On social justice:
Comparing Paul with Plato,
Aristotle and the Stoics

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Abstract

In "In search of Paul" (2004) Crossan and Reed argue that Paul's vision and program were essentially in continuity with Jesus': both opposed, be it in Galilean villages or Roman cities, an unjust imperial system by means of an alternative project of egalitarian, distributive justice. Although Crossan elsewhere demonstrates the deep roots of this concern in the Jewish tradition, he tends to downplay the importance of Greek contributions in this regard. The purpose of this essay will be to offer, in constant dialogue with Crossan (and Reed), a more refined comparison of social justice in Paul on the one hand and Plato, Aristotle and the Stoics on the other. If Paul tried to establish egalitarian and sharing Christian communities under the Roman empire, how do this vision and program compare and contrast with Plato's hierarchical but communal concept of justice, Aristotle's distributive notion according to merit, and most importantly the Stoics' argument of "oikeiosis" (i.e., other-concern by concentrical familiarization with the other)?

Imagine, say Crossan and Reed (CR hereafter) in their recent book on Paul, the following dialogue between ourselves and Paul:

> Do you think, Paul, that all men are created equal and endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights? *I am not speaking about all men, but about all Christians.* But do you think, Paul, that all people should be Christians? *Yes, of course.* And do you think, Paul, that all Christians should be equal with one another? *Yes, of course.* Then do you think, Paul, that it is God's will for all people to be equal with one another? *Well, let me think about that one for a while and, in the meantime, you think about equality in Christ.*

> (CR 2004:234)

This fictive conversation emphasizes that Paul's primary concern was with a life of radical egalitarianism to be practised *within his Christian congregations*, but it also simultaneously hints at the continuity between his vision and programme on the one hand and the ideals of *universal human rights* on the other. And lest the point be misconstrued as mere romantic idealism, the authors insist that the issue be squarely located within the context of ancient and modern global imperialism. It is like two tectonic plates, they say, constantly grinding against each other: the one of violent imperial conquest and domination against the other of non-violent distributive justice and equality (2004:270, 291). Or rather, like one giant plate of imperial injustice against two smaller ones, one of non-violent justice and another of violent terrorism - two smaller plates which do not only grind against the central one, but also against each other (2004:413).

But note, they insist, that Paul – like Jesus before him – is not simply opposing an unjust system for the sake of negating it, but is actually offering an alternative vision and implementing an alternative programme to empower the marginalized and down-trodden. It is for this reason that reading non-violent activists like Gandhi on the British Empire, or Václav Havel on the Soviet Empire, may help us better understand Jesus and Paul back then: "They are not just *against* something, they are positively *for* something else" (2004:409). Without this "primacy of the positive ... you are doomed to negativity, which is why,"they believe, "imperial dictators are often replaced by postcolonial ones and foreign thugs are often replaced by local ones" (2004:409).

And the means, they stress further, to achieve the objective should be non-violent and should aim at changing the concrete lives of ordinary people. "A future secured by violence might actually be worse than what exists now," says Havel (in CR 2004:411), such a future "would be fatally stigmatized by the very means to secure it. ... violent political overthrow ... does not seem radical enough." Or, as Ghandhi explains: civil disobedience would be necessary, but not primary, since with the British gone, India's fundamental problems would still be there. The primary goals should therefore be at local, everyday level "ending untouchability, ... improving the diet of Indian villagers, improving the lot of Indian women, making peace between Muslims and Hindus" (2004:410).

Now although the authors state that the crucial point of this book is to highlight the similarity between Rome then and America or the West now (2004:412), they do not engage with current postcolonial discourses in any depth. Nor do they here offer any profound discussion of the relevance of their study on Paul for the debate on universal human values – except to suggest

its inescapability by catching Paul in an argument in which he admits that he would need some time to "think about that one," but suggests that his interlocutors should for their part "in the meantime, ... think about equality in Christ"!

The focus of the book is thus clearly on an historical understanding of Paul's vision and programme (from a careful exegesis of his authentic writings)[1] within the context of the mythology[2] and practice of the Roman Empire (as reconstructed from archaeological inscriptions and images as well as literary sources). The fundamental argument is that these traditions represent clashing alternatives to be understood with reference to their antecedent traditions: the Hellenistic Empires of Alexander and his successors as forerunners of Roman world-conquest on the one hand, in contrast to Judaism as the matrix within which to make sense of Jesus and Paul's passion for systemic justice on the other. In CR's (2004:270-271) words:

> The tectonic plate of Hellenistic tradition mutated under the Roman
> challenge until, at least for many, Caesar's apotheosis meant not

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[1] CR (2004:xiii, 105-106, 163, 316, 119, 229, 272, 331-333, 366) accept the following letters as authentic: 1 Th (minus the post-Pauline 2:14-16), Phil and Philemon (both written from Ephesus, during his imprisonment there), 1 Cor (minus the post-Pauline insertion in 14:33-36) and 2 Cor 10-13 (two letters written from Ephesus, after his release from imprisonment there, reflecting the worsening relations between Paul and the Corinthians), 2 Corinthians 1-9 (his last letter, written after his reconciliation with the Corinthians, from Macedonia), Galatians (to churches in the cities of Northern Galatia), and Rm (ca 55-56 CE, from Corinth). The other letters attributed to Paul are considered to be post-Pauline, differing in style and content from the historical Paul. Acts is used with the utmost critical care as a source for the historical Paul (2004:5). Writing in the 80s or 90s CE the author of Luke-Acts – not the physician on Col 4:14 (2004:16), but probably a God-fearer (2004:41) – creates a Paul for his own place and time. The author may provide historical information on the places that Paul visited and even on their sequence, but "seems to care very little about the purposes, intentions, and meanings that Paul himself emphasizes in his own letters" (2004:28) in the 50's CE. CR's (2004:162) method, in short, is "to accept Luke when he agrees with Paul, to omit Luke when he disagrees with Paul, to bracket Luke when he adds independent data that is theologically and tendentiously Lukan, but to accept such data cautiously and carefully when no such biases or prejudices are evident."

[2] I use mythology and theology as synonyms. Whether it is one or many gods that are imagined to intervene in human history, the phenomenon is the same. Any comparative study should start from this assumption in order to be legitimate (cf J Z Smith 1990). It is quite inadmissible to claim primacy of our God (theology) against their gods (mythology) at the outset. The ethical assessment of the values that are grounded by a specific mythology / theology is, of course, a different matter, as CR clearly demonstrate in their study. I do note, however, that although Crossan (2003:304) explains that he would not have "the slightest problem with using myth, parable, symbol, figure, metaphor or any such term *as long as you use the same for both stories*," but that he prefers as a strategy to use "parable rather than myth *for both stories*"since "myth means lie for all too many hearers and parable does not carry such negative baggage", theology is used for both Rome and Christianity in CR (2004:x, 4, 10, 16, 19-20, 57, 58, 68, 73, 74, 136, 155, 188, 350) but mythology is reserved solely for Greece and Rome (2004:19, 20, 58, 80).

just the promise, but the start of the world's salvation, redemption, and justification. The tectonic plate of Judaism mutated under the Christian challenge until, at least for some, Christ's resurrection meant not just the promise, but the start of the world's salvation, redemption, and justification. But, as always, the end of evil and injustice, and even the start of that end, was about means.

My aim in this essay will be to problematize this dichotomy, by arguing for a nuanced assessment of major Greco-Roman philosophical perspectives on social justice – something that would be an important preliminary or intermediate step for relating Paul to modern liberal and radical philosophical discourses on human rights and from postcolonial locations. But before I turn to Plato, Aristotle and the Stoics in comparison with Paul on the issue of social justice, a brief summary of CR's argument would be in order.

