

Neither did I receive it from man, nor was I taught it, except through revelation by Jesus Christ.

The good news which was declared by [Paul] as good news is not something human.

Did a “Governing Body” govern Paul?

Readings (part 2 of 2)

Paul, an apostle, neither from men nor through a man.

When God ... called me ... I did not go at once into conference with flesh and blood.

Neither did I [Paul] go up to Jerusalem to those who were apostles previous to me. ... Three years later I went up to Jerusalem.

After fourteen years I [Paul] again went up to Jerusalem. ... I went up as a result of a revelation.

James and Cephas and John, the ones who seemed to be pillars... imparted nothing new [to Paul].

[Paul] resisted [Cephas] face to face, because [Cephas] stood condemned.

Hagar means Sinai a mountain in Arabia, and she corresponds with the Jerusalem today, for she is in slavery with her children

If we or an angel out of heaven were to declare to you as good news something beyond what we declared to you as good news, let him be accursed.

Doug Mason

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Did a “Governing Body” govern Paul?

READINGS

The *Study* is available at:

http://www.jwstudies.com/Did_a_Governing_Body_govern_Paul_Part_1_-_The_Study_.pdf

ADDRESS AT THE GRADUATION OF THE 59TH CLASS OF GILEAD

Fred Franz, Vice President and Principal Bible Scholar of the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society
7 September 1975

It is a privilege that is to be esteemed for anyone to give a talk to a class of missionaries attending the Watchtower Bible School of Gilead and it is my privilege this morning to take advantage of my first opportunity to speak to this graduating class, number 59.

Now this class is being sent forth in collaboration with the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York incorporated by the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of Pennsylvania.

Now, the question may be raised today: what right does the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society have to send missionaries out into the field? Or evangelizers? The American Translation renders the word evangelizer: Missionary.

Who authorized the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of Pennsylvania to send missionaries all around the globe?

Now such challenging questions may be also raised with an earlier circumstance and that is based on the fact that the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society was founded by a man who became an evangelizer of world note; one of the most eminent evangelizers of this 20th century and especially attaining global fame when he made his trip around the world in the year 1912. That man was Charles Taze Russell of Allegheny, Pennsylvania.

Now, I've often wondered about this matter, and maybe you have too. Just HOW did Russell become an evangelizer –WHO made him an evangelizer?

At the time that he lived, this professed Christian organization that was symbolized in Jesus' parable by the dragnet that gathered in fish suitable and unsuitable for orthodox Jews to eat, this professed Christian organization was still in operation and was gathering in these different qualities of symbolic fish.

That meant that the various religious establishments of Christendom were in operation. For instance, there was the Anglican Church with its ruling body and the Protestant Episcopal Church with its ruling body. There was the Methodist Church with its conference. There was also the Presbyterian Church to which Russell used to belong with its synod. There was also the Congregational Church which Russell joined with its central congregation. But by none of these controlling organizations of this dragnet organization was Russell made an evangelizer or a missionary.

Well now, since Russell broke away from all these religious institutions of Christendom they didn't recognize him and he became known as Pastor Russell and I remember how the clergy would raise the question: Who made him a Pastor?

So the validity of his ministry was questioned and challenged by the clergy of this dragnet organization about which the Lord Jesus Christ spoke in the 13th chapter of Matthew.

So, in view of those things I often wondered, now how did Russell become what he did become, and maybe you've wondered about the matter too. So I just began to think about the 1st Century when this Christian evangelistic work or missionary work was first started.

Now, the word evangelizer, or evangelizers, is a rare word in the Bible, it occurs only three times — twice *evangelizer* and once *evangelizers*. Now we remember how Jesus sent forth his twelve Apostles, and then he sent afterwards seventy disciples of his to go out preaching the good news of the Kingdom. And these 70 disciples are generally differentiated from the 12 Apostles by being called evangelists or evangelizers.

And so there were 70 of these evangelizers that the Lord Jesus Christ sent forth. Now the record says that he sent them forth by two's. Now we're not to imagine that by sending these 70 evangelizers — if we're allowed to use that term — because they did preach the evangel of the good news of the Kingdom — by sending them forth by two's, the Lord Jesus Christ was not creating each two a committee, so that for the 70 evangelizers there were 35 committees of two.

Well, you Missionaries, you're being sent forth today after your graduation as missionaries. The last telegram we heard was about two being sent to Bolivia. Then there are others who are being sent, maybe four or six or eight to a different country as assignment for work.

Now don't you missionaries think because you are being sent forth two together – or maybe four, or six, or maybe eight – that you are being sent forth as a committee to take over the work in the land to which you are assigned.

No such thing. You are being sent forth as individual *missionaries* to cooperate together, and to cooperate with the branch of the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society which is operating and directing the work in the land to which you are assigned to act as an evangelizer. So don't get this committee idea into your head because you are being sent out in groups to a special land.

Now, Jesus Christ finished his course as the greatest evangelizer of all, and then time moves on, and there is a man who comes on the scene, and he is the only one who is directly called an evangelizer. That's his personal title. We find it in Acts chapter 21 verse 8, and that is Philip of Caesarea.

And when Paul visited him on his stopover there at Caesarea, why, he was called Philip the *evangelizer*. He's the *only one*. Paul told Timothy in his final letter, 2 Timothy 4 verse 5 that he should do the work of an evangelizer but Philip is the one who is directly, and the only one thus called personally an evangelizer. But of course we know there were other evangelizers. Now how did this man come on the scene, and who made him an evangelizer or missionary? Now that's the point to observe.

Well, we remember how the scripture in Ephesians 4, verse 11 tells us how the Lord Jesus Christ ascended on high and led a body of captives and how he gave gifts in the form of men. Verse 11 says he gave some as Apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelizers, and some as shepherds and teachers.

The Lord Jesus Christ, the Head of the Congregation, He gave not only apostles, not only prophets, but also *evangelizers*. Now how did this Philip become an evangelizer of note, of special mention in the Bible? Well you know how he came on the scene.

Trouble arose in the Jerusalem congregation which was expanding and embracing Greek-speaking Jews as well as the Hebrew-speaking Jews, and there was complaint made because evidently there was prejudice against the non-Hebrew speaking Jews, against the widows who spoke the Greek language which was the universal language of the day.

But yet there was some sort of prejudice against these foreign language talkers among the disciples. They weren't receiving their allowance of food to their satisfaction and the problem came up before the Apostles of Jesus Christ, and what did they do?

Well, they told the whole congregation to recommend seven men who were really spiritual characters whom they the apostles might approve over this business. And so there were seven who were recommended and the first two were Stephen and also this Philip, and then others.

And the apostles appointed them to be over this business. Well now, if you look up the McClintock and Strong's *Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge* you find that the work that the Apostles assigned to these seven men is called a semi-secular work. But the Apostles didn't want that semi-secular work. They unloaded it off on to these seven men and said "you take care of that".

"Well", they said "we're going to specialize on prayers and teaching".

Now, were these 12 Apostles of the Lord Jesus Christ, by unloading this responsibility for taking care of tables, were they making of themselves really figureheads in the congregation of God and of Jesus Christ?

They certainly were not making themselves figureheads because they specialized on spiritual things. They were more active at the spiritual end of the matter than at the semi-secular end of the matter.

So things prospered when they did that, when they rendered the things to which they had not been appointed by Jesus Christ as Apostles to take care of as his witnesses to all the congregation.

And they specialized on preaching, and the Lord God blessed them. Now we find with regard to this Philip that he left this job of taking care of tables at Jerusalem. Did you know that? He left that job, and he went down to Samaria, and when he was down there in Samaria he did a preaching work and performed many signs and wonders. And it was because of the work that he did down there and afterwards that he became an evangelist. Now who made Philip an evangelist, or evangelizer?

