

THE APPEARANCE AND SPREAD OF CHRISTIANITY IN ANTIOCH

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Abstract. This study explores the origins and expansion of Christianity in Antioch, a major metropolis of the Roman Empire known for its cultural and religious diversity. The paper examines the initial introduction of Christianity by Judeo-Christians during the diaspora, highlighting the significant role of key figures such as the Holy Apostles Peter, Paul, and Barnabas. It delves into the establishment of the first Christian community in Antioch, the successful integration of Gentile converts, and the city's role as a pivotal center for the spread of Christianity to the Gentile world. The study also discusses the Council of Jerusalem's decisions on the inclusion of Gentiles and their implications for the Christian mission. Antioch is portrayed as a melting pot where new religious ideas, including Christianity, thrived, contributing to the city's transformation into a hub for the dissemination of the Christian faith.

Keywords: Jesus Christ, Christianity, the Holy Apostle Peter, the Holy Apostle Paul, the Holy Apostle Barnabas, Church, Antioch.

Introduction

Antioch, as a great metropolis of the Roman Empire, boasted in early Christianity a mixture of cultures, ethnic groups, and religious traditions². From a religious point of view, Antioch was a city in which various religious systems competed, trying to preserve, revitalize, or create the identity of its followers. Thus, on the pagan soil of Antioch, Judaism, Christianity, and Gnosticism took root. In this metropolis, where there were many inhabitants, the dominant religious element was idolatry, with its orgiastic worship of the deities of Phrygia, Egypt, Phoenicia,

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² Nicholas Thomas WRIGHT, *Pavel, Apostolul lui Iisus Mesia-o biografie*, (transl. Ierom. Nectarie Dărăban), Sibiu: Deisis, 2020, 104.

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Syria, Persia, and other countries. The Phoenician goddess Astarte used to even be offered human sacrifices. In addition to human sacrifice, licentiousness and human passions were shrouded in the garment of ritual worship of the gods³.

Thus, due to its confluence with the Greek and Oriental civilizations, the city eventually became home not only to the ancient Hellenistic cults of Zeus, Apollo, and the other gods of the Greek pantheon, but also the Syrian cults of Baal, and of the goddesses, as well as the religions of mysteries with their teaching about salvation, death, regeneration, eternal life. Because it was one of the most important cities⁴ of the Roman Empire, but also one of the largest trade centers in the ancient world, Antioch had people who brought not only goods from all corners of the Empire, but also new religious ideas, as it was the case also with Christian teaching⁵. The great metropolis was a melting pot of every kind of social and cultural group⁶. In this situation, if there was a city that needed to preach the gospel, it was certainly Antioch⁷.

Antiochian Christianity

We have the first information about the appearance of Christianity in Antioch from the Acts of the Apostles. Among the seven deacons whom the Holy Apostles chose and ordained was: “*Nicolaus⁸ of Antioch, a convert to Judaism*” (Acts 6, 5). Christianity was preached in Antioch, at first by the Judeo-Christians in the diaspora, who distinguished themselves as zealous missionaries, preaching the Savior Jesus Christ and the Greeks, thus succeeding in making as many conversions as possible to Christianity: “*This account satisfied them, and they gave glory to God, saying, God has clearly granted to the gentiles too the repentance that leads to life. Those who had scattered because of the persecution that arose over Stephen travelled as far as Phoenicia and Cyprus and Antioch, but they proclaimed the message only to Jews. Some of them, however, who came from Cyprus and Cyrene, went to Antioch*

³ SOTIRIOS, *Pavel, apostolul neamurilor*, (transl. Ilie Stănuș), Galați: Egumenița, 2019, 55.

⁴ Claude TRESMONTANT, *Sfântul Pavel și Taina lui Hristos*, (transl. Rodica Chiriacescu), București: Meteor Press, 2015, 75.

⁵ Adrian PODARU, *Ioan și reformarea Antiochiei: un proiect eşuat*, în: Adrian Muraru (ed) *Ioan Gură de Aur, Omilii la statui I*, Studiu introductiv, Iași: Polirom, 2011, 27 – 28.

⁶ N. T. WRIGHT, 104.

⁷ SOTIRIOS, 55.

⁸ Deacon Nicolaus was ordained to serve the faithful in the Hellenistic community.

where they started preaching also to the Greeks, proclaiming the good news of the Lord Jesus to them. The Lord helped them, and a great number believed and were converted to the Lord” (Acts 11, 18-21).

Therefore, among the first missionaries who came to Antioch were those who took refuge in Jerusalem⁹ in the year 36, due to the persecution that started there after the death of Archdeacon Stephen¹⁰. These missionaries who settled in Antioch¹¹ preached to the Jews, but also to the Greek-speaking pagans, eager to share the news of the Savior Jesus Christ¹². Thus, for the first time, Christianity set foot in a metropolis of the ancient world, founding a Church in a place that, through its connections with all parts of the world, seemed destined to become one of the centers of irradiation of the new faith¹³.

The Christian mission in Antioch was successful, and so the first community was born very quickly. This is because Christian teaching responded very well to the religious and cultural needs of the time and because ancient religious denominations and ancient philosophies tended to become matters of individual faith as people sought religious answers to their own problems and aspirations. In addition, there was also a practical reason the preaching in Antioch was so successful: being the capital of Syria and ruled by a legate, public order was well established. Thus, the risk of riots against new converts was much lower than in Jerusalem, for example, where persecution had already started. This is because Jerusalem was ruled by the procurator of Judea, who was officially inferior in both rank and power to the Syrian legate¹⁴.

As in the case of the mission in Samaria, the Church in Jerusalem, when it hears about the existence of Christians, sends Barnabas to Antioch¹⁵ to see and strengthen this community: “*The news of them came to the ears of the church in Jerusalem and they sent Barnabas out to Antioch. There he was glad to see for himself*

⁹ Sabin VERZAN, *Sfântul Apostol Pavel*, București: Basilica, 2016, 68.

¹⁰ *Istoria bisericească universală*, Vol. I, De la întemeierea Bisericii până în anul 1054. Manual pentru Facultățile de Teologie din Patriarhia Română, Viorel IONIȚĂ – Daniel BENGĂ – Nicolae CHIFĂR – Adrian GABOR – Ioan-Vasile LEB – Constantin PĂTULEANU (eds), București: Basilica, 2019, 94.

¹¹ SOTIRIOS, 55.

¹² N. T. WRIGHT, 105.

¹³ Maurice GOGUEL, *La Naissance du Christianisme*, Paris, 1944, 207.

¹⁴ A. PODARU, 28.

