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**“For I am already being poured out like a drink offering, and the time for my departure is near” (II Tim 4, 6).
The Last Period of the Missionary Activity of the Apostle Paul and the Beginning of Martyrdom**

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Abstract

The present study seeks to bring to light the last period of the missionary work of Saint Paul the Apostle and the beginning of his martyrdom. I have highlighted, from the very beginning, the plurivalency of the personality of the one who, with so much worthiness, will bear the title of Apostle to the Gentiles. His emergence in the biblical history takes place at a fairly delicate moment, more precisely in the middle of a terrifying scene. Young and enthusiastic, having the feeling of serving a noble cause, he witnesses the death of Dean Stephen, the Apostle Paul's biography beginning with the martyrdom of Saint Stephen and ending with his own martyrdom.

Very soon, after this tragic picture, we will find him invested with the power of the high public administration, against those who were announcing Christ. This situation will not last long, because the divine intervention will transform him profoundly from a persecutor of Christians into a fervent preacher. This metanoic process will begin with the itinerary on the road of Damascus, a crucial moment in his life, since

from this moment he has the revelation that will persuade him to preach the One whom he had longly persecuted, even with the risk of suffering for Him and on His behalf.

This will be the moment to confirm his mission of bringing light to those who were in the shadow of the spiritual death, the entire humanity of darkness will thrive on the message that this minister of Christ's teachings brought.

Without much opportunity, the Apostle Paul managed to transform the heathen world into a people of righteousness, his missionary journeys being an extremely important element that will change the future of mankind.

With all his attitude of true soldier of Christ, Saint Paul the Apostle was the one who trumped the good news of salvation to the end of the ages, being the one who spread the idea of love and peace among people, the multiplicity of the paulin genius putting its mark forever on the propagation of the Gospel of Christ and on the teaching that the Church will preach on.

Keywords

Saint Paul the Apostle, missionary activity, apology, preacher, martyrdom

I. Introduction: From the persecution of the Lord to the apology of His teachings

In full agreement with the information on the Luke's line and described in the Acts of the Apostles, we state that the Christian doctrine has spread to the edges of the earth, and "a decisive contribution to its dissemination was largely due to zeal, personality"¹, and multilingualism of the genius of St. Paul the Apostle.

Being endowed with an inborn Jewish subtlety, genius of the Torah and fervent defender of the Jewish cult, Saul was given the official authority to persecute the Christians². In its acceptation, Christianity was a "sect (*hairexis ton nazoraion*) that formed within Judaism"³ and which claimed all of the prophecies of the Old Testament. This had led him to watch impassively how Christians were taken to death for the Crucified, and more than that, mobilized himself in the persecution of the Galileans, throwing them in prison and making them repudiate their ideals and beliefs.

¹ JUSTINIAN, Patriarhul Bisericii Ortodoxe Române, "Sfinții Apostoli Petru și Pavel în lumina apostolicității și sobornicității Bisericii", in: *Ortodoxia*, XIX (1967) 2, p. 153.

² *Dicționar Biblic*, Editura Cartea Creștină, Oradea, 1995, p. 975.

³ Constantin PREDA, "Saul, care se numește și Pavel. Apostolul evreu al ne-evreilor", in: *Studii Teologice*, VI (2010) 2 p. 43.

“For I am already being poured out like a drink offering, and the time for my departure is near” ...

Clothed with the wisdom gained from Gamaliel, he was full of zeal in the depths of his theology, devoted to the Jewish law, with all its hypocrisy⁴, insidious and convinced that he had to cut through the blood the ideological rebellion of Christians. This situation will not be long, because the ecstatic vision on the road to Damascus will transform it deeply. From this moment on, the depth of his rabbinical teaching opens to the sky of the fulfillment of prophecies in the Messiah, penetrates, preaches and interprets the Gospel of Christ as no one had ever done before. His call to the teachings of Christ “meant disarming the most dangerous opponent of Christianity and his turning into the greatest Apostle”⁵.

Through the preaching that he will accomplish, Paul, the convert, will become a “chosen vessel called to preach Christ’s teaching to the Gentiles”⁶, breaking Europe into pieces with all its idols, and preparing it for the breaking of bread in the Divine Liturgy. As a result of the conversion from the road of the Damascus, he was invested with a sacred mission, becoming a servant of the Gospel- **διάκονος εὐαγγέλιον** (Eph 3,7; Col 1,23) and minister of the Church - **διάκονος εκκλησίας** (Col 1, 24-25)⁷, with this authority penetrating into the hearts of those who received the word of the Gospel. When he was preaching, heavens were listening to him, for the Lord’s wounds hurt him terribly, and Christ, the Lord, was speaking to him. He was as thin as a reed, but the power of God rested inside him, and even if he was small in stature, he used to see the heights of heaven. Although his voice was low, the world was silent when he was sharing the light and warmth of the divine grace.

He was slapped by the angel of Satan, but he crushes through the preaching, the Satan’s raids on the entire continent of Europe. He suffers terribly, but brings to eternal joy a great crowd of people. The way he outlines his preaching, through the holiness of life and the personal example remains eloquent for contemporary world. In the brilliant apology that he

⁴ Nicolae M. IONIȚĂ, *Convertirea Sfântului Apostol Pavel – Apologie Biblică*, Chișinău, Tipografia Eparhială Cartea Românească, 1932, p. 32.

⁵ Ioan RĂMUREANU, Milan ȘESAN, Teodor BODOGAE, *Istoria Bisericească Universală*, vol I (1-1054), București, Ed. Institutului Biblic și de Misiune al Bisericii Ortodoxe Române, 1987, p. 73.

⁶ Ioan MIRCEA, “Organizarea Bisericii și viața primilor creștini după Faptele Apostolilor”, in: *Studii Teologice*, VII (1955) 2, p. 77.

