

# Three Sidelights on a Paradox: The Cult of St Paul in Post-Reformation English Culture

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The Reformation of the Church in England was given under Edward VI and Elizabeth I a Protestant-enough slant for it to carry with it two somewhat contrasting consequences. The first was to considerably devalue the cult of the saints in general and of the Petrine role in the Church more especially. The second was to exalt the cult of just *the* one saint on whose statements such theses as the devaluation of works in relation to faith were based, namely St Paul. The combination of these two features constitutes the essential paradox of the Pauline cult in post-Reformation England.<sup>1</sup>

The pervasiveness of the Paradox is such that it is not difficult to detect its presence in all three of the constitutive dimensions of religion: the social – institutional – ritual; the experiential – devotional – mystical; the theoretical – doctrinal – metaphysical.<sup>2</sup> Comprehensive treatment of the topic is not possible within the scope of a short essay, but even a summary perusal of a few paradigm cases should suffice to carry conviction about the importance of the Pauline paradox in the Genesis of Anglicanism.

## I Word-centred Church Morphology

In the context of the social – institutional – ritual dimension, the paradigm case that

springs instantly to mind is Wren's St Paul's cathedral in London.<sup>3</sup>

When, in 1672, the astronomer turned architect, Sir Christopher Wren, was given the task of designing a new St Paul's cathedral after the old one had been destroyed by the Great Fire of 1666, he made the first serious attempt at designing a church specifically for Reformed worship. The Anglican liturgy had until then been enacted in the mediaeval churches with which the Church of England was overprovided at the time. The main difference between the settings of Catholic and Protestant worship lay of course in the relative importance given to the lectern for Bible reading (including the Pauline epistles) on the one hand, and to the cult of the saints (other than the author of the epistles) in visual imagery, on the other hand.<sup>4</sup>

When a cathedral was first established in London, as soon as the city had begun to assume a capital role, it was dedicated to St Paul on his own. Thus, as far back as 604 on the site of Wren's St Paul's near the West Gate of the Roman city, there already was a Saxon cathedral dedicated by Bishop Melitus to the apostle.<sup>5</sup> It ought to be recalled that the joint cult of Peter and Paul had been particularly

<sup>1</sup> Cfr. F. Heal and R. O'Day *Church and Society in England, Henry VII-James I* (London, 1977); H. Davies, *Worship and Theology in England: From Cranmer to Hooker 1534-1603* (place of publication?, 1970); *From Andrewes to Baxter and Fox, 1603-1690* (Princeton Uss, 1975); Charles H. George-Catherine George, *The Protestant Mind of the English Reformation 1570-1150* (Princeton 1961).

<sup>2</sup> For a cogent demonstration that these three elements are the necessary and sufficient conditions of religion, cfr. the original exposition of the analysis by Friedrich von Huelgel in the second chapter of his *The Mystical Element of Religion*, adjusted and corroborated by Nicholas Lash, *Easter in Ordinary* (London, 1988), 154-62.

<sup>3</sup> Cfr. J. Summerson, *Sir Christopher Wren* (London, 1953); M. Whitney, *Wren* (London, 1987); K. Downes, *Christopher Wren, the Design of St Paul's* (London, 1988).

<sup>4</sup> Cfr. Frank E. Brightman, *The English Rite*, 1921; Geoffrey J. Cunnig, *A history of Anglican Liturgy* (London, 1980); Horton Davies, *Worship and Theology in England*, 5 vols. (Princeton, 1961-75).

<sup>5</sup> Cfr. W. Longman, *History of St Paul's*. The great source-book remains Dugdales's *History of St Paul's Cathedral* (1658), of which an importantly revised edition by Sir Henry Ellis was published in London in 1818.

prominent from the start of the tradition of the Church in England. Legend has it that at Glastonbury, first Joseph of Arimathea had come to convert the British to Christianity but succeeded only in originating the Grail story (out of which myths first were to be churned from the Tales of the Round Table to the Da Vinci Code in our own days); then, a British King, around 170, who had asked the pope to send new missionaries, built England's first major church near Joseph's original tiny chapel. It was dedicated to St Peter and St Paul.<sup>6</sup> However, in 1148, a shrine was erected behind the high altar with the relics of the Saxon bishop St Eerkenwald (d. 693). Soon it became the main focus of attention because of the pilgrimages it attracted. Romanesque (11<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> centuries) and Gothic (13<sup>th</sup>-14<sup>th</sup> centuries) accretions led to St Paul's becoming the largest and most impressive sanctuary in England. It was largely thanks to St Erkenwald's bones being there. Those of the apostle were meanwhile irremediably drawing pilgrims to Rome, not London; and it was certainly not the pulpit from which the New Testament (of which Paul had written the earliest and crucial parts) was proclaimed that was the catalyst in the vast architectural space of the cathedral of England's capital city.

