


IDEALISM AND REALISM IN PAUL

Liberation Christology and Christian Leadership

By DAVID STANLEY

 ONE OF the distinct impressions which one receives from even a cursory reading of the pauline correspondence preserved in the New Testament is that the 'historical Paul' was, through his apostolic career, continually caught up in controversy. Indeed, it is not difficult to sense that, whatever love and loyalty he inspired in most of the members of the churches he himself had founded, to the generation or two immediately following his death, Paul undoubtedly appeared as a controversial, if not totally suspicious, figure. This conclusion seems inescapable when one studies the post-pauline literature, for example, Acts and the Pastorals. For in the interests of defending the Paul of history against censure, or — what is worse — oblivion, the authors of these documents have painted a picture, more than life-size, of the Apostle of the Gentiles. In a word, they have created a figure, on the heroic scale, the 'legendary Paul', which cannot always be reconciled with the Paul of the genuine letters. The problem is compounded, of course, by the fact that there is as yet no real consensus amongst contemporary pauline scholars as to precisely which of the letters ascribed to Paul (apart from the Pastorals and Hebrews) came in reality from his pen.

These hazards have been alluded to from the outset because the editor of *THE WAY* has proposed, as theme for this study, a question at once provocative and complex. Granted, on the evidence of the letters that 'there is a considerable gap between what Paul has handed on to his churches as having himself received from the Lord and the living out of his preaching by the members, is it possible to discover and describe what Paul would regard as the point of equilibrium between orthodoxy and orthopraxis?'

Before attempting to answer the question, two *caveats* appear to be

in order. In the first place, in the absence of any documentation from the 'other side' of the various controversies in which Paul became embroiled, one can only make an educated guess as to the concrete historical situations out of which they arose. In fact, as early as the mid-second century of the christian era, this warning was issued by the author of 2 Peter, when he admitted that the letters of 'Paul, our friend and brother . . . contain some obscure passages, which the ignorant and unbalanced misinterpret to their own ruin' (2 Pet 3, 15-16). And secondly, we are left very much in the dark as to the resolution, successful or otherwise, of practically all these controversial issues. What, for instance, was the outcome of Paul's confrontation with Peter at Antioch (Gal 2, 11-14)? Indeed, how did those volatile Celts themselves react to this angriest of Paul's letters, whom he addresses as 'You fools of Galatians! you must have been bewitched!' (Gal 3, 1)? Did Paul succeed in reassuring the Christians of Thessalonica about the fate of their friends who had died before the parousia? How did Paul's beloved Philippians heed his intemperate warnings to 'beware of those dogs and their evil machinations' (Phil 3, 2), those 'enemies of the cross of Christ . . . whose god is their belly, whose glory is in their shame' (2, 18-19)? What success was ever achieved at Corinth by Paul's letters, of which two are most certainly lost? One final observation is in order here. If one is to keep this article within the limits set by the editor, in an issue of *THE WAY* chiefly dedicated to the contemporary crisis within the Church over Christology, it appears appropriate to restrict our discussion to the notion of christian leadership, which Paul evolved — not only despite, but because of — the gap he so valiantly attempted to bridge between the ideals set forth in his gospel and the living-out, by the Christians of the churches he had founded, of what he proudly and consistently referred to as 'my gospel' (Rom 2, 16). For, to the naïve Galatians, he peremptorily dismissed any 'other gospel' as perversion of 'the gospel of Christ' (Gal 1, 6-9), stating unequivocally that 'the gospel proclaimed by me is no mere human invention. Nor did I receive it from any human being, nor was I taught it in any other way than by a revelation from Jesus Christ!' (Gal 1, 11-12). And he angrily takes issue with his fractious Corinthians, who have accepted 'a certain visitor, who proclaims a Jesus other than the Jesus we proclaimed', and thus 'have received a spirit opposed to the Spirit already given to you, a gospel at odds with that you have already accepted' (2 Cor 11, 4).

