APOSTLE PAUL AND HIS MESSAGE THROUGH THE LENSE OF POST-COLONIAL ANALYSIS[1]

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The writings of the apostle Paul belong to the earliest layer (dated about 50–64 AD) of New Testament literature. This is the era of the Roman principate known as the rule of the Julio-Claudian dynasty (27 BC – 68 AD). It was at the time of Caesar Augustus that Roman religious-political power became known by the Latin term *imperium*, which roughly means 'power to command'. Imperium was soon related to a specific person known as the *imperator,* who had the right to rule like a divine being in the power structure that subjected individuals to the patronage system of relationship. Imperial ideology represented by the cult of Caesar was proclaimed and distributed geographically with the means of Romanisation[2], which was most evident in the peripheral areas known as colonies. The concept of colony (from the Latin word *colōnus*, 'peasant serf') is related to the area of government that does not have an independent ruling apparatus but takes orders straight from the patronising power.

Most scholars are convinced that there is an explicit connectedness between the theological symbols used in the *Corpus Paulinum* and the world in which the texts of this corpus were constructed. Interpretations vary only in the method of identification and the meaning or nature of those symbols. Today, there are sundry newer methodological approaches that enrich the classical canon of historical-philological methods of exegesis.[3]

[1] The research on which this article is based was supported by the Estonian Science Foundation / Estonian Research Council Grant no. ETF8665.

[2] Romanisation is known as a political, economic and linguistic expansion of the Roman Empire.

[3] Cf., e.g., Manfred **Oeming**, *Contemporary Biblical Hermeneutics. An Introduction*. Transl. by Joachim Vette (Aldershot, Burlington: Ashgate, 2006), 31–138; Anthony C. **Thiselton**, *Hermeneutics. An Introduction* (Grand Rapids, Mich., Cambridge, U.K.: Eerdmans, 2009), 255–348.

One of the latest is known as post-colonial bible criticism, which seeks to complement possibilities of biblical interpretation. However, while this method does not have a systematically functional compound, it cannot be handled as an undisputed instrument of objectivity. The following is an attempt to present some of the theological ideas of Paul using various methods of post-colonial analysis.

ABOUT THE THEORY OF POST-COLONIALISM

The prefix *post* in the word *post-colonialism* terminologically means the passing of colonialism, but sometimes only one of its aspects is emphasised as "anti-colonialism" or "anti-imperialism." Post-colonialism specifically addresses the historical, textual, discursive and epistemological legacies of colonialism.[4] Yet critics stand out because of the binary construction (colonial *versus* post-colonial) on which different cultural and socio-discursive patterns (like: self–other, metropolis–colony, centre–periphery, etc.) are based. They insist that this concept of post-colonialism places the theory in a simplistic and bivalent axis of opposition that discloses many types of abuse of power (e.g., feminism and discrimination of women). There is, however, also an axis of time that would flatten out the problems of imperial domination on the level of the historical past. This would not be very productive for the handling of political nuances, since it does not distinguish between the beneficiaries of colonialism (the ex-colonisers) and the casualties of colonialism (the ex-colonised).[5]

In reply to critics, the concept of "oppositional post-colonialism" has been coined, and this which should eliminate the antinomy without dividing the idea into different historical or cultural eras.[6] Once we cease to view it merely in terms of a succession of ideas and concepts, but as the staggering of legacies and symptoms at their different stages of articulation, then the 'displacement' of colonialism by post-colonialism becomes

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4 Laura E. **Donaldson**, "Postcolonialism and Biblical Reading: An Introduction" – *Postcolonialism and Scriptural Reading*. Ed. L. E. Donaldson. Semeia, 75 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1996), 1–14, 2.

5 Anne **McClintock**, *Imperial Leather. Race, Gender and Sexuality in the Colonial Conquest* (New York, London: Routledge, 1994), 292.