In Old St Paul's, partly because of its huge size, only the choir was regularly used for Church services. The rest became known as 'Paul's Walk' – it had actually become a secular meeting place for all kinds of social purposes and indeed in part a market. 'Paul's Walk' is where Shakespeare, for example, makes Falstaff buy a horse. Desecration prevailed in the iconoclastic climate of the Reformation in the latter half of the sixteenth and the first half of the seventeenth centuries, but it was thereafter stopped. The cathedral returned to being again a supremely sacred place. But the cult of the saints, including that of Eerkenwald was not revived, except for that of St Paul which now re-emerged more splendidly than ever, in isolation and solitary grandeur.

Even before the Fire and Wren, Inigo Jones had built a classical portico in front of Old St Paul's by royal commission. The 're-surfacing testifies to the symbolic importance

that the Stuart monarchy attached to Old St Paul's as the spiritual centre of the reformed faith; its restoration formed part of the plan to monumentalize London in rivalry with Rome, ... The centrepiece of the plan was the new domed St Paul's Cathedral.<sup>7</sup>

There can be no doubt that Wren's St Paul's 'is in some ways intended to contrast with St Peter's, Rome, the Church of the Counter-Reformation.' Highlighting the difference that is the deep motivation of a contrast is classically best secured by establishing as close as possible a likeness in all other respects. The first impression of any view of Wren's St Paul's is that of a striking similarity to the Bramante – Michaelangelo – Bernini basilica erected to replace the mediaeval cathedral of St Peter's in Rome. The new architecture of St Peter's was deliberately worked out among other things to ensure both on the outside and the inside the availability of conspicuous space for exalted visions of the saints in grandiloquent statues carved by the great Baroque sculptors. In London's St Paul's analogous space was reserved only for St Paul.

On the outside of the cathedral, the pediment placed in the central part of the facade over the two-storeyed portico – corresponding to where in a mediaeval cathedral there would have been a Christ in Glory with the portal beneath signifying the threshold of heaven – contains a depiction of the conversion of St Paul, the work of the sculptor Francis Bird. Admittedly, the image implies a reference to Christ in Glory but it is indubitably St Paul himself, as recipient of the divine light, who catalyzes the casual onlooker's eyes.

Inside, the most compelling iconographic decoration is made up of eight scenes in grisaille from the life of Paul. These grandiose images are the work of Sir James Thornhill (1675-1734), who was the first English-born artist to be knighted and is considered to be the greatest English exponent of Baroque decorative painting. He had competed successfully with, among others, Sebastiano Ricci and Giovanni Antonio Pellegrini for the commission. The reaction provoked at the time by Thornhill's pictorial biography of the

<sup>6</sup> Cfr. Christina Hole, *Saints in Folklore* (London, 1965).

<sup>7</sup> T.F. Reddaway, *The Rebuilding of London after the Great Fire* (London, 1940).

apostle is expressed typically by verses such as the following: 'Thy dome, O Paul, which heavenly views adorn/Shall guide the hands of painters yet.'<sup>8</sup>

The impression of almost exclusive homage to St Paul among the saints has been emphasized by the later insertion of sometimes huge monuments (like that of the Duke of Wellington), since these massive memorials are to great men of this world rather than to the Blessed in Heaven. It is only St Paul's image that is projected so as to dominate over everything else.

Even though Old St Paul's had been dedicated to St Paul, the sense communicated to pilgrims and visitors was definitely that of Paul as complementary to Peter. Paul illustrated the missionary dynamism of the Church with Peter recalling the full communion with Rome required for order throughout the universal church. New St Paul's visually untwinned the two apostles. It may not be pushing interpretation altogether too far if one gets the whiff of a suspicion that the idea floated later that Paul was a sort of second founder of the Church is already being mooted.<sup>9</sup> At any rate, Paul certainly eclipses Peter, who now seems to embody merely the ancestral figure of all ecclesiastical bureaucrats and devotees of deal wood.