Spiritual leadership

Since these (and other) intemperate statements of an angry Paul may well give any reader the false impression that the Apostle, in his zeal for orthodoxy, was betrayed into confusing leadership with apostolic authority, as has happened not infrequently in the course of the history of the Church down to our own day, we cite here the shrewd observations of the distinguished american moral theologian, Richard A. McCormick, S.J., regarding the crucial necessity of avoiding 'a constant tendency in the past to identify authority and leadership in the Church'. He notes the paradoxical result that:

the more there is reliance on mere authority, the less one does those things required of true leadership . . . This careless identification of leadership with office yields two remarkable results. First, an independent value is attributed to mere office, with, of course, a dominant concern for the prerogatives of office and a corresponding insensitivity to the goals it serves. Secondly, we begin to experience the controlled group or society . . . dominance of the negative in teaching . . . avoidance of risk in decision-making . . . enslavement to the traditional formula in theologizing, secretiveness in the use of power.

By contrast, 'True leadership, in whatever form it is found, calls forth the best in those led. It *liberates* them into the fulness of their potential as individuals and as a group'. And he continues with a description of theological leadership:

A man is a theological leader because of the depths of his insight into the faith and the power of his communication of these. Now depth of insight and power of communication constitute leadership precisely because they liberate us from the confinements of our own imaginations and formulations, from our ignorance and doubt. . . . We are all victims of the oppression of our own limitations and need liberation to that extent.¹

It is the contention of the present writer that such a conception of spiritual leadership was verified in Paul of Tarsus; that, in fact, his ideals of leadership derived from what is perhaps his dominant interpretation of the effect of Jesus's death and resurrection, redemptive liberation, and that, finally, the chief means Paul used to aid his Christians in bridging the gap between 'orthodoxy and orthopraxis' were his teaching on the formation of the christian conscience and his insistence, with those churches he himself had founded, upon the

imitation of himself, as well as his stress upon the significance of 'testing', 'discerning', 'examining' one's own christian self-awareness, itself the effect of the indwelling dynamism of the Spirit of God. We shall begin, however, with a concrete verification, in one delicate situation faced by Paul, of the kind of spiritual leadership described by Fr McCormick: Paul's brief note to the little 'house-church' in Colossae, denominated (not quite accurately) as 'to Philemon'.

Paul as spiritual leader

From the start of this short letter, Paul eschews any injunction on the basis of his apostolic authority, although he somewhat playfully alludes to such a possibility at several points (vv 8, 14, 21). He deliberately avoids his customary style in the letter's address, 'Apostle', substituting instead 'prisoner of Christ Jesus', while designating Timothy as 'the brother'. The so-called 'Thanksgiving' evinces several novel features, which illustrate the *personal* nature of pauline leadership. 'I keep hearing of the love and the faith you display towards the Lord Jesus and towards all the saints' (v 5). This unprecedented inversion of love and faith underscores the foundation upon which Paul has chosen to support his plea that Onesimos, the runaway slave, be returned to him by Philemon, and, still more, the all but unexpressed request for Onesimos's manumission. 'It is with full confidence in your compliance that I am writing to you, knowing you will do even more than I am asking' (v 21). Paul summarizes the prayer he had made before writing as a request 'that your participation in the faith may spring to action by the recognition of *every good thing* [natural, no less than supernatural], abiding in us both in relation to Christ' (v 6). Philemon is twice addressed as 'brother', and is not allowed to forget that the runaway, now a newly baptized Christian, is 'my child, whom I have begotten in prison' (v 10); and hence Philemon's 'beloved brother, immensely dear to me — and so much more to you, both as a man and as a Christian' (v 16). For, as Paul humorously hints, as he sends, over his own signature, his I.O.U., the owner of the slave is in fact in debt, for his own entry into the Church, to the Apostle: 'not to mention the fact that you owe yourself to me!' (v 19).

