

■ INTRODUCTION

IN CARTHAGE ON a (presumably) hot 17 July in the year 180 CE, the proconsul (Roman governor) of Africa, P. Vigellius Saturninus, took up the case of twelve professed Christians (nine men and three women) from the town of Scillium.¹ Through their spokesperson, Speratus, the accused rejected both the emperor and the “empire of this world” (*Acts of the Scillitan Martyrs* §6). The patient governor urged them to swear by the genius of the emperor and to offer prayers for his welfare. The prisoners refused. In due course (§12) the governor asked Speratus about the contents of his case (*capsa*). “Books and letters of a just man named Paul” (*libri et epistulae Pauli viri iusti*), he replied. These books would have been seized with the prisoners. The group refused a postponement of thirty days, were duly sentenced, and promptly executed by the sword.

This account raises a number of questions, such as: What were the contents of that *capsa*, properly a container for scrolls?² The most likely answer is books and letters written by Paul. Slightly less arguable is “(some) books as well as letters of Paul.”³ What books written by Paul might this case have held? The *Acts of Paul*? One hypothesis is that the books included a copy of the Third Gospel. That would suggest that these Christians could have been followers of Marcion, who regarded an edition of Luke as a Pauline gospel and accepted this, together with an edition of Paul’s letters, as the authoritative Christian scripture, a “New Testament.”⁴

One might also ask from what letters of Paul these believers learned to reject the emperor’s authority. Romans 13:1-7 does not promote this posture, while 1 Tim. 1:1-2 enjoins prayer for the emperor. The Scillitan martyrs evidently advocated a rather radical Paulinism, more akin to that

of the aforementioned *Acts of Paul*⁵ than to the eventual corpus of thirteen letters. This two-page Latin account of a trial reveals strongly divergent appropriations of the legacy of the self-described “apostle to the gentiles” (Gal. 1:16) in the early church. Among these divergent appropriations is the most famous portrait of Paul, known from the book of Acts, in which Paul, who is not an apostle, gives constant priority to evangelizing Jews.⁶ There have always been many Pauls.

The thesis of the present book is that the only real Paul is the dead Paul. This contests the standard—and far from erroneous—view that, unlike Jesus, whose words survive only in writings by others (e.g. the various Gospels), Paul’s actual thoughts are directly accessible in a number of letters, in addition to which are letters not written by Paul but attributed to him, and other texts, such as the canonical book of Acts and the *Acts of Paul*.⁷

A quantity of Paul’s *ipsissima verba* (actual words) certainly survive in his letters, but they do so as the result of a process that included the selection of certain letters, the probable rejection of others, at least some editing—everyone must concede that the external addresses, like those now placed on envelopes and at the head of a communication, have been lost—and the arrangement of these into a collection (an important activity, for what comes first helps determine the meaning of what follows and the occupant of the final position leaves an enduring impression), as well as the combination of multiple letters into one, the composition of what are called pseudo-Pauline letters (letters that Paul did not write), and various narratives about Paul.⁸ Paul’s epistles were not discovered, like thousands of ancient letters, through the labors of modern archaeologists,⁹ nor were they preserved for the benefit of future historians or theologians. They were edited and copied to meet the needs of early Christians. This is an obvious but very important point: the Pauline letters that have come down to us represent Paul as some early believers wished him to be received and understood.

■ Table 1: Paul vs. Jesus?

(Note: The underlined words show contrasts between the two passages.)

*Jesus Tradition (Luke 12:49-53)*¹⁰

Jesus said, “Whoever comes to me and does not hate father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and even life itself, cannot be my disciple.” (Luke 14:26)

Jesus said, “I came to bring fire to the earth, and how I wish it were already kindled! I have a baptism with which to be baptized, and what stress I am under until it is completed! Do you think that I have come to bring peace to the earth? No, I tell you, but rather division! From now on five in one household will be divided, three against two and two against three; they will be divided: father against son and son against father, mother against daughter and daughter against mother, mother-in-law against her daughter-in-law and daughter-in-law against mother-in-law.”

*Pauline Tradition (Col. 3:18-21)*¹¹

Wives, be subject to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord. Husbands, love your wives and never treat them harshly. Children, obey your parents in everything, for this is your acceptable duty in the Lord. Fathers, do not provoke your children, or they may lose heart.

Why does the Christian church revere the Gospels and confess Jesus Christ as its Lord and Savior, but prefer the more conventional ethics of the Pauline tradition to the robust teachings of Jesus? Outside of a general distaste for parent-bashing and wife-beating, the underlying question is the mystery of how an utterly rural Galilean prophet became an object of worship in the cities of the Roman Empire. This is, from what the apostle would call “the human perspective,” the problem of why Christianity became an international gentile religion. When the credit for this accomplishment is awarded, one villain and one hero tower above all rivals. The hero is, of course, Paul. The name of the villain, as all realize, is...Paul, beside whom, in the eyes of more than a few, Judas begins to acquire a bit of luster.

How did this come about? How is it that a Greek-speaking Diaspora Pharisee could launch an operation that would command the allegiance of one third of the world’s people by the end of the second millennium? How could these small and isolated bands of believers become within a few decades the normative form of the Jesus-movement and grow into the established religion of the Western world?

