

THE EXTENT OF CHRISTIAN THEOLOGICAL DIVERSITY: PAULINE EVIDENCE

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In 1970, Krister Stendahl noted the distinctive status that the word *hermeneutics* had acquired in theological exegesis; it had become a term that the NT critic “uses to prove that he is a member of the club. If he can spell it and use it right, he is in, just as the former generation did with the word ‘kerygma’ and the one before that with the word ‘eschatology.’”¹ One year later, James Robinson and Helmut Koester published a collection of essays that undertook “the dismantling and reassembling of the categories of New Testament scholarship.”² In their exploration of *Trajectories through Early Christianity*, Robinson and Koester recognized that terms (“categories”) are “the capsules in which the heritage of scholarly achievement is transmitted from generation to generation.”³ Three decades later, the study of Christian origins is in significant respects a field remade along the lines that Robinson and Koester proposed.⁴ One indication of the magnitude of their achievement is the rise of the term “diversity” in the vocabulary requisite for the study of Christian origins.

The word diversity is itself rare in the essays collected in *Trajectories*, but the concept was central to the project. Koester treated “The Origin and Nature of *Diversification* in the History of Early Christianity” in his essay, “GNOMAI DIAPHOROI” (114–57; emphasis mine). The concept of diversity is crucial also to his essays, “One Jesus and Four Primitive Gospels” (158–204) and “The Structure and Criteria of Early Christian Beliefs” (205–31), and to Robinson’s

¹ Krister Stendahl, “The New Testament Background for the Doctrine of the Sacraments,” in *Meanings: The Bible as Document and as Guide* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984), 174; originally published, *Evangile et Sacrement—Oecumenica* (1970): 41–60.

² James M. Robinson and Helmut Koester, *Trajectories through Early Christianity* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1971), 1.

³ Robinson, “Kerygma and History in the New Testament,” in *Trajectories*, 20.

⁴ Robert W. Funk’s Jesus Seminar has drawn more notice than Robinson and Koester, even among NT scholars. In large part, however, the Jesus Seminar has only developed various aspects of their work; see Charlotte Allen, *The Human Christ: The Search for the Historical Jesus* (New York: Free Press, 1998), 275.

contribution “On the Gattung of Q” (“LOGOI SOPHON,” 71–113). In the generation since the appearance of *Trajectories*, the concept of theological diversity has taken its place at the head of the catalogue of critical shibboleths to which Stendahl referred.

Theological Diversity and Christian Origins

In one sense, the judgment that earliest Christianity was theologically diverse was already uncontroversial before Robinson and Koester undertook their work. Driven in part by ecumenical interests, NT scholars following World War II documented that the earliest Christian literature expresses the significance of Christ crucified and risen in a variety of ways.⁵ A representative recent study finds different NT books conveying the significance of Jesus’ death via images drawn from five spheres of ancient public life: the law court (e.g., justification), the agora (e.g., redemption), personal relationships (e.g., reconciliation), cult (e.g., sacrifice), and war (e.g., victory).⁶ There is thus no fixed formulation that can be designated the one “early Christian doctrine” of Jesus’ mission to Israel and the nations, his earthly ministry, his death and resurrection, or the other “moments” of his messianic career.⁷ In that respect, the sources surviving from the first two Christian generations (ca. A.D. 30–110) are without question diverse.

The thesis of Robinson and Koester was much more ambitious. As is well known, they were inspired by Walter Bauer’s contention that in the second and later centuries heterodoxy preceded the variety of Christianity later deemed orthodox in much of the world.⁸ Robinson and Koester sought to apply this

⁵ For the relationship between this earlier, theological interest in diversity and the thesis of *Trajectories*, see John Kloppenborg Verbin, *Excavating Q: The History and Setting of the Sayings Gospel* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2000), 346–49.

⁶ John Carroll and Joel Green, *Death of Jesus in Early Christianity* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1995), esp. 265. John Fitzgerald provides a more refined account of reconciliation, arguing that Paul’s use of this image draws principally on ancient diplomacy, which however was understood in terms of friendship between nations, thus employed the language of personal relations (“Paul and Paradigm Shifts: Reconciliation and Its Linkage Group,” in *Paul beyond the Judaism/Hellenism Divide* [ed. Troels Engberg-Pedersen; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2001], 241–62).

⁷ For the notion of Christological “moments,” see Raymond E. Brown, *An Introduction to New Testament Christology* (New York: Paulist, 1994), 105–41.

