PAUL THE CONVERT

The Apostolate and Apostasy of Saul the Pharisee

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CHAPTER TWO

PAUL'S ECSTASY

PAUL'S MYSTICAL REPORTS

Paul is a mystic. Like conversion, mysticism is a modern, analytic category, which cannot be applied to Paul without qualification. Mysticism has seemed more congenial than conversion to New Testament scholars, and the term has been employed extensively since the publication of Albert Schweitzer's influential *Mysticism of Paul the Apostle.*[1] Mysticism, however, is no more a part of Paul's vocabulary of self-understanding than conversion, though he uses the term *mystery* at several crucial points.[2] Mysticism has an esoteric, particular meaning in first-century Judaism; it is not merely a style of doing theology, as modern students of Paul have viewed it, or quiet contemplation. Rather, mysticism in first-century Judea was apocalyptic, revealing not meditative truths of the universe but the disturbing news that God was about to bring judgment. So scholarly use of mysticism has been etic, whereas the term retains its analytic power only when its first-century context has been adequately explored.

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

Paul describes his own spiritual experiences in terms appropriate to a Jewish apocalyptic-mystagogue of the first century. He, like Enoch, relates his experiences of heavenly travel, in which he sees the secrets of the universe revealed. He believes his salvation to lie in a body-to-body identification with his heavenly savior, who sits on the divine throne and functions as God's glorious manifestation. He identifies this experience with his conversion, although it apparently characterizes a lifetime of spiritual discipline rather than a single event. As we have seen, the significance of this experience is later reworked by the church when Paul's life is made into the model for gentile conversion. In the later context, the mystical aspects of Paul's experiences are downplayed, and his new understanding of law becomes the primary value of his conversion.

Although the account of Paul's ecstatic conversion in Acts is a product of Luke's literary genius, Paul gives his own evidence for ecstatic experience. In Galatians 1, Paul claims that he did not receive the gospel from a human source. In 2 Cor. 12:1–9, he describes an experience that transcends human ken[3]:

> I must boast; there is nothing to be gained by it, but I will go on to visions and revelations of the Lord. I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago was caught up to the third heaven—whether in the body or out of the body, I do not know, God knows. And I know that this man was caught up into Paradise—whether in the body or out of the body, I do not know, God knows—and he heard things that cannot be told, which man may not utter. On behalf of this man, I will boast, but on my own behalf I will not boast, except of my weaknesses. Though if I wish to boast, I shall not be a fool, for I shall be speaking the truth. But I refrain from it, so that no one may think more of me than he sees in me or hears from me. And to keep me from being too elated by the abundance of revelations, a thorn was given me in the flesh, a messenger of Satan, to harass me, to keep me from being too elated. Three times I besought the Lord about this, that it should leave me; but he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness."

As in Galatians 1, Paul calls this experience an *apokalypsis,* an apocalypse, a revelation. As in Acts and Galatians 1, the actual vision is not described. Unlike Acts and Galatians 1, however, this passage is a confessional description of a vision, or possibly two different ones, depending on whether the paradise visited in the ascension can be located in the third heaven.[4] Thus, the vision is both mystical and apocalyptic.[5]

The vision should be examined in the context of first-century Jewish apocalypticism. Second Corinthians 12 is so abstruse and esoteric that it must be teased from context and combined with our meager knowledge of apocalypticism and Jewish mysticism. Techniques of theurgy and heavenly ascent were secret lore in rabbinic literature (see b. Hagiga 13a–15b), which dates from the third century. Paul alone demonstrates that such traditions existed as early as the first century.[6]

Most people believe that 2 Corinthians 12 refers to Paul himself.[7] Paul says that he is boasting, yet he does not explicitly identify himself as the ecstatic voyager, since rhetoric demands his modesty and he says that nothing will be gained by his boasting. This follows from his statement that charismatic gifts cannot themselves prove faith (1 Corinthians 12–13). Paul may actually be revealing secret information in this passage.

By the end of the passage, Paul undoubtedly speaks about himself without specifying that he has changed the subject. He says that he has spoken three times with the Lord about "a thorn in the flesh" (2 Cor. 12:7–10), probably an infirmity; but the Lord had decided that it perfected his power. As a sudden change in subject would be clumsy, most scholars affirm that Paul is speaking about himself throughout. Further, Paul's admission that he has spoken to Christ about his infirmity three times in itself implies a communication greater than petitionary prayer.[8] Although the passage can be understood in other ways, Paul reveals modestly that he has had several ecstatic meetings with Christ over the previous fourteen years. One important meeting, possibly but not necessarily the first one, took place in a heavenly ascent to the enthroned presence of Christ. Paul's claim is not strange or ridiculous for a first-century Jew, since this experience parallels ecstatic ascents to the divine throne in other apocalyptic and merkabah mystical traditions in Jewish Hellenism. Paul's identity as the mystic seems assured, though his reputation has never featured ecstasy, perhaps because he opposed the excessive claims made by his opponents on the basis of his own ecstatic experiences described in this passage.

It is possible, if unlikely, that 2 Corinthians 12 records Paul's original conversion experience. In Galatians Paul speaks of his conversion as a revelation (apocalypse [1:12]), and in 2 Corinthians 12 he also speaks of revelations (*apokalypseis*). Acts 26:19 and 2 Cor. 12:1 describe (heavenly) visions (*optasias*). Yet in Galatians, Paul mentions a three-year hiatus between his conversion and his first visit to Jerusalem. Paul mentions that fourteen years passed before his second visit to Jerusalem, which was made at the direction of another revelation (Gal. 2:2). But ancient writers

did not count years as we do; they could count initial and final fractions of a year as an entire year. Therefore, Paul's ministry must begin fourteen to seventeen years before the writing of Galatians, depending on whether the fourteen years includes the three years between his conversion and his first visit to Jerusalem. If 2 Corinthians was written subsequently, as many scholars believe, it may not be referring to his conversion, but arithmetical conventions prevent surety. Second Corinthians, however, is certainly a composite work, and since Paul's life is largely a mystery, it cannot be dated precisely. It would be unwise to proclaim that 2 Corinthians 12 was definitely Paul's conversion. It remains one of innumerable historical problems that cannot be resolved without further evidence or insight.

It is just as likely that Paul is describing a revelation both similar and subsequent to his conversion. We know that Paul necessarily had several ecstatic experiences. This is Luke's opinion as well, for Luke describes ecstatic revelations in the three narrations of Paul's conversion (9:3f; 22:6f; 26:12f). But Acts 16:9f, 18:9f, and especially 22:17f describe other ecstatic visions (*en ekstasei* [22:17]).[9] Even allowing for Acts' repetition, Paul's earliest biographer claimed that he had several ecstatic experiences. This is not surprising, given Paul's cultural environment. Jewish mysticism, and perhaps apocalypticism as well, sought out visions and developed special practices to achieve them.[10] Thus, we can assume that Paul had a number of ecstatic experiences in his life, that his conversion may have been one such experience—though it need not have been one—and that the meaning of these experiences was mediated by the gentile Christian community in which he lived.

We know that converts learn the meanings of their experience in their new community. This appears to be true of Paul's mysticism as well. He may have learned about ecstatic experience as a Pharisee or merely known about them generally from his Jewish background. He may also have learned about them in Christianity, but this merely begs the question; ultimately, someone Jewish must have brought them into Christianity, and there is not much time between the end of Jesus' ministry and the beginning of Paul's.

The Christian interpretation by Paul of his visions does mark his long association with the Christian community. The divine nature of Paul's revelation does not preclude the influence of his supporting Christian community. Converts naturally find the meaning of their conversions and their visions in the community that values them. Thus, we can ask but we need not answer why a Pharisee would have a vision of Christ. Any convert and especially a converted Pharisee who knew of mystical and

apocalyptic traditions would give these experiences Christian interpretations if that person had chosen to join a Christian community. Instead of trying to pin these ecstatic visions to Paul's conversion, as evangelical and Pentecostal Christians try to do, the modern data about conversions suggests that the interpretation of the visions is mediated by an education in Christian community. Paul may have decided to become a Christian for the reasons that Luke suggests, or the experience itself may be lost forever since Paul himself does not tell us how it took place. It may be either rational or mystical. But it is clear that Paul had visions. He used these visions to interpret the consequences of his faith and to express the meaning of his conversion. To understand Paul's interpretation we must first try to understand the features of Jewish apocalypticism and mysticism. Indeed, we can understand a good deal more about first-century Jewish mysticism if we take Paul seriously as a Jewish mystic, with a special Christian cast.

APOCALYPTICISM AND MYSTICISM

Apocalypticism and mysticism have remained separate scholarly categories because they refer to two different, easily distinguishable types of literature. But they are not unrelated experiences. Jewish mystical texts are full of apocalypses; early apocalyptic literature is based on ecstatic visions with profound mystical implications. This suggests that scholars have carried a distinction in literary genre into the realm of experience without sufficient warrant. It is likewise misleading to distinguish strictly between ecstatic, out-of-body visions as found in mysticism and literal bodily ascensions to heaven as are more frequently found in apocalypticism.[11] In merkabah mysticism the voyager often speaks as though he is actually going from place to place in heaven, yet we know from the frame narratives that the adept's body is on earth, where his utterances are being questioned and written down by a group of disciples.[12] Paul speaks at a time before these distinctions were clear or accepted by his community. He is not sure whether the ascent took place in the body or out of it. We should also note that Paul does not utilize the concept of a soul (*psychē*) to effect this heavenly travel. Paul's concept of the soul is quite limited, undisturbed by Platonic ideas of the soul's immortality. Rather, Paul refers to spirit (*pneuma*) more frequently. This suggests that Paul understood being *in Christ* as a literal exchange of earthly body for a new, pneumatic one to be shared with the resurrected Jesus at the eschaton.

Under what terms could a credible journey to heaven take place?

Modern sensibilities balk at the notion of physical transport to heaven, whereas a heavenly journey in vision or trance is credible. When a heavenly journey is described literally, the cause may be literary convention or the belief of the voyager; when reconstructing the actual experience, only one type can pass modern standards of credibility. Paul's confusion over the nature of his ecstatic journey to heaven provides a rare insight into first-century thinking, since it demonstrates either a disagreement in the community or more likely a first-century mystic's inability to distinguish between bodily and spiritual journeys. Our world no longer supports his quandary; nor did the ancient world shortly after Paul's time. They adopted the Platonic notion of the soul, which answered the question sufficiently for them and which still informs religious life today. Paul, however, conceived his journey without a developed concept of the soul. Thus, he is apparently describing a mystical notion of a spiritual body that is received by and finds residence in Christ.