INTELLECTUAL BACKGROUNDING (AND FOREGROUNDING)

At one time Protestant scholarship, in particular, saw the task of analyzing pre- (and post-) Augustinian¹² exegesis of Paul as demonstrating how “they” misunderstood him.¹³ Today, that task involves showing how these interpreters *understood* Paul.¹⁴ Three of the most important reasons for this shift are: (1) the impact of ecumenism, which has brought scholars of varying traditions into conversation with one another; (2) the evolution of historical criticism, which summons researchers to treat their sources with respect; and (3) various impulses of postmodernism, including admiration for a plurality of views and suspicion about “pure objectivity.” In fewer words: it is no longer possible to assume that there is a “correct” interpretation of Paul against which all others may be measured. If the “Paulinism” of Irenaeus of Lyon (c. 180) and that of Clement of Alexandria (c. 200) was affected by the issues and methods of their times, so also were the interpretations of Paul by Martin Luther and Karl Barth, in the sixteenth and twentieth centuries, respectively. The capacity to inspire different interpretations in response to the needs of various generations is now viewed as a sign of Paul’s success.

By that criterion, few persons have been more successful. Paul has played a major role in nearly all of the movements for renewal and reform, as well as conflicts within Christianity. One example is the development of “proto-orthodox” or “early Catholic” Christianity. Rebelling against this early synthesis, Marcion of Sinope, who was active from the second quarter of the second century, sought to purge Christian thought and practice of all that did not conform to his understanding of Paul. The church he created constituted a formidable rival to the emerging “great Church.” It lasted for centuries. The other formidable rival of emerging Christianity was Gnosticism, not a single church, but a variety of movements that shared a number of typical features, classically a strong dualism between matter and spirit, between the true god and the material universe. Both “Gnostic” and “orthodox” Christians appealed to Paul in defense of their views. Mani (216–277), the founder of a Gnostic world religion, took Paul as his model.¹⁵ The medieval Christian heresies of the Paulicians and Bogomils in the east and the Cathari in the west made considerable use of Paul in expanding their views. The Cathari constituted a serious threat to catholic Christianity in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries.¹⁶

A survey of highlights of the impact of Romans alone yields an impressive narrative. In response to a child’s “*tolle, lege*” (“pick up and

read”), Augustine picked up and read Rom. 13:13: “let us live honorably as in the day, not in reveling and drunkenness, not in debauchery and licentiousness, not in quarreling and jealousy” (*Confessions* 8.12). From Romans 5 Augustine (who was engaged in a theological debate¹⁷) developed a view of original sin, a notion destined to have vast consequences for Western history. The brilliant twelfth-century theologian Peter Abelard drew substantially upon the arguments of Romans. A course of lectures on Romans and other Pauline epistles by John Colet (1466[?]-1519) marked a new approach to biblical interpretation, the impact of Humanism, which encouraged the exploration of critical issues and attention to historical context. Romans formed the subject of Martin Luther’s first lectures on the New Testament at the new university of Wittenberg (1515-16).

One notable outcome of that Augustinian monk’s attempt to understand Romans was the Protestant Reformation. Romans also played a major role in the development of the magnificent theological edifice designed by John Calvin. It is not an egregious exaggeration to say that Western Christianity split over the interpretation of Romans—not only Protestants from papalists, but also Calvinists from Lutherans. In 1738, an Anglican priest found his heart “strangely warmed” as he heard a reading of Luther’s Preface to Romans. His name was John Wesley. In 1918, as the Great War that demolished “Christendom” drew towards an end, there appeared the first major writing of a young theologian. Karl Barth’s commentary on Romans marked the demise of the old Liberal theology and the beginning of Neo-Orthodoxy. The Pauline legacy is, by any criterion, rich.

Another factor that has shaped recent assessment of this legacy is a shift in the nature of religious authority. Classical Protestant Orthodoxy, that is, seventeenth-century Lutheranism and Calvinism, identified Scripture—the books of the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament—as the sole basis of doctrinal and other authority. The Roman Catholic Church (as well as the eastern Orthodox and, to a lesser degree, Anglicans) also assigned a place to tradition, but Scripture was the chief official source for all Christians. Fundamental to the various parties’ view of the Bible was the principle that the quality of “apostolicity” implied that apostles or their associates composed all of the New Testament texts.

The eighteenth century saw the rise of a critical skepticism that emphasized reason. This generated widespread challenges to traditional authority.¹⁸ Questions were raised about the authorship of the Pastoral

Epistles (1 and 2 Timothy, Titus), for example.¹⁹ This constituted a serious breach in the fortress of critical orthodoxy. If Paul (or Peter, and so on) did not compose some of the epistles transmitted under his name, the canon was no longer a secure basis for doctrine and discussion.²⁰ This view set the terms of the debate for about a century and a half. To state that Paul did not write 2 Timothy or Ephesians was to deny those texts authority.²¹ Supporters of the tradition understood themselves as obliged to defend the Pauline authorship of the disputed epistles, while some liberals rejoiced in repudiating texts of whose teachings they disapproved.

This debate has largely abated during the last generation, not because defenders of the Pauline authorship of disputed epistles no longer exist, but because it is widely agreed that to call a certain text “inauthentic” does not mean that it is bad, or unworthy of inclusion in the New Testament. The present consensus is that Paul wrote seven epistles: Romans, 1 and 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Philippians, 1 Thessalonians, and Philemon. These are “undisputed.” This book regards the others (Ephesians, Colossians, 2 Thessalonians, 1 and 2 Timothy, and Titus) as post-Pauline compositions. The object is not to strip away this unseemly husk to reveal the “real Paul,” but to utilize the Deutero-Pauline letters as components of the developing Pauline legacy.

