

PAULINE PARADIGMS AND PAULINE AUTHENTICITY

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A good while ago I was ready to write my book on the theology of Paul. It should have been easy. I would begin with the usual observation that the primary sources for our knowledge of Paul's theology are the seven, undisputed Pauline letters, 1 Thessalonians, Galatians, 1 and 2 Corinthians, Romans, Philippians, and Philemon, although some scholars would include Colossians and 2 Thessalonians as well; and I would then outline the various issues in present day Pauline studies, regarding diversity and coherence, which my own investigation might resolve. But this turned out to be very difficult. The problem had to do with the initial and basic assumption concerning the sources. From my graduate study in Germany in the 1960s, the assumption that had informed my work was that the diversity of material we encounter in the Pauline writings arises from juxtapositions of "tradition" and Pauline "interpretation," which reflect the apostle's theological "application" of his understanding of salvation in concrete situations.¹ Over the years, however, as I struggled to achieve a verse by verse understanding of the Pauline writings, I became convinced that they are something quite different: they can only be understood as complex redactional compositions, that may include appropriations of early Pauline material, but most certainly include an abundance of later material as well.

It might have seemed reasonable, therefore, to preface my investigation of Paul's theology with a discussion of the literary integrity of the Pauline writings. But this problem is also not so simple. Proposals that the writings of Paul include various secondary interpolations are not exceptional.² But such views are not

¹ See Hans Conzelmann, "Paulus und die Weisheit," *NTS* 12 (1964), 231-244; also *An Outline of the Theology of the New Testament* (New York: Harper, 1969), 164-170; and *1 Corinthians* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1975), 9. For an example of my own attempt to apply these principles, see D. Doughty, "The Presence and Future of Salvation in Corinth," *ZNW* 66 (1975), 61-90.

² The issue was given new life about thirty years ago by two essays written by Günter Bornkamm: "Die Vorgeschichte der sogenannten Zweiten Korintherbriefes," *SAH*, 2, 1961 (= *Geschichte und Glaube, Zweiter Teil, GA IV* [Munich: Kaiser, 1971], 162-194), and "Der Phillipperbrief als paulinischen Briefsammlung," in *Neotestamentica et Patristica. Freundesgabe an Oscar Cullmann* (Leiden: Brill,

generally presupposed by Pauline scholarship,³ and encounter fierce resistance in some quarters.⁴ Moreover, my conception of the Pauline writings as redactional compositions was something quite different from assuming the presence of a few interpolations, or even viewing these writings as editorial combinations of original Pauline fragments. To be sure, at least in principle, no critical interpreter would exclude the possibility that the Pauline writings might even be redactional compositions. But the issue cannot be resolved simply by an exegesis of particular Pauline texts. For the plausibility of such proposals depends very much on assumptions with which we begin. And the collection of assumptions which today constitutes what can be characterized

1962), 192-202 (= *GA IV*, 195-205). And this was followed by Walter Schmithals, who argued in a prolificacy of studies that all the Pauline writings represent editorial compositions: see, to begin with, *Die Gnosis in Korinth* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1965), and, more recently, *Die Briefe des Paulus in ihrer ursprünglichen Form* (Zürich: Theologischer Verlag, 1984).

It is probably fair to say that today most critical scholars regard at least 2 Corinthians as a redactional composition (e.g., Victor Furnish, *II Corinthians* [Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1985], 35-41). Many scholars perceive 1 Cor in the same way (cf. Gerhard Sellin, "Hauptprobleme des Ersten Korintherbriefes," *ANRW II*, 25.4, 2940-3044: 2964-2985). Interpolation and redactional proposals for other Pauline writings are not uncommon (e.g., Hans-Martin Schenke and Karl Fischer, *Einleitung in die Schriften des Neuen Testaments: Die Briefe des Paulus und Schriften des Paulinismus*, [Gütersloh: Gerd Mohn, 1978]. And Leander Keck declares flat-out that "Paul's letters were also edited.... What we have are those forms of Paul's letters that were prepared for church use long after Paul himself wrote them" (*Paul and His Letters* [Philadelphia: Fortress, 1988], 17, 18).

³ Victor Furnish observes that "there has been no general scholarly agreement on the probability, or even the plausibility, of any of these hypotheses about glosses and interpolations" ("Pauline Studies," in *The New Testament and its Modern Interpreters*, E.J. Epp and G.W. MacRae, eds. [Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1989], 321-350; 325). Hans Hübner, declares that such issues relate only to the discipline of New Testament Introduction, and that for his "central question concerning the theology of Paul" can be bracketed out ("Paulusforschung seit 1945. Ein kritischer Literaturbericht," *ANRW II*, 25.5, 2649-2840: 2651). Few if any major studies of Paul and Pauline theology address this issue, even when it would have importance for their own arguments.

⁴ Heikki Räisänen sharply rejects such "extreme conclusions" with the observation that "consistency of thought is a dubious criterion for authenticity, and particularly so in the case of a writer as impulsive as Paul" (*Paul and the Law* [Tübingen: Mohr, 1983], 6). Kurt Aland bemoans the fact that "hypotheses concerning the division of the Pauline letters are so much in vogue today among German scholars" (*Neutestamentliche Entwürfe* [Munich: Kaiser, 1979], 350); and Harry Gamble ominously observes that anyone who does not find difficulty with the assumption of a wide-spread propensity in the ancient church to revise and conflate the texts of Paul's letters "has not reflected on the matter" ("The Redaction of the Pauline Letters and the Formation of the Pauline Corpus," *JBL*, 94, 1975, 403-418: 404).

as the “normative paradigm” for Pauline studies renders such proposals historically unlikely and methodologically unnecessary.

My primary concern here is not to demonstrate the redactional character of the Pauline writings, or even that these writings contain a variety of interpolations, but to clarify the historical and methodological assumptions that such views imply. This essay will probably be most interesting, therefore, for persons who already hold such views—or at least such suspicions—but wonder why it is so difficult to make these views plausible under the conditions of the present paradigm, perhaps even for themselves. My argument is that to justify such views requires an entirely new paradigm, with a new set of historical and methodological assumptions. The present paradigm, which has dominated Pauline studies for at least the past century, has no place for such assumptions; but it has been unable to resolve the most basic questions presented by the Pauline writings—and has failed, therefore, to legitimate its own paradigmatic validity. I will then suggest the possible contours of a new paradigm, and what its construction might require, lest anyone think the undertaking might be easy, or uncontroversial.

How the Normative Paradigm Works

The concept of a “normative paradigm” derives from a book written some time ago by Thomas Kuhn, entitled *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*.⁵ This book was primarily concerned with paradigmatic presuppositions in the physical sciences, but its insights are illuminating for our discipline as well. In the same way as the physical sciences, our discipline is governed by a collection of presupposed “paradigms,” shared in common by the scholarly community. In the physical sciences such paradigms are derived from experimental achievements in the past regarded as fundamental for present research; in biblical studies they are derived from the past works of great masters, figures such as J.B. Lightfoot and Theodor Zahn. In both disciplines, however, such paradigms are regarded as foundational because they seem more successful than their competitors in making sense of the multifarious “facts” with which one’s discipline is concerned.⁶ According to Kuhn, these paradigms constitute an “implicit body of intertwined theoretical and methodological belief” which tells the

⁵ Thomas Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, Chicago: University of Chicago, 1962.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 16, 33.

practitioner “what both the world and his science are like.”⁷ Those persons whose research is based on shared paradigms “are committed to the same rules and standards for scientific practice. That commitment and the apparent consensus it produces are prerequisites for the genesis and continuation of a particular research tradition.”⁸ This is what I refer to as a “normative paradigm,” namely, the interlocking collection of assumptions, commitments and methodologies that determines the way in which Pauline studies is pursued today, consciously and unconsciously.

Kuhn emphasizes that, at least to begin with, it is not necessary that all the “facts” be explained, but only that the paradigm is able to integrate a wide range of facts in a more satisfactory way than alternative paradigms. The task of future research is to show how the remaining facts and unsolved problems can be explained in its light. The paradigm takes on a life of its own. The paradigm itself identifies those “facts” which are “particularly revealing about the nature of things,” the problems that remain to be solved, and the rules “that limit both the nature of acceptable solutions and the steps by which they are to be obtained.” A “revealing fact” is one which extends the paradigm. A legitimate problem is one for which the paradigm indicates that a solution can be obtained. And an acceptable solution must cohere with the assumptions of the presupposed paradigm. Facts that do not fit the paradigm are often not perceived as facts at all. Solutions that fall outside the paradigm are not regarded as solutions at all. Kuhn likens the normative paradigm to a jigsaw puzzle for which the only acceptable solution makes use of all the pieces, interlocking them to create the correct picture. If a certain piece cannot be made to fit unless the entire picture is modified, it is unacceptable.⁹

In this light, it at least becomes evident why it is so difficult to argue for the presence of interpolations in the Pauline writings, let alone to maintain that these writings are redactional compositions. Such claims cannot be demonstrated simply by exegesis of specific passages, since these represent only individual pieces in the puzzle. To make such a claim plausible would require a different puzzle. From a methodological perspective, solutions based on redactional proposals should as legitimate as any other. But such solutions fall outside the normative paradigm, and are

⁷ Ibid., 16f, 40-42.

⁸ Ibid., 11.

⁹ Ibid., 24-27, 38f.

easily characterized therefore as "subjective" and "arbitrary."¹⁰ The normative paradigm presumes that the Pauline writings are a literary unity.¹¹ Redactional proposals are referred to "partition hypotheses" (*Teilungshypothesen*), as if this were a problem in itself.¹² Of course, every historical judgment is a hypothesis rendered more or less probable by accepted methods of historical evaluation.¹³ Given the presupposed paradigm, however, such proposals are said to require a special "burden of proof."¹⁴

One such stipulation is that proponents of redactional hypotheses elucidate the historical situation, motivations, and

¹⁰ With reference to nineteenth century proposals regarding interpolations in the Pauline writings, C.E.B. Cranfield asserts, for example, that "the thoroughly arbitrary and subjective nature of these theories is now generally recognized," and that similar, more recent, proposals are likewise "arbitrary and subjective" (*The Epistle to the Romans*, Edinburgh: Clark, 1975, Vol. I, p. 5). But Cranfield offers no arguments to support these accusations and no references to scholars who provide such arguments. One may assume, of course, that he simply presupposes the work of his predecessors, W. Sanday and A.C. Headlam. But here also we merely learn that all such theories are so "subjective and arbitrary" that they hardly bear repeating (*The Epistle to the Romans*, Edinburgh: Clark, ICC, 1902, lxxxvii). More recently, Furnish refers to the "highly subjective" judgments of J. C. O'Neill regarding interpolations in Romans and Galatians ("Pauline Studies," 325).

¹¹ With regard to 1 Thess, Willi Marxsen makes the "fundamental observation," that "the first assumption should always be that the transmitted letters represent an original unity..." (*Der erste Brief an die Thessalonicher* [Zürich: Theologischer Verlag, 27]. And R.F. Collins postulates, "It is, in fact, the lack of integrity of the letter which must be proved rather than the inverse" ("A Propos the Integrity of I Thes," *Ephemerides theologicae lovanienses* 55 (1979), 67-106: 95f).

