



Befriending the Beloved Disciple and the Beloved Apostle: A Study of the Diverse Unity of John's and Paul's Theologies

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The richness of the writings of the New Testament lies both in their unity as well as in their diversity. This article endeavors to “befriend” the theologies of both John and Paul. Despite many obvious differences, there are a number of points of convergence in John’s and Paul’s Christology, Ecclesiology and Soteriology. At least three aspects manifest profound similarities in their Christologies: (1) Their foundational experience of Jesus Christ; (2) their relationship with Jesus Christ founded in the experience of love and (3) the radical affirmation of the pre-existence and divinity of Jesus. Their Ecclesiologies converge: (1) In the concept of “new creation in Christ,” applied to the believers and to the Church as a whole; (2) the image of the “Total Christ” as the preferred representation of the Church; and lastly, (3) John and Paul’s particular relationship with the recognized authorities in the primitive Church. Soteriologically, both converge in presenting that faith that Christ is the Messiah is necessary for salvation.

Keywords: *Paul, John, Unity, Convergence, Christology, Ecclesiology, Soteriology*

Introduction

This paper explores the similarities of the spiritual experiences and the theologies of the Beloved Disciple of the Fourth Gospel and the apostle Paul, to whom I attribute the qualification ‘Beloved Apostle,’ since he is the only apostle to claim in his writings to have been loved personally by Jesus: “He loved me and gave himself for me” (Gal 2:19-20) and of having received

a special personal grace and encounter with Jesus (cf. 1 Cor 15:8-10, Gal 1:13-15).¹ We can affirm that the most influential theologies of the New Testament are the theology of Saint Paul and his school and the theology of the Johannine Community.² Johannine literature includes a Gospel, three letters and the book of Revelation while Paul and the Pauline school wrote almost half of the New Testament, and this constitutes the earliest writings of the Christian canon. Much has been written about the supposed-to-be contrasting Christologies of John and Paul, the former focussing on the Incarnation, and the latter stressing the centrality of the Cross. Thus traditionally, the differences between them have been overemphasized by playing up the contrasting perspectives of their theologies:

The great Pauline words ‘justification’ and ‘grace’ are virtually absent from John. Certainly they play no role in the basic structure of the Gospel. ‘Son of man’ and ‘the Son,’ on the other hand, so important to John, are entirely absent (in the case of ‘Son of man’) or virtually so (in the case of the absolute use of ‘the Son’) in Paul. One can summarize: what is important to Paul John ignores; and what is important to John was not learned from Paul.³

In the recent decades, a new current of thought started to emerge as scholars began to research on the different ways in which the theologies in the New Testament actually converge toward the same intention or derive from the same experience. One of these scholars is J. N. Sanders who in his *Commentary to the Gospel of John* states: “It is not surprising that their [John’s and Paul’s] teaching on the person of Christ is similar. But it requires a very close resemblance between them to prove that John is actually dependent on St Paul or the writer of the Hebrews.”⁴ R. Scroggs as well made a valuable research on the similarities in the Christologies of Paul and John and concluded that “both Christologies show striking fundamental similarities.”⁵

An article of Frank Matera, “Christ in the theologies of Paul and John: a study in the diverse unity of New Testament Theology,”⁶ which presents a continuity within the diversity of the theologies of the New Testament, motivated this writer to research and discover some profound spiritual and theological connections between John and Paul.⁷ F. Matera also warns any theologian who embarks on the task of

¹ This point will be discussed at length below; for now what is given is just a brief justification for the appellation given to the apostle Paul in the title of this paper. For the sake of simplicity the study will refer to them as John, representing the writings of the Johannine community, and Paul, since that is how they are referred to by most authors.

² Robin Scroggs, *Christology in Paul and John* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1988), 105.

³ Scroggs, *Christology in Paul and John*, 105.

⁴ J. N. Sanders, *A Commentary on the Gospel According to St. John* (London: Adam & Charles Black, 1968), 23.

⁵ Scroggs, *Christology in Paul and John*, Preface X.

⁶ Frank Matera, “Christ in the theologies of Paul and John: a study in the diverse unity of New Testament Theology,” *TheolStds* 67 (2006): 237-256.

⁷ This paper will limit itself to those letters whose Pauline authorship is not disputed (Romans, 1 and 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Philippians, 1 Thessalonians and Philemon). The Acts of Apostles will

reconciling these theologies that he will find three main difficulties:

- First, the nature of the writings is radically different. While Paul's writings are more oriented to problem-solving without any systematic description of his theology—excluding in a certain way the letter to the Romans—John writes a Gospel in which his theology is being expressed through the way the ministry of Jesus is being narrated.
- Second, we know a big amount about Paul whereas we know so little about the author of the Fourth Gospel and the identity of the Beloved Disciple.
- Third, they clearly have two different starting points. Paul focuses on the Cross while John focuses on the Incarnation.⁸

Having these three elements in mind, one can embark on the noble attempt at discovering the unifying elements of the theologies and spiritual experiences of the Beloved Disciple and the Beloved Apostle. Taking inspiration from the title of Adele Reinhartz' book *Befriending the Beloved Disciple*, this researcher will endeavour to “befriend” both John and Paul and get them to “befriend” each other, so to speak, by presenting the points of convergence of their spiritual experiences and theologies, but without taking their diversity away. J. H. Bernard found a great number of similarities between the theologies of John and Paul, a few of which will be extensively developed in this research:

In the four great Epistles (Rom, 1 and 2 Cor, Gal), Paul has many phrases which recall Johannine teaching. Jesus is not only “the Son” (1 Cor 15:28), which is common to all the evangelists (see on Jn 5:18), but is God's “own Son,” ὁ θεὸς τὸν ἑαυτοῦ υἱὸν (Rom 8:3, cf. Jn 5:18). That God “sent His Son” (Rom 8:3, Gal. 4:4) is a conception common to all the Gospels, but cf. Jn. 3:16 in particular. For the phrase τέκνα θεοῦ (Rom 8:16,17,21) cf. Jn 1:12. For Paul, Christ is ἐπὶ πάντων (Rom 9:5); cf. ἐπάνω πάντων ἐστίν (Jn 3:31). Χάρις is a characteristic term in Paul; it is only used in the Prologue to the Gospel by Jn., but Paul means particularly by “grace” what Jn. means when he writes, “God so loved the world” (see note on 1:14). The Pauline contrast between the “law” and “grace” (Rom 4:16. 6:14-15, Gal 5:4) is, again, explicitly enunciated in the Prologue (see on 1:17). Jn. does not use Paul's word πίστις in the Gospel but the emphasis laid in “believing” is a prime feature of Johannine doctrine (see on 1:7). Finally, Paul's “Christ in me” (Rom 8:10, 2 Cor 13:5, Gal 2:20) and “I in Christ” (Rom 16:7, 2 Cor. 5:17, Gal 1:22) are conjoined as inseparable in Jn 15:4-5. Paul's ἐν Χριστῷ is not less mystical than anything in Jn descriptive of the Christian life (see on Jn 14:20, 15:16, 17:23).⁹

be used in the aspects in which there is no conflict between the information found in the Acts and in the Letters of Paul.