⁸ Walter Bauer, *Orthodoxy and Heresy in Earliest Christianity* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1971 [1934]); note also the essay on the reception of Bauer’s work (286–316). For significant responses to Bauer, see H. E. W. Turner, *The Pattern of Christian Truth: A Study in the Relations between Orthodoxy and Heresy in the Early Church* (London: Mowbray, n.d. [1954]); Thomas A. Robinson, *The Bauer Thesis Examined: The Geography of Heresy in the Early Christian Church* (Lewiston, NY: Mellen, 1988); Arland Hultgren, *The Rise of Normative Christianity* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1994), esp. 9–18.

account of a pluriform Christianity to the history of the first Christian century. The most significant element of their appropriation was the postulate of first-generation Christian communities that attached little or no importance to Jesus' death and resurrection, indeed that construed his significance in entirely different terms.⁹ The one sentence that most anticipated what was to come in the Robinson-Koester trajectory of scholarship was Koester's statement concerning the communities in which the extracanonical Gospels originated: "It cannot be presupposed that all those groups derived their own 'kerygma' from that specific kerygma of the cross and resurrection which is the basis of the orthodox creed and of the canonical gospels."¹⁰ Koester argued that an orientation on Jesus'

⁹ In recent work Koester maintains that "the most fundamental differences" appear in "two major early developments . . . [1] the proclamation of Jesus' death and resurrection as the turning point of the ages and the subsequent development of the passion narrative and . . . [2] the cultivation of the memory of Jesus' sayings together with their further enrichment and interpretation" ("The Synoptic Sayings Gospel Q in the Early Communities of Jesus' Followers," in *Early Christian Voices: Essays in Honor of François Bovon* [ed. David H. Warren, Ann Graham Brock, and David W. Pao; Leiden: Brill, 2003], 46). Both Robinson and Koester have invoked the genius of Bultmann in connection with their project, Robinson describing them as Bultmann's students "involved in the current indigenization of the Bultmann tradition on American soil" (*Trajectories*, 1), Koester tracing the origins of his mature work on the Gospels to his Marburg doctoral thesis (*Ancient Christian Gospels: Their History and Development* [Philadelphia: Trinity; London: SCM, 1990], xxix). There is justification for this claim in Bultmann's general concern with the history of earliest Christianity and specifically in his one 1913 essay devoted to Q (see Kloppenborg Verbin, *Excavating Q*, 343–44), but Bultmann remained an unmistakably Lutheran biblical theologian, propounding a *theologia crucis* that anchored the gospel in the *Dass* of historical existence. In substance, Robinson and Koester represent more nearly a refinement of the work of Adolf Harnack, which distinguished between the dogmatic, apocalyptic doctrine of Paul and Mark and the pure ethical teaching of Jesus collected in Q; see Harnack's *Sayings of Jesus: The Second Source of St. Matthew and St. Luke* (London: Williams & Norgate; New York: Putnam, 1908 [1906]), 247–51.

¹⁰ *Trajectories*, 163; see also the survey of research in Kloppenborg Verbin, *Excavating Q*, 353–408. Koester has appealed to the following evidence for an early variety of Christian devotion without cross and resurrection: the opponents of Paul in 1 Corinthians, the *Gospel According to Thomas*, the *Dialogue of the Savior*, and the opponents of the Gospel according to John (*Ancient Christian Gospels*, 165); all are problematic as to date, interpretation, or both. Recently Koester has also cited the eucharistic prayers of *Didache* 9–10 as evidence of a community that "had no need to reflect on the death of Jesus, as long as not Jesus' death and resurrection but Jesus' words were the saving message" ("Synoptic Sayings Gospel Q," 57). This interpretation is problematic as the prayers identify Jesus as God's servant and agent of eschatological salvation; Koester follows Kurt Niederwimmer, who curiously derives the conclusion "it is difficult to posit any allusion to the servant of God in Deutero-Isaiah" from the

death and resurrection was merely one of four primitive construals of Jesus' significance, each of which came to expression in the production of a distinct type of Gospel: the sayings collection presenting Jesus as sage, the aretology depicting Jesus as a divine man, and the revelatory discourse exhibiting Jesus as a heavenly revealer, in addition to the Marcan "passion narrative with a biographical introduction."¹¹