⁷ Marin STAMATE, “Noțiunea de diakonia la Sfântul Apostol Pavel”, in: *Ortodoxia*, XXVI (1974) 3, p. 478.

makes to love, considering it as the most valuable asset (I Cor 13, 13, Gal 5, 22), superior even to the divine gifts (I Cor 13, 10), it is relevant the distinctive sign of the ministry of Christ⁸.

He wrote deeply for all Christian breath, being persecuted and chained to Christ, but his words remained for posterity as a shock wave of God's grace.

He became a confessor of Christ and a defender of His teachings, and then a holy one, actively working his whole life to rest in the eternal life of Christ. Nothing was more important to him than the souls of those who were taken from the bondage of death into the realm of promise, to the eternal kingdom of God.

II. "... I have become all things to all people so that by all possible means I might save some" (I Cor 9, 22). End of missionary activity

The area of the Apostle Paul's preaching mission was a very complex one. In order to spread the word of God and the calling of the Gentiles to salvation, the one converted on the path of the Damascus was made himself everything to everyone, the same as he himself had to say. He is the one who "marked the beginnings of Christianity to such an extent that some theologians appointed him the second founder of the Christian faith"⁹. Accompanied by his collaborators, including Barnabas¹⁰, John-

⁸ Ilie MOLDOVAN, "Semnificația și responsabilitatea slujirii preoțești după Sfântul Apostol Pavel", in: *Ortodoxia*, XXXI (1979) 2, p. 291.

⁹ Kieran I. O'MAHONY, *Theology for Today. The Pauline Writings*, volume one, Dublin, The Priory Institute, 2009, p. 11.

¹⁰ *Barnabas* or *Varnava*, from the etymological point of view, comes from the Aramaic language and means "son of caress" or "son of prophecy". He is also called Joseph and was born on the island of Cyprus (Acts 4, 36), and after the spread of Christianity in those lands, he joined this teaching, later being part of the 70 disciples of the Savior. After the Descent of the Holy Spirit he sells his land and brings the money at the feet of the Apostles. Knowing Saul from childhood, he would bring him from Tars where he had retreated to Syria's Antioch by helping him to integrate into the apostolic group (Acts 9, 27). He attended the Apostle Paul in the missionary journeys, and in the years 49-50, with Paul, he took part in the Apostolic Synod of Jerusalem as delegates of the Syria's Antioch Church. At the end of the Synod's works, he goes on mission to Cyprus, with John Mark, his nephew (Acts 15, 39-40), in others' opinions, his cousin. It seems that Barnabas then met again with Paul, who would entrust him with various

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Mark¹¹ Sila, Tit, Timothy, Aquila and Priscilla and many others, undertook three missionary journeys between the years 45 and 58, crossing the sea and land, sometimes under great conditions throughout the Roman Empire at that time. The Greek-Roman paganism was embellished with a multitude of religious ideas, superstitions, myths, prejudices and sins. It was materialized in great temples and statues accompanied by various ritual forms, all of which constituted the glory of Paganism. The Arena in which the Apostle to the Gentiles had to run and fight, in order to reach a desired end, was of great magnitude. A multitude of sins, contrasts, injustices and social displeasures darkened the face of a world that St. Paul had started to convert and change it into appearance.

The missionary activity of the Apostle to the Gentiles consisted of a constant desire for preaching, both for his people and for those from other nations. Departing from Antioch of Syria, he preaches in the cities: Pafos, Pisidia, Likonia, Antioch of Pisidia, Iconium, Listra, Derbe, Perga, Galatia, Frigia, Misia, Troy, Samotracia, Neapolis, Philippi, Amphipolis, Corinth, Ephesus, Macedonia, Iliria, Milet, Tyr, Ptolemaida, Jerusalem and Spain.

ministries in the newly established communities (I Cor 9, 6, II Cor 12,18), being close to Paul also during captivity (Col 4, 10). From the information we hold, Barnabas seems to have been stoned in the city of Salamina on the island of Cyprus, in the year 63. From Dorotheus' list, containing the names of the seventy disciples of the Savior we also find out that Barnabas had become a bishop of the Mediolan. Today, the Orthodox Church celebrates him on June 11 of each year. See, Ioan MIRCEA, *Dicționar al Noului Testament*, București, Ed. Institutului Biblic și de Misiune al Bisericii Ortodoxe Române, 1995, p.56; Ene BRANIȘTE, Ecaterina BRANIȘTE, *Dicționar Enciclopedic de cunoștințe religioase*, Caransebeș, Editura Diecezană, 2001, p 530.

¹¹ *John Mark* is the son of Mary, in Hebrew, his name is translated as “God has shown His mercy”. The books of the New Testament he appears under the name of John Mark; John was the Hebrew name, while Mark was the Roman name. Mark was originally from Jerusalem, being a cousin with Barnabas: Aristarchus, the imprisoned with me, and Mark the cousin of Barnabas, embraces you ... (Col. 4, 10). His mother's name was Mary, and her house served as a home and prayer house for the apostles, and later for the primary community in Jerusalem. John Mark had accompanied accompanied Paul and Barnabas on the first missionary journey (Acts 12, 25) to Perga in Pamphile, after which he returned to Jerusalem, while Paul and Barnabas continued their journey . He was present at Jerusalem on the occasion of the Apostolic Synod in the year 49-50, and then accompanied Barnabas on the second missionary journey (Acts 12, 25; 13, 13; 15, 37-39). After this account, there is no mention of John Mark in the book of Acts of the Holy Apostles, but his name was found in several Pauline epistles: Tim 4, 11; Phil 2: 3; I Pt 5: 13. Dumitru BONDALICI, *Enciclopedia marilor personalități din Vechiul și Noul Testament*, Caransebeș, Editura Diecezană, 2004, pp 473-474.

