APOSTLE PAUL: HELLENIZED JEW

PROTAGONIST OF CHRISTIANITY

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It is a world where the majority of the people are poor. The poor endure **boundless injustices,** while he most powerful empire spends its wealth on making its military even more potent. It is the world of **Apostle Paul**, who sets out to save it from an apocalyptic end!

In the world of 2007 years ago, the Roman Empire is the sole superpower, but its Republic democracy, emulated from the **Greeks** [*read article by Kritsotakis*] is now supplanted by the dictatorial rule of belligerent emperors. Then, as now, **globalization** is taking roots in the **Greco-Roman world**. Trade is booming, in part because of a lingua franca in commerce and communications, **Hellenistic Greek**; in part because of network of **super-highways** built for the Roman military [*like our **Internet** electronic network highways developed for the military, which was made available to the world in the 1990s at the end of the **Cold War***]. The policy started by Alexander is emulated; people can **exercise their religion freely,** but they must not challenge the authority of Centurions for they can be declared "*enemy combatants*", for which they can be crucified; **Rome** has all the power!

One religion gives the emperors headaches. It is the Jewish monotheistic religion**;** Jews believe in an ineffable, universal god of mercy who forgives anyone who asks for it in penitence and good faith. It is a highly structured religion with mandatory rules and regulations, strict dietary laws, belief in eternal life for martyrs of faith. Although enslaved and persecuted, Jews claim to be God's favorite people standing apart from the rest by **circumcision** of males within 8 days of their birth, or with a painful ritual for older **male converts** to Judaism [in *a brilliant move, Paul substitutes **baptism** for circumcision*] .

The inner sanctum of the Solomon's Temple on the **Rock**, [*which had burned down, but was rebuilt by king of Arab-blood **Herod the Great** and his descendants; a **mosque** stands on top of it now*], is off-limits to non-Jews, the **Gentiles**, not unlike the sacred sites of **Mecca**, which are not open to non-Muslims, the **Infidels**! The Jerusalem Temple is guarded by the High Priest who is authorized to punish, even **kill by stoning**, or by **crucifixion,** after referral to the Roman magistrate [*i.e., **Pontius Pilate***], anyone who defiles the Temple [*i.e., **Jesus of Nazareth***]. The Torah is for the Jews what the **Bible** is for the Christians who establish themselves 3 centuries later thanks to **Constantine the Great** [*see article by Prof. Kaldellis*], and what the **Koran** is for Islam founded by **Mohamed** 6 centuries later. The Torah is taught by the **Pharisees**, who are teachers and thus proselytizers, in the **synagogues.** There are many Jews in **diaspora** all over the Mediterranean, as there are Greeks and other nationalities living in peace as long as they obey Roman law. One such Jew of the diaspora, **Saul** [*which is **Παυλος** in Greek; **Paulus** in Latin; **Paul** in English*] is born around the time of **Jesus**.

Saul is born in **Tarsus** of Cilicia, [*map*], a typical, prosperous, **free, autonomous Geek** city. [***Alexander** recuperated from a comma in Tarsus on his way to nearby **Issus** to battle **Darius;*** see Issue 4]. The majority of the people of Tarsus worship either irenic Greek hero **Hercules** [*Herakles*], who is born a man but through his struggles, good deeds, and atonement for his sins is elevated to deity; or **Mithras**, the Hellenized Persian god of sun light, who like Heracles goes into the underworld to rescue human souls from Hades. The ***"pagans"*** of Tarsus appeal to Hercules for salvation as his statue is paraded once a year through the city, while the Mithraec devotees end their weekly litanies with a communal dinner fete.

Saul attends the local synagogue but he reads in Greek the Jewish Scriptures of the Old Testament that had been translated in **Alexandria**, at that time, the preeminent world capital of culture, knowledge, and

commerce. His families are well-established tent makers, a business that is booming with all the armed conflicts, rebellions, and re-building of conquered cities. Nevertheless, Jerusalem is the center of Judaism plus a tourist attraction for Greeks and other gentiles because of the opulent palaces and entertainment facilities built by the kings of the **Herod** Dynasty. Saul moves to Jerusalem, continues his studies, and helps in the family business through his work in the Temple where thousands of lambs are butchered by the priests during the Passover. Caiaphas is the High Priest serving with the **consent** of the Procurator of **Rome**.

As member of the staff of Caiaphas, **Saul** is an **eyewitness to events of cosmic significance** that fundamentally shape the mores, morals, culture, history of the world ever since! As a devout Jew to his last days and as staff member of the Temple, Saul is among those who persecute and prosecute the newly emerging "**heretics**" in Jerusalem, i.e., the believers in the resurrection of **Jesus**. On his way to Damascus, on a mission to persecute such "*heretics*", he becomes a **heretic** himself; as such, Paul is persecuted by Jews in synagogues from Jerusalem to Rome.

Unlike today's nuclear-armed Israel, the Jews of the **epoch of Saul** are weak, powerless, and troublesome. Frequently they rebel to protest religious infringements by Roman soldiers, such as carrying military emblems into their holy Temple. [*Bin Laden accuses us Americans, too, for sacrilegious infringements on his holy homeland, Saudi Arabia, i.e.,* ***military bases*** *of infidels; American women working outdoors without being covered from head to toe!*]. After a major Jewish insurrection in 65, in a show of super might, Roman legionnaires destroy the Temple and wipe out the entire city of Jerusalem in 70 AD. The "heretics", who by now call themselves by the **Greek name** Christians [**Χριστιαννοί**], to avoid the wrath of Rome, distance themselves from Judaism in their writings. **Anti-Semitism** spreads to Europe and beyond.