The work of Koester and Robinson focused on gospels: the canonical gospels, various documents hypothesized as underlying them (especially Q), and the apocryphal gospels (especially the *Gospel According to Thomas*). Their project thus gave priority to extant sources commonly dated no earlier than the second Christian generation (ca. A.D. 70–110) and to a hypothetical source used by Matthew and Luke, which also cannot be securely dated before 70.¹² In so doing they neglected the only sources commonly dated to the first Christian generation, the genuine letters of Paul.¹³ The Pauline letters were of course

premises that 1) the image of the holy vine promised to David and now revealed through God's servant Jesus (*Did.* 9.2) refers to eschatological salvation; 2) this passage is best understood within "the Christian schema of promise fulfilled" (but cf. 1 Cor 15:3–4!); 3) the description of Jesus as servant originated in archaic Jewish Christian liturgy (but cf. 1 Cor 11:23–25!); 4) the meaning of $\pi\alpha\iota\varsigma$ is thus "servant" rather than "child" (*The Didache: A Commentary* [Hermeneia; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1998] 146–448). In view of Rom 1:3–4 and 1 Cor 15:3–4, it should rather be concluded that the faith/gospel that Paul shared with Jerusalem authorities characterized Jesus as the Davidic heir and Son of God (cf. 2 Sam 7:13–14) whose suffering and death fulfilled the messianic servant's representative vocation and brought vindication/ salvation to Israel (cf. Isa 53:3–12; Hos 6:1–3), in reward for which God raised him up (cf. Isa 52:12; 2 Sam 7:12) and exalted him to reign in heaven at his right hand (cf. Ps 110:1). The *Didache's* eucharistic prayers find their natural home within this milieu rather than in a supposed community that found salvation in Jesus' words apart from his actions.

¹¹ Koester, "One Jesus and Four Primitive Gospels," in *Trajectories*, 162.

¹² Paul Hoffman argues that Q 13:34–35 presupposes the fall of Jerusalem ("The Redaction of Q and the Son of Man: A Preliminary Sketch," in *The Gospel Behind the Gospels* [ed. R. A. Piper; NovTSup 75; Leiden: Brill, 1995], 197); see also M. Myllykoski, "The Social History of Q and the Jewish War," in *Symbols and Strata* (ed. R. Uro; Helsinki: Finnish Exegetical Society; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1997), 144–99. For the possibility that Q is a phantom of the scholarly imagination, Luke having derived the double tradition from Matthew, see Mark S. Goodacre, *The Case against Q: Studies in Markan Priority and the Synoptic Problem* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 2002); Nicholas Perrin and Goodacre, eds., *Questioning Q* (London: SCM, 2004).

¹³ As all the evidence considered in this essay is from the undisputed letters, we may table the question as to which Pauline letters are genuine. The question has been reopened outside evangelical circles principally by Luke Timothy Johnson; see his *Writings of the New Testament: An Interpretation* (rev. ed.; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1999), esp. 271–73. See also Bo Reicke, *Re-Examining Paul's Letters: The History of*

consulted in *Trajectories*, but their data were used piecemeal to supply context for the development of gospel traditions; the Pauline sources were not themselves made the focus of an investigation into the extent of earliest Christian diversity.¹⁴

The present essay is a preliminary attempt to address this lack by assessing the significance of the Pauline evidence for the extent of theological diversity in earliest Christianity. I will argue that all the Christian authorities and communities known to Paul in the movement's first three decades shared the conviction that the resurrection of Jesus, the crucified Messiah, constituted God's decisive saving action in the history of Israel and of the nations. Three of Paul's letters in particular offer evidence supporting this thesis.

The Apostolic Consensus in 1 Corinthians 15:1–11

This passage is well known for Paul's declaration that he had handed on to his converts a gospel centering on the death and resurrection of Christ, which he in turn had received from his predecessors in the apostolate. In form, the text is a rehearsal of the missionary preaching by which Paul founded the Corinthian community, laid down as the predicate for Paul's engagement of those who deny the resurrection of the dead (1 Cor 15:12).¹⁵ The rhetorical force of the passage

the Pauline Correspondence (ed. David P. Moessner; Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 2001).

¹⁴ Similarly, John Kloppenborg assesses the claim that Q presupposes Jesus' death and resurrection by comparing Q with the hypothesized pre-Markan passion narrative rather than Pauline traditions concerning the death of Jesus ("Easter Faith' and the Sayings Gospel Q," *Semeia* 49 [1990] 76–82). John Dominic Crossan devotes a total of five text pages out of 586 to 1 Cor 15:1–11 (*The Birth of Christianity: Discovering What Happened in the Years Immediately after the Execution of Jesus* [New York: Harper Collins, 1998] xxviii, 546–47, 550, 568). Koester has recently noted the importance of Paul as "the sole surviving contemporary witness to the earliest developments" ("The Memory of Jesus' Death and the Worship of the Risen Lord," *HTR* 91 [1998], 343). His treatment however confines the traditional formulae of 1 Cor 15:3–7 and 11:23–25 to Antioch (343–48), and his statement elsewhere that "[h]ow this tradition is related to Jerusalem is unclear" ("Synoptic Sayings Gospel Q," 47) fails to account for 1 Cor 15:11 and Gal 1:23; similarly, the judgment that the Jerusalem Council shows only that "the authorities in Jerusalem at least did not object to [the Pauline] understanding of the saving significance of the death of Jesus" ("Synoptic Sayings Gospel Q," 47) is inadequate to the statement of concord in Gal 2:6–10.