Behind this change stand not only convincing scholarly arguments but also changed understandings. As indicated above, at one time scholars opposed to certain views could help denounce them by arguing that the views in question were not from the pens of Peter, Paul, James, and others. Inauthentic texts were not apostolic and thus not authoritative. In short, if not by Paul or whomever, “kick it out.” This is no longer true. Arguments that a particular text was not written by its traditional or alleged author are attempts to provide a historical context and framework rather than to invalidate the material or to discharge it from the Bible.

The understanding of the functioning of pseudonymity has also changed. On the one hand, prior to modern printing and copyrights, the attribution of a text to a certain person had more to do with the authority invoked than with authorship. The production of pseudepigraphical compositions was an accepted and honored practice by students or admirers. The leading motive for such compositions was to provide fresh formulations of the master’s thought for a new situation, to make it “relevant” and “contemporary.”²² Finally, the general prejudice against the works of followers, “epigonids” or the like, is not warranted. Is Deutero-Isaiah an inferior work? Certainly not to Christians.

Excursus: Research on the Pauline Legacy

A full history of Paulinism would be a difficult project, probably beyond the scope of any single scholar.²³ Present-day scholarship focuses upon the reception of Paul. Two seminal works appeared in German in 1979, followed by an American dissertation in 1981. The value of these three contributions will be recognized by all who consult the subsequent footnotes.

Andreas Lindemann's *Paulus im ältesten Christentum* (Paul in Primitive Christianity) is noteworthy for its comprehensiveness and critical insight. If the book before you is selective, Lindemann approaches the encyclopedic. I am not attempting to replace him. A merit of Ernst Dassmann's engagingly titled *Der Stachel im Fleisch* (The Thorn in the Flesh)²⁴ is that he pursues his study through Irenaeus (180 CE), whereas Lindemann, whose research has concentrated upon Christian writings of the period up to c. 100 CE, closes with Marcion and the earliest apologists. On the other hand, Lindemann recognizes the value of the editing of the corpus for understanding the issues. Dassmann, a historian of early Christianity, is rather more moderate in his critical approach. The nearly simultaneous publication of these two studies indicates the congruity of method and view among Protestant and Roman Catholic scholars in Germany. The year 1981 saw the appearance of a Yale dissertation by David Rensberger, titled "As the Apostle Teaches: The Development of the use of Paul's Letters in Second-Century Christianity." This contribution was never published, primarily because of the recent appearance of Lindemann and Dassmann. In retrospect, this is regrettable, for Rensberger has a number of useful insights.

Subsequent decades have seen a profusion of work on individual studies and groups, such as the Pastoral Epistles and Colossians/Ephesians. Both particular and general studies have often appeared in collections of essays, most of which contain valuable contributions.²⁵ Contemporary attention to reception has not neglected the subsequent task of construction, since one cannot properly describe the subsequent Use and application of Paul without attending to the resulting portrait of the apostle. Finally, study of the reception of Paul cannot neglect divergent reception, that is, the continuing presence of intra-Pauline conflicts, which mark the process from beginning to end.

IN THE END, PAUL...

In Romans 15, Paul spoke of his plans to take to Jerusalem a collection raised by his gentile communities to Jerusalem. For Paul, the collection was a tool for forging church unity, an attempt to find a platform for unity that was not based upon perfect agreement in belief and practice. Just as his letters were instruments for the organization of individual churches, so the collection served to remind all believers of their fundamental unity in Christ and of their origins, with which the collection forged a concrete link. Romans 15:30-31 indicates that Paul had fears about the results, fears attributed to the designs of unbelievers. This is most probably the last time Paul's voice is heard from his surviving writings. For the results of that collection the only witness is the ambiguous hints of Acts 20-21.²⁶ In any case, the apostle was arrested in Jerusalem, sent eventually to Rome, and there executed. His last mission was on behalf of Church unity. This theme of unity assumed a growing role among his followers in the period after his death.

Among the crucial decades of nascent Christianity, that of 60s may be no less important than the 30s. Under Nero the East was recovering in the 60s from the rapacity of earlier Roman exploitation. The emperor himself would make a concert tour of Greece, crowning his triumphs with a proclamation of liberation. On the microscopically minute end of the scale, the fire ignited by Jesus had given birth to a number of vibrant if dimly visible movements. Three leaders of the movements were most prominent. One was James, a notably pious brother of Jesus who lived in Jerusalem. Although willing to include gentiles, James was most concerned for those who remained loyal to Israelite tradition and observed Torah. He was far from the most conservative early believer, but he lined up on the right, as it were. Paul, for his part, was not the most radical, but he represented the claim that gentiles could receive the promises of God without conforming to Torah. Lodge him on the left. Between these two stood a figure and symbol of moderation, Simon, nicknamed "the rock."²⁷ Peter, as we call him, pursued compromises that would strive to avoid offending the observant while incorporating gentiles. During the 60s, Paul was executed in Rome, according to tradition; Peter likewise, according to a somewhat mistier tradition; and James in Jerusalem, according to Josephus.²⁸ In 66, Judea and neighboring regions erupted in revolt, the results of which devastated the country and destroyed the Temple, which, together with that "land," had long been the glue that bound the people

together. A minor—at that time—result of the revolt was the disruption of the Christian community in Jerusalem.²⁹ Out of this cauldron of discontinuity there would emerge in subsequent generations two new “religions”: (an increasingly gentile) Christianity and formative Rabbinic Judaism.³⁰ For all the survivors, the crisis was acute. So long as the temple had constituted the basis for Jewish unity, room remained for a diversity of sects. The Pharisaic party, which had a program that did not require a temple, provided the dominant contribution to a new synthesis. Representatives of various “Jesus-movements” offered, for their part, rival syntheses. The ultimately decisive “orthodox” Christian synthesis emerged during the final quarter of the second century in the work of Irenaeus of Lyons.³¹ Earlier attempts at syntheses permeate the New Testament texts, the vast majority of which were written in the period *after* the deaths of Paul and the other apostles, in the 60s and later.

