

# Freedom and dependence in the Pauline writings. A theological approach according to *Colossians* and *Ephesians*\*

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## 1. Terminology and models

### 1.1. Introduction

Talking about freedom in the Pauline writings is something that goes beyond a question of terminology<sup>1</sup>. Staying there would limit the

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1. About Paul and Freedom, cf. R. N. Longenecker, *Paul, Apostle of Liberty*, Harper & Row, New York 1964; K. Niederwimmer, *Der Begriff der Freiheit im Neuen Testament*, Topelmann, Berlin 1966; S. Lyonnet, *San Pablo: libertad y ley nueva*, Sígueme, Salamanca 1967; R. Schnackenburg, “Christian Freedom according to Paul”, in *Christian Existence in the New Testament*, University of Notre Dame Press, South Bend (IN) 1969, pp. 31-53 (in Spanish: “Libertad cristiana según San Pablo”, in *Existencia Cristiana según el Nuevo Testamento. Ensayos y conferencias*, II, Verbo Divino, Estella 1971, pp. 41-63); J. Sánchez Bosch, *Libertad y gracia en la Carta a los Romanos*, Facultad de Teología, Barcelona 1973; *Maestro de los pueblos. Una teología de Pablo, el Apóstol*, Verbo Divino, Estella 2007; H. Schlier, “Chiamati a libertà. La concezione paolina della libertà”, in *La fine del tempo*, Paideia, Brescia 1974, pp. 247-265; F. Mussner, *Theologie der Freiheit nach Paulus*, Aschendorff, Düsseldorf 1976; P. Richardson, *Paul’s Ethic of Freedom*, Westminster Press, Philadelphia 1979; S. Jones, *Freiheit in den Briefen des Apostels Paulus. Eine historische, exegetische und religionsgeschichtliche Studie*, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, Göttingen 1987; S. Vollenweider, *Freiheit als neue Schöpfung. Eine Untersuchung zur Eleutheria bei Paulus und in seiner Umwelt*, Brill Deutschland GmbH, Paderborn 1989; R. Penna, “Legge e libertà nel pensiero di S. Paolo”, in J. Lambrecht (ed.), *The Truth of the Gospel (Galatians 1:1-4,11)*, Abbazia di S. Paolo, Roma 1993, pp. 249-276;

investigation to a few letters and topics<sup>2</sup>. The deepest notion of freedom is expressed with a very broad terminology and, above all, is captured in the conjunction of the fundamental dimensions of Pauline thought. These dimensions are part of a single mystery, to which the Pauline writings approach, from different points of view and using different models (which affects the images, the symbolism, the reasoning, the use of Sacred Scripture, etc.)<sup>3</sup>, based on the situations experienced by the various recipients to whom it is written. Only two letters offer, in a certain way, a more general and systematic theological vision, less linked to concrete situations, often controversial: *Romans* and *Ephesians*. There is, in any case, in the proposals, an increasingly broad and comprehensive vision of what is revealed in Christ and whose content constitutes the gospel preached by Paul<sup>4</sup>.

At the heart of that gospel is what the Letters *to the Colossians* and the *Ephesians* call *μυστήριον*. This mystery is that part of the gospel that had not been spoken of before and that has now been revealed in Christ<sup>5</sup>. It is in the context of this mystery that it is possible to approach the most essential or fundamental of human freedom, which is presented to us as a paradox that is difficult for modern man to understand and accept: God's eternal plan for men is an offering of fullness of life, in the image of the life of the Son, found in the union and mutual dependence of all,

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G. Barbaglio, *La Teologia di Paolo. Abbozzi in forma epistolare*, EDB, Bologna 1999; J. D. G. Dunn, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle*, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids (MI) 1998, L. Álvarez Verdes, *Caminar en el Espíritu. El pensamiento ético de S. Pablo*, Editiones Academiae Alphonsianae, Roma 2000.

2. For instance, *ἐλεύθερος*, *ἐλευθερία*, *ἐλευθερώω*; *δοῦλος*, *δουλεία*, *δουλεύω*, *δουλός*; *ἀπολύτρωσις*; *ἐξαγοράζω*; etc. Cf. H. Beck, "Libertad", in L. Coenen et al., *Diccionario Teológico del Nuevo Testamento (DTNT)*, II, Sígueme, Salamanca 1990, pp. 433-440; W. Mundle, "Redención", in *Diccionario Enciclopédico de Biblia y Teología*, IV, 1994, pp. 56-59; L. Roy, "Libération/liberté", in X. Léon-Dufour, *Vocabulaire de théologie biblique*, Cerf, Paris 1970, pp. 658-664.

3. J.-N. Aletti, *Essai sur l'ecclésiologie des lettres de saint Paul*, Gabalda et Cie, 2009. I quote according to the Spanish translation: *Eclesiología de las cartas de san Pablo*, Verbo Divino, Estella 2012, pp. 25-27.

4. J. Fitzmyer, *Paul and his Theology. A Brief Sketch*, Prentice Hall, Upple Saddle River (New Jersey) 1989, pp. 38-41.

5. J.-N. Aletti, *Saint Paul. Épître aux Éphésiens*, Gabalda et Cie, Paris 2001, pp. 324-326.

through love, with Christ, in God and wrought by the Holy Spirit, with an eschatological character, which already the baptized live in the present, although in a way called to be full. Freedom, therefore, appears linked to dependence and, moreover, is seen as something that one already is/has, but which is called to be fully.

In view of this, the questions that arise are: how is it possible to combine freedom and dependence? What then do that freedom and dependence consist of? How do you have that freedom and how do you live it? How do you lose that freedom and in what is this loss manifested?

In the following sections we will try to offer a series of reflections that help answer these questions, focusing on the thought contained in the Letters to the *Colossians* and to the *Ephesians*. For that, we will identify the theological ideas of the first letters that will later lead, in a logical way, to the vision of *Colossians* and *Ephesians*. This will lead us to the double metaphor of the body and the head. Then the notion of freedom that emerges from this theological approach will be studied<sup>6</sup>.

It is not the intention of this article to offer a detailed exegetical analysis of the texts. Where appropriate, it will be sent to those who have already done so. The idea is to offer a general vision, a concrete harmonization of the questions, so that the most essential part of the Pauline notion of man's freedom is illuminated as best as possible.

### 1.2. *The First Letter to the Corinthians*

The first *Letter to the Corinthians* deals with a series of issues that affect the Christian community itself and that have unity as their nuclear point. It is, therefore, an intra-ecclesial perspective. In this letter, the terminology freedom-slavery appears in various contexts: in reference to slaves<sup>7</sup>, to the freedom of the widow to take a new husband<sup>8</sup>, to the voluntary surrender to serve others<sup>9</sup>, to control one's own body<sup>10</sup>, to

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6. H. Schlier, *Grundzüge einer paulinischen Theologie*, Herder, Freiburg 1978. I quote according to the Spanish translation: *Fundamentos de una teología paulina*, BAC, Madrid 2016, pp. IX-XXV.

7. 1 *Cor.* 7, 21-23.

8. 1 *Cor.* 7, 39.

9. 1 *Cor.* 9, 19.

10. 1 *Cor.* 9, 27

the conscience<sup>11</sup>, to the servants in the Mystical Body of Christ<sup>12</sup>. These issues must be taken into account, but the reality to which they allude is not only not reduced to these apparitions, but also finds its most decisive presence in the ecclesiological and eschatological approaches of chapters 11-15, whose ideas will be taken up, with a new perspective and with an expanded model, in *Colossians* and *Ephesians*<sup>13</sup>.