¹⁵ Richard Bauckham, "Kerygmatic Summaries in the Speeches of Acts," in *History, Literature, and Society in the Book of Acts* (ed. Ben Witherington III; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 185–217, esp. 211–12. To treat 1 Cor 15:3b–5 or 3b–7 as a "bare formula" (so Kloppenborg Verbin, *Excavating Q*, 365) and base historical conclusions on that characterization thus involves a significant error of method (evident also in Gerd Luedemann, *Opposition to Paul in Jewish Christianity*

is similar to other texts in 1 Corinthians in which Paul reminds his converts of ties binding them to other Christian communities (already at 1:2) and indeed of their accountability to traditions they share with other churches (4:17; 7:17; 9:4–6; 14:33b–34; 16:1–4). In fact, the passage asserts considerably more than that the proclamation of Christ’s death and resurrection merely antedates Paul’s missionary career.

In 1 Cor 15:5–8, Paul lists those who were granted an appearance of the risen Christ, which as a rule involved appointment as his apostles (vv. 9–10).¹⁶ Then comes the key statement in verse 11: “Whether it was I or they, so do we preach and so did you believe” (εἴτε οὖν ἐγὼ εἴτε ἐκεῖνοι, οὕτως κηρύσσομεν καὶ οὕτως ἐπιστεύσατε). The pronoun ἐκεῖνοι (v. 11) has as its ultimate antecedent the list of apostolic witnesses of the risen Christ enumerated in verses 5–7.¹⁷ On Paul’s account, the gospel of Jesus’ messianic death and resurrection was proclaimed by all the apostolic witnesses of the risen Christ enumerated in verses 5 and 7: Cephas and the Twelve, James the Lord’s brother and “all the apostles,” last of all Paul himself.¹⁸ Paul anticipates this enumeration in 9:5 with his reference to “the other apostles, the brothers of the Lord, and Cephas” as those who are without question entitled to the prerogatives of apostleship, including maintenance at the expense of the churches that they serve.¹⁹ Paul’s summary of the qualifications for apostleship in 1 Cor 9:1—a (commissioning) vision of the risen Lord and proficiency in the founding and nurturing of churches—confirms that in his usage “apostle of Jesus Christ” is not limited to the Twelve and himself.

[Minneapolis: Fortress, 1989 (1983)], 46–52). The passage summarizes a fuller account previously related to Paul’s converts. The most obvious evidence for this, 1 Cor 9:1–7 presupposes that the Corinthians recognize Cephas and the Lord’s brothers as itinerant missionaries who regularly receive financial support from the churches they serve, a fact not mentioned in 15:3–7.

¹⁶ The appearance “to more than five hundred at one time” (v. 6) is best understood as a parenthesis recounting a vision of the risen Christ that, unlike the others listed, did not involve the apostolic commissioning of the witnesses (against Luedemann, *Opposition*, 260 n. 45). Otherwise, the climactic, inclusive reference to “all the apostles” in v. 7 must depict a second mass Christophany (i.e., to Cephas and the twelve, the five hundred, and James et al.), and the first would lose the uniqueness that the mention of five hundred in v. 6 suggests.

¹⁷ The immediate antecedent of ἐκεῖνοι is αὐτῶν πάντων in v. 10, in Paul’s comparison of his missionary productivity with that of other apostles; in turn, the antecedent of αὐτῶν πάντων is τῶν ἀποστόλων (v. 9), which refers to the list of apostolic witnesses of the risen Christ enumerated in vv. 5–7.

¹⁸ Larry W. Hurtado, *Lord Jesus Christ: Devotion to Jesus in Earliest Christianity* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 168.

¹⁹ Bauckham, *Jude and the Relatives of Jesus in the Early Church* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1990), 57–59.

