

CHRISTOCENTRISM AND PNEUMATOLOGY IN PAULINE SOTERIOLOGY

A Hermeneutics According to the Mahoukou Law (C·R·R):

Call — Response — Resonance

Doctrinal and Systematic Monograph

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Abstract

This monograph offers a systematic rereading of Pauline soteriology through the C·R·R hermeneutical triad — Call, Response, Resonance — as formalized in the Mahoukou Law. In critical dialogue with Jean-Luc Marion's phenomenology of givenness, whose dyadic structure proves insufficient to account for the ontological transformation of the subject and the communal and cosmic resonance that Paul deploys with increasing insistence from Galatians to Romans, this study argues that Pauline Christocentrism constitutes the structure of the divine Call (C) — an original, kenotic, and objective event — while pneumatology constitutes the structure of Resonance (R2) — progressive metamorphosis, adoptive filiation, ecclesial *koinōnia*, and cosmic recapitulation. Faith (*pistis*), as an irreducible hinge moment, is analysed as the structure of the Response (R1): a free act made possible by the Call that absolutely precedes it. The C·R·R triad thereby resolves the classical aporias of soteriology — justification / participation, freedom / grace, individual / cosmos — and reconciles Eastern (*theosis*) and Western (forensic justification) hermeneutics without collapsing one into the other. A confrontation with the patristic tradition (Irenaeus, Athanasius, Augustine, Chrysostom) and contemporary debates (New Perspective, Barclay, Campbell) completes the analysis.

Keywords: *Pauline soteriology · Christocentrism · Pneumatology · Mahoukou Law · C·R·R Triad · Justification · Participation · Pistis · Theosis · Jean-Luc Marion · Phenomenology of givenness · Patristics · New Perspective on Paul*

Methodological Foreword: The C·R·R Triad as Hermeneutical Key

This monograph is inscribed within an approach that seeks to move beyond the limits of Marionian phenomenology of givenness in order to propose a ternary hermeneutics of Pauline soteriology. Jean-Luc Marion, in his celebrated phenomenological trilogy — *God Without Being* (1982), *Being Given* (1997), *In Excess* (2001) — opened a decisive intellectual space by distinguishing the idol from the icon and by positing the gift as a structure irreducible to economic exchange. In doing so, he freed Pauline theology from its onto-theological captivity. However, the dyadic structure inherent in his framework — donor and recipient, call and saturation — runs up against a fundamental aporia: it accounts neither for the ontological transformation of the receiving subject, nor for the communal and cosmic resonance that Paul deploys with increasing insistence from Galatians to Romans.

The triadic framework allows Pauline soteriology to be read as an organic and irreversible movement: God calls (C); the believer responds in faith (R1); the Spirit produces the transforming resonance (R2) — and this resonance itself becomes, within the community, a new Call addressed to the world. Soteriology is no longer a closed process but a pneumatic spiral open onto eschatology. It is to demonstrate this thesis that this monograph is dedicated, through a close reading of the authentic Pauline corpus, a confrontation with the patristic tradition, and a critical dialogue with contemporary hermeneutics.

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General Introduction: The Founding Aporia

Pauline soteriology poses from the outset a difficulty that is also its richness: it is at once too juridical for the mystics and too mystical for the jurists, too individualist for theologians of the ecclesial body and too communal for advocates of personal decision, too historically determined for philosophers of pure existence and too ontologically ambitious for strictly historico-critical exegetes. This apparent polyphony is, as we shall argue, a real polyphony: it reflects the irreducible complexity of a thought that attempts to say, in the limited language of human history, the absolute event of reconciliation between God and his creation.

The central question we pose is the following: how does Paul articulate the christological centrality — the cross and resurrection as the objective and universal foundation of salvation — with pneumatological action — the Spirit as the principle of subjective and communal actualisation — without reducing one to the other and without dissociating them into two parallel economies? This question is not new. It has structured, in depth, the debate between the Reformation and Tridentine Catholicism, between the forensic theology of Melancthon and the participatory mysticism of Athanasius, between the New Perspective on Paul of Sanders, Dunn and Wright, and the post-New Perspective rereading of Barclay, Thiselton and Campbell.

