"Re-Cognizing" Paul
Theory, Ecstasy, Politics

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Abstract

This dissertation explores the place of politics, or "the political," in the thought and practice of the apostle Paul. This is a topic that has received much recent attention not only from New Testament scholars but also continental philosophers who are interested in drawing out the possibilities presented by Paul's thought for rethinking conceptions of political subjectivity. My dissertation contributes to this interest by bringing Jonathan Z. Smith's comparative approach to the history of religion to bear upon Paul's correspondence with the Corinthian Christ association. This approach allows me to bring new theoretical perspectives into the discussion of Paul, with an eye to the possibilities these perspectives offer for redescribing and rethinking our conception of Paul.

Beginning with a discussion of the scholarly presentation of the "political Paul," I note that a great deal of the research that has been undertaken on this topic has proceeded without reference to any explicit theory of religion, let alone a theoretical perspective that draws connections between the religious and the political. Presenting a socio-semiotic theory of religion that allows the theorization of how social actors enter into the symbolic order and manipulate that order in service of specific projects brings us to a discussion of Paul's "conversion" from one who persecuted the assemblies of Christ into the apostle of Christ to the gentile nations—or, to state the topic in different terms, it allows us to ask after the conditions of Paul's emergence as an apostle, and the subjective shift that this would have entailed.

Noting that some important recent work on Paul's "experience" has highlighted the importance of ecstatic practices, trance, and spirit possession for the apostle's life and thought, I critique some of the attempts to describe Paul's becoming-apostle in terms that are too highly "cognicentric," marked by their over-reliance upon procedural models of ratiocination that do

not recognize or allow for the importance of "altered states of consciousness" in many non-modern, non-Western cultures. Critiquing this cognicentric bias builds toward a demonstration of an entire tradition of scholarly refusal to take Paul's ecstatic practices seriously as evidence that Paul was, precisely, an ecstatic practitioner. Beginning to deploy cross-cultural analogies in service of the dissertation's comparative enterprise allows me to sketch the possibilities for reimaging Paul and the Corinthians in this new manner. The importance of speaking in tongues, spirit possession (both possessing and being possessed by the "spirit of Christ), and the importance of the status of being-in-Christ are redescribed in the process. This shows that Paul and the Corinthians alike shared many of these practices and attitudes.

By drawing out the political implications of this shared set of interests and identifications, I further pursue the political significance of Paul's "resurrection language" by comparing the Corinthian situation with the American Indian Ghost Dance of 1870 as it developed among the Paiute on the Walker River Reservation in Nevada. This analogy shows the importance for the development and spread of Paul's assemblies in the Roman Empire by highlighting the shared identity of being-in-Christ as a formative factor, in light of the increasing consolidation of Roman imperial identity in the first century CE. A final chapter moves to a discussion of the Lord's Dinner as an especially salient "site" of social contestation and self-definition, as meal practices, generally and cross-culturally, tend to be. It also highlights Paul's "micro-political" maneuvers, as he struggles to work out his own notions of what a Christ association should be, and how this important ritual should be conducted in service of ongoing social formation amidst the material and political realities of Roman Corinth. A brief conclusion attempts to draw together the various "threads" of my argument in order to weave a vision of Paul's project as an attempt to establish and maintain a "place" within the social disruptions and cultural collisions

that defined the eastern Mediterranean during this period of Roman imperialism.

Preface

This thesis is an original work by John W. Parrish. The research project, of which this thesis is a part, received research ethics approval from the University of Alberta Research Ethics Board, April 3, 2007.

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For Debbie,
sine qua non

Acknowledgements

It is humbling to recognize the truth of Michel Foucault's statement, long ago now, that the borders of any work spread far beyond the mere parallelepiped of the printed-and-bound page. The true borders of a work, a text, a dissertation, must necessarily extend into a network, indeed a forest of texts that can never be cited, never be controlled by so simple a scheme as a bibliography. That is, the text itself, which extends beyond the control of any one person—just as, by definition, so does the authorship—is never simply the work of one person, but is the result of many writers, who have invested themselves in a given project.

Just so.

Many of the ideas that appear within this work did not actually originate with me alone— only in conversation with many friends and valued colleagues, who helped me clarify my ideas and saved me from many time-consuming errors. Without them, this work would be both shorter, and poorer. Not only that, but the writing of this manuscript would have been far less valuable of an exercise, intellectually speaking. I learned much from them, and hope that they will recognize their "mind-prints" upon this work. I owe them all a debt I cannot repay, but I *can* at least recognize them here. Above all, I owe incalculable thanks to my co-supervisors, William Arnal and Willi Braun. Without their wisdom, guidance, humour, and indeed friendship, I'd still be out there counting "the cats in Zanzibar." Many additional thanks are owed to Joseph M. Bryant, Ronald Charles, Glen Fairen, Pamela E. Klassen,, John Kloppenborg, Timothy Langille, John W. Marshall, Russell T. McCutcheon, Marie-Eve Morin, Colleen Shantz, Jonathan Z. Smith, Selina Stewart, Stanley K. Stowers, Leif Vaage, Heidi Wendt, and Lorne Zelyck. For better or worse,

they have all contributed to this project, and I believe they have made it better than it otherwise would have been. It goes without saying that the remaining flaws in the text, the argument, or the references are mine and mine alone.

I have dedicated this dissertation to the one who has supported me throughout its writing, For her infinite support, her brilliant companionship, and for the fact that she never once stopped believing in my ability or my talent when I couldn't see it, I offer her my thanks. For sharing her life and her love with me, I offer her my heart, my thanks, and my love—always and forever. We did it, babe! We made it!

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Introduction

> [C]omparison does not necessarily tell us how things "are" [or, for that matter, how they "were," but]…like models and metaphors, comparison tells us how they might be "redescribed" … comparison provides the means by which *we* "re-vision" phenomena as *our* data in order to solve *our* theoretical problems…[It] is an active, at times even a playful, enterprise of deconstruction and reconstitution which, kaleidoscope-like, gives the scholar a shifting set of characteristics with which to negotiate the relations between his or her theoretical interests and data stipulated as exemplary. The comparative enterprise [thus] provides a set of perspectives which "serve different analytic purposes by emphasizing varied aspects" of the object of study.
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> — Jonathan Z. Smith[1]

It is surely every historian's fantasy to have at his or her disposal the remarkable historiographical tools made available to one Lemuel Gulliver, surgeon and sea captain, during his stay on the sorcerous isle of Glubbdubdrib—a little-known island in the South Pacific, roughly the size of the Isle of Wight.[2] Gulliver's travelogue—written by his chronicler, Jonathan Swift—informs us that the Governor of Glubbdubdrib was renowned for his skill in necromancy that rendered him capable of summoning persons from the dead for several hours, during which they could be questioned regarding the circumstances of their life and death, and could also be relied upon to clarify certain matters of historical interest that the textual and archaeological record had left a bit fuzzy. This was, according to the Governor, the only accurate way to do History.

Gulliver reports that he took part in this perfect historiography, throwing a banquet for Homer in the midst of all his commentators, teaching Aristotle the history of Western philosophy, and orchestrating a reunion between Caesar and Pompey. He was even lucky enough to hear

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[1] Jonathan Z. Smith, *Drudgery Divine: On the Comparison of Early Christianities and the Religions of Late Antiquity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), 52, 53.

[2] If the report by Jonathan Swift, in *Gulliver's Travels* (London, 1726), 3.7-8, is to be believed.

Alexander the Great confirm that he died from fever and not from poisoning, and to learn from Hannibal's own mouth the manner in which he crossed the Alps.

How disappointing, then, that Gulliver reports no dialogue with the figure of St. Paul, in order to clarify what exactly was the nature of the problems he was addressing in his letters to his assemblies, or precisely what was the nature of his "project," what was his strategy in "founding" these urban associations? What were they like? Alas, such questions are never addressed. Nor does Gulliver make any effort to instruct us in the method by which such figures *could be* raised, so that other historians with divergent interests could write their histories "accurately" as well. He therefore violates the first principle of sound methodology: providing testable, intersubjectively available, and therefore falsifiable or revisable methods and theories by which the scholarly public can collaborate in the ongoing project of accumulating knowledge.

He must have had good reasons for this omission. Perhaps he feared that some might abuse the privilege for selfish gain, as the vile necromancer Joseph Curwen abused the spirits of the dead to gain the secret of immortality in H. P. Lovecraft's *The Case of Charles Dexter Ward*.[3] Or, perhaps he himself did not quite understand the method of this perfect historiography. But, whatever Gulliver's reasons, and despite Tomoko Masuzawa's playful characterization of historical interests as "necromantic curiosities,"[4] the notion of a perfect historiography, and an "accurate history" which would answer once and for all the question of "what really happened?" or "what was it really like?" remains but a fantasy—a pipe dream composed by an Irish satirist in

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[3]   The publication history of Lovecraft's stories is itself a sordid tale. Printed editions abound. I merely refer the reader to the story as printed in H. P. Lovecraft, *The Dream Cycle of H.P. Lovecraft: Dreams of Terror and Death* (New York: Del Rey, 1995), 212-323.

[4]   Tomoko Masuzawa, *In Search of Dreamtime: The Quest for the Origin of Religion* (Religion and Postmodernism; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 1.

1726—and not a viable scholarly goal. Other, less "accurate"—but also less magical—methods will have to be adopted by historians who work in the real world.[5]

This study is driven by the conviction that the field of Pauline studies is in dire need of theoretical creativity. Especially now that the apostle Paul and his writings have become topics of interest not only to biblical scholars or students of religion, but also continental philosophers, critical theorists, cultural theorists, literary theorists, and even an anthropologist or two, scholars of the New Testament and Christian Origins are long past the point where we can claim disciplinary "ownership" of the Pauline texts—if indeed we ever legitimately could.

Perhaps more than any other criticism—or cause for outright rejection—leveled against Paul's philosophical readers (the "New Paulinists," if you will), Pauline scholars cite the lack of familiarity with biblical scholarship that is immediately evident when one reads these authors. On one hand, the criticism is certainly justified, but on the other, it does seem more than a little self-serving. For Pauline specialists to criticize others who attempt to bring legibility to these writings because they lack specialist knowledge is a blatantly obvious case of circling the wagons. And, while I agree that the advances made by this scholarship over the last forty years has resulted in several paradigm shifts in our understanding of Paul and his letters, I would also argue that a field based upon the study of such a tiny set of texts truly *needs* disciplinary others to refresh and provoke what is always in danger of becoming the status quo. I fear that if we do not allow ourselves to be challenged in this way, we may well deserve the irrelevance to which

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[5] I have been very impressed by an endnote passage in *In Search of Dreamtime*. Masuzawa states that, since Freud, "representation is no longer to be assessed in terms of accuracy, resemblance to the original, and so on, as if the representation were a matter of transferring the selfsame 'reality' from one context to another, but that it is by nature a kind of transformative act; a change of place (*Stelle*) involved in representation (*Darstellung*) is necessarily a distortion (*Entstellung*) to some extent" (182 n. 8).

we could all-too-easily be relegated.

Thus, rather than simply call for theoretical creativity in Pauline studies, this project was written as an exercise in such creativity. My topic of interest, simply stated for now—and to be elaborated along the way—is the relation between Paul and "the political." Given that much of the interdisciplinary interest in Paul has been animated by the possibilities for political thought that his texts offer, this seems a natural choice. For other reasons—some intellectual, some biographical—I have chosen to focus on the Corinthian correspondence. The idea is to attempt to read the text in ways it has not often, if ever, been read, by introducing new concepts, suggesting new possibilities or connections, new reading strategies, which may bring our imagination of Paul and the Corinthians to a fresh place. The goal is to strike a balance between theoretical/philosophical rigor and historical discipline—to blend, in a sense, the philosophers' Paul with the Paul of the biblicists. Thus, not every chapter is written in the same "style," and sometimes I will switch styles within the course of the same chapter. But, in keeping with the old writers' instruction to "show it," rather than "tell it," it would be helpful to provide a summary of the course my argument takes in the following chapters.

The first chapter serves to introduce the interest in the political Paul that has lingered in the field in recent decades, and not only introduces the problem of Paul and the political, but also addresses what, to me, makes this problem especially "problematic," and thus worthy of investigation. It seems to me that much of the scholarship I include in this grouping suffers from the lack of an adequate (let alone explicit) theory of religion, and so the first chapter introduces such a theory, as well as providing select examples of what scholars of Christian origins might "do" with such a theory. The following chapter refines this theory by further elaborating on the possibilities that psychoanalytic theory might contribute to our theorizing, though only briefly.

The major problem under review is the relation between Paul's political project and the ecstatic tendencies and practices evinced to us by 1 Corinthians. The relation between political action and ecstatic expression is a problem addressed by several thinkers, and the point of the second chapter is to establish how Paul's ecstatic practice fits in with his politics. Chapter three gauges the effects of Paul's interventions directly though a consideration of Alain Badiou's concept of the "event."

The fourth and fifth chapters diverge from the more theoretically-freewheeling discussions of previous chapters, and while they are no less theoretically-rigorous, they do look more like "traditional" social-historical biblical scholarship. Looks may be deceiving, here, however, as I build these chapters upon Jonathan Z. Smith's methodology for the comparative history of religion. Chapter four deals with, among other things, the problem of "nativism" and the apparently paradoxical fact that some of Paul's Corinthian adherents denied the resurrection. There, draw upon the Paiute Ghost Dance of 1870 as a cross-cultural analogy in order to perform a Smithian redescription of the problems and rectification of the categories through which we may imagine Paul and the Corinthians. Chapter five deals with the conflicts and innovations surrounding the Lord's Dinner, as evinced to us by 1 Corinthians. Again, cross-cultural comparison is employed in order to clarify certain aspects of the Corinthian situation. The conceptual apparatus I use to make sense of these problems is the locative and utopian categories found in Smith's early work, as well as his later categories of "here, there, and anywhere."

Part of the point of these chapters is to illustrate how profoundly a simple conceptual shift can inflect one's heuristic, so that different heuristics can be used for different projects. Assumed in all of this is the idea that there is no cost-less theory, and no theory that can do everything. Assumed in all of this is that the scholar should be responsible for knowing what a theory *can*

do and what it *can't*. Concomitant with this assumption is the exhortation that the scholar should not jettison or abandon a theoretical apparatus on the basis of what it *cannot* do, but should rather be disciplined and self-reflexively aware enough to know for which projects that theory might be best suited. In other words, no single tool is right for every job, and part of the disciplinary training of the guild of Christian origins scholars (Pauline scholars among them) should be the inculcation of a basic knowledge of which tool *is* right for the job.

Here, I have used several tools for various operations, and I view these chapters as having a basic forward thrust that connects them. I imagine it would be possible to read them separately, or in any given order, but the idea does not sit easily with me. It is true, of course, that chapters four and five appeared individually before their appearance in this study, but now that I have seen them set into their place here, they seem to have become naturalized as part of the manuscript, at least in my mind. Regardless of how closely or loosely related the chapters seem to any given reader, however, it is my hope that the underlying conviction of the need for theoretical creativity does not seem superfluous or unproductive. Indeed, I hope that the descriptive and cognitive differences these contributions make to our imagination of Paul and the Corinthians will be so lively that one finds, in the end, a Paul that can barely be recognized. Or, to put it perhaps too playfully, I hope we find, in the end, a Paul we must "re-cognize."

1) The Formation of Paul: On the Emergence of Political Subjectivity and the Mission to the Gentiles

Riding the wave of postcolonial and empire-critical thought that has swept through the humanities and social sciences in recent decades, many contemporary students of the Pauline writings have begun to emphasize the "political" language and ideology found in the apostle's letters. More specifically, many interpreters of Paul, using resources drawn from the broad field of "postcolonialism," have begun to place a heavy focus on Paul's "anti-imperial" agenda.[6] Due to their insistence that Paul wrote with Roman imperial hegemony in his sights—and challenged or questioned that hegemony in his writings—this approach is distinguished from earlier studies which considered Paul's thought to be purely "religious" (and thus, apolitical) in nature. These aspects of Paul's thought have been variously termed anti- or counter-imperial, resistance, or—in a more postcolonial vein—as hybridity and mimicry. And while there may be some confusion as to the precise meaning of "the political" in these discussions (whether politics is conceived as statecraft, the art of governance, as community organization, or even as a form of insurgency), there is no doubt that the political "moment" of Paul's thought is a topic of great scholarly interest.

In many ways, this new development in Pauline studies represents a true methodological

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[6] The most influential proponent of this view is Richard A. Horsley, who has edited several volumes of essays placing Paul in his Roman imperial context. See especially his *Paul and Empire: Religion and Power in Roman Imperial Society* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 1997); idem, *Paul and the Roman Imperial Order* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 2004). Also noteworthy is the work of Neil Elliott, whose reading of Paul as an "anti-imperial" figure is explicitly political, finding in Paul an ideology of emancipation or "liberation." See "The Anti-Imperial Message of the Cross" in Horsley, *Paul and Empire*, 167-183.; idem, "The Apostle's Self-Presentation as Anti-Imperial Performance," in Horsley, *Paul and Empire*, 67-88. Similar perspectives on Paul's anti-imperial stance have been proposed by Helmut Koester, "Imperial Ideology and Paul's Eschatology in 1 Thessalonians," in Horsley, *Paul and Empire*, 158-66; Dieter Georgi, "God Turned Upside Down," in Horsley, *Paul and Empire*, 148-57; J.R. Harrison, "Paul and the Imperial Gospel at Thessaloniki," *JSNT* 25.1, 71-96, and others.

step forward, and recognizes the importance of Paul's own social world and the necessity of minding the realities of that world when interpreting his letters. However, when assessing much of this scholarship, one gets the sense that the conceptual pendulum may have swung too far in our readings of Paul's writings: where once they were read as purely "religious" (hence, not political), so now they may be read as purely "political" (hence: not religious, or barely so). Whether or not N.T. Wright is correct in his assessment that "to say that Paul opposed imperialism is about as politically dangerous as suggesting that he was in favour of sunlight, fresh air, and orange juice,"[7] there is undoubtedly a widespread tendency to read Paul's letters as polemics against the Roman *imperium*, and also a (slightly less) widespread inclination to invoke this polemic as a call for political action in our contemporary situation.[8] So influential is this tendency that Sze-kar Wan has argued that even the "collection for the poor" that Paul discusses in various places (Rom 15:25-28; 1 Cor 16:1-4; 2 Cor 8-9; Gal 2:10) was an "anti-colonial act."[9] Casting one's eye across our contemporary scholarly landscape, one gets the impression that many proponents of the "anti-imperial" Paul operate with a normative desire to portray him as something of a Hellenistic Frantz Fanon, author of such compelling tractates as "Judean Skin, Roman Masks," or "*hoi tailapōroi tēs gēs*.[10]

However, as Calvin Roetzel has pointed out in a response to Wan, the categorization of

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[7] Wright, N.T. "Paul's Gospel and Caesar's Empire," in Richard A. Horsley, ed., *Paul and Politics*, (Harrisburg: Trinity Press International, 2000), 164.

[8] To be clear, I do not mention these political agendas as a backhanded criticism. That the work of scholars like Horsley and Elliot has political implications is obvious—as indeed, *all* academic work has political implications of some kind, since there is no such thing as the "neutral" intellectual—and it may well be that such a heuristic enables Elliot to see aspects in the data that other, more explicitly "theological" heuristics might obscure. Yet there is no such thing as a cost-less theory, and, as I will argue in this chapter, the normative desire to see Paul as a starkly anti-imperial figure requires something of a distortion of the evidence, suggesting that the methodological "costs" of Elliott's heuristic somewhat outweigh its "benefits."

[9] Wan, Sze-Kar, "Collection for the Saints as Anticolonial Act: Implications of Paul's Ethnic Reconstruction," in Horsley, *Paul and Politics*, 191-215.

[10] I am referring, of course, to two famous works of Fanon's, *Black Skin, White Masks* and *The Wretched of the Earth*.

Paul as an anti-imperial activist working fervently towards decolonization is not credible unless this model can be reconciled with Romans 13.[11] Indeed, both Romans 13:1-7 and—and I would argue—1 Thess 4:9-12, cry out like the blood of Abel against any attempt to render Paul's "resistance" stark enough truly to justify the label, "*anti*-imperial." A more nuanced heuristic is required, which does not rely too heavily on the binaries of "resistance-affiliation," "condemnation-endorsement," or even "imperial-anti-imperial." By the same token, I will argue that we need to develop a reading strategy that does not treat the two terms, "religion and politics," as a *binary* or a *dichotomy*, but which integrates these concepts in a manner more in keeping with the historical realities of the ancient Mediterranean world in which Paul lived— indeed, one that is more in keeping with the realities of our own, contemporary world, where religion and politics are anything but separate.

Such a rethinking is needed, I argue, because the idea that Paul was writing in opposition to Rome may be overemphasized by a great deal of recent work. As John Barclay has argued, in a pithy formulation, the Roman empire may have been "insignificant to Paul *qua* the Roman empire." In other words, Paul did not operate within the hegemonic *doxa* of the Roman imperial order, nor see Rome as truly hegemonic, despite Rome's material and political dominance of his life-world. Perhaps, by contrast, Paul's subjectivity had been transformed by a "truth-event" or "situational rupture" (Badiou), which allowed him to *recognize* the importance (not to mention reality) of Roman domination while also *relativizing* Rome as "bit players" within a much larger drama. Analyzing Paul's rhetoric, one finds it does not *invert* Roman ideology so much as *subvert* it by diverting attention away from it. Paul, having himself been interpellated[12] into the

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[11] Roetzel, Calvin J. "RESPONSE: How Anticolonial Was the Collection and How Emancipatory Was Paul's Project?" in Horsley, *Paul and Politics*, 228.

[12] As always, I use interpellation in its Althusserian sense, as developed in his essay "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses." For a brilliant elaboration of this concept, see now Judith Butler, *The Psychic Life of Power:*

Jesus movement, is operating within a new ideology, with a new conception of agency into which he attempts to interpellate his *ekklesiai*, rather than to bring them into a contrapuntal mode of being-within the Roman imperial order. In this regard, the Paulinist "insurrection"[13] comes about via a destabilization of identities that renders his thought far *more* political than a simple opposition would allow. As Karl Galinsky has similarly observed, Paul's thought and practice, far more than a simple anti-imperialism, is better conceived in terms of "surpassing" or "superiority," as a practice of *outbidding* the claims of empire. Galinsky points to Paul's citation of "'peace and security' (1 Thess 5:3) and [the] resonances of the terminology one finds, though by no means uniformly, in inscriptions pertaining to the imperial cult. The emperor is a guarantor of peace, provider of material blessings, savior, and so on. Paul's message is not anti-imperial, but *supra*imperial: the emperor and the dispensations of empire only go so far. They are surpassed, in a far more perfect way, by God and the kingdom of heaven."[14]

Our goal, in this chapter as well as this study as a whole, will be to rethink Paul's relation to the political, by providing a series of theoretically creative readings of various aspects of Paul's Corinthian correspondence. The goal is *not* simply to describe—or even redescribe—*what* Paul was doing as he traveled through the Roman East, founding his assemblies, earning his keep, and writing his letters, nor even to explain, in theoretical terms, *how* he was doing it (processes of social formation, discursive practices of interpellation, etc.). By contrast, the goal must be to explain—to provide a theory of—*why* he was doing it. And to do this, we need a theory of religion that can take Paul's subjectivity into account and explain his formation as an

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Theories in Subjection (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997).

[13] I take this term from Blanton, Crockett, Robbins, and Vahanian, *An Insurrectionist Manifesto: Four New Gospels for a Radical Politics*. For their elaboration, of their theory of insurrection as creation of new political possibilities, see their co-written "Introduction," 1-20.

[14] Galinsky, "In the Shadow (or not) of the Imperial Cult," 222

Apostle of Jesus Christ, devoted to taking his message to the Gentile nations—and can thus explain how this political project emerged and took shape.

Surprisingly (or not), this is a question that has rarely been broached by Pauline scholars. The reason is as obvious as it is problematic: we already think we know the answer. After two thousand years of Christian tradition, when the phrase "Damascus road experience" is a byword for a miraculous and instantaneous transformation, it is all-too-easy to assume that we already know why Paul was writing to "his" assemblies, why he was interested in extending his Judean identity to all peoples, and why he devoted his existence to the project of proclaiming a crucified messiah as a way of demonstrating that his god, Theos, preferred the dregs and dross of humankind to the wealthy, beautiful, and powerful—that, indeed, Theos preferred things that as yet had no being to things already in existence. Whether derived from traditional, popular, Christian imagination or more pluralistic notions of an experience of the generalized sacred, the idea that Paul had a "life-changing experience" of some kind, after which he "believed" he had been called to spread his message to the Gentile nations, has been considered a sufficient explanation for his activity.

In fact, this non-explanation is considered so sufficient that the question is hardly ever considered by Pauline scholars. Consider, for example, the work of Burton Mack, whose social redescriptions of Christian origins were foundational for the work of the Redescribing Christian Origins seminar. In his 1988 *A Myth of Innocence*, Mack simply states that "Paul was converted to a Hellenized form of some Jesus movement that had already developed into a Christ cult."[15] Though Mack acknowledges that Paul's letters reveal that he "struggled with the strange new gospel" prior to his "conversion," he also warns that "Paul's letters are to be read with a very

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[15] Burton L. Mack, *A Myth of Innocence: Mark and Christian Origins* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1988), 98.

critical eye. His own reports of his precipitous turnabout should alert the reader to the possibility that Paul's description of the gospel might be overly dramatized. His first encounters with the Jesus people had angered him. His claim was that his anger stemmed from zeal for the traditions of his fathers (Gal 1:14), but one suspects a special brittleness about the zeal on Paul's part." Mack's "psychologizing" interpretation of Paul—oddly out of place in a study of the *social* history of early Christianity—might appear to take Paul's subjectivity into account, but does not seem to consider his "conversion" and subjective transformation or restructuring as a problem to be explained. In any case, his descriptions are contradictory: in the same paragraph, Mack states both that Paul's gospel "really may have been his own construction, the product of *a brilliant mind*, a *sensitive spirit*, and a stimulating but painfully irresolvable conflict of cultures," and that Paul's claims "are obvious signs of an *unstable, authoritarian person*."[16] To make matters worse, in his 1995 *Who Wrote the New Testament?* Mack further displays an inability to take any conception of subjective transformations or "experiences" seriously when he offers this scenario as a redescription of Paul's "conversion":

> Paul ran into Christians (sic) on his own turf and, as he said, "was violently persecuting [or pursuing] the church of God and was trying to destroy it" (Gal 1:13). What, possibly, could have *changed his mind*? Only two *thoughts* were necessary, one of which would have been *extremely painful* for a Jew such as Paul, but possible nonetheless, and the other *quite attractive* once *assent* had been given to the first. The first thought was that the Christians might be right. What *if* [emphasis original] they were right? What if gentiles did not need to be circumcised in order to belong to the people of God? *That* [emphasis original] thought must have been revolutionary for such a person as Paul. The

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[16] Mack, *Myth of Innocence*, 98, emphasis added.

other was that, if so, the time had come and the door was opened for a concerted mission to the nations. *That* thought must have been electrifying. Suddenly the importance Paul had been attaching to the presence of Judaism in the greater Greco-Roman world would have turned incandescent…Paul *switched*. He *decided* that the Christians were right.[17]

Note the manner in which Mack consistently casts Paul's "conversion" as a matter of thought, deliberation, ratiocination, and assent. Granted, this is a *redescription* of Paul's conversion, based upon an intellectualist theory of religion as developed by Jonathan Z. Smith, who has often argued that "it is the perception of incongruity that gives rise to thought." I do not disagree with this theory, nor do I disagree that there was an incongruity that Paul perceived, and that he did, at some level work out this incongruity based upon the cultural resources available to him. However, I do not accept this as an *explanation* of Paul's conversion, because Mack does not explain *why* Paul *perceived* incongruity in the first place. What was the "situational incongruity" to which Paul was responding? What was the nature of the incongruity that made it so "irresolvable"? This would need to be taken into account before Paul's conversion could be *explained*, and my wager is that such an explanation would occasion a very different redescription.

Beyond the Damascus Road: On the Emergence of Paul's Apostolic Subjectivity

Beginning to work toward an explanation of the subjective transformation Paul experienced, we can take note of some of Mack's indications as to where the roots of such an explanation might

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[17] Burton L. Mack, *Who Wrote the New Testament? The Making of the Christian Myth* (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1995), 102. Unless explicitly noted, all emphases in this quote have been added.

lie. Just as he argues, Paul would have come into contact with Jesus-people who were claiming that members of the Gentile nations did not need to be circumcised in order to belong to the people of God. Paul, for some reason, clearly came to believe that these Jesus-people were correct. I believe Mack is correct to refer to the "aura of incandescence" that would have surrounded such a notion, and the affective shock of such an insight, once reached, would have a coruscating effect on Paul's self-understanding and his future activity. But Paul's transformation, by its very nature, cannot be convincingly described as a process of reasoning, no matter how rigorous, any more than his "conversion" can be convincingly portrayed as miraculous and instantaneous; in the context of the humanities and social sciences—based upon naturalistic, historical-materialist, and anthropological premises—both accounts are equally-implausible products of "mystification," rather than the results of disciplined critical inquiry. Human thought and behavior are not predictively determined by the algorithmic demands of symbolic logic, nor can any human experience truly be "unconditioned" by *either* the salient social formations and cultural orders in which it obtains *or* the constitutive biological deep histories and intransigent bodily affectivities that set the material stage upon which human life is "played."

To describe and explain Paul's conversion, though it occupies a further section of this investigation, is not our ultimate goal. But it is only after providing an historically plausible and anthropologically valid—in a word, *humanly possible*—account of Paul's "emergence" as an apostle of Jesus Christ that we can begin to elaborate theoretically the precise nature of Paul's activity. I am aware, of course, that this enterprise might seem wrongheaded from the outset, given certain widespread understandings of "religion." Why, it might be asked, should we even attempt—let alone expect—to find the emergence of a political subjectivity in the proverbial "Damascus road experience," which is perhaps *the* canonical example of a "religious

conversion" in both popular and scholarly imagination? (Just as Siddhartha Gautama under the

Bodhi tree would be the textbook case of "enlightenment," and Moses on Mt Sinai the

quintessential scene of "theophany.") Such confusion about the nature of religion is, I would

argue, not only endemic but is, in fact, symptomatic of the way religion is widely conceived in

our twenty-first century globalized capitalist culture. Through providing a fully supportive

argument for such a statement is far beyond my scope, both in this chapter and the study as a

whole, a few remarks will indicate the extent to which this holds true.

Most important, for our purposes here, is the generally-shared notion that "religion" is a

private matter; it is a matter of individual concern, freed from social and political considerations.

It is held to be a matter of personal "belief," and not political belonging, a matter of feeling,

rather than thought. So prevalent is this latter opposition of feeling vs. reasoning that all too often

"social" (as opposed to individualist or phenomenological) descriptions of "religious" belonging

and behavior simply portray these activities as matters of vested (material or political) interests,

as if those engaging in religious practice are doing so under the sway of some form of

ideological compulsion. On the other hand, theologically or apologetically-oriented scholars of

religion (or of early Christianity, in our present case) often eschew references to religious

"experience" altogether, in order to protect the earliest Jesus-people or Christ-believers from

charges of "irrationality" and/or "superstition." In both cases, "religion" is understood as being

opposed to rational thought *in general*. Discussions of religion such as these, from both sides of

the humanistic and fideistic divide, tend to shy away from allowing "religious experience" to be

a thoughtful mode in which social actors engage the world around them. In order to explain

Paul's conversion, however, I argue that such reticence will have to be left by the wayside.

Especially, the valorization of forms of ratiocination and deliberation against notions of

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"belief" or "experience" in many social theories of religious change and activity is a reflection of the European Enlightenment provenance of the modern Academy in general, and the study of religion in particular. Here, reason and cultural rationality are prized above other forms of knowledge-gathering and "reality-testing." Thus, whether we are studying contemporary non Euro-American cultures or pre-modern ones, a certain form of rationality has come to be preferentially valued in the study of these cultures—simply because it is so valued in the culture doing the studying. This ethnocentric bias has been increasingly recognized in recent scholarship, and corrective attempts have been made. Among other names, this bias has come to be known as "cognicentrism," and is recognized as a stance rooted in the perspectives of the scientific enlightenment that occurred at the dawn of modernity, prizing "the idea of objective truth as the product of critical thinking stripped of personal investment," and thus free from emotional or affective dimensions of human experience. Though this notion of "objective" knowing might be portrayed as value-free and non-judgmental by design, in fact the "cognicentric stance purports to arbitrate what counts as acceptable knowledge as well as what counts as acceptable ways of coming to know."[18]

One unfortunate consequence of the normativity of cognicentric terminology and conceptions, in the study of Paul at least, is that the question of his "emergence" as an apostle, his subjective transformation from one "violently persecuting the assembly of God and trying to destroy it" (Gal 1:3) to one so convinced that members of the Gentile nations could be part of that assembly—and, indeed, could actually become descendants of Abraham—that he embarked upon a career of bringing that message of inclusion to "the nations," has been a question largely

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[18] Colleen Shantz, *Paul in Ecstasy: The Neurobiology of the Apostle's Life and Thought*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

answered in one of two ways. The first is simply *mystification*, which essentially reduces to asserting that something "inexplicable" happened. The second can be described as some kind of *logical narration*, outlining a step-by-step process of deliberation and reasoning in which Paul convinced himself that Gentiles could achieve inclusion in Israel through participation in Christ. This is odd because, when one looks at Paul's own writings, he constantly tells us exactly how it happened: through a series of "visions" and other experiences that the modern scholar of religion should have no trouble recognizing as "ecstatic experiences."

To be quite clear, my objection to such "narratives" as these is not that they are inherently implausible: something like these lines of reasoning, and something like these "insights" must have occurred to Paul in *some* manner or other in order for him to reach the conclusions he did. And, in fact, one of the strengths of such proposals is that they *do* recognize these conclusions precisely *as* conclusions, outcomes of a *process*, as opposed to ideas that sprang into Paul's mind fully formed. But our challenge is to move beyond the Paul of heroic reasoning, an intrepid adventurer of ruthless logic, and toward a Paul who *developed* his gospel over time, more or less exactly in the manner he claims to have done. That is, we must develop a new image of Paul, and begin to "re-cognize" him as an ecstatic practitioner, and give the knowledge-gathering effects of his ecstatic experience their due.

The recognition of ecstatic experience as a formative factor in Paul's thought is not a new insight. As Colleen Shantz writes in her study of ecstasy in Paul's life, many scholars have admitted that Paul's experience(s) must have informed his discourse and activity in ways not normally addressed by the methods of Pauline scholarship—rhetorical criticism, "mirror" reconstruction, social-historical investigation of material contexts, and so forth. In fact Shantz reports her general finding, after thoroughly researching scholarship on Paul's ecstatic practice,

that "many scholars would like to address their sense that Paul's experience contributed to his theology but have no means of exploring the connection in a disciplined manner," being forced instead to resort to cognicentric terminology.[19] But then, as Shantz also argues, the seemingly-grudging reliance upon cognicentric concepts and conceptualizations as a putative "last resort" might be more apparent than sincere. In my view, it is not as though non-cognicentric terminology has truly been tried and found wanting; rather, it has been found untheorized and left untried. Even when "experience" is given some weight as a causal factor in Paul's development of his "apostolic" subjectivity, one must admit that "the understanding of experience is often not very robust or even very realistic," resulting in proposals that are only plausible or even "possible only with a rather thin understanding of experience and knowing."[20] In such a form, one must ultimately affirm that the notion of Paul's experience being deployed is "de facto cognicentric—it is the amassing of theological constructs and their expansion through a reflection on scripture."[21] Again, Paul appears as the champion of reasoning, with no trace of ecstatic practice or of what might be termed "mysticism."

This is nowhere more true than in the case of Albert Schweitzer, whose book, *The Mysticism of Paul the Apostle*, bears a title that sounds as though it would take the importance of Paul's experience very seriously, while avoiding the bias of cognicentrism. Alas, this is not the case. Though "mysticism" has often served as a "straw man" in certain Christian apologetic efforts to reduce the importance of ecstatic religious experience in the "New Testament church" and thus remove scriptural warrant for such practice in contemporary churches, Schweitzer's own treatment of mysticism is more complex. Indeed, one might almost call it a "schizoid"

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[19] Shantz, *Paul in Ecstasy*, 111.
[20] Shantz, *Paul in Ecstasy*, 112.
[21] Shantz, *Paul in Ecstasy*, 112.

approach to mysticism, characterized as it is by an odd combination of attraction and repulsion. That is to say, "Schweitzer stands out from his contemporaries because he both championed mysticism as a prevalent and central aspect of Paul's thought and, at the same time, reduced that mysticism to *conceptual* aspects stripped of any but incidental *experiential* components. So, on the one hand, Schweitzer uses the term 'Christ-mysticism' and introduces the notion of 'being in Christ' to describe Paul's distinctive insights…and, breaking with the dominant tradition of his time, he describes Paul's understanding of righteousness by faith as merely 'a subsidiary crater which has formed within the rim of…redemption through the being-in-Christ.'"[22] In a move that will be hugely significant to our understanding of Paul's emerging "gospel" and a defining feature of his political project, Schweitzer recognized the importance of participation in Christ as Paul's central concept, and was able to see certain features of his thought that have inordinately preoccupied legions of interpreters—such as the idea of freedom from the law—as essentially "side effects" of that core insight.

This was not all that Schweitzer had to say about Paul's mysticism, however, and the deeper he delved into his discussion of the topic, the less seriously he seemed to take it. Rather than providing visceral, bodily impetus to the formation of Paul's concept of being-in-Christ, Paul's mysticism is, for Schweitzer, "always a synthetic, intellectual construct, and the relation of Paul's actual experience to his mysticism is incidental and perhaps confirmatory, but never initiatory."[23] To illustrate, we might consider Schweitzer's reading of Paul's discussion of "dying and rising with Christ" in Romans 6, which is undoubtedly a participatory notion and—one might be forgiven for thinking—likely a viscerally meaningful one, as well. Considering the

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[22]Shantz, *Paul in Ecstasy*, 27.
[23] Shantz, *Paul in Ecstasy*, 29.

various lists and catalogs of sufferings Paul has scattered through his surviving writings, one need not "read into" the passage too deeply to imagine a connection between those sufferings and an experience of "dying with" the one with whom one shares one's being. But no, not for Schweitzer. On his telling, the connection is purely logical rather than pathological. As Shantz relates, "for Schweitzer, Paul's occasions of suffering did not provide for him an experience best conceived as dying with Christ, that he was then able to articulate as a principle; rather, because he had formulated the principle of suffering as dying with Christ, he was then able to see his own experience in that same light."[24] This order of progression, *from* discursive articulation *to* experiential verification, obtains throughout Schweitzer's text. He consistently, even torturously, maintains that "experience has no meaning without the template of articulated doctrine." And while he "frequently admits that the reasons behind Paul's various theological positions remain obscure," he also "asserts that only the most linear reasoning lies behind them, reasoning that Schweitzer himself must often supply."[25]

Schweitzer, of course, is hardly alone in devaluing experience in general, and ecstatic experience in particular, as a resource for creativity and insight. That is, after all, perhaps *the* hallmark of cognicentrism. But Schweitzer is indeed "remarkable" in the lengths to which he goes "to avoid the category of visionary experience in assessing Paul." One might wish to give him a mark of distinction among cognicentric Pauline scholars for the sheer relentlessness of his effort to "so thoroughly and insightfully at one and the same time to explore mystical *thought* and equally thoroughly reject mystical *experience*."[26] But regardless of the cognicentric terminology and rejection of ecstatic (or "mystical") experience, we are still indebted to

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[24] Shantz, *Paul in Ecstasy*, 29.
[25] Shantz, *Paul in Ecstasy*, 29.
[26] Shantz, *Paul in Ecstasy*, 31, emphasis original.

