

## COMMANDS-COUNSELS: A PAULINE TEACHING?

JOHN W. GLASER, S.J.

*University of Detroit*

THE PRESENT crisis of religious life has given a new importance to the question of the "evangelical counsels." The "windows" to the problems involved in discussing the counsels are like those of a greenhouse—almost countless, and viewing the reality from a multitude of angles. This essay will look through one of these "windows," fully aware of the limited view any one window can offer, but confident that any legitimate angle of observation must help our understanding of the complex totality.

Moral theology has traditionally distinguished between "commands that bind" and "counsels that invite." This essay wants to consider the validity of such a distinction on the background of some larger Pauline ideas. The investigation of this question is prompted by the number and stature of current theologians who either implicitly or explicitly call this distinction into question.<sup>1</sup>

The traditional understanding of commands-counsels might be summarized as follows. Command has as its object a duty, i.e., an unconditional obligation. The fulfilment of such a command is an *opus debitum*; its nonfulfilment is a sin. Counsel is an invitation or suggestion which does not oblige, but leaves the decision up to the one invited (*consilium in optione ponitur ejus cui datur*). The fulfilment here is a work of supererogation and its nonfulfilment is a positive imperfection. The first reason for considering this question in a Pauline context is the fact that moralists have traditionally gone to St. Paul for support of their commands-counsels thesis. For example, one finds the following "Scripture proof" in a moral manual from the year 1959:

The existence of counsels is clear from the testimony of Scripture: "About remaining celibate, I have no directions from the Lord but give my own opinion

<sup>1</sup> Some moral theologians who have expressed their dissatisfaction with this traditional understanding of commands-counsels are F. X. Linsenmann, F. Tillmann, J. Stelzenberger, O. Lottin, J. Fuchs, and B. Häring. Bruno Schüller presents the most thorough explicit critique of this traditional interpretation; he finds it inadequate on three counts: its understanding of law, its understanding of freedom, and scriptural justification. Cf. *Gesetz und Freiheit* (Düsseldorf, 1966) pp. 65-74. Karl Rahner does not explicitly criticize the traditional teaching on counsels as such. However, in three articles which explicate elements central to the discussion of commands-counsels, one finds the most thoroughgoing, if implicit, critique of this traditional teaching. Cf. "Über die Einheit von Nächsten- und Gottesliebe," *Schriften* 6, 277-300; "Über die evangelischen Räte," *Schriften* 7, 404-34; "Die Ehe als Sakrament," *Schriften* 8, 519-40.

(*consilium*) as one who, by the Lord's mercy, has stayed faithful. . . . In other words, the man who sees that his daughter is married has done a good thing, but the man who keeps his daughter unmarried has done something even better." Hence it is clear that there are acts which in themselves are more perfect than others; such acts are, then, not commanded but counseled.<sup>2</sup>

Consulting the exegetes on this passage (1 Cor 7), one finds that the moralists cannot be accused of contradicting a solid body of exegetical thought. A number of Scripture scholars definitely share the opinion of the moralists that 1 Cor 7 contains the idea which has evolved into the traditional teaching of commands-counsels. To bring new and old from the storehouse of exegesis, two examples might be cited:

In discussing the question he [Paul] gives a *gnōmē*—an opinion—which should not be understood as a merely subjective opinion; rather it is the judgment of one who is an emissary and steward of Christ—hence it is a directive according to Christ's will. Since it is a directive of the practical and not merely theoretical order, and since, on the other hand, it is a directive so given that the individual retains his full freedom (it is an appeal to his higher idealism), we have before us what the Church understands as a counsel: *consilium de bono meliore*.<sup>3</sup>

P. Allo's commentary on First Corinthians also claims to find the traditional Catholic teaching of commands-counsels in this seventh chapter: "Paul, in applying this, shows that, contrary to certain non-Catholic opinions, the spirit of Christ proclaims the 'counsels' as well as the 'commandments.'" <sup>4</sup>

On the background of this traditional teaching of commands-counsels, and prompted by the more recent critique of this traditional stance, this essay wants to investigate two questions: (1) Does this text, 1 Cor 7, actually support the traditional understanding of commands-counsels? (2) A question of far more theological import: Would such a teaching be in harmony with the larger scope of Pauline ideas, ideas such as charisma and vocation, ideas which are part of the immediate context of 1 Cor 7?