¹² Cf. W. Michaelis, "Teilungshypothesen bei Paulusbriefen," *ThZ* 14 (1958), 321-326. A. Sand observes, that such proposals "are hypotheses and will always remain so" ("Überlieferung und Sammlungen der Paulusbriefe," in *Paulus in den neutestamentlichen Spätschriften*, K. Kertelge, ed. [Freiburg/Basel: Herder, 1981], 11-24: 19, n. 29).

¹³ Furnish rightly observes, with reference to 2 Cor, that "partitionists are not the only ones who must employ hypotheses. Those who would defend the integrity of the canonical letter must regularly resort to their own hypotheses in order to explain phenomena others regard as evidence for its composite character" (*II Corinthians* [Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1984], p. 35). This would apply, or course, to other Pauline writings as well.

¹⁴ John Hurd contends, for example, with regard to the redactional character of 1 Cor, that the evidence is not strong enough to bear the "burden of proof which this kind of theory must always bear" (*The Origin of Corinthians*, Macon, GA: Mercer University, 1983, 47). This view is also affirmed by William Walker: "Individual passages in otherwise authentically Pauline letters are themselves to be regarded as authentically Pauline unless convincing arguments to the contrary are advanced... In the treatment of any particular passage in the Pauline writings, the burden of proof rests with the argument that the passage is an interpolation..." ("The Burden of Proof in Identifying Interpolations in the Pauline Writings," *NTS* 33, 1981, 610-618; 610f). Walker's purpose in this essay is to merely "lighten" the burden of proof (615).

methods under which the original letters of Paul were interpolated or edited in such a way.¹⁵ From a historical-critical perspective, this seems like a reasonable expectation. Presupposed by this stipulation, however, is not only that Paul wrote letters, but a myriad of other supposedly established facts about early Christian history that interlock in such a way to make this requirement impossible to fulfill. That would require an entirely new paradigm. Victor Furnish observes that the recent multiplication of redactional hypotheses makes it "increasingly apparent that new investigations of the formation of the Pauline corpus need to be undertaken."¹⁶ But defenders of the traditional paradigm are hard at work buttressing the barricades against any such endeavor.¹⁷

A common assumption, conscious or unconscious, is that recourse to redactional proposals is unnecessary so long as "satisfactory" explanations can be given for the text as it stands. With regard to Romans, for example, Cranfield observes: "in every case the passage in question can be explained satisfactorily without having recourse to this hypothesis."¹⁸ With regard to 2 Cor, W.G. Kümmel asks, "Does the text as transmitted to us compel us to assume that the material has been combined secondarily?"¹⁹ And Gordon Fee observes, with regard to 1 Cor, that "when one can make perfectly good sense of the document as it comes to us, such theories are as unnecessary as they are

¹⁵ See W. Michaelis, "Teilungshypothesen"; also Harry Gamble, "Redaction of the Pauline Letters, 403;" and Furnish, "Pauline Studies," 326f.

¹⁶ "Pauline Studies," 327.

¹⁷ A traditional argument against redactional proposals, going back to Theodor Zahn, is that the early exchange and circulation of the Pauline writings excludes such possibilities (*Introduction to the New Testament* [Edinburgh: Clark, 2 Vols., 1909], Vol. 1, 152-164; also *Geschichte des neutestamentlichen Kanons* [Erlangen: Deichert, 1888], 811-839). Aland now argues that this view is confirmed by the manuscript tradition ("Glosse, Interpolation, Redaktion und Komposition in der Sicht der neutestamentlichen Textkritik" in *Studien zur Überlieferung des Neuen Testament und seines Textes* [Berlin: de Gruyter, 1967], 35-57; and "Die Entstehung des Corpus Paulinum" in *Newtestamentliche Entwürfe*, 302-350. And Aland's view finds affirmation from Gamble ("Redaction of the Pauline Letters", 418). In a more recent article Gamble simply claims, in a way similar to Zahn, that "the Pauline letters were early valued and circulated outside the particular communities to which they were addressed..." ("The Canon of the New Testament," in *The New Testament and its Modern Interpreters*, 205-212 [citation from p. 205]; see also Gamble's article, "The Pauline Corpus and the Early Christian Book," in *Paul and the Legacies of Paul*, ed. W.S. Babcock [Dallas: SMU, 1990], 265-280).

¹⁸ *Romans*, 5. Sanday and Headlam claimed that "the possibility of the commentaries which have been written proves conclusively the improbability of theories implying a wide element of interpolation" (*Romans*, lxxxviii).

¹⁹ *Introduction to the New Testament* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1975), 290.

unprovable."²⁰ But a satisfactory explanation may only be one that accords with one's own aesthetic sensibilities²¹ or theological proclivities.²² F.C. Baur was rightly suspicious of such explanations, observing that the human imagination is capable of generating any number of possible explanations for historical data. Characteristic of what Baur referred to as "subjective" interpretations is the assumption that a possible explanation for the text is satisfactory merely because it is conceivable, and thus obviates the necessity and even the legitimacy of alternative explanations.²³ What we really see here, however, is the normative paradigm at work. In our paradigmatic language of discourse, the "integrity" of the text means literary unity, and a satisfactory interpretation is assumed to be obtained when the integrity of a text, so understood, is upheld. But more than this is at stake. Given the interlocking character of paradigmatic assumptions, such interpretations are regarded as satisfactory because they presuppose and uphold everything the normative paradigm tells us about the significance of Paul and the Pauline writings in early Christianity, and about the history of early Christianity as such.

Leander Keck observes that how we account for the content of the Pauline writings "entails consequences for the way one

²⁰ *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 16.

²¹ With reference to the Pauline authenticity of Galatians, for example, J.B. Lightfoot observes, "Its every sentence so completely reflects the life and character of the Apostle to the Gentiles that its genuineness has not been seriously questioned... As an exhibition of the working of the Apostle's mind, it stands far beyond the reach of a forger in an age singularly unskilled in the analysis and representation of the finer shades of character..." (*St. Paul's Epistle to the Galatians* [reprint by Hendrickson, Peabody, MA, 1993], 57).

²² Gordon Fee states, for example, with regard to the argument in 1 Cor 15:1-11, that "to deny the objective reality of Christ's resurrection is to have a faith considerably different from Paul's. One wonders whether such faith is still the Christian faith" (*The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987, 737. Fee's emphasis). According to Horton Harris, F.C. Baur's rejection of the New Testament writings as trustworthy historical documents "followed logically from the rejection of the supernatural and miraculous element in Christianity. For if there is no such element, then its New Testament portrayal is obviously without historical foundation..." (*The Tübingen School* [Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1975], 256). Most often, however, the ways in which theological proclivities influence our historical judgments are not so obvious.

²³ See Baur's debate with Olshausen regarding the presence of Peter in Rome: "Ueber Zweck und Veranlassung des Römerbriefes und die damit zusammenhängenden Verhältnisse der römischen Gemeinde. Eine historisch-kritische Untersuchung," *TZTh*, IX (1836), 59-178, pp. 163-178; = *Ausgewählte Werke in Einzelausgaben*, vol. 1 (Stuttgart-Bad Cannstatt: Friedrich Frommann, 1963), 147-266, pp. 251-266.

pictures the emergence of Christianity as a whole.”²⁴ But the reverse is also true: our picture of early Christianity as a whole has consequences for how we understand the content of the Pauline writings. R.G. Collingwood explained that historians always begin with an imaginative picture of the past that determines which sources can legitimately be used for its historical construction and which facts, derived from these sources, can be regarded as genuine.²⁵ For New Testament studies this picture of the past is mediated by the normative paradigm. And as Kuhn observes, once in place the normative paradigm tells us which sources and which facts revealed these sources are relevant for future research. This paradigmatic picture of the past determines how the Pauline writings are employed as sources for its own construction—which has no place for the possibility that the Pauline writings in their present form have little or no relationship to letters Paul may have written, or that perhaps Paul wrote no letters at all. Only when the historian’s “imagination” conceives a different picture of the past is the credibility of these sources and the alleged facts they present perceived in a different way.

There is a direct relationship between interpolation proposals and the question of Pauline authenticity as such. As Winsome Munro observed, the assumption of genuineness is the “flip-side” of the issue of interpolations. If we cannot determine the identifying characteristic of possibly interpolated material, neither can we identify what is genuine.²⁶ This is the point at which interpolation and redaction proposals become controversial. For once we grant that there are “almost certainly interpolations both in the Pauline corpus as a whole and in the individual letters with the corpus,”²⁷ that “the letters of Paul cannot be simply equated with what Paul himself wrote,” but “present us with is Paul as he was transmitted by the church,” and therefore that “the theology of the letters is not simply identical with the theology of Paul himself,”²⁸ the question necessarily arises whether we have anything that “Paul himself wrote,” or how we distinguish between the “theology of the letters” and the “theology of Paul himself.” Once one grants the probability of secondary interpolations, the

²⁴ L. Keck and V. Furnish, *The Letters of Paul* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1984), 32.

²⁵ R. G. Collingwood, *The Idea of History* (New York: Oxford, 1956), 244f.

²⁶ “Interpolation in the Epistles: Weighing Probability,” *NTS* 36 (1990), 431-443, p. 433.

²⁷ Walker, “Burden of Proof,” 615.

²⁸ Leander Keck, *Paul*, 19.

roller coaster is already plunging down the first drop, and the ride will be furious.

The fundamental assumption of the present paradigm is that we have before us at least seven authentic letters written by Paul (Rom, 1 and 2 Cor, Gal, Phil, Philm, 1 Thess). All the assumptions about early Christian history presupposed by the present paradigm interlock to support this assumption. This is taken for granted today by all New Testament Introductions, whose purpose, as Kuhn points out, is to introduce future scholars in a paradigmatic way to their field of research. Whenever a scholarly study on Paul observes at the beginning that only the seven “indisputably authentic” Pauline letters will be considered, the normative paradigm is operative. It is no longer necessary even to reference the works in which the authenticity of these writings was supposedly established.²⁹ That is not the issue addressed by such statements. The point is only that additional writings attributed to Paul by Christian tradition (Col, Eph, 2 Thess, and the Pastoral Epistles), and still regarded as authentic in some circles today, will not be considered. The authenticity of the “indisputable” seven is taken for granted.

The assumption of Pauline authenticity determines almost the entire research agenda of Pauline studies today. The on-going production of dissertations and monographs and commentaries on the Pauline writings shows that satisfactory interpretations can be provided under the present paradigm. Whether such interpretations focus on a single, obscure passage or the entire Pauline corpus, however, at a fundamental level they finally represent attempts to undergird the paradigmatic assumption of Pauline authenticity in some new way; and they are regarded by the scholarly community as “satisfactory” in so far as this goal seems to be achieved.³⁰ But the present paradigm has failed to

²⁹ R.G. Collingwood observes that “all that the historian means, when he describes certain historical facts as his data, is that for the purposes of a particular piece of work there are certain historical problems relevant to that work which for the present he proposes to regard as settled; though, if they are settled, it is only because historical-thinking has settled them in the past, and they remain settled only until he or some else decides to open them” (*The Idea of History*, 244). The function of a normative paradigm is to define which “problems” may be regarded as having been “settled,” and may serve therefore as reliable “data” for present research.

