

Paul, the One Apostle of the One Gospel¹

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Introduction

In spite of all the breakthroughs in New Testament Studies over the last centuries, one main assumption still holds control: the New Testament books are the product of different traditions or schools. Whenever these differences are viewed as offshoots going back to one original source, that source is usually considered to be the teaching of the prophet Jesus from Nazareth of Galilee. As such, the different traditions are subscribed to his main disciples with the exception of the outsider, Saul of Tarsus. Whenever the latter is presented as being ultimately, albeit indirectly, one of the “fold,” appeal is made to the fortnight of contact between him and Cephas (Gal 1:18, where ἰστορήσαι is considered to mean “consult with, inquire from”). In other words, Paul the apostle was introduced to the person as well as the teaching of Jesus through his counterpart, Peter, who had personally known the “Teacher.” In turn, such introduction of Paul to Jesus is used to explain the parallelism, at least in broad outline, between the Gospels and the Pauline epistles. Thus is resolved the dilemma that would have resulted from viewing Jesus and Paul as the two parallel pillars, if not founders, of nascent Christianity, the one being from Palestine and the other from the Jewish *diaspora*. Consequently, we are told, Christianity has one founder, Jesus, and two promoters, Peter and Paul. Other scholars, who take seriously the independence of Paul from Jesus, try to maintain a parallelism between the two without resorting to an assumption of actual contact, direct or indirect, and appeal to a similarity of experience concerning the shortcomings of the Mosaic Law in ensuring divine blessing without the risk of divine curse.² In this way, those scholars maintain that Jesus and Paul came independently to the same conclusion; hence the similarity in their teaching regarding circumcision and the Law.

However, all approaches to solving the dilemma created by the relation between the teachings of Jesus and Paul, despite the lack of actual contact between them, do not take seriously enough the fact, acknowledged by virtually all scholars, that the letters of Paul preceded the Gospels containing the teaching of Jesus and, consequently, that the literary Paul came before the literary Jesus. If one takes seriously the churchly as well as scriptural tradition that Luke was, and that Mark ended up being, Paul's followers (Col 4:14; 2 Tim 4:11; Philem 24), then, at least traditionally speaking, the Gospel of Mark and the diptych Luke-Acts, which account for over a third of the New Testament, are “Pauline.” And since one cannot possibly ignore the fact that the Gospel of Matthew betrays the Markan stamp, it is no wonder that the traditionalists are most

¹ A form of this paper was presented as part of *Paul in His Milieu: Land, Religion, Culture*, International Conference held at the Tantur Ecumenical Institute, Jerusalem, May 7-14, 2009.

² The most recent example is Jerome Murphy O'Connor's *Jesus and Paul: Parallel Lives*; Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 2007.

eager to stick to the independence of the Gospel of John as bearing the witness of the “beloved disciple” who “lay close to the breast of Jesus” (Jn 13:23, 25; 21:20).

But the “thorn in the flesh” for those who wish to see the Johannine tradition as independent from Paul will always remain the scriptural witness to the close relation between Mark and John. Mark, the “cousin of Barnabas” who ended in Paul’s camp (Col 4:10), is thrice³ presented in Acts as “John whose other name was Mark” (Acts 12:12, 25; 15:37). Add to this the literary testimony of Peter, Paul’s counterpart par excellence. Peter, the assumed writer of the two letters in his name, who called Mark “my son” (1 Peter 5:13), acknowledged Paul’s letters as scripture at the end of his second letter: “So also our beloved brother Paul wrote to you according to the wisdom given him, speaking of this as he does in all his letters. There are some things in them hard to understand, which the ignorant and unstable twist to their own destruction, as they do *the other scriptures* (τὰς λοιπὰς γραφὰς).” (2 Pet 3:15-16).

The hypothesis I shall defend in this paper is the following: Paul’s school is behind the entire the New Testament literature, the Gospels as well as the epistles and the Book of Revelation. The New Testament did not come into being over the second through fourth centuries as the result of church leaders and councils picking and choosing which works to include or exclude from a smorgasbord of independently created sources. The literature was created by Paul’s school and imposed authoritatively upon the church by Paul’s school. Ultimately the church leaders and councils could only accept or reject what was presented to them.

My conclusion is fundamentally similar to that of David Trobisch but I am presenting different evidence in support of it.⁴ Trobisch builds his argument primarily on the evidence of the extant families of manuscripts and their different readings. My evidence is intra-textual. I find in the texts themselves evidence that the entire New Testament literature revolves around revisiting “in many and various ways” (Heb 1:1) the thesis originally proposed by Paul in Galatians which he presents as “the one unchanging gospel” (Gal 1:6-9). In this paper I will also show that Paul himself did not acknowledge other Christian leaders as having any independent authority for his churches -- even in 1 Corinthians 15 where most scholars believe he did just that. There was always one and only one voice of authority in the Pauline church, and that single voice of authority continues to speak to the Christian church today through a single cohesive literary monument that we call the New Testament. That literary monument was created by Paul and his disciples, not by Jesus and his disciples.

One gospel to the one church through the one apostle

Early on, in his letter to the churches of Galatia, Paul establishes the oneness of the gospel as an undisputable premise (1:6-7), a matter so essential for him that it is reflected in the agreement, possibly written,⁵ reached at the first summit meeting in Jerusalem: in his apostolate to the diaspora Jews Peter is to carry the same gospel that Paul has been preaching among the Gentiles

³ Three is the scriptural literary device for full assuredness.

⁴ David Trobisch, *The First Edition of the New Testament*, Oxford University Press, USA, 2000; id., *Paul’s Letter Collection: Tracing the Origin*, Quiet Waters Publications, 2001.

⁵ See Hans Dieter Betz, *Galatians: A Commentary on Paul’s Letter to the Churches in Galatia* (Hermeneia, Philadelphia 1979), 96-97; Paul Nadim Tarazi, *Galatians: A Commentary* (Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir’s Press, 1999), 69-70.

(2:7-8). Nothing short of that would do. However, Paul, the consummate pastor, is not content to confine this matter to the theoretical realm. The one gospel carries the one Christ who is lord over the church of God, and so the church itself can only be one. Paul’s hearers would understand this since in Roman society there is only one lord of a given household. On the factual level, the church of God is established by an apostle. Thus, on the practical side, unless there is one apostle in a given area there is no guarantee that the church there would be one. This Pauline “rule” is heard at its fullest at the end of Romans: “...thus making it my ambition to preach the gospel (εὐαγγελίζεσθαι), not where Christ has already been named, lest I build on another man’s foundation (ἄλλότριον θεμέλιον οἰκοδομῶ), but as it is written, ‘They shall see who have never been told of him, and they shall understand who have never heard of him.’” (15:20-21). The phrase ἄλλότριον θεμέλιον οἰκοδομῶ brings to mind what we hear in the Corinthians correspondence regarding the same matter.

