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## **NEW SCHOLARS**

### **“SET APART FOR THE GOSPEL OF GOD” A Study on the Meaning of the Term avfwrisme,noj in Romans 1:1 and its Relevance to Consecrated Life**

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#### **1. Originality of the Study**

Paul’s epistle to the Romans commences with “Paul, slave of Christ Jesus, called apostle set apart for the gospel of God” (Rom 1:1). With this self-introduction, the apostle identifies his master, his office, his mission and the source of his call.

The apostle is totally convinced that in his concrete calling and task he is distinct from all others. This comes from the predication avfwrisme,noj, taken from the Old Testament (cf. Lev 20:26; Isa 29:22; Ezek 45:1) which does not refer to the contrast with Paul’s Pharisaic past. The verb avfori,zw is used in LXX in reference to God’s

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'separating' and calling of Israel from other nations (cf. Lev 20:26) and in Acts 13:2 of the 'setting apart' of Barnabas and Saul for missionary service. Similarly Paul as a 'called apostle' has been set aside by God for a special purpose in God's plan for history.

In this greeting formula Paul identifies himself as 'a slave of Christ Jesus', 'called to be an apostle' and one 'set apart for God's gospel'. Many scholars have studied the first two terms 'a slave of Christ Jesus' and 'called to be an apostle'. And yet *avfwrisme,noj* (cf. Rom 1:1) has received hardly any attention from commentators and biblical scholars. Some of the commentaries take no real notice of the expression *avfwrisme,noj* except to equate its meaning with 'set apart'.

Here the purpose of the endeavour is to determine what the author of the epistle to the Romans intended by using the term *avfwrisme,noj* in the perfect middle passive participle form of the verb *avfori,zw*. Why did Paul use *avfwrisme,noj* instead of *farisai,oj* which also means separated one? Is this expression a simple allusion to what he wrote in Gal 1:15: how did God set him apart from birth and call him to proclaim His Son among the Gentiles? Since these questions will form the core of this entire investigation, it is sufficient to state here briefly that by this unique expression *avfwrisme,noj* Paul was expressing a deep theological viewpoint, namely that he has been specifically consecrated for the gospel of God not as a thing but as a person, Jesus Christ who is the unique mode of salvation open to humanity.

## 2. Method and Procedure of the Study

To arrive at the meaning of *avfwrisme,noj* therefore, an exegetical method is followed applying both diachronic and synchronic approaches. This is followed by a synthesis insofar as it helps to bring out the theological implications of the theme in consecrated life.

Apart from the general introduction, the *status quaestionis* which comprises chapter one and the general conclusion, this thesis has five chapters. The second chapter is preparatory in character, sketching out the meaning of the concept 'segregated' from both the Old and New Testaments in its religious and cultural background. The third chapter investigates the concept of 'set apart' in the OT through a semantic and exegetical analysis.

Chapter four, explains the immediate and general contexts of Romans 1:1 with an exegetical study on the verse. This is followed by an appendix dealing with the term *avfwrisme,noj* in the other New

Testament writings apart from Romans, with the purpose of understanding possible contemporary influences on Paul. The term *avfwri,zw* is rarely used by the NT writers. Though the term *avfwri,zw* is used by the evangelists Matthew and Luke, apart from Paul the apostle, the meaning they rendered is different from that of Paul. Chapter five is a reflection on the theological aspects of Rom 1:1. The salutation of the epistle to the Romans is a long and theology-laden sentence. Paul's development of theology in this verse is distinctive. His theological ideas are developed around the redemption brought about by Jesus of Nazareth. This is a unique approach. By using the term 'slave of Christ Jesus' in Rom 1:1, Paul highlights the mystical conception of his apostolic vocation.

