

*Early Christianity in its Mediterranean Contexts*

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# Preface

The papers in this issue are drawn from the first sessions of the new Christianity Seminar from its spring and fall 2013 meetings. The Christianity Seminar, founded by Bernard Brandon Scott (chair), Nina Livesey, and Lane McGaughey, proposes to adjust the picture of early Christianity while integrating the findings of the Paul and Acts Seminars into the work done by the Jesus Seminar.

The Christianity Seminar's goals include keeping to the fore the larger Mediterranean context, particularly the machinations of the Roman Empire, the lost actors of early Christianity (especially the female apostles), Second Temple Judaism and the emergence of rabbinic Judaism, the rise of the apostolic tradition, and the journey to canon and orthodoxy. The first papers inaugurated the new agenda and experimented with a new timeline for studying the early Christian communities.

The spring meeting featured Elaine Pagels, the Harrington Spear Paine Foundation Professor of Religion at Princeton University and a longtime Fellow of the Westar Institute. Pagels' 2012 book *Revelations: Vision, Prophecy, and Politics in the Book of Revelation* was the subject of a daylong study. In response, Arthur Dewey's "Per Omnia Saecula Saeculorum: Worlds Colliding and Created" and my "Roman Apocalypticism: Death, Doom, and Delight in the Early Empire" located Christian apocalyptic within the larger context of Roman Imperial propaganda. Dewey, a founder of the Paul Seminar, argues for the pivotal role of prophecy in the interpretation of Paul's mission. He also emphasizes Roman efforts to advertise the dawn of a new *saeculum*, which would legitimate the empire's own rise to Mediterranean power.

In many accounts of early Christianity, some voices have been stifled or marginalized. The Christianity Seminar aims to ensure that those voices are heard at every step of the discussion. A session of the spring meeting was devoted to papers that turned up the volume on women's voices in the early Christian communities. Nina Livesey's "Women in the Authentic Letters of Paul" urges a more careful reading of Paul's letters, one which would mark later interpolations and reveal Paul's high regard for women. She argues that the "authentic" Paul, shorn of such later additions as 1 Cor 11:3–16 and 14:33b–36, would show his equal treatment of female and male and his identification of women as potential leaders.

At the fall 2013 meeting the Christianity Seminar initiated the discussion of some seminal items. Central to the work of the new Seminar is the issue of how

dating Acts to the second century forces a reinterpretation of the foundational mythology of the church. Moving Acts to 125–130 CE shakes our confidence in the conventional dating of other documents. Joseph Tyson, a doyen of Acts studies, co-chair of the Acts Seminar and author (with Dennis E. Smith) of *Acts and Christian Beginnings: The Acts Seminar Report* (Polebridge 2013), takes on this thorny problem in his “Second Century Christianities.” In equating the portrait of Paul in Acts with the Marcionite heresy in his *Marcion and Luke-Acts: A Defining Struggle* (2006), Tyson helped define another key issue for the Seminar: to what degree have the tensions between heresy and orthodoxy shaped the Christian vision?

“By the Books: Canon Formation among the Romans” is my attempt to step outside the confines of Christianity and see canon as a concern for the new masters of the Mediterranean as well as for peoples under their sway. This is in line with the Christianity Seminar’s emphasis on situating Christianity in the context of Empire.

As the Christianity Seminar continues to reveal how limiting the canon is as an instrument for taking the measure of the Christian communities, expect some surprises in these pages.

—Christine Shea

# Per Omnia Saecula Saeculorum

## Worlds Colliding and Created

*Hearing with new eyes*  
Cincinnati Opera

*"It puts a whole new face on it."*  
Mr. Golenski<sup>1</sup>

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.<sup>2</sup> *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. <sup>12</sup>I 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. <sup>13</sup>Surely you've heard of my own behavior as a practicing Jew, how aggressively I harassed God's new community, trying to wipe it out. <sup>14</sup>I went way beyond most of my contemporaries in my observance of Judaism, and became notably zealous about my ancestral traditions. <sup>15</sup>However, 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 <sup>16</sup>known 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 call<sup>3</sup> and has seen himself as the vehicle for the transmission of this message to "the nations."<sup>4</sup> 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.<sup>5</sup>

#### 1 Thess 4:13–18; 5:1–11

<sup>4</sup> <sup>13</sup>Concerning those who have died, we don't want you to be uninformed: you shouldn't mourn as do those without hope. <sup>14</sup>Because if we believe "Jesus died and arose," so also God will bring with Jesus all those belonging to him who have died. <sup>15</sup>We 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.



<sup>16</sup>the 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; <sup>17</sup>then 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.

<sup>18</sup>So 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.<sup>6</sup> In this section we are concerned with matters of communal life and behavior.<sup>7</sup> 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*.<sup>8</sup> 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.<sup>9</sup> 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. <sup>2</sup>Surely you know perfectly well that the day of the lord arrives like a thief in the night. <sup>3</sup>When 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. <sup>4</sup>But 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. <sup>5</sup>Rather, you are enlightened people, a people of the day. We are not denizens of the night living in the dark. <sup>6</sup>Therefore, let us not sleep through life as others do, but be fully awake and in control of ourselves. <sup>7</sup>“Nightpeople” are always asleep and drunkards are never sober, <sup>8</sup>but 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. <sup>9</sup>For God has not set us up for condemnation, but intends for us to be liberated through our lord Jesus, God’s Anointed, <sup>10</sup>who died for us so that—whether we have died or are still alive—we might live together with him. <sup>11</sup>Therefore, 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).<sup>10</sup> 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. <sup>51</sup>Listen, 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, <sup>52</sup>in 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.

<sup>53</sup>Because this perishable man must be clothed with the imperishable, and this mortal man must be clothed with immortality. <sup>54</sup>And 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.

<sup>55</sup>Where, 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.<sup>11</sup>

### 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. <sup>23</sup>If 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? <sup>24</sup>But if everyone is prophesying and some non-members or uninitiated persons come in, they will be convicted by all, called to account by all, <sup>25</sup>the 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. <sup>2</sup>I 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. <sup>3</sup>I know that this man—whether in the body or out of the body I don't know, God knows—<sup>4</sup>was carried off to Paradise and heard indescribable words which no one may speak. <sup>5</sup>I am willing to brag about that one, but I'll not brag about "yours truly" except for my limitations. <sup>6</sup>I 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. <sup>7</sup>So 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. <sup>8</sup>Three times I begged our lord for it to go away. <sup>9</sup>He 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.<sup>12</sup> 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 <sup>19</sup>Do 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. <sup>13</sup>Because 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. <sup>14</sup>For 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. <sup>15</sup>You 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!" <sup>16</sup>God's power and presence joins us in affirming that we are God's children. <sup>17</sup>And 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. <sup>18</sup>I regard the sufferings of the present pregnant moment as nothing compared with the future splendor to be revealed to us. <sup>19</sup>For the whole creation eagerly anticipates<sup>13</sup> the disclosure of who God's children really are. <sup>20</sup>For the purpose of the creation was suppressed through no fault of its own, but by the One who subjugated it <sup>21</sup>in 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. <sup>22</sup>We know that the whole creation has been moaning with birth pangs till now; <sup>23</sup> 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. <sup>24</sup>This hope [of adoption] has saved us. Hope is not about what our eyes can see. For who hopes for what he sees? <sup>25</sup>But if we are hoping for what we do not see, then we are eagerly looking forward to it through our perseverance. <sup>26</sup>In 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. <sup>27</sup>The 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*)<sup>14</sup> 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.

Georgi<sup>15</sup> 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*<sup>16</sup> 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.”<sup>17</sup> 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.<sup>18</sup> 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)<sup>19</sup>

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:<sup>20</sup>

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.<sup>21</sup>

### 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.<sup>22</sup> 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.<sup>23</sup> 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.<sup>24</sup> 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.<sup>25</sup> Each was destined to compete for this visionary and historical space.<sup>26</sup> 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.<sup>27</sup> 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.<sup>28</sup> She has contrasted it with a contemporary apocalyptic text of *Fourth Ezra*.<sup>29</sup> 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*.<sup>30</sup> 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."<sup>31</sup>

Yet a most puzzling lacuna appears in Pagels's presentation of the "Nineties Generation."<sup>32</sup> 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*,<sup>33</sup> 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?<sup>34</sup>

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 Ephesians<sup>35</sup> 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*).<sup>36</sup> 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")<sup>37</sup> 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.<sup>38</sup> 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.<sup>39</sup> 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”).<sup>40</sup> There is the understanding that the *mysterion* has been revealed by *holy envoys and prophets under God’s power* (Eph 3:5).<sup>41</sup> 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,<sup>3</sup>(namely, that) the secret (*musterion*) was made known to me by revelation (*kata apokalupsin*), as I have written briefly earlier<sup>4</sup>so 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.<sup>42</sup> 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 eschatology<sup>43</sup> 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?<sup>44</sup> 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.<sup>45</sup>

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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# Roman Apocalypses

## Death, Doom, and Delight in the Early Empire

Christine Shea

For the 2013 Oscar telecast, electronics giant Samsung produced a series of six commercials centered on a single narrative. The plot of the tale involved an IT team who were using new Samsung products to create a movie from a video game. The name of the film and game? "Unicorn Apocalypse."<sup>1</sup> Of course we all chuckled knowingly—wouldn't this just be the ultimate entertainment extravaganza?

But let's pause for a moment and think about what lies behind the veil of the name: the unicorn, whose origin is a wild combination of Greek tales of an Indian ass, the rhinoceros displayed in the Roman beast shows, and the King James translation of a Hebrew word for the aurochs<sup>2</sup> and whose mythology roils together the Incarnation and Passion of Christ, courtly love, chastity and marital fidelity, a panacea for poisoning, and My Little Pony; and the apocalypse, with all its rich associations. Truly a multicultural *mélange*, and for the moment a name which perfectly evokes the tenor of our times.

To a certain degree the same process that is behind the creation of the name "Unicorn Apocalypse" was at play in the creation of the Book of Revelation. Here, too, associations from a variety of sources, from a variety of cultures, were flung together to form a text that served as its own kind of "video" entertainment system.<sup>3</sup>

Since Elaine Pagels in *Revelations: Visions, Prophecy, and Politics in the Book of Revelation* has so masterfully made us aware of how Revelation was interpreted by John's community, I thought I might add to the discussion by trying to uncover how the text might have revealed itself to an average Roman citizen. Since

1. See the spots online at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5fcUf4d-Y3s>.

2. We now know that the aurochs (*Bos primigenius*) survived in Europe until 1627. Its identification with the unicorn is doubtless due to artistic depictions showing the animal in profile, with only one horn visible. See, e.g., an Indus Valley steatite seal, dated 2600–1900 BCE in the British Museum (BM AN345738001). The unicorn has also been identified with other animals, of course, such as the goat (the Samsung commercials refer to this theory). The Hebrew word translated nine times by the King James translators as "unicorn" is *re'em* (Gr. *monokeros*; Vulg. *unicornis*).

3. For the importance of the visual in Revelation, see Frilingos, *Spectacles of Empire, passim*.

I intend to imagine a character who has access to all the cultural information available, that is, access to political meetings, the army, entertainments, etc., I will have to imagine a Roman citizen, that is, a male. No inclusive language here.

In the pages that follow then I'll attempt to illustrate how the natural environment of the Mediterranean and political and socio-cultural developments of the early Empire may have shaped the reactions of the ordinary Roman to John's apocalypse. I'll conclude with some comments on the imperial mythmakers.

### Natural Disasters

It has been observed many times that one of the factors shaping the American view of the world is the simple fact that northern Europeans coming from a reasonably stable temperate climate crossed the Atlantic to another area with a similarly stable temperate climate. It's this fact, it is noted, which makes us discuss average temperatures or average snowfalls. If we inhabited a more chaotic environment, if we simply had a monsoon season, for example, Middle Western placidity might be seriously discombobulated.

Moreover, the American Midwest, for example, sits on a very old, very cold craton of rock (which explains the lack of mountains, e.g.). Although the most powerful earthquake in the recorded history of the eastern United States had its epicenter at New Madrid, a Missouri town near St. Louis, geologists now argue that Midwestern earthquakes are aggravated by bounce-backs of the earth's crust, depressed by the weight of the Holocene glaciers.<sup>4</sup>

By contrast, consider the March 2011 Japanese earthquake, caused by the subduction of the Pacific tectonic plate under the Eurasian plate, the most studied natural disaster in human history. The 9.1 quake was so powerful it jolted the earth off its axis, caused the coast of Japan to subside about three feet, and lasted a full five minutes, rather than the 10–15 seconds geologists on the scene were anticipating. The major quake launched a tsunami, which would reach a height of thirty feet when it hit the Japanese mainland. The tsunami, meeting flat farmland for miles, spread what has been estimated as one cubic kilometer or ten billion tons of water over some areas. Whole towns were carried away by the wall of debris, the waves pushed forward; others were sucked into the sea when the waves pulled back. The quake generated more than 500 aftershocks in a month, some as violent as 6.5. More than 20,000 were killed, and this in a modern prosperous country as prepared for such a disaster as any country could be.<sup>5</sup>

4. See Grollmund, "Did deglaciation trigger intraplate seismicity," 175–78.

5. Data on the Japanese earthquake from a *Nova* telecast, "Japan's Killer Quake," which aired March 30, 2011. See <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/nova/earth/japan-killer-quake.html> for more information.

Now contemplate the Mediterranean basin. The Mediterranean was formed when, during the period when Pangaea, the mega-continent was splitting up, the Arabian peninsula swung up and captured part of the Tethys Sea between Eurasia and Africa. Essentially, the African continental plate—some of the oldest and heaviest rock on the planet—is crashing into the Eurasian plate at the rate of about four inches a year. Thus, the Mediterranean is one of the most seismically violent areas in the world. Greece alone, for example, annually accounts for about 15% of all the seismic events *on the planet*. The western Mediterranean is equally violent. There were thirteen quakes over 4.2 in 2012 alone in Italy, a country a little smaller than Arizona.<sup>6</sup> Of the sixteen particularly dangerous volcanoes listed by the United Nations on the International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction watch list, four are in the Mediterranean area, two (Etna and Vesuvius) in Italy, one in the Greek islands (Santorini).

Pagels and other commentators who date Revelation to the time of the Flavian emperors cite the eruption of Vesuvius in 79 CE as a possible model for the scenes of destruction in the text. This is certainly a “valence” the ancients felt; Vesuvius, as a stratovolcano, must have had an immeasurable impact on the topography, climate, and, hence, culture of the Mediterranean. When Krakatoa, between Java and Sumatra, another stratovolcano, erupted in 1883, it launched massive tsunamis and killed more than 36,000. The explosion was heard more than 3,000 miles away. The volcano ejected more than five cubic miles of material; ash was thrust more than fifty miles into the air. Average global temperatures fell, crops failed worldwide, the thirteen- and seventeen-year locusts came out early, and snow fell in summer.<sup>7</sup> Global temperatures did not return to normal until 1888. Human corpses on pumice rafts washed up on the coast of Africa up to a year after the event.

It is often noted that chapters of Revelation seem to be evoking the plagues of Egypt from Exodus (7:8–12:36). It may be perhaps that John is echoing Exodus uncritically, as a sacred text with terrifying associations. But many find in the descriptions of the plagues in Exodus an evocation of the kinds of phenomena which may have been produced by a tremendous eruption of the volcano on Santorini (ancient Thera), a Cycladic island just north of Crete. A sampling of Greenland ice cores (which have never melted) and the discovery of a tree under the lava flow have permitted us to date reasonably reliably the eruption which destroyed half the island to the seventeenth century BCE (somewhere between 1627–1600 BCE). Once again, the eruption sent up massive amounts of debris that likely interfered significantly with weather worldwide. A tsunami

6. See Wikipedia, s. “List of Earthquakes in Italy.”

7. It is customary to equate the locusts of Rev 9:1–12 with the invading Parthian cavalry. As for the frequency of such occurrences in the chaos of the Mediterranean environment, please take note that on March 4, 2013, it was reported that Egypt had been overrun with some thirty million locusts.

was launched which may have affected the waters of the Red Sea. A large earthquake may have preceded the eruption.

The eruption of Vesuvius certainly left its mark on the Mediterranean, but, of course, the influence of the eruption on this text can only be adduced when we date the text to 79 CE or later. But Vesuvius isn't the only natural disaster to have occurred during the period in which we normally assign Revelation—it isn't even the only disaster to have struck the Campanian territory of Italy. Seventeen years before, in 62 CE, Pompeii and other areas were struck by a strong (5 or 6 on the Richter scale) earthquake that affected nearly all the buildings in the town. A large percentage (perhaps as much as one-third) of the population moved away. Moved away—because their homes and businesses were damaged or because they anticipated an eruption of the giant volcano looming over the area? We can't say, of course, although they must have understood the environment in which they lived. In 1956, an earthquake on the island of Santorini was enough to send more than 90% of the Greek population away.

Thus, we may argue that our Roman citizen is likely to have witnessed or heard of some cataclysmic natural disaster in his lifetime, whether he lived in the western or the eastern Mediterranean—not that it's necessary for someone to witness a natural disaster in the Mediterranean for that disaster to make its way into his/her imagination. The past record of catastrophic events pockmarks the Mediterranean landscape, and many sacred places (perhaps even the Temple Mount itself) have been sanctified by geologic or climatic upheavals. Thus, for example, Delphi is sanctified by the presence of the Phaedriades ("the Shining Rocks"), where a slab of the mountain has slid past another slab, just as if pushed by a gigantic hand. The ancients honored the geologic anomalies: the Temple of Apollo was located just where two major geologic faults cross.<sup>8</sup> Elsewhere in the Mediterranean environment, sacred spots are lone hills, unconnected to mountain chains, where the earth gives off sulfurous odors, and strange creaks and bellows issue from the earth. These are unexploded volcanic caps, and the landscape of Greece, for example, is littered with them.

In other areas, it is easy to see calamitous, world-changing (world-ending?) events have taken place: when one is sailing into the harbor of Santorini, it is impossible to miss that the harbor is the caldera of a volcano—or that a new cap is forming. At some point fully one-third of Sicily's Mt. Etna was swept by lava into the Mediterranean, causing (no doubt) a huge tsunami and leaving signs of its slide to the sea. Etna, by the way, erupted explosively in 122 BCE, causing so much damage to nearby Catania that Roman officials forwent taxes for ten years. Etna has its place in the myth record: Typhon (Typhoeus), the monster defeated by Zeus, was confined under the mountain as a punishment. The duel

8. The crossing of the faults, it has been argued, created a kind of tube, through which ether-ish substances escape. This is where the Pythia's tripod was placed. See the work of Hale and de Boer, "New Evidence," 707–11.

of Typhon and Zeus is the Greco-Roman version of the duel of the *Enuma Elish*, which Pagels evokes as a model for the heavenly war chapters of Revelation.<sup>9</sup>

Another geological phenomenon that may have contributed to Mediterranean myths of the end-times: the bedrock of the Mediterranean is, for the most part, limestone, a porous easily eroded stone. Mediterranean hillsides collapse in periods of heavy rain, often revealing layers containing the remains of extinct animals. The bones of giant mammals or dinosaurs were often taken as the bones of giant humans (it's possible to rearrange the bones of almost any large animal into a shape which appears human), thus giving rise to myths of titanic battles between gods and giants or other supernatural beings, which end in the destruction of one world or period of this world. We know of such instances from the historical period. Plutarch reports that after the Persian War Kimon recovered the gigantic bones of the Athenian hero Theseus and brought them back to the city; it is generally assumed the bones were of some prehistoric giant mammal or dinosaur.<sup>10</sup>

Tales of world-ending calamity somehow feel at home in such an environment. Thus, for example, the Santorini eruption is thought to have been recorded in the myth record, not only of the Greeks and Hebrews, but of peoples as far away as the Chinese (the *Bamboo Annals*; ca. 1618 BCE).<sup>11</sup> Similarly, it was likely to be expected that it would be Hollywood, the crown of California with its chaotic geology and bizarre climate (there have been hundreds of tornados in Los Angeles—did you realize that?), which would produce films like our *Unicorn Apocalypse*.

### The Political Context

But when Zeus had driven the Titans from heaven, huge Earth bore her youngest child Typhoeus of the love of Tartarus, by the aid of golden Aphrodite. Strength was with his hands in all that he did and the feet of the strong god were untiring. From his shoulders [825] grew a hundred heads of a snake, a fearful dragon, with dark, flickering tongues, and from under the brows of his eyes in his marvellous heads flashed fire, and fire burned from his heads as he glared. And there were voices in all his dreadful heads [830] which uttered every kind of sound unspeakable; for at one time they made sounds such that the gods understood, but at another, the noise of a bull bellowing aloud in proud ungovernable fury; and at another, the sound of a lion, relentless of heart; and at another, sounds like whelps, wonderful to hear; [835] and again, at another, he would hiss, so that the high mountains re-echoed. And truly a thing past help would

9. Pagels, *Revelations*, 24–25. Hesiod's description of the battle (*Theogony* 820–52) clearly describes earthquake and tidal wave activity. Further, see below under The Political Context.

10. Plutarch, *Theseus* 36.1–2.

11. The destruction of Santorini (Thera), which hosted an advanced culture with ties to Minoan Crete, is thought by many to have been the model for Plato's Atlantis. See Friedrich, *Fire in the Sea*, *passim*.

have happened on that day, and he would have come to reign over mortals and immortals, had not the father of men and gods been quick to perceive it. But he thundered hard and mightily: and the earth around [840] resounded terribly and the wide heaven above, and the sea and Ocean's streams and the nether parts of the earth. Great Olympus reeled beneath the divine feet of the king as he arose and earth groaned thereat. And through the two of them heat took hold on the dark-blue sea, [845] through the thunder and lightning, and through the fire from the monster, and the scorching winds and blazing thunderbolt. The whole earth seethed, and sky and sea: and the long waves raged along the beaches round and about at the rush of the deathless gods: and there arose an endless shaking. [850] Hades trembled where he rules over the dead below, and the Titans under Tartarus who live with Cronos, because of the unending clamor and the fearful strife.<sup>12</sup>

This is Hesiod's (ca. 700 BCE) description of the battle of Zeus and Typhoeus (Typhon), derived most likely from that oldest of sources, the *Enuma Elish*, just as parts of Revelation are.<sup>13</sup> Note that in this "multivalent" text there are political aspects as well. Zeus, aided by his mother Rhea, has staged a *coup d'état* and deposed his father and his father's siblings (and, incidentally, his own older brothers). In retaliation his grandmother (Earth) has brought forth another contender for the throne, Typhoeus. Before Zeus and the Olympians can settle down to a peaceful reign, Zeus must fight off an ancient Not-So-Bonnie Prince Charlie. On the political side, it's harem wars. Can Hesiod (or the *Enuma Elish*, for that matter) have been coding real political events into a mythological narrative? We'll likely never know. But Hellenistic poets like Apollonius (called the Rhodian) and Roman poets like Vergil and Horace clearly are doing just that.<sup>14</sup>

Thus, it is perhaps a commonplace in the general Mediterranean culture to commemorate change of regime with tales of earth-shaking and -shattering portents and with human events echoed in otherworldly battles and with human great men replaced by supernatural combatants. If we assume Revelation was composed toward the end of the reign of Domitian (81–96 CE), our Roman citizen would have a number of names and events to plug in as correspondences to elements of the text. The Republic has yielded to the Empire; Julius Caesar has come to power after defeating Pompey the Great (who added Judaea to the Empire); Caesar was, in turn, assassinated; Mark Antony and Cleopatra take over the eastern Empire (attempting to reproduce the empire of Egypt at its greatest historical extent—which included Judaea and Patmos); Antony

12. Hesiod, *Theogony* 820–52 (trans. Hugh G. Evelyn-White, from the Perseus website <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu>). Note that it is obvious an earthquake and tsunami are being described.

13. See Pagels, *Revelations*, 24–25 and "Natural Disasters" above. The *Theogony* is also influenced by such texts as the Hittite song *The Kingship in Heaven* and other songs of the Hittite-Hurrian Kumarbi Cycle.

14. See The Socio-Cultural Context below.

and Cleopatra are defeated at the Battle of Actium by Octavian/Augustus and Agrippa; Augustus established the Principate as a hereditary monarchy; the Julio-Claudian dynasty produces Tiberius, the infamous Caligula, and the Beast Nero<sup>15</sup> Nero is forced out of power and commits suicide; four emperors arise in a single year (69 CE); Vespasian, up from the legions, establishes himself as emperor, marching on Rome from Jerusalem, which he was preparing to besiege when news of Nero's death arrived; Vespasian's son Titus is the first emperor to have succeeded his father; Titus celebrated a triumph for his conquest of Jerusalem; Vespasian's son Domitian succeeds his brother and demands to be addressed as *dominus et deus* ("lord and god"); Domitian was assassinated, with the collusion of the senatorial class, and a *damnatio memoriae* declared.<sup>16</sup>

It is generally acknowledged that John's Jewish Christian readers identified Babylon (Rev 14:17), the Whore of Babylon (Revelation 17), the Beast from the sea (Rev 13:1–10), etc., with Rome in the wake of the conquest of Jerusalem (70 CE). But in this multivalent text it's not so easy, perhaps, to plumb the readers' point of view: as Pagels quite rightly points out,<sup>17</sup> it was the oppressed provincials who put up those cruel monuments to Roman conquest at Aphrodisias, to curry favor with their new overlords. By contrast, it's the Roman emperor Hadrian (r. 117–138 CE) who has put on the cuirass of his statue in the Athenian Agora the wolf suckling the founders of Rome, Romulus and Remus—with Athens' Athena standing on top, not prone gnawed to death by the wolf.

As for our Roman citizen, his feelings on reading such an abstruse and evocative text are perhaps more complex than we might have thought. Let's consider, for example, the point of view of the great author and Augustan propagandist Vergil. Vergil, although an Italian, came to adulthood in a time and place that suffered from the tramp of the legions as much as any site in the Near East.

