

## *An Introduction to the Acts of Paul and Thecla*

**T**HIS DOCUMENT DRAMATIZES the saga of Thecla, telling of a young woman's call to an independent life of teaching and healing in the Christ movement. The figure of Paul appears around the edges of the story, primarily as a heroic inspiration for Thecla as she faces overwhelming opposition to her choices. Thecla overcomes the beasts of the arena, various suitors who desire to have her under their control, and city governments.

The authorship of the Acts of Paul and Thecla is unclear, not simply because of the general difficulties of determining actual authors of ancient documents, but also because the document itself gives no hints. Most estimates of the date of this Greek composition are mid-second century, although some scholars place it as early as 70 CE. It is possible that the piece was written in Asia Minor (current-day Turkey) where the saga takes place.

Consisting of nine women and ten men, the New Orleans Council found itself drawn to a number of documents from outside the traditional New Testament that showed women in leadership in the first generations of the Christ movements. Among them were the Gospel of Mary, the Gospel of Philip, *The Thunder: Perfect Mind*, the Acts of Paul and Thecla, and the Diary of Perpetua, all of which made it through the early rounds of selection. In the final meeting in February 2012, much discussion was pointed toward the Acts of Paul and Thecla and the Diary of Perpetua.

As discussion and debate ensued, it seemed clear that the Gospel of Mary and *The Thunder: Perfect Mind* would be chosen, and that either the Acts of Paul and Thecla or the Diary of Perpetua would be included as an additional work expressing female authority at the beginning of Christianity. Both of them feature stories of women in leadership threatened with death because of their courage and public presence. Although the Diary of Perpetua may very well also be the first piece composed by a woman in leadership, in the end the council preferred the Acts of Paul and Thecla for two reasons: Paul and Thecla demonstrates more clearly the success of Thecla in standing up to government and cultural authorities, overcoming the negligence of her ally and mentor Paul, and asserting her right to be an independent teacher and healer; and the Diary of Perpetua was clearly composed in the third century, and there were doubts as to whether the council should choose documents not composed in the first or second century.

Unlike many works in *A New New Testament*, the Acts of Paul and Thecla has high drama, clear and consistent characters, and eloquent thematic focus. At each

turn, the story moves toward the issue of whether one or another person can prevent Thecla from achieving her chosen goal of following Paul's model of healing and teaching. The story begins after Thecla has already determined her future. The drama lurches from one confrontation with critics of a young woman asserting such independence to another. At each turn, she reaffirms her will and strength to heal and teach independently in the name of Christ, including a scene (34:3) in which she baptizes herself (as Paul seems to be dawdling about baptizing her). Throughout the story, Paul remains the inspiration and perhaps mentor for Thecla, but curiously enough when she is in danger, Paul is not around or is unwilling to advocate for her, and Thecla must draw on her own courage and strength to meet the challenge.

As early as the late second century, the early Christian leader Tertullian condemned this document because of its implications that women were able to lead communities and baptize. This book continued to be a focal point of such protest in the ensuing centuries and actually became very popular in the third through fifth centuries, and indeed the criticism did not diminish its status and popularity in the churches throughout the centuries.

Given its extreme popularity during the time that the traditional New Testament was slowly coming into being, one might ask why the Acts of Paul and Thecla did not become a part of the traditional New Testament. That process was uneven and unclear, without either any final authority or any single decisive moment, but it seems likely that the opposition of some fourth- to sixth-century church authorities to women's leadership may have played a role.

The inclusion of the Acts of Paul and Thecla, joining *The Thunder: Perfect Mind* and the Gospel of Mary in *A New New Testament*, highlights how important the spiritual and political struggle for mutuality between women and men is for the twenty-first century. In many ways, we hope the presence of these three works changes the commonly held picture of gender and power in the first centuries of Christianity. Given these documents, it is much more difficult to see the New Testament as completely patriarchal. Perhaps even more pivotal, these three books provide much more support for a tradition of gender mutuality and allow twenty-first-century women to see themselves as powerful spiritual leaders. It is also true that four other books added to *A New New Testament* also give new evidence of women's leadership in the first two centuries of the Christ movements: the Odes of Solomon, the Prayer of Thanksgiving, the Secret Revelation of John, and the Gospel of Truth offer aspects of inclusiveness of women.