Starting from the model of the body, seen from a sociological perspective, Paul speaks of the harmonious relationship between the members of the Christian community, who put at the service of all what each one can contribute, their own qualities and the gifts received, face to the common good. It is the question of unity and diversity: rich and poor, strong and weak, etc. This model is amplified by the reference to the Eucharist. The body is Christologized: what produces the proper Christian unity is the body and blood of Christ, which is offered as food to all the baptized. It is now about something that goes beyond mere coordination for a common good: the Eucharist does not *join*, but *unites*, and it does so thanks to the identification that those who take this food make with the life of Christ, who has given himself for us. For this reason, whoever does not share his goods with others or does not welcome the inferior or weakest members of the community, betrays his faith by participating in the Eucharist: the body and blood of Christ only produce unity if the one who takes them lives the faith he claims to profess<sup>14</sup>. The same thing happens with charisms: they only build if they are vivified by charity. His action is not magic<sup>15</sup>.

Chapter 15 is the culmination of the theological progression sought by the order of the issues addressed in the letter. Paul speaks of the resurrection of the (personal) body in terms of continuity and discontinuity. But, at the same time, this resurrection affects in a decisive way the body that is the Church. The letter relates *submission* to *unity* in

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11. 1 Cor. 10, 29.

12. 1 Cor. 12, 13.

13. J. Sánchez Bosch, *Maestro de los pueblos*, pp. 299-329.

14. 1 Cor. 11, 17-22.

15. 1 Cor. 12, 12-31; 14, 1-40. A. Vanhoye, *I carismi nel Nuovo Testamento*, Pontificio Istituto Biblico, Roma 2011, pp. 137-142.

terms of *fullness of life*<sup>16</sup>. We could express the logic in this way: what hinders the unity of the body and its fullness is death, which entered the world through the sin of Adam; the resurrection of Christ is the first fruit of the resurrection of all those who belong to Christ; our resurrection is *total submission* to Christ, that is, the complete kingdom of charity in the resurrected. When we are all resurrected, there will be nothing to prevent the union of all in Christ, through charity; then, Christ, with his own, will be *submitted* to the Father; that is, all will be completely united to the Father, with nothing to separate them, in a communion of life of the whole particular, in a glorious body: «ἵνα ᾗ ὁ θεὸς [τὰ] πάντα ἐν πατρὶ»<sup>17</sup>. In this way we can all have with the Father the relationship reserved for the Son<sup>18</sup>.

### 1.3. *Galatians* and *Romans*

*Galatians* and *Romans* address the question of the role and value of the Mosaic Law. Each one of them does it in a situation and with its own perspective. *Galatians* deals with a controversial issue about the value of the Law for the Jewish converts to Christianity, while *Romans* widens the field of reflection, already outside of a polemic, to the relationship between Israel, the pagans and the Christians.

In *Galatians*, freedom appears in the context of the need for the baptized not to give the Law salvific value. After speaking of the divine origin of his gospel, Paul tries to show that, if the blessings promised to Abraham depend on being his descendants, being descendants do not depend on being a subject of the Mosaic Law, but on faith in Christ (which is the true offspring of Abraham) and baptism. The key point is the filiation, which leads to the example of Hagar and Sarah, the free and the slave. The Pauline argument relates life with filiation, filiation with faith and baptism, freedom with filiation<sup>19</sup>. Based on these reflections, Paul affirms that Christ has freed from subjection to the Law of Moses, but he does

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16. 1 Cor. 15, 20-28.

17. 1 Cor. 15, 28.

18. J. L. Caballero, *Los escritos de Lucas y Pablo. Notas exegético-teológicas (I)*, Eunsa, Pamplona 2021, pp. 73-76.

19. *Gal.* 5, 1-6.

not say that the baptized person should not have a law, but rather that the law by which he must abide is that of Christ<sup>20</sup>.

In *Romans*, the approach is more general and is developed against the background of salvation history. God has desires, projects and dreams for man. If he accepts this proposal and behaves as a son of God, allowing himself to be guided by the Spirit<sup>21</sup>, he fulfills the Father's dream. What prevents the realization of those dreams is sin. In this context, Romans accentuates the division of history between before and after the redemption wrought by Christ. This redemption is liberation, concretely, from sin and its wages, death<sup>22</sup>. The reasoning of Romans goes along this line: by faith and baptism, man dies to sin and is born to the life of grace; he is now a descendant of the lineage of Christ and not of Adam<sup>23</sup>. He has left behind the slavery and death of the old humanity. The Mosaic Law served to reveal to what extent man was a slave to sin, which acted by seduction and deception, causing an inner rupture in man<sup>24</sup>. The baptized person is alive in/with Christ, has been freed from sin and is at the service of God and justice<sup>25</sup>. Thanks to Christ, believers have received the Spirit and, with him, sonship and inheritance. The baptized person is guided by this Spirit, and in him receives a capacity to act that leads to life, although he must still fight not to submit to the law of sin and death again: whether creation is liberated and bears fruit depends of him<sup>26</sup>.

The panorama described so far includes these realities, which will reappear in *Colossians* and *Ephesians*: creation, sin, slavery, death, Law, redemption, faith, baptism, filiation, life in Christ, Church. We must also add here the authority or power, not only in relation to grace and sin, but also in the context of human authorities, constituted by God for our good, to provide peace and freedom, to correct when necessary<sup>27</sup>. This reflection

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20. *Ibid.*, pp. 85-96.

21. *Rom.* 8, 14.

22. *Rom.* 6, 23.

23. *Rom.* 5, 12-21.

24. *Rom.* 7, 1-25.

25. *Rom.* 6, 15-23.

26. *Rom.* 8, 19-22. *Ibid.*, pp. 97-125.

27. *Rom.* 13, 1-7.

has been preceded by a few words about the one body that the baptized form in Christ, all being members of one another. In the line of the first *Letter to the Corinthians*, it is spoken again of how each member, in acting according to his own function, must think of the others<sup>28</sup>. The indications that are given in both *Galatians* and *Romans* about the believer's actions are a consequence of his new identity. The action of the Spirit will help him to discern what God's will is at each moment<sup>29</sup>, that is, to avoid what destroys the body and to pursue everything that seeks its unity and growth. Free action is directly related to charity, which is what builds<sup>30</sup>.

#### 1.4. *Philippians* and *Philemon*

Also in the rest of the first Pauline letters there is talk of freedom-slavery<sup>31</sup>. Faced with what is of interest here, a brief mention of two of them suffices. Paul exhorts, in *Philippians*, to have the same mind. The *exemplum* is that of Christ, who voluntarily lowers himself to become a servant even to death on the cross. The letter makes it clear that Christ gives himself voluntarily, thus relating the *greatest subjection* to the *freest act* of Christ, since what he does to take upon himself the darkest of man, the consequences of his sin. This act of supreme love is at the origin of his exaltation, and shows us how Christ has wisely exercised his power, thus achieving dominion over death itself<sup>32</sup>.

The *Letter to Philemon*, in its brevity, provides an interesting theological thought, specifically in the field of freedom and slavery, at various levels. The deepest refers to the identity of the baptized: although in social relations some are lords and others servants, the baptized must treat each other as free men in Christ, that is, according to the law of Christ. Guided by it, each one must discern how to behave in each specific situation<sup>33</sup>.

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28. *Rom.* 12, 3-8.

29. *Rom.* 12, 2.

30. *Gal.* 5, 1-6, 10; *Rom.* 9, 12-21.

31. *1 Thess.* 1, 9; *2 Cor.* 3, 17; 4, 5; *Phil.* 1, 1; 2, 7; *Philem.* 1, 16; *1 Tim.* 6, 1-2; *Titus* 1, 1; 2, 9; 3, 3; *2 Tim.* 2, 2. And, if we include *δέσμιος*: *Phil.* 1,7;14, 17; *Philem.* 1, 1, 9, 10, 13; *2 Tim.* 1, 8; *Hebr.* 13, 3.

32. A. M. Buscemi, *Gli inni di Paolo. Una sinfonia a Cristo Signore*, Franciscan Printing Press, Jerusalem 2000, pp. 17-36.