The mission of the Apostle Paul in these cities was decisive for the future of Christianity as well as for the religious, moral and cultural destinies of the Greco-Roman world¹². In most of the lands he crossed, he founded Christian communities, converted people with important positions and major responsibilities, people who would play a very important role in preaching the word of God. The teaching proclaimed by the Apostle to the Gentiles “was to identify Jesus Christ with the prophecies of the Old Testament, with the Crucified and Risen Messiah”¹³.

The third missionary journey proved to be, as well as the first two, prolific and full of extraordinary results for the spread of Christianity to the gentiles. This long missionary journey started no later than the year 54 autumn and completed in the summer of the year 58, had a dual purpose: to fulfill the promise made to the Ephesian Christians to return to them and the research of the communities set up, either personally, or through disciples or through epistle¹⁴.

However, unfortunately the last part of his missionary activity was marked by several negative aspects, his life becoming a mixture of pain and passion. Thus, during the third missionary journey, the Apostle of the Gentiles endured dangers, beatings, dungeons, hunger, thirst and persecution (II Cor 6, 4-5.11.23-27), and a physical illness often took his powers down, but he considered that he was given all these not to praise himself with the multitude of discoveries that he was worthy of (II Cor 12, 7-9). With all these trials, no suffering diminished his relentless zeal for the spreading of the Gospel of Christ, because in the year 58 his thoughts were directed to the capital of the empire, Rome and to Spain (Rom 15, 24-28).

At the end of the third missionary journey, the last settlement in which Paul is three days away is Caesarea of Palestine¹⁵.

¹² Teodor M. POPESCU, “Sfântul Pavel, Apostolul Neamurilor”, in: *Studii Teologice*, III (1951) 7-8, p. 369.

¹³ Edith M. HUMPHREY, “Glimpsing the Glory: Paul’s Gospel, Righteousness and the Beautiful Feet of N.T. Wright”, in volume *Jesus, Paul and the People of God. A Theological Dialogue with N.T. Wright*, Illinois, Inter Varsity Press, 2010, p. 164.

¹⁴ Leon ARION, *Compendiu neotestamentar de introducere și exegeză*, Ediția a treia, Ploiești, 2010, p. 81.

¹⁵ *The Caesarea in Palestine* or *Caesarea Maritima* (παράλιος Καισάρεια) is the city where the King of Judea, Herod the Great (37 BC - 4 AD), changed his name to Caesarea in honor of the Roman emperor Octavian Augustus Caesar. At the beginning of

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Here he will stay in the house of Philip, one of the seven deacons. Now the prophet Agab preaches the arrest of St. Paul by the Jews at Jerusalem and his surrender to the Roman authority (Acts 21, 8-10).

However,

“the Apostle Paul follows his destiny without being constrained by the prayers and tears of the companions and Christians of Caesarea, showing that he was always ready to give his life for Christ and His teaching. He proves that the limit to where he should go for the confession of Christ is self-sacrifice. And even if, humanly, he suffers, knowing how far he has to pass, his determination to go to Jerusalem remains unchanged. The firm attitude and indignation of the Apostle to the Gentiles, who, even though knew what was waiting for him at Jerusalem, affirmed his right to choose the ministry of Christ regardless of the risks this work contained”¹⁶.

Through his preaching, lifestyle and activity, St. Paul communicates and gives himself totally to Jesus Christ¹⁷.

After saying good-bye to his brothers he reassured the Christians of Caesarea and his companions who entrusted themselves and their teacher to the will of God, saying, “The will of the Lord be done” (Acts 21, 12-14).

the Christian era, Caesarea became the political center of the Roman administration in what was to be called the Holy Land. The city was the civilian and military capital of the province of Judea and the official residence of the Roman procurators, governors and prefects, including Pontus Pilate and Antonius Felix. In the archaeological site of Caesarea of Palestine there was discovered in 1961 a stone inscription that mentions Roman prefect Pilate, the only archaeological testimony of this character mentioned in the Holy Gospels. Historians also believe that Caesarea was the main residence of Pilate, who went to Jerusalem only when necessary. The city was an important urban center for primary Christianity. St. Luke mentions the *Caesarea* in Palaestine in the Acts of the Apostles, telling about the work of the Holy Apostles Peter, Philip and especially Paul, in this city. Here in Caesarea, the Apostle Paul was imprisoned before being sent to Rome to be judged. See Jonathan L. REED, *Archaeology and the Galilean Jesus: a Re-examination of the Evidence*, Michigan, Trinity Press International, 2002, p.18; Daniel J. HARRINGTON, *Historical Dictionary of Jesus*, Scarecrow Press, p. 32.

¹⁶ Sabin VERZAN, *Sfântul Apostol Pavel*, Editura Basilica, București, 2016, p. 281.

¹⁷ John CORRIE, *Dictionary of Mission Theology. Evangelical foundations*, Illinois, Inter Varsity Press, 2007, p. 268.

III. Jerusalem, place of the beginning of the Pauline martyrdom

After being entrusted to the Lord, the Apostle of the Gentiles prepares to go to Jerusalem (Acts 21, 15-16). Accompanied by some Christians from Caesarea, whom he calls brothers, obviously brothers in faith, the Apostle Paul travelled about 100 kilometers, the distance between Caesarea and Jerusalem. It seems, however, that Mnason of Cyprus (Acts 21,16), an old disciple in whose house the Apostle was housed, did not live in the Holy City, but in a nearby locality; in the book of Acts¹⁸.

Here, the Apostle to the Gentiles will feel safe and, at the same time, will spend a quiet night before entering Jerusalem where, after so many gloomy prophecies and unfavorable news, he was expecting heavy moments¹⁹.