<sup>2</sup> Ludovicus Wouters, C.S.S.R., *Manuale theologiae moralis* (Bruges, 1959). Other manuals making similar use of 1 Cor 7 are those of Prümmer, Zalba, Noldin-Schmitt, and Vermeersch.

<sup>3</sup> Karl Wenemer; from an unpublished set of class notes, p. 4.

<sup>4</sup> P. E.-B. Allo, *Etudes bibliques: Première Epître aux Corinthiens* (Paris, 1934) p. 177. A similar opinion can be found in Joseph Huby, *Première Epître aux Corinthiens (Verbum salutis 13; Paris, 1944)* p. 176. Neuhäusler definitely seems to be of the same opinion: "Ruf Gottes und Stand des Christen," *Biblische Zeitschrift* N.F. 3 (1959) 43-60.

To answer the first question affirmatively it is not enough to show that Paul says that virginity is better and recommends it—which he certainly does.<sup>5</sup> The precise point that must be established is that an individual who is called or invited by this charisma is free to accept or reject it. (The question of criteria by which one judges whether or not such a call or charisma is present should not be allowed to confuse our problem. These are two different problems. This second question—the criteria for establishing such a call—will be touched on later in this essay.)

When we ask if Paul proposes such a counsels-concept in 1 Cor 7, the answer must be a definite no. In chapter 7 we find only that virginity is recommended as better *in general*. If one finds that he lacks the necessary charisma for this, he should marry. Or perhaps better expressed, there is a negative norm by which one knows if he is called to virginity or not: if he finds that he cannot live in the state of virginity, this indicates that he has another charisma: *ho men houtōs, ho de houtōs* (7b). The very question that has to be answered to establish the doctrine of commands-counsels is never asked or discussed by Paul here: whether *for the individual* to whom such a call is directed, this “better state” of virginity is only recommended or commanded. Since this precise question is neither posed nor answered by Paul, 1 Cor 7 cannot be used as a Scripture proof to show that the individual who is the object of such a call to virginity is in the moral situation traditionally described as a counsel and not in the situation of a command.

The second question is far more difficult: whether or not such a commands-counsels doctrine harmonizes with the larger symphony of Pauline thought. Such a thesis cannot be proven in the strict sense; nor does the scope of this essay allow for more than a few indications as to where the solution to such a problem might lie. The method here employed will be to investigate some key ideas of Paul which occur in the immediate context of 1 Cor 7. These basic Pauline “melodies” will be sounded, and on this larger melodic background of Pauline thought we will then hear the tones of the commands-counsels doctrine. The question will then be whether or not we hear an accord and harmonious blending, or a discord. If there is a disharmony in several basic areas, we will have reason to suspect such a doctrine of not being Pauline.

<sup>5</sup> The whole question of what “better” means has also been the subject of recent discussion; cf. H. Rusche, “Ehelosigkeit als eschatologisches Zeichen,” *Bibel und Leben*, March, 1964; Leonhard Weber, *Mysterium magnum*, esp. pp. 114–18; Léon-Dufour, “Mariage et virginité selon saint Paul,” *Christus* 42, 178–94, esp. 190–94; Karl Rahner, *Schriften* 3, 61–72, esp. 71 f.; *Schriften* 7, 404–34.

## CHARISMA

It is important to preface this section with a caution against a double danger. The first danger is in seeing the charisma as a mere ornament or external flash, something added to the Mystical Body to make its glory shine; such a misunderstanding makes the connection between the Mystical Body and charisma far too extrinsic and superficial. The second danger is closely related to the first: it is to consider the charisma as some "thing" distinct from God's self-communication, as some "object" which God offers us.

So long as, and to the extent that, these two misunderstandings are allowed to function as silent presuppositions in our thinking on charisma, we will be in danger of not taking charisma as seriously as its nature demands (as God's offering of Himself as salvation-grace mediated through this specific charisma-grace) and its role will be overlooked (as concrete realization of the Mystical Body in its multiplicity and variety—determined by God). Considering the essential relationship between grace and charisma and the essential role that charisma plays in the realization of the Church, one will be less ready to find a doctrine in Paul which sees such a charisma as a mere suggestion to an individual which can be refused as well as accepted. But this is getting ahead of the game.