33. J. L. Caballero, *Los escritos de Lucas y Pablo*, pp. 127-130.

### 1.5. *Colossians and Ephesians*

The *Letter to the Colossians* speaks of the statute and the work of believers. Paul has endeavored to spread the gospel (τὸ μυστήριον) to all men<sup>34</sup>. This is essential for the apostle: Christ has come to the Gentiles and has remained in them to fill them with the treasures of his wisdom<sup>35</sup>. Now he exhorts fidelity to that gospel. The decisive point is the fullness received in Christ by believers: they have filled themselves with him, they have risen with him<sup>36</sup>. In Christ believers have already received everything and have no need for practices that suppose incomplete, or still to be obtained, the salvific gifts received in Christ<sup>37</sup>. This new situation affects all dimensions of Christian existence. The ethical dimension is that in which the fullness received must be manifested, made to be shared: the ethical action of believers is, at the same time, the fruit of the fullness lived with Christ and the place where it makes itself read and recognize<sup>38</sup>.

The *Letter to the Ephesians* speaks of the μυστήριον as a reality to be known and lived. God has saved and raised believers to heaven, and this has been done through the reconciliation between pagans and Jews (= among all peoples) brought about by Christ. By doing this, in Christ the mystery hidden for centuries has been revealed, and that believers must strive to know better and better. But this mystery is not something simply to be known, but rather to be lived: as a unified and diversified body, in daily life, not like the pagans, but according to the new man<sup>39</sup>. To defeat those who try to prevent this from happening, the believer must put on the armor of God<sup>40</sup>.

These two letters set forth his Christology and his Ecclesiology using a different model from the models used previously, but not incompatible with them. Christology now develops around the category of primacy, especially in *Colossians*, while Ecclesiology develops along the lines of

34. *Col.* 1, 28; 2, 7; 3, 16.

35. *Col.* 1, 28.

36. *Col.* 2, 10; 3, 1.

37. *Col.* 2, 8-19.

38. *Col.* 3, 1-4, 1. J.-N. Aletti, *Lettera ai Colossesi*, EDB, Bologna 2011, pp. 179-181, 239-245.

39. *Eph.* 4, 20-24.

40. *Eph.* 6, 10-20. J.-N. Aletti, *Saint Paul. Épître aux Éphésiens*, pp. 321-326.

the body model (σῶμα, κεφαλή), already used in *first Corinthians*, but expanded and deepened. Christology and Ecclesiology appear closely linked, although, due to the context of each letter, Christology is more developed in *Colossians* and Ecclesiology is more developed in *Ephesians*<sup>41</sup>.

The emphasis that the two letters place on knowledge and wisdom is striking<sup>42</sup>. This is related to the μυστήριον, which until now was hidden, but also to the deception and falsehood that are opposed to the truth of the gospel and, therefore, also to the μυστήριον. It is necessary to emphasize this because it is an issue closely related to that of freedom, as we will see later, since it directly affects foolish or wise behavior and, therefore, the growth of the body of Christ<sup>43</sup>.

### 1.6. Overview

In the brief review that we have done, some key notions have emerged. The terminology is varied and the contexts too:

a) Man without Christ finds himself a slave to sin and death<sup>44</sup>. This slavery is reflected in a way of thinking and living<sup>45</sup> that not only destroys man himself, but also other men and the rest of creation, which leads to vanity<sup>46</sup>.

b) Christ, with his death, resurrection and ascension, has freed us from the power of sin<sup>47</sup>, granting us the possibility of participating in his death to sin and his resurrection to life through faith and baptism, thus giving us a new identity: the new man, a new creation<sup>48</sup>.

41. P. Benoit, «Corps, tête et plérôme dans les Épîtres de la Captivité», *Revue biblique* 63 (1956), pp. 5-44.

42. ἐπιγνώσκω (*Col.* 1, 6); ἐπίγνωσις (*Col.* 1, 9, 10; 2, 2; 3, 10; *Eph.* 1, 17; 4, 13); γνώσκω (*Col.* 4, 8; *Eph.* 3, 19; 6,22); γινώσις (*Col.* 2,3; *Eph.* 3, 19); γνωρίζω (*Col.* 1, 27; 4, 7, 9; *Eph.* 1, 9; 3, 3; 5, 10; 6, 19, 21); σύνεσις (*Col.* 1, 9; 2, 2); συνήμι (*Eph.* 5, 17); σοφία (*Col.* 1, 9, 28; 2, 3; 3, 16; *Eph.* 1, 8, 17; 3, 10); σοφός (*Eph.* 5, 15); ἀλήθεια (*Col.* 1, 5, 6; *Eph.* 1, 13; 4, 21, 24, 25; 5, 9; 6,14); ἀληθεύω (*Eph.* 4, 15).

43. See *1 Cor.* 1, 10-3, 23.

44. *Rom.* 6, 16-18.

45. *Eph.* 4, 17-18.

46. *Rom.* 8, 19-22.

47. *Rom.* 8, 2.

48. *2 Cor.* 5, 14-17; *Eph.* 2, 15. Cf. G. Segalla, "Cuatro modelos de «hombre nuevo» en la literatura neotestamentaria", in J. M. Casciaro et al., *Esperanza del hombre y revelación*

c) The baptized person obtains divine filiation in Christ<sup>49</sup>, that is, belonging to a new lineage, in which one becomes part of the body of the baptized, heirs of divine blessings. The life of this body, in which there is diversity of members, functions, hierarchies<sup>50</sup>, is called to grow until full union in God with Christ<sup>51</sup>, and the law that governs it is that of Christ, which is a law of mutual subordination in charity: having the sentiments of Christ<sup>52</sup>.

d) The baptized person must lead a life worthy of his vocation<sup>53</sup>, rejecting sin, which is everything that separates from God and the rest of the body, and leading a life of charity, inspired by the Holy Spirit<sup>54</sup>, with whose help one must discern how to act at each moment for the benefit of the body. For this freedom we have been freed<sup>55</sup>.

## 2. Freedom and dependence

### 2.1. Will of God and *μυστήριον*

In Christ, in an unexpected way, the immense panorama of God's plans, of his projects, desires and dreams is opened to us: the offer made to man to participate in the relationship that only the Son has with Him<sup>56</sup>. This is the good news, already begun in the history of Israel, and whose heart will be what *Colossians* and *Ephesians* will call *μυστήριον*: the Church, explained from the body/head model. This Church is conceived in terms of a new creation, the new man, governed by a new law, the law of Christ. In it, its members will be able to have with God the Father the proper relationship of the Son, since their life will be the life of the

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*biblica*, Servicio de Publicaciones de la Universidad de Navarra, Pamplona 1996, pp. 83-135.

49. *Rom.* 8, 15; *Eph.* 1, 5.

50. *1 Cor.* 12, 28.

51. *1 Cor.* 15, 28; *Eph.* 4, 6.

52. *Gal.* 5, 14; *Phil* 2, 5.

53. *Eph.* 4, 1.

54. *Rom.* 5, 5; *Eph.* 3, 17.

55. *Gal.* 5, 1.

56. U. Vanni, *L'ebbrezza nello Spirito. Una proposta di spiritualità paolina*, AdP, Roma 2000, pp. 9-10.

Son, whose law is that of charity. Obviously, what is meant here by love or charity is much more than what we understand today when using those terms. God never ignores these plans. He does not create man and throws him into existence and forgets about him, but calls him and never stops helping him to make his call to be a son come true<sup>57</sup>.

God had already begun to speak to us about the nature and life of this body with the election and history of the people of Israel. The studies carried out on the *corporate personality* have highlighted the richness of divine revelation, since the very creation of Adam, in the election, in the Covenant, in the Law, in the institutions and, finally, in the very vicissitudes of Israel's history, that is, from the *body of Adam* to the *body of Israel son*. All these elements are part of a journey of revelation in which it is a question not only of understanding but also of living with the consciousness of belonging to a body. This is part of the deep identity of the members of the people of Israel. What is always at stake is the life of the body, on which the life of each of its members depends, a life that in turn depends on fidelity to the Covenant with God. The dynamics of the life of this body, called to grow not only in number, is to live a fidelity and a very special fraternity, which becomes a witness for all other peoples. This will only be possible by fighting against the disintegrating forces, both internal and external, that seek the very extinction of Israel. The Mosaic Law is offered as a privilege that, in its essence, points to something already inscribed in the hearts of all men, but obscured by sin<sup>58</sup>.

