

# Crucifying Adam: The Mysticism and Mystagogy of Paul the Apostle

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## The Mysticism of Paul the Apostle

Albert Schweitzer began his 1930 study of the Apostle Paul with the following definition of mysticism: “We are always in the presence of mysticism when we find a human being looking upon the division between earthly and super earthly, temporal and eternal, as transcended, and feeling himself, while still externally amid the earthly and temporal, to belong to the super-earthly and eternal.”<sup>1</sup> Schweitzer went on to differentiate between “primitive” mysticism, akin to magic in its naïve faith in the efficacy of ceremony and ritual, and “developed” mysticism, wherein “the conception of the universal is reached” and “entrance into the super-earthly and eternal then takes place through an act of thinking.”<sup>2</sup> The mysticism of the Apostle Paul, he argued, stood somewhere between these two conceptions, combining the Apostle’s singular intellection that unity with God is mediated through Christ with his simple faith that “being-in-Christ” is effected by dying and rising with Christ in baptism.

Despite substantive criticism of his insistence on the realized eschatological effect of baptism,<sup>3</sup> and, ironically, his over-emphasis on the intellectual character of Paul’s mysticism,<sup>4</sup> Schweitzer’s definition remains in some ways a fitting description of his subject. Paul himself professed to contemplate not things that are seen but things that are unseen and eternal, while yet remaining in his “earthly tabernacle”:

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1. Albert Schweitzer, *The Mysticism of Paul the Apostle* (trans. William Montgomery; Baltimore/London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998), 1.

2. Schweitzer, *The Mysticism of Paul the Apostle*, 2.

3. James D. G. Dunn, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1998), 390–393.

4. John Ashton, *The Religion of Paul the Apostle* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), 143–151.

τὸ γὰρ παραυτίκα ἐλαφρὸν τῆς θλίψεως ἡμῶν καθ' ὑπερβολὴν εἰς ὑπερβολὴν αἰώνιον βάρος δόξης κατεργάζεται ἡμῖν, μὴ σκοποῦντων ἡμῶν τὰ βλεπόμενα ἀλλὰ τὰ μὴ βλεπόμενα· τὰ γὰρ βλεπόμενα πρόσκαιρα, τὰ δὲ μὴ βλεπόμενα αἰώνια. Οἶδαμεν γὰρ ὅτι ἐὰν ἡ ἐπίγειος ἡμῶν οἰκία τοῦ σκήνου καταλυθῇ, οἰκοδομῇ ἐκ θεοῦ ἔχομεν οἰκίαν ἀχειροποίητον αἰώνιον ἐν τοῖς οὐρανοῖς (2 Cor 4:17–5:1 [NA27]).

For the momentary lightness of our affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all measure, since we contemplate not things that are seen but things unseen; since the things that are seen are transitory, but the things that are unseen are eternal. Because we know that if our earthly tabernacle in which we dwell is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. For while we are yet in this tent we groan, longing to be clothed with our heavenly dwelling . . . (2 Cor 4:17–5:2).

The object of Paul's contemplation is supplied by the context of 2 Cor 4:17–5:2, preceded as it is by mention of "seeing the glory of the Lord in a mirror" (τὴν δόξαν κυρίου κατοπτριζόμενοι, 2 Cor 3:18) and "always carrying about the body the death of Jesus" (πάντοτε τὴν νέκρωσιν τοῦ Ἰησοῦ ἐν τῷ σώματι περιφέροντες, 2 Cor 4:10). The close proximity of these seemingly different images in the same letter ought to caution against too firm a distinction between a *theologia gloriae* and a *theologia crucis*. For Paul the image of the glory of the Lord and the image of the crucified Christ are one and the same, into which image those who turn to Christ are being transformed (τὴν αὐτὴν εἰκόνα μεταμορφούμεθα, 2 Cor 3:18). Thus Paul's reference to his own co-crucifixion with Christ in Gal 2:19–20 merits closer attention than it has yet received in studies of Paul's mysticism:

ἐγὼ γὰρ διὰ νόμου νόμῳ ἀπέθανον, ἵνα θεῷ ζήσω. Χριστῷ συνεσταύρωμαι· ζῶ δὲ οὐκέτι ἐγώ, ζῇ δὲ ἐν ἐμοὶ Χριστός· ὃ δὲ νῦν ζῶ ἐν σαρκί, ἐν πίστει ζῶ τῇ τοῦ υἱοῦ τοῦ θεοῦ τοῦ ἀγαπήσαντός με καὶ παραδόντος ἑαυτὸν ὑπὲρ ἐμοῦ (Gal 2:19–20 [NA27]).

For through the law I died to the law, so that I might live to God. I have been crucified with Christ; I live, yet no longer I, but Christ lives in me, and the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave himself on my behalf (Gal 2:19–20).

2 Cor 4:17–5:2 and Gal 2:19–20 exert a strong claim to represent the respective antipodes of Paul's mysticism: contemplative ascent to the divine met by a corresponding descent of the divine to earth. Though only Gal

2:19–20 appears among Schweitzer’s “utterances of Pauline mysticism,”<sup>5</sup> in both cases the division between earthly and super-earthly, temporal and eternal is transcended, and Paul finds himself belonging to the super-earthly and eternal while still externally “in the flesh.”

### The Religious Experience of Paul the Apostle

In contemporary Pauline studies the question of whether and how Gal 2:19–20 represents an utterance of Pauline mysticism is closely related to a debate over Paul’s unusually emphatic use of “I” (ἐγώ). Gordon D. Fee has aptly summarized the difficulty of this passage:

The surprise in this sentence comes in the very personal way of speaking about the saving event. Ordinarily Paul speaks of our salvation in terms of (1) its being rooted in the Love of God and (2) its being collectively for all of God’s people. Here alone we find this expressed in terms of Paul personally, which in context, of course, is to be understood as also paradigmatic for the Galatians. But one simply cannot easily get past Paul’s own sense of being loved personally by God’s Son in his crucifixion.<sup>6</sup>

Like Fee, most commentators indicate that Gal 2:20 alludes to a powerful sense of personal identification with Christ. Unlike Fee, many commentators add that Gal 2:20 alludes to a mystical experience.<sup>7</sup> In either case the question is how, in context, Paul’s own relationship to the crucified and indwelling Christ is paradigmatic for the Galatians. That Paul considered a similar experience of Christ in their own lives as critical to the success of his apostolic commission is indicated by his exhortation that they “become as I am” (Γίνεσθε ὡς ἐγώ, Gal 4:12a) and his subsequent reference to them as “my children, for whom I am again in labour until Christ is formed in you” (τέκνα μου, οὓς πάλιν ὠδίνω μέχρις οὗ μορφωθῇ Χριστὸς ἐν ὑμῖν, Gal 4:19)—where “Christ in you” is analogous to the “Christ . . . in me” of Gal 2:20.<sup>8</sup>

5. Schweitzer, *The Mysticism of Paul the Apostle*, 3.

6. Gordon D. Fee, *Pauline Christology: An Exegetical-Theological Study* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 2007), 223.

