

Martin Zender's Clanging Gong News

"If I know all mysteries and all knowledge, but have no love,
I am a clanging gong" --1 Cor. 13:1-2



Two out of three isn't bad.

PAUL TO THE ROMANS

A Martin Zender paraphrase,
the first of several installments



Tryphena at the Coliseum

I sit down to write to you from this musty room in Corinth, not that I'm complaining. I have learned to abound and to be abased, and today I am getting practice at how to be abased. I abounded about six weeks ago, when the wind shifted from the east to the west and the odors from the chicken farm across the road here at last wafted elsewhere—toward the home of the Circumcisionists. But now these odors have returned. All is of God—*except this*.

I am a messenger

I am only a messenger. Some people celebrate me, but they should not go overboard, although I do accept sailing certificates, as you know. Only a handful of people on this planet realize who I am and what I was sent here for. You Romans, for instance, are among those few. I thank God for you. But mark my words: The day will come when people will read, "Paul to the Romans," and will imagine you to have been some vast conclave, with your own church building. They will imagine, even, that you had your own flag (I am speaking as a fool now), with a red white background, a blue field of some kind, and a red cross on it. (Ha! Can you imagine? Forgive me this bout of

frivolity.) They will suppose that you were a spit-polished assembly, and that you had a secretary and a foyer and a place to put the babies when they cried.

Oh, but they will not know a thing of the truth, will they, dear ones? Little will the people of the future realize that I am writing to you, Tryphena, and to you, Persis, and to you, Rufus, and to you, Phlegon (on second thought, perhaps I am not writing to you, Phlegon, because, Phlegon, you still owe me many shekels from the card game of three years ago at Perga,

"They will suppose that you were a spit-polished assembly, with a secretary."

and I would like to continue my missionary journey, sir, if you please.) I am writing to all you who gather in the home of Julia on Wednesdays and at the home of Olympas on Fridays. (And oh, by the way, thank you, Tryphena, for sending me a sampling of the Grecian grind that you serve at the home of Olympas. I wish I could buy it here in the markets, but I cannot. They only sell grinds here from the cheap and ill-fertilized Corinthian beans, which taste like something scraped from the bottom of a Roman boot.)

I am a servant

I am also a servant of Jesus Christ, as you know, appointed a messenger for the service of the Gospel of God. Yes, the prophets hinted at this gospel, did

they not? It is the gospel of justification by faith to you, the nations. Non-Israelites! (And for this, many of the Jews seek my life.)

Do I feel inspired right now, as I write this letter to you? No, not as one feels the heat or the cold upon the flesh. And yet I know I am. I know what I am about to say (roughly), and I am burdened until I say it. There are major themes I must discuss. I am not actually writing this letter; my scribe Tertius is here. *Aren't you, Tertius?* (He is nodding now, and grinning, as is his wont.) We joke about this sometimes; we do. I have used this man before, as you know—my scribe. I use him and



This is Tertius. He looks somewhat like me, or at least that's what his mother thinks.

abuse him, one might say. He is complaining this evening because the table is so small, and our light is no good. It is late evening, and we have just returned from supper at the Ben Damon



Artwork at the Ben Damon Bar & Grille. I do not necessarily endorse it, but neither do I condemn it.

Bar & Grille. So very spiritual, yes I know. But perhaps you do not know that I am serious. *What? The Ben Damon Bar and Grille does not fit your vision of spirituality?* Then you must enlarge your vision. It is all a part of this glorious process.

There is a lovely waitress there, Rosa, whom Tertius is quite fond of. It took some prodding to get him away from her, and I had to remind him of our task at hand. He said, “Cannot we write to the Romans some other night?” And I said to him, “No, for tonight is the night. I feel it, Tertius.” He said, “But Paul. How do you know?” He said this as he picked the baked chicken from between his teeth with a splinter of gopher wood.

How I become inspired

This is not the first letter I have written under the inspiration of God. I know what it feels like. I said that I do not feel it as one feels temperature on the skin. I explain it thusly: there is no special spiritual *sense* (for spirit is not sense, that is, it is not *soulish*) that

translates physically, or to the soul. Thus, it is not a feeling. The inspiration of God and holy spirit is not so overt. It is a compulsion from within, born of necessity. (Necessity is the mother of invention. I predict to you that this will become a very popular phrase, but that no one will remember that I, Paul, the Apostle to the Gentiles, uttered it while under the inspiration of Holy Spirit, preparing to write to you, a gaggle of believers gathered at the home of Olympas around Grecian coffee.)

What I am trying to tell you is that I am full, this hour, with things to say, and that such things become so burdensome that I must be relieved of them. If Tertius is scarce, I grab the pen and write myself—though quite illegibly.

This precise thing happened as I prepared to write my second letter to the believers in Thessalonica. I *thought* Tertius was in his room sleeping. I went to awaken him, but he was not there. So there I was, burdened with the message of the lawless one who is to be unveiled in his own time, whose presence is in accord with the operation of Satan, with all power and signs and false miracles, and with every seduction of injustice among those who are perishing, because they do not receive the love of the truth for their salvation. Imagine being burdened with this kind of thing, with all of the words seeming to rush to you at once, and then when you want to dictate it, your so-called faithful scribe is nowhere to be found.