Based on Paul's report, it is not possible to know whether any liturgical rites accompanying or even stimulating the astral journey existed in first-century Judaism. Since the apocalyptic and pseudepigrapical literature is vast, with an enormous variety of ascension accounts, many different concepts (and perhaps techniques) of spiritual journeys were available to mystics and apocalypticists.[13] Because Paul's experience was a journey by means of a spiritual body, it seems warranted to call it an ecstatic or paranormal experience, rather than physical transport, though Paul himself would caution against claims of authority based on ecstasy.

PAUL'S CONVERSION IN LIGHT OF APOCALYPTICISM AND MYSTICISM

With only the most general hints about Paul's conversion in his own writing, we must fill in the Jewish cultural context informing his experience. Ezekiel 1 was one of the central scriptures that Luke, and Paul, used to understand Paul's conversion. The vision of the throne-chariot of God in Ezekiel 1, with its attendant description of Glory (*Kavod*), God's Glory or form, for the human figure, is a central image of Jewish mysticism, which is closely related to the apocalyptic tradition.[14] The name *merkabah*—that is, throne-chariot mysticism, which is the usual Jewish designation for these mystical traditions as early as the mishnaic period (ca. 220 C.E.; see Mishnah Hagiga 2.1)—is the rabbinic term for the heavenly conveyance described in Ezekiel 1.[15] (The ground-breaking work of Hugo Odeberg, Gershom Scholem, Morton Smith, and Alexander

Altmann[16] showing the Graeco-Roman context for these texts in Jewish mysticism has been followed up by a few scholars who have shown the relevance of these passages to the study of early rabbinic literature,[17] as well as apocalypticism and Samaritanism and Christianity.[18] The entire collection of Hekhaloth texts has been published recently by Peter Schaefer[19] and translations of several of the works have already appeared.[20] Nevertheless, the results of this research have not yet been broadly discussed, nor are they well known. The ten-volume compendium known in English as *The Theological Dictionary of the New Testament,* edited by G. Kittel, has scarcely a dozen references to Ezekiel 1, although it is a crucial passage informing the christology of the New Testament, as Gilles Quispel has so cogently pointed out.[21])

Those of us who have championed the importance of this material had been waiting for the publication of the full text of the Angelic Liturgy from Qumran, for the existence of speculation on the heavenly hierarchy has been strongly suggested in the initial reports of the finds in cave 4 (4QShirShab).[22] Recently, the long-awaited text has been published. The new critical edition confirms the same themes of Jewish mysticism that we can only date to the third century from mystical sources. The Angelic Liturgy is pre-Christian and could not have appeared later than the first century C.E. It contains many oblique references to the divine hierarchies, the seven heavens inside one another, and the appearance and movements of God's throne-chariot, familiar to scholars of merkabah mysticism. First Enoch and Ezekiel 1 seem to be the informing scriptural passages, but the hierarchy of heavens is best known from such merkabah documents as the *Rewyoth Yehezkel* (The visions of Ezekiel).[23] The Angelic Liturgy evinces some of the most characteristic aspects of Jewish mysticism in an apocalyptic community of the first century. Exactly which parts of merkabah speculation were understood this early, however, is unclear. In this general atmosphere, Paul is an important witness to the kind of experience that apocalyptic Jews were reporting and an important predecessor to merkabah mysticism.

MERKABAH AND ITS PREDECESSORS

Though it would be impractical to review all work currently underway on apocalyptic and merkabah mysticism, its relationship to Christianity and Paul's writings can be briefly summarized. In the Hebrew Bible, God is sometimes described in human form. Exod. 23:21 mentions an angel who has the form of a man and who carries within him or

represents "the name of God." A human figure on the divine throne is described in Ezekiel 1, Daniel 7, and Exodus 24, among other places, and was blended into a consistent picture of a principal mediator figure who, like the angel of the Lord in Exodus 23, embodied, personified, or carried the name of God, YHWH, the tetragrammaton. This figure, elaborated on by Jewish tradition, would become a central metaphor for Christ in Christianity.

Several Jewish traditions discuss the *eikōn* or image of God as Adam's prelapsarian appearance, an especially glorious and splendid form that humanity lost when Adam sinned. The lost "image and form of God" (Gen. 1:26) is thereafter associated with God's human appearance in the Bible or with the description of the principal angel of God who carries God's name. The human figure on the merkabah described by Ezekiel is called "the appearance of the likeness of the Glory of the Lord." Thus, God's Glory or *Kavod* can be a technical term for God's human appearances.[24]

This enigmatic human appearance of God, discussed with appropriate self-consciousness in the Bible, is probably related to the so-called son of man, which is not a proper name. The heavenly son of man appears in the vision in Dan. 7:13 in which an "ancient of days" appoints a human figure ("one like a son of man") to execute justice in the destruction of the evil ones. This human figure is best understood as an angel.[25] In Dan. 12:3 resurrection is promised both for the faithful dead and for the most heinous villains, who will be resurrected so that they may be sentenced to eternal perdition. *Hamaskilim,* or "those who are wise," the elite of the apocalyptic group, will then shine as the stars in heaven. This scripture implies that the leaders will be transformed into angels, since the stars were identified with angels in biblical tradition (e.g., Job 38:7).

The preeminence of the enigmatic human figure is due primarily to the description of the angel of the Lord in Exodus. Exod. 23:20–21 states: "Behold, I send an angel before you, to guard you on the way and to bring you to the place which I have prepared. Give heed to him and hearken to his voice, do not rebel against him, for he will not pardon your transgression; for my name is in him." The Bible expresses the unique status of this angel by means of its participation in the divine name.[26] In Exod. 33:18–23, Moses asks to see the Glory of God. In answer, God makes "his goodness" pass in front of him but he cautions, "You cannot see my face; for man shall not see me and live. . . . Behold, there is a place by me where you shall stand upon the rock; and while my Glory passes by I will put you in a cleft of the rock, and I will cover you with my hand until I have passed

by; then I will take away my hand and you shall see my back; but my face shall not be seen." Yahweh himself, the angel of God, and his Glory are peculiarly melded together, suggesting a deep secret about the ways God manifested himself to humanity.

The Septuagint, the second-century B.C.E. translation of the Hebrew Bible into Greek, identifies the figure on the throne in Ezek. 1:26 with the form (*eidos*) of man. This term has a philosophical history dating from Plato's *Parmenides* 130c, where *eidos* means the *idea* of man. For Platonists, *eidos* meant the unchanging immortal idea of man that survives death. Because of Plato's fortunate use of language, Hellenistic Jews could reinterpret the phrase "form of man" to mean *eidos*. So for Hellenistic Jewish mystics like Philo, the figure of man on the divine throne described in Genesis, Exodus, Ezekiel, Daniel, and the Psalms (forming the basis of the son of man speculation) was also understood as the ideal and immortal man. His immortality and glorious appearance were things Adam possessed in the Garden of Eden and lost when he sinned.[27] In this form, the traditions concerning the son of man are centuries older than Christianity, and Paul, as we shall see, uses them to good advantage.

In the Hellenistic period many new interpretations of Ezek. 1:26 grew up. In various Jewish sects and conventicles the foremost name given to the figure on the throne is Yahoel. The first-century *Apocalypse of Abraham* presents Yahoel as a version of the divine name, since it is a combination of the tetragrammaton and a suffix denoting angelic stature. Yahoel appears in chapters 10 and 11, where he is described as the one "in whom God's ineffable name dwells." Other titles for this figure included Melchizedek, Metatron, Adoil, Eremiel, and preeminently the son of man. Melchizedek appears at Qumran, in the document called 11QMelch, where he is identified with the *Elohim* of Ps. 82:1, thus giving us yet another variation on the theme of carrying the name of God. Metatron is called YHWH *hakaton*, or YHWH, Jr., and sits on a throne equal to God's in 3 Enoch 10.1.[28] The name of the angel varies from tradition to tradition. Michael is God's "mediator" and general (*archistrategos* [2 Enoch 33.10; T. Dan. 6.1–5; T. Abr. 1.4; cf. Life of Adam and Eve 14.1–2]). Eremiel appears in the *Apocalypse of Zephaniah* 6.1–15, where he is mistaken for God. In the *Ascension of Isaiah* 7.2–4, an angel whose name cannot be given appears.

Chief angelic mediators appear in Jewish literature of the first several centuries.[29] The chief angelic mediator, whom we can call by a number of terms—God's vice-regent, his Wazir, his gerent—is easily distinguished from the plethora of divine creatures, for the principal angel is not only head of the heavenly hosts but sometimes participates in God's own being

or divinity. The rabbis most often call God's principal angel Metatron. In rabbinic literature and Jewish mysticism Metatron is probably not a proper name but a title adapted from the Greek word *Metathronos*, meaning "one who stands after or behind the throne." This represents a rabbinic softening of the Hellenistic term *synthronos*, or "one who is with the throne," that is, sharing enthronement or acting for the properly enthroned authority. The rabbis would have changed the preposition from one connoting equality (*syn-*, "with") to one connoting inferiority (*meta-*, "after or behind") in order to reduce the heretical implications of calling God's principal helping angel *synthronos*.[30]

Alongside these traditions lies the notion more relevant to Christianity that certain heroes can be transformed into angels as part of their ascension. This may be the most puzzling part of the mystic traditions but it is important in view of Paul's mysticism.[31] In the *Testament of Abraham* 11 (Recension A), some patriarchs are exalted as angels. Adam is pictured on a golden throne with a terrifying appearance and adorned with Glory. Abel is similarly glorified, acting as judge over creation until the final judgment (chaps. 12–13). 2 Enoch 30.8–11 also states that Adam was an angel: "And on earth I assigned him to be a second angel, honored and great and glorious."[32] In the Prayer of Joseph, found in Origen's Commentary on John 2.31 and with a further fragment in Philocalia 23.15, Jacob describes himself as "an angel of God and a ruling spirit," and he claims to be the "first-born of every living thing," "the first minister before the face of God," "the archangel of the power of the Lord, and "the chief captain among the sons of God."[33]