Schweitzer, at the very least, for highlighting the importance of Paul's "participatory" understanding of being-in-Christ. And, as James Hanges puts it, whether we "accept the details of Schweitzer's analysis or not, it should be clear that Paul's 'in Christ' language takes us beyond the realm of concepts alone and into the realm of experience." And what an intimate experience it is that Paul describes, to such a point that he "can use terms to refer to the believer's relationship to Christ that normally would be used to describe sexual union. These terms occur in contexts which also speak of the union of members in one body (e.g., 1 Cor 6:15, cf. 12:12-27). In these, as well as in other passages Paul can easily exchange 'Christ in us' for 'we in Christ' without producing any fundamental semantic difference. The metaphor of the community as the temple of the Holy Spirit makes the church the corporate locus of the sacred."[27]

The experiential component of the Christ-followers, those who have "put on" and "are one in" Christ (Gal 3:27-28), all participating in the "body of Christ" is given stricter definition by the language Paul uses to describe that experience. In using this language, he moves us closer to an anthropological understanding of the type of phenomenon the notion of "being-in-Christ" seems to refer to. We should note that "Paul makes firm lines of distinction impossible between phrases constructed with Christ and those that use the spirit…Christ is the *pneuma* ("spirit," 2 Cor 3:17) and therefore immediate to the believing community. He is the 'last Adam,' a life-giving spirit (1 Cor 15:45)…Hence, in describing membership Paul can express the notion of being in the church by making synonymous the phrases 'in Christ' and 'in the Spirit' (Phil 1:13; 3:9; 4:7)."[28] Such notions of a "mutuality of being"[29] between the Christ-followers evokes a strong sense of kinship and identification, while confirming Schweitzer's own observation

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[27] James C. Hanges, *Christ, the Image of the Church* (Aurora, CO: The Davies Group Publishers, 2006), 106.
[28] Hanges, *Christ the Image*, 103.
[29] Marshall Sahlins, *What Kinship Is—And Is Not* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013).

regarding the importance of "participation" as a concept in Paul's discourse.

The cognicentrism of Schweitzer's researches might be more dramatic than some other examples, but it is not rare. It is part and parcel of a more general problem in the study of Christian origins, which is the unquestioned acceptance of a "history of ideas" approach as a viable and appropriate method of study. While this approach is hardly limited to the study of Christian origins, it is especially insidious in that data domain because it maps so easily on to "common-sense," Euro-American cultural notions of religion as private and personal, a matter of beliefs and convictions, as focused on "spiritual" matters as opposed to social ones, and above all as being focused on "otherworldly" concerns, hardly influenced by "this-worldly" conditions and processes. Though the very distinctions between private-public, spiritual-material, and so on are themselves products of a very specific—and very political—history, the effect of their widespread acceptance is the unquestioned—and for many, perhaps unquestionable—assumption that religion (or, at least, "true" religion) is (or, at least, should be) apolitical at its core. This precept, if accepted, can do and has done much mischief in attempts to theorize religion as a social, human phenomenon. It has also hindered attempts to take Paul's ecstatic experience seriously as a biographically significant datum. This returns us to our problem of the neglect of the experiential side of Paul's formation and subjective transformation into an apostle of Christ to the Gentiles. Cognicentric bias is not always to blame for this neglect. Sometimes, as a direct result of the insistence that religion must be apolitical, it has also been treated as ahistorical and therefore *unconditioned* by the social, cultural, and material contexts in which those experiences appear. As a result, experience has either been neglected as incidental, with respect to the discourses and practices in which Paul engaged, or dismissed as uninformative, with respect to *why* Paul said and did these things. Though this neglect and dismissal frequently appears

alongside cognicentric distrust of experience, it is important to our project of theory-building that the two are recognized as separate heuristic problems.

One attempt to provide an account of Paul's emergent "apostolic subjectivity" is provided by Terence Donaldson, though both of the above-mentioned problems hurt his project. In an admirably disciplined though thoroughly cognicentric study of Paul's "convictional world" and the effect of his "conversion" upon that world, Donaldson argues that the "transformational event" was Paul's "vision of" or "encounter with" the risen Christ, for which the Damascus road experience often serves as shorthand. But, as both Shantz[30] and Hanges have noted, Donaldson's account is thoroughly bound by cognicentric terminology and devoid of any real notion of experience rich enough to allow him to admit Paul's bodily experience as a meaningful factor in his subjective transformation. Thus, while Donaldson's account is more thorough than Mack's discussion of Paul's "conversion," it is nonetheless hindered by a heuristic that functions more as a blinder than a useful interpretive lens. As Hanges relates, Donaldson may begin by admitting Paul's "encounter" with the risen Christ as the major factor in his subjective reorientation, but "[n]o sooner than one might begin to wonder if Donaldson has departed the world of ideas for the realm of non-rational, ecstatic experience, he makes clear that while it was transformative, Paul's Damascus road experience transformed, without destroying, his past convictional world into his future understanding of the relationship between the Torah and Christ. Whatever non-rationality might have been associated with the encounter was limited."[31] Again, we are left well within the framework of cognicentrism. The insistence, first of all, that Paul had an "encounter with," and not just a "vision of," the risen Christ speaks to the persistent valorization of

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[30] Shantz, *Paul in Ecstasy*, 11.
[31] Hanges, *Christ the Image of the Church*, 135.

objectivity, as opposed to admitting the reality of subjective experiences, which—though no less experientially real—still do not carry enough weight to "change Paul's mind" regarding the significance of Christ for the history of God's people. Experience can only confirm what linear reasoning has first determined. As Hanges describes Donaldson's "scenario," highlighting the synthetic, intellectualist role of experience in the process of Paul's becoming-apostle, here "Paul must have first come to accept the possibility that a Christ-centered mission to the Gentiles was a reasonable possibility before he ever could have understood a call to carry out such a thing. Yet interestingly, Donaldson believes that this could not have first come to Paul's mind at Damascus [or wherever the experience(s) occurred]—only later experience could have provided a basis for understanding such a call."[32] Above all Donaldson shares with Schweitzer the conviction that Paul's development of his message and the conception of his mission was the outcome of a *thought* process, comprised of the strictest *reasoning*. For Donaldson, the conception of his "call" was a "cognitive shift for Paul and it is the cognitive dimension of the experience that primarily interests Donaldson; in his view all this is a matter of propositional logic."[33]

In order to clarify what precisely is at stake here, it is important to note that, while the cognicentric focus of these discussions of Paul's subjective transformation is objectionable, it is nonetheless also closely tied to an appropriate methodological caution. When treating such categories as "experience" in historical studies, we must be mindful of what, precisely, it is possible for us to know or to hypothesize, since subjective experience cannot be directly engaged by historical methods. But this does not mean that experiential factors cannot be defensibly taken into account, nor does it ensure that declining to speak about subjective experience directly will

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[32] Hanges, *Christ the Image of the Church*, 136.
[33] Hanges, *Christ the Image of the Church*, 136. Cf. Terry L. Donaldson, *Paul and the Gentiles: Remapping the Apostle's Convictional World* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1997), 236, 304.

protect one from imputing subjective knowledge in one's historical account. As Shantz explains,

> [p]art of the reticence to explore Paul's religious experience has been the appropriate
> caution that we cannot know his mind. Yet, although the general caution is warranted, it
> is not best addressed by simply ignoring or sidestepping the whole category of experience
> because when we avoid the attempt to examine experience explicitly we do not secure
> ourselves against the error of pretending we know Paul's mind' in fact, we are still
> making de facto claims about it, but doing so without theoretical awareness. Our silence
> is not sufficient to bracket out the internal world because what he has written simply
> expands to fill the space of his cranium. We end up with statements that catalog all the
> things Paul somehow "knew"; whatever we can describe "objectively" on the basis of the
> hard data of rhetoric and philology becomes by default the content of Paul's mind. Thus,
> in turn, Paul becomes by default someone who read and reflected on texts and picked and
> chose between cultural elements in much the same way we academics do when we study
> them. Rhetorical practice, textual parallels, mirror reconstructions, and theological
> conventions become, in the silence of other factors, the mind of Paul.[34]

This returns us to our earlier question of what, exactly, was the situational incongruity that Paul perceived, and what made it seem so "irresolvable" that it occasioned a profound subjective transformation? I would argue that it was precisely the ecstatic experience of "spirit possession" among Gentile Jesus-followers that occasioned Paul's perception of incongruity. This is a thesis that, in different ways, both Hanges and Shantz have presented.

To make sense of this claim, we should recall Mack's thesis that Paul was "converted" to

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[34] Shantz, *Paul in Ecstasy*, 209.

a Hellenized form of some Jesus movement when, after "violently persecuting" them, he changed his mind after having two necessary thoughts: that the Gentile nations did not need to be circumcised in order to become part of God's people, and that the time was right for a mission to those nations. I have been arguing that thought, ratiocination, and propositional logic is not a sufficient explanation for Paul's subjective transformation. I have argued, along with Shantz and Hanges, for allowing "experience," and particularly ecstatic experience, to be considered as a causal factor in the emergence of Paul's apostolic subjectivity. This is a notion that Mack's account, like Schweitzer's before him and Donaldson's after, does not allow. Hanges' comments apropos of Donaldson might well be applied to Mack's or any number of other accounts when he writes that Donaldson

> seems uninterested in the fact that Paul, like all human beings, experienced his own experiences as a part of a world filled with experiencing others…Donaldson may well be correct to place Paul's convictional reconfiguration against a background in which he originally persecuted a Hellenistic Jewish form of Jesusism.[35] Yet, this necessarily means that Paul experienced those he persecuted experiencing not only the persecution he inflicted upon them but also probably something of their religious experience as devotees of Jesus, in particular their ecstatic spirit-possession. It is not speculative psychologizing to assume that what he witnessed affected the reconfiguration of his convictional world…Nevertheless, despite the implications of this admission for the role of experience, Donaldson denies that Paul inferred from this personally observed fact of Gentile inclusion the functional displacement of the Torah as the criterion of election….

[35]By "Jesusism," Hanges refers to the earlier Jesus movements that accepted the "special," perhaps even "messianic," role of Jesus in Israel's mythic history but did not accept that he held a higher place in Israelite tradition than Moses or the Torah.

The bottom line is that one cannot suppose that Paul's antithesis was formulated first on the basis of theological wrestlings that produced his mission without the status of Gentiles he had already witnessed in the churches playing a role.[36]

Hanges' implied point about the efficaciousness of ecstatic practice in attracting people into the social formations of the earliest Christ-followers is well-taken and important. Despite the impression given in the narrative of Acts, in which Paul's message is spread solely through preaching, Paul's own writings consistently claim exactly the opposite: preaching seems to have had very little to do with how the message was spread. As Shantz notes, Paul often "explicitly reminds the recipients of some extraordinary corporate manifestation that accompanied their reception of his message (e.g., 2 Cor 12:12; Gal 3:1-3; 1 Thess 1:5), and the surviving correspondence with Corinth suggests that such manifestations were central to the continued participation of some of the members, although troublesome to the community as a whole." It may even be that phenomena associated with ecstasy "served to convince the Jerusalem leadership that the time to include Gentiles had arrived. By these means, religious experience [would have] had both a motivational and an apologetic force in earliest Christianity."[37]

Further, Shantz holds "that something emotionally powerful and viscerally dramatic lies behind the call text," and "that Paul's own subjective engagement is a fundamental ingredient in his call," but "would temper the cognicentric focus" we have perceived in certain scholarly discussions of the call. For Shantz, the bottom line is that "[s]omething more than conscious reasoning is at work in Paul's shift in identity, and attention to the nature of religious experience helps to name what that 'something' is. Paul's experience of union with Christ during the peak of

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[36] Hanges, *Christ the Image*, 137-138, 141, referencing Donaldson, *Paul and the Gentiles*, 287-288, 165-170, 173.
[37] Shantz, *Paul in Ecstasy*, 207-208.

neurological tuning, as well as his repeated perception that the divine spirit inhabited or possessed him, created in Paul a knowledge of resources beyond his own.…So—to put the implications in an extreme, if hypothetical, form—even the 'objective' appearance of the 'real' risen Christ on the road to Damascus would not have been sufficient for what came of Paul's life. The compelling and embodied knowing of ecstatic experience is necessary (though by no means sufficient) to account for Paul's christianity."[38]

Having made these caveats, and keeping them in mind, I will say that Mack's redescription project, as it is applied to Paul, represents one of the few attempts to deal with Paul's conversion in any "theoretical" way relevant to the study of religion as part of the human sciences. As noted, many scholars simply accept the traditional picture of his conversion and move on. With this "explanation" so entrenched that it now goes without saying, scholars can then go about the "real work" of discussing Paul's subsequent activities. Upon reflection, however, this self-evidence cannot be allowed to stand. We need to develop a way to discuss Paul's activity as something that is *problematic*, rather than assumed. Rather than simply redescribing Paul's activity, his relation to a previous Jesus tradition, his reception (or lack of it) by various audiences, and explaining why his message was "attractive" (or not) to those audiences, we need to see Paul's activity as *itself* something that needs to be explained. In a word, we need to provide a theory of what we have come to think of as Paul's "conversion," in order to explain how he began to develop his thought and engage in his activity in the first place. And, in order to do that, we must use a theory that takes the political nature of "religion" into account, rather than separating "the religious" and "the political" from the outset. We need a theory that can account for religion as part and parcel of how political subjectivities are formed,

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[38] Shantz, *Paul in Ecstasy*, 208.

rather than relegating it to a private sphere. In a word, we need a theory that explains how the human individual "enters" the socio-symbolic order and, through processes of identification, "emerges" as a religio-political *subject*.

Recognizing this, one begins to grasp an explanation for a certain awkwardness among proponents of the "anti-imperial" Paul. In social-historical terms, it is hardly surprising that Paul would use the language of his day when portraying Christ as a powerful figure or a ruler, or that Paul's descriptive terms for his assemblies and the constituents of those assemblies would be drawn from ancient Greek political thought. But, when these scholars begin to argue that Paul's *activity*, and not just his *vocabulary*, had a political edge, they often treat this aspect of the apostle's practice as something *surprising*. It is as if Paul, the religious virtuoso, should have only dealt with "theological" topics, and not engaged in anything like political praxis. But when, lo and behold, one encounters a political resonance in his formulations, suddenly the religious aspect of his thought is cast aside as incidental, as a theological "husk" containing the political "kernel" of his thought. It is as if an ancient figure such as Paul cannot be taken seriously as having a political orientation unless his thought has first passed through the purgative veil of secularity; as if no social actor can truly enter the infernal realm of the political without passing through a portal, above whose lofty arch is inscribed, "Abandon all religion, ye who enter here." But such an understanding, either of "the religious" *or* "the political," cannot be justified either historically or theoretically. To treat "religion" as an apolitical aspect of human life, or to imagine that it is somehow separable from larger sets of social and cultural processes, is an ideological side effect of how life is perceived in our own, globalized capitalist modernity, where religious belief and belonging are imagined to be relegated to a so-called private sphere, and is not considered to be a relevant predicate of any individual when it comes to participation in

public life. But it is fairly clear that—regardless of how religion might be *imagined* or rhetorically *portrayed* as private, asocial, apolitical, and free of historical conditioning—such a portrayal is patently false: religion has never been free of politics and economics. In fact, in the ancient Mediterranean world, it is not much of an exaggeration to say that religion *was* politics and economics. Even in the contemporary North American context in which I am writing, it is clear that what is generally stipulated by these two categories, the religious and the political, cannot be separated. Granted, they may not be wholly identical, but there nonetheless exists a point at which they are indistinguishable, as in—to use the most elementary illustrations—the intersection of two circles or the line of contact between two planes. And even if we set aside for the moment the putative difficulty of defining "religion" (to which I will return later), and simply provide a "minimalist" definition of politics as "the actions human beings take to change their fate, especially the actions taken by human beings with the power to affect the fate of others,"[39] it quickly becomes clear that "religious" activities may be the most political type of activity that human beings can engage in. To change one's eternal fate and obtain a blessed state in the Hereafter, human beings have variously engaged in unbelievable acts of self-renunciation, abjection, and contrition, as well as stunning acts of violence, murder, and genocide. When one considers its power and potential to affect the fates of "others" (whether they are outsiders to one's own group, or insiders that one perceives as needing "guidance" or "correction"), the history of "religion" reveals it to be the most rhetorically forceful means of motivating, coercing, or forcing people in a direction that will, in one way or another, "seal their fate." With apologies to Clausewitz, "religion" thus appears to be "politics" pursued by other means—more aggressive, more symbolic, and indeed, more *aggressively symbolic* than other forms of political

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[39] Constantin Fasolt, *The Limits of History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), xiii.

activity, perhaps, but still it seems the political aspect of "religion" is *structural*—that is, endemic to and constitutive of "religious" activity—and not incidental: political effects are the norm, not an aberration. To study this aspect of the Pauline writings, we need a theory of "religion" that can take these complexities and considerations into account.

Signs But Not Wonders: Toward a Semiotic Theory of Christian Beginnings

In what follows, I want to present an outline of a semiotic theory of religion. This theory was developed by Tim Murphy, and forms not only a theory of socio-political transformation, but also a theory of "religious" persistence and change, as well as a basic definition of what we mean by "religion." Introducing these theoretical insights, illustrating certain key concepts, and establishing a vocabulary will set the stage for what follows in the remainder of this project.

Before outlining Murphy's theory, however, it will be helpful to make explicit some of the advantages I can see in adopting a semiotic model to discuss Paul's activity. An unfortunate aspect of semiotic theory, generally, has always been its over-reliance on technical terms, which have rendered it inaccessible and largely uninteresting to non-specialists. But Murphy's model is notable for its ability to explain religious traditions as ongoing products of semiotic constructions and displacements without recourse to problematic phenomenological or essentialist explanations, *while also* avoiding the pitfall of obscurantism.[40]

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[40] In this, Murphy's theoretical proposal resonates closely with another, developed independently of both Murphy and Smith, by the anthropologist Marshall Sahlins. In his essay "Individual Experience and Cultural Order," *Culture in Practice: Selected Essays* (New York: Zone Books, 2000), 277-291, Sahlins attempts to mesh the Structuralist concept of "reproduction" together with what we may provisionally term the Marxist concept of "transformation"—though the notion of historical change and development is by no means unique to Marxism—in order to account for continuity and change within a cultural order. Like Murphy, Sahlins also relies upon the classic distinction between language as a system (*langue*) and language as an act of articulation (*parole*). Sahlins

It should also be noted that, while Murphy does characterize religion as the interplay between a "canon" and a "hermeneute," this should not encourage us to limit our understanding of "canon" to textual material, or of the "hermeneute" to a scribal figure. Indeed, it would be a mistake to limit the constituents of this interplay to such things as beliefs or ideas in general. This cautionary note resonates closely with two recent major attempts to place the study of religion upon a sturdy materialist—as opposed to idealist or discursive—theoretical basis, those of Manuel Vasquez[41] and Donovan Schaefer.[42] As Schaefer writes, to "reduce religion to a contraption of beliefs disrupts our ability to grasp how religion produces politically engaged religious bodies."[43] The thoroughly cognicentric stance Schaefer is critiquing may be as good as orthodoxy in many of the human sciences, a "discourse ontology" that ironically insists that there essentially is no *being*, but only *becoming*, that these structures of becoming are cultural in nature, linguistic in form, and that—to rephrase the old joke—it's discourse *all the way down*.

The problem with such discursive limitation—or, if one prefers, such limitation to discourse—is that it leaves no room for matters of affect, species-being, the body, or the

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argues that culture shares this "dual mode of existence" with language: "[C]ulture appears both in human projects and intersubjectively as a structure or system. Intentionally arranged by the subject, it is also conventionally constituted within the society. But, as a symbolic process, it is differently organized in these two dimensions" (286).

Everything Sahlins says about "culture" can be—and indeed, by Murphy, has been—said about "religion." While I have chosen to rely upon Murphy in my discussion above, it seems to me that Sahlins would also be an excellent theoretical resource for students of religion. Sahlins' theoretical apparatus, as presented in "Individual Experience and Cultural Order," was formulated in discussions throughout his *Historical Metaphors and Mythical Realities: Structure in the Early History of the Sandwich Islands Kingdom* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1981); see also idem, *Islands of History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985); idem, *Culture and Practical Reason* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1976). Many paragraphs that appeared in *Historical Metaphors and Mythical Realities* are reprinted wholesale throughout Sahlins' work, although in the context of different ethnographical discussions. This demonstrates a long-standing preoccupation of Sahlins': to "mesh" the Structuralist-presentist concept of "reproduction" with the Marxist-historicist concept of "transformation." The essay "Individual Experience and Cultural Order" is the most concise presentation of this theory. Sahlins' reliance upon careful ethnography, coupled with his clarity of thought and accessible style of writing, render his arguments and theoretical proposals extremely persuasive, in my view.

[41] Manuel Vasquez, *More Than Belief: A Materialist Theory of Religion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

[42] Donovan O. Schaefer, *Religious Affects: Animality, Evolution, Power* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2015).

[43] *Religious Affects*, 35.

phenomenality of experience. Donna Haraway writes with characteristic concision when she notes that these matters regarding "the corporeal join of the material and the semiotic" are "unacceptable to the secular Protestant sensibilities of the American academy and to most versions of the human science of semiotics."[44] It is in complete agreement with these concerns that I present this semiotic theory of religion.

One advantage of the semiotic model given by Murphy is precisely that it does not require too strict a distinction between the "social" and the "cultural," as if causal priority should or could be attributed to one or the other. While it may sometimes be methodologically useful to examine the context of a social formation before examining the cultural "elaborations" that emerged from it, in order that one may appreciate the context in which such a cultural construction was efficacious; it should not be forgotten that it is the cultural order which puts the "form" in social *form*ation. A final advantage of this theory is that, due to its emphasis on the addressivity of all acts of enunciation, and the "agonistic" dimension thereof, it might be said that "resistance" is *built into* the model and expressly theorized. This will prove helpful as a means of "streamlining" my discussions of "the political Paul."

A semiotic theory of religion "does not seek the origins of a phenomenon, religious or otherwise, but rather traces out the scenes of its transformations."[45] A semiotic theory holds that

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[44] Donna Haraway, *The Companion Species Manifesto: Dogs, People and Significant Otherness*. (Chicago: Prickly Paradigm Press, 2003), 15-16. I will note in passing that, as a doctoral student in History of Consciousness at the University of California, Santa Cruz, Murphy counted Haraway among his teachers.

[45] Murphy, "Semiotic Theory," 49. See also Murphy, "Discourse," in Braun and McCutcheon, *Guide to the Study of Religion*, 398, which makes clear the utility of semiotic/discourse theory to the study of Christian origins by pointing to the scholarly debates over the sources of the New Testament, noting that

[s]cholars argue that we can find historical influences from Platonism, Stoicism, Gnosticism, mystery religions, Jewish apocalypticism, and even early rabbinic Judaism [in the text of the New Testament]. Typically, a scholar will argue for the more or less exclusive influence of one of these factors on a particular section of the text. Discourse theory would see all of these as the "already" of the text, that is, those fragments of discourse which precede the text, and of which the text is itself composed. Consequently, the text is plural: it is an ensemble of all these discourses, each sometimes more and sometimes less foregrounded. Discourse theory would refuse to reduce the text to its social context, for that too is plural, nor would it reduce the text

religions "'originate' by transforming, combining, or even inverting pre-existing cultural materials," thus enabling us profitably to ask after "the *conditions* which brought about acts of transformation, dissemination, incorporation, contestation, or preservation of this pre-existent material" in the first place.[46] Murphy's theory takes initial inspiration from Jonathan Z. Smith's argument that "the fundamental operation of religion lives, as it were, in the interplay between a canon of signs and a hermeneute who 'applies' the given canonical elements to particular circumstances."[47] Smith presents this argument as a means of "exploring the proposition that sacrality persists insofar as there are communities which are persistent in applying their limited body of tradition; that sacred persistence…is primarily exegesis; that, if there is anything distinctive about religion, it is a matter of degree rather than kind, what might be described as the extremity of its enterprise for exegetical totalization."[48]

The temptation to seek such totalization arises from the assertion of the canon's immutability; the semiotic material considered as "canonical" by members of a given social formation seems set apart from the words, gestures, or other elements of everyday discourse, in that the canon seems to be

> located in a distant zone, organically connected with a past that is felt to be hierarchically
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> higher. It is, so to speak, the word of the fathers. Its authority was already acknowledged

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to the author's intentions. Finally, mere etymology of terms, as in traditional biblical exegesis, would not suffice, because the terms derive their meaning by their place within a specific, historic discourse.

This is an exemplary summation of the methodological and theoretical advances that a semiotic perspective has to offer the study of Christian origins: removing the notion of the possibility of a "pure," sutured text (or identity) free of any "influence' from the surrounding "environment" dispenses with the crypto-theological assumptions that have so often defined the enterprise and allows us instead to treat all Hellenistic religions as historical products on an historical plane.

[46] Murphy, "Semiotic Theory," 50-51, emphasis added.

[47] Murphy, "Semiotic Theory," 53.

[48] Jonathan Z. Smith, *Imagining Religion: From Babylon to Jonestown*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), 44.

in the past. It is a prior discourse. It is therefore not a question of choosing it from among

other possible discourses that are equal. It is given (it sounds) in lofty spheres, not those

of familiar contact. Its language is a special (as it were, hieratic) language. It can be

profaned. It is akin to taboo, i.e., a name that must not be taken in vain.[49]

In Smith's argument, "this fixity of the canon, and its consequent distantiation from the everyday,

is off-set by the mutability inherent in the on-going acts of appropriation of its circumscribed

body of material in, for, and to the ever-expanding and changing circumstances of the present—

with its necessary proximity to the everyday."[50] Taking this as his starting point, Murphy

reframes the notions of canon and hermeneute in terms of structuralist semiotics, arguing that

"the canon stands in relation to the hermeneute in very much the same way the field of

association, or paradigm, stands in relation to the combinatory process, or syntagm." Put in

different terms, imagine that "the canon is the lexicon of a language, the sum of possible

resources for making sentences out of words, while the activity of the hermeneute, that is, the

activity of interpretation, is the act of combining words into sentences." Therefore, just as "a

language *is* just its vocabulary and its rules of grammar, i.e., its rules for the combination of

words…, a religion is both its canon and its interpretation of that canon."[51] This "dynamic, yet

bounded process defines the concept of a religious tradition without resort to problematic

substantialist or essentialist notions of historical continuity."[52] Just as, in language, words

develop new meanings as they are deployed and re-deployed in new ways, so too "religious"

traditions change and adapt as they are interpreted and reinterpreted. Given world enough and

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[49] Mikhail Bakhtin, *The Bakhtin Reader* (ed. Pam Morris; London: Edward Arnold, 1994), 78.
[50] Murphy, "Semiotic Theory," 53.
[51] Murphy, "Semiotic Theory," 54.
[52] Murphy, "Semiotic Theory," 53.

time, this process of adaptation via interpretation within a single (though never uniform) tradition may give rise to two or more traditions. On occasion this development may eventuate in the emergence of "new" religions—even though, from the perspective of adherents, innovation is rarely conceived as such, but is rather portrayed as the uncovering of the "true" meaning that was "there all along," if only we had eyes to see. (Paul's interpretation of the promise to Abraham in Galatians can be seen as a prime example of this rhetorical use of "uncovering.") From a semiotic point of view, the processes of differentiation between and within tradition is analogous, with respect to the question of origins, to the emergence of genres as envisioned by Tzvetan Todorov:

> Where do genres come from? Quite simply from other genres. A new genre is always the transformation of an earlier one, or of several: by inversion, by displacement, by combination…There has never been a literature without genres; it is a system in constant transformation, and historically speaking the question of origins cannot be separated from the terrain of the genres themselves. Saussure noted that "the problem of the origin of language is not a different problem from that of its transformation." As Humboldt had already observed: "When we speak of primitive languages, we employ such designations only because of our ignorance of their earlier constituents.[53]

With this shift, the question of origins has changed dramatically, now asking more pointedly "after the conditions which brought about acts of transformation, dissemination, incorporation, contestation, or preservation of this pre-existent material in the first place."[54] This allows us to account for a basic fact: "the *reason* for speaking (writing, acting, gesturing, interpreting, or any

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[53] Tzvetan Todorov, *Genres in Discourse*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 15.
[54] Murphy, "Semiotic Theory," 51.

species of signification)."[55] Murphy correlates the act of interpreting a canon with the structuralist concept of *enunciation*, and points to the work of Mikhail Bakhtin to show that "[a]n essential (constitutive) marker of the utterance [or enunciation] is its quality of being directed to someone [or, we may add, something], its addressivity."[56] In other words, an act of enunciation is always *addressed to* something or someone, and is always performed in *response to* something or someone, so that "every utterance must be regarded primarily as a *response* to preceding utterances of the given sphere (we understand the word 'response' here in the broadest sense)."[57] But by the same token, the *addressivity* of each enunciation also shows that it is "oriented toward a future answer-word: it provokes an answer, anticipates it, and structures itself in the answer's direction. Forming itself in an atmosphere of the already spoken, the word is at the same time determined by that which has not yet been said but which is needed and in fact anticipated by the answering word."[58] In this way, "[e]very mark, every sign, every symbol, every text" is imprinted by both moments of time, the anterior and the posterior, like the two sides of a coin. "The enunciation replies and anticipates a reply; essentially Janus-faced, it looks in both directions of time at once."[59]

"Enunciation" therefore specifies the process in which the socio-cultural order is manipulated by historic agents in response to pre-existing socio-cultural conditions. It stands to reason that the semiotic material manipulated in these acts of enunciation will take on new, unpredictable—yet always culturally-patterned—significance as a result of these deployments, without any necessary rules of re-deployment except that each enunciation make "cultural sense"

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[55] Murphy, "Semiotic Theory," 59, emphasis added.
[56] Bakhtin, *Bakhtin Reader*, 89.
[57] Bakhtin, *Bakhtin Reader*, 85.
[58] Bakhtin, *Bakhtin Reader*, 76.
[59] Murphy, "Semiotic Theory," 60.

as a response to and provocation towards the "speech of the other," whether an "immediate participant-interlocutor" or "an indefinite, unconcretized *other*."[60] Regardless of the degree of specificity obtaining in the address toward the addressee, however, the process of enunciation-address is not freewheeling or aleatory. Rather, the relation between address and addressee is structural, and by its nature, "the addressive structure of the sign marks a relationship both of alterity and of commonality between addressor and addressee: alterity, since any act of signification presupposes 'twoness,' and this necessarily entails the nonidentity of addressor and addressee; commonality, because the enunciation assumes the possibility of communication (even if incorrectly so)."[61]

This theoretical perspective also precludes the possibility of privileging origins, of assuming that the "origin" of a religious tradition adheres to, and is contained within, everything that is subsequently formulated within that tradition, like an oil spill that coats anything it touches, including the hermeneutes' fingertips, thus leaving its own mark upon the very site and surface of their interpretive activity. Nor does the "origin" already contain everything that *could be* formulated within this discourse, as if a metaphysical plenitude resided in experience before the "fall" into discourse. No: the "Eden" model of creation and fall does not apply here, nor does the "essence and manifestation" theory. While essentialist or substantialist theories presume fundamental continuity between different moments in the history of a religion by positing that the diverse modes of a given religion are all "manifestations" of the same "essence," on this understanding a semiotic theory of religion looks for moments of discontinuity and transformation. Where a religion appears to have a ceaseless, continuous, genetic, even

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[60] Bakhtin, *Bakhtin Reader*, 86.
[61] Murphy, "Semiotic Theory," 60.

teleological development from its origin to its present formulation, the historian of religion who assumes a semiotic model sees, like Nietzsche, a "subduing" of previous interpretations in service of a new interpretation done in response to new conditions. The previous enunciations are either redeployed in service of this new interpretation, or are silenced entirely, thus allowing the appearance of continuity. Here is the key text:

> [T]he cause of the origin of a thing and its eventual utility, its actual employment and place in a system of purposes, lie worlds apart; whatever exists, having somehow come into being, is again and again reinterpreted to new ends, taken over, transformed, and redirected by some power superior to it; all events in the organic world are a *subduing*, a *becoming master*, and all subduing and becoming master involves a fresh interpretation, an adaptation through which any previous "meaning" and "purpose" are necessarily obscured or even obliterated.[62]

By implementing this Nietzschean twist into the semiotic model, we can immediately theorize in a way that highlights—and even assumes—the political nature of "religion." One does not need to deploy a hermeneutic of suspicion to recognize that "one of the most important forms of the relationship between religious address, or enunciation, and its addressee is that of antagonism, or, more precisely, an *agon*, or contest, a contest of meanings."[63] A hermeneutic of suspicion is unnecessary to see this, because such antagonism is manifestly, and perennially, on the "surface" of such discursive acts: "[t]he sense of reversal, the use of 'rules,' or guidelines, all in the act of a violent appropriation and imposition, captures nicely the subtlety and sophistication often

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[62] Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals: A Polemic* (trans. Walter Kaufman and R. J. Hollingdale; New York: Vintage, 1967), 77, emphasis original.
[63] Murphy, "Semiotic Theory," 60.

manifest in 'wars of interpretations'—or, the interpretation of wars."[64]

This type of "agonism" may be found in the case of Paul and his "split" or "contestation" with Cephas in the incident at Antioch (for example). We find here an illustration of how Paul's formation as an apostle of Christ occasioned the antagonism that would become definitive for his mission to the Gentile nations. At stake in the contest is a question of *significance*, the significance of certain elements of the Judean "canon" over others. Two enunciative possibilities, at least, were hermeneutically enacted. As Hanges narrates, "Paul's cosmology [or, more precisely, his "cosmographic enunciation"] places Jesus in a position not shared by his opponents…Jesus Christ is exalted to a position which makes Moses and Torah irrelevant for membership in the elect community of the holy ones; Moses and Torah are opposed to being 'in Christ.' The fact that much of Paul's ethical standards are rooted in the Torah does not affect these relative positions. This Christ is a different figure from the figure imagined by his Jesusite counterparts, and this difference is sufficient to generate a novel [enunciation], the symbolic representation of a distinct religious community.'[65] The contest is over the significance of being "in Christ," and the question is whether or not that status gets to "count" as the sole marker of identification and inclusion into Israel. For Paul's opponents (Hanges' "Jesusites"), participation in Christ (or being possessed by the Spirit) is not enough. For Paul, it is all that matters. What the Jesusites may have recognized as *one* possible marker of Judean identity among others has become, for Paul, the *sole* marker. Again and again in Paul's letters, we see evidence that

> Christ-Spirit possession is the defining characteristic of the Pauline communities,
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> especially over against Jesusites…The important point…is that the experience of the

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[64] Murphy, "Semiotic Theory," 61.
[65] Hanges, *Christ the Image*, 120.

Spirit…[took place] outside the defined area of Torah obedience…[I]t is altogether likely that Spirit possession and its associated ecstatic phenomena were the conduits of affiliation that gave rise to the self-consciousness prerequisite for the formation of Pauline communities, with the Christ image held by these groups reflecting that social reality. The given for Paul is that the Galatians have, in fact, received the Spirit (3:2), and have been baptized into Christ, through no other means than believing the gospel he preached.[66]

Through interpreting Christ-Spirit possession to have this significance, Paul enunciates the "site" of his own emergence as an apostle, illustrating the agonistic process of identity formation as he does so. And, as enunciation presupposes addressee, so "resistance is constitutive of the agon."[67] Foucault, commenting on the passage from Nietzsche cited above, reminds us that "emergence designates a place of confrontation, but not as a closed field offering the spectacle of a struggle among equals. Rather, as Nietzsche demonstrates in his analysis of good and evil, it is a 'non-place,' a pure distance, which indicates that the adversaries do not belong to a common space. Consequently, no one is responsible for an emergence; no one can glory in it, since it always occurs in the interstice."[68] Just so: from the "anonymous," and *instrinsically meaningless* (on its own), field of languages and media that we are here calling Paul's "canon," the apostle has drawn forth the semiotic elements by which to articulate his newfound subject-position, and, ultimately, formulate his "mission." These "traditional" elements, enunciated in a singular way, form an assemblage not accepted by his more "traditionalist" interlocutors. Yet Paul himself, and his discourse, come to form a different tradition of interpretation…and so on. As this example

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[66] Hanges, *Christ the Image*,153-154.
[67] Murphy, "Semiotic Theory," 61.
[68] Michel Foucault, "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History," in *The Foucault Reader*, edited by Paul Rabinow (New York: Pantheon, 1984), 84-85.

shows, "tradition" is not marked by continuity of meaning, but by coincidence of trope. The

general sense of the process I am theorizing is nicely captured in Hayden White's useful term,

"retroactive confiscations."[69]

So, Murphy argues, "the very constitution of a canon, a tradition, and a tradition of

interpretation, can be the compressed, congealed, and concealed product of numerous contests,

each of which vies as a silent or silenced voice, to name the meaning of the whole."[70] So, "the

entire history of a 'thing,' an organ, a custom can in this way be a continuous sign-chain of ever

new interpretations and rearrangements whose causes do not even have to be related to one

another but, on the contrary, in some cases succeed and alternate with one another in a purely

chance fashion."[71] Thus, Murphy concludes, "[a]s the interplay of address and addressee, there

can be no laws, no determinism [and no essence] in the history of a canon, of a religion, of

anything whose substance is semiotic. One can only trace out the varying and various scenes of

these contests."[72]

For the purposes of this project, the contests and interplays that will preoccupy us will be

"scenes" from the life and career of the apostle Paul, specifically drawn from the Corinthian

correspondence. Using this theoretical account as a heuristic to view these scenes of contestation

can provide the basis for a new reading of Paul that does not view his thought in the traditional

terms through which they are normally considered. Our theory shows that we can account for

moments of social and political change in ways that enable us to develop "a theory of religion

that can explain Christian origins without recourse to miracles and divine intervention."[73] My

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[69] Hayden White, *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe* (Baltimore: Johns
    Hopkins University Press, 1973), 363, quoted in Murphy, "Semiotic Theory," 61.
[70] Murphy, "Semiotic Theory," 62.
[71] Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, 77, quoted in Murphy, "Semiotic Theory," 62.
[72] Murphy, "Semiotic Theory," 62.
[73] Mack, *The Christian Myth*, 83. Elsewhere, Mack elaborates "that the understanding of religion implicit in this

argument is that a re-reading of Paul's "political imaginary" can be done in a theoretically-controlled manner, which neither valorizes Paul's "resistance" to the Roman imperial order, nor ignores the political nature of his project, but rather allows us to re-think the question of Paul and "the political," in terms of a theory of "religion" that does not alienate it from the domain of politics, power, resistance, and the rhetoric of supremacy. With these theoretical concepts in mind, we can rethink the Pauline project. For, as our theoretical heuristic had already made clear, in Paul, we find a different type of resistance than what has often been asserted, just as we find a politics played out in a different key than we might have expected. But, above all else, it is important to remember that we *do* find them.

But what, after all, is the type of politics that we find?

