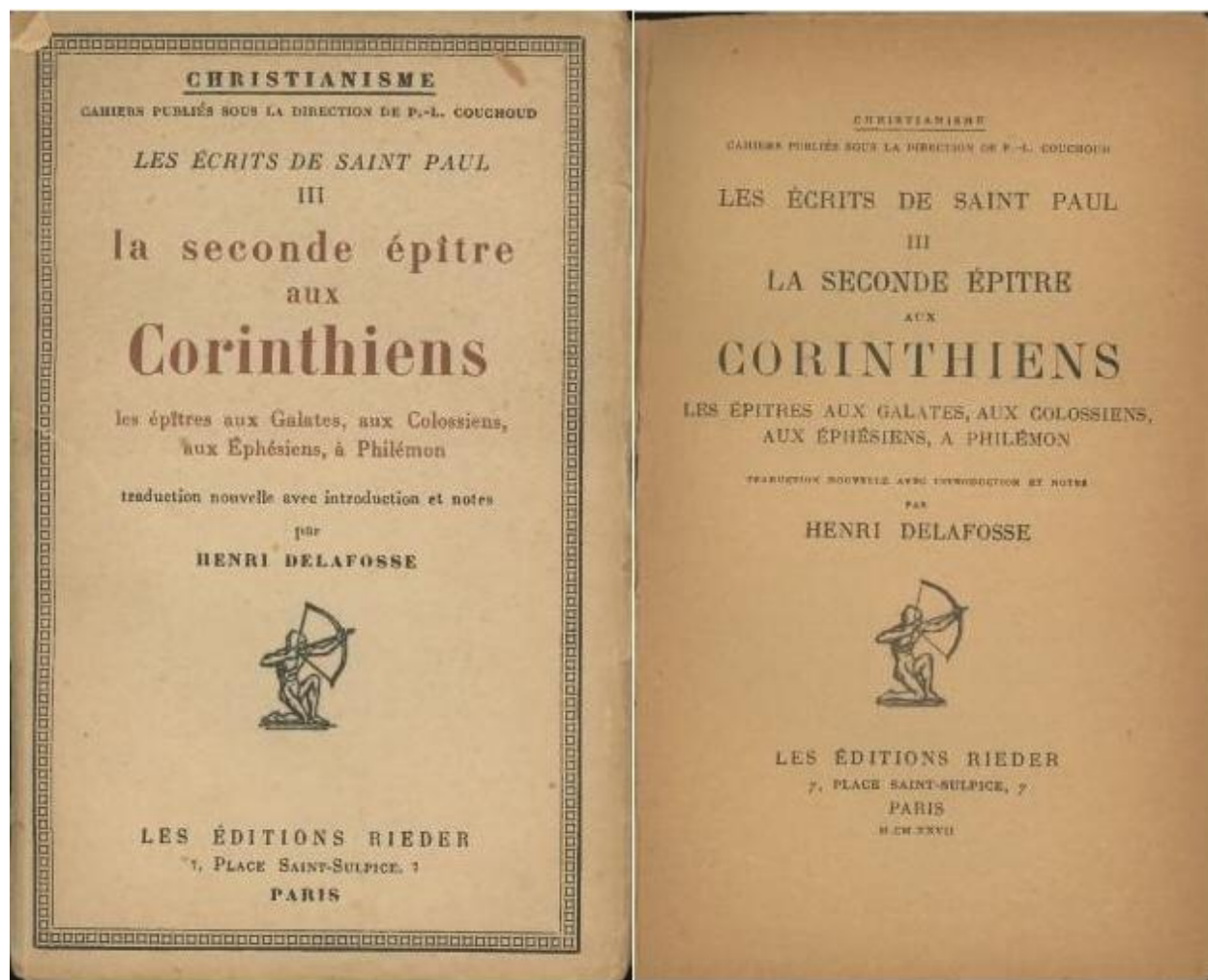


This file was created October 2021 as a translation for my personal use and without any thought of sharing publicly at the time. I only ask that you keep that in mind when using it. I have made a copy of the French text available at

<https://archive.org/details/turmel-les-ecrits-de-saint-paul-iii-la-seconde-epitre-aux-corinthiens>

Neil Godfrey - November 2023



# SECOND EPISTLE TO THE CORINTHIANS

The second letter to the Corinthians actually contains two separate letters.

The first was written at a time when Paul had only been to Corinth once, had undertaken to return, but had postponed his plan. This is evident from the following text (I, 15):

I wanted to go to you first so that you might have a second grace.

The Corinthians received a first grace, which consisted in the apostle's first journey to Corinth. The second journey, if it had happened, would have been the second grace. And this second grace Paul wanted to grant "first", that is, before certain events of which the letter speaks. But this project, thwarted by the aforementioned events, has not yet been put into effect.

This first letter extends over chapters I-IX and was written about a year after the first epistle. In fact, according to VIII, 10, the Corinthians had been intending to send money to the poor of Jerusalem for a year. Now it is the first epistle XVI, 1 which notified them of the project of collection. Our letter thus dates from the year 56.

10

The second letter belongs to a time when Paul had just completed a second trip to Corinth and was preparing to return there a third time, as these two texts<sup>1</sup> prove.

1. We can see in Estius, XIII, 2, the expedients to which those who, like him, think that these texts do not suppose two journeys already completed, have to resort.

XII 14. Behold, I am preparing to go to you for the third time.

XIII, 1. For the third time I will go to you... When I was at your house for the second time I said, and now that I am away I say again...

It dates from the years 57 or 58. It extends over the last four chapters X-XIII.