Enoch and Moses are the most important non-Christian figures of divinization or angelic transformation. Philo describes Moses as divine, based on the word *God* used of him in Exod. 4:16 and 7:1. In Sir. 45:1–5 Moses is compared to God ("equal in glory to the holy ones," in the Greek version of the text). Philo and the Samaritans also expressed Moses' preeminence in Jewish tradition by granting him a kind of deification.[34] In the *Testament of Moses*, Moses is described as the mediator or "arbiter of his covenant" (1:14) and celebrated as "that sacred spirit, worthy of the Lord . . . the Lord of the Word . . . the divine prophet throughout the earth, the most perfect teacher in the world," the "advocate," and "the great messenger" (11:16–19). Wayne Meeks concluded that "Moses was the most important figure in all Hellenistic Jewish apologetic."[35]

Evidence of the antiquity of mystical speculation about *Kavod* is found in the fragment of the tragedy *Moses* written by Ezekiel the Tragedian in the second century B.C.E. or earlier.[36] Moses is depicted as seeing a vision

of the throne of God with a figure seated on it. The figure on the throne is called *phōs gennaios,* "a venerable man," which is a double entendre in Greek, since *phos* can mean either light or man depending on the gender of the noun.[37] The surviving text of *Moses* also hints at a transformation of an earthly hero into a divine figure. Ezekiel the Tragedian relates that the venerable man handed Moses his scepter and summoned him to sit on the throne, placing a diadem on his head. Thereafter the stars bow to him and parade for his inspection. Since throughout the biblical period the stars were thought to be angels (Job 38:7), Moses is being depicted as leader of the angels and hence above the angels. Moses' enthronement as a monarch or divinity in heaven resembles the enthronement of the son of man. This scene illustrates some of the traditions that later appear in Jewish mysticism and may have informed Paul's ecstatic ascent. The identification of Jesus with the manlike appearance of God is both the central characteristic of Christianity and understandable within the context of Jewish mysticism and apocalypticism.[38]

Philo often speaks of Moses as being made into a divinity (*'eis theon* [e.g., *Sacrifices* 1–10; *Moses* 1.155–58]). In exegeting Moses' receiving the Ten Commandments, Philo envisions an ascent, not merely up the mountain but to the heavens. This possibly describes a mystical identification between God and Moses, suggesting that Moses attained a divine nature through contact with the *logos*. In *Questions and Answers on Exodus* 1.29, 40, Philo writes that Moses was changed into a divinity on Mount Sinai. In *Moses* 1.155–58, he says that God placed the entire universe into Moses' hands and that the elements obeyed him as their master; then God rewarded Moses by appointing him a "partner" (*koinonon*) of God's own possessions and by giving into his hand the world as a portion well-fitted for God's heir (155). In the *Sacrifices of Cain and Abel* 8–10, Philo refers to Deut. 5:31 as proof that certain people are distinguished by God to be stationed "beside himself." Moses is preeminent among these people as his grave is not known, which for Philo apparently means that Moses was transported to heaven.

The Hebrew term *shutaf* (partner), describing any of God's helpers, became a heresy to the rabbis in first- and second-century Judaism. Thus, the stage was set for a great conflict over the existence, nature, status, and meaning of God's primary angelic mediator. Merkabah themes of viewing God can be seen in Philo's allegory. In light of the subsequent battle, it is amazing that such a prominent Jew of the first century as Philo could suggest so clearly a mystical merging of humans with a divine manifestation.[39] Philo himself cannot possibly be the author of these traditions. He

relied on the Hebrew Bible, but he must also have had access to traditions that amplified these texts in a mystical direction, as did the other Hellenistic Jewish writers.

Philo also made use of biblical traditions of intermediation in his description of the *logos,* his name for God's demiurge in creation and for the pattern of the world. Philo claimed Gen. 1:26 described the creation of the heavenly man, and he took Gen. 2:7 to refer to the creation of the earthly man (*On the Creation* 134; *Allegory* 1.31, 53ff, 88f; *Questions on Gen.* 1.4; 2.56). He calls the heavenly man the image of man (*ho kat' eikona anthrōpos*) and the *logos* a second God (*deuteros theos*): "Why does he say, as if of another god: 'in the image of God he made man' and not 'in His own image'? . . . It is because nothing can be made in the likeness of God but only in that of the second God *deuteros theos,* who is His *logos*" (*Questions on Gen.* 2.62). On the basis of the divine likeness, Philo calls the visible embodiment of God a *second God.* The heavenly man shares his image with mankind as well, since he is the Platonic form of man.

Philo allegorizes any reference to God's human features in the Hebrew Bible as the *logos.* Moses and the elders see the Lord, who is the logos (*Of Flight and Finding* 164f). The Lord whom Jacob saw on the heavenly ladder (Gen. 28:13) was the archangel, that is, the logos, in whose form God reveals himself (*On Dreams* 1.157; *On the Change of Names* 87, 126; *On the Migration of Abraham* 168; *Allegory* 3.177; *Who is Heir* 205). These references anthropomorphize God, because they symbolize the likenesses he shares with humanity.

Enoch is similarly esteemed as a heavenly voyager. His exploits form an enormous body of material, second only to Moses. According to the sectarian book of *Jubilees,* Enoch receives a night vision in which he sees the entire future until the judgment day (4:18–19). He spends six jubilees of years with the angels of God, learning everything about the earth and heavens, from their composition and motion and to the locations of hell and heaven (4:21). When he finally ascends, he takes up residence in the Garden of Eden "in majesty and honor," recording the deeds of humanity and serving in the sanctuary as priest (4:23–26); he writes many books (21:20), and there are indeed references to his writings in many other pseudepigrapha.[40]

The various incarnations of God's principal angel carry or personify his name, which can be identifical to the form of man.[41] Exemplary men can also ascend to divinity by identification with or transformation into the enthroned figure. The rabbis polemicized against the idea that God has a partner or that there are "two powers in heaven" (*shtei reshuyot b'sham-*

ayim).[42] Because no early Jewish mediator figure helps in creation, and because the Gnostic mediators primarily do so, a creative function for the mediator would signal an important intermediary role in transmitting and possibly transforming these traditions into Gnosticism—which J. Fossum finds in Samaritanism.[43]

One apocalyptic mediator, Enoch, predates Paul. He is portrayed in the Enochic literature, which was widespread in Judaism, as we have learned from the Dead Sea Scrolls.[44] Enoch is a primeval hero of the Bible whose death is not mentioned. Gen. 5:18–24 twice relates that Enoch walked with God and then disappeared, for "God took him."

First Enoch is the first of many books based on the terse biblical report. Enoch begins his journey to heaven to intercede for the fallen angels (14). In Enoch's vision,[45] believers are mystically transformed into white cows, which appear to symbolize the messiah: "And I [Enoch] saw that a snow-white cow was born, with huge horns; all the beasts of the field and all the birds of the sky feared him and made petition to him all the time. I went on seeing until all their kindred were transformed, and became snow-white cows; and the first among them became something, and that something became a great beast with huge horns on its head" (90:37–39). The believers symbolically share the being of the messiah. The messiah not only saves but serves as the model for transformation of believers.

In *The Parables of Enoch* (1 Enoch 37–71), Enoch performs various messianic functions. He is righteous and knows divine secrets (46.3). He is victorious over the mighty of the earth and judges the wicked (46.4–8; 62.9; 63.11; 69.27–29). He is probably the figure described as the "Chosen One" or the "Elect One" or the "messiah," since virtually identical functions are attributed to these three figures (49.2–4; 51.3–5; 52.4–9; 55.4; 61.4–9; 62.2–16).[46] He judges "in the name of the Lord of Spirits" (55.4), sitting on the throne (51.3; 55.4; 61.8; 62.2–6; 70.27), and at the end of his life he ascends to his enthroned status.

The Parables of Enoch contain several references to angelic transformation. Enoch ascends to heaven while reciting hymns and blessings, as do the merkabah mystics, where he is overcome with the splendor and glory of the throne rooms (39). His face changes on account of the vision, which evidently reflects the prophecy that "those who are wise shall shine as the stars" (Dan. 11:2). First Enoch 62.15 states that the elect shall shine as stars and be clothed with garments of glory. Most important, at the end of *The Parables of Enoch* (70–71), Enoch is mystically transformed on the throne into the figure of the son of man: "My whole body mollified and my spirit transformed" (1 Enoch 71:1).[47] This event underlines the importance of mystic transformation between the adept and the angelic viceregent of God, giving a plausible explanation of how the sectarians that produced the visions in Daniel expected to be transformed into stars. It is possible to say that 1 Enoch 71 gives us the experience of an adept undergoing the astral transformation prophesied in Dan. 12:2, albeit in the name of a pseudepigraphical hero. If this is true, then Paul gives us the actual, confessional experience of the same spiritual event, with Christ substituting for the son of man. In both cases, the believer is subsumed into the body of heavenly savior and becomes a kind of star or celestial immortal.

Because the ascent of the living is supposed to parallel exactly the ascent of the dead after death, 1 Enoch 70–71 either retells Enoch's earthly ascent or refers to the ascent at the end of his life. The puzzling superscription to chapter 70, the composite nature of the text, and some possible imprecision in chronology prevent complete surety on this issue: "And it happened after this that his living name was raised up before that son of man and to the Lord from among those who dwell upon the earth" (70.1). The journey is taken by Enoch's name, not precisely his soul, again reflecting a level of mystical speculation that predates the importation of the platonic notion of a soul. It may be that the transformation motif is particularly important because the notion of the soul had not deeply penetrated this level of Jewish society. This transformation motif is, of course, amenable to the explicit concept of the immortal soul as it develops within Judaism and Christianity.

Whatever the intention of the author of 1 Enoch, the relationship to Paul's experience is important.[48] Like Enoch, Paul claims to have gazed on the Glory, whom Paul identifies as Christ; Paul understands that he has been transformed into a divine state, which will be fully realized after his death; Paul claims that his vision and transformation is somehow a mystical identification; and Paul claims to have received a calling, his special status as intermediary. Paul specifies the meaning of this calling for all believers, a concept absent in the Enochic texts, although it may have been assumed within the original community.

