ARTICLES

PAUL AND AUGUSTINE: CONVERSION NARRATIVES, ORTHODOX TRADITIONS, AND THE RETROSPECTIVE SELF*

There are some fairly simple ideas that we find it difficult to keep hold of. . . . One such is the proposition that no narrative can be transparent on historical fact.

Frank Kermode, *The Genesis of Secrecy*

PAUL AND AUGUSTINE, the two fountainheads of Western Christianity, stand in the tradition as prototypes of the Christian convert—great sinners redeemed from the error of their earlier lives by a single, dramatic moment of conversion.[1] Modern scholars, attempting to understand how each man viewed this radical change

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[1] The volume of literature on this topic is enormous. Reviews of the Pauline bibliography may be found in G. Lohfink, *The Conversion of St Paul: Narrative and History in Acts* (Chicago, 1976), 33–46; U. Wilckens, 'Die Bekehrung des Paulus als religionsgeschichtliches Problem', *ZTK*, lvi (1959), 273–93, primarily a discussion of H. J. Schoeps, *Paul* (Philadelphia, 1961; German original 1959). H. D. Betz, *Galatians* (Philadelphia, 1979), 64 n. 82 gives extensive bibliographic references. See also E. Pfaff, *Die Bekehrung des h. Paulus in der Exegese des 20. Jahrhunderts* (Rome, 1942); B. Rigaux, *Saint Paul et ses Lettres* (Paris, 1962), esp. 63–97; W. Kümmel, *Römer 7 und das Bild des Menschen im Neuen Testament* (München, 1974; originally 1929), esp. 139–60; K. Stendahl, *Paul among the Jews and Gentiles* (Philadelphia, 1976; a reprint of his seminal article, 'Paul and the Introspective Conscience of the West'); and E. P. Sanders, *Paul, the Law, and the Jewish People* (Philadelphia, 1983) (hereafter *PLJP*).

For Augustine, the relevant entries in T. van Bavel, *Répertoire bibliographique de S. Augustin, 1950–1960* (The Hague, 1963); T. L. Miethe, *Augustinian Bibliography, 1970–1980* (Westport, 1982), 83–5; the annual bibliographical review in *Revue des études augustiniennes* (Paris). See also the literature reviewed in vol. 14 of the *Bibliothèque augustinienne* (Paris, 1962), 546 n. 7; in P. Courcelle, *Recherches sur les Confessions de S. Augustin* (Paris, 1968), esp. 7–12 and 175–210; and in G. Bonner, *St Augustine of Hippo. Life and Controversies* (Philadelphia, 1963), 42–52.

For an extremely useful review of current literature on conversion see L. Rambo, 'Current research on religious Conversion', *RSR*, viii. 2 (1982), 146–59; N.B. sections 6 (Augustine) and 7.1 (Paul).

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in his life, have typically scrutinized the documents to uncover what 'really' happened. A necessarily hypothetical reconstruction of a conversion experience then serves as a key to understanding the entire man, his personality, his past and present circumstances, and his theology.[2] We have ended, unsurprisingly, with myriad Pauls and Augustines, all hotly defended by an appeal to the same data.

Why should this be so? Our sources might at first seem largely responsible. Paul alludes to the event we call his conversion only briefly, many years after the fact, and in highly charged circumstances. From the Epistles themselves we gain no clear picture of the way Paul saw this change, either when it occurred or when he referred to it in correspondence.[3] But from Augustine we have an abundance of self-consciously written material precisely about his conversion: the Cassiciacum dialogues, composed within months of the event in 386;[4] the great description of his conversion in Book VIII of the *Confessions* (*c.*400); his continuing reflections on this spiritual turning-point in the anti-Pelagian writings (418–30)—in brief, the quality and quantity of primary evidence that New Testament scholars dream of having from Paul. Yet the same problems of interpretation remain.

[2] As the key to Paul's theology, e.g. M. E. Thrall, 'The Origins of Pauline Christology', *Apostolic History and the Gospel*, ed. W. W. Gasque and R. P. Martin (Grand Rapids, 1970); H. G. Wood, 'The conversion of Paul: its nature, antecedents, and consequences', *NTS* i (1955), 276–82; J. Dupont, 'The Conversion of Paul and its influence on his understanding of salvation by Faith', *Apostolic History*, op. cit.; Philippe Menoud, 'Revelation and Tradition: The Influence of Paul's Conversion on his Theology', *Interpretation*, vii (1952), 131–41. As the key to his psychology, personality and/or conversion, e.g. M. Goguel, *The Birth of Christianity* (New York, 1954), 85; R. Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament* (New York, 1951); J. Gager, 'Some Notes on Paul's Conversion', *NTS* xxvii (1981), 697–704; S. Kim, *The Origin of Paul's Gospel* (Grand Rapids, 1982).

Augustine's case is more complicated, since he himself deliberately presents his conversion as the key both to his theology and to Catholic Christianity: see below, §2.

[3] The *locus classicus* is, of course, Gal. 1: 13 f. (see Betz, *Galatians*, 9–12, on the date and historical situation of the epistle); also 1 Cor. 15: 8. Both Phil. 3: 4 f. and Rom. 7 have been used to reconstruct Paul's pre-conversion self; these will be discussed below. Schoeps sees a reference to the Damascus experience in 2 Cor. 4: 6 (*Paul*, 54), as does Dupont, 'Conversion', art. cit., 192; J. Munck ('La vocation de l'Apôtre Paul', *Studia Theologica*, i (1948), 131 ff.), in 2 Cor. 12: 2–4 (though cf. *Paul and the Salvation of Mankind* (Atlanta, 1977), 35); Thrall, in 1 Cor. 9: 16 ('Pauline Christology', art. cit., 305 n. 2): I do not.

On the problem of recollection, polemic, and/or later theological commitments distorting Paul's recollection in these passages, e.g. Betz, *Galatians*, 64 f.; B. Holmberg, *Paul and Power* (Lund, 1978), 14, and the literature reviewed n. 20; Munck, *Paul*, 124.

[4] These are *contra Academicos*, *de beata vita*, *de ordine*, and *soliloquia*; see esp. *c. Acad.* II, ii, 5.

The chief source of our difficulties, then, may lie less in our data than in our approach to them. This approach is in both cases still dominated, critical scholarship notwithstanding, by the Book of Acts. Now Acts' historical reliability has been called into question for many reasons,[5] and modern historians have little difficulty relinquishing the particulars of Luke's description of Paul's experience on the road to Damascus.[6] But by their conviction that Paul's conversion holds the key to Pauline theology—a conviction they share with and, I will argue, because of Augustine—they let Acts in the back door. Not the narrative details of Luke's portrayal, but the situation it presupposes of two clearly perceived and sharply contrasting religious options, dominates scholarly reconstructions both of Paul and of his early first-century environment. And it is echoed in the classic definitions of conversion as a 'deliberate turning . . . which implies that a great change is involved, that the old was wrong and the new is right'.[7]

Luke's continued influence on our understanding of Paul's conversion, despite the self-conscious intentions of critical scholarship, owes something to his place in the canon and, hence, in Christian tradition. But in the West, Augustine further compounded Luke's influence when he modelled his own conversion on a characteristically unique, but initially Lucan, reading of Paul. In order to traverse these layers of reinterpretation and approach Paul without the theological assumptions of later Christians or the

[5] On the problems of chronology, anachronism, and contradiction, see, e.g. W. Marxsen, *Introduction to the New Testament* (Philadelphia, 1976), 19–22 and 170; Betz, *Galatians*, 63; R. Jewett, *A Chronology of Paul's Life* (Philadelphia, 1979), 7–22, 89–94, and *passim*. Unfortunately, the new study of Gerd Luedemann, *Paul, Apostle to the Gentiles: Studies in Chronology* (Philadelphia, 1984) was not available to me for this essay. On using Acts for information on Paul, J. Knox, *Chapters in a Life of Paul* (Nashville, 1950), esp. 13–73; and, more recently, E. P. Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism* (Philadelphia, 1977), 431 f. (hereafter *PPJ*). For a more positive valuation of Luke's historical reliability, e.g. Munck, *Paul*, 13–35 and *passim*; Thrall, 'Pauline Christology', art. cit., 304, 313, and *passim*; Wood, 'Conversion', art. cit., *passim*; more recently, the work of Martin Hengel, e.g. *Acts and the History of Earliest Christianity* (Philadelphia, 1979) and *Between Jesus and Paul* (Philadelphia, 1983). W. C. van Unnik reviews the issues in 'Luke–Acts, a Storm Center in Contemporary Scholarship', *Studies in Luke–Acts*, ed. L. E. Keck and J. L. Martyn (Philadelphia, 1980), 15–32. An ingenious explanation for Luke's picture of Paul, so at variance with Paul's own statements in Galatians, can be found in O. Linton, 'The Third Aspect. A Neglected Point of View', *S.Th.* iii (1949), 79–95.

[6] The triple account in Acts (9: 1–19; 22: 3–21; 26: 9–18) attests to the importance of Paul's conversion for Luke. See E. Haenchen, *The Acts of the Apostles* (Philadelphia, 1971), 103–10 and 327, for a discussion of the apologetic function of the divergences in the three accounts; also Lohfink, *Conversion*, 87.

[7] A. D. Nock, *Conversion* (Oxford, 1972; originally 1933), 7; cf. 134.

methodological assumptions which modern scholars unwittingly adopt from them, let us examine first Luke and Paul on Paul, then Augustine on Paul and Augustine, and finally Paul once again, in his own right. We may thereby come to a more nuanced understanding of both these men, of the phenomenon of conversion, and of the way conversion narratives work within the Western Christian tradition.

§1. Acts and Paul

We first meet Saul of Tarsus in Jerusalem, Acts 7: 58. He not only consents to Stephen's death (8: 1), but enthusiastically persecutes the young Church, dragging Christians out of their homes to prison (8: 3), breathing threats and murder (9: 1), soliciting letters of introduction from the High Priest in Jerusalem so that he can extend his activities to Damascus. Suddenly, everything changes. Smitten on his way, blinded by celestial light, Saul is converted by the voice of the Risen Christ (9: 3–6; cf. 22: 4–16; 26: 9–18). He reaches Damascus and, once baptized (9: 18), proclaims in the synagogues that Jesus is the Son of God. The Jews then plot to kill him, but he escapes Damascus, goes forthwith back to Jerusalem, and thence to Caesarea and Tarsus (9: 20–30). Renouncing his mission to the Jews in Antioch (13: 46 ff.), Saul, 'also called Paul' (13: 9), turns to Gentile audiences ever further West. Having witnessed to his faith before important Imperial officials (Gallio, 18: 12–17; Felix, 24: 10–26; Festus and Agrippa, 25–6), Paul, himself a Roman citizen, is compelled by Jewish plots to appeal to Caesar, and so arrives to continue his mission in Rome (28).

By placing Paul in this historical and religious context, Acts answers the questions fundamental to understanding this conversion: From what did Paul turn, to what did he turn, and how? From Jewish Orthodoxy, claims Luke, to Christian Orthodoxy, by the sudden intervention of the Risen Christ. Paul studies with Gamaliel in Jerusalem, where he first encounters and subsequently persecutes the new Christian community; converted, he contacts as soon as possible the original disciples, with whom he maintains good relations, while he continues Peter's work among the Gentiles (15: 7). For he, like them, now realizes that the Law is an impossible burden and that salvation—now forfeited by the Jews—is by grace through faith in Christ (15: 10–11). If only we did not have Paul's own letters, we could stop our investigation here.

