

## Christ in the Eye of the Beholder: A Re-reading of Pauline *Charis* in the Autobiographical Conversion Narratives of Galatians 1 and 1 Corinthians 15

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1. *Phi.Legat.*1.237-238: ἀκοὴν ἐδεξάμεθα παλαιάτην ὑπὸ τῶν κατὰ τὴν Ἑλλάδα λογίων παραδοθείσαν, οἱ τὴν τῆς Γοργόνης κεφαλὴν τοσαύτην ἔχειν δύναμιν ὠμολόγουν, ὥστε τοὺς προσιδόντας εὐθὺς λίθους καὶ πέτρους γίνεσθαι. τοῦτο μύθου μὲν πλάσμα ἔοικεν εἶναι, τὸ δ' ἀληθὲς αἰετὰ καὶ ἀβούλητοι καὶ ἀνήκεστοι συντυχία ἐπιφέρουσιν. ὄργαι δεσπότητος θάνατον ἀπεργάζονται ἢ παραπλήσιόν τι θανάτῳ. νομίζεις, ὃ μήποτε γένοιτο, παραπεμπόμενον εἰ θεάσαιτό τις τῶν ἡμετέρων εἰς τὸ ἱερόν τὸν ἀνδριάντα, οὐκ ἂν εἰς πέτρους μεταβαλεῖν, παγέντων μὲν αὐτοῖς τῶν ἄρθρων, παγέντων δὲ τῶν ὀφθαλμῶν, ὡς μηδὲ κινήθηναι δύνασθαι, ὅλου δὲ τοῦ σώματος τὰς φυσικὰς κινήσεις μεταβαλόντος καθ' ἕκαστον τῶν ἐν τῇ κοινῶνι μερῶν αὐτοῦ;

We have heard a very ancient tale, handed down throughout Greece by learned men, who affirmed that the head of the Gorgon had such great power that those who looked upon it immediately turned into stones and rocks. This story is, no doubt, a figment of myth, but great and unexpected and disastrous events do bring with them the truth that it conveys. The wrath of a despot brings about death, or something closely resembling death. Do you suppose (may it never be!) that if any of our own should see this statue being escorted into our temple, they would not be changed into rocks, their joints frozen, and their eyes too, so that they might not even be able to move, their entire bodies—every part and system—losing all their natural motions?<sup>1</sup>

2. *Pla.Phae.*252e-253a: οἱ μὲν δὴ οὖν Διὸς δῖόν τινα εἶναι ζητοῦσι τὴν ψυχὴν τὸν ὑφ' αὐτῶν ἐρώμενον: σκοποῦσιν οὖν εἰ φιλόσοφος τε καὶ ἡγεμονικὸς τὴν φύσιν, καὶ ὅταν αὐτὸν εὐρόντες ἐρασθῶσι, πάν ποιοῦσιν ὅπως τοιοῦτος ἔσται. ἐὰν οὖν μὴ πρότερον ἐμβεβῶσι τῷ ἐπιτηδεύματι, τότε ἐπιχειρήσαντες μανθάνουσι τε ὅθεν ἂν τι δύνωνται καὶ αὐτοὶ μετέρχονται, **ιχνεύοντες δὲ παρ' ἑαυτῶν ἀνευρίσκουσιν τὴν τοῦ σφετέρου θεοῦ φύσιν εὐποροῦσι διὰ τὸ συντόνως ἠναγκάσθαι πρὸς τὸν θεὸν βλέπειν, καὶ ἐφαπτόμενοι αὐτοῦ τῇ μνήμῃ ἐνθουσιῶντες ἐξ ἐκείνου λαμβάνουσι τὰ ἔθη καὶ τὰ ἐπιτηδεύματα, καθ' ὅσον δυνατόν θεοῦ ἀνθρώπῳ μετασχεῖν.**

The followers of Zeus desire that the soul of him whom they love be like Zeus; so they seek for one of philosophical and lordly nature, and when they find him and love him, they do all they can to give him such a character. If they have not previously had experience, they learn then from all who can teach them anything; they seek after information themselves, and **when they search eagerly within themselves to find the nature of their god, they are successful, because they have been compelled to keep their eyes fixed upon the god, and as they reach and grasp him by memory they are inspired and receive from him character and habits, so far as it is possible for a man to have part in God.**<sup>2</sup>

3. Gregory of Nyssa, *Homilies on the Song of Songs* 5: ὥσπερ γὰρ οἱ πρὸς τὴν ἀληθινὴν θεότητα βλέποντες ἐφ' ἑαυτῶν δέχονται τὰ τῆς θείας φύσεως ιδιώματα, οὕτως ὁ τῇ ματαιότητι τῶν εἰδώλων προσανέχων μετεστοιχειοῦτο πρὸς τὸ βλεπόμενον λίθος ἐξ ἀνθρώπου γινόμενος.