Still, it is important to note that there is strong advocacy for women's leadership in the traditional New Testament as well. The gospels of Mark, Luke, and John have been recognized as underlining the importance of women's leadership. The image of "neither male nor female in Christ" in the writings of Paul cannot be

ignored. And the acclamation of Tabitha as a disciple in the Acts of the Apostles blatantly contradicts claims of churches today that women do not deserve leadership roles.

### Recommended Reading

Melissa Aubin, "Reversing Romance: The Acts of Thecla and the Ancient Novel," in *Ancient Fiction and Early Christian Narrative*, edited by Ronald F. Hock, J. Bradley Chance, and Judith Perkins

Jeremy W. Barrier, *The Acts of Paul and Thecla*  
Virginia Burrus, *Chastity as Autonomy: Women in the Stories of the Apocryphal Acts*

## The Acts of Paul and Thecla

**1** <sup>1</sup> As Paul went up from Iconium, after his flight from Antioch, his fellow travelers were Demas and Hermogenes, a bronze worker. They were full of hypocrisy and flattered Paul as if they loved him. <sup>2</sup> But Paul, gazing only at Christ's kindness, did no evil toward them but loved them so much that he made all of the words of the Lord, the teachings and explanations of the good news, the birth and resurrection of the Beloved sweet for them. He described to them, word for word, the great things of Christ and how they had been revealed to him.

**2** <sup>1</sup> And a man named Onesiphorus, hearing Paul had come to Iconium, went out with his children, Simmias and Zeno, and his wife Lectra, to meet Paul so that he might welcome him. Titus had described Paul's appearance to him for he had not seen him in the flesh, but only in spirit.

**3** <sup>1</sup> And he went down the royal road to Lystra and stood waiting for him, looking at all those walking by, according to Titus's description. <sup>2</sup> And he saw Paul coming—a man small in stature, with a bald head and crooked legs, healthy, with knitted eyebrows, a slightly long nose, and full of kindness—for at times he appeared as a human being and at others he had the face of an angel.

**4** <sup>1</sup> And when Paul saw Onesiphorus, he smiled and Onesiphorus said, "Welcome, servant of the blessed God!" And Paul replied, "Grace to you and your household!" <sup>2</sup> But Demas and Hermogenes were jealous and went further into their hypoc-

risy so that Demos said, "Are we not of the Blessed, too, that you all have not welcomed us just as him?" <sup>3</sup> And Onesiphorus said, "I do not see in you the fruits of justice, but if you are anything, come to my house as well and rest."

**5** <sup>1</sup> And when Paul entered into Onesiphorus's house, there was great joy and kneeling and breaking of bread, and the word of God concerning self-control and resurrection. As Paul said, "Blessed are the clear of heart, for they will see God. <sup>2</sup> Blessed are those who observe purity in flesh, for they will become a temple of God. <sup>3</sup> Blessed are the self-possessed, for God will speak to them. <sup>4</sup> Blessed are those who set themselves apart from this world, for they will please God. <sup>5</sup> Blessed are those who have wives as if they do not, for they will be heirs of God. <sup>6</sup> Blessed are those in awe of God, for they will become messengers of God.

**6** <sup>1</sup> "Blessed are the ones who tremble at God's words; for they will be called. <sup>2</sup> Blessed are the ones who receive the wisdom of Jesus Christ, for they will be called children of the Highest. <sup>3</sup> Blessed are the ones who keep their baptism, for they will rest with the Father and the Son. <sup>4</sup> Blessed are those on the journey to uniting with Jesus Christ, for they will be in the light. <sup>5</sup> Blessed are the ones who have departed the form of the world through God's love, for they will judge angels and, at the right hand of the Father, they will be praised. <sup>6</sup> Blessed are the compassionate, for they will receive compassion and will not see the day of grievous judgment. <sup>7</sup> Blessed are the bodies of maidens, for they will

have favor with God and will not lose the reward for their holiness; for the Father's word will be a work of salvation for them until the day of his Child, and they will have rest forever."