As Karl Wenemer points out, charisma is an especially Pauline term.<sup>6</sup> It occurs in Paul sixteen times, and only once outside of Paul in the entire New Testament. He characterizes Paul's use of charisma: "All New Testament charisma-passages agree on one point: the charisma of God refers to the supernatural order of salvation and hence must be characterized as a supernatural gift or grace. In other respects the word charisma can vary considerably in meaning. It can refer to God's grace in a more universal and essential way; or it can have a more specified and particular meaning."<sup>7</sup>

Accordingly, Paul's basic use of charisma falls into two main groups. For the first group, charisma is the technical term signifying the totality of God's gracious dealing with man in Jesus Christ; it signifies the essential salvation-grace. Adam prefigured the One to come, but the

<sup>6</sup> Karl Wenemer, "Die charismatische Begabung der Kirche nach dem heiligen Paulus," *Scholastik* 34 (1959) 503-25. After the completion of this article another book on the subject of charisms was called to the attention of the author: G. Murphy, *Charisma and Church Renewal* (Rome, 1965). The interested reader will find much valuable material in Murphy's study, especially the chapter on charisms in the New Testament. See also K. Rahner, *The Dynamic Element in the Church* (New York, 1964) esp. pp. 42-84, "The Charismatic Element in the Church."

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 503-4.

gift itself considerably outweighed the fall. "If it is certain that through one man's fall so many died, it is even more certain that divine grace, coming through the one man Jesus Christ, came to so many as an abundant free gift" (Rom 5:15).<sup>8</sup> The second, more specialized way that Paul uses charisma is characterized by Wenemer as follows: "Paul also uses the word charisma in a narrower sense, namely, to indicate gifts and talents which are not of themselves essential moments of this salvation-grace and hence are not necessarily given to everyone. These are the various gifts which are distributed differently in the Body of Christ, the Church."<sup>9</sup>

It is to this second group that virginity belongs.<sup>10</sup> Whether or not marriage is also a charisma in this sense finds no general agreement. Wenemer shows no hesitation in placing it among these charismata.<sup>11</sup>

Here we come to a key question in our investigation: What is the relationship between the salvation-grace and charisma-grace? Wenemer describes charisma-grace as "gifts and talents which are not of themselves essential moments of this salvation-grace and hence are not necessarily given to everyone." But what does this mean: "not essentially related to salvation-grace"? Does it mean that salvation-grace can be present with *no* charisma-grace? Or merely that salvation-grace need not be present as any one specific charisma-grace, but its presence will be mediated through some specific charisma-grace? Wenemer hints at a solution to this when he says: "One should be careful not to separate too much the *gratiae gratis datae* from the *gratia gratum faciens*."<sup>12</sup> A fuller development of the implications of this is given by Rahner:

He [Paul] recognizes other spiritual gifts as well, and recognizes them as just as important for building up the Body of Christ. Furthermore, these special charismata need not necessarily always concern extraordinary mystical things. The simplest help, the most commonplace service can be a charisma of the Spirit. Another striking fact is that Paul does not oblige the theologian by dis-

<sup>8</sup> Cf. also Rom 1:11; 5:16; 6:23.

<sup>9</sup> Wenemer, "Die charismatische Begabung," p. 505.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 518 f. Wenemer states this as generally accepted.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 507. Lietzman rejects this; Michaelis agrees with Wenemer. K. Rahner calls attention to the fact that the charismatic dimension of the Church extends even beyond this. "But on the other hand this does not mean, either, that we are not permitted to see the charismatic element in the Church where it really exists within her, not in the great pages that belong to general world history merely, but in hidden fidelity, unselfish kindness, sincerity of disposition and purity of heart, virile courage that does a duty without fuss; in the uncompromising profession of truth, even when it is invidious; in the inexpressible love of a soul for God; in the unshakable trust of a sinner that God's heart is greater than ours and that he is rich in mercy" (*The Dynamic Element in the Church*, p. 64).

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 521.

tinguishing between a *gratia gratum faciens* and a *gratia gratis data*, that is, between a grace that makes its recipient himself intrinsically holy and pleasing to God, and a grace only given "gratuitously" to someone for the benefit of others and the Church generally but which does not sanctify the recipient. . . . Paul does not make the distinction. On the contrary he only sees or only envisages the case where the charismata both sanctify the recipient and redound to the benefit of the whole Body of Christ simultaneously and reciprocally. It is a very evangelical way of looking at it. For how else could one truly sanctify oneself except by unselfish service to others in the one Body of Christ by the power of the Spirit? And how could one fail to be sanctified if one faithfully takes up and fulfils one's real and true function in the Body of Christ? If both are done, and that by God's Spirit, inconspicuously perhaps but in a truly spiritual way, that for Paul is a charisma of the Spirit of the Church, and it belongs just as essentially to the body and life of the Church as the official ministries.<sup>13</sup>

