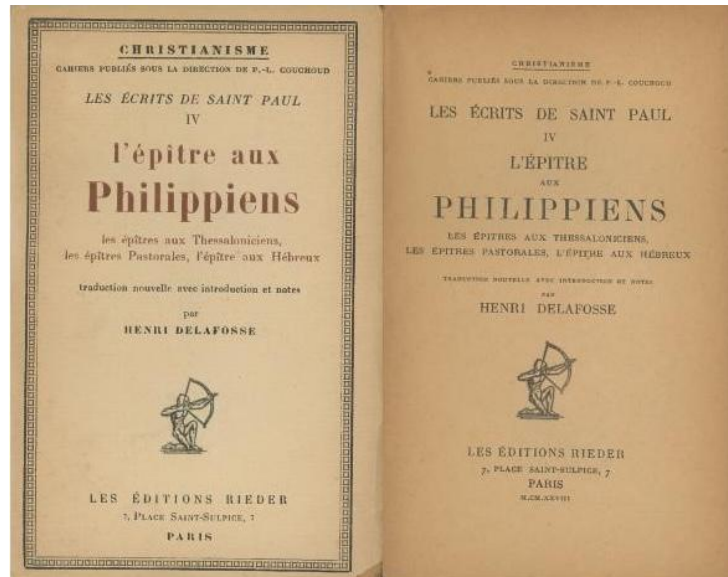


This file was created October 2021 as a translation for my personal use and without any thought of sharing publicly at the time. I only ask that you keep that in mind when using it. I have made a copy of the French text available at

<https://archive.org/details/turmel-les-ecrits-de-saint-paul-iv-l-epitre-aux-philippiens>

Neil Godfrey - November 2023



FIRST EPISTLE TO THE THESSALONIANS

Thessalonica, a large city in Macedonia, was evangelized by Paul around 49. Some Jews and several Gentiles - initiated into Judaism - gave their support to the preacher who showed them by the oracles of the prophets that the Messiah, that is to say the man entrusted by God with the restoration of the kingdom of Israel, had to pass through death before carrying out his program [Acts XVII, 3-4]. The harvest looked good. But Paul was soon accused before the magistrates of making propaganda for "another emperor, Jesus" [il., 7). He had to leave in a hurry. He wondered then with concern if his departure would not be fatal to the fruits that his apostolate had gathered in Thessalonica. So, as soon as the opportunity arose, he asked Timothy to go and find out. Timothy brought back good news. Then Paul happily wrote a letter which, in the

course of the second century, has received important additions. Let us first take note of what belongs to Paul.

I

PAULINE REDACTION

The Pauline composition includes the first chapter; the section from II, 17 to III, 13; the instructions IV, 9-12 and V, 1-11 excluding V, 10; and finally verse V, 26.

In chapter I Paul fills the Thesians with praise. The faith of which verse 3 speaks is the belief in the kingship of Jesus. Hope is the expectation of his coming to inaugurate the kingdom. Charity is the good harmony that should reign among the members of the Christian community. Charity is placed before hope whose object is located in the future, while its object belongs to the present life. Paul laid the foundation stones for the building of the theological virtues.

The Thessalonians imitated Paul in that, like Paul, they believed in the kingship of Jesus. In 9 we read that the Thessalonians "turned away from idols". Note that Paul brought "God-fearing" people to the Christian faith, that is, men who attended the synagogue and practiced the Jewish religion. His apostolate among them did not consist in turning them away from idols, for this was already done. He merely instructed them in the details of the restoration of the kingdom of Israel that they were all waiting for, explaining that the restorer had to die before he could inaugurate the kingdom. Verse 9 therefore contains a distortion of the facts, but this distortion is intentional. Paul, who hates the Jews, seems to forget that the ancient Gentiles he is addressing had already renounced idols when he came to them, and that their conversion to the worship of the true God was precisely the work of Judaism. He is biased in exaggerating the scope of his apostolate.