With Paul's commission "last of all," we thus have in 15:5–8 an inclusive list of those who founded and nurtured churches as apostles of the risen Christ, and verse 11 affirms their agreement that Jesus' death and resurrection constitute the foundation of apostolic proclamation and Christian communal identity. The gospel of messianic death and resurrection summarized in 1 Cor 15:3–8 is presented as an apostolic consensus, which those Corinthians who hold that there is no resurrection of the dead are implicitly opposing (v. 12). Paul maintains that all those recognized as authoritative proclaimers of Christ in the first generation of Christian existence preached Jesus' death and resurrection as the foundation of corporate Christian existence.²⁰

From Persecutor to Proclaimer in Galatians 1:23–24

A similar conclusion emerges from Gal 1–2. For our purposes, the most important statement is found at Gal 1:23, where Paul recalls that in the early days of his apostolic ministry, the churches of Judea received the news that their onetime persecutor "now makes gospel of the faith of which he formerly sought to make ruin" (ὁ διώκων ἡμᾶς ποτε νῦν εὐαγγελίζεται τὴν πίστιν ἣν ποτε ἐπόρθει). In 1:23, τὴν πίστιν refers to the content of Paul's proclamation, which is described as identical with the faith of those he previously opposed.²¹ It is noteworthy that Paul presents this as the Judean churches' judgment, not his.

This representation of theological concord between Paul and Judea continues in Paul's account of his relations with Jerusalem apostles in chapters 1–2. Early in his missionary career, Paul stayed as Cephas's houseguest (ἐπέμεινα πρὸς αὐτὸν) for a fortnight (Gal 1:18–19). In view of the significance of hospitality in the early Christian milieu (cf. 2 John 10), this suggests a mutual recognition of the fundamental concord between their two apostolic missions.²²

²⁰ Cf. Martin Hengel, *The Four Gospels and the One Gospel of Jesus Christ: An Investigation of the Collection and Origin of the Canonical Gospels* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 2000), 153–57. Lloyd Gaston also notes the plain sense of 1 Cor 15:11, but the presupposition of a cleft between Paul and Jerusalem that he inherits from F. C. Baur prevents him from seeing its full significance (*Paul and the Torah* [Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1987] 107–15); he assumes, for example, that Paul does not fully endorse the Christological formulae he derives from the Judean churches (1 Cor 15:3–7; 11:23b–25; Gal 1:4a; Rom 4:25; 1:3–4; 3:24–26a). Gaston thus reaches the conclusion that "[t]he theology of Paul and the theology of Jerusalem are completely different, and yet Paul can say they are the same (1 Cor 15:11)" (115), which represents either a paradox or a charge that Paul was duplicitous.

²¹ Such a use of πίστις has been supposed to be characteristic of so-called early Catholicism; such studies as R. Alistair Campbell, *The Elders: Seniority within Earliest Christianity* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1994), require a reconsideration of this thesis in all its aspects.

²² Martin Hengel and Anna Maria Schwemer, *Paul between Damascus and Antioch:*

Gal 2 does not alter this picture, though it has often been so interpreted since Baur.²³ The meeting described in Gal 2:1–10 involved disagreement regarding the status of Gentile converts and pitted Paul and Barnabas against persons whom he characterizes as “false brothers” (2:4).²⁴ These false brothers are clearly distinguished from the Jerusalem pillars, however, and the meeting concluded with a statement of fundamental agreement between the Jerusalem pillars and the apostles based in Antioch (2:6–10).²⁵

Conflict then followed at Antioch (Gal 2:11–14), but the issue dividing Paul from Peter, Barnabas, and the other Jewish Messianists there was halakhic: should Jews who profess faith in Jesus Christ share a table with Gentile Messianists? The issue was not the fact or nature of God’s saving action in Christ but its implications for conduct, especially for the observance of the common meals that sustained and constituted the new Messianist fellowship. Paul saw the practice of separation adopted by Cephas and other Jews in Antioch as inconsistent with the gospel (2:14), but it was apparently Paul who made the argument theological. The gospel of justification through the death and resurrection of Christ formed the common ground on the basis of which Paul engaged Cephas (Gal 2:14b–21).²⁶ The agitators in Galatia likewise seem

The Unknown Years (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1997), 144–50.

²³ See Hengel, *Four Gospels*, 156; Craig C. Hill, *Hellenists and Hebrews: Reappraising Division within the Earliest Church* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992), esp. 107–22, 126–42; Luke Timothy Johnson, *The Letter of James: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (New York: Doubleday, 1995), 94–96.

²⁴ It is not entirely clear from Gal 2:4–5 whether Paul and Barnabas came into conflict with the false brothers first at Jerusalem (so Hill, *Hellenists and Hebrews*, 114–15) or already at Antioch (so Luedemann, *Opposition to Paul*, 35). If the reference to “Titus, who was with me [sc. in Jerusalem]” (2:3) is closely connected with 2:4–5, this would seem to place the conflict in Jerusalem, but 2:4–5 should perhaps be read as a parenthesis. If Acts 15 describes the same meeting as Gal 2:1–10, then the best supported conclusion is that the false brothers were Judean Christians visiting Antioch (Acts 15:1–2).

