

**“OVIDIUS” UNIVERSITY CONSTANȚA
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**THE OLD SELF AND NEW SELF ACCORDING
TO PAUL’S EPISTLES**

- SUMMARY -

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The PhD thesis project entitled *“The Old Self and New Self according to Paul’s Epistles”* contains 315 pages, and it is structured into 5 big chapters: *I. “General Information Concerning Paul’s Epistles to Colossians, Ephesians and Romans”*, *II. “Our Old Self Crucified – Romans 6 : 6”*, *III. “The New Self - Ephesians 2:15”*, *IV. “Taking Off the Old Self/ Putting On the New Self, Colossians 3: 9-11”*, *V. “Topicality of Paul’s Message”*, which in turn are divided into sections and subsections.

The purpose of this thesis is to investigate the signification and function of the metaphor “old self/ new self” in the theology of the Saint Apostle Paul. For this investigation I have chosen as method an exegetical study comparing the four passages of Paul’s texts in the New Testament when one or both of them appear.

In **Chapter 1** I established the context of this study by approaching several issues:

1. The authenticity of the Epistles to Colossians and Ephesians as main sources;
2. Aspects of Paul’s theology relevant for the study;
3. The signification of the biblical terms “old self/new self”;
4. Different points of view on the meaning of this metaphor;
5. Key-questions and approach method of the thesis.

In **Chapter 2** I have investigated the crucifixion of “our old self” , together with Christ according to Romans 6:1-14. **Chapter 3** recounts the creation of the “new humanity”, in Ephesians 2:14-18. **Chapter 4** deals with the phrases “putting off the old self” and “putting on the new self” , in Colossians 3:5-11, whereas in the fifth chapter Paul’s message is brought to the present. Therefore, we are to conclude that the Saint Apostle Paul himself formulated the terminology “old self/new self” based on the typology Adam/Christ and in his own eschatological and redeeming perspective. This metaphor suits the motif “once/now” and functions on two levels. On a collective level, “the old self” is the world of lost individuals, solidary with Adam, whereas “the new self” is a prototype of the church, the universal community of redeemed humanity, solidary with Christ, as a prototype of “the new self”. On this level “the old self” and “the new self” coexist in the history of redemption. On an individual level, “the old self” is the person identified with Adam and belongs to the present. “The new self” is the Christian, identified with Christ, and belonging to “the world to come”, which has begun now, “in Christ”. The Christian goes from “putting off the old self” to “putting on the new self” in order for “the new self” to be progressively accomplished in the knowledge of God and His ways.

Context of the study

Apostle Paul is one of the most fascinating and influential personalities in the history of Christian thought. Whoever tries a critical-historical comprehension of his New Testament pieces of writing, whether they like Christianity or not, will soon realize there are no easy approaches. There are various reasons for this, one being the fact that nowhere in his letters did Paul write an explicative preface or describe his way of theological thinking in the systematic categories he used. This is mainly due to the occasional, specific character of his letters. In all these circumstances Paul preached the Christian Gospel, adapting it to various situations and events caused by the demands and specific problems of the ecclesiastical life of each Christian community.

If the church was able to develop early a systematic theological thinking, this is mainly a result of the fourteen epistles we have from Saint Apostle Paul, which, aside from the four gospels, represent the most important part of the New Testament. It is obvious that Paul did not promote the epistle as a genre, with the intention of creating a literary work similarly to numerous writers from Antiquity. He created his letters circumstantially, under the pressure of situations or events that demanded an urgent intervention from his part in one or another of the Christian communities he created. Therefore, it is no surprise that the texts he dictated, as the trends of the time was, to volunteer or paid tachographs, contains some unclear phrases, unfinished sentences, interrupted thoughts, brackets, digressions and forced continuations, although the Greek language use is correct, rich and has many nuances, being situated immediately after that of Saint Luke. That is why Paul's epistles must be seen for what they are: part of the missionary work of the great apostle, the written proof of what he would preach orally (of course, with some additions or accents imposed by the actuality of the theme).¹

Concerning his characteristic oral style we notice that he often uses long phrases, interpellations (imaginary dialogues), sudden changes of topic, interruption of some thoughts, direct prayers which divert the narrative line, etc. according to A. Deissmann, Paul often writes without a careful structure, moving freely from one subject to another, often skipping between ideas.² The difficulties in his epistles can have as a source either Paul's language (borrowed words, figures of speech, especially metonymies, brackets,

¹ I.P.S. Bartolomeu Anania, "*Bible commented – The New Testament*", Bucharest, 1993, p. 247.