Aware that Philemon, a wealthy man in whose grand house this tiny colossian congregation meets for worship, is well acquainted with the language of commerce, Paul playfully makes abundant use

of legal and commercial language. He refers to Onesimos as 'your proxy in serving me in prison' (v 13), and declares that 'he has been separated from you for a brief spell' [a euphemism for 'he ran away'], 'in order that you might get him back as payment in full'; since Onesimos, now a Christian, has become truly Philemon's brother, instead of slave. 'I, Paul, am signing in my own hand — I will repay!' (v 19). Then he adds his subtle plea that Onesimos be manumitted: 'Yes, brother, for my part, I could wish as a Christian that you, also a Christian, would let me have this favour from you. It is with full confidence in your compliance that I am writing to you, knowing you will do even more than I am asking' (vv 20-21).

The almost forced gaiety of Paul's tone throughout his note suggests how sensitive he is to Philemon's bitterness and resentment at being cheated by this slave. For this eminently successful business man, it will be next to impossible to accept Onesimos back into his household and his confidence, as his chattel, let alone as his brother 'in Christ'. Paul exemplifies the genuine qualities of leader, as he seeks by every means in his power to liberate Philemon from his rancour and malevolence, and bring him to free this treacherous slave. Paul's seriousness in attempting the impossible may be gauged by his abundant use of the language of christian mysticism, 'in Christ', 'in the Lord'.

It is, moreover, to be noted that Paul's leadership is directed also towards the community, in this issue which chiefly concerns the slave's owner. The letter begins and ends as a communication to the entire congregation. This is not simply a matter of epistolary form, or etiquette. No one is more aware than Paul that in the Church, 'Christ's body' (1 Cor 12, 27), personal affairs are no longer merely private. He must prepare the church at Colossae to receive Onesimos as 'a beloved brother'; and this demands that this little group, which undoubtedly shared Philemon's furious resentment over the flight of this slave, must also be liberated by growing in love, in the first place, and also faith, if this augment of one is to become true growth 'in Christ'.

The freedom for which Christ has set us free (Gal 5, 1)

The death and resurrection of Jesus is the focal point in pauline thought, as may be seen by the fact that Paul employs some ten different symbolic expressions to describe its effects upon christian existence. Of these, the three most significant are undoubtedly 'new

creation' (Gal 6, 15; 2, Cor 5, 17), 'reconciliation' (2 Cor 5, 18-19; Rom 5, 10-11; 11, 25; see Col 1, 20-22; Eph 2, 16), and 'freedom in Christ' (Gal 2, 4; 5, 1. 13; Rom 6, 8. 20. 22; 8, 2. 21). I venture to suggest that this last was the most congenial to the Apostle, especially when one includes its antithesis, 'slavery', which paradoxically Paul uses to express the same reality, his being in union 'with Christ'. In fact, one receives the impression that he not infrequently thought of his confrontation by the risen Christ on the Damascus road as his own liberation. 'Am I not a free man? am I not an apostle? have I not seen Jesus our Lord?' (1 Cor 9, 1); and further on, 'I am a free man, and own no master!' (v 19). He dwells at some length upon the present effects of this liberation from his former religious life as a Pharisee (Phil 3, 7-15), which has freed him to pursue Christ his Saviour. Paul makes use of the metaphor of the foot-race from the Greek Games to describe his new christian freedom:

Not that I have already won [the prize]. I have not yet attained perfection. On the contrary, I keep running hard to reach the goal, by virtue of my having been overtaken by Christ Jesus. No brothers! I do not judge myself to have reached the goal. One thing only I bear in mind. Forgetting what lies behind, I press on eagerly to what lies ahead: I run hard towards the goal for the prize of the call heavenwards by God in Christ Jesus (vv 12-15).