Analogous Vignettes: The Commune, The Folk Song, and The Beggar King

Marx wrote that what mattered most about the Paris Commune of 1871 was not any ideals it sought to realize but rather its own "working existence," which underlined the extent to which the insurgents shared no blueprint of the society to come. As Kristin Ross writes, "The Commune, in this sense, was a working laboratory of political inventions, improvised on the spot or hobbled together out of past scenarios and phrases, reconfigured as need be, and fed by desires

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discipline [of New Testament studies] is inadequate for the task of redescribing Christian origins. Interest in religion among New Testament scholars comes to focus on personal transformation, or what is sometimes called 'personal religious experience.'…This ring of fire around which scholars dance has always occasioned caution lest they get too close to these mysteries and find themselves tempted to explain them…The critical thinker is stunned and stymied when confronted with such scholarly hesitations in the face of the gospel's mystique. Taking up such questions directly, in the attempt to make some response, leads nowhere. That is because questions such as these are phrased in existentialist, psychological, and mythic terms which leave the gospel's aura of mystique in place. If one is drawn into this discourse on its own terms, one cannot avoid joining its dance around the gospel's ring of fire" (ibid, 66).

awakened in the popular reunions at the end of the Empire. An insurrection in the capital fought under the flag of the Universal Republic, the Commune as 'event' and as political call to action has remained prominent in the political imaginary of emancipatory movements around the world. As one of its former members recalled years later, it was, above all else, 'an audacious act of internationalism.'"[74]

Do we not also find in Paul's writings a questioning of history and one's place in it? May we not imagine the conversations taking place within these assemblies, associations coming to the fore as places where they may provide answers to their questions of where they are going in time? In the blink of an eye, Paul tells one association, all will be transformed. Already, but not yet, the time has come, he tells another. A new world is coming, he says—indeed, it is already here. May we not find, in the political imaginary of the Paris Commune, *one* possible attitude of imaginative approach to the Corinthian assembly?

After the massacre of the Commune, Eugène Pottier, one of the survivors, wrote a poem called the "Internationale" while fleeing to London. Published as a poem in his 1887 collection *Chants Révolutionnaires*, the poem would later be set to music, with abridged lyrics. However, the original lines of the poem's first stanza dramatically capture this sense of an unfolding, an emergence into history, and indeed the founding of a new world, a new temporality:

> Debout, les damnés de la terre
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> Debout, les forçats de la faim
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> La raison tonne en son cratère
>
> C'est l'éruption de la fin

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[74] Kristin Ross, *Communal Luxury: The Political Imaginary of the Paris Commune*. (New York: Verso, 2015), 22-23.

Du passé faisons table rase

Foule esclave, debout, debout

Le monde va changer de base

Nous ne sommes rien, soyons tout

These words would eventually become a world-wide anthem for the socialist movement, but do we not already, in Paul's announcement that God has chosen the weak of the world to shame the strong, the poor and despised to shame the rich and "honorable," and the mere nothings of the cosmos to bring down the highest powers, a precursor to Pottier's lines? *Can* we think of Paul's tractate, which we now retain as 1 Cor 1-4, along these lines? Indeed his words are poetic, but might we also imagine them as an anthem?

Certainly, these words are not unique in the significance they came to have, the apparent motive force for driving organization and inflaming the desire for social and political change. There are other examples of how a song may come to galvanize those who hear it to political action. Consider the case of Swedish-American trade union organizer and songwriter, Joe Hill (born Joel Emmanuel Hägglund). Many of Hill's songs have themselves become folk classics, but Joe Hill has become a folk hero in the eyes of many Leftists since his execution (or judicial murder) on November 9, 1915. Hill sent a final telegram in which he wrote the famous words, "Don't waste time in mourning. Organize." Nowhere near as eloquent as Pottier's poem, it nonetheless inspired a popular song of its own; "Joe Hill" became a folk song of the worker's movement, popularized especially by Paul Robeson's performance at the Peace Arch concert in 1952. I reproduce the lyrics here:

I dreamed I saw Joe Hill last night
Alive as you or me.

Says I, "But Joe, you're ten years dead."

"I never died," says he.

"The copper bosses killed you, Joe,

They shot you, Joe," says I.

"Takes more than guns to kill a man."

Says Joe, "I didn't die."

And standing there as big as life,

And smiling with his eyes,

Joe says, "What they forgot to kill

Went on to organize.

"Joe Hill ain't dead," he says to me,

"Joe Hill ain't never died.

Where working men are out on strike,

Joe Hill is at their side."[75]

Commenting on these lyrics, Slavoj Žižek highlights the "radical dimension" of this song's declaration, comparing it to the "*immortalization of the body* signaled by [the declaration that] 'Christ is not dead.'"[76] For, Žižek argues, the implication of both statements is that "there is something in the human body which is more than a human body, an obscene undead partial object which is more in the body than this body itself." The struggle referred to in the song illustrates "in a simple but effective way the Christological aspect of the emancipatory collective, a struggling collective bound by love," which can only render its working existence truly *effective* by first recognizing the necessity of a subjective reversal here: "the mistake of the

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[75] I reproduce these lyrics from Slavoj Žižek, *Less Than Nothing: Hegel and the Shadow of Dialectical Materialism* (New York: Verso, 2012), 85-86. All of the information on Joe Hill in the text above is taken from Žižek's discussion.
[76] Žižek, *Less Than Nothing*, 85, emphasis original.

anonymous narrator who does not believe that Joe Hill is still alive is that he forgets to include himself, his own subjective position, in the series: Joe Hill is not alive 'out there,' as a separate ghost; he is alive here, in the very minds of the workers remembering him and continuing his fight—he is alive in the very gaze which (mistakenly) looks for him out there. The same mistake of 'reifying' the searched-for object is made by Christ's disciples, a mistake which Christ corrects with the famous words: 'Where two or three are gathered in my name, I will be there.'"[77]

But the collective that participates in this emancipatory struggle cannot simply be bound together by a shared support in the Symbolic, the cultural and semiotic order which, in the end, provides the collectivity with nothing more than a free-floating signifier, ungrounded and baseless. At the level of the Real, this would change nothing. Such signifiers—semiotic supports, we might call them—must find *material* support in social reality, in formation and organization, and in the collective activity of each member who identifies with (and thus "grounds") such signifiers.[78] This crucial aspect of subject-formation accounts for the more-than-material ("immortal") dimension in political subjectivities of this type. A slight change in the lyrics of Joe Hill, as performed by Paul Robeson at the Peace Arch concert, illustrates the point nicely. Robeson changed the line "What they *forgot to* kill…" into "What they *can never* kill went on to organize." Thus, as Žižek extrapolates, the immortal dimension in man, "that in man which it

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[77] Žižek, *Less Than Nothing*, 86.

[78] "In spite of all its grounding power, the big Other is fragile, insubstantial, properly *virtuai*, in the sense that its status is that of a subjective presupposition. It exists only insofar as subjects *act as if it exists*. Its status is similar to that of an ideological cause like Communism or Nation: it is the substance of the individuals who recognize themselves in it, the ground of their whole existence, the point of reference that provides the ultimate horizon of meaning, something for which these individuals are ready to give their lives, yet the only thing that really exists are these individuals and their activity, so this substance is actual only insofar as individuals believe in it and act accordingly…This virtual character of the big Other means that the symbolic order is not some kind of spiritual substance existing independently of individuals, but something that is sustained by their continuous activity" (Žižek 2006: 10-11).

'takes more than guns to kill,' the Spirit, is what went on to organize itself." Despite appearances, this dimension of Spirit should not simply "be dismissed as an obscurantist-spiritualist metaphor—there is a subjective truth in it: when emancipatory subjects organize themselves, it is the 'spirit' itself which organizes itself through them. One should add to the series of what the impersonal 'it' ([id,] *das Es*, *ça*) does (in the unconscious, 'it talks,' 'it enjoys'): *it organizes itself* (*ça s'organise*—therein resides the core of the 'eternal Idea' of a revolutionary party)."[79]

One must wonder, then, with Žižek, whether we can think with this notion of a "formless remainder," *qua* surplus of immanence, in order to push forward to the question of what, precisely, one of Christ's apostles found in his own subjective position, in his very gaze, that led him to shift his subject position, indeed, that occasioned a change of type in his subjectivity, and began his project of engaged emancipatory-political struggle, organized as a community of believers. Because this apostle never met the man Jesus in life, he never made the mistake of looking for him "out there," as a separate ghost. Rather, this man had no choice *but* to include himself and his own subjective position in the series of the life of the Spirit (*pneuma*): for him, Christ was "what [the Romans who crucified him] could never kill," the *remainder of life* which went on to organize as a community of believers, always *here*, in (a certain kind of) *the flesh*, "in the very minds of the workers remembering him and continuing his fight."

Of course, we are talking about Paul, even if the figure we are outlining does not seem as familiar as Paul perhaps should. But these vignettes, kept in mind as our argument progresses in the following pages, may help to recolour our imaginings of Paul's political-organizational activity, and the ways in which he tried to guide and develop the "working existence" of his

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[79] Žižek, *Less Than Nothing*, 99, emphasis original.

Corinthian association. By grafting his "gospel" (*euangelion*) onto an *ekklesia* format, reinstating

in the process the *polis* model that had been the backbone of Hellenistic political thought for

centuries, Paul's project seems to have been preponderantly political. Indeed, to recall Zizek's

discussion of Joe Hill, we are led to posit that the "emancipatory subjects" in the Corinthian

assembly, organizing themselves around the figure of Jesus Christ, possessed by and possessing

his spirit, might be described as a Commune *avant la lettre*. This "formless remainder," that

which the Roman soldiers who crucified Christ could never kill, went on to organize as the

community of believers. Zizek continues by musing that it is "from this standpoint that we

should reread Oedipus himself as a precursor of Christ: against those—including Lacan

himself—who perceive Oedipus at Colonus and Antigone as figures driven by the

uncompromisingly suicidal death drive."[80] We might join Terry Eagleton in seeing that Oedipus

at Colonus

> becomes the cornerstone of a new political order. Oedipus's polluted body signifies
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> among other things the monstrous terror at the gates in which, if it is to have a chance of
>
> rebirth, the polis must recognize its own hideous deformity. This profoundly political
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> dimension of the tragedy is given short shrift in Lacan's own meditations...In becoming
>
> nothing but the scum and refuse of the polis—the "shit of the earth," as St Paul racily
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> describes the followers of Jesus, or the "total loss of humanity" which Marx portrays as
>
> the proletariat—Oedipus is divested of his identity and authority and so can offer his
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> lacerated body as the cornerstone of a new social order. "Am I made a man in this hour
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> when I cease to be?" (or perhaps "Am I to be counted as something only when I am

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[80] Zizek, *Less Than Nothing*, 88-89.

nothing / am no longer human?"), the beggar king wonders aloud.[81]

Given this description, it is hardly surprising that Zizek asks if Oedipus at Colonus does not "recall a later beggar king, Christ himself, who, by his death as a nobody, an outcast abandoned even by his disciples, grounds a new community of believers? They both re-emerge by way of passing through the zero-level of being reduced to an excremental remainder. The notion of the Christian collective of believers (and its later versions, from emancipatory political movements to psychoanalytic societies) is an answer to a precise materialist question: how to assert materialism not as a teaching, but as a form of collective life?"[82] Let us keep these questions in mind as we progress.

"Flesh" and "Spirit," Creaturely and Resurrected Bodies.

In addition to ecstasy and the sense of being *out* of one's body, I would argue—drawing upon Eric Santner's notion of something that is *in* the body *more* than the body itself—that much of Paul's thought (about the Law, for example) may be productively read in tandem with a certain conception of the body—a certain conception of the "flesh"—that Santner has characterized as "the creaturely." Relying upon Santner's work provides us with several resources from Freud, Kafka, Rosenzweig, Benjamin, and other figures from German Jewish philosophy that can function as a "redescriptive" lens for Paul's thought. This will have the comparative advantage of letting us read Paul's thoughts on law without relying upon a Christian

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[81] Eagleton, *Trouble with Strangers*, 185-186, 271.
[82] Zizek, *Less Than Nothing*, 100.

idiolect.

To illustrate how this might help us reconsider Paul's thought, let us begin, provisionally and all-too-briefly, by looking at Jonathan Z. Smith's early essay "Birth Upside Down or Right Side Up?" In an early discussion of what he would later come to term a "utopian" perspective, Smith argues that, in the Hellenistic world, "structures of order" were often portrayed and discursively presented as having been reversed: "rather than the positive limits they were meant to be, they have become oppressive. Man is no longer defined by the degree to which he harmonizes himself and his society to the cosmic patterns of order; but rather by the degree to which he can escape the patterns."[83] Smith argues that "the world was seen by hellenistic (*sic*) man in this manner because this *was* the way he had discovered his world to be. The world was experienced as a prison, as a constellation of reversed values. It was experienced this way objectively…As Paul in Romans 7 was to discover about the Law of YHWH, that it was good *once*, but that it had been captured by the powers of Sin and turned upside down so that 'the very commandment which promised life proved to be death to me' (Rom. 7:10), so each culture was to discover that its cherished structures of Fate, the gods that ordained and maintained the structure of Fate, and the myths which described the establishment of the world according to these cosmic patterns were perverse, were upside down."[84] Paul's response to this inversion is, precisely, to *transvalue* it: his proclamation that the crucifixion of Jesus brought life through the resurrection, defaced the "living death" that had come to characterize life in Paul's *cosmos.* This defacement paradoxically effects a "labor of the negative" which inverts the inversion, and—by defacing what had already been defaced—has potential to turn the world "rightside up" again.

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[83] Smith, "Birth Upside Down" 162.
[84] Smith, "Birth Upside Down," 163.

That the ancient Mediterranean world in which Paul lived was widely perceived as a kind

of "living-death" is borne out by more than just Smith's brief discussion. Just limiting ourselves

to the Latin sources, one gets the sense that the "rulers of this age...[who] crucified the lord of

glory" (1 Cor 2:6-8) were widely seen as spreading death rather than the glory they claimed.

Recent studies of "Silver Age" literature have noted a number of works in which the characters

seem already to be dead before their actual death.[85] Paul Miller suggests that this change was

symptomatic of changes in structures of power that accompanied Rome's transformation to an

empire and the attendant "consolidation of the political and cultural order around the figure of

the emperor."[86] Examples of this subjective mortification may be found in Ovid, for instance,

who writes from exile as if from a condition of living-death, "in which true death, while desired,

nevertheless eludes him: in *Tristia*…3.11, he describes himself as a ghost, his body already

reduced to ashes and buried in a tomb; in *Ex Ponto* 1.9 Ovid exhorts his friend Maximus to

number him with the dead."[87] Literary sources contemporary to Paul are "conspicuously

'haunted' by figures of death-in-life, whether in the form of ghosts, or persons who have returned

from the dead, or pictures of the world as a ruined place, from which all vitality has been

withdrawn."[88] And Seneca's tragedies depict "a world of moral chaos, in which isolated

individuals are driven to acts of violence by gigantic passions."[89] This is hardly surprising,

considering that "Seneca himself lived through and witnessed, in his own person or in the

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[85] T.N. Habinek, *The Politics of Latin Literature: Writing, Identity, and Empire in Ancient Rome* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998); P.A. Miller, *Subjecting Verses: Latin Love Elegy and the Emergence of the Real* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004); Basil Dufallo, *The Ghosts of the Past: Latin Literature, the Dead, and Rome's Transition to a Principate* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2007); cf. also D. and E. Henry, *The Mask of Power: Seneca's Tragedies and Imperial Rome* (Warminster: Aris & Phillips, 1985).

[86] LL. Welborn, "'Extraction from the Mortal Site': Badiou on the Resurrection in Paul," *New Testament Studies* 55 (2009): 300.

[87] Welborn, *ibid.*, 300-301.

[88] Welborn, *ibid.*, 301; cf. Dufallo, *Ghosts of the Past*, 123-137.

[89] Welborn, *ibid*, 302.

persons of those near him, almost every evil and horror that is the theme of his writings. Exile, murder, incest, the threat of poverty and a hideous death were the very texture of his career."[90] It would seem that these figurations of death-in-life are "by no means idiosyncratic, but…endemic, at least in the literature of persons of a certain social class. In the writings of those who were most self-conscious and articulate, we glimpse a subject cringing around a void, simultaneously registering and repressing knowledge of the death-driven situation by which his existence was constrained. The ground of this experience of disillusionment was not personal…but structural: the geopolitical expansion of the Roman Empire, and the emergence of sole sovereignty, excercised through an ongoing 'state of exception,' ensured that 'the actions of one man, the emperor, could indeed affect the known world.'"[91]

But a key category that I would deploy, at least provisionally, to theorize "the political" here comes not from ancient studies, but rather, from German Studies, specifically the work of Eric Santner. In a series of studies on 19th and early-20th century German thought, Santner has demonstrated a persistent preoccupation with the "psychotheological" or "creaturely" dimensions of everyday life among thinkers as diverse as Freud, Benjamin, Heidegger, and Rosenzweig. With respect to the latter, Santner's *Psychotheology of Everyday Life* highlights the "messianic" dimension in Rosenzweig's *Star of Redemption*, which he argues centers on one's conception of the place (and "face) of the neighbor in our thought and action. Rosenzweig's conception of neighbor love, Santner argues, "orbited around the difficult task of turning toward such a face, of becoming responsive, answerable to the new ethical material—he calls it *metaethical*—it manifests. Both Freud and Rosenzweig shared the view that this uncanny—or

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[90] C.J. Herrington, "Senecan Tragedy," *Arion* 5 (1966): 430, quoted in Welborn, *ibid*, 303.
[91] Welborn, *ibid.* 303.

"creaturely"—expressivity was an index of a traumatic kernel around which the 'ego life' of the other has, at some level, been (dis)organized. The new ethics of neighbor love adumbrated by Rosenzweig locates our responsibility in our capacity to elaborate forms of solidarity with this creaturely expressivity that makes the other strange not only to me but also to him- or herself."[92]

Santner begins to describe some of what he means by the "creaturely" dimension by emphasizing a specific vision of "natural history" developed by Walter Benjamin. The interplay between nature and culture, the natural and the human, may result in an "encounter" with the natural world, especially "where it appears in the guise of historical remnant. The opacity and recalcitrance that we associate with the materiality of nature—the mute 'thingness of nature—is, paradoxically, most palpable where we encounter it as a piece of human history that has become an enigmatic ruin beyond our capacity to endow it with meaning, to integrate it into our symbolic universe. Where a piece of the human world presents itself as a surplus that both demands and resists symbolization, that is both inside and outside the 'symbolic order'…that is where we find ourselves in the midst of 'natural history. What [Santner is] calling creaturely life is a dimension of human existence called into being at such natural historical fissures or caesuras in the space of meaning. These are sites where the struggle for new meaning—in Nietzsche's terms, the exercise of will to power—is at its most intense."[93]

Santner writes that the "question of why these German-Jewish writers manifest a special concern with or sensitivity to this dimension [of creaturely exposure] can be answered" in two ways. "First, it seems that the process of assimilation that German Jews underwent over the course of the long nineteenth century occurred, in large measure, as a kind of double bind in

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[92] Santner, *On Creaturely Life*, xiii.
[93] Santner, *Creaturely Life*, xv.

which the Jews were in effect told: 'Be like me! You can't be like me!' The demand for

assimilation was at some level structured as an 'impossible' interpellation; it involved an

exposure to an arresting opacity that could be experienced only as a persistent disruption and

disorientation…in the self-understanding of those Jews who tried to assume the demand." In

addition, and perhaps more interesting, "was a second aspect of the process of assimilation that

had more to do with issues of secularization. For secular Jews, that is, the laws of normative

Judaism—the commandments of the Torah—were themselves experienced to a very large extent

as a set of opaque rules—enigmatic signifiers—with which they could no longer identify even if

they did not fully cease to feel addressed by them. It is against this background that we can

understand Gershom Scholem's characterization, in his correspondence with his friend Walter

Benjamin, of the status of Holy Writ for Kafka as 'the nothingness of revelation.'"[94]

By referring back to Marx's famous description of a capitalist order as a form of life

where "all that is solid melts into air," Santner argues that it is the splitting of an object into user-

and exchange-value and the rapidity with which both types of value decompose under the force

of capitalist exchange that led Benjamin to theorize about the experience of objects that have

"survived" the form of life which produced them. These relics/artifacts/ruins become remainders,

hieroglyphs that do not signify any longer, but only signify *to* because the form of life that

produced them has "exhausted" itself.[95]

Beginning to think of Paul's attitude toward the law as something that "signifies *to*" but

no longer carries any real significance allows us to begin thinking of Paul as living within a

contradictory social environment in which the retreat or "deadening" of the force of law was

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[94] Santner, *Creaturely Life*, 39
[95] Santner, *Creaturely Life*, 78-9 n. 42. Cf Lear, *Radical Hope*

being perceived due to changed conditions of a political and material kind. A way of life was beginning to be exhausted, its ontological vulnerability was acute, and headed toward expiration.

Santner's later *Royal Remains* further elaborates this attitude of "creaturely life" as ontological vulnerability by considering the notion of the "flesh." As he eloquently describes it, "*the flesh is the thorn in the body*, the dimension of embodied subjectivity that registers an excess of the normative pressures that inform and potentially 'deform' a life lived in relation to agencies of authority and authorization."[96] Or, in a more developed formulation:

> the notion of the 'flesh' refers to the substantial pressures, the semiotic and somatic stresses, of...'creaturely life'…It signifies a mode of *exposure* that distinguishes human beings from other kinds of life: not exposure simply to the elements or to the fragility and precariousness of our mortal, finite lives, but rather to an ultimate lack of foundation for the historical forms that distinguish human community. This lack, this crucial *missing piece of the world*, to which we are ultimately and intimately exposed as social beings of language is one that we thus first *acquire* by way of our initiation into these forms of life, not one already there in the bare fact of our biological being[, and for that reason, it is something like "that which they could never kill]."[97]

To begin to describe Paul's "creaturely" existence, then—and, however fanciful or anachronistic it might seem at this point, to begin considering his attitude toward the "flesh" as opposed to *pneuma*, one should consider Santner's further remark that creatureliness refers to an ontological vulnerability "that permeates human being as that being whose essence it is to exist in forms of life that are, in turn, contingent, fragile, susceptible to breakdown," a vulnerability often

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[96] *Royal Remains*, 5.
[97] Santner, *Royal Remains*, 39.

expressed by the fact that it is often "the very ways in which human communities attempt to shelter—to immunize—their lives from such vulnerability [that] effectively serve to intensify it."[98] Recalling Smith's discussion of the Law of YHWH in "Birth Upside Down or Right Side Up," in which the law that had *once* been good now proved perverse, as bringing forth pain rather than protection, we may begin to use Santner's discussion as a way of thinking of Paul as being himself a "philosophical anthropologist" of sorts, and his gospel as a response to contradictions that were felt and perceived, and which perhaps motivated him to undertake the task of "immunization" against the "deadening" effects of law.[99]

Conclusion

The ecstatic, the creaturely: how these concepts relate to "the political" is a question we are not yet in a position to answer because, strictly speaking, they are tied to a notion of subjectivity. It remains to be seen how such individually-oriented concepts can be made to inform a notion of being-together, the relations between a subject and its others, between *ego* and *alter*, between a person and group(s) to which they belong. Though this will begin to be addressed in the following chapter, nonetheless we have begun to sketch the forms such relations may take. The "addressivity" of an individual expression, the interplay between address and addressee, ensures that the Other is "contained" within every single articulation of significance; that is to say, no

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[98] *Royal Remains*, 6

[99] I cannot resist further quoting the analogy Santner draws between the "rebounding violence" of immunization efforts against creaturely vulnerability and science fiction dystopias: "the technologies created to secure the protection and flourishing of the human world—robots, computers, replicants—'come alive' and turn against that world; the *means* of self-preservation, of individual and communal immunization, themselves become infected with their own drive of self-preservation and begin, in the manner of compulsive *Doppelgänger*, to attack the life at issue" (RR, 15).

utterance is ever really "Self-contained." Just so, Paul's subjectivity was formed within, and with reference to a determinate *socius*, and inasmuch as his discursive enunciations signify at all, that signification is social. Indeed, this social significance is made explicit in the case of Paul. For, no matter how sublimely interior were the experiences that led to the formation of his apostolic subjectivity, the exterior conditioning of that experience is loudly proclaimed by the very fact that Paul interprets them as a call to be the apostle *to the nations*. If such an experience really were only a private matter, solely of internal significance, then the result truly would be a tale told by an idiot, signifying nothing.

That this is not the case has the happy result that we can now turn to a discussion of the beginnings of the Paulinist movement. In the next two chapters, I will discuss the significance of Paul's ecstasy in shaping his political vision of a people "in Christ," with especial attention to the social and political *implications* of how Paul's project of constituting a polity of the Spirit-possessed both explains some of the specific features of this thought as well some of the problems that he faced during his mission, specifically those problems he faced during his correspondence with the "Corinthian Commune."

2) The Richness of An Embarrassment: Scholarly Discomfort and Paul's Ecstatic Practice

As discussed in the previous chapter, much, if not most, scholarship on Paul's ecstasy (or even on Paul, generally) displays a "pervasive tendency," influenced by Protestantism and Modernism, "to value the rational over all other forms of knowing," a tendency which Shantz terms "cognicentrism."[100] Before continuing, a few more words about what cognicentrism is and how it impacts our imagination of Paul will be helpful. For, in Pauline studies, it is not only with respect to ecstatic phenomena such as trance or spirit possession that cognicentrism has a deleterious effect on our imaging of Paul and his fellow Christ-followers. In a study on Paul's understanding of resurrection, Frederick Tappenden highlights the extent to which Paul's resurrection language has either been understood in "literal" or "metaphorical" terms, most often with reference to "eschatological" language and imagery. But, Tappenden argues, by stressing "the eschatological rather than locative importance of the body, modern treatments have produced an ironically disembodied view of resurrection in the Pauline letters."[101] Building upon theories of cognitive linguistics, which (despite the presence of the term "cognitive) are resolutely *non*-cognicentric in nature, Tappenden moves past the literal-metaphorical binary. In perfect keeping with our discussion of Christ-followers as those who possess (and are possessed by) the Spirit of Christ in the previous chapter, Tappenden argues that "notions of resurrection are always metaphorical *and* necessarily comprehended with respect to more concrete experiences of human embodiment," and "that Paul envisions Christ-devotees as currently caught up in an ongoing process of resurrection that is enacted on the human [*sōma*]. In both

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[100] Shantz, *Paul in Ecstasy*, 111-112.
[101] Tappenden, *Resurrection*, 2-3.

ways, the somatic foundations of Paul's thought preclude the imbalance of eschatology and locative foci" so prevalent in many discussions of Paul's notion of resurrection.[102]

Tappenden also argues specifically against cognicentrism, which he discusses with reference to the term's author, Michael Harner. "[C]ognicentrism," argues Tappenden, "is analogous to ethnocentrism, the latter being concerned with the 'narrowness of someone's *cultural* experience' and the former with the 'narrowness of someone's *conscious* experience.'…[Largely at issue here] is the legitimation of nonscientific modes of knowing, specifically with respect to shamanic practices and altered states of consciousness."[103] This last point is in keeping with the way that Shantz uses the term. However, more in line with Hanges, for Tappenden, cognicentrism denotes

> a deep-seated and persistent bias whereby theology (and human cognition more generally) is understood as propositional in nature. In this tradition, theological concepts such as resurrection are understood as noetic abstractions; they are objective mental assents, and their truth claims exist independently of space, time, culture, and human agents. Put differently, cognicentrism refers to the preference given to the noetic at the expense of the somatic. The term cognicentrism, therefore, denotes the disembodiment of knowledge. At the heart of this cognicentric bias is the Cartesian separation of mind and body whereby human cognition (i.e., rationality) is isolated from physical matter (i.e., the human body).[104]

Finally, Tappenden argues that—with respect to Paul and Pauline studies—"cognicentrism

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[102] Tappenden, *Resurrection*, 3.
[103] Tappenden, *Resurrection*, 3.
[104] Tappenden, *Resurrection*, 4-5.

results in the abstraction of the apostle's resurrection ideals as propositional and thus lacking in concrete grounding within human experience and perception."[105] It is against precisely this kind of abstraction that my intervention, in this chapter, is directed.

The Stakes of Paul's Attitude Towards Ecstatic Practice

To take Paul's ecstatic practice seriously "defamiliarizes" him in our eyes, making a figure we have come to think of as familiar suddenly seem quite strange. It reminds us that Paul lived in another age—really, another world—far distant from ours. And if, as many have argued, the practices so described were foundational to the way Paul perceived himself, we are forced to see Paul as unfamiliar and strange, as well. If, upon reflection, we conclude that Paul was an "ecstatic," then this will change the way we read him,[106] and it will also change the way that we "write" him into histories, as well as how we conceive of the communities with which he corresponded. It will force us to give up comfortable familiarities that, in some conceptions of Paul's life and practice, may be allowed to stand, but not when Paul is conceived as an ecstatic.

But this conception of Paul does more than alter any possible "theological" reading of his writings. I will argue that recognizing the value of Paul's ecstatic practice will help us to gain a renewed biographical understanding of Paul's relationship with his communities—specifically, for the purposes of this paper, the Corinthian Christ association. This renewed understanding is a very timely contribution to Pauline studies, generally. Since the appearance of Dieter Georgi's monumental study of Paul's Corinthian opponents, there has been an upsurge of studies focused on the communities addressed in Paul's letters, rather than on Paul himself. While, in many

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[105] Tappenden, *Resurrection*, 7.
[106] For example, if Paul is truly a "mystic," then what are we to make of Paul's instructions to the Corinthians group to hand an immoral man "over to Satan" when they are assembled together, and Paul is "with them in spirit" (1 Cor 5:3, 4)? Is he actually claiming to be capable of being in two places at once?

ways, this marks a major advance in the study of early Christianities—revealing as it does an awareness that Paul was neither the *sine qua non* originator nor the orchestrator of the histories of these groups—this advance has not come without cost. For, though our understanding of the social and historical settings of the communities with which Paul corresponded has greatly increased, the concepts and categories by which we imagine Paul have remained largely stable. Paul continues to remain an intellectual, a letter writer, a rhetorician who, in the final analysis, is not terribly different from a contemporary pastor who sits in his study and contemplates how he might meet the needs of his congregation(s), or a professor who cogitates on how best to instruct her students. The bifurcation implied by the phrase "Paul *and* the Pauline assemblies" is confirmed by the fact that, in contemporary New Testament scholarship, "Paul" and "the Pauline assemblies" largely refer to two distinct areas of research. An "integrated" approach, which studies "Paul *among* the Pauline assemblies," remains a prime need.

This chapter is intended as one attempt to bring our imagination of Paul and the Corinthians together, in a manner that allows a number of ecstatic practices to form part of a "common ground" shared by all concerned (with the status of possessing, and being possessed by, the Spirit of Christ constituting another piece of common ground). It will be necessary to undertake a lengthy review of scholarly attempts to "explain away" Paul's ecstasy as anything other than ecstasy, before moving on to a further discussion of Shantz, who uses neurobiological insights in order to argue that Paul is describing a genuine ecstatic experience that he had in the past, and not contriving a rhetorical performance for political gain in the present. Taking this notion seriously, I will finally propose a cross-cultural analogy drawn from the cognitive ethnography of Harvey Whitehouse, who provides us with a model that can account for the socio-political dynamics we see operating at Corinth by identifying the various "modes of

religiosity" present there. Using Whitehouse's terminology, I argue that both Paul and the Corinthians are practitioners of a highly (but not exclusively) "imagistic" mode of religiosity, and conclude by asking what difference this "social fact" might make for our understanding of Paul *among* the Corinthians.

Explaining (Away) Paul's Ecstasy

As a first step in pushing back against the cognicentric bias in Pauline studies, one might note that, when scholars examine Paul's instructions for the Corinthians to avoid "ecstatic abuses," they tend to read this as though Paul condemns ecstatic practice wholesale. This is problematic, for it ignores those occasions when Paul expresses a positive view of ecstasy—which is strange, since these positive mentions often appear in the same passages where he cautions against abusing it. This imbalanced treatment of the sources results in "a tacit argument that Paul was the sane opponent of early Christian exuberance," who, despite the fact that he speaks in tongues more than any of the Corinthians (1 Cor 14:8), and has ascended into Paradise (2 Cor 12:1-4), nonetheless finds ecstatic practice "at best, embarrassing, and, at worst, repugnant."[107]

These two passages in the Corinthian correspondence, which refer to speaking in tongues and heavenly ascent, are perhaps the best evidence we have for Paul's ecstatic experiences, although many other passages may serve as "minor attestations" of such experiences. Paul's reference to glossolalia, in particular, has been used to justify the assertion that he found ecstatic practice "embarrassing" or "repugnant." Over-emphasis on Paul's discomfort has led even the most interesting work on the practice to rely too heavily on the notion that the practice was primarily being engaged in by certain Corinthian "dissidents," and that Paul participated in the

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[107] Shantz, *Paul in Ecstasy*, 46, 51.

practice only sparingly, if at all. Other times, and most problematically, the practice has been

studied in total isolation from Paul, resulting in a model that has rendered the Corinthians'

reception of Paul, as well as his instructions to them, all but incomprehensible. Dale Martin, for

instance, in his landmark work *The Corinthian Body*, has argued that the Corinthian

"glossolalists" were of relatively high status in the Corinthian community, and that these

"strong" members were using their "elite" spirituality to assert their authority over "weaker"

members of the community.[108] Noting that Paul shows a fair amount of discomfort with issues of

status, patronage, and asymmetrical power relations elsewhere in 1 Corinthians, Martin argues

that Paul attempts to ameliorate the status tensions caused by the glossolalists by inverting the

hierarchy that they had established. To do this, he reminds them that, in God's world order, the

"weak" will shame the "strong," and the "foolish" things are valued more highly than "wise"

things. Thus, the hierarchy is overturned, and—according to Martin—status tensions within the

group are erased.

As tempting as Martin's proposal is, however, Shantz points out that it also has the

unfortunate side effect of making Paul look like a moron. She reminds us of Paul's positive

attitude to "esoteric speech" which is directed towards the good of the community. He seems to

regard glossolalia as the use or abuse of such speech simply as an end in itself, as is evident from

his statement that "the one speaking in a tongue is [selfishly] speaking not to human beings but

to God" (1 Cor 14:2). However, Paul also thinks that "the one who prophesies edifies an

assembly" (1 Cor 14:4). Thus, it is clear that, "[a]s an alternative to glossolalia, Paul promotes

prophecy (which is most like mediumship), which expresses different social dynamics than

glossolalia…Thus, if Paul is trying to reverse status divisions, as Martin argues, he does so by

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[108] Dale Martin, *The Corinthian Body*. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), 87-103..

ineptly asserting an arrangement with even greater potential for status distinction."[109] In that case, Paul's proposed solution to these divisions

> would not level the playing field but would in fact introduce an added layer of specialization into their worship. Furthermore, that distinction would be compounded by the fact that the social dynamics of prophecy are such that a community can only host a limited number of practitioners. To emphasize that fact, Paul instructs the assembly to allow only two or three prophets to speak on any occasion (14:29-31). So, if Martin is correct in his theory that glossolalia was an assertion of superiority that Paul was trying to end, then Paul proceeded quite incompetently.[110]

Since it is clear that portraying Paul as an incompetent pastoral figure is not Martin's intention, we are left to ask why he ends up looking this way in Martin's study. Although Martin is certainly correct in his assessment of Paul's discomfort with patronage and high-status practices, one wonders whether he over-emphasizes Paul's discomfort with the practice of glossolalia. Noting, as we have, the widespread bias against ecstatic practices in New Testament scholarship, it seems that Martin's study participates, however unwittingly or unwillingly, in this discourse, as well. I would argue that Paul is not "uncomfortable" with the practice of glossolalia at all—a safe assumption, since he thanks God that he is able to do it more often than any of the Corinthians. Nor, I would argue, does Paul discourage the Corinthians from making glossolalia the central focus of their worship, as is often asserted. Rather, Paul seems to be telling them not to allow their own individual practice of glossolalia to distract them from their worship *as a community*. Rather than allow each adherent to do his or her own thing, Paul tells them to *focus* on two or

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[109] Shantz, *Paul in Ecstasy*, 164.
[110] Shantz, *Paul in Ecstasy*, 164

three individuals for the edification of the community. So, far from casting glossolalia off to one side, Paul literally makes it the central focus—and, arguably, the *constitutive* practice—of the Corinthian community.

Again, this alters our conception of Paul *as well as* the Corinthians. By removing the notion that glossolalia was a practice that drove a "wedge" between the two entities, it now seems as though the practice was an "anchor" that held them together. However, if they shared this much in common, then what about the other conceptual barricade that has often divided Paul from the Corinthians: the common phrase, "Paul's Corinthian opponents"? Might this be a false wedge, too?

Although it cannot be denied that Paul perceived "divisions" and "opposition" at Corinth, Shantz argues compellingly that biblical scholars have used a methodology that has over-emphasized these divisions. She describes this as "mirror exegesis," in which "commentators construct an argument from silence in which the positions and actions of Paul's opponents are reconstructed as the mirror opposite to Paul's statements."[111] This method, she argues, can "introduce a fatal circularity into the interpretation of a text. For example, in 1 Cor 12, som interpreters begin with the assumption that Paul is combating an organized and explicit party of spiritual enthusiasts. On that basis, they reconstruct the views of this group by inverting Paul's own—a maneuver that then provides evidence of opposition."[112] While some might question the extent to which this circularity is "fatal" to the interpretation of Paul's letter, Shantz is certainly correct in identifying the cognitive (and cognicentric) *effect* of this method. By first portraying Paul as an opponent of specific spiritual enthusiasts in Corinth, commentators are then able to

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[111] Shantz, *Paul in Ecstasy*, 43.
[112] Shantz, *Paul in Ecstasy*, 43-44.

portray him as an opponent of spiritual enthusiasm, generally. Since Paul now appears to them as an opponent of ecstatic religious practice *tout court*,

> any statement he makes in favour of it simply cannot be taken at face value….Thus, when Paul speaks his thanks for his own gift of tongues, he must be doing so ironically or even sarcastically, may be using hyperbole, or perhaps is merely quoting a slogan. At any rate, according to these readings, Paul's intention in one way or another is to communicate the opposite of what he has written. Clearly there are points at which the circularity of this reasoning exceeds the permissible benefit of the doubt.[113]

The widespread tendency to treat Paul's ascent story—his "fool's speech"—as "an item by item refutation of the position of the super-apostles" reveals the extent to which it is assumed that ecstatic experience played no major part in his self-understanding and apostolic practice. It evinces precisely the kind of bias which Tappenden condemns, where Paul's words are treated "as propositional and thus lacking in concrete grounding within human experience and perception." Indeed, when it comes to scholarly discussion of Paul's ascent to heaven, the extent to which "rhetorical" explanations are invoked can hardly be overemphasized, nor can the relative paucity of attempts to take seriously that Paul is describing an actual experience. We are thereby left to wonder what changes would occur if we took the foundation of Paul's practice to be, not rhetoric, but ecstasy.

Paul's Ascent to Heaven: "Rhetorical" vs. "Embodied" Readings

Despite the fact that Paul implies he is talking about someone else, and seems to distance himself

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[113] Shantz, *Paul in Ecstasy*, 44.

from "a man I know" as much as possible, the "vast majority of scholars, from Irenaeus onward, have recognized that Paul must be speaking of his own experience."[114] One notable exception is Morton Smith, who argued that the "man in Christ" that Paul says he knew was Jesus himself.[115] In his book, *The Religion of Paul the Apostle*, John Ashton refutes Smith's proposal, noting that he mistranslates *oida* as "I knew," and fails to explain how Paul could refer to knowing Jesus "in Christ."[116] A different argumentative tack has been tried by Michael Goulder, who argues that the terms *apokaluseis* and *optasiai* have distinct meanings for Paul, with the latter referring to "heavenly" or "angelic" visions, and the former to "earthly" ones. Since, according to Goulder, Paul is an "opponent" of ecstatic visions, he has not experienced such an ascent, but he knows someone who has. This friend of his is someone he might boast about—assuming, of course, that he regarded such visions as boastworthy in the first place.[117]

Christopher Morray-Jones has refuted Goulder's proposal,[118] stating that there is really no reason to doubt that Paul is referring to himself, nor is there any reason to accept Goulder's distinction between the two terms. Nonetheless, when Morray-Jones presents his own explanation of why Paul uses the third person, it is purely in terms of a rhetorical decision on Paul's part, leading Morray-Jones to explain away Paul's ecstasy.