Our thesis is that the C-R-R triad — as formalised in the Mahoukou Law — offers an unprecedented hermeneutical key for exiting these antinomies. By rigorously distinguishing the divine Call (Christocentric prevenient grace), the response of faith (*pistis* as free and gratuitous act) and pneumatic Resonance (the ontological transformation operated by the Spirit), this triad allows us to account simultaneously for the absolute gratuity of salvation, the responsibility of the subject in faith, and the real transformation that this faith engenders — without sacrificing any of these three moments to either of the others.

The monograph unfolds in three movements. The first chapter will analyse Christocentrism as the structure of the divine Call: how the person and work of Christ constitute the original event that precedes, grounds and orients the whole economy of salvation. The second chapter will explore pneumatology as the structure of Resonance: how the Spirit, far from being a mere executor of the christological decision, is the living milieu in which transformation is accomplished, from within the subject to the furthest reaches of the cosmos. A third synthetic moment will propose an integrated rereading of the two preceding moments in the light of the complete C-R-R triad, including the response of faith as an irreducible hinge between the other two.

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Chapter I — Soteriological Christocentrism: The Call as Originary Event

The first moment of the C-R-R triad — the Call — finds its christological structure in Pauline soteriology. To say that God calls is to say that Christ is the Call made flesh; not a signal among others, but the event par excellence that ruptures the apparent equilibrium of the world under the Law and opens the unprecedented space of grace. This chapter explores the three dimensions of this christocentric Call: revelation, mediation, justification.

I.1. Christ as Revelatory Call: Epiphany of Divine Glory

Paul situates the ultimate revelation of God not in conceptual gnosis, not in solitary observance of the Torah, but in the *prosōpon* (the person) of Christ (2 Cor 4:6). This formula, echoing the creation of light (Gen 1:3), is theologically audacious: the same act by which God drew the world from dark chaos is the one by which he now illumines the human heart through the knowledge of his glory on the face of Christ. Christ is not merely the bearer of a divine message: he is himself the onto-epiphanic structure through which God gives himself to be known.

The Abrahamic promises (Gen 12:3; Rom 4:13-17) and the prophetic promises (Isa 52-53; Ps 22) converge eschatologically in him: Christ is the *sperma* through which all nations are blessed (Gal 3:16). The Torah itself, in its diagnostic function (Rom 3:20: *dia nomou epignōsis hamartias* — through the law comes knowledge of sin), was only the negative preparation of this positive Call. It reveals sin precisely in order to render the christological Call inevitable and urgent. It is in this sense that Paul can write that the Law is *paidagōgos eis Christon* — a guide who leads us to Christ (Gal 3:24): it leads to the place of the Call, not as its rival but as its precursor.

I.2. Christ as Mediating Call: Redemption through Cross and Resurrection

Christological mediation constitutes the objective heart of the soteriological Call. Rom 3:24-25 deploys a terminology of remarkable semantic density: *apolytrōsis en Christō Iēsou, hilastērion dia pisteōs* (the redemption in Jesus Christ, offered as an instrument of expiation through faith). Christ is presented as the *hilastērion* (Lev 16), the place of propitiation, accomplishing redemption by absorbing the legal curse (Gal 3:13; Deut 21:23). This theological construction is often reduced, in the forensic tradition of Lutheran and Calvinist inspiration, to a penal substitutionary transaction: God punishes Christ in the place of the sinner. But this reading is exegetically fragile and hermeneutically reductive.

Paul does not say that God punishes Christ. He says that God established him as *hilastērion* — that is, as the place of encounter between his justice and his mercy, as the space in which the *dikaioynē theou* (covenantal justice) reveals itself simultaneously as judgement of sin and justification of the sinner (Rom 3:25-26). The very structure of the Call manifests itself here: God calls humanity not to undergo punishment but to pass, in Christ, to the side of life. The cross is the event in which the divine Call takes its most radical form: it calls while itself assuming the weight of the separation that sin had established.