I picked up the pen to write the letter myself, and I got as far as, “Paul and Silvanus and Timothy (these gentlemen were with us at the time) to the ecclesia of the Thessalonians, in God, our Father, and the Lord Jesus

“If Tertius is scarce, I grab the pen and write myself—though quite illegibly.”

Christ...” and who walks in but Tertius. I said, “Where in the world were you?” He said, “I did not want to disturb your studies in the living area, and so I crawled out the window and went to Philip’s Rotisserie.” (We were here in Corinth then as well.) I am telling you, when this man is not sleeping, he is eating. And when he is not eating, he is sleeping.

So you see, dear Romans, God uses circumstance to inspire me, and there is rarely another way. I do not sit around and wait for Him. I do not

say, “*Will there be inspiration coming today, Lord?*”

It is not my job to write inspired scripture; it is my job to listen to truth. And to think. And to wear out my eyeballs in the Hebrew Writings. It is simply that when there is a need to say something, then that

need is impressed upon me and the inspiration comes.

I think I know how to explain this to you in one word: *people*. It’s when I feel the burden to tell *people* these truths that I long to write. It starts either with someone I have talked to, or a report I have received about the state of a particular ecclesia. There is ordinarily a screw-up of some kind; either some evil person (usually a Circumcisionist) is infiltrating and bringing in law to confound our grace, or someone is committing some grievous sin, or someone has circulated a false letter said to be written by me. It is any number of evils that gets my blood boiling to the point of righteous indignation. But even these cannot be called the most fruitful times.

My fellowship with Christ

The most fruitful times are when I am alone with Christ. I do not now refer to those sacred conclaves in the

deserts of Arabia. Oh! I do not even speak of *those* times here, and I will not now speak of them. I speak, rather, of those times in the early parts of the day when I sit alone by a fire and sip my coffee, and there is no sound in the world except for my own breathing. And maybe the sound of the wind. It is still dark outside my window, and my mind wanders to Christ. It is not my habit to read at such an hour, but only to let my mind wander to Christ, and to all those



This is one of my notebooks, which will end up in an old man's attic in a city known as Schnectady (a man by the name of Richard Leek, who will buy it at a flea market in Ankara), and no one will ever realize what it is. Isn't that funny? It just strikes me as so. The really funny thing is, this notebook is still in my possession. I, myself, purchased it in Tarsus.

things He taught me in the desert.

And then! A new connection will come. Not new information, but a new connection. I will suddenly be able to take one thing, told me by Him, and connect it with another thing. One time, I did this with the law. He told me in Arabia that the law came so that sin might increase. (I will never forget that day, and every physical detail accompanying that revelation. And I wondered, *God, why did you not illumine Israel with this long ago?* Of course, I had not then made the connection with the other thing I learned from Him, that Israel shall be a long time in her apostasy—in fact, until the

fullness of the nations has come in and the body of Christ is complete. I remember it being some months later, in the hold of a ship bound for Ephesus, when the lightning struck. It was early morning then, too. And then it dawned on me: *Israel had to become so discouraged at her failure to do law that she would invent her own self-righteousness, and she would be so buried in that self-righteousness that it would become, for her, a grave for the eon.*

How I remember things

I wrote that down as fast as I could! I write in a notebook that I carry on my person at all times. I added it to a long, long list of other revelations. (Contrary to what people think of me, I can never really remember these things. I always have to write them down. My advice to the saints everywhere is to write things down as they come, so as not to forget them. People think that I have a perfect memory. That is so laughable. Especially in Tarsus, the believers there think that I am a genius. And then I pull out my notebook, and they gasp. They have no idea how many things I write to myself. They look at a page, and they say, "Paul! How can you read that?" And then I joke with them that I have the gift of interpretation, and that I need that gift to discern my own handwriting.)

What good are God's words if I do not share them? Days, weeks, and sometimes even months will go by, however, when I do not share. I may want to, but the time is not right. That is, the truth is not *pressing*. I cannot even say that I wait for the pressing, because I do not. I go about my business, and when the pressing comes (usually by means of some circumstance, as I have said), I look for Tertius, and he is nowhere to be found. When I do find him, he has much food between his teeth.

My apostleship

I date my apostleship, as you may *not* be aware, from the commission I received at Antioch. It is important to me, before I begin this letter in earnest, to convince you of my commission. The things I am prepared to say in this letter will be deemed by you so fantastic and unlikely that, if any among you are yet unconvinced, I must secure your utter awareness that my apostleship is of Christ—that it is directly of Christ—and that it came in the most miraculous manner. I will not here recount for you my conversion on the Damascus road; you already know that story well. But perhaps you do not know so well what happened in Antioch and immediately thereafter on the island of Paphos. You will strain yourselves to believe it, but I swear upon Abraham and Moses that it is true. Prepare yourselves for it, if you can. ■



Hello to all my friends in the faith! My sister Kelly and I were in Rochester, NY, for three days recently, at the invitation of a great man of faith there—as well as a Fantasy Football mogul—(Draftsharks.com): Lenny Pappano. He introduced us to some smart people who are helping us redesign my website to elicit more traffic. The experts we met were impressed that we had 5000 visitors in January. One said: "That's really a great number, considering you guys are doing everything wrong." We took that as a compliment! We've nowhere to go but up. Look for the new design soon. God bless you all, and thanks for your continued support—financial and otherwise—of this work.



—Martin