Paul's teaching on the gospel cannot be confined to merely a set of convictions. Paul asserts the gospel as the good news about that reality called "God". He announces what God has done, by resurrecting Jesus from the domain of death. Paul affirmed that Jesus had fulfilled the hope for the Messiah among the Jewish people. Through Jesus the Jew, there is continuity between the Israel and the new movement that starts with the name of Israel's expected Messiah-Jesus. The final chapter enunciates the relevance of Rom 1:1 to the consecrated life. As God called Paul to be an apostle for the gospel of God (cf. Rom 1:1), so consecrated persons are called by God in the name of Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit. When one experiences this call he dedicates his life wholeheartedly to God, and the same God consecrates him for his purpose.

### **3. Results of the Study**

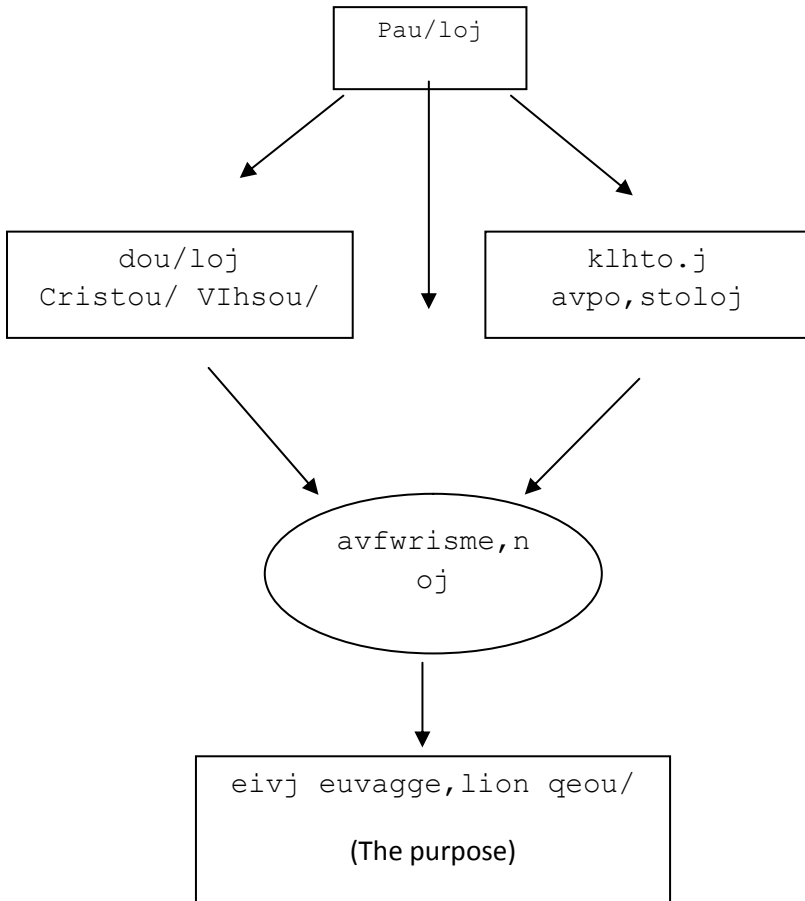
The opening salutation in the epistle to the Romans is the most elaborated one that occurs in the entire Pauline corpus. This research has attempted to study the meaning of the term *avfwrisme,noj* in the epistle to the Romans and its relevance to the consecrated life.

#### **a. A New Analysis of Rom 1:1**

Among the scholars it is generally accepted that the apostle Paul uses in his epistle to the Romans three epithets in order to describe himself, and this is unusual in comparison with his other epistles. The three descriptions are as follows:

1. A slave of Christ Jesus
2. Called to be an apostle
3. Set apart for the gospel of God.

From the analysis we made in chapter two it can be concluded that:



Both *dou/loj Cristou/ VIhsou/* and *klhto.j avpo,stoloj* stands in the same case (noun, nominative, masculine) and number (singular). In Rom 1:1 these two titles are followed by the principal verb *avfwrisme,noj*. Thus the perfect passive participle of *avforizw* is not an epithet of the apostle like “slave of Christ Jesus” and “called to be an apostle”, but it is the principal verb which qualifies both the description about Paul and his purpose. Since *klhto.j* is an adjective referring to the noun *avpo,stoloj* it sounds more meaningful when it is translated as ‘called an apostle’. Thus Paul is called an apostle not by others or by somebody who has invited him to that status, but it is God’s sovereign choice and gift.