The resurrection confirms its eschatological efficacy: triumph over Death-Sin (1 Cor 15:54-57), inauguration of the *ktisis kainē* (2 Cor 5:17), promise of cosmic fullness (Col 1:20). The double Pauline polarity — redemptive

death, inaugural resurrection — universalises the Call: as through the trespass of one man condemnation reached all, so through one act of righteousness the justification that gives life extends to all (Rom 5:18). The christological Call is not a private invitation addressed to a few elect: it is the cosmic event through which the divine economy enters its decisive phase.

1.3. Christ as Justifying Call: Faith as the Threshold of Response

Gal 2:16 poses the decisive alternative of Pauline soteriology: a person is not justified by *erga nomou* (works of the Law) but by *pistis Christou* (faith in/of Christ). The question of whether this formula designates the believer's faith in Christ (objective genitive) or the faithfulness of Christ himself (subjective genitive) has occupied exegetes since Richard Hays (1983). Within the framework of the Mahoukou Law, this alternative is partly transcended: in the C·R·R triad, *pistis Christou* designates the event in which the christological Call (the faithfulness of Christ unto death) encounters the human Response (the faith of the believer). The two genitives are structurally linked: it is because Christ responded faithfully to the Father's Call (kenosis, obedience of the cross) that the believer can in turn respond to the Call addressed to them.

Justification (*dikaiōsis*) is the divine verdict that, by anticipating the eschatological Judgment, declares the sinner *dikaios* on the basis of union with Christ. The Law, as *paidagōgos*, reveals transgression without remedying it. Grace (*charis*) is the sovereign gift that precedes all meritorious disposition: *pistis* is not a merit but a reception — what Paul expresses by *dōron* (Rom 5:15-17). The gratuity of salvation is thus preserved without the believer's responsibility being abolished: the Response (R1) is real without being meritorious, free without being self-sufficient.

Doctrinally, Christ-as-justifier articulates two moments that the tradition has too often dissociated: the forensic declaration (status of *dikaios* before God) and participatory transformation (union with the dead and risen Christ). Paul never opposes them. Justification initiates an ontological *metabasis* — transition, passage — (Rom 6:1-4: our old self was crucified with him) and a pneumatic one (Rom 8:1-4: the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus). The forensic status is the opening of the space in which transforming Resonance can be accomplished.

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Chapter II — Soteriological Pneumatology: Resonance as Integral Transformation

If Pauline Christocentrism designates the structure of the Call (C), and if *pistis* designates the structure of the Response (R1), Pauline pneumatology designates the structure of Resonance (R2): the moment in which the Call, accepted and received in faith, produces its effects of transformation in the flesh, in relations and in the cosmos. This third moment is irreducible to the first two: it cannot be deduced from Christology nor from the theory of faith. It is the proper space of the Spirit, its *Wirkungsgeschichte* (a term associated with Gadamer, in his work *Truth and Method*, designating the living history of interpretations and their effects) within the subject and the community.

II.1. The Spirit as Seal of Resonance: Filial Justification

Paul introduces the Spirit not as a reality superadded to salvation but as its internal confirmation and eschatological guarantee. Rom 8:9-11 poses a radical equation: whoever does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him. Belonging to Christ — that is, the reality of the Response (R1) to the Call (C) — is indexed to the presence of the Spirit. This means that Resonance is not a facultative supplement to justification: it is its internal structure. One cannot be justified without being simultaneously set in motion by the Spirit.

The cry *Abba Pater* (Rom 8:15; Gal 4:6) is without doubt the finest Pauline illustration of pneumatic Resonance. It is not the believer who says *Abba*: it is the Spirit himself who cries within them, inhabiting the depths of their being in such a way as to transform their relationship with God. Adoptive filiation is not a juridical metaphor: it is an ontological reality produced by the presence of the Spirit in the heart. The subject does not produce this filial resonance through voluntary or moral effort; they are its place and its beneficiary. Therein lies the whole difference between Pauline grace and Pelagianism: Resonance is not a human performance but a gift that the Spirit operates in the silence of interiority.