15. That Revelation refers to Nero is widely accepted. Some aspects of Nero's life and death certainly seem to be shaping the text: (1) after the great fire of Rome in 64 CE, Nero, having condemned Christians as arsonists (they talk about Romans burning, remember), sent many to the beasts (sewing them up in animal hides and loosing dogs on them, e.g.) or to other *outré* displays (using them as torches in the imperial gardens); (2) Nero, pursued by the imperial guard who intended to assassinate him, is supposed to have committed suicide with bungled and cowardly ineptitude; (3) although Nero was in fact deposed by the Roman senatorial class, he had been a favorite of the plebeians since his golden boyhood, and it was widely rumored that he was still alive or would return in glory from the dead. A mishmash of these factors may have led John's community to regard him as a Roman messianic figure to rival a Jewish messiah. Thus, Nero becomes the Beast. The use of "666" or "616" (in some manuscripts) as the name of the Beast is then explained as Jewish numerological code for the name "Nero".

16. Domitian's assassination was nearly bungled when he lived long enough to wrestle Stephanus, one of the assassins. Stephanus and his concealed dagger play a big part in Suetonius' account in *Domitian* 17. Rev 13:3 contains a reference to one who appeared to receive a deathblow but was healed. It's usually thought to be a reference to Nero's suicide or to Julius Caesar's assassination, but Domitian's death may have been thought to qualify as well.

17. Pagels, *Revelations*, 13.



From the assassination of Julius Caesar, the armies of the Second Triumvirate—the extra-constitutional alliance of Octavian, Caesar’s grand-nephew who would become the Emperor Augustus, Mark Antony, Caesar’s lieutenant, and M. Aemilius Lepidus, Caesar’s master of the horse—raged across Italy, forcing peaceful farming communities into conflict and starvation. This is the context of Vergil’s *Eclogues*, ten poems published in 37 BCE which only pretend to be about the lives of simple shepherds. Indeed, it was assumed in antiquity that in this work Vergil was lamenting the loss of his own family’s farm when the veterans of Antony and Octavian were resettled on his land after 42 BCE.

Italy in the period of the civil wars endured social and political disruption on a major scale, the product of three forces which might also have had an impact on Judaea before and after the destruction of the Temple: competing armies living off the land; “enemies” lists of the victors which brought the knock on the door in the middle of the night and armies of informers; and retired legionaries paid in farmland confiscated from the conquered. The siege of the city of Perusia (in north-central Italy, modern *Perugia*) might be taken as emblematic: while Octavian’s troops sat in siege around the town, food was allotted on a graduated scale, with slaves receiving none. They could be seen outside the walls foraging for grass. After the city capitulated it was burned, perhaps on Octavian’s command.

Vergil’s works, although ostensibly justifying the seizure of power by the Julio-Claudians, display subtle sentiments, even toward the Emperor Augustus. The *Aeneid*, especially, must not be thought to be a glorification of Imperial stormtroopers nor an uncritical encomium of Augustus’ deeds and policies. It is a complex and ambiguous work, with plenty for the victims of Empire as well as for the victors. And, you may recall, the *Aeneid* is a standard school text by the time of Nero or Domitian. So, our Roman citizen, it could be argued, has been trained to hold in mind contradictory points of view, to hunt with the hounds and run with the hares. Thus, ironically, some of the condemnations and cursings of Revelation might be thought to have an appeal to a Roman who longed for the Republic or who had chosen Pompey over Caesar or Antony over Octavian or to an upstart plebeian family like that of Vespasian.<sup>18</sup>

Moreover, just as we saw in that passage of Hesiod with which we began, if dynastic squabbles are being represented in literature and art as battles of the gods and giants—or angels or other beings with super powers—an ordinary citizen might be justified as seeing these conflicts as the doings of his social superiors, as the unmitigatedly insane operations of those patrician idiots. If

18. Vespasian was supposed to have been descended from an ordinary Roman legionary who rose to centurion. The writers of the HBO *Rome* series may have had this in mind when they gave Ray Stevenson’s character the name Titus Pullo (Vespasian’s mother’s name was Vespasia Pullo)—it’s possible in later years they intended to make his and Cleopatra’s son the ancestor of Vespasian.



so, he may not be reading Rome (i.e., himself and his pals) as Babylon, but the upper-class precincts of Rome as Babylon, not himself and his pals as Beasts, but the dynasts who bleed Rome white with their extravagances. Thus our ordinary Roman might very well feel himself allied with a Jewish population who've been declassed in the Empire: the ordinary Roman has been demoted, too. Let's keep in mind that, although we're clearly an "evil empire"—in the words of Ronald Reagan's speech to the National Association of Evangelicals—we persistently see ourselves as those courageous, armed farmer/revolutionaries . . . those Tea-Partiers.

### The Socio-Cultural Context

Some aspects of Roman civilization seem to align nicely with ideas expressed in Revelation. For example, as Donald Kyle (*Spectacles of Death*) reminds us:

Both Romans and Christians understood punishment and vengeance beyond death. The punishments that Christian writers record or predict for their persecutors reflect traditional Roman patterns of abuse and damnation, but with their final scene being the fire of hell. (p. 254)

Thus, it might be argued that our ordinary Roman has been prepared all his life to anticipate that after death he might have the delight of witnessing the torment of his enemies.<sup>19</sup> In fact, some Roman social institutions reflect this thinking, the most prominent being the Roman practice of the *devotio*, as described in the early Empire text of Titus Livius' *History of Rome* (8.9.3–12)

[3] in the beginning the strength of the combatants and their ardour were equal on both sides; but after a time the Roman *hastati* on the left, unable to withstand the pressure of the Latins, fell back upon the *principes*. [4] in the confusion of this movement Decius the consul called out to Marcus Valerius in a loud voice: "we have need of Heaven's help, Marcus Valerius. come therefore, state pontiff of the Roman People, dictate the words, that I may devote myself to save the legions." [5] The pontiff bade him don the purple-bordered toga, and with veiled head and one hand thrust out from the toga and touching his chin, stand upon a spear that was laid under his feet, and say as follows: [6] "Janus, Jupiter, Father Mars, Quirinus, Bellona, Lares, divine Novensiles, divine Indigites, ye gods in whose power are both we and our enemies, and you, divine Manes, —I [7] invoke and worship you, I beseech and crave your favour, that you prosper the might and the victory of the Roman People of the Quirites, and visit the foes of the Roman People of the Quirites with fear, shuddering, and death. [8] as I have pronounced the words, even so in behalf of the republic of the Roman People of the Quirites, and of the army, the legions, the auxiliaries of the Roman People of the Quirites, do I devote the legions and auxiliaries of the enemy, together with myself, to the

19. This would be in contrast to, e.g., the Homeric view of life after death, where only those criminals who have offended the gods in face-to-face encounters suffer punishment.

divine Manes and to Earth.”[9] having uttered this prayer he bade the lictors go to Titus Manlius and lose no time in announcing to his colleague that he had devoted himself for the good of the army. [10] he then girded himself with the Gabinian cincture, and vaulting, armed, upon his horse, plunged into the thick of the enemy, a conspicuous object from either army and of an aspect more august than a man’s, as though sent from heaven to expiate all anger of the gods, and to turn aside destruction from his people and bring it on their adversaries. [11] thus every terror and dread attended him, and throwing the Latin front into disarray, spread afterwards throughout their entire host.

Livy here is recording an event that may have taken place at the battle of Sentinum in 295 BCE, as the Romans fought a coalition of Samnites and Gauls. What’s happened here is this: the consul P. Decius Mus, seeing his army falter, has formally and with appropriate ritual language and dress dedicated himself to the gods of the underworld. He then rides into the enemy’s ranks. When he is killed, the enemy will suffer the wrath of the underworld—he will effectively be leading the enemy to hell.

A wild-eyed figure on horseback, dressed in the shining white of the toga, carrying the enemy off to hell, in a kind of reverse rapture—how very apocalyptic. It might be argued Rev 19:11 with its rider ritually prepared and dressed is ringing a change on the Roman model. What may also be significant are the circumstances of the reportage of this incident. Livy is for the most part reasonably indifferent to historical fact we usually argue; he’s engaged in a work of propaganda to shore up the Julio-Claudian dynasty.

As for political suicide among the Romans (we call it martyrdom when the Christians do it), there is a conspicuous example during the period of the composition of Revelation. In 69 CE, the year of the Four Emperors, the year that may be commemorated in this text by the Four Horsemen, Otho, one of the four, is supposed to have committed suicide after losing a battle, although his adherents were resolved to fight on. He is thought to have said, “It is far more just to perish one for all, than many for one” and the next day to have plunged a dagger directly into his heart.<sup>20</sup>

Moreover, it might be argued that Revelation conveys a delight in its visions of violence, the delight of a spectator at the gladiatorial combats, beast shows,

20. This would make him another possible candidate for the victim of the sword mentioned in Rev 13:3. See above, n. 16. Further on Otho and political suicide, see Plass, *The Game of Death*, 81–84 *et passim*.

Otho has a place in the literature of the Empire as well. Martial, during the reign of Domitian, produced this epigram (6.32):

Although the goddess of civil warfare was still in doubt,  
 And soft Otho had perhaps still a chance of winning,  
 He renounced fighting that would have cost much blood,  
 And with sure hand pierced right through his breast.  
 By all means let Cato in his life be greater than Julius Caesar himself;  
 In his death was he greater than Otho? (tr. Wikipedia, s. Otho)

or, it might be argued, land and sea battles staged in the imperial arenas.<sup>21</sup> In fact, although it is often argued that Revelation is told from God's point of view, we might also note that, as entertainment, the pageant of the end times is viewed from the best seats in the house, that is, the emperor's point of view.<sup>22</sup>

It happens to be in vogue just now to discuss how Judeo-Christian propagandists (although commentators generally don't call them that) co-opted the cultural structures of the Empire and reinterpreted them for ecclesial use.<sup>23</sup> Some scholars have also equated the visions of Revelation with arena entertainments.<sup>24</sup> What I would like to contribute to the discussion is some speculation on why the early Judeo-Christian communities might have chosen to condemn the arena performances while aping their emotional effects in performance texts such as Revelation.<sup>25</sup>

As for why the Judeo-Christian communities despised the games, it is important to remember that the games are a significant part of the Roman religious apparatus. Gladiatorial combats, for example, first performed in Rome in 264 BCE, are connected with Etruscan funerary ritual, dispatching prisoners of war, slaves, or criminals as attendants in the afterlife for an honored chief.<sup>26</sup> Moreover, by the early Empire, beast shows and gladiatorial combats often depicted episodes from Greco-Roman myth, such as the death of Hercules and the castration of Attis, which were witnessed by Tertullian.<sup>27</sup> Obviously, practitioners of monotheistic religions must be kept from these enticing spectacles.

But the author of Revelation is not just deploring the brutality of Roman entertainments; he is on some level creating his own version of the very entertainments he condemns. Now it has often been argued that this is yet another example of the Judeo-Christian communities' coopting the structures of the Roman imperial apparatus to construct an Empire of God to rival the Empire of the Caesars. But Revelation is not a simple text with straightforward intentions;

21. There were by 1994 five Roman amphitheaters dating to the second and third centuries CE excavated in the area of Roman Palestine.

22. See Pagels, *Revelations*, 39 and refs.

23. For excellent general discussions, see Crossan, *God and Empire*. For a lucid (if conservative) summary on Paul and the emperor cult, see Oakes, "Re-Mapping the Universe."

24. For Revelation as a reinterpretation of arena entertainments, see, e.g., Frilingos, "Spectacles of Empire"; Murray, "Urban Earthquake Imagery"; and, in particular, Stratton, "The Eschatological Arena."

25. Here I use the phrase "performance text" because, as you may recall, one way or another the ancients eschew silent reading: either they've heard a text read aloud at a dinner party, e.g., or they themselves are reading the text aloud as an aid to working through documents riddled with holes or blotched with impurities. Both of these cases contribute to the interpretation of the text.

26. The single combat between Spartacus (Kirk Douglas) and Antoninus (Tony Curtis) before Crassus (Laurence Olivier), Caesar (John Gavin), and assorted legionaries in the 1960 *Spartacus* (directed by Stanley Kubrick) is Hollywood's take on the oldest form of the ritual.

27. Tertullian, *Apologeticus pro Christianis* 15.4 (repeated at *Ad nationes* 1.10.47). See also Coleman, "Fatal Charades," *passim*.

as Origen exclaimed (*De principiis* 4.2.4), “Who can read the revelations granted to John without being amazed at the hidden depths of the ineffable mysteries?”

Our Roman citizen, for example, might be delighted by Revelation for the same of the same reasons he’d be delighted by the great games: (1) it’s real, but not real at the same time. For the most part, performances have more in common with WWF wrestling than with witch-burnings or even with Dempsey vs. Tunney. When it costs so much to train a gladiator, for example, why waste him?<sup>28</sup> (2) enemy combatants are social no-accounts: slaves, prisoners of war, condemned criminals, bankrupts, members of a group not your own, in an us-and-them culture;<sup>29</sup> Revelation’s readers are unlikely to find themselves in the same room with the likes of Nero, for example—the bad guys can be demonized, like the inhuman armies of Ahriman or of *Lord of the Rings*, for that matter; (3) performances of myths with sexy overtones are titillating—Dirce and the Bull, for example, an actual Roman scenario which is ably portrayed by Deborah Kerr and Buddy Baer (Max’s heavyweight boxer brother) in the 1951 *Quo Vadis?* The Roman performance was no more real than the film or than the description of heavenly battles in Revelation. The linking of sex and violence is a commonplace in Greco-Roman art and popular culture—and in the Bible as well. As for Revelation, picture the Whore of Babylon (played by some Roman Lady Gaga perhaps) onstage in the Circus Maximus; (4) it’s an opportunity for social bonding: scenarios often portray the triumphs of the Empire, the triumphs of the people. Our Roman citizen, dressed in his group-identifying toga at the games, is invited to exult in the successes of his people. Revelation clearly also acts as a mechanism for group-formation; (5) the Romans believed the games had psychological benefits for the spectators, such as inspiring bravery and self-sacrifice.<sup>30</sup> Our Roman may well feel himself stronger, tougher, and more deserving after a performance; Revelation aims for the same effect.

28. It was the lanista Lentulus Batiatus’ staging a fight to the death at the gladiatorial school that sparked Spartacus’ rebellion—the gladiators don’t expect necessarily to die. If they can stay alive for three years, they become trainers for a time, and then are awarded their freedom. Remember, for the most part, they’re condemned criminals. Spartacus’ rebel gladiators are Gauls and Germans (likely prisoners of war) new to the Roman system, or they might have seen gladiatorial success as the road to wealth, freedom, and feminine attention. See Friedländer, *Roman Life and Manners*, 2.240–90.

29. In a society where most men have been trained for the army, gladiator can seem a reasonable career choice. Gladiators can retire from the arena (after only three years) with significant amounts of money; it is not uncommon for Romans, even Roman patricians, to resign their class status to recoup their financial losses. See once again Friedländer, *Roman Life and Manners*, vol. 2.

30. We tend to focus on the scenarios reported by the Christian fathers (such as Tertullian, above), all of which apparently involve some innocent, passive Christian devoured by some monstrous beast. But, even if the Christian fathers are correct (and there’s no particular reason to assume they are), we have to suppose the Christians pushed into the arena had the same deal offered everyone else: they were provided the wherewithal to fight the beast or the opponent—otherwise there’s no show at all. Punishment is clearly an aim of the shows

The question for commentators to tackle, in my view, is this: did Revelation imitate the Roman spectacles to condemn them or to provide a substitute that would pull the same strings, play to the same urges—on a budget? In other words, is it only the lack of the resources of a state that prevented John's community from staging Revelation as an arena show, with heretics as fallen angels and bladders filled with pigs' blood for special effects?

### Propaganda for a New Empire

The arena shows were always a venue for political propaganda, of course, even from that long-ago day in 264 BCE when they were first introduced to Rome. That gladiators fought in honor of the anniversary of the death of a notable ancestor of one of the great families was an amplification of the reputation of someone who sooner or later would be a candidate for public office. It is probably no coincidence, then, that the shows increased in number and extravagance during the political dueling of Julius Caesar or that sometime in the second century CE such shows would come to be presented 175 days a year. After all, as the direct political involvement of the Roman citizenry faded, the games became an assembly of all the citizens, became the one place for emperors to test the mood of the mob.

But the establishment of the Empire and of the Julio-Claudian dynasty also required high-culture propaganda, as the emperor Augustus well knew. Some of the mythologizing emphasized in this period of Roman history may also have proved useful for those who were busy instituting the Empire of God.

One of the most prominent Julio-Claudian myths dealt with the clan's descent from the goddess Venus through her son Aeneas, the son of Prince Anchises of Troy. Aeneas was thought to have led a desperate band of the last survivors of Troy out of the burning city with his crippled father on his back and holding the hand of his son Ascanius (also called Iulus or Julius; the name of the clan is derived from his).<sup>31</sup> Aeneas is also depicted as carrying the Lares and Penates or the Palladium, all sacred objects of Troy, out of the city.

It was this sketchy tale that Augustus commissioned the great poet Vergil to weave into a foundation myth for a new dynasty, a new Rome. Vergil cast Aeneas as a new kind of hero, a hero with a mission, a messianic hero, we might say, who would take the conquered and scattered "leavings of the Greeks and of savage Achilles" (*reliquias Danaum atque immitis Achilli* 1.30) on a diaspora

involving condemned criminals, but the Romans, as a fighting people, admire courage—and skill—as well. The shows are teaching moments, too.

Other scenarios have very little to do with punishment as reenactments of how our brave cavalry defeated lions or the Parthians or how our brave sailors triumphed in a sea battle, etc. Again, teaching moments or training films.

31. A denarius coin of Julius Caesar dated to 47–46 BCE has Venus on the obverse, Aeneas carrying Anchises out of Troy on the reverse ([vroma.org](http://vroma.org), s. "Palladium").

across the Mediterranean to found a new Troy, a new Jerusalem, we might say, in Italy.

In the course of spinning his tale, Vergil describes the destruction of Troy (Venus is speaking to Aeneas):

You do not hate the face of the Spartan daughter of Tyndareus, nor is Paris to blame: the ruthlessness of the gods, of the gods, brought down this power, and toppled Troy from its heights. See (for I'll tear away all the mist that now, shrouding your sight, dims your mortal vision, and darkens everything with moisture: don't be afraid of what your mother commands, or refuse to obey her wisdom): here, where you see shattered heaps of stone torn from stone, and smoke billowing mixed with dust, Neptune is shaking the walls, and the foundations, stirred by his mighty trident, and tearing the whole city up by its roots. There, Juno, the fiercest, is first to take the Scaean Gate, and, sword at her side, calls on her troops from the ships, in rage. Now, see, Tritonian Pallas, standing on the highest towers, sending lightning from the storm-cloud, and her grim Gorgon breastplate. Father Jupiter himself supplies the Greeks with courage, and fortunate strength, himself excites the gods against the Trojan army. Hurry your departure, son, and put an end to your efforts. I will not leave you, and I will place you safe at your father's door." She spoke, and hid herself in the dense shadows of night. Dreadful shapes appeared, and the vast powers of gods opposed to Troy. (2.601–20)<sup>32</sup>

Here, a century earlier, Vergil has created his own mini-Revelation, dispelling with Venus the cloud (*omnem . . . nubem*), which hides the battles of the gods from us. Here, too, a mighty city falls to cruel conquerors from the western sea, but the magical mother will save her son for greater deeds.

In Book 8, Vergil casts the battle of the gods as an omen of the future (we know the event took place before the omen, but does our Roman citizen?):

In the centre bronze ships could be seen, the Battle of Actium, and you could make out all Leucate in feverish preparation for war, the waves gleaming with gold. On one side Augustus Caesar stands on the high stern, leading the Italians to the conflict, with him the Senate, the People, the household gods, the great gods, his happy brow shoots out twin flames, and his father's star is shown on his head. Elsewhere Agrippa, favoured by the winds and the gods leads his towering column of ships, his brow shines with the beaks of the naval crown, his proud battle distinction. On the other side Antony, with barbarous wealth and strange weapons,

32. Translation by A. S. Kline (poetryintranslation.com).

conqueror of eastern peoples and the Indian shores, bringing Egypt,  
 and the might of the Orient, with him, and furthest Bactria:  
 and his Egyptian consort follows him (the shame).  
 All press forward together, and the whole sea foams,  
 churned by the sweeping oars and the trident rams.  
 They seek deep water: you'd think the Cycladic islands were uprooted  
 and afloat on the flood, or high mountains clashed with mountains,  
 so huge the mass with which the men attack the towering sterns.  
 Blazing tow and missiles of winged steel shower from their hands,  
 Neptune's fields grow red with fresh slaughter.  
 The queen in the centre signals to her columns with the native  
 sistrum, not yet turning to look at the twin snakes at her back.  
 Barking Anubis, and monstrous gods of every kind  
 brandish weapons against Neptune, Venus,  
 and Minerva. Mars rages in the centre of the contest,  
 engraved in steel, and the grim Furies in the sky,  
 and Discord in a torn robe strides joyously, while  
 Bellona follows with her blood-drenched whip.  
 Apollo of Actium sees from above and bends his bow: at this  
 all Egypt, and India, all the Arabs and Sabaeans turn and flee.  
 The queen herself is seen to call upon the winds,  
 set sail, and now, even now, spread the slackened canvas.  
 The lord with the power of fire has fashioned her pallid  
 with the coming of death, amidst the slaughter,  
 carried onwards by the waves and wind of Iapyx,  
 while before her is Nile, mourning with his vast extent,  
 opening wide his bays, and, with his whole tapestry, calling  
 the vanquished to his dark green breast, and sheltering streams. (8.675–713)<sup>33</sup>

Ah, yes, Cleopatra, the Whore of the Nile, who lured poor Mark Antony into  
 another Roman civil war.<sup>34</sup>

Here she is again, in an ode by another of Augustus' propagandists, Horace:

It would have been wrong, before today, to broach  
 the Caecuban wines from out the ancient bins,  
 while a maddened queen was still plotting  
 the Capitol's and the empire's ruin,

with her crowd of deeply-corrupted creatures  
 sick with turpitude, she, violent with hope  
 of all kinds, and intoxicated  
 by Fortune's favour. But it calmed her frenzy

33. Translation by A. S. Kline (poetryintranslation.com).

34. It would have been impolitic to villainize Mark Antony, since he was the father by Octavia, Augustus' sister, of Antonia, the mother of the emperor Claudius, grandmother of the emperor Caligula, and great-grandmother of Nero.



that scarcely a single ship escaped the flames,  
 and Caesar reduced the distracted thoughts, bred  
 by Mareotic wine, to true fear,  
 pursuing her close as she fled from Rome,  
 out to capture that deadly monster, bind her,  
 as the sparrow-hawk follows the gentle dove  
 or the swift hunter chases the hare,  
 over the snowy plains of Thessaly. (*Od.* 1.37)<sup>35</sup>

From these examples, I think it's clear our Roman citizen was primed for the imagery and action of Revelation. That he may have understood John's work in a different way than the members of John's community may not have concerned John or his imitators. The question that remains is, was Revelation shaped by John or later writers deliberately to play to Roman associations and sensibilities?

### Conclusion

I've tried here to suggest some ways we might link the message of Revelation more directly to Roman cultural values and to speculate on how an ordinary Roman might understand John's text. This is an exercise that I think might prove instructive for the future of the Early Christianity Seminar.

35. Translation by A. S. Kline (poetryintranslation.com).

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# Women in the Authentic Letters of Paul

Nina E. Livesey

Paul's reputation for treating women as equals is not good. A fair number of Pauline scholars—those with more than just a cursory knowledge of his letters—argue that Paul subordinates women to men.<sup>1</sup> While these scholars acknowledge that Paul cites several women leaders, passages such as 1 Cor 14:33b–36, and in particular 1 Cor 11:3–16, convince them that in the end Paul exhibits signs of patriarchy similar to other males of his time.

Often Paul's stance with regard to women is conflated with later and pseudo-Pauline writings such as 1 Timothy, Colossians, and Ephesians in which there are clear instances of male superiority or patriarchy (1 Tim 2:9–15; Col 3:18–19; Eph 5:22–24, 33),<sup>2</sup> and also with the book of Acts (e.g., Acts 18). Yet even when assessing Paul on women exclusively from his seven authentic letters,<sup>3</sup> his equal regard of women and men comes into view only partially and with difficulty. Not only does the history of the interpretation influence one's own evaluation, but also in some cases the authentic letters themselves are unreliable. As I indicate below, beginning as early as the second-century, scribes added entire passages that have Paul silencing and subordinating women to men. These intentional modifications to the Greek texts have not only greatly contributed to Paul's poor reputation with regard to his equal treatment of women but also have made him appear untrustworthy and self-contradictory on this subject.

My goal with this essay is not to make Paul into an exemplary figure on women's equality, turning him into someone who stands well above the throng

1. See Castelli, "Paul on Women and Gender," 228–29; MacDonald, "Reading Real Women," 215–16. Added to that, some of these same modern Pauline scholars, already assuming that Paul subordinates women, find instances in which Paul formulates his arguments in ways that appear to esteem men more highly than women. See, e.g., Marchal, *Politics of Heaven*, 53, passim. According to Marchal, Paul employs distinctly male language and requires conformity to male models like himself (85). Along these same lines, Elizabeth Castelli maintains that with his call to "be imitators of me," Paul constructs "the early communities with a hierarchical 'economy of sameness,' the structuring of thought and social life around the uniquely valued concept of *identity*." Castelli, *Imitating Paul*, 17 (italics, the author's).

2. On this point, see Furnish, *The Moral Teachings*, 97–102.

3. Most recent studies of Paul assess that he wrote seven of the thirteen canonical letters attributed to him. These letters are 1 Thessalonians, Galatians, 1–2 Corinthians, Philemon, Philippians, and Romans. On this issue, see especially Dewey et al., *The Authentic Letters of Paul*; Roetznel, *The Letters of Paul*, 85–126, 141–66.

of other males of his time, but instead to unearth as much as possible concerning his own treatment of women and to bring greater clarity to this issue. I argue this based on a preponderance of evidence about women within Paul's writings and by exposing as much as possible the long history of textual emendations within these writings. Paul becomes inconsistent and far less egalitarian toward women due to these later scribal emendations; they serve to bring him under a patriarchal system. Paul himself makes no rulings and offers no judgments against women leaders. To the contrary, he speaks of being dependent on women as well as on other men.