⁸ Matera, “Christ in the theologies of Paul and John,” 237-256.

⁹ J. H. Bernard, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to St. John*, (Edinburg; T & T Clark, 1962), cxxxvii.

It would certainly be a wonderful enterprise to discuss in detail each and every one of the elements described by J. H. Bernard. However, the necessary conciseness of the study compels the researcher to be selective in the elements that will be included in this paper. It is not the goal of this research to harmonize the major lines of the theologies of John and Paul, but simply to find common elements within their general theological topics that will help us to discover a similar experience of Christ and equivalent theological realities expressed in different ways.

Christology of John and Paul

The study takes as its starting point the similarities in John's and Paul's experience of Christ and their Christology, since this will be the foundation of their Ecclesiology and Soteriology. R. Scroggs concludes in his book that there are three main reasons to think that there is "no historical connection between John and anything that would count as the distinctive Pauline theology. If there was such a connection, then the Johannine community and the author of the Gospel have so completely structured and relanguaged Paul that he is unrecognizable."¹⁰ R. Scroggs further enunciates that the three main objections to consider any possible dependence of John on Paul or even a historical connection are the different vocabulary, the different Christological structure and the different trajectories of tradition.¹¹ Despite the "evidences" of their theological independence, R. Scroggs suggests that the radical difference in the level of language and tradition does not exclude "some profound similarities of understanding about what really is at issue between persons and the God revealed in Jesus Christ."¹² Regarding the Christological thought the following three aspects manifest 'profound similarities' between John and Paul: the foundational experience, a relationship with Jesus Christ founded in the experience of love, and the radical affirmation of the pre-existence and divinity of Jesus.

Foundational Experience

John and Paul apparently, did not know each other during the time of the ministry of Jesus, since "most scholars today are prepared to see Paul's pre-conversion knowledge about Jesus as having been obtained entirely from Pharisaic sources, which he trusted."¹³ Because of that, and according to the way each of them narrates his own encounter with the Lord, they seem to have very different foundational experiences. On the one hand, the testimony of the Beloved Disciple is based on the experience of having witnessed the ministry of Jesus and having discovered the love he expressed through his incarnation, public ministry, passion, death and resurrection (1 Jn

¹⁰ Scroggs, *Christology in Paul and John*, 106-107.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 105-106.

¹² Scroggs, *Christology in Paul and John*, 107.

¹³ Richard N. Longenecker, *The Road from Damascus: The Impact of Paul's Conversion on His Life, Thought, and Ministry* (Cambridge: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1997), 20.

1:1). On the other hand, the experience of the Beloved Apostle is an extraordinary personal encounter with the Glorified Christ (Acts 9:1-9),¹⁴ of which we have no other records of something similar in the whole history of the Church. It seems that the experience of Paul is not the same experience that the apostles had when they saw the resurrected Christ but an astonishing experience of the Glorified Christ.¹⁵

Thus, considering the difference between the Resurrected Christ and the Glorious One who appeared to Paul,¹⁶ we end up with the surprising conclusion that the Beloved Disciple experienced what the Beloved Apostle was never able to and the Beloved Apostle experienced, in turn, what the Beloved Disciple never did. The Beloved Disciple witnessed the human Jesus, His death and His Resurrection before going to Heaven. On the other hand the Beloved Apostle experienced the Glorified Jesus, the one who already sat at the right hand of the Father and appeared to him in a very exceptional intervention in the history of Christianity. That leads us to the wonderful picture that shows the complete “face” of Jesus through the complementarities of their experiences.

Despite the differences, it is very interesting to discover the same pattern in their experiences. The Johannine community summarizes their experience of Jesus in the beginning of the first letter which is actually a summary of the experience that has been expressed already in the Prologue of the Gospel:

1 Jn 1:1-4 **Something which has existed since the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our own eyes, which we have watched and touched with our own hands,** the Word of life – this is our theme. ²That life was made visible; we saw it and are giving our testimony, declaring to you the eternal life, which was present to the Father and has been revealed to us. ³We are declaring to you what we have seen and heard, so that you too may share our life. Our life is shared with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ. ⁴We are writing this to you so that our joy may be complete.¹⁷

Jn 1:1-14 **In the beginning was the Word:** the Word was with God and the Word was God... ⁴What has come into being in him was life, life that was the light of men; ⁵and light shines in darkness, and darkness could not overpower it...

⁹**The Word was the real light that gives light to everyone;** he was coming into the world...

¹⁴**The Word became flesh,** he lived among us, and we saw his glory, the glory that he has from the Father as only Son of the Father, full of grace and truth.

The concepts of Word, Light, and Flesh are the three different ways in which the Second Divine Person reveals himself and gives way to a kind of experience that

¹⁴ Martin Hengel and Anna Maria Schwemer, *Paul: Between Damascus and Antioch* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1997), 38.

¹⁵ Xavier Leon- Dufour, *Dictionary of Biblical Theology* (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1997), 29.

¹⁶ Hengel and Schwemer, *Paul: Between Damascus and Antioch*, 40.

¹⁷ Scriptural quotations are taken from *New Revised Standard Version* (1989).

the Johannine Community has heard (because He is a Word), has seen (because He is a Light) and has touched (because He became flesh).

