

Per Omnia Saecula Saeculorum

Worlds Colliding and Created

Hearing with new eyes

Cincinnati Opera

"It puts a whole new face on it."

Mr. Golenski¹

Arthur J. Dewey

Paul the Prophet

Despite the attempt by the author of Acts to remove Paul's entitlement as an "envoy of the God's Anointed," the title *apostolos* has very much determined how we look at Paul. But that designation very much needs to be filled in, especially by Paul himself. Indeed, the usual direction of the question of Paul the envoy may be better served by investigating how Paul saw himself, particularly as he functioned as a prophet. As we shall see, this can be seen at the core of Paul's self-understanding. When we then turn to instances of prophetic language in the letters of Paul, we may become surprised by what he was attempting to communicate to his different audiences. Such an investigation is crucial for the Christianity Seminar's work, *since the trajectory of prophecy may very well underpin much of what would eventually be called the origins of Christianity*. The recent volume by Elaine Pagels begins to address this consideration.² *Yet what remains to be investigated is what the prophetic function consisted in and how that was generative in the developments of the Jesus traditions and communities*. Additionally it is important to locate this phenomenon within the context of the Roman Empire. It is not enough to point out that Paul was operating within the imperial atmosphere; rather, we must note that the Empire itself had prophets and seers, who also tried to usher in a new saeculum. *By considering the prophetic language of Paul we can begin to get a hint of the claims, from a number of competing voices, Jewish and Roman, that the world was shaking, that visions of the world-to-be were colliding, that*

1. Mr. Golenski was the father of a dear friend. We visited his business (an auto junkyard) in New Bedford, Mass. many years ago. It ranged over many acres. Around ten in the morning he stopped for a coffee break at a local shop. When we returned from that gregarious excursion, he exclaimed, surveying his domain, "*It puts a whole new face on it.*" Mr. Golenski was a wise man.

2. Elaine Pagels, *Revelations*.

people were envisioned in the birth throes of a new age. In considering these points, we shall also begin to notice that such prophetic strains, though sometimes repressed, were sometime subject to reprisal, and within a generation or two, were recast, outcast, and even blacklisted.

The Pauline Strain

Gal 1:11–16

Let me make it clear, friends, the message I announced does not conform to human expectations. ¹²I say this because it was not transmitted to me by anyone nor did anyone teach it to me. Rather, it came to me as an insight from God about Jesus as God's Anointed. ¹³Surely you've heard of my own behavior as a practicing Jew, how aggressively I harassed God's new community, trying to wipe it out. ¹⁴I went way beyond most of my contemporaries in my observance of Judaism, and became notably zealous about my ancestral traditions. ¹⁵However, when the One, who designated me before I was born and commissioned me to be an envoy, surprising all human expectations, chose to make his son ¹⁶known through me with the intent that I would proclaim God's world transforming news to the nations . . . (SV)

In summarizing the arguments about Gal 1:15–16a, Daryl Schmidt has pointed out that Paul has self-consciously used the language of a prophetic call³ and has seen himself as the vehicle for the transmission of this message to "the nations."⁴ If Paul described the experience that changed the direction of his life in prophetic terms, we might be allowed to follow up on that language. The act of divine "uncovering" (*apokalupsai*) would function as an oracle, a word of God. Indeed, if we recall oracles both Hebraic and Greek, this would have meant both a "sound and light show," a vision to be transmitted through words. Moreover, Paul understands his prophetic mission as proclaiming "world-transforming news" (*euaggelizomai*) to "the nations." This was not a singular mystical experience but a prophetic vision with immediate social and international implications.⁵

1 Thess 4:13–18; 5:1–11

⁴ ¹³Concerning those who have died, we don't want you to be uninformed: you shouldn't mourn as do those without hope. ¹⁴Because if we believe "Jesus died and arose," so also God will bring with Jesus all those belonging to him who have died. ¹⁵We can assure you of this by these prophetic words from the lord:

we who are still alive when Jesus comes will not be given preference over those who have already died.

3. "when the One, who designated me before I was born and commissioned me to be an envoy"

4. Daryl D. Schmidt, "Paul on Paul," 186–87.

5. See A. J. Dewey, R. W. Hoover, L. C. McGaughy, and Daryl D. Schmidt, *Authentic Letters of Paul*, 149–50.

¹⁶the lord himself will descend from heaven with a loud summons, with an archangel's shout and with the trumpet of God, then those who have already died and belong to the Anointed will ascend first; ¹⁷then those of us who are still living will be caught up with them in the clouds to greet the lord in the air. And so we will be with the lord from then on.

¹⁸So you should encourage each other with these prophetic words.

Readers often miss that in 1 Thessalonians we actually find evidence of Paul delivering oracular utterances. Because the reader is caught up in what appears to be apocalyptic issues (1:10; 4:14; 5:1–3), the actual format of 4:15–18 is overlooked. From a rhetorical perspective 4:13–5:11 is part of the third major section of Paul's speech.⁶ In this section we are concerned with matters of communal life and behavior.⁷ Indeed, the question of what will happen to those who have died before the arrival of the lord appears paramount to the Thessalonians.

