

Completing the Mission: Paul's Application of the Gospel to the Faith and Life of the Thessalonian Converts in 1-2 Thessalonians

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Dear friends – both those known and unknown to me. I submit the following as a paper in progress, hoping for your constructive advice for developing it further.

1. Introduction

The late New Testament (NT) scholar, Nils Astrup Dahl, once alerted me to the use of ἑνορκίζω in 1 Thess 5:27. “Why is it,” said he, “that Paul, in a letter so full of praise and commendations to the Thessalonian Christians, urged them to swear by oath that they would read the letter to ‘all the brethren’?” The text of 1 Thess 5:27 reads, ἑνορκίζω ὑμᾶς τὸν κύριον ἀναγνωσθῆναι τὴν ἐπιστολὴν πᾶσιν τοῖς ἀδελφοῖς. Following the translation by Louw & Nida¹ one may render it as, “I ask you to swear by the name of the Lord to read this letter to all the Christian brothers.”² ἑνορκίζω basically means “to cause a person to say under oath.”³ Hence, when the oath is to be made ‘by the Lord’, it becomes a strong demand from Paul to the Thessalonian Christians and cannot be overlooked when reading and interpreting the letter. Since my encounter with Dahl I have come to the conclusion, that requiring an oath with regard to reading the letter out loudly was a necessary ingredient in Paul’s enterprise of completing his mission to the inhabitants of Thessalonike, in that both 1 and 2 Thess were needed to further confirm and develop Christian belief and behaviour among all the Thessalonian Christians (πᾶσιν τοῖς ἀδελφοῖς 1 Thess 5:27). Thus 1-2 Thess became instruments in Paul’s negotiation with the Thessalonian Christians toward a modified or transformed worldview. In this essay I will argue for this by focusing on three matters: (1) The conversion of the Thessalonian Christians as the initial step in a process toward a modified or transformed worldview; (2) Paul’s need for visiting the newly converted, his sending of Timothy, and his writing to them as part of this process; (3) the role of his message in preparing common standards for Christian belief and behaviour when negotiating new core values in the Christian community in Thessalonike.

2. The Conversion of the Thessalonians

2.1 Conversion as turning away from the idols to the true and living God

From Luke’s account in Acts 17:1-4 we may, among the converts in Thessalonike, identify some Jewish believers as well as a large group (πλῆθος πολὺ) of god-fearing Greeks (τῶν τε

¹ J. P. Louw & E. A. Nida, *Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament: Based on semantic domains*, New York: United Bible Societies, 2nd Ed. 1996.

² Louw & Nida 1996, 33.467.

³ *Ibid.*: ἑνορκίζω; “to demand that a person take an oath as to the truth of what is said or as to the certainty that one will carry out the request or command – ‘to put under oath, to insist that one take an oath, to require that one swear’... In other words... may be rendered as ‘to cause a person to say under oath.’”

σεβομένων Ἑλλήνων)⁴ who shared the Jewish monotheistic belief. Also there were ‘not a few of the leading women’ (γυναικῶν τε τῶν πρώτων οὐκ ὀλίγαι). This is in line also with what Luke tells about the converts in Philippi and Beroea. In Philippi the woman Lydia – a seller of purple goods – is identified in Acts 16:4 as a ‘god-fearer’ (σεβομένη τὸν θεόν) who had joined the Jewish worshippers for prayers on the Sabbath (v 13). She had obviously been attracted to the monotheistic belief and practices of the Jews. And, through the preaching of Paul, she was converted to Christian faith (v 14f), receiving baptism together with her entire household (v 15). Her conversion immediately made her adopt Christian hospitality by opening her home for the missionaries Paul and Silas (v 15). It was also in her home that, after their release from prison, the two missionaries met the new Christian converts (‘brothers’ τοὺς ἀδελφοὺς), encouraging them before departing (v 40).⁵ In the Roman Empire there were many such Gentile adherents of or sympathizers with Jewish monotheistic faith and ethos, as is also attested by Luke elsewhere in Acts.⁶ Likewise we find that in Beroea (Acts 17:10-12) there were Jews who converted (v 11f) and ‘not a few Greek women of high standing as well as men’ (καὶ τῶν Ἑλληνίδων γυναικῶν τῶν εὐσημόνων καὶ ἀνδρῶν οὐκ ὀλίγοι v 12). From this we may conclude that at least some of the newly converted Christians in Philippi, Thessalonike and Beroea had previously been instructed in Jewish Scriptures, traditions of faith, worship and ethos; these they could bring along from their association with the synagogues to their new Christian faith community.⁷ But from what Paul writes in 1 Thess 1:9 we must further conclude that a majority of the newly converted Christians in Thessalonike were former Pagans, in that they had ‘turned to God from the idols to serve the living and true God’ (καὶ πῶς ἐπεστρέψατε πρὸς τὸν θεὸν ἀπὸ τῶν εἰδώλων, δουλεύειν θεῷ ζῶντι καὶ ἀληθινῷ). Even for some of the god-fearers the initial step had made them turn to believe in the living and true God; conversion to Christian faith implied making a new step.

Whereas the conversion of Jews and god-fearers implied accepting faith in Jesus as the suffering and resurrected Messiah (Acts 17:3f), the Pagans’ conversion included also a step from polytheism to monotheism. The implications of conversion from polytheism have been pointed out by Earl J. Richard as follows,

... conversion [to Christian faith] meant a social, religious separation of believers from their Roman neighbors, a situation which caused tensions and hostility on the part of some in the general population. The converts in effect adopted a new value system which radically changed their social, cultic, and religious affiliations and loyalties. But disruption of their social world also led, on the positive side, to the

⁴ On the identity of these god-fearers, see James D. G. Dunn, *Christianity in the Making*. Vol. 2: *Beginning from Jerusalem*, Grand Rapids, Michigan / Cambridge U. K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2009, 560-562.

⁵ For Lydia’s attraction to Jewish faith, and her subsequent conversion, see Thor Strandenæs, “Forretningskvinnen og innvandreren Lydia: En frukt av urkirkens misjon i Europa”, *Misjon og teologi* 5/6 (1998/1999), (45-76) 66-74.

⁶ Acts 10:2; 13:16. 26. 43. 50; 16:14. 17:4; 18:7. We may guess that the monotheistic faith of Judaism, its worship, ethos, and social concern – or a combination of these – were the chief attractions of this faith which drew the god-fearers. As for the attraction which the Christian message and faith represented to the population in the Roman Empire it is equally difficult to present firm evidence. However, Adolf von Harnack (*The Mission and Expansion of Christianity in the First Three Centuries*, London: Williams and Norgate/New York: Harper Torchbook, 1908, book 2, chs. 2-5) and Dunn (2009, 657-659) have both suggested some plausible reasons.

⁷ As to the god-fearers’ familiarity with Jewish scriptural tradition, James Dunn (2009, 563) notes, that “...since the LXX was not widely known in the Greco-Roman world, such knowledge could only have been gained if the Gentile readership had already been familiar with and in some cases quite well schooled in these Scriptures, which could only be because they had attended many readings and expositions of these Scriptures in the Synagogue on Sabbath days (cf. Acts 15.21).”

creation of a new world and the establishing of new familial and social relations. Fellow converts became brothers and sisters, thereby replacing and redefining familial ties. Paul and his co-missionaries speak of their roles and methods of operation to the activity of a father with their own children ([1 Thess] 2:7, 11). One also understands Paul's use of "Father" for God and of "Lord" for Jesus as he redefines the converts' social world and their relationships to principal figures in their religious ideology. Thus, conversion implied both the turning away from and the turning to a way of life with its whole range of relationships, community, and goals.⁸

Moreover, by focusing on the saving and sanctifying activities of God, Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit in the recent salvation historical events – including also the lives of the Thessalonians and the expected parousia, Paul demonstrates what it means that God is the 'living and true God' (1 Thess 1:9), to whom they had turned from the 'idols'.⁹

Polytheism in the Antiquity, especially reflected by the Greco-Roman pantheon and the Hellenistic gods,¹⁰ allowed individuals the freedom to choose among gods to worship. They were nonetheless expected to take collectively part in temple feasts and rituals in honour of different deities – local as well as more widely accepted ones. Prayers and sacrifices went together, and there was "rarely a ritual without prayer, and no important prayer without a ritual: *litai – thysiai*, prayers – sacrifices is an ancient and fixed conjunction."¹¹ But in spite of the offerings to one or more gods, during festivals and in times of need or thanksgiving, the gods were considered to be both remote, arbitrary, and unpredictable, as well as having both good and bad features. Because of their remoteness they lived a life of their own and could not be expected to interact regularly or daily with the human beings and their needs.¹² Due to their arbitrariness and unpredictability one could not expect answers to prayers, only a hope that sacrifices and prayers would mitigate the gods so as to cause no harm.¹³ Walter Burkert thus summarizes:

The gods do not hold the world in a close maternal embrace; they stand at a distance, well-moulded figures, to be viewed from various angles. This accords man in turn the freedom to say no or even rebel... There is no obedience to god, just as there are scarcely any divine commands; there is no divine court which sits in judgment over men. And only rarely is the god invoked with the title Lord, *despota*, the word a slave

⁸ Earl J. Richard, *First and Second Thessalonians* (Sacra Pagina Series 11), Collegeville, Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 1995, 10.

