

Yamauchi
LECTURES IN RELIGION

Paul Past and
Present: Five
Specific Issues

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The Yamauchi Lectures in Religion series, established in 1985, is named in memory of the Rev. H. James Yamauchi, S.J., a former chair of Loyola's Department of Religious Studies who taught at Loyola from 1956 to 1966. Yamauchi was known for his effective and enthusiastic communication of knowledge about the religions to the New Orleans community.

About the Rev. Jan Lambrecht, S.J., Ph.D.

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His books in English include *Once More Astonished: The Parables of Jesus* (New York: Crossroad, 1981); *The Sermon on the Mount: Proclamation and Exhortation* (GNS 14; Wilmington, Del.: Glazier, 1985); *Justification by Faith: The Implications of Romans 3:27-31* (with Richard W. Thompson; Zacchaeus Studies; Wilmington, Del.: Glazier, 1989); *Out of the Treasure: The Parables in the Gospel of Matthew* (Leuven: Peeters, 1992); *The Wretched 'I' and Its Liberation: Paul in Romans 7 and 8* (Leuven; Peeters, 1992); and the commentary *Second Corinthians* (Sacra Pagina 8; Collegeville, Minn.: The Liturgical Press, 1999). Thirty recent articles are brought together in *Collected Studies on Pauline Literature and on The Book of Revelation* (Analecta Biblica 147; Rome: Editrice Pontificio Istituto Biblico, 2001). Dr. Veronica Koperski edited twenty-two more of his studies in *Understanding What One Reads. New Testament Essays* (Annua Lovaniensia, 46; Leuven - Paris - Dudley, MA: Peeters, 2003).

In his Letter to the Galatians, Paul presents himself as "an apostle not from human beings nor through a human being but through Jesus Christ and God the Father who raised him from the dead" (Gal 1:1). In his First Letter to the Corinthians, Paul sees himself as "called to be an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God" (1 Cor 1:1), and in the Epistle to the Romans as "the apostle to the Gentiles" (Rom 11:13; cf. 11:5; 15:16 and 18; Gal 1:16; 2:2 and 8-9). By some commentators, Paul has been considered as the thirteenth apostle; his well-known expression "sola fide" can be seen as the eleventh commandment, and the proclamation "sola gratia" and "without the works of the law" as no less than a fifth gospel. But what Paul writes in his letters is not always easy to understand.

In this lecture, I would like to deal with five specific important items. For each we must first attempt to detect exactly what Paul meant (a); then, we should reflect how a better insight regarding the ideas and convictions of the apostle allows us to quite rightly speak of a Pauline spirituality for Christians today (b). No exhaustive treatment of Paul's theology should be expected. Thus nothing is said about Paul in Acts; the delicate question of Paul and Israel is not dealt with, nor that of Paul and his opponents. Moreover, only the seven undisputed Pauline letters will be referred to and cited.

As you probably remember, on June 28, 2007, eve of the Solemnity of Saints Peter and Paul, Pope Benedict XVI, in the Basilica of St. Paul Outside the Walls in Rome, declared a Year of St. Paul to mark the symbolic 2,000th anniversary of the Apostle to the Gentiles. That year will run from June 28, 2008, until June 29, 2009. Hopefully this lecture will function as an early but timely preparation for the coming Pauline Year.

1. Conversion or Call

- a) A first question to be asked is whether one should speak of Paul's conversion or of his call. There can be no doubt that one day Paul experienced the invasion, the sudden unexpected irruption of God into his life. That life he refers to as "my former life in Judaism" and he characterizes his old self as a "zealot for my ancestral traditions." But God, who from his mother's womb had set him apart and called him through his grace, was pleased to reveal his Son to him (cf. Gal 1:13-16). Paul evidently refers here to what today is termed the Damascus event.