## FIRST LETTER I-IX

### SUBJECT

This letter is dominated by the two cases of the incestuous man and the quest for the "saints" of Jerusalem.

In his first letter, Paul, who prescribed to the Christians of Corinth to exclude the incestuous from their assemblies, reproached them at the same time for their guilty indulgence of this tris ie person. But he later learned that his reproaches had made a considerable impression on the recipients. The present letter shows us the means which the apostle employed to calm this emotion and to liquidate the affair of the incestuous person.

11

It also tells us at length about the quest for which Paul ardently desired success. As we read it, we can see that under a philanthropic guise, the quest had a hidden motive of interest, and that Paul, in bringing money to the poor of Jerusalem, was primarily interested in disarming the hatred of which he was the object of the Jews.

The two cases of the incestuous and the quest, so different from each other, have, by the effect of circumstances, reacted on each other. Paul, who, at the time of his first epistle, intended to return to the Corinthians soon, and who had even announced his visit to them (I Cor., XVI, 5-9), gave up his project when he learned of the turmoil into which his reproaches had thrown the Christians of Corinth. He did not want to expose himself to a reception marked by discontent or even hostility. But on the other hand, he foresaw that these incidents would jeopardise the success of the quest which was so close to his heart, and he thought of ways to avert this catastrophe. What he did for this we learn from our letter, of which it is time to take note.

12

## 1. Continuation of the case of the incestuous one.

The letter begins (I, 8-11) with a quick mention of an event in which the apostle almost died (probably the incident related in Acts XIX, 23-40). After this allusion Paul engages in a long plea in which his personal apology is combined with the promises of God. The explanations he gives are awkward, artificial and above all elliptical and must be corrected and completed. Here is what had happened.

When he heard - probably in Troas, where he went after leaving Ephesus - of the disturbance his letter had caused among the Corinthians, the apostle did not dare to go to Corinth himself. But he sent Titus in his place with a mission to soften the Corinthians with good words, to rescue the quest from the wreckage that threatened to swallow it up, and to return to Troas as soon as possible to give him news. Titus made him wait for his return. Impatient to have information, Paul decided to go himself to meet his delegate and to go to the coast of Europe. He ended up meeting Titus either at Neapolis, where those who came from Asia to Europe landed, or at Nicopolis, a nearby city where, as we know (II Tim., III, 12), the apostle had stayed. The information provided by Titus came down to this: The Corinthians had shown no enthusiasm for the quest; they had resigned themselves to pronounce against the incestuous man the exclusion which was demanded of them, but this measure had seemed excessive to them and they had only executed it reluctantly. They had also been displeased to hear that Paul, who had promised to return, was breaking his word, and their displeasure had been expressed in words like these: 'When Paul says yes, it is no that we should believe; let us apply this principle to all that he told about the promises which God has made to us and which Christ must fulfil. He said it is yes; let us believe it is no.

13

These irreverent reflections affected the apostle in his person. They also affected the faith of which he was the preacher. First of all, Paul goes to the most urgent matter and begins by defending the faith. He says (20):

All the promises of God [of which I have spoken to you] are yes in Christ [will be fulfilled through Christ] and through him the amen [the yes, i.e. the fulfilment of the promises] is pronounced by us to the glory of God.

Paul does not tell us what these "promises" are that God has made and that are to be fulfilled through Christ. But the explanation which is lacking here is to be found in the texts of Gal, III, 16, 18, Rom, IV, 13, where we learn that Christ came to fulfil the promises made by God to Abraham 1.

1. See Letter to the Romans, p. 13.

14

After defending the honour of God and strengthening the faith of the Corinthians in the promises, Paul turns to his own honour and makes an apology for his conduct (I, 23-11, 13). He tells the Corinthians that he did not go to see them so as not to be obliged to punish them, and also so as not to make a spectacle of the sadness with which he was filled, since he wrote his letter with a heavy heart and eyes full of tears. He then settles the situation of the incestuous man: "It is not only I," he says in substance, "whom this man has afflicted; it is all of you whom he has hurt, a punishment which, it is true, has been moderate. All of you have punished him. The punishment you have inflicted on him is enough. Prolonged further it could throw him into despair. The enemy, that is, the Jew, is there coveting his prey. We know his thoughts: let us thwart them. Do not let the incestuous one return to Judaism; give him access to your meetings.

Here Paul declares to the Corinthians, not without some exuberance, that he has great affection for them and asks to be paid back (VI, 11-13; VII, 2-3). He notes with sadness that so far he is not loved as he loves (VI, 12). So we are surprised to hear him later, in VII, 7, speak of the deep affection the Corinthians had for him. And the unlimited trust he shows the Corinthians (VII, 16) does not lessen our surprise. The noisy demonstrations of VII, 7, 16 do not fit well with VI, 13 and VII, 2. How can we explain their presence here? By chapter IX (VIII did not exist primitively) of which he denies to speak now and which relates to the quest. Paul is going to knock on the Corinthians' coffers; he is going to ask them for money. This delicate operation is one that needs to be prepared for by skilful approaches. The best preparation in such cases is optimism. Paul adopts a commanding optimism without worrying about agreeing with himself. The important thing is to have money.