7. For a recent overview of the controversy, see Jouette M. Bassler, *Navigating Paul: An Introduction to Key Theological Concepts* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2007), 35–47.

8. On maternal imagery in Paul’s letters, see Beverly Roberts Gaventa, *Our Mother Saint Paul* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2007).

Renewed interest in Paul's mysticism in late-twentieth and early twenty-first century scholarship has been marked by close attention to Paul's first-century Jewish milieu as the proper context in which to understand both his putative conversion and the various "visions and revelations" which he claims to have received. Primarily on the basis of Paul's firsthand account of a disorienting journey to the "third heaven" and other revelatory experiences, including an apocalypse accompanying his conversion (Gal 1:11–17), Alan Segal sketches a portrait of Paul that is impressive both for its critique of the modern category of mysticism and its blurring of other categories:

Paul is a mystic. Like conversion mysticism is modern, analytic category, which cannot be applied to Paul without qualification. Mysticism has seemed more congenial to New Testament scholars, and the term has been employed extensively since the publication of Albert Schweitzer's influential *Mysticism of the Apostle Paul*. Mysticism, however, is no more a part of Paul's vocabulary of self-understanding than conversion, though he uses the term mystery at several crucial points. Mysticism has an esoteric, particular meaning in first-century Judaism; it is not merely a style of doing theology, as modern students of Paul have viewed it, or quiet contemplation. Rather, mysticism in first-century Judea was apocalyptic, revealing not meditative truths of the universe but the disturbing news that God was about to bring judgment. So scholarly use of mysticism has been etic, whereas the term retains its analytic power only when its first-century context has been adequately explored.

Paul is both a mystic and a convert. Perhaps because of modern reticence in the face of subjective and extraordinary aspects of experience, Paul's mysticism is no better understood by scholars than his conversion. Paul is a first-century Jewish apocalypticist, and as such, he was also a mystic. In fact he is the only early Jewish mystic and apocalypticist whose personal, confessional writing has come down to us. To understand Paul's Judaism and his conversion, his mysticism must be investigated. In the process we can a great deal can be discovered about the religious life of early Christians and about Jewish mysticism in the first century.

Paul describes his own spiritual experiences in terms appropriate to a Jewish apocalyptic-mystagogue of the first century. . . .<sup>9</sup>

According to Segal, Paul is a convert from Pharisaic Judaism to a new mystical and apocalyptic form of Judaism characterized by ecstatic visions

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9. Alan F. Segal, *Paul the Convert: The Apostolate and Apostasy of Saul the Pharisee* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990), 34–35.

and “religiously altered” or “paranormal” states of consciousness,<sup>10</sup> but his conversion did not occur *ex nihilo*. “His language shows the marks of a man who had learned the contemporary vocabulary for expressing a theophany and then has received one.”<sup>11</sup> This theophany subsequently formed the basis of his theology.

Paul’s conversion also figures prominently in John Ashton’s more recent study, a revised and expanded version of the 1998 Wilde Lectures in Natural and Comparative Religion delivered in Oxford University. Like Segal, Ashton eschews theology in favour of something more primary, what he refers to in the title of his book—in a freighted allusion to Schweitzer<sup>12</sup>—as *The Religion of Paul the Apostle*. Using “religion” in the general sense of a variety of unreflectively absorbed beliefs and practices, “all relating somehow or other to unseen powers,”<sup>13</sup> Ashton champions the affective category of religion over the propositional category of revelation. The linchpin of his analysis is Paul’s ostensibly unreflective and pre-theological experience of conversion:

Was Paul a theologian? In one sense, yes, though his thought is a good deal less systematic than many New Testament scholars would have us believe. He undoubtedly reflected long and hard both upon his own experiences, and upon the problems of the various Christian communities to whom he wrote. It is not altogether wrong to speak of the outcome of his reflections as theology. But he starts out as a religious thinker in the more primitive sense: the subject matter of his reflections, above all the experience of his conversion, belongs not to theology but to religion.<sup>14</sup>

Ashton proceeds to define Paul’s conversion “simply in the sense of radical change,”<sup>15</sup> or, echoing Nietzsche, “a transformation of all his previous values.”<sup>16</sup> Having already accepted the non-controversial proposition that Paul’s Damascus road experience occurred within a thoroughly Jewish matrix,<sup>17</sup> Ashton then takes on the unenviable task of explaining how the

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10. Segal, *Paul the Convert*, 52.

11. Segal, *Paul the Convert*, 69.

12. Ashton, *The Religion of Paul the Apostle*, 26.

13. Ashton, *The Religion of Paul the Apostle*, 23.

14. Ashton, *The Religion of Paul the Apostle*, 26.

15. Ashton, *The Religion of Paul the Apostle*, 77.

16. Ashton, *The Religion of Paul the Apostle*, 116.

17. Ashton, *The Religion of Paul the Apostle*, 27–28.

self-styled zealous persecutor of the Jesus movement became its most controversial advocate.