Building and foundation are found in 1 Corinthians 3 where, although at the surface there is equality between Paul and Apollos in that both are “table servants (διάκονοι) through whom you believed” (v.5), the Apostle is quick to add “as the Lord assigned to each.” On the assignment level, there is a clear differentiation: whereas Paul is the one who planted, Apollos has merely watered the already extant plant, and it is in this manner that “God gives the growth” (v.6). Indeed, although “[he] who plants and he who waters are at one (ἐν),”⁶ yet “each shall receive his wages *according to his labor*” (v.8). In order to make his point clear, at this juncture Paul moves from the metaphor of planting to that of building: “For we are God’s fellow workers; you are God’s field, God’s building.” (v.9) When dealing with the newly introduced metaphor, Paul singles out himself as the only foundation layer, whereas the other (namely, Apollos) not only ἐποικοδομεῖ but also he better watch out as to how he does so (v.10) since his work will be judged as to whether it fits with the one and only foundation (vv.11-15). If it does not, Apollos himself could be consigned to the divine punishment of total corruption (v.17).

At the end of the Corinthians correspondence Paul calls the area where he laid the foundation of the gospel – or in other words the church that he established and so is under his authority – his “rule” (κανών). Most translations obscure this use of the Greek word behind the English “canon”:

But we will not boast beyond limit, but will keep to the limits *of the rule* (κανόνος) God has apportioned us, to reach even to you. For we are not overextending ourselves, as though we did not reach you; we were the first to come all the way to you with the gospel of Christ. We do not boast beyond limit, in other men’s labors; but our hope is that as your faith increases, our field among you may be greatly enlarged (ἐν ὑμῖν μεγαλυνηθῆναι κατὰ τὸν κανόνα ἡμῶν εἰς περισσεΐαν), so that we may preach the gospel in lands beyond you, without boasting of work already done in another’s field (κανόνι). “Let him who boasts, boast of the Lord.” (2 Cor 10.13-17)

The Pauline “rule” is actually God’s since it is God himself who apportions the limits of such “rule” to each of the apostles. Paul’s defense against the accusation of his apparent breaking of that rule in Romans is that he is the apostle “unto the obedience of faith among *all* the nations, among whom you (the Romans) are” (1:5-6). This statement undergirds the entire epistle as is

⁶ The neutral ἐν reflects the functional oneness as in Jn 17:21-22.

clear from the *inclusio* it forms with its repetition at the closure of the epistle: “Now to him who is able to strengthen you according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery which was kept secret for long ages but is now disclosed and through the prophetic writings is made known *to all nations*, according to the command of the eternal God, *unto the obedience of faith*” (16:25-26).

The noun “canon” occurs only once more in the entire NT, in Galatians 6:16 where it unequivocally refers to Paul’s gospel teaching. For Paul, then, the flip side of the canon of the one gospel is the canon of the one apostle for one given church. Just as the earlier scripture was given at the hand of Moses (3:21), this Pauline “rule” was consigned as “scripture,” written at the hand of the Apostle (Gal 6:11), so much so that it imposed itself on all subsequent church life: any one church is apostolic to the extent it is associated with the name of one apostle or *isapostolos*. The two exceptions are Antioch and Rome, which I shall discuss later.

This “rule” is set down in an incontrovertible way via the metaphor of fatherhood, which Paul uses in 1 Corinthians 4:14-21: one cannot possibly have more than one father. Even more, it is only insofar as the Corinthians submit to having the same father, that they are brothers and sisters, and not that they are siblings by their mere decision and then opt for a father of their liking. And Paul, being a Roman citizen, has full and complete authority as a *paterfamilias* does:

But I will come to you soon, if the Lord wills, and I will find out not the talk of these arrogant people but their power. For the kingdom of God does not consist in talk but in power. What do you wish? Shall I come to you with a rod, or with love in a spirit of gentleness?⁷

That is why the Christ he is preaching is the solely only valid one:

I feel a divine jealousy for you, for I betrothed you to Christ to present you as a pure bride to her one husband. But I am afraid that as the serpent deceived Eve by his cunning, your thoughts will be led astray from a sincere and pure devotion to Christ. For if some one comes and preaches another Jesus than the one we preached, or if you receive a different spirit from the one you received, or if you accept a different gospel from the one you accepted, you submit to it readily enough.⁸

That is also why, should the children not listen, that father’s judgment is tantamount to that of God himself:

This is the third time I am coming to you. Any charge must be sustained by the evidence of two or three witnesses. I warned those who sinned before and all the others, and I warn them now while absent, as I did when present on my second visit, that if I come again I will not spare them—...I write this while I am away from you, in order that when I come I may not have to be severe in my use of the authority which the Lord has given me for building up and not for tearing down.⁹

On the other hand, the submission required of the children is to the father’s teaching, which is the same “everywhere in every church” (1 Cor 4:17). This means that Galatians is *de facto* the muster that is repeated in different tunes and shapes in all the other letters. Indeed, not only is the

⁷ 1 Cor. 4:19-21.

⁸ 2 Cor 11:2-4.

⁹ 2 Cor 13:1-2, 10.

teaching of the one Christ already found in that epistle, but also the threat we just heard at the end of 2 Corinthians is an echo of the “rule” (κανόνι; Gal 6:16) Paul left in writing to the churches of Galatia:

Now I, Paul, say to you that if you receive circumcision, Christ will be of no advantage to you. I testify again to every man who receives circumcision that he is bound to keep the whole law. You are severed from Christ, you who would be justified by the law; you have fallen away from grace.¹⁰

Finally, this kind of absolute authority allows him, without the blink of an eye, to write the harshest possible verdict on his “equals” when it comes to their meddling with the affairs of his *familia*:

For such men are false apostles, deceitful workmen, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ. And no wonder, for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light. So it is not strange if his servants also disguise themselves as servants of righteousness. Their end will correspond to their deeds.¹¹

Again, this verdict is an echo of the condemnation issued in Galatians after the so-called Antioch incident: “But when Cephas came to Antioch I opposed him to his face, because he stood condemned κατεγνωσμένος. the reason being that when I saw that they [mainly Cephas and Barnabas] were not straightforward about the truth of the gospel, οὐκ ὀρθοδοῦσιν πρὸς τὴν ἀλήθειαν τοῦ εὐαγγελίου,” the same ἀλήθεια τοῦ εὐαγγελίου that was sealed at the Jerusalem summit (1:5).

For Paul this was a matter of the utmost seriousness. In the Roman Empire, the fields of Peter and Paul overlapped: Jews cohabitated with Gentiles. Consequently, what obtained in Antioch, the capital of the Roman province Syria, must have obtained, as it actually did, in every capital of every major province. As a corollary then, if Peter and Paul were *the* apostles of the one gospel and if Peter betrayed this one gospel, then it stands to reason for Paul that he would be the only apostle of the truth of the one gospel, the sole truthful apostle. In this new situation forced upon him, he viewed his apostolic commission as a necessity (ἀνάγκη), and it would include not only the Gentiles but also the Jews:

For though I am free from all men, I have made myself a slave to all, that I might win the more. To the Jews I became as a Jew, in order to win Jews; to those under the law I became as one under the law -- though not being myself under the law -- that I might win those under the law. To those outside the law I became as one outside the law -- not being without law toward God but under the law of Christ -- that I might win those outside the law.¹²

Even if he did not actively pursue the apostolate to the Jews, still, given the overlapping of the “fields,” sooner or later he would have been forced into debates with Jewish leaders throughout the Roman Empire, similar to the debate he had in Antioch. This explains why, in the Pauline

¹⁰ Gal 5:2-4.

¹¹ 2 Cor 11:13-15.

