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SOURCES AND TRADITIONS IN EPHESIANS  
*Izvori i tradicije u Poslanici Efežanima*

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*Abstract*

*This article attempts to underline the importance of discovering and recovering the underlying traditional material in the Letter to the Ephesians. The first part of this study provides necessary information and issues concerning the letter, the author and the addressees. Although we cannot be completely certain, the internal evidence from the letter itself indicates that Ephesians is written by one Paul's disciple from Asia Minor, a Jewish-Christian from larger Ephesus area. For the same reason, we believe that this letter does not address exclusively the community within the city of Ephesus, but rather it includes other Christian communities from the same Ephesus surroundings that would have been familiar to the author. Even the date and the place of composition is hard to determine, but the peaceful tone of the letter, developed Christian liturgical material and closeness to Colossians (written around AD 80) in vocabulary and in theology, suggest a later date towards the last decades of the 1<sup>st</sup> century, possibly around AD 85-90. The place of composition could be the city of Ephesus, because this is the administrative center and center of Pauline missions in Asia Minor that covers a large area. We are dealing with a predominately Gentile Christian community (communities), whose members have been recently converted. The second part of the article addresses very briefly the style and the genre of the letter, which combines epideictic and deliberative rhetoric. This part aims to provide the guidelines for the most important issue of this article, respectively the sources and traditions. The third part finally takes on various proposals on sources and traditions found in Ephesians, including a possible pre-Gnostic influence on the letter. This procedure enables us to understand better the context of the letter and the letter itself. According to their origin, these*

*traditions can be divided in three main groups: Jewish, Christian and Gentile traditions. The purpose of this study is not just to give general information on sources and traditions but to arouse scholarly discussion and a more profound investigation of this important issue in the Croatian biblical and liturgical milieu. Indeed, the letter's important evidence regarding the early Church's liturgy is essential for the history of liturgy.*

*Key words: The Letter to the Ephesians, the author, the addressees, style, genre, sources, traditions, liturgy*

## INTRODUCTION

Modern commentaries often avoid a full discussion of the issue of sources and traditions that can be unearthed in the Letter to the Ephesians and fail to recognize their importance for the understanding of the communal and situational context of the letter, its *Sitz im Leben*. Most of these studies are more concerned with the question of the authenticity of the author of Ephesians and its addressees and less about the richness of meaning of the letter itself. This letter is also a valuable historical document that opens a window into the post-apostolic and post-Pauline Christianity and bears witness to notable developments in theology, liturgy and ecclesiology. This ecclesiological document provides important evidence for the history of Christianity and history of the early Church's liturgy. It bears testimony to the rise of a distinctive and unified Christian identity that surpasses other two important religious-ethnic identities of Jews and Gentiles. There is a growing self-awareness of the Church as a living organism and a separate entity, brought to life and chosen by God to bear witness to his universal promise of salvation for the entire cosmos and the entire humanity. Ephesians shows deeper and a more profound understanding of the role of the each of the three persons of the Holy Trinity in the birth, sustainment and future of the Church, so that we can even speak of the rise of the Trinitarian ecclesiology (cf. Eph.2:18; 2:22).

In this study we are focused on identifying and interpreting many underlying layers of Jewish, Christian and even Gentile traditions. It is obvious that Ephesians pays special attention and employs a variety of Christian liturgical and catechetical material, mostly connected to baptism and, in certain part, to Eucharist. It is not always clear whether it uses specific Jew-

ish-Christian sources or directly the Jewish liturgical material or, simply, a contemporary Christian liturgical sources and traditions that betray a strong degree of dependence on the Jewish liturgy. Gentile philosophical and religious traditions are also important since Ephesians is created in the Greek-Roman and Hellenistic environment. The author of Ephesians certainly employs the rhetorical and metaphorical speech and other contemporary material, but with a clear purpose to engage his readers even more with the message of the Gospel. Then again, a Gnostic influence on the Letter to the Ephesians is much harder to prove since this is a later 2<sup>nd</sup> century movement. It is more likely that both Ephesians and Gnostics have used a common pre-Gnostic traditional material, sources and traditions or even that Ephesians is the one influencing the subsequent Gnostic writings.

Hopefully, this inquiry into the issue of sources and traditions found in Ephesians, including a brief examination of the author, the addressees, the date and place of composition, style and genre, sheds more light on the meaning and importance of the Letter to the Ephesians not just for the biblical studies, but also for the field of ecclesiology, theology and liturgy.

#### 1. GENERAL REMARKS REGARDING THE LETTER AND AUTHOR OF EPHESIANS

If we carefully read the Letter to the Ephesians, we can almost certainly realize the differences in vocabulary and style, in the historical situation of the addressees and in theology between this deutero-Pauline letter<sup>1</sup> and other Paul's authentic letters.<sup>2</sup> The latter aspect of theology holds the most weight, since the theology of this letter, including ecclesiological, Christological and pneumatological aspects (cf. the Trinitarian ecclesiology in

<sup>1</sup> The term "deutero-Pauline" ("second Paul") refers to the letters that are traditionally attributed to Paul but are written by one of his disciples and not the Apostle himself. These letters undoubtedly belong to Paul's patrimony, as they clearly originate from and continue his teaching, while addressing the communities regarding newly risen issues and in changed circumstances.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Romano Penna, *Lettera agli Efesini. Introduzione, versione, commento*, Edizione Dehoniane Bologna, Bologna, 1988., 21-23. For more information on the author, addressees, literary genre and style, and other introductory matters, cf. Marinko Vidović, *Pavao i njegova misao. Uvod i osnove tumačenja i teologije Pavlovih i deuteropavlovskih poslanica*, Crkva u svijetu, Split, 2010., 698-725.

