paul’s rhetoric confirmed by his symbolization of final salvation as transcendent, heavenly, personal, and spiritual? The response is that all these adjectives are inadequate. There are indeed a few places where Paul’s comments seem to imply a final salvation that is spiritual and heavenly.<sup>45</sup> Nevertheless, Paul’s millennialism is not fundamentally world-ending or world-denying but world-transforming; it is far more terrestrially next-worldly than vertically other-worldly. It does not envision the goal as disembodied individual immortality but as corporate re-embodiment<sup>46</sup> in the context of a restored creation (Rom. 8:18-25). Final salvation does not entail the departure of the righteous from earth to heaven, but an ultimate merging of earth and heaven, so that God’s imperial reign (now supreme only in heaven) will be universal. “Heaven,” actually a rather rare in word in Paul’s writings when compared with the rest of the NT,<sup>47</sup> is the source of deliverance,<sup>48</sup> and the place where salvation is now reserved,<sup>49</sup> until the time when it emerges with a renovated earth,<sup>50</sup> but it is not itself the final destination. Quite apart from being interested in the spatial landscape of final salvation, Paul describes it much more in social and political terms: for instance, as God’s universal reign following an embattled victory;<sup>51</sup> as implying the relational solidarity of believers with Messiah Jesus;<sup>52</sup> as a realization of peace, justice, and true joy;<sup>53</sup> and as the immediate participation in God’s splendor (glory).<sup>54</sup>

The millennial moorings of Paul’s vocabulary also shape his understanding of the corporate body of believers now united with the Messiah. As J. C. Beker put it:

Because the church has an eschatological horizon and is the proleptic manifestation of the kingdom of God in history, it is the beach-head of the new creation and the sign of the new age in the old world that is “passing away” (1 Cor. 7:31). . . . The vocation of the church is not self-preservation for eternal life but service to the created world in the sure hope of the world’s transformation at the



time of God's final triumph. The last judgment is not only a judgment on the world outside the church but also a judgment that will assess the church's faithfulness to its mission in the world (cf. Rom. 14:10; 2 Cor. 5:11; cf. also 1 Pet. 4:17).<sup>55</sup>

Moreover, this community is pictured as participating in the final battle of God's triumph.<sup>56</sup> But as its attire and weaponry for war, Paul identifies "faith," "love," "hope," and "justice/righteousness" (1 Thess. 5:8; 2 Cor. 6:7; Rom. 6:13; cf. Eph. 6:15). As Tom Yoder Neufeld suggests, Paul has democratized and pacified the holy war imagery of Israel.<sup>57</sup> As for methods in the cosmic war, Paul advises: "Do not be conquered by evil, but conquer evil with good" (Rom. 12:21),<sup>58</sup> and observes: "for the weapons of our warfare are not fleshly but are powerful in God to destroy strongholds" (2 Cor. 10:4).<sup>59</sup> This language implies not a conforming function in relation to the current socio-political structures, but a critical function (cf. Rom. 12:1-2; Gal. 1:4). Apart from tacitly endorsing actual military conduct, it actually precludes it.<sup>60</sup>

### **Use of Politically Loaded Terms to Describe Deliverance, the Messiah, and the Messiah's Community**

In connection with this basic millennial script, scholars have recently identified particular texts in which there appear parodies or challenges of imperial claims and ideologies. An example is 1 Thess. 5:3, where Paul parodies Roman imperial rhetoric while announcing doom, presumably on the prevailing power structures (which are tied to the community's distress; cf. 1:6-2:2; 3:3): "When they say, 'Peace and security,' then sudden destruction will come upon them."<sup>61</sup> Other examples are texts in which terms of explicit political identity or connotation are applied to the community of the Messiah: the implicitly alternative "[political] assembly (*ekklisia*) of God" in Thessalonica is exhorted "to lead a life worthy of God, who calls you into *his own* kingdom (*basileia*) and glory" (1 Thess. 2:12); the "consecrated" and "faithful ones" in Colossae are reminded that God "has delivered us from the authority (*exousia*) of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom (*basileia*) of the son of his love" (Col. 1:13); and the "consecrated ones" in Philippi are advised that their "politics" (*politeuesthe*) be worthy of the saving news (*euangelion*) of the Messiah" (Phil. 1:27), and

that their true “political identity (*politeuma*) resides in heaven” (Phil. 3:20).<sup>62</sup> These texts indicate that for Paul the civic and political authorities have, at minimum, only a penultimate character, if not that their reality is fundamentally subverted.<sup>63</sup> The political connotations of such terms as *ekklēsia* and *euangelion* have also been highlighted. Paul’s usage of *ekklēsia* is linked to the language of political assemblies of Hellenistic city-states and the corporate identity of Israel’s past,<sup>64</sup> and that of *euangelion* (gospel, good news) finds its closest counterpart usage in the rhetoric proclaiming the deliverance brought by the imperial order.<sup>65</sup>