⁹ On conversion in Antiquity, see A. D. Nock, *Conversion: The Old and the New Religions from Alexander the Great to Augustine of Hippo*, London: Oxford University Press, 1961.

¹⁰ The attitude of universalism in Hellenism also meant the inclusion into the Greco-Roman world of the empirical cult, Egyptian gods, mystery cults, and cults of magic and healing. See J. Gwyn Griffiths, "Hellenistic Religions" in: *The Encyclopedia of Religion*, (ed.) Mircea Eliade, Vol 6, New York / London: Macmillan Publishing House / Collier Macmillan Publishers, 1987, 252-266, see especially 255-258. See further: John Ferguson, *The Religions of the Roman Empire*, Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1970; Luther H. Martin, *Hellenistic Religion: An Introduction*, New York/Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987.

¹¹ Walter Burkert, *Greek Religion: Archaic and Classical* (Engl. Tr. By John Raffan), Oxford: Basil Blackwell Ltd, 1985, 73; (on prayer: 73-75).

¹² "The gods exist, but they cannot be harnessed to the ends of man; they seem familiar in their humanity, they can even be laughed at, but still they remain distant... Gods cannot give life, but they can destroy it. There is no devil in the ancient religions, but each god has his dark and dangerous side." *Ibid.*, 188.

¹³ "And yet the sense in which men needs the gods is quite different from the sense in which the gods need men. Men live by the hope of reciprocal favour, *charis*. 'It is good to give fitting gifts to the immortals' – they will show their gratitude. But it is never possible to count on this with certainty. The ritual, it is true, is attended by the expectation that it will produce certain effects, but the Homeric gods can always say no without giving any reason." *Ibid.*, 189.

uses to his owner. Man faces the gods coolly as a well-moulded individual just like his statues of the gods. This is a kind of freedom and spirituality bought at the price of security and trust. But reality imposes its limits even on man in his freedom: the gods are and remain the Stronger Ones.¹⁴

It is true that the expression used about God in 1 Thess 1:9, as being ‘living and true’ “underscores divine transcendence and holiness”.¹⁵ But his transcendence is not to be understood in the sense that he is remote and disinterested. Rather the attributes ‘living and true’ explain his divine nature in three regards. First, Paul presents God as the driving force behind planning and orchestrating the saving events linked to the death, resurrection and parousia of Christ (1 Thess 1:10; 5:2. 9-10; 2 Thess 1:5-10; 2:1-12). Second, God is also now interacting with the Thessalonians in their life with Jesus Christ (1 Thess 3:12f; 2 Thess 3:3f), and through the activities and guidance of the Spirit (1 Thess 1:5f; cf 5:19). Third, he is not remote, arbitrary and unpredictable but a god to whom both Paul and the Thessalonians can give thanks and pray to about their concrete needs (1 Thess 1:2f; 2:13f; 3:9-13; 5:17f. 23f. 25; 2 Thess 1:3. 11; 2:16f; 3:1-5. 16), expecting him to answer in accordance with his revealed nature and will.

While showing first what conversion to monotheistic faith has given the Thessalonians Paul later contrasts their new life with that of their former, in that he points to the expected fate of those who are now Gentiles. They are the Pagans or ‘Gentiles who do not know God’ (τὰ ἔθνη τὰ μὴ εἰδότα τὸν θεόν 1 Thess 4:5). That is, they do not know God in the sense which the Thessalonians have experienced him, and now know him and relate to him. The Pagans have not experienced the God of history, of salvation, the one who gives faith, hope and love (1 Thess 1:3f; 3:12f; 4:9f), calls (1 Thess 4:7), selects (1 Thess 1:4), saves (1 Thess 5:9), and sanctifies (1 Thess 5:23f; cf 4:3. 7).

There is a considerable difference between converting to Christian faith in a situation where Christian faith, ethos and worship are totally new in a society, as compared to when new converts are able to join an established congregation which has developed its Christian belief, behaviour and worship practices over time. In the latter case the converts join a community where they may be introduced to Christian worship, faith and ethos by participating in and observing a congregation which has already developed these according to Christian norms. Thus they can socialise into the established paradigm of faith, worship and ethos by learning from the already existing Christians. In the former case, however, converts venture into a totally new paradigm of worship, faith and ethos and must develop their faith at the same time as the other new converts. This was the case in Thessalonike, a church newly established by Paul and his co-workers (1 Thess 1:2-6; 2:1-16; Acts 17:1-4).

From what Paul tells in 1-2 Thess many or most of the converts in Thessalonike were new in the monotheistic faith, having believed ‘the truth’ (2 Thess 2:13-15; cf 1 Thess 2:13) which Paul proclaimed in his gospel. They had turned to the living God from ‘idols’ (1 Thess 1:9f), that is, from their former worship and faith in Greek (Roman, and other) gods to faith in Christ.¹⁶ It is likely that the leaders which Paul and his colleagues had installed in the new

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ Richard 1995,52.

¹⁶ A number of Greek, Roman and Egyptian cults are known to us to have been practiced in Thessalonike during the Roman era, such as Dionysus, Heracles, the Dioscuri, Apollo and Aphrodite, the imperial cult, the Cabiri, and Isis, Serapis, and Osiris. See Charles Edson, “Cults of Thessalonica”, *Harvard Theological Review* 41 (1948) 105-204; Emmanouil Voutiras, “Thessaloniki under the Romans”, in: *Queen of the Worthy Thessaloniki: History and Culture*, Vols. I-II, : edited by L. K. Hassiotis, Thessaloniki: Publishing house *paratiritis*, 1997, Vol I:

church ‘to work among’ the new converts (1 Thess 5:12f) were persons who already before the arrival of the missionaries had either adopted or were sympathizers with a Jewish monotheistic belief, and were used to practising corresponding worship and ethos. In this sense there was a Jewish inspired foundation for the new Christians to build on. But they were all new as Christians and had to consolidate this new belief together and develop afresh its fruits in worship and behaviour.¹⁷ It is on this background that we must read Paul’s two letters. They contain further instructions in Christian faith (e.g., 1 Thess 4:13-18; 2 Thess 2:1-12), implications which these (and formerly preached) cognitive facts had for upholding Christian faith and living (1 Thess 2 Thess 2:5f. 14-17; 4:4), and for maintaining and further developing Christian practices in daily life, also in a time of persecution (1 Thess 2:13-16; 3:1-13; 2 Thess 1:4ff).

Finally, it is clear from what Paul writes that he considers the conversion of the Thessalonian Christians both as something which had taken place (1 Thess 1:9f) and as a process which they had entered but not yet completed (2 Thess 1:11f; 2:2f; 2:15-17). In his exhortations Paul therefore spells out the standards which must continuously guide their transformation.¹⁸ And, since conversion cannot be separated from their sanctification, he asks God in prayer to bring this process to a good conclusion (1 Thess 5:23f; 2 Thess 1:11f; cf 2:13-17; 3:4f).

In spite of a predominant focus in the Thessalonian correspondence on the needs of Gentile Christians there is no reason to doubt Luke’s account in Acts 17:3f, of a mixed group of converts, although the Jewish converts are likely to have been a minority. The likely reason for Paul’s demand, that 1 Thess be read ‘to all the brethren’ (1 Thess 5:27), is that he wanted all the converts to be reminded and informed about common standards for belief and behaviour, and to abide by these. Thereby those who had already conformed faith and practices to these standards were acknowledged for doing so,¹⁹ and those who were still in need of adjusting belief and behaviour to the same standards were admonished to do so,²⁰ including those who lived disorderly or unruly (ἀτάκτως 2 Thess 3:6) or were ‘weak’, ‘idlers’ or ‘faint-hearted’ (1 Thess 4:1-5:17). For a missionary – as in the case of Paul and his co-workers – the reception of the gospel in faith with corresponding ethos is a main concern. Besides this there is the concern for those whose faith is not yet stabilised, those who are in the danger of or actually slipping away, and for those who either develop heterodox faith or practices or otherwise live in conflict with the norms of Christian faith and ethos. In the project of negotiating the new faith with the Thessalonians it was therefore important for Paul and his co-workers to make sure that all the Thessalonians adopted Christian standards – and therefore also values – for faith and life practices.