When we take a close look at the experience of Paul we find a very interesting parallelism. Luke narrates the experience of Paul three times (Acts 9:1-20, 22:3-16, 26:9-18) and in the three stories we find the same elements. Since Paul's own description of his conversion is not very detailed in his letters¹⁸ the study will serve of the first account found in the Acts of Apostles describing his conversion. According to M. Hengel and A. M. Schwemer "... there are no reasonable grounds for rejecting this [account] as 'legendary'... it is not mere fiction but rests on tradition – presumably ultimately coming orally from the apostle himself."¹⁹ Luke's first account reads:

Meanwhile Saul was still breathing threats to slaughter the Lord's disciples. He went to the high priest and asked for letters addressed to the synagogues in Damascus, that would authorize him to arrest and take to Jerusalem any followers of the Way, men or women, that he might find. It happened that while he was travelling to Damascus and approaching the city, suddenly **a light from heaven shone** all round him. He fell to the ground, and then **he heard a voice** saying, 'Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?' 'Who are you, Lord?' he asked, and the answer came, **'I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting.** Get up and go into the city, and you will be told what you are to do.' The men travelling with Saul stood there speechless, for though they heard the voice they could see no one. Saul got up from the ground, but when he opened his eyes he could see nothing at all, and they had to lead him into Damascus by the hand (Acts 9:1-8).

The narrative describes how Paul saw the light (v.3), heard the voice (v.4), and discovered that he was "touching" Christ through the members of his Body (v.5). It is very surprising, indeed, to discover the same elements which define the experience of Jesus of the Johannine community in the conversion of Paul; an experience that implies seeing, hearing, and touching. In some ways, what the Johannine community experienced through the Incarnation of the Logos was granted to Paul by the "appearance of the Risen Christ" to him (1 Cor 15:8). Hengel and Schwemer explain the narrative of Luke on the conversion of Paul in this way:

And because of course in Luke the person affected cannot recognize the cause of the light and his blinding, in addition to the light there is an audition with the self-revelation of the Exalted One... the audition and vision of the persecutor before Damascus was bound up with a deep, even physical, shattering and resulted in a temporary blindness, and must therefore be not just a mere literary theme.²⁰

Thus, they also pointed out the three dimensions of Paul's experience (seeing, hearing, and the physicality of the encounter with Christ) which happen to be, as already mentioned, the same dimensions identified by the Johannine community.

¹⁸ Only a few references to the experience of his conversion are found in Paul's letters: 1 Cor 9:1, 15:8, and Gal 1:12.15-16.

¹⁹ Hengel and Schwemer, *Paul: Between Damascus and Antioch*, 38.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 40-41.

Lastly, regarding their experience of Christ, it seems that both John and Paul share the same perspective of not abiding in the corporal experience they may have had of Jesus but rather they both invite their communities to discover Jesus in a new way. The invitation of Paul to his community in 2 Cor 5:16 "...from now on, therefore, we regard no one from a human point of view; even though we once knew Christ from a human point of view, we know him no longer in that way" finds a clear echo in the Johannine theology during the narratives of the resurrection.

In a first instance Jesus directed Mary Magdalene to the community when she wanted to hold him, indicating in that way that the community would be from then onwards 'his new body:' Jesus said to her, "Do not hold on to me, because I have not yet ascended to the Father. But go to my brothers and say to them, 'I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God'" (Jn 20:17). In the post-resurrection appearance to Thomas, Jesus blessed as well those who have never met him 'in the flesh' but came to believe in him through the testimony of the community: "Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe" (20:29).

John and Paul declared themselves to be personally loved by Jesus

If there are similarities in their foundational experience of encountering Jesus more can be said about the way they felt personally loved by Jesus and were moved to explicitly declare it. In fact they are the only two writers of the New Testament who expressed themselves in terms of a personal and profoundly intimate relationship of love with Jesus Christ (Jn 13:23; 19:26; 20:2; 21:7.20, Gal 2:20).

It is noteworthy that in the Gospels, even though the whole reality of the Incarnation and Jesus' whole ministry are cited as proof of love, there are just a few times that the love of Jesus for His people, His disciples, or any concrete person is explicitly stated. In a general way it is told twice in the Fourth Gospel that Jesus loved His disciples (13:1; 14:21); once the love of Jesus for his friends, Lazarus, Martha, and Mary is mentioned (11:5); once in the Gospel of Mark Jesus' personal love for a concrete person, that is, the rich young man of 10:21, is expressed; twice Jesus' love for his deceased friend Lazarus is acknowledged (11:3, 36). But the most striking discovery is the five times in which Jesus' personal love for a particular disciple is captured in the very designation used by the writer of the Fourth Gospel, referring to that disciple as ὃν ἠγάπα ὁ Ἰησοῦς (Jn 13:23-24, 19:26-27, 20:2, 21:7.20).

Paul, as well, discovered that the love the Father and Jesus had for the world (cf. John 3:16) was also directed personally to him: "But when God, who had set me apart even from my mother's womb and called me through His grace, was pleased to reveal His Son in me so that I might preach Him among the Gentiles, I did not

immediately consult with flesh and blood” (Gal 1:15-16). He even expressed this conviction in a more conclusive way in, perhaps, the most famous of all his sentences: “I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself up for me” (Gal 2:20). In his exegesis on that verse, P. Mendoza affirms:

The text of 2:20 stands out because of the exclusivity in expressing the personal relationship between Christ and the apostle with overwhelming depth... When Paul describes the secret of his own spiritual life he talks in a personal way of what it is for him to believe in Christ ... What the apostle affirms, he lives out intensely... The apostle writes here ‘for me:’ it is not a general affirmation but the awareness of a personal relationship... While the pre-Pauline tradition never makes this aspect so explicit, Paul clearly affirms it... As a conclusion to the exegesis, it manifests the conviction of Paul, of knowing himself to be loved by Christ.²¹

Being thus convinced of having been personally loved by Jesus, both John and Paul play a very important role in teaching all Christians the way to understand the salvation Jesus Christ attained for all through his life, death, and resurrection. Jesus Christ is the Savior of the world, indeed He is, and He is also the personal Savior of each person living in it, the one who left the ninety-nine sheep in the desert just to look for the one sheep that was lost (Lk 15:4). The Beloved Disciple and the Beloved Apostle want to teach their communities that there is no other way to understand Christianity than having this personal, intimate, and unique experience of the love of Christ. That is why they both strongly reacted to a kind of religiosity based on rituals, works of the law, and traditions, or a justification achieved by personal merits rather than by the love experienced in Christ.