With the departure of the founders, a crisis of authority broke out. How were these nascent communities to be managed? One possibility was reliance upon direct revelation, the work of the Spirit in the life and worship of the community.³² Others appealed to the authority of Jesus manifested in his teachings, now being collected and beginning to achieve written form.³³ Those who belonged to the Pauline circle worshipped the exalted Christ and made relatively limited use of stories, traditions, and sayings of or about the “earthly” Jesus prior to his passion.³⁴ Leaders and others may have wished to support their authority by appeal to Paul, but he was gone. The communities founded by Paul (and his network) faced problems both numerous and large.³⁵ His followers, including, no doubt, some of his co-workers, had to struggle to maintain that heritage. One effort to preserve this inheritance emerges in Deutero-Paulinism, which is an element of what scholars call emergent early catholicism. This concept refers, in large part, to the gradual emergence of communities organized under episcopal leadership, with clear and comprehensive regulations and a theology based upon a synthesis of various trends, characteristics of which include suspicion of some of the more adventurous speculative approaches and a firm inclination to reject moral experimentation. Others took different paths. That was a long-term result. In the short term, matters were more fluid.

From the available data it is reasonable to postulate the emergence of one or more Pauline “schools,” in more or less the sense of ancient philosophy:³⁶ a nucleus of pupils engaged in the study and application of the master’s words. Ancient schools derived from authorities. If one task

of those involved in such a school was to preserve and transmit the writings of a master, an equally important responsibility was to interpret and update these teachings. Since the (written or oral) words of the master were the basis of authority in schools, the tendency to issue works under his name was quite customary. This practice, which we call pseudonymity, strikes present-day readers as quite improper. These values should not be imposed upon antiquity. It is not accidental that no Christian work from the period c. 60–c. 125 appears under the name of its actual author. All are either anonymous or pseudonymous. Authorship, for many ancient texts, refers more to authority and intellectual orientation than to composition. The use of such names as Plato, Enoch, or Paul as authorities relates to their authority or to the system invoked.

One mark of school activity is that Paul became an object of reading, whether at worship, in small groups, or in private. Public reading is mandated in 1 Thess. 5:27.³⁷ Reading as a reflective activity is apparent in Eph. 3:3-4 (“how the mystery was made known to me by revelation, as I have written briefly. When you read this you can perceive my insight into the mystery of Christ”). These verses indicate that Paul is now a written text for study, discussion, and reflection.³⁸

The production of various Deutero-Pauline epistles, as these texts are called, witnesses to the *success and form* of Paul’s technique of writing letters. Just as the transformation of Jesus’ parables and the production of new parables testify to the power of that form,³⁹ so these later epistles show that Paul’s authority endured and that his methods were deemed worthy of emulation. Individuals will have different positions about the authorship of this or that epistle, but all should understand and agree that their existence manifests flattery in its least adulterated form. One object of such “school” activity was to foster a sense of universalism, *to make the local work of Paul in various places catholic*. The social, rather than the historical, moral, or ideological, implications of pseudonymity are linked to the pursuit of broadened horizons. These “schools” sought to stabilize communities and relate them to the larger whole. Community growth, inter-connections with other churches, and interaction with the non-Christian world are all aspects of this phenomenon. Another is the subtle transformation of the understanding of Paul as an example and source of assistance for believers. These activities reflect variable stances toward the authority of Israelite scriptures.⁴⁰ Ephesus is the most likely seat for the earliest of such activities, which may have begun in Paul’s lifetime.⁴¹

The attempts to maintain Pauline communities after his martyrdom, to build connections with other parts of the Jesus movement/nascent Christian Church, resulted in a number of activities:⁴²

The development, as noted, of so-called early Catholicism, linked relatively conservative bodies in various locations to one another through communication and the sharing of various resources, including money.

The production of Deutero-Pauline letters was a major feature of this process.⁴³

The formation of a collection of Pauline epistles to be shared among the faithful and used as an authority included editorial efforts to transform the apostle's communications addressed to particular communities into general communications to all believers.

The composition of narrative and other texts about Paul, from which varied texts it is possible to discern underlying narratives. Letters contain or, more often, presume a story. One of the challenges of reading other people's mail is the reconstruction of those underlying narratives. As in the case of Jesus "the teacher," legends and stories about Paul developed. These legends, which often competed with one another, *preceded* the use of his letters in a wider sense—collected and shared—although, in the course of time, the letters could be included within them.⁴⁴

The "canonical," in several senses, form of this narrative constitutes what could be called, with some hesitation based upon both propriety and taste, a "paulology."⁴⁵ After his death, Paul was widely celebrated as a missionary, pastor, and martyr. Some of the motifs related to this post-mortem portrait of Paul are common to such otherwise different works as Colossians, Ephesians, Acts, the Pastoral Epistles, 1 Clement, and the *Acts of Paul*. In outline form, with intentionally "creedal" wording, these are:

Paul, the missionary/apostle to the gentiles,
evangelized the entire world and is now a figure within salvation
history.

