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Paul and the Origins of Christianity

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Respecting St Paul . . . I hold him to have been the first great corrupter of Christianity.

J. S. Mill¹

Saint Paul was wrong about sex.

Bishop James Pike²

Although Bishop Pike may be right about sex and about Paul, Mill, conversely, is very much in error about Christianity and about Paul. While Paul certainly had a greater influence on the development of Christianity than did Jesus, he did not corrupt Christianity. Rather, he served unwittingly to create a new religion which would develop into Christianity from a zealous sect of Judaism whose Messianic message he claimed to represent.

Paul accomplished this feat by successfully opening the doors of Judaism to the Gentiles and preaching his amalgamated gospel of salvation which he had developed much to the dismay of the leaders of the Jewish sect. The result of this in the political climate existing after Paul's death was that the original Jewish sect died out while Paul's message flourished between A.D. 75 and 150.³

Schonfield says of the original Nazorean sect, "We would not think of as particularly Christian a movement which had no trinitarian doctrine, which accepted Jesus as the Messiah descended from David, but did not ascribe to him deity or even divinity, and held him simply to have been a man sent and endowed by God. Neither would one regard as Christian in any orthodox sense a community which was zealous for the law of Moses, practiced circumcision, worshiped in temple and synagogue and was animated by expectations of Israel's national

¹ J.S. Mill, letter to William George Ward (1849), *The Collected Works of John Stuart Mill, Volume XIV - The Later Letters of John Stuart Mill 1849-1873 Part I*, ed. Francis E. Mineka and Dwight N. Lindley (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1972) #15.

² N. Maggeridge, A., Vidler, *Paul: Envoy Extraordinary* (San Francisco, 1972), p. 13.

³ H.J. Schonfield, *The Jesus Party* (New York, 1974), p. 13.

deliverance. Yet this was actually the position of the apostles themselves and those who joined them. We would only say that we have here an undoubted Jewish sect which acknowledged Jesus as Messiah from which Christianity derived certain of its beliefs and practices.”⁴

Paul's influence on Christianity can be seen in all the great moments and revolutions in the Christian church's history when Paul's gospel came to light. In his book Paul, Burnkamm observes the profound impact his thinking has exerted over the centuries: “One cannot conceive of Augustine's theology apart from his rediscovery of Paul, and the same is particularly true of the breakthrough to new insights on the part of Luther and Calvin of the Reformation and centuries later, of John Wesley's movement in England.”⁵

To understand how Paul could exert such a tremendous influence on the development of the early Church and consequently in later centuries also, scholars insist that we consider the historical context in which the work of Jesus and Paul and the writing of the gospels occurred.

Religiously and philosophically, the late classical world was in a profound state of confusion and the Jewish faith became attractive as the myths about the gods no longer satisfied one's need for protection, blessing, salvation and redemption in this world and the next. Additionally, the syncretizing of old religions with new ones was ubiquitous.⁶ The influence of eastern religions and mystery cults with doctrines of eternal salvation and deliverance are related to the Jewish Messianic fervor and belief that the first century A.D. was the Last Times. Schonfield describes why this is the case:

Part of the answer lies far back in the period when Palestine was under Persian rule, and came strongly under the influence of Iranian-Babylonian religious thought. The concept of a Cosmic Drama came to the fore, in which through a succession of Ages the forces of Light and Darkness were contending with each other with varying success and

⁴ Id., p. 110.

⁵ G. Burnkamm, *Paul* (New York, 1971), p. xxvii.

⁶ Id., p.7.

which looked to a final Age in which Light would ultimately triumph. While Judaism could not embrace a dualistic concept of Deity, the idea of the Drama fired prophetic imagination, and fitted in well with Jewish hopes of an era in which Israel would be redeemed and the world under God would live in peace and justice... The greater sufferings of the Jews, and heathen pressure upon them to forsake their ancestral faith, the more evident it became that the forces of Evil were exerting themselves to gain victory.

The Drama must therefore be approaching its climax; and it behooved the faithful to intensify resistance by unanswering loyalty to God and His law, accepting persecution and isolation as the price to be paid for winning through to a share in the bliss of the Age to Come which clearly could not be very much longer delayed.⁷

Furthermore, the political situation involving the Roman occupation and the revolutionary tendencies of the Jewish people, particularly those associated with Messianic movements, cannot be given too much attention. More on this will be considered later.

One product of this combination of mystical and political turmoil was the rise of the zealots⁸ who tried to enforce strict adherence to the law. Paul, who came from a strict Jewish family living in the Diaspora may have had a different background in this regard, however.⁹ Burnkamm writes, "The Diaspora synagogue's mission was fairly liberal in its principles, being satisfied if the 'God-fearers' drawn from the heathen into adherence to the Jewish community pledged themselves to confess belief in the one God and to observe a minimum of ritual commandments (Sabbath observance, the dietary laws, etc.) and the basic ethical commandments of the law. No demands were made for circumcision - not all were required to become 'proselytes,' full members of the Jewish people... This shows us that even with the Jewish mission to the Gentiles there were two conflicting schools of thought on circumcision, the one originating in Diaspora and the other in Jerusalem."¹⁰

This strict adherence to ritual and ethical commandments is why the Nazoreans (the Jewish sect which proclaimed Jesus as Messiah and expounded the novel idea that the Messiah would

⁷ Schonfield, *The Jesus Party*, p. 7.

⁸ Described in detail in Brandon's *Jesus and the Zealots*. (S.G.F. Brandon, *Jesus and the Zealots* (New York, 1968).

⁹ Burnkamm, *Paul*, p. 3.

¹⁰ Id., at p. 16.

return from the dead) regarded the Gentile God-fearers who accepted Jesus as unable to be deemed Israelites unless they took on all the responsibilities of a member of the House of Israel. It later became a major issue for the Nazoreans when Paul challenged this understanding.¹¹

Into this milieu entered Paul. Saul (later using the Latin “Paul”), curiously enough, originally took a major role in hostile persecution of a section of the Nazoreans. Schonfield describes him as “in a state of blind rage bordering on insanity, ready and eager to take part in a wild attack of young bloods on the houses of Hellenists, known to be Nazareans or sympathizers.”¹² Whether this was the result of his religious zeal in persecuting blasphemers or jealousy from stumped Messianic ambitions of his own, he does not mention it (Gal. 1. 13) although it has been doubted that Luke has represented the circumstances genuinely.¹³

Many kinds of illness have been suggested in efforts to explain Paul's behavior and what he says incidentally in his letters which indicates that he had some serious sort of physical trouble or disability which gave him splitting headaches and affected his sight and speech. His temperament can be described in terms of a manic-depressive.¹⁴ Schonfield notes that “it has been suggested that . . . he was a victim of the falling sickness, an epileptic. This would be consistent with his character, abilities and mysticism. It is clear that he had grandiose ideas related to the conviction that he had been chosen of God for an exalted mission, and anxious to establish his worthiness, he plunged in excess into recondite spiritual studies, outstripping many of his contemporaries.”¹⁵

According to Schonfield, Ebionite and Mandaean traditions speak of a mass migration to seek asylum in the area of Damascus. “It may be assumed that Saul's aim in setting out for Damascus was to pursue this body of devotees and apprehend as many as possible before they became dispersed. This would be more profitable than [sic] chasing all over the country for

¹¹ Schonfield, *The Jesus Party*, p. 155.