II.2. The Spirit as Agent of Transforming Resonance: Ontological Metamorphosis

The Pauline term that best expresses the structure of Resonance is *metamorphōsis* (Rom 12:2; 2 Cor 3:18). This term is philosophically weighty: it designates a transformation of form, not a mere change of state. It is not that the person changes their behaviour while remaining the same in their deep being: it is the person themselves who is progressively reconfigured according to the image of Christ, from glory to glory (*apo doxēs eis doxan*, 2 Cor 3:18). The agent of this metamorphosis is the Spirit: *kathaper apo Kuriou pneumatōs* — as from the Lord who is Spirit.

The *sarx / pneuma* dialectic that structures Rom 8 and Gal 5 illuminates the nature of this Resonance. *Sarx* is not the body in the material sense: it is the power of self-centredness, of the closing of being upon itself, the old Adam who refuses the Call and constitutes himself as his own foundation (Rom 8:7: *phronēma tēs sarkos echthra eis theon* — the mindset of the flesh is enmity against God). *Pneuma*, by contrast, is the power of openness, relation, gift: it is the new Adam (1 Cor 15:45) who responds to the Call with a continual Resonance. Sanctification is thus the progressive victory of *pneuma* over *sarx* — not through repression but through transformation, through the interior reconfiguration that the Spirit operates by taking possession of the depths of the subject.

II.3. The Spirit as Vector of Cosmic and Missionary Resonance

Pauline Resonance does not stop at the boundaries of the individual subject. Rom 8:19-23 deploys a cosmic pneumatology of breathtaking scope: creation itself groans and suffers the pangs of childbirth, awaiting the revelation of the children of God. The Spirit operates in the whole of creation an eschatological Resonance: the transformation of the believer is the vanguard of a universal transformation. Pauline soteriology is thus intrinsically cosmic: the salvation of the human being is a moment in a vaster process that encompasses all of creation.

This cosmic dimension is crucial for understanding the scope of the C·R·R triad. The divine Call is addressed not only to the individual but to the cosmos; the response of faith is the point of entry for a Resonance that propagates in concentric circles – from the interiority of the believer to the ecclesial community, from the *ekklēsia* to culture and history, from history to the cosmos. The Spirit is the principle of this propagation: it is simultaneously the milieu of individual transformation (Rom 8:11: vivification of the mortal body), the builder of the ecclesial body (1 Cor 12:13: *en henī pneumati pantes eis hen sōma ebaptisthēmen* – in one Spirit we were all baptised into one body) and the agent of cosmic restoration (Rom 8:21: creation will be set free from its bondage to decay).

Missionary by nature, the Spirit transforms the Resonance of the believer into a new Call addressed to the world. It is here that the C·R·R spiral closes and re-opens: the Resonance accomplished in the believer becomes itself a Call for others, as Paul experiences in his own vocation (Rom 15:18-19: what Christ has accomplished through me to bring the nations to the obedience of faith, by the power of the Spirit). Mission is not an activity added to soteriology: it is the external form of Resonance, its expression in history.

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Chapter III — Systematic Synthesis: The C·R·R Triad as Integral Hermeneutics

III.1. The Response of Faith: The Hinge Moment of the Triad

If the first chapter analysed the christocentric Call and the second the pneumatic Resonance, it is now necessary to account for the median moment of the C·R·R triad: the Response (R1), that is, *pistis* as the free and gratuitous act by which the subject enters into the soteriological movement. This moment is structurally irreducible: it can be absorbed neither into the Call (which would be a predestinarianism that abolishes freedom) nor into Resonance (which would be a quietism that dissolves responsibility).

The articulation between the Response (R1) and Resonance (R2) illuminates one of the deepest tensions in Pauline theology: the relation between justification and sanctification. The Lutheran tradition tended to separate the two rigorously: justification is God's act by which he declares the sinner righteous (*forensic, extra nos*), while sanctification is the process of moral transformation that progressively follows (*in nobis*). Tridentine Catholic tradition tended to unify them too immediately, at the risk of subordinating grace to human cooperation. The C·R·R triad allows them to be distinguished without separating them: the Response (R1) is the moment of justification — an act of faith that unites to Christ and draws into his righteousness — ; Resonance (R2) is the moment of sanctification — transformation operated by the Spirit in the subject united to Christ.