¹⁵ C. TRESMONTANT, 75.

that God had given grace, and he urged them all to remain faithful to the Lord with heartfelt devotion; for he was a good man, filled with the Holy Spirit and with faith. And a large number of people were won over to the Lord” (Acts 11, 22-24). For the support of the Antiochian Christians, the Mother Church in Jerusalem sent Barnabas, who was one of the most respectable personalities of the apostolic age¹⁶.

Thus, a Christian community was established in Antioch, consisting of pagans and Jews. Barnabas was sent by the Holy Apostles to organize this community, and also to understand the perspective of the Greek-speaking communities. He was the one who guaranteed for Saul, in Jerusalem before the Holy Apostles, after his conversion on the road to Damascus. Barnabas was a Jew of the tribe of Levi, a native of Cyprus. At first, he was called Joseph, but in Jerusalem, after embracing Christianity, the Holy Apostles gave him the nickname Barnabas, which means the son of encouragement¹⁷, as St. Luke the Evangelist tells us: *“There was a Levite of Cypriot origin called Joseph whom the apostles surnamed Barnabas (which means ,son of encouragement”). He owned a piece of land and he sold it and brought the money and presented it to the apostles”* (Acts 4, 36-37).

When Barnabas arrived in Antioch, he realized that this was a good place for Christianity to enter the broad circles of paganism. That is why he thought that the Saint Paul could help him in his mission,¹⁸ being the most suitable person for this work¹⁹. Barnabas, through his zeal and kindness, succeeded in converting many Jews and Gentiles to Christianity. So, after his success, he went to Tarsus to call Saul²⁰ to help him organize and develop the Christian community in Antioch: *“Barnabas then left for Tarsus to look for Saul, and when he found him, he brought him to Antioch”* (Acts 11, 25). The Holy Apostles Paul and Barnabas were asked by the church leaders in Antioch to work together for future missionary action. Barnabas represented the Tradition of the Holy Apostles, and Paul created a new dynamic within this Tradition²¹. The two collaborated with local leaders for a whole year, teaching and guiding the growing new community²². During this

¹⁶ SOTIRIOS, 55.

¹⁷ N. T. WRIGHT, 101.

¹⁸ Liviu Galacticon MUNTEANU, *Viața Sfântului Apostol Pavel*, Cluj-Napoca: Renașterea, 2004, 34.

¹⁹ N. T. WRIGHT, 108.

²⁰ The future St. Paul, the Apostle.

²¹ SOTIRIOS, 55-56.

²² S. VERZAN, *op. cit.*, p. 69.

period of preaching Christianity, St. Paul, and St. Barnabas, endeavored to shape the new believers and their lives in common, in accordance with the good news of the events about Jesus Christ. Their preaching mission was successful, and the two succeeded in converting many heathens to Christianity, as they shared the view that through the death and resurrection of the Savior Jesus Christ, barriers to the inclusion of nations fell²³. „*And it happened that they stayed together in that church a whole year, instructing a large number of people. It was at Antioch that the disciples were first called ,Christians*” (Acts 11, 26).

Thus, in Antioch, the name Christian appears for the first time, which will represent not only a new word, but also a new idea. If before, in the Jewish community, Christians were called disciples, believers, brothers, saints, from now on, they will be called by the name of Christ. This will be a proper and specific name to them and will be borne by all who will come into the Church, both from Judaism and from paganism. We notice that in Antioch, the great metropolis, which was the pearl of the Orient, in a pagan environment, Christianity spread in a new environment, and also with a new name²⁴. If Jerusalem were the center of the Christianization of the Jews²⁵, Antioch would become the center of Christianization of the Gentiles. Another important Christian community will be formed in Syria, among the Jews and proselytes of Damascus.

In 44 AD, the Saint Apostle James (also called James the Great), the brother of the Saint Apostle John, became the first martyred apostle. By order of Herod Agrippa (41-44 AD), the grandson of Herod the Great, the Holy Apostle James was killed: “*It was about this time that King Herod started persecuting certain members of the church. He had James the brother of John beheaded*” (Acts 12, 1-2).

The murder of the St. Apostle James was a joy for some Jews, and so Herod Agrippa will arrest and imprison the Holy Apostle Peter: “*And when he saw that this pleased the Jews, he went on to arrest Peter as well. As it was during the days of Unleavened Bread that he had arrested him, he put him in prison, assigning four sections of four soldiers each to guard him, meaning to try him in public after the Passover*” (Acts 12, 3-4). The Holy Apostle Peter was miraculously released from prison by an angel, after which he went to the house of Mary, the mother of Mark.

²³ N. T. WRIGHT, 106.

²⁴ Călin Ioan DUȘE, *Imperiul Roman și creștinismul în timpul Sfântului Clement Romanul*, Cluj-Napoca: Presa Universitară Clujeană, 2020, 226 – 227.

²⁵ SOTIRIOS, 56.

Here were gathered many believers who were praying: *“It was only then that Peter came to himself. And he said, ‘Now I know it is all true. The Lord really did send his angel and save me from Herod and from all that the Jewish people were expecting.’ As soon as he realized this, he went straight to the house of Mary the mother of John Mark, where a number of people had assembled and were praying”* (Acts 12, 11-12).

After this episode, in which the Holy Apostle Peter escapes the arrest of Herod Agrippa, he left Jerusalem and went to another place, at the beginning of the year 48²⁶ in Antioch²⁷: *“Peter, meanwhile, was still knocking. When they opened the door, they were amazed to see that it really was Peter himself. He raised his hand for silence and described to them how the Lord had led him out of prison. He added, ‘Tell James and the brothers.’ Then he left and went elsewhere”* (Acts 12, 16-17).

We will also find St. Peter the Apostle among the Christians in Antioch with St. Paul the Apostle. Unfortunately, there was a discussion in Antioch about Christians from the Gentiles and those from the Jews. Thus, there was a wide and strong dispute within the Church.²⁸ There were many Jews who still considered the pagans to have a contagious impurity, which came from the culture of idolatry and immorality²⁹. Thus, Judeo-Christians demanded pagans, to first pass by the Mosaic law, and to observe particularly the circumcision on joining Christianity: *„Then some men came down from Judaea and taught the brothers, ‘Unless you have yourselves circumcised in the tradition of Moses you cannot be saved’”* (Acts 15, 1). In this situation, St. Paul and St. Barnabas strongly defended the teaching that Circumcision could not be obligatory for the reception of pagans into Christianity: *“This led to disagreement, and after Paul and Barnabas had had a long argument with these men it was decided that Paul and Barnabas and others of the church should go up to Jerusalem and discuss the question with the apostles and elders”* (Acts 15, 2).

