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Pauline Universalism: Anachronism or Reality?

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Are we able to attribute a modern concept such as universalism (in the sense of the opposite to particularism) to Paul in the formation of his communities, or is such an idea hopelessly anachronistic? This paper suggests that although Paul's universalism does not fully conform to modern definitions, there is a universalistic dimension to his formation of the ἐκκλησία that was radical within his own culture in both Jewish and Hellenistic terms. Nevertheless, there were some first-century social and philosophical currents that would have provided some implicit support for his application of universalistic principles. However, the roots of Paul's approach are to be found not so much in Hellenistic philosophical currents, but rather in his understanding of divine convenantal condescension. These considerations allow us some insights to understanding the status of different genders, ethnicities, and socio-economic classes in the Pauline communities.

Keywords: Paul, universalism, particularism, diversity, equality, egalitarianism, gender, ethnicity, social class

1. Introduction

It has become popular in recent years to refer to Paul's universalism.[1] In the context of this paper, universalism does not refer to universal salvation. Rather, it is a modern term that may be defined as follows: "All human beings, regardless of race, gender, sexual preference, ethnic, cultural, linguistic, and religious background . . . [being] . . . considered moral equals and . . . therefore . . . [being] . . . treated as equally entitled to

1 See, for example, Kathy Ehrensperger, *That We May Be Mutually Encouraged: Feminism and the New Perspective in Pauline Studies* (New York: T&T Clark, 2004), 176–194; James G. Crossley, *Reading the New Testament: Contemporary Approaches* (Abingdon; NY: Routledge, 2010), 107–108; and Michael Fagenblat, *A Covenant of Creatures: Levinas's Philosophy of Judaism* (Standord: Stanford University Press, 2010), 24–26.

moral respect."[2] Are we able to attribute this modern concept to Paul, or is such an action hopelessly anachronistic? In practical, evidence-based historical terms did Paul reflect a universalistic approach to the formation of his communities? If so, to what extent did this reflect the attitudes of society and culture of Paul's time? This paper seeks to adopt a broad-based approach in responding to these significant questions.

The classic statement of Paul's universalism is found in Gal 3:28: "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus." In view of the rules of first-century society, to quote J. M. Bassler, "[t]hese were extraordinary words for the first century, daring to proclaim and difficult to actualize even within the walls of the church."[3]

It may be initially useful to note the following explanation by Aristotle, which provides some context in terms of the basic classical and Hellenistic views of the issues at hand:

> [I]t is clear that the rule of the soul over the body, and of the mind and the rational element over the passionate, is natural and expedient; whereas the equality of the two or the rule of the inferior is always hurtful. . . . Again, the male is by nature superior, and the female inferior; and the one rules, and the other is ruled; this principle, of necessity, extends to all mankind.
>
> Where then there is such a difference as that between soul and body, or between men and animals . . . the lower sort are by nature slaves, and it is better for them as for all inferiors that they should be under the rule of a master. . . . It is clear, then, that some men are by nature free, and others slaves, and that for these latter slavery is both expedient and right.[4]

2 S. Benhabib, "Universalism in Contemporary Philosophical Debates", in *The Claims of Cultaure: Equality and Diversity in the Global Era* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002), 27. In this regard, universalism is usually discussed in terms of standing against the concept of particularism. Universalism is a preferable to the term equality, since it need not necessarily imply equality in every sense, and it is also preferable to the term egalitarianism, which has political connotations.

3 J. M. Bassler, "The Widow's Tale: A Fresh Look at 1 Tim 5:3–16," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 103/1 (1984): 24.

4 Aristotle, *Politics*, 1. 1254b–1255a, in *Aristotle in 23 Volumes* (vol. 21; trans. H. Rackham; Loeb Classical Library; Cambridge, MA: Heinemann Ltd., 1944).