The needs of the Gentile converts were most probably the main concern of Paul in writing to the Thessalonian Christians about continuing their sanctification by abstaining from sexual immorality (1 Thess 4:3) and from yielding to lustful passion of lust (4:5). But his teaching

History and Society 102-113, and especially 109f; further: Helmut Koester, “Archäologie und Paulus in Thessalonike”, in: *Religious Propaganda and Missionary Competition in the New Testament World* (Festschrift for Dieter Georgi), Edited by L. Bormann et al. NovTSup 74. Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1994, 393-404.

¹⁷ Although Paul does not address particularly the Thessalonian worship life in 1-2 Thess we must take it that this had been part of his instructions during his first visit. Also, the fact that he does not make Christian worship a topic in his two letters must be understood as indicating that it was either not in need of being corrected, unlike the case of the Corinthians (1 Cor 11; 14), or that Timothy had rectified any wrong attitudes to their common worship.

¹⁸ 1 Thess 3:12f; 4:1-8. 10-12; 5:4-8. 12-22; 2 Thess 1:11f; 2:2f; 2:15-17; 3:6-15.

¹⁹ Hence Paul’s many confirmations of their doing so: 1 Thess 1:2f; 3:6-13; 4:1ff. 9ff; 5:11; 2 Thess 1:3-5.

²⁰ 1 Thess 4-5; 2 Thess 2: 1ff. 15; 3:13-15.

about the parousia of Christ (1 Thess 4:13-5:11), what were to precede the parousia and judgment (2 Thess 2:3-3:5), and how to deal with those who were conducting a ‘disorderly’ life (2 Thess 3:6-15), were of relevance to both Jewish and Gentile converts. As Robert Jewett has convincingly argued, a millenarian worldview was the main threat to a continued main stream eschatology in Thessalonike, since millenarism could have been adopted by both Jewish and Gentile converts.²¹ Thus Jewett concludes that it was the “millenarian fever” in the church which led Paul to write 2 Thess and prompted him to approach a different tone:

The addition of new material in 2 Thessalonians, designed to clarify the nature of the eschatological signs that must precede the parousia, does not indicate a changed eschatological perspective on the author’s part but rather the urgent need to demolish the belief that the parousia could be present while this evil age is still so clearly in evidence... The radicalized situation in Thessalonica in the wake of the reception of his first letter thus called for a second letter that was both a condensation and an expansion of the earlier letter.²²

Thus, in presenting his teaching on the parousia Paul both refers to his first meeting with the Thessalonians, confirms the tradition they had received from him then and in his former letter (2 Thess 2:15; 3:6). He further supplies new teaching on the subjects which might (once again) bring them in harmony with the standards of Christian faith and living which he had himself received and taught them (2 Thess 2:15; 3:6f). And he warns them against living in conflict with the tradition he represents (2 Thess 3:6) and believing heterodox teaching coming in letters purporting to come from him (2 Thess 2:2)

What Paul does in his letters, therefore, is to spell out central elements of Christian faith as he has formerly taught them, and to give explications of these as well as their implications for Christian faith and living. Additional ethical exhortations also show standards for Christian living. All this is done with a view to confirm and further develop Christian faith and practices in harmony with the gospel and ethos which Paul serves as a missionary. Before giving some examples which reveal the nature and contents of Paul’s teaching and instructions in 1-2 Thess we shall, however, briefly show how Paul’s instructions to the Thessalonian Christians regarding explicit and implicit faith may have been intended as a contribution toward transforming or modifying their core values, that is, their worldview.

2.2 Developing a Modified or Transformed Worldview

In a recent anthropological study Paul Hiebert has defined worldview as the “fundamental cognitive, affective, and evaluative presuppositions a group of people make about the nature of things, and which they use to order their lives.”²³ He goes on to state that “Worldviews are what people in a community take as given realities, the maps they have of reality that they use for living.”²⁴

²¹ Robert Jewett, *The Thessalonian Correspondence: Pauline Rhetoric and Millenarian Piety*, Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986, 161-178.

²² *Ibid.*, 191-192.

²³ As a concept worldview has several roots. Immanuel Kant introduced “Weltanschauung”. By the 1840ies it had become a standard word in Germany and was used by the historians “to refer to the deep, enduring cultural patterns of a people.” Paul G. Hiebert, *Transforming Worldviews: An Anthropological Understanding of How People Change*, Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 2008, 15.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 14.

In his book Hiebert deals with three levels of conversion, each of which relate to three levels of culture.²⁵ He shows that worldview belongs to the core or foundational level of culture, and that behaviour and rituals belong to the surface level. Beliefs and belief systems are found in-between the surface and deep cultural levels.²⁶ Whereas the worldview themes of culture (such as categories, logics, and epistemology) are regarded as belonging to the *implicit* (core) level of culture, the belief systems represent an *explicit* level (in-between core and surface); the cultural products, patterns of behaviour, signs and rituals are *sensory* levels of culture – the surface level.²⁷ When working as a missionary to the Thessalonians, Paul was able to address explicitly two levels of culture – the explicit and sensory levels – hoping thereby eventually also to affect the core of their cultural reference – its implicit level.

When people, such as the Thessalonians, convert, changes may either start with their belief (or belief system) or in their behaviour, understanding and use of rituals. The Christians in Thessalonike started their conversion with a changed belief – belief in a living God (1 Thess 1:9f). But their changed belief obviously had immediate effects also on their behaviour, as witnessed both by Paul’s letters and Timothy. Paul remembered that their faith showed itself in works, their love in labour, and their hope in steadfastness (μνημονεύοντες ὑμῶν τοῦ ἔργου τῆς πίστεως καὶ τοῦ κόπου τῆς ἀγάπης καὶ τῆς ὑπομονῆς τῆς ἐλπίδος τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ ἔμπροσθεν τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ πατρὸς ἡμῶν, 1 Thess 1:3). And Timothy could report back good news to Paul after his visit about both their belief and their behaviour (‘love’) fared well (εὐαγγελισμαμένου ἡμῖν τὴν πίστιν καὶ τὴν ἀγάπην ὑμῶν, 1 Thess 3:6). Also Paul notices their growing faith, mutual love, and that their faith shows itself in that it makes them endure the persecutions and difficulties with which they are faced (2 Thess 1:3f).

Eventually, however, changes in belief and behaviour will have impacts on the original worldview of people – either by transforming it extensively or changing or modifying it somewhat. Thus the underlying “tensions between surface ideologies and between these ideologies themselves and the underlying worldview lead to incremental changes in ideologies and worldviews.”²⁸ When the existing worldview is fundamentally changed or replaced by another, we may – with Thomas Kuhn – talk about “paradigm shifts”.²⁹ It is, however, possible for individuals or groups in society to change their worldview without this (immediately or ever) affecting society at large. Basically it depends on the number of individuals, the size of the group, and their influence on the cultural values of the majority of the population. Hence a change of worldview may start with individuals or within social groups but eventually influence society at large and then a paradigm shift may follow.³⁰ This was the situation of the early Christians in the Roman Empire as compared with the time when Christianity was made the favoured religion under the reign of the emperor Constantine – starting a new era. In Paul’s correspondence with the Thessalonians we see him presuppose and build on the message he preached during his first visit, and on the instructions they received from Timothy during his visit (1 Thess 3:1-10), in further negotiating with them implicit and explicit values of their new faith. His aim was obviously to consolidate their faith and ethos, so as to make them ultimately independent of his temporary apostolic leadership.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 316

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 314-316; (illustration by Figure 11.1) 316.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 31-88; (illustration by Figure 2.1) 33.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 316-317.

²⁹ Thomas S. Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, 2nd ed. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970.

³⁰ On the consequences of Christian missions for paradigm shifts, and vice versa, see David Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission*, Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1991; Stephen B. Bevans & Roger P. Schroeder, *Constants in Context: A Theology of Mission for Today*, Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2004.