³⁰ Kuhn observes that once the normative paradigm is in place the enterprise of normal research “seems an attempt to force nature into the preformed and relatively inflexible box that the paradigm supplies. No part of the aim of normal science is to call forth new sorts of phenomena; indeed those that will not fit the box are often not seen at all. Nor do scientists normally aim to invent new theories, and they are often intolerant of those invented by others. Instead,

mediate a satisfactory understanding of the diversity of data we encounter in the Pauline writings. The most basic problems presented by these writings still remain unresolved. According to Kuhn, new paradigms are necessary and a scientific "revolution" takes place when indisputable "anomalies" appear for which the present paradigms provide no explanation and thus "subvert the existing traditions of scientific practice."³¹ For Pauline studies, however, it is not simply a matter of a few anomalies; it has to do with our entire understanding of the Pauline writings and Pauline theology. It is as if we had been working a jigsaw puzzle upside down, for many years, and turning it over we found no picture at all.

The Problem of Authenticity

We observed that the real issue has to do not with possible interpolations in the Pauline writings, but with the determination of Pauline authenticity as such. Fundamental for the present Pauline paradigm is that the authenticity of at least seven writings attributed to Paul is "indisputable." A basic problem for the present paradigm, however, is its own inability to identify authentic Pauline material, and thus confirm this fundamental assumption. Victor Furnish observes that "so far no firm and convincing techniques or criteria have been developed to aid the identification of glosses and interpolations" in the Pauline writings.³² At least implicitly presupposed here, however, is that such techniques do exist for the identification of authentic Pauline material, which is not the case. For if we could identify the characteristics of authentic Pauline material, it would be much easier to identify material that lacked such characteristics. The problem is not methodological, but paradigmatic. In principle, the techniques and criteria for identifying redactional discontinuities and redactional material in the Pauline writings are not different from those employed in the study of the Gospels or Acts. Indeed, my own view is that the Pauline writings, which mediate the teachings of the great "apostle to the Gentiles" in epistolary form, are very similar to the Gospels, which mediate the "teachings of the Lord" in narrative form. But the normative paradigm does not allow us to conceive the Pauline writings in

normal-scientific research is directed to the articulation of those phenomena and theories that the paradigm already supplies" (*Revolutions*, 25).

³¹ *Revolutions*, 6.

³² "Pauline Studies," 325.

such a way, and to employ the usual techniques of redaction criticism.

In some ways, of course, we do utilize form-criticism and redaction-criticism in our interpretations of the Pauline writings. A common way to deal with disparities within a Pauline writing is to classify anomalous material as "traditional" and "pre-Pauline," in contrast to actual Pauline interpretations of such material.³³ Such explanations at least recognize that the Pauline writings contain anomalous materials that cannot simply be harmonized into a coherent Pauline theology. And they also rightly recognize that the Pauline writings presuppose a history of tradition and interpretation. But it is not clear how one decides that the present interpretations derive from Paul, and not the presupposed traditions.³⁴ And in some cases, material identified as "pre-Pauline" might be just as easily, or even better, understood as deutero-Pauline. The distinction between tradition and interpretation provides a way to rationalize the presence of anomalous materials in the Pauline writings, but no criteria for determining what might be actually Pauline. Under the present paradigm, it is presupposed that the writings in their final form derive from the pen of the apostle. But the tradition history of these writings is probably far more complex than the present paradigm allows.

This dilemma is reflected in the ongoing search for the "coherent center" of Pauline theology. After more than a century of research guided by the assumptions of the present paradigm,

³³ See Hans Conzelmann, "Paulus und die Weisheit," *NTS* 12 (1964), 231-244. Conzelmann generally regarded Paul's interpretations to be based on traditional confessional formulations (see Idem., *An Outline of the Theology of the New Testament* [New York: Harper, 1969], 165f.). Ernst Käsemann objected that the focus on confessional material was too limiting, and that the traditional materials that informed Paul's theology were quite diverse ("Konsequente Traditionsgeschichte?", *ZThK* 62, 1965, 137-152). An extensive discussion of traditional materials presupposed by the Pauline writings is provided by Philipp Vielhauer (*Geschichte der urchristlichen Literatur* [Berlin/New York: de Gruyter, 1975], 9-66). Perhaps the most thoroughgoing commentary on a Pauline writing from a tradition-historical perspective is H.D. Betz's *Galatians* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979), see pp. 26-28.

³⁴ A good example would be the ongoing discussion regarding the significance of the πίστις Ἰησοῦ motif in the Pauline writings. Sam Williams originally identified this as a pre-Pauline motif, and the material in which it appears (Rom 3:24-26) as pre-Pauline tradition (*Jesus' Death as Saving Event. The Background and Origin of a Concept* [Missoula, MT: Scholars Press], 1975). More recent studies, however, seem to move this motif nearer to the center of Paul's own theology: see L. Johnson, "Romans 3:21-26 and the Faith of Jesus," *CBQ* 44 (1982), 77-90; Richard Hays, *The Faith of Jesus Christ* (Chico, CA: Scholars Press, SBLDS 56, 1983); L. Keck, "Jesus in Romans," *JBL* 108 (1989), 443-460.

scholars are still searching for this mysterious entity.³⁵ Rudolf Bultmann's treatment of Pauline theology represented an attempt to overcome the religious-historical and doctrinal disparities in the Pauline writings by means of existential interpretation.³⁶ Ernst Käsemann's emphasis on the apocalyptic, theological framework of Paul's thought, and on God's righteousness as the central theme in Pauline theology, called attention to a cosmic and theological horizon in the Pauline writings obscured by Bultmann's interpretation,³⁷ but again centered on a specific "doctrine," and actually highlighted the disparity of Pauline thought by calling attention to the dichotomy between theology and anthropology,³⁸ and theology and christology.³⁹ Christiaan Beker's interpretation of the Pauline writings attempts to overcome a doctrinal objectification of Pauline thought by emphasizing the "dialogical" interplay between the "apocalyptic triumph of God" as the "coherent center" of Paul's theology and the "contingent" situations addressed by his epistles. In spite of his emphasis on the "deep structure" of Paul's theology, the "symbolic structure" of its apocalyptic core, and the "dialogical" structure of the Paul's hermeneutic, however, one still must ask whether, much like Käsemann, Beker has not finally elevated

³⁵ In 1911, Albert Schweitzer concluded that "the study of Paulinism has nothing very brilliant to show for itself in the way of achievement" (*Geschichte der Paulinischen Forschung* [Tübingen, 1911], 185; ET = *Paul and His Interpreters: A Critical History* [New York: Macmillan, 1956], 237). In 1929, Rudolf Bultmann asked whether "a unified concern of Paul cannot be made visible," but observed that from "the picture offered by the most recent research it does not appear as if this goal had already been achieved; indeed, one cannot perceive any unified intention, but the motifs are all mixed up" ("Zur Geschichte der Paulus-Forschung," *ThR* N.F. 1, 1929, 26-59, p. 52). With regard to the situation today, see Hans Hübner, "Paulusforschung," 2721-2729; Victor Furnish, "Pauline Studies," 333; Leander Keck, *Paul*, 138-158.

³⁶ R. Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament*, vol. 1 (New York: Scribners, 1951), 187-352.

³⁷ E. Käsemann, "The 'Righteousness of God' in Paul," in Idem., *New Testament Questions of Today* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1969), 168-182 (German = *ZThK* 58 (1961), 367-378).

³⁸ See R. Bultmann, "ΔΙΚΑΙΟΣΥΝΗ ΘΕΟΥ," *JBL* 83 (1964), 12-16; also Hans Conzelmann, "Paul's Doctrine of Justification: Theology or Anthropology," in *Theology of the Liberating Word*, F. Herzog, ed. (Nashville: Abingdon, 1971), 108-123 (German version = *EvTh* 28 (1968), 389-404); G. Klein, "Gottes Gerechtigkeit als Thema der neuesten Paulus-Forschung," in Idem., *Rekonstruktion und Interpretation* (Munich: Chr. Kaiser, 1969), 225-236. For a survey of the discussion, see Hübner, "Paulusforschung," 2721-2729.

³⁹ See J. Christiaan Beker, *The Triumph of God in Life and Thought* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1980), 17.

only one motif from the Pauline writings and simply declared it to be the “coherent center.”⁴⁰

The continuing search for a “coherent center” is a crucial task for “normal” Pauline research today because disparities between and within the Pauline writings present a fundamental problem for the normative paradigm. References to the coherence of Paul’s “theology” obscure the fact that the real issue is the coherence of the Pauline writings themselves, individually and as a collection. All proposals regarding the coherent center of Paul’s theology find support somewhere in the Pauline writings, but usually in different places. Seldom if ever are differing proposals based on different interpretations of the same passages. The real issue has to do with the identification of characteristic Pauline material as such. It makes no difference whether we conceive this coherence in terms of theological doctrines, underlying convictions, or as a particular way of addressing the contingencies of diverse historical situations, if we cannot identify the characteristic elements of Paul’s thought, we cannot identify which of the disparate materials in the Pauline writings are in fact Pauline, or which are not. Nor can we say why we regard a particular writing as authentic, and another as not—or what we mean when we say that any writing is “Pauline.” The present paradigm does not allow for the assumption that these writings represent a conglomeration of diverse traditions that, over a long period of time, in various ways and for various reasons, came to be associated with Paul.

⁴⁰ In spite of Beker’s repeated attempts to clarify its meaning, the “apocalyptic triumph of God” remains a vague entity (somewhat like Bultmann’s concept of the “kerygma”) that can be appealed to in various ways, or not at all in some contingent situations. The letter to the Galatians, precisely where the “truth of the gospel” is at stake (Gal 2;4,14), is distinguished by the “virtual absence” of the supposed apocalyptic core of Paul’s gospel (Ibid., 58), which is amazing in view of Beker’s claim that Paul’s gospel “does not tolerate a world view that cannot express those elements inherent in the apocalyptic world view and that to Paul seem inherent to the truth of the gospel” (171). Beker rightly observes, therefore, that “Galatians threatens to undo what I have posited as the coherent core of Pauline thought... The Christocentric focus of Galatians pushes Paul’s theocentric apocalyptic theme to the periphery.” But the normative paradigm does not allow Beker to entertain the possibility that the christological focus and the absence of an apocalyptic horizon might be indications of deutero-Pauline composition. Elsewhere (*Heirs of Paul*, Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991) Beker seems to say that the Pastoral Epistles represent a “quite successful” and “relevant rendering” of Paul’s gospel (pp. 84, 86) even though any apocalyptic expectation of the imminent triumph of God has entirely disappeared (42, 85).

