

GREAT THEMES OF PAUL

CD I

Approximate Chronology of Paul's Life

- 1-10 A.D. "Saul" is born a Greek-speaking Jew in the Diaspora in Tarsus, Asia Minor.
- 20-30 A rabbinical student in Jerusalem under Gamaliel, speaks Aramaic too. Achieves some status in the Sanhedrin, temple police and as a Pharisee. Jesus is killed somewhere during this period.
- 33-36 Leads raids against new Jewish heretical sect, called "the Way."
- 39 Escapes from Damascus and goes to Jerusalem to present himself to Peter, James and John.
- 43 Antioch with Barnabas, distinguishes himself from the Judaizers.
- 45-49 First missionary journey to Cyprus, Lystra and back to Antioch.
- 49 Defends himself at the first Council of Jerusalem, criticizes Peter.
- 50-52 Second missionary journey to Galatia, Phillippi, Thessalonika, Athens, Corinth.
- 53-58 Third missionary journey to Ephesus and Corinth.
- 58-60 In jail in Caesarea, trial before Felix.
- 60 Voyage to Rome, via Malta shipwreck, under military guard in Rome.
- 63 Freed from prison, goes to Ephesus.
- 67 Again a prisoner in Rome, where he is presumably beheaded.

Likely Sequence of Letters

- 47-52 Thessalonians (oldest book in New Testament, expects Jesus to return soon)
- 56 Philippians (compilation of at least two letters)
- 57 1 Corinthians
2 Corinthians (compilation of at least two letters)
Galatians
- 58 Romans (theological treatise more than a letter)
- 61 Philemon (his only completely personal letter)
Colossians (did Paul or his students write it? cosmic vision of Christ)
- 63 Ephesians (did Paul or his students write it? His Grand Manifesto, if he did.)
- 66 2 Letter to Timothy (Pauline authorship still debated)

(I assume that 2 Thessalonians, 1 Timothy, Titus, and Hebrews are probably **not** Pauline)

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CD 5

The Risen Christ

Every-Body in Its Transformed State

The Risen Christ is a living icon of God's creative plan with humanity, with the cosmos and with all history. It is a transformation of consciousness and all material reality too—"a new heavens and a new earth" spoken of in the Book of Revelation. In this transformation, what we crucify, God is still able to renew. What we have undone, God will redo. What we have done wrong, God is willing to refashion and transform. God actually uses our mistakes as a part of the final work of art. The risen Christ icon always has wounds. This is good!

The concept of "body" is exemplified and lived by Jesus, theologized by Paul and by the early church. It is emphasized especially in the Eucharist and community. This corporate concept is very difficult, if not impossible for postmodern individualists to understand, although science and brain studies are now helping. Here are three systems or force fields of the "body."

1) Body of Sin and Death is seen as an organism, an organic solidarity, and a kind of psychic unity that has resonance in material form. People know their own kind and resonate with one another at this level. It is variously called flesh, the law, the law of death, the untransformed self, the false self, the self of ego. Frankly, it is the sensual self, which is living out of the reptilian brain of survival, sex and food.

2) Body of the Crucified includes those in the cauldron of transformation—a transformational shift into divinity. If the suffering people of the

world see God in their pain, they are actually in a common psychic and material "body" of understanding. The poor, prisoners and addicts often have a natural empathy and sympathy for one another. They know something the rest of us do not know. Baptism is supposed to be an initiation into this "body," but I'm afraid it seldom is.

The "body of the crucified" is a brilliant psychological and spiritual understanding, which avoids the impossible burden of individualism. The weight of guilt, shame, sin is far too much for the individual to bear. Thus we carry the mystery "in the Body," or in Paul's phrase "in Christ"—"making up what is yet lacking in the suffering of Christ."

3) Body of the Risen One includes those who have come out the other side transformed, alive and with a new identity in God. They have died to the old identity, the false self. They are saints in the original New Testament sense! They know something about who God is and who they are and about what is real—*that you cannot know in any other way*. They are truly reborn—a good word that is now trivialized. The "body" concept realizes that the individual person cannot carry the weight of glory any more than they can carry the weight of sin and death. "In Christ," we are saved corporately. The individual self is an oxymoron and will always produce inflated egos or defeated selves. The small self will always lose. This transformed body is meant to be the church and sometimes is.

—Richard Rohr

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CD 10

The Pauline Parabola

This is the pattern that transforms the small self into the Godself, the pattern that realigns all of reality into its full truth. For Paul this is an historic, cosmic and corporate pattern, which we can now trust and carry because of Christ and in Christ. The individual cannot do it alone.