But as we shall soon see, for the time being they needed the apostles' guidance, since their own local leadership was incapable of dealing with the challenges they were facing.

3. *The Need for Follow-up by Visits and Writing*

According to the account of Paul's journeys in Acts we are led to conclude that he stayed for shorter times in the cities he visited early in his missionary endeavour but spent longer time in both Corinth (Acts 18:1-18) and Ephesus (Acts 18:19-21; 19:1-20:1. 5-37). During one of his visits in Ephesus he spent more than two years, preaching in the synagogue for three months (Acts 19:8f), and proclaiming his message to Jews and Greeks. And in Corinth he spent more than eighteen months (Acts 18:11. 18). After his visits both churches received letters (i. e., 1-2 Cor and Eph).

Abraham Malherbe concludes from the evidence of Acts 17:1-9, that Paul's first stay in Thessalonike lasted from two to three months.³¹ This would include three Sabbaths in the synagogue, subsequent time for instructing the Gentile converts, for hard labour and toil (1 Thess 2:9; 2 Thess 3:7), and for receiving help from Philippi twice (Phil 4:16).³² This is in line with the pattern shown by Luke elsewhere in Acts: Paul's preaching was first done in the synagogues, and then among the non-Jewish population.³³ In Thessalonike he preached in the synagogue for three consecutive Sabbaths (Acts 17:1f). Had he not been forced to leave the cities of Philippi, Thessalonike and Beroea (Acts 16:39f; 17:9f. 14f)³⁴ he is likely to have spent longer time in each of them to further his ministry among the newly converted Christians. This we may conclude from the following facts. *Firstly*, according to Acts, he paid visits to the Christians in these cities later. Most probably the Macedonian trip mentioned in Acts 20:1f included Philippi, Thessalonike, and Beroea – all along the *Via Egnatia*. Here, on his way through Macedonia, he encouraged the Christians there with many words (διελθὼν δὲ τὰ μέρη ἐκεῖνα καὶ παρακαλέσας αὐτοὺς λόγῳ πολλῷ v 2). Also on his return to Jerusalem through Macedonia he is likely to have followed the same highway, leading him through Beroea and Thessalonike (Acts 20,4). Here he was joined by delegates from these cities on his journey to Jerusalem with the gifts from different churches.³⁵ Also a visit to the Christians in

³¹ Abraham J. Malherbe, *The Letters to the Thessalonians: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, (The Anchor Bible, 32B), New York/ London/ Toronto/ Sydney/ Auckland: Doubleday, 2000, 60f.

³² Richard 1995, 10.

³³ Thus in Antioch in Pisidia (Acts 13:13-50) and in Corinth (Acts 18:1-18).

³⁴ (1) In Philippi Paul and Silas (/Silvanus) received apologies but were nevertheless 'asked to leave the city' (καὶ ἐλθόντες παρεκάλεσαν αὐτοὺς καὶ ἐξαγαγόντες ἡρώτων ἀπελθεῖν ἀπὸ τῆς πόλεως.) Although Luke here uses a verb which expresses a mild form of persuasion, the message most likely is to be understood in the sense that it indicated a forced exit. (Also in other languages, such as in English, this is a common way of politely expressing a command: When "passengers are asked to leave" it expresses a determination on behalf of the speaker(s) that the passengers have to leave.) "Freilich ein weiteres Verbleiben am Ort ist nicht möglich." Ernst Haenchen, *Die Apostelgeschichte* (Meyers Kritisch-Exegetischer Kommentar über das Neue Testament, Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 7th Ed., 1977, 481; "asking them to be good enough not to remain in Philippi any longer", F. F. Bruce, *Commentary on the Book of Acts*, (The New International Commentary on the New Testament) Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., (13th printing) 1977, 341). Otherwise Gerhard Krodel, *Acts* (Augsburg Commentary on the New Testament), Minneapolis, Minnesota: Augsburg Publishing House, 1986, 315 ("From Luke's point of view this was not an expulsion, for in 20:6 the missionaries returned.") (2) Although Jason put up bail for Paul and Silas (Acts 17,5-9), the fact that they had been accused of treason – of "acting against the decrees of Caesar, saying that there is another king, Jesus" (v 7) – prompted them to leave the very same night, for Beroea (v 10). (3) But while in Beroea the Jews from Thessalonike came there "stirring up and inciting the crowds" (v 13). So again Paul (but not Silas and Timothy) was immediately accompanied by the brethren down to the sea and sent off (v 14).

³⁵ Sopater, the son of Pyrrhus, from Beroea; Aristarchus and Secundus, both from Thessalonike (Acts 20:4); cf 1 Cor 16:1-3; 2 Cor 8:19. 23; 9:1-5.

Philippi is likely to have taken place then, since it is mentioned as the last city he departed from when sailing to Troas (Acts 20:6).³⁶ Had the problems which were addressed in 1-2 Thess escalated or remained, Luke would certainly have mentioned it. Instead he relates a ‘happy ending’ to the story, namely of Paul being accompanied by the two delegates from Thessalonike – Aristarchus and Secundus (Acts 20:4) – on his way to Jerusalem. Thus, by engaging from the start in sharing faith with others, as attested by Paul in 1 Thess 1:8, the Thessalonians first became witnesses to the gospel in words and example (*martyria*). Subsequently they adopted the ministry of *diakonia* by offering gifts to the poor in Jerusalem – both examples of their growth in main stream Christian faith. *Secondly*, Paul saw the need to write letters as part of the follow-up communication subsequent to his first visit to Thessalonike (1 Thess 1:1; 2 Thess 1:1; 2:15).³⁷ Similarly a letter was sent to the Philippians (Phil 1:1),³⁸ who also supported him in his first mission to Thessalonike and afterwards (Phil 4:15-18). *Thirdly*, he also used other means of keeping in contact with the Thessalonian Christians (1 Thess 3:1-6). He sent Timothy to establish them in their faith and exhort them (1 Thess 3:2). From Timothy or also otherwise Paul was informed about and given updates as to their progress in belief and behaviour, as well as to their challenges and problems (1 Thess 1:7-10; 5:11; 2 Thess 3:6, 11). Moreover his written communication with them expresses that he himself had been eager to visit them again but had been hindered (1 Thess 2:17f; 3:1-10). On this basis we may conclude that Paul did not consider his mission to Thessalonike completed, and that his letters,³⁹ sending a co-worker, his subsequent visits, as well as other communication with them were all elements in his project of completing what he had started during his first visit with them.⁴⁰

While agreeing with the general scholarly consensus, that 1-2 Thess bear the marks of genuine Pauline authorship,⁴¹ I think it is necessary to address the question of co-authorship in 1-2 Thess, where Paul, Silvanus and Timothy are introduced as co-authors (1 Thess 1:1; 2 Thess 1:1). The phenomenon of co-authorship can be found in seven of the Pauline letters.⁴² Timothy is mentioned in five (2 Cor, Phil, Col, 1-2 Thess, Philem), and Silvanus in two (1-2 Thess). The fact that they are introduced in the letter opening as co-authors, and not merely at the end of the letters as sending greetings, indicates a role which “was obviously more than providing companionship while Paul wrote the letters.”⁴³

³⁶ Despite Luke’s awareness of Neapolis being the harbour city of Philippi (Acts 16,11f) he does not mention it in the context of Acts 20:6. Rather it is (the Roman colony of) Philippi, where he had earlier founded a church (Acts 16:9-40), which is named.

³⁷ Most probably the letter mentioned here in 2 Thes 2:15 is 1 Thes. Still the possibility is open that Paul also wrote more than the two letters.

³⁸ No letter is known by us to have been sent by Paul to the Christians in Beroea, however.

³⁹ Thus I presuppose Pauline authorship for 1-2 Thess, and not as Robert Jewett, that 2 Thess is “probably Pauline” (Robert Jewett, *The Thessalonian Correspondence: Pauline Rhetoric and Millenarian Piety*, Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986, 17).

⁴⁰ “...it is clear that Paul would much rather have been present in person to deal with the issues and communications to which his letters responded. ...The contrast between his personal presence and presence by letter was something of which Paul was at times acutely conscious (1 Cor. 5.3-4; 2 Cor. 10.9-11).” Dunn 2000, 589.