Unfortunately, no matter how many and strong the arguments of St. Paul and St. Barnabas were, no definitive conclusion could be reached in Antioch concerning the claims of the Judaizers in Jerusalem. Due to the severity of the problem, the church in Antioch decided that the two of them, along with others, should go to Jerusalem³⁰: *“The members of the church saw them off, and as they passed through*

²⁶ N. T. WRIGHT, 164.

²⁷ *Istoria bisericească universală*, 77.

²⁸ S. VERZAN, 118.

²⁹ N. T. WRIGHT, 106.

³⁰ S. VERZAN, 119.

Phoenicia and Samaria, they told how the gentiles had been converted, and this news was received with the greatest satisfaction by all the brothers” (Acts 15, 3).

Therefore, to solve this problem, which arose in the early Church, around 50 AD, the Holy Apostles gathered in Jerusalem for a council³¹. It is not the first time that St. Paul and St. Barnabas have come to Jerusalem as envoys of the Church of Antioch. This time, for the first time, they are now coming as envoys to submit to the Mother Church of Jerusalem a matter of Christian doctrine and missionary practice, which arose in the mission of preaching the gospel to the Gentiles and receiving them in the church.

In the apostolic age, this was the first and last case involving a Church, namely that of Jerusalem, in which the Holy Apostles and ordained ministers were active, in order to solve a problem with such an accentuated doctrinal character, like that raised by the delegation of the Church of Antioch, led by St. Paul and St. Barnabas³². *“When they arrived in Jerusalem they were welcomed by the church and by the apostles and elders and gave an account of all that God had done through them. But certain members of the Pharisees’ party who had become believers objected, insisting that gentiles should be circumcised and instructed to keep the Law of Moses. The apostles and elders met to look into the matter, and after a long discussion, Peter stood up and addressed them. ‘My brothers,’ he said, ‘you know perfectly well that in the early days God made his choice among you: the gentiles were to learn the good news from me and so become believers. And God, who can read everyone’s heart, showed his approval of them by giving the Holy Spirit to them just as he had to us. God made no distinction between them and us since he purified their hearts by faith. Why do you put God to the test now by imposing on the disciples the very burden that neither our ancestors nor we ourselves were strong enough to support? But we believe that we are saved in the same way as they are: through the grace of the Lord Jesus.’ The entire assembly fell silent, and they listened to Barnabas and Paul describing all the signs and wonders God had worked through them among the gentiles. When they had finished it was James who spoke. ‘My brothers,’ he said, ‘listen to me. Simeon has described how God first arranged to enlist a people for his name out of the gentiles. This is entirely in harmony with the words of the prophets, since the scriptures say: After that I shall return and rebuild the fallen hut of David;*

³¹ Nicolae CHIFĂR, *Istoria creștinismului*, vol. I, Sibiu: Universitatea „Lucian Blaga” Press, 2007, 31.

³² S. VERZAN, 119-120.

I shall make good the gaps in it and restore it. Then the rest of humanity, and of all the nations once called mine, will look for the Lord, says the Lord who made this known so long ago. My verdict is, then, that instead of making things more difficult for gentiles who turn to God, we should send them a letter telling them merely to abstain from anything polluted by idols, from illicit marriages, from the meat of strangled animals and from blood” (Acts 15, 4-20). At the end of the debate, the council decided that the Mosaic Law was not mandatory for pagan Christians, but especially to avoid idolatry, fornication, bloodlust, and strangled animals³³. If the council had accepted the obligation to circumcise this decision would have been tantamount to expelling them from the faith and transforming the Church into an annex or branch of the synagogue³⁴.

Therefore, the Apostolic Council of Jerusalem analyzed the conditions for the admission of Gentiles into the Church and wrote the decision which was sent to the Churches of Antioch, Syria, and Cilicia³⁵: *“Then the apostles and elders, with the whole church, decided to choose delegates from among themselves to send to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas. They chose Judas, known as Barnabas, and Silas, both leading men in the brotherhood, and gave them this letter to take with them: The apostles and elders, your brothers, send greetings to the brothers of gentile birth in Antioch, Syria, and Cilicia. We hear that some people coming from here, but acting without any authority from ourselves, have disturbed you with their demands and have unsettled your minds; and so, we have decided unanimously to elect delegates and to send them to you with our well-beloved Barnabas and Paul, who have committed their lives to the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. Accordingly, we are sending you Judas and Silas, who will confirm by word of mouth what we have written. It has been decided by the Holy Spirit and by ourselves not to impose on you any burden beyond these essentials: you are to abstain from food sacrificed to idols, from blood, from the meat of strangled animals and from illicit marriages. Avoid these, and you will do what is right. Farewell”* (Acts 15, 22-29).

These decisions of the Council of Jerusalem will constitute a new stage, which will be especially important in terms of promoting the preaching of the gospel to the Gentiles, but especially in terms of the distribution of missionaries in the pagan world. The results of the preaching of the gospel to the Gentiles will not be

³³ N. CHIFĂR, 31.

³⁴ S. VERZAN, 123-124.

³⁵ *Istoria bisericească universală*, 78.

long in coming, and the first Christians among the heathen who received the faith were the Greeks³⁶. Thus, the first missionaries to preach the gospel to the Greeks will be the missionaries who left Jerusalem because of the unrest for Stephen: *“This account satisfied them, and they gave glory to God, saying, ‘God has clearly granted to the gentiles too the repentance that leads to life.’ Those who had scattered because of the persecution that arose over Stephen travelled as far as Phoenicia and Cyprus and Antioch, but they proclaimed the message only to Jews. Some of them, however, who came from Cyprus and Cyrene, went to Antioch where they started preaching also to the Greeks, proclaiming the good news of the Lord Jesus to them. The Lord helped them, and a great number believed and were converted to the Lord”* (Acts 11, 18-21).

Shortly after the Apostolic Council in Jerusalem, St. Peter the Apostle came to visit the Christian community in Antioch. He was received by St. Paul and by other Christians. Thus, in order not to deny the attitude he had at the end of the Council of Jerusalem, in the matter of receiving the pagans to Christianity and not to oppose the decisions made, St. Peter behaved according to the customs of the community of Antioch. There was no distinction between Jews and Gentiles in this community, and no one wondered what faith he had before his baptism. Also, the honor given to one was given by the way he understood to live Christianity, and therefore St. Peter did not make a distinction between believers either. He embraced them all with the same brotherly love, entered everyone’s homes, and talked with everyone. He also took part in agape and ate indiscriminately, not fearing that he would defile himself with the food of the heathen and of the Jews. Thus, the Holy Apostle Peter quickly gave up his Jewish customs so as not to differ in any way from others.