First, there is imperial ideology, and its theological grounding. The imperial foundation myth, propagated by poets like Virgil and Horace, observed in the visual imagery of temples and statues, on coins and cameos and cups, and inscribed on stone across the Empire, proclaimed Augustus (27 BCE-14 CE) as Lord (*Kurios*), Son of God (*Theou huios* translates both *divi filius* and *dei filius*), God (*Theos*) and Saviour (*Soter*), and legitimized his world-conquest as divine providence and ordained destiny. Thus Virgil, in his *Aeneid*, praises Augustan redemption and proclaims Rome's world conquest as divinely willed (2004:408). He has "the dead Anchises, consort of Venus, father of Aeneas, and grandfather of Julus" not only prophesy to his son, during the latter's visit to Hades, the arrival of a new Golden Age with the birth of Augustus, "son of a god" (2004:98), but also has Anchises admonish his son "to be sure to rule the world ..., to spare the vanquished and to crush the proud (6.851-53)" (2004:408). And Horace, taking over as Augustus' court poet after Virgil's death in 19 BCE, celebrates the dawn of this New Age in his *Carmen saeculare* for the great Saeculum Games of 17 BCE: he praises Augustus for ushering it in by restoring the *mos maiorum*, through his new marriage laws of 18 BCE, and prays that Augustus be "triumphant o'er the warring foe, but generous to the fallen" (2004:99).

Augustus, furthermore, in his *Res Gestae*, "to be inscribed in bronze at the doors of his mausoleum in Rome's Campus Martius" and to be incised in Greek and/or Latin across the empire in temples of Dea Roma and Augustus, proclaims his divine rule over the whole world (the *orbs terrarum*), accomplished by military force (2004:407). In it "Augustus cites place after place and people after people who now submit to imperial control. Land and sea, east and west, Europe, Asia, and Africa" (2004:407) – a global rule based on his and his successors' divinization, which is attested in inscription after inscription, and temple after temple, across the empire.

At Priene, for example, the governor's proposal to the Asian League of cities that Augustus' birthday henceforth be regarded as New Year's Day is met with great enthusiasm. The inscription, of 9 BCE, indeed praises Augustus as saviour (*Soter*), who has brought good tidings (*euaggelia*) to the world (2004:239), and the architrave above Priene's main temple proclaims in Greek its dedication to "Athena Polias and to the World-Conqueror [Imperator] Caesar, the Son of God, the God Augustus" (2004:242).

At Aphrodisias, recalling Augustus' divine ancestress and therefore his favorite city in the East, the sculptural programme of the Sebasteion portrays imperial conquest as violent rape (2004:242) on the southern friezes. On one panel an idealized Julio-Claudian emperor holds "a battle trophy above a kneeling and weeping barbarian prisoner whose hands are tied behind her back" (2004:19). On another a nude, divine Claudius (41-54 CE) stands ready

> to pierce the female figure of Britannia with a spear. She is pinned by his knee to the ground and is dressed with a belted tunic completely off her shoulder to expose her right breast [Amazon-like, but unarmed!]. One hand grasps that garment at her left shoulder to keep it from sliding off, and the other is held up in a futile attempt to protect herself. Claudius' left hand holds her by the hair, which is long and loosened to indicate iconographically the uncontrolled barbarian (2004:268).

Again, in another panel, "Nero's [54-68 CE] youthful, muscular nude [i. e., divine] body stands astride a slumped Armenia. He holds her up from complete collapse with a firm grasp of her left arm, but holds his sword ready in the other hand. She is completely naked except for the Roman iconographic symbols for all Orientals, high boots, Phrygian cap, and barbarian-style hair flowing out to shoulder length" (2004:268-269).

Turning from the southern gallery to the northern one, the conquered peoples are restored as "elegantly dressed females standing on inscribed bases, extending across the entire sweep of the Roman Empire and emphasizing military victories under Augustus" (2004:18). The conquered, as it were, "become part of the empire, concubines of the *pater patriae*, part of his imperial harem, members of his global family" (2004:269).

And so we may continue to add evidence of imperial ideology and its foundational mythology on cameos, cups, and coins. The *Gemma Augustea* (ca 12 CE) portrays a divine-like Augustus seated amid his court in the upper register on top of defeated barbarians in the lower section, and on the *Grande Camée de France* (ca 17 CE) the deified Augustus looks down from heaven on his adopted son and successor Tiberius in the middle register, who in turn

again sits on top of subjugated men, women and children in the bottom part (2004:144-7).

On one panel of the Augustus cup from Boscoreale (ca 7 BCE) the enthroned Augustus holds a globe in his extended right hand and receives from his ancestress Venus a winged Victory on top of this globe, whilst Mars leads conquered tribes towards the divine emperor. On the other panel the subjugated *ethne* humbly offer their children to a seated Augustus, who surrounded by military officers extends his right hand in an act of clemency to the barbarians. A second cup from Boscoreale, the Tiberius cup, depicts an armor-clad Tiberius sacrificing a huge bull on one panel, and on the next his triumphal procession as a result of his piety (2004:284-288).

But if it was possible to hold the imperial message in one's hand at an aristocratic banquet, coins were the means of putting it in the hands of every subject throughout the empire, typically with the head of an emperor on one side with words like *divi filius*, *divus*, *pater patriae* and *pontifex maximus* next to it. As far back as Actium (31 BCE) Octavian already minted silver denarii which showed winged Victory flying on a globe and himself as *divi filius*, the adopted son of the murdered but now divinized Julius Caesar, with his own foot on a globe (2004:91).

The transformation, however, emanated and reverberated from the centre, from Rome itself, which proclaimed its message not only in literature for aristocrats, but also in visual images to be admired especially by the populace. Of the latter Augustus' Temple to Mars Ultor (dedicated in 2 BCE) in his new Forum and the *Ara Pacis* (dedicated in 9 BCE) in the Campus Martius provide the most splendid examples of imperial propaganda in the capital. The pediment of this temple includes the war-god Mars (father of Augustus, by his mortal mother Atia), Venus (divine ancestress of the Iulii, via Anchises, Aeneas and his son Iulus), Romulus (founder of Rome, son of Mars and the Vestal Virgin Rhea Silvia, herself a descendant of Aeneas), and the goddess Roma. In front of the temple stands an altar for blood sacrifices by victorious generals to Mars the Avenger. Inside the temple, next to the statues of Venus, Mars and the god Julius Caesar, are the standards recovered from the Parthians to indicate their final subjugation. The porticoes flanking the plaza contain sculptures of Rome's military heroes and conquered peoples, terminating in *exedrae* next to the temple with images that illustrate the meaning of Rome's foundation myths: Aeneas of filial duty to his father and *pietas* to the gods on one side, and Romulus as exemplary of *virtus* needed for imperial expansion on the other. In the center of the forum, surrounded by Rome's famous generals and gods, stands an enormous statue of Augustus himself in a four-horse chariot.

The sculptural panels of the Altar of Peace, erected on the Campus Martius, the Field of War, for real blood sacrifices to this god, proclaimed the same imperial message from Rome to the provinces and from Augustus through his successors. Augustus' propagation of religious piety and family values are underlined as he appears on a side frieze, with head veiled for the sacrificial ritual, amongst a procession of priests, followed by the imperial family with men in togas, women in conservative, matronly stolae, and several children. On the enclosure wall, to the right of the back entrance to the altar, Dea Roma "is seated atop a pile of defeated weapons" (2004:101), whereas to the left of this entrance an idyllic Pax is depicted with children and symbols of abundant fertility. Together these images proclaim the imperial message of a new age of peace and fertility that has finally dawned, based on "the maintenance of ritual religious duties and the restoration of traditional family values" (2004:93), but of course – being located on the Field of War and with Dea Roma on guard atop those arms – a peace only achieved by means of war and violent subjugation.