The Pauline reflections place the *μυστήριον* on this Old Testament background. The Gospels strive to show how in Christ the realities announced by the Old Testament are fulfilled and come to fruition: Christ is the announced Messiah who inaugurates the Kingdom of God; he reveals the scope of God's plans and opens us to the mystery of the

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57. *Phil.* 1, 6. The Fathers of the Church reflected abundantly on these questions. Cf., *Dizionario di spiritualità biblico-patristica*, vol. 15 (G. Boccaccini et al, *Elezione, vocazione, predestinazione*, Borla, Roma 1997) and vol. 36 (F. Bianchi, S. A. Panimolle, P. Bovati, *Libertà-Liberazione nella Bibbia*, Borla, Roma 2003).

58. Cfr. L. Sánchez Navarro, *Un cuerpo pleno, Cristo y la personalidad corporativa en la Escritura*, Universidad San Dámaso, Madrid 2021, 27-57.

Church, a mystery of communion and holiness; Old Testament prophets and kings are types of Christ; with his sacrifice and his resurrection he inaugurates a new creation, that of the Church, the body of the Son. The apostolic writings and, in a very particular way, the Pauline ones, will strive to deepen the identity of Jesus and the meaning of what Jesus has said and done, in the context of God's eternal plans<sup>59</sup>.

The *eulogia* of the first chapter of *Ephesians* transports us to these plans, in which the points of reference are the creation and the new creation in Christ, the first man and the new man in Christ<sup>60</sup>. This will of God<sup>61</sup> is spoken of in terms of creation/work<sup>62</sup>, disposition/purpose<sup>63</sup> and election/call<sup>64</sup>. These plans refer to an adoption/inheritance<sup>65</sup>, they have an economy<sup>66</sup>, and their content is the hidden mystery and now revealed in Christ to Paul<sup>67</sup>. All this work of God, both in creation and in the new creation, is powerful and effective<sup>68</sup>.

With its own context, *Colossians* expresses the same basic thought, although placing special emphasis on what, in the will of God<sup>69</sup>, refers to the primacy of Christ in creation<sup>70</sup> and in redemption<sup>71</sup>. Again we are

59. Cfr. *Ibid.*, 59-96.

60. *Eph.* 4, 24: «καὶ ἐνδύσασθαι τὸν καινὸν ἄνθρωπον τὸν κατὰ θεὸν κτισθέντα ἐν δικαιοσύνῃ καὶ ὁσιότητι τῆς ἀληθείας». See A. Martin, *La tipologia adamitica nella Lettera agli Efesini*, Pontificio Istituto Biblico, Roma 2005.

61. θέλημα (*Eph.* 1, 1, 5, 9, 11; 5, 17; 6, 6); εὐδοκία (*Eph.* 1, 5, 9).

62. Καταβολὴ κόσμου (*Eph.* 1, 4); κτίζω (*Eph.* 2, 10; 3, 9; 4, 24); ποίημα (*Eph.* 2, 10).

63. προορίζω (*Eph.* 1, 5, 11); προστίθημι (*Eph.* 1, 9); πρόθεσις (*Eph.* 1, 11); προετοιμάζω (*Eph.* 2, 10).

64. ἐκλέγω (*Eph.* 1, 4); κλησῖς (*Eph.* 1, 18; 4, 1, 4); καλέω (*Eph.* 4, 1, 4); ἐκκλησία (*Eph.* 1, 22; 3, 21; 5, 23, 24, 25, 27, 29, 32).

65. υἰοθεσία (*Eph.* 1, 5); κληρονομία (*Eph.* 1, 14, 18; 5, 5); κληρώ (*Eph.* 1, 11); συγκαληρονόμος (*Eph.* 3, 6).

66. οἰκονομία (*Eph.* 1, 10; 3, 2, 9).

67. μυστήριον (*Eph.* 3, 3, 9; 5, 32; 6, 19).

68. ἐνεργέω (*Eph.* 1, 11, 20, 3, 20); ἐνέργεια (*Eph.* 1, 19, 3, 7, 4, 16); κράτος (*Eph.* 1, 19; 6, 19); δύναμις (*Eph.* 3, 7, 20); δύναμαι (*Eph.* 3, 20; 6, 11); ἐνδυναμώω (*Eph.* 6, 10); ἰσχύς (*Eph.* 1, 19; 6, 10).

69. θέλημα (*Col.* 1, 1, 9; 4, 12).

70. «πρωτότοκος πάσης κτίσεως» (*Col.* 1, 15); «ἐν αὐτῷ ἐκτίσθη τὰ πάντα ... τὰ πάντα δι' αὐτοῦ καὶ εἰς αὐτὸν ἔκτισται» (*Col.* 1, 16).

71. «πρωτότοκος ἐκ τῶν νεκρῶν» (*Col.* 1, 18); «καὶ δι' αὐτοῦ ἀποκαταλλάξαι τὰ πάντα εἰς αὐτόν» (*Col.* 1, 20).

told of the mystery<sup>72</sup>, in which Christ occupies a central place. Men have been called to form part of a single body, in whose head, Christ, dwells all the fullness of divinity<sup>73</sup>, of which we have been invited to participate. It is Christ himself who has formed this body, freeing us from sin and reconciling us<sup>74</sup>. In this way, those who, in the hands of sin, were in the power of darkness, were strangers and enemies, had vain thoughts and taught falsehoods, were falsely humble, were seduced, deceived, imprisoned, subdued, dead, full of evil works, separated<sup>75</sup>, now, thanks exclusively to Christ, they have received the forgiveness of sins and have been freed from their power and from the power of the one who accused them because of those sins; they have been stripped of the old man and have been clothed with the new; they have received peace; they have risen with Christ and have become part of the Church, united by the bond of love with one another; they have been made heirs; they have received a new life and a new ability to understand things. Not in vain, those who are part of the body participate in all the treasures of a wisdom that is at the origin of all things and that, therefore, penetrates everything and knows how everything can reach its fullness<sup>76</sup>. This new situation is an invitation to build the body that is the Church with one's own behavior.

## 2.2. Creation and laws

God has created a universe in which there is an order, an immense variety, a hierarchy, laws and a purpose for the whole and for each one of its elements. These laws are physical and moral, and both are peremptory: only when they are respected can the universe be itself both *grow* and bear fruit. These laws, therefore, are the path to freedom, understood as an opening to perfection that is offered to each element of that universe.

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72. *μυστήριον* (Col. 1, 26, 27).

73. Col. 2, 9.

74. «ὅς ἐρρύσατο ἡμᾶς ἐκ τῆς ἐξουσίας τοῦ σκοτους καὶ μετέστησεν εἰς τὴν βασιλείαν τοῦ υἱοῦ τῆς ἀγάπης αὐτοῦ, ἐν ᾧ ἔχομεν τὴν ἀπολύτρωσιν, τὴν ἄφεσιν τῶν ἁμαρτιῶν» (Col. 1, 13-14).

75. Col. 1, 13, 21; 2, 4, 8, 13, 18, 19.

76. Eph. 4, 1. Col. 1, 12, 13, 14, 18, 20, 22, 24; 2, 2, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 20; 3, 1, 2, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 15, 16, 24.

Now, the moral law has as its specific subject men, free beings, created in the image and likeness of God. Physical laws always apply, but if man does not respect moral laws, all creation (to which he himself belongs) is subject to expiration and vanity: the government of that creation has been placed in the hands of man and she needs those laws to be fulfilled<sup>77</sup>. This moral law is inscribed in everyone's heart so that, in a natural way, everyone can know it, both by observing creation and discovering it within themselves<sup>78</sup>.