Now in 4:14–16 we have a threefold use of the word *hoti*.⁸ In English it is rendered: (*that*) "Jesus died . . ." (14) . . . *that = quotation marks* who we are (15) . . . *that = quotation marks* the lord himself (16). If *hoti* is used in the same way in 4:13–14, that is, as quotation marks for the following words, then what follows in vv. 15 and 16 would be quotations of some sort of utterance. Also note in v. 15 the phrase *by the word of the lord* just before *hoti* is employed. In v. 18 Paul urges them to *encourage each other with these words*. In 4:15b we would then have an oracular utterance addressing the concern of the Thessalonians. The text of 4:16–17 would follow actually as a second oracle in visionary form. In effect, Paul would be functioning as a prophet, delivering oracles through the letter's performance to the Thessalonian community.⁹ In effect, through the words delivered by Paul, an opening has been provided to the community to deal with the reality of their lives together.

While there is for the stressed Thessalonians some sort of time plan (thus: 4:16, 17 we have *then, first; then*), it is only for the specific issue of those who have already "fallen asleep." Only in the following chapter do we become aware of what has been called the concern for an apocalyptic chronology or timetable.

5 Concerning the chronology of the great events to come: friends, you don't need to have [anything] written to you. ²Surely you know perfectly well that the day of the lord arrives like a thief in the night. ³When everyone expects peace and security, that's just when ruin strikes without warning, or [it is] like the sudden onset of birth contractions in a pregnant woman—no one can avoid such events. ⁴But you, friends, are not in the dark so that the day [of the lord] would catch

6. 1 Thess 1:2–10 forms the exordium; 2:1–3:13 the defensive narration; 4:1–5:22 displays the paraenesis. Note also the introductory greeting and final salutation and blessing (1:1; 5:23–28). For a more detailed outline, see *Authentic Letters of Paul*, 22–23.

7. Note the use of the word/phrase "concerning" (*peri*) in 4:9, 13. This is typical usage in letters giving advice on specific issues (cf. 1 Corinthians).

8. *hoti* can be translated as "that," "since," "for," or as quotation marks.

9. The phrase "word of the lord" or "oracle of the lord" is typical of Jewish prophetic discourse.

you by surprise like a thief. ⁵Rather, you are enlightened people, a people of the day. We are not denizens of the night living in the dark. ⁶Therefore, let us not sleep through life as others do, but be fully awake and in control of ourselves. ⁷“Nightpeople” are always asleep and drunkards are never sober, ⁸but since we are “day-people” let us always be in control of our senses and let us protect ourselves with the armor of our confidence in God and our unselfish love for one another and with a helmet of the hope of our liberation. ⁹For God has not set us up for condemnation, but intends for us to be liberated through our lord Jesus, God’s Anointed, ¹⁰who died for us so that—whether we have died or are still alive—we might live together with him. ¹¹Therefore, continue to encourage one another and to support each other as you have been doing.

It is curious that 1 Thess 5:1 does not actually continue the time line but interrupts it (cf. Mark 13; Matt 24).¹⁰ A decided change comes in the eschatological vision; the response features something like non-knowledge of the last times. In fact, 1 Thess 5:4–5 makes clear that the eschatological signs are located already to some extent in the community. A guarantee is given, a presence/presentiment of the end already stands in their midst.

Verse 9 gives us the basic thrust (retaining the future aspect and destiny of these people) of salvation (already begun) that grounds the ethical advice (paraenesis). Thus the community can build upon the sure foundations of salvation. The eschatological issues are refocused and given new shape. What was previewed in 1:9–10 and 3:13 is handled here. The writer has demonstrated by *induction* that the issues of the last time are already effectively at work in the life of the community (cf. 1:3). Paul thus answers the community’s eschatological concerns while continuing to build up by this visionary statement the thriving Thessalonian community.

One further note should be made. 1 Thess 5:8 is very impressive:

let us protect ourselves with the armor of our confidence in God and our unselfish love for one another and with a helmet of the hope of our liberation.

The military terms are not unusual. But what is significant is that they are applied to the community and not to the God of Israel (cf. Isa 59:17). Members of the community have begun to act with divine attributes. This should not be lost on us when we move to Romans 8 and the works of Horace.

1 Cor 15:50–57

What I am saying, my friends, is this: flesh and blood is not capable of inheriting the coming Empire of God, no more than the corruptible can inherit the incorruptible. ⁵¹Listen, now; I am going to tell you a wondrous secret:

We are not all going to die, rather we are all going to be transformed, ⁵²in an instant, in the blink of an eye at the sound of the last trumpet signal. The

10. Consider the Markan use of the conjunction of a time schedule with a spontaneous, unknown interruption.

trumpet will sound and the dead will be raised incorruptible and we [too] will be transformed.

⁵³Because this perishable man must be clothed with the imperishable, and this mortal man must be clothed with immortality. ⁵⁴And when the perishable is clothed with the imperishable and the mortal is clothed with immortality, then the saying that is written will come true:

Death has been engulfed by victory.