Based on his expert knowledge of the apocalyptic-merkabah literature on heavenly ascents, Morray-Jones notes that in this tradition "the ascent into heaven and the vision of the *kabod* [glory of God]…involves a transformation of the visionary into an angelic or supra-angelic likeness of this glory or divine image, and that this seems to be the background of Paul's

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[114] Christopher Morray-Jones, "Paradise Revisited (2 Cor 12:1-12): The Jewish and Mystical Background of Paul's Apostolate Part 2: Paul's Heavenly Ascent and Its Significance" *HTR* 86 (1993), 272; Irenaeus, *adv. haer.* 5.5.1.
[115] Morton Smith, "Ascent to the Heavens and the Beginnings of Christianity," *Eranos* 50 (1981), 403-29.
[116] John Ashton, *The Religion of Paul the Apostle* (New Haven: Yale 2000).
[117] Michael Goulder, "The Visionaries of Laodicea," *JSNT* 43 (1991), 19.
[118] Morray-Jones, "Part 2," 272-3.

concept of glorification (for example, Rom 8:29; 2 Cor 3:18)," Morray-Jones argues that the "man in Christ" is "Paul's 'heavenly self' or 'apostolic identity,' which is conformed to the image of the enthroned and glorified Christ and therefore possesses 'power' and divinely conferred authority. 'This man' is contrasted with Paul's earthly, human self."[119] In other words, Morray-Jones argues that Paul objectified himself for literary purposes, in keeping with the conventions of genre. The idea that Paul may actually have been describing a real experience is hardly entertained.

Alan Segal suggests another possibility by identifying a rabbinic rule forbidding public discussion of mystical phenomena and experiences. If this proscription dates back to the first century, it "would explain why Paul could not divulge his experience *in his own name.*"[120] While this explanation is no doubt plausible, it is also too speculative to be useful.

A rather different (and arguably less speculative) proposal has been made by Hans Dieter Betz,[121] who demonstrates that Paul is following a rhetorical convention of ironic boasting as a form of apology in the Socratic tradition. As James Tabor summarizes:

> Paul is taking no credit for this exalted experience, the visions and revelations are from the Lord (12:1 subjunctive genitive). He ironically boasts of 'weakness' (v. 5), but the weakness he has in mind came as a *result* of this very privileged experience, namely the harassing angel of Satan (vv. 7-10).[122]

A.T. Lincoln agrees with this assessment, and expands:

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[119] Morray-Jones, "Part 2," 273. Cf. James Tabor, *Things Unutterable: Paul's Ascent to Paradise in its Greco-Roman, Judaic, and Early Christian Contexts*. (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1986), 10-13.

[120] Alan F. Segal, *Paul the Convert: the Apostolate and Apostasy of Saul the Pharisee* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990), 58.

[121] Hans Dieter Betz, *Der Apostel Paulus und die sokratische Tradition* (Tuebingen, 1972).

[122] *Things Unutterable*, 114.

[Paul] uses the third person in the narrative and yet is talking about himself, as *v.* 7 makes clear. The best explanation for this is not in terms of 'the objectifying of the I' or of a dualistic anthropology where 'Paul distinguishes two men within himself' or where he distinguishes his present self from his future self. It is also not provided by the convention of the pseudonymity of apocalyptic where an anonymous seer transfers his own experiences to a well-known figure such as Enoch, but rather by Paul's perspective on boasting. One of the elements of the apology in the Socratic tradition was that one must not boast about oneself, but if necessary this may be done by someone else. Paul's use of the third person is his way of observing this sort of convention.[123]

Lincoln generally agrees with Betz's argument, but qualifies it by noting that "Paul is far too passionately involved in the situation and concerned for the cause of Christ to have a basic affinity with Socrates' detached irony."[124] He also deems it "unlikely" that Paul is consciously following the Socratic 'apology' as such, as Betz appears to hold, and more likely that he is making effective use of elements from this tradition with which he is acquainted from their employment in popular culture and conventions."[125] Nonetheless he thinks Betz is right in identifying the rhetorical strategy Paul uses to deal with the arguments of his Corinthian opponents. He argues that the Corinthians had been impressed by the abilities, rhetoric, and presence of the so-called "super-apostles" and were turning away from Paul.

Betz compares Paul's dilemma to that of Socrates when his disciples were at first astounded by the knowledge of the sophists and provides many examples of the way in

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[123] A.T. Lincoln, "'Paul the Visionary': The Setting and Significance of the Rapture to Paradise in II Corinthians XII.1-10." *NTS* 25 (1979), 208.
[124] "Paul the Visionary," 206.
[125] *Ibid*.

which Socrates and subsequent philosophers defended themselves when charged with charlatanism. In conducting his apology the true philosopher rejected the usual means of rhetoric and by the use of irony vindicated himself in the name of philosophy, demonstrating that his poverty and weakness were proof of the genuineness of his claims, exposing his opponents as sophists who had at their disposal wealth, political influence and a whole arsenal of rhetorical tricks, and reducing their claims to absurdity. In such apologies it was not good form for the true philosopher to speak of his own accomplishments, but when necessary this could be done by someone else and in moderation. If absolutely forced to defend himself against false charges then one means he could adopt to avoid boasting about himself directly was to take on the role of 'the fool,' because the fool could get away with assertions which would not normally be permissible and could make extravagant claims.[126]

Thus, in verse 6, when Paul says he can boast without being a fool, because he is telling the truth, he is drawing upon a widespread rhetorical convention in order to defend himself against his opponents' attacks. But, for the Corinthians to be convinced that, although he *is* boasting, he is not talking like a fool, he has to speak of himself in the third person. Well, then! *Quod erat demonstrandum*—assuming, of course, that Paul is (a) willing (or able) to contrive such a rhetorical performance in the first place, and (b) strategically drawing upon the ecstatic language of his "opponents" solely in order to dismantle their claims through irony. The notion that Paul might actually have had an ecstatic experience which he valued as much as he claims is apparently considered too irrational to be entertained.

The bias of cognicentrism obviously influences such proposals. In these models, it simply

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[126] A.T. Lincoln, "Paul the Visionary," 206-7.

goes without saying that Paul's representation of himself in the third person is a rhetorical, literary, intentional, and above all a *rational*, move. At no point is Paul's experience itself considered as a possible explanation of why he describes it in such a way. At no point is the fact that Paul repeatedly—and even *laboriously*—states that he does not know whether he was in or out of his own body ever taken seriously as an indicator that Paul had an actual ecstatic experience. More often, it is merely assumed that Paul says this in order to make a carefully designed rhetorical point. Schmithals, for instance, thought that being "in" or "out" of the body was a crucial point in Paul's conflict with the Gnostics.[127] James Tabor's explanation of this qualification, which holds that Paul "wants to separate what he knows—that he was taken into Paradise and received secret revelation—from what he does not know, just how this took place" is certainly not implausible, but when we encounter such an explanation right on the heels of his statement that "we must take Paul's statement at face value," it does seem rather problematic.[128] To take Paul "at face value" in 2 Cor 12:1-10, one must take seriously that Paul is *describing an experience*, not performing rhetoric. Indeed, as Colleen Shantz puts it, to take Paul "at face value" here, one must appreciate the "absurdity of such a situation," of the fact "that anyone should be certain that they were located precisely in the third heaven but simultaneously have no clear sense of the whereabouts of their own torso."[129] Viewed in this way, Paul`s statements about the disorientation of his body evince a different kind of conflict, not rooted among the various "factions" Paul addresses at Corinth, but located within the body of the apostle himself.

Drawing upon medical and neurological data on how the brain orients "mind" to "body,"

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[127] Walter Schmithals, *Gnosticism in Corinth: an investigation into the letters to the Corinthians*. Trans. John Steely. (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1971), 209-18. Cf. Lincoln, "Paul the Visionary," 215.
[128] Tabor, *Things Unutterable*, 121.
[129] Colleen Shantz, *Paul in Ecstasy: The Neurobiology of the Apostle's Life and Thought* (Cambridge, 2009), 96.

Shantz argues that Paul's stated lack of knowledge about his body can be explained as a result of the altered states of consciousness that result from an ecstatic experience. "During normal consciousness," Shantz writes, "a stable sense of the body is reinforced by a number of means," most especially a "neural map of the body" located on the surface cortices in the right hemisphere of the brain. In fact, the brain maintains *two* neural maps, "one, a motor depiction in our frontal lobes and the other, a set of sensory correlates in our parietal lobes."[130] During normal consciousness, these two maps are maintained in perfect tandem so that "the bodily coordinates from tongue to toes are plotted out on our brains," resulting in "a reconfigured whole...sometimes referred to as the homunculus, the little human we carry around in our heads."[131] However, when consciousness is altered—whether through injury, trauma, loss of limb, or even through trance—this neural map conflicts with the physical reality of our bodies, and the incongruity can have any number of side effects (such as the well known "phantom limb" syndrome). During intense states of religious ecstasy, the incongruity gives rise to several observable side effects, which Shantz describes at length:

> On the one hand, bodily sensation (from both the "homunculus" and the body proper is blocked from consciousness. On the other hand, the efferent activity of the orientation association area is more intense than usual. The human mind is left to interpret this strange combination of neurological silence and noise in an intelligible way. Thus, the body is perceived as present, but its sensations—its weight, boundaries, pain, or voluntary motion—are all absent from consciousness. In an attempt to interpret these phenomena as coherently as possible, ecstatics frequently report the sensation of floating

[130] Shantz, *Paul in Ecstasy*, 96.
[131] Shantz, *Paul in Ecstasy*, 96.

or flying without physical boundaries between themselves and the people and objects in their awareness. Not surprisingly, descriptions of ascent are also common in interpretations of ecstatic experiences. Paul's ascent is among them. Like other ecstatic thinkers, Paul genuinely could not know the status of his body by using the sensate signals that would normally inform him. The question of whether he was in the body or outside it is not simply a rhetorical means of dismissing the issue; t is rather an account of one of the phenomena of trance.[132]

To recognize that Paul's "rhetorical" statement about his bodily status is actually a description of his trance experience (which he interpreted as an ascent) is to go a long way towards bringing the religiosity of Paul and the Corinthians in line with one another. Unlike the mirror-reading strategy, which takes an interest in Paul's statements only in order to invert them, to treat Paul's statements as his description of his own experience—and thus to locate the source of his supposed propositional, noetically-based "rhetoric" in his own body—brings us to an understanding of the text that is actually *more* exegetically sound than most traditional exegeses, because it does not base itself upon an explanation located "outside" the text. I would argue that a similar clarification occurs if we take Paul's reference "unutterable utterances" seriously, as well.

Why Can't Paul Speak of What He Heard? The "rhetorical" answer, part II

Paul tells the Corinthians that he heard "inexpressible expressions" or "unutterable utterances" (*arrēta rhēmata*) during his ascent to Paradise. Much exegetical ink has been spilled in an effort

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[132] Shantz, *Paul in Ecstasy*, 98.

to clarify just what this might mean. The notion of "unutterable utterances" itself, though paradoxical, is hardly unique in the Hellenistic world. There are texts which speak of words that are inexpressible because it is beyond human capability to speak them, or, as one of the Greek Magical Papyri has it, "it is not able to be spoken by a human mouth."[133] The phrase can also refer to "something too sacred to express, something which is prohibited. Philo speaks of men biting off their tongues to avoid disclosing '*ta arrēta*.'"[134] Tabor compares this with Paul's reference to the "deep things of God" which are revealed to initiates by the Spirit (1 Cor 2:6-16). In a common move among exegetes, Tabor locates the origin of this term among Paul's opponents, arguing that Paul

> is picking up on the technical language of his opponents here, the 'spirituals,' who must have made claims to heavenly secrets. But, he applies these capacities to the community as a whole, to all who possess the Spirit. In view of this, what Paul claims to have received in Paradise was an even higher and more privileged revelation. It was *neither shared by*, *nor to be shared with*, others who possessed the Spirit.[135]

These claims would simultaneously bolster Paul's authority while undermining that of his opponents, whose "revelations" seem rather feeble alongside Paul's "inexpressible" knowledge.

Tabor further argues that Paul's two-stage journey is rhetorically constructed to surpass the claims of his opponents at Corinth. These opponents, who Paul accuses of being "false apostles" and "deceitful" workers of Satan (2 Cor 11:13-14) were, according to Tabor, "putting forth their own claims to 'visions and revelations' (2 Cor 12:1). This was likely part of their claim to be superior (2 Cor 11:5)." Tabor suggests that Paul relates his *two-stage* journey to

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[133] *PGM* 13.763.
[134] Tabor, *Things Unutterable*, 122; Philo, *Det.* 175.
[135] Tabor, *Things Unutterable*, 112.

counter his opponents' claims to special knowledge. "First, he says that he *too* has had such revelations of heavenly secrets, even at the third level of heaven." This may indicate that the "super-apostles" had also claimed to have seen the third heaven. Paul's statement indicates that he, too, has seen it. Then, having identified their claims with his, Tabor suggests that Paul

> suddenly *distances* himself from their level of operations. Yes, he can relate visions and revelations; yes, he too has been as far as the third heaven; but he, moreover, has been taken *into Paradise*—he has appeared before God's very throne in the highest heaven. There too he heard words, but of such a nature that they cannot even be communicated to lower grade initiates.[136]

Tabor's proposals, like many reviewed here, takes part in the cognicentric discourse we have been trying to critique. In this model, Paul's every statement may potentially be seen as a rhetorical move, strategically contrived to persuade his auditors and weaken his opponents. For example, his statement that he did not proclaim his gospel "through persuasive words of wisdom, but through a demonstration of spirit and power" (1 Cor 2:4), which—if taken at face value— would seem to indicate that Paul disdained the use of rhetoric in his face-to-face communication with the Corinthians, could, on this model, be seen as a rhetorical move, a roundabout way of saying "I don't speak in rhetoric; I merely speak the truth—with power!" This method of reading Paul does violence to the apostle's words, by, first of all, assuming that Paul never means exactly what he says, *while also* assuming that he is always completely in control of the meaning of what he is saying. Since we are dealing with a man who admits that he speaks in tongues more than any members of his audience (1 Cor 14:8), this seems a fairly problematic assumption.

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[136] *Things Unutterable*, 120.

Tabor's confidence in this cognicentric manner of reading the text is so high that he can expand upon his initial treatment in the following way. He makes clear that he does not think

> Paul's claim is a simple matter of one-upmanship. He is not just claiming a higher vision. He does not even recognize the opponents as being 'in Christ' so his boast as a 'man in Christ' of having entered Paradise is not to be classed with theirs. Still, it *is* an highly privileged and exalted revelation, the most one could claim, and it *is* authentically from the Lord (12:1, 7). Those aspects together serve to remove him from their arena of comparison.[137]

The irony of this passage is that, despite the fact that Tabor devotes an entire study to Paul's account of his ascent to heaven—and thus appears to "take seriously" a text that is often brushed aside—he still manages, in his conclusion, to trivialize the passage's importance for our understanding of Paul. It is a good, though perhaps unintentional, example of the "tendentious desire" that Christopher Morray-Jones identified in many studies of Paul's ascent text, a desire "to prove that visionary experience was of no more than marginal importance to Paul."[138] Indeed, Tabor's conclusion leaves us with the impression that what was *truly* constitutive of Paul's self-understanding and apostolic practice was his rhetorical training, rather than any ecstatic experience he might have had. His emphasis on Paul's rhetorical intention is so great that his proposal does not even require Paul to be talking about a real experience: it works just as well if Paul had simply made the whole thing up for rhetorical purposes.

If, on the other hand, one makes the opposite assumption, and places social experience before rhetoric, one realizes that Tabor may be putting the cart before the horse. It may not be

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[137] Tabor, *Things Unutterable*, 121.
[138] Morray-Jones, "Part 2," 284.

that Paul rhetorically presented his (alleged) experience in a way that would bolster his authority while undercutting that of his opponents, but that Paul's experience influenced him in a way that was later elaborated in his discourse and reflected in his practice.

A.T. Lincoln comes close to arguing this when he argues that the very form of 2 Cor 12:1-10 "illustrates Paul's view of the role of such [ecstatic] experiences of heavenly life in present Christian existence."[139] As Philip Hughes puts it, "[t]he man who experienced the ineffable 'ascent' even to the third heaven was the same man who had experienced the undistinguished 'descent' from a window in the Damascus wall."[140] Lincoln argues that "it is the link between the apostle's experience of heaven and his experience of humiliation which the account of his thorn in the flesh is designed to emphasize."[141] Paul makes it clear that he was given this thorn as a result of his vision, and that he prayed unsuccessfully for the thorn to be removed. Thus, his account of his revelation provides his audience with no revelation, because the words he received cannot be spoken. But, when he prays, unsuccessfully, for a miracle, he received words which *can* be spoken: "My grace is sufficient for you. My power is made perfect in weakness" (2 Cor 12:9).

If Paul viewed things from this perspective, then "weakness was not something of which [he] had to be ashamed....[Rather, i]t was the surest proof of his being a representative of the crucified Christ who is the Lord."[142] Paul's belief that God's power is "made perfect in weakness" (2 Cor 12:9) clarifies many aspects of his *praxis*. He boasts in his hardships because he sees in them a sharing in the sufferings of Christ, and likely devotes himself to demeaning

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[139] "Paul the Visionary," 218.
[140] Philip E. Hughes, *Commentary on the Second Epistle to the Corinthians* (Grand Rapids, MI, 1962), 422.
[141] Lincoln, "Paul the Visionary," 218.
[142] Lincoln, "Paul the Visionary," 218-9.

manual labour in order to associate with the "base" things of the world, which will eventually shame the things that the world holds in high esteem. John Ashton suggests this is a result of his conversion experience, which he characterizes as "violent, uncompromising, and extreme, swinging from total acceptance of Judaism (circumcision, the law, zealous persecution of the church, everything he can think of) to a complete rejection of it all…for the sake of achieving one thing only, and that is Christ."[143] While I certainly believe Ashton is dead wrong to think that Paul "rejects Judaism," I do at least think his characterization of Paul's life "in Christ" as a Nietzschean "transvaluation of values," in which the existing world order is rejected in favour of another, is quite apt (if ironic, considering Nietzsche's hatred of Paul.) This suggests that Paul's ecstatic experiences were quite significant in contributing to his perception of a world turned upside down.

If this is true, and Paul's performances were not as "rhetorical" as we tend to imagine, then another way of reading this text, beyond the socio-rhetorical and historical-critical approaches, might be useful.

Ecstasy, Individuality, and Social Transmission

Traditionally, Paul has been depicted as preaching in the synagogues during the beginning of his urban ministry, then breaking away once converts were gained. Alternately, Paul has been depicted as preaching while he labored in his leatherworking shop,[144] or even converting trade associations.[145] In all these depictions, it is assumed that what convinced people to adopt Paul's

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[143] Ashton, *Religion of Paul*, 126-7.
[144] Ronald F. Hock, *The Social Context of Paul's Ministry: Tentmaking and Apostleship* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1980).
[145] Richard S. Ascough, *Paul's Macedonian Associations: The Social Context of Philippians and 1 Thessalonians* (Tuebingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2003).

"religion" was his preaching. In other words, the conversion takes place through an essentially "deliberative" process of intellection.

In light of the conclusions we have drawn, however, which suggest the importance of ecstatic practices in Paul's life, and also the fact that modern scholarship contains an implicit bias against this kind of experience, we might have to question this consensus. What if we took Paul seriously when he said he "proclaimed" the gospel to the Corinthians not through rhetorical arts of persuasion, but "with a demonstration of spirit and power" (1 Cor 2:4)? One obvious implication is that we should take the centrality of ecstatic practices and experiences seriously. Paul's "message" may not have been as carefully crafted as has often been assumed.

The literature reviewed here has altered our conception of Paul's religiosity. Indeed, it has presented us with a Paul we barely recognize, who we must "re-cognize." It has also shown that Paul's interactions with the Corinthians might not have been as tense as some other models might suggest: his ecstatic practice seems more in line with their own, and the possibility raised by Shantz, that Paul's corrective instructions to the Corinthians do not require him to have "opponents" there, has eliminated one major conceptual block. However, this raises the question of how Paul "evangelized" the Corinthian group. What difference does this ecstatic religiosity make for our conceptualization of "Paul among the Corinthians"? In these concluding sections, I will briefly consider how recent work in cognitive theory can supplement Shantz's neurological analysis of Paul, by giving us insights into the socio-political dynamics of the Corinthian Christ association.

In a series of articles and monographs, Harvey Whitehouse has laid out a cognitive theory

that distinguishes between what he calls the doctrinal and imagistic modes of religiosity.[146] These two modes "can occur quite separately, as the organizing principles of religious experience, belief, practice, and organization. But often the two modes occur together, in a single religious tradition, and interact with each other."[147] When this happens, it is common for a given formation to be more doctrinal than imagistic, or vice-versa. When the doctrinal mode is dominant, teachings and instruction gain pride of place, and transmission of these teachings is accomplished through "highly routinized (i.e., frequently repeated)" rituals,[148] which are enacted by authority figures who ensure that the material is accurately transmitted. One other aspect of the doctrinal mode is that social formations highly invested in this "mode" are able to develop trans-local connections with other groups that have highly similar, if not identical, teachings, due to the emphasis on accurate transmission. Reliance upon texts is not uncommon.

The "imagistic" mode of religiosity tends to take the form of less-frequently performed, highly arousing or "ecstatic" practices which can trigger altered states of consciousness and what Whitehouse calls "spontaneous exegetical reflection," which is "often experienced as personal inspiration or revelation."[149] When people have these experiences, they "tend to speculate about their significance and meaning. An important factor here is that elevated arousal is occasioned typically by sensory stimulation (often using a variety of channels—auditory, visual, kinesthetic, olfactory, etc.). This in turn encourages people to draw associations between different images evoked in religious ceremonies which are rooted in the way perception is organized."[150] This is

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[146] Harvey Whitehouse, *Inside the Cult: Religious Innovation and Transmission in Papua New Guinea* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995); idem, *Arguments and Icons: Divergent Modes of Religiosity*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000);idem, "Modes of Religiosity: Toward a Cognitive Explanation of the Socio-Political Dynamics of Religion," *MTSR* 14:3-4 (2002), 293-315.
[147] Whitehouse, "Modes of Religiosity," 294.
[148] Whitehouse, "Modes of Religiosity," 297.
[149] Whitehouse, "Modes of Religiosity," 305.
[150] Whitehouse, "Modes of Religiosity," 305-6.

entirely in keeping with the dynamics of our semiotic model, in which the pre-existing semiotic

material is drawn upon and redeployed in service of a new enunciation. The multiplicity of

possible associations may then be linked up to form "revelations" or "forms of belief," which—

although they "may converge on certain themes and central ideas"—will almost inevitably lead

to a diversity of religious representations within a single social formation. [151]

Whitehouse developed his theory over years of fieldwork in Papua New Guinea.

However, ethnographic reports from the early 20th century show that these two modes have been

operating in New Guinea for quite some time. Whitehouse identifies the so-called Taro cult of

Northern Papua, for which we have extensive documentation, as a prime example of an

"imagistic" formation. His study of the dissemination of the cult shows that imagistic movements

can spread and flourish just as well as doctrinal ones. Whitehouse's study also demonstrates, as I

will argue, that Paul could have successfully "evangelized" the Corinthians without relying too

heavily upon "doctrinal" sermons or rhetorical performances.

Although studies of the Taro Cult have sometimes grouped this movement together with

the Melanesian cargo cults, this label is inaccurate.[152] Originating around 1914 and persisting at

least until the late 1920s, the Taro Cult "sought to promote natural fertility by supernatural

means," and thus, to ensure an abundance of a native staple food—the taro—and ending reliance

on Western cargo.[153] Like other Melanesian movements, such as the Baktaman initiation cult, the

Taro cult was highly imagistic in its socio-political organization.[154] In this cult, "verbalized

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[151] Whitehouse, "Modes of Religiosity," 306.
[152] Peter Worsley, *The Trumpet Shall Sound: A Study of "Cargo" Cults in Melanesia*. (London: MacGibbon & Kee, 1957).
[153] Whitehouse, *Arguments and Icons*, 57.
[154] Fredrik Barth, *Ritual and Knowledge Among the Baktaman of New Guinea*. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1975); idem., *Cosmologies in the Making: a generative approach to cultural innovation in inner New Guinea*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987).

doctrine and exegetical commentary were all but lacking and revelations were evoked through techniques of irregular, non-verbal transmission, based primarily on feasts and spirit possession." These ecstatic rituals "produced small, cohesive, bounded communities and thus highly sectarian and fragmented patterns of political association."[155] It was this highly fragmented and non-verbal aspect of the cult which bewildered F. E. Williams, the group's ethnographer, and brought him to the conclusion that the adherents of the Taro cult considered "theory or doctrine…wholly subordinate to action or ritual…those who carry out all the observances of the Taro cult with precision and confidence are often ignorant of or indifferent to its theories."[156] Whatever religious insights might have been developed during or as a result of these rituals, it was never formulated into a logically coherent "theology," nor communicated with other members of the cult.

While Williams tried to account for this lack of elaboration or "exegetical commentary" by positing "a lack of intellectual curiosity or imagination among adherents of the cult," his ethnography nonetheless includes sufficient detail that we can confidently say that the Taro cult was a strongly imagistic formation, which "generated powerful revelations through the medium of its rituals."[157] One of the most important of these rituals was a harvest feast, undertaken by the whole community with a mixture of enthusiasm and solemnity: although the meal was accompanied by a choir and drumbeats, this accompaniment was "consciously slothful," and the food was presented in a "distinctive fashion" which suggests that the adherents of the cult held this feast in high regard and considered it immensely important to the life of the group.[158]

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[155] Whitehouse, *Arguments and Icons*, 57.
[156] F. E. Williams, *Orokaiva Magic* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1928), 83-84.
[157] Whitehouse, *Arguments and Icons*, 66.
[158] Whitehouse, *Arguments and Icons*, 66; Williams, *Orokaiva Magic*, 39-40.

Another important feature of the Taro cult was the phenomenon of *jipari*, described by Williams as "uncontrollable body movements or paroxysms," which resulted from possession either by the spirit of the taro plant, or, sometimes, by the spirit of a dead person.[159] Possessions of this sort could seize any member of the cult at any time, and could sometimes, though rarely, even be brought on at will. Whenever one member of the group was seized by the spirit, "there was a tendency for those around him or her to exhibit, *jipari*, as well."[160] Both Williams and, earlier, Chinnery, directly observed "instances of individual possession triggering collective shaking fits."[161] Yet, neither of these eyewitness ethnographers could deduce the precise religious meaning that these *jipari* trances had for the cult adherents, nor the doctrinal basis for the expectation that having these trances would somehow promote the growth of their crops. As Williams put it, "Very often it is futile to search too deeply for a meaning, because the words of [their cultic songs] have been learned by rote, and so confused in the course of transmission that they have become little more than gibberish. But whatever their meaning, or lack of it, the songs are understood to contribute in some way to the growth of taro."[162] In addition to the frustration of his efforts to obtain a native exegesis of the cultic *Kasamba* songs, Williams was also "unable to discern any religious significance in the specific movements of afflicted persons," apart from the fact that they understood the affliction as a form of spirit possession.[163]

Upon surveying these and other observations by Williams, Whitehouse notes that there are at least two assumptions in his ethnography that need to be challenged:

The first is that people who did not supply verbal interpretations of taboos [and dances

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[159] Willliams, *Orokaiva Magic*, 66; cf. Whitehouse, *Arguments and Icons*, 66.
[160] Whitehouse, *Arguments and Icons*, 66.
[161] Whitehouse, *Arguments and Icons*, 67.
[162] Williams, *Orokaiva Magic*, 39.
[163] Whitehouse, *Arguments and Icons*, 67.

and songs] had no insights into their significance. An alternative hypothesis…is that the religious ideas surrounding taboos in the Taro Cult were not amenable to expression in words, and were most effectively codified non-verbally. Secondly, and related to this, the fact that some people could be persuaded to proffer tentative exegesis was not necessarily indicative of superior powers of imagination. It could imply the very opposite, namely a failure to appreciate the multivocal character of the symbolic process, and thus a willingness to render it in a simple and rather sterile form. But perhaps the main reason why some people struggled to explain Taro Cult taboos was that, for whatever motives of their own, they desired the approbation of the ethnographer.[164]

Whitehouse concludes his discussion of the Taro cult by noting that, in contrast to some other, "doctrinal" religious movements, which spread by careful and frequent rehearsal of specific sets of doctrine, disseminated via the preaching of an authoritative figure, the Taro cult, by sharp contrast,

was spread by rank and file adherents, through a process of "contagion," for example, where a mass possession in one village induced *jipari* among visitors from another village. Each group thus affected tended to elaborate its own distinctive versions of the cult rituals. Instead of being tied to a single authoritative ideology, Taro adherents were bound to localized "sects," the autonomy, chauvinism, and solidarity of which were emphasized in collective performances.[165]

In such a situation, the adherents "were not persuaded to join the Taro Cult by the power of the Word. There was no corpus of doctrine to inspire conversions, and nobody was ever 'talked into'

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[164] Whitehouse, *Arguments and Icons*, 69.
[165] Whitehouse, *Arguments and Icons*, 72.

joining the cult."[166] Rather, the spirit of the taro was transferred to the adherents by a man named Buninia, who was the first to be visited by the spirit. Yet, despite his role as "founder" of the cult, Buninia was no more helpful than the other adherents when it came to explaining the doctrinal significance of the possessions. "When asked by Williams to relate the experience, Buninia. seemed to struggle to put it into words, eventually resorting to a sort of miming of the events."[167] After Buninia's first experience of possession, the *jipari* passed from his body to the bodies of those in his immediate vicinity—particularly affecting those who touched him—and then, through "contagion," to people in the neighbouring villages. Whitehouse compares the spread of the cult to the "spread of a virus," and notes, significantly, that those "who received the spirit indirectly from Buninia had no knowledge of how the cult began and certainly no special reverence for the originator." And, while there were rituals and taboos that the adherents observed and abided by, Williams reports no word-of-mouth instruction that passed between adherents. Rather, it was believed "that ritual knowledge was conferred by 'strictly private inspiration,' during possession or sleep."[168] In other words, if I may be permitted a small distortion of the evidence in order to drive our analogy home, it might be said that the Taro adherents were not convinced to obey the cult taboos through lofty words of wisdom, but through the power of the Taro spirit.

If we return to the Corinthian situation with this material in mind, several analogies present themselves that could alter our imagination of that situation. The presence of highly ecstatic rituals, of glossolalia which may be described as a form of "spirit possession," and of prophetic speech perceived as revelations to the community, all witness to a social formation

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[166] Whitehouse, *Arguments and Icons*, 77-78.
[167] Whitehouse, *Arguments and Icons*, 78; Williams, *Orokaiva Magic*, 13-14.
[168] Whitehouse, *Arguments and Icons*, 78, quoting Williams, *Orokaiva Magic*, 17.

whose "normal" functioning would provide many opportunities for spontaneous exegetical reflection—indeed, the necessity of having an interpreter on hand to explain the ecstatic speech to the community would almost seem to *require* that spontaneous exegetical reflection had occurred. The presence of so-called "factions" at Corinth, in which various members affiliated themselves to one figure or another, could possibly have arisen via shared ecstatic experiences which formed bonds of association between those who were present in/at the experience—although this latter proposal must remain speculation. Also, one other intriguing possibility is that—if Paul's claim to authority is that he has seen the Lord (1 Cor 9:1)—perhaps other members of the community had experiences in which they saw the Lord, as well, which would inevitably lead to agonistic interactions as these members revealed their "divergent representations" of the Lord's sayings to the community. A similar *agon* can plausibly be imagined with reference to the Lord's Supper practiced by the Corinthians.[169] Given how intimately group formation, acts of identification, and practices of commensality are tied together, we can understand how divergent understandings of this ritual meal, and of how it defined the group at Corinth, would have captured Paul's interest and appeared to him as a problem of special urgency. His instructions to the Corinthians seem to be intended to bring unity to the divided situation, although—rather than appear as the one voice *beyond* or *above* the many—Paul's voice might have appeared in this multi-vocal arena as merely one voice *among* many. Imagining Paul in such a hectic economy of identification provides one plausible context for his claim to be "all things to all people," in a constantly-shifting, polytropic manner, so that the addressivity of his enunciations might reach as many targets as possible. Though we obviously do not need to assume that Paul brought the spirit to the Corinthians with anything like

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[169] I will discuss this ritual, and the issues surrounding it, in chapter five.

the spontaneous, apparently instruction-free manner in which the Taro cult spread, the analogy does make a real difference in our conception of the situation. For instance, to conceive of Paul among the Corinthians in this way, we are required to downplay somewhat the importance of Paul in the formation of this particular assembly. That is, in order to grant the Corinthians some manner of agency, to enable them to be "present at their own making," we must move beyond the "heroic Paul."

If Paul and the Corinthians share these imagistic practices, we might also note that they differ in certain ways. Paul does seem to consider himself part of a larger network of "all the assemblies in all places" who share faith in Christ (1 Cor 1:2). These trans-local connections need not be shared or even recognized by every member of each association in order for Paul to perceive them. And, while Paul certainly does give the Corinthians (and others) instructions on how to behave and perform their rituals, it is notable that he tends to do so mainly when trying to correct practices that have gone too far away from what he deems it acceptable for Christ-followers to do. This suggests that the Corinthians' initial experimentations with Christ worship might have been far less doctrinally-controlled that we traditionally imagine, and this free-ranging experimentation may be imagined as providing one "occasion" for the acts of transformation and scenes of contestation that Paul addresses throughout the Corinthian correspondence. With the spontaneous dissemination of the Taro cult as a cross-cultural analogy, I suggest that Paul's claim that he brought Christ to Corinth through a demonstration of the spirit and power may need to be taken far more literally than most scholarship has been willing to do.

"Pneumatic Warfare": The Body Politic of Christ

In this chapter, we have reviewed some of the scholarship on Paul's discussion of his ascent to heaven as a particularly prominent example of his ecstatic practice, highlighting first of all the extent to which "rhetorical" or discursive explanations are invoked, then noting the relative paucity of attempts to take seriously that Paul is describing an actual experience when he describes his "ascent to Paradise" (not to mention just how contested these latter attempts are), and finally, asking what changes would occur if we took the basis of Paul's description of this ascent to be, not rhetoric, but ecstasy. Considering the phenomenon of "spirit possession" that is apparently quite ubiquitous among the Corinthian Christ-devotees (as among the Pauline assemblies, in general),[170] we can appreciate how the indeterminateness that results from a corporate identification of the assembly as the "body of Christ," possessed by the Spirit, allows the members of this body articulate their own "space" in which to dwell, and why Paul at times must work so hard to ensure that the body remains a unity, defined by solidarity *in* Christ as well as fidelity *to* Christ.

As with Paul's understanding of resurrection, which Tappenden presents in non-cognicentric terms as both "metaphorical *and* necessarily comprehended with respect to more concrete experiences of human embodiment," we should understand Paul's conception of the "body of Christ" both literally and metaphorically—or, in a word, *realistically*. Paul truly means just what he says. To get at the gravity of this assertion, we would do well to recall that

> in Paul's world *pneuma* (wind, air, breath, spirit…)…is a refined, qualitatively higher

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[170] In addition to the work of Hanges and Shantz, Giovanni Bazzana has recently published a major study of "spirit possession" in the Pauline assemblies as well as the earlier Jesus movements. See Giovanni Bazzana, *Having the Spirit of Christ* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2020).

substance with its own power of movement and intelligence. Paul betrays exactly this kind of physics and cosmology. So, for example, in 1 Cor 15:39-41 the substances of the lower and heavenly cosmos vary qualitatively in a grand hierarchy…Humans participate in Adam because they share bodies consisting of the same stuff as Adam (15:42-49). Those in Christ participate in him because they share with him the most sublime kind of pneuma, divine pneuma that he received in being resurrected from the dead. Paul's language here is not metaphorical…in the sense of not involving a realistic meaning and reference….It is a reinterpretation into the modernist [cognicentric] framework to treat the language of participation as fundamentally metaphorical without the referent of a substantial ontology….[The] ancient conceptions understood the world to work by the principles of mind (e.g., value, purpose) permeating the cosmos.[171]

This being so, we are led to conclude that the associations of Christ-devotees to whom Paul writes, including the Corinthians, are understood by Paul to constitute collectively a true earth-bound body of Christ. Those who possess and are possessed by the pneuma of Christ are his body. Just as, in the normal order of things, one's own pneuma (spirit *and* breath) inhabits and animates one's own body, so Christ's pneuma inhabits and animates Paul and the Christ-followers to whom he writes. Drawing from the work of Stanley Stowers, we can see that the effects of this bodily conceptualization are structural in Paul's thinking, touching upon every aspect of his thought. "Those in Christ are members of him. The relation is like the relation of the arm to the rest of the body. The same stuff makes Christ and believers contiguous. Paul means this so realistically that for a believer to be joined to a prostitute in sexual intercourse would be to join her to Christ and create that arm-body relation…[T]he basic model for the

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[171] Stowers, "Pauline Participation," 355-356.

discourse of participation is that of descendants and relatives sharing the same stuff as ancestors or those to whom they are related.'[172]

But again, our persistent preoccupation in this study is the relation of Paul's thought, with its variegated moments, to the element of the political. We are therefore led to ask after the political effects of this conception of the "body (politic) of Christ" upon the nature of the social formations of the Corinthians. One among many possible answers would be that we must reconfigure some of the characterizations of the Corinthian assembly that have been suggested by advocates of the political Paul *qua* resistor to the Roman *imperium*. For example, in one of the finest presentations of his political understanding of the Corinthian assembly, Richard Horsley characterizes the Corinthians as an "alternative society."[173] While there is certainly nothing *a priori* implausible about such a description, I would argue that it is nonetheless inadequate. This is because, in framing the Corinthian assembly in such contemporary terms, Horsley's characterization misses the impact of the *ancient context* in which this assembly existed. It is not so much that Paul conceives an alternative to the larger, urban world in which the Corinthians live, move, and have their being. Rather, because they have the pneuma of Christ (or, perhaps because the pneuma *has them*), I would argue that Paul and the Corinthians should not be imagined as dwelling contiguously with the Roman socio-imperial order, as upon a plane of immanence where all social actors are equally dispersed, where formations coagulate and cohere over against one another directly. No: those in Christ are *ontologically distinct* from those not in Christ, and since their "true citizenship" is in heaven, I would argue that they do not

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[172] Stowers, "Pauline Participation," 358.

[173] Richard A. Horsley, "Paul's Assembly in Corinth: An Alternative Society," in Daniel N. SChowalter and Steven J. Friesen, eds, *Urban Religion in Roman Corinth: Interdisciplinary Approaches* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005), 371-395

perceive themselves as living, moving, and having their being within the social ontology of the urban Roman East (or simply Roman Greece and Asia Minor).[174] They dwell apart; their *being* is of a qualitatively higher order, and they see themselves as being ontologically more "authentic" than those outside Christ—although of course, they do not think of themselves in such technical, philosophical terms, if indeed they reflect upon this fact at all; this entire notion of the "ontology of Christ" can only operate at the level of redescription, to make a larger theoretical point.