As for 10, the "impending wrath" of which he speaks must strike all those who, by putting Jesus to death, claimed to prevent the founding of the kingdom, all those who refuse to recognize the kingship of Jesus, who do not believe that Jesus, risen from the dead, will return to found the kingdom. This wrath is an adaptation of the wrath that the prophets of the Old Testament (Isaiah, XIII, 9; LXIII, 3; Zephaniah, I, 15, etc.) threaten the enemies of Yahweh 1. But it was Paul who took it from the writings of the prophets and adjusted it to the messianic program of Jesus.

1. See Epistle to the Romans, p. 18.

In II:17-III:13 Paul explains that he tried twice to see the Thessalonians again and that, prevented by the "satan" from carrying out his plan, he sent Timothy instead. The "satan" of which he speaks is probably the Roman authority which, by lending its support to the Jews, was thwarting Paul. In any case, this word is taken in the sense given to it in the Old Testament, where it designates any man who is the adversary of another. Thus, in I Reg, Y, 18 (in the Vulgate III Reg, V, 4) Solomon says: "Now the LORD my god has given me rest on all sides; there is no longer any Satan, there are no more calamities" (see the Thesaurus of Gesenius). We must therefore read II, 18 as if it were: "The adversary has prevented us". It is also the Roman authority which is the tempter of III, 5. It goes without saying that these two mysterious terms were suggested to Paul by a very natural feeling of prudence. They are like passwords which only the initiated could understand.

Without including moral concerns in his program, Paul did not want the small group of which he was the leader to be an object of scorn and derision for those "outside". Hence the warnings grouped in IV, 9-12. The lesson of good behavior is given with great delicacy, but it is given. And we see that the honorability of the Thessalonian Christians was not perfect. The teachings given by God concerning brotherly love of which IV, 9 speaks are those which one reads in the Old Testament. See Reuter, XV, 2,7; XXII, 1; Leyit, XIX, 16-18, etc.

As for instruction V, 1-11, the "day of the Lord" is the day on which Jesus will inaugurate his kingdom. The inauguration will consist in the manifestation of the "wrath" spoken of in I, 10, that is, in the massacre of all unbelievers. When the ground is cleared, Christ will found his kingdom in Jerusalem, to which believers who are the true sons of Abraham will belong. Now Paul, who has overwhelmed the Thessalonians with compliments, could not, however, conceal the fact that their faith was wavering, since in III, 10, he proposes to go and consolidate it. Now he gives his project a beginning of execution in the lesson V, 1-11 whose true meaning, hidden by an artifice of language, is this:

"You are wrong to doubt my predictions on the pretext that nothing has yet come, that nothing even announces a forthcoming upheaval. The day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night; it will come unexpectedly, when no one is expecting it. The unbelievers will all be exterminated, not one will escape. But we will be spared if we are clothed in the armor of faith and charity, and if we have hope as a helmet for our salvation (reminiscence of Isaiah, LIX, 17).

II

MARCIONITE REDACTION

The piece IV, 1-8 contains a moral lesson with which that of IV, 9-12, mentioned above, would be duplicated, were it not for two profound differences which separate them. One of these differences concerns the very foundation of morality. In IV, 1-8 what is put forward is the will of God whose object is, we are told, the sanctification of the Christian: we are faced with a mystical morality. In IV, 9-12 the Thessalonians must behave well because of "those outside": this is what we call today the morality of honor. Another difference comes from Paul's attitude. In IV, 1-8 the apostle says over and over again that, while he was with the Thessalonians, he taught them what they had to do to please God. In IV, 9-12 it is through God himself, that is, through the Bible, that the Thessalonians learned to behave honorably. Our two moral lessons do not have the same origin. We have seen that IV, 9-12 is the work of Paul; IV, 1-8 is not his. The mystical morality which is preached there, the Holy Spirit which is presented there as given by God and which brings us back to the birth by the Spirit of the Fourth Gospel III, 6, invites us to assign to it a Marcionite origin.

The instruction IV, 13-18 seems to belong to V, 1-11 which follows it and which I spoke about above (p. 35). In reality it is totally foreign to it. In V, 1-11 there is mention of the massacre from which only believers will escape when Christ comes to found the kingdom; but no Christian has died. In IV, 13-18 (minus verses 15-16, which are there as an overlay) there are Christians who have died; he explains that these dead Christians are now with Christ and therefore reside in heaven; he adds that the living will soon join them.