The laws dictated by men are (should be) an expression of the good government that man must exercise over what has been entrusted to him: this exercise of authority is a participation in the authority of God, who has offered man to collaborate with him so that creation may reveal its treasures and serve man to grow towards his fullness<sup>79</sup>. This government is exercised with work and will improve to the extent that man knows more and more deeply the physical laws<sup>80</sup>.

In this general framework, the law of sin makes its appearance in the world, a law of rebellion<sup>81</sup>, whose sole purpose is to make God's plans truncated. This law, which is a law of death, settles in the heart of the man who opened its doors to it<sup>82</sup>. His language is seduction and lies<sup>83</sup>. Precisely because it is seduction, it acts by generating a fiction: that man can create his own order and his own laws apart from the divine, so that, believing himself to be free, in reality he becomes a slave (cf. the story of the Babel Tower). This law influences their way of conceiving power, of exercising authority, of relating to others and with the rest of creation, and of conceiving and carrying out their work. With Christ we will not only be freed from this subjection to the law of sin, but also the extraordinary scope of God's plans will be revealed to us.

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77. *Rom.* 8, 19-23.

78. *Rom.* 2, 14-16. J. L. Caballero, *Los escritos de Lucas y Pablo*, pp. 119-125.

79. *Rom.* 13, 1-7.

80. J.-N. Aletti, «Paul et les autorités politiques. À propos de Rm 13, 1-7», in D. Luciani et A. Wénin (dir.), *Le pouvoir. Enquêtes dans l'un et l'autre Testament*, Cerf, Paris 2012, pp. 263-288.

81. *Eph.* 2, 2; 5, 6.

82. *2 Cor.* 4, 4.

83. *Eph.* 4, 14, 22, 25; 5, 6; 6, 11.

The Mosaic Law is understood, in this context, as a privilege given to a specific people, a people whom God loves, whom he cares for in a special way and to whom he has given a very special mission. With that Law he reminds him of his identity and helps him to live according to it. This is well expressed by the names with which we call the legislative codes of Israel, even though they belong to a transitory Law<sup>84</sup>: Covenant code, holiness code, priestly code. The ministry of this Law, as is said in the *Second Letter to the Corinthians*, has a certain glory, but it is temporary, incomparable with the glory of the ministry of the gospel<sup>85</sup>. That is why it is a path to freedom, illuminating the essentials of the moral law and guiding its fulfillment through external precepts: some negative (attitudes to avoid and that mark the borders of life) and others positive (pointing to love and that help to do it, educating the heart).

The Mosaic Law guided as a pedagogue, since Israel was often shown as a minor with a hardened heart, who rejected again and again the Covenant that was offered to him<sup>86</sup>. Thus, the Law is like the slave that educates the child also through correction and punishment, also with the aim of unmasking the presence and action of sin. By doing this, he *multiplies* the presence of sin in the world, not only by illuminating it but also by reviving the rebellion of those who are in his hands<sup>87</sup>. That is why Paul says that the Mosaic Law was at the service of sin, not because it was bad (it was from God, although it was mediated by angels and men, and it was holy) but because of what it *produced*<sup>88</sup>.

In any case, the Mosaic Law is an external law, which acts from outside the hearts, while the law of Christ is internal, it is fulfillment of the promise of renewal of the heart that appears in the prophets<sup>89</sup>. Precisely because the Mosaic Law is an external and transitory law, it is possible that, making it permanent and identifying itself with the *letter*,

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84. *Gal.* 3, 25.

85. *2 Cor.* 3, 7-11.

86. *Gal.* 3, 23-25; *Eph* 4, 18.

87. *Gal.* 3, 19.

88. *Rom.* 7, 7-13.

89. *Ezek.* 36, 26-28.

it becomes a law that enslaves<sup>90</sup>. In this context, expressions such as the one we read in the first *Letter to Timothy* can be understood: the Law must be used according to what it was issued for (*νομίμως*<sup>91</sup>).

### 2.3. The building of the body

All the models used to speak of the Church refer to a dynamic of life that includes relationship and growth: the house must be built, the family must grow in members and in communion, the body must mature. The Church must also be built, live in communion, expand, mature. These images interrelate and complement each other. And its key to understanding is Christ: the Church is the body of Christ<sup>92</sup>, the new man<sup>93</sup>, to which all the baptized belong, and which, united to Christ, its head<sup>94</sup>, is called to relate as Son with the Father. In fact, all of creation is called to be part of the body of Christ, and only in it will it be able to fulfill its deepest vocation. Hence the expressions *through Christ, with Christ, in Christ*<sup>95</sup>.

What is the nature of the body of Christ? What is its own life? To what perfection do he aspire? Let us look at the body/head image as used by *Colossians* and *Ephesians*, drawing attention to some expressions and literary features such as, for example, the persistent insistence on the use of terms with the prefix *συν-* and on the use of adjectives denoting mutual relationship:

<p><i>Col</i> 2, 19 τὴν κεφαλὴν, ἐξ οὗ πᾶν τὸ σῶμα διὰ τῶν ἁρῶν καὶ συνδέσμων ἐπι- χορηγούμενον καὶ συμβιβασζόμενον αὐξήσει τὴν αὐξησιν τοῦ θεοῦ.</p>	<p>A man of this sort is not united to the head, and it is the head that adds strength and holds the whole body together, with all its joints and sinews - and this is the only way in which it can reach its full growth in God.</p>
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90. 2 *Cor.* 3, 6.

91. 1 *Tim.* 1, 8.

92. *σῶμα* (*Eph* 1, 23; 2, 16; 4, 4, 12, 16; 5, 23, 28, 30; *Col.* 1, 24; 2, 17, 19); *σῶσωμος* (*Eph.* 3, 6).

93. *Eph.* 2, 15.

94. *κεφαλὴ* (*Eph.* 1, 22; 4, 15; 5, 23; *Col.* 1, 18, 2, 10, 19).

95. *Eph.* 1, 5, 10, 12; 2, 6, 7, 10, 13, 16; 3, 6, 11, 21; 4, 1, 17; 6, 1; *Col.* 1, 2, 4, 8, 27; 2, 10.

*Eph. 2, 20-22* ἐποικοδομηθέντες ἐπὶ τῷ θεμελίῳ τῶν ἀποστόλων καὶ προφητῶν, ὄντος ἀκρογωνιαίου αὐτοῦ Χριστοῦ Ἰησοῦ, ἐν ᾧ πᾶσα οἰκοδομὴ συναρμολογουμένη αὕξει εἰς ναὸν ἅγιον ἐν κυρίῳ, ἐν ᾧ καὶ ὑμεῖς συνοικοδομεῖσθε εἰς κατοικητήριον τοῦ θεοῦ ἐν πνεύματι. You are part of a building that has the apostles and prophets for its foundations, and Christ Jesus himself for its main cornerstone. As every structure is aligned on him, all grow into one holy temple in the Lord; and you too, in him, are being built into a house where God lives, in the Spirit.

*Eph. 4, 15-16* ἀληθεύοντες δὲ ἐν ἀγάπῃ αὐξήσωμεν εἰς αὐτὸν τὰ πάντα, ὅς ἐστιν ἡ κεφαλὴ, Χριστός, ἐξ οὗ πᾶν τὸ σῶμα συναρμολογούμενον καὶ συμβιβασόμενον διὰ πάσης ἀφῆς τῆς ἐπιχορηγίας κατ' ἐνέργειαν ἐν μέτρῳ ἐνὸς ἐκάστου μέρους τὴν αὕξησιν τοῦ σώματος ποιεῖται εἰς οἰκοδομὴν ἑαυτοῦ ἐν ἀγάπῃ. If we live by the truth and in love, we shall grow in all ways into Christ, who is the head by whom the whole body is fitted and joined together, every joint adding its own strength, for each separate part to work according to its function. So the body grows until it has built itself up, in love.