Numerous titles of honor applied to the Messiah also appear to have significant political connotations, and some seem to directly challenge titles ascribed to the emperor. These include: *Christos* (Messiah, a title, not a name), *Kyrios* (Lord), and *Soter* (Deliverer, one time).<sup>66</sup> Commenting on Paul’s remark in Phil. 3:20 that from heaven (where their political identity resides) believers “await the Savior, the Lord Jesus, the Messiah,” N. T. Wright remarks:

These are Caesar-titles. The whole verse says: Jesus is Lord, and Caesar isn’t. Caesar’s empire, of which Philippi is the colonial outpost, is the parody; Jesus’ empire, of which the Philippian church is a colonial outpost, is the reality.<sup>67</sup>

Corresponding to this is the ascription of enthronement imagery, which directly rivals that of Hellenistic rulers and the Roman *imperium*, for instance in Phil. 2:5-11:

Messiah Jesus  
who, though he was in the form of God,  
did not count equality with God (*isa theō*) a thing to be grasped. . .  
Therefore God has highly exalted him  
and bestowed on him the name that is above every name,  
that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend, in heaven and  
on earth and under the earth. . . (Phil. 2:5, 9-10)

Read against honorific discourse of the ruler cults in the Greek East, features of this hymn (e.g., *isa theō*) appear as an ironic appropriation of terms central to the Greco-Roman patronage and imperial system.<sup>68</sup> In addition, it is argued that Paul’s rhetoric of *fides Messiah*, literally *pistis Christou* (faithfulness of

the Messiah), in reference to his bringing deliverance, is meant to rival the Roman rhetoric of *fides Augustus*.<sup>69</sup> In this connection, Paul's references to the *parousia* ("coming") of the Lord Messiah<sup>70</sup> mimic the formalized Roman references to the royal *adventus* of the emperor in deliverance, judgment, and celebration.<sup>71</sup>

Other claims of implicit anti-imperial rhetoric have been made for all of 1 Cor. as an argument for the realization of an alternative society over against the Roman patronage system;<sup>72</sup> for the opening chapter of Romans, read as a "defiant indictment of the rampant injustice and impiety of the Roman 'golden age,'" and "a direct challenge to the ritual and ceremony of empire";<sup>73</sup> and even for Paul's work in collecting a fund from the relatively more wealthy urbanites of Macedonia and Greece for the poor of Jerusalem.<sup>74</sup> Finally, Paul's attempts to preclude the use of civic courts for settling disputes within the Messiah's community illustrate a rather negative view of the civic judicial system:<sup>75</sup>

Does a brother . . . dare go to law before the unjust [civic courts] instead of the consecrated ones (*hagioi*, saints)? Do you not know that the consecrated ones will judge the world (*kosmos*)? Do you not know that we are to judge angels? (1 Cor. 6:1-3)

### **Paul's Own Experience of Arrest, Torture, Imprisonment, and Execution at the Hands of Roman and Civic Authorities**

Paul's own experience of arrest, torture, and imprisonment seems to confirm a critical posture toward the empire, while contradicting the presentation in Luke-Acts of the Roman authorities as the great protectors of the persecuted believers, a theme that seems intended to improve either the reputation of early Christians in the eyes of the Romans or the reputation of Rome in the eyes of Christians. Some scholars have thus even doubted the veracity of the repeated Lukan claim to Paul's Roman citizenship (Acts 16:37-38; 21:39; 22:25-29; 23:27). Paul's testimony is to having received torture at the hands of both Jewish authorities (2 Cor. 11:24, 26; cf. Gal. 5:11; 6:12) and Gentile authorities (2 Cor. 11:25-26, "three times beaten with rods"; cf. 11:32-33).

Paul was imprisoned by the Roman or provincial authorities at least four times: (1) probably Ephesus (Phil. 1:13; cf. 2 Cor. 1:8), the likely setting of Philippians, Philemon, and Colossians (if authentic); (2) in Philippi (see 1 Thess. 2:2 and Acts 16:23);<sup>76</sup> (3) Jerusalem and then Caesarea (Acts 21:27-26:32); and (4) Rome (Acts 28), where he was probably executed (cf. 1 Clement).

Paul claims as an honor the fact that he has been imprisoned, tortured, and near death (see 2 Cor. 1:8; cf. 4:16-5:5) far more than rival apostles of Jesus (2 Cor. 11:23; cf. “prisons,” 2 Cor. 6:5). Moreover, he thinks that it is important that he is imprisoned in particular as one who proclaims the gospel of the Messiah (Phil. 1:7, 12-17). Further, he presents his experiences as “a paradigm for . . . his communities generally” (Phil. 1:29-30; 1 Thess. 1:6; 2:14).<sup>77</sup> For Paul, no human tribunal can be feared (Rom. 8:33-34). Klaus Wengst reasons that Paul’s flogging, imprisonment, and execution do not invalidate the possibility of Roman citizenship, especially since the extra-judicial torture even of Roman citizens is known to historians (e.g., Josephus, *War*, II, 306-8). Even so, Paul’s experiences do mean (1) that Roman citizenship probably meant nothing to Paul (e.g., he preferred not to identify with the elite, but deliberately chose a loss of status),<sup>78</sup> and/or (2) that it meant nothing to the Romans. Wengst contends that Paul “did not have these experiences because he had committed some illegalities in the moral and legal sense but because as a Christian [sic]<sup>79</sup> his loyalty was suspect and because he continued to propagate being Christian, which was evidently felt to be a disturbance of the public order.”<sup>80</sup> Once Paul’s millennial ideology was decoded, it’s not hard to understand an execution on the grounds of treason. Paul had already pictured his execution in sacerdotal ways, as a participation in the path of the Messiah (Phil. 2:17; 2 Cor. 1:3-7; 2:14-16; cf. Col. 1:24).