Shortly after the arrival of St. Peter the Apostle in Antioch, a number of Judeo-Christians came from Jerusalem, who were very zealous in the practice of Jewish rituals, claiming that they had been sent by St. James³⁷. He may have been one of those, who during the work of the Apostolic Council at Jerusalem strongly urged the circumcision and fulfillment of other precepts of the Law to the pagans who entered Christianity. They were also surprised by the judeo-pagan fraternity, which existed within the Christian community in Antioch. Thus, the Judeo-Christians in Jerusalem could not understand how they could mingle with each other at the

³⁶ S. VERZAN, 163.

³⁷ N. T. WRIGHT, 162.

agape, the Jews with the Gentiles, and how they ate from each other food without thinking that it was defiled. Moreover, they were surprised by the attitude of St. Peter, who so quickly acquired the customs of Antioch.

Unfortunately, their reserved and almost hostile attitude towards Christians with pagan background, but also the reprehension of St. Peter and Judeo-Christians has caused unrest in the community of Antioch. Thus, they had no words of friendship or brotherhood with the pagan-Christians, keeping their distance, and with the Judeo-Christians they had harsh words of rebuke, since they left their ancestral customs and they have turned away from the true saving faith. Therefore, they did not sit together at the common table, lest they should be defiled if they mingled with the heathen. St. Peter the Apostle, for fear of being accused when returning to Jerusalem, for being caught up in pagan customs, sat down next to the Judeo-Christians from Jerusalem, as did the Jews from Antioch. Barnabas did the same, separating himself from the Gentile group of Christians. So, they felt abandoned, realizing that they had built a dividing wall between them and their Jewish brothers who had come from Jerusalem.

As a result of this incident, pagan Christians felt despised and humiliated, and only St. Paul the Apostle remained with them. This very delicate situation could become dangerous for the Christian community in Antioch, and therefore St. Paul, outraged by what had happened, had to defend the interests of the Christians of Antioch, but also of the Church. Thus, he arose in the assembly and condemned the attitude of the Holy Apostle Peter³⁸, as he confesses in the Epistle to the Galatians 2, 11-19: *“However, when Cephas came to Antioch, then I did oppose him to his face since he was manifestly in the wrong. Before certain people from James came, he used to eat with gentiles; but as soon as these came, he backed out and kept apart from them, out of fear of the circumcised. And the rest of the Jews put on the same act as he did, so that even Barnabas was carried away by their insincerity. When I saw, though, that their behavior was not true to the gospel, I said to Cephas in front of all of them, ‘Since you, though you are a Jew, live like the gentiles and not like the Jews, how can you compel the gentiles to live like the Jews?’ We who were born Jews and not gentile sinners have nevertheless learnt that someone is reckoned as upright not by practicing the Law but by faith in Jesus Christ; and we too came to believe in Christ Jesus so as to be reckoned as upright by faith in Christ and not by practicing the Law: since no human being can be found upright by keeping the Law. Now if we*

³⁸ L. G. MUNTEANU, 52-54.

too are found to be sinners on the grounds that we seek our justification in Christ, it would surely follow that Christ was at the service of sin. Out of the question! If I now rebuild everything I once demolished, I prove that I was wrong before. In fact, through the Law I am dead to the Law so that I can be alive to God." Verse 19 is one of the most extraordinary statements ever written by a Jew in the first century AD or perhaps of any century³⁹.

Therefore, when St. Peter, along with Barnabas and the other Judeo-Christians, withdrew from the Gentile Christian community, St. Paul rebuked him in front of the faithful, and he will strongly defend the universality of Christianity⁴⁰.

Christianity in Antioch was also preached by other Apostles. Of prime importance was the visit of St. Peter, after the Council of Jerusalem. He came to Antioch and took part in the life of the Church here for a while, but unfortunately, we do not know how long he stayed⁴¹. It was a symbolic visit designed to strengthen the determination of the Holy Apostles regarding Christians who came from among the heathen. The later tradition made St. Peter the Apostle the founder of the Church of Antioch and the first bishop of this community, which could be explained from the following perspective: when the great ecclesiastical centers claimed that they were founded by the Holy Apostles (Alexandria claimed to be founded by Mark, Rome by Peter and Paul or by Peter alone, Jerusalem of Jacob, the Lord's brother), Antioch could not be inferior, stating that through his visit to Antioch St. Apostle Peter laid the very foundations of the Church there⁴². After the departure of St. Peter, the Apostle from Jerusalem in 44 AD, the trace of the Holy Apostles will be lost in Acts of the Apostles. The history of Christianity will be dominated, more than three decades from now on, by the exceptional personality of the Holy Apostle Paul⁴³.

The preaching of Christianity in Antioch by St. Paul

The one who managed to preach, to interpret, to systematize, but also to apply the Gospel of the Savior Jesus Christ to the social realities of the time was St.

³⁹ N. T. WRIGHT, 171.

⁴⁰ Ioan RĂMUREANU – Milan ȘESAN – Teodor BODOGOAE (eds), *Istoria Bisericească Universală*, vol. I (1-1054), București: IBMBOR, 1987, 62-67.

⁴¹ N. T. WRIGHT, 162.

⁴² A. PODARU, 28.

⁴³ RĂMUREANU – ȘESAN – BODOGOAE (eds), 67.

Paul. He was the most brilliant of the Holy Apostles, the most daring preacher of Christianity among the Gentiles, but also his doctrinaire, being considered after the Savior Jesus Christ the greatest genius of Christianity⁴⁴. We can also see that St. Paul is after the Savior Jesus Christ, the most familiar person in the New Testament, because the Acts of the Apostles, but also his fourteen epistles, speak of him.

He is the first theologian of Christianity, a precious witness, who can give us the most authentic view of the beginning of Christianity⁴⁵. Thus, the first and only time in human history when a man, by his own abilities and powers, but also by the grace of the Savior Jesus Christ, changed himself, but also the whole world, managing to create a new reality to which all mankind has been heading for two thousand years, feeling a deep thirst for God. Also, the culture of the spirituality of the East and the West is based on the Gospel of the Savior Jesus Christ, but also on the preaching of St. Paul⁴⁶. Through his life and activity, he dominated the life of early Christianity for more than three decades, from 36 to 67 AD.