Oh, you say, “The Apostles! The body of Apostles! Of *course*; it couldn’t be any other *way*”.

But was it? We read the account; let the Bible speak for itself: it was because of the persecution that was stirred up by Saul of Tarsus that, the record says, that all the disciples; all of the members of the Jewish congregation were scattered from the scene except the twelve apostles. And so Philip, as one of the refugees, or the fugitives, he went down to Samaria and he preached just as the Bible says all the others who were scattered went preaching. And Jehovah was especially with Philip and he established a congregation there, and it was only later when the Apostles heard about this, what was going on down there that they dispatched two members of the Apostolic body to go down there and see that they had the holy spirit of God imparted to them. And then after that what happened?

Why, God Jehovah’s angel talks to Philip and says now YOU go, this is the assignment to YOU from Jehovah’s angel, you go down to the road that leads southward from Jerusalem to Gaza. And he went down there on that assignment from Jehovah’s angel!

And then is when he had the encounter with the Ethiopian Eunuch and he baptized him and after the baptism, why, he was quickly caught away, or led away by God’s spirit, and he went down there to the Philistine seacoast and up the coast of Caesarea where he settled down and they had four daughters. And he was there as an evangelist when the apostle Paul came on that boat trip back to the Holy land.

So that’s what happened with Philip; how he became an evangelizer. Now these are things to note friends!

Then something happened right after that and the Lord Jesus Christ took action, and he took direct action without consulting any man or body of men on earth!

And that’s when he, the head of the congregation, met Saul of Tarsus the persecutor there in the road leading to Damascus. He stopped him and he said, “Now this is a chosen vessel under me. I’m choosing him as the head of the church without consulting any people on earth.” And He chose Saul to be an evangelizer to carry the message, not only to the Jews but also to all the Gentile nations.

Well, What about Jerusalem and the body down there? Later on the account tells us that Barnabas took Paul, or Saul of Tarsus, down to Jerusalem, but they were all afraid of him. And Saul of Tarsus, or Paul, tells us that when they went up there to Jerusalem he saw none of the Apostles, except Peter with whom he spent 15 days, and also the apostle James. Those are the only two! Then he went back to Tarsus and he continued on in his labors.

Well, later on, why, Barnabas was sent down there to Antioch and he ended up. Saul brought him there, and they taught in Antioch for quite a while. Paul became a member of the Antioch congregation, and he was one of the prophets there in that congregation specially mentioned.

And then, all of a sudden as he was serving there in Antioch – in Syria – not in Israel, but in Syria, why, God’s spirit spoke to that congregation there in Antioch and said now, of all things you set aside — this congregation in Antioch – YOU set aside these two men namely Barnabas and Saul for the work for which I have commissioned them.

And so the Antioch congregation did that. And they laid their hands upon Paul, or Saul, and Barnabas and *sent them forth*, as a number of translations read, sent em forth!

And then they went forth by the holy spirit operating through the Antioch congregation and they went out on their first missionary assignment. So you see, the Lord Jesus Christ was acting as the Head of the congregation and taking action directly; without consulting anybody here on earth what he could do or what he could not do!

And he acted in that way with regard to Saul and Barnabas, and they were both Apostles of the Antioch congregation, and so they went out on the work and had great success.

And in the course of time they completed their first missionary tour, and where did they go?

WHERE DID THEY REPORT?

Well there's a record, you read it for yourself in the closing verses of the 14th Chapter of Acts. **THEY WENT BACK TO ANTIOCH**, to the congregation there and the account says, "They related things in detail to them, to this congregation that had committed them to the undeserved kindness of God for the work that they had performed".

So there's where they reported! So, the record also says, now they stayed in Antioch "not a little time". Well note what happened. All of a sudden something occurs and Paul and Barnabas they go up to Jerusalem. Well, what's the matter? What brings them up to Jerusalem?

Well, is it the body of the Apostles and the other elders of the Jerusalem congregation that have summoned them up there and said, look here! We have heard that you two men have gone out on a missionary tour and you've finished it and you haven't come up here to Jerusalem to report to us!

DO YOU KNOW WHO WE ARE? We're the council of Jerusalem!

Don't you recognize the headship of the Lord Jesus Christ? If you don't come on up here in a hurry we're going to take disciplinary action against you!

Is that what the account says?

Well if they had acted that way toward Paul and Barnabas because they reported to the congregation by means of which the holy spirit had sent them out, then this council of Jerusalem of apostles and other elders of the Jewish Congregation **WOULD HAVE PUT THEMSELVES ABOVE THE HEADSHIP OF THE LORD JESUS CHRIST!**

But that isn't what occurred. You know what happened; how Jews came down from Jerusalem and stirred up the matter of circumcision and it troubled the congregation there in Antioch so much that the **ANTIOCH CONGREGATION SENT PAUL AND BARNABAS UP TO JERUSALEM** to have the council settle the issue. And of course being sent by the congregation of Antioch they had to come back and report and advise the congregation of the settlement of the question of the decision that was made by the council there at Jerusalem.

And **THEN IT WAS** when they were arguing in favor of Christians from the gentiles not having to be circumcised like Jews it was **THEN** that Paul and Barnabas told what God had done by means of them in the Gentile world. And **THEN** it was that the council got the report.

Then they went back to Antioch, which had sent them forth to make known the decision and the Jerusalem council, why, sent along two men Judas and Silas with them. And so they delivered the report from the council, and there was great rejoicing among the Gentile believers.

Now time passes, and Paul and Barnabas are at Antioch. And what occurs now? Well, do they receive an assignment from somewhere on their next move? The account says that the two men, Paul and Barnabas, Paul said to him, he said, "Of all things let us go and visit the congregations that we have established". And they were agreed on this matter.

And then the matter of accompanying them came up. Who was going to go with them? And Barnabas was in favor of Mark - young Mark. But Paul didn't want him because he had left them in Pamphylia in Asia Minor and had not gone along with them to the finish of the first missionary tour.

So Paul didn't have any confidence in Mark for the time being. And they had a great altercation, as you know and it resulted in a split and Barnabas took along Mark. And it proved to be a good choice because afterwards Paul appreciated now the faithfulness of Mark and said, he is a useful servant even to me. But what about Paul? Well, he chose Silas, or Silvanus, as his companion in his missionary tour.

And here's one thing we must note again – now this happened up in Antioch towards the close of the 15th chapter of Acts, it says that after Paul and Barnabas had been commended by the brothers of the Antioch congregation to the underserved Kindness of God that they went forth on the second missionary tour of the apostle Paul.

So again, the Antioch congregation is being used to send out missionaries of great eminence in Bible history.

Then later on, after completing the second missionary tour, the apostle Paul finally returns to Antioch, and then Acts 18 verse 23 tells us that after he had spent some time in Antioch in Syria, then he started out on his 3rd missionary tour.

And he was a man who wanted to break fresh ground; he didn't like to build on another man's foundation. When another man had pioneered the way as an evangelizer, but he wanted to break new ground — and that's what he did.

And so, as we examine this account of these two most outstanding among the missionaries recorded in Bible history, we find that they were sent off specially by the Lord Jesus Christ — the Head of the Church. A fact which the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society has upheld and accepted ever since the Society was formed.

So we see how the Lord Jesus Christ as the Head of the Church has the right to act direct without any other organizations in view no matter who we are

He is the Head of the Church, and we can't challenge what HE does".