But the Epistles complicate this picture, forcing Luke's material into three categories: that which Paul contradicts, that which Paul corroborates, and that about which Paul says nothing. All three bear on our present effort.

Contradicted Material

Preferring primary evidence to secondary, modern scholars readily concede that Luke must be relinquished where Paul contradicts him. But beyond a broad consensus that the implicit chronology of the letters cannot easily fit into the framework of Acts,[8] scholars do not agree on which aspects of Luke's narrative Paul contradicts. I take the following to be instances of contradiction, where Paul's report must be decisive in any reconstruction:

1. *Initial Arena of Paul's Activity as Persecutor.* Paul in Gal. 1: 15–22 states that he was not known by face or by sight (τῷ προσώπῳ) to the communities of Christ in Judaea as late as μετὰ τρία ἔτη[9] after God's revelation of Christ to him. I take this to mean that his activity began and centred not around Jerusalem, as Luke's story of Stephen's stoning requires, but Damascus (Gal. 1: 17), and that it was through a community there that he first encountered the Jesus movement.[10]

2. *Initial Area of Paul's Activity as Missionary.* Paul presents himself primarily if not exclusively as an apostle to the Gentiles.[11] His communities, while they may have also contained Jews, were apparently predominantly Gentile; and, as I read Gal. 1: 16, 2: 2, and 2: 7–8, Paul saw the purpose of his calling as bringing the gospel to the Gentiles. This undermines the pattern of Paul's mission (synagogue—rejection—Gentiles) as presented in Acts.[12]

[8] Jewett, *Chronology*, 1–24 and literature reviewed.

[9] A period probably closer to eighteen months than three years: see Betz, *Galatians*, 76.

[10] This would seem to be the consensus: see W. Meeks, *The First Urban Christians* (Yale, 1983), 10 and 199 n. 6; also H. C. Kee, 'The Conversion of Paul: Confrontation or Interiority?', *The Other Side of God*, ed. P. Berger (New York, 1981), 48–60, esp. 49 ff. Against this view, and holding that Paul's first contact with the early Jesus community and his activity against it were in Judaea, e.g. Wood, 'Conversion', art. cit., 277; more recently, A. Hultgren, 'Paul's pre-Christian persecutions of the Church', *JBL*, xcv (1976), 97–111, esp. 107.

[11] e.g. Gal. 1: 16, 2: 7–9; Rom. 1: 15, 11: 13 f., 15: 15–21.

[12] Paul's activity during his time in Arabia (Gal. 1: 17) is completely lost to us: Betz, *Galatians*, 73 f., and Bultmann, *Existence and Faith*, ed. S. M. Ogden (New York, 1960), 116, assume this to be Paul's first mission field. Did Paul go first to the Jews? Several passages in his letters might give that impression (1 Cor. 9: 20 ff., 'To the Jews I became as a Jew, in order to win Jews'; 2 Cor. 11: 24, receiving thirty-nine lashes five times—obviously a Jewish punishment; Gal. 5: 11, Paul is 'still persecuted', because he does not preach circumcision). W. D. Davies sees Paul preaching to Jews, at least in so far as they would have been present in his communities ('Paul and the People of Israel', *Jewish and Pauline Studies* (Philadelphia, 1984), 135. Sanders does not see the verses cited above as indicating an actual mission to the Jews, *PLJP*, 179–90, esp. 187 f. See finally the comments of Meeks, *Urban Christians*, 26.

3. *Relations with the Original Community*. Paul's report in Gal. 2 suggests a relationship between himself and the 'reputed pillars' significantly more complicated than what we find in Luke; and the issue of the law-free mission to the Gentiles, initiated by the original community itself in Acts, is a matter of misunderstanding, debate, and bad feeling in Gal. 2: 11 ff. Paul does elsewhere include himself in the original community of witnesses to the Risen Christ (1 Cor. 15: 3–8), but otherwise he emphasizes his early independence and continued autonomy from Jerusalem. And while in Galatians Paul might exaggerate,[13] his remarks indicate a distance between himself and the Jerusalem community which Luke, so concerned to present the direct transmission of Christian teaching, precisely denies.[14]

Corroborated Material

Luke claims that Paul was a Pharisee who zealously persecuted the early Church; so does Paul.[15] Luke claims that Paul experienced a dramatic religious reversal, so that he came to champion the movement he once persecuted; so does Paul. Luke claims that the content of Paul's message was the law-free gospel of Christ; so does Paul. But Luke presents each of these points in ways so at odds both with the information that Paul himself provides and with our own historical knowledge that even here, where he is generally corroborated by Paul, Luke cannot be depended on without serious risk of anachronism.

Luke's Pharisee, for example, is a proto-rabbi, securely anchored, via Gamaliel, in the traditions of Palestinian Judaism—an image of the 'orthodox' Jew sketched from the author's own period, post-70, not Paul's.[16] Paul himself, beyond asserting his Pharisaic views

[13] Especially about his former life in Judaism. As Betz notes, 'This reference [to his pre-Christian life in Judaism] is needed because it shows the radical change which took place as a result of his vision of Jesus Christ. . . . As a Jew he had no reason to leave Judaism', *Galatians*, 66–8. See also Meeks, *Urban Christians*, 176, on the strategic value of Paul's 'autobiographical' description; cf. Gager, 'Notes', art. cit., 699 f., whose psychological reconstruction of Paul's conversion seems to drive him to ignore his own earlier warnings against depending on Paul's highly retrospective report.

[14] On Paul's relations with Jerusalem, see esp. Holmberg, *Paul*, 14–56; on Paul's difficulties co-ordinating his gospel with the 'traditions' of the other apostles, Betz, *Galatians*, 65. On Luke's concern to present the Gentile Church as continuous with the message of the first generation, and of Jesus, e.g. Haenchen, *Acts*, 100; Marxsen, *Introduction*, 169; Lohfink, *Conversion*, 55; Jewett, *Chronology*, 9.

[15] Acts 9: 1 ff.; 22: 4; 26: 9; cf. Gal. 1: 13; 1: 23; Phil. 3: 6; 1 Cor. 15: 9.

[16] See Davies, 'Paul and People', art. cit., 135 f., on the great variety within Judaism pre-70, and within the Pharisaism itself; also 187. On the consequences of emergent Pharisaism *vis-à-vis* Christianity and halacha both, L. Schiffman, 'At the Crossroads: Tannaitic Perspectives on the Jewish-Christian Schism', *Jewish and Christian Self-Definition*, vol. II, ed. E. P. Sanders (London, 1981), 115–56, esp. 148. On the difficulties of using rabbinic material to reconstruct this period of Jewish history, the work of Jacob Neusner, esp. 'The Use of the Later Rabbinic Evidence for the Study of Paul', *Approaches to Ancient Judaism*, ed. W. S. Green, vol. II (Chico, 1978), 43–63 (a critique of Sanders, *PPJ*).

with respect to the Law (Phil. 3: 5), never presents himself as other than a Jew of the Diaspora, whose language and scriptures were Greek.[17] The nature of and motivation for Paul's activities as a persecutor receive scant attention in the Epistles, where Paul mentions only his 'zeal'.[18] But in Acts, Saul's murderous actions are of a piece with those of his Jewish compatriots, ever mobilized to defend Judaism against a movement already so offensive and so threatening. In this, Luke continues to develop the theme, crucial to his concept of Paul's conversion and already important in his Gospel, of constant and terrible Jewish hostility to Christianity.[19]

What do we gain by considering Paul alone on the issue of these early persecutions? First, that Paul would have had to be aware of a distinct Jesus movement as early as *c.*34, the year of his change of heart. The community (probably in Damascus) which attracted his attention had to be Jewish, or else it would not have concerned him.[20] Deviance from the Sanhedrin's views on the correct interpretation of Torah or nevi'im *per se* could not have been the main issue, or the High Priest would have been sending zealous young Pharisees to Qumran (which did not recognize his authority) and Zealot Galilee (which *vis-à-vis* Rome posed a much greater threat to the Temple than would the Jesus-followers). Moreover, precedent existed, particularly in Hellenistic Diaspora Judaism, for as loose an interpretation of halachic observance as later Christianity would evolve.[21] To see the Jewish Jesus community in Damascus as

[17] So uncertain is Paul's religious formation as a Hellenistic Jew, and so baffling are his remarks about Judaism *if the traditional interpretation of these remarks is correct*, that Diaspora Judaism has been blamed as the inauthentic, legalistic cult that Paul criticizes: see esp. Schoeps, *Paul*, 25–37; also S. Sandmel, *The Genius of Paul* (Philadelphia, 1979), 15 ff. Wayne Meeks rightly emphasizes the degree to which the significant contrast for Paul may not be Palestine/Diaspora so much as rural/urban, *Urban Christians*, 33.

[18] See Dupont, 'Conversion', art. cit., 181 ff. and 189 f.; cf. the cautious remarks of Sanders, *PLJP*, 191.

[19] On this issue generally, D. R. Hare, *The Theme of Jewish Persecution of Christians in the Gospel of Matthew* (New York, 1968); B. Pearson, '1 Thessalonians 2: 13–16: A deutero-Pauline Interpolation', *H.Th.R.* lxiv (1971), 79–94, esp. 86 ff.

[20] Or been the focus of his activity. As Sanders rightly points out, '*Punishment implies inclusion*', *PLJP*, 192 (author's emphasis).

[21] The three ancient sources usually mentioned in this connection are Philo, *de migratione Abrahami*, 89–93 (discussion in Meeks, 37), Josephus, *Antiquities*,

championing a law-free gospel actually *hostile* to Torah in *c.*34 projects a particular reading of Paul's theological message to the Gentile Galatians *c.*55 back to the very earliest, Jewish days of the movement.

But if we interpret Gal. 1: 13 (*καθ' ὑπερβολὴν ἐδίωκον τὴν ἐκκλησίαν . . . καὶ ἐπόρθουν αὐτήν*) in light of Jewish disciplinary practice, both Paul's role as persecutor and the beliefs of the Damascus community come into focus. Paul may have been active in having followers of Jesus in the Jewish community of Damascus flogged, as he himself was later flogged during his missionary work.[22] But that then raises the question, Why? What belief about Jesus could have been so articulate so soon after his death, could have spread so quickly from Jerusalem and the Galilee to Damascus, and could have been so egregious or offensive that it attracted the attention of a zealous young Pharisee? New Testament scholars have traditionally offered two explanations: (*a*) that proclaiming the arrival of the messiah would have led to legal offence; or (*b*) that proclaiming a crucified messiah would have led to religious offence.

According to the first explanation, those Jews believing Jesus to be the messiah would have ceased to observe the Law and actually preached against it, since the Law was cancelled with the coming of the messiah. They would thus have called down upon themselves the disapprobation of the larger Jewish community, and particularly of Paul the Pharisee. Paul in this scenario is thus introduced to a law-free Jesus movement, a sort of pre-Pauline Pauline Christianity, often identified with the mysterious 'Hellenists' of Acts.[23] This explanation requires, however, the existence of a first-century Jewish tradition that the Law would be abrogated in the days of the messiah: evidence for such a tradition other than in New Testament scholarship is slim.[24] Might Jesus himself, or some of his immediate followers (James and Peter excepted), have been the source of such a teaching? In principle, this is possible; but such a law-free gospel so fully developed within a few years of Jesus' death, and among Jewish Jesus-followers, seems more likely a scholarly projection backwards of Paul's mid-first-century gospel to the Gentiles.