¹² 1 Cor 9:19-21.

epistles, Peter is presented positively—and even then only to some extent—only in Galatians 1:18 and 2:7-9. Thereafter the reference to him is always adversarial, if not virtually dismissive.¹³

1 Corinthians 15:1-11 is not an Appeal to Other Authorities

The passage 1 Corinthians 15:1-11 has been misunderstood because it is read as an exposition of fact rather than a literary device. Recent rhetorical studies of the Pauline literature have elucidated the aspect of persuasion that pervades those writings. A case in point is the letter to the Philippians that is conceived as an apologia (1:7, 16) offered by Paul in a Roman court, actually in the highest possible such forum, the “praetorium” (1:13). A defense attorney’s goal is not so much to uncover the truth as it is to persuade his hearers, more specifically the jury, that the matter he is defending as being the truth. In other words, he is trying to persuade his hearers of his own conviction. Hence, the high incidence of words and verbs of the root *peith*—, which bears the connotation of persuasion as well as conviction, in the Pauline vocabulary, beginning with Philippians itself (1:6, 14, 25; 2:24; 3:4 *bis*). The same picture of having been deserted by close colleagues during his apologia is found in 2 Timothy 4:16 (see Phil 1:7) and so is the fact that such desertion did not affect the outcome: the message was nevertheless proclaimed (2 Tim 4:17; see Phil 1:12-18). Romans, which abounds with the terminology of *dikaio sunē* reminiscent of Roman legal terminology, is clearly, literarily speaking, an apologia to Roman citizens of Rome itself; that is why it smacks of being addressed *urbi et orbi*: the entire church *oikoumenē* is brought into the picture in ch.16. 1 Corinthians is also woven as an apologia (1 Cor 9:3). In 2 Corinthians, which is replete with the *peith*— vocabulary (1:15; 2:3; 3:4; 5:11; 8:22; 10:2, 7), Paul repeats in ch.3 the argument of 1 Corinthians 9, that he does not need any “letter (of recommendation)” because his addressees are the proof of his being apostle (2 Cor 3:1-3) ending his argument with the statement: “Such is the *πεποιθήσις* that we have through Christ toward God.” (v.4)

But again, all this goes back to Galatians that H. D. Betz contends and, according to me has convincingly shown, is formally an apologia. There Paul uses both the vocabulary and the metaphor of “persuasion.” The vocabulary is within a cluster of terms that bracket Paul’s argumentation as an *inclusio*:

I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting him who *called* you in the grace of Christ and turning to a different *gospel*—not that there is another *gospel*, but there are some who *trouble* you and want to pervert the gospel of Christ....Am I now *seeking* the favor of men, or of God?

You were running well; who hindered you from obeying the *truth [of the gospel]* This *persuasion* is not from him *who calls you*... *I have confidence* in the Lord that you will take no other view than mine; and he who is *troubling* you will bear his judgment, whoever he is.¹⁴

The metaphor is found in a passage that Betz has shown to be written after the *topos philias* (Gal 4:12-10) where Paul is trying to cajole his hearers away from those who are trying to lure them away from him, all being in conjunction with the “truth (of the gospel)”:

¹³ Gal 2:9, 11, 14; 1 Cor 1;12; 3:22; 9:5; 15:5.

¹⁴ Gal 1:6-7, 10.

Have I then become your enemy by telling you the *truth*? They make much of you, but for no good purpose; they want to shut you out, that you may make much of them. For a good purpose it is always good to be made much of, and not only when I am present with you.¹⁵

This metaphor of two lovers pursuing the same love goes hand in hand with the defense attorney and the prosecutor trying to persuade the same jury of his own conviction. This view is borne out by the ending with Paul wishing to have been in the Galatians' presence in order for him to be able to use the change in voice intonation that lawyers and rhetors excel in (v.20).

That the Pauline letters were written as though he was "present," and thus were written to be read orally to the gathered congregation is evident from two classical instances. In Colossians his apostolic and thus authoritative request is: "And when this letter has been read among you, have it read also in the church of the Laodiceans; and see that you read¹⁶ also the letter from Laodicea." (4:16) The church here is undoubtedly the gathered community as the Hellenistic *ekklesia* (body politic) is. This understanding is clearly spelled out in Philippians where Paul's letter is expressly addressed to "*all* the saints in Christ Jesus who are at Philippi, (together) *with the bishops and deacons*" (1:1).¹⁷ It is then preposterous to assume in 1 Corinthians 15:1-11 that Paul was appealing to the teaching of the other apostles as a reference. To do so would be dynamiting his entire argumentation in 1 and 2 Corinthians. His hearers would have been given ammunition against him. His two letters would have produced the opposite effect he was aiming at. For Paul to appeal to his opponents after his having threatened them with a total *phthora* should their teaching not be fully consonant with his (1 Cor 3:16-17), and after his having threatened his hearers with *olethros*, albeit for their good, should they not follow his dictate (1 Cor 5:1-5), is tantamount to having set his ship in a "self-destruct mode."

1 Corinthians 15:1-11 is rather a rhetorical device aimed at blocking any way for the Corinthians to appeal to the other authorities. It is like a father or mother saying to his or her children, "Should you ask your uncle or aunt, he or she would tell you the same thing." Obviously, this is not an invitation for them to do so. To the contrary, it is an absolute prohibition of such. Actually, as is clear from its ending, 1 Corinthians 15 is not, as is often assumed, information about the raising of Christ and our eventual raising. Rather, it is referencing to this information in order to prepare the hearers for the upcoming divine judgment to which the resurrection is just the preamble. That is why the lengthy chapter ends with the conclusion that the Corinthians had better behave, rather than think, correctly: "*Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain.*" (v.58)¹⁸ This conclusion is similar to the one concluding the digression on the raising of Christ (Phil 2:6-11): "*Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, so now, not only as in my presence but much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for God is at work in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure.*" (vv.12-13)

¹⁵ Gal 4:16-18.

¹⁶ Obviously, from the immediate context, "read" means "have it read." This is also clear from the original *anaginōsko* whose exact connotation is "read aloud" and thus for others to hear (see Rev 1:3).

¹⁷ This, in turn, explains the frequency with which Paul refers to his absence versus presence. He condemns those who take advantage of his absence to contravene his teaching (2 Cor 10:11; 13:2). Conversely, he applauds those who abide by it in his absence as though he were present (Phil 1:27; 2:12; Col 2:5) and invites the others to do the same (Phil 3:17).

¹⁸ See also the earlier statement: "Come to your right mind, and sin no more." (v.34)

Even more, given that the entire correspondence ends with the threatening “third coming” of Paul (2 Cor 13), the hearers are not given the chance to consult with anyone since their decision is to be made by the time they have finished listening to the letter(s). Such is reminiscent of Galatians where the letter clearly closes with the caveat of “end of discussion” (Peace and mercy be upon all who walk by this rule, upon the Israel of God. Henceforth let no man cause me troubles; Gal 6:16-7a); the alternative is anathema (1:8-9; 5:1-3). Just as in Galatians, Paul’s appeal is to the “original” gospel (1:8-9) endorsed by all concerned leaders (2:7-9) *before* Cephas’ and Barnabas’ lapse (2:11-14), so also in 1 Corinthians 15 his appeal is to the “original” gospel once shared by all: Cephas, James, and *all* the apostles, even by 500 brethren ἐφάπαξ (vv.5-7).