THE WILD DIVERSITY OF THE EARLY CHRISTIAN CHURCH¹

To put the process of canonization into its proper context, we need to know something about the wild diversity of the early Christian movement during its early centuries. You might think that from the beginning, Christianity was always basically one thing: a religion descended from Jesus, as interpreted by Paul, leading to the church of the Middle Ages on down to the present. But things were not at all that simple. About a hundred fifty years after Jesus' death we find a wide range of different Christian groups claiming to represent the views of Jesus and his disciples but having completely divergent perspectives, far more divergent than anything even that made it into the New Testament.

Who were some of these groups?

The Ebionites

The Ebionites were a group of Christians who were converted Jews who insisted on maintaining their Jewishness and on following the laws God had given Moses, as found in the Hebrew Bible, all while believing that Jesus was the Messiah sent from God for the salvation of the world. We do not know where their name comes from. Most scholars think that it derives from the Hebrew word *ebyon*, which means "the poor." Possibly these Christians followed Jesus' command to give up everything for the sake of the Gospel and had taken on voluntary poverty as part of their religious devotion, much like the first followers of Jesus as described in the book of Acts (Acts 2:44-45; 4:32). The Ebionites almost certainly claimed to be the spiritual descendants of these first followers and like them understood that faith in Jesus did not entail a break with Judaism but the proper interpretation of it, the religion revealed to Moses by God on Mount Sinai.

Some scholars have thought that the Ebionites may have held views very much like those of the first followers of Jesus, such as his brother James or his disciple Peter, both leaders of the church in Jerusalem in the years after Jesus' death. James in particular appears to have held to the ongoing validity of the Jewish law for all followers of Jesus. His view, and evidently that of the Ebionites later, was that Jesus was the Jewish Messiah sent from the Jewish God to the Jewish people in fulfillment of the Jewish law. Therefore, anyone who wanted to follow Jesus had to be Jewish. If a gentile man converted to the faith, he had to be circumcised, since circumcision always had been the requirement of a male to become a follower of the God of Israel, as God himself demanded in the law (Genesis 17:10-14).

Eventually the apostle Paul came along and insisted the opposite, that the God of Jesus was the God of all people and that gentiles did not have to become Jewish to follow Jesus. For Paul, doing what the law required could not put a person into a right standing with God, and trying to keep the law was pointless when it came to salvation.

Paul ended up winning this argument, but for centuries there were Christians who disagreed with him, including the Ebionites. They did not view Paul as the great apostle of the faith; he was the one who had gotten the fundamentals of the faith precisely wrong.

The Ebionites were strict Jewish monotheists. As such, they did not think that Jesus was himself divine. There could be only one God. Instead, Jesus was the human appointed by God to be the Messiah. He was not born of a virgin: his parents were Joseph and Mary, and he was a very righteous man whom God had adopted to be his son and to whom he had given a mission of dying on the Cross to atone for the sins of others.

You might wonder why the Ebionites didn't just read their New Testaments to see that Jesus was born of a virgin, was himself divine, had abrogated the Jewish law, and was correctly proclaimed by Paul. They couldn't read the New Testament because there was as yet no New Testament. The Ebionites had their own sacred books, along with the Hebrew Bible, that proclaimed their points of view, including a Gospel that looked very much like our Gospel of Matthew (the most "Jewish" of our Gospels), but without its first two chapters, which narrate the virgin birth.

¹ *Jesus, Interrupted*, pages 191-198. Bart Ehrman

The Marcionites

At the opposite end of the theological spectrum were the Marcionites, followers of Marcion, a famous preacher-theologian of the second century from Asia Minor, who spent a few years in Rome before being expelled from the church and moving back to Asia Minor, where he established numerous churches in lots of cities.

Unlike the Ebionites, Marcion understood Paul as the great hero of the faith, the one apostle who actually understood Jesus and his relation to the Jewish law. As we have seen, Paul drew a distinction between the law given by Moses, which could not bring salvation, and the gospel of Jesus, which could. Marcion thought that this distinction was absolute: the Jewish law and the gospel of Jesus had nothing in common. The law was one thing (for Jews), the gospel was another (for Christians).

Marcion wrote a book called the *Antitheses* (literally, “Contrary Statements”) that showed the absolute dichotomy between the God of the Old Testament and the God of Jesus. The God of the Old Testament was a wrathful, vengeful God of judgment; the God of Jesus was a loving and merciful God of salvation. How different were these two Gods? Marcion drew a logical conclusion: these were two different Gods.

The God of the Old Testament had created this world, chosen Israel to be his people, given them his law, and then condemned them, and everyone else, to eternal punishment when they disobeyed. The God of Jesus had nothing to do with this creation, Israel, or the law, and came into this world to save people from the wrath of the Old Testament God. He did this by having Jesus die on the cross, to take the wrath of God upon himself. Those who have faith in Jesus can therefore escape the clutches of the vengeful God of the Jews.

In this interpretation, Jesus was not and could not be a human being. That would make him physical, part of the physical creation, a creature of the creator God. According to Marcion, Jesus only seemed to be a human but was actually a divine being, pure and simple. Marcion’s opponents called this view of Christ “docetism,” from the Greek word *dokeo* (“to seem, to appear”). Jesus appeared in the likeness of human flesh, as Paul says (Romans 8:3); he did not really become flesh.

Consequently, per Marcion, the followers of Jesus were not to be associated with Jews or Judaism in any form. They were to be followers of Jesus and of Paul, the one apostle who understood Jesus.

Marcion had his own list of sacred books, but obviously not those of the Ebionites. His canon consisted of the ten letters of Paul that he knew (all of our thirteen, apart from the Pastoral Epistles) and a form of the Gospel of Luke. All of these books, though, are problematic in terms of the support they offer for Marcion’s views, since they quote the Old Testament (the book of the “other” God) and seem to assume that the Creation was made by the true God. Marcion believed that all of these books had been altered by the scribes who copied them, who did not understand the truth of the Gospel. And so Marcion produced his own version of his eleven books of Scripture (he did not, of course, include the Old Testament in his canon), a truncated version that eliminated the scribal changes that tied Jesus to the creator God.

The Various Groups of Gnostics

Scholars debate whether or not the Christians called Gnostics constitute one group or a bunch of roughly similar groups, or a number of groups without much in common. I won’t go into all of the scholarly debates here, but simply indicate that I think there were multiple groups of Gnostics that had some basic theological views in common and that it is heuristically useful to think about these groups together, as “Gnostic.” (Of course there were differences, too, otherwise they would not be separate groups.)

They are called Gnostic, from the Greek *gnosis*, “knowledge,” because they maintained that knowledge, not faith, was necessary for salvation. But knowledge of what? Knowledge of how this world came into existence and, yet more important, of who you really are.

Specifically, you need to know who you are, where you came from, how you got here, and how you can return. The assumption of the various Gnostic groups was that some of us do not come from here, on this earth, and do not belong here. We come from another realm, a heavenly place, and we have

become entrapped in the evil confines of our bodies. We need to learn how to escape, and for that we need secret knowledge (*gnosis*).

The Gnostics believed that this world is not the creation of the one and only true God. Instead, there are many divine beings in the heavenly realm, even if all of them were generated from the ultimate divinity, and this world was an afterthought, the creation of lower, inferior, and ignorant divinities. Its creation was a kind of cosmic disaster, the result of a catastrophe that took place in the divine realm. In part the world was created in order to provide a place of imprisonment for elements of the divine. Some of us have these sparks of the divine within us. We need to learn the truth about this world and the world above, and about our true identity, in order to escape and return to our heavenly home.

What does this have to do with being a follower of Jesus? In the Christian Gnostic systems (there were also non-Christian varieties), Jesus is a divine being who has come down from the divine realm in order to communicate the secret knowledge of salvation to the spirits who have been entrapped here. This knowledge includes an account of how the divine realm itself came into being, how the catastrophic material creation came to exist, and how elements of the divine managed to become entrapped here. Without Jesus we could not have this knowledge. He really is the savior of our souls.