For just as those who look to the true godhead receive in themselves the unique features of the divine nature, so too, the one who devotes himself to the vanity of idols is transformed into that upon which he looks, becoming a stone instead of a human being.

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<sup>1</sup> Unless otherwise indicated, all translations are my own.

<sup>2</sup> Translation by H. Fowler (1925).

4. Jos.Ant.2.230-231: καὶ τριετεί μὲν αὐτῷ γεγεννημένῳ θαυμαστὸν ὁ θεὸς τὸ τῆς ἡλικίας ἐξῆρεν ἀνάστημα. πρὸς δὲ κάλλος οὐδεὶς ἀφιλότιμος ἦν οὕτως, ὡς **Μουσῆν θεασάμενος μὴ ἐκπλαγῆναι τῆς εὐμορφίας**, πολλοῖς τε συνέβαινε καθ' ὁδὸν φερομένῳ συντυγχάνουσιν ἐπιστρέφεσθαι μὲν ὑπὸ τῆς ὕψεως τοῦ παιδός, ἀφιέναι δὲ τὰ σπουδαζόμενα **καὶ τῇ θεωρίᾳ προσευσχολεῖν αὐτοῦ· καὶ γὰρ ἡ χάρις ἢ παιδικῇ πολλῇ καὶ ἄκρατος περὶ αὐτὸν οὕσα κατεῖχε τοὺς ὁρῶντας.**

When [Moses] was three years old, God also raised him up to an astonishing stature for his age. And with respect to his beauty, there was no one so indifferent as that, **upon seeing Moses, they were not struck by his good looks.** And it often happened when they met him being carried along the road that **the countenance of the child made them turn back towards him** and that they left off whatever they were rushing about to do **and devoted their time to gazing at him.** For indeed, **youthful charis**, being in his case great and undiluted, **held fast those who saw it.**

4. Phi.Ebr.145-152: οὗτος μητρὸς γέγονεν Ἄννης, ἥς τοῦνομα μεταληφθέν ἐστι χάρις· ἄνευ γὰρ θείας χάριτος ἀμήχανον ἢ λιποτακτῆσαι τὰ θνητὰ ἢ τοῖς ἀφθάρτοις ἀεὶ παραμείναι· χάριτος δ' ἦτις ἂν πληρωθῇ ψυχῇ, γέγηθεν εὐθύς καὶ μειδιᾷ καὶ ἀνορχειται· βεβάκχευται γὰρ, ὡς πολλοῖς τῶν ἀνοργιάστων μεθύειν καὶ παρακινεῖν καὶ ἐξεστάναι ἂν δόξαι. διὸ καὶ λέγεται πρὸς αὐτὴν ὑπὸ παιδαρίου τινός, οὐχ ἑνός, ἀλλ' ὑπὸ παντός τοῦ νεωτερίζειν καὶ τὰ καλὰ χλευάζειν ἀκμὴν ἔχοντος· ἕως πότε μεθυσθήσῃ; περιελού τὸν οἶνόν σου· φιλεῖ γὰρ τοῖς θεοφορήτοις οὐχ ἡ ψυχὴ μόνον ἐγείρεσθαι καὶ ὡσπερ ἐξοιστρᾶν, ἀλλὰ καὶ τὸ σῶμα ἐνερευθὲς εἶναι καὶ πεπυρωμένον **τῆς ἔνδον ἀναχεύσεως καὶ χλαινούσεως χαρᾶς τὸ πάθος εἰς τὸ ἔξω διαδιδούσης·** ὅφ' οὐ πολλοὶ τῶν ἀφρόνων ἀπατηθέντες τοὺς νήφοντας μεθύειν ὑπετόπασαν. καίτοι γε ἐκεῖνοι μὲν τρόπον τινὰ μεθύουσιν οἱ νήφοντες τὰ ἀγαθὰ ἀθρόα ἠκρατισμένοι καὶ τὰς προπόσεις παρὰ τελείας ἀρετῆς δεξάμενοι, οἱ δὲ τὴν ἀπὸ οἴνου μεθύοντες μέθην ἄγευστοι φρονήσεως διετέλεσαν νηστείαν συνεχῆ καὶ λιμὸν αὐτῆς ἄγοντες. εἰκότως οὖν ἀποκρίνεται πρὸς τὸν νεωτεροποῖδόν καὶ γέλωτα τίθεσθαι οἰόμενον τὸν σεμνὸν καὶ αὐστηρὸν αὐτῆς βίον· ὦ θαυμάσιε, γυνὴ ἢ σκληρὰ ἡμέρα ἐγώ εἰμι, καὶ οἶνον καὶ μέθυσμα οὐ πέπωκα, **καὶ ἐκχεῶ τὴν ψυχὴν μου ἐνώπιον κυρίου·** παμπόλλη γε παρρησία τῆς ψυχῆς, ἢ τῶν χαρίτων τοῦ θεοῦ πεπλήρωται...τί γὰρ ἦν τὸ "ἐκχεῶ τὴν ψυχὴν μου ἐναντίον κυρίου" ἢ σύμπασαν αὐτὴν ἀνιερῶσω, δεσμὰ μὲν οἷς πρότερον ἐσφίγγετο, ἃ περιῆψαν αἱ τοῦ θνητοῦ βίου κεναὶ σπουδαί, πάντα λύσας, προαγαγὼν δὲ ἔξω καὶ τείνας καὶ ἀναχέας τοσοῦτον, ὡς καὶ τῶν τοῦ παντός ἄψασθαί περάτων καὶ πρὸς τὴν τοῦ ἀγενήτου παγκάλῃν καὶ ἀοίδιμον θεᾶν ἐπειχθῆναι;