Paul's characterization of the status and role of women is even-handed and positive. Without qualifying his remarks, he names several women as leaders, one an apostle and another a deacon. The apostle Junia assumed that role prior to Paul's attainment of it, and Phoebe was *his* leader. According to Paul, women and men worked together to advance the "world-transforming message;"<sup>4</sup> women like men risked their lives for the cause of this message and to safeguard Paul. Women and men had equal conjugal rights and equal influence and responsibilities toward their spouse. In contrast to Roman law, which ruled in favor of marriage regardless of the circumstances surrounding it, Paul counseled single women (and men) to remain unmarried, if so desired. Below, I discuss the status and the role of many women Paul knows and refers to and often by name, interpret two Pauline passages that deal specifically with women, and in a final section interpret two passages that are best assessed as non-Pauline interpolations, passages that when viewed as Paul's own writings only serve to confuse and reverse his otherwise positive assessment of women as full and equal members and leaders of his early communities of Jesus followers.

### The Women Paul Knew

Paul refers to just over a dozen women either explicitly by name or by association with some other named person. There would have been no need to mention these women were they not in some way strategic to his mission. The number and location of the women within Romans 16 provides an indication of their importance.<sup>5</sup> Of the twenty-five individuals greeted by name in Rom 16:1–16, eight or slightly less than one-third are women. Females are the first two names listed. Among the first seven names, four are female. Paul names three women together with their male companions, likely spouses, Prisca and Aquila (Rom 16:3), Andronikos and Junia (Rom 16:7), and Philologos and Julia (Rom 16:15). He lists two other unnamed women along with a named male, Rufus, and his mother (Rom 16:13) and the sister of Nereus (Rom 16:15). Yet Paul also refers

4. For this term, see Dewey et al., *The Authentic Letters of Paul*, 21, 205–6, *passim*.

5. This final chapter of Romans was itself likely a separate letter that accompanied the larger one (Romans 1–15). Dewey et al., *The Authentic Letters of Paul*, 200.

to women without reference to a man, indicating that women functioned on their own for the mission and/or to further the message. These women include Phoebe, who heads the list of names in Romans 16 (v. 1),<sup>6</sup> Miriam<sup>7</sup> or Mary (Rom 16:6), Tryphaina and Tryphosa (Rom 16:12), most likely sisters,<sup>8</sup> and Persis (Rom 16:12). In addition to this larger cluster of women, Paul elsewhere refers to Chloe and those who belong to her (1 Cor 1:11), Apphia, the sister<sup>9</sup> of Philemon (Phlm 1b–2), and Euodia and Syntyche (Phil 4:2–3).

### Junia: A Female Apostle

Paul refers to Junia and Andronicus as ἐπίσημοι ἐν τοῖς ἀποστόλοις (“out-standing<sup>10</sup> or notable among the apostles”; Rom 16:7). The two were Jews like Paul (συγγενεῖς),<sup>11</sup> “fellow prisoners” with Paul (συναιχμαλώτους), and associated with or in the Anointed prior to him (πρὸ ἐμοῦ γέγοναν ἐν Χριστῷ). Given that Paul’s primary self-designation is “apostle” (Rom 1:1; 11:13; 1 Cor 1:1; 2 Cor 1:1; Gal 1:1), this title designated for Junia already provides a strong indication of Paul’s acknowledgment of the high status of women. In the case of Paul, the title “apostle” (ἀπόστολος) gives him authority and justifies his mission. The root meaning of ἀπόστολος is a person who is sent, a messenger, but its religious meaning is “messenger from God.”<sup>12</sup>

Karl Rengstorf (*TDNT*) fully explored this term and its various meanings within ancient Greek writings. According to him, the term ἀπόστολος is almost non-existent in Hebrew scripture<sup>13</sup> and its meanings within the New Testament are distinct from classical and Hellenistic Greek thought, as well as from Cynic and Stoic philosophy. According to Rengstorf, Paul breathes new life into the term, regards it highly (see 1 Cor 12:28), and attributes various and significant

6. The SV translators Dewey et al. understand Rom 16:1–23 as a separate letter of recommendation for Phoebe. Other Pauline scholars have argued that Romans 16 circulated separately and was destined not to Rome but to Ephesus. See the discussion in Whelan, “Amica Pauli,” 72. By contrast, Robert Jewett understands Romans 16 as the concluding section/chapter of the larger letter, the *peroratio*. Jewett, *Romans*, 941. For the purposes of this paper, I am following the SV translators and assuming that Rom 16:1–23 was a separate letter and intended for a Roman audience.

7. Robert Jewett remarks that the textual evidence is evenly divided between Μαρίαν and Μαριάμ. He favors the latter and reports that Miriam was likely a Jewish convert from Rome and “one of the earliest members of the church at Rome.” According to him, the church’s organization was due to her influence. Jewett, *Romans*, 961.

8. Jewett, *Romans*, 968.

9. According to Victor Furnish, it is unlikely that Apphia was Philemon’s wife because Paul addresses her as “the sister.” Furnish, *The Moral Teachings*, 123.

10. This is Jewett’s preferred translation of ἐπίσημοι. Chrysostom writes, “Even to be an apostle is great, but also to be prominent among them—consider how wonderful a song of honor that is!” Jewett, *Romans*, 963.

11. On this point, see Jewett, *Romans*, 962.

12. *LSJ* 220.

13. The Greek noun ἀπόστολος occurs only once in the LXX (Aquila and Symmachus) at 1 Kgs 14:6. In that verse, the prophet Ahijah is sent to the wife of King Jeroboam regarding the fate of her sick son. K Rengstorf, “ἀπόστολος,” *TDNT* 1.413.

meanings to it.<sup>14</sup> With regard to the term “apostle” and Paul’s employment of it, Rengstorf found four primary meanings.

In the first place, an apostle is someone sent and commissioned by God. Paul justifies his mission based on his self-identification as being God-commissioned (see especially Gal 1:1; 1 Cor 1:1; 2 Cor 1:1; Rom 1:1). Thus, due to his sense of apostolic mission, Paul “integrates himself into the world plan of God as a significant and indispensable member; his indispensability derives not from himself, but from God (1 Cor 3:5).”<sup>15</sup> Furthermore, employing his status as an apostle, Paul makes demands on others (see 1 Thess 2:7).

In the second place, an apostle can be commissioned by a gathering of the faithful. By taking the collection to Jerusalem, Titus and Paul function in this capacity (see 2 Cor 8:23). In that the Philippians sent Epaphroditus to Paul (Phil 2:25), he too functioned as one commissioned by a gathering.<sup>16</sup>

In the third, apostles are “bearers of the NT message.”<sup>17</sup> Yet here Rengstorf’s interpretation suffers from the influence of Acts and from his own prejudice against the notion of women apostles. While Rengstorf remarks that unlike the Lukan author, who referred to a closed circle of twelve males (Acts 15; 16; cf. Acts 1:13, 26), Paul does not limit the number of apostles to twelve.<sup>18</sup> Yet he, and like the author of Acts, does assess that only men were apostles. Rengstorf understands the name “Junia” in Rom 16:7 to be “Junias,” a male name. He writes, “It [apostle] always denotes a *man* who is sent, and sent with full authority.”<sup>19</sup> This third definition also requires some refinement with respect to its breath: Paul does more than simply “bear the message;” he proclaims it. Rengstorf’s amplification of this definition comes later in his article, when he remarks that Paul functioned as a prophet.<sup>20</sup>

In the fourth, being an apostle means having had the experience of the risen Jesus (1 Cor 9:1).<sup>21</sup> According to Rengstorf, this implies that such persons had an “apostolic consciousness.”<sup>22</sup> According to Paul, the risen Jesus appeared first to Cephas, next to the twelve, then to more than five hundred “brothers” (ἀδελφοίς), then to James and “to all the apostles” (τοῖς ἀπόστολοις πᾶσιν)

14. Rengstorf, *TDNT* 1.420–23, 437–43.

15. Rengstorf, *TDNT* 1.438–39.

16. Rengstorf, *TDNT* 1.422.

17. Rengstorf, *TDNT* 1.422.

18. On this point, see Schüssler Fiorenza, “The Apostleship of Women,” 136. Schüssler Fiorenza remarks, “[T]he Pauline texts also indicate that many more apostles existed in early Christianity than we now know by name.”

19. See Rengstorf, *TDNT* 1.422 n. 93. Italics are my own.

20. See Rengstorf, *TDNT* 1.441.

21. Rengstorf, *TDNT* 1.423; Brooten, “Junia,” 143.

22. Rengstorf, *TDNT* 1.438. According to Rengstorf, Paul recognized that God called him and that he is now part of God’s mission (Rom 1:1; Gal 1:15).

and finally to Paul himself (1 Cor 15:5–9). Thus, according to Paul, there were certainly more than twelve apostles, and while the five hundred are specified as male (brothers), the term “all the apostles” lacks an explicit gender specification.

Apart from these definitions, Paul also speaks of an apostle as someone “condemned to death” (ἐπιθανάτιος; 1 Cor 4:9). While it is difficult to know whether or not Junia and Andronicus faced death, Paul mentions they were his “fellow prisoners” (συναιχμαλώτους μου; Rom 16:7).<sup>23</sup>

Based on this assessment of the term, some general conclusions can be made with regard to Paul’s understanding of an apostle and how it pertains in the case of Junia. As an apostle, Junia held the highest among Paul’s list of religious rankings; and she like Paul and others would have been considered God-commissioned or God-appointed. Furthermore, Junia was likely among those who had a vision of the risen Jesus.<sup>24</sup> While there is no mention that Junia was commissioned by a gathering, one can nevertheless assume that she proclaimed the message and likely did so prior to Paul, as Paul mentions that she and Andronicus were “in” the Anointed before he was (πρὸ ἐμοῦ γέγοναν ἐν Χριστῷ). Furthermore, her appointment involved risks, as is evident by her imprisonment.

Due to prejudice and blatant deceit, Paul’s reference to a female apostle was very nearly lost.<sup>25</sup> Accordingly, in the late medieval period and then more recently in the early twentieth century, incredulous and/or opposed to the existence of a female apostle, authors and editors responsible for developing Greek editions of the NT changed the accent mark on the accusative form of the proper name in Rom 16:7 from an acute (Ἰουνιάν) to a circumflex (Ἰουνιάων). In so doing, they changed from a female-designated name (Junia) and created what they believed to be a male one (Junias). The 1927 alteration to Ἰουνιάων can be observed in the Nestle<sup>13–21</sup>, the Nestle-Aland<sup>22–27</sup> (4th printing 1996) and in the GNT<sup>1–4</sup> (2nd printing 1994). The name is only changed back to a female-designated one in the late 1990s, and can be observed in its corrected form (Ἰουνιάν) in the Nestle-Aland<sup>27</sup> (5th printing 1998) and in the GNT<sup>4</sup> (3rd printing 1998).<sup>26</sup> Those adopting the name Junias reasoned it was derived from the Greek male name Ἰουνιάς, -ᾶ, ὁ or Ἰουνίας, -α, ὁ. Yet these editors failed to verify whether or not the ancient male name Junias ever existed. To date, there are no extant

23. As Robert Jewett writes, as in Phlm 23, here too Paul refers to a joint imprisonment between Andronicus, Junia, and Paul. Jewett, *Romans*, 962.

24. Bernadette Brooten remarks that Paul must have recognized the experience of the risen Jesus in those whom he called “apostles.” See Brooten, “Junia,” 143.

25. Even recent scholars appear to be unaware that Paul names a woman an apostle. See Corley, *Maranatha*, 130.

26. On these issues, see Jewett, *Romans*, 950 n. h.

inscriptions of this name nor is there textual evidence for it.<sup>27</sup> As Eldon Epp explains, the name Junias would have been a contracted form of either Ἰουνιανός in Greek or of *Iunianus* in Latin. However, there is no evidence that either of those longer Greek and Latin names ever had a contracted form Junias.<sup>28</sup> The feminine accusative singular Ἰουνίαν from the feminine name Ἰουνία, -ας, ἡ is the correct reading, attested in every Greek NT, with the exception of Alford (1862) and some early medieval minuscules, since Erasmus (1516) and up until 1927. The feminine form also occurs in all extant early translations, Old Latin, Vulgate, Sahidic and Bohairic Coptic, and Syriac.<sup>29</sup> While the name Junia appears in the most recent editions of the Greek NT, such was not the case less than two decades ago. This history merits retelling because it is an example of one among many instances of the denial of the notion of female leaders. This and similar types of tampering with Greek passages on the subject of Paul and women play a significant role to confuse the issue of Paul's treatment of women, and to diminish the reputation of Paul on the subject of women's equality.

### Phoebe: A Female Deacon and Leader

Phoebe is another woman Paul knows and names. He refers to her as a fellow sister, a "deacon" (διάκονον) of the gathering in Kenchreia, and a "leader" (προστάτις) of many including Paul himself. Phoebe was likely also the bearer of Paul's letter to the Romans (Rom 16:1–2).<sup>30</sup> And as Robert Jewett remarks, a letter bearer did more than simply declaim the written words. "Ancient epistolary practice would . . . assume that the recommendation of Phoebe was related to her task of conveying and interpreting the letter in Rome as well as in carrying out the business entailed in the letter."<sup>31</sup> Thus, based on Jewett's understanding of the ancient function of the letter bearer, one can assume that Phoebe could read Greek and interpret the text to its hearers. She functioned, then, not unlike later rabbis.

27. Jewett, *Romans*, 24, 44. Bernadette Brooten carried out the investigation of the inscriptions, and, as mentioned, she found no evidence of the name "Junias." Furthermore, exegetes from ancient and medieval times, including Origen, John Chrysostom, Jerome, Hatto of Vercelli, Theophylact, and Peter Abelard understood the name to be feminine. Aegidius of Rome (1245–1316), however, and for no apparent reason, took the name to be masculine. While Aegidius seems to be the one who got the ball rolling in the male-oriented direction, Martin Luther's commentary on Romans kept it spinning. Luther followed Faber Stapulensis' commentary, which took the accusative form of the Greek name to be "Junias" (masculine). See Brooten, "Junia," 141–43.

28. See Epp, *Junia*, 40–44.

29. Epp, *Junia*, 23–24.

30. L. Michael White remarks that the one delegated to carry the letter would have been one of Paul's "most trusted co-workers." White, *From Jesus to Christianity*, 211. According to these SV translators, Romans 16 appears to be a recommendation of Phoebe. See Dewey et al., *The Authentic Letters of Paul*, 251.

31. Jewett, *Romans*, 943.



In ancient sources a διάκονος is either a “servant,” “messenger,” or an “attendant or official in a temple or religious guild.”<sup>32</sup> The feminine noun διακονία means “service” or “business,” or “attendance on a duty, ministry,” and the verb διακονέω means “to wait on” or “to serve: to furnish, supply.” The earliest Greek attestations of the verb indicate the sense of “to wait at table,”<sup>33</sup> or more simply “to serve.”<sup>34</sup>

Like its ancient counterpart, the modern English word “deacon” denotes a male religious official who serves other officials of higher rank. The OED, for example, defines a deacon as “a subordinate officer in a Christian church.”<sup>35</sup> In the modern sense, a woman would not be a deacon but instead a deaconess, and like her male counterpart, she too would be in the role of an assistant, reporting to someone of higher rank within a religious organization.<sup>36</sup> Although Paul lived and was active *prior* to the establishment of church offices and rankings, this modern sense of a subordinate to a higher religious official within an institutional religious community often governs how Pauline interpreters understand the meaning of deacon. For instance, Andrew Clarke remarks that a “more menial connotation” of the term διάκονος is “fundamental to Paul’s understanding of ministry.”<sup>37</sup> C. E. B. Cranfield writes that a deacon is a person concerned with the “practical service to the needy.” And, according to Cranfield, a deacon implies a church office.<sup>38</sup>

Paul’s use of this term, however, differs from these modern and ancient meanings and provides little or no indication of a rank designation beneath someone in higher authority. In many cases, the person identified as a διάκονος (“deacon”) or who does the work of διακονία (“service or ministry”) reports directly to God and not to anyone else. As was the case with ἀπόστολος, Paul infuses διακον words with power and authority. And unlike the modern sense

32. *LSJ* 398.

33. As mentioned in Aristophanes (ca. 446 BCE–ca. 386 BCE), *Ach.*, 1015ff. Hermann Beyer, “διακονέω, διακονία, διάκονος,” *TDNT* 2.82. According to Dennis E. Smith, slave servants would greet guests at the door, lead them to the dining hall; other servants removed guests’ shoes and washed their feet. Once in the hall, other slave servants brought water for washing the guests’ hands. Slave servants delivered the food by transporting it on tables or trays. Smith, *From Symposium to Eucharist*, 27–28.

34. Beyer, *TDNT* 2.82. *LSJ* mentions the meaning “rendering service,” which can also mean rendering service to a god (398).

35. This is true for the Episcopal, Presbyterian, and Congregational churches. A deacon is also defined as a cleric, “who acts as principal assistant at a solemn celebration of the Eucharist.” “deacon, n. 1,” OED Online, March 2014, <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/47603> (accessed May 21, 2014).

36. “deaconess, n. 1,” OED Online, March 2014, <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/47607?redirectedFrom=deaconess> (accessed May 22, 2014).

37. Clarke, “Jew and Greek,” 115–16.

38. According to Cranfield, it is quite natural to understand the term διάκονος as referring to a particular office. *Epistle to the Romans*, 2.781.

of the word “deacon,” in Paul’s writings there is no indication of a church office associated with this function.

Persons to whom Paul associates this term do not undergo a loss of agency and status, but instead experience a rise in these personal attributes. Very often the noun διακονία (Rom 11:13; 2 Cor 3:9; 4:1; 5:18; 6:3; 11:8), the title διάκονος (1 Cor 3:5; 2 Cor 3:6;<sup>39</sup> 6:4) and the verb διακονέω (Phlm 13) regard the “world-transforming message.”<sup>40</sup> For example, both Apollos and Paul are διάκονοι, and due to their work in this capacity other persons have come to trust in the message (διάκονοι δι’ ὧν ἐπιστεύσατε; 1 Cor; 3:5b). As John N. Collins remarks, the Corinthian hearers would have understood that Paul and Apollos “have been entrusted with the god’s message, that they have the duty to pass it on and the right to be heard and believed, and that their rights and duties are equal.”<sup>41</sup> The SV paraphrases and enlarges upon the Greek: “We [Apollos and Paul] are servants (διάκονοι) through whom you came to put your trust in God’s world-transforming message in accordance with the role God assigned to each of us” (1 Cor 3:5b).<sup>42</sup> According to Paul, being a “servant” (διάκονος) to God is unlike being a servant or slave to a human master. The sense of servant-hood is reversed. God calls and marks people with a special designation and on account of this, personal esteem rises. In addition, Paul refers to himself as being in the διακονία (“service or ministry”)<sup>43</sup> “to the nations” (ἔθνεσιν; Rom 11:13b).<sup>44</sup> And in 2 Cor 5:18, Paul and others<sup>45</sup> are in the διακονίαν τῆς καταλλαγῆς<sup>46</sup> (“ministry of reconciliation,” NRSV). The ministry of reconciliation<sup>47</sup> is “the

39. Paul refers to himself and others as διακόνους of the new covenant. According to Victor Furnish, the others are Paul’s associates. See Furnish, *II Corinthians*, 197.

40. For this term, see Dewey et al., *The Authentic Letters of Paul*, 8 and passim. John N. Collins assesses sixteen of Paul’s διακον- words as pertaining to the “word.” He breaks down these uses into three categories. Under “mediating the word,” he lists 1 Thess 3:2; 1 Cor 3:5; 2 Cor 3:3; 6, 7, 8, 9; 5:18; 6:3, 4; 11:15, 23. Under “mandated for the word,” he includes Rom 11:13; 12:7; and under “on the mission for the word,” he lists 2 Cor 11:8; Phlm 13. Collins, *Diakonia*, 338.

41. Collins, *Diakonia*, 196.

42. There is no definite object for the verb “to trust.” The SV supplies “God’s world-transforming message.” Dewey et al., *The Authentic Letters of Paul*, 81–82.

43. The SV translates the noun as “ministry.” Dewey et al., *The Authentic Letters of Paul*, 236. The same translation is found in the NRSV, ASV, and NIV. The KJV, however, translates the noun as “office.”

44. Robert Jewett defines the διακονία as serving “in behalf of the gospel and the formation of communities of faith.” Jewett, *Romans*, 679.

45. Paul uses the pronoun we. See, e.g., 2 Cor 5:20. The “we” likely refers to Paul and some other people, but who these people were is unclear.

46. The SV translates the phrase as “ministry of change.” Dewey et al., *The Authentic Letters of Paul*, 128. See their note on 2 Cor 5:18. I understand the expression διακονίαν τῆς καταλλαγῆς as pertaining to Paul and to those with him, which makes sense of Paul’s appeal to the Corinthians to be reconciled to God (2 Cor 5:20). By contrast, Victor Furnish understands the term as applying to the “whole believing community.” Furnish, *II Corinthians*, 321.

47. It pertains to the “message of reconciliation” (2 Cor 5:19). According to Victor Furnish, the message is “God’s word, the gospel.” Furnish, *II Corinthians*, 337.

coming together of God and man<sup>48</sup> in the Anointed, and those involved in it are “ambassadors of the Anointed” (Χριστοῦ οὖν πρεσβεύομεν; 2 Cor; 5:20).<sup>49</sup>

Like Paul and Philemon, the slave Onesimus is also involved in the *διακονία* for the message. Onesimus does the work for the message in the place of Paul, while and because the latter is in prison. A common misunderstanding of the *διακονία* Onesimus performs is in service *to* Paul,<sup>50</sup> and as a result Onesimus’ role of direct service for the message is often lost. The translation of the phrase *μοι διακονῆ* as “he might be of service to me” (Phlm 13b) is at the heart of this misconception. The entire Greek phrase reads, ἵνα ὑπὲρ σοῦ μοι διακονῆ ἐν τοῖς δεσμοῖς τοῦ εὐαγγελίου. The NRSV, for example, translates, “so that he [Onesimus] might be of service to me in your place during my imprisonment for the gospel” (Phlm 13b).<sup>51</sup> In this NRSV translation, the word “gospel” (εὐαγγελίου) functions as the cause of Paul’s imprisonment. However, the extended prepositional phrase ἐν τοῖς δεσμοῖς τοῦ εὐαγγελίου is adverbial and thus modifies the subjunctive verb διακονῆ. The subject of the verb is Onesimus. The final modifier of the phrase τοῦ εὐαγγελίου, emphatic by position, specifies the type of work or type of service Onesimus performed and not the cause of Paul’s imprisonment. The phrase is best translated, “so that he [Onesimus] might serve for (instead of) me in your place in the bonds of the world-transforming message.”<sup>52</sup> In this translation, Onesimus does the work of proclaiming the message because Paul is unable to do so; and Paul refers metaphorically to the proclamation of the message as a work of bondage.<sup>53</sup> Such a metaphor fits the context of the slave Onesimus and Paul’s imprisonment. Furthermore, the repeated ending sound οὐ forges a connection between Philemon, “your” (σοῦ), and τοῦ εὐαγγελίου (the gospel), and thereby reinforces Philemon’s own

48. Collins, *Diakonia*, 205.

49. John N. Collins writes, “Paul is clearly thinking of this commission as one involving the delivery of the message.” Collins, *Diakonia*, 205.

50. Focusing on the etymology of the name Onesimus (“useful”), Joseph Marchal has suggested that he may have served Paul in a sexual capacity. Marchal, “The Usefulness of an Onesimus: The Sexual Use of Slaves and Paul’s Letter to Philemon,” 749–70. However, the overall context of the letter does not suggest such a meaning for “useful.”

51. Joseph Fitzmyer translates as “so that he might serve me on your behalf during my imprisonment for the gospel.” Fitzmyer, *The Letter to Philemon*, 110. According to him, the reason why Paul is in prison is for the “ministry of evangelization” or “service of the gospel” (111). The SV translators write, “so that he could assist me on your behalf while I am in prison for proclaiming God’s world-transforming message.” Dewey et al., *The Authentic Letters of Paul*, 157.

52. Translation is my own.

53. John N. Collins translates the phrase in Phlm 13 as I am suggesting. Following the RV translation, he writes, “that in thy behalf he might minister unto me in the bonds of the gospel.” With regard to the type of service he understands Onesimus to have performed, he writes, “Such a sentence, then, would be speaking of more than a butler for a gaoled apostle, and we are led to read ‘minister for me’ in the sense of going out on errands—here, in the interests of the gospel—with the dative ‘for me’ having the same grammatical function as the dative ‘for the saints’ at Rom 15:25, namely, to designate the person organizing and authorizing the activity.” Collins, *Diakonia*, 222.

involvement with the message (see Phlm 6, 17). There is the sense in which Onesimus serves in the place of Paul (μοι διακονῆ; “for me”), yet so also does Philemon (ὑπὲρ σοῦ; “in your place”). Like the other forms of διακον words, in this passage too the service itself does not indicate subordination to another person. Peter Arzt-Grabner remarks that Paul and Philemon have a type of business partnership, a “partnership of faith” (κοινωνία τῆς πίστεως; Phlm 6), and that in this letter he (Paul) is requesting that Philemon receive Onesimus as he would Paul, as a “business partner” (see Phlm 17).<sup>54</sup> Both Onesimus and Philemon serve as equals in the capacity for the message. There is no sense in which Paul subordinates Onesimus, rather he seeks to promote him to the status of “brother” (Phlm 16).