⁴¹ As Robert Morgenthaler has shown, the proportion of words which are peculiar to 2 Thess is no higher than in 1 Thess (Robert Morgenthaler, *Statistik des neutestamentliche Wortschatzes*, Zürich: Gotthelf, 1958, 38. Likewise J. Terence Forestell, “In fact, over 80 per cent of the vocabulary in I and II Thes is found in the major epistles; subject matter often dictates a select vocabulary.” (J. Terence Forestell, “The Letters to the Thessalonians” in: *The Jerome Biblical Commentary*, (eds.) Joseph Fitzmyer, Raymond E. Brown & Roland E. Murphy, Vol II *The New Testament and Topical Articles*, Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1968 (227-235), 226).

⁴² 1-2 Cor, Phil, Col, 1-2 Thess, Philem.

⁴³ Dunn 2009, 593.

First, we may not be able to conclude as to the exact role of Silvanus and Timothy in composing or writing the letters, but the inclusion of their names together with Paul's must have been understood by the recipients as indicating that all three stood behind the contents of the letters, and that the text represented a joint consensus. Second, also the extensive use of first person plural would give the readers the impression of collegiality. The two letters to the Thessalonians are written in an almost exclusive first person plural form.⁴⁴ In the five exceptions from the plural form Paul either identifies himself explicitly or implicitly as the speaking subject.⁴⁵ Even if we agree with Malherbe, that Paul in 1-2 Thess uses a literary or authorial plural in 1-2 Thess, and that Paul makes use of the plural "in specifying what he shares with his readers,"⁴⁶ this does not imply that the readers did not at the same time, behind the plural Paul uses, also see the two other missionary colleagues as standing together with Paul and consenting with him in what he wrote. After all, the Thessalonians had met them as traveling colleagues in mission, who jointly shared the gospel with them.⁴⁷ The hard labour of which the Thessalonians are reminded to have observed when Paul and his colleagues visited them (1 Thess 1:9 and 2 Thess 3:8) cannot be taken to reflect solely the work of Paul but must have included the whole team.⁴⁸ As Ben Witherington III has commented,⁴⁹

I would suggest it has something to do with the fact that the founding of the church in Thessalonike was a team effort, and, though Paul is doing the speaking, he is speaking for the leadership team, even though he is the head spokesperson, the one, for instance, who sends Timothy back to Thessalonike.

Witherington has convincingly argued that Paul's letters to the Thessalonians should be characterised in rhetorical rather than epistolary categories.⁵⁰ According to Witherington Paul's use of rhetoric in 1 Thess follows an *epideictic* and in 2 Thess a *deliberative* (didactic)

⁴⁴ Malherbe 2000, 86. As Malherbe points out, in 1 Thess the verb is used in this way forty-five times, plural participles twenty times, and the pronoun in first person plural ('we') forty-three times. Only twice does the verb occur in the singular (3:5; 5:27), and once (2:18) the singular pronoun ('I'). Likewise in 2 Thess the verb in first person plural is found seventeen times, a plural participle once, and twenty-two times the plural pronoun, whereas the verb only occurs twice in the singular (2:5; 3:17).

⁴⁵ Explicitly: 1 Thess 2:18; 3:5 (the latter because of his name identification the immediate context – 2:18); 2 Thess 3:17; implicitly: 1 Thess 5:27 (because of the 'I, Paul' he uses in 2:18 and 'I' in 3:5); 2 Thess 2:5 (because of his autographic greeting in 3:17).

⁴⁶ Malherbe 2000, 88.

⁴⁷ According to Acts 17:14f Timothy was together with Paul and Silas in Berea and stayed behind there when Paul left. He is not mentioned during Paul's stay in Thessalonike (acts 17:1-9), but may have joined the other two there and traveled to Berea after them. But Timothy's visit to Thessalonike, which is reflected in 1 Thess 3:1-8, would have been more difficult for him to undertake if he had not already been acquainted with them from an earlier visit.

⁴⁸ Thus in Corinth Paul worked together with Aquilas and Priscilla, and the latter two instructed Apollos (Acts 18:1-3, 26).

⁴⁹ Ben Witherington III, *1 and 2 Thessalonians: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary*, Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2006, 9f. n. 44. For other rhetorical studies, see, e.g., Bruce C. Johanson, *To All the Brethren. A Text-Linguistic and Rhetorical Approach to 1 Thessalonians* (Coniectanea Biblica. New Testament Series 16; doctoral dissertation, University of Uppsala), Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell International, 1987. Frank Witt Hughes has proposed the following structure of 1 Thess: (1) 1,1-10 Exordium; (2) 2,1-3,10 Narratio; (3) 3,11-13 Partitio (/Propositio); (4) 4,1-5,3 Probatio; (5) 5,4-11 Peroratio; (6) 5,12-22 Exhortatio; (7) 5,23-28 Final Prayers and Greetings. (Frank Witt Hughes, *Early Christian Rhetoric and 2 Thessalonians* (Journal for the Study of the New Testament Supplement Series 30) Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1989).

⁵⁰ Although otherwise reflecting appreciation for the work of Malherbe (Abraham J. Malherbe, *The Letters to the Thessalonians: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, (The Anchor Bible, 32B), New York/ London/ Toronto/ Sydney/ Auckland: Doubleday, 2000), Witherington (2006, 17) disagrees with his classification of 1-2 Thess as parenetic letters.

pattern.⁵¹ This means that he holds that Paul in these letters employed two of the three classes of rhetoric (which also comprises the *forensic*).⁵² Prior to Witherington Robert Jewett had made the observation that the shift of tone in 2 Thess, as compared to 1 Thess, was due to the current “millenarian fever” in the congregation,⁵³ and thus the deliberative rhetoric was called for. On the one hand, as J. Dean Andersen Jr. points out, this should alert us to the fact that,

...the rules and effects described in rhetorical theory often embody the general feelings and expectations in terms of language usage and contemporary society, or at least an important segment of that society. Ancient literary criticism inevitably moved in rhetorical circles. In this way we are enabled to gain, at least partially, more of a *feeling* for the contemporary effects of various forms of argumentation and style. We are provided with a complex canon of rules and advice against which contemporary writings may be compared and contrasted.⁵⁴

In line with this Witherington rightly argues, that when Paul makes use of the epistolary conventions in his letters,

The overwhelming majority of the content of these documents does not submit to epistolary analysis because it does not in the main reflect those highly stylized and formal conventions. Rather these documents to a far greater degree reflect rhetorical conventions.⁵⁵

In spite of the rhetorical usage we must keep in mind that 1-2 Thess, despite exceeding the length of ordinary contemporary letters, and by following to some extent canons of epistolary writing, including the use of structural rhetorical categories,⁵⁶ were nonetheless real letters and meant to be read out aloud to the recipients (1 Thess 5:27).⁵⁷ Thus Paul in his ministry made use of both epistolary and rhetorical conventions but adapted them to his own missionary purpose, namely those of teaching, explaining and reaffirming Christian faith, thereby showing the implications of the new faith, commending Christ-like behaviour among his addressees, and exhorting them to conform their ethos to their new faith in Christ. As for the rhetorical classes applied in 1-2 Thess – the epideictic and the deliberative, respectively – these represent overall structures adopted in his letters, which he felt free to adapt to his purposes in communicating with the new Christians. Hence the classification does not *per se* preclude that 1 Thess – as an epideictic letter – is not also, on Paul’s behalf, meant to correct or adjust the faith and practices of the recipients. Thus both 1-2 Thess contain paraenetic material – exhortations (1 Thess 4:1-5:15; 2 Thess 3:1-12). And, although the deliberative rhetoric was in particular expected to contain such exhortations,⁵⁸ these “were not uncommon at the end of pieces of epideictic rhetoric, even including funeral oratory.”⁵⁹ This means that both deliberative and epideictic rhetoric could be used by Paul in his project of affirming and

⁵¹ Witherington III, 2006, 21-36.

⁵² For a further discussion on the categorization of Paul’s letters and the relation of rhetoric to epistolography, including the rhetorical situations in which Paul’s letters appeared, see R. Dean Anderson Jr., *Ancient Rhetorical Theory and Paul*, Leuven: Peeters, (Rev. Ed.) 1998, 109-127.

⁵³ Jewett 1986, 191.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 290.

⁵⁵ Witherington III, 2006, 21.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 113, 126f.

⁵⁷ Witherington III, 2006, Preface xiii-xv; 176f. Cf. also Dunn (2009, 588-591) who advocates that Paul’s letters are *sui generis* and are not to be classified according to the classic types of ancient rhetoric (591).

