

**Waldemar Chrostowski, *St Paul at the Crossroads between the Synagogue and the Church (A Biography)*, Fronda, Warszawa 2024, pp. 708 + 56 in colour.**

This monograph is an English version of a book published in Polish by the same publishing house in 2021. In the English edition, the book was enriched with an Introduction written by Card. Gerhard Ludwig Müller (pp. 13–19) and a Foreword written by the Rev. Professor Stefan M. Attard from the University of Malta (pp. 20–22).

The monograph is an attempt to write a comprehensive biography of Paul the Apostle. The peculiarity of this book consists in the fact that it was written by a renowned biblical scholar, who was awarded Ratzinger Prize in 2014 for his work in the field of biblical studies as well as his engagement in Catholic–Jewish and Polish–Jewish dialogue. Moreover, Professor Chrostowski is an expert in biblical tourism, who guided numerous groups in all the regions and cities that he describes in his book. This fact is documented by his numerous colour photos of the places that he refers to in his monograph. Therefore, his book is a work of a dependable “eyewitness and minister of the Word” (cf. Luke 1:2).

Personal acquaintance with the places described in the book can be seen almost everywhere on its pages. For example, describing Paul’s passage from Perge to Antioch (cf. Acts 13:14), Chrostowski writes: “What Luke puts into those few words actually took much time and required a considerable effort. The laconic information about the passage of Paul and Barnabas through Perge and their arrival at Antioch in Pisidia corresponds to a route of about 250 kilometres through very rugged mountain areas” (p. 151).

The plan of the book follows the course of life of Paul the Apostle, from his childhood and youth, through his “transformation” near Damascus, through his three missionary journeys, to his arrest in Jerusalem, imprisonment in Caesarea Maritima, and his journey to Rome. As can be seen from this plan, Chrostowski resolved to take the Acts of the Apostles as his guiding work in his reconstruction of the life of Paul. Such a decision has its pros and cons, especially concerning the problematic issue

of the relationship between Paul's letters and Luke's Acts, but Chrostowski remains faithful to his resolve throughout his entire work.

Thus, for example, Chrostowski discusses the surprising issue of Paul's Roman name *Paulus* not at the beginning of his biography of Paul but in the section devoted to Acts 13:9, assuming that Paul might have had two names from his birth, although neither Paul nor Luke suggested such a fact (pp. 143–44). Likewise, following the Lukan text Acts 21:39, Chrostowski assumes that the Israelite Paul from the tribe of Benjamin (cf. Rom 11:1; Phil 3:5) simply considered himself a Jew (pp. 30–34), although Paul nowhere in his letters (apart from the reported speech addressed to Cephas in Gal 2:15) directly referred to himself in this way. Such nuances concerning being a Roman, an Israelite, a Benjaminite, a Jew, etc. could be important in a biography of someone standing between the Synagogue and the Church.

In order to depart from Luke's depiction of Paul as writing no letters and take into consideration Paul's known letters as well, Chrostowski, following the method usually adopted by biblical scholars, inserts the letters in various places into the plan borrowed from the Acts of the Apostles. It should be noted that the Polish scholar in his biography of Paul takes into consideration all the canonical letters that are attributed to the Apostle, including the *antilegomena*: Second Thessalonians, Colossians, Ephesians, Titus, First Timothy, and Second Timothy.

From the theological point of view, in his analyses Chrostowski often quotes the opinions of Benedict XVI. This fact is important because Benedict XVI can be regarded as a dependable guide in the thorny issues related to the Catholic–Jewish dialogue. Chrostowski tries to understand Jewish sensitivity but on the other hand he is deeply Catholic in his views. Such a stance, respecting both the interlocutor's identity and one's own identity, is crucial to the outcome of every sincere dialogue, and Chrostowski knows it from his life-long practice in this dialogue.

Therefore, Chrostowski's concluding words concerning Paul the Apostle cannot come as a surprise: "What makes Paul the Apostle and Christianity different from Judaism in the shape in which, following a profound transformation initiated by rabbis in the 1st century, it has existed until today as Rabbinic Judaism? The answer is, not 'what' but 'Who', that is, Jesus Christ" (p. 704). The Polish scholar notes with sadness that, after the initial acceptance of Jesus Christ by Judeo-Christians, "the opposition would radicalize over time, often masked by indifference or complete silence about Jesus (and Paul), which has lasted until today" (p. 706).

If we want to hold the Christian–Jewish dialogue, notwithstanding the historical and theological crossroads between the Synagogue and the Church, we should engage in serious scholarly discussions concerning Paul, regarded not as a “Christian rabbi” but as the first directly known Pharisee, who probably knew 4QMMT or similar works using the phrase “works of the law” (cf. Adamczewski, “Are the Dead Sea Scrolls Pharisaic?”). Professor Chrostowski’s monograph is an important step in this direction.

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