If we believe that Jesus died and rose again, then God will bring those who have died through Jesus and with him. Then we who are alive and remain will rise together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air; and so we will always be with the Lord.

The doctrine taught here is the one that aroused the indignation of Justin and Irenaeus, that is, the doctrine of the future life without the resurrection. It sends the souls of Christians to heaven immediately after death. It waits for the Day of the Lord, which Paul introduced into Christian dogmatics, but it sublimates it. Her day of the Lord, which has nothing in common with Paul's, is the day when the present world train will stop and men will receive their final home. We are not told what will become of the wicked, but we are told that the good Christians will ascend into the air to the Lord Jesus, who already has in his company the souls of dead Christians. This is the doctrine of Marcion.

Verses 15-16 show us the dead rising from the grave and ascending from earth to heaven. This is in contrast to 14 where the dead are brought up with Jesus who is in heaven. These two verses are a Catholic interpolation intended to introduce the doctrine of the resurrection into the instruction. The author has concealed his alteration by borrowing the formula "We who are alive

and remain" from the first edition. This explains why the said formula appears twice (it is 15 which borrows from 17).

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III

CATHOLIC REDACTION

1. Oblique attack against preachers

charlatans.

In II, 1-12, Paul exposes the evil he was careful to avoid during his apostolate among the Thessalonians, and the good he practiced. He did not make preaching an industry to enrich himself, he did not want to be a burden to anyone, he also avoided flattery and he did not obey preoccupations of vain glory: to say the least, his preaching was not based on charlatanism and deceit. No, but while preaching the Gospel, he worked night and day to support himself; his conduct was that of a father, a mother; his life was pure, free from all reproach.

Usually, pleas come after an accusation and are intended to answer it. Sometimes, however, they have not been preceded by any reproach and their defensive formulas serve in reality to mask an offensive against unnamed adversaries. Is Paul's panegyric of his apostolate a defense? Is it an attack? The first hypothesis is incompatible with the affection that Paul has for the community of Thessalonica, that the community of Thessalonica has for Paul. The Thessalonians, so attached to the apostle, would never have tolerated an accusation that their spiritual father was a charlatan; they would have immediately suppressed this calumny and would not have allowed it to take shape. They would have immediately suppressed the slander and would not have allowed it to become a reality. Paul, on the other hand, would never have had relations with a church in which his ministry had been so outrageously misrepresented.

Besides, let us suppose for a moment that he had been reduced to justifying himself against infamous lies, he would certainly not have spared his accusers; his vigorous and even violent reply would have had nothing in common with the paternal apology which we read in II, 1-12.

So this piece is not a defense. Is it an attack? It is enough to expose the hypothesis to show its implausibilities. It assumes that preachers had entered the Christian community of Thessalonica after the departure of Paul. These so-called apostles began by winning the confidence of the

faithful by flattering them and by employing various charlatan procedures; they then extorted money from the naive; they arranged themselves in such a way as to live at the expense of the community; they led a scandalous life; Paul, informed about them by Timothy, denounced them; but not daring to attack them openly, he took an oblique way; he made an apology of his conduct, the hidden meaning of which is this: "I have not become rich among you like those people to whom you put your trust, I have not been dependent on you as they are, I have not exploited you as they do. ...". This is the meaning of the apology which is put before our eyes, but this meaning is hidden because Paul wants to leave the conclusion to the Thessalonians. _

This is the hypothesis. Does one see Paul not daring to look his opponents in the face and hitting them by ricochet? This timid and reserved Paul is not precisely the one who shows himself to us in the epistle to the Galatians. And let us not forget that the first epistle to the Thessalonians was written only a year after the apostle left Thessalonica. So the preachers denounced here took only one year to carry out their exploits. They really did not waste any time!