God's revelation resulted in a radical break for Paul. In Philippians, he writes: "If anyone else thinks he can be confident in flesh, all the more can I. Circumcised on the eighth day, of the race of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of the Hebrew parentage, in observance of the law a Pharisee, in zeal I persecuted the church, in righteousness based on the law I was blameless. But whatever gains I had, these I have come to consider a loss because of Christ. More than that, I even consider everything as a loss because of the supreme good of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have accepted the loss of all things and I consider them so much rubbish, that I may gain Christ" (3:4-8). Paul realizes that he is the least of the apostles, not fit to be called an apostle, because he persecuted the church of God. But he adds: "By the grace of God I am what I am and his grace to me has not been ineffective. Indeed, I have toiled harder than all of them, not I however, but the grace of God [that is] with me" (cf. 1 Cor 15:9-10).

While saying "I am what I am," the self-conscious Paul must have felt that he went one step too far and he immediately corrects himself: God's grace did it with me! Yet one has only to look at the impressive, realistic lists of circumstances (the rightly famous *Peristasenkataloge*) in the Second Letter to the Corinthians to be overwhelmed by that new 'ego' of the converted Paul: what he did, what he suffered, what he felt, and what he boasts of in foolishness while attacking his Jewish Christian opponents. "Are they Hebrews? So am I. Are they Israelites? So am I. Are they descendants of Abraham? So am I. Are they ministers of Christ? (I am talking like an insane person.) I am still more, with far greater labors, far more imprisonments, far worse beatings, and numerous brushes with death. Five times at the hands of the Jews I received forty lashes minus one" (11:22-24). The enumeration of sufferings and labors continues. But we ask, is this radically changed and transformed Paul no longer a Jew?

To be sure, many things have become different. Paul has become really free. In First Corinthians, he can even state: "To the Jews I became like a Jew to win over Jews; to those under the law I became like one under the law—though I myself am not under the law—to win over those under the law. To those outside the law I became like one outside the law—though I am not outside God's law but within the law of Christ—to win over those outside the law. To the weak I became weak, to win over the weak. I have become all things to all, to save at least some. All this I do for the sake of the gospel...." (1 Cor 9:20-23).

Yet, in what perhaps is Paul's last letter, that to the Romans, it appears that Paul considers himself to have remained a Jew: "For I could wish that I myself were accursed and separated from Christ for the sake of my brothers, my kin according to the flesh" (9:3) and, even more clearly in chapter 11: "I ask, then, has God rejected his people? Of course not! For I too am an Israelite, a descendant of Abraham, of the tribe of Benjamin. God has not rejected his people whom he foreknew" (11:1-2). So with regard to Paul it is better not to speak of a conversion from one religion to another, from Judaism to Christianity, but of God's call: Paul, remaining a Jew, became a servant, "a slave of Christ Jesus" (Rom 1:1); he became the apostle to the Gentiles.

- b) A first reflection with regard to Pauline spirituality today should contain a threefold focus—admiration, appeal, transformation. First, admiration for Paul's obedience to his call, for his work and labors, for his astonishingly generous apostolic care. Second, the thoroughly human face of a Paul who knows who he is and dares to compare himself with others, must in no way, however, diminish the challenge to follow his example. To the Christians in Philippi he writes: "Join with others in being imitators of me, brothers and sisters, and observe those who thus conduct themselves according to the model you have in us" (3:17); and to those in Corinth: "Even if you should have countless guides to Christ, yet you do not have many fathers, for I became your father in Christ Jesus through the gospel. Therefore, I urge you, be imitators of me" (1 Cor 4:15-16). Third, becoming a Christian signifies for non-Jewish people today changing religion. This was not the case for Paul; he remained a Jew. Yet although authentic faith in Christ will radically alter and transform the modern convert, much of what we are by birth and tradition could and should remain: gender and race, language and culture. There is no opposition between creation and redemption.