15

## 2. The quest.

The epistle, as we read it today, contains two requests for money, each of which has its own introduction and conclusion. One of them occupies the whole of chapter VIII, the other is in chapter IX. These two clearly distinct requests were not composed at the same time. This is the result of comparing VIII, f-5 with IX, 2. VIII, 1-5 tells us that the contribution to the collection is a fact in the churches of Macedonia (i.e. Thessalonica

and Philippi). The Christians there "gave voluntarily according to their means and even beyond their means". In IX, 2 Paul preaches the collection to the Christians in Macedonia. To stimulate their generosity he tells them of the hopes he has for the church in Corinth. In other words, in VIII the harvest is done in Macedonia; in IX we witness the sowing. Let us conclude that the dissertation of IX preceded chronologically that of VIII. The latter was taken to Corinth at a later date by Titus who is mentioned there; the former is one with the letter. Let us quickly take note of these two pieces.

16

In chapter IX the considerations presented are as follows: " 1° I have praised you in the churches of Macedonia; I have said that for a year you have been willing to untie your purse strings. You will be anxious to deserve the reputation I have made for you; 2. When I go to your house to collect the money, I may be accompanied by some Macedonians. What a shame it would be for you and for me if they found that, during my stay with them, I had given them an inaccurate picture of your generosity! 3) God will treat you as you have treated your fellow men. He will repay with usury what you have given with joy. He will make your business prosper. And, instead of impoverishing you, your alms will be a source of wealth for you. (Paul does not add that the so-called "saints" will also bless the instrument which God used to bring the Corinthians to faith, and that the hatred with which they have hitherto pursued this instrument will disappear.)

17

This request, together with the letter of which it is an integral part, was carried to its destination by "the brethren" (3 and 5), i.e. by two or three of the companions whom Paul had at his side. These 'brothers' soon returned with bad news. The Corinthians had not wanted to promise anything and had based their refusal on the following reasons or pretexts: "Paul gives us orders (IX, 7: "Let each one give as he has determined"); we do not want them. And then to reduce us to misery to enrich the beggars of Jerusalem is an operation which does not agree with us ". When this unfortunate information reached him, Paul, who was either in Philippi or Thessalonica, was collecting alms from the Christians in Macedonia. When his work was done, he returned to the Corinthians and sent them, through Titus, a second request, the one inserted in chapter VIII. This note is probably only a few months later than the letter. After informing the Corinthians of the generosity shown by the Macedonians, Paul asks them, who excel in everything, to excel also in charity. Then he answers the objections that have been made to his first approach. He was accused of imposing his will. He says (8): "I do not speak in the form of a command; but I point out to you the readiness

of others to show your own; (10) and I give you an opinion on this subject. This is useful to you who have not only begun to act (this word seems to indicate that the "brothers" have brought in some very meagre alms) but who, since last year (or one year ago), have had the will to give". He was reproached for wanting to strip the Christians of Macedonia and Achaia to enrich the poor of Jerusalem. He answers in substance (13-14): "I do not want to reduce you to poverty. I ask you to provide for their misery with your superfluity so that, if the opportunity arises one day, they in turn may provide for your misery with their superfluity. In the letter Paul intended to go to Corinth himself to collect the money (IX, 4). In his note he has given up his project, because he praises the probity of Titus and his companions (VIII, 18-23), which only makes sense if these envoys had themselves received the mission to take the alms.

1. The expression apo perusi of IX, 2 and VIII, 10 refers to the time when the Corinthians received the first epistle which (XVI, 1), spoke to them of the collection.

19

## SUPPLEMENTS

The scholar whose analysis we have just read has received various supplements with which we must now become acquainted.

The first supplement consists of a long dissertation which goes from II, 14 to VI, 10. It contains a whole treatise on theology which has no connection with the affair of the incestuous but which cuts it off. Thrown like an erratic block in the middle of the apology of Paul which it dislocates, it frankly appears as an hors d'oeuvre. Here are the main thoughts that one meets there.

1. The word of God altered by the many.

In II:14-17 Paul and his companions present themselves to us as preachers of the word of God. They preach it "in every place"; they preach it in all its purity and without any alteration. Wherever they go, they spread the knowledge of God like a good smell. I say "of God". No doubt they themselves are the good odour of Christ and this good odour they spread around them. But this good odour of Christ which they spread glorifies God and, in the end, the knowledge of Christ results in the knowledge of God. But Paul and

his companions, who nevertheless go "everywhere", are only a small minority in the army of preachers of the gospel. Of these preachers the great majority alter the word of God and make neither God nor Christ known.

20

Here two observations. Firstly, Paul, except in Athens, preached the gospel to Jews who already knew God. Paul did not pretend to introduce them to the knowledge of God, but told them that God's promise to Abraham would be fulfilled through Christ. Secondly, those preachers who, compared to Paul's group, are a large majority and who distort the word of God, i.e. who do not make God and Christ known, did not exist in the years 50-62. And it would be a waste of time to look for them. Let us continue.

## 2. The two covenants.

In III, 5-14 two covenants appear, the old and the new. The new covenant has as its organ the divine spirit which pours itself into souls and gives them life. Hence, the ministers of this covenant exercise "the ministry of the spirit" or "the ministry of justice". The old covenant has as its organ a writing, a "letter" which is still "read" among the Jews today. This letter only brings threats of punishment and death to men. Hence, the ministers of this covenant exercise "the ministry of death" or "the ministry of condemnation". In two words, "the letter kills but the spirit gives life". This is what we learn from this piece.

21

Now Paul knows the "promise" and the "law" (Gal., III, 15-18; Rom., IV, 13-22). The "promise" which was made to Abraham, which is to be fulfilled by Christ, and which has for its object the possession of the land of Chaenan; the "law" which, coming four hundred and thirty years after the promise, could not abrogate it. If he had known several covenants, the promise made to Abraham would have been for him the old covenant and he would have reserved the word "new covenant" to designate the Mosaic law. But the two covenants are unknown to him. And if he uses the word "testament" once (Gen. III:17), it is to equate the "promise" with a testament whose irrevocable clause could not be broken by the "law". He ignores the two covenants. All the more so does he ignore the covenant of the letter as opposed to the covenant of the spirit. The theology that is spread out here is foreign to Paul's horizon. On the other hand, it is closely related to the two oracles of Galatians III, 19 and Romans V, 20,



which teach us that the law was given to multiply sins. But these oracles are of Marcionite origin 1.