Once we cross the Tiber we arrive in the lower-class neighbourhood of Trastevere, where most Jews and Christians of Paul's time in the 50's CE would have lived in *insulae*, ie noisy, crowded apartment blocks (2004:355, 363, 374), which usually included on a higher level more spacious rooms for the owner (2004:376). What one would have seen on each street corner of this neighbourhood was an altar dedicated to Augustus. "Augustus," CR (2004:357) observe, "made sure that imperial Roman theology penetrated deep into local districts among the urban plebs." The earlier *lares compitales* or neigbourhood shrines for guardian spirits of the crossroads were transformed by Augustus into *lares Augusti* at the *compita* or street corners of neighbourhoods. His image now appeared in the center of these altars, and whenever the neighbourhood would meet to sacrifice and share the barbequed meat, in a kind of lower-class block party to be organized by specific officials appointed from freedmen and even slaves (2004:354), it was to be in honour of Augustus!

It is against this background, or rather foreground, that we should, according to CR, understand Paul's counter-imperial but reconstructive programme, and its theological grounding. Their first argument is based on titles and terminology. If Caesar is proclaimed as Lord, Saviour and Son of God, so is Paul's Christ as *Kurios*, *Soter* and *Huios tou theou*. Instead of the good news (*euaggelia*) of Augustus' birth stands the *euaggelion* of Christ Jesus. Against the expected arrival (*parousia*) of and meeting (*apantesis*) with Caesar, Paul announces to the Thessalonian Christians that of Christ – a deliberate "counterlanguage" (2004:10) and "calculated treason" (2004:11).

The vocabulary is the same, but the content is radically different. And to understand the content, one has to analyse Paul's arguments within the imperial context that I have briefly sketched above.

The master model to be imitated is found in the "kenotic" Christ of Philippians 2:6-11 and the crucified Christ of 1 Corinthians 1-4. From his precarious situation under military custody in Ephesus' prison Paul tells the Christians in the Roman colony of Philippi not to follow Rome's imperial paradigm of domination, of lording-it-over its subjects, but instead to "empty themselves" by serving each other (2004:273, 288-291).

To the Christians in the Roman colony of Corinth Paul explains from Ephesus, after his release from the Ephesian prison, the meaning of following a crucified Christ as model in their communal practices. The few that are powerful in the congregation and serve as patrons to their gatherings should not treat the poor majority with contempt during their communal meals by eating the best food first and leaving nothing for the poor who arrive late, but should respect the ritual of the Lord's supper (*kuriakon deipnon*) as an *agape*-meal, that is as a share meal, which would allow for no class discrimination. It is indeed because the few strong ones in the Corinthian congregation replicate the competing patronal networks of their society within the Christian *ekklesiai* that Paul, according to CR (2004:331, 336-341), refuses to accept their patronal financial support and become financially dependent on them. Such financial support is, however, accepted with much appreciation from the Philippians, for the very reason that theirs would be communal rather than patronal.

Equality of class, gender and ethnicity within the Christian community is indeed of paramount importance to Paul's message and programme. In his letter to the Christian communities in Northern Galatia Paul argues polemically against Jewish and Jewish-Christian opponents who insist on the need of circumcision for God-fearers (*theosebeis*, *phoboumenoi* or *sebomenoi*), who wish to fully join the synagogue or Christian assemblies. For Paul this prerequisite is absolutely unacceptable within the Christian *ekklesiai*, since it would maintain the unjust hierarchies between Jews and Gentiles, men and women, the free and the enslaved, which are precisely to be abolished within the Christian communities (cf Gl 3:28; CR:228).

In his letter to Philemon Paul prompts this slave-owner not only to pardon his run-away slave Onesimus that sought refuge with Paul, his master's friend, while Paul was in prison at Ephesus, but actually to free the slave. As a convert to Christianity Philemon is obliged not only to accept Onesimus back as "brother in the Lord" (*en kurio*), but also as one "in the flesh" (*en sarki*) (Phlm 1:16). "In every possible way ... Paul tries to get

Philemon to free Onesimus and to do so willingly, since "Christian owner of a Christian slave" would be an oxymoron (2004:109). The implicit principle to be applied across Pauline Christianity is that of equality (2004:110).

Women, Paul insists according to CR's (2004:111-6) reading, should be equal with men in the family, the assembly and the apostolate. When the Corinthians ask Paul's advice on celibacy, he explains that, because of Christ's imminent return, ascetic abstention is preferable but insists that marriage and intercourse are permissible. In both cases "a consistent equality of female with male or male with female" (2004:111) is emphasized throughout Paul's discussion in 1 Cor 7: "Paul's preference is about celibacy over marriage and not about inequality over equality for both women and men within either status" (2004:111).

A close look at Rom 16 reveals the importance of women in Paul's congregations and missionary programme. Amongst the many women mentioned is Phoebe, a literate woman of means, referred to as a *prostates* ("benefactor") of the Christian community, and carrier of this letter from Corinth to Rome, where she would be expected to circulate, read and explain it (2004:114). Greetings are sent to Prisca and Aquila (with Prisca mentioned first!), the tentmaker wife and husband who now are in Rome, but previously assisted Paul at Corinth and Ephesus. The Jewish couple Andronicus and Junia are called "prominent among the apostles", which would make Junia, a female, a prominent apostle! It is thus, in CR's (2004:111) view, clear that "Paul opposes any superiority, inferiority, or inequality within Christianity."

Those three instances of human injustice, of systemic discrimination on the basis of gender, class and ethnicity, of institutionalized hierarchies so characteristic of Roman imperial society, are to be replaced, Paul insists, within Christian communities with egalitarian programmes, in which differences would be respected as necessary for the building up of congregations. The whole of 1 Corinthians 12-14 is indeed devoted to the issue of "unity amid diversity," but "without hierarchy" (2004:345). The problem is again one of "superiority and inferiority, who is better than whom, who has the most important function, the best position, the greatest gift" (2004:345). Paul's answer is, of course, that the body has many members with none more important than the others. They are all equally important, equally dependent on each other. Diversity of members and functions are imperative for the common good of the congregation, but ethnic, gender and class hierarchies are not. Most important is the building up of the church through love, through *agape* as sharing. "All that is," as CR (2004:348) say, "Paul's egalitarian vision in action of a Christian kenotic community that empties itself in love and service for others."

Paul's sense for distributive justice as communal sharing is, they hold, particularly evident from his collection for the poor in Jerusalem. When Paul met the leaders of the Jerusalem assembly fourteen years after his conversion, he agreed to collect money from his pagan converts for the support of this community that did not possess anything in private but instead held everything in common (2004:354, 389, 397). To the Christians in Rome he explains that "Macedonia and Achaia have been pleased to share their resources" with the poor Christian Jews in Jerusalem, and argues that this is just right since "if the Gentiles have come to share" in the Jerusalem community's spiritual blessings (*ta pneumatika*), the Christian Gentiles also have an obligation to support the Jerusalem community in material things (*ta sarkika*) (Rm 15:25-27; CR 2004:398). And earlier in 2 Corinthians 8:13-14 he explains to the Corinthians, with whom he has now finally been reconciled, that the donation for James' congregation in Jerusalem is all about the fair distribution of resources: "I do not mean," Paul says, "that there should be relief for others and pressure on you, but it is a question of a fair balance (*ex isotetos*) between your present abundance and their need, so that their abundance may be for your need, in order that there may be a fair balance (*hopos genetai isotes*)" (2004:402).

That systemic justice is indeed the primary issue in Paul is finally clear, CR hold, from Paul's announcement of a general, bodily resurrection that has already started with Jesus' bodily resurrection. The metaphor is under-standable not only in contrast to the Platonic dualism of immortal soul *versus* mortal body and Rome's senatorial propagandistic proclamation of the apotheosis of individual dead emperors, but especially within the context of Jewish covenantal faith and Pharisaic apocalyptic expectations (2004:133-135, 173-174, 341-345). If the Corinthian wise, in Platonic fashion, refuse to accept Christ's bodily resurrection, Paul insists emphatically on its importance. Why? Because justice is always about concrete bodies, individually and collectively, and not about pure, disembodied souls. If God is just (as Jewish covenantal faith proclaimed), he will bodily and concretely vindicate those just martyrs who have been brutalized in the body by unjust systems, someday here below on a transformed earth (as Pharisaic Judaism deeply believed). Paul's point is, and here he introduces something profoundly new into the Pharisaic apocalyptic view, that the process has already begun with Christ's bodily resurrection: God has already started to clean up this mess, to make things right down here in this unjust world. And, we may ask, where is this metamorphosis, this change, to be seen? Come and look at our alternative communities of egalitarian sharing, Paul would have answered.