The Missing Sitz-im-Leben

Werner Kümmel observes, again and again, that what we learned from F.C. Baur was that ancient writings must be interpreted with reference to the total historical situation in which they were written.⁴¹ In fact, however, this was presupposed by Baur, as the basic tenet of historical criticism deriving from the Enlightenment. What Baur himself insisted on was that this total historical situation (*geschichtliche Zusammenhang*) could not simply be assumed, on the basis of traditional belief or from a superficial reading of the writings themselves, but must be critically determined. It does not matter that a particular interpretation is “possible,” or from one perspective or another is regarded as “satisfactory.” Apart from a *geschichtliche Zusammenhang* that renders an interpretation probable it is nevertheless “subjective.” What we are told by Leander Keck, therefore, presents a problem:

Because the letters of Paul are responses to what was going on among the readers, it is necessary to understand the situation to which the letters respond. All we can know about the situation, however, must be inferred from the answer; we have no independent, non-Pauline, access to the situation. After inferring the question we can interpret the answer. There is no alternative to such circular reasoning.⁴²

If were truly the case, we would be condemned to subjective interpretation: with “circular reasoning” any interpretation is possible. In fact, however, we know a good deal about the history of early Christianity at the time the Pauline writings were supposedly written. From recent reconstruction and investigation of the Q Source,⁴³ and from form-historical investigation of other traditions presupposed by the Synoptic Gospels,⁴⁴ we can identify

⁴¹ “Baur gained for New Testament research the perception that it can no longer abandon, namely, that the task of historical criticism of the New Testament writings is only fulfilled when the historical place of origin of a writing within the framework of early Christian history is also established” (*The New Testament: The History of the Investigation of its Problems* [Nashville: Abingdon, 1972], 131); “His demand that every single writing be arranged in a total historical perspective is a permanent legacy of his work” (*Ibid.*, 136; cf. 142).

⁴² *Paul*, 19. Gerd Lüdemann similarly observes that “when we deal with the question of the position of Paul and the position of his opponents, we are involved in a circular process of understanding” (*Paul, Apostle to the Gentiles* [Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984], 44).

⁴³ See now Burton Mack, *The Lost Gospel Q. The Book of Christian Origins* (San Francisco: Harper, 1993).

⁴⁴ An important work, of course, is the collection of essays by James Robinson and Helmut Koester in *Trajectories through Early Christianity*, (Philadelphia:

a panoply of early “Jesus communities,” most of which engaged in missionary work of one form or another. And we can also identify a variety of “Judaisms and their Messiahs” in this period.⁴⁵ The problem, however, is that little or nothing of what we know from these sources is reflected in the Pauline writings,⁴⁶ and little we learn from the Pauline writings is reflected in these sources.⁴⁷ Keck rightly observes that “it has proven virtually impossible to achieve a broad consensus about Paul’s relation to earliest Christianity.”⁴⁸ The assumptions of the present paradigm illuminate no *geschichtliche Zusammenhang* for the Pauline writings. For this reason almost any “possible” interpretation of these writings can be regarded as “satisfactory.” But the result is a Paul with an eccentric personality and an eccentric, confusing theology, and with no world to call his home.

A fundamental question regarding the *Sitz-im-Leben* of the Pauline writings is the identity of the supposed opponents. All the writings commonly regarded as authentic (except for Philm, and possibly 1 Thess) seem to presuppose the presence “opponents”—or at least persons with whom Paul differs in serious ways. Determining of the identity of these opponents is a necessary prerequisite for a historical understanding of these writings, individually and as a group. After more than a century of research,

Fortress, 1971). For a recent study, see Gerd Theissen, *The Gospels in Context. Social and Political History in the Synoptic Tradition* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991). A work that has not received the attention it deserves, however, is Gottfried Schille, *Anfänge der Kirche. Erwägungen zur apostolischen Frühgeschichte* (Munich: Kaiser, 1966).

⁴⁵ See Jacob Neusner, et. al. (eds.), *Judaisms and their Messiahs at the Turn of the Christian Era* (Cambridge/New York: Cambridge University, 1987).

⁴⁶ One could refer of course to conceivable parallels between Paul’s problems with Jewish, or Jewish-Christian, legalists in Jerusalem and the polemics against “Scribes” and “Pharisees” in the Synoptic Gospels; but this is a very complicated subject. More significant perhaps are parallels drawn by Robinson and Koester between Synoptic wisdom traditions and “divine man” christologies and opposition to Paul in 1 Cor and 2 Cor: see J. Robinson, “Kerygma and History in the New Testament” (*Trajectories*, 20-70); and H. Koester, “One Jesus and Four Primitive Gospels” (*Idem.*, 158-204), and “The Structure and Criteria of Early Christian Beliefs” (205-231). From my perspective, however, that “fanatical or mystical form of belief in the resurrection combated in the pastorals was emerging in Corinth in Paul’s own time” (Robinson, 32) is precisely the kind of observation that suggests alternative explanations for such parallels.

⁴⁷ In Gal 2, for example, we are told that Paul and the so-called “pillars” in Jerusalem divided up the entire missionary world between themselves, as if no other Christian missionaries or missionary communities existed. And the relationship of Paul in the Pauline writings to any “Judaism” we know of is entirely mysterious.

⁴⁸ *Paul*, 140. Keck rightly identifies “accounting for Paul’s thought historically” as a “persistent issue” (138).

however, we have been unable to reach agreement on this central question.⁴⁹ The supposed opponents have been conceived as judaizing Christians,⁵⁰ or Jewish legalists;⁵¹ as Christian Gnostics,⁵² Jewish-Christian Gnostics;⁵³ as Hellenistic Jewish missionaries,⁵⁴ or Christian spiritual "enthusiasm,"⁵⁵ and now once again as judaizing Christians.⁵⁶ Scholars are uncertain about whether Paul faced the same opponents in every community⁵⁷ or different opponents in different places,⁵⁸ and whether in some communities opponents of different kinds were present.⁵⁹ There is little hope that additional studies based on present

⁴⁹ See, in general, Dennis Duling and Norman Perrin, *The New Testament* (New York: Harcourt, 1994), 197-204; and Walter Schmithals, *Paul and the Gnostics* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1972); John Gunther gives a brief overview of the variety of proposals, in *St. Paul's Opponents and their Background* (Leiden: Brill, 1973), 1-7; E.E. Ellis presents a helpful survey of the discussion ("Paul and His Opponents: Trends in Research," in *Christianity, Judaism and Other Greco-Roman Cults: Studies for Morton Smith at Sixty*, J. Neusner, ed. [Leiden: Brill, 1975], 264-298), but also a glorification of J.B. Lightfoot.

⁵⁰ Originally proposed, of course, by F.C. Baur, "The Christuspertei in der korinthischen Gemeinde, der Gegensatz des petrinischen und paulinischen Christentums in der alten Kirche," *TZTh* 4 (1831), 61-206.

⁵¹ For example, A.F.J. Klijn, "Paul's Opponents in Philippians iii," *NovTest* 7 (1964), 278-284.

⁵² Wilhelm Lütgert, *Freiheitspredigt und Schwarmgeister in Korinth* (Gütersloh: Bartelsmann, 1908) also Idem., "Die Vollkommenenen im Philipperbrief und die Enthusiasten in Thessalonich," *BFChTh* 13 (1909), 1-23.

⁵³ Walter Schmithals, *Die Gnosis in Korinth* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1965); *Paulus und die Gnostiker* (Hamburg-Bergstedt: Reich, 1965).

⁵⁴ Dieter Georgi, *Die Gegner des Paulus im 2. Korintherbrief* (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, WMANT 11, 1964); also J. Gnilka, "Die antipaulinische Mission in Philippi," *BZ*, 9 (1965), 258-276.

⁵⁵ Ernst Käsemann. Of his many writings dealing with this subject, see "On the Subject of Primitive Christian Apocalyptic," in Idem., *New Testament Questions of Today* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1969), 108-137; "The Cry for Liberty in the Worship of the Church," in Idem., *Perspectives on Paul* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1971), 122-137. In his *Commentary of Romans* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1980) Käsemann sees Paul confronted by spiritual enthusiasm, on the one side, and Jewish legalism, on the other.

⁵⁶ F.C. Baur's proposal has been recently revived by Gerd Lüdemann, *Opposition to Paul in Jewish Christianity* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1989).

⁵⁷ The view of F.C. Baur, Wilhelm Lütgert, Walter Schmithals, and now Gerd Lüdemann, among others.

⁵⁸ See Helmut Koester, "Heretiker im Urchristentum," *RGG* III, Vol. 3, 17-21; also *History and Literature of Early Christianity* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1982), 106-145.

⁵⁹ See, for example, E. Käsemann, *Commentary on Romans*; also R. Jewett, "Conflicting Movements in the Early Church as Reflected in Philippians," *NovTest* 12 (1970), 362-389.

paradigmatic assumptions will resolve this issue. With regard to the identity of the supposed opponents, the Pauline writings remain documents in search of a *Sitz-im-Leben*.

Another example would be the never-ending debate about Paul and Judaism, and, in particular, about Paul and the Law.⁶⁰ Interpreters do not agree about whether the differences with regard to Judaism and the Law in Galatians and Romans (and other writings as well) can be explained as a "development" of the apostle's theology in different situations, consistent with his fundamental conception of justification by faith;⁶¹ or a more basic modification arising from conscious reconsideration of Paul's part;⁶² or whether Paul's understanding of the law is totally confused and confusing.⁶³ We differ about whether Paul rightly understood, or rightly represents, the significance of the Law for Judaism.⁶⁴ We disagree about whether for Paul the Law remains valid for followers of Christ.⁶⁵ We do not agree even about whether the issue of the law and justification represents a (or the) fundamental theme in Pauline theology⁶⁶ or merely a side-issue,⁶⁷

⁶⁰ See in general Hübner, *ANRW* II, 25.4, 2668-2691; and Thomas Geer, "Paul and the Law in Recent Discussion," *Restoration Quarterly* 31 (1989), 93-107. For a different perspective, however, see Heikki Räisänen, *Paul and the Law* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1983), 1-15.

⁶¹ See Hans Hübner, *Law in Paul's Thought* (Edinburgh: Clark, 1984); also Ferdinand Hahn, "Das Geseverständnis im Römer- und Galaterbrief," *ZNW* 67 (1976), 29-63; Ulrich Wilckens, "Zur Entwicklung des paulinischen Gesetzesverständnisses," *NTS* 28 (1982), 154-190.

⁶² J.W. Drane, *Paul, Libertine or Legalist? A Study of the Major Pauline Epistles* (London, 1975).

⁶³ Räisänen, *Paul and the Law*. Räisänen observes that Romans and Galatians are "beset with internal tensions and contradictions." As I see it, if taken seriously, such observations lead directly to the probability that the Pauline writings are redactional compositions.