A close examination of 1 Corinthians 15:1-11 will elucidate how it actually functions in Paul’s argument and how it parallels his approach in Galatians.

1. Paul’s preaching of the gospel and his fear that the recipients may have deserted it (Gal 1:6-7)
2. The addressees received (*parelabete*) the gospel from Paul
3. Paul received that gospel from God. More often than not scholars understand the couple *parelabon~paredōka* in 1 Corinthians in terms of the rabbinic or later monastic tradition of receiving a teaching from an earlier human generation and communicating it to a subsequent generation. However, such assumption is unwarranted since, earlier in the same letter, the same terminological couple is used in concordance with what we hear in Galatians 1:11-12: “Ἐγὼ γὰρ παρέλαβον ἀπὸ τοῦ κυρίου, ὃ καὶ παρέδωκα ὑμῖν.” (1 Cor 11:23) Paul’s source is God himself, and not a human agent.
4. On his first ascent to Jerusalem Paul visits with Cephas; James is secondary when it comes to the preaching of the gospel (Gal 2:18-19). The importance of Cephas lies in that he is the “first” among all the apostles as well as the twelve to receive the apostolic commission of the raised Christ (1 Cor 15:5, 7).¹⁹
5. The link of the “twelve” with Cephas in v.5 in contradistinction with the mention of the “apostles” together with James (v.7) is reflective of what was said of Peter in Galatians as to his being the apostle to the circumcised, twelve being the scriptural number for Israel. This is corroborated by that in v.6, *before* the mention of James, we hear of the appearance to 500 brethren. This number again is reflective of Israel just as the number 5000 is: 5 refers to the Torah, the fullness of the divine teaching to Israel, and 100, 1000 respectively, is the number reflective of the totality of the addressees. Put otherwise, metaphorically speaking the message of the gospel was supposed to reach the totality of the Jewish diaspora through Cephas.²⁰
6. Although Paul is “last” (1 Cor 15:8), still he is no less apostle than those who preceded him; actually he did more than they (vv.9-10). And, as in Galatians, it is God’s grace that

¹⁹ Cephas’ apostolic “primacy” lies in that Christ’s appearance to him is part and parcel of the gospel’s “content”: it is prefaced with the fourth and last *hoti* in the four clauses related to the apostolic preaching (1 Cor 15:3-5), whereas the subsequent appearances are appended after a series of *eita* or *epeita* (vv.6-7).

²⁰ That some of the Jewish addressees have died is a Pauline twist to prepare his hearers to the reality that they are no better than the Jews: they also are death bound (1 Cor 15:18, 29, 46).

was behind his apostolic activity and success (compare 1 Cor 15:9-10 with Gal 1:15; 2:9, 21; see also Gal 1:6 and 5:4).

7. Again, as in Galatians, his call to apostleship is connected with his having “persecuted the church of God” in a verbatim parallelism: ἐδίωκον τὴν ἐκκλησίαν τοῦ θεοῦ (Gal 1:13) and ἐδίωξα τὴν ἐκκλησίαν τοῦ θεοῦ (1 Cor 15:9).
8. Still, his having worked for the gospel’s sake more than all the others parallels 2 Corinthians 11 where Paul dismisses those others as the “deacons of Satan” (vv.13-15) Thus, I take the reference in 1 Corinthians 15:8 to his being the “last” (ἔσχατον) in the same sense as the ἔσχατος in v.45 and thus with the connotation of “eschatological,” “ultimate,” the “one who functions as the closing chapter.” Paul views himself as the *terminus ad quem* of all apostleship. If he has toiled more than the others, it is because the others have faltered, and he has proved to be the “last,” “remaining” apostle in the gospel arena. In other words, if Paul is the “last” of the apostles, he functions as authoritatively as the “last” of the Old Testament prophets. Any change to the gospel after Paul is from Satan, the opponent and hinderer of the gospel par excellence (2 Cor 2:11; 12:7; 1 Thess 2:18).

From all of the above it follows that 1 Corinthians 15:1-11 is not a description of what was actually happening at the time of writing, but rather, as in Galatians, is a reference to the “original” gospel that the Corinthians became privy to through Paul’s—and only his—preaching. This is evident from the aorist verbs in the first person singular in vv.1 (εὐηγγελισάμην) and 3 (παρέδωκα). The Corinthians’ reception of that same gospel is also expressed in the aorist (παρελάβετε [v.1] and ἐπιστεύσατε [v.2]). What is important for this argument is that we have the same ἐπιστεύσατε after κηρύσσομεν in v.11 as well as εὐηγγελισάμην in vv.1 and 2. Consequently, the present tense κηρύσσομεν cannot possibly be describing the situation that existed at the time of writing, as it is usually surmised. This understanding is further corroborated by that, in the immediately following passage (vv.12-18), the present tense εὐρισκόμεθα (v.15) and, by the same token, κηρύσσεται (v.11) are subject to the aorist ἔμαρτυρήσαμεν (v.15) which harks back to the previous εὐηγγελισάμην. The only viable conclusion is that κηρύσσομεν in v.11 prepares for κηρύσσεται in v.12 which in turn sets up the scene for τὸ κήρυγμα in v.14 corresponding to τὸ εὐαγγέλιον in v.1. In other words, the present tense verbs refer to the intrinsic and thus permanent value of Paul’s preaching to the Corinthians as being *the* gospel sanctioned by God and thus there is no need for it to be validated against the preaching of the other apostles. Actually, any preaching is ultimately subject to the judgment of the same God: any and all of the apostles may well be deemed ψευδομάρτυρες τοῦ θεοῦ (v.15).

My reading of 1 Corinthians 15:1-11 as being a μαρτυρία that the gospel Paul preached in Corinth is *the* gospel and thus that the passage is descriptive of that gospel and of what his colleagues should have been doing rather than a painting the latter’s actual activity. This is borne out by the fact that it follows in the footsteps of the argument in Galatians, as I have already shown. To be sure, in Galatians Paul says: “I laid before them (but privately before those who were of repute) the gospel which I preach among the Gentiles, lest somehow I should be running or had run in vain.” (2:2) However, his encounter with the Jerusalem authorities is undertaken for the sake of his addressees and not for his own sake (v.5) in the same vein as what we hear in 1 Corinthians 15: “by which [gospel] you are saved, *if you hold it fast -- unless you believed in vain.*” (v.2) Indeed, Paul did not learn, let alone submit to, anything new at the Jerusalem

summit. Rather, he stood his ground and forced the pillars—who οὐδὲν προσανέθειτο (v.6) to the gospel [I] ἀνεθέμην αὐτοῖς (v.2)—to realize “that I had been entrusted with the gospel to the uncircumcised, just as Peter had been entrusted with the gospel to the circumcised” (Gal 2:7) and to officially seal the matter by giving to Paul “the right hand of fellowship” (v.9). Consequently, the ψευδομάρτυρες τοῦ θεοῦ (1 Cor 15:15) is not intended to express the possibility that he might be wrong, but rather it is a condemnation of his opponents who betrayed the original gospel. This is clear from its terminological reference to his solemn μαρτυρία in Galatians 5:3-4.