¹² Id. at p. 122.

¹³ Id.

¹⁴ Maggeridge, p. 73.

¹⁵ H.J. Schonfield, *Those Incredible Christians* (New York, 1968), p. 73.

scattered individuals.”¹⁶

At any rate, on the road to Damascus, perhaps in pursuit of fleeing Nazoreans, he claimed to have had some sort of fit in which he saw a vision of Jesus resulting, after a period of retreat to think through his insights, in his attempting to take up the message of the Nazoreans. The question will arise, however, of whether by joining the Nazorean movement and so changing its message he did it less violence as a persecutor than he did as an adherent.¹⁷

Paul began preaching the message in the synagogues and was contacted later by Barnabas. Antioch, the official seat of the Roman legate of Syria, marked the first considerable adherence of Gentiles to the Messianic cause. The incident of Caligula's statue, the deliverance of Petronius and the salvation of the Jews must have contributed to the “multitudes of Greeks” Josephus describes being attracted to Jewish religious ceremonies. Barnabas noted the need for a teacher from a Greek environment of high intellectual standing and thought embodied by Paul. He sought him out in Tarsus and for a year the two of them worked closely at Antioch. It was at Antioch that the term Christiani was coined in Gratin (mixed Greek and Latin).¹⁸

Two problems confronted Paul in his profession of faith which resulted in his discipleship starting under a cloud of suspicion which would darken in the development of his later activities. First, he had been unmercifully persecuting the Nazoreans as an agent of the Roman-appointed Priesthood, which had condemned the Messiah. Second, he was of such a different type and calibre that his association was an acute embarrassment.¹⁹ Nevertheless, with Barnabas vouchsafing his veracity (Acts ix 26-30), according to Luke (although Paul's account differs),²⁰ Paul persevered in his preaching.

¹⁶ Schonfield, *The Jesus Party*, p. 137.

¹⁷ A.P. Davies, *The First Christian* (New York, 1957), p. 154.

¹⁸ Schonfield, *The Jesus Party*, p. 154.

¹⁹ Schonfield, *Those Incredible Christians*, p.60.

²⁰ Schonfield, *The Jesus Party*, p. 118.

The Message was first given out “in the synagogues of the Jews” (Acts xiii 5) and the Nazoreans had no design to proclaim the Messiahship of Jesus to other than Jews. But in Paphos, in Cyprus the word by official request was proclaimed in the presence of the Roman proconsul Sergius Paullus:

Thereafter, in the progress of the tour, Jesus as the Christ was announced to both Jewish and Gentile audiences, from this time Saul used the Roman name of Paul. What had happened at Paphos evidently shocked John Mark. To preach about Jesus to Rome's representatives was casting pearls before swine... To be an instrument for enlightening the Gentiles had been one of Paul's great dreams... from this moment he assumed leadership of the expedition and Barnabas fell into second place.²¹

The problem with this, which will manifest itself shortly, is described by Schweitzer. He says, “In themselves the vision of Christ, and the law, have nothing to do with one another. What Paul received in that moment was the conviction of the Messiahship of Jesus. While other believers were content to simply adopt this conviction, he proceeds to draw from it in some way or other the conclusion that the law was henceforth invalidated. Whether he did that at the moment or only later, we do not know. What is certain is only that he does draw this conclusion, though it is not contemplated either in the thoughts of Jesus or in those of the primitive community.”²² The original Jewish Christians, the Nazoreans, regardless of how they interpreted the death of Jesus, did not change in their belief that the covenanted means for atonement was prescribed in the Torah and practiced in the sacrificial cultus of the Temple.²³

Schweitzer later goes on to relate that the only justification Paul finds for this view is the unusual state of the world between the death and Parousia of Christ. Because of this, Gentiles are now entitled to share in the privileges of Israel without taking upon them the law and circumcision. Schweitzer maintains that Paul meant that the Gentiles “...merely do not need to do so - they must not do so, on path of losing their salvation.” He goes on to say, “What Jesus thought

²¹ Id. at p. 169.

²² A. Schweitzer, Paul and His Interpreters, (New York, 1956), p. 246.

²³ S.G..F. Brandon, p. 157.

about the matter is just as indifferent to him as His opinion regarding the legitimacy of preaching to the Gentiles.”²⁴ So it was that, according to Paul, the only thing differentiating the Gentile from the Jew in being heirs to the promises God had made to His people, was that the Gentile did change his religion.²⁵ The policy of the Nazoreans included no place for the evangelization of the Gentiles. This is attributed to some of the followers of Stephen, who first began “preaching the Lord Jesus” to the Gentiles of Antioch. Stephen and his movement were an aberration from the original form of the faith. This distinction was quite apparent to the Jewish authorities who suppressed Stephen.²⁶

Paul's account of the Nazorean reaction to his preaching to Gentiles relates that after Peter had come to Antioch and had made no difficulty about accepting the converts from the Gentiles as brethren and had eaten with Gentiles then “certain men came from James.” The news from Antioch at this particular time in Judea precipitated “an outburst of zealous anger” according to Schonfield. If the conditions had not been this unusual, the outburst might not have been so strong, but prompt action was necessitated to counteract a betrayal which potentially might discredit the Nazoreans and the cause of the Messiah. So it was that commissioners were sent to Antioch.²⁷ When they arrived, Peter became intimidated and withdrew from the combined Gentile Jewish fellowship. Barnabas did likewise and the rest of the Jews followed suit. Davies says that, “Paul saw at once that this meant a division of the Jewish and Gentile believers which might never be healed.”²⁸ The Acts omits this episode with Peter and makes no mention of his presence at Antioch.²⁹

The Commission summoned Paul and Barnabas to appear before the highest Nazorean court, leaving them no option other than to obey. In his letter to the Galatians, Paul makes a virtue

²⁴ Schweitzer, p. 246.

²⁵ Schonfield, *Those Incredible Christians*, pp. 52-53.

²⁶ Brandon, p. 157.

²⁷ Schonfield, *The Jesus Party*, p. 180.

²⁸ A.P. Davies, p. 48.

²⁹ Schonfield, *Those Incredible Christians*, p. 64.

of a necessity - "I went up to Jerusalem by a revelation and reported to them the terms of the gospel I preach to the Gentiles." They did not dispute the admittance of Gentiles into the family of Israel, but pointed out that this required adherence to the law and circumcision.³⁰

"How then," Burnkamm asks, ". . . was it possible for the retention or abandonment of this immaterial ancient rite [of circumcision], not even maintained by the liberal, Hellenistic Jews of the Diaspora, to have acted as the catalyst in the battle in the Christian church about gospel and faith?" The answer, he says, is that circumcision for strict Jews was the "indispensable sign of the Covenant which God made long ago with Abraham for his descendants and which assured the Jews that they belonged to the true chosen people."³¹ Paul, even when he was not yet free to proclaim his whole gospel, stressed salvation by faith in the Messiah Jesus and illustrated this with the story of Abraham who believed in the one God before the Mosaic Law and circumcision. His circumcision was an evidence of his faith. His posterity which would inherit the earth, according to Paul, was not his physical descendants, but all who had faith in God's Messiah. For most Judaic believers, this was too much. God still held a special province for the Jews and another for Gentiles.³²

Schonfield summarizes what happened after the Commission came to Antioch and summoned Paul and Barnabas to appear:

Only one side of the story is given in the New Testament, and this in two versions, that of Paul in his letters to the Galatians and that of Luke in the Acts, which differ so much that some have thought they cannot have been referring to the same events. What they represent, however, is different angles written with distinct aims in view . . .