² A. Deissmann, *Paul: A Study in Social and Religious History*, W.E. Wilson (trad.), London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1927, 14.

diatribe, a fortiori argumentation, litotes, euphemism, rhetorical questions, etc.), or his type of thinking (concentrical comebacks to a certain subject – spiral, parallelism, chiasm, antitheses, paradoxes), difficulties in writing(dictations, digressions, oral style).³ This type of difficulties can be found even in letters, although they are less elaborate.

Generally, Paul impresses with his wisdom and spiritual understanding, and various times we get the impression that he is thinking too fast in order to write everything he sees with the eyes of his mind, his spiritual eyes (acc. to Romans 11:32-36). We could sum up by stating that Paul's letters have introduced constant elements of the Christian gospel in dynamic interaction with dynamic elements of certain Christian communities in theological thinking.

What exactly constitute constant elements of the gospel and dynamic elements concerning particular situations, as well as the relationship between them raises numerous literary interpretations and problems of historical hermeneutics, and also theological questions in the critical study of Paul's texts. The problems are familiar to competent scientists in Paul's theology, and, on a large scale, we can find a variety of hypotheses and positions regarding these questions in the history of research of Paul's texts.

In the wider domain of application of Paul's theology, his anthropology is one of the most difficultly comprehensible aspects of his thinking. There are various reasons for that. Firstly, his opinions about the signification of humanity are based on suppositions or inherited convictions since he never mentions something concrete so as to explain them in his letters. Secondly, his anthropology is relational and practical rather than philosophical and systematic. His greatest preoccupation are the humans in their relationship with God, evil, the world, and vice versa. Consequently, his anthropology intermingles with various other elements of his theology overall. Thirdly, we are met with a wide range of anthropological terms, some with antecedents in Jewish tradition and others in Greek tradition. In spite of that, he shows no classification of the nature of human beings, of the features or components. As a result, sometimes there appears a slightly enigmatic definition regarding the use of the terms. He uses different terms with the same anthropological meaning, but also the same term to designate

³ A. Kuen, Introduction au Nouveau Testament. Les lettres de Paul, *Saint-Legier (Suisse): Editions Emmaus, 1989, 56-62.*

different things.⁴ Numerous of the terms specific to Paul's theology appear more or less frequently in his letters. This lack of terminological and conceptual systematization contributes to the complexity of his anthropology. However, in the light of these factors, researchers must continue to investigate the anthropological language Paul used to understand the various facets of anthropology connected to his theology. This leads the way in the current study.

The central notion in Paul's terminology, the concept of *humanity* (άνθρωπος) is the basis for the specific notions of Paul's anthropology. This first notion - *human* (άνθρωπος) – has more meanings in Paul's conception, determined either by the circumstances in which it is used, or by the necessities which obliged him to appeal to it. It always expresses the limits of human thought and acts, contrasting with God's absolute and His revelation.

In a subordinate plan, we can remark the notions of *heart* (καρδία), *consciousness* (συνείδησις), *reason* (νοῦς), *soul* (ψυχή), *human spirit* (πνεῦμα), *flesh* (σάρξ), *body* (σώμα), which are as important in Paul's theology and secondary only in comparison to the central notions – Human and Christ.

The multitude of significations of the notions above results from the specificity and elasticity of Paul's terminology. In reality, Paul describes neither the Greek human, nor the Jewish human, in themselves, but rather the different relationships of the believer before God. Besides, the terms of Paul's anthropology do not designate parts of the human, but rather aspects of the human as a whole, seen from different perspectives. Those who see only the anatomical or psychological element fail to comprehend the deepness of Paul's thinking. Everything Saint Apostle Paul tells about the creation of humanity helps to fully understand his conception about salvation in Christ.

The following expressions that we shall analyze are as important as the ones above: “New self” and “old self”, “man of the flesh” and “man of the spirit” (ὁ ψυχικός άνθρωπος and ὁ πνευματικῶς άνθρωπος). Saint Paul has a series of terminological phrases, which help him suggestively present the religious condition of the human he contemplates, and which show how far away or how close this human is to Christ. These phrases lead us to the essence of Paul's anthropology, which, according to ethical criteria, divides human life and mankind life in two, and at the same time expresses

⁴ For instance, σώμα (body) and σάρξ (flesh), overlap occasionally, in the sense 2 Cor. 4:10 with 4:11 and 1 Cor. 07:34 with 2 Cor. 7:1; however both terms have a wide range of meanings, for σώμα: Gal. 6:17; Rom. 12:04 - 5; 1 Cor. 15:44; Col. 1:22; 2:17; and for σάρξ: Rom. 3:20; 6:19; 7:5, 8:7; 11:14.

plastically Saint Paul's conception on human's moral state: man of the flesh and spiritual man, old self and new self.