### **Romans 13 and the Monumental Contradiction**

What, then, do we make of Romans 13? We seem to be left with a monumental contradiction. The Roman authorities themselves are seemingly exalted, albeit as “ordered” under God’s ultimate sovereignty, and the text seems to teach an almost blind obedience to them through the imposition of an apparently absolutist

subordination scheme:

Let every person be subject to the prevailing authorities (*exousiai*), for there is no authority (*exousia*) except from God, and those that exist have been ordered (*tassomai*) by God. So that the one who resists/revolts (*antitassomai*) against the authority (*exousia*, i.e., *imperium*), resists/revolts against the arrangement (*diatagē*) of God; and the ones who revolt (*anthistēmi*) will incur judgment upon themselves. The rulers (*archontes*) are not a terror to good conduct but to bad. . . . The authority (*exousia*) is God's minister (*diakonos*) for your good . . . to execute wrath on the evildoer. (Rom. 13:1-4)<sup>81</sup>

Whereas Rom. 12:19-20 presented God's sole prerogative for justice ("wrath"), now in Rom. 13 the Roman *imperium* is presented as "God's minister" for the maintenance of order and justice. Whereas elsewhere Paul parodies the Roman *imperium* and predicts its doom, here its legitimacy is apparently certified using the commonplaces of Jewish and Hellenistic political rhetoric.

Most contemporary interpreters have rejected the notion that Paul here presents a formal theory of the state, usable for creating Christian dogma, whether legitimizing all prevailing political authorities or framing the basis for an ideal Christian political authority. While some argue that the point of Rom. 13 is to highlight God's supreme authority (implicitly subverting that of Rome), others admit that "Paul's ideological defense of the state [is] difficult to understand, especially his appeal for subjection to the state and his way of describing the state and its officials in the traditional laudatory language of Hellenistic politics."<sup>82</sup> At most, expressed here is "the conventional prophetic-apocalyptic affirmation that God disposes the rise and fall of empires and gives the power of the sword into the hands of the ruler,"<sup>83</sup> without necessarily implying divine approval of the rulers' actions or of their fundamental legitimacy.

Those who wish to "rescue" Paul's more radical stance toward the authorities, as expressed elsewhere, highlight the situational and historical nature of the rhetoric, and the alienation of Jesus-followers from any corridor of imperial power. Explanations offered are that Paul was simply seeking (1) to preempt violent revolution among some who had joined the ranks of Messiah's community (and had not understood the nature of its "warfare of love"), (2)

to preclude further repercussions against the Roman Jesus-believing community (either the Gentile majority, the threatened Jewish minority, or both), (3) to rehabilitate Paul's own reputation within the Gentile-dominated community as being fully loyal to Rome,<sup>84</sup> or (4) to ensure that Paul's missionary plans, namely to make Rome as a base of operations for a campaign in Spain, are not thwarted.<sup>85</sup> Paul appears to apply the ethic of non-retaliation and peace (Rom. 12:13-14, 17-21) to a politically volatile situation. As some argue, the text is essentially an exhortation for caution and its warrants are auxiliary.<sup>86</sup> A similar tension between practical exhortation and theological warrant can be seen in 1 Cor. 11, where Paul calls the Corinthian community to be cautious with respect to scruples for women's head attire, exhorting women to cover their heads in worship, but introduces warrants which promote a hierarchical scheme in the cosmos and whose result is legitimized Christian misogyny through the eras: "the head of every man is Messiah, the head of a women is her husband, and the head of Messiah is God. . . . The man is the image and glory of God, but woman is the glory of man. For man was not made from woman, but woman from man; neither was man created for woman, but woman for man" (1 Cor. 11:3,7-9).

For some Christian interpreters who still seek to take Paul's voice seriously, Rom. 13 is only meaningful in the context of a broader biblical dialogue, for example, alongside Rev. 13, written forty years later, in which the Roman *imperium* is presented as the embodiment of the Great Dragon, Satan. Just as one would not go first to 1 Cor. 7 to deduce a Christian theology of marriage, so also one might not go first or exclusively to Rom. 13 for a Christian approach to the political authorities, let alone for a theory of the state itself.