. . . The author of the Acts, of course, is intent on building up Paul as the architect and pioneer of the new Hellenic Christianity which was developing in the last quarter of the first century A.D. Consequently, he is concerned to tone down the bitterness of the conflict with the parent body and convey that the issue was resolved in a manner which

³⁰ Id. at p. 65.

³¹ Burnkamm, p. 34.

³² A.P. Davies, p. 215.

endorsed Paul's championship of the rights of Gentile believers. Paul . . . waves aside all the opposition to his position and claims that he accepted nothing compromising to the stand he had taken. But the tradition of the strict Jewish followers of Jesus will have none of this. Peter was rescued from any suggestion of laxity, and Paul was held to be the great apostate who had done the cause of the Messiah much harm, and his name and memory were reviled and execrated for centuries.

. . . What was insisted upon by the Commission from Jacob [James] was that only those believing Gentiles who became full proselytes to Judaism qualified for membership of the House of Israel.

Paul was deeply incensed at what he termed the hypocrisy of his eminent colleagues, which made a mockery of his gospel. If what he had taught was not true his converts were still aliens. . . . The issue had to be decided officially, and a ruling therefore had to be obtained at governmental level in Jerusalem. . . . Unless he could gain the support of the Big Three (Jacob, Peter and John) he would not stand a chance. And once a verdict had been given against him a split would be inevitable. And what then would become of his mission? Paul was no schismatic: the cause he championed demanded a unity of the Nazorean body politic as the Israel of God with Jerusalem as its organic and spiritual center.

The issue was really settled out of court . . . what was being proposed was in line with Jewish practice . . . Gentile believers in Jesus were to be treated as non-Jewish associates, resident aliens of the Messianic community, subject only to the laws of Noah.

It was Jacob who laid down the terms on which agreement was practicable. Paul's status as an envoy would be officially endorsed only on condition that he confine his activities exclusively to Gentiles, when the question of persuading Jews to forsake the law would not arise.

If the Acts is to be believed, Paul himself broke the compact by continuing to preach in the Jewish synagogues everywhere he went on subsequent journeys. Equally, those who were envoys to the Jews of the Diaspora did not scruple to interfere in Paul's affairs, visiting his communities to undermine his authority and induce his converts to become full proselytes to Judaism.³³

To Paul's dismay, his peculiar teaching left him unwittingly responsible for a shocking state of affairs in the communities he had founded. They often degenerated into communities of wastrels, served as revolutionary breeding-grounds, and were extremely corrupt and earthly. Schonfield blames this on Paul's mistakenly viewing the Gentiles as being similar in character to

³³ Schonfield, *Those Incredible Christians*, p. 180-181.

himself with his strict Jewish morality and principles and Pharisee upbringing. Schonfield goes on to note that, "Before long the Christians of the Empire were getting a bad name, and became more readily distinguishable from the Jews by their behaviour, as well as by their special customs and organization. This did not apply of course to the stricter Nazoreans, who were predominantly Jewish and were as devoted to the laws of Moses every bit as zealously as other eclectic groups in Israel."³⁴

At any rate, the problem the Nazorean leaders had in dealing with Paul was that they could not repudiate that the Holy Spirit had come on Gentiles as well as Jews. Paul then went on to claim that on the basis of faith in Christ alone the believing Gentiles should be included in the House of Israel. His illustration of Abraham whose faith without the act of circumcision is rewarded as described above is used to support this view. James responds to this view in a letter to Paul saying, "Can you not realize, you dunce, that faith without deeds is unproductive? Was not our father Abraham vindicated by his deeds...?"³⁵

The verdict reached was a compromise and Gentile believers would be granted a status equal to that which Abraham had before he entered into the covenant. It would not be insisted upon that Gentiles should become Jews, but neither was Paul's contention that they were to be regarded as Israelites allowed.³⁶ Paul was fortunate in obtaining this verdict and would have fared very differently if the zealots had had their way.³⁷ The stand of the Jerusalem church freed Paul's gospel from limitations imposed by Judaism for their own missionary work, but by virtue of this, also for the mission to the Gentiles, since the Jewish view of salvation as law, saving history, and chosen people, was henceforth broken down.³⁸

In his later missions Paul preaches his full gospel of salvation through his crucified,

³⁴ Id., at p.51.

³⁵ Id., at p.66.

³⁶ Id., at p. 70.

³⁷ Id. at p. 83.

³⁸ Burnkamm at p. 39.

resurrected saviour, Jesus Christ, whose gnosis was imparted to him by revelation and with whom believers are united through faith in one body and the Sacraments.³⁹ But Paul finds he is fighting a losing battle and is eventually driven to desperate measures by the Nazoreans who invaded his communities to urge his converts to become full Jews and belittled Paul as being unqualified since he had not known or been appointed by Jesus. Although Paul had been warned that if he went to Jerusalem, bonds and imprisonment awaited him, he was compelled to seek relief from harassment by appeal to the Nazorean leadership.⁴⁰

Paul went to Jerusalem carrying a collection which most likely was intended represent the Nazorean church as founded from Jews and Gentiles of equal status as members and to legitimize the gospel without the law. Both the his life and death are fatefully linked with this concern.⁴¹

In Jerusalem Paul's collection is accepted and James has him perform purification rights to demonstrate his zeal, to which he submits. But as he is performing this ritual he is recognized and attacked by a mob. A Roman sentry intervenes and would have turned him over for arrest and trial by the Sanhedrin, but Paul invokes his rights as a Roman citizen and appeals to Caesar. But Paul's presence was not taken very well by the Nazoreans of Rome, either when he arrived there, even though Luke would suggest differently. So Paul turns his attention to the Gentiles while he waited in prison. The Nazoreans of Rome, in response to Paul's evangelical zeal and heterodox teaching, became more active to combat this influence. Schonfield says, "The effect was to bring the followers of Jesus more prominently to public and official attention which probably contributed to sealing Paul's fate and brought terrible suffering on the whole community."⁴²

Paul apparently meets his end, according to a late tradition, by beheading not far from the Ostian way. It may have been the miserable state of affairs in Judea which resulted in Nero

³⁹ Davies, p. 229.

⁴⁰ Schonfield, *The Jesus Party*, p. 205.

⁴¹ Burnkamm at p. 41,

⁴² Schonfield, *The Jesus Party*, p. 226.

replacing Albinus with Cessius Flores and determined that Paul should die as a seditionist.⁴³ Even before Paul's death the Nazorean emissaries defeated Paulinism over a wide area and many of Paul's converts were won over by their convincing logic to become full proselytes to be assured of a share in the Messianic Age.⁴⁴

In his lifetime, his opponents regarded him as acting without legitimation and as a perverter of the Nazorean message, and he was rejected as antagonistic to Peter and James, the Messiah's brother. He was ranked with Simon Magus, chief of the heretics. The Gnostics and sect leaders in particular Marcion, were the ones who claimed him, making him all the more suspect.⁴⁵ The communities he had founded seemed to have almost forgotten him until decades later when the rediscovery of his letters in the light of the publication of Luke-Acts, which would bring him his greatest triumphs.⁴⁶

Paul provides the only information in the New Testament on the beliefs of the Nazorean movement to which Jesus had appointed the Apostles.⁴⁷ Christianity is indebted to the Nazoreans; for without the information on Jesus which they passed on, the Church would know almost nothing of Jesus' career and teaching from the letters of Paul.⁴⁸ There was nothing known by the original apostles about Jesus which mandated the creation of a new religion.⁴⁹ But Paulinism conflicts with the Nazorean school and eventually displaces it due to its greater appeal to the Gentiles and political conditions which did not allow the Nazorean church to control Paulinism and, in fact, which eventually resulted in the Nazorean school being outlawed as heretical.⁵⁰

"The Pauline version of Christianity," writes Schonfield, "did in fact lay the foundations of a new religion in many respects alien to that of Jesus and his Apostles. Christian scholars who

⁴³ Id., p. 228.