While this foundational experience, his meeting with the risen Lord, can be depicted by Paul in terms of God's creation of light (2 Cor 4, 6), and presented as God's act of 'reconciling' ('All this comes from God who reconciled me to himself through Christ and gave me the ministry of reconciliation' — 2 Cor 5, 18), it is also true that this momentous meeting contributed significantly to Paul's image of Christ as Liberator, who imparts freedom through his gift of the Spirit; 'for where the Spirit of God is present, there freedom exists' (2 Cor 3, 17). In fact, as he reminds the Galatians, who stand in peril of a new enslavement by judaizing missionaries, 'We are not, my brothers, children of the slave-girl, but of her that is free. It was for freedom that Christ has freed us: stand firm, then, and refuse to be entrapped once more in a yoke of slavery' (Gal 4, 31ff). 'You have received the call to freedom, brothers: only do not turn that freedom into license for your earthbound self; rather through love become enslaved to one another' (Gal 5, 13).

In the letter to the roman community, Paul sums up the effects of Jesus's death and resurrection as the liberation of mankind from the

tyranny of Sin and Death, personified as enemies of all Adam's children (Rom 5, 15-19). In this passage, it should be noted, Paul puts special emphasis upon the *moral* aspect of Christ's work by stressing his obedience to the divine will. Accordingly, in the new christian life, the liberating effects of the Christ-event demand an ethical response: 'By being freed from Sin, you have become enslaved to Righteousness' (Rom 6, 18). This gracious gift of God in Christ means also that the Christian is now free from the Mosaic Law. 'As a result, my brothers, you have been put to death to the Law, through Christ's body, so as to belong to Another, to him who rose from death, that we might bear a rich harvest for God' (Rom 7, 4). Somewhat later Paul depicts this divine act of graciousness as liberation. 'There is consequently no verdict of condemnation for those in union with Christ Jesus. For the "law" of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has liberated me from "the law" of Sin and of Death' (Rom 8, 1-2). Finally, Christ the Liberator has freed the believer from his earthbound self. 'For none of us can live for himself, and no one dies by himself. If we are alive, we are living for the Lord; if we are dying, we are dying for the Lord. Hence, whether we live or whether we die, we are the Lord's (Rom 14, 7-8). 'He died', Paul had stated to the Corinthians, 'in order that those who are alive might no longer live for themselves, but for him who died and was raised on their behalf' (2 Cor 5, 15).

The consequences of this seminal insight into the liberating effects of Jesus's death and resurrection may be observed in Paul's dealings with the churches under his care. Whether he is encouraging and exhorting these communities, or correcting and reproving them, he constantly displays the greatest reverence and respect for the presence in them, individually and collectively, of the liberating Spirit of Jesus. He takes care to 'recommend' his injunctions or reproof by giving reasons, drawn from revelation and elsewhere, for his use of authority. Above all, even when he is angry (as in Galatians) or hurt (as in 2 Corinthians), he strives manfully to exercise authority as an expression of the single command to love one's neighbour as oneself (Gal 5, 14; Rom 13, 8-10). We are given a precious glimpse of Paul's genuine leadership in his directives to Corinth regarding the formation of the christian conscience.

The formation of a christian conscience

It may be fairly stated that Paul not only introduced the term conscience (*syneidēsis*) into christian vocabulary, but contributed largely

to the theological development of the concept. The word was not in common use in hellenistic Judaism, but it figured prominently in Stoicism and Epicureanism. Paul, however, gave the word a meaning very different from the sense it has acquired among the Stoics, whose pantheism excluded the notion of a personal God. For him the obligation to act in accordance with conscience derived from the divine will. To the mind of the Epicurean, conscience passed judgment upon actions once they were posited; it was not, therefore, a source of moral obligation.

Paul was himself blessed with a robust conscience, as is clear from 1 Corinthians 4, 3-5. In that passage he asserts that an examination of his conscience reveals that he is free of sin, 'Yet not for that reason am I justified. The one who judges me is the Lord!' The Apostle here reveals his awareness of the danger of turning an examination of conscience into a process of self-justification; and so he asserts categorically that his state of sinlessness is the effect of Christ's justifying action upon him. To read Romans 7, 7-25 as an autobiographical sketch is to misinterpret Paul, by viewing him as a sort of Hamlet.