Complete surety about the history of this tradition is elusive. Paul does not explicitly call Christ the Glory of God.[49] And because 1 Enoch 37–71 are missing from the Dead Sea Scrolls, we cannot date them accurately. They might date from the first century or later and be influenced by Christianity, since they are extant only in the Ethiopic Version of Enoch, the official canon of the Ethiopian Christian Church. Whatever the date of 1 Enoch 70–71, the stories of Enoch's ascensions in 1 Enoch 14 antedated

Paul and would have influenced his conceptions about heavenly journey.[50] Further, as long as the date of 1 Enoch 70–71 cannot be fixed exactly and the evidence from the Dead Sea Scrolls remains ambiguous, Paul himself remains the earliest author explicitly expressing transformation in Judaism. If his discussion of transformation can be related to apocalyptic mysticism in Judaism, he also becomes the only Jewish mystic of this period to relate this experience confessionally.

The theme of angelic transformation usually appears in a story of a heavenly journey. It becomes especially important in Kabbalah, but it is sparsely attested in first-century Judaism. Since we have no rabbinic works that can be firmly dated to the first century, Paul's confessional reports are important as evidence for dating merkabah mysticism.[51] Paul's texts provide information about first-century Judaism and Jewish mysticism, as important as the Jewish texts that have been found to establish the meaning of Christian texts. Indeed, Paul's letters may be more important to the history of Judaism than the rabbinic texts are to the interpretation of Christian Scriptures.

Second Enoch, extant only in two Slavonic versions, is an extension of the Enoch legend, most probably through a Christian recension, since Torah does not figure in the story. Yet, the possibility of a Semitic, possibly even a Jewish *Vorlage,* especially in the shorter version, cannot be ruled out. In 2 Enoch 22.7, Enoch is transformed into "one of his glorious ones," an angel, during a face-to-face encounter with the Lord. But note the use of glorification language to characterize angelic status: God decrees, "Let Enoch join in and stand in front of my face forever," explaining the rabbinic term *Prince of the Presence,* which is normally applied to Metatron. Then Enoch is transformed: "And the LORD said to Michael, 'Go, and extract Enoch from [his] earthly clothing. And anoint him with my delightful oil, and put him into the clothes of my glory.' And so Michael did, just as the Lord had said to him. He anointed me and he clothed me. And the appearance of that oil is greater than the greatest light, and its ointment is like sweet dew, and its fragrance myrrh; and it is like the rays of the glittering sun. And I looked at myself, and I had become like one of his glorious ones, and there was no observable difference" (*2 Enoch* 22.8–10, recension A).

This transformation is effected through a change of clothing. The clothing functions as or symbolizes Enoch's new, immortal flesh, as they are immortal clothes emanating from the throne room, not from earth. This parallels Paul's future glorification of the mortal body in 2 Cor. 5:1–10.[52] Enoch has been put *in* the body of an angel, or he is *in* the manlike figure in 1 Enoch 71. This could explain Paul's use of the peculiar terminology *in Christ.*

The *Ascension of Isaiah* also focuses on ascent and heavenly transformation. In chapters 6–11, usually attributed to a Christian hand, the theophany of Isaiah 6 is described as a heavenly journey in which the prophet sees God. The prophet is taken through each of the seven heavens, stopping to view the glorious figure seated on the throne of each heaven. When he worships the figure in the fifth heaven, he is explicitly warned not to worship any angel, as the rabbis warn against the crime of assuming that there are two powers in heaven. Isaiah is told that his throne, garments, and crown await him in heaven (7.22). All those who love the Most High will at their end ascend by the angel of the Holy Spirit (7.23). At each heaven, Isaiah is glorified the more, emphasizing the transformation that occurs as a human travels closer to God (7.24); he effectively becomes one of the angels. According to the other angels, Isaiah's vision is unprecedented; no one else has been vouchsafed such a complete vision of the reward awaiting the good (8.11–13). But Isaiah must return to earth to complete his prophetic commission before he can enjoy the rest that awaits him in heaven.[53]

The climax of the story is angelic transformation, but the stated purpose of the journey is theodicy—to understand God's justice. The journeys in these early apocalyptic texts usually begin after a crisis of human confidence about God's intention to bring justice to the world, and they result in the discovery that the universe is indeed following God's moral plan. The ancient scriptures about God's providence are proved true, and it is foretold that the evil ones who predominate on earth, oppressing God's saints, are to receive the punishment that they richly deserve. The ascension story, especially if performed by an earthly hero before his death, functions as a justification for the suffering of the righteous because it verifies what the community would like to believe—namely, that injustices will be recompensed by their ascension to heavenly immortality after death and that the evil ones will be condemned to hell. Although its narration describes exotic and amazing events, the purpose is pragmatic, explaining the structure of heaven and providing an eschatological verification that God's plan will come to fruition. Immortalization is the explicit purpose of the pagan ascension texts. In some of the Jewish material, where immortality is automatically guaranteed by moral living, more complex purposes are promulgated. Besides confirming God's plan in the face of the earthly victory of the ungodly or the slaughter of the righteous, the stories describe the mechanism by which immortality is achieved.

Transformation to one's immortal state is pictured as becoming one with an angelic figure, perhaps illustrating the person's identification with a preexistent guardian angel.

In 2 Baruch (Syr.) the theme of angelic transformation sounds loud and strong. This book is widely believed to have been influenced by Christianity, but it is variously dated from the first century to the third. Second Baruch 51.3ff portrays a gradual transformation of all believers into angelic creatures, as the process of redemption is fulfilled:

> Also, as for the glory of those who proved to be righteous on account of my law, those who possessed intelligence in their life, and those who planted the root of wisdom in their heart—their splendor will then be glorified by transformations, and the shape of their face will be changed into the light of their beauty so that they may acquire and receive the undying world which is promised to them. . . . When they therefore will see that those over whom they are exalted now will then be more exalted and glorified than they, then both these and those will be changed, these into the splendor of angels and those into startling visions and horrible shapes; . . . For they will live in the heights of that world and they will be like the angels and be equal to the stars. And they will be changed into any shape which they wished, for beauty to loveliness, and from light to the splendor of glory. . . . And the excellence of the righteous will then be greater than that of the angels.[54]

This is a true fleshing out of the visions of Daniel. The evil ones are transformed into the terrible beasts of the Daniel vision, and the righteous are explicitly transformed into stars.

Another aspect of this tradition is the enormous size of the principal angelic vice-regent of God; an analogy with Indo-European mythology may have influenced the development of the Judeo-Christian tradition. A correspondence between a cosmic man and the features of the cosmos is an ancient aspect of Indo-European thought.[55] Such conceptions probably enter Greek literature through Orphism. Representations of a giant man, the Macranthropos, with a head composed of the heaven, a belly or body composed of the sea or the ether, feet composed of earth, eyes of the sun and moon, are found in the Derveni papyrus, the Sarapis Oracle in Macrobius, the Greek Magical Papyri, and the Hermetic literature.[56]

In merkabah mysticism, the mediator figure is apparently not God himself, though he is often described in divine terms, as when he is given the name Zohariel YHWH. In this case, it is not possible to distinguish between the angel and God. In other references, the awe and reverence of

the supreme deity is protected by giving the figure on the throne a clear angelic identity, like Metatron. Divinizing Metatron is explicitly labeled heresy both in rabbinic writings and the hekhaloth texts. These traditions no doubt reflect different rabbinic understandings of the contradiction between biblical passages describing God's self-revelation (e.g., Exod. 24:10) and the statements that no one may see God and live (Exod. 33).[57]

In writings of the church fathers and in Gnostic sources, similar ideas of ascent and mediation are found. Gnostic sources often depict an opposition between two heavenly hypostases, one a savior and other an ignorant demiurge.[58] The difference between the high God and the intermediary forms can be described in the relationship between an object and its image. God's image is often the intermediary and can also be described as the perfect man, as is Adamas in Irenaeus's account of the Barbelognostics (*Against the Heresies* 1.29.33).[59]

In the Merkabah tract now called 3 Enoch (*Sefer Hekhaloth*), the man Enoch is transformed into Metatron (3–15). Metatron bears a striking resemblance to Moses in Ezekiel the Tragedian's play. God makes a throne for Enoch-Metatron in 3 Enoch (10.1); he gives him a special garment of Glory and a royal gown (12.1–3); God makes him ruler over all kingdoms and all heavenly beings (10.3); all the angels of every rank, and the angels of the sun, moon, stars, and planets, fall prostrate when Enoch sits on his throne (14.1–5); he knows the names of all the stars (46.1–2; see Ps. 147:40)[60]; God reveals to him all the secrets of heaven and earth so that Enoch knows past, present, and future (10.5; 11.1; cf. 45.1; 48 (D).7); God calls him YHWH hakaton, another interpretation of Exod. 23:21 (12.5).[61] The date of these documents is far too late to be of specific guidance for Paul.[62] Whatever the date of Daniel or the earliest son of man traditions, this angelic figure, the figure that the Bible sometimes calls the *Kavod* or the principal angel of God, is pre-Christian and is a factor in Paul's description of Christ.[63]

There is adequate evidence that many Jewish mystics and apocalypticists sensed a relationship between the heavenly figure on the throne and important figures in the life of their community. The roots of this tradition are pre-Christian. Further, Jewish scholars have overlooked Christianity as evidence for the existence of these traditions in first-century Judaism. Paul did not have to be a religious innovator to posit an identification between a vindicated hero and the image of the *Kavod,* the manlike figure in heaven, although the identification of the figure with the risen Christ is obviously a uniquely Christian development.[64] Paul is the only Jewish mystic to report his own personal, identifiably confessional mystical expe-

riences in the fifteen hundred years that separate Ezekiel from the rise of Kabbalah.