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 31.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 27 (cf 24). Witherington here gives the example of Plato, *Menexenus* 246B-249E.

further developing the Thessalonians' faith, as well as for presenting an adequate ethos for Christians which he encouraged his readers to maintain or adopt. Also epideictic rhetoric he could accomplish this:

Epideictic rhetoric is primarily about testimony and appreciation, not primarily about argumentation and proofs. But the audience is not just to appreciate. They are reminded of what is true – what they already do or ought to know. They are being urged to embrace these truths or virtues.⁶⁰

Many commentators have Paul's *pastoral motifs* in mind; these include, among others, Earl J. Richard,⁶¹ Abraham J. Malherbe,⁶² and James D. G. Dunn.⁶³ In arguing for the status of 1-2 Thess as part of Paul's *missionary enterprise* I do not see any contradiction between this and a pastoral interest on behalf of Paul in ministering to and writing to the Thessalonians. Rather, in attempting to further develop the Thessalonians' faith and practices, Paul had the goals of his missionary task in mind: sharing the gospel with them – even his life (εὐδοκοῦμεν μεταδοῦναι ὑμῖν οὐ μόνον τὸ εὐαγγέλιον τοῦ θεοῦ ἀλλὰ καὶ τὰς ἑαυτῶν ψυχάς 1 Thess 2:8; cf 1:5; 2:2. 4. 9 etc); and contributing to their continuous conversion, by developing their Christian knowledge (4:13-18) and behaviour (1 Thess 4:1ff. 9ff; 5:6-11. 12-22; cf 2 Thess 1:11; 3:5). This he did in order that the Thessalonians might remain sanctified (1 Thess 3:13; 5:23f; cf 2 Thess 2:13) and with the Lord until his parousia (1 Thess 4:17; 5:10; 2 Thess 2:14). Thus missionary and pastoral aspects of his ministry are closely interconnected.

According to Luke's account in Acts 14:23 Paul installed leaders in the newly founded churches of Iconium and Lystra (χειροτονήσαντες δὲ αὐτοῖς κατ' ἐκκλησίαν πρεσβυτέρους – 'elders'). Leadership in the churches Paul established is also reflected in his letters, including 1 Thess 5:12f and 1 Cor 16:16. 18). In 1 Thess 5:12 they are referred to as 'those who work among you and are over you in the Lord' (τοὺς κοπιῶντας ἐν ὑμῖν καὶ προϊσταμένους ὑμῶν ἐν κυρίῳ). Both the Corinthian and the Thessalonian Christians are asked to respect their leaders. Dunn, however, rightly observes,

Most striking is the fact that in the very troubled situations in Galatia and Corinth, as also in Thessalonica, Paul seems to have been unable to appeal to any leadership to exercise the discipline and authority called for. Where were the elders that Acts tells us that Paul appointed in the Galatian churches? Elders are noticeable by their complete absence from the scene in Thessalonica and Corinth, and in Galatians! Instead Paul had to give long-range leadership to himself.⁶⁴

Although 2 Thess does not contain a similar adjuration as in 1 Thess 5:27, the fact that Paul signed it (2 Thess 3:17) renders it the authority it needs to have in order to be read – in line with 1 Thess. In admonishing the Thessalonians not to believe teaching in letter purporting to be written by him (2 Thess 2:2) further stresses their need to abide by his authority alone.

4 Stating Common Faith and Ethos

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 22.

⁶¹ Earl J. Richard, *First and Second Thessalonians* (Sacra Pagina Series 11), Collegeville, Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 1995. Thus Richard combines these two perspectives in his exposition of 1 Thess 2:1-12, calling the passage "Missionary Behaviour as Parenetic Model" (77-111).

⁶² Abraham J. Malherbe, *Paul and the Thessalonians: The Philosophical Tradition of Pastoral Care*, Philadelphia: Westminster, 1987 (esp. 68-78). Malherbe 2000, 78-92.

⁶³ Dunn 2009, 587-597; 704-707; 719.

⁶⁴ Dunn 2009, 639.

4.1 Stating Their Common Ground

Statements of their common faith – that of Paul, his co-workers, and the Thessalonian Christians – have two functions in the letter. *First* they reiterate some main contents of the gospel which the recipients heard Paul and his colleagues preach when he first visited them (1:5f; 2:1-13; 3:4). These also Timothy shared when he visited them anew (3:2f. 5),⁶⁵ and are also shared with them by Paul in 1 Thess. Thereby the Thessalonians are reminded that they share a common ground with Paul and his colleagues. This is also the case in 2 Thess, where Paul again presents important excerpts of his gospel and affirms both authenticity and consistency in the tradition he has communicated with them orally and in writing (2 Thess 2:15).

Second, in affirming their common faith, Paul also uses the creedal statements to strengthen the faith of the Thessalonian Christians and to prevent them from accepting false teachings. Thus in 2 Thess he warns the Thessalonians against false teachings purporting to be from him and begs them ‘not to be quickly shaken in mind or excited’ (2 Thess 2:2). After all it is God who is the one who has destined the Thessalonians to receive salvation through the Lord Jesus Christ (1 Thess 5:9f). In 1-2 Thess Paul mentions, without further commenting on each of them, three of the four aspects of Pauline theology which relate to *the effects of the salvation event*, and as outlined by Joseph A. Fitzmyer.⁶⁶ These are (1) *reconciliation*: 2 Thess 3:16 – Christ has brought peace, saving them from wrath (1 Thess 5:9); (2) *expiation*: 2 Thess 2:16 – ‘Now may our Lord Jesus Christ himself, and God our Father, who loved us and gave us eternal comfort and good hope through grace...’; (3) *justification*: 1 Thess 2:10; 2 Thess 1:5f (God’s righteous judgment, and the Thessalonians being counted worthy of the kingdom of God, for which they suffer).

4.2 Apostolic Authority, Divine Origin and Authenticity of the Gospel

Neither in the letter opening of 1 Thess 1:1 nor in that of 2 Thess 1:1 the three coworkers – Paul, Silvanus and Timothy – are said to be ‘apostle(s)’, as is otherwise commonly indicated at the very outset of several other Pauline letters.⁶⁷ But the apostolic identity of Paul and his co-workers is otherwise expressed clearly in 1 Thess. As such they are said to have been approved and entrusted by God to deliver the good message (1 Thess 2:4. 8. 13), and as apostles of Christ (2:6; cf 3:2; 4:2). It is as a messenger in this capacity that Timothy has visited the Thessalonians (3:2ff) and that Paul wishes to meet with them again (3:10). Thus Paul affirms his (and his co-workers’) apostolic authority as sanctioned by God.

As for his message, Paul refers to the message which he and his coworkers first declared (1 Thess 1:5; 2:4. 13f; 2 Thess 2:14f) to the Thessalonians (ἡμῶν λαλήσαι πρὸς ὑμᾶς τὸ εὐαγγέλιον, 1 Thess 2:2; cf 2 Thess 2:14), and which they are now proclaiming to them as ‘our gospel’ (ὁ εὐαγγέλιον ἡμῶν 1 Thess 1:5). Having acknowledged that this gospel was his message (and that of his coworkers) Paul immediately goes on also to qualify its divine origins, as ‘the gospel of God’ (1 Thess 2:2; cf 2:4. 8. 9. 13). Also in 2 Thess 2:13f one can

⁶⁵ 2 Thess 2:15.

⁶⁶ A fourth one (not found in 1-2 Thess) is *redemptive liberation*; Joseph A. Fitzmyer, “Pauline Theology” in: *The Jerome Biblical Commentary*, (eds.) Joseph Fitzmyer, Raymond E. Brown & Roland E. Murphy, Vol II *The New Testament and Topical Articles*, Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1968, 814-817.

⁶⁷ Rom 1:1; 1 Cor 1:1; 2 Cor 1:1; Gal 1:1; Eph 1:1; Tit 1:1. Not so, however, in Col 1:1; 1 Tim 1:1; 2 Tim 1:1; Phil 1:1; Philem 1.

see the close relation between God's activity – he chose them to be saved, v 13 – and Paul's gospel, whereby God called them (v 14). As in other genitive constructs with εὐαγγέλιον it is impossible to separate the subjective from the objective genitive usage in 1-2 Thess.⁶⁸ The gospel is a message which both *originates* with God – an expression of his will – and is *about* God and his works. As such it is entrusted to Paul and his co-workers. He has “been approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel” (1 Thess 2:4). Thus, in sharing the gospel with the Thessalonians, Paul recognises that he is authorised by God and accordingly seeks to please him who is able to scrutinise both the loyalty and uprightness of Paul and his co-workers by testing their hearts (1 Thess 2:4).