Reflecting on this in the terminology of our discussion would suggest the following essential relationship between salvation-grace and charisma-grace. Salvation-grace is not and cannot be realized in a vacuum or merely in general, but is always the realized and concretized grace of one specific individual; the realized and applied salvation-grace can only exist in this way. And this concretized form which salvation-grace takes in each individual is precisely his charisma-grace. This means that charism-grace is essential and necessary—it is the concrete form in which God comes to the individual as salvation-grace.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>13</sup> Karl Rahner, *The Dynamic Element in the Church* (New York, 1964) p. 55.

<sup>14</sup> The objection that some charismata appear where no grace is present (cf. Mt 7:22 f.) does not necessarily contradict this, since it can merely indicate that God can also draw good from evil. That the external appearance of charisma does not always guarantee charisma-grace precisely as realized (i.e., is not a guarantee that the bearer is in the state of grace) does not weaken the argument that salvation-grace can only present itself to the individual as his individual charisma-grace. Nor does Wenemer's statement, that charisma-grace is not necessarily given to everyone, necessarily contradict this—as we have already pointed out. Even though Paul speaks primarily of the "higher gifts," he certainly held that the whole Body of Christ was so structured—some in one way, some in another. The fact that a specific charisma need not come to each one does not mean that a person can exist as a member of the Body of Christ without some charisma. There is a further aspect to be considered; the *charisma Christi* (in both forms of salvation-grace and charisma-grace) should be thought of as existing within as well as beyond the confines of the Church. Vatican II (*Gaudium et spes*, no. 22; *Lumen gentium*, no. 16; *Ad gentes*, no. 7), though admittedly not speaking to our specific problem, points in this direction when it emphasizes that the redemptive grace of Christ works in the life of every man. On this point Rahner says: "The grace of Christ surrounds man more than we think, and is deeper, more hidden and pervasive in its application in the depth of his being than we often imagine. It is quite conceivable that wherever a human being really affirms moral values as absolutely binding, whether expressly or merely in the actual unreflecting accomplishment of his nature, intrinsically orientated as this is beyond and above itself towards the absolute mystery of God, he possesses that attitude of authentic

Such a differentiated and structured realization of grace (salvation-grace as realized in interrelated and unified charisma-grace) is precisely the ordered *corpus mysticum*. Such a concept is supported by the fact that Paul's charisma-theology has its *Sitz im Leben* precisely in his larger *sōma*-theology.

In Paul and in 1 Clement we find the charisma-concept functioning within the larger context of *sōma*-theology: 1 Clement 37,38 and 1 Cor 12:4 ff. In 1 Cor 12 we meet a group of *hekastos*-statements (1 Cor 12:7,9,19), similarly Rom 12:3, Eph 4:7,16 (cf. 1 Cor 3:5 and 1 Pt 4:10). If we compare the pertinent texts in 1 Cor 7 and 1 Cor 12, Rom 12 and Eph 4, it is clear how again and again the same concepts and relationships between these concepts reveal a fundamental structure: the unity and diversity must be preserved, since both the unity and the diversity are given and willed by God. The idea that the individual within the totality has his own charisma according to God's measure, also shows the connection between the various texts under consideration: 1 Cor 7:7; 1 Cor 12:7,11; Rom 12:6; Eph 4:7,16.<sup>15</sup>

It is obvious that Paul himself saw his own charisma-grace as apostle precisely as the concrete realization of his salvation-grace. It would be contrary to Paul's own testimony to maintain that the Apostle saw his apostolic charisma as a supererogatory gift of God which he was free to accept or reject without at the same time accepting or rejecting God Himself. ("Not that I do boast of preaching the gospel, since it is a duty which has been laid on me; I should be punished if I did not preach it": 1 Cor 9:16.) This being so, the question presents itself: Is there any evidence that Paul saw a formal difference between the relationship of his own salvation-grace-charisma-grace and the relationship of these forms of grace in others? That it was a "greater" grace and charisma than most is obvious. The question is: On what basis and with what criterion do we introduce a line between Paul's call to be an apostle and his obligation to accept this, on the one hand, and the call to a "lesser" vocation where no such obligation exists, on the other? That a mere criterion of a "higher calling" does not suffice to answer this should be quite clear, since the degree of the calling does not, of itself, affect the formal relationship between salvation-grace and charisma-grace. The introduction of a difference in formal structure between

---

faith (even if only virtually), which together with love, suffices for justification and so makes possible supernatural acts that positively conduce to eternal life. If this is taken into account, it becomes even clearer that we have no right to assign arbitrary limits to the grace of God outside the Church and so make spiritual gifts and favours simply and solely an exclusive privilege of the Church alone" (*The Dynamic Element in the Church*, p. 64).