2. Christ and the Law

- a) About the year 49 or 50, Barnabas and Paul went up from Antioch to Jerusalem and met with James, Peter, and John, who, according to Paul, were reputed to be the "pillars" of the community. Titus, a Gentile convert was brought with them from Antioch as a test-case. Although he was a Greek, Titus was not compelled to be circumcised. Nothing was added to the gospel preached by Paul. "On the contrary, when they saw that I had been entrusted with the gospel to the uncircumcised, just as Peter to the circumcised..., when they recognized the grace bestowed upon me, James and Cephas and John ... gave me and Barnabas their right hands in partnership, that we should go to the Gentiles and they to the circumcised" (cf. Gal 2:1-9). However, not long after this agreement at the end of the so-called Council of Jerusalem the incident of Antioch regrettably complicated the matter.

In Romans 10, Paul concisely states what is needed for salvation: "If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved" (v. 9). In 1 Corinthians 15, the early Christian creed contains four discrete clauses: "that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures; that he was buried; that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the scriptures; that he appeared to Cephas" (vv. 3-5). The first and the third are long and theologically loaded clauses which, one could say, find their historical proof in the brief second and fourth clauses: burial means really dead, and appearance means really risen. Christ crucified is the expiation of our sins; he is our justification and our reconciliation. This Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep. In the christological hymn of Phillipians 2:6-11, Paul expands the dimensions of life, death, and resurrection even more. Before his incarnation, Christ was pre-existent in the form of God; he did not regard equality with God something to be grasped, or used for his own advantage. The same Christ is also, as it were, 'post-existent': God greatly exalted him, God gave him the name that is above every name, so that every knee should bend and every tongue confess to the glory of God the Father: "Jesus Christ is Lord" for ever and ever.

But we must return to the Antiochian incident. Peter was inconsistent. First he used to eat with the Gentile Christians; but when some conservative Jewish Christians, people from James, arrived in

Antioch, he began to draw back and he separated himself. Others followed his example and even Barnabas was carried away by this hypocrisy. Paul reacts vehemently: You Peter and I Paul, we are Jews by nature and not sinners from among the Gentiles. Yet we know that a person is not justified by works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ and therefore we too became believers in Christ (cf. Gal 2,11-16). Not "by works of the law": the expression is repeated several times in Galatians and appears also in Romans. One almost spontaneously asks: why not? If one observes the law, keeps the commandments, does the will of God devoutly and humbly, why should he or she not be saved?

Paul, however, appears to be convinced that nobody has been capable of observing the whole law, that all, not only the Gentiles but also the Jews, are sinners, that all are deprived of the glory of God and therefore in need of God's mercy. It would seem that the works of the law are lacking. Those works are not in the first place circumcision, avoidance of unclean food, violation of sabbath. No, Paul means above all grave moral sins as he extensively explains in Romans 1 - 3.

Just as more than once elsewhere, Paul, in Romans 7, defends the law: "the law is holy, and the commandment is holy and righteous and good," and also: "the law is spiritual" (vv. 12 and 14). The problem, however, is that sin, or better the personified culprit Sin (with capital!) seized the opportunity in the commandment and produced in human beings every kind of covetousness. Thus, although the law is good and holy, Sin worked death in us by means of the law; through the commandment Sin became sinful beyond measure. What Paul writes in verse 15 about the miserable, wretched "I" is well-known: "What I do, I do not understand. For I do not do what I want, but I do what I hate," and in verse 19: "I do not do the good I want, but I do the evil I do not want." Without Christ the situation is hopeless. To be "under the law" is to be a sinner, in need of redemption! In a retrospective way thus Paul looks back to his own previous existence without Christ and to the analogous situation of every Jew, yes of everybody.

But what exactly is Paul's problem with the law? According to Galatians it came four hundred and thirty years later than God's promise to Abraham, the covenant ratified by God (Gal 3:17); unlike the promise, the law was (only) promulgated by angels at the hand of a mediator, Moses (3:19); Israel was held in custody under law, confined for the faith that was to be revealed (3:23); the law was but a disciplinarian for Christ (3:24-25); and as for the Christians in

Galatia who now want to live like Jews, that so much desired new life under the law can be compared with that of their previous idolatry, their slavery under the elemental powers (4:3 and 9). So far Paul's Letter to the Galatians. According to Romans the function of the law is to bring consciousness of sin (Rom 3:20); the law entered in so that transgressions might increase in number and gravity (5:20); the law awakens our sinful passions (7:5) and, finally, as we already said, the holy law has sadly been misused by Sin (7:7-13).