From the Acts of the Apostles, which were written by his disciple St. Luke the Evangelist in Rome at the end of 63 AD⁴⁷, but also from his epistles, we can describe his life and missionary activity. Thus, from the moment of his conversion, the year 36, St. Paul entered the Christian community as a “chosen vessel” beginning his activity as a *called* apostle, preaching the Savior Jesus Christ: “*He began preaching in the synagogues, ‘Jesus is the Son of God.’ All his hearers were amazed, and said, ‘Surely, this is the man who did such damage in Jerusalem to the people who invoke this name, and who came here for the sole purpose of arresting them to have them tried by the chief priests?’ Saul’s power increased steadily, and he was able to throw the Jewish colony at Damascus into complete confusion by the way he demonstrated that Jesus was the Christ. Some time passed, and the Jews worked out a plot to kill him, but news of it reached Saul. They were keeping watch at the gates day and night in order to kill him, but the disciples took him by night and let him down from the wall, lowering him in a basket*” (Acts 9, 20-25).

⁴⁴ Ion CONSTANTINESCU, *Studiul Noului Testament, manual pentru seminariile teologice*, București: IBMBOR, 1981, 204.

⁴⁵ Mauro ORSATI, *Introducere în studiul Noului Testament* (transl. Călin Daniel PAȚULEA – Adriana ZAHARIA), Blaj: Buna Vestire, 2008, 251.

⁴⁶ SOTIRIOS, 47.

⁴⁷ Ioan CONSTANTINESCU, *Studiul Noului Testament, manual pentru seminariile teologice*, București: Credința Noastră, 1992, 130.

Saul's conversion and preaching astonished Christians and shocked the Jews, who wanted to kill him. He left Damascus and retired to Arabia for three years between 36-39 AD, where he meditated on the Bible and prepared for the new mission entrusted to him⁴⁸. St. Paul the Apostle chose Arabia, where he was led by The Lord alone, possibly even on Mount Sinai, the place where the Old Law was revealed, as the Apostle of the Gentiles suggests: "*now Sinai is a mountain in Arabia and represents Jerusalem in its present state, for she is in slavery together with her children*". (Gal. 4, 25). In Arabia, the Holy Apostle Paul was able to thoroughly learn the gospel. In the three years of silence in the wilderness of Arabia, the Holy Apostle Paul will lay the foundations of a brilliant apostolic work, through which he has succeeded in drawing all the nations of the world to Christ⁴⁹.

Therefore, the preparation of the Holy Apostle Paul was also three years, as well as that of the twelve Apostles. The teaching he received was identical with that of the Holy Apostles, as can be seen from his meeting in Jerusalem with Peter, James, and John, who were considered pillars of the Church: "*It was not until fourteen years had gone by that I travelled up to Jerusalem again, with Barnabas, and I took Titus with me too. My journey was inspired by a revelation and there, in a private session with the recognized leaders, I expounded the whole gospel that I preach to the gentiles, to make quite sure that the efforts I was making and had already made should not be fruitless. And when they acknowledged the grace that had been given to me, then James and Cephas and John, who were the ones recognized as pillars, offered their right hands to Barnabas and to me as a sign of partnership: we were to go to the gentiles and they to the circumcised*" (Gal 2, 1-2, 9).

In 39 AD, Saul came to Jerusalem for the first time after his return from Arabia and his second sojourn in Damascus. He wanted to draw close to the Holy Apostles, but everyone feared him because he was a great persecutor of Christianity. "*When he got to Jerusalem, he tried to join the disciples, but they were all afraid of him: they could not believe he was really a disciple*" (Acts 9, 26). So, Saul had left Jerusalem as a murder and a persecutor, but now he returns repentant and persecuted. Unfortunately, in Jerusalem the position of the Holy Apostle Paul was difficult, both on the part of his compatriots, who were informed of his apostasy from Judaism, and on the part of Christians, who feared him because he persecuted the Church⁵⁰.

⁴⁸ *Istoria bisericească universală*, 93.

⁴⁹ SOTIRIOS, 39.

⁵⁰ SOTIRIOS, 49-50.

With the help of Barnabas⁵¹, he was introduced to the circle of the Holy Apostles, and told them how his conversion had taken place, but also how he had preached the Savior Jesus Christ in Damascus: *“Barnabas, however, took charge of him, introduced him to the apostles, and explained how the Lord had appeared to him and spoken to him on his journey, and how he had preached fearlessly at Damascus in the name of Jesus. Saul now started to go round with them in Jerusalem, preaching fearlessly in the name of the Lord.”* (Acts 9, 27-28). The fourteen days he spent in Jerusalem were especially important for St. Paul because he learned from St. Peter details about what the Savior Jesus Christ had done and taught. The meeting between the two great leaders of Christianity contributed to the knowledge and thorough connection of St. Paul with the Tradition of the Apostles and with the first Church. Also, during his time in Jerusalem, the Holy Apostle Paul did his apostolic work, speaking to the Jews and to the other nations about the Savior Jesus Christ. Unfortunately, the Jews rebelled against him and wanted to kill him. When the Christians found out about their intentions, they took him safely out of Jerusalem, and St. Paul went to Caesarea in Palestine, and from there he went to his native Tarsus⁵²: *“But after he had spoken to the Hellenists and argued with them, they became determined to kill him. When the brothers got to know of this, they took him to Caesarea and sent him off from there to Tarsus”* (Acts 9, 29-30).

After his conversion to Christianity, the Jews considered Saul to be a renegade of the Jewish Law. From now on, he will be constantly persecuted and threatened by the Jews with death. As a Jew, Saul wanted all his life to convert them to Christianity and to make them understand that the Savior Jesus Christ is the Messiah of whom their prophets spoke. Unfortunately, he suffered greatly because he was often persecuted by his compatriots, and they did not understand his message. For this reason, his thirty-one years (36-67 AD) mission was among the Gentiles (heathen). This activity of his among the heathen was done at the entrustment and recommendation of the other Holy Apostles. Therefore, the Holy Apostle Paul and his friends will preach the gospel to the Gentiles, while the Holy Apostles James, Peter, and John will collaborate with the Jewish people⁵³.

⁵¹ S. VERZAN, 63-65.

⁵² SOTIRIOS, 50-52.

⁵³ N. T. WRIGHT, 116.