Paul Ended Up Being the Sole Apostle for All Christians, Jews as well as Gentiles

Is there an indication in the Pauline letters themselves that Paul did end up as the sole apostle to both Jews and Gentiles? I believe there is, and in no other than the letter to the Romans—understand, to the Roman *oikoumenē*—where we hear that his gospel (Rom 2:16) was offered to the Jews first, then to the Gentiles. Furthermore, as spelled out in chs.9-11, it was offered to the Gentiles because, or at least when, the Jews refused it. At precisely the juncture of the Jews’ refusal Paul writes: “I ask, then, has God rejected his people? By no means! I myself am Ἰσραηλίτης, ἐκ σπέρματος Ἀβραάμ, a member of the tribe of Benjamin.” (11:1) The immediate combination of “Israelite(s)” with “seed of Abraham” occurs only once more in the New Testament, in 2 Corinthians 11:22 where Paul is distinguishing himself from his colleagues, the apostles. However, a closer look at Romans 9-11 will readily show that the terminology of 11:1 forms an *inclusio* with the start of that section where Paul refers to his “kinsmen by race’ among his “brethren”²¹ whom he specifically calls Ἰσραηλίται (9:4). A few verses later, in the same argument, he parallels Ἰσραήλ (v.6) with σπέρμα Ἀβραάμ, (v.7) just as he does in 11:1. The parallelism is also evident in the similar conclusion that the word of God has not failed (9:6) and God has not rejected his people (11:1). The reason is that Paul did not falter *as an apostle to both Jews and Gentiles* as is clear from the context: “Now I am speaking to you Gentiles. Inasmuch then as I am an apostle to the Gentiles, I magnify my ministry in order to make my fellow Jews jealous, and thus save some of them.” (11:13-14) Here, Paul rejoins what he said in 1 Corinthians 9 where he speaks of his apostolic commission as encompassing both Jews and Gentiles. The link between the two texts is further corroborated linguistically through the use of the same phrase σώσω τινὰς found only in these two instances in the New Testament (Rom 11:13 and 1 Cor 9: 22). The oneness of both Jews and Gentiles as branches of the one tree is secured by the one root. This imagery reflects that of the plant in 1 Corinthians (3:6-9), in the sense that the oneness lies in the oneness of the message: there is one Christ, one gospel, one Spirit in Corinth *because* there is one apostle to that city (2 Cor 10:1-6). Here again, the oneness of Christ goes back to the gospel written for the ages, which is Galatians: “Now the promises were made to Abraham and to his offspring. It does not say, ‘And to offsprings,’ referring to many; but, referring to one, ‘And to your offspring,’ which is Christ.” (3:16)

Still, the apostle accounts only for the root, not the plant, just as he accounts for the foundation, not for the building. Hence, time and again, although he never wavered concerning the correctness of his preaching and teaching, Paul repeatedly feared that he was running in vain (1 Cor 9:26-27; 15:10, 14; Gal 2:2; Phil 2:16; 1 Thess 2:1; 3:5). The reason is that, unless his message was accepted by at least one Gentile (and one Jew since Peter’s betrayal), it would not have been a “gospel,” as is evident from two overlooked Pauline texts:

²¹ Thus, speaking of those among the Jews who accepted Jesus as God’s messiah, i.e. the Jewish Christians.

For this reason, when I could bear it no longer, I sent that I might know your faith, for fear that somehow the tempter had tempted you and that our labor would be in vain. But now that Timothy has come to us from you, and *has evangelized us* with your faith and love and reported that you always remember us kindly and long to see us, as we long to see you—for this reason, brethren, in all our distress and affliction we have been comforted about you through your faith; for now we live, if you stand fast in the Lord.²²

And you Philippians yourselves know that *in the beginning of the gospel, when I left Macedonia*, no church entered into partnership with me in giving and receiving except you only.²³

That is why, when he went up to Jerusalem, he did so for a showdown and not to ask for approval. Titus was, as it were, his showcase which allowed him not to give in an inch regarding “the truth of his gospel” in Jerusalem itself (Gal 2:1-5), let alone later at Antioch (vv.11-14).

In Romans 11, Paul remembers his “thorn in the flesh” (2 Cor 12:7), which I take to be “the hardening from part of Israel” (Rom 11:7, 25), and he tries, as the sole faithful apostle, to “save some (of that Israel)” (v.14). For although he is the sole remaining apostle, he is in no better position than Elijah, also a sole remaining prophet, who was harshly reminded that it is God, and only he, who is in control (vv.2-4).²⁴ And God is ultimately interested in his “vine” and not simply the root. Hence Paul’s speaking of the *λείμμα* or *ἐκλογὴ* of Israel (11:5, 7). The terminology of Romans 11:1-10 forms an *inclusio* with that of 9:6: to be *ἐξ Ἰσραήλ* is not to be equated with *Ἰσραήλ*. And here again, we bump into Galatians where already Paul coined the unforgettable *τὸν Ἰσραήλ τοῦ θεοῦ* to speak of those Jews who follow his *kanōn* (Gal 6:16). It is this *kanōn*, and only it, that will secure their eventual re-grafting into the one tree (Rom 11:23) or plant (1 Cor 3:6-9).

The Other New Testament Authors are Members of the Pauline School

As witnessed in the same Pauline literature, part of that *λείμμα* or *ἐκλογὴ* of Israel is first and foremost Timothy, Paul’s heir apparent, to whom was entrusted the gospel *paradosis* as *parathēkē*.²⁵

I hope in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you soon, so that I may be cheered by news of you. I have no one like him, who will be genuinely anxious for your welfare. They all look after their own interests, not those of Jesus Christ. But Timothy’s worth you know, how as a son with a father he has served with me in the gospel.²⁶

²² 1Thess 3:5-8, which parallels 1 Cor 15:1-2.

²³ Phil 4:15.

²⁴ See also God’s response to Paul’s complaint in 2 Corinthians: “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.” (12:9)

²⁵ 1 Tim 1:18; 6:20; 2 Tim 1:12, 14; 2:2. If both *parathēkē* and *paratithēmi* are absent from the letter to Titus, it is because he did not remain faithful as Timothy did: “Do your best to come to me soon. For Demas, in love with this present world, has deserted me and gone to Thessalonica; Crescens has gone to Galatia, Titus to Dalmatia. Luke alone is with me.” (2 Tim 4:9-11)

²⁶ Phil 2:19-22; see also Rom 1 Cor 4:17; 16:10; 1 Thess 3:2; 1 Tim 1:2; 2 Tim 1:2; Heb 13:23).

This explains the unique place of honor he was assigned as co-writer of many Pauline epistles (2 Cor 1:1; Phil 1:1; 1 Thess 1:1; 2 Thess 1:1; Philem 1). But the *leimma* counts also Mark (Col 4:11) who is spoken of highly *in conjunction with* Timothy: “Get Mark and bring him with you; for he is very useful in serving (διακονίαν) with me.” (2 Tim 4:11) As is evident from the Pauline literature the apostolic διακονία corresponds to the εὐαγγέλιον of Philippians 2:22. So Mark, after his reinstatement (Col 4:11), is introduced as being on a par with Timothy. It is Mark, as I shall show later, who will function as the rallying person between Peter and Paul: he is a “son” of Peter (1 Pet 5:13), who ended in Paul’s camp and thus preserved the oneness of the apostolate as well as that of the gospel, as acknowledged at the Jerusalem summit (Gal 2:7-9).