2. Paul and Modern Universalism

Paul arrived on the scene when these attitudes were widespread. It is no wonder that modern scholars have struggled to understand him in this regard. On the one hand, Lesley Massey is of the view that there was a pre-Pauline Christianity where equality prevailed between the sexes, and that Paul was the great subjugator of women.[5] In other words, Jesus treated women well, but Paul started the repression of women that has continued to this very day.

On the other hand, we have Alain Badiou, who in 2003 wrote a book entitled *St. Paul: The Foundation of Universalism*. Alain Badiou is one of the world's most prominent Marxist philosophers and an atheist. How could he then write a book in which he essentially praises Paul's theology? It is because he sees Paul as the literal founder of the Western philosophical tradition of universalism that in some societies today is reflected in the notion of human rights and in others as communism.

It should be noted that a key challenge is avoiding arbitrary superimposition of a twenty first century philosophical term and its definition onto the writings of a first century Christian who was rooted in Judaism. The inclination to make Paul fit the definition must be carefully avoided. Paul's universalism is certainly not identical to Alain Badiou's universalism, and this calls for caution.[6] Furthermore, exactly what is meant by moral equality and moral respect in Benhabib's definition, as quoted above also requires clarification.

Even at face value, it is evident that Paul explicitly fails the modern definition of universalism cited above. Paul's letters clearly show that he would not consider those with specific sexual preferences or religious backgrounds[7] as being equally entitled to moral respect. Yet we may grant Paul some tolerance on these points, given that he lived in the first

5 Lesley Massey, *Women in the Church: Moving Toward Equality* (Jefferson: Macfarland & Co., 2002), cited in Gail J. Stearns, "Women and Spiritual Equality in Christian Tradition, and: Women in the Church: Moving Toward Equality, and: Women and World Religions, and: Women, Gender, Religion: A Reader," in *National Women's Studies Association Journal* 115/2 (2003): 185-191.

6 Indeed, Badiou's work has been sharply criticized by Mark Lilla for its anti-Jewish implications. See Mark Lilla, "A New, Political Saint Paul?" in *The New York Review of Books* 55 (2008): 75–79; and *The Stillborn God: Religion, Politics, and the Modern West* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2007), 55–103, 308. However, rather than agreeing with Lilla's reasoning, I would simply suggest that these implications arise from Badiou's own inadequate understanding of Pauline universalism, given his lack interest in the Biblical text itself, and in its cultural context.

7 Rom 1:26–28; 1 Cor 6:9–10; 1 Cor 8:5–7.

century A.D., and that his mission was clearly religious in nature. Indeed, it is worth noting that Paul never used the term universalism; rather, we are left to deduce it from his letters. We will therefore continue to use the modern universalism, for want of a better term, recognizing that its ancient manifestations do not necessarily fully conform to its modern meaning.

3. Universalism in the First Century

The Graeco-Roman world of the first century evinced what we may call detectable universalistic trends. These universalistic trends were influenced by the philosophical rationale provided by Stoicism and reinforced by middle Platonism.[8] McLean and Aspell attribute the formulation of the universalism found in the theology of all later Greek writers to the philosopher Xenophanes (c. 540 B.C.).[9] Xenophanes strove "to purge god of particularity and to make him universal."[10] In the late Hellenistic period, philosophical and political ideas converged. McLean and Aspell comment that:

> The vast and radical forces at work in society and in the individual during the post-Aristotelian era gave birth to its critical reconstruction of philosophy. The all-pervading political cause of this development was the gradual transition of the center of both Greek and Roman life from the city to the universal-state. . . . Within the changing political scene, there was also a growing intellectual tension between the poles of universalism and individualism.[11]

This intellectual tension, and indeed a nascent universalism, permeated the Graeco-Roman world:

> The advance of the spirit of universalism was manifested in many ways: . . . Roman architectonic visions of world-states composed of heterogeneous territories; the great military and commercial plans to extend, strengthen, defend, and sustain the unity of the whole empire at the expense of the small city-state; and the systematic organization of philosophical works.[12]

8 P. F. Esler, *The Early Christian World* (New York: Routledge, 2002), 65.

9 G. F. McLean and P. J. Aspell, *Ancient Western Philosophy: The Hellenic Emergence* (2nd ed.; Washington, DC: Council for Research in Values and Philosophy, 1997), 51.