²⁵ Luedemann’s interpretation of Gal 2:8 makes far too much of the ellipsis of ἀποστολήν from the main clause (*Opposition to Paul*, 37). In 2:7, Paul is said to have been entrusted with τὸν εὐαγγέλιον τῆς ἀκροβυστίας, but the omission of τὸν εὐαγγέλιον (a term correlative with ἀποστολή) from the verse’s subsequent reference to Peter (καθὼς Πέτρος τῆς περιτομῆς) does not deny that Peter was entrusted with the gospel. Rather, it is Christ’s having entrusted these two witnesses with the gospel (and the responsibility to proclaim it) that constituted them as his apostles. Further, in 2:9 the Jerusalem pillars are presented as having recognized (γνόντες) the gift granted to Paul (τῆν χάριν τῆν δοθεῖσαν μοι), i.e., by God, a phrase that in its other uses refers to Paul’s apostolic charism (Rom 15:15; 1 Cor 3:10; cf. Rom 1:5).

²⁶ Martin Hengel, *The Atonement: The Origins of the Doctrine in the New Testament* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1981), 55. Paul’s report of his confrontation with Peter clearly

to have taken actions that Paul regarded as in practice a denial of the cross (6:12) rather than having explicitly repudiated the cross and resurrection as fundamental symbols.²⁷ Thus Galatians, while documenting significant differences within earliest Christianity over the behavioral implications of the gospel of the crucified Messiah, also attests that this gospel itself was the common property of Paul and Christians in Judea and Antioch as well as of the rival missionaries in Galatia.

Paul's Roman Memo

Paul's letter to the Romans is valuable to the early Christian historian not only for the theological depths it plumbs but also because in this letter Paul addresses a community that he did not found and had never visited (Rom 1:8–15; 15:18–29). The convictions presupposed in the recipients indicate what Paul could take for granted in a Christian community founded through the proclamation of other missionaries. It is striking then that towards the close Paul characterizes this letter as a reminder: "Rather boldly have I written you in part, in the capacity of one reminding you because of the [apostolic] gift granted me by God" (τολμηρότερον δὲ ἔγραψα ὑμῖν ἀπὸ μέρους ὡς ἐπαναμνησκῶν ὑμᾶς διὰ τὴν χάριν τὴν δοθείσάν μοι ὑπὸ τοῦ θεοῦ, 15:15). This description of Romans as a reminder is suggestive for the convictions the letter assumes in its audience. Paul's use of ἐπαναμνησκῶν need not be taken to mean that there is literally nothing in the preceding fifteen chapters that would strike the recipients as fresh information; indeed, one may suspect some flattery of the readers on Paul's part. But it does require that the broad outline of Paul's argument covers territory familiar to his Roman audience.

In Rom 1:16–17 Paul introduces the body of the letter as an exposition of the εὐαγγέλιον, the same term he uses in 1 Cor 15:1 to describe the initial instruction imparted to converts at the beginning of their Christian experience. Paul opens Romans with a reference to the εὐαγγέλιον θεοῦ (1:1), and a brief account of this gospel as promised in the Scriptures concerning God's Son, born of David's line at one terminus of his earthly career, installed as God's Son by resurrection of the dead at the other terminus (1:2–4). Resurrection, and the death that resurrection presupposes, are thus assumed as familiar items of conviction from the opening lines of the letter.

The clearest indication that Jesus' messianic death and resurrection were fundamental to the Roman Christians' identity comes in 6:3–4: "Are you

extends through Gal 2:17, as indicated by the continued use of the first person plural, referring to Jewish Christians; it is best to take the whole passage through v. 21 as a report of this confrontation, recalled here as the basic thesis Paul seeks to establish in his conversation with the Galatians.