My understanding of the Pauline literature is corroborated in the way the book dedicated to “the Acts of the Apostles” handles this subject matter. It practically follows the blueprint of 1 Corinthians 15:1-11: the raised Christ, who first appears to Simon (Lk 24:34) and then James (as Cleopas; vv.18, 35)²⁷ and all the apostles (vv.33, 36), commissions these to evangelize the entire Roman *oikoumenē* (vv.46-49). However, in practice, their mission is confined to the Jews and Gentiles of Judea and Samaria. Specifically, Peter functions as the apostle to the Gentiles in the Jewish “field,” behaving thus as a “proto-Paul.” Then he and James exit the scene (Acts 11) before Paul, the “last” of the apostles, takes center stage alone. Following the blueprint of Galatians 2, first Paul is in the company of Barnabas until Barnabas betrays the cause of the gospel because of John Mark, the third among “those of repute.” Thereafter, Paul is on his own, evangelizing Jews as well as Gentiles throughout the Roman Empire up to the capital, Rome, where he plants firmly, albeit in hope, the seed of the kingdom of God (Acts 28:30-31). What is of import is that Peter is presented as the champion of the “original and true” gospel, which prepares the hearer to “see” that Paul was actually doing the right thing all along. Just as we learn from the epistles, Paul has difficulty with the Jewish leaders of the Gentile world just as Peter had difficulty with those of Judea and Samaria. That the author of Acts was using the Pauline epistles as blueprint is corroborated by the fact that, when it comes to Paul’s “apostolic journeys,” he expands on Paul’s activity only in the cities or the areas to whose churches Pauline letters were addressed: Galatia, Philippi, Thessaloniki, Corinth, Ephesus, and Rome.²⁸ Moreover, when it comes to Rome, (1) In Acts Paul has a heated debate with the Jewish leaders just as he has in the letter to the Romans (9-11) and in a similar terminology,²⁹ and (2) Paul plants the seed in hope (Acts 28:30-31), just as he does in the letter.

The question that remains is why in Acts did Luke present Peter in a much more positive way than he is presented in the Pauline letters? Or more pointedly put, how did he get to that view? Was it his or did he inherit it? My contention is that he inherited it from the Gospel of Mark, his predecessor. There, Peter is offered the way to repentance by following the Lord into Galilee after having betrayed him (Mk 14:27-31; 16:7). Galilee is the Galilee of the nations where (the truth of the) the gospel found its *arkhē* (Mk 1:1). This corresponds to Paul’s having planted the seed in Philippi, his first stop in the land of Alexander of Macedon and the Ἑλληνας (Phil 4:15;

²⁷ See my comments on Cleopas in my *New Testament Introduction, Volume 2: Luke and Acts* (Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir’s Press, 2001), 181 and 181 n.77.

²⁸ For Colossians as a stand in for Rome in the East, see my *New Testament Introduction, Volume 4: Matthew and the Canon* (Minneapolis, MN: OCABS Press, 2009), 76.

²⁹ See a detailed discussion in my *New Testament Introduction, Volume 2: Luke and Acts* (Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir’s Press, 2001), 6, 10-11.

Acts 16: 11-15) and, beyond them, to the Roman *oikoumenē* at large, since Philippi “is the leading city of the district of Macedonia, and a Roman colony,” as specifically underscored in Acts 16:12. Still, why would Mark do that? Is there a basis for this approach in the Pauline epistles? I believe there is. At the end of Colossians we hear of the Apostle’s request to “reinstate” Mark as a member of the innermost circle: “Aristarchus my fellow prisoner greets you, and Mark the cousin of Barnabas (concerning whom you have received instructions—if he comes to you, receive him), and Jesus who is called Justus. These are the only men of the circumcision among my fellow workers for the kingdom of God, and they have been a comfort to me.” (4:11-12) This is an indication that Mark, after having split with Paul and followed Barnabas³⁰ (Acts 15:36-40), must have realized his mistake and “repented.” The acceptance of Mark by the Pauline school can be seen in Philemon where he is established within the inner circle and, for that matter, in the company of Luke: “Epaphras, my fellow prisoner in Christ Jesus, sends greetings to you, and so do Mark, Aristarchus, Demas, and Luke, my fellow workers.” (Philem 23-24) And in 2 Timothy, Paul’s testament, Mark and Luke are presented as the companions of Timothy, Paul’s heir (Phil 2:22-24): “Luke alone is with me. Get Mark and bring him with you; for he is very useful in serving me.” (2 Tim 4:11)

This Markan repentance is reflected in the call of John the Baptist, which inaugurates the Gospel of Mark, inviting all the Jerusalemites and Judahites to repentance “out of Jerusalem” (Mk 1:5) in order for them to welcome the gospel that originates in Galilee. The same Gospel ends by inviting Peter to do the same: repent and submit to the teaching of the raised Lord whom he is to follow into Galilee. This is tantamount to saying that Mark, the author of the Gospel, is pulling Peter to the “fold” of those who accepted the gospel whose *arkhē* took place at Philippi, that is, the gospel preached by Paul. Not only does Luke’s Gospel follow the same lead, but he also does so by using the terminology found in Corinthians 15 “The Lord was raised and appeared to Simon [who had betrayed him]” (Lk 24:34), which can hardly be a coincidence. On the other hand, in Acts, just before Peter “departed and went to another place” (12:17), disappearing from the scene, so to speak, and opening the door for Paul’s apostolic activity in ch.13, we are told that “he went to the house of Mary, the mother of John whose other name was Mark, where many were gathered together and were praying” (12:12). Again, that Peter, at the last end of his apostolic activity, joined the fold of which John Mark was a member can hardly be coincidental. Furthermore, since in Acts, there are only two women called Mary, one the mother of Jesus (1:14) and the other the mother of John Mark, the statement of 12:12 cannot but mean that John Mark first, and then Peter, ultimately joined the church of God’s spirit. What Luke does in Acts is retroject this “repentant” reality of Peter back into his “apostolic” life, making him all along the bearer of the true gospel, a proto-Paul as I indicated earlier. This retrojection of the “ultimate” image of Peter into his actual reality finds its highest expression in Acts 15 where, after having disappeared from the scene (12:17), he reappears only once more at the Jerusalem summit where he not only agrees with Paul (Gal 2:7-9) but actually champions the cause of the one gospel. His “image” in Acts 15 is the concluding one of a process that started with Mark and through him. Indeed, it is Mark, “Peter’s son” (1 Pet 5:13), who will ultimately salvage his “father” and thus the name of the apostle to the Jewish diaspora, who betrayed Paul after having given him the right hand of fellowship.

³⁰ Just as “brother,” “cousin” in the Semitic lingo expresses similarity or, at least closeness, in thought or attitude.