In a subsequent chapter entitled “Paul the Mystic” Ashton criticizes Segal for simply assuming that Paul’s “mystical experiences, for all their Jewishness, were nevertheless fundamentally those of a Christian convert.”<sup>18</sup> The remainder of Ashton’s chapter is devoted to demonstrating that Paul’s experience was, in fact, the experience of a Christian convert. Ashton does this by tracing Paul’s epistolary reflections on four mystical experiences back to their putative source in that initial encounter with Christ, which Ashton regularly describes as a rupture in the apostle’s religious life caused by his experience of dying and rising again. Although there is evidence that Gal 2:19–20 corresponds to Paul’s account of his conversion earlier in the letter,<sup>19</sup> Ashton defers a discussion of this passage to a final chapter entitled “Paul the Possessed,” where—in what turns out to be a typical move in commentaries on Gal 2:20—he explains Paul’s sense of being possessed by the indwelling Christ in terms of Paul’s references elsewhere to possessing the spirit:

How are we to make sense of this extraordinary statement? No rational human being can think of himself as being occupied by another. Whatever name we give to Paul’s conviction, it unquestionably depends on his awareness that Christ is no longer an ordinary human being but a spirit. In accounts of possession the occupying spirits are frequently given names. The name Paul gives to the spirit that has now taken hold of him is Χριστός: the Anointed One.<sup>20</sup>

Ashton’s classification of Gal 2:20 under the category of possession rather than mysticism suggests that Paul’s experience of being possessed by Christ is related to, but distinct from, Paul’s mystical experiences. Ashton’s analysis of the indwelling spirit of Christ in Paul suggests that Paul’s experience is non-rational, at best, or even irrational; that from the start it was a tear in

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18. Ashton, *The Religion of Paul the Apostle*, 116.

19. On the possibility that Paul’s use of the dative phrases ἐν ἐμοί (“in me”) in Gal 1:16 refers to an ecstatic experience and corresponds to the same phrase in Gal 2:20, see Hans Dieter Betz, *Galatians: A Commentary on Paul’s Letter to the Churches in Galatia* (Hermeneia; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979), 71. The phrase in Gal 1:16 is translated as a simple dative (“to me”) by J. Louis Martyn (*Galatians: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* [AB 33A; New York: Doubleday, 1997], 158).

20. Ashton, *The Religion of Paul the Apostle*, 233.

the very fabric of his existence, and that Paul continued to see it as such for the remainder of his life.

Primarily on the basis of the reasonable supposition that Paul can scarcely have expected his converts to undergo the same wrenching experience of Christ that he himself had endured, both Segal and Ashton indicate that Paul saw the ritual of baptism as the principal means by which Christians could receive the spirit of Christ. Whereas Schweitzer had focused on the eschatological ramifications of baptism as incorporation into the body of Christ, Segal and Ashton emphasize the sociological dimensions of baptism as a rite of passage incorporating new members into the community. Segal traces the origin of Christian baptism to the practice of ritual immersion in mystical Judaism, “the central purification ritual preparing for ascent into God’s presence.” The Pauline communities merged this ritual with proselyte baptism to form a single rite of passage, with the result that believers gained through baptism what Paul had gained through a revelation.

. . . Paul can say, as he does in Gal. 1:16 that “God was pleased to reveal His Son in me [*en emoi*].” This is not a simple dative but refers to his having received in him the Spirit, in his case through his conversion. Being in Christ in fact appears to mean being united with Christ’s heavenly image. The same, however, is available to all Christians through baptism. . . . Dying and being resurrected with Christ in baptism is the beginning of the process by which the believer gains the same image of God, his *eikōn*, which was made known to humanity when Jesus became the son of man . . . <sup>21</sup>

Segal’s study is open to the same criticism leveled at Schweitzer’s book, for Segal, too, suggests that Paul understood baptism as the starting point for some kind of ‘real’ transformation—an ontological metamorphosis. Ashton is more equivocal, preferring “to leave some questions unanswered” whilst hinting at the impoverished ability of moderns to appreciate the reality of language, or more specifically, to appreciate Paul’s language of dying and rising as something more than a play on words.<sup>22</sup>

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21. Segal, *Paul the Convert*, 64.

22. Ashton, *The Religion of Paul the Apostle*, 134–35.

## The Mystagogy of Paul the Apostle

This much is clear: Paul is an anomaly. In his own words he is an abortion (ἐκτρώμα, 1 Cor 15:8). Neither he himself nor Luke, for all their differences, regard his conversion as normal or normative. Even if the conditions that prepared the way for his apostolic commission can be sketched on the basis of his “former life in Judaism” (Gal 1:13), his encounter with a “mystical and apocalyptic” form of Judaism (Segal), or his encounter with emergent Christianity (Ashton), the invasion of the person who bestowed that commission cannot similarly be explained except on the basis of categories which Paul himself had already resolutely rejected in the sectarian specificity given to them by the fledgling Jesus movement: Lord Jesus; Jesus Christ; Jesus, Son of God; Jesus, Glory of God.<sup>23</sup> As Oda Wischmeyer has observed,

There is absolutely nothing in the life of Paul the Jew that leads to the Christ vision. Paul himself described this revelation as neither an autobiographical rupture nor an autobiographical fulfilment but as—speaking with Goethe—‘a new epoch in world history’ or, more appropriately, as the beginning of God’s eschatological dealings with humanity. . . . According to Paul’s understanding, the great disruption that the Damascus Road experience represents does not simply signify a new relationship to the Law, to Judaism in general, or to his own religious existence. That is to say, neither his religion, Judaism, nor his individual religiosity as a Pharisee were corrected or changed by his own initiative. . . . For Paul this disruption is a reality from the outside that causes the greatest discontinuity. . .<sup>24</sup>

It is equally and paradoxically clear that Paul eventually came to view the agent of this disruption from outside as a distinctively continuous internal reality that had only lately emerged to displace his former sense of self, in what he graphically describes as an excruciating and permanent death: “I have been [and still am] crucified with Christ . . . ” (Χρυστῷ συνεσταύρωμαι). The new life which he perceives within himself is not

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23. On the probable origin of these titles in pre-Pauline Christian communities, see Larry W. Hurtado, *Lord Jesus Christ: Devotion to Jesus in Earliest Christianity* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2003), 98–108.