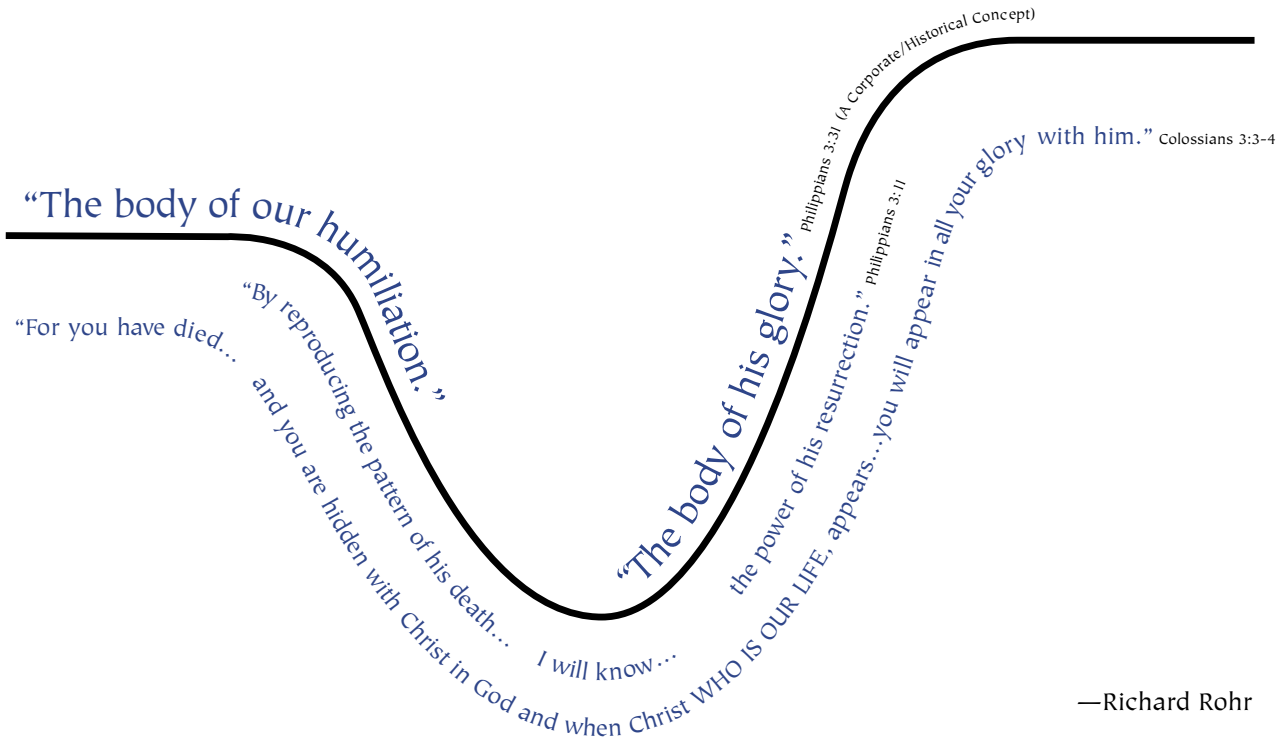
This is the “mystery of Christ” for Paul. Inside of this movement ALL can be used, and renewed and “saved.”

History is now optimistic and filled with hope. There are no dead ends or false goals. Jesus’ successful living of this pattern is what makes him the Messiah/the Christ, in Paul’s mind.

Through this redemptive pattern he saves the world.

This paschal mystery of death and rebirth is opposed to:

- “doing it right” (the performance principle that always eventually leads to death).
- “knowing” correct truths or intellectually “believing” things (Gnosticism).
- a Utopian vision of everything moving onward and upward (perfectionism or “Americanism”).
- a fatalistic doctrine of victimhood and blaming (much of history).



—Richard Rohr

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Lexicon

An Attempt to Explain Terms in Paul's Letters

Body of Christ: The force field between those who live consciously in this new union with God. Needs a physical word to communicate the here/now quality of it, the cause and effect of it. It is real, concrete, and dynamic.

Christ: The God given instrument for total reconnection of all that is created with its Source. God reconciling all things through a human/Divine gift to us. Jesus is the personal face of the Christ.

Death: To think and act as if you are disconnected from God. Not to be in communion with what is real. To remain unconscious.

Flesh: The false self, a pre-Freudian word for ego. The self precisely as separate and therefore fragile and insecure.

Freedom: The ability to be who you really are, and all that you really are, as opposed to our recent idea of the freedom to choose between many options (which merely confirms the false self and the ego in its attempts to concoct an identity). Freedom is *from* illusion and *for* truth.

Grace: The absolutely un-earnable nature of God and Life—totally a gift or it is not grace. We are always on the receiving end, which is a humiliation for the ego.

Justification: Validation, legitimation of the self. It is done by God and not by our own efforts. A legal word close to our idea of acquittal.

Law: Any attempt to create the self by outer performance or outer criteria. The performance principle.

Participation in Christ: Living at the level of consciousness of who we are, deliberate corporate abiding—both in the positive life and the necessary pain. A corporate reality. Reality is One, God is One, pain and joy are One and we merely bear the mystery as individuals.

Pauline dialectic: His preference for teaching by contrast, by antithesis, by comparison. It feels dualistic, but it is really searching for synthesis. Creative tension learned through the paradox of death and resurrection, which first seem like opposites until they are lived through.

Pauline parabola: The pattern of descent and ascent, loss and renewal, that defines all of creation and is revealed and affirmed in Jesus. His basic worldview of how transformation happens. Cannot be proven, can only be lived and suffered.

Sin: The impossible situation that we find ourselves in. The seeming inability to be who we really are. The contradictions that we inherently are. The tragic side of life. We are unable to liberate ourselves from it by ourselves, without transformation into the True Self, which is always a gift of grace.

Spirit: The true self. God as shared Being within us, instead of a Being beyond us. For Paul, to be in Christ is to be sharing the One Life of the Spirit.

The mystery; the hidden plan; the folly of the cross: God's great turnaround and surprise. The initiative for the relationship that we call holiness is totally from God's side. The entrance point is the tragic rather than the perfect, failure instead of success. We all expected it to be a reward and punishment system, a performance from our side instead of a gift from God's side.

Your Life: The shared Being that we all are, but instead we get lost in our individual manifestation—our life situation. The Great Self, the Godself, Being Itself, Pure Consciousness. To live your real life is to live in this Holy Spirit and not in the small flesh.

—Richard Rohr