⁴⁴ Schonfield, *Those Incredible Christians*, p. 58.

⁴⁵ Burnkamm, at p. 229.

⁴⁶ Davies, at p. 244.

⁴⁷ Schweitzer, at p. 238.

⁴⁸ Schonfield, *The Jesus Party*, p. 240.

⁴⁹ Id. at p. 13.

⁵⁰ Schonfield, *Those Incredible Christians*, p. 56.

reached this conclusion in the nineteenth century were in the right, but because the Church ultimately built its teaching on Paulinism in its development outside Palestine, it was difficult at any period to make this clear. Theologically, the Church is still compelled to take its stand on the judgement that Paul had the true light and to consider Jesus in terms of his Christology.”⁵¹ But, in spite of Paul's courageous and desperate fight, Paul's message did not prevail as long as the Nazorean Church existed to challenge it.⁵²

Later, circumstances would - as a result of the disastrous Jewish revolt - become much more favorable to Pauline doctrine both in regard to political acceptability and diminished antagonisms. There are several reasons for this: Paul had been a Roman citizen, he had favored a mystical soteriology in substitution for the Mosaic law, he had taken a non-political viewpoint and had advocated recognition of Roman hegemony and obedience to its officials and mandates, and, finally, the Jerusalem church was wiped out in the war.

The community in Rome in A.D. 64 was implicated in the Great Fire and was largely destroyed and its members barbarously put to death. Paul and Peter both perished about this time. Then the Jewish revolt to win independence from Roman rule ended with the martyrdom at Masada, the destruction of Jerusalem, and the Temple and the withering implication this had in terms of the Messianic Hope.⁵³ Later, the anti-semitism which permeated Christendom would see in the Roman destruction of Jerusalem God's punishment of those who slew his son.⁵⁴

The effect that the war had on the Nazorean movement was catastrophic. Schonfiel states, “...we may fairly hold that a high percentage of the Nazoreans of Palestine perished in the war... so if Jesus was crucified under Pontius Pilate... before A.D. 37, very few who had seen and heard him can have been alive forty years later. The war created a gap only tenuously bridgeable in early

⁵¹ Id. at p. 56

⁵² Id. at p. 89.

⁵³ Id. at p. 121.

⁵⁴ Brandon, at p. 16.

Christian history.”⁵⁵

The Jerusalem Church disappeared and its records with it. No document survived that can be identified with certainty as originating from that primitive community of disciples.⁵⁶ Before 70 A.D., as the writings of Acts attest, it was the unchallenged authority for Christianity. If it had moved after the destruction of Jerusalem its power and prestige would have continued and would be evident in the records of the Sub-apostolic Ages.⁵⁷ So it was that the Nazorean Church was deprived of authoritative leadership and its members were left dispersed, if alive, and the Church was additionally faced with a totally different and highly uncertain set of conditions in the post-war 70 A.D. Environment. The result was that Jewish members readily joined gentile converts in trying to convince the Romans that their Messiah was different from the Zealot Messiahs who had caused the war and were still making trouble. Consequently, Jews who remained Jews were victimized far more by the Romans than those who joined the movement.⁵⁸

Judaism, facing a bleak future, concerned itself with solidarity and vigorously attacked the belief in the Risen Jesus. The Gentile believers, meanwhile, were claiming to be the true Judaism and accused those of Jewish ancestry of rejecting their Messiah. They had also borrowed the Greek translation of the Septuagint to prove their case.⁵⁹ Davies describes this, “For a long time it was the Old Testament that was the Christian Bible. It was to this Jewish Bible which Christians had taken as their own, that believers went in search of “proof texts” of the mission and significance of Jesus as Messiah and Lord. This was the evidence that was then regarded as conclusive: Jesus was found (in ways that would astonish modern readers unfamiliar with this ancient practice) to have fulfilled the inspired prophecies. The literature which eventually became what we know as the New

⁵⁵ Schonfield, *The Passover Plot* (New York, 1977) p. 187.

⁵⁶ Brandon, at p. 57.

⁵⁷ Id. at p. 214.

⁵⁸ M.Harris, *Cows, Pigs, Wars and Witches* (New York, 1974) p. 175. Harris also notes that “The age of full scale imperial persecution of Christians did not begin with Nero, but much later – after 150 A.D. . . . The Christian churches had once again become a political threat to Roman law and order.”

⁵⁹ Davies, at p. 62.

Testament was at first regarded as quite secondary.”⁶⁰

The Church in Rome, meanwhile, deprived of authoritative guidance from Jerusalem and perhaps even fearful of it in view of Roman hostility to political Messianism, considered itself called upon in the post-war period to exercise special responsibilities. This would gradually, through the use of propaganda and undermining of the legitimate apostolic authority of the Nazorean Church, lead to the assumption of Christian leadership.⁶¹ It was found expedient to repudiate militant Messianism to placate the government and Paul's gospel which had previously been attacked and largely rejected was now divorced from Judaism and found tremendous support. At this time, the writings of Paul were the chief available Christian documents and, in due course, these were widely circulated and studied and became the first assembly of Christian literature received as Scripture. Before long, Paul was the hero of post-war Christianity in the West.⁶²

One major reason for Paul's enduring influence is opportunistic as described by Brandon, who relates “. . . if the record of Acts is to be trusted, when Paul came to Rome, the Jewish community there spoke as though they had no first-hand knowledge of Christianity, and the impression is given that Paul began to form a community there, presumably of Gentiles. If this were so, then it would be reasonable to suppose that Paul's 'gospel' formed the faith of this newly established church, so that his interpretation of the Crucifixion as the divinely planned means of mankind's salvation was current there; and this interpretation . . . paid scant regard to the historical circumstances of Jesus' death.”⁶³

Since Judaism was still legally recognized as a religion in the Roman Empire, and Christianity was not, it was advantageous to have it regarded as a branch of Judaism, or better yet, as the true Judaism, while at the same time disparaging orthodox Jews to make them seem like

⁶⁰ Id. at p. 60.

⁶¹ Schonfield, *Those Incredible Christians*, p. 119.

⁶² Id. at p. 122.