Wren's cathedral has always been said by art historians to be easily identified as a quintessentially English design. Its author utilized his manifest awareness of French and Italian Baroque in such a way that it is marvellously made to subserve to the glorification of Anglican identity. Besides having even more in its interior than already on the exterior such a distinctively Protestant mark, St Paul's was carefully planned to emerge as the supreme identifying mark of the London skyline, with direct responsibility for

which Wren had been entrusted. He understood that St Paul's should be for London the same sort of landmark that St Peter's was for Rome.

Wren's St Paul's is possibly the supreme poetic and cultural expression of the Pauline paradox. The cathedral is the material envelope that conditions (as much as it was conditioned by) the nationally-specific liturgy celebrated within its aesthetic hold. It would be possible to show that it was really iconic not only with regard to the Anglican liturgy to which it is so obviously related but also of the whole social and institutional complex which it was put up to symbolize as well as serve.

## II Kerygmatic Mystagogy

Turning to the experiential – devotional – mystical dimension of religion in the post-Reformation year, the paradigm case that comes to mind most spontaneously is that of John Donne.<sup>10</sup>

On the one hand, the poems of the greatest master of the Metaphysical school may be dismissed as irrelevant in the present context, because they can only have been caviar to the common people.

On the other hand, his sermons can surely be taken as expressive of the most typical mould of divine experience of the age. Probably there has been no other period when hearing sermons was so popular as the seventeenth century and Donne was probably the most popular preacher of the age.<sup>11</sup>

Palpably, Donne's sermons came from his passionate heart as well as his most acute mind; nevertheless, the character of his audience can be profiled out of them no less than Shakespeare's out of his plays or the character of any other *lector in fabula* from any text, possibly by using Umberto Eco's techniques.

It is no doubt true that the popular love of

<sup>8</sup> For more information on Thornhill, cfr. Ellis Waterhouse, *Painting in Britain, 1530-1790* (Harmondsworth, 1953); Charles J. Abbey, *The English Church in the 18th Century* (London, 1878); Ernest Gordon Rupp, *Religion in England, 1688-1791* (Oxford, 1986).

<sup>9</sup> The issue of St Paul's status in relation to the origins of Christianity has recently been notably redebated in the English context between A.N. Wilson (*Paul, the Mind of the Apostle*, London, 1977) and Tom Wright (*What St Paul Really Said; Was Paul of Tarsus the real founder of Christianity?*, London, 1997) Cfr. the review of the debate by Prof. J. Leslie Houlden, *The Times Literary Supplement*, 28 March 1997, 3-4.

<sup>10</sup> Cfr. R.C. Bald, *John Donne A Life* (Oxford, 1970); Kate Gartner Frost, *Holy Delight: Typology, Numerology and Autobiography in Donne's Devotions Upon Emergent Occasions* (Princeton, 1990).

<sup>11</sup> *The Sermons of John Donne*, eds. G.R. Potter and Evelyn M. Simpson, 10 vols. (California, 1953-62). All quotations from *The Sermons* are taken from this edition.

hearing sermons partly stemmed out of the Protestant emphasis on the Biblical Word of God as the only means of salvation. Equally, there can be no doubt that ordinary people listened so eagerly and avidly to a complex and subtle preacher such as Donne because of near coincidence between his own psychological disposition and theirs in critical times of disturbing change.

Donne makes it abundantly clear that a root – reason for his singular admiration for St Paul was that he regarded the apostle as primarily a preacher, not a scholarly/scholastic teacher of an un-lived purely theoretically knowledge of God. Paul was as Donne wished to be: a passionately kerygmatic theologian if ‘theologian’ is the right word at all.

In a sermon, Donne says that there are: ‘these three characters in Paul’s ministry: first, Labour and Assiduity; and then Labour bestowed upon the right means, Preaching; And lastly, Preaching to the right end, to edification and advancing the kingdom of God.’

Expectedly, Donne did not resist declaring most solemnly and categorically that the epistles of St Paul were his favourite book in the New Testament. He gave a two-fold reason for this: they had a strong resonance that was universal. ‘Whenever I open St Paul’s Epistle, I meet not words but thunder, and universal thunder, thunder that passes through all the world ... So universal a Priest ... He was struck blind, and all the world saw better for that.’