2:18; 2:22), proves to be the most evolved and highly advanced. This is even more obvious when we directly compare Ephesians to the authentic Pauline letters, such as Romans, First and Second Letter to the Corinthians, Galatians, Philippians, Philemon, written mostly in the mid-fifties of the 1<sup>st</sup> century, and, especially, to the First Thessalonians, which is considered the oldest New Testament document (written around AD 51). The historical setting of the letter, although hard to determine with certainty, and the peaceful and unifying tone of this letter, show no more signs of a clear-cut division between the Jewish-Christians and Gentile Christians and of the latter's struggle to enter the Church on equal terms. In fact, the setting of the letter points more towards the end of the 1<sup>st</sup> century, when the situation seems to be reversed because of the prevailing number of Gentile Christians in the Church. Now there is a struggle to keep the Jewish roots of the Church, which are indispensable for the true understanding of Jesus Christ, of the Gospel and of the Christian faith. To fully understand itself and its vocation, the Church must be aware of belonging to the unique history of salvation that begins with the calling of Israel. Only then can the Church truly represent the first step and the concretization of God's universal plan of salvation. That is why the newly converted Gentile Christians are addressed directly and reminded of Israel's privileges, especially in the chapter 2, in which we read: "Therefore, remember that at one time you, Gentiles in the flesh, called the uncircumcision by those called the circumcision, which is done in the flesh by human hands, were at that time without Christ, alienated from the community of Israel and strangers to the covenant of promise, without hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus you who once were off have become near by the blood of Christ" (Eph. 2:11-13). Later, in the same chapter 2, the author of the letter fortifies the ecclesiastic unity by claiming that all members of the Church, whether Jews or Gentiles, have been reconciled with God in Christ and thus all of them have equal rights and equal access to God: "He came and preached peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near, for through him [Christ] we both have access in one Spirit to the Father"<sup>3</sup>. So then you are no longer strangers and sojourners, but

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<sup>3</sup> Eph. 2:18 shows traces of an explicit Trinitarian ecclesiology, found also in Eph. 2:22 ("in him you also are being built together into a dwelling place of God in the Spirit"), which represents another important aspect that distinguishes this letter

you are fellow citizens with the holy ones and members of the household of God” (Eph. 2:17-19). The emphasis on equality provides credible evidence that the disputes about the terms under which the converted Gentiles could enter the Church and Christian community are resolved and long gone. This offers another proof that we are dealing with the post-apostolic period of the Church and post-Pauline period, which means that Paul himself cannot be the author of Ephesians.<sup>4</sup>

The letter itself gives us hints that some else is the author in Eph. 1:15, where we read “Therefore, I, too, hearing of your faith in the Lord Jesus and of your love, for all the holy ones”. We know for a fact that Paul visited Ephesus and Ephesian Christians more than once and had spent almost three years in Ephesus (cf. Acts 19), so he would have seen their level of love and faith with his own eyes. Rather, the author of Ephesians should be searched for amongst the circle of his disciples in Asia Minor, probably from Ephesus area, because it had to be someone who had known both Paul and the addressees, their relationship and their situation.

### 1.1. *The Author, the Addressees and the Date and Place of Composition*

It must be noted that there are no exact geographical and chronological indicators about the community that would enable us to pinpoint the exact date of composition, or even the exact situation and specific communal issues. This means that, notwithstanding the letter’s designation “to the Ephesians”<sup>5</sup>, we

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from other authentic Pauline letters. Trinitarian ecclesiology of Ephesians is an important topic, but since our focus is set on sources and traditions, it remains a matter of future investigation.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Charles Leslie Mitton, *Ephesians*, The New Century Bible Commentary, Grand Rapids, 1983., 4-6. Besides differences in vocabulary and style, there are doctrinal-theological differences and dependence on Colossians, which, most probably, has been written by another Paul’s disciple around AD 80; Romano Penna, *Lettera agli Efesini*, 21-23ff. This scholar concludes that all the noted differences offer a reliable proof that someone else, other than Paul, has written the Letter to the Ephesians. The most logical conclusion would be one of his own disciples, or at least someone who is familiar with Paul’s thought and Pauline tradition.

<sup>5</sup> The issue of the addressees and of the authentic designation of this letter or even the lack of such is an interesting topic that belongs to a field of textual criticism and the history of textual transmission. It requires an extensive analysis that needs to be elaborated separately in a different article. For more information on this matter, cf. the critical apparatus of NA<sup>28</sup>, 590 and Bruce Manning Metzger,

cannot be certain that the author addresses solely the Christian community in the city of Ephesus. It seems much more probable that this letter is meant to address a much wider audience of Asia Minor, possibly the communities of larger Ephesus area, since this city is both the political and administrative center, and, at the same time, the center of Pauline missions in Asia Minor.<sup>6</sup> The knowledge of history of salvation and an obvious Jewish standpoint and vocabulary, for example “circumcision” and “uncircumcision” in Eph. 2:11, “the covenants of promise” in 2:12, “the law with its commandments and legal claims” in 2:15, point towards a Jewish-Christian author, whereas the remaining specific vocabulary and style, including a constant emphasis on knowledge and revelation, peace and wisdom, and even the author’s metaphoric language, point to his Hellenistic education and the influence of a Greek-Roman culture and environment (cf. the Greek-Roman metaphor of strangers and sojourners, fellow citizens and household members in 2:19). What is certain is that we are dealing with someone who is highly familiar with Paul’s thought and who is eager to continue his teaching and his tradition, especially in the Ephesus area, from which the author most likely originates.<sup>7</sup> Considering the peaceful tone of the letter, the appropriation of Greek-Roman metaphors, a developed Christian liturgical and hymnic material, the expanded church offices that, besides the teachers, the apostles and the prophets, now include “evangelists” and “pastors” (cf. Eph. 4:11), it is safe to propose a date of composition of Ephesians closer to the end of 1<sup>st</sup> centu-

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*A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament*, Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft/ United Bible Societies, Stuttgart, 1994., 532.