⁵⁵Where, O Death, has your victory gone?

What's happened, O Death, to your fatal sting?

Here is Paul's attempt to persuade the Corinthians that the future is still "aborning," that there is more to come. In some ways he has reiterated the oracle that he delivered to the Thessalonians (see above). However, there has been a change. Both those who have died and those who are alive are still figured in this oracular vision. Here, however, the emphasis is upon the nature of the transformation. A genuine metamorphosis of the very conditions of what constitutes existence will occur. Earlier oracles (15:54–55: Isa 25:8; Hos 13:14) are now in play to help envision what this new reality will be.¹¹

1 Cor 14:22–25

What this means is that ecstatic language is an omen not for members but for non-members, and prophecy is an omen not for non-members but for members. ²³If then the whole community of the Anointed has come together in one place and everyone is speaking in ecstatic languages and outsiders or non-members come in, will they not say that you are mad? ²⁴But if everyone is prophesying and some non-members or uninitiated persons come in, they will be convicted by all, called to account by all, ²⁵the secrets of their hearts are exposed; and so they will fall on their faces and worship God and declare that "God really is present among you."

In 1 Cor 14:22–25 Paul directly dealt with the function of prophecy. It was a divine sign or signal (*semeion*) for community members. Prophecy allows for the depths of the heart to be revealed. Reality is enabled and encountered through prophetic speech.

11. The use of earlier oracles is not limited to Jewish tradition. Indeed, it should not be overlooked that, after the destruction of the Roman Sibylline books in the fire of the temple of Jupiter (83 BCE), a new collection of oracular utterances was brought together (Dionysius of Halicarnassus, *Ant. Rom.* 4.62.6). Tacitus notes that during the reign of Augustus many of these new oracles were circulated (*Ann.* 6.12). Suetonius adds that Augustus edited these new oracles and even attempted to produce the final version (*Aug.* 31.1). In the *Carmen saeculare* Horace mentions how these oracles help generate this song and the choral performance:

quo Sibyllini monuere versus
virgines lectas puerosque castos
dis, quibus septem placuere colles,
dicere carmen. (11.5–8)

2 Cor 12:1–9

I have to brag. Although it's pointless, I'll move on to visions and special insights about the lord. ²I know a man who belongs to the Anointed who fourteen years ago was carried away—whether in the body, I don't know, or out of the body, I don't know, God knows—carried off to heaven's third level. ³I know that this man—whether in the body or out of the body I don't know, God knows—⁴was carried off to Paradise and heard indescribable words which no one may speak. ⁵I am willing to brag about that one, but I'll not brag about "yours truly" except for my limitations. ⁶I wouldn't be a fool, if I wanted to brag because I would be telling the truth. But I hold back, so that people won't think more of me than they see in me or hear from me. ⁷So I wouldn't get a swelled head from an overabundance of transcendent experiences, I was awarded a painful disability, a messenger from Satan to pummel me so that I would not get too carried away. ⁸Three times I begged our lord for it to go away. ⁹He spoke in an oracle to me:

My favor is enough for you, because my power achieves its ends through [your] limitations.

Now more than ever I shall brag most gladly of my limitations, so that the power of God's Anointed might reside in me.

In contrast to what we have just seen, the passage from 2 Corinthians features a wonderful parody of revelatory experiences and oracles.¹² Instead of using what might have been his authorizing experience to win his argument with the Corinthian community, Paul actually turned a wondrous vision into comic relief. Coupled with that is a note that he suffered from a *painful disability*, much to his dishonor and embarrassment. And even though he petitioned for relief, the only response he got was hardly a comforting line of Asclepius; rather it was a gnomic utterance, which he then interprets as another way to proclaim the Anointed One. We should note that Paul was not simply fixed to a formula. Instead, he was quite capable of using visions and oracles for various effects, including the comic. Yet, visions and sayings, the sounds and sights of wonder in the ancient world, are used to relate to the community in an effort to build it up (cf. 1 Cor 14:22–25 above):

12 ¹⁹Do you really think that all this time we've been defending ourselves to you? Before God, my dear friends, we say all these things in the spirit of the Anointed for your growth and development as a community.

Rom 8:12–27

So, brothers and sisters, we are under no obligation to worldly life, to live according to what it expects of us. ¹³Because if you live in accord with worldly expectations, you are surely doomed. But if by the power of God you continue to eliminate the malignant practices of your mortal life, you will live. ¹⁴For all