XX. 34 on the royal house of Adiabene (Meeks, 18–19), and Rabbi Joshua's position in bYebamot 46a. See also the discussion in P. Borgen, 'Observations on the theme "Paul and Philo"', *Die paulinische Literatur und Theologie*, ed. S. Pedersen (Aarhus, 1980), 85–102, esp. 85–9; N. McEleney, 'Conversion, Circumcision, and the Law', *NTS*, xx (1974), 319–41, esp. 328–33. Cf. Schiffman, 'Crossroads', art. cit., esp. 134 f. (against this interpretation of bYeb. 46a) and 127 f. (against this interpretation of Izates in Josephus).

[22] 2 Cor. 11: 24; see Hultgren, 'Persecutions', art. cit., 104; Hare, *Jewish Persecution . . .*, 43–6.

[23] e.g. G. Bornkamm, *Paul* (New York, 1971), 22; Bultmann, 'Existence', art. cit., 113; Dupont, 'Conversion', art. cit., 185–7; Gager, 'Notes', art. cit., 701; cf. discussion in Davies, 'Paul and Jewish Christianity', op. cit., 170, and Holmberg, *Power*, 16 n. 28.

[24] For discussion of this so-called Jewish tradition, see Sanders, *PPJ*, 479 and n. 25, 480, 496; Sandmel, *Paul*, 40 f.; cf. Davies, 'Paul and the Law', art. cit., 101 (but he gives no reference); also Meeks, *Urban Christians*, 177. Dupont, noting that the early Christians' beliefs about the Law were probably closer to James' than to the Paul of the mid-first century, says 'It is thus a weak explanation that Paul's zeal for the Law made him a persecutor of Christians at a time when there were those who did not think that their faith in Christ should call into question their fidelity to Judaism', 'Conversion', art. cit., 186. See also Davies, 'Law in First Century Judaism', art. cit., 3–26.

According to the second explanation, the claim that the crucified Jesus was the messiah spurred Paul's hostility, and accounts for the general Jewish rejection of the gospel. How so? To proclaim a dead teacher the messiah might have seemed bizarre, but it would not have constituted a legal offence.[25] His *mode* of death, however, crucifixion, would have occasioned religious offence, given the curse in Deut. 21: 23 (Gal. 3: 13): 'Cursed of God is every man hanged from a tree.' This group, proclaiming as messiah someone who died by crucifixion, and hence accursed of God, would thus have been opposed 'as a form of national apostasy'.[26]

This explanation is more complicated that the first, and so are the reasons why it does not work. First, the 'hanging' in Deuteronomy refers not to a mode of execution, but a form of publication that a sentence of capital punishment has been carried out. The accused, cursed of God because of his capital offence (traditionally, blasphemy or idolatry), is executed (thus making atonement for his sin), and his body then displayed by hanging. Thus bSanhedrin 43a, presenting Jesus' death as an halachicly correct execution pursuant to the sentence of the Jewish court, states that for practising magic and deceiving and leading Israel astray, 'Jeshu' was first stoned (i.e. killed) and then hanged. The 'curse' in this case would have obtained because of the finding of the religious court, and not because of the subsequent hanging of the body, which *per se* did

[25] A generally recognized point, e.g. Hultgren, 'Persecutions', 103; Davies, 'Paul and the Law: Reflections on Pitfalls in Interpretation', op. cit., 100; Schiffman, 'Crossroads', 147.

[26] So Hultgren, 'Persecutions', 103; Menoud, 'Revelation', art. cit., 133, Jesus condemned by God himself, given his manner of death, therefore Saul would have been 'theologically opposed' to the Christian message; Wood, 'Conversion', art. cit., 282, to claim Jesus messiah in light of his manner of death would have been 'intolerable blasphemy'; Davies, *Paul and Rabbinic Judaism* (Philadelphia, 1980), 227–9; Meeks, *Urban Christians*, 168, 'the almost unthinkable claim that the messiah had died a death cursed by the Law'; also 180–3 on the theme of the crucified messiah; M. Hengel, *Crucifixion* (Philadelphia, 1977), *passim*, esp. 85 ff.

not indicate that the deceased had been 'cursed of God'.[27] The bodies of both Saul and Jonathan were hanged, but nowhere is this taken to indicate that they had died under a special curse.[28] In other words, the spiritual status of the deceased cannot be inferred from the disposition of his body.

But scholars will argue further that not hanging in general, but crucifixion in particular, would be seen as dying under the curse of God: hence 'the cross never became the symbol of Jewish suffering'.[29] This view has serious problems. First, it requires the conflation of crucifixion with the hanging in Deuteronomy: Paul does this, but did the Pharisees, or later the rabbis?[30] Also, if the rabbis saw crucifixion as a religiously offensive mode of death, they would have surmized that the 800 Pharisees killed under Alexander Janneus (*Ant.* 13: 14, 2), Judah the Galilaean and his family (*Ant.* 18: 1), and every other Jew crucified in the rebellions against Rome had likewise died 'cursed of God': for this we have no evidence. It is, moreover, counter-intuitive to hold that Jews generally would consider compatriots executed by an oppressive occupying force to be anything other than victims, if not heros.[31] Finally, by the

[27] Scholars who cite 'rabbinic evidence' in support of the view that 'hanging' immediately implies 'curse' (regardless, apparently, whether pursuant to a sentence of a Jewish religious court or a Roman secular one) fail to provide citations to the rabbinic liberature: See, for example, the literature cited above, n. 26; also R. T. Hereford, *Christianity in Talmud and Midrash* (New York, 1975; originally 1903), 83–90; Paul Winter, *On the Trial of Jesus*[2] (New York, 1974), chap. 7 (crucifixion) and chap. 8 (Jewish death penalties).

[28] 2 Sam. 21: 12 (Heb. *telaom*; LXX *ezaliasmenos*); cf. Deut. 21: 23 (Heb. *taloui*; LXX *kremamenos*).

[29] So, for example, Hengel, *Crucifixion*, 85, who seems to argue that this 'fact' is to be explained by the existence of the 'rabbinic interpretation' that death by crucifixion is death under divine curse: he does not give a reference.

[30] Targum Onkelos might make this association, if one construes *zlv* as 'cross' (cf. 'gibbet', 'gallows', 'place of hanging'); still, the hanging/crucifixion here would refer to the display of the body, and not the mode of execution.

Three centuries later, the connection between hanging and crucifixion was obscure enough to have created a pastoral problem for Augustine. Some North Africans assumed that the curse referred to Judas, since he, not Jesus, had died by hanging. 'Nam quod quidam nostri minus in Scripturis eruditi, sententiam istam nimis timentes, et Scripturas veteres debita pietate approbantes, non putant hoc de domino esse dictum, sed de Iude traditore eius: aiunt enim propterea non esse dictum, *Maledictus omnis, qui figitur in ligno*, sed *qui pendent in ligno*; quia non hic dominus significatus est, sed ille qui se laqueo suspendit', *Expositio Ep. ad Galatas* 22.

[31] Josephus, of course, would have his own reasons for viewing the fate of Judah *et al.* with little sympathy (but with some admiration? See *Ant.* 18. 1, 6).

In light of the tremendous number of crucifixions under the Romans, the rabbis may in fact have chosen to associate this way of death with no less crucial an example of righteousness, faith, and suffering than the *Akedah*. Gen. Rabba 56. 3, on Gen. 22: 6, comments: '*Abraham took the wood for the offering, and placed it on Isaac his son*. And as one who carries *zlvo* [his own cross/gibbet/gallows] on his shoulder . . .', so Isaac carried the wood for his sacrifice. Gen. Rabba is a sixth-century text, and it is impossible to know whether this association of crucifixion with the *Akedah* pre-dates or post-dates the patristic use of this episode. But either way, this passage would seem to indicate that no rabbinic interpretation held that crucifixion *per se* indicated death under a special curse from God.

first century CE, the traditional Jewish symbol of suffering had long been sanctioned in custom, canon, and ritual: the historical and communal image of exile. To observe that Jews drew their prime symbol of suffering from Genesis, Exodus, Isaiah, and Lamentations rather than from a Roman form of capital punishment is simply to observe that they were not late first-century Christians.

In sum, then, Deut. 21: 23 cannot bear the weight the traditional argument lays on it. The source of this interpretation of crucifixion as curse, and its original context, is not first-century Judaism, nor the later rabbinic tradition, but Paul and the chiasma 'blessing/curse' in Gal. 3: 10–14. The brief and novel exegetical argument Paul makes in passing in Gal. 3: 13 could not have been so universal, and so crucially important, so early on.[32]

Then what accounts for Paul's 'persecution' of this Jewish group in Damascus so soon after Jesus' death? Perhaps our clue is not the *crucified* messiah, but the crucified *messiah*. This early community might have believed and taught that Jesus, though crucified, was the messiah who would shortly return to overthrow the unrighteous and vindicate his people at the End of Days. In other words, they would have been familar with some form of the Jesus tradition *c.*34 that shows up much later in the Gospels as the Son of Man material.[33] Proclaiming as messiah someone known to have died would not have enhanced the credibility of this good news: the *skandalon* of the cross is in declaring *any* dead leader a messiah, because to function as messiah, the leader (as Akiba realized) could not be dead. But any group or individual openly and energetically preaching the imminent arrival of the Kingdom might well have been perceived by the larger Jewish community as a threat to peaceful co-existence with the Imperial government, especially if their messiah was known to have been recently executed by that government in the manner usually reserved for political insurrectionists.[34] An appropriate discipline, from Paul and later to Paul,

[32] 'The answer [of Gal. 3: 13] is introduced because of the *Stichworte* which lead the argument from "Gentiles" to "blessing" to its opposite, "curse". Thus Gal. 3: 13 is not the keystone of the argument, but has a subsidiary place in explaining how the curse (3: 10) is removed', Sanders, *PLJP*, 25, and discussion 25–7.

[33] See also Davies, 'Paul and Jewish Christianity', art. cit., 164–71.

[34] The Empire in this apocalyptic scenario would be considered doubly unrighteous, both for polluting the Land and for killing the messiah; cf. the traditional

might have been lashing (*makkot mardut*).[35] And, this messianic conviction need not, indeed most probably *did* not, affect the community's attitude toward Torah.

If we let go of Luke for our picture of Paul's religious training in Judaism and his manner of and motivation for harrassing the Jesus community in Damascus, we are left with Paul, a Pharisee of the Diaspora, introduced to the early Jesus movement through a group in Damascus about which we know little more than that it was within the Jewish community there. The law-free gospel of the Epistles is Paul's message to largely, if not solely, Gentile churches, after a lifetime of missionary activity. But Luke locates this message within the earliest moments of the Church, with the original

images used for the Empire in Revelation which, like most apocalyptic, expresses a political critique. This may account for Paul's scrupulous avoidance of naming the Empire when he talks about responsibility for the death of Jesus in 1 Cor. 2: 8: 'None of the rulers of this age understood this [the hidden and secret wisdom of God, v. 6—a veiled reference to God's plans to conclude history in Paul's days? Cf. Rom. 9–11 and 13], for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of Glory.' *Αρχόντες τοῦ αἰῶνος τούτου* can refer here to cosmic powers as well as to earthly rulers (later Gnostic Paulinists took this to indicate the evil rulers of the planetary spheres): see W. Bauer, *Lexicon of the New Testament and other Early Christian Literature*, ed. Arndt and Grinrich (Chicago, 1979); also E. Pagels, *The Gnostic Paul* (Philadelphia, 1975), 58; cf. Ignatius, Ephesians 17: 1 and 19: 1, where the Archon is apparently the Devil. Nor does Paul hold his own people responsible: see Pearson, 'Interpolation', art. cit., on the status of 1 Thess. 2: 13–16 (but cf. Davies, 'Paul and People', art. cit., 125–7).