But Paul proclaims: now we are justified by faith in Jesus Christ. We are no longer enslaved by Sin, we are no longer in custody under law. In Galatians 5:1, Paul writes: "For freedom Christ set us free; so stand firm and do not submit again to the yoke of slavery," and in 5:13: "You were called for freedom, brothers and sisters. But do not use this freedom as an opportunity for the flesh; rather, serve one another through love." It must strike the reader of Galatians that Paul, who in his negative depictions so denigrated—one would say—the law, immediately after verse 13 explicitly mentions that same law and writes: "The whole law is fulfilled in one statement, namely, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself'" (5:14). This summary statement should be compared with that of Romans 13:8-10: "Owe nothing to anyone, except to love one another; for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law. The commandments, 'You shall not commit adultery; you shall not kill; you shall not steal; you shall not covet,' and whatever other commandment there may be, are summed up in this saying, [namely] 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' Love does not do evil to the neighbor; hence, love is the fulfillment of the law."

It must be added, however, that the many exhortations in Paul's letters are not motivated by so many references to the law but by the presence of the Holy Spirit in the believers. Yet one cannot but refer also to Galatians 6:2: "Bear one another's burdens, and so you will fulfill the law of Christ." Of course, the law of Christ is the whole law that is fulfilled in the one commandment of love (cf. 5:14).

- b) Jesus Christ and the law. What is our reaction at the end of this paragraph? Most of us may be of the opinion that Paul exaggerates in his negative picture of the law and that there appears to be in his letters, teaching, and exhortation together, a tension, if not a contradiction: no longer in custody under the law according to the doctrine, yes, but the commandments of the law return in the parenthesis.

Of course, not enough gratitude can be shown for God's liberation through Christ. Certainly, the Christian of today must avoid a legalistic keeping of the law as if human deeds and works of the law without God's grace could bring about salvation and "merit" it. And Christians today are not bound by the so-called Jewish identity marks: they rightly neglect the commandment of circumcision, the food regulations, and the calendar stipulations for holy times. One cannot reflect, of course, on Romans 7 without duly realizing that a sinning Christian can fall back into that stalemate situation of wanting the good but doing the evil. Romans 7 contains a warning for all of us.

True Pauline spirituality for today is expressed at its best in Galatians 5:6: "In Christ Jesus circumcision nor uncircumcision counts for anything, but only faith working through love: *alla pístis di' agapès energoumenè*."

3. The World and the Christian

- a) In his exhortation of Galatians 5,16-17, Paul opposes 'flesh' and 'Spirit': "I say, then: live by the Spirit and you will not gratify the desire of the flesh. For the flesh has desires against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; these are opposed to each other." That confrontation takes place during the life of the Christian. In 5:19-23, Paul first lists "the works of the flesh" (immorality, impurity, licentiousness, idolatry, sorcery, hatred...), and then "the fruit of the Spirit" (love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness...). Further, after stating in 5:24: "Now those who belong to Christ [Jesus] have crucified their flesh with its passions and desires," he formulates in 5:25 the famous sentence which first indicates the indicative: "If we live in the Spirit" (as indeed we do!), and then the imperative: "let us also follow the Spirit."