**7** <sup>1</sup> And Paul said these things in the middle of the association in Onesiphorus's house. A certain maiden, Thecla—whose mother was Theocleia and was promised in marriage to a man, Thamyris—sat at a window close to the house and listened night and day to the message about holiness spoken by Paul. She did not turn away from the window, but moved forward in faith, rejoicing exceedingly. <sup>2</sup> And yet having seen many women and maidens coming to Paul, she also desired for herself to be deemed worthy, to stand face-to-face with Paul and hear the word of Christ. For she had not yet seen Paul in person, but only heard his word.

**8** <sup>1</sup> And since she did not move away from the window, her mother sent for Thamyris, and he came joyfully as if having already received her in marriage. <sup>2</sup> So Thamyris said to Theocleia, "Where is my Thecla?" <sup>3</sup> And Theocleia said, "I have a strange story to tell you. <sup>4</sup> Indeed, for three days and nights Thecla has not risen from the window—either to eat or drink—but gazes as if looking upon some enjoyable sight. In this way she clings to a strange man who teaches deceptive and cunning words, so that I wonder how a maiden of such respect can be so painfully troubled.

**9** <sup>1</sup> "Thamyris, this person is threatening the city of the Iconians, and your Thecla as well—for all the women and youth go to him and are taught by him. He says that it is necessary to fear God alone and live purely. <sup>2</sup> And my daughter, like a spider in the window, also is bound to his words, held sway by new desire and fear-

ful emotions. <sup>3</sup> For the maiden fixates on the things he says and is captivated. <sup>4</sup> But go to her and speak to her for she is betrothed to you."

**10** <sup>1</sup> And Thamyris went to her, at once loving her and also fearing her passion. He said, "Thecla, my betrothed, why do you sit like this? <sup>2</sup> What is the emotion that binds you in passion? <sup>3</sup> Turn toward your Thamyris and be ashamed." <sup>4</sup> And her mother also said the same things to her, "Child, why do you look down and sit like this, answering nothing but acting like a mad person?" <sup>5</sup> And they cried desperately—Thamyris for the loss of his wife, Theocleia for the loss of her child, and the maidservants for the loss of their mistress. So there was great confusion and mourning in the house. <sup>6</sup> And while these things were happening, Thecla did not turn back, but was fixed to the word of Paul.

**11** <sup>1</sup> And Thamyris leaped up and went out into the street, and closely watched those going in to Paul, and those coming out. <sup>2</sup> And he saw two men quarreling with each other and said to them, "Men, who are you? Tell me. And who is this one who is inside with you, misteading the lives of young men and deceiving young women that they should not marry, but remain so, as they are? I promise to give you both much money if you will tell me about him, for I am a most important man of the city."

**12** <sup>1</sup> And Demas and Hermogenes said to him, "Who this one is, we do not know, but he deprives young men of wives and young women of husbands, saying, "There is no resurrection for you unless you remain holy and do not sully the flesh, but keep it holy."

**13** <sup>1</sup> And Thamyris said to them, "Come, men, into my house and rest with me."

<sup>2</sup> And they departed for an extravagant banquet with much wine and great wealth and a magnificent table. And Thamyris gave them drink, because he loved Thecla and wanted to have her for his wife.

<sup>3</sup> And at the banquet Thamyris said, "Men, tell me what his teaching is so that I may know it, for I have more than a little anguish about Thecla because she loves the stranger, and I am deprived of my marriage."