From the above analysis the verse can be translated as “Paul, a slave of Christ Jesus, called apostle, set apart for God’s gospel.”

### **b. “Set Apart for the Gospel of God”**

Paul’s total dedication to the gospel of God cannot be considered merely a set of convictions: but it is from his new revelation of God through Jesus Christ. The person of Jesus Christ is the core of his preaching. Paul affirmed that in Jesus the Messianic expectation of the Jewish people were not only fulfilled but were surpassed.

The research has discovered the link between the first verse of the epistle and the whole epistle, and the theme ‘gospel of God’, for which Paul is set apart by God as the unifying theme throughout the epistle. It clarifies certain specific nuances of *avfwrisme,noj* in the epistle to the Romans that have been subjected to exegetical scrutiny. “Set apart for the gospel of God” (Rom 1:1) is not a title to introduce the apostle himself as that of “slave of Christ Jesus” and “called apostle” as used in Rom 1:1. And the participle verb *avfwrisme,noj* in Rom 1:1, which is in divine passive stands for both the epithets Paul used to designate himself. Since it is in divine passive, God is the subject of the action. It is God who called and set Paul apart as the apostle for the gospel. From these studies it is demonstrated that when God is separating someone with a particular purpose that always entails consecration on the part of God. Hence the phrase “set apart for the gospel of God” has two implications. If it is viewed from the perspectives of God, it means consecration. This consecration is not like that of the ritual consecration, rather, through this act, God gives human beings a possibility or the grace to be in the realm of holiness. From the part of those who are consecrated by God it implies an absolute dedication of themselves to the purpose of God.

The apostle used the word *avfwrisme,noj* instead of *Farisai/oj* which has the notion of separation (*Farisai/oi*, separated ones). The Pharisees took their name from their separation, because they separated themselves for the study of the Law, and might be called *aphorismenoi eis ton nomon* (separated for the law); which Paul had formerly been. But now he is separated by God for his gospel, *aphorismenos eis to euaggelion theou* (separated for the gospel of God). Jesus showed him a new way of life, and revealed to him a new horizon to fix his gaze upon.

### **c. Theological Reflections on “the Gospel of God”**

One gets the full sense of a word only from the context in which it is used. This applies in the case of Paul’s writings. In the opening

greeting of the epistle to the Romans, the apostle writes “set apart for the gospel of God” (Rom 1:1) where the focus is on the origin of the gospel (subjective genitive). It is followed by saying that “the gospel of his Son” (cf. Rom 1:9) which specifies the content of Paul’s preaching (objective genitive). If we read it as either subjective or objective genitives, both make good sense. Thus the terms ‘gospel of God’ and ‘gospel of Christ’ seem to be interchangeable. In other words Paul realized that both the source and the content of the gospel that he preached contain his understanding of God in Christ (cf. Rom 1:1; 15:16; 2Cor 11:7). When we read the epistles of Paul it is clear that he never tried to proclaim through the gospel what Jesus of Nazareth did during his earthly life. In the opening salutation of the epistle to the Romans Paul emphasized almost all the aspects of the gospel of God.

#### **d. Relevance of Rom 1:1 to Consecrated Life**

Consecrated life is rooted in Jesus’ call to become His disciples. With this analysis of the epistle to the Rom1:1 and its relevance to consecrated life, it becomes clearer that the call to dedicate oneself totally to and for the gospel of God is not merely a matter of human achievement, but it absolutely originates from God and it is God who consecrates the person. As a response to this call one dedicates himself totally to and for the proclamation of the gospel of God.