συνεζωοποίησεν ( <i>Eph. 2, 5</i> )	συνδέσμων ( <i>Eph. 4, 3</i> )	συνταφέντες ( <i>Col. 2, 12</i> )
συνήγειρεν ( <i>Eph. 2, 6</i> )	συναρμολογούμενον ( <i>Eph. 4, 16</i> )	συνηγέρθητε ( <i>Col. 2, 12</i> )
συνεκάθισεν ( <i>Eph. 2, 6</i> )	συμβιβασόμενον ( <i>Eph. 4, 16</i> )	συνεζωοποίησεν ( <i>Col. 2, 13</i> )
συμπολίται ( <i>Eph. 2, 19</i> )	συμμέτοχοι ( <i>Eph. 5, 7</i> )	συνδέσμων ( <i>Col. 2, 19</i> )
συναρμολογουμένη ( <i>Eph. 2, 21</i> )	συγκοινωνεῖτε ( <i>Eph. 5, 11</i> )	συμβιβασόμενον ( <i>Col. 2, 19</i> )
συνικοδομεῖσθε ( <i>Eph. 2, 22</i> )	συνδούλου ( <i>Col. 1, 7</i> )	συνηγέρθητε ( <i>Col. 3, 1</i> )
συγκληρονόμα ( <i>Eph. 3, 6</i> )	συνέστηκεν ( <i>Col. 1, 17</i> )	συναιχιμάλωτος ( <i>Col. 4, 10</i> )
σύσσωμα ( <i>Eph. 3, 6</i> )	συμβιβασθέντες ( <i>Col. 2, 2</i> )	συνεργοί ( <i>Col. 4, 11</i> )
συμμέτοχα ( <i>Eph. 3, 6</i> )		
ἀλλήλων ( <i>Eph. 4, 2</i> )	ἑαυτοῖς ( <i>Eph. 4, 32</i> )	ἀλλήλων ( <i>Col. 3, 13</i> )
ἀλλήλων ( <i>Eph. 4, 25</i> )	ἀλλήλοις ( <i>Eph. 5, 21</i> )	ἑαυτοῖς ( <i>Col. 3, 13</i> )
ἀλλήλους ( <i>Eph. 4, 32</i> )	ἀλλήλους ( <i>Col. 3, 9</i> )	ἑαυτοῦς ( <i>Col. 3, 16</i> )

Charity is a bond of perfection<sup>96</sup>, because it is what opens man to a way of thinking and acting that exceeds his natural capacities. Let us think of a body as a complex system of (living) members and relationships.

96. *Col. 3, 14*.

Each member has its own purpose and, at the same time, lives from the rest of the body and for the rest of the body. But only the head knows how each member is and how the body is. The way that the Spirit has to vivify each member is to open it completely to the good and the needs of the whole body, granting the necessary wisdom to know how to discern at each moment how to behave within the body and giving the strength to do it<sup>97</sup>.

This behavior has borders that guard the possibility of life: actions that lead to death or damage to the body. But, on the positive side, each member not only contributes what is *expected* of him, because it is his own, but is also capable of balancing the state of the entire system at all times, sometimes even *bracketing* his own perfection. It is in this sense that the letters use expressions such as bear with each other<sup>98</sup>, forgive one another<sup>99</sup>, be thankful<sup>100</sup>, be taught<sup>101</sup>, be encouraged<sup>102</sup>, be subject to one another<sup>103</sup>, watch<sup>104</sup>.

This type of life is that of charity: in fact, only openness to the action of the Spirit in us allows us to realize, in its deepest sense, the heart of the law of Christ, which is *to love God above all things and love your neighbor as yourself*<sup>105</sup>. This type of union of the members of the body of Christ with each other is manifested in a particular way in the union of the spouses, made one body and with a life that is no longer *sum* but a new *unity*<sup>106</sup>.

97. *Eph.* 5, 10, 17; cf. *1 Cor.* 1, 18-25. Cf. also: *1 Thess* 5, 21: «πάντα δὲ δοκιμάζετε, τὸ καλὸν κατέχετε»; *Phil.* 2, 13: «θεὸς γὰρ ἐστὶν ὁ ἐνεργῶν ἐν ὑμῖν καὶ τὸ θέλει καὶ τὸ ἐνεργεῖν ὑπὲρ τῆς εὐδοκίας».

98. *Col.* 3, 13; *Eph.* 4, 2.

99. *Col.* 3, 13; *Eph.* 4, 32.

100. *Col.* 3, 15

101. *Col.* 3, 16.

102. *Col.* 3, 16.

103. *Col.* 3, 18; *Eph.* 5, 21.

104. *Eph.* 6, 18. Cf. *Phil.* 2, 3-5: «μηδὲν κατ' ἐριθείαν μηδὲ κατὰ κενοδοξίαν ἀλλὰ τῇ ταπεινοφροσύνῃ ἀλλήλους ἡγούμενοι ὑπερέχοντας ἑαυτῶν, μὴ τὰ ἑαυτῶν ἕκαστος σκοποῦντες ἀλλὰ [καὶ] τὰ ἑτέρων ἕκαστοι. Τοῦτο φρονεῖτε ἐν ὑμῖν ὃ καὶ ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ».

105. *Gal.* 5, 14; *2 Cor.* 5, 5.

106. *Eph.* 5, 22-33. J.-N. Aletti, *Eclesiología de las cartas de san Pablo*, pp. 174-182.

In this context, a deeper meaning can be given to the expression *to redeem the time*, «τὸν καιρὸν ἐξαγοραζόμενοι»<sup>107</sup>. Rescuing or redeeming time is not just taking advantage of time, because evil is acting and can surprise us. To redeem time is also to free it from a certain vanity or expiration when thoughts and works are trapped in what is immediate and in what is seen, detached from a deeper and more comprehensive vision. The first would be a vain life; the second, a full life. This is the power of divine wisdom, which acts in the heart of the (good) believer, making him truly free<sup>108</sup>.

We can thus outline the coordinates of the life of the body of Christ:

a) In order to unite with the Father, to participate in the life of the Son, the first thing we have to do is *to be all one with the Son*: that is, it is necessary that we be *of Christ*<sup>109</sup> so that later we can be, with him, of the Father<sup>110</sup>. But we Christians do not belong to Christ one by one, but as a body: the relationship with Christ always includes the rest of the body, of which, in fact, all men and all the rest of creation are called to form a part.

b) In that body of Christ to which we are all called, there are no walls of separation: there are no divisions, because in Christ all are related as equals before God<sup>111</sup>. This does not mean that there is no diversity among the members. In this body there is no depersonalization. The relationship in the variety will produce, through love, a superior life from which, at the same time, all the members will benefit: τὴν αὐξήσιν τοῦ θεοῦ.

c) The merely sociological conception of the harmony of the body is overcome in *Colossians* and *Ephesians* by saying that the body of Christ aspires to a life that is of a higher order than the natural one and is unknown to us. This implies that *there is a kind of unity and life that cannot be produced by the human will*, no matter how well we understand and govern ourselves.

d) The growth of the body of Christ is related to the mutual presence of one in another and, ultimately, to the presence of God in all. This

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107. *Col.* 4, 5; cf. *Eph.* 5, 16.

108. J. L. Caballero, *Los escritos de Lucas y Pablo (I)*, pp. 139-143.

109. *Gal.* 2, 20.

110. *1 Cor.* 3, 23.

111. Cf. *Gal.* 3, 28.

presence of one in another is possible through Christ: in Christ we are recapitulated, of Christ we clothe ourselves, thanks to his Spirit we can live in one another<sup>112</sup>.

e) The life proper to the body of Christ, called to be one with the Father as Son, is life in the Spirit<sup>113</sup>. *It is his presence in our hearts that allows us to desire and aspire to an existence completely open to God and to others*<sup>114</sup>. It is this Spirit that is capable of making us sons of God, guiding our feelings and our actions in such a way that this being all in all becomes possible. This is the law of charity. This guidance *is not an external dictation to us* but a capacity that is offered to us<sup>115</sup>.