The Pauline universality to which Donne alludes implies not merely spatial coverage of the earth, but also a pluralist inclusiveness. In his polemics against Catholics and Calvinists alike, Donne always rejoices that his Anglican convictions do not compel him to ‘unchurch’ other questions. In his celebration of Paul’s universality, in the sense of perceiving the Church as a many coloured fleece, Donne seems to anticipate in flashes Badiou’s very recent picture of St Paul as the first prophet who preached the politics of recognition of the Other. Donne saw Anglican ecclesiology as consisting essentially of putting Pauline pluralist inclusiveness into practice.

Donne also preached more sermons on the life and message of St Paul than on any other biblical text or model of Christian life.<sup>12</sup> In one of them, Donne said: ‘The Book is called the Acts of the Apostles; But sayes *S. Chrysostome*, and *S. Hierome*, too, it might be called the Acts of *S. Paul*, so much more is it conversant about him, than all the rest.’

In another sermon Donne further underlines the uniqueness of Paul among saints and even apostles in the cult of the Church by noting that his conversion was ‘a period and a passage which the Church celebrates in none but in St Paul, though many others were strangely converted too, she celebrates none but his’.

In the previously-quoted sermon, Donne goes on to show that in the sequence of his own sermons on the conversion, he was pursuing an unusually systematic plan for him, precisely to bring out the uniqueness of Paul in terms of Salvation History:

‘at this time of the yeare, and in these dayes, when the Church commemorates the Conversion of *S. Paul* I have for divers yeares successfully, in this place determined my self upon this Book. Once upon the very act of his conversion, in those words, *Saul, Saul why persecutest thou me?* Once upon his valediction to his Ephesians at Miletus, in these words, *now I know that all ye shall see my face no more.* And once upon the escape from the Viper’s teeth, and the viperous tongues of those in constant and clamorous beholders, who first rashly cried out, *He is a murderer, and then changed their mindes, and said, He is a God.* And now for the service of your devotions, and the advancement of your edification, I have laid my meditations upon this His Stratagem, and just avoiding of an unjust judgement, *When Paul perceived that one part were Sadducees, and the other Pharisees, etc.*’

Donne goes on in this Sermon to identify himself with Paul, in as much he was himself adopting and adapting Paul’s ‘Stratagem’ to his own situation, in his own relations with Papists on the one hand and Puritans on the other. He regards the Anglican *Via Media*,

<sup>12</sup> In the Potter and Simpson edition of *The Sermons of John Donne*, there are no fewer than 26 sermons on texts from the epistles and eight on texts from Acts – all of which are occasions for larger or smaller, more or less fireworky displays of Pauline fervour.

formally as well as substantively, the just, Pauline stance.

In the sermon which Donne characterizes as Paul's Valediction (a word Donne used twice as title of two great Paul-referenced poems) to the Ephesians, Donne reveals how he had overcome his early morbid interest in the physical corruption caused by death – through concentration on Paul's expressed attitudes as the apostle felt himself to be on the point of dying and prepared himself for it. The Pauline theme of death and resurrection, the master key of his thought, is picked up by Donne not only in autobiographic contexts but also as a clue to the interpretation of history. Anglicanism is perceived by him as a revival of the Pauline spirit of the early Church.

In the literary process of rendering Paul's uniqueness no less visible than was later to be done in the iconographic decoration of Wren's cathedral, Donne also makes much more explicit than the building could, the comparison with Peter to Paul's advantage. Donne says about St John Chrysostom that 'though he joyne them both together, *Iugati boves ecclesiae*, meaning that St Peter and St Paul were that yoke of oxen that ploughed the whole Church; though he say of both, *Quotcarceres sanctificastis?* How many prisons have you two consecrated? ... Yet we may observe a difference in St Chrysostom's expressing of persons so equall to one another, *Quid Petro maius?* Says he. But *Quid Paulo par fuit?* What can exceed Peter, what can equall Paul?' Here Donne asserts by even clearer *innuendo* in words exactly what Wren had asserted through inclusion and exclusion, imaging and eclipsing.

Donne goes on to give essentially three reasons to explain the greater greatness of Paul over Peter. The first is the following: 'St. Paul was a man of low stature; but four feet and half high, says he; and yet his head reached to the highest heaven, and his eyes saw, and his ears heard the counsels of God. Scarce any Ambassadors can show as many Letters of his Master's owne hand.' In other words, not even Peter was taken up to heaven to complete his discipleship – and it shows.