6 Donaldson, "Postcolonialism and Biblical Reading: An Introduction", 5.

a complex matter and can vary according to the objective for which that displacement is argued.[7] In that sense post-colonialism should be defined as a historically nuanced multi-interpretative theory and a strategy that could be used in research on power exploitation.[8] The essence of post-colonial criticism is then to identify the negative social, economical, psychological and political influences of colonialism in its many forms.[9] This kind of approach to post-colonial analysis is not only focused on the past, but it also takes seriously different types of neo-colonialism that tend to replace formal political systems with the mechanisms of social and ideological control. An analytical approach should also identify the influences of these mechanisms for those who participate as the objects (colonisers) as well as the subjects (the colonised) of colonisation.[10]

Post-colonial analysis has become an interdisciplinary cultural research method by its very nature. It can be practiced irrespective of a person's department of knowledge and scientific background. A considerable amount of post-colonial research comes from scholars who were born or raised in colonial areas and were educated at western academic institutions.[11]

POST-COLONIALISM AND BIBLICAL ANALYSIS

The possibilities of post-colonial theory are auspicious, just because of its broad parameters, which appear useful in researching ancient imperial projects. One of the foremost researchers to apply post-colonial theory in biblical theology is Fernando F. Segovia. Segovia insists that an implicitly

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7 Rey **Chow**, *Writing Diaspora. Tactics of Intervention in Contemporary Cultural Studies* (Bloomington, Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1993), 56.

8 Donaldson, "Postcolonialism and Biblical Reading: An Introduction", 10.

9 There are other adjectives for expressing the idea of postcolonialism; for example, *gendered* post-colonialism is based on knowledge that postcolonial analysis cannot be limited by the relations between slave and master or patron and client only because it would exclude other categories of interpretation.

10 Christopher D. **Stanley**, "Introduction" – *The Colonized Apostle. Paul through Post-colonial Eyes.* Paul In Critical Contexts Series. Ed. C. D. Stanley (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2011), 4.

11 *Ibid.*, 4. The experience of these individuals has given them a quite unique position in doing post-colonial studies. On the one hand they have got comprehension of the inner realities of society and on the other hand the knowledge from Western academic discourse provides resources for making themselves understandable.

contextualised New Testament exegesis should take into consideration the Roman Empire as an ineluctable and overwhelmingly devastating reality.[12] He brings forth three main tasks of post-colonial biblical criticism:

First, there is a need to examine the extent to which Paul's letters, and all New Testament documents, show accommodation of or resistance to imperial dominance and its concomitant colonialism.

Secondly, a post-colonial reading of the New Testament must revisit historical interpretations of biblical texts and the methodologies used to study them, especially traditional historical-critical methods.[13] For example, the imperialism of Spain, Portugal, France, Germany, and England from the 15th to the 19th centuries carried with it a missionary agenda along with the appropriate biblical interpretations, in order to support both imperialism and the evangelisation of conquered peoples in the lands renamed "North America" and "South America", as well as the continents of Africa and Asia.[14] Segovia points out that this kind of exegetical approaches should not be left to dominate our own readings, but should be subject to close, critical analysis.[15]

Thirdly, Segovia posits a set of questions connected to the modern context. What is the role of the descendants of the colonised (*the children of the colonised*) in the enterprise of biblical interpretation? As people who have experienced the effects of colonial domination for generations, they are in a unique position to interpret imperial and colonial reality as integral aspects of the biblical texts. Because many readers from non-Western cultures know what imperialism and colonialism look and feel like, their participation in the interpretive process produces new and insightful readings of the biblical texts.[16]

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[12] Fernando F. **Segovia**, "Biblical Criticism and Postcolonial Studies: Toward a Postcolonial Optic" – *The Postcolonial Bible*. Ed. Rasiah S. Sugirtharajah (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998), 48–65, 56.

[13] A wider problem of replacing the historical-critical method with newer methodologies is noticed here in Segovia's argumentation. In the opinion of the author of this article this kind of approach cannot be justified because the historical-critical method is not guilty of colonialism and imperialism but the imperial-colonial presuppositions have defined outcomes of the use of this methodological instrument.

[14] Efrain **Agosto**, "Foreword" – *The Colonized Apostle* (see note 10), xiii–xiv.