Gentile Christians toward the end of the century would have felt this anxiety no less keenly, and it can help to account for the progressive exculpation of the Romans and inculpation of the Jews in the Passion Narratives: see C. K. Barrett, *Jesus and the Gospel Tradition* (London, 1967), 53–67.

[35] Hultgren's reference to Makkot 3. 15 ('Persecutions', 104), suggests that he reads 2 Cor. 11: 24 as *makkot arba'im—the* thirty-nine lashes. Given the complexity of the halachah on this punishment (if we can assume that early first-century communities would have observed the requirements for evidence, warning, etc.), it is unlikely that someone could have received such a punishment even once, much less five times! See also Hare, *Jewish Persecution*, 43 f. Given the absence of the article in the Greek (*ὑπὸ Ἰουδαίων πεντάκις τεσσεράκοντα παρὰ μίαν ἔλαβον*), the RSV translation is misleading.

On the importance of community courts in the Diaspora, see E. R. Goodenough, *The Jurisprudence of the Jewish Courts in Egypt* (Amsterdam, 1968; first published 1929); also Meeks, *Urban Christians*, 229 n. 143; on Jewish legal procedure, Hare, *Jewish Persecution*, 19–79.

Gaston's ruminations on the improbabilities and incoherencies of most answers to the puzzle of 'anti-Christian persecution' bear repeating here: 'The idea that Jews would persecute Gentiles who adopted some Jewish ideas along with faith in Jesus is absurd. It is equally absurd to think that Jews would persecute those Jews who taught Gentiles to believe in Jesus apart from the Torah. I also think it is false to assume that Jews persecuted other Jews who kept the commandments through faith in the messiah Jesus', 'Paul and the Torah', *Anti-Semitism and the Foundations of Christianity*, ed. A. Davies (New York, 1979), 65 f. See also Sanders, *PLJP*, 190–2.

Twelve; and Paul's gospel to the Gentiles becomes, for Luke, *the* gospel, *tout court*. Hence the centrality of Paul's conversion to Luke's understanding of the Gentile Christian tradition, which he traces back through Paul to the earliest community, and ultimately to Jesus himself.

What for Luke was a theological necessity is for modern historians an unwitting anachronism. Their insistence that Paul's conversion is central to Paul's self-understanding and to his mature theology leads them, in their search for evidence, to over-interpret Paul's few brief and infrequent references to this event.[36] Scholars will extract from highly charged contexts Paul's allusions to his witness to the Risen Christ (1 Cor. 15; Gal. 1: 11 ff.) and current attitudes toward his former Torah observance (Phil. 3: 4; 2 Cor. 11: 21–12: 10), and treat them as Paul's testimony about his conversion. This 'testimony' is then used as evidence for reconstructing the 'conversion itself', which is usually defined in part as Paul's precipitous turning to those opinions on the Law that he held years later, *c.*55–60.

But if we take seriously the early date of his transformation, the way Paul speaks of it, and the later polemical context in which he speaks, we must question first of all the formal appropriateness here of the word 'conversion' itself. In the year *c.*34, to join the Jesus movement would have been to effect a lateral movement *within* Judaism, in Paul's case from the Pharisaic party to the Jesus party.[37] Conversion usually refers to movement *between* religions, from one articulated symbol system to another:[38] Augustine converts;

[36] Or to argue *ex silentio*. Wood assumes, in the complete absence of supporting data, that 'Paul must often have told the story of his conversion', 'Conversion', art. cit., 277; Munck, on the basis of Paul's silence in Galatians, argues that 'the story of his call was part of the Christian education of his churches', *Paul*, 14; similarly Linton: 'Although Paul here . . . passes over to a short allusion to his conversion, we may confidently take for granted that the Galatian churches—as well as the communities of Judaea—knew . . . how the persecutor became a preacher of the Gospel', 'Third Aspect', art. cit., 81. My sense is that the 'conversion' is much less important to Paul as an explanation of his subsequent activities than it is to these historians, who draw very much on Acts (and modern evangelical practice!) for their reconstructions.

[37] Betz, *Galatians*, 64. He notes: 'Strictly speaking, we cannot speak at all of a "conversion" of Paul. . . . He changed parties within Judaism from Pharisaism to Jewish Christianity. . . . His switch is comparable to the present Galatian plans to change from Pauline Christianity to another rival faction of Christianity.'

[38] A point especially well made by Davies in his discussion of Israel's eschatological role in Rom. 11: '. . . [D]oes the saving of the Jew mean the same kind of radical break with his *religion* that the saving of the Gentile implied? There is a difference . . .,' and he concludes, with reference to the Jews, that 'Paul was not thinking in terms of what we would normally call conversion', 'Paul and People', art. cit., 140 and 142.

Luther does not.[39] Paul's circumstances are closer to Luther's than to Augustine's. If we do not say that Luther converted to Protestantism, then neither should we say that Paul converted to the Jesus movement (which *c.*34 was still within Judaism), much less to Christianity (which *c.*34 did not yet exist). Luke, of course, does see Paul as converting to Christianity. But by Luke's time, this new and self-consciously separate religious entity does exist, differing in culture, language, ethnic group, and geographical location from its rural Palestinian Jewish parent. Christianity in this sense only begins to come into being in the mid-first century: it cannot, therefore, serve as an interpretative background to Paul's 'conversion'.

Paul himself shows us how to avoid this Lucan anachronism in Galatians, where he refers to his experience as a prophetic call. We would do well, as others, most notably Krister Stendahl, have argued, to do the same.[40] This is not a mere quibble about words:[41] 'conversion' in this context necessarily entails anachronism, whereas 'call' enables us to take seriously Paul's own background, rather than the late first century one Luke provides him with. For Paul did indeed experience a radical change in his religious consciousness prior to his evangelizing activity, and he couches his claim in the language appropriate to it from within *his* religious tradition: in the face of the imminent arrival of the Kingdom, Paul was called to preach the good news of salvation to the Gentiles.[42]

How then did Paul subsequently view his religious tradition? This is a hotly debated issue in the current literature.[43] Traditional ecclesiastical and academic consensus states that Paul in some basic sense repudiated Judaism, seeing the grace of the Gospel as annulling the works of the Law, since justification (so he realized at or after his call) is through faith.[44] E. P. Sanders has recently (and

[39] But cf. M. Harran who, while naming Luther's tower experience an 'evangelical breakthrough', and using 'conversion' in scare quotes, finally decides that the term is appropriate, *Luther on Conversion* (Ithaca, 1983), 174–93.

[40] Stendahl, *Jews and Gentiles*, esp. 7–23 and 85 ff.; Munck, *Paul*, 11–35; Betz, *Galatians*, 64.

[41] Against, for example, J. Gager, *The Origins of Anti-Semitism* (Oxford, 1983), 209 f.; Sanders, *PLJP*, 56 n. 63 and 176–8.

[42] 'Paul's "call" can be accounted for within the terms of Judaism, so that there is no need to relate it to a breaking away from Judaism. Paul himself sees his "call" in analogy to that of a prophet like Jeremiah, and there is no reason to doubt the appropriateness of that analogy', Betz, *Galatians*, 64.

[43] See, for example, Davies, 'Paul and People', art. cit., 123–52, and Sanders, *PLJP*, *passim* and esp. part II, for a review of the current literature.

[44] This constitutes an *idée fixe* in most of the literature. To mention only some of those essays I draw on here, for example, Wood sees Saul of Tarsus reacting to (and later championing) 'the message of Jesus . . . [who was] annulling Judaism',

to my mind, convincingly) rejected the usefulness of the concept of 'justification by faith' as a key to anything other than Lutheran scholarship;[45] and Lloyd Gaston has issued a stunning challenge to the traditional picture by urging that Paul nowhere denigrates Torah, circumcision, or the promises to Israel, but simply holds these to be *irrelevant for the Gentiles*, on behalf of whose eschatological salvation Paul has been called to work.[46] To the arguments of these two scholars I would add that, however Paul conceived of his calling, it was *not* in terms of grace *versus* the Law. That he realized in grace a personal release from the burden of the Law comes from Luke (Acts 15) and not Paul (Phil. 3). And in his only major extended discussion of this theme of grace and the Law—that is to say, in Romans—Paul refers to his experience of revelation not at all.[47]

Uncorroborated Material

Among the many bits of information given in Acts about which Paul is silent are his Hebrew name (Saul, 7: 58), his home town (Tarsus, 21: 39), his profession (tent-making, 18: 3),[48] his witness to Stephen's death (8: 1), and his training in Jerusalem with Gamaliel (22: 3).[49] He may indeed have been a Roman citizen, but he nowhere mentions it; and this could be a plot device on Luke's part to get his hero to Rome.[50] He may have preached first to the Jews, but the evidence of the Epistles is at best ambiguous. Paul himself claims to have gone to the Gentiles from the beginning, and this motif in

'Conversion', art. cit., 278; Dupont: Paul, unlike most early Christians, understood 'the fatal blow which their theology of the cross would strike at Judaism', 'Conversion', art. cit., 190; Bornkamm, '. . . sin consisted in harking back to the Law which Christ's death on the cross had nullified', *Paul*, 46.

[45] *PPJ*, 33–59 and 434–42, two splendid bibliographical essays which pull together the basic New Testament scholarship of the past century. See also Davies, 'Paul and the Law', art. cit., 94 and 330 n. 9.

[46] 'Paul and Torah', art. cit., 48–71; 'Israel's Enemies in Pauline Theology', *NTS* xxviii (1982), 400–23.

[47] How Rom. 7 came to be seen as such a reference I discuss below, with literature, pp. 27 f. and n. 95.

[48] Paul says only that he worked with his hands, 1 Cor. 4: 12, καὶ κοπιῶμεν ἐργαζόμενοι ταῖς ἰδίαις χερσίν; tentmaking appears only in Acts 18: 3.

[49] If these last two items are historical, it is difficult to account for Paul's silence about Stephen when he speaks of his past as a persecutor, or about Gamaliel when he boasts of being a Hebrew of Hebrews (e.g. Gal. 1: 13 f.; Phil. 3: 4–6).

[50] 'Paul the Roman citizen seems to me in all probability still another part of Luke's fiction. Paul's arrest by the Romans in Jerusalem and his being sent on to Rome—the whole last half of Acts—. . . all hangs on Paul's citizenship and his appeal to Caesar', E. R. Goodenough, 'The Perspective of Acts', in *Studies in Luke–Acts*, 55; similarly, Sandmel, *Paul*, 156.