The Preexistence of Jesus in Paul and John

John is the author of the New Testament who clearly states and develops the Christology of the preexistence of the Son in his Prologue and in his constant reference to the descending-ascending Son throughout the Gospel. Paul, on the other hand, having written his letters before the Fourth Gospel, serves as a kind of bridge between the personal experience of those who met Jesus ‘in the flesh’ and the open proclamation of Jesus’ divinity by John. Paul quotes some hymns in his letters which clearly express the belief in the preexistence of the Son, though he himself does not

²¹ Pedro Mendoza Magallon, *Estar Crucificado Juntamente con Cristo: El Nuevo Status del Creyente in Cristo*, (Rome: Gregorian University Press, 2005), 95.101-102: “El texto de 2:20 destaca por su exclusividad and el modo de expresar la relación personal entre Cristo y el apóstol con una profundidad insuperable... Pablo, en cambio, cuando describe el secreto de su propia vida espiritual, refiere de modo personalizado qué cosa es para él creer en Cristo... Lo que el apóstol afirma, lo vive intensamente... El apóstol escribe aquí ‘por mí’: no se trata de una afirmación general, sino de la toma de conciencia se una relación personal... Mientras que la tradición pre-Paulina no explicita nunca este aspecto, Pablo la explicita... Como conclusión se la exégesis de Gal 2:19-20, queda manifiesta la convicción de Pablo de saberse amado por Cristo.” (My translation).

make any theological reflection about it. R. Scroggs echoes this reality found in the letters of Paul saying:

Paul is aware of the belief in preexistence, yet reference to it emerges in his writings only when he seems to be citing or alluding to formulas created by others in the church. Nowhere does he develop the motif in his own theological reflections. Preexistence clearly does not have an essential function in his Christological structure.²²

Despite the non-essential place of the notion of preexistence in Paul's Christology, the mere fact that he incorporated the hymns into his letters is remarkable. His use of them as foundation for the message he is conveying to the communities shows more than simply knowledge of the belief in the preexistence of Jesus. He, in fact, shows his agreement to the truth contained in the hymn, making it an integral part of his theological system, though not the core of it. The three main passages in which he referred to the doctrine of preexistence in a direct or indirect way in the Proto-Pauline letters are: 1 Cor 8:6, 2 Cor 8:9, and Phil 2:5-7. In the Prologue John, one could identify striking similarities with Paul's concept of preexistence:

1 Cor 8:6 yet for us there is but one God, the Father, from whom are all things and we exist for Him; and one Lord, Jesus Christ, by whom are all things, and we exist through Him.	Jn 1:3 All things came into being through Him, and apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being.
2 Cor 8:9 For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sake He became poor, so that you through His poverty might become rich.	Jn 1:12 But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name.

In 1 Cor 8:6 one finds the same concept as in Jn 1:3, affirming that it is through the Son that everything exists. Though Paul does not refer to him as the Son, but the fact that he calls him "Lord" is an explicit proclamation of his divinity. As B. Dianzon states in her reading of the text: "In fact, in many instances that he calls Jesus 'Lord' (*Kyrios* in Greek), the term represents the Hebrew name of God—*Yahweh*."²³ Paul also remarks in the passage the role of Jesus Christ in the creation of the universe and that is exactly the same concept that we see in the beginning of the Prologue of John, His divinity and His role in the creation of the universe. In 2 Cor 8:9, Paul makes it clear to us that it is through the kenosis of Jesus Christ that we are enriched. Though the words used are different, and so is the style, yet we find the same concept in v. 12 of the Prologue, where John makes us see that the λόγος, by becoming man, can give to those believing in him the power to become children of God.

²² Scroggs, *Christology in Paul and John*, 45.

²³ Bernardita Dianzon, *Glimpses of Paul and His Message*, (Pasay City: Paulines Publishing House, 2008), 38.

The third Proto-Pauline passage where Paul quotes another hymn referring to the preexistence of the Son is Phil 2:5-7:

Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus, who, 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. For this reason also, God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus EVERY KNEE WILL BOW, of those who are in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and that every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Paul uses two out of three of the passages referring to the preexistence of Christ to show the attitude he wants the churches to have. His abasement expressed in 2 Cor 8:9 and Phil 2:5-7 is meant to serve as a model of conduct in living the Christian life and relating with one another in the community. In her reading of the hymn of Philippians 2 B. Dianzon affirms:

Paul uses the kenotic hymn not to teach the Philippians any sublime doctrine, but rather to exhort them to assume certain attitudes in relation to one another. He wants to check the Philippians' tendency to be ambitious, to feel self-important and to compete with one another. He puts forward Jesus Christ as the ultimate model for moral action.²⁴

We can see that Paul's belief in the preexistence of the Son is much more than simply knowing of the existence of those hymns; he sets the doctrine of the preexistence of Jesus Christ and his decision to empty himself of that glory as the model for every Christian's way of relating with one another. Thus, we can see a different focus of attention in the role of preexistence in the theology of Paul, compared to the theology of John. While in John the preexistence is a way to show how much Jesus loved us, in Paul the focus is more on Jesus Christ's humility and generosity as a role model for Christians.

These differences in the perspective of the preexistence of Jesus are reflected in the way both writers narrated and conceived the first coming of the Lord. On the one hand, John summed up that reality in one of the most beautiful verses of his Gospel: "And the Word became flesh and lived among us" (Jn 1:14). On the other hand, Paul emphasized the *kenotic* action of becoming one of us: "...but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness" (Phi 2:7). B. Dianzon summarizes beautifully the different perspectives of John and Paul regarding the first coming of Jesus:

John and Paul give two perspectives of one reality. For John, it is 'putting on;' for Paul, it is 'taking off.' For John, God becomes one of us by 'putting on human flesh,' whereas for Paul, it is by 'emptying himself of divine glory.' John's concept is what

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 67.

theologians call the ‘incarnation.’ Paul’s concept instead is known as ‘kenosis,’ from the Greek *kenos*, meaning ‘empty.’²⁵

Ecclesiology of John and Paul

Having demonstrated some points of convergence in Paul’s and John’s personal experience of Christ and therefore in their Christologies, the study will now endeavour to explain how their respective personal experiences have shaped their Ecclesiological perspectives and the way they understood and formed their respective communities. There are three aspects in which Paul’s and John’s ecclesiological views converge: the concept of “new creation in Christ,” applied to the believers and also to the Church as a whole, the image of the Corporate Christ as the preferred representation of the Church, and lastly, their particular relationship with the recognized authorities in the primitive Church.