10 Ibid.

11 Ibid., 241.

12 McLean and Aspell, *Ancient Western Philosophy*, 241–242.

3.1 Pauline Adaptability

Many scholars have seen Pauline universalism as being closely related to Pauline adaptability. The classic passage illustrating Pauline adaptability is found in 1 Cor 9:20–23 within which Paul states: "I have become all things to all men, so that I may by all means save some" (v. 22). Barbara Hall does not mince words on this: "Paul's description in 1 Cor 9:19–23 of the way he habitually functioned in response to God's call is not just problematic; it is outrageous, quixotic, impossible. As a general guideline or principle of behavior, it is hopeless. . . . We use the expression as a criticism. . . . We imply failure in the attempt."[13]

Paul is not merely criticized by modern scholars for his adaptability; it appears that he constantly faced charges of fickleness in his own lifetime. He vigorously defended himself against these charges: "Therefore, I was not vacillating when I intended to do this, was I? Or what I purpose, do I purpose according to the flesh, so that with me there will be yes, yes and no, no at the same time? But as God is faithful, our word to you is not yes and no" (2 Cor 1:17–18).

There have been many suggestions for the sources of Paul's adaptability, and many of them have been based on the teachings of Greek philosophy. Clarence Glad has influentially suggested that the source of Pauline adaptability may be found in Epicurean psychogogic theory and practice.[14]

Surely, however, it is worthwhile asking Paul himself from where he derives his concept of adaptability. While his letters may not specifically answer all aspects of this question, they are sufficiently explicit, and in other areas sufficiently implicit, as to guide us to the most likely sources of his concept of adaptability. While Paul's adaptability is rooted in an interplay of a range of contemporary Hellenistic influences, it is clear that the concept of divine condescension is key. He expresses this numerous times. A clear example may be found in Phil 2:6–8: "who [Christ], although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men. Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross."

[13] B. Hall, "All Things To All People: A Study of 1 Corinthians 9: 19–23," in *The Conversation Continues: Studies in Paul and John* (eds. Robert T. Fortna and Beverly R. Gaventa; Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1990), 149.

[14] C. E. Glad, "Paul and Adaptability," in *Paul in the Greco-Roman World* (ed. J. Paul Sampley; Harrisburg: Trinity Press International, 2003), 17–41.

Philippians 2:1 is also worthy of note, since Paul here urges the church to follow Christ's example of condescension. Paul also elsewhere uses the term ταπεινος, "humble," to his own practice.[15] Paul therefore bases his own source of adaptability on his understanding of divine condescension as reflected in the teaching and example of Jesus. Ziesler identifies evidence of an underlying Semitic church tradition regarding Jesus in the writings of Paul.[16] In this regard, Bruce notes that "while none of our canonical Gospels existed at this time, the teaching of Christ recorded in them was current among the churches."[17]

Enquiring further, we might ask, which influences would have helped Paul shape his understanding of divine initiative as condescension. Paul ultimately, and perhaps naturally, grounds his understanding of divine condescension within his own Jewish tradition. In this regard, Berman's recent work[18] is highly significant. Berman convincingly argues that ancient Israelite society, as reflected in the Pentateuch, reflected a profound shift towards a non-hierarchical, egalitarian society, in contrast to the nations around it.[19] Berman notes, for example, that "Deuteronomy is a document in which heredity and class play little role in government—a document that has no word for class, caste, noble, or landed gentry."[20] Berman affirms this major theological and social shift by reference to the covenant narratives, in which the whole of Israel, rather than the king or the priests, "bear[s] the status of a subordinate king entering into treaty with a sovereign king, God."[21]