Reflecting on his intense missionary activity, we find out that the Apostle of the Gentiles preached the Gospel of Christ in the western parts of the Roman Empire: in Asia and the East of Europe, with particular emphasis on populated and higher cultural and economic centers. He had touched Iliria to the northwestern and southern parts of the Balkan Peninsula, meeting him all over the places where the Jews had settled, and where his word penetrated to the nations²⁰. Realizing that he was at a turning point in his work, the Apostle Paul considered as expedient and beneficial to present a synthesis of his work of spreading the word of God to the church community in the holy city of Jerusalem.

This is why St. Paul will go to Jerusalem, although he knew the danger he was subjected to by making this journey. In this context, St. Luke presents Paul as preacher of the Gospel, coming to Jerusalem to go again the path of Christ's sufferings²¹.

Having arrived at the destination, together with Luke and the Apostle to the Gentiles, he will be gladly welcomed by the brothers in the Mother Church of this city, but at the same time with restraint, because the brothers of Jerusalem knew the negative intentions of the Jews in the holy city.

¹⁸ Andrew Finlay WALLS, "Mnason", in: *The New Bible Dictionary* (3rd ed.), Inter Varsity Press. 1996, p. 775.

¹⁹ Sabin VERZAN, *Sfântul Apostol Pavel*,..., p. 282.

²⁰ A. J. FESTUGIERE and P. FABRE, *Le monde gréco-roman au temps de Notre-Seigneur*; vol 2, Paris, 1935, pp. 231-234.

²¹ Constantin PREDA, "Saul, care se numește și Pavel. Apostolul evreu al ne-evreilor...", p. 54.

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The next day, Paul is welcomed by the group of elders, in the presence of Jacob the ruler of the Christian community in Jerusalem. The information brought to their attention about the conversion of more and more nations into the teachings of Christ gave feelings of joy and spiritual satisfaction to the hearts of all present.

Also on this occasion it is assumed that the Apostle Paul offered to the Church in Jerusalem the help he had gathered for the Christians in this city from the brothers of Achaia, Galatia and Macedonia. In the Pauline view, these gifts collected for the Jerusalem community were not only a deed of mercy, but also a ministry (δικονία), a communion (κοινωνία), a blessing (εὐλογία) and a spiritual gift (χάρις)²².

These aids were obvious evidence of love and Christian philanthropy frequently encountered in the Primary Church. Moreover, the preaching of the Gospel of Christ along with the Christian ministry is the very essence of the Pauline apostolate.

This state of incipient joy will be shadowed by the atmosphere contrary to the Apostle to the Gentiles with the predominance of those in Asia who accused Paul of advising the Jews from the diaspora to apostate from Judaism, *to deny Moses - ἀποστασίαν διδάσκεις ἀπό Μωϋσέως* (Acts 21, 21), telling them not to cut their children around, nor to follow their ancestral customs²³.

These serious accusations could have had unpleasant consequences, so they had to be denied, in this sense a special plan being put in place (Acts 21, 23-24). Jacob the Right urges Paul to resort to a stratagem and, according to the Mosaic Law, to assume the voluntary vote of the Nazareth²⁴ together with four other men, thus invalidating the accusations

²² Justin MOISESCU, “Sfântul Pavel și viața celor mai de seamă comunități creștine, în epoca apostolică”, in: *Studii Teologice*, III (1951) 7-8, p. 414.

²³ *Noul Testament-Faptele Apostolilor*; ediție bilingvă, Introducere, traducere, comentariu și note patristice de Cristian BĂDILĂ, Editura Vremea, București, 2017, pp. 397-398.

²⁴ The term Nazarite comes from the Hebrew word *nazir*; the Septuagint translates as “consecrated” or “set apart”. Nazarite is the “saint of the Lord – *naziraios*” (Num 6, 8) and must guard against any unclean ritual. The law’s prescriptions he follows are in accordance with those respected by the High Priest and the priests in worship, as described in the Leviticus book. The assumption of this ascetic vote required the man to refrain from wine, vinegar (made of wine), grapes, raisins and any alcoholic beverage. To refrain from cutting hair and beard, to avoid the bodies, even those of a family member (according to the Jewish Law and any dead body was considered

and avoiding the hostility of the Jews. Paul will accept the suggestion of St. Jacob to accompany and help four Christian Jewish men who had made the Nazareth's vote. This Paul's vote in no way represents a compromise with Judaism, but is an expression of Paul's Christian charity, a Jewish Christian to the Jewish Christians in Jerusalem, in order to erase their false ideas and win their trust, thus showing that it is not against the practices of the Mosaic law, but he himself was faithfully keeping the law.

Facts of great significance that took place at the temple in connection with the Apostle to the Gentiles had the effect attracting the entire city of Jerusalem in their pursuit. But this fact led to the knowledge of the tribune of the cohort (*lat. tribunus militum; gr. χιλίαρχω τῆς στείρης*), Claudius Lysias who assured the guard and order around the temple (Acts 21, 31)²⁵.

Unjustly accused of profanating the Temple of Jerusalem by putting Trophim of Ephesus into it (Acts 21, 29), the Apostle was assaulted from all sides by the crowd with the intention of killing him. Sentinels at the gates of the fortress immediately announced the Roman garrison near the Temple and only the prompt intervention of the Roman tribune, Claudius Lysias, who ordered that Paul should be handcuffed, saved the life of the Apostle²⁶.

After that, Roman chiliarch (*χιλίαρχος*) went to investigate the cause of the disturbance, but because he could not get any eloquent information from the ignorant crowd that had been fierce, he ordered that Paul should be taken to the fortress in order to investigate him. At the beginning, Claudius Lysias misidentified St. Paul with the impression that he was an *Egyptian*

unclean). This vote was usually for a fixed period of time, 7, 30, 90 or even 100 days. At the beginning of the Nazarite period, the man assumed used to sacrifice a lamb, a sheep, a ram, and a basket of bread and cakes. In some cases, one of the parents made this vote to his son, a vote the child had to respect for his entire life. See, *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, Volume X, New York, The Encyclopedia Press, Inc., 1913, p. 727.