Paul more than once uses the term 'flesh' in a neutral way, e.g., "Christ according to the flesh" (Rom 9:5), but frequently 'flesh' points to the sinful nature and desires of the human being. In 2 Corinthians 10:3, the two senses appear together: "Although we are in the flesh, we do not battle according to the flesh." In Galatians 6:14-15, suddenly the negative nuance of the term "world" appears: "May I never boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world. For neither does circumcision mean anything, nor does uncircumcision, but only a new creation." And this brings us to the equally negative expression of "this

age" of Romans 12:2: "Do not conform yourselves to this age but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and pleasing and perfect." In Romans 12 – 13, a series of diverse exhortations culminates with a reference to the nearness of the hour: "Do this because you know the time; it is the hour now for you to awake from sleep. For our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed; the night is advanced, the day is at hand. Let us then throw off the works of darkness and put on the armor of light; let us conduct ourselves properly as in the day, not in orgies and drunkenness, not in promiscuity and licentiousness, not in rivalry and jealousy. But put on the Lord Jesus, and make no provision for the desires of the flesh" (13:11-14).

There can be no doubt that Paul eagerly expected the parousia, that he was convinced of the nearness of the Lord's return. One must take this conviction into account in explaining what Paul says about married and unmarried life in 1 Corinthians 7. It causes him to seriously relativize earthly values, particularly that of marriage. Let us quote the beginning of this long chapter: "Now in regard to the matter about which you wrote: 'It is a good thing for a man not to touch a woman,' but because of cases of immorality every man should have his own wife, and every woman her own husband. The husband should fulfill his duty toward his wife, and likewise the wife toward her husband. A wife does not have authority over her own body, but rather her husband, and similarly a husband does not have authority over his own body, but rather his wife. Do not deprive each other, except perhaps by mutual consent for a time, to be free for prayer, but then return to one another, so that Satan may not tempt you through your lack of self-control. This I say by way of concession, however, not as a command. Indeed, I wish everyone to be as I am, but each has a particular gift from God, one of one kind and one of another" (7:1-7).

Even if we assume that in verse 1b ("It is a good thing for a man not to touch a woman") we may read Paul's own view, the clause still testifies to a tendency to sexual asceticism among some Corinthians. By its wording the verse recalls Genesis 2:18, a verse which, however, states almost the opposite: "It is not good that the man should be alone." It cannot escape one's notice that in 1 Corinthians 7:2-6, Paul considers wife and husband as equals. The chiasmic parallelism in verses 3-4 underscores this. One also admires Paul's careful procedure in verse 5: before the exception can be admitted there has to be mutual agreement; abstention is justified only for a set time and only for

prayer, afterward they have to return to one another. Moreover, Paul adds in verse 6 that the whole matter is but a concession, not at all a command. The clause at the end of verse 5 obviously runs counter to the modern positive evaluation of marriage and sexual life. Furthermore, of course, for married people temptation is hardly the main motive to "come together," but the clause "so that Satan may not tempt you through your lack of self-control" points back to verse 2 ("because of cases of immorality"); in both clauses Paul appears to speak in a realistic, forthright way. By "I wish everyone to be as I am" Paul clearly manifests his own opinion: the unmarried state, celibacy, is better. In verses 32-34, he motivates his view: "I should like you to be free of anxieties. An unmarried man is anxious about the things of the Lord, how he may please the Lord. But a married man is anxious about the things of the world, how he may please his wife, and he is divided." In verse 34, he repeats the same thing with regard to the unmarried and married woman. In verse 35, he concludes the paragraph as it were by means of an excuse and stresses his genuine intention, his loving care: "I am telling you this for your own benefit, not to impose a restraint upon you, but for the sake of propriety and adherence to the Lord without distraction." Again we must point out that what Paul says in this particular unit about the complete devotion of the unmarried as well as the worldly concerns of those married will hardly be accepted today without serious qualification.