- <sup>6</sup> For a detailed information and discussion of the issue of the addressees, cf. Andrew T. Lincoln, *Ephesians*, Word Biblical Commentary 42, Dallas, 1990., LXXV-LXXVI; Frank Thielman, *Ephesians*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament, Grand Rapids, 2010., 19-27; Nils Alstrup Dahl, ed., *Studies in Ephesians. Introductory Questions. Text & Edition-Critical Issues. Interpretation of Texts and Themes*, Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament 131, Tübingen, 2000., 442-447; Markus Barth, *Ephesians. Introduction, Translation, and Commentary on Chapters 1-3*, The Anchor Bible 34, New York, 1974., 2-11, Rudolf Schnackenburg, *The Epistle to the Ephesians. A Commentary*, T&T Clark, Edinburgh, 1991., 28-29, etc.
- <sup>7</sup> For the origin of the author of Ephesians, cf. Andrew T. Lincoln, *Ephesians*, LXXIX-LXXXV; Markus Barth, *Ephesians 1-3*, 12-18. For an extensive study of the authorship of Ephesians, we suggest: A. van Roon, *The Authenticity of Ephesians*, Supplements to *Novum Testamentum* 39, Leiden, 1974. We do not intend to speculate of a potential name, since we are more interested in resurfacing the sources and traditions that the writer of Ephesians has employed.

ry, when Gentile Christians have become majority. Additionally, a strong influence or even dependence on vocabulary and topics from Colossians (written after AD 80), narrows a period of composition around AD 85-90.<sup>8</sup> As for the place of composition, we find that the city of Ephesians is the most probable solution, since it is the political, commercial and urban center of Asia Minor and a center of Pauline missions from which most of the Asia Minor could be reached due to a developed Roman infrastructure and road network. From there, Paul could have easily sent his Asian associate Tychicus (cf. Acts 20:4) to any part of Asia Minor and further (cf. Eph. 6:21-22).

## 2. STYLE AND GENRE OF EPHESIANS

After a brief examination of necessary information regarding the letter, we have learned that the author of Ephesians is one of Paul's disciples, probably from a larger Ephesus area. In connection with this premise, we are also prone to believe that the letter itself is written for a larger audience of this area and not just the Christian community within the city of Ephesus. Furthermore, various aspects of the letter, such as specific vocabulary and style, the lack of specific communal issues and a highly developed theology of the letter, speak more of a general climate of the 1<sup>st</sup> century Christianity, when there is already a prevailing number of Gentile Christians in the Church and a distinctive Christian identity has already been established. All these factors point to the end of the 1<sup>st</sup> century as the period in which the Letter to the Ephesians is composed.

A birth of a distinctive Christian identity, a predominance of Gentile Christianity and a development in the Church's theology and self-awareness ask not only for a developed vocabulary, but also for a specific style and genre that is best understood by the newly converted Gentile Christians who are raised in Hellenistic culture and surrounded by a specific Greek-Roman environment and Roman political juridical system.

All the above has prompted the author of Ephesians to employ a specific solemn (Asian) style and a specific engaging rhetorical speech.

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<sup>8</sup> For the date of composition, cf. Charles Leslie Mitton, *Ephesians*, 24-25 and Andrew T. Lincoln, *Ephesians*, LXII-LXXXVII.

### 2.1. *Certain indications regarding the Style of the Letter*

The style of Ephesians follows the contents of each of the two parts of the letter. The first part is characterized by the language of worship and liturgy, often employed with the epideictic rhetorical genre. To impress the readers' minds and hearts, the writer uses stylistic features such as repetition, parallelism, synonymy and amplification. He also uses long sentences (cf. 1:3-14; 1:15-23; 2:1-7; 3:1-7; 4:11-16; 6:14-20), extended with relative clauses, ὅτι clauses, prepositional phrases (with preposition ἐν), frequently uses the adjective πας (48x), different conjunctions, participial, infinitive and genitive constructions. These long periods are often found in the Hymns of Thanksgivings in the Qumran writings. The writer also uses paronomasia and the repetition of sounds that serve a particular rhetorical effect. He puts together many prepositional phrases, especially with the preposition ἐν, which provide temporary pauses with slowing down effect upon the rhythm of the many long sentences. In other places, the writer creates a more concise and a more direct discourse, which suggests that the use of the amplifying style is deliberately chosen for the particular purpose that is known to the author. In the many repetitions and parallels it is possible to recognize elements of the Hebrew poetry, but there is also a clear usage of Greek epideictic rhetoric of the ceremonial orations of praise. This combination was appropriate of Hellenistic Jewish style that has greatly influenced the early Christian liturgy and (the writer of) Ephesians with its ornamental flowery language looking to inspire the readers' thankfulness and worship. Even though we can find the long sentences in the second part (cf. 4:1-16; 5:21-33; 6:10-20), the style of the second part of the letter prefers the use of paraenesis, a more direct approach, including the shorter sentences and imperatives. This is followed with the use of the participles with imperative force and exhortations that use infinitive constructions.<sup>9</sup> These stylistic features are characteristic of a deliberative rhetoric that attempts to persuade to a certain behavior.

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<sup>9</sup> For the presentation on the style of the Ephesians, cf. Andrew T. Lincoln, *Ephesians*, XLIV-XLVII. For more information on connection between Ephesians and Qumran writings, cf. Jerome Murphy-O'Connor, ed., *Paul and Qumran. Studies in the New Testament Exegesis*, Geoffrey Chapman, London, 1968., 116-120.