Having once been an (essentially polytheist) unbeliever and persecutor,
Paul subsequently converted by the power of Christ. Paul
is a Redeemed Persecutor, the prototypical arch-sinner
who became beneficiary of grace.

Paul suffered and died, a martyr whose commitment to the gospel was
sealed by his salutary passion and death.

Paul remains as a hero,
a bearer of salvation,

a teacher of the church.

As a teacher Paul is a promulgator of virtuous conduct, an opponent of false teaching and will brook no deviation, and a champion of unity and ecclesiastical consolidation.⁴⁶

The portraits of Paul arising in early (and subsequent) Christianity did not, to reiterate, derive from a concern to preserve history for the benefit of subsequent investigators, but from the problems of those churches in their own times. These challenges helped to motivate the collection of Paul's highly esteemed letters.

Each of the elements in the foregoing narrative outline has some basis in Paul's life and writings, but they emerge in new forms and with new meanings after the crises following his death, the Jewish revolt, the proliferation of Jesus movements and followers, and various pressures upon believers in the Christ. This construct, this paulology, is not by necessity linked to Paul as a writer of letters—witness Acts. Others, however, continued the tradition of letter writing, seeking to enhance these images by means of texts purportedly written by Paul, as well as letters inspired by Pauline practice. The bare bones of this outline require a bit of flesh.

The Apostle

In the Deutero-Pauline letters and the *Acts of Paul* Paul is, in most instances, the only apostle.⁴⁷ Paul becomes *the* apostle without peer, even to those who have not heard him. “His apostleship transcends the particularities of time and place and encompasses the world.”⁴⁸ He alone writes, speaks, and acts.⁴⁹

The absent, suffering Paul became a substitute for the visiting Paul. This is to say that the martyr death of Paul both ruptured his relation to the communities he served and gave impetus to collect his letters as the apostolic deposit and bequest to his followers.⁵⁰ In some ways the dead Paul was more acceptable than a living apostle. One could more readily take exception to the letters of a living Paul; his death colored and changed the reception of his words. Just as the post-mortem Jesus became a universal savior, so the dead Paul greatly expanded the influence of his living predecessor.

Evangelist of the Entire World

As the apostle *par excellence*, Paul's apostolic field is not a single province, but “all creation.”⁵¹ Paul is not just the “minister” of the gospel but of the

church (Col. 1:24-25). The strength of Paul's authority is apparent in the effort to ascribe universality to his jurisdiction. Paul is the one apostle to all members of the one church, present and future. From the perspective of the object of unity, the Paul of the canonical Acts presents less of a contrast to the figure of the Deutero-Pauline letters than is sometimes asserted. Although not an apostle in Acts—the title is restricted to followers of the earthly Jesus—he is, like them, a witness,⁵² and, more importantly, gentile missionary *extraordinaire*. Peter, rather than Paul, had, with divine prodding, initiated the gentile mission, but Paul was its effective agent. For Acts, as for Ephesians, the success of the gentile mission raises the question of unity among Jewish and gentile believers. Once again, it is possible to point to the continuation of themes addressed already by Paul in Romans. Acts also affirms that Paul's arrest came as a result of his quest for unity. If the Paul of Acts is not in a literal sense the sole missionary to “the ends of the earth” (Acts 1:8), he is the essential instrument of that program. (In later texts *kēryx* [“herald”], with its sacral and universal connotations, emerges as a preferred description of Paul's role.⁵³) Ephesians trumpets a Paul who is more universal mystagogue than world-wide evangelist (Eph. 3:9). The concept of universality admits considerable variation.

To create a universal audience for Paul's message, the apostle's followers were obliged to let Paul's principle of not issuing orders to communities that he had not founded languish. Already in Colossians, “Paul” begins to address those who had not heard him (1:4). Ephesians does speak of “apostles” (somewhat awkwardly as figures of the apparent past),⁵⁴ but there is no doubt that Paul is the only significant representative of this group. The Pastoral Epistles (1 and 2 Timothy, Titus) likewise do not make the explicit claim that Paul is the only apostle, but he alone exercises and deputizes authority in the church.

Later acts and letters integrate the two approaches of the Deutero-Pauline letters and the canonical acts. *Third Corinthians*,⁵⁵ the Coptic *Apocalypse of Paul*, and the *Epistula Apostolorum*⁵⁶ link Paul, his teaching, and the subsequent gentile mission with the Twelve. The *Acts of Paul* does not provide details about other apostles, but leaves no doubt that Paul proclaims the words and deeds of Christ (that is, the contents of the written Gospels) in harmony with others.⁵⁷ The purpose of displaying Paul as more or less the only apostle and as the evangelist of the whole (gentile) world is not simply to glorify Paul, nor is it to denigrate other apostles. Behind this image lies the goal of forging unity among a number of scattered and diverse communities. It is typical of the process of heroization

that Paul needs no more than a few weeks to plant a successful mission and move on. The author of Acts is obliged to provide a rationale for lengthy stays, as in the vision of 18:9-11.⁵⁸