1. The Epistle to the Romans, p. 26.

22

3. The God of this age.

In III, 17-IV, 6 we see the knowledge of God in the symbol of a light which Paul and his companions have received and which they send back by preaching 'the gospel of the glory of Christ who is the image of God'. This light reaches all souls who are not blinded. But there are souls whom "the God of this age" has struck blind.

What is "the God of this age"? It is said to be an angelic creature in revolt against God to whom it owes its existence. It is agreed, moreover, that the existence of this rebel was not even suspected by the pagans. But then a question arises. How could he be "the God of this age", that is, at least the God of the pagans? To worship a god, to give him a cult, the first condition required was to believe in his existence. Artemis was worshipped in Ephesus, Demeter in Eleusis, Isis and Mithras had devotees everywhere. But the angel who rebelled against God, where could he be worshipped since he was not known anywhere? Would it be said that this angel was the sole beneficiary of the tributes paid to the more or less mythical deities of the pagan pantheon? If he did, it was in any case without the knowledge of the pagans? Their intention was not to worship a creature in revolt against its creator; this creature was not their god. And the negative but peremptory conclusion we arrive at is that the 'God of this age' who blinds the minds of the unbelievers cannot be the rebellious angel to whom Christian theology gives the name of devil.

23

Who he is, let us see what he does. He blinds some men. Now in Isaiah VI, 10, XXIX, 14, God blinds the Jews of whom he has cause for complaint; he takes away their wisdom. And in Exodus IV, 21, VII, 3, etc., God hardens the heart of Pharaoh. The "God of this age" performs the same operations as the God of the Old Testament. Hitherto we have been unable to identify this character; his identity is now established. The "God of this age" is the God who created the world, who is its absolute master, who is its God with all the fullness of meaning that this word implies. But this Creator God strives to "lose" men, and in order to bring about their loss, he veils from them the gospel of the

glory of Christ; he is the enemy of Christ, the enemy of the God whose image Christ is. Our text, with all that surrounds it, contains a profession of faith in dualist theology.<sup>1</sup> And all the scratching that theologians and commentators have done to erase this profession of faith is in vain. Let us note in conclusion that the "unbelievers" whose minds are blinded by the God of this age are not the pagans, but the Catholics who worship the Creator God, who believe neither in Christ the Spirit, of III, 17, nor in the God whose image this Christ is.

1. Irenaeus (III, 7) read: "God has blinded the minds of the unbelievers of this age" and his translation which removes all difficulty has had an enormous vogue in the past. But it is agreed today that it is a pure expedient.

24

#### 4. We groan in this tent.

According to IV, 16-V, 8 there is in each of us the outer man, which is the body, and the inner man, which is the soul. The body, our earthly home, is for us a tent that weighs us down (reminiscence of Wisdom IX, 15). We groan in this tent and wish that the mortal element would be absorbed by life. We desire this all the more because the body keeps us away from the Lord. So we desire to leave the body. Then we will have a new home which will be none other than heaven and we will be with God. This is what this piece teaches us when we have deduced verses 2, 3 and 4b. It rejects the resurrection and sends the soul to heaven into the company of the Lord immediately after death. It presents the Christian longing to get out of the prison of the body to be with God.

But 2, 3 and 4b strike a different note. According to them what the Christian desires is to put on the resurrection body over his present body without passing through death. His groaning comes from the fact that this privilege will be reserved only for those who, at the time of the parousia, will still be clothed in their bodies. Verses 2, 3 and 4b are Catholic alterations introduced into a Marcionite redaction and intended to neutralise it. To these alterations must be added 5, which mentions "the pledge of the Spirit"; see I:22. The whole is an incoherent assemblage in which theologians and critics have become hopelessly entangled. Critics have said that Paul, when he wrote this, had just become acquainted with Greek philosophy and had adopted its ideas without, however, renouncing the rabbinic doctrine of the resurrection. But the difficulty is to understand how Paul could say simultaneously that the Christian wants to keep his body and wants to leave it to be with God. And this difficulty is not even addressed by the critics' explanation.

## 5. We no longer know Christ according to the flesh.

V, 14-21 is a summary of the essay we encountered in Romans IV, 25-VIII, 19 1, and it must be illuminated by it. Here is what he means. The Creator contrived to make men sin that he might afterwards, in all justice, kill and punish them in hell. But the good God had mercy on us. Instead of imputing our sins to us, he resolved to reconcile us with him and make us his children. This was only possible if we were first removed from the Creator's empire, and, therefore, the first operation to be accomplished was to free us from the yoke of our tyrant. To achieve this result God came to earth clothed in an ethereal organism in human form called the Christ (19: "God was in the Christ", i.e. in the ethereal organism). Christ, having committed no sin, was not subject to the law of death, which strikes men only because their body is a body of sin, a body necessarily producing sin. Nevertheless, God did not want to exempt him from death; he treated him as a body of sin (21). (21) We shall now see why and how this arrangement brought about our salvation.