Acts could again be part of Luke's concern with the theological pattern of the gospel's passing to the True Israel, having been rejected by the apostate nation. He may in fact have appeared before Gallio at Corinth, or this could again be Luke's invention, having Paul witness before an important (and indifferent) Roman official, despite the hostile Jewish mob.[51] He may in fact have been baptized himself, or this too could be Luke's emphasis on the Church as the institutional conduit of the Holy Spirit.[52]

How should we use all this material? With extreme caution, and with a test for authenticity on the analogy of the criterion of dissimilarity with the Synoptic material.[53] In other words, if Luke says something about the early first-century Jewish Jesus movement that would *not* be in the interests of the late first/early second-century Gentile Church, then that statement has a higher probability of authenticity than otherwise. To observe that not much material survives this test is simply to acknowledge Luke's skills as an ecclesiastical historian and theologian. He is not writing history in the modern sense, of course—carefully checking sources, critically handling evidence, and so on. He is writing a persuasive narrative with an obvious theological and apologetic intent. He constructs his image of the past from the present, weaving his narrative from bits of tradition and common knowledge; supplying (from his point of view) plausible links, chronologies, and motives where certain knowledge is lacking; mounting an argument that sounds true even where he is inventing.[54]

[51] See Bornkamm, *Paul*, 68 and 92. Haenchen suggests that these scenes in Acts may be motivated by Luke's desire as a dramatist to move Paul into a new and highly significant field of action, confronting Imperial Rome, and his desire as an apologist to present the upright treatment of Christians by Roman officials, as opposed to the stylized negative treatment meted out by the Jews (*Acts*, 106 f.; 334 f.; also 'The Book of Acts as source material for the history of early Christianity', *Studies in Luke–Acts*, 275).

[52] A point Gaston might want to emphasize, since according to his argument, Paul held that Jews are already *qua* Jews within the eschatological community, so that baptism would be an entry requirement only for Gentiles.

[53] As opposed to the general 'dependable until proven otherwise' approach of much of the scholarship. Norman Perrin formulated the criterion of dissimilarity in *Rediscovering the Teaching of Jesus* thus: (*a*) A saying of Jesus' may be regarded as authentic 'if it can be shown to be dissimilar to characteristic emphases both of ancient Judaism and of the early Church', and (*b*) 'The burden of proof will be upon the claim of authenticity', op. cit. (New York, 1967), 39. However, dissimilarity to first-century Judaism implies a definition of 'authentic' as 'unique', whereas consonance, on the contrary, might be construed as favourable to a claim to authenticity. See also M. D. Hooker, 'Christology and Methodology', *NTS*, xvii (1970/1), 482 ff.; J. Gager, 'The Gospels and Jesus: Some doubts about method', *JR*, liv (1974), 257.

[54] Whereas Luke clearly has written traditions to draw on for his Gospel, his sources for Acts are obscure. Scholars have wanted to see in the 'we' sections the traces of eyewitness reports that were turned over to Luke; against this, e.g. Marxsen, *Introduction*, 168. Luke clearly draws on oral traditions, but without convergent lines of evidence we cannot assess that tradition's accuracy. See J. Vansina, *Oral Tradition. A Study in Historical Methodology* (Chicago, 1965); also Gager, 'Method', art. cit., for a provocative application of Vansina's study to the synoptic material.

Luke, in other words, can and does take liberties with his material which today we would grant only to the historical novelist. And as he constructs his story, he uses those devices of realistic narrative common to both novels and history writing, most especially plausible chronology and seemingly incidental detail.[55] Thus, in the absence of independent evidence, we cannot take this plausibility or seeming off-handedness as prima-facie testimony to the reliability of Luke's information.[56] And we should not import his material to fill in (much less dictate the outline of) information we have from Paul.[57]

Omitting all of Luke's problematic material, considering solely the evidence of the Epistles, what can we say about Paul's understanding of his religious transformation when it occurred? In truth, very little: that it *probably* convinced him that Jesus was in some special way God's Son, or the Messiah, or both (if that equation had already been made by *c.*34); that he should stop harassing that part of the Jewish community in Damascus which held this view (which I assume at this time to be linked with eschatological expectation);[58] and *possibly* that as a result he should preach Christ Crucified—and about to return—to the Gentiles.

Can we say more about the way Paul eventually came to see his call? Yes, providing we let go of a whole set of assumptions that we inherit not only from Luke, but also from our belief that testimony about a transformational experience, whether first or second hand,

[55] As Frank Kermode has pointed out, commenting on the Passion Narratives, 'convincing' narrative convinces in part because, through chronology, it achieves the effect of the real; and in part because it reassures us by providing what appear to be impartially accurate contextual details. 'When John [the evangelist] gives the distance from Bethany to Jerusalem, and names the place where Pilate sat in judgement, he may well be wrong in both cases, but the detail is immediately reassuring', *The Genesis of Secrecy. On the Interpretation of Narrative* (Cambridge, 1979), 118. See also the discussion of strategies of *vraisemblance* in J. Culler, *Structuralist Poetics: Structuralism, Linguistics, and the Study of Literature* (Ithaca, 1975), 140–60, 192 f.; also Hans Frei, *The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative* (New Haven, 1974), 13–14.

[56] Against Jewett, *Chronology*, 9 f., 12–13.

[57] As does, for example, Jewett who, despite his avowed intention of letting go of the Lucan framework in order to hold on to the 'ascertainable data', nevertheless pins his chronology to Paul's meeting with Gallio, which derives from Acts, *Chronology*, 39, 85.

[58] See Davies, 'Paul and Jewish Christianity', art. cit., 167 ff.

provides the best possible evidence for reconstructing that experience. This point becomes much clearer through a study of Augustine's famous conversion, a case where we have much more information and can view the dynamics of retrospect and polemic in a detail impossible with the Epistles. In addition to this contribution by analogy, Augustine provides an indispensable element for our study, since his retrospective conversion shapes not only the way we see him, but also the way we see Paul.

§2. Augustine

In Book VIII of the *Confessions*, composed around the year 400, Augustine provides a classic account of a religious conversion. There he describes his encounter with divine grace in a Milanese garden some fourteen years earlier. The conversion scene, especially in chapters 7–12, powerfully recapitulates the theological themes that contour the first seven books of the *Confessions*: the weight of sin on man the child of Adam; the weakness of the divided will in the face of carnal custom; man's absolute dependence on the freely given, inexplicable grace of God. The moment of dramatic reversal and resolution comes as Augustine reads the words of Paul in Romans: 'Not in rioting and drunkenness, not in chambering and wantonness, not in contention and envy; but put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh and its appetites' (13: 13–14). 'I had no wish to read any further, and no need. For in that instant, with the very ending of the sentence, it was as though a light of utter confidence shone in all my heart, and all the darkness of uncertainty vanished away' (*Conf.* VIII. xii, 29).

When we turn to Augustine's writings from the period immediately following his conversion, however, to those works written at Cassiciacum in 386, we find a different person. This Augustine is perplexed by the problem of evil philosophically conceived. He again reports that he seized a book of Paul's letters, but they reveal to him the face, not of continence, but of Philosophy.[59] This is a different conversion, one viewed not as the struggle of the will, sin, and grace, but as progress in philosophy.[60]

To complicate the picture, Augustine's interpretation and use

[59] *c.Acad.* II. ii. 5.

[60] Presented as such, with a difference, in *Conf.* VII and VIII. Peter Brown notes: 'A sense of purpose and continuity is the most striking feature of Augustine's "Conversion". Seen in his works at Cassiciacum, this "conversion" seems to have been an astonishingly tranquil process. Augustine's life "in Philosophy" was shot through with S. Paul; but it could still be communicated in classical terms', *Augustine of Hippo* (Berkeley, 1969), 113 (hereafter cited as *Aug.*). See also Licentius' definition of conversion in *de ordine*, viii. 23, written at Cassiciacum.

of Paul in the period 386–8 is inconsistent with the overwhelming importance he attaches to the Apostle in *Conf.* VIII. Paul scarcely appears in the Cassiciacum dialogues; and where Augustine does cite him extensively, in *de moribus ecclesiae* (*c.*388), it is to reclaim him from the Manichees, the target of that treatise's polemic. His use of Rom. 7: 22–5 in Book VI of *de musica* (*c.*389) only anticipates his later arguments from that verse in the *Confessions*.[61] And Rom. 13: 13–14, the centrepiece of the conversion scene in *Conf.* VIII, receives scant attention from Augustine before he writes his religious autobiography.[62] Indeed, in the *expositio quarundam propositionum ex epistola ad Romanos*, written within five years of the *Confessions*, Augustine comments only on v. 14, and in such an uninteresting way that, were this commentary all we had, we could not imagine that this verse played any particular role, much less a crucially important one, in Augustine's life.[63]

How can we account for these two radically different first-hand reports, from the same man, of the same event? To choose between them[64] entails either a denial or an oversimplification of the fact to which they point: that Augustine's style of thinking and the questions he addresses in 386 are, in large part, determined by the problematic of fourth-century Neoplatonism and the Graeco-Roman philosophical language that he had only recently acquired. We must, rather, take the two accounts together, for they are the measure of the degree to which Augustine's theological opinions developed and changed, in characteristically complex ways, in the years following his stay at Cassiciacum.[65]

[61] *de musica*, VI. 5, 14, and 11. 33. See W. Babcock, 'Augustine's Interpretation of Romans (AD 394–6)', *Aug. Stud.* x (1979), 55–74, esp. 58.

[62] See L. C. Ferrari, 'Paul at the Conversion of Augustine (*Conf.* VIII. 12, 29–30)', *Aug. Stud.* xi (1980), 5–20; for locations of this verse in Augustine's writings before the *Conf.* esp. pp. 12–14.

[63] He observes that concern with one's health is permissible, unless this concern becomes self-indulgent, in which case it is bad, *Propp.* 77.

[64] Debate on this issue has scarcely moved beyond the lines drawn at the beginning of the century: both reports are true and only seem to be different; the reports are different, and therefore only the prior one can be true. This last radically sceptical position is most associated with P. Alfaric, *L'Evolution Intellectuelle de S. Augustin* (Paris, 1918). See Courcelle, *Recherches*, 7–12, for a review of the literature.

[65] These dialogues (Augustine's choice of literary format is of course significant) are in a sense 'appreciations' Augustine writes to the intellectual system which had provided him with a coherent and viable Christian alternative to Manichaean dualism; see J. Ries, 'La Bible chez S. Augustin et les Manichéens', *REA*, x (1964), 309–29, esp. 320. Neither his highly critical review of these writings (*Retractationes* I. 1–4), nor his critique of pagan Neoplatonism in *de civ. Dei* should obscure the fact that Neoplatonism itself remains absolutely fundamental to Augustine's thought throughout; on this see esp. R. A. Markus, *The Cambridge History of Later Greek and Early Medieval Philosophy* (Cambridge, 1970), 341–406.

As Augustine's theological opinions changed, so did his view of Paul—and, correspondingly, of himself. The Plotinian Paul whom Augustine had encountered in Italy all but disappeared once Augustine returned to North Africa in 389/390.[66] There, before the watching eyes of his own church and its schismatic rival, the Donatists, Augustine had to confront publicly a well-organized Manichaean sect that based much of its dualistic and deterministic doctrine on the Pauline Epistles.[67] To proceed against the Manichees, Augustine had to reclaim Paul.[68]

He did so exegetically. Beginning in 395, Augustine produced a steady stream of essays, commentaries, and 'think-pieces' on Paul's letters, particularly on Romans.[69] With the conceptual vocabulary granted him by the Epistles, Augustine pursued the problem of moral evil through an analysis of the dynamics of love, memory, and human motivation as these express the interplay of grace and free will. In 395, commenting on Rom. 7: 15–16, Augustine argued against a deterministic reading of the Apostle: the sinner under the law, he says, can freely choose to respond in faith to God's call and so turn to Christ who grants grace that man might cease to sin.[70] Election to salvation is thus based on the merit of man's freely willed faith, which God foreknows: *fides inchoat*

[66] For the changes Augustine lived through in this period, Brown, *Aug.* 138–45.