Now if we accept CR's argument that Paul's central concern was indeed with egalitarian and distributive justice as an alternative to imperial greed and hierarchies, we would do good to locate his vision in comparison with Greco-Roman philosophers who not only spent a lot of time reflecting on this very issue, but have also exercised a tremendous influence on later political thought and practice. Unfortunately this perspective is notably neglected in CR's important recent book on Paul. I would therefore like to provide some indication, in outline, of exponents and aspects that would be of crucial importance in such a comparison.

CR (2004:233) importantly argue that Paul's non-violent, egalitarian option for Christian churches was already present within his Jewish tradition. In Jewish *Sibylline Oracles* 2:313-338, "from the Augustan age in the generation before Paul" and "from Phrygia, along whose eastern borders Paul moved northward through Galatia", we are presented with the following apocalyptic vision of egalitarian justice to be brought about by divine intervention:

> The earth will belong equally to all, undivided by walls or fences. ... Lives will be in common and wealth will have no division. For there will be no poor man there, no rich, and no tyrant, no slave. Further, no one will be either great or small anymore. No kings, no leaders. All will be on a par together.

And in *Sibylline Oracles* 3, "from Egyptian Judaism between 163 and 145 BCE" (2004:132-133) we learn:

> There will be no sword on earth or din of battle ... There will no longer be war ... but there will be great peace throughout the whole earth. ... Prophets of the great God will take away the sword for they themselves are judges of men and righteous kings. There will also be just wealth among men, for this is the judgment and dominion of the great God.

In his earlier work on *The birth of Christianity* Crossan (1998) argues in greater detail for the continuity, with regard to the fundamental concern for social justice, between the historical Jesus and earliest Christianity on the one hand and specific strands within Jewish and broader Ancient Near-Eastern traditions on the other. If the thirst for social justice is evident from kings and ruling elites in Mesopotamia, Ugarit, and Egypt who introduced legislation "on behalf of the poor and less fortunate classes", particularly the "widows and orphans" (Weinfeld, quoted affirmatively by Crossan 1998:185), it is even more seriously present in the Hebrew Bible (2004:186). The Torah prescribes

not only the remission of debt and liberation of Hebrew slaves every seventh year (the Sabbath year), but also the reversal of land dispossession every fiftieth (the Jubilee year). The prophets offer relentless social criticism, from Samuel who warns against the abuses of monarchy, through Elijah and Elisha who "did not simply *talk* about widows and orphans, [but] *did* something about them" (2004:198-199), to Amos who in the eighth century "was appalled by the widening discrepancy between rich and poor" (2004:200) during the reign of Jeroboam, king of Israel. This kind of criticism continued in the following centuries with Hosea, Isaiah, Micah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel and Zechariah.

But, granted all of that, where is the recognition here of, and fair and legitimate engagement with, comparable strands in Greco-Roman thought on social justice? If Amos, the farmer of Tekoa in Palestine, represents one example of this concern for social justice in the Hebrew tradition, then Hesiod, the farmer from Boeotia in Greece, epitomizes a roughly contemporary parallel. He warns the exploitative nobles of his time, not unlike the slave Aesop with his witty fables, as follows:

> Now I will tell a fable to the lords (*basileusin*), although they can think for themselves. Here is how the hawk addressed the dapple-throat nightingale as he carried her high in the clouds, grasping her in his claws; impaled on the curved talons, she was weeping piteously, but he addressed her sternly:
> "Goodness, why are you screaming? You are in the power of one much more superior, and you will go whichever way I take you, singer though you are. I will make you my dinner if I like, or let you go. He is a fool who seeks to compete against the stronger: he both loses the struggle and suffers injury on top of insult."
> So spoke the swift-flying hawk, the great winged bird. ...
> [But] you ..., my lords (*basileis*), attend to this justice-doing of yours. For close at hand among men there are immortals taking note of all those who afflict each other with crooked judgments, heedless of the gods' punishment.
>
> (*Works and Days* 201-212, 248-251; West 1989:42-44)

And if certain kings in the ancient Near East introduced legislation to protect the lower classes, then compare Solon, the Athenian legislator and statesman of the 6th century BCE:

> The citizens themselves, through their foolish acts, are willing
> to destroy the great city, yielding to their desire for wealth,
> and the leaders of the people have unjust minds, for whom soon
> there will be many griefs to suffer as a result of their great
> *hubris*.

> For they do not know how to control their excess, nor to order well
>   their present good cheer in the peace of the feast
> ...
>   and they grow rich, prompted by their unjust acts,
> ...
>   and sparing neither sacred possessions nor public ones
> they steal in violent seizure, one from one source one from another,
> and do not observe the solemn foundations of Justice.
>
> *(Poem 4*, or *Good Order* [*Eunomia*]) (Cartledge 1998:79)

Solon, the moderate aristocrat, came to sympathize with the poor majority of farmers, "some ... destitute and in danger of being sold into slavery" (Fisher in Cartledge 1998:85). In order to solve the social crisis Solon introduced new laws that "abolished debt-slavery ... and cancelled debts" (1998:88).

In the next century the historical Socrates, though claiming ignorance about many things, was absolutely sure about one thing: one should always side with the just, and never do injustice (*adikein*) towards others, whatever the political circumstances under which one lives. Thus, when the Thirty Tyrants, conducting their reign of terror, in 404 BCE instructed Socrates to arrest Leon of Salamis, who had done nothing wrong, in order to execute him, Socrates simply defied their orders and went home (Plato, *Apology* 32c-d). What Socrates was trying to make clear to his fellow-citizens was that they could do nothing better than to side with those who, on the basis of careful examination, show themselves to be just, and to do so even when it endangers one's life (cf Döring 2001:675, 682).

Socrates' most famous pupil, Plato, is given some attention by CR (2004:341-345). At issue is the contrast between Plato's soul-body dualism versus Paul's bodily resurrection. CR imagine that the wise in the Corinthian congregation accepted Plato's hierarchy of immortal soul over mortal body, which by the first century, they assume, would have been almost a commonplace. They quote Plato's *Phaedo*, *Cratylus*, *Phaedrus* and *Laws* as evidence for Plato's hierarchy of soul over body. In the *Phaedo* Socrates spends his last day in conversation with friends, telling them that

> [the soul must] have its dwelling ..., both now and in the future, alone by itself, freed from the shackles of the body. ... The soul is most like that which is divine, immortal ... whereas body is most like that which is human, mortal. ... [At death] the soul, the invisible part, which goes away to a place that is like itself ... into the presence of the good and wise God, where, if God so will, my [Socrates'] soul must shortly go. ... Every seeker after wisdom knows that up to the time when philosophy takes it over his soul is a helpless prisoner,

chained hand and foot in the body, compelled to view reality not directly but only through its prison bars, and wallowing in utter ignorance (67d, 80bd, 82e).

In the *Cratylus* (400c) "the soul is in the body (*soma*) as in a tomb (*sema*)," and in the *Phaedrus* (250c) the soul is in the body "as an oyster in its shell." In *Laws* 12.959b:

> Soul is utterly superior to the body, and that which gives each one of us his being is nothing else but his soul, whereas the body is no more than a shadow which keeps us company. So 'tis well said of the deceased that the corpse is but a ghost; the real man - the undying thing called the soul - departs to give account to the gods of another world, even as we are taught by ancestral tradition - an account to which the good may look forward without misgiving, but the evil with grievous dismay.