Other interpreters are more inclined to challenge both Paul's rhetoric and its ideological underpinnings. While applauding the new anti-imperial or anti-Roman reading of Paul (as explicated especially by Horsley and Elliott), some on the liberationist side still see difficulties. Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, for instance, decries the implicit identification with Paul in these readings and the privileging of "the authorial master-voice of Paul," valorizing Paul's rhetoric over (against) the pluriform voices in the first-century assemblies of Jesus-believers. In particular she finds little comfort in finding an anti-imperial Paul while overlooking Paul's own "politics of 'othering'" within the community

itself, evident for instance in his vilifying rival missionaries and teachers, in silencing the voices of those who would differ with him, particularly women (e.g., Corinthian women prophets), and in his re-inscribing of hegemonic subordination schemes within the alternative community itself.<sup>87</sup> Accordingly, this interpretive approach sees little (and perhaps misleading) value in any attempt to “rescue” the political discourse of Rom. 13, since it also “revalorizes” and “reinscribes Paul’s rhetorics of subordination.”<sup>88</sup>

## Conclusions

What, then, might be some conclusions? (1) Texts within the Pauline corpus display considerable tension, ambivalence, even contradiction on the topic of Paul and politics. For instance, we seem to find two perspectives on the “powers”: on the one hand, they are to be redeemed and reconciled; on the other, they are to be conquered and destroyed. Undoubtedly, this, tension reflects to a large degree the situational character of Paul’s instrumental rhetoric. At the same time, it may be construed as a consequence of Paul’s own ambivalence and internal tension. On one side, some texts seem to indicate that he is caught up in the imperial system, lauding its benefits, and unwittingly using and legitimizing its themes and subordinationist ideology. On the other, Paul appears far more critical of the imperial powers than often granted by interpreters; and his rhetoric is certainly not apolitical.

A similar tension can be seen in Paul’s perspectives on gender and social order (slavery). While Paul understandably perpetuated the endemic patriarchy of his day, clear examples show his language contrasts to the usual gender moralists, and indicate his practice includes numerous women in his network of leaders. One explanation of this paradox is the interplay between “charisma” and “order” evident in his assemblies.<sup>89</sup> Perhaps Paul’s political perspective is fraught with a similar dynamic.<sup>90</sup> J. C. Beker, for instance, explains the tension using the language of the play between his apocalyptic “passion” and practical “sobriety.”<sup>91</sup> One could also point to Paul’s own hybridized cultural identity and status inconsistency as explanations.

(2) Given the variety of Paul’s rhetoric, and the fundamental primacy of Paul’s millennial horizon, Rom. 13 cannot (should not) function as the hermeneutical center or sole text for assessing Paul’s political perspective; 1

Cor. 2:6-8 and 15:24-28 could equally well be identified as a hermeneutical starting points.

(3) Paul's practical political vision focuses on the emergence of an alternative society, local communities of character and resistance in anticipation of God's coming triumph, and not on extending the "ecclesial revolution" to society at large.<sup>92</sup> Yet, even here one can complain that Paul's manifesto of a new humanity in which old distinctions based on gender, class, and ethnicity are subverted (esp. Gal. 3:26-28), is not applied consistently or comprehensively.<sup>93</sup> Paul, it seems, was uncompromising on the matter of ending *distinctions* based on ethnicity (not on ending *differences*), but was compromising when it came to applying the ending of distinctions based on gender and social class/status. He made steps in the latter areas, but chose the first as his main arena of battle. The legacy of the church after Paul was to go back on even the small strides made by Paul in those areas.

(4) Given the diversity of Paul's rhetoric, multiple readings of his political perspective will remain. One might say that some readings should be given greater validity, based on whether the interpretation is in harmony with the overall biblical drama of God's reclamation of all creation toward peace and justice (e.g., Rom. 14:17), that is, to the extent that they are emancipatory. While some subordinationist and "othering" texts may not be easily rescued, the overall direction of Paul's rhetoric, in my opinion, is still amenable to — even demands — an emancipatory reading. In contexts in which Paul's authorial voice is venerated, it will be natural to highlight Paul's anti-imperial perspective, somewhat against the grain of received interpretations. On the other hand, in contexts where readers are open to placing Paul in broader dialogue with other voices in the Christian canon and in the emerging Christian assemblies (and otherwise silenced), it will be appropriate to highlight how Paul *both* reinscribes *and* challenges imperial and subordinationist schemes.

## **Notes**

<sup>1</sup> For references, see e.g., H. D. Betz, "Paul," *The Anchor Bible Dictionary* (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 5:187.

<sup>2</sup> For a recent discussion that eerily came just before September 11, see Lewis A. Lapham, "The American Rome: On the Theory of Virtuous Empire," *Harper's Magazine* (August 2001), 31-38.



<sup>3</sup> Arif Dirlik, "The Postcolonial Aura: Third World Criticism in the Age of Global Capitalism," *Critical Inquiry* 20/1 (1994): 329.

<sup>4</sup> E.g., R. S. Sugirtharajah, *Asian Biblical Hermeneutics and Postcolonialism: Contesting the Interpretations* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1998), 3-28; Ankie Hoogvelt, *Globalization and the Postcolonial World: The New Political Economy of Development* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997), 153-61.