[67] 'Apostolum accipis?' 'Et maxime.' *c.Faust.* IX. 1. African Manichaeism in Augustine's time was virtually a Paulinist heresy; and, whatever the ultimate Eastern root of their dualism, the Manichees had as little difficulty as had the Gnostics before them in finding scriptural support in the 'apostolus haereticorum'. See, for example, the pattern of scriptural citation in the *Capitula* (ed. P. Monceaux, *Le Manichéen Faustus de Milève. Restitution de ses Capitula*, Mémoires de l'Institut National de France, t. XXXIII, Paris (1933)), the Latin counterpart to the *Kephalaia* (discussed in Ries, art. cit.); also W. H. C. Frend, 'The Gnostic-Manichaean Tradition in Roman North Africa', *JEH*, iv (1953), 13–27, esp. 21 ff.

[68] P. F. Landes, *Augustine on Romans* (Chico, 1983), ix. The *c.Fortunatum* records one of Augustine's first public acts of reclamation, a debate he undertook at the behest of a joint delegation of Catholics and Donatists at Hippo in 392 (Possidius, *Vita Augustini* VI). The debate is reviewed in M. E. Alflatt, 'The development of the idea of involuntary sin in S. Augustine', *REA*, xx (1974), 113–34, esp. 133; P. Fredriksen, 'Augustine's Early Interpretation of Paul', diss., Princeton University (1979), 87–106.

[69] These are *propositionum ex epistola ad Romanos* (hereafter *Propp.*), *expositio epistolae ad Galatas*, *epistolae ad Romanos inchoata expositio* (hereafter *Inch. Ex.*), questions 66–8 of *de 83 diversis quaestionibus* (hereafter *de 83 qu.*), and finally, capping this period, the *ad Simplicianum* and the *Confessions*.

[70] 'For by his free will man has a means to believe in the Liberator so that . . . he might cease to sin', *Propp.* 44. 3. Augustine had introduced the characteristic teaching of this treatise, the four stages of salvation, 'so that the Apostle seems neither to condemn the Law nor to take away man's free will' (13–18. 1–2) as the Manichees understood him to do. See also A. Pincherle, *La formazione teologica di sant'Agostino* (Rome, 1947), 85.

meritum.[71] So great is God's love and God's mercy that the only sin for which he can grant no forgiveness, the sin against the Holy Spirit, Augustine concludes, is despair. The proof is tautological: if the sinner despairs of forgiveness, he will never repent, and so will continue to sin.[72]

Within two years, commenting on these same verses, Augustine repudiates precisely this interpretation. In the *ad Simplicianum* I. ii, he argues that man's faith itself is not man's work, but God's gift, and hence no ground for merit; that man's will is itself elected by God; and that God's righteousness surpasses human understanding not because his mercy and grace are so abundant, but because he chooses to redeem some inexplicably chosen few from the *massa damnata* of humanity.[73] Not man's will, but solely the absolutely unmerited gift of God's grace, can correctly orient man's love toward the Divine. Augustine makes his case exegetically in the *ad Simplicianum* and autobiographically in the *Confessions*,[74] demonstrating it through his description in Book VIII of the conversion.

A gulf yawns, then, between Augustine's reading of Romans in 395 and in 400. It is bridged by his image of Paul. In the *epistolae ad Romanos inchoata expositio*, identifying the sin against the Holy Spirit as despair, Augustine argues that any sin of commission—adultery, treachery, murder, schism, or heresy—can be forgiven once the sinner repents.[75] Who is Augustine's prime example of a sinner not so low that he could not be saved? Paul. The Paul who wrote Philippians 3 might well have wondered whom Augustine had in mind. It was the Paul of the Catholic tradition, whom Augustine imports as he comments on Romans. For Paul, Augustine argues on the basis of Titus 3: 3, was himself once 'foolish and unbelieving, erring, a slave to various pleasures and desires'—

[71] *Propp.* 62. 9.

[72] *Inch. Ex.* 14. 1; 22. 3; cf. his comment on despair in 386 in *soliloquia* vi. 12.

[73] *Ad Simpl.* is structurally contrapuntal to *Propp.*: I. i implicitly treats man in stages one and two, *ante legem* and *sub lege*; I. ii, how man passes from *sub lege* to *sub gratia*, though these actual phrases are not used, and the way Augustine sees man's reception of grace is radically new. Cf. *Propp.* 13–18, 12–13; 60. 15; 62. 9; *de 83 qu.* qu. 68. 4; *Inch. Ex.* 23. 7, and *ad Simpl.* I. ii. 5; *ad Simpl.* I. ii. 22 is a complete reversal of his position in *Propp.* 44. 3. One can trace the rapid development of his concept of the *massa*, so crucial to his later teaching on Original Sin, in *Propp.* 62. 19; *de 83 qu.* qu. 68. 3; *ad Simpl.* I. ii. 17 ff. For a more complete comparison and discussion see Fredriksen, op. cit., 191–231; on the *massa*, ibid. 136–42 and 203–7.

[74] F. E. Cranz, 'The development of Augustine's ideas on society before the Donatist Controversy', *Augustine: A collection of critical essays*, ed. R. A. Markus (New York, 1972), 361; also the discussion in E. TeSelle, *Augustine the Theologian* (London, 1970), 178–82; Brown, *Aug.* 170.

[75] *Inch. Ex.* 14. 1–22. 4.

exactly the way Augustine will present himself in the *Confessions*.[76] And how was Paul saved? '[B]y one word from on high . . . whereby his mind and will were . . . set on the right way towards faith', at the moment of his conversion as it is presented in Acts (the finale of the *ad Simplicianum*).

The Augustine who stands embroiled in the anti-Manichaean campaigns of the North African Church in the year 400, who has read the letters of Paul for over a decade in a very different personal, political, and ecclesiastical setting from that of the garden in Milan and the *otium liberale* of Cassiciacum, sees the events that re-introduced him to Catholicism quite differently from the way he saw them in 386.[77] He also sees a different Paul—not the Christian philosopher, nor the staunch defender of free will, but the sinner inexplicably redeemed from his former life by the unmerited gift of God's grace; and who, like Augustine, accordingly sings praises to God's divine inscrutability.[78]

Augustine's account of his conversion in the *Confessions*, in other words, is a theological reinterpretation of a past event, an attempt to render his past coherent to his present self. It is, in fact, a disguised description of where he stands in the present as much as an ostensible description of what occurred in the past. And he constructs his description from his reading of Acts 9 as well as from his new theological convictions.

But he renders this account in a public document. In the contest for Paul against Donatists[79] and Manichees, Augustine claims Paul for Catholicism in a very radical way: through autobiographical exegesis. He self-consciously presents his personal history as the model for his theology in the *Confessions*, and interprets his personal history in light of Paul's, as he sees it through Acts and the deutero-Paulines. He thus places himself within the Pauline

[76] *Inch. Ex.* 21. 4 f.

[77] See Brown's sensitive assessment, *Aug.* 158–81.

[78] *ad Simpl.* I. ii. 22; see also *Conf.* X. xxxi. 45. Augustine interprets Rom. 11: 33 f. as man's acknowledgement of his inability to comprehend the most hidden and secret standard of equity by which God chooses to leave to damnation those sinners whom he did not elect to salvation: 'Eorum autem non miseretur, quibus misericordiam non esse praebendam, aequitate occultissima et ab humanis sensibus remotissima judicat', *ad Simpl.* I. ii. 16; cf. his concluding argument, years later, in *de praedestitatione sanctorum*, I. vi. 11.

[79] A contest in which Augustine did not hesitate to draw upon the work of the Donatist theologian, Tyconius, whose own interpretation of Paul in his *Liber Regularum* had a decisive influence on Augustine's. For an analysis of Tyconius' work, and Augustine's appropriation of it, see Pincherle, 'Da Ticonio a Sant' Agnostino', *Ricerche Religiose*, i (1925), 443–66; Babcock, 'Augustine and Tyconius. A Study in the Latin Appropriation of Paul', *Studia Patristica*, xviii (1982), 1209–15; Landes, 'Tyconius and the End of the World', *REA* xxviii (1982), 59–75.

theological tradition established in the New Testament canon and, in a sense, demonstrates the truth of orthodoxy's claims about Paul through his public application of (the Catholic) Paul's story to his own past.[80] Not incidentally, this has the added polemical advantage of affirming that the tradition of Paul, of the Church, and of Augustine are all one.

This also accounts in part for the re-emergence of these issues, and of the centrality of Paul and of the *Confessions*, in the heat of the Pelagian controversy almost twenty years later.[81] Challenged on his views on predestination and grace—accused, indeed, of being a Manichee[82]—Augustine builds his case once again from Romans. 'For grace forms almost the only topic discussed for the Romans, and is plied with so much persistence and variety as to fairly fatigue the reader's attention.'[83] Disavowing his 'erroneous' arguments in the *Propositions*, Augustine urges his enemies to read carefully the correct views on grace and free will put forward in the *ad Simplicianum* and the *Confessions*.[84] But even in these works, Augustine now states, he had not properly understood the import of such verses as Rom. 7: 22–4: 'For I delight in the law of God in my inmost self, but I see in my members another law at war with the law of my mind, making me captive to the law of sin. Wretched man that I am! who will deliver me from this body of death?' Earlier, he had held that Paul here delivers a rhetorical lament of the man *sub lege*, before the reception of grace.[85] But this speaker cannot be man *sub lege*, Augustine now argues, because no one not yet under grace could delight, even if only inwardly, in the law of God. No: Paul here describes man *sub gratia* who, despite the reception of grace, still suffers because of the concupiscence of the flesh.[86] In fact, Augustine now concludes, *Paul here speaks of himself*, and the Pelagians, missing this autobiographical reference, misread his entire text.[87]

[80] e.g. his use of Rom. 7: 22–5 in *Conf.* VIII. v. 12.

[81] Pelagius, who in 406–9 has himself written expositions of the Pauline epistles, took offence at the note of moral passivity in the *Confessions*, *de dono perseverantiae*, xx. 53; see Courcelle, *Recherches*, 245–7.

[82] e.g. in *de nuptia et concupiscentia*, III. iii. 8; xxiii. 38. See Brown on the shared sensibility of Augustine and the Manichees, *Aug.* 393–7.

[83] *de spiritu et littera*, vii. 12; see also Brown, *Aug.* 359.

[84] *de praedestinatione sanctorum*, I. iii. 7; iv. 8; *de dono pers. xx*, 52.

[85] *Propp.* 44; 45–6; *Exp. Ep. Gal.* 47; *ad Simpl.* I. i. 9.

[86] *praed. sanct.* I. iv. 8.

[87] *contra ii epistolas Pelagianorum*, I. viii. 13–14; also his use of Paul's conversion in *de praed. sanct.* I. ii. 4. Even the apostles, who clearly had moved *sub gratia*, nonetheless 'groaned because of the concupiscence of the flesh', I. x. 22–4. See Brown, 'Augustine and Sexuality', *Center for Hermeneutical Studies* xlvi (1983), 1–13. Interestingly, Jerome seems to interpret Rom. 7 similarly, as Paul speaking of his own struggles *after* his conversion, *Ep.* 22. 5. 1 *ad Eustochium.*

Augustine 'proves' the correctness of this autobiographical reading by interpreting it, in turn, autobiographically: he personally identifies with the inner struggle he sees Paul ascribing to himself in Rom. 7. His own conversion, Augustine argues now against the Pelagians as he had earlier in the *Confessions*, happened not of his own will, but only through the grace of God, who had rescued him from himself.[88] None the less, despite the reception of this grace which had enabled him to enter the Catholic Church, he continued to endure the afflictions of *concupiscentia carnalis*: his own body remained for him a rebel province, held hostage by 'The Enemy'.[89] It is Augustine's final rejection of the classical ideal of moral perfection and the practice of virtue (so close to the soil of the reformist Pelagian religious sensibility)[90] through which, ironically, he had been reintroduced to Catholicism so long ago, as a young man in Milan. It had failed him—very possibly, as Peter Brown shrewdly suggests, 'because it could not withstand the terrific weight of his own expectations of it'.[91] But now he maintains that he had always held these views from the moment of his conversion ('*ab initio conversionis meae tenui, semper ut teneo*'),[92] for these are not his opinions, but the tradition of the Church, and the teaching, especially in Romans, of Paul.