Of course Jesus himself could not be an entrapped spirit. Some Gnostics agreed with Marcion that Jesus was a divine being who only appeared to be human. He came to earth in order to convey his secret teachings. Most Gnostics thought differently, however; according to them, Jesus himself was a human being who was temporarily

inhabited by a divine being, the Christ, for his public ministry between the time of his baptism—when the Christ entered into him in the form of a dove—and the time before his death. That’s why on the cross Jesus cried out, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” It was then that the divine Christ left Jesus to die alone. But he raised Jesus from the dead, after which he continued to deliver his secret teachings to his close disciples before ascending back to the heavenly realm.

This may not sound like the kind of Christianity you learned about in Sunday School, but it was very popular in many regions of the early church. Salvation came not by having faith in Jesus’ death and resurrection but by understanding the secret teaching that he revealed. Since the teaching was secret, the public instruction that Jesus gave was not his real message, or at least it was carefully coded so that only the insiders, those with the divine spark within, could fully understand it. His real message came in private revelations that he gave to his closest followers. Many of the Gnostic books reveal this divine knowledge.

We are fortunate that a number of these books have turned up in modern times, especially when a cache of Gnostic writings, commonly called the Gnostic Gospels, was discovered in the wilderness of Egypt near the town of Nag Hammadi in 1945. They convey a picture of Christianity quite unlike anything most of us were reared on or ever even heard before. And the reason for this is obvious: the Gnostics were losers in the struggle over who would decide the “right,” the official, form of Christianity for all posterity.

The Proto-Orthodox Christians

Ultimately, only one group of Christians won in the struggle to gain converts. Their victory was probably sealed sometime in the third century. When the Roman emperor Constantine converted to Christianity in the early fourth century, he converted to this victorious form of the faith. When Christianity later became the official religion of the empire, about fifty years after Constantine, it was this form that was accepted by nearly everyone—with lots of variation of course. Alternative views have always been around.

Once it won the battles, this form of Christianity declared not only that it was right, but that it had been right all along. The technical term for “correct belief” is “orthodoxy” (in Greek, *orthos* means “right”; *doxa* means “opinion”). The “orthodox” Christians, that is, the ones who won the struggle, labeled all the competing perspectives heresies, from the Greek word for “choice.” Heretics are people who choose to believe the wrong belief, a nonorthodox belief.

What should we call the group of Christians who held to the views that eventually won out, before the victory was sealed? I usually call them the “proto-orthodox,” the spiritual ancestors of those whose views later became orthodox.

The proto-orthodox are the second- and third-century Christians we are best informed about, since it was their writings, not the writings of their opponents, that were preserved for posterity. This would include such writers as Justin Martyr, Irenaeus, Tertullian, Hippolytus, Clement of Alexandria, and Origen—figures well known to students of early Christianity. These authors were responsible for shaping the views that eventually became orthodox. They did so in no small part by arguing against all contrary sides at once, leading to certain kinds of paradoxical affirmations. For example, they agreed with the Ebionites that Jesus was fully human, but disagreed when they denied he was God. They agreed with the Marcionites that Jesus was fully divine, but disagreed when they denied he was human. How could the proto-orthodox have it both ways? By saying that Jesus was both things at once, God and man. This became the orthodox view.

The major orthodox doctrines are the ones that eventually made it into the Christian creeds: there is one God, he is the creator of all there is; therefore, the Creation is inherently good, even if flawed by sin. Jesus his son is both human and divine, and he is not two beings (as the Gnostics held), but one; he brought salvation not through secret knowledge but by shedding his real blood.

Like all of their opponents, the proto-orthodox had a range of books that they considered sacred authorities and that they saw as authorizing their particular perspectives. Some of these books eventually made it into the canon. The major debates within proto-orthodox circles concerned which of the proto-orthodox books to accept, but all proto-orthodox agreed that none of the heretical books could possibly have been written by any of the apostles and so were not to be included in the canon of Scripture.

PAULINE CHRISTIANITY²

Pauline Christianity is a term used to refer to the Christianity associated with the beliefs and doctrines espoused by Paul the Apostle through his writings. Orthodox Christianity relies heavily on these teachings and considers them to be amplifications and explanations of the teachings of Jesus. Others, as detailed below, perceive in Paul's writings, teachings that are different from the original teachings of Jesus documented in the canonical gospels, early Acts and the rest of the New Testament, such as the Epistle of James. Proponents of the perceived, distinctive Pauline form of Christianity, include Marcione of Sinope, the 2nd century theologian and excommunicated heresiarch, who asserted that Paul was the *only* apostle who had rightly understood the new message of salvation as delivered by Jesus Christ.

Opponents of the same era include the Ebionites and Nazarenes, Jewish Christians who rejected Paul for straying from Second Temple Judaism. *Pauline Christianity*, as an expression, first came into use in the 20th century among scholars who proposed different strands of thought within Early Christianity, wherein Paul was a powerful influence. It has come into widespread use among non-Christian scholars, and depends on the claim that the form of the faith found in the writings of Paul is different from that found elsewhere in the New Testament, but also that his influence came to predominate.

Reference is made to the large number of non-canonical texts, some of which have been discovered during the last 100 years, which show the many movements and strands of thought emanating from Jesus' life and teaching or which may be contemporary with them, some of which can be contrasted with Paul's thought. Of the more significant are Ebionism and Gnosticism. However, there is no universal agreement as to Gnosticism's relationship to Christianity or to the writings of Paul. The expression is used by modern Christian scholars, such as Ziesler and Mount, whose interest is in the recovery of Christian origins and the contribution made by Paul to Christian doctrine, Christian Reconstructionism and Restorationism.

Characteristics of 'Pauline Christianity'

The characteristics of the critical use of the term take a number of forms. They are partly political and partly theological.

Political

From a political perspective, Robert Eisenman sees Pauline Christianity as a method of taming a dangerous sect among radical Jews and making it palatable to Roman authorities. Pauline Christianity was essentially based on Rome and made use of the administrative skills which Rome had honed. Its system of organization with a single bishop for each town was, in Bart Ehrman's view, the means by which it obtained its hegemony.

Theological

The theological aspect is the claim that Paul transmuted Jesus the Jewish messiah into the universal (in a wider meaning "catholic") Savior. Pauline theology is also a term referring to the teaching and doctrines especially espoused by the apostle Paul through his writings. Mainstream Christianity relies on Paul's writings as integral to the biblical theology of the New Testament and regards them as amplifications and explanations consistent with the teachings of Jesus and other New Testament writings. Christian scholars generally use the term expressing interest in the recovery of Christian origins and the contribution made by Paul to Christian doctrine. Others, especially non-Christian scholars, claim to see a Pauline distinction different from that found elsewhere in the New Testament, a distinction that unduly influenced later Christianity.

Other views

The use of the term by Christian scholars, such as John Ziesler, is altogether different. Pauline Christianity is the development of thinking about Jesus in a gentile missionary context; Christopher Rowlands concludes that Paul did not materially alter the teachings of Jesus. Much of this view turns

² http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pauline_Christianity (accessed 1 July 2013)

on the significance of the Council of Jerusalem. According to this view, James decreed that Christianity was for the Gentiles and not just for the Jews, and quoted the prophet Amos in support of this position (the *Apostolic Decree* is found in Acts 15:19-21). He entrusted Paul among others with bringing their decision to Antioch (15:22-31).