Elsewhere in Paul’s writings, the person performing the work of διακονία has full authority and commands respect. For instance, as a function of his own work of service, Paul considers himself authorized to command his gentile audience in Romans. He forcefully and directly addresses his listeners, Ὑμῖν δὲ λέγω τοῖς ἔθνεσιν (“But now to YOU<sup>55</sup> I speak, to the gentiles”; 11:13a). The second-person plural pronoun (Ὑμῖν) is in first position and added only for the purpose of emphasis. Paul also speaks of “glorifying” (δοξάζω) his διακονία,<sup>56</sup> a role or position highly esteemed and similar in function to his apostleship (Rom 11:13b).

Furthermore, Paul uses διακον-related words in a specialized sense to refer to the collection for the saints (διακονίας τῆς εἰς τοὺς ἁγίους; 2 Cor 8:4; 9:1).<sup>57</sup> In these cases, he reports to those in Jerusalem and not solely to God. In a related verse Paul writes, ἵνα . . . ἡ διακονία<sup>58</sup> μου ἢ εἰς Ἱερουσαλήμ εὐπρόσδεκτος τοῖς ἁγίοις γένηται (“so that . . . my service to Jerusalem might be acceptable to the saints”; Rom 15:31). Paul is commissioned to do the work of ministry, in the same way as he was commissioned for his work as an apostle

54. Arzt-Grabner, “How to Deal with Onesimus?” 139–42.

55. The pronoun is emphatic by position. In an inflected language, pronouns are not needed to make sense of the phrase, thus when present, they signify emphasis.

56. Some commentators make excuses for Paul and remark that he boasts not of his own merits (see Rom 3:27) but rather of his service to God. Jewett, *Romans*, 679. While the SV translators downplay the notion of glorification, likely on account of its rather obscure meaning, they nevertheless see a consequential relationship between Paul’s apostleship and his διακονία. They translate, “In view of my being an envoy [apostle] to the nations, I make large claims about my ministry [διακονία] . . .” (11:13b). Dewey et al., *The Authentic Letters of Paul*, 236.

57. See also 2 Cor 9:12, 13; Rom 15:25, 31. According to John N. Collins, the meaning of the διακον- words in these verses is “emissary of the church.” He locates Phoebe in this category. Collins, *Diakonia*, 338–39.

58. While there is much manuscript support for the Greek word “διακονία” in Rom 15:31, a few manuscripts such as B D\* F G ar b d\* substitute δωροφορία (“gift-bringing”). According to Jewett, the former gives a sense of Paul’s subordination to Jerusalem, while the latter lessens that connotation. See Jewett, *Romans*, 920 n. t.

(see Gal 2:7–10). While Paul agrees to make the collection, he dismisses the notion that James, Cephas, and John are his superiors (see Gal 2:6).<sup>59</sup>

Finally, Paul considers διακονία (ministry or service) as one of seven God-given gifts (χαρίσματα) for individual members in the community (Rom 12:3). The gift of prophecy heads the list (Rom 12:6), but as Robert Jewett comments, one cannot assume that the first gift mentioned is the most important, because the list itself “reflects a random sequence.”<sup>60</sup> There is also no indication that the διακονία or any of the other χαρίσματα within the list refers to a church office.<sup>61</sup> As was the case with apostle, there is the sense in which a διάκονος can be subjected her or himself to harm and hardship (2 Cor 6:4–5; 11:23).

As seen within the writings of Paul, the dominant sense of διάκονος and διακον-related words concern the proclamation of the message. There are no indications of a ranked position or an office associated with this function. Paul refers to himself as a διάκονος; and the functions associated with it are similar to that of an apostle. Thus, it is reasonable to assume that like Apollos, Philemon, Onesimus, Paul, and others, Phoebe was also involved in some way with the message.<sup>62</sup> The διάκονος, who is involved with the message, reports to no one. Like Paul, Phoebe would have derived authority from this position. As someone involved with the message, Phoebe ranked equal to Paul and to other named males in the similar role.

Phoebe was not only a διάκονος but also a προστάτις (“leader”). Her leadership is described more fully as καὶ γὰρ αὐτὴ προστάτις πολλῶν ἐγενήθη καὶ ἐμοῦ αὐτοῦ (“for she herself is a leader of many and also of me”; Rom 16:2). According to LSJ, the noun προστάτις is the feminine form of προστάτης. The latter means “the one who stands before,” “a leader or a chief,” “a ruler,” “a president”<sup>63</sup> or presiding officer,” “one who stands before and protects,” or a “patron.”<sup>64</sup> In LSJ, the feminine form of the noun means “protectress.”<sup>65</sup> However, a

59. The issue of Paul’s status vis-à-vis the early leaders (James, Cephas, and John) mentioned in Galatians 2 is rather complicated. There is the underlying suggestion that Paul was meant to report to these persons. Paul, however, claims that these “leaders” have no real authority over him (see Gal 2:6–10). For more on this issue, see Betz, *Galatians*, 92–95.

60. Jewett, *Romans*, 746

61. Jewett, *Romans*, 745, 748–49.

62. John N. Collins places Phoebe in a special category distinct from other persons Paul designates with this same term. Collins names Phoebe the “community’s emissary,” yet he also states that the precise nature of her business is unknown. What appears odd is that he also categorizes Stephanas (1 Cor 16:15) in this same way, as an “emissary of the community,” yet in the case of Stephanas, the “ministry” regards the work of the gospel. Collins, *Diakonia*, 224–25.

63. Ray Schulz opts for this meaning of the term and calls Phoebe a “president.” See Schulz, “A Case,” 126. Schulz, however, also understands “president” to be a church office. Since it is unlikely that Paul is referring to any office within this passage, the meaning “president” is not the best choice.

64. *LSJ* 1526–27.

65. *LSJ* abridged version, 607.

Logeion search of *προστάτις* yields, “champion, leader.”<sup>66</sup> “Leader” or literally someone who stands (*στάτ*) before (*προ*) is the dominant sense for this noun.

As was the case with Junia, so too late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century English translations de-emphasize Phoebe and downplay her various leadership roles. Many of those English-language bibles (Darby Version [1890], ASV [1929], RSV [1952], BBE [1965], NAS [1971], NKJV [1975]) translate *προστάτις* incorrectly as “helper” or as “succourer” (KJV), demoting Phoebe to an inferior position. Moreover, ancient manuscripts reveal much earlier attempts to diminish Phoebe’s role as a leader and as deacon. The 27<sup>th</sup> (1996) Nestle-Aland Greek edition of Rom 16:1–2 reads as follows.

1. Συνίστημι δὲ ὑμῖν Φοίβην τὴν ἀδελφὴν ἡμῶν, οὕσαν [καὶ] διάκονον τῆς ἐκκλησίας τῆς ἐν Κεγχρεαῖς,
  - 2a. ἵνα αὐτὴν προσδέξησθε ἐν κυρίῳ ἀξίως τῶν ἁγίων καὶ παραστήτε αὐτὴ ἐν ᾧ ἂν ὑμῶν χρῆζῃ πράγματι·
  - 2b. καὶ γὰρ αὐτὴ *προστάτις* πολλῶν ἐγενήθη καὶ ἐμοῦ αὐτοῦ.
1. Now I commend to you Phoebe our sister, she is [also] a deacon of the assembly in Kenchreia.
  - 2a. so that you receive her in the lord, as is worthy of the saints, and provide for her in whatever she may need from you.
  - 2b. for she herself has become a leader of many and also of me.<sup>67</sup>

The manuscript tradition divides equally between the inclusion and absence of the *καὶ* (“also”) before the *διάκονον* (“deacon”) (v. 1).<sup>68</sup> When included, the *καὶ* emphasizes Phoebe’s role as a deacon and provides the indication of her multiple responsibilities in Kenchreia.<sup>69</sup> Several manuscripts<sup>70</sup> change *αὐτὴν* *προσδέξησθε* to *προσδέξησθε αὐτὴν* (v. 2a). The modification results in a change from “her receive” to “receive her,” placing less emphasis on Phoebe herself, as the feminine pronoun (*αὐτὴν*) before the verb is emphatic. In some instances,<sup>71</sup> the *αὐτὴ* (“she herself”) before the *προστάτις* (v. 2b) is changed to *αὕτη* (“this woman”). This variant also serves to de-emphasize Phoebe. Finally, there are instances<sup>72</sup> of *προστάτις* (“leader”) changed to *παραστάτις* (“helper” or “assistant”; v. 2b), which clearly, and as we saw above, removes the sense of leadership.

66. “*προστάτις*,” Logeion Online, <http://logeion.uchicago.edu/index.html#προστάτις> (accessed May 23, 2014).

67. The translation is my own.

68. Jewett, *Romans*, 941 n. c.

69. Robert Jewett comments that the *καὶ* “lends weight to Phoebe’s qualifications.” Jewett, *Romans*, 941 n. c.

70. These are B C D F G ar mon. Jewett remarks that while this reading is “strongly attested,” it is also “probably secondary.” Jewett, *Romans*, 941 n. d.

71. See Jewett, *Romans*, 941 n. e.

72. F and G contain this variant reading. See Jewett, *Romans*, 941 n. f.



Moreover, rather than understanding *προστάτις* as “leader,” many modern scholars<sup>73</sup> translate this noun in Rom 16:2 as “patroness,” and assume that Phoebe was of a high social class and helped Paul financially with his mission.<sup>74</sup> To justify his translation choice, Robert Jewett<sup>75</sup> cites Ramsay MacMullen’s survey of ancient rescripts, in which a tenth of the addressees were women, those deemed able to donate funds to various *collegia*. Based on that study and those of the social settings of early Christianity, Jewett reasons that “upper-class benefactors, both male and female” played important roles in early Christian communities.<sup>76</sup> Absent from his discussion, however, is any direct evidence of Phoebe’s wealth or social status. Even while remarking that the Greek word *προστάτις* literally means “one who stands before” and that this term was often used for the presiding officer, Victor Furnish similarly adopts the translation “patron” for Phoebe.<sup>77</sup>

Indications within Romans argue against her being a wealthy patron of Paul. As Esther Ng remarks, “it is very unusual in Greco-Roman letter writing for one to recommend somebody superior to oneself in social standing.”<sup>78</sup> And if being a patron garnered special distinction, Paul would have referred to her in first place in that role. However, Paul refers to Phoebe foremost as “our sister” (τὴν ἀδελφὴν ἡμῶν), next as a διάκονος (Rom 16:1), and in last position as a *προστάτις*. Moreover, Paul urges those in Rome “to receive” (*προσδέξισθε*) and provide for Phoebe, to literally “stand by” (*παραστήτε*) her in whatever she “might need” (*χρηζῆ*; Rom 16:2). Those needs could certainly have been material ones.<sup>79</sup>

73. See Schüssler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her*, 181–82. Caroline Whelan also argues that Phoebe was a wealthy patroness. See Whelan, “Amica Pauli,” 82–85. Wayne Meeks, who likewise maintains that this noun should be translated as “patron,” seems puzzled by the fact that Phoebe could be a leader over Paul. He writes, “it is difficult to imagine what Paul could have meant by describing Phoebe as ‘also presiding over me.’” According to Meeks, Phoebe was an independent woman of wealth and also a leader in the church of Kenchreia. See Meeks, *The First Urban Christians*, 60. Was calling Phoebe a “patron” a way of avoiding the “problem” of having Phoebe be a leader over Paul?

74. The Book of Acts’ depiction of women as benefactors may sway the interpretations toward the view that Phoebe was Paul’s patron. See, e.g., Acts 16:14; 17:4, 12.

75. Jewett, *Romans*, 941. Robert Jewett’s theory with regard to Phoebe and her role as a patroness is complicated. Jewett surmises that Phoebe was underwriting Paul’s Spanish mission, and she was also to arrange for the translators needed for the mission (947–48). This arrangement, however, is highly atypical of Paul. While Paul gives the impression of being in need of funds for his work, he was conflicted when it came to asking for help (see 1 Cor 9:1–18; 2 Cor 11:9–10). C. E. B. Cranfield translates this word as “source of assistance.” Cranfield, *Epistle to the Romans*, 751. By contrast, Esther Ng argues that there is no indication from the text that Phoebe was a patroness. See Ng, “Phoebe as Prostatis,” 8. The SV treats the noun *προστάτις* as a verb and translates it as “provided help.” Dewey et al., *The Authentic Letters of Paul*, 251. This translation seems apt, as it allows for the sense of leadership and skirts the notion of subordination implied with “helper.”

76. Jewett, *Romans*, 946–47. See also MacDonald, “Reading Real Women,” 209.

77. Furnish, *The Moral Teachings*, 119–20.

78. Ng, “Phoebe as Prostatis,” 12.

79. On this point, see Ng, “Phoebe as Prostatis,” 10.

Paul's word choice indicates a play on the Greek word for "stand,"<sup>80</sup> which helps to guide his meaning. Both *παραστήτε* and *προστάτις* have roots in the Greek verb *ἵστημι* ("to stand"). Paul, then, asks his addressees to "stand by" Phoebe, as she herself has already "stood before" others, thereby emphasizing Phoebe's role as one who stands before others, that is, as a leader. Moreover, Paul employs the cognate verb *προΐστημι* twice (1 Thess 5:12; Rom 12:8) to imply leadership. While Jewett renders the Greek participle *προϊστάμενος* (Rom 12:8) as "the leader/presider," he nonetheless insists that the verbal form is distinct from its cognate noun *προστάτις*, which he considers an upper-class designation.<sup>81</sup>

Given the lack of evidence of Phoebe's wealth or of her high social standing, the dominate sense of *προστάτις* as "leader," and Paul's use of the cognate term *προΐστημι* as leader, it is likely that Phoebe was a leader<sup>82</sup> of many and also of Paul. Furthermore, and as mentioned, as letter bearer, Phoebe would have read and interpreted the Greek text to its hearers. The debate regarding how best to translate the term *προστάτις* concerns not the ambiguity in the Greek word, because the term commonly means "leader," but instead the fact that a female is designated by it. Here, too, interpreters appear to stumble over the issue of female leadership.

### Chloe, Prisca and Paul's Unnamed Women

Paul makes one small reference to another female leader, Chloe. We hear of those "of" Chloe (τῶν Χλόης; 1 Cor 1:11). While Joseph Fitzmyer seems reluctant to consider her a leader of a group,<sup>83</sup> evidence from Paul's writings already marshaled in support of women working in leadership roles supports this understanding of her role.<sup>84</sup> Like Junia and Phoebe, Chloe too worked to further the mission. We first hear of Chloe when Paul responds to a report given to him by some of Chloe's people about divisions within the Corinthian community (1 Cor 1:11).<sup>85</sup> While the information regarding her is very slight, that Paul would

80. As Esther Ng notes, there appears to be a plea on Paul's part for the Roman addressees to respond in kind to Phoebe. Ng, "Phoebe as Prostatist," 10.

81. Jewett, *Romans*, 752–53.

82. In a recent *Fourth R* article, William O. Walker also assesses Phoebe to have been a leader and not a benefactor. See William O. Walker, "Paul on the Status and Role of Women," 6.

83. Fitzmyer, *First Corinthians*, 141. According to Fitzmyer, those of Chloe could be members of her own household, slaves or former slaves. As Fitzmyer remarks, "Nothing in the text suggests that she was the overseer of a house church" (141).

84. Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza comments, "the communities of Corinth and vicinity had . . . at least three outstanding women leaders in their midst: Chloe, Prisca, and Phoebe." Schüssler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her*, 219.

85. According to Joseph Fitzmyer, Chloe did not necessarily send people to Paul; they appear to have been in Ephesus for another reason. Fitzmyer, *First Corinthians*, 141.



drop her name is of significance. In mentioning her, Paul lends weight to his own argument.<sup>86</sup> As Victor Furnish remarks, “[T]he fact that Paul identifies her only by name suggests that she was someone already well known to the Corinthians and respected by them.”<sup>87</sup>

Beyond the designations of ἀπόστολος, διάκονος, and προστάτις, Paul refers to several women as “fellow workers” (συνεργοί) and to others as “those who labor hard” (τὰς κοπιώσας).<sup>88</sup> Prisca (Rom 16:3), Euodia, and Syntyche (Phil 4:2–3) are called “fellow-” or “co-workers,” and Mary (Rom 16:6), Tryphaena, Tryphosa, and Persis (Rom 16:12) are those who work hard.

Among the group of women-workers, Prisca is best known. Paul refers to her in two separate letters (Rom 16:3; 1 Cor 16:9). In addition, the author of 2 Timothy refers to her (2 Tim 4:19), and the author of Acts mentions a “Priscilla” (Acts 18:3, 18, 26), the diminutive of Prisca, likely to refer to the same Prisca mentioned in Romans and 1 Corinthians.<sup>89</sup> From the list of twenty-five named persons in Rom 16:1–16, Prisca’s name is second after Phoebe. The names “Prisca” and “Priscilla” never appear in isolation from Aquila.<sup>90</sup> In Rom 16:3 Paul mentions Prisca’s name prior to Aquila’s,<sup>91</sup> which could indicate her higher social status,<sup>92</sup> yet he reverses the order of their names in 1 Cor 16:19, making such an assumption unlikely.<sup>93</sup>

86. Antoinette Wire finds it significant that Paul breaks from his more usual habit, such as is seen in 5:1, 11:18, and 15:12, 35, and cites his source. As she says, her name must “add in some way to the credibility of his description.” Wire, *The Corinthian Women Prophets*, 41.

87. Furnish, *The Moral Teachings*, 122. Victor Furnish surmises that she had “material resources” and was of a “relatively high social status.” Furnish, *The Moral Teachings*, 122

88. A feminine plural accusative participle of the verb κοπιᾶν, “to work hard, work till one is weary.” Paul only employs verbal forms of this word.

89. I am following Robert Jewett on the assumption that NT references to Prisca or to Priscilla refer to the same person. See Jewett, *Romans*, 955 n. 29.

90. They share a house; he is likely her husband. Whereas Aquila could be Prisca’s brother, that relationship seems less likely, because Paul appears to explicitly signal those types of relationships (see Rom 16:15).

91. Prisca’s name also appears prior to Aquila’s in 2 Tim 4:19.

92. Stanley Stowers writes that Prisca “possessed a higher status” than her husband. According to him, she was probably freeborn and a Roman citizen. Stowers, *Rereading of Romans*, 75. See also Robert Jewett, who argues that Prisca came from a noble background. Jewett, *Romans*, 955; and see Meeks, *The First Urban Christians*, 59.

93. Acts refers to this same couple, with Aquila’s name appearing first in Acts 18:2, and then in second place in Acts 18:18, 26. See Pervo, *Acts*, 451. In Acts, there is no mention of the couple being co-workers in the Lord, but instead they work along with Paul as tentmakers (Acts 18:3). Of these three, only Paul is involved in testifying or witnessing for Jesus as the Messiah (Acts 18:5). In Acts, Aquila and Priscilla teach, but they only instruct Apollos and do so in private (Acts 18:26). In turning the name “Prisca” into a diminutive and omitting mention of the gathering in Prisca’s and Aquila’s home, the author of Acts not only subordinates Prisca, but also diminishes their joint leadership roles for the mission. They are no longer seen as equal to Paul and others in spreading the message.

Prisca (Πρίσκαν)<sup>94</sup> and her husband Aquila are co-workers with Paul in the Anointed Jesus (τοὺς συνεργούς μου ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ; Rom 16:3). One can reasonably infer that the couple worked as equals.<sup>95</sup> The act of proclamation of the message can be inferred by analogy to others designated as co-workers.<sup>96</sup> Euodia and Syntyche,<sup>97</sup> for example, are co-workers “for the message” (ἐν τῷ εὐαγγελίῳ; Phil 4:2–3).<sup>98</sup> Additional persons similarly designated include Timothy, “a co-worker for God for the message of the Anointed” (συνεργὸν τοῦ θεοῦ ἐν τῷ εὐαγγελίῳ τοῦ Χριστοῦ; 1 Thess 3:2), Urbanus, a “co-worker in the Anointed” (συνεργὸν ἡμῶν ἐν Χριστῷ; Rom 16:9), Apollos, and Paul himself (1 Cor 3:9). According to Robert Jewett, the expression “in the Anointed” is an indication that the work involved the message.<sup>99</sup> Furthermore, Prisca and Aquila hosted gatherings of Jesus-followers (ἐκκλησίαν) in their house<sup>100</sup> (Rom 16:5; 1 Cor 16:19),<sup>101</sup> indicating their leadership role.<sup>102</sup> There is some debate over whether the couple hosted gatherings in one house or two.<sup>103</sup> Finally, the two

94. Robert Jewett notes that manuscripts of the Textus Receptus replace the name “Prisca” with “Priscilla.” According to Jewett, these are secondary manuscripts and conform to Acts’ characterization of Prisca. Jewett, *Romans*, 949 n. a. Priscilla is the diminutive form of Prisca and thus its use indicates the diminution of her status.

95. On this point, see Walker, “Paul on the Status and Role of Women,” 6.

96. Wolf-Henning Ollrog writes that according to Paul a co-worker is 1) a “representative” (*Beauftragte*) of God; 2) “works cooperatively in the same work of Christ as Paul”; and 3) “proclaims the mission” (*Missionverkündigung*). Ollrog, *Paulus und seine Mitarbeiter*, 68–72.

97. In contrast to what I am arguing here, Joseph Marchal finds that Paul is trying to bring these two women back under his control. See Marchal, *Politics of Heaven*, 103–4.

98. That they are involved in missionary preaching, similar to that of Paul and his various other associates, see Furnish, *The Moral Teachings*, 122. See also Margaret MacDonald, who reasons that the two women worked together as leaders and were involved in “the evangelizing of nonbelievers.” MacDonald, “Reading Real Women,” 205.

99. The expression τοὺς συνεργούς μου ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ is “technical language for missionary colleagues.” Jewett, *Romans*, 957. Schüssler Fiorenza calls Prisca a missionary co-worker. Schüssler Fiorenza, “Missionaries, Apostles, Coworkers,” 429.

100. Having a house could indicate a degree of wealth, as Robert Jewett remarks. See Jewett, *Romans*, 956–57. By contrast, Peter Lampe argues against their being wealthy. See Lampe, “Prisca,” *ABD* 5.468.

101. There is no such gathering in their house in either 2 Tim 4:19 or Acts 18:2–26. In 2 Tim 4:19 one finds mention of the household of Onesiphorus, and in Acts 18:2 Paul is said to stay with Aquila and Priscilla (in their house) because they are all in the same trade as tentmakers. Thus, while they have a house, it is not for the purpose of hosting a gathering of Jesus followers.

102. According to Robert Jewett, the two led the congregation in their home. Jewett, *Romans*, 959.

103. If Paul wrote 1 Corinthians from Ephesus, as is generally assumed (see, Dewey et al., *The Authentic Letters of Paul*, 73; Fitzmyer, *First Corinthians*, 48, 627), then the reference to their house made in 1 Cor 16:19 would likely have been a location in Ephesus. Paul’s reference in 1 Cor 16:19 to Aquila and Prisca’s house is one reason why some scholars have maintained that Romans 16 was not destined for those in Rome but instead for those in Ephesus. On this point, see Whelan, “Amica Pauli,” 72. With the understanding that Romans 16 was destined for those in Rome, the house of Prisca and Aquila to which Paul refers in Romans would have been in Rome. This would have meant that the couple had two homes, one in Ephesus

are said to have risked their own necks for Paul's life (ὕπερ τῆς ψυχῆς μου τὸν ἑαυτῶν τράχηλον ὑπέθηκαν;<sup>104</sup> Rom 16:3). While neither of them died over this incident(s), whatever they did might have resulted in their death. To sum up, Prisca along with her husband worked together as equals with Paul for the Anointed Jesus, most likely as proclaimers of the message, they hosted gatherings of Jesus-followers in their home(s) (1 Cor 16:19; Rom 16:5), and they risked their lives for Paul. The work of Prisca and Aquila is similar to that of Euodia, Syntyche, Urbanus, Apollos, Timothy, and Paul, all mentioned as co-workers. As co-workers, none of these persons mentioned answered to anyone else in authority over them.

Paul also describes four other women-workers using a different Greek word for work, κοπιάω. This work also likely regarded the message. Κοπιάω has a stronger connotation than συνεργέω; its root is the Greek word κόπος, which means "beating, weariness as though one had been beaten, and the exertion or trouble which causes this state."<sup>105</sup> In Homer, κόπος is synonymous with another Greek word πόνος, which denotes strenuous effort.<sup>106</sup> In NT and Hellenistic usage, the verb κοπιάω means "to become weary/tired" or "to exert oneself physically, mentally, or spiritually."<sup>107</sup> Thus, by contrast to συνεργέω, κοπιάω entails work that causes weariness. Paul and Apollos grow weary from working with their hands (1 Cor 4:12). Paul also works hard on behalf of the message (Gal 4:11; 1 Cor 15:10; Phil 2:16). Mary<sup>108</sup> or Miriam<sup>109</sup> "worked hard (to the point of exhaustion) for those in Rome" (πολλὰ ἐκοπίασεν εἰς ὑμᾶς; Rom 16:6). Persis "labored very hard" (πολλὰ ἐκοπίασεν) "in/for the lord" (ἐν κυρίῳ; Rom 16:12), as do two other women, Tryphaena and Tryphosa (κοπιώσας ἐν κυρίῳ; Rom 16:12). Such work merits respect: Paul urges the Thessalonians "to recognize" (εἰδέναι) such persons (1 Thess 5:12) and the Corinthians "to subordinate" themselves (ὑποτάσσησθε) to these workers (1

and another one in Rome. According to Robert Jewett, Prisca and Aquila were evicted from Rome (Acts 18:2), went to Corinth where they met Paul, and then traveled to Ephesus with him (Acts 18:2–21). Sometime later they went back to Rome. For a fuller description of these events, see Jewett, *Romans*, 955. Stanley Stowers follows on Jewett's historical reconstruction. See *Rereading of Romans*, 75. Jewett and Stowers base their information of the events regarding Prisca and Aquila on Acts, yet according to Richard Pervo, the scenario narrated in Acts cannot be confirmed. Pervo writes, "Acts 18:1–18 is very far from the kind of prose on which anyone would want to depend for the detailed reconstruction of past social, political, or religious history." Pervo, *Acts*, 447.