## 2.2. *Brief indications regarding the Genre of the Letter*

First of all, it must be said that Ephesians is a real letter that combines two diverse rhetorical genres for each of the two parts of the letter. In the first part, consisting of chs. 1, 2 and 3, there is a clear usage of demonstrative or epideictic laudatory rhetoric that aims to reinforce and reiterate common Christian values and identity. For that purpose, the writer uses the language of eulogy (cf. 1:3-14), thanksgiving (1:15-23) and prayer (cf. 3:14-21), while also narrating what God has done in favor of the recipients of the letter (cf. 2:1-22), so that they can fully understand God's gift of salvation, attained through Christ's reconciliation ministry. In the second part, consisting of chs. 4, 5 and 6, the deliberative rhetoric is being used to persuade recently converted Gentile Christians to live and behave as Christians in accordance with their new acquired Christian identity.<sup>10</sup> The writer employs the vision of a unified body and exhorts to embrace mutual love (cf. 4:1-16), to lead a new life in Christ (cf. 4:18-24) and to avoid an immoral life (cf. 4:25-5,5). He then continues to offer practical exhortations as to their general behavior and daily conduct (cf. 5:6-20), while also providing guidelines for family relations (cf. a household code in 5:21-6:9). Finally, there is a strong reminder of an on-going spiritual battle against the evil, which is still present in their lives and in their near surroundings (cf. 6:10-17), and an important emphasis on a constant need for a prayer (6:18-20). This is the only way that these newly converted Gentile Christians will be able to fulfill their calling to "live as children of light" (5:8) and truly embrace their distinctive Christian identity.

In sum, neither is the author of Ephesians concerned with Genre and Style, nor does this letter fall into a single genre, because, after all, we are dealing with a letter that is written in a form of a rhetorical speech<sup>11</sup>. However, Ephesians is also a real letter that preserves its epistolary genre by using the epistolary frame with epistolary opening and closing announcements. Nev-

<sup>10</sup> Cf. Peter S. Williamson, *Ephesians*, Catholic Commentary on Sacred Scripture 10, Grand Rapids, 2009., 10.

<sup>11</sup> A rhetorical speech consists of four basic elements: *exordium* (introduction), *narratio* (narration), which encloses *prepositio* (the main theme or hypothesis that wishes to be discussed), *argomentatio* (arguments or proofs in favor of *prepositio*) and *peroratio* (repetition and conclusion).

ertheless, it is more than obvious that the author uses rhetorical devices and readily combines epideictic and deliberative rhetoric to confirm, reassure and remind the community of their specific Christian identity that needs to be followed by a distinctive moral way of life in Christ.

### 3. SOURCES AND TRADITIONS IN EPHESIANS

Ephesians is an ecclesial letter, a letter that testifies of the history of the post-apostolic Church and, especially, of the situation of Asia Minor Christian communities in the larger Ephesus area and further. It also provides an excellent testimony to the developing Christian liturgy and worship, traces of Jewish liturgy, and of various influences from the Greek-Roman political system and Hellenistic culture. To fully understand and appreciate the importance of this letter, it is essential to get to know better the underlying traditional material and various sources employed for the composition of Ephesians.

#### 3.1. *Various proposals on Sources and Traditions in Ephesians*

Ephesians is an interesting letter that uses abundance of traditional material with a clear purpose to affirm certain common Christian values. The first section of the letter uses mostly the liturgical traditions, whereas the second one uses paraenetic traditions. The liturgical material of Ephesians includes eulogies, intercessory prayers, doxology, other traditional liturgical language (cf. 1:3-14), creedal formulations (cf. 1:15-23), and hymnic material (cf. 2:14-16). The first section also uses Christian preaching formulas (cf. "once...now" in 2:1-22) and Scriptures (directly in 2:17 and indirectly in 1:20.22). The traditional material of the second section features early Christian catechetical material (cf. 4:22-24), *topoi* or sentences (cf. 4:25-5,20), list of virtues and vices (cf. 4:31-32; 5:3.4; 5:9) and the household code (cf. 5:21-6:9). We also have a direct (cf. 5:31.32; 6:2.3.14-17) and indirect use of the Scriptures (cf. 4:25.26; 5:18), liturgical or hymnic parts (cf. 5:14), confessional formulas (cf. 4:4-6), and other traditional formulas (cf. 5:2.25). In addition to different liturgical, doctrinal, and paraenetical traditions, Ephesians

uses and adapts many of the Pauline traditions from Colossians and other Pauline letters.<sup>12</sup>

The hymns and confessional formulas found in Ephesians (cf. 1:3-14.20-23; 2:1-22, etc.) can be recognized by the frequent use of *hapax legomena* and the obvious interruption of the preceding argument that the writer is trying to develop. These hymnic structures and traditional materials are sometimes preceded by the introductory formulas to bridge the difference between the original purpose (and vocabulary) and the writer's purpose. However, it is not always easy to discern Paul's own material (Može li se ovdje govoriti o Pavlovom vlastitom materijalu ili o autorovom vlastitom materijalu, ako Pavao nije autor ove poslanice? Can we speak here of Paul's own material or of the author's own material, if Paul is not the author of this epistle? ) from the traditional one or its exact origin, since these introductory formulas are employed both for biblical (cf. 4:8) and liturgical texts (cf. 5:14; also 1:7).<sup>13</sup> Besides the hymnic-liturgical tradition<sup>14</sup>, Ephesians uses missionary and baptismal formulas to express the mystery of the inclusion of Gentiles into the elected people of the Church (cf. esp. Eph. 2). In the end, the entire letter seems to be composed of different traditions that were selected, ordered, and incorporated by the author of Ephesians.<sup>15</sup>

It is also possible to find traces of the Jewish liturgy of the covenant renewal during the Feast of Pentecost that was later used for the renewal of the Christian covenant, hence the baptismal vows. The usage of traditional liturgical material of the

<sup>12</sup> Cf. Andrew T. Lincoln, *Ephesians*, XLVI-XLVII. LXXXVII. For more information, cf. John Muddiman, *The Epistle to the Ephesians*, Black's New Testament Commentary, London, 2001., 20-32. This scholar is convinced that Ephesians was expanded with Christian liturgical, scriptural, creedal-hymnic, and Pauline catechetical material to resemble a homily.