<sup>15</sup> Neuhäusler, *art. cit.*, p. 48, n. 4.

Paul's own salvation-grace-charisma-grace, on the one hand, and the salvation-grace-charisma-grace of the faithful, on the other, should be justified by clear scriptural testimony or speculative argument; neither seems to offer itself.

Another consideration which supports this essential union of salvation-grace and charisma-grace is the relationship between the individual charisma and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. Here we are explicitly touching the question which has been implicit in the foregoing: charisma is not merely some object distinct from God which He offers to the individual and which is less than Himself—and so can be rejected without rejecting Him; rather, a charisma is precisely God offering Himself to the individual in the concrete manner in which He wills to do this. Cerfaux makes this point clear in his discussion of the relationship between the indwelling of the Holy Spirit and the charismata.

The Spirit, in whom we participate, procures for us these spiritual gifts—charity and the other “fruits,” the charismata. Because of the parallelism between these objects, these gifts are seen as a participation in the very person of the Spirit: it is a divine person who communicates Himself in these spiritual gifts.<sup>16</sup>

One might say at this point: for the sake of argument, we concede that much of the above argumentation might be correct. But God can offer Himself in one charisma or another, as Paul says (1 Cor 7:7). If the individual does not accept this one, God can offer Himself in another. In answer: obviously God can offer Himself in various ways. He can and does offer Himself even when one has rejected Him through rejecting the “commandments,” i.e., repentance is a possibility for the sinner. But the question is: Does our rejecting a specific charisma-grace imply our rejecting the giver, just as our rejecting the commandment implies this rejection of its giver? An affirmative answer is the only one which would be logically consistent with the whole foregoing analysis of Paul's thought.

Another concept to be measured against Pauline theology is that of man's initiative, implicit in the commands-counsels teaching. The defenders of commands-counsels often see the counsels as calls by which man's initiative is called into play: the individual is called into a situation where a good and a better object are offered him, and it is up to his initiative to decide which of these he will choose. How does such an idea of man's initiative with relationship to God fit into Paul's theology of salvation history? Paul's total concept of salvation history is one in

<sup>16</sup> L. Cerfaux, *Le chrétien dans la théologie paulinienne* (1962) p. 221.

which the merciful and redeeming God sweeps into history with a might, wisdom, and love surpassing our understanding or expectation.<sup>17</sup> This absolutely undeserved ("doubly undeserved": Rom 5) salvation of man is accomplished by God through Christ. Its realization takes place in, and is precisely, the Body of Christ. God's loving and merciful initiative calls into being the Body of Christ; this Body of Christ, the Church, is man's incarnate answer to this initiative of God. For Paul, man *answers*; for Paul, man is an *answerer* to God's loving initiative.<sup>18</sup>

That man is an answerer with regard to salvation-grace and that the idea of man's initiative with respect to such grace is unthinkable needs no discussion. Because of the essential unity of salvation-grace and charisma-grace (i.e., that these are not two separate realities but one and the same reality seen from two different points of view), it should be clear that there is no room for man's initiative with respect to charisma-grace either. The only reason for making room for an invitation which can be rejected without rejecting the person inviting is that (a) the one inviting lacks the necessary knowledge of the one invited and so must cover this lack of knowledge by offering self in several possible forms, or (b) the invitation intrudes into a sacred area where the person inviting has no right to intrude. That this can and does happen between men is clear; that it cannot happen where God is the one who invites is equally clear.

#### VOCATION

The question of calling and inviting brings us to another theme: vocation. It should be clear that this is not really a distinct theme at all; it is, rather, another aspect of the question we have been discussing, since charisma is precisely the call of God seen under a specific aspect. Schnackenburg discusses this connection precisely in the context of 1 Cor 7. "We should understand the individually specified charismata as the differentiated call of God to His service (1 Cor 12:4-11; Rom 12:3-8; Eph 4:11-16). The imitation of Christ is demanded of each and every one, but in different ways, according to God's individual call."<sup>19</sup> 1 Cor 7, in its handling of practical questions, has one theme or principle according to which each question is to be answered: be true to the Lord in the calling He has given to you.<sup>20</sup> Neuhausler also emphasizes this point:

<sup>17</sup> Cf. H. Schlier, *Der Brief an die Epheser* (Düsseldorf, 1957) p. 30.