²⁵ The Tribune of the Cohort (*lat. tribunus militum; gr. χιλίαρχω τῆς στείρης*) was named Claudius Lysias, who was the cohort commander stationed in the fortress of Antonia, located near the Temple. It consisted of 1,000 soldiers, 760 pedestrians and 240 horse-men, and one of the missions of this cohort was keeping the order in the Temple. See, Barclay NEWMAN Jr., *The Greek-English Dictionary of the New Testament*, Stuttgart, Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1993, p. 198.

²⁶ *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, Volume XI, New York, The Encyclopedia Press, Inc, 1913, p. 572.

“For I am already being poured out like a drink offering, and the time for my departure is near” ... prophet who caused a rebellion against the Romans, eventually stifled by Felix, the prosecutor of Judea²⁷.

In those extremely delicate moments, the Apostle to the Gentiles kept his temper, managing to perfectly control his feelings without making any compromise on the truth. Paul appealed to the chiliarch in Greek, in a very polite manner, asking for his permission to speak, and thus the apostle denied his origin by eliminating the suspicion of the Roman commander that he was the prophet of Egypt: “I am a Jew, from Tarsus in Cilicia, a citizen of no ordinary city. Please let me speak to the people” (Acts 21, 39). Wonderfully, he was allowed to speak, which indicates that Paul had won the respect of the Roman governor.

The Apostle prepares his apology addressing in the Aramaic language to his fellow countrymen, a dialect of the Hebrew language, spoken by all the Jews of that age²⁸, which helped to increase the audience’s interest in what he had to say. In the first part of the apologetic speech, the Apostle to the Gentiles considers that period of his life when he learned the science of the great scholars of his generation, with the illustrious teacher, Gamaliel²⁹.

The effect of the teaching received after the righteousness (κατὰ ἀκρίβειαν) of the famous Rabbinic school was that, before conversion, Paul was the greatest persecutor of the Church and Christians (Acts 22, 3-5). He will understand the error in which he was only when the Lord appeared to him on the road to Damascus, and the consequence of this

²⁷ Joseph Flavius reports in his writings about the episode of the *Egyptian rebellion*. He claimed to be a prophet, had come to Jerusalem, and gathered a great crowd of subjects he led to the Mount of Olives, intending to attack the holy city from there. Prosecutor Felix intervened and chased the movement, but the Egyptian prophet escaped. Thus, the Roman ruler believes that St. Paul is the remaining Egyptian prophet. See, Flavius JOSEPHUS, *Antichități Iudaice II, Cartea a XX-a, capitolul VIII, 5*, Traducere, note și indici de nume de Ion Acsan, Editura Hasefer, București, 2001, p. 565; *Istoria Războiului iudeilor împotriva romanilor, Cartea a doua, Capitolul XIII*, Traducere de Gheneli Wolf și Ion Acsan, Editura Hasefer, București, 2004, p. 179.

²⁸ In the exile and post-exile period, the Hebrew language loses its purity and beauty. With time, the Hebrew language is replaced in speech by the Aramaic language, and since the people no longer spoke the Hebrew language, the biblical text and its interpretation could no longer be understood in the synagogue. This is why Aramaic targums and glosses appeared. This Aramaic language will also be spoken in the time of the Savior, being also used by the Apostle to the Gentiles in his defense speech. See, Emilian CORNÎTESCU, Dumitru ABRUDAN, *Limba Ebraică Biblică*, București, Editura Institutului Biblic și de Misiune al Bisericii Ortodoxe Române, 2002, p. 12.

²⁹ Teodor M. POPESCU, “Sfântul Pavel, Apostolul Neamurilor...”, p. 370.

demonstration was his election and referral to preach the new teaching “to the Gentiles and the kings” (Acts 9, 15). Therefore, in trying to persuade his fellow countrymen of the righteousness of his position as Apostle of Christ, he writes in his defense speech, the event of his conversion (Acts 22, 6-10)³⁰.

The Apostle Paul, Saul at that time, testified that he had received from Jesus the guidance of leaving Jerusalem to be sent “far away to the Gentiles” (Acts 22, 21). We must note that the Apostle Paul is the first, chronologically speaking, to be informed that the Gospel will be preached to the Gentiles³¹. When the Apostle to the Gentiles spoke of his sending to other nations, the hateful crowd demanded the death of the Apostle, and so the apology suddenly ends, interrupted by the voices and indignation of crowd³².

The previous and the present assertions that “there is no more a chosen people ... but all of us are the sons of God ... Or is God the God of Jews only? Is he not the God of Gentiles too? Yes, of Gentiles too...” (Rom 3, 29)³³, angered the crowd. They did not accept that the grace of God was to be shared with the Gentiles. Vanity as well as their national pride caused them to revolt against the thought that the uncircumcised pagans were shown equal to the sons of Abraham³⁴.

They reproached disdainfully any argument, human or divine, that could have influenced their beliefs. Seeing the disturbance produced and not understanding what it was about, the Roman chiliarch come to the conclusion that the prisoner had to be guilty of a serious deed and intended to whip him to make him confess his deed. The attempt of the Roman tribune to punish the Apostle by whipping was interrupted immediately, Paul claiming his privilege as a Roman citizen (Acts 22, 25), and exposing a citizen to such humiliation meant treason against the greatness of the Roman people.

³⁰ Sabin VERZAN, *Sfântul Apostol Pavel*,..., p. 295.

³¹ Ioan BRIA, “Slujirea Cuvântului (Fapte 6, 4)”, in: *Glusul Bisericii*, 1972 1-2 , pp. 53-55 .

³² *Noul Testament-Faptele Apostolilor*, ediție bilingvă, Introducere, traducere, comentariu și note patristice de Cristian BĂDILIȚĂ, Editura Vreamea, București, 2017, p. 408.