²⁷ J. Louis Martyn, *Galatians: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (AB 33A; New York: Doubleday, 1997), 124–25, 263–69.

unaware that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were buried therefore with him by our baptism into his death, in order that as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we also might walk in newness of life.” The passage presumes that the recipients have participated in a ritual of baptism into the crucified and resurrected Christ. From the language of verse 3 alone, it might be debated whether Paul presupposes the specific notion of baptism into Christ’s death as a familiar element of Roman conviction, but the phrase introduced by *τοῦτο γινώσκοντες* in verse 6 anticipates that the recipients will accept without argument an interpretation of their baptism as *ὁ παλαιὸς ἡμῶν ἄνθρωπος συνεσταυρώθη*. It is noteworthy that the three moments of Christ’s career alluded to in verses 3–4—death, burial, and resurrection—are all paralleled in 1 Cor 15:3–4, whereas burial goes unmentioned in Paul’s other references to Christ’s death and resurrection (cf. the functionally parallel 1 Thess 4:14). John Kloppenborg has suggested that a baptismal origin for 1 Cor 15:3–5 would account for the reference to burial there.²⁸

Thus as he does for Jerusalem and Antioch, Paul assumes for Rome a community oriented on the death and resurrection of the Christ. He offers not a hint that the recipients might construe Christ’s significance otherwise or that they might be in contact with other communities that do so—and this in the city to which all the roads of the empire led.

The Value of Paul’s Testimony

What reason is there (a skeptic might ask) for concluding that the concord Paul asserts obtained in fact? How can we be sure that Paul did not exaggerate or indeed invent this apostolic consensus on messianic death and resurrection? In fact, the rhetorical situation of each of these three letters affords good reason to conclude that what Paul says was substantially the case. Enough has been said about Romans to establish the point for that letter. In the case of both 1 Corinthians and Galatians, two considerations are crucial.

First, Paul has worked to bring both the Galatian and the Corinthian Christians into contact with Christians in Jerusalem. He has done this by organizing the collection for the poor of the saints there, enlisting both the Corinthians (1 Cor 16:1–4; 2 Cor 8–9) and the Galatians (1 Cor 16:1; Gal 2:10).²⁹ In 1 Cor 16:3–4, Paul calls for representatives of the Corinthian church to be sent to Jerusalem bearing the offering—either bearing a letter of introduction from Paul or accompanied by him, at the Corinthians’ discretion. As Paul had taken Titus along on his previous visit to Jerusalem (Gal 2:3), he

²⁸ Kloppenborg, “An Analysis of the Pre-Pauline Formula in 1 Cor 15:3b–5 in Light of Some Recent Literature,” *CBQ* 40 (1978): 366–67.

²⁹ Hurtado, *Lord Jesus Christ*, 159–60.

now proposes to bring a number of his converts into close contact with Judean Christians, certainly involving hospitality and conversation and likely also including joint worship. Such contact was bound to surface any fundamental theological rifts between the Judean churches and Paul's. This policy was most short-sighted if Paul manufactured the apostolic consensus he represented as existing at the founding of the Corinthian church and of which he reminds the church in 1 Corinthians 15:1–11.

Second, in both 1 Corinthians and Galatians, Paul's authority is under some degree of challenge. In such circumstances, to claim an apostolic consensus that could be readily falsified would risk losing all credibility with these churches that Paul seeks to continue influencing. Paul's own self-interest, if not also higher motives, would suggest that his claims of agreement in essentials with the faith of Judean Messianists are substantially accurate.

Paul's Opponents and Theological Diversity

The Pauline evidence surveyed betrays no awareness of Christian communities resembling any of Koester's alternatives to Christian faith oriented on Jesus' death and resurrection. Some Pauline texts, especially in the Corinthian letters, have of course been taken as evidence of alternative Christologies current in the Pauline churches, but recent study has cast doubt on the exegesis of a generation past that would support such claims.³⁰ Thus the cry 'Ἀνάθεμα Ἰησοῦς (1 Cor 12:3) is better understood with John Hurd as "the hypothetical opposite of the cry 'Jesus is Lord' " than as an actual theological judgment rendered by a Corinthian faction.³¹ The reference in 2 Cor 11:4 to the Corinthian opponents' proclamation of "another Jesus" (ἄλλον Ἰησοῦν κηρύσσει) is best taken as hyperbole, with a function similar to the mention of the ἕτερον εὐαγγέλιον in Gal 1:6; support for this interpretation is found in the fact that Paul's polemic in 2 Cor 10–13 is directed at the character and actions of the rival missionaries, not at their message.³² As is the case throughout canonical 2 Corinthians, Paul no more sets out to oppose a divergent Christology than another Gospel (cf. εὐαγγέλιον ἕτερον) or an alternative pneumatology (cf. πνεῦμα ἕτερον). Now that the perils of mirror-reading are more apparent to students of Paul, an interpretation of the opponents in 2 Corinthians as teaching a fundamentally divergent Christology seems much less plausible.³³ Recent work on 1 Cor 1–4 similarly has shown that Paul takes issue there not with an aspect of the Corinthians' theology but with the church's

³⁰ Michael D. Goulder's *Paul and the Competing Mission in Corinth* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2001) is characteristically learned and ingenious but takes no account of the important work of Sumney (see below, n. 33) and indulges in mirror reading with a vengeance. Goulder also gives inadequate attention (18–19) to Nils Dahl's careful exegesis of 1 Cor 1–4 ("Paul and the Church at Corinth according to 1 Corinthians 1–4," in *Christian History and Interpretation: Studies Presented to John Knox* [ed. W. R. Farmer et al.; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1967]; revised version in Dahl, *Studies in Paul: Theology for the Early Christian Mission* [Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1977], 40–61), which persuasively accounts for the factions without the postulate of fundamental theological divergence.