<sup>13</sup> Cf. Markus Barth, *Ephesians 1-3*, 6-10. This scholar underlines that Paul himself uses traditional material in other authentic letters (cf. Rim 1:3-4; 1Cor 15:3-4; Phil 2:6-11), but not as abundantly as in Ephesians and mostly introducing a direct appeal to the traditional material.

<sup>14</sup> For more information on traditional hymnic material, found mostly in first three chapters of the letter, cf. Jack T. Sanders, *Hymnic Elements in Ephesians 1-3*, *Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft* 56 (1965), 397-410.

<sup>15</sup> Cf. Ernst Käsemann, *Ephesians and Acts*, in L.E. Keck - J.L. Martin (eds.), *Studies in Luke-Acts. Festschrift for Paul Schubert*, Philadelphia, 1966., 288-297. Cf. also John Paul Sampley, *And the Two Shall Become One Flesh. A Study of Traditions in Ephesians 5:21-23*, Society for New Testament Studies. Monograph Series 16, Cambridge, 1971., 16-76. This scholar is convinced that the traditional material from Eph 5:21-31 derives from the Church's worship.

Jewish synagogue can be seen in Eph. 1–3, especially in the Thanksgiving (cf. 1:15–23), which betrays the elements of the Benediction prayer (berakha). It is possible that Ephesians drew from the contemporary Jewish-Christian liturgy of Eucharist and/or baptism that evolved from the Jewish berakha. In fact, Ephesians seems to use Christian liturgical-catechetical traditions connected with baptism and inspired by the Jewish liturgy of the proselytes' conversion.<sup>16</sup>

Other scholars reject the hypothesis that Ephesians is drawing from the contemporary liturgy since we do not possess direct evidence on the fixed Christian liturgy from this period and since the writer reproduces abundantly the Pauline material, especially from Colossians. The liturgical tenor of the letter suggests only that the writer knew that the letter would be read during an assembly or worship.<sup>17</sup>

We find an interesting proposal regarding sources and traditions in Ephesians in the work of Nils Alstrup Dahl, who asserts that “the author drew upon liturgical and catechetical traditions of which Paul, in his undisputed letters, made a more creative and original use. Ephesians combines “pre-Pauline”, Pauline, ultra-Pauline and non-Pauline elements under a post-Pauline perspective”.<sup>18</sup> Furthermore, it is possible to find parallels to Ephesians in the Qumran texts, synagogue prayers, rabbinic exegesis, Hekaloth mysticism, Philo, Middle Platonism, Hermetic writings, and in other sources.<sup>19</sup> We can also add the influence of the typological, apocalyptic, or even early Christian interpretation. Concerning the Old Testament, references come mostly from the Prophets, especially Isaiah (30), and also from the Pentateuch (17), the Book of Psalms (11), and the Sapiential literature of the Septuagint (10). Here we must note that there is

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<sup>16</sup> Cf. John C. Kirby, *Ephesians. Baptism and Pentecost. An inquiry into the structure and purpose of the Epistle to the Ephesians*, Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, London, 1968., 125–172. The Pauline traces in the liturgical parts of the letter reveal that Ephesus liturgy was formed based on Paul's teaching during his stay in Ephesus. This would explain the similarities between the liturgical material in Ephesians and in other Pauline letters. For the Jewish-Christian liturgical material, cf. Jack T. Sanders, *Hymnic Elements in Ephesians 1–3*, 397–410; Nils Alstrup Dahl, *Adresse und Proemium des Epheserbriefes*, *Theologische Zeitschrift* 7 (1951), 241–264. The latter scholar notes that Eph. 1:3–14 is a baptismal eulogy that resembles the proselytes' baptism liturgy.

<sup>17</sup> Cf. Charles Leslie Mitton, *Ephesians*, 22–24.

<sup>18</sup> Nils Alstrup Dahl, *Studies in Ephesians*, 452.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibidem*, 456.

only one explicit quotation formula διὸ λέγει (“therefore, it says”) in Eph. 4,8 and in 5,14, where the latter introduces a Christian hymn. The main purpose of the Scriptures’ use is to demonstrate that the same God who called Israel is calling the Gentiles into the unity and community of the Church, under the rule of Jesus Christ, the same Messiah who was promised to Israel (cf. Rom 3; 4; 9–11; Gal 3–4). The first kerygmatic part of Ephesians (chs. 1–3) employs the Old Testament to depict God’s relationship with his Son and his people, to explain the salvific meaning of Christ’s death, his exaltation, and the spiritual gifts. The specific imagery, such as temple, planting, and marriage, is further used for the description of the Church. The second paraenetic part of the letter (chs. 4–6) employs ethical exhortations from legal and wisdom literature.<sup>20</sup>

What is quite surprising is that Ephesians seems to give almost the same authority to the Scriptures and to Christian liturgical and catechetical traditions, since the introductory formula διὸ λέγει, “therefore, it say”, in 4:8 (cf. Ps 68,18) is used also for the Christian hymn in 5:14. This suggests that the letter uses Old Testament as one of the many authoritative traditions (cf. 2:17 on the Church’s unity), whether directly from the Septuagint or through targumic, rabbinic, and Jewish paraenetical sources. The use of the Scriptures serves to emphasize the Church’s continuity with Israel, although lacking the promise-fulfillment pattern, since the writer believed that the mystery of the inclusion of Gentiles into God’s blessing had not been revealed to prior generations (cf. 3:5), including the Old Testament writers and prophets. This usage results formative for Ephesians’ theology, since it works as a cohesive and unifying force, along with other Jewish-Christian liturgical traditions.<sup>21</sup> The way the writer uses the Scriptures suggests that he considers it a part of his own patrimony. He seems to be deliberately avoiding a direct dependence and the fulfillment perspective because the Gentile Christians have become a majority in the Church. That is why he uses the

<sup>20</sup> Cf. Markus Barth, *Ephesians 1–3*, 15.27–31.