In his first extant letter to Corinth, the Apostle has devoted considerable space to a question, which may, on a superficial reading, appear to the present-day reader as a kind of museum-piece: whether the Christian is permitted to eat meat that had been sacrificed in pagan shrines to idols (1 Cor 8, 1-11, 1). If, however, these chapters are read with attention, one discovers they contain an invaluable treatise on the formation of a christian conscience. Paul was obliged to deal simultaneously with the 'enlightened' believer ('the robust') and the person who is scrupulous, yet easily led astray by the example of others ('the insecure'). There is much that needs correction and development in either type of conscience. The man with the so-called enlightened conscience boasts, 'We all possess knowledge'. Paul grants the claim, but gently attempts to bring such a one to see that mere theoretical knowledge without love and concern for others simply 'breeds conceit' (1 Cor 8, 1-2); it lacks 'the love that builds', which helps the neighbour to grow. More importantly, it is as yet ignorant, because 'it does not know God's will' (*kathōs deī*). Such love is, of course, a gracious gift of God's own love: 'If a person loves God, such a one has been known [in the true sense] by him' (v 3). 'By loving us, God makes us lovable', says St Augustine. As he lacks real love, 'the robust', revelling in what he wrongly regards as his christian freedom, needs to be reprimanded.

Thus, while Paul grants, 'Certainly food will not bring us into God's presence', still he warns 'the robust' to 'Be careful that this freedom of yours does not become a pitfall for the insecure' (vv 8-9). Indeed, 'this knowledge of yours is utter disaster to the insecure, the brother for whom Christ died! In thus sinning against your brothers and wounding their conscience, you sin against Christ' (vv 9-11). In the sequel, Paul brings arguments from Israel's experience in the exodus (1 Cor 10, 1-11), as well as from his own apostolic example (1 Cor 9, 3-23), to instil in 'the robust' a greater concern for the weaker consciences in the community, while inculcating the need of christian prudence.

The 'insecure' Christian, on the other hand, is precisely weak in *faith*; specifically, he cannot bring himself to believe in God's almost irrational love for himself, as well as in the goodness of the creation. It is interesting to recall a text (Rom 14, 23) where Paul actually uses 'faith' as a synonym for 'conscience'. 'A man who has doubts is guilty if he eats, because his action does not arise from his *faith*; and anything that does not come from *faith* is sin'. Such a person needs to convince himself that he, personally, is the object of God's love that has been demonstrated by Christ's saving death. Such a one must come to realize that he is in truth 'the brother for whom Christ died'. Only in this way can he form a genuinely christian conscience, and so be *liberated* through accepting in faith the fulness of God's self-revelation through love.

It is helpful to recall that Paul is dealing here with what is specifically a *christian* problem, which could not arise for the devout Jew who had, in the Law of Moses and in the 618 precepts of pharisaic Judaism, norms or rules that governed the entire gamut of his actions. Paul's awareness that the Mosaic Law no longer bound the Christian brought him to see the necessity of following one's conscience, and thus for himself as apostle, the duty of forming the christian consciences of those in his care. Finally, it is to be remarked that Paul concludes this discussion with the injunction 'Become imitators of me, since I am [an imitator] of Christ' (1 Cor 11, 1). This notion of 'imitation' is found, in the New Testament, exclusively in Paul's authentic letters. and in certain post-pauline writings that evince pauline influence (Eph 5, 1; Heb 6, 12; 13, 7), where, however, the notion of imitation has undergone certain modifications. Since this continual invitation to imitate himself, issued to those communities he had founded, is another means Paul employed to bridge the gap between orthodoxy and the living-out of the gospel, we must examine its meaning.