CR's argument now is that Paul would have disagreed fundamentally from this Platonic view, which was apparently held by the wise amongst the Corinthian Christians. These members would have had difficulty to understand Paul's insistence on the *bodily* resurrection of Jesus. The apotheosis of Jesus' soul to the eternal, divine realm would not have presented a problem to them. Nor would they have had a problem to accept that Jesus was seen after his death by many people, including Paul himself, since in their Greco-Roman traditions "individuals had often come back from the dead to visit the living" (2004:342). But they would have considered Paul's suggestion foolish that anyone would wish to take "the shackles of prison ... into eternity" (2004:342). Why does Paul then insist on its importance? As explained above, the bodily resurrection of Jesus expresses for Paul the crucial fact that God's justice has already begun within the Christian communities.

If the Corinthian wise then ask about the kind of body with which the dead will be raised, Paul answers that it will be the same buried body (*soma psychikon* "soul-body"), but now transformed and empowered by the Pneuma of God (as *soma pneumatikon* "Spirit-body"). A transformed world here below on earth would require transformed Spirit-bodies. CR (2004:344-345) ask in conclusion and as summary to this section:

> Why did Paul not agree with his "wise" Corinthian converts by accepting Platonic theology and insisting that Christ's soul, as purer even than Socrates's, resided now with God in a state of such eternal holiness that it judged positively or negatively all other souls before or after it. Plato, after all, had insisted (against Homer's

Hades) that the soul's immortality was necessary for divine justice so that virtuous souls could be rewarded and evil souls punished after this life. Why not, at least, leave two options for Christian faith: the resurrection of the body or the immortality of the soul?

They answer emphatically:

Because, quite simply, *the general, bodily resurrection was, first of all, about the justice of God ... here below upon a transformed earth, and, second, within that, it was about the martyrs who had died for justice and from injustice with their bodies tortured, brutalized, and murdered.* ... The soul's immortality, even with all due postmodern sanctions, did not restore a world disfigured by human evil, injustice, and violence. For the Jewish and Pharisaic Paul, divine justice was necessarily about transfigured bodies upon a transfigured earth.

In a previous article, in conversation with Crossan, I already raised the issue of comparing the historical Jesus with key figures from the Greek tradition who seriously addressed the question of social justice (Strijdom 2003:280-290). I started by quoting Hesiod, Solon and Socrates, as I do here, and continued with Plato, Aristotle and the Stoics. With reference to Plato, I argued that if social justice is indeed the issue, it would not suffice to stop with Plato's dualism of soul over body, but would be imperative to engage seriously with Plato's *Republic* as well.

Crossan (2003:305-6) replied that he would not have a problem with Hesiod, Solon, Socrates and Plato's *Republic* as evidence for a Greek concern with social justice, but stressed that his interest in and criticism of Plato was limited to the single aspect of soul over body, and that he considered its effect on Western sensibility quite harmful. As he put it in an earlier work: Plato introduced "a profound fault line in Western sensibility and consciousness, ... a cosmic dualism [which] separates spirit and matter, exalts spirit over matter, equates male with spirit and female with matter, and dehumanizes our sexuality and our humanity in that process" (Crossan 1999:39).

He claims in his response to me that, firstly, the only valid criticism of him on this point would be to show "that Plato did not so separate soul and body or that, having done so, it was good for the Western future" (2003:305-306). Secondly, he admits that he is much more interested in the social justice of Jesus' Kingdom than that of Plato's *Republic*, since "there are millions of people in our modern world who base their lives on Jesus' Kingdom and no such popular tradition based on Plato's *Republic*" (2003:306). Finally, if I say

that Plato's ideal *polis*, like the Qumran sect, intended to combat greed, he would like to point out that the "one was never tried out in practice", whilst the other "lasted for a couple of hundred years and was destroyed finally by Roman power" (2003:306).

I do not find this response of Crossan adequate, and would like to repeat the challenge here, now with reference to Paul, that it would be imperative to move beyond the limited aspect of soul over body, if we want to meaningfully compare Plato and Paul on social-political justice.

But, as a preliminary remark, it would be important to note that Crossan has changed his position on Paul's relationship to Plato from Crossan (1999) to CR (2004). In that earlier work Crossan (1999; cf 1998:xxii-xxvii) distinguished between sarcophilic and sarcophobic sensibilities, the latter being derived from pernicious Platonic dualism. He then considered the historical Jesus and his brother James, the canonical gospels and rabbinic Judaism amongst the former sarcophilic option, but Philo, Paul, Josephus and the gnostic gospels tending towards the latter sarcophobic option. He there, on the one hand, agreed with Boyarin that "Paul compromised between his Judaism and his Hellenism by adopting not a radical (rejection of flesh for spirit) but a moderate Platonic dualism (subordination of flesh to spirit)" (1999:42), but on the other hand differed from Boyarin, claiming that Paul applied that dualism *inconsistently* to Galatians 3:28's distinctions of ethnicity, class, and gender: whereas Paul negates the ethnic distinction between Jew and Greek "to the fullest physical extent concerning circumcision or kosher," he negates the class distinction between slave and free, and the gender distinction between male and female, "in a far more spiritual manner" (1999:42). In CR (2004:413), however, Paul seems to be rehabilitated from inconsistency and the dangerous tendency towards Platonic dualism, so that the authors can claim by the end of this book that in Paul they "have found a saint not only for then, but for now and always." It is, I would say, a pity that Crossan has not defined his new position expressly in relation to his earlier one.

Back then to Crossan's statement that his sole interest was in Plato's soul-body hierarchy and its deleterious influence on Western consciousness. The next step, I maintain, and Crossan will probably agree with me here, will be to develop the comparison between Paul and Plato beyond the single aspect of body-soul dualism by considering Plato's psychology and ethical-political views in order to meaningfully compare their respective views on social justice. In the *Republic*, for example, the theory of a tripartite soul is intimately linked to the theory of an ideal, just *polis*. The one actually serves as analogy for the other: just as the rational element (*logistikon*) in each individual must, in collaboration with the obedient spiritual element

(*thumoeides*), exercise control over the lower desires (*epithumiai*) for excess food and drink, sex and pleasure, wealth and power, just so must rulers (*archontes*), in collaboration with obedient soldiers (*epikouroi*), exercise control over the common people (*hoi polloi*). Here are a few random quotations from Socrates as the argument progresses in Book 4:

> So a just man is just, I think we shall say, Glaucon, in the same way a city was just. ... We haven't at any point forgotten, I hope, that the city was just when each of the three elements in it was performing its own function (441d).
> Each one of us will be just, and perform his own proper task, when each of the elements within him is performing *its* proper task. (441e).
> But the truth is that although justice apparently *was* something of this kind, it was not concerned with the external performance of man's own function, but with the internal performance of it, with his true self and his own true function, forbidding each of the elements within him to perform tasks other than his own, and not allowing the classes of thing within his soul to interfere with one another. He has, quite literally, to put his own house in order, being himself his own ruler, mentor and friend, and tuning the three elements just like three fixed points in a musical scale - top, bottom and intermediate. And if there turn out to be any intervening elements, he must combine them all, and emerge as a perfect unity of diverse elements, self-disciplined (*sophron*) and in harmony with himself. Only then does he act, whether it is a question of making money, or taking care of his body, or some political action, or contractual agreements with private individuals (443d-444a).

A strict hierarchy within the soul is paralleled by a strict hierarchy within the polis. That is the model that is presented here, and which was prepared for already in Book 3 by the myth of the metals as prerequisite for establishing the utopian city. The first thing ruler specialists will have to do in order to found a perfect, hierarchical city, Socrates argues, is to create a myth, a noble lie, which should ideally be believed by all people. They should be told that there are some people made of gold by the gods who are to act as rulers, others of silver who are to serve as soldiers, and lastly those of iron and bronze who are the farmers and manual workers (*Republic* 415a). The way to get them to believe this as the truth, is to teach it to the children as the truth (and not as mere fiction, or made-up story) with the result that by the second and third generations they will not question it at all. The common people should actually be forbidden to question its truth, whereas the specialists alone should be allowed to have the insight into its fictionality (its being-made-up) and be entrusted to do this kind of lying.