§3. Conversion Narratives, Orthodox Traditions, and the Retrospective Self

Augustine meets a challenge to his theological views with an appeal to his past as the divine origin of his current position. His view of his conversion, continually contoured by his circumstances, maximizes its theological and polemical value. To accusations of idiosyncrasy and innovation, Augustine can respond by shaping his message (grace and predestination) and the legitimating moment of its reception (the conversion) in terms of the received—and contested-for—tradition. Through Luke and the Pastorals, Augustine can appropriate Paul, his prototype of the sinner saved despite himself because God so willed.[93] His meditation on Paul's

[88] *de dono pers.* xx. 53.

[89] Brown, *Aug.* 366; *de nupt. et concup.* I. xxxi. 35.

[90] See esp. P. Brown, 'Pelagius and his supporters: aims and environment', *Religion and Society in the Age of St Augustine* (New York, 1972), 183–207, and 'The Patrons of Pelagius', 208–26; E. TeSelle, 'Rufinus the Syrian, Caelestius, Pelagius: Explorations in the pre-history of the Pelagian Controversy', *Aug. Stud.* iii. (1972), 61–96.

[91] *Aug.* 147.

[92] *contra Iulianum*, VI. xii. 39.

[93] Paul's conversion serves as Augustine's paradigm of and for another controversial (and, *pace* Augustine, innovative) case he is arguing in highly charged circumstances. To Donatist protests against the policy of coercion which Augustine is instrumental in implementing, he responds: 'Where is what the Donatists are wont to cry: Man is at liberty to believe or not believe? Towards whom did Christ ever use violence? Whom did he compel? Here they have the Apostle Paul. Let them recognize in his case Christ first compelling, and afterwards teaching. . . .' *de correctione Donatistarum*, xxi. 6, a reference to Paul's conversion in Acts 9.

story in Acts may in fact have contributed to his abandoning his earlier position: man's freely imploring the Liberator's aid could not fit with Paul's pre-Christian activities as Luke presents them. 'The wills are elected. . . . The will itself can have no motive unless something presents itself to delight and stir the mind. That this should happen is not in any man's power. What did Saul do but attack, seize, bind and slay Christians? What a fierce, savage, blind will was that! Yet he was thrown prostrate by one word from on high. . . .'[94] Augustine's earlier formulation could not accommodate the case of Paul the persecutor.

The New Testament canon thus serves as a sort of chamber for this mythic feed-back system, where Augustine the convert interprets Paul's conversion through his own, and his own through what he sees as Paul's. Taking his cue from Luke, Augustine holds Paul's conversion as the hermeneutic key to Pauline theology—identical, for him, with Catholic tradition. He thus sees in Paul, and especially in Romans, the charter for the introspective self as the premier theological category, the setting for the drama of human will and divine grace; human will expressed in the works of the Law, grace in the unmerited salvation of the sinner (Paul/Augustine) in Christ.

Hence, for Augustine, the inner life of man is the sovereign arena of God's work of redemption, and the chief problem Paul addresses in Romans is the works of the Law and of grace. The heart of the epistle for him is Rom. 7, the torment of the saint in the face of his divided will, which only God can heal.[95] Man is universally and

[94] *ad Simpl.* I. ii. 22.

[95] Was Augustine's view of Paul in Rom. 7 Paul's view? Kümmel's now classic treatment of the question argued definitively against any autobiographical understanding of the text (*Das Bild des Menschen* . . ., esp. 117–32); current scholarly opinion is once again divided. In favour of an 'autobiographical' reading of chap. 7, whether pre- or post-conversion, e.g. J. Dunn, 'Rom. 7: 14–15 in the theology of Paul', *TZ*, xxxi (1975), 257–73; P. Meyer, 'Rom. 10: 4 and the "End" of the Law', *The Divine Helmsman*, ed. J. L. Crenshaw and S. Sandmel (New York, 1980), pp. 66 f.; against, e.g. Munck, *Paul*, 11 and n. 2; Menoud, 'Revelation', art. cit., 133; Meeks, *Urban Christians*, 186 and 242 n. 59; Stendahl, *Jews and Gentiles*, *passim*. C. L. Mitton sees Rom. 7 referring to the dilemma of 'any man relying on his own resources' ('Rom. 7 Reconsidered', *Expository Times*, lxv (1953/4), 78–80, 99–103, 132–5); Bultmann, as descriptive of 'Jewish existence in general' (!) (*Existence*, op. cit., 114, 147–57). Davies, while resisting the autobiographical interpretation, does urge that Rom. 7 'reflects' a personal experience, 'Paul and the Law', 106. For discussion and extensive references see Sanders, *PPJ*, 443 n. 4 and 479 n. 23; also *PLJP*, 70–81.

justly condemned to damnation after the sin of Adam: God in his graciousness mysteriously elects a few to be predestined to salvation. 'Unsearchable are his judgements, inscrutable are his ways!' (Rom. 11: 33, at the conclusion of the *ad Simplicianum*).

Paul, I think, could not have agreed less. He indeed focuses on the ways that grace and the Law function in God's work of redemption, but the stage for that work is not the individual human soul, but all of human history—a history which, shortly, God will bring to a glorious consummation. Paul sees this eschatological redemption, in other words, as historical, not psychological; communal (the redemption of Israel), not individual; universal, not selective. He announces a sweeping salvation history in Romans, reviewing God's great acts of redemption: the sending of his Son, most recently; but also the promise to Abraham, the promise passing to Jacob, the exodus from Egypt. What for Augustine is the hidden mystery of the way God chooses between one sinner and another, for Paul is the unexpected way in which God is about to redeem Jew and Gentile both. God's inscrutable ways have led, paradoxically, to the justification of the ungodly and the stumbling of Israel which, since God's promises are irrevocable, could never have stumbled so as to fall.

> For the gifts and the call of God are irrevocable. Just as you were once disobedient to God but now have received mercy because of their disobedience, so now they have been disobedient in order that by the mercy shown to you they also may receive mercy. For God has consigned all men to disobedience, that he may have mercy upon all. O the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgements, how inscrutable his ways! For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who has been his counsellor? Or who has given him a gift, that he might be repaid? From him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen' (Rom. 11: 29–36).

It is with his intense eschatological commitment in mind that we should view what tradition has labelled Paul's conversion, but which Paul understands as his call. His allusions to his experience of the Risen Christ function similarly and in similar situations, *mutatis mutandis*, to Augustine's descriptions of his own conversion. They are nodal points in debates occurring many years after the fact, and they articulate his present convictions. But unlike Augustine's, Paul's allusions to his call are *not* primarily autobiographical or theological so much as rhetorical: they serve as one of a number of arguments he brings to bear against a particular position. In 1 Cor. 15, Paul refers to his experience of the Risen Christ ('He appeared . . . to me', v. 8) in order to persuade his congregation to his point of view ('Now if this is what we proclaimed, that Christ

has been raised from the dead, how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead?' v. 12). To the Philippians, to whom rival missionaries (Christian? Jewish?) had preached circumcision, Paul responds with a catalogue of his Jewish achievements ('. . . as to righteousness under the Law, I was blameless', Phil. 3: 6), only to dismiss them ('But whatever gain I had I count as loss for the sake of Christ . . . I count them as refuse. . . .' vv. 7–8) by way of suggesting that the Philippians do the same with the propositions of his rivals. So also in Galatians: challenged on his 'law-free' gospel to the Gentiles, Paul responds not to relay personal information, but to defend his concept of apostolic authority. He had already successfully defended his position some time ago to James, Peter, and the other pillars of the apostolic community (2: 2–9). Even they recognized the authority of his gospel, which had been granted to Paul independently of Jerusalem, 'when he who had set me apart before I was born and had called me through his grace, was pleased to reveal his son to me (*en emoi*), in order that I might preach him to the Gentiles . . .' (1: 15 ff.).

Paul invokes this past experience defensively, to deflect immediate criticisms of his gospel. But in his epistle to the Romans, the questions he responds to are posed by himself: this is diatribe, not polemic. He writes to a community he does not know personally; in Rome, his authority as apostle, not yet established, could not be challenged in the same way as we find in his other letters. Accordingly we find in Romans no alusion to his call.[96]

Yet his call does provide us with the hermeneutical key to Romans—though not in the way that Luke, Augustine, and many modern historians hold. Paul's Christian competitors, the rival missionaries who urged the Galatians to seal themselves in the eschatological community of redemption with the ancient sign of the covenant, implicitly impute to Paul a break with tradition. But what tradition? 'Christian tradition' might seem implied, since Paul defends his authority over against his present opponents by discussing the recognition accorded his authority earlier by the Jerusalem apostles, who might seem to be the arbiters of such a tradition. *But in the first half of the first century there is no 'Christian tradition' as such.* Beyond a certain unanimity of opinion on the special status of Jesus there was a wide range of interpretations of the gospel, as we see from the evidence of Paul's letters themselves. Besides, Paul was not being criticized for his interpretation of Jesus. No, the tradition Paul's opponents criticize him for violating is the

[96] On the situation of this epistle, see the essays in *The Romans Debate*, ed. K. Donfried (Augsburg, 1977); Sanders, *PLJP*, 148, on the difference in tone and situation between the letters to Galatia and Rome.

same one he invokes to legitimate his position: Jewish missionary practice in the face of the coming End of Days.

At the end of times, the nations of the earth (according to the 'liberal' interpretation) would be redeemed along with Israel by joining Israel, forsaking fornication and idolatry, worshipping in Jerusalem at 'the house of the God of Jacob'.[97] The prophecies bespeaking this eschatological universalism served as the scriptural warrant for Jewish missions to the Gentiles both before and after the birth of Christianity.[98] But Paul interpreted this mission in a radically new way: that the Gentiles could enter the eschatological community of the saved through baptism into Christ, without assuming 'the yoke of the kingdom of heaven'. The controversy in Galatia is with rival Christian missionaries, not with Judaism; and though the Law remains for Paul an important source of ethical teaching,[99] he did not require halachic observance of his Gentile converts.

Did Paul hold this opinion on the Law from the beginning, as he claims in Galatians? Lacking the sort of comparative evidence for him that the Cassiciacum dialogues provide us with for Augustine, we cannot say. But we see him legitimating his gospel *c.*55 *in terms of his religious tradition, Judaism*, by presenting its origin as a prophetic call similar to those of Isaiah and Jeremiah, two figures of unimpeachable authority likewise called by God to witness to his plan to bring salvation to the nations.[100]

[97] Mic. 4: 2, identical with Isa. 2: 2–4; of apocalyptic texts written in our period, e.g. 1 Enoch; Sybilline Oracles iii. 797 ff.; also the catena of scriptural citations Paul gives in Rom. 15: 9–12. See now E. P. Sanders, *Jesus and Judaism* (Philadelphia, 1985), pp. 212ff. on the Gentiles in Jewish eschatological theology.