⁶³ Brandon, at p. 246.

renegades or at least troublemakers.⁶⁴ The Roman church had good reason to focus attention on disparaging and discrediting the Nazoreans, Schonfield notes, “for one thing it was fatal to the doctrine of the death of Jesus that his own Apostles and the Christian members of his family had held that he was no more than man, and had been annointed by the Spirit of God at his baptism, thus becoming the Messiah (the Christ). The true apostolic tradition had to be fiercely denied and controverted; but in the late second century when a movement arose urging the Church to return to what came to be called the Adoptionist view, that Christ had been received into sonship of God when he was baptized in terms of Psalm 11 6-7, its advocates could still point out that this view had been held 'by all the first Christians and by the Apostles themselves.' The evidence available establishes that they were right.”⁶⁵

In keeping with the increasing divergence, it was also expedient to assert a claim to a higher mandate, that of the continuing voice of Jesus speaking from heaven. Paul figures in here since he had been the first to establish an independent authority based on his receiving special revelations from Christ through the Holy Spirit. Building on the Pauline foundation, the Roman church made guidance by the Holy Spirit the primary source of Christian authority. Consequently, any doctrine the church found desirable to proclaim as Catholic Truth could be attributed to this guidance, even when no warrant could be found for it in the New Testament.⁶⁶

The Nazoreans were the only potential source of a condemning rebuttal to the Roman Christianity, but when a counterblast did come, it was too late. The Nazoreans were hounded by the Romans as potential or actual rebels. Rabbinical Judaism concerned, as mentioned above, with toning down apocalyptic and Messianic enthusiasm so as to get the Jewish people to settle down and avoid Roman reprisal, regarded the Nazoreans as a menace. Gentile Christians, of course, taking the exasperating stance of representing the true Judaism looked at them askance on account

⁶⁴ Davies, at p. 85.

⁶⁵ Schonfield, *Those Incredible Christians*, at p. 117.

⁶⁶ Id.

of their adhering to Jewish observances and Jewish nationalism.⁶⁷ For these reasons, the Nazorean arguments - lacking the influence they had entertained prior to being deprived by circumstances of those intimately associated with Jesus - could not keep Paul's contentions from being regarded as divinely inspired. The consequences were that the Church, as Schonfield points out, would become "involved down the centuries in conflicts and schisms, enmity, persecution and bloodshed, as Christians wrestled with the implications and interpretations of Pauline doctrines, the nature of Christ, revelation by the Holy Spirit, adoption, predestination and justification by faith - doctrines which could never be rightly understood without knowledge of Paul's background and training."⁶⁸

Schonfield feels that it is unjust to regard Paul as wholly responsible for the character of Christian theology after his death. He remarks that "for all his hellenistic associations he remained consistently a Jew, a Jew of a mystical type, who was impatient of all criticism of doctrine which he believed he had received by a Divine revelation peculiarly vouchsafed to himself. A Jewish occultist could understand him much more readily than his non-Jewish adherents could and did. They misinterpreted elements of his recondite philosophy and arrived at conclusions alien to his meaning and intentions."⁶⁹

So it can be seen how the Roman Church with its advantageous position at the center of the Empire was able to rise to power in the vacuum of church authority after the disastrous Jewish revolt. But, the question of how they were able to make the Pauline gospel figure in so prominently comes to the fore. As was noted, skillful propaganda and also forgery played a significant role in building up the Pauline framework of the gentilized early Roman Catholic Church. As Burnkamm notes, "In the ancient world a narrator had much more free play in the matter of literary art, and precisely as a historian he made use of particular ways of presenting his subject which are not at the disposal of the present-day historian. His contribution consisted not only in transmitting the tradition, but in reproducing it in such a way as to make things vivid and

⁶⁷ Id. at 149.

⁶⁸ Id. at 89.

⁶⁹ Id. at 56.

meaningful.”⁷⁰

Rome had the advantage of being associated with two renowned Apostolic figures, Peter and Paul, who represented conflicting views in the raging dispute of the pre-war Church. So in reading the Acts one must be aware of the author's aims. In passages relating to the Jewish following of Jesus, he was trying to modify the cleavage and to placate Roman authorities. Consequently, little more is related about the Judean believers than is necessary to illustrate the conversion and career of Paul and the preaching of his Gospel to the Gentiles.⁷¹ The stature of Peter is exalted as being mandated by Jesus to speak for him while on earth and we find him subscribing to Paulinism (and in Matthew he announces that Jesus is not only Messiah, but also the son of the Living God), and Paul is presented as the recipient of Jesus' revelation from heaven. Nevertheless, no convincing proof exists that Peter ever diverged from the Nazorean position, the testimony of the Apostles, Elders and relatives of Jesus, who held that Jesus was the Messiah, a wholly human Messiah, and remained loyal to their Jewish faith. Peter, in fact, had led a following in opposition to Paul.⁷²

Since Paulinism was favored by the post-war church at Rome, in order to bring the two figures into harmony, Peter had to be shown to have subscribed to Paulinism. This required much literary activity, the construction of documents, editing of others and rewriting of Christian beginnings. The aforementioned statement in Mathew fits this pattern. Certainly the practice of forgery in early church history is not unheard of. Paul mentions it, and the author of Revelation puts a curse on anyone altering his book.⁷³

Schonfield comments, “The illusion was fostered by the injection into the evangelical records of Jesus of sayings and comments which confirmed and accorded with what Paul had postulated. Thus readers of Christian Scriptures had little to go on to persuade them that what

⁷⁰ Burnkamm, at p. xvi.

⁷¹ Schonfield, *The Jesus Party*, p. 260.

⁷² Schonfield, *Those Incredible Christians*, p. 137.

⁷³ Id. at p. 127.

they were offered was the tour de force of a wayward genius rather than the legitimate expression of the Gospel.”⁷⁴

By virtue of this desire, eventually, the author of Acts is apparently concealing the story of the differences between the Hellenist and original Judaic believers. Actually, although he wishes to portray the new movement leading to the mission to the Gentiles as developing with only slight disputes, the cleavage was major from the very beginning, but we cannot be certain of the cause of it.⁷⁵ Davies considers this interpretation:

“In the light of what we have gleaned of Luke's methods, it now also becomes clear to us that he arranges for the Jerusalem Council and James' edict of tolerance to the Gentiles at an early stage in Paul's career because he does not want the later stages clouded by evidence of the Judaic-Gentile conflict. Actually, although Paul may have subdued this conflict in the Aegean cities and in Galatia, it was still raging elsewhere. Indeed, his success in subduing it had inflamed Judaic hostility toward him that much the more. But Luke does not want his readers to know this and so produces the settlement which Galatians contradicts. The same consideration obliges him to omit all mention of the collection that Paul is taking to Jerusalem. No doubt it had been widely (and correctly) stated that this was a peace offering; but Luke wants it to appear that there was no tension and therefore no need to seek peace.”⁷⁶

Even Mark, the first of the Gospels to be written is called into question by Brandon in his Jesus and the Zealots as well as by other scholars on its presentation of Jesus as the Messiah, since it was apparently written for a Gentile Roman audience. Checking Mark's interpretation from the period A.D. 60-75 against the earlier (by at least a decade) Epistles of Paul for divergence from the original tradition only complicates matters. In his letters, Paul dealt with ad hoc problems, mostly of a pastoral nature and consequently the whole impression of the faith seems different from that evident in Mark. A meager harvest of allusions and reminiscences of the Jesus in the Gospels has been compiled by scholars from Paul's Epistles. In his most explicit statements about the crucifixion, Paul attributes it to demonic powers ruling the lower universe. This detachment of the

⁷⁴ Id. at p. 84.

⁷⁵ Davies, at p. 22.