**14** <sup>1</sup> And Demas and Hermogenes said, "Bring him to the governor Castellius on the charge of seducing the masses to the new teaching of the Christians. Then he will kill him, and you will have your wife Thecla. <sup>2</sup> And he will teach you that the resurrection, which he says is coming, has already taken place in the children which we have, and that we have risen when we learned to know the true God."

**15** <sup>1</sup> But when Thamyris heard these things from them, he was filled with jealousy and wrath. Rising early in the morning, he went to the house of Onesiphorus with the rulers, public officials, and a large crowd with clubs, saying to Paul, "You have corrupted the city of the Iconians and also my betrothed so that she will not want me. Let us go to the governor Castellius." <sup>2</sup> And the whole crowd said, "Arrest the magician! For he has corrupted all of our wives and has seduced the masses!"

**16** <sup>1</sup> And Thamyris stood before the court crying out loudly and said, "Proconsul, this person—we do not know where he is from—who does not allow maidens to marry, let him say to you on what account he teaches these things." <sup>2</sup> But Demas and Hermogenes said to Thamyris, "Say he is a Christian and then you will destroy him." <sup>3</sup> And the governor held to his purpose and he called Paul, saying to him, "Who are you and what do you teach? For

it is no small thing they have accused you of."

**17** <sup>1</sup> And Paul lifted up his voice, saying, "If I, today, am interrogated for what I teach, then listen, Proconsul. <sup>2</sup> The living God, the God of retribution, the jealous God, the self-sufficient God, desiring the salvation of humanity, has sent me so that I might reclaim them from corruption and impurity, all pleasure and death, that they might no longer sin. For this reason God sent his own child whom I bring good news and teach about. In that one, humans have hope, who alone had compassion for a wandering world so that humanity might no longer be under judgment, but have trust and fear of God, and knowledge of dignity and a love of truth. <sup>3</sup> If, then, I teach the things revealed to me by God, what wrong have I done, Proconsul?" <sup>4</sup> But the governor, hearing these things, ordered Paul to be bound, and he was carried off to prison until the governor might have the leisure for a more careful hearing of him.

**18** <sup>1</sup> But in the night Thecla took off her bracelets and gave them to the gatekeeper, and the door was opened for her. She went into the prison and gave the jailer a silver mirror. She went in to Paul and sat at his feet, and she heard the great things of God. <sup>2</sup> And Paul feared nothing having rights in the freedom of God, and Thecla strengthened her trust, kissing his chains.

**19** <sup>1</sup> But when Thecla was sought out by her own people and Thamyris, they pursued her through the streets as one who is lost. And one of the fellow slaves of the gatekeeper disclosed that she had left in the night. <sup>2</sup> And they questioned the gatekeeper, and he said to them, "She has gone to the stranger in the prison." <sup>3</sup> And they went as he told them and found her bound in affection. They went out from that place

and drew together a crowd, and they declared to the governor what had happened.

**20**<sup>1</sup> And Paul was ordered to be brought to the court. Thecla wallowed in the place where Paul taught as he sat in the prison.<sup>2</sup> But the governor ordered that she also be brought to the court. And she went off exulting with joy.<sup>3</sup> When Paul had been brought, the crowd cried out even louder:

"He is a magician! Take him away!"<sup>4</sup> But the governor heard Paul contentedly as he spoke about the divine works of Christ. And when the governor had considered the counsel he was given, he called Thecla, saying, "Why do you not marry Thyamis according to the law of the Iconians?"<sup>5</sup> But she stood looking intently at Paul, and when she did not answer, Theoclea, her mother, cried out, saying, "Burn the lawless one! Burn the one who refuses to be a bride in the middle of the theater so that all the women taught by this man will be afraid!"

**21**<sup>1</sup> And the governor was greatly moved and had Paul whipped and thrown out of the city; but Thecla he condemned to be burned.<sup>2</sup> And immediately the governor rose and went off to the theater, and the whole crowd went to the violent spectacle.