104. This expression is used elsewhere in Greco-Roman literature. See Jewett, *Romans*, 957, n. 58.

105. F. Hauck, "κόπος, κοπιάω," *TDNT* 3.827.

106. Hauck, *TDNT* 3.828.

107. *BAGD* 558.

108. Dewey et al., *The Authentic Letters of Paul*, 251.

109. The textual evidence is evenly divided between Mary (Μαρίαν) and Miriam (Μαριάμ). Robert Jewett prefers the latter, as it is the more difficult reading. Jewett, *Romans*, 949, n. f.

Cor 16:16). Based on an analogy with Paul's own hard work for the message,<sup>110</sup> I understand all four of these women to have worked tirelessly and independent of external authority to promote the message of the Anointed Jesus.

In sum, while editors and exegetes from ancient to modern times have attempted to either erase or diminish the leadership roles of several women Paul names, he clearly considered them as leaders and as having equal authority to himself and to other men he mentions. He referred to Junia as an apostle. He recognized Phoebe, Chloe, and Prisca as leaders in their own right of assemblies of Jesus-followers. These and other named women (Euodia and Syntyche, Mary, Tryphaena, Tryphosa, and Persis) were involved in the work of the message. All of these women worked with *and not for* Paul and others. They functioned in the very same way as Paul and other men he named. Some women even endured hardship and risked their lives for their work.

### **Paul on Relations between Women and Men**

Paul's remarks regarding the relations between women and men fall primarily within two passages of his authentic writings (1 Cor 7:1–34; Gal 3:26–28). Both of these structural units indicate Paul's egalitarian treatment of women and men. As is the case within all of his letters, the situation determines Paul's remarks. In 1 Corinthians, Paul responds to several problems within the community, including divisions among the members (1 Corinthians 1–4), immoral sexual behavior (1 Corinthians 5), and suing each other in a court of law (1 Corinthians 6). He also addresses certain issues, among them are the relation between women and men (chapter 7), whether or not one should eat meat sacrificed to idols (chapter 10), and conduct of participants at the Lord's meal (chapter 11). Chapter 7 is in response to an issue the Corinthians themselves raise. Gal 3:26–28 is likely an earlier and non-Pauline baptismal formula that Paul cites in support of his argument for why gentiles have no need to practice aspects of Jewish Torah.

#### **Equal Status in Martial Relations: 1 Corinthians 7**

In 1 Corinthians 7, Paul spelled out his views on sexual relations between women and men and on marriage. In these passages he counseled equality with regard to sexual rights between married couples; he upheld the rights of women to remain single; and he was of the opinion that both wife and husband have the same types of responsibilities and influence over their non-believing spouse. Because both men and women are vulnerable to involuntary sexual desire, Paul suggested it was best to marry.

110. Jewett, *Romans*, 968, and Peter Lampe, "Tryphaena and Trphosa," *ABD* 6.669 regard the expression *κοπιώσας ἐν κυρίῳ* as referring to either missionary work or church leadership.

While Paul affirmed heterosexual marriage, his reasons for doing so at first glance appear paternalistic.<sup>111</sup> Indeed, he begins his discussion of the topic (1 Cor 7:1b) with the advice that it is best for men to avoid women, if possible. His opening comment on this subject was in response to a prior Corinthian correspondence concerning their advocacy of sexual abstinence. He writes,

7:1b καλὸν ἀνθρώπῳ γυναικὸς μὴ ἄπτεσθαι<sup>112</sup>

7:2 διὰ δὲ τὰς πορνείας ἕκαστος τὴν ἑαυτοῦ γυναῖκα ἐχέτω καὶ ἕκαστη τὸν ἴδιον ἀνδρα ἐχέτω.

7:1b it is good for a man not to “fasten onto” a woman

7:2 but because of sexual immorality, let each man have his own wife and let each woman have her own husband (1 Cor 7:1b–2).<sup>113</sup>

Whether he quoted from their prior letter or summarized it,<sup>114</sup> he agreed with their prior assessment.<sup>115</sup> Paul’s concern was sexual immorality or πορνεία (1 Cor 7:2). As Kyle Harper explains, Paul desired to distinguish his community from the surrounding culture and did this in part by strengthening the range of meanings for πορνεία (1 Cor 7:2). While in classical Greek, πορνεία<sup>116</sup> means “to prostitute oneself” or to sell access to one’s body,<sup>117</sup> in line with Jewish writings from the Hellenistic period, such as in the Book of Sirach, the Book of Tobit, and the works of Philo, Paul broadened the sense of πορνεία to mean incest (1 Cor 5:1–13), male sexual relations with prostitutes (1 Cor 6:12–20), and extramarital sex (1 Cor 7:2–9). Harper adds, in a culture rampant with the sexual exploitation of slaves and prostitutes, marriage proved to be the answer for the problem of uncontrolled desire.<sup>118</sup>

111. Indeed, Antoinette Wire understands Paul’s statement in 1 Cor 7:1 as a male problem but one that Paul takes up with the community at large. According to her, Paul is trying to convince female members of the community to relinquish thoughts of sexual abstinence and the celibate life to help curb the potential of male sexual immorality. Wire, *The Corinthian Women Prophets*, 78–79.

112. The Greek verb ἄπτω literally means “to fasten” or “to fix upon a thing.” In the middle voice found here, it has the sense of “to cling to” or “grasp.” Modern translations, such as the NRSV, KJV, and NAS, render the verb in English as “to touch.” Yet as Gordon Fee has demonstrated, the Greek phrase used in conjunction with a woman (γυναικὸς), as it is in this case, is a “euphemism for sexual intercourse.” Fitzmyer, *First Corinthians*, 278.

113. Translation is my own.

114. There are interpreters on both sides of this issue. See Fitzmyer, *First Corinthians*, 278.

115. Suggesting that this phrase is not a direct quote but that Paul is in agreement with it, the SV translators write, “I do think it is better for a man to abstain from sexual intercourse with a woman.” Dewey et al., *The Authentic Letters of Paul*, 87.

116. Kyle Harper remarks, “The Greek root πορν already suggested the public sexual availability of the prostitute, and it made the association between the term πορνεία and the types of sexual license permitted in Gentile culture practically inevitable.” Harper, “Porneia,” 374–75.

117. Harper, “Porneia,” 369–74.

118. Harper, “Porneia,” 379.

Harper, however, fails to mention that for Paul the problem of uncontrolled sexual desire affects not just men but women as well. While two of Paul's discussions regarding *πορνεία* assume men as the active agents of sexual immorality (1 Cor 5:1–13; 6:12–20), his statements regarding the control of sexual desire in 1 Cor 7:2 recognize that *both* women and men can fall victim to it (see also 1 Cor 7:5). Both the unmarried (women and men) and the (*female*) widows (τοῖς ἀγάμοις καὶ ταῖς χήραις) need “to practice self-control” (ἐγκρατεύονται; 1 Cor 7:8–9).

Paul called for equality within the sexual relationship between married couples.<sup>119</sup> Each partner can make demands of the other and neither one has complete authority over her or his own body. Paul's position is apparent through a close reading of the Greek text of 1 Cor 7:3–4. He writes,

7:3a τῇ γυναικί ὁ ἀνὴρ τὴν ὀφειλὴν ἀποδιδότω,

7:3b ὁμοίως δὲ καὶ ἡ γυνὴ τῷ ἀνδρὶ.

7:4a ἡ γυνὴ τοῦ ἰδίου σώματος οὐκ ἐξουσιάζει ἀλλὰ ὁ ἀνὴρ,

7:4b ὁμοίως δὲ καὶ ὁ ἀνὴρ τοῦ ἰδίου σώματος οὐκ ἐξουσιάζει ἀλλ' ἡ γυνή

7:3a Let the husband give to the wife (her) due,

7:3b and in the same way *also* the wife to (her) husband.

7:4a The wife does not have authority of (her) own body but the husband (does),

7:4b and in the same way, the husband also does not have authority of (his) body but the wife (does).<sup>120</sup>

In these verses, one finds the same number of references to “wife” (γυνή) and to “husband” (ἀνὴρ) and similarly patterned grammatical structures that reinforce the parallel treatment for each sex. For example, in the first verse (7:3), Paul begins with the man as the subject, but reverses that order in the next verse (7:4). The second half of each verse (7:3b and 7:4b) parallels the structure and wording of its own first half. The parallel grammatical structures within each verse reinforce Paul's point regarding the equality of the sexes.

Paul recognized that both wives and husbands have equal responsibilities, influence, and power to save their non-participatory spouse (1 Cor 7:12–16). The Greek for non-participatory spouse<sup>121</sup> is ἄπιστος (literally, “faithless”). Once again, parallel expressions with nearly identical wording provide clear

119. The equivalences observed in this passage (1 Cor 7:3–4, 12–16) have been called the “rule of justice.” See Wire, *The Corinthian Women Prophets*, 25. Yet Antoinette Wire finds that Paul overdramatizes the equivalences for women and men so as to gain support from the women to return to a marriage commitment. Wire's position is weakened, however, by the fact that Paul also counsels women not to marry (1 Cor 7:25–26) and even suggests that marriage can cause them distress (1 Cor 7:28).

120. Translation is my own.

121. For this meaning of the term, see Dewey et al., *The Authentic Letters of Paul*, 88.

evidence of the important role the participatory spouse—woman and man alike and in the same way—plays in the life of their non-participatory partner.

7:12 εἴ τις ἀδελφὸς<sup>122</sup> γυναῖκα ἔχει ἄπιστον καὶ αὕτη συνενδοκεῖ οἰκεῖν μετ' αὐτοῦ, μὴ ἀφίετω αὐτήν·

7:13 καὶ γυνὴ εἴ τις ἔχει ἄνδρα ἄπιστον καὶ οὗτος συνενδοκεῖ οἰκεῖν μετ' αὐτῆς, μὴ ἀφίετω τὸν ἄνδρα.

7:14a ἡγίασται γὰρ ὁ ἀνὴρ ὁ ἄπιστος ἐν τῇ γυναικί

7:14b καὶ ἡγίασται ἡ γυνὴ ἡ ἄπιστος ἐν τῷ ἀδελφῷ

7:14c ἐπεὶ ἄρα τὰ τέκνα ὑμῶν ἀκάθαρτά ἐστιν, νῦν δὲ ἅγια ἐστιν

7:15 εἰ δὲ ὁ ἄπιστος χωρίζεται, χωρίζεσθω· οὐ δεδούλωται ὁ ἀδελφὸς ἢ ἡ ἀδελφὴ ἐν τοῖς τοιοῦτοις· ἐν δὲ εἰρήνῃ κέκληκεν ὑμᾶς ὁ θεός.

7:16a τί γὰρ οἶδας, γυναί, εἰ τὸν ἄνδρα σώσεις;

7:16b ἢ τί οἶδας, ἄνερ, εἰ τὴν γυναῖκα σώσεις;

7:12 If a brother has a wife who is non-participatory and she agrees to live with him, let him not abandon her.

7:13 And if a wife has a husband who is non-participatory and he agrees to live with her, let her not abandon him (7:13).

7:14a For the husband who is non-participatory becomes sanctified by the wife.

7:14b and the wife who is non-participatory becomes sanctified by the brother.

7:14c otherwise, your children are impure, but now they are holy.

7:15 But if the non-participatory spouse separates, let him separate; in these cases, the brother or the sister is not bound. But God has called you for peace.

7:16a For what do you know, wife, whether you will save (your) husband?

7:16b Or, what do you know, husband, whether you will save (your) wife?<sup>123</sup>

Both the husband and wife have equal power over their non-participatory spouse. Each has the authority to send the non-participatory partner off (ἀφίημι; 1 Cor 7:12–13). In the NRSV, the Greek word ἀφίημι translates as “divorce.” One can understand, then, that each sex has the right to divorce, and

122. It is not entirely clear why Paul switches to the word “brother” here in the place of “husband,” and yet he does not similarly change from “woman” to “sister.” We see the same use of “brother” without the corresponding change to “sister” in 1 Cor 7:14b. By contrast, in 1 Cor 7:15 Paul uses brother and sister terminology to remark that each one is not bound to their non-participatory spouse, should the latter choose to leave. Joseph Fitzmyer remarks that by not using the term “sister,” Paul loses the perfect parallel he established earlier with regard to marital relations. Fitzmyer, *First Corinthians*, 299.

123. Translation is my own.



this “rule” applies to the non-participatory spouse as well (1 Cor 7:15). If the pair does not separate, both the woman and the man have the power to save their non-participatory spouse (1 Cor 7:16a, 16b). According to Dale Martin, Paul refers here to issues of purity and pollution (1 Cor 7:14a, 14b). The non-participatory spouse is made pure by contact.<sup>124</sup> Such contact extends to sexual intercourse, as the offspring of this couple is born holy (1 Cor 7:14c). Martin remarks: “He [Paul] insists that the purity of Christ holds such power that it may, in certain situations, purify even nonbelievers.”<sup>125</sup> Thus, according to Paul there is a spiritual power within both female and male members of the community that is strong enough to infuse the non-participatory partner and bring about positive change.

One of Paul’s more radical views concerned the right of women and men to remain unmarried. Such a stance broke with the Augustan legislation *lex Julia et Papia*,<sup>126</sup> which penalized celibacy. This law affected unmarried women between the ages of 20 and 50, including widows who had not remarried within a year (later two years) and divorcees who had not remarried within a year (later 18 months).<sup>127</sup> It was aimed more specifically at the wealthier class in that violators were banned from inheriting legacies under a will, and those with assets exceeding 20,000 sesterces<sup>128</sup> were subject to a one percent tax.<sup>129</sup> In contrast to the cultural norm and legislative rulings, but also due to his understanding of the approaching end of time<sup>130</sup> (1 Cor 7:26, 29–31), Paul counseled “the unmarried” (τοῖς ἀγάμοις), “the never married” (τῶν παρθένων),<sup>131</sup> and “the widows” (ταῖς χήραις) to remain celibate (1 Cor 7:8, 25, 27). According to him, by remaining single, both women and men can devote themselves more fully to the affairs of the Anointed (1 Cor 7:32–34).

### No Sexual Distinctions in the Anointed: Gal 3:26–28

Elsewhere Paul quotes what is likely an early baptismal formula (Gal 3:26–28),<sup>132</sup> which many interpreters take to be highly determinative for assessing

124. Martin, *The Corinthian Body*, 218. According to Joseph Fitzmyer, the concept of holiness discussed here is highly debated and “not easy to explain.” Fitzmyer, *First Corinthians*, 300.

125. Martin, *The Corinthian Body*, 218.

126. On this point, see Walker, “Paul on the Status and Role of Women,” 7.

127. Gardner, *Women in Roman Law and Society*, 77.

128. These were small silver coins worth one quarter of a denarius. A denarius is thought to have been equivalent to a day’s wages. See <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Denarius>, accessed on Dec. 31, 2012.

129. Gardner, *Women in Roman Law and Society*, 78.

130. On this point, see Fitzmyer, *First Corinthians*, 313.

131. Joseph Fitzmyer extends the phrase “τῶν παρθένων,” normally translated “concerning virgins” to both women and men.

132. See Furnish, *The Moral Teachings*, 107. See also Hans Dieter Betz, who writes that Gal 3:26–28 is a saying that “must have had its place and function in early Christian baptismal liturgy.” Betz, *Galatians*, 181. According to Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, several factors indicate that Gal 3:26–28 is a “baptismal confession” Paul quotes. There is a shift in person



Paul's views on women.<sup>133</sup> The formula declares the lack of distinctions between persons along certain ethnic and social categories and between the sexes. The heart of the formula is

3:28a οὐκ ἔνι Ἰουδαῖος οὐδὲ Ἕλληγν, οὐκ ἔνι δοῦλος οὐδὲ ἐλεύθερος, οὐκ ἔνι ἄρσεν καὶ θῆλυ.

3:28b πάντες γὰρ ὑμεῖς εἷς ἐστε ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ.

3:28a There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female;

3:28b for all of you are one in the Anointed Jesus.<sup>134</sup>

Paul's letter to the Galatians regards the issue of Torah observance and gentiles. Paul argues that gentiles have no need to observe aspects of the Torah such as circumcision. Of the three oppositional pairs, the first (no longer Jew or Greek) fits this general context the best, yet Paul uses the word "gentile" for non-Jews throughout the letter rather than the word "Greek" used in the formula. While the notion of slavery is mentioned, issues regarding sex are otherwise absent from the letter.

With regard to the last oppositional pair, our main interest, there is a slight difference in its designation from the other two: the οὐδὲ ("or") used for the first two pairs (Jew/Greek and slave/freeperson) becomes καὶ ("and") for the male/female (ἄρσεν καὶ θῆλυ) or last pair. The variation in the coordinating conjunction signals an inter-textual reference to Gen 1:27, in which the same wording is found (ἄρσεν καὶ θῆλυ, LXX). Genesis discusses separation into distinct entities as something to be affirmed, with prospects for fertility lying at the heart of biological differences in the species (Gen 1:21, 24–25, 27). Thus, we see that in Gen 1:28 and just after the creation of male and female, God says, "Be fruitful and multiply" (NRSV).<sup>135</sup>

between "we" (v. 25) to "you" (v. 26); the immediate context does not concern baptism nor social relationships; Paul does not speak of Greeks, as the formula states; and the male and female pair are otherwise entirely absent from Galatians. Schüssler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her*, 208.

133. E.g., William Walker writes, "Paul quite clearly and unequivocally affirms his radically egalitarian position." Walker, "Paul on the Status and Role of Women," 7. According to Elizabeth Castelli, the statement implies "a radical dissolution of socially constructed differences." However, Castelli finds that elsewhere (such as in Gal 4:22–26) Paul does not erase these differences but instead inscribes them. Castelli, "Paul on Women and Gender," 230–31. According to Schüssler Fiorenza, "patriarchal marriage—and sexual relationships between male and female—is no longer constitutive of the new community in Christ." Schüssler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her*, 211. Gal 3:28, she writes, "offered a new religious vision to women and slaves, it denied all male religious prerogatives in the Christian community based on gender roles" (218).

134. Translation is my own.

135. On this point, see Schüssler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her*, 211. She writes, "The reference here alludes to Gen 1:27, where humanity created in the image of God is qualified as 'male and female' in order to introduce the theme of procreation and fertility."

In contrast to the Genesis narrative, the baptismal formula envisions the abolition of sexual difference (“there is no longer male and female”; 3:28).<sup>136</sup> By dissolving the differences between the sexes, the baptismal formula affirms not “life as it is” or “life as the God in Genesis meant it to be” but instead a different kind of existence. With no distinctions between the sexes, there would be no possibility for the subjugation of one sex to the other, but there is also no affirmation of life as it is and no possibility for its continuation. The formula evokes not the work-a-day world but another and imagined realm. For instance, the baptized person is to imagine “being clothed” (ἐνεδύσασθε) with the Anointed (Gal 3:27),<sup>137</sup> an otherworldly being. Wayne Meeks calls this formula “performative language,” an utterance that helps shape a symbolic universe.<sup>138</sup> The final explanatory phrase πάντες γὰρ ὑμεῖς εἰς ἓστε ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ (“for you are all one”<sup>139</sup> in the Anointed Jesus”) provides the justification for the dissolution of the two distinct entities. If the formula is “radically egalitarian”<sup>140</sup> with respect to women and men, it is only so in a particular and symbolic sense:<sup>141</sup> it envisions no biological differences between the sexes, and thus no possibility for the subjugation of one sex to the other.<sup>142</sup> However, it fails to be radically egalitarian in two ways: 1) by envisioning the erasure of biological sex, women are no longer women and men no longer men,<sup>143</sup> and 2) it offers no real solutions for inequalities within life as it is.

136. According to Hans Dieter Betz, the statement could be interpreted along gnostic and apocryphal lines. If so, “it would claim the metaphysical removal of the *biological* sex distinctions as a result of the salvation in Christ.” If this is the case, one is speaking of androgyny. See Betz, *Galatians*, 196 (italics, the author’s).

137. Thus, Alan Segal writes, “[Enoch’s] transformation is effected through a change of clothing. The clothing functions as or symbolizes Enoch’s new, immortal flesh, as they are immortal clothes emanating from the throne room, not from earth.” Segal, *Paul the Convert*, 48. Daniel Boyarin quotes this passage by Segal. See Boyarin, *Radical Jew*, 24.

138. See the discussion in Betz, *Galatians*, 189.

139. It is difficult to know what the formula means by the idea of “one.” J. Louis Martyn comments, “Members of the church are not one *thing*; they are one *person*, having been taken into the corpus of the One New Man.” Martyn, *Galatians*, 377 (italics, the author’s). Hans Dieter Betz mentions that Paul does not explain what he means by the notion of being “one in Christ Jesus.” Betz, *Galatians*, 200.

140. For this expression, see Walker, “Paul on the Role and Status of Women,” 7.

141. With regard to the meaning of Gal 3:28, Victor Furnish writes, “They [the newly baptized persons] *now inhabit a realm* in which their lives are no longer defined by the religious, social, and gender distinctions they had previously taken for granted as ‘the way the world works.’” Furnish, *The Moral Teachings of Paul*, 107 (italics, my own). According to Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, the language of the formula is similar to that of the mystery religions. Schüssler Fiorenza, however, understands the formula to bring about some kind of actual change within the community. She writes, “Being baptized into Christ means entering the sphere of the resurrected Lord, the life-giving Spirit whose *reality and power are manifested* in the Christian community.” Schüssler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her*, 214 (italics, my own).

142. Gal 3:28, Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza writes, “offered a new religious vision to women and slaves, it denied all male religious prerogatives in the Christian community based on gender roles.” Schüssler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her*, 218.

143. On this point, see Daniel Boyarin, who writes, “For Paul male-and-female means neither male nor female in the non-corporeal body of the risen Christ.” Boyarin, *Radical Jew*, 24.

In sum, with regard to marital relations, Paul treats women and men with equality, he honors a woman's right to remain single and understands that both husband and wife have the same responsibilities and influence over their non-participatory spouse. Paul does not adopt the one-sided approach that only men need to practice self-control. Marriage is Paul's solution for uncontrolled desire for both women and men. While Gal 3:28 informs our understanding of Paul's treatment of women, its otherworldly orientation limits its practical application. It is radically egalitarian only in so far as the baptized person thinks of her or himself as being sexually non-distinct and thereby not susceptible to subjugation by the other. Its power for this world lies in the hearers' belief that in the Anointed differences in biological sex do not count for anything.

### **Non-Pauline Interpolations**

Paul's treatment of specific women, his longer reflection on sexual relations between married couples, marriage and celibacy in 1 Corinthians 7, and his reference to a baptismal formula in Galatians 3 comprise the majority of his extant and explicit comments on the subject of women. Printed editions and manuscripts of the Pauline corpus, however, contain two other passages pertaining to women, namely, 1 Cor 14:33b–36 and 11:3–16. These passages have also been highly determinative of Paul's views on women. While included in modern print editions of 1 Corinthians, they are most likely of a later hand. These passages are best understood as interpolations, defined as "foreign material inserted deliberately and directly into the text of a document."<sup>144</sup> Conceptually, they agree decidedly more with later non-Pauline writings such as 1 Tim 2:8–15, Col 3:18, Eph 5:22, 24, 33, and 1 Pet 3:1–7 than with Paul's own accounts of women. When taken to be the work of Paul, these passages have done more to muddy the issue of Paul's equal treatment of women and men than any of the previously discussed textual or translation issues.

#### **Paul's Alleged Silencing of Women: 1 Cor 14:33b–36**

First Corinthians 14 is an extended discussion on speaking aloud in the context of public worship. In his discussion, Paul distinguishes between ecstatic speech, which, because it is not readily understood without an interpreter, functions to diminish the good of the group (1 Cor 14:4, 6, 7–12, 13–19) and unsettle outsiders (1 Cor 14:23), from prophecy, which he argues is more helpful in building up the group because, unlike the former, is readily understood (1 Cor 14:5, 22, 24–25, 29–33a, 39–40). Interrupting this discussion regarding speaking in public are verses 1 Cor 14:33b–36, in which "Paul" calls for the silencing of women.

144. Walker, *Interpolations*, 23. Walker argues convincingly that both 1 Cor 14:34–35 and 11:3–16 are interpolations (63–90, 91–126). I am following William Walker's careful work on interpolations within the writings of Paul for this section of my paper.

In the modern scholarship on Paul, 1 Cor 14:33b–36 has strong but not unanimous support for being a later non-Pauline interpolation.<sup>145</sup> Some modern English translations such as the NRSV and NAB either set these verses apart from others and/or remark in a footnote that scholars consider them to be later and non-Pauline insertions. The verses are as follow:

- 33b Ως ἐν πάσαις ταῖς ἐκκλησίαις τῶν ἁγίων  
 34 αἱ γυναῖκες ἐν ταῖς ἐκκλησίαις σιγάτωσαν· οὐ γὰρ ἐπιτρέπεται αὐταῖς λαλεῖν, ἀλλὰ ὑποτασέσθωσαν, καθὼς καὶ ὁ νόμος λέγει.  
 35 εἰ δέ τι μαθεῖν θέλουσιν, ἐν οἴκῳ τοὺς ἰδίους ἄνδρας ἐπερωτάτωσαν· αἰσχρὸν γὰρ ἔστιν γυναικὶ λαλεῖν ἐν ἐκκλησίᾳ.  
 36 ἢ ἀφ' ὑμῶν ὁ λόγος τοῦ θεοῦ ἐξῆλθεν, ἢ εἰς ὑμᾶς μόνους κατήντησεν;
- 33b As in all the assemblies of the saints,  
 34 the women, let [them] be silent in the assemblies, for they are not permitted to speak, but let them be subordinate, as the law also says.  
 35 But if there is anything they desire to know, let them ask their own husbands at home, for it is shameful for a woman to speak in the assembly.  
 36 Or did the word of God come from you? Or did it reach only to you?<sup>146</sup>

The call for women to be silent is not only highly atypical of Paul's statements elsewhere concerning women but also out of place in a chapter that concerns types of speaking in public worship. William Walker cites eight different types of evidence for why this passage is likely a non-Pauline interpolation. These are text-critical, contextual, linguistic, ideational, comparative, situational, motivational, and locational.<sup>147</sup> Below, I discuss four among these types of evidence.