[15] *Ibid*., xiv.

[16] *Ibid*.

Those three steps accurately indicate what post-colonial biblical analysis is all about. The first two are mainly related to the historical-critical text interpretation, but the third includes a phenomenological aspect as well. Taking into consideration the scope of this article, I will focus mainly on the first point presented by Segovia.

Most of the post-colonial analysis of the New Testament from the beginning of the 1990s has focused on the Gospels and Revelation. There is not a single article about *Corpus Paulinum* or Paul in *Semeia* (no. 75), published in 1996, which is the first larger compendium of articles on post-colonial biblical analysis. There is no post-colonial conception of Paul in the papers and articles on post-colonial biblical criticism published even ten years later.[17] The first scholarly works related to Paul and post-colonialism appeared from the beginning of 2008, and it is at the beginning of the present decade that there seems to have been a new wave of Pauline studies through the post-colonial lens. Nevertheless, even in the 1990s there were some schools that took seriously Apostle Paul in his imperial context. Some volumes of articles edited by Richard Horsley reflected more the classical exegetical approach, but their authors were strongly influenced by post-colonialism. In this context, two names from Jesus' seminar, John D. Crossan and Jonathan Reed, should also be mentioned.[18]

TOWARDS A POST-COLONIAL ANALYSIS OF PAUL: THE CENTRE OF PAUL'S MESSAGE IN THE CONTEXT OF THE 1ST CENTURY

Post-colonial theory offers an additional perspective and context to the historical-critical method. Post-colonial perspectives are relevant in Pauline studies because the writings of Paul inevitably come from the

[17] Cf. ***The Postcolonial Biblical Reader***. Ed. Rasiah S. Sugirtharajah (Oxford: Blackwell, 2006); Stephen D. **Moore**, *Empire and Apocalypse: Post-colonialism and the New Testament*. Bible in the Modern World (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix, 2006). The last book is an introduction to the post-colonial studies and consists of commentaries on Mark and John as well as Revelation, but there is not anything about Paul's writings.

[18] John Dominic **Crossan** and Jonathan L. **Reed**, *In Search of Paul: How Jesus' Apostle Opposed Rome's Empire with God's Kingdom* (New York: HarperSanFrancisco, 2004). John Dominic **Crossan**, *God and Empire: Jesus against Rome, Then and Now* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 2007).

world defined by the Roman imperial order.

The essence of Paul's message is based on Christ's death and resurrection. The derivation of the statement in 1Cor 15:3b–5, for example, indicates that it was proclaimed orally prior to its circulation in written form. Paul said that the message was "given forward" (παρέδωκα, 1Cor 15:3a).[19] Three basic phrases in the text assure that Christ has died, has been buried and is resurrected. Those short affirmations concentrate the ideological essence, because the title 'Christ' refers to the Messiah who is enthroned as a ruling king of Israel. This sort of primitive announcement (κήρυγμα) evolves into more specific forms (such as confessions of faith and the literary form known as the Gospel) in the current of tradition. In the primary phase of the tradition, and particularly in Paul's lifetime, the gospel was mainly an acclamation about Christ, who is sitting upon an elevated throne after being resurrected from the dead.

Direct allusions to the kerygma can be found in the texts where Jesus from Nazareth is proclaimed as Lord (κύριος Ἰησοῦς).[20] The kerygma is all about envisioning an elevated Christ, and includes the title Kyrios, which influenced the *Weltanschauung* of the first Christians, who proclaimed an ideological contrast to the imperial cult.[21] The elevation of Jesus meant not only his resurrection and going to heaven, but due to his enthronement, it also specifically referred to the envisioning of his special power and status.[22]

It is important to note that Jesus' enthronement is related to a specific text, one of the most widely used Old Testament texts in the New Testament, namely Psalm 110:1, through which Jesus' person and activity became prominently known and interpreted.[23] This became the most

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[19] The phrase ἐν πρώτοις (1Cor 15:3a) indicates the priority or the highest importance in Paul's use.

[20] Look for example: "It will be reckoned to us who believe in him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead" (Rom 4:24b); "If you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved" (Rom 10:9).