Secondly, in terms of apostlehood, Donne says:

Though we cannot give *S. Paul* a greater name than an Apostle except there be some

extraordinary height of Apostleship enwrapped in that which he sayes of himselfe, *Paul an Apostle, not of men, neither by men but by Iesus Christ ...* He was made an Apostle by Iesus Christ ... when he was glorified in Heaven, and not a mortall man upon earth, as he was when he made his other Apostles; And that in his being an Apostle, there entered no such act of men as did in the election of *Matthias* to that office, though *Matthias* were made after the Ascension as well as he ... *S. Paul* was otherwise an universall soule to the whole Church, than many of the other Apostles were, and had a larger liberty to communicate himselfe to all places, than any of them had. That is it which St Chrysostome intends, when he extends St Paul's dignity, *Angelis diversae Gentes commissae* ... Every Apostle was designed to some particular and certaine compasse, and did but than, in that, which *S. Paul* did in the whole world.

At the back of this reasoning by Donne, there lies the fact that Jesus, when alive as a human being, restricted his preaching to his own nation, the Jews, and only after Pentecost did the gospel begin to be preached to all nations. Thus, Donne links the call of Paul by the already-glorified Christ to the universality of his mission, and excludes Peter from that status.

Perhaps the climax of the great Anglican divine's expression of his Paulinism is reached in his statement of its third ground. He begins with just a reference to the *sensus fidelium* and then proceeds to a confession pregnant with personal commitment: 'Origen says many did believe that St Paul had been the Holy Ghost, which Christ had promised to the world after his departing from it.' Cautiously, Donne placed himself at a double-remove from this *dictum de dicto de dicto*, but he follows it with a formulation of his own belief that is hardly less startling in its audacity: 'Paul was another manner of Sacrament, and had another manner of Transubstantiation.' Donne seriously considered Paul to have become somewhat related to the Holy Spirit on the road to Damascus as Bread and Wine became related to Jesus Christ at the Last Supper.

Patently, Donne's highlighting of the seminal theme of Paul's conversion is related to his own unregenerate youthful years and to his struggles against carnal desire even after

his accession to the priesthood at the age of forty. His highlighting of the concluding theme of Paul's shipwreck is more subtly related to his nationality. The English people naturally have a relationship with the sea that is the exact converse to that of the Hebrews as pictured in the Bible. This topic deserves some dwelling upon in the present context.

The editors of Donne's sermons did not fail to note that an aspect of Donne's Englishness that appears incidentally but strikingly in his sermons, especially in those most oddly symptomatic of his peculiar devotion to St Paul, is language that might aptly be called 'sailor-speak.' Since London was one of the world's greatest ports, inevitably Donne's congregation at St Paul's normally included many sailors. That fact by itself explains Donne's penchant for nautical jargon. Thus, for instance, the conversion of St Paul is said to be the act by which 'a Pirate becomes a save Pilot'. (Paul is always pictured, no matter the kind of metaphor being employed, essentially as a spiritual master, a mystical guide, rather than as any sort of clerical hierarch). However, there are times when Donne's indulgence in sailor-speak seems to be partly an imitation of the classic narrative in the Acts of Paul's shipwreck in Malta.

This suspicion arises strongly in such quite frequent instances as when he works out in great detail the commanding simile of life as journey, spelling out temptation as tempest, the Church as ship, and so on:

It is well with us, if we can ride out a storm at Anchor in that confidence, till the storm blow over. It is well for us if we can bear out a storm at sea, with boarding to and again; ... It is well for us, if, though we be put to take in our sayls, and to take down

our masts, yet we can hull it out; that is, if in storms of contradiction, or persecution, the Church, or State ... be yet able to subsist and swimme above water, and reserve itselfe for God's farther glory, after the storme is past; ... He is a good Christian that can ride out, or board out, or hull out a storme, that by industry, as long as he can, and by patience, when he can do no more, over-lives a storm, and does not forsake his ship for it, that is not scandalized with that State, nor that Church, of which he is a member, for those abuses that are in it.

This interest in seafaring is natural in all those whose culture is that of an island state, as it is of Englishmen. It probably explains in part Donne's choosing to pick the topic of the shipwreck for one of his sermons on the feast of the conversion.<sup>13</sup> The structural parallelism of its place in *Acts* to that of the Passion in the gospels is probably another part of the explanation.