Saint Paul is the first one to establish the distinction between the natural man and the spiritual one in a pure Christian sense. To achieve this he uses the adjectives *ψυχικός* (*natural*) and *πνευματικώς* (*spiritual*) with different meanings than the nouns *ψυχή* and *πνεύμα*. The phrase spiritual man/natural man expresses not the opposition, but rather the deep distinction, in the sense that the spiritual man is only the one who has *πνεύμα*, which the natural man does not possess. Occasionally "spiritual man" refers to all believers, other times it is restricted to those who have special gifts (I *Cor.* 14,37; *Gal* 6,1). The "spiritual" state is certainly not reserved for an elite of the believers. More importantly, from Paul's point of view, the natural man needs God's talent in order to become spiritual.

The following expressions, "*new self*" and "*old self*" (*ὁ παλαιός ἄνθρωπος* and *ὁ καινός ἄνθρωπος*) represent the subject of this work. An analysis of the places in Paul's writing where we can find the phrases *Ὁ παλαιός* and *Ὁ νέος ἄνθρωπος*, helps us form a synthetic view over Paul's conception on the essence of Christianity and on deification understood as passage from the old self to the new one. This passage is not continuous, it is a discontinuity, an entirely new existence, entirely the work of Christ. There is no growing link between old and new, and this idea helps us understand that we are looking not at the material part that could claim visible continuity of matter, but mainly the spiritual part that is reborn. There is a new creation at Christ's cross, not from earth but from spirit, that is why the old self dies to sin, and the old existence is erased. We can see that on a rational level „*ὁ καινός ἄνθρωπος*” and „*Ὁ παλαιός ἄνθρωπος*” are opposed. *The new self* is the man reestablished, recreated, reborn through Christ in the moral-religious condition he owned before Adam's sin. He is the man who reenters God's obedience on a new, richer level, the man who consents God's intention from the moment of creation.

That is why for Saint Paul the phrase "*in Christ*" (*ἐν Χριστῷ*) develops the idea of life communion and internal connection of the believer with Jesus Christ, where his whole existence evolves and from where all of his actions should originate. Being "*in Christ*", in Paul's theology, means being in the most intimate communion with Christ.

The main concern of this work is to investigate two anthropological formulations found in the Pauline corpus, namely *ὁ παλαιός ἄνθρωπος* (old self) and *ὁ καινός / νέος ἄνθρωπος* (new self), which appear in four passages:

1. "our old self" in Romans 6:6: τούτο γινώσκοντες, ότι ο παλαιός ἡμῶν ἄνθρωπος συνεσταυρώθη, ἵνα καταργηθῇ τὸ σῶμα τῆς αμαρτίας, του μηκέτι δονλεῦν ἡμᾶς τῇ ἀμαρτία.

2. "new self" in Ephesians 2:14-15: Αὐτός γάρ ἐστιν ἡ εἰρήνη ἡμῶν, ὁ ποιήσας τα ἀμφότερα ἐν καὶ τὸ μεσότοιχον τὸν φραγμοῦ λύσας, τὴν ἐχθραν, ἐν τῇ σαρκὶ ἁντον, τὸν νόμον τῶν ἐντολῶν ἐν δόγμασιν καταργήσας, ἵνα τοὺς δύο κτίσῃ ἐν αὐτῷ εἰς ἓνα καινὸν ἄνθρωπον ποιών εἰρήνην ν,...

3. the two phrases together: "old self" and "new self" in Colossians 3:9-10: μὴ ψεύδεσθε εἰς ἀλλήλους, ἀπεκδυσάμενοι τὸν παλαιὸν ἄνθρωπον σὺν ταῖς πράξεσι ν αὐτοῦ, καὶ ἐνδυσάμενοι τὸν νέον τὸν ἀνακαινούμενον εἰς ἐπίγνωσιν κατ' εἰκόνα τὸν κτίσαντος αὐτόν,...

