



THE RECONCILIATION OF NIETZSCHE AND PAUL: *A Postmodern Symposium*



By
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The Reconciliation of Nietzsche and Paul
– A Postmodern Symposium

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Dedication

**To Jay Clark, in gratitude for his wisdom and
support as friend and editor**

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Forward

Many of us, in our more serious moments, find ourselves engaged in interior conversation with noted historical figures who embody our frustrations and aspirations, our fears and hopes. During these conversations in the mind those we cherish and those we abhor are freed from their historical constraints and ancient sages like Plato or Moses can speak directly to - well anyone they wish to. Marx, or Freud or whoever. Through these inner debates our own search for wisdom is often clarified and we become in time an inevitable part of the discussion.

As a philosophy major in college I had my own favorites but the one who has stayed with me the longest is Nietzsche, the strident advocate of the superior or super human being, not because I admired Nietzsche but because I detested him. As I blurted out in an earlier work, "I hate the son of a bitch!" I hated his arrogant claims to live beyond good and evil, his master race elitism, his violent metaphors attacking the admittedly noxious complacencies of his time. But I did read him and ponder his thought. Another germinal figure for me has been Paul of Tarsus who I came to view not as an obtuse and authoritarian theologian and church founder, the bane of our Enlightenment rationalism, but as a short Jewish rabbi-like figure, with a speech impediment, who was lowered at midnight out a second story window in a big basket to escape imprisonment. My image of Paul, which I've defended in other works, is based on *I Corinthians 13*, where everyday patience and kindness are favored over knowledge, prophesy, and surprisingly hope (in God's coming kingdom) and even faith. Faith in God, Jesus, and the risen Christ he encountered on the road from Jerusalem to Damascus. Amazing! Paul, the

arch defender of orthodoxy says love wins out over faith and hope. I'm not saying Paul didn't cherish his experience of Christ; I'm just taking him at his word when he says that love is greater than faith and that even the faith to move mountains is - without love - as nothing. In any event, Paul of Tarsus is the other central figure in *The Reconciliation of Nietzsche and Paul - A Postmodern Symposium*.

Since I've been wrestling with these two figures for most of my adult life it's not perhaps surprising that other voices have joined the conversation. Figures I've come to value for their own unique contributions. Many of these appear in the work that lies ahead: William James the good-hearted pragmatist who acts as the moderator between the claims of Paul's love and Nietzsche's power, and a mix of postmodern thinkers - skeptics like Foucault and Derrida, contemporary feminists, a liberal political philosopher, a postmodern Christian thinker from Italy, and varied voices from the audience - a priest from South Boston and a burly Red Sox fan, among others. Look for a cameo appearance by a tall older man with large glasses and wispy white hair.

As I was writing, like many authors, I found the characters taking over the story, and though I have strong views myself I found these receded as the various figures I'd internalized over the years spoke directly to one another. And - not surprisingly really - began to evolve in their thinking past their own historical setting. My internalized Paul, Nietzsche, and William James in conversation with one another respond seriously to the other person's point of view and then take directions that seem, to me at least, consistent with the inner logic of their own lives. If Paul, for example, is focused on love (as well

as his admitted belief in Jesus) it might be natural for him to address contemporary issues like the role of women in society and even homosexuality (briefly), without being bound by his earlier unfortunate rants. The two adversaries might also, when pressed in the heat of battle, re-examine some of their primal commitments. The cultural icons might even be pressed to confront their own secluded thorns in the flesh which impeded their growth as human beings.

While I have lived intensely, if only imaginatively, with all the figures that speak during the symposium, and have scrupulously tried to convey a credible likeness of each thinker's thought and personality, I can't pretend the dialogue is more than one observer's internal conversation with some of the significant figures in his life. In any event I had a ball writing the story of Paul and Nietzsche's reconciliation and I hope you enjoy it.

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Characters

Featured Speakers

**Friedrich Nietzsche
Paul of Tarsus**

Moderator

William James

Panelists

**Foucault – Postmodern Disciple of Nietzsche
Vattimo – Postmodern Christian
Habermas – Liberal Voice of Reason
Derrida – French Deconstructionist
Irigaray – Psychoanalytic Feminist
Heidegger – Neo-Existentialist
Bell hooks – Revolutionary Feminist**

Voices from the Symposium

**Morose Young Man
Burly Red Sox Fan
Young Mother
Irascible Old Man
Father Sullivan from Holy Rosary
Marie**