Christians themselves disagree as to how far there was tension between Paul and the Jerusalem Church. One difficulty is the tension between Acts and Paul's letters; another is the disparity between his views in different letters. Galatians is reserved about the teaching of the Jerusalem church and is hostile toward Jews who would impose Jewish distinctives, codified in the Mosaic Law, on Gentile converts; in Romans Paul is deeply concerned about the spiritual condition and ultimate destiny of the Jewish people. ...

As a pejorative term

All that is good about Christianity stems from Jesus, and all that is bad about it stems from Paul. (Tom O'Golo, *Christ? No! Jesus? Yes!*, p.199)

The pejorative use of the expression "Pauline Christianity" relies in part upon a thesis that Paul's supporters, as a distinct group, had an undue influence on the formation of the canon of scripture, and also that certain bishops, especially the Bishop of Rome, influenced the debates by which the dogmatic formulations known as the Creeds came to be produced, thus ensuring a Pauline interpretation of the gospel. The thesis is founded on differences between the views of Paul and the apostles in Jerusalem, and also between the picture of Paul in the Acts of the Apostles and his own writings, such that it is claimed that the essential Jewish or Old Testament character of the faith was lost.

Christian anarchists, such as Leo Tolstoy and Ammon Hennacy, believe Paul distorted Jesus' teachings. Tolstoy claims Paul was instrumental in the church's "deviation" from Jesus' teaching and practices, whilst Hennacy believed "Paul spoiled the message of Christ." According to Tom O'Golo, the Ebionites believed Paul was a false prophet whose task was not to convert Romans to Christians but Christians to Romans. Irenaeus, bishop of Lyon, wrote in the latter half of the 2nd century that the Ebionites rejected Paul as an apostate from the law, using only a version of the Gospel according to St. Matthew, known as the Gospel of the Ebionites.

Tom O'Golo postulates several key elements were added by Paul to Christian theology that weren't evident in Jesuism. These included:

1. Original sin
2. Making Jews the villains
3. Making Jesus divine
4. Transubstantiation of bread and wine into actual flesh and blood
5. Jesus' death being seen as atonement for human sin
6. Making Jesus the Messiah
7. Shifting the emphasis from an earthly to a heavenly kingdom
8. Enlarging the chosen people to include anyone who accepted Jesus as Saviour
9. Making salvation a matter of belief in Jesus almost regardless of the demands of the Torah
10. Establishing a hierarchy (literally a holy order) to create and control a Church and more importantly to create and control the beliefs of its membership.

The argument made that Christian doctrine (that is, the teachings of Jesus) was subsequently distorted by Paul and the Church of Rome depends on a view as to how the canon of Scripture came to be compiled, about which little is known. The earliest references to Paul's writing are fragmentary: Clement of Rome, writing about AD 95, quotes from Romans; Ignatius of Antioch (d. AD 115) quotes from 1 Corinthians, Romans, and from 1 Timothy and Titus as if authoritative, not merely as the opinion of one writer.

As to his influence, there are considerable differences of scholarly opinion concerning how far Paul did in fact influence Christian doctrine. Among the most radical is G. A. Wells, a professor of German rather than of theology or history, whose view is that Jesus was a mythical figure and that Christianity was in good part invented by Paul. More widely influential is the view of the 19th-century German theologian F.C. Baur, founder of the Tübingen school, that Paul was utterly opposed to the disciples, based upon his view that Acts was late and unreliable and who contended that Catholic Christianity was a synthesis of the views of Paul and the Judaizing church in Jerusalem. Since Harnack, the Tübingen position has been generally abandoned, though the view that Paul took over the faith and transformed the Jewish teacher to the Son of God is still widely canvassed ...

On the other side, the idea that Paul invented Christianity is disputed by numerous Christian writers. Christopher Rowlands contends that, "the extent of his influence on Christian thought has been overestimated". Thus, though thirteen letters under his name appear in the New Testament, the great controversies of the 3rd and 4th centuries were about the Person of Christ and the nature of God - the so-called Christological and Trinitarian debates - in which St. Paul does not greatly feature; likewise, the Nicene Creed contains no doctrine of atonement. Moreover, while the influence of the Church of Rome was very important in the credal debates, Greek theologians such as Athanasius, the Cappadocian Fathers, Basil the Great, Gregory of Nazianzus and Gregory of Nyssa were formidable figures. The resolution of these controversies at the Council of Chalcedon was not dictated by the Bishop of Rome or Latin Christendom, but was made more difficult by the necessary task of translating technical terms between the two languages of Greek and Latin, and not by arguments over Pauline theology.

As for the New Testament itself, there are evident tensions between the Judaizing party and Paul's views, which are made plain by a comparison between Acts and Paul's letters. How far Paul is to be taken as anti-Jewish (pro-Hellenization or Romanization) is a matter of disagreement, but there has been widespread acknowledgement of the view of W. D. Davies that the essential Jewishness of Paul's Christian perspective has been underplayed. In Davies' view, Paul replaced the Torah, the Jewish Law or Mosaic Law, with Christ. In any case, "the problems with which he wrestles in his letters were probably typical of many which were facing the Christian sect during this period".

Further, by contrast one of the common features of Protestant churches, certainly in English-speaking countries and those influenced by the reformers Martin Luther and John Calvin, is their use of formulations other than the ancient Creeds, such as the Westminster Confession of Faith, in which Pauline formulations play a much greater part. Ideas such as justification by faith, which, though not absent from Catholic formulations, play a much more central role in Protestant thinking, where they are considered fundamental Christian truths and essential for defining the Gospel.

As to the conclusion that Paul distorted rather than developed the faith, this depends upon a judgment as to wherein lies the right path. Henry Chadwick, former Oxford don, commented about a later controversy: "It was not that the heretics departed from the road; it was that they took a path along which the road was not subsequently built." Roman Catholics, Eastern and Oriental Orthodox, conservative Protestants, and most Messianic Jews contend that Paul's writings were a legitimate interpretation of the Gospel. Those who disagree with them either argue that Paul distorted the original and true faith or claim that Christianity is, largely, his invention. The former include such secular commentators as the philosophers Friedrich Nietzsche and Bertrand Russell, whose criticisms are based upon their moral objections to Paul's thought; others thinkers, such as Slavoj Žižek and Alain Badiou, also agree with this interpretation, but hold much more positive opinions about Paul's theological influence.

WINNERS, LOSERS, AND IRENAEUS³

When in church life there is an irreconcilable difference over important doctrine, there are winners and losers. The winning party becomes the church, and its opinion is orthodoxy (Greek *orthē doxa*, correct opinion); the losing party is driven out of the church and becomes a sect (Latin *secta*, a school under a particular teacher), or heresy (Greek *haeresis*, a party). In the early Christian church the Petrites won at Antioch (Gal. 2.11-14); but Paul played his cards carefully, and did not split away. In the second century the Paulines won, and the Aramaic churches split away and became heretical sects, called the Ebionites and the Nazarenes. Their writings were all lost with time; but we have some traces of their teachings, partly in accounts given by orthodox Fathers (who may be more or less reliable), and partly in quotations, which may be assumed to be accurate.

When we have clear, datable evidence from a later century, we can ask whether there is any reflection of such a view in the controversial documents in our New Testament. I shall argue that we have a statement of the Jerusalem christology in the account of the Ebionites given by Irenaeus, bishop of Lyons in France (180); that this is borne out by quotations from the Gospel of the Ebionites (150); that it is this position which is argued against by Ignatius (115) and in the letters and Gospel of John (100); that it is the basis of the gospel which was taken over and re-written by Mark (69), and is the teaching opposed by Paul (50-62).