Strange as this “literary” rehabilitation may seem, it too has a blueprint similar to the case of Paul since he himself was rehabilitated by God from having been the “persecutor and destroyer of God’s church” (Gal 2:13, 23; Phil 3:6) into his “planter and builder” (1 Cor 3:6-17). And since he himself stated that nothing is settled until the Lord’s coming (1 Cor 4:1-5), then it stands to reason that Mark, his repentant disciple, would launch a repentant image of his “father” Peter, especially since Mark himself was graced with such repentance. However, and much more importantly, what ultimately matters is the gospel message which is the bearer of the divine grace and mercy that overlooks our sins. That one message is offered to both Jews and Gentiles through the one gospel and the one apostolate (Gal 2:7-9). In no way does an apostle’s failure supersede God’s grace as Paul unequivocally stated: “My [God’s] grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.” (2 Cor 12:9) This same God “is able from (these) stones to raise up children to Abraham” (Lk 3:8). Still, the oneness of the gospel can be preserved only through the oneness of the apostolate. Paul, strictly speaking, is the apostle to the Gentiles and, only by default, carried his apostolic mission to the Jews also. So, the salvaging of Peter’s apostolate through the repentance of Mark, his “son,” was to insure that, although Peter personally faltered, his mission and the gospel he was entrusted with still stood unadulterated. Put otherwise, Mark’s thesis, which impacted all four Gospels, is: *Had Paul betrayed the gospel Peter would have been preserved faithful so that the one gospel could be imparted to both Jews and Gentiles, uniting them in one table fellowship (Gal 2:11-14); if Paul was de facto the one who proved to be faithful, it is solely and exclusively through God’s grace, as he himself repeatedly stated!*

Peter’s scriptural reinstatement finds its culmination in the two letters ascribed to him. In the first, we are told that he fully understood the “scandal” of the teaching related to the transfiguration (1 Pet 1:16-18). In the second, his “testament,” after the manner of his “son” Mark (1 Pet 5:13) he asks his followers to submit to the writings of Paul *as scripture* in spite of their “difficulty” and the fact that the opponents “twisted”³¹ them: “So also our beloved brother Paul wrote to you according to the wisdom given him, speaking of this as he does in all his letters. There are some things in them hard to understand, which the ignorant and unstable twist to their own destruction, as they do the other scriptures.” (2 Pet 3:15-16) Even more, Peter invites his hearers to consider the Pauline scriptures as the basis to avoid “falling away” from the firm teaching (v.17) as Paul forewarned in Galatians 5:4 where we hear the same verb *ekpiptō*. This total submission to the Pauline teaching in 2 Peter is sealed in that, when compared to “an apostle of Jesus Christ” in 1 Peter 1:1, here Peter introduces himself as “a slave and apostle of Jesus Christ” (2 Pet 1:1), which parallels Paul’s move between his traditional epistles and Philippians, his “testament.”

The Pauline school’s handling of Peter’s legacy was applied to that of James (actually Jacob) and his Judea (Judah). In order to comprehend fully my argument one is to take into consideration that the English James and Jude are actually misnomers of the Greek originals Ἰάκωβος and Ἰουδάς. The first is the LXX Ἰακωβ (Jacob), the patriarch whose other name is Israel, with the Greek ending –ος. The second is the LXX Greek for both the patriarch and the country Judah. Thus both those “brothers” are representative of the Palestinian, and more specifically Judean, Jewish leadership who tried to check the gospel to the Gentiles as well as to the diaspora Jews

³¹ Reminiscent of the perversion to which Paul’s teaching was submitted to in Gal 1:7.

(Gal 2:1-10). Unlike Peter and Paul, James was not strictly speaking an apostle as they were (Gal 1:18-19; 2:7-8). He, as Jacob, was the “patriarch” of the Jerusalem church (Gal 2:12; Acts 12:17; 15:13; 21:18). In this position he could influence Peter’s apostolic activity among the diaspora Jews and, by the same token, indirectly affect the oneness of the gospel (Gal 2:11-14). Still, he was not a traitor as Barnabas was. So his point of view was integrated into the Pauline New Testament canon and even validated through the final book, the Gospel of Matthew, which elucidated Paul’s teaching: Paul adamantly taught his Gentiles that the gospel of freedom is “the law of the spirit of (freedom and) life” (Rom 8:2) as well as “the law of the (freeing) Christ” (Gal 6:2). Together with James (Jacob) was subsumed the entire Jerusalemite and Judean leadership around James and impersonated as “Judah”—Jude is a misnomer for *Ioudas*—his “brother” (Jude 1). Again here, Judah’s/Jude’s letter was validated through Peter’s testament (2 Peter): by submitting to Peter, and not by pressuring him as in Galatians 2:11-14, James’ Judea is ultimately salvaged.

As to Barnabas the “traitor,” his name is not associated at all with any “canonical” teaching. He is the perfect type of the antichrist as we hear in 1 John 2:18-19: “Children, it is the last hour; and as you have heard that antichrist is coming, so now many antichrists have come; therefore we know that it is the last hour. They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us; *but they went out, that it might be plain that they all are not of us.*”

Jesus in the Canonical Gospels

Although the person of Jesus is not in the purview of this paper, still it would be interesting to end on this note, considering Father Murphy-O’Connor’s latest book *Jesus and Paul: Parallel Lives* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2007). In drawing out eight points of parallelism between the two lives, the author takes at face value much of the information about Jesus found in the New Testament. But what if one gives due value to what the four Gospels, our source for a “life of Jesus,” call themselves: gospel (Mark), word (Luke), and testimony (John)? These terms are none other than those Paul uses to speak of his apostolic preaching. With John we have the clear intention of scripturalizing the testimony into a book (20:30; 21:24-25), a process that culminates with Matthew who entitles his work as “book” (1:1) and then refers to it as “this gospel of the kingdom” (24:14). However, this process originated with Paul himself as early as Galatians (6:11) and was set in stone in Colossians (Col 4:16). It stands then to reason to view the four Gospels as *gospels* that “carry out” Jesus Christ, and were not intended to function as historical narratives that describe him. Put otherwise, the only Christ there is, is the scriptural Christ. Any Christ that is self-standing before or behind the Gospels is as much an idol as a Roman emperor.

As strange as this may seem, it is actually nothing other than the scriptural pattern witnessed to in the Old Testament. The Pentateuch and the so-called Historical Books are actually the Law and the Prophets. Unfortunately, the Hellenistic nomenclature turned them into what they were not meant to be. Positing a God outside, before, or behind the scriptures renders him as much an idol as the other deities and their monarchs who need to be carried by their people. The scriptural God, to the contrary, carries his people in the palm of his same hand (Is 46:1-7) with which he delivers to them his written word (Ezek 2:9-10). The God to whom this hand pertains cannot possibly be “out there.” He is ensconced in Ezekiel 1, which describes a reality defying any

projection of it into our surrounding world. The “Ezekielian” words are that God’s throne, for he is “the holy one, who is enthroned on the praises of Israel” (Ps 22:3). The same phenomenon is seen in the New Testament. Just as in Ezekiel 16, 20, and 23, we have the blueprint of what became the Law and the Prophets, so also the Pauline letters are the blueprint of the Gospels and Acts. In both cases, the Lord is “formed out” of the written words, prophetic and apostolic, respectively, which is precisely what Paul said so masterly early on: “My little children, with whom I am anew in travail until Christ (takes shape) μορφωθῆ in you!” (Gal 4:19)

Since, on the other hand, there is one gospel and its sole faithful apostle is Paul, it stands to reason that the Christ of the Gospels has “Pauline” features through and through. To put this in a way that more directly relates to Father Murphy-O’Connor’s latest book: if the scriptural Christ was created by Paul’s school, and if their lives are parallel, it is Jesus’ life that is modeled after Paul’s, and not the reverse. I will point out here some of the most striking Pauline characteristics of the scriptural Jesus:³²