THE ECSTATIC DIMENSION OF VISIONS AND TRANSFORMATIONS

Because Paul's experiences are manifestly ecstatic, there has been no need to question the existence of ecstasy within the Jewish mystical tradition. But biblical tradition and early Judaism also hint that visions normally took place in religiously altered states of consciousness. Besides the exegesis of Ezekiel and related passages, a tradition of ecstatic vision was well established in Hebrew society and was interpreted as ecstatic from its biblical precedents.[65] The vocabulary of biblical theophanies and the visions of God in the Hebrew Bible imply ecstasy or paranormal consciousness—not only with the preposition *like* (*k*), but also of other terms suggesting likeness and comparison, such as *mar'eh, demuth, tavnith,* and *ṣelem*. The terms in Hebrew originally signified the paranormal quality of the experience of these theophanies, safeguarding the sight of God from ordinary human vision. Thus, they are also closely associated with the revelation of the appearance of God's manlike form and with the creation of man throughout scripture: "Let us create man in our *likeness* and *form*" (Gen. 1:26).

In Ezek. 1:2, the prophet receives his call through a theophany at the river Chebar. In his "visions of God" (Ezek. 1:1) he sees the likeness (*demuth*) of living creatures who had the likeness (*demuth*) of men in the front but animal faces on the other sides. Above the firmament he sees the likeness (*demuth*) of a throne with a figure with the likeness of a man (*demuth kmar'eh adam*) seated thereon (Ezek. 1:26 LXX: "kai epi tou homoiōmatos tou thronou homoiōma hōs eidos anthrōpou anōthen"). Ezekiel understands this vision as a description of God's Glory: "Such was the appearance of the likeness of the Glory of the Lord" (1:28; in Hebrew, "Mareh demuth kavod YHWH"). That the Glory of God refers to the manlike figure and not the whole vision is manifest from the rest of Ezekiel where *Kavod* YHWH or the God of Israel is described as sitting on the throne or otherwise personified (3:12, 23; 8:4; 9:3; 10:4, 18–22; 11:22–25; 43:2–5; 44:4). In this particular place, the vision means that the presence of God has left Jerusalem before the destruction of the temple and remains with the exiles in Babylonia.[66]

The term *Glory* is itself a way of safeguarding the actual appearance of God. We do not know God himself, who is beyond our figuration. We only know his Glory, the form in which he chooses to reveal himself. The terms for likeness, then, suggest two things: first, that the experience is visionary, not normal; second, that Ezekiel saw an appearance or an image of the Glory, not the Glory itself, which further safeguards the majesty of God. No one can see God and live (Exod. 33:20), nor apparently can one see his Glory directly as Moses did, but people do see images of his Glory in religiously altered states of consciousness. Once the dignity of the divinity is protected, the human features of his appearance are described with no sensitivity to anthropomorphism.

Both terms, *appearance* and *image,* later become technical terms for the Glory of God, but in their original context they function to indicate paranormal experience. In Daniel 7, likeness (*demuth* is not used, but the scene is a dream vision [Dan. 7:2]) and the Hebrew preposition *k* make it clear that the experience is paranormal. The adept is not seeing these things in the way one normally sees, but he sees them in a religiously altered state of consciousness. Hence, the visions look like normal sights but are not. The scene is a heavenly throne room with two manlike figures, one an ancient of days and the second a son of man. Son of man is not a title and can only mean that the divine figure has a manlike form because the phrase usually means simply *a human being*. The exact phrase in Daniel is "one like a son of man" (*kbar 'enash*), signifying that the next visionary figure was shaped like a man.[67]

The best guess as to the identity of the figure shaped like a man is that he is simply one of the principal angels, in whose form God deigns to appear, for some angels were envisioned in human form. At his second appearance, Gabriel is described as "the man Gabriel whom I had seen in the vision at first" (9:21). Then in Daniel 10:5 "a man clothed in linen," probably an angel, is described in a way reminiscent of Ezekiel's description of God's Glory. Again, in Daniel 10:16, Daniel sees a human figure, probably, as before, an angel shaped as a man (*kdemuth bnei adam*).

Because merkabah mysticism is esoteric and the rabbis comment on it only within works that are fundamentally exegetical in nature, some scholars have maintained that there is no mystical content to the stories at all.[68] This is a hasty conclusion, however, based only on the exegetical hints one finds in talmudic literature. There is no firm evidence of ecstasy or mystical rites among the rabbinic writers because they are exegetes interested in the legal consequences of these experiences, not the experiences themselves.[69] The first century, like all preceding and succeeding centuries, took experience gained in visions and dreams seriously.[70] It also valued ecstasy or trance as a medium for revelation and developed tech-

niques for achieving the ecstasy or trance in which these visions occurred.[71] These beliefs pervaded Jewish culture as well and enriched Jewish spirituality. In the Hellenistic period, these terms become associated with the language of ascension or theurgy, the magic use of shamanic techniques to stimulate these out-of-body experiences. This vocabulary, as we shall see, was known to Paul and became a central aspect of Paul's explanation of the Christian message.[72]

In the *Poimandres,* usually considered a later document but which might date from as early as the first century, many of these themes come together in a mélange of Hellenistic Jewish exegesis of Genesis and gnosticizing spirituality. The *Nous* is the highest God. His son, the Primordial Man, is described as the image or form of the father. The vision starts with an ecstatic reverie. The purpose of the mystical contemplation of the *Nous* is both cosmological in that it gives a coherent view of the universe and soteriological because that view forms the basis of salvation.[73] The tractate echoes Genesis, using Greek philosophy to reformulate the biblical creation. Poimandres, who is a figure of gigantic size, identifies himself with the light and embodies the highest god, Nous (1.6). After revealing the secrets of cosmology, he outlines how a person can enter into the Good. The person mounts upward through the heavens until, stripped of all materiality, he or she begins to sing hymns to the father, accompanied by those who have preceded him or her. All who are in the eighth sphere give themselves to the powers, and becoming powers themselves, they enter into God (*en theō ginontai* [1.25]). A similar pattern is revealed in tractate 13, though this is usually regarded as a later document.[74]

In the *Poimandres,* the ecstatic nature of the vision is clear and appears to be sought after by a special technique resembling meditation or contemplation. Philo also mentions meditation as his method for speculating on cosmological problems in his youth (*Special Laws* 3.1–6), though he was forced to abandon these experiences due to his mature responsibilities. Philo's account of revelation occasionally uses mystical terminology—for example, he mentions ecstasy and korybantic frenzy, described as the root of humanity's most cherished perceptions.[75] For Philo, Moses' visions of the angel of the Lord were also meant to be ecstatic visions of the *logos,* the form of man, the sum of the perceptible world that God makes available to his prophets. Since Philo only alludes to the experiences and prophetic literature contains few explicit instructions about obtaining visions, it is impossible to define exactly what kind of experience

is meant in these visions. But it would be loosely understood as ecstasy or trance in contemporary parlance. Ecstatic trance has a long history in the ancient Near East as a way in which God spoke to humanity, and it was closely associated with prophecy. But in the Hellenistic and Graeco-Roman period, these experiences were widely popular because of growing respect for altered consciousness. The so-called *interpretatio Graeca* allowed disparate cults of the ancient Near East and Hellenic world—cults as separate in their origins as Eleusis, Isis, Cybele, Mithras, and others—to seek a similar ritual form involving secret initiations by means of carefully controlled religious rituals that often involved ecstasy and stressed Platonic anthropology, or the myth of the soul's proper journey heavenward.

The Paris Magical Papyrus contains a rather detailed example of the rites that might accompany the mystic's journey upward. The ascent is stimulated by various magical preparations and by inhalation of vapors and the sun's rays. Of course, the setting in the magical papyrus is pagan, and it is a crude magical rendering at that, but the purpose of this face-to-face encounter with the great god Helios Mithras is immortalization. Something like the same assurances given to this magical practitioner can be found in Apuleius's *Golden Ass,* where Lucius is initiated into the mysteries of Isis. In this case, secrecy prevented any exact description of the mystic experience, though the rituals were figured in general terms. Lucius's initiation into the Isis cult is meant to be profoundly religious, but it is similar in content and structure to the journey described in the magical papyri. Both were considered significant religious experiences in their day.

In Jewish mysticism, the so-called *Shiur Koma* gives the exact measurements of the image and reflection of the divinity in figures meant to promote contemplation and trance—like the songs, spells, and charms of the hekhaloth literature. One stated purpose of merkabah mysticism, as outlined in the hekhaloth texts, is to "see the king in his glory."[76] In the ninth century, Hai Gaon recounts that the journey to view this divine figure was undertaken by mystics who put their heads between their knees (the posture Elijah assumed when praying for rain in 1 Kings 18:42),[77] reciting repetitious psalms, glossolalic incantations, and mantra-like prayers, which are recorded in abundance in the hekhaloth literature[78]: "When he seeks to behold the merkabah and the palaces of the angels on high, he must follow a certain procedure. He must fast a number of days and place his head between his knees and whisper many hymns and songs whose texts are known from tradition. Then he perceives the chambers as if he saw the seven palaces with his own eyes, and it is as though he entered

one palace after another and saw what is there. And there are two *mishnayoth* which the tannaim taught regarding this topic, called *Hekhaloth Rabbati* and *Hekhaloth Zutreti*."

Hai Gaon is aware of the mystical techniques for heavenly ascent and describes them as out-of-body experiences where the adept ascends to heaven while his body stays on earth. It is even possible that he understands the entire journey as an internal, intrapsychic one, but this is not entirely clear.[79] The hekhaloth texts themselves mention the transformation of the adept into a heavenly being, whose body becomes fire and whose eyes flash lightning, a theme repeated in the *Paris Magical Papyrus*.[80]

THE MANLIKE FIGURE AND EARLY CHRISTIANITY

Heavenly man traditions are crucial to the development of the Christian meaning of Jesus' earthly mission.[81] They inform the New Testament discussions of the son of man in ways that have been infrequently discussed.[82] It is quite likely that some of Jesus' followers thought of him as a messiah during his own lifetime, though they were disabused of that idea by his arrest, trial, and death on the cross as the King of the Jews, for no pre-Christian view of the messiah conceived of the possibility of his demise at the hands of the Romans.[83] Instead, the disciples' experience of Jesus' resurrection and ascension to the right hand of God confirmed the originally discarded messianic title retrospectively in a new, dynamic, and ironic way. Resurrection and ascension had entered Jewish thought in the century before Jesus as a reward for the righteous martyrs of the Maccabean wars. Thus, although Christianity represents a pure Jewish reaction to a tragic series of events, the reaction was at the same time absolutely novel. The process should be of special interest to Jewish scholars as well as students of Christology, because it is the clearest evidence we have on the intersection of the historical founding of new religious groups and Jewish expectations derived from biblical texts. The events were given meaning by creative interplay between the facts and the hermeneutic process.