4. the two phrases together: "old self" and "new self" in Ephesians 4:22-24: ἀποθέσθαι ὑμᾶς κατὰ τὴν προτέραν ἀναστροφὴν τὸν παλαιὸν ἄνθρωπον τὸν φθειρόμενον κατὰ τὰς ἐπιθυμίας τῆς ἀπάτης, ἀνανεοῦσθαι δὲ τῷ πνεύματι τὸν νοὸς ὑμῶν, καὶ ἐνδύσασθαι τὸν καινὸν ἄνθρωπον τὸν κατὰ θεὸν κτισθέντα ἐν δικαιοσύνῃ καὶ ὁσιότητι τῆς ἀληθείας.⁵

These denominations are part of a category called ἄνθρωπος – greater in Paul's writing which involves four more antitheses:

1. ὁ φνχικός / πνευματικός ἄνθρωπος— the person without the Spirit/ the person with the Spirit (1 Cor. 2:14-15; also see σάρκινοι, σαρκικοί / πνευματικοί in 1 Cor. 3:13);

2. ὁ ἐξω I ἐσω ἄνθρωπος— outwardly/ inwardly (2 Cor. 4:16; Rom. 7:22; Ephesians 3:16);

3. ὁ πρῶτος / δεῦτερος sau ἐσχάτος ἄνθρωπος— the first man/ the last man (1 Cor. 15:45-47; cf. 15:20-22; Rom. 5:12-19); ἢ

4. ὁ χοϊκός / ἐπονράνιος [ἄνθρωπος]— man of the dust of the earth/ man of the heaven (1 Cor. 15:47-48).⁶

The modified words παλαιός and νέος / καινός can also appear together in other parts, for instance in the antitheses "old yeast/ new unleavened batch" (1 Cor. 5:7-9) and "old /new covenant" (2 Cor. 3:6-14).

⁵ The text of these verses is quoted, here and throughout the work, from *The Greek New Testament*, Nestle-Aland, 3rd edition, Stuttgart, 1975.

⁶ The following terms appear in the singular in Paul's texts: 1) φθαρτός ἄνθρωπος – mortal man (Rom. 1:23); 2) ταλαίπωρος ἄνθρωπος – wretched man (Rom. 7:24); 3) τέλειος ἄνθρωπος / ἀνὴρ – mature man (Col. 1:28; Ephesians 4:13.); 4) ὁ ἄνθρωπος τῆς ἀνομίας – man of lawlessness (2 Thessalonians 2:3); and 5) αἰρετικός ἄνθρωπος – man who stirs up division (Tit 3. : 10).

The presence of the phrases “old self/new self” in the passages above raises several aspects I would like to investigate in this chapter. These, in turn, establish the general frame for the content and contribution of this study. Firstly, all the passages except one - Romans 6:6 – appear in what some researchers consider to be a second group of Pauline epistles. This needs a short comment about the Letters to Colossians and Ephesians, since they are the main sources of this study. (1.1). I shall present a case for their authenticity as work hypothesis for the study. The authenticity of the Epistle to Romans has not been contested. Secondly, the terms rarely appear in the Pauline corpus, which poses a question regarding their place and importance in Paul’s anthropology, as well as some aspects of his theology. The word *ἄνθρωπος* refers strictly to an anthropological context, but the similar expressions with a Christian meaning, *παλαιός* and *καινός* / *νέος* must be placed in a wider frame of theological reference. In order to achieve that, I shall draft the main features of Pauline anthropology as well as its characteristics in the current work. (1.2). Thirdly, it must be observed that the terms appear suddenly, with little explanatory comments. There are interpreters who wonder if the terms were used or not before these pieces of writing, therefore I shall present some aspects concerning their context and origin (1.3). In the fourth place, the Christianized meaning phrases from above will be exhibited with more explanations (*συννεστανρώθη*, Rom. 6:6; *κτίση*, Ephesians 2:15; *ἀπεκδυσάμενοι*, Col. 3:9 / *ἀποθέσθαι*, Ephesians 4:22; and *ἐνδυσάμενοι*, Col. 3:10 / *ἐνδύσασθαι*, Ephesians 4:24), which indicates that the author intended for the names “old self/new self” to be understood as metaphors. It is not very clear which are their significations and their thematic functions. (1.4). This has led to more questions which must be answered so as to interpret this double metaphor and to expose the methodological approach I have followed in this study (1.5).

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