³³ Ioan SPIRU, “Sfântul Apostol Pavel și adevărurile evanghelice cuprinse în epistolele sale”, in: *Altarul Banatului*, IV (1993), pp. 82-83.

³⁴ Sfântul IOAN HRISOSTOM, *Comentariu la Faptele Apostolilor, Omilia XXX,1, PG LX*, 221.

"For I am already being poured out like a drink offering, and the time for my departure is near" ...

From previous scriptural references, we infer that St. Paul had been benefiting from the status of a Roman citizen since his birth (Acts 22, 25-26), which impressed Lysias, acknowledging that he had acquired the Roman citizenship by paying an important sum of money³⁵. After this finding, Claudius Lysias realizes that the only way to save his prisoner's life was to imprison him, but also to build on the situation, which led him to think of another, more lenient detention. After a deeper study, Lysias realized that St. Paul was guilty before the Jews for not complying with Mosaic Law prescriptions.

After a night spent in Fort Antonia, the following morning the bishops and the Sanhedrin gathered, and Paul was brought before them. The Apostle of the Gentiles was fully aware of the dangerous situation in which he was, he knew it was not a trial, but rather a religious dispute, for which reason he would build his apology based on theological differences between the Sadducees and the Pharisees on the resurrection of the dead doctrine, and of the existence of angels and Spirit³⁶. A simple discussion degenerates into conflict. Anania, the bishop, orders the Apostle to be slapped over his mouth, a gesture that blasphemy was punished with, but in the end it turned out that the way in which the Apostle organized his defense led to the pursued result namely: preventing a decision of sentencing to death.

In his plea, the Apostle Paul demonstrates his ability by using a stratagem, that is the reduction of his accusations to the fact that his preaching supports the doctrine *of hope in the resurrection of the dead - περί ἐλπίδος καὶ ἀναστάσεως νεκρῶν*³⁷, thus preventing serious accusations of the members of the Sanhedrin about the uselessness of facts and ritual prescriptions of the Law (Acts 23, 6).

The Pauline statements led to the sudden fracture of the members of the Sanhedrin, the Sadducees claiming that there was no resurrection, neither

³⁵ Biblical interpreters discuss the issue of the Roman citizenship of Saint Paul, some claiming to be just a Lucan fiction, because in his Epistles he does not mention anything about the status of a Roman citizen. Moreover, Roman citizenship is given by service to the empire or by special favor. It seems, however, that the father of the Apostle, an influential notary of Tarsus, will be chosen to receive this status. See, Marie-Françoise BASLEZ, *Saint Paul*, Paris, 1991, pp. 19-36.

³⁶ Dionisie STAMATOIU, *Sfântul Apostol Pavel*, in: *Mitropolia Olteniei*, 2001 1-2, pp. 54-58.

³⁷ *Noul Testament-Faptele Apostolilor*; ediție bilingvă, Introducere, traducere, comentariu și note patristice de Cristian BĂDILIȚĂ, Editura Vremea, București, 2017, p. 413.

angel nor spirit, for them the revelation being limited to the Pentateuch³⁸. The lack of understanding between the Sadducees and the Pharisees led the Roman Commander to temporarily suspend the trial, leaving the trial initiated by the Sanhedrin unresolved and without a sentence (Acts 23,10). The following night the Lord appeared to Paul in a dream, confirming through his vision the agreement with his activity, and also urging him to confess Him further (Acts 23, 11), entrusting him with the fact that his days would not end at Jerusalem³⁹.

Unfortunately for the Apostle of the Gentiles, the animosity of the Jews grows in intensity, They will not give up the thought of losing him, some of them forty in number even swore they would not put food or drink in their mouths until they killed Paul (Acts 23, 12-15). A conspiracy of over forty Jews for the assassination of Paul was revealed, which is why Claudius Lysias immediately summoned his centurions and soldiers, and gave exact orders that Paul should be safely led to Caesarea, and thus the odious plan was thwarted.

The revelation previously revealed showed a certainty, namely that the Jews would not give up their plan to remove the Apostle. Faced with this situation, Claudius Lysias would decide the immediate transfer of the Apostle to Caesarea, the seat of the governor of the province of Judea, who was also the chief of the Roman military tribune in Jerusalem.

IV. The Apostle Paul prisoner in Caesarea of Palestine

The tense situation will prove to be a good opportunity for Claudius Lysias to get rid of his uncomfortable imprisoned, by sending him to Caesarea of Palestine and entrusting him to Procurator Marcus Antonius Felix⁴⁰. With

³⁸ Stelian TOFANĂ, *Studiul Noului Testament-Curs pentru anul I de studiu*, Ediția a doua revizuită și îmbunătățită, Editura Alma Mater, Cluj-Napoca, 2005, pp. 102-103.

³⁹ Ellen G. WHITE, *Faptele Apostolilor*; Traducere de Vasile Florescu, Ed. Viața și Sănătate, București, 1999, p. 343.

⁴⁰ Marcus Antonius Felix was the Roman prosecutor of the province of Judea between the years 52-58, being the successor of Venitidius Cumanus. He was known to be a cruel man who applied severely punishing methods. Claudius Lysias would send Saint Paul to trial before Felix, who, having met his prisoner, and his wife Drusilla, would frequently call him to talk about the new teaching. See, "Felix Antonius", in: *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, vol. 10(11th ed.), Cambridge, Cambridge University Press. p. 239.

“For I am already being poured out like a drink offering, and the time for my departure is near” ...

this escort, a letter addressed to Proxel Felix, called *Aelogium*, is also sent, this letter being the only ancient text to be kept in the New Testament (Acts 23, 25-30)⁴¹.

The road between Jerusalem and Antipatrida (Ἀντιπατρίς), a town set up by Herod the Great in memory of his father Antipater, was about 50 kilometers⁴².