24. Oda Wischmeyer, “Paul’s Religion: A Review of the Problem,” in *Paul, Luke and the Graeco-Roman World: Essays in Honour of Alexander J.M. Wedderburn* (ed. Alf Christophersen, et al.; JSNT Supplement Series 217; London/New York: T & T Clark, 2003), 87.



his own but that of the crucified and resurrected Christ, as if, having died, he were given the opportunity to return home only to find it swept clean and ineluctably occupied by another; a once familiar setting suddenly rendered strange and unhomely.

It is also clear that Paul came to view his experience of the crucified and risen Christ as an model for believers, such that Christ ought to be formed in them just as he had been formed in Paul. However dissimilar his initial experience may have been from that of his converts, he is quick to remind the Galatians not only that it was by hearing that they themselves first came to their faith but that it is also by hearing that they continue to experience the presence of the Spirit (Gal 3:2, 5). When he is unable to come to them at a critical moment to speak with them personally he “expresses his vexation” with the situation: “How I wish I could be with you now, for then I could modify my tone!” (Gal 4:20). That a man who has been called “the most influential letter writer”<sup>25</sup> in history seemingly lacked faith in the capacity of the written word to convey his most important messages is among the great ironies of history, matched only by the conviction of subsequent generations that his letters finally did convey his most important messages. Yet it has also been axiomatic for these same generations, in varying degrees, that the word as it is written is ineffective without the cooperation of the Spirit and the enthusiasm of priests, pastors, and lay preachers. “How shall they believe in one of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher?” (Rom 10:14).

The priority which Paul gives to speaking over writing in his letter to the Galatians is inversely related to the priority which he gives to hearing over speaking elsewhere in his letters. Paul desires to speak with the Galatians in person so that he may hear their side of the story, so that he may render his words less stridently—as he was accustomed to do in person—, so that they too might see his gestures and hear his tone of voice. Conversely, in his third-person account of a trip to “Paradise” in 2 Cor he mentions hearing “unutterable words (ἄρρητα ῥήματα) that no mortal is allowed to speak” (2 Cor 12:5), words that were always already inexpressable, audible yet ineffable. In both cases, however, speech and hearing signify the immediacy

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25. Jaroslav Pelikan, *Whose Bible is it?: A History of the Scriptures Through the Ages* (New York: Viking, 2005), 22.

of presence; Paul was there, in Paradise, just as he desires to be there with the Galatians.

Paul's influence on the subsequent history of Christian mysticism is difficult to overestimate; he is the "archetypal mystic."<sup>26</sup> His preference for hearing or speaking over writing casts a long shadow over systematic or intentional reflections on mystical phenomena, beginning already with mystics themselves—who, like Paul, invariably underscore the ineffability of their experiences—and extending to learned studies of mysticism. In Evelyn Underhill's oft-cited bon mot, the philosophers and theologians of mysticism are "no more mystics than the milestones on the road to Dover are travellers to Calais."<sup>27</sup> William James similarly distinguished between "institutional religion" and "personal religion," which he defined as "the feelings, acts, and experiences of individual men in their solitude, so far as they apprehend themselves to stand in relation to whatever they may consider the divine." James further classified "theology or ecclesiasticalism" as aspects of institutional religion that he would hardly consider at all, having already proposed "to ignore the institutional branch of religion entirely."<sup>28</sup> As subspecies of personal religion, in Jamesian terms, both conversion and mysticism are inherently idiomatic; whatever structures appear to be designed to reduplicate or encourage such experiences belong to the category of theology or institutional religion.

That both Segal and Ashton downplay the theological and ecclesiological dimensions of Paul's experience may have more to do with the anxiety of influence generated by Schweitzer than with James. For his part, Segal draws upon sociologically more sophisticated models of conversion than James, while Ashton indicates that the work of Steven Katz on the linguistic mediacy of mystical experiences "must be right."<sup>29</sup> Yet both

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26. Bernard McGinn, *The Foundations of Mysticism*, vol. 1 of *The Presence of God: A History of Western Christian Mysticism* (4 vols.; New York: Crossroad, 1991), 74.

27. Evelyn Underhill, *Mysticism: A Study in the Nature and Development of Man's Spiritual Consciousness*, Eleventh Edition (London: Methuen & Co.; repr. Kessinger, 2003), 98.

28. William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience: A Study in Human Nature: Being the Gifford Lectures on Natural Religion Delivered at Edinburgh in 1901–1902* (New York: Modern Library, 1936), 31–32.

29. In a series of flagship essays in four volumes on mysticism edited by Katz and published between 1978 and 2000, Katz proposed a methodical revision of the traditional understanding of mysticism and the generative causes of mystical experiences, as represented by the likes of William James, Rudolf Otto, and Walter T. Stace. Katz basic argument remained

Segal and Ashton walk a fine line between suggesting that Paul's conversion was theologically preconditioned and insisting that his conversion colours the whole of his subsequent theology. If these propositions are each equally true, then the distinction between theology and experience is considerably more chimeric than either scholar acknowledges.<sup>30</sup>

Whatever word one uses for Paul's initial encounter with Christ—"conversion" or "calling"—are the most popular—the problem of his sudden about-face from persecutor of the church to preacher of Christ is as much epistemological as it is theological, psychological, or sociological. His experience of the indwelling Christ cannot adequately be characterized by adjectives like "subjective" or "irrational"—not least because he seems to expect others to have a similar experience. It is better to ask what are the probable rational categories by which Paul would likely have understood such an experience. If these categories are fundamentally Jewish for the simple reason that Paul was a Jew of Pharisaic extraction, "one of only two Pharisees to have left us any personal writings, and the only first century Jew to have left confessional reports of mystical experiences,"<sup>31</sup> the same cannot be said of his first century Gentile converts, which raises the corollary question of whether and how Paul's Jewish mystagogy translates into Gentile contexts. To adequately explore Paul's mysticism one must also ask what are the probable rational categories by which Paul's experience would likely have been internalized by his predominantly Gentile readers.

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essentially unchanged over the 22 year period in which the volumes appeared, namely, that mystical experiences are largely preinterpreted by the epistemological matrices of the mystics themselves. Katz's essays include "Language, Epistemology, and Mysticism" in *Mysticism and Philosophical Analysis* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978), 22–74; "The 'Conservative' Character of Mystical Experience" in *Mysticism and Religious Traditions* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983), 3–60; "Mystical Speech and Mystical Meaning" in *Mysticism and Language* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 3–41; and "Mysticism and the Interpretation of Sacred Scripture" in *Mysticism and Sacred Scripture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 7–67.