12. See A. Dewey, "The Masks of Paul," *Forum ns* 7,2 (2004) 170–71.

who are led by the power and purpose of God are the children of God. ¹⁵You have not received a slave's spirit that will lead you back to a state of fear, but you received a spirit of adoption by virtue of which we call out, "Abba! Father!" ¹⁶God's power and presence joins us in affirming that we are God's children. ¹⁷And if we are God's children then we are also heirs, heirs of God and co-heirs with the Anointed, since we experience the same abuse as he did in the hope that we may share his exaltation. ¹⁸I regard the sufferings of the present pregnant moment as nothing compared with the future splendor to be revealed to us. ¹⁹For the whole creation eagerly anticipates¹³ the disclosure of who God's children really are. ²⁰For the purpose of the creation was suppressed through no fault of its own, but by the One who subjugated it ²¹in the hope that the creation itself would be liberated from its subjection to degeneration and participate in the splendid freedom of the children of God. ²²We know that the whole creation has been moaning with birth pangs till now; ²³ and not only the creation, but we who have savored the first taste of God's power also sigh within ourselves while we await our adoption, the release and transformation of our bodies from their earthly limitations and fate. ²⁴This hope [of adoption] has saved us. Hope is not about what our eyes can see. For who hopes for what he sees? ²⁵But if we are hoping for what we do not see, then we are eagerly looking forward to it through our perseverance. ²⁶In support of this hope God's power comes to the aid of our weakness—we do not know what we should pray for as we ought, but God's power intervenes with yearnings beyond words. ²⁷The One who searches human hearts knows what the divine intention is. God's power and presence intervenes on behalf of the people of God in accordance with the purposes of God.

In a very profound sense, Paul's advice to the Thessalonians ("Do not suppress the power and presence [*pneuma*] of God, do not make little of prophecy [*prophetia*]; 1 Thess 5:19) carries through in Romans 8. After demonstrating how life is contradictory and disastrous for those who live out of the attempt to seek a singular advantage through cultural success (Rom 7:7ff.), Paul speaks of the life of those who live together in the power and presence of God (*pneuma*). In essence, genuine life is lived by those who live out of trust in the God who is present and effective in their midst. Such presence is manifest by the outcry of "Abba" by those who realize that they are now empowered by that God. Indeed, the sufferings of the present become the basis for understanding creation (*ktisis*)¹⁴ in different terms. By speaking in eschatological terms Paul addressed the reality of the Roman community's life. Indeed, he deepened it by showing the cosmic implications. The entire creation is imagined in birth pangs, and the people Paul addressed are exhorted to see themselves as part of this cosmic upheaval and

13. *eagerly anticipates*: in the Greek, *apokaradokia*. This word makes a first appearance here in Paul. Such a vision contrasts with the Roman imperial propaganda, which announced a new golden age through the iconography of a fertile Mother Earth.

14. *ktisis* can refer to "creation" or "foundation." In 2 Cor 5:17 it refers to the new regime, which God has brought about. See the notes in *Authentic Letters of Paul*, 128.

transformation. Paul uses throughout the first person plural (in contrast to Rom 7:7ff.) to underscore the solidarity of all involved. The very power and presence of God is the cause of the shaking of the foundations of the world. Both in the depths of creation and in the very depths of the human heart this transformative movement is felt. Even the phrase “children of God,” formerly referring to angels, now becomes the entitlement of the human community. As we saw in 1 Thessalonians, heavenly aspects and attributes come to rest in the human. In sum, the power of prophecy belongs to the entire community. Paul’s words to the Romans then become one prophetic voice among the choir of prophets who cry out of the heart of the universe.

An Earlier Prophetic Voice

The usual move by NT scholars in attempting to understand the use of prophecy is to move backwards into the Hebrew scriptures. The linkages with Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Hosea are noted and explored. However, the investigation of the Qumran materials has cautioned us to beware a simple backward movement. The Pesharim and the Hodayot would urge us to see that contemporaries or near-contemporaries of Paul were able to push the tradition forward in attempts to make sense of their present. But I should like to go beyond “the usual suspects” to reexamine briefly the work of Dieter Georgi, who made a most important case for the prophetic aspects of Roman, indeed, imperial, poetry.

Georgi¹⁵ brings forward recent scholarship on the *Carmen saeculare* by Horace. Here is a poem where imperial designs and poetic vision coalesced. While it is still uncertain how much this poem played a significant role in the games celebrating the Augustan revolution, it is clear that the poem was part of the effort to legitimize and create the vision of the imperial regime. We can say that this poem helped envision and carve out what this new *saeculum*¹⁶ was all about. Georgi points out that in *Ode* 4.6, written about the time of the *Carmen saeculare*, Horace disclosed his own sense of mission as a poet:

Spiritus Phoebus mihi, Phoebus artem
Carminis nomenque dedit poetae. (Odes 4.6.29–30)

15. D. Georgi, “Who is the True Prophet?” 25–51.

16. A *saeculum* originally meant the longest span of human life (cf. C. L. Smith, *The Odes and Epodes of Horace*, 328). Livy (*Perioch.* 49) considered it about a hundred years. Then under Augustus, the “rediscovered” Sibylline oracles put it at 110 years. Augustus would see in the celebration of the games the beginning of a new *saeculum* (cf. Virgil, *Fourth Eclogue*). It is significant that Claudius celebrated the festival in 47 CE and Domitian celebrated it again in 88 CE. Such a contrast in time periods should not surprise anyone who is familiar with how the Romans would determine the calendar every month. The Priene inscription even points out how the Greeks in Asia Minor reframed their yearly calendar around the birthday of Augustus.