Now this political proposal must surely, on first impulse, be rejected as totalitarian, as Karl Popper did in *The open society and its enemies, Vol 1: The spell of Plato*. It appears deplorable not only to our egalitarian sensibilities, but would also – we may now add – be in fundamental conflict with the vision and programme of CR's historical Paul.

We should, however, make two comments here. Firstly, within the proposed hierarchical structure Plato's Socrates allows for some upward and downward mobility. At least those members from the lower classes and those women who have the capacity to think, are allowed into the ruler class. As Socrates says:

> Most of the time you will father children of the same type as yourselves, but because you are related, occasionally a silver child may be born from a golden parent, or a golden child from a silver parent, and likewise any type from any other type. ... If their [the rulers'] own child is born with a mixture of bronze or iron in him, they must feel no kind of pity for him, but give him the position in society his nature deserves, driving him out to join the skilled workers or farmers. On the other hand, any children from those groups born with a mixture of gold or silver should be given recognition, and promoted either to the position of guardian or to that of auxiliary.
>
> (*Republic* 415b-c)

And when Glaucon observes: "What wonderful men you have fashioned as our rulers, Socrates," Socrates corrects him: "Men *and women*, Glaucon. You mustn't think that in what I have been saying I have had men in mind any more than women – those of them who are born with the right natural abilities" (*Republic* 540c).

Secondly, regarding the noble lie we are faced with a profound and deeply unnerving insight, which is pertinent not only to ancient imperial and Christian mythologies, but to contemporary ones as well. At issue is not only the conscious manipulation of myths by intellectuals, poets and leaders to influence people's thoughts and behaviour, but also the veiled way in which it is done. Plato knew exactly what he was doing: he was creating a fictional story (*plasma*), which he would present to the common people as factual truth, in order to achieve his objective of establishing an ideal (ie, hierarchical) *polis*. As Kathryn Morgan (2000:265) aptly observes: "A successful Noble Lie does not make its fictional status apparent."

About five centuries after Plato, towards the end of the second century CE, Celsus would still maintain this Platonic insight, now applied to Christian

myths as well. Part of his programme was to expose the Christian Gospels as fictional stories (*plasmata*), which purported to be read as history (*historia*). He argued that the Christian story about Jesus' resurrection, for example, was as mythical as those told about heroes from his own Greco-Roman tradition, but that the Christian ones were a far cry from the superior Greco-Roman ones. How could the story of Jesus' resurrection anyway be of value to humanity, he argued, if it was invented by a hysterical female, Mary of Magdala (*Contra Celsum* 2.55; cf Bowersock 1994:3, 95, 118)? Origen, of course, though an allegorist, replied by insisting on its factuality (*Contra Celsum* 2.48; cf Bowersock 1994:115).

CR have shown us how Augustan poets, sculptors and artists manipulated traditional myths in order to propagate an imperial ideology and programme, and claimed that Paul's Christ myth served not only to oppose it but also to offer an alternative model. Although it is quite probable that Virgil, Horace and Ovid knew exactly what they were doing, it is not clear whether Paul actually and consciously thought that he was busy with myth-making. For Crossan (2003:304) the important point would not be to try and get clarity on where those authors were on accepting a given story as literal or metaphorical, but instead to focus on the ideological content of the stories (whether taken as fact or fiction). I agree, of course, on the importance of determining the value system encoded by a particular myth, but will simultaneously insist that attending to the subtle ways in which myths are manipulated as fictional constructs is of equal critical importance.

This I have learned not only from René Girard's analysis of scapegoat rituals, but also from Burton Mack's criticism of Girard and Mack's extensive analysis of the problematics of early Christian myth-makings (cf Strijdom 1997:610-613). According to Girard the real function of sacrificial rituals, to redirect aggression onto a scapegoat as prerequisite for cultural formation, is masked by myths of salvation. This true insight is to be revealed by the critical thinker, but the revelation will be dangerous to society, Girard says, since as soon as the veil is lifted by the critic the ritual may lose its usefulness and actually lead to the group's self-destruction. According to Girard the proclamation of Christ's death and its ritualisation in the eucharist offer a solution to the dilemma, but Burton Mack criticized him for his unhistorical reading of early Christianity and argued that far from offering a solution, the Jews became the new scapegoats of the Christians. My purpose is not to debate the theories of Girard or Mack here, but only to underline the importance of analysing the process of myth-making itself, of how myths and rituals are manipulated and actually work within society.

Plato's insight into how myths work is pertinent to our imperial world, as can be seen in the *New York Times*-debate (2003) on its influence via the Plato-scholar Leo Strauss and his neocon disciples on the imperialist policy decisions of the Bush administration. William Pfaff (2003), in the *International Herald Tribune*, summarizes Strauss as believing that "the essential truths about human society and history should be held by elite, and withheld from others who lack the fortitude to deal with truth. Society ... needs consoling lies. ... Platonic truth is too hard for people to bear .... Hence it has been necessary to tell lies to people about the nature of political reality. Elite recognizes the truth, however, and keeps it to itself. This gives it insight, and implicitly power that others do not possess." This is, of course, contrary to what most Americans would like to believe, but Plato's "noble lie" does challenge us to seriously reflect not only on the content but also the subtle manipulation of imperialist and anti-imperialist myths in our world.

I have so far only considered Plato's ideal, hierarchical city in Book 4 of the *Republic*, which is prepared for by the "noble lie" of the metals in Book 3. But if we want to compare Paul on social justice with Plato's *Republic*, we will have to go back to Book 2 as well. The first city that Socrates imagines is a simple agrarian one, which is based on the egalitarian sharing of material goods, produced by everyone according to his/her natural skills (*Republic* 369c-372c). What would Paul have thought of Socrates' first proposal for a beautiful city? It seems to me he would have had little reason to disagree that it might serve as model for his Christian communities.

Socrates' dialogue partner, however does have a problem with it, and objects that such a city would be a "city of pigs" lacking in sophisticated urban culture. Plato's Socrates therefore at this point introduces a new hierarchical model, which will address the problem of greed. In order to combat greedy desires for wealth, the guardians of the city should not be allowed to own any private property, but should live communally and share their meals. This arrangement should prevent them from starting to behave like wolves attacking the common people (i.e., the farmers and craftsmen) instead of dogs protecting the common people (*Republic* 416a-e). When Adeimantus objects that Socrates is not making the guardians happy (*eudaimones/makarioi*) this way, Socrates reminds him that the aim is not the happiness (*eudaimonia*) of only one segment of the population, but of *all* the classes (*Republic* 419-420c).

It was in this connection that I referred to the Qumran Essenes, a rigidly hierarchical society in which no private ownership was allowed and whose members lived communally. But unlike Plato's admission of women into the ruler class of his ideal *polis* (and, we know, in actual fact also into his

academy), they would not allow women into their community (Strijdom 2003:285-286). Crossan (2003:306) replied that the fundamental difference lies in the fact that Plato's ideal *polis* "was never tried out in practice," whilst the Qumran sect "lasted for a couple of hundred years and was destroyed finally by Roman power." I do not think, as should be clear from my remarks above, that it is academically responsible to sideline Plato's utopia as mere abstract theory, or neglect him because "there are millions of people in our modern world who base their lives on Jesus' kingdom and no such popular tradition based on Plato's *Republic*" (Crossan 2003:306). An in-depth and nuanced comparison of Plato and Paul may indeed contribute to the academic debate and real-life practices of our world.