30. Segal offers a more systematic approach to the question of religious experience in early Jewish mystical texts in a recent essay entitled "Religious Experience and the Construction of the Transcendent Self," in ed. April DeConick, *Paradise Now: Essays on Early Jewish and Christian Mysticism* (SBL Symposium Series 11; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2006), 27–40. Here, he posits "a more complex interaction between the body and the culture's explanation of the state" (38), presumably encompassing theological explanations.

31. Segal, *Paul the Convert*, xi.

In what follows I shall approach each of these questions from a different angle: first, by taking up a hint in Segal's analysis of Paul's first-century Pharisaic Judaism, and, second, by looking at the reception of Gal 2:20 among Greek patristic writers from Clement of Alexandria to Dionysius the Areopagite.<sup>32</sup>

### A Pharisee from the Tribe of Benjamin

Segal and others who have read Paul's letters in light of Jewish mysticism typically discuss them in relation to early merkabah practices deriving from contemplation of Ezekiel's vision of the throne-chariot and glory of God in Ezekiel 1. Other texts of importance in the merkabah tradition include Isaiah 6, Daniel 7, and the later hekhalot literature, which discloses various journeys through celestial palaces or temples.<sup>33</sup> Often in these accounts of heavenly journeys, the hero of the story is transformed into an angelic or divine figure. Paul himself may allude to this tradition when, in 2 Corinthians, he mentions that the "glory of the Lord" (τὴν δόξαν κυρίου) is unveiled "in Christ," adding that "we are being transformed into the same image" (τὴν αὐτὴν εἰκόνα) (2 Cor 3:14, 18; 4:6). Indeed, it would be difficult to escape the conclusion that he did see himself as already subject to the kind of transformation described in the literature of early Jewish mysticism, were it not for the fact that he draws upon a stock of scriptural language that will have been equally at home in Pharisaic Judaism, Segal's "mystical, apocalyptic form of Judaism," or nearly any other contemporary Jewish sect. Few first century Jews would have denied the existence of angels, the possibility of possession and transformation, or the proposition that God's

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32. Obviously these two approaches are not methodologically equivalent. An examination of the first century context of Paul's Gentile readers that will parallel existing analyses of Paul's Jewish background awaits further research. In the meantime, the brief *Wirkungsgeschichte* provided here fills a lacuna left by the recent commentary on the reception history of Galatians by John Riches, *Galatians Through the Centuries* (Blackwell Bible Commentaries; Malden, Mass.: Blackwell, 2008). Riches' excursus on "Galatians 2:20 in the Mystical Tradition" (137–143) begins in the sixth-century with Pseudo-Dionysius and ends in the twentieth century with the Keiji Nishitani and the Kyoto school of Zen Buddhism.

33. On the theory that the rabbinic story of four men who entered *pardes* provides the background for Paul's ascent into paradise in 2 Cor 12, see the two-part article by C. R. A. Morray-Jones, "Paradise Revisited (2 Cor 12:1–12): The Jewish Mystical Background of Paul's Apostolate," *Harvard Theological Review* 86 (1993): 177–217 and 265–292.

glory and image could appear in visible manifestations, although they may have disagreed over the frequency, precise identification, and means of experiencing such theophanies. Jesus himself reportedly believed that human beings would be “like the angels” in the resurrection, and there is little reason to believe that this view was idiosyncratic.

Among the specifically Christian innovations to this Jewish “language of theophany” is the identification or close association of Jesus with the *eikōn* and glory of the Lord. The book of Acts describes Stephen, a Hellenist, as having a countenance “like the face of an angel” (ὥσεὶ πρόσωπον ἀγγέλου, Acts 6:15) in the moments preceding his last words and his dying vision of “the glory of God and Jesus standing at the right hand of God” (δόξαν θεοῦ καὶ Ἰησοῦν ἐστῶτα ἐκ δεξιῶν θεοῦ, Acts 7:55). Although the author of Acts composed Stephen’s final speech several decades after the Romans destroyed the Jewish Temple, Stephen’s critique of the Temple can be profitably understood in the context of a broader re-evaluation of the place and significance of the Temple that began long before the events of 70 C.E. and is likely to have included Pharisees like Paul himself:

. . . the Most High does not dwell in houses made with human hands, just as the prophet says:

‘Heaven is my throne,  
and the earth my footstool.  
What kind of house shall you build for me,  
or what is the place of my rest?  
Did not my hand make all of these things? (Acts 7:48–50).

Prior to the destruction of the Temple, this re-evaluation did not necessarily include an outright rejection of the Temple and its associated cult (except perhaps in the case of the Qumran sectarians, but even they expected a restored Temple with a pure priesthood). The emphasis of groups such as the Pharisees on ritual purity and strict dietary laws, for example, represent devout efforts to extend the sanctity of the Temple service into daily life. Saul the Pharisee quite possibly viewed such observances as preparatory for the very kind of experience that Paul the Convert describes in 2 Corinthians, and ultimately for the angelic life to come. In this case the sudden appearance of Jesus in Saul’s sought-after theophany would fall under the privative category of “unexpected” rather than “irrational”—so unexpected that it caused him to abandon his “former life” almost entirely.

So little is known about pre-70 Pharisaic Judaism, however, that it is only slightly more difficult to portray the Pharisees as proto-Orthodox Christians than as proto-Rabbinic Jews. This difficulty, which arises in no small part from the negative press the Pharisees receive at the hands of the gospel writers, is further compounded by Paul's vituperative rhetoric in Phil 3. Even if the "dogs" and "evil workers" against whom he warns his readers are not themselves Pharisees, as he himself was, the fact that Paul refers to everything in which he had once taken pride as "dung" (σκύβαλα) does not reflect well on his former coreligionists. Still, the acute sensitivity of Paul and the evangelists to anything that seems to resemble Pharisaism seem to reveal the deeper anxieties of a new movement still struggling to define itself.