<sup>21</sup> Cf. Andrew T. Lincoln, *The Use of the OT in Ephesians*, *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 14 (1982), 24–50; Id., *Ephesians*, XCIII. Lincoln counts only five direct quotations from the Old Testament; Is 52,7; 57,19 in Eph. 2,17; Ps 68,18 in Eph. 4,8–10; Gen 2,24 in Eph. 5,31–32, and Ex 20,12 in Eph. 6,23, and notes the use of rabbinic exegesis (cf. Eph. 2,17), midrash-pesher (cf. Eph. 4,8–10), or even typology (cf. Eph. 1,20.22; 5,31–32), but always in the light of the Christ event.

same opening formula διὸ λέγει, “therefore, it says”, both for biblical passages (cf. the use of Ps 68,19 in Eph. 4,8<sup>22</sup>) and Christian liturgical texts (cf. Eph. 5,14<sup>23</sup>).<sup>24</sup>

Other scholars, such as K.G. Kuhn, attempt to prove an existence of a common Essene tradition shared by Ephesians and Qumran writings, including other late Palestinian Jewish writings, such as the Book of Jubilees, the Testament of the Twelve Patriarchs, and the Enoch literature. This proposal suggests that the first part of the letter (Eph. 1–3) would employ Qumran liturgical-hymnic language, whereas the second paraenetic part of the letter (Eph. 4–6) would employ pre-Christian Jewish and Hellenistic traditions, especially the ones found in the Qumran writings, such as the Testament of Levi, Testament of Judah, Testament of Reuben, etc. The motif of light and darkness, used at the baptism, would further point to the ritual of acceptance of new members into the Essene community. Besides the Qumran traditions, the paraenetic section would originate from other late Jewish-Hellenistic traditions that often point to the Stoic sources (cf. Household code in 5:22–6:9).<sup>25</sup>

M. Barth explains that Ephesians uses many oral, written, hymnic, prose, liturgical, ethical, mystical, and proverbial traditions. These can be divided in three groups: traditions from Israel, traditions from the early Church, and the traditions of Gentile origin and character. The first group would consist of the Old Testament passages, intertestamental Judaism of rabbinical, apocalyptic, Qumran, and Philonic character and other Jewish traditions. The latter includes especially the Jewish liturgy and the Benediction prayer that was prayed in the synagogues, in Jewish homes and in Qumran. The second group would con-

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<sup>22</sup> Eph. 4,8: “Therefore, it says: “He ascended on high and took prisoners captive; he gave gifts to men”.”

<sup>23</sup> Eph. 5,14b: “Therefore, it says: “Awake, O sleeper, and arise from the dead, and Christ will give you light”.”

<sup>24</sup> Cf. Romano Penna, *Lettera agli Efesini*, 35-36, who notes the absence of the classical introduction formula “it was written” or “the Scripture says”.

<sup>25</sup> Cf. Karl Georg Kuhn, *In the Light of the Qumran Texts*, in J. Murphy-O'Connor (ed.), *Paul and Qumran. Studies in New Testament Exegesis*, London, 1968., 115-131. On paraenetic traditions, cf. Joachim Gnilka, *Paränetische Traditionen im Ephesebrief*, in A. Deschamps – R.P.A. de Halleux (eds.), *Mélanges bibliques: en hommage au R.P. Béda Rigaux, Duculot, 1970.*, 397-410. According to Gnilka, the author of Ephesians does not use fixed Christian and Hellenistic-Jewish traditions, but rather expands, changes and develops these traditions according to his own needs and of his readers.

cern the Christian worship, especially the homiletic parts of the baptismal liturgy, Christian hymns and the paraenetic traditions found especially in the Household code. This group would also point to a probable existence of a late apostolic or a post-apostolic “School” that collected and inserted various traditions into Ephesians. The third group would include the classical Greek and Roman ceremonies concerning gods (Zeus, the Father tradition), Orphic and especially Stoic conceptions of the universe as a single body with Zeus as its head. Furthermore, this group would include the Stoic origin of the Household code, the traces of the mystery religions and cults, the Gnostic elements, especially the Myth of the Redeemed Redeemer, which would explain the Savior role of Christ, and many other philosophical and religious traditions of the Gentile origin.<sup>26</sup>

Based on the analysis of the traditional material in Ephesians, we can possibly identify three different proposals. The first one identifies frequent presence of the liturgical material in the letter (M. Barth<sup>27</sup>). The second position is more moderate and finds traces of traditional layers in 1:3-14; 1:20-23; 2:4-7; 2:14-18; 5:2.14 (K.M. Fischer<sup>28</sup>). The third and the most equilibrate position (van Roon<sup>29</sup>) affirms that a certain traditional material was adapted and integrated into the new context of the letter (cf. 1:7.20; 2:4-10.14-18; 5:22-6,9; also 1:3-14; 4:5-6; 5.14).<sup>30</sup>

Finally, it is possible that the author of Ephesians has employed various Jewish, Christian and Gentile traditions, although they cannot be traced with certainty, as a part of his rhetorical strategy to reach the Jewish and Gentile audience that lived in the multi-cultural and multi-religious cosmopolitan society of Ephesus and its surroundings.<sup>31</sup>

<sup>26</sup> Cf. Markus Barth, *Traditions in Ephesians*, *New Testament Studies* 30 (1984), 3-25. On the Jewish-Hellenistic, syncretistic and Gnostic sources, cf. Ernst Käsemann, *Leib und Leib Christ. Eine Untersuchung zur paulinischen Begrifflichkeit*, *Beiträge zur historischen Theologie* 9, Tübingen, 1933., 1-96.