Paul identifies the Abrahamic covenant, in effect, as a covenant of condescension.[22] In this regard, God's condescension to Abraham is pervasive in Paul's writings, as in this classic example from the fourth chapter of Romans: "What then shall we say that Abraham, our forefather according to the flesh, has found? For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God. For what does the

15 See examples in 2 Cor 11:7; 12:21; see also Phil 2:8.

16 J. Ziesler, *Paul's Letter to the Romans* (London: SCM, 1989), 301–302.

17 F. F. Bruce, *Romans* (Tyndale New Testament Commentaries; Leicester: InterVarsity Press, 1985), 213.

18 J. A. Berman, *Created Equal: How the Bible Broke with Ancient Political Thought* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

19 Ibid., 10, 49.

20 Ibid., 80.

21 Ibid., 9.

22 Gen 15:1–21; 18:1–22.

Scripture say? 'Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness'."[23]

Subsequently, in v. 6, the example of divine condescension to David is also mentioned. Indeed, throughout the epistle to the Romans, Paul emphasizes the role of divine condescension in Israel's salvation.[24] Paul sees the concept of divine condescension as the pattern of God's dealings with His people throughout history. Furthermore, because of God's dealing with the world through the cross, divine condescension in turn becomes the model for relations both within the church, and with the world (Phil 2:5–8).

3.2 Unity or Equality?

Banks cautions us that the recognition of Paul's assertion of unity in Christ should not lead us into a false impression: "Paul's stress is not so much upon the equality of Jews and Greeks, free and slave, and men and women with one another as upon their unity in Christ. . . . Paul is no advocate of a universal, classless and unisexual society—he merely affirms that these differences do not affect one's relationship with Christ and membership in the community."[25]

With regard to the Pauline churches, Elliot states that non-discriminatory inclusion, rather than equality, is the point.[26] For this reason, 1 Cor 12:14–17 mention "inferior" and "superior" members with "lesser" and "greater" honour, who, although they are unequal, are all united in service in the body of Christ.[27] Paul's enumeration of the various functions in 1 Cor 12:28–31 does not presuppose equality, but rather variation in the quality of these gifts.

3.3 The Cross and Universalism

The cross is central to Paul's theology (1 Cor 1:23). Within Paul's agenda of creating a new community in Christ, the cross is correspondingly central. Christ crucified defines the identity of the community and its members, and indeed, defines the boundaries of the community:

23 Rom 4:1–3; see also Gal 4:21–28.

24 D. J. Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans* (2nd ed.; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1996), 727.

25 R. Banks, *Paul's Idea of Community: The Early House Churches in Their Historical Setting* (Surrey Hills: Anzea, 1979), 133–134.

26 J. H. Elliot, "The Jesus Movement Was Not Egalitarian But Family-Oriented," *Biblical Interpretation* 11/2 (2003): 181.

27 Ibid., 182.

> The cross—*o stauros*—was offered here as the primary identity marker for those in the Christian *ekklesia*. . . . For Paul, the cross created a new all-encompassing dichotomy that effectively reconstituted the Corinthians' relational universe, replacing the more familiar dichotomies of Jew and Greek (1.23–24), foolish and wise (1.26–27), weak and strong. Instead of multiple overlapping networks . . . now there were only two mutually exclusive ones: 'those who are perishing' and 'those who are being saved'.[28]

For Paul, it is the cross that matters; everything else matters because of the cross. Boyarin for example, regarding Paul's attitude to food, can say that "Paul's declarations that observances of the Law are adiaphora, matters of indifference, represent 'a cultural tolerance'."[29] His argument is precisely against those who think that what one eats is of significance. There may be differing views on what exactly Paul means by law in differing contexts. However, Boyarin's assessment of Paul's argument, regarding a range of issues with which Paul dealt, is substantially correct.