⁷⁶ Id. at p. 87.

crucifixion from its historical context and endowing it with supernatural significance is consistent with Paul's conception of Jesus, but like the few references to Jesus' life, indicates that this conception was quite independent of the career of that Jesus who lived in Palestine during the first three decades of the present era.⁷⁷

Something in Mark, however, does make it most evident that his presentation is not in keeping with the original Apostolic tradition, according to Brandon. He claims that "...although appearing to give factual account of events that took place in Judea during the procuratorship of Pontius Pilate, Mark is really describing the career of a divine being, the Son of God. Now, in this divine role, Jesus obviously had a universal significance such as he could not have had as the Messiah of Israel - for example, to the Gentile Christians of Rome, for whom Mark wrote, so essentially Jewish a conception as that of Messiah could have had little appeal or meaning."⁷⁸

Considering the evolution of the usage of the terms "God" and "Son of God" as synonymous with Jesus certainly sheds some light on the origins of Christianity and how Paul's influence had a considerable effect on the form Christian beliefs would take. Although in his mystical philosophy Paul never spoke of Christ as God, his terminology is so delicately poised that those unacquainted with its esoteric background could misunderstand. In Gentile Christianity, particularly that connected with the language of Plato and the Mystery Cults, there was a natural disposition to pay divine honors to Jesus. The result in some Christian circles under gnostic influences was a tendency towards dualism. Monotheism was salvaged only by the complex doctrine of the Trinity.⁷⁹ Paul's use of "Son of God", although one of his basic terms in speaking about the salvation now open to all, transcends all the particularistic limitations of Jewish messianism.⁸⁰ Paul uses the word "Christ" almost as part of the personal name of Jesus, as though it were self-explanatory. And yet he is little concerned with Jesus as the Messiah of Israel. This may be understandable, since, as mentioned earlier, his letters were mainly addressed to ad hoc problems

⁷⁷ Brandon, at pp. 10-11.

⁷⁸ Id. at p. 6.

⁷⁹ Schonfield, *The Passover Plot*, p. 112.

⁸⁰ Burnkamm, at p. 21.

in Gentile communities where the Jewish concept would have had little appeal. Paul seemed to realize that his presentation differed from that current among the original Jewish disciples. He was presenting Jesus as primarily a divine being whose true role transcended his historical career.⁸¹

Davies notes how it was “impossible” for the concept of the Jewish Messiah to be preached to Gentiles without being adulterated not only from the influences of different traditions in the other cultures but also from differences in meanings of terms in the Gentile tongues. He notes, “Even the New Testament book of Revelation, an apocalypse entirely in the Jewish manner, portrays Jesus as a luminous being on a white horse 'and his eyes are a flame of fire and upon his head are many diadems... and he is arrayed in a garment sprinkled with blood (xix, 11ff)' - which is a portrait not of Jesus but of Mithras! Whence too in the same book came the references to 'the blood of the Lamb'? The baptism in blood ('and they washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb' vii, 14) belonged to the Attis cults and its variants where the initiates stood beneath a grating while an animal (usually a bull) was killed above them and they became covered with his blood.”⁸²

Davies also remarks on how the change of Jesus' status derived from the use of the term “Lord.” He explains that in Hebrew (Adonal) this only can mean Jehovah, and Jesus would not have been hailed as such. The term in Aramaic (Moran) exhibits a change in meaning since the Syrian redeemers were lords. The Greek term (Kurlios) would identify Jesus as a redeemer-god not unlike the other lords of the mystery religions. The problem was that this term was not specifically used for this purpose, but was also employed in the same sense that one would say “Sir” in English. Additionally, when the word was used in describing Caesar or a redeemer-god, its meaning became exalted (he notes also that the concept of a redeemer as Son of God existed prior to Paul's mission and also that the concept of Mother of God was well developed in Isis, Cybele and countless other Mater dolorosus). It was inevitable that this term would be used to describe Jesus when he was preached to the Gentiles; otherwise he would have been reduced in status to a lower

⁸¹ Brandon, at p. 11.

⁸² Davies, at p. 140.

dignity than Attis, Tammuz or Usiris.⁸³

The influences on Paul's thinking and, hence, upon the development of Christian beliefs, which manifested themselves on Judaism and Paul from Gentile sources provide some valuable insight into the evolution of Paul's and Christian beliefs. As was stated previously, Paul was first and foremost a Jew and entertained no intention of splitting away from Judaism. Late Judaism provided his main source of influence from comparative religions. Schweitzer holds that one must be cautious in suggesting that Paul was personally and directly affected by "oriental" beliefs because the oriental material had, before Paul's day, already been poured into Jewish molds and received a Jewish impress into a set of Apocalyptic conceptions. Schweitzer claims that "...Late Judaism knows nothing of mysticism or sacraments; and if one is not content to assume that the Apostle has created or invented this non-Jewish element out of his inner consciousness; there is at first sight no alternative but to make the attempt to explain it from conceptions and suggestions which are supposed to have come into it from without, from some form or other of oriental syncretism."⁸⁴

Nevertheless, to Paul raised in the strong Greek atmosphere of the Diaspora the Gnostic systems were thoroughly familiar. Obviously he found the familiar concepts of the Hellenistic culture more significant as he interpreted the experience of his vision (remember, he avoided consulting 'those who were apostles before him') than those of Judaism. He found deeper meaning in a conception of mankind, as a whole (not just Israel), being in a state of subjection to demonic powers (rather than to the Romans). So salvation for Paul was the rescue of mankind from this condition, not the freeing of Israel from heathen oppression. ⁸⁵ Thus, Paul employed, according to Davies, "Gnostic terms, though with reserve, in thinking through his soteriology. It was even in these terms that he defined his apostleship. Jesus had appeared to him, he says, as to 'one born out of due time,' or, to translate literally, as to 'the abortion' (I Cor, xv, 8). This phrase is

⁸³ Id. at p. 142.

⁸⁴ Schweitzer, at p. 176.

⁸⁵ Brandon, at pp. 182-183.

incomprehensible until we know that according to the Gnostic cosmogeny the 'abortion' is the surplus of crude matter which had been cast out of the cosmos when it was created but which was used later by the Gnostic savior to form a perfect 'Aeon' or (very roughly) 'world-soul.' What Paul is saying then is not merely that his apostleship came to him late or under humbler conditions than in the case of the earlier apostles but that his Savior, Jesus, had especially 'formed' him out of the 'material' rejected when creating other apostles to make him the perfect apostle of the fully redemptive gospel."⁸⁶

To fully understand how influential the mystery religions were can be recognized from a consideration of their rise to prominence. Halliday, in The Pagan Background of Early Christianity describes this:

The conquest of the Graeco Roman world by the Oriental religions was irresistible, and long before the battle of Actium, whatever might be their technical and legal status, their actual hold upon Rome and Italy was too secure to be shaken by any temporary measure of attempted suppression. The number of their adherents... included large numbers of Romans, and in particular a considerable proportion of the emancipated women of the upper class. Their vogue steadily increased under the Empire.

It was, indeed, not long before Isis obtained an official status equal to that which Cybele had long enjoyed, and the various divinities of the East became rivals for the patronage of imperial favor.⁸⁷

Although Schweitzer is willing to say that Paul's mysticism found representation in the vernacular of the mystery religions and found in them expressions and concepts which facilitated and, in cases, were even indispensable to the full development of his soteriology,⁸⁸ he gives trouble to those who stress the influence of the mystery religions beyond this. He claims Paul could not have known the mystery religions as they are known now, because they had not yet developed to this form. Therefore, he maintains, those comparing Pauline thought and that of the mystery religions tend to lend too much credence to hypothetical reconstructions of the mystery faiths and

⁸⁶ Davies, at pp. 121-122.