The sailors who formed part of Donne's London congregation had been among the first witnesses of the New Protestant brand of Christianity that had begun to break out and flourish on the continent between 1520 and 1530.<sup>14</sup> St Paul had never figured at all prominently among the saints adopted by sailors as their patron before the Reformation, possibly because the rescue from the shipwreck has nothing prodigious or miraculous about it. It may be precisely for this very same reason that Donne was induced to invoke Paul instead of the saints who traversed seas with cloaks as their vehicle. At any rate, Paul emerges as the sole intercessor now acceptable for non-superstitious manners.<sup>15</sup>

Like that of Wren's St Paul's, Donne's style tends to be baroque, but it is not Italianate. The

<sup>13</sup> The prayer in the office for the commemoration of SS Peter and Paul, according to the ancient use of St Paul's runs as follows: '*Deus, cujus dextera Beatum Petrum Apostolum ambulanti in fluctibus ne mergeretur erexit, et co-apostolum ejus Paulum tertio naufragatum de profundo pelagi liberavit, exaudi nos propitius, (et concede) ut amorum meritis aeternitatis gloriam consequamur, qui vivis et regnas Deus*'. The text is reproduced in W. Sparrow Simpson, *Documents illustrating the history of St Paul's Cathedral*, Camden Society (London, 1880), 26.

<sup>14</sup> Alain Cabantous, *Le ciel dans la mer Christianisme et civilisation marine XVI e - XIX e siècle Fayard* (Paris, 1990), 250; M. Lewis, *A Social History of the Royal Navy* (London, 1986).

<sup>15</sup> It may be noted that three of the images of St Paul usually referred to in iconographic dictionaries or art encyclopaedias as found in England are of the shipwreck: the fresco in the Chapel of St Anselm at Canterbury cathedral (c.1180); Adam Elsheimer's painting at the National Gallery, London (17th cent), and Benjamin West's at Greenwich Hospital (1789). West, of Quaker origins, incidentally was the first American artist ever to achieve an international reputation with his new classical images in which he usually managed to capture a dramatic moment in history with a haunting sense of actuality, cfr. R.C. Alberts, *Benjamin West, A Biography*, (Boston 1978).

poet-preacher is just as English in manner as is the astronomer-architect. It might well be also that Donne was directly influenced by the rabbinic Paul's 'twice-born' ways of self-expression. When to the Pauline panegyrics in Pauline style there are added the attacks, occasionally launched with Miltonic savagery, on the Roman clergy for, among other things, 'the supply of legends of the Saints in place of sound scriptural teaching', Donne appears also the equal of Wren in his pithy expression of the Pauline paradox.

### III Dialogic Ontology

For the theoretic-doctrinal-metaphysical dimension perhaps there is no better paradigm to take than John Locke (1632-1704).<sup>16</sup> He is the only English philosopher universally acknowledged to be great who was a stalwart Christian and who drew inspiration from his faith in the elaboration of the liberal political theory that decisively inspired the writing of the American Constitution.<sup>17</sup> Locke was throughout his life a Bible addict, but especially dependent on St Paul; acute Paulinism was indeed the main quality which he shared notably with his friend Sir Isaac Newton. (As early as 1690, Newton visited Locke at Oates to begin exchanging ideas with him on biblical hermeneutics. Sir Isaac counted his Pauline studies to be at least as important as his scientific work).<sup>18</sup>

Locke devoted the last few years of his life almost entirely to paraphrasing in modern language and commenting upon Paul's epistles: Galatians, Corinthians I and II, Romans, and Ephesians. When he died the work was still unfinished, but he had given instructions to his nephew to ensure that it was published posthumously. The *Paraphrases* were a popular success. They ran into many

editions, were translated into many languages, and were imitated by many other writers in the years immediately following the great British empiricist's death.<sup>19</sup>

Its Preface is subtitled: 'An essay on the Understanding of St Paul's Epistles by consulting St Paul Himself'. It deals with use and abuse of the Bible, but focuses mainly on Paul, whose teachings Locke held to be its summation. The book has risen much in general esteem over recent years mostly because of Locke's proposed hermeneutical philosophy, despite the persistent criticism of him as a ventriloquist. 'He that would understand St Paul right must understand his Terms in the Sense he uses them, and not as they are appropriated by each Man's philosophy, to Conceptions that never enter'd the Mind of the Apostle.'

Locke developed two of the ground ideas in political philosophy for which he is most renowned – on religious toleration and minimalist government – in the course of his Pauline meditations.