Finally, the gospel is also called the gospel of Christ (1 Thess 3:2; cf 2 Thess 1:8). It is the good tidings *brought by* Christ and the good news *about* Christ, especially about his death, resurrection, and coming again in glory (1 Thess 1:10). Whether the gospel is that of Paul and his co-workers, or of God or Christ, the *content* is ‘good news/tidings’. For the Thessalonians in particular it is the good news that they – like Paul and his co-workers – will ‘obtain salvation through Jesus Christ’ (1 Thess 5:9) and ‘live with him’ whether they ‘wake or sleep’ (v 10).

By emphasising his (and his coworkers') apostolic authority – as messengers of God with the gospel – and by referring to the origin and nature of this gospel, Paul emphasises the divine foundations of both his ministry and his message. He thus anchors the contents of the gospel he shares with the Thessalonians both formally and materially with God and Jesus Christ, representing an external reference for the contents of his teachings. In the following we shall show how Paul through his teachings presents the theology and ethos of the Christian faith which he expects the Thessalonians to adopt as a common treasure – held commonly by the missionaries and the Thessalonians. Theology in this context refers to the *implicit* and ethos to the *explicit* values of the Christian faith to which the Thessalonians have turned (cf 2.2 above).

4.3 Confirming the New Implicit Values – Toward a Shared *regula fidei*

Dispersed in the Thessalonian correspondence we find elements of what we may call an emerging *regula fidei*, that is, early Christian expressions of faith in God.⁶⁹ Without developing a systematic Trinitarian teaching about God, Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit, Paul's letters to the Thessalonians certainly reflect his theology on each of them. As such they must be seen in the context of the entire Pauline letter corpus if we are to get a representative picture of Pauline theology as a whole. I shall, however, not venture to do so here but stick to the teachings reflected in 1-2 Thess.

God the Father

God is referred to and addressed as God (1 Thess ; 2 Thess 1:3. 5f. 8 etc;), and God the (/our) Father (1 Thess 1:1.3; 3:11. 13; Thess 1:1f; 2:16). Also he is called a living and true God (1 Thess 1:9b). The idols (τῶν εἰδώλων) are here juxtaposed to the ‘true’/ ‘real’ God. Regarding the implicit understanding of the idols as ‘dead’, Witherington rightly notices that, “By this Paul does not mean that the idols represent nothing... He does not see pagan religion as

⁶⁸ G. Strecker, “εὐαγγέλιον, ου, τό *euaggelion* Evangelium”, in: Horst Balz/Gerhard Schneider (Hrsg.), *Exegetisches Wörterbuch zum Neuen Testament* II, Stuttgart/Berlin/Köln/Mainz: Verlag Kohlhammer GmbH, 1981, 178f.

⁶⁹ For a rather recent account of the theology of 1-2 Thess, see Frank Thielman, *Theology of the New Testament: a canonical and synthetic approach*, Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 2005, 234-261.

having no connection with the spiritual realm but as connected with the dark side and the evil beings of that realm.”⁷⁰ But for Paul it is loyalty to the living God and the Lord which is at the fore here (cf 1 Cor 8:5-6). Although Paul has elsewhere made reference to God as almighty (παντοκράτωρ, 2 Cor 6:18) he neither there or in 1-2 Thess makes an abstract treatise on the omnipotence of God. Instead he presents God as true and living with reference to his known activities in salvation history, including the lives of the Thessalonian Christians. Thus God is said to be the one who loved them (2 Thess 2:16; cf 3:5), called them (1 Thess 2:12; cf 2 Thess 1:11), chose them (1 Thess 1:4; 2 Thes 2:13), and whose kingdom the Christians – also in Thessalonike – will inherit (2 Thess 1:5; cf Rom 2:5ff; Phil 1:28). In this way he testifies to the great power of God as well.

Jesus Christ

Jesus is referred to as ‘Jesus’ (1 Thess 4:14), ‘the (/our) Lord Jesus Christ’ (1 Thess 1:1. 3; 5:9. 23. 28; 2 Thess 1:1f. 12; 2:1. 14. 16; 3:6. 12. 18), ‘the Lord’ (1 Thess 1:1.8; 3:8; 4:16; 5:12. 27), ‘the (/our) Lord Jesus’ (1 Thess 2:15. 19; 3:11. 13; 2 Thess 1:8; 2:8), ‘Christ’ (1 Thess 3:2; 4:16. 17; 5:2), ‘Christ Jesus’ (1 Thess 2:14; 5:18), and as God’s Son, Jesus (1 Thess 1:10). Paul’s use of a varied nomenclature demonstrates differentiation on his behalf when he speaks of of Jesus Christ, the one whom his gospel particularly concentrates (2 Thess 1:8; 2:14). Also the Thessalonian Christians must have heard him use these many different names of Christ since Paul here presupposes their familiarity with them.

Whereas ‘Jesus’ particularly refers to the historical person who died and rose again to life (4:14), and of whose death Paul is a witness (cf 1 Cor 15), ‘the Lord’, ‘the (/our) Lord Jesus’, and ‘Christ’ are invariably used with reference to the (crucified and) risen one, now alive and in heaven, and whom Paul and the Thessalonians expect will return in glory at the parousia (4:15-17). He is the living one with whom the Christians have been united, have faith in and live with (4:16f). He is the one whom the gospel is centred on, and of whose gospel Paul is a servant (3:2).

In the combinations ‘the (/our) Lord Jesus’, ‘the (/our) Lord Jesus Christ’, and ‘Christ Jesus’ the identity between the historical Jesus and the risen Christ is particularly signified. As Martin Hengel has demonstrated, ‘Jesus Christ’ or ‘Christ Jesus’ must be understood to have been used as a double name for Jesus, who fulfilled the messianic expectations.⁷¹ Thus in this double name both his human and divine origin is confirmed. At the same time they emphasise his living presence (4:10), his coming again (5:23) and his being the mediator of their salvation (4:9). Also when Jesus is referred to as the Son of God this is a designation particularly referring to his being sent on a divine mission into the world to die and resurrect, a mission which will only be completed by his return from heaven (1 Thess 1:10). Hence also here Jesus’ divine origin and its connection with his human nature are attested.

Thus Jesus Christ is believed to be the Son of God who suffered, died and was made to rise again from the dead by God (1 Thess 1:9f; 4:14). Implicitly Jesus is said to have ascended into heaven, since he will come again from heaven (1 Thess 1:10; 4:15-17; cf 2 Thes 1:7-10; 2:1ff) – an event the Thessalonians are now awaiting (1 Thess 1:10). Therefore the Christians

⁷⁰ Witherington 2006, 74. Paul elsewhere deals with polytheism – the many gods and lords of Greco-Roman society (1 Cor 8:4-6) – and says that idol worship is the same as worship of demons (1 Cor 10:7. 14. 21). Hence in 1-2 Thess Paul also makes reference to Satan as representing the evil powers, either by hindering Paul (and his colleagues) from visiting the Thessalonians (2:17f) or by causing other kinds of evil (such as lawlessness, deception and pretended signs and wonders, 2 Thess 2:9-11).

⁷¹ See the article/chapter (4) “‘Christos’ in Paul” in Martin Hengel, *Between Jesus and Paul: Studies in the Earliest History of Christianity* (English Translation: John Bowden), London: Fortress Press, 1983, (64-77), 76f.

can “live with him” (σὺν αὐτῷ ζήσωμεν) whether they “wake or sleep” (εἴτε γρηγορῶμεν εἴτε καθεύδωμεν 1 Thess 5:10). As the Son of God, Jesus is also described as the one who “delivers us from the wrath to come” (1:10). This is a belief which the apostles share with the Thessalonian Christians. As to their conduct, the Christians are commended for being willing to suffer as a consequence of their new faith (1:6; cf), just as Paul and his co-workers, and the Christians in the Judean churches did (2:14-16) – an indirect reference to the sufferings of Christ. Sufferings are bound to be part of the lives of those who follow him; this includes Paul and those who have been brought to faith by him (2:13f; 3:4f; cf Rom 8:17; 2 Cor 1:6f; 4:8-11; Phil 2:5-11).