Georgi remarks that the gods for Horace were “a presence laden with power.”¹⁷ Apollo not only inspired Horace but gave him the art of poetry and even the title of poet. Indeed, Horace calls himself a *vates* (*Odes* 4.6.44). By this he apparently understood himself to an inspired singer and thus connected to the bards of old.¹⁸ The *Carmen saeculare* celebrates the appearance of the impossible. Soon after divisive wars, a new golden period has been ushered in. The ancient ideals have returned:

Now Faith and Peace, Honor, and ancient Modesty,
Dare to return once more, with neglected Virtue,
And blessed Plenty dares to appear again, now,
With her flowing horn.

May Phoebus, the augur, decked with the shining bow,
Phoebus who's dear to the Nine Muses, that Phoebus
Who can offer relief to a weary body
With his healing art,

May he, if he favors the Palatine altars,
Extend Rome's power, and Latium's good-fortune,
Through the fresh ages, show, always, improvement,
Lustra ever new. (ll. 57–58)¹⁹

The age of the founding, of Aeneas, has returned in the persona and regime of Augustus. It is also important to note that this was a public performance, sung by young men and women as a prayer for prosperity, stability, and peace. The voice of the *vates* was taken up by a chorus, which echoed the hopes of many during the celebration.

In contrast, we find in *Epode* 16, written probably during the last years of the civil strife, a remarkable vision of flight from the desperate times. Rome was on the verge of national suicide.

Our impious generation, of cursed blood, will destroy,
And the land will belong again to beasts of prey.
A savage victor, alas, will stamp on our city's ashes
The horsemen will trample them with echoing hoof,
And, vile to see, will insolently scatter Quirinus' bones,
That are still sheltered, as yet, from the sun and winds!
Perhaps, as would be wise, all, or the better part of you,
Would prefer to escape this grievous suffering?

17. Georgi, “Who is the True Prophet?” 29.

18. Georgi, “Who is the True Prophet?” 30. The term evidently was misunderstood in Augustus' time.

19. A. S. Kline, *Horace: The Epodes and Carmen Saeculare*, 2005, at <http://www.poetryintranslation.com/PITBR/Latin/HoraceEpodesAndCarmenSaeculare.htm>.

In this poem Horace actually advises leaving Rome. He urges people to seek out

The fields, the golden fields, the islands of the blest,
 Where the land, though still untilled, yields a harvest every year,
 And the vines flower forever, though un-pruned,
 Where the shoots of the olive-trees bud, and are never failing,
 The dark fig graces the branch of its native tree,
 Honey flows from the hollow ilex, and from the lofty hill
 The stream leaps lightly down with a splashing of feet.

In fact, he describes a *topos* to seek:

There the goats come, without being told, to the milking pail,
 And the willing flock returns with swelling udders,
 No bears roam growling round the sheep-fold when evening falls,
 Nor is the higher ground swollen thick with vipers:
 And happily we'll wonder at further marvels, how rainy
 Eurys fails to deluge the fields with showers,
 How the fertile seed's not burnt and killed by the sun-baked soil,
 Since the king of the skies moderates rain and sun.
 No pine keel, with Argo's oarsmen at work at the oars, sailed here,
 Here no shameless Colchian woman set her feet:
 No Sidonian merchants turned their yardarms towards this place,
 No toiling sailors who crewed for Ulysses.
 No contagion comes to harm the flock, no constellation's
 Burning violence comes to scorch the lowing herds.

He exhorts people to vow to return only when conditions appear that bear an uncanny affinity with Jewish eschatological motifs:²⁰

But swear to this: it will only be right to return when rocks
 Shall rise from the ocean depths, and shall float again,
 We'll only be ready to trim our sails, turn for home once more,
 When the Po shall wash the Mantinian summits,
 When the towering Apennines shall jut out into the sea,
 When unnatural affection mates monsters together
 In strange desire, so tigers will long to take deer,
 And the doves will delight in union with kites,
 The trustful herd will show no fear of the tawny lion,
 And a smooth-scaled goat will love the briny waters.

20. Georgi points out that Horace may well have known these motifs through Jewish missionary propaganda. See also D. Georgi, *Opponents*, 35–36 nn. 45–46.

It would seem that in the *Carmen saeculare* Horace risks his words on a vision that the *miraculum* is coming about. Possibilities seen in earlier moments of desperation take on sound and body.²¹

Prophetic Consciousness

Georgi then raises a most important issue about the nature of prophecy. He maintains that prophetic consciousness has a distinctive cast. Prophetic consciousness declares a “hold on historical reality” and calls into question the claims that official reality makes. What is at stake is the power to create and construct the world.²² Horace in his poetry demonstrated that he was more than a political poet. His words indicate a cultic sensitivity and a cosmic vision. *Epode* 16 shows that he can look a devastated world in the eye and provide an alternate vision. His *Carmen saeculare* takes this world building out of the realm of the possible and casts it into time and space. His words were used to help bring the Empire to birth and to inaugurate a new age.