⁶⁴ See H.J. Shoeps, *Paul. The Theology of the Apostle in the Light of Jewish Religious History* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1959) and Räisänen, *Paul and the Law*; also, in some sense, E.P. Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism. A Comparison of Patterns of Religion* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1977).

⁶⁵ Räisänen asks, "What is one to make of the fact that still in our own time, with all the historical-critical apparatus available, learned scholars like, for example, Cranfield and Käsemann can propose diametrically opposed views of Paul's intentions? Where Cranfield says that the gospel and the law are, for Paul, essentially one, Käsemann maintains that they are quite non-dialectically mutually exclusive antitheses" (*Paul and the Law*, 3).

⁶⁶ See the recent reaffirmation of this view by Peter Stuhlmacher, "The Theme of Romans," in *The Romans Debate*, K. Donfried, ed. (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1991), 333-345.

⁶⁷ See in general: Hans Conzelmann, "Current Problems in Pauline Research," *Interpretation* 22 (1968), 170-186; Hübner, *ANRW* II, 25.4, 2721-2729. Cf. also the debate between Krister Stendahl ("The Apostle Paul and the Introspective

perhaps a product of Paul's idiosyncratic personality.⁶⁸ The resolution of these issues remains a central and unfulfilled task for Pauline studies that is unlikely to be fulfilled under the assumptions of the present paradigm.

The letter to the Romans presents a special case, and good example, of the problem regarding *Sitz-im-Leben*. We have to do here with what has been, throughout Christian history, the most important Pauline writing in the life of the Church. But critical scholarship has been unable to determine why this writing was produced in the first place or what it represents.⁶⁹ There is no agreement about whether this writing was addressed to the particular circumstances of the Roman community or represents a summary of the apostle's theology — to prepare for the apostle's missionary work in Spain, or to counter misrepresentations of his position by others, or perhaps indirectly to impress his Jewish-Christian critics in Jerusalem. There is no agreement about whether Paul intends to come to Rome to bring about the "obedience of faith" in a Gentile community not yet submissive to apostolic authority, or simply desires to find support in Rome for his future missionary work in the West. According to Karl Donfried, a consensus has now been reached "that Romans is addressed to the Christian community in Rome which finds itself in a particular historical situation," and this marks "a genuine advance in the Romans debate."⁷⁰ But one may well be suspicious of such a claim. If we must still assume that the writing had more than a single purpose, and that Roman Christianity was characterized by "wide-ranging diversity,"⁷¹ such attempts may simply represent harmonizations serving to justify the presupposed paradigm. So long as "how that historical

Conscience of the West," *HThR* 56 (1963), 199-215; = Idem., *Paul Among Jews and Gentiles* [Philadelphia: Fortress, 1976], 78-96); and, in answer to Stendahl, Ernst Käsemann ("Justification and Salvation History in the Epistle to the Romans," idem., *Perspectives on Paul* [Philadelphia: Fortress, 1971], 60-78).

⁶⁸ Cf. Burton Mack, *A Myth of Innocence* (Philadelphia: Fortress 1988), 98-99.

⁶⁹ Some key articles on this subject were gathered together by Karl Donfried in *The Romans Debate* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1977); a second edition with many new essays appeared in 1991 (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson). In the first edition the question "whether Romans was addressed to a concrete historical situation or was to be considered as an essentially non-historical *christianae religionis compendium*" remained unresolved (cf. Donfried, "Introduction 1991," xlix). The new essays in the second edition are obviously intended to resolve this issue.

⁷⁰ "Introduction 1991," lxix, xlix.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, lxx.

situation is described still varies,⁷² no *Sitz-im-Leben* has been determined.

One way to explain the differences between the Pauline writings, and the obscurity of passages within these writings, is to observe that they were “occasional” letters, addressed to specific problems arising from the particular circumstances of Paul’s churches.⁷³ One should not expect, therefore, that Paul would have said the same thing, in the same way, in every community; the basic themes of Paul’s missionary preaching would have been already well known; obscure references to opponents would have been better understood by the original readers. Perhaps so. But on what basis then do we attribute such writings to Paul? In fact, however, the “particularity” of the Pauline writings has been overemphasized. Passages in these writings that address only an isolated problem in a particular community, without wider significance for other churches, are exceptional at best. There are no such passages at all in 2 Cor or Phil. The teachings concerning “those who have fallen asleep” in 1 Thess 4:13-18 may once have addressed an immediate problem; but also have enduring significance. The strange teachings about women wearing veils in 1 Cor 11:3-16 are said to refer to a practice in all the “churches of God” (v 16). The exhortations in 1 Cor 5:1-6:20 are given wider application (5:12f; 6:7; 6:18-20). The teachings about respect for weak brethren in 1 Cor 8:1-13 (and Rom 14) and participation in pagan cults in 1 Cor 10:14-22 can be applied to many situations. In fact, the characteristic of the Pauline writings that requires explanation is their universality.

The question of *Sitz-im-Leben* and the question of authenticity—or the true character—of an ancient writing are intrinsically related. The primary test for the authenticity of an ancient writing is whether the presumed historical location, claimed by the writing itself or by tradition, can be shown to be most probable—whether the presumed *Sitz-im-Leben* provides

⁷² Ibid., lxix.

⁷³ Keck, *Paul*, 19. This view is programmatic for J.C. Beker, *Paul the Apostle*, see pp. 23-27; also John Drane, *Paul: Libertine or Legalist?* (London: SPCK, 1975). The emphasis on the particularity of the Pauline writings, however, as a way to explain the diversity in the Pauline writings, is rather recent, and seems to derive from the essay by Nils Dahl, who argued that the “particularity” of the Pauline epistles presented a problem for their canonization and use by the wider church (“The Particularity of the Pauline Epistles as a Problem in the Ancient Church,” *Neutestamentica et Patristica: Eine Freundesgabe, Herrn Prof. Dr. Oscar Cullmann zu seinem 60. Geburtstag* [Leiden: Brill, 1962], 261-271).

the best explanation for the information presented by the writing. Zahn and Lightfoot attempted to demonstrate that this was true for all the writings attributed to Paul.⁷⁴ One cannot characterize their work as a “scientific revolution” in the sense referred to by Kuhn, since it represented only a reaffirmation of what had always been taken for granted by Christian tradition. But their work nevertheless has paradigmatic significance.

No one today, of course, would argue that James and 1 Peter are authentic apostolic writings; most scholars regard the Pastoral Epistles as deutero-Pauline, and perhaps 2 Thess, Col, and Eph as well; and most would claim to have some reservations about the historical reliability of Acts. Nevertheless, whether directly derived from Zahn and Lightfoot or not, the basic assumptions of the normative Pauline paradigm regarding early Christian history and the location of the Pauline writings within that history, as well as methodological assumptions which legitimate such views, are very much like theirs. These assumptions still determine how we read and understand the Pauline writings today. But it is no longer obvious that such assumptions provide the best explanation for these writings—particularly when the information they present is not read with critical eyes.

The Problem of Methodology

Kuhn observes that “scientists work from models acquired through education and through subsequent exposure to the literature often without quite knowing or needing to know what characteristics have given these models the status of community paradigms.” They do not usually ask or debate what makes a particular problem or solution legitimate, not because they necessarily know the answer, but because “neither the question nor the answer is felt to be relevant to their research.”⁷⁵ But it is also the case that

Normal science can proceed without rules only so long as the relevant scientific community accepts without question the particular problem solutions already achieved. Rules should therefore become important and the characteristic unconcern about them should vanish whenever paradigms or models are

⁷⁴ Theodor Zahn, *Introduction to the New Testament*, 2 Vols. (Edinburgh: Clark, 1909); for the Pauline writings, see Vol. 1, 152-564. Lightfoot deals with the history presupposed by the Pauline writings in his “dissertation” on “St. Paul and the Three,” in *St. Paul’s Epistle to the Galatians* (London, 1890), reprinted now by Hendrickson (Peabody, MA, 1993), 292-374. According to E.E. Ellis, this essay provided a “devastating critique of the views of Baur” (“Opponents,” 273).

⁷⁵ *Revolutions*, 46.

felt to be insecure. This is, moreover, exactly what does occur.⁷⁶

For the construction of a new Pauline paradigm, we need to talk about methodological “rules.” We need to ask about what makes a particular problem or solution legitimate.

In the “science” of history, the basic issue has to do with how we read an ancient text. On the one hand, we can simply accept the text as it presents itself on the surface. The information presented by the text may be limited, obscure, and confusing, but the assumption is that this information is basically “reliable” — that the text is not attempting to mislead anyone. I would refer to this as the “orthodox” approach, because when the ancient texts are read in such a way what results is the “orthodox” view of how things came to be — which is why such writings became canonized. On the other hand, one can read a text “critically,” with the “suspicion” that there may be more (or less) there than is evident on the surface, perhaps something quite different from what the text represents itself to be about. For the past hundred years our interpretation of early Christian writings and our conception of early Christian history has been largely informed by the “orthodox” way of reading texts. And the constructions of early Christian history derived from reading the texts in such a way have been accepted as “satisfactory” because they generally reflect what Christian tradition has always assumed.

Fundamental for an interpretation of ancient texts that is both historical and critical is the exercise of systematic skepticism in the evaluation of one’s sources.⁷⁷ The integrity and reliability of written sources cannot simply be assumed, it must be established. As Van Harvey succinctly states, “The historian *confers* authority upon a witness.”⁷⁸ From a historical-critical perspective, the seemingly plausible assumption that, apart from contrary evidence, the veracity of a text should be presumed is false. The exercise of systematic skepticism requires the opposite: that we assume the integrity of our sources is not what it appears to be, and that the

⁷⁶ Ibid., 47.

⁷⁷ See in general R.G. Collingwood, *The Idea of History*, esp. 231-282; and Van Harvey, *The Historian and the Believer* (New York: Macmillan, 1966), ch. II. To this extent, Edgar Krentz rightly observes that “sources are not themselves history and do not give immediate access to history... Historical sources are like witnesses in a court of law; they must be interrogated and their answers evaluated” (*The Historical Method* [Philadelphia: Fortress, 1977], 43). But his analogy has limits: it does not follow that historical sources should be presumed “innocent” until proven “guilty.”

⁷⁸ *Historian*, 42.

significance of what they tell us may be different than it appears on the surface. No limits can be imposed on the methodological exercise of systematic skepticism. Interpreters are free, of course, to operate with whatever assumptions they desire.⁷⁹ Where such limits are imposed, however, one cannot claim that the resulting interpretations are derived from historical-critical investigation.