I say nuanced, because Plato was willing during his long life to revise his views on the soul and politics. On his changing psychology, from a bipartite to a tripartite soul, and in the latter case from a suppression of the lower desires to an acknowledgement of their importance as motivational forces, Martha Nussbaum (1986) has offered us a provocative thesis for debate and comparison. On Plato's political philosophy and its relationship to his moral psychology Christopher Bobonich (2002) is now forcing us to consider Plato's recasting of his earlier utopia of the *Republic* in the later *Laws*.

Finally, there is the complex reception of Plato, which calls for a more incisive assessment. Werner Kelber (1999:102) already, with reference to Crossan's statement on the pernicious influence of Plato's sarcophobic dualism, critized him for "a serious *mis*judgment of the tradition," which is "inadequately grounded in the historical experience, hence liable to distorting the plenitude and variability of Christian traditions." Gender inequality, Kelber points out, was after all also maintained by "Jewish patriarchal values ... and Christian apostolicity" (1999:99), whereas asceticism could serve as a way to liberate women from "the pressures of a menacing political establishment that coerced women into the role of bearers of children" (1999:100).

I now turn to Aristotle and Paul on social justice. CR (2004) does not mention Aristotle, but in his earlier work Crossan (1998:183) did take issue with Aristotle's view of distributive justice, which actually demanded *in*equality. For Aristotle distributive justice meant that things be distributed equally only amongst those of equal worth. To distribute "equal shares among unequal persons, or of unequal shares among equal persons, would be unjust" (Finley, in Crossan 1998:183). That natural *in*equality was fundamental to Aristotle's thinking, is evident from his analysis of friendship and slavery. As Karl Marx indeed correctly stated according to Crossan (1998:183): "Greek society was founded upon slavery, and had, therefore, for its natural basis, the inequality of men and of their labour power."

In debate with Crossan I asked for a more refined reading of Aristotle's argument, which would consider Aristotle's general definition of justice (*dikaiosune*), and then his distinction between two specific kinds of justice, namely distributive (*dianemetikon*) and corrective/rectificatory (*diorthotikon*) in Book 5 of the *Nicomachean Ethics* (Strijdom 2003:286-287). In line with his empirical epistemology Aristotle defines justice in general according to the dominant opinion that he observes in his society as

> that moral disposition (*hexis*) which renders men apt to do just things, and which causes them to act justly and to wish (*boulontai*) what is just; and similarly by injustice (*adikia*) that disposition which makes men act unjustly and wish (*boulontai*) what is unjust.

> (*Nicomachean Ethics* V.1. 1129a)

Justice, Aristotle continues,

> is displayed towards others (*pros heteron*). ... Justice alone of the virtues is "the good for others (*pros heteron*)," because it does (*prattei*) what is for the advantage of another (*allo*). ... the best is not he who practices virtue in regard to himself but he who practices it towards others (*pros heteron*); for that is a difficult task.

> (*Nicomachean Ethics* V.1. 1129b-1130a)

After this definition of justice in general (the *genus*), Aristotle proceeds to distinguish between two specific types of justice. The first species, distributive justice, is defined as the fair distribution amongst equals of "honour, wealth, and the other divisible assets of the community" (V.2. 1130b). This distribution, in order to be just and fair, Aristotle says, must be proportional and according to merit (*kat' axian*): "it is when equals possess or are allotted unequal shares, or persons not equal equal shares, that quarrels and complaints arise" (V.3. 1131a). In the second species, corrective/rectificatory justice, this should not play a role, since

> in this branch of justice, which involves what we would call the civil and criminal law, the aim of the judge is to compensate the victim of crime or fraud for his loss and to punish the perpetrator by taking away his ill-gotten gain. ... "[the law] treats the parties as equals and asks only whether one has done and the other has suffered wrong, and whether one has done and the other has suffered damage" (V.4, 1132a). ... In other words, while merit must count in distributive justice, it must not in matters of rectification; while distributive justice may be aristocratic, rectificatory justice must be egalitarian.

> (Prior 1991:170-171)

In his response to me Crossan (1993:306) emphasized that he did not dismiss Aristotle *in toto*, but that his criticism was limited to Aristotle's view of slavery as natural. "Aristotle," he says, "should have done better on that one by wondering what if he himself had been captured and enslaved." Furthermore, he does "not see how Strijdom's fuller reading of that Aristotelian passage changes anything." I would like to reply with two sets of questions and remarks, which would deserve answers and elaboration at a later stage.

Crossan's specific problem is with Aristotle's view of distributive justice, which actually demands *in*equality (evident from his endorsement of slavery in his society as natural). Against that view of distributive justice as *in*equality then stands CR's Paul[3] with a radical egalitarian vision and programme, which deny the validity of hierarchical relations between men and women, masters and slaves, and maintain that material resources should be distributed equally within and amongst the Christian communities. My question concerns the way in which distribution according to merit (*kat' axian*, in Aristotle's terms) functions within modern theories of justice. How would John Rawls' (1999) theory of justice as fairness or Martha Nussbaum's capabilities approach (cf references in bibliography) relate to CR's construct of a radically egalitarian Paul? If Nussbaum uses Aristotle to develop her liberal approach to and programme for a flourishing society, how does it compare to and contrast with those of radical philosophers in the Marxist tradition? CR (2004:403) admit that the egalitarian vision and programme of their Paul have never worked out in the world as expected, but insist that "it must work out somehow, if the earth is to have any future" or else "God will still be God, but only of the insects and the grasses." Wouldn't Rawls' justice as fairness, or Nussbaum's capabilities approach, we should ask, perhaps offer liberal alternatives, which are more realistic for our world than the radical one of CR's Paul?

Crossan did not consider Aristotle's view of corrective / rectificatory justice. But in my view this species of justice presents itself as another case in point for fruitful comparison with Paul. Crossan, after all, often contrasts distributive with retributive justice in his work. In Aristotle, however, these do not represent either-or alternatives as in Crossan, but are simply two types or species of the genus justice. "Vengeance and justice," says Crossan (2000:186), "are desperately easy to see as twin sides of the one coin and

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[3] Unfortunately CR (2004) debate neither Antoinette Wire's (1990) reading of 1 Cor 7 as evidence of Paul's patriarchal attitude towards women, nor Gerd Theissen's (1984) view on Paul's proposal of "love patriarchalism" in 1 Cor 8 as solution to the problem between "the strong" (the wealthy minority) and "the weak" (the poor majority from the lower classes) in the Corinthian house churches – cf Strijdom (2001) for a summary of these views. Here I assume as working hypothesis the validity of CR's reading of Paul, and then ask about its relation to Plato, Aristotle and the Stoics.

desperately hard to see as two distinct coins." Given their mixture in our own heart and humanity, he is "not surprised to see them projected in similar mix onto our divinity," and interwoven "across *both* Testaments and, indeed, across two thousand years of the Christianity that grew out of them." They are often even "announced side by side in the very same [Bible] book," where "they are not reconciled, just juxtaposed" (2000:186). In Crossan's mind they simply are not reconcilable, but represent clear alternatives.

I am wondering whether it would not be helpful to take Aristotle's distinction of two types of justice seriously, and to problematize on that basis about means and degree, rather than to consider distributive and retributive justice as alternatives as Crossan does. According to Nussbaum (1999:160) Aristotle's "major contribution" lies specifically in his "discussion of the equitable ... within his account of justice." Strict and harsh retributive justice, which demands symmetrical punishments and judges according to rigid laws, is contrasted with gentle, merciful justice, which is flexible and lenient and judges according to the merit of particular cases. If someone committed an offense unintentionally or non-deliberately, the judge should take this into account when deciding on the punishment. A truly just, ie equitable (*epieikes*), person has a forgiving attitude and has the ability to share the other person's point of view (*suggnome*), which is closely linked with the Aristotelian view of sympathy or compassion (*eleos*) (cf Nussbaum 1999:160-161). It is clear, Nussbaum (1999:162) says, that "Aristotle's attitude to law and equity was not simply a theoretical fiction," but that it definitely "shaped legal practice." It is also clear that "Aristotelian *suggnome* stop[s] short of mercy" (1999:163), an idea which is fully developed later in Seneca's *De Ira* and *De Clementia* (1999:165-168).