<sup>5</sup> E.g., R. S. Sugirtharajah, *The Postcolonial Bible*, *The Bible and Postcolonialism* 1 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998); Fernando Segovia, *Decolonizing Biblical Studies: A View from the Margins* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 2000); R. S. Sugirtharajah, *The Bible and the Third World: Precolonial, Colonial, and Postcolonial Encounters* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

<sup>6</sup> Musa W. Dube, *Postcolonial Feminist Interpretation of the Bible* (St. Louis: Chalis Press, 2000). Note also the forthcoming *Postcolonial Bible Commentary*, edited by R. S. Sugirtharajah, and the new consultation within the Society of Biblical Studies, New Testament Studies and Postcolonial Studies, chaired by Fernando Segovia and Stephen Moore.

<sup>7</sup> R. S. Sugirtharajah, *Asian Biblical Hermeneutics*, 15, remarks: "It must be stressed that it is not a homogenous project, but a hermeneutical salmagundi, consisting of extremely varied methods, materials, historical entanglements, geographical locations, political affiliations, cultural identities, and economic predicaments."

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 17.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 15-16. Thus to treat postcolonialism as a subspecies of Eurocentric postmodernism is to engage in intellectual imperialism.

<sup>10</sup> Neil Elliott, *Liberating Paul: The Justice of God and the Politics of the Apostle* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1994), 74-75, 83-84.

<sup>11</sup> E.g., Paul W. Meyer, "Pauline Theology: A Proposal for a Pause in Its Pursuit," in *Pauline Theology, Vol. IV: Looking Back, Pressing On*, ed. E. Elizabeth Johnson and David M. Hay (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1997), 140-60.

<sup>12</sup> E.g., Rom. 13:1-7; 1 Cor. 7:17-24; 11:2-16; 14:34-35; Col. 3:18-4:1.

<sup>13</sup> For a brief review, see Elliott, *Liberating Paul*, 37-40.

<sup>14</sup> See, e.g., Sugirtharajah, *Asian Biblical Hermeneutics*, 20: "Paul, a genuine immigrant by current political standards, gives the impression in his writings that he has been fully co-opted into the imperial system. An example occurs in Romans 13, in which he reinscribes colonial values by asserting that God and history are on the side of the Roman Empire. The sensible thing for Christians, Paul writes, is to live peaceably with the colonial administration and to work within its framework, rather than to revolt. The almighty Roman power was hardly questioned in his epistles, except in teleological terms. Occasionally he censures the evils of the Empire, but offers no political strategy or practical solution for its liquidation." For North American feminist responses, see n. 87.

<sup>15</sup> Maryknoll: Orbis, 1994.

<sup>16</sup> Klaus Wengst, *Pax Romana and the Peace of Jesus Christ*, trans. J. Bowden (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1987), esp. 79-89; see also his *Humility: Solidarity of the Humiliated*, trans. J. Bowden (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1987).

<sup>17</sup> Dieter Georgi, *Theocracy in Paul's Praxis and Theology*, trans. D. Green (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991).

<sup>18</sup> Richard Horsley, ed., *Paul and Empire: Religion and Power in Roman Imperial Society* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 1997).

<sup>19</sup> Richard Horsley, *Paul and Politics: Ekklēsia, Israel, Imperium, Interpretation: Essays in Honor of Krister Stendahl* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 2000).

<sup>20</sup> E.g., H. D. Betz, "Paul," 187.

<sup>21</sup> In textbook after textbook, the great virtues of the Pax Romana, along with the imperial conquests of Alexander, are celebrated as providing the fertile ground for the spread of the gospel, as if the gospel of the cross really needed such power structures in order to thrive. For an alternative reading of the Roman empire, see, e.g., Wengst, *Pax Romana*, 7-54; Horsley, *Paul and Empire*, 10-137.

<sup>22</sup> The Latin term "command," used to refer to the Roman state and its "sovereignty" and "authority."

<sup>23</sup> Thus also O. Cullmann, *The State in the New Testament* (New York: Scribner's, 1956), 50-70.

<sup>24</sup> In addition to the letters deemed "undisputed" by biblical scholars, I tend to treat Colossians also as an "authentic" letter of Paul. Once Paul is taken out of a dogmatic straitjacket, or freed from the assumption of absolute logical consistency (e.g., Romans 6 vs. Col. 3) and from the demand to have his ethics cleaned up (Col. 3:18-4:1; cf. 1 Cor. 7, 11), and treated as a rhetorician, the arguments against the authenticity of Colossians become less convincing. The linguistic and stylistic arguments themselves are not decisive, and the more spatially framed millenarianism of Colossians is not absolutely incompatible with that of the undisputed letters. In this essay I address the perspective of Paul as he is available to historical reconstruction, as opposed to the Paul of the canon, or the Paul of history, canon, and legend.

<sup>25</sup> See J. C. Beker, *Paul the Apostle: The Triumph of God in Life and Thought* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1980).

<sup>26</sup> For a helpful typology, see Bryan Wilson, *Magic and the Millennium: A Sociological Study of Religious Movements of Protest among Tribal and Third-World Peoples* (New York: Harper & Row, 1973).

<sup>27</sup> Fiorenza, "Paul and the Politics of Interpretation," in *Paul and Politics*, 55, refers to both the critical and the conforming function that is potential with millennial ideology.

<sup>28</sup> Reynaldo Ileto, *Pasyon and Revolution: Popular Movements in the Philippines, 1840-1910* (Manila: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 1979).