The claim is often made, particularly by conservative scholars, that those persons who "corrected" Baur's conception of early Christian history, and whose works constitute the paradigmatic basis for our present research, employed the very same historical-critical methods as he did. W.G. Kümmel, whose history of New Testament research is itself fundamental for the present paradigm, observes that by the second half of the nineteenth century Baur's basic principle that the New Testament must be explained "according to strict historical canons" had "widely prevailed."⁸⁰ But this claim is untrue. For Baur, the

⁷⁹ According to I.H. Marshall, for example, the conservative "is prepared to adopt the principle of historical criticism only up to a point," but "refuses to apply to the text the wholesale skepticism and questioning attitude which is the mark of the historian." Marshall denies, however, that such an approach is unhistorical: "It is one thing to interrogate a text minutely in order to discover all that it really says or implies; it is quite another to disbelieve every statement that it makes until it can be proved to be true. It is at this point that a clear distinction emerges between the so-called conservative and radical viewpoints... In the absence of contrary evidence belief is reasonable" (*New Testament Interpretation* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977], 134). And Edgar Krentz argues for a historical methodology that allows for a "theological or transcendental explanation of cause," in contrast to interpreters such as Harvey, who "assumes a closed universe," which "does not leave room for divine action in history" (*Method*, 58, 61).

⁸⁰ *History*, 174 (the original German reads "[hat] sich sehr weitgehend durchgesetzt"). For Kümmel, the issue had to do not with Baur's methodology, but with his results: "Since Baur's time, scientific work on the New Testament has been possible only when the fundamental principles he indicated have been followed and his overall historical view has been superseded or improved" (143). According to Kümmel, this was achieved by Albrecht Ritschl, who "by employing Baur's methodological principles... carried further the necessary correction of the historical picture drawn by the Tübingen School" (162). And Kümmel further observes that, even though Lightfoot "reveals an almost undisturbed confidence in the report of Acts... and in the traditional ascriptions of authorship with respect to the New Testament writings," he too "stands with complete confidence on the ground that the New Testament should be interpreted with the strict canons of historical investigation" (174).

In a similar way, Stephen Neill observes that the work of Baur could only be refuted by an investigation pursued "on basically the same critical principles, but far more soberly, far more realistically, with far greater attention to accuracy," that "Lightfoot's method was from the start strictly historical," and that "working on just the same critical principles as his predecessors... Harnack arrived at much more conservative conclusions than they" (*The Interpretation of the New Testament 1861-1961* [New York: Oxford, 1966], 34f, 58). And according to Krentz, "There was

geschichtliche Zusammenhang for ancient writings could only be determined by the exercise of critical skepticism; and this can hardly be said to have characterized the work of scholars such as Lightfoot and Zahn, who assumed from the beginning that the writings of Paul were authentic and early, and that other early Christian writings (1 Clement; Ignatius; Polycarp) were just what Christian tradition had always regarded them to be. The exhaustive exegetical and historical arguments presented by these brilliant and learned interpreters finally represent little more than apologetic harmonizations intended to secure these assumptions.⁸¹

In a similar way, we are told, again most often by conservative interpreters, that everyone today recognizes and employs the same methods of historical criticism. According to Stephen Neill, “the liberty of the scientific and critical approach has established itself almost beyond the possibility of cavil... The so-called ‘liberal’ and the so-called ‘conservative’ of today differ in their results; in the definition of the methods to be employed there is hardly the shadow of a difference between them.”⁸² And Krentz likewise observes that the historical-critical method is now “generally accepted... One can no longer distinguish liberal and conservative simply on the basis of exegetical method...”⁸³ If this claim is true, it is indicative of the problem. But such claims are at best misleading.⁸⁴ All that might be true is that under the present

consensus by the end of the (19th) century that Baur's methods were basically correct. Even the conservative scholars of the salvation-history school used the historical method to determine the facts. They differed only in their attempt to keep revelation, the interpretive word, tied closely to the facts" (*Method*, 27f).

⁸¹ Like many scholars today, Lightfoot assumed that a satisfactory interpretation, based on the assumption of authenticity, was sufficient: “Reasonable men will hardly be attracted towards a theory which can only be built on an area prepared by this wide clearance of received documents... If then a fair and reasonable account can be given both of the origin and progress of the Church generally, and of the mutual relations of its more prominent teachers, based on these documents assumed as authentic, a general answer will be supplied to all objections of this class.” (*Galatians* [“St. Paul and the Three”], 294).

Zahn declared as a basic principle that “what is spurious can be tested only with reference to what is acknowledged to be authentic; and if criticism is to obtain any positive results, it must be based upon historical data acknowledged to be trustworthy” (*Introduction*, 155). Since Baur had not challenged the genuineness of Romans, 1 and 2 Corinthians, and Galatians, Zahn's defense of those writings rejected by Baur consisted primarily of detailed comparisons and harmonizations with these supposedly authentic writings.

⁸² *Interpretation*, 338.

⁸³ *Method*, 2f.

⁸⁴ See above, note 78. Horton Harris contends that “all historical criticism is ultimately determined by its dogmatic presuppositions,” and that historical criticism

paradigm, for which questions of authenticity are assumed to have been resolved long ago, how one conceives and exercises historical-criticism doesn't seem to matter. But we cannot take for granted that everyone today means the same thing by historical-critical interpretation, or operates with the same critical perspective when dealing with issues of historical probability. The construction of an alternative paradigm requires rigorous application of a method that is both historical and critical, and historical because it is also critical.

What disturbed those persons who strived to "correct" Baur's construction of early Christian history had to do not with the "Hegelian" assumptions he supposedly imposed, but with his view that from the very beginning and throughout the post-apostolic period this history was characterized by diversity and conflict. The alternative was basically a view of church history which assumed that while Paul may have had certain disagreements with the Jerusalem apostles, it was not a fundamental conflict; that Paul's real opposition arose from a few "Jewish Christians," who soon disappeared from the scene; that there was an apostolic mainstream in early Christianity throughout the first two centuries, and that any conflict that appeared during this period was instigated by "scismatics" who rejected the teachings of the apostolic church. This, of course, is essentially the conception of early church history challenged by Walter Bauer.⁸⁵ And it is understandable, therefore, that defen-

"must be honest and unflinching enough not to push aside the question of the existence of a transcendent personal God" (*The Tübingen School*, 251). And Graham Stanton argues that "the interpreter's prior decision about the possibility or impossibility of miracle is bound to influence his conclusions about the historicity of miracle stories" in the gospels and Acts (*New Testament Interpretation*, I.H. Marshall, ed., 64). Similar arguments were made long ago by Albrecht Ritschl ("Ueber geschichtliche Methode in der Erforschung des Urchristenthums," *JDT* 6 (1861), 429-459), and recently by Peter Stuhlmacher (*Historical Interpretation and Theological Interpretation of Scripture* [Philadelphia: Fortress, 1977]).

For a critical response to such proposals, see Christiaan Hartlich, "Historisch-kritische Methode in ihrer Anwendung auf *Geschehnisaussagen* der Hl. Schrift," *ZThK* 75 (1978), 467-484. The false assumption in such arguments is that the historian can simply decide which historical "causes" are admissible. From a historical perspective (which Harris rightly observes was presupposed by Baur), such causes can only be those which are verifiable by historical-critical investigation; and "theological" or "transcendent" causes do not fall in that category. Even if "theological" or "transcendent" causes are present, and even if the historian believes they are present, they cannot be verified by historical-critical methods, and therefore cannot be regarded as "historical."

⁸⁵ *Orthodoxy and Heresy in Earliest Christianity* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1971; the original German version appeared in 1934). Since the appearance of Bauer's book a multitude of studies have examined his work from a variety of perspectives. The histories of early Christianity in Palestine, Syria, Asia Minor, and Egypt have all

ders of the traditional paradigm quickly associate F.C. Baur with Walter Bauer⁸⁶—and with anyone else who seems to suggest that the history of early Christianity might have been characterized by diversity,⁸⁷ and therefore perhaps also by more competition and conflict than assumed by traditional ecclesiastical conceptions. What F.C. Baur and Walter Bauer basically shared in common, however, was the premise that ancient writings must be read with critical eyes to disclose the history concealed beneath their surface. There is a direct relationship between how we read an ancient text and the resulting conception of early Christian history.

Neither F.C. Baur nor Walter Bauer, however, pursued such criticism to its final consequences. F.C. Baur still assumed the authenticity of Rom, 1 and 2 Cor, and Gal. And working under what by then had become the normative paradigm, Walter Bauer, assumed authenticity for the usual seven Pauline writings, and for Ignatius, 1 Clement, and Polycarp as well, whose genuineness by then was equally indisputable. The only significant exceptions, where the critical task was consistently pursued, were the repre-

been placed under the microscope of scholarly scrutiny by experts in each area. And the discovery of the Nag Hammadi writings have complicated the matter. But Bauer's fundamental insight regarding the significance of Christian diversity in the second century is still valid.

The most extensive attempt to refute Bauer is that by Thomas Robinson, *The Bauer Thesis Examined. The Geography of Heresy in the Early Christian Church* (Lewiston/Queenston: Mellen, 1988). What he demonstrates, however, is only that, in contrast to Bauer, an uncritical reading of the usual "orthodox" sources produces an "orthodox" conception of early Christian history.

⁸⁶ See Robinson, *Ibid.*, 15-18. Robinson observes that "the Bauer Thesis, at its heart, does not seem to share in a substantial way the perspective of the Tübingen school in regard to heresy," but the Tübingen reshaping of our view of the primitive church did "have some impact on Bauer. It would have at least contributed in that it made radical reconstructions of the early church's character acceptable within a circle of scholars" (16). E.E. Ellis observes that Lightfoot's "devastating critique" of Baur "remains instructive today, especially for a generation that 'knew not Joseph' and is attracted to the views of a more recent Bauer" ("Opponents," 273, n. 28).

⁸⁷ From this perspective, Robinson is also critical of Helmut Koester, "the man who stands above all others as one committed to the refinement and advancement of the Bauer Thesis," and who with James Robinson attempted "to supply the Bauer Thesis with first-century support" (*Bauer Thesis*, 26). And he is even disturbed by the work of James Dunn (*Unity and Diversity in the New Testament: An Inquiry into the Character of Earliest Christianity* [Philadelphia: Westminster, 1977]), because "Dunn's minimal common core of the traditions... does not provide a common confession much different from that allowed by the Bauer Thesis, taken at its most extreme" (*Ibid.*, 25, n. 62).

sentatives of “Dutch Radical Criticism”⁸⁸ — such persons as A.D. Loman, Rudolf Steck, D.E.J. Völter, and, in particular, W.C. van Manen, whose views became known in the English-speaking world through his several essays in the *Encyclopaedia Biblica*.⁸⁹ According to van Manen, this “radical criticism”

does not start from the belief that the *non plus ultra* of critical emancipation has been realized by the Tübingen school; but neither does it think that that school went too far. For it, there is nothing *a priori* ‘too far’ in this field; and it believes that criticism is ever duty bound to criticize its own work and repair its own defects. It recognizes no theoretical limit whatsoever that can reasonably be fixed... It wishes nothing better than, *mutatis mutandis*, to continue the research pursued by the Tübingen school, and, standing on the shoulders of Baur and others, and thus presumably with the prospect of seeing clearer and farther, to advance another stage, as long a stage as possible, towards a real knowledge of Christian history.⁹⁰

By this time, however, the normative paradigm was already in place. And as Kuhn observes, “There are always some who cling to one or another of the older views, and they are simply read out of the profession, which thereafter ignores their work.”⁹¹ The construction of a new paradigm will have to take up this work anew.