Irenaeus was an active, careful, truthful man, whose influence was for the peace of the church (in line with his name — *eirene* means peace in Greek); and he wrote a large work in five books *Against the Heresies*. The dominant threat was from a development in Christianity called Gnosticism, and its two leading teachers Valentinus and Marcus. In Book I he devotes the first twenty-two chapters to these movements, and then in 1.23-31 he gives a brief account of the earlier (and surviving) groups which are tarred with the same brush. Only one of these shows clear signs of being Jewish Christian, the Ebionites, and this is what Irenaeus says about them:

Those who are called Ebionites agree [with the church] that the world was made by God; but their opinions with respect to the Lord are similar to those of Cerinthus and Carpocrates. They use the gospel according to Matthew only, and repudiate the Apostle Paul, maintaining that he was an apostate from the Law. As to the prophetic writings, they endeavour to expound them in a somewhat singular manner: they practise circumcision, persevere in those customs which are enjoined by the Law, and are so Judaic in their style of life that they even adore Jerusalem as if it were the house of God (AH 1.26.2).

The Ebionites are plainly Jewish Christians, and close to the positions which we have ascribed to the Jerusalem mission. They *circumcise*, observe *the Law* as prescribed by tradition (*those customs which are enjoined, are Judaic in their style of life*), and reverence *Jerusalem*. Their *somewhat singular* exposition of the prophets only means that they understood them differently from Irenaeus. As we should have expected for Jerusalem Christians, they *repudiated* the epistles of *Paul*, because he argues against observing the Law in its entirety; and they *used the Gospel of Matthew*, which is much the closest to a Jewish-Christian Gospel. We are not told that they used *all* the Gospel of Matthew, and they may well have dropped Matt. 1-2. ... The name Ebionites is Semitic: it is derived from the Hebrew word *'ebionim*, which means *poor*.

Irenaeus links the Ebionites' *opinions with respect to the Lord* to those of Cerinthus, which he sets out in the previous paragraph:

He represented Jesus as not having been born of a virgin, but as being the son of Joseph and Mary according to the normal course of human generation, while he nevertheless was more righteous, prudent and wise than other men. Moreover after his baptism, Christ descended into him in the form of a dove from the highest Ruler, and then he proclaimed the unknown Father, and performed miracles. But at last Christ departed from Jesus, and then Jesus suffered and rose again, while

³ *St. Paul versus St. Peter*, pages 108-109. Michael Goulder

Christ remained untouched by suffering, inasmuch as he was a spiritual being (*AH* 1.26.1).

The Ebionites (and Cerinthus) thought Jesus was a straightforwardly human being, just as is implied by Peter's Messiah, line-of-David christology; and because the Paulines have by now come to believe in the virginal conception, the contrast is set out clearly — he was conceived *in the normal way by Joseph and Mary*. What was different about Jesus was that he was especially good; and for a period, *from his baptism to his crucifixion, he was possessed* by a heavenly spirit called *Christ*. This spirit was sent not by God himself but by an archangel, *the highest Ruler*, who is distinguished from *the unknown Father*. The spirit is called *Christ*, quite a different use of the word from the traditional one used in the Messiah approach. Jesus' possession by this spirit enables him to do two things which he could not have done naturally: he *proclaimed the unknown Father* — taught much about God, referred to often as *your heavenly Father* in Matthew's Gospel — and *performed miracles*. These two activities constituted the coming of the kingdom of God, the core of the Petrine good news. But the spirit, *Christ*, like any spiritual being, cannot suffer death, so it left Jesus on the cross. So Jesus died on his own, and the cross is not a significant part of the good news — just as in the teaching of the Cephas Christians in I Cor. 1-2, which Paul contrasts with his gospel of the cross. But the Ebionites did believe that *Jesus rose again*; Paul says in I Cor. 15 that the resurrection of Jesus was common ground between him and Peter and James.

WHAT WOULD HAVE HAPPENED IF THE MARCIONITES HAD GAINED THE ASCENDANCY?⁴

If the Marcionite Christians had gained ascendancy, would people still ask, “Do you believe in God?” Or would they ask, “Do you believe in the two Gods?” Would anyone except scholars of antiquity have *heard* of the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and John? Would we have an “Old” Testament? How would the social and political relations of Jews and Christians over the centuries have been affected? Would Christians who rejected the Jewish God and all things Jewish feel a need to polemicize against and attack Jews? Or would they simply ignore Jews as not presenting any real competition to their own claims of the knowledge of the other God, who saved them from the creator? Would anti-Semitism be worse, or would it be nonexistent?

If, on the other hand, Ebionite Christians had gained ascendancy, would Christianity have remained a sect within Judaism? Would Christians today worship on Saturdays instead of Sundays? Would they keep kosher? Would these Jewish-Christians have wanted or been able to convert masses of people to their message of salvation, when conversion would have required men to undergo the operation of circumcision? Would Christianity have been anything but a footnote in the history of world religions?

We can probably say with some certainty that if some other side had won—Marcionite, Ebionite, some form of Gnostic—there would have been no doctrine of Christ as both fully divine and human. As a consequence, there would have been no doctrine of the Trinity. How would that have affected the intellectual life of the Middle Ages, the development of scholastic modes of argumentation, the modern Christian debates over the relationship between divine revelation (say, of religious mystery) and human reason (which cannot comprehend the depths of mystery)?

These questions affect everyone, not merely those who call themselves Christian. The beliefs, practices, and institutions of Christianity have played an enormous role in western civilization as a whole, not just for members of the Church. Take the New Testament itself, for example, considered by most people throughout the course of its history to be a single book, with a unified message that serves as the ultimate basis for this religion’s faith and practice.

The New Testament has been and continues to be the most widely read and revered book in the history of the West. It continues to inspire belief, to stimulate reflection, and to provide hope to millions. It is preached from the pulpit; it is studied in the university; it is attacked by skeptics; it is revered by believers. In the United States it is widely considered to have been a foundational document for the founders; it is quoted on the floor of the Senate to justify acts of war and at peace rallies to oppose the use of military force; its authority is cited by both opponents and proponents of the right of a woman to have an abortion, by both opponents and proponents of the death penalty, by both opponents and proponents of gay rights. It was used to justify slavery and to abolish slavery. It has been used to justify capitalism and socialism. It has been used for good and for evil.

But where did this book come from? It came from the victory of the proto-orthodox. What if another group had won? What if the New Testament contained not Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount but the Gnostic teachings Jesus delivered to his disciples after his resurrection? What if it contained not the letters of Paul and Peter but the letters of Ptolemy and Barnabas? What if it contained not the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John but the Gospels of Thomas, Philip, Mary, and Nicodemus? Or what if it did not exist at all?

On an even more fundamental level: If some group other than the proto-orthodox had won, how would our approaches to reading texts and our “natural” ways of thinking differ? Most people, for example, take a commonsensical approach to the task of reading. We know what words mean, we see how words are used in a text, we notice the grammatical connections of the words, and by reading them in sequence in view of our knowledge of the language we reconstruct what an author meant. But what if this “literal” way of reading a text had been marginalized as an inadequate mode of interpretation? What if the religious and intellectual traditions passed down through the centuries,

⁴ *Lost Christianities*, pages 247-249. Bart Ehrman

traditions that determine how we read and make sense of texts, indeed, of our world, what if these traditions supported the primacy not of literal readings but of figurative ones, where the assumption is that the real meaning of a text is not the literal one, that words have secret meanings available only to those who have special insights, for example, as given from above? Would we be able to read a newspaper the way we do today?

In considering the importance of the victory of proto-orthodox Christianity, we should also reflect on broader historical implications. A case can be made that this victory was one of the most significant events in the social and political history of western civilization. Had it not happened, one could argue, the vast majority of people in the world who adhere to Christianity—some two billion by some recent estimates, the largest religion on the planet—would still be pagans, adhering to one or another polytheistic religion. The history of western civilization as we know it, from late antiquity through the Middle Ages, to the Renaissance, the Reformation, and into modernity, would never have occurred.