Several strategies served this pursuit of unity and universality. The geographical symbolism of Acts (1:8; 13:47)⁵⁹ and *1 Clement* (5:7, above) is apparent. Colossians and Ephesians are notable for their use of *pas* (“all, every”).⁶⁰ Every nation, person, race, and place is embraced. The cosmic christology and ecclesiology developed in those texts also serves to give the one church a single, worldwide horizon. Ephesians takes the process a step further by omitting personal greetings or local details: only the bearer, Tychichus, is named (6:21). This lack of detail and engagement with the readers, who are not even addressed with the characteristic “sisters and brothers,” is often laid against the text. Presuming that the writer could have concocted any details desired, or, like the author of Colossians, borrowed them,⁶¹ it is more likely that the author eschewed such devices in order to enhance the general applicability of the message.⁶²

Redeemed Sinner

New believers can identify with the “redeemed persecutor” who had been converted from a sinful life. Although this view is at some variance with Paul’s own self-understanding,⁶³ it constituted an important model for those who had turned away from the evils of the world. Among the most edifying, if least historically defensible, elements of the post-Pauline construct is the portrayal of “the pre-Christian Paul” as a vicious sinner, the veritable enemy of the people of God, and, more or less, as a gentile. First Timothy 1:12-17 is perhaps the most thoroughgoing example of this tendency:

I am grateful to Christ Jesus our Lord, who has strengthened me, because he judged me faithful and appointed me to his service, even though I was formerly a *blasphemer*, a persecutor, and a *man of violence*. But I received mercy because I had acted ignorantly in unbelief, and the grace of our Lord overflowed for me with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus. The saying is sure and worthy of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save *sinners—of whom I am the foremost*. But for that very reason I received mercy, so that in me, as the foremost, Jesus Christ might display the utmost patience, making me an example to those who would come to believe in him for eternal life. To the King of the ages, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen. (Emphasis added.)

Of the several terms, only “persecutor” belongs to Paul’s self-description.⁶⁴ The epithets “blasphemer” and “violent person” in v. 13⁶⁵ do not correspond to Paul’s view of his career, nor does he describe himself as the “foremost of sinners” (vv. 15-16). “Ignorance” (v. 13) brings to mind Acts 3:17; 17:30, and Eph. 4:18, where the term serves to explain, if not to excuse, *gentile* behavior.⁶⁶ The pre-conversion Paul of 1 Timothy is as ignorant as the idolatrous Athenians. The contrast between “pagan” and “Christian” Paul is central to the moral teaching of the Pastorals and their emphasis upon “law and order.” Paul is the prototypical sinner⁶⁷ and therefore the model convert.

First Timothy is not the sole witness to this tendency. The quite assuredly pre-Lucan legend of “The Conversion of Paul” (Acts 9) includes this remarkable phrase: “Who are you, Lord?” (v. 5). Such a question belongs to a polytheistic milieu, in which one needs to know just which particular god’s ire has been aroused and the reason for the epiphany. It is therefore quite at home in “conversion stories,”⁶⁸ but scarcely appropriate in the present context. Saul, as he is called in Acts, is quite aware of whom he is persecuting, and he had not learned at the feet of Gamaliel or elsewhere that there were many true lords. The persecutor presented here is a typical enemy of the people of God, and to all intents and purposes a polytheist sinner.⁶⁹

Acts depicts the persecuting Paul as a bloodthirsty beast, the personification of *mania* (“raging insanity”).⁷⁰ Only the most vicious and twisted of officials would seize *and bind* women no less than men. In Acts 26:10, Paul advises Agrippa that he had consistently voted for the death penalty against followers of Jesus. The confrontation with the risen one transformed Paul from darkness to light, error to truth, madness⁷¹ to moderation, “*le miracle des miracles*.”⁷²

The Paul of Eph. 3:8 is pleased to characterize himself as “the most insignificant of saints.”⁷³ This interesting modification of 1 Cor. 15:9 (“least among the *apostles*”) follows the same path. Paul has a past so sinful that he could scarcely dare raise his head but for the grace of God.⁷⁴ Ephesians 2:3—“All of us once lived among them in the passions of our flesh, following the desires of flesh and senses, and we were by nature children of wrath, like everyone else”⁷⁵—indicates that this understanding of the pre-Christian Paul had taken hold by the close of the first century.⁷⁶

The parenetic and catechetical utility of this contrast between wretched sinner and mild-mannered apostle is patent. Paul illuminates both virtue and vice, with conversion providing the means and point of

radical change, the pivot for the shift of eons now construed in terms of individual conversions. No longer the immediate agent of gentile conversions, Paul becomes the very model of the modern majority, a gentile convert, a figure with whom such converts can identify and to whom they may look for both inspiration and guidance.⁷⁷

Suffering and Saving

Paul's life as a Christian missionary was, so to speak, no bed of roses. Rather than regard his misfortunes as inexplicable, due to bad luck or the like, the historical Paul regarded his suffering as authentication of his apostolic credentials,⁷⁸ verification that he was an imitator of Christ. Post-Pauline products did not neglect this feature of his existence. They intensified it.