Let us also consider for a moment the preceding verses 26-31 in 1 Corinthians 7. Paul thinks that "because of the present distress it is a good thing for a person to remain as he is. Are you bound to a wife? Do not seek a separation. Are you free of a wife? Then do not look for a wife. If you marry, however, you do not sin, nor does an unmarried woman sin if she marries; but such people will experience affliction in their earthly life, and I would like to spare you that. I tell you, brothers and sisters, the time is running out. From now on, let those having wives act as not having them, those weeping as not weeping, those rejoicing as not rejoicing, those buying as not owning, those using the world as not using it fully. For the world in its present form is passing away." One cannot but reflect and object: the end of the age has not yet come; earthly values should therefore be more appreciated than Paul seems to do. Yet although Paul's conviction as to the near end has proved erroneous, the passing character of our individual lives recommends eschatological restraint. Earthly values should not be taken as absolute and infinite goods; they should never become idols.

- b) With both our praise and respectful criticism of Paul's doctrine, indications for Pauline spirituality today have already been given concerning married and unmarried life, concerning the relations between husband and wife, concerning the shortness of the time and the passing away of this world, and, consequently, the relative value of all earthly goods.

To conclude this third section on Paul's view of the Christian and the world, we should above all keep in mind that "whoever is in Christ is a new creation: the old things have passed away; behold, new things have come" (2 Cor 5:17). Therefore in Galatians 3:28, Paul can speak to his readers as follows: "there is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free person, there is not male and female, but you are all one in Christ Jesus." Here Paul refers to God's view: equality notwithstanding evident differences, on God's side no partiality.

4. Spiritual Gifts and Love

- a) Paul deals with the variety of spiritual gifts more than once in his letters, and he also more than once employs the comparison of the body. So in Romans 12:3-8, Paul writes: "By the grace given to me I tell everyone among you not to think of himself more highly than one ought to think, but to think soberly, each according to the measure of faith that God has apportioned. For as in one body we have many parts, and all the parts do not have the same function, so we, though many, are one body in Christ and individually parts of one another. Since we have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us exercise them: if prophecy, in proportion to the faith; if ministry, in ministering; if one is a teacher, in teaching; if one exhorts, in exhortation; if one contributes, in generosity; if one is over others, with diligence; if one does acts of mercy, with cheerfulness."

1 Corinthians 12 – 14, however, is the most extensive section where Paul treats the problems connected with the diversity of spiritual gifts and charisms: "There are different kinds of spiritual gifts but the same Spirit; there are different forms of service but the same Lord; there are different workings but the same God who produces all of them in every one. To each individual the manifestation of the Spirit is given for some benefit. To one is given through the Spirit the expression of wisdom; to another the expression of knowledge according to the same Spirit; to another faith by the same Spirit; to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit; to another mighty deeds; to another discernment of spirits; to another varieties of tongues; to

another interpretation of tongues. But one and the same Spirit produces all of these, distributing them individually to each person as he wishes" (12:4-11).

The concrete problem in Corinth seems to have been the preference that some Christians manifested for the charism of "tongues" and the disorder it caused in the meetings. With great effort Paul explains his opinion and gives directives: "Strive eagerly for the spiritual gifts, above all that you may prophecy. For one who speaks in a tongue does not speak to human beings but to God, for no one listens; he utters mysteries in spirit. On the other hand, one who prophesies does speak to human beings, for their building up, encouragement, and solace" (1 Cor 14:1-3). Paul thus very much stresses the need for understandable interpretation, for intelligible speech and discernment, for the building up of the church and, of course, also for the appropriate order when the whole church meets in one place.

Yet all things considered, although one may strive for the greatest spiritual gifts, there is a still more excellent way. Paul writes: "If I speak in human and angelic tongues but do not have love, I am a resounding gong or a clashing cymbal. And if I have the gift of prophecy and comprehend all mysteries and all knowledge; if I have all faith so as to move mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. If I give away everything I own, and if I hand my body over so that I may boast but do not have love, I gain nothing. Love is patient, love is kind. It is not rude, it does not seek its own interests, it is not quick-tempered, it does not brood over injury, it does not rejoice over wrongdoing but rejoices with the truth. It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never fails" (13:1-8). As everybody knows, I am citing here from the so-called hymn of love. I do not think that it was originally a pre-existent hymn which Paul borrowed and inserted into his letter. Most probably Paul himself composed the text, evidently in a more solemn, poetic and somewhat emotional style. With three lengthy conditional sentences he first emphasizes the indispensability of love (vv. 1-3); he then gives an impressive description of true love (vv. 4-7) and in the third part, verses 8-13, he deals with the permanence of love. All gifts are partial and will pass away. Love, however, will never fail. It is not clear whether the term "now" in the last verse has to be understood logically ("now we know that") or, more likely, temporally ("now, that is during this life on earth"). "Now faith, hope, love remain, these three." Indeed, those are