And what is that point? To ask how spirit possession can mesh with an attitude of resistance, of course. And, since the brutal truth is that the most prominent New Testament interpreters arguing in favor of "Paul the anti-imperialist" rarely reflect upon "resistance" as a concept—or, better, treat the concept "resistance" as a ready-at-hand tool to be used, rather than a question in need of clarification—we would do well to draw upon one of the most robust recent reflections on "resistance," namely Howard Caygill's *On Resistance: A Philosophy of Defiance*. Caygill begins his work with a discussion of a classic text on conflict and the capacity to resist: Carl von Clausewitz's *On War*. Happily for us, Caygill discusses Clausewitz's difficulties in conceptualizing "wars of resistance," as opposed to the more traditional warfare of the Napoleonic campaigns or the strategic maneuvers of the wars of revolution. Caygill describes Clausewitz's difficulties thusly:

> The warfare of the *Ancien Régime*, which resembled a carefully choreographed and complicit movement of solid masses, was destroyed by what Clausewitz described in *On War* as the liquid, wave-like offensives of the revolutionary armies...Clausewitz counters

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[174] One textual indication of this is 1 Cor 5:3-4, where Paul instructs his Corinthian audience to hand a man over to Satan, where his flesh may be destroyed. Outside the fellowship of the Christ-devotees, apart from the security of Christ's body, there is only the domain of the "rulers of this age," both human and metahuman, obvious and nonobvious. This does indeed suggest that it is Christ's embodied pneuma that renders the devotee ontologically secure.

the metaphor of liquid violence with one of vaporization and condensation. From the defeat of the massed solids of the armies of the *Ancien Régime* by the liquid mass of the revolutionary army emerges the People's War (*Volkskrieg*) of episodic and pointillist attacks, momentary condensations of an intangible political vapour or cloud that is the actualization of a new capacity to resist.[175]

Given that vapor, cloud, and steam, in addition to wind, breath, spirit, are all possible translations of "pneuma," the reader can likely see where this is headed. Caygill further reports that

Clausewitz found himself having to think not only beyond the physics of opposed solid bodies axiomatic for traditional military doctrine but also beyond the liquid military body of the revolution. He begins with the problem of describing the actuality of resistance: 'That a resistance so distributed is not suited to achieving the effect (*Wirkung*) of major blows concentrated in space and time is evident'; instead of physical presence in solid or liquid form, the actualization of People's War must be compared to 'the physical process of vaporisation.' Clausewitz's use of the doctrine of the four elements has not often been remarked, but there is a consistent alignment of war with fire, with the intensity of its expression graded according to the low degree of solid matter (earth), the intermediate degree of liquid matter (water) and the highest degree of vaporization (air)...Strategists of People's War must maintain its nebulous state and resist the temptation to assume solid form and enter into conventional conflict…'On the other hand it is however necessary that this fog condenses at certain points and forms threatening cloud from which powerful bolts of lightning can emerge.' Not only must these points of condensation be

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[175] Caygill, *On Resistance*, 24.

without constant presence and manifest themselves at unpredictable intervals, they must also appear where they are least expected, and then disappear without ever engaging in a frontal confrontation with the enemy.[176]

Drawing upon these ideas as a possible analogy, we can provisionally say that Paul and the Corinthians are engaged in a "vaporous war" with the rulers of the age, both terrestrial and celestial. It should be noted, however, that this does not even need to have been their intent in order for a political act of great magnitude to have taken place. It is enough that they do not see themselves as dwelling on the same "plane" as those not-being-in-Christ; it is enough that they see their citizenship as transcending the wider social order for their actions already to be preponderantly political *in effect*, whether or not this was remotely present in their minds. As we will discuss in chapter four, it was enough for the participants of the 1870 Ghost Dance in the western United States to be organizing their "religious" ceremonies in a manner that looked like political agitation for the United States government to observe them with a suspicious eye, and the "religious" content of the political organizations that occurred during the 1890 Ghost Dance was not enough to convince the government that what the Sioux were doing was not tantamount to insurrection. In that tragic case, the things lost in translation resulted in the horrific events of Wounded Knee. For that matter, colonial overseers were not concerned with F. E. Williams' ethnographic interests when they allowed him to observe the nature and extent of the Taro cult. Rather, they feared the deleterious effect upon their exploitative colonial enterprises if "the natives got restless." This was also the case with the roughly contemporaneous "Vailala madness."

In the case of Paul and the Corinthians, the vaporous antagonisms that spread among the

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[176] Caygill, *On Resistance*, 25-27.

Christ-followers enabled them to conceive themselves in ontologically distinctive ways, quite apart from the authority of the local governors and the distant emperor. In their eyes, the ultimate authority was right there with them, in their bodies more than they themselves were. As with the Communards asking after their place in history, with a concomitant awareness that a new time had begun, so the Corinthians were now living in the time of the Christ-pneuma, undergoing a process of resurrection even as they lived their earthly lives under terrestrial authorities. It is *this* effect of Christ-spirit possession, and not any self-consciously anti-imperial agenda, that provided the political edge to Paul's thought and activity. As argued in the first chapter, "religion," as the rhetoric of supremacy (here articulating a qualitatively higher mode of being opposed to those "not-in-Christ"), might best be described as "politics pursued by other means"

Yet whether or not the comparisons and theoretical interventions I have pursued here are entirely convincing, our discussion has at least succeeded in bringing Paul and the Corinthians out of the conceptual fields in which they normally play, and into new territory. The new vistas that border this territory provide us with a means of imagining the apostle's ecstatic practices in ways that are cross-culturally identifiable and recognizably within the bounds of the humanly possible. In observing how human beings have responded, cross-culturally and trans-temporally, to the experience of altered states of consciousness in their own lifetimes, we may yet catch a glimpse of how the man we call Paul of Tarsus responded and corresponded with those experiences in his lifetime. This man Paul, who left us with nothing but a small body of written work to assure us that he ever existed, still gave just enough evidence in those writings for us to know something of *how* he existed: both "in" the body and "outside" of it.

3) Assessing Paul's Intervention: Structure, Ethnicity, Event

> "Politics is a thought. This statement excludes all recourse to the theory/practice pairing. Doing politics cannot be distinguished from thinking politics."
>
> —Alain Badiou[177]

In addition to the theoretical perspectives outlined in the first chapter, I want to explore further the possibility of reading Paul in philosophical terms, while also maintaining a strong historical interest. I want to continue inquiring after the place of politics in Paul's life and thought, not only in keeping with a certain widespread trend in Pauline studies, but also in dialogue with recent developments in continental philosophy. One way to do this is to bring in certain concepts drawn from recent developments in political philosophy—albeit a form of political philosophy quite different from what is traditionally meant by that term—in order to render Paul's text differently-legible. Therefore, building upon the previous two chapters, I will draw upon psychoanalytic thought as a *theoretical resource* to help clarify (or complicate) specific issues that seem pressing at this current juncture of our investigation.

We have re-imagined the beginnings of Paul's "mission" to the Gentile nations and his attitude towards the Law in the first chapter. In the second chapter we secured our imagination of Paul as an ecstatic practitioner and highlighted the socio-political impact of the spirit-possessed "body-politic of Christ." It will be necessary to tread a rather circuitous path before we can fully address the driving question of this chapter: how does Paul's ecstasy—particularly his status of possessing and being possessed by the Spirit of Christ—fit in with, or relate to, his broader political project?

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[177] Alain Badiou, *Metapolitics*, 46.

A great theoretical assist has been provided by Paul Eisenstein and Todd McGowan. Among other things, to be considered in subsequent chapters, this perspective will aid us in considering recent attempts to conceive of Paul's ethnic discourse in political terms, as an attempt to redefine Jewish and Gentile identities in various ways. They present different type of political philosophy, which is not concerned with issues such as the legitimate distribution of power—as political philosophy generally has since the time of Plato—but a type of political thought organized around the notion of the "event," or of "rupture." By orienting their thought around this notion, they gain a thinking of politics that "has the ability both to make sense of political events and to animate political acts." A rupture, for them, is "the interruption of the flow of social life whose force remains in the wake of revolutionary changes. The political impact of rupture does not disappear when its obvious manifestations cease to be prominently visible."[178]

> [R]upture occurs when the coordinates that organize existence undergo a shift, such as when culture emerges out of the natural order…Or instead of viewing hierarchical relations as stemming from the nature of things, we begin to conceive of an inherent equality among human beings. Or instead of viewing real numbers as the limit of mathematical inquiry, we calculate with imaginary ones. From the perspective prior to their onset, these events are impossible, and yet they transpire nonetheless. Rupture is the occurrence of the impossible, when the very ground under our feet shifts in order to transform the point from which we see.[179]

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[178] Paul Eisenstein and Todd McGowan, *Rupture: On the Emergence of the Political* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2012), 3.

[179] *Rupture*, 4. They elaborate that "The fact that rupture takes place has concrete ontological implications. Being cannot be one or a while in which all beings remain in their places. Rather than a harmony of being, there is disjunction and antagonism. The existence of historical ruptures testifies to a divide within being itself. In this sense, avowing the fact of historical change functions as an ontological claim, and ontology has for us a clear political bearing. Political acts are possible and transformative change can occur because being is always at odds with itself, and this self-division is both destabilizing and productive."

When the flash of an event occurs, a rupture may be left in its post-evental wake—provided that there are individuals or groups who recognize the event as such and maintain fidelity to it, thus becoming subjects-of-the event. In that case, the rupture "is the point where politics begins and ends, and our political task consists in finding ways to inhabit this point without falling back into a secure sense of identity. The political subject exists within the rupture, and rupture is the absent foundation for all the values that inform our political struggles."[180]

One important thing to ask, then, when studying Paul's relation to the political, is just how largely rupture figures into his thought. Conversely, one must also ask just how successfully Paul managed to exist within the rupture rather than falling back into the more fully constituted symbolic structure. First, though, it is important to bring this notion of rupture in line with our general semiotic theory outlined in the first chapter. The task is not particularly difficult, since, after all, rupture marks the creation of value out of nothing, and the paradigm for this creation is the emergence of signification itself. In other words, the theory of rupture is primarily a theory of signification.

To explain what this means, we will need to keep in mind that a theory of signification— or, in the present case, a semiotic theory of religion and socio-political change—must absolutely include a theory of how the person enters the symbolic order and becomes a subject. As human beings are, by nature, social animals, and each comes-to-be within pre-existing socio-symbolic formations, such a process might seem natural, yet it is anything but. Indeed, socio-symbolically constituted "realities" (or "worlds," to use Alain Badiou's parlance) can only produce "subjects" because of a given world's constitutive incompleteness. That is to say, the subject "is" nothing but a gap in the structure, the fissure between the Real and the impossibility of the Real's full

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[180] Eisenstein and McGowan, *Rupture*, 11.

symbolization as a "world." As Slavoj Žižek describes the effect of the Real upon the

constitution and transformation of social reality, "[t]he paradox of the Lacanian Real…is that it is

an entity which, although it does not exist (in the sense of 'really existing,' taking place in

reality), has a series of properties—it exercises a certain structural causality, it can produce a

series of effects in the symbolic reality of subjects."[181] Although the Real can never possibly be

encountered as such, every "world" is touched by the Real, which pushes back against every

symbolic structure. Sometimes, the Real may break through in an event that changes the

parameters of a situation, rendering visible or articulable what had previously gone "uncounted"

by the "state" or "transcendental regime" of that situation/world.[182]

As to the question of how the individual enters the socio-symbolic order and becomes a

"subject," it is, again, the fundamental, structural incompleteness of that order which elicits the

emergence of subjectivity by allowing events to take place. As noted, the political subject, or

subject-of-the-event, dwells within the rupture opened by an event, and this is only possible if

both Subject and Substance (the socio-symbolic order) are internally fissured and not self-

identical. Substance and Subject are both articulated through the lack within the structure as the

"indivisible remainder" or inevitable remnant of the process of symbolization. This signals

substance's failure to constitute itself fully *qua* a cohesive, undivided One-All or self-enclosed

system. From this failure, subject emerges as the very impossibility that caused the decentering

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[181] Slavoj Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology* (London: Verso Books, 1989), 163.

[182] I alternate between situation and world in order not only to acknowledge the two terms that Badiou uses to describe a given socio-symbolic "reality," but also to indicate that I am drawing upon both his *Being and Event* (which uses the term "situation") as well as his later *Logics of Worlds* (which, predictably, uses the term "world" to indicate roughly the same theoretical construct. It is worth citing, here, Adrian Johnston's explanation that Badiou "uses the word *state* in two overlapping senses: on the one hand, the ontological-phenomenological conception of the state as the representational architecture of a state-of-the-situation (or…the transcendental regime of a world), and, on the other hand, the state according to the everyday understanding of the word as referring to the institutional apparatus of government endowed with a sufficiently recognized quota of strength." Johnston, *Badiou, Zizek, and Political Transformations: The Cadence of Change* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2009), 38.

of the structure-as-substance in the first place. Thus substance and subject to not stand opposed (*pace* many current theorists who invest so much time debating about structure vs. agency), as if they were both fully constituted "objectivities," but instead as incompletely constituted, internally-divided, non-All instances—as Hegel famously stated, substance is also subject (i.e., self-divided).

So, again, the question of just how heavily a thought-practice of rupture figured into Paul's project must be answered. It seems to me that Badiou might once again provide us with the theoretical resources to address this question. As Mari Ruti explains:

> Badiou conceives of human existence as consisting of two (at times overlapping) realms. The first is the ordinary, everyday domain of (seemingly) coherent identities. This domain (or 'situation') is organized around the pursuit of personal interests, such as wealth, success, acclaim, happiness, or rewarding relationships, and it is held together by a pool of taken-for-granted knowledge about the state of the world and the meaning of human life. The second is the exceptional domain of truth-events-moments when the subject is seized by an epiphanic vision so powerful that it is momentarily dislodged from its ordinary life. During such sudden surges of insight [or moments of "spontaneous exegetical reflection"], the subject is able to view the world from an angle that is foreclosed by its customary mode of being.[183]

As I have argued throughout, the event that occasioned Paul's becoming-apostle and began to shape his thought and his eventual project was his reception of the Christ-pneuma, and his recognition that members of the Gentile nations were also receiving that pneuma. Paul's

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[183] Mari Ruti, *Singularity of Being*, 83.

distinctive genius lay in his working out the implications of that and forming the notion of a "mission" to the Gentile nations, as well as developing a proclamation based on what he believed was the spirit of the risen Christ. This last part, commonly called the "Christ-event" in certain theological reflections, was a true innovation on Paul's part, since seemingly no other Jesus movement had been claiming that Jesus was resurrected. Indeed, as near as we can tell, no previous Jesus movement even allotted much significance to the fact of Jesus' crucifixion, apart from recognizing that prophets often die violent deaths. Considering just how impossible it is to get back "behind" Paul, even in the most speculative imaginings, and picture what the pre-Pauline Jesus movement—apparently practicing spirit-possession without a notion of Jesus' resurrection—would have been like, we might want to reconsider our terminology and speak instead of the "Paul-event."

This last point is what clamps the notion of rupture inseparably to Paul's life and thought. For, it was Paul's own intervention into the Jesus movement, and his organization of Christ-devotees into assemblies having trans-local connections as one political body of Christ, that irrevocably changed the coordinates of the entire "world" of Christian beginnings.

In his 2012 magnum opus, *Less Than Nothing*, Žižek provides an illustration for a theoretical point that perfectly captures the effect of the "Paul-event," and an explanation for why it occurred. He begins by discussing Italo Calvino's short story "A Beautiful March Day," which explores the conspiracy against Julius Caesar, but with a twist: Calvino focuses on the unforeseen and unpredictable consequences of Caesar's assassination, which the conspirators could not possibly have been prepared for. As Molly Rothenberg explains:

> The very world in which it made sense to get rid of Caesar also vanishes with those
> dagger strokes—not because Caesar held that world together, but because the assassins

could not foresee that their act would also transform the way the act would be judged. They could not factor in the historicity of their action; neither they nor anyone else could predict or govern how the future would interpret the assassination. Put another way, we could say that there simply was no way for them to take into account the *retroversive* effect of future interpretations.[184]

After noting Rothenberg's description, Žižek draws out the grist for the theoretical mill, stating that, in this example, "we encounter the key feature of the symbolic: the fundamental 'openness' it introduces into a closed order of reality. Once we enter the symbolic, things never simply are, they all 'will have been,' they as it were borrow (part of) their being from the future."[185] To refer to Rothenberg again, she provides a simple but very apt example of the retroversive effect that later interpretations can have upon seemingly trivial happenings. She asks us to consider the following simple statement: "Carl smiled as he gently stroked the velvety skin of his lover…," and then connect it to the supplement, "…with the keen edge of a steak knife." The shock occasioned by the supplement ensures that there is no "going back" to the original simple statement—or, if there is a return, then it will not be to the same statement, nor therefore can it be a return to the "origin." It is more or less the same case with the pre-Pauline forms of the Jesus movement. The effect of retroversion takes the "origin" right out from under the feet of the scholar of "Christian Origins," and for reasons that are nonreducible. Žižek explains that the "cause of this irreducible 'openness' of the symbolic is not its excessive complexity (we never know into what decentered context our statement will be inscribed), but the much more refined, properly dialectical impossibility of taking into account the way our own intervention will

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[184] Molly Anne Rothenberg, *The Excessive Subject: A New Theory of Social Change,* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2010), 1.
[185] Žižek, *Less Than Nothing*, 558

transform the field. The speaking subject cannot take into account the way it is itself 'counted' in the signifying series; with regard to its own inclusion, it is irreducibly split, redoubled."[186]

The unforeseen consequences of a subject intervening into the symbolic order are but small-scale reflections of the emergence of a given symbolic order into the brute reality of a weak, incomplete nature. Like subject itself, substance "emerges as the result of a decisive break—the appearance of a nonsensical signifier (an act, a name, a gesture) that introduces a constitutive rupture into being. To be confronted with this nonsensical master signifier…is to enter into a radically new universe of signification. In the encounter with this initial signifier, the subject receives the demand of the social structure. But this demand never acquires a definite sense, and the structure remains incomplete because no binary signifier for the master signifier exists…The incompletion of the signifying structure is the way in which the initial rupture that forms the structure manifests itself on an everyday level."[187]

Beginning to adopt semiotic language in service of our theory-in-the-making, it will be helpful to explain that saying that there is no "binary signifier" here is simply means that the "structure's injunction exists on its own, without any subsequent signifier that would provide completion and justification for the master signifier. Any signifier elected to complete and justify the master signifier would itself become the signifier in need of completion and justification, leading to an endless proliferation of signifiers. No additional signifier can come along and bring the initial signifier into the realm of signification."[188]

The very possibility of entrance into the socio-symbolic order, which is enabled by the missing binary of the master signifier, "testifies to a hole in the wholeness of one's world, and

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[186] Zizek, *Less Than Nothing*, 558-559.
[187] Eisenstein and McGowan, *Rupture*, 42-3.
[188] Eisenstein and McGowan, *Rupture*, 43, emphasis added.

the avowing of this hole…activates the political possibilities inherent in the world's incompletion. Because our world is incomplete, authority remains an imposture, and belief is always a testament to this imposture. Without rupture, there would be no space in which belief might emerge, no missing signifier in which one might invest oneself…But this belief must sustain its relation with absence rather than filling it in with a present figure of authority: only in this way does belief enable the political act that breaks entirely from the domain of authority."[189]

Having discussed "rupture" enough to introduce it as a workable concept, we may now turn our attention to the study of Paul, to provide an "e.g." for this theoretical concept, while also theoretically inflecting our imagination of Paul in a novel manner.

That Old Chestnut: Paul, the Jews, and the Gentiles

One of the effects of the instability of any acts of identification that occur in the wake of rupture is that new identities can be constructed, via acts of enunciation which draw upon elements of the pre-existing signifying structure, but which—like the rupture that occasioned them—have no "place" within this established order of words and things. Like signification itself, then, it will seem to have appeared from "nothing"—and, indeed, in terms of that established order of words and things, it will have emerged from a place in the structure that "counted" as nothing. However, as discussed above, once these new acts of enunciation become conventionalized, they will retroversively appear to have, somehow, always been there. In our terms, they will be "retroactively confiscated" into the symbolic structure. To use one obvious example, before the voyage of Christopher Columbus, the Western world, at least, had always assumed there were

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[189] Eisenstein and McGowan, *Rupture*, 43-44.

only three continents on the planet. Indeed, during the Middle Ages, some theologians had even argued that this *must* be so, as a reflection of the triune nature of God. It had never been imagined that there was a fourth continent, let alone a fifth, sixth, and seventh. The "world" literally changed—in the Western imagination—even though the "planet," with its seven continents, continued on spinning as it always had. Or, for that matter, consider the shift from Ptolemaic cosmology to Copernican cosmology. The geocentric model had assumed the sun moved around the earth, as indeed, it still *appears* to do. It was not until Copernicus and Galileo realized that, in order to make accurate measurements or observations, one had to inscribe one's *own* point of view within the model itself, that the earth did—in thought as it did in fact—move around the sun. The same would be true for any number of scientific and mathematical discoveries: even if we grant that these forces and factors had a place in our brute, material universe before their discovery, they had no place within human histories or social orders. Their discovery was their creation, which called them into being. However counter-intuitive it may sound at first blush, these things were retroactively "posited" as always-having-existed.

A similar act of retroactive confiscation, which covers over a previous history, seems to lie behind our common-sense notions that Paul and Paul's letters can be classified as "Christian." While it has been common for decades to argue that the New Testament, at least the majority of its texts, are "essentially Jewish," there have been important developments in the field that have argued that we should think of Paul, his letters, and his audience—even those we would normally conceive of as Gentile-Christians—as being Jews in a very real sense. In other words, this is not the line of argument that goes back to Justin Martyr, arguing that Christians are a "Spiritual Israel." This is an argument not only that Paul believed that his Gentile converts became Jews/Judeans, but also that the term "Christian" simply has no place in, and no

descriptive relevance to, Paul's own vocabulary.

One of the earliest significant contributions to this particular line of thought is Caroline Johnson Hodge's book *If Sons, Then Heirs: A Study of Kinship and Ethnicity in the Letters of Paul*.[190] Johnson Hodge demonstrates that Paul's writings draw from ancient Mediterranean discourses on kinship, ethnicity, adoption, and inheritance to argue that Gentiles can become a companion people to God's original people, Israel. She demonstrates that Paul sees baptism into Christ as providing Gentiles with an Abrahamic lineage, but not Israelite membership. Her book is an excellent study of these discourses and Paul's techniques of argument, but a recent book by Joshua Garroway has pushed her argument even further. For Garroway, Paul's redeployment of these discourses of kinship and ethnicity is far more "dramatic and scandalous."[191] Garroway argues that Paul does not see his Gentile believers as a "companion people" at all. Rather, he argues, "Paul insists upon the Abrahamic origins of baptized Gentiles because he believes that they have become a part of the genuine people of Israel. Faith, in Paul's view, turns Gentiles into authentic descendants of the patriarchs, authentic Israelites, authentically ethnic Jews, because the death and resurrection of Christ fundamentally altered the way that the identity of Israel was to be reckoned in the last stage of human history." As a result of this rupture, which threw traditional norms into the air and transvaluated traditional values, all of the traditional markers which had been signifiers for genuine belonging-to-Israel were changed. Thus, "each of those ethnic markers could be achieved through Christ and Christ alone. Faith in Christ made a person into a descendent from Abraham; faith in Christ made one circumcised; faith in Christ made it possible to observe the righteous dictates of the Law. Through Christ, Paul believed, Gentiles

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[190] Caroline Johnson Hodge, *If Sons, Then Heirs: A Study of Kinship and Ethnicity in the Letters of Paul* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

[191] Joshua Garroway, *Paul's Gentile-Jews: Neither Jewish Nor Christian, but Both.* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 5.

could become ethnic Jews through and through;…the premise of Paul's mission was that Gentiles should be reckoned as authentic, circumcised, ethnic Jews because of the transformation wrought in them as a result of their faith and baptism into Christ"[192] Or, as James Hanges has argued, in a very similar vein, "Paul's argument in Galatians is that because Gentiles have received the Holy Spirit (Gal 3:4-5) without qualification by Jewish ethnic identifiers such as circumcision, they cannot…among those who have through baptism 'put on Christ' (Gal 3:27-28), thereafter be distinguished from Jews on the basis of those same, now-irrelevant ethnic markers."[193] As a result of this transformation, they become, to use the term Garroway suggests, "Gentile-Jews."

Garroway's neologism, awkward as it may be, has the advantage of reflecting the difficulty of Paul's own conception of those who are "in Christ." In a discussion that maps perfectly onto our own theory, Garroway notes that "Paul's rhetoric is 'double-voiced' precisely because his effort to redefine the terms of Jewish identity requires him at the same time to invoke and validate the normative conceptions of Jewish identity against which he inveighs." That is, "Paul cannot redefine what *he* thinks Jewish identity is without simultaneously acknowledging what *everyone else* thinks it is; the result is an inherently self-contradictory discourse in which Paul constantly intermingles his own voice with the normative discourse he opposes."[194] Thus, the apparently oxymoronic and certainly awkward term "Gentile-Jew" is advantageous because it actually "*reflects* rather than *resolves* Paul's incapacity to describe the identity of his charges with a consistent, coherent term."[195]

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[192] Garroway, *Gentile-Jews*, 5.
[193] James C. Hanges, *Christ the Image*, 100.
[194] Garroway, *Gentile-Jews*, 6.
[195] Garroway, *Gentiile-Jews*, 8.

Garroway acknowledges that his proposal fits well within what Homi Bhabha has called the "Third Space" that intrudes upon supposed cultural dichotomies. The hybridity of this "Third Space," which I would call the space of rupture, allows Paul to represent an apparently impossible entity, "a non-Jewish Jew, a Gentile-Jew—which he can neither represent nor resolve given the constraints of his discursive world."[196]

The productivity and fecundity of this space of rupture, which cannot be inhabited, but only evoked, and the generative nature of the discursive "constraints" with and against which Paul worked, are highlighted by a third contribution to this line of thought. In an essay entitled "*Doxa*, Heresy, and the Rhetoric of Self-Construction," William E. Arnal has provided arguments that point in very similar directions to Garroway's, but in a more social-historical vein, using the work of Pierre Bourdieu and his theory of sociological orthodoxy and "heresy" as his model. As a first step in his argument, Arnal uses Bourdieu's model to redescribe heresy as a sociological, rather than a theological or (merely) rhetorical, phenomenon. He writes:

> Once we strip away the 'religious' and late antique Christian…terminology through which the phenomenon receives its distinctive and quite narrow expression, what emerges is the reality of *group insiders* who redeploys 'our' values and discursive tropes in unacceptable ways. Obviously such a description of 'heresy' views it as a *social fact* like many others, one whose boundaries are artificially circumscribed by neither 'religious' subject-matters nor by explicit invocation of the relevant terminology; in any instance in which we have such insider departure from the institutionalized norms or assumptions about behavior or belief, we have, *de facto*, heresy.[197]

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[196] Garroway, *Gentiile-Jews*, 9.
[197] Arnal, "*Doxa*, Heresy, and Self-Construction," 52-3.

After fleshing this redescription out and providing a brief summary of identity construction in the Roman Empire, Arnal provides a series of observations which bring us closer to our purposes here. Though, obviously, traditional ethnic and cultural discursive formations were disrupted and sundered by Roman imperial encroachment, this rupture did not result in annihilation, but only in new patterns of enunciating these ethnic and cultural identifications, often couched in traditional terms.

> In short, forms of identity, including the possibilities for cultural and ethnic expressions of identity, were to reflect the political supremacy of Rome, and, in an imperial situation, the social supremacy of political identity, which was in fact Roman ethnic identity. The power and supremacy of Rome itself, of course, was an obvious feature of the socio-political landscape, and there is nothing particularly surprising about these conclusions. But the encode a set of assumptions that—*differentially* applied, albeit without saying so—fostered both multicultural integration in urban centers and Roman supremacy at the same time. The genuinely multicultural aspects of the empire, the very real differences in practice and belief that existed among the different subunits of this far-flung state, were permitted—even promoted—and used as a vehicle and outlet for a continued sense of identity within long-standing cultural entities, now constructed, however, as *aspects* of the imperium.[198]

Without taking up too much space, here, with a discussion of Paul's Christ myth, we should note, with Arnal, that the explicit reference to crucifixion in Paul's letters, especially 1 Cor 15, would make it quite clear that the "lord of glory" Paul is discussing was killed by the Romans. Specifically noting that it was the Romans who had killed Messiah, the one who truly had divine

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[198] Arnal, "*Doxa*, Heresy, and Self-Construction," 72.

right to earthly rule, would have been most likely, to the minds and ears of Gentile auditors, not seen as a nostalgic attempt to revise a national epic or as a lamentation on what had been lost, but—especially when coupled with the prophecy that Christ would return and overthrow the established order—as an explicit repudiation of the sanctity of Roman rule. With Paul's attempt to bring Gentiles into the fold of Israel, as Gentile-Jews—an identification that by definition did not adhere to any one region or ethnicity—we can see that he was also challenging the hegemony of Roman ethnic identity as political identity. In the view of the world that Paul presents, the Roman people are only *one aspect* of the peoples of the earth; they are only one people among many. As Arnal summarizes:

> Paul's fundamental project is to constitute *Gentiles*—as such—as members of a *Jewish polity*. In so doing, his potentially subversive political agenda is extended beyond the nostalgic and ethnically-circumscribed 'national' imaginations so effectively co-opted and channeled into *de facto* submission by the Romans. Paul turns the world upside down, discursively at least, by making the Roman *oikoumene* itself into a vehicle for the subjection of the entire world under the rule and protection of the Lord God of Israel, rather than the entity to which that world 'naturally' belonged, Rome, her emperors, her gods…[This constitutes] an effort not simply to overturn the hierarchy of domination or to shake of the yoke of foreign rule, but actually to colonize the colonizers.[199]

Arnal argues that the very structure of Paul's Christ myth, "even *without* an explicit reference to crucifixion and hence to state power, should not be ignored in any discussion of the politically heterodox implications of Pauline mythology. The outline of the myth, especially as it relates to social characteristics of those who have adopted it, may reveal a great deal about its

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[199] Arnal, "Doxa, Heresy, and Self-Construction," 86-87.

implications and functionality." Arnal thus turns to an experiment in comparison, with an e.g. drawn from the work of Jonathan Z. Smith, regarding the Ceramese myth of Hainuwele (Coconot Girl). I will cite his discussion in full. He begins by noting that, among many interesting details about this story, one in particular is

> its symbolic reconfiguration of a concrete social reality: the presence of Europeans among the Pacific islands and particularly the excessive and over-abundant consumer goods which mark their special status. Hainuwele is presented as producing such goods by defecation. The image stands as a striking condemnation of this alien super-abundant wealth (such wealth is shit), as well as a sense of befuddlement and disapproval as to its origins (it is not produced by work or growth, but essentially springs into being magically and *ex nihilo*). The decision of the other women to kill coconut girl also expresses disapproval of 'unnatural' wealth, and at the same time attempts to assimilate commercial wealth to the natives' own, traditional, understanding of wealth as food: Hainuwele is not simply killed, but afterwards, as tubers arise from her dismembered body, becomes a new and—from the native perspective—better kind of wealth. Overarchingly, the narrative may be imagined to suggest also an inversionary restoration: by the end of the story, excrement has been transformed into food, rather than, as is the usual state of affairs, food becoming excrement.

> One of the most striking features of at least 1 Corinthians…is its rather excessive language of inversion, and more specifically its inversionary characterization of the adherents of the *ekklesia* from lowly to lofty standing…And indeed this sort of imagery—applied by Paul both to himself and his adherents—coheres very well with the fundamental Pauline myth of Christ's death and resurrection. That story traces out a

movement from worthlessness, physical and social degradation (execution as a criminal),

and indeed the non-being (*ta me onta*) of death, to infinite value, exaltation, and new life.

The Christ myth and the social self-perceptions of Paul are evidently parallel to each

other…We might say that in the Hainuwele story, wealth is shit, while in the Christ story,

shit is wealth, i.e., what is degraded in the world is exalted in the eyes of God."[200]

Before moving on, a brief theoretical reminder is in order. Recalling our discussion of the

"missing signifier" as the unavoidable shadow of the Master signifier, we recall that the

recognition of this missing signifier can be seen as "the herald of a heretofore unimaginable

social bond," rather like that of the Paris Commune or, as I would like to call it, the "Corinthian

Commune." The "missing signifier" is "included in the social order it inaugurates but does not

belong to it…it indexes everything that is indiscernible inside an extant political structure of

signification." Such is the case with Paul's "heretical" presentation of those who have the spirit

of Christ as being "Gentile-Jews," or "mere nothings" (*ta me onta*) who nonetheless are most

highly valued in the eyes of God—a "crazy, oxymoronic designation" that nonetheless forms the

beginning of Paul's most political gesture. "Indeed, as *the* proper political gesture [of rupture],

we should [imagine Paul as] forcing into the field of acceptable political speech acts, over and

over again if need be, these very nonsensical designations."

Constitutionally, *in esse*, the missing signifier is *"*a signifier that appears to us at the zero

point of its own content, a point at which its authority appears constitutively compromised. But it

is at this very moment, too, that it is most *available*." We can see this in Paul's case, with his

recognition of the "rupture" in the world order that has occurred as the result of the paradoxical

final victory of a "failed Messiah," in his preponderantly inversionary rhetoric—so provocatively

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[200] Arnal, "*Doxa*, Heresy, and Self-Construction," 83-4.

analogous to the language of the Hainuwele myth—that frustrates and repudiates the conventional "wisdom of the world," an indeterminate *something* is asserting itself here, without necessarily bearing any authoritative meaning. To be a Gentile-Jew, or to become one, is *stricto sensu* meaningless and nonsensical—as, indeed, is the proclamation of a crucified criminal who ends up gaining final victory over the earth. And yet, though inexistent according to traditional socio-political standards of recognition, the identity is nonetheless coming-into-being, is in the process of appearing. In socio-political terms, one may note here that there is a vaguely "populist" dimension to Paul's project. But then, this is hardly surprising. For, "as the history of Western political life attests, populism can slide quickly into experiences of ecstatic (or nativist) election. Populists take apart the meaning of an extant order's governing signifiers but do not linger with the signifier as such and what it portends."[201] I would urge us to recognize that such a characterization, and such a fate, may also apply to the Corinthian Commune, up to and including Paul himself.

Although I have focused upon such "high-speed" concepts as event and rupture in this chapter, it should be noted that the cadence of change does not occur at the same velocity as the event itself. In Badiou's theory, an event inaugurates its own singular temporality, in which the post-evental labor must be carried out. As Adrian Johnston cautions, when writing of an "event" in the Badiouian sense, we should make a point of "contrasting the abrupt, irruptive temporality of the instantaneity of the event with the protracted, enduring labor, engaged in by a militant subject-of-the-event, of both drawing out the consequent truths following from this event as well as faithfully 'forcing' the situation and its state to change by inscribing these truths back into the textured being of the world. According to Badiou, whereas the time of the event is an

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[201] Eisenstein and McGowan, *Rupture*, 51.

immeasurably fast coming and going, the unique time this specific event creates in its wake, a time forged through the fidelity of this event's subject(s), can be (and often is) an extended, sustained period or path spanning lengthy stretches of the becoming of chronological-historical time, a post-evental time tied to the enduring, eternal 'trace' left behind by the vanished event."[202]

At this point in our investigations, we are ready to turn from the heady philosophical terrain of the "Paul-event" and ontological rupture, and begin to ask after precisely the nitty-gritty, brass-tacks praxis in which Paul had to engage in order to "force" the situation at hand to fit in with his insights into what a Christ assembly should be, and the protracted, lengthy conversations he had with the Corinthian Commune on the finer points of being a member of the body of Christ *qua* subject-of-the-event. In the next two chapters, I will look at specific situations with which Paul dealt, and try to grapple with them in terms of the political charge they seem to carry forth. I conclude by quoting Johnston again, with reference to Badiou's politics, in a passage which I believe also characterizes Paul's political attitude: "given the post-evental labors of forcing engaged in by subjects-of-events, which involve rolling up one's sleeves and grappling with the details of how to change determinate situations and worlds, [Paul's] politics is certainly not abstract and ethereal…In more general philosophical terms…the post-evental process of a subject-of-an-event forcing its surrounding situation or world to be transformed though its faithful work of extracting and exploring the reality-altering implications of the event—in so doing, subjects force being to respond to and be reshaped by events—shows how [Paul] is indeed interested in the dialectical interaction between, at the broadest of levels,

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[202] Johnston, *Badiou*, 15.

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the ontological [*stasis*] and the trans-ontological [*kinesis*]."[203] Indeed, as the next two chapters

should clarify, it is precisely the dialectical relation between *stasis* and *kinesis* that defines Paul's

admonitions and attitude toward the Corinthian Christ-followers.

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[203] Johnston, *Badiou*, 15.

4) Speaking in Tongues, Dancing with Ghosts: Redescription, Translation, and the Language of Resurrection

> What interests us here is not so much the connections between phenomena as the connections between problems.
>
> —Valentin N. Vološinov[204]

Jonathan Z. Smith has persuasively argued that the comparative approach to the study of religion is an analogical enterprise that "brings differences together solely within the space of the scholar's mind" in order to lift out and mark "certain features within [those differences] as being of possible intellectual significance…being 'like' in some stipulated fashion."[205] Understood in this way, comparison is not intended to demonstrate homological "processes of history, influence, or diffusion,"[206] nor will comparison "necessarily tell us how things *are*"[207]—or, for that matter, how things were, but, rather, how things might be *understood* in order to clarify a larger theoretical interest.[208] Because Smithian comparison is built upon analogy, it is "axiomatic that comparison is never a matter of identity," and not only welcomes, but actually "*requires* the acceptance of difference as the grounds of its being interesting, and the methical manipulation of that difference to achieve some stated cognitive end."[209] In the study of religion, the "cognitive end" of comparison is most often the clarification of the categories by which the

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[204] *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1973), xv.
[205] Smith, *Drudgery Divine: On the Comparison of Early Christianities and the Religions of Late Antiquity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), 115, 52.
[206] Smith, *Drudgery Divine*, 115.
[207] Smith, *Drudgery Divine*, 52
[208] Smith describes the cognitive effect of a comparison as a useful distortion or "disciplined exaggeration in the service of knowledge" (*Drudgery Divine,* 52)..
[209] Smith, *To Take Place: Toward Theory in Ritual* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), 14.

scholarly imagination of religion is carried out.

Informed by this understanding of the comparative method, this chapter attempts to bring together Smith's writings on Paul and the Corinthian Christ association,[210] and—through comparison—to rectify the categories by which Smith has described them. Such a "redescription" is necessary, I argue, because of ambiguities within the "locative/utopian" dichotomy as it was used in Smith's earlier work. He explicitly labels Paul as utopian in *Drudgery Divine*, and makes certain comments in his essay "Re: Corinthians" which suggest he would label the Corinthians as having a locative orientation. Through an exercise of "immanent critique," or of "reading Smith *against* Smith," I will show that imagining the Corinthian situation along this dichotomy drives too great a wedge between Paul and the Corinthians, and complicates, rather than clarifies, our understanding of why the "locative" Corinthians would receive and accept Paul's "utopian" message in the first place. After demonstrating the problems with using locative/utopian as a dichotomy, I will attempt a cross-cultural comparison of the Corinthian Christ association with the Northern Paiute Ghost Dance movement of 1870. Through this situational analogy, I try to demonstrate that Smith's "topography" of spheres and soteriologies, as developed in "Here, There, and Anywhere," provides a more useful heuristic for understanding the Corinthian situation—and also makes it more amenable to cross-cultural comparison—than the simple locative/utopian dichotomy.

The Problem of "Locative/Utopian"

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[210] Smith, *Drudgery Divine*, 89-115, 139-143; Smith, "Re; Corinthians," in *Relating Religion: Essays in the Study of Religion* (Chicago, 2004), 240-261.