During his missionary work, St. Paul preached the gospel from Jerusalem to Illyria⁵⁴, going only to those places where the Savior Jesus Christ was not known. According to an approximate calculation in his activity of preaching the Gospel, the Holy Apostle Paul would have traveled almost thirty thousand kilometers⁵⁵, an impressive distance, if we consider the means of transportation of two thousand years ago. It should be noted that of all the Holy Apostles, Saul was best prepared to conduct a fruitful mission among the Gentiles. His outstanding qualities recommended him for this difficult mission. Being a Jew by birth and education, having a theological training as a rabbi and the zeal of a Pharisee, Saul was at the same time a Hellenist by culture and a good connoisseur of the Greek language. Let us not forget that he was a Roman citizen, having legal rights, which the other Holy Apostles did not have, and thus his qualities made him a perfect person to be able to conduct, in the best and most efficient conditions, the Christian apostolate.

During his mission, St. Paul the Apostle, first addressed the Jewish communities in the diaspora, the proselytes, after which he addressed those who were part of the Greco-Roman world, especially the big cities, because their population was even more interested in latest ideas. When he considered that he had formed and organized a local Christian community, St. Paul kept them under close supervision through visits and stayed connected with this community through messengers, but also through letters. These epistles include counsel, exhortations, but also clarification of doctrinal or moral issues.

After completing his work of preaching the gospel in Jerusalem, St. Paul began his mission in the heathen world. Although the Acts of the Apostles does not mention this, St. Paul speaks of his mission in Syria and Cilicia: *After that I went to places in Syria and Cilicia* (Gal. 1, 21). Thus, following this mission, which lasted from 40-42 AD, flourishing churches were established in Syria and Cilicia⁵⁶.

St. Paul was called by Barnabas in 42 AD in Antioch where, for a year, they preached and converted many to Christianity: *“Barnabas then left for Tarsus to look for Saul, and when he found him, he brought him to Antioch. And it happened*

⁵⁴ In ancient times, Illyria was a province located in the west of the Balkan Peninsula, between the Adriatic Sea, the Morava River and Pannonia. The Romans conquered it in 168 BC. The most important cities in the province were Apollonia in Albania and Rihzon (now Risan) in Macedonia.

⁵⁵ M. ORSATI, 256-257.

⁵⁶ S. VERZAN, 67.

that they stayed together in that church a whole year, instructing a large number of people. It was at Antioch that the disciples were first called, Christians” (Acts 11, 25-26). So, Paul began his activity in Antioch as an Apostle of the Savior Jesus Christ. Now the most beautiful period of his life has begun. The two Apostles worked for a long time, together with the priests from Antioch to implement a unique plan, part of the divine economy, for the salvation of humankind⁵⁷. Here, in Antioch, the disciples will receive the name of Christians for the first time, and since then this term has become popular throughout the world⁵⁸.

Thus, Antiochian Christianity was strengthened by the preaching of St. Paul and St. Barnabas. followers of the *new sect*. The missionary activity of the Holy Apostle Paul was crowned with success, and his sermon was heard by the broad circles of the pagans, who converted to Christianity. Thus, in Antioch, a growing Christian community was formed, and within it there was full harmony between Jews and Gentiles.

This was the first community in which the teaching of the Savior Jesus Christ succeeded in blurring the distinction between Jews and heathens. It was a marvelous thing for the Jews to be acquainted with the Gentiles, because until then they always tried to avoid any connection with the other nations, not to be defiled, as they became acquainted with them. Antioch became the first place in which a new kind of trans-ethnic community life appeared⁵⁹. And this miracle was done by St. Paul and Barnabas only in one year, because before the great apostle there was no more the Jew and the heathen, but the new man whom the Savior Jesus Christ calls for salvation. Thus, the dominion of the Jewish Law has been abolished, and so one who acknowledges Jesus Christ, receiving his teaching, he is received into his Church through baptism, whether he was Jewish or a Gentile. This is because baptism erases differences, because it gives birth to a new man who does not belong anymore to the past. What the other apostles accomplished among the sons of the same nation, the Holy Apostle Paul succeeded in doing among the sons of different nations, and in the Christian community of Antioch we thus have the image of God's kingdom on earth. Thus, the first universal Church was founded in Antioch⁶⁰.

⁵⁷ SOTIRIOS, 56.

⁵⁸ SOTIRIOS, 57.

⁵⁹ N. T. WRIGHT, 111.

⁶⁰ SOTIRIOS, 57.

The Christian community in Antioch is the beginning of what would become the future Christian communities, which will be born inside paganism. This spirit of Christian unity, which St. Paul succeeded in inspiring in the Christian community of Antioch, attracted many Christians from Jerusalem. They came to see how the Jews could live with the Gentiles, praising the same God, how they could share the same chalice, and how they could eat agape at the same table. Among those who came from Jerusalem was Agabus. He foretold a famine that would come upon Jerusalem, and this prophecy was fulfilled during the reign of Claudius (41-54 AD)⁶¹: *“While they were there some prophets came down to Antioch from Jerusalem, and one of them whose name was Agabus, seized by the Spirit, stood up and predicted that a severe and universal famine was going to happen. This in fact happened while Claudius was emperor. The disciples decided to send relief, each to contribute what he could afford, to the brothers living in Judaea. They did this and delivered their contributions to the elders through the agency of Barnabas and Saul.”* (Acts 11, 27-30).

Unfortunately, we do not have data on the number of Christians in this period, but the community in Antioch must have been strong enough if in 46 or 47⁶² it was able to send financial aid to the Jerusalem community, which was suffering from a famine that had broken out in that area⁶³. So, in the year 43-44, the famine began in Jerusalem, and the Antiochians sent the Holy Apostles Paul and Barnabas with the help they had gathered⁶⁴. This is the first splendid example of Christian love, which binds Christians in two cities, two countries, and two different nations, and Jerusalem and Antioch became sister churches⁶⁵. Thus, Christians in Antioch were the first to become one translocal community with mutual responsibilities⁶⁶. This help of the Antiochians was especially important because the Christians in Jerusalem were suffering from hunger, but also from the bloody persecution that King Herod Agrippa (41-44 AD) unleashed in 44 AD. As a result of this persecution, St. James the Apostle was killed, the pillar of the Church in Jerusalem⁶⁷.

⁶¹ L. G. MUNTEANU, 34–35.

⁶² N. T. WRIGHT, 111.

⁶³ A. PODARU, 28.

⁶⁴ C. TRESMONTANT, 75.

⁶⁵ SOTIRIOS, 57.

⁶⁶ N. T. WRIGHT, 111.

⁶⁷ C. I. Dușe, 235, 242.