All this is implausible. Paul could not have written the apology of II, 1-12 either to defend himself against accusations directed against him or to attack opponents underhandedly. The above-mentioned apology is not the work of Paul. Its origin must be sought elsewhere. But before any research a preliminary remark is necessary. As long as we thought we heard Paul himself praising his ministry, it was impossible for us to decide a priori whether this praise was an answer to accusations or an attack, and we had to leave the door open to both hypotheses. Now that the historical Paul has been discarded and we are in the presence of a fictional Paul, there is no room for an alternative. The apostle who fictitiously occupies the stage here is not defending himself against slanderous accusations, but rather taking the offensive against mysterious opponents.

All we have to do is find out who the opponents are. The description which we have is the following: these men preach the Gospel exactly, because no heresy is imputed to them; but they seduce the people by charlatan procedures; moreover they make Papostolat a source of income, are dependent on the communities and lead a scandalous life.

The Marcionites have nothing in common with this portrait; it is therefore in another direction that we must go. A controversialist of the second century, Apollonius, says, speaking of Montan (Eusebius, Hist, eccl., V, 18, 2-11):

He established money collectors; under the name of offerings he organized the collection of donations; he provided stipends to preachers of doctrine to provide the teaching of religion with the support of good food... Is it not clear that the Scripture forbids the prophet to receive gifts and money? When I see the prophetess accepting gold, silver, luxury clothes, how can I not reject her? Those among them who are called prophets and martyrs receive subsidies not only from the rich, but also from the poor, the orphans and the widows... the fruits of the prophet must be appreciated, for it is by the fruit that one recognizes the wood... Tell me, does a prophet

go to the baths? Does a prophet dress up? Does a prophet like to adorn himself? Does a prophet play dice? Does a prophet become a banker?

Another anonymous controversist of the same period (Eusebius, loc. cit., V, 8) says that Montan seduced the people with flattering words *hupokoris- tikon kaï laoplanon pneuma*. He also points out another means of seduction employed by this character, which consisted (7) in experiencing disordered transports and speaking in ecstasy. Montan and his collaborators respond exactly to the information provided by the instruction II, 1-12 of the first epistle to the Thessalonians. This piece, which makes no sense in the words of Paul, becomes intelligible when it is attributed to a Catholic around 165 who censures Montan's actions and who, to give more weight to his sentence, has Paul set out in the form of a personal apology the code of the perfect missionary.

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2. The anger reached the Jews to the end.

The panegyric of Paul's ministry is followed by a bizarre piece (II, 13-16). The panegyric of Paul's ministry is followed by a bizarre piece (II, 13-16) in which the docility with which the Thesalonians listened to Paul's preaching is discussed, as well as the persecutions inflicted on them by their fellow countrymen, and the analogy which, as a result of these persecutions, exists between their situation and the situation of the churches of Judea persecuted by the Jews; of the incessant crimes committed by these Jews who put Christ and the prophets to death, who are enemies of all men, who prevent even Paul from evangelizing the pagans; finally, of the wrath that has reached them forever. I have said that this piece is strange. It is strange first of all because of its context, which juxtaposes the most diverse thoughts, without our being able to know, other than by divination, which is the main thought. It is especially so because of the final thought which has to do with "the anger" of which the Jews have been the victims "for ever". But this "wrath", which at first confuses us, soon enlightens us. A serious examination convinces us, in fact, that it does not correspond to anything in Paul's life and that, to find some meaning in it, we must look at the years following the apostle's death. The "wrath" which affected the Jews "for ever" did not reach them until after Paul's death, and consequently the piece which mentions it is not by Paul: this is a first result. Immediately we have the explanation of 16a where we read that the Jews prevent Paul from speaking to the Gentiles. This text dates from a time when Christian preaching was addressed to pagans; but it is not understandable from the pen of Paul who, except in Athens, had always addressed himself either to Jews or to proselytes of Judaism, and who, moreover, must not have been tempted to renew the experience of Athens, which was a complete failure (Acts, XVII, 34, which tries to mitigate the failure, is a reworking contradicted by 32).