<sup>27</sup> Cf. Markus Barth, *Ephesians 1-3*

<sup>28</sup> Cf. Karl Martin Fischer, *Tendenz und Absicht des Ephesebriefes*, *Forschungen zur Religion und Literatur des Alten und Neuen Testaments* 111, Göttingen, 1973.

<sup>29</sup> Cf. A. van Roon, *The Authenticity of Ephesians*.

<sup>30</sup> Cf. Romano Penna, *Lettera agli Efesini*, 63-64.

<sup>31</sup> Cf. John Paul Heil, *Ephesians. Empowerment to Walk in Love for the Unity of All in Christa*, *Society of Biblical Literature*, Atlanta, 2007., 10, who speaks of Paul's rhetorical strategy.

### 3.2. ALTERNATING PROPOSAL OF THE INFLUENCE OF PRE-GNOSTICISM

Besides the existence of the three main groups of traditions and sources that can be found in Ephesians, respectively, Jewish, Christian and Gentile traditions, there is another interesting proposal that traces certain parts of the letter to various Hellenistic and syncretistic ideas. More precisely, parts of material used in Ephesians could possibly relate to certain pre-Gnostic teachings and ideas, although more in a sense of a refusal, common to the Gnostic matrix. However, we must be careful not to ascribe these ideas to the 2<sup>nd</sup> century movement of Gnosticism that surfaces after the composition of Ephesians (AD 85-90).

According to certain scholars, the influence of these (pre-) Gnostic ideas can be traced to many different concepts elaborated throughout the Ephesians, especially in chs. 1-3, such as knowledge, fullness, mystery, perfect, body, and even a new man. However, it is important to underline that Ephesians Christianizes these ideas and that this letter precedes Gnosticism as a developed system. Nonetheless, certain pre-Gnostic ideas, such as those of inner spiritual truths could have managed to penetrate the Christian community. Under the influence of these ideas, some Christians could have believed that fullness of Christian living is reached only by those intellectually superior, thus causing division within the community. If this is so, the author of the letter would be propelled to refute such distorted understanding of Christian faith. In fact, it may be that traces of a polemic against such a faulty view are found in the prayer for the readers in 3:14-21. In this section, the author writes "that he may grant in you in accord with the riches of his glory to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in the inner self" (3:16). He is probably aware that this statement could be interpreted incorrectly in the sense of privileged higher knowledge and thus proceeds with clarification that it is not the knowledge itself that leads to salvation and fullness of Christian living, but the saving love of Christ. So, in 3,19 we read: "[and] to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, so that you may be filled with all the fullness of God". The insistence on the value of higher and present knowledge with no regard to the Jewish heritage and history of salvation in which Israel holds a prominent role would endanger the historical roots of the Church. In addition, internal discordance within the community, this would also cause division



with other churches still upholding the Jewish traditions. In the face of the forgetful members who could have also lost interest in historical person of Jesus Christ, the author of Ephesians offers a strong emphasis on the historical heritage of the Church and on the continuation of the history of salvation through its Jewish members, even though now all members of the Church have equal access to God in/through Christ (cf. 2:11-22 and the explicit mention of “community of Israel” in 2:12). If we accept the existence of Gnostic ideas in Ephesians or, at least, of those ideas that are common to Gnostic matrix, then we can also speak of their positive use in this letter. For example, it could be that the author of Ephesians employs the pre-Gnostic idea of a present transformation to underline that since Christians are already transformed and saved in present living, they need to lead a distinctive way of life and exercise a highly moral life in accordance with their new Christian faith (cf. 4–6).<sup>32</sup>

The notion of present salvation through higher knowledge is certainly a popular Gnostic concept, but it is not confined exclusively to the Gnostic circles. In fact, a concept of higher knowledge as a way of salvation is widely recognized, whether in Greek culture or in the Hellenistic surrounding of Christianity. However, this concept comes in various forms and shapes, so we can hardly speak of a unified belief system. The idea of a higher knowledge as a path to present salvation, which will become so important for the future Gnostic movement, finds its counterpart (rebuttal) in Ephesians, where the salvation is ascribed only to God and not to human achievement and endeavor. In this letter, the salvific knowledge belongs to Christ, crucified and risen. Instead of attributing salvation to some unknown god or to human wisdom, Ephesians clearly emphasizes the saving knowledge of Christ, who through his death on the cross reconciles both Jews and Gentiles, thus creating a new being of the Church as a distinctive and unified identity (cf. Eph. 2:15 and 4:24: *καὶνὸν ἄνθρωπον*, “new man”). This is especially clear in the section Eph. 3:1-13, where the author of Ephesians writes that he has been commissioned by God himself to reveal to every believer “the mystery of Christ” (3:4), that is made known to him and to all the apostles and prophets in the Church, whereas it was hidden to previous generations of believers prior to Christ.

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<sup>32</sup> Cf. Charles Leslie Mitton, *Ephesians*, 20-32.