Now it is not a question of attempting to argue that Paul knows Horace.²³ Rather *our task is to determine if there are any useful strategies of imagination, any structures of composition and function that can be observed and used in trying to make sense of the developing era, when worlds were colliding or about to collide.* Moreover, *we can begin to detect in both Horace and Paul that envisioning was a social act.* From the outset of Paul’s breakthrough insight he saw a mission to the nations. Horace was attempting to give voice to a new age for his traditional home. His *Carmen saeculare* was part and parcel of a concerted celebrated effort to give birth to a new regime.

For Paul the vision comes out of the future.²⁴ Horace, on the other hand, sees the Roman *revolution* as a return to the best of the past. Both were making claims through their visions about what was the real. Each was imagining the real.²⁵ Each was destined to compete for this visionary and historical space.²⁶ Each was ushering in a new world, yet each world was destined to collide with the other.

21. The Einsiedeln Papyrus appears to continue this imperial tradition with pastoral poems that were probably written around the time of Nero’s accession to the principate in 54 CE. They deliver the hopeful anticipation of a new Caesar, as a savior and bringer of the golden age. See D. Georgi, “Why Was Paul Killed?” 155.

22. Georgi, “Why Was Paul Killed?” 48.

23. As the Medieval apologists did with Paul and Seneca.

24. See 2 Cor 5:16–21. Dewey, et al., *Authentic Letters of Paul*, 128, n. on 5:18. Paul was not summoning his listener back to an original point but into a relationship of a new situation. It was not a task of reconciling to the old but of discovering the new.

25. This was a favorite phrase of Amos Wilder.

26. A close reading of Rom 1:1–7 will show how Paul actually counters the claims of the *Carmen saeculare*. See A. Dewey, “Competing Gospels.”

Even in the use of the imaginative there are interesting similarities. Both Horace and Paul can use their imaginative perspectives to generate movement. The disasters of the civil wars gave Horace the occasion to imagine “those blessed isles” and to consider fleeing the homeland. Paul, in Romans, actually de-centers the world. For, although he would journey to the so-called center of the world, he would soon depart for Spain.²⁷ In each of their writings one can sense that the earth is shaking.

Such observations may force us in this extended investigation to re-imagine time. The usual trajectory is forward tending. But what if we look at and inhabit ancient time? If we try to inhabit the imaginations of these prophetic figures, what happens? What is time doing for Paul, for Horace? Does time coil back on itself? How do we imagine the return of a “golden age”? (For is that also not underneath the nostalgia of the Acts of the Apostles?) Do our mathematical images (such as *trajectory* or *point in time*) prove adequate for redescribing the fragments we investigate? What deep metaphors do we assume? What new ones do we need to comprehend the data? How does the inspection of prophecy/poetry assist us in this? What models of construction and communication must be envisioned in order to come to grips with this developing complexity?

The Issue Broadens and Deepens

The attention to the question and function of prophetic consciousness shows its applicability in reviewing the recent work of Elaine Pagels. Pagels has rightly situated the Scroll of Revelation within its literary, social, and political contexts.²⁸ She has contrasted it with a contemporary apocalyptic text of *Fourth Ezra*.²⁹ And she does not forget the imperial setting. She also quite capably indicates that the writer of the Scroll attempts to maintain and shore up social relations within the seven communities (Revelation 1–3) under scrutiny. She further points out that there are alternative visions available. Here her source materials come from Nag Hammadi (*Secret Revelation of James, Allogenes, Thunder: Perfect Mind*). Just before she introduces alternate visions, she points out that Ignatius

27. See A. Dewey, “*Eis ten Spanian*.” I have contended: “If we now add Spain, we see that Paul’s breadth of vision extends to the very borders of the Roman dream. With Spain comes the possibility of collision, where Roman economic dreams of an extractive economy would come directly up against the revision of Paul’s sense of God’s solidarity (*dikaiosune*) with humanity (and with the creation). One can easily envision a war of utopian proportions in the making.” (346).

28. Indeed, Pagels’s point that the Scroll of Revelation is “wartime literature,” written by someone who may have witnessed the war in Jerusalem, is rather suggestive. While it may be that the writer was suffering from post traumatic stress disorder, we still need to discern how these visions were generated. The writer creates visions from a collage of texts, as well as structuring scenes from known mythological *tupoi* and *topoi*. When we compare these with Roman eschatological visions, we begin to see that this is a literary industry.

29. Pagels’s reading of Ezra is extremely empathetic, engaging, and compelling, not an easy accomplishment for any reading of an apocalyptic text (Pagels, *Revelations*, 76–84).

of Antioch may well represent a significant counter to the writer of the Scroll of Revelation. Ignatius may well be imitating Paul in writing letters to communities. Further, as Pagels clearly points out, Ignatius functions prophetically by *crying out under the influence of God's power and presence*.³⁰ Indeed, he does this to assert his authority. Pagels begins to detect the historical context for Ignatius' authority as "overseer" over community members who did not subscribe to such structural constraints. In light of that Pagels points out that the warning to the Ephesians given by the seer of Revelation may well be addressing "would-be apostles . . . coming from Pauline circles, trying to enter established groups and take them over."³¹

Yet a most puzzling lacuna appears in Pagels's presentation of the "Nineties Generation."³² While she would argue that the historical context for the Scroll of Revelation was sometime in the nineties of the first century and that the writer of this scroll was addressing communities that may well have had Pauline connections some thirty years after Paul's *disappearance*,³³ there is no use of the letters to the Ephesians or Colossians. Such an oversight is crucial, not only in establishing a Pauline trajectory, but also in determining the possible nature of the argument in the Scroll of Revelation.