In a series of works, Smith developed the terms *locative* and *utopian* as categories by which to isolate and identify processes of religious persistence and change within and across religious traditions.[211] In his most developed formulation, Smith classifies as "locative" those formations which are "concerned primarily with the cosmic and social issues of keeping one's place and reinforcing boundaries."[212] Those formations which focus upon *transcending* place, or which contain soteriologies based on escaping death, he classifies as "utopian." In contrast to utopian formations which might value resurrection as a means of salvation, in locative formations "what is soteriological is for the dead to remain dead. If beings from the realm of the dead walk among the living, they are the objects of rituals of relocation, not celebration" (123). Within any given tradition, Smith argues, the orientation may shift in response to changed social conditions. In the Hellenistic world, for instance, utopian traditions rose to relative prominence, owing in part to the imperial disruptions and colonial displacements of native, locative religious traditions. In this widely shared social situation, the utopian mode of religion came to dominate.

In many instances, these categories have great explanatory power, as evidenced by Smith's insightful discussion of the soteriology attached to the cult figure of Attis in *Drudgery Divine* (125-129). But when one looks carefully at Smith's writings on Paul and the Corinthians, one notices that these categories can obfuscate as much as they clarify. For instance, in *Drudgery Divine* Smith classifies Paul as "thoroughly utopian" (142), and this classification seems correct, given Smith's formulation of what utopian means: Paul's resurrection language and his understanding of salvation as an escape from the "non-being" (*ta mē onta*) of death (1 Cor 1:29) would seem to place him squarely in the utopian stream. On the other hand, Paul's report that

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[211] For instance, Jonathan Z. Smith, "Native Cults in the Hellenistic Period." *History of Religions* 11 (1971); idem, *Map Is Not Territory* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), idem, *Drudgery Divine*.
[211] *Drudgery Divine*, 121-124.
[212] Smith, *Drudgery Divine*, 121. Further citations will be found in the text above.

"some" Corinthians are denying that there is a resurrection (1 Cor 15:12) suggests to us that at least *some* members of Paul's Corinthian audience are what Smith would term locative in orientation. For, while Smith himself never *explicitly* calls the Corinthians locative, the language he uses to describe them strongly suggests the locative model—especially when he says that Paul's "Christ myth would be, strictly speaking, meaningless to some Corinthian groups. If Christ, having died, is no longer dead, then this violates the *fundamental presupposition that the ancestors and the dead remain dead*, even though they are thoroughly interactive with their living descendents in an extended family comprising the living and the dead."[213] Given Smith's lengthy discussion and elaboration of the locative category in *Drudgery Divine*,[214] we are led to suspect that if "some Corinthians"[215] hold the "fundamental presupposition" that the dead must remain dead, then, in Smith's terms, they must hold a locative form of belief. The idea that the resurrection-deniers might have been locative is made more plausible if we observe—as Smith does not—that, despite Paul's lengthy discussion of a "spiritual resurrection" (1 Cor 15:35-58) at the end of the letter, he still specifically depicts Christ as being *buried and raised from the dead* (1 Cor 15:4). This is what Paul says he had "passed on" to the Corinthians (1 Cor 15:3) and it may even be what the Corinthians are denying, though this is far from certain.[216] In any case, this ambivalence towards resurrection language is, on the basis of Smith's earlier writings,

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[213] Smith, "Re: Corinthians," in *Relating Religion: Essays in the Study of Religion* (Chicago: University o f Chicago Press, 2004), 350, emphasis mine.
[214] *Drudgery Divine*, 121-142.
[215] Smith, "Re: Corinthians," 350.
[216] Confer, for instance, Ramsay MacMullen's statement that, "[i]n all the "oriental" cults in general, whether of Atargatis, Mithra, Isis, or Cybele, the element of resurrection has received emphatic attention in studies old and new—attention emphatic but not always firmly controlled. It should really not be taken for granted, as it often is assumed, that people who believe a god might rise from death also believed in such a blessing for themselves as well. The conjecture needs support—and finds none" (*Paganism in the Roman Empire* [New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981], 55). Since one thing that may set gods apart from humans is their ability to escape death, it is not clear that devotion to a resurrected deity would necessarily move locative religionists into a utopian sphere. The question of exactly *which* resurrection the Corinthians were denying, though, remains an interesting one.

unsurprising: the image of the dead emerging from their tombs is precisely what Smith has described locative religionists as wishing to avoid at all costs.[217]

Given Smith's own descriptions of the locative/utopian dichotomy, then, this classification makes perfect sense. *However*, classifying "some Corinthians" in this way poses a number of problems. First of all, if these Corinthians hold a locative form of belief, then why would they have ever been attracted to Paul's obviously utopian message? If Paul proclaimed a "gospel" of a martyred ancestor emerging from his tomb to a group of locative religionists, it would not sound like "good news" to them. Smith recognizes this, and argues that it was Paul's language of "spirit," or *pneuma*, which originally attracted these Corinthians to Paul's message, and not the Christ myth as such.[218] This solution, while plausible, is only partial. When Paul discusses the "tradition" that he passed on to the Corinthians (1 Cor 15:3-7), he makes no mention of *pneuma*: he simply says Christ died, was buried, was raised, and was seen by as many as 500 people. Although there is no reason to think this is *all* Paul said to the Corinthians when he first preached to them, and while the Corinthians certainly could have selectively taken up and developed the parts of Paul's message they liked, the question of "attraction" still looms large. Smith's proposal, while tantalizing, is problematic: if we are to think of the Corinthians as having a locative orientation, then it is difficult to see how they would have been sufficiently attracted to Paul's utopian message in the first place to have bothered with his "spirit" language.

The classification of the Corinthians as locative also runs into difficulty with the fact that they are colonized subjects living in diaspora (see below). Since their native traditions have been disrupted, either as a result of imperial displacement or voluntary distancing from the "place" of

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[217] Smith, *Drudgery Divine*, 123; ; cf. Ovid, *Fasti* II.546-556; Late Akkadian *Gilgamesh* VII.4.40-49.
[218] Smith, "Re: Corinthians," 348-349.

locative religiosity in the homeland, this setting would—on the basis of some of Smith's writings[219]—lead us to expect the Corinthians to be more utopian than locative in their orientation (though this need not *necessarily* be the case).

Finally, if—as in Smith's earlier writings—we use locative/utopian *as a dichotomy*, we are presented with another difficulty: while Smith has provided us with a thorough discussion of what locative means,[220] his discussions of the utopian category have been, comparatively, rather meagre. It seems as though the category is not only *literarily* neglected (i.e., Smith has written less about it), but also *conceptually* underdeveloped. A good illustration of this is found when Smith relegates Paul to the "utopian" category in *Drudgery Divine*. He seems to do this on the basis of his resurrection language alone, and gives very little discussion of what being utopian might actually *mean*.[221] This leads one to suspect that utopian merely means "that which is not locative,"[222] and is not a satisfactorily-developed "mode of religiosity" in its own right.

The point that should be taken from this discussion is *not* that the locative and utopian categories are useless to Pauline scholars. Quite the contrary! The point is that the

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[219] E.g., "Native Cults in the Hellenistic Period," *History of Religions* 11 (1971), 238; *Map Is Not Territory*, xiv-xv.
[220] *Drudgery Divine*, 121-124.
[221] Indeed, the closest Smith comes to describing what "utopian" might actually mean, with respect to Paul's world-view, is a line near the very end of *Drudgery Divine*, where Smith describes the "thoroughly utopian turn" taken by Paul as "a desire for personal transcendence as if the world were not worthy unless transformed" (*Drudgery Divine*, 142). Yet these are not Smith's words: he quotes them from the work of Burton L. Mack (*Myth of Innocence*, 123), who uses the phrase to imply a negative evaluation of Paul's mythmaking activity. This negative evaluation is evident if we look at the full quote: "Though the Christ myth was born in the desire to justify a novel experiment in social inclusiveness, its cultivation was *in danger* of creating a desire for personal transcendence as if the world were not worthy unless transformed" (Mack, *Myth of Innocence*, 123, emphasis mine). This reliance upon Mack explains, to some degree, why Paul does not make sense alongside the Corinthian group: in Mack's charting of the history of early Christianity, Paul appears as something of a "wrong turn." Mack is not interested in making Paul and the Corinthians amenable to cross-cultural comparison, but in charting out the sequence of early Christian mythmaking. Since Smith himself admits that he is using Mack's work "to answer questions that are not [Mack's]" by developing it "in directions with which he may not agree" (Smith, *Drudgery Divine*,134 n. 36), I am tempted to suggest that the ambiguity surrounding the figure of Paul in Smith's thought results, in part, from Smith's "annexation" of this figure from Mack's work. But, as such musings are mere speculation, I am unable to develop them any further.
[222] See similarly William E. Arnal, "Review of *Drudgery Divine: On the Comparison of Early Christianities and the Religions of Late Antiquity*." *Method & Theory in the Study of Religion* 6.2, 1994, 198..

locative/utopian dichotomy *as it was developed in Smith's earlier studies* of religious persistence

and change is problematic when applied to the specific "site" of the Corinthian Christ

association. Recently, however, Smith has presented a new typology—or perhaps "topography"

is a better word—which far surpasses the simple locative/utopian distinction in its explanatory

power. In fact, it is difficult to understand his essay "Here, There, and Anywhere" as anything

but the abandonment of the locative/utopian dichotomy *as a dichotomy*.[223] Instead of

dichotomizing these two terms, Smith *taxonomizes* them as contrastive "soteriological

orientations" that are coeval possibilities within three different "spheres" of religiosity. These

spheres are: the "here" of domestic religion and ancestral reverence; the "there" of temple-based,

civic, and national religion; and "the 'anywhere' of a rich diversity of religious formations that

occupy an interstitial space between these two other loci, including a variety of religious

entrepreneurs and ranging from groups we term 'associations' to activities we label 'magic'"

(325). These spheres map out the social-symbolic dimensions of a "place" constructed by a given

religious formation, and may, at various times, be oriented towards locative soteriologies of

sanctification or utopian soteriologies of salvation (334). This topography of spheres and

soteriologies seems cross-cultural in scope, and also, I argue, holds more explanatory power than

a simple dichotomy. In the next section, I will attempt to demonstrate the value of this

topography for understanding Paul's dealings with the Corinthian Christ association.

To Speak in Tongues…

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[223] "Here, There, and Anywhere," in *Relating Religion*, 323-339.

We have seen that the locative and utopian categories, as developed in Smith's earlier work, drive too great a wedge between Paul and "some Corinthians," and makes their reception of his message all but incomprehensible. It remains to be seen whether the topography of "here, there, and anywhere" makes things any clearer. For, there is still the problem of explaining why certain Corinthians denied the resurrection. Why would they have been attracted to Paul's ideology of resurrection at all, only to deny it once they adopted it? I think Smith is arguing in the right direction, that it was Paul's language of "spirit" that generated the most interest among the Corinthians,[224] but the evidence he cites for this claim is not entirely secure. A closer examination of the setting of 1 Corinthians provides a sounder basis, as it is the *situational* aspects of the Corinthians that will make them amenable to cross-cultural comparison, and not simple ideological "parallels."

A) The "Unsettled" Corinthians

After decades of political and military strife between Rome and the Achaean League, forces led by the Roman general Mummius defeated the Achaeans in 146 BCE. After this victory, the Roman army sacked and burned Corinth, killing most of her inhabitants and selling the rest into slavery.[225] The wealth taken from Corinth went to Rome, and the land surrounding the city became Roman land, which was farmed by citizens of the nearby city of Sikyon on Rome's behalf.[226] The city stood in ruins for a hundred years, as a ghost town haunted by squatters and

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[224] "Re: Corinthians"
[225] Strabo 8.6.23; Cassius Dio *Hist. Rom.*, 21; Pausanias, 6.16.7-10
[226] Donald Engels, *Roman Corinth: An Alternative Model for the Classical City* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), 16. Cf. Cicero, *De Leg. Agr.* 1.2.5, 2.51; Pausanias 2.2.2

vagrants, and a forceful reminder that Greece belonged to Rome.[227] Then, in 44 BCE, Julius

Caesar ordered that Corinth be re-founded as a Roman colony and developed into a major

commercial centre, to revive Greece's failing economy.[228] To achieve this end, the city was

repopulated with freed slaves and decommissioned military veterans from Rome, who were

allotted portions of the *territorium* outside Corinth—possibly taking on the Sikyonians who had

previously farmed the land as their tenants—and set to work rebuilding the city.[229]

By the middle of the first century CE, Corinth had achieved its purpose, and was a

bustling seaport and trading centre. Estimates suggest that Corinth had an urban population of as

much as 80,000 and a rural population of 20,000 [230] This urban population would have been

composed primarily of Greeks—from the nearby villages as well as more distant cities—who

had immigrated there. Immigrants also came from Italy and all parts of the Roman East, such as

Judea, Syria, Egypt, and Asia Minor, in search of whatever opportunities the city might

provide.[231] The members of the Corinthian Christ association emerged from this population.

This is the background behind Smith's claim that the Corinthians were "relatively recent"

immigrants,[232] though it is unclear just how "recent" a century can be, and Smith makes no

attempt to clarify this statement. Also undefended is his limitation of the Corinthian Christians to

being "at most, second-generation immigrants to Corinth."[233] Why this limitation? In light of the

100+ years from Corinth's re-settlement to the writing of 1 Corinthians (ca. 50 CE), his

characterization of the Corinthians to second-generation "at most" is problematic. It seems

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[227] Cicero, *Tusc. Disp.* 3.53
[228] Engels, *Roman Corinth*, 17.
[229] Jerome Murphy-O'Connor, *St. Paul's Corinth: Texts and Archaeology* (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1983), 68-69. Cf. Strabo 8.3.23c; Engels, *Roman Corinth*, 16-17, 67
[230] Engels, *Roman Corinth*, 79-84
[231] Engels, *Roman Corinth*, 69-70.
[232] "Re: Corinthians," 348.
[233] *Ibid*, 348

logical to assume that at least some inhabitants of Corinth in the mid-first century CE would be third or fourth generation—assuming that a reproductive generation is 25-30 years. However, Donald Engels has cautioned against the easy assumption that the majority of urban Corinth's inhabitants would have been third- or fourth-generation at this time.

Engels provides the rationale for this caution by reminding us that pre-industrial cities were largely unable to maintain their populations without a constant influx of immigrants, due to high mortality rates caused by disease and famine.[234] Of course, a major urban centre such as Corinth, which provided many opportunities for employment, had no trouble attracting immigrants, and therefore suffered no population depletion—its population grew steadily throughout the first two centuries. But, paradoxically, this high rate of immigration may have actually posed a further obstacle to the maintenance of generational continuity. Engels notes that the "pattern of migration" we see in the Roman imperial period "may have tended to depress birth rates in large cities, since many of the migrants may have been single males and not single females or families. This localized imbalance in sex ratios could have depressed the birth rates in urban areas, [though] not in the population on the whole."[235] Combined, all of this suggests that it may have been difficult even for families of relative wealth to ensure continuity that extended to the third or fourth generation. Since Corinth's population only grew throughout the first century CE, we must imagine a massive rate of immigration into Corinth, with perhaps the majority of the population being, at any given time, "first-generation."[236]

This evidence suggests that relatively few inhabitants of Roman Corinth in the mid-first century would have had grandparents who were born there, which somewhat validates Smith's

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[234] *Roman Corinth*, 76.
[235] *Roman Corinth*, 76.
[236] Engels, *Roman Corinth*, 74-84.

seemingly-arbitrary limitation of the Corinthian Christians to being "at most, second-generation." However, even if this limitation is untenable, the feeling of "dislocation" from homeland and family which Smith argues the Corinthians were experiencing is nonetheless validated by the archaeological evidence for the religious life of Corinth in the mid-first century CE. Richard DeMaris has drawn our attention to the heightened chthonic and burial concerns evident in the cultic activity of this period, which suggests a widespread preoccupation with ancestral concerns.[237]

One contributing factor to this chthonic emphasis was the "service economy" of Corinth, in which agriculture played relatively little part[238] DeMaris has argued, for example, that this is why Demeter devotion at Roman Corinth developed such a strong chthonic orientation, and did not focus upon the agricultural or fertility aspects it emphasized at Eleusis or Pergamum—if most of the population was not directly dependent upon the soil and the harvest for its social and economic well-being, there was little reason for concern about these aspects of Demeter.[239] In addition to the fact that most Corinthians were relatively recent immigrants, this lack of strong material ties to the land would also have contributed to a feeling of "unsettledness" among the population. Taken together, this lack of social and material "roots" indicates the possibility that "deracination" was a widespread experience among Corinth's inhabitants at this time. In the absence of strong *actual* roots, the Corinthians would likely have been in search of *ideological* roots. This makes more plausible the presence of heightened ancestral concerns, nostalgia for the

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[237]"Demeter in Roman Corinth: Local Development in a Mediterranean Religion" *Numen* 42 (1995), 105-17; "Corinthian Religion and Baptism for the Dead (1 Corinthians 15:29): Insights from Archaeology and Anthropology" *Journal of Biblical Literature* 114 (1995), 661-82; "Funerals and Baptisms, Ordinary and Otherwise: Ritual Criticism and Corinthian Rites." *Biblical Theology Bulletin* 29 (1999), 23-34.

[238] Engels, *Roman Corinth*, 16-18, 43-65; DeMaris, "Demeter in Roman Corinth," 113.

[239] DeMaris, "Demeter in Roman Corinth," 113.

homeland, and experiments in "re-emplacing" disrupted religions of "here" among the Corinthians of this period.

B) The Corinthian "Spiritists"

In light of the above, Smith's assertions seem plausible. His discussion of the Corinthians' interest in spirits fits in with the setting of mid-first-century Corinth. Smith argues that we should distinguish between two sorts of ancestral religious practices occurring within the Corinthian Christ association: the first being focussed upon "oracular attempts to obtain esoteric wisdom" from the spirits of those ancestors now left behind in the homeland, and the other focussing upon "cultic relations with the more immediate dead, now buried in Corinth," and including "a range of activities from memorial meals with the dead to oracles guiding present behaviour."[240]

Smith is aided in making this claim by an experiment in comparison. In a bold redescription, Smith compares the Corinthian correspondence with an ethnographic study of the Atbalmin (a tribe of Papua New Guineans who were converted to Christianity by "native" missionaries), and draws several interesting implications from this cross-cultural comparison.

I will highlight Smith's points that are the most relevant for clarifying the Corinthians' interest in "spiritual things" (*tōn pneumatikōn*; 1 Cor 12:1). First, Smith describes the Atbalmin as a group of 3,000 or so individuals living in settlements containing 30-40 people. After the initial European contact, which occurred around 1950, the majority of the Atbalmin converted to

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[240]Smith, "Re: Corinthians," 349

Christianity, having been missionized by "pastor" figures from the nearby Urapmin and Tifalmin tribes. This gave the Atbalmin Christians a sense of belonging to a widespread, trans-local community that crossed traditional ethnic lines to include both Europeans and Melanesians (342-343). However, it also created tension within the native social formations of the Atbalmin, because conversion required them to leave behind their indigenous religious practices. This proved unfeasible, as the indigenous religion was so thoroughly embedded into the quotidian life of the Atbalmin that it was impossible to remain in community with one's non-Christian neighbors if the indigenous ways were abandoned entirely. Especially relevant, for our purposes, is the extent to which kinship relations were established and maintained through ancestral mythologies and practices of ancestral reverence. Chief among these practices were the ritual modes of contact that allowed for the transmission of traditional wisdom, passed on from generation to generation via the medium of ancestral spirits (343). Smith cites Jack Goody's description of the general attitude towards these ancestral spirits:

> Since knowledge is held largely in the minds of men…the older are inevitably at once the most experienced, and the most privileged communicators, as well as the most likely to die, taking their knowledge with them to the world of the ancestors. The dead must therefore know more than the living; the forefathers are also the forebearers, the carriers of 'tradition.' And it is in the cult of the ancestors that the dead reveal some of their superior, more comprehensive knowledge.[241]

The missionaries' demand that the Atbalmin abandon their indigenous religious practices predictably led to a great deal of tension between the "native" identity and their newly-formed

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[241] Jack Goody, "Foreword," in Fredrik Barth, *Cosmologies in the Making: A Generative Approach to Cultural Variation in Inner New Guinea* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987; repr., 1993), xi

"Christian" identity. The negotiations of these tensions led very soon to the concomitant appearance of two new religious movements.

The first of these was a Christian "revival" movement,[242] which actively sought to end the non-Christian practices of the Atbalmin. The other was a nativistic movement,[243] "spurred, in the early 1980s, by the arrival of West Papuan refugees from conflicts in Irian Jaya with the Indonesian government who settled in villages close by the Atbalmin."[244] This nativism sought to eliminate all outside forces by uniting the "native" peoples together under the rubric of a Melanesian identity. The category "outside forces" included Christianity and Christians (345). The leaders of this movement called for a return to the old ways, and a reinstatement of the ancestral religious practices. They also claimed that they commanded special modes of contact with the spirits of the dead ancestors, who would aid them in their struggle to eliminate these "outside forces" (345). It is very interesting to note that, while both the Christian "revival" movement and the Melanesian "nativistic" movement prophesied the destruction of the opposing movement, they did not cancel each other out. Rather, both remained active for quite some time. The situation was such that, ten years later, after both movements had suffered a decline, an ethnographer could characterize the Atbalmin as being both "Christian and non-Christian at the same time" (345).

Smith begins to relate the New Guinean materials to the Corinthian materials by first characterizing the Atbalmin as a "relatively homogenous" community, explaining that by "relative homogeneity" he refers to "the fact that among folk who live in small-scale societies

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[242] Smith, "Re: Corinthians," 343-44

[243] Despite an over-reliance on Weberian terminology, Ralph Linton ("Nativistic Movements," *American Anthropologist* 45 [1943], 230-40) provides a good study of this category.

[244] Smith, "Re: Corinthians," 344.

with traditional kinship systems, while ethnically identical, kinship serves both to manufacture difference and to overcome that difference" (357 n. 33). In other words, while these groups may be ostensibly heterogeneous, they are nonetheless relatively homogenous from an etic perspective, and can be classified as such based on a generally shared cultural order. He then identifies two main elements in the New Guinean materials that he argues will aid the scholarly imagination of the Corinthian Christian group(s). "The first is the ability of a small relatively homogenous community to absorb a stunning series of situational changes within a brief span of time through strategies of incorporation and resistance," and the second element "is the capacity of a small relatively homogenous community to experiment, simultaneously, with multiple modes of religion" (347). These two elements make "the presumption of the coexistence of multiple experiments by early 'Christian' communities as well as their localism" more plausible (347). Although, at first glance, the Atbalmin communities seem more closely to resemble "the Galilean villages associated with Q and the Jesus traditions," Smith argues that, even "in a locale such as Corinth, the clear presence of face-to-face communication networks, and the relative prominence of 'households' suggests the existence of analogous communities within the larger urban landscape" (347). Indeed, I would argue, from Paul's strangely local-yet-ecumenical address in 1 Cor 1:2,[245] that part of the attraction of the Christ association for the "native" Corinthians may have been the awareness that they were becoming part of a trans-local "network" of associations. In this way, then, the Corinthians and the Atbalmin may have felt an analogous "attraction" to the Christ traditions.

I agree with Smith, then, in thinking that this analogy "suggests the possibility of thinking

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[245] "To the church of God in Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus…*together with all those in every place who call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ*," emphasis added.

of Paul (and others) as intrusive on the native religious formations of the Corinthians addressed in 1 Corinthians [as] analogous, to some degree, to intrusions on the Atbalmin" (347). Furthermore, as the Corinthians "are the result of a relatively recent displacement and re-placement: the resettlement of Corinth (44 B.C.), involving the movement of non-Roman populations of freed slaves from Greece, Syria, Judaea, and Egypt," Smith proposes that, in this respect, the Corinthians "bear some situational analogy to the West Papuan refugees" (348).

The West Papuans' concerns about the spirits of their ancestral dead and experimentation with modes of relation to those spirits may be helpful in our attempt to understand the Corinthians' concern with "spirit(s)." Noting that "[a]nalogous notions of oracular relations to the ancestors and the more proximate dead, within the context of a set of cultic relations and responsibilities to the dead, are…found in Papua New Guinea, Israel, and the ancient Near East and are likewise present in each of the culture areas from which the resettled population of Corinth was derived," Smith submits:

> we might imagine two different sorts of essentially familial practices obtaining for some groups in Corinth…One would focus on cultic relations with the spirit(s) of the now dislocated ancestors left behind, in the homeland. Such relations would include attempts to obtain oracular esoteric wisdom. Another would focus on cultic relations with the more immediate dead, now buried in Corinth, and would include a range of activities from memorial meals with the dead to oracles guiding present behavior, including moral guidance. I see nothing that would have prevented both sorts of honored dead being referred to as pneumata…or collectively, as pneuma (349).

This argument has merit. Recalling Jack Goody's generalization of Melanesian attitudes toward oracular contact with the dead, it is helpful to note that similar attitudes existed in the Hellenistic

world. Plutarch[246] for instance, associates the spirits of the dead with oracles, claiming that disembodied souls have the gift of prophecy just as embodied souls possess the faculty of memory. Seneca[247] and Lucan[248] both describe prophecy or divination as an "ecstasy," as though a higher power—or, more appropriately in this context, an external spirit—takes over the seer's body and reveals its own wisdom. This is in keeping with our discussion, in the previous chapter, of the ecstatic practices and interests in spirit-possession of both Paul and the Corinthians.

While Smith strings together many consequences of this redescription, most important for our purposes is his conclusion that

> a Christ myth would be, strictly speaking, meaningless to some Corinthian groups. If Christ, having died, is no longer dead, then this violates the fundamental presupposition that the ancestors and the dead remain dead, even though they are thoroughly interactive with their living descendants in an extended family comprising the living and the dead. For the ancestral dead, it is the fact of their death, not its mode and significance…that establishes and sustains their power.[249]

Again, the archaeological evidence supports Smith's claim. The Panhellenic games celebrated at the temple of Poseidon at Isthmia "were dedicated to the dead hero Palaimon or Melikertes and were funerary in nature."[250] This cultic devotion first became prominent during the Roman period, and was especially prominent in the mid-first century CE.[251] Both literary and archaeological evidence indicates that this cult's "worship focused on the dead or the

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[246] De. Def. Or. 431-32F
[247] Agam. 867-908
[248] Phar. 5.86-224
[249] Smith, "Re: Corinthians," 350-351
[250] Richard E. DeMaris, "Corinthian Religion and Baptism for the Dead (1 Corinthians 15:29): Insights from Archaeology and Anthropology" *JBL* 114 1995: 665
[251] DeMaris, "Corinthian Religion," 665-666.

chthonic."[252] In both Isthmia and Corinth, Demeter worship carried a profound chthonic emphasis, and there is evidence that the sanctuary of Demeter and Persephone on Acrocorinth, which was reestablished in the first century, was dedicated not to Demeter, but to Persephone. If so, then "the central temple of the Roman-period sanctuary…[would] have been dedicated to the queen of the underworld rather than Demeter."[253] The chthonic emphasis of Demeter and Persephone worship in the region is further underscored by the presence of a Plutoneion—a shrine to Hades—in the sacred glen at Isthmia, near the temples of Demeter and Persephone.[254] The coexistence of these shrines and temples suggests a close association between Demeter devotion and chthonic concerns, and is indicative of a strong preoccupation with the dead and the world of the dead in the religious life of Corinth and the surrounding region. The Corinthians who received Paul's message would have shared these widespread concerns.

While the causes of this chthonic preoccupation were no doubt diverse and complex, DeMaris has made some important first steps toward an explanation by pointing to the coexistence of both Greek and Roman burial practices in the same cemeteries in Corinth, which he argues would have led to a widely-shared sense of unease regarding the status of the dead as well as concern for the maintenance of traditional rites of ancestor reverence.[255] If this explanation is accepted, then the Corinthians may well have received Paul's message as a "tool" to help them negotiate and alleviate this sense of unease. Burton Mack comes very close to arguing this when he posits that the Corinthians received Paul as "a traveling teacher/philosopher, with something of interest to say about 'wisdom,' 'spirits,' group identities, and meals in memory of ancestors," who could also teach them how to communicate with "the

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[252] DeMaris, "Corinthian Religion," 666.
[253] DeMaris, "Corinthian Religion," 668; cf. 666-669.
[254] DeMaris, "Corinthian Religion," 667.
[255] DeMaris, "Corinthian Religion," 670-682.

spirit of a martyred folk hero at a distance from his tomb."[256] If the Corinthians were, in fact, already concerned about communication with and the maintenance of ties to their ancestral dead—whether in Corinth, in their homelands, or both—then Paul's main attraction was his ability to help them "translate" their religions of "here" into a religion of "anywhere." Thus, their reception makes sense, given these concerns.

This certainly clarifies the religious interests of what Smith calls "some Corinthians," but it still does not answer the question that has persistently dogged us in this chapter. The "presumed endless accessibility of the ancestors"[257] would indeed be a requirement for the religion of the Corinthian "spiritists," which explains why their "fundamental presupposition [would likely be] that the ancestors and the dead remain dead, even though they are thoroughly interactive with their living descendants."[258] So why would the Corinthian spiritists—who presumably are the ones displaying reticence about resurrection in 1 Cor 15:12—have bothered with the Christ figure Paul offered them? Unlike Mack, I am not quite sure the Corinthians thought Paul was telling them how to communicate with "the spirit of a martyred folk hero at a distance from his tomb." This is because Paul explicitly told them that Christ was no longer in his tomb (1 Cor 15:4)! Mack does not entertain the possibility that the Corinthians may have been attracted by the fact that this martyred folk hero was apparently not bound by the limits of his tomb, and could therefore move from place to place. Presumably, this oversight occurs because Mack is thinking of the Corinthians in terms of the locative/utopian dichotomy. But, what if we were to think of Paul and the Corinthians in terms of "here, there and anywhere"? The Corinthians' ancestral concerns make them a prime candidate for being classified as

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[256] Mack, "Rereading the Christ Myth," 52, 64.
[257] Smith, "Here, There, and Anywhere," 326.
[258] Ibid., 350.

members of "here." Paul's message seems best characterized as a religion of "anywhere." So, we should ask, must it be a "fundamental presupposition" that the dead must remain dead when a religion of "here" is experimenting with "anywhere"? If so, what does it *mean* for the dead to remain dead? Does it mean they must stay in their tombs? Is the idea of resurrection always *necessarily* incompatible with the dead remaining dead? Or is the issue less cut-and-dry than Smith and Mack allow?

These questions have been asked before, though not about the Corinthians, and not in terms of Smith's topography of religiosity. In an essay entitled "The 1870 Ghost Dance at the Walker River Reservation: A Reconstruction" Michael Hittman poses an analogous question about the Northern Paiute in Western Nevada: "How [shall we] explain [the 1870 Ghost Dance's] enigmatic central doctrine of resurrection when ritual avoidance of the dead is a marked feature of Northern Paiute culture?"[259] It is my contention that an analysis of the 1870 Ghost Dance as it developed on the Walker River Reservation will not only help us elucidate certain features of the Corinthian situation that might otherwise be missed, but will also help us to clarify why experiments with resurrection language might occur within a displaced religion of "here." In the process, I hope to clarify what exactly "resurrection language" might mean in such a situation. Though it "is axiomatic that comparison is never a matter identity,"[260] I do feel that the situation to be discussed here is analogous enough to the Corinthian situation that it will prove useful to us in clarifying and solving the theoretical problems that interest us here.

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[259] "The 1870 Ghost Dance at the Walker River Reservation: A Reconstruction." *Ethnohistory* 20 1973, 247.

[260] Smith, *To Take Place*, 14.

To Dance with Ghosts…

The Ghost Dance movement of 1870 seems to have originated among the Northern Paiute (Numu) of the Walker River Reservation in Western Nevada around 1869, in response to the message of the prophet Wodziwob, also known as "Hawthorne Wodziwob" or "Fish Lake Joe."[261] It seems Wodziwob first announced his revelations at a traditional Paiute Round Dance, a ceremony with both social and ritual purposes. He commanded his audience to paint their faces before dancing and then to bathe themselves after the dance. The dance Wodziwob instructed them to perform was based upon the traditional Round Dance form. In it, "[m]en, women, and children all participated. Forming a circle, they alternated sexes, interlocked fingers, and shuffled slowly to the left, all the while singing the numerous songs revealed to individual dancers in visions."[262] As he initiated the Ghost Dance, Wodziwob proclaimed that if the Paiute would continually dance in this manner, then their deceased "fathers and mothers" would return "pretty soon." When this return of the dead occurred, Wodziwob said, everybody would "be happy."[263] Wodziwob apparently did not clarify the meaning of these instructions until after the ceremony had ended, when he entered a trance during which his soul visited the land of the dead, far to the south. When he emerged from this trance state, he told his audience where he had been, and "told individual members of his audience that he had seen their deceased relations, that they were enjoying themselves (e.g., hunting successfully), and that they would soon return to earth."[264] After this initial prophecy, Wodziwob continued to preach the return of the dead, which he

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[261] Hittman, "1870 Ghost Dance," 247. Gregory E. Smoak, *Ghost Dances and Identity: Prophetic Religion and American Indian Ethnogenesis in the Nineteenth Century* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), 115.
[262] Smoak, *Ghost Dances*, 114-115.
[263] Hittman, "1870 Ghost Dance," 250-251.
[264] Hittman, "1870 Ghost Dance," 251.

claimed would occur within four years. He also used displays of power (perhaps involving the creative use of dynamite) to emphasize the authority of his preaching.[265] At first, Wodziwob's preaching was received with some enthusiasm, but after a few years, the popularity of the movement on the Walker River Reservation had waned.

While the reasons for the movement's obsolescence will not concern us here, the reasons for its initial *success* have great heuristic value for our imagination of the first-century Corinthian situation. Scholars have proposed several theories why the Ghost Dance was attractive to the Paiute on the Walker River Reservation, with deprivation theory providing the most popular explanation ever since James Mooney first proposed a version of the "deprivation hypothesis" (1896), which pointed to the lack of food and resources on the reservation as the primary causal factor in the rise of the Ghost Dance. By contrast, Cora Du Bois adopted a "diffusionist" perspective, which argued against the deprivation hypothesis and proposed "a recurring native pattern" in Northern Paiute culture, which was, she claimed, sufficient to account for the movement's emergence. I favour Michael Hittman's attempted synthesis between Du Bois' cultural explanation and Mooney's deprivation hypothesis Hittman thus explains the movement as a culturally patterned response to the social and material conditions of deprivation that were experienced on the reservation. He also points to the *colonial* context of the Ghost Dance movement, a context that in large part established the conditions that led to the Paiute's experience of deprivation in the first place. From this perspective, the redeployment of those Paiute cultural elements that shaped the Ghost Dance can be described as an agonistic enunciation performed in response to American colonization.

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[265] Hittman, "1870 Ghost Dance," 251; Cf. Cora DuBois, *The 1870 Ghost Dance*. Anthropological Records, 3/1. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1939), 5.

The history of contact between the Northern Paiute and the American settlers makes clear why "deprivation theory" has been so popular. First contact between Euro-Americans and the Northern Paiute seems to have occurred in 1827, but did not begin to disrupt the Paiute cultural patterns until after 1845, when foreign settlements in the area of Walker Lake began to have a "cataclysmic effect upon Paiute culture."[266] Miners clear-cut pine groves for lumber to construct their mining shafts, and ranchers began to graze large herds of cattle, depriving the Paiute of pine nuts and wild grasses, both of which were important food sources.[267] After a decade or so of violent resistance by the Paiute, the United States federal government "pacified" them and re-settled them on the Walker River Reservation in 1860.

Despite the promises made to them by the United States government, things did not improve for the Paiute after 1860. Drought made it difficult to grow food, and the government did not provide the technical assistance in adopting modern farming methods that had been promised to the Walker River Reservation Paiute. Fish, plentiful in the river and a valuable source of both food and income to the Paiute, were soon depleted by over-fishing. The drought continued until 1872, leading to a serious famine that left the Paiute with very little food.[268] Many Paiute lived at subsistence level. Many others starved. This harsh state of "deprivation" was only exacerbated by the onset of several epidemics that struck between the months of August and October, 1867.[269] These outbreaks were followed by a measles epidemic that struck in the spring of 1868. Together, these epidemics proved fatal to a large percentage of the

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[266] Hittman, "1870 Ghost Dance," 252.

[267] Hittman, "1870 Ghost Dance," 252..
[268] Hittman, "1870 Ghost Dance," 254.

[269] Hittman, "1870 Ghost Dance," 255.

Northern Paiute population at the Walker River Reservation.[270] This was the seedbed from which the 1870 Ghost Dance arose.

It makes sense, then, that when Wodziwob began to prophesy "the resurrection of the dead and the restoration of the environment to its state prior to Euro-American expansionism," these prophecies "would have had great appeal to the Walker River Reservation Paiute."[271] In fact, Hittman argues that "Wodziwob's role can be defined as that of a crisis-broker, [because] resurrection of the dead and weather control [of which Wodziwob claimed to be capable] can be seen as time-honored and time-tested Paiute techniques of crisis-mediation."[272] Hittman argues that the doctrine of the resurrection of the dead, which seems "strikingly at odds with the ethnographic fact of Northern Paiute ritual avoidance of the dead,"[273] was attractive to the Paiute because of the devastating rupture that had recently occurred within the Northern Paiute kinship system as a result of the recent epidemics.[274]

Because many Northern Paiute cultural traits display a careful ritual avoidance of the dead, I would classify their culture as basically locative in orientation. Hittman lists a few of these locative cultural traits, which he culls from various ethnographies: "immediate burial of the dead; destruction of all personal belongings; a 'talker' who at the gravesite pleaded with the soul not to return from the land of the dead and bother the living; prohibition against mentioning the name of the dead person; relocation of campsite"[275]

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[270] Hittman, "1870 Ghost Dance," 256.

[271] Hittman, "1870 Ghost Dance," 260.
[272] Hittman, "1870 Ghost Dance," 260.

[273] Hittman, "1870 Ghost Dance," 264.

[274] Hittman, "1870 Ghost Dance," 262.

[275] Hittman, "1870 Ghost Dance," 265.

But if souls are begged not to return from the land of the dead, then why would the Ghost Dance prophet think it was a good idea to promise their return? Hittman explains this by noting that Wodziwob came from among the Fish Lake Valley Paiute (hence the name "Fish Lake Joe"), a Paiute group that did not share the strict codes of ritual avoidance of the dead that so characterized the Northern Paiute. Therefore, Hittman argues, Wodziwob was able to "convert" the Northern Paiute to a tradition based upon the resurrection of the dead by "grafting" the Fish Lake Valley Paiute ceremony of the "cry dance" onto the pre-existing Northern Paiute "Round Dance." The "cry dance" was an annual mourning ceremony, held by the Fish Lake Valley Paiute to honour their ancestors, while the Round Dance was an "increase rite" intended to provide food sources to the Northern Paiute. By turning the Round Dance into a dance of mourning, Wodziwob was effectively creating a community-healing rite that would allow the Walker River Reservation Paiute to overcome the recent rupture in their kinship system and maintain controlled contact with their dead. In this way, the environment would be returned to pre-contact conditions: the land would be healed (which, again, was one purpose of the Round Dance) and the dead would return. Ethnographic reports of the 1890 Ghost Dance, which seems to have been similar, if not identical, in practice to the way Dances were held in 1870,[276] describe dancers falling out of the circle and wiggling on the ground, as if in a trance, or even talking to spirits of the dead that they saw while dancing.[277] This datum, if acceptable, supports the

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[276] Though this is uncertain, Jeffrey Ostler makes this assertion more plausible by arguing that Wovoka learned the Dance from his father Tavivo, who had been a follower of Wodziwob. See Ostler, *The Plains Sioiux and US Colonialism from Lewis and Clark to Wounded Knee* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 244.