THE PRIMACY OF PAUL'S WRITINGS

The following passages by recognised historian Paula Fredriksen⁵ summarise the views held by her fellow historians and Bible scholars. This information is provided at this stage to provide the reason this Study applies due caution with sources outside Paul's writings for information about Paul.

Some necessary preliminary considerations before turning to [Paul's] letters themselves:

First, the investigation here focuses solely on the information Paul provides in his own letters: I resist supplementing that information with the stories about Paul provided in Acts. Acts dates from a significantly later period, well after the Roman destruction of Jerusalem in 70. By that time, the original community gathered in Jerusalem, to which Paul had a complicated and highly charged relationship, had virtually disappeared. Further, as we shall see, the information that Acts relates about Paul—most specifically, on the event and circumstances of his call to be an apostle to the Gentiles, and on his later negotiations with the Jerusalem community—contradicts Paul's own statements in crucial ways. Finally, Paul's speeches in Acts, according to the conventions of ancient historiography, are the free compositions of the author; they thus tell us more about Luke than about Paul. For all these reasons, then, Acts is not used here as a source for reconstructing Paul's reflections on the figure of Jesus.

Second, though the basis of our investigation is solely the letters of Paul, not all the letters attributed to him in the canon are his. Ancient Christian tradition ascribed fourteen of the twenty-seven writings comprising the New Testament to Paul. Modern scholarship accepts as definitely Pauline only half that number: 1 Thessalonians, 1 and 2 Corinthians, Philippians, Philemon, Galatians, and Romans (in probable order of composition). The Pauline authorship of all the others—2 Thessalonians, Ephesians, Colossians, 1 and 2 Timothy, and Titus—is disputed; that of Hebrews, dismissed. This second group originated most probably not from Paul himself, but from various early Christians in the generation following who saw themselves as standing in a tradition established by Paul and who accordingly wrote in his name. The theologies of this second group vary much among themselves and differ markedly from that of Paul. That Paul was so widely interpreted by those who stood so close to him should caution us about the difficulties of his thought.

Third, questions also surround the literary integrity of the individual letters: we cannot be sure whether the text of the letters as we now have them is substantially the same as when Paul dictated them. Many scholars, for example, see several letters edited together in our present versions of Philippians, 2 Corinthians, and Romans. ...

What little biographical information Paul does give us seems to fatally compromise, if not contradict, what we have from Luke [in Acts]. Paul himself never states that he studied in Jerusalem under Gamaliel or anyone else (as we would expect he would when he boasts of being a "Hebrew of Hebrews"; Phil.3:4-6); nor that he participated in any way in persecutions there (as we would expect when he speaks of his former life as a "persecutor"; e.g. Gal.1:13-14). Further, he explicitly denies that he went up to Jerusalem immediately after his call or sought to confer with the original disciples until some time later, after a sojourn in Arabia and another trip to Damascus. At this point, "after three years," Paul reports that he "was still not known by face"—either as a persecutor (cf. Acts 8:1) or as an

⁵ *From Jesus to Christ*, pages 53 and 55. Paula Fredriksen.

apostle (cf. Acts 9:28-29)—to the churches of Judea (Gal.1:17-24). And while he alludes to having been punished several times in his career by synagogue authorities (2 Cor.11:24), Paul claims to have been explicitly and uniquely called to—indeed, created for—the mission to the Gentiles. The Jewish mission he left to James and Peter, to whom he refers with some sarcasm as “so-called pillars,” later disparaging Peter as a hypocrite whom he opposed “to his face” (Gal.1:15; 2:9, 11).

If Acts did not exist and all we had were Paul's letters, we would have no reason to think of him as other than a Jew of the Diaspora whose language was Greek, whose original arena of activity was Damascus, and whose relations with the original disciples were complicated and occasionally difficult. More difficult still were Paul's relationships with fellow Christian missionaries in the field, whom in his letters he variously describes as “dogs,” “mutilators of the flesh,” “servants of Satan,” and “false apostles” (Phil. 3:2; 2 Cor.11:12-14; cf. the “false brethren” of Gal. 2:4). Such men were guilty, in Paul's eyes, of preaching a “different gospel” and a “different Jesus”—different, that is, from Paul's own.

THE STATUS OF CHRIST IN THE PAULINE RELIGION⁶

Let us be brave and ask whether a literary, historical and critical analysis of the Pauline corpus can confirm the view of the later tradition of the church and state that Jesus Christ was divine?

The titles 'Son of God' and 'Son of the Father' were incontestably part of Paul's language and conceptual world. However, one must not overvalue the phrases and, ignoring their meaning in the religious language of the Jews of the age, turn 'Son of God' into a synonym for God. In fact, Paul never envisaged Jesus as fully sharing the nature of the Deity. When compared to God the Father, 'the Son' always occupies an inferior position in Pauline thought, although he stands far above ordinary humans. The co-equality of the divine persons is a concept that is still centuries away.

The superiority of God over Christ is manifest in Paul's religious imagery. Just as he gave man a dominating role over woman in the context of marriage, he placed Christ above the humans, but below God. Woman, man, Christ, God is Paul's ascending hierarchical order.

I want you to understand that the head of every man is Christ, the head of a woman is her husband, and the head of Christ is God (1 Cor. 11:3).

The situation is made clear in the Pauline sketch of the denouement of the eschatological drama. After the defeat of all the hostile powers by God through the Messiah, it will be the turn of Christ, the Son, to bow and subject himself to God the Father. Paul argues his thesis from a Midrashic fulfilment interpretation of Psalm 8:6.

But when it [the Psalm] says, 'All things are put in subjection', it is plain that this does not include the one [God] who put all things in subjection under him. When all things are subjected to him, then the Son himself will also be subjected to the one who put all things in subjection under him, so that God may be all in all. (1 Cor. 15:27-8)

The two extracts quoted from 1 Corinthians clearly indicate that in the genuinely Jewish conceptual world of Paul, no one had the same dignity or possessed the same power as God; no one, not even Christ, was his equal. 'The Son' stood head and shoulders above the other 'sons of God' whose dignity derived from the fact that they were 'predestined to be conformed to the image of the Son ... the firstborn among many brethren' (Rom. 8:29).

How did, then, Jesus the Christ acquire this peerless dignity? Was he born with it? The answer is no. First of all, Paul shows no interest in the life story of Jesus before his betrayal and crucifixion. All we learn from him about Jesus the man is that he was 'born of a woman ... under the Law' (Gal. 4:4), i.e. that he was the son of an unnamed Jewish mother and that as the Christ/ Messiah he belonged to the family of King David (Rom. 1:3). His elevation to divine sonship was posthumous: he was 'designated Son of God in power ... by his resurrection from the dead' (Rom. 1:4). In other words, Jesus was granted the status of Son of God in the full sense, not from his birth, let alone from eternity, nor during his lifetime, but by virtue of his rising from the tomb. In plain words, in Paul's thought expressed in his most influential writings (1 Corinthians, Galatians and Romans), Jesus' elevation to the dignity of 'Son of God' postdated his earthly existence. ...

The examination of a collection of texts ... unquestionably show to whom prayers and blessings are regularly addressed in Pauline literature. ...