The content of the revelation of the mystery of Christ is “that the Gentiles are coheirs, members of the same body, and copartners in the promise in Christ Jesus through the Gospel” (3:6; also 6.19: “the mystery of the gospel”).<sup>33</sup>

#### CONCLUSION

After an examination into the authenticity of the author, the addressees, the date and place of composition in the first part of the article, we are convinced that the Letter to the Ephesians is written around 85-90 AD from the city of Ephesus by one of Paul’s Jewish-Christian disciples from communities of the larger Ephesus area, to which this letter is addressed. The second part briefly investigates into the matter of style and genre and provides evidence that Ephesians is a real letter, written in a solemn liturgical-catechetical manner and style. It is also written in the form of a speech for a public reading and ecclesial assembly. For that purpose, it combines epideictic laudatory rhetoric to reaffirm and reassure the newly converted Gentile Christians in their Christian faith (cf. Eph. 1–3) and deliberative exhortative rhetoric and to persuade them to live and behave according to their new and distinctive Christian identity (cf. Eph. 4–6).

Finally, the third part of the article provides an insight into various proposals on the origin of the traditional material, of sources and traditions found in Ephesians. These sources and traditions may be divided in three separate and yet connected groups of Jewish, Christian and Gentile traditions. We are not convinced with an alternative proposal on Gnostic or pre-Gnostic influence, which is hard to determine, even if we allow for certain common pre-Gnostic notions, since a Gnostic movement post-

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<sup>33</sup> Cf. Markus Barth, *Ephesians 1–3*, 12-18. This author offers presentation of different proposals that speak of the influence of Ephesians on later Gnostic concepts of a god-Man, on a head-body image and on Gnostic concepts of salvation in general. For more information on Gnostic influence, cf. Petr Pokorný, *Epheserbrief und gnostische Mysterien*, *Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft* 53 (1962), 160-194. This scholar considers a possibility that Ephesians provides an anti-Gnostic polemic against the overly individualistic view of salvation, which has influenced some members of the Church, and emphasizes a communal (Christian) vision of salvation; Heinrich Schlier, *Der Brief an die Epheser. Ein Kommentar*, Patmos Verlag, Düsseldorf, 1962., 19-20, who interprets the insistence on the unity of the Church as a polemic against a Jewish-Christian gnosis (cf. 4:20; 5:6.32).

dates the Letter to the Ephesians, and it may be influenced by the letter itself.

We are convinced that more attention should be given to an examination and analysis of the early Church's (Christian) liturgy and catechesis. It is also important to investigate the Jewish liturgy and specific Jewish-Christian forms that offer a bridge between the Jewish and Christian liturgy. Finally, we believe that this letter represents an essential ecclesial document that provides important evidence of developments in ecclesiology, Christology, pneumatology and theology from the apostolic to the post-apostolic and post-Pauline period of the Church. Furthermore, a careful analysis of Ephesians shows a growing self-awareness of the Church and an emerging Trinitarian ecclesiology in which every person of the Holy Trinity is attributed with a specific role in the existence of this holy God's creation and a living organism of the Church.

## IZVORI I TRADICIJE U POSLANICI EFEŽANIMA

### *Sažetak*

Ovaj članak nastoji naglasiti važnost otkrivanja i identifikiranja tradicionalnog materijala u Poslanici Efežanima. Prvo dio članka donosi neophodne podatke glede same Poslanice, njenog autora i primatelja. Unutarnji dokazi iz same poslanice daju nam naslutiti, iako ne možemo u potpunosti biti sigurni, da je autor jedan od Pavlovih učenika iz Male Azije, vjerojatno kršćanin iz židovstva iz šireg područja Efeza. Na temelju istih dokaza, smatramo da ova poslanica nije upućena samo jednoj zajednici koja boravi u gradu Efezu, već je upućena većem broju kršćanskih zajednica u široj okolici Efeza, koje je autor dobro poznao. Nije lako ustvrditi niti sam period i mjesto nastanka poslanice, ali prevladavajući pomirljivi ton, tragovi razvijene kršćanske liturgije te sličnost u rječniku i teologiji s Poslanicom Kološanima (napisana oko 80. godine pr. Kr.) upućuje na kasniji datum nastanka, potkraj 1. stoljeća, vjerojatno oko 85-90. godine pr. Kr. Poslanica je vjerojatno nastala u samom gradu Efezu, jer je on bio administrativno-politički centar Male Azije i ujedno centar pavlovskih misija u Maloj Aziji, iz kojeg je bilo moguće pokriti široko područje. Poslanica je upućena kršćanskoj zajednici (zajednica-

ma) koja je većinom sastavljena od kršćana iz poganstva koji su se nedavno obratili. Drugi dio članka ukratko donosi osnovne naznake vezane za stil i žanr ili vrstu same poslanice, koja kombinira epideiktičku i deliberativnu retoriku. Ovaj dio funkcionira kao uvod u najvažniju tematiku članka, a to je pitanje izvora i tradicija koje Poslanica Efežanima koristi. Treći dio članka donosi različite prijedloge vezane uz podrijetlo tih izvora i tradicija, uključujući potencijalni proto-gnostički utjecaj. Otkrivanje podrijetla i ispravno identificiranje različitog tradicionalnog materijala omogućuje bolje razumijevanje konteksta u kojem je poslanica nastala, a samim time i ispravnije razumijevanje same poslanice. Prema njihovom podrijetlu, tradicije u Efežanima možemo podijeliti na tri glavne grupe: na židovske, kršćanske i poganske tradicije. Cilj ovog članka nije puko pružanje osnovnih informacija o tradicijama i izvorima koje možemo pronaći u Poslanici Efežanima, već je cilj potaknuti zanimanje i detaljnije proučavanje ovog važnog pitanja na hrvatskom biblijskom i liturgijskom području. Poslanica Efežanima pruža važne dokaze o liturgiji rane Crkve, što je čini neophodnom za povijest liturgije.

*Ključne riječi:* Poslanica Efežanima, autorstvo, primatelji, stil, vrsta, izvori, tradicije, liturgija