1. The Epistle to the Romans, pp. 24-37.

Christ was put to death by the minions of the Creator. But Christ is the head of an immense mystical body of which all those who believe in Him and whose faith has been manifested by the reception of baptism are a part. When Christ was put to death, all his members were put to death with him (more exactly, they are put to death when they become members, that is, when they receive baptism). They have therefore paid the tribute they owed as sinners to death, and the Creator who has satisfied his anger can no longer do anything about them; they escape his empire. And now we see why Christ died, and how his death brought our deliverance. But let us continue.

Christ, who was not dependent on death, who died only to procure our salvation, did not remain in the power of death. He rose from the dead. With him all his members, that is to say all Christians, have risen. They are risen, and so far all that has been accomplished in them has been through Christ. The rest is left to their activity. They must now live only for Christ who died for them. (15) Now they live for Christ only if they

live by the life of Christ who, as a divine spirit, is in them, who, moreover, is their head and of whom they are the members. And to live the life of Christ, they must not live according to the flesh. This flesh was killed at the time of their baptism, they must not let it live again (see Rom. VIII, 9-10 and VI, 3-4). Christians are no longer in the flesh but in the spirit. In accordance with this principle Paul no longer wants to know anyone in the flesh (16). And, no doubt, he did know Christ in the flesh. But that was before his conversion. At that time he had a complete misunderstanding of Christ, whom he regarded as a national king and to whom he attributed a carnal body. Since his conversion he no longer knows Christ according to the flesh because he knows that Christ did not have a fleshly body. But all his companions, all those who share his faith, think as he does: "If we knew Christ according to the flesh, now we do not know him so". We are faced with a fictitious Paul who preaches the faith of Marcion.

28

## 6. No agreement between Christ and Beliar.

The essay we read from VI, 14 to VII, 1 has to do with mixed marriages, which it compares to the agreement of Christ with Beliar, that is to say, to a thing whose very thought makes one shudder. This oracle dislocates again the plea of Paul which, interrupted a first time in II, 15, had resumed in VI, 11-13: it is thus not of Paul. On the other hand it does not have the same author as the piece of I Cor. VII, 12-16 which admits in principle mixed marriages. The rigorous morality that it teaches and the vocabulary that it uses (light and darkness) invite us to assign a Marcionite origin to it. Beliar, whatever the origin of this term, refers to the 'God of this age', i.e. the Creator who is also represented under the symbol of darkness. The "unfaithful" spouse (to whom the Christian should not be joined) is not a pagan but a Beliar worshipper, i.e. a Catholic.

The three biblical texts which are supposed to prove that the Christian is the temple of God and which, in reality, prove nothing, since they do not speak of a temple, are overloads of Catholic origin.

29

## 7. Christ who was rich became poor.

In VIII, 9 we say:

For you know the good deed of our Lord Jesus Christ, that for your sakes He made Himself poor from being rich, that you might be enriched by His poverty.

He puts before the eyes of the Corinthians the admirable example of charity given by the Lord Jesus who, being rich, became poor in order to enrich men. This example is certainly likely to inspire the Corinthians with charity. But let us see how it is brought about. The particle "for" which introduces it presents it as serving to explain what precedes. Now in the preceding verse Paul says that he does not intend to give orders to the Corinthians, but that he points out to them the generosity of the Macedonians in order to stimulate their emulation. This thought needs no explanation, and verse 9, which claims to explain or motivate it, arrogates to itself a very useless role. Verse 9 does not fulfil the function it is supposed to perform. Instead, it violently separates the two parts of the same thought, which is: "I do not intend to command you, but I point out the generosity of the Macedonians (8) and give you advice (10). Verse 9 is an intruder that has been given the particle "for" to make it seem as if it completes and justifies the previous thought. Its real purpose is to proclaim the pre-existence of Christ. The verse II Cor. VIII, 9 is one of the three or four texts which theologians use to prove the pre-existence of the Pauline Christ. It is certain that the Christ who "was rich and became poor" is a pre-existent Christ. But this Christ is a Marcian product: he is not Pauline.

30

## SECOND LETTER X-XIII

### OCCASION OF THE LETTER

Paul returned to Corinth in about 58, and, if we are to believe Acts XX, 3, he stayed there for three months. The Christian community in that city gave him a humiliating spectacle. Not only was there a spirit of hatred and discord, but - more distressingly - many of its members were living in debauchery and filth. Paul declared that if, on his next return, the culprits had not renounced their disordered life, he would proceed to expel them. He promised, moreover, that he would not take any punishment until after a careful examination and that he would require the testimony of two or three witnesses

before deciding on the unworthiness of a member of the community (XIII, 1-2). Then he left.

But he was not alone in his findings. The Corinthians had also made observations. They had noticed that the apostle, so firm in his letters, had lost all confidence during his stay among them. His embarrassed manner lacked prestige and his speech lacked authority (X, 10). As a conclusion they had not taken anything tragic or even serious about what Paul had written and said to them. Rivalries and hatreds continued to flourish among them, and vice had not diminished (XII, 20-21). Let us add that the quest had appeared suspicious. It was said that the apostle, who had always claimed not to be a burden on the community, had embarked on this financial operation in order to obtain money by devious means (XII, 16-18).

31

Paul was informed of this situation and wrote a new letter, which must have been written several months or at least weeks after his departure from Corinth. It is this second letter that chapters X-XIII give us, with the deduction of various supplements that must be pointed out.

## SUPPLEMENTS

### 1. The meekness and goodness of Christ.

The first supplement is found in X, 1. It consists in the proposition: "I pray you by the meekness and goodness of Christ. This interpolation, whose motive is to present an ideal and superhuman Christ, introduces a syntactical incorrectness which is often hidden in translations but which is evident in the Greek where the relative pronoun "who" is violently separated from its antecedent which it wants to follow immediately. The original text reads: "I, Paul, who am humble to the face and bold to the absence.