#### 2.4. Seduction and sin

Given the above, what does Paul understand by slavery? What is it that makes man a slave? From what must he be freed? The first Pauline letters, in a very particular way *Galatians* and *Romans*, expand on speaking of sin as a law that, rooted in the interior of man, encloses him in himself and closes him to the relationship with God and with others. This is what makes man a slave, because it closes his natural-supernatural vital horizon. Man has been created for relationship, and what destroys him is selfishness with all its manifestations.

*Colossians* and *Ephesians* speak of this in the larger context of the cosmic body of Christ. Therefore, the relationship that the *Letter to the Romans* makes explicit between the liberation of man and the liberation of creation is also taken up again. In *Colossians* and *Ephesians* the terminology referring to sin is not used much<sup>116</sup>, but that reality is continually present in other ways.

In *Ephesians*, sin appears in relation to death<sup>117</sup>, as it already appears in *Romans*, and the insistence is on how it acts and, on the effects, it produces

112. *Eph.* 1, 10; 4, 24; *Col.* 3, 10.

113. *Eph.* 1, 3, 13, 17; 2, 2, 18, 22; 3, 5, 16; 4, 3, 4, 23, 30; 5, 18, 19; 6, 12, 17, 18; *Col.* 1, 8, 9; 2, 5; 3, 16.

114. H. Schlier, *Fundamentos de una teología paulina*, op.cit., pp. 164-186.

115. Cf. U. Vanni, *L'ebbrezza nello Spirito*, op.cit., pp. 115-126.

116. ἁμαρτία (*Col.* 1, 14; *Ef.* 2, 1); ἁμαρτάνω (*Eph.* 4, 26); παράπτωμα (*Col.* 2, 13; *Eph.* 1, 7; 2, 1, 5).

117. *Eph.* 2, 1, 5; 5, 14.

in terms of deception, seduction, foolishness, madness and hardening of the heart<sup>118</sup>. Distance from God<sup>119</sup> leaves man in the hands of vain thoughts and the will of the flesh<sup>120</sup>. This path, with the semblance of freedom, is the life of slaves, of submission not only to one's own desires but also to the agents of evil, to whom one gives power over oneself<sup>121</sup>. *Ephesians* calls those who follow this path sons of rebellion and sons of wrath<sup>122</sup>.

The approach of *Colossians* is the same, although the tone is controversial: the proud, with affected piety, swollen by the mind of their flesh and full of reason and persuasive eloquence<sup>123</sup>, have fallen into the hands of deception and, seduced by power of darkness<sup>124</sup>, they have separated themselves from the head and from the truth of the gospel<sup>125</sup>. Therefore, what we also see in *Ephesians* appears in *Colossians*: sin separates the head and the body, and this separation leads to vanity, lack of self-control, slavery and death. This has its implications in the way of relating to the rest of the body of Christ in terms of what characterizes the old man: impurity, greed, anger, misdeeds, divisions<sup>126</sup>.

Seduction and lies, therefore, are closely related to freedom and slavery. *Colossians* and *Ephesians* paint a rather dark picture with regard to the capacity for discernment and the capacity to act of those who live far from God<sup>127</sup>. Abounding in the epithets that describe this situation, the letters

118. ματαιότης (*Eph.* 4, 17); ψευδός (*Eph.* 4, 25); ἀπάτη (*Eph.* 4, 22); ἀπατάω (*Eph.* 5, 6); πλάνη (*Eph.* 4, 14); ἄσοφος (*Eph.* 5, 15); ἄφρων (*Eph.* 5, 17); κλυδωνίζομαι (*Eph.* 4, 14); περιφέρω (*Eph.* 4, 14); πάρωσις (*Eph.* 4, 18).

119. *Eph.* 2, 12, 13, 14, 16, 19; 4, 17.

120. *Eph.* 2, 3; 4, 14, 17; 5, 11.

121. H. Schlier, *Principalities and Powers in the New Testament*, Herder and Herder, New York 1962, pp. 11-40.

122. «ἐν τοῖς υἱοῖς τῆς ἀπειθείας» (*Eph.* 2, 2); «ἐπὶ τοὺς υἱοὺς τῆς ἀπειθείας» (*Eph.* 5, 6); «ἡμεθα τέκνα φύσει ὀργῆς» (*Eph.* 2, 3).

123. «ἵνα μηδεὶς ὑμᾶς παραλογίζηται ἐν πιθανολογίᾳ» (*Col.* 2, 4); «μή τις ὑμᾶς ἔσται ὁ συλαγωγῶν διὰ τῆς φιλοσοφίας καὶ κενῆς ἀπάτης» (*Col.* 2, 8); «εἰκὴ φυσιοῦμενος ὑπὸ τοῦ νοῦς τῆς σαρκὸς αὐτοῦ» (*Col.* 2, 18).

124. «ὃς ἐρρύσατο ἡμᾶς ἐκ τῆς ἐξουσίας τοῦ σκότους» (*Col.* 1, 13).

125. *Col.* 2, 19.

126. *Col.* 3, 5, 8, 9, 11; *Eph.* 2, 3.

127. Cf. *Rom.* 1, 21, 24.

go back to the action of the devil<sup>128</sup>, who, trying to make his own *body*, in imitation of the body of Christ, recruits his *satellites* to put them in the fight to seduce and deceive man<sup>129</sup>. This is their way of exercising dominance, of subjugating, of making them slaves: inoculating the opposite of the law of love. Their native language is lies (selfishness), while the Christian's native language is charity (truth). Sin, by moving away from God, not only blurs the face of God, but also blurs that of man himself, making him live in a fiction of autonomy and deceiving him about his situation as a slave<sup>130</sup>. Lying and sin thus lead to death; truth and charity lead to life<sup>131</sup>.

It is in this context that expressions such as *wrath of God*, *sons of wrath*, *sons of rebellion*, *sons of perdition* are understood. God is certainly angry, but his anger is not like that of man: it is not irrational and destructive. In Him there is a perfect domain, and His anger is an expression of pain at the paths of perdition that man takes and of His way of acting to make him reconsider and invite conversion. The wrath of God is His total implication in His eternal plans and in the existence of who has come out of his hands. *The wrath of God is the maximum expression of His love for man*<sup>132</sup>.

## 2.5. Subordination and freedom

What we have seen so far allows us to approach with a broader mind the question of the relationship between freedom and dependence, subordination or submission<sup>133</sup>, according to the various translations. We have already spoken of freedom as *openness to the fullness of life that is one's own, by nature or by gift, without any restriction*. This is, in reality, a definition of Christian love or charity, which is identification with God's

128. Cf. 2 *Cor.* 11, 14.

129. *Eph.* 6, 11-12.

130. D. Barthélemy, *God and His Image. An Outline of Biblical Theology*, Ignatius Press, San Francisco 2007. I quote according to the Spanish translation: *Dios y su imagen. Trayectoria bíblica de la salvación*, Dinor, San Sebastián 1965, pp. 23-64.

131. H. Schlier, *Principalities and Powers in the New Testament*, *op.cit.*, pp. 11-40.

132. A. Martin, *Anche Dio si arrabbia. L'ira e il giudizio divini come modi estremi di amore*, Città Nuova, Roma 2020; X. Léon-Dufour, «Colère», in *Vocabulaire de théologie biblique*, Cerf, Paris 1970, pp. 179-187.