[21] The linguistic form κύριος is a broadly used term functioning at different kinds of hierarchies in the Greco-Roman society.

[22] Ferdinand **Hahn**, *Christologische Hoheitstitel. Ihre Geschichte im frühen Christentum* (Berlin: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 1965), 128.

[23] Rom 8:34; Col 3:1; Eph 1:20; 1Pet 3:18; Heb 1:3, 13; 8:1; 10:12; 12:2; Acts 2:34; 7:55–56; Mark 16:19 and 1Clem 36:5; Barn 12:10.

important *testimonium* in early Christianity. Two examples of this testimony in Paul's usage are presented below:

(a) "Who is to condemn? It is Christ Jesus, who died, yes, who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who indeed intercedes for us" (Rom 8:34).

In this text, a specific image about Jesus' elevation is adopted that does not exist anywhere else in the letters of Paul, namely that of the king who is sitting at the right hand of God and "intercedes" (ἐντυγχάνω). This expresses the task of the priestly king and refers to Psalm 110:1, 4: "Sit at my right hand. You are a priest forever."

Paul does not say that the king "is sitting" on the right, but it is implicitly there. The imagery of sitting was known in the ancient world as a symbol of the act of ruling and judging. Rulers and judges had to sit in order to keep their dignity.[24]

The title Kyrios (κύριος ἡμῶν) has also been attributed to Jesus in Rom 8:31–39. It is supported by the acclamation 'at right hand' through which Jesus' position and power over the world of mythological beings such as "powers", "angels", "rulers", "height" (δύναμις, ἄγγελος, ἀρχή, ὕψωμα) is affirmed. Neil Elliott has noted that those beings in Paul's characterisation curiously achieve their purposes with human means, such as "sword", "distress", "persecution" and "peril" (Rom 8:35). Elliott doubts that such rhetorically strong text could be episodic if one considers the closer context (Rom 9–11), in which Paul reports his concern about fellow Jews in Israel. Paul may have been motivated not only by the rights of the Jews in Rome but also by imperial oppression in Roman Palestine at the time the epistle was written.[25]

(b) "For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his

[24] All higher Roman officials, magistrates and procurators, were speaking from the *sella curulis* (a bench that was known for its significance in the Roman politics because of the authority it represented). King Herod Agrippa I followed the same practice (Acts 12:21; 23:3). Archaeological material from Ancient Egypt, Ancient Near East and the Hellenistic world shows that sitting is a distinctive sign of deity. The god often sits while men stand praying before him (see "καθίζω" [C. Schneider] – *Theological Dictionary of New Testament. Vol.* 3. Gerhard Kittel *et al.*, eds. [Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964–1976], 442).

[25] Neil **Elliott**, "The Anti-Imperial Message of the Cross" – *Paul and Empire. Religion and Power in Roman Imperial Society*. Ed. Richard A. Horsley (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 1997), 167–183, 179f.

feet. The last enemy to be destroyed is death. For God has put all things in subjection under his feet" (1Cor 15:25–27).

Paul does not use the metaphor of "sitting at God's right hand" here. However, in this text he explains the motive from Psalm 110:1 with a number of allusions on a larger scale than anywhere else in the New Testament. He particularly explains the meaning of those "enemies", and also refers to another text, Psalm 8:6 ("You have given them dominion over the works of your hands; you have put all things under their feet"). Richard Hays has argued that here Paul is giving the first documentation of the Christological exegesis of Psalms, which was broadly influential in early Christianity.[26] Paul has used both psalms to support his statement about the subjection of authorities and powers under the dominion of Jesus Christ.[27] Paul has combined two texts from Psalms in order to bring under Christ's feet "all things" (τὰ πάντα; Ps 8:6). He related "all things" with the "enemies" in 1Cor 15:25 in the way that it would also contain the idea of "death" (θάνατος).[28] The resurrection of Jesus (and accordingly all other dead people, because the closer context in verses 24–28 points to eschatological resurrection) starts a defeating process of "every ruler and every authority and power" (v. 24) by eliminating "death" as the strongest legitimating power in the world.