Since Jesus died as a martyr, expectations of his resurrection would have been normal in sectarian Judaism.[84] But the idea of a crucified messiah was unique. In such a situation, the Christians only did what other believing Jews did in similar circumstances; they turned to biblical prophecy for elucidation. No messianic text suggested itself as appropriate to the

situation. But Ps. 110:1 was exactly apposite: "The Lord says to my lord: 'Sit at my right hand, 'til I make your enemies your footstool.'" This description of the enthronement of a Davidic descendant was now understood as a heavenly enthronement after death and resurrection. Yet nothing in the text makes the death or resurrection part of the narrative inevitable. It must have come from the historical experience of the early Christian community, after they experienced these events. Thereafter, Ps. 110:1 could be combined easily with Dan. 7:9–13, the description of the enthronement of the son of man. Dan. 7:9–13 seemed to describe the scene of Christ's exaltation and ascension, because Jesus could be identified with the son of man, the angelic figure. Further, Dan. 12:2 had promised astral immortality to those who taught wisdom, making plausible while it confirmed the entire set of expectations.

Jesus apparently used the term *son of man* while alive, though deciding what he meant by the phrase remains problematic. He may have predicted the future coming of a human figure, or he may not have referred to the Daniel passage at all.[85] After his crucifixion and the experience of his resurrection, the son-of-man phrases Jesus used were put in the context of the statement in Dan. 7:13 about the enthronement of the son of man, and Jesus' disciples believed that Jesus' victory over death was followed by his ascension and enthronement in heaven as the gigantic angelic or divine figure who was to bring God's coming justice. Through the imagery of the son of man, the man Jesus was associated with the figure on the throne in Dan. 7:13 while the traditions of Jesus' messianic function were associated with traditions about the son of man, taking on a uniquely Christian interpretation. Like the description of the venerable, fatherly figure in Ezekiel the Tragedian's writing, the scene in Daniel involves the enthronement of an ancient of days with the son of man coming to sit next to the ancient of days. The traditions themselves were present in Judaism before Christianity, but it was Jesus' life and mission itself, along with the post-Easter expectations of his followers, that brought messianism, judgment, and heavenly ascent together in this particular way.[86]

The Christians identified the son of man, the human or angelic representation of God, with the risen Christ.[87] Christians took the second lord of Ps. 110:1 to refer to Jesus and to signify the divine name Lord. Thereafter, the risen Christ was understood as an aspect of the divinity.[88] Since the angel with the human figure was also divine itself, carrying the name YHWH (Exod. 23:21), Jesus can be said to have attained to divinity. In the Gospel of John, Christ also became logos, God's intermediary form, and *light*, which was Philo's term for God's principal hypostasis as well. Christ

as Son is said to be above the angels, just as Moses is enthroned and worshiped by the stars in Ezekiel the Tragedian's work. This is made explicit in the later document, Heb. 1:8, where the Son is identified with the Elohim in Ps. 45:7.

There were other conceptions of Jesus as prophet and as Son, but they were summed up in the earliest Christian designation of Jesus as Lord, the name of God. This identification of Christ as the human figure of God enthroned in heaven, the vision that Ezekiel saw, was vouchsafed to Paul. Paul's experience differs from other Jewish mystics in that he identified the figure as Christ, but Paul himself cannot be a good witness to how these elements originally came together in his mind. In his writing, many years after the vision, he has completely subsumed the content of the vision into an acceptable Christian theophany. Leaving aside the special Christian polemic that the man on the throne is the messiah Jesus and is also greater than an angel, Paul's statements are important evidence for the existence of first-century Jewish mysticism.

PAUL'S USE OF MYSTICAL VOCABULARY

Paul himself gives the best evidence for the existence of ecstatic journeys to heaven in first-century Judaism with his report in 2 Corinthians.[89] His inability to decide whether the voyage took place in the body or out of the body is firm evidence of a mystical ascent and shows that the voyage has not been interiorized as a journey into the self, which becomes common in Kabbalah. Further, since the rabbis proscribed the discussion of these topics except singly, to mature disciples, and only then provided that they had experienced it on their own (*mevin meda'ato* [M. Hag. 2.1]), the rabbinic stories interpreting the merkabah experience often take place while traveling through the wilderness from city to city, when such doctrines could be discussed privately. This is the scene that Luke picks for Paul's conversion.[90]

In 2 Corinthians 12, when Paul talks about mystical journeys directly, he too adopts a pseudepigraphical stance. He does not admit to the ascent personally. Apart from the needs of his rhetoric, rabbinic rules also forbid public discussion of mystic phenomena. A first-century date for this rule would explain why Paul could not divulge his experience *in his own name* at that place. It also suggests why Jewish mystics consistently picked pseudepigraphical literary conventions to discuss their religious experience, unlocking the mystery behind the entire phenomenon of pseudepigraphical writing. None of the standard discussions of this incompletely understood phenomenon mentions Paul's confession or the Mishnah.[91] Again, Paul may be giving us hitherto unrecognized information about Jewish culture in the first century that is unavailable from any other source.

When Paul is not faced with a direct declaration of personal mystical experience, he reveals much about the mystical religion as it was experienced in the first century. Paul himself designates Christ as the image of the Lord in a few places (2 Cor. 4:4; Col. 1:15 [if it is Pauline]), and he mentions the *morphē* of God in Phil. 2:6.[92] More often he talks of transforming believers into the image of God's son in various ways (Rom. 8:29; 2 Cor. 3:18; Phil. 3:21; 1 Cor. 15:49; see also Col. 3:9). These passages are critical to understanding Paul's experience of conversion. They must be examined in close detail to understand their relationship to Jewish apocalypticism and mysticism, from which they derive their most complete significance for Paul. Paul's longest discussion of these themes occurs in an unlikely place (2 Cor. 3:18–4:6), where he assumes the context rather than explaining it completely:

> And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being changed into his likeness from one degree of glory to another; for this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit. Therefore, having his ministry by the mercy of God, we do not lose heart. We have renounced disgraceful, underhanded ways; we refuse to practice cunning or to tamper with God's word, but by the open statement of the truth we would commend ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God. And even if our gospel is veiled it is veiled only to those who are perishing. In their case, the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the likeness of God. For what we preach is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, with ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake. For it is the God who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of the Lord in the face of Christ. (2 Cor. 3:18–4:6)

Paul again used the imagery of darkness and light, which Gaventa notes is important to his conversion vocabulary.[93] The social aspect of this mysticism-apocalypticism is equally important to Paul. In calling him a mystical Jew, we discover a whole social and ethical side to first-century mystical writings normally missed in the modern separation of ethics,

apocalypticism, and mysticism. Paul's writings are social and ethical; yet behind them lies a mystical experience that he calls ineffable and that is always confirmed in community.

Paul's use of the language of transformation often goes unappreciated. In 2 Cor. 3:18, Paul says that believers will be changed into Christ's likeness from one degree of glory to another. He refers to Moses' encounter with the angel of the Lord in Exodus 33–34. Earlier in the Exodus passage, the angel of the Lord is described as carrying the name of God (23:21). Moses sees the Glory of the Lord, makes a covenant, receives the commandments on the two tables of the law, and when he comes down from the mount, the skin of his face shines with light (Exod. 34:29–35). Moses thereafter must wear a veil except when he is in the presence of the Lord. Paul assumes that Moses made an ascension to the presence of the Lord, was transformed by that encounter and that his shining face is a reflection of the encounter.

Paul uses strange and significant mystical language in 2 Cor. 3:18–4:6. What is immediately striking is that he uses that language to discuss his own and other Christians' experience in Christ. Paul explicitly compares Moses' experience with his own and that of Christian believers. The experiences are similar, but the Christian transformation is greater and more permanent. Once the background of Paul's vocabulary is known, his daring claims for Christian experience become clear. His point is that some Christian believers also make such an ascent and that its effects are more permanent than the vision that Moses received. The church has witnessed a theophany as important as the one vouchsafed to Moses, but the Christian theophany is greater still, as Paul himself has experienced. The Corinthians are said to be a message from Christ (3:2), who is equated with the Glory of God. The new community of gentiles is not a letter written on stone (Jer. 31:33), but it is delivered by Paul as Moses delivered the Torah to Israel. The new dispensation is more splendid than the last, not needing the veil with which Moses hid his face. Paul's own experience proved to him and for Christianity that all will be transformed.

Paul's phrase the Glory of the Lord must be taken both as a reference to Christ and as a technical term for the *Kavod,* the human form of God appearing in biblical visions. In 2 Cor. 3:18, Paul says that Christians behold the Glory of the Lord (*tēn doxan kyriou*) as in a mirror and are transformed into his image (*tēn autēn eikona*).[94] For Paul, as for the earliest Jewish mystics, to be privileged to see the *Kavod* or Glory (*doxa*) of God is a prologue to transformation into his image (*eikōn*). Paul does not say that all Christians have made the journey literally but compares the

experience of knowing Christ to being allowed into the intimate presence of the Lord. We do know that he himself has made that journey.

The result of the journey is the identification of Christ as the Glory of God. When Paul says that he preaches that Jesus is Lord and that God "has let this light shine out of darkness into our hearts to give the light of knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ" (4:6), he is describing his own conversion and ministry, as he described it in Galatians 1, and as he explains the experience for the purpose of furthering conversion. His apostolate, which he expresses as a prophetic calling, is to proclaim that the face of *Christ* is the Glory of God. When reading this passage in terms of Paul's later description of the ascension of the man to the third heaven, one could conclude that Paul's conversion experience involved his identification of Jesus as the image and Glory of God, as the human figure in heaven, and thereafter as Christ, son, and savior. At least this is how Paul construes it when he recalls it.