Searching for a New Paradigm

I do not suggest that the present “normative paradigm” is held in same way and to the same extent by all Pauline scholars today. Individual scholars certainly differ in this regard. But it is not an individual matter. The reference is to the collection of assumptions, historical and methodological, that determines the community of scholarly discourse. If an individual wishes to participate in that community, he or she must conform with the assumptions and expectations of the normative paradigm.⁹²

⁸⁸ For a recent, thorough, and sympathetic survey of Dutch Radical Criticism, see Hermann Detering, *Paulusbriefe ohne Paulus. Die Paulusbriefe in der holländischen Radikalkritik* (Frankfurt/New York/etc.: Lang, 1992; for a previous, somewhat more reserved, survey, see R.J. Knowling, *The Witness of the Epistles: A Study in Modern Criticism* (London: Longmans, 1892).

⁸⁹ *Encyclopaedia Biblica* (New York: Macmillan, 4 Vols., 1899-1903). See in particular van Manen’s articles, “Paul,” Vol. IV, (3603-3620), 3620-3638 (the first part of this article, §§ 4-32, were written by E. Hatch); and “Old-Christian Literature,” *Ibid.*, 3471-3638.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 3622.

⁹¹ *Revolutions*, 19.

⁹² One might think that this presents a problem primarily for so-called “conservative” scholars, who argue perhaps for the authenticity of the Pastoral

These assumptions are not necessarily conscious. We do not think about them very much; they do not become the subject matter for seminars at scholarly meetings, at least not openly. They may be disclosed, however, if we think about the possible contours of an alternative paradigm.

I would begin from the perspective that during the first three or four centuries of the Common Era two new world religions were emerging, Judaism and Christianity. Neither of these religions achieved their "normative" identity until the fourth or fifth century. And at least for Christianity this was an arduous struggle. What finally emerged as "orthodox" Christianity had to establish its identity not only with reference to Judaism, other religions in the Roman world, and the Roman State, but also with reference to a variety of competing movements claiming to be Christian.⁹³ As a necessary part of this religious and historical process, Christians mythologized their beginnings and idealized the history of the struggle, to confirm that the final product was determined by divine will.⁹⁴ This all came together in the *Ecclesiastical History* of Eusebius;⁹⁵ but it began long before Eusebius, and took many forms. This is what religions must do, of course, if they are to survive and flourish. But the task of the historian is to sort this all out, to deconstruct the myths of origin and uncover the historical obscurantism. From our standpoint, it is very much like peering through a dimly lighted tunnel, filled with fog. We cannot know in advance what will emerge when we clear away

epistles, or the historical reliability of Acts. Such views, however, are easily tolerated under the present paradigm. In fact, since the existence of any pseudo-Pauline writings places in question the authenticity of all the writings attribute to Paul, the articulation of such "conservative" views can be perceived as an acceptable endeavor to undergird the present paradigm by the incorporation of still "anomalous" data.

⁹³ Elaine Pagels observes, "Diverse forms of Christianity flourished in the early years of the Christian movement. Hundreds of rival teachers all claimed to teach the 'true doctrine of Christ' and denounced one another as frauds. Christians in churches scattered from Asia Minor to Greece, Jerusalem, and Rome split into factions, arguing over church leadership. All claimed to represent the authentic revelation" (*The Gnostic Gospels* [New York: Random House, 1989], 7).

⁹⁴ See in general, Robert Wilken, *The Myth of Christian Beginnings. History's Impact on Belief* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1972); also Elaine Pagels, *Gnostic Gospels*.

⁹⁵ See Robert Grant, *Eusebius as Church Historian* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1980); Timothy Barnes, *Constantine and Eusebius* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard, 1981); Glenn Chesnut, *The First Christian Histories* (Macon, GA: Mercer, 1986), 33-174.

that fog; but it probably won't be what Christian tradition has always taken for granted.⁹⁶

We have already observed that such a view of early Christian history is neither uncontroversial nor uncontested. It is not my intention here to legitimate this view with historical arguments. But it seems obvious to me that for an alternative paradigm this is how one must begin. For presupposed by the present paradigm—in varying degrees (or perhaps not at all) by individual scholars, but largely unchallenged by the scholarly community—would be 1) that Acts presents a basically reliable source for earliest Christianity history; 2) the letters of Paul are authentic, and were circulated and collected at an early date; 3) writings such as 1 Clement, Ignatius and Polycarp are as early and reliable as Christian tradition has always assumed them to be; 4) such persons as Tertullian and Irenaeus can be relied upon; 5) what Eusebius relates is generally based on good information; 6) an orthodox, and even Pauline, mainstream Christianity existed throughout the first two centuries; 7) and, above all, the methodological principle that the veracity of all these sources should be presumed unless decisive evidence to the contrary can be produced. All this was taken for granted by scholars such as Lightfoot and Zahn, and in the last hundred years has seldom been seriously questioned. All these assumptions interlock to undergird the traditional, ecclesiastical conception of early Christian history in a way that makes redactional proposals for the Pauline writings historically improbable. The construction of a new paradigm must begin with critical suspicion concerning everything we think we know about the history of early Christianity on the basis of such assumptions.

My own impression (no one takes a poll on these matters) is that most New Testament scholars today assume the historical reliability of Acts. It may well be recognized that there is material in Acts that is legendary, or tendentious; but the common

⁹⁶ Bauer's characterization of what was taking place in the second century as a struggle between "orthodoxy" and "heresy" was certainly too simple. Bauer rightly perceived that second century Christianity was marked by diversity and conflict, and that this is obscured by a uncritical reading of the ancient texts. But both "heresy" and "orthodoxy" were more diverse and complex than Bauer portrays them, as were their historical interaction. In addition, it should be obvious by now that I do not accept the view that in the second century, after the Pauline writings were first written and widely circulated, there was a "falling-off in esteem for Paul in orthodox circles" because of his appropriation by "heretics," until he was finally "rediscovered" by the church (cf. Hans von Campenhausen, *The Formation of the Christian Bible* [Philadelphia: Fortress, 1972], 144; also Georg Strecker, "Paulus in der nachpaulinischer Zeit," *Kairos* 12 [1970], 208-216: 214).

assumption seems to be that where such characteristics are not obviously present, or where material does not conflict with the Pauline writings, or, better yet, seems to cohere with what we learn from the Pauline writings, such material may be regarded as historical—or at least as containing a “historical kernel.”⁹⁷ This debate has been going on ever since Baur first rejected the historical reliability of Acts for earliest Christian history, and probably never will be resolved. At this point, one simply has to choose sides. I would emphasize, however, that how one perceives the historical reliability of Acts has significant consequences for our understanding of the Pauline writings (even though they are never mentioned in Acts). For the very purpose of Acts is to locate Paul in a history of early Christianity characterized by the absence of Christian diversity and conflict, which is precisely why those persons who, according to Kümmel, “corrected” Baur’s construction of early Christian history, and his interpretations of the Pauline writings based on this construction, began by affirming the historical reliability of Acts. And this is certainly one reason this continues to be an issue today.

While “critical” scholars may well recognize that individual stories in Acts are “legendary” and “tendentious,” its idealized conception of early Christian history as beginning in Jerusalem, from where it spread to “Judea, Samaria and to the end of the earth” (Acts 1:8) can be essentially reproduced.⁹⁸ And the result is a

⁹⁷ Karl Donfried observes, for example, that Hengel and Jervell “are correct in calling into question the extreme scepticism which has dominated a large part of New Testament scholarship in recent years... There must be (in?) the realism that Acts contains much valuable and accurate information about the Pauline mission even though the writers’ theological tendencies are quite apparent” (“Paul and Judaism: I Thessalonians 2:13-15 as a Test Case,” *Interpretation* 38 (1984), 242-253: 243). One problem here is the assumption that the writer’s tendencies were only “theological.”

An interesting example, however, is Gerd Lüdemann’s endeavor to determine the “historical value” of the traditions presupposed by Acts, which he generally assumes to be “confirmed” by coherence with similar or related information in the writings of Paul (*Early Christianity according to the Traditions in Acts* [Minneapolis: Fortress, 1989], esp., pp. 9-17). Such traditions would have real “historical value,” however, only if they could be shown to be historically reliable and, at the same time, independent of Paul’s letters. But Lüdemann does not address this question; and the import of his arguments becomes unclear. When he concludes, therefore, that “alongside the letters of Paul Acts remains an important source for the history of early Christianity,” since “many of the traditions which it uses are historically reliable and enrich our knowledge of earliest Christianity in addition to the letters of Paul” (*Ibid.*, 17), the reader might well assume that it is not the traditions in Acts that find confirmation, but the writings of Paul.

⁹⁸ This is even true for Helmut Koester’s description of “The Earliest Christian Communities” (*History*, 86-94). Koester begins by observing that the reports in Acts about the early church in Jerusalem “are dominated by legendary and idealizing

basically “linear” and “harmonious” conception of early Christian history that obscures the diversity that most certainly existed from the beginning.⁹⁹ Moreover, the result is an overwhelming “Pauline” view of early Christianity, dominated almost entirely by the missionary adventures of the great “apostle to the Gentiles.” All this, however, belongs to the myth of Christian beginnings. Since thirteen writings in the New Testament are attributed to Paul, and since most of Acts is concerned with Paul and his “missionary journeys,” it is easy to assume this view of Paul and early Christian history is plausible. But this assumption may be entirely false. Leander Keck rightly asks, “Did Paul dominate Christianity in his own time as much as he now dominates the New Testament? Or does Paul’s place in the canon make him loom larger than he actually was?”¹⁰⁰ In his own time Paul’s life and work may have had nothing like the significance it later obtained in the traditions preserved by Acts and by the many writings attributed to him by the church.

Another way in which Acts paradigmatically skews our understanding of early Christian history has to do with the relation-

tendencies” (86). But his portrayal of the development the earliest Christian communities basically replicates the outline of Acts: “The disciples who had fled from Jerusalem returned and established the circle of the Twelve.”(87). The Christian community in Jerusalem “participated in the temple cult, practiced circumcision, and observed Jewish dietary laws” (87). The “Hellenists” appeared on the scene; Stephen was martyred; and Christian churches were founded in Damascus and Antioch, “probably by the Hellenists once they left Jerusalem” (91), who were also responsible, at least in part, for “a number of other Christian churches” that came into existence elsewhere (93). And this portrayal of “the earliest Christian communities” is then followed directly by sections on “the life and ministry of Paul,” and the “Apostolic Council” (97ff).

In spite of even more reservations regarding the legendary character of the accounts in Acts, Hans Conzelmann’s account in his *History of Primitive Christianity* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1973, 32-67, 68-90) is very similar.