There is text-critical evidence for 1 Cor 14:33b–36 as a non-Pauline interpolation. According to Walker, text-critical evidence for interpolation is “data in early witnesses to the text—manuscripts, versions, lectionaries and/or ecclesias-

145. For a very good discussion on this issue, see Jouette Bassler's short article in the *Women's Bible Commentary*. Bassler writes that these verses are “strange by any reckoning of the matter.” She wonders how women like Euodia, Syntyche, Prisca, Mary, Junia, and others can function as co-workers in the churches if they cannot speak out. According to her, these verses were a scribal gloss that wound up being included into the text of the letter. Bassler, “1 Corinthians,” 564–65. For this same position, see Furnish, *The Moral Teachings*, 102–6; Walker, “Paul on the Status and Role of Women,” 9; Walker, *Interpolations*, 63–90; and Dewey et al., *The Authentic Letters of Paul*, 112, who extends the interpolations from v. 33b up through v. 38. By contrast, Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza writes, “Since these verses cannot be excluded on textual-critical grounds but are usually declared inauthentic on theological grounds, it is exegetically more sound to accept them as original Pauline statements and then explain them within their present context.” Schüssler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her*, 230. Thus, also Wire, *The Corinthian Women Prophets*, 152–58.

146. Translation is my own.

147. See Walker, *Interpolations*, 63–90.

tical writers—suggesting that a passage may at one time not have been a part of the Pauline letter in which it now appears.”<sup>148</sup> Within the manuscript tradition, verses 34 and 35 float from one location to another; they can be found either in their present location or after verse 40.<sup>149</sup> When a passage moves from one location to another, there is the distinct possibility that the verses began as a marginal gloss, and that scribes at some later time placed the verses within the text itself, either in one nearby location or another, as they saw fit.<sup>150</sup>

In addition to text-critical evidence, there is good contextual evidence for interpolation. The passage is a poor fit within its present location (after verse 33a). Stylistically, the passage interrupts the immediate context, one that concerns ecstatic speaking and prophesying.<sup>151</sup> Chapter fourteen concerns *speaking out* in the assemblies (1 Cor 14:13–19, 20–25) and doing so clearly and distinctly (1 Cor 14:6–12). Indeed, Paul’s discussion in chapter fourteen can be described as how best to “make noise” about the Anointed. Types of sounds to be made include the interpretation of tongues (1 Cor 14:13), prophecy (1 Cor 14:3), singing (1 Cor 14:26), reading aloud (1 Cor 14:26), and giving a revelation (1 Cor 14:26). The various noises are for the purpose of building up the assemblies (1 Cor 14:3, 5, 12, 26). By contrast, verses 34 and 35 call for silence. Furthermore, whereas 1 Cor 14:33b–36 regards only women,<sup>152</sup> the surrounding larger passage is gender neutral and refers to everyone present (see 1 Cor 14:5, 18, 23, 24, 26, 31).<sup>153</sup> There is more reason than not to imagine that women were among the noisemakers.<sup>154</sup>

Linguistic evidence, defined as the presence of “non-Pauline vocabulary . . . and/or stylistic features (genre, grammar and syntax, various types of rhetorical and artistic devices, and the like),”<sup>155</sup> also suggests interpolation. The vocabulary within verses 34 and 35 exhibits a high degree of similarity to 1

148. Walker, *Interpolations*, 66.

149. As Joseph Fitzmyer comments, in the manuscripts of the Western textual tradition, D, E, F, G, 88\* and in some forms of the *Vetus Itala* (d, g), and in some later patristic and medieval writers such as Ambrosiaster, Sedulius, and Scotus, verses 34–35 follow what is now v. 40 in most printed editions. Fitzmyer, *First Corinthians*, 529. While these are not the majority of the manuscripts, taken together, they constitute a primary reading within the Western tradition. On this point, see Walker, *Interpolations*, 69–70.

150. On this point, see Bassler, “1 Corinthians,” 564–65. In addition, see Furnish, *The Moral Teachings*, 103–4.

151. The SV translators remark, “This passage . . . interrupts the coherence of Paul’s argument in this chapter on the relative value of ecstatic speech and prophetic speech.” Dewey et al., *The Authentic Letters of Paul*, 112.

152. Walker comments, “[T]he exclusive focus on women in vv. 34–35 distinguishes these verses from the remainder of ch. 14.” Walker, *Interpolations*, 87.

153. By contrast, William Walker regards this type of difference as ideational evidence for interpolation. Walker, *Interpolations*, 82.

154. In particular, see Antoinette Wire, who argues for the presence of women within the Corinthian assemblies. Wire, *The Corinthian Women Prophets*. Victor Furnish writes, “Paul drops not even the slightest hint that the gifts of prophecy and ecstatic utterance are bestowed only on male believers.” Furnish, *The Moral Teachings*, 104. Paul, however, uses the word “brothers” in 1 Cor 14:6, 20 and not “brothers and sisters.”

155. Walker, *Interpolations*, 76.

Tim 2:11–12. While the Greek word used for “keeping silent” (σιγᾶν) in 1 Cor 14:34–35 differs from the Greek noun for silence employed in 1 Tim 2:11–12 (ἤσυχος), two other primary verbs are the same. The verb for “submitting” (ὑποτάσσω; 1 Cor 14:34; 1 Tim 2:11) and the one for “permitting” (ἐπιτρέπω) stated in the negative (as in, “do not permit”; 1 Cor 14:34; 1 Tim 2:12) occur in both passages. Furthermore, this passage conforms to a literary pattern that serves to keep “women in their place.” The pattern consists of three elements: 1) a general statement or command regarding the proper role of women, 2) a reason or justification for the statement, and 3) a mitigating statement that serves to provide an additional reason for the statement itself.<sup>156</sup> First Timothy 2:11–12 is a very clear example of this pattern and 1 Cor 14:33b–36 is a close and only slightly weaker example of it.<sup>157</sup>

Finally, there is ideational evidence for interpolation. Ideational evidence is “data suggesting that significant features of the substantive content of the passage are not characteristically Pauline, or in some cases, perhaps that they are even anti-Pauline.”<sup>158</sup> As indicated, Paul remarks that women were leaders of assemblies and involved in the work of the message, likely spreading the message in one way or another. Surely these women were not doing these sorts of tasks in silence. Nowhere does Paul indicate that women in particular are to consult with their husbands in private rather than speak their opinion openly. Indeed, some of the women signaled as being in leadership roles and who work on behalf of the message appear in the texts without any mention of a husband (e.g., Phoebe, Chloe, Euodia and Syntyche, Mary, Tryphaena, Tryphosa, and Persis). In contrast to Paul’s equal treatment of women and men as leaders found within his authentic writings, this passage calls for women to be silent and subordinate to men.

In sum, there is considerable and solid evidence for ruling 1 Cor 14:33b–36 a non-Pauline interpolation. Text-critical evidence indicates that the passage floats from one location to another, suggesting that it likely originated as a marginal gloss that was later incorporated into the text. Contextually, it is a poor fit in its present location: in a larger passage that concerns various forms of speaking out, 1 Cor 14:33b–36 calls for silence. Linguistically and ideationally, the passage conforms more closely to 1 Tim 2:11–12 than to Paul’s other and multiple statements that regard women as leaders who work on behalf of the message.

156. Walker, *Interpolations*, 80.

157. The fact that this passage conforms linguistically and even ideationally to 1 Timothy also qualifies it as comparative evidence for interpolation. Comparative evidence is “data suggesting that significant features of a passage—linguistic, ideational, and/or situational—are more closely akin to those of known non-Pauline (and particularly post-Pauline and pseudo-Pauline) writings than to those of the authentically Pauline letters.” Walker, *Interpolations*, 84.

158. Walker, *Interpolations*, 82.



### Issues of Hierarchy and Head Coverings: 1 Cor 11:3–16

First Corinthians 11:3–16 is not only difficult to understand, but like the previous passage discussed, fits very poorly within its present context. It too interrupts a larger discussion. The topic of the Lord's meal begins in chapter ten and ends at the conclusion of chapter eleven. It includes the meaning of the cup and bread (1 Cor 10:14–22), whether or not one is free to eat meat sacrificed to idols (1 Cor 10:23–11:1), correct behavior at the Lord's meal (1 Cor 11:17–22, 33–34), a rehearsal of the words spoken during the institution of the Lord's meal (1 Cor 11:23–26), and the correct attitude regarding the meaning of the meal (1 Cor 11:27–32).

Unlike 1 Cor 14:33b–36, many scholars, both female<sup>159</sup> and male,<sup>160</sup> consider 1 Cor 11:3–16 authentically Pauline. On the other hand, William Walker, G. W. Trompf, and more recently the authors of the SV of Paul's letters argue convincingly for it being a non-Pauline interpolation.<sup>161</sup> There is strong contextual and linguistic/ideational evidence for interpolation. Furthermore, the wide acceptance for 1 Cor 14:33b–36 being a non-Pauline interpolation weighs in favor of another passage in the same letter, which also diminishes women, as being in the same category.

In so far as the contextual fit, like 1 Cor 14:33b–36, 1 Cor 11:3–16 abruptly<sup>162</sup> interrupts the flow of Paul's discussion.<sup>163</sup> Rather than dealing with a meal, 1 Cor 11:3–16 concerns the proper way for women and men to pray and prophesy (11:4–5, 13), issues regarding head coverings, especially with regard to women (11:5–7, 10, 13–15), and various unqualified statements regarding how men are superior to women (11:3, 7–9).<sup>164</sup>

159. According to Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, in this passage, "Paul . . . makes a more or less convincing theological argument for the 'proper' hairstyle as the cultic symbol for women's spiritual power and equality in the Lord. The goal of his argument, then, is not the reinforcement of gender differences but the order and missionary character of the worship community." Schüssler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her*, 230. See also her more lengthy evaluation of the passage on pp. 227–30. In addition, see Wire, *The Corinthian Women Prophets*, 116–34. See also MacDonald, "Reading Real Women," 215–16; Castelli, "Paul on Women and Gender," 228–30.

160. See Martin, *The Corinthian Body*, 229–49; Furnish, *The Moral Teachings*, 109–15; Fitzmyer, *First Corinthians*, 404–25. See also Victor Furnish, yet he argues that Paul does not subordinate women to men in this passage. Furnish, *The Moral Teachings*, 112–13.

161. Walker, *Interpolations*, 91–126; Trompf, "On Attitudes Toward Women," 198–209; Dewey et al., *The Authentic Letters of Paul*, 110–11.

162. Regarding this point, William Walker comments that the passage disrupts the overall context. Walker, *Interpolations*, 120. See also Dewey et al., *The Authentic Letters of Paul*, 110–11.

163. G. W. Trompf writes, "It is manifest that Paul's discussion in 1 Corinthians 10–11 proceeds much more smoothly if we omit 11:3–16 from the text." Trompf, "On Attitudes Toward Women," 198. Trompf makes the point that in verse 18, which comes after the passage in question, Paul raises an issue of first importance. That issue is factions in the assemblies. If the issue of factions is of *first* importance, how is it that Paul could have mentioned head-coverings prior to it? (see 198).

164. By contrast, in 1 Cor 11:12 Paul writes that women come from men just as men come from women and, as such, he treats the sexes with equality.

Features that can either be categorized as linguistic or ideational strongly support a non-Pauline interpolation.<sup>165</sup> Atypical of Paul, 1 Cor 11:3–16 issues statements that affirm divinely sanctioned rankings by sex, the necessity to recognize authority, and an excessive concern for the behavior of women and men and head-coverings. These issues do not conform linguistically/stylistically and ideationally with Paul’s statements found elsewhere.

Among the linguistic aspects most telling of a non-Pauline interpolation is the passage’s use of the Greek word for “head” (κεφαλή).<sup>166</sup> The number of occurrences—all grouped together in a concentrated fashion—and the particular metaphoric use of the word to indicate authority over someone are otherwise absent from Paul’s writings. Elsewhere Paul employs the Greek word for head only *twice* and in separate letters (Rom 12:20; 1 Cor 12:21), yet the word for “head” occurs *nine times* within this short passage (1 Cor 11:3 [3x], 4 [2x], 5 [2x], 7, 10). Moreover, in 1 Cor 11:3–10 the author uses κεφαλή metaphorically to signify authority five times,<sup>167</sup> a sense not found in either Rom 12:20 or in 1 Cor 12:21.<sup>168</sup>

The word κεφαλή (“head”) understood as “ruler” not only dominates the first verse (1 Cor 11:3) but also informs and sets the tone for the entire passage. There are three instances of the word κεφαλή in the first verse, and all three are metaphors for “ruler.”<sup>169</sup> The first verse of the passage reads,

- 3a Θέλω δὲ ὑμᾶς εἰδέναι ὅτι παντὸς ἀνδρὸς  
 3b ἢ κεφαλή ὁ Χριστὸς ἐστίν,  
 3c κεφαλή δὲ γυναικὸς ὁ ἀνὴρ,  
 3d κεφαλή δὲ τοῦ Χριστοῦ ὁ θεός.

3a But I want you to understand that of every man

165. As Walker notes, “[I]t is often difficult to maintain a distinction between *linguistic* and *ideational* features in a passage.” Walker, *Interpolations*, 103.

166. According to Walker, the atypical use of κεφαλή is a linguistic feature more similar to pseudo-Pauline literature than to Paul’s authentic writings. Walker, *Interpolations*, 108.

167. The first three uses of κεφαλή (1 Cor 11:3) are clearly metaphorical and signify “ruler,” the same can be said for the second instance of this word in verses 4 and 5.

168. In Rom 12:20, Paul quotes Prov 25:21–22, in which the word for head is used in a literal sense. That quote refers to heaping burning coals on one’s head. In 1 Cor 12:14–26, Paul creates an extended allegory to explain how the various “parts of the body” relate to one another. In 1 Cor 12:21, he personifies the literal use of “head.” The head, he states, cannot say to the feet that it has no need of them. In this passage, Paul undermines the notion that one “member” is more worthy of honor than another.

169. Victor Furnish minimizes the subordination of women to men implied by 1 Cor 11:3. He reads the Greek word for “head” as a metaphor for “source,” as found in Gen 2:18–23. He acknowledges that even by understanding the “head” to mean “source,” the passage can still be read as subordinating women to men. Yet, according to Furnish, Paul does not intend the subordination of women but instead *distinctiveness* between the sexes. Furnish, *The Moral Teachings*, 112 (italics, the author’s). Distinctiveness, itself, however, is also problematic, as Paul does not make these types of distinctions elsewhere; and Gal 3:28 implies an erasure of gender distinctions.



- 3b the Anointed is the **head**,  
 3c and the man is the **head** of the woman,  
 3d and God is the **head** of the Anointed.<sup>170</sup>

A literal reading of the Greek yields, “The *head*, the Anointed is . . . the *head* the man is . . . the *head* God is.”<sup>171</sup> The repetitive<sup>172</sup> Greek word κεφαλή is emphatic by position in each of three short similarly structured cola or phrases (3b, 3c, 3d) and thus draw attention.<sup>173</sup>

The metaphoric sense of κεφαλή (as in “ruler”) influences its subsequent literal use in the verses the follow. For instance, the issue of proper head coverings in 1 Cor 11:4 and 5 is not about simply whether or not a woman or a man should put something on her or his head but instead also concerns the recognition of authority. The woman and the man must respect the head, not “dishonor” (καταισχύνει) it (1 Cor 11:4–5).<sup>174</sup> Furthermore, the reason the man is not to have his head covered is because he is in the “image and glory of God” (εἰκῶν καὶ δόξα θεοῦ ὑπάρχων) and receives honor and authority on account of his status (11:7). By contrast, the woman is to have “authority” (ἐξουσίαν) on her head (11:10) because God deems a woman authoritative only indirectly and through the man (11:7, 9).<sup>175</sup> The insistence upon honor and authority found here is common within the pseudo-Pauline literature (Col 1:18; 2:10, 19; Eph 1:22; 4:15; 5:23), but not within Paul’s other extant writings. In these later non-Pauline writings, κεφαλή is used metaphorically and often to indicate rule over something or someone (Col 1:18; 2:10; Eph 1:22; 5:23).<sup>176</sup> In particular, the metaphoric use of κεφαλή found in 1 Cor 11:3 is very close linguistically and ideationally to Eph 5:23.

170. Translation is my own.

171. Italics are my own.

172. According to Lee and Scott, repetitive sounds influence the reception of further uses of the same word. On the strong influence of repetition on oral reception, see Lee and Scott, *Sound Mapping*, 112.

173. Lee and Scott, *Sound Mapping*, 142.

174. In contrast to my argument here, Antoinette Wire understands the passage to be Pauline. Wire, however, understands the issue of head coverings in ways that parallel my own reading, namely, having to do with issues of honor and shame. See Wire, *The Corinthian Women Prophets*, 118–30.

175. First Corinthians 11:10 is hard to decipher. It states that, because of angels, women should have authority (a symbol of?) on their head. Joseph Fitzmyer considers the phrase “because of the angels” to be “highly enigmatic.” He provides seven different proposed interpretations of this phrase. He prefers his last listed interpretation, “because of (good) angels.” These good angels assist at the public gatherings. Fitzmyer writes that the woman must have authority on her head because “she is in the presence of men” and also because she is “praying in the presence of God and His angels.” Fitzmyer, *First Corinthians*, 417–19. Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza finds that the angels give the women power. Schüssler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her*, 228. Victor Furnish, who does not find that Paul subordinates women in this passage, writes that the head coverings are to indicate the authority that women already have. Furnish, *The Moral Teachings*, 113.

176. Walker, *Interpolations*, 108.

Although it is somewhat attenuated (see vv. 4, 11, 12), the passage focuses on women more so than on men. For example, women and what they have on their hair or scalp are the topics of verses 5 (2x), 6 (4x), 13, and 15 (2x), whereas men come into view only in verses 7 and 14. As G. W. Trompf remarks, "The really contentious issue . . . is not the dress and role of men but of women, . . . since references to men only serve to disclose the real need for appropriate female behavior which steadily becomes the author's dominant concern (vv. 5–7, 10, 13–15)."<sup>177</sup>

Moreover, 1 Cor 11:3–16 concerns precise details of male and female behavior in worship not otherwise so closely specified elsewhere in Paul's writings. As Walker remarks,

[I]n his undoubtedly authentic writings Paul nowhere indicates any concern for such 'incidental' matters as whether men and women should pray and prophesy with their heads covered or uncovered or whether their hair should be long or short or confined or loose.<sup>178</sup>

In a somewhat comparable situation, while Paul counsels men and women to offer conjugal rights to their spouse and to decide between themselves whether or not to abstain for a time from sexual acts, he does not offer specific details regarding the sex act itself, nor does he specify the duration of time the couple should avoid sexual activity (1 Cor 7:3–5). In the immediately preceding chapter of 1 Corinthians, Paul is open-minded and flexible with regard to the partaking of meat sacrificed to idols. Whether or not the Corinthians eat meat sacrificed to idols is dependent not on some predefined rule but instead on the present circumstances (see 1 Cor 10:25–29).<sup>179</sup>

Thus, based on contextual, ideational, and linguistic grounds, one can reasonably assume that, like 1 Cor 14:33b–36, 1 Cor 11:3–16 is also a non-Pauline interpolation. The passage breaks the flow of a discussion dedicated to meals, one that begins at 1 Cor 10:14 and, without the intervening passage, picks up again at 1 Cor 11:17 and continues to 1 Cor 11:34. The passage's use of the Greek word for head is distinctive and not found elsewhere within Paul's writings. The use of κεφαλή found in 1 Cor 11:3 conforms linguistically and ideationally with pseudo-Pauline writings, as seen especially in Eph 5:23. Paul does not elsewhere indicate any compulsion to adhere to customs aimed at recognizing honor and authority,<sup>180</sup> and he is generally unconcerned with so-called inci-

177. Trompf, "On Attitudes Toward Women," 206. As he maintains, "The core of the argument lies in the general statement of v 7, where woman is distinctly subordinated to man in worship."

178. Walker, *Interpolations*, 114.

179. On this point, See Trompf, "On Attitudes Toward Women," 202.

180. See Walker, *Interpolations*, 119.

dental matters such as headcoverings. More importantly, ranking authority is absent from Paul's authentic writing: elsewhere Paul chides the Corinthians for regarding one person over the other (1 Cor 3:4–9), and remarks that all those in the Anointed comprise a single body with each member having equal worth (1 Cor 12:4–31). As Trompf notes, "[T]he idea of man's inherent superiority over woman is foreign to the best attested passages of the epistles."<sup>181</sup> In that it ranks women beneath men, subordinating them to men, the passage is similar ideationally to 1 Cor 14:33b–36, itself widely considered to be a non-Pauline interpolation.

According to Walker, in the period after Paul, women leaders within the assemblies of Jesus followers may have been perceived as a problem, in turn motivating insertions such as 1 Cor 14:33b–36 and 1 Cor 11:3–16.<sup>182</sup> Passages such as these would have been a way of gaining Pauline authorization for these later patriarchal positions.

### Conclusion

By altering the texts and at times rendering inaccurate translations of Greek words, editors and interpreters from ancient to modern times have made numerous attempts to diminish women's status and role within Pauline writings. Yet a careful and more nuanced reading of his letters yields a different, less confusing, and more uniform treatment of women. As indicated, Paul has a high and equal regard for women. He unapologetically and, one might even say unselfconsciously, refers to women as leaders. According to Paul, many women worked to promote the world-transforming message, enacting the same function as Paul himself and the other male leaders he names. Paul counsels that both women and men respect each other's conjugal rights; marriage is his best advice to men and women, both equally prone to uncontrolled sexual desire. He remarks that both women and men can be highly influential in the life of their non-participatory spouse, serving as a positive force to bring them into the community of the Anointed. Contrary to Roman legislation, Paul does not require

181. Trompf goes on to remark, "On the one hand, for instance, the gifts of the Spirit are not bestowed on one sex as against another (12:4–11; Rom 12:6–7). On the other hand, Paul is afraid that anyone among his fellow Christians could be deceived, like Eve was, by the serpent's cunning (1 Cor 11:3); women are no more prone to sin than men (cf. Rom 3:9–18). He castigates men who misuse women (1 Thess 4:3–5). In Gal 4:19 he depicts himself as woman, giving birth to disciples, and in 1 Thess 2:7 as a nurse. The Son of God himself, he avers, was born of a woman (Gal 4:4), and in one of his allegories Christians are described as children of the free woman Sarah, who is mother through God's promise rather than through fleshly desire (22–31). Christ is the second Adam, indeed the perfect redemptive substitute for the first man, for it is Adam (Rom 5:12–21; 1 Cor 15:21–22; 45–49) and not Eve (cf. 1 Tim 2:8–15) who was the original transgressor." Trompf, "On Attitudes Toward Women," 211.

182. Walker, *Interpolations*, 86.

that single women (or men) marry. Indeed, Paul's equal treatment of women and men and his recognition of women as leaders of groups was recognized quite early in the Christian tradition and likely motivated those who desired to institute patriarchal views to alter Greek manuscripts and insert passages such as 1 Cor 14:33b–36 and 1 Cor 11:3–16. These interpolations have functioned to confuse the issue of Paul and women.

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# The Old Testament and Second-Century Christians

Joseph B. Tyson

In a famous statement written in 1921, Adolf Harnack questioned the relevance of the Hebrew Bible for Christians:

If one carefully thinks through with Paul and Marcion the contrast between “the righteousness that is by faith” and “the righteousness that is by works” and is persuaded also of the inadequacy of the means by which Paul thought that he could maintain the *canonical* recognition of the Old Testament, consistent thinking will not be able to tolerate the validity of the Old Testament as canonical documents in the Christian church.<sup>1</sup>

Later in the same chapter, Harnack states the following thesis, for which he argues:

*[T]he rejection of the Old Testament in the second century was a mistake which the great church rightly avoided; to maintain it in the sixteenth century was a fate from which the Reformation was not yet able to escape; but still to preserve it in Protestantism as a canonical document since the nineteenth century is the consequence of a religious and ecclesiastical crippling.*<sup>2</sup>

Harnack recommended that the Protestant churches make it clear that the Hebrew Bible is useful for reading but is not canonical, that it is not to be put on the same level as the NT and has no compelling authority for Christians.

Harnack would have regarded the jettisoning of the OT in the second century as a mistake, but he is not clear as to why this is so. I do not wish to question the wisdom of second-century Christians in retaining these scriptures but rather to examine some of the issues that relate to their deliberations about them.<sup>3</sup>

Abundant reasons for discarding these writings can easily be cited. For most Christians in the early second century, observance of the first day of the week had taken the place of Sabbath day observance. Although the practice of fasting continued among some groups and in some places, most dietary restrictions and

1. Harnack, *Marcion*, 133, emphasis in original.

2. Harnack, 134, emphasis in original.

3. In general I use the terms “Hebrew Scriptures,” “scriptures,” and “Old Testament (OT)” interchangeably, although it is clear that the last term is exclusively a Christian one. Further, most Christians of the second century did not know the scriptures in the Hebrew language but in a Greek translation, the Septuagint (LXX), which included books that were not represented in the Hebrew.

purity regulations based on Torah had either ceased or been greatly modified. Male circumcision of gentile believers was not demanded. Christians accepted and even hailed the destruction of the Jerusalem temple and the demise of its priesthood. The people of the “old covenant” were regarded as the despised opponents of God’s saved people. The abandonment of so many practices and principles along with the retention of the sacred texts that command them is an issue that calls for explanation.