<sup>18</sup> Cf. Bruno Schüller, *Gesetz und Freiheit* (Düsseldorf, 1966) pp. 42-60.

<sup>19</sup> Rudolf Schnackenburg, *Die sittliche Botschaft des N.T.* (Munich, 1962) p. 33.

<sup>20</sup> J. Kürzinger, *Echter Bibel* (1954) p. 20.

God is the one who calls (1 Cor 7:17). He not only determines the degree of faith for each one, but determines also the state of life in which this call reaches the individual, i.e., He calls the Jew as Jew and the slave in the subjection of his slavery. God's call reaches the individual in his totality. The division between a religious and profane dimension is unknown to Paul. The vocation of God is an existential event; it pertains to the individual in *his* situation and not in the same way to another. In God's calling-event He reveals and communicates Himself to the individual. The individual, in turn, answers personally this call in his faith.<sup>21</sup>

Neuhäusler concludes from this: "The Apostle's concern in the whole seventh chapter is that this state in life should not be changed or given up in so far as possible."<sup>22</sup> A bit later he adds: "the 'natural' situation of the individual is not meaningless, nor is it a matter of indifference how one handles this situation; rather it is strictly ordered that the individual not alter this situation."<sup>23</sup>

This position seems to emphasize an important point on the one hand, and yet present some serious problems on the other. The important point that it emphasizes is that the call to serve Christ cannot come in a vacuum where the concrete form of the person's life is something outside this call to salvation-grace.<sup>24</sup> As we have pointed out earlier, the call to perfection and service of God (call to salvation-grace) must come in some concrete form (charisma-grace) and it is in this form that the call is to be answered.<sup>25</sup>

The difficulty that Neuhäusler gets involved in seems to stem from the fact that he wants to include in this absolute obligation a dimension which does not necessarily participate in either the salvation-grace or the charisma-grace. This dimension is: the state in which you were called. He maintains that the obligation is to remain *in the state of life the person was in when called to Christianity*. He claims that Paul was not merely counseling this but giving it as an absolute command. But saying that God calls each individual in a specific way (offers him a specific charisma-grace as the concrete form of salvation-grace) and that the person is *obliged* to accept this salvation-grace in the form God offers it is one thing (and this is precisely the thesis of this essay).

<sup>21</sup> Neuhäusler, *art. cit.*, pp. 48 f.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 44.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 50.

<sup>24</sup> Cf., on this point, K. Rahner, "Über die evangelischen Räte," esp. pp. 410-14.

<sup>25</sup> Cf. Neuhäusler, *art. cit.*, p. 49: "Paul himself experienced it thus before Damascus. For Paul, the vocation to Christianity was never separated from the vocation to be an apostle. These two dimensions formed a unity in the self-revelation of Christ. It pleased God in His grace to call Paul and to reveal His Son to him, in order that Paul might proclaim Christ among the heathens (Gal 1:15 f.)."

To say that this necessarily implies *staying in the state one was in when called* in order to be loyal to this call is quite another thing. Neu-häusler includes both of these "obligations" in his analysis. But he seems to realize the difficulty here, even though he does not offer a solution, when he says that our state is "to be maintained *to the extent that this is possible.*"

Might it be suggested that Paul definitely holds that we are to remain in the state *to which* Christ has called us? This is absolute—as absolute as our obligation to be true and loyal to Christ, since this state, *to which* we are called, is the specific form in which Christ offers Himself to us. But Paul, like anyone trying to help another find the specific call of Christ for him, can only indicate criteria by which we can try to determine this, should it not be absolutely clear. For some individuals the call will be absolutely clear and overwhelming—as in the case of Paul himself. This is one of the differences between Paul and the others: his vocation came with a clarity which left no room for doubt *how* Paul was to serve Christ and thus be loyal to Him. Too often we tend to interpret this lack of clarity in the area of criteria as a lack of obligation to follow the call when it is determined. Paul's lack of certainty is not as to whether or not we are to remain in the state to which Christ has called us. He does not say: stay there more or less. He says: stay there in your specific call to salvation-grace, and thus be loyal to Christ.