⁸⁷ W.R. Halliday, *The Pagan Background of Early Christianity*, (New York, 1970), p. 234.

⁸⁸ Davies, at p. 133.

attempt to locate a “Greek redeemer god” who might serve as an analogue to Jesus Christ. Schweitzer claims that there is no figure that can deserve the designation of redeemer-god in any myth or mystery religion.⁸⁹

Perhaps Schweitzer's mistaken views can be attributed to his information being rather dated. Davies notes that, “It was believed until recently that Gnosticism was a Christian heresy which developed in the late first or early second century, but it is now known that it existed considerably before that time and that Christianity absorbed some of its features and then came into severe conflict with sects that had retained others. In fact, for awhile Christianity, in many of its aspects, was a part of the general Gnostic movement over which in the end it emerged victorious.”⁹⁰

Paul took thought forms from his Hellenistic background into his Judaic thinking and so adapted them that they formed a distinctive and new system. The Gnostic mystery religions and their redeemer-gods were subjected to this and blended surprisingly well considering the great differences between the Jewish Messiah and the pagan redeemers. Davies writes, “Paul's Messianic thinking began with his acceptance of Judaic eschatology . . . he went on, as we have seen, to transform the concept of the Jewish Messiah into that of a mystery cult redeemer. Yet he retained a great deal of the original concept too . . . There is a unity of the two concepts - Jesus as Messiah and as Redeemer - with the letters themselves that indicates quite plainly that what may be a psychological impossibility for us was not at all impossible for Paul.”⁹¹ He says that Paul, seeing relationships between Jewish and Hellenistic concepts, developed upon them under the supposition that he was simply enriching his Judaism from the Gentile sources. An analogy to this would be found in modern theologians who use depth psychology to enrich the traditional theology.⁹²

⁸⁹ Schweitzer, at p. 192.

⁹⁰ Davies, at p. 119.

⁹¹ Id. at p. 150.

⁹² Id. at 148.

For example, in spite of certain eastern myths, the concept of the resurrection was foreign to Greek thinking. Paul's description of it in Athens was received with polite disbelief. Hence, he was prepared to concede that the resurrection body was of a new order, not flesh and blood, but akin to that of angels.⁹³ The terms he used for the flesh that was crucified as well as spirit and psyche do not have Jewish equivalents. This is not to say that Paul was thinking other than as a Jew, but he was a Jew thinking in Greek and as he drew Rabbinic concepts from a Judaic background, he also drew Greek concepts from his Hellenistic background to fit his needs.⁹⁴

Schweitzer, while admitting that Paul's dualism derives from Platonism⁹⁵ still holds that a Hellenization of Paul's eschatology cannot be proven.⁹⁶ He writes, "If the Apostle... introduced such a tremendous innovation as the Greek 'physical' mysticism of redemption and the sacraments into primitive Jewish Christianity, could the latter have permitted this and continued to keep him in its midst? How was it possible for it to admit without a struggle, indeed unnoticed., something so entirely alien, and to raise no objections either to the Christology or to the mysticism or to the sacramental doctrine of the Apostle, but simply and solely to his attitude towards the law?"⁹⁷ As has been pointed out, Paul was not free from disputes with the Nazoreans on matters other than the Law (for example, the consternation caused over dining with Gentiles), but since Paul never intended to be other than Jewish, it was often unwittingly, as Davies noted above, that he gave rise to the employment of pagan concepts in his communities. Additionally, it should be recalled that his view on the Law actually derives from Hellenistic roots.

In regard to Paul's unwittingly engendering the use of Pagan concepts, Schweitzer seems to be on the right track in his views on the sacraments. He maintains that Paul did not introduce the sacraments into the sacred ceremonies, but discerned a baptism and a Lord's supper already existing which guaranteed salvation in accordance with early church doctrine. Paul then altered this view

⁹³ Schonfield, *The Jesus Party*, at p. 95.

⁹⁴ Davies, at p. 124.

⁹⁵ Schweitzer, at p. 66.

⁹⁶ Id. at p. 76

⁹⁷ Id. at p. 229.

into the mystical view of the dying and rising again with Christ. But rather than attributing this to any Pagan influences, like the Mystery-religions, Schweitzer attributes this solely to Paul's gnosis contending that the sacraments effect that in which the inner essence of redemption consists.⁹⁸ Schweitzer claims that neither a direct nor indirect connection between the cultus meal of Paul and that of the Mystery religions has been demonstrated⁹⁹ and that the utterance of the name in the baptismal rite has not been demonstrated so that, in spite of other similarities, a connection is lacking.¹⁰⁰

Nevertheless, it is hard not to agree with Halliday when he says, "It can hardly be denied that the influence of the Pagan mysteries must be, in part at least, responsible for the very different attitude towards the celebration of the Lord's Supper and the rite of Baptism in the Apostolic Age and in the time of Tertullian respectively. Or, to take a point of detail, it is difficult not to believe that the custom of giving milk and honey to the newly baptized was not borrowed from pagan initiations, of which it was a common feature."¹⁰¹

Halliday also mentions that Church Fathers in later centuries studying Mithraism were surprised by its similarity to later Christian rites. This included baptism, the sacramental meal of bread and either water or wine, and even a promise of resurrection. The Fathers could only account for these extraordinary similarities by supposing the devil had inspired them as a parody of divine ordinances.¹⁰²

Indeed, it was the conclusion of critical Protestant research of over a century ago that, upon revealing the gap between Paul's Jesus and the Jesus of history, the founding of Christianity should be attributed to Paul who turned it into a religion of redemption and whose Jewish modes of thought were influenced by oriental Pagan views and myths which manifested themselves in the

⁹⁸ Id. at p. 215.

⁹⁹ Id. at p. 199.

¹⁰⁰ Id. at p. 207.

¹⁰¹ Halliday, at p. 318.

¹⁰² Id. at p. 310.

Hellenistic religions.¹⁰³

Schweitzer would put this view in other terms. Of the Protestant research he has this to say, “In consequence of the parallelism which they maintain between the mystery religions and Paulinism, they come to ascribe to the Apostle the creation of a 'religion.' Nothing of the kind ever entered into his purpose. For him there was only one religion: that of Judaism. It was concerned with God, faith, promise, hope and law. In consequence of the coming, the death and the resurrection of Jesus Christ, it became its duty to adjust its teachings and demands to the new era thus introduced, and in the process many things were moved from the shadow into the light, and others from the light into the shadow.”¹⁰⁴

Putting the question of whether Paul moved things into the light or the shadow aside, there is still the fundamental difference between the preaching of the historical Jesus and that of Paul and the post-Easter church concerning which Burnkamm says, “...Only the unthinking can miss...”¹⁰⁵ Then there is the difference between Paul's concept, of “the power of God for salvation to everyone who has faith” (Rom. 1:16) which did not fit into any apocalyptic pattern and the views of Nazorean authorities. This not only brought Paul into disfavor with the Nazoreans and made him an outsider, it made deadly enemies of the Jews. Because of it, he became the apostle to the Gentiles eventually precipitating the severance of Christianity from Judaism and giving the new church its first theological base.¹⁰⁶ In Schonfield's words, “for the Nazoreans, the cross of which Paul made so much was evidence of the hostility of the world ruled by Rome towards God and his Messiah, an instrument of redemption only in the sense that the Messiah had accepted this suffering at the hands of his enemies as a means of persuading his people to repent and thus advancing the day of deliverance. To present the crucifixion as a saving mystery was pandering to heathen notions such as those of the devotees of Dionysus, Adonis and Mithras.”¹⁰⁷

¹⁰³ Burnkamm, at p. 228.