Ferdinand Hahn has indicated that the Old Testament conception of the imperative of "sitting at God's right hand" (cf. Ps 110:1) acquires a clearer meaning in the Kyrios-ideology of Jesus Christ, so that he is functioning as a ruler who has power in the present tense.[29] Nicholas T. Wright is also certain that Paul, by combining two Psalms, insured the predicate of the divine ruler to Jesus, and by applying the title Kyrios was opposing the emperor. He insists, however, that Paul's opposition to the emperor and his loyalty to Jewish messianic hopes should be seen as one and the same phenomenon.[30] He thinks that the idea of Jesus as the supreme king

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[26] Richard B. **Hays**, *Echoes of Scripture in the Letters of Paul* (New Haven, London: Yale University Press, 1989), 84.

[27] The allusive character of reference, however, makes it difficult to determine whether Paul is the originator of this Christological reading or he is appealing to an already established tradition. Hays (*ibid.*) thinks that the latter is more likely.

[28] David E. **Garland**, *1 Corinthians* (Michigan: Grand Rapids, 2003), 713.

[29] Hahn, *Christologische Hoheitstitel*, 129.

[30] N. T. **Wright**, "Paul's Gospel and Caesars Empire" – *Reflections* (Princeton, New

could not cause serious hostility unless it were based on some kind of Jewish messianic belief.[31]

APOSTLE PAUL ON THE ANTI-IMPERIAL POSITION

The position of Jesus as a supreme ruler in Paul's proclamation brings a strong message to Roman officials, but especially to the emperor. Eliminating the concept of death by proclaiming the resurrection of Jesus was a kind of antagonism towards the imperial order. The concept of resurrection operates as a symbol that abolishes everything in this world that could be achieved by military power.[32] From this point of view, there cannot be any ground for a long-lasting dispute upon differences between Paul and Judaism. Paul did not abandon his Jewish heritage and political theology, but he fulfilled his prophetic vocation as a Jewish critic of the heathen powers.[33] His patronising attitude in favour of the fellow Jews in the church of Jerusalem (and in favour of all churches) is implicit. The donation for the Christians in Jerusalem influenced the unification of Jewish and Hellenistic Christians, and this constructed a new, overwhelmingly socio-political order that could be understood as a contrast to the imperial and colonial power.[34] We can also recognise the so-called 'virtue-evil' catalogues and parenetic reprimands in the writings of Paul as a way of opposing imperial ideological violence (Rom 8:18; 2Cor 4:17).

Jersey: Princeton Center of Theological Inquiry, 2002–2004), 4 (http://ntwrightpage.com/Wright_Paul_Caesar_Empire.pdf). Wright insists that Paul was not a dualist: "Just as it is wrong to suppose that either Paul was anti-Jewish or he had no critique of any other Jews, so it would be wrong to suppose that either he was opposed entirely to everything to do with the Roman empire or he was a quisling, a compromiser, going with the flow of the new establishment" (*Ibid*., 9).

31 N. T. **Wright**, *The New Testament and the People of God. Christian Origins and the Question of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992), 347–348.

32 Jeremy **Punt**, "Pauline Agency in Postcolonial Perspective Subverter of or Agent for Empire?" – *The Colonized Apostle* (see note 10), 53–61, 58.

33 It can be doubted that Paul was proud of his achievements as a Jew but he surely did not hesitate to refer to it: 2Cor 11:22; Gal 1:13–14; Phil 3:4–6 (Sze-Kar **Wan**, "Collection for the Saints as Anticolonial Act. Implications of Paul's Ethnic Reconstruction" – *Paul and Politics. Ekklesia, Imperium, Interpretation. Essays in honour of Krister Stendahl*. Ed. Richard A. Horsley [Harrisburg, Pennsylvania: Trinity Press International, 2000], 191–215, 191).

34 *Ibid*., 192.

Even Romans 13 could be understood as an acknowledgment of God's supreme power, because any submission to the rulers of this world could be seen as a resistance that helps avoid violence.