<sup>29</sup> Richard Horsley, *Jesus and the Spiral of Violence: Popular Resistance in Roman Palestine* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1987), 121-45; Elliott, *Liberating Paul*, 141-80.

<sup>30</sup> See esp. the thesis of J. C. Beker, *Paul the Apostle*; for an application of Paul's apocalyptic heritage to his anti-imperial perspective, see R. Horsley, "Rhetoric and Empire — and 1 Corinthians," in *Paul and Politics*, 93-102.

<sup>31</sup> Judith Kovaks, "The Archons, the Spirit, and the Death of Christ: Do We Really Need the Hypothesis of Gnostic Opponents to Explain 1 Cor. 2:6-16?" in *Apocalyptic in the New Testament: Essays in Honor of J. Louis Martyn*, eds. J. Marcus and M. Soards, JSNT Supplements 24 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1989), 224.

<sup>32</sup> Krister Stendahl, "Hate, Non-retaliation, and Love: 1QS x, 17-20 and Rom. 12:19-21," *Harvard*

*Theological Review* 55 (1962): 345. For a discussion of whether Paul's ethic of non-retaliation is merely an apocalyptic restraint, or also tied to the values of love and reconciliation, see Gordon Zerbe, "Paul's Ethic of Non-retaliation and Peace," in *The Love of Enemy and Nonretaliation in the New Testament*, ed. W. Swartley (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1992), 177-222.

<sup>33</sup> Contra, e.g., J. D. G. Dunn, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 104-10.

<sup>34</sup> Walter Wink, *Naming the Powers: The Language of Power in the New Testament* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984); *Engaging the Powers: Discernment and Resistance in a World of Domination* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992), 65-85.

<sup>35</sup> Discomfort with this last theme is evident among interpreters. It is de-emphasized by Wink, *Naming the Powers*, 59-63; and these last two texts are also absent in the discussion of the "powers" by John Howard Yoder, *The Politics of Jesus: Vicit Agnus Noster* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972), 135-62.

<sup>36</sup> Georgi, *Theocracy*, 52-57.

<sup>37</sup> Richard Horsley, "1 Corinthians: A Case Study of Paul's Assembly as an Alternative Society," in *Paul and Empire*, 244.

<sup>38</sup> E.g., G. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 103-104.

<sup>39</sup> E.g., R. Horsley, "1 Corinthians," 244.

<sup>40</sup> Wink, *Naming the Powers*, 40-45; Cullmann, *The State*, 62-64; cf. Elliott, *Liberating Paul*, 110-13, who interprets the powers in terms of the "mythic symbolism of Jewish apocalypses," such that Pilate's individuality is seemingly dissolved. While not referring to a specific, official miscarriage of justice, the phrase still refers to the cosmic powers who stand behind the earthly actors. "We should marvel, not that Paul can speak of his 'word of the cross' without specifically identifying Pilate, but that his indictment goes beyond Pilate to include all the powers of heaven and earth together that stand hostile to God" (113). Paul refuses to demonize a particular individual, but rather invites discernment to see how the powers are embodied.

<sup>41</sup> See esp. Elliott, *Liberating Paul*, 105-31.

<sup>42</sup> For texts and scholarly discussion, see Elliott, *Liberating Paul*, 254, n. 55.

<sup>43</sup> On the notion of cross as God's burlesque, in the treatment of the phrase *skandalon tou staurou* (scandal of the cross), see Georgi, *Theocracy*, 46-51.

<sup>44</sup> Rom. 8:18-39; 15:12; 16:20; 1 Cor. 2:6-8; 6:2-3; 15:23-29; Phil. 1:27-30; 2:9-11; 3:20-21; Gal. 1:4; 1 Thess. 4:13-5:11.

<sup>45</sup> E.g., 1 Thess. 4:13-18: "caught up in the clouds," "meet the Lord in the air"; 2 Cor. 4:16-5:10, longing for the building from God, eternal in the heavens; Phil. 3:20, "our citizenship is in heaven"; Phil. 1:23-26, longing to depart and be with Messiah; Col. 1:5: "hope stored up in heaven"; Col. 1:12: to share in "the inheritance of the saints in light"; 1 Cor. 15:50: "flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God"; 1 Cor. 15:19: pitied if only for this life to have hoped in Messiah. Cf. the notions of "immortality", 2 Cor. 5:4; and physical transformation — 1 Cor. 15:20-28; Phil. 3:21; Rom. 8:23.

<sup>46</sup> See esp. Rom. 8:29.

<sup>47</sup> Occurring a mere 11 times in the undisputed letters, 16 times if Colossians is included, compared with 273 in the entire New Testament.

<sup>48</sup> E.g., Rom. 1:18; 2 Cor. 5:2; 1 Thess. 1:10; 4:16; cf. Rom. 11:26 (Zion as heavenly Zion).