Once they reached there, Prosecutor Felix wanted to know as much information about the prisoner. Finding out he was from Cilicia, he decided to interrogate him later in the presence of his defendants who would be summoned to Caesarea (Acts 23, 34-35)⁴³.

In Caesarea, Paul was under guard in the praetorium, but he did not wait very much, being summoned again. Wanting to know the truth for which the Jews had accused him, commander Felix summoned the Sanhedrin delegation and brought Paul to him for clarification.

⁴¹ The letter format is consistent with the general format in the Graeco-Roman world, of *author* to *recipient* with a *greeting* with the subsequent content of the reason for the letter. This letter, however, was not altogether factual. It is an interesting specimen of Roman military correspondences (Acts 23, 26-30). Although acknowledging Paul's innocence, Claudius Lysias gave the impression that he had rescued Paul because of having learned that the apostle was a Roman, whereas in reality he had violated Paul's citizenship rights by having him bound and even ordering that he be examined under scourgings. See, John B. POLHILL, "Political Background of the New Testament," in: *Foundations for Biblical Interpretation*, David S. DOCKERY, Kenneth A. MATHEWS, and Robert B. SLOAN (eds.), Nashville, Tenn.: Broadman & Holman Publishing House, 1994, pp. 531-532.

⁴² In the year 9 B.C. the king of Judea, Herod the Great, built, as it seems, in the place of the former Pegai locality, a new city after the hypodamic system. Herod named the new city. Antipatris, in the memory of his father, Antipatros Edomite, the founder of the Antipatria dynasty. In different sources, the city's name also appears as Antipatrus or Antipatras. Antipatrida was at the crossroads of two Roman military roads linking Jerusalem and Lida to the Roman capital, Caesarea. In the Book of Acts, it is mentioned that the Apostle Paul was taken under escort by the Roman soldiers on the way from Jerusalem to the prison of Caesarea (Acts 23, 31). They left Jerusalem at night and traveled about 50 km from a mountainous region to Antipatrida (Acts 23, 31). From there, the Apostle of the Gentiles was escorted to Caesarea by 70 horsemen, crossing a road of about 40 km through a plain area. Antipatrida witnessed the events of the Jewish war, and after the war, the city was ruined and temporarily declined, so that it would later experience a new flourishing. Blasius UGOLINI, *Thesaurus Antiquitatum Sacrarum Complectens Selectissima Clarissimorum Virorum Opuscula, Antipatris*, Volume Sextum, DXXXIX (p. 539).

⁴³ Sabin VERZAN, *Sfântul Apostol Pavel*,..., p. 314.

Archbishop Anania, several elders, members of the Sanhedrin and a certain rhetor Tertullus⁴⁴, were empowered to uphold allegations against St. Paul in the process. The Apostle is characterized by Tertullus as a dangerous instigator who had produced many actions of rebellion of the people, had tried to profane the Temple, and at the end of the accusations he was blamed with resounding accusations for the Roman ruler: “We have found this man to be *a troublemaker, stirring up riots among the Jews all over the world. He is a ringleader of the Nazarene sect*” (Acts 24, 5)⁴⁵.

After this introduction, the rhetor gives voice to the accusers to present all the accusations they had brought, the Jews claiming that they were so (Acts 24, 9). Then the prosecutor gives Paul the opportunity to address his plea. The Apostle to the Gentiles begins to speak and he recognizes Felix’s authority as a judge, from the very beginning, (Acts 24, 10), after which the primordial care was to deny that he had made a “crowd disorder” or profaned the Temple⁴⁶, adding that: “These men cannot prove the things they accuse me of doing” (Acts 24,13). Then he invokes that the Sanhedrin did not find any injustice done by him, their great dissatisfaction consisting in his support in the hope of the resurrection of the dead and in the fact that he had proclaimed to the Gentiles the new saving doctrine⁴⁷.

After a through analysis of the events exposed by the two sides and knowing the Christian teaching quite well, being in Judea for many years, Prosecutor Felix finds that Paul is innocent. However, in order to alleviate the suspicions of the parties and under the pretext of listening to Commander Lysias as well, he decided to postpone the verdict, refusing to release Paul, because of the morals of that time, hoping to receive a sum of money from Paul (Acts 24, 26).

⁴⁴ About Tertullus (a common name frequently known as Tertius), we know he was a rhetor, a specialist in the art of speaking as a masterly. Being a connoisseur of Greek and Roman law, he was hired by the members of the Sanhedrin to persuade Prosecutor Felix of the fairness of the ideas and accusations against St. Paul the Apostle. Through a through but truthless argumentation, Tertullus tries to describe Paul as an instigator who does not respect the Mosaic Law and creates problems for Roman authority. See, *Dicționar Biblic*, Editura Cartea Creștină Oradea, 1995, p. 1268.

⁴⁵ *Noul Testament-Faptele Apostolilor*,..., p. 422.

⁴⁶ J. DUPONT, *Etudes sur les Actes des Apôtres*, Paris, 1967, p. 527.

⁴⁷ Mikeal C. PARSONS, *Luke – Storyteller, Interpreter, Evangelist*, Massachusetts, Hendrickson Publishers, 2006, p. 135.

"For I am already being poured out like a drink offering, and the time for my departure is near" ...

However, willing to please the Jews, Prosecutor Felix will keep Paul under guard in Caesarea of Palestine for two years 57-59 or 58-60, until the expiration of the procurator's term, leaving the final decision to be put in application by his successor (Acts 24, 27)⁴⁸. Two years after the incarceration of the Apostle to the Gentiles, Prosecutor Felix was replaced by Emperor Nero, most likely in the summer of 59 or 60, and Porcius Festus is appointed as Prosecutor in Caesarea, an integral magistrate, the son of an illustrious Roman family⁴⁹.

Seeking to make a comparison between Procurator Felix and his successor Porcius Festus, we find that the new Governor Porcius Festus, invested by the Roman authority, proves to be more balanced.