32

### 2. Paul's weapons.

The second supplement includes the piece X, 2b-6 where the apostle accused of walking according to the flesh answers that he does not use carnal weapons, but that he wants to destroy everything that rises "against the knowledge of God." Paul's programme, as set out in the epistles to the Romans 1 and Galatians, is not to bring the knowledge of God to Jews who are already acquainted with God by background or education. Its purpose is to teach people who have heard of the promise to Abraham that this promise will be fulfilled through Christ, and that only those will benefit who are sons of Abraham through faith in Christ. X:2b-6 is outside Paul's horizon. This impression is strengthened by the end of the piece where the author declares that he wants to submit every thought to the obedience of Christ and prepares to crack down on any disobedience when the obedience of the Corinthians is complete. The obedience he has in view is the obedience of the mind, that which consists in the adherence of the spirit, that is, in faith. Now this obedience the Corinthians practice. The disobedience they show consists in forgetting the rules of decency and the dignity of life (XII, 20-21); it is moral. The author of the interpolation assumes it to be intellectual. He takes as the starting point of his speculations a historical fact which he has previously distorted.

1. See Ephesians to the Romans, p. 43.

33

### 3. Those who glory in the works of others.

The third supplement runs from X, 12 to XI, 6. Paul begins by saying that he does not want to compare himself to certain people who boast in themselves. But it is not long before we see that he is speaking ironically, for he adds with disdain, 12b: "They do not understand that they use their own judgment to magnify themselves. So these characters are boasters. They have yet another defect which is mentioned in verses 13-15 where we read, "We do not go beyond measure, which would take place if we boasted of the works of others..." Paul, who merely speaks here of what he and his companions do not do, expects us to complete his thought ourselves. So let us complete the sentence he wanted us to guess. This is what he had to say to You: "They boast of work which they have not done, which has been done by others; they show off their activity; they claim to have brought the Gospel to you, which is not true, since it is we who have come to you. In a word, these boasters are charlatans who take for themselves the gospel works of which I and my disciples are the authors. Here we are in the presence of mysterious preachers who resemble the jay of the fable adorning itself with the feathers of the peacock, who attribute to themselves the works of Paul. Who, then, among the contemporaries of the apostle, were the men who made such

false and extravagant claims? It would be a waste of time to look for them. They did not exist. Paul was not robbed of his work by the Christians of his time. And, consequently, the complaint formulated here does not emanate from him.

34

But this complaint is an echo. One day men met who accused their opponents of robbing Paul of the credit for his conquests and transferring it to competitors, in other words of falsifying the history of Christian origins. Who were these competitors for whose benefit the falsification had been committed? Two texts from Justin's great apology shed valuable light here. In one (XXXIX, 3) we read:

Twelve men went out from Jerusalem into the world. They were simple and could not speak. But by the power of God they announced to all mankind that they had been sent by Christ to proclaim the word of God to all.

35

And the other (XLV, 3) says the same thing in slightly different terms.

The apostles left Jerusalem and preached the word of God everywhere.

Justin teaches us here that the world was evangelised by the apostles who left Jerusalem, by the Twelve, that is to say by the immediate disciples of Jesus. About ten years before him (around 140) the same doctrine had been put into the mouth of Christ by these famous words (Matthew, XXVIII, 19):

Go and teach the nations, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. I am with you to the end of the age.

Justin is only translating into historical language what in Matthew is turned into an oracle.

This is the conception of history against which Paul, a fictional Paul, protests.  
Enlightened by

Justin his complaint is: "This so-called evangelisation of the world by the Twelve is a war machine directed against me. It was I who went to you Ephesians, not John. And you Romans saw me, not Peter. The Twelve take credit for my work; I am robbed by the Twelve. And this complaint, which Justin's texts give us the key to, explains to us in turn



the true objective of the legend which attributes the evangelisation of the world to the Twelve. It teaches us that this legend wants to demolish Paul, the historical Paul, for the benefit of the Twelve and that its meaning is this: "The infamous Marcion claims that Paul was the only worker of Christ. Do not believe him. The real workers of Christ are the Twelve. It was they who converted the world to the religion of Christ. They are the ones whom Christ entrusted with this mission when he said: "Teach all nations.

36

#### 4. The apostles quite superior.

If there were any doubt about the validity of these conclusions, it would vanish before XI, 5 where we read:

I consider myself to be in no way inferior to the altogether superior apostles, your superlative apostles.

Here are the Twelve with their leaders Peter, James and John. We can say that they are designated here by name, so much so that it is impossible to misunderstand the meaning of the text. The expression: "altogether superior apostles" was obviously used by Paul's opponents to enhance the prestige of the Twelve. Paul seizes upon it and says, "These all-superior apostles, as you like to call the Twelve, know therefore that I am as much as they." Now that we hear him proudly posing as the equal of the Twelve, how can we doubt that these same Twelve were also the very people to whom he ironically said he did not dare to compare himself and about whom he declared at the same time that he had something to complain about? So, without any possible dispute, it is indeed the Twelve who, in X, 12-18, stripped Paul of the work of his apostolate. In XI, 1-5 a new misdeed is reproached to them. They are accused of having altered the gospel and preached a false Christ to whom the Corinthians unfortunately did not know how to refuse their adhesion. We, who know that behind Paul there is a disciple of Marcion, are not surprised by this accusation. We can see the meaning of it: "I preached to you a spiritual Christ, that is, the good God who came down from heaven to earth to deliver men from the yoke of the Creator. But like Eve at the beginning of time, you have been seduced by the henchmen of your tyrant, who, in this case, were the Twelve. These individuals preached to you a carnal Christ whose mission was to found an earthly kingdom. And you took them at their word on the pretext that they were the superior apostles. I tell you that I am as much as they are.