For Paul, it is the cross that represents the death of the old and the familiar, and which is the means of a new creation that relativizes all other distinctions. It is the cross that establishes the boundaries of the New Israel of God: "But may it never be that I would boast, except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world. For neither is circumcision anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creation. And those who will walk by this rule, peace and mercy be upon them, and upon the Israel of God."[30]

3.4 Immorality and the Boundaries of the Pauline Churches

While many things lose their importance in the light of the cross, one thing that matters to Paul is the betrayal of the cross. For Paul, the cross is betrayed particularly by sexual immorality. Note 1 Cor 6:15–20, which commences with Paul asking, "Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ? Shall I then take away the members of Christ and make them members of a prostitute? May it never be!" (v. 15).

Paul's argument here is that because of the cross (v. 20) the bodies of the members of the εκκλησια have been bought by God so that they no longer have authority over them (v. 19). When a person "joins himself to

[28] C. K. Robertson, *Conflict in Corinth: Redefining the System* (New York: Peter Lang, 2001), 136–137.

[29] Daniel Boyarin, *A Radical Jew: Paul and the Politics of Identity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 9.

[30] Gal 6:14–16; see also Eph 2:12–17.

the Lord" (v. 17), he or she becomes part of the "body of Christ."[31] Indeed, the "body of Christ" is the εκκλησια itself, so that the boundaries of the εκκλησια are the boundaries of the "body of Christ."

For Paul, sexual immorality means to "take away the members of Christ and make them members of a prostitute." In other words, the issue of sexual immorality is an issue which deals with the heart of one's identity as a Christian; it has to do with the very boundaries of the Christian community. The one who is sexually immoral has effectively crossed the boundaries of the εκκλησια. For this reason, Paul describes immorality as a sin of a different order, in that "the immoral man sins against his own body" (v. 18). It is a sin against the whole body of Christ, the entire εκκλησια. Immorality is a repudiation of the cross, which Paul presents as the prime identity marker for the Pauline communities, as well as the basis of God's presence within the community.[32]

Paul therefore scrupulously emphasizes sexual purity in his letters, as in 1 Cor 6:9–10 and Gal 5:18–20. For Paul, to cross over this boundary of the community was, in the definition of Morgan et al., a second-order change.[33] It was not to be countenanced; in Paul's words, "May it never be!" (1 Cor 6:15). Accordingly, Paul protects the homeostatic balance of the community by safeguarding it from any association with sexual impurity or adultery.

3.5 Race in the Pauline Churches

With regard to the issue of race, the ancient world was clearly and irrevocably segmented. The challenge that Christianity faced has been famously expressed by Fustel De Coulanges:

> Christianity was not the domestic religion of any family, the national religion of any race or community. From its first appearance it called to itself the whole human race. This principle was so extraordinary, and so unexpected, that the first disciples hesitated for a moment. We may see in the Acts of the Apostles that several of them refused at first to propagate the new doctrine outside the nation with which it had originated. In this there was something quite new. For everywhere, in the first ages of

[31] Rom 12:5; 1 Cor 12:27.

[32] M. Newton, *The Concept of Purity at Qumran and in the Letters of Paul* (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 104.

[33] D. D. Morgan, D. H. Levandowski, and M. L. Rogers, "The Apostle Paul: Problem Formation and Problem Resolution from a Systems Perspective," *Journal of Psychology and Theology* 9/2 (1981): 136–143, 137–138, cited by Robertson, 119.

humanity, the divinity had been imagined as attaching himself especially to one race.[34]

Modern research has borne this out, with Mason observing that the term *Ioudaioi* was in the main a racial, rather than religious designation.[35] It meant, essentially, "Judean" with the religious connotations principally derived from its racial categorisation. Cohen highlights that there is significant evidence that Jewish proselytes were not considered full Jews in many places and times.[36] One did not simply change one's religion; it belonged to your race. You were born that way. Christianity, however, shattered the paradigm by announcing the creation of a new race, indeed, a whole new creation, in Christ. Paul conceived of a church where the lines that had divided humanity based on race no longer existed.