<sup>3</sup> But Thecla, like a lamb in the wilderness looking around for the shepherd, sought for Paul.<sup>4</sup> And when she looked into the face of the crowd, she saw the Lord sitting there in Paul's form and said, "As if I were not able to endure, Paul has come to see me." And she looked intently at him; but he departed into heaven.

**22**<sup>1</sup> And the young men and young women brought firewood and straw so that Thecla might be burned.<sup>2</sup> And as she came naked, the governor wept and marveled at the power in her.<sup>3</sup> And the executioners laid out the firewood and ordered her to climb upon the pyre. And when she made the sign of the cross, she climbed

upon the firewood. They lit it<sup>4</sup> and a great fire blazed, but the fire did not touch her. For God, having compassion, caused a sound under the earth, and a cloud, filled with rain and hail, darkened the sky from above, and the vessel poured forth all that was in it. Many were in danger and died, and the fire was extinguished. And Thecla was saved.

**23**<sup>1</sup> And Paul was fasting with Onesiphorus and his wife and children in an open tomb as they went on the road from Iconium to Daphne.<sup>2</sup> And when many days had passed, as they were fasting, the children said to Paul, "We are hungry."<sup>3</sup> And they had nothing with which to buy bread, for Onesiphorus had left behind the things of the world and followed Paul with his entire household.<sup>4</sup> And Paul took off his robe and said, "Go, child, and buy more bread and bring it back."<sup>5</sup> But when the child was buying bread, he saw his neighbor Thecla and was astounded. And he said, "Thecla, where are you going?"<sup>6</sup> And she said, "I am looking for Paul; I was saved from the fire."<sup>7</sup> And the child said, "Come, I will lead you to him for he is mourning for you and has been praying and fasting for six days already."

**24**<sup>1</sup> And when she was brought to the tomb, Paul was kneeling and prayed, saying, "Father of Christ, do not let the fire touch Thecla, but stand by her because she is yours."<sup>2</sup> But she rose behind him and cried out, "Father who made heaven and earth, Father of your beloved Child, Jesus Christ, I praise you because you quickly granted what I asked for, and you heard me."

**25**<sup>1</sup> And there was much love in the tomb, Paul rejoicing, and Onesiphorus and all of them.<sup>2</sup> And they had five loaves and vegetables and water and salt, and rejoiced at the divine works of Christ.<sup>3</sup> And Thecla said to Paul, "I will cut my hair

short and follow you wherever you go."<sup>4</sup> But he said, "It is a shameful time and you are fair. May no other trial come upon you worse than the first, and this time you are not able stand firm but are cowardly."<sup>5</sup> And Thecla said, "Only give me the seal of Christ and no trial will touch me."<sup>6</sup> And Paul said to Thecla, "Have patience, and you will receive the water."

**26**<sup>1</sup> And Paul sent Onesiphorus and his entire household away to Iconium and, taking Thecla, went to Antioch.<sup>2</sup> But immediately, as they entered, the president of the provincial council of Syria, a certain man named Alexander, saw Thecla and became enamored with her and tried to persuade Paul with money and gifts.<sup>3</sup> But Paul said, "I do not know the woman of whom you speak, nor is she mine."<sup>4</sup> But Alexander, having a lot of power, embraced her on the street. And she would not endure it, but sought after Paul<sup>5</sup> and cried out bitterly, saying, "Do not violate the stranger! Do not violate the slave of God!"<sup>6</sup> I am important among the Iconians and because I did not wish to marry Thyamis I have been thrown out of the city."<sup>7</sup> And taking hold of Alexander, she tore off his cloak and took the crown from his head and caused him public shame.

**27**<sup>1</sup> But he at once, loving her and also being dishonored by what had happened to him, brought her before the governor. And when she confessed the things she had done, he sentenced her to the wild beasts.<sup>2</sup> And the women were panicked and cried out before the court, "Evil judgment! Unholy judgment!"<sup>3</sup> But Thecla asked the governor that she might remain pure until she was forced to fight the wild animals.<sup>4</sup> And a rich queen, named Tryphaena, whose daughter had died, took Thecla into her care and found solace in her.