⁹⁹ Both Koester and Conzelmann are well aware that such diversity probably existed. Conzelmann affirms that “from the very outset the church was not limited to the city of Jerusalem. The only thing is, we know practically nothing about these communities in Galilee. One can only suspect their existence” (*History*, 33). Koester’s reservations on this matter are difficult to understand. He observes that “Mark 16:7 could be understood as an indication that there were congregations in Galilee that claimed to be founded by appearances of the risen Lord. Luke 6:17 speaks of people who came to Jesus from *Paralios*, i.e., the sea coast with its cities Tyre and Sidon: does this prove the existence of congregations in that area that derived the tradition of their founding from Jesus’ own ministry?” But he leaves this question open. For a more illuminating study of this subject, see Gottfried Schille, *Anfänge der Kirche: Erwägungen zur apostolischen Frühgeschichte* (Munich: Kaiser, 1966). According to Schille, a Christian community in Jerusalem did not even exist in the earliest period.

¹⁰⁰ *Paul*, 5.

ship between Christianity and Judaism. The normative paradigm assumes that the Christian missionary enterprise encountered hostility and persecution by Jews and legalistic Jewish Christians from the very beginning; that the separation between Christianity and Judaism took place very early (the gospel was first preached to Jews, who rejected it, and then to Gentiles, who accepted it), and that any significant Jewish Christianity soon disappeared from the scene.¹⁰¹ These views basically derive from Acts, and must also be seen as the product of Christian obscurantism. If “normative” Christianity and “normative” Judaism did not emerge until at least the fourth century, for a long time prior to this relationships between Judaism and Christianity must have been various and complex.¹⁰² And “Judaizing opponents” must have been regarded as a threat by some Christian communities throughout this period. Everything preserved or related by ecclesiastical traditions regarding relationships between Christians and Jews in the first centuries must be critically evaluated from this perspective, including the writings of the Christian canon.

Early Christian writings such as 1 Clement, Ignatius, and Polycarp have similar paradigmatic significance for our understanding of early Christian history. These writings are appealed to as evidence that an apostolic mainstream existed in early Christianity; that “heresy” was not widespread or significant; that the Pauline writings were circulated, and even collected, very early (and therefore could not have been subjected to interpolations); and that the writings of the great apostle were revered in orthodox Christianity from the very beginning. Even if these writings are authentic, such claims are questionable. But the authenticity of these writings is doubtful.¹⁰³ We are told that

¹⁰¹ Georg Strecker observed (in 1964) that recent treatments early Christian history “have for the most part followed the older pattern of ecclesiastical historiography without contradiction. From the fact that there is only a sparse tradition of Jewish Christian witnesses they incorrectly conclude that Jewish Christianity was actually insignificant, without taking into consideration that our knowledge is determined by the ecclesiastical tradition...” (“On the Problem of Jewish Christianity,” in Bauer, *Orthodoxy and Heresy*, Appendix 1, 241-285: 242).

¹⁰² In addition to the article by Strecker just cited, the significance of Jewish Christianity in the second and third centuries has been recently emphasized by John Gager (*The Origins of Anti-Semitism: Attitudes Toward Judaism in Pagan and Christian Antiquity* [New York: Oxford, 1983]), and Gerd Lüdemann, *Opposition to Paul in Jewish Christianity* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1989).

¹⁰³ Apart from Polycarp (Phil 13.2), there is no explicit reference to the letters of Ignatius prior to Eusebius! And apart from Polycarp, even the name of this supposedly famous martyr is mentioned only in two obscure passages attributed to Origin (see Lightfoot, *The Apostolic Fathers* [Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, reprint

Theodor Zahn proved “conclusively” that the seven (Ignatian) letters of the Middle Recension were the “original letters,”¹⁰⁴ or that after a few textual problems had been explained, it was shown by Zahn and Lightfoot that “all other features of the world of Ignatius were compatible with a date somewhere between (say) 100-118 C.E.”¹⁰⁵ But these are merely paradigmatic affirmations. The arguments presented by Zahn and Lightfoot for the authenticity of these writings are certainly learned and detailed. With regard to their historical assumptions and methodology, however, they do not differ in kind from the arguments they advanced for the authenticity of writings such as 1 Peter and James. Their conclusions must be reexamined from a truly historical-critical perspective.

With regard to the Pauline writings, let me first restate what I have said before: if we believe that the writings of Paul have been “subjected to... editing and alteration,”¹⁰⁶ and therefore “cannot be simply equated with what Paul himself wrote,” but present us with “Paul as he was transmitted by the church,”¹⁰⁷ promoted by “the winners of the ecclesiastical struggle in the second and third centuries,”¹⁰⁸ the “burden of proof” has already shifted. The question now becomes on what basis any material in these writings can be regarded as authentically Pauline. This should follow simply from the fact that inauthentic writings attributed to Paul (and Peter

1989], Part Two, Vol. 1, 144, 348f). Irenaeus knows a tradition that identifies Clement as the third bishop in Rome, and relates also that “in the time of this Clement” a letter was written to the Corinthians by the “Church of Rome” (AH 3.3.3); but he does not identify “this Clement” as the actual writer of the letter. Clement of Alexandria refers to the writer of this letter as “Clement” (Strom 1.7), whom he later identifies as an “apostle” (4.17f); elsewhere he refers to the writing as the “Epistle of the Romans to the Corinthians” (5.12). An explicit identification of Clement, the third bishop of Rome, as the writer of the letter is again found only in Eusebius (EH 3.16).

¹⁰⁴ Koester, *History*, 59. Zahn might have shown that other Ignatian letters circulating in the Middle Ages were pseudepigraphical; but it does not necessarily follow that the remaining seven are authentic, or even identical to those supposedly known to Eusebius.

¹⁰⁵ William Schoedel, *Ignatius of Antioch* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985), 4f). Schoedel admits that not all scholars were satisfied with the conclusions of Zahn and Lightfoot, and that “these conclusions were attacked a number of times in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.” According to Schoedel, however, “the critics... damaged their own cause by the unduly speculative character of much of their work.” This is an accusation commonly made by conservative scholars, the implication being that the consensus view is based on considerations that have nothing to do with “speculation.”

¹⁰⁶ Victor Furnish, in L. Keck and V. Furnish, *The Pauline Letters* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1984), 16.

¹⁰⁷ Keck, *Paul*, 19.

¹⁰⁸ Walker, “Burden of Proof,” 614.

and James and John as well) are known to exist. And from an historical-critical perspective, of course, the “burden of proof” always falls upon one who would maintain the authenticity of an ancient writing. It must be demonstrated that, when read from a critical perspective, an assumption of authenticity provides a better explanation for the information presented, directly and indirectly, by such a writing than alternative explanations. In any case, a new paradigm for Pauline studies must begin with the view (which it seems to me has already been established) that the Pauline writings are redactional compositions, and (from a critical perspective) that these writings may or may not contain authentic Pauline material.

I would suggest that the diversity of materials we encounter in the Pauline writings reflects both the diversity of Christianity in the “post apostolic” period and a relatively long, diverse history of tradition and interpretation. The Pauline polemic against persons vaguely characterized as “workers of evil” (Phil 3:2; 2 Cor 11:13) and “false apostles” (2 Cor 11:13), proclaiming a “different Jesus than we preached” (2 Cor 11:4), or a “gospel contrary to that which you received” (Gal 1:9), could well apply to “enemies of the cross of Christ” (Phil 3:18) wherever they appeared in the first three centuries.¹⁰⁹ The diverse attitudes towards Judaism and the Law in these writings represent an accumulation of traditions, reflecting a variety of relationships between Christianity and Judaism in the early centuries. The diverse “theologies” found here also reflect an extended history of tradition, interpretation, and reinterpretation.¹¹⁰ From this perspective, it is meaningless to talk about “criteria” for distinguishing supposedly “authentic” and “inauthentic” Pauline material. The best we can do, at least to begin with, is distinguish between materials that are “early” and those that are “late.” But even what we might identify as “early” materials will probably be diverse.

The tradition-history presupposed by the Pauline writings should not be conceived as simply a “linear” development. We probably have to do with a variety of “Pauline” traditions, reflecting different Pauline “trajectories” (or “schools”). Even in a single writing such traditions may be interwoven or juxtaposed in various ways. We might distinguish, for example, between “gnostic”

¹⁰⁹ See my article “Citizens of Heaven. Philippians 3.2-21,” forthcoming in *NTS*.

¹¹⁰ Many Pauline traditions may have their home in northern Syria. But I cannot imagine that the diverse and multi-layered conglomeration of traditions and interpretations in the Pauline writings was merely the product of a few years work by the “Christ cult” in Antioch (cf. Mack, *Myth of Innocence*, 98-123).

and “apocalyptic” traditions; traditions that focus, in various ways, on the cross as a saving event, and those that focus on the resurrection; traditions that emphasize the apostleship of Paul and those that know nothing about this; Gentile Pauline traditions and Jewish Pauline traditions; “heterodox” and “orthodox” traditions. We should consider whether, in some cases, the supposed “opponents” might not themselves represent some form of Pauline Christianity. In any case, the most productive assumption is that the Pauline writings in their present form reflect neither the work of a single person, nor the product of a final editor, but the complex religious history of “Pauline Christianity.” The task is not to harmonize the diversity in these writings by the discovery of some “coherent center,” but, at least to begin with, to identify and sort out the various traditions and histories of tradition we encounter here.

This undertaking should include historical- and tradition-critical evaluation of everything we can learn about Pauline Christianity from the writings and traditions of early Christianity, canonical and extra-canonical: the Pastoral epistles; the supposedly “apocryphal” *Acts of Paul* (and other apostles); gnostic writings; Marcionism and Montanism; the Clementine writings; and, to be sure, Polycarp, Tertullian, Irenaeus, and even traditions related by Eusebius. We should attempt to associate what we find in the canonical Pauline writings with similar religious-historical traditions, practices, and social settings in the Roman world. But we will no longer be limited by the assumption that these writings are early. If mythologoumena from gnosticism or mystery religions seem to be present, for example, their significance can be explored without the reservation that such movements only obtained real importance in the second century. The same would be true for teachings concerning Christian life and conduct: exhortations concerning suffering and persecution; asceticism and celibacy; worship and sacraments; the conduct of Christian apostles; and relations with governing authorities. But none of this can be accomplished simply on the basis of what we think we already know about the history of early Christianity. A new understanding of the Pauline writings requires a more critical and more complex understanding of early Christian history, and vice versa.

A normative paradigm determines what the “world” is like, how we perceive our world, what we “see” and do not “see,” or in our case, how we perceive the Pauline writings. Given the present paradigm, we perceive the significance of what we encounter in

these writings in one way; given a different paradigm, we perceive this in an entirely different way, not just a verse or passage here and there, but everything in these writings. Scholars can certainly differ about even important matters, and always will. When such differences, however, derive from different methodological and paradigmatic assumptions, there is no reason to believe that the continued repetition of old arguments, or even new arguments not yet imagined, will resolve such matters. The present normative paradigm consists of an interlocking network of historical and methodological assumptions which support the presumption of authenticity and literary unity for the Pauline writings, and thus render alternative views historically and methodologically unlikely. Those scholars who see things differently, and desire to pursue what they see, must begin working with a new paradigm.