Ecstatic ascensions like the one described in 2 Corinthians 12, and spiritual metamorphoses like 2 Corinthians 3, are strangely unfamiliar to modern Jewish and Christian religious sentiments. Neither Christianity nor rabbinic Judaism openly transmitted these lively mystical Jewish traditions of the first century. But in the context of the first few centuries, the combination of the themes of ascension and transformation, both inside and outside Judaism, suggested the attainment of immortality. The context of Jewish mysticism also connects these themes with theodicy. Daniel 12 suggests that the enlighteners who lead others to wisdom (*hamaskilim*) will shine as the brightness of the heavens (the stars), and that they will be among those resurrected for eternal reward. First Enoch 37–71 contains the interesting narration of the transformation of Enoch into the son of man, but this might be a Christian addition to the text, since it agrees so completely with the transformation that Paul outlines.[95] Without Paul we could not suppose that this experience is evidenced in the first century because the date of 1 Enoch is uncertain. Nor would we know that the mystic experience was even possible within Judaism.

In apocalypticism and Jewish mysticism ascensions to God were the prerogative only of the most pure, made after the adept went through several ritual preparations, including fasting and cleansings but preeminently through ritual immersion (*tevilah*). Qumran is an important location for purity rites. The Angelic Liturgy found at Qumran, which specifies the Psalms for human and angelic Sabbath singing, assumes that the purity rules of the community have been observed.[96] It is not surprising therefore that many scholars have felt echoes of a baptismal liturgy in 2 Corinthians

3 and especially in 2 Cor. 4:4–6.[97] The word *phōtismos* (4:4; 4:6) and the phrase *kainē ktisis* (5:17) are reminiscent of baptismal liturgy. Since the words *lampō, augazō,* and *phōtismos,* which are commonly used in baptismal liturgy, are used by Paul here only, it is quite possible that Paul is paraphrasing a baptismal liturgy to express this mystic identification. Paul's quotation might then indicate that it was specifically during baptism that the identification between the image of the savior and the believer was made.

Paul's famous description of Christ's experience of humility and obedience in Phil. 2:5–11 also hints that the identification of Jesus with the image of God was reenacted in the church in a liturgical mode: "Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form he humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross. Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name which is above every name that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."

This passage has several hymnic features, indicating that Paul is quoting a fragment of primitive liturgy or referring to a liturgical setting.[98] Thus Philippians 2 is probably the earliest writing in the Pauline corpus, as well as the earliest Christology of the New Testament; it is not surprising that it is the most exalted Christology.[99]

In Phil. 2:6, the identification of Jesus with the form of God implies his preexistence. Christ is depicted as an eternal aspect of divinity, which was not proud of its high station but consented to take on the shape of a man and suffer the fate of men, even death on a cross (though many scholars see this phrase as a Pauline addition to the original hymn). This transformation of form from the divine to the human is followed by the converse, the transformation back into God. Because of this obedience God exalted Jesus and bestowed on him the "name which is above every name" (Phil. 2:9). For a Jew this phrase can only mean that Jesus received the divine name Yahweh, the tetragrammaton YHWH, translated as the Greek name *kyrios,* or Lord. We have seen that sharing in the divine name is a recurring motif of early Jewish apocalypticism, where the principal angelic mediator of God is or carries the name Yahweh, as Exodus 23 describes the angel of God. The implication of the Greek term *morphē,* "form," in Philippians 2 is that Christ has the form of a divine body identical with *Kavod* and

equivalent also with the *eikōn,* for man is made after the *eikōn* of God and thus has the divine *morphē* (in Hebrew: *demuth*). The climax of Paul's confession is that "Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father" (Phil. 2:11), meaning that Jesus, the messiah, has received the name Lord in his glorification, and that this name, not Jesus' private earthly name, is the one that will cause every knee to bend and every tongue to confess.[100]

In paraphrasing this fragment from liturgy, Paul witnesses that the early Christian community directed its prayers to this human figure of divinity along with God (1 Cor. 16:22; Rom. 10:9–12; 1 Cor. 12:3)—all the more striking since the Christians, like the Jews, refuse to venerate any other god or hero. When the rabbis gained control of the Jewish community they vociferously argued against the worship of any angel and specifically polemicized against the belief that a heavenly figure other than God can forgive sins (b. Sanhedrin 38b), quoting Exod. 23:21 prominently among other Scriptures to prove their point. The heresy itself they called believing that there are two powers in heaven. This heresy mainly (but not exclusively) referred to Christians, who, as Paul says, do exactly what the rabbis warn against—worship the second power.[101]

Concomitant with Paul's worship of the divine Christ is transformation. Paul says in Phil. 3:10 "that I may know him and the power of his resurrection and may share his sufferings, becoming like him [*symmorphizomenos*] in his death." Later he says: "But our commonwealth is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will change [*metaschēmatisei*] our lowly body to be like [*symmorphon*] his glorious body, by the power which enables him even to subject all things to himself" (3:20–21). The body of the believer eventually is to be transformed into the body of Christ.

Paul's depiction of salvation is based on his understanding of Christ's glorification, partaking of early Jewish apocalyptic mysticism for its expression.[102] In Rom. 12:2 Paul's listeners are exhorted to "be transformed [*metamorphousthe*] by renewing of your minds." In Gal. 4:19 Paul expresses another transformation: "My little children, with whom I am again in travail until Christ be formed [*morphōthē*] in you!" This transformation is to be effected by becoming like him in his death (*symmorphizomenos tō thanatō autou* [Phil. 3:10]). Paul's central proclamation is: Jesus is Lord and all who have faith have already undergone a death like his and so will share in his resurrection. As we have seen, this proclamation reflects a baptismal liturgy, implying that baptism provides the moment whereby the believer comes to be in Christ. Christianity is a unique Jewish sect in that it makes baptism a central rather than a pre-

paratory ritual, but some of the mystical imagery comes from its Jewish past.

Alternatively, Paul can say, as he does in Gal. 1:16 that "God was pleased to reveal His Son in me [*en emoi*]." This is not a simple dative but refers to his having received in him the Spirit, in his case through his conversion. Being in Christ in fact appears to mean being united with Christ's heavenly image. The same, however, is available to all Christians through baptism. This is not strange since apocalyptic and mystical Judaism also promoted *tevilah,* ritual immersion or baptism, as the central purification ritual preparing for the ascent into God's presence. The Jewish ritual of purification for coming into the divine presence and proselyte baptism has been transformed by Paul's community into a *single* rite of passage, though it does not thereby lose its relationship to its source. Dying and being resurrected along with Christ in baptism is the beginning of the process by which the believer gains the same image of God, his *eikōn,* which was made known to humanity when Jesus became the son of man—the human figure in heaven who brings judgment in the apocalypse described by Daniel. Paul's conception of the risen body of Christ as the spiritual body (1 Cor. 15:43) at the end of time and as the body of Glory (Phil. 3:21) thus originates in Jewish apocalypticism and mysticism, modified by the unique events of early Christianity. The meaning of Rom. 8:29 can be likewise clarified by Jewish esoteric tradition: Paul speaks of God as having "foreordained his elect to be conformed to the image of his Son" ("proōrisen symmorphous tēs eikonos tou huiou autou"). Paul uses the genitive here rather than the dative as in Phil. 3:21, softening the identification between believer and savior. But when Paul states that believers conform to the image of God's son, he is not speaking of an agreement of mind or ideas between Jesus and the believers. The word *symmorphē* itself suggests a spiritual reformation of the believer's body into the form of the divine image. Paul's language for conversion—*being in Christ*—develops out of mystical Judaism.

Paul speaks of the transformation being partly experienced by believers in their preparousia existence. His use of present tense in Rom. 12:2 and 2 Cor. 3:18 underscores the idea that transformation is an ongoing event. In 1 Cor. 15:49 and Romans 8, however, it culminates at Christ's return, the parousia. This suggests that for Paul transformation is both a single, definitive event and a process that continues until the second coming. The redemptive and transformative process appears to correspond exactly with the turning of the ages. This age is passing away, though it certainly remains a present evil reality (1 Cor. 3:19; 5:9; 2 Cor. 4:4; Gal. 1:4; Rom. 12:2). The gospel, which is the power of God for salvation (Rom. 1:16), is progressing through the world (Phil. 1:12; Romans 9–11).

First Cor. 15:42–51 is one of the most systematic uses of this apocalyptic and mystical tradition, which is central to Paul's message of the meaning of Christ:

> So is it with the resurrection of the dead. What is sown is perishable, what is raised is imperishable. It is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness, it is raised in power. It is sown a physical body, it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a physical body, there is also a spiritual body. Thus it is written. "The first man Adam became a living being"; the last Adam became a life-giving spirit. But it is not the spiritual which is first but the physical, and then the spiritual. The first man was from the earth, a man of dust; the second man is from heaven. As was the man of dust, so are those who are of the dust; and as is the man of heaven, so are those who are of heaven. Just as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we shall also bear the image of the man of heaven. I tell you this, brethren; flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable.

As Paul connects his own conversion with his resurrection in Christ, it is resurrection that brings the salvation of God and a return to the pristine state of humanity's glory before Adam's fall. He says this explicitly in 1 Cor. 15:21: "For as by a man came death; so by a man has also come resurrection of the dead." Paul makes Adam and Christ contrasting images of fall and salvation respectively. But Paul seems to have more than Jesus' earthly existence in mind, since he uses the term *anthrōpos,* which can also refer to his resurrected nature: "Just as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we shall also bear the image of the man of heaven."[103] The agent that begins and is responsible for this change on earth is the spirit. The spirit not only creates the Christ that is within believers, but itself takes on the character of Christ. The risen Jesus is to be experienced as a life-giving spirit, explaining how the transformation starts, and culminates in the mystic process in the apocalyptic end.[104]

When speaking of the resurrection, Paul describes a reciprocal relationship between Adam and Christ: as Adam brought death into the world, Christ, the second Adam, will bring resurrection. This depends on interpreting Adam's divine likeness as being identical to the Glory that the Christ had or received. Because of the first human, all humanity is brought to death; but because of Christ's divine image all will be brought to life (15:21–22). The first man, Adam, became only a living soul, whereas the

last Adam became a life-giving spirit (15:45). The first man was of the earth and therefore earthly; the last man is from heaven, therefore divine. Just as humanity has borne the outward image of the old Adam, those who inherit the kingdom will also bear the inward spiritual *eikōn* of the heavenly man (15:47–49). Paul, however, is not so much talking about the man Jesus as he is talking about Christ's exalted nature as *anthrōpos*. Since the imagery depends on the contrast between fallen and raised states, this passage also implies a baptismal setting. It is interesting that the alternation is conceived in bodily terms, not as a transmigration of souls.