The Holy Apostle Paul is coming to Jerusalem on this occasion for the second time as an apostle.⁶⁸ He hoped to meet the other apostles as well, but they left Jerusalem because of Herod Agrippa's persecution. Thus, he met only with the priests who remained among the faithful, to whom he offered material help, but also the apostolic consolation and encouragement. St. Paul and St. Barnabas did not stay long in Jerusalem. During the few days they stayed here, they took refuge in Maria's house, Barnabas' sister. She was a widow and lived with her son Mark, being one of the women who considered herself a disciple of the Lord. In Jerusalem it is possible that St. Paul had the revelation of which he speaks in (2 Cor 12, 2-4): *"I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago - still in the body? I do not know, or out of the body? I do not know: God knows - was caught up right into the third heaven. And I know that this man - still in the body? or outside the body? I do not know, God knows-was caught up into Paradise and heard words said that cannot and may not be spoken by any human being."* Through this revelation St. Paul was prepared and strengthened by God for the difficulties he would face in the mission among the heathen. At the end of the meeting with the leaders of Jerusalem, the Holy Apostle Paul urges them to continue⁶⁹ the charitable activity: *"They asked nothing more than that we should remember to help the poor, as indeed I was anxious to do in any case."* (Gal 2, 10).

After fulfilling their charitable mission entrusted to them by the Antioch Christians, St. Paul, and St. Barnabas, returned to Antioch⁷⁰. When they left Jerusalem, at the request of Mark, the son of Mary and the grandson of Barnabas, St. Paul, took John with them to Antioch: *"Barnabas and Saul completed their task at Jerusalem and came back, bringing John Mark with them."* Acts 12, 25. Mark is the young man who mentions in his Gospel that he was following the Savior Jesus Christ when the soldiers arrested him in the Garden of Gethsemane and fled when they wanted to catch him: *"A young man followed with nothing on but a linen cloth. They caught hold of him, but he left the cloth in their hands and ran away naked"* (Mk. 14, 51-52). So, Mark grew up and lived in an apostolic environment, certainly knowing the Savior Jesus Christ. He was also well acquainted with the teachings and works of the Lord, as is clear from the gospel he carefully wrote, in accordance with the preaching of St. Peter, which he had accompanied for years. It

⁶⁸ S. VERZAN, 69.

⁶⁹ N. T. WRIGHT, 111.

⁷⁰ S. VERZAN, 69.

is no coincidence that the Gospel written by the St. Mark is also called the Gospel of the Gentiles, „because of his connection to Antioch⁷¹.

After arriving in Antioch, the two continued their preaching work. Within the Antioch Church, St. Paul will complete his training as a Christian missionary in terms of missionary practice, pedagogy, and the art of exposing the evangelical truth to the Gentiles⁷². The Holy Apostles Paul and Barnabas determined that Antioch, the great Hellenistic center, should be the starting point for missionary travel⁷³. St. Paul also succeeded in training a number of disciples in Antioch, who gave him great hope that he would be able to continue his missionary work⁷⁴. During his missionary activity in Antioch, St. Paul was helped by Barnabas, Simeon called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene and Manaen: *“In the church at Antioch the following were prophets and teachers: Barnabas, Simeon called Niger, and Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen, who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch, and Saul”*. (Acts 13, 1).

Due to missionary activity, the Church in Antioch developed even further in the following years, and the Greek language and culture were the vehicle of international Christianity. Thus, the Holy Spirit counted among the faithful prophets and teachers, who came from different countries, in which the international Greek spirit dominated. Among them are Lucius of Cyrene (North Africa), Simeon called Niger and Manaen, who grew up in the royal palaces with Herod the Tetrarch. Among them was born the desire for the gospel to be preached in their own lands and in other nations. In the spring of 45 AD, the leaders of the Church of Antioch, after fasting and praying, asked God to show them His will regarding the mission to the Gentiles⁷⁵.

Thus, St. Paul was chosen by the Holy Spirit, most likely during the „Breaking of Bread,” along with Barnabas, as a missionary to the pagan world. After this election followed the official consecration of the two: *“One day while they were offering worship to the Lord and keeping a fast, the Holy Spirit said, ‘I want Barnabas and Saul set apart for the work to which I have called them.’ So it was that after fasting and prayer they laid their hands on them and sent them off. So, these two, sent on their mission by the Holy Spirit, went down to Seleucia and from there set sail for Cyprus.”* (Acts 13, 2-4). Therefore, this moment represents the consecration

⁷¹ SOTIRIOS, 59-60.

⁷² S. VERZAN, 70.

⁷³ SOTIRIOS, 54.

⁷⁴ L. G. MUNTEANU, 36-37.

⁷⁵ SOTIRIOS, 60.

of St. Paul as a missionary for the Gentiles and the beginning of the missionary journey⁷⁶. The Church of Antioch became the center of its missionary activity for the pagan world⁷⁷. St. Paul will leave his best collaborators to lead the Christian community in Antioch, collaborators whom he has invested with the gracious power to perform the Holy Sacraments⁷⁸.

Together with Barnabas and John Mark, they set out on their first missionary journey, which took place between 45 and 48 AD (Acts 13, 2-14, 28). This is the beginning of the missionary journeys of St. Paul the Apostle, who, through his work of preaching the gospel in the pagan world, was also called the Apostle to the Gentiles⁷⁹. In his missionary activity, St. Paul addressed, first, the Jewish communities, the proselytes, and then those of the Greco-Roman world. He preferred the larger cities of the Roman Empire, because here the interest in innovative ideas was greater. In his missionary activity, St. Paul was helped by fellow Jews, but also by some of the Gentile converts⁸⁰.

The preaching mission St. Paul took place over a vast area. Thus, after completing the preaching mission, the two will return and visit the cities they passed on arrival, reaching Perga, and from here they headed to the port of Attalia, to embark for Antioch in Syria. Following the sermons, but also the miracles they performed, St. Paul and St. Barnabas succeeded in converting many Jews and Gentiles. They established and organized communities, for which they ordained priests: *“The disciples came crowding round him but, as they did so, he stood up and went back to the town. The next day he and Barnabas left for Derbe. Having preached the good news in that town and made a considerable number of disciples, they went back through Lystra, Iconium and Antioch. They put fresh heart into the disciples, encouraging them to persevere in the faith, saying, ‘We must all experience many hardships before we enter the kingdom of God.’ In each of these churches they appointed elders, and with prayer and fasting they commended them to the Lord in whom they had come to believe. They passed through Pisidia and reached Pamphylia. Then after proclaiming the word at Perga they went down to Attalia and from there*

⁷⁶ S. VERZAN, 70.

⁷⁷ *Istoria bisericească universală*, 94-95.

⁷⁸ L. G. MUNTEANU, 37.

⁷⁹ S. VERZAN, 70.