¹⁰⁴ Schweitzer at p. 277.

¹⁰⁵ Burnkamm, at p. 110.

¹⁰⁶ Id.

¹⁰⁷ Schonfield, *Those Incredible Christians*, at p. 85.

The ramifications of Paul's thinking and proclamations are seen not simply in the divergence he precipitated from Judaism, but are felt to this day in the Christian church.

The abandonment of food taboos inherent in Judaism in Paul's day can be attributed to him. He did not accept the prohibition concerning meats offered to idols which to a Jew was vital since he could only eat meat that was "blessed" by the one God. Paul thought it was unimportant if the meat had been offered to nonexistent deities, since intelligent people knew better. What one had to beware of was that the enlightened individual's example may cause a weaker person "to stumble" (Chap, viii).¹⁰⁸

From Paul's letters, it is apparent psychic phenomena played a part in Christian gatherings. Such phenomena were regarded as the spiritual presence of Jesus and as gifts from above heralding the powers of the Messianic Age to come. Schonfield remarks that, "Such 'possession' and mediumship conveys to us something of the emotional intensity and fanaticism of the members of the movement, and also . . . that those members initially were largely recruited from the orders of society among whom phenomena of this type are of more frequent occurrence. Women and artisans, freedmen and slaves, were the chief ingredients of the early Christian communities."¹⁰⁹ This factor of Christianity is evident in the present-day Church and the connection certainly is not impossible to establish.

Paul's influence apparently also helped to keep the church united. Halliday notes that the tendency of cults was to multiply by subdivision into independent small religious associations standing in close spiritual relationship to their leaders. The problem presented by this type of organization to Christianity which was already a serious danger in the Apostolic Age, was that each group would follow its own line of development in the direction determined by the personal idiosyncrasies of its leader. This apparently was the model the Corinthians were following when

¹⁰⁸ Davies, at p. 46.

¹⁰⁹ Schonfield, *Those Incredible Christians*, p. 85.

Paul perceived and acted to counteract the threat this presented to the unity of the Church, to its corporate entity, and to the individuality of its doctrines. Although some of the spiritual values of the pagan pattern of organization may have been lost, if it had not been replaced by the imposition of doctrinal discipline and hardened orthodoxy, Christianity would have become composed of innumerable sects united only by-the vaguest common denominator.¹¹⁰

Christian missionary activity is justified by a passage from Corinthians (9:19-23). It has been debased and misused by Christians to legitimize all manner of accommodation of Christian preaching to their own situations and times. Paul was claiming that the gospel must be adapted to the speech patterns and thought forms of its hearers to be best understood (something he evidently practiced as well as preached). His words have been employed as a basis for a technique of missionary accommodation.¹¹¹

Paul's contribution to the meaning of the term love is described well by Burnkamm who says, "The words 'to love' (agapon) and 'love' (agape), taken over by Hellenistic Judaism of the Diaspora, were not entirely unknown in classical Greek, but they were of no great significance and lagged far behind other lofty terms such as eros and philia (friendship). It was only in the Greeks' translation of the Old Testament (the Septuagint), in the literature of Hellenistic Judaism, and, to crown all, in primitive Christianity that these little-esteemed words were given their momentous relationship to God and Man (the two factors in Jesus' commandment) and, accordingly, their central importance. Only as we are aware of this background can we estimate Paul's contribution to the concept of 'love'."¹¹²

Burnkamm additionally details other aspects of Christian thinking influenced by Paul's work. Romans 13:1-7 has played a very active historical role for a biblical text. Basically, it demands that Christians should render obedience to the powers of the state, like everyone else. In

¹¹⁰ Halliday, at p. 250.

¹¹¹ Burnkamm, at p. 173.

¹¹² Id. at p. 216.

other words, it admonishes good citizenship.¹¹³ Yet it resulted in thinking in terms of blind submission and, conversely, has inspired impassioned protest, consequently raising more questions than it answers. Burnkamm remarks, "At the present day it is especially disputed in a world that has turned against Paul, where the Christian's responsibility to join in the shaping of political life has been elevated into a self-evident requirement."¹¹⁴ With the rise to the national political forefront of powerful, organized Christian organizations, little more need be said.

Another passage from Romans proclaims that "all men are under the power of sin" (Rom, 3:9; cf. 3:10-20). Paul later gives his reasons for this view at length, expounding upon the whole history of mankind with Adam and Christ standing at its beginning - Adam representing man fallen victim to death and Christ representing man set free for righteousness and life. Burnkamm has this to say about Paul's view, "Paul was not the first to conceive an idea of this kind . . . Hellenistic Judaism as influenced by the Gnostics acquaints us not only with metaphysical speculations about Man's divine origin and destiny, but also about his fall and the tragedy of his ensnarement in the inferior world dominated by hostile powers opposed to God. While there can be no doubt that Romans 5 makes use of such a scheme of ideas and concepts, it did not adopt them just as they were. They were reshaped and understood in a new way. The tension between the tradition which Paul took up and his own reinterpretation of it can be seen in the very syntax: the first sentence is not carried through to its end, but is more than once interrupted by explanations and amendments . . . And in actual fact, Romans 5 thus interpreted has had a lasting influence on the doctrine of 'original sin,' or at least on it as commonly understood, and has largely contributed to a dubious depreciation of sex in the general Christian consciousness."¹¹⁵

Furthermore, Burnkamm could have mentioned how the view that all have sinned by virtue of merely being born has repercussions psychologically in terms of breeding guilt and what would be considered by most any psychoanalyst as a sick self-image.

¹¹³ Burnkamm, at p. 173.

¹¹⁴ Id. at p. 214.

¹¹⁵ Id. at p. 123.

In retrospect, Paul's tremendous influence in shaping what would ultimately emerge as the new religion of Christianity out of the Messianic movement (in particular, the Nazorean sect) of Judaism also, by opening the door to Gentile influence, engendered something even he (not to mention James and the Nazorean authorities) would have balked at. Because of Paul, the Roman Church was able to vindicate the issuance of dogmatic statements concerning all sorts of issues.¹¹⁶ Hence, we find the legacy of revealed truth in Christian savants sanctifying upon revelatory divine authority all manner of war atrocities and stupidity down through the centuries from witch-burning and constant opposition to the advancement of science to periodic rapture disappointments. Perhaps George Bernard Shaw was on the right track when he wrote, "It was Paul who converted the religion that has raised one man above sin and death into a religion that delivered millions of men so completely into their dominion that their own nature became a horror to them, and the religious life became a denial of life."¹¹⁷

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¹¹⁶ The concept that the Pope is divinely appointed by right of succession to some special dialogue with god that is not allowed the rest of us mere mortals was built upon the Pauline foundation for authority through special revelations from Christ through the Holy Spirit. Schonfield, *Those Incredible Christians*, at p. 117.

¹¹⁷ Maggeridge, at p.13.

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