**28**<sup>1</sup> When the wild animals were led in

procession, they bound her to a ferocious lioness and the queen Tryphaena followed her.<sup>2</sup> But the lioness sat down in front of Thecla and licked her feet, and the entire crowd was astounded. And the charge on her inscription was "Sacrilege."<sup>3</sup> And the women along with the children cried out from above, saying, "God, a godless judgment has been passed in this city!"<sup>4</sup> And after the procession, Tryphaena received her again, for her daughter, Falconilla, who was dead, said to her mother in a dream, "You will have the lonely stranger, Thecla, in place of me so that she might pray for me and I might be transferred to the place of the just."

**29**<sup>1</sup> When Tryphaena received her back from the procession, she at once mourned because Thecla was going to fight with the wild animals the next day, but also loved her vehemently like her own daughter, Falconilla, saying, "Thecla, my second child, come here and pray for my child so that she might live forever, for I saw this in a dream."<sup>2</sup> And without hesitation, she lifted her voice and said, "My God, the Child of the Highest, the One in heaven, give her according to her wish so that her daughter, Falconilla, might live forever."<sup>3</sup> After Thecla said these things, Tryphaena mourned that such beauty was to be thrown to the wild animals.

**30**<sup>1</sup> And when dawn arrived, Alexander came to take her away, for he was the one who offered the games, saying, "The governor is seated and the crowd is clamoring for us. Take away she who is to fight the wild animals!"<sup>2</sup> But Tryphaena cried out so that he fled, saying, "A second mourning for my Falconilla has come upon my house and there is no one to help—neither my child, for she is dead, nor relatives, for I am a widow."<sup>3</sup> God of my child Thecla, help Thecla!

**31** And the governor sent soldiers to

bring Thecla, <sup>2</sup> but Tryphaena would not stand away from her, but taking her by her hand led her, saying, "I brought my daughter, Falconilla, to the grave, and you, Thecla, I bring to fight the wild animals."<sup>3</sup> And Thecla cried ferociously and wailed to the Lord, saying, "Lord God in whom I trust, with whom I have taken refuge, who rescued me from the fire, render reward to Tryphaena who showed compassion for your slave and guarded my holiness."

**32** <sup>1</sup> Then there was an uproar and rumbling of wild animals, and a cry from the people, and the women sitting together, some saying, "Bring in the sacrilegious one!" and others saying, "Let the city be destroyed for this lawlessness! Destroy all of us, Proconsul! Ferocious spectacle! Evil judgment!"

**33** <sup>1</sup> And Thecla was taken out of Tryphaena's hands and stripped, and received a girdle and was thrown into the stadium. <sup>2</sup> And lions and bears were thrown in front of her. <sup>3</sup> And a ferocious lioness charged her and then lay down at her feet. <sup>4</sup> And a bear ran up to her, but the lioness charged and met it, and tore the bear apart. <sup>5</sup> And again, a lion that had been trained against humans, which belonged to Alexander, ran up to her, and the lioness engaged the lion, and the two were killed together. <sup>6</sup> And the women mourned even more since the lioness that helped her was dead.

**34** <sup>1</sup> And they threw in many wild animals as she stood and stretched out her hands and prayed. <sup>2</sup> But as she finished the prayer, she turned and saw a great pit full of water and said, "Now it is time for me to wash." <sup>3</sup> And she threw herself in, saying, "In the name of Jesus Christ I baptize myself on the last day!" <sup>4</sup> And seeing this, the

women and the whole crowd wept, saying, "Do not throw yourself into the water!"; so that even the governor wept because the sea lions\* were going to devour such beauty. <sup>5</sup> Then she threw herself into the water in the name of Jesus Christ, but the sea lions, seeing the light of a lightning flash, floated on the surface, dead. <sup>6</sup> And surrounding her was a cloud of fire so that neither the wild animals could touch her nor could she be seen naked.