the basic needed virtues of adult Christian life. "But the greatest of these is love," the greatest also because it is permanent, indestructible, eternal. Faith will yield to a face-to-face vision, and once we get what we hope for, hope itself disappears. But love remains, never fails.

- b) In a meditation on Pauline spirituality today, one must emphasize first that the description of love in 1 Corinthians 13 is realistic. The person who practices what Paul says in verses 4-7 is a really loving person, loving God by loving the neighbor. One should also understand that love is present in the various gifts themselves. Not all of them are miraculous; some point to leadership, ministry, service. The gifts, however, include all kinds of talents and abilities. Today, looking at the lists which Paul presents, we cannot but reduce the extraordinary, spectacular, or sensational character of those spiritual gifts. What we experience in our life is not the visible miracle.

One more point about love in Paul's letters is worth mentioning. Paul deals with it twice, in 1 Corinthians 8 – 10 and again in Romans 14 – 15. Can one eat meat sacrificed to idols? If you do, you look strong, but the weak believers will eventually be scandalized. In following your example and eating against their conviction they may be brought to sin and their consciences will be defiled. Paul himself certainly belongs to the category of the strong, to those who know and judge correctly: There is no idol in the world; there is no God but one (1 Cor 8:4); we are not worse off if we do not eat, nor are we better off if we do (8:8); Paul is convinced in the Lord Jesus that nothing is unclean in itself (Rom 14:14); the kingdom of God is not a matter of food and drink, but of righteousness, peace, and joy in the holy Spirit (14:17). Yet, one can be strong and right in what he knows, but for the sake of love one must often give in; one must yield so as not to put a stumbling block in the way of a weak brother or sister for whom Christ has died.

In 1 Corinthians 8:1, Paul writes: "knowledge inflates with pride, but love builds up."

5. Death and Resurrection

- a) In Corinth, some of the Christians say in public that there is no resurrection of the dead (cf. 1 Cor 15:12). Do they mean that there will not be a bodily resurrection or that the resurrection has already taken place (cf. 2 Tim 2:17-18)? Perhaps they simply assume, as many people do everywhere and at all times, that there will be no resurrection at all, no life after death. Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die (cf. 15:32, a quotation from Isa 22:13).

How will Paul counter this false and harmful assertion? No philosophical arguments for the immortality of the soul are provided. In the first section of 1 Corinthians 15, verses 1-11, Paul reminds the Corinthians of the basic tradition of their faith. He cites the main part of the creed: "I handed on to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures; that he was buried; that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the scriptures; that he appeared to Cephas" (vv. 3-5). In order to underscore the historical reality of the resurrection, Paul adds a list of witnesses. The risen Christ appeared not only to Cephas-Peter but then also to the Twelve and after that to "five hundred brothers at once, most of whom are still living, though some have fallen asleep" (v. 6), then also to James, then to all the apostles and last of all to Paul himself. The list contains six different instances of the risen Lord's appearance. Furthermore, not only from the beginning has the resurrection been preached but in all places in the same way, not only by Paul but also by all the others: "Whether it be I or they, so we preach and so you believed" (v. 11).