The similarities between the two sects extend beyond their common belief in the resurrection of the dead to cluster around a shared ambivalence toward the Temple and its official priesthood. Although the Temple long remained the *loca sancta* for the divine presence, that presence could also be honoured in other ways and in other abodes. The word *oikos*, typically translated as "house" in Stephen's speech, is one of several words that could refer to temples in the Graeco-Roman world, and it may well be with this usage in view that Paul writes in 1 Cor 4:1, "let people regard us as servants of Christ and *oikonomoi* of the mysteries of God" (Οὕτως ἡμᾶς λογιζέσθω ἄνθρωπος ὡς ὑπηρέτας Χριστοῦ καὶ οἰκονόμους μυστηρίων θεοῦ). Paul uses another common word for "temple" later in the same letter, when he warns the Corinthians against sexual immorality: "do you not know that your body is a temple (ναὸς) of the Holy Spirit in you, which you have from God, and is not your own? For you were bought with a price; therefore glorify God in your body" (δοξάσατε δὴ τὸν θεὸν ἐν τῷ σώματι ὑμῶν, 1 Cor 6:19–20). Similarly evocative language appears in 2 Cor 5:1–4, where Paul contrasts "our earthly tabernacle" (ἡ ἐπίγειος ἡμῶν οἰκία τοῦ σκηνῶν) with "a building from God" (οἰκοδομὴν ἐκ θεοῦ), representing both as garments.

With the exception of Paul's explicit reference to Christ in 1 Cor 4:1, such expressions could have been written with no contradiction and no less conviction by Saul the Pharisee. The latter set of images, in particular, presupposes a belief in the resurrection of the dead that Paul the Convert carried with him into his adoptive community. The Tabernacle and the Temple serve as respective metaphors for the human body before

and after the resurrection: the one temporary, the other permanent, yet both designed to house the glory of the Lord. The fact that neither the Tabernacle nor the Temple contained an actual *eikōn* of the deity, unlike other Greco-Roman temples, did not stop Jews like Paul from extending the metaphor to encompass the presence of a spiritual *eikōn*. “The Lord is spirit,” after all, “and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom” (2 Cor 3:17). To the extent that Paul had crucified his “old self” (ὁ παλαιὸς ἄνθρωπος, Rom 6:6), he could already anticipate a foretaste of freedom in increasing conformity to this spiritual *eikōn* (1 Cor 15:49).

### Putting Adam in His Place: Paul Amidst the Greek Fathers

In the “mind of the Fathers,” freedom is seen primarily in terms of detachment from the passions of the present life, frequently and succinctly summarized by the single multivalent term “flesh” (σάρξ). That Paul himself had “crucified the flesh with its passions and desires” (Gal 5:24) did not escape his ascetically-minded interpreters, yet the relative flexibility with which this notion could be excerpted from its original context and adapted to new circumstances is evident already in Clement of Alexandria, who provides one of the earliest patristic witnesses to Galatians 2:19–20. Clement uses the passage as a wedge against the moral turpitude of unnamed revelers who disavowed both “godly” celibacy and “sober-minded marriage”:

“Purify out the old leaven, that you may be a new lump,” cries the apostle to us. And again in anger at such people he directs that we should “have no fellowship with anyone called a brother if he is a fornicator or covetous man or idolater or reviler or drunkard or robber; with such a man one ought not even to eat.” “For I through the law am dead to the law,” he says, “that I may live unto God. I am crucified with Christ; it is no longer I that live” [Gal 2:19–20], meaning that I used to live according to my lusts, “but Christ lives in me,” and I am pure and blessed by obeying the commandments; so that whereas at one time I lived in the flesh carnally, “the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God” (*Strom.* 3.106).<sup>34</sup>

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34. Leonard, Ernest John and Henry Chadwick, trans., *Alexandrian Christianity: Selected Translations of Clement and Origen with Introduction and Notes* (Library of Christian Classics 2; Philadelphia: Westminster).

Although Clement invokes Galatians against the more licentious of his targets, the general thrust of his previous arguments (beginning in 3.102) against a bevy of arch-heretics who reportedly looked unfavorably on birth and marriage implies that the opposite extreme represented by ungodly celibacy could be regarded as equally “fleshly.”

Within similar ethical/ascetic contexts, however, flesh does not always signify opposition to spirit, nor even necessarily opposition to human affairs. In his *Commentary on the Psalms* Eusebius sketches a portrait of ascetic activity that may well reflect the realities of his contemporary milieu. Commenting on Psalm 64:9 (LXX), Eusebius indicates that those “dwelling at the farthest reaches” are “by no means those who live at the ends of the earth, but those who are able, like Paul, to say: ‘Though living in the flesh, we do not wage war according to the flesh’ [2 Cor 10:3], and ‘I live, yet no longer I, but Christ lives in me’ [Gal 2:20]” Such persons live in a “borderland, as it were,” neither plunging into nor removing themselves entirely from human affairs, “but living as citizens on both boundaries of human life” (*Comm. Ps.* 64 [PG 26.637C–D]). The paradox of Paul’s life in the flesh is mimetically re-enacted in the liminal existence of Eusebius’s contemporaries, who simultaneously live near to and far from the normal ebb and flow of human life.

Elsewhere, in a passage that is worth quoting in full, Eusebius connects the psalmist David with the Apostle Paul. David’s exile in the wilderness as portrayed in Psalm 62:1–2 (LXX) provides an occasion for Eusebius to reflect upon the psalmist’s sublimation of his fleshly desire into erotic passion for God:

David wandered like the rest of the prophets in deserts and hills, caves and holes in the ground; trained by the labors of endurance, he continually sang psalms with upraised hands. Dedicating the time in the wilderness to godly philosophy and arousing his own *erōs* for things divine, he confessed to thirst for the draught of immortality. Therefore he shouted to God saying, “O God my God, with you I lie awake sleepless. My soul thirsts for you, how often my flesh [...] for you.” In lieu of “how often my flesh [...] for you,” Aquila interprets, “my flesh suffers for you,” but Symmachus has “My flesh desires you;” so that not only David’s soul reached toward God, but also his very flesh and body, clearly sanctified and purified by devotion to God. And moreover the saying, “O God my God, before you I lie awake sleepless,” was indicative of nocturnal purity. For, in the case of one defiling their own soul by licentiousness and lasciviousness, their body being stained and impure, such a person would not permit these kinds of utterances to



be accepted. But the great David, with a clear conscience, did not simply call out to God saying, “O God;” but, as if having God all to himself, he writes a second time, which is why he goes on, saying “my God.” Then after that, since he has ventured to call him his God, he teaches the virtue of courage, saying, “with you I lie awake sleepless. My soul thirsts for you, how often my flesh [...] for you.” For these reasons he added “my God,” since no desire for anything earthly, nor yet for things seen with the eyes of the flesh, distracts me. Just as the Apostle says, “I live, yet no longer I, but Christ lives in me,” with such a mind David, too, said to God, “before you I lie awake sleepless. My soul thirsts for you.” Just as if a certain place, not being accustomed to rain, were said to thirst for it, in the same way he thirsted for you, or he desired you with “my soul” and even “my flesh,” as if thirsting in many ways (*Comm. Ps. 62* [PG 23.604B–605A]).

Eusebius locates the motivation for David’s asceticism in a pervasive and sublime *erōs*: the Psalmist’s passionate desire to see God. In his attempt to fill a lacuna in the text of Ps 62:2b by reference to the respective editions of Aquila and Symmachus, Eusebius even assimilates Aquila’s “suffering” flesh to Symmachus’ “desiring” flesh, concluding that even the flesh is capable of desire for God when properly “sanctified and purified.” All of this in preparation “to see the power and glory of God in the sanctuary” (ἐν τῷ ἁγίῳ, Ps 62:3 LXX).

That Eusebius should bring David into connection with Paul in this context resonates with accounts found in early Jewish mysticism of inward or upward journeys to temples or palaces, but the Greek Fathers most clearly echo the Jewish mystical background of Gal 2:20 in homilies and commentaries on the Song of Songs. In Gregory of Nyssa’s third homily on the Song of Songs, for example, Gregory refers to the bridegroom as both a “throne” (θρόνος) and a “temple” (οἶκος):

Perhaps St. Paul himself or someone like him could be worthy of such words. For once Paul became a “vessel of election” [Acts 9:15], he no longer lived his own life, but showed Christ living in him [cf. Gal 2:20] and gave proof of Christ speaking in himself [2 Cor 13:3]. Thus he was a temple containing that nature which cannot be contained (*Hom. Cant. 3*).<sup>35</sup>

Gregory extends the metaphor in his subsequent comments on Song of Songs 3:9–10, where he describes the construction of Solomon’s “litter” (φορεῖον):

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35. Gregory of Nyssa, *Homilies on the Song of Songs* (Casimir McCambley, trans., Brookline, Mass.: Hellenic College Press, 1987), 82–83. Slightly modified.

It is clear by our earlier words that the person thus bearing God in himself is a litter where God sits. According to the holy Paul, no longer does such a person live for himself, but he has Christ living in him [Gal 2:20] and gives proof of Christ speaking in himself [2 Cor 13:3]. This person is rightly called a litter who is borne about by Christ and carried by him (*Hom. Cant.* 7.6.206–207).<sup>36</sup>

Ignatius of Antioch, the “Godbearer” (θεοφόρος), may be in view here as an example of someone “bearing God in himself” (ὁ τὸν θεὸν ἐν ἑαυτῷ φέρων φορεῖόν), but it is the Apostle Paul to whom Gregory turns for ‘proof.’ Gregory associates Paul with the “throne,” “temple,” and “litter,” of God, much like the angelic creatures who form the throne-chariot described in the first chapter of Ezekiel.

The title Metathronos (“one who stands after or behind the throne”), borne by several angelic figures appearing in early Jewish mystical texts and Rabbinic literature, presents an interesting parallel to Gregory’s description of Paul.<sup>37</sup> This parallel suggests that Gregory’s portrait of Paul has roots in the shared Jewish and early Christian belief in the potential of human beings for translation into an angelic mode of life structured around the throne of God. Imitating this life as far as possible in the present came to be seen as the goal of human existence:

For human persons, though wrapped in mortal flesh, are to be stronger than physical desires, and to rule over both desires and all shameful passions, and henceforth even now to imitate the angelic life to come, so that Paul is able to say, “Our citizenship is in heaven” [Phil 3:20]. How is this not violent, and, as someone might say, seemingly against nature and beyond strength? Yet would anyone not agree, observing that the devout ascetics all but kill their flesh, such that they are entitled to say, “I have been crucified with Christ, and I no longer live” [Gal 2:19–20], that truly they take the kingdom of heaven by force [cf. Matt 11:12]? And if anyone were to attend to the wondrous spectacle of the holy martyrs, how could they not say that they took the kingdom by force according to the salvation they proclaimed beforehand (Eusebius, *Theoph. Fr.* 6 [PG 24.673D–676A]).

Just as the Galatians had once received Paul as an angel, the Greek Fathers received the Apostle as a model of the angelic life to come, both in word and in deed. Even the demons shuddered at Paul’s voice, according to

36. Gregory of Nyssa, *Homilies on the Song of Songs* (McCambley, trans.), 143. Slightly modified.

37. Segal, *Paul the Convert*, 42–43.

John Chrysostom, “which lifted the truth on high, had Christ riding upon it, and everywhere went about with Him; and what the Cherubim were, this was Paul’s tongue” (*Hom. Rom.* 32). Like Gregory of Nyssa, Chrysostom portrays Paul in terms that vividly evoke Ezekiel’s vision of the angelic throne-chariot and the Glory of God. Such portraits take for granted that the Apostle had attained a qualitatively different mode of existence that allowed him both to speak and to act with the authority of Christ. Because Paul was thought to speak “those things only which were acceptable to Christ” (*Hom. Rom.* 32), his comments about himself were of more mere biographical interest. “For, if Christ lives in Paul and does not live in me,” asks Origen, “how does that benefit me?” (*Hom. Luc.* 22.3).