**35** <sup>1</sup> And the women, when other, more frightening, wild animals were being thrown in, cried aloud, and some threw petals, while others nard, and others cinamon, and yet others cardamom, so that there was an abundance of perfumes. <sup>2</sup> And all the wild animals which were let out were held as if by sleep and did not touch her. So Alexander said to the governor, "I have exceedingly terrorizing bulls. Let us bind them to the one who is to fight the wild animals." <sup>3</sup> And looking sad, the governor turned to him, saying, "Do what you will." <sup>4</sup> And they bound her by the feet between the bulls, and placed burning irons under their genitals in order to agitate them further so they might kill her. <sup>5</sup> Then they leaped up, but a consuming flame burned through the ropes and Thecla was as if she had not been bound.

**36** <sup>1</sup> And Tryphaena fainted as she stood by the arena, on the stage,† and the female slaves said, "Queen Tryphaena is dead!" <sup>2</sup> And the governor froze, and the whole city was frightened. And Alexander fell down on the governor's feet and said, "Have mercy on both me and the city and acquit the animal fighter in case the city be destroyed with her." <sup>3</sup> For if Caesar should hear these things he will quickly destroy us

together with the city, because the queen Tryphaena, a relative of his, died beside the stage.

**37** <sup>1</sup> And the governor called out to Thecla from the midst of the wild animals and said to her, "Who are you? <sup>2</sup> And what is it about you that not even one of the wild animals touched you?" <sup>3</sup> And she said, "I indeed am the slave of the living God. And as to what it is about me, I have trusted in the Child of God, in whom he finds pleasure, and through whom not even one of the wild animals touched me. <sup>4</sup> For this one alone is the limit of salvation and the foundation of life through the ages. For he is a refuge for those in a storm; freedom for the oppressed; for the despairing a shelter; and once and for all, whoever does not trust in him will not live but die forever."

**38** <sup>1</sup> And when he heard these things, the governor ordered garments to be brought for her and said, "Put on these garments." <sup>2</sup> And she said, "The one who clothed me when I was naked among the wild beasts is this one who will clothe me with salvation in the day of judgment." <sup>3</sup> And having taken the garments, she put them on. <sup>4</sup> And the governor immediately sent forth a decree saying, "God-fearing Thecla, slave of God, I release you." <sup>5</sup> And the women all cried out in a loud voice, as if from one mouth, and gave praise to God, saying, "One is God who has saved Thecla," so that the whole city shook from their voice.

**39** <sup>1</sup> And Tryphaena, receiving the good news, came to meet her with a crowd and embraced Thecla and said, "Now I have confidence that the dead are raised! Now I trust that my child lives! Come inside, and I will assign to you all the things that are mine." <sup>2</sup> Then Thecla went in with her and rested in her house for eight days, instructing her in the word of God so that

even most of the maidservants believed. And there was great joy in the house.

**40** <sup>1</sup> But Thecla missed Paul and searched him out, looking around everywhere, and it was reported to her that he was in Myra. <sup>2</sup> And taking young men and young women, she bound herself up and stitched together her garment—a robe in the fashion of a man's—and departed for Myra. And she found Paul speaking the word of God and waited near him. <sup>3</sup> And he was astonished when he saw her and the crowd that was with her, wondering whether another trial was upon her. <sup>4</sup> But observing this, she said to him, "I have observed a bath, Paul. For the one who worked together with you for the good news also worked together with me in my baptism."

**41** <sup>1</sup> And Paul took her hand and led her to the house of Hermias, and he heard everything from her so that Paul greatly marvelled. And those who heard were affirmed and prayed on behalf of Tryphaena. <sup>2</sup> And as Thecla stood up she said to Paul, "I am going to Iconium." <sup>3</sup> And Paul said, "Go and teach the word of God." <sup>4</sup> Then Tryphaena sent her many clothes and gold so she could leave a portion behind for Paul to use in service for the poor.