His reflections on the first topic stem from considerations on the relation between revelation and rational thought.<sup>20</sup> Paul's epistles were as much Locke's favourite New Testament text as they were Donne's, despite the vast difference between their temperaments. Locke preferred Paul essentially because of the 'reasonableness' of his Christianity.<sup>21</sup> It is true that Locke – as against Hume's blatant misinterpretation of him – recognized with Paul that there were a few revealed truths that were above reason, but for the most part the doctrine of Christianity, the ethical, were just commonsense (of which Locke is regarded by most historians of philosophy as the self-appointed apostle-in-chief).<sup>22</sup>

<sup>16</sup> M. Cranston, *John Locke* (London, 1957); J. Dunn, *John Locke* (Oxford, 1984); J.D. Mabbott, *John Locke* (Oxford, 1970); G. Parry, *John Locke* (London, 1978); W.S. and N.L. Sahakian, *John Locke* (Boston, 1975); R.S. Wodehouse, *John Locke* (Briton, 1992).

<sup>17</sup> R.W. Grant, *John Locke's Liberalism* (Chicago, 1987).

<sup>18</sup> Cfr. H. McLachlan, *The Religious Opinions of Milton, Locke and Newton* (Manchester, 1941); F.M. Manuel, *The Religion of Isaac Newton* (Oxford, 1968).

<sup>19</sup> A modern edition of the *Paraphrases* has been published (with a long introduction and copious notes by A.W. Wainwright) in two volumes by the Clarendon Press, Oxford in 1987.

<sup>20</sup> J.T. Moore, 'Locke's Analysis of Language and the Ascent to Scripture', *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 37, 4 (1976), 707-14; D. Snyder, 'Faith and Reason in Locke's Essay', *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 47 (1986), 197-213.

<sup>21</sup> G.R. Cragg, *From Puritanism to the Age of Reason; A study of Change in Religious Thought within the Church of England 1660 to 1700* (Cambridge, 1950).

<sup>22</sup> Cfr. M.V.C. Jeffreys, *John Locke: Prophet of Common Sense* (London, 1967).

Christ's teaching about the relation between God and Caesar and the appropriate behaviour towards enemies become foundation stones of Lockeanism because of their super-eminent rationality.<sup>23</sup>

Even more attention was given by Locke to the other big bone of contention among the philosophers theologians of his age: how corrupt was man?<sup>24</sup>

Locke derives the answer (and the whole of the anthropology that had to do heavy duty as the foundation of his political theory) from St Paul's letter to the Romans. Adam's fall did not result in total depravity but in mortality by inevitable accident. The essential effect of the Fall was fallibility, but left man still in enjoyment of a degree of freedom.<sup>25</sup> Hence – despite the human need of governance because of the fallibility, the best government was weak, and preserved in desirably enfeebled state by proliferation of checks and balances.

In the course of 'paraphrasing' Paul's views on many other topics, Locke has projected the image of a Saint Paul who could be regarded as the grandfather of Liberalism. This Lockean St Paul is a close kinsman of the St Paul portrayed by Donne (and, it seems to me, also Badiou), although the two are by no means identical in spiritual profile.<sup>26</sup> *Prima facie*, one such topic is that of the rights of women.

Locke interprets Paul's arch-famous text on women – to be or not to be veiled, to prophesy or not to prophesy, etc. – as not excluding them from leader roles in liturgical assemblies. But Locke's exegesis does not hit upon the mistranslation of *exousia* and on the whole deserves a prize for prudence more Petrine than Pauline as its most distinctive merit.

Locke's philosophy can be seen as the

completion with a third dimension of what might be called the Paulinisation of English culture. First Wren had created an unprecedented Pauline architecture, the artistic expression of an integral humanism understood to be the perfectly rounded image of the transcendent; a space the configuration of which was determined more by the desire to ensure resonance of the Word rather than by a saint-dedicated sacrificial altar; thus he gave a local habitation to the Pauline spirituality, 'twice-born' and charismatic that Donne had projected; then Locke spun out a Pauline political philosophy (a State that governs minimally and tolerantly in response to man's being a tissue of freedom and fragility). Thus the cult of St Paul became firmly established and dominant in every cultural department of post-Reformation England.

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The image of St Paul that emerged at the time of the establishment of the Church of England has remained powerfully present in the Anglican Communion down to our own day.<sup>27</sup> In all the three dimensions of religion, it is possible even by the briefest of references to signal out the continued presence of a Pauline focus. If the paradox may have become somewhat softened in comparison with the early days, it is perhaps less through mitigation of Pauline enthusiasm than through admission of others to the same sphere of glory, in stricter fidelity to the spirit of Paul himself. In the institutional sphere, the preference for a Pauline rather than a Petrine focus is perhaps nowhere more visible than in the missionary activity that, despite all the ambivalences

<sup>23</sup> Cfr. S. Lamprecht, *The Moral and Political Philosophy of John Locke* (New York 1962).