Explanations are not, however, readily apparent. Pragmatic considerations point in opposite directions. On the one hand we may ask if it was advantageous for the second-century church, now overwhelmingly gentile in its composition, to include Jewish writings among the sacred scriptures. To include Hebrew literature as part of Christian sacred scripture would seem to do little to support missionary work among so-called pagans. Why burden prospective converts with writings that are foreign to their culture? On the other hand, the fledgling Christian movement desperately needed to disprove its novelty in a world that prized the ancient. Aware of the need for deep roots, Christians could cite the Hebrew Scriptures as part of their own history and so gain a degree of respectability in the Roman world. Further, we must remember that the OT had long ago been translated into Greek (probably second-century BCE), and so was accessible to educated readers throughout the empire. The weight of these observations should not be discounted, and yet such pragmatic considerations do little to explain the church’s retention of the OT as sacred, authoritative literature.

For most first and early second-century Jesus believers, the authoritative status of the OT was a non-issue. The Hebrew Scriptures would inevitably constitute the Bible for those believers who considered themselves to be Jews and were so regarded by their fellows. But gentile Christian writers appear to share similar views about the authority of the OT, although in the LXX version. These writers display little interest in arguments that would support their assumptions about the OT, undoubtedly because few questions were raised about them. Some early writers reveal that there were underlying issues about the ancient texts, but it is not until the time of Marcion that the churches seriously wrestled with the place of the OT for Christians. A glance at a few of the representative texts will highlight their viewpoints.<sup>4</sup>

The writer of the letter known as *1 Clement* (traditionally dated c. 95 CE) is concerned about the apparent ouster of some church leaders in Corinth. Writing

4. In this section I focus attention generally on the texts collectively known as “the Apostolic Fathers” and so will not include here a mention of canonical texts, with the exception of the Letter to the Hebrews. It should, however, be noted that the NT texts generally share the assumptions about the OT that we find among the Apostolic Fathers. Paul accepts the authority of the LXX even while claiming that Torah observance is not necessary for gentile believers. The Gospel of Matthew stresses the conviction that Jesus is the fulfillment of ancient Hebrew prophecy. The Acts of the Apostles will be discussed below.



from Rome, he puts a high premium on proper order in the church, and he is able to cite numerous OT examples to support his position. The problems caused by jealousy, he writes, faced not only Peter and Paul but also Cain, Abel, Moses, and David.<sup>5</sup> He urges his readers to turn from jealousy and obey the commandments of God, and he cites Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Lot, and Rahab as exemplars of obedience.<sup>6</sup> To support his insistence on proper order in the church he refers to the practices of priests and Levites: "For special liturgical rites have been assigned to the high priest, and a special place has been designated for the regular priests, and special ministries are established for the Levites. The lay person is assigned to matters enjoined on the laity."<sup>7</sup>

For Ignatius of Antioch (usually dated c. 110–115 CE), likewise, the Hebrew Scriptures are authoritative, even if some qualifications are notable. Explicit references are sparse in the seven letters, but the bishop is certain that the prophets predicted the coming of Jesus the Christ.<sup>8</sup> His insistence on the distinction between Judaism and Christianity seems to be directed more against the continuation of Jewish practices among Christians than against the scriptures per se. In the letter to the Magnesians Ignatius writes:

It is outlandish to proclaim Jesus Christ and practice Judaism [ἄτοπόν ἐστιν, Ἰησοῦν Χριστὸν λαλεῖν καὶ ἰουδαίειν]. For Christianity did not believe in Judaism, but Judaism in Christianity—in which every tongue that believes in God has been gathered together.<sup>9</sup>

Ignatius is aware that Jesus believers have abandoned the observance of the Sabbath and substituted the Lord's Day.<sup>10</sup> In the letter to the Philadelphians there is a curious reference to uncircumcised advocates of Judaism and circumcised advocates of Christianity,<sup>11</sup> followed by an equally puzzling reference to the "archives" or "ancient records":

For I heard some saying: "If I do not find it in the ancient records [ἀρχαίους], I do not believe in the gospel." And when I said to them, "It is written," they replied to me, "That is just the question." But for me, Jesus Christ is the ancient records [ἀρχαία]; the sacred ancient records [τὰ ἁθικτα ἀρχαία] are his cross and death, and his resurrection, and the faith that comes through him—by which things I long to be made righteous by your prayer.<sup>12</sup>

William Schoedel and others have convincingly argued that "archives" in this passage must refer to the OT.<sup>13</sup> Ignatius' objection, thus, seems to be directed

5. See *1 Clement* 4.

6. See *1 Clement* 9–12.

7. *1 Clement* 40.5 (Ehrman, LCL).

8. See, e.g., Ignatius, *Magn.* 8.2.

9. Ignatius, *Magn.* 10.3 (Ehrman, LCL).

10. See Ignatius, *Magn.* 9.1.

11. See Ignatius, *Phld.* 6.1.

12. Ignatius, *Phld.* 8.2 (Ehrman, LCL).

13. See Schoedel, *Ignatius of Antioch*, 207–9; Schoedel, "Ignatius and the Archives."

against believers who hold exclusively to these scriptures and do not see the harmony between them and the Ignatian gospel. They would most likely be believers from among the Jews or else gentile believers who are attracted to Jewish traditions. In any event, what is at stake between Ignatius and his opponents at this point is not the authority of the OT but its interpretation.

The Letter to the Hebrews<sup>14</sup> also reveals that interpretative issues must have been under discussion. This author seems proud to cite the numerous examples of faith among the Hebrew worthies (Heb 11:4–40). But he is equally concerned to proclaim that the first covenant with the Jews has become obsolete and has been replaced by the new (Heb 8:13). He claims that practices associated with the Jewish people have been superseded by the sacrifice of the Christ. There is no longer a need for mortal priests to make sacrifices or for a temple or altar, since the perfect and eternal sacrifice of the heavenly priest has accomplished the forgiveness of sins for those with faith in Jesus. Ironically, however, the author requires the authority of the OT in order to prove its obsolescence. Only if one accepts the authority of Genesis does it make sense to cite the mysterious Melchizedek as priestly predecessor of Jesus (see Gen 14:18; Ps 110:4; Heb 5:6, 10; 6:20; 7:1–28).

Some of the same themes that we see in Hebrews appear also in the *Epistle of Barnabas* (probably c. 130 CE), but with more vehement anti-Jewish expressions. As in Hebrews, we see the pitting of one part of the scriptures against another part. In *Barn.* 2.4 we have, “For through all the prophets he has shown us that he has no need of sacrifices, whole burnt offerings, or regular offerings.”<sup>15</sup> He belittles Jewish observance by claiming that Jews were mistaken in taking the OT commandments literally. They were mistaken, for example, in interpreting the prohibition of pork as a prohibition against eating pork. The commandment really, Barnabas says, tells us not to associate with pig-like people.<sup>16</sup> Moses spoke “in the spirit.” “But they received his words according to the desires of their own flesh, as if he were actually speaking about food.”<sup>17</sup> Jews also thought that God commanded them to remember the Sabbath day, but the commandment rests on the creation narrative in which God rested on the seventh day (Gen 2:2–3) and on the affirmation that with God one thousand years is a day (Ps 90:4). Thus, *Barnabas* concludes that the commandment has nothing to do with the observance of the seventh day of the week but rather it signifies the consummation of all things in 6000 years.<sup>18</sup> The *Epistle of Barnabas* reveals that, for Christians, the problem with the

14. Harold W. Attridge considers a number of possible dates for the writing of Hebrews but finally agrees that any narrowing of dates beyond 60 and 100 CE is tenuous. Attridge is convinced that Hebrews is later than *1 Clement*, which he dates 90–120 CE. See Attridge, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, 6–9.

15. Ehrman, LCL. The author has in mind Isa 1:11–13; Jer 7:22; Zech 8:17; Ps 51:17.

16. See *Barn.* 10.3.

17. *Barn.* 10.9 (Ehrman, LCL).

18. See *Barn.* 15.3–4.

OT is its interpretation, not its authority. Literal interpretation is mistaken; one must always search for a meaning that we would call metaphorical. For these reasons, *Barnabas* can conclude that God's covenant was never meant for Jews and that it is wrong to think of it as intended for both them and us.

And so you should understand. And yet again, I am asking you this as one who is from among you and who loves each and every one of you more than my own soul: watch yourselves now and do not become like some people by piling up your sins, saying that the covenant [ἡ διαθήκη] is both theirs and ours. For it is ours. But they permanently lost it, in this way, when Moses had just received it.<sup>19</sup>

It is doubtful if any of our authors thought of the parts of the OT as having equal authority. It is not likely that they had a holistic concept of these scriptures. We are not yet at a time of clear canonical definition, either by a Jewish or a Christian body. Although some Christians had access to the LXX, they probably did not feel compelled to approach it as a unity. Luke comes close to defining the contents of the scriptures when he speaks of the Law of Moses, the prophets, and the Psalms (Luke 24:44; see also Acts 24:14).<sup>20</sup> Much stronger than any sense of unity, for most writers of our period, there is a clear preference for some parts over others. Justin, for example, sees no conflict between affirming the scriptures and rejecting the Mosaic Law. He states that Christians believe in the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, but not Moses, since Christ abrogated the Mosaic Law.<sup>21</sup>

Although the above summary is by no means exhaustive, it would not be misleading to regard it as representative of the various attitudes toward the OT among the early Christian communities. What we may learn from it is that the basic authority of the OT, in its LXX translation, was generally affirmed. We must, however, take note of two qualifications. First, not all parts of the OT are equally authoritative; second, problems of interpretation become paramount.

We probably will never know the full story of the church's use of the OT in the second century, but we may gain some insight into the situation by examining what is probably the most serious challenge to its retention: I mean, of course, that of Marcion. In the early to mid-second century Marcion and his followers maintained that the OT had no relevance for Christians.<sup>22</sup> At best its inspiration came from the creator-God rather than from the God and father of

19. *Barn.* 4.6–7 (Ehrman, LCL).

20. Luke's language reflects the fact that the book of Psalms constituted a single entity (see Luke 20:42; Acts 1:20) and that there was a recognized order (see Acts 13:33, 35).

21. See Justin, *Dialogue with Trypho* 11.

22. The precise dates for Marcion's activity are quite uncertain, because the sources on which we must rely are inconsistent and confusing. Harnack thinks he must have been born about 85 CE and that he arrived in Rome c. 138 and was excommunicated from there in 144. See Harnack, *Marcion, 1\*–27\**. In my judgment, Marcion's views were probably known in the East as early as 115–120 CE, well before he arrived in Rome. See the discussion in my *Marcion and Luke-Acts*, 26–31.

Jesus Christ. The Law of Moses has nothing to do with the gospel proclaimed by Jesus and Paul. Although the Hebrew prophets predicted the coming of a messiah, Jesus did not fulfill these prophecies. His messiahship was of a very different kind from that predicted by these prophets.

Marcion's core convictions led him to conclude that the God who was revealed by Jesus was totally unknown before Jesus' appearance. What Jesus revealed and Paul taught was fundamentally new, unexpected, and unanticipated. Marcion, thus, concluded that there could be no connection between Jesus and the Hebrew prophets. Evidently, he stressed a non-allegorical, non-figurative interpretation of the prophets. Tertullian condemned him for this because it meant that he was in agreement with Jews, who likewise denied that the prophets predicted the coming of Jesus.<sup>23</sup> But Marcion accepted Isaiah and the other prophets as trustworthy predictors of the future. He concluded that the messiah foretold by these prophets was not Jesus and that such a one had not yet come. That coming is still to be anticipated as a future event, as Jews believe.<sup>24</sup>

If, as Marcion contended, Jesus revealed a hitherto unknown God, it follows that the Creator-God is not to be the object of Christian worship, and his book is irrelevant. Marcion was sharp in his criticism of the God of the OT. For him, neither the creation stories of Genesis nor the Torah as a whole is to be challenged on the grounds of accuracy but rather in terms of the God portrayed in them. This God enacted the *lex talionis*, which allowed for physical retaliation that for Marcion was deeply objectionable.<sup>25</sup> This God is inconsistent: "he forbids labour on sabbath days, and yet at the storming of the city of Jericho he commands the ark to be carried round during eight days which include the sabbath."<sup>26</sup> This God is inconsistent on the matter of sacrifices.<sup>27</sup> This God is either capricious or lacking in foresight, initially approving and later disapproving certain persons,<sup>28</sup> or repenting a previous action, as in the cases of Saul (1 Sam 15:11) and Jonah (Jonah 3:10; 4:2).<sup>29</sup> This God seems not to be omniscient, unaware of the whereabouts of Adam in the Garden of Eden (Gen 3:9, 11) or of Cain's murder of Abel (Gen 4:9–10).<sup>30</sup> Marcion's critique of the Hebrew Bible was, for the most part, directed to the morality and deficiency of the God who inspired it. He saw in these writings, especially in Torah, something that fell beneath the teachings of Jesus and Paul, and the contrasts were so extreme that he concluded that the God who inspired these scriptures was not the God revealed in Jesus Christ.

The struggle with Marcion and his followers involved a number of complex issues, not least among them the authority of the OT and its interpretation.

23. See Tertullian, *Marc.* 2.21.2; 3.5.4; 3.12.1.

24. See Tertullian, *Marc.* 3.6.3; 3.7.1–8; 3.8.1–2; 3.21.1.

25. See Tertullian, *Marc.* 2.18.1.

26. Tertullian, *Marc.* 2.21.1 (Evans).

27. See Tertullian, *Marc.* 2.22.1–4.

28. See Tertullian, *Marc.* 2.23.1.

29. See Tertullian, *Marc.* 2.24.1–2.

30. See Tertullian, *Marc.* 2.25.1, 3.

His literal interpretation of the OT all but foreclosed this option for his proto-orthodox opponents. As a result the victors in the struggle came more and more to stress various non-literal methods of reading the scriptures. These methods were not, of course, new. They had a long history extending from Paul's allegorical reading of Genesis 21 in Galatians 4 to the metaphorical interpretations of the Mosaic Law in the *Epistle of Barnabas*.

But did Marcion's Bible actually contain the OT? Most scholars have answered this question in the negative, but in a recent monograph Sebastian Moll suggests that Marcion's canon did in fact contain these scriptures. Consciously going against the mainstream of scholarship on Marcion, Moll claims that Marcion's NT would have been meaningless without the OT. He blames Harnack for instituting the view that Marcion excluded the OT from his canon, citing Harnack's well-known antipathy toward it. Moll writes:

*Marcion did not understand the Old Testament in the light of the New, he interpreted the New Testament in the light of the Old . . . This is why it would be a misconception to believe that Marcion would have needed the New Testament in order to "discredit" the Old, for it is in fact the Old Testament which forms his starting point. The evil God created a miserable world with weak creatures, gave them a burdensome Law and judges them cruelly. Then Marcion's good God enters the scene as a pure anti-God, with no other function than to spite the Creator and to free mankind from its horrible lot.<sup>31</sup>*

Thus, according to Moll, Marcion could not have excluded the OT from his church, since without it the message about the good God could not be proclaimed effectively.

Moll does not, however, fully clarify Marcion's intentions. Why would it have been necessary to include the OT in the canon in order to demonstrate the superiority of the good God to the creator-God? If the function of the OT in Marcionite circles is to illustrate the nature of the God who inspired it, why would it thereby have *canonical* authority alongside the scriptures of the "anti-God"? In Moll's terms, the OT is the product of an evil (rather than a just) God, whose subjects are to be released. It would seem, then, that the OT is not authoritative for Christians but serves at best as the prologue to the NT.

Jason BeDuhn is, in my judgment, on sounder ground than Moll at this point. He understands Marcion as embracing a form of Christian faith that preceded him, a form that cherished Paul's epistles and devalued Jewish influences.<sup>32</sup> Conflict occurred when Marcion ran up against the Roman church, where, as John Knox described it, "the historical continuity with Judaism is prized as one of the most precious values, where ultimate authority is vested in the Jewish Scriptures, where the sharp Pauline antithesis between law and gospel, be-

31. Moll, *The Arch-Heretic Marcion*, 82–83, emphasis in original.

32. See BeDuhn, *The First New Testament*, 20–23.

tween letter and Spirit, is softened, if not effaced.”<sup>33</sup> Under these circumstances, Marcion’s refusal to accept the canonical authority of the OT would be central to his theology and would constitute a major stumbling block between him and his Roman counterparts.

BeDuhn calls Marcion’s canon the “first New Testament.” It may be more nearly correct to designate it as the “first Christian Bible.” It is, for Marcion and his followers, the complete Bible, the entire canon. And it is not so much that Marcion rejected the OT as it is that he failed to include it in his canon. If Marcion’s is the first Christian canon, it would not be right to say that he rejected a previous canon that included the OT. Marcion was certainly aware of the historic use of the OT in the early church, and his failure to include it in his canon is a conscious rejection of its authority. But this is not the same as imagining that he dismantled a canon that had previously been generally accepted.

However we conceive it, Marcion’s denial of authority to the OT created a strong negative reaction from the church at Rome and doubtless other churches as well. In my judgment, however, the author of Acts, writing about 120 CE, had already perceived the threat of Marcionite Christianity and attempted to address its contentions point by point.<sup>34</sup> This author concedes that the Jesus believers altered some practices that had previously been commanded in the OT, but he justifies the changes. Dietary regulations appear to be abolished when Peter is told to eat all kinds of animals (see Acts 10:9–17). Sunday worship is traced back to the time of Paul (see Acts 20:7–12). More significant are those aspects of the Acts narrative that appear to respond to specific Marcionite claims. Marcion stressed the distance between Jesus and the Hebrew Scriptures, but the author of Acts repeatedly showed that Paul and the other Christian leaders maintained that Jesus fulfilled the predictions of the Hebrew prophets (see, e.g., Acts 3:18; Luke 24:26–27). Marcion claimed that Paul was the only apostle, but the author of Acts portrayed him as at one with Peter and the others, even subservient to them on some occasions, and—despite his obvious admiration for Paul—defined apostleship in a way that actually excludes him (see Acts 1:21–22).<sup>35</sup> Marcion called Peter and the others “false apostles,” in contrast to Paul, but the author of Acts not only characterized them as in total agreement with Paul but even went so far as to attribute to Peter the first conversion of a gentile (see

33. Knox, *Marcion and the New Testament*, 13.

34. Although Luke and Acts have traditionally been dated c. 80 CE, recent studies have argued that there are good reasons for dating the composition of these texts to the first quarter of the second century. See Pervo, *Dating Acts*. Pervo mounts a compelling argument for dating the composition of Acts in about 115–25 CE. See also my *Marcion and Luke-Acts*, where I maintain, following John Knox, that Acts was written in the second century as, to a significant extent, an anti-Marcionite text. See Knox, *Marcion and the New Testament*. In my judgment, the author of Acts was acquainted with the teaching of Marcion at an early date.

35. Only in Acts 14:4, 14 does the author use the term “apostle” for Paul (and Barnabas). These references constitute exceptions to the rule laid down in Acts 1:21–22.

Acts 10:1–11:18) and to write for him a speech that made him sound a lot like Paul (see Acts 15:7–11). Marcion maintained that Paul proclaimed release from the dominion of the God of creation and Torah, but the author of Acts characterized Paul as a Torah-observant Jew and devout Pharisee (see, e.g., Acts 23:6; 26:5) and portrayed him as proclaiming to the Athenians that the creator-God is the only God (see Acts 17:24–31). Marcion taught that Jesus brought Torah to an end, but the author of Acts showed that the apostles and Paul, inspired by the spirit, agreed that some things from Torah were still to be required even of gentile believers (see Acts 15:20, 29; 21:25).

A major theme in Acts is that of promise and fulfillment, a theme that plays a role in Christian hermeneutics for centuries. Contrary to the Marcionite claims, the author of Acts makes it clear that the Hebrew prophets were not only proclaiming truth but that what they proclaimed pertained to Jesus and his followers. Peter announces that the suffering of the Messiah (Acts 3:18) and the coming age of universal restoration (Acts 3:21; cf. 3:24, 25) were predicted by all the prophets. At the home of Cornelius, Peter tells his audience that the prophets had proclaimed that belief in Jesus assures the forgiveness of sins, presumably for gentiles as well as Jews (Acts 10:43). James announces that inclusion of gentiles in the believing community was foretold by the prophets, and he confirms this with a quotation from Amos 9:11–12 (Acts 15:15–18). The Paul of Acts, likewise, claims that his preaching conforms to the prophetic writings (Acts 26:22; 28:23).

The author of Acts is not simply telling the story of the rise of Christianity; he is, to a significant extent, defining the Christian movement in opposition to Marcionite concepts. His narrative totally revises the Marcionite portrayal of the earliest Christians. For the author of Acts, belief in Jesus is in conformity with the teachings of the Hebrew Scriptures; Torah is not totally dispensed with; Jewish traditions are not absolutely jettisoned. The forceful and engaging narrative of Acts and its use in anti-Marcionite controversies late in the second century assured that for proto-orthodox Christians the Hebrew prophets would thereafter be bound up tightly with Christian proclamation.<sup>36</sup>

In terms of canonical development the author of Acts played a pivotal role. By insisting on the role of Jesus and the apostles in fulfilling prophetic promises, the author of Acts contributed significantly in paving the way for the Hebrew Scriptures (in the LXX version) to become part of the Christian Bible, as the Old Testament. Although the author of Acts did not explicitly discuss the issue of canonicity, he had his main character, Paul, proclaim that he believed “everything laid down according to the law or written in the prophets” (Acts 24:14; see also 26:22; 28:23). Although other early Christian authors and leaders

36. See Mount, *Pauline Christianity*; Gregory, *The Reception of Luke and Acts*.



played important roles, it is plausible to suggest that without the contribution of the author of Acts, the canonical status of the OT would have been far more questionable than it in fact was.<sup>37</sup>

The history of second-century attitudes toward the OT is admittedly complex and requires much more extensive treatment than can be undertaken in this brief contribution. My intent here has been only to scratch the surface of this history and to offer a suggestion that may shed some light on the situation. The proposal is that the Marcionite challenge called upon proto-orthodox Christians either to discontinue the historic use of the OT or to justify its position as authoritative and relevant for them and that the composition of Acts was a major response to the challenge. The proto-orthodox rejection of Marcion, beginning with the composition of Acts, led to the framing of a Christian canon that would begin with the OT.

If these considerations do not fully answer the question of why second-century Christians retained the OT, they at least help us to understand the issues that were at stake. Paramount among the issues is the authority of the OT, and proto-orthodox Christians, acknowledging the long history of its acceptance among believers and rejecting Marcion's rejection, affirmed it. Secondary issues involve the relative authority of parts of the OT and the right ways to interpret these scriptures. Justin probably speaks for most believers when he demotes the Mosaic Law to a position below that of the prophets. Issues of interpretation were resolved by virtually abandoning methods pre-emptively employed by Marcionites and exploring metaphorical, allegorical, and typological possibilities. Although some of the issues emerged prior to Marcion and continued afterward, it was the Marcionite challenge and the response to it that settled the basic status of the OT for second-century Christians, and the author of Acts was a major and early participant in shaping the anti-Marcionite response.

37. On the role of Luke-Acts in the history of NT canonization, see Knox, *Marcion and the New Testament*.

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# By the Books

## Canon Formation among the Romans

Christine Shea

As presumptuous as it may seem for a classicist to be addressing the subject of canon with a group whose forerunners invented the very idea, still, I'm hoping we'll see the Romans had structures in their society and institutions which contributed, if not directly to the formation of the Christian and Jewish canons, at least to their ready acceptance.

It is sometimes supposed that "canon" in the strictly literary sense is the descendant of Greco-Roman usage, while the biblical use of "canon" is an altogether different beast.<sup>1</sup> But this paper will argue that, while the Romans were busy grouping high-culture writings in the Latin vernacular into literary genres and canons copped from the Greeks, they were also busily formulating canons to promote the doctrines of Empire.

### Romans and Greeks

Rebecca Flemming summarizes quite elegantly the relationship between the Greeks and Romans on the threshold of Empire:<sup>2</sup>

By the end of the Mithridatic wars, Rome had acquired a vastly increased amount of Greek knowledge. This knowledge was accumulated in literary form in the libraries of great nobles like Marcus Licinius Lucullus; in the personal form of Greek scholars and teachers—slave, freed, and free—who now made the imperial capital their home in much greater numbers; and in the form of more material booty. The encounter between Greek learning and Roman power was accordingly intensified on both sides.

Although the Romans were in general enthusiastically accepting of Greek knowledge, with the work of Marcus Porcius Cato ("the Elder" "the Censor"; d. 149 BCE) and later of Marcus Terentius Varro (116–27 BCE) a movement arose

1. The word *κανών* in classical Greek was never used in the meaning ordinarily assigned it by today's literary critics. In pagan antiquity the word maintained the basic meaning "rule, model" from its use in ethics. The term "canon" for specific lists (a concept covered by the Greek word *πίνακες*, "indices") was first used in the early modern period by David Ruhnken in 1768. The word was employed by Christian writers such as Eusebius (the first reference we have) for the canon of scripture. See Pfeiffer, *Classical Scholarship*, 207.

2. "Knowledge and Empire," *Camb. Hist.*, 236.

to rival the written products of Greek imagination with native Latin works. This led to a codification of literary genres and styles and to what we might call the first treatises on comparative literature.<sup>3</sup> The movement also led to such remarkable productions as Varro's *Disciplinae*, an encyclopedia, a canon we might call it, of all the knowledge a Roman of good class ought to have.<sup>4</sup>

In addition, Roman students were soon put to work imitating Greek masters and their genres.<sup>5</sup> When under the Emperor Augustus a concerted effort was made to reproduce in Latin the literary "canons" of the Greeks, the Romans were primed with an exhaustive knowledge of original texts (such as Homer) and of the commentaries produced by centuries of studies of such texts (at the great Library at Alexandria, e.g.). Thus, when P. Vergilius Maro sets out to create a Roman Odysseus/Achilles in the form of the Trojan Aeneas, he has on hand: (1) his excellent knowledge of Greek; (2) his schoolboy experience imitating the Homeric style; (3) access to commentaries (by the librarians of Alexandria, e.g.) on Homer's works;<sup>6</sup> (4) access to previous imitations of Homer's work, which are lost to us; (5) access to imitations of Homer's work written by librarians of Alexandria; and (6) access to early Latin epics in the style of Homer. And yet, with all that, Vergil's epic *Aeneid* proves to be something quintessentially Roman.