[277] Michael Hittman, "The 1890 Ghost Dance in Nevada," *American Indian Culture and Research Journal* 16 1992, 146-147; cf. John Neihardt, *Black Elk Speaks: Being the Life Story of a Holy Man of the Ogalala Sioux*. (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1979), 241, for a first-hand account.

description of the Walker River Paiute Ghost Dance as making possible a ritually controlled, and therefore non-polluting, mode of contact with the ancestral dead—analogous, to some degree, to the oracular modes of contact in the Corinthian situation.

Finally, to complete our presentation of the Ghost Dance data: Hittman reports that not all of the Northern Paiute accepted Wodziwob's prophecy of the resurrection of the dead, and many denied it right up until the movement's obsolescence, though this did not always keep them from participating in the dances.[278]

If we juxtapose the data just reviewed to the data from the Christian group in Roman Corinth, several analogies present themselves. At the *situational* level, the enormous differences between these two sets of data can be negotiated by saying, generally, that we are dealing with experimental social formations that appear to be reformulating older practices in response to changed social conditions. In both cases here, the social conditions can be described as *colonial*—although the kind of "colonization" that has occurred is different in both cases. While respecting this difference, we can also postulate the Walker River Reservation as analogous to *Colonia Laus Julia Corinthiensis*, and the relatively recent, forced re-location of the Paiute onto the Reservation suggests some situational analogy to the less recent re-settlement of Corinth— especially if, as argued above, the experience of "deracination" was strong among the more recent Corinthian immigrants. There are, of course, important differences between these two situations: while there is evidence that Corinth experienced a number of serious grain shortages in the middle of the first century—precisely when the Christ association would have emerged[279]—there is no parity between this and the harsh state of deprivation the Northern

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[278] Hittman, "1870 Ghost Dance," 251, 267.

[279] Bruce Winter, *After Paul Left Corinth Paul Left Corinth: The Influence of Secular Ethics and Social Change*.

Paiute experienced.[280] Still, without claiming—or even requiring, since we are comparing

through analogy, not homology—perfect isomorphism, we can generalize and say that both

groups had experienced a rupture in their respective kinship systems: dramatically, in the case of

the Walker River Reservation Paiute, from deaths caused by epidemics and starvation; and less

dramatically, in the case of the Corinthian Christians, from inaccessibility to the tombs of their

ancestors, which disrupted their domestic religions of "here." In the Paiute example, resurrection

language was linked to culturally patterned means of negotiating the tension, unrest, and feelings

of "deprivation" caused by this loss of kinship ties.

The Ghost Dance example therefore helps us to explain why the more locative-oriented

members of the Corinthian association (e.g., the so-called "spiritists") would not necessarily be

mortified by Paul's resurrection language, even though their interests in maintaining ties to the

ancestors would seem to require the dead to remain dead. In this case, I suggest that the

"mobility" of the resurrected dead was precisely what attracted them to Paul's message in the

first place—for, if the ancestral spirits could be mobilized by the powerful figure of *Christos*,

then the problem of the ancestral tombs' inaccessibility could be solved through intellectual and

ritual means, though it could not be physically overcome.

Smith himself hints at such a view when he states that "[s]ome Corinthians may have

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(Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), 215-225.

[280] In fact, if we take the evidence of 1 Cor 1:26 at face value, we can assume that some members of the Corinthian
Christ association—though "not many"—had some measure of wealth, even if their status was inconsistent with
this wealth. Added to the fact that the Corinthians seem to have met in households—meaning that some members
had houses big enough to accommodate a decent-sized gathering of people—this evidence shows that some
Corinthians were far removed from an experience of "deprivation." This stands as an important and informative
difference.

understood Paul as providing them, in the figure of Christ, with a more proximate and mobile ancestor for their new, nonethnic 'Christian' *ethnos*," because "celestial figures often have a mobile advantage over chthonic ones who are more readily bound to a place."[281] That the Corinthians may have understood him in this way is rendered more plausible by some of Paul's other discussions of the resurrection, such as 1 Thess 4:16-18, where Paul informs his audience that *Christos* will bring the dead with him upon his return. That this mobilization of the ancestors would occur *through* the very act of resurrection shows that the notion of resurrection *per se* need not be as disruptive of ancestral traditions as Smith sometimes seems to suggest.[282]

Keeping in mind that Smithian "redescription" is the result of "comparison across difference, taking cognitive advantage of the resultant mutual distortion,"[283] we may say that Wodziwob and Paul both used resurrection of the dead as a "technique of crisis-mediation"— literally, in the case of Wodziwob, since this was a culturally-patterned technique, and analogously in Paul's case. Because the cult figure which Paul offered could provide contact with the ancestors, he was bringing the Corinthians a method to "re-emplace" their disrupted religion of "here" by translating it into a religion of "anywhere." Redescribed in this way, *Christos* appears as a "religious technology" for repairing a thorny social situation.

There is more. Smith's passing mention of the "new, nonethnic 'Christian' *ethnos*" is rendered significant by a further aspect of the Ghost Dance data, which would be missed if we kept our analysis at the local, colonial, or even "religious" level.

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[281] Smith, "Re: Corinthians," 351.

[282] E.g. Smith, "Re: Corinthians," 350.

[283] Smith, "Re: Corinthians," 346.

Gregory E. Smoak concludes his *Ghost Dances and Identity* by pointing out that the

Ghost Dances occurred at a time when evangelical Protestant identity more or less defined what

it meant to be American, and that this "white, middle-class, native-born, and Protestant" identity

was by far the dominant, even hegemonic, definition of "American."[284] Religious language—

especially prophetic language, as evangelical Protestantism was marked by millenarian

fervour—was used to define national identity. Prophetic language was also a discourse through

which American Indians articulated their identities.[285] Smoak points to a number of examples. In

1761, a Delaware holy man called Neolin prophesied a pan-Indian revival that would end with

the removal of the Europeans who blocked the Natives' path to heaven. After the French and

Indian War, the Ottawa Pontiac used Neolin's prophecy to unite Indian warriors from several

tribes to make war against the British and stop their expansion into Indian territories. One

hundred years later, a Shawnee prophet named Tenskwatawa preached a similar vision, while his

brother Tecumseh "led the political and military resistance against white expansion that promised

to unite native peoples from the Gulf of Mexico to the Great Lakes."[286] Smoak rightly points out

that while studies of these movements have "consistently cast the intertribal, prophetic nativism

inherent in the respective religions as one aspect of an emerging American Indian nationalism,

due in no small part to the direct ties between the religious prophecies and the political and

military movements led by the iconic leaders Pontiac and Tecumseh," the millenarian nativisms

that emerged farther west have not been classified "in terms of emergent identity but rather as

narrower reactions to colonization and deprivation."[287] This is despite the fact that the Ghost

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[284] Smoak, *Ghost Dances*, 197.

[285] So Christopher L. Miller, *Prophetic Worlds: Indians and whites on the Columbia Plateau*. (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1985).

[286] Smoak, *Ghost Dances*, 198.

[287] Smoak, *Ghost Dances*, 198.

Dances, the Dreamer religion, the Prophet Dances, and other such movements "all exhibited to one degree or another the unifying pan-Indian spirit of the earlier religions."[288] Smoak suggests, quite rightly I believe, that the lack of overtly *political* or *military* leaders has prevented these movements from being classified as emergent "nationalisms." He points out, very suggestively, that all of these movements arose precisely when

> the evangelical American identity was fully formed and dominant and at the very time that a shared American Indian identity emerged as meaningful. This was no accident of history. The Ghost Dances were a prophetic expression of an American Indian identity that countered American attempts to assert a particular identity and to impose that vision on American Indians.[289]

This "religious" movement thus has a political edge. Recognizing that this political aspect of the Ghost Dance has been obfuscated and overlooked due to scholars' excessive focus upon its "religious" aspect, we should now ask whether a similar obfuscation has occurred in the study of the early Christ association in Corinth.

Challenging the "Rulers of This Age"

Contrary to the long-standing view, informed mainly by the pseudo-Pauline mystification of Paul's language of the "rulers of this age" as "powers and principalities of the heavenly realm"

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[288] Smoak, *Ghost Dances*, 198.

[289] Smoak, *Ghost Dances*, 198.

(Eph 6:12), many scholars have recently shown that much of the language Paul uses to describe Christ and Christ's victory over the "rulers of this age" (1 Cor 2:6,8; 15:24) was taken directly from the language of the Roman imperial cult. Neil Elliott, for instance, has demonstrated the political overtones in Paul's language of the "powers" and his message of "Christ crucified."[290] Dieter Georgi has argued that the attempts to derive Paul's notion of *euangelion* from traditional Jewish usage are unconvincing, and that the closest parallel to Paul's use of "gospel" occurs with reference to the new beginning instituted by the birth of Caesar Augustus.[291] Many other of Paul's key concepts are drawn from Roman imperial ideology as well. For instance, the term *kyrioi*, "lord," by which Paul describes *Christos*, had been the honorific title for the emperor since the time of Augustus. J. R. Harrison notes that the Julio-Claudians so thoroughly "eclipsed their political rivals that talk of 'another Lord,' without any deference to or incorporation into their power base, was inconceivable."[292] Paul's mention of the *parousia* of Christ (1 Thess 4:15) refers to the arrival of a triumphant *Imperator* into a city. Similar echoes of Roman imperial ideology are found in Paul's language of "son of God,"[293] "savior" (*sōter*), and especially *eirēne kai asphaleia* (*pax et securitas*; 1 Thess 5:3), which was so closely tied up with Roman imperial propaganda that it was practically "'imperial shorthand' for the *Pax Romana*".[294]

Taken together, the weight of this evidence shows Paul's "religious" message to be far

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[290] Neil Elliott, "The Anti-Imperial Message of the Cross." In *Paul and Empire,* 176-181; idem., "The Apostle Paul's Self-Presentation as Anti-Imperial Performance. In *Paul and the Roman Imperial Order*, 67-68.

[291] Dieter Georgi, "God Turned Upside Down," in *Paul and Empire*, 148-149.

[292] J. R. Harrison, "Paul and the Imperial Gospel at Thessaloniki." *JSNT* 25.1 1996, 78, 78 n 25. Cf. Abraham Smith, "Unmaskiing the Powers: Toward a Postcolonial Analysis of 1 Thessalonians," in *Paul and the Roman Imperial Order*, 60.

[293] Smith, "Unmasking the Powers," 57; J. R. Harrison, "Paul and the Imperial Gospel at Thessaloniki." *JSNT* 25.1 1996, 83.

[294] So J. R. Harrison, "Paul and the Imperial Gospel," 86; cf. Smith, "Unmasking the Powers," 48.

more politicized than has traditionally been thought. That Paul's ideology has not traditionally been seen in this way is in large part a result of the older, *Spiritualisierung* reading that saw early Christianities as essentially "religious" (hence, not political) in orientation. This obfuscation is analogous, in some degree, to the categorization of the American Indian Ghost Dances as religious, rather than political resistance movements. But if we think of the Pauline assemblies as religio-political in orientation, we might ask if they fit into a widespread pattern of "native revolts," as do the Ghost Dances.

Before we can answer this question about native revolt patterns, however, we should first ask if something analogous to the unification that occurred among the American Indian tribes in response to the presence of a fully-formed American imperial identity could have happened in the Roman world? William Arnal provides an important assist in answering this question. As discussed in chapter three of this study, using Pierre Bourdieu's model of *doxa* and heresy, Arnal argues that Paul's letters do not present a critique of Judaism, and should not be seen as such, but should instead be seen as an attempt by Paul to extend the *doxa* of what it meant to be "Jewish" during this time period in order to construct "artificial Jews." To put it another, more precise way, Paul is attempting to extend the Jewish identity by means of non-material (i.e. "spiritual") markers, thus creating an identity that could, potentially, be extended to include the gentile nations. This ethnic identity is not based upon belonging or birthright, nor does it rely upon anatomical markers such as circumcision. Rather, Paul denies these biological markers and collapses such distinctions as "Jew and Greek," "slave and free," and even "male and female" to create a new, potentially universal social identity. This he does by reference to the work of a mythical ancestral figure: *Christos*. With respect to the Roman imperial *doxa* of the time, Paul would appear as a "heretic" who illicitly manipulates the totalizing aspects of imperial ideology

in order to make this "non-ethnic ethnicity" possible. This is because Paul took the notion that an ethnicity could extend to include all nations from Roman imperial propaganda, where the "Roman" ethnicity—which was just one ethnicity among others—was presented as "value-neutral," hence universalizable and capable of subsuming all other ethnicities beneath its canopy. But while the extension of "Roman" identity was effected by means of conquest and domination, Paul wanted to extend the "Jewish" ethnicity by means of incorporation and inclusion; the domination would come later, when *Christos* returned to conquer those outside this extended "Jewish" family. Thus, Arnal argues that by using the imperial terms of "loyalty," "justice," and "peace," and applying them to the new, "spiritual" ancestor he had found in *Christos*, Paul proclaims him a "new Abraham" whose "gospel" is directed against the totalizing claims of the Roman empire by means of a counter-imperial *ethnos*, thus creating an artificial oikumenical Jewry.[295]

This aspect of Paul's thought makes it very strongly analogous to the "counter-nationalism" of the Ghost Dancers. It allows us to think of the Pauline assemblies as part of a larger pattern of Jewish resistance to Roman rule, which extends from the time of Pompey's conquest of Judaea (63 BCE) to the Jewish War that ended in 70 CE, on up to the Bar Kokhba revolt of the mid-second century. Just as the lack of overtly political and military forms of resistance have kept the Ghost Dances from being counted as part of a broader movement of native resistance to American rule, it may well be that anachronistic views of the Pauline assemblies as being exclusively "religious" in nature have hindered our ability to place them

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[295] For this reason, it is crucial that Paul's "gospel" not be described as *anti*-imperial, as though it were a critique of imperial power *per se*. Rather, Paul is criticizing and challenging *Roman* imperial power specifically, and the *ekklēsiai* he founded might better be described as experiments in *counter*-imperialism. Paul countered Roman imperialism with "Jewish" imperialism; he opposed Roman universalism by proposing *another* universalism.

politically within their Roman imperial context. But Paul's "gospel," when redescribed as a counter-imperial ideology of resistance that is thoroughly grounded in the Judaic religion of his day, would seem to fit nicely into this wider pattern of Jewish revolt.[296]

These broader analogies suggests the possibility of imagining the Corinthian situation and the Walker River Ghost Dance situation as analogous, too—both at the level of their immediate *colonial* context and also in their larger *imperial* context. The religio-cultural "enunciations" that we find within these two sets of data can therefore be seen as the work of social actors who are invested in reforming their religions of "here" in terms of "anywhere," and who are doing this in response to analogous social situations.

As might be expected, then, there are several analogous articulations within the Ghost Dance data and the Corinthian data. Most striking, at first glance, is that the Corinthians and the Walker River Paiutes share an ambivalence towards resurrection language, even though the social formations in which they have invested are, to some degree, intimately tied up with this notion. Hittman characterizes this as a "lack of fit" between the Northern Paiute traditions and Wodziwob's resurrection prophecy, stating that, "since the Walker River Reservation Paiute population was culturally heterogeneous, the meaning and understanding of [the] Ghost Dance

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[296] While I will not pursue the question here, I note in passing the work of Stephen Dyson on native revolt patterns in the Roman Empire ("Native Revolts in the Roman Empire," *Historia* 20 1971, 239-274; "Native Revolt Patterns in the Roman Empire." *ANRW* 2.3 1975, 138-175). I also note S. R. F. Price's observation that "local cultic traditions could become the rallying ground for opposition to Roman rule" ("Response." In *Paul and the Roman Imperial Order*, 175-183. Edited by Richard A. Horsley. Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International.2004: 180). Price references instances of "religious" opposition to political rule—often through apocalyptic prophecies such as the Potter's Oracle—as well as armed resistance movements in which the fighters rallied around religious leaders (180). Instances of the latter movement occurred in Thrace, when a priest of Dionysos led a rebellion against Rome (180; cf. Cassius Dio 51.25.5; 54.54.5-7), and in Gaul, where the Druids led a rebellion in the belief "that the (accidental) burning of the Capitoline temple in Rome signified the end of Roman rule over the Gauls" (Price, "Response," 180). The question of how early Christian social formations in the Roman east fit into these patterns deserves further study.

doctrine [of resurrection] would naturally have varied."[297] Given the culturally, ethnically, socially, and economically heterogeneous composition of the Corinthian Christ association[298]—not to mention the obvious factionalism Paul discusses in the letter (1 Cor 1:12-13)—it seems equally plausible that the meaning and understanding of what it meant to be a "Christ association" would also have varied. Resurrection language likely meant different things to different members of the association, and since those Corinthians who were interested in establishing and maintaining ties with their ancestors were obviously proactive in their own mythmaking enterprise (i.e., they developed Paul's language of "spirit" in ways that Paul himself neither passed down nor foresaw), it is possible that they simply developed the notion of resurrection in a way Paul did not like. For instance, if the Corinthian "spiritists" were interested in the spirit of *Christos* as a way of contacting or accessing the spirits of their ancestors, then they may actually have been *attracted* (rather than repulsed) by Paul's "buried and raised" language, which suggests *Christos* is not bound within his tomb, though he may still be active within the sphere of the dead. Indeed, as one of the powerful dead, these Corinthians may have thought him able to provide access to other spirits in the realm of the dead. Those Corinthians who were baptizing themselves on behalf of their dead (1 Cor 15:29), then, may have been doing so in order to bring their ancestors within *Christos*' realm of influence. Yet *none* of this would necessarily have required a "resurrection" in the Pauline sense. In a religion of "anywhere," and possibly in religions of "here," it would seem there are more ways for the dead to remain dead than Smith's older "locative" category would allow.

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[297] Hittman, "1870 Ghost Dance," 266, 267.

[298] Wayne A. Meeks, *The First Urban Christians: Social World of the Apostle Paul* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984); Steven J. Friesen, "Prospects for a Demography of the Pauline Mission: Corinth among the Churches." In *Urban Religion in Roman Corinth: Interdisciplinary Approaches*, 351-370. Edited by Daniel N. Schowalter and Steven J. Friesen, 2004

Just as Wodziwob "grafted" the Cry Dance onto the Round Dance to produce a new mode of contact with the dead that would also result in a "healing of the land," so too it seems that Paul "grafted" the *ekklēsia* model onto the Corinthians' pre-existing concerns, and thus provided them with a way to maintain relations with the ancestors *while also* founding an assembly that would survive the coming judgment, when *Christos* would trample the imperial powers under his feet and establish the kingdom of God, thus "healing the Empire."[299] This analogy, more than any other, makes plausible the hypothesis presented in this article, that an association interested in maintaining contact with the ancestors in Corinth and the homeland, would also find a counter-imperial "gospel" attractive, and respond accordingly.

Finally, I would point to the long discussions regarding "speaking in tongues" that Paul includes in his letter to the Corinthians as evidence for something analogous to the "spirit possessions" or trance-like states that occurred within the Ghost Dance circles. We know that analogous conceptions of spirit possession existed among the Walker River Paiute and in the Hellenistic world, just as we observed similarities between Atbalmin ecstasy and Hellenistic ecstasy when we discussed Smith's own comparisons. The comparative experiments I have performed here further strengthen our confidence in imagining Corinthian "spirit-talk" as, in fact, "spirit possession."

On the Walker River Reservation, a tradition where contact with the dead was to be carefully avoided was reformulated (we might say "translated") to allow for such contact in a ritually-controlled way. This translation was necessary because the roots of their traditional

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[299] Robert Jewett has in fact made an argument that strengthens this view, claiming that Paul's discussion of the corrupt nature of the present world (Rom 8:18-23) was a refutation of the imperial propaganda which stated that Caesar Augustus had ushered in a "golden age," and that Rome's citizens and subjects were living in a "new creation." Paul rejects this view, claiming that the world is still broken and in need of a new creation, which only God can provide. See Jewett, "The Corruption and Redemption of Creation: Reading Rom 8:18-23 within the Imperial Context." In *Paul and the Roman Imperial Order*, 25-46.

religion of "here" had been sundered: living on the Reservation as they did, their old home, which had been "here," was now "over there." They had to find a way to be at home "anywhere."

We can say with some confidence that an analogous process occurred at Corinth: a disrupted religion of "here" was translated into a religion of "anywhere," so that the ancestors could be contacted in their inaccessible tombs through the powerful spirit of a martyred folk hero who was not bound to his own tomb. To varying degrees, this "translation" occurred, in both instances, in response to a perceived rupture in the kinship system—through deaths by famine and epidemic in the Walker River Paiute situation, and through dislocation from the ancestors' graves in the Corinthian Christian situation. Thus, the practices of speaking in tongues and dancing with ghosts appear to be structurally analogous. The situations of the Walker River Paiute and the Corinthian Christ association also seem analogous: neither strictly locative nor necessarily utopian, both groups invest in new modes of religiosity, while struggling, sometimes straining, to make "anywhere" feel like home.

5) Cultural Anthropology and Corinthian Food Fights: Structure and History in the Lord's Dinner

"In all societies, both simple and complex, eating is the primary way of initiating and maintaining human relationships…Once the anthropologist finds out where, when, and with whom the food is eaten, just about everything else can be inferred about the relations among the society's members…To know what, where, how, when and with whom people eat is to know the character of their society."[300]

As we have known at least since Shklovsky, the task of "defamiliarization"—to make familiar what, at first glance, appears strange to us, and to make strange what we first thought familiar— is essential to the study of any human social formation.[301] In the field of Christian Origins—the branch of the academy charged with the study of early Christian writings, and a field which has remained overwhelmingly an affair of native exegesis—it is especially imperative, since it is sometimes easy to forget that our data is unfamiliar. Though, in anthropological terms, a text like 1 Corinthians should appear no more familiar to the scholar than any ethnography of a 19th century Fijian village, we scholars of Christian origins often allow the "self-evidence" of the Corinthian Christ group to stand unquestioned. We often assume we know why this association was formed, why they continued to meet, and what kind of problems they were experiencing.

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[300] Peter Farb and George Armelagos, *Consuming Passions: The Anthropology of Eating* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1980), 4.

[301] Victor Shklovsky, "Art as Technique," in *Russian Formalist Criticism: Four Essays* (ed. and trans. Lee T. Lemon and Marion J. Reis; Regents Critics Series; Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1965), 3-24; as referenced in Jonathan Z. Smith, "*Dayyeinu*," in *Redescribing Christian Origins* (ed. Ron Cameron and Merrill P. Miller; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 2004), 484.

Upon reflection, however, this self-evidence cannot be allowed to stand.

If, as this chapter's epigraph from Farb and Armelagos suggests, it is possible to know the character of a social formation from its eating practices, then we have every indication that the Corinthian Christ association was a strange formation indeed. If we were to attempt an historical ethnography of this group based on its eating practices, we would have several ethnographic "markers" to guide us. There are many references to meal practices in Paul's letter, and they tell us quite a bit about Paul's understanding of the group, not to mention the nature of the social formation itself. One of the most interesting references occurs while Paul is arguing against the consumption of "food sacrificed to idols" (*ton eidolothyton*; 1 Cor 8-10). He warns the Corinthians, "it is impossible to share the cup of Christ and the cup of demons" (1 Cor 10:21), with the obvious implication that he equates the taking of *ton eidolothyton* with demon worship—meaning that he thought some Corinthians were dining with demons!

This theological concern of Paul's serves as an anthropological clue for us. It alerts us to the presence of at least two divergent forms of religiosity in the Corinthian formation. As Jonathan Z. Smith informs us, "demon worship" is rarely ever a first order term that one applies to one's own religiosity. It is almost always "a term of estrangement" that is applied to the religion of others. It "represents a reduction of their religiosity to the category of the false but not (it is essential to emphasize) to the category of the impotent."[302] Paul is obviously afraid of the harm demons can cause, just as he considers it dangerous to partake of the Lord's Dinner in vain (1 Cor 11:27-30). Thus, when trying to dissuade certain Corinthians from participation in these meals, he appeals to demons in order to scare these Corinthians away.

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[302] Smith, "Towards Interpreting Demonic Powers," 425.

Since Paul uses the category of "the demonic" in a regulatory manner, attempting by this deployment of the category to de-authorize certain forms of religious behaviour, we might argue, as Smith does, that the category "demonic" serves a "locative function," in the most literal sense of "locating and establishing a place."[303] In Smith's later work, of course, "locative" came to have a more technical meaning, and was correlated with another term, "utopian."[304] Taken together, the two terms signify different "maps" or "world-views" that religious traditions oscillate between, sometimes co-existing within the same tradition simultaneously.[305] I argue that 1 Corinthians is evidence for just such a co-existence of divergent religiosities within the Corinthian Christ association, and—as I will argue in this essay—the tension this co-existence generates is absolutely basic for an "anthropological" understanding of this group.

The observation of this diversity has already defamiliarized our imagination of the Corinthian association. We are worlds removed from the naïve, apologetically influenced models used in some studies of 1 Corinthians, as this quote illustrates: "In apostolic times we have a full description of the services in Corinth, *and they remind you of a modern prayer meeting or an old-fashioned Methodist class meeting*."[306] Such a statement, to put it mildly,

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[303] See, e.g., Smith, "Demonic Powers," 427, 429-430, 437-439.

[304] For a roughly chronological development of Smith's thinking on these terms, see Smith, "Demonic Powers"; idem., "Native Cults in the Hellenistic Period," *History of Religions* 11 (1971), 236-249; idem., "Hellenistic Religions," *Encyclopedia Brittanica* 15th ed., (1974) 8: 749-751; idem., *Map Is Not Territory* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), xi-xv, 67-207; idem., *Drudgery Divine*, 121-125 *et passim*. For a different, more developed proposal, see Smith, "Here, There, and Anywhere," *Relating Religion* 323-339.

[305] Though a few words about the meaning of "locative" and "utopian" in Smith's thought are necessary, due to space considerations I include them in a footnote. In locative traditions, the soteriology tends to be based upon sanctification, and a chief concern of locative religionists is keeping things in place. Thus, resurrection language (for instance), is uncharacteristic of these traditions, as beings from the realm of the dead are out of place in the realm of the living. The soteriology of utopian traditions tends towards salvation, or escape from a place that is seen as oppressive. Resurrection language is quite common in these traditions: it does not matter if things keep their place or not if the cosmos is already perceived as being out of place or "out of joint."

[306] John Alfred Faulkner, "Did Mystery Religions Influence Apostolic Christianity?" *The Methodist Quarterly Review* 73 (1924), 395, emphasis added.

ignores a great deal of evidence from 1 Corinthians. If eating food sacrificed to idols (1 Cor 8-10), wildly speaking in tongues (1 Cor 14), and baptizing people on behalf of the dead (1 Cor 15:29)—not to mention overtly denying that there is a resurrection (1 Cor 15:12)—is characteristic of old-fashioned Methodist class meetings, it is news to this author. Such excision of historical difference in favour of abstract sameness is methodologically indefensible, not to mention unhelpful. For the purposes of this study, it is difference and division—not continuity or identity—that will prove most useful.

I hope to further our understanding of the Corinthian Christ association by focusing upon the conflict surrounding the ritual meal known as the Lord's Dinner, which Paul discusses in 1 Cor 11. I will argue, on the basis of the diversity we have already observed within the Corinthian formation, that this ritual was taken up and divergently mythologized in conflicting ways intimately connected with group definition. I will also argue, on the basis of several cross-cultural analogies, that the conflicts, tensions, and contradictions this divergence generated both *structured* the history of the Corinthian formation, and also gave that structure its *historical dimension*. It is to the task of demonstrating this that we now turn.

Demons and Divisions

The locative and utopian "maps" are both present within the Corinthian association. With Smith, I classify Paul as utopian.[307] The centrality of resurrection to his thinking, and his explicit view of salvation as an escape from the "non-being" (*ta me onta*) of death (1 Cor 1:29), place Paul squarely in a utopian stream. On the other hand, I classify many—but not all—of the Corinthians he is writing to as locative, given their denial of resurrection (1 Cor 15:12). Nonetheless, it

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[307] Smith, *Drudgery Divine*, 138-143.

cannot be denied that Paul is using the category of the "demonic" here in something like a

locative—we might also say "situational," "border-lining," or *apotropaic*—manner: like wild

men at the edge of maps or dragons on the edge of nautical charts, "demons" for Paul constitute

a boundary that should not be crossed—or, better, a threat that should not be allowed into the

association—and Paul's adamant warnings represent his attempts to set up a bulwark against

them. Smith notes that this usage of the category is common, and elaborates:

> with the demonic (as with analogous categories such as clean/unclean) we are not
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> attempting to interpret substantive categories; but rather situational or relational
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> categories, mobile boundaries *which shift according to the map being employed*. Demons
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> serve as classificatory markers which signal what is *strong and weak*, controlled and
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> exaggerated in a given society in a given moment.[308]

In contrast to many other commentators on these passages, therefore, I will not take Paul at his

word regarding the divisions between the "strong" and the "weak," the "cup of the Lord" and the

"cup of demons." Smith's observation of the *relational* nature of such hierarchies, by contrast,

allows us to explore the letter from a different angle. If Paul is operating with a different "map"

of the social formation than some other Corinthians are operating with, then the "food fights"

surrounding the Lord's Dinner might better be described as springing from the tension brought

on by the "conjuncture" between Paul and the Corinthians than as a simple theological

disagreement. In Smith's terms, this tension is a conflict between the locative and utopian

ideologies which seem to be coexisting, however anxiously, at the time Paul writes 1

Corinthians.[309]

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[308] Smith, "Demonic Powers," 430, emphasis added.

[309] A thorough review of the social setting of 1 Corinthians would be helpful at this point, but it would also bog us

Four Winnebago Myths and Corinth

From the structure of Paul's own rhetoric—his use of the category "demonic" to regulate Corinthian practice, for example—as well as our knowledge of the social setting of 1 Corinthians, we can deduce something of the divisions existing within this social formation. But these examinations have only provided us with glimpses of the social formation. In order to fill in some of the blanks and colour in the gray areas, it will be helpful to consider a famous ethnographic example, which provides a good analogy for the kind of divisions we find at Corinth, and highlights the hierarchical nature of these divisions. This ethnographic example is found in Claude Lévi-Strauss' essay on the Winnebago, entitled "Do Dual Organizations Exist?"[310]

A few preliminary remarks upon the Winnebago social structure will be helpful. They are divided into two moieties: "Those Who are Above" (to be referred to as *A*) and "Those who are On Earth" (*B*). When Paul Radin was living among the Winnebago and learning about their society, he noticed a "curious discrepancy" among the Winnebago's accounts of their social organization. Though all recognized the dual organization between *A* and *B*, the way that they described this organizational "map" was quite different. Smith relates:

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down excessively. See Edward Adams and David G. Horrell, eds., *Christianity at Corinth: The Quest for the Pauline Church* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2004), 2-13ff. for a concise review of the setting. More specialized studies can be found in J. Wiseman, "Corinth and Rome I: 228 B.C.-A.D. 267," *ANRW* 2.7.1 (1979) 438-548, and Engels, *Roman Corinth*.

[310] "Claude Levi-Strauss, "Do Dual Organizations Exist?" *Structural Anthropology* (New York, 1967-73), 1: 132-163. This essay was a commentary on Paul Radin's monograph *The Winnebago Tribe*, (Lincoln, 1970), and was itself commented upon in Jonathan Z. Smith's *To Take Place*, esp. 42-44. For what follows, I rely upon Smith's discussion of these other works. As interesting as the various Winnebago myths and social formations are, it is the theoretical implications of Radin's monograph and Levi-Strauss' essay that is of the most interest here. Thus, the discussion of the Winnebago social organization is entirely a reiteration of, or extrapolation from, Smith's exemplary discussion.

The majority of [Radin's] informants described a circular village with equal areas belonging to the two moieties, divided from each other by an "imaginary diameter running northwest and southeast." The lodge of the Thunderbird clan, the first of the four clans of the *A* moiety, stood at the southern extremity within the one half, with the other lodges belonging to *A* scattered throughout the moiety's "territory." The lodge of the Bear clan, the first of the eight clans of the *B* moiety, stood at the northern extremity within the other half, with the remaining lodges belonging to *B* scattered throughout the moiety's "territory."[311]

However, several of Radin's native informants insisted on a different model. In this second model:

[T]here was no distinction between the two moieties. The ruling lodges (those of the Thunderbird and Bear clans) were in the center, with the other lodges clustered around them. The contrasts were between the village and the cleared land surrounding it and between the cleared land and the encompassing forest. The first model, which Lévi-Strauss terms a "diametric structure," and which is symmetrical and reciprocal (the one moiety's territory being the mirror image of the other), was "always given" by members of *A*. The second model, which Lévi-Strauss terms a "concentric structure," is hierarchical. It collects the ruling functions in the center in distinction to their lodges (regardless of moiety) and then distinguishes the human and inhabited realm from the cultivated land, and the cultivated land from the wild land. This latter diagram was described only by members of *B*.[312]

[311] Smith, *To Take Place*, 42.
[312] Smith, *To Take Place*, 42-43.

While both Smith and Lévi-Strauss make much of this "discrepancy," Smith relies upon Lévi-Strauss' "apt" critique of Radin to set the stage for his own interpretations of the data:

> Radin did not stress the discrepancy; he merely regretted that insufficient information made it impossible for him to determine which was the true village organization. I should like to show here that the question is not necessarily one of alternatives. These forms, as described, do not necessarily relate to two different organizations. They may also correspond to two different ways of describing one organization too complex to be formalized by a single model, so that the members of each moiety would tend to conceptualize it one way rather than the other, depending upon their position in the social structure. For even in such an apparently symmetrical type of social structure as dual organization, the relationship between moieties is never as static, or as fully reciprocal, as one might tend to imagine.[313]

Lévi-Strauss also points out that the "diametric structure" of moiety *A* is more likely to be perceived as an inherently reciprocal and balanced structure, whereas in "concentric structures, the inequality may be taken for granted, since the two elements are, so to speak, arranged with respect to the same point of reference—the center—to which one of the circles is closer than the other." This leads Lévi-Strauss to a question that will prove helpful in our discussion of the Corinthian group: "How can moieties [or groups, or factions] involved in reciprocal obligations and exercising symmetrical rights be, at the same time, hierarchically related?"[314] While Lévi-Strauss goes on to provide a superior, if still problematic, solution to the "discrepancy" first noted by Radin,[315] it is Smith's own response to this question that I find most helpful.

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[313] Levi-Strauss, *Structural Anthropology* I:134-135, quoted in Smith, *To Take Place*, 43.
[314] Levi-Strauss, *Structural Anthropology* I:139-140, quoted in Smith, *To Take Place*, 43.
[315] See Smith, *To Take Place*, 143-145 n. 100, for a long discussion and rectification of Levi-Strauss' solution.

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While Radin maintained that the titles "Those Who Are Above" and "Those Who Are on Earth [Below]" have "no connotation of superior and inferior,"[316] and Lévi-Strauss never fully grasped the import of his observation that "members of each moiety would tend to conceptualize [the social structure] one way rather than the other, depending upon their position in [that same] social structure,"[317] Smith takes the question of hierarchy as central to the interpretation of the Winnebago data. He links together a catena of facts that clearly indicates hierarchy: the chief is selected from moiety *A*, never moiety *B*;[318] moiety *A* as a whole is sometimes referred to as the "chiefs," while moiety *B* is sometimes called the "soldiers"[319]; *A* has the power to determine the boundaries of the tribe, is responsible for declaring war, avoiding war in times of peace, and negotiating treaties with other tribes, while "*B* is responsible for the internal order and discipline of the tribe; and so on.[320]

> Thus, it is from a perspective of power that *A* sees the village as symmetrical and reciprocal; it is from a position of subordination that *B* pictures the village as hierarchical. *A*'s position is one of relative clarity; hence, the mirror-image character of its picture of the tribal organization. *B*'s position is ambivalent; hence, its more highly valenced 'concentric' diagram.[321]

Smith concludes: "These opposing positions give rise to two discordant ideological maps of geographical and social space."[322]

If we return to the Corinthian situation with this ethnographic example in mind, we find

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[316] Radin, "The Clan Organization of the Winnebago," 211, quoted in Smith, *To Take Place*, 44.
[317] Levi-Strauss, *Structural Anthropology* I:134-135.
[318] Radin, *The Winnebago Tribe*, 272.
[319] Ibid., 136.
[320] See Smith, *To Take Place*, 44, for a fuller discussion and bibliography.
[321] Smith, *To Take Place*, 44.
[322] Smith, *To Take Place*, 45.

several analogous relations present within the social formation to which Paul is writing. Most obvious, at first glance, are the various "factions" or "parties" that seem to be present within the formation: for instance, 1 Cor 1:14, in which Paul reports that some Corinthians have sworn allegiance to different leaders: "I am of Paul! I am of Cepha! I am of Apollos! I am of Christ!" Furthermore, the implied distinction between the "strong" and the "weak"[323] reveals an ideology of hierarchy, which Paul's epistle is not only evidence for, but also an instance of.

This is an important point, which Gerd Theissen, among others, has called our attention to: while 1 Corinthians may be "mined" for "social facts" about the Corinthian Christ association, it is easy to forget that 1 Corinthians is itself a "social fact."[324] Yet, as Theissen demonstrates, the social fact of 1 Corinthians tells us a great deal about the social formation it was written to.

First of all, we learn something about the position of Paul's "informants" in the social formation. We also learn something about Paul's critics and addressees. Theissen argues that the Corinthians' letter to Paul—to which 1 Corinthians is a response—"clearly is formulated from the standpoint of the strong."[325] It is quite clear that there was some kind of factional bias present in the letter, since the "slogans" that Paul quotes from it reflect this: other opinions on

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[323] Although, it is important to note, Paul never makes reference to the "strong," only to the "weak." The presence of the "strong" in the Corinthian Christ association is a logical extrapolation from Paul's letter, and is not—so far as we know—a first-order term.

[324] Gerd Theissen, "The Strong and the Weak in Corinth: A Sociological Analysis of a Theological Problem," in *The Social Setting of Pauline Christianity* (Edinburgh, T & T Clark, 1982), 137. This is an important point. It is easy for those of us in the field of Christian origins, who are largely trained as textual exegetes, to take for granted the "transparency" of the early Christian writings, seeing them merely as "windows" to the "communities" behind them. The fact of the texts themselves is rarely noticed or questioned.

[325] Ibid., 137. *Pace* Theissen, I hesitate to impose "strong" and "weak" as substantive categories that are "native" to the Corinthian formation. The terminology may well be Paul's, and I see nothing in the various mentions of the "weak" that would require it to be a "native" term of Corinthian discourse. Rather, like the category "demonic," I hold that "strong and weak" are "situational or relational categories, mobile boundaries which shift according to the map being employed. [Categories such as 'demonic'] serve as classificatory markers which signal what is *strong and weak*, controlled and exaggerated in a given society in a given moment," Smith, "Demonic Powers," 340 emphasis added.

such things as *eidolothyton* "are not reflected, [since] the catch phrase 'all of us possess knowledge' (8:1) leav[es] little room for that."[326] The authors of this letter wrote as though they could represent the Corinthian formation as a whole, despite the obvious divisions among the group—the same divisions, in fact, that provided the occasion for the writing of the letter in the first place! Theissen proposes that the authors "comprise the leading circles."[327] This is possible. It is also possible that their act of textually representing the Corinthian group is a grab for power: by speaking out in the name of all the Corinthian Christians, one can thereby silence any dissenting voices. In any case, the social fact of the Corinthians' letter is somewhat indicative of high status: the textual mode of representation would not have been available to all inhabitants of Roman Corinth. "Paul is thus informed on the basis of a perspective 'from above.'"[328] It is telling, in light of this, that when Paul does receive conflicting information about the Corinthian group, it is in the form of face-to-face, oral communication (1 Cor 1:11; 11:18), and not from another letter. This oral report, as Theissen puts it, "sees things from below (1:26ff.; 11:20ff.)."[329]

Yet, as in the Winnebago example, the divide between "those above" and "those below" is not healed by Paul's proposed solution. It is allowed to continue, with an ideological veneer that appears to suture the rift. When Paul writes his letter to the Corinthians, he is—almost by definition—addressing his reply to the "strong" who first represented themselves textually to him. By addressing the "strong" on their own terms, he reinforces their superordinate position. Note, for instance, that in almost every passage where he directly addresses the Corinthians using the second-person plural pronoun, he is discussing the concerns reported in the Corinthians'

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[326] Ibid., 137.
[327] Ibid. 137.
[328] Ibid. 137.
[329] Ibid. 137.

letter, sometimes going so far as to quote from their letter (1 Cor 7:1; 7:25; 8:1; 8:9-10, 11; 10:15, 31)—e.g., when he uses the well-known *peri de* formula.[330] Paul therefore reproduces the privilege of the "strong" party at Corinth.