133. ὑποτάσσω (*Col.* 3, 18; *Eph.* 1, 22; 4, 2; 5, 21, 22, 24).

plans, with the feelings of Christ and with the good will of Christians. We can only achieve this with the help of the Holy Spirit, who works so that, in the body of Christ, all members model their existence as mutual dependence according to the law of Christ. This is properly being a son of God. Although, in reality, there is only one Son. *Men are not other sons like that Son.* And that is clear with the body/head image. But since man has been created in the image of the Son, in Christ we see who man is:

a) Man has been created free, for he has been created in the image of the Son, and the Son is free. The first Pauline letters already speak of the freedom of the Son in the context of redemption: the Son gives himself freely for man<sup>134</sup>, and in his example we see that, paradoxically, the *maximum involvement* in the dark history of man, the *maximum submission* when bearing the consequences of our sins, is the *maximum manifestation of freedom*. This is the law of charity: the wisdom of the Cross<sup>135</sup>. *Colossians* takes up this idea when speaking of the primacy of Christ in creation and redemption: Jesus Christ is totally free because he has received all power from the Father. Man, as the image of the Son, is also free, but with the freedom of a creature, because he is not the Creator<sup>136</sup>. It could be said that he is *born free* in order to *become free*, insofar as the maximum expression of his freedom will come from the maximum union with the Father in Christ.

b) Man has been called to adoption in Christ<sup>137</sup>, but being sons of God comes from a free and liberating decision. What makes us sons is baptism, whose door is the free opening by faith to what God offers. Again the question of the relationship between freedom and grace: faith is a gift of God, but does faith work in man without counting on his freedom? Paul has already spoken in the first letters that there is a close relationship between grace/faith and freedom: man opens himself to grace and grace opens him to faith. There is a free act of man, and faith and grace make man free. God works first. He does it freely. But it needs the free

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134. *Phil.* 2, 5-11; *Eph.* 5, 2.

135. *1 Cor.* 1, 18-31.

136. J. M. Fidalgo, *No esclavos, sino hijos. La libertad interior del cristiano*, Palabra, Madrid 2021, pp. 114-119.

137. *Eph.* 1, 5.

opening of man. No baptized person has ever been a Christian outside of the body of Christ. There is no Life apart from the Body. But that is not a limitation, but rather a liberation as an opening to a fullness that, although it is called «*ἡ αὐξησης τοῦ θεοῦ*»<sup>138</sup>, seems to have no limit, because charity has no limit: «*ἡ ἀγάπη οὐδέποτε πίπτει*»<sup>139</sup>.

c) Pauline statements using the verb ὑποτάσσω (Christ with God, Christians with Christ, Christians with Christians, Creation with Christians) could be translated using the verb ἀγαπάω or the noun ἀγάπη. In fact, *Eph* 5:22, 25 makes a comparison between the verbs when speaking of the spouses. Life in the image of the Son only has full meaning in *subordination*. We could give a linguistic example: people are like hypotactic subordinate clauses, which only make full sense in their subordination, first of all, with respect to Christ and, in him, with respect to the other baptized. This is what makes them fully significant. To *submit oneself* is to fully live a love relationship without anything clouding it. The true mastery is that of the one who has self-mastery to accept and surrender according to the law of Christ. He who has that good domain is free<sup>140</sup>.

d) And so the whole creation is modeled, from the small to the great, according to a mutual dependence, and according to laws of which we still know very little. We can also look at the cosmos with its hierarchies. The body of Christ also has hierarchies, which imply specific functions, but that does not make some members more worthy than others. In fact, only with the logic of charity can the members of the body wisely exercise the authority that has been granted to them, and that is a participation in that of God for the edification of the body of Christ. Alien to that law, power is destructive and enslaves the very one who holds it, because it goes from dominator to dominated, even if they are not aware of it.

e) Also in this context, the essence of work, divine original mandate, can be well understood: in the dynamics of the body of Christ, work is a contribution to its edification, as long as it follows the law of Christ. If the work contributes to the unity and growth of the body of Christ, it will

138. *Col.* 2, 19. Cf. *Eph.* 4, 15: «*ἀληθεύοντες δὲ ἐν ἀγάπῃ αὐξήσωμεν εἰς αὐτὸν τὰ πάντα, ὅς ἐστιν ἡ κεφαλή, Χριστός*».

139. *1 Cor.* 13, 8.

140. U. Vanni, *L'ebbrezza nello Spirito*, pp. 29-35.

be liberating. Therefore, the creation yearns for the manifestation of the sons of God<sup>141</sup>.

### 3. Final reflection

The aim of this study was to see how the head/body model used in *Colossians* and *Ephesians* illuminates the nature of human freedom. In line with the first Pauline letters, freedom is understood within the framework of God's creative plan, of full life as a full relationship, of man as the image of the Son, of the Church as the body whose head is Christ, of the law of Christ, of the work of the Spirit in each believer and in the whole Body. The Holy Spirit is a Spirit of freedom<sup>142</sup>, because he frees man from what, by deception, encloses him in himself; it opens him to his mature age in Christ and helps him to progress towards it, living the law of Christ, in the body that is the Church, which is where he relates as Son with the Father. Freedom is, therefore, free subordination, that of love, in which one, having dominion over oneself, accepts and gives oneself to others, forgives and is forgiven, at every moment and in every situation, discerning with the help of the Spirit, which liberates him immediately, allowing him to live on earth with a *celestial mind*<sup>143</sup>, that is, already leading a divine life here. This free man is the one who, in turn, is capable of desiring and procuring the freedom of others and of the entire creation. This dynamic can be seen and explained in a broader and deeper way by resorting to philosophy<sup>144</sup> and theology<sup>145</sup>.

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141. J. L. Caballero, "Elementos para una teología paulina del trabajo. En torno al documento «¿Qué es el hombre?»", *Scripta Theologica* 53 (2021), pp. 169-190.

142. *2 Cor.* 3, 17.

143. *Col.* 3, 1-3.

144. Cf. S. Pinckaers, *The Sources of Christian Ethics*, T&T Clark, Edinburgh 1995, pp. 379-399; S. Piá, "La libertad trascendental como dependencia", *Studia Poliana* 1 (1999), pp. 83-97; L. Polo, *La libertad trascendental*, Servicio de publicaciones de la Universidad de Navarra, Pamplona 2005; *Persona y libertad*, Eunsa, Pamplona 2008.

145. Cf. R. Guardini, *Glaubenserkenntnis. Versuche zur Unterscheidung und Vertiefung*, Matthias-Grünwald-Verlag, Mainz 1997 (en español: *Pequeña suma teológica. Dominio de Dios y libertad del hombre*, Madrid: Guadarrama, 1963, pp. 59-79); *The Living God*, Sophia Institute Press, Manchester 1997, pp. 45-54 (en español: *El Espíritu del Dios viviente*,

## ΠΕΡΙΛΗΨΗ

Ἐλευθερία καὶ ἐξάρτηση στὶς ἐπιστολὲς τοῦ Παύλου.  
Μία θεολογικὴ προσέγγιση κατὰ τὶς ἐπιστολὲς  
*Πρὸς Κολοσσαεῖς καὶ Πρὸς Ἐφεσίους*

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Ἄν καὶ κάθε ἐπιστολὴ τοῦ ἀποστόλου Παύλου ἔχει συγκεκριμένο πλαίσιο καὶ προσέγγιση, ὅσα λέγονται σὲ αὐτὲς ἀποκαλύπτουν τοὺς μεγάλους πυλῶνες μιᾶς ἀρμονικῆς θεολογικῆς σκέψεως. Ἕνας ἀπὸ αὐτοὺς τοὺς πυλῶνες εἶναι ἡ στενὴ σχέση μεταξύ ἐλευθερίας καὶ ἐξάρτησης, ἡ ὁποία ἔρχεται σὲ ἀντίθεση μὲ τὸ προφανές ὅτι ἡ ἐλευθερία εἶναι ἀνεξαρτησία. Αὐτὸ τὸ ἄρθρο ἀποτελεῖ μία προσέγγιση τῆς προαναφερθείσας αὐτῆς σχέσεως. Ἐπιχειροῦμε νὰ προσφέρουμε μία πρόταση γιὰ τὸ θέμα, μὲ βάση τὶς κατηγοριοποιήσεις τοῦ Παύλου καὶ ὀρισμένες βασικὲς φράσεις-κλειδιά ἀπὸ τὶς ἐπιστολὲς τοῦ *Πρὸς Κολοσσαεῖς καὶ Πρὸς Ἐφεσίους*.

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