The antonymous pairs, natural/spiritual, earthly/heavenly, corruptible/incorruptible, point to the contrast between the nature of Christ's resurrected body and ordinary human life. All these contrasts are characteristic of a man who underwent a radical conversion. One cannot ignore the close relationship between Paul's view of the future immortality of believers and his description of the risen Christ from his own conversion, as his conversion experience may have been a process involving several visions and the search for their meaning. When Paul says that Christians shall be raised imperishable, as he does in 1 Cor. 15:51–58, the background for this conception is his other descriptions of transformation into the raised Christ, Paul's own context. His view of the coming end is merely the culmination of the process that has started with conversion and baptism:

> Lo! I will tell you a mystery. We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be *changed,* in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable and we shall be changed. For this perishable nature must put on the imperishable, and this mortal nature must put on immortality. When the perishable puts on the imperishable, and the mortal puts on immortality, then shall come to pass the saying that is written:
>
> "Death is swallowed up in victory."
> "O death, where is thy victory?
> O death, where is thy sting?"
>
> [Isa. 25:8; Hos. 13:14]
>
> The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

Paul's view of the immortality of believers is parallel to and depends on his description of the raised Christ in heaven. Paul's imagery for the description of the coming resurrection in 1 Corinthians 15 fulfills the vocabulary of spiritual body and Glory of God that ultimately derives from his conversion. Because believers on earth, by virtue of their conversion, have been transformed into the body of Christ, who is the image of God, the destiny of believers will be the same as the destiny of Christ. The believer is to share in Christ's immortality at the last trumpet, as Paul himself experienced transformation by Christ. It appears that Paul considers himself special in that the whole process of salvation has been revealed to him. Others have not had his visions, so his visions give him special powers to speak on the meaning of Christian life. But the process has started within the Christian community, continuing there, whether those who have acknowledged Christ recognize it or not. Although Jesus' humanity is mentioned here and in Romans 5, it is not the human life that is the point of the exegesis. Christ's resurrection and metamorphosis into the true man power the analogy. Christ is the man from heaven. His power on earth is the spirit.

The relationship between transformation and justification can be seen in a later part of the Corinthian correspondence, where Paul discusses the effect of the spiritual transformation. Transformation and community are clarified there, making the differing social contexts of the two letters besides the point. In 2 Cor. 5:15–6:1, Paul speaks of the Christian as a new creation:

> From now on, therefore, we regard no one from a human point of view; even though we once regarded Christ from a human point of view, we regard him thus no longer. Therefore, if any one is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has passed away, behold, the new has come. All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. So we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We beseech you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God. Working together with him, then, we entreat you not to accept the grace of God in vain.

The "human point of view" is literally "according to the flesh" (*kata sarka*), whereas the believer is a new creation of spirit. The reformulation experience changes the believer from a physical body to a new spiritual

creation. It turns the believer into the righteousness of God, although the final consummation has not yet occurred. Paul can refer to himself even as an ambassador and fellow worker with Christ before the final transformation, participating in his body with him as he works. Because the verb is implied, the passage can also mean that "there is a new creation," giving the event a cosmic as well as an individual significance.[105] It is also clear that the experience of being made righteous is coterminous with this transformation. Thus, conversion for Paul means both a transformation and a parallel process of being made righteous. This process takes place in community. Like many visionaries, Paul suggests not just a personal transformation but a transformation of community and of the cosmos as well.

The mystical experience of conversion is not only with the risen Christ but with the crucified Christ. The most obvious relationship between the believer and Christ is suffering and death (Rom. 7:24; 8:10, 13). By being transformed by Christ, one is not simply made immortal, given the power to remain deathless. Rather, one still experiences death as Christ did and like him survives death for heavenly enthronement. This is a consequence of the Christian's divided state. Although part of the last Adam, living through spirit, the Christian also belongs to the world of the flesh. As James Dunn has noted, "Suffering was something *all* believers experienced—an unavoidable part of the believer's lot—an aspect of experience as Christians which his converts shared with Paul: Rom. 5:3 ('we'); 8:17f ('we'); 2 Cor. 1:16 ('you endure the same sufferings that we suffer'); 8:2; Phil. 1:29f ('the same conflict which you saw and now hear to be mine'); 1 Thess. 1:6 ('imitators of us and of the Lord'); 2:14 ('imitators of the churches of God in Judea: for you suffered the same things'); 3:3f ('our lot'); 2 Thess. 1:4ff."[106]

Thus, the persecution and suffering of the believers is a sign that the transformation process has begun; it is the way to come to be *in* Christ. Paul is convinced that being united with Christ's crucifixion means not immediate glorification but suffering for the believers in this interim period. The glorification follows on the final consummation. The connection between suffering and resurrection is clear in Jewish martyrology; indeed, the connection between death and rebirth was a prominent part of the mystery religions as well. The language of transformation is not solely a Jewish vocabulary. It is also part of Hellenistic religious piety throughout the period. The identification of the adept with the divinity through a vision is characteristic of later Hellenistic mysticism, where the mystic adept may seek a vision of the divinity face to face, intuit the saving *gnosis* as in the *Poimandres,*[107] or end by breathing in the divine to become divine himself or herself.[108] But understanding suffering as the uniting experience is a special Christian interpretation of the martyrdom theme underlying the ascension story from Daniel. The genesis of the doctrine points both to the passion of Jesus and to the persecution of the community.

In the letters of the Pauline school, some of these themes receive even fuller development. Colossians is a veritable summary of the whole constellation of language describing transformation into the heavenly *Kavod,* understood as Christ. Christ is called, "the image of the invisible God" (1:15–20) and the "firstborn of all creation" (1:16). He is the author of creation and the captain of the heavenly hosts and is coeternal with God. As Christ, he is also "firstborn from the dead." He is the head of the body, the church, a remark that hints at possible relationships with Jewish *Shiur Koma* speculation as well as pagan concepts of the Macranthropos.

In Colossae, important baptismal practices, similar to Jewish mysticism and Qumran, developed.[109] Col. 3:10 speaks of Christians as having taken off an old nature and put on a new nature in baptism, "which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator." Eph. 4:24 speaks also of putting on a new nature created after the likeness of God. This language of transformation comes from Jewish apocalyptic mysticism, yet it implies a specifically Christian theology and a baptismal setting. If contemporary scholars were not convinced of the Pauline authorship of these letters, one can nonetheless say that they give irrefutable evidence about the popularity of Paul's mystical teaching among his earliest disciples and the direction in which these teachings were interpreted.

Paul's conversion experience and his mystical ascension form the basis of his theology. His language shows the marks of a man who has learned the contemporary vocabulary for expressing a theophany and then has received one. This language of vision has informed his thought in a number of crucial respects. First, it has allowed him to develop a concept of the divinity of Christ or the messiah both as a unique development within the Jewish mystical tradition and as characteristically Christian. Second, he uses this Jewish mystical vocabulary to express the transformation experienced by believers. Believers warrant immortality because they have been transformed by becoming formed (*symmorphous*) like the savior. Third, he uses the language of transformation, gained through contact with Jewish mystical-apocalypticism and presumably through ecstatic conversion, to discuss the ultimate salvation and fulfillment of the apoc-

alypse, raising believers to immortality. Fourth, he uses the terms of fleshly and spiritual existence to distinguish between true faith, independent of fleshly rules, and false faith, depending on the flesh.

Though Paul's language constantly invokes the concept of prophetic commissioning (*kletos* [see Galatians 1 and Romans 1]), his commissioning also clearly represents a religious conversion. In fact, his conversion experience and other experiences like it allow Paul to argue for something controversial to early Christianity: his commission as an *apostle* to proclaim the gospel to the gentiles (Rom. 1:1; 11:13;, 15:16; Gal. 1:16; 2:6–8; etc.).[110] Paul's credentials as apostle for this mission were widely disputed in both Judaism and Christianity, forcing Paul continually to answer his detractors with the defense that his mission comes not from men, who largely opposed it, but solely from the command of Christ and God himself (Gal. 1:16). In contrast to the Jerusalem church's conception of apostolate as deriving from Jesus' personal appointment, Paul develops a charismatic idea of apostleship dependent on a vision of the risen Christ. This is exactly what modern psychology and sociology would call a conversion. Because of his vision, he can claim that his apostolate is an agency of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 12:4), unlike the previous apostles who were tutored directly by Jesus, and, like his detractors, he can call himself a *miscarriage*, an apostle born out of time (*ektrōma* [1 Cor. 15:8]), perhaps relying on Isaiah 49.[111] His vision allows him to describe his teaching as an *apocalypse*—a revelation of hidden knowledge—through the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 2:10), though it is mediated through the mind, not through the speaking of tongues (1 Cor. 14:19). Acts 22:17 also describes Paul as receiving his commission in ecstasy (*en ekstasei*). The implication of these statements for the church cannot be missed. Ordinary apostles link their apostolate to traditions derived directly from Jesus, legitimating their authority through the apostolic succession. In a ploy that has been repeated throughout the history of religion, Paul opposed the apostolic claim by a claim of direct revelation. He also includes in his claim of legitimacy his gentile converts, for they are his letter from Christ. There is ample evidence that this is one of the basic sociological conflicts that has been played out time and time again in world religion: the opposition of traditional authority to claims of direct, ecstatic revelation, though the conflict can take several forms, depending on the opinion of central authority about ecstatic knowledge of God.[112]

We shall never know Paul's experience. But we can see how Paul reconstructs it. In retrospect, Paul construes his first Christian experience as (ecstatic) conversion. Nor should we dispute Paul's own opinion. The

clearest demonstration of Paul's conversion is merely to compare him with other Christians who, like Paul, came from Judaism but whose entrance into Christianity changed none of their disposition about Torah (see Acts 15:5) and so opposed Paul. It was possible to go from Pharisaic Judaism to Christianity without having a conversion experience such as Paul's. There are Christians whose faith in Christ only completed their previous belief in Judaism. But Paul is not one of these Jews. He is no Pharisee whose faith in Christ confirms his Judaism; rather, his conversion makes a palpable difference in his Christianity. His conversion caused him to revalue his Judaism, in turn creating a new understanding of Jesus' mission. This metamorphosis seems always to underlie Paul's understanding of the difference between flesh and spirit.