37

This is how I understand this passage. As for the commentators, they are in complete confusion. Most of them claim that Paul is not referring to the apostles themselves at all, but only to Judaizing preachers who were claiming to be apostles. Some, however, while asserting that the Judaizers with whom Paul is dealing here are not the apostles, agree that Paul makes a reply to them in which the apostles are somewhat splashed. Some say that 'the altogether superior apostles' are not the Twelve, but the unknown Judaizers who were working in Corinth and whom Paul magnifies in order to mock them. Others, on the other hand, recognize that these all-superior apostles must be the Twelve, or at least the chief among the Twelve, namely Peter, James and John; but, according to them, the Judaizing preachers who fight Paul and whom Paul fights do not represent the Twelve. (a) Paul uses the phrase "the all-superior apostles" only because the Corinthians threw it in his face, and it is not conceivable that the Corinthians would have referred to preachers other than the Twelve in this way. (b) If the Judaizing preachers had made unwarranted claims against the Twelve, Paul should have replied: "You have no right to claim to be of the Twelve; you do not represent them; the Christ you preach is not the Christ of the Twelve. Now he does accuse certain mysterious preachers of preaching 'another Christ', but then he merely adds that he is not inferior to the absolutely superior apostles, i.e. the Twelve. From what he says and what he does not say one must necessarily conclude that this "other Christ" is preached by the Twelve; c) the argument of XI, 1-6 is intelligible when it is put in the mouth of a fictitious Paul fighting, around 140, the Catholic bishops who claim to be the Twelve; but it is deprived of any kind of sense when it is attributed to the Paul of history addressing the Corinthians around the year 56.

39

## 5. Again, the superior apostles.

The fourth supplement, the longest of all, goes from XI, 12b to XII, 12. In a page animated by a powerful breath and which counts among the most beautiful of the New Testament, Paul makes his apology. He knows that to boast is the act of a fool. But his opponents, by committing it first, have forced him to commit it himself. So he does the foolish thing. It costs him a lot. But finally he does it: he glorifies himself. Of what? First of all of the advantages of the flesh. His opponents boast that he is a son of Abraham. Well, he too is a son of Abraham. What else? Of works done for Christ. His opponents boast of being Christ's workers. Well, he is, more than them, the worker of Christ. He has worked more than they have, suffered more than they have for the cause of Christ,

not to mention that he has the care of all the churches. What else does he boast of? Of his weakness. In Damascus he only escaped death by climbing down from a window into a basket along the city wall. And after that? He was taken up, somehow, to the third heaven, to paradise. And there he heard ineffable words. But so as not to be puffed up with pride, he received a thorn in the flesh; an angel of Satan blew him away. This is the apology that Paul makes of himself. It ends with the statement we have already heard in XII, 11: "I was not inferior in any way to the altogether superior apostles.

40

If rhetorical flights of fancy weighed anything in the scales of criticism, the one we have just read about would be of immense weight and would win our support with great difficulty. All the literature of the world combined contains, indeed, few accents of more rousing eloquence. But this sonorous fanfare cannot make us forget the crucial question: Who are these men who boast of being the sons of Abraham, the workers of the Lord, who crush Paul with their disdain, who with their self-congratulatory praise make fools of themselves, who have forced Paul to boast and say to them: "I am as much as you are, I am more than you are"? Let us see where the apostle's panegyric ends. His conclusion is in this final sentence: "I was not inferior in any way to the superior apostles. We can see that there is what rhetoric calls a litote here, and that Paul's real thought is this: "You always speak to me of your superior apostles; therefore know that I am more than they. But this is a detail. We have just seen that "the all-superior apostles" are the Twelve, must necessarily be the Twelve. The vehement apology of XI, 13, XII, 12 is thus directed against the Twelve. It is the Twelve that it reproaches for being boastful. If only she could articulate this complaint against them! But it formulates another incomparably more serious one, another of which I have not yet spoken and which it is now time to mention. We read in XI, 13 :

41

These men are false apostles, deceitful workers who disguise themselves as apostles of Christ. And this should not be surprising; for Satan himself disguises himself as an apostle of light. It is not surprising, therefore, that his ministers disguise themselves as ministers of justice. But their end will be according to their works.

Here are the Twelve, especially Peter, James and John, called ministers of Satan! What more do we need to conclude that the Paul who speaks here is a fictional Paul?

42

The apology of XI, 13-XII, 12 is an interpolation like that which we have noted in X, 12-XI, 6. These two pieces have the same origin, they pursue the same goal. I add here that they are intimately linked to each other and that the second is the continuation of the first. We are around 140. Marcion, who preached a spiritual Christ, put this Christ under the patronage of Paul, he made Paul the doctor of the Marcionite religion. He decreed that vulgar Christianity - that which alone existed when he, Marcion, entered the scene - is a travesty of the doctrine brought by Jesus, and he made the Twelve responsible for this travesty. The Catholic bishops replied that Paul was nothing compared to the Twelve who had lived in the company of Jesus and to whom, moreover, the expansion of the Christian movement in the world was due. Paul then intervenes in person and to the defence of the Twelve, he opposes his own defence. In X, 12-XI, 6 he said: "It was not the Twelve who converted the world; it was I. And the Twelve, by taking credit for the spread of Christianity, are robbing me of my labours." He continues his campaign in XI, 13-XII, 12 and says: "The Twelve-Peter, James and John first-are the workers of the Creator, the workers of Satan. They boast that they are the sons of Abraham; I am like them. I have worked and suffered for Christ much more than they have. And then I was - without being able to say how - taken up to the third heaven, to the heaven where the good God resides.