<sup>49</sup> Phil. 3:20; Col. 1:5; cf. Gal. 4:26 (the Jerusalem above). See the comments on Phil. 3:20 by Andrew Lincoln, *Paradise Now and Not Yet*, SNTS Monograph Series 43 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 193, 63: "It is not, as has often been thought, that heaven as such is the homeland of Christians to which they, as perpetual foreigners on earth, must strive to return, but rather that since their Lord is in heaven, their life is to be governed by the heavenly commonwealth." "Paul often conceives of objects and events normally associated with the end-time as existing already in heaven (e.g., the Jerusalem above in Galatians 4:26)."

<sup>50</sup> E.g., Rom. 8:18-25.

<sup>51</sup> E.g., 1 Cor. 15:20-28; 35-57; 1 Thess. 4:16 (trumpet imagery); Rom. 8:18-25, 37; 11:25-26, 32, 36; 15:12; 16:20; Phil. 1:27-28; 2:9-11; as the "day" (1 Cor. 1:8; Phil. 2:16) and as involving judgment, destruction and wrath (1 Thess. 1:10; 5:1-11; Phil. 1:27-30; 3:17-21; Rom. 1:18; 2:5-16; 1 Cor. 4:5). Cf. the promise that believers are "given all things", Rom. 8:32; "inherit the cosmos", Rom. 4:13; judge the cosmos and angels, 1 Cor. 6:2-3; on the judgment of believers, cf. Rom. 14:10-12; 1 Cor. 4:4-5; 11:27-32; 2 Cor. 5:10.

<sup>52</sup> 1 Thess. 4:13-18; Phil. 1:23-26; Rom. 8:39; Col. 1:12-13; 3:3; Gal. 2:19-20; 1 Cor. 13:10-12.

<sup>53</sup> Rom. 14:17.

<sup>54</sup> "Glory," "glorification": e.g., Rom. 8:17, 30; 2 Cor. 4:17; Phil. 4:20; Col. 3:3; language of "life" and "age-like life" — Rom. 8:13; Gal. 6:7. On the use of "glory" in Paul, see Carey C. Newman, *Paul's Glory-Christology: Tradition and Rhetoric* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1992).

<sup>55</sup> Beker, *Paul the Apostle*, 313.

<sup>56</sup> E.g., Rom. 13:11-14; cf. Paul's reference to fellow "soldiers": Phil. 2:25; Philemon 2.

<sup>57</sup> Thomas Yoder Neufeld, *'Put on the Armour of God': The Divine Warrior from Isaiah to Ephesians* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997).

<sup>58</sup> See also Rom. 13:11-14; 2 Cor. 10:3-4 for warfare imagery and Rom. 8:32, 37 for conquest imagery. Cf. Eph. 6:10-20.

<sup>59</sup> In this text, the divine warfare is directed against the community itself (2 Cor. 10:5-6, 8; 13:10), as often in prophetic holy war texts of Israel.

<sup>60</sup> Compare the assertion (without argument) by M. Desjardins, *Peace, Violence and the New Testament*, The Biblical Seminar 46 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997), 82: "the military metaphors so loved by Paul are not his attempts to 'spiritualize' what he considered unworthy of Christianity; rather, they reflect his recognition of the importance and worth of the military — or at least his acceptance of it."

<sup>61</sup> See H. Koester, "Imperial Ideology and Paul's Eschatology in 1 Thessalonians," in *Paul and Empire*, 158-66.

<sup>62</sup> See above, n. 49, and the remarks on Phil. 3:20 by Fiorenza, "Paul and the Politics of Interpretation," 55: "The '*politeuma* in heaven' has usually been understood in dualistic terms as 'pie in the sky' or as otherworldly spiritualized reality that has nothing to do with the reality and politics of the earthly Roman Empire. However, if one understands 'otherworldliness' and 'heaven' not as negation of humanness and creation, but as the site of G\*d's justice and well-being that is traditionally called 'salvation,' then one can conceptualize the Divine *politeuma* as the theological location from where a radical critique of oppressive 'earthly' structures becomes possible."

<sup>63</sup> Also on the notion that the Messianic can never legitimate the political order but can only

relativize and ultimately replace it, see the remarks by Jewish philosopher Jacob Taubes, *Die Politische Theologie des Paulus*, ed. Aleida Assmann and Jan Assmann (Munich: Wilhelm Fink Verlag, 1993), 178-80.

<sup>64</sup> E.g., Beker, *Paul*, 313-17; Georgi, *Theocracy*, 57-58.

<sup>65</sup> Georgi, *Theocracy*, 83; see also N. T. Wright, "Paul's Gospel and Caesar's Empire," in *Paul and Politics*, 164-65.

<sup>66</sup> See esp. Wright, "Paul's Gospel and Caesar's Empire," 166-70, 173.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, 173.

<sup>68</sup> Erik Heen, "Phil 2:6-11 and Resistance to Local Rule: The Use of *isa the* in the Civic and Christian Cult," paper presented to the Society of Biblical Literature Annual Meeting, Nashville, TN, 2000. Abstract in *Society of Biblical Literature 2000 Abstracts* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2000), 106. For another example of a possibly politically charged hymn to the Messiah, see Rom. 1:3-4.

<sup>69</sup> Georgi, *Theocracy*, 36-44, 83-84. See Gal. 2:16, 20; 3:22; Rom. 3:22, 26; Phil. 3:9.