Theissen in fact says as much when he discusses Paul's strategy of "love-patriarchalism," a strange term that he uses to describe the techniques by which Paul "allows social inequities to continue but transfuses them with a spirit of concern, of respect, and of personal solicitude."[331] To put it another way,

> Paul's recommendation, based on love, that the higher classes accommodate their behavior to the lower classes, only mitigates the tension between the two but allows the differing customs to exist. The factual privileges of status enjoyed by the higher strata are preserved…Nor is participation in cultic meals [e.g., *eidolothyta*] excluded in principle. All that is prohibited [by Paul] is disturbing a weak person by doing so. In other words, everything must take place in a very 'exclusive' circle.[332]

This "exclusive circle" is the same circle that held more privileges than the other members of the group in the first place. Paul's solution is a "compromise" that in reality maintains the status quo, where "[t]he wishes (or prejudices) of the weak are upheld just as is the knowledge (and social privilege) of the strong. For that very reason," Theissen concludes, "it is realistic and practicable,"[333] though he admits that this love-patriarchalism "cannot be considered the solution to contemporary social problems."[334]

Theissen's acknowledgement of the inadequacy of Paul's rhetorical strategy for solving

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[330] See similarly Theissen, "Strong and the Weak," 137.
[331] Theissen, "The Strong and the Weak," 139.
[332] Ibid., 139.
[333] Ibid., 139.
[334] Ibid., 140.

contemporary problems is also a tacit acknowledgement of the profound asymmetry that it both sustained and made possible. In light of the Winnebago example reviewed above, we can now use the asymmetrical positioning of these Corinthian parties as a useful ethnographic marker for the group. As with the conflicting "maps" of Moiety *A* and Moiety *B*, it is from a position of power that Paul and the implied "strong" are able to view the solution provided in 1 Corinthians as symmetrical. I doubt that the implied "weak" would have viewed it in quite this way, although their position has been lost, partly due to the oral nature of their self-representations.

Yet, apart from the fairly clear (and, undoubtedly, correct) theoretical points that have been drawn here—regarding the asymmetry of power and privilege distributions within a given social formation, the manner in which "subaltern" voices are lost, almost by definition, and other lessons drawn from conventional social-science wisdom—there is still a further, more subtle theoretical lesson to be drawn out. Though the "maps" of moiety *A* and *B*, like those of the "strong" and the "weak," do not correspond to social reality without remainder, they nonetheless *coexist* simultaneously and are operative within a determinate, active social formation. The problem with a "postcolonial" approach to this issue is that it tends to privilege the underprivileged perspective, implying (if not outright declaring) that the "people's history" corresponds most closely to the "true history." But the temptation to declare this should be resisted: the point to grasp is precisely that *both* perspectives are "true" and operative all at once, which grants us a deeper insight. As Slavoj Žižek points out regarding Levi-Strauss' essay,

> the very splitting into the two "relative" perceptions implies a hidden reference to a constant—not the objective, "actual" disposition of buildings but a traumatic kernel, a fundamental antagonism the inhabitants of the village were unable to symbolize, to account for, to "internalize," to come to terms with, an imbalance in social relations that

prevented the social community from stabilizing itself into a harmonious whole. The two perceptions of the ground-plan are simply two mutually exclusive endeavors to cope with this traumatic antagonism, to heal its wound by means of the imposition of a balanced symbolic structure."[335]

Žižek's point concerns the manner in which the Real intervenes or pushes forth into the Symbolic, socio-semiotic order:

> First we have the "actual," "objective" arrangement of the houses, and then its two different symbolizations that both distort, in an anamorphic way, the actual arrangement. The "Real" here, however, is not the actual arrangement, but the traumatic core of the social antagonism that distorts the tribe members' view of the actual antagonism.[336]

We will return to Žižek's point in the conclusion to this chapter. For now, however, this excursus has gained for us a greater appreciation of the asymmetry and antagonism that can occur in small-scale social formations—even urban formations such as the Corinthian Christ association. The recognition of alternative maps of the Corinthian assembly, silenced by the nature of the historical record, has allowed us to "re-cognize" Paul. No longer is he seen as the *sine qua non* of the Corinthian group. Rather, in a divided formation, Paul's voice appears as one among many, no matter what rhetorical spin he puts on his position when writing 1 Corinthians.

Thus, we can now appreciate the highly rhetorical nature of Paul's discussion of the Lord's Dinner in 1 Cor 11. Though the meal is called the "Lord's" Dinner, and is painted as a traditional meal, Mack has persuasively shown that the picture Paul presents, as well as the instructions he provides, are in fact his own sketches. The Lord's Dinner—a "tradition" Paul

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[335] Slavoj Žižek, *The Puppet and the Dwarf*, 73.
[336] Ibid.

"received"—is, in its present form, a Pauline creation that has been subjected to instant-aging techniques in an effort to bolster his own authority.[337] Thus, Paul is able to present his version of the Lord's Dinner "as a contrast and correction to [the Corinthians] own meal and meeting practices."[338]

If, as many scholars have recently argued,[339] this Corinthian association pre-existed Paul's importation of Christ into Corinth, then, logically, this means it was a Corinthian association before it was a Corinthian *Christ* association. Paul "grafted" his *ekklesia* format onto this association and tried to bring its pre-existing meal practices into conformity with his Lord's Dinner. This means that the text describing the Lord's Dinner is "a myth of origins that *grounds an association practice already in place*," and suggests that Paul "confiscated" the major markers of the Corinthians meal (breaking bread and drinking wine) and used them as

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[337] This effort to bolster his authority is, in fact, the unifying theme of the four or five chapters surrounding the dinner text. In these chapters, Paul engages in a long series of arguments intended to make the Corinthians aware of their faults, while reminding them of his authority to point those faults out.

[338] Mack, "Rereading the Christ Myth," 52. It is important, also, to note that the text does not present itself as a script for re-enactment. Nor is there any "sacramental" significance attached to the ritual; by contrast, it appears quite explicitly as a memorial meal in honor of the martyr—as in 1 Corinthians 11:24, where Jesus breaks the bread and says "Do this as my memorial." (Mack, "Rereading the Christ Myth," 53-54); cf. Stowers, "Elusive Coherence," 69-70: "Against the instincts of Christian piety, Paul's story of the institution betrays the idea that these were sacred words repeated as part of the Lord's dinner celebration. If later Christianity had not appropriated this text into its liturgy, we would not suspect that it was part of the Lord's dinner celebration. The words of 11:23-26 remind the audience of a story that they should know, but there is no reason to think that Paul ever would have told the story in exactly the same words twice.")

In addition to the non-sacramental nature of the meal, it is important to see Paul's use of the dinner tradition alongside the other tradition he claims to have received: the Christ myth of 1 Corinthians 15:3-5. The point of Paul's reference to the "dinner tradition" is not to remind the Corinthians that they have strayed from the proper, liturgical script, but rather "to authorize his instructions to [them] about their own common meals in accordance with his notions of how an association should behave and think about itself if focused on the Christ myth." This is "directly related to his own gospel of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ" in 1 Corinthians 15:3-5 (Mack, "Rereading the Christ Myth," 53). Note also that, in Paul's rehearsal of the Christ myth at the end of the letter, he adds himself to the end of the list of "appearances" Jesus had made, comparing himself to "one untimely born." Obviously, Paul did not "receive" a tradition that had his name on it; rather, he added himself to that tradition to underscore his own authority. It seems Paul has done the same thing with the dinner text. In both cases, the "received traditions" are rhetorical devices deployed according to Paul's own interests—mythmaking as social argumentation.

[339] See note 307, above.

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"'reminders' for the martyr's death of Jesus their founder-teacher and patron"[340]

The tensions and contradictions brought about by this confiscation of one sociomythic structure by another, together with the ideological "smoothing over" that occurred to hide the seams, are, I think, what defines the Corinthian situation. The negotiation between these tensions and contradictions constitutes, it seems to me, a clear instance of what Marshall Sahlins has termed a "structure of the conjuncture."[341]

Re-Placing Structure, Overcoming Event

Another excursus, into another distant ethnographic land, will help us to understand the tensions inherent in the Corinthian conjuncture, and how these became mystified, mythologized, and symbolized by the ritual meal. This time, the distant land we will explore is Fiji, and since we are already using his concept of the structure of the conjuncture to understand the Corinthian situation, Marshall Sahlins will be our guide.

In a long discussion of the complexities of Fijian kinship systems,[342] Sahlins includes a brief reference to Lévi-Strauss' essay on dual organizations, applying it to a Moalan group that bears some situational analogy to the Corinthians we are interested in, as we will see below. But first, a few words about Moalan social structure.

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[340] Mack, "Rereading the Christ Myth," 56. Paul "grafted" this practice onto a pre-existing association, and the tensions and contradictions brought about by the merging of these two sociomythic structures are, I think, what defines the Corinthian situation as revealed by 1 Corinthians. The negotiation between these two tensions constitutes, it seems to me, a "structure of the conjuncture."

[341] See similarly Smith, "Re: Corinthians," who comes to similar, if less developed, conclusions.

[342] Sahlins, *Culture and Practical Reason* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1976), 19-54.

Most Moalan villages are divided into two groups: Land People and Sea People. The Sea People tend to be the Chiefs of these societies, as well as master-fishers who provide seafood to the Land People, who in turn serve as Warriors and provide pigs to the Sea People. In these small-scale social formations, "relations of production on sea and land are constituted in agreement with the structures of reciprocity among the categories so designated, and through this sea and land as natural elements are given cultural order."[343] The divisions of labour break down strictly along the lines of these cultural categories: "villages dominated by Land [People] do very little deep-sea fishing to this day, whatever the feasibility of access to fishing grounds" (38). Nor will the Land people eat "pig in the presence of the Sea, [just] as the latter must not eat fish before Land—for fish and turtle are what the Sea People provide the Land," just as pig and taro are provided to the Sea (38). These reciprocal relations provide "the substance or nourishment which constitutes the other, and so must produce in the element of the other," as well as providing the models for "the domestic division of labor," which in turn constitutes the template for gender relations and patterns of marital exchange (38-39). But this dual relation of reciprocity is, in practice, permuted into "a typical [by Fijian standards] structure of four" (38). This structure is, I would say, a social geography:

> [F]or ordinary labor, if (some) Moalan men do deep-sea fishing on occasion, it is the
> women's daily netting and collecting in the lagoon areas that yield the main supply of
> seafood…[W]omen weave mats and make bark cloth in the village, whereas all
> cultivation of crops in the interior "bush" is mans' work…women's activities are
> "inside," in the village and adjoining sea, flanked on either geographical extreme by the

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[343] Sahlins, *Culture and Practical Reason*, 37. In this section, further citations to this work will occur in the text above.

men's domains of deep sea and high forest…[In this way,] the land is socially bisected into village (*koro*) and bush (*veikau*), while the sea is likewise differentiated into the *wai tui* or "chiefly sea" of the men, beyond the reef, in contrast to the lagoon or inland side of the sea, place of women's activities, called by the same term (*dranu*) as inland fresh waters. In Marx's phrase, the nature known to man is a "humanized nature" (38-39).

After this general review of Moalan social structure, Sahlins brings out a very interesting "ethnographic example" (41) of how one Moalan village responded to the rupture of that social structure.

Noting first of all that the "symbolic coordinates of Moalan culture" are so resilient that they seem "to develop an immunity to changing circumstance,"[344] Sahlins points to the village of Nuku, which he visited during his fieldwork, and which "has the usual dual organization of land and sea sections, although strictly speaking there has never been a single Land group in the community" (41). The village was founded in the latter half of the nineteenth century, and populated entirely by master-fishers in the service of the Chiefs, "who had migrated from the capital village of Navucinimasi and ulteriorly from the islands of Gau and Bau. Yet by the local conception, certain Nuku groups were Land People" (41). Sahlins reports that he often suggested to the villagers that they were all Sea People, and that this fact was "readily admitted" (41). But, he writes, the Nuku villagers had created a sort of legal fiction, which prioritized the earliest immigrants to Nuku, who "*receive*[*d*] the fish from the sea and [were] warriors (*bati*) for the later groups; that is, they are 'Land' in relation to the true Sea People who arrived afterward" (41). In my language, I would call this a culturally-patterned "re-emplacement strategy," which provides a solution to the historical experience of social displacement that was caused by the migration to

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[344] Sahlins, *Culture and Practical Reason*, 41.

Nuku.

Sahlins calls the Nuku example a "disclosure of the mechanism of cultural reproduction in the face of a historical disconformity" (41). His elaboration of this cultural reproduction is worth quoting at length:

> Mutilated by history, the moiety system is recreated by the transposition of symbolic correspondences from related domains to the population remaining. A dual division of groups into 'Land' and 'Sea' is restored by a congruent contrast between original and immigrant peoples. On the conceptual level, this particular procedure is especially facile, insofar as the temporal displacement remains unaffected—if needs be, the myth of settlement can be revised to conform to it—while the social distinction can always be thought one way or another. Yet such is merely the mechanics of the process. More fundamental is the fact that the moiety opposition is always present in village life, even in the absence of its historical existence, because the distinction between Land People and Sea People is continually *practiced* in a thousand details of rite and myth…The social duality is not only conceived; it is lived (41-42).

Yet, as the saying goes, all is not well in Mudville—mighty Casey may strike out. As Sahlins puts it:

> the reconstruction of structure at the expense of event is not achieved without residue. If the symbolic scheme seems manipulable without error or failure, history subsists in a certain opacity of the real: there is no escaping the contradiction of a village at once composed of Land People and Sea People, and yet of Sea People alone…So in the Nuku case, the opposition of structure and event is overcome, but at the cost of a social complication which denies the structure even as it is confirmed. One dualism negates the

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other (42).

In hectic social situations, cultural schemes may be re-emplaced, but without the social structures that made them possible and sustained them, they will not subsist without contradictions. Should the social economy remain tense or hectic, those contradictions may eventually be overdetermined and bring about a reconfiguration of the structure. This is especially true when the structure contained contradictions even in the most stable times, as is clearly the case with Moala: "Complementary yet unequal, symmetrical but asymmetrical, Fijian dualism contains an endemic contradiction: a conflict, as we have seen, of reciprocity and hierarchy" (43). For, as we have already learned from Lévi-Strauss, "even in such an apparently symmetrical type of social structure as dual organization, the relationship between moieties is never as static, or as fully reciprocal, as one might tend to imagine."[345]

Though I claim no simple parallels or isomorphism, there are analogies to be postulated between the Nuku villagers and the Corinthian settlers. There is some situational analogy between the two groups, in that both have experienced a relatively recent resettlement and/or displacement.[346] There is also an analogy to be found in the ideological schemes that structure the group. In the case of Nuku, it is the fictive perpetuation of a division (Sea People-Land People) that no longer exists in reality, and which eventually overdetermines and reconstitutes the structure. In the case of the Corinthians, I argue, an analogous process is revealed to us in the historical record: the disconformity of the Corinthian association with the *ekklesia* format which Paul brought to it, and his confiscation and re-deployment of the Corinthians' own meal practices

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[345] Levi-Strauss, "Dual Organizations," 135, quoted in Sahlins 1976, 43.
[346] After being destroyed by Rome in 143 BCE, Corinth was refounded as a Roman colony in 44 BCE and repopulated by military veterans and freed slaves. By Paul's time, it had become a bustling seaport and center of commerce, with people coming from all across the empire to try and make a living there. With Arnal, Mack, Smith, and Stowers, I assume the Corinthians who made up the social formation addressed in 1 Cor were part of this "deracinated" class of relatively recent immigrants.

in service of his own already-formed notion of what a Christ association should be, led to contradictory notions of group identity and antagonistic relations between those invested in the "before" and the "after" of the Corinthian group. In the final pages of this chapter, I will elaborate on how the ritual meal became a semiotic "battleground" for this conjuncture.

Mapping the Corinthian Meal

In two separate papers,[347] Stanley K. Stowers has examined Paul's complicated and often contradictory statements in 1 Cor 8-11 and argued that the contradictions found in these chapters are not the result of Paul's lackluster mind or unawareness of the Corinthian situation, but are rather echoes of tensions and contradictions already found within the eating practices of the Corinthians themselves.[348] Stowers contextualizes the Lord's Dinner within the larger arena of Hellenistic dining practices, and shows how this ritual meal functioned both within and in opposition to this wider arena. When one considers the various meanings that the Dinner ritual could have taken on—that is, what significance(s) the practices might have generated according to first-century Hellenistic codes of eating—it is not at all surprising that the Corinthians could have had a *very* different understanding of the ritual meal than Paul intended.

Stowers argues that the problems surrounding the Corinthian dinner could be explained, at least in part, by the tension between the meal's *form* and its *content*. The *form* of the meal is simple enough: it begins with broken bread and ends with the drinking of wine. Nor is the meal's *genre* especially mysterious: the etiological myth of the Dinner's origins in 11:23-26 clearly

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[347] One paper included in the second volume of the Seminar proceedings of the Ancient Myths and Modern Theories of Christian Origins seminar of the Society of Biblical Literature, entitled "Kinds of Meals, Myths, and Power: Paul and the Corinthians," [Ron Cameron and Merrill P. Miller, eds, *Redescribing Paul and the Corinthians* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 2011), 105-50; and another entitled "Elusive Coherence: Ritual and Rhetoric in 1 Corinthians 10-11," in *Reimagining Christian Origins: A Colloquium Honoring Burton L. Mack* (ed. Elizabeth Castelli and Hal Taussig; Valley Forge, PA: Trinity Press International, 1996), 68-83.
[348] Stowers, "Elusive Coherence," 78.

identifies it as a memorial meal for the dead.[349] Yet by other standards, such as its lack—so far

as we know—of a ritual sacrifice and consumption of meat, the Lord's Dinner was closer to the

everyday meal, which would have consisted primarily of bread, and would have been prepared

by women. The martyr myth that explains the significance of the bread—depicting it as the

martyr's body, and thus potentially linking it to notions of sacrifice: "This is my body, which is

broken *for you*"—shows that it holds pride of place in the meal, serving as its focus and

centerpiece.[350] This is markedly different from what one would expect in the culture of context.

While it is not unusual for the breaking of the bread and the consumption of wine to mark the

beginning and end of the meal, respectively,[351] the fact that this was a *memorial meal for the*

dead would have seemed strange, since such meals always featured sacrificial meat.[352] For

bread, not meat, to be the focus of the memorial meal—a memorial meal that was self-

consciously portrayed as a "sacrifice"—was a contradiction of form and content: "[w]here one

expects filet mignon, there is white bread."[353]

Within Hellenistic culture, the coagulation of such diverse eating codes in the form of the

Lord's Dinner would have predictably—though not *necessarily*—led to contradictions that would

have been both perceived and experienced—in a word, lived.[354] But, this seems to be Paul's

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[349] Which, interestingly, is a possible translation of the *eidolothyton* of 1 Corinthians 8-10. See Charles A. Kennedy, "The Cult of the Dead in Corinth," in J.H. Marks and R. M. Good, eds., *Love and Death in the Ancient Near East: Essays in Honor of Marvin H. Pope* (Guilford, CT, 1987), 227-236, for a tantalizing, if not decisive, argument for this translation.

[350] Intimately connected with dining practices was the structuring of gender relations: women cooked bread for the everyday meals, while the men sacrificed the animals and divided the portions for special meals or feasts. Stowers, "Elusive Coherence," 74. It is tempting to think, as Stowers does, that perhaps some of the problems Paul was discussing with respect to the unruly women in the Corinthian association were caused, or at least occasioned, by the heightened importance of bread in the Lord's Dinner, which seemed to be taking the place of meat in the memorial meal and might possibly have been perceived as a loosening of the gender distinctions that structured ordinary meal practice.

[351] A common feature of Hellenistic meals. See Stowers, "Elusive Coherence," 75 n. 43.

[352] See Stowers "Elusive Coherence," 76 n. 49.

[353] Stowers, "Kinds of Myth," 136; idem, "Elusive Coherence," 76.

[354] Stowers, "Elusive Coherence," 74.

intention: everything about his description of the Lord's Dinner in 1 Corinthians suggests that he both understood and developed the ritual in a way that distinguished it from ordinary meals and sacrificial meals.[355] Why would Paul have done this?

Stowers brilliantly suggests that the answer lies in Paul's distinctive understanding of the Christ martyr myth, which "plays on a disjunction between the body and the self" and thus sets the ritual somewhat apart from other meals of the period. As Stowers demonstrates, commensality in the Greco-Roman world was intimately tied to community-formation as well as identity-formation.[356] The meal codes fit together to provide one with the truth of his or her identity, and this identity was a matter of flesh and blood: body and self were *identical*, in both senses of the term.[357] In this world, identity was pre-eminently a matter of belonging, and to eat in a community was to affirm that one belonged to that community. When a group sacrificed to the god, the deity in turn "provided signs about this truth [viz., the truth that one belonged to the group] during the skillful cooking, sharing and eating of meat in honor of the god. The medium for communicating this truth about flesh and blood was the flesh and blood of an animal from the best lineages that Greek animal husbandry could provide."[358]

Stowers notes that, generally, Greek anthropology made no distinction between the "body" and the "self." In other words, for the Greeks, one did not *have* a body so much as one *was* a body—and in fact, the thing that distinguished a free male citizen from a woman, a child, or a slave was precisely how much control they *had* over their bodies/themselves. By contrast, Paul's exposition of the Lord's Dinner shows that he is operating with a different anthropology—

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[355] Stowers, "Elusive Coherence," 74.
[356] Peter Garnsey, *Food and Society in Classical Antiquity* (Cambridge, 1999), 128-138
[357] Stowers, "Kinds of Myth," 137.
[358] Stowers, "Kinds of Myth," 137.

a tripartite anthropology already present in his thought as early as 1 Thess 5:23—that relies upon the distinction between one's body and one's *self*, or true identity.[359] Though commensality is still constitutive of community identity and essential to group belonging,[360] the community is no longer tested, formed, or confirmed by the eating of meat. This is the Dinner's most distinctive feature, and shows that the ritual is articulated both within and in opposition to the *doxa* of Hellenistic culture. Whereas, in the ordinary sacrificial meal, meat symbolizes the body and is the centerpiece of the meal, in the Lord's Dinner, the focus is on the bread, which is the symbol of an absent body—an absence that is structurally homologous to Paul's "utopian" understanding of the true self, which may "inherit the kingdom of God" while "flesh and blood" cannot (1 Cor 15: 50).[361] This is why Paul holds that the members of the Corinthian association must not eat the bread or drink the cup without first "discerning the body" (11: 29), since this discernment reveals the truth of the Lord's eating practice: "the true self consists in being beyond oneself just as the martyr [Christ] surpassed himself in giving up his body."[362]

This leads Stowers to note "a deep ambiguity" that is possible in the way this ritual meal was carried out. Though bread and wine are explicitly mentioned, "Paul…left the cuisine in the rest of the meal unspecified. What if someone brought meat or slaughtered a goat, piglet, or

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[359] I do not wish to be misunderstood: I am *not* drawing a distinction here between "Greek" and "Jewish" worldviews, as I find such a distinction misleading and patently unhistorical. As Jonathan Z. Smith has shown in *Drudgery Divine*, this distinction has primarily been deployed for theological reasons, as part of an apologetic agenda to keep the origins of Christianity "pristine" and untouched by "pagan" corruption. I view the Hellenistic culture of the first century C.E. as hegemonic, with various "sub-altern" identities and articulations made possible precisely by that hegemony. Though Paul's anthropology is distinct, it should not be seen as unique or unintelligible in the context of Hellenistic culture. Indeed, many features of Paul's writings—such as the fact that they are written *in Greek*, using *Greek rhetorical and compositional techniques*—show that Paul is thoroughly "Hellenized," whatever that means.

[360] Cf. 1 Corinthians 5:11, in which Paul warns the Corinthians not to eat with those who call themselves "brothers" but live immoral, greedy, or idolatrous lives.

[361] cf. Stowers, "Kinds of Myth," 137.

[362] Stowers, "Kinds of Myth," 137.

sheep?"[363] Stowers points to a number of mixed signals that could have arisen from such an eventuality. Since "Greeks traditionally did not distinguish between sacrificing an animal and butchering,"[364] this would have added "possible 'pagan' connotations to the feast" as well as introduced "an element, meat, that would normally be set above and in contrast to bread."[365] It is even possible that the *eidolothyta* that Paul is concerned about in chapters 8-10 were actually happening at the Lord's dinner he discusses in chapter 11. If so, then we can understand the perplexity with which Paul tries to deal with these problems. Paul (and likely the Corinthians themselves) are so vexed because, from both an emic and an etic perspective, it would seem that the Lord's dinner, perhaps more than any other Corinthian Christian practice, was the ritual by which the Corinthian formation defined itself. The Lord's Dinner was so problematic because it was symbolically overdetermined: it "was negotiating a new place in the larger code of eating," and not simply reproducing the old order of "gender and social relations" which had been naturalized in Greco-Roman ideology. Tensions also arose because the "new order of ritualized bread and wine, rather than meat, fit a new order of power in the city detached from the land."[366]

> The cultural logic of the Lord's Dinner, at least as Paul conceives it, now seems obvious:
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> If meat is the natural product of men according to the patrilineal principle of the seed of the founding ancestor passed on as flesh, then bread is the fabrication of food by art, like spinning wool, the artifice of women and slaves. In Greek sacrifice, the body is present to be touched and eaten. But where is the body in the Lord's Dinner? It is present in its absence. The bread of human art is the reminder of a body that occupies no place. Christ

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[363] Stowers, "Elusive Coherence," 75
[364] "To eat unsacrificed meat was an abomination that would surely be punished by the gods," Stowers, "Elusive Coherence," 75-76 and 82 n. 47.
[365] Stowers, "Elusive Coherence," 75.
[366] Stowers, "Elusive Coherence," 78-79.

who, by the art of his obedience and will, triumphed through God's power, lives in a new plane of existence where a body seems superfluous."[367]

The ritual meal Paul describes in 1 Cor 11 thus perfectly exemplifies what Jonathan Z. Smith has termed a "utopian" religious practice. The problem is—as we saw in the previous chapter—that many of the members of the Corinthian Christ association were "locative" in their religious orientation. These were the Corinthian "spiritists" who were attempting to re-establish ties to their ancestors in the homeland, and who were engaging in oracular modes of contact with their recently dead, now buried in Corinth. These were the Corinthians who, by reason of those ancestral concerns, denied the resurrection—a notion which would appear both as a pollution and an abomination in a locative tradition.

In such a locative religious world, Paul, too, could appear as intrusive. His provision of *Christos* as a collective ancestor, analogous to Abraham, who could provide his devotees with an ethnic identity not based upon locale,[368] might have been very attractive to deracinated settlers interested in re-establishing their patterns of domestic religion in a diaspora setting. But the notion of resurrection would not likely have been attractive to them at all, especially in its vulgar (to locative sensibilities) formulation of 1 Corinthians 15:3-5, that "Christ was buried…and raised." Paul's "gospel" of the dead emerging from their tombs would not be "good news" to locative religionists.

Nor would the "spiritual" resurrection that Paul discusses in the later parts of 1 Cor 15 have been attractive to those with locative sensibilities. Though there is nothing inherently offensive in the notion of a spiritual resurrection, when it is wedded to the ritual meal, it becomes

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[367] Stowers, "Kinds of Myth," 138; cf. "Elusive Coherence," 78-79.
[368] Arnal, "Paul, Doxa, and Self-Construction"; Garroway, *Gentile-Jews*.

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immediately problematic. As with the Moalan disconformity between a village comprised of Land and Sea People, yet only of Land people, there is no escaping the contradiction between a memorial meal that is held in honor of a collective ancestor, yet which does not feature the sacrificial meat of an animal raised and fed on the land where the meal takes place. The sacrificial meat, which secures the bond between the memorial meal and the structure of kinship, would be essential to those Corinthians who wanted to establish and maintain ties to their ancestral dead. The utopian logic of the bread of human artifice, which is featured as a sacrifice that denies the diners' citizenship in this world, is ultimately incompatible with the locative impulse to establish ties to the land and the ancestors via the eating of domestic meat. The Corinthians' ritual meal, which Paul co-opted in his effort to make the Corinthians "Christian," was based upon this locative ideology. Those who continued to feast upon the meat at the ritual meal, and those who followed Paul in focusing upon the bread, occupied different "maps," identified with different ideologies, performed a different ritual—and, in the final analysis, were members of different social formations. The Corinthian conjuncture, which for a moment allowed two different social formations to appear as one, eventually overdetermined its own contradictions through the ritual performance of the common meal/Lord's Dinner. As in the Nuku case, the social actors invested in this formation overcame its historical dissolution for a time, but could not escape the complications generated by the structural denial of the event. However, there is one important difference: in Nuku, *one* social formation was presented, ideologically, as *two*—a village of Sea People lived as though they were both Land and Sea. At Corinth, the reverse was true: *two* social formations were made to appear, through rhetorical and ritual acts of enunciation, as *one*.

This basic contradiction, however much it may appear as an *obstacle* to the functioning

of the Corinthian social formation, is also equally its very *enablement*. For, as Žižek has argued, society is defined by a basic antagonism, because of which it cannot be substantially equal to itself. Correlatively, subjects are also always divided against themselves, which is why social formations, like subjects, cannot be self-identical. This division is structural and cannot be overcome, for it is this very gap that enables the reasoned activity of speaking beings to obtain at all: within that interstice, reflection, debate, contestation, communication, persuasion, and even play occur. The self-division of a social formation, and the inescapable contradiction this entails, is the basic antagonism that also enables it to function; without contradiction, with nothing but self-identical perseverance, history and change could not occur. This antagonism, this friction that enables politics and history as well as social life to obtain is well-represented by Marx's term, "class struggle." It is also, on a more reflexive level, what Freud provocatively—if enigmatically—termed "death drive." It is just this attritional, triturative quality of the ongoing be(com)ing of social ontologies that our semiotic theory identifies as the *agon*. Paul's reworking of the Corinthians' ritual meal was a way of recognizing and "coping" with this antagonism. The divisions could be dealt with and rectified in the Symbolic by means of ritual, even though they could never be overcome in the Real. Paul engineered the ritual so that it enabled reflection upon the Corinthians' shared experience of being "in Christ," and in this way provided a means for them to inhabit, however imperfectly and temporarily, the ontological rupture that this experience enabled and declared. So, while it is possible to say that 1 Corinthians outlines a "structure of the conjuncture," perhaps—with apologies to Sahlins—it is *also* possible to say that it shows us a conjuncture of structures, with an eventful history.

6) Conclusion: "The Original Political Apostle"

Rather than "as below, so above," as traditional sociological thought might suggest, Paul seems to operate on the principle of "as beyond, so apparent," in which the current world order is but a pale imitation of the divinely order empire. The general idea behind this reasoning is made clear by Marshall Sahlins, when he argues that "human societies were engaged in cosmic systems of governmentality even before the instituted anything like a political state of their own." A.M. Hocart, for instance, "variously speaks of the king as the vehicle, abode, substance, repository, or representative of the god. The clear implication is that gods precede the kings who replicate them—which is not exactly the common social science tradition of cosmology as a reflex of sociology."[369] Indeed, following Emma Wasserman, who seems Paul's eschatological cosmology as the outgrowth of a certain type of political imagination, I would argue that it is this type of cosmological imaginary—pre-existent semiotic material—that informs Paul's understanding of Empire, rather than the other way around. Sahlins continues his discussion of Hocart by noting tat he effectively wrote about a cosmic polity, hierarchically encompassing human society, [where] the life-giving means of people's existence were supplied by 'supernatural' beings of extraordinary powers: a polity thus governed by so-called 'spirits'—though they had human dispositions, often took human bodily forms, and were presence within human experience."[370]

Sahlins picks up this insight and takes it "beyond kingship to its logical and

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[369] Marshall Sahlins, "The Original Political Society," in David Graeber and Marshall Sahlins, ed., *On Kings* (Chicago: Hau Books, 2017). 23.
[370] Sahlins, "Original Political Society," 24.

anthropological extreme":

> Even the so-called "egalitarian" or "acephalous" societies, including hunters such as the Inuit or Australian Aboriginals, are in structure and practice cosmic polities, ordered and governed by deities, the dead, species-masters, and other such metapersons endowed with life-and-death powers over the human population. There are kingly beings in heaven where there are no kings on earth. Hobbes notwithstanding, the state of nature is already something of a political state. It follows that, taken in its social totality and cultural reality, something like the state is the general condition of humankind. *It is usually called religion.*[371]

It follows, for our purposes, that Paul's "religious" thought, the object our study, is *already* and *essentially* political thought. Without remainder, the apostle to the nations was a political thinker, through and through. His projects were political projects, his classifications were political classifications. And, at least when it comes to his extant letters, "a certain type of political imagination" might well have been all the imagination he had.

As Giovanni Bazzana has recently argued, the "centrality of spirit possession for the life of the Pauline groups is a theme whose importance has often been obfuscated in earlier research by the use of misleading categories (such as 'mysticism') or by the need first and foremost to produce a 'theology' of Paul (with the attached cognicentric bias)."[372] But for Paul, "the decisive signal that the [*pneuma*] that should possess Christ believers is indeed 'Christ' is obviously the connection between this 'spirit' and Jesus' death and resurrection. As a consequence of those massively important events Jesus has become a 'spirit' who can now be experienced by all

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[371] Ibid, emphasis added.
[372] Giovanni Bazzana, *Having the Spirit of Christ* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2020), 105.

believers through possession."[373] Thus, one might imagine the revolutionary act of Christ's

refusal to submit to earthly authorities, submitting instead to a Higher Purpose in accordance

with the will of God, as having been "weaponized." This "vaporous" substance occupies the

world in new ways, forming a corporate—rather than corporeal—body, "transforming" the

members of this new polity and, indeed founding that polity in the process. But unlike other

polities this counter-imperial "state (of being)" is not established through conquest. Indeed, we

see the "inversionary" aspect of Paul's thought quite clearly at work here: the foundational

violence operative here is not enacted by the founder-figure, but—by starkest possible contrast—

is enacted *upon* him. It is as if Paul is saying that, after the faithful execution of God's chosen

one as a political criminal, no further violence is needed in service of political action. As if God

has pre-empted forever the need for violence as a means of attaining (in this case, the ultimate)

political revolution. What further violence could be required? One is reminded of Danton's

words spoken at the onset of the Terror in the French Revolution: "Let us be terrible, so that the

people need not be."

     Yet none of this will do without an investment in spirit-language as an expression of

solidarity between Paul and his interlocutors. The enunciation of Paul's audience as "Gentile-

Jews" sharing a common kinship is not merely ethno-political language, and still less a

"theological" statement. Rather, it is an ontological statement expressing a rupture with the world

as it is now apparently constituted, and this rupture, with Paul's attendant lack of sustained

mythmaking or even consistent terminology regarding other gods and lesser divine beings, can

be seen as "an outgrowth of a certain type of political imagination. Most centrally, this type of

political thinking implicitly reclassifies other gods so that they are imagined as subordinates of

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[373] Bazzana, *Having the Spirit of Christ*, 115.

the Jewish God."[374] It is by "imagining apocalyptic cosmology as the fluid, open-ended expression of a certain type of political thinking" that we can begin to conceive "how this continuum might be understood as extending from the heights of heaven down to the variegated earthly world below; as encompassing a complex but differentiated social terrain that can involve people and divine beings in multiform arrangements; and as enmeshing the inner regions of the self or personality within a vast political kingdom that is conceived of as coextensive with the cosmos as a whole."[375] As Wasserman later elaborates more fully:

> Paul's letters adapt Greek traditions about inner conflict and ethical solidarity to construct a Christ-elect with distinctive plights and privileges…Paul consistently organizes these interests and anxieties around rather traditional notions of divine rule, election, and righteous victimization. In fact, one of the most remarkable aspects of Paul's letters is that they greatly expand the discourse of victimization that is also featured in much other [apocalyptic] literature…[H]e portrays the chosen as an alienated, victimized elite who have been empowered by *pneuma* but must still struggle mightily to master their own passions, maintain unity, and submit to the supreme deity through Christ. Their alienation from the temporary, earthly, and evil ways of others emerges as a seemingly necessarily corollary to their elite status in the broader cosmo-political drama.[376]

Thus, despite their divergent interests, both Paul and the various Corinthians that comprised his audience shared spirit possession against the background of this cosmic drama as a presupposition. As a result of this shared form of experience, Paul's writings are structured

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[374] Wasserman, *Apocalypse as Holy War*, 171.
[375] Wasserman, *Apocalypse as Holy War*, 173. Wasserman later elaborates: "Paul's letters adapt Greek traditions about inner conflict and ethical solidarity to construct a
[376] Wasserman, *Apocalypse as Holy War*, 202.

around possession as a largely unspoken "ground" of his discursive productions. This leaves the presupposed experience as a point of opacity that can only be glimpsed in its absence. For completely contingent reasons, the various Christianities that emerged in the centuries following Paul's life (from Roman Imperial Catholicism to Protestant Christianity to modern evangelicalism or liberation theology) were all able to take up the Paulinist discourse and map in onto their own projects, presupposing an equally-shared set of experiences. Each formation of Christianity has been politicized, whether for reactionary or progressive purposes, and each for contingent, historically-specific reasons. That these Christianities were *able* to politicize the Pauline writings, however, is *not* contingent, but structural. Paul intellectualized the experience of being-in-Christ in a manner that was, *in esse*, political, due to his conceptualization of Christ-spirit possession as an ontological rupture. The hybrid polyphonic indeterminacy of being-in-Christ, and thus being a Gentile-Jew, enabled the Corinthian assembly's complexity. This is because being "in" Christ, as a locative concept denoting an ontological space of being, was also a concept that—from the perspective of the broader, sociopolitical regime of being—had *no place* within the "world" in which these social actors dwelt. Thus, in Smith's terms, the locative and utopian logics were *both* operative, thus providing a further emergent complexity to a form of being already characterized by indeterminacy and occasioned by the over-determined aspects of a presupposed experience of ecstasy.

With all of this in mind, we can now return to the beginning of our study, where we asked if the tendency to read Paul "politically" ignored the "religious" nature of this thought. Given the theoretical and historical investigations we have undertaken, the answer must now be no. Rather, to read Paul politically *as opposed to reading him as a religious thinker* introduces an illegitimate distinction that is both anthropologically suspect and theoretically untenable. As "the

rhetoric of supremacy," the "religious" actually seems to be the political *par excellence*. And, since Paul is the earliest writer in the Christian canon, and the first to claim the title of apostle, we may now say—once again, with apologies to Sahlins—that the man we know as Paul of Tarsus was, in fact, the "original political apostle."

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