A New Creation in Christ

In the Johannine literature we find different ways in which the Church is presented as the new Creation. On the one hand, with respect to the Johannine Gospel, scholars agree that it is impossible to think that the writer did not have in mind the Book of Genesis when he used as a start the very same words with which the latter begins: “Ἐν ἀρχῇ...” (In the beginning...).²⁶ M. E. Boismard confirmed this perspective in his wonderful work on the Prologue:

This reference to Genesis has been accepted from the time of St. Irenaeus and of Tertullian and is still generally acknowledged today. A comparison with the Greek translation of the Septuagint is particularly striking: in the first three verses of Genesis and in the first four of the Prologue the same expressions are found: ἐν ἀρχῇ, ἐγένετο, σχοτία, φῶς, εἶπεν (ὁ λόγος).²⁷

In addition to the connection of the Prologue with Genesis in the creational sense, some authors have identified this new creation in the Fourth Gospel as the Church. Stephen Bedard recognized the creation of the Church all throughout the Gospel.²⁸ Thomas Barrose, on the other hand, found the essential elements of the Church being created in the first six days narrated by the evangelist in the beginning of Jesus’ ministry (1:19-51).²⁹ Those elements are “...the Precursor, the Savior, the disciples, the Chief Apostle, the apostles and the believing Israel. The seventh day, the first sign at Cana, is then seen as symbol of the great eschatological banquet and

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 66.

²⁶ T. Evan Pollard, “Cosmology and the Prologue of the Fourth Gospel,” *VigChr* 12 (1958): 148.

²⁷ M. E. Boismard, *St. John’s Prologue* (London: Blackfriars Publications, 1957), 6.

²⁸ Stephen J. Bedard, “The Johannine Creation Account” available at <<http://www.biblicaltheology.com/Research/BedardSJ03.pdf>>, 1.

²⁹ T. Barrosse, “The Seven Days of the New Creation in St. John’s Gospel,” *CBQ* 21 (1959): 507-516.

manifestation of the Church.”³⁰ The way to enter in this new reality in the Johannine theology is by being “born again” of water and Spirit (Jn 3:5) which implies the water of Baptism.³¹ The community of those who are “born again” will form the New Jerusalem which will eventually transform the first creation into a glorious one:

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. And I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “See, the home of God is among mortals. He will dwell with them; they will be his peoples, and God himself will be with them; he will wipe every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more; mourning and crying and pain will be no more, for the first things have passed away.” And the one who was seated on the throne said, “See, I am making all things new.” Also he said, “Write this, for these words are trustworthy and true.” Then he said to me, “It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. To the thirsty I will give water as a gift from the spring of the water of life. Those who conquer will inherit these things, and I will be their God and they will be my children (Rev 21:1-7).

In the case of Paul, this new creation theme has two dimensions; the individual and the corporate. “While not purporting to be Paul’s central thought, New Creation is nonetheless one of his most important teachings.”³² In fact, the term as such appears only twice—2 Cor 5:17 and Gal 6:15—though related words and ideas are found all throughout his letters and theology. Explaining the twofold dimension of the theme in Paul’s writings M. Bockmuehl and M. B. Thompson give the following interesting insights:

For Paul, this is a collective as well as an individual theme... That is, being in Christ represents the specific sphere of belonging for the new community, and its distinctive point of reference. Paul’s usage of ‘new creation’ does look to be individual in reference (Gal 6:15; 2 Cor 5:17), but even in these two passages there is clearly a collective, communal dimension implied... More widely as well, this is what Paul implies for the whole Christian community. That is, the community is God’s new creation, which is characterized by the new life given at baptism and incorporation into Christ.³³

Through faith, expressed in Baptism, this new individual being began a completely new life in Christ: “Therefore we have been buried with him by baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life” (Rom 6:4). B. Dianzon states: “Baptism into Christ is said to imply baptism into his death, and therefore the believer’s death with Christ and his/her resurrection with Christ in the new life of the corporate

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Crane, *The Message of John*, 47.

³² Joaquin C. Yap, Jr. “St. Paul’s teaching on the New Creation and Some of its Implications for Campus Ministry” (M. A. Thesis, Ateneo de Manila University, 1995), 35.

³³ Marcus Bockmuehl and Michael B. Thompson, *A Vision of the Church: Studies in Early Christian Ecclesiology* (Edinburg: T & T Clark, 1997), 106.

personality of Christ.”³⁴ She also identifies the Church as a ‘living organism’ and extension of the personality of Jesus himself in his corporate reality constituting the new humanity.³⁵ R. Scroggs summarizes what this new life and new creation, the fruit of victory in faith, are all about:

The person who is thus liberated is thrown into a new world. “The old has passed away, behold, the new has come” (2 Cor 5: 17). Since a person *is* the world in which he lives, a new human is created, and it is no casual figure Paul uses when he implies that such a transformation into a new creation is an act of *create ex nihilo* by God (1 Cor 1:28). This new person lives by and in faith. In fact “faith” is the word Paul uses to describe the quality of life in the new creation. Faith is the new primal perspective by which a person views God and world ... This new self is gifted with a new mind ... Thus not only does this person have a *new being*, he or she is freed for a *new doing* as well. New being and new doing are described by Paul in terms of freedom, joy, peace, and love.³⁶

As the preceding discussion has shown, both the Beloved Disciple and the Beloved Apostle speak about the Church in terms of a new creation which is formed by believers who have been transformed first through the faith and the waters of Baptism.