³¹ John Hurd, *The Origin of 1 Corinthians* (New York: Seabury, 1965), 193. These do not exhaust the possible interpretations, which run to twelve in Anthony Thiselton's enumeration (*The First Epistle to the Corinthians: A Commentary on the Greek Text* [NIGTC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000], 918–24).

³² Victor Paul Furnish, *II Corinthians: Translated with Introduction, Notes, and Commentary* (AB 32A; Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1984), 500–502.

³³ See Jerry L. Sumney, 'Servants of Satan', 'False Brothers' and Other Opponents of Paul (JSNTSup 188; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999), 124. See also Sumney's earlier work focusing entirely on 2 Corinthians and engaging closely with Georgi, Schmithals, and others, *Identifying Paul's Opponents: The Question of Method in 2 Corinthians* (JSNTSup 40; Sheffield: JSOT, 1990).

inclination towards faction, specifically in relation to recognized Christian authorities.³⁴ Finally, those whom Paul identifies as “enemies of the cross of Christ” (Phil 3:18–19) are more likely so in view of their self-indulgent conduct than any Christological aberration (cf. Gal 6:12), especially as Paul does not identify them as teachers.³⁵ No more than the churches in Jerusalem, Antioch, and Rome do Paul’s opponents espouse a fundamental alternative to the gospel of the crucified and resurrected Messiah.

Conclusion

Paul maintains that the resurrection of the crucified Messiah was a constant in Christian experience from Jerusalem and Judea to Syria and Cilicia, from Asia and Macedonia and Achaia to Rome, and the circumstances of his correspondence lend credibility to his claim. This being the case, we must seek a different explanation of the diversity actually attested in the later sources than the hypothesis of an originally pluriform Christianity. Paul himself indicates that his preaching of the crucified and resurrected Messiah was far from meeting with universal approval; it was “an offense to Jews, folly to Gentiles” (1 Cor 1:22–24)—presumably most Jews and most Gentiles in Paul’s missionary experience. We should not be surprised if in time some converts to Christianity sought to efface the offense and mitigate the folly by displacing Jesus’ death and resurrection from the center of Christian corporate identity. The earliest such interpretations of Christianity clearly attested in the sources can be credited to the schismatics of 1 John (ca. A.D. 100), the Docetists of Ignatius’s *Smyrneans* (ca. A.D. 115), and the Gospel according to Thomas.³⁶ It is to the second and

³⁴ In addition to Dahl (above, n. 30), see Stanley K. Stowers, “Paul on the Use and Abuse of Reason,” in *Greeks, Romans, and Christians: Essays in Honor of Abraham J. Malherbe* (ed. David L. Balch, Everett Ferguson, and Wayne A. Meeks; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1990), 255–62; Margaret M. Mitchell, *Paul and the Rhetoric of Reconciliation: An Exegetical Investigation of the Language and Composition of 1 Corinthians* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1991), 297–302; Stephen M. Pogoloff, *Logos and Sophia: The Rhetorical Situation of 1 Corinthians* (SBLDS 134; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1992), 189.

³⁵ Gordon D. Fee, *Paul’s Letter to the Philippians* (NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 370–71; Markus Bockmuehl, *The Epistle to the Philippians* (BNTC; London: A & C Black, 1997), 230–32.

³⁶ See John Painter “The ‘Opponents’ in 1 John,” *NTS* 32 (1986): 64–65; Jerry L. Sumney, “Those Who ‘Ignorantly Deny Him’: The Opponents of Ignatius of Antioch,” *J ECS* 1 (1993): 345–65; Bentley Layton, *The Gnostic Scriptures: A New Translation with Annotations and Introductions* (New York: Doubleday, 1987), 360, 377–79; John P. Meier, *A Marginal Jew: Rethinking the Historical Jesus* (ABRL; New York: Doubleday, 1991), 124–39.

third generations that we should turn if we seek the first Christians who did not base their communal identity on the resurrection of the crucified Messiah.