[98] On Jewish prosyletism, most recently, Gager, *Origins*, 35–112; G. F. Moore, *Judaism*, i (Cambridge, 1966; originally published 1927), 323–53; McEleny, 'Circumcision', art. cit., on patterns of proselytism. Sanders comments, 'Paul was engaged in a thoroughly Jewish task, bringing the Gentiles into the eschatological people of God', *PLJP*, 198, and of course Paul was not the first Jew to proselytize on behalf of this movement, p. 207.

Against this picture, Munck, *Paul*, who argues that Paul initiates the Gentile mission (236); that Jewish Christianity had no mission to the Gentiles (207); and that Judaism itself, not having correctly understood Isaiah, had 'no missionary theory': 'Judaism is not an evangelizing [*sic*] movement', (242): I am baffled by his description. Also, for example, Dupont, who sees Paul's mission to the Gentiles as precipitating tensions with Judaism *per se*, 'Conversion', art. cit., 179.

[99] Especially given his communal eschatological emphasis: see esp. Sanders, *PLJP*, 84 (Paul's positive statements about the Law); also 94 f.; Meeks, *Urban Christians*, 101–5 (this concern with moral behaviour relates to the purity of the community and is a normal concern of eschatological apocalyptic); also 'The Social Functions of Apocalyptic Language in Pauline Christianity', in *Apocalypticism in the Mediterranean World and the Near East*, ed. D. Hellholm (Tübingen, 1982); Davies, 'Paul and the Law', art. cit., 105.

[100] Isa. 49: 1, 6; Jer. 1: 5; see Stendahl, *Jews and Gentiles*, p. 8; Meeks, *Urban Christians*, 117–39.

Hence the problematic of Romans, Paul's expanded, and calmer, companion piece to Galatians. Here he treats the themes of man's sinfulness and God's grace, the privileged position of Israel with the Law and God's miraculous inclusion of the Gentiles apart from the Law in Christ, as he strains for an answer to the question posed by eschatological apocalyptic itself: the problem of history.[101] Paul rearranges the sequence of certain items in the traditional apocalyptic scenario—the coming of the messiah had preceded the End; his resurrection preceded the resurrection of the dead which traditionally was held to be a signal of the End; the Gentiles convert well before the End, etc.—but the basic Jewish lineaments remain.[102] To conceptualize, present and, where needed, defend his version of messianic apocalyptic redemptive mythology, Paul places himself in the tradition of the classical prophets as they were interpreted in first-century Judaism. They were called to do what Paul does; Paul does what they did: preach the salvation of the Gentiles. In other words, like most apocalyptic prophets, Paul uses 'traditional scriptures and traditional interpretations of scriptures in novel combinations to justify radical innovations'.[103]

Of course, the problem of history did not resolve itself as Paul so fervently believed it would. What arrived was not the Kingdom, but the Church, and Paul came to serve as the foundation for something he certainly never envisioned: orthodox ecclesiastical tradition. Gentile Christianity, half a century or more after the non-arrival of the Kingdom, separated from and antipathetic to

[101] For eschatological transformation as a response to the problem of evil, Meeks, *Urban Christians*, 183–92; as a resolution to the 'theological anomaly', of eschatological Israel and 'the vast majority of then-living Jews', ibid., 168. Such a reading of Romans brings chaps. 9–11 to the fore: see esp. Sanders on the 'anguish and dilema' of these chapters, *PLJP*, 197; Davies, 'Paul and People', art. cit., 130–3 and 345–7 n. 32 reviewing interpretive positions on this part of the epistle; also 142; Stendahl, *Jews and Gentiles*, 28 ff. ('The real center of gravity in Romans is found in chapters 9–11. . . .'); Meyer, '"End" of the Law', art. cit., 60 ('Romans 9–11 . . . is at the same time the one place in Paul's letters where the historical horizons of his theology become most apparent, where he grapples most directly with the question where God's purposes and judgements are sustained in the history of his people. . . .'), 75 n. 5.

[102] Betz, *Galatians*, 70 (pointing to Rom. 9–11); Davies, loc. cit. and p. 102; Munck, *Paul*, 123, 255–8, 276 f., 303–5; Schoeps, *Paul*, 219 f.; Sanders, *PLJP*, 171–206. For the view that Paul's commitment to apocalyptic diminished or changed considerably by the end of his career, P. Benoit, 'L'Évolution du langage apocalyptique dans le corpus paulinienne', *Apocalypses et Théologie de l'Espérance* (Paris, 1977), 299–335, but his argument depends on taking Colossians, Ephesians, and 2 Thessalonians as Pauline.

[103] Wayne Meeks, personal correspondence, 13 May 1980. See *Urban Christians*, 171–80, on apocalyptic and the management of innovation; also 'Apocalyptic Language', art. cit.

its parent religion, largely abandons the Jewish redemptive myth of eschatological apocalyptic which had provided the content and context of the mission of Paul[104]—and, *mutatis mutandis*, of Jesus.[105] Looking to the past to sanction its present, developing new, Christian myths of redemption, the Gentile Church sees this separation and antipathy *ab origine*, and *in origine*.[106] This conviction shaped the traditions about Jesus, when they were finally

[104] The earliest and clearest example of this is Marcion, who saw especially in Paul the charter for the renunciation of the Jewish scriptures *in toto*; see J. Knox, *Marcion and the New Testament* (Chicago, 1942); more recently, Gager, *Origins*, 160–7. 'Orthodox' Christianity also championed a de-eschatologized gospel, and this difference between the Jewish apocalyptic messianism of the first generation of apostles and Luke's reinterpretation of it is one of the key differences between the Paul of history and the Paul of Acts.

[105] The classic study is A. Schweitzer, *The Quest of the Historical Jesus* (New York, 1968; original printing 1906); see now Sanders, *Jesus and Judaism*. Bultmann sees Jesus as standing in the historical context of Jewish expectations concerning the end of the world, but argues that this expectation is reinterpreted, and to that extent demythologized, as Jesus calls his followers to decision, i.e. to existential authenticity, esp. as over-against the 'legalism' of Judaism; see e.g. *Theology of the New Testament*, 3–52. Cf. E. Käsemann, 'The Beginnings of Christian Theology' (82–107) and 'On the subject of Primitive Christian Apocalyptic' (108–37) in *New Testament Questions of Today* (London, 1969), and Bultmann's reply, 'Ist die Apokalyptik die Mutter der christlichen Theologie?', *Exegetica* (Tübingen, 1967), 476–82. Both scholars discuss the issue with respect to both Jesus and Paul.

[106] On the effects on the Jesus material: the polemic against the Pharisees, Gager, *Origins*, 134 ff.; the shape of the Passion Narratives (trial of Jesus; progressive exculpation of Rome and inculpation of Jews), esp. Barrett, *Gospel Tradition*, 53–67; also Pearson, '1 Thess. 2: 13–16: A deutero-Pauline Interpolation', art. cit., 79–94. The effect on the Pauline material: Gager, op. cit., 134–95; Pearson, art. cit.; Davies, 'Paul and Law' and 'Paul and People', art. cit., esp. on the effects of Javneh; also Schiffmann, 'Crossroads', art. cit., 147–56, on Jewish context of this debate. S. G. F. Brandon, *The Fall of Jerusalem and the Christian Church* (London, 1978), gives the military and political context of this cultural and religious disengagement; more on the effects of 'context' on 'content', Davies, art. cit., 99, 137–8; Meeks, *Urban Christians*, 164 on the relation of social matrix to theological systems.

Modern New Testament scholars too often continue the ancient Gentile polemic, for example, Munck speaks of *Israel* as crucifying Jesus, concluding: 'As always, Israel is unbelieving and stubborn, and this generation [i.e. Jesus'], which experiences greater things than all previous generations, is unbelieving and disloyal to a quite exceptional degree', *Paul*, 271. See C. Klein's review of modern New Testament scholarship from this perspective, *Anti-Judaism in Christian Theology* (Philadelphia, 1978); before her, the milestone study by G. F. Moore, 'Christian Writers on Judaism', *H.Th.R.* xiv (1921), 197–254. For a review of the New Testament literature itself, Sandmel, *Anti-Semitism in the New Testament* (Philadelphia, 1978); Rosemary Reuther, *Faith and Fratricide. The Theological Roots of Anti-Semitism* (New York, 1974); Gaston, 'Paul and Torah', art. cit.; for a review of both ancient and modern writings, Gager, *Origins*, esp. 11–23 and 117–192.

written down; it determined the way the Church reads Paul and (especially through Luke, Augustine, and Luther) interprets his 'conversion'.

What, in light of our historical study, can we say about conversion, conversion narratives, and conversion traditions in Western Christianity? First, that the theological (or intellectual or ideological) *content* of the conversion does not lie in the clear moment of radical change that the classic literature presents to us. That moment exists only retrospectively, when the convert, examining his life, attempts to interpret his present in light of his past ('How did I get here?'). But he comes to his past only through his present, and it is from his vantage point in the present that the convert constructs a narrative that renders past and present continuous, intelligible, and coherent ('This is how I got here'). To see a content-filled moment of conversion is to have constructed a narrative whereby that moment emerges retrospectively as the origin of (and justification for) one's present.[107] And the more articulate the tradition for expressing this change, the more likely the convert's experience will conform to the traditional paradigm. For the seemingly historical narrative of the conversion account serves to reaffirm the tradition which the convert, through this event, has joined: the traditional elements with which the convert constructs his narrative anchor him in a world new both religiously and socially. The convert thus sees the subsequent events in his life in light of his conversion; but, *à l'inverse*, his description of his conversion should be read in light of these subsequent events.

In sum, the conversion account is both anachronistic and apologetic: apologetic personally and publicly, for the convert must explain himself to himself and to his audience (his new group; his old group; an opposing group); anachronistic, because the account rendered in the conversion narrative is so shaped by later concerns. The conversion account, never disinterested, is a condensed, or disguised, description of the convert's *present*, which he legitimates through his retrospective creation of a past and a self.

As with conversion narratives on the individual level, so with orthodox traditions on the institutional level. They too, I would argue finally, are apologetic (for those within and those without)

[107] On the construction of narratives as a way of coping with epistemological crises both individual and cultural, see esp. the suggestive article by A. MacIntyre, 'Epistemological crises, dramatic narrative, and the philosophy of Science', *The Monist* (1977), 453–71; on the 'retrospective moment' and identity formation, M. Foucault, 'Nietzsche, Genealogy, and History', *Language, Counter-Memory, and Practice*, ed. D. F. Bouchard (Ithaca, 1977), 139–64, esp. 142–3.

and anachronistic of necessity. Any traditional religion which sees its origins in a discrete historical revelation will hold consonance with the past to be the ultimate criterion of legitimacy. Put differently, the present is legitimate only to the degree that it rearticulates and reaffirms the past. But the past is not thus preserved so much as remade in the image of the present: The past is too important, in a sense, to be allowed to exist.

What *actually* happened, what the convert actually thought or experienced at the time of his conversion, is thus not accessible to the historian. He must frame his questions differently, for he knows that he cannot know—any better, perhaps, than can the convert himself—what was perceived at the 'moment of conversion'. The historian works with the available evidence, the conversion narrative; and that narrative can reveal to him only the retrospective moment, and the retrospective self.

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