One of the reasons why Paul could do this was because he started with what united humanity, rather than with what separated it. The Stoic and Middle-Platonic philosophers had started by attempting to deal with what separated humanity. For Paul, the problem was not that people all belonged to different races, what separates us, but rather in what unites us: that is, that we are all sinners. Therefore, Paul can write: "there is no distinction; for all have sinned" (Rom 3:22–23).

3.6 Socio-Economic Status in the Pauline Churches

Here, we will consider the issue of socio-economic status. The new consensus on this is that the socio-economic make-up of Paul's churches reflected that of the broader society.[37] If Gehring's estimate that 99.5% of the population of the Roman Empire belonged to the lower classes is correct,[38] this would have been reflected in the composition of the Pauline churches. This is reflected in 1 Cor 1:26 (NIV): "Brothers, think of what

[34] Fustel de Coulanges, *The Ancient City: A Study on the Religions, Laws, and Institutions of Greece and Rome* (1874), 391; cf. S. J. D. Cohen, "Crossing the Boundary and Becoming a Jew," *Harvard Theological Review* 82/1 (1989): 13–33; and S. Mason, "Jews, Judeans, Judaizing, Judaism: Problems of Categorization in Ancient History," *Journal for the Study of Judaism* 38 (2007): 457–512.

[35] Mason, "Jews."

[36] Cohen, "Crossing the Boundary."

[37] Werner Eck, "Das Eindringen des Christentums in den Senatorenstand bis zu Konstantin d. Gr.", *Chiron* 1 (1971): 381–406, cited in W. A. Meeks, *The First Urban Christians: The Social World of the Apostle Paul* (2nd ed.; New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), 214.

[38] R. W. Gehring, *House Church and Mission: The Importance of Household Structures in Early Christianity* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2004), 166.

you were when you were called. Not many of you were wise by human standards; not many were influential; not many were of noble birth."

Paul's statement indicates that the reverse was also true. While not many were influential, some were. While not many were of noble birth, some were. Regardless, what is clear is that the membership of the Pauline communities comprised people of different social status. Paul's emphasis on unity rather than on strict equality meant that the advantages of people with higher socio-economic status appear to have led to their contributing to the Christian community in ways which others could not. In this regard, Banks comments that "differentiations of a social kind were not treated as if they did not exist; nor were they subjected to an indiscriminate leveling process. Social privileges, no longer a mark of *distinction between* members of the community, could become an occasion for *service* to them."[39]

3.7 Gender in the Pauline Churches

Cotter notes that "Roman and Greek culture agreed in the exclusion of women from the public and/or political arena; not only were women denied public offices, they were expected to refrain from any formal 'public' behaviour."[40] This exclusion included public worship, with the exception of some of the female-oriented mystery cults such as the cult of Isis. However, in line with the spirit of universalism which was emerging in the Hellenistic world, Bassler observes that "[i]n the centuries immediately preceding the advent of Christianity, a gradual liberation of women occurred in the Greco-Roman world. Yet this liberation seems to have been somewhat stronger in theory than in practice, and it aroused as much reactionary animosity as support."[41]

What we see, particularly in the Pauline communities, is that women appear to have held positions of honour and authority,[42] they held a higher status than pagans,[43] they outnumbered men,[44] and had higher

39 Banks, *Community*, 137.

40 W. Cotter, "Women's Authority Roles in Paul's Churches: Countercultural or Conventional?," in *Novum Testamentum* 36/4 (1994): 350–372, 366–367.

41 Bassler, "Widow's Tale," 25.

42 Found throughout the Pauline epistles. See also Jerome, *Commentarii in Jesaj* 3:2 (trans. R. M. Berchman, in *Porphyry Against the Christians*; Leiden: Brill, 2005), 156.