In conclusion I then turn to the Stoics and Paul on the issue of social justice. Although the comparison between Paul and the Stoics has received extensive attention in recent Pauline scholarship, CR chose not to engage with it in any explicit way. They acknowledge in passing that "many sholars ... see in Pauline thought parallels to Stoicism or other ancient philosophical systems," but only to add that "at least in terms of ecstatic speech, Paul would have been seen as more akin to those devotees of Dionysos or Cybele who were, from the Roman perspective, out of control, hysterical, or even mad" (CR 2004:279-280).

These Eastern cults, with their out-of-control behaviour, always posed a potential threat to Roman order and therefore called for Rome's constant vigilance and firm control. What Rome attempted to do with Cybele's cult, which had officially been brought to Rome from Phrygia, was "to integrate her into civic life" (2004:254) by even building her a temple on the Palatine Hill,

but keeping her cult always under strict control. Isis, by the middle of the first century CE in Rome, "made it onto the official civic-religious calendar, ... by the end of the first century, she was even wed to the emperor cult, and Domitian refurbished the Iseum after the fire in 80 CE" (2004:67). But it was probably because the Egyptian cult enjoyed such popularity amongst ordinary people, including slaves, "soldiers and veterans, freedmen and municipal officials, ... even some members of the imperial family", that "imperial or senatorial acceptance was but an attempt to consolidate their positions by jumping on Isis' bandwagon." CR (2004:68) conclude: "Isis ... did not directly challenge the Roman imperial theology. ... It is no surprise that not long after Paul's death, Isis and emperor had merged in a marriage made in heaven."

When CR then consider the visions of these ecstatics, they maintain that these were not against the imperial project as such and did not really offer an alternative to it as we would find amongst Paul's Christian communities. Though these cult members may have ecstatic visions like Paul, the content of Paul's would be quite different. And if this is true, it would make sense to rather compare the content of the Stoics' view of a flourishing world with Paul's vision and programme of social justice. In order to do so I accept as crucial semantic insight that not only may the *same words* be used with *different meanings*, but also so may *different words* be used to express the *same concept*. We have already seen how CR apply the first part of this statement to the titles of *Kurios*, *Soter* and *Huios tou theou*. We now turn to its second part to see how this may be applied to Paul and the Stoics.

In several publications Troels Engberg-Pedersen (cf bibliography for references) has argued that the concept of *oikeiosis*, central to Stoic ethics, is very similar to Paul's concern in his Christian communities for "treating one another with *agape* and putting the interests of others ahead of one's own" (Engberg-Pedersen 2005:51). The Stoics argue that the individual should, by way of rational argument, extend his concern for himself in concentrical circles until all humankind is eventually included. Antiochus of Ascalon in Syria (first century BCE) explains this concept of cosmopolitan justice concisely:

> In the whole of morality ... there is nothing more brilliant, nor of greater extent than the association of people with other people, a kind of community and sharing of advantages and a real affection for the human race. It is born with us from conception, since children are loved by their parents, and the whole household is held together by marriage and offspring, and gradually spreads abroad, first through kin relationships, then marriage connections, then friendships, then relations of proximity, then to fellow-citizens and those who are allies and friends politically, and finally embraces the entire human race. This attitude of the mind, which allots to each

> their own, and maintains this community of human association ... is called justice.
>
> (Cicero, *De Finibus* V 65, in Annas 1993:316-317)

The movement from the individual I's self-concern to the collective, altruistic we-concern is identical between Paul and the Stoics. What is different is the fact that the cognitive change is occasioned by rational argument in the Stoic case, but by Christian faith in Paul's case. The basic point, however, is the same.

Engberg-Pedersen (2005:54) furthermore underlines that it would be wrong to suppose that "the Stoic ideas are intrinsically abstract and of little relevance to person-to-person relations in everyday life, whereas Paul is precisely engaged with the latter." He observes: "*if* two or more Stoic wise people do live together (as of course they could), then ... they *will* be *fully* friends of one another, goodwilled (*eunous*) towards each other, in good repute (*eudokimoi*) reciprocally and approving of one another (*apodechomenoi*). There is nothing irredeemably abstract about that."

What Engberg-Pedersen unfortunately does not do, is to interpret the meaning of *oikeiosis* and cosmopolitan other-concern within their imperial contexts, or to show whether and how these issues apply concretely to the sharing of material resources (distributive justice), or to gender, class and ethnic relationships (egalitarian justice). It is at this level that CR indeed mention some Greco-Roman moralists in passing: for example, Cicero for his self-righteous, arrogant claim "that Rome's success abroad was due to its morality and religion at home" (2004:58), his display of "the standard Roman attitude that 'no one shall have gods to himself, either new gods or alien gods, unless recognized by the State'" (2004:250), and his rhetorical attack on Jewish religion as Jewish rebellion (2004:352); Seneca on the right of slaves seeking asylum from an angry owner (2004:107), or on his bias against Jews (2004:353, 366); Martial on patronal humiliation of clients at aristocratic banquets and Pliny the Younger's disapproval of such "patronal discrimination" but alternative of "patronal slumming" (2004:338-339). CR admit that Paul's solution to the problem of patronal meals in the Corinthian congregations "maybe a little too close for comfort to Pliny's aristocratic complacency" (2004:340), but they nowhere discuss in any depth this very problem of "love patriarchalism", which Gerd Theissen (1982:110, 140) argued should be rejected as inappropriate for our times, since it in fact "allow social inequities to continue" (2004:139).

In his earlier work Crossan (e. g., 1998:334) indeed treated the Cynics at length as the closest Greco-Roman analogue to the historical Jesus. Both

criticized the Roman Empire and negated "hierarchical and patronal normalcies" (1994:198) by means of an unconventional life-style. But whereas the Cynics valued their independence and begged for food, Jesus insisted on sharing and communal dependency as a way "to rebuild peasant society from the grassroots upward" (2004:118).

Crossan (1991:70-71, 78-80) furthermore used Epictetus (ca 55-135 CE) as an example "on the borderline between Stoicism and Cynicism" to suggest that "in terms of holiness, Jesus and Epictetus were extremely close" (Crossan 2003:306). He emphasized that it was never his intention "to exalt one over the other" (2003:306). It is therefore interesting that in CR (2004:380) Epictetus is in passing referred to as "a pagan saint", who as a firm believer in his God would have objected to Paul's inaccurate polemics against Greco-Roman "idolatry" in the opening chapters of Paul's letter to the Romans. But one wonders how exactly CR would further spell out the similarities and differences between this "pagan saint" on the one hand and Paul, the Christian saint that they have discovered in their search, on the other hand.

Musonius Rufus (ca 30-100 CE), with whom Epictetus studied while still a slave, offers a vision of women that clearly parallels that of CR's Paul. In his earlier work on the historical Jesus Crossan (1991:76) already discussed Musonius' argument, against "the standard gender roles" of the Roman empire, that women are equal as philosophers on the basis of their sharing with men "the same reason, senses, body, and 'inclination' to virtue, goodness, and justice."

But if Musonius and Paul are similar in their view of women, how should we elaborate a comparison between Paul and the Stoics on slavery, the poor, and the ethnic other? And how do Paul and the Stoics compare with regard to the distribution of material resources? These are questions that will need careful investigation, if we want to relate Paul and the Stoics in a meaningful way to each other.

In this essay I have given a survey of CR's construct of the historical Paul within his imperial and Jewish contexts. I have accepted as working hypothesis their idealized portrait of Paul as a saint who implemented his vision of egalitarian and distributive justice as an alternative to imperial exploitation and hierarchies, in order to ask about its meaningful comparison with Greco-Roman philosophers on the same issue of systemic justice. In the process I have elaborated on a few issues that should in my view be of crucial importance in such a comparison, and have identified a few issues that may stimulate further research.

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