[Samuel's] mother is **Hannah, whose name translates as charis; for apart from divine charis it is impossible either to abandon the ranks of mortal things or to remain always among the immortals; but whatever soul is filled with charis, it rejoices at once, both smiling and leaping up to dance;** for it begins to act like a bacchant, so as to appear to many of the uninitiated to be drunken and intoxicated and ecstatic. And because of this it was said to her by a young boy—and not by one only, but by all who were at the age where they wanted to change everything up and make a mockery of the good—'How long are you going to be drunk? Put away your wine'. For the soul of those possessed by God is generally not only raised up, but is even as it were made wild, and also the body becomes somewhat ruddy and as if it were on fire, **with the joy poured out on the inside and warming up, passing the experience of it onto the outside;** by which many foolish people are deceived, and suspect sober people of being drunk. And yet indeed these sober ones are in some sense intoxicated, having drunk deep of all good things, and having received toasts from complete excellence. But those who become intoxicated from drinking wine continue to the end of their lives without ever having tasted wisdom, remaining in continual fasting and famine from it. It is appropriate, then, that she answers that reckless one, who thinks he will get a laugh out of her holy and austere life: O foolish one, 'I am a severe woman of the day, and I have drunk no wine or strong drink, **but I am pouring out my soul before the lord.**' Very great is the boldness of that soul which is filled with the *charites* of God...And what was this expression, 'I am pouring out my soul before the lord', but 'I will dedicate it entirely', having broken the chains which formerly bound it fast, which all the empty anxieties of mortal life fastened around it, and having led it out and stretched it and poured it forth to such a degree as even to touch the limits of the universe and hasten on to the beautiful and praiseworthy sight of the uncreated one.

5. Gal. 1.13-17: Ἦκούσατε γὰρ τὴν ἐμὴν ἀναστροφὴν ποτε ἐν τῷ Ἰουδαϊσμῷ, ὅτι καθ' ὑπερβολὴν ἐδίωκον τὴν ἐκκλησίαν τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ ἐπόρθουν αὐτὴν καὶ προέκοπτον ἐν τῷ Ἰουδαϊσμῷ ὑπὲρ πολλοὺς συνηλικιώτας ἐν τῷ γένει μου, περισσοτέρως ζηλωτῆς ὑπάρχων τῶν πατρικῶν μου παραδόσεων. ὅτε δὲ εὐδόκησεν [ὁ θεὸς] **ὁ ἀφορίσας με ἐκ κοιλίας μητρὸς μου καὶ καλέσας διὰ τῆς χάριτος αὐτοῦ ἀποκαλύψαι τὸν υἱὸν αὐτοῦ ἐν ἐμοί, ἵνα εὐαγγελίζωμαι αὐτὸν ἐν τοῖς ἔθνεσιν**, εὐθέως οὐ προσανεθέμην σαρκὶ καὶ αἵματι οὐδὲ ἀνήλθον εἰς Ἱεροσόλυμα πρὸς τοὺς πρὸ ἐμοῦ ἀποστόλους, ἀλλὰ ἀπῆλθον εἰς Ἀραβίαν καὶ πάλιν ὑπέστρεψα εἰς Δαμασκόν.