In the year 70, the Jews experienced a catastrophe which the Christians attributed to the wrath of God, and it is quite natural to think that the text II, 166 refers to this event. But there is a serious difficulty. Verse 14 mentions the persecutions which the Jews inflicted on the churches

of Judea: "You have become imitators of the churches of God which are in Judea, because you have suffered from your countrymen the evils which they suffered from the Jews. In the hypothesis that we are adopting provisionally, this text tells us how, around 100 or 120, the situation of the churches of Judea was represented in the years preceding the ruin of Jerusalem: it was believed that these churches had then been persecuted by the Jews. But Eusebius brings us a text which also informs us on the same point, which also tells us what posterity thought of the situation of the churches of Judea in 66. Now this text (Hist. eccl. III, 5, 3) gives us a completely different picture. According to it, the Christians left Palestine in 66 and went to Perea. Was it to escape the untenable fate of the Jews? Not at all. They left Palestine to escape the coming Roman army, to escape future evils, evils which they had not yet experienced, but which they would have had to suffer if they had stayed. They even attributed their flight to a celestial intervention, they said that an oracle had enjoined them to flee, an oracle that no one would have thought of if the evil had already been present:

An oracle revealed to the leaders of the church in Jerusalem warned the people of that church to leave that city before the war, and to go to a town in the region called Pella. The Christians left Jerusalem and went to this city, so that the saints left the metropolis of the Jews and the whole of Judea.

The churches of Judea were not persecuted by the Jews around the year 70, or if one wishes - this is the only thing that matters here - posterity has not believed that the churches of Judea were persecuted by the Jews in the years preceding the ruin of Jerusalem. I would add that the "saints" who inhabited Palestine at that time were - except in Jerusalem - very few in number, since they were all able to take refuge in Pella, and that the "churches of Judea" did not exist before 70. We already knew that the text I Thess. II, 14, with its churches of Judea persecuted by the Jews, could not be by Paul. We can now say that he is not referring to the events of 70, but to another situation.

What is it? To find it we need only open Justin's first apology (XXXI, 6) where we read the following:

In the recent war in Judea, Barcochba, the leader of the revolt, inflicted terrible torments on Christians and Christians alone, if they did not consent to deny and blaspheme Jesus Christ.

We shall soon see (p. 55) why Barcochba wanted to force the Christians to deny Jesus Christ. For the moment it is sufficient to note that this character, who rebelled against Rome at the time of Adrian, persecuted Christians and that these Christians resided in Judea, since Barcochba's operations took place between Béther and Jerusalem. Verse II:14 becomes intelligible only when applied to the events of 132-135.

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II:13-16 was written after the revolt of 132. And, therefore, the (divine) "wrath" of which 16b speaks refers to the terrible punishments (supposedly emanating from God) which the Jewish

nation paid for this attempt at independence. But why does the text say that this wrath reached the Jews "forever"? Applied to the Jews who were massacred or sold into slavery, the phrase "forever" would be foolishness. But the Jews who were slain or enslaved were not the only ones punished. Even those who remained alive and free were cruelly hit by the prohibition against approaching Jerusalem on pain of death (Eusebius, III, 6, 3). This is the "wrath" that struck "forever". - Forever" means until the day this piece was written. The author notes that at the time of writing the Jews were not yet allowed to approach Jerusalem. Such an observation would not be understandable in the immediate aftermath of the punishment. It warns us that the punishment is ancient and that, despite its antiquity, it is still in force. We conclude that II:13-16 was written long after the Roman victory of 135. Who is it by? From the Catholic of around 165 who wrote II, 1-12. It is the same author who, after having censured the apostles of Montanism, denounces the hatred with which the Jews pursue the Christian name. For this is the main thought of the instruction II, 13-16, a thought to which the others serve as a transition or introduction. The author complains about the malignity of the Jews towards the Christians (we find the same complaint in the writings of Justin I Apol., XXXVI, 3; Dialogue, XVI, 4; CXXXI, 2; of the author of the martyrdom of Polycarp, XIII); but he is visibly satisfied to see that the wrath of God has struck these perverse men for ever.

In short, the Pauline redaction comprises the major part of our epistle, a proportion which it does not reach anywhere else. It does not deal with the collection for the saints in Jerusalem or with some daily incident, as is the case in the other epistles, but with the kingdom of Christ. With the exception of the Epistle to the Romans, it is in our epistle that we find the most important contribution to the history of Paul's thought.