Let's contemplate for a moment what kind of work we think Augustus commissioned from Vergil: a work in a genre (traditional epic) currently out of vogue;<sup>7</sup> a written imitation of what were (we now know) oral traditional works, with the full apparatus of orality, including formulaic repetitions;<sup>8</sup> a self-conscious, erudite imitation of what were naïve traditional works; an upstart

3. We might mention in this connection the *περὶ ὑψους* (*De sublimitate*), a curious little treatise from about this period (although wrongly attributed to the rhetor Cassius Longinus), which is attempting to formulate a theory of greatness in literature which transcends genre, culture, and language. In service of his theory, the author (probably a Greek professor at Rome) praises, in addition to masterworks in Greek, works by Romans in Latin and "Let there be light" from Genesis.

4. Although this work is lost, we can reconstruct with some confidence its contents. For more information, see Flemming, "Knowledge and Empire," 237.

5. Canons in Roman education, as a complex and well-documented topic, are outside the scope of this (small) paper; I will merely mention that canons of literary works in the Latin vernacular formed the hub of "higher" education for Romans of good class. The rhetorician Quintilian (d. ca. 100 CE), for example, once proposed that the entire school curriculum be keyed to Vergil's works.

6. Displayed by his knowledge of Ethiopian cooking, e.g.

7. Since the publication of *Aetia* of Callimachus (d. ca. 240 BCE; a scholar at the Library of Alexandria) and his anti-epic pronouncement *μέγα βιβλίον, μέγα κακόν* ("a big book is a big evil"), the *epyllion* ("little epic") had been the favorite. Callimachus had great influence on the development of Latin literature.

8. That the linguistic oddity of Homeric works had been a topic of study in this period can be illustrated by the *περὶ ὑψους*, which tries to explain away the differences between the two epics. See above, n. 3. Vergil imitates, rather half-heartedly, some of the formulae of the Homeric epics, but on the whole eschews this stylistic technique, which is so essential to traditional oral epic.

Roman work in the upstart language Latin, which dares to take on classics of a more prestigious culture that have thoroughly penetrated the hearts and minds of more than one culture; a sort of *histoire à clef* which, while set in the legendary past, celebrates Augustus' present and makes predictions about Augustus' future;<sup>9</sup> and a tour de force which would put the Greeks (and others) in their place while coopting their cultural treasures.

I've begun this discussion with Vergil as an example because I intend to center this discussion on the long reign of the Emperor Augustus as a period that laid out enduring cultural definitions and set standards for other cultures and times.<sup>10</sup>

### An Age of Canons

One of the reasons to focus on the Emperor Augustus as the father of canons, if we may call him that, is that the early Empire is particularly a time of the codification and emulation of ancient works of the Greeks, the prestige culture of this period. In fact, we now see many of the trends from the Augustan Age as fueling the full flowering of the Second Sophistic (from about 50 to about 230 CE), and many of the Christian writings as prototypical productions of the Second Sophistic.

What we seem to see in Augustus is a young and politically insignificant member of an undistinguished family whose remarkable great-uncle has thrust him onto the world's stage attempting to consolidate his family's grab for power by associating himself, his clan, his adherents, and his political machinations with the fabled actions of fabled Romans and the generative power of the gods. There is perhaps no artifact from Augustus' reign—not even the *Aeneid*—which illustrates his problems and his solutions to those problems more eloquently than the Temple of Mars the Avenger (Mars Ultor) he built. That this is the god he chose to honor is already indicative of his and his family's woes: he is doubtless thinking of the god as supporting him in avenging the death of Julius. The temple's pediment portrayed Mars with Romulus (first king of Rome) and Venus (ancestress of the Julian clan) on his left and with Fortuna (the Julians were fated to rule) and Roma (no Hellenizers here) on his right. Other sculptures include Aeneas (the last of the Trojans and ancestor of the Julian clan)

9. A technique borrowed perhaps from such works as Apollonius' epic *Argonautica* (third century BCE).

10. I don't know if we have to insist, with T. S. Eliot that, "Our classic, the classic of all Europe is Virgil" ("What Is a Classic?" *Selected Prose of T. S. Eliot*, 130), but I'm glad to see the notice of Dennis MacDonald's new book, *Luke and Vergil: Imitations of Classical Greek Literature*.

This is also, of course, a crucial period for the development of prototypes of the canons of Western law. That the Romans are imposing on the Empire written law codes may also speak to the development of Christian canons, but this, like the introduction of canons for Roman education, is a topic too large for this paper.

and Romulus, accompanied by kings of Alba Longa and Augustus' ancestors (the Julians were there from the beginning) and Republican heroes. Augustus, dressed as a triumphant general riding a four-horse chariot, faces the altar at the front.<sup>11</sup>

The establishment of what we call the Empire under Augustus and his gang sends ripples of change across Italy and the Mediterranean, and it is tempting to see the grand nephew of the wily Julius Caesar as the puppet-master of all this cultural upheaval. Of course, it can be argued that Augustus was simply responding to, institutionalizing perhaps, cultural changes that were already well underway. In either case, Augustus, as has been long noted, is one of the models for the figure of Jesus, and Augustan political and cultural manipulations, we might argue, are models for the early Christian communities.<sup>12</sup> Thus, Augustus' re-creation of the history of Rome, which emphasizes not only the role played by one of his ancestors, Aeneas, but also the role played by a founding father from a culture older than the Greek (Aeneas, the last of the Trojans), permits the Romans to admire the Greeks and admit their cultural debt to them while asserting their own superiority. In an age of Greek cultural dominance across the eastern Mediterranean (because of Alexander) and across the western Mediterranean (because of Greek colonization and Roman conquest), many cultures must be learning from the Romans how to act out similar scenarios.

### Media and Messages

What may have contributed to the interest in compiling of lists of appropriate works in the early Empire is the introduction of new technologies. The increasing use of the codex, instead of the papyrus roll, as the medium of copying and preserving literary works seems to have fed a passion for codification and the kind of information classification techniques more commonly associated with modern libraries.<sup>13</sup> Thus, for example, not only does the codex put literary works in a more easily preserved form (since the frequency of use of the codex parallels the rise in the use of parchment, a more durable medium than papy-

11. For a complete description, see Lim, "The Gods of Empire," 269.

12. Or, at least the cult figure of Augustus, as presented particularly in the East, is a model for the cult figure of Jesus. See, e.g., the inscriptions quoted in the next section.

13. Although the codex was early adopted by the Christian communities and although Christian works were regularly copied into codices (apparently), while the majority of pagan works continued to be copied onto papyrus rolls, still the first mention of the codex is from a Roman author, Marcus Valerius Martialis (Martial; d. ca. 102–104 CE), who in 1.2 and 14.188, 190, 192 seems to be discussing codex copies.

Simultaneous with the increased use of the codex is the development of the poetic book, such as Vergil's *Liber bucolicon* (*Ecloues*), Sextus Propertius' *Monobiblos*, and Horace's *Liber sermonum*, all from the Augustan period and bearing the Augustan imprimatur. The emphasis on the book as a coherent unit comes to leave a mark on the content of individual poems, requiring them to echo another or balance another in the collection. This also may speak to issues in canon formation. See Zetzel, "Re-Creating the Canon," 89ff.



rus), it also makes it easier for librarians to classify and group works by providing a book spine as the location for titles and librarian-ish comments. Thus, the library shelf provides a quickly and easily assembled "top ten" list, as well as a kernel of "commentary"—another kind of sacred book (see below).<sup>14</sup>

Although the preference for the codex is particularly associated with the early Christian communities, the codex itself is often thought to be a variant of the Roman's portable personal notebook, which regularly consisted of several wooden tablets bound together—Julius Caesar had one. The word *codex* (in Republican Latin, *caudex*) itself suggests the wood of tablets, since it's commonly used for the trunk of a tree or a block of wood. Thus, we can think of this kind of information retrieval device as rising with the Roman Empire as well as with the spread of Christianity.

Another typically Roman medium, which may have contributed to the formation of canons, is the epigraphical inscription. Not all cultures write on stone, but the Greeks and Romans certainly do, and we have thousands of such inscriptions, the great majority mini-biographies from gravestones and votives. What can it have meant to the conquered peoples of the Near East to see, set up in a permanent medium, the achievements of Augustus?

Consider these examples, where Augustus is called:

the master of Europe and Asia, the star of all Hellas (Phylae);  
 father of all the human race (Sardis);  
 benefactor and savior of all men (Dionysopolis);  
 the savior of the whole human race, whose foresight not only fulfilled but even went beyond the prayers of all. For land and sea are at peace and the cities flourish, well governed, in concord and harmony (Halicarnassus).<sup>15</sup>

Or, consider the *Res Gestae Divi Augusti*, those huge, lengthy (more than 2600 words) catalogues of Augustus' deeds carved in stone on whole walls of temples throughout the East.<sup>16</sup> The permanence of the medium and the enshrining of the emperor's achievements on the walls of temples must have been a galling reminder of the triumphs of one culture over others, as well as providing a model for the catalogues of deeds of local notables. Moreover, such

14. Not to be envisioned as in modern libraries; books were laid flat on "library" shelves in antiquity.

15. See Tarn, "Alexander the Great," 123; *Monumenta Asiae minoris antiqua* 6 (1933) 292; *Ancient Greek Inscriptions in the British Museum*, 894; and Mashkin, "Eschatology and Messianism," 206–28.

16. The fullest copy remaining to us is likely to be the one on the Temple of Augustus and Rome in Ankara, Turkey (the Monumentum Ancyranum). The Members and Fellows of the Westar Institute will recall that John Dominic Crossan has spoken to the group on this inscription and illustrated his talk with photos. See also his *In Search of Paul*, 72–73.

On the proliferation of stone inscriptions in religious contexts in the Empire, regular attendees of meetings of the Westar Institute will recall the discussion of Steven J. Friesen's paper on "The Wrong Erastus: Ideology, Archaeology, and Exegesis" in spring 2011.

a monument would also canonize Roman preferences for the telling of such stories—that is, Roman-style history and “Lives to Live By” biography.

### **Top Four, Five, Seven, Ten, Twelve, Twenty-Four, Twenty-Seven Lists**

Before we leave the subject of literary canons, we might stop for a moment at the phenomenon of “top [supply magic number here] lists” which we find playing a part in the Romans’ rivalry with Greek styles and genres. These lists function on one level pretty much as we would suspect, with one Roman innovation: the Romans are in essence inventing comparative literature by finding qualities of work and life which will let them compare ten Roman orators, for example, to ten Greek orators of comparable merit.<sup>17</sup> Whether any of the lists can be dated back to Augustus’ reign or not, still we might pause here to comment on how significant numbers may have played a part in the formation of literary or magico-religious canons.

Most of the numbers connected with literary “best” lists have magical/symbolic associations: four represents the four corners of the earth, or the Empire; five and its multiples, the hand; seven, the five visible planets and the moon and the sun; twelve, signs of the Zodiac and months of the year; twenty-four, hours of the day; even twenty-seven has magical echoes, as the cube of three.<sup>18</sup> The influence of magic number lists on canon formation is pretty obvious: you have to find ten Roman orators to match the Greek list; you have to find examples from the all the corners of the Empire to build a top four; you may have to throw in a work of dubious authorship so you can have a top seven collection of Aeschylus’ plays.<sup>19</sup>

### **Sleight of Hand: Magical Books and Their “Canonical” Contents**

Of course up to this point we’ve basically been discussing canons of literary works—which may have some ritual or religious overtones, but are, at least

17. Although for the argument that there may never have been a canon list of the ten orators, see Douglas, “Cicero, Quintilian and the Canon” (he does concede that there were canon lists of other genres). For the Alexandrian canon lists, see Zetzel, “Re-Creating the Canon,” *passim*.

18. See Fowler, “The Number Twenty-Seven,” 211–12. Although he disagrees with Diels (*Sibyllinische Blätter*, 37–38) that twenty-seven is especially associated with the Sibylline prophecies, he gives a good survey of its pervasiveness as a magic number in Mediterranean cultures.

19. That the *Prometheus Bound* is likely not by Aeschylus has been argued persuasively by such commentators as M. L. West and Mark Griffith.

in the eyes of modern commentators, firmly in the secular sphere. But, for our purposes, the Roman canonization of sacred documents is of particular use, not only to see how the cultures of the East might have influenced Rome—and how Rome might have influenced the East—but also because study of Roman canons can perhaps contribute in some small way to our reconstruction of the history of the early Christian communities. The adoption of Christianity by Romans was likely facilitated by those elements in Christianity that seemed familiar to the convert, after all.

One of the first questions might be: what exactly is a canon of sacred books? What makes books and collections of books sacred? Is it the presence of sacred words, hallowed by great antiquity, long usage, mysterious injunctions, mystic symbolism, dead or forgotten languages, portents of future events? Is it the author who makes a book sacred? Is it the use of the book in sacred rituals, rituals that re-create the sacred origin of the book with every use? Do sacred book collections validate the specialness of a particular city or ethnic group? Are commentaries on sacred books or sacred collections themselves sacred—or, is sacredness somehow “catching”? Whatever your responses to these points might be, the Romans are likely to have had a book or collection in every category—so far as we can tell from the scanty information available.

Although there are many examples of magical writings in the Mediterranean—the magic papyri, the Books of the Dead, the Orphic Hymns, the Etruscan books of prophecy, Samnite ritual books—one example might stand for all: the so-called Sibylline Books. In Roman lore, the Sibylline Books were acquired by the last king, Tarquinius Superbus, in this way: an old woman (the Sibyl from the Romano-Greek city of Cumae near Naples) appeared one day, with a collection of nine books for sale. She offered the books to Tarquinius who ridiculed the high price she asked for them. She immediately before his eyes burned (in a sacred, ritualistic manner) three of them. She asked him for the same ridiculously high price for the remaining six. He again scoffed at her offer. She burned three more books and asked for the same price for the last three as for the original nine. Realizing himself to be in the presence of the magical divine, Tarquinius paid her. The three books proved to have prophecies invaluable to the success of Rome and its armies.<sup>20</sup>

The Sibylline Books were kept in a sacred repository under the temple of Jupiter, Aulus Gellius tells us, until 83/82 BCE when the temple was razed by a fire. The books, however, somehow survived to be resuscitated by sleight of hand of Augustus, who declared them to be the only valid prophetic books in Greek or Latin and placed them in two gilded containers under the statue of

20. For the tale, see, e.g., Aulus Gellius (b. ca. 125 CE), *Noctes Atticae* 1.19; Dionysius of Halicarnassus (d. after 7 BCE), *Roman Antiquities* 6.2.

Palatine Apollo.<sup>21</sup> Historical references to consultation of the Sibylline Books abound, particularly from the period 218–167, for which we have Livy to thank.<sup>22</sup>

The Sibylline Books represent a classic example of the amalgam of cultures the Romans had put together by the early Empire. The books were written in Greek, but interpreted by a college of priests (the *quindecimviri sacris faciundis* “fifteen men for the performance of sacred rites” increased from ten, the *decemviri*, in the late Republic, perhaps by Sulla, and from two, the *duumviri*, in remote antiquity). Although the books were thought to have been passed on to Tarquinius by the Sibyl of the Greek city of Cumae, Romans (apparently) believed that there were ten Sibyls and that the Sibylline Books had most likely be imported from the East.<sup>23</sup> Since these *libri fatales* (“Books of Fate”) were particularly consulted on occasions when the Romans were considering admitting foreign deities to their pantheon, consider the ironies: the Romans were using a collection of prophecies, written in a language not their own, some of which may have originated in the East in the service of Eastern religions, to determine whether Eastern cults (perhaps the very Eastern cults which had originated some of the prophecies) should be officially recognized by Rome.

Although Augustus has had a role in the handling of the prophecies (see below on “Canon Fire: Burning Books”) and, in reconstituting the books after the fire of 83/82 BCE, may have, for all we know, fabricated prophecies more suitable to his political ends, still that ordinary Romans may have come to believe that the fate of their society and of themselves and their children might be determined by prophecies from subject cultures is a remarkable development. John Scheid in a 1995 article argues that the Romans had a long tradition of “open city” politics, which made a virtue of the city-state’s acceptance of

21. Suetonius, *Augustus* 31 has Augustus sending to the ends of the Empire for individual prophecies to be recollected into the books lost in the fire; see below, under “Canon Fire: Burning Books.”

22. The standard text on the subject remains Sackur’s *Sibyllinische Texte*. For more recent discussions, see Alexander, *The Oracle of Baalbek*; Scheid, “Graeco Ritu,” 25–26; *Class. Trad.* s. “Sibyls.”

Some references from Livy (Titus Livius Patavinus) demonstrating the range of problems on which the books were consulted: 3.10.6, 42.2.6–7 (natural disasters or prodigies); 5.14.4, 7.27.1 (plague); 22.9.8 (how to appease the gods in the midst of a military disaster); 29.10.4–5 (the importation of a foreign god to avert a military disaster). Livy is, of course, one of Augustus’ propagandists, even if a reluctant one, and his “histories” are to be interpreted in that light.

A consultation of the Sibylline Books by the *quindecimviri* was also made, on order of the Roman Senate, in the foundation of temples (e.g., the temples of Apollo, Aesculapius, Venus Erycina, Mens, Magna Mater, Venus Verticordia). See Hekster and Rich, “Octavian and the Thunderbolt,” 155ff.

23. Lactantius (1.6.10–11, ca. 300 CE) has Varro give the number as ten. The Christian and Jewish Sibylline Oracles have no relation to the Roman Sibylline Books, beyond the name, but the legend of the ten Sibyls, from all over the Mediterranean, does create a kind of multicultural prophetic network which influences medieval and renaissance thought (see, e.g., Michelangelo’s Sistine Chapel).

foreigners and foreign cults.<sup>24</sup> On the other hand, Augustus also has an interest in establishing a stable and secure state in which Romans and Italians can feel their place has not been usurped by the hordes pouring into Rome from the conquered corners of the Empire. The tensions between these two points of view shape the discussion in Augustus' time and into the Second Sophistic.

### Canon Fire:<sup>25</sup> Burning Books

One method of determining the principles of canon formation among the Romans would be to examine the cases of book burning in the early Empire. Thus, for example, we see Augustus not only taking positive action in attempting to develop Roman religious canons but also using the suppression of religious writings as a means of promoting the prestige of his canon. That he is squelching other ideas may be almost as telling as what other ideas he's decreed unacceptable.

As we mentioned above and as Richard Lim puts it, "the Roman state and private religion were both in fact quite dynamic and open to innovation."<sup>26</sup> Yet it seems to have been a vital element of Augustus' campaign of moral and religious renewal that the syncretizing energy of Roman politics and religion be controlled and slowed somewhat, in the guise of returning the Romans to some purer Ur-state. Thus, when Augustus is restoring old sanctuaries (and he restores eighty-two, according to the *Res Gestae*) and re-establishing old rituals, he is also reasserting the originality of Roman and Italian culture in the face of the inroads of Hellenization.<sup>27</sup> There are political overtones here as well; his great rival Mark Antony is a well-known Hellenizer and will, of course, ultimately be charged with going native in Cleopatra's Egypt.

When he has such a stake in the matter, then, it should probably not surprise us that Augustus burns some 2,000 copies of Greek and Latin magic prophecies, according to Suetonius.<sup>28</sup> Given that the Sibylline Books are the only prophetic

24. "Graeco Ritu"; see above, n. 21. Whether this tradition was true to the realities of life in early Rome is irrelevant here. By the time of Augustus, we can see propaganda-makers extolling a multicultural polyglot as the crucible of the Roman ethos. See, e.g., Vergil's *Aeneid*, Books 7–12.

25. Yes, I made this joke. I'm not proud of it.

26. Lim, "The Gods of Empire," 269.

27. For a complete discussion, see Lim, "The Gods of Empire," 268–73.

28. *The Twelve Caesars* 31. Gaius Suetonius Tranquillus, of course, was born just after the death of Nero, the last of the five Julio-Claudian emperors.

This is not the only burning of prophecies in Roman history, at least according to Livy. Several times before the second century BCE Roman magistrates had been required by the Senate to burn prophetic books (Livy 39.16.8). And, in a tale told by both Livy and Varro (b. ca. 116 BCE), books of King Numa (forgeries likely), in Greek and dealing with Pythagorean precepts, were burned on orders of the Senate in 181 BCE. In the act of burning these prophetic books, Augustus is acting out the role of a pious Roman of the old school. This, we might cynically propose, may be his only reason for burning the books.

volumes he keeps, it is perhaps worth noting that the Sibylline Books were burnt in their original home in the fire of 83/82 BCE. Augustus is represented as a rather superstitious and religiously jittery character by Suetonius (*Augustus* 90–93), and, of course, it is difficult for post-Enlightenment critics to plumb the mindset of the ancients, but is it possible Augustus is inflicting on the texts of others the punishment the gods have apparently meted out to the Roman sacred books?

I might digress here for a comment on prophecies and their place in the political machinations of complex societies. Since we scoff at what appears to be the gullibility of the ancients and gasp at the wealth accumulated at a place like Delphi, where for millennia a poorly-educated middle-aged village woman raved out answers to complex questions under the influence of ether-ish (ethyl-ene) inhalations, it may be difficult for us to understand prophecy as a tool for smoothing over what appear to be irreconcilable political differences. And yet, as Republicans attempt for the forty-first time to forestall the implementation of President Obama's health plan, consulting at random a magic book for an answer sanctioned by the gods and settling the question quickly and with a minimum of hostile repercussions seems a model of peaceful conflict resolution.

What may be sparking this Augustan age of religious canon formation—and what may also be affecting canon formation in Jewish communities in the East—is that much of prophecy has moved from its traditional modes of delivery, that is, you, the questioner, show up at Delphi at certain times of the year on a certain day of the month; you purify yourself in the sacred spring; you present your question and a special cake to the sanctuary staff; you sacrifice a goat or sheep; you sleep overnight in the sanctuary; you are ushered into the sacred corner of the Temple of Apollo where the entranced priestess (the Pythia) utters a mysterious answer from a tripod placed over a hole from which emanates a gas which makes you happy and receptive; the priests interpret the priestess's ravings in verse and send you tipsily on your way. Writing in this kind of system is confined to gnomic inscriptions on the sanctuary walls and records of prophecies given.<sup>29</sup>

The move to prophetic books which not only record past prophecies but also detail predictions of future events—or in which past prophecies connected to an earlier event can be re-invoked for present circumstances—can lead to the kind of rancorous disagreements which the on-the-spot prophecies of the past sought to obviate. Although books of prophecy had been readily available in some parts of the Mediterranean for millennia (see the discussion above), still the wholesale exclusive use of written prophetic works in some cultures strengthened the need for a canon of approved texts. Moreover, in recycling

29. In general, our knowledge about the exact procedures at Delphi is fuzzy because our sources are late and often contradictory. For a recent popular treatment of the cult at Delphi, see Broad, *The Oracle, passim*. See also the report of the researchers into the ether-like gasses, Hale and de Boer, "Questioning the Delphic Oracle," 66–73.

written prophecies applicable to a hallowed past for an uncertain future, it became necessary to develop a glossary of symbolic terms to interpret and adapt prophecies for the present situation. Thus, the prophetic commentary was born—and was soon itself canonized.

In the case of Augustus and the burning of more than 2,000 copies of prophecies in Greek or Latin, we have to argue that the introduction of books of prophecy, books which might be kept in public places or—heaven forbid!—the libraries proliferating throughout Rome (twenty-eight private libraries, we're told) rendered the whole process much less easy to control than predictions generated in the whispered conferences of politically savvy priests at Delphi we usually imagine. Book burning can have its uses.

### History as Prophecy

The Romans became expert at generating literary texts, which, in addition to their other objectives, could serve as books of prophecy, books of prophetic commentary, textbooks for prophecy-creators, and textbooks for prophecy commentators. These are books in the genres we often argue are distinctively Roman: history (particularly Livy-style history) and "big man" biography. Again, no matter what other purposes these works serve, they are usually compendia of fulfilled prophecies and omens. Thus, for example, in just four chapters of his "history" of the twelve Caesars (*Augustus* 94–98) Suetonius mentions: seven fulfilled omens about the birth of Augustus, including two borrowed from the birth of Alexander; four prodigies from Augustus' childhood; prophetic dreams, prophecies, encounters with soothsayers, etc., etc. More than one of these have been "recycled" since they originally applied to Alexander, that is, they were earlier prophecies reinterpreted to apply to Augustus and, thus, were made available to be reapplied and reinterpreted again and again. Suetonius publishes the prophecies, interprets them, and teaches budding prophecy-makers how to reapply and reinterpret them.

Thus, as we can see in this example, literary canons and magico-religious canons are not so far apart; literary works among the Romans have their own kind of magic. History, in particular, functions on another magical level: by showing how the Romans or certain Romans were prophesied to win this battle or conquer this people or relive Alexander's conquests, it reinforces the idea that Rome deserved, earned her Empire, that the very gods had conspired in making her queen of the Mediterranean, that it was as futile to fight her in the future as it had been in the past.

It is curious to note in this connection how much these ideas linger in our own day. How many of us have not said "history repeats itself" without a thought to the absurdity of the statement? Haven't we, in fact, with the ancient Romans, just asserted that the events of the past portend the future? Aren't we ourselves thereby reading history as prophecy?



### Conclusion

Augustus and his cohort in the early Empire grappled with a variety of problems: how to remain close to and yet apart from an older and more prestigious culture; how to create a literature which would foster an independent cultural identity while using models and tools borrowed from other cultures; how to validate a new, illegal regime by appeals to an older time; how to convince their fellow citizens that one-man rule, a political system banished so long before, was, in fact, the salvation of the state; how to make the new old, peace through war, Greeks and Trojans both Romans. In the search for solutions, the culling of ideas through canons often fit the bill.

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