Paul's proper place was in jail. To the undisputed "imprisonment epistles," Philippians and Philemon, were added Colossians, Ephesians, 2 Timothy, 3 *Corinthians*, and *Laodiceans*. Acts reports a number of apprehensions and incarcerations, culminating with the arrest in Jerusalem of ch. 21.⁷⁹ For the residue of Acts, Paul remains, at least technically, a prisoner. In *1 Clem.* 5:7, the number of his imprisonments has reached the altogether satisfactory total of seven.⁸⁰ The *Acts of Paul* reports imprisonments in Iconium,⁸¹ Ephesus,⁸² Philippi,⁸³ and Rome.⁸⁴

In all of these contexts the theme of imprisonment gave scope for the development of rhetorical pathos with its capacity for moving the reader. Second Timothy 4 is the most extravagant example of this potential. No doubt such stories provided inspiration to Christians faced with actual arrest and imprisonment. In the epistolary tradition, imprisonment also functions as an element of post-mortem *parousia* ("presence"). Superficially, the apostle cannot visit in person because he is in prison. The continuing vitality of epistolary *parousia* is affirmed by an imitator, Polycarp:

Not that I should be taking on myself to write to you in this way about the life of holiness, my brothers and sisters, if you yourselves had not invited me to do so. For I am as far as anyone else of my sort from having the wisdom of our blessed and glorious Paul. During his residence with you he gave the people of those days clear and sound instruction in the word of truth, while he was there in person among them; and even after his departure he still sent letters that, if you study them attentively, will enable you to make progress in the faith which was delivered to you. (*Smyrn.* 3.1-3)⁸⁵

At a symbolic level, imprisonment gives scope for the use of bonds and prison as images for death.⁸⁶ It is possible that this symbolism provided a kind of cloak for authors (and readers?) of pseudonymous texts. Presence through absence is used in Acts at the point of Paul's greatest success: the mission to Ephesus. Paul is rarely "off-stage" from Acts 15 through 28, but he is not described as personally active in 19:13-20, 23-40. Explanations of this odd phenomenon tend to focus upon the apologetic desire to remove Paul as far as possible from the riot. This has merit, but it is also valid, and perhaps more cogent, to look to the Ephesian church of Luke's era, where Paul was present by reputation and by legend, in message and in memory. The absent Paul continues to care for the flock.⁸⁷

Later tradition and literature glorify and magnify Paul's suffering, which becomes a leading means through which the gospel is spread (Col. 1:24-28).⁸⁸ Rather than inhibit his work, suffering provides the central impetus to growth.⁸⁹ In the canonical and apocryphal Acts persecution is a leading motive of the plot.⁹⁰ Persecution, intended to suppress the mission, backfires because it does no more than drive the apostle on to new sites. If the various Acts give full range to the possibility for edifying narrative, the Pastorals provide occasion for making the moral implications and example clear. Second Timothy 3:10-11, for instance, says:

Now you have observed my teaching, my conduct, my aim in life, my faith, my patience, my love, my steadfastness, my persecutions and suffering the things that happened to me in Antioch,⁹¹ Iconium, and Lystra. What persecutions I endured! Yet the Lord rescued me from all of them.

Utilizing persecution as the mainspring of mission in the narrative works may appear to be a relatively harmless literary device. By reading these accounts together with the epistles, one perceives the underlying *theologoumenon*: because Paul's suffering enables the gospel to spread, it has soteriological significance.⁹² In the undisputed correspondence, Paul had already played with the correspondence between absent savior and absent apostle, with the themes of *parousia* and *apousia* (presence and absence).⁹³ Following his death, the absent, suffering Paul became a substitute for the visiting Paul. Like Jesus, who had also suffered, he remained "present in spirit." Colossians 2:5—"For though I am absent in body, yet I am with you in spirit, and I rejoice to see your morale and the firmness of your faith in Christ"—doubtless takes its impetus from expressions such as that found in 1 Cor. 5:3,⁹⁴ but there has been a major shift. Paul, like

the Christ of Matthew (Matt. 28:18-20, and so on), is always with his followers, observing—rather like Santa Claus in the cautionary song—the actions of those around him.

Although Colossians is apparently the earliest of the Deutero-Paulines and closest to Paul in thought and style, this text assimilates Paul to Christ in some remarkable ways. Not only is the apostle present in spirit, but his sufferings also have a vicarious effect. Accommodations of Paul’s “passion” to that of his master raise few questions so long as they are regarded as imitating Christ. Some texts may, however, go beyond such “mere” parallelism.

Best known are the “Jesus–Paul parallels” of Luke and Acts,⁹⁵ where the narrator’s intentions become patent in the reciprocity of “influences.” At points, Luke may have adjusted the Gospel account to correspond with that of Acts.⁹⁶ In any case, the similarities are numerous enough to demand attention. The author intended to show a close correspondence between the ministry and passion of the two leading heroes (and others). Why, then, does Luke not narrate the death of Paul, an event of which he was surely aware?⁹⁷ There are strong arguments for interpreting Acts 27–28 as a symbolic narration of Paul’s death and resurrection.⁹⁸ Such readings are open to challenge. In this instance, the Lucan parallels and the internal imagery of Luke and Acts provide both impetus and control. Those who prefer a “concrete” reading of the surface text must deal not only with the problem of the length of the account, exciting as it is, but also with Paul’s essentially free status following his delivery from the deep. Has the narrator forgotten (for a while) that Paul is supposed to be a prisoner?⁹⁹

If the living and abiding Paul with whom Acts leaves the reader has experienced a kind of crossing over from death to life, the narrators of Colossians and Ephesians speak from heaven, as it were, to believers urged to share with him the heavenly throne of God.¹⁰⁰ Second Thessalonians also grounds salvation with Paul and his colleagues.¹⁰¹ The narrative approach of the *Acts of Paul* is quite explicit.¹⁰²

Paul the Teacher

The general tendency of the post-Pauline period was to promote Paul as a “teacher of righteousness” (e.g., *1 Clem.* 5:7). The “righteousness” (*dikaiosynē*) in view was not justification by faith but proper conduct.¹⁰³ This view of the apostle as first and foremost an instructor in good behavior dominated proto-orthodox writing until the late second century.