<sup>24</sup> Cfr. W.M. Spellman, *John Locke and The Problem of the Pravit* (Oxford, 1988).

<sup>25</sup> Cfr. R. Polin, 'Locke's Conception of Freedom' in *John Locke: Problems and Perspectives*, ed. J. Yolton (Cambridge, 1969); M. Johnson, *Locke on Freedom* (Austin, 1977).

<sup>26</sup> Besides the controversies raised by the atheist philosopher Alain Badiou (*St. Paul et La Fondation de L'Universalisme*, Paris, 1997), there has been a very remarkable revival of interest in the political implications of St Paul's doctrine and praxis in recent years. Among the most notable are the contributions of Jacob Taubes, *La Théologie Politique de Paul*, Schmitt, Benjamin, *Nietzsche et Freud* (Paris, 1999), and Giorgio Agamben, *Le temps qui vient. Un Commentaire à L'épître aux romains* (Paris, 2000). These extremely interesting works have been critically reviewed by Paul Ricoeur and by Jean Claude Monod in *Espri*, Feb. 2003, 85-2124. Nevertheless, it is paradoxical that no one of these commentators seems to be aware of the very relevant and surprisingly actual political application of Pauline theology made by the founder of modern liberal thought, John Locke himself.

<sup>27</sup> Cfr. e.g., J.W.C. Wand, *Anglicanism in History and Today* (London, 1963) Stephen C. Neal, *Anglicanism* (Baltimore, 1965).

almost inherent in the nature of the British empire, led to the genesis and growth of the world-wide and very polychrome Anglican Communion of the one-nation Church of England. It is hardly possible to imagine a more Pauline development of the societal dimension of a Church community.

In the devotional sphere, it is very striking that both the major thrusts, in opposite directions that arose out of the Church of England in the Victorian Age, Methodism on the one side and Anglo-Catholicism on the other, were greatly inspired by specifically Pauline spirituality.<sup>28</sup> In this connection, it might be noted that in 1622, Donne preached to the Virginia Company. 'Donne's sermon on this occasion has been termed 'the first missionary sermon' – but Donne was not the first preacher to exhort the company to take the gospel to the natives of the lands they were opening up for trade'.<sup>29</sup>

In the doctrinal sphere, it suffices to peruse

almost any exposition, whether academic or popular in appeal, of Anglicanism for the continued centrality of Paul's philosophical – theological insights to be apparent. For instance, if one turns to Archbishop Michael Ramsey, surely one of the most authoritative of recent explorers of the Anglican identity, one finds him unfolding his vision of 'the future of the Christian Church' by focussing on Paul's treatment of death and resurrection in Paul to the Corinthians; pondering up the relationship between 'the Church and the World' by focussing on St Paul's concept of *doulos* in the Letter to the Philippians; contemplates the path 'Towards Unity' in the light of Paul's 'one Lord, one faith' etc. passage in the Letter to the Ephesians.<sup>30</sup> Likewise Pauline centrality still remains a most striking feature of more eccentric or even post-modern Christian protagonists of post-Reformation English culture. Wren's St Paul's remains, for all them, the cathedral *par excellence*.

<sup>28</sup> Cfr. Owen Chadwick, *The Victorian Church* (London, 1966).

<sup>29</sup> R.C. Bald, *John Donne* (Oxford, 1970), 436.

<sup>30</sup> Michael Ramsey, 'Ecclesia Anglicana' in *The Gospel and the Catholic Church* (London, 1990).

WIGNACOURT MUSEUM (RABAT – MALTA)  
XXV ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATIONS

MUSEO WIGNACOURT (RABAT – MALTA)  
CELEBRAZIONI XXV ANNIVERSARIO

ACTS OF THE INTERNATIONAL SYMPOSIUM, 26–27 JUNE 2006  
ATTI DEL SIMPOSIO INTERNAZIONALE, 26–27 GIUGNO 2006

The Cult of St Paul  
in the Christian Churches  
and  
in the Maltese Tradition

Il culto di San Paolo  
nelle chiese cristiane  
e  
nella tradizione maltese

John Azzopardi (ed.)

*Don Giovanni Azzopardi*