<sup>70</sup> Notably in 1 Cor. 15:23; 1 Thess. 2:19; 3:13; 4:15; 5:23.

<sup>71</sup> For references, see, e.g., W. Bauer, W. Arndt, F. Gingrich, and F. Danker, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 2nd edition (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979), s.v. *parousia*.

<sup>72</sup> R. Horsley, "1 Corinthians: A Case Study of Paul's Assembly as an Alternative Society," in *Paul and Empire*, 242-52; "Rhetoric and Empire — and 1 Corinthians," in *Paul and Politics*, 72-102; Georgi, *Theocracy*, 52-60.

<sup>73</sup> Neil Elliott, "Paul and the Politics of Empire: Problems and Prospects," in *Paul and Politics*, 37-39.

<sup>74</sup> Sze-kar Wan, "Collection for the Saints as an Anticolonial Act: Implications of Paul's Ethnic Reconstruction," in *Paul and Politics*, 191-215. Noted is Paul's rejection of vertical Roman patronal structures and his emphasis on the new Messianic, eschatological universalism.

<sup>75</sup> Especially highlighted by O. Cullmann (*The State in the New Testament*, 60-62) as providing a counterpart to Paul's positive remarks about the authorities in Romans 13.

<sup>76</sup> In 1 Thess. 2:2 Paul refers to his flogging (Acts 16:20-24) as "maltreatment."

<sup>77</sup> See esp. Wengst, *Pax Romana*, 76.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, 75; on Paul's deliberate move down the social ladder, see Elliott, *Liberating Paul*, 57-66.

<sup>79</sup> To use the term "Christian" at this stage of the emergence of Christianity is anachronistic.

<sup>80</sup> Wengst, *Pax Romana*, 75.

<sup>81</sup> Author's translation. Deciding on the translation of this text itself is notoriously difficult, and politically charged: are the readers invited to "be subordinate" or to "be subject" (*hypotassomai*); are the authorities "ordered/arranged" or "ordained/instituted" (*tassomai*, <*taxis*; *diatag*, <*diatassomai*) by God; are the readers called not to "resist" generally or not to "revolt" (*antitassomai*; *anthist mi*) in some more specific sense?

<sup>82</sup> Beker, *Paul*, 326.

<sup>83</sup> Elliott, *Liberating Paul*, 224. Cf. Isa. 44:2-8; 45:1-7 (Cyrus as God's "anointed"); Jer. 25:9; 27:6; 43:10 (Nebuchadrezzar as God's "servant"); Dan. 2:37.

<sup>84</sup> Wengst, *Pax Romana*, 82.

<sup>85</sup> See esp. Neil Elliott, “Romans 13:1-7 in the Context of Imperial Propaganda,” in *Paul and Empire*, 184-204.

<sup>86</sup> E.g., Jan Botha, *Subject to Whose Authority? Multiple Readings of Romans 13* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1994), 219-26.

<sup>87</sup> Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, “Paul and the Politics of Interpretation,” in *Paul and Politics*, 40-57. For classic works on recovering the voices of the silenced in first-century Christianity, see esp. E. Schüssler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her: A Feminist Theological Reconstruction of Christian Origins* (New York: Crossroad, 1983); Antoinette Clark Wire, *The Corinthian Women Prophets: A Reconstruction through Paul’s Rhetoric* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990); for more critical analyses of Paul, see also Elizabeth Castelli, *Imitating Paul: A Discourse of Power* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1991); Cynthia Briggs Kittredge, *Community and Authority: The Rhetoric of Obedience in the Pauline Tradition* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 1998).

<sup>88</sup> Fiorenza, “Paul and the Politics of Interpretation,” 53.

<sup>89</sup> That is, the leadership roles for numerous women in Paul’s circles (e.g., Rom. 16) can be explained in terms of the expression of “charisma,” the giftedness of the assemblies which is not distributed by gender and which interrupts prevailing patriarchal norms for ordering communities. In Colossians, however, it appears that the concern for “order” (*taxis*, 2:6; cf. 3:18-4:1) overtakes the democratizing role of charisma. Other texts expressing explicit concern for communal “order” are 1 Cor. 14:40 (*taxis*), 1 Cor. 7:35 (*eusch’mon*, decorum, good form), 1 Cor. 14:33 and 2 Cor. 12:20 (vs. *akatastasia*, disorder), and 1 Thess. 5:14 (vs. the *atakttoi*, disorderly, out of rank, insubordinate). Georgi (*Theocracy*, 60-61) claims, however, on the basis of 1 Cor. 14:33, that Paul plainly distinguishes between “peace” and “order,” favoring the former over against contemporary ideology.

<sup>90</sup> See also the argument that Paul’s remarks on the Jewish Torah are fundamentally incoherent: Heikki Räisänen, *Paul and the Law* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983).

<sup>91</sup> J. C. Beker, *The Triumph of God: The Essence of Paul’s Thought* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress Press, 1990), 35-36.

<sup>92</sup> For a discussion of this, see esp. Beker, *Paul the Apostle*, 325-27.

<sup>93</sup> E.g., Beker, *Paul the Apostle*, 322.