In the year **0050**, Paul begins his first of many **unendurable for a normal man** evangelical missions to **Greece** [*map*] preaching that the crucified and resurrected **Jesus** is the anointed by God **Christos**, i.e., the **Messiah**! One of the towns he visits in Macedonia is my hometown **Veroia** [*map; also Berea; several towns in the USA are named Berea; one in Ohio; or Beroea, or Veria*]. He makes a convert who follows him to **Athens**. In Athens, he has another epiphany and, in

another brilliant move, Paul begins to concentrate his preaching on the gentiles, for which he is known as the **Apostle of the Gentiles**!

It is 1950. The city of Veroia [*Berea*] is being spruced up because important delegates from around the world are to visit the marble **Steps** from which **Apostle Paul** addressed the Jews in 0050. [*Berea had a big Jewish population; 800 before WWI;* ***none now***]. It is the 1900th year anniversary of the apostolic journeys of Paul, and the delegates are visiting the cities in which he preached. Metropolis church priest *Reverend* **Paul** [*my father*], as assistant to *Veroia Bishop* **Alexander,** is excitingly busy with the local arrangements. I, on the other hand, find it silly that people would travel that far to see the soiled bare marble slabs in the un-fenced dusty yard of my elementary school. Two cypress trees stand tall between a neglected **mosque** and the **Steps**. I hide there, stepping over the Steps while playing hide-and-seek during school recess.

The clergymen came in **funny garbs**. Never before had I seen priests without **ράσσα** [*black robes; I never even saw my father without his ράσσα*]. Some of them were in sutane but most were in suits and ties; even some were **women**! For me, it was exciting to watch **civilian foreigners** instead of soldiers parading through our streets, after 10 years of continuous bloody wars. Soon thereafter, my father raised funds with Olga Michaelidou, a devotee of **Lydia**, the first European convert of Apostle Paul, to build a proper historical monument [*pic*].

After rereading the Bible plus several books, I realize that the revered **evangelist** of Orthodoxy Paul is not only a religious giant, but also a major historical figure. The Berea Steps where Paul stood in Macedonia are the Steps on which Alexander would stand during the **Pythian Games** that his father Philip sponsored in Veroia 3 centuries earlier. Apostle Paul is the "*Alexander-the-Great*" **of the Jews** [*see article by Daniel*]. However, Paul conquered the world with **Religion**!

Religion is the **strongest of all human motives**, as we can readily see, even today, in the **post Cold War conflicts**!

His first convert is Greek: Τιμοθεος [Timothy], a young man from Greek father and Jewish mother, whose baptismal name means honor to god. Timothy becomes a trusted assistant sent to several congregations in Greece and Anatolia to resolve church issues. The first European city visited is Greek: Philippi, [*map*], a city in Macedonia founded by **Philip the Great**; a prosperous town thanks to mining operations and commercial trading, and thus has a large Jewish community. The **first European Christian** is a Greek woman: Lydia from Philippi, a rich cloth merchant of unusual talents, as she runs her own business, even though women are not given the right to own and operate property in those days. The first gentile church is in Greece**:** In his walks around Athens, he sees a statue dedicate "***to the unknown god***". Quoting Greek theologians like Epimenides of Crete and Aratos of Cilicia, **monotheist Plato**, he tells Athenians that he is the messenger of the unknown God. His first converts are a woman named **Damaris** and **Dionysios,** the first bishop of Athens, The first bishop of Rome is Greek: Clement from Philippi.

Paul's first of many **Epistles**, all written in Greek, is written in Corinth where he stays for 2 years working with tent-makers Priscilla and Aquila, a Jewish couple who had moved there from Rome. His first Epistle is to the congregation in **Thessaloniki** [*map*], in which he praises the gentiles of Veroia. Everyone who studied Apostle Paul has a favorite Epistle; mine is Paul's letter to the **Corinthians** in which he lists his 3 major human virtues:

FAITH [**ΠΙΣΤΙΣ**],
HOPE [**ΕΛΠΙΣ**],
LOVE [ΑΓΑΠΗ]!

- Πίστις [Pístis] is **faith** but the Greek word means not only faith to God but also credible trust in Him.
- Ελπίς [Elpís] is the Greek word for **hope**, but it means also the expectations for the blessings that come with a pious life.
- Αγάπη [Agápi] is a Greek word for love, which in the **Hellenic tradition** and **Greek language** comes in 4 forms:
  - Φιλία [Filia] is the unflinching love among friends, like that of Achilles and Patroklos; Alexander and Hefaestion!
  - Ευσέβια [Efsevia] is the devotional love for parents and family, filial piety as that of Hector, the son of King Priam of Troy; of Telemachos of Ithaca, the son of Odysseus; of Argos, the dog of Odysseus.
  - ’Ερως [Eros] is the love of procreation as that of Menelaus for **Helen of Sparta**; of Hector for Andromache; of Penelope for Odysseus; and *vice versa*!
  - Αγάπη is the love preached by ***Apostle Paul***, i.e., *αγαπάτε αλλήλους* ; for love is potent, love is kind; it is the greatest virtue of all!

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