When Paul says: but if you cannot live as a virgin or widow you may marry without sinning, he is not saying that the genuine call to virginity or widowhood is a "counsel" by which the individual is not bound and which he is hence free to accept or reject without sinning. He is saying, rather, that this inability to live as virgin or widow is a sign that such a state in life is not the specific one *to which* this individual is called; it is not his specific charisma-grace. Hence one can pass it by without rejecting salvation-grace, i.e., without sinning.

It seems plausible that Paul had certain criteria which he considered telling when trying to determine a vocation which was not clear beyond all doubt. These were positive indications which *could*, with a certain degree of probability, indicate a vocation to a certain state. Such indications might be (a) the fact that a person was baptized in such and such a state; (b) the fact that an "act of God" put the individual into such a state—e.g., the death of one's spouse put one into the state of widowhood; (c) a promise to live in a spiritual marriage. (In this last case the impulse to make such a promise would be seen as the positive indication of a vocation to such a state.) But Paul realizes that these positive indications do not always suffice alone, and so he also has a

very practical "negative" norm which must also be taken into consideration: Is it possible for the individual to remain in this state *in peace*?

It is precisely this "negative" norm of peace which invites more investigation—unfortunately, more investigation than can be given in this essay. Such further investigation is prompted by the fact that there are several lines of Christian reflection on the question of vocation which converge on this idea of peace.<sup>26</sup> A brief look at the *eirēnē* texts and their contexts in Paul gives good reason to suspect that a more thorough study of this question under this specific formality might uncover this "negative" norm as *the* ultimate norm for Paul.

#### CONCLUSION

Many points touched on in the second part of this essay have not been adequately substantiated within Paul's thought. A more detailed investigation of the topics discussed would have to be made to offer an airtight argumentation against the compatibility of the traditional teaching on the evangelical counsels and Pauline thought. But a number of serious reasons were found which seem to indicate a disharmony between the traditional teaching on counsels and the larger picture of Pauline theology.

In summarizing we could say: to the first question discussed—whether or not 1 Cor 7 supports the traditional commands-counsels teaching—a definite negative answer can be given. The very heart of this distinction, as traditionally developed and discussed, is not handled in 1 Cor 7. To the second question—whether such a commands-counsels doctrine harmonizes with the major lines of Paul's theology—a less definite, but not unfounded, negative answer can be given.

1 Cor 7 is certainly a charisma-vocation orientated chapter. These two ideas of charisma and vocation are essential elements of Paul's thinking; they are essentially related to charisma and vocation in the larger sense of grace and vocation to salvation itself. The various levels of charisma and vocation are so intrinsically and essentially related to one another, and a part of one another and the very Mystical Body itself, that it seems impossible for one of these levels to have a set of "ground rules" which are not only different from, but actually contradictory to, Paul's basic concept of salvation history. This basic picture is one of God as loving and merciful giver, not merely of some "object" that is less than Himself, but of His very Self. Man's value and sancti-

<sup>26</sup> Cf. H. Schlier, "Der Ruf Gottes (Mt. 22, 1-4)," *Besinnung auf das Neue Testament* (Freiburg, 1964) pp. 218-26; *Der Brief an die Epheser* (Düsseldorf, 1965) pp. 83 f.; K. Rahner, "The Logic of Concrete Individual Knowledge in Ignatius Loyola," *The Dynamic Element in the Church* (New York, 1964) pp. 84-170.

fication consist precisely in a grateful acceptance, in a personal answer to this offer of God. This offer of God is not general and abstract, but concrete and individual. Salvation-grace-vocation can only come as concrete and individual charisma-grace-vocation. To reject this latter is to reject not only the concrete and individual charisma-grace-vocation, but precisely the salvation-grace-vocation specified in it.<sup>27</sup>

<sup>27</sup> To avoid any misunderstanding, one clarifying point should be made, especially in light of the numerous departures from religious life and the priesthood in recent years. The content of this essay does not in any way imply that those who have changed their state have thereby rejected a specific charisma-grace—although this is one possibility. However, there remain other possibilities. Their departure could be the result of their realizing that they do not have this specific charisma-grace; or it could also be an actual deeper commitment to the very values which, up to now, have been realized and lived by them in their religious vocations. It seems to me that the present phenomenon of increasing departures is a very nuanced and differentiated one, and hence is badly in need of theological analysis, especially to hear the unquestionably positive message which it also speaks to the Church.