His status being recognized officially, Festus goes to Jerusalem, and the members of the Sanhedrin remind him that Paul was not condemned as they had asked for. In this context, the Sanhedrinians present a new request for the Apostle's indictment, describing the same accusations formulated and sustained previously in the two processes. More than that, the Sanhedrinians demand that the accused should be transferred from Caesarea to Jerusalem, in which case they prepare a conspiracy with the intention of killing him on the road (Acts 25, 3).

Their tenacious appeal is rejected, but the Sanhedrinians are invited to Caesarea for a new interrogation. This time, the delegation of the Sanhedrinians will extend the area of accusations, but Pauline apology clearly shows that he (Paul) did not do anything wrong⁵⁰, nor to the Law, neither to the Temple and nor to Caesar (Acts 25, 8). Ascertaining Paul's innocence, but at the same time wishing to thank the Sanhedrinians, Porcius Festus proposes to the Apostle that the trial be transferred to Jerusalem, and there again be judged (Acts 25, 9).

By proposing to transfer the trial to Jerusalem, Governor Festus wanted to decline his competence. However, St. Paul takes advantage of his Roman citizenship, which grants him the right to resort to the imperial judgment, and thus appeals to the judgment of Caesar - Καίσαρα ἐπικαλοῦμαι. Invoking the judgment of Caesar, the Apostle of the Gentiles he eludes the

⁴⁸ Eckhard J. SCHNABEL, *Early Christian Mission. Paul & the Early Church*, volume two: *Missionary Work in Asia Minor, Greece and Spain*, Illinois, Inter Varsity Press, 2004, p. 1262.

⁴⁹ Leon ARION, *Compendiu neotestamentar de introduce și exegeză*,..., p. 99.

⁵⁰ Eckhard J. SCHNABEL, *Early Christian Mission. Paul & the Early Church*, volume two: *Missionary Work in Asia Minor, Greece and Spain*,..., p. 1263.

legal authority of the Procurator of Judea, and is placed under the supreme authority of Caesar⁵¹. Thus, St. Paul sees his desire to end up preaching Christ to Rome, in front of Caesar and the inhabitants of this city.

In the following period while he was in Caesarea, the Apostle of the Gentiles met King Marcus Julius Agrippa II⁵² and Berenice the older daughter of Herod Agrippa I and the sister of Agrippa II. Coming to Caesarea, King Agrippa was informed by Festus of the situation of the Apostle. Festus will show King Agrippa and Berenice his efforts to clarify the reasons why St. Paul had been incarcerated for so long (Acts 25, 14-21), while stating the Roman principle of equity, but also the Apostle's desire to be judged at Rome.

Governor Festus's narrative provokes King Agrippa's desire to see and listen to the great Apostle, and so, the next day, Paul is summoned in the courtroom. Before the representatives of Roman authority, Agrippa and Festus, Paul has a solemn apology in the form of a catechesis in which he makes an anamnesis about his conversion and the Christian teaching, which will become the substance of his missionary work. In the epilogue of his speech, Paul shows how happy the condition of the one who believes in Christ is⁵³.

The words of the Apostle of the Gentiles make a profound impression on the audience, and as a conclusion of the findings, King Agrippa states: "This man could be released, if he had not asked to be judged by Caesar" (Acts 26, 32). St. Paul's request to be judged by Caesar in Rome prompted Procurator Porcius Festus to entrust him to the Julius of Augusta cohort in the autumn of 60, embarking him on a ship to the capital of the empire, Rome. This long and unexpected journey can be perceived as the accomplishment of the apostolic project and the fulfillment of a divine aspiration.

⁵¹ *Noul Testament-Faptele Apostolilor*,..., p. 427.

⁵² Marcus Julius Agrippa II, also nicknamed "the young one", was the son of Herod Agrippa. In the year 50 or 53 he will become king of Chalcis, a small principality of Lebanon, and due to his qualities, he will later receive other territories for administration. He was a stylish erudite with good manners, with a vast cultural horizon that included deep knowledge of Judaic religion and traditions. See, William SMITH, *A Dictionary of Greek and Roman Biography and Mythology*, volume I, London, John Murray, Albemarle Street, 1870, p. 78.

⁵³ Iustinian CĂRSTOIU, *Desăvârșirea creștină în Epistolele Sfântului Apostol Pavel*, Ed. Bucura Mond, București, 1996, pp. 23-26.

V. Conclusions

1. The spread of Christian teaching on such a vast surface was largely due to the zeal, personality and multilinguality of the genius of St. Apostle Paul.

2. The preaching activity of the Apostle Paul was a very complex one, the primary purpose being to propagate the word of God and the calling of the Gentiles to salvation.

3. Unfortunately, the last part of his missionary activity was marked by a number of negative aspects, the Apostle of the Gentiles bearing dangers, beatings, persecutions and imprisonment, his life becoming a mixture of pain and passion.

4. With all these trials, no suffering diminished the relentless zeal for spreading the Gospel of Christ, leaving for Jerusalem proving this.

5. The holy city of Jerusalem, the place of the beginning of the Pauline martyrdom and the first plea before the Sanhedrin and the Roman tribune Claudius Lysias.

6. Having revealed a conspiracy of over forty Jews wishing Paul's assassination, Claudius Lysias will decide the immediate transfer of the Apostle to Caesarea of Palestine.

7. In Caesarea, the Apostle Paul claims his innocence before Procurators Marcus Antonius Felix, Porcius Festus and King Marcus Julius Agrippa II.

8. The solemn apologies held by the Apostle Paul before the dignitaries of the Roman administrative authority conclude his innocence, as revealed by King Agrippa's statement: "This man could have been set free if he had not appealed to Caesar" (Acts 26, 32).

9. The Apostle Paul's appeal to the judgment of Caesar in Rome is respected, and so the apostolic project of preaching in Caesar's city is accomplished.