Become imitators of me, as I am of Christ (1 Cor 11, 1)

This habit of urging the imitation of himself, peculiar to Paul, was a practice adopted by the Apostle only towards those christian foundations he himself had assembled, the communities of Thessalonica, Philippi, and Corinth. It never appears in the other authentic pauline letters. Thus it was proposed only in the context of those intensely personal relationships, which caused him so much joy and grief. It should be observed, moreover, that Paul nowhere speaks of the imitation of Christ without urging in the first place the imitation of himself (1 Thess 1, 6-7; 2 Thess 3, 7-9; Phil 3, 17; 1 Cor 4, 15-16; 11, 1). The Apostle was deeply sensitive that, as human beings, we stand in need of a concrete example of christian values. Further he was well aware that, in a very real sense, it is impossible to imitate Jesus, particularly in his career as redeemer. Thus, it is instructive to note that, when he cites an early christian hymn which extols that saving career of Christ (Phil 2, 6-11), he avoids suggesting that the Philippians are to imitate his achievement. Finally, Paul also knows that this imitation of himself, and *through him* the imitation of Christ, is not some kind of external copying. Rather it is an experience, mediated by these Christians' personal knowledge of Paul. Thus it is akin to that 'intimate knowledge of our Lord, who has become man for me', which St Ignatius bids the retreatant beg for in the second week of the Spiritual Exercises. Such knowledge is perceived consequently as a gracious gift of God. This imitation of himself to which Paul invites his communities is the result of a shared experience of faith, with him who fathered them in that faith: 'You have not a plurality of fathers, since, as regards your union with Christ, it was I who fathered you through the gospel. Accordingly, I beg of you, become imitators of me' (1 Cor 4, 15-16). Such was the nature of the apostolic charism with which God had gifted Paul that (as he knew) this imitation of himself would lead his communities to an ever deeper knowledge of Christ his Lord. For it was for Christ, not himself, that Paul made disciples. Here again, through these exhortations to imitate himself, we see Paul exercising his spiritual leadership.

Discernment of Spirits (1 Cor 12, 10)

Ignatius Loyola was led to compose *The Spiritual Exercises* out of the conviction that his own experiences of God and of Christ in the castle of Loyola, at Manresa and the river Cardoner, and at La

Storta, despite their often deeply mystical character, could be useful to other Christians bent upon 'seeking and finding the will of God'. Thus his statement of purpose ('the conquest of self and the regulation of one's life in such fashion that no decision is made under the influence of any inordinate attachment'), admittedly bleak in its formulation, indicates the goal to which he desired to assist the exercitant: a truly spiritual experience of christian freedom. Because the aim is an experience of *liberation*, the retreatant must be released from the strictures of 'the death-dealing letter' (2 Cor 3, 6) and guided towards the leading of 'the life-giving Spirit' by the art of 'the discernment of spirits'. Because the experience is christian (the antithesis of egocentrism) this discernment is to be carried out while contemplating the mysteries of Jesus's earthly history. Because the experience is *spiritual*, it can be attained primarily under the infallible guidance of the Holy Spirit and only secondarily with the assistance of a director. I recall here these salient features of ignatian spirituality in order to introduce a brief discussion of the pauline phrase, 'discernment of spirits' (1 Cor 12, 10), since that spirituality bears several striking points of resemblance to Paul's, being the product of mystical experiences analogous to those of the Apostle.

The two chief obstacles to Paul's preaching of the gospel were undoubtedly the judaizing tendencies of certain jewish-christian missionaries and the pagan philosophy of Stoicism. To explain the violence of Paul's opposition towards the first group is difficult: the precise identity of these adversaries (were they Jews as well as jewish-Christians?) is impossible to ascertain, and their teaching concerning the necessity of the Mosaic Law for salvation would appear tinged with some sort of incipient gnosticism. The challenge offered by the spread of popular versions of Stoicism in the hellenistic world lay not in its pantheism, but rather in its lofty ethical ideals, especially its advocacy of the flight into inwardness as the means of achieving the preservation of the self.