The value of Paul's words for hammering false teachers was also prominent in the first three decades of the second century (note Acts, Pastoral Epistles, Polycarp), but then fell into desuetude. Here the impact of Marcion and various "Gnostics" is apparent. Until Irenaeus (c. 180), the major exponents of Pauline theology belonged to the heretical side of the eventual division. The proto-orthodox stressed his moral message. The nature of that message was crystallized in the "Household Codes" that first appeared in Colossians and remained prominent in texts directly or indirectly associated with Paul (Ephesians, 1 Peter, *1 Clement*, the Pastoral Epistles, Ignatius, Polycarp).¹⁰⁴

The Codes show Paul as also a general manager of families and communities who is able to issue firm, universally applicable instructions. They presume, in conjunction with the ancient world in general, a society that is both stable and congruent with the universal (as they saw it) empire. The Deutero-Pauline tendency to shift from temporal (eschatological) to spatial categories and images is another means through which universalism is implemented.¹⁰⁵

CONCLUSION

There are a number of ways in which the formation and proliferation of traditions about Jesus and Paul are similar. In both cases, followers set out to preserve his heritage by producing texts from oral and written traditions. The process included the amalgamation of different genres, the editing of multiple texts into one, experiments with different sorts of editions, and the production of "apocrypha."¹⁰⁶

Universalism was another interest. In this matter Paul had a head start, as it were, through his explicitly gentile and ecumenical mission, but followers took pains to make his occasional letters to specific communities applicable to believers everywhere. Matthew, John, and Luke (as well as the composer of Mark 16:9-20¹⁰⁷) sought to establish the worldwide, inclusive character of the Jesus movement. Universalism is not simply a missionary ideal. It serves also to make the particular Galilean and Judean teachings of Jesus and the occasional instructions of Paul to particular communities general.¹⁰⁸

Paul came to have an advantage that Jesus lacked: a sinful past that in itself exemplified the benefits of conversion. He was a figure with whom gentile converts could find identification as well as inspiration. Both Jesus and Paul gathered disciples or followers to whom they delivered their

message and over whom they exercised spiritual and pastoral care.¹⁰⁹ For both Jesus and Paul, heroic suffering came to play a decisive role. The gospels that achieved normative status among mainstream believers were those based upon the “creedal” shape introduced by Mark, namely, the suffering, dying, and rising Son of God. What validated Jesus’ message and saved his followers was not the specific content of his ethical teaching, nor his great deeds, but the offering of his own life on the cross. In the course of time Paul’s suffering not only acquires romantic hues; it also comes to have redemptive significance. The bringer of salvation is also a savior. It need not be said that a rather full repertory of saving deeds, exorcisms, healings, and resurrections, accompanied that emphasis.

This is not to suggest that Paul becomes a competitor with his Lord for membership in the Holy Trinity. The goal of this survey is to state that the development of writings about and of Jesus and Paul followed some similar lines because they were responses to similar problems and elements of projects seeking to maintain and nurture the heritage of faith.

This introduction has presented a summary of the big picture, the major limbs of the tree, at a high level of generalization. Hereafter the subject will be twigs and leaves, as well as various small branches. (See the diagram of the Pauline “family tree,” Appendix.) This is to say that this introduction really is an introduction, a map of the sites to be visited and a structure to be held in mind while examining the various texts.

The following table attempts to highlight the extent to which problems about authorship and whether the canonical text is a single letter pervade the corpus.

■ **Table 2: Letters Attributed to Paul in the Early Church**

(Note: The letter marks should be viewed loosely as an academic metaphor. An “A” does not represent excellence, however. A high “grade” of authenticity indicates a high degree of scholarly consensus that the text was written by Paul; a high “grade” of integrity indicates that the extant “letter” corresponds to the original scope of a single document.)

Text	Authenticity	Integrity
Romans	A	B+ ¹¹⁸
1 Corinthians	A	B+ ¹¹⁹
2 Corinthians	A	C- ¹²⁰
Galatians	A	A
Ephesians ¹¹⁰	C-	A
Philippians	A	B- ¹²¹
Colossians	C	B ¹²²
1 Thessalonians	A	[118]
2 Thessalonians	C	A(-) ¹²³
1 Timothy	D	A ¹²⁴
2 Timothy	D	A
Titus	D	A
Philemon	A	A
Hebrews ¹¹¹	D-	A-
3 Corinthians ¹¹²	F	A
Laodiceans ¹¹³	F ¹¹⁷	A ¹²⁵
Paul and Seneca ¹¹⁴	F	A
Alexandrines ¹¹⁵	F	—
Others ¹¹⁶	F	—

Only in the cases of Galatians and (the tiny) Philemon is there a high degree of agreement that the texts were, in fact, written by Paul and preserved intact. Both the order, placement, and contents of the Pauline corpus varied considerably in ancient manuscripts and lists.