It should be insisted that in the case of resistance, Paul never uses direct oppositional constructions in regard of the emperor or the Roman imperial order. Although there is a lack of revolutionary tone in his writings, Paul seems to create a cultural anti-programme that can be seen as an alternative discourse to imperial propaganda. Imperial ideology and imperial rituals were a kind of resource for structuring and conceptualising the world and defining the position of the emperor.[35] Because visual representation (art and architecture) played a definite role in the creation of imperial order, it is possible that Paul's textual rhetoric and the ideological and visual rhetoric presented by the imperial cult could build a mutual, complementary and semantically functioning system.[36]

Contrasts between Jesus and emperor are not limited to the presentation of Christ's supreme position, but also concern Paul's apostolic authority. Paul uses his patronising position in order to create ecclesiological structures and hierarchies and to present himself like the 'father' of the congregation, who are children (Gal 4:19). Paul understands his apostolic vocation in quite the same way as priests of the imperial cult in the provinces used cultic symbols to create connections of power. His apostolic nature is understood as the manifestation of divine power: he is "the aroma of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing" (2Cor 2:15) and the Gospel which is proclaimed by him "is the power of God for salvation to everyone who has faith" (Rom 1:16).

Regarding Paul's position in the eyes of the congregation and his authority in the church, which seems to mirror the same structure that supported the emperor, it is important to note that Paul was not inclined to dualism. He opposed the emperor not at the structural level of power but on the basis of qualitative values. In order to conquer the iniquitous dominion of the despot, Paul used the same structure and the same

[35] S. R. F. **Price**, "Rituals and Power" – *Paul and Empire. Religion and Power in Roman Imperial Society*. Ed. Richard A. Horsley (Pennsylvania: Trinity Press International, 1997), 47–71, 49–50.

[36] Davina C. **Lopez**, *Apostle to the Conquered. Reimagining Paul's Mission* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2008), 28.

grammatical system as the imperial ideology. Paul's strategy was based on creating an alternative structure of discourse alongside the ideology and status of the upper class in the Roman world.

SUMMARY

Post-colonial biblical criticism is part of the diverse and interdisciplinary methodology of cultural research, and is considered useful mainly for the following reasons: (a) it helps to interpret biblical text more contextually by considering imperial cultures such as the Greco-Roman culture, especially at the time when Paul wrote his writings; (b) it helps to revise some problematic avenues of biblical interpretation from the time when Western societies were engaged with the colonial domination of many parts of the world; (c) and it also helps to explore the possibilities for implementing biblical texts under the conditions of contemporary neo-colonialism and the global market economy. This third moment constitutes the phenomenological and epistemological strategy which allows one to investigate Paul's message against the modern cultural-political horizon.

In relation to these three points, it is important that post-colonial criticism not lose its linkage to the prerequisite of biblical interpretation, which is the traditional historical-philological study of texts. Therefore, the main reason of post-colonial biblical criticism is considered here, because it should be a good starting point for the next two levels.

The essence of the writings of Paul is defined by salvation by the gospel of Jesus Christ. This proclamation is based on the anticipation for the king that the prophetic writings of the Old Testament declare, and therefore it touches not only the religious sphere but the political area of society as well. The resurrection of Christ and his elevation to the position of the supreme ruler embody contrasts and challenges to the Roman authoritarian order. The resurrection functions symbolically in Paul's use, and it overrules everything else that could be achieved with the help of military power. Although Paul does not directly oppose the emperor and the Roman imperial order, he creates a subculture that contains programmatic alternatives to the imperial propaganda. It is precisely on this presupposition that the argumentation of post-colonial biblical research and its anti-imperialist approach to Paul is based.

The writings of Paul are not an easy subject to study, and it should be insisted that the post-colonial lens offers only one way of doing it. Nevertheless, it can bring a unique angle to Pauline studies if done properly. In putting Paul's writings into the post-colonial research perspective, it is imperative not to regard them as a simplified opposition or revolution against Roman society. There is much more than a dualism in them, and it is wise to take into consideration Paul's broad and complex discursive program.