**42** <sup>1</sup> And she left for Iconium, <sup>2</sup> and went to Onesiphorus's house and fell on the floor where Paul had sat and taught the words of God. And she cried, saying, "God of me and of this house where the light shone on me, Christ Jesus the Child of God, my help in prison, my help before governors, my help in the fire, my help with the wild animals—you are God and you are the glory forever. Amen."

**43** <sup>1</sup> And she found that Thamyris had died, but that her mother was alive. And she called her mother and said to her,

\* Or "seals."

† Technically, *abaci*, a location on or near the stage.

"Theocleia, Mother, can you believe that the Lord lives in heaven? <sup>2</sup> For if you desire money, the Lord will give it to you through me, or your child. Look, I am standing before you." <sup>3</sup> And bearing witness to these things, she departed for Se-leucia, enlightening many with the word of God.

**44** <sup>1</sup> But certain ones in the city, Greeks by religion and doctors by profession, sent violent young men to her to ruin her. For they said, "She is a maiden and serves Artemis. Because of this, she has power with healing." <sup>2</sup> And by God's foresight she entered into a rock, alive, and it descended under the earth. <sup>3</sup> And she left for Rome

to see Paul and found him sleeping. <sup>4</sup> And after staying there a little while, she slept with a beautiful sleep. And she is buried about two or three stadia† from the tomb of her teacher Paul.

**45** <sup>1</sup> She was cast into the fire when she was seventeen and to the wild animals when she was eighteen. It has been said that she was an ascetic in a cave when she was seventy-two, so all the years of her life were ninety. <sup>2</sup> And after accomplishing many healings, she rests in the place of the holy ones having fallen asleep on the twenty-fourth of September. In Christ Jesus, our Lord, to whom be the glory and strength forever and ever. Amen.

## An Introduction to the Letter to the Colossians

**B**URSTING WITH VITALITY about the success of a Christ movement among the many different peoples around the Mediterranean, this letter throbs with the wide dimensions of a "worldwide" message. Of course, the "world" (1:6) here means all the different cultures of the Mediterranean unified by the Roman Empire. For the Christ movement, an image of "the assembly" (1:18) portrays all these cultures as more spiritually united than they ever could be through Roman conquest.

The status of this letter, however, has confused many readers, in terms of both whether it was written by Paul and whether it was addressed to the Christ assemblies in Colossae. The letter's date has been part of this confusion. Colossians' portrait of Christ and its interest in a true "assembly" consisting of different groups worldwide differ dramatically from the authentic writings of Paul, such as Galatians and 1 Corinthians. On the other hand, some of this letter's vocabulary is very close to that of Paul's authentic letters. The complete destruction of the city of Colossae by an earthquake in 60 CE presents further complication. Scholars are fairly evenly divided on whether Paul wrote none, part, or all of this letter. Those who think it was written later must obviously also assert that it was not written to Colossae, a proposal that fits with the more general tone of the letter.

Colossians is quite well known for its ancient song praising a cosmic Christ:

He is the image of the unseen God, firstborn of all creation.

In him all things were created, those in the heavens and on the earth,

The visible and the invisible, whether thrones or lordships, rulers or authorities —

All things have been created through him and for him.

He is before all things and all things cohere in him.

He is the head of the body — the assembly;

He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead,

So that he might have the first place in everything.

In him, the entire fullness of everything was pleased to dwell,

And through him to reconcile all things in him,

Whether those on earth or in the heavens, through the blood of his cross. (1:15–20)

This letter focuses entirely on gentle people and portrays them as "once having been alienated and hateful in your intentions, doing evil works, . . . now reconciled in the body of his flesh, through death, presenting you holy, blameless, and without reproach before" Christ (1:21–22). This focus celebrates a larger body of Christ, "not Greek and Jew, circumcision and uncircumcision, Barbarian, Scythian, slave, free; but Christ . . . [in] all things and all in Christ" (3:11). In this spirit

\* That is, he had died.

† A quarter to three-eighths of a mile.