Prayer formulas

'We cry Abba! Father!' (Rom. 8:15)

'May the God of steadfastness and encouragement grant you to live in such harmony with one another, in accord with Jesus Christ, that together you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.' (Rom. 15:5-6)

⁶ *Christian Beginnings: From Nazareth to Nicaea*, pages 106-107, 111-113. Geza Vermes

‘I appeal to you, brethren, by our Lord Jesus Christ ... to strive together with me in your prayers to God on my behalf.’ (Rom. 15:30)

‘I give thanks to God always for you.’ (1 Cor. 1:4)

‘I thank God that I speak in tongues more than you all.’ (1 Cor. 14:18)

‘He will worship God and declare that God is really among you.’ (1 Cor. 14:25)

‘Thanks be to God who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.’ (1 Cor. 15:57)

‘Thanks be to God who in our Lord Jesus Christ always leads us in triumph.’ (2 Cor. 2:14)

‘Thanks be to God who puts the same earnest care for you into the heart of Titus.’ (2 Cor. 8:16)

‘Thanks be to God for his inexpressible gift.’ (2 Cor. 9:15)

‘We pray God that you may not do wrong.’ (2 Cor. 13:7)

‘Because you are sons, God has sent the spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba! Father!’ (Gal. 4:6)

‘I thank my God in all my remembrance of you.’ (Phil. 1:3)

‘We give thanks to God always for you all ... remembering before God our Father all your work.’ (1 Thess 1:2-3)

‘For what thanksgiving can we render to God for you?’ (1 Thess 3:9)

‘May the God of peace himself sanctify you.’ (1 Thess 5:23)

‘We are bound to give thanks to God always for you.’ (2 Thess 1:3)

Benedictions and doxologies

‘From him [God] and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory for ever. Amen.’ (Rom. 11:36)

‘To the only wise God be glory for evermore through Jesus Christ. Amen.’ (Rom. 16:27)

‘Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.’ (2 Cor. 1:3)

‘The God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, he who is blessed for ever.’ (2 Cor. 11:31)

‘To our God and Father be glory for ever and ever. Amen.’ (Phil. 4:20)

These examples demonstrate that Paul directed his prayers, thanksgivings and benedictions to God alone, and never to Christ. Jesus Christ appears as the mediator through whom God is approached and not the addressee of the prayers. These citations furnish a practical, and as it were experimental proof of the distinction in Paul’s thought between the role of the Father and that of the Son. Father and Son are not, to use the later theological definition, co-equal.

A final element of proof derives from the deutero-Pauline sources. In spite of their near equation of God and Christ, they still abstain from worshipping the latter and continue to address, in the old Pauline and Jewish mode, prayer and thanksgiving to God or to God the Father.

‘Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.’ (Eph. 1:3)

‘Always and in everything giving thanks in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to God the Father.’ (Eph. 5:20)

‘We always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you.’ (Col. 1:3)

‘To the King of ages, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honour and glory for ever and ever. Amen.’ (1 Tim. 1:17)

‘Now may the God of peace who brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus ... equip you with everything good that you may do his will ... through Jesus Christ; to whom [viz. to God] be glory for ever and ever. Amen.’ (Heb. 13:20-21)

INVISIBLE AND VISIBLE FEATURES OF PAULINE CHRISTIANITY

Invisible features of Pauline Christianity

The invisible features that underlie Pauline Christianity consist in an elaborate doctrinal construct developed by Paul's fertile mind on the subject of the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ. Compared to his vision, the theology of the Synoptic Gospels and of the Acts of the Apostles appears primitive, but Paul finds his match in John's superb mystical portrait of the superhuman Christ.⁷

The return of Christ

The Christianity taught by Paul, like the religion preached by Jesus, was driven by an overpowering eschatological ardour. Jesus repeatedly asserted that the Kingdom of heaven would be revealed to his generation. Paul was perhaps even more emphatic about the immediacy of the return of Christ and the inauguration of the reign of God.

A fully developed form of Pauline eschatology is attested already in the initial phases of his preaching, in the First Letter to the Thessalonians, probably written in AD 51, and in 1 Corinthians, dating from a couple of years later. Paul exhorted the Thessalonians to wait eagerly for the reappearance of Jesus, who would abruptly arrive from heaven 'like a thief in the night' (1 Thess 5:2). Throwing all caution to the winds, he boldly asserted — as a certainty based on Christ's promise — that he and his flock would participate in the great encounter, which he sketched with masterly strokes.

For the Lord himself, with a cry of command, with the archangel's call and with the sound of God's trumpet, will descend from heaven ... Then we who are alive, who are left [without experiencing death], will be caught up in the clouds together with them to meet the Lord in the air; and so we will be with the Lord for ever. (1 Thess 4:15-17)

Such a firm announcement of the imminence of the Second Coming ... continued to be ardently expected until as late as the end of the first century AD.⁸

Visible features of Pauline Christianity

Baptism

Paul envisaged baptism as a mythical re-enactment of the mystery of the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus by the person undergoing Christian initiation. He gave an unexpected twist to the imagery of an ordinary Jewish purification ritual. ...

In Judaism, immersion into water was intended to wash away the ritual impurity ... In a more spiritual sense, the baptism of repentance, administered by John the Baptist, symbolized the removal of the pollution caused by sinful conduct. ... The immersion associated with the entry into the Covenant of the new members of the Qumran community also remained essentially an act of purification. ... For Paul, the baptismal pool had a deep allegorical meaning. It symbolized the tomb in which the crucified body of Jesus was laid to rest and where it remained until the resurrection on the third day. Baptism for Paul is a myth-drama. Being dipped into and lifted from the baptismal pool meant an allegorical identification with the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus. Through the baptismal ritual, the effects of the cult drama were transferred onto the new Christian. Baptism seen through believing eyes was a sacramental rebirth.

Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? Therefore we have been buried with him by baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life. (Rom. 6:3-4)

⁷ *Christian Beginnings: From Nazareth to Nicaea*, page 99. Geza Vermes

⁸ *Christian Beginnings: From Nazareth to Nicaea*, pages 103-104. Geza Vermes

Paul's understanding of baptism is closer to the ideas of the Greek, Egyptian, Syrian and Persian mystery cults that flourished in the Roman Empire in the age of Jesus than to the traditional Jewish and Judaeo-Christian purification ritual.⁹

The Lord's Supper

Paul inherited from his predecessors a second great cult practice, the communal meal, referred to as the 'breaking of the bread' as well as 'thanksgiving' or *eucharist* in Greek. As in the case of baptism, Paul supplied a new meaning to the community meal and turned it into an imitation and repetition of the 'Lord's Supper' — Jesus' last Passover dinner with his apostles on the evening before his crucifixion.

Paul implies that the mythical significance of this meal was revealed to him directly by Christ: 'I received from the Lord what I also handed on to you' (1 Cor. 11:23). He does not say that it came to him through apostolic tradition as the story of the death, burial and resurrection of the Saviour: 'I handed over to you what I in turn had received' (1 Cor. 15:3). If my understanding is correct, the mystical significance of the Last Supper must not be attributed to the Synoptic evangelists composing their accounts between AD 70 and 100, but to Paul writing in the early 50s. It seems that the idea entered the tradition of the Gospels of Mark and Matthew through Luke, Paul's disciple, whose Last Supper account mirrors that of his teacher. Only Paul and Luke mention Jesus' command relating to the repetition of the ritual. For Paul the rite comprised a twofold allegory: the participation of the believers in the redemptive acts of the death and resurrection of Christ, and their assimilation into the mystical body of Jesus and the church.

In Paul's view, those who partook of the bread and drank from the cup were in the first instance united, mystically and sacramentally, with the redeeming death of Christ.¹⁰

⁹ *Christian Beginnings: From Nazareth to Nicaea*, pages 90-91. Geza Vermes

¹⁰ *Christian Beginnings: From Nazareth to Nicaea*, page-91. Geza Vermes