Moreover, it is not enough to say that Ignatius comes from a "Pauline circle." He too is part of the Pauline history, since he evidently knows (from his frequent citation of a variety of letters) a Pauline collection. Additionally, both he and the writer of Revelation engage in a Pauline activity: letter writing to communities. Furthermore, the fact that Ignatius utters out of divine influence should not be lost on the critical reader. He too is functioning as Paul did (as noted above). The critical question is: does he imitate Paul in trying to build a world with such a vision, or has world-construction been replaced by personal image building?³⁴

A further unaddressed question is the relevance of the Acts of the Apostles. Pagels occasionally cites or alludes to Acts to support her case about the first century. Yet it is not clear when Pagels dates Acts. Such a point is significant because, if Acts is dated to the second century, it may well be in the mix of materials that give us a picture not only of the happenings of the second century, but also of the later reconfiguration and domestication of the legend and letters of Paul.

30. Ignatius, *Phil.* 8.1–2. See Pagels, *Revelations*, 68–69.

31. Pagels, *Revelations*, 68.

32. Pagels, *Revelations*, 58. This opens up new meaning to the phrase "gay nineties."

33. Given Paul's counter-cultural vision and writings (see especially Rom 1:1–7), it is not surprising that he ended among the "disappeared" of the regime. The narratives of his death are both late and historically problematic. It is better to situate his ending among other victims of imperial control.

34. An example of the latter is Trajan's Column, where a personal history replaces the larger story of Roma. The *euangelion* of the Empire becomes specified in the story of one ruler, instead of the ruler being embedded in a larger story (e.g., Augustus within the narrative of Aeneas). See A. Dewey, "The Gospel of Trajan."

Colossians and Ephesians

What would happen if we were to consider the letters of Colossians and Ephesians³⁵ for any evidence of prophetic consciousness and function? A close reading of both letters would lead one to conclude that neither letter focuses upon prophetic activity. Rather, the stress appears to be on *epignosis* (*insight or knowledge*).³⁶ The hymn in Col 1:15–20 provides a remarkable summary of this knowledge. A cosmic Anointed One, the image of the invisible God, the first born of creation and of the dead, the head of all the powers of the universe and of the *ekklesia*, having reconciled all through the *blood of his cross*, effectively sums all up. Such a vision contends with the eschatological ones such as given in 1 Thessalonians 4, but there is a major difference. While Paul's images are shaking with a future dimension, the language in the Colossians hymn is quite steady and established. The future vector, found in the authentic materials, has been replaced by a solid vertical line from the heavens to the earth. There has been a revelation, one that had been hidden, was made known, and now is hidden in the skies (1:5; 3:3).

I was a servant in regard to the "game plan" (*oikonomia*) of God that was given to me to complete God's message—the secret (*mysterion*) hidden from all ages and from all generations—but now was manifested to his holy ones, those whom God wished to know what is the wealth of that splendid secret to the nations—which is God's Anointed in you, the hope of splendor. (Col 1:25–26)

The term *mysterion* ("secret")³⁷ comes from the apocalyptic wisdom tradition (cf. Dan 2:18, 19, 27, 30, 47; 4:9). It refers to a riddle or mystery which has a divine solution.³⁸ While these lines seem to reflect the experience related in Gal 1:11–16, there is a loss of any prophetic nuance. Instead the language is steeped in what one could call revelatory discourse.³⁹ Further, one does not see in Colossians any forward movement; rather waiting for the hidden to be finally revealed is the order of the age. The community of people from "the nations" is urged to remain steadfast upon their strong foundations and not to waver in

35. There is significant consensus that Colossians and Ephesians were written after the death of Paul sometime in the 80s–90s. A close comparison of the two letters leaves one with the conclusion that the writer of Ephesians knows the letter to the Colossians. Indeed, the particular word fields of Colossians are taken up in Ephesians and amplified. On the other hand, predominant Pauline issues found in the authentic letters of Paul are either missing or greatly transmuted. The entire onrush and pull of the future has been muted and replaced by a static condition of things. The political comedy of *to soma tou Christou* (1 Corinthians 12) is lost on the rather serious cosmic condition of *to soma tes ekklesias* of Col 1:18. It should be noted that Colossae is quite near one of the cities mentioned in Revelation—Laodicea, which is actually noted in the letter (Col 2:1). The letter to the Ephesians is most likely a more general letter to a number of cities in the vicinity. The name "Ephesus" is missing from a number of manuscripts.