III.2. Synoptic Table: Pauline Soteriology According to the C·R·R Triad

C·R·R Moment	Theological Content	Agent	Key Pauline Texts	Patristic Reception
Call (C)	Sovereign initiative of God; christological kenosis; objective paschal event	Christ / Father	Rom 3:24-25; Gal 3:13; Phil 2:6-11; 2 Cor 5:19	Irenaeus: recapitulation; Athanasius: redemptive incarnation
Response (R1)	<i>Pistis</i> as active reception; obedience of faith; union with the crucified Christ	Human / Spirit	Gal 2:16; Rom 1:5; 4:5; 10:9-10; Gal 5:6	Augustine: faith as gift; Chrysostom: paradoxical synergy
Resonance (R2)	Metamorphōsis by the Spirit; adoptive filiation; ecclesial <i>koinōnia</i> ; cosmic restoration	Holy Spirit	Rom 8:14-23; 2 Cor 3:18; Gal 4:19; 1 Cor 12:13	Gregory of Nyssa: <i>epektasis</i> ; Maximus: progressive theosis

III.3. The C·R·R Triad and the Classical Aporias of Soteriology

The Aporia of Justification / Participation

The Lutheran Reformation legitimately insisted on the gratuity of justification against all meritism: *sola gratia, sola fide*. But this insistence tended to hypostatise forensic justification (Rom 3–4) at the expense of ontological participation (Rom 6; Gal 2:20). The New Perspective on Paul (Sanders, Dunn, Wright) rebalanced the scales by showing that "being in" — the fact of being in Christ, in the new people of God — was at least as central to Paul as "getting in" through individual justification. But this rebalancing created its own aporia: if corporate belonging is essential, what becomes of individual transformation?

The C·R·R triad integrates both perspectives: the Call (C) grounds absolute gratuity against all meritism; the Response (R1) is the moment of individual entry into salvation through faith; Resonance (R2) is at once individual transformation and communal incorporation. There is no need to choose between the individual

and the community, between the forensic and the participatory: both are moments of Resonance, one in its interior dimension (metamorphosis of the subject), the other in its ecclesial dimension (incorporation into the body of Christ).

The Aporia of Freedom / Grace

The semi-Pelagian then Augustinian discussion, taken up in the Tridentine-Reformed debate, opposes prevenient grace to human freedom. If God is the absolute author of salvation, how can the human Response be free and real? If human freedom is real, how can grace be absolutely sovereign? This classical aporia is, in the C·R·R triad, productively displaced. The Call (C) is absolutely sovereign and precedes all human disposition — it is not a reaction to human virtue but its origin. But precisely because it is a Call and not a constraint, it opens a space in which the Response (R1) can be real: one responds only to a call, not to a force. The structure of the kenotic Call (Phil 2:6-11) is precisely the form in which God creates the conditions for a free Response.

The Aporia of Individual / Cosmos

Pauline soteriology apparently oscillates between a strictly individual soteriology (the justification of the sinner, Rom 3–4) and a cosmic soteriology (the restoration of creation, Rom 8; Col 1:20). The C·R·R triad resolves this tension by showing that Resonance (R2) is intrinsically expansive: it begins in the interiority of the subject (*Abba*, Rom 8:15), unfolds in the ecclesial community (1 Cor 12), and extends to the groaning cosmos (Rom 8:22). The Call is addressed to the individual, but Resonance is cosmic by nature.

III.4. Dialogue with the Patristic Tradition

The patristic reception of Pauline soteriology produced two great hermeneutics which, viewed through the C·R·R triad, appear less contradictory than is often thought.

The Eastern hermeneutic — represented by Irenaeus, Athanasius, Gregory of Nyssa and Maximus the Confessor — places emphasis on participation (*methexis*) and *theosis*: salvation consists in the progressive deification of the human being through participation in the divine nature. This hermeneutic is a theology of Resonance (R2): it articulates with rigour how the Call, received in faith, ontologically transforms the subject to the point of communicating to them divine life itself. The Gregorian *epektasis* — the infinite movement of the subject toward God — is precisely the form of Resonance in eternity.