43

Paul attacks the Twelve. But, around 140, the Twelve did not boast about themselves; they were boasted about. And their panegyrists were the Catholic bishops who, claiming to be the heirs of the thought of the Twelve, had a vested interest in elevating these figures. Paul takes this situation into account. Most of the time he falls on the Twelve: he is supposed to write to the Corinthians in 56. But here and there he remembers that he is actually speaking around 140 and that he is addressing all Christians in the middle of the second century. So he strikes a blow against the bishops and reproaches the faithful for allowing themselves to be led by these individuals who exploit them. This explains XI, 4, where Paul says in substance: "You listen to the first man who comes along and preaches to you another Jesus whom I did not preach to you..."; this also explains XI, 19-20: "You who are wise willingly put up with fools. You bear with being enslaved, with being eaten, with being disposed of, with being exalted above you...". Those who "eat" Christians are the bishops of 140 who already know that one of the main tasks of the shepherd is to shear his sheep 1. And those who rise above the Christians are the same bishops who, according to Hermas, reserve the first place for themselves and learn the art of parade.

1. See The First Epistle to the Corinthians, p. 59. Montan raised to the level of an apostolic institution and organised a practice which had long been out of fashion.

A word about the apology XI, 13-XII, 12. The author has attached it to the authentic text XI, 12, where Paul, who has just boasted that he has never been a burden to the Corinthians, declares that he will never be a burden to them either. The reader, who has heard Paul's panegyric, sees without surprise that this panegyric continues, and he passes without noticing it from the historical apology to the fictional one. The transition is thus skilfully arranged. Not so skilfully, however, that a connection had to be made. This is because our apologetic piece begins with a violent attack on the Twelve: "These men are false apostles," This beginning has no point of contact with Paul's text, which explains why he will never be a burden to the Corinthians, saying: "I will do this to take away all pretext from those who seek a pretext to boast of me. To create this point of contact 1 interpolator changed the text and added these words: "That they may be found as we are. In doing so, he has achieved nothing more than to put commentators in an inextricable embarrassment, for this phrase has no plausible meaning. We are therefore in the presence of an attempt that has not been successful.

## 6. The ethnarch of Aretas.

In the course of his apology Paul gives us information about his life. The information which he provides adds to that which comes to us from the Acts of the Apostles details of which only two can be checked. Let us say at once that the control is not favourable. Paul tells us that he fled from Damascus to escape from the ethnarch of King Aretas. Now Damascus seems to have been under Roman rule for the whole of the first century of the Christian era. In any case, assuming that the Arab king Aretas IV was the master, this could not have happened until after the death of Tiberius, i.e. at the earliest in the year 37. And since Paul's journey to Damascus - a journey mentioned in the Acts - must have taken place before that date, it is difficult to see how the apostle could have been obliged to leave Damascus to escape the police of Aretas. Loisy, *Les Actes des Apôtres*, p. 420 conjectures that this king had, with the consent of the Romans, a representative in Damascus charged with maintaining order in the Arab quarter of this city. But this hypothesis, imagined only to save our text, is quite implausible. The system of multiple police forces, where it worked, always favoured criminals who, pursued in one district, took refuge in another. It has sometimes been imposed on weak governments, which have been subjected to it in spite of themselves. But the Romans, to whom Aretas was not in a position to lay down the law, could not themselves have

taken it upon themselves to make the police of Damascus impracticable. Besides, what is to be gained by supposing that the Roman power left it to Aretas to police the Arab quarter of Damascus! Paul, who was making his propaganda to the Jews by origin or education, had no occasion to go into the Arab quarter. And if, by chance, he ventured into the Arab quarter, he could, at the first warning, pass quickly into the Roman quarter without being reduced to descending through an opening in the city wall. In short, there is nothing to prevent the account of Acts IX, 21 from being historical. And the precision which II Cor. adds, XI, 33 is an artifice which simulates personal information to impose it on us.

46

## 7. Date of Paul's vision.

The same observation applies to the text of XII, 2. Paul who tells us here of a vision of which he was favoured, wants us to know that, since then, fourteen years have passed. This chronological preoccupation warns us that we are in front of an event which was capital in the life of the apostle. Nothing like it has taken place since that date; nothing like it had taken place before. This vision is a unique peak on which Paul's eyes immediately stop when they turn to the past. Now Acts reports that Paul had a vision when he was struck down on the road to Damascus. This heavenly favour had an importance in the life of the apostle that nothing can compare to, since it turned Paul around, shifted the axis of his mentality, of his activity. Let us conclude that the author of II Corinthians XII, 2 refers to the vision reported in Acts. He refers to it; but he adds that fourteen years have passed since this marvellous fact. Here he is mistaken, for between the drama on the road to Damascus and the second epistle to the Corinthians, more than fourteen years have passed. And since Paul could not have made such a mistake, we cannot escape the conclusion that the Paul who is being portrayed here is a fictional Paul. We had already arrived at this result several times; text XII, 2 brings us back to it once more.

47

## CONCLUSION

Two letters united and provided with ample supplements: this is the second epistle to the Corinthians. In the supplements Paul is concerned for all the churches, he wars with the apostles, and he strives to lead us to heaven. But in the letters his concerns are all

material - and tend to strengthen his shaken authority. The supplements present us with a fictional Paul; only the letters present the Paul of history.