⁸⁰ *Istoria bisericească universală*, 95.

sailed for Antioch, where they had originally been commended to the grace of God for the work they had now completed” (Acts 14, 20-26)⁸¹.

After returning from their first missionary journey St. Paul and St. Barnabas presented a report to the community that mandated them in this mission⁸². They described the results of their mission among the Gentiles: “*On their arrival they assembled the church and gave an account of all that God had done with them, and how he had opened the door of faith to the gentiles.*” (Acts 14, 27). The two will continue to preach the gospel in the community of Antioch between the years 48-50.

Because of some Judeo-Christians who came from Judaea and learned that the pagans who would convert to Christianity would have to obey the requirements of the Mosaic Law on Circumcision, there was a disturbance in the community of Antioch. To solve this problem, St. Paul and St. Barnabas, together with Titus, went to Jerusalem as delegates of the Church of Antioch.⁸³ This is where the Apostolic Council of 49/50 took place, which decided that the pagans, who would convert to Christianity, would not be obliged to obey the requirements of the Mosaic Law but would have to “*abstain from food sacrificed to idols, from blood, from the meat of strangled animals and from illicit marriages*”. (Acts 15, 29).

The Council of Jerusalem represents for St. Paul the moment of his final and full consecration as a missionary and minister of the Gospel. Thus, his primacy will be recognized in the preaching of the gospel to the Gentiles: “*On the contrary, once they saw that the gospel for the uncircumcised had been entrusted to me, just as to Peter the gospel for the circumcised (for he who empowered Peter’s apostolate to the circumcision also empowered mine to the gentiles), and when they acknowledged the grace that had been given to me, then James and Cephas and John, who were the ones recognized as pillars, offered their right hands to Barnabas and to me as a sign of partnership: we were to go to the gentiles and they to the circumcised*”. (Gal 2, 7-9). Therefore, the importance and value of the missionary work of St. Paul and St. Barnabas is emphasized, but also of the path they have opened in the direction of preaching the gospel to the Gentiles. The whole Pauline soteriology will be based on the debates and decisions of the Council of Jerusalem. This was also the reason such a theology will enjoy in the apostolic age an exceptional reception and appreciation, and in the future, it will become the basis of any theological development.

⁸¹ C. I. Dușe, 269.

⁸² *Istoria bisericească universală*, 95.

⁸³ RĂMUREANU – ȘESAN – BODOGOAE (eds), 71-75.

The delegates of the Council of Jerusalem, Paul, Barnabas, Silas, and Judas, after arriving in Antioch, will present the synodal letter to the faithful: *“The party left and went down to Antioch, where they summoned the whole community and delivered the letter. The community read it and were delighted with the encouragement it gave them. Judas and Silas, being themselves prophets, spoke for a long time, encouraging and strengthening the brothers.”* (Acts 15, 30-32). The decisions of the Apostolic Council of Jerusalem in Antioch enjoyed wide and earnest presentations, which certainly met the united support of the joy of the faithful in this Church. St. Paul the Apostle and Barnabas continued to teach and catechize the faithful in Antioch⁸⁴. They were assisted in this mission by other ministers of the Antiochian Church⁸⁵: *“Paul and Barnabas, however, stayed on in Antioch, and there with many others they taught and proclaimed the good news, the word of the Lord”* (Acts 15, 35).

In the summer or fall of 51 A.D., after parting with Barnabas and the community of Antioch⁸⁶, St. Paul the Apostle went on a second missionary journey with Silas. At the end of his missionary journey from Ephesus, St. Paul returned to Antioch, passing through Caesarea in Palestine and Jerusalem⁸⁷. He arrives in Antioch, with his whip scars, and enjoys the warm welcome of his brothers⁸⁸. Here was his place of rest, and where he felt at home amid the community he founded. He stayed here to recover from the hardships of his second missionary journey. During this time, St. Paul enjoyed the prosperity of the Christian community in Antioch. In the spring of 54 AD, he embarks on his third missionary journey⁸⁹ between 54-58 AD. (Acts 18, 23-21:15). He went with his companions from Antioch, the main target being Ephesus⁹⁰, which was the most important city on the coast of Asia Minor.

Conclusions

From all presented above, we can say with full certainty that regarding the missionary activity that St. Paul conducted during his life, it has two important

⁸⁴ SOTIRIOS, 85.

⁸⁵ S. VERZAN, 138-139.

⁸⁶ L. G. MUNTEANU, 56.

⁸⁷ *Istoria bisericească universală*, 96.

⁸⁸ SOTIRIOS, 107.

⁸⁹ L. G. MUNTEANU, 74-75.

⁹⁰ SOTIRIOS, 107.

stages. Thus, the first stage is the one that took place before the Apostolic Council in Jerusalem, and the second is the one that follows it.

In the first stage, between 36-50 AD, St. Paul receives, in a supernatural way, the Gospel, after which he becomes known and recognized by the Church in Jerusalem, but also by the Holy Apostles. After that, he will prove his qualities as a great Apostle, in Syria, Cilicia, Antioch, but also during his first missionary journey. In this first stage of his missionary activity, St. Paul collaborated with Barnabas, who was one of the most important missionaries of the Church at that time.

In the second stage, between 50-67 AD, St. Paul was the main preacher of the Gospel to the Gentile peoples, benefiting also from the mandate entrusted to him in this respect by Peter, James, and John, the three pillars of the Church in Jerusalem (Gal. 2, 7-9).

We can also say that the primary history of the Church has two important stages. Thus, in the first stage, the gospel was preached with priority to the Jews, Jerusalem, Palestine, and even the diaspora. In this first stage, the acceptance of the pagans into Christianity is especially exceptional and accidental, and such actions took place under divine inspiration. Also, during this first stage, especially in Jerusalem and to a lesser extent in Antioch, a massive group of missionaries will be trained who, especially after the Apostolic Council, will preach the Gospel and establish Churches within the Roman Empire.

In the second stage of the development of the Church, which follows the Apostolic Synod of Jerusalem, all Christian missionaries, led by St. Paul the Apostle and the other Holy Apostles, will travel throughout the Roman Empire to fulfill the command of the Savior Jesus Christ to carry the Gospel to all the nations under the sun⁹¹.

The activity of the Holy Apostles took place around 70 AD, when all of them ended their lives in martyrdom, except for St. John the Apostle, who will live until 100 AD. Thus, he created a close connection between the apostolic age and that of the Apostolic Fathers⁹².

⁹¹ Pr. dr. Sabin VERZAN, *op. cit.*, p. 117-118.

⁹² Nicolae CHIFĂR, *op. cit.*, p. 32.

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