The Western hermeneutic — represented by Augustine, Anselm and Latin scholasticism — places emphasis on prevenient grace, justification and the satisfactory mediation of Christ. This hermeneutic is a theology of the Call (C) and the Response (R1): it articulates with rigour that grace absolutely precedes freedom and that faith is the reception of a gift that comes from outside (*extra nos*). The Augustinian distinction between *gratia gratum faciens* (sanctifying grace) and *gratia gratis data* (charismatic grace), taken up in scholasticism, expresses in its own way the distinction between the objective Call (created grace in Christ) and the subjective Resonance (sanctifying grace in the subject).

The C·R·R triad reconciles these two hermeneutics by showing that they do not bear upon the same soteriological moment: the West theologises the Call and the Response, the East theologises Resonance. Paul

theologises all three. That is why Pauline soteriology remains, still today, the pre-eminent ecumenical resource.

III.5. Philosophical Dialogue: Marion Reconsidered

Jean-Luc Marion's phenomenological enterprise remains precious for Pauline theology, provided it is completed by the C-R-R triad. In *Being Given* (1997), Marion develops a phenomenology of the gift that breaks with the logic of exchange: the true gift is the one that expects no return, that gives itself without condition and without reciprocity. This structure of the unilateral gift is relevant for thinking the Pauline Call (C): grace is precisely the gift that precedes everything and requires no meritorious counterpart.

However, Marion's phenomenology of the saturated phenomenon — in *In Excess* (2001) and beyond — runs up against a limit that the Mahoukou Law identifies with precision. By insisting on saturation and the overflowing of the gift as characteristic traits of revelation, Marion tends to dissolve the Response into the passive reception of an intuition that exceeds all concept. Yet Paul does not describe faith as a passive reception of satiety: he describes it as active obedience, a dynamic *pistis*, a response that engages the whole being in a historical movement. Moreover, Marion does not thematise Resonance: what happens in the subject after saturation? How does ontological transformation accomplish itself? These questions remain without answer in Marion — and it is precisely the space that the Mahoukou Law comes to occupy with the third term of the triad.

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General Conclusion: Pauline Soteriology as Pneumatic Spiral

At the conclusion of this monograph, we can formulate our thesis in its most concentrated form: Pauline soteriology is a pneumatic spiral structured by the C·R·R triad — christocentric Call, response of faith, transforming Resonance — and this spiral is open, that is, it never closes upon itself but unfolds indefinitely in the flesh of the believer, in the ecclesial body, and in the very entrails of the cosmos.

Pauline Christocentrism is not a speculative principle but an event: the cross and resurrection of Christ constitute the divine Call in its most radical historical form. This Call precedes all human disposition, ruptures all logic of Law and merit, and opens the unprecedented space of grace. Pauline pneumatology is not a spiritual psychology but an ontological realism: the Spirit effectively transforms the structure of the human being, from *sarx* to *pneuma*, from death to life, from servitude to filiation. And between these two poles, *pistis* is the irreplaceable hinge: it is the Response in which the Call receives its existential reality and in which Resonance finds its point of departure.

The Mahoukou Law, by formalising this triad, offers to Pauline theology a hermeneutics that transcends the antinomies inherited from confessional history and contemporary academic debates. It allows us to read Paul without mutilating him: neither Lutheran forensic without transformation, nor Orthodox participation without justification, nor corporate belonging (New Perspective) without interior depth. Pauline soteriology is all of this at once, precisely because it is a spiral and not a point.

This spiral has one final property, eschatological: it is oriented. The Resonance (R2) accomplished in the believer and in the community becomes itself a new Call (C') addressed to history and to the world. The mission of the Church is thus inscribed in the very structure of soteriology: not as an external obligation but as the natural form in which Resonance pours itself beyond itself. *Paulus non tantum docet sed vivificat* — Paul does not theorise salvation: he causes it to live, from flesh to flesh, from Call to Resonance, until God is all in all (1 Cor 15:28: *hina ē ho theos panta en pasin* — that God may be all in all).

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