Paul appears to have correctly diagnosed the chief peril in both these errors as an attack upon 'our freedom in Christ Jesus' (Gal 2, 4). He seems to have Stoic *apatheia* (the flight into inwardness) in mind in his remarks to the Corinthians: 'I am free and acknowledge no master. Yet I have made myself a slave to all men, in order that I may win the majority of them' (1 Cor 9, 19). And to the Galatians: 'You have received the call to freedom, my brothers . . . yet through love you must become slaves to one another' (Gal 5, 13). His reit-

erated and passionate declarations that the Christian has been liberated from the hobbling shackles of the Law sprang from his conviction of the opposition between it and the Spirit. 'If you are led by the Spirit, you are not subject to the Law' (Gal 5, 18). He was well aware that the present earth-bound conditions of every human being (*sarx*) was only aggravated by the Law that was powerless to save (Rom 7, 7-25).

The liberating effects of Christ's saving work were communicated to the believer by the Spirit. 'For our part, it is upon the Spirit by means of faith that we base our hope for the uprightness we await. By contrast with our union in Christ Jesus, circumcision can have no more effect than the lack of it. What counts is faith that is operative through love' (Gal 4, 4-5). This text picks out the four vital elements in christian freedom: faith, hope, love, with their source, the Spirit.

Attention then to the operation of the indwelling Spirit of God is essential to the ongoing process of liberation, since the Spirit is the source of the believer's consciousness of his true identity as an adoptive child of God (Gal 4, 6; Rom 8, 14-16). 'We, however, have not received the spirit of the world but the Spirit, who comes from God, in order that we may recognize God's gracious gifts to us' (1 Cor 2, 12). The Spirit is at the heart of christian affectivity expressed in prayer (Rom 8, 26-27). Hence Paul knows that the activity of the Spirit through the mind, heart, and sensibility of the Christian is to be held in deep reverence. 'Do not stifle the Spirit: do not despise prophecy' (1 Thess 5, 19-20).

At the same time, Paul is fully aware that, because the Spirit operates through the affective as well as intellectual faculties, these 'spirits' are ambiguous, and must be discerned for what they are by 'testing' and 'discrimination' (2 Cor 13, 5). Thus to the text just cited Paul adds immediately: 'Bring them all to the test; then guard what is good and avoid the evil of whatever kind' (vv 21-22). In his first letter to Corinth Paul discusses various criteria that are needed in successful discernment. Those gifts of grace that are orientated to the 'building up' of the community are to be preferred to more personal charisms. Prophecy and all forms of christian teaching hold a high place, while love remains 'a more excellent way' (1 Cor 12, 13). Paul puts this community on guard against the ambivalent character of certain manifestations of religious enthusiasm, which might easily be confused with the ecstatic frenzies induced in the hellenistic mysteries (1 Cor 12, 2-3). He reminds the church that

'No one can say, "Jesus is Lord", except under the influence of the Holy Spirit' (v 3). This primitive christian *credo*, the epitome of true christian belief, cannot be meaningfully uttered apart from faith, the Spirit's gift. Moreover, for genuine discernment, love is also essential. 'And this', Paul writes to his Philippians, 'Is my prayer for you: may your love yield an ever richer harvest of true knowledge and a perception of every kind, so that you may test what is most worthwhile' (Phil 1, 9-10).

Today's reader of Paul's letters may sense disappointment at the relatively little space in them devoted to discernment. It is a salutary reminder that this great theologian of christian liberation was convinced that a restrictive set of regulations in this delicate matter would be totally inconsistent with his supreme confidence in the Spirit of God for the guidance of his Christians to true 'freedom in Christ Jesus'.

¹ Richard A. McCormick, S.J., 'Notes on Moral Theology', in *Theological Studies* 33 (1972), pp 101-02. This is the author's preface to his paper on 'Leadership and Authority', in *Proceedings of the Catholic Theological Society of America*, 36 (1971).