The gospel which Paul at first presented to the Thessalonians obviously must have included also some account of the life of Jesus, albeit Paul does not reiterate much of it elsewhere in his writings, save for brief references to the incarnation and works of Christ (Phil 2:5ff; Gal 4:4; cf Rom 8:3), descriptions of the institution of the Lord’s supper (1 Cor 11:23-25), and an account of the resurrection of Christ and the following events (1 Cor 15), both of the latter as accounts which he had received from the Lord (Ἐγὼ γὰρ παρέλαβον ἀπὸ τοῦ κυρίου, ὃ καὶ παρέδωκα ὑμῖν 1 Cor 11:23; τὸ εὐαγγέλιον ὃ εὐηγγελισάμην ὑμῖν, ὃ καὶ παρελάβετε 1 Cor 15: 1).

The Holy Spirit – God’s gift (1 Thess 4:8)

The gospel came to the Thessalonians “in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction” (1 Thess 1:5). As such they received it “with joy inspired by the Holy Spirit” (1 Thess 1:6). Hence the Holy Spirit is regarded as God’s gift to the Thessalonian Christians (1 Thess 4:8), a gift which they must beware not to disregard or quench (1 Thess 5:8. 19; 2), since it was by him they were sanctified and came to faith in the truth (2 Thess 2:13). Also the gift has come with moral consequences – their call to sanctification (1 Thess 4:7f). Thus it is by God’s Spirit that they have become Christians (cf 1 Cor 2:4f; 12:13): “the election takes place through the gospel he [Paul, 2 Thess 2:14] preached..., which is the mode by which the Spirit sanctifies and faith is engendered (cf. Rom 10:14-17).”⁷²

In summing up we may say that no doubt is left as to the divinity of God, the Father, but that Paul offers no systematic theological treatise in his two letters, neither on God, Jesus or the Spirit. Instead Paul gives the Thessalonians pertinent examples of the activities of God, Jesus Christ, and the Spirit of God in salvation history. These include events each of them has caused in salvation history, is presently conducting, and shall engage in at the return of Christ on the Day of the Lord – all experienced in and relating to the lives of the Thessalonian Christians – both the living and those who have died (1 Thess 4:13-5:11; cf. 2 Thess 1:7-10). Through his letters, however, Paul confirms the divine origin of the Spirit as well as the divine origin and human nature of Jesus Christ. But there is no attempt made to develop a Trinitarian theology as such, although both Jesus Christ and the Spirit are considered to have been sent by God. What Paul does, however, is to express vital elements of what he considers to be a common Christian creed, relating it to the activities of God, Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit. In so doing Paul defines their common faith – his, his co-workers and that of the Thessalonians. This he does as a reminder, a further explication of what he has formerly taught, but also by imparting new knowledge about the implications of their faith (1 Thess 3:13-18; 2 Thess 2:1-12).⁷³ Further he exhorts them to maintain their jointly held faith in spite

⁷² Malherbe 2000, 438.

⁷³ Although Paul in 2 Thess 2:5 reminds them that he spoke of these things during his first visit in Thessalonike, the fact that he has to reiterate the facts and further elaborate on them shows that the Christians – as of yet – had not grasped the meaning or implications of his teaching.

of their sufferings, difficulties, and uncertainty about (certain) implications of their newly gained faith (2 Thess 1:11; 2:11. 15-17).

4.4 Confirming the New Explicit (Ethical) Values

It is impossible here to give a detailed account of what the new ethos entails in 1-2 Thess and which Paul introduced during his (and Timothy's) visits in Thessalonike. In this context I shall limit myself to showing that Paul's letters confirm the *explicit* (ethical) values of their new faith at the same time as they show them what to refrain from. The latter either represents values of their former faith or unacceptable deviations from the Christian ethos which was conveyed to them by Paul and his coworkers.

On the one hand Paul repeatedly commends the Thessalonians in his letters for their behaviour (e.g., 2 Thess 1:3f). First, their faith has been known by others, both in Macedonia and Achaia (1 Thess 1:6-10) and is considered by Paul as exemplary (v 7), since they have abided by his teachings (v 6; cf 2:11-13). While practising their new faith their love has been industrious, and their hope patient (v 3; cf 2:14f). Second, their ethos has been affected by his instructions (1 Thess 1:6-8). But he encourages them to do so even more and to make even more progress (1 Thess 4:1. 10). In instructing their behaviour Paul partly deals with a behaviour which is in contrast to that of their former belief, using the commandments against fornication and adultery (1 Thess 4:3) and coveting (v 5) as his terms of reference, but also the commandment to love their neighbours (4:9f) and to work diligently with their hands. This does not allow them to opt for a leisurely life and for becoming dependent on the charity of others (4:11f). Additional instructions are given toward the end of 1 Thess (5:14-22), where they are both told what not to do and what to do. Similarly in 2 Thess (3:6-15) Paul gives standards by which to abide in Christian ethos. These concern both that of being diligent workers (2 Thess 3,11f) and that of handling fellow Christians who conduct a life 'out of order' and do not live according to the set standards for a Christian living (ἀπὸ παντὸς ἀδελφοῦ ἀτάκτως περιπατοῦντος καὶ μὴ κατὰ τὴν παράδοσιν ἣν παρελάβοσαν παρ' ἡμῶν 2 Thess 3:6). Also their new faith obliges them to follow the standard set by Paul and his coworkers (3:11-15).

On the other hand Paul is keen to correct such behaviour which contradicts the newly gained faith of the Thessalonians. In other words, he shows the demarcation lines between what is acceptable and non acceptable Christian behaviour. Thus in 2 Thess 3:6 'in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ' he commands (Παραγγέλλομεν) the Christians there 'to keep away from idleness' (ἀπὸ παντὸς ἀδελφοῦ ἀτάκτως περιπατοῦντος) and not to live contrary to the tradition which they have received from Paul (καὶ μὴ κατὰ τὴν παράδοσιν ἣν παρελάβοσαν παρ' ἡμῶν). The use of this phrase is interesting, since it shows Paul's reference to a common ethical tradition which he has both received himself and transmitted to the Thessalonians. Thus, in line with similar expressions for 'received and transmitted tradition' of Christian belief – regarding the Lord's Supper and his resurrection (1 Cor 11:23ff; 15:1ff), and of his coming again (1 Thess 4:15) – Paul uses reference to a common heritage also with regard to standards for Christian ethos – stating a common standard behaviour among Christians. Likewise in other exhortations Paul may give reference to 'the Lord' (1 Thess 5:12), God, and Jesus Christ (5:18), and to his own example (1 Thess 2:9-12; 2 Thess 3:7) to emphasise both the authenticity and authority of his teachings, and therefore the importance of what he wishes to convey and hopes the Thessalonians may adopt as standard in their new life as Christians.

5 Conclusion

Paul's mission task toward the Thessalonians was not completed after his visit in Thessalonike. By sending Timothy on a renewed visit, by writing letters to the new converts, and by visiting them again himself Paul demonstrated that he was negotiating with them such standards for Christian belief and behaviour which were based on the message of that gospel for which he and his co-workers were serving as ministers. His aim was for the Christian church in Thessalonike to abide by the implicit and explicit values of the Christian faith to which they had converted and of which they were now taught to see the implications. In order for them to maintain unfailing faith and ethos he emphasised his and his co-workers' authority as ambassadors of God. Also he shared with the Thessalonian converts the authentic message about the Lord Jesus Christ which he had received and was now passing on. On their way to independence as a church the core values of their faith in the living and true God had to be reiterated and confirmed. These were values which Paul in his letters demonstrated were a heritage to be commonly kept and cherished by him, his co-workers and the Thessalonian converts. In spelling out a *regula fidei* to which they might adhere, as well as ethical standards by which they might abide he negotiated with the Thessalonian converts a new worldview which these standards reflected. When the Thessalonians were faced with persecution, millenarianism, and the temptation to return to the standards of their former polytheist ethos, Paul showed them again the implications of their conversion. They had left the idols to serve the true and living God who had sent his Son to die and to be resurrected for their salvation. This Son, Jesus Christ, would certainly return – but not yet. While awaiting his return they must realize that the gospel about him – the gospel of whom Paul and his co-workers were ambassadors – was the will of the true and living God to whom they had turned from their idols. Because he is the God of history and salvation, he is also able to make the parousia of his Son occur at the time which he has destined, and which is yet to come. Since not all the Thessalonian converts seem to have grasped this truth fully, nor its implications, Paul's mission was incomplete until all the brethren had come to believe and behave according to the standards of the new world view, by accepting its explicit and implicit values. Thus he had to send Timothy, write letters and continue his negotiations with them, aiming at modifying their worldview to the standards of their new, monotheistic faith in the living and true God. Nothing less would do for Paul and his co-workers, since they regarded their common belief and behaviour to be spelled out in the gospel they were serving in their mission.

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