1. As early as Galatians Paul establishes that his apostleship to the nations is independent of the Jerusalem authorities since it originates directly in God himself (Gal1:11-17). If, at one point, he consents to meet those authorities, it is for a showdown in which he does not give one inch to them. Even Antioch ceases to be an acceptable headquarters after Peter and, more importantly, Barnabas’ betrayal under the pressure of James’ Jerusalem, and is replaced by Ephesus, the last major city of the East looking westward to Greece and, beyond it, to Rome. Similarly, Jesus starts, even originates, in the Galilee of the nations³³ where he performs his ministry to both Jews and non-Jews to the dismay of the Jerusalem authorities. When he finally goes up to Jerusalem, it is for a showdown³⁴ that ends up in his return to Galilee (Mark, John, and Matthew) where his disciples are invited to continue his legacy or in his leaving Jerusalem for good (Luke) while commissioning his disciples to turn their back to Jerusalem and proceed to preaching to the non-Jews through the Roman empire all the way to Rome, the capital. It is worth pointing out the Lukan device in Acts 1. In order to underscore that Galilee is the place of origin of the gospel, he omits it from the list of the areas to be evangelized in the Lord’s commission to his disciples in v.8 and he refers to the commissioned carriers of the gospel as “Galilean men” in v.11.
2. Both the Apostle Paul and the Prophet Ezekiel delivered the entirety of their teaching outside of Judea. Just as the prophet underscored that the new life for the exiled Judahites had its roots in a plain in Babylonia (37:1-14) and thus outside Judea, so also Paul preached the gospel of resurrection unto life outside Judea, in the Roman empire at large where the Jewish diaspora resided. Finally, Ezekiel underscored that the message of life was to include the long forgotten children of Joseph (Samaria) together with the children of Judah, making out of the two one household (Ezek 37:15-27), a feat that will include the nations in the recognition of the Lord as the one universal God (v.28). And Paul follows in Ezekiel’s footsteps when he draws the Gentiles together with the Jews into one table fellowship and one household of God (Gal 2:10-14; 3:26-29; 6:10).

³² I have detailed *in extenso* those Pauline traits in my New Testament Introduction tetralogy.

³³ He is known as “the Nazarene” rather than the Bethlehemite

³⁴ John 2:12-25.

Similarly, Ezekiel, the “son of man” and “speaker in parables” and whose authority is questioned by the elders of Israel, becomes the blueprint for the Jesus of the Gospels.

3. Not only are Jesus’ disciples slow to understand his scandalous teaching and more specifically concerning him as Son of man, but he repeatedly elucidates that teaching in *kat’ idian* encounters with Peter, James and John, just as Paul had with the same three in Galatians 2:1-10. Moreover, the most “scandalous” aspect in Jesus’ deportment is linked at repeated occasions to table fellowship, which is again reminiscent of Galatians 2:11-14.
4. On the other hand, the Peter of the Gospels reflects the one found in the Pauline literature, beginning with Galatians 2:11-14. Peter, the “rock,” is singled out as the one ready to stay the course and yet betrays Jesus miserably, a betrayal he is invited to repent of. In Mark, Peter is also singled out in the risen Lord’s request that the disciples rejoin him in Galilee (Mk 16:7) where he would precede them (14:28). Thus the hearers, especially of Mark, the original Gospel, get the impression that the entire Gospel story is woven around the two encounters of Galatians 2:1-14.

The outline of a gospel story reflected in the Pauline epistles gave birth to the expanded story of Jesus, the Teacher, found in the Canonical Gospels. The tension between Paul and his opponents provided the raw material that Paul’s school reworked into tension between Jesus and his opponents in the story of Jesus. And since Paul’s experience was encapsulated and expressed most powerfully in the passage Galatians 2:1-14 which reflects a showdown over the matter of table fellowship, most of the periscopes in the Gospels revolve around the following pattern: debates that culminate with confrontations occasioned by the issue of sharing or not sharing food with “outsiders.”

This pattern by which the New Testament came into being follows the example set by the Old Testament. The outline of a story about Israel by Ezekiel (16, 20, 23) gave birth to the expanded story found in the Law and the Prior Prophets, and the tension between Ezekiel and the elders of the Judahite exiles became the blueprint for the tension between the prophets (beginning with Moses and ending with Jeremiah) and the leaders of Israel and Judah in the Law and the Prior Prophets.

Conclusion

In this summary study of the rise of the New Testament literature I tried to show that the oneness of thought among its books is due to neither a simplistic view of divine inspiration à la fundamentalism nor to their later “canonization” by subsequent generations of church authorities or councils. Rather, just as is the case with the Old Testament literature, the unity these books reflect is due to the process of their production. After the uneasy agreement with the Judahite “Jerusalem” authorities, which met its fatal end in the “Antioch” incident (Gal 2:11-14), the Pauline contingent, mainly of diaspora Jews, founded a new home in Ephesus at the border between the birthplace of Judaism (Middle East and Asia Minor) and the land of the Greeks (Achaia) and Alexander (Macedonia), now Roman provinces under the aegis of the new world master, Rome. There, looking both East and West, that school developed a literature patterned after the Old Testament “scripture” and defending the correct interpretation of the latter. It was

intended to be read *as scripture* together with the Old Testament readings in the congregations dubbed ἐκκλησίαι to distinguish them from the συναγωγαί. The συναγωγαί were gatherings, essentially of Jewish constituency, around the reading of the Law, the Prophets, and the Writings. The ἐκκλησίαι were conceived as Roman style house gatherings to which both Jews and Gentiles were invited on the same footing. During those meals, the same Old Testament readings were read and then correctly interpreted by the diaspora rabbi Saul and his followers. However, the ἐκκλησίαι were fledgling communities disowned by the leaders of Judaism, a *religio licita*, and not yet recognized by the Roman authorities. As such they were in danger of being disbanded at any time. In order to ensure their future, it was necessary to perpetuate the teaching around which they were founded and by which they lived. Since any oral teaching dies or is at least open to alteration, in order to maintain its unadulterated survival, Paul and, after him, his followers committed that teaching to an official scripture to be read at the gatherings immediately after the Old Testament books. Given that the center was Ephesus, the epistolary writings were addressed mainly to the main cities around it, east as well as west.

Still, the epistles were formally similar to the literature of the Latter Prophets, consisting of teachings rather than narratives. Just as the prophetic parabolic teaching (see especially Ezekiel) was expanded into the continuous story of the Law and the Prior Prophets, the Pauline school followed suit and started producing narratives around the epistolary teaching. And in order to keep tight the link between the two, it bestowed on the titles of these narratives the specific terms Paul used to refer to his preaching (gospel, word, testimony). Ultimately they were identified by the specifically scriptural term “book” or “scroll.” This move actually canonized the process of committing the teaching to a γραφή, a *written* document *intended* to be *read aloud*. Consequently, just as the Law is canonized to become an icon of the scriptural God (Rom 2:17-24) so too the Gospels and ultimately the entire New Testament were canonized to become an icon of his Messiah. The Messiah lives forever within this icon as his inscribed legacy.