36. E.g. Col 1:9.

37. Col 1:26, 27; 2:2; 4:3.

38. See also Rev 1:20; 10:7; 17:5, 7.

39. See Col 2:2 where the language is nothing if not overly epiphanic.

allegiance (1:22–23). While they are advised to keep their eyes on the skies, there is no imagined breaking and entering final scenario.

The letter to the Ephesians carries on with the stiff upper lip advice. “Revelation” (*apokalypsis*) has been given, but for *epignosis* (“knowledge”).⁴⁰ There is the understanding that the *mysterion* has been revealed by *holy envoys and prophets under God’s power* (Eph 3:5).⁴¹ But that period appears to be over. Now the revelation has changed from a prophetic vision to an insight into the divine plan. In fact, Eph 3:2–4 provides a guide to the hermeneutics of this handing over of tradition.

If, as I suppose, you have heard the “game plan” (*ten oikonomian tes charitos tou theou*) of God’s benefit that was given to me for your benefit,³(namely, that) the secret (*musterion*) was made known to me by revelation (*kata apokalupsin*), as I have written briefly earlier⁴so that when you read this you can understand my insight (*ten sunesin mou*) into the mystery (*en to musterio*) of the Anointed . . .

Thus, instead of a prophetic oracle, what was granted to the “Paul” of Ephesians is revelation of a secret. The intention of telling them about this is that they would be enabled *by reading* to understand what he meant (*anaginuskontes noesai ten sunesin mou*). The community would not be startled by some sort of prophetic utterance but would come to recognition of the divine will. Indeed, they also are urged to don the military metaphors of the divine (6.11ff.) just as in 1 Thessalonians 5. But again there is a decided difference. The language has lost all of the eschatological zest found in 1 Thessalonians. At best it sounds like a dress rehearsal for a time that may be a long way off. The various household advisories are designed for an established situation. There is nothing earth-shaking for this letter. All the foundations are rock solid and in place.

With these observations in mind, we would suggest that a more appropriate target for the writer of Revelation would quite likely be the author/s of these letters. The vision that underlies these letters does convey a cosmic quality. But it is more like the eternal entablature of Roman fate.⁴² The breakout possibility of Jewish prophecy and apocalyptic is not present. The fact that neither letter acknowledges the necessity of the Jewish traditions would also be a significant problem to the writer of Revelation. Indeed, the language of Eph 2:14–18 would more than suggest a very different direction in regard to the status of the “nations.”

The visionary of Revelation may well be fighting a war on two fronts. His breakthrough visions actually compete both with Roman imperial eschatology⁴³ and with what might well be a wisdom column from the successors of

40. Eph 1:9; 1:17

41. ho heterais geneais ouk egnōrīsthē tois huiōis tōn anthrōpōn hōs nyn apekalypthē tois hagiois apostolois autou kai prophētais en pneumatī.

42. Cf. Ovid, *Metamorphoses* 15.745ff.

43. The Arch of Titus should be played off of the scroll of Revelation. Here are two theological frames contending for mastery of the world.

Paul. In one sense the seer of Revelation is more faithful to the historical Paul. He is generating visions that attempt to speak to the incoming reality. The later materials Pagels introduces from Nag Hammadi may well be further instances of the Colossians—Ephesians circuitry.

Further Along the Road

This paper has just begun to address the prophetic or visionary vein of the developing Christian traditions. Pagels has begun to carve a way through the dense woods. But there need to be more players in the mix. For example, the second layer of the Q material may well be revisited. Also where does the *Didache* fit into this multilayered tradition? While the text seems wary of prophets, there are what appear to be some eschatological visions underpinning at least some of the document. What shall we do with the gospel tradition? What does each writer do in generating eschatological scenarios? What worlds are in collision there? We need to return to Ignatius to see how he shares the developing Pauline tradition and how he may well mutate it. Certainly, we cannot overlook what Acts might be doing to the prophetic momentum. Despite the words of Peter on Pentecost about sons and daughters prophesying and young and old having visions and dreams, it may well be that the volume actually is trying to control, if not short circuit, this flow. Marcion may well be the reason for Acts' reserve. The matter of Marcion will have to be explored in terms of this prophetic line. Was Marcion actually reenacting the collation of the Sibylline oracles in gathering the Pauline fragments? Was his collection a way to generate the authentic vision that he thought had been lost by later generations? Is the Gospel of the Savior another clue as to how visionaries of the second century went about the manufacturing of visions?⁴⁴ Was Irenaeus tone deaf to the prophetic and visionary voices of the late second century? And, of course, there is the seismic disaster of the war with Rome. Certainly the aftershock of this catastrophe affects everything in its wake. So much remains to be explored.⁴⁵

44. For more on this, see A. Dewey, "The Gospel of the Savior."

45. The masterful study by Hans von Campenhausen, *Ecclesiastical Authority*, cannot be overlooked. What was seriously missing in his work was the Empire itself. The Christianity Seminar has to locate our fragments within the political and cultural imagination of the entire period. We must shore up as many fragments as we can muster.

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