The word signifying co-crucifixion in Galatians 2:19 (συσταυρόομαι) appears elsewhere in Paul’s letters only in Romans 6:6, where the surrounding context links it to dying and being buried with Christ in baptism. Thus baptism naturally came to be seen as a prerequisite for the indwelling of Christ. Yet in these usages Galatians 2:20 tends to be understood in ethical/ascetic terms as referring less to the immediate effect of baptism than to the goal or obligation of all who are baptized. “Everyone who is baptized,” writes Basil of Caesarea,

... is equally indebted according to the word of him who died and rose on our behalf ... For if the one who is circumcised in a part of the body with the circumcision according to Moses is obligated to keep the whole law, how much more is the one circumcised with the circumcision according to Christ by the stripping off of the whole body of sins of the flesh [cf. Col 2:11–12], just as it is written, obligated to fulfill what was said by the Apostle: “I have been crucified to the world, and the world to me; I live, yet no longer I, but Christ lives in me?” (*Bapt.* 2.1.2 [SC 357.206; PG 31.1580C–1581A]).

Similarly, in view of Paul’s carefully nuanced argument in Romans 6, Chrysostom sees Galatians 2:20 as referring to “the manner of life after” baptism, “through which our members are put to death” (cf. Rom 6:13). He implies that someone could still resurrect “the old self” who was crucified in baptism, then he points to Paul as a counter-example: “Paul did not do this but remained wholly dead ... Look at the discipline of his life and be exceedingly amazed at that blessed man. For he does not say, ‘I live,’ but ‘Christ lives in me’. Who dares say such things!” (*Hom. Gal.* 2 [PG 61.646]). Of course, by presenting Paul as a paragon of virtue, Chrysostom dares his

hearers to say just such things, suggesting thereby that whatever union with Christ is effected through baptism must be manifested in the conduct of those who are baptized.

Origen frames the issue with characteristic acuity: “For what does it profit if I should say that Jesus has come in that flesh alone which he received from Mary and I should not show also that he has come in this flesh of mine? (*Hom. Gen.* 3.7)<sup>38</sup>. Referring deictically to his own body, Origen portrays his flesh as a vehicle either for the “passions and desires” or for Jesus. Underlying this notion, here as elsewhere in the ascetic tradition, is a fundamentally Pauline dialectic, wherein one could become fleshly by submitting to the desires of the flesh, or spiritual by sublimating these desires and subjecting the flesh to the indwelling Christ through appropriate disciplines. Saints like Paul, who had reached “the height of perfection,” had become spiritual beings equivalent to the angels (Origen, *Princ.* 4.4.2).

Origen shows as much concern for the life of the mind as for life in the flesh. Thus he also describes the indwelling of Christ as a matter of contemplation:

. . . the Saviour was not in His disciples but with them, so long as they had not arrived in their minds at the consummation of the age. But when they see to be at hand, as far as their effort is concerned, the consummation of the world which is crucified to them [cf. Gal 6:14], then Jesus will be no longer with them, but in them, and they will say, “It is no longer I that live but Christ that lives in me”. . . (*Hom. Jo.* 10.43 [ANF 10.385, my italics]).

That Origen should view the saints as becoming like angels to one degree or another is not incidental to his emphasis upon the life of the mind (however unorthodox his more elaborate doctrine of contemplation seemed to later ages), nor does it fall outside the broader framework within which I have set Paul’s legacy. To “embrace Jesus,” Origen claims, one must enter the temple in the Spirit. To enter the temple, one must “struggle with every effort to possess the guiding Spirit . . . He who dares to say ‘I live, now not I, but Christ lives in me,’ he possesses Jesus” (*Hom. Luc.* 15.3, 5).<sup>39</sup> For Origen,

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38. Origen, *Homilies on Genesis and Exodus* (Ronald E. Heine, trans.; Washington D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1982), 101.

39. Origen, *Homilies on Luke; Fragments on Luke* (Joseph T. Lienhard, trans.; FOC 94; Washington D.C.: Catholic University of America Press), 63, 65.

this struggle to possess the Spirit and enter the temple takes place both “in the flesh” and in the mind.

### **Conclusion: Dionysius the Areopagite and the Ecstasy of the Apostle Paul**

The problems of definition associated with the term “mysticism,” together with the recognition that Gal 2:19–20 has as much to do with Paul’s present way of being as it does with a past conversion experience or passing moment of ecstasy, have led some commentators to prefer the terminology of “participation” in Christ over the language of mysticism.<sup>40</sup> This contemporary discussion has been conducted largely without reference to the use of participation language in platonic and neoplatonic philosophy, culminating in the corpus of writings attributed to the sixth-century Christian neoplatonist, Dionysius the Areopagite, a pseudonymous disciple of Paul whom James rightly called “the fountain-head of Christian mysticism”<sup>41</sup> Gal 2:20 prompted Dionysius to describe Paul as participating in the erotic-ecstatic life of God:

... the great Paul, seized by divine *erōs* and participating in its ecstatic power, said with inspired lips, “I live no longer, but Christ lives in me.” He was like a true lover and beside himself for God, as he himself says, living not his own life, but the life of his beloved as exceedingly beloved (DN 4.712A).

Although scholars increasingly acknowledge not only that Paul was a mystic, but an ecstatic mystic,<sup>42</sup> the ecstasy of the Apostle Paul according to Dionysius is quite unlike the fleeting ecstasies that fill the pages of modern studies of Paul’s mysticism. For Dionysius, participation in the life of Christ is ecstatic because God is ecstatic; that Paul should be “beside himself” is a natural consequence of the indwelling Christ. This is scarcely the transient, Jamesian sort of ecstasy that has come to be expected of mystics. In the view of Dionysius and his predecessors in the Greek patristic tradition, not only did Paul feel himself to belong to the super-earthly and eternal, he was already a citizen of heaven, even while still living in the flesh. However

40. Dunn, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle*, 390–412; Bassler, *Navigating Paul*, 37–46.

41. James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, 407.

42. John Dominic Crossan and Jonathan L. Reed, *In Search of Paul: How Jesus’s Apostle Opposed Rome’s Empire with God’s Kingdom* (New York: HarperSanFrancisco, 2004), 277–284.

extraordinary this experience was thought to be, it was also thought to be accessible and replicable via the ‘institutional’ matrix of baptism, asceticism, and contemplation.