People who contend that there will be no future resurrection from the dead must, Paul says, also deny Christ's past resurrection. But in that case our preaching is empty and your faith is equally empty and vain, and you are still in your sins and those passed away in Christ have perished (cf. vv. 13-18). "If for this life only we have hoped in Christ, we are the most pitiable people of all" (v. 19). Then, after having pointed out the disastrous consequences of the denial, Paul continues in a positive way: "But now Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep" (v. 20). "First fruits" does not merely indicate a temporal order (Christ the first of a series); of even greater significance is its causal effect: "in Christ shall all be brought to life" (v. 22). The last enemy to be destroyed by the risen Christ is death itself and then, at the parousia, the Son will

subject himself to the Father so that God may be all in all (cf. vv. 23-28). In this way, Paul returns to his theocentric vision of the end of history. Verses 12-34 thus underscore that there will be a resurrection from the dead.

In the last section of this chapter, verses 35-58, Paul will reply to the question "How are the dead raised? With what kind of body will they come back?" Paul states that the resurrection body will be spiritual: "It is sown corruptible; it is raised incorruptible. It is sown dishonorable; it is raised glorious. It is sown weak; it is raised powerful. It is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body" (vv. 42-44), that is a body transformed and dominated by the Spirit. Yet, it must strike the reader that Paul himself thinks that the Lord will return before his death, that he himself will be still alive at the parousia. But the saying that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God and that corruption cannot inherit incorruption (cf. v. 50), applies to the living as well as to the dead: "I tell you a mystery. We shall not all fall asleep, but we will all be changed, in an instant, in the blink of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed" (vv. 51-52). So it has become clear that the resurrection in imperishability of the dead and the transformation of the living go together. But the main point for Paul remains: the future bodily resurrection of the dead cannot be denied.

Two notes should be added. First, in this chapter, Paul does not deal with a general, as it were "neutral," resurrection before the last judgment, but of the resurrection of those who belong to Christ, similar to that of Christ, a totally positive resurrection. Second, it would seem that somewhat later, as one can infer from 2 Corinthians 5:8-10, Paul reckons with the possibility that he will be with the Lord, immediately after death, before the resurrection. He may point to the same possibility in Philippians 1:21-23: "For me life is Christ, and death is gain. If I go on living in the flesh, that means fruitful labor for me. And I do not know which I shall choose. I am caught between the two, I long to depart this life and to be with Christ, [for] that is far better. Yet that I remain [in] the flesh is more necessary for your benefit."

- b) Resurrection spirituality is an integral part of the whole New Testament. For Paul, this spirituality is very much present in almost all of his letters. Reflecting more specifically on 1 Corinthians 15 the Christians of today can easily feel themselves as the direct addressees of his exhortation in verses 33-34: "Do not be led astray: 'Bad company corrupts good morals.' Become sober as you ought and stop sinning. For some have no knowledge of God, I say this to your shame," or also in the final verse 58: "Therefore, my beloved brothers and sisters, be firm, steadfast, always fully devoted to the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain."

Of course, in his expectation of the imminent return of the Lord Paul was wrong. This should be conceded plainly. Yet all of us realize that over not too many years we will belong to those "who have fallen asleep in Christ" (v. 18). Will definitive loss, consignment to oblivion, total destruction be our destiny?

Future bodily resurrection means eschatological redemption of the whole human person, body and soul. Do many Christians today, in an almost complete secularisation and almost without hope, not repeat what some Corinthians said: "there is no resurrection of the dead" (15:12)? Yet this Pauline and genuinely Christian hope is as central to our faith as the belief in Christ's "sacrificial" death for our sins (cf. 15:3b).

At the end of Romans 8, Paul asks: "What then shall we say to this? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son but handed him over for us all, how will he not also give us everything along with him? Who will bring a charge against God's chosen ones? It is God who acquits us. Who will condemn? It is Christ [Jesus] who died, rather, was raised, who also is at the right hand of God, who indeed intercedes for us. What will separate us from the love of Christ? Will anguish, or distress, or persecution or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or the sword? ... No, in all these things we conquer overwhelmingly through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor present things, nor future things, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord" (vv. 31-35 and 37-39).

NOTE: Citations from the New Testament are taken from the *New American Bible* translation.