For you have heard of how I went about when in Judaism, that I was excessively persecuting God's church and was trying to destroy it; and I was advancing in Judaism beyond many of my peers among my people, since I was more abundantly zealous for the traditions of my ancestors. But when it pleased God, **who set me apart from my mother's womb and called me through his *charis*, to reveal his son in me, in order that I might proclaim the good news among the nations**, I didn't immediately consult with flesh and blood, nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those who were apostles before me, but I went out into Arabia and then later returned again to Damascus.

6. 1 Cor. 15.1-11: Γνωρίζω δὲ ὑμῖν, ἀδελφοί, τὸ εὐαγγέλιον ὃ εὐηγγελισάμην ὑμῖν, ὃ καὶ παρελάβετε, ἐν ᾧ καὶ ἐστήκατε, δι' οὗ καὶ σφύζεσθε, τίνι λόγῳ εὐηγγελισάμην ὑμῖν εἰ κατέχετε, ἐκτὸς εἰ μὴ εἰκὴ ἐπιστεύσατε. παρέδωκα γὰρ ὑμῖν ἐν πρώτοις, ὃ καὶ παρέλαβον, ὅτι Χριστὸς ἀπέθανεν ὑπὲρ τῶν ἁμαρτιῶν ἡμῶν κατὰ τὰς γραφὰς καὶ ὅτι ἐτάφη καὶ ὅτι ἐγήγερται τῇ ἡμέρᾳ τῇ τρίτῃ κατὰ τὰς γραφὰς καὶ ὅτι ὤφθη Κηφᾶ εἶτα τοῖς δώδεκα· ἔπειτα ὤφθη ἐπάνω πεντακοσίοις ἀδελφοῖς ἐφάπαξ, ἐξ ὧν οἱ πλείονες μένουσιν ἕως ἄρτι, τινὲς δὲ ἐκοιμήθησαν· ἔπειτα ὤφθη Ἰακώβῳ εἶτα τοῖς ἀποστόλοις πάνσιν· **ἔσχατον δὲ πάντων ὡσπερὶ τῷ ἐκτρώματι ὤφθη κάμοι**. Ἐγὼ γάρ εἰμι ὁ ἐλάχιστος τῶν ἀποστόλων ὃς οὐκ εἰμὶ ἰκανὸς καλεῖσθαι ἀπόστολος, διότι ἐδίωξα τὴν ἐκκλησίαν τοῦ θεοῦ· **χάριτι δὲ θεοῦ εἰμι ὃ εἰμι, καὶ ἡ χάρις αὐτοῦ ἢ εἰς ἐμὲ οὐ κενὴ ἐγενήθη, ἀλλὰ περισσότερον αὐτῶν πάντων ἐκοπίασα, οὐκ ἐγὼ δὲ ἀλλὰ ἡ χάρις τοῦ θεοῦ [ἢ] σὺν ἐμοί**. εἴτε οὖν ἐγὼ εἴτε ἐκεῖνοι, οὕτως κηρύσσομεν καὶ οὕτως ἐπιστεύσατε.

Now let me remind you, brothers, of the good news which I proclaimed to you, which you also received, and in which you have taken your stand, and through which you are saved, if you hold fast to the message which I proclaimed to you, unless of course you trusted in vain. For right from the start, I passed on to you what I also received, that Christ died on behalf of our sins in accordance with the scriptures, and that he was buried and that he was raised up on the third day in accordance with the scriptures, and that he was seen by Cephas, then by the twelve; next he was seen by more than five hundred brothers all at once, the majority of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep; next he was seen by James, then all of the apostles; **and last of all, as if by a stillborn child, he was seen even by me**. For I am the very least of the apostles, I who am really not even fit to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God; **but by the *charis* of God I am what I am, and his *charis* to me was not in vain, but I have toiled more abundantly than all of them—not I, but rather the *charis* of God with me**. So then, whether it was I or they, thus we preach and thus you trusted.

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