43 R. Stark, *The Rise of Christianity: A Sociologist Reconsiders History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), 128; M. Walsh, *The Triumph of the Meek: Why Early Christianity Succeeded* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1986), 114–116; and Cotter, "Authority Roles," 369–371.

44 See the greetings in Rom 16.

primary conversion rates than men.[45] Where Paul does appear to place restrictions on women, his concerns go both ways, and impact on both males and females. Indeed, it is not only interesting, but also significant, to note how Paul always balances his advice to females with corresponding advice to males. Badiou called this "subsequent symmetrisation."[46] What this demonstrates is how Paul clearly differentiates between males and females, yet gives them equal consideration within the Christian community. Here are some examples:

"The wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband does" (1 Cor 7:4a)	"and likewise also the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife does" (1 Cor 7:4b)
"Every man who has something on his head while praying or prophesying disgraces his head" (1 Cor 11:4)	"But every woman who has her head uncovered while praying or prophesying disgraces her head, for she is one and the same as the woman whose head is shaved" (1 Cor 11:5)
"the man is the head of a woman" (1 Cor 11:3a)	"as God is the head of Christ" (1 Cor 7:4b)
"Wives, be subject to your husbands, as to the Lord" (Eph 5:22)	"Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church, and gave Himself up for her" (Eph 5:25)
"Therefore I want men in every place to pray, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and dissension" (1 Tim 2:8)	"Likewise, I want women to adorn themselves . . . modestly and discretely" (1 Tim 2:9)
"if any man aspires to the office of overseer, it is a fine work he desires to do" (1 Tim 3:1)	"Women must be likewise dignified, . . . temperate, faithful in all things" (1 Tim 3:11)

Table 1: Subsequent Symmetrization

[45] Acts 16:13, 17:4; see also Origen, *Contra Celsum* 3.50–55 (trans. H. Chadwick; Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 1950).

[46] A. Badiou, *Saint Paul: The Foundation of Universalism* (trans. Ray Brassier; Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003), 104.

4. Conclusion

An understanding of Paul's universalism within its first century Graeco-Roman context has much to contribute to modern discussion in a variety of contexts. In significant ways, Paul lived in a culture that was remarkably similar to ours, with its contradictions between theory and practice with regard to emerging ideas about freedom and equality, and the social and economic realities. Within the first-century culture of nascent universalism, the Pauline communities actually operationalized radical universalistic principles based on Paul's understanding of the gospel. These were radical in comparison to other available social and religious structures of the time. To the extent that the Pauline communities survived, flourished, and grew, they were successful. Indeed, within the culture of Paul's day, the universalism of the Pauline communities may have been a significant source of competitive advantage. Dunn notes that Paul's contribution to Christianity was that he

> . . . stretched the diversity of infant Christianity, preventing it from falling back into a Jewish sect, and leaving developing Christianity the challenge of addressing wider culture in meaningful language. . . . the diversity of his theological assertions helps prevent his successors succumbing to a narrowly consistent Christology, a monochrome concept of salvation or a uniform concept of community. And the vision of principled adaptability remains a model for sensitive and flexible pastoral practice. In a word, Paul the apostle is the apostle of Christian diversity.[47]

Although Paul's thinking was molded by his culture, Paul was able to stretch this diversity to which Dunn refers beyond its boundaries. He was able to do this because his universalism was based on a new and radical conceptualization of the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus Christ. One senses that Alain Badiou is right, and that Paul's radical universalism was a major contribution to human culture. One must hasten to add that this was not, however, the boundaryless egalitarianism that Badiou may envisage. It was, rather, a universalism that was shaped fundamentally by Paul's understanding of his ministry, operationalized within the context of the culture of his own time.

47 J. D. G. Dunn, "Diversity in Paul," in *Religious Diversity in the Graeco-Roman World: A Survey of Recent Scholarship* (ed. D. Cohn-Sherbok and J. M. Court; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001), 107–123, 123.