The Corporate Christ as the preferred representation of the Church

Regarding the ecclesiological allegory that greatly influenced both Paul and John, it can be affirmed that it is the Corporate Christ that really summarizes the new reality of Jesus Christ’s existence for both theologians. In John, the Glorified Christ is united with the Church the way the vine is united to the branches (Jn 15:1-12). In Paul, the image of unity is shown in the organic relationship of the Body to its members (1 Cor 12:12-27). According to B. Ahern:

To measure accurately the meaning of this [concept of the Corporate Christ] it is necessary to keep in mind the large Pauline context which forms the background of this formulation. Ultimately Paul’s thought is rooted in the dominant theological motifs of the Old Testament *Heilsgeschichte* which Christ brought to consummation in fulfilling the divinely inspired hopes of Israel.³⁷

Ahern then describes three different motifs which work as background to the image of the Body of Christ that Paul uses to describe the Church. These same motifs can be verified in the way John uses different images expressing the same reality.

1. First Motif: Strong Sense of Community

Hebrews lived with the awareness that they were but one reality, they were

³⁴ Dianzon, *Glimpses of Paul*, 120.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 125-126.

³⁶ Scroggs, *Christology in Paul and John*, 35-36.

³⁷ Ahern, *The Church as the Body of Christ*, 46.

God's people, the chosen ones and, thus, they shared the same fate as a nation throughout the centuries. "Law and cult were equally important guidelines binding the people to God and to one another in the unity of social life and worship. All dreams and expectations of the perfect Israel-to-come were rooted in an awareness that God's people must live as the *Qahal Jahweh*."³⁸ Paul's belief as a Hebrew was actualized in the new reality found in Christ.³⁹ This unity and identity as one is perfectly pictured by Paul through the allegory of the Body:

For even as the body is one and yet has many members, and all the members of the body, though they are many, are one body, so also is Christ. For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free, and we were all made to drink of one Spirit (1 Cor 12:12-13).

In the Johannine theology we find the same strong sense of community, a community not bound anymore by the Law and the cult but by the very love of Christ: "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another" (Jn 13:34-35). The reality of unity among the believers is so strong that it is presented three times in the prayer of Jesus to the Father (17:21.22.23) and it is the condition for the people to believe that the Father has sent Jesus: "That they may all be one; even as You, Father, *are* in Me and I in You, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that You sent Me" (17:21). The need for unity goes as far as the awareness that complete joy can only be achieved when all share the same faith (1 Jn 1:4).

2. Second Motif: Corporate Personality

"The Biblical principle of solidarity is fundamental to Paul's teaching... The identification of the one with the many, of the father with his progeny, of the representative with the represented is characteristic both of the Old Testament and the Pauline concepts."⁴⁰ Thus, Paul applies this same concept when describing the reality of the Body of Christ: "And if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; if *one* member is honored, all the members rejoice with it" (1 Cor 12:26). And Paul himself feels in his own flesh the effect of this corporate personality: "Who is weak without my being weak? Who is led into sin without my intense concern?" (2 Cor 11:29). Even his very experience of vocation/conversion is already an experience of the corporate reality between Christ and the believers, so that persecuting them means persecuting Christ himself (1 Cor 9:4-5).⁴¹ This concept is also widely applied by Paul when describing the effect of the sin of the first Adam and the obedience of the second Adam:

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 47.

³⁹ Dianzon, *Glimpses of Paul*, 124.

⁴⁰ Ahern, *The Church as the Body of Christ*, 48.

⁴¹ Dianzon, *Glimpses of Paul*, 112.

So then as through one transgression there resulted condemnation to all men, even so through one act of righteousness there resulted justification of life to all men. For as through the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, even so through the obedience of the One the many will be made righteous (Rom 5:18-19).

Although this is not the main emphasis found in the Johannine theology regarding the Corporate Christ, traces of it can be found in the way the sacrifice of Jesus is being presented as the atonement for our sins and those of the world: "And he is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world" (1 Jn 2:2). In fact, the sin of the world is also presented as a singular and corporate reality: "The next day he saw Jesus coming toward him and declared, 'Here is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!'" (Jn 1:29). Thus, the sacrifice of Jesus already means freedom from sin for all those who have believed in him. And even if they should sin again the same blood poured out by Jesus on the cross will still cleanse them: "... but if we walk in the light as he himself is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin" (1 Jn 1:7).

3. *Third Motif: Dependence On Jesus*

The third very important element represented in the allegory of the Body is the reality of the Christians' total dependence upon Christ, in the same way that the People of Israel were deeply dependent upon Yahweh. Paul explains this reality with one of the most important expressions in his theology, in Christ (ἐν Χριστῷ): "So we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another" (Rom 12:5). "This union with Christ Paul celebrates as not only possible but even unbreakable, at least by outside forces. 'Who will separate us from the love of Christ?' he asks defiantly in Rom 8:35, and answers his own question by listing all the possible external threats, dismissing them all in turn."⁴² Paul will express the dependence Christians have upon Christ in so many varied and enriching ways. "It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me" (Gal 2:20); "For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain" (Phil 1:21); "For I will not presume to speak of anything except what Christ has accomplished through me, resulting in the obedience of the Gentiles by word and deed" (Rom 15:18). Thus for Paul dependence upon Christ results in such a vital union that Christ is actually the one acting through the apostle.

The Beloved Disciple greatly developed this theme, and portrays it as much more than a physical place where believers are located, but rather it is their deepest reality: "In that day you will know that I am in My Father, and you in Me, and I in you" (Jn 14:20). He goes further in explaining the detail of the believers' vital dependence

⁴² Warren Dicharry, *Paul and John*, vol. 2, *Human Authors of the New Testament* (Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 1992), 42-43.

on Christ and union with him using the allegory of the vine and the branches in chapter 15:

I am the true vine, and my Father is the vine grower. He removes every branch in me that bears no fruit. Every branch that bears fruit he prunes to make it bear more fruit. You have already been cleansed by the word that I have spoken to you. Abide in me as I abide in you. Just as the branch cannot bear fruit by itself unless it abides in the vine, neither can you unless you abide in me. I am the vine, you are the branches. Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit, because apart from me you can do nothing (Jn 15:1-5).

The reality of the believers' nothingness when separated from Christ is very strong in the Johannine presentation of their vital union with Jesus.

Communities of John and Paul: love at the centre of authority in the Church

Another similarity we find in the ecclesiological dimension of the writings of the Beloved Disciple and the Beloved Apostle is the way they presented themselves vis-à-vis the recognized authorities in the primitive Church. They both claimed authority on the basis of a personal, special relationship of love with Jesus himself and their being elected by him, rather than the position conferred on them within the structure of the Church. They both respect the authority of the Church leaders even though they seem to consider themselves privileged in front of them. In other words, their testimony was valid not because authority was bestowed upon them by other human authorities but because of their relationship with Jesus.

Much has been written about the “supposed-to-be anti-clerical” perspective of the Fourth Gospel, where Peter is presented as less knowledgeable than the Beloved Disciple in the last Supper (13:24); someone who did not understand Jesus in the washing of the feet and in his arrest (13:6-10, 18:10-11); who ran slower than the Disciple whom Jesus loved (20:4-6); who did not immediately recognize Jesus after the miraculous fishing and had to be told by the Beloved Disciple that “It is the Lord” (21:7). These are indications that, for the Johannine community, the service of authority had absolutely nothing to do with the merits of the person appointed, neither with his personal holiness of life, but it was simply a grace coming from God.

Despite the many instances that the Beloved Disciple is portrayed as a better model of discipleship compared to Peter, he nevertheless shows deference to Peter in the episode of the empty tomb, allowing him to enter the tomb first, and later “provoking him” to go towards Jesus ahead of them after the miraculous fishing.⁴³ Finally the author of the Fourth Gospel carefully includes the episode where Jesus reaffirms Peter, in front of the other disciples, as the Head—Rock—of the Church⁴⁴

⁴³ Crane, *The Message of John*, 110.

⁴⁴ Schnackenburg, “Is There a Johannine Ecclesiology,” 252. Schnackenburg also clarifies, “even if this chapter perhaps did not belong to the original plan of the gospel, it certainly belongs to the evangelist’s tradition,” 252.

and re-confirms the will of Jesus to appoint Peter as Head of the Church.⁴⁵ Urs Von Balthasar identifies “two ecclesiologies” of the Church from his reading of the Fourth Gospel, and he calls them the *official Church* and the *Church of love*. The former is identified with Peter and the latter with John. Von Balthasar underlines both the connection and the distinction between the two, affirming that these two govern the Church “in harmonious tension: office working for love, love respectfully giving precedence to office.”⁴⁶

A strong similarity in disposition and manner of relating with the recognized leaders of the Church can be found in Paul. On the one hand, he strongly defends his apostleship as a gift received from God and not from any human authority (Gal 1:11-12). He manifests a disinterest in anything that has to do with human influence or authority (Gal 1:15-19; 2:6-9) and even boasts that he has the boldness to correct no less than Peter in front of the rest of the brothers (Gal 2:11-14). But at the same time he recognizes the authority of the leaders of the Church and even affirms that to proclaim the Gospel without the approval of the leaders of the Church would be like running in vain (Gal 2:1-2). Thus, like John, Paul gives primacy in the community to the authority of love, but without minimizing the “authorities” set by Jesus over His Church:

Love is the supreme gift of the Spirit in Paul’s vision of what the Christian community should be like. This is clear from both Gal 5:22-26, where it is set at the head of the list, and also I Cor 13 (more precisely, 12:31-14:1), where love is given the central place and controlling function in Paul’s long discussion of the gifts of the Spirit in 12-14... It is not just in one or two isolated passages that Paul shows love to be central to his vision of what the community should become. Thus, for example, in Rom 12: 9-13... love expresses Paul’s understanding of the way the whole Christian community and its way of life can be transformed... In Rom 13:8-10, indeed, Paul sets love as the fulfillment of the law and as that which is fundamentally important for all relationships and conduct within the community.⁴⁷

Even if Paul himself may not have been so concerned with issues of leadership and hierarchy, it seems that his disciples, who later wrote letters in his name, recognized the need for more structured communities, especially since the faith was now definitely sown on Gentile soil and needed to be preserved in its pure:

Paul’s vision may seem blurred on this issue [leadership and hierarchy] as far as the Christian community is concerned... Compared with what can be observed elsewhere in the New Testament (NT), and the rapid developments otherwise in early Christianity, Paul appears not to have a particularly developed or precise view... The larger questions arise whether Paul would want effectively to give preference to some kinds of individuals, and whether he is in danger of asserting

⁴⁵ Mary Ann Getty, “Peter and the Gospel of John” *BibleT* 43 (2005): 231.

⁴⁶ Hans Urs Von Balthasar, “Official Church and Church of Love (According to the Gospel of John),” in *The Balthasar Reader* (New York, Medard Kehl and Werner Löser, 1997), 276-277.

⁴⁷ Marcus Bockmuehl and Michael B. Thompson, *A Vision of the Church*, 108.

or imposing his own authority; and in both cases, how compatible this is with his overall vision. Within the Pauline tradition, especially the Pastorals there are clear developments... Hence it needs to be asked whether this represents a perversion of Paul's vision, or a natural and inevitable development."⁴⁸

Soteriology of John and Paul: Faith that Christ is the Messiah

Both Paul and John developed ample explanations on how anyone can be saved and what the role of Christ in their salvation is. They share the same perspective that salvation is a gift that passes through the vitality of the faith that Christ is the Messiah and the only door that leads to salvation.

In Paul, there is an ongoing debate on how the Greek expression "pistis Christou" (πίστις Χριστοῦ) should be translated. Many scholars now propose the recovery of an older translation, which is "faith of Christ," instead of "faith in Christ," which became the common translation in the twentieth century versions of the Bible. In this proposal, Χριστοῦ is understood as a subjective genitive. What the believer calls his/her faith is a participation in the faith and faithfulness of Jesus Christ which brought about the salvation of the world.⁴⁹ Nevertheless, the translation "faith of Christ" does not take away the need for the person to express his/her faith in Jesus Christ as the Messiah and Lord, because the proclamation of the Gospel demands a response from the hearer. The following passages that contain the expression πίστις Χριστοῦ clearly show that this "faith of Christ" is actually being applied to those who believed that Jesus is the Christ:

<p>Rom 3:22 δικαιοσύνη δὲ θεοῦ διὰ πίστεως Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ εἰς πάντας τοὺς πιστεύοντας. οὐ γὰρ ἐστὶν διαστολή.</p>	<p>Rom 3:22 even <i>the</i> righteousness of God through faith of Jesus Christ for all those who believe; for there is no distinction.</p>
<p>Gal 2:16 εἰδότες δὲ ὅτι οὐ δικαιούται ἄνθρωπος ἐξ ἔργων νόμου ἐὰν μὴ διὰ πίστεως Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ, καὶ ἡμεῖς εἰς Χριστὸν Ἰησοῦν ἐπιστεύσαμεν, ἵνα δικαιωθῶμεν ἐκ πίστεως Χριστοῦ καὶ οὐκ ἐξ ἔργων νόμου, ὅτι ἐξ ἔργων νόμου οὐ δικαιωθήσεται πᾶσα σὰρξ.</p>	<p>Gal 2:16 nevertheless knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the Law but through faith of Christ Jesus, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, so that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the Law; since by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified.</p>
<p>Gal 3:22 ἀλλὰ συνέκλεισεν ἡ γραφὴ τὰ πάντα ὑπὸ ἁμαρτίαν ἵνα ἡ ἐπαγγελία ἐκ πίστεως Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ δοθῇ τοῖς πιστεύουσιν.</p>	<p>Gal 3:22 But the Scripture has shut up everyone under sin, so that the promise by faith of Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe.</p>

⁴⁸ Bockmuehl and Thompson, *A Vision of the Church*, 115.

⁴⁹ Dianzon, *Glimpses of Paul*, 57.

Thus, the “faith of Christ” is actually given to the believers, that is, to those who put their faith in Jesus as the Messiah. There is no conflict between translating πίστις Χριστοῦ as “faith of Christ” and affirming that in Paul’s theology the faith of the person in Jesus Christ is necessary for salvation.

The Beloved Disciple wrote his Gospel stating very clearly the objective he wanted to achieve: “Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book. But these are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name” (Jn 20:30-31). Thus, the objective is to provoke faith that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, in order that that faith may enable the believers to attain life in his name. This concept is very similar to the concept of faith in Pauline theology. R. Bultmann explains the similarities between the two theologians in this regard:

John and Paul interpret the coming of Jesus as eschatological event, and therefore they understand their time as the period of salvation. For both, salvation consists in the fact that in Christ God has given to sinful men the possibility of living from God instead of from the world, and thereby for them to make a decision for life. Both oppose Gnostic dualism with faith in the Creator, and both replace the Gnostic ideas of substance with the historical dialectic of judgment and grace.⁵⁰

Faith is not an end in itself; rather, it is the necessary condition to attain grace and so be saved. John and Paul, using diverse terminologies, are actually describing the same reality—the reality of salvation, the reality of enjoying the life that is eternal and that is a grace that no one can claim as a merit to oneself.

This reality is very much present in the theology of the Beloved Disciple, conveyed through the negative expression “no one...” which occurs 39 times in the Gospel. And in a good number of these occurrences, it refers to the impossibility of attaining the gift Jesus wants to give, without him taking the initiative to graciously bestow it (3:3.5.27; 6:44.65; 14:6; 16:22; 19:11). The whole Gospel also abounds with contrasts between those who believe in Jesus and those who do not believe in him. It seems as if there is no middle ground position one can adopt in regard to Jesus. One is either in the light or in the darkness, able to see or is blind, dead or living the eternal life.

Paul likewise acknowledges the reality that faith is a precondition for receiving the grace of salvation. R. D. Philips shed light on this concept when he affirms: “The Bible makes it plain that not everyone is or will be saved, so there has to be something that distinguishes those who have received God’s grace and that bring grace to them... Paul teaches that grace comes to us through faith. Faith is the vessel in which grace is received.”⁵¹

⁵⁰ Rudolf Bultmann, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary* (Oxford; Basil Blackwell, 1971), 9-10.

⁵¹ Richard D. Philips, *Saved by Grace* (New Jersey: P&R Publishing, 2009), 93.

Conclusion

The richness of the writings of the New Testament lies both in their unity as well as in their diversity. To overemphasize the diversity without trying to discover the deep spiritual and theological connections does not do justice to the same God who unified those hagiographers who committed to writing their own lived experience of union in Christ. On the other hand, to unify their writings in a way that oversimplifies the richness of their content does not do justice to the writers' freedom and inspiration in the Spirit to live and express their faith in different ways according to their own character and as they deem appropriate for the audience they were addressing their message to.

The Beloved Disciple and the Beloved Apostle are the two persons whose theologies have influenced the history of Christianity the most.⁵² To fit them into the same frame would mean losing the unfathomable richness they provide to Christianity. To separate them as though they were not talking about the same Christ and the same experience of salvation would bring confusion to the ordinary Christian who would compel to define which Jesus he/she is following, the one of John or the one of Paul. Such confusing divisiveness would no doubt merit the same reproach that Paul himself unsparingly directed to the Corinthians:

For it has been reported to me by Chloe's people that there are quarrels among you, my brothers and sisters. What I mean is that each of you says, "I belong to Paul," or "I belong to Apollos," or "I belong to Cephas," or "I belong to Christ." Has Christ been divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul? (1 Cor 1:11-13).

Paul and John were both deeply loved by the same Christ, the only Savior, and the same person who made them feel that they, individually, were the reason why he became man and died on the cross. They both proclaimed in different ways and with different words that Jesus Christ is the Savior of the world, yes, indeed, but the Savior as well of each and every person on this earth. Both of them experienced that the person who radically changed their lives was God, sent by the Father and co-creator with Him, in whom everything exists and remains alive.

Paul and John both discovered the mystical way in which believers are united with Christ and with one another. Thus, they are all brothers and sisters in Christ and have only one commandment to follow, the commandment of love. Nothing is more important than love in the believers' relationships in community. No one is more important than the other because love is what binds all in this new reality that is the Church, and love is also the mode by which the reality of the new creature and new creation is made present in the world.

⁵² Frank Matera, "Christ in the theologies of Paul and John," 237.

Paul and John both saw that eternal life or salvation was an experience of grace granted freely by God through Jesus Christ to those who would believe in the One he sent to justify humankind, the One sent by the Father so that all may have eternal life. Both discovered with distress the power of human freedom to reject that grace, and because of that, they kept warning those who do not believe of the terrible consequence that will befall them and their children because of their lack of faith.

Paul and John, both apostles of Christ, both beloved, continue testifying to succeeding generations about the One they have heard, seen, and experienced, with one voice but from